

***brg* 73**

December 2011

Jennifer Bryce Ditmar Bruce Gillespie John Litchen Gillian Polack Joy Window
and many others



* brg *

No. 73 December 2011

Another fanzine for the December 2011 mailing of ANZAPA and a few others
written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard St., Greensborough VIC 3088.
Phone: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc@pacific.net.au. Member fwa.

Contents

3

One ordinary editorial, with people — Bruce Gillespie

4

**Fever dream from Langedoc:
Gillian Polack's British trip, July 2011**

6

Five weeks in Europe — Jennifer Bryce

12

Joy's 'I survived America's Deep South' road trip
— Joy Window

20

**Dancing on sand, diving into life:
My life and science fiction, part 4**
— John Litchen

43

Letters of comment

Mike Ward :: Robyn Whiteley :: Julian Warner :: Malcolm McHarg :: Lee Harding
:: Tim Marion :: John Litchen :: John Bangsund :: Cy Chauvin :: George
Zebrowski :: Steve Sneyd :: Tony Thomas :: Robert Elordieta :: Steve Jeffery ::
Dora Levakis :: Jerry Kaufman :: Don Ashby :: Doug Barbour :: Ned Brooks ::
Casey Wolf :: Andy Robson :: Tim Train :: Marty Cantor :: Robert Lichtman ::
Wm Breiding :: Race Mathews :: Patrick McGuire :: & We Also Heard From

Illustrations

Front cover: 'Paradise', by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).

Back cover: 'After Dark' DJFractal by Elaine Cochrane.

Photographs: pp 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11: Jennifer Bryce; p. 13: supplied by Joy Window,
Alan Sandercock; pp. 15, 16, 18: Wikipedia; pp. 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 39, 41:
John Litchen (who also supplied photos of book covers); p. 53: Art Bebe Productions;
pp. 54, 55: Dora Levakis; 59: Helena Binns, Tim Train; p. 60: Marty Cantor.

One ordinary editorial, with people

This issue was meant to appear in the April 2011 mailing of ANZAPA. All the articles except Gillian Polack's had been sent to me during 2010, along with two other travel articles that still don't fit this issue, from **Paul Anderson** and **Dora Levakis**. I have also been offered the opportunity to reprint **John Baxter**'s scintillating article about Martin Hibble, and several wonderful pieces by **William Breiding**.

Life got in the way. All I have published for the year have been various mailing comments-only issues of **brg**, and the final two parts of the Fortieth Anniversary Issue of *SF Commentary*, Nos 81 and 82. I received a fair bit of paying work at the beginning of the year, then spent the payment for those jobs in publishing *SFC* (which cost over \$3000 to print and post). I calculated that all my work sources had dried up for the rest of the year, but Elaine discovered a new client for both of us. Hence no *Steam Engine Time*, none of the promised editions of **brg**, and no more *SF Commentaries*, although I have hundreds of pages of material waiting.

I recommend the issue you are about to read, but wish I could have published the 2010 articles in 2010.

In mid 2011 **Gillian Polack**, ace Canberra academic, fan (designer of the special historical dinners at Conflux conventions), novelist, critic, blogger, and much else beside, was invited to travel to Britain to meet critics and fans in a special gathering to discuss criticism. If only we could have such a thing in Australia! In the early 1970s, **John Foyster** suggested we should hold critics' workshops with the same gusto as we were then holding fiction writers' workshops. Since then, almost all trace of interest in ferocious criticism has disappeared in Australia, but it still boils away on the British SF stove.

Jenny Bryce continues to work, coincidentally gathering around her a group of SF enthusiasts who attend Nova Mob (although Jenny doesn't). Jenny has tried to cut her workload to three days a week so she can write fiction, but is still sent on expeditions to the educational hot spots of the world. In this issue she reports to us on her visit to Europe.

Joy Window is best remembered by many of us as an energetic member of renascent South Australian fandom in the early 1970s. She attended several conventions and helped organise others, then dropped from sight in the mid 70s. The Internet allowed us to find her again a few years ago, only for us to discover that Joy has also become a freelance book editor. She lives on the south coast of New South Wales with her partner Andrew.

Another active member of the 1970s South

Australian group was **Alan Sandercock**. He studied abroad, married **Sue**, an American, and settled in Georgia. Their daughter is **Maria**. Sue and Alan lived back in Australia for awhile, then returned to Georgia, split up, and Alan married **Jane**. And all the while **Paul Anderson**, **Joy**, and other friends from the really good old days kept in contact with Alan, hoping we would meet him again one day. (He never has visited Melbourne on his trips back to Australia.) Finally, in 2010, both Joy and Paul at different times visited Alan and Jane. I hope to fit Paul's report into a future issue of **brg**.

All readers of **brg** will be familiar with **John Litchen**'s articles as he slowly writes an impressive autobiography in episodes. Part 4 appears here. John, it seems, has done everything, even while keeping his interest in science fiction over the years. Formerly a stalwart of Melbourne fandom, he now lives with his wife **Monica** on the Queensland Sunshine Coast, tries to maintain his interests on a retirement income, publishes books, and writes fiction. Does he still play the congas?

In the letter column, give special attention to the messages from **Dora Levakis**. Dora is teaching in a remote (to a Melburnian) corner of the Top End of Australia. She enjoys teaching, and the contact with the livewire Aboriginal community, which includes quite a few artists, but tropical living can have its drawbacks. Dora is also a fine painter — if you have some cash available for buying exciting portraits, I can put you in touch with her. I just I had the money to buy some of her best works, and the wallspace to hang them.

It's not been a good year for some of our friends. First **Bruno Kautzner** was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia. He has undergone a new form of treatment, which so far has been very successful. :: Another friend, **John Straede** (ex MSFC, returned to Victoria a few years ago after many years in NSW), was diagnosed suddenly with a brain tumour. He stays cheerful. :: Just before his 60th birthday in December 2010, **Carey Handfield**, one of our oldest friends (but four years younger than me) and one of Melbourne's most popular fans, suffered a heart attack. Fully recovered, during 2011 he has been living a quieter life and Doing All the Right Things. Unfortunately, in mid November he suffered from a stroke that might have been devastating if he had not been sitting in the waiting room at Austin Hospital at the time. After a risky, successful operation, Carey is undergoing rehabilitation.

You people matter to us! Best wishes to all.

— **Bruce Gillespie, November 2011**

Fever dream from Languedoc

Gillian Polack's British trip, July 2011

I was in London the first week of July for a meeting of the British Science Fiction Association, for the British Science Fiction Foundation Criticism Masterclass, and for research. I want to write a dull report, for the challenge of it, but the week was so very exciting that dullness is hard to achieve. I need to say, however, that without the help of the University of Western Australia (where I'm currently doing a PhD) and the ACT Government, I would have remained in Canberra, both cold and much less educated. Also, I would have less cider inside me, have fewer friends and colleagues, and not known just how very much fun the BSFA people are or how extraordinarily good the BSFA Masterclass is. They are just two of the reasons why Britain has some of the best and most robust SF criticism anywhere.

The culture I encountered was one that was extremely positive — we were taught to criticise the writing and to understand it, not to make personal attacks on the writer. The culture I have encountered recently in Australia of many criticisms being read as personal, even when they are patently not, and of *ad hominem* attacks resulting is rarer. I discussed this with Aliette de Bodard in Paris (sorry about name dropping, of person and of place; given my last three weeks, this is inevitable) and we agreed that SF culture is stronger for this positive approach.

So this is the context. I didn't know what to expect. What I found was a warm and welcoming and highly critical and intellectual environment. What I also found was an entirely brilliant Masterclass. It will take me a long time to process all that I learned there, but both my criticism and my fiction are going to improve from it.

I took notes, but they're sketchy. I meant to take much more detailed notes, but the virtue of the Masterclass was that it was very interactive. A half dozen of us spoke more than the others, but everyone spoke, and there were some exceptionally insightful class members. I have a list of names (starting with the teachers, but not limited to the teachers) of people whose critical writing I must watch out for. I loved it that one US participant spoke using the style and vocabulary of a teacher while every utterance of a UK participant came out as perfect prose, almost poetic, but always cutting and thoughtful. I loved it that Mark Bould — even off the cuff — speaks in essays, and that Claire Brialey throws a thousand questions out there and then sits back and watches what

happens to them.

My notes are sketchy. My brain is also sketchy, as I was bitten by something interesting in York. The doctor told me the name of the insect, but my fever and the regional French accent defeated me — all I know is that it's a creepy-crawly and that it likes biting a great deal and that the bites often become infected — and that's why I'm writing you this, now, in Montpellier, rather than leaving it until I get home and it's all entered into my deeper brain and hard to recall. This report is a fever dream from Languedoc, in fact. What this means is that I'm writing in another world. At another time, 20 days later. Hopefully other participants will read this and correct me and fill in the details and say 'Gillian, no; it wasn't like that!' This is the wonder of fandom and of good critical debate, that there is a dialogue and not a monologue.

Before I type up my notes, I do need to say (in case it wasn't clear) how wonderful the BSFF was and how particularly good the organisation was. Farah and Shana were there, whenever they were needed and troubleshoot before trouble dawned. I am a bit of a magnet for problems sometimes (insects! now!) and so I can say, with great relief, that the organisers were terrific. (And here I admit that Shana noticed my propensity for attracting problems and wrangled me through a significant amount of the International Medieval Congress a few days later, but that's a different story and not for this place or time.)

Rather than give you all my notes, let me give you some typical notes from Paul McAuley's first session. Mostly they were thoughts that needed further thinking; that is, they were not notes to base a lecture or an article on. I'll type them up like that, then — just a list of thoughts resulting from the discussion. Normally I would distinguish between my thoughts and the teacher's and the other students', but this time I haven't done so. I'm sorry! If a thought was yours, please claim it! (I blame long flights and long hours work for the sudden loss of such a good habit.)

- Internalised idea of what a novel can do — this is not necessarily the same as a formalised idea of what a novel can and does do.
- Difference between a book review (especially job lots — and this was definitely McAuley speaking, as was the previous note — thank goodness for memory when note systems fail) and a critical review. Criticism, for one thing, doesn't have to be contemporaneous — it can

look back.

- What makes a book good? Crafting, language (including grammar), realism, style/capacity to distinguish between authors (harder for pulp — lack of strong writer voice doesn't make pulp not good, since its style is different).
- Paul discussed the 'cult of the sentence'; that is, admiring the beauty of a sentence rather than examining the competence of the storyteller. Senior British literary reviewers/critics seek beautiful sentences that indicate accurately and profoundly a psychological state. This is less true of speculative fiction than of literary fiction, because of differences in the world as shown and the world we know.
- Writers train readers in the rules of story. McAuley talked a great deal about codes and deconstructing them, including about codes that imply mimesis and world building. Delany talks about the shortcuts while Gibson calls it the SF toolkit. It's used to convey mimesis, not world building. It's important not to confuse the amount of world building with the world building the story actually needs.
- A comment by me in my notes (miracle!) — don't confuse credibility with consistency in a text.

This was all introductory. From here I have a page of notes with comments from the teacher, from Chris, from Justin, from Jörg exploring this topic. This is how it worked. Our teacher introduced and then we explored. In this particular instance, we talked about author contexts and about reader expectations and about quality of writing in reviews.

McAuley introduced us to a threesome of novels, to show what a critic could do with three novels with elements in common. The three were *Fairyland* (Paul McAuley), *Moxyland* (Lauren Beukes), and *Pattern Recognition* (William Gibson). He had us look for the elements that the novels shared. The topics we discussed included search for meaning, search for authentication, cities as characters, floating worlds, trapped characters, use of the present tense. My particular addition to this was split discourse and a moment in the narration when the split is unified.

We also discussed steampunk and brass realities. From now on, steampunk in my mind is 'brass realities', and I will recognise it because those brass realities are dense (physical attributes of steampunk).

McAuley summarised this by pointing out that good criticism can read deeply into the writing, revealing more about the narrative's shape and meaning than is immediately obvious — good criticism is about increasing understanding for the reader.

And that was our first session. Much under-reported, but our first session. We had six sessions over the three days, two with each teacher.

Each one of them approached criticism from a different angle, and the sum of the parts was definitely greater than the parts combined.

Mark Bould took us through much theory, and brought SF media into the discussion. I loved his thoughts on the relationship of spectacle with the cognitive core. It was the first step for me resolving the problems I'm having with my current novel, in fact: our notion of Medieval spectacle has not much to do with cognitive cores, for a number of reasons, so I was trying to write a novel that had this conflict at its heart, without realising that the conflict had to be addressed.

Bould pointed out that Suvin says that SF is driven by cognitive estrangement. My last two weeks have been spent (among other things) thinking about this and its implications. I'm not sure it's right. I suspect that the spectacle in SF is the thought of and potential for cognitive estrangement — we get our pageant and our excitement from this — but if the cognitive estrangement is real, then the reader interface is tough and the book becomes unreadable. It's a balancing act, in other words, between a terrific idea and the reality of readers. My own personal response in balancing is to use a cosy style (characters that look very real and have small lives) so that the reader encounters the cognitive estrangement and takes it in their stride. In my ideal book, a reader might not even know that I've led them so far astray. But it's more normal to focus on the estrangement and to make it a key factor of a book, I suspect.

This is the pattern for the whole long weekend. We learned things. We thought about them. We discussed them. We applied them to the things we knew best.

We discussed so much. So very much. I have a note from McAuley's second session: 'He's a character in a story and he only notices what he's been told to notice.' One of the things that we know but need to articulate — we need criticism to remind us. I have a note about that first session of Bould's that sums about a half-hour of intense debate: sublime vs grotesque vs gorbliney. The comment crystallised when we were talking Lovecraft, and Mark Bould had pointed out that the Old Ones were part vegetable. This made me think about recipes, of course, which is when it all turned to 'gorbliney'. I have no notes for Brialey, because we were so very participative in her sessions that I quite forgot to write. There were many discussions, both in class and in pubs after class. Sleep was at a premium, but the three days were intensely developmental and very entertaining.

That's all the report you're getting, I'm afraid, because my own research beckons. There will be another Masterclass next year — the best way to find out about it is to attend.

— Gillian Polack, July 2011



The area where Jenny Bryce stayed in Bremen.

Five weeks in Europe

Jennifer Bryce

(all photos: Jennifer Bryce)

I am sitting in Connection Restaurant at Frankfurt Flughafen. Still water (non-sparkling) is translated as 'silent water'. My coffee order is a mistake: a cross between a giant macchiato and cappuccino with too much froth. The crisp, light Kaiser roll is served with unsalted butter (not margarine) — I must be in Europe.

And indeed I am in Europe, QF005 having just landed from Singapore. It is wonderful to spread out after the strangely intimate existence with fellow Economy Class travellers. I had a snug little possie. It was described as a window seat, but there was no window. I ended up sitting amidst an entanglement of headphones, blanket, eye shields, and a bag of 'play lunch' — handed out in case we got hungry during what was supposed

to be night. In some ways it seems no time since I left Melbourne — I guess because I'm wearing the same clothes I put on nearly two days ago in Melbourne's 23 degrees. Here it is 2 degrees, but I've only been in the air terminal so far. I have a five-hour wait for my connection to Bremen. I've just spent the past 24 hours or so in a capsule that flew over India, the Caspian Sea, and exotic places like Tabriz, that were just dots on the Flight Path map. That's why the odd coffee and unsalted butter are so good — the first evidence that I am actually somewhere else.

