

'Steam World' (Alan White).

July 2024

76 pages

STEAM WORLD

by Alan White

In a realm where cogs entwine with the aether's dance,
If the end of the steam-driven world chose a Saturday perchance —
Would gears cease their clockwork, marking time's endeavor,
Or would steam and brass proclaim a new eternity, lasting forever?
Imagine waking to find gears replaced the dawn's embrace,
The familiar world transformed into a steampunk grace.
The airship sky, a canvas of dirigibles sailing high,
Aether currents whispering tales, rewriting the sky.
Your life, a labyrinth of pipes, levers, and steam,
Not what you knew, but a dreamscape of a new regime.
Dear ones, perhaps, mechanised companions by your side,
Lost in the whirl of gears, within the clockwork's tide.
Would you retreat to the sanctum of your workshop's lore,
Amongst brass gadgets and arcane tomes, forevermore?
Cursing fate, would you tighten bolts, defy the machined face,
Resolving to sculpt destiny in this clockwork space?
Amidst the clatter and hiss, a prayer to the steam gods,
Begging for restoration, untangling the temporal odds.
Fists flung, gears grinding, defiance in your stare,
A declaration to forge a destiny, a steadfast glare.
Yet, what if night's curtain, unyielding, descends,
Not upon the world, but shadows within, where darkness blends?
A yearning for dawn, a hope in the flickering gaslight,
Seeking a reprieve from this eternal, mechanical night.
Or would you peer through the goggles of your soul's machine,
Realising the essence of time within this steampunk sheen?
That though the world's mechanisms altered, gears entwined,
The ever-turning clockwork declared now as forever, combined.
In this steampunk sphere, the brass, the steam, the clock's endeavor,
It's always now, a perpetual dance, an eternal forever.
For as I scribe these lines, the gears cease not to turn,
In this realm of cogs and steam, where eternity does yearn.

— Alan White, 2024

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BACK COVER: 'Brian Aldiss's "The Worm That Flies": Image 2' (Dennis Callegari).

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I must be talking to my friends

The social whirl

Why have I not finished these latest issues of *SFC*? Not because I have been working on other fanzines. Not because I was writing my memoirs. No, I was caught up in the social whirl. Stranger things have happened, but not many.

Monday, 27 May, Elaine and I took the train (the trains were running that day!) out to Carnegie to join with 11 old friends and true for lunch at the Rosstown Hotel on the corner of Koornang and Dandenong Roads in Carnegie. It's somehow become much smarter looking and more roomy than when we last gathered there in December 2019, before our Rosstown gatherings were rudely interrupted for four years.

The occasion was a **tribute lunch for Dick Jenssen**, who left us on 7 March. Dick had asked that there should be no funeral or gathering after he died, but he had given the okay to a meal at the Rosstown.

The assembled multitude included some of those who met there regularly during the years before Covid, especially Race and Iola Mathews, Keren Kautzner, Elaine and me, Peter and Tanya Kemp, and David Russell. Justin Ackroyd also joined us. Close friends of Dick, but not Rosstown regulars, were Tony Thomas and Rob Gerrand. We raised a glass to those regulars who have died since 2019: Lee Harding, Merv and Helena Binns, Bill Wright, and Yvonne Rousseau. Some other Rosstown regulars had had to drop out on Monday because of illness or a cancelled train. Elaine proposed the toast at the end of a very good meal.

(Elaine was most surprised to overhear Rob, Tony, and Justin solemnly discussing Aussie Rules football, with the implication they actually sit around and watch games on TV. I shut up.)

On the previous Saturday (25 May), Elaine and I were very surprised when my nephew **Colin Rout and his wife Sri** offered to drop in for afternoon tea after watching a football match at the MCG. This was only the second time Colin has dropped in on us during the twenty years we've been at

Greensborough. 6 p.m. seemed a bit late for afternoon tea, so we toddled off to **Cafe Spice**, our local favourite Indian restaurant, and ate too much, as we always do at the Cafe Spice.

I told Colin about Cafe Spice's special significance. There was a time when Lee Harding would drive from Moonee Ponds to Carnegie to pick up Dick Jenssen, and bring him to the Cafe Spice in Greensborough. They would take part in a riotous dinner with us, then Lee would drive Dick back to Carnegie, then drive back to Moonee Ponds. Unfortunately, Dick's arthritis became much worse over the last 15 years, and Lee's driving skills tapered off. Eventually Dick could attend only the Rosstown and only if Lee, and then Geoff Allshorn, drove him from home to there.

I didn't catch much of the program at this year's **Continuum 16**, the Melbourne convention finally being revived after five years. The trains were out all weekend, supposedly replaced by Replacement Buses. Fortunately, Carey drove me into the Jasper Hotel on Elizabeth Street on the Sunday morning for the 10 a.m. **launch gathering for Leigh Edmonds's *Proud and Lonely: A History of Australian Fandom: Part One 1939-1961***. Rob Gerrand has arisen as the phoenix from the long-dead ashes of **Norstrilia Press** (1975-85) and has become the sole publisher of Leigh's book. Leigh brought with him from Ballarat a rucksack full of copies of the book (also available as Print on Demand and e-book). With gusto Perry Middlemiss launched the book, and Leigh gave a passionate speech about its origins and aims. Last I heard, Leigh and Rob had sold 19 copies by the end of the hour, but probably many more have been sold since.

We toddled off the other end of town for the **ANZAPA lunch** that **Perry Middlemiss** had organised at the **Spaghetti Tree Restaurant** at the top of Bourke Street in honour of **Margaret and Bob Riep**, who were visiting Melbourne from Canberra for Continuum. It was a good meal, but afterward I had a very difficult time getting home. It was

raining when we left the restaurant. There was a huge demonstration outside Parliament House in Spring Street, so I failed to find the boarding point for the replacement buses. I caught a tram up to Gertrude Street, and after 20 minutes the Bundoora tram trundled into view. Out at Bundoora I caught the bus to Greensborough. I arrived home nearly two hours after leaving the Spaghetti Tree. If the trains are replaced by buses next year I won't attend Continuum.

At some point during the **Proud and Lonely book launch**, someone cried out, 'There's a problem with the index.' I didn't worry too much at the time. I had spent weeks on compiling the index, and was sure there were few errors left in it. But when Rob and Leigh looked at the index closely they found large numbers of astonishing errors. I hadn't made them. So what had happened? David Grigg, the designer and typesetter of the book, cannot work out what happened. He uses a newish DTP program called Affinity. Somehow this program had done its own little AI dance, changing many index numbers, added new numbers, and generally stuffed up the document without help from anybody. Since the book was published as Print on Demand, we're all hoping Rob and Leigh can replace most of the copies that people have already bought.

Dick Jenssen has dominated our lives during much of the last four months. Much of the pressure had fallen on **Elaine**. When it became obvious that Dick could not move back into his flat because he could no longer move around in it, Elaine was given 10 days by Cabrini Hospital to find a care home for him. In those ten days, Elaine investigated three possible candidates in our general. She found a high-quality place, **Grace Villa**, only a few hundred yards from us in Greensborough. Dick moved in four weeks before his death.

Elaine's immediate task was to arrange for the clearance of Dick's flat to sell it to pay for his stay in aged care. To this end, **Carey Handfield** asked for help from various muscly people to help pack up all Dick's belongings so they could be transported to our place. During Dick's last week, **Justin Ackroyd** packed a couple of hundred boxes of books, DVDs, Blu-rays, and CDs with great help from **Murray MacLachlan**, **Carey Handfield**, **Rob Gerrand**, **Elaine**, and her school friend **Gladys Williams**. The boxes were delivered by van on Wednesday, 6 March. On Thursday morning 7 March, Grace Villa rang to say that Dick had died overnight.

Why did I not take part? During the last two

years I've suffered from an intermittent rotator cuff injury in my left arm, and I can't lift boxes. So not only is Elaine the resident genius in our household (along with Chloe the cat), she is also the only one of us who can lift boxes. And now our front living room is suddenly filled with a vast hill of boxes.

What has all this to do the social whirl that has stopped *SFC* in its tracks?

At the beginning of April we joined a **Nova Mob meeting** for the first time in several years in order to offer our tribute to Dick Jenssen. This was part of a session of tributes to people we've lost recently. The only people attending the Kensington Town Hall for that meeting were Murray and Natalie, Elaine and me, and Bruce Barnes. But Murray has perfected the Zoom system, so we were digitally joined by 11 other Novapeople. A good night's discussion,

We wanted to thank the mighty-thewed fans who undertook the packing of the Jenssen boxes. On 23 April, we gathered at the **Cafe Spice** for yet another excellent Indian meal. We were able to catch up with **Jenny Ackroyd** as well as **Justin**, **Maggie Gerrand** as well as **Rob**, **Jo Handfield** as well as **Carey**, **Natalie MacLachlan** as well as **Murray**, and **Gladys Williams**, who had travelled all the way from Noble Park. Several people came back to our place for coffee, where various truths and secrets were bounced around the conversation circle. I promise I've forgotten every revelation.

So we've socially whirled and whirled. All my fanzine deadlines have been danced to death.

My sisters, **Robin Mitchell** from Bendigo and **Jeanette Gillespie** from Guildford near Castlemaine, toddled down for lunch at **Urban Grooves**.

I visited the first of **Perry Middlemiss's** monthly get-togethers, but I became nearly lost in the strange streetscape on the western side of Southern Cross Station. The area is spooky, and so is **Platform 28**, the chosen pub. However I did find the place, and **Leigh Edmonds**, who had travelled to Corflu in Las Vegas, travelled down from Ballarat to present to me the international FAAN Award for Best Genzine that I had won in Las Vegas. I count it as my Hugo Award, as no real fanzines ever win Hugo Awards these days.

Perry, Leigh, and Irwin visited us at Greensborough one day, and we all headed off to **Lucky Little Dumplings**, our current favourite Chinese restaurant in Greensborough. That was to celebrate our being able to retrieve 16 boxes of **Helena and Merv Binns's** fannish stuff from the house where Helena had lived before she went into care, where she later died. Leigh retrieved material he



Leigh Edmonds remains the only photographer who can take a flattering photo of me. Presentation of the FAAN Award for Best Genzine, brought by Leigh from Las Vegas, at Platform 28 fan gathering, 14 March.

needed for the *History*, and Perry took away most of the rest of the boxes so they could stay at his place until they could be transferred to a library. This proved to be a good move, because our house was about to replace 16 Binns boxes with 256-plus Jenssen boxes.

As I've already related, a bad little program went and done blitzed the index I wrote for Leigh Emonds' new book. It's an ill-wind, though. With luck nobody will offer me indexing work in future. Now I can retire completely.

The whirl has not stopped whirling, even though it might become less social than before. Elaine was hoping for some rest and recreation after Dick left us, but instead she has faced many days of digital 'paperwork'. Dying is a complex, expensive business these days. Now that Dick's boxes have arrived, she has been cataloguing all of Dick's DVDs and Blu-rays, in preparation for distributing them in accordance with Dick's wishes.

A poem of comment from Alan White:

The Great Spaceship Gillespie

In the silent void of space's deep,
Where stars whisper secrets and galaxies
weep,
A lone ship sails through the cosmic sea,
Its name whispered softly: Gillespie.

Pirates of space, with hearts so cold,
Lurk in the darkness, daring and bold.
They eye the ship with treachery afire,
Intent on plunder, their dark desire.

Yet Gillespie sails through dangers un-
seen,
Past alien horrors and pirates keen.
With each lightyear passed, it forges
ahead,
Through the silence of space, where the
fearless tread.

Bound by the stars, a legacy bold,
In the chronicles of space, its story is told.
It sails on alone, in quiet defiance,
The steadfast, brave ship: Gillespie.

Real things

A few weeks ago, Australia Post announced that because it thinks not enough people are sending letters and magazines in the mail, it decided to make the service more expensive and increase the difficulty of sending letters and magazines. It did not do the obvious: lower prices to make their service more attractive. It's not long since the cost of posting a letter went from 70 cents to a dollar, but now it costs \$1.50 to send an ordinary letter to an address in Australia. The cost of sending anything overseas has gone way above my income level.

Worse, mail deliveries would be cut to three days a week.

What actually happened? The new system

began a few weeks ago. Thus far, we have received mail at our place on *four* days of each week!

Things sent and received in the mail are *real* things, as opposed to things sent digitally. They include occasional letters (such as hand-written letters of comment from Steve Campbell and David Russell), subscribed-to magazines such as *Rhythms*, *Locus*, *Limelight*, and *Readings Monthly*, and lots of fanzines, CDs, Blu-rays, and books.

I wrote a list of all those people who have sent me valuable stuff during the last year and a half. The list comes to more than 100. If I fail to thank you, it's not for lack of well-wishing, but I have run out of time and pages.

Hand-delivered

Justin Ackroyd of Slow Glass Books

I'm obliged to people who take the effort to deliver to me books or CDs. One of them is **Justin Ackroyd**. At one stage I had thought he had closed **Slow Glass Books** as a business. I was wrong. Slow Glass is no longer top of his priorities, but

Justin still obtains for me books that I would have little hope of importing. I wish he would revive the *Slow Glass Catalogue*, of course, but receiving it would cause me to buy a whole lot of books for which I have no room.

Thanks to Dave Clarke at Readings Carlton

Dave Clarke at **Readings** in Carlton has for 25 years performed miracles in obtaining CDs for me, and has also found books that I thought unobtainable.

But I'm now in mourning. I've discovered that Readings has 'let go' Dave after 25 years and has closed its CD section. For 50 years Readings, first through Steve Smith and then through Dave, has been taking special care to make sure I receive all the books, LPs, then CDs that I have ordered from overseas. Now I face the possibility of not being able to buy the CDs I want, which means my musical experience will be very different. And

since I won't have the ever-cheerful and obliging Dave to watch over my orders, I will not be buying much from Readings.

I received a polite letter from **Mark Rubbo**, founder and executive manager of the Readings stores, claiming that CD sales are now down to 3 per cent of the turnover of the Carlton store. Well? There's nothing to replace CDs, or Dave Clarke. I have been a loyal customer for half a century, and I estimate that they have made several hundred thousand dollars from me over that period.

John Clute vs the British Library

**THE BOOK BLINDERS:
ANNALS OF VANDALISM AT THE BRITISH
LIBRARY: A NECROLOGY**
by John Clute
(Norstrilia Press; 2024; 500 pp.; book and
cover design: Judith Clute; \$A71.90;
£55.90; \$US69.00)

About all I can say by way of review is that *The Book Blinders* is a blindingly beautiful book from Rob Gerrand's revived **Norstrilia Press** about what proves to be an important source of information for book lovers throughout the world.

I could quote **John Clute's** blurb describing the genesis of the idea for the book, but you can find that as part of the book's publicity on all the online sources.

It's much more satisfactory to quote from a recent fine review by much-awarded **Michael Dirda**, long-time reviewer at the *Washington Post* and friend of science fiction, fantasy, and fandom as well as world literature.

Dust jackets

Michal Dirda
reviews John Clute's **THE BOOK BLINDERS**
in the *Washington Post*, 31 May 2024

How do you feel about dust jackets, sometimes called dust wrappers or book covers? For most of their history, the British Library and the Library of Congress have stripped off the jackets from the books on their shelves. In *The Book Blinders: Annals of Vandalism at the British Library*, John Clute reveals, through his study of 115 illustrated examples, how much information is lost because of this shortsighted practice. As this eminent collector and scholar of fantastic literature writes, 'Every dust-jacket is a ceremony of passage between world without and text within.'

We know, for example, that H.G. Wells's 1895 book, *The Time Machine*, once bore a dust jacket that would have revealed how the novel was presented to the public before science fiction even



Cover design: Judith Clute.

had a name. But no dust jacket of that first edition survives. Bertrand Russell's *Icarus: or the Future of Science* (1924) was written as a counter-blast to J.B.S. Haldane's *Daedalus: or Science and the Future* (1924), but only the dust jacket reveals this important fact. When in 1937 Gollancz published Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* — it's about the communist rebellion in the 1930s — a photograph of the then little-known Mao Zedong dominated the front cover. That picture drives home the immediacy and newsworthiness of Snow's book. Without that cover, it's just another book.

Some of the mini-essays in *The Book Blinders* scrutinise dust jackets with the intensity William Empson devoted to poems in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* — the cover of which Clute analyses — while others situate a jacket in the cultural moment when the book first appeared. In either case, Clute's richly layered prose — freewheeling, punchy, recondite, and often lyrical — mingles explication with elegy, semiotic assessment with jeremiad. Whatever works he investigates, whether Georges Simenon's *The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By* or Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, you come away seeing afresh.

Dick Jensen

My greatest debt is to **Dick Jensen**, of course. I hope I thanked him enough while he was still alive. Dick liked giving gifts. He was awkward about Elaine and me giving him gifts, and he would not accept payment for things he thought we should have. This extended in particular to CDs, Blu-rays, and DVDs we had not heard of. With Dick no longer there to talk to on the phone, I feel that an entire area of my brain has disappeared. Confined to his flat, Dick would search relentlessly through Internet sources for discs in editions that almost certainly would not be released in Australia. In recent years, he lost interest in current films, but became more and more interested in luxuriant remastering packages of older movies.

The real treasures to be found in foreign parts

have been releases of restorations of older movies long thought lost (or never heard of). Often these releases have been issued in small batches of 1500 or 3000. Each includes vast amounts of extra material, such as complete documentaries. Dick would pre-order two copies, one for him and one for me. For example, I had often heard him mention **Samuel Fuller's *The Big Red One***, which was cut by an hour by the producer for its theatrical release in 1980 — but suddenly appeared last year fully restored. It was Fuller's attempt to show what World War II in Europe was like for the ordinary American soldier who survived it. The photography has a rough edge, but the complete movie is an epic, often comical as well as tragical.

John Davies and Geoff Allshorn visit to watch movies

We have the smallest possible monthly film group at our place once a month. We can place only four seats side by side in front of our 50-inch TV set to watch Blu-rays and DVDs. We can't offer back stalls, so we can't expand the group.

John Davies, one of our monthly visitors, is also a fan of searching through the overseas lists and tracking down copies of famously obscure movies that I really should watch. Again, these editions often come in boxes, with vast amounts of extra material. Often John Davies orders them through **Play Video/Audio, down the lane behind 50 Bourke Street, Melbourne**. And often he buys second and further copies for his friends. I'm very lucky that I'm one of his friends.

A good example is ***Targets***, **Peter Bogdanovich's** first feature film. The new Blu-ray includes an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, saying almost exactly what he said to an audience at Melbourne's University's Union Theatre in 1972 when Bogdanovich toured Australia to support *The Last Picture Show*. Boris Karloff, whose last movie it was, is also featured in the supporting features. And the remastered print is better than the print that I first saw many years ago at the cinema.

Geoff Allshorn, almost a neighbour (he's one suburb away in Montmorency), is also a member of our film group. He also has been known to offer us DVD box sets of classic TV series from time to time.



In the mail

Belinda Gordon, executor for her father Lee Harding

We're not only missing Dick Jenssen greatly, but also, at a greater distance, **Lee Harding**. His Perth family took care of him during his final year, and after his death in early 2023, his daughter **Belinda Gordon** kindly offered us to make a selection of the DVDs and CDs Lee left behind. Belinda sent us some DVDs and a selection of boxed sets of great music, including, for example, Mozart's *Chamber Music for Strings: Complete String Duos, Trios, Quartets & Quintets* (Brilliant Classics),

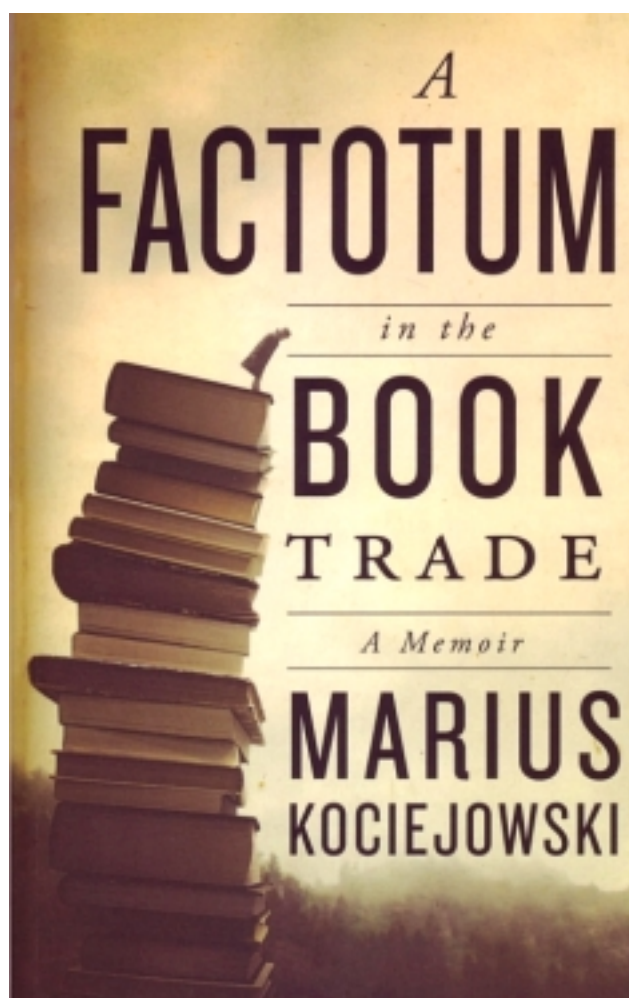
which fills a lot of gaps in our collection, and Rudolf Buchbinder's version of *Haydn: The Complete Piano Sonatas* (Warner Classics). My favourite so far is *Mendelssohn's Complete Symphonies* (Brilliant Classics), which includes all the early 'string symphonies' that Mendelssohn composed when he was a teenager. Many of these are more delicious than most of his five official later symphonies.

David Russell, emissary from Warrnambool

David Russell from Warrnambool also enjoys giving gifts, especially (in my case) for my birthday. He organises for me a celebration each year, often at a restaurant Elaine and I could not afford. Our favourite over the years has been the Flower Drum Chinese restaurant in the Melbourne Central District. In recent years David has given me as a birthday present sets of DVDs that he has been able to buy in JB Hi Fi in Warrnambool.

For my birthday in 2023 David also gave me a wonderful book full of tall tales about the London secondhand book trade during its great days: ***A Factotum in the Book Trade: A Memoir*** by **Marius Kociejowski** (Biblioasis; 2022). It's full of extraordinary characters who are obsessed by the secondhand book trade and often lead unfortunate lives. Like many books these days, *Factotum* would have benefited from an index.

John Baxter is not mentioned, but the only book to which I could compare it is Baxter's ***A Pound of Paper*** (Doubleday; 2002). Perhaps Baxter was not scruffy or mad enough for Kociejowski's unerring eye.



Colin Steele, our emissary from Canberra

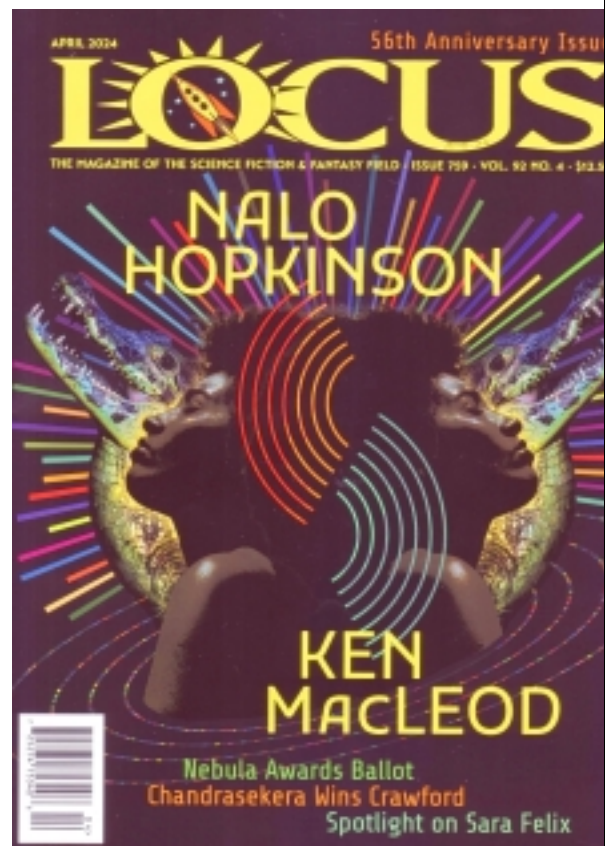
Colin Steele, along with his wife **Anna Creer**, is *SFC*'s ace long-time book reviewer — since 1979. Colin is very good at writing clear non-emphatic reviews that demonstrate his opinions about a book without insulting or over-praising it. I can always tell whether or not I will enjoy the book.

From time to time I mention to him that I would really like to read such-and-such a book — and Colin sends it to me. In recent years, the best of these presents — because I wouldn't have heard of it otherwise — has been **Peter May's *A Winter Grave***. Peter May has a major reputation among those who read Scottish crime/mysteries, but I hadn't heard of him, and neither, it seems, have my friends who also count themselves fans of the crime genre. *A Winter Grave* is a deft combination of an unsolved murder (the body is found in a block of ice at the edge of glacier) and 'climate fiction'. The novel is set in 2051, by when the major change on the northern Scottish coast is a rapid intensification of weather changes. Peter May knows his Scottish shores, and what might happen there. ***Coffin Road***, the only other Peter May novel I've been able to find, is also very good.

Locus returns

Locus,
edited by **Liza Groen Trombi and Kirsten Gong-Wong**
(locus@locusmag.com; **Locus Fundraiser 2024**
at igg.me/at/locusmag2024)

After the Covid pandemic hit Australia in March 2020, only one jet a week was flying across the Pacific between Australia and USA. Regular mail deliveries did not resume until the end of 2021. Even into 2022, print copies of American magazines arrived months late or not at all, especially the print editions of **Locus** that I had paid for. **Kirsten Gong-Wong**, of the *Locus* staff, did her best to find out what was happening, and made sure I could download the digital monthly copies of *Locus*. But they're not the beautiful print copies — the real thing — that I had paid for. Finally the distributor, the USPD, and Australia Post have got



their act together, but print copies did not arrive regularly until the middle of last year.

For *Locus* itself, the crisis of the last few years has been the withdrawal by the US publishing industry of all advertising from print magazines. I don't know by what miracle it is still being published, but subscribers are staying the course. **Locus Fundraiser 2024** asks friends of the magazine to make donations wherever possible.

Magazine deliveries return

All magazine deliveries were delayed for over two years, especially those arriving from Britain. Distribution is now back to normal for magazines bought from the local newsagent: music magazines such **Uncut** and **Mojo**. I subscribe to magazines such as **Rhythms**, Australia's magazine about roots, blues and folk music; and **Lime-light**, Australia's magazine about classical music. I have given up trying to find copies of *Films & Filming* and *Gramophone* in Melbourne.

Bibliowews

BIBLIOWEWS (No. 421, March 2024).
Edited by **Richard Blair** and published by the **Book Collectors' Society of Australia**

I'm always grateful to receive an envelope containing the latest issue of **Bibliowews**, edited by **Richard Blair** in Sydney. I wouldn't have known about it if **Colin Steele** hadn't recommended it. It features articles of great interest about old books and great book collectors, and always concludes

John Hertz forever

VANAMONDE, written by **John Hertz** (many editions; the latest to reach me is No. 1584, 5 March 2024; 2 pp. Write to John at 236 S. Coronado Street, No. 409, Los Angeles CA 90057, USA).

Vanamonde is **John Hertz's** weekly two-page fanzine for APA-L. You'll receive it only if you prove yourself in some way an interesting fan and a good

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Journal of the Book Collectors' Society of Australia
for book collectors and book lovers

with Colin's reviews about book publishing and collecting. Many of these are so interesting that I've been republishing them here, along with Colin's reviews of new SF books.

Subscriptions are ridiculously low, so I suggest sending a \$50 note or something like it to the Treasurer of the Society, **Hilary Goldsmith, 26/100 King Street, Randwick NSW 2031**. My only regret is that the Victorian branch seems to have become inactive since the Covid lockdowns.

friend but I'm sure John would be happy if you got in touch with him.

Most issues include his editorial piece, plus about a page of mailing comments to APA-L members. In the latest issue I've received, No. 1584, John writes about his polling place, **La Fayette Park; Baron Macaulay**, author of, among other much else, **History of England**; and **Samuel Johnson** (1709–1784) 'among the greatest of English writers ... Why should a science fiction fan

read such things? You love to see different worlds, don't you?

Dave Langford and Ansible Editions

[ANSIBLE EDITIONS \(ae.ansible.uk\)](http://ae.ansible.uk)

Dave Langford is currently the greatest producer of new books about fandom and SF. Not that Dave is publishing for his own benefit. All the proceeds from **Ansible Editions** go to **TAFF (the Trans Atlantic Fan Fund)**. All his books are available as e-books, with an invitation to contribute to TAFF. The Print on Demand trade paperback editions can be bought through Amazon.com. The most recent book that Dave sent me for review is:

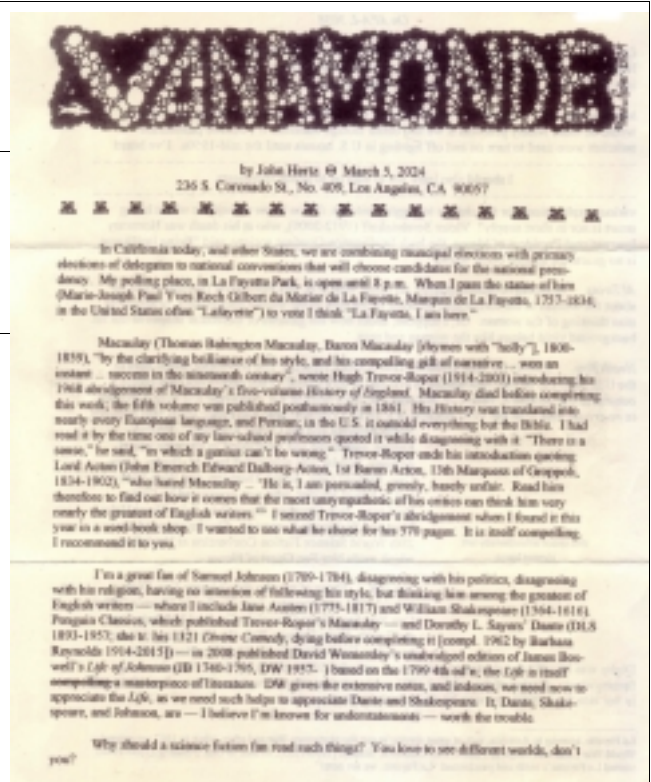
BEYOND FANDOM: FANS, CULTURE AND POLITICS IN THE 20TH CENTURY
Edited by Rob Hansen (2023; 155 pp.).

Also recently published is:

NEW WORLDS PROFILES 1952 TO 1963
(also from Ansible Editions)

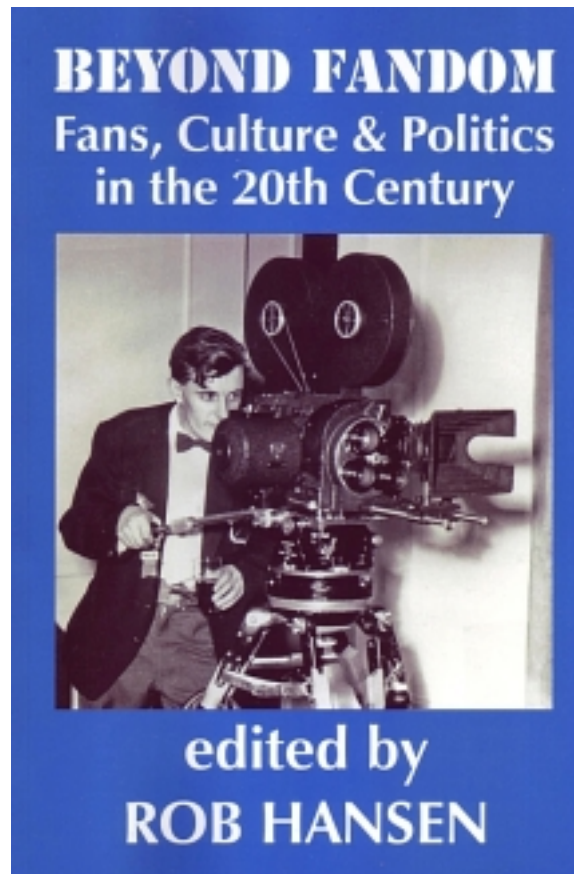
Such industry is beyond my comprehension. (Dave has also written 800,000 of the 7 million words in the online *Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, edited by John Clute.) **Beyond Fandom** is about the other professions and vocations undertaken by people better known to us famous fans. Some chapters are about groups of fans ('The Pacifists', 'The Warriors', 'The Futurists', etc.) but most are about individuals. Chapter 27, 'The Government Minister' is the chapter I looked at first. Yes, **Race Mathews'** role in Victorian and Australian politics has finally been recognised within the SF community! In Australia, we know him as both a founder member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club in 1952 and as a member of two different Labor governments (federal and state), but I suspect few visitors to Aussiecons 1 and 2, both opened by Race, knew of the range of his achievements.

