

SF COMMENTARY 116

June 2024

125 pages

FAREWELL, DITMAR
(DICK JENSSEN)

JOHN HERTZ'S
RECONSIDERATIONS

THE REST OF THE
GIANT LETTER
COLUMN

'Beyond the Klimt
Universe'
(Ditmar/Dick Jenssen)



S F Commentary 116

June 2024

125 pages

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FRONT COVER: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'Beyond the Klimt Universe'.

BACK COVER: David Russell.

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Farewell to the master:

Dick Jensen (1935–2024): A tribute

MARTIN JAMES DITMAR (DICK) JENSSEN left us on 7 March 2024. He was a founder member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group/Club in 1952. Among those of his friends who were also members of the Club during the 1950s, most have died during the last four years, in particular Merv Binns, Helena Binns, Lee Harding, and Bill Wright. Only Race Mathews remains from the original group. Among the friends who met every month, and then every six months at the Rosstown Hotel in Carnegie until December 2019, few are left.

The first article is one of several autobiographies that Dick wrote after he rejoined fandom in 1993.

This is followed by a tribute I wrote in the early 2000s when Dick Jensen became one of a group of veteran fans inducted as Lifetime Members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. I have changed few details. In my second article I've written about his last few years, especially to show his courage and cheerfulness during his last days.



Dick Jensen, 2004: 'Ssshh!' (Photo: Helena Binns.)

My guess is that Dick wrote the following autobiography for the occasion when he and a number of other veteran fans were inducted as Lifetime Members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club in early 2005. I found it in an elaborate folder/semi-fanzine that Dick sent to Bill Wright for *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*. The folder turned up in a box of Merv and Helena Binns' memorabilia after Helena died. I wish every fan writer and science fiction/ fantasy writer would leave us with an illustrated autobiography of similar length and entertainment value.

Ditmar (Dick Jensen 1935–2024)

A Ditmar life: The event-filled life of Dick Jensen

Being an SF fan

I am a science fiction fan, as opposed to merely a reader or viewer, because I find great joy in the stories, films, and discussions of this genre. And that pleasure is the result of the interaction between what is read or seen and my personality. In other words, I am a fan simply because it is my nature to be so. It is not an active choice on my part. Indeed, to misquote Theodore Sturgeon very slightly, 'Why must we love where the lightning strikes, and not where we choose? But I'm glad it's

you, science fiction, I'm glad it's you.' As I hope this suggests, I believe an SF fan is someone who lives slightly askew from those who inhabit the drab everyday world, someone who sees things from a modified perspective. Someone who can perceive the extraordinary in the ordinary, the ultra-mundane in the mundane, and the wonder which resides in the ubiquity of the commonplace. But there's even more to a fan.

Abraham Merritt expressed the combination of beauty of emotion and logic masterfully in *The Metal Monster*:



Top left: Circa early 1936, age 6 months or so, with his mother Galina (Gail) (Photo by Tia Jensen.)

Top right: Circa 1934. Self-portrait by Tia Jensen. Dad, in his cool (before such an adjectival characteristic existed), photogenic, slightly dangerous film-star persona.

In this great crucible of life we call the world — in the vaster one we call the universe — the mysteries lie close packed, uncountable as grains of sand on ocean's shores. They thread gigantic, the starflung spaces; they creep, atomic, beneath the microscope's peering eye. They walk beside us, unseen and unheard, calling out to us, asking why we are deaf to their crying, blind to their wonder. Sometimes the veil drops from a man's eyes, and he sees — and speaks of his vision.

And those who hear are the SF fans ...

Life before science fiction

I was born, on 6 July 1935, in Shanghai, China, of a British father — Tia Jenssen — and a Russian mother — Gail, nee Bredihina. Mother, father, and child were moved to Sydney in 1941 by Tia's employer — the Shell Oil Company. Gail and I left first, and Tia was lucky enough to be on the last ship out of Shanghai before the Japanese moved in. The rest of the family, apart from two of Gail's sisters, were interned during the war. British aunts, uncles, cousins, Russian aunts and cousins, Norwegian grandfather, Polish/Jewish grandmother all sat out the war in camps. All survived, but the family never really got back together — split amongst the US, Canada, England, and Singapore ...

That name Ditmar

I was christened Martin James Ditmar Jenssen, and, as usual, my father did not remember the correct form of my naming, because for many years he thought, and told the world in every official document he signed on my behalf (school legal papers, for example), that I was Ditmar James Martin Jenssen. It was only when I had to use my birth certificate to obtain a passport

and immigrant visa to the US in 1963 that the correct ordering of my Christian names was discovered. There is more to say concerning 'Ditmar' below, but for now it must be pointed out that my father's family was one in which the individuals were known by names quite other than those given them. Dad was Matthew Albert, but answered only to 'Tia'; my uncle was George William, but was 'Dede' at home; my aunts were 'Tommy' and 'Lala' — names that would never have been given them. And so, I was never 'Ditmar', nor 'Martin', nor 'James', but always 'Dick'. Why I do not know. My poor mother apparently had no say in the matter — she once confided to me that she would have preferred me to have been a 'Donald Alan'.

A first glimpse of Science Fiction Art

For as long as I can remember, I have been an SF fan. I have always responded to SF in words and images, even though until I was about fifteen, I didn't know that what I liked should be called 'science fiction'. Unfortunately, growing up in Australia in the 1940s and 50s meant that what was available was almost only comics and movie serials, and in turn that meant that SF was inevitably described as 'that Buck Rogers stuff' — a description that had intensely derogatory overtones when used by those who spoke from a position of ignorance, bias, and prejudice.

But two events, both when I was about eight years old, and both in the same classroom, made me realise just how wrong, and how stupid, such a negative view was.

The first was when one of the boys brought a large picture-book of astronomical paintings into class — he had either just returned from America, or had just been sent the book. Now,

he was seated on the opposite side of the room to me, and was about 45 degrees toward the front of the class, but I still could see the book with extreme clarity, and so beheld a view of Saturn from just outside its rings, in breathtaking colour. I mean breathtaking quite literally. I can remember gasping at the beauty of the painting which may, or may not, have been by Chesley Bonestell. Now I could never have imagined this for myself at the time, because any depiction of Saturn I had encountered was either a bad sketch in a comic, or a poor special effect in a serial, and in black and white. But having seen the painting, I could now not only imagine it, but could visualise variations of it, could change the colours, the viewpoint, add details or hardware — in short, that one painting suddenly opened up a world I never knew, expanded my imagination, and threw off some of the shackles that constrained it.

The other was a reading by our teacher of a story. What the story's title was, or who wrote it, I can not remember (it might even have been a Professor Branestawm yarn by Norman Hunter), but it dealt with a professor who had invented a time machine and who, accompanied by his nephew and niece, had used it to travel back into the Triassic Age. Perhaps the teacher was a great reader, perhaps the story was so well told, perhaps it was my thus-stimulated imagination, or a combination of all three, but I saw the dinosaurs, the huge trees, the great ferns, heard the sounds, and moved with the small party of three through a new landscape. Again, I could never have imagined this for myself, but, once exposed to the ideas, could now embellish them.

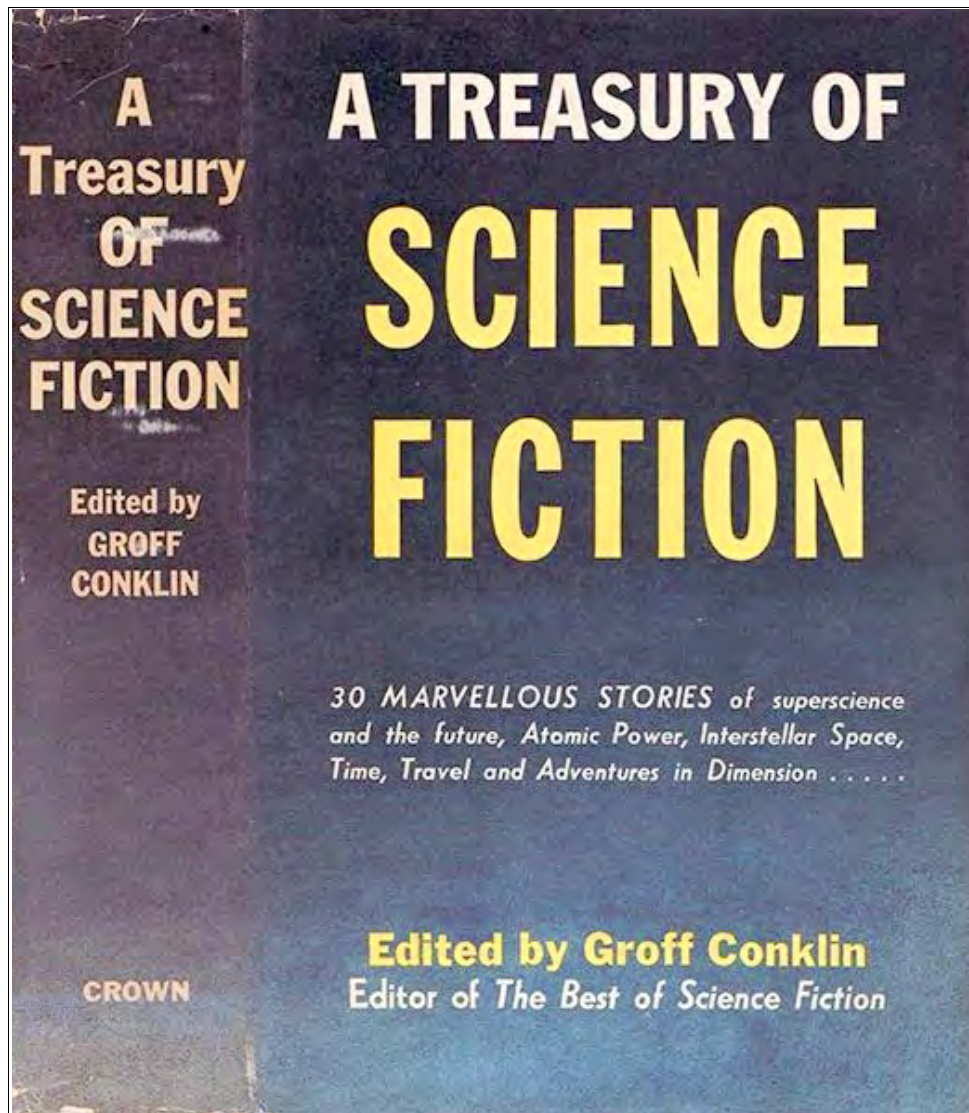
Real science fiction

Some seven years later, my school friend Race Mathews further

enriched my life and influenced it forever by giving me a digest-sized magazine, dated October 1950 and which bore on its cover, in blocky letters, the words 'Science Fiction'. Above these words, and in a different and smaller typeface — which meant it was not as significant — was '*Astounding*'. I read every word, and discovered that what I had responded to in the past was called science fiction, that this magazine was for adults, that many people took it seriously (the letter column was a mixture of enthusiasm and vaguely comprehensible science), and that there were ideas in the stories which made me think. And think deeply. SF was not only wonder, a goad to the imagination, but it also offered intellectual pleasures.

Race also let me know that the school library had a copy of Groff Conklin's *The Best of Science Fiction* (the first hardcover anthology of SF ever published), and told me where I could buy a copy of Healy and McComas's *Adventures in Time and Space* (the second hard cover anthology, and still one of the best ever). Many of the stories — those which involved time travel paradoxes in particular — forced me to think very hard indeed in order to resolve the seeming inconsistencies. They forced me to apply logic and rigour when I thought about the stories — they made me exercise not only my imagination but my intellect. Such as it was. Other stories had a mathematical bent — how to imagine a fourth space dimension, how a one-sided, one-edged, surface could exist ...

And it was Race, yet again, who gave me what remains after fifty-six years my most read and second-favourite novel. (The top favourite is Marcel's Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, which is also — by far — the best novel I have read. The third favourite is Henry Kuttner's *Fury* ...).



The early Melbourne Science Fiction Club

Race was fifteen at this time, very mature, of a strong personality, and possessed of what appeared to be unlimited energy — which he still has. So it was not surprising that he discovered other SF fans in Melbourne, and arranged meetings where we all could get together — I was included because of the accident of knowing Race. Initially, we met in each others' houses, but the group soon grew so large that less confined spaces had to be found.

The first meeting place was a coffee lounge called Val's in Swanston Street between Little Collins and Bourke Streets. It was at a Val's meeting that we decided to call ourselves a Group, but without any formal rules or brief, or office-bearers — and so, again simply by the serendipitous fact of being in the right place at the right time, I found myself a founding member of the Group which later transformed into the Club.

They're not (such) a weird mob

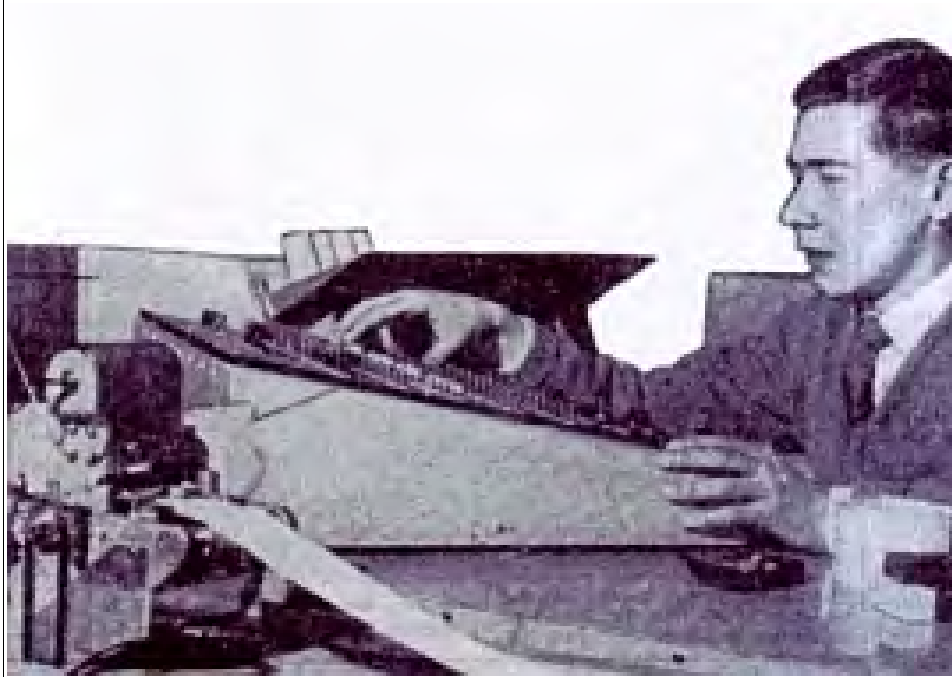
SF, I have said, brought me wonder, goaded and stimulated both my imagination and intellectual capabilities, and introduced me to new scientific and mathematical concepts — all the while entertaining me royally. Even though — if I listened to those who weren't 'dreamers' and who didn't need such 'escapism' — what I read was supposedly barely literate. Though it was J. R. R. Tolkien who pointed out that the people most frightened of escape are the jailers of this world — those who believe in the power and necessity of shackles. Dreamers, say the warders, are also those who live in ivory towers, quite forgetting the fact that from the top of such a tower one can see further and much more clearly than can the grunting hogs at its base who eye only the mire and ordure through which



**Founders of the Melbourne Science Fiction Group — later the Melbourne Science Fiction Club.
Standing: Mervyn Binns; Dick Jenssen. *Seated:* Bob McCubbin; A. Bertram Chandler; Race Mathews.
(Photograph (c. 1952) by Lee Harding.)**

they snuffle their lives away.

The members of the Club seemed to be neither illiterate nor intellectually challenged. They had imagination (which is necessary for dreams) and they questioned the world around them (because the view from the tower exposed more to their intellect). They may have viewed the universe aslant, but they seemed to me to be freer because of it.



**Dick at the controls of CSIRAC in 1957. CSIRAC functional.
(Photo: unknown *Sun Newspaper* photographer.)**

A choice of career

If SF had done no more than affect my life as I have just sketchily outlined, it would have been a powerful shaper of my days and thoughts. But it helped mould my career. It seems likely that I would have chosen science in any event, but the decision was inevitable given the pleasure SF had bestowed on me. And with the heavy emphasis in SF at that time on the



**Dick at the controls of CSIRAC in 2003. CSIRAC inoperative.
(Photo: Professor Peter Thorne at Melbourne Museum.)**

mathematical sciences, I had to major in Physics.

Very early in my vocation as a science fiction fan, I had read F. G. Rayer's novel *Tomorrow Sometimes Comes* — a book which was to have a great influence on me. Not for the prose, since, at sixteen, I could not distinguish good from bad, nor Vargo Statten from John Wyndham, but for the ideas and the amazingly prophetic depiction of an invention which was to change the world, though few realised it at the time. The plot combined many disparate themes, Armageddon, the Sleeper Awakes, the Redemption and Restitution of the world, and Time Travel. What brought these together was that the destroyer who unleashes Armageddon, is the Sleeper who wakes, who then becomes the Saviour of the world by becoming the Time traveller. The invention which has changed our world was the computer; in the novel it was the Mens Magna (which sounds so much more intimidating than Giant Brain), occupying a huge building — probably larger than a city block — and which controlled all aspects of the city, and the inhabitants' lives. It also waged a war against the 'barbarian' hordes outside the gates. The Mens was capable of conducting many hundreds (if not thousands) of interviews at once, while simultaneously running all other control programs, repairing itself, and adjusting and amending its own programs. It communicated by keyboard, visual screens, and voice — both understanding human speech, and responding vocally. It was massively redundant with many 'control units'. All newcomers to the city were required to be interviewed by the Mens, which attempted to elicit hidden information by asking apparently disconnected questions in the nature of non sequiturs. The computer was thus self-programming, self-aware, multi-tasking, redundant, and communicated in a highly sophisticated manner, and seemingly possessed of intelligence. (Remember, this was written in 1950.) If the above description sounds familiar, that



Cover by Clothier

may be because the Alpha 60 computer in Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 film *Alphaville* shared all these traits. Rayer was not, of course, credited.

Five years after the Club was formed, I had just completed my B.Sc., and was so in love with the academic life that the thought of facing the whole wide, cruel, world was terrifying. But my third year results were so spotty and inconsistent — honours and bare passes — and my experimental abilities so non-existent (I think I must have been one of the very few who ever failed Practical Work), that a Master's in Physics was out of the question. But — as so often has happened in my life — luck stepped in, and a friend of mine in the third year class told me that Meteorology was looking for a Master's candidate. Which seemed about as interesting as the physics and chemistry of doughnuts, but I went to see them anyway. Again, the fickle finger waved approvingly and I found that the research topic was The Barotropic Model — a simplified set of equations governing the behaviour of the atmosphere and which allowed a prediction to be made of the weather using an electronic digital computer. Australian scientists at CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research — later to become CSIRO) had built what I believe is the world's third computer that had its programs, and data, stored internally in its memory. CSIRAC, as the computer was acronymed, had just been installed within the Physics Department.

So the planned M.Sc. project was going to be, as far as I was concerned, like living an SF story. Resistance was futile, even if it had crossed my mind. Were it not for SF and Rayer (and a very scrappy undergraduate record, and the desperation of the Meteorology Department) I would have had a very different professional career. I would have missed out a job which, for the most part, was enjoyable and rewarding, and I would never

have known just how much I liked teaching. Programming and lecturing slowly usurped the place SF had occupied in my life, a place to which I only returned after my retirement, and then not nearly as passionately as in the early years.

The highlights of my career include moving, after taking my Ph.D., to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1963 as an Assistant Professor in the Meteorology Department. In 1966 I returned to Australia and to Melbourne University, where I spent most of my professional life in the Meteorology Department, of which I have been Chairman. I've authored some 30 papers (mainly in the field of computer modelling of large ice masses such as Antarctica), co-edited a book (*Climatic Change and Variability. A Southern Perspective*, Cambridge University Press), been a council member and Secretary of the Royal Meteorological Society (Australian Branch) and the Australian Meteorological Society, and editor of the *Australian Meteorological Magazine*. My main professional successes were performing the first computer weather forecast in the Southern Hemisphere, and pioneering the use of computer modelling of glacial dynamics and thermodynamics. I have been a Research Associate at The Scott Polar Institute, the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, and at CIRES at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Graphics

Very early in my life as a real SF fan, I found myself wanting to express my devotion to the genre and to do so in a way which I would find rewarding. There was writing, and I tried this, but it was always a chore: sitting down to put words on paper, even if what I wanted to say was clear in my mind and had been written there, at least in principle, was not a satisfying experience. And I was not — it was very, very clear,

very, very soon — a competent scribbler. What gave me the greatest satisfaction was pen on paper, graphically. I was, as I've said, a great fan of *Buck Rogers*, and so drawing comics, from the age of seven or so, was inevitable. I remember at that time telling a friend of mine that when I reached legal maturity — twenty-one, that is — I was going to change my name, by deed poll, to Buck Rogers. It seemed perfectly sane at the time, and Ken Hayward, to whom I confessed this ambition, regarded it also as nothing unusual. I never did, of course, effect the change, but with time I transformed my primitive comics into drawings for fanzines.

There were essentially three of these: *Bacchanalia* from Race Mathews, *Perhaps* from Lee Harding, Merv Binns, and myself, and *Etherline* from Harding, Ian Crozier, and myself. I did covers and interior illustrations for all three. *Etherline* was a Roneoed, digest-sized publication typed onto waxed master sheets: these were then placed on a drum containing ink, a handle was cranked (Merv was always co-opted for this task as he seemed to spray the least amount of ink on the surrounds) and paper fed through under the drum. Drawing on these waxed sheets was done using a metal stylus — which had the unfortunate effect of all too readily tearing the surface apart. It was always a challenge.

Now, my memory is faulty — it always has been; I seem to have a facility to remember trivia; useless facts about words (for example, that abstemious and caesious are words which contain the vowels a, e, i, o, and u once and once only in their correct order, or that duoliteral and prunoidean contain all the vowels once only but in reverse order); or numbers; or film credits — but important facts, and names, and faces keep evaporating. So when I say that I remember a digest-sized American fanzine in the 1950s titled *Science Fiction Advertiser*,

I'm almost certainly wrong. I also remember that some of its covers were done by a Morris Scott Dollens — but that, too, is likely a figment of my mismemory. These covers, whoever they were by, and wherever they appeared, were in black and white — stunning space and planetary scenes (perhaps they were photographed models?) in rich chiaroscuro. They inspired me to try to create some of my own, and when I went to the downtown artists' supplier — Dean's — and asked how I could go about such a program, it was suggested to me that I try scraperboard. This was a thin plaster, or something akin to it, such as cohesive chalk, bonded to a cardboard base. The white surface could be painted (usually black), then scraped away with a scalpel to reveal the white underlay: it was a method of drawing in negative. I used this method for covers for *Bacchanalia* and *Perhaps*. Interior graphics were standard pen and black ink on paper. (I liked an onion paper for these).

When I went to the US in 1963, I found myself not only away from my circle of SF fans, but so heavily involved in work — which was enjoyable, satisfying, and rewarding — that I had no time to pursue my graphics. The work became even more demanding (and enriching) as I moved up the academic ladder and had to add administrative duties to my work day, so that, even though I was now back in Melbourne, I drifted away from the SF scene. Only when I took early retirement at the end of 1992, did I segue back into the field and renew my friendships with Race Mathews (fifty-eight years of it), Lee Harding and Merv Binns (both fifty-one years), Bill Wright (fifty years), Bruce Gillespie (forty years) ... Science fiction friendships have a quality, it would seem, of long-term sustainability.

My career had been intimately connected with computers, starting with my M.Sc. work in 1957 and then climate and glaciological modelling research, so that when I found myself



Early Dick Jensen art
(Pre-Ditmar days)

Above: Dick Jensen cover for *Perhaps 3*, January 1954.



'Paradise': One of Ditmar's graphics from the early 2000s. Not quite typical of his work from that period, but one I like a lot.



**The Melbourne Science Fiction Group/Club reunion (during Aussiecon 3, 1999).
Standing: John Foyster, Bruce Gillespie, Jack Keating, Bill Wright, Mervyn Barrett.
Seated: Race Mathews, KRin Pender Gunn, Mervyn Binns, Dick Jensen. (Photo by Helena Binns.)**

away from work, the best way I could think of filling in the time while I was sliding down the razor-blade of life into total senescence, was to explore my discarded interest in graphics. There were no conscious influences at work here, no artists which I could truly say were my guides or exemplars, because I knew that what little facility I possessed, if I truly had any, was of an exquisitely minor nature. However, perhaps my graphics have been shaped inadvertently by those artists whom I admire: Botticelli, Tiepolo, Redon, Tapes, Alma-Tadema, Leighton, Dali, Puvis de Chavannes, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Toulouse Lautrec ... the list goes on. And of course, Hannes Bok, Maxfield Parrish, and Winsor McKay. But I cannot, no matter how hard I try, see their influences on my work.

Since I always had trouble in using pen, or brush, to transfer, what I had vaguely in mind, on to paper — and the initial image was indeed vague — and since I usually always wanted to redo what I had created in order to reorganise the compositional elements, and/or the colouring, and/or the elements themselves, it seemed that graphic packages would be ideal. Software which would allow me to generate three-dimensional objects in a virtual world, to organise their spatial distribution and relations, to colour them as I wished, to manipulate them in unreal ways. The problem was that, as a retiree, I had limited funds to play with, and so what I bought would not only need to be powerful but inexpensive. I settled on Metatools' Bryce 2.

I rejoined the SF scene partly by accident, and once again it was Race Mathews who was responsible. He gathered together some old-time fans — Lee Harding, Bruce Gillespie, John Foyster, myself — for dinner at his place, and we discovered that even though we all still read SF, but for most of us in a rather desultory manner, we all were confirmed cinema buffs. Race suggested that we get together on a monthly basis to

watch films. Which we did.

With the SF contingent strong at these evenings, and since we were later joined by Bill Wright who, like me, had moved back into the SF fold and was resurrecting his apazine *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*, it seemed inevitable that I would proffer my graphics to fanzine editors — Bill and Bruce in particular. Bill, especially, has been most generous in his use of my efforts, inasmuch as except for the first, coverless, *IRS* reissue (December 1996), and that for December 2004, he has used my work on every subsequent cover. Bruce Gillespie also has had my work on his 'zines **brg**, *Metaphysical Review*, *SF Commentary*, and *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*. His wife, Elaine Cochrane, had used some illustrations of mine in her gardening 'zine *Weeders' Digest*. Other places where people have been fearless enough to use Ditmar work have been *Thyme* (Alan Stewart), and 'zines by US fans Bill Bowers (*Outworlds 70*), Michael Waite, and Tim Marion. Even Earl Kemp has been bold enough to not only use some images of mine, but has 'published' on his eZine a *Ditmar Portfolio* — a collection of some recent efforts of mine.

I said that I initially used Bryce 2, and as it went through successive metamorphoses, I moved with it: to Bryce 3, then 4, then 5. Corel had taken the software over by then, and for two years just sat on it. They then discontinued supporting it for the MAC, and it seemed to me that its days were numbered. But, by one of those Jungian synchronistic events, I received an email from Eon software to tell me that, as a legitimate and registered user of Poser I was entitled to a massive discount on Eon's Vue d'Esprit 4 — an alternative to Bryce. So I moved to Vue, which was quite an improvement from Bryce in many respects. Then came — a few months apart — Vue 4 Professional, Vue Esprit 5, and now Vue Infinite. As each incarnation



**Some of the people gathered by Race and Iola Mathews for monthly film night, 1973–2013.
L. to r. standing: Carey Handfield, Bruce Gillespie, Race Mathews, Bruno Kautzner, Merv Binns, Helena Binns, Dick Jenssen,
Madeleine Harding, Lee Harding. *Seated:* Bill Wright.**



Ditmar receives his second Ditmar in 2010. Smirking and displaying his Ditmar, Dick Jensen has returned to the audience. Life has been good to him. And so have the voters ... (Photo by Cath Ortlieb.)

was a good step beyond the last, the latest (Infinite) is well beyond Bryce. DAZ has now taken over Bryce and the latest incarnation is version 5.5, which is still well behind Vue.

Ditmar and the Ditmar

For most of my life I have been lucky — I knew Race Mathews at school and so was part of the group he organised and which eventually became the Melbourne Science Fiction Club; in fact, because of this coincidence I became a Founding Member. At work, when I was a Ph.D. student, we had in the department a Visiting Fellow for a year, and we two played chess at morning and afternoon coffee breaks. When Schwerdtfeger left, the game score was 50-all, and I take this as the reason that I was invited to Wisconsin as an Assistant Professor at the end of my studies; that is, so we could continue our matches. And so it was that when I was part of an organising committee for a Convention to be held in Melbourne in 1968, there came another serendipitous occurrence. It was at this convention that the first Australian Science Fiction Awards were to be given. The committee met on a particularly stifling summer's day in the clubroom's oppressively hot confines. There came the usual (for anyone who is used to the way committees work, which is certainly slowly and very mysteriously) protracted and meandering discussion trying to fix on a popular name for the awards — Constellation, Southern Cross, DownUnders ... Finally, thirst overwhelmed me, and my frivolous nature erupted, with the result that I facetiously suggested that they be called 'Ditmars'. To my surprise, this found favour; with Merv Binns being the most vociferous in support. Many years later Merv claimed that he did not know that 'Ditmar' was my Christian name — a claim of which I have trouble acknowledging the veracity. However, if anyone had asked for an explanation of why the Australian Science Fiction Awards

should be colloquially called Ditmars, I was ready to say that I was intending to analyse the statistics of the voting forms on a Melbourne University computer known as a Digital Integrating and Tabulating Mechanism for the Advancement of Research. But no one ever inquired.

Things of which I am proud

If I look back at my life and career, there are things which I think I might be proud of, but which, on reflection, are not quite so. For example, there are those in the 'highlights of my career' paragraph above. But these 'accomplishments' fell into my lap, so to speak, because of my luck and even if they were my efforts, they were not uniquely mine, in the sense that anyone could have accomplished them. If it had not been me, then someone else would have done so. They are mine because I was in the right place at the right time.

Only four things belong in the category of 'what I would not want my life to have been without' — and even if these, too, were freaks of fortune, of stochastic serendipity, and due to circumstances beyond my control, they are mine alone, and could not belong to another's life. The major one is finding the love of my life and having that love returned and multiplied many times over. As Dowson says:

They are not long, these days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.

But short as my life with my love was — a tad less than fifteen years — it was a dream from which '...when I waked I cried to dream again...'. But now I am descending into the maudlin,

and into that state of too much unnecessary information.

The three other never-to-be-lost events are having the Ditmars bear my name — no matter how undeserved that may be — winning a Ditmar myself in 2002 in the category of Best Fan Artist, and being made a Life Member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club in April 2005.

The Investiture of the Life Members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, 15 April, 2005

The Melbourne Science Fiction Club formally inducted nine fans as Life Members of the Club. These were: Mervyn Binns, Paul J. Stevens, Bruce Gillespie, Race Mathews, Dick (Ditmar) Jenssen, Lee Harding, Bill Wright, Alan Stewart, and George Turner. Of these nine, three were absent. George Turner had died and, as John Donne put it: 'When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated'. Paul Stevens had moved interstate and had gafiated so completely that he was uncontactable. And although he had retired as a politician some years ago, Race Mathews was still so busily involved in that work that he was speaking elsewhere that night. But for the six of us who attended, the evening was an unforgettable honour, made all the more memorable by Jack Dann masquerading as Master of Ceremonies.

Jack would have liked to have had the evening as a group roast of the inductees (he admitted this), but was confined by the biographies of the life members which had been written by Rose Mitchell, printed as a pamphlet, and given to all attendees. Being Jack, however, he allowed himself moments of sly digs and uproarious humour.

Dick Jensen's awards



**Previous page: Left: International Rotsler Award 2016 for a lifetime's artwork.
Right: Dick's Ditmars (Australian Achievement Awards) for his artwork: 2002 and 2010.
Below: Left: Two of Dick's three Cronos Awards (Victorian): two in 2012, and another in 2009.
Right: International FAAN Award Certificate 2019 for Best Photographer.
(All photos: Elaine Cochrane.)**





Investiture of the Life Members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, April 2005.
Left to right: Bill Wright, Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen, Jack Dann (Master of Ceremonies), Lee Harding, Bruce Gillespie, Alan Stewart. (Photo by Helena Binns.)

After each life member's biography had been read by Jack, they were led on stage and given commemorative badges and certificates, and it was at this time, usually, that Jack indulged in the roasting comments he had been saving up. The effects of his words are clearly seen in the photographs of (1) Bill Wright, Alan Stewart and Bruce Gillespie and (2) Janeen Webb, Dick Jenssen, Lee Harding and Mervyn Binns. Clearly we all enjoyed a laugh at the other guy's expense ... After the investiture we all were herded together on stage for the group hug photograph. From left to right we are Bill Wright, Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen, Jack Dann, Lee Harding, Bruce Gillespie and Alan Stewart. As ever, I am the smallest ...

Moby-Dick quotes for the science fiction fan

It would seem that Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* holds a particular fascination for SF authors and scriptwriters, if not for the SF fan, as snippets from it appear with some frequency in the literature. Especially in *Star Trek* episodes and films. Inasmuch as the readers of this fanzine are inquisitive, intelligent, and thirsty for information, I offer what few quotes I have found. I suspect that all readers will easily identify the SF works in which these are used — think Philip Jose Farmer, Ray Bradbury, and *Star Trek*. By the way, all quotes are from the Library of America edition of Melville, which contains the three novels *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick*. And, parenthetically, I think *Moby-Dick* is one of the best three novels ever written in the English language.

Chapter 1

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and

bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; ... then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.

Chapter 36

(W)ith merciless imprecations (Ahab) shouted out 'Aye, aye!, and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men!'

Chapter 36

'But in each event — in the living act, the undoubted deed — there, some unknown but still reasoning thing still puts forth the moulding of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask!'

Chapter 41

All that maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his heart's hot shell upon it.

Chapter 70

'O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind.'

Chapter 74

Is it not curious, that so vast a being as the whale should see the world through so small an eye, and hear the thunder through an ear which is smaller than a hare's? But if his eyes were as broad as Herschel's great telescope; and his ears as capacious as the porches of great cathedrals; would that make him any longer of sight or sharper of hearing? Not at all. — Why then do you try to 'enlarge' your mind?

Chapter 134

'Ahab is forever Ahab, man. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before the ocean rolled. Fool! For I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine.'

Chapter 135

'Oh lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Toward thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee'.

There are no prizes — save personal satisfaction — for linking these few quotes to science fiction treasures.

— **Ditmar (Martin James Ditmar Jensen)**, 2004

Bruce Gillespie: My 2004 tribute

Dick Jensen: The legend and the man

I found this first article in my files. I cannot remember writing it, but I'm fairly sure that I wrote it in 2005 when Dick became a Life Member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Dick did write another long autobiography for a talk he delivered to the Spaced Out Group in Melbourne in 2002: see the Spaced Out site: <https://miriam-english.org/spacedout/website/DU-14/whatsciencefictionmeanttome.html> .

Thanks very much to Geoff Allshorn for all his help in preparing this tribute to Dick. Many photos from Melbourne fandom's history can be found at https://fanlore.org/wiki/Main-Page/Helena_Binns#-Personal_Gallery

Although the first article was written 20 years ago, I need change very little. Add to it that Dick won a second Ditmar Award for Best Fan Artist in 2010. Also, he was very proud of receiving the Rotsler Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2016 – one of world fandom's most prestigious awards.

The second article was written recently. Thanks to Elaine Cochrane for her help in checking it.

What would it have been like if I had been twelve years older than I am? What if I had been born in 1935 rather than 1947? What if I had been wandering the streets in 1952, desperate

to find science fiction to read? I would have found no SF magazines and few books to read, unless I had happened to discover Franklin's Books in Melbourne. Would I have one day

recognised fellow starvelings gathered at the counter of Franklin's and joined the small group of teenagers who became the Melbourne Science Fiction Group (later Club)?

I doubt it. If I had joined the new group, I would have met a group of blokes quite unlike those I in fact grew up with. There was Race Mathews, the oldest of the teenagers, who Dick Jenssen at Melbourne Grammar. Lee Harding and Merv Binns, were younger than them, but more than a match for anybody in telling jokes, swapping puns, and displaying their knowledge of everything, including much I would never have heard of. I would have been uncomfortable with that subversive, even terrifying sense of humour. In Melbourne of the 1950s and 1960s, it was rare to find people who used ironic humour as a normal part of daily speech.

I suspect that Merv Binns would have been a more serious lad than the others. He had just joined McGill's Newsagency, where within a few years he was to hold sway as Melbourne's importer and purveyor of science fiction.

If I had been a member of the group, I would have either been savaged by their humour, welcomed as a fellow science fiction nut, or both. I would have started publishing fanzines, as Race, Lee, and others did, or I would have written articles or stories for their fanzines, as Dick did. It would have been an exciting part of my life, especially during Olympicon in 1956, the first SF convention held in Melbourne. Perhaps Mundane Existence would have taken me away from the excitement, as it did Race in 1958. (He sold up his SF collection to get married, became a politician, and did not again become a regular part of fandom until the early 1990s.)