I am travelling to Bremen to attend a music education conference. At last it is time to find the gate lounge for the Lufthansa flight that will be the last leg of the trip. We are herded into security,



Walking on ice: Bremen.

and just as I wonder how the large unruly group is going to manage to go through the routine — laptops out of cases, shoes off — an official woman starts screaming ‘out, out!’ with her arms outstretched and everyone runs back out of the area. I follow. There are no alarm bells or other signs of emergency, but it seems better not to question. I follow the herd and find that there is another entrance to the B gate lounges, so I line up obediently with laptop ready. I never found out whether the shouting was a genuine emergency or a routine method of crowd control.

The flight to Bremen is very short — just 45 minutes. I had refrained from buying a Frankfurter mit potato salad for lunch (having had two breakfasts). I thought that Lufthansa might be like Qantas and serve some kind of refreshment during the flight. They do: Toblerone bars.

I had been a bit anxious about arriving in Bremen; I thought it might be dark, and there was some message about the hotel reception closing on Sunday afternoons. But everything seems to tune into the warm sunshiny afternoon; a pleasant taxi driver, a cheap fare (or so it seems to me). When I arrive at the hotel a little after 3.00 p.m. I can understand the message (in German) on the door — it will reopen at 5.00 p.m. The area feels so safe that I leave my luggage inside an unlocked door (to a kind of entrance hall from which the door into the hotel is locked) and I go for a stroll around the neighbourhood. The houses are very substantial, well-to-do, with interesting leadlight and ironwork. It is so warm that I even sit on a garden chair and read for a short time. Yet the next day, with the sun gently warming my back, I realise that the ducks are walking, not swimming, on the river. It is frozen.

Monday starts with a typical German breakfast in a turn-of-the century breakfast room: various fruits, muesli, other cereals, juices, boiled eggs, crisp ‘brot’, meats, cheeses, jams, honey, a huge variety of teas that you brew yourself (teapots provided), and coffee. No conference for me today, so I set off mid-morning to explore Bremen. Being a Monday, the galleries are closed — and the main art gallery is closed for renovations. Being such a



Bremen town square.

pleasant day, I just walk. It is not a large city — the centre is the old fourteenth-century marketplace. There is a sense of well-being. Everything is in good shape. A lot of brick cobbled roads (right in the centre, no cars). No potholes, no neglected buildings — and very few neglected people. I walk through the narrow alleyways of the very old part: the Schnoor, and along the side of the river where people are sitting, soaking up the sun.

In a foreign city, buying something is a considerable achievement, as is making oneself understood in German. Everything seems to fall into place. I am able to obtain money from the first ATM I try. I manage to buy tram tickets for the rest of the week (to get to the conference) and I successfully send a postcard. But when it comes to going to a toilet with *spoken* instructions in German, I falter. I don’t want to spend the rest of a sunny afternoon locked in a toilet. So instead I have an unnecessarily good lunch in a restaurant that will definitely have a toilet: Caesar salad with lots more ‘fleisch’ than I need — of course, hachembrot is chicken breast — how descriptive! Then, when it comes to finding the toilet, I understand the girl to say second door on the left — in I go. Lots of urinals — how commendable that the people of Bremen are so open-minded! Only on the way out do I notice ‘herren’ gently etched on the glass door. Fortunately no herren came in while I was there.

I won’t give an account of every day. I enjoyed going to the conference, setting off each morning on the tram (ultimately adjusting to catching it on the right hand side of the road). The conference was small, intense, and worthwhile. On the final evening there is a concert of piano music, starting with a piece by Brecht that requires the performer to place a vase of flowers inside the piano. The concert ends with tango music.

At the end of the week I am on holidays — on a train to Amsterdam. The country is flat and green. I am impressed by the many wind farms and farmhouses with solar panels. At the side of the railway line are forests of birch and other leafless trees. I think a lot of the impact of World War II.

I imagine airmen, shot down, hiding in those forests. I look out for buildings that would be more than 65 years old — that would have survived the war — for example, just out of Dortmund there is an old brick and stone railway viaduct. All the time I am hoping that some loudly giggling women will get off the train — there are about six of them, off somewhere for a ‘girls’ weekend’, I guess. At one point they burst into song, but most of the time they are behaving like rowdy 10-year-olds. Around Wuppertal the towns are almost connected by suburban-type housing — post 1950s apartment blocks, all very industrial. Wuppertal seems to have an extensive monorail that looks quite old. It is on a green metal structure and winds all over the town. Is it post war?

From Dusseldorf to Arnhem the seat next to me is occupied by a woman returning from Sri Lanka. She flies in and out of Dusseldorf, via Dubai. She works for a charity and has a 25-year-old foster daughter in Sri Lanka. Of course she speaks English very well — her mother tongue is Dutch and she is also fluent in German and speaks Russian and French. The differences in the country — now that we are in Holland — are manmade ones. There are more canals through the fields. The farms seem smaller and ‘neater’ (although of course, compared to Australian farms, German ones are very neat). I thought that the first windmill was a tourist attraction — but no, there are windmills in the fields, and in one case, a windmill *and* a wind farm!

We arrive in Amsterdam and my hotel is blessedly close to the station; no need to wander around in the dusk with a heavy backpack. Outside the station there are piles of bikes! I have never seen so many. Some of them seem to stay there all the time. How would you find your bike? There must be thousands of them. It is a dull hotel compared to the one in Bremen, but that was my choice: cheap and a good location.

I am trying to find out more about the 8.9 earthquake in Japan. There is a much bigger selection of TV stations than in the German hotel, but they all seem to be comedy of some kind —

The bicycles of Amsterdam.



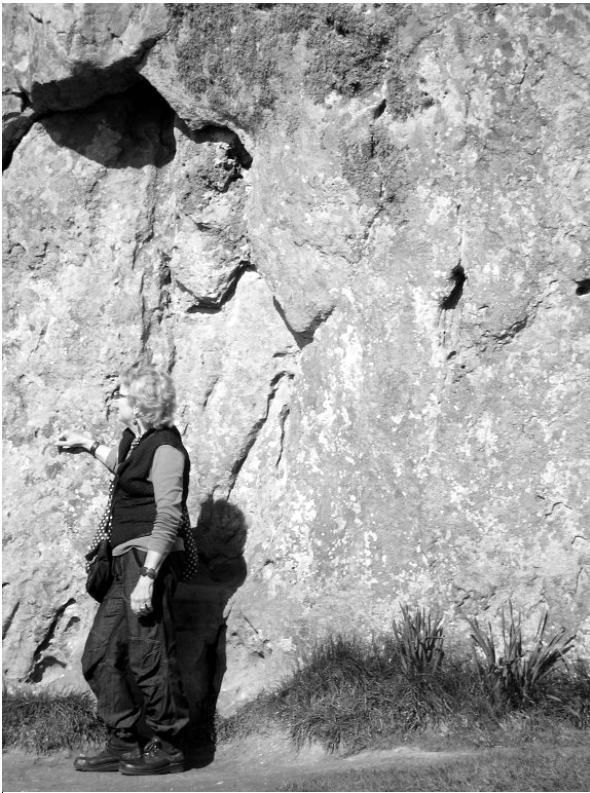
not even a decent movie. I could pay for one, but I really want some news. Not even CNN in my room; however it is played in the bar, where I go for a quick dinner.

Sunday in Amsterdam: I saunter along the canals and guess where the Anne Frank museum might be; I am right. There is a long queue. But I wait, entertained by beautiful Sunday bell chimes and an American man in the queue telling someone that his dog is having psychotherapy. I am glad I went to the Anne Frank museum to experience where people hid from the Nazis — but I couldn’t bear to look at some of the exhibits. Then to the Reichsmuseum: Vermeers and Rembrandts. Lunch with a woman from Estonia in Amsterdam for the day to celebrate her birthday. Then the Van Gogh museum. He was so prolific, and most of his works were painted in a 10-year period. There is also an interesting exhibition of early Picasso: up to 1909. The display highlights early influences, and shows a lot of Paris around the turn of the century, including fascinating film of women at the Folies Bergères and on a moving ‘trottoir’.

Thanks to being a ‘senior citizen’ I travel first class on the Thalys train from Amsterdam to Brussels. People travelling alone are issued individual seats: everything red plush, complimentary food, drinks and wi fi. The train is going so fast — on a special track — there is a freeway — we are whizzing past the cars, maybe at twice their speed — 200 kph? We seem to go under the suburbs of Rotterdam and emerge at the station: a miniature Empire State building. Just out of Antwerp I am asked whether I would like a taxi ordered for me in Brussels: non, mercimonsieur.

In Brussels I catch up with friends who spend half their life living in Melbourne, and half in Brussels in a lovely old high-ceilinged apartment near a palace, within walking distance from the centre and my hotel. Most people speak English, and I can use my French. It is lovely to be met at the train and to share the responsibility of finding my hotel — which is easy. I don’t bother to unpack and soon we are in ‘le foret’: a gentle, almost warm afternoon with golden light through the European trees, beeches and oaks. It is a huge area close to the centre of the city where people go jogging and grandparents (mainly) walk toddlers and babies. After a pleasant stroll we sit at the edge of a lake watching birds and discuss the amazement of growing old, the future ... The next day I am seen off to London on the Eurostar. Things start to feel British even before I get on the train; the Roman numerals of the clock, announcements in English as well as French and Flemish. I was just getting into the swing of French and at breakfast managed to read *Le Soir* without too much difficulty.

The Belgian and French countryside is bleak: we go through Lille, then, just before plunging under the Channel, there is a lot of barbed-wire fortification. Amazingly quickly we are at London



Jenny at Avebury.

St Pancras. And, thanks to the Oyster Card I purchased in Australia, I am on the London Underground — those familiar velvety check seats — blue and red. It is not too crowded and I am off to New Cross Gate: a five-year break erased by the familiarity. And, walking with my luggage, I almost remember the ‘quick route’ to Anne’s place. I only have to ask directions once. Anne has left the key for me as she has an appointment — and I am at home in her upstairs living room watching the news on BBC4.

With the whole of London at my disposal, I am sitting at the very front on the top of a double-decker bus on my way to St Paul’s for the London Museum (a photographic exhibition recommended by Anne). But suddenly the bus isn’t going to St Paul’s any more after insistently announcing at every stop that it is. I ask the man next to me what is happening. It turns out he is a writer who will be in Australia for the Sydney and Perth writers’ festivals. I feel I should recognise him. That evening at home I check on the Internet; is he Christopher Hampton? No, he may have been A. C. Grayling. Alighting at the unexpected stop, I take a few wrong turns, but it doesn’t matter; I am in London; I ultimately reach my destination.

On the way to the museum I make a stupid purchase of a mobile phone that never works — I never use it; will throw it away. The exhibition is good; beautiful photographs of London street scenes from early photography in the 1860s to present times. Afterwards I walk along what must have once been the old London wall and then

cross the river. I go to the Florence Nightingale Museum, which is a little disappointing; I had hoped to learn more about early nursing and early nineteenth-century beliefs about disease. It focuses on Florence Nightingale’s life. Then I go home to cook dinner, as Anne has choir practice. It is fun doing ordinary things like buying food for dinner at Sainsbury’s.

On Saturday Anne and I head off for Bath on the M4. So many adventures: the miniature stonehenge at Avebury; an old creaky hotel at Bath; sitting in Bath Abbey listening to Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, the music soaring up to the finely carved roof of the ancient building that has known so many expressions of worship. The world of Jane Austen as we walk around Royal Crescent, and the countryside, everything green: blue-bells and daffodils and meadows with cows grazing. Then to the Cornish coast, St Ives: the azure sea, the grey-white cliffs, and the plaintive call of the huge seagulls, their sound being integral to the whole experience. We have a room with a view, and I could stay here for ever. Virginia Woolf’s lighthouse is somewhere out there in the mist. Although it was 70 years ago, I do think of the War in places like this; I imagine the German bombers flying over the coast and the occupation of some of the islands. It happens to be the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Plymouth and there is a special segment about it on the TV news.

Then a weekend of music, first a performance of the Bach *B Minor Mass* by a group led by Martin Feinstein, who is a flautist. He leads with his flute.

Bath Abbey.





The harbour at St Ives.

A beautifully light performance with no big choir and the softness of baroque instruments. They serve sherry at a 'coffee concert' — a breathtaking performance of Bach's *Musical Offering*.

I had thought of staying in the Cotswolds, but decide to make Oxford my base. Three days! I take the Oxford Tube, a very cheap bus that leaves from Victoria station. I sit upstairs in the very front seat — my favourite spot — and it drops me quite close to my B&B. In the evening it seems proper to eat in a pub: lamb shank pie. Surprisingly, a lot of the conversation is Australian: a young man talks to the barman about some beautiful little town in New South Wales and a couple of blokes who have had a few pints argue about the Queen's representative in Australia and whether or not Australians like the royal family, then they move (with a couple more pints) to Aboriginal people and one, with slurred speech says 'Let's go back to Roman times; the Aborigines want to live like Aborigines'. I didn't quite get the point: when in Rome? However, at the table nearest to me two women spend the whole time (at least an hour) discussing their hairstyles. Their voices sound like the stupid girl in *Vicar of Dibley*, while 'Rockin' Robin' plays gently in the background.

This afternoon is my last chance to visit the

Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. I try to forget my sore leg (later diagnosed as two broken bones in the knee). What I find amazing is that the collection itself is so old. There are Saxon artefacts that the museum has held for 400 years! I must narrow down my selection so that I am not completely overwhelmed. I end up with a wideranging assortment. I start with England around 600 AD; I am surprised to find that some leather (a belt) has survived this long. Then to India 600 to 1200 AD: shivas, ganeshas, buddhas, beautiful bronzes. Musical instruments: a chest of viols, an intricately carved Stradivarius violin. (Why doesn't this one get played?) A special exhibition of posters from the Chinese cultural revolution — a bit of a contrast! Then my leg cries out for a rest, so I succumb to a pot of tea (made with a teabag) and some kind of moist orange cake.

Time to leave Oxford. I get to the bus stop with my luggage an hour early, just in time to see an Oxford Tube leave. So when another pulls up about 10 minutes later I realise it is too early to be the one on which I'm booked. I persuade the driver to let me on. He says he shouldn't, and not to do it again; maybe I look like a local? The London traffic is awful, and I would have been panicking if it were an hour later. As it turns out, I am home by five and ready to set off for my

dinner date at Ann Finer's at about 5.30, as planned.