There are chapters about a wide variety of people perhaps more famous in the 'real world' than in fandom. **Roger Ebert** ('The Film Critic') and **Dave Van Ronk** ('The King of Greenwich Village') are two such. Since the book does not have an index, I'm not quite sure which chapter might have looked at the life and work of **Judge**



Jack Speer.

My only complaint about the book, which I've discussed with Dave, is the type size. The main type size is 10 pt, but the sans serif type face of quotations is 8 point, quite a challenge for my 77-year-old eyes. The quotations are often long,



detailed, and essential to the stories they tell.

Irwin Hirsh

A few months after I received the review copy of *Beyond Fandom*, **Irwin Hirsh** arranged for some of us to buy various print Ansible publications. The two I chose were ***Homefront: Fandom in the UK 1939–1945* (edited by Rob Hansen; 2020–2022; 353 pp.)**, which covers that very difficult period in Britain’s fannish history; and Dave Langford’s further contribution to the **John Sladek** legacy, ***New Maps: More Uncollected John Sladek* (2019; 255 pp., including an index!)**. Both look enticing, but I haven’t read them yet.

Irwin has also been kind enough to send me parcels of books no longer needed at the Hirsh household, including lots of books about films.

John Litchen and Yambu Publications

The only person who can claim a recent similar level of productivity to that of Dave Langford and Rob Hansen is **John Litchen** from Queensland. He was written, illustrated, and published in a few years a set of huge autobiographical books. He has drawn on an enormous and accessible collection of photos, most in colour, taken over the last 60 years or more. He writes attractively and informatively about his personal story. The final volume is:

CHANGING STATES: A MEMOIR
(Yambu; 2023; 473 pp.; write to **John Litchen** at 3 Firestone Court, Robina QLD 4226).

Equally interesting and valuable is:

**MORE DREAMS OF MARS:
150 YEARS OF STORIES ABOUT MARS**
(Yambu; 2023; 406 pages)

This is a sequel to John’s equally fat volume ***Dreams of Mars*** from a few years ago, in which he writes about the many books and stories about Mars he had been able to find. Who could have believed that so many SF writers over the last 200 years could write so much about one rather dry,

HOMEFRONT

FANDOM IN THE UK

1939-1945

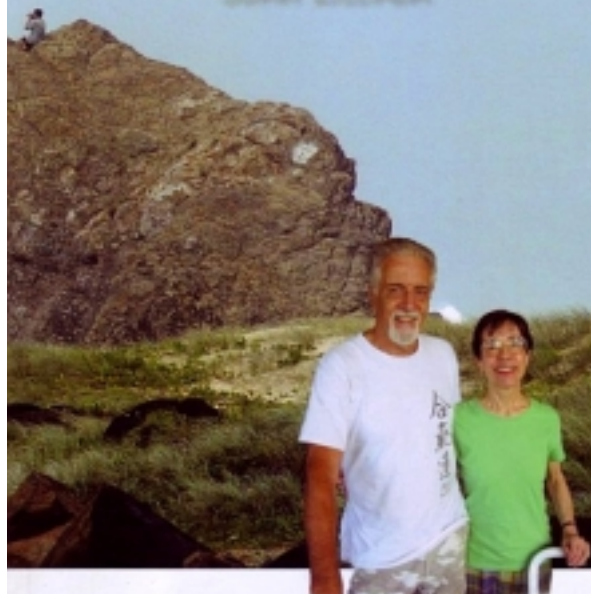


edited by
ROB HANSEN

Changing States

A Memoir

John Litchen



cold, and inoffensive planet?

Leigh Edmonds flies again

ORNITHOPTER MK. IIA, February 2024,
edited by Leigh Edmonds; cover by Alison
Scott

(leighedmonds01@gmail.com or
downloadable from <http://efanzines.com>).

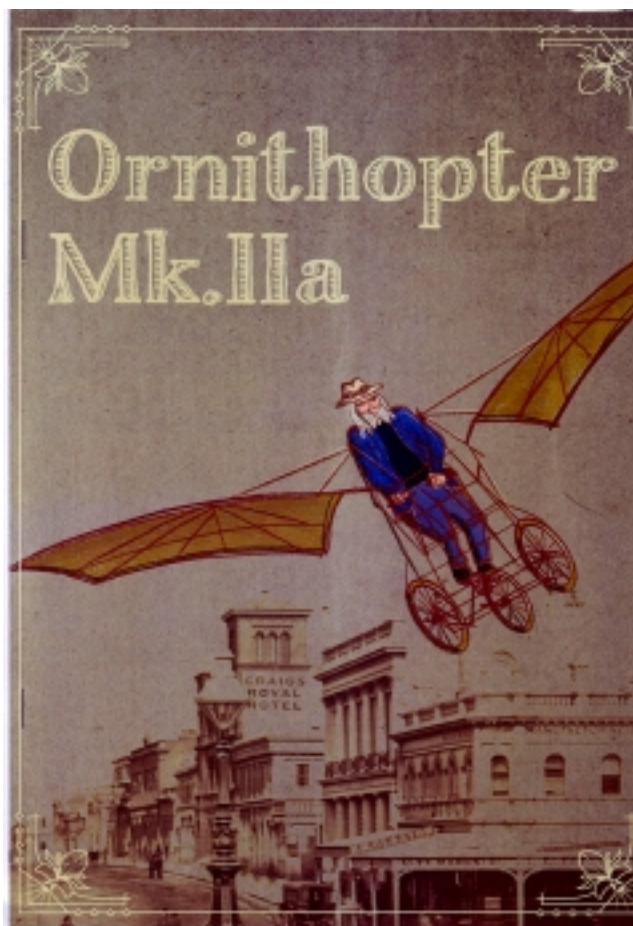
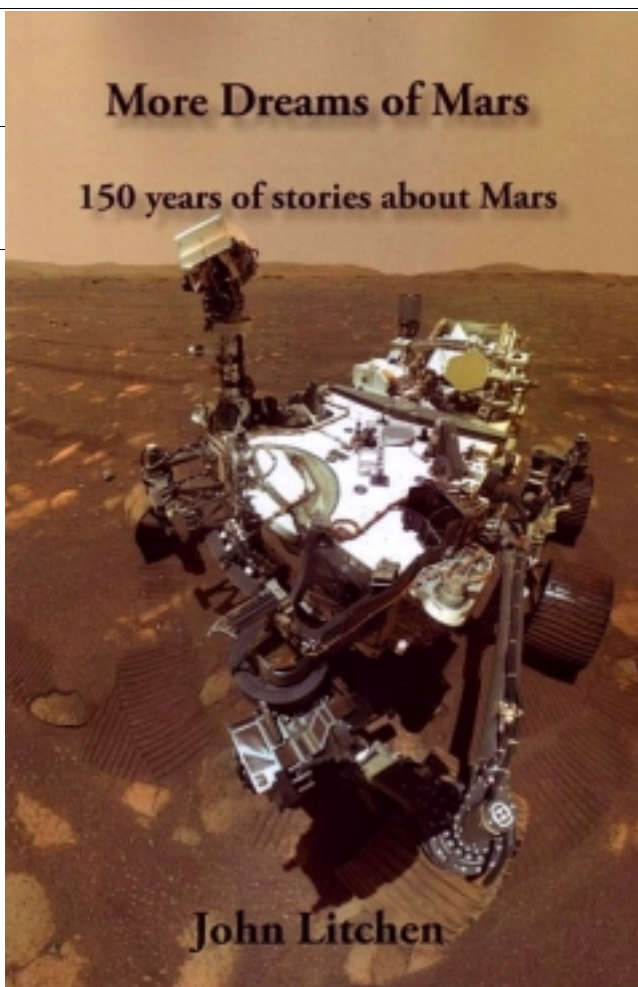
There are fanzine writers who have 'natural style' and they have been making writers like me weep into our beer ever since we typed our first stencils. Since he rejoined fandom about ten years ago Leigh has been writing letters of comment of endless length and great entertainment value to most of our fanzines. Each letter is a document I could never write.

Leigh has been writing fanzines as well, especially *iOTA* (all issues available from efanzines.com), which includes many of the documents used as evidence for his *History of Australian Fandom*, and his contributions to SAPS and ANZAPA. But his final brainwave hit him during a fan gathering last year. He challenged a group of us to contribute 1500 words each to a revived *Ornithopter*. It's a long time since the last issue, and Leigh might have been tempted to revive his most famous fanzine name, *Rataplán*. But here it is, the first of the new series of *Ornithopter*.

I'm in it. I try to fill in a few gaps in my non-travel report of 1974 (about my four months in USA in late 1973), but the complete report has still to be written.

Most interesting to me is Leigh's revival of some 1963 correspondence sent by **Dick Janssen** to **John Foyster** for his fanzine *The Wild Colonial Boy*. They reveal a rather more quicksilver figure than the respectable academic figure that most of us remember meeting at the end of the 1960s. Dick was always a movie fan, so it's interesting to read reviews written when *Last Year at Marienbad*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Cleopatra*, *Dr No*, and *The Man With the X-Ray Eyes* were first released. Lesleigh Luttrell might be interested in Dick's appreciation of the delights of the University of Wisconsin's campus in Madison when he was working there from 1963 to 1966.

More film talk from **Perry Middlemiss**, this time about the offerings at the **Lido Cinema Complex**, which is quite near his home. It consists of eight cinemas, ranging from 500 seats to 50. The seats are comfortable, but Perry does not discuss



recent movies. Instead, he remembers the rather different seating arrangements at the Cloudland Drive-In in Gladstone, South Australia, near where Perry grew up. Perry also discusses classic suburban cinemas, most of which disappeared during the 1960s.

Elder Melbourne fans' minds are filled with great memories. In **Rose Mitchell's** case, she remembers the event I merely heard about, the **Sunbury Rock Festival** of January 1972. It was meant to be Australia's Woodstock, of course, to tie in with the vast outpouring of new Australian rock music during 1971 and 1972, and the belated discovery of 'the sixties' by Australians. Rose gives a lively account of a 17-year-old enjoying life and breaking away from the old rules. She sounds quite surprised that she found herself tripping, going topless and standing on the shoulders of her boyfriend, and being attacked by mosquitoes. The whole adventure did leave Rose with a horror of camping. 'Who would ever believe that the tripping, half naked teenage girl would grow into such a straight, old pillar of the Establishment?'

It seems that **Alan Stewart** has never published his account of his 1994 DUFF trip. '**Planning, More Planning, and Spontaneity**' is another chapter from it. He combined work obligations with opportunities to visit American fans. As had happened to me in 1973, Alan found himself invited to stay with **Bob and Fern Tucker**. By 1994 they had moved back to Bloomington, Illinois, their traditional home city. Bob Tucker is still known as the greatest SF fan.

The great conventions tend to occupy a large section of the memory of any veteran fan. In **Leigh Edmonds'** case, it had been thirteen years since he had attended a full science fiction convention. Last year's was **Conflux 17** in Canberra. Conflux was the first Australian convention to become fully operational after the Covid lockdowns, and so has become the national convention in 2022 and 2023. Canberrans escape the nation's capital as often as possible (especially during the public holiday at the beginning of October, when Conflux is staged), but to a visitor like me (in 2008) the temptation was to skip large sections of the convention and visit the tourist sites. Leigh mentions hitting the National Library and National Portrait Gallery on the same day, then spending the next day scouring **John Ryan's** fanzine collection, which is in the National Library. Eventually Conflux started: 'Most of [my memories of the convention] include Perry, Alison, Justin, Alan and Rose, and more grog than I've consumed in years ... I don't feel that I drifted too far onto the intoxicated side of the spectrum but spent a lot of time in a very pleasant mental state among friends'. Some of the conven-



Ornithopter Mk.IIb

tion items about fandom sound as if I would have enjoyed them, especially Perry's GoH speech and any items regarding fanzine collections, but I can't drink these days, and people ignore me anyway, so I probably would have hit more of the regular program items than Leigh did.

Gillian Polack tells about some TV she watched recently. For good reasons, she has not been able to travel recently.

ORNITHOPTER MK. IIB: ON A WHINGE AND A PRAYER: BEING THE REPORT OF A CONFUSED HISTORIAN FROM AUSTRALIA ON HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FOR SUNDRY PURPOSES

(written by Leigh Edmonds; 73 pp.; available as a PDF from leighedmonds01@gmail.com or downloadable from <http://efanzines.com>)

Only a brief mention here, because I've read only fragments so far. I did not receive it through the mail, but I do have a print copy, because Leigh included it as a contribution to the April mailing of ANZAPA (828 pages). As you're holding out for another another great swatch of Edmonsiana, you'll enjoy Leigh's account of his visit to **Las Vegas** for 2004's **Corflu**. I'm not sure some of his readers will appreciate his dividing his account into 'whinges' (in tribute to Nic Farey). As the title of my account of my American trip in 2005, *American Kindness* says, my feeling is that individual

Proud And Lonely: A History of Science Fiction Fandom in Australia Part One: 1936 To 1961

by Leigh Edmonds

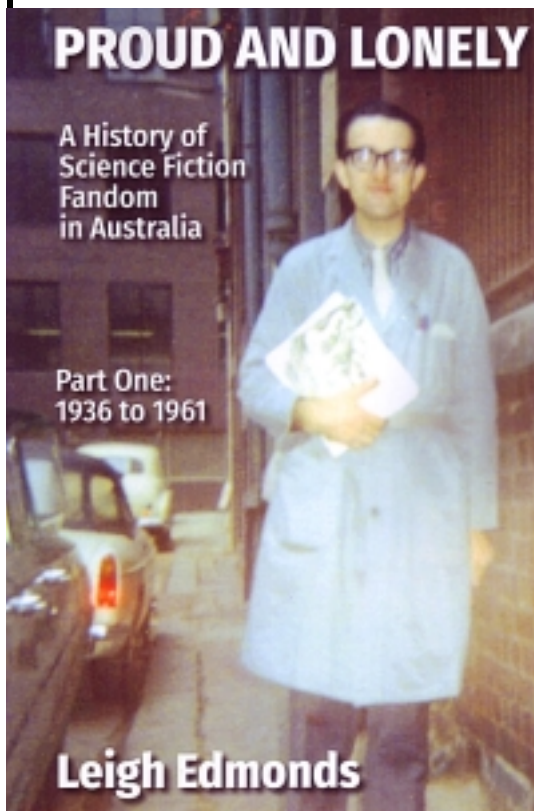
PROUD AND LONELY is new history of science fiction and its fans in Australia, telling the story of its arrival in Australia in the 1920s, and the start here of a sub-culture of fans of the genre.

‘Science fiction was seen as a low form of literature and didn’t get public acceptance until at least the 1970s,’ says the author, historian DR LEIGH EDMONDS.

‘Because of the frequent ridicule, fans of the genre kept quiet about their interest in public. But in private they sought out other fans, locally and overseas. They corresponded, started clubs and published amateur magazines about the genre’, he said.

‘They created a fascinating sub-culture that was a microcosm of Australian life from the 1930s to the 1960s.’

Publisher ROB GERRAND said that NORSTRILIA PRESS was pleased to be publishing PROUD AND LONELY. ‘In our first incarnation our major focus was on science fiction, and we believe Leigh’s history makes a significant contribution to the study of the field. It will also be of value to people interested in cultural and literary studies.’



PROUD AND LONELY is part one of a two-part history exploring how science fiction fandom developed in Australia, from its beginnings in the 1930s to the first World Science Fiction Convention held in Australia, in 1975.

PART ONE deals with the early period up to 1961, when government regulations prevented most science fiction from being imported into Australia, and the seeds were sown of a gathering energy that would raise Australia’s profile in the global science fiction community.

Available from bookshops and online.

PROUD AND LONELY is published on 1 May 2024. ARP: \$39.99; UK £19.99; USA \$29.99. eBook A\$10.99

LEIGH EDMONDS is available for interview.

To receive a review copy of PROUD AND LONELY, please contact: Rob Gerrand 0411 134 904 or rob@norstriliapress.com.

Americans are generous beyond limit to poor wandering Australian fans. During my trip I did share Leigh's confusion at the abrupt changing sides of the road from Australia to America. Also I had difficulty in finding the correct name for the drink I call 'long black coffee'. The first time I tried 'espresso' I received a tiny dribble of coffee in the bottom of a cup. I can't remember the right answer — just ask for 'coffee, no milk', I think.

PROUD AND LONELY: A HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM IN AUSTRALIA: PART ONE: 1936 TO 1961, by Leigh Edmonds (Production by David Grigg for Norstrilia Press; May 2024; 242 pp.; available as Print on Demand from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com); or \$A40 from the publisher www.norstriliapress.com)

Proud and Lonely is a book, not a fanzine. **Leigh Edmonds** has been working on it for at least six years, and here is Part One, covering the years from 1935 to 1961. I'm giving it a special mention because it is an important document not only about and for Australian fans, but also because it deals with the attempts in Australia by readers and writers to obtain supplies of their favourite reading matter, and with some of the early attempts to begin an SF publishing industry in Australia.

You will remember that Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrand, and I were the partners in the original Norstrilia Press from 1975 to 1985. That incarnation is long dead, but Rob has revived the **Norstrilia Press** imprint. And he doesn't have to print and store 1500 copies of each book, as these days we have the benefit of Print on Demand publishing and distribution.

In *Proud and Lonely* you will find a free-flowing account of an amazing set of mainly teenagers who formed clubs before World War II, lost those links

when they were all sent away to fight, then reformed those clubs in 1946.

Sydney and Melbourne fandoms took divergent paths. Sydney fandom was dominated by the **Futurian Society**, whose main organisers were people such as **Graham Stone** and **Vol Molesworth**. They believed that the main point of an SF club was the promotion of science fiction. The Futurians were beset by rules and regulations, and harboured bitter disputes between members.

The **Melbourne Science Fiction Group/Club** was formed from kids who just wanted to track down the few overseas SF magazines and books that might be littered around secondhand bookshops. They met first in friends' homes, then in clubrooms with widely varying facilities, meanwhile publishing a number of interesting fanzines. **Etherline**, the Club's fanzine, edited by **Ian Crozier**, lasted 101 issues, disappearing at the end of the 1950s.

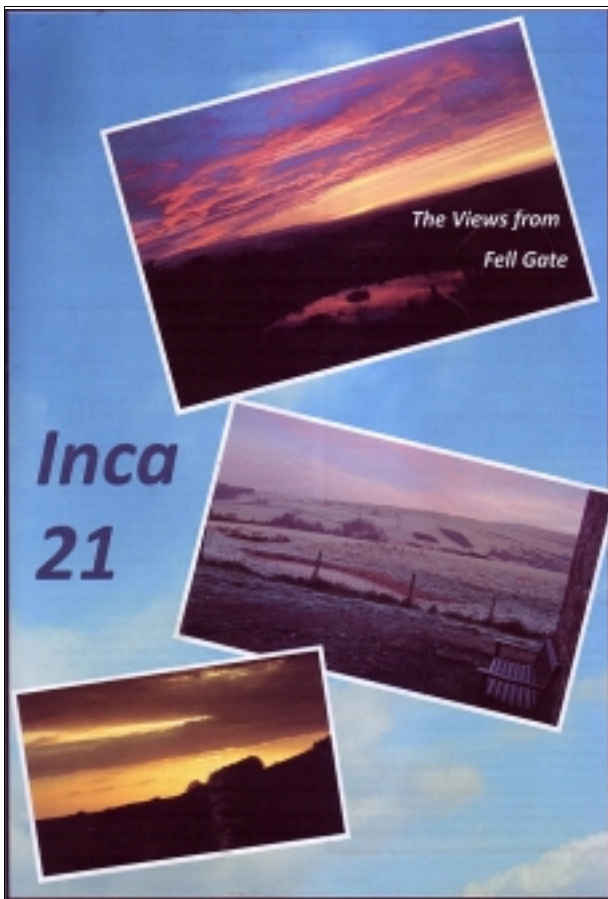
Leigh Edmonds is very good at illustrating a number of general points by concentrating on the people involved. His book is based on a vast amount of detailed research, made possible because most of the fanzines published by Melbourne and Sydney fans have been stored in libraries. Leigh's academic heart beats below the surface of the narrative, but the surface itself reads like a good novel. The book includes far more illustrations than I've ever seen of 1950s fans. And the cover features the hero of the book, **Merv Binns**, who was the man on the front desk at McGills Newsagency in central Melbourne for twenty years, providing the only regular source of fans' favourite reading matter. He was also the indefatigable organiser who kept the Melbourne SF Club and its library going through difficult times (the late 1950s to 1966). By contrast, in Sydney the saturnine figure of **Graham Stone** hovered over everything.

Rob Jackson's Inca

In an email to **Rob Jackson** I said that I probably wouldn't send him a letter of comment, but would review the latest issue of *Inca*. I hadn't counted on my own tardiness. *Inca 21* (March 2023), which I promised to review, has already been followed by *Incas 22* (July–August 2023) and *23* (January 2024). No. 24 might already be on its way.

INCA 21
edited by **Rob Jackson**, who also provided the cover; March 2023; 50 pp.
(Chinthay, Nightingale Lane, Hambrook, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 8UH, or robjackson60@gmail.com)

Inca, printed with coloured illustrations, must cost a fortune to produce and post. Each issue



radiates a spirit of friendly conviviality that is the envy of other fanzine publishers, such as me. **No. 21** includes a wide variety of personal and fannish articles, with photos, some retrieved from the past and others about it.

Rob's mother's family history is both interesting and well illustrated. **Rob's** fannish article 'The Gamblesby Ghost', reprinted from 1976, is an amusing tale about a family ghost. **Harry Bell's** 1975 'Tale from the Grimling Bosch: The Great Expedition' is about a doomed Gannetfandom trip to the Lakes District.

In 1975, **Coral Clarke** wrote an article about 'The Psychology of Room Parties', which Rob reprints here. Current Australian hotel policies preventing the holding of convention room parties make this irrelevant, but Coral's observations were accurate at the time.

Perhaps more interesting to the contemporary fan about town is **Rob's** account of the fanzine fans' convention **Corflu Pangloss**, held in **Vancouver** in **October 2022**. Lots of photos of fans I've never met, photos of old friends I met in 2005 in San Francisco, plus nice colour shots of Vancouver and a lively convention report.

Rob also publishes **Garth Spencer's Guest of Honour Speech**. A nerve-wracking practice of each year's Corflu is to draw out of a hat the name

of an attendee. That person becomes the Guest of Honour, and is expected to give a sparkling speech at a day's notice. Cowards like me pay \$25 to make sure their names do not go into the hat.

In 'On the Wheels of Night' **Taral Wayne** writes yet another of his fine articles, but about a subject that doesn't interest me: cars — *but* in this article he writes about the various incarnations of the Batmobile and revivals of *Batman*.

A feature of many issues of *Inca* is has been Rob Jackson's summary of topics being discussed on the **IntheBar** e-list discussion group. I joined IntheBar many years ago, but unjoined quickly because of the high volume of traffic. Little did I know that **Fictionmags**, the e-list group I stayed with, would match IntheBar for chatter tracks. Here in *Inca 21* and later in 23, Rob provides some of his own comments gleaned from IntheBar. Subjects discussed include 'Veganism vs science', 'Chasing sleep', and 'Rail fandom'.

The letter column is lively, as you would expect. A long letter from **Heath Row** is the highlight in this issue.

INCA 22

July–August 2023; 44 pp.; cover by Rob Jackson

Inca 22 begins with a Major Article, the kind of standout piece every fanzine editor wishes to receive. **Kingsley Amis** has often been linked with British SF, especially because of the publication of his critical book *New Maps of Hell* and his SF/alternative history novels *The Alteration* and *Russian Hide and Seek*. **Kevin Williams** writes a 'history with personal reminiscence' about '**Kingsley Amis in Swansea: Lucky Jim, Dylan, Jazz & the Dynevor Connection**'. Amis and his family lived in Swansea, Wales, from 1949 to 1961, years that produced *Lucky Jim*, Amis's most popular novel. The Dylan in this case is Dylan Thomas. The section on 'Amis and SF' includes a wealth of material, mainly concerning Amis's friendship with such writers as Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison and the several conventions they all attended. Williams also covers Amis's 'swing to the right' and his move to Cambridge from Swansea, a move that he regretted greatly.

It's not often that **Taral Wayne's** fanzine articles take second place to anybody else's, but I must admit I'm not much interested in *Ghostbusters*, the subject of 'Ghost Writing'. If the *Ghostbusters* franchise is your thing, you would enjoy this article.

Another *Inca* and another Corflu. **Corflu** is the

only non-Australian convention I would like to attend every year, especially as it's been revived now for three years since Covid but Melbourne's own Continuum has only just risen from deep slumber. **Rob** reviews **Corflu 40**, also known as **Corflu Craic**, held in Belfast in 2023. It sounds as if everybody had a great time, especially as many of the attendees had met each other the year before in Vancouver. This convention, organised by **Tommy Ferguson**, had a special significance: it gave fans with fanhistorical interests the chance to tour the main sites of **Irish Fandom**, especially Oblique House, where Walt and Madeleine Willis lived when Irish fandom first started. The gang shown on page 22 also visited Scrabo Tower. Rob writes: 'It was built in 1857, apparently financed by the tenants and friends, as tribute for [the third Marquis of Londonderry]'s concern during the Irish famine; but its fannish fame is as the ultimate destination in *The Enchanted Duplicator* [the ultimate fannish document].'

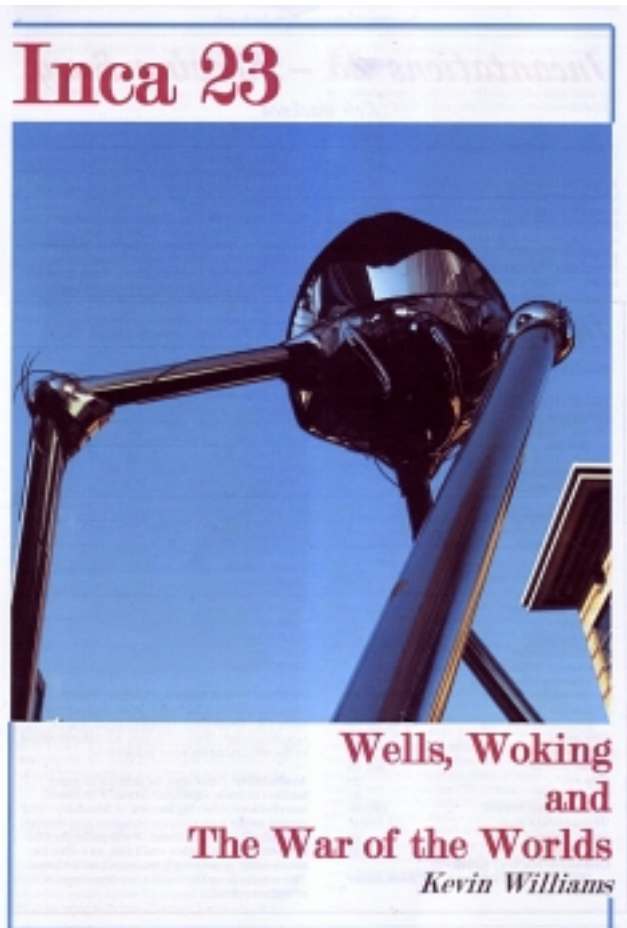
Rather more esoteric is **Rob's** article about Australian expatriate **Clive James'** song lyrics, details of which seems to have escaped aficionados of Australian literature. Rob tells us that **Pete Atkins** set to music a set of James' lyrics, leading to albums released in the early 1970s. The lyrics themselves have appeared in **Clive James' Collected Poems 1958–2015**, and in a book by **Ian Shircore**, *Loose Canon: The Extraordinary Songs of Clive James and Peter Atkin* — but not on CD.

INCA 23

January 2024; 46 pp.; cover by Kevin Williams

Who is this paragon of fanzine writing, **Kevin Williams**? Why have we never corresponded, let alone exchanged fanzines? In *Inca 23*, he contributes another major piece of writing, **'Wells, Woking and The War of the Worlds'**, which begins with Wells writing: 'I'm doing the dearest little serial for Pearson's new magazine, in which I completely wreck and destroy Woking.' Aldiss echoed this thought many years later when he confessed that in his novel *Greybeard* he enjoyed flooding the Thames Valley.

Kevin Williams writes that the 'mere 18 months that Wells lived in Woking were perhaps the most productive of his whole writing career'. *The Time Machine* had already been published in 1895, but ***The War of the Worlds*** seems to have been the novel that really launched Wells' career. Williams appears to be as familiar with Horsell Common, where the first Martian spaceship landed, as he is with Wells's work. Using many illustrations, he writes about the locations of the action of *War of*



the Worlds, and provides a map of them. Delicious stuff, including his own adjunct article '**Henri Alvin Correa and The War of the Worlds**'. Correa was asked by Wells to illustrate a Belgian edition his novel. Rob tells us that 'Correa contracted TB and died in 1910 at the age of 34 — and was largely forgotten until the 1970s when Brazilian art historians brought him back to attention with an exhibition at the Sao Paulo Museum of Art.'

Curt Phillips contributes '**Wet Shirts over Gettysburg**', an article about the making of the 1993 movie *Gettysburg*. Thanks to Dick Jenssen I've seen the entire film, over 4 hours long, from a

DVD print that includes a minute or two left out of the theatrical print. Also thanks to Dick, I have the latest Blu-ray of the film, but I forgot to ask him if it includes the missing minute or two. Curt Phillips, prominent American fan, has read '50 books and uncountable articles' about the **Battle of Gettysburg**, usually nominated as the turning point of the American Civil War. Curt writes this article from the standpoint of a Civil War re-enactor. Being a movie extra on a battlefield sounds very uncomfortable, but Curt would not have missed it for the world.

Christina Lake's Nowhere Fan

NOWHERE FAN 7, November 2023, written by
Christina Lake; cover by Christina Lake
(4 West Rise, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4HJ,
UK or email: christina.l@virgin.net)

I feel very privileged to receive a print copy of **Nowhere Fan 7** from **Christina Lake** in Cornwall because (a) even low-scale postage has become high-expensive these days; (b) Christina is one of fandom's great 'natural writers': to read every sentence she writes feels like reading gold. Christina and her partner Doug Bell lead interesting lives because Christina is interested in interesting things. She learns the Cornish language. She runs marathons. She swims competitively. She takes an interest in world fandom.

Christina locs fanzines I've read and meant to reply to, but haven't. I'm grateful. Fanzines reviewed this issue include **John Berry's Dot-Fanzine**. Sorry, John and Eileen, I haven't replied yet. I do keep up a conversation with **Jerry Kaufman**, and I enjoyed his latest, *Littlebrook 12*, as much as Christina does.

Good to see that **Suzle** writes about **the Bee Gees** in this issue. Remember that they had had a burgeoning career in Australia before they set sail for London. There their lives and careers became very complicated, as can be seen in 2020's documentary, *The Bee Gees: How Can You Mend a Broken Heart*.

Christina's comments about **Inca 22** echo my own.

I haven't seen **Marcin Klak's A-Zyn**, possibly because it hasn't appeared as a PDF on efanzines.com. Marcin and I did finally achieve the

fannish handshake when he visited Melbourne during his GUFF trip, but I've not established continuous correspondence since then. To judge from Christina's comments, I'm missing out on a good fanzine.

Over the last 50 years I've tried to keep up with trip reports from winners of international fan funds. I doubt if I had many **TAFF trip reports** (trips back and forth across the Atlantic) until recently, but they are becoming more available, either as paper documents or as items stored on Fanac.org. I have most **DUFF trip reports** (Down Under Fan Fund, which takes fans back and forth



from Australia to USA), but not Jack Herman's, as he likes to remind me. **GUFF trip reports** (which takes fans back and forth between Australia and Britain or Europe) are favourites as well. I'm not sure I've seen a **FFANZ Report** (Australia and New Zealand).

Christina reminds me of TAFF trip reports from people I've never heard of, such as **Don Ford**, and from others who remain legends, such as **Ron Ellik**, who died not long after his trip in 1968, or **Robert Madle**, who died recently at the age of 102. Christina writes: 'What interests me more in the old TAFF trip reports is the throwaway lines about life in Britain from the perspective of the American visitors'. She quotes lots of good lines from Robert Madle.

Christina also discusses **Walt Willis's *The Harp Stateside***, which lucky fans can also find as part of the vastest fanzine of them all: **Warhoon 28**, the Willis omnibus published 50 years ago by Richard Bergeron.

Christina also reviews **Sue Mason's recent *Into the Wide Purple Yonder***, about her visit to USA in 2000. Fortunately **ALISON SCOTT** sent me a print copy, which I haven't yet read. I will enjoy comparing Christina's notes with my own impressions.

Lively fan writing attracts lively letters of comment, including **Fred Lerner** writing about a trip to Britain fifty years ago, and **Robert Lichtman** contributing one of his last letters of comment before his death in 2022.