What I don't know about Martin James Ditmar Jenssen, usually

known as Dick Jenssen or 'Ditmar', is whether he remained a regular part of Melbourne fandom throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. He certainly became a figure of legend.

In 1966, *Australian Science Fiction Review* began. It was the fanzine that put Australia on the map among science fiction fans throughout the world. A new group of Melbourne fans had emerged to run *ASFR*, including John Bangsund, its editor. At the end of 1966, John

forged a path through the undergrowth to a certain door, and stood knocking. And stood. Eventually the door slowly opened, and there, blinking in the light, his slender frame draped in a dressing-gown, clung Dr Jenssen. His agile brain alert and active even at so early an hour (9.30 a.m.), he soon recognized me and showed me in. Then he sort of slumped into a chair and appeared to relapse into sleep as I asked his permission to reprint that article from *Satura*. Anything for a quiet life, anything to hit the cot again: he agreed. (*ASFR* 6, January 1967)

Here John notes one of Dick's most famous characteristics, his reluctance to arise before two o'clock in the afternoon. Dick's article that John so wanted to reprint was 'Off on a Comet', which Dick had originally posted from America as a letter to John Foyster while Dick was conducting his post-doctorate research at the University of Wisconsin. In the article Dick describes setting eyes for the first time on a copy of the very first science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, No. 1, April 1926, at the home of Stuart Hoffman, somewhere in mid America. Mr Hoffman owned genuine Finlay illustrations and vast numbers of all the great SF magazines (unobtainable in Australia, except by indirect means, until 1959). Handling them — caressing them — Dick tells of his revived sense of wonder, and he writes at length about the 'plight of modern SF'. It was

not clear which year Dick favoured as the date of the end of true SF and the beginning of 'modern' SF.

There is little other evidence, except for a collection of wonderful photographs, that Dick was part of the 1960s group who produced the mighty *Australian SF Review*. These photos, showing John Bangsund, Lee Harding, John Foyster, and Dick Jenssen making odd gestures at each other, were going to be part of a photographic comic strip to appear in issue 2 of Lee Harding's *Canto*. That fanzine never appeared, but the photos remain.

The only other evidence of Dick's fannish activity during the late sixties is his name 'Ditmar', which was given to the annual Australian SF Awards. As Dick tells the story, he and the *ASFR* team (also the 1968 Conference committee) were sitting around for a whole afternoon trying to think of a nickname for the new awards, when he suggested one of his own names: Ditmar. In later years, when people asked what the letters DITMAR stood for, Dick would explain earnestly that 'the votes were to be compiled on the specialised computer at Melbourne University known as the Digital Automatic Tabulating Mechanism for the Advancement of Research'. The awards themselves have led to more controversies, conflicts, and bad blood among Australian fans than any other cause, but they are still awarded every year, and everybody wants to win one.

Since I was in fact born in 1947, not 1935, I did not meet 'the good doctor', as he was usually known, until 1968. At the Melbourne SF *Conference*, held at the Melbourne Science Fiction Clubrooms during Easter of that year, Dick Jenssen was the auctioneer. Here he revealed a level of wit, sarcasm, and showmanship unknown in my experience. There were few SF books or magazines of quality presented for auction. During

the 1970s some major collections came onto the Australian market as their owners died, but in 1968 the bits and pieces people presented for auction would have attracted little interest without Dick's skills. His trick was to make each object sound so dazzlingly awful that somebody (usually Kevin Dillon) felt obliged to buy it. While Dick sold the stuff, Lee Harding and Tony Thomas raised eyebrows in astonishment at the prices achieved as they relieved fans of their money.

Since Dr Jenssen was obviously a man of fierce wit, even compared to people such as John Foyster and John Bangsund, it seemed unlikely that shy neofan me would ever speak to him. I didn't, in fact, until the Easter convention in 1970. Somebody had allowed me to run the Ditmar Awards. I made a major mistake, never to be repeated, of running a one-stage ballot instead of the usual two-stage ballot (nominations followed by a final ballot). By the first day of the convention, few people had bothered to vote. Dick Jenssen saw my plight (egg-on-face syndrome), and offered to help. When a large number of ballots turned up late in the first day of the convention, all marked with the same choices (but not the same handwriting or signature), I felt that not everything was okay. I was so annoyed at the low voter turnout that I allowed the ballots. It turned out that Dick Jenssen had applied more persuasiveness when campaigning for his choices than anybody else had. This resulted in Best International Fiction being awarded to a book called *Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino. Only one person at the convention was known to have read this book — Dick Jenssen. Similarly, the Fanzine winner, *The Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology (JoE)*, edited by John Foyster, was known to have a small readership, also including Dick Jenssen. For a few months John Bangsund was bloody annoyed at the results (because Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* came second to *Cosmicomics*). Most Melbourne fans quickly

forgot about the controversy. Melbourne later become mildly famous as the first place in the world to give an award to Italo Calvino, who would probably have won the Nobel Prize for Literature if he had lived longer.

Somewhen in the 1960s Dick had finished his PhD, stopped traipsing the world, and had settled down as head of the Meteorology Department of the University of Melbourne. He hosted the New Year's Convention 1971 in a Nissen hut owned by the Department. Nothing else on campus was open. The only available toilets were nearly 100 yards away, across Swanston Street, behind another building owned by the Department. It rained the whole weekend. Not only were people trapped inside the Nissen hut for three days, but when they wanted to take a leak they had to run like hell through the rain. On the last day of the convention, as the Film Panel was beginning, Lee Harding appeared at the door and said, 'There's a gelati man with a bicycle out here' The whole convention left the hut and queued for gelati. The convention has been known as 'Gelaticon' ever since.

What we didn't realise is that Dick had been getting more and more annoyed by the state of science fiction during the 1960s, especially in its manifestation known as 'New Wave'. Towards the end of his masterly speech at Gelaticon, after a tirade of witty abuse mainly directed against New Wave writers, Dick settled his gaze upon Frank Herbert's *Dune*, the novel that, every time a poll is held, is voted Best SF Novel Ever by *Locus* readers:

I believe that *Dune* exemplifies the bad writing, the bad readership and the bad criticism of science fiction. It exemplifies bad writing because it cheats all the time. It presents a hero who is supposed to be a superman and in every page, almost, it tells you: he is a superman. Once

and once only in the novel are you shown something which this protagonist does which is superhuman. Only once, when he, by some thought process, gets rid of some poison in his system. Every other event, like taking off his hat or removing his shoes, is presented in italics with 'this is a superman feat' ...

I must admit that reading *Dune* was a most pleasurable experience. I was caught up by the novel; I read it with great pleasure, with great excitement. But it's rather like going to the lavatory. I enjoy having, if you'll pardon the expression, a shit. The end result is exactly the same — what is produced is one great, big turd. (*Boy's Own Fanzine*, No. 2, December 1973)

Dick then disappeared from my sight and knowledge (except for occasional news of him relayed by Bill Wright) from January 1971 until 1993. I assumed that he had no time for fandom because of the increasing demands of his teaching career at Melbourne University. However, he said later, his absence from conventions had much to do with his disenchantment with latter-day science fiction.

During the next two and a half decades, occasionally I saw Dick buying books at Readings in Carlton. He nodded to me, possibly trying to remember who I was and where he had seen me last. Therefore I was very much surprised to be greeted warmly when in 1993 we found ourselves talking to each other in the living room of the man who had begun the whole great Melbourne SF enterprise: Race Mathews.

Race had become a politician by the time he left fandom in 1958. In the 1960s he became Gough Whitlam's parliamentary secretary, then gained the Melbourne outer suburban seat of Casey for Labor (considered an impossibility) during the 1972



Race and Iola's monthly Film Night meeting, Christmas 1999 or 2000.

***Standing: Behind l. to r.:* Bill Wright, Bruce Gillespie, Merv Binns, Race Mathews, John Foyster, Dick Jenssen, Peter Nicholls, Sean McMullen, Rob Gerrand, Trish Smyth, Carey Handfield.**

***Standing, front:* Bruno Kautzner, Yvonne Rousseau, Clare Coney (Nicholls), Lee Harding, Helena Binns, Madeleine Harding, Andrew Gerrand.**

***Seated:* Justin Ackroyd, Lucy Ackroyd.**

federal election, which brought Whitlam to power. Race and Lola were married during the election campaign. Race lost his seat in 1975, but a few years later he gained a seat in the Victorian State Parliament. He held the seat of Oakleigh for 17 years, much of that time as a Minister in the Cain Labor Government. When Labor lost most of its seats in 1992, Race found himself involuntarily retired. He and Lola moved to a house in South Yarra, and Race made contact with fans he had known from the old days, as well as the people who had published the first and second incarnations of *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

To our own surprise, we people gathered by Race and Lola were linked more by our interest in films than in science fiction. An interest in films had been a bond between science fiction fans during the 1950s. For many years we were persecuted by the Commonwealth Film Censor, who loved to deprive Australians of large sections of SF, fantasy and horror films. But we could hardly have expected that our mutual interest in films would have continued in parallel. Race had bought a home theatre system, which featured a large-screen TV and a laser disc player. Every month we gathered (and still gather) to watch films (DVDs and Blu-rays), and Elaine and I made new friendships, especially with Dick Jenssen.

Dick told us that he had suffered some very depressing years in the late eighties, having taken early retirement in 1990 because of difficult administrative changes at Melbourne University. For some years he had been almost a hermit. Race had got in touch with him and encouraged him to meet people at the monthly film nights. In turn, Dick got in touch with Bill Wright, who had also disappeared from sight for some years. In the mid 1990s, Bill again became a major figure in Melbourne fandom. We began to meet with Dick for dinner, but

I don't think we would have kept in regular touch if it had not been for a fit of the computer horrors.

Dick has been working with computers, including the first one to be installed in Melbourne, for most of his life. Elaine and I came to use computers only because they were essential for our livelihoods, although I quickly found how useful they are for producing fanzines. When my computer went horribly bung in 1996, Dick was quick to volunteer to help sort out the problems. In this way, we found out that Dick's great talent is for teaching as well as solving problems. He showed us how to get friendly with a computer, or at least refrain from throwing it out the window. Dick is a scientist, an experimenter. He has a great ability to understand machines, whereas I regard machines as natural enemies of humans. Not only was he always willing to help fix our problems, but he showed us how, with a bit of patience and experimentation, we could also avoid Microsoft-caused insanity.

Dick also enjoys sharing his interest in and knowledge of films. He changed my attitude to recent films, which I had tended to dismiss as valueless, based on the small number I had seen during the 1980s and early 1990s. Dick's real breakthrough was a few years ago, when he showed a film I knew I would hate. It had been reviewed as being a film about unremitting violence. Not so, said Dick: watch what is actually happening. The film was *Fight Club*, and I soon saw that much more was happening than might be guessed in a simple plot summary. The last half-hour of the film convinced me that something very subversive and exciting was happening in films at the end of the nineties. *Three Kings* left me with the same feeling. *The Sixth Sense* had a more meditative feeling, but again it showed that Hollywood film makers were again willing to try anything. Dick introduced me to the work of David Cronenberg, and

encouraged me to escape from very narrow ways of thinking about film.

During the same period, entertainment electronics were improving faster every year. DVD took over from laser discs and videotape, and plasma screens took over from CRTs. Dick showed us some fine films and encouraged us to get involved in the DVD revolution by giving us a large TV monitor that would make it possible for me to buy a DVD player and show DVDs. Dick's generosity can be very helpful.

When Dick took early retirement, he became busier than ever. His retirement coincided with a rapid improvement in home computers. One new program that Dick bought was Bryce. To the user of regular Window programs, its interface is almost incomprehensible. Dick sat down for week after week, learned the program, and began to use it to create a wide variety of science-fictional computer graphics. He gave files of his creations to Bill Wright, me, and other fanzine producers. We have been decorating the covers and pages of our magazines since 1995. Ditmar graphics looks so good that I began to run colour covers to show them at their best. The proliferation of this artwork in fanzines meant that Dick (who signs his works 'Ditmar') finally won a Ditmar Award for Best Fan Artist in 2002 [and another in 2010].

Dick also wrote a program to generate pictures based on fractals. Elaine put the program on her computer, and immediately began to create pictures that look a lot more interesting (to me) than any abstract expressionist painting that one might find in an art gallery. Elaine kept asking for more features in DJ Fractals, so every few weeks Dick writes new bits for the program. Dick has offered the program to anybody who is interested in learning it, but so far Elaine has been his most apt student.

In my case, not all Dick's attempts at education have paid off. He loves competitive games and tests of intellectual strength. I have few brains, and not a competitive or gaming gene in my body. Dick has a great knowledge of mathematics, and I have no mathematical ability. We only sometimes agree on works of general fiction. But even so, if Dick recommends a work of fiction or a book about science, I will usually find it interesting, and he has pointed me towards science fiction authors I hadn't read for many years. And he and Elaine and I have discovered some great restaurants together.

I meet few legends, people who combine lives of artistic creativity and science, but then, few people like to use every waking hour for intellectual excitement. Thanks, Dick.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 2005

Bruce Gillespie: My 2024 tribute

Dick Jenssen left us on 7 March 2024. For Elaine and me, this was hard to take, but we knew the end was coming.

Dick had been suffering from advanced arthritis for many years, certainly from early in the 2000s. He refused to have hip-replacement surgery, and therefore found it increasingly difficult to move from beyond his flat. However, he did make a valiant effort to join people for dinner while he could. For a year or two, Lee Harding would drive from Moonee Ponds to Carnegie to pick up Dick, drive both of them to Cafe Spice, our favourite Indian restaurant in Greensborough, then drive him back to Carnegie and then drive home to Moonee Ponds. Eventually Lee stopped driving, and he died in 2023.

Dick's last public appearance was at Aussiecon 4, 2010, in Melbourne. Although by then walking only with the help of a walking stick, he was able to attend the session of Dudcon (the gathering at Aussiecon that substituted for the Australian national convention) where he received his second Ditmar Award for Best Australian Fan Artist. Having given his name to the awards in 1968, it gave him great pleasure to receive two of them.

He was able to join a group of us at the Rosstown Hotel in Carnegie. For some years, this was a monthly event. Lee Harding, then Geoff Allshorn, would pick him up from home and take him home. In the years before Covid, our Rosstown gatherings dwindled to twice a year. In December it was for Helena Binns' birthday, and in July for Dick's and Merv Binns'

birthdays. The Covid lockdown restrictions from March 2020 onward put a stop to those celebrations, and they did not resume. By then Dick was able to move around his flat only on two crutches.

In 2020 Dick's GP detected that he was suffering from bladder cancer, and Dick underwent severe surgery to save his life. His movements were restricted even further by compensating for this surgery, and he remained at home permanently. His only visitors seemed to be Elaine and me, and his Council helper Lindy, who took him shopping once a week. During the Covid crisis, she was allowed to buy necessities for him, and then only once a fortnight. Elaine and I travelled to his place whenever he felt up to receiving visitors. We would phone for the delivery of pizzas from Gabriele's in Carnegie, a great pizza shop, and we would chat for several hours.

He suffered a period of increasing pain and difficulty of movement, even around his own flat. There was one night when he called us about 10 p.m. to say that he had fallen from his chair and could not get up again. It took us an hour to travel by taxi to his place. We found just how difficult it is, even for two people, to raise another person to his feet so that he could stagger to a chair. It was obvious that he could not move back to his bed by himself, so reluctantly agreed that we should call an ambulance. The ambulance arrived eventually, and left carrying Dick to hospital at 2 a.m. An examination showed that his legs wouldn't work because he had contracted a kidney infection. After this was treated with antibiotics, Dick could

return to his flat. He had several months of relative good health until an infection again made it difficult for him to walk. By that time he had established a link with a medical alert service. He had to ring them every day. Elaine and I took to ringing him every day, or he rang us.

These conversations over his last few years were very enjoyable, as indeed any conversation with him always was. Dick is still the only person to whom I could talk about almost any subject (except politics; I learned to hold my tongue about politics), especially movies and books. Elaine could talk long about maths and science subjects, and the maths books that Dick was still reading for pleasure until a few months before his death.

Dick's body disappeared from under him. That's the only way we can describe his last few months. He would suffer another kidney infection and would need to go to Cabrini Hospital (where, he reported, the food was very good, as was the care he received). Each time the medical team would allow him to return home — but his deepest fear remained, of losing the shelter of his own flat. But he was finding it more and more difficult to move around. We visited him for the last time on Boxing Day last year.

And then ... and then ... another fall ... another visit to hospital. He spent two weeks in Cabrini Rehabilitation Ward, but the doctors could see that he could no longer move back to his flat without 24-hour care. And that was impossible in that rather small flat.

More and more Elaine, as his Medical Attorney, was caught up in these problems. She had often had to visit his flat to pick up items to take to him in nearby Cabrini Hospital, but there was

a period when public transport was barely operating in the area because of closures on both the Pakenham and Frankston railway lines. She had to take taxis.

During the last two months of Dick's life, she was given 10 days to find a permanent place of residence for him! She investigated three places in our area, and found a splendid place a few hundred metres from our house: Grace Villa of Greensborough. Dick did make the move, but he was not happy, and decided his life was over. His hearing was deteriorating, so he found it difficult to talk to the staff or hear them. His eyesight was also dimming, so he was finding it difficult to read the captions on TV programs.

Elaine and I visited him as often as possible, but Elaine was also arranging the emptying of his flat. She could not have done this without help from several mighty-thewed souls, including Justin Ackroyd who packed the books, Blu-rays, DVDs and CDs, with much help from Carey Handfield, Murray MacLachlan, Rob Gerrand, and Elaine. Gladys Williams, Elaine's friend from schooldays, also helped for a day.

Dick had fallen out of bed trying to retrieve the zapper for the TV set. We received a call from Grace Villa about 11.30 at night. We were rung at 1.30 a.m., then at 2 a.m., from the hospital, where he had been sent for observation. They sent him back to Grace Villa later that night. The next day, Elaine visited him, and found him quite cheerful, as he explained the circumstances of the fall. Two days later, a removalist van moved most of the boxes from Carnegie to our place. Elaine went to visit Dick that afternoon, but he was sleeping. The following morning we were rung from Grace Villa, The indomitable Martin James Ditmar (Dick) Jenssen had died at 6 a.m. on 7 March.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 22 April 2024

I must be talking to my friends

Friends talk back to me: Letters Part 2

This letter column was rudely interrupted, cut off at the end of *SFC* 115. Let the great conversation continue ...

Feature letter: Discovering fanzine fandom

MARK NELSON

**School of Mathematics and Applied Statistics,
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Wollongong NSW 2522**

David Grigg, current Official Bloody Editor of ANZAPA, kindly sent me all of his Official Bloody Organs dating back to ANZAPA mailing 318 (December 2020). I'd really like to get my hands on the OBOs

for the other mailings in 2020. As you were the OBE before David I thought I'd ask if there's any chance that you still have them — electronic form is OK if you've still got the files.

**[*brg* Mumble grumble mumble — yes, I finally found them all.
Looking forward to your results.*]**

I noticed your encouragement for ANZAPAns to engage with *SFC*. I've downloaded these, but there is (as I'm sure you realise) a

variation on the ANZAPA giant-size problem: issues 112 and 113 are 114 and 123 pages respectively (in the Landscape format). That's another load of reading.

Flicking through one of the issues I noticed that Colin Steele reviews a book about **Stalin's** personal library. This put me in mind of a recent article in the newspaper. **Virginia Woolf's** copy of one of her early novels, maybe even her first, was recently found in the University of Sydney library. I don't know if they knew that they had it, but it had been misfiled and was only recently found. This particular copy is of interest to Woolf scholars because it contains amendments she was considering making when the novel was republished in the USA. As I remember it, in the end she did not revise it.

Did Stalin annotate any of the books in his library? I don't know. Even if he did, will they be of interest? But at least his library exists (I assume). What's the future of scholarship about public figures who only have electronic libraries?

(5 August 2023)

I've always had an interest in reading obituaries. The only faint connection I have to any of the ten people who were remembered in *SFC* 112 is to **Eve Harvey**. Her name was sometimes mentioned at meetings of the Leeds University Science Fiction Club in the late 1980s, though not as often as the names Alan Dorey and Simon Ounsley. They were also only names to me; if they still lived in Leeds they'd long stopped hanging out at the student society.

Regarding **Dick Jenssen's** memories of **Lee Harding** and himself being taunted for reading SF. Could that happen today with SF so part of the mainstream? Think of the popularity of *Star Wars*, Superhero movies (not really SF though?), and *Star Trek*. Being taunted for reading books, I can imagine that. But being taunted for liking 'that Buck Rogers crap'?

John Bangsund's reported comment that 'Lee and Carla's place was full of books and music, and I felt at home the moment I arrived' puts me in mind of my experience when I first started looking for a property in Wollongong. If you are more worldly that I am, there are any number of things that you look at when you are inspecting a house. Me? My main first concern was seeing if there were any bookshelves, and if so, what books were on them. I can safely say that if John Bangsund is looking for a house to haunt, his ghost will not feel welcomed in Wollongong. If we discount bedrooms belonging to university students, then books were few and far between. Wollongong is not a bookish city, and the properties I inspected did not belong to bookish individuals.

An academic exercise might be to track the use of the word **fanzine** in print media over the last 80 years. Perhaps of more interest would be to identify the rise and fall of the fandoms associated with its usage in the print media. The more recent examples I've seen in the *OED*, not statistically significant in size, skewed towards punk fanzines.

SF fanzines are not the only fruit, and perhaps these days are not even considered a fruit when print media consider fanzines. In any case, perhaps fanzine fans of any fandom are a dying breed in an age of podcasts and the such like.

[*brg* I think that all thoughtful activity is dying. Fanzine fandom is an example, not an exception.*]

I was intrigued to read that **Charles Taylor** was 'desperate to escape from teaching in private schools'. I wonder why? Of course, there are private schools and there are private schools. But in many parts of Australia I would have thought it beats teaching in the public sector.

Was **Jennifer Bryce's** list of her ten best books of 2022 a reflection of a magical year in publishing? Or was it the magic of her writing and thoughtful insights that make them seem so

special? I would love to read her previous reviews of her best ten books. Where did these appear?

[*brg* Keep leafing backward through issues of SFC on efanzines.com and you will find plenty of other contributions by Jenny Bryce. But you remind me that I should compile a bibliography of all her articles and letters that have appeared in my fanzines since the 1980s.*]

Your mention of the undoubted pleasures, the unexpected pleasures, of browsing, an activity that 'will no longer be possible if you don't support our bookshops', touched a chord with me. When I was a graduate student in Leeds I liked to visit the part of the science library which was set aside for new journals. For each journal the last year or so of issues were available, unbound, to browse through. There were certain journals for which I always scanned the table of contents; they were relevant to my research. There were one or two journals that I would always sit down with and more carefully examine, one of which was not related to my research topic. But it was educational to pick journals up at random to see what was listed in the table of contents. It's a form of browsing that did bring me many unexpected pleasures.

That kind of browsing has not been possible at Wollongong for a number of years. You see, from the perspective of the library, the problem with purchasing hard copies of journals is that you must find somewhere to store them. It's much easier to subscribe electronically to journals, because there are then no storage problems. Of course, if at any time you subsequently stop subscribing to a journal you lose access to the back-issues of the journal that you previously paid to access. But at least you do not need to store the journals. Consequently, the kind of random browsing I enjoyed as a graduate student is no longer possible.

You can subscribe to journals of interest and have the table of contents emailed straight to your mailbox. But that's a soulless endeavour, viewing a digital table of contents.

And I'm pretty busy, so I don't scroll through electronic tables of contents of journals that are not related to what I'm doing. There's no longer the hope of an unexpected journey through the journals. There's not even the enjoyment of walking to the library and spending an hour browsing through new journals.

I don't consume as many classical CDs as you do. In fact, you couldn't consume fewer classical CDs than I do, as I currently buy one classical CD a year. I say that I buy one a year; I've done it twice. But where to buy from? There used to be a classical music store in the QVB, but that long ago ceased trading. I bought my last two classic CDs from the Classical Music Shop Australia, but that has now ceased trading. Where to order the next one from? I like to avoid Amazon and prefer not to order from overseas; it's not really worth the postage for one CD.

I've never attended a Worldcon and I doubt that I will. (I've only ever attended conventions held in Leeds.) Still, I enjoyed reading **John Hertz's** account of **Chicon VIII**. It made the convention sound interesting to someone with no interest in reading a convention report. I think this was because John straddles a number of fandoms within the wide field of SF fandom.

(5 October 2023)

[*brg* As you've noticed, the memoirs and obituaries in SFC 112 point to a world now pretty much lost, especially the love of real books. Our own shelves are also full of CDs, DVDs/Blu-rays, magazines I want to keep, and I have several large cupboards of print fanzines.

Thanks for the memory of Eve Harvey, who was a great friend of quite a few Australian fans, mainly through visits to worldcons and various fan fund trips.

You confuse the popularity of media SF and the continued scorn

for written SF. After all, *Star Trek* only goes back to 1967. While I was commuting during my university days and early working life (1965–1973), I used to place a brown paper cover over my SF paperbacks, or remove the dustjacket from SF hardbacks while reading them in the train or on the tram. The first sign I saw of anybody else reading any book I would call SF was in 1972 when one bloke on a tram was brazenly reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*. By that time it was a bestseller, and the movie was not far off, but still in my mind it was an SF book.

Dick Jensen, twelve years older than I am, has some very bitter stories of being scorned or punished for even mentioning science fiction when he was at school in the 1940s and 1950s, especially when he once pointed out the great scientific ideas that he found discussed in the SF magazines. The story of fandom is one of people who felt themselves a despised minority in their own land, and who reached out to each other via the letter columns in the pro magazines, then formed clubs and began publishing fanzines. And even after media SF arrived in the late 60s and early 70s, with specialist clubs for various programs, that was still very different from the love of written SF — and science itself for that matter — as a whole. And I find still almost complete ignorance of and dislike for written SF among people who consider themselves academics or wide readers.

The term fanzine was invented by American fan Lou Chauvenet in 1940, and stayed with SF fanzines until sometime in the sixties, when it jumped to rock music (Gregg Calkin's *Who Put the Bomp?* is usually credited as the first rock fanzine). I'm not sure how it then jumped to punk fandom in the seventies, but by then the historical connection had been broken by the johnny-come-latelies. Also, today's 'zines' are different from ours in some ways, mainly that they are sold rather than traded, and tend to be hand-made and then photocopied rather than created

by computer. All our fanzines were hand-made, typed then printed with duplicators etc, until the early 1980s when most fanzines went to cheap offset printing. We all had to move to distributing via PDF files on the internet about 2000 as postage rates began to skyrocket, especially those we wanted to send overseas. Zines, by contrast, tend to be sold at zine fairs.

If you want to track down favourite writers in my fanzines all you need to do is to go to the two places from which the PDF versions are distributed. <https://efanzines.com> is Bill Burns' site. If you want to go to, say, the latest issue of SFC, No. 114, follow the link <https://efanzines.com/SFC/index.html#sfc114> and download that issue. However, when you are in the SFC section, you will notice all the issues back to No. 76. The earlier issues can be found by going to <https://fanac.org> and flicking through the various issues.

You're right. There are now no classical CD specialist shops in Australia. Disgraceful. The only way I can find what I want is through googling 'Presto Music' in Britain. It is actually a site you can use for browsing. The company charges relatively little for postage, and the discs arrive within a couple of weeks.*]

My local JB Hi Fi once stocked a reasonable selection of jazz CDs, and other CDs of interest. Recently, the number of CDs seems to have dramatically decreased. The number of DVDs has shrunk even more dramatically. My wife tells me that if you look at their web page they have many more DVDs for sale than they have in the shop.

I read with interest the comments about AI art by both **Dennis Callegari** and **Jim Burns**, and admired their art work. Their art work? There's the rub. Where does one draw the line between a work that is attributed to an artist, that was actually produced under supervision by their atelier, and a work that is attributed to

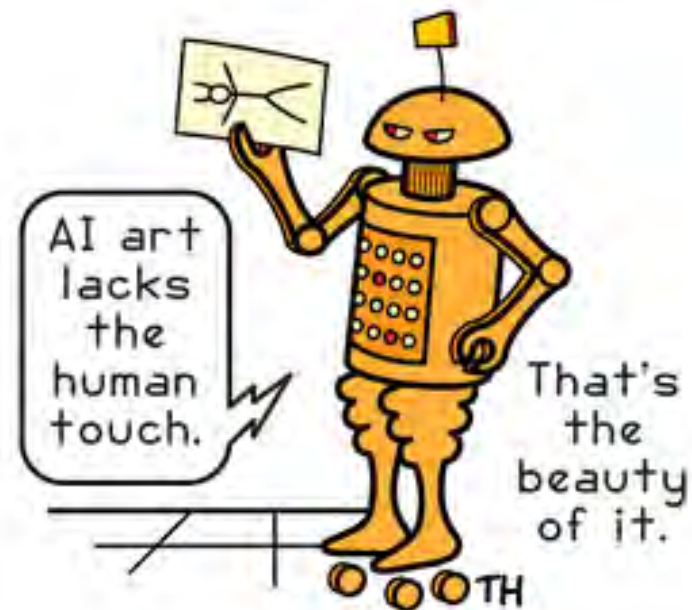
an artist, that was actually produced under supervision by a piece of AI software? I also ponder about the adaptation of technology to the production of art.

The primary method of painting until c. 1500 AD was to disperse powdered pigments in egg yolk. (Most of the surviving works by Michelangelo are in egg tempera.) This was replaced by oil painting, in which powdered pigments, from minerals or plants, are added to oil. According to the *Oxford Companion to Art* oil painting offered 'greater flexibility, richer and denser colour, the use of layers, and a wider range from light to dark'.

A few centuries later, the impressionists were painting outdoors using synthetic pigments. This was a consequence of the invention of the squeezable metal tube (in 1841) and advances in colour chemistry, a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. I'm also minded that the medium of painting has changed, from wooden panels to canvas and now to the computer. Perhaps it's a facile observation that just as oil and synthetic paints opened new doors to artists, so does AI technology. Of course, there are important differences. Synthetic paints can't learn from the artist and then start creating their own works!

Helena Binns's fannish life story was fascinating. It is quite staggering to think that there were science fiction conventions in Australia in the 1950s, though by Melcon in 1958 it was 21 years since the first science fiction convention. Have programs survived from the **early Australian conventions**? How did the the program of those early conventions differ from more recent ones? Do Australian science fiction conventions of the 2020s have the same *joie de vivre* as those of the past? I wonder what attendees at the sixth convention in 1958 would have made of the recent sixty-first convention? I gained the impression from comments made in ANZAPA that some viewed it as a science fiction convention in name rather than spirit.

One can't help but wonder how long it will take the Republican



Party to move from the **banning of books** to the burning of books to the burning of authors. Perhaps at some future date a Canadian professor will be writing 'The Index of Prohibited Books: Four Centuries of Struggle Over Word and Image for the Greater Glory of the Republican Party'?

Will some books have the honour of being banned both by the Catholic Church and the Republican Party?

Vose writes that 'Ideas matter, but they can also be dangerous — and that tension is precisely what a liberal arts education best equips us to study.' But how long before the idea of a liberal arts education comes to the attention of the Republican Party?

I hugely enjoyed reading the book reviews from **Colin Steele** and **Anna Creer**. No particular comment, but they are both excellent reviewers.

(10 April 2024)

Feature letter:

Jenny Bryce and the Shakespeare Grove party

JOHN LITCHEN

3 Firestone Court, Robina QLD 4226

SFC 113: It was a nice surprise to see **Colin Steele** giving my two Mars books a recommendation in his review of *The Book of Mars* edited by Stuart Clark. I would also like to thank you for mentioning *More Dreams of Mars* as well as *Changing States* in the letters column. I have to agree with Colin Steele that Stuart Clark's selection of fiction tends to not represent what he discusses in the introduction, with the stories and chapter excerpts leaning towards the fantastical rather than towards those based on technology and the current knowledge of what Mars is like or was like at the times the stories were written. It's a large book, with 857 pages plus just on 50 of notes and index. My two Mars books combined total 756 pages. It will take some time to get through Stuart Clark's book. What will help is that many of the fiction selections he has used I have already read, so I can skip over those. I'm more interested in the non-fiction pieces he has selected and will enjoy going through those over the next few weeks, or months (it is a big book).

Hope you are well after those problems with your legs. It just goes to show how vulnerable we get as we age. My balance is not as good as it used to be, and my legs are definitely weaker. I should walk more, and will do that from now on. Monica was the one who walked a lot. I never did because at that time I was training and teaching Aikido, but not having done that now for the last four years, it really shows. It's too late for me to get back into it (I'm 83 now) but some other lighter forms of exercise need to be done

to keep fit.

(2 July 2023)

I read *SFC* all the way through, but had to stop when I got to your Jenny Bryce piece. It almost brought tears to my eyes. I remember Jenny, although I didn't see much of her, but she had a way of making herself be remembered. It was nothing overt, but just her personality and feeling of empathy that endeared her to you.

Your article brought back a memory of going with Monica to the **house in Shakespeare Grove** opposite Luna Park one night in the early 1980s. I don't know if it was a housewarming party or one of those infamous Nova Mob meetings but there were a lot of people there. John Foyster was right in the middle of a group discussing something with enthusiasm. He seemed to be dominating the group. As we walked in to the front room, Jenny was there with two friends playing classical music. She smiled a greeting to us and continued with the piece. It was beautifully played and Monica loved it. I was off classical music or chamber music, having spent too many years at the Melbourne Conservatory of Music where I studied classical violin. I gave that up when I broke the little finger in my left hand attempting to compete in an athletic tournament while at University High School in 1957 (my Matriculation year). But I could certainly appreciate good playing when I heard it, and Jenny's group was certainly very good. Monica and I listened until they finished playing.

There weren't too many people listening to the group, which I thought was disrespectful, but it was a party and the guests were doing whatever guests do at such events.

The party got rowdier once the music stopped, and Jenny disappeared somewhere to prepare something for the guests to eat. I don't recall much else, other than the odd screams from people over the road riding the famous roller coaster at Luna Park. Monica and I left while the party was in full swing. That's all I recall — Jenny playing chamber music with her friends while surrounded by a noisy mob. Reading how she suffered various illnesses as she neared the end of her life brought back memories of my recent experience with Monica in her declining years, and I felt really sad. I had to take a break from reading for a while. Let me say that I think this was one of the best *SFC* issues you've done, and can understand why it took so long for you to put it together. I was really moved by it and suppose others will also be moved.

(19 July 2023)

I thought you outdid yourself with the color reproduction of **Jim Burns' AI artwork**. As he says, AI is another tool to be added to what is already being used, and he is such a brilliant artist, always one of my favorites, that even his AI stuff has a distinctive difference to it, obviously influenced by his own personal approach to how he renders his compositions.

Too much of what you see at the moment is nothing more than a muddle of effects that all have a similar sameness to them. Creators need to remember, they are the creators, the ones with the ideas, and all the AI program does is render their visions. It reminds me of what photographers were doing for a couple of years after Photoshop became the standard digital program for them. There was too much confusion as they put everything but the kitchen sink into photographic concoctions. In time, as users became familiar with what they could do, it settled down. AI is at that stage now and people experimenting with it try too hard to

do too much, with most results mediocre at best. But in the hands of a true artist, I'm sure in time we'll see some truly great stuff. Remember, it's early days yet.

I found **Kim Huett's** pieces most interesting. I remember the encyclopedia he talked about, and immediately went to my bookshelves to look at it, only to discover it wasn't there. I have no idea what happened to it. I have a couple of other illustrated encyclopedias of science fiction, but not that one. I do remember it because of the cover art. But what can you do when it's not there anymore? His explanation of the availability of paper for printing during the 1940s was enlightening. I did know something about this and mentioned it briefly in my *Dreams of Mars*, but Kim has given much more detail to it and fills in the missing bits. I was also surprised to see how much early science fiction was being published in Australia at that time. That had all but vanished by the time I started buying pulp books at my local newsagent in the 1950s and what I got then were stories by Carter Brown, Volstead Gridban, and Vargo Statten among others, so it was interesting to learn about it.

As always, I love the book reviews because it gives me an idea of what's out there and what I may be interested in reading when I can afford to get more books. There are too many of them to afford right now so I've gone back to sifting through my bookshelves and finding stuff I have little recollection of reading and from time to time will reread one of them. Often I am surprised at how entertaining or good a story was and will put the book back onto the shelf, but at other times I have found the story selected to be unreadable after so many years, and it goes into pile to give away to the local op-shop.

(30 November 2023)

Feature letter:

Random train to an undecided destination

LEIGH EDMONDS

46 Hocking Avenue, Mount Clear VIC 3350

Thanks for the reminder about **SFC 112**. As it turns out I read it, and most of **113** yesterday on a trip down to Melbourne and back. Since Derrick Ashby's, David Grigg's, and my birthdays fall within a few weeks of each other, David and Sue invited us to dinner at an eatery in Middle Park. So I took *SFCs* 112 and 113 with me to read.