The link with Ann Finer is quite remarkable. Her father was a close friend of my grandfather when they were at Oxford together over a hundred years ago. I remember my grandfather talking of Andrew. He went over to see Andrew when he retired, the year of the Queen's coronation. Andrew's eldest son — named Colin after my grandfather — was at my grandparents' wedding, and when I met him about eight years ago he told me he could remember the wedding because he had to wear an uncomfortable sailor's suit outfit. As I sit in Ann's cluttered sitting room sipping fino sherry I wonder whether Granddad gave Andrew any of the books that are in Ann's lovely old bookcases, or whether he ever sat on the antique chairs. Sadly Ann is now the only surviving member of that generation of the family. She is 86. She has made us a three-course dinner, including 'pudding'.

It is my last day in England. Anne and I walk in Peckham Rye Park, then go for lunch at a very good pub. All too soon we are on the Tube, heading for the Heathrow Express at Paddington. I am really sad to be leaving England. It is strange how one has a sense of belonging here. Why is this? Later Laurance tells me that his father, who didn't visit England until well into adulthood, burst into tears when he first saw London. And I feel a bit like that; there really is an emotional bond. But why? It must be the traditional English stories — particularly the childhood ones: Beatrix Potter and Winnie the Pooh, Enid Blyton, and then Jane Austen, the Brontës ... When I was a child, people still spoke of 'going home' as they set off for England in big passenger liners.

Everything is going my way, and I am 'bumped' up to Business Class, although I'd only requested an upgrade for Premium Economy. So I it is a very comfortable trip to Hong Kong complete with bed. Laurance is there to meet me at Hong Kong airport and we are in time to watch the amazing sound and light show over Hong Kong harbour.

Laurance's apartment is in a part of Hong Kong with which I'm a little familiar, near Nathan Road, where I stayed the first time I visited Hong Kong. To begin with I am unimpressed: very crowded streets; everything looks the same; lots of shopping malls and writing I can't understand.

On the Monday I give a seminar at Laurance's university: the Hong Kong Institute of Education. It is quite good to be setting off for work after so much holiday. We grab large coffees at Starbucks (this suddenly seems good coffee when in Hong Kong). I'm in a familiar setting — a university — and most people are speaking English. Cantonese



Laurance's apartment block in Hong Kong.

and local form of Mongolian are beyond me. I am taken to lunch by Magdalena, who is interested in our work and perhaps some collaboration. Is she just being polite? I participate in Laurance's class of Master's students (starting at 6.00 p.m.), so we have a very late Italian dinner — oh bliss, some wine!

Tuesday is a public holiday for grave sweeping. On Wednesday, my last day, Laurance has to go to work so I venture out to the Hong Kong Museum of Art. I wasn't sure whether I could appreciate Chinese art. But the calligraphy is marvellous, and I enjoy an historic exhibition of art from the time of the Opium Wars, a lot of it British impressions of the challenges of the time. Once again everything falls efficiently into place. I pick up my luggage from Laurance's flat, catch a *free* shuttle bus from the Holiday Inn to the airport train station, check in my luggage at the train station, and am whisked out to the airport on the train. There is time to sit in the hushed Qantas Club reading material for Friday's meeting. My computer tells me that it is after midnight Melbourne time and there's work tomorrow. So I had better call it a day.

— Jennifer Bryce, June 2011

Joy's 'I survived America's Deep South' road trip

by Joy Window

Saturday 22 May 2010

Andrew saw me off at the Brisbane international airport for the Qantas 11 a.m. flight to LA. I sat next to an Indigenous man and his wife who were on their way to Seattle for a world-wide indigenous conference, which happens every year in different localities (I think it's the First Nations conference or some such). They live in an over-fences gated community somewhere around Brisbane. We arrived in LA international airport (LAX) at 6 a.m. the same day.

A curious and heart-stopping moment in LAX airport: I had wound my way around the loong queue to get into the American Airlines terminal (very efficient queue-minders there) and was walking through the *n*th security check when four big, tall African-American security guys ran through, shouting 'Boom, boom, boom'. We all stopped. They shouted, 'Stay still, don't move!' We all froze. About 30 seconds later, an announcement over the PA said it was a drill. Phew! I asked the nearest person what it was about, and she had no clue.

I had absolutely no problems getting from LA to Atlanta — it took half an hour to get through LAX immigration *and* picking up my luggage in LA *and* customs, then had a two-hour wait to catch a connecting flight to Dallas with American Airlines, then another two-hour wait for a connecting flight to Atlanta. It is curious that on American Airlines you must pay for your food or drink (even a US\$1 bottle of beer) with a credit card; no cash accepted. My luggage appeared on the carousel just as Alan and Jane Sandercock arrived to pick me up at 7 p.m.-ish Atlanta time (14 hours 'behind' Lismore time). It was roughly 29 degrees C and fine, though a bit muggy. Imperial units (miles and Fahrenheit and gallons) are generally used in the US.

We ate a sandwich snack at the airport before driving (this was the first time I experienced the large size of American meals; enough for two, but I was starving so I polished it off) in Alan's Prius (I'd heard hybrids are quiet and it's true) to their home in Decatur (pronounced 'Dec-A-tur', not 'Dec-a-TUR'). It is a quiet neighbourhood with lots of trees and manicured lawns, a few kilometres from Atlanta's centre. It was a bit disconcerting to be driving on the 'other' side of the road, and to have a road rule 'right on red', so that you can turn right when facing a red light if it is safe to do

so.

Emory University is in the neighbourhood and has a huge campus. Jane works at the Centers for Disease Control, a huge organisation doing research on health and epidemiology. She wanted to show me through, but I would have had to have serious security checks — not practical for an afternoon's visit. The facility has lots of nasty things on site, like smallpox and Ebola.

Sunday 23 May 2010

I awoke at 3.30 a.m. raring to go. Fortunately Alan and Jane have a great library with books of much interest to me, so I started reading *The Lost City of Z*, about the search for a lost city in the Amazon: well written and gripping. Later I read *My Stroke of Insight*, by a neuroanatomist who herself had a stroke and describing her attack and recovery: another well-written and fascinating book.

After the sun rose, I moved to the breakfast table, where I was able to look at the back deck and bird feeder. Jane and Alan put out seeds to attract birds. I saw a male and female cardinal this morning at the bird feeder — and a squirrel! Squirrels are considered a nuisance, but had novelty value for me.

After breakfast Alan drove me went to the Book Nook to fill in the holes in my *Buffy* comic collection. I ordered the missing one, to arrive in a couple of days.

Then after lunch went to the local Barnes and Noble — as massive as I remembered from New York. I bought some magazines (there are no newsagents as such, except in California, and I was able to get some titles we can't get in Australia except through the Internet) and ordered the animated DVD *Samurai Jack*, and the books *Handmade Electronic Music* and *Automata and Mechanical Toys* for Andrew. They couldn't get the others on the list as they were UK published. The weather was good: 28 to 30 degrees C (Fahrenheit is used in the US) and not yet too humid. Apparently the temperature and humidity in Atlanta are very unpleasant in high summer.

In the evening the three of us went for a walk in the woods near here: interesting different types of trees to those in Australia, plus a lake. I saw a heron somewhat like our white-faced heron, which Jane thought was a great blue heron. Some of the trees were witch-hazel. We saw a male American robin (yellow beak, reddish chests,

nothing like our robins). Also heard bleating frogs — and they sound much more like real sheep than our bleating tree frogs in Northern NSW. Jane says West Nile virus is in this area; I felt right at home, as northern NSW mosquitos give us Ross River fever and Barmah Forest virus. Fortunately there weren't any mossies during our walk. Jane showed me what we dubbed the 'Graffiti Temple Archaeology Site': old, falling-down waterboard buildings on which graffiti artists had drawn impressive paintings.

Saw chickadees and more cardinals and yet more squirrels on the back deck, coming in for the seeds Jane puts out. Other birds seen were:

- the eastern towhee, about the size of our noisy miner
- the Carolina chickadee, about the size of a house sparrow
- brown-headed nuthatch
- red-bellied woodpecker
- downy woodpecker
- titmouse.

Monday 24 May 2010

The astounding Georgia Aquarium was on the menu today. It opened in November 2005, billed as the 'world's largest aquarium' of more than eight million gallons of water. The largest tank, the Ocean Voyager, is reportedly the world's largest aquarium exhibit with 6.3 million gallons of water containing four whale sharks, two manta rays, a hammerhead and other species of sharks, turtles, and a zillion other saltwater creatures. The whales and sharks have to be fed by tube, as there's no way that the amount of plankton they

need to live on every day could be supplied. Smaller aquariums (but they are still quite large) feature various fresh and seawater habitats, like the Amazon and the Lake Malawi cichlids, Asian small-clawed otters, giant Pacific octopus (sleeping under a ledge as it was daytime), two beluga whales, garden eels, alligators, weedy sea dragons and seahorses, and touch pools where you can caress cownosed rays (surprisingly soft, smooth skin) and horseshoe crabs (common on the eastern seaboard).



(Right) Joy Window, 2010. (Photo supplied by Joy Window.)

(Below) Maria, Alan and Jane Sandercock, 2010. (Photo supplied by Alan Sandercock.)



Alan said this aquarium had been planning to have dolphins, and told me a disturbing story that is apparently true, from the documentary *The Cove*. I already knew that hundreds of dolphins are killed yearly in one place in Japan. Apparently these people supply some (that they have caught but obviously not clubbed) to dolphin shows around the world for a couple of hundred thousand US dollars each. Not good in any way shape or form.

I regret forgetting to take a picture of the sign at the front door, warning patrons not to take in a list of offensive artefacts, like guns, drugs, knives and gum.

In the evening Alan drove me to visit his ex-wife, Sue, whom I last saw in 1986 in Nashville. She is still producing pottery, and earning a living by cataloguing German and Russian literature in a library. Bob, her husband, is a woodworker and furniture restorer. Their friendly dog, an 'Austrian Alsatian', is actually a border collie.

Tuesday 25 May 2010

Alan drove me to a couple of hardware stores, but none had the Leatherman Charge TTI, a multi-function tool that Andrew was keen to get a hold of (at about half the price of those in Australia). We finally tracked one down at REI, a large camping store (think Sydney's Kathmandu, Paddy Pallin and Patagonia rolled into one and multiplied by 20).

We also went to the Decatur Farmers' Market, which was a large barn with many local and exotic fruits, vegetables, cheeses, beer and alcohol (including a lot of Aussie alcohol). There was a sign saying 'no photographs'. Alan speculated that this might have been because of illegal immigrants working there.

The evening meal was at Manuel's Tavern, where we met up with the three people we are sharing the student dormitory with at Charleston: Jane, Elmore and Nanette.

Afterwards we went to band practice. All the above are members of the Seed and Feed Marching Abominables, who had been invited to play at the Spoleto festival. The band is a street marching band; the two Janes play cymbals and Alan is official photographer. The members are called:

- *Abominables*, who play instruments, whether they are horns, drums, or accordions
- *Abominettes*, who wear costumes and march in front of the band
- *Despicables*, who act somewhat like marshals, surrounding the band and providing crowd control or warning the other members of road hazards on the route, and
- *Incorrigibles*, who are children of band members.

I found it amusing to walk at the side or behind the band and see the reactions of the folks on the footpath as we walked to the venues. The 'Seed and Feed' is a rural supply store.

Random facts: petrol ('gas') was US\$2.69 per gallon (3.785 litres) (or thereabouts), which is US\$0.711 per litre: currently AUS\$0.786 per litre. Presently petrol in Lismore is AUS\$1.32 per litre. Alan was getting about 54 miles to the US gallon in his hybrid.

Wednesday 26 May 2010

We packed up Alan's Prius and drove about six hours east to Charleston on the coast of South Carolina, with a brief stop at the South Carolina Welcome Center — these buildings are like our information centres and contain knowledgeable staff and brochures for travellers and tourists coming into a state on the major freeways — and at a Subway franchise just off the freeway for lunch.

We then moved into a spacious (four bedrooms, with a double bed each, kitchen and lounge room, with washer and dryer) apartment at the College of Charleston, involving numerous visits to the CVS store (franchise pharmacy on the ground floor) for supplies. This place was right in the middle of everything: perfect for casual strolls taking in the shops and scenery and festival events.

We walked to the waterfront park through the French quarter. The architecture of Charleston is utterly charming, and it was such a pleasure just walking down the street, especially down Battery Row and behind that section of the town. Of course the city was in festival mode and showing its best side. We had arrived a couple of days before the Spoleto festival started, and were able to compare it pre- and during the tourist invasion. The city, which was established in 1670, has much 'olde worlde' fascination.

We walked through the old slave market, which is now an art and craft market. Unlike Atlanta, Charleston has preserved much of its historic features. There was a distinct smell of what I thought was sewage, but turned out to be mud-flats: the tide goes out a long way and leaves the anaerobic mud exposed, hence the sulphur smell. The magnificent magnolia trees were in bloom. There were lots of balconies and lovely gardens visible through side gates. The palmetto palm is indigenous to the area, and is on the South Carolina flag with a crescent moon. American flags and South Carolina flags were much in evidence on private and public buildings.

Birds seen in Charleston: boat-tailed grackle, yellow-crowned night heron, turkey and black vultures over the freeway, mocking bird, black-headed gull.

From Jane's notes, here are some of the highlights, combined with some of mine:

- Sitting on a windy rooftop restaurant on a beautiful day in Charleston enjoying the meal, a beer and the company
- Spying on night herons in the marsh near the wharf near the fountain



- Strolling down the old streets at the end of the peninsula in the evening with the secret gardens and cobblestone streets and blocks to help you step up into a carriage, and fountains and gazebos and birds
- After yet another walk around through town, enjoying a good meal at Fleet Landing (fabulous seafood pasta!)
- Winding our way through the artist market and visiting with the guy who made didgeridoos, the guy who photographed China and of course the jewellery makers (I went nuts and bought lots of good quality stuff)
- Listening to the Madrigal singers and the medieval instruments in the old church; chatting with our neighbours before it started; watching our neighbour so elegantly sketch the musicians
- Nanette and I singing two-part harmony at the top of our lungs while fast-walking down the street trying to find the theatre with the illusionist — people on the sidewalk smiling — perhaps they thought it was another festival performance
- Seeing an 'illusionist' who was so bad that the show provided hours of entertainment afterwards: we thought about rewriting his script and sending it to him
- All the hubbub before, during and after our band performances
- Peeking through the glass at Nick Cave's (closed) exhibition of splendid costumes (not



Two houses, Charleston, South Carolina.
(Photos: Wikipedia.)

the musician, but the American fabric sculptor, dancer and performance artist)

- Dropping into a charming boutique hotel to ask directions when my map was unreadable
- Meandering the streets alone in 'off' times and absorbing the atmosphere
- The three of us sharing a pedicab driven by Buffy the Vampire Slayer (in the guise of a petite, blonde college student called Meredith) through the night, gazing at the softly lit, pretty backyard gardens with the warm winds flowing through our hair. Who needs Paris?

Thursday 27 May 2010

Coffee for breakfast (having finished off the yummy crab-cakes from last night) at the Kudu coffee shop. Coffee splendid wherever I went. Then we walked to the South Carolina Aquarium: not as big as the Atlanta one, but impressive nevertheless. Lunch restaurants aplenty of the same sort as Subway and Maccas, but much better quality — not so many of these in Australia. You go in and order a selection of food and drink the way you prefer. In Australia it is more 'what you see is what you get, and no deviation'.