Banana Wings fly on

BANANA WINGS 79, November 2023; 60 pp.; colour cover by Ulrika O'Brien (edited and written Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, CR0 7ES, UK; fishlifter@gmail.com. Available only by print or email attachment.)

Every aspect of **Banana Wings** reeks of smooth brilliance. Take the editorials. Not just one writer/editor here with 'natural style', but two of the best: **Claire Brialey** and **Mark Plummer**. Claire has in her time won a Hugo for Best Fan Writer, and Mark has just won a FAAN Award for Best Fan Writer. Claire and Mark have been selected as Fan Guests of Honour at this year's Worldcon in Glasgow (8-12 August). Claire has won British fandom's Doc Weir Award. Between them, they've won Nova Awards. Fortunately they carry such honours with humour, aplomb, and modesty. But no complacency.

Banana Wings can only be obtained by snail mail or by asking them nicely for a PDF attachment. Thanks very much, Claire and Mark, for sending it to me. Here's yet another fanzine I haven't yet looked at but which I did promise to review.

Claire and Mark are the exemplars of the kind of fanzine editorial writing that unravels gently, but whose ends tie up firmly at the end. I had no idea where **Claire** was going in her editorial when she started talking to her twenty-years-younger self in the middle of the night. It turns out that Claire, despite honours heaped upon her, harbours doubts about herself and her place in

fandom. Claire and Mark are the two people in fandom who most Take the Trouble in anything they attempt. If you don't enjoy various fan activities, you drop them. If you enjoy them, you don't need to justify yourself. On her way through her absorbing but slightly confusing editorial, Claire

BANANA WINGS 79 – NOVEMBER 2023



mentions doubts that have always puzzled me. Why won't she write me letters of comment, or even allow brilliant prose passages in ANZAPA to be reshaped slightly for letters of comment? I've never understood that, but Claire does try to explain her attitude. I don't agree with her, and hope she changes her mind one year, but at least I now know where she is coming from. She says she wants to put the 'fun' back into her fan activities, but I get the impression that wherever she and Mark take a pew is a 'fun' place. My own social life is much more limited. But nothing takes away from the fun of publishing fanzines.

Claire does say 'It's all Bruce Gillespie's fault' that she and Mark joined **ANZAPA**. Yet it's all **Yvonne Rousseau's** fault — she introduced me to **Acnestis**, an apa where I really enjoyed the discussion from 1995 to 2005. Mark and Claire left **Acnestis** long before it closed. *Banana Wings* rose as a power in the fannish world. Claire and Mark and I (and Spike) were at Potlatch in San Francisco in 2005 and I had just taken on the Official Bloody Editorship of ANZAPA. Claire and Spike came up to me on the last afternoon and asked if they could join. Mark writes that he has contributed 75,000 words there during the last 19 years.

So that's how it goes, Claire. One good thing in fan activity leads to another. We've all ended up on the other side of Covid feeling a bit battered, mainly because of the Post Offices of three countries, but we just keep on publishing until we have to stop.

Mark's editorial is a bit more episodic than Claire's. He points out that *Banana Wings* has not appeared since March 2022, No. 78, although he promised to return its schedule to 'normal'. No matter. *SFC 116* should have appeared in January. The concept of 'normal' schedule is a vague one.

Mark pays tribute to the good and great who have left us recently. **Bob Madle** died in October 2022, at the age of 102. His achievements in fandom were immense.

Mark also remembers **Justin Busch**, whose print-only fanzines I could not trade with because of the horrendous things that happened to the US Post Office in 2020. I hope somebody had scanned his fanzines to fanac.org.

Martin Morse Wooster's death I've already remembered in *SFC*, and also that of **Robert Lichtman**, whose absence still hits us. I didn't know **Erik Arthur**, but Melbourne fans enjoyed the company of **Eve Harvey** whenever she and

John visited here. And I have written in *SFC* about losing **Maureen Kincaid Speller**.

Mark writes about the **British Eastercon** of 2023, but perhaps a bit too politely. I gather that the new 'passive' model of panelist-audience interaction is not nearly as interesting as the one we're all used to. More interesting is Mark's discussion of being made a Worldcon Guest of Honour.

No time or space left to discuss the other fine articles in *Banana Wings*, those of **D. S. Ketelby**, a new voice to me, and **Alison Scott**, about 'The first and most successful UK television ad to effectively use a science fiction theme' (Cadbury's Smash Martians).

As I read the *BW* letter column I realised all over again the skill with which Claire edits it. Every letter leads into another seamlessly, by a surreptitious method that I recognise, envy, and have been rarely able to achieve. Australians seem to have taken over the letter column — **Rose Mitchell**, **Leigh Edmonds**, and **Perry Middlemiss** this time; wot, no **Kim Huett**? — or our comments have set off conversations among others.

William Breiding admits feeling 'a deep barrel of inferiority complexes', especially when attending conventions, even after he had become quite famous. I wish I had known this when I attended Corflu in 2005; I had expected William to be one of the people to whom I could talk most easily, but that just didn't happen.

Steve Jeffery talks of dealing with old technologies. I just let them whirr away until they stop working.

Jerry Kaufman and others discuss keeping up with 'fannish gate-keeping' and the problem of maintaining activity when getting older. That's my central problem, as it is with many *Banana Wingers*.

Leigh Edmonds comes closest to exposing the contradictions in my own viewpoints. Yes, Leigh, I do find sending out individual availability messages about the PDF edition of *SFC* more of a drudge than the old routine of typing, duplicating, collating, stapling, enveloping, and sending out the copies. That's because it was all my work, and I could send each copy as a present in the mail. Now Australia Post prevents me making contact with overseas friends with a *real* fanzine. If Bill Burns's **efanzines.com** did not exist, I could no longer publish, and neither could most current fanzine fans.

Let's give Geri a Hugo!

IDEA 13, December 2023,
edited by Geri Sullivan; 118 pp.; FAAN-Award
winning cover by Sue Mason
(Toad Woods, idea@toad-hall.com)

Thanks to **Geri Sullivan** for arranging for **Mark Plummer** to send me from England *Idea 13*, although I am not a contributor. It appears 23 years after *Idea 12*.

I had thought *Idea 13* would be a shoo-in to win the FAAN Award for Best Genzine at the most recent Corflu, in Las Vegas. My gob-smacking surprise of the year is that *SF Commentary* won. The injustice of it.

But fortunately *Idea 13* is one of the few real fanzines to be nominated recently for a Hugo Award in the Best Fanzine category, to be awarded at the Glasgow Worldcon. If you're voting for the Hugos, vote for *Idea*.

I am pleased that **Alison Scott** pushed Geri into returning to fanzine publishing. I've never met Geri, but I see her occasionally on Facebook and I'm told she radiates sweetness and light to fans she meets. In particular, I remember that she took Bill Wright to the **Ig Nobel Awards Ceremony** in 2013, during his DUFF trip. (Geri was graphic designer for the Annals of Improbable Research (AIR), sponsors of the Ignobel Awards, for fourteen years.)

In her editorial, Geri speaks for me and many others:

Since 2000, Terry Hughes died. Jeff's and my dog Willow died. Mom died. Lee Hoffman died. Daddy died. Susan Palermo, Jim Young, Kate Yule, and Randy Byers all died of glioblastoma, My sister Sue died. Denny Lien died. So many more friends and loved ones died. You'll find articles and letters about some of them, from some of them, in these pages. They're gone; their words remain. We are fortunate in the latter, though certainly not in the former.

Many of the articles in *Idea 13* are brilliant, and the ones that are not are still well worth reading.

Who but **Alison Scott** could write about how she and her husband **Steven Cain** met and got together as a screenplay; a screenplay, moreover, that is very funny and not sentimental or embar-



assing? The main characters come to life on the page.

The **convention report** is the mainstay of many fanzines, but some convention reports are more enjoyable than others. **Sandra Bond** writes an epic, a chapter from her forthcoming TAFF Report, about a convention that goes horribly wrong at the beginning and does not improve. The convention was **Pemmi-Con**, last year's NASFiC in Winnipeg, Canada (the NASFiC is the world convention they hold in America when it escapes overseas). This is no mere whinge. You can imagine Sandra trudging through the convention rooms in Winnipeg, soaking up details, getting angrier and angrier, arranging the crimes of the convention organisers in her head as a great yarn to be unleashed on fandom.

In 1985, Elaine and I and a few others were invited to dinner at the home of **John Bangsund** and **Sally Yeoland** after the last day of Aussiecon II, held in Melbourne. At that dinner I got to know **Art Widner** much better, and really got to know **Terry Hughes** for the first time. He was quite the nicest man I've ever met in fandom. We had swapped fanzines, of course. His *Mota* was a masterpiece of understated humour, but its pages revealed little of the personal charm of the editor. In 2001 I was one of many fans completely

shocked when I heard that Terry had died of a glioblastoma brain cancer. Those outside his closest circle had received no warning. In **'A Brother Remembered'**, **Craig Hughes'** speech at the Memorial Service held for Terry on 28 November 2001, he shows how strongly his family felt about him his whole life. There are some people we can't lose, but do.

It sounds as if I'm overpraising everything in *Idea 13*, but it's not often I sit down and relax with a 120-page fanzine, reading it straight through. The two other articles I consider brilliant are **Geri's** own account of **'The Further Adventures of Geri Sullivan, Girl Homeowner'** and **Ted White's** surprising **'The Last Man on Earth'**.

The only reason why Elaine and I have been able to survive in our own home in the suburbs is because Elaine is the brilliant practical person who can solve endless problems that would force me out of the house to wander forever the foot-paths of Greensborough. **Geri** tells what it's like if

you're the only person in a new house out in the woods and you really do need some practical advice during emergencies.

Ted White has always been an advocate for genuine 'fan fiction', i.e. fiction written by fans for fans *about fans*. But over the years I've seen few pieces of fan fiction that he's written. I don't know whether he means 'The Last Fan on Earth' to be his own last hurrah, but it's certainly a penetrating and amusing extrapolation of the fate of the last fan sitting in a small room when nobody else remains. I hope some editor picks this up for an SF anthology.

Don't miss out on the letters column, with not one but two letters by **Skel (Paul Skelton)** in fine funny ferocious form. Twenty-three years later, a letter of comment from Skel is just as welcome. The same column includes what must have been **Harry Warner Jr's** last letter of comment, just to show how it's done.

William Breiding the inspirer

PORTABLE STORAGE 8, Autumn 2022,
edited by William Breiding; cover: Joe
Pearson; 132 pp.
(Email William at portablezine@gmail.com)

PORTABLE STORAGE 9; final issue March
2023 (Cover: carl juarez; 188 pp.)

The most inspiring fanzine editor — for me — in recent years has been **William Breiding**, who discovered that many fans still need an outlet for their serious but personal essays about SF, fandom, and the wider world. Those fans who prescribe what other fans should write about have a rather rigid idea of what 'fannish' writing should be like. But I began publishing fanzines because I was told that in fanzines I could publish just what pleased me. If recipients of the early issues didn't like what they received, they could ask to be taken off my mailing list. But since then I've tried to ignore the distinction between 'fannish' and 'sercon' (serious–constructive) whenever possible.

When William Breiding began *Portable Storage* a few years ago, he was putting into action the same model I've always held in my mind. He asked his wide range of friends to send contributions about whatever really turned them on. William has much greater layout and artistic skills available to him than I have, and he's worked

out a way to distribute print copies via Amazon.com. But *Portable Storage* during its brief life before William closed it, has been very close to what I might have liked to have published.

When William asked individuals for contributors, the contributions rolled in. These days I don't have the energy or concentration power to write 5000-word articles about my favourite authors, but William allowed me to publish in three different issues long articles that first appeared many years ago: the **Roger Weddall** article from the nineties, the **Avram Davidson** article from 2001, and the **James Tiptree Jr** article from 2018.

My favourite articles from *PSNo 8* include **Andy Hooper's** article about the truly great fan writer **Redd Boggs**; **Kurt Erichsen's** article about the **Cyrkle**; **Steven Byron Bieler's** article about the role of **typewriters** in literature; and **G. Sutton Breiding's** poem 'Croon'.

The true star of both issues is **William** himself, with his brilliant editorials and his deft handling of the letters of comment.

In No. 9, my four-star articles include **Darrell Schweitzer's** 'Women in Science Fiction' (there has been a much greater number of women writers of science fiction and fantasy since the 1930s than now claimed by advocates of women's writing). **Casey Wolf's** 'A Wild Talent & Fine Friend', about the work of **Eileen Kernaghan**, upset me merely



because I had hoped that Casey would send it to me! (Hear the cry of envy from any fan editor who believes he or she has missed out on a great article.) **John Fugazzi** writes a brilliant article about the 1960s' garage bands. **Andy Hooper** pays a proper tribute to the very great **Robert Lichtman**, who left us in July 2022. In 'A Pleasure Full Grown', the finest contribution in *Portable Storages* 8 and 9, **Dale Nelson** writes in depth about the current threats to freedom posed by intellectual and emotional totalitarianism. And **Gary Hubbard** writes a sparkling piece of life history that reminds me he has been one of fandom's best writers for many years. Congratulations to William for attracting an article from him.

The letters of comment column is superb, as I expected. If you ask him nicely William will supply

you with a PDF of the letters of comment that were sent to him after the publication of No. 9.

20 pages is quite enough! But I still have many more items sent through the mail to discuss. Wait until **SFC 118**.

— **Bruce Gillespie, 14 May 2024**



COVER—BY CARL JUAREZ

JANEEN WEBB is a multiple award-winning Australian author, editor, critic, and academic who has written or edited a dozen books and over a hundred essays and stories. Her most recent novel is *The Gold-Jade Dragon* (2021). She has taught at various universities, is internationally recognised for her critical work in speculative fiction, and has contributed to most of the standard reference texts in the field. She holds a PhD from the University of Newcastle, NSW. She is a recipient of the World Fantasy Award, the Peter McNamara SF Achievement Award, the Aurealis Award, and four Ditmar Awards. Her next short story collection, *Scorpion Girl*, will be published later this year.

Janeen Webb

Alternate History: Why do I write it?

[First delivered as a talk to the Nova Mob, Melbourne's SF discussion group, 5 June 2024.]

I've always been a history tragic, never happier than when I'm up to my elbows in a pile of old papers. As a kid, my friends used to joke that they could always find me because they only had to look in the library — and that was before I discovered the stacks. That fascination hasn't changed: I recently cut short a UK holiday (after I'd been to the 2019 Dublin Worldcon and the Belfast Convention), and flew to Washington DC because I received an email giving me permission to access the US State Department archives — where I spent a happy week checking the handwritten correspondence between President Pierce and Consul James Tarleton. Consul Tarleton was most definitely on the ground in Ballarat at the time of the Eureka Stockade. He was certainly in contact with James McGill and Charles Ferguson, leaders of the California Rangers at the time of the uprising. Governor Hotham knew it; Police Commissioner Robert Rede complained about it; but somehow our historians have forgotten about it. More about this later, when we talk about *The Five Star Republic*.

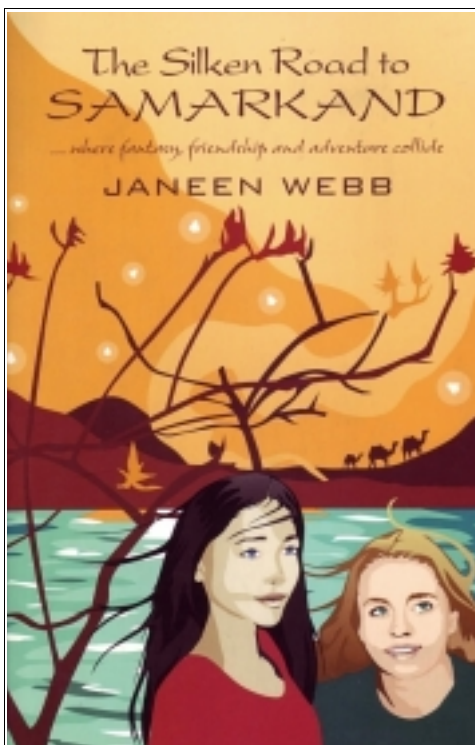
As a career academic I've specialised in literary history, so it's natural enough that when I finally turned to writing fiction, alternate — or counterfactual — history was a natural fit for me. History, after all, is a fragile thing: events could always so easily have gone another way.

So what do I mean by **counterfactual fiction**?

There are a lot of definitions around, but it is generally accepted that counterfactual fiction involves some form of divergence from 'known' history, and creates a scenario which envisions a different sequence of events — one that would



Janeen Webb. (Photo: Andrew Enstice.)



change that history. The essence of good counterfactual fiction is good research, and lots of it — research that reveals the cracks in the fabric of the generally accepted versions of events that constitute our popular histories. For me, what this often comes down to is the truism that reality is socially constructed — that what is ‘true’ for people of one period is not ‘true’ for people of another. There is always a gap between what is common knowledge at the time, and what later turns up as recorded history, and my counterfactual fiction often occurs in this gap. To quote historian Niall Ferguson, ‘To understand how it actually was, we need to know how it actually wasn’t — but how, to contemporaries, it might have been.’¹

Let me give you an example of how this works. There is an early (1888) Australian scientific romance, *The Battle of Mordialloc — or How We Lost Australia*,² which is based on a predictive scenario where Russian forces invade Victoria. At the time, the Victorian gold fields were the richest prize on earth, so they were a target. For a modern reader, the idea that Russia might begin an invasion by attacking the sleepy seaside suburb of Mordialloc seems highly unlikely — but, at the time, everybody knew that the main Pacific trading routes included a well-used run from the Russian Kamchatka Peninsula via Hawaii and on down to Victoria, so this scenario was perfectly plausible — so plausible, in fact, that the Victorian government commissioned one of the most advanced warships in the world, the Monitor-class gun ship HMVS *Cerberus*, to defend Port Phillip Bay against Russian invasion. If we add to this the knowledge that this commission occurred immediately after

the US Civil War (1861–1865), when the Yankee North had brokered an agreement with Russia for its Pacific Fleet to attack Australia if Great Britain entered the war on the side of the Confederate South, we can see why Victoria was so nervous, and why the anonymous author of *Mordialloc* set his invasion story there. HMVS *Cerberus* is, of course, still with us — its hulk serving as a breakwater and a roost for local seagulls.

My short stories have always tended towards alternate realities, and I think my first deliberate foray into alternate history was a story called ‘**The Lion Hunt**’, which I wrote for Pamela Sargent’s collection, *Conqueror Fantastic*. The brief was to write an alternative history featuring an important historical figure. I chose Alexander the Great, and I warped known events just a little — so that Alexander was poisoned instead of his father, Philip of Macedon. In terms of counterfactual fiction theory, this story does have a single divergence point, but this divergence does not occur until the very end — after Alexander’s funeral — when the reader is left to consider just how much world events would have changed if Philip had not been murdered at that point in time, and Alexander had not taken the throne so early. ‘The Lion Hunt’ grew out of a strange bit of serendipity, when I was attending a science fiction conference at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, and I was lucky enough to be included in a small private tour of the burial site of Philip, led by the archaeologist who had discovered it. It was one of those rare moments of clarity, a window into another world, a genuine historical revelation.

Other stories, such as my novella ‘**Red City**’, drop predictably unprincipled modern characters into historical situations (in this case the strange events that led the Emperor Akbar to abandon the city of Fatehpur Sikri in India’s Uttar Pradesh), just to see how things might have played out.

I’ve re-worked several historical legends into alternate variations: ‘**Full Moon in Virgo**’ is based on the legend of Eggardon Heath, where many people swear that they have seen a Roman cohort marching by moonlight along a road that is no longer there; ‘**A Second Coming**’ explores the mayhem that erupts when postgrad students researching local legends surrounding Stonehenge succeed in raising a dead Celtic warrior and his wife from one of the less fashionable barrows down near the motorway, only to discover that the folklore offers nothing at all about putting them back to death — and the newly-risen Celts have absolutely no intention of cooperating in doing anything of the kind.

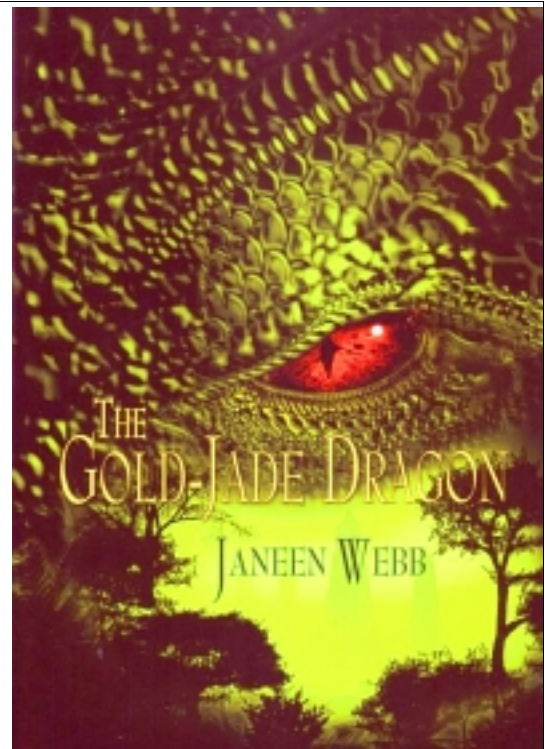
I’ve also written quite a few alternate stories

that play with our literary history. The Arthurian cycle is there in **'Gawain and the Selkie's Daughter'**, and again in **'The Sculptor's Wife'**, which combines the story of Nimue with the story of Pygmalion to create a monstrous creature who is right at home as an Influencer in our celebrity-obsessed culture. In **'Velvet Green'**, a teenage girl with attitude accidentally summons a traditional trickster — a Green Man — who promptly entangles her in conflict with the Faery Queen inside the Scottish border ballad of Tam Lin; **'A Faust Films Production'** slides Marlowe's Dr Faustus onto a modern movie set; **'A Wondrous Necessary Woman'** resets *The Changeling* on a sub-orbital station; **'Sorrow'** turns Coleridge's 'nightmare life-in-death' from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* into a Siren who is bound up with the world's plagues, bringing everything from the Black Death to Covid from ship to shore; **'Gallipoli Belle'** transposes Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* to the shores of Anzac Cove; while **'Paradise Design'd'** takes off from the realisation that Milton somehow neglected to mention dinosaurs when explaining the ways of God to man in *Paradise Lost* — my version of The Fall sets out to remedy that oversight, but the dinosaurs, alas, are behaving badly.

More recently, I have contributed (along with other Nova Mob members such as Lucy Sussex) to anthologies by **Steve Proposch and Christopher Sequeira**. These books deliberately set out to showcase alternate versions of historically significant writers, notably H. G. Wells and H. P. Lovecraft: my novella **'Apostles of Mercy'** was written for their anthology on *War of the Worlds*; my new story **'Mordor South'** is my take on *The Time Machine*; while **'Lady of the Swamp'** and **'A Pearl beyond Price'** (which won a Ditmar) are my alternate extrapolations of the Cthulhu universe. For those interested in definitions, this type of literary alternate history which extrapolates from historically popular imaginary worlds is often seen as a sub-genre in itself, sometimes called 'transcendent counterfactual fiction'.

In terms of longer fiction, my YA series, **'The Sinbad Chronicles'** (*Flying to Babylon* and *The Silken Road to Samarkand*) catapults a modern girl into ancient settings that combine stories from Sinbad's adventures in *The Thousand and One Nights* with elements of *The Odyssey* (and also components of *Gilgamesh*, in the as yet unpublished third book, *Flying to Babylon*). This synthesis creates yet another different kind of alternate literary history, blending ancient stories to create modern ones.

There's a distinction to be made between alternate histories, which tend to be set in variations



on what is recognisably 'our' world, and alternate realities that occur in analogous but slightly different versions of our world. My recent **Dragon novels** — *The Dragon's Child* and *The Gold-Jade Dragon* — are satires which take place in a magical-realist version of Hong Kong. Here, a ruthless, shape-shifting dynasty of Dragons has formed a corporate elite, manipulating global economies in their unending desire to increase their hoards — which are now, of course, digital. In this world, cold-blooded financial decisions are being made by actual reptiles — which I think would explain a lot! These dragons are adept at passing for human: they are charming, sophisticated, glamorous, and outrageously wealthy (the kind of Dragons you'd meet at a Gatsby party). And they are beautiful: I imagined that if a Faberge egg were to hatch, these jewelled creatures would emerge. Their scales are precious metals and gemstones, producing gorgeous creatures such as Ruby-Gold and Amethyst-Jade. The dynasty's matriarch, Lady Feng, is a pure gold Chrysanthemum Dragon with golden scales and eyes, while her patriarch partner, Lord Jade, has jade-green upper scales, ruby eyes and a ruby underbelly. Their recalcitrant offspring, Gold-Jade (gold scales, jade green eyes), is at the centre of these books: born with dragon power but tainted by human emotion when he is raised by human foster parents, this young dragon is trouble. When he goes rogue, his innate powers of coercion are augmented by the reach of social media, accessed via the Chinese University. His avatar, Iron Dragon, becomes a phenomenally successful

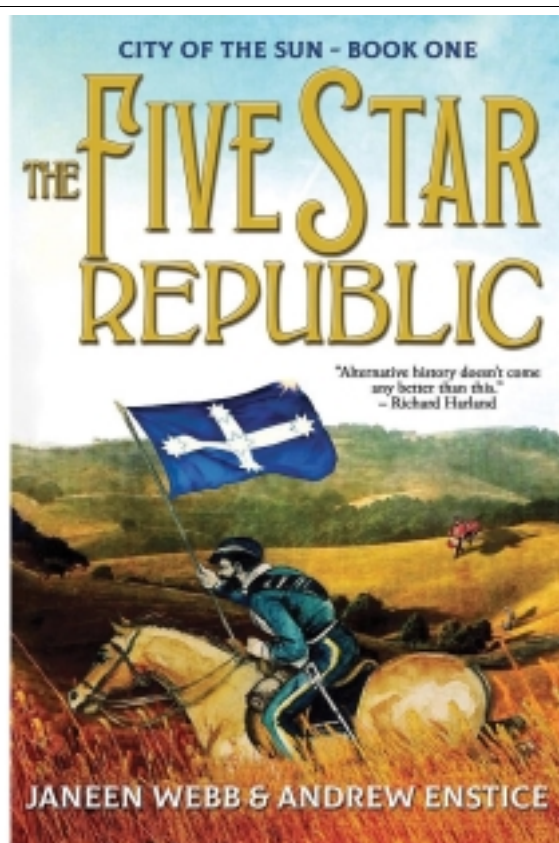
Influencer who expands his reach from gossip to blackmail and extortion, meddling with Hong Kong's dangerous crime syndicates until his activities threaten the whole Dragon dynasty. And the dynasty fights back.

And now, I'll return to the anecdotes I began with about discoveries made in the US State Department archives. You will, of course, have guessed that this particular line of research was part of a much larger project connected with my most extensive forays into counterfactual novels: the collaborations with my colleague **Andrew Enstice** which produced *The Five Star Republic*, and the as-yet-unpublished stand-alone sequel, *Solar City*. These are quintessential counterfactual novels, exploring a perfectly possible solar-powered nineteenth-century Australia — an alternate history that was technologically, culturally, and temporally possible. Basically, it is a story of a historical 'near miss'.

At this point, it is probably worth reminding ourselves of a common characteristic shared by history and counterfactual history: they are both stories constructed by a creative combination of available evidence and extrapolation. I began by talking about hands-on primary research into the historical narrative of the Eureka Stockade: by ignoring secondary sources, and approaching our research without preconceptions, Andrew and I looked for neglected points of view. In other words, we researched alternate sources to generate alternate narratives. The results were extraordinary: it turned out that the accepted history was highly selective, with whole sections of the popular narrative based on downplaying or ignoring evidence already in the public domain. So we reinserted some of those neglected elements and characters into our counterfactual account of events — producing a kind of recursive history, where unfamiliar truths may be read as fiction.

In the specific case of US Consul Tarleton, we knew that, before the uprising occurred, both Hotham and Rede had accused America of backing the rebel miners — and that Tarleton had denied it. So we applied for access to the archived presidential papers and went searching for a smoking gun. What we found was a smoking alibi — a master class in plausible deniability — which does, of course, tell its own fascinating story.

Rather than focusing on such things, we grounded the narrative of *The Five Star Republic* by concentrating on a subsequent and well documented real turning point in history — the 1873 global stock market crash, which severely weakened the British Empire (and for those of you interested in literary trivia, provided — I think —



the impetus for Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*). This stock market crash led to real recession, and created, for us, a plausible space for counterfactual constitutional and economic reform in Australia. We then added a consequent investment in John Ericsson's nascent solar steam technology — and *The Five Star Republic* became a credible alternative to the disastrous consequences of fossil fuel development that we live with today.

These novels do not follow established (or expected) patterns. *The Five Star Republic* does not have a single divergence (or jonbar) point: it is both a nexus story (occurring at the time of a break from commonly accepted history and demonstrating how that break occurred), and a true alternate history that continues long after that break to extrapolate a society that could easily have come to pass. Instead of a single divergence point, we started with a question: given the relatively advanced state of solar steam technology in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the obvious suitability of the Australian climate for its development, were there circumstances under which that technology might have become a rival to fossil fuels at the time? We answered this question by introducing a number of tiny divergences that occur in response to known circumstances — these appear innocuous at first, but collectively they add up to produce a significant change in political, scientific, and social direction. We were at great pains to keep these changes

plausible and definite so the whole thing could work. We also mixed real historical figures with fictional characters, to drive the plot, on the grounds that since the real historical actors had lacked the will to follow this direction, we needed fictional ones with more vision. To this end, the impetus for change in *The Five Star Republic* comes from Melbourne's businessmen (both real, like George Train, and imaginary, like Alec Buchanan), whose commercial decisions push Victoria's politicians into action — again, grounding the story in observable reality. We did help things along by giving the major investors a copper mine to guarantee supply of the copper components necessary for large-scale electrical conductivity (and given that the subject matter details alternate energy generation, it comes as no surprise that the novel has been identified by some readers as also belonging to the sub-genre of solar punk). In addition, because we could, we made social changes that ensured life was better for the historical female figures: in this counterfactual, Lola Montez does not die young, but becomes the owner of a successful Supper Club in fashionable Melbourne; Clara Seekamp, historical co-owner and founder of *The Ballarat Times*, is not reduced to floor-scrubbing poverty after her divorce, but establishes Australia's first women's magazine, *The New Day*, instead. And so on.

Counterfactual history assumes some reader familiarity with historical events, so that readers can identify the fictional alterations. So we had to think about what our readers might reasonably be expected to know. *The Five Star Republic* begins with the Eureka Uprising — common knowledge for Australians, but a complete mystery to most other readers (we encountered some US readers who simply read it as fiction). Luckily for us, international readers have no problem at all with extrapolating the development of solar-powered steam electricity generation — that strikes a chord everywhere. The early development of solar-powered electricity is very well documented: as an sf fan, I was delighted to discover that Hugo Gernsbeck had devoted one of his early magazines — *The Electrician* — entirely to charting its progress. Again, there was a common expectation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that solar-powered electricity was the future. The technology was progressing in leaps and bounds, and the world's largest solar-powered generating plant was built in Egypt in 1913 — just in time to get blown up at the start of World War One in 1914. And there's the rub. The carnage of WWI included the deaths of millions of horses, most of them pack animals, and, as the world literally ran out of horsepower, it turned to diesel as a quick

replacement. Diesel engines could be readily weaponised. Solar engines could not. The rest is, unfortunately, history.

Some writers have suggested that readers of counterfactuals should look up true history for themselves to check where divergence points occur, but this is seriously unlikely to happen; others insist that readers can be guided by insertion of the unfamiliar historical material within the text, but this can produce the kind of narrative lumps we all try to avoid. So Andrew and I tackled this thorny issue by adding an endnote section called 'These Things Are True', in which, for those interested in such things, we provide accurate potted biographies of the historical characters in the book. Some of the feedback was interesting, including one reader who complained that we had left out a bio of a fictional character he was sure must have existed.

Another major issue we had to address was the question of how to make the counterfactual novels feel real — how to make them an immersive experience and not just a costume drama. One of the most important choices a writer must make at the planning stage is the narrative voice of the story. This is not just a question of deciding point of view: the narrative voice determines a whole raft of stylistic elements. In *The Five Star Republic*, Andrew and I chose the voice of a progressive nineteenth century novelist to make it feel like the novel was contemporary with the counterfactual events. That's not to say that the voice is an exact simulacrum — no modern reader would sit still for the convolutions of nineteenth-century grammar and syntax. Sean McMullen picked up that voice immediately, likening the book to a Trollope novel. In terms of narrative process, because we were writing counterfactual fiction we were also strict about language — we didn't allow words that weren't in use at the time, or weren't invented yet. Our characters use period expression, and we have used slightly old fashioned grammar, but sparingly. We also adhered to the sometimes slightly awkward social conventions of the time, which gives a sense of period-appropriate formality without slowing the action. We were also sticklers for period-appropriate technology: everything we included was invented or in development at the time, and we layered up masses of little details to give perspective. Our narrative tweaks are confined to building on what was perfectly possible if political, economic or personal circumstances had been just that little bit different at the time.