On the whole they were very enjoyable. You have turned *SFC* into its very own art form and now perform it with style and, sometimes verve. However, I must add that these days *SFC* leads me down all different kinds of paths of introspection, probably because of the people who write letters of comment to it and because of your sometimes antique way of looking at things.

The reason I got through so much of both issues is because I deliberately skipped a lot of the content. I had sworn to myself that I would read all your death notices which are, from what I've read previously, excellent. However, before heading off to the station to catch the train I happened to glance at Facebook and there somebody had reposted a photo of **Valma** talking with Robin Johnson and Mike O'Brien in our then new house but before we moved in. The tears welled up and that put me off reading what you had to say about Valma or any of the other dead people you wrote about. Maybe later.

The other bits I skipped were those in which some of your

contributors listed the things they liked or write interesting reviews of them. That's not because they aren't well written or interesting but because, having turned 75 this year, I realise that there are many things that I would love to do but almost certainly won't. So reading such lists only reminds me of my own mortality, which I am not fond of being reminded of just at the moment.

Having said that, I did enjoy **Jenny Bryce's** style in the books she wrote about and I like your 'tasting notes' approach to writing about what you've read. It is quite relaxed and informal and suckered me into reading more than I really needed to about books, records, movies, TV shows, etc that I will never experience for myself. On the one hand, I am delighted, almost thrilled, to read that there is so much interesting and exiting brain work going on out there in the world despite the terrible problems that confront, and are going to confront, humanity in the future. Maybe it will have been worth it when it's all over.

Having skipped over all the dead people and enjoyed Jenny's final book reviews which are, it seems to me, about the relationships people build with each other and the world around them, I came to 'Bruce Gillespie: My favourite things 2022'. This brought on a moment of reflection as I gazed out the window of the train. (I'd caught an early train so the heavy frost over the landscape as the sun came up gave it a rather festive look — as in those Christmas cards we used to get which were about the Northern Hemisphere Christmas with snow and all. Which is nice to look at but not somewhere you'd really want to live. The same for frosty Ballarat mornings, which I avoid when I can.)

Eventually, dragging myself away from my window gazing and contemplation of the Victorian landscape in high winter, I decided that **my favourite thing of 2022** was not so much a thing as a process. Around the middle of the year the renovations were completed and we were able to unpack and sort a lot of the stuff that had been in boxes since we left Raglan Street. As part of that process I spent a lot of money on a wall of shelves for what Valma used to refer to as my 'office'. After all my time working in universities I only regretted three things about not getting a tenured position. One was the title; next was the pay; but what I really would have liked was the offices stuffed with books that most academics had. The other things they had, such as students, lectures, tutorials, staff meetings, and university politics, they were welcome to, but they really had great offices. So now that Rhys the builder has filled a couple of walls with books my life, in this aspect anyhow, is now complete.

As I was getting all the books out of the back shed I sorted them roughly into the books I wanted on my new shelves and the ones for the shelves in the rest of the house. With the exception of the set of *Historic Records of Australia*, all the books in here are my history, sociology, political science, and cultural studies that I began acquiring when I started at ANU in 1980. All the books from before that, the stf, literature, etc, etc, that mostly date from before 1980, are in other rooms.

The other thing I finally got done was to organise all my **scale-model kits and models** in the back shed. For the past decade they've been spread all over the place but, during summer and early autumn I finally managed to get them sorted and organised and my data base updated. It's not much to look at but when, yesterday, I decided that I must make a model of a Supermarine Seagull for my collection of RAAF aircraft I looked up my kit collection on my data base, saw which box it was in, and it was the work of a minute to find it to start work on.

So there you are, in summary, perhaps, my favourite thing for

2022 was organisation, or at least the time and space in which to get a bit more organised.

I'd caught an early train down to Melbourne because I had some shopping to do before lunch with Derrick, Sue, and David. For a year or so now I've been contemplating buying a new and better camera than the one I now use, which I bought in 2010 just after Aussiecon IV. The main things I use it for are for photographing documents in archives and taking pictures of scale-model aeroplanes. On and off I've looked at the options on the interweb and decided that it was finally time to bite the bullet and do it. Consequently I spent a lot of the day before yesterday getting myself completely confused about what would be best and where to get it. Eventually I gave that away and instead made myself a list of what I needed in a camera and the shops in the CBD where I might find such a camera. I thought this might take an hour or so to get done so I arrived in the area in Elizabeth Street where they were all located just after the shops opened. As it turned out the entire process took about twenty minutes. I saw what I wanted in the first shop, checked what was in the other two shops and then went back and bought the first camera I'd seen. It helped, I suppose, that I had spent all that time the day before so I had a rough idea about what I was looking at.

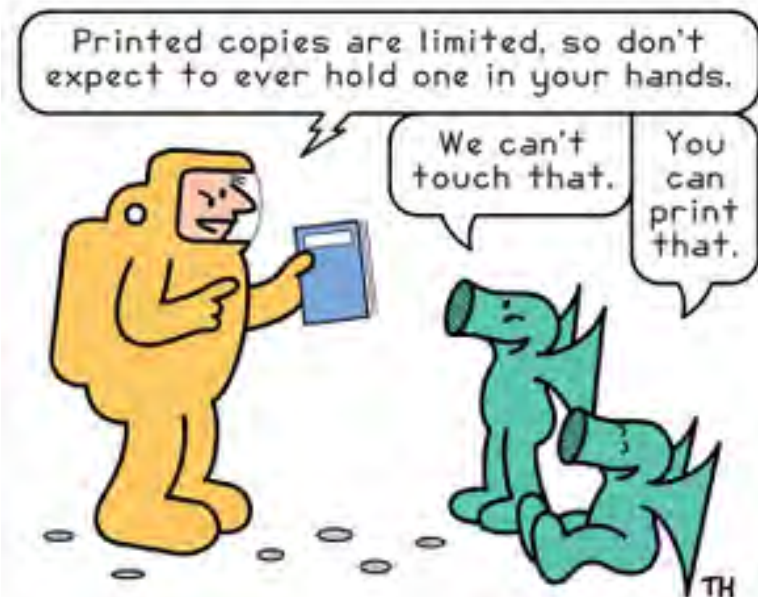
Having completed that process so quickly I was left with a couple of hours to kill. Why not take a wander around the city? I thought, so I strolled down Elizabeth Street past where McGills used to be, took a turn down Royal Arcade into Little Collins Street where I see that the old Coles store (with its magical cafeteria) used to be is now a hole in the ground, down a couple of arcades to Degraeves Street, which has changed remarkably since the days of Henry's Degraeves Tavern.

However, the legs are not what they used to be, so I tottered over to Flinders Street Station and caught **a random train to an undecided destination**, figuring that if I caught the train out of the city for twenty minutes I could then cross over to the other

side of the track and catch the returning train back into Flinders Street again. As it happened, the next departing train was to Glen Waverley, which is a line I don't think I've been on before. It turned out to be one of the lines running through Melbourne's leafy (even in winter) suburbs so it was a pleasant ride. After about 20 minutes we pulled into Glen Iris station so I got off, intending to catch the next train back into the city. I checked and the return train wasn't due for another ten minutes or so, so I decided to leave the station and what the area looked like. You wouldn't want to live in Glen Iris unless you had buckets of money — which is, of course, the same for most of Melbourne's leafy eastern suburbs. Strolling along looking at the shops I saw a tram up at the end of the shopping strip, no doubt waiting to make the return trip back to the city. So I changed my plans and got onto it instead for the trip back into the city.

The trip out to Glen Iris had taken about 20 minutes and the journey back to the city took the best part of three-quarters of an hour. On the other hand it was a lot more entertaining to view as a passenger passing through and the tram was not crowded until it got to St Kilda Road. I didn't notice the names of the strip shopping centres we ran through, but most of them would suck your credit card dry very quickly if you were inclined to shopping there. And in a couple of strips, you'd need to really like expensive women's clothing to do your shopping there. The other thing I noticed — well, I noticed quite a few things, but these two I remember. One was that there weren't too many vacant shops in the areas the tram ran through, in comparison to the poorer parts of Melbourne and Ballarat I've seen where Covid and the coming recession have had an effect for sure. The other was that I could see that tops of some remarkably gorgeous houses from the tram but almost every one has a tall brick wall separating the house from the street. (When I mentioned this at our lunch I thought it might be for privacy, but Sue pointed out that is probably more so for the noise, and having a big tram rumble past every few minutes would really need some kind of noise reduction to make those places habitable.)

Suddenly the tram was at Chapel Street and it felt like we were back again in the Melbourne I remember. They are doing a lot of work for the underground railway station they are building near the Shrine in St Kilda Road which seems to be disrupting the traffic, or perhaps the work that's been done for traffic calming and to keep cars out of Swanston Street is working because it seems very quiet there — well, relatively quiet — along that stretch of the road in comparison to what it was like when I last lived in Melbourne. Off I jumped at the Flinders Street Station, caught the soonest train around to Spencer Street (Southern Cross) Station and then out into Spencer Street to catch the tram down to Middle Park for lunch. As you will know, but perhaps others don't, a lot of the track follows the old St Kilda train line from the city. After you've battled your way through South Melbourne, it's a very nice run to Middle Park. What did surprise me was the number of excited-looking Asian faces on the tram. I thought they might be headed to the Casino but, no, they were headed to the South Melbourne Market which is, so Derrick told us, open on Wednesday. Apparently those markets are very popular with tourists.



Having lunch with Derrick, Sue, and David was immensely pleasant. It may well be that the last time we had eaten together was in the days of Degraives Tavern; I can assure you that the food, wine, and service have somewhat improved since the days of Henry and Gemma, though not as congenial as Henry could be. Sue said that she invited us all because we had birthdays around the same time, so that was the excuse, and if she has lunch with people around their birthdays it means she sees her friends at least once a year. That sounds like a good plan to me.

It was, of course, partly melancholy not having **Christine Ashby** and **Valma** there. This was compounded by reading, on the train back to Ballarat, **Joseph Nicholas's** letter about what he is doing after **Judith Hanna** died. I have to salute his bravery and energy in keeping the allotment that he and Judith put so much love and effort into. I don't know about Joseph, but I'm beginning to understand my declining physical strength, and know that gardening is not something that I can afford to do if there are other things that I also need or want to do. We spent a lot of time and money building a garden in the back yard that Valma could enjoy. I had to realise that I could not look after it by myself so I have to pay people to come and tend it for me. Joseph could probably do the work in a few hours, but I'm afraid I can't, and I don't want it to degenerate into a wilderness again.

What else? I seem to have chuntered on for a lot this time. *SFC* puts me into a reflective mood these days, partly a reflection on old friends and experiences and partly a reflection on all the interesting and exciting things that your correspondents are reading, listening to, and doing. I wish my life were quite so exciting. Of course, I'm planning a trip to Conflux in September and a trip to Corflu next March, so it's not all dullsville around here.

(21 July 2023)

One way and another I do consume a lot of cultural material, partly

by listening to a lot of radio (ABC Classic) during the day, watching two or three hours of screen diversion during the evening, and listening to two or three hours of audiobook during the later evening. What do I think about all of it? Not much, by which I don't mean that I don't like it, but more that I consume it without thinking about it or being too critical of it. For example, I recently consumed (listened to) **Chris Priest's *The Prestige***. What did I think about it? Only three things, which were: I enjoyed it, I was impressed by his writing skills (I wish I could write like that), and I wondered how long and how much effort it took him to devise the shape and content of the novel and how many drafts it had gone through to end up as such a complete package as it did.

As an aside here, yesterday I went out to Moorabbin Airport (three hours each way) to attend a Christmas event put on by the Aviation Historical Society of Australia. There is no easy connection between the Frankston railway line and the airport so the easiest thing to do is catch a taxi or Uber. You never know who is going to turn up when you order one, but I've come across a couple of interesting people so far. Last time I was driven back to the station by somebody from Mongolia and yesterday I was driven back by somebody from Nigeria who, when I asked him, would go only so far as to tell me he was a refugee. As we talked it came up that I was a historian and that I'd written a dozen or so books. He lit up, wanting to know how to write. He had some stories he wanted to write and didn't know how. He did not look at all happy when I told him that writing involves a lot of work and most of my published stuff goes through four or five drafts, and sometimes more, before it is readable. He thought that it should come out right the first time and was dismayed that good writing didn't. So I don't know whether or not he will do anything, but I told him that my first drafts were terrible, so his probably would be too.

Anyhow, back to *SFC*. Similar to listening to fiction, I heard a bit of the **Jordi Savall** version of **Mozart's *Requiem*** on ABC Classic the other day, and all I really thought about it was that it seemed so light and lively in comparison to some other versions you hear.

Likewise, last night I watched the latest **'Harry Potter' spin-off** on Netflix. What did I think about it? That its look was sort of late romantic and that its plot was overblown. Come to think of it, 'late romantic' and 'overblown' come to the same thing, don't they? It seems to me that most of the movies I watch on Disney or Netflix could happily be cut by at least half an hour, and simplified plotwise, to make them more compact and enjoyable. When I look at things like this movie and **Avatar: The Way of Water**, I think I'm mainly looking at a bunch of special effects artists showing off more than is necessary. I assume that they do it because they think, and probably know from the analytics, that people like that kind of thing.

And that just about plumbs the depths of my analytic abilities and interests. I'm no Rich Horton, with his ability to get into a story and expose all its glistening innards. What I liked about his article was the skill with which he assembled all the components and then displayed them so artfully. I suppose I was more interested in the form of his article than the content. I gather, from what he wrote, that he learned to do this kind of thing through university courses. I see the same kind of treatment in some of the material that you write with a sort of guided tour of the piece of writing you're analysing, showing all the points of interest you want us to note, then a kind of analysis based on the highlights pointed out, and then some kind of conclusion. All very erudite, informative, and so on, even entertaining if the writer feels that is worth throwing into the pot. It is not, however, the kind of thing that I find very rewarding because if I've read the piece I've probably acknowledged that I liked it, or didn't as the case may be, made a mental note (soon forgotten) or some interesting aspect, and gone on to some other mental exercise.

[*brg* That sounds more like the Bruce Gillespie of the 1970s and 1980s than Gillespie 2024. I'm finding it difficult to write more than one or two paragraphs about any piece of writing, movie, or piece of music. I feel more and more that the essence of what anybody wants to say about any work of art can be said in

a few words, and all the rest is decoration. It's five years since I've found subject matter for one of my 5000-word articles. Perhaps there will never be another.*]

As a consequence of all this, while I usually enjoy reading *SFC*, I often have little to say about it. All those reviews from **Colin Steele** are good to read, and make me feel that I should find some more time from somewhere to read more. **Anna Creer's** writing is interesting, too, but I am even less likely to read crime than I am to read stf. So, as with what I wrote above, issues of *SFC* like this one entertain me more for their form than their content, and so I find that I have little to say about them.

The only thing that did leap out and attract my attention was **Kim Huett's** piece on **Currawong Press** in Australia during the war. This was something I'd been thinking about as a historian, and Kim has pushed the story of what happened a little further than I do in my history of fandom in Australia. Interesting too is Kim's summary (p. 43) of what had happened to cause the emergence of Currawong. This is probably where the training I got at university differs from yours (and some of your contributors) in that I cannot help but look at those few paragraphs critically and think that if this were an essay I had to mark there would be a few comments and queries scrawled in the margin in my illegible writing. Not that Kim is wrong in the historical facts, just that I thought his interpretation of them was somewhat undercooked.

I found another article in the *West Australian*, published a couple of days later, which referred to the Canadian High Commission's comments on the Australian embargo on materials from North America. The comments shed some additional light on the subject. I also found a shortish article somewhere else on the poor state of the Pound Sterling in March 1940. That might also have had some bearing on the Australian Government's decision to limit imports of many things from non-Sterling countries.

It would be quite interesting to dig up the original Cabinet decision

to embargo so much non-Sterling stuff. In the good old days I would simply have gone to the Archives and pulled out the folder of decisions from 1940 to see if it's there. (It might not have been there, because back then it was not uncommon for a Minister to turn up to a cabinet meeting with a minute written by one of his officials that he'd read out and which the other ministers would agreed to. So all there is as the record of decision is a minute with a notation in the margin saying it was agreed to, with or without changes. So you have to go through departmental files to find it, and that takes a lot of time and effort.) These days, however, finding that kind of thing on the WWW is much more difficult because it is almost as if you have to know the details of what you're looking for before you can find it, whereas most of the time you don't know what you're looking for until you find it.

Anyhow, this is not something worth following up. The simple fact is that the Australian Government did impose an embargo upon the importation of a great many things from non-Sterling countries, most notably the United States, and this had a profound

effect on the development of sf and fandom in Australia as a result. A very interesting area of historical research would be to look into the effect of say, the embargo on importation of 'reapers and binders' or 'high tension ignition coils', both of which were also mentioned in the same news release, on other aspects of Australian life during and after the war. Now, if I were still an academic and had a postgraduate student wanting a topic, here it is.

There is one technicality that did annoy me in Kim's article, a small point but one that did annoy me a lot. Kim writes that 'it was decided by the federal parliament to introduce legislation...' 'No!', I would have written in the margin, 'the Commonwealth parliament passed the legislation, the "government" (meaning Ministers of the Crown) introduced the legislation to Parliament, where it was passed'. It is, of course, more complicated than that, but it probably summarises how I think about such things.

(11 December 2023)

JERRY KAUFMAN

PO Box 25075, Seattle WA 98165, USA

I've read *SFC* 112, though I only skimmed **John Hertz's Chicon report**. (I may have read this in *Vanamonde* earlier this year.) I was at the convention but didn't see any of the panels that John was on. I'll mention that John's report of the Fan Fund party (really just a DUFF party but with some support from Fanac.org) lacks something: me. Lesleigh and I organised the event. John writes about the '1946' panels: he was on two, if I recall correctly, while I was on one about fandom in 1946.

The tribute articles about **Marty Cantor** and **Martin Morse Wooster** were eye-openers, as there were many aspects of their lives that were unknown to me.

You talk about *Light from Uncommon Stars* and *The Cartographers*, among others. Both books have been choices of a book club I'm in. We discussed the first several months ago, and the latter is the subject of our next meeting. I'm entirely in agreement with you on *Stars*; at the halfway point in *The Cartographers*, I'm wondering who will play Nell and Felix in the movie version.

(11 August 2023)

In the Landscape version of *SFC* 113, the photo of **Chris Couch and Lesleigh Luttrell** has disappeared, with only white space and the caption showing.

[*brg* In many years of creating the Landscape edition in Ventura and Adobe Acrobat, this has never happened to me until now, so I didn't know about it until you alerted me. It happened

Jiant Shoulders



A Fanthology for Corflu Pangloss—October 21-23, 2022

again in a later on-screen fanzine, but I think I've worked out the answer to the problem. Fortunately the photo of Chris and Lesleigh does show correctly in the print copy and the online Portrait version.*]

Marilyn Holt and Cliff Wind missed the ferry we'd planned on, but that gave us the time to have a quick lunch; they caught the following boat, and we reached the Mountaineers Club just at the time Astrid Bear had announced, 2 p.m., as the beginning of **Celebration of Life for Greg Bear**.

Tables with light snacks and beverages lined one end of the hall, and a montage of photos were being projected at the other end. People who hadn't seen one another for months or years (some unrecognisable under Covid masks and grey hair) greeted old friends and began to catch up. Two displays stood along one side, one showing the obit and appreciations from *Locus* Magazine, the other filled with reproductions of artwork Greg had painted (all of professional quality, a surprise to me).

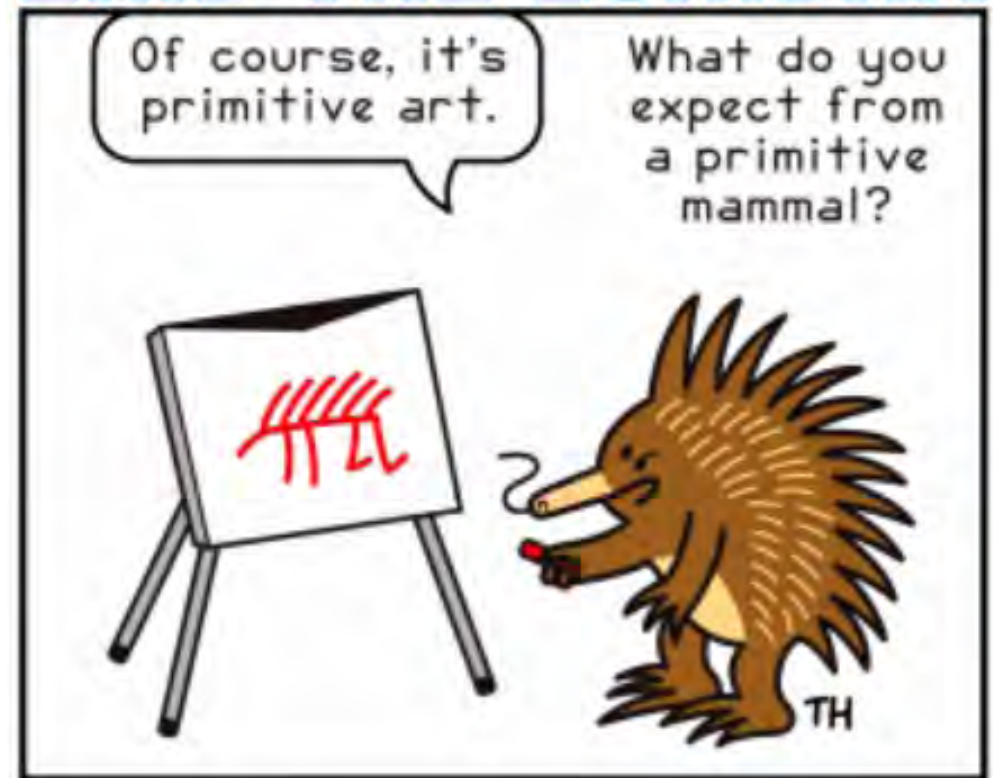
Soon **Astrid** called us to order, and with great self-possession read a eulogy, choking up briefly as she read a few lines of poetry (if memory serves). Greg's daughters, his sister-in-law (I think), and niece all spoke, too, but were too emotional to complete their thoughts. Two of Greg's old friends, **Paul Sammon** and **David Clark**, recalled youthful and other adventures (we met them both later), and a couple of others spoke.

After 4 p.m., many people left, and those of us still around decamped to a nearby restaurant and brewery for refreshment. The place was up a storey, with outdoor seating, a street level pavilion, and a good view of Lake Washington and the many boaters enjoying our clear warm weather. We hung out awhile, listening to more stories, then drove Marilyn and Cliff back to Edmonds to catch their ferry home.

A good sad day. Mixed emotions all around.

(4 July 2023)

ENID THE ECHIDNA



I try/Like a song I can hear playing right in my ear/But I can't sing it I can't help listening.' That's 'For A Dancer' from *Late for the Sky*, one of his many songs about his late wife — but of course they resonate for all of us.

Our neighbour died recently, unexpectedly, and we went to his funeral and got reacquainted with his son Alex. Hadn't seen much of either of them in years — we went to Alex's bar mitzvah and now he is a grown man of 31. I hugged him and told him about my late friend Bill. I think about Bill almost every day — not morbidly, but just because the Sports section of the newspaper reminds me of things I want to talk to him about. He is alive in

We went to dinner the other night with **Andy Hooper**, **Carrie Root**, and **Ulrika O'Brien**, and I bugged Andy and Carrie about the hard copy of *Jiants Shoulders* you wanted (because you're in it). As there are still corrections to be made, an article by Rob Hansen to be added, payouts to be improved, and possibly a replacement or two of pieces Andy deems unrepresentative of a person's best writing, Ulrika offered to help re-do the layout in Publisher (Carrie had used Word originally), there will be a new edition, and that's what I think you'll get.

Of course, I could settle down with our printer some day soon and print out a hard copy of what's currently posted at the Corflu website and mail that to you.

(6 December 2023)

[*brg* You've done your best! Your fellow Seattleites move in mysterious ways. Thanks for the digital version you did send me (cover shown here). My friendly printer bloke in Greensborough could do a hard copy for me of the version that was ready at Corflu — but that would take the psychological pressure off Andy to produce the Final Edition.*]

KENNEDY GAMMAGE
1234 Upas Street,
San Diego CA 92103, USA

Bruce, isn't it strange that we're all in the same boat? Must be a rather large craft, maybe *Titanic*-sized or larger. Big enough for a whole cohort of really cool, really fun, and worldly (otherworldly?) SF fans. Cheers!

That's a lovely cover to *SFC 112*: **“Charles and Nic Taylor, July 2019”. Photo taken by Maggie Miranda, at the hilltop town of Loreto Aprutino, Italy.** Jackson Browne sings: 'Don't know what happens when people die/Can't seem to grasp it as hard as

my heart and in my thoughts. Same with your many friends I'm sure.

Your tribute to **Lee Harding**: I live in America and have heard of him. A BNF for sure. Good-looking family. Thanks for all these photos! They really capture these warm and wonderful people.

Ditmar's tribute mentions **Charles Harness**. I have a paperback of *The Rose* about 30 feet from where I'm sitting. I like these little synchronicities. That's a funny picture of **Lee Harding** and **John Foyster**!

Jack Dann — he's a good friend of your group. I have a number of his books and I see I have only scratched the surface! He wrote some things with **Barry Malzberg**, one of my favourites. Yeah, Ditmar's photos of Lee are priceless. Those big black hornrims and sly smile!

Charlie Taylor wearing his *Tales of Topographic Oceans* tee-shirt! I'm sure we would have been friends — I still listen to that album a lot. **Nic**, sorry for your loss!

Leigh and Valma ... I'm so sorry. So many long-time friends and family down. Hard to know what to say, right? To their living friends: they will live on in you.

Your tribute to **Jenny Bryce**. Thanks for her many great book reviews and photos of their covers, most new to me.

Bruce, where is that elaborate library with the circular staircase on page 73?

[*brg* I don't know. One of those inspiring photos that people post on Facebook without offering details.*]

I had mixed feelings about ***Everything Everywhere All At Once***. Entertaining but frenetic *and* a total ripoff of *The Matrix* IMHO.

Think Jamie Lee Curtis was good in it?

Ha ha! How come you rank movies? What a fool's errand! (I take that back; yer no fool; this is just a pet-peeve of mine.) In fact, I'm a hater — I hate **Rolling Stone magazine** and their dumb-ass lists: the hundred best rock guitarists. Really? Is Keith Richard better than Pete Townshend? Is Jann Wenner smarter than Ben Fong-Torres? No — they're both morons. You should list the rock guitarists either alphabetically or chronologically.

Wait. **Perry Middlemiss's *Perryscope***? Is that available on eFanzines? Sign me up!

[*brg* I find it easy to rank my favourite anythings — but have long since given up talking about the best anythings. That's for the individual to decide.

Don't you pick your fanzine reading matter from the fanzines listed on Bill Burns' *efanzines.com* website? That's where you will find Perry's *Perryscope* and David Grigg's *Megaloscope*.

You can also find copies of my fanzines back to *SFC 76* on *efanzines.com* — and all duplicated copies back to 1969, thanks to Joe Siclari and Edie Stern on *fanac.org* and Mark Olson and Perry Middlemiss, who scanned the originals.*]

Rolling Stones' ***El Mocambo '77***? Thanks for the tip!

Yes, you and I are both **Neil Young** fans. We just saw him at the Rady Shell on San Diego Harbor. Lovely night — he was solo and in fine voice. He's 77. Played both keyboards and guitars, acoustic and electric (loud and distorted!) Kept asking us 'What's your favourite planet?' I was thinking, Jupiter? Saturn? I think he was looking for Earth!

John Hertz does bad-ass Worldcon reviews! He goes, so I don't

have to. I might *like to*. But it ain't happening. You republish an amazing H. T. Webster cartoon, '**The Idea Dynamo**' from 1923. My folks have this great hardback book that I've been enjoying since I was a boy: **The Best of H. T. Webster**.

SFC 113: Ditmar's '**Overhang City**' cover illo is beautiful. A change of pace in this issue. We have done the tributes to our fallen friends and can redirect our attention to more sercon pursuits, starting with **Daniel King**'s excellent article about **Michael Coney**.

Mats Dannewitz Linder writes compellingly about **cli-fi**. Many of these I've read and enjoyed: Blish, Le Guin, Ballard. My friend Julianne gave me a copy of **Ministry of the Future** and I'm looking forward to it. Stephenson, Crichton.

Colin Steele's cool book list: I like the idea of a **Christopher Tolkien festschrift**. He did so much to move his father's work into the twenty-first century. Look at those amazing cover paintings by **Ted Nasmith** and **Alan Lee** on page 31. Those are meaningful images for me from my youth: the Falls of Rauros and the Fall of Númenor. The latter was just a back story in *LotR*, fully fleshed out later — or at least published later. Maybe Tolkien had the whole thing fixed in his mind the whole time. That was some mind!

Colin reviews biographies of **Roald Dahl and Patricia Neal**. She was the matriarch of **The Waltons**, a hugely popular TV show of my youth. She was a stroke survivor.

As part of the LoCs, I liked **Dennis Callegari**'s spectacular 'Dirigible from the Earth to the Moon' illo! Thanks for the letter from **William Breiding**, with the two covers from **Portable Storage** by **Joe Pearson** and **carl juarez**. You and I were both in *Portable Storage*, which is kind-of where I 'met' you. Of course I had always heard of you — but now suddenly because of William and *PS* I am part of the *SFC* family in 2023. On the opposite shore of the world's largest ocean. Say thank ya. (2 September 2023)

'Stop dying, everybody! Please!' I second the motion. You know, it's a very strange thing. I have a large and very close group of college friends, fraternity brothers from U.C. Berkeley — who started dying about 25 years ago. Two in a small plane crash, followed by heart attacks, suicides — you name it. More than a dozen, I believe. We were actually thinking of consulting an actuary to see if it was out of the ordinary. But good news — no one has croaked in a while. I hope your many friends also call a moratorium.

Sadly my reading list has very little overlap with yours and Tony Thomas's and Colin Steele's et al. but I did very much enjoy **Ray Nayler**'s **The Mountain and the Sea**, which included a very frightening evocation of China's worldwide predatory squid fleet.

I loved seeing **Asteroid City** in the movie theatre. ScarJo was particularly good in **Wes Anderson**'s huge cast. Actually let me mention a memoir not on anyone's list (though you may have read and reviewed it years ago): **Phil Collins' Not Dead Yet**. As a Genesis fan I inhaled the book with gusto after finding it in someone's Little Free Library in Pacific Beach. One thing I learned from the book was that for more than a decade he was one of the biggest pop stars in the world. Besides fronting Genesis he had all those solo albums and collaborative projects. His third LP **No Jacket Required** sold 25 million records! That's the one with 'Sussudio' and 'One More Night'. He toured constantly all over the world. That's why he kept getting divorced. And the final section about his descent into alcoholism was shocking. Enough to put you off your pint, mate. Well, yours possibly — I'm still loving our strong Cali IPAs.

My wife has that **Richard Osman The Last Devil to Die** book on her nightstand but I haven't read it. We mainly read different books. I recently enjoyed **E. Jean Carroll's Hunter Thompson** bio, **Karl Ove Knausgaard's** latest **The Wolves of Eternity**, and have re-read several of **Frederik Pohl's** Gateway books.

Sorry to skip around from books to films and back but I'd like to see **Blow Up** again. **David Hemmings** was also great as the narrator of **Rick Wakeman's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth***.

Love the **Dennis Callegari** illo 'Leonardo's Flying Omnibus' on page 100.

(26 March 2024)

LLOYD PENNEY

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Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

Many thanks for *SFC* 113! I must recant on one statement I made ... **CanCon** in Ottawa is most certainly *not* dead. I guess that, like a particular parrot, it was just restin'. We've looked into it. Given my new standing with ***Amazing Stories***, I thought we might attend to be a part of things, but the membership costs and the hotel rates mean this convention is priced right out of our range. All I can say is that missing CanCon will allow us to keep saving for other events in 2024, like the NASFiC in Buffalo, New York, and the World Fantasy Convention in Niagara Falls, New York, both just down the highway, and much more affordable.

(2 July 2023)

I have a number of **Michael Coney** books on my bookshelf, and have enjoyed them all, but will also say that when Michael Coney lived in Sidney, British Columbia, I lived just down the highway in Victoria, BC. I had read that he was up in Sidney at the time, and I think there was an article about his as a writer in a local newspaper.

I have a lot of **Tolkien** books and books about Tolkien, and as the *Great Tales*, the number of books never ends. And, given my interest, that's a good thing, in spite of the fact I will probably

never read them all. I remember a massive Tolkien artwork exhibit in Toronto some years ago, with work by **Alan Lee** and **Ted Nasmith** ... I didn't want to leave. I have not seen the ***Rings of Power*** TV series, nor am I especially attracted to it.

The Film Memoirs section reminds me that I recently picked up a copy of **Carrie Fisher's *Wishful Drinking*** — I am only through the introduction, and into Chapter 1.

At my own heart of hearts, I would prefer paper over electrons, but it is easier to store PDF files than paperzines. I am still wrapping my heart around the idea of giving my zine collection away. Meanwhile, if my entire collection were digitised, it would fit on a remote drive that would fit in my pocket.

Cory Doctorow did indeed live in Toronto for a while (actually born in Toronto), and one time, we were invited by his girlfriend at the time to come and visit them in their apartment in an old warehouse. Huge bookshelves, great company. He and his family now live in Los Angeles, but he's back in Toronto whenever he can make it.

Oooh, a feature letter! Thank you! It is about a year old, we did celebrate my 64th and our 40th, and I am now about ten months away from retirement. **Rich Lynch** did start a new zine to make comments on the locs he received. Canadian literary conventions will continue, namely **When Words Collide** in Calgary, and **CanCon** in Ottawa, but it looks like fannish conventions are gone, unless some local fans can unite their efforts and bring **Ad Astra** back. That is happening right now ... I have introduced the two who have been working towards this goal, and together, I hope they will succeed.

I will take the opportunity to promote a project if which I was a part of from the beginning, a new book by **Tom Easton** and **Frank Wu** called ***ESPionage: Regime Change***, what they call spy-fi, a real page-turner, and some fun reading. It's the latest book in the

Amazing Selects series, and it will soon be available from Amazon in download, paperback, and hardcover.

(22 August 2023)

Thanks for *SFC* 112. Lost friends indeed. I've met only a few of the people memorialised in this zine. The rest are people of my knowledge that I never got to meet, usually because of bad luck, or great distances. **Lee Harding, Valma Brown, Eve Harvey, Charles Taylor, Peter Ryan, Broderick Smith, Denny Lien, Jennifer Bryce** ... I wish I'd had the chance to meet you all.

I did meet **Martin Morse Wooster** a few times at Worldcons. As you say, he was not easy to talk to. He was often abrupt and perhaps unfriendly, but he was best known for his correspondence, and the body of his work. No one should ever have to die the way he did.

I knew **Marty Cantor**, too. Some years later, Yvonne and I were Fan GoHs at **Loscon 39**, Marty transported us to various places around the LA metropolis, and to the LASFS Clubhouse, where we marvelled at the place itself. Marty was a great host, and we chatted with many members.

I would love to get my hands on the complete **David Suchet Poirot** series. We used to watch an episode of Suchet's *Poirot*, plus one of **Jeremy Brett's Holmes**, with a giant pot of tea and a sweet pastry or two. I miss those days, but I believe I could download most of the episodes through YouTube.

[*brg* The British box set of the complete David Suchet Poirot episodes was still available recently in Australia, at a reasonable price. You should be able to buy it in Canada.*]

Anything recorded at the **El Mocambo** is great stuff. The club shut

down for some time, but was revived by a local eccentric millionaire, bless his heart, and the EIMo continues on to this day. Yes, that's the one in Toronto.

(3 September 2023)

I am taking a well-deserved break from this busy (and extremely fattening) Christmas season to write a quick loc on *SF Commentary* 114. I need this break, and frankly, so does my wallet. (Thank you for comments on **Yvonne's birthday** ... we had a wonderful breakfast this morning, and will be subsisting on bread and water, without the bread, for the rest of the day.)

North Americans should be **Covid-aware**, but we are not. I see the term 'post-pandemic' everywhere, but XCovid is still going strong in some parts of the world. Yvonne and I have had six shots each, and some people we know have had seven. I think we will be getting the shots for some time, but the era of free shots is about done, and getting more shots could be expensive. We are looking into RSV shots, but each of those is about Can\$200.

Could AI replace artists and writers? Very possibly. I had a lucrative editorial gig with a British SF writer, but I have lost that to AI, so I am wary of it. I am hoping that my former client will become my future client, and he will find the current shortcomings of AI, but that may be dreaming. As long as AI becomes a tool we can safely use, I'd be okay with it, but how others could misuse it definitely worries me. The artwork on pages 4 to 10 look great, as long as it is original artwork, maybe with an AI assist.

Something tells me I should get Yvonne that book on **Alan Rickman's** diaries. She's always been a fan of Rickman's, especially for the 'Harry Potter' movies.