In the afternoon we drove to Sullivan's Island, one of the barrier islands that have been built up. Expensive real estate, as you might imagine.

Jane says there is a certain colour that houses are painted with on the outside, to keep away the haints (restless or evil spirits). It is called 'haint blue' and is a blue/green. The Gullah people who have this tradition are descendants of African slaves who worked on rice plantations in South Carolina. They have distinctive words and a lilt in the way they talk. Some 'low country' whites also speak it. (The 'low country' is the geographic and cultural region located along South Carolina's

coast; the region includes the South Carolina Sea Islands.

Friday 28 May 2010

The festival proper started today, and crowds were on the streets. We walked through the market at Marion Square, where I bought a festival T-shirt, and then to the visitors' centre to buy tickets to some events. On the way back, we dropped in on an art and craft expo, where I spent heaps of money on jewellery.

The Pleasures of the Royal Courts (madrigal singers) event was in the Presbyterian church, and was most enjoyable, especially as Jane and I sat in my favourite spot for concerts: as far up the front as possible. The medieval instruments, like the crumhorn, were laid out on the pew in front, so we couldn't get much closer. Next to me was an artist sketching the musicians with watercolour pencils. We got talking. She lived in the Bahamas, had an apartment in New York City, and went to the Charleston festival every year.

Saturday 29 May 2010

Today I went to a Sacred Harp shape-note singing 'performance', which wasn't really a performance, but a gathering. I hadn't heard of this wonderful form of traditional southern four-part *a cappella* harmony. It made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up to be seated amongst 60 people belting out hymns at the tops of their voices: very moving, even though I am not a Christian. I guess I just go to church for the music!

'Anderson's Illusion' was in the afternoon. The poor man has having technical problems with the lights, but his 'patter' was woeful as well. Good job I had only been charged US\$8 for it (for being a 'senior': my first over-55 discount!)

The band's morning gig was the Children's Parade in the Marion Square parkland. The mid-night gig was tonight: the Pajama Parade at the US Custom House. Very loud and very colourful. The audience really enjoyed it.

Sunday 30 May 2010

I meandered around the streets, checking out some art galleries and stores on my own, then walked down to the US Custom House for the band's Memorial Day gig. They'd all dressed in red, white and blue.

Monday 31 May 2010

Had breakfast in an old-style diner, 'Jack's' (where I tried grits — ground corn, sort of like oat porridge — I liked it; and biscuits (= scones)), packed and said goodbye, then off to St Mary's on the coast in the very south of Georgia, near the Florida border (four hours on the freeway from Charleston). The Florida peninsula is all that is guarding us from the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

I now know the difference between a swamp and a marsh. Marshes have low grasses, reeds and sedges (about one metre high) with rivulets in between, and swamps have tall trees, often with hanging Spanish moss, growing on wet, spongy land. Sweetgrass grows in the marshes, and only

Georgia Low Country: Hunting Island State Park. (Photo: Wikipedia.)



the local black people are allowed to harvest it to make into baskets, a traditional craft now having a revival.

We dropped in at a Burger King for a break, and there was a brown thrasher pecking around near the car park. It was peach season, and many roadside stalls sold them. Somewhere along the line we saw four sandhill cranes. There were many bus-sized mobile homes haring along the freeway, some pulling full-sized cars, and one with another trailer with Harley-Davidson motorcycles inside it.

St Mary's seems to be not much more than the take-off point for the ferry to Cumberland Island, one of the many barrier islands on the Atlantic coast. We had dinner at a pleasant restaurant overlooking saltwater marsh rivulets. An anhinga (somewhat like our cormorants or darters, but brown rather than black and white) landed on the rocks below and hung out its wings to dry.

Tuesday 1 June 2010

Off to the island by ferry (a 45-minute ride)! On the horizon, you can see the industrial towers of Florida.

I love travelling by ferry, and this was no exception. There's something soothing about travelling in calm waterways. The island is designated a 'National Seashore' and managed by the US National Park Service. Cumberland Island is the largest island in terms of continuously exposed land area of Georgia's barrier islands. The island is 17.5 miles (28 km) long, with an area of 36,415 acres (147.37 km²), including 16,850 acres (68.19 km²) of marsh, mudflats, and tidal creeks. There is no bridge to the island; most visitors reach the island by the Cumberland Ferry, while the most convenient boat access is from the town of St Mary's, Georgia. The island has three main ecosystem regions. Along the western edge of the island there are large areas of salt marshes. You can see gnarled live oak trees covered with Spanish moss and the palmetto plants at the edge of Cumberland's dense maritime forest. Cumberland Island's most famous ecosystem is its beach, which stretches over 17 miles (27 km). The island is home to many native interesting animals, as well as non-native species. There are white-tailed deer, squirrels, raccoons, nine-banded armadillos, wild boars, American alligators, as well as many marshland inhabitants. It is also famous for its wild horses roaming free on the island. These horses have over the decades adapted to the environment (and the environment has adapted to them), and they can drink much more salty water than 'normal' horses can. What looked like cattle egrets followed the horses, just like they follow cattle at home.

There are old ruins at Dungeness from the days when the wealthy Carnegies and other families owned the island and built mansions there (1880–1916). It is reputed to be one of the most unde-

veloped areas of the United States — and may it stay that way.

There's a small but effective museum with some archaeological bits and pieces from when native Americans lived on the island. A National Parks ranger took us on a most interesting walk of about an hour, telling us the history of the place. The palmetto palm and live oak forest with hanging Spanish moss is most atmospheric (especially when you learn that there are chiggers — a type of tick — in the hanging moss! Made me feel right at home, as we often come in from working on the property at Larnook to discover several ticks on us).

I was keen to see an armadillo. Nannette used to be a wildlife carer, and had told me that the safest way to pick them up (for both me and the armadillo, not that I was *going* to pick one up) was to grab it by the base of the tail and hold it upside down, a little away from the body so that it can't scratch you with its sharp claws. They are nocturnal, so the chances of seeing one were slim — but, alas, I did see a baby one, quite freshly dead, on a walking path. At least I got a good, close-up look. The soil had many 'holes' that looked very much like bandicoot scratchings. I guess armadillos fill the same niche as bandicoots at home.

Here are some of Jane's notes from that day:

- Staring at the surface of the water for a glimpse of a manatee and then getting it: just a glimpse of a nose
- Following the park ranger around the lower side of Cumberland and watching a foal scratch his back on a low tree limb
- Finding a baby armadillo (sad but interesting) and watching fiddler crabs wave at us in unison from the boardwalk
- Truly royal giant old oaks with elegant robes of Spanish moss and shoulders of redemption ferns
- A perfectly delicious lunch of bread, pepper-jack cheese, apple and stale cookie without even one ant bite or mosquito bite.

I was bushed by the end of the walk (it was warm and humid), so lay down on a picnic table and left Alan and Jane to visit the Atlantic Ocean by themselves. Jane reported several horseshoe crab skeletons on the beach. At home I would be souveniring these, but Australian Customs most certainly would not let me bring them into Australia. There was a display near the toilets of local shells, many of which were familiar.

On the way back on the ferry, something was jumping out of the water a lot. We assumed it was dolphins, but the shape wasn't right, and Jane came to the conclusion that they were manta rays, which do travel in packs and jump out of the water. Also saw an osprey and tufted titmouse (a bird). There was a blue jay on the motel lawn.

Today we received news that the band's four life-sized plastic pink flamingos and banner had been recovered. They had been stolen during the festival, apparently by a couple of girl freshmen



(Left): John Wesley statue and Reynolds Square, Savannah. (Right): Sorrel Weed House, Savannah. (Photos: Wikipedia.)

(freshgirls?), but security videocameras had re-coded the event (I had forgotten there are security cameras all over the States, as there are in the UK) and the campus police had tracked them down and recovered them. Campus police are usual in US universities, and are separate from the state law enforcement. Charges were not going to be pressed, as the girls hopefully got enough of a fright to deter them.

We had a swim in the motel pool in a thunderstorm before heading off to a nice little restaurant for dinner.

Wednesday 2 June 2010

North to Savannah today: another attractive, historic city on the coast, with lovely old buildings. The city was established in 1733, and has many historic homes and churches. It is laid out in 24 or so squares, each of which has a park with a statue or fountain and shady trees — most pleasant to walk around. Residences are built around the squares. Today there was a busker playing music in several of the squares we walked through, a nice touch. We walked around looking at the architecture and visiting an independent bookshop, then lunch and back in the car for the spurt to Atlanta. I learned that the interstate freeway is blocked in places when a hurricane comes through, so that the only evacuation routes are left open for people to flee from the coast.

The Okefenokee swamp is somewhere in south Georgia. Jane says there are canoe trails, where you must camp on platforms as the ground is squelchy and moves around. Panthers are natives to this swamp.

Thursday 3 June 2010

My ankles are still swollen, as they have been every day I have been here. Is this because I am upside down? :)

Today was a bit of a rest day after all the travelling. I read Alan's copy of *Crow World*, about — you guessed it — crows. Since crow is a bit of a symbol for me (after all, coming from South Australia I am a crow-eater), I found this book

interesting. I also read Martin Rees's *Six Numbers*, about the physical characteristics of the universe.

Friday 4 June 2010

The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta is world-famous in the puppetry scene. Andrew had mentioned this place to me, and it was just wonderful. They put on regular performances and have a museum of wonderful stuff. I'm not sure why I like puppets; perhaps because they are magical beings. Puppetry is not only for children, but for storytelling in general. I had seen one of Philippe Genty's surreal performances at the Opera House many years ago, and was totally hooked from then.

The centre has a room dedicated to over 700 objects donated by the Jim Henson family. I saw many of the original puppets from the *Muppet Show*: Kermit, Dr Teeth, the Swedish Chef, Rolf, Big Bird. I knew they were person-sized, but was still surprised at how big they are in real life. Another room had puppets from the films *Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*: Sir Didymus and a wonderful larger-than-person-sized Skeksis (because someone was inside), for example.

The main body of the museum has examples of puppets from around the world. The first room you go into has a 'Trash Phoenix'. The room is in semi-darkness and you press a button. A light goes on showing a 44-gallon drum, which peels open to reveal a pteranodon-creature made of car parts, which rises up to more than two metres and stretches its wings to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning, then folds up into the drum. Wow! No wonder there is a warning sign that this could scare young children. The next room is like a puppet store room, except every 20 seconds or so something *moves*. A little girl who was with her granny was scared by this. One of the last rooms has a human-sized praying mantis that you can manipulate with rods: quite an eerie effect when the lights also dim and you get a bit of a horror-movie effect. I only went around twice but could easily have spent several hours there studying the details.

The store sold puppets, of course, and chil-

dren's DVDs, but I managed to get an adult DVD (just a bit of swearing and concepts going over children's heads) called *Transylvania TV*, which is strange and hilarious. I'd previously come across *Greg the Bunny* years ago: another hilarious, surreal puppet show that is most definitely not for children, and (for all you Buffy fans) starring Seth Green as the human sharing a flat with the fabricated American, Greg.

Later in the day, Jane and I went (in *her* hybrid car) to the Fernbank Museum, a small but well-appointed natural history museum (I love going to these sorts of places). The cafe is surrounded by full-sized dinosaur skeletons. The dioramas of ancient life and current bioregions were great. There was also an exhibition of lie geckos: most fascinating. The little buggers were well camouflaged and hard to see sometimes. We saw the Imax version of *Bugs*, about insects rather than the pesky rabbit. Imax is always impressive.

Saturday 5 June 2010

The Atlanta Botanical Gardens are truly splendid: a large acreage with many varied and interesting displays, even pitcher plants and some really big bullfrog tadpoles (and bullfrogs), not to mention stunning orchids in one of the many large conservatories dedicated to botanical regions of the world. There's a canopy walk and a children's garden, plus many metal and stone garden sculptures, including a couple of large ones by the glass artist Chihuly: gorgeous indeed. One of these was outside as part of a fountain, and I'm amazed it hasn't broken yet.

After dinner at a restaurant with the largest range of beers I have ever come across (at least 10 A4 pages of possibilities), we came across a capoeira demonstration. This is an art form that combines elements of martial arts, music, and dance. It was created in Brazil by slaves from Africa, sometime after the sixteenth century.

After the post-dinner walk, we saw fireflies in Jane and Alan's backyard.

Sunday 6 June 10

The southernmost edge of the Appalachian Mountains is only an hour and a half drive north of Alan and Jane's place, and we headed there to Anna Ruby Falls today. We drove past many small buildings with large carparks full of cars. In Australia, these would have been pubs, but Alan put me right by saying they were Southern Baptist Churches, this being Sunday and people being

very religious hereabouts. After lunch at a lodge, the walk up to the falls was pleasant. The larger trees seem to be hemlocks. The falls are very pretty, and lots and lots of water makes its way down small streams and rapids: very picturesque and giving me a sense of this type of wild forest.

The Appalachian Trail is a 2000-mile hiking track that runs from northern Georgia to Maine, the northernmost US state. After visiting the falls, we drove to a store that services hikers: a full-on clothing and camping supply store. The woman behind the counter and I got talking about Australia. When I described where I lived, she thought it was in the Outback. Far from it. She thought I had a New England accent, so perhaps New Englanders have a more British tone than the usual US accent (but there are so many US accents, it'd be hard to define a 'usual' one). I just finished Bill Bryson's book *A Walk in the Woods*, about his experiences on the trail: very droll.

Monday 7 June 2010

Flew from Atlanta to Dallas to LA to Brisbane, as my dad had gone into hospital (he died a couple of weeks later). There were more things on my list, but perhaps I'll get another opportunity. Luckily I brought a spare bag with me so I could use my generous 57 kg weight allowance.

I met some interesting people in transit: a Taiwanese/American woman going to Sydney to look after her sick sister (she was amazed I knew about *Monkey* and *The Journey to the West*; I don't know how we got onto this esoteric topic); a Californian runner who wanted to be an editor and proofreader (how's that for synchronicity?); and a couple from Philadelphia who were going on a diving expedition in Papua New Guinea and fired up out their laptop to show me their excellent fish and invertebrate photos when I mentioned my love of nudibranchs — a good way to spend four hours at midnight in LA International Airport.

On the whole an excellent trip, full of my favourite things: visiting good friends; making new friends; seeing architecture, living history, museums, and botanic gardens; enjoying creative pursuits; and hiking and experiencing nature. Many thanks to Alan and Jane for the time and effort they put into feeding and lodging me and showing me around.