Finally, I should add a last word about the process of collaboration on *The Five Star Republic*. The point of any collaboration is that it should produce work that is greater than the sum of its

parts — better than either contributor would have created alone. As literary historians, Andrew and I have co-authored several non-fiction works, including *Aliens & Savages*, recently reissued in 2023. So when we came to try applying this experience to alternative fiction, we were confident that we could split the research between us and be fairly certain that we were, so to speak, working on the same page. But fiction is a very different beast. When it comes to creative work, we have divergent skill sets: Andrew as a screenwriter and dramatist, and myself as a novelist and short story writer. Collaborating meant that we needed serious planning. We approached the novel series like a TV or film script; we mapped the action; we kept a bible of characters to keep track of their idiosyncrasies (favourite words and phrases, clothing, jewellery, etc., etc.). Ultimately, it was a process of creative compromise — a lot of my first drafts ended up on the metaphorical cutting room

floor when Andrew got at them—but it did produce a more dramatic result. *The Five Star Republic* is a fast read. I hope you enjoy it.

Notes:

- 1 Ferguson, Niall: 'Virtual History: Towards a 'Chaotic' Theory of the Past.' In *Virtual History: Alternative and Counterfactuals*. Ed. Niall Ferguson (London, Pan, 2003, p. 87). Cited in Dann, Jack: *The Fiction Writer's Guide to Alternate History*. (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, p. 26).
- 2 Anon: *The Battle of Mordialloc — or How We Lost Australia* (Samuel Mullen, Melbourne, 1888).

— **Janeen Webb**, June 2024

Introducing Janeen Webb

Born Newcastle, New South Wales: (1951–) Australian author, editor, critic, and academic with PhD in Literature, married to Jack Dann since 1995, who has published notable essays and reviews since 1985 and who was part of the influential editorial collective of *Australian Science Fiction Review: Second Series* from 1987 to the magazine's closure in 1991. With Dann she co-edited *Dreaming Down-Under: Thirty-one Original Stories From the Wild Side of Australian Speculative Fiction* (anthology, 1998), winner of the Ditmar Award and World Fantasy Award as Best Anthology. In the Introduction and Dedication to the sequel anthology *Dreaming Again* (2010) Dann all but formalises a co-editor credit to Webb, who 'would — and should — have been co-editor'.

Nonfiction works

Nonfiction works of note (all with Andrew Enstice) are *Aliens & Savages: Fiction, Politics, and Prejudice in Australia* (1998) republished 2023 ahead of Australia's Voice referendum; the lack of progress on race relations is salutary; *The Fantastic Self* (1999), an edited collection of critical essays on fantasy and science fiction; and a scholarly edition of *The Yellow Wave* by Kenneth Mackay (1895, this edition 2003).

Fiction works

Webb's first story of genre interest was 'Death at the Blue Elephant' in *Enter: HQ/Flamingo Short Story Collection* (anthology 1997); this is assembled along with most of her early short work as *Death at the Blue Elephant* (collection 2014).

The Sinbad Chronicles series, comprising *Sailing to Atlantis* (2001) and *The Silken Road to Samarkand* (2003), is Young-Adult fantasy.

The Dragon's Child (2018 chapbook) and *The Gold-Jade Dragon* (2020), set in a fantasy version of Hong Kong, are satires in which shapeshifting dragons comprise a ruthless corporate elite. The hoards they accumulate are digital. *The Dragon's Child* is all the more chilling (and engrossing) for being told deadpan.

The Five Star Republic (2021) with **Andrew Enstice** is a counterfactual (alternate history) novel where solar power fuelled late nineteenth-century Australia. It is the first in the projected **City of the Sun** series and persuasively relies on social and economic factors to provide the several junbar points upon which the counterfactual is based, as compared to the Great Man approach to nexus moments in history.

— **Murray MacLachlan**, based on Janeen's entry in *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (edited by John Clute and John Grant)

CY CHAUVIN writes:

I hope no one might get the impression from this article that I dislike poetry. I enjoy browsing through *The Lives of the Poets* by Michael Schmidt and *Ambit* magazine. My favourite poets are T. S. Eliot, Gerald Manley Hopkins, and Christina Rossetti. I read more poetry now than at any time in my life. The first poem that I recall reading as a child is ‘Catalog’, by Marianne Moore. The beginning lines go something like ‘Cats sleep fat, and walk thin. They’re not where they’ve been. And if a pumpkin grew under one, the cat would arch over it.’ I’ve liked to write and talk about science fiction and books in general since college, and live again in my childhood home in Roseville, Michigan, where I first received *SFC* in the 1970s. I met Bruce in person at the Worldcon in Toronto in 1973, my first convention, where I was too nervous and excited to say much.

Cy Chauvin

The sham — and the true — connection between science fiction and poetry

The attempt to connect science fiction and poetry in a serious way began with the publication of *Holding Your Eight Hands*, edited by **Edward Lucie-Smith**, in 1970, although it is carefully titled ‘an anthology of science fiction verse’. It included works by major science fiction authors such as Brian Aldiss, Thomas Disch, C. S. Lewis, John Brunner and H. P. Lovecraft, as well as notable poets of the time, such as Ted Hughes, John Ciardi, George MacBeth and others.

In his introduction, Lucie-Smith notes that ‘science fiction writers tend to be weak as creators of character, but gifted makers of powerful and meaningful imagery — sometimes more meaningful than the writers seem to know’. Later he repeats the cliché ‘technology itself began to overtake the fictional imagination’ after the first *Sputnik* was launched into space. Of course we know that this is irrelevant to the purposes of science fiction. But interestingly, he suggests that science fiction in response to this technological success turned to ‘inner space’ (this was the New Wave period in science fiction, after all), and sf writers came in closer and closer contact with modern poetry in order to ‘describe and reproduce the phenomena of inner space’.

Furthermore, Lucie-Smith suggests that the scientific logic and extrapolation ‘becomes

unconvincing’ (!) in this modern day. Instead, ‘poetic logic’ has become more convincing — ‘meaning by that a way of thinking which moves forward through the use of analogies and hidden correspondences’. Later on, he rather tellingly remarks that ‘Since the war, poetry has visibly been suffering from a want of subject matter’.

In the years since Lucie-Smith’s book, the concept of ‘science fiction poetry’ has obtained deep roots. There is a Science Fiction Poetry Association, with attendant awards. The major and minor sf magazines now publish scads of this stuff. There is even a *UFO Poetry Review*, rather a review of two nonexistent things at once.

It is instead my conviction that there is no true ‘science fiction poetry’, and that any poetry that pretends to be sf is derivative. SF poetry does not extrapolate or speculate; all its ideas come from written science fiction. In all the years since Edward Lucie-Smith’s book, not an original idea or extrapolation has been generated by ‘sf poetry’.

And even the ideas that poetry takes from science fiction are not treated in any serious way. Instead, they become metaphors — sometimes interesting metaphors in the hands of good poets, but still only metaphors. And certainly the kind of *frisson* that hard science fiction can evoke in a reader when a taut bit of scientific speculation is

worked up by a story is completely absent. It is the same sort of difference that Thomas Disch once referred to in a review of a book by Ian Watson, where Disch wrote that Watson seemed to believe in his ideas, whereas he (Disch) only ‘entertained’ them. One might say that even more so of poetry.

Science fiction is an awkward tool to use for poetry. Its concepts need to be explained. The future needs to be extrapolated. Speculation requires verbiage; poetry, compression. Why use a ray gun to make cheese toast? Poetry and science fiction work to cross-purposes, and so attempting to do both at once makes it especially difficult for it to be good. Science fiction strives to show us the future, or the consequences of an imaginary invention or technology; poetry is about the concrete and the specific, a recollected emotion. How is it possible to envision the future in two or three lines in any meaningful or honest way?

Some poets may suggest that science fiction is no more than a bag of sf tropes, a collection of images that one uses to decorate a story; that science fiction is not a structural method to approach a story (or even a story at all).

It might seem that this essay has been provoked by a re-reading of Mr Edward Lucie-Smith’s anthology. Instead, it is caused by the mass proliferation of dull poetry in sf magazines.

It is hard to know how to begin to sort through the awfulness. **Bruce Boston**, in his poem ‘**The Observer**’ in the March–April 2023 *Analog*, asks us to ‘Imagine a nothing so dark and so deep, there is never any end to it’. Once it has been imagined, he concludes, it is ‘no nothing’. Surprisingly for *Analog*, that doesn’t seem to conform to any known physics for black holes or other nothings. And how can such a vague and unimaginable image be poetry, when the essence of poetry is the concrete and specific?

In ‘**Horizon**’, in the May–June 2023 *Analog*, **David C. Kopaska-Merkel** begins: ‘Space-time beats like a heart. We are the indrawn breath. Centered in immensity; between one beat and the next you were lost.’ He concludes that back on earth ‘your dog is barking’. Obviously, space-time doesn’t beat like a heart, and there is no explanation of any of it. There is no space in poetry for even bare-bones explanation of science or speculation.

But *Analog*, some would say, is obviously not the magazine to look for poetry. Is *Asimov*’s?

Asimov’s publishes a lot more poems than *Analog* (five in the May–June 2023 issue, as opposed to two in *Analog*), but the quality is not remarkably better, and the science fiction content

more minimal. In the case of **G. O. Clark**’s ‘**Three Hearts as One**’, the poem is a longing memory of someone dead, ‘decades old roots nourished by her alien ashes,/the salvaged piece of silver fuselage fashioned into a headstone.’ She had two hearts.

It is difficult to imagine the images that science fiction poetry attempts to conjure up because it is not fiction, and there is no space for description or explanation. This again handicaps it to the point that it becomes insignificant. Because of this handicap, much of it makes no sense. Take ‘**Notes from the Interplanetary Ambassador**’ by **Joshua Gage**, in which he writes about ‘sequined horizon of February cities’. It is not a clear image. Yes? The ambassador is obviously insect-like with ‘hemolymph that drums though our carapaces’, and they ‘give their bodies for one more breath, one more morning, even small fragments’: none of these images is clear or concrete, which is supposed to be the stuff of modern free verse. There is nothing else to hold it together. And original — insect-like alien ambassadors? I would never in a million years have thought of that combo!

The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction has also greatly increased the number of poems it publishes, but again to not much advantage.

Take ‘**The Wren in the Hold**’ by **Shaoni White**, in its May–June 2023 issue. ‘A letter from a wren, genetically resurrected eight centuries after the species’ extinction, composed in the hold of a spaceship,’ writes the author, at the beginning of her poem, as part of it. But a wren does not have the ability to write a letter; it does not have the capacity in its brain cavity for this sort of intelligence, genetically resurrected or not. It also does not have any hands suitable for writing. Perhaps the author assumes it would use its beak and type on a keyboard. But if that is the case, why would the wren type ‘peck’ on line two? Or ‘patter’ — or many of the other words in this letter? The author is not taking the scientific basis of extrapolation she set out in her first sentence the slightest bit seriously.

If you don’t take it seriously, anyone could take the line ‘A letter from a wren, genetically resurrected eight centuries after the species’ extinction, composed in the hold of a spaceship’, and put it in front of any poem or story, and call it science fiction. But that hardly changes the true character of the story. She isn’t writing sf or fantasy; she is writing lyrical or metaphorical poetry. And is it really about anything important, or does it offer any real insight? I don’t think typing ‘the sky’ 163 times to fill eighteen lines offers any real insight.

Interzone, the last major traditional sf magazine, does not seem to publish poetry in any regular way. However, by happenstance, it did reprint something in the No. 294, January 2023 issue, as a frontispiece, that approaches poetry:

I believe in the power of the imagination to remake the world, to release the truth within us, to hold back the night, to transcend death, to charm motorways, to ingratiate ourselves with birds, to enlist the confidences of madmen (from **'What I Believe'**, by **J. G. Ballard**, first published in *Interzone* 8, 1984).

Perhaps this isn't science fiction either, but it is beautiful, and as a manifesto says it all.

To get back to Lucie-Smith, it seems that any collaboration between sf and poetry should be a true one: fiction and poetry together. He suggests that the older writers have 'the pleasing habit' of sprinkling light verse and poetry fragments within their fiction. But in some it might be more than that; the poems and verse included can be a means to describe character (a singer? or a poet?).

Perhaps in consequence of the creation of genre science fiction poetry, the use of poetry within actual science fiction stories (and even possibly the use of poetic material) has fallen away, leading to the trivialisation of science fiction, morphing into 'sci-fi'.

And yet Lucie-Smith misses one of the best uses of poetry in science fiction: **Cordwainer Smith** in **'Drunkboat'** uses the poetry of French poet **Arthur Rimbaud** to describe the experience of an 'Artyr Rambo' who goes through 'Space-3'. He travels through space without a spaceship, arriving back on earth naked, and in a comatose state. When he is interrogated by the Lords of Instrumentality, and asked where did he go, he replies with what appears to be Smith's own translation of part of Rimbaud's most famous poem, **'The Drunken Boat'**.

Where did I go? Where the waves washed back and forth with the dead of all the ages. Where the stars became a pool and I swam in it. Where blue turns to liquor, stronger than alcohol, wilder than music, fermented with the red reds of love. I saw all the things that men have ever thought they saw, but it was me who really saw them. I've heard the phosphorescence singing and tides that seemed like crazy cattle clawing their way out of the ocean, their hooves beating the reefs. You will not believe me, but I found Floridas wilder than this, where the flowers had human skins and eyes like big cats.



Save poetry for moments when science fails.

This is the way for a true collaboration between science fiction and poetry, one that uses the strengths of both, instead of providing a mine for disconnected images.

Another example is the **Brian Aldiss** story **'The Worm that Flies'**. That story is about a future earth in which all life has been given immortality (plant, animal, and human). Immortality has been experienced for so long that people have forgotten how life was before — even about being children. Argustal, the main character, is collecting stones for his 'parapattern', which is a large pattern of stones stretching across acres that seems to be both art and science. But this summary is bald faced; Aldiss uses such poetic language to enhance the viewpoint of his immortals, who are nothing like those ever before presented in science fiction, and alien in their thinking. When his wife has a dream of her childhood, Argustal asks, 'What is child?' 'There is no such thing in reality but in the dream the child that was I was small and fresh and in its actions at once nimble and clumsy.'

Later, **William Blake**'s poem that gives the story its title is uttered as 'a voice in stone, stuttering before it grew clearer, as if it had long known of words but never practised them.'

Thou art, O thou art worm thou art sick, rose invisible rose. Worm thou art found out O rose thou art sick and found out flies in the night

Dennis Callegari: Poetic prose (1):

Cordwainer Smith's 'Drunkboat'



Dennis Callegari: Poetic prose (2):

Brian Aldiss's 'The Worm that Flies'



thy crimson life destroy.

Virginia Woolf described her modernistic writing as 'saturated', and that seems a good term to use for the Aldiss story. The prose has become poetic to give an alien perspective to the people; but it preserves the beauty, and is not simply strange for its own sake. As poetry became separated from science fiction, and used only as a mine for 'images', this power of perspective saturation becomes lost. And by remaining a story, by remaining science fiction, there is space

for speculation and explanation.

The best kind of science fiction poetry is within the language of science fiction itself.

This is the way forward toward a true collaboration between science fiction and poetry, one that uses the strengths of both, instead of endless recycling of images, archetypes, and clichés from one genre to another.

— **Cy Chauvin**, 2023

As revealed in *SFC 115*, COLIN STEELE, SF and fantasy book reviewer for us since 1979, received his AM Award on 25 January. He reviewed regularly for *The Canberra Times* from 1979 until 2023, until that newspaper stopped accepting freelance reviews. He now reviews regularly for the *Canberra City News*, and is also a regular reviewer for *BibliNews*, the quarterly Journal of the Book Collectors Society of Australia, which recently awarded him life membership for his reviews over a 20-year period.

Apart from book reviews, Colin's main recent ANU activity has been convening and organising the free ANU/Canberra Times Meet the Author events, which he has been running since 1987. See the end of this column for updated details of Meet the Author events for the rest of 2024.

Colin Steele's Bookworld

Romantasy

HOUSE OF FLAME AND SHADOW
by Sarah J. Maas (Bloomsbury; \$34.99)

FOURTH WING: THE EMPYREAN BOOK 1
by Rebecca Yarros (Hachette; \$24.99)

Sarah Maas and **Rebecca Yarros** are the Taylor Swifts of contemporary book publishing with their romantasy novels, a blend of romance and fantasy. Why? Is it because of Book Tok and

Instagram publicity to a young, notably female audience, or the need for readers of all ages to escape from an increasingly difficult world?

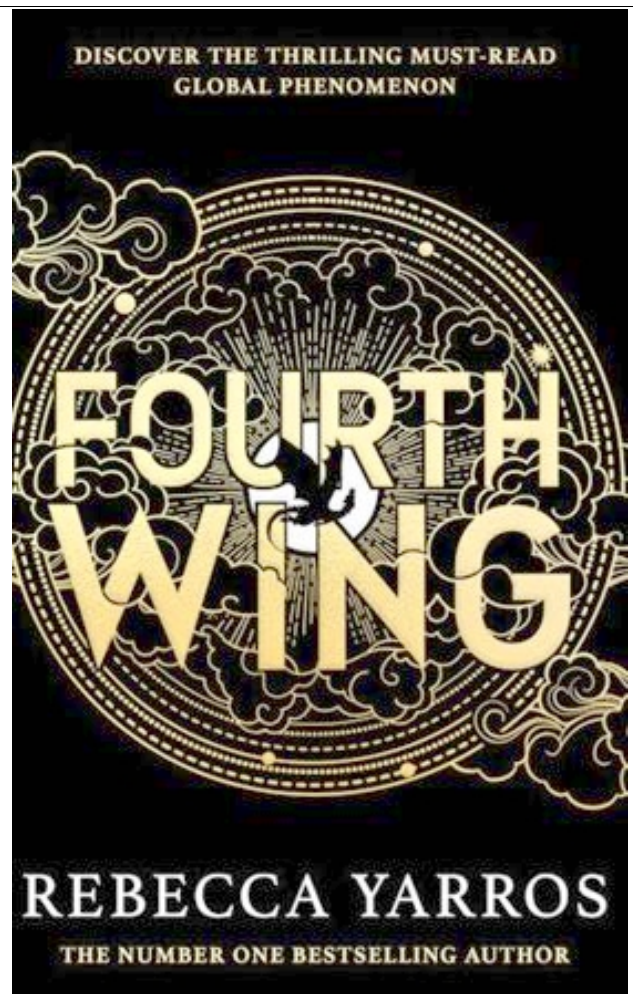
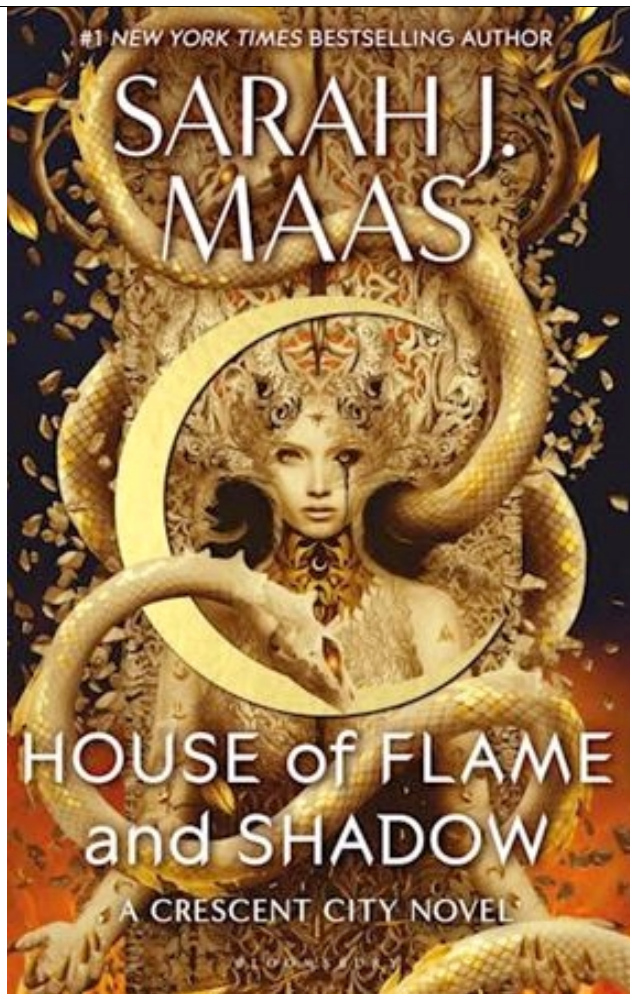
One major publisher has commented: 'It's not an accident that Book Tok and romance readership kicked off in 2020 — a period characterised by uncertainty'. Kathleen Farrar at Bloomsbury Publishing, one of the leading Romantasy publishers, has said that the genre's 'strong yet nuanced female characters features have attracted huge



Sarah J Maas.



Rebecca Yarros.



numbers of female readers who may previously not have felt particularly welcome or catered for in the fantasy market’.

The two leading Romantasy authors are Americans Sarah J. Maas and Rebecca Yarros, who have topped global fiction bestseller lists in 2023 and 2024. Maas’s series of books, including *The Throne of Glass* and *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, have sold 40 million copies worldwide in 38 languages. Maas’s publisher Bloomsbury has reported that associated hashtags connected to Maas’s books have had more than 11.5 billion views on TikTok alone. Social media is central to the romantasy publishing phenomenon.

Maas’s and Yarros’s books cover loss and grief, trauma and friendship, infused with a generous dose of ‘spice’, Book Tok’s term for eroticism and sex. It’s not uncommon for romantasy novels to come with ‘spice ratings’ from their female readers, ‘Spice Girls’.

Sarah Maas’s *House of Flame and Shadow* paperback edition, the third book in her Crescent City series, became, in early 2024, the highest-selling print title in Australia, selling over 36,700 copies in its first week of release. It continues the story of hybrid heroine, Bryce Quinlan, a 25-year-

old half fairy, half human woman.

In the latest book, Bryce is stranded on a world in which she does not know who to trust, while her lover, fallen angel Hunt Athalar, is imprisoned by ancient godlike beings, the Asteri. Rebellion may be the only option, with Bryce becoming ‘the young woman who saves a faerie kingdom from a dark overlord’. Despite its huge sales, the plot line, however, echoes those of the previous books, and Bryce, who has always been about fighting for the people she loves, becomes too imperious and self-centred.

Rebecca Yarros delivers a fresher romantasy series with her Empyrean novels ***Fourth Wing*** and its sequel *Iron Flame*, which have sold 1.2 million and 1 million copies in the US respectively, making her the second-best selling author (fiction and non-fiction) after Colleen Hoover.

The B format paperback of *Fourth Wing* topped the highest new entries on the Australian publisher list in mid-April. It tells of book-loving 20-year-old Violet Sorrengail, enrolled in the ruthless War College for dragon training, in which you either graduate or die. The dragons are particularly ruthless — ‘Dragons don’t bond with fragile women. They incinerate them.’

Violet becomes enmeshed in what will be an ‘enemies-to-lovers’ relationship with her family’s nemesis Xaden Riorson, a relationship initially compromised by the fact that Violet’s mother killed Xaden’s father. It’s a compelling mix of magic, dragons, slow-burn romance, and political intrigue, with a cliffhanger conclusion that leads onto the next book, *Iron Flame*.

Yarros is touring Australia in late June but unfortunately not to Canberra. At American book launches Yarros is often mobbed by fans dressed as her characters from her novels, with midnight launch parties at bookshops. It’s revealing that the Australian organisers of the Yarros tour indicate that only one book initially can be signed per person, stating ‘fans wanting multiple books signed will need to queue up multiple times’, which reflects the nature of fantasy fandom. I still

remember the four-hour queue for signings on one occasion for Terry Pratchett at a Canberra Meet the Author event.

Genre publishing, including crime and science fiction, has often been looked down upon by the ‘literati’ especially when it sells well. One major ABC book reviewer recently commented on the book she was reviewing, ‘Don’t turn off because this is a genre book’, which highlights the problem of critical disdain.

Tanya Kirk, the Curator of the British Library’s recent exhibition, *Fantasy: Realms of Imagination*, has commented that now it’s a very vibrant genre with far less literary ‘patronisation’ than in the past, and that genres like romantasy ‘lets us look at our own world in a new light’. Maas and Yarros certainly do that.

Science fiction and fantasy books

THE UNDERHISTORY

by Kaaron Warren (Viper; \$39.99)

Canberra author **Kaaron Warren** has, to date, arguably never received the national or popular attention her books deserve, perhaps because they have been primarily in the horror and fantasy genres, in which she has won Australian Shadows, Ditmar, and Aurealis Awards, which are often neither appreciated nor understood by literary editors.

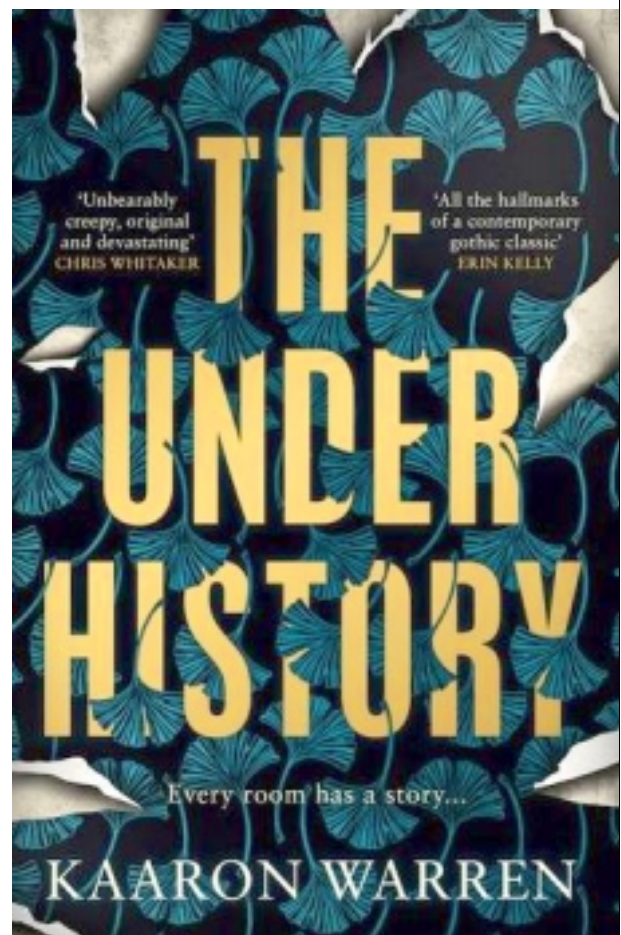
Warren has said: ‘Whenever I’m asked why I write horror — and aren’t we all asked that often? — part of my answer is because it helps me to try to understand what the hell is going on. The world, people, and the things they do, fate, luck (good and bad), entropy, decay, and birth; we look all of this in the face in horror. We go to places other writers perhaps don’t go ... I’m proud to be part of a genre that can embrace better ways of communicating these fears. That we no longer need to use aggressive, abusive, racist, ableist, sexist, homophobic language in our work (unless deliberately creating a monster who speaks in that way)’.

Her public profile may well change with her new novel *The Underhistory*, a blend of crime fiction and gothic thriller, which had a major launch as a hardback and audiobook in the UK in May.

The novel begins in 1993 with Pera Sinclair, in her early 60s, running historic tours of her labyrinthian ‘mansion’, Sinclair House.

Pera’s life, at the age of nine, fell apart in 1941.

A pilot, with his family on board, deliberately crashed his plane on the Sinclair family home, killing his own family, all the members of Pera’s family except Pera, and various VIP house guests,



including the Prime Minister and his wife. Pera, who was in the garden at the time, was the only survivor. Pera reflects that she is only famous for 'how my family died'.

After an understandably troubled childhood, Pera uses her inheritance to gradually rebuild the large house and its chapel, eventually opening the house as a tourist attraction, each room allowing Pera to tell a part of her story and also of related people who died, notably her sister, who was murdered in 1936, and her ultimately abusive husband. The events in Pera's life are related in flashback chapters from 1993, with chapters titled after the name that Pera has given to each room of the house.

Pera embellishes her last tour of the season for a young family with stories of the ghosts in the house, which may or may not be true. Pera says hers 'was the first haunted house tour in Australia'.

The tour, however, is turned upside down when five violent escaped convicts, including murderers, including one that Pera knew as a child, descend on what they think is a deserted house looking for money. While the convicts are somewhat caricatured and thus lack character depth, their ability to kill Pera and the tour group is without doubt. They are 'Dangerous men, who will hurt the family without a second thought, and who will keep an old woman alive only so long as she is useful'.

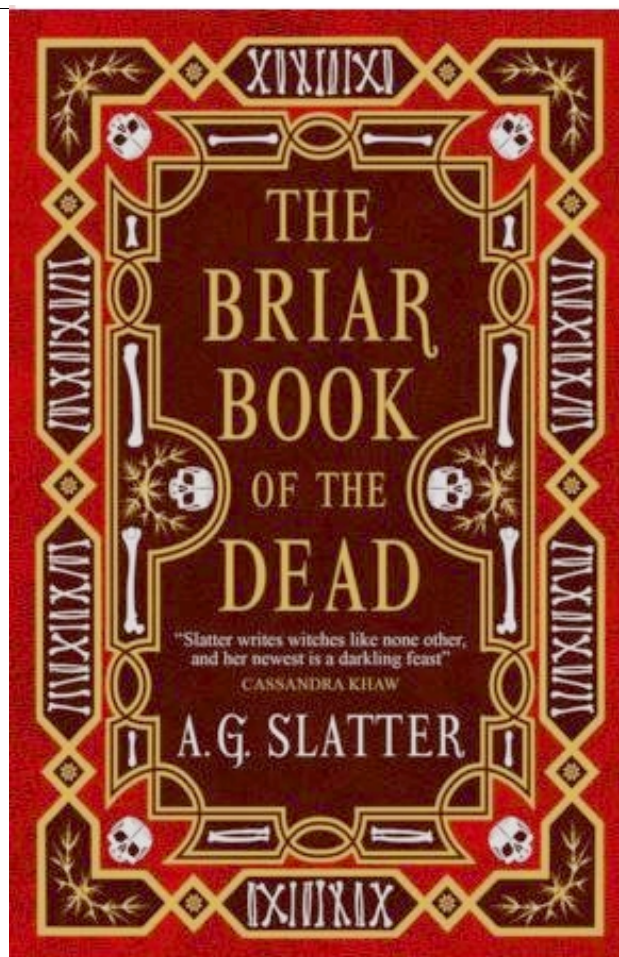
Warren skilfully delivers a home-invasion framework, as Pera desperately leads the convicts, fuelled by drink, from room to room in search of promised treasures in a house which is almost a character in itself.

Ursula Le Guin once said that women over 60 are invisible. To the convicts, Pera is virtually invisible and no threat, but they fail to realise that for Pera death has been omnipresent in her life. She will need to create conflict in the convict group and then implement their deaths if she is to survive. 'It would only end if she stopped it.'

Warren has delivered in *The Underhistory* an impressive dark, haunting, and decidedly original, novel which juxtaposes the themes of family, loss, and self-preservation.

THE BRIAR BOOK OF THE DEAD by A. G. Slatter (Titan; \$27.99)

Dr Angela Slatter, a.k.a. **A. G. Slatter**, has won a World Fantasy Award, a British Fantasy Award, a Ditmar, a Shirley Jackson Award, three Australian Shadows Awards, and eight Aurealis Awards.



Her book *All The Murmuring Bones* was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards Book of the Year in 2021 and for the Shirley Jackson Awards in 2022. *The Path of Thorns* won the 2022 Aurealis Award for Best Fantasy Novel, as well as the Australian Shadows Award for Best Novel.

In *The Briar Book of the Dead*, Slatter follows the witches of the Briar family, who protect the inhabitants of a small town, Silvertown, remote from the large cathedral city of Lodellan and its anti-witch bishops. Normally, witches would be burned to death but the Briar witches escape this fate, given their role in protecting the town's inhabitants and providing a barrier to incursions from the Leech Lords of the Darklands.

Ellie Briar, the first non-witch born into the family for 300 years, has no magical powers, which leads to a diminished status within the family and the town. Even when Ellie assumes the role of Steward, the duties for which she exhibits skill and empathy, she is still troubled by doubt. However, after an accident, Ellie discovers that she has a supernatural gift that enables her to see ghosts. Her life, and that of her family, will change dramatically, set against the hidden secrets of the town.

The Briar Book of the Dead displays Slatter's



dark gothic inventiveness, but at the heart of the novel is Ellie's pathway to becoming an independent freethinking woman. Here is an addition to Slatter's balanced and nuanced heroines.