(19 December 2023)



things change to accommodate the needs of the normies with such speed, yet anyone else has to put up with it.)

I have had some recent good news — I've been approached by a Japanese record label, who will be releasing **Dub Music from Rural Southern Australia**, the current album, on vinyl as well as doing a compilation of my other work. It's going to be an ongoing relationship, so it's a dream come true for me, really. They're pretty high-falutin' as well, which makes me look respectable ...

I've had about as much interest in my music as I have in my writing from the mainstream Australian media and public institutions, so I feel like a horse that has bolted the gate. The thought that I will never have to suck up to all those middlebrow media mediocrities makes me very happy indeed.

We're in Pascoe Vale these days, which I think I told you ... our oldest dog died recently, having almost reached 17 years of age, but this was anticipated so we had already acquired a new puppy, a border collie poodle cross called **Taiga**, and there was a six-month overlap. While **Luffy** may have passed, his pack still lives on, which I think of as a way of compensating for the cruel shortness of their lifespans. Taiga himself is quite a handful!

(23 June 2023)

TARAL WAYNE

245 Dunn Ave., Apt 2111, Toronto, ONT M6K 1S6, Canada

Today was **Canada Day**, or as we called it as kids, 'Firecracker Day'. Officially it was Dominion Day, but it was renamed Canada Day some years ago. June first was supposedly the day some papers or other were signed ... perhaps the *British North America Act* in the 1850s, or perhaps the repatriation of the BNA more recently, or then again Pierre Elliott Trudeau's birthday. Just kidding about that last one. PET was the current prime minister's

CHRIS GREGORY

30 Stennis St., Pascoe Vale VIC 3044

I've been working on music as best I can with my back being what it is. (I'm on a disability pension because of it ... I have very bad neuropathy. So the Covid years actually made things better for me; suddenly things that I was forced to drag my poor carcass outside to do could suddenly be managed online ... it's funny how

father, and was PM back in the 1970s, where he was sort of the Beatlemania of his day. He was also hated with a passion by ultra-conservatives, because he tried to nationalise the oil industry, robbing all those poooooor little rich oil-company stockholders of their well-deserved ownership of the country's most important asset. This was PET's only real failure ... the PLR-OCSH still own the oil lock-stock-and-barrels. So that's why the fireworks.

(2 July 2023)

WILLIAM BREIDING

**PO Box 10726,
Albuquerque NM 87184, USA**

Looks like another fabulous issue. Looking forward to the **Michael Coney** piece — I've been interested in his work, but for some reason have never delved into his books. And he seems primarily overlooked by the critics. The only place to find Coney reviews are in ancient issue of **Foundation** when **Peter Nicholls** was editing it. So you have a rare piece. Thank you for finding **Daniel King** and convincing him to allow you to publish it!

(2 July 2023)

Gail and I are still orienting ourselves to our new and very beautiful environment here in Albuquerque (see change of address above). We arrived on 23 October on a beautiful autumn day. Since then it has already snowed three times, the last leaving the Sandia Mountains covered deep in snow. It did warm back up, though, and today it looks to be in the mid-50sF, pleasant for December at 5000 feet.

We have spent much of our time in the last month trying to squeeze our four-room house in Tucson into a two-room casita (in-law), a rental that we were lucky to find. Although we are still in the high desert, because of the Rio Grande we are essentially living in a large riparian area (see attached photos) and it is quite

**Photos on next two pages: Where William and Gail live.
Below: William Breiding. (Photo: Gary Mattingley.)**









beautiful. But drive a few miles and you are in the desert. New Mexico is beautiful. And we have turquoise licence plates on our little Honda hatchback.

We had to make some difficult decisions about what to get rid of to fit into our new smaller home, but it was all for the best as we both approach 70 (Gail 69, and I, 67) to get rid of as much as possible. I still have far too many books. But now that I am retired I will actually have the time to read a lot of them. Recently finished **Lauren Groff's** first novel, ***The Monsters of Templeton***, which I quite enjoyed, with its revisionist history of **James Fenimore Cooper's** works and love of Upstate New York. Am now ploughing through **Dozois' *Year's Best Science Fiction 2001***. Of course you can never agree entirely with his choices, but I find him far more consistent to my tastes than **Jonathan Strahan's *Year's Best***, which I have found incredibly bland and will no longer pursue.

I am putting **Michael Bishop's *Brittle Innings*** at the top of my To Be Read pile, crossing fingers that it will be as good as I hope it to be. He will be missed.

(6 December 2023)

CASEY WOLF

South Vancouver, BC V5M 4P5, Canada

It's too bad that **Michael Coney's** work is pretty much forgotten. I haven't read ***Brontomek!*** either, or seen a copy. I confess I am curious. Apart from the interview I did with him, I don't think I will be writing anything about him. I write so little these days. You are welcome to reprint the interview. I conducted it with him in the last weeks before he died. See <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/michaels-spyglass-an-interview-with-mike-coney/>

I'm glad that you and Elaine got to enjoy ***Friends Come in Boxes*** recently. Anytime I come across one of his novels and give it a read I am always happy that I did so. I really like Michael's *mind*.

I did know Michael, although not as a close friend. We hung about in the same writing circles and at VCon, where he would stage plays with our friends as ***The Lonely Cry Theater***, which I was occasionally seconded to. It was readers' theatre and very fun. A few years after his death I started up the **Pallahaxi Players Readers Theater** (at VCon) in honour of his efforts and his books. I think we only lasted three or four years before **VCon** closed down because of Covid. It has never reemerged, due entirely, from what I can reckon, to a dearth of energetic fans. Or at least numerous and very focused ones. It is so sad that we have finally lost our local con. I miss it a lot.

(6 July 2023)

I'm glad you're getting a good response to the PDF editions.

Whenever I get one I open it up and plan to read it later and then forget it completely. This is just how my memory is going these days. This afternoon I noticed that the gate was open and I went out to close it and was distracted by something and never did close it. I didn't remember it again until I heard it shut an hour or so later. If something isn't right in front of me I can't remember it. I still have good intentions and hope I'll be able to make the shift for *SFC*, but right now my priority is my health and what I need to do most is rest. So it's rather silly that I am writing you at one in the morning or whenever it is. I'll wrap it up as quickly as I can and hit the sack.

I am surprised that Michael Coney's *Friends Come in Boxes* was not published in Britain. I thought all his earlier books were published when he was there. Now I am curious.

(23 July 2023)

[*brg* This proves to be incorrect. A friend on Facebook has recently put up covers of several different editions of *Friends Come in Boxes*, at least one of which was a British edition. I've only ever seen the DAW edition.*]

I don't know if I knew and had forgotten or if I just learned from your zine that **Jennifer Bryce** had died, but I was very sorry to hear it. It does seem that at our age there are an awful lot of memorials to read and write.

I am not doing very well physically at the moment. I have some pinched nerves in my pelvis that offered me anything from mild and persistent to excruciating pain in my left leg. The good news is it isn't my back this time, as I feared it might be. It's making sleep even harder than normal and I am all over the place sleep-wise and very tired.

(27 July 2023)

It has been a shockingly long time since I have written to you. I see I didn't even thank you for putting my article in your beautiful magazine. (That foolish thing that always tells me I will answer later the emails I want to spend some actual time on – and then I forget to reply all.) Thank you!

This has been a really hard year! I guess the last few have been harder than usual, dealing with illness and precipitous (I am thinking of a graph here) overwork, my brother dying. Even the wonderful things I was putting energy into this year, though I have no regrets about doing them, about doing them, were very depleting.

Since I got back from Ireland the last time I have largely been in bed, or so it feels. Less so in the last month, but still it's a slog. However, I have signed up to a drawing class, of all things. When I was very young I used to draw and paint a bit — I drew a lot and I painted a bit — but I never learned any real technique. And now I don't draw at all. But I have a friend who wants to learn how to draw and paint and since I have often thought of doing that, and I do like spending time with her, we've decided to take a class together. It's at a good enough time of day that it won't be super hard on me to do it, and I am looking forward to thinking about something outside of the usual and getting more out of my thoughts and into my senses.

As for me writing fannishly, the desire is still there, but my intention this year is to try to stop taking on projects (unless I find the creative juices moving again, in which case I wouldn't mind writing some poems or a short story or two) and step back from much of the work that I do. I want to spend my last years, however many they be, in a more relaxed way.

SFC 114 looks good, by the way. I have done a scan of the magazine and will try to remember to read it. (You know me. If a book isn't right in front of me I forget that it exists, and I don't do very well with e-books, anyway. But I will try.)

I am glad to see some green in my garden, made more lush looking because of the rain. Our winter was briefly terrible — starting on the day I was trying to fly out and finishing before I got home nine weeks later — and so the bay laurel, the ivies, and a few other perennials have died. But enough has survived that there is still beauty.

(20 April 2024)

BEN PEEK

Somewhere in NSW

I've been reading **Robert Chambers' *The King in Yellow***. I hadn't read it before, and managed to find one of the many PoD copies online that wasn't too ugly. I was curious because it has a high reputation and every year you see someone putting out some anthology relating to the book. Got to say, though, it's pretty forgettable so far. '**The Repairer of Reputations**' is all right, but what follows is pretty ordinary, so much so that you might say it was just bad. Anyhow, I mentioned this online, and people have come out to tell me how wrong I am and how the man is a genius and I suppose after I'm finished I might start a little fire for all the geniuses I've not loved enough.

(4 July 2023)

MATTHEW DAVIS

15 Impney Close, Church Hill North, Redditch B98 9LZ, UK

Bad-ish news, good-ish news.

The bad-ish news is that earlier this year I started to type up and collate thematic notes and relevant quotations on/from **Fritz Leiber** (at the same time that I was finally typing up other assorted orts and thoughts I'd scribbled on bits of papers over the years). After a couple of days of this I thought I'll organise this before I go any further with typing, then save it all elsewhere for

safekeeping. Which thought immediately provoked my computer to comprehensively die — the hard disk dying beyond the point of my IT engineer brother-in-law being able to even attempt reclamation. This annoyed and dispirited me, as you may imagine. Luckily I distrust IT enough that I hadn't crossed out or disposed of any of my notes, which I returned to a large cardboard box for another much later day.

The good-ish news is that your email arrived just as I finished reading a whole tranche of material (American writers and books — male, white — whom I'd always meant to read, or had read decades ago, or just books I'd bought ages ago and never got around to) and was just about to start on the subsequent tranche of books/ writers (American, white, female, etc, etc). (Feel free to guess at the nature of tranches 3, 4, and 5.) But my nephew will be down in a couple of weeks when school lets out and allergies were already starting to kick me in my ability to concentrate, so I wasn't quite looking to dive in again.

So your email came at an opportune time. I've dragged the papers out and am starting to transcribe again — on an awfully rickety desktop computer, saving recurrently to multiple locations online and to memory sticks. Progress of a kind.

But I have no entitlement to Leiber. If anyone has questions and I can remember what I thought when I was thinking about Leiber I'm more than willing to share, or direct to where information may be found. For instance, I think there's a really fascinating feminist reading against Leiber to be done, but I'm certainly not the person to do it.

As far as **Leiber and chess**, there's a fascinating tally of Leiber stories (in detail even to just those casually mentioning chess), his recorded matches, even his state rankings: http://billwall.phpwebhosting.com/articles/fritz_leiber.htm

(4 July 2023)



Alan White: Untitled.

HENRY GASKO

119 Moroney Street, Bairnsdale VIC 3875

We are both fine and settling in **Paynesville**. If you haven't caught up with the news, we sold our house in Wallan and have purchased a new one almost immediately in Bairnsdale. The plan is that Emily and Ollie and Finley will live there for a while (two to three years). That will give them a chance to sell their current place, which will give them the money to start building their dream home on a block north of Bairnsdale. Otherwise they were never going to have enough money to do so. And in the meantime we will continue to live in our onsite van in Paynesville. We have been here for so long that it feels like home, though we are looking forward to moving into an actual house again sometime in the future.

In other news, I will probably be going to Canada again in mid-August for about six weeks, so returning near the end of September. I'll be staying with my Mum who is now 92, as well as visiting friends in and around Toronto and then a few days in Vancouver. When I get back, Judy has her second knee replacement scheduled for the beginning of October. So that will mean she is going to be recovering until about Christmas. That will be both knees and one hip — she says the other hip is okay. So we might be able to get back to doing some stuff again. I on the other hand am fine and have no complaints to speak of.

We have been pretty busy with first cleaning up and selling the old house and now buying and settling all the little things that need to be done for the new house. As a result I have not done any writing at all this year. And with the trip to Canada and then Judy's operation and recovery, I suspect that this year will be a write-off. But I am now pretty sure that I can pick it up again without too much trouble.

Hope that everything is fine with yourself and Elaine. Thanks again for the dinner a few months ago (and the catch-up with Carey Handfield). Is your leg getting better? Also, I have started reading

Project Hail Mary, which both you and Carey recommended. Not much of a story, given the vast amount of science he is trying to shoe into it, not leaving any room for tension or plot or character development.

I am also in a writers' group in Bairnsdale, and have established communications with a couple of overseas writers (a woman in Seattle, and a Texan living in Berlin) and am exchanging stories with them. I have also signed up for a six-month creative writing with **Curtin University**, starting in November. So I am still determined to get back to some serious writing in the future.

(4 July 2023)

KEN SAUNDERS

Somewhere in USA

I very much enjoyed the issue, particularly the well-researched article by **Mats Linder** on **climate fiction**. Please pass on my compliments to him. He did an excellent job of unearthing the early and prescient works on the subject. It is curious to see that he found so little fiction from the viewpoint of the global warming deniers. He notes that there has not been funding for such fictional efforts by fossil-fuel think tanks, PR people, and Rupert Murdoch's minions, whose purpose is to obfuscate climate science. Perhaps that is reflective of their attitude regarding the importance of literature and fiction. The tobacco industry paid Hollywood for decades to have characters smoke in the movies, but I guess singing the praises of burning coal is hard to work in as a film product placement. I was not surprised to read that **Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle** had written a climate-change-denying novel in the 1990s and that, as Mats discovered, in it science fiction fans help save the world. I had the misfortune to read **Footfall** by that duo in the 1980s, a puerile book in which the world is (vainly?) saved by a handful of science fiction authors (aided in part by the mighty world-saving US armed forces of course).

Of the more recent climate novels, the only one I've read so far is **Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry of the Future***. For all its worthy intent, if I had to judge it as a novel, I would say it is a mediocre one— but perhaps I'm not the intended audience. I thought the characters were un- engaging, the dialogue often weak, and the plotting unlikely in places. There were many lively ideas in the book about potential climate action but I'd rather read about such things in a *New Scientist* article than have it explained to me by one of his (sometimes irritating) characters. I also thought the novel was utterly naïve regarding how world governments would respond to eco- terrorism.

(6 July 2023)

I've recently finished the first draft of a comedy science-fiction novel. At this point, it is a long way from even getting to the stage of being rejected by publishers. If it is all right with you, in the draft, there is a passing mention of one character having had an article published in *SF Commentary* in the early 2000s. I can take it out if you would prefer, make it a fictional SF magazine. He is a sympathetic character but with his head in the clouds (or outer space in this case.)

(6 December 2023)

[*brg* We science fiction fans always welcome a Tuckerism. A Tuckerism is a name placement in somebody's novel, preferably if the character described bears no relation to the person Tuckerised — named after Wilson (Bob) Tucker, who often Tuckerised his friends in his novels.*]

DANIEL KING

420 Spencer Road, Thornlie WA 6108

Thanks for the copy of *SFC*, which has just arrived. I'm pleased you gave my article prime billing, although I doubt that will mean anyone will read it, much less comment on it.

I was surprised to note the reference to **Richmal Crompton**, an author I always used to enjoy. My favourite children's author, however, was **Enid Blyton**. Interestingly, I've been re-reading a huge number of Enid Blyton books, and it's amazing how well they hold up, and how hard it is to put them down once you start reading. My favourite series was always her '**Mystery**' series, especially when the kids would play hilarious tricks on the stupid policeman Mr Goon (whose name, incidentally and interestingly, predates the *Goon Show*). Every time I see on the news some cop pontificating about 'male person' instead of 'man' or 'canine squad' instead of 'dog squad' I think of Mr Goon. Blyton's '**Barney**' **Adventure Series** was also one I really liked, and also the '**Adventure**' series (*The Island of Adventure* was the one I liked best). I was not so keen on the **Famous Five**, though; Julian always came across as an annoying prat.

(7 July 2023)

[*brg* I agree completely with you about Enid Blyton, whose books filled my childhood up to the age of 12. I loved the William books as well, but there were fewer than a dozen in my local library. It was the constant ripple of sardonic humour in Crompton's language that I enjoyed greatly.]

And I loved the 'Adventure' series the best. They were by far the most expensive Blyton books to buy, but my father managed to sneak a few into annual Sunday School prizes. He was the Sunday School superintendent for a while, so could get away with this much-appreciated bit of minor corruption.*]

I considered discussing *Friends Come in Boxes* in my article but I decided to focus on the novels rather than on a book of short stories with a common background. I enjoyed *Friends Come in Boxes*, but Brian Stephens in *Argo Navis* 3/3 described it as 'terrible ... who wants their kid murdered at the age of six months?' Stephens also hated **Brontomek!**, as does **Guy Salvidge** (I'm



WILLIAM WAS HAPPILY AND QUIETLY ENGAGED IN BURNING THE PAINT OFF HIS BEDROOM DOOR.

THE MOUNTAIN OF ADVENTURE

BY

ENID BLYTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
STUART TRESILIAN



LONDON
MACMILLAN AND CO LTD

NEW YORK • ST MARTIN'S PRESS

1955

How Daniel King and I filled our childhoods:

- (l.) Richmal Crompton's William 'happily and quietly engaged in burning the paint off his bedroom door' (*Just William*);
- (r.) The title page from one of the best novels of Enid Blyton's best series from the mid 1950s (*The Mountain of Adventure*, 1955).

t sure why); but the novel won an award, so I guess the conclusion is that Coney tends to polarise people.

I think the reason children like **Enid Blyton** is that she presents adults as dull, cautious, and obsessed with rules (which, of course, they are). She also cleverly reminds children of certain character and plot details that a child's mind may not retain between one bedtime story session and another. My only criticism of her is that as her series progressed her main characters all began to morph into Julian. Fatty in the 'Mystery' books was originally a boastful but generous larrikin; but by the time of the last novels he's a prig. Ditto for Barney in the two novels after he finds his father.

(8 July 2023)

I read an interesting book recently: a 1920 fantasy by **Norman Douglas** (a contemporary of Graham Greene) called ***They Went***. It's based on the Brittany legend of the engulfed continent of Ys — the same legend that inspired Debussy's *The Engulfed Cathedral* (which in turn inspired, I suspect, Philip Dick's *Galactic Pot Healer*). If you can imagine a novel with familiar fantasy tropes but written by a very good writer completely ignorant of what would later become fantasy clichés, you have a good idea of the feel of *They Went*.

(19 December 2023)

LEANNE FRAHM
Seaholme VIC 3018

Such a sad list of tributes on the cover of **SFC 112**, and so many of them. The Golden Age of Fandom is indeed passing on. The tributes themselves made melancholy reading, but thank you for collecting and publishing them all. I learned many things that I hadn't known about in fandom. I was quite blown away by them. So beautifully crafted, it's no surprise you win awards. Congratulations! All in all — as usual — great reading. Thank you again.

I'm still fascinated by the use of **AI** in creating art, and pleased to have **Jim Burns'** input as well as **Dennis Callegari's**. I'm finding the detail in the backgrounds mind blowing and am wondering how much of that is orchestrated by the artists. I did find the portraits of Chloe looked a little cartoonish against those backgrounds, especially given that she was identical in every picture. Both men have great credentials as artists, so I'd be interested in knowing what sort of picture could be created by a complete novice working with AI.

Rich Horton's — should I call it a review? — of '**Scanners Live in Vain**' was another fascinating read. The minutiae of the wordage was excellently explained and his admiration of the story really shone through. So much so I'm almost tempted to read it if I could find it!

I noted your complaint re Melbourne trains. The same thing is happening here. Not that I catch trains any more, but according to the regular grumbling on the local Facebook site, the disappearing train service phenomenon is a regular occurrence.

(6 December 2023)

ALEX SKOVRON
Caulfield North VIC 3161

I've been busy, as usual, and spending a lot of time these days at home with Ruth, though we do get out as well. My new manuscript, titled ***Monograms***, is in the works, though I still have a fair bit of fine-tuning to do. It's a collection in both prose and verse; my publisher likes it; but I can't see it coming out (if it does) before late 2024 or 2025. We'll see.

(10 July 2023)

I enjoyed your excellent, comprehensive tribute to **Jenny Bryce** in *SF Commentary* 112. An impressive woman indeed. A pity I

never got to know her, beyond those few encounters when we happened to cross each other's paths.

(24 July 2023)

Thank you once again for such a rich and generous coverage of my **Patrick White Award** and the presentation ceremony. It was good to read your personal account of the event, and to revisit **Kevin Brophy's** article from *The Conversation*. I was delighted, too, with the way you set and presented my poem, 'Shadow World'. Please pass on my thanks, as well, to **Alan White** — I love the cover illustration.

For the record as agreed, my Czech collaborator's name is **Josef Tomáš**.

(26 March 2024)

[*brg* Try as I might, I could not type Josef Tomáš's name with the correct accents using Ventura, but now his name has turned out using the implanted text of the email that Alex sent me.*]

STEPHEN CAMPBELL

Unit 7, 4 Sturt St, Koroit VIC 3282

Thanks for recent *SFCs* — and it seems the one-hundredth issue was only a short while ago.

SFC 113 is graced again with one of **Ditmar's** graphics depicting the mystery of flight machines among primitive landscapes that dwarf them. On the inner pages, my mind becomes dwarfed by the lists, reviews, and letters. I feel that this is home, making me feel comfortable because of the active stimulation. I recognise names and voices of people I've never even met, but who seem like friends.

Most of my reading lately has been literary fictions, written across

the last 200 years, that contain extraordinary convulsions of language and technique. I have read some science fiction for its alien qualities and descriptions. My sense of wonder is sated by all of this. I know that **John Foyster** enjoyed **Anthony Trollope**. **Jorge Luis Borges** is as confounding as **Philip K. Dick** and his *Exegesis*, not to mention his SF stories.

I read in *SFC* so much of the thinking of like-minded people (or are we really?) that my ego deflates, but I realise that I am not alone. I notice an emphasis in the articles and reviews on the subject of **climate change**, and its destructive power, but it is hardly a modern phenomenon. I read science fiction as a genre with its own specific tropes, and realise that the attempts of publishers to make money overwhelm the attempts of writers to make art. The sellers of books themselves become the new genre, at which point the enterprise becomes like a serpent eating its own tail and ignoring the cosmos. I miss some of the writing and reviewing by people such as **George Turner**, who was not frightened to show his contempt for poor or faulty work or to show in his own books a contempt for faulty people. His stories range from Australia's activities in bio-engineering, for instance, to *The Sea and Summer*, which covers climate change but is most memorable for its image of future changes to cities.

Colin Steele's reviews are always a pleasure to read, and I particularly enjoyed his review of the book about book cover blurb writing. The people who do this enjoy the same status as the copy-writers of advertising.

I really enjoyed **Dennis Callegari's** picture '**Dirigible to the Moon**', which I thought would have looked very good in colour on the cover.

[*brg* It is shown in colour in both the Portrait and Landscape PDF files. Everything is in colour in the PDF files, but of course I can't afford to print colour on anything but pages 1, 2, 83, and 84.*]

I read **Rob Gerrand**'s poem — a romantic venture that with the addition of a few short phrases becomes science fiction!

I was very pleased to hear of **Don Ashby**'s ability to recover from the disastrous fires that burnt his house and belongings. He is the only fan I know of who seems to remain young and not too shy to show his colours about what concerns him. By contrast, we fans seem to be becoming more and more consumed by the sheer volume of media. Is there a natural point where our desire for excellent entertainment degenerates into a desire for mundane and wonderless entertainment?

(15 July 2023)

SFC 112: I read this sadly at the news of the passing of fans I had known and liked. Only a few months before, I had rung **Lee Harding**, but he didn't seem to remember me, and after the call I was concerned that he had contracted dementia. And then I found that he had passed on.

David Russell informed me of **Valma Brown**'s passing, and I spoke to **Leigh** by phone. I did not feel up to visiting his home, but David gave me an informed report of the fannish gathering that took place at Leigh's place.

Charles Taylor I had many friendly conversations with, and liked him. Now I find he also has gone.

The death that shocked and saddened me the most was that of **Jennifer Bryce**, whose outlook I had always admired, and who I thought of as a beautiful woman and person from the moment I first met her when she lived in St Kilda with **John Foyster**. I remember first meeting her at a **Nova Mob meeting** at her and John Foyster's house in St Kilda, not far from Luna Park. She was a talented musician and always gave gravity to her observations about music, books, and the countries she had visited. I will miss seeing her again.

(23 October 2023)

Feature letter: Life interrupts mailing comments

PATRICK MCGUIRE

**7541-D, Weather Worn Way,
Columbia MD 21046, USA**

The latest in my string of excuses for not writing a proper loc to **SFC 113** just yet is that my desktop computer is currently misbehaving. It may be a software problem that I can fix, but I

would need more time and patience to deal with it than I can muster just now. (Several attempts to fix already failed.) Failing that, I'll probably just replace the thing, which I had been planning to do fairly soon anyhow, although I need to research what I want for a replacement. I'm disgusted enough with Windows that I'm seriously considering an alternative OS. I can probably make do for a while with my obsolescent laptop, especially if it will talk to

my Android tablet, which I'm not sure I've tested.

In my published loc, I said that between Covid lockdown and getting older, I was having trouble getting back into the groove of arriving places at a specified time, such as for medical appointments, meetings, or social engagements. I've gotten better at that since writing, with the lockdowns hopefully a thing of the past, but it's still not as routine a habit as it once was, and I often seem required to allow more lead time than before.

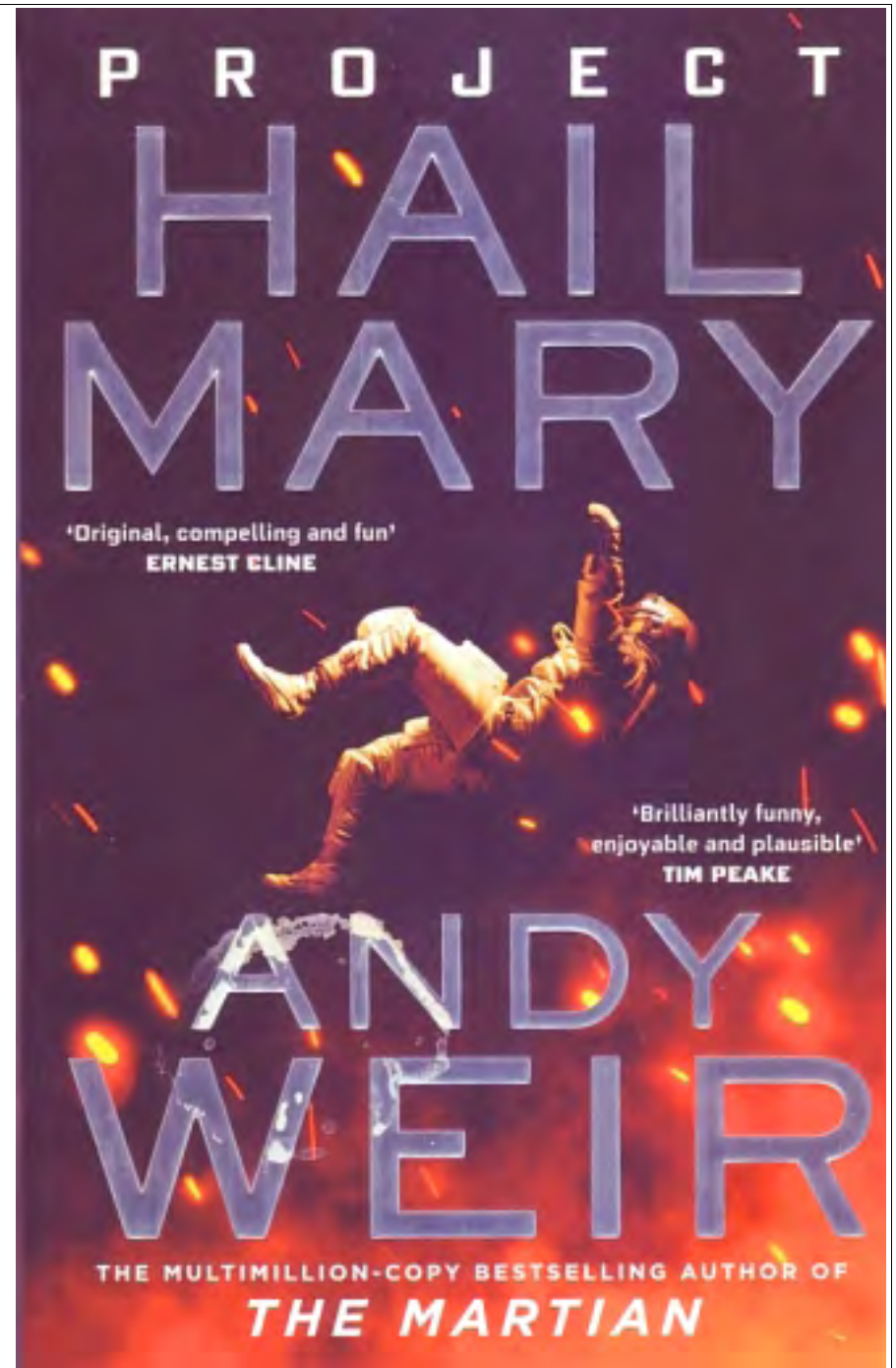
I've read some of **Michael Coney**, but not nearly as much as **Daniel King** did for the issue's feature article. But I'll read the article more carefully and perhaps find something to say. So far I've barely looked at the always-interesting locs.

(3 July 2023)

I was pleasantly surprised to see that you liked **Project Hail Mary**, given your generally more 'literary' tastes. I, predictably, liked it a lot.

However, as usual I find it easier to discuss flaws than what went right and what therefore fits invisibly into the whole. Notwithstanding my positive net evaluation of the book, a comment I made right after reading it was that I didn't think *Project Hail Mary* was, internally to the novel, a plausible name for an international project. (**Andy Weir** might have realised this and used it anyhow for artistic reasons.) As you probably know, in this context, a Hail Mary is a 'desperate undertaking', from the term 'Hail Mary (pass)' in American football. There it refers to a last-minute pass down the entire length of the football field, the image being of a (presumably Catholic) quarterback saying a prayer for heavenly intervention as he throws, since only with such help will the pass succeed.

So, although in American culture the phrase accurately characterises the mission, it is (1) a term mostly confined to the US and



clearly identified with that country even by non-Americans who understand it; (2) it is probably not widely understood even elsewhere in the Anglosphere; (3) it is meaningless or, worse, misleading, to speakers of other languages; and (4) offensive to the atheist or non-Christian sensibilities of other participating countries, notably important player China, and probably even offensive to many Protestants and even some Orthodox Christians — even though the latter have a similar veneration for Mary, for historical reasons a minority of Orthodox are still vehemently anti-Catholic, and the Hail Mary is a Catholic prayer (although one mostly quoting Scripture). In sum, it's a highly improbable name for a project with heavy contribution from outside the US. We could head-cannon a rationale for how it was proposed and accepted, but it would slow down the book and artistically Weir probably was right to handwave it, if it were to be used at all.

The Wikipedia shows that of languages offering an article on the book, the French and German retitled it completely, the Russian and Finnish call it **Project Ave Maria**, messing up the connotations, and the other languages with characters that I can read leave the 'Hail Mary' in English.

(10 July 2023)

Having hit what I hope is a breathing space in my task list, I am working on a loc that I will try to get off in the next few days, before the holidays really close in, since those plus end of year tax stuff will wipe out December, and recovery will take a while in January. Speaking of holidays, I am still, almost two weeks later, doing dishwasher loads resulting at least indirectly from American Thanksgiving. Obviously it would have gone faster if washing dishes were my highest priority, but in fact I am letting each load air dry and then gradually emptying the dishwasher and putting away the dishes and the now-empty containers for leftovers.

I know you were closer than I was to **Michael Bishop**, so you have my condolences on his recent death. His family had put out

a request for physical cards prior to his death, so I mailed him one with my appreciation, and it should have arrived before he passed. A lot of death lately, but we personally, and fandom in general, are not as young as we once were. I just got word today that **Fuzzy Pink, Larry Niven's wife**, has died.

(6 December 2023)

I did get my tax return in by the extension deadline and also got some other urgent business settled. But I probably ran down my disease resistance from the stress, and anyway I have a history of picking up some vague virus (not Covid; I tested negative on the home covid test) every year as soon as the weather gets cold. So that hit this year (despite my going mostly masked indoors in public). I'd heard complaints about strong reactions this season from the vaccinations and hadn't wanted to deal with that before my tax deadline. The virus lingered for a while, but I finally got my shots done and went through a fairly minor reaction afterward. But my stamina really took a hit, presumably from illness plus inadequate exercise. It's finally recovering some, so that I'm making some progress on things requiring standing for long periods and physical effort.

After that, a visit to the dentist for a checkup turned rather messy. I not only had a little can't-wait drilling, but I'm set to lose several teeth eventually, one of them soon. Also I've got a pretty involved tooth-and-gum-care regime now. Sigh.

My desktop computer could not run current tax software and could not be easily upgraded, so I bought a new laptop. I got Windows 11 on it figured out well enough to do the taxes, but I'm still not really comfortable with it. More work for later. My old desktop computer, which I had hoped to use for some purposes as a stand-alone isolated from the internet, has something wrong with it, so that it runs slow, but evidently not because of a virus. It was tricky getting some records off of it for taxes. There are more drastic things that I could yet try to fix it, but perhaps I would lose

would files in the process. (Many files, but possibly not all, are backed up.) For email I'm thumb-typing on my tablet so far. The desktop machine is so obsolescent that it's not worth a paid repair if I can't figure it out myself.

On other fronts, the **Columbia SF Book Club**, faced with ageing membership, is trying a shift from meeting on a weekday evening in a supermarket food court to meeting on Saturday afternoon at a library (the food court is too crowded and noisy then). The tricky part is finding an unreserved study room at one of the county's library branches. So far we've had two sessions at two different library branches. The shift to daylight does seem to have increased our attendance somewhat.

One of the books we read that might be of interest to *SFC's* readership is **Neal Sharpson's *When the Sparrow Falls*** (2021). I don't think the novel uses any sfnal ideas that had not come up before, but the plot has original points, and I thought it worked well and was handled deftly with a seeming knowledge of the genre. I believe it was modestly successful commercially, but Sharpson's next book was horror, in which I have no interest. If this is a one-and-done for Sharpson in the sf genre, in my estimation it was an exceptionally successful one. It also has 'literary' qualities that may recommend it to the many *SFC* readers who value those at a higher priority than I do.

Sharpson is an Irishman born and raised in the Republic and living in Dublin. As far as I can remember, he is the only native-born Irish Republic person to have turned out notable sf in a very long time. (In contrast to people from NI, or people who moved to the Republic such as McCaffrey or Harrison.) I learned from the *Sparrow* jacket notes that Sharpson also has a long-running blog. There he discussed Disney feature animations until he ran out of those and then started in on the DC Cinematic Universe. I've been gradually reading the entries and finding it very enjoyable.

I nominated **Heinlein's *For Us the Living*** (written 1938, unpub-

lished in his lifetime) for the Columbia SF Book Club, including in my nomination a description of how uncharacteristic of his published work it is. I wouldn't recommend the book, even for historical interest to anyone unfamiliar with Heinlein's work, but the club had already read all the worthwhile novels by him, plus some of the less worthy ones. Somewhat to my surprise, *For Us* was solidly voted in. At the meeting, some people found it an interesting read for historical reasons, and others just found it a pretty bad novel. (It is a straightforward utopia, sharing many points with **Bellamy's *Looking Backward***, but based on a different social theory and with much more technological extrapolation and marginally better characterisation.)

Preparatory to that meeting, I developed a speculation that I still find attractive, although I haven't convinced anyone else that it's plausible, and I myself concede that it's unprovable. This is that the surviving manuscript, namely what was published posthumously, and which seems to be a xerox copy of a carbon copy that was sent to Heinlein's friend **Caleb Laning**, is not in fact the submission version that Heinlein submitted to several publishers and that evidently in due course got readings there. (After a few rejections, Heinlein, contrary to his later advice to keep every manuscript on the market until sold, evidently decided that his novel was unpublishable, and instead mined it for plots and ideas used in many stories over the coming decades.) Heinlein thought he eventually had destroyed every copy of the novel.

My speculation is that the surviving manuscript is so very far from submission quality, as for example in its notorious page-and-a-half footnote, that Heinlein, whose then-wife, after all, worked at a movie studio, could not have been so naïve as to send it in in that shape. Besides that footnote, noted and sneered at by several people writing about the posthumously published version, there are other oddities, such as a change partway through in the date format used by people in 2086, and *three* differing wordings of how the control switch is labelled that toggles a particular aircraft between helicopter mode and fixed-wing mode.