— Joy Window, December 2010

At the end of part 3 (**brg** 67), John Litchen had just returned from Darwin:

John Litchen

Dancing on sand, diving into life

My life and science fiction, part 4

(All photos: John Litchen)

Melbourne was miserable. I arrived back from Darwin in October to find icy winds blowing off the bay, which, as far as I was concerned, might as well have come directly from Antarctica. There was rain too, sleety and gusting in concert with the winds: spring in full swing. In my view spring in Melbourne is the worst time of year. The best is autumn with its lovely warm days, mild breezes, and the smell of burning leaves as people raking up fallen leaves burn piles of them. Of course this doesn't happen anymore, since burning leaves pollute the air, and there is enough pollution in cities without burning leaves to add to it. Even so, autumn is still the most pleasant time of year. Even early winter can be fabulous, with frosty mornings to ice up car windscreens and turn front lawns white as if they are covered in snow, which soon dissipates and turns into glorious sunny days, although not very warm.

After almost a year in Darwin and the Northern Territory, always so warm, where the only seasons are Wet or Dry, I couldn't adjust to the cold weather in Melbourne. I constantly shivered, and had to wear extra jumpers to keep warm. I believe one's blood thins out in the tropics, which is the reason I was so cold after coming back from Darwin. It took about a month to acclimatise, and by that time it was November, and on the days when the sun came out it was definitely warmer.

One of the first things I had to do was to obtain a driver's licence. I had been driving in Darwin, actually around in the bush at Humpty Doo, and nobody cared whether I was licensed or not, but in Melbourne I needed a licence, especially since I was to start driving a van to deliver and pick up dry cleaning from agencies established by my Uncle Eddie while he leased the family business from Dad. He had let it run down a bit, because he was more concerned with running a never-ending card game — often held at the back of the dry cleaning factory — and Dad had decided he would take it back as soon as the five-year lease expired, which was at the end of the financial year in June 1959. I was to do the driving that at the

moment was being done by Eddie's son-in-law, who was married to Dawn, the younger of my two cousins on Eddie's side.

Apart from driving the dry-cleaning van, Dad also delegated me to drive Zara to her dance classes, which gave him some free time at home. The sooner I got a licence the better. Eddie spoke to a friend of his, Ivan Foley, who operated a driving school from his place in Cecil Street, and he came and picked me up. He took me around with him doing the driving so he could gauge whether I needed practice, and we followed the course the police take the student when doing a test. He warned me of the tricks they use to see whether the student is paying attention, and after running the course a few times he decided I didn't need extra lessons because I already could drive. He booked me in, and we went to the police station in Ballarat Road in Maidstone a day or so later. We parked the car in the street a couple of hundred yards away and went inside.

The first thing the examiner told me was that he would do an eye test. I was expecting to read the usual chart they hang on the wall with the letters in rows of diminishing sizes but he looked out the window to the street and said, 'What's the number on that car parked five along?' I looked, and it turned out to be the same car I was using for the test. He obviously hadn't seen us arriving. So I told him. I knew it from memory anyway. My eyes were good but not that good, but he didn't know that. 'You don't need an eye test,' he said, and ticked something on the papers he had.

We went outside, and Ivan introduced me to another examiner, who would accompany us while I drove where he directed. The very first thing he made me do was to drive out into the street then back up past several cars to reverse-park into an empty spot. If I failed this we would not proceed to drive any further. I've never had any trouble reverse-parking, and this time was no exception. Once that was done we drove around for about 10 or 15 minutes, then returned to the police station, where I went inside and was issued

Dancing on Sand

Dancing on sand
leaves ephemeral footprints
erased by shifting wind.
Cleansed by tides
the remains of our dance
is the beach inviolate
till the end of time.

Bailando en la arena

Bailando en la arena
deja pisos efimeros
mudados por vientos.
Limpiados por las mareas
lo que deja de nuestro baile
es la playa inviolable
hasta al fin del mundo.

— John Litchen



with a licence.

After that I went off with Eddie's son-in-law on his delivery and pickup route until I knew it and could do it on my own. Dad had ordered a new Volkswagen Kombi van for me to drive. At the factory I asked them to paint it bright yellow. It took a bit to convince them because they wanted to supply us with blue or an awful burnt orange colour. At that time blue was traditionally the colour always supplied for a commercial van. But I insisted it had to be bright yellow, and in the end they complied. We then got a signwriter to use bold black letters to print the business name on both sides of the van.

WILLIAMSTOWN DRY CLEANERS

I chose yellow because it was very bright and would stand out among all the monotonous colours used on cars and vans in 1959. Bold black

letters really caught everyone's eye. I copped a lot of flak when people I knew accused me of being a Richmond supporter, since yellow and black were their colours, but I didn't give a stuff about football and never followed any team. In fact I have never been to a football game anywhere in Australia regardless of the code played. I chose yellow and black because of the contrast between them, and the fact that they would be instantly visible anywhere. We also changed the colours in the shop from mundane blues and browns to bright yellow with all the signage being in bold black.

The business was reborn. Dad started a three-hour or six-hour system of cleaning, and a same-day service to all the agencies, which meant I had to drive the route twice a day, in the mornings to pick up stuff, and in the afternoons to deliver it back, while picking up stuff for the next day. We were incredibly busy. Including my sisters Zara and later Christine, we had three girls working in

the main shop serving customers, taking in orders, sorting work in the back, and six pressers working full time, with two of the presses located in the shop so customers could see their work being finished. My brother Phillip joined us, and he worked in the factory part with the cleaning and spotting along with three other people while I mainly did the deliveries. Dad, of course, sat in his office and managed the whole thing, only occasionally venturing out onto the factory floor to do some pressing if we were short of someone.

Phillip and I had to learn how to the pressing as well as the cleaning and spotting, so while everyone else more or less stuck to one role we could take anyone's place if he or she were sick or couldn't turn up or away on holidays. We also assisted in the shop if needed. Phillip went to night school and obtained a boiler attendant's certificate, and although I could operate the boiler, I didn't get a certificate. Dad did, because it was required by law to have a registered boiler attendant on the premises whenever the boiler was operational.

The boiler was the size of a steam train without wheels, housed in a special shed out the back on an adjacent block of land behind the factory: a monster of a thing that burnt tons of oil. Eventually it was replaced by a more compact 30-horsepower machine, which was housed in a special room built between the factory and the shop. This was much cleaner, and when the price of oil escalated we had it changed to burn gas, which was again cleaner and less expensive.

I loved the driving because it meant I was outside of the factory and the shop for about six hours a day. I was always driving in peak-hour traffic, in the mornings and in the afternoons. It was exciting whizzing in and out of traffic, sometimes double parking in busy streets while I raced into a shop with a load of clothes, much to the annoyance of drivers wanting to pass, but I didn't care. It hardly took any time at all to race in and out and be on my way again. I did what I had to do, and in all the years of driving fast, double parking, whizzing in and out of traffic, I was only ever booked twice for speeding, and that was some 10 or 12 years after I started doing the delivery and pick up. Both times I was tearing along Millers Road towards North Altona. When the cop said it was a bit much to be picked up twice in a year, I told him I was driving 100,000 miles in a year, and twice within that number wasn't much really. This about the time we were changing from miles to kilometres and the speedometer in the van had a transparent overlay to show the kilometres. I told him I had been looking at the miles — doing 60 which was really 100 kilometres per hour — while thinking it was kilometres. I didn't realise I was going fast. He didn't buy that excuse and booked me anyway. Besides, when he booked me I reckon I had by then driven almost a million miles, and all in peak-hour traffic. We changed vans every two

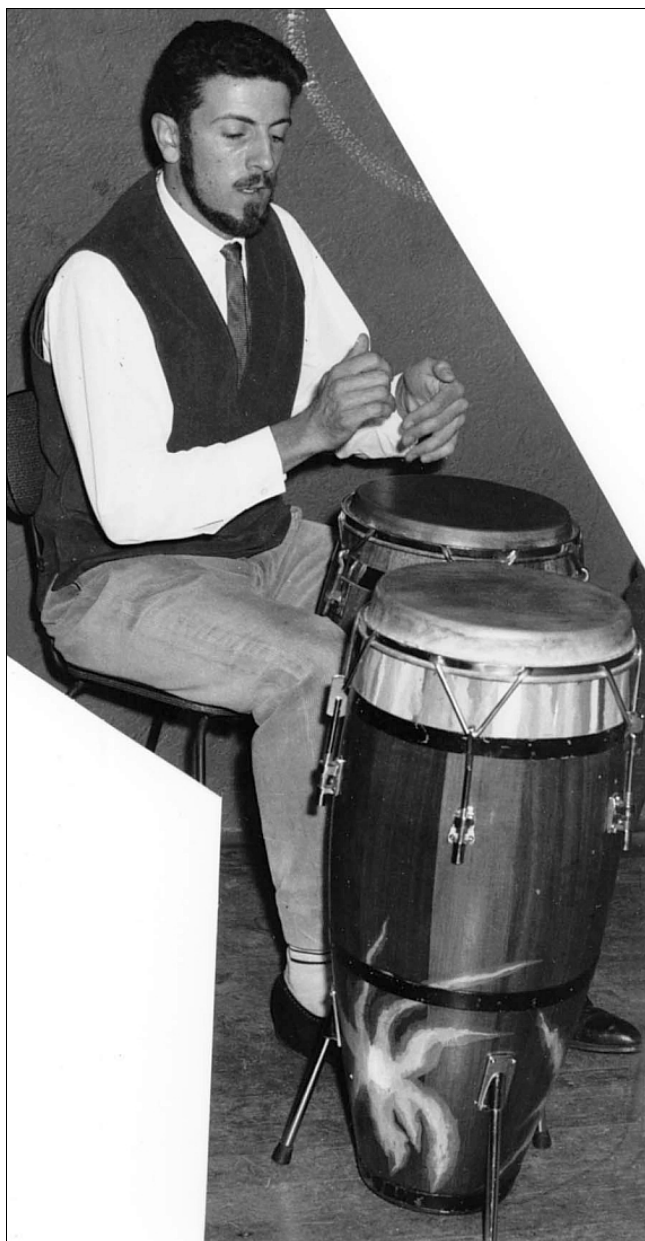
years, having done over 200,000 miles in that time. The van was serviced every month with new spark plugs, new points, and anything that needed replacing done each time. We could not afford to have the van off the road. It was essential to keep the business and the quantity of clothes coming and going through the factory.

When it came to taking Zara to her dance classes she refused at first to be seen arriving in a bright yellow van, and I had to take her in Dad's Ford Fairlane to Spanish dance class or her jazz ballet or Indian dance classes. She did everything, having given up classical ballet some years earlier. She was a good dancer, the classical training having stood her in good stead. Her ambition was to dance in the theatre in shows at the Tivoli and in musicals, which she eventually did. In the meantime she helped out by working in the shop at the dry cleaner.

I have said elsewhere that memory is elusive, and in my case often isn't there. I don't remember exactly how and when I started playing conga drums. It must have been sometime in 1959 or perhaps early 1960. I have a vague recollection of going to one or two nightclubs located in Fitzroy in Johnston Street or Brunswick Street and listening to a group of about four or five people playing Latin-American music. 'Misirlou' was one of the songs I distinctly remember, and there were others that I had heard played by Greek musicians, which I thought had been Greek songs. I was astounded to discover they were popular Latin-American songs and that they had been translated into Greek. They were boleros and cha-chas and something the band members called Afro-Cuban. I loved it. The rhythms were simple compared to those in Greek music, and I was impressed with the way the drummer played the bongo and the conga drums. I thought I might like to do that, so I spoke to him and he started to teach me.

At that time night clubs were not allowed to sell alcohol. Pubs shut at 6 p.m., and any alcohol consumed in these places at night was illegal. We had to smuggle in brandy or whisky in bottles hidden in a jacket or a hip pocket — hence the popularity of hip-flask-sized bottles — and order a Coke or some other soft drink to mix the hard alcohol with. Even coffees were suffused with brandy. Those were the days!

Clubs were sometimes raided and people with alcohol on them were charged, while the club owners denied knowledge of anyone smuggling in such stuff. I remember later buying a huge overcoat with enormous pockets, which I wore when attending a ball. The oversized pockets were used to smuggle in bottles of beer or brandy to have with the dinner served. Everyone did it, and it was often amusing to see so many lumpy men wandering about with huge overcoats which they deposited at their tables and draped over a chair, instead of leaving them at the coat and hat



John playing congas at Birdland 1961.

checkin.

The name of the guy who originally taught me how to play bongos was Danny Green. His bongo playing was good, but his conga drumming was awful; I didn't know it at the time. I was fascinated by these drums, and we often jammed together. It was he who suggested we visit a jazz club called Birdland (named after the famous club in the USA), which was in St Kilda. It was the place where after-hours musicians of all kinds hung out to relax and jam and exchange ideas. This club was upstairs in Ackland Street when I first went there. Later it moved around to Fitzroy Street, where it became more commercial and less frequented by visiting musicians.

It was about this time that the Katherine Dunham Dance Theatre came to Australia, and the program it presented was all Haitian and Cuban folk music. I was blown away by the drumming and the singing, not to mention the dancing. I had never seen Afro Cuban or Afro Caribbean drum-

ming, and had not realised that such complexity of the interlocking rhythms existed. I was drawn more towards the Cuban style rather than the Haitian, but all of the rhythms were both musically and rhythmically independent of each other, allowing dancers to dance to any of them, but at the same time they interlocked to produce a melodic structure that overlaid the underlying rhythms. Somewhere in that mix was a beat that locked it all together, but where the count began was a mystery to me. I found out much later that the underlying beat often wasn't actually played, but was always implied, and that each drummer knew exactly where it was and how everything else fitted and blended with it. Amazing stuff!

The other thing that grabbed me was that most of the drumming was in 6/8 time, something I could feel, but something I was not used to listening to. Most European and western music fitted into simpler structures based on 2 and 4 beats to a bar or occasionally the 3/4 of waltz tempo. Not this stuff: it was 6 against 8 or 6 against 4 or 12 against 4 and it was combined with African styles of singing but with European-based melodic forms, Spanish for Cuban and Creole French for the Haitian. Often the singing was in half time to the drumming as it followed the unheard beat beneath the frenzied drumming, but whatever way it was sung it was unlike anything I had ever heard before. It was my first encounter with the syncretisation of African music and rhythms with Spanish or French melody.

My way in was the popular song 'Misirlou', played in what was euphemistically called Afro-Cuban, a rhythm that is common in many guises all across Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (actually a corrupted form or a secularisation of a religious group of rhythms played on Bata drums with three drummers, simplified so it can be performed by one drummer on conga drums), a rhythm in which the pronounced tones repli-

cated the clave beat used in many of the slow romantic boleros, erroneously called rumbas, that were played in the night clubs.