THE FUTURE FUTURE
 by Adam Thirlwell
 (Jonathan Cape; \$34.99)

British author **Adam Thirlwell's** *The Future Future*, his first novel for eight years, follows the life of a woman who moves between pre-revolutionary Paris and an alien settlement on the Moon in order to defend and reclaim her integrity and challenge the rule of men and crimes against women.

Nineteen-year-old Celine, the socialite wife of an older man, a 'minor but murderous fascist', becomes the centre of vicious rumours about her life and alleged sexual liaisons, propagated by men in anonymous pamphlets. Thirlwell, who builds upon the historical research of American historian Robert Darnton on pre-revolutionary French underground literature, clearly references contemporary social media, trolling, and the distribu-

tion of misinformation.

Thirlwell, who has previously declared himself as not being a fan of historical fiction, has said: 'The novel is ironically set in the past, in late eighteenth-century Paris, but also across the globe. That was partly a way into the present, a moment where a recognisably modern moment was taking shape ... One of the reasons I wanted to set this book in the eighteenth century was that it was [a time] when ideas of what it is to be modern got invented — [ideas] that we're still living with. In the 18th century, people saw writing as a revolutionary ideal. Could there be a moment at which too much production of language inhibits understanding?'

Thirlwell explores language rather than Celine's character, as she attempts to restore the narrative in her own favour, because the pamphlets' readers 'believed they knew Celine without knowing her at all ... In a world made of writing, malevolent writing could only be erased by more writing.'

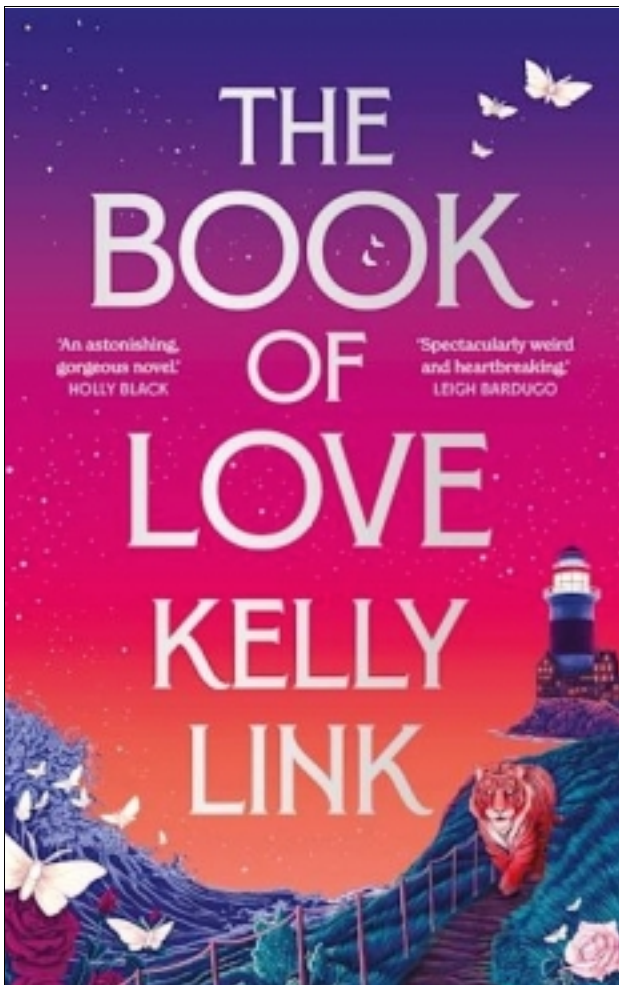
Celine is supported against the attacks by a small group of female friends before the story jumps to the New World of Hispaniola and colonial Boston, where men oppress the colonised just as they do women. Then, after a drunken night out, Celine wakes up in 2251, ending up in an egalitarian, gender-fluid, alien society on the Moon, before she returns to earth to encounter Napoleon!

The Future Future is overly ambitious in its overall intent, but it certainly never lacks for ideas, ultimately reflecting that for Thirlwell 'centuries and centuries go by, but everything happens in the present moment'.

THE BOOK OF LOVE
 by Kelly Link (Head of Zeus; \$32.99)

The Book of Love is the debut novel from **Kelly Link**, whose short stories have made her a Pulitzer Prize finalist, as well as a MacArthur 'Genius' Award winner. Her setting for *The Book of Love* is a small coastal town in Massachusetts, appropriately called Lovesend.

Link places her book within the categories of 'nighttime logic vs. daytime logic', a way of thinking, she says that: 'Howard Waldrop came up with to talk about how narrative logic holds together for the reader as much as for the writer. With daytime logic, there is an explanation for things that happen, and clocks tell time in the way you would expect. Even if strange or fantastical things happen, there's a rule book by which they work that will be explained to you. A lot of realistic fiction, and a lot of science fiction and fantasy, rely on daytime logic: here's something startling, but I'm



going to explain how it functions in the world. Even ghost stories, which are often rooted in the inexplicable, have a kind of daytime logic to them: somebody is haunted because they did something wrong, and this is the consequence.'

In a message to the reader in advance publicity, Link says her book is a love letter to 'writers of romance novels and graphic novels' and explores 'not only various shades of romantic love, but also familial love; the love that exists between friends; how obsessive hatred can, in fact, be something like obsessive love'. She also says *The Book of Love* is a homage to 'supernatural melodramas like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'. Finally, it is a coming-of-age novel.

Link apparently originally envisaged a trilogy, which might have been preferable, given the book's complexity and length of 625 pages. The story is told in individual chapters on the lead characters, notably four high school students, of which three, Laura, Daniel, and Mo have returned from the dead, although Lovesend residents think they have been on a trip abroad.

Kelly has said: 'Laura and [her sister] Susannah and Mo and Daniel are dear to my heart. It felt liberating to have a novel in which to explore their

lives and deaths and their feelings about music and love what it might mean to have access to magic, what that access might cost ... I did think about making them much older, but adolescence is a liminal space. It's a period in which you're experiencing enormous change. You're figuring things out about yourself, but you're also more likely to make leaps into the wild. For me, these characters needed to be people whose impulsivity or decision-making felt more unpredictable, with fewer guard rails'.

Laura, Daniel and Mo cannot remember how they died and or how they ended up in a 'a blotted, attenuated, chilly nothingness'. Nor can they understand why they are resurrected, although this may be only temporary, in the music room of the local high school, where their teacher, the mysterious Mr Anabin, informs them that only magic will save them and only they will determine their ultimate fate.

Lovesend becomes the focus for a battle between otherworldly forces. Link juxtaposes wonder and horror and everyday realities, often banal, of the small town within the framework of an overarching magical battle between Anabin and another with supernatural power, Bogomil, and their tests of the teenagers.

This is an outsize novel with outsize ambitions that largely succeed, though some editorial pruning would have made it even more magical.

WELLSVILLE

by L. C. Scott (L.C. Scott Books; \$21.99; also available as an e-book)

Lucas Scott's *Wellsville* is in a debut novel, aimed at a YA audience, but will appeal across the reading age spectrum. Scott, who grew up in Newcastle, New South Wales, has delivered a coming-of-age novel set in virtual reality bubbles.

The four main characters living in Wellsville are teenagers Priya, Mia, Colby, and Liam, all, notably Colby, with disparate personalities and conflicts. 'Mia can't stand "Smellsville", Priya can't stand Mia, Colby can't stand people in general, and before today, Liam didn't think any of them even knew he existed.'

They come together reluctantly to find out why they alone have survived from a societal coma in their idyllic beachside town of Wellsville, 'a paradise, and an oasis, a safe haven from the awful world outside its borders. That's what the news would have you believe anyway. And why its inhabitants are unable to leave.'

Gradually the quartet learn that they are part

of VR worlds created after planetary destruction as they follow up on a tenuous link that has been sent to Liam. Their plight becomes more complicated technologically as they battle to save their own 'beta' lives and combat the immortal 'alphas' and seek a resolution.

Scott covers some interesting AI developments, although there are perhaps too many technological leaps of faith for the quartet as they squabble and fall out before a conclusion that changes their lives and 'humanity' for ever.

Australian SF publishing is in something of a downturn at the moment, and the fact that Scott had to self-publish with Amazon distribution is an indictment of the local SF publishing field as compared to the fantasy field. Having said that, *Wellsville* is an inventive novel that, despite the need for more rigorous editing, promises much for Scott's future SF writing career.

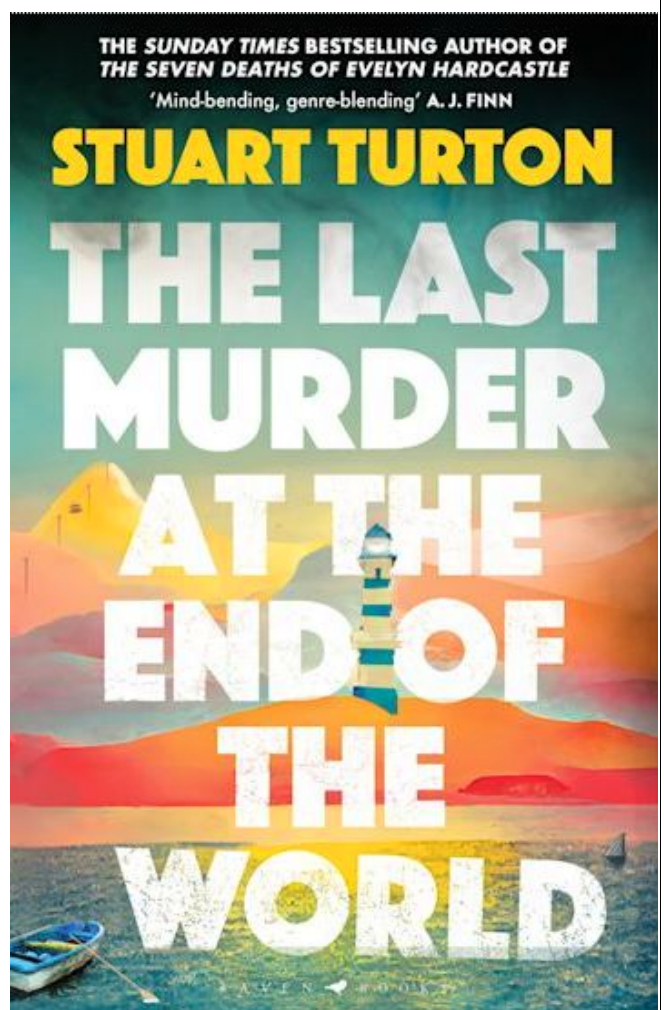
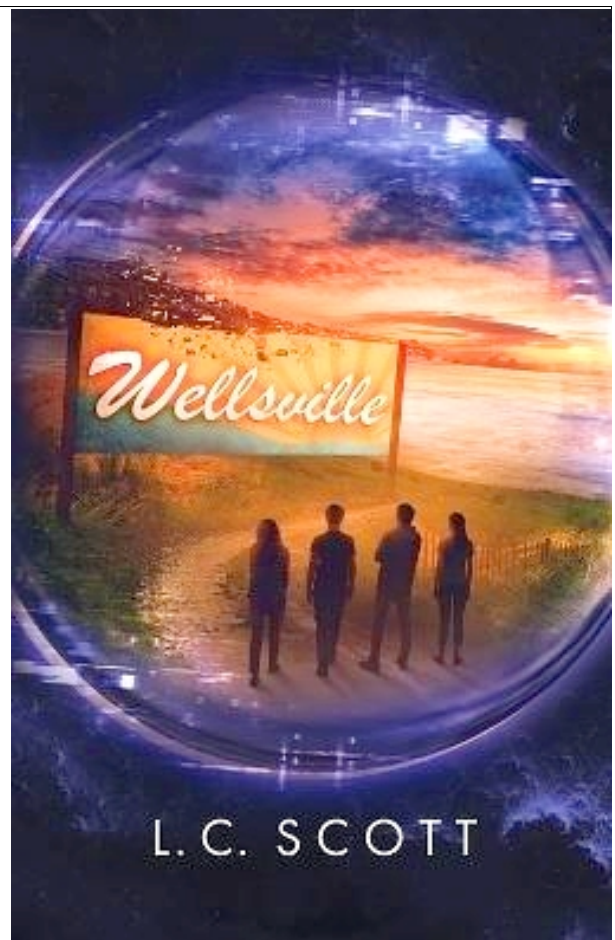
Crime fiction/science fiction crossover

THE LAST MURDER AT THE END OF THE WORLD by Stuart Turton (Raven Books; \$32.99)

Stuart Turton, Costa Book Award winning author of *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, has moved into science-fiction territory in *The Last Murder at the End of the World*, although not totally successfully. Turton himself has called it 'Agatha Christie meets *Lost*'.

The setting is a post-apocalyptic world in which nearly all of humanity has been killed by a toxic fog 90 years ago. The survivors are 122 villagers and three scientists, 'the elders', who have survived and been AI protected on a remote island, which is shielded from the fog by scientific barriers. When one of the scientists is murdered, the island's AI security system induces a collective amnesia so that no one can remember what happened on the night of the murder. An added complication is that if the murder is not resolved quickly, the lowering of the security barrier system will allow the fog to envelop the island — 'the human race will be rendered extinct in 91 hours'.

An AI, named Abi, is the 'unreliable narrator' of the story, which follows Emory, one of the least conformist of the islanders. Emory, with an initially estranged daughter Clara, takes on the challenge of solving the murder and thus to determine the fate of humanity. Emory faces major



problems, not least uncovering the posthumous plans of Niema, the 173-year-old authoritarian leader of the scientific laboratory on the island, and her apparent experiment to save the island through altering 'human nature from the inside'.

Turton examines issues of scientific and social

responsibility in creating a brave new world, but overall the plot line, despite, or perhaps because of, its numerous twists and turns, is not strong enough to carry the reader through to complete narrative belief.

Biography

DREAMER OF DUNE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF FRANK HERBERT by Brian Herbert (Gollancz; \$36.95)

This is a reissue of a book first published in 2003 by **Frank Herbert's** son **Brian Herbert**, who continued his father's famous *Dune* series with Kevin J. Anderson. Brian Herbert provides everything you would want to know, perhaps too much, about his father.

Dreamer of Dune certainly warrants a republication, however, following the release of the two *Dune* movies by Denis Villeneuve and the resurgence of interest in the 1984 David Lynch film version.

Frank Herbert (1920–1986) created one of the best-known novels in science fiction, *Dune*, although he initially found it difficult to find a publisher in the early 1960s, and the book was not an immediate commercial success on publication in 1965. Today the novel has been translated into dozens of languages and has sold over 20 million copies.

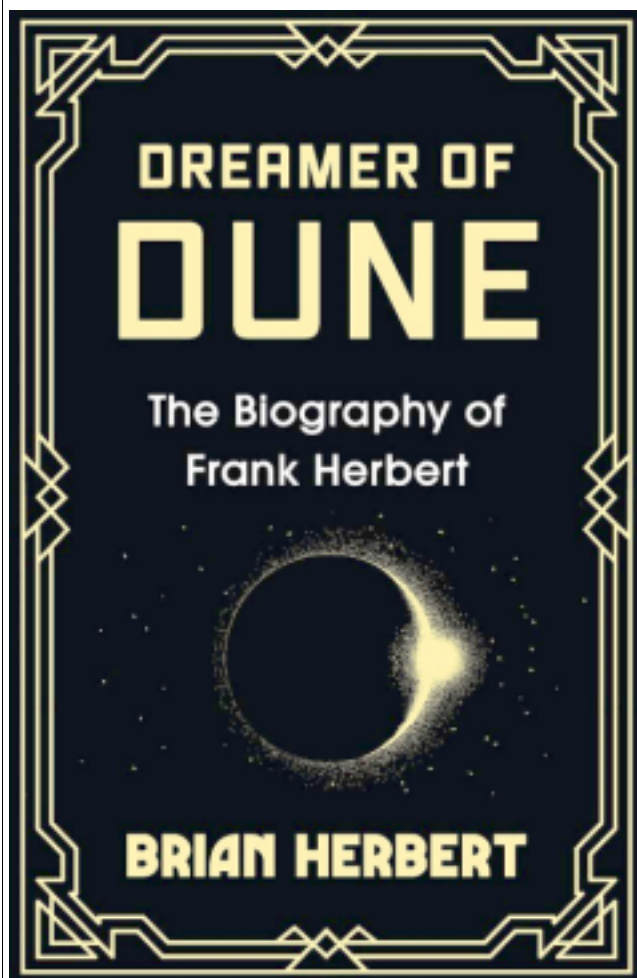
Frank Herbert, a precocious child, sold his first short story at 17. Brian, called 'number one son' by his father, covers the influences on Frank's writing until his death in 1986, influences that included T. E. Lawrence, Jung, Islamic culture, and Zen Buddhism.

Herbert's passion for ecology and environmentalism was also a major driving force behind *Dune*. Brian informs the reader that his father felt he was like the Fremen leader Stilgar, 'the stalwart and determined guardian of Dune, a position not dissimilar from the one my father placed himself in with respect to Earth'.

Herbert did not take up full-time writing until 1972. He worked in a variety of professions, as a professional photographer, TV cameraman, radio news commentator, oyster diver, jungle survivor instructor, lay analyst, speech writer, and teacher of creative writing!

In 1940 he married Flora Parkinson, with whom he had a daughter, Penny, but they divorced in 1945. Herbert had two sons, Brian and Bruce, with his second wife, Beverly, a copywriter, who was a major influence and who sacrificed her own career to support her husband's. Brian documents the ups and downs of his relationship with his father. Herbert was a difficult father, apparently often using a lie detector on his sons and never accepting his second son Bruce's gay lifestyle. Brian often took to drinking to escape the internal pressures.

Brian writes: 'It was characteristic of my father that he never admitted he was wrong about anything', and 'My father wanted it all. He wanted strong family ties, and he tried hard in that direction. But he wanted celebrity status too, which left



less time to be with his family’.

Herbert published his first science fiction pieces in *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Amazing Stories*, notably *Under Pressure*, which became the novel *The Dragon in the Sea*, and then the serialisation of *Dune*, which took six years of research and writing. Twenty-three publishers rejected *Dune* in manuscript book form before it was finally accepted. He received an advance of only \$7500 for the relatively small print run. The first edition is now very collectible.

Herbert retired from journalism in 1972 to continue the *Dune* Chronicles, *Dune Messiah*, *Children of Dune*, *God Emperor of Dune*, *Heretics of Dune*, and *Chapterhouse: Dune*. His last published novel, *Man of Two Worlds*, was written in collaboration with Brian.

Kara Kennedy, in her book *Frank Herbert’s ‘Dune’ A Critical Companion*, has outlined Herbert’s ‘exploration of politics and religion, its influential ecological messages, the focus on the human mind and consciousness, the complex nature of the archetypal hero, and the depiction of women’s influence and control. In *Dune*, Herbert demonstrated that sophistication, complexity, and a multi-layered world with three-dimensional characters could sit comfortably within the science fiction genre. Underneath its deceptively simple story line sits a wealth of historical and philosophical contexts and influences that make it a rich masterpiece open to multiple interpretations’.

On reflecting on the huge success of *Dune*, Herbert has commented:

There was no room in my mind for concerns about the book’s success or failure. I was concerned only with the writing. Six years of research had preceded the day I sat down to put the story together, and the interweaving of the many plot layers I had planned required a degree of concentration I had never before experienced. It was to be a story exploring the myth of the Messiah. It was to produce another view of a human-occupied planet as an energy machine. It was to penetrate the interlocked workings of politics and economics. It was to be an examination of absolute prediction and its pitfalls. It was to have an awareness drug in it and tell what could happen through dependence on such a substance. Potable water was to be an analog for oil and for water itself, a substance whose supply diminishes each day. It was to be an ecological novel, then, with many overtones, as well as a story about people and their human concerns with human values, and

I had to monitor each of these levels at every stage in the book. There wasn’t room in my head to think about much else. Following the first publication, reports from the publishers were slow and, as it turned out, inaccurate. The critics had panned it. More than twelve publishers had turned it down before publication. There was no advertising. Something was happening out there, though. For two years, I was swamped with bookstore and reader complaints that they could not get the book. *The Whole Earth Catalog* praised it. I kept getting these telephone calls from people asking me if I were starting a cult. The answer: ‘God no!’ What I’m describing is the slow realization of success. By the time the first three *Dune* books were completed, there was little doubt that this was a popular work — one of the most popular in history, I am told, with some ten million copies sold worldwide. Now the most common question people ask is: ‘What does this success mean to you?’ It surprises me. I didn’t expect failure either. It was a work and I did it. Parts of *Dune Messiah* and *Children of Dune* were written before *Dune* was completed. They fleshed out more in the writing, but the essential story remained intact. I was a writer and I was writing. The success meant I could spend more time writing. Looking back on it, I realize I did the right thing instinctively. You don’t write for success. That takes part of your attention away from the writing. If you’re really doing it, that’s all you’re doing: writing. There’s an unwritten compact between you and the reader. If someone enters a bookstore and sets down hard-earned money (energy) for your book, you owe that person some entertainment and as much more as you can give. That was really my intention all along.

Despite its propensity for repetition and family minutiae, in the nearly 650 pages of *Dreamer of Dune*, Brian Herbert provides considerable insight into one of SF’s major figures of the twentieth century.

Addendum

It’s unfortunate that, given the plethora of travel and domestic detail, the book gives only a fleeting coverage of Frank and Beverly’s travel to Australia. Herbert was Guest of Honour at Advention ’81, the 20th Australian SF Convention, held 6–8 June 1981 in Adelaide. The main reference is of Beverly sending postcards of baby kangaroos back to America. Similarly, Herbert’s August 1985 overseas trip, which included Australia, is marked only by the purchase of an Australian outback hat.

Books and society

LOVE: A CURIOUS HISTORY IN 50 OBJECTS

by Edward Brooke-Hitching
(Simon & Schuster; \$55)

Prince Charles, when asked in 1981 if he was in love with Diana, famously replied, ‘Whatever “in love” means’, as he looked awkwardly at the floor. The profusely illustrated *Love: A Curious History in 50 Objects* by Edward Brooke-Hitching, if it had been available, might have provided Charles with a more considered reply.

Brooke-Hitching, a former factfinder for the BBC series *QI*, is the author of the bestselling books *Fox Tossing, Octopus Wrestling and Other Forgotten Sports* (2015), *The Phantom Atlas* (2016), *The Golden Atlas* (2018), *The Sky Atlas* (2019), *The Madman’s Library* (2020), and *The Devil’s Atlas* (2021).

Through essays on 50 objects, Brooke-Hitching’s entertaining and informative survey explores the role of love as a psychoactive agent of history and art. When it comes to love and the heart, little has changed over the millennia. Brooke-Hitching notes: ‘Our species is at its most impressive, most terrible and strangest, when inspired to demonstrate the full furnace of our imagination, and nothing pours more petrol on that fire than love.’

The essays are roughly chronological. The earliest entry is of a sexually embracing couple, the Ain Sakri lovers, a stone carving of about 9000 BC, while the last essay documents the golden phonograph recording of ‘Sounds of the Earth’ that was sent out into interstellar space on *Voyager I* in 1977. The record includes the brainwaves of a woman in love with Carl Sagan converted into sound: ‘the love story that left the solar system’.

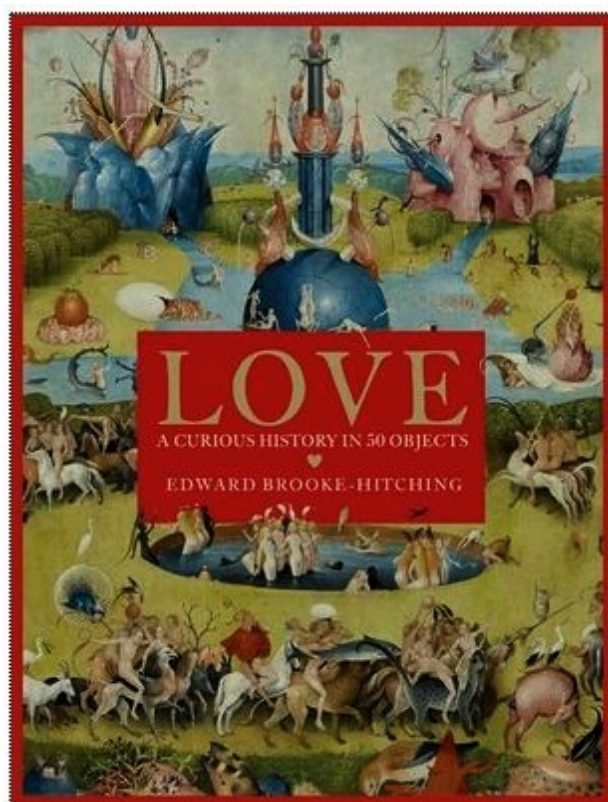
Brooke-Hitching’s background on *QI* lends itself to some quirky and unusual commentary, spinning off items such as prehistoric carvings, phalluses, chastity belts, love spells in medieval manuscripts, a Viking guide to dating, wedding chains, romantic messages in artworks and code-books, courting sticks, and love spoons and combs. Did you know that the dating app can be traced back to an ad in the *Manchester Weekly Journal* in 1727, but the woman seeking a man to share her life was publicly castigated and placed in a mental institution for a month?

Thomas Edison taught his wife Morse Code so

they could tap out loving messages to each other, and he even proposed to her in Morse Code. But is love all pink hearts and Valentine’s Day roses — or is there a darker side? Medieval physicians diagnosed love and heartbreak as serious illnesses. Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?

And is it possible to die of a broken heart? The practice of preserving the heart, the ancient symbol of the soul and emotion, symbolised lovers being united in death. Perhaps the most famous literary heart is that of poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), whose heart was eventually retrieved from an Italian beach grave and given to Mary Shelley, who reputedly kept it in her desk, wrapped in the pages of one of his last poems, *Adonais*, until her death 30 years later.

Jennifer Lopez once commented, ‘Think I’m gonna spend your cash? I won’t/Even if you were broke, my love don’t cost a thing’, but historically women especially were often commodities and dowries applied — and just think of Jane Austen’s heroines. In 1832 the *Dorset County Chronicle* carried an advert by a widower seeking ‘a woman to look after the pigs while I am out at work’. The notion that you can pick your own partner based



on love is a relatively modern one.

From the female perspective, Brooke-Hitching reports that the idea for his book was found in the armpits of nineteenth-century rural Austrian women. When women danced they did so with slices of apple tucked into their armpit. Men would surround them in a circle. When a woman decided that her apple was sufficiently soaked in sweat, she would present it to the suitor of her choice. If he wished to accept the proposal, he would eat the 'soggy slice' to share 'her personal fragrance'. If he declined, the woman would place the slice back under her arm and resume dancing.

Samuel Johnson believed that 'marriage is a triumph of imagination over intelligence. Second marriage is the triumph of hope over experience', while American columnist Franklin P. Jones stated: 'Love doesn't make the world go around. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile.'

Perhaps the best way to conclude is with *The Art Of Love* by the Roman poet Ovid, in which he argues that to retain a woman's love is 'not forgetting her birthday' and 'not asking about her age'.

LITTLE ENGLANDERS

by Alwyn Turner (Profile; \$49 99)

BRITISH INTERNMENT AND THE INTERNMENT OF BRITONS

edited by Julie Carr and Rachel Pistol
(Bloomsbury Academic; \$170)

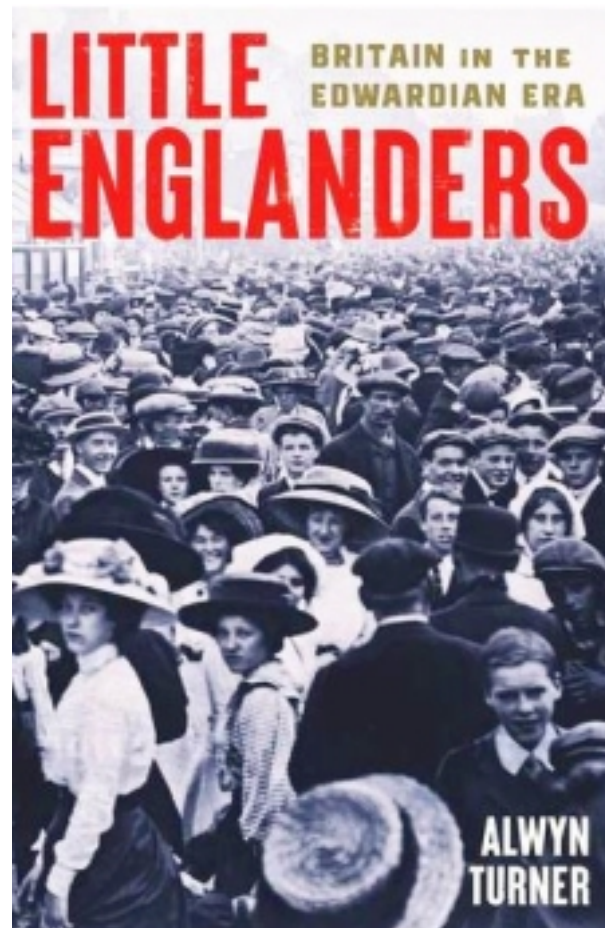
A NORTHERN WIND: BRITAIN 1962 TO 1965

by David Kynaston (Bloomsbury; \$59.99)

Three books provide fascinating insights into Britain in the twentieth century, accounts that reflect 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'.

In *Little Englanders*, Alwyn Turner examines 'the last decade of British history' from the death of Queen Victoria to World War I, through a fascinating analysis of social and popular culture, an approach that David Kynaston has almost made his own.

Turner sees Edward VII, who succeeded Queen Victoria, as a latter-day Henry VIII, 'though with multiple mistresses rather than wives'. This was an Edwardian era that saw poverty and increasing financial inequality; government corruption; the rise of populist newspapers like *The Daily Mail* ('a paper for those who could read but not think' said Lord Salisbury; a 1905 *Aliens Act* aimed at outlawing rising immigration; and the emergence of



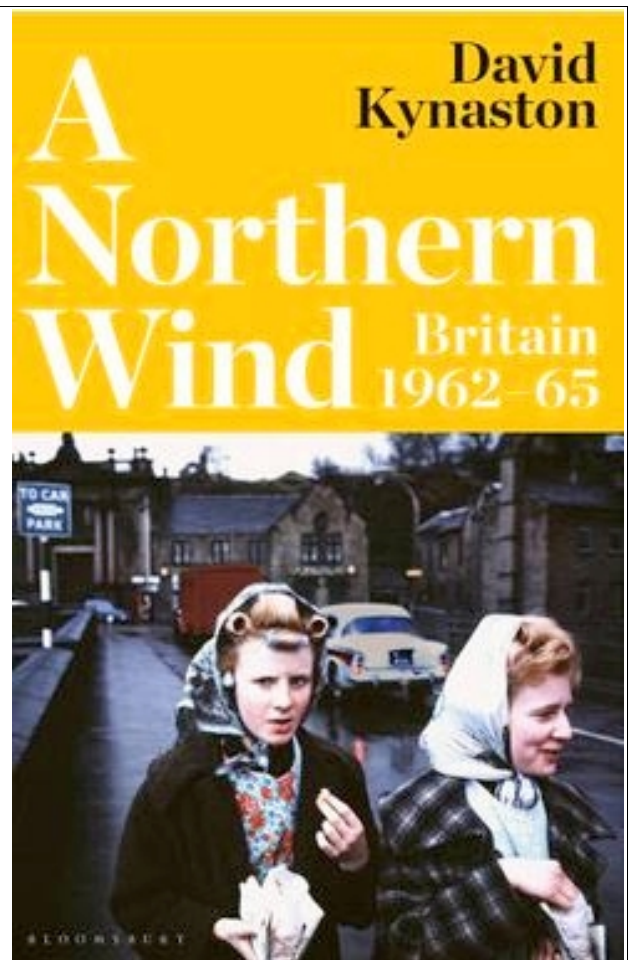
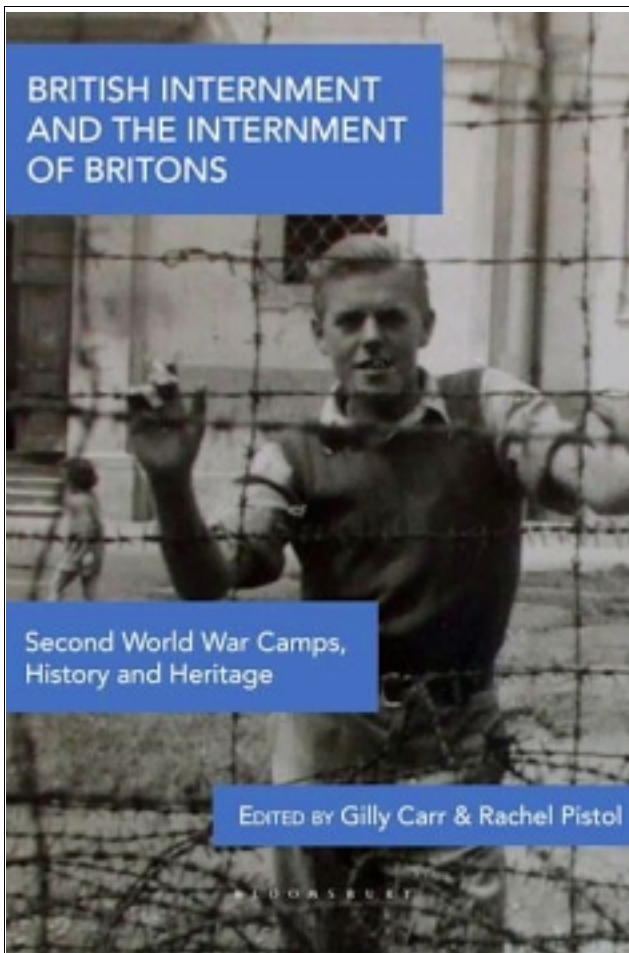
public celebrities, such as Marie Lloyd, through music halls.