I speculate that the surviving version is an earlier draft. Prior to xerox machines, making copies beyond at most two or three carbons on a manual typewriter was either prohibitively expensive (for 'photostatic copies') or involved retyping everything. I conjecture that what Heinlein sent his friend Laning was the copy of an earlier version that RAH decided was close enough to the final one for Laning to get the idea. (In the few facsimile pages reproduced in the published novel, there do appear to be smears suggesting that the pages are from a carbon copy, which seems odd if this was a pre-final draft. But RAH could have intended from the start to send out copies of an intermediate draft to friends for comment, or he could have followed a practice later mentioned, but not especially recommended, by **de Camp** in *The Science Fiction Handbook*, of always making a carbon as one composed, on the off-chance that a page might turn out not to need revision in the submission draft and so would not need retyping for the author to retain a copy.)

I conjecture that in the actual submission copy, Heinlein either simply deleted that footnote or incorporated some of it into the main text, and fixed the inconsistent control labels and date formats, and possibly made other changes, so that his submission did not look like the work of a clueless utter amateur. In my theory, Heinlein indeed successfully destroyed all copies of the submission draft, either because they came back to him or because the people having them honoured his destruction request (we know that **John Campbell** had at least read the novel) — but that for whatever reason Laning kept his copy and later a xerox was made from it. Since this is all that survived, it is what was published post-humously, and what folks have sneered at since then. I think the revisions would have been restricted to tidying it up a bit, and that even the hypothetical submission copy would be of chiefly historical interest.

I ran my speculation past Heinlein expert **Kyle McAbee** (who I believe is in Fictionmags with you, Bruce). I gather that there is no known firm evidence to decide the matter conclusively, but

Kyle does not buy my theory. He holds that submission format standards were indeed so low in 1938, and reference works on how to format a manuscript were so few, that reputable publishers could plausibly have given the surviving manuscript a reading, rather than shooting it back by return mail.

I did have more success in resolving another point to my satisfaction. *For Us* contains a long rant from the viewpoint of 2086 against the organised religion of the twentieth century, especially the Christian churches, in their real and supposed attempts to impose their values on civil society. (Some of the complaints seem entirely justified today, even to most American Christians.) This rant is put into the mouth of a character, **Master Cathcart**, but given the utopia format of *For Us*, I have no doubt that Cathcart speaks for Heinlein. (In most normal cases, it is of course a capital mistake to take a character's views for the author's.)

Given this vehemence, I wondered how much hypocrisy and invention lay in the positive remarks about '**Father Michael**' in RAH's *This I Believe* contribution from 1953 (*Grumbles From the Grave*, p. 140). *This I Believe* was a CBS radio program where celebrities and regular people aired brief personal credos. Per Wikipedia, the format was copied elsewhere, including in Oz. I checked Google Maps for a Catholic or Episcopal church near the former Heinlein residence. Indeed there is a Catholic church in the right place, and I further determined the pastor in 1953 was indeed a Michael. Given that falsehoods with that much detail in a national broadcast would probably have come back to bite Heinlein via his neighbours, I conclude that Heinlein was truthfully on friendly terms with the pastor as claimed (I suppose they had met at some civic event), and that RAH may well have somewhat softened his views on organised religion by then. (See <https://stpaulcos.org/history/>.)

Many sf people, including **Jo Walton**, enjoy the writing of **Jennifer Crusie**. So far Crusie has written no science fiction, but she has written fantasies as well as works in several other genres.

Some of your readers might be interested to know that she has recently emerged from over a decade of writer's block, so that she and frequent coauthor **Bob Mayer** have already self-published, in ebook and print, an excellent mystery trilogy with romance elements (the '**Liz Danger**' trilogy), and they have another unrelated trilogy in the works, with more hopefully to come later. (Crusie's blog indicates that she reads a lot of sf, even if she hasn't published any, and she is, I believe, a fan in particular of **Martha**

Wells and of **Connie Willis**.)

If I hold this up any longer, for instance until I actually *read* issue 114, I fear it will get swallowed up by the holidays, so I'll close here.

(13 December 2023)

JOHN HERTZ

236 S. Coronado St., No. 409,
Los Angeles CA 90057, USA

I said that Heath Row had succeeded **Marty Cantor** as OE of LASFAPA. I erred. Cantor's successor there is **David Schlosser**.

Note that neither APA-L nor LASFAPA are LASFS publications; they're produced at but not by or for the LASFS. In contrast, **Shaggy (Shangri l'Affaires)** was a Club publication.

The LASFS newsletter **De Profundis** is anomalous. The Club voted to quit pubbing it on paper. That outraged Cantor, who took it overpersonally — making it not by but for. I'm unsure of its current status; it still appears after Cantor's death, and I was sent a paper copy.

GIAMPAOLO COSSATO

Cannaregio 3825, Calle Fontana, 30121-Venezia, Italy

I hope you found a solution to your leg problem. Last week I had again a couple of infiltrations of hyaluronic acid (one for each knee) but I know it is only a palliative. My legs are stiff. My knees are not happy and my step, when I step on the steps may that be the majestic ones of the bridges or the more humble but smaller and perfidious of the common stairs, is fogged by incertitude with the knowledge that a misstep could toll a probably everlasting griev-

ance. And four bridges separate me from the hospital. A very perilous trek to get there.

Now the climate has decided to play a role that used to be the exclusive ground of science fiction. Ballard has been vindicated.

(25 July 2023)

Now I am dealing with a problem more serious than all the others I've listed previously. I am affected by a neoplasm in the perineal region that make it difficult for me to sit and generally is not pleasant at all.

I did various tests, including an MRI. A biopsy is next, and then I have an appointment with a surgeon. So before I become incapacitated I send to you and Elaine my best wishes for 2024 (even if at the moment it does not appear to promise much).

(17 December 2023)

[*brg* Until I received the next email, I had hoped your health news has not become worse. That was a bit optimistic. Our 54 years of epistolary friendship must stand firm. Thanks in particular for the contribution sent to the SFC Sinking Fund, even though I can no longer send you print copies.*]

I still owe you thanks for your email of 6 January in which you

mentioned the possibility of visiting me in the hospital if you could.

My full recovery is still an ongoing procedure. I have to medicate myself once or twice every single day and use a leg urine collection bag which is rather bothersome. The hyperbaric chamber mentioned beneath did help but the wound, given the awkward position, proved rather obdurate.

The surgery took place on 15 January (it should have been the eleventh but it was postponed) after which I spent 36 days in the hospital. Fortunately in my region (Veneto) the health system is still working. Nice nurses, nice doctors, fair food, and the bed was one of those ultramodern with all the commands available.

But that was not the end of it. Once out of the hospital I had to spend another 26 days in a hyperbaric chamber. Roughly two hours every morning from 9.30 to 11.30 (with the exception of Saturday and Sunday). Simulated depth 14 metres. It was meant to help to cicatrise faster the wound caused by the surgery and 'exterminate' the germs that might still dwell in there.

But the hyperbaric chamber is not in Venice. It is on the mainland, which meant I had to reach the place every morning in time for the 9.30 appointment. The chamber normally has room for 14 people seated (13 patients and a doctor in case of problems) and at the opposite end of the main entrance there is an escape hatch, pressure controlled, which give access to a two-place smaller chamber in case someone for some reasons needs to leave during the two hours cycle.

'Fortunately', as I am classified as 'fragile' (in Italian the word which appears on the specific form is exactly the same, '*fragile*', pronounced in a slightly different way) because of my ailments, the National Health Service (here it is called ULSS which stands for 'Unità Locale Socio-Sanitaria', plus a number that defines the specific area) came to my help.

Every day the people working for the Red Cross or the Green Cross came to take me by hydro ambulance to a hub in Piazzale Roma (the place where land transport have to stop before entering Venice itself) and from there by land ambulance to the hyperbaric chamber, and then back (which sometimes could be a bit tricky as they did not have the urgency to synchronise the two different means of transport). All free of charge (hyperbaric chamber included). The 36 days in hospital is a given; you do not have to pay if you are an Italian citizen.

I must admit that my life has become a tad complicated. I can still walk, but steps at times it can be a challenge.

There is no way to know how long the struggle is going to last. And I must not forget that it could have been much worse. All considered I am a lucky one. Real suffering is something else.

(15 May 2024)

GILLIAN POLACK Chifley ACT 2606

You said not to send anything new until you'd published all the old ones, so I haven't written anything specifically for you in that time. I have a weekly blog (with other SFF writers) <https://treehousewriters.com/wp53/>, I still write for **The History Girls**, I write for **Aurealis** (I'm currently writing a piece about **Guy Boothby**, which is a lot of fun), and I write for my patrons on **Patreon**. I'm happy for Patreon pieces to be used for *SF Commentary*. Let me know if you're interested and I'll send you a select few. I'd love to know if you're using any of the pieces I specifically wrote for you, however, and what you still have of mine.

(27 July 2023)

DORA LEVAKIS

c/o 16 Deakin Street, Yarraville VIC 3013

I am now in Minyerri with a most loveable but rowdy and frenetic cohort of years 7 to 9. Keeping me super busy.

(27 July 2023)

Sorry not to have managed to catch up when last down from the Northern Territory earlier this month. I was flat out with family, trying to keep up with swimming, and I was looking after a friend's cat. There are a few other friends I didn't see. A group dinner could be a good idea next time, during the December–January six weeks' holidays.

The day after I last saw you and Elaine together was the day I began learning to swim in the sea and as a raw beginner.

Another 'distraction' during my last visit home was working together with my swimming teacher on a short film entry to the **Altona Beach Film Festival**. The theme is 'water'.

(28 July 2023)

ALEX PIERCE

Ballarat VIC 3350

We've moved to Ballarat recently, and I'm taking some time off teaching to work on other projects. The main one, which is going to launch in a month or so, is an **oral history project**: I've been interviewing Melbourne women who protested against the **Vietnam War and National Service**. It's turned into a 15-episode audio documentary, and I've been working on it for about six years! So it will be good to have that done. I've also got a science fiction-related project in the works, but it's not ready to go public yet. I'll let you know when it is! I'm also reviewing at **Locus**, rather than Tor.com, these days.

(29 July 2023)

Speculative Insight

July 2024



A few months ago I mentioned I had something new in the works. I have launched a new journal for SFF essays, ***Speculative Insight***. The website is now live; essays will be published from January onwards: www.speculativeinsight.com

(8 December 2023)

[*brg* Alex handed the first issue to me during Continuum 16, May 2024. Thanks, Alex!*]

DAVID RUSSELL

196 Russell Street, Dennington VIC 3280

It seems curious to be writing a letter of comment on a paper copy of *SFC* when my last missive was a lamentation about the ending of sending paper copies by you. You must be less generous with your paper, printer's ink, and money if you are to keep the cats fed in the manner to which they would like to become accustomed.

Artwork featured in ***SFC 113***: I did like **Ditmar's** cover, '**Overhang City**'. It was better with the chromed pipes underneath the town buildings than without (as seen in the version on the back cover). One thinks that the machinery underneath Overhang City *must* have something to do with keeping all that you can see from plummeting to the surface of the planet waiting below.

Your phone call when you mentioned that none of the 15 recipients of the paper copies had loded nearly 10 days after receiving *SFC* in the mail would normally have spurred me into action, but I'd gone into my local Collins Bookseller shop armed with three titles recommended by **Colin Steele** to place an order for them, and one of them — **Shaun Bythell's *Reminders of the Day*** — was already stocked in the shop.

I really liked the three previous books by Shaun Bythell that I had bought. I read it in four days (which for me is a very hurried read) so I was delayed in putting fountain pen to paper.

Irwin Hirsh's photos of the printed paper zines you've sent him over the decades (pause for a moment here to contemplate how few zine editors measure their output in decades) allowed me to reference my letter on ***SFC 111*** and wish that Irwin had stacked them vertically rather than horizontally. How else can we determine who has the most Bruce Gillespie fanzines?

While I was reading Shaun Bythell's book, my local Collins book-seller in Warrnambool phoned twice more to tell me that ***Once Upon a Tome*** by **Oliver Darkshire** had arrived in hardcover, and a few days later, while I was finishing reading it, they rang to let me know that ***The Art of the Illustrated Book*** (Thames & Hudson) was in.

I have been strong, Bruce! I've held off picking up the \$90 latter item mentioned ... because I wanted to finish this letter to you. Not having enough cash on hand (because it was the weekend) to purchase it has no bearing on the matter at all.

I selected books from **Colin Steele's** column feature (one at a time) in my **local newspaper, *The Standard***. Sometimes you feature Colin's reviews first; sometimes it's the *Standard's* turn. I must appear precognitive at times ordering stuff that gets reviewed after my request is made.

Then a backlog of **Gary Mason's** ANZAPazine ***Crash of the Hard Disc*** arrived; then ***Ethel the Aardvark 222***, with a really good David L. Russell cartoon on the cover. I don't know why, but I spent a lot of time working at it. Then ***SFC 112*** thudded into my mailbox and the unread newspapers are piling up and the dishes in the sink really do need to be washed sometime this week.

Sigh *SF Commentary*, a cause of mayhem since 1969.

(2 August 2023)

Geri Sullivan from the US sent me a Xmas card posted on 23



December, which arrived on Wednesday 10 January, and her big news is that she's restarting her fanzine **Idea** and writes that paper copies should arrive midway through January 2024.

I don't know if you're a fan of her work, but it's a seriously well-presented zine. I received your card in the mail prior to Geri's. Thank you for making the effort. You were one of 15 people to return-send a Xmas card to me. When you send out 65 cards, the level of response is a little disappointing. Obviously I didn't know when I was well off, because there are worse things that can

happen when you send a politically incorrect card like mine, which can be seen as insensitive. I sent a card to my doctor Yang Chen, and a nurse from her doctor's rooms phoned me to tell me I was banned from attending appointments for one month.

[*brg* And I know of one recipient of your annual Christmas cards who had the same reaction quite a few years ago. You do need to road-test the captions to some of your cartoons — say, on ultrasensitive persons such as Stephen Campbell or your sister — before sending them to fanzine editors.]

But that's not the problem with your Christmas cards reply rate. You have to count yourself lucky to receive 15 replies! People like Elaine simply don't send Christmas cards these days — perhaps making an exception only for cards received from very aged persons who have been sending us cards for 40 years. I send about five per year, two of them being to my sisters, and one to you (usually about the end of January).*

For the last three years I've been trying to grow wormwood, the silver grey shrubby herb that is pretty much the only one of the Artemisia family of 200 plants that can be grown by seed rather than cuttings. The seeds need light to germinate, and are so light in weight that using a standard hose nozzle just washes them off the top of the potting mix they're placed on, so I've been using a mist water bottle nozzle, and finally, germination! A dozen or so seedlings, incredibly small and light green in colour rather than the silver grey of the parent plant.

I'd always thought the name **wormwood** meant that people made wooden items (it grows about two metres tall here in Dennington)

out of the trunk of the plant if they wanted to avoid woodworm damage to furniture. But no! it just means a few crushed leaves steeped in boiling water for five minutes, then a drink of the resulting tea will kill internal parasites.

I received **SF Commentary 114** just when I was busy with mailing out those Xmas cards, so I had to hold off on reading it until that job was done. The **Colin Steele** book reviews had a lower success rate with me this issue, with only one book, **Donna Leon's Wandering Through Life**, causing the I-must-have-it response. If I lived in Canberra I'd have gone to a few of the Meet the Author events that Colin has organised.

(22 January 2024)

JEANNE MEALY

1595 E. Hoyt Ave., St Paul MN 55106, USA

John, Nixie, and I are doing OK after a very busy summer. It was dry and hot. Leaves are changing and falling already. I'm getting birthday cards and greetings.

Have you heard anything about **Margaret Orchard**? She stopped responding to e-mails. I sent a card, no reply. I'm fearing the worst, as has happened to other fannish friends, but would like to know for sure.

[*brg* Can anyone help? Margaret was a member of ANZAPA for a long time, for two different eras and under two different surnames. Nobody in ANZAPA has mentioned her for years.*]

Lyn McConchie has had some health problems and will probably have to make a major change within a year. I hoped she could make it back here from New Zealand for another visit, but no.

(23 September 2023)

[*brg* Lyn has been sounding quite chipper on her Facebook posts recently. She's selling all the books she writes, and seems quite happy managing her farmlet.*]

ROS GROSS

North Balwyn VIC 3104

Great to hear your news, Bruce, and glad to hear you're both doing OK, albeit feeling the slings and arrows of age. Apologies for not replying previously. I've found things tough, as they can be when you've been married to someone for so long and they die. It's almost a year now. since I lost **Aby**. I still feel pretty lost, but OK. I'm officially retired now, too. I have lots of interests but still not a great deal of motivation to explore them. I guess it just takes time. I do have a three-and-a-half years grandson, **Aidan**, whom I absolutely adore! And lots of books, even if most of them are e-books nowadays.

(11 August 2023)

VAN IKIN

c/o17 Zamia Place, Greenwood WA 6024

As you'll have guessed from my inexcusable silence, this year is not going well for me — though it's my wife **Marjory** who is having by far the worst of it. (She has a cancer on the kidney and last week had minor surgery to determine whether or not she is having a recurrence of breast cancer.) My time is almost totally taken up with carer duties, which I don't mind (and which I am finding I can handle quite readily — touch wood!) but it's very tiring and my energy flags.

I usually get 60–90 minutes per day for my own things, and I've been putting most of that time into the next issue of **Science Fiction**, with the incredible result that I'm just a few weeks away from having both 2023 issues ready in the correct calendar year.



Alan White: 'Robot and Dragon.'



I was horrified some months ago when I received your latest issues in the mail. Horrified, first, because it led me to search my 'out' box and discover that I never replied to your request for permission to stop sending printed copies. I did think I had told you that was okay — but no, that was an unfinished email in my drafts box. I'm very sorry. But I don't need printed copies as I am more than happy to read on-screen, especially if you send out a notification when new issues appear. I have transferred a small donation earlier today to try to give you some recompense for my failure to respond at the proper time.

[*brg* Thanks very much, Van. A great help. But those 2023 issues of *Science Fiction* have still not arrived. (And this issue of *SFC* is only six months behind.) I've heard nothing more about the state of your health or Marjory's.*]

And I was also horrified to read of your leg problems! Whilst I moan a bit about my woes, I've not had anything so alarming happen so quickly, and I imagine it would be an awful experience. All I can say is that I hope the situation has settled down for you by now — though I fear that, at our age, nothing ever quite settles down.

(20 September 2023)

I was really low for the first six months of the year, mainly just due to worry/concern about Marj. (My own health situation with Crohn's is stable thanks to medication, but I'm safer staying home and indoors so that I can rest on the few occasions when it flares up.) I have embarked upon a review which, if it ever gets finished, will be my first review since 2010 or 2011 and which I'm hoping you might like to use in *SFC*. (Right from the start it has struck me as material that might be of interest to *SFC* readers.) It's on two sf verse novels — **Greg McLaren's *Camping Underground*** and **Earl Livings' *The Silence Inside the World*** — framed by a quick summary of the Aussie context for verse novels. I won't be the least offended if you say no when you read it and you're not to be offended if I take a-g-e-s to get the darned thing done. (But I do think it will happen.)

(28 September 2023)

[*brg* I always enjoy publishing your reviews, Van, but I haven't seen this one yet.*]

RICK KENNETT

PO Box 118, Pascoe Vale South VIC 3044

Thanks for the invite to visit you in Greensborough but, as the old song says, I don't get around much anymore. As a courier I used to cover 150 kilo- metres per day. Since retiring I barely stick my nose out the door, and then usually only to go to the local supermarket. Haven't been to a con since the last one in Melbourne before the pandemic. However I'm eagerly awaiting the return of Melbourne Continuum conventions.

The big news is that the Carnacki book I wrote with Chico Kidd in 2002, **472 Cheyne Walk**, will be republished by a UK small press — **Cathaven** — probably next year, revised and with added material.

In bios accompanying podcasts, people often mention their cats. Being catless for 30 years or more whenever I have a story podcast I have to be content to say, 'I sometimes talk to next door's white tom who sometimes condescends to talk to me.'

(3 October 2023)

MARIANN McNAMARA

PO Box 619 North Adelaide 5006

So, this is it — I slept at my new house for the first time Sunday night (actually it was Monday morning as it was 1:36 a.m. when I hit the pillow), then up at 6 a.m. as we had to get the truck back to the rental people by 8 a.m. **Pat** [Mariann's son] was so tired that as he drove here to pick me up, he headed off to Croydon and realised that when he was on Port Road, I wasn't there any more. We'd had a long weekend, but it will ultimately be worth it. Had a great small group of friends who helped, both days, so that was terrific.

My bestest thanks to: **Andrew, Barbara, Chris, Greg, James,**

John, Kai, Melinda, Sue, Tosh, Vinod, and Will and next weekend will be the same with a mostly new crew. After we moved me out of Croydon, we celebrated with a Chinese takeaway and a glass of red.

The place is busy with boxes, but that's what one expects. Some of my effects have been in storage since early 2019 when I started to pack up, having bought the block of land I was going to build on, at Chiton near Port Elliot, but then didn't, as my place didn't sell.

It's been a journey of genuine frustration and patience, given what we've all had to face these past three years. At least I have the house. Many have missed out and are in a very difficult situation.

(16 November 2023)

NARELLE MACDONALD

**Higher Education Territory Manager, NSW, WA and ACT,
Cambridge University Press, Australia & New Zealand**

Thanks, **Colin Steele**, for your terrific review of the ***The Near Future in Twenty-First Century Fiction: Climate: Retreat And Revolution*** by **David C. Sargeant**.

(24 October 2023)

JOE THOMAS

Somewhere in USA

To **Rich Horton**: What a fine article. Thank you. I enjoyed it very much. There is so much to unpack in '**Scanners Live in Vain**', and I believe that you are on the beam in considering the inherent cruelty of Smith's world and how that unfolds and echoes in ways unexpected.

Nick Lowe was onto something: 'You gotta be cruel to be kind, in

the right measure' seems like a possible theme song for the Instrumentality.

(21 November 2023)

CREATH THORNE
Somewhere in USA

I don't know if you remember me, but we corresponded just a wee bit and I heard lots about you from old friend **Lesleigh Luttrell**.

So let me tell you why I'm writing ... I've been a lawyer for 40 years and most of those 40 years I've just worked away at my trade. However, I'm quitting next year and hoping to do some reading and writing I've deferred for decades. In particular, I'd like to read *SF Commentary*.

I don't particularly like reading on-line or with my laptop or with my Kindle. Would you have any interest in letting me buy from you the last 25 print issues? I have no idea what the price is but I'm sure we can work something out. Assuming there's interest on your part, I will need tutoring on how to disburse funds.

I hope this works out. In any event, I've enjoyed reading recent issues on-line.

(5 December 2023)

[*brg* It's been great to make contact with you again after many years. In the early 1970s we were both in APA-45 and you were part of Columbia fandom until everybody in Columbia, Missouri, moved elsewhere.

It's also tempting to charge money to somebody who offers it. But the postage costs of shipping 25 issues of SF Commentary would probably be over \$1000. I suggest it would be much

cheaper to download the PDFs of all 25 copies from efanazines.com and have them printed at your local photocopying shop.*]

Shortly after you wrote, my spouse of 52 years died. While not unexpected (**Ann** had been very ill) it has thrown me for a loop. I'm just now trying to get back to what I guess is the New Normal.

In any event, I will be retiring soon and still plan to dip some of my toes back into the waters of fandom. It should be interesting after 40 years to see what is different and what has changed.

I have already taken your advice and am just printing out copies of *SF Commentary*. Interesting! I'll hope to write more soon.

(1 March 2024)

DENNIS CALLEGARI
159 Kilby Road, Kew East VIC 3102

My AI images came up nicely on the printed pages as well as in the PDFs.

I keep meaning to say that I enjoy reading **Giampaolo Cossato's** letters in SFC. My family comes from the Veneto (though not Venice itself) so I'm intrigued to read about modern life in Venice.

Somewhere you mentioned **R. F. Kuang's** novel *Babel*. I started reading it a couple of months ago ... and after a few pages hit a snag that stopped me cold. It's in the world-building for the novel. Babel is a college in Oxford where they teach the magical uses of silver. The protagonist (a despised foreigner) arrives in Oxford to study there — and before doing anything else, he gets involved in a secret plot to bring down the whole edifice.

Why on Earth would a writer want to deflate the world they were building so precipitately ...?

By accident, while trying to generate an image of **T. S. Eliot's 'Macavity'**, I came up with this: not Chloe (who was on the covers of *SFC 114*), but clearly a relative!

(19 November 2023)

SIMON BROWN
Somewhere in Australia

Sorry I haven't been much of a correspondent lately, but over the last couple of years life has been in something of a flux. Since 2021 I've lived in Johannesburg, Vincentia (on the NSW south coast), Townsville, and Vientiane.

Most of the last year has been spent in **Laos**, a wonderful country: a reserved but gentle and hospitable people, an extraordinary and tragic history and, of course, amazing food. And I've found that I prefer living in the tropics to almost any other climate zone. But Alison's work at the international school here has come to an end and we're returning to Australia in a few days, probably for good this time. We'll be moving to Wagga Wagga for a year or so, and then finally returning to our real home in **Mollymook**, a coastal town a couple of hours' drive south of Sydney (warm temperate climate zone, my very favourite ... who needs winter?).

While I've been jumping from one home to another over the last two years, I've found my reading and writing has also been, well, all over the place. As I get older one trend is clear: I'm reading much more nonfiction than fiction. Best reads over the last few years:

- ***The Human Advantage*** by **Suzana Herculano-Houzel**
- ***The Vital Question*** and ***Transformer***, both by **Nick Lane**
- ***God, an Anatomy*** by **Francesca Stavrakoulou**
- ***The World's Wife*** by **Carol Ann Duffy**.

I was sorry to hear about your health problems, and hope you're



'T. S. Eliot's "Macavity"' (Dennis Callegari).

properly on the mend. The thing I most hate about getting older — well, all right, getting old — is that bits of the body stop doing their job. I'd fire them if they didn't belong to a union.

(13 December 2023)

STEVE JOHNSON

Anchorage, Alaska, USA

I particularly enjoyed **Richard Horton**'s article on the publications history of **Cordwainer Smith**'s '**Scanners Live in Vain**'. One detail that caught my attention was Figure 3, which reproduced the back jacket of ***Science and Sorcery***, in which the story was reprinted. Because even an undamaged jacket does not mention 'Scanners Live in Vain', I wonder if the image was mistakenly reproduced. A better image would show the front inside flap of the book, which does describe Smith's story as follows:

With 'Scanners Live in Vain' Cordwainer Smith entralls you with a powerful story of the habermans — fantastic, eerie products of science, half-men, half-machines — whose task it is to pilot spacecraft across the gulf between the worlds in defiance of the Great Pain of Space. 'Scanners Live in Vain' is definitely one of the most unusual stories ever written.

(12 December 2023)

Attached is a scan of the inside flap of the front cover of ***Science and Sorcery***. I recall that I purchased my copy from the publisher in the early seventies.

(13 December 2023)

Price \$3.00

SCIENCE AND SORCERY

Presenting an exciting new anthology: fifteen thrilling stories, each a fine example of a particular style or type of fantastic fiction.

Here are science stories of the world of today—and tomorrow! Amazing chronicles of man battling the unknown dangers of interplanetary space; fascinating adventures beyond the galaxy; strange tales of our own earth.

Some of these stories take you adventuring with entities which are not quite human, such as Bel-X—the robot who becomes a man—in George Cowie's intriguing "Demobilization." In "Naming of Names" you journey with Ray Bradbury to Mars and learn how an Earthman becomes a Martian. With "Scanners Live in Vain" Cordwainer Smith entralls you with a powerful story of the *habermans*—fantastic, eerie products of science, half-men, half-machines—whose task it is to pilot spacecraft across the gulf between the worlds in defiance of the Great Pain of Space. "Scanners Live in Vain" is definitely one of the most unusual science stories ever written!

If fantasy is your favorite fiction, you'll find it in the Asimov-MacCreigh story, "The Little Man on the Subway," and in half a dozen other stories in these pages.

The first edition of "Science and Sorcery" has been limited to 1000 copies.

Jacket design by Crozetti and Walter

FANTASY PUBLISHING COMPANY, Inc.
8318 Avalon Blvd., Los Angeles 3, California

NICOLETTE TAYLOR

PO Box 134, Owen SA 5460 (c.o.a)

Please thank Elaine for her birthday greetings. I had a party in the hotel bar in Owen with potato wedges, Philadelphia and chilli dip, also toothpicks with ham, cheese, olives, salami, and cornichons. There was a mud cake too.

Christmas lunch was organised by the mayor for people without family nearby. Everyone brought a dish. There was a green bean

dish with orange wedges which at first I thought were pumpkin. Not as elegant as your bean dish.

Today I'm making room, as Morgan is planning to drive over with my granddaughters on New Year's Day.

Loved the **AI Chloë** by **Dennis Callegari**.

(26 December 2023)

Feature letter:

How I became a publisher and translator

JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG

PO Box 94, S-260 40, Viken, Sweden

Fans were for a very long time a large part of my contacts. I am, I suppose, in many ways fairly typical of those who became inordinately active in fandom. In my case probably brought on largely by early illness. At about three, I was found to have severe allergic asthma, brought on by allergic reactions to things like pollen, dust, animal fur (my parents had to give away their Afghan hound), and much else. So I spent about a third of the time from three to eleven in bed, either at home or in the **Sachsska children's hospital** in Stockholm. I was, as I understand it, very lucky; early on, my attending physician was a doctor named **Sven Kraepelien**, who was an asthma specialist working on his doctorate on the treatment of that particular disease, and who chose me as one of the 100 patients he intended to follow for his MD thesis. This meant that for a number of years, he was on

constant call for his research group, and always made beds available for us at the hospital when necessary. So I spent somewhere between two and three years at the Sachsska, and still have some, though vague, memories from there, including a night spent hiding under the bed when older and less sick kids were out to somehow bother me and others. Consequently I had virtually no friends, was never really socialised, but learned to spend my time listening to the radio and reading.

This kept on, though with decreasing frequency of attacks, during my first few years of school; I was sent to a small, private school where I made very few friends but instead was taken in by two elderly ladies who ran a magazine and tobacco store next to the main entrance to the apartment building where the school was housed on the second and third floor. I spent most lunch breaks in their store, where they allowed me to sit in a chair and read all the new **comics** as long as I was quiet and careful with the

magazines so that they could still sell them as mint after I had read them. At around ten or eleven, I had tired of comics, which on the whole struck me as pointless (the **Superman** adventure that made me give up *Superman* for the rest of my life I still remember — a meteor was threatening Metropolis, so Superman dug out an enormous inverted cupola in the Arctic ice, brought a billion tons of sand from the Sahara and put in it, went up to the moon for speed, flew his fastest down into the sand to turn it into molten (and, I suppose, armoured) glass at the explosion when he slammed into it, thus creating a giant glass cupola, which he placed over Metropolis so that the meteor when it hit bounced off. This made up the requisite number of pages. Since I had previously seen him fly into space and move objects there, it struck me as simply a waste of time in order to fill the story, and I never read any further *Superman* adventure.

I was, for a long time, lucky. My asthma went away at puberty — according to my doctor, this was fairly common with children; around half of his research group was lucky enough to experience the same development. He still was on call, however, until I was 20. By then I was in good physical shape, after having been plagued through most of my teens by numerous infections, including a dozen or more cases of single or double pneumonia, in a couple of cases so bad that I managed to develop allergy to penicillin (no fun; your hands and feet swell up to double size and look — not to mention feel — like raw and red meat). By the time I had my last meeting with Dr Kraepelien, he had long since passed his doctorals and was the head of the Sachsska children's hospital and a highly regarded specialist; I came to say goodbye and we talked for half an hour in his office at the hospital, where we shared cigarettes at his desk. Times were pretty different back in the 1960s.

At any rate, I had no playmates as a child, apart to some small extent from a guy called **Chris-Ivan**, son of friends of my parents, though the typical experience I remember with him was that he would sit around reading my comics while I built some elaborate

Lego structure on the floor of my room, after which he would say, 'Now let's play bomb raid' and throw stuff at it to destroy it. I seldom saw him after I became well, and have never kept in touch with him.

My first actual friends were some of the younger fans I met after I had entered fandom — the closest during the early years were **Mats Dannewitz Linder** and **Bertil Mårtensson**, both of whom I met in 1963. After them came other fans I met initially only through correspondence — **Peter Singleton**, a weird English fan who was actually locked away in a mental institution. but carried on a voluminous correspondence with many fans around the world — I was one of them. **Peter Weston** was another, in the US **Seth Johnson** and **Harry Warner**, but also several others, including **Terry Carr**, **Bill Donaho**, **Robin Shuster**, a girl I wrote fervent love letters to for years but who felt less than enthused about me when we finally met in Copenhagen when we were both around 20. But by then I had been well for a few years and also actually had made mundane friends in high school, while primarily until the end of the 1970s spending all spare time in fandom.

What ended that was two experiences, the first of them being the years I spent as **a draftee in the army**, which stationed me at a signal corps regiment outside Uppsala. I was initially inducted to a preparatory officers' school there, since it seems I had done exceedingly well on the various tests given to drafted subjects, but after a few weeks we were asked to write an essay as part of our personality evaluation, and so, inspired by my reading of Rand and other liberal authors, I wrote an essay on why compulsory military service was legalised slavery and incompatible both with human natural rights and with the UN declaration of human rights. I was consequently pulled from officers' training and reassigned to non-fighting duties. I spent a fairly boring year working a switchboard, sorting papers, and typing, and could take immense amounts of time off to attend Uppsala university and to produce fanzines. Even so, I don't doubt the experience was enormously good for me; I had to learn to talk to and get on with non-readers,

non-sf-fans and in general people of many different kinds I had never before known or spoken to.

The other thing ending my full-time fanac was when I was asked to come to work for the **Moderate Party**, then in a government coalition with two other non-socialist parties, in 1978. (That came about because after the army, I applied for the job of editor of the Stockholm Student Union magazine, *Gaudeamus*; this was in late 1971, when I was 22, and apart from my application I sent in a bunch of my best fanzines; weirdly, I got the job, and so from early 1972 through 1973, when I was offered the job as Sam Lundwall's replacement as sf editor with **Askild & Kärnekull publishers**, I was editor-in-chief of Sweden's largest student magazine, which had 23 issues a year and printed around 50,000 copies. The job brought me into contact with a huge number of people, many of them active in student politics, and I became friends with many of them; it was one of them, **Dag Klackenborg**, later a member of parliament, diplomat, and later still a successful bookseller, who phoned to ask me to join the staff of the moderates as editor of their membership monthly magazine and all-around staff writer. So I shouldered my libertarian convictions and came to work for the moderates; during my five years in that position, I worked hard at converting as many young moderates as I could to libertarianism, and the party magazine never in that time mentioned such party stalwarts (the moderates had, before their then leader **Gösta Bohman**, who was a kind of closet liberal radical, always been Sweden's most conservative party) as the monarchy, the draft, government schools, the state church, and so on. I know that there was after my first month or two at party headquarters never a single week when not at least one, often more than one, local party group didn't write in to demand my being fired for my extremist views. In the end, after Mr Bohman resigned as party leader (in late 1981, tragically due to his wife having been struck by Alzheimers, at a time when he was in fact the most popular party leader in Sweden and might well have become the prime minister after the 1982 election), I was summarily fired by his successor, **Ulf Adelson**, who also fired a half

dozen other executive employees (executives were the ones, like myself, empowered to formulate and espouse party policies in public) for extreme liberalism. Adelson went on to lose the election and in the 1982 election the Social Democrats under **Olof Palme** got back in power after six years in opposition, their first period outside government since 1933.

(13 July 2020)

I'm reasonably well for my age, I suppose, though my diminished lung capacity is tiresome since it's tiring. But busy I am — currently translating **Stephen King's** next year's collection of mostly new stories, spent last weekend in an outrageously cold small town called Eskilstuna, where the fall meeting of the **Swedish Crime Fiction Academy** was held and we handed out the annual prizes to Best First Novelist, Best Swedish Crime Novel, Best Crime Children's Book, and Best Crime Novel Translated into Swedish. Can't say I stand by all of the results, but then I'm used to being voted down. (Some translated books I thought ought to have won but weren't even shortlisted: **James Ellroy's** *L.A. Confidential* and *The Black Dahlia*; **Harlan Coben's** *Win*; **Jonathan Lethem's** *Motherless Brooklyn*; and **Stephen King's** *Billy Summers*. I won't mention the Swedish novels I think should have won, since you have never heard of either them or the ones that did win.)

Monday I'm flying to Stockholm to participate in the first panel discussion of science fiction ever held by the **Swedish Authors' Society** (founded in 1893, so it's taken its time to discover there is such a thing — in the mid 1970s, when one of the founders of Swedish fandom, **Dénis Lindbohm**, had published his first half dozen books, he told me that he had applied for membership but been rejected, since they had found that he had 'never published any worthwhile fiction').