I later discovered that the clave was the key that holds Cuban music together. It has two forms, one of which appears to be a reversal of the other, but actually isn't. There is the form used in traditional rumba groups and folkloric music that has religious significance, and the other form is used in popular dance music. They should not be confused, but they often are. The stick patterns played on the side of a drum or on a cowbell are all extensions of one or other of these two basic clave patterns, and it is these patterns that hold the group together and allow them to lock in with their various rhythms. They allow the mixing of such combinations as 6/8, 4/4, 2/4, 6/4, 12/4, 12/8, and 2/8. The clave holds it together because it fits into the rhythms played in 6 as well as those in 4, and was for me the key to unlocking how it works. Once I knew that, I could find 1, or the first beat in first bar of the clave pattern, and the rest fell into place. The clave always goes over two bars before repeating, so melodic rhythms always go over two or four or eight repetitions of the clave, although they could be made up of a number of one or two bar drum patterns. It sounds complicated and it is, but once you immerse yourself in it, the way it comes together becomes intuitive, and is thus not so difficult after all. Our heart beats in 6/8 and our blood flows with the same pattern. This kind of rhythm is innate, and everyone has the ability to feel it even if they don't understand it. Even rhythms in odd metres such as 5/4 and 7/4 and 9/8 are intuitive, once you feel the melodic structure of the pattern instead of trying to count it in a rational manner.

The members of the Katherine Dunham dance troupe were feted with great hospitality in Melbourne, and a few of them decided to stay in Australia when the company returned to the USA. There was Yolanda and Antonio Rodriguez, with Yolanda originally from New York and Antonio from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, who were married but later separated, and Albert La Guerre, a Haitian drummer who was the lead drummer in the Haitian sequences. There were a couple of others whose names I can't recall. They all did floor shows in Melbourne and Sydney clubs and hotels, and eventually I got to know them quite well.

Albert I came across one night in Birdland sitting in and playing with the band. He used the drums that belonged to the club, as did I when I later played there. I was very impressed with his way of playing, which no one I had met up to then was able to do. I introduced myself and we struck up a friendship that lasted for years. He started teaching me how to play conga drums, and that's when I realised that Danny didn't know how to play them even though he was fine with bongos — in the same way that a non-Latin drummer used to playing kit drums would be if playing bongos. The riffs were drum riffs, which are not

the same as those a Latin drummer or Afro-Cuban drummer would do, because of the different heritage and lineage in the evolution of the playing. Danny had no idea of the importance of the clave, and like most local musicians at that time assumed it was added in to give a feeling of something exotic in the music. The clave is fundamental to the structure of Cuban and related music. The Latin drummer's riffs are always an expansion of the clave, both rhythmically and melodically. They always think of drum patterns in terms of melody first, before thinking of them as rhythm. It wasn't until I started learning with Albert that I became aware of this.

I was fascinated by the fact that a drummer learnt his craft from another master drummer and no written music was required. A good memory was essential, along with an innate sense of rhythm and a feeling for melody. Rhythms and drum patterns are often taught by singing them, and this can be heard in every culture where drumming is prominent. Thinking of the drums as melodic instruments rather than as percussion instruments was also essential, because when you have interlocking rhythms on different drums tuned to different pitches you also get a rhythmic melody composed of the various pitches of drums that rides over all the individual rhythms being played. You have to keep in mind the melody as well as all the individual rhythms that make up the structure of the group as a whole. Once the basic structure of everything is fixed in your mind, only then can some parts of it be varied without losing the overall feel and sound. The way those parts are varied will depend on how the drummer who is playing that bit feels and reacts to what is going on within and around the group. There is a profound depth to Afro-Cuban and Afro-Caribbean drumming of both the religious and the secular styles that dates back thousands of years to mostly West African origins.

The religious styles of drumming are basically unchanged from their African origins up to and including exactly the same kinds of drums as were originally used, the same singing in the appropriate African language, and the invocation of the same deities as those in Africa, with only some of them syncretised with Catholicism and Christian saints — but the secular music drumming (and singing) has changed radically over the years, incorporating many diverse influences from Spain, Portugal, France, and even England, as well as more recently American jazz (which itself originated from Afro-Cuban slave music via the blues) and all its various innovations.

All of this was mindboggling, and I fell profoundly in love with Afro-Cuban music. Most of the local musicians at the time were interested only in learning a few popular songs and maybe one rhythm that could generally be played with hardly any adaptation to everything they wanted to do in the clubs. Very few cared to delve into the origins and history of the music and the drum-



(Top) At the Spanish Club in Fitzroy playing bongoes.

(Right) Albert La Guerre as he was in 1959.

ming, so in effect I became a bit of an expert. It also allowed me access to the people who were the masters of this drum music, and they were happy to teach me and have me play with them. As a result I taught other guys how to play conga drums and how they interlocked with bongos and the timbales, the three indispensable types of drums used in popular dance music that originated from the island of Cuba and for a while was known as tropical music, but for last 30 years or so has been loosely called salsa.

As a term, *salsa* doesn't really describe what the music is. It is a poor generic term that only means 'sauce', as in the stuff used to flavour food. How it became the word that describes an enormous variety of varying rhythms and styles all emanating from Cuba as well as including those from Puerto Rico and even perhaps Santo Domingo is totally beyond me. I do have a theory, though, which refers to a chorus, often repeated in faster tempo music, exhorting dancers to move with more excitement which says 'Put some sauce into it ... Échale Salsa'. When this was repeated enough, originally in New York, but soon after in many different places and in many different up-tempo songs, it may very well have become the term most associated with the music. Once some people started calling it *salsa* it quickly became the generic term for all music played in the USA that had its origins in Cuba and the Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean.





Once again at Birdland with half of the comedy duo 'The Two Earls' c. 1960.

How can it be used to describe mambo, guaracha, guaguanco, cha-cha, charanga, son, son montuno, guajira, danzon, changui, timba, pilon, and many variations evolving from mixing these with religious drumming and singing (of African origin), not to mention bomba and plena from Puerto Rico and merengue from Santo Domingo, cumbia from Columbia, joropo from Venezuela, and their modern derivatives mixed with other Caribbean influences?

It's not possible, and it denies the existence of some wonderful and ever-evolving music that defies description, relegating it to a single concept. It's like saying South American music or Latin American music and expecting people to know what you mean. Everyone will have a different idea of what South American and Latin American music is, and whatever it is it will be limited by that person's understanding of the music itself, to what they have been exposed to and to what they may have heard broadcast commercially. South America is a vast continent that has many different countries, all of which have their own musical traditions that consist of many different influences, and styles and instrumentations.

There is no term that can be used to describe

all of it. How can you lump together tango, milongo, cueca, son huasteca, samba, bossa nova, chorros, and rancheras, just mention a few from a few countries under the banner of a single name? For me the term salsa is as meaningless as Latin American or South American. It would be better to describe it as Cuban or Afro-Cuban music, Puerto Rican music, Colombian music, Venezuelan, Paraguayan, Argentinian, Chilean, Peruvian, or whatever the country may be, which would at least give a hint as to origin, without going into all the possible styles and rhythms employed in that country.

True, it is difficult to find much difference between a mambo, for example, played by a Cuban or Puerto Rican or Colombian or a North American New York band, or even a European or a Japanese band (such as Orchestra de la Luz). The mambo was created in Cuba by Israel 'Cachao' Lopez and his pianist brother Orestes Lopez, and has been refined over the years by Perez Prado, Tito Rodriguez, and Tito Puente, to mention a few, but a mambo is always recognised as a mambo, as is a guaracha or a bomba or a cha-cha when played by groups of various sizes. To call all of them salsa is simply erroneous and lazy and shows a lack of basic knowledge.

There was another guy, a Canadian who was in born in Hungary in the late 1930s, but after the Second World War found himself in Canada, then later the USA and in particular New York, where he frequented the Palladium during the era of the Big Band confrontations between the hot sounds of Tito Puente and the ultra-cool sounds of Tito Rodriguez, the two supreme orchestras that always had top billing at the Palladium. He learnt how to play conga drums in New York and found himself in Melbourne playing on Saturday nights at St Kilda's Birdland. We became friends. As I became better known at the club we used to take turns playing the congas on Saturday nights. The club often featured a floor show. George preferred not to play during that time so I did it instead. The floor show usually featured singers and a dance act, or a comedy act: it was a short variety show that lasted about half an hour. Johnny Summers was a featured singer at that time, a gifted singer who unfortunately died younger than he should have, and a comedy duo called Crocker and Clarke, They were very popular, especially Barry Crocker, who went on to carve a brilliant career in show business. Kahmal also performed there. I did some shows with him as a bongo player when the calypso craze was at its height. He was singing the songs Harry Belafonte had made popular.

One night there was an exotic dancer who danced with a huge python wrapped around her. I was playing that famous rhythm based on the clave, which had a monotonous thump to it. Every time she released the python it would start crawling towards me instead of towards the audience, which is what she wanted. The constant thump and the vibration of the drums on the wooden floor were obviously irresistible to it, much to my disquiet. Fortunately, every time the python reached the drums and raised its head as if searching for the source of the vibrations, the dancer would gently drag it back and wrap it around herself again. Although this particular show went on for several weeks, I never did get used to the snake crawling towards me.

I can't remember the names of a lot of people who went on to be good musicians and great performers, all of whom cut their teeth on working the floor show at this club. Visiting musicians would drop in after their shows and jam with the band, and some nights were absolutely fantastic. There was no other place like it in Melbourne at that time.

I can't actually remember when or where or how I got my first conga drum. Like those American presidents who, when asked questions that could incriminate them, replied with 'I don't recall that' or 'I have no recollection of that', I can say the same thing: I don't remember. I suppose I would have bought it from a drum shop. I do remember decorating it with a rim of bright colours and an amoeboid-looking sun at the bottom after seeing Albert's drum painted with sym-

bols that I assume had some religious significance to a Haitian, but which looked interesting in a primitive kind of way to the audience.

I do remember taking it everywhere with me, as I did with other better drums later, in the yellow van that advertised Williamstown Dry Cleaners. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights would find that van parked somewhere in St Kilda until two or three in the morning. I cannot remember how I managed to get up at 7 a.m. to go to work, but at the time I was 18 and 19, then into my twenties, so had boundless energy. I can remember driving with Danny to Sydney on a Friday night, so we could go to a club in King's Cross called the Afro Cuban Nite Spot, which was much better than Birdland in St Kilda. We would sit in and play some Cuban-style music with its group, which played great stuff which sounded very authentic: the music you would have heard at the Palladium, but with a smaller group of six to eight people compared to the big bands in New York. There was a photographer sometimes at the club, and I got him to take some shots of Danny and me playing with the band. After the club closed we would grab a couple of hours sleep in the car, then set off to drive back to Melbourne on Sunday because both of us had to be at work on Monday. We did this quite a few times, but eventually the long drive put us off and we stopped going to Sydney.

I played conga drums with lots of different people all over town. At one stage I met a trumpet player who was interested in Latin jazz. We wanted to practise, but with two very loud instruments such as conga drums and trumpet we had nowhere to practise until I suggested we do it after hours at the dry cleaning shop. A couple of times a week for a few months we went there at 7 or 8 p.m. and practised out the back of the shop in the factory area for a couple of hours. Since all the neighbours were other shops closed at night there was no one nearby to complain about the noise. Eventually we formed a small group with saxophone, trumpet, and bass, with me playing conga drums. We did a few jazz gigs, but the music was too strange for people who wanted to dance, and it was bit too far out for straight jazz fans. I can't remember who the musicians are now after all these years. Shortly after we did those few gigs we each went separate ways and I saw none of them again.

In the meantime I also drove my sister Zara to various dance classes. One of her teachers, who had a studio in Elwood, organised to choreograph a show on the ABC, which had studios nearby. The group was doing some Calypso dance routine and needed a male dancer to do lifts. Zara suggested me and I just laughed at her. I'm not a dancer, but I had been doing some dance training with Antonio Rodriguez (an ex-Katherine Dunham dancer from Brazil), who took classes at a studio in Russell Street that was behind the cinema which showed foreign movies. I had been

there to see *Orpheo Negro* starring Marpessa Dawn, which was a modern retelling of the classic Greek story of Orpheus and Eurydice, but set in Rio de Janeiro during Carnival. It was a brilliant film that introduced to the world the real sounds of samba (as distinct from the watered-down rubbish played in American and European dance bands) with all its percussive complexity overlaid with beautiful husky Portuguese singing and music. The composers of the film's music were also the creators of a new form of Brazilian music called bossa nova, which took the jazz world by storm, giving musicians a softer and more subtle form of 'Latin American' music than what they had been used to. I loved the music so much I saw that film 17 times over a couple of weeks.

Always game, I agreed to have a go at dancing in the routine set up by Zara's teacher, VijaVetra. I discovered that if you didn't do the lifts correctly it was damned hard to lift the girl up and make it look effortless and graceful. It was all about timing. You had to lift just as the girl met you and made a slight jump. You had to catch the upward movement of the jump and using your whole body rise up into the lift as you lifted the girl. Then it was easy, and almost effortless. Once she was up and sitting on your shoulder or supported at the apex of the lift it was easy to move around, then carefully bring her back down again. We rehearsed a few times, then went to the ABC studios and rehearsed some more. Finally the show went on live, as these shows did, so there was no room for mistakes. None of us ever did get to see how the show looked to viewers because we didn't have video recorders then. One of the girls did manage to get a couple of shots during the studio rehearsal: the photos featured here. I never did one of those shows again. Dancing was not something I aspired to, although Zara did do other shows on TV, such as *The Hit Parade*, where dancers mimed and danced to hit songs of the day.

I wasn't only into Cuban and related music; I was also an avid fan of rock and roll music. I had every record of Bill Haley and the Comets, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Gene Vincent, Little Richard, the Platters, and whoever was the latest sensation at the time. Mum and Dad didn't mind us playing this music at home, and Mum encouraged us to bring our friends home. This started before I went to Darwin. It began right after the astonishing sounds of 'Rock Around the Clock' filled the theatre that played the film *Blackboard Jungle* (in 1956). We had lots of parties. Mum always made heaps of food so none of us got drunk on the beer we had. We danced like crazy until eventually we wore out her carpet in the lounge room. We saw all the movies that featured rock and roll, we went to the concerts at Festival Hall, the only venue big enough to accommodate the screaming fans that flocked to see whoever they idolized at the time, and we all tried out the dance steps with varying degrees of success. We even had pyjama parties. They were all the rage at one stage. I had Mum make me a special pyjama set that was bright blue. My friend Brian had elected bright red, which Mum made as well. We would rock into a party with our bright pyjamas and it was sensational. Brian would insist on me playing my drums to the music and nobody minded. It was the days of hippies who played bongos. Even famous actors, such as Marlon Brando, played conga drums. I was right up there with the latest fashion.

When we wanted to slow down towards the end of a party Brian would bring out a record of the George Shearing Quintet and we would quieten down to his romantic jazz interpretations of popular Latin American (Cuban) music.