The Suffragette movement was emerging, and social reform was on the political agenda. Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister, 'the first premier not to have a country estate', is praised by Turner as initiating the welfare state. New Year's Day 1909 was when many received their first old-age pension. The Labour Party was formed, led by another Keir — in this case Hardie.

Fast-forward to World War II. The numerous contributors to *British Internment and the Internment of Britons*, edited by Julie Carr and Rachel Pistol, deliver a revealing analysis of wartime internments, with similarities to present-day internments, including the current Conservative attempts to send refugees to Rwanda.

The book has three parts. The first covers in-depth the internment of European 'enemy aliens', many of whom were interned on the Isle of Man. The second documents the internment of British civilians in Europe, of which P. G. Wodehouse was most controversial. Groups included the Roman Catholic Anglo-Maltese, originally from Libya, who were interned in Italy. Many emigrated to Melbourne after 1945.

The third part covers European 'enemy aliens'



interned in the dominions, notably Australia, Canada, and India. Largely funded by the British Government, Australia took in Germans, Austrians, and Italians, most famous of these who travelled here on the HMT *Dunera*.

The chapter on the internees held in Camps 1–4 at Tatura in regional Victoria notes the frequent disputes between the different groupings and loyalties. The major drawback to a well-researched book, which fills a gap on the historical study of internees, is the price of \$170, which will effectively prevent access for many.

David Kynaston's *Northern Wind* covers October 1962 to February 1965, a period that saw significant cultural and political change in Britain. In October 1962, the Beatles released their first single, 'Love Me Do', and the first James Bond film, *Dr No*, opened, while the book ends with Winston Churchill's death in January 1965.

In nearly 600 pages Kynaston ranges widely over public records, private diaries, political speeches, and media coverage, blending detail into a panoramic vision of Britain.

After 13 years, a Conservative Government was clinging to power. Harold Macmillan's 1957 election message 'you've never had it so good' had a

fading appeal because of a deteriorating balance of payments and an increasing north–south economic divide, while the country as a whole dithered over its approach to Europe.

2.5 million people lived on or below the poverty line. One in nine in my home town of West Hartlepool was on the dole. One third of the rail network was axed by Dr Richard Beeching's cuts, the impact of which is still being felt today.

It was another Conservative Government that was humiliated by scandal. Prominent minister John Profumo was caught lying to Parliament over the Christine Keeler affair. Who could forget Philip Larkin's comment, 'Christine Keeler's newspaper order? — one Mail, one Observer, and as many Times as possible?' Harold Wilson led Labour to victory in 1964.

Racism was still prevalent, with many boarding houses carrying the sign 'no coloureds'. 16.5 million people watched *The Black-and-White Minstrel Show* on the BBC, while Bristol bus workers refused to work with West Indians.

And yet it was also a period of emerging optimism found through the new Labour Government, pop music, the arts, and the teenage revolution. On television, programs emerged such as *That Was the Week That Was*, *Coronation Street*, *Doctor*

Who, and *Top of the Pops*, with the new mood led by individuals such as Joan Littlewood, Harold Pinter, Dennis Potter, and Margaret Drabble.

Kynaston, in his epic 'Tales of a New Jerusalem'

series, scheduled to conclude with the 1979 Thatcher election, continues to provide a comprehensive and incisive bottom-up view of British history.

ANU/Canberra Times Meet the Author Dates 2024

So you cannot attend any of the Meet the Authors gatherings? In that case, follow the link <https://www.anu.edu.au/anu-the-canberra-times-meet-the-author-series> and you can see the podcasts listed under each of the past events.

June 13: Jennifer Rayner

will be in conversation with John Uhr on her new book ***Climate Clangers: The Bad Ideas Blocking Real Action***. Vote of thanks by Adam Triggs. Harry Hartog bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

June 18: Nick Bryant

will be in conversation with Mark Kenny on his new book ***The Forever War***. Vote of thanks by Allan Behm. RSSL Auditorium, ANU.

June 19: Kaaron Warren

will be in conversation with Daniel O'Malley on Kaaron's new novel ***The Underhistory***. Vote of thanks by Colin Steele. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

June 25: Michael Brissenden

will be in conversation with Mike Bowers on his new novel ***Smoke***. Vote of thanks by Sally Pryor. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

July 9: Allan Behm

will be in conversation with Mark Kenny on his new book ***The Odd Couple: Reconfiguring the America-Australia Relationship***. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

July 16: Brigitta Olubas and Susan Wyndham

will be in conversation with Julieanne Lamond on ***Hazzard and Harrower: The Letters***. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

July 22: Cassandra Pybus

will be in conversation with Mark McKenna on her new book ***A Very Secret Trade: The Dark Story Of Gentlemen Collectors in Tasmania***. Vote of thanks by Diane Bell. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

August 7: Paul Ham

will be in conversation with Hugh Mackay on his new book ***The Soul: The History of the Human Mind***. Vote of thanks by Allan Behm. RSSL Auditorium, ANU.

August 13: Andrew Ford

will be in conversation with Malcolm Gillies on his new book ***The Shortest History of Music***. Vote of thanks by Robyn Holmes. Larry Sitsky Room, ANU School of Music.

August 16: Norman Swan

will be in conversation with Laura Tingle on his new book ***So You Want to Know What's Good for Your Kids?*** Vote of thanks by Hugh Mackay. Llewellyn Hall, ANU.

August 20: Hayley Scrivenor

will be in conversation with Chris Hammer on Hayley's new novel ***Girl Falling***. Vote of thanks by Anna Creer. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

August 27: Catherine Fox

will be in conversation with Michelle Ryan on Catherine's new book, ***Breaking the Boss Bias: How to Get More Women into Leadership***. Vote of thanks by Haussegger. RSSL Auditorium, ANU. 6.30 start.

September 3: Don Watson

will be in conversation with Mark Kenny on his new quarterly essay ***The US Election***. Vote of thanks by Allan Behm. RSSL Auditorium, ANU.

September 9: Darren Rix and Craig Cormick

will be in conversation on their new book ***Warra Warra Wai: How Indigenous Australians Discovered Captain Cook***. Vote of thanks by Kate Fullagar. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

September 12: Kevin Bell

in conversation with Kim Rubenstein on his new book ***Housing: The Great Australian Right***. RSSL Auditorium, ANU.

September 18/19: Raina McIntyre

on her new book ***Vaccine Nation***. TBC.

September 24: Rebecca Huntley

in conversation with Karen Middleton on Rebecca's new book ***Sassafras***. Vote of thanks by Jeanne Ryckmans. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

October 10: Gina Chick

in conversation on her new book. Vote of thanks by Jeanne Ryckmans. Street Theatre, 15 Childers Street.

October 20: Tim Winton

in conversation about his new novel ***Juice***. In association with the Canberra Writers Festival. Llewellyn Hall, ANU.

November 4: Benjamin Stevenson

in conversation with Jack Heath on his new novel ***Everyone This Christmas Has a Secret***. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

November 12: Peter Fitzsimons

in conversation on his new book ***The Legend of Albert Jacka***. Harry Hartog Bookshop, Kambri, ANU.

December 6: Leigh Sales and Annabel Crabb

Llewellyn Hall, ANU.

— Colin Steele, May 2024

ANNA STEELE was head of English at Canberra Grammar School, before retiring in 2005. Since then, using her maiden name ANNA CREER, she has been a regular reviewer of crime fiction, historical fiction, as well as non-fiction about Jane Austen and Shakespeare. Since July 2023 Anna's reviews have been appearing in *The Canberra City News* once a month.

Creer on Crime

SANCTUARY

by Garry Disher (Text Publishing; \$35)

Garry Disher is arguably Australia's greatest living crime writer. In 2018 he received the Australian Crime Writers' Association's Ned Kelly award, the most prestigious literary prize for crime fiction in Australia, describing him as 'a giant not only of crime fiction but of Australian letters'.

Disher has created many memorable characters, and he introduces another in *Sanctuary*, his latest standalone novel.

Raised in foster homes, Grace has been a thief since childhood. But she's no ordinary thief. Grace knows the value of rare *objets d'art* from stamps to watches to paintings and antiques. 'To handle, look or understand the story behind a beautiful painting, stamp or brooch made her feel better about herself.'

Grace is also a chameleon, able to quickly alter her appearance to blend in or to become invisible. She knows when to walk away from a job, knows the escape routes, 'keep the job simple, quiet and unobtrusive ... and always have a plan B, which was a way of saying always plan for and expect the worst'. Her caution has kept her alive.

At the Brisbane Stamp Fair she glimpses Adam Garrett, her foster brother and former associate in crime but, when they both had targeted a rare Jaeger-LeCoultre watch, Grace had got there first and she knows Adam wants revenge.

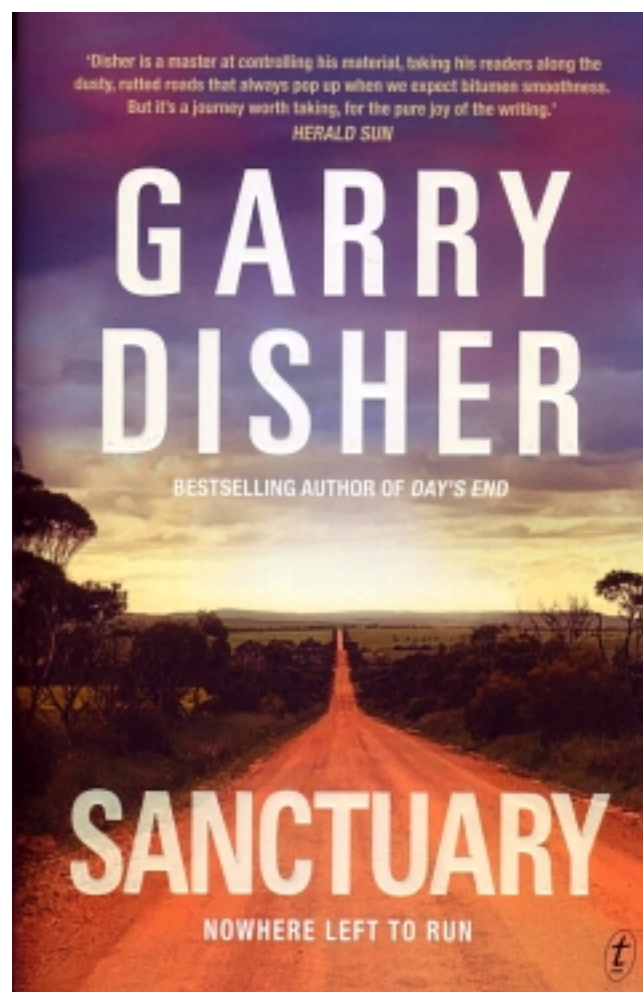
Grace goes on the run through rural New South Wales and into Victoria. By the time she reaches South Australia, she's running out of money. In the small town of Battendorf in the Adelaide Hills, she takes a job in an antique shop owned by Erin Mandel. She seems to have found a refuge, somewhere to hide.

A friendship develops between Grace and Erin, and Grace begins to feel at home, forgetting the caution that has kept her alive.

But Grace doesn't know that Erin is in hiding

too, and someone is looking for her.

Disher's crime fiction is far from simple. He admits he has developed techniques to enrich his fiction, including 'carefully placed turning points with buried secrets coming to the surface, getting the reader to exercise their mind about the wrong issue'. As a result, *Sanctuary* is a carefully crafted story of many skilfully interwoven strands. Disher builds sympathy for Grace, despite her many faults, in a disturbing story about predatory angry men and their victims.



TO THE RIVER by Vicki Wakefield (Text; \$34.99)

South Australian author **Vicki Wakefield**, in her latest novel *To the River*, also explores the plight of a young woman on the run.

While Disher uses the small towns of the Adelaide Hills as a place of sanctuary for Grace, Wakefield turns to the Murraylands and Riverlands region when creating a refuge for her main character.

Twelve years ago, 17-year-old Sabine Kelly was arrested for murder after a series of devastating fires at the caravan park where she lived killed nine people, including her mother and sister and a police officer. However, she managed to escape and, despite there being a reward of \$100,000 for information leading to her discovery, she has eluded capture ever since.

Sabine's childhood has been difficult. Her mother was a known drug addict and dealer. To the people of the town and the police, the Kelly family was trouble.

For twelve years, Sabine has lived on the river on an ageing houseboat owned by her grandfather Ray, with a faithful dog, Blue, for company. A

small network of friends has been her only support.

However, when she stops at the grandfather's riverside shack, she meets his neighbour Rachel Weidemann, a journalist, and she decides it's time to tell her story and seek justice.

Rachel had seen Sabine briefly four years earlier outside Ray Kelly's shack, and since then has investigated until 'she knows everything about the case. Her mild interest had grown into an obsession. It's the kind of story that could make her career.

Rachel needs a big story. She has been recently divorced after her husband of 27 years began an affair with a younger woman. Although she has managed to keep the riverside house, she's using her redundancy package to pay the mortgage, and as a freelance journalist she's become dependent on her diminishing savings.

But there are powerful people who don't want Sabine's story told and, as the two very different women learn to trust each other, inevitably they realise their lives are in danger.

The fragility of the river's ecosystem mirrors the fragility of Sabine and Rachel in their struggle to survive. *To the River* is tense, dramatic, and compulsive reading.

THE GOOD DOG by Simon Rowell (Text; \$34.99)

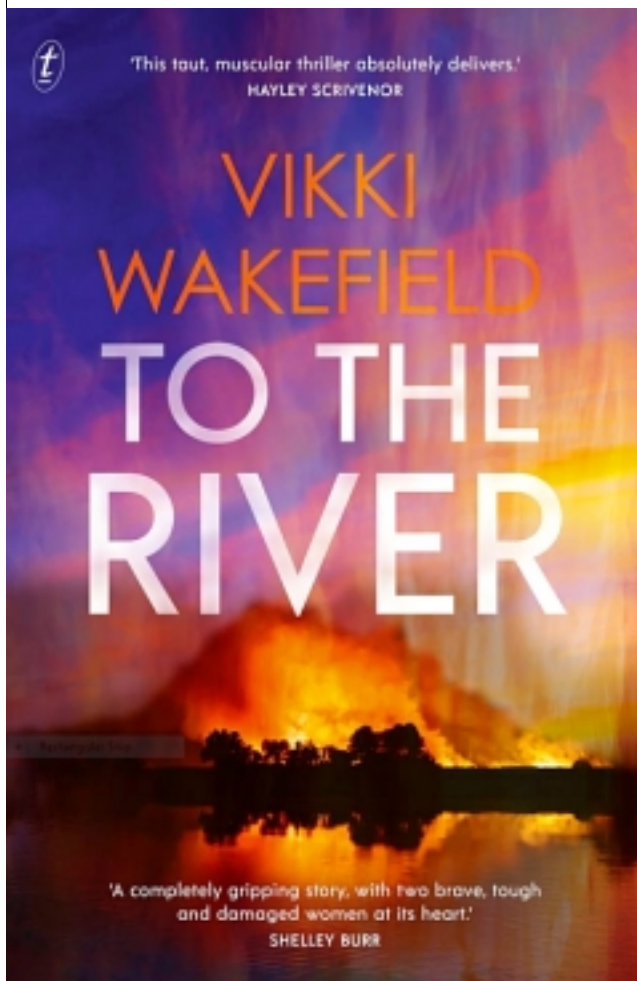
Simon Rowell writes and sets his crime novels in rural Victoria. He introduced his police detective Sergeant Zoe Mayer in *The Long Game* (2021), followed by *Wild Card* (2023).

Zoe has suffered trauma in her professional past, and as a result she now has a service dog, a golden retriever, Harry, who accompanies her everywhere. Harry is the reason she can return to work.

She tells her colleagues 'Harry's a big part of the reason I'm Okay ... I was a wreck. I'm better because he's here with me every day.'

The Good Dog is the third in the series, and Zoe has a new partner, Ben Torro, transferred from the Armed Crime Squad. He doesn't make a good first impression. On the first day 'he strutted into the squad room in a grey tailored three piece suit, his dark hair carefully styled. To Zoe, he looked more gangster than cop.' And he's concerned about dog hair on his suit. As a result, Zoe questions his capability in Homicide.

On a hot summer's night, Zoe and Ben are called to Mount Macedon to investigate shots





THE STRIP by Iain Ryan (Text; \$34.99)

Iain Ryan's *The Strip*, set on the Gold Coast in the early 1980s, is a much grittier read.

Ryan has used the 1980s Queensland Police Corruption scandal as the inspiration for his novel, saying: 'It's the very first news story I can remember ... the corruption is a matter of public record, and it is truly wild. We're talking about absolute collusion between organized crime elements, state government politicians and the very highest echelons of the Queensland Police.'

Ryan's starting point for *The Strip* was the rumour that corruption on the Gold Coast was even worse.

When a doctor is brutally murdered in northern New South Wales, Detective Constable Lana Cohen is co-opted from the New South Wales police force to the Gold Coast's Strike Force Diablo, which, over the past two years, has been investigating six similar murders.

Lana is told by her boss that 'The coast is where the Queensland Police send their deadwood' and that 'Diablo should have turned something up by now. The talk is there's a dirty element.'

Lana discovers Strike Force Diablo is dysfunctional. The best of the detectives, Emmett

being fired. Two men are found dead. All the evidence suggests a murder-suicide, but when the victims are identified as Piers Johnson and Anthony Peterson, Zoe isn't convinced.

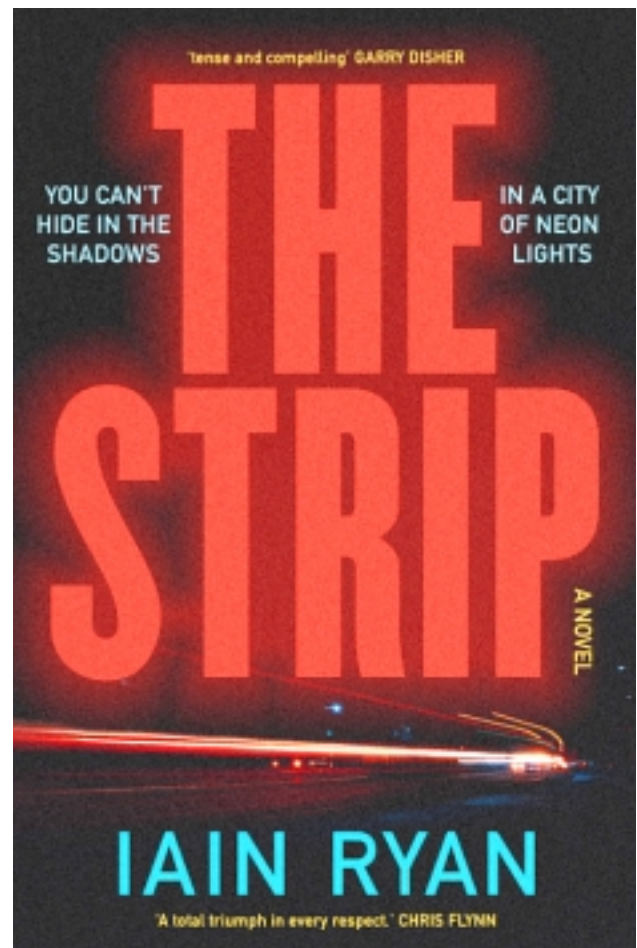
Piers Johnson had recently been acquitted of fraud and Peterson had been his defence lawyer at the high-profile trial. Johnson had persuaded both friends and neighbours in Mount Macedon to invest in a projected deluxe resort in Bali, but when the money was transferred it disappeared.

Even though Johnson himself lost ten million dollars, he was accused of being behind the scam. He was acquitted of all charges, but many of those defrauded had threatened to kill him.

The case becomes even more complicated when Peterson's teenage daughter is kidnapped.

The Good Dog is a cleverly crafted police procedural, as each of the suspects is eliminated until, in a tense climax, Zoe and Ben finally confront the killer.

And there's nothing cute about Harry. He's a smart working dog who warns Zoe when there's danger ahead, can signal when a witness is telling the truth, and can seek out injured victims. Harry is literally the good dog of the title.



Hades, is on leave. Lana is told, 'Diablo got to him ... he lost the plot a few months ago.' The remaining detectives frequent pubs and brothels and ignore her, except for Henry Loch, a detective described in an official report as 'an unredeemable thug with a slim list of achievements'.

Henry, however is determined to retain his position in Homicide, and he and Lana work together to uncover the murderer hidden behind extraordinary levels of misogyny, debauchery, violence, and deception.

It's not surprising that the 1987 *Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct* lasted two years and resulted in the resignation of Queensland's Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the jailing of three of his ministers and the Police Commissioner, Sir Terry Lewis, who lost his knighthood.

Ryan believes that 'for the most part, Australian crime fiction is "literary fiction" rather than hard-boiled noir ... we're strangely light on the grittier, weirder stuff'. He aims to address this imbalance. He has submitted the second book in the series and is already planning a third.

THE TEACHER by Tim Sullivan (Head of Zeus; \$39.99)

Tim Sullivan is a successful British screenwriter and director of both film and television, as well as a best-selling crime writer.

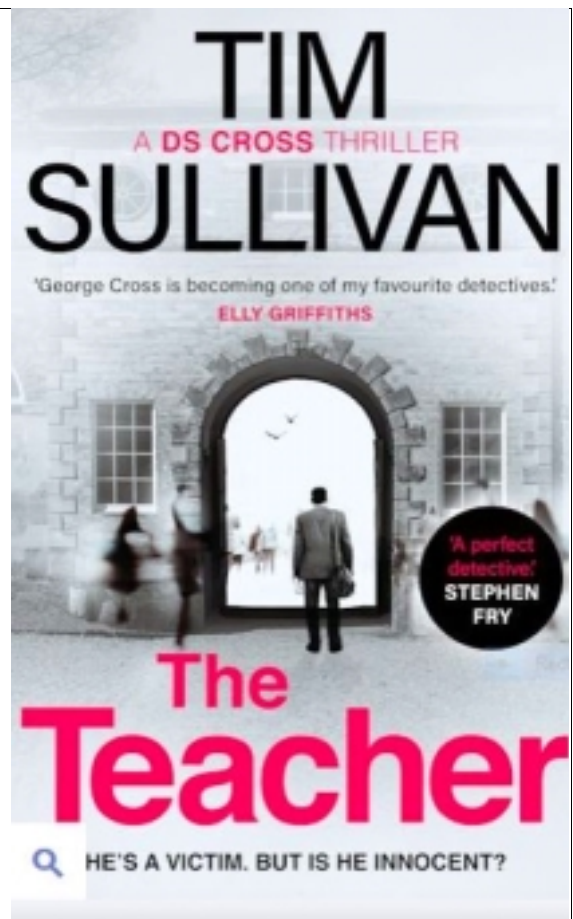
The Teacher is the sixth in his 'DS Cross Thriller' series featuring a detective who has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

George Cross, who is a member of the Major Crimes Unit of the Avon and Somerset Police, is an extraordinary creation. His colleagues understand that he has no sense of humour and is 'averse to small talk as well as being completely inept at it'.

DCI Carson indulges Cross's need for quiet and his own space, as well as his literal interpretation of any conversation because Cross is 'uniquely gifted when it comes to solving crime'. He has the highest conviction rate in the force.

He plays the church organ to relax. The sounds of the organ, particularly the low pedal notes reverberating off the walls, in an almost physical way, put him in a familiar safe and comforting solitary space.'

The Major Crimes Unit is called to the small village of Crockerne, where an elderly, reclusive man has found been murdered. Alistair Moreton was not popular in the village. He was opinionated, 'didn't care who he upset', disrupted parish



council meetings, and took his neighbours to court repeatedly.

When the police discover Moreton had been the headmaster of a prep school with a reputation for bullying and sadistic beatings, the number of suspects grows.

Cross is supported by his colleagues as he begins the investigation, but a senior officer from a neighbouring force, DI Warner, is co-opted to lead the team. His lack of understanding of Cross's character creates humour, until the dark side of DI Warner is revealed.

Sullivan's vivid style reflects his film and screenwriting career, particularly in his descriptions of the sadism of the prep school and Cross's interviews with suspects.

In his acknowledgments, he reveals that 'the writing of this novel has been surprisingly cathartic' because he has drawn on his own experiences at his first prep school to create Moreton and his behaviour, saying 'I still find it unbelievable and inexcusable what happened to me and my contemporaries in a quiet corner of Somerset many years ago'.

IT TAKES A TOWN by Aoife Clifford
(Ultimo; \$34.99)

Australian author **Aoife Clifford** was born in London of Irish parents, studied Arts/Law at the Australian National University, and now lives in Melbourne. She has been writing best-selling, award-winning literary crime novels since 2016.

Clifford sets her latest novel *It Takes a Town* in the fictional remote Australian country town of Welcome, which has produced one celebrity, Vanessa Walton, who has returned to live in the town and teaches drama at the local high school.

Vanessa found fame as a child and has ‘the sort of charisma that had caught the nation’s eye and managed to hold its faithless gaze for most of the following forty years’.

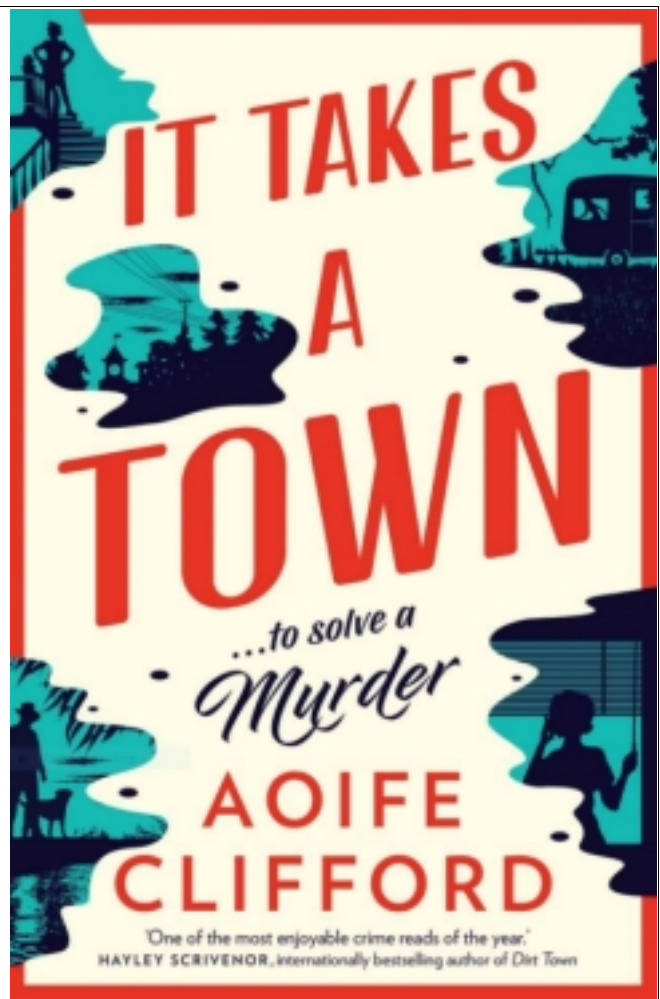
Sergeant Carole Duffy arrives in Welcome, the morning after a violent storm, to learn that Vanessa Walton has been found dead at the bottom of her stairs. The evidence suggests that she tripped and fell, as there’s no sign of a forced entry. The coroner decides the death was an accident.

The Langridges are Welcome’s wealthiest family. Barton Langridge, who ‘has the sort of face you instantly want to punch, even if you know nothing about him and his statements about “crazy lefties”, “Marxist teachers” and “taking Australian jobs”’, is the local member of Parliament.

Jasmine Langridge, Barton’s 16-year-old stepdaughter, a climate activist who vehemently opposes her stepfather’s ideas, believes Vanessa was murdered, because she and her friend had accidentally discovered anonymous death threats in Vanessa’s bag at school.

When Jasmine disappears, the police are forced to reinvestigate Vanessa’s death as they search for Jasmine.

Carole Duffy is told ‘it takes a town to solve a murder’, but it is the women of the town, the English teacher, the supermarket worker, the nosy neighbour, and Jasmine and her friend Brianna who ask the right questions and uncover



hidden truths, revealing the motivation and identity of the murderer.

Clifford says that her novel explores ‘the unintended consequences of a murder investigation across a community, the price of fame told from the perspective of the not-so famous, and how the real dangers come from the ones we love. Life can be both heartbreaking and hilarious and it is important that my writing reflects this.’

As a result, *It Takes a Town* is a complex and immersive read.

— **Anna Creer**, May 2024

Winter reading

Winter is icummen in,
Lhude sing Goddamm,
Raineth drop and staineth slop.
And how the wind doth ramm!

Ezra Pound ‘Ancient Music’

It’s time to stay indoors and let four authors take you to faraway places.

THE MYSTERY WRITER

by Sulari Gentill (Ultimo; \$34.99)

Local author **Sulari Gentill** will take you to the town of Lawrence in Kansas in *The Mystery Writer*, where Theodosia Benton arrives unexpectedly to stay with her lawyer brother Gus. Theo is supposed to be studying law in Australia at the ANU but she wants to be a writer and hopes to find the freedom to follow her dream in the US.

Gus encourages Theo to find somewhere to write each day and she discovers a local coffee bar, Benders, to work on her historical mystery, set in the twenties in Canberra. There she meets Dan Murdoch, an established author, who becomes her mentor and eventually her lover, while promising to send her manuscript to his agent, Veronica Cole.

But someone murders Dan and Theo discovers she's the prime suspect. Gus and his friend Mac, an IT expert, join forces to protect Theo as attempts are made on her life. Then Theo disappears.

At the same time an online group of conspiracy theorists are preparing to save the world from depravity and evil by creating The Shield, led by the mysterious Primus.

The Mystery Writer is complex, intriguing and completely unpredictable, full of twists and turns as the two lines of the plot eventually converge.

THE CALL

by Gavin Strawhan
(Allen & Unwin; \$32.99)

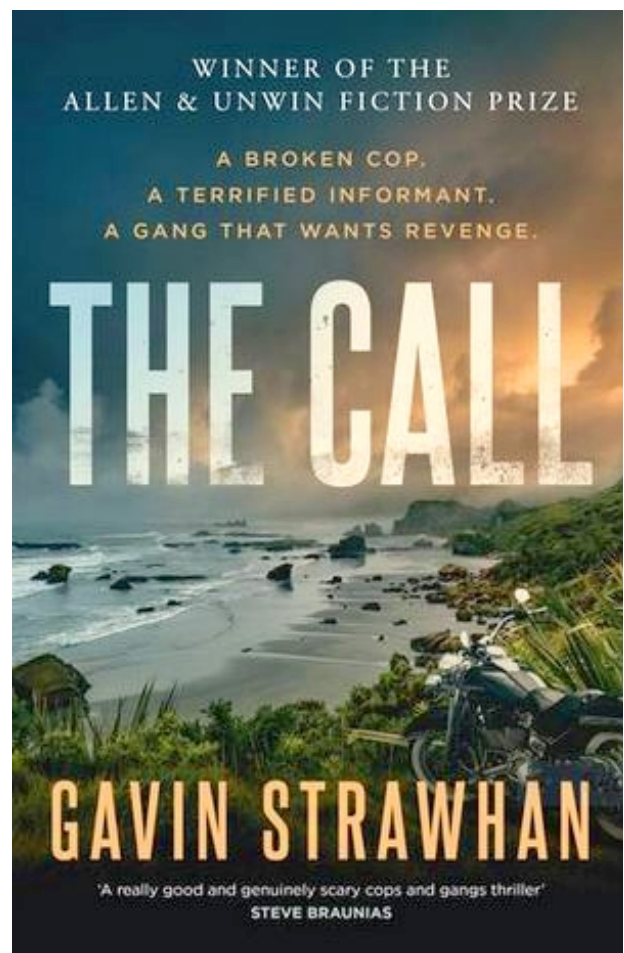
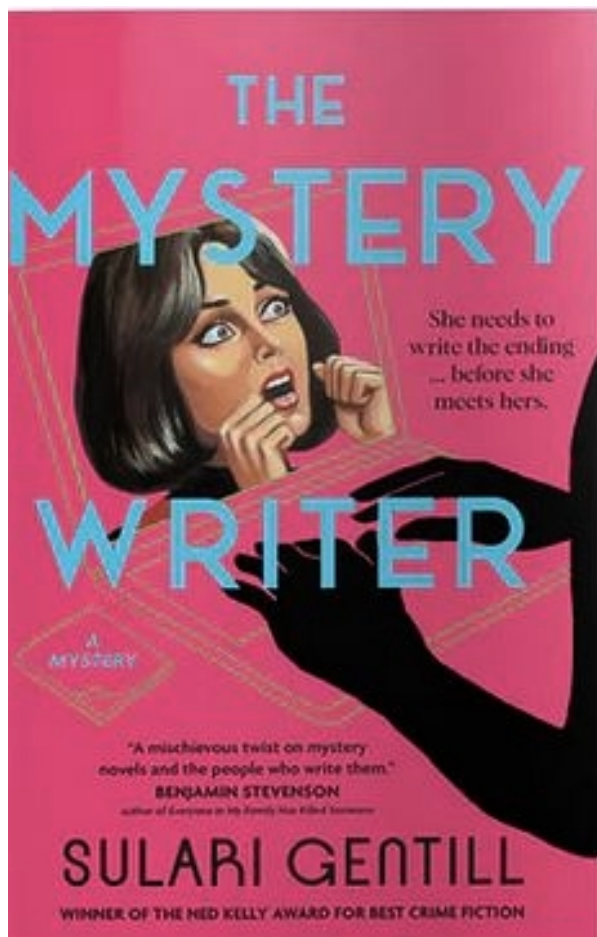
Gavin Strawhan will take you to New Zealand in his debut novel *The Call*, which won the 2023 Allen & Unwin Fiction Prize, and centres around the terror created by bikie gang members deported from Australia.