And I'm currently thinking very actively of starting a new, small publishing company to do sf — there is almost none published in

Sweden, but a large number of books that ought to be translated. On my shortlist of stuff I'd like to bring out: **Suzy Charnas' *Walk to the End of the World***, **Stapledon's *Sirius***, **Russ's *The Two of Them***, **Walter Tevis's *The Man Who Fell to Earth***, a collection of stories by **Kuttner and Moore**, another collection by **Tiptree**, **Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*** ... well, there are enough titles for a year or two, the idea being to do four books each spring, four each fall, beginning, I hope, next fall. But we'll see, of course. I probably have the money to do it, at least for a couple of years.

And I still write stuff; a couple of months ago I had a longish essay called '**The Thing About Literature**' in a quarterly journal called ***Bibliis*** and published by the **Friends of the National Library of Sweden** — very prestigious, but pays no fees. Oh well. *SFC* is always a treat and a joy; many thanks.

(9 December 2023)

[*brg* Scandi-noir TV series are popular here, but mainly for those people who can download streaming services (and I still can't; the explanation is long and tedious). But I find very few Scandi-noir titles in the bookshops. New novels by Jo Nesbo, and an Icelandic author whose name I can never remember, and almost nobody else. Maybe the national distributor Booktopia has a Scandi-noir section in its online catalogue. Anyway, I don't need new authors or books in the house — the overflow from the shelves is already up to 50 boxes.

Holly plays around in my mind, as it's meant to do. I finished it last night. And it occurs to me that **Holly Gibney** herself is rather bland compared to the character introduced by King in *Mr Mercedes*. I've still to track down the intermediate novels in which she turns into the character in her own novel. **Holly** is really about the old academic couple, and the subject matter is the American (and to an extent, Australian) obsession with avoiding

becoming old. They are the real subjects of the book, in part because their method of capturing victims is shown from the beginning, in part because the science behind their actions just might have validity, but mainly because they are able to fool themselves for such a long time that their methods are working. The other blazing character is the much-loved senior poet, whose actual creative achievements and abilities are a main factor in prolonging her life. The detective activities of **Holly** and friends seem just a bit pedestrian compared with the way King brings to vivid life the motives and actions of his villains. (Nobody could forget **Mr Mercedes** and his ice cream van.)

That's an amazing roll call of books you've translated. Probably most of them are unobtainable now, because of the disappearance of secondhand bookshops. Perhaps they are now on e-book lists, but I don't read e-books. But they are on my shelves, and they are staying there until I die. Elaine can keep what she likes after that.

In a letter to me you mention a large number of my favourite novels: *Forgotten Lives* (the last time I achieved a professional reviewing gig, in *The Age* many years ago), *Greybeard*, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, *Forever War*, *The Lincoln Hunters*, *The Long Loud Silence*, *The Man In The High Castle*, etc etc. An intoxicating list. All should be re-read, but probably won't be.*]

Alas, that long list of favourite sf novels were not ones I've translated, but books I have published while in a contracting capacity at other or at my own companies; with only two exceptions (**Heinlein's *The Door Into Summer*** and ***Starship Troopers***) I have translated none of them. I certainly would have liked to translate some of them, but when I've been a publisher I've seldom had the time to translate much; translating is something I do to make money when between (or, of course, lately retired from) publishing positions.

My major publishing stint was the six years I spent at the most enjoyable job I've ever held, as fiction publisher for the **Bra Böcker Publishing Group**, where I had one trade imprint and mostly three book clubs and chose all fiction for all of them; my list was over a hundred titles annually, considerably more than any other single publisher in Sweden at the time. But during that period I had no sf or fantasy imprint, and so published mainly mainstream fiction, some poetry, some horror, a fair amount of crime fiction, some romance, you know the drill. I did get a number of what I thought were sf and fantasy titles that might appeal to a more general readership — **sf** by **Clarke, Niven and Pournelle, Mike Resnick, Michael Crichton, Orson Card's** first Ender novel; **fantasy** by **Jonathan Carroll, Tim Powers, Suzy McKee Charnas, and Dan Simmons**. But I also did two (one of them huge) collections of stories by **Harlan Ellison**, which had excellent reviews, and I published **Ben Okri**, whom I suppose you might call a fantasy author (or at least 'magical realist').

Otherwise, though, I'm fairly proud of having had a decent number of bestsellers — among authors I introduced in Sweden at that house were people like **James Ellroy, John Grisham, Diana Gabaldon** (an sf fan, of course, and writing fantasy), **Dean Koontz** (we literally sold millions of books by Koontz, although I find him a basically formulaic and indifferent writer; still, he writes horror for people who dislike actual horror — in a Koontz novel you can rest assured that the hero, the girl friend, and the dog will all survive while the monster is disposed of), and **Sue Grafton**. It was enormous fun to do those lists and find the books for them; I did at least four international book fairs annually, adding also each year a week in New York to visit agencies and publishers, and I had an editorial budget of around US\$6 million. Then the company switched its CEO and after half a year I quit. You can't work as a publisher for someone who before a Frankfurt fair tells you it's okay to purchase rights for a certain amount, then two weeks after the fair tells you to renege on those contracts. It was a sad day. A few months after I quit the company was sold, though, and the new owner fired half the staff anyway, so probably it was

just as well that I left. (Old history, really; it strikes me that today is almost exactly 30 years since I handed in my resignation.)

I agree with you about the subtext of **Holly**, of course, but beg to disagree about the detection part: as far as I understand that part of the novel is actually very realistic, which of course makes it pretty pedestrian since actual detective work usually is. This, too, is something King likes to do: try to be as realistic as possible in order to make the fantastics he throws in more believable, which they are if you already believe in the characters and their activities.

Another quirk of **Stephen King's**, which seemingly many readers don't quite understand and therefore complain about, is that he usually refuses the traditional American Mythos notion of Hero in Final Duel with Evil. The evil in most of King's stories is really once it's brought on stage quite pitiful and far from powerful; it takes no duel at dawn to dispose of it, and King's heroes are almost never particularly heroic. But many readers complain about this. I suppose that this, again, is because I doubt that King believes much in the grand evil of westerns and thrillers; he cares about his characters, even those among them who do stupid or nasty or misguided things, but views none of them as superheroes.

Apart from King, anyway, it's not often I've been given any sf or fantasy to translate. I've done an **Asimov** long ago (**The Currents of Space**), the two Heinleins mentioned, a pretty bad **Murray Leinster** (**The Monster at Earth's End**), also long ago, the three novels so far written by **Andy Weir**, both of **Ted Chiang's** story collections, **Dick's Counter-Clock World**, but that's about it. Ten books out of the around 200 I've translated. At least a hundred have been crime fiction. A fair amount have been non-fiction about stuff like dinosaurs, dogs, space, geography, even in desperate moments about feng-shui and magical crystals. You translate what you're offered if you need the income. The vast amount of sf I actually have translated has been short stories, for **Nova** magazine and for the five sf anthologies I've edited — in all, around 140 short stories, and certainly 120 of those sf. Some of those



were enormous fun to translate, like **Joe Haldeman's 'The Hemingway Hoax'** (which necessitated checking huge amounts of Hemingway texts), or **Poul Anderson's 'Goat Song'**, where I had enormous fun translating the various ballads and poems he quotes. For **King's 'Dark Tower'** series, I also did the first Swedish translation of **Browning's 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'**, 34 six-line stanzas of rhymed iambic pentameter. I actually like translating formal verse; it's to me what I suppose crossword puzzles are to many others, and occasionally I've been commissioned to translate just the verses in some book otherwise translated by someone else. I greatly enjoyed doing five or six **Dorothy Parker** poems for one romance novel, for instance, and I've done a couple of **Kipling** poems for some other book. I should have kept the books; now I hardly remember how I solved **'McDonough's Song'**, or **Parker's 'Resumé'**.

Of the probably almost a hundred crime novels I've translated, I think I might offhand be able to recall perhaps half a dozen. Most were run-of-the-mill, quickly typed, and as quickly forgotten. Sadly, perhaps. But on the other hand, when you care about what you translate, it takes longer, is a greater effort, and so pays less. A ridiculous but inescapable conflict. I don't deplore the 25 novels by **David Baldacci** I've translated (the second greatest number of books by any single author I've done), but I couldn't tell you the plot of more than a couple of them in any detail at all, and for most I couldn't remember the titles), and they've paid our upkeep for years without any great effort.

(11 December 2023)

ANDREW DARLINGTON

**Spa Croft Road, off Manor Road,
Ossett, West Yorkshire WF5 OHE, UK**

This is something that has never happened to me before.

Just before Christmas the editor of the magazine I write for (Sean

of *R'n'R*) asked me if I was interested in doing an interview with **Melanie Safka** for the next issue. Naturally I sprang to accept the opportunity, and waited for the word from her PR or record company to set up the Zoom! face-to-face appointment to chat, in the regular way. I was lying in the bath, relaxing in the warm suds, going through various questions and approaches to ask her. She must have been quizzed about the sixties, about Woodstock, about 'Ruby Tuesday' so many times, so how can I get around that with something she's not been interrogated about before? Ask about her contemporaries, Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Jackie DeShannon. I remember a TV interview that DeShannon did in which she was asked what she wanted to be remembered for — as a songwriter or as a singer? And she said 'as a singer'. Which I thought was all wrong. There are any number of fine singers around hunting songs to be their next hit. But once you can write your own material, you are self-sufficient. Melanie wrote her own hits and albums.

Then just as I was thinking that it was about time to contact her PR for a hurry-up, I hear that she's died. No-one else has ever died on me before an interview. That is the strangest most unsettling sense of loss and regret for something that never happened, and now, never will

(26 January 2024)

LESLEIGH LUTTRELL
Madison, WI 53706, USA

I hope you enjoyed the day of your birthday, given all the things you and Elaine have been dealing with recently. A lot of people you know were watching **Leigh Edmonds** (with help from **Perry Middlemiss**) giving a presentation on the **history of Australian fandom 1960–1975**. Your name came up more than once. In fact I mentioned in the chat that it was your birthday, but someone said you don't zoom so that's why you weren't there. But perhaps you might look for the video on the **Fanac channel** when it's been

put up. I found it fascinating, and the rest of the fans in the audience (from all over the world) seemed to as well.

My brother **Chris Couch** was watching it from his home in Massachusetts so it felt like we were seeing it together. In fact we've seen a lot of Fanac history interviews that way. And of course I was one of the speakers when they did one about fan funds a while ago. That video is also up on the Fanac channel.

Leigh had a lot of slides, including one of the cover of your first fanzine. I was expecting the first DUFF race to be part of the presentation — and of course it was. My brother took a screen shot of one of the photos of Syncon and emailed it to me. Thinking you might enjoy seeing it, I have attached [see next page].

So glad I played that small part in Australian fan history — and made some lifelong friends doing it.

(19 February 2024)

ROB GERRAND
11 Robe Street, St Kilda VIC 3182

Thanks very much for **SFC 115**, and I'm glad I now have the print edition. It is beautiful to handle, particularly with the stunning front and back covers by Alan White and Dennis Callegari, respectively.

The pieces about Alex Skovon showed me someone who I had not known about. For the obituaries, it was sadly otherwise.

The tribute to Zelda evoked warm feelings as you captured the cat and you and Elaine's relationship with her and her sister Chloe.

So 55 years, eh? It does almost seem like yesterday, but it's not. It's fifty-five years of work. Congratulations on an extraordinary achievement in maintaining the very high quality of the discourse



**Lesleigh during her DUFF trip, August 1972. Lesleigh is still very recognisable, Ler never changed much, but these days you might not recognise the bloke on the right.
(Cover of *SF Commentary* 30, October 1972.)**



over these many years.

PS: **Norstrilia Press** is publishing **John Clute's** *The Book Blinders* on 1 May, and Leigh Edmonds' *Proud and Lonely*, his *History of Australian science fiction fandom, Part One: 1936–1961* on 5 May.

(1 April 2024)

CY CHAUVIN

17829 Peters, Roseville MI 48066, USA

I have a sort of PS to add to my last letter, which ended with some comments about **Rich Horton's** article and his fear that **Cordwainer Smith** might be forgotten. In the November–December 2023 *Asimov's*, there is a story called '**The Four Last Things**' by **Christopher Rowe**. In the introduction, editor **Shelia Williams** writes: 'The following story grew from the author's fascinations with the intersection between animal and human intelligence, the works of the legendary science fiction author Cordwainer Smith, and the eschatological traditions of various world religions.' And in case that just seems a fluke, in the March–April 2024 *Asimov's*, there is a story by **Lavie Tidhar**, '**Sunsets**'. Again, in the introduction, 'A massive fan of Cordwainer Smith, who gets his dues in this story ...' It seems that Cordwainer Smith may still be popular, at least among the newer authors. (Now, of course, I should really read these stories Smith in part inspired.)

The other odd Smith reference I may possibly have come across is a Sufi tale from Central Asia, retold by **Amina Shah**, '**The Mountain of Jade**', reprinted in *The Tale of the Four Dervishes*. One of the main characters is a talking horse, and it is set on a mountain of jade where various people are held captive. Could it have been the germ for the story '**On the Gem Planet**'?

(13 April 2024)

We also heard from ...

DAVID GRIGG (Mill Park, VIC): He and **Sue** were sorry to miss the celebration for the life of **Jenny Bryce**: 'I'm glad the occasion was well attended. She was a popular, and very active, person. A great loss.' (4 July 2023)

ROB JACKSON (Chichester, UK): 'Luckily, I did see your email with *SFC* attached, even though I don't regularly use the Inbox on the robjacksonmaya address. I usually see emails quickest if you use robjackson60. *SFC*, even in PDF format, is more than adequate as trade. But I will at least put you in the WAHFs in *Inca 22!* (4 July 2023)

MADDY HARDING (Gippsland, Victoria): 'Thanks for sending me a copy of *SFC* 112.'

RON DRUMMOND (somewhere in USA): 'It seems you got precious little feedback on my Joanna Russ essay. Saw *Oppenheimer*: magnificent film!' (27 July 2023)

MARC ORTLIEB (Forest Hill, VIC): 'Printing and postage are real killers.' (27 July 2023)

THOMAS BULL (Doncaster, VIC): 'Thank you for mailing me a printed copy of *SF Commentary 112*.' (27 July 2023)

MICHAEL DIRDA (Silver Spring, MD, USA): 'Many thanks, Bruce. I look forward to reading the latest issue.' (29 July 2023)

LYNC and **JOCKO (JAMES ALLEN)** (Coburg VIC): 'Many great tributes. Heart wrenching and heart warming.'

DAVID PRINGLE (Selkirk, Borders, Scotland): 'My e-address has not changed in almost 20 years: I'm still here at davidpringle186@btinternet.com'. (27 July 2023)

MATS LINDER (Norrstalje, Sweden): 'Glad to have contributed (in some small way) to the continued existence of *SFC*. And I am particularly looking forward to reading **Daniel King**'s article, since I've been fond of **Michael Coney** since the start of his career.' (2 July 2023)

GUY SALVIDGE (Northam WA): 'I'll be sure to let you know when I'm back in Melbourne again.' (2 July 2023)

NICK THOMAS (Coburg VIC): 'Thanks, Bruce.' (4 July 2023)

ANDY SAWYER (Chester, UK): 'Will download when back home!' (5 July 2023)

JUSTIN ACKROYD (Carlton VIC): 'My plans have been to drop in on you ... but severe back problems have got in the way of many things.' (26 July 2023)

Thanks, Justin. I was very glad that your back problems have improved enough by February so you could carry out the Vast Packing Job of putting Dick Jenssen's books in boxes in preparation for their removal from his flat. It would have been an impossible project without your help. (5 March 2024)

KAARON WARREN (Downer ACT): 'Always wonderful to catch up on what's happening.' (27 July 2023)



'Bob Holds a Party' (Alan White).

RON SHELDON (Aroona QLD): 'Chris and I will be heading off to London in September to visit some relatives then train to Bordeaux for a river cruise to Paris. Very much looking forward to it.' (28 July 2023).

Thanks, Ron, for the Facebook photos and trip report. You did seem to enjoy yourselves.

PAMELA SARGENT and **GEORGE ZEBROWSKI** (Delmar, New York, USA): 'Thanks, Bruce — much appreciated.' (28 July 2023)

ROMAN ORSZANKSI (Adelaide SA): 'Did I ever send you *The Steam Driven Flugelhorn*? It was a cassette fanzine I did circa 1983.' (28 July 2023)

Yes, Roman It's among the several hundred cassettes I saved from the 1980s. I'm not sure if it still plays.

JOY WINDOW (Lismore NSW): 'Thanks, Bruce.' (28 July 2023)

PAUL SKELTON (Stockport, Cheshire, UK): 'Many thanks. Here's hoping they manage to break my LoCer's Block.' (28 July 2023) It didn't — but I'm complimented that you read the copy downloaded from efanazines.com.

CAROL KEWLEY (Port Glasgow, Scotland): 'Thanks Bruce. Feel free to use more of my photos if you like.' (28 July 2023)

MIKE and PAT MEARA (Spondon, Derby UK): 'Thanks for the links. I'm not really into fanzines any more, but I'll try to have a look later.' (29 July 2023) That's a pity. I've always enjoyed your fanzines, even if (*sigh*) I failed as a loccer.

RICH HORTON (USA): 'Thanks, Bruce! The pdf copy is fine. It is an honour to appear in *SF Commentary*.' (19 November 2023)

DAVE LANGFORD (Reading, UK): 'I saw the announcement that it was on eFanzines and read it there!' (10 December 2023)

MICHAEL DOBSON (Bethesda, Maryland, USA): Thanks, Bruce. Hope you have a sunny, happy Christmas. (10 December 2023)

ROBYN WHITELEY (Buninyong, VIC): I thanked Robyn and **Barbara Selvay** for being part of the plot to get me to the **Wayzgoose** [Publications Branch annual reunion], despite our train service being out — which it usually is whenever I want to go anywhere. It was a very enjoyable night: 'Barb and I were equally complicit in getting you there. It would be a shame for you to have missed out.' (13 December 2023)

GREG BRIDGES (USA): 'My name is **Greg Bridges**, but no relation to **Gregory Bridges** — the Aussie SF artist. Met him once here in USA; he seemed nice enough and he is very good artist. We bought some of his prints. :: Seems I remember sending issues to you in the past (20 or more years ago!) I understand about postage.' (19 November 2023)

MICHAEL GREEN (Springvale, VIC): 'Thank you Bruce.' (13 December 2023)

ROBERT ELORDIATA (Traralgon, VIC): 'I received a drawn picture from **David Russell** in the mail on Monday, wishing me a nice Christmas. He is looking forward to **Continuum** returning next year after being away a few years because of Covid-19. (13 December 2023)

TERESA PITT (Clifton Hill, VIC): 'Two issues of *SF Commentary* just landed in my letterbox — what a nice Christmas present! Thank you so much.' (19 December 2023)

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 22 May 2024

Criticanto Reconsiderations

John Hertz

INFINITE WORLDS

by Vincent Di Fate (1997)

(Originally published November 2008 at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; copyright remains with the author. Used by permission.)

One of the panel discussions I could not attend at Denvention III, the 2008 World Science Fiction Convention, the third in Denver, was 'Twenty Essential Books of the Past Twenty Years'. I sent a note to the moderator suggesting *Infinite Worlds*. She answered 'I see what you mean.' For this spectacular survey of sf art, coffee-table size, 9 x 12 inches, 320 pages, the selecting of images (and getting permissions) is astounding even to think of; there are nearly seven hundred, most in colour, the rest monochrome, as they originally appeared.

The main parts are a hundred-page historical perspective, and a two-hundred-page examination of a hundred leading artists, one at a time. There is a foreword by Ray Bradbury, an introduction by **Vincent Di Fate**, and just after the first part a study of how a Stanley Meltzoff picture influenced three others, one of which is by Di Fate, one of which is the Paul Lehr picture on the front cover. If you are historically minded you will be pleased to find the

editorial director was W. John Campbell.

You may know the fame of Meltzoff — Lehr — W. John Campbell and John W. Campbell, Jr. — Bradbury — or Di Fate. Maybe not. Fame is relative in this wide wide world. The best work has something for the expert and for the novice.

Di Fate was the man for this book. He was Artist Guest of Honour at the 1992 Worldcon, which started it; he won the Chesley Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Association of SF Artists just after, in 1998. He had won the Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist in 1979. He had commissions from International Business Machines, the National Geographic Society, and the National Aeronautics & Space Administration of the United States Government; he chaired the Permanent Collection Committee of the Museum of American Illustration; he was consulted by Universal and 20th Century Fox and United Artists; he was an Adjunct Professor at the State University of New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, where he taught the history of illustration, and sf art.

I recount these things to show, not how Di Fate was approved — what do you care what other people think? — but his breadth and



'Saturn as Seen from the Moon' (Chesley Bonestell).

r



Cover by Paul Lehr



John Schoenherr's cover for James Schmitz's 'Goblin Night', *Analog*, April 1965.

each. Note in particular his conjoined activity in the worlds of making, teaching, commerce, and museums. Talking about art is itself an art. He had the talent for the task, and by 1997 his thirty-year career had been like a refiner's fire.

In its history *Infinite Worlds* names the right artist at the right moment. It makes the right point with the right picture, there and in the one-by-one review. Its words are right. Novices, you are in good hands; experts, see how exactly Di Fate applauds.

The masterful brush of Chesley Bonestell speaks to us with such commanding authority that it doesn't occur to us to question what our eyes behold ... essential in validating the use of astronomical art as an alternative to the garish and meretricious ... no matter how focused Bonestell was on scientific fidelity, his paintings were never less than works of illustrative art.

I can remember studying Kelly Freas' work for long hours — his superlative draftsmanship and exquisite design sense, his exceptional use of color and his superb mastery of black and white techniques ... bold, facile pen strokes ... meticulous rendering of images on scratchboard ... a sentimentality and a gestalt that make the whole far greater than the sum of its parts.

Richard Powers' surreal and largely abstract images ... opened the floodgates to using a greater diversity of styles ... raised the aesthetic standards of the field ... might well be the most prolific illustrator ... Although one is powerless to know with certainty what the shapes represent, they capture the spirit and mood of SF.

Illustrator was always Kelly Freas' word. In our field, to the elusive demands of realism upon any fiction, we couple the elusive demands of unrealism. Our authors meet both, and our illustrators meet the result. Certainly they are artists.

When technical knowledge is helpful Di Fate brings it.

Widely recognised as one of the most exquisite black and white drawings ever done for the genre, this work on scratchboard [by Virgil Finlay] illustrates Wilson Tucker's classic tale of immortality, *The Time Masters* (1954). Careful observation ... reveals that the woman's face in the foreground is drawn on the board in a series of crosshatches, while the background textures and details are scratched out of the ink in finely etched stipples [dots] and undulating lines.

The intense drama created by light and composition in John Schoenherr's work reveals an aesthetic sophistication ... the art for 'Goblin Night', one of his best *Analog* cover paintings, uses values [degrees of lightness and darkness] to great effect. The bold, triangular silhouette of the animal contrasted against the starry night sky is most dramatic ... an early step by the artist toward brightening his palette.

Michael Whelan's art is character-based, intensely rendered, and beautifully colored ... His careful manipulation of values and ... analogous color schemes [all principal colours having one component in common] are highly effective in creating mood ... often uses airbrush ... fastidious in bringing every aspect ... to a high level of finish.

There are famous pictures here; to name only six by artists I have not yet mentioned, Frank R. Paul's magazine cover for *The War of the Worlds*, Edd Cartier's magazine interior for 'The Crossroads', Hubert Rogers' magazine cover for 'New Foundations', the Hildebrandt brothers' poster for *Star Wars*, Diane and Leo Dillon's cover for the Caedmon Records *Foundation and Empire*, Ron Walotsky's book cover for *Temporary Agency*. They were made to illustrate sf stories; they are here to illustrate the story of sf.

To this extent, in fairness to Di Fate, we must realise his book is backwards. The contents of *Infinite Worlds* are aesthetically successful, characteristic (or interestingly uncharacteristic),

striking — pictures in themselves worth looking at, with less regard for their publisher or for what they illustrate. That is the reverse of what the men and women who made them had as their task. I do not propose it as a fault; I consider it an achievement.

So is the beauty of his book.

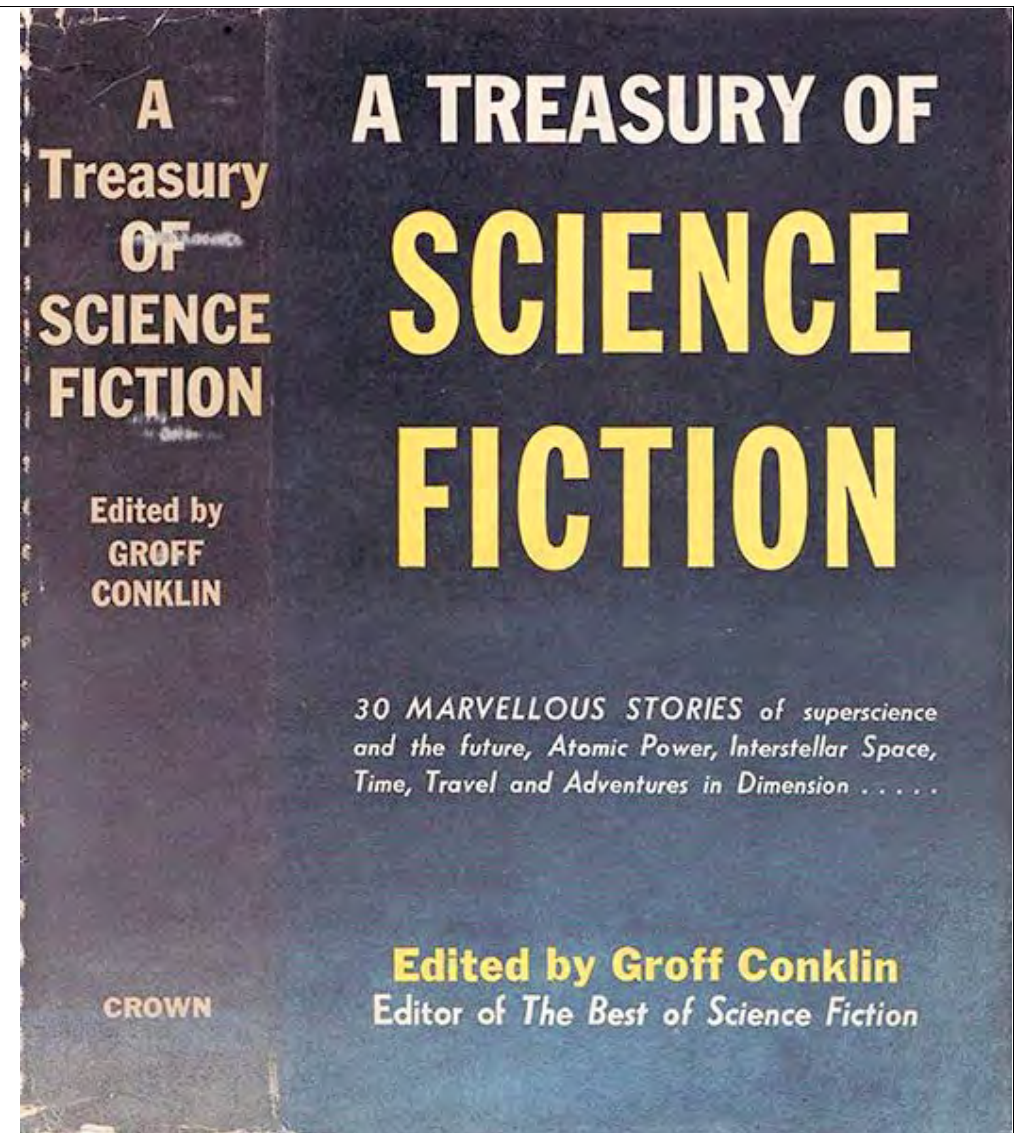
A TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION edited by Groff Conklin (1948)

(Published originally April 2007 at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; copyright remains with the author; used by permission.)

Groff Conklin (1904–1968) was one of our best anthologists, and *Treasury*, his second, was one of his best anthologies. I'm here to talk about the original hardback Crown edition, 517 pages, thirty stories; under the same title Berkley reprinted eight in a 1957 paperback. Crown sold *Treasury* at \$3.50 when gasoline was 26¢ a gallon. That's history for you.

Great and famous stories are in this *Treasury*. Three are from the spectacular partnership of Henry Kuttner and Catherine Moore, 'Mimsy Were the Borogoves' under their pen name Lewis Padgett, 'No Woman Born' as by Moore, 'Vintage Season' as by Lawrence O'Donnell. 'Woman' Conklin called 'scintillating ... the C. L. Moore masterpiece' in his introduction. 'Season', the only story included of its length, was voted Best Novella of All Time in the 1999 *Locus* magazine poll. 'Borogoves' has just (March 2007) inspired a Tim Hutton movie.

By Arthur Clarke are 'Loophole' and 'Rescue Party', both good, 'Rescue' a gem. By Robert Heinlein, 'It's Great to be Back' is one of those he made so understandable to people with no special love of sf that it ran in *The Saturday Evening Post*. 'With Folded Hands' may be the best thing Jack Williamson ever wrote. 'The Ethical Equations' by Murray Leinster, well crafted like so much by that master artisan, touches in passing a notion Heinlein built a future



history on. 'Flight of the *Dawn Star*' by Robert Williams, published in John Campbell's *Astounding*, compares wonderfully with Campbell's own 'Forgetfulness' published (as by Don Stuart) there a year earlier.

Three more of my favourites have lacked the applause of further anthologising: 'Children of the *Betsy B*' by Malcolm Jameson, that too-rare achievement, an sf comedy; 'Tools' by Clifford Simak, a fine study by an otherwise celebrated writer; and 'The Embassy' by Donald Wollheim (as by Martin Pearson), another comedy, which did appear in a 1952 Frederik Pohl volume.

What makes an sf classic? I've been discussing this in the sf community. I propose that a classic is an artwork that survives its time; one which, after the currents which may have buoyed it have changed, can be seen to hold merit in itself. In sf particularly, changing times affect the currents of prediction and, if I may say so, preachment. I suggest they are subsidiary. Decades after the *Treasury* stories were written, a few look false through the lens of science, a few through the lens of politics. But falsehood has an extraordinary meaning in fiction.

The twentieth-century writer Vladimir Nabokov said, 'An original author always invents an original world, and if a character or an action fits into the pattern of that world, then we experience the pleasurable shock of artistic truth.' He was talking about why Jane Austen was not 'dated'; no more is Shakespeare — or Lady Murasaki — or Sophocles. The great artworks of another culture inspire us to study it; in the proverb, *To bring home the wealth of the Indies you must carry the wealth of the Indies with you.*

Below the peaks of greatness we can have what Marty Helgesen, a well-known fan in New York, calls useful fun. The *Treasury* stories were written before I was born; of their day I am no deep student; they carry no nostalgia for me; the best of them are delicious for their own sake, and although this is quite sufficient, to enjoy it now that we are different broadens the mind.

To stay with Nabokov a little further — I am quoting his *Lectures on Literature*, given in his Cornell University days and posthumously published (incidentally, sf lovers, they include Stevenson's 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' and Kafka's 'Metamorphosis') — 'Read

books not for the infantile purpose of identifying oneself with the characters, and not for the adolescent purpose of learning to live, and not for the academic purpose of indulging in generalizations ... read books for the sake of their form, their visions, their art.'

Ordinary touches in 'It's Great to be Back' hone the extraordinary. Mr and Mrs MacRae, returning from Luna City in the Moon, staying at a Manhattan hotel, breakfast on orange juice, coffee, eggs, and toast. To order, Mr MacRae faces the telephone and shouts at it, 'Service!' — and while he is shaving, a delivery cupboard buzzes. I'll quote. 'Breakfast over, he put down his paper and said, "Can you pull your nose out of that magazine?" "Glad to. The darn thing is too big and heavy to hold." The MacRaes had forgotten what pounds weigh on Earth. They had likewise forgotten, which is the thrust of the tale, what seeing far horizons meant.

The title of 'Tools' is a joke, and the end is a joke, although it's gallows humor. The giant evil corporation is only a pawn of the author, who was writing something better than social satire — as with Dickens, the social satire is flimsy, redeemed by the author's soaring vision. So is the wise old psychologist. Not for nothing is he named Steele. Not for nothing is he resilient, yet finally snapped under torsion. He is the hero, but not the protagonist; he triumphs in tragedy (unlike 'Vintage Season'); he out-thinks everyone, perhaps. Of all the moments in the book one of the finest is the last gesture of his cigar.

For L.A.Con IV, the 64th World Science Fiction Convention in 2006 (fourth in the Los Angeles area produced by the same people or their successors; the first was in 1972), as a member of the program subcommittee I set panel discussions of four Classics of SF, a panel each. One of the four was 'No Woman Born'. In Progress Report 4 and on the con Website (www.laconiv.org) I wrote, 'This masterly novelette explores beauty and attraction with almost inhuman resonance. It probably could not have been written by a man or in any other genre.'

Look how Moore reveals each viewpoint, the show-business manager outgoing enough for his career, the planetwide star performer persevering enough for hers. Of the imaginary science Moore gives only what the characters perceive; or for the scientist, carefully made the fulcrum but not the protagonist or narrator, what he naturally remarks to the others. By the guiding rule of our field, it is what people do with the science that makes the story. At the emotional climax, prepared by the narrative climax, Maltzer asks: 'You do admit it, then?' Deirdre demands: 'Do you still think of me as delicate?' Who has learned? Who is protecting whom — in the world of 1948? Or today? Wow!

A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT **by Mark Twain (1889)**

(Published originally June 2009 at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; copyright remains with the author; used by permission.)

Six years before Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) this story, operated by time travel but barely exploring it, is placed in the theatre of Aristocracy and the Common Man, like *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896), and perhaps *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

It has inspired a dozen versions in film, on stage and television, one a Rodgers and Hart musical (with 'Thou Swell'), others featuring Will Rogers, Bing Crosby, Bugs Bunny, and Whoopi Goldberg.

Our protagonist Hank Morgan, the Yankee, is so severe against 'those transparent swindles, transmissible nobility and kingship' (ch. 28) that his book is often made out to be an attack on them. Perhaps. But let us consider it as science fiction.

'Why 'but'?' you ask. 'Isn't science fiction social satire?' Perhaps.

There is a framing story. Its narrator, who at the end of the book

proves to be Mark Twain, tours Warwick Castle and meets a mysterious stranger. The stranger is more interesting than the tour guide. After a surprising remark he is gone. That evening he knocks on the narrator's door at the Warwick Arms. He is welcomed with a pipe, a chair, a hot whisky — a few whiskies — in hopes of a tale. After the fourth he begins, 'I am an American.' After the day at the Castle this is another surprising remark. The stranger goes on awhile, finds himself drowsy, and takes us to a manuscript called, perhaps by our first narrator, *The Tale of the Lost Land*, which at the end of the book the first narrator has just finished.

That inner story, whose title is not at all insignificant, and points to Twain's pioneering treatment of what is now a well-known SF device, is the story of Hank Morgan and his years with King Arthur — Hank Morgan, born in nineteenth-century Hartford, and King Arthur, ruling in sixth-century Camelot.