It turned out that George Shearing's Cuban drummer was Armando Peraza who, in my opin-

(Below and over page:) Rehearsing for a Calypso number with Zara's dance class at the ABC studios, Elwood, 1959.





ion then and still today, was and is the greatest Cuban drummer ever to have lived in the USA. They talk about Chano Pozo and the stuff he did with Dizzy Gillespie, and he is a legend still revered in Cuba, but in my view there are others who have long surpassed what he was doing in the forties up until he was killed in New York: people such as Tata Guines in Cuba and Armando Peraza who moved to the US in the forties. They speak of Chano with great respect, but I think both of them are far better than he was. There are many others who are also better, including Tata Guines in Cuba, who are probably unknown outside of that island. Unlike Mongo Santamaria, Francisco Aguabella, and Patato Valdez, who were contemporaries of Armando, he is not as well known as them. For years he worked with George Shearing, and sometimes with Cal Tjader, and later with Carlos Santana, but I think in ability and technical prowess he outshone his contemporaries while maintaining a low profile. Listen to a recording made in the early fifties called *Artistry in Rhythm*. It features several different drummers, mostly jazz drummers, but there is one extended track of a solo with Armando Peraza accompanied by Ray Mosca, both of whom were with George Shearing at that time. Peraza takes the lion's share of the solo, which extends over about 12 minutes. It's an amazing recording of Armando in his prime. There was also, much later, a live recording of him playing 'Caravan' with George Shearing, where he plays another amazing solo beginning with three conga drums and bongos simultaneously before shifting across to the bongos for the main part of the solo. You can hear the audience going wild in the background. There are many others, but these two stand out in my memory.

When George Shearing visited Australia in the late 1950s Armando was with him. Armando was a friend of Albert Laguerre, and naturally Albert went to see him. It was with Albert that I met Armando, and the three of us jammed a bit on drums at Albert's place. Armando loved the way Albert played, because Haitian drumming was very different to Cuban drumming, and Albert likewise loved the way Armando played. Armando was more a bongocero than a conguero, but on either instrument he was brilliant. I only wish I had been able to understand more at that time. I would have learnt so much.

What has the above got to do with science fiction?

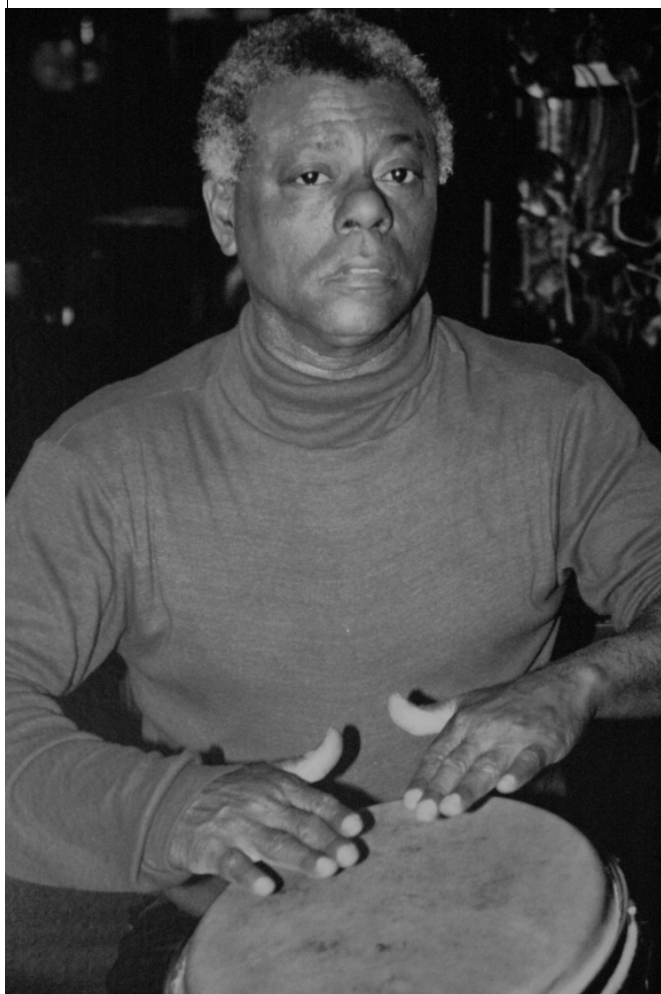
Absolutely nothing, but it does show that in those days I lived different lives simultaneously. Don't the readers of science fiction live ordinary lives? Surely they don't spend all their time reading SF stories? Of course, these days they have TV and DVDs and video games, Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and all that stuff to occupy young minds. They didn't exist in the '50s and '60s. We barely had television; there wasn't one in our house until I came back from Darwin and found my parents had bought this monstrous piece of furniture that filled half the damned lounge room to display a 22-inch horrible grey flat-looking image. At least they liked it.

Most of the people I interacted with in the music field had no idea what I did at other times, except for George, who I discovered loved skin diving, after which we often went diving together, and Gary Hyde — son of Billy Hyde, a great drummer and showman — who I taught how to play basic conga drum patterns. I got on really well with both him and his father, and often went around to their place to socialise and play drums.

While I was playing music in night clubs around Melbourne and driving a dry cleaner's van I was also reading SF stories. I read whatever was available, which I invariably bought from McGill's Newsagency in the city. Then there was not a lot of stuff available, so I managed to read everything that was imported into Australia: novels, story collections, and the English magazines. For some reason I wasn't too fond of the American magazines, and only read the odd one when nothing else was available. I wasn't very fond of short stories, but that was all that was available at that time. Short stories generally left me dissatisfied, but at the time I didn't know why. I simply preferred longer stories and novels, and read every one that appeared. You could do that then — read everything that was published — because the field wasn't large. As more and more novels appeared I read fewer and fewer short stories. The novels kept me enthralled in ways the short stories never did.

However, just to contradict myself, one of my all-time favourite books was published in 1957. It would have been one of the first books I bought after returning from Darwin. It cost me 31 shillings and 9 pence (31/9), which was probably expensive then although it doesn't sound much now. (\$3.19) It was called *Famous Science-Fiction*

Armando Peraza (c. 1978): one of the all-time great players.



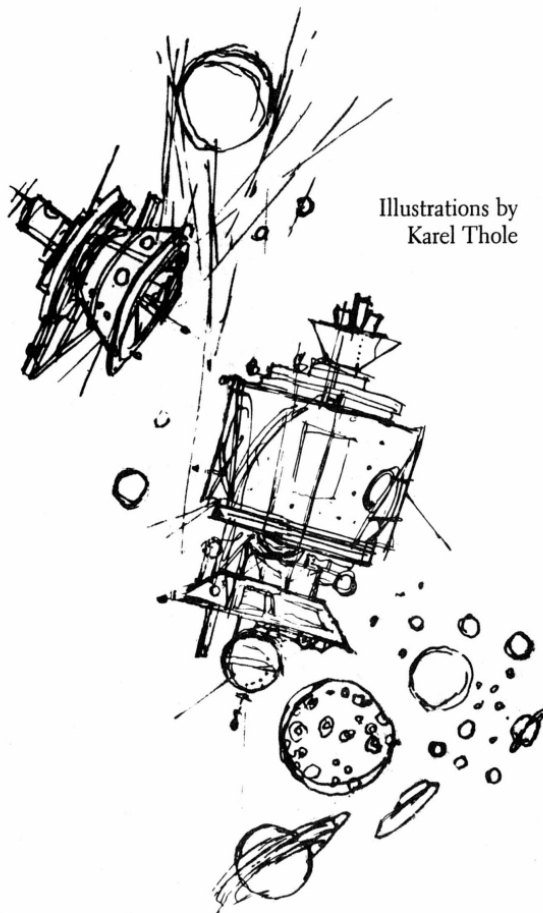
Stories, subtitled *Adventures in Time and Space: 35 Great Stories of the Worlds of Atomic Power, Rockets, Robots, Time and Space Machines, etc.*, edited by Raymond J. Healy and Francis J. McComas. No better collection had been published before then. It was originally published in 1946, so the most recent story in the collection was from 1945. My edition was a republished Modern Library edition from Random House 1957. I loved most of the stories in this book even though they were all American. It had such masterpieces as 'Nightfall', by Isaac Asimov, 'The Weapons Shop' and 'Black Destroyer', both by A. E. Van Vogt, 'Symbiotica' by Eric Frank Russell, 'Requiem' by Robert Heinlein, 'Nerves' by Lester Del Rey, and, among many others, 'Who Goes There?' by Don A. Stuart and 'Farewell to the Master' by Harry Bates (most of which were novellas or novelettes rather than short stories, which at least allowed room for some development of story and character along with a good idea).

'Farewell to the Master' was done by Hollywood as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and was a pretty good film, whereas 'Who Goes There?' was turned into the atrocious mishmash of *The Thing from Another World*, which is still regarded as better than the remake, John Carpenter's *The Thing* from the 1980s. At least the remake was filmed in Alaska, even though it was reset in Antarctica instead of the Arctic, whereas the original version was filmed on a back lot in Hollywood with cold interiors shot inside a freezer room. The remake went back to the idea of the story in having the Thing being a shape-shifter able to change into the appearance of another living thing in order to blend in, but Carpenter went overboard and turned the idea into ridiculous horror and gore that completely destroyed any credibility the film may have started with. Though they were both awful films I enjoyed them immensely, and think perhaps now is the time to have another look at the story and do a film that is worthy of it.

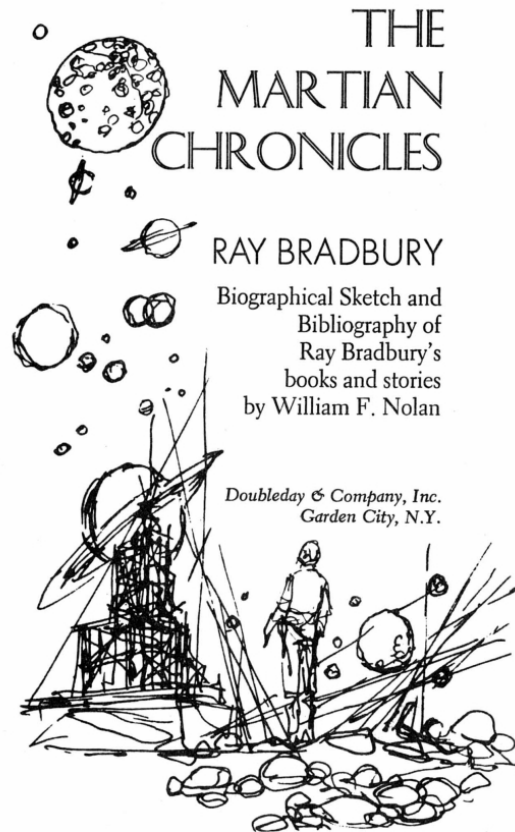
I also liked the remake of *The Day the Earth stood Still* with Keanu Reeves, whose wooden performance seemed suitable for an artificial alien trying to mimic a human without any understanding of human cultural heritage, or should I say American human cultural heritage? I didn't like the giant robot, which seemed a little too big and ridiculous even though it was scary enough, and I would have preferred a flying saucer rather than the glowing, semi-translucent sphere, but none the less I enjoyed the film.

Taking this book down from the shelf after all these years I am very tempted to start reading the stories again to see how well they hold up today, but perhaps I might be disappointed. Maybe what would have been a sense of wonder and astonishment to me back then would only appear trite and perhaps a little melodramatic nowadays. I wouldn't want to be disappointed, and thus spoil the fond memories I have of those stories.

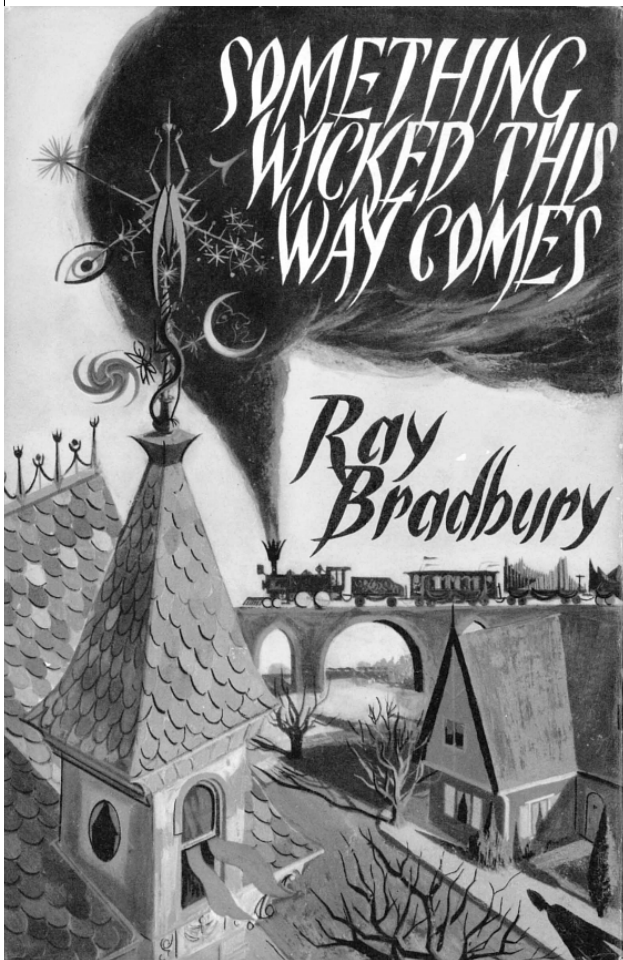
Perhaps today I expect too much from a story.



Illustrations by
Karel Thole



Doubleday & Company, Inc.
Garden City, N.Y.



There is so much to choose from and so little time to read all that is worth reading, that to waste time going back over something written more than 60 years ago seems kind of pointless. I am not the same person now as I was then, and I fear my jaded self would not find the sense of wonder and the excitement, and adventure my imagination conjured up when I read those stories. So perhaps I will leave them alone and rely only on my memories of them.

There were three authors who were my favourites at that time: Arthur C Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Ray Bradbury. I bought and read every book of theirs that I could get my hands on.

Before I had finished school and gone off to Darwin I had read Bradbury's *The Silver Locusts* in paperback (the English edition of *The Martian Chronicles*), *The Illustrated Man* (three of whose stories were later filmed starring Rod Steiger as *The Illustrated Man* quite a few years later, but this film vanished into that space where they send dead and unsuccessful films, never to be seen again), and *The Golden Apples of the Sun*, also in paperback. I don't think I read *Fahrenheit 451* until after I came back from Darwin, when I bought a hardcover copy. I also found a beautiful illustrated (by Joe Mugnaini) copy in hardcover of *The October Country*, which I found to be very creepy, and didn't like as much as Bradbury's science fiction stories.

One of my favourite short stories of all time is

'There Will Come Soft Rains', which resonated with me on a deep level, and has probably influenced how I see possible futures. Although I was turning away from short stories, I always made an exception for Bradbury: he was a master of the short story and could evoke wonderful moods and strong impressions with a minimum of words. He wrote only a few novels that were actual novels rather than collections of linked short stories, and apart from *Fahrenheit 451* the other I most remember is *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, published in 1962. The edition I have, which cost me 22/6, is the English hardcover from Rupert Hart Davis published in 1963.

In 1973 I replaced my copy of *The Silver Locusts* with a special illustrated (by Karel Thole) hardcover edition of *The Martian Chronicles*, which contained two extra stories. I must have been impressionable, because one story in that edition had me dreaming at night of lying in bed while not quite asleep, with tendril-like things coming out of the bed to invade my body in order to turn me into a Martian. I would wake up shivering and reluctant to go back to sleep. I thought it was a beautiful and creepy story but it gave me awful dreams. Eventually that passed as I put Bradbury aside and started reading other stuff.