Auckland police woman, DS Honey Chalmers, recovering from a near fatal brutal attack, has returned home to the remote coastal town of Waitutu to care for her mother, Rachel, who is struggling with the early symptoms of dementia.

Honey is convinced she was attacked by members of the Reapers bikie gang, after she cultivated an informant, Kloe Kovich, the partner of one of the gang members. Kloe has disappeared and Honey fears she is dead.

But the Reapers are not convinced, and follow Honey to Waitutu.

Through flashbacks, Strawhan slowly builds suspense towards a terrifying ending. It is an





impressive debut.

THE SHADOWS OF LONDON

by Andrew Taylor
(Hemlock Press/Harper Collins; \$15.00)

Or you can let **Andrew Taylor** take you back to Restoration England in *The Shadows of London*, the latest in his James Marwood and Cat Lovett novels.

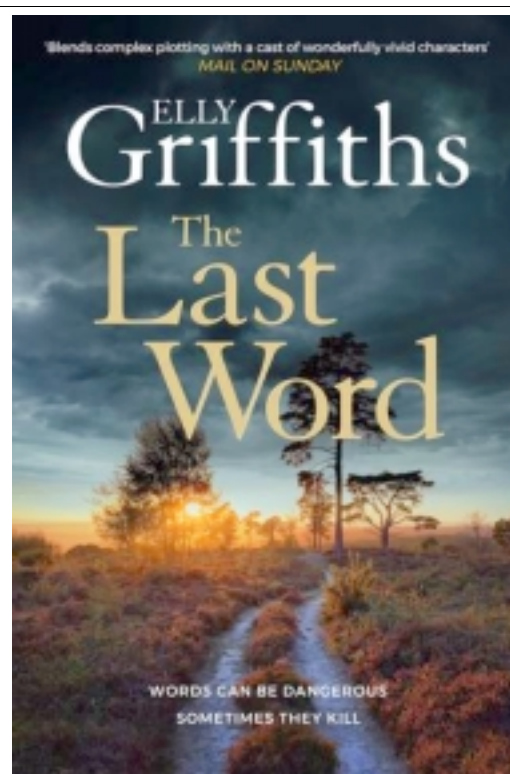
Taylor, a celebrated crime writer, was awarded the CWA's prestigious Diamond Dagger Award for sustained excellence in crime writing in 2009.

The Shadows of London is set in 1671, and Cat Hakesby (nee Lovett) is now a widow and an architect. She has been employed to restore the ruins of an old almshouse but building work is suspended when a murdered disfigured body is found on the site.

Cat knows she needs James Marwood's help or she will be financially ruined. Marwood works for Lord Arlington, the principal Secretary of State and the most powerful man in the country after the King.

Marwood decides they need to identify the dead man to uncover the motive for his murder but, as they investigate, they uncover corruption at the heart of government and a plot to place a young vulnerable French woman, Louise de Keroualle, in the King's bed.

Taylor has said that part of his motivation for



writing *The Shadows of London* came from Dr Linda Porter's *Mistresses*, which reveals the more important women who shared Charles II's bed. Porter's chapter on Louise de Keroualle describes how her seduction was part of international politics.

For Taylor, de Keroualle was a defenceless young woman barely out of her teens and her seducer a powerful man twice her age. Charles' pursuit of her was supported by some of the most influential men in Europe. Taylor argues she was as much a victim as those used and abused by Jeffrey Epstein.

THE LAST WORD

by Elly Griffiths (Quercus; \$32.99)

Or you could relax with the latest cosy crime novel from **Elly Griffiths**, *The Last Word*, a sequel to *The Postscript Murders* (2020). The beautiful Nataalka, the ex-monk Benedict, and the elderly ex-BBC presenter Edwin return to investigate the mysterious deaths of a number of authors, all connected to a sinister writer's retreat near Hastings.

The Last Word may be cozy but it's also cleverly plotted and filled with empathetic, likeable characters. If you enjoy TV programs like *Poirot*, *Midsomer Murders*, and *Father Brown*, this is the book for you.

— **Anna Creer**, June 2024

The Tony Thomas column

Philosophical coincidences?

A few weeks ago on community radio station 3MBS Melbourne I interviewed the great Australian pianist and composer **Michael Kieran Harvey** on my weekly program *Contemporary Visions*. During the hour or so in which we played a number of Michael's compositions and performances we discovered a mutual admiration for the American philosopher **Daniel Dennett**, whom Michael had met at a lecture in Britain, and whom I had seen and heard in person for the only time in 2010 at the Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne. I'd been reading Dennett for years before this and mentioned what is probably his most famous book, ***Consciousness Explained***, about which I said some people took the view that it didn't (though both Michael and I thought it went a good way towards doing so).

Dennett had appeared at the 2010 Convention as one of the four horsemen of Atheism. The other horsemen were biologist Richard Dawkins and philosopher Sam Harris, who were there, but writer Christopher Hitchens, who also was supposed to be there, had recently died. Making up admirably for Hitchens' absence was philosopher **A. C. (Anthony) Grayling**, who like the other horsemen spoke brilliantly, though they hardly had to convince 99 per cent of the attendees about *The God Delusion*, as Dawkins' book was titled.

In April this year Michael Harvey told me that Dennett, long associated with Tufts University and much of whose work had been about the meaning of free will, had died just a week or so ago. This was news I hadn't then heard. I told Michael that I had Dennett's recent autobiography, ***I've Been Thinking***, on my coffee table, just dipped into, waiting to be read.

Dawkins and Harris are still with us, and Dawkins, I think, has written a book or two that amount to autobiography.

Yesterday I went with my son, Nick, and his

partner, Kym, to hear Anthony Grayling speak in the Athenaeum Theatre as part of the Melbourne Writers Festival. Over the years I'd read a substantial part of Grayling's oeuvre and heard him speak quite a few times at various cities in Australia, as well as frequently on TV. And I'd spoken a few words to him at a number of book signings. This time, as usual, he spoke for an hour without notes or hesitation, the subject being his last book but one, the 426 page ***Philosophy and Life: Exploring the Great Questions of How to Live***. As he said in his talk, he could only give a taste of the substantial book in 45 minutes. One of the key messages, derived from Socrates via Plato, was that the good life was one that an individual must choose for themselves, after thinking for themselves. Prophets, seers, all '-isms' were to be avoided, or at least thought deeply about, with only what was valuable, if anything, to be extracted. He repeated the old Bertrand Russell joke which I'd heard him tell a number of times: 'Most people would rather die than think, and they do.'

Afterwards, at the book signing, I told Grayling that I admired the chapter late in ***Philosophy and Life***, where (rarely for him) he'd spoken personally about his own life. I suggested he write his memoirs. He told me that his friend Christopher Hitchens had told him, shortly after writing his memoir, the danger about this was that this might suggest that one's life had come to its natural end. I told him then that perhaps he should not write his memoir. We laughed. I went off and had coffee with my son and we talked about thinking and getting *Meno*, one of Plato's Dialogues that Grayling had described in some detail, for him to read.

I don't think I'll be writing my memoir any time soon.

What goes around comes around, or does it?

— **Tony Thomas**, 12 May 2024

JOHN HERTZ has taken the trouble to extract from his *Vanamonde* files items that he and I consider might be interesting to readers of *SF Commentary*. Many *SFC* readers might already receive *Vanamonde* in the mail, but many will have only heard of his weekly fanzine (for APA-L in Los Angeles). John does not offer *Vanamonde* on the internet.

The first number for each item is the source issue of *Vanamonde* from which the extract has been taken, followed by the date of publication.

Only the first piece, 'Two doors opening' is derived from elsewhere.

The John Hertz corner

Two doors opening: Mike Glyer's File 770 40th Anniversary/10th Anniversary

(7 January 2018, *File 770*)

In our calendar — there are others — the first month, January, is named after the Latin word for a door (*ianua*), since it is the door of the year. Its birthstone is the garnet, symbol of constancy.

Two doors opened for us this month (January 2018), the fanzine *File 770*, whose 40th birthday is 6 January 2018, and its electronic pseudopod, the Weblog *File 770*, whose 10th birthday is 15 January. Fanzines and Weblogs come and go; this is an extraordinary constancy, worth celebrating. Indeed here we are.

The name *File 770* is a joke, like many things around here. If you don't know it, talk to an older fan about 'Room 770'.

Those of us in or familiar with the United States knows that Our Glorious Host (Mike Glyer) deserves a 10/40 anniversary if anyone does. He might prefer we not associate this numeration with motor oil, but consideration may show his merit in reducing friction of moving parts, which would waste useful power by converting kinetic energy to heat, and by wear lead to lower efficiency and degradation.

I've contributed in one way or another to *File 770* for a while. You have too — even if you haven't been sending in much. Those also serve who only sit and read.

However, *File 770* is a newszine, so do send the news. In fandom (as a teacher of mine used to say

in another context) the difference is the participation. Over the years OGH has grown unsurprised when people evidently think 'Oh, Glyer must already have heard' and no one tells him.

I asked him if there was anything in particular he hoped from me for this occasion. He kindly suggested I think whether there was any poetry, Chinese or otherwise, I could comment on.

'Otherwise' is usually good for me.

I was going to quote '**Pied Beauty**'. What could be more fannish than glory in all things counter, original, spare, strange; whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how)?

In my college days, which partly by my own doing were counter, original, spare, strange, I began with credit from Advanced Placement exams, so in my first year I took fourth-year English.

It was Antioch — not the one on the Orontes, nor on the Sacramento; nor had we a Crusader or a Killer Rabbit — and I should have realised that the teacher might be counter, original, spare, strange, or that we might waste useful power by converting kinetic energy to heat, and by wear lead to lower efficiency and degradation. However, I was thus introduced to Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), and the end crowns all.

But Hopkins was a theist; indeed, a Christian, indeed, a Jesuit. He wrote 'Pied Beauty' the year he was ordained a priest. Of course he wrote God in, the third word and the last, the beginning and

end. Never mind what I believe, or what OGH may believe, why should I put you to the trouble, in case you don't, of transposing some fellow's poetry into a different key you're happier to sing in?

On another hand, if nothing like that may ever be, goodbye diversity.

So let's go to China.

There the flower of January is the plum. It starts to bloom around now, and is particularly beautiful in the snow (there isn't any where I'm writing, or in Australia and New Zealand — I really should do my DUFF Report — but you may have plenty). It symbolises resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity. It lives long; Huang-mei County in Central China is said to have a 1,600-year-old plum which is still flowering. Here are two plums of Chinese poetry.

Both are anthologised in the *Ch'ien-chia-shih*; not literally 'A Thousand Poems by Masters' or 'A Thousand Masters' Poems', it's two hundred poems by a hundred poets, 'eminently useful in teaching ... the rhythms of the language and also the heart ... the most-quoted poems in the Chinese language ... for the past eight centuries, it has been the most-memorised collection of verse in China and part of every student's education' (p. 5 of the 2003 edition I'm using, called *Poems of the Masters*). There's diversity for you.

These two, in the original, are each four five-character lines.

About *No. 11*, by **Ho Chih-chang** (659–744), the translator notes: 'Although he served [as] vice-minister of the Ministry of Rites and director of the Palace Library, he was better known for his clever

conversation and love of drinking. **Tu Fu** [712–770, possibly the greatest Chinese poet] included him among the Eight Immortals of Wine' (p. 28; the Chinese is given too, the translator showing his work).

We've never met good sir
I stopped because of the woods and stream
don't worry about buying wine
I have some coins in my purse

About *No. 6*, by **Li Pai** (701–762; also known as Li Po; the other main candidate, with Tu Fu), we're told: 'He wrote this poem ... in Hsuan-cheng ... south of Nanching ... Chingting Mountain ... five kilometers northwest ... was only 300 meters high known for its crags and cliffs ... water represents wisdom ... mountains represent compassion' (pp. 16–17).

Flocks of birds disappear in the distance
lone clouds wander away
who never tires of my company
only Chingting Mountain

Some have translated it differently — there's Chinese poetry for you — one taking it as Ch'an Buddhism (or if you prefer, Zen) saying the poet sat until only the mountain remained. You could.

This translator, quite familiar with such things, said only (only!) 'poetry ... summarized the subtleties of the Chinese vision of reality ... in the palace, in the street, in every household, every inn, every monastery, in every village square' (p. 3).

So be it. Happy New Year.

What can one learn?

(*Vanamonde* 1434, February 2021):

What can one learn without being taught? without a textbook? a manual? With only an example who disregards teaching? To what extent need one be able to manage the costs of mistakes? Is it better or worse for the subject to be — or appear — like one's existing acquaintance? Must one know facts, or will having them at hand suffice? How much consists in facts, how much in technique of application? How much does it matter who, or what, that one is? I keep saying how well Theodore Sturgeon punned with 'Science fiction is knowledge fiction' — consider the Latin root of *science*. Heinlein's *Space Cadet* (1948) immediately comes to mind as an epistemological novel.

For several decades we've been saying we want educated children to have critical thinking skills. But what is that? Too often it evidently amounts to *Agree with me*. Or *Display the approved dissent*, or its cousin *Be sceptical but only over there*. Jerry Pournelle sometimes said he thought 10 per cent of budgets should be set aside for contrarians. Also awkward is measurement. Teachers find essay-questions hard to grade the answers of. It's easier to manage 'Who was the King of France in 1789?' than 'Has France been better or worse under kings?' Law schools give eager lip-service to the so-called Socratic Method, i.e. the teacher only asks questions. One of my law-school teachers (in the US we call them 'professors'), a veteran who'd been there a long time and was highly regarded,

said 'It's the Socratic Method around here until the teacher gets frustrated and blurts out the answer.'

Respect even what we don't care to resume

(1454; July 2021)

Later it would fall,
Although its power, beauty,
Took no evil turn.
In its day our minds, our speech,
Nourished, seemed universal.

Latin was the language of the West for two millennia. The Romans brought it. The Church maintained it. Neither it nor anything else could or did go on so long merely by command; people found it helped communication. From Poland to England, from Sweden to Spain, you could write to anyone, and travellers could talk; in itself it was considered expressive, indeed using it was felt to

improve thought. Much of it has influenced and been adopted into English — not at all incidentally, those (and 'incidentally') are Latin words. *E pluribus unum* ('Out of many, one') — which I wish the United States had not replaced as a motto in 1956 — is Latin; so is the warning I still must keep in mind, *Brevis esse laboro obscurus fio* ('When I labour to be brief, I become obscure'). Let us treat with respect even what we do not care to resume.

(The poem is an acrostic — read down the first letters of each line — in unrhymed 5-7-5-7-7-syllable lines, like Japanese *tanka*.)

The thinnest paper

(1397, May 2020):

The earliest known paper seems to be Chinese from two millennia ago. It was made of two vegetables, hemp — yes, *Cannabis sativa* — and ramie, a kind of nettle. Paper eventually replaced bamboo, wooden strips, and silk, for writing on. It seems to have come to Japan through a Korean Buddhist priest about 600 CE (CE = 'Common Era', used by many who do not care to date according to divinity in Jesus). After a while Japan made paper from local vegetables, *kōzo* (a kind of mulberry) and *gampi* (a bush). Westerners, mostly missionaries, arriving in Japan about the sixteenth century, brought their own paper, but eventually used Japanese paper, which was exported to Europe. Rembrandt (1606–1669) used *gampi* paper. *Kōzo*, *gampi*, and wood pulp are all used to make paper in Japan now, individually or mixed, by hand or by machine. *Shoji* paper, for sliding screens in a Japanese-style house, used to

be pure *kōzo* but now is often partly wood pulp.

The thinnest paper in the world is a *kōzo* paper from Kōchi prefecture in Japan, the southwestern part of the island of Shikoku. Kōchi Castle is one of only twelve original castles still standing today. The paper is an extraordinary form of *tenguchōshi* (sometimes Westernised to 'tengujo'), which I believe may be translated 'classic writing paper'. This particular kind is 0.02 mm thick. It's almost transparent. It weighs only 1.6 g/m² and only the Hidaka Washi company has been able to make it (*washi* is 'Japanese paper'). To help the *kōzo*, *neri* is also included, from a kind of hibiscus. Heavier — if that word may be used — grades of *tenguchōshi* at 5 or 9 grams a square metre are also made. This finest *tenguchōshi* is the thickness of one *kōzo* fiber. What's it good for? Conservation. There's an article about it in the 5 May 20 *New York Times*, p. D3, 'For a Very Weighty Job, You Use the Thinnest Paper', by Oliver Whang.

Rhymes with ‘banter’

(*Vanamonde* 1543):

Many ways to think
Arrive through what others tell.
Restrain no freedoms,
Tolerate discords, knowing
Yet nutrition comes from them.

Marty Cantor (1935–2023) left our stage Saturday morning, 29 April 2023. Advanced cancer, which for a while had been held back by treatment, finally overcame him.

He was active in fanzines. His fanzine *Holier Than Thou* (with Robbie Bourget, then his wife) was a three-time Hugo finalist; his later *No Award* (I wrote to him ‘You are worthy of No Award and No Award is worthy of you’) too was applauded; he helped run Corflu IX (fanziners’ convention; corflu = mimeograph correction fluid, largely historical by Corflu I but once indispensable) and chaired Corflu XXXIV; he served three separate terms as Official Collator of APA-L (its sole officer; APA or apa = amateur press association, in which contributors’ fanzines are collated and the whole then distributed to each); he helped found LASFAPA (L.A. Scientifiction Fans’ Apa, our old word *scientifiction* by then historical) and served as its Little Tin God (sole officer; accused of taking a high-handed attitude to the apa rules and behaving like a little tin god, he so changed his official title, LTG for short, then began the *HTT* fanzine; when Corflu XXII was called ‘Corflu Titanium’ [Ti = 22] and people were given elemental nicknames, his was Tin); he (with Mike Gunderloy, Mike Glycer, Mark Sharpe) brought *Shangri-L’Affaires* into one of its bursts of life (clubzine of the L.A. Science Fantasy Society, begun in the 1940s, Retrospective Hugo finalist); he (with Glycer) published the 6th Edition of *The Neo-Fan’s Guide*; he edited and published Phil Castora’s memoir *Who Knows What Ether Lurks in the Minds of Fen?*; he edited *De Profundis* (a later LASFS clubzine; ‘LASFS’ as if rhyming with a Spanish-English ‘*màs fuss*’).

He and Robbie were elected DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund) delegates to Aussiecon II the 43rd World Science Fiction Convention; each wrote a DUFF report, both published head-to-tail like Ace Books’ double titles; his was *Duffbury Tales*. He was an agent for the successful Britain in ’87 bid to hold the 45th Worldcon. He was given the Evans–Freehafer (LASFS’ service award).

From the mid 1950s through the early ’60s he was a folksinger and instrumentalist (also a poet published in the little magazines of that time), playing 6-string and 12-string guitar, gut-bucket, jug, washboard; he carried two guitars strapped to his motorcycle from coffee-house to coffee-house; Dave Van Ronk (1936-2002) taught him an open-C guitar tuning; he jammed with Jim Kweskin (1940–), David Lindley (1944–2023), and the New Lost City Ramblers.

Later he managed a tobacco shop and then was the only full-time clerk at another, from which he managed to get leave for his DUFF trip five months into his employment. During those years he was often seen with a pipe; so portrayed on the cover of *Duffbury Tales*. Later than that he managed a U-Haul shop; later than that, his apartment building, hosting tabletop board games in the garage when COVID-19 precautions eased. He and Robbie met at Chicon IV the 40th Worldcon, were married the next January; divorced after sixteen years; no children; managed to stay on good terms.

One of our more cynical — and self-deprecatory — sayings is *The Golden Age of science fiction is 12*. Cantor found SF fandom at 40. He joined the LASFS in May 1975. His Evans–Freehafer Award came in 2016.

He hated snow. One day Charles Curley driving along an L.A. freeway noticed the mountains could be seen clearly (they were sometimes obscured by smog) and were covered with snow. Here in Los Angeles! Practically on Cantor’s doorstep — aha! So Curley recruited some friends and shovels and a tarpaulin and a pickup truck; drove into the mountains; loaded the tarp with snow; and in the still of the night drove to Cantor’s place and piled snow by the outdoor entrance. Cantor was really touched that they cared enough about him to pull this stunt, but added ‘Don’t ever do that again’.

He didn’t forsake classical music. In his school orchestra he had been Principal of Second Violins (an orchestra has two violin sections, Violin I and Violin II, with different parts), calling for both musical quality and leadership. As an adult he loved Tchaikovsky’s *Violin Concerto* (1878) and Praetorius’ *Terpsichore* (1612) — two very different works, in case you don’t know.

In print, including electronic media, he could be vigorous in his opinions. He did not keep his mundane political views away from his fanac (our

old word for fan activity); for example, in APA-L he waxed wroth upon such subjects with Karl Lembke, who also did much for the LASFS (chaired the Board of Directors twenty years, substantial donor, E-F Award 2010) and local conventions (often ran Hospitality, contributing his own cooking and brewing; chaired Loscon XXXII) but was

as firmly on the Right as Cantor was on the Left. Yet Cantor punctiliously engaged in fanac with people whose views were far from his — e.g. Lembke. It was a point of honour with him.

May his memory be for a blessing.

Virginia Postrel never lost the thread

(1550, June 2023)

The Fabric of Civilization by **Virginia Postrel** ('pah-strell'; 2020) inspired Anna Murphy in *The Times* (of London; 10 Dec 20) to: 'Hers is a story of great intricacy. Yet she — and we — never lose its thread.' Shadi Bartsch-Zimmer in *History Today* said (12 Dec 21): 'The best history books refocus our gaze on previously invisible threads of causality and consequence.' Maybe Postrel started it with her title for a book telling the history of textiles. She opens her Preface quoting Mark Weiser: 'The most profound technologies ... weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it' ('The Computer for the 21st Century' *Scientific American* Sep 91). Two pages later she says: 'We repeat threadbare clichés ... catch airline shuttles, weave through traffic, follow comment threads ... speak of life spans and

spinoffs and never wonder why drawing out fibers ... looms so large in our language.' Including photographs and diagrams, thirty pages of notes, and an index, she gets from Neanderthals to polyethylene, with the Andes, Ghana, India, Italy, and France, fibres and factors (in the mercantile sense, though math is not minimised), in just three hundred pages. She shows how things are made and what difference they make. Beginning with her version of Weiser, 'to reverse Arthur C. Clarke's famous adage ... any sufficiently familiar technology is indistinguishable from nature' (p. 3), she ends, 'universals are manifest in history only through particulars' (p. 249), having made that good. I wish she wouldn't use 'oblivious' to mean *not perceiving* instead of *having forgotten*; it's longer, more Latin, and less true than *blind*, not better. Luckily she lumbers like that little.

Beethoven's birthday

(1425, 16 Dec. 2020 — Beethoven's birthday):

The towering genius of **Beethoven** (1770–1827) so changed music that we have since been in his shadow. We can't write music like Mozart's (1756–1791), or Bach's (1685–1750), or Monteverdi's (1567–1643), or Tallis' (1505–1585); for a while we couldn't even bear listening to it. Leonard Bernstein said we were in the Age of Anxiety (actually his *Symphony No. 2* [1949, rev. 1965] was so named for W. H. Auden's 1947 poem). Who knows what may come next? We have already begun to

perceive that art before Beethoven is not necessarily primitive, nor he necessarily advanced. Bernstein (1918–1990), that complicated man, may be an indicator of this. Among all else, said no less a Haydn (1732–1809) scholar than H. C. Robbins Landon (1926–2009), he was the great Haydn conductor of the day — Haydn, who said quite sincerely 'Anyone can see that I am a good-natured fellow.' If one man could lead orchestras to sound like Haydn or Beethoven, the future may not be down Beethoven's road; there may not be a road from Tallis through Beethoven.

Mary Cassatt, the only American among the Impressionists

(1463, September 2021)

Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), born in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, living most of her adult life in France, was the only American among the Impressionists. She and her work have been on United States postage stamps: a *Great Americans* engraving in purple shows her face and a fine hat (23¢; 1988, Scott 2181; <https://images.app.goo.gl/cj5qBt98YBdx1q>), my favourite of her in her fifties, from a 1900 photograph in the Smithsonian Institution Archive of American Art; a multicoloured Giori-press of her 1893 *Boating Party* (5¢; 1966, Scott 1322; <https://images.app.goo.gl/XRjZbEozSw2WPbtC7>) shows her masterly composition — look at the masses along the upper left — lower right diagonal, dominated by the back of the rower, the centre occupied by his left elbow, the child's face above. Among my favorites elsewhere are *The Letter* (1891, color print with drypoint and aquatint, e.g. front jacket cover of *Cassatt and her Circle*, N. Mathews ed. 1984; [https://www.artic.](https://www.artic.edu/artworks/13508/the-letter)

[edu/artworks/13508/the-letter](https://www.artic.edu/artworks/13508/the-letter), and *Reverie* (sometimes *Woman with a Red Zinnia*, also 1891, oil on canvas, e.g. B. Shapiro, *Mary Cassatt* fig. 32, 1998; <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.46574.html>). The usual cautions apply: e.g. <https://www.marycassatt.org/Offering-The-Panel-To-The-Bullfighter.html> is not 'panel' but *panal* (Spanish, 'honeycomb'); the woman is offering him a glass of water, into which he is dipping *panal* for a refreshing drink. You'll hear, deservedly, about Cassatt's line, her colouring, her handling of light. Look too at her faces — e.g. *Breakfast in Bed* (1897; oil on canvas, e.g. Shapiro fig. 40, <https://emuseum.huntington.org/objects/5291/breakfast-in-bed?ctx=3b9d0ce6-d45e-437d-b03f-116e3f20dfe5&idx=0>); especially of children, e.g. *Augusta Reading to Her Daughter* (1910; oil on canvas; e.g. <https://www.marycassatt.org/Auguste-Reading-To-Her-Daughter.html> — note 'Auguste'). Adelyn Breeskin (1896–1986) did a 1948 *catalogue raisonné* for the Smithsonian, and a 1979 revision.

Paul Laubin died at his worktable making an oboe

(1547, May 2023)

Paul Laubin (1932–2021) died at his worktable, age 88, making an oboe. He had succeeded to his father's firm of musical-instrument makers in 1976. It goes on today. A. Laubin, Inc., of Peekskill, New York, makes oboes, and English horns, by hand. Their hardwoods, grenadilla, Honduran rosewood, cocobolo, are stored outdoors for a decade or more so they acclimate to extremes of weather, ready, as the firm says, to endure both outdoor summer concerts and drafty orchestra pits. In the mid 1960s it produced a hundred instruments a year; by the mid 1970s less than half that; by the mid 2000s just over a dozen. *The New York Times* obituary (30 Mar 21) naturally

ended by suggesting this made no financial sense, citing a son and quoting a widow who urged modernisation, and describing Paul Laubin as knowing 'the old ways would come to an end ... finding it harder to ignore the realities of being an Old World artisan in the modern era'. Yet it had to begin with Sherry Sylar, then and now associate principal oboist of the New York Philharmonic: 'There is something that strikes a chord deep in your body when you play a Laubin ... a resonance that doesn't happen with any other oboe ... nothing else will do.' Today the firm says: 'We are proud to continue this tradition of hand-craftsmanship and attention to detail.' Long may it

— **John Hertz**, 2021–23

Criticanto Reconsiderations

John Litchen

The very first sequel to *The War of the Worlds*

EDISON'S CONQUEST OF MARS
by Garrett P. Serviss

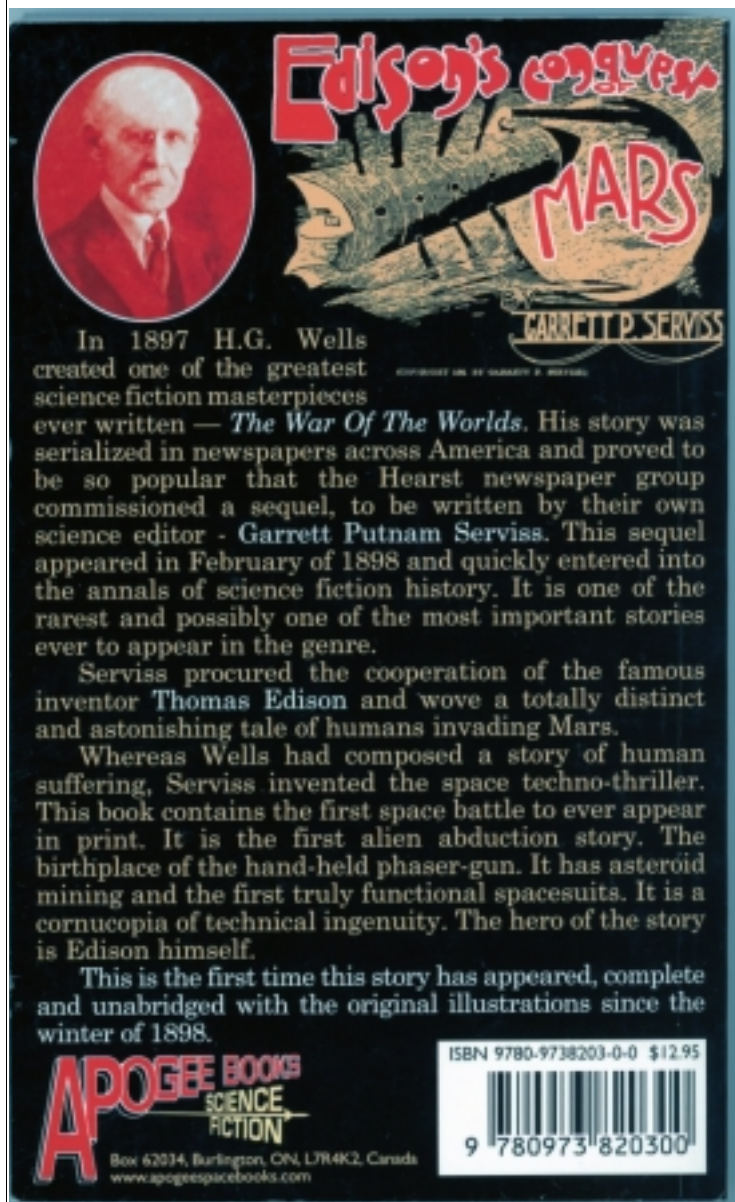
Edison's Conquest of Mars appeared in February 1898 as a serial, immediately after the serialisa-

tion of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* had concluded in the American newspapers of the day. It was written by science journalist and astronomer **Garrett P Serviss**.

Although Wells' original serial shortly became published as a proper book, which is constantly reprinted, Garrett P. Serviss' sequel vanished once the serial had concluded and was not reprinted until a limited edition appeared in 1947, years after the author's death in 1929. It is a pity because this sequel contains many technological concepts later adopted by almost every SF author, yet very little credit is given to this author who first came up with those ideas. People think of Wells and Verne as the progenitors of modern science fiction, but Serviss should also be added to that list.

A restored edition of *Edison's Conquest of Mars* with many original newspaper illustrations was reprinted in 2010, and this is definitely worth a closer look. It has an excellent cover design by Ron Miller, an author and illustrator with over 50 books to his credit. (Notably *Spaceships: An Illustrated History of the Real and the Imagined*; 2016.)