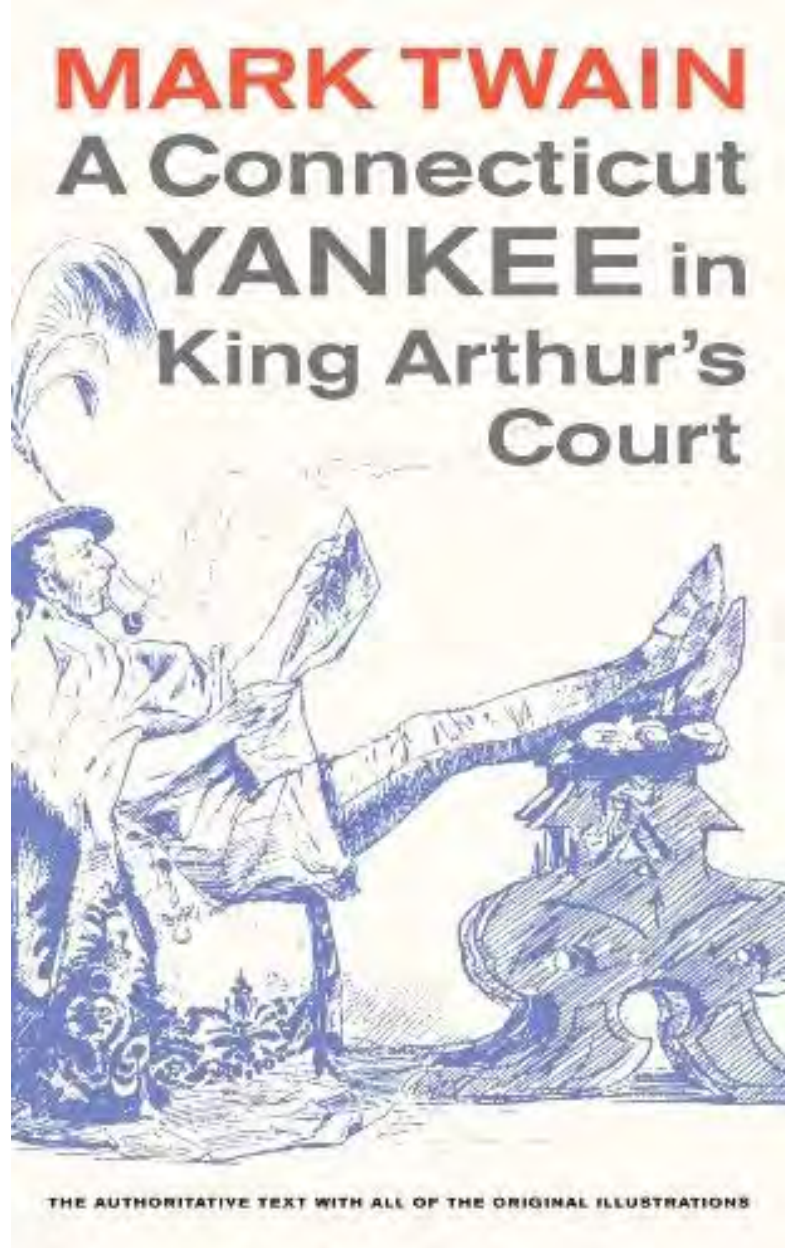
Today's sf readers presented with time travel are used to explanation. In science fiction we expect to hear about a machine, or some principle of physics; in fantasy, magic or some mystical idea; on the unclear border, perhaps both, or ambiguity, as in Tim Powers' *Three Days to Never*, or Larry Niven's *Rainbow Mars*, whose author believes time travel is fantasy but whose characters don't know that and think they're in science fiction.

This is not Twain's chosen subject, and he is far too masterly to dwell on inessentials. The first words we get from Morgan are on the second page:

'You know about transmigration of souls; do you know about transposition of epochs — and bodies?'

I said I had not heard of it. He was so little interested ... that he did not notice whether I made him an answer or not.

Four pages later we are told barely of his travel away: struck on the head in a fight, he falls comatose, to wake an hour's walk from



Cover by Daniel Carter Beard.

Camelot. Four hundred forty-four pages later we are told barely of his return: stabbed in a fight, amid rampant disease he falls comatose; we are not given his moment of awakening.

Nor is the book history. When Morgan first wakes he meets a knight armoured in plate of a millennium later. When Morgan rises to power he makes use of a solar eclipse for which he happens to have the exact date, but there was no solar eclipse in 528. Throughout he rails against domination by the Roman Catholic Church, which first made an Archbishop of Canterbury in 597, first baptised an English king — of Kent, not England — in 601, and first employed the Interdict, Morgan's doom, in the ninth century.

We do not need to know Twain's previous achievements to be sure this is no slovenry. Every step shows us what we are in for.

At the start we learn two essentials about Morgan:

My father was a blacksmith, my uncle was a horse-doctor, and I was both, along at first. Then I went over to the great arms factory and learned my real trade ... to make everything: guns ... boilers, engines ... it didn't make any difference what ...

I became head superintendent ... full of fight ... with a couple of thousand rough men under one, one has plenty of that sort of amusement. I had, anyway. At last I met my match, and I got my dose. It was during a misunderstanding conducted with crowbars.

and as he wonders what and where he has come to:

if it was still the nineteenth century and I was among lunatics and couldn't get away, I would presently boss that asylum or know the reason why; and if ... it really was the sixth century ... I would boss the whole country inside of three months [ch. 2].

He is no tyrant; he is as benevolent as he is feisty and slangy. In

his capacity and character are the seeds of his triumph and tragedy.

He does not start as an antagonist. But the first words he gets upon awakening are 'Fair sir, will ye joust? Will ye try a passage of arms for land or lady or for —' and, when Morgan retorts 'What are you giving me? Get along back to your circus, or I'll report you', the knight charges, Morgan flies up a tree, and the knight takes him prisoner.

By the twenty-first century we have innumerable First Contact stories. Twain mostly sustains the main characters we know from Malory's superb *Death of Arthur*: Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere, Kay who captures Morgan. Twain makes Merlin a charlatan, but shrewd and vital enough to be potent. We can be sure Twain knows Malory, not only because Twain quotes him, but because Twain wields him: his poetry and drama are the tools of this book.

Among Twain's achievements in *Yankee*, the people we meet are so painted that we see how they could be what we find they are.

By the twenty-first century we also have what we call Clarke's Law, although Sir Arthur Clarke formulated more, *Sufficiently advanced technology can be indistinguishable from magic*. That is the matter of this book, before Clarke, before (speaking of Niven) *The Flying Sorcerers*, and a host of others. Morgan finds that the people who without inspection imprison him, and would execute him, are in dread of magic, perhaps because they are poor at inspection, so he seizes his technology and stands as a magician.

The nineteenth-century performer Robert-Houdin said *A [stage] magician is an actor playing the part of a magician*. Twain grasps this and shows Morgan doing it. That is some of the entertainment of this book. I may never forget the appearance of the Constantinople Bagpipers' Association, with proper complementary details, in the Valley of Holiness (ch. 23).

We love Morgan for his impatience with pretension. We love Amyas le Poulet too, a flippant page whom Morgan finds like-minded, calls 'Clarence', befriends, trains, and is almost succeeded by. Merlin is the figure of pretension. Twain knows that neither of these characters is enough to balance Morgan; this must be the King, who is thus seen, at first glance, noble, benign, and pure (ch. 3), then shown generous and faithful (ch. 6), then found hidebound (ch. 25) — a grave flaw to the likes of Morgan — then revealed wise (ch. 27) — then at the smallpox hut, in Morgan's own words, sublimely great (ch. 29). Thus Morgan and the King are in the title.

Tragedy needs sympathy. Morgan finds sixth-century England not only credulous and primitive but unjust and in pain. He determines to right these wrongs. During four hundred pages of adventure, hair-raising, comical, or both, he is, off-stage, building workshops, schools, factories. At last Twain brings Morgan to the top and Morgan can throw aside the curtain. Three years later he has slavery abolished, taxation equalised, and the telegraph, telephone, railroad, phonograph, typewriter, sewing machine introduced. But we are almost at the end of the book. What is going to happen?

If Hank Morgan were like Dorothy Gale in *The Emerald City of Oz* he could stay in this fairy-land — or if Twain were writing what Frank Baum wrote. Instead it all crashes. The land is lost.

We have seen Morgan, the alien with advanced technology, arrive in a benighted world and try to enlighten it. He seems to succeed. Since the world is our past, and our sixth century did not become the nineteenth, and Twain does not choose to write an alternative history in which it did and so stayed, the success must collapse. Twain says nothing of what we now call the time-traveller's paradox; he has bigger fish to fry.

Morgan is gotten out of England. While he is gone, various bad elements of human nature arise, a quarrel flares into war, the King

is killed, and the Church shuts down everything with an Interdict — including Morgan — as he learns when he comes home to darkness fallen — it is his home by then — and Clarence tells him Church agents had lured him away. Fifty young men stand by him. Thirty thousand knights attack. High technology destroys them. Disease from their corpses destroys the rest. Morgan's manuscript journal returns with him, as his nineteenth-century clothes went with him to Camelot.

At the beginning of the end Clarence asks, 'Did you think you had educated the superstition out of those people? You may unthink it' (ch. 42). Is this a despondent book? That would be a disaster, not a tragedy. Also the remark is made by a character in fiction, revealing his viewpoint, not necessarily ours.

What kind of teacher is Morgan?

He must be good to have set up all that technology. In his first four years (ch. 10) he has a thousand trained men and fifty brilliant experts; at his height later, surely more. Since Twain puts thousands of men to death so that we see this was not good enough, how was it lacking?

Twain has Morgan tell us.

Inherited ideas are a curious thing ... I had mine, and the king and his people had theirs. In both cases they flowed in ruts worn deep by time and habit, and the man who should have proposed to divert them by reason and argument would have a long contract on his hands [ch. 8].

Old habit of mind is one of the toughest things to get away from in this world. It transmits itself like physical form and feature; and for a man, in those days, to have had an idea that his ancestors hadn't had, would have brought him under suspicion of being illegitimate [ch. 22].

True? Perhaps. But we are in a novel, not a treatise in epistemol-

ogy; this is a character speaking; and it is, repeated, his confession. The grapes are sour; he could not get them. Yet these are the very grapes at which he set himself.

Great as Morgan is — and he is heroic, or no tragedy — he makes himself the opponent of what he would change, not the ally of the people he wants to improve; he is a fighter, not a lover; and who joins him?

Practicality is the particular care of the SF author. If the characters and their world are wholly alien, how shall we understand? Not for nothing are there so often youths who must learn as they grow, ignorant or even slow companions who must be explained to. Twain, sending a man from his own day into a distant past, writes a science fiction story from the viewpoint of the alien.

It would be too much to call this a story of an unreliable narrator. Twain's own love of humankind is great enough that he can satirise his hero. So far his tale is timeless.

THE BEST FROM 'FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION': 13TH SERIES **edited by Avram Davidson (1964)**

(Published originally July 2008 at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; used by permission)

'We are all of us one-of-a-kind writers, really, but Avram was more one-of-a-kind than most,' said Robert Silverberg in *The Avram Davidson Treasury*. Like Winsor McCay's Little Nemo, like R. A. Lafferty, like Gerard Manley Hopkins outside our field, **Avram Davidson** was both fine and distinctive.

As an author he could be simple or complex. What could be simpler than his short story 'The Golem'? He could be recondite — the word 'recondite' may itself be recondite, alas — but he did not speak only to the love of learning; take 'The Affair at Lahore Cantonment', which won the Edgar Award from the Mystery

The best from FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by Avram Davidson

Thirteenth Series



Cover by Tom Chibbaro.

Writers of America, and in which the Kipling reference is brilliant for whoever sees it, while everyone else is still hospitably served.

He was a kind of miracle, as shows in his short wonderful term editing *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. He kept up his own writing, he followed Alfred Bester as the *F&SF* book reviewer, and he brought out others' marvels.

Behold this anthology.

He received these suitably thirteen stories; the history of literature is full of things that were sent but not received. Perhaps he improved them; the public record rightly does not say, and although some of the authors are alive, and I know some of them, I have not asked. He selected them. He saw and provided achievement other than his own.

Here is Jack Vance's 'Green Magic', a candidate for his best though he widely excelled before and since; it was fifteen years later the title story of a collection. Here is Ray Nelson's first story to be anthologised, 'Eight O'Clock in the Morning', a strange look at freedom from the man who fifteen years earlier invented the propeller beanie.

Many stories here are strange looks at freedom. Shall we say that was in the air then? Why not? It may be in the air now. How can art not be of its time? The best will also be of our time. That *how* I can't tell you. But we can try to appreciate it.

Here is Richard McKenna's 'Hunter, Come Home'. If his best in our field may be 'Casey Agonistes', a rival is 'Hunter', his most stfnal — our old adjective (pronounced 'STEF-nal'), a relic of the word Hugo Gernsback wanted, *scientifiction*. The science is biology. 'Hunter' was the cover story for the March 1963 *F&SF*, with the Mordinmen and the fate of Midori Blake well illustrated by Ed Emshwiller, who did more covers for *F&SF* than anyone else. Those who know the story will like my calling it a rival.

Here is Davidson's own 'What Strange Stars and Skies', also later to entitle a collection. It is less simple and less fantastic than his 'Where Do You Live, Queen Esther?' but it is as poetic and just. His wonderful women! He shows them vivid and victorious, smart and strong, quiet and quirky, which fifteen years after his death we note he does not neglect.

Zenna Henderson published seventeen stories about the People, who looked so much like Earth folk that when their planet succumbed to a natural disaster, and their ships fled through interstellar space, and some landed on our world, they could fit in — or almost, see 'Pottage'. Not until the ninth, 'Deluge' here, are we told of the escape. Henderson's gift is to sail at the edge of sweetness. One false tack and she would be saccharine. She isn't. When Priscilla and Mark Olson of the New England SF Association's NESFA Press edited the 1995 collection *Ingathering*, Priscilla in her introduction called these 'stories of us at our best, as we hope to be, and where (with work and with luck) we may be in some future'.

Arrangement too is an art. Davidson begins with 'The Golden Brick' by P. M. Hubbard, ends with 'Deluge'. Before 'Hunter' is 'Treaty in Tartessos' by Karen Anderson; after, 'McNamara's Fish' by Ron Goulart. Nor do the comic and tragic simply alternate; before 'Strange' comes 'They Don't Make Life Like They Used To' by Bester, which is, at least, both. There are resonances. The sea keeps coming in. It has a silent part in 'Treaty'. Ships go away at the end of 'Brick' and 'Deluge' — leaving us with what different kinds of happiness!

Let us take in some of the voices.

Vance:

He explored much of the green realm, finding so much beauty that he feared his brain might burst. Nourishment came in a thousand different forms: from pink eggs which burst into a hot sweet gas, suffusing his entire body; from passing through

a rain of stinging metal crystals; from simple contemplation of the proper symbol. Homesickness for Earth waxed and waned.

McKenna:

'Miss Blake, young Craig has clearly been your dupe, as you insist he has,' Barim said ... 'Invent a motive, then. Say you hate Mordin. Say you hate me.'

'I hate no one. I'm sorry for you.'

'I'll give you a reason!' Miss Ames jumped to her feet ... 'Your reckless, irresponsible use of translocation endangers us all! Accept defeat and go home!'

She helped Barim recover his composure. He smiled ... 'We neither accept defeat nor fear death. We require no tears of anyone.'

Anderson:

It was darker inside the tent than out, despite the luxury of three lamps burning at once. 'I hope you've dined well? May I offer you something?' Kynthides asked politely, with considerable misgivings. The centaur probably wouldn't know what to do with a barley loaf, and as for wine — well, there wasn't a drop within five miles of camp. Or there had better not be.

Each of these speakers is wrong, as it happens, but their authors do not make them cheap. The first, Howard Fain, is transported by learning, but not enough. We are left to realise he never thinks what good he might do others. Barim the Huntmaster is not smug. We may dislike the ways of Planet Mordin, but the courage of the Mordinmen has truth. The centaur too may be more noble than his opponent. With Vance's strange poetry we have nourishment in a thousand forms. With McKenna's drama of strength and ignorance we have human pathos that makes the scientific method, mistakenly applied as it is, our pro-agonist. With Anderson's horse story we have corroborative detail to give artistic

verisimilitude.

Short fiction has been called the peak of sf writing. Mike Resnick gave the novelette a moving tribute on Hugo Awards Night at Chicon VI, the 2000 World Science Fiction Convention. Four of these thirteen are novelettes, Bester, Davidson, Henderson, and McKenna; the rest are short stories. Focus can achieve much in little. Shakespeare's plays run three hours, Dickens' novels run eight hundred pages; but Shakespeare also wrote sonnets, before Dickens was Austen, and in Japanese the highest form of writing for a thousand years was the 31-syllable *waka*, which finally, not short enough, gave birth to the 17-syllable *haiku*. The Roman orator Cicero said, 'Please forgive me for writing such a long letter, I didn't have time to write a short one.'

Michelangelo when asked how he sculpted said, 'I get a block of marble and chip away anything that doesn't look like a Madonna and Child.' This jest has truth. It presupposes not only his vision but his focus. In our field A. J. Budrys said, 'Always ask yourself: Why are they telling me this?'

'Peggy and Peter Go to the Moon' by Don White is even shorter than 'Eight' or 'Treaty'. Everything about it is right, although everyone in it is wrong, really wrong. Nanny helps Peter on with his new red mittens. He is nineteen. Peggy is wearing her mink-collared gold lamé party frock, the one she hadn't worn since Rosemary Jane's party celebrating the defection of her father to the Russians. Cook has come (not 'the cook', they're British) with sandwiches, and a nice Thermos of hot Bonox and rum. Off they go from their father Professor Love's secret rocket range, the little Loves. Off go Professor and ex-nanny. His last words are cream.

THE END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov (1955)

(Published originally November 2007 at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; copyright remains with the author).

Here is Margaux wine gleaming red through the glass, with the flavor you can't decide whether to call strong or delicate and the breath of violets. Here is Japanese *nigirimeshi*, seaweed around a triangle of rice holding in its careful blandness a sharp centre, perhaps a salted plum.

Asimov at Noreascon III, the 1989 World Science Fiction Convention in Boston, told us that while he had by then published 400 books, of which only 75 were sf, he considered himself an sf author. By his death in 1992 it was 500.

He is represented in each of the ten categories of a library's Dewey Decimal System except philosophy. He used to say a good joke could do more to provoke thought than hours of philosophical discussion.

This book is dedicated to *Galaxy* editor Horace Gold, who rejecting it as a short story provoked its rewriting as a novel. It has been translated into Russian (1966), Hebrew (1979), Finnish (1987), and Spanish (2004).

Two thousand years ago the great Roman poet Horace said to start a story in the middle of things. Fifty-five thousand years from now *Eternity* begins, 'Andrew Harlan stepped into the kettle.' He moves the starting lever. The kettle doesn't move.

Notice the touch of resonance Asimov brings by giving the same word 'move' to the kettle and the lever. Doing such things aptly is an element of the writer's art. We'll look at more.

Andrew didn't expect the kettle to move. This is time travel. He

was born in the 95th century and is off to the 2456th, a sizable distance even for a hardened Eternal.

Eternity is outside ordinary time. Men invented it. The men who live there, Eternals, are brought from ordinary time and trained for the task of watching, protecting.

If ordinary time, Reality, appears to be going wrong, Eternals change it. They seek the minimum necessary change for the maximum desired response.

Because an Eternal entered Time and tampered with a vehicle clutch, a young man does not reach a lecture on mechanics. He never takes up solar engineering. A simple invention is delayed ten years, and a war is moved out of Reality.

What if personalities were changed? The new personalities were as human as the old and as deserving of life. A great work of literature was never written in the new Reality, but copies were preserved in the libraries of Eternity, and new creative works came into existence.

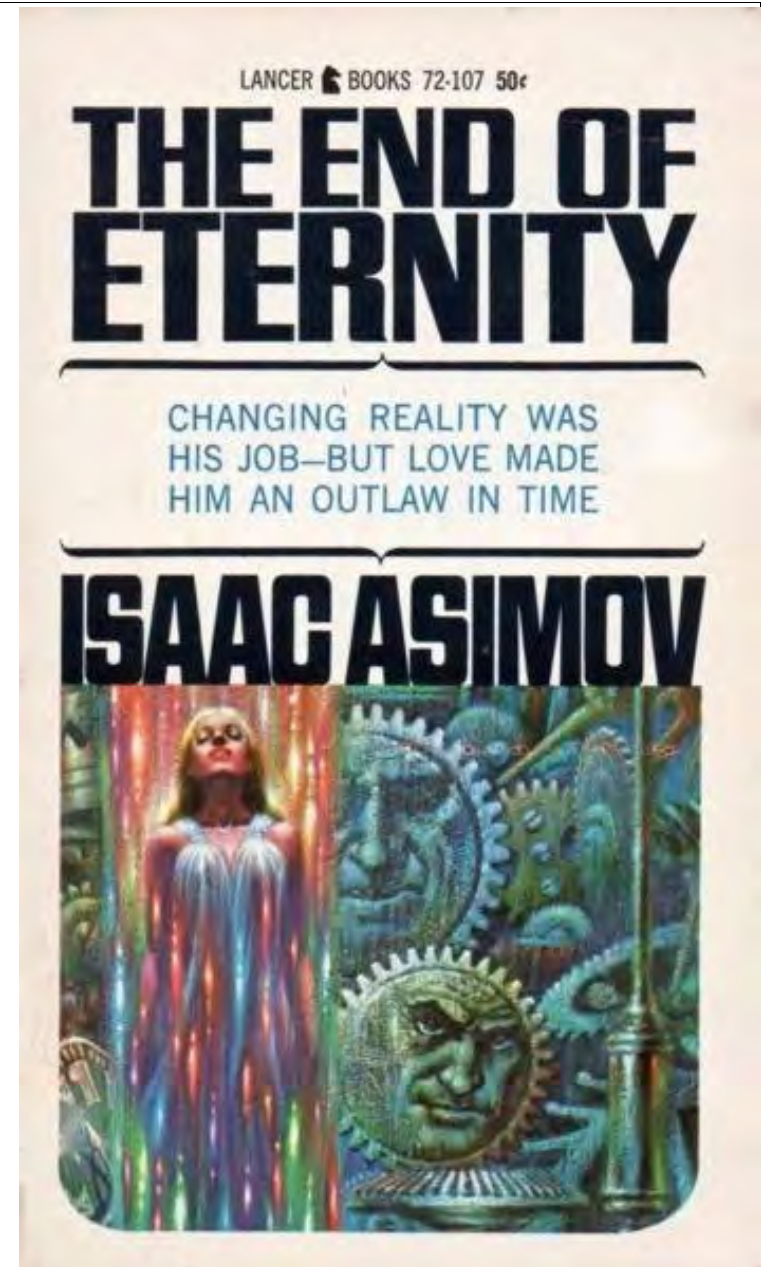
The man who got this result, and had these thoughts, is Andrew Harlan. He excels at finding the minimum necessary change.

The night after the vehicle clutch he could hardly sleep, worrying. But he had begun his career.

If there is a flaw in Eternity, Andrew muses later, it involved women. He knew the flaw — or thought he did — almost from his first entrance into Eternity, but he felt it personally only the day he first met Noÿs.

Seven pages after we see this collection of symbols we learn it is the name of a woman.

We were expecting her.



Cover by Kelly Freas.

Asimov assumes his readers know or will discover — and since this book note is on the World-Wide Web your software may not even show you — that the two dots over the vowel 'y' are a diaeresis mark, signalling a separate sound.

In the interests of avoiding emotional entanglements, an Eternal must not marry. In the interests of avoiding emotional entanglements, an Eternal must not have children. Liaisons exist, as a compromise with human appetites.

Such liaisons are almost always of Eternal men and Timer women.

Women almost never qualify for Eternity. For some reason, taking them from Time into Eternity is ten to a hundred times more likely to distort Reality than is taking men.

When Eternity was published, men — and women — readers might have smugly taken this in stride. Today's women — and men — readers might smugly take offence. Wrong, wrong, all wrong. See instead what the author has made.

Noÿs Lambent as a Timer from the 482nd century comes to change Andrew's life. She is youthful, physically attractive. Andrew is promptly consumed with desire and, when we meet him, is already deep in an affair of the heart.

His conscience is clouded. His world turns sweet and sour. He is a Technician whose task is to manipulate Reality; he now marches through mist after mist of manipulation. Eternals, trained to be selfless, he sees again and again as self-interested; where they should be pure, he sees they are petty.

Yet far more is in store for him, as he ponders what underlies Reality, what he is, and what is the truth of Noÿs.

We meet the one era in Reality that develops electro-gravitic space-travel. Sociologist Kantor Voy says, 'It's an aesthetically

pleasing device. It's a pity we must Change away from it.' These particular ships are called beautiful, a rare instance of that word in the entire book. And Eternity keeps Changing away from space travel.

The four instances of 'beauty' are these ships, Andrew's work, the music of an instrument Noÿs plays, and Noÿs herself.

There is intrigue in this book, unstated plans, detection. There is indeed a scheme, but it is neither the first nor the second that may present itself — I allude to Conan Doyle's story 'The Final Problem'; Asimov was a Sherlock Holmes fan.

There is the fruit of considerable thought about time travel, which makes this book interesting to students of sf as a genre.

Similarities come to mind.

Hermann Hesse's Nobel Prize sf novel *The Glass Bead Game* (1943) imagines a secular culture of men, in about the year 2400, who for the sake of their profession as a kind of guardians exclude themselves from women. Hesse is alive to consequences of that, and as to thoughts of eternity he lets us glimpse the Roman Catholic Church offstage, whose monasticism, it seems, is of a fundamentally different order.

Asimov's *Eternity* never mentions religion.

Larry Niven's novel *Protector* (1973), the later books in his Ringworld series (*The Ringworld Engineers* [1980] and thereafter), and his time-travel comedy *Rainbow Mars* (2000) explore problems of protecting people that may arise even with superior intelligence, technology, or perspective.

There is no sign that Eternals have superior intelligence; indeed it is essential to the story that they are of ordinary human nature.

Discussing Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) at sf conventions recently I've observed that, while we may prefer customs between men and women today over those when it was published, we have to recall the shocking effect then of some *Brave* passages.

In George Orwell's *1984* (1949) the idyll of Winston Smith and Julia — Orwell never tells us her last name — was still a shock.

We may react quite differently from a 1950s audience to the explicit — but not graphic — intimacy between Andrew Harlan and Noÿs Lambent.

The 482nd was not a comfortable century for him, hedonistic, marriage a personal agreement without binding force. He wishes millions of pleasure-seeking women would transform into pure-hearted mothers. She says only 'Wouldn't you like to?' and later 'You just ask a girl. It's so easy to be friendly. The girl has to be willing, of course.'

Fifty years ago this was titillating. Today it may seem offensively convenient. See instead what the author has made.

Brave New World is foaming, heady, a poem of intoxication. *1984* is a stiff dose of bitters. The *Brave* women are as false as the men. In *1984* too no one is redeemed.

The End of Eternity is a love story. Our questions about Andrew's love are right. In the end as the mists melt — indeed by reflecting on Noÿs — we recognise what he has been and done. His mistakes are worse, and his character better, than we thought. We are left with a man who learns.

Asimov's spare prose is here at its height. It stands in his language, his focus. Hills of detail are at a stroke given to the imagination. Minds and hearts — and this is a novel of the mind and heart — are painted partly by silence, by the author's silence, by what is

set before us and what goes unsaid. The reader, the re-reader, who looks, who notes, is rewarded. Theodore Sturgeon used to say, 'Science fiction is knowledge fiction.' That is true not only of physical knowledge.

THE WONDERFUL FLIGHT TO THE MUSHROOM PLANET by Eleanor Cameron (1954)

(Published originally July 2011 at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; copyright remains with the author. Used by permission.)

The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet has been loved for decades. It is on dozens of children's-book lists.

Upon publication, *The Atlantic* (Dec. 54, p. 98) called it 'a perfectly made fantasy ... most realistic description of a trip that two boys make in their own space ship. I felt as if I were right there with them.' Four pages earlier the same reviewer praised Dr Seuss' *Horton Hears a Who*, and ten pages earlier her editors praised Ben Shahn's *Alphabet of Creation*.

The *New York Times Book Review* (4 Nov 54, pt. 2 p. 30) said 'scientific facts are emphasized in this well-built story. Since they are necessary to the development of the story the reader absorbs them naturally.' Just above was praise of Walter Brooks' *Freddy and the Men from Mars*.

Coming from outside the sf community this is high praise, and these reviewers show taste.

Hugo-winning editor Ellen Datlow has applauded *Flight*. So has novelist Walter Mosley. It has strangeness and charm.

We since 1992 have been giving the Golden Duck Awards to sf written for children. In 2002 the Golden Duck Middle Grades Award was named for **Eleanor Cameron** (1912–1996). She followed *Flight* with four more books about Tyco M. Bass and the little planet

Basidium-X, *Stowaway to the Mushroom Planet* (1956), *Mr Bass's Planetoid* (1959), *A Mystery for Mr. Bass* (1960), and *Time and Mr. Bass* (1967). Of these the first is the best.

I'm writing just before the 2011 World Science Fiction Convention, 'Renovation', to be held in Reno, Nevada, during August — the 69th Worldcon, incidentally, annual since 1939 except during World War II. Renovation accepted my suggestion to schedule three Classics of SF discussions: Jules Verne, *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865); Fritz Leiber, *The Wanderer* (1964); and *Flight*.

I've been saying a classic is an artwork that survives its time; one which, after the currents which may have buoyed it have changed, can be seen to hold merit.

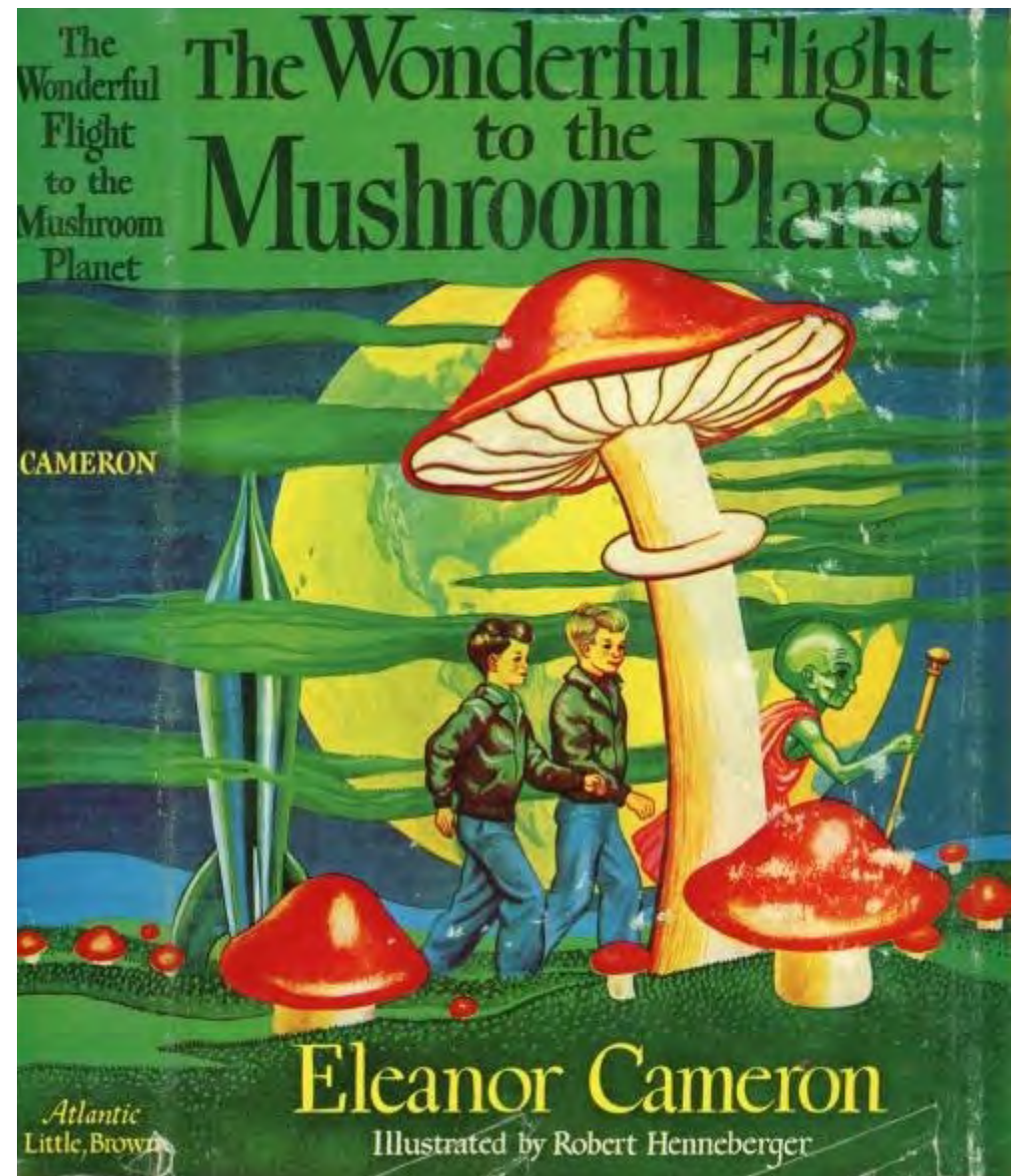
Can a children's book be a classic? Worth reading for an adult?

I've quoted the twentieth-century writer Vladimir Nabokov (this is from his *Lectures on Literature*), 'Read books not for the infantile purpose of identifying oneself with the characters, and not for the adolescent purpose of learning to live, and not for the academic purpose of indulging in generalizations ... read books for the sake of their form, their visions, their art.'

At about the same time W. L. Renwick (*English Literature 1789–1815*) said: 'A good story does not depend on anything but how it is told.' He was talking about Robert Burns.

Let's look at *Flight*. Some of us have read it; perhaps more than once.

We remember Mr Bass, who keeps saying 'precisely' although he confesses he is like a cook who can't tell anyone else afterward just how he did it. We remember his house on Thallo Street, and his newspaper want ad written, as Northcote Parkinson taught in *Parkinson's Law* three years later, to draw only one answer, the right one. We remember Mrs Pennyfeather the hen, and the



Cover by Robert Henneberger.

oxygen urn that went phee-eep, and the wise men who weren't very wise.

Why did the space ship have to be built by a boy, or two boys, between the ages of eight and eleven? Was it to make children the protagonists of the story, so that children would like it? Perhaps. Perhaps Mr Bass is the protagonist. The First Boy, David Topman, and the Second Boy, Chuck Masterson, themselves ask — fifty pages into a two-hundred-page book, when we are well along. By then we know them and their parents, and we have spent the last twenty pages with Mr Bass, a little old man who is an engineer, a farmer, and an astronomer.

In fact Mr Bass is not of our planet, he and his ancestors being Mushroom People, basidiomycetous and thallophytic. The boys are going to them on Basidium. Why not get one of the big airplane companies? 'Dear me! ... A huge rocket ship ... and all the great lumbering men in space suits with oxygen tanks and cameras and radar instruments, would have frightened the poor Mushroom People out of their wits. Then too', smiled Mr Bass rather dryly, 'what president of an airplane company would have believed me? You boys wasted no time in doubting.'

We believe Mr Bass because, by the time he gives this explanation, Cameron has already shown what makes him believable. Chapter 2 introduces him to us, before the boys meet him. We find him on a high stool, writing in an enormous ledger, under a light he invented, surrounded by a clutter of nails and wires and batteries. He finishes his arithmetic and squints through a telescope at his planetoid:

'Diameter — thirty-five miles. Yes, yes, there's no way out of it. And yet, if the diameter is so small, how in thunderation has it managed to hang onto its atmosphere?'

He is an individualist, an eccentric, but a scientist where it counts. So is the book. We also know about doubting.

In Chapter 4, David's father, a physician, who thought the want ad was odd because he knew the town and there was no Thallo Street, went to look. At dinner David said the boys had finished the space ship.

For some reason Dr Topman's face grew red: 'You mean [David asks] that you've seen Mr Bass?'... 'Er — after a manner of speaking, yes. I thought I'd just take a peek in the window, as I couldn't rouse anyone, and would you believe it, the window was flung right up in my face, and a head appeared.'... 'Oh, but Father ... was it Mr Bass? What did you say to him?' 'Very little. I was rather in a hurry. Now kindly get on with your dinner.'

Cameron's gentle comedy is only one of the gems set in her simple direct language.

At midnight of the day they deliver the ship, the boys blast off. The hour is set by Mr Bass' calculations, and he is sorry for it. Nor do the boys sneak out their windows; he insists they ask their parents' permission, which to the boys' surprise is given.

This is a point schoolteachers recommending the book make much of, thinking with others in their world that an artwork is good if it portrays what they want to promote. Second-rate readers like to recognise their own ideas in a pleasing disguise. In *Flight* the point has literary merit. The flower is that things unsnarl in this adventure; the leaf is that there are many touches of magic unrealism, to reverse an expression. Of course the boys do not sleep through midnight, but get up and go.

On Basidium they meet Mebe and Oru, who would be the King's wise men, as they are called, if they were wiser. But they are painted lovingly, as is everyone in this book, another gem.

The king, Ta, proves dignified, gracious, and intelligent. He could easily have been made contemptible — *a king!* mustn't we jeer? — or without a twinkle in his eye, near the end when we are ready

for it — mustn't we revere? But Cameron has imagined what her characters need be if they are to do what her story tells.

There are strange plants and clothes. There is trouble, which Mr Bass has sent the boys to relieve.

'Perhaps, [the King responds to them] you have a new thought ... that we must work with the thing itself which is causing the trouble.'

Their learning, their deducing, their agonising, and their answer, have the ring of truth for any scientist. Then home.

There is a reason Mr Bass could not go himself. He had other fish to fry.

And there are touches of fantasy. Some are brushstrokes that make Cameron's painting what it is. In the first sentence we see David reading *Dr Dolittle in the Moon* (1928), which A. L. Sirois rightly finds a telling detail.

Those who do not know that book get from the title alone something of David and his household; the rest, a sign. There in particular among Hugh Lofting's tales of a fantastic naturalist is a great deal beyond the possible, but it too is grounded, they all are as we see with a double-take, in science.

John Dolittle knew animals' language because he learned it by observing them. This is explicit in the *Voyages* (1922), and as he progresses from mammals, to fish, to insects, to plants, he would rather preserve his notebooks than his life.

Cameron was a craftsman who used to point out that Dylan Thomas' father read him Shakespeare at the age of four. Some of the fantasy in *Flight* seems as if it could have been brought within the possible — but this is like the way Sam Johnson or Ben Jonson blushed for Shakespeare whom they all but idolised — or at least like Lofting.

At the beginning of *Flight* David Topman goes to bed thinking about frameworks and air pressure and velocity (all, we get no other warning, are points of fantasy). At the end there is no ship left — which also kept happening to John Dolittle — but there are two notebooks and a souvenir of Ta.

Aren't Cameron's names wonderful?

So is the book.

PAST MASTER by R. A. Lafferty (1968)

(Published originally December 2009; at *Collecting Science Fiction Books*; copyright remains with the author; used by permission.)

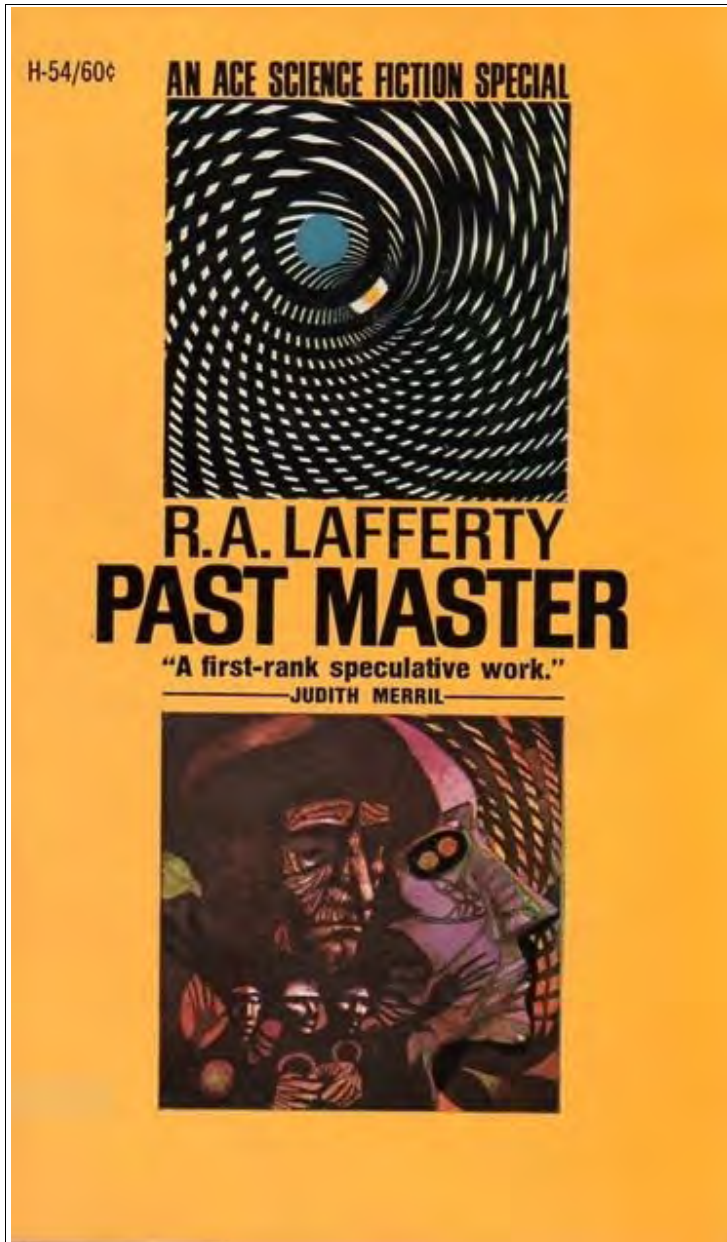
The expression is 'passed master' — one who has presented his masterpiece, has been examined, and has been accepted. But here is a master from the past.

In the year 2535, on the planet Astrobe, Thomas More is brought from the year 1535 on Earth. Humankind has lived on Golden Astrobe five hundred years. Life is perfect: only it isn't. Maybe More will help.

Or maybe he won't; maybe he will do something else; and what does who mean by help? That is the plot of this book, that is the satire. The book, standing on those feet, rises higher.

Past Master was **R. A. Lafferty's** first novel, after three dozen short stories in *Galaxy* and *If* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*; he published about thirty, about two hundred short stories.

The three big men were met together in a private building of one of them. There was a clattering thunder in the street outside, but the sun was shining ... the mechanical killers ... shook the building ... The three men ... each believed that he



Cover by Leo and Diane Dillon.

controlled the other two ... 'This is Mankind's third chance,' said Kingmaker. 'Ah, they're breaking the doors down again.' [ch. 1]

By 1968 we had been fearing political dominators, predatory drones, for a while. One of these fearsome men is named Kingmaker — Cosmos Kingmaker. Who are the others? Brutus Truth-twister? Simon Faithseller? No, they are Peter Proctor and Fabian Foreman. Lafferty can lay it on, but the hand is the hand of an artist.

'We must agree [says Kingmaker] on our candidate for World President.' 'We want a man [says Proctor] who can serve as a catchy symbol, a man who can be manipulated by us.'

By 1968 this was recognizable stage-setting.

'We need not limit ourselves [says Kingmaker] to men now living. Chronometanastatis has been a working thing for a dozen years. Find a dead man who once led well. Let him lead again. It will catch the fancy of the people.'

How short these words are, except the one Lafferty makes up; how simple, except it and the two signals of the speaker's sophistication, or his sneaking, *limit* and *fancy*.

Foreman wants More. The others agree. Foreman sends a pilot named Paul through space and then through time. Astrobe, five light-years from Earth, is by Hopp-Equation Travel less than one Earth month. But the Law of Conservation of Psychic Totality will not be abridged. There are years of psychic awareness to be compressed into a month, and it forces its compression into dreams.

Every poignant thing that ever happened, every comic or horrifying or exalting episode ... is still drifting somewhere in space. One runs into fragments (and concentrations) of billions of minds there; it is never lost, it is only spread out thin. [ch. 2]

As it happens other time-travellers have visited More. To make sure we have his book *Utopia* in mind Lafferty has him tell Paul, 'I coined the word and the idea Utopia.' More comes along. Through time and then space Paul pilots. They arrive in a tumult. Through and through the book are killers. The two men survive. When Paul comes to, both are in a barrio. Twenty years ago Astrobe was completely beautiful and civilised; then these places appeared.

'But, Thomas, everybody in Cathead and the Barrio is here by choice. They left civilized Astrobe of their own free will to set up these giant shambles. They can return to civilized Astrobe today, within the hour, and be cared for and endowed with property, and settled in ease. And they'd be rid of the mechanical murderers also.'

'God over my head! Why don't they do it, then?' [ch. 3]

To colossal Cosmopolis, the capital. There is a Convocation. The Exaltation Trumpets blast. Thomas More wins an Ovation like a pouring ocean. 'It is the Past Master,' the people everywhere say.

A précis machine gives More general information. He talks back.

'I remember now who it was who limned this all out before,' said Thomas. 'It was myself. What other man makes a joke about a tree, and the tree bears fruit? ... It was a joke, I tell you, a bitter joke. It was how not to build a world.' [ch. 5]

Against the advice of his mentors, More travels. He has a loose retinue. Amid strange places and creatures, improbable persons and animals, he becomes a strong advocate of the Astrobe Dream. Yet he wants to look more deeply. He finds the feral lands and climbs Electric Mountain. He spends days in Cathead and meets the Bishop of Astrobe — the Metropolitan — the Pope — a very old thin black man.

'Kingmaker, cannot something be done about the Programmed

Killers? They nearly had me again last night ... I am not a threat to the Dream! I love it ... I also in all honesty could blazon on my breast I have not been false to the Vision. There is something wrong with the programming of these things.' [ch. 9]

He takes office as World President. The job is amazingly easy. Bills are drawn up, agreed on and submitted by the Lawmakers. How can you go wrong when the answer is always yes? There is an additional reason to assent. A president of Astrobe who three times vetoes any proposal adopted by the Lawmakers is sentenced to death. This is Chapter 11, 'Nine Day King'.

From Earth, where on July 6, 1535, he would have been put to death for refusing to get with the program, he has come to Astrobe, where on July 6, 2535, he is put to death for refusing to get with the program.

Science fiction in 1968 was athrob with protest. There is no sign Lafferty marched to that drummer then nor does this book seem to now. In the resonance of *Past Master* his warnings are neither because of nor despite what other people cry. He speaks in a voice singularly his own.

'I don't know how to strike a medal for it,' the man said.

'If you find someone who does, tell him to strike a medal for it,' the Emperor said [we are with Charles DCXII in the feral lands]. 'Put my own fine hand on it, and the motto They Come to Me Like Eagles. Why, here is a dead saint from Old Earth, the Devil-Kid of Astrobe, a necromancer of unlikely powers, a transcendent ansel [named Rimrock, improbably a person and animal], a priest of Saint Klingensmith, an avatar who burns up bodies, and pilot Paul who is a broken-faced old warlock. Not for thirty reigns have there been so many grand people at court at one time ...'

'How long a time has the thirty reigns been?' Thomas asked

him.

'It has been what we call a rapid year,' the Emperor said.
[ch. 7]

How could More be taken in? Even today his own book is sometimes made out to be some kind of sweet. He tells Paul, 'There is something very slack about a future that will take a biting satire for a vapid dream [ch. 2].' But the prospect of relief from suffering softens the heart. In the barrio he groans, 'Is there no compassion in the civilized sections of Astrobe? Can they do nothing to alleviate the misery here [ch. 3]?' Also domination can be subtle.

'You were talking nonsense, you know,' Paul told him after that particular speech ...

'Paul, I said words and I said words, but there were other words that I did not say ... Somebody else spoke those words out of my mouth.'

'Oh, that! I suspect they've been doing it to you for a long time, and you just haven't been paying attention. You've been saying many things, publicly and privately, that don't sound like you. It's one of the oldest and easiest tricks of the Programmed. They crawl into your mind at odd moments and take control.' [ch. 9]

Is this tale a tragedy? Is it More's? In history he is first impressed with the Government program and furthers it, then has second thoughts and stands by them. He has years rising in the offices of his country and the favour of its great until he realises he can no longer do as he is asked. In Lafferty's book he starts there. He suspects and distrusts the ways of Astrobe. Yet he comes to support them. In the end he revokes his recantation. But too much has happened, and he is crushed by the motion he helped perpetuate.

Or is the tragedy humankind's? In biblical theology the Egyptians

were punished, not just the Pharaoh, because they went along. When he said 'Hurt the Israelites' no one said 'No', or 'Who are you?' In *Past Master* we see a little of the great, a lot of the dissatisfied. Their turning from official joy troubles the top. Yet the bottom stays down. Surprising numbers of it vote with their feet, walking into real pain away from unreal pleasure, indeed working far harder in Cathead than is offered in Cosmopolis: but whose hands does this leave on the levers? At the end a coup too late to save More is still advancing.

Well, does it happen? Does the reaction become the birthing?
What does it look like?

Will we see it now, in face and rump, the new-born world?

Be quiet. We hope. [ch. 13]

Grinding away all but the satire, and even the structure, would leave a very flat book. Lafferty's imagination, his poetry, and his artist's hand fill it with fire. He was one of the most original authors we have known.

THE DRACO TAVERN by Larry Niven (2006)

(Published originally May 2007 at *Emerald City*; copyright remains with the author; used by permission.)

Larry Niven is short. Brief. With his brush he touches-in bright-coloured points. We see the people and the landscape. He has an eye for the telling detail.

The Draco Tavern is two dozen stories, the most recent from 2006, the earliest from the 1970s, some anthologised before.

In the near future — 'say two years from whenever you're reading any given story,' offers his introduction — star-travelling aliens take up orbit round the Moon, and set up a spaceport in Siberia.

Rick Schumann builds an interspecies tavern. (Incidentally, it rhymes with 'wacko'; I've heard Niven say it.)

Now and then humans arrive. Look at Alan Webber:

Some customers wear a slack and gaping grin the whole time they're here, like everything they see is new and different. He wore that grin as if sketched by a drunken artist with a shaky hand. 'Offered me a wish.'

Even if I don't quote a word more, you know what kind of story this is, don't you?

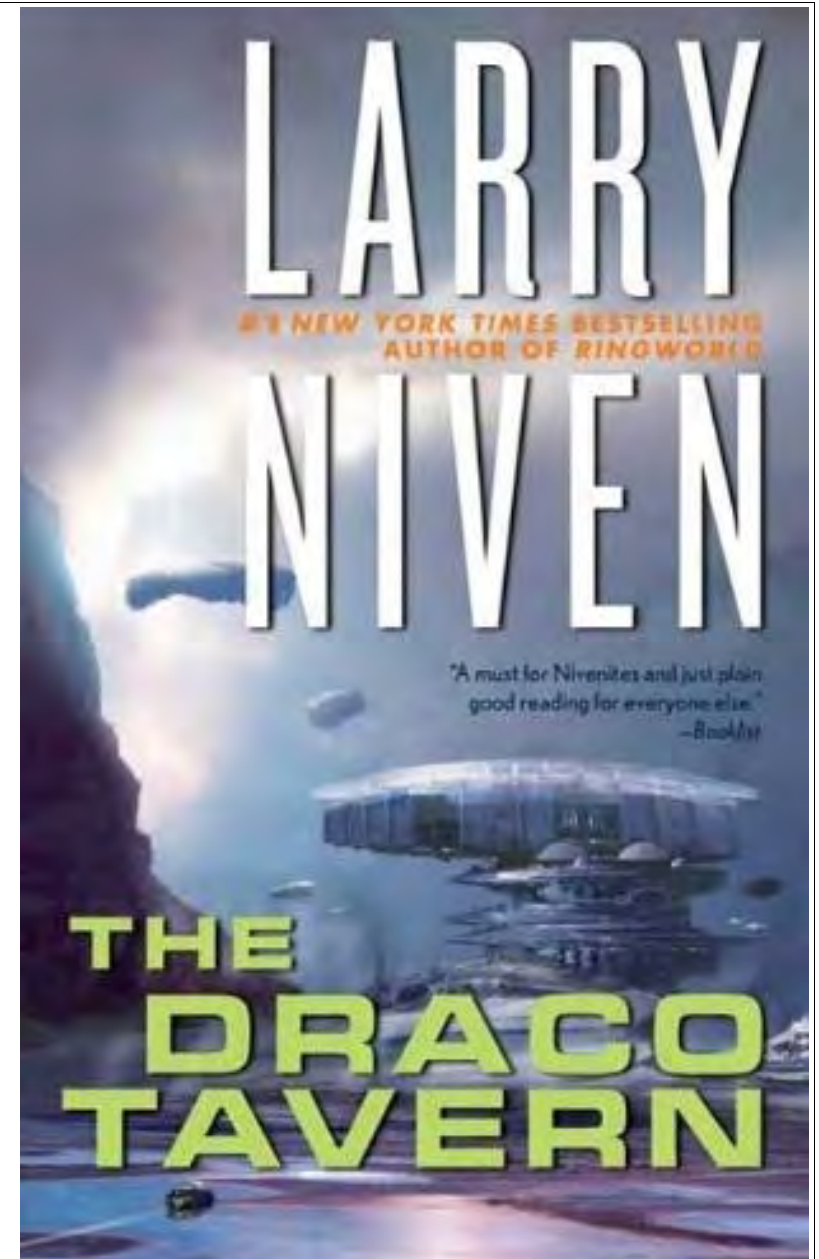
Niven gives good alien names. Schumann the human meets a Joker, recognising the Batman reference: tall, spindly, with dead-white skin, a triangular manlike face and a permanent grin, voice like someone dancing on a bagful of walnuts. There are also Warblers, Low Jumbos, and the Wayward Child.

Some aliens don't take names in our language. This one, being tested by a female to see if he's worth mating with, is a Pazensh; he explains accepting help with the test:

If I can trust a companion, it speaks for my intelligence. If I choose one who will mock me, or a fool who will lead me astray, that speaks too.

Niven is a comedian. I'm not sure whether that comes with deftness. Shakespeare is a comedian, and Nabokov, and Issa — I use the literary present tense, their work is alive, like any classic. Sometimes Niven makes you laugh. Sometimes in a tense moment you have enough breath to smile. Here's Schumann:

We must be a common thing to the Chirpsithra. A civilization is only beginning to learn the structure of the universe, when interstellar liners appear and alien intelligences blurt out all the undiscovered secrets.



Cover by Stephan Martiniere.

The Chirps have been civilised, capable of space travel, for billions of years. They run the liners. We only meet the officers — almost — who are all female.

One piece in the collection was a Masquerade entry at the 1984 World Science Fiction Convention. Decades ago the Masquerade was a costume party. Since the late 1960s it's been an on-stage competition, with lights and sound, judges, a big audience. I've judged them. Marvels appear.

For the 1984 entry 'One Night at the Draco Tavern' costumer Kathy Sanders built a dozen Niven creatures, some not seen in the Draco Tavern world, but Niven wrote the script. He put himself in as a helpless 'Larry' who never quite understood what was going on. A four-foot-high telepathic monster from Niven's first novel controlled Schumann and got Niven's drink. They won Most Humorous, Master class.

Another story was first published in *Playboy*. Niven's work is a big tent.

Here's a Gray Mourner:

We think the Old Mind almost stopped manufacturing new elements, long ago, and we think we know why. It would have become the dominant natural force in the universe. Nothing interesting could happen after that.

Three-fifths into the book Niven has this creature ask, 'Have you ever wondered if there are entities older than Chirpsithra?' The Old Mind may have been alive for ten billion years. Sometimes it converges. The Gray Mourner ship, *Chimes in Harmony*, is going to look. Don't let me forget to mention the Arthur Clarke joke.

A lesser author would have quit 'The Convergence of the Old Mind' at the climax — it's quite good enough — and left off the last four paragraphs. Niven put them in. They're worth it; they tell a lot about Rick Schumann, and you'll need them a hundred pages

later.

Along the way another creature says something surprising and Niven has Schumann tell us the word that sat in my head like a time bomb. Of course it did. That's almost the end of a story too. Now and then Niven waves at us as we go by. He's a big-hearted man and a good host. Some of us who know him in person have been party guests in his house. He treats his readers likewise.

You can hear, and sometimes you can buy, peculiar nightmares in the Draco Tavern.

Nightmares for guests? Well, a barkeep does ask, 'What'll you have?' We want tales and meetings in a tavern. Niven serves them. Fiction writers do interesting things with reality. Nabokov used to say that calling a story true is an insult to truth and to story. The Chirpsithra could be the greatest liars in the universe, and how would we ever know? There's Niven waving again.

The time bomb and the nightmares are in 'Storm Front'. It isn't the only storm, or the only front — or the only contagion, I mention in case you've read *Draco Tavern* already and are here to see how I manage, a time-honoured motive for following a review. The book is wonderfully integrated, a feat in itself when you consider the making.

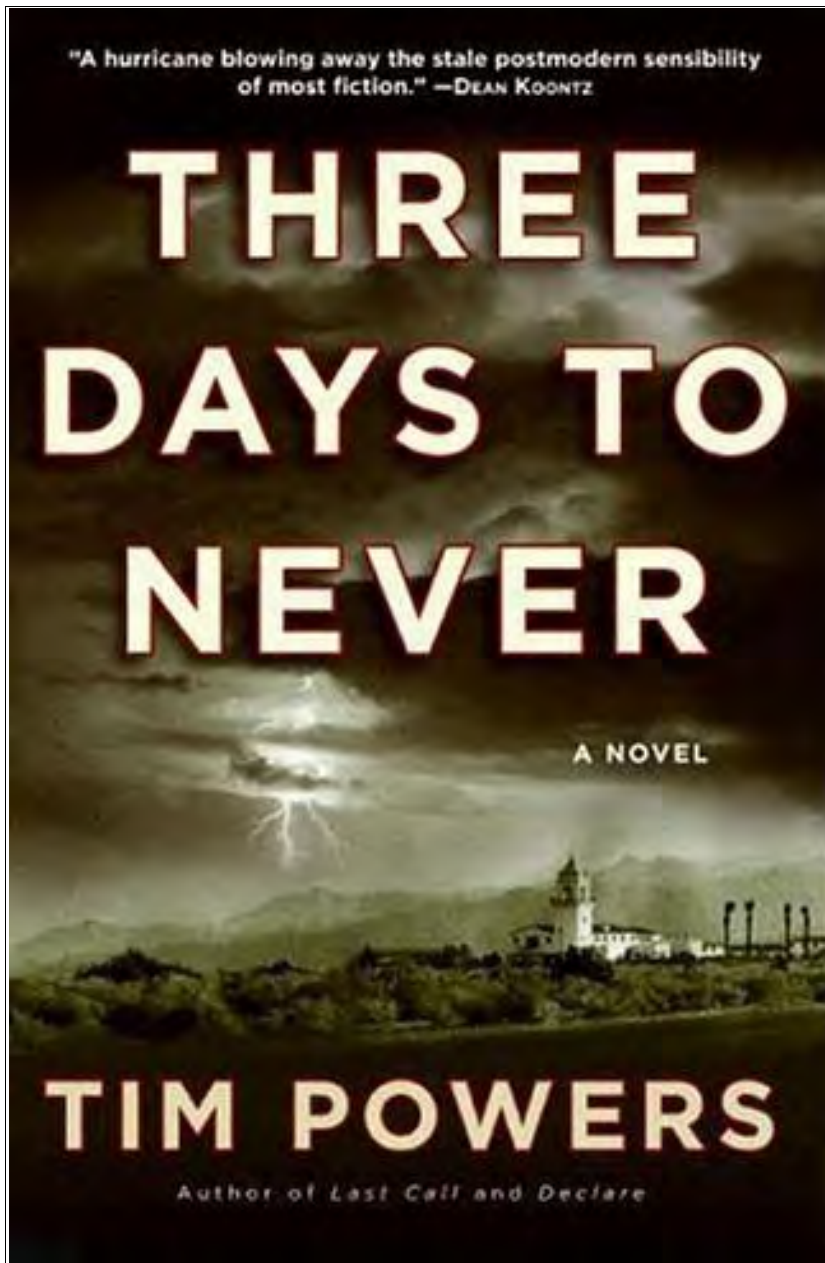
The visitor rolled in like a big lamp, a five-foot-tall sphere glowing yellow-white ... That glow must be riding-lights, I thought ... the refugee gestured at the nova in Earth's sky.

The gesture is with a tendril of light.

The Chirp was amused. She asked me, 'Did you think the steady weather in your star was an accident?'

Schumann has more to ask in return.

But the Chirpsithra officer and her fiery refugee had gone off to



Cover by Bradford Foltz.

another table.

There's plenty of depth in these stories. That can be done in few words. An artist chooses. Perhaps I may say they're sweet like Irish coffee, richness you drink through, touched with sour and bitter, a jolt to change your viewpoint.

And the opening story is called 'The Subject is Closed'. He's a comedian.

THREE DAYS TO NEVER by Tim Powers (2006)

(Published originally March 2007 at *Emerald City*; copyright remains with the author; used by permission.)

In the seventeenth century we thought drama should be governed by three unities, of place, time, and action. A hundred years later we were already wondering how valid they were as laws, but as guides they could strengthen focus in the theatre, a main virtue there.

The novel rose, with its huge sweep; eventually sf, with its measureless extension of the seemingly possible and even impossible. Today we are less likely to think that a rule will be a help than that it will be a tyranny. But imaginative artists find use in disregarded tools. In ***Three Days to Never*** it is remarkable how far the unities are observed, particularly considering its huge sweep, its measureless extension.

The place is Greater Los Angeles, a neighbourhood today, San Bernardino, Pasadena, Hollywood, Palm Springs. People arrive, or their predecessors did, so there are reflections, or repercussions, of Germany — Switzerland — Israel — and a ranging universe so vast and strange the characters think of it as a freeway to their local lives, or God.

The time is 1987: three days of it: hence the title — with a look at 1967 — the days of Charlie Chaplin and Albert Einstein — Pope Innocent III — Moses — and a man from 2006 who can't stand the crude technology.

The actors are a preteen girl and her father who teaches literature — and her great-grandmother — and her uncle — and two teams trying to undo place, time, and action, one from the Israeli intelligence service, one vast and strange.

The focus of these forces keeps this story strong. Powers has set us at their nexus, holds us there. The careful painting of their operation, almost prosaic in the midst of poetry, almost mundane in the midst of the mystic, keeps this world weird. He makes it shock and shimmer. Its spine is his imagination. Its sinew is his understanding. He is unafraid of good or evil, of comedy or crime.

C. S. Lewis is a writer whom I remember for the one-strange rule. An ordinary person, he said, meeting extraordinary things, or an extraordinary person meeting ordinary things. It's a good rule; it can be a help and not a tyranny; it can strengthen focus. Look how well it has been used in sf, by which I include both science fiction and fantasy. Indeed *Three Days* is both.

Daphne Murrity is the first person in the book we meet by name. The first we see of her is ordinary, or as ordinary as any twelve-year-old girl with an observant mind and a quick wit. She worries about things an adult wouldn't. She is with her father as they look round her great-grandmother's house in Pasadena. Later, much later, we understand what had just been happening when they arrived.

Such is investigation. As you start looking there are mysteries. If you keep looking, especially if you don't panic, reasons begin to appear. Daphne's uncle Bennett is a panicker. This is not quite why we dislike him. **Tim Powers** carefully invites us to suppose he is a bad guy. He is that, though we meet worse, much worse.

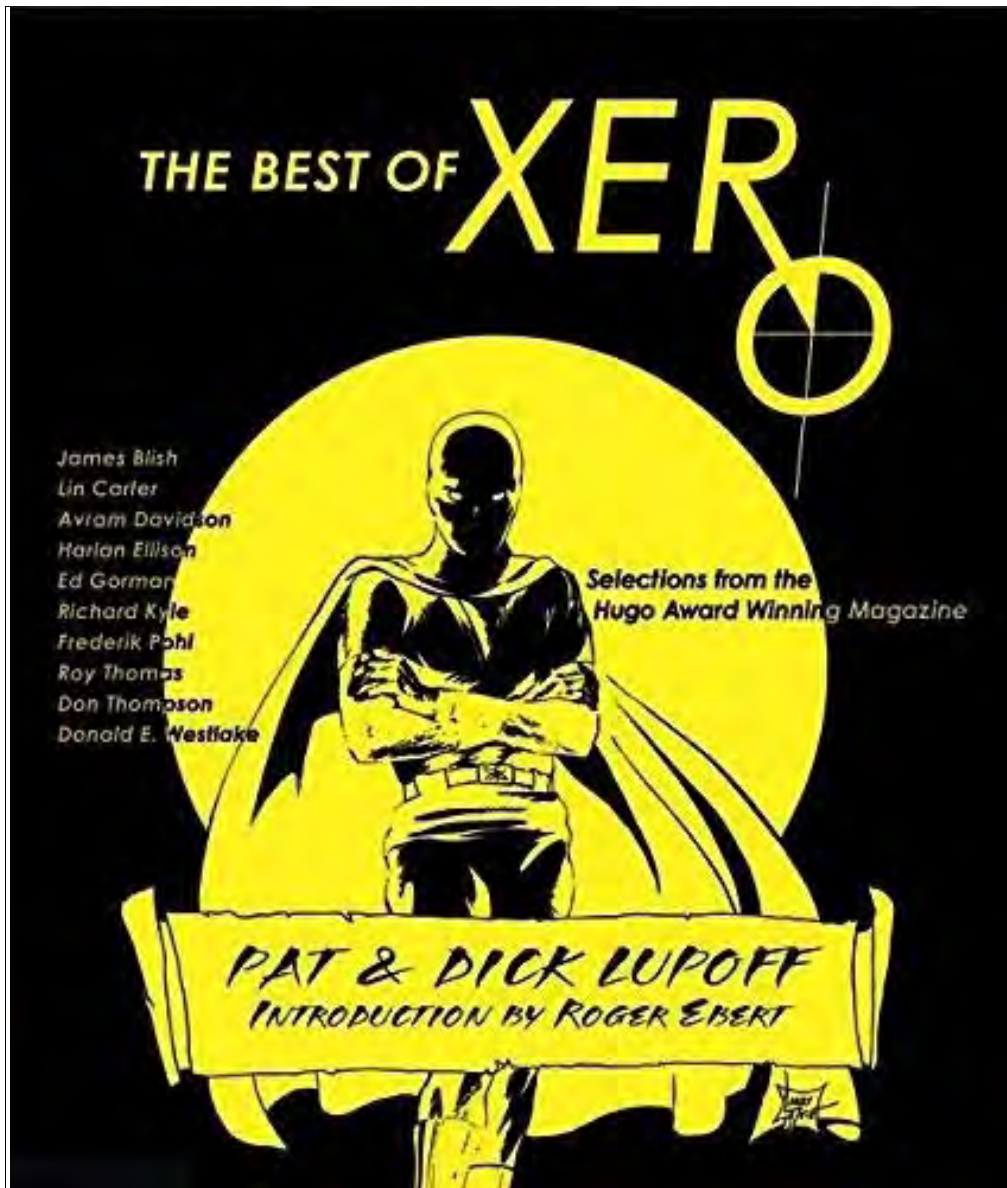
Powers also invites us to suppose this is why Bennett is jumpy. The invitations Powers gives us are good.

Investigation is the through-line of *Three Days*. Formal detective stories are hard in sf; the author, bringing us unfamiliar worlds, must work twice teaching us what is incongruous. But investigation — we learn as the characters do, our wonder is theirs — is one of our classic forms. It is one of the resonances of science fiction. If the post-modernist sensibility is, as Bob Dylan sang, 'Nothing is revealed', that is not true of a Powers story. The strange may however stand revealed as stranger.

At Westercon LIV, the 2001 West Coast Science Fantasy Conference — not only have I said sf here, but over fifty years we've hedged our bets by sometimes saying science fantasy — Mike Glycer was Fan Guest of Honor, Powers was Writer Guest of Honor. Glycer interviewed Powers. Lest Powers close the circuit by interviewing Glycer, which as any Powers fan would fear might have had unimaginable consequences, I interviewed him, but that's another story. Powers said, 'Some people write books with a message. Brush your teeth. I hate that.'

There are no sermons in *Three Days*. The characters are what they are, and do what they do. Powers knows *Show 'em, don't tell 'em*. We have never met these people, and if as Powers says himself he is writing fantasy, we cannot meet them. But we believe that if we did, they would be as he portrays. Such is the art of fiction.

If I talked about balance in this book you might think it static. I could take you there; it is, at crucial points, outside time and space. But I mean a sense of event, of weight in motion. Powers' characters grope and hurl and hurtle. But he, the architect, has poised them — no — he, the choreographer, directs them. Or, if he merely gets out of the way, his instincts are sound. There is economy in *Three Days*, a breathtaking achievement when things seem fearfully complicated, as, outside time and space, they may.



Cover by Larry Ivie.

Rules get exceptions, and counter-rules. A counter to one-strange I remember as the derg rule. In Robert Sheckley's classic story 'Protection', a man by an extraordinary contact hears a validusian derg, a creature able to perceive dangers and warn how to avoid them. The man gradually realises that his involvement with the derg is drawing in extraordinary dangers. Powers knows this too. Characters who grow involved with the extraordinary are coloured by it. There is a reason why, in *Three Days*, two men row a boat on Echo Park Lagoon with a collection of mechanical toy animals, some of which they must keep winding up as they talk of allegiance and death.

Shakespeare is a theme in *Three Days*, mainly his great play *The Tempest*. An illegitimate daughter of Einstein calls her father Prospero. He tries to drown his book. The parallel is not close, but there are reflections. Shakespeare is the poet of love. In *The Tempest*, as elsewhere, are people who seek power hatefully, people who seek freedom in slavery, people who will not repent, and people who are redeemed. There are no sermons in Shakespeare. He never says, but he shows, that love is not in the nature of imposition; it can be community. With these lights *Three Days* searches. It shines. It is the novel of the year.

THE BEST OF 'XERO'

edited by Patricia & Richard Lupoff
(Tachyon Publications, 2004)

(Published originally October 2004 at *Emerald City*; copyright remains with the author; used by permission.)

Patricia and Richard Lupoff's *Xero* won the 1963 Hugo Award for Best Fanzine. Now Tachyon Publications of San Francisco has brought out *The Best of 'Xero'* in hard covers, illustrated, a labour of love. I ran the Fanzine Lounge at the 2004 Worldcon, and made sure to put a copy on display. It's a fine piece of work, which I commend to you.

In the sf community we've published amateur magazines, by and for each other, since before the first World Science Fiction Convention (1939). In the 1940s we adopted the late Russell Chauvenet's word 'fanzine'. In the 1950s we established the Hugo Awards, including Best Fanzine along with Best Short Story, Best Professional Artist, and the rest. Fan activity is one of our bright sparks. Likewise fans and pros mixing it up.

I now come to a matter which has caused me a semi-sleepless afternoon, *vide-licit* Steve Stills' [Avram Davidson, here quoted from the letter column, knew the artist was Steve Stiles, and how to spell *videlicet* — JH] vertical cartoon strip by name 'Lin Carter's Fantastic Bunny Rabbit' (it will never catch on with the syndicates, Lin & Steve): Why are rabbits called bunny? Bulwinckle [*Bulfinch's Mythology* + Bullwinkle the Moose of Jay Ward's cartoons — JH] says of this only, 'A pet or familiar name for rabbits, conies, or squirrels.' That's a big help. If anyone can tell me why rabbits are called bunny I'll tell him why cats are called pussy.

Davidson, Carter, and Stiles all contributed to *Xero*; Stiles, who in 2004 was on the Best Fanartist ballot, in *Xero* days drew with a stylus on mimeograph stencils, the technology of the day. Pat and Dick Lupoff typed stencils in their Manhattan apartment, printed them on a machine in Noreen and Larry Shaw's basement, collated by hand, and lugged the results to sf cons or stuffed them in mailboxes. The machine had not been given by Damon Knight, A. J. Budrys explained in a letter after a while, but lent. Eventually drawings could be scanned by electro-stencil, a higher tech. Coloured ink joined coloured paper, sometimes wildly coloured. *Xero* could be spectacular.

Knight later founded the Science Fiction Writers of America; he and Budrys were each later Writer Guest of Honor at a Worldcon. James Blish won two Retrospective Hugos in 2004; in *Xero* he reviewed Budrys' *Rogue Moon* (not reprinted by this anthology), and Kingsley Amis' *New Maps of Hell*. You'll also see Anthony Boucher, Harlan Ellison, Ethel Lindsay, Fred Pohl, Rick Snearly, Bob

Tucker as 'Hoy Ping Pong', Harry Warner — fans and pros mixing it up. Roger Ebert, later a movie critic, contributed poetry, often free-style, or formal and funny in his fanziner's version of Brown-ing's 'Last Duchess':

This crud
I print for you disgusts me; the thud
Is of your fanzine dully falling.

Earlier in 2004, I happened to be at dinner with Ann Monn, *Tachyon's* layout artist and typographer on the *Best of 'Xero'* project. She, editor Jacob Weisman, and the Lupoffs were all striving at it. One problem was selection. Another was the giving of some context to a cuisine whose meat was freely salted with in-jokes. A third, kin to both, was the treatment of graphics.

You might not recognise her wizardry without seeing the originals. The letter column was 'Epistolary Intercourse', edited by Pat; for one issue it was illustrated by an abstract face in red and blue, which Monn reproduced in black and white somehow. The original of the Eddie Jones cover included in *Best of 'Xero'* was orange and blood-red. Less dramatic, but probably still harder, were the stylus drawings, like Andy Reiss' 'Harlan Ellison Playing Skittles'. Bob Stewart (yes, with an 'h'), who became art editor for *Xero*, with everything from caricature to montage, is well represented. Then there's where to put what, and the sizes, and the shapes. I'm impressed.

Did I mention comic books? They were a thread through *Xero* from beginning to end. Roy Thomas, later editor-in-chief at Marvel, wrote of *Bulletman*, *Captain Midnight*, and other Fawcett folk; Don Thompson, later of the *Comic Buyers Guide*, wrote of the *Spectre* and *Doctor Fate*. The book jacket is Larry Ivie's 'New Rendering of the Old "Atom"', also done in gold on the cover. Walter Breen applauded the combination of 'comic books and genuine intellectuality' (not reprinted); F. M. Busby, whose *Cry of the Nameless* won Best Fanzine in 1960 — another of us active both as fan and

pro — wrote, 'The idea of a sophisticated sercon ['serious and constructive'] fandom centered around comic books just naturally breaks me up' (not reprinted). You be the judge.

Doctor Fate and the *Spectre* were, of course, too super to last, even in an age of flamboyant comic book superheroes. But ... nowhere in science fiction, even in the cosmic settings of Doc Smith's *Lensmen* series — do you find such lavish backdrops for the action. Even fantasy can't match them — it is a new, startling and, for a time, fascinating thing to find stories in which there are

no limits, where every card is wild.

Fanzines roar along today, on paper, on the Web, or both. Some folk who wrote letters to *Xero* have also had letters in my fanzine. It's bracing to realise how science fiction, and fandom, have been around long enough that we can cultivate a sense of the classic, of what was done before our own time which we find to hold interest, even nourishment, for us whose times are changed.

— **John Hertz**, compilation 2023