Edison's Conquest of Mars begins not long after the Martian invasion of Earth as humanity starts to rebuild the damage caused by the Martian invasion; more flashes are seen appearing to emanate from Mars. They fear a second invasion is underway. The scientists of the day, led by American inventor Thomas Edison, who has invented an electrical-cigar shaped ship capable of travelling in space, propose a counter invasion. They will go to Mars and destroy the Martians, thus preventing them from ever attacking



Earth again. All their resources are put towards building a fleet of spaceships to be manned by scientists of all disciplines as well as fighting men. Edison has also invented a disintegrator, his answer to the Martian heat rays which caused so much devastation, which he demonstrates to the world leaders. What it does is break down and separate the atoms in whatever it is aimed at, so the target vanishes, broken into individual atoms and dispersed.

There are several firsts in this novel. Serviss has them fly to the moon for practice and preparation for the ongoing flight to Mars. Something NASA is considering as part of its attempt to go to Mars. They encounter an asteroid and his description of how they react to extremely low gravity as they explore the asteroid is spot on.

The disintegrator gun is used here for the first time, both as a small handheld weapon as well as a much larger weapon mounted within the spaceships.

How many stories have been produced since then (1898) where ray guns are used?

Every space opera has ray guns and they continue to do so in more complex ways in modern stories. This is especially notable in TV series like Star Trek, not to mention the Star Wars films.

On the way to Mars the fleet encounters an asteroid where Martians are mining for metals, and a space battle occurs between the fleet and the Martian ships. The humans prevail because of their superior disintegrator weapons. Space battles are now common in space opera stories but this was the first time such a battle was described.

His descriptions of space suits and how they look and work, and the way the crew enter and exit the ships through airlocks, and the methods used to move around in space between the ships had never been described so accurately before this story. It is exactly, in principle, how it is done today in space. He even warns us that if someone gets too far away from the ship and runs out of propellant, there is no way back and they would drift forever. Who knew that way back in 1898, when no one considered going into space was even possible?

When the fleet arrives at Mars the story exhibits all the beliefs of what Mars was thought to be like in the nineteenth century: criss-crossed with canals, with massive urban complexes built around intersection points, with shallow seas, and industrial complexes where space projectiles were being built.

Wells's idea was of a dying planet with a population desperate for water and other resources so

its inhabitants attacked Earth for the riches they could obviously see.

Serviss's idea is that the Martians are a warlike race and enjoy conquering and enslaving the peoples of other planets and they have been to Earth before. He tosses in the idea that they built the pyramids and the monuments in ancient Egypt. Who before him ever suggested that aliens built the pyramids? He also had them destroy an early Himalayan civilisation, bringing the survivors back to Mars as captives enslaved. Only one of them has survived by the time the humans invade Mars, a beautiful young woman of course.

Unlike Wells's tentacled and hideously alien Martians, Serviss's Martians are human looking except that they are more than twice as large as us. It was commonly thought that because Mars has a lower gravity, less than a third of what we have on Earth, that everything would be bigger and taller. His Martians are fourteen to sixteen feet tall and all their buildings etc. are similarly bigger to accommodate them.

In Serviss's version of Mars, it is not dying at all. There is plenty of water, oceans of it, kept at bay with locks and gates which allow sufficient to be fed into the canals for irrigation and other purposes. But his Martians are warlike, and the moment they see the Earth ships hovering in the atmosphere they attack with their heat rays, destroying several ships.

The human fleet retaliates with devastating effects using their large, mounted disintegrator guns. The Martians throw up a smoke cloud enveloping the planet so nothing can be seen from space. The human fleet travels to the other side of the planet where one of the ships goes down beneath the cloud to infiltrate their defences. This is where they discover a beautiful human captive with whom they eventually communicate. She gives them the clues that they need to destroy the Martians, and this is done in spectacular fashion by opening the gates that hold back the oceans of Mars. They beat the Martians by flooding the whole planet, which destroys their cities and their industrial capacity to build spaceships and anything else, in the process killing millions of Martians. This is as exciting as it is spectacular.

This latter part of the novel is fantasy based on what people thought Mars was like, whereas the first part was much more scientific, extrapolating engineering and astronomical concepts into practical ideas.

For all its good points there are a couple of anomalies that jar, that remind the reader that no matter how futuristic or modern some of the story is, it was written more than 100 years ago. There

are references to the pure Aryan Race, which is not how we think today, especially after what happened during World War II.

However, it is an enjoyable story, and in many

ways, surprisingly modern.

Or is it that modern stories use so much of what he first extrapolated way back then which makes Garrett P. Serviss seem so modern today?

Reviving the sense of wonder

SLAN

by A E Van Vogt

A. E. Van Vogt's *Slan* and the *The Weapon Shops of Isher* were two SF novels I lent my literature teacher when I was fifteen. I had raved about how good they were and he asked to have a look at them. I felt quite devastated when he returned them a week later and told me they were absolute garbage. I was upset enough to avoid attending his classes for some time. I had been reading other SF books, mostly in cheap paperback editions, since I was 12, but these two books were handsome hardcover editions.

That was in 1955. In 2011, 56 years later, I re-read *Slan* because I was curious to see if it was as good as I remembered, or if it was in fact garbage, as my literature teacher had claimed. He was correct. *Slan* was and is garbage, but it is superior garbage. It is sufficiently well written to keep you reading, but you need to consider the time it was written, the melodramatic style of writing of science fiction of the period, and its ideas within their time. Comparing it with other books written 55 or more years ago, it does hold up well.

Many SF books written between the 1940s and 1950s were basically juveniles, and *Slan* is no exception. The main character starts off as a young boy of eight or nine attempting to escape with his mother from a bunch of normal humans who are hunting them in city streets, determined to kill them. Immediately the reader is drawn into the action. We discover that the people called Slans are able to read minds, and they have two hearts, and superior muscle structure. They have a high intelligence with an eidetic memory that makes them much superior to humans, which is why they are hated so much. We also find out that there has been a war between humans and Slans which has resulted in the Slans being almost wiped out. Those left are remnants, who must be hunted down and exterminated. We discover this in the first few dozen pages: young Jommy is helped by his mother to escape, but she is murdered.

Slans look exactly like humans except for some

fine golden tendrils that appear on the scalp where they are almost hidden by hair. These tendrils allow the Slans to read minds. We are told Slans are mutated humans deliberately created to be superior, but when they tried to take over the world ordinary humans rebelled at the idea and a devastating war ensued. This was 200 years before the opening events in the story.

Once Jommy manages to escape he finds himself a captive of a greedy old woman who keeps him in line by threatening to turn him over to the police. She uses him to help steal stuff she can sell to fuel her alcoholism and other needs. Jommy's mind-reading ability is a great asset in these activities. As he grows older he searches for other Slans and tries to work out solutions to the world dilemma.

As Jommy becomes a teenager his powers also increase. He discovers other Slans, who don't have



golden tendrils in their hair, and can't read minds like the true Slan can. These tendril-less Slans have control of the airship business, and they also have secret spaceships powered by anti-gravity and a colony on Mars. There are many more of them than humans are aware of, and they have infiltrated almost every aspect of human activity. They do not wish to be revealed, so they too are determined to hunt down Jommy and kill him because he has discovered them.

At the age of 15, Jommy comes into possession of an atomic weapon built and designed by his late father. It can cause matter to collapse. He also comes into possession of his father's scientific information, equipment, and ability to create super-dense metals. He goes in search of other true Slans. He searches for a reconciliation between Slans and humans. To do this he captures a fake-Slan spaceship and heads off to Mars. However, he is captured by the ship's captain, because the fake-Slans have been waiting several years for him to reappear and lead them to other Slans.

He escapes his captors when the ship arrives on Mars, which according to 1940s theories had a reasonable atmosphere and a number of slowly evaporating seas and lakes. He enters and infiltrates a Slan city on Mars. He hypnotises a number of people who unknowingly help him. He sees people being reincarnated after being killed in accidents. He manages to convince the ship's captain who has recognised him that fake-Slans and true Slans should work together for the betterment of all. She helps Jommy to return to Earth, where he discovers a true Slan who has been living all her life in the President's castle, ostensibly so she can be studied before being killed at the age of fifteen.

He rescues her and of course they fall in love, being the only two of their kind. They escape to the country, but soon she is shot and killed by the chief of police, who has been monitoring all Slan hiding places. In seeking revenge he invades the palace via secret passageways he learnt about from his father's hypnotic memories implanted in his mind. There he discovers the true Slan he fell in love with was actually the President's own daughter, and that the president himself is a tendril-less Slan. He also discovers that Slans have been a natural mutation of humans and that

the person whose name became synonymous with Slans hadn't created them but had selectively bred them to produce a superior form of human. He finally discovers that the president's daughter is in the process of being reincarnated and that she is not dead after all. The story finishes with only the vaguest of hints that in the future Slans and humans will overcome their hatred of each other and will be able to live together.

The book's theme is that of a common but unusual person overcoming almost unsurmountable odds to rescue a captured princess. Throw in interplanetary flights, mind-reading abilities, atomic energy, and superhuman abilities and you have the thrilling ingredients for a story that would appeal to any young male between the ages of 10 to 18, as it did to me all those years ago.

I even enjoyed reading it again, although many parts I found boring because of information dumps. Published in 1940 as a serial, then later as a book in 1946, it became so popular that it was released as a hardback. The edition I have is a British revised edition that appeared in 1953 as part of Weidenfeld & Nicolson's Science Fiction shelf series.

There are holes in the plotting, jumps skipped over without explanation, many twists and reversals, extremely poor characterisation to the point of being cartoonish, and totally implausible situations, but readers of the time obviously thought the story was fabulous or they would not have been willing to pay a lot extra to get a copy. Even today, I think a reader would be propelled along with enough curiosity to overlook the holes, info-dumps, and out-dated speculation that now appears almost steampunkish, just to see how young Jommy will survive.

In 1940 *Slan* was considered the cutting edge of speculation, and A. E. Van Vogt was a thrilling writer. His many short stories, including those that were collected as *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*, were extraordinarily popular both in magazine publication and in book form. Like the work of other authors of his era, Van Vogt's writing was infused with a sense of wonder that is sadly lacking in most of today's efforts in SF.

— **John Litchen**, 2011

Philip K. Dick's worlds that might have been

RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH

by Philip K. Dick

The film and the novel

When I saw the movie made from **Philip K. Dick's** novel *Radio Free Albemuth*, my first impression was that the person playing the role of Dick doesn't look anything like the photos of him. This almost spoils the experience of watching the film, because his role is pivotal to the story. He is the outside observer to whom the lead character, Nicholas Brady, relates his experiences, and it is from his viewpoint that we try to make sense of what is happening to the main character.

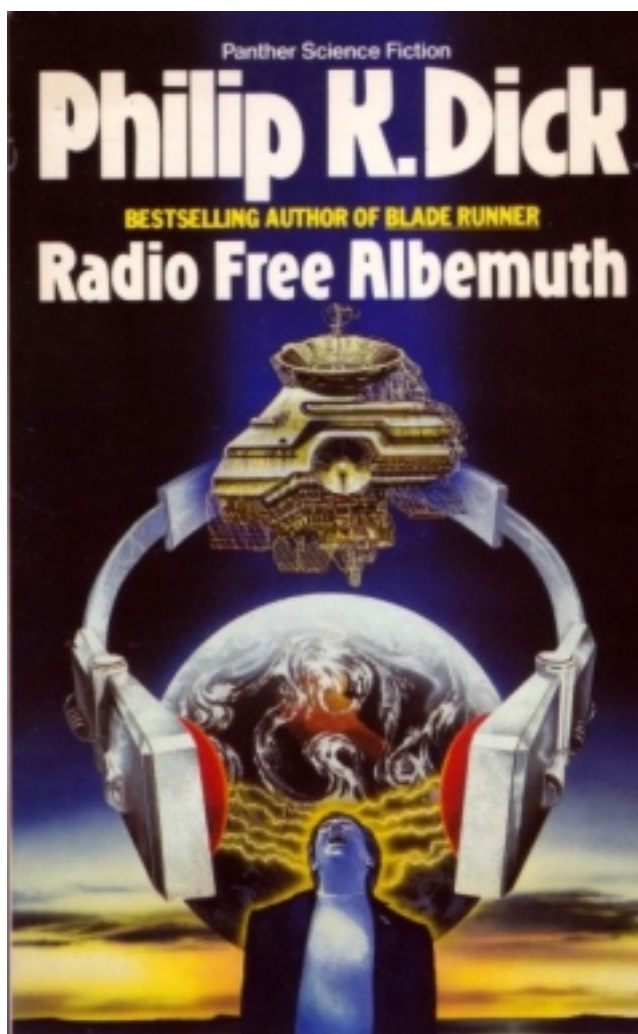
After viewing the film I decided to dig out my copy of the book from the unpacked boxes (after 20 years in the garage). From the synopsis, the story appears to be exactly the same. The claim that this film is the only one that truly resembles the story from which it was taken is probably correct. The book *Radio Free Albemuth*, published after Dick's death, was found among many unpublished mainstream novels he wrote, now published. It is a mainstream novel with SF or surrealistic elements. It also postulates a slightly altered version of the USA during the late 1970s. An increasingly fascist government enlists the youth of the nation (Friends of American People) to spy on everyone while they search out communists whom they are convinced want to destroy the country. The cold war between USSR and America has ended, but echoes of McCarthyism has its echoes through this decade.

There are elements from Dick's real life in this film. In the early 1970s he returned home one night to find his place ransacked, with papers and furniture scattered. The intruders seemed to have wanted to make sure Dick knew he was being watched. In the film nothing is stolen, whereas in the novel many papers and files have been taken, but his completed novel *Flow My Tears the Policeman Said*, critical of the government, was safely stored at his agent's office. Dick was sure that this was what they were looking for. When Dick reports the break-in to the police, they suggest that he staged it himself to create publicity for his next SF book. Dick believes he was being spied upon by the FBI.

In the film, the FAP youth brigades (modelled on Hitler's Nazi Youth) wear a grey quasi-military uniform, whereas in the book they are simply

cleancut and well dressed. They take a prominent role within the story after Nicholas Brady and his wife move to Los Angeles, where he takes a job as a recording executive. Their move south from San Francisco is followed by Philip K. Dick, who joins them there as a house guest before finding a place of his own. Nicholas and Phil wander about discussing the visions Nicholas has experienced and what they could possibly mean. They spend a lot of time discussing whether Nicholas is being contacted by himself from an alternate universe or from the future. As his appearance in the visions does not change, he believes the visions appear from a different parallel reality. Nicholas believes that he is being contacted from an orbiting satellite put there thousands of years ago by alien intelligences. (In the film they send visions directly into his mind.)

Originally *Radio Free Albemuth* was called *Valisystem A* (Vast Active Living Intelligent System A),



which is what Brady believes is contacting him and programming him (always at night) in his sleep. In real life Dick had visions similar to those he relates happening to Nicholas Brady.

When Philip K. Dick sent this novel to his publisher, it was suggested that he rewrite parts of it because it was too personal and autobiographical. Instead he put it aside and wrote a whole new novel, which he called **VALIS**. It is just as autobiographical as *Radio Free Albemuth*, but more convoluted. It was published before *Radio Free Albemuth*.

Philip Dick followed this period of his writing with another two novels, *The Divine Invasion* and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. He was finally breaking out of the SF ghetto. His novel *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, his only mainstream novel published in his lifetime, appeared from a small independent press and was not widely distributed. It was republished in 1975. *Radio Free Albemuth* was not published until 1985, three years after he died. Some critics asserted it is one of his best works, tying together the three novels that followed it. This seems unlikely, because Dick himself considered it a trial run for *VALIS*, and had virtually forgotten about it.

The novel includes background history relating to President Freemont (based on President Nixon). The book asserts that Nixon had President Kennedy and his brother Robert assassinated, as well as other well-known public persons, such as Martin Luther King. This assertion is barely mentioned in the film, but is implied. Once he gains the presidency he declares martial law and a curfew as part of the fight against communism. He claims a secret terrorist organisation, which at first doesn't seem to exist, is trying to undermine the American way of life. This gives him an excuse to maintain martial law. Nicholas and Phil think this is brilliant, since no can prove the organisation does or doesn't exist. Later we find that the organisation does exist. It recruits Nicholas, but it is much more than a simple terrorist group; it is an alien artificial intelligence that only has good things in mind for the human race, and has had for thousands of years.

The Friends of American People interview both Nicholas and Phil, asking each to spy on the other. They believe that Nicholas is trying to use subliminal methods to influence the youth of the country by hiding seditious messages in the lyrics of the popular songs his record company records and releases. But Nicholas is only doing what he believes Valis is asking him to do via his nightly visions. He also believes he is being re-programmed, and that what is happening to him

also happened to Moses and to Jesus in the past, and that the orbiting alien satellite has been watching over them for thousands of years and is always trying to help improve the human condition.

Phil also believes that the Russians and the Americans are the same, but one group is left wing and the other is right wing. The American President Freemont is secretly a communist, which is why his government and police act the same way as their communist counterparts in the USSR. FAP also records the conversations between Nicholas and Phil and take very seriously their ideas about Valis.

Every day when President Freemont broadcasts a message, the American people are required to listen. They must leave their doors unlocked so members of FAP roaming the streets can enter at any time to see that the residents are listening to the President. Questionnaires are handed out after each broadcast to check whether or not they have been paying attention. The questions are often convoluted and misleading, which inspires Nicholas and Phil to fill them in with bogus answers.

Eventually Nicholas and Phil are arrested by FAP, now revealed as secret police working directly for President Freemont. Nicholas and Phil are



questioned regarding their loyalty. During this process Nicholas is executed. In the film it is absolutely stunning and unexpected; in the book, less so.

Radio Free Albemuth the novel is unusual because the first part is seen from Phil Dick's viewpoint and is told in the first person as well as third person (up close), a narration of the events that happen to Nicholas but which he couldn't have observed. The second part of the book is seen from the viewpoint of Nicholas, and is again told in the first person, with only a few minor scenes involving Phil (as a third-person character). The final couple of chapters in the third part again revert to the viewpoint of Phil in first person. In this section he is sent to a remote farm, presumably as a political prisoner to work (for the American people) for the rest of his life. Here he tries to explain to another prisoner what Valis is or was. During the final scene of both the book and the film, he is taking a break from working in the fields when he sees a bunch of teenagers watching them from outside of the fence enclosing the prison farm. They are listening to music that contains subliminal messages encoded in the lyrics, the same messages Nicholas wanted to put into the recording. He

realises that although FAP stopped his friend's recording from being produced and released, Valis had succeeded with another group. There is hope after all for the future of America and its people ...

— **John Litchen**, September 2016

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE by Philip K. Dick

Contrary to what I always believed, I now believe that *The Man in the High Castle* is not a science fiction novel; it is mainstream.

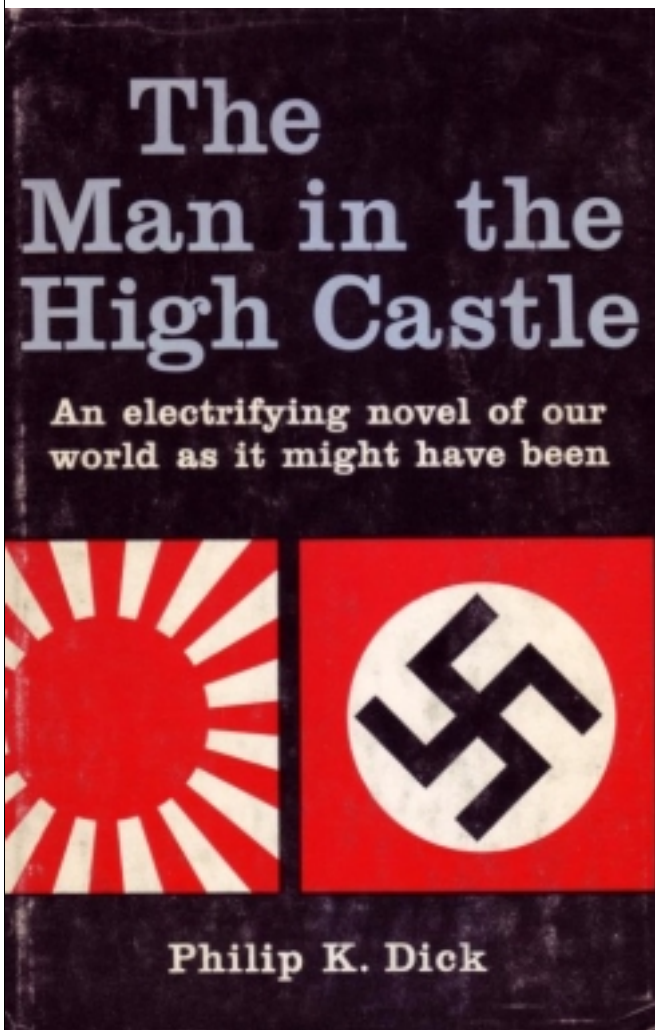
During the 1950s Philip K. Dick wrote at least nine mainstream novels. None of them could get published in his lifetime (other than *Confessions of a Crap Artist*), so he put aside his mainstream ambitions and returned to writing science fiction.

In 1962 he wrote *The Man in the High Castle*. It was a controversial story because it postulated that Japan and Germany had won the Second World War and divided the world up between them. Japan received the Pacific region, which included the West Coast of USA, Mexico, and parts of South America, Australia, and so on, while Germany took Europe, the East Coast of the USA (and presumably the same side of Canada although this isn't mentioned) and countries bordering the Atlantic, including all of Africa, now undergoing the eradication of its peoples so 'pure Aryans' can occupy the continent.

The novel is a study of the Japanese character and cultural awareness, their insights into art, and their belief that they are superior to most other races. They are the occupying force on the West Coast of USA. In dealing with American natives they are condescending, but not overtly cruel as are the Germans who occupy the other half of the continent. The Japanese do not hold the same beliefs as the Germans.

There is much dislike of the Japanese by the Germans, who would like to get rid of them altogether once they have sorted out their leadership problems. Hitler has died. Two factions are vying for power; one wants to cooperate with the Japanese and the other wants to wipe them off the face of the Earth. Until that is sorted out there is an uneasy truce between the two occupying forces with much diplomatic shenanigans happening. We see this only from the Japanese viewpoint.

There are few SF elements in this novel, which are mentioned in passing as something quite ordinary. The Germans travel by rocket planes between Europe and America in about 45 minutes. They have colonised Mars and the Moon and Venus (still thought of in 1962 as being super



tropical) with the purest of Aryans. Television is crude black and white with broadcasts limited to four hours a day. Long-distance phone calls are still made via manned exchanges, and any news is disseminated via radio and newspapers, much as it was in 1962. There are few extrapolations of technology from that of the actual world of 1962.

One of the main characters in the novel is an art dealer who specialises in early American artefacts, which the Japanese find fascinating. This dealer doesn't know he is often selling fakes, and the Japanese can't tell the real from the fake anyway. The manufacturers of the fake artefacts know what is a fake and what is real, and one of them causes an upset by telling the dealer he is selling fakes. He then convinces the dealer to take on new handmade jewellery (since he quit working at the factory producing fake American artefacts) to create a new market for American craftsmen.

The dealer tries to sell some of this new jewellery to a young Japanese couple, who take a piece for examination. When it is suggested he license the piece to a Chinese consortium for mass manufacturing he perceives this as a putdown. He refuses to go along with this idea even though it could make him wealthy.

We also follow the story of a German spy posing as a Swedish businessman wanting to meet a certain Japanese gentleman who is travelling to San Francisco by ship. A meeting is set up at the Japanese embassy. The Germans want to stop this meeting from taking place because they suspect the aim is to make some kind of peace deal with the Japanese. An assassination attempt is made at the embassy. It fails miserably and the Germans deny knowing anything about it.

Meanwhile the estranged wife of the American man meets an Italian truck driver who is not what he seems to be. He gives her a book to read. It has been banned in the German side of the USA as well as in Europe, but is not banned by the Japanese, many of whom have read it. It was written by a man who lives in the no-man's-land between the two occupied territories, somewhere near Denver. This book imagines what America would be like if the Allies had won the Second World War instead of the Japanese and the Germans. As the novel develops, the idea of an America without being occupied by the Japanese and the Germans takes on increasing prominence. Legend has it that the author lives in a fortified building high in the mountains, the High Castle, impossible to approach without being seen, but no one knows for sure.

The Germans want to kill this man and have sent an assassin to do the job. The estranged wife

of the artisan has an argument with her Italian lover when she finds out he is not Italian but is a German assassin, and in the process she slashes his neck with a razor blade. She goes on alone to meet the author of this banned book *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, and is disappointed that he doesn't live in a fortress on a hill but in a very ordinary house in an outer suburb of Denver. She wants to warn him of the German attempts to assassinate him, but he hardly cares. He tells her that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* tells of real events: the Americans and the Allies did win the war, not the Germans and the Japanese.

Two incidents give a clue as to whether this is an alternate history novel or something else.

The first is near the end of the novel. The Japanese consul goes for a walk in the park to contemplate the piece of American jewellery given to him as a gift. During the walk he sees the construction of an elevated roadway that he had never seen before (the Embarcadero). When he leaves the park to get a closer look he sees all sorts of modern cars with which he is unfamiliar. He sees no pedicabs. He enters a diner and orders someone to give him a seat and they get angry and tell him to piss off. He stumbles back out and heads to the park once again. When he leaves the park everything is back to normal; he hails a pedicab and goes back to the embassy.

The other incident is at the end of the novel. The author of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* tells the estranged wife his book is factual and all true. She doesn't know what to believe, so leaves his house to look for a taxi to take her back to her motel, and everything seems different to her. The author's house is in the American reality depicted in his book and not the other.

The book finishes here with no further explanation.

Most people believe that the story is an alternate history novel. The detail is fantastic and the focus is very much from the Japanese viewpoint, and everything could very well be as it is described. But what do we make of the two disruptions near the end?

I think Dick wanted to write a mainstream literary novel from a Japanese viewpoint but knew he would never be able to sell it to a publisher, so he added some elements that would make it SF, either as a parallel universe story with a couple of moments of intersection or an alternate history story. This guaranteed a publisher would publish it as another Philip K. Dick SF novel in which everyday reality is not what it seems. This is a far more sophisticated novel than all his previous books. It is a contender for the position of the best

book he ever wrote.

For me, it's a parallel universe story. Something happened at a certain point in the Second World War that caused a split in reality. Simultaneous but opposite worlds were the result. Somehow there is a way in which some people can move from one into the other. The author of the *Grasshopper* book wrote the truth as he saw it in one universe. The Japanese consul accidentally walked into the side where the Americans won before returning to his own reality.

Dick never explains how this happened. He leaves it up to the readers to draw conclusions of their own.

I first read this book in the British Gollancz edition in 1975, and again in 2016. I am astonished at how fresh and exciting it seems after all those years. There are virtually no SF elements in this book that would date it. Many old SF books are unreadable after their extrapolations and predictions are now seen to be way off the mark.

It is worth the trouble to re-read this book especially since a TV series has been produced by Amazon, but has it has not been released on DVD and Blu-ray. I would like to compare the TV series with the book to see how it updates or diverges from the original.

THE UNITED STATES OF JAPAN by Peter Tieryas

This book is by young author **Peter Tieryas**, who was a character artist on films such as *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Alice in Wonderland*, but has written only one other novel, *Bald New World*. This is his second novel and it more than lives up to expectations engendered by his first.

This novel takes the concept of a Japanese-controlled western half of the US far beyond Dick's vision in *The Man in the High Castle*. **The United States of Japan** begins with Japan and Germany, having defeating the Allies, releasing the prisoners (Japanese immigrants Issei and their descendants born in the USA, Nissei) held in camps along the west coast of the USA in 1948.

In one of the camps near San Jose in California a young soldier who had previously escaped from the same camp to join the Japanese army is seen releasing prisoners. When one of them questions him about why the Emperor couldn't have saved them before her husband had been tortured to death, he shoots her in the head in front of the others for discrediting the Emperor. This is an

event that sets the tone for the rest of the novel. It shows the attitudes of its Japanese characters to anyone who questions the Emperor.

The story then jumps 40 years to 1988. Beniko Ishimura, one of the young children who had witnessed the woman being shot, works as a censor of video games. His girlfriend works for the feared Japanese secret police. Most of the population believe that Japan had acted in an exemplary manner during the Second World War and that the USA had been at fault. Only a group of rebels who come from the no-man's land between the Japanese-occupied West Coast and the German-occupied East Coast believe otherwise and are willing to fight for the return of their country.

In Dick's book the main character is an American living as a Japanese in many ways, whereas in Tieryas's novel all the main characters are Japanese and everything is seen from a distinctly Japanese viewpoint. Beniko Ishimura is the censor who tries to find the originator of an extremely popular interactive video game that depicts the United States winning the War with Japan defeated. This game is being subversively distributed by rebels called the 'George Washingtons' who wage a continuous battle against the Japanese overlords.

Through flashback scenes we see how Ishimura became the person he is, and also a general idea of what has happened over the 40 years since America lost the war and ceased to exist. There is much skulduggery relating to the video game and the secret police, about a missing Japanese general and his daughter (a friend of Ishimura) whom Ishimura is trying to find. Ishimura's girlfriend, who is a secret police operative, is also searching for the missing general. There is a huge battle brewing near San Diego between the rebels and the Germans who want control of Texas where the oil is. The Japanese don't want to lose Texas because they need the oil. Eventually we find out who created the subversive video game.

This is an exciting novel that takes the concept of Japanese occupation a notch further than Philip K. Dick did, and over a longer time frame. Its spectacular battle scenes remind me of the battles scenes in the *Pacific Rim* film. Giant robots driven by special pilots demolish whole cities and are virtually invincible. It includes a great detective story underlying the alternate history story as well as a hint of romance.

— **John Litchen**, May 2016

William Sarill

Reflections on Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*

I've just finished rereading **Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle (TMITHC)*** for maybe the thirtieth time, and the book never fails to reward a reading. Except for a few minor flaws it's the work of a supremely confident young master operating at the peak of his abilities. All the characters are believable, acutely observed, and fully realised, unlike some of the more slapdash and perfunctory characterisations in *A Maze of Death* or *Ubik*.

Another feature that makes it such a pleasurable read is the sheer elegance of its construction, like that of a finely crafted Swiss watch. Once set into motion, the gears mesh and the story unwinds without effort, as if imbued with the Taoist principle of *wu wei* or actionless action. The circularity of the story, with each character linked unwittingly to another by synchronicity, gives a sense of wholeness and closure despite an ending left open.

I like that ending just the way it is, although others will disagree. It's reminiscent of Golden Poppy Stadium, the huge structure Lotze and Baynes spot from their rocket as they descend toward San Francisco. 'Open on one side. A new architectural design. They are very proud of it,' says Baynes. The baseball stadium is built with *wabi sabi*, the Japanese aesthetic that finds beauty in things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete: perfectly imperfect in other words. Which is also true for the book as a whole.

Wabi sabi is difficult to translate into English. It's more a feeling than a concept, one that rejects all things fake, overproduced, and overconsumed, while encouraging simplicity and authenticity. One can see why it's central here to Dick's overarching Gnostic concerns. The word is a compound of *wabi* (a concept that plays so important a role in the text, meaning less is more) and *sabi* (originally meaning old and elegant, although that meaning has shifted over the centuries). Both words suggest sentiments of desolation and solitude. Together they signify an appreciation of impermanence with attentive melancholy; the

Moment moves on and only change is eternal.

In fact, serene melancholy in response to hopeless hope, artless art, and actionless action is the book's predominant sensibility. I'm thinking especially of the melancholy that Robert Childan feels after rejecting the plan to mass-produce Edfrank jewellery as good luck charms. First he feels calmness and grace, and then melancholy over the impermanence of his brief *satori*. One must remember that in Japanese culture melancholy was regarded as an exquisite emotional state, at least until Americans taught them it was just another form of depression that could be treated with Prozac.

There is much else I could say about the book — it may be the first time that Dick mentions trash by the side of the road as holy, for example — but I want to bring up a view that may be purely idiosyncratic on my part. One of the aspects I most loved about *TMITHC* is the ambiguity of Tagomi's visit to a parallel world. Did he actually travel there or was it all in his head? He sees the Embarcadero Freeway and says: 'I never saw it before.' A case of inattentive blindness or actual travel to another universe? There are no pedicabs on Kearny Street; he thinks to himself you can never get one when you need it. Finally he winds up at a dingy lunch counter where no whites will give him their seat. It could be that he's in a part of San Francisco he's never visited before, where lingering hostility to the Japanese occupation still festers. What's the difference between an actual alternative reality and a perceptual one?

I never did get a chance to ask Phil about that, but the matter was resolved when he gave me 10 pages of notes for the sequel in which it was quite clear that the Nazis in *TMITHC* were planning to invade our world. But the sequel wasn't very good and would never be written, he told me, so I'm free to contemplate my own interpretation with a sense of serene melancholy.

— **William Sarill**, 2023

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Dennis Callegari: 'Brian Aldiss's "The Worm That Flies", Image 2.'