In those days Arthur C. Clarke was my all-time favourite author.

I recently opened a box of books that had not seen the light of day for almost 16 years. There are 17 such boxes stacked in my garage because I have not yet had the space or the time to build bookshelves to house them. Expecting schools of silverfish to escape when I opened the box I was pleasantly surprised to find no such creatures. But the books did appear to be stained a bit as the paper had begun to darken on some of them. The dustjackets were also a bit battered, showing me I had not been as careful with them years ago as I presently thought I had been. I found a bunch of books by Arthur C. Clarke and some by Bradbury. Looking at them brought back lots of memories, so I thought I would take a peek at *Childhood's End*.

I bought this at McGill's for 13/3, probably in about 1955 or 1956. It was published in 1954 by Sidgwick and Jackson. I have never seen the original American edition. Mostly we could buy books that had been published in England. I had not looked at this book since then, about 55 years ago. I have just read the first 25 pages, and I am astonished at how prescient Clarke was. The opening scene describes two giant rocket ships powered by atomic engines almost ready for launching into space. The man in charge of the presumably American effort is wondering how his old associate, who had chosen to join the Russians at the end of the Second World War, was managing and if their project is as advanced as his. The other man, somewhere on the shores of Lake Baikal, is wondering the same about his

American counterpart in the Pacific. Each is thinking that the other is about to start a space race as they attempt to rocket off the Earth.

And this was before the Russians launched Sputniks 1 and 2 to launch the space race between the Russians and the Americans in 1957.

The American man in charge of the project is wondering whether the Russians have subs off-shore monitoring their activities — shades of the Cold War, which must be in progress at the time this was written. Then what happens almost immediately before they are both ready to launch? The sky is blotted out by huge silent circular space ships that descend and travel across every country, coming to rest where they hover over every major city in every country. No one sees what the inhabitants of those ships look like, but there is no doubt about their obvious power. And that is the end of humankind's hopes of getting into space.

Does this remind anyone of the beginning of the TV series *V*, both of them, and especially the recent remake where the huge ships drift down and hover over the most important cities in every country? Surely the writers of that series must have been influenced by *Childhood's End's* first few pages. I will have to re-read this book to see what happens, because I'm sure it's nothing like I remember. Damn it!

What I do remember though is that Clarke wrote two kinds of stories: those that were mind-boggling and always thought-provoking, in which grand ideas of humanity's future were depicted in ways that seemed magical, yet we knew were grounded in pure science; and more pedestrian adventures that involved explanations of technology and future lifestyles, most often mingled with drama on a smaller scale, that preached to younger readers like myself. As he grew older, Clarke's second type of story became increasingly pedestrian, and he probably lost many readers other than those hardcore followers who would stick with him no matter what. It wasn't until *Rendezvous with Rama*, years later, that he recaptured that enigmatic sense of wonder he exhibited in his earlier novels, such as *Against The Fall of Night* and *The City and The Stars*, both of which are the same story, with the latter written years later while he was living in Australia and exploring the Great Barrier Reef, of which he also wrote a book about called *The Coast of Coral*.

In 1935 Clarke was influenced by Olaf Stapledon's magnificent *First and Last Men* and its coverage of millions of years of human history, so he wanted to do something like that. He wrote many versions, and even though the story was rejected by John W. Campbell as *Astounding* as being too downbeat, Clarke eventually found a place in *Startling Stories* in 1948 for this story, only to be disappointed by the fact that the editor used a very sexy magazine cover that had nothing to do with his story.

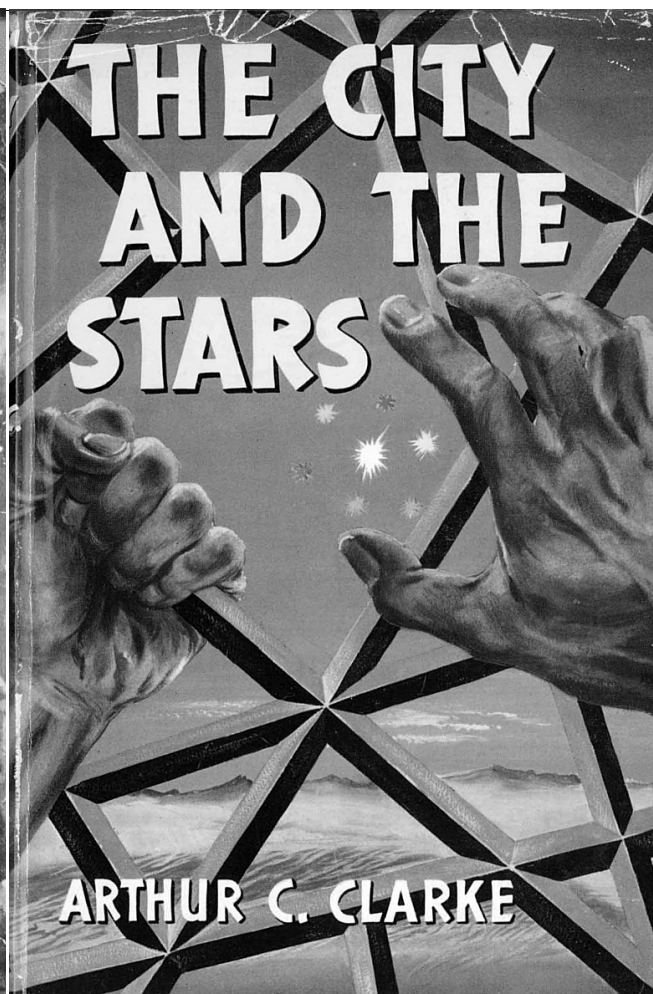
He couldn't get the story and its millions of



years of history out of his mind, so when some time became available while he was living on the Great Barrier Reef he rewrote this story, producing what he considered a better, although longer story. He was surprised when many readers said they preferred the earlier version, but I'm sure there were many like me who liked both versions, and would find it hard to choose between them.

All of Clarke's novels and short stories were and still are worth reading. If I had the time I would go back and read all of them again, but I have neither the time nor the same enthusiasm, and there are too many new books and writers that are interesting enough to attract me. But I will re-read *Childhood's End*. Soon

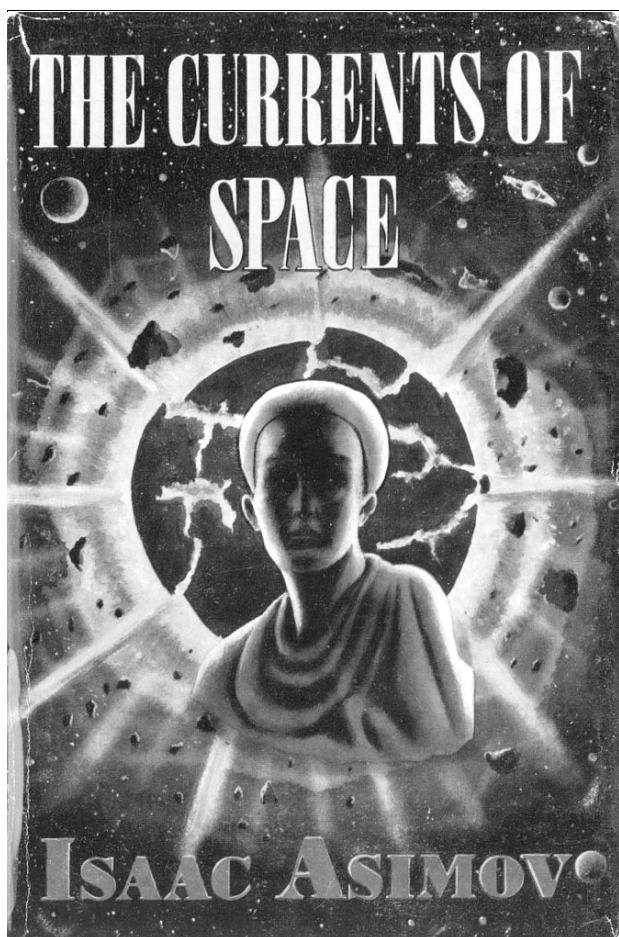
Two other books that Clarke wrote as a result of his time on the Great Barrier Reef were *The Deep Range* (1957, published by Frederick Muller and sold in Australia for 17/-), and a juvenile novel called *Dolphin Island* (Victor Gollanz, 1963, for 15/6). I liked them both, but *The Deep Range* was probably the first novel to depict undersea farming and whale herding. Whale herding, like cattle herding, he got wrong. *Dolphin Island*, however, was not a bad story. It dealt with communications between dolphins and humans, all cutting-edge research in 1963, with lots of underwater information that fascinated me at the time because I was also into skindiving and scuba diving.



Islands in the Sky is one of Clarke's earliest books. It is illustrated with a cover that looks very technical, like a black and white photo taken in space as a space station is being constructed (by R. A. Smith and originally used in Clarke's book *The Exploration of Space*) and with black-and-white scraper board illustrations (typical of the 1940s and 50s SF magazines) scattered throughout the book. There is no publication date on the book, but it had been reduced from 10/- to 5/- at McGill's, so I must have bought it around 1955 when I first started buying books there. As a fifteen-year-old I enjoyed it immensely, although it now seems dated, and although probably technically accurate in how it describes the effect of no gravity in a space station the way it describes life on board a space station it is woefully inaccurate, to judge from what I have seen of the Russian and American programs as well as images from the ISS.

Probably such old books are better left in boxes in a garage.

Besides, who am I to talk about these books? I'm not a scholar or an academic who specialises in SF or literature, but simply a reader who enjoys a good story that can transport me to another realm or another world, or into some place I would not normally see or find, that can entertain me as a movie does and probably better than a movie, can because it gives my imagination space to



roam alongside that of the author. That's all I ask of a book.

Isaac Asimov was another author I was fond of. Such books as *Pebble in the Sky* and *The Currents of Space* were two that I enjoyed immensely. And then there were the Robot stories in the collection *I Robot*. I didn't discover his 'Foundation' volumes until the early 1960s. I found them a good read but not up to what I expected after hearing so much about them. They were all written in the 1940s, with the first collected volume being published in 1951, and they were bestsellers everywhere. They were full of good ideas, as was everything he wrote, but those two first-mentioned books had more sense of wonder in them than did the 'Foundation' stories. Nevertheless, when my paperback copies wore out I replaced them with a hardcover edition. I did like the robot stories, and when *The Caves of Steel* appeared, a novel that combined robots and humans living in sealed cities and a murder mystery that involved the murder of a human by a robot which was thought impossible because of the three laws of robotics, which were supposed to prevent such things from happening, and to have a robot police inspector investigate—*wow!*—this was something different. For years they talked about making a film of this story. I even heard some time ago that Jack Nicholson was to star as the robot detective, but nothing eventuated. There was a recent fabulous film called *I*

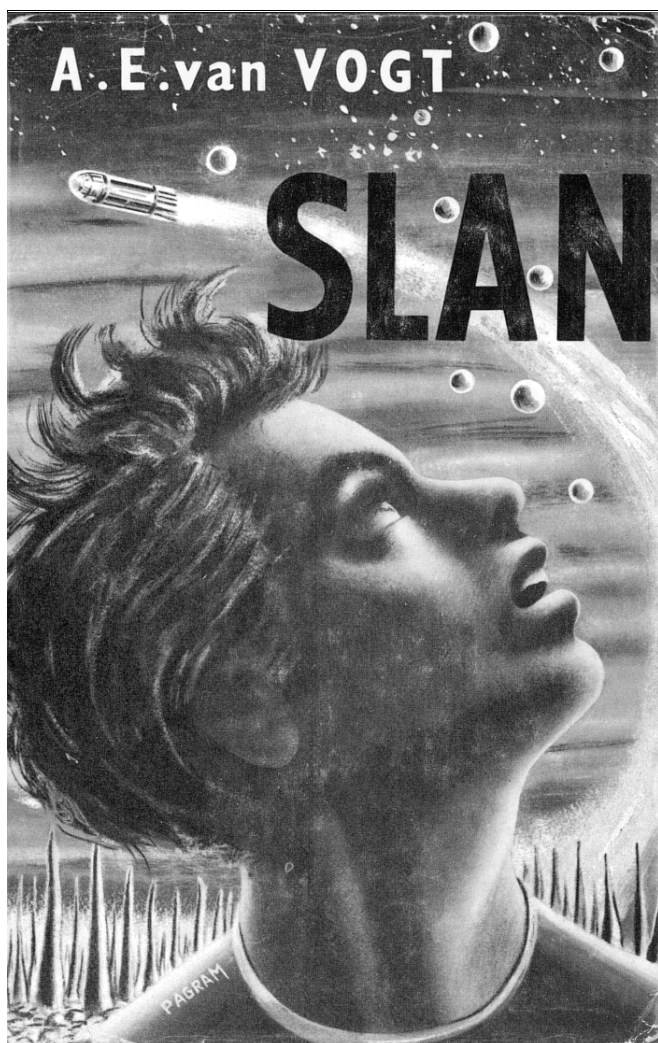
Robot starring Will Smith, which looked spectacular, but had very little to do with Asimov's *I Robot*, other than the name and perhaps the names of some of the characters from those robot stories.

There was a lot of friendly rivalry between Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, since they both were scientists and both wrote SF stories as well as scientific and technical articles. Asimov was the more prolific writer, though probably 80 per cent of his output was in the field of dumbing down science so the average reader could understand it, whereas I think Clarke's scientific articles were often more technical when they weren't strictly speculative. On the other hand, Asimov's fiction was in general more exciting for me than Clarke's, but when Clarke wanted to do so, he could transcend pedestrianism in books like *Childhood's End*, *Rendezvous with Rama*, and, many years later, *Songs of Distant Earth*.

'Nightfall' was probably the greatest story Asimov wrote. It was a novelette, the one I remember and have read a few times, and much better than the expanded version written by Robert Silverberg 40 or so years later.

I have heard it said that Clarke's *The City and The Stars* was his answer to Asimov's 'Foundation' series, with its idea of an immensely old city or place where knowledge of all humankind was kept so it could be used to help civilisation, or successive civilisations, to recover after a massive collapse, but I don't see that as a viable comparison. Clarke's book was generated by his reading of Stapledon's *Last and First Men*, a massive history of humankind from its beginning to its end when the world is swallowed by the sun billions of years in the future, whereas Asimov's 'Foundation' stories looked for their inspiration to the past, as shown in *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Clarke's book generated more excitement and feelings of wonder than did Asimov's series.

James Blish blew them all out of the water with his 'Cities in Flight' series. While other writers were thinking of faster-than-light travel and explanations of how it might work in order to get mankind to the stars, along came Blish, with his gravity-neutralising device, which he called a spindizzy, which enabled him to have huge cities of millions of people take off and leave Earth to wander among the stars. What an idea that was! It blew me away. These days it belongs to another alternate universe, because in this one it is pure science fantasy. It could never happen, any more than flying cars zipping about in the airspace of cities could. Can you imagine the chaos if you translated the traffic problems every major city has from the ground into a three-dimensional space above a city? It's bad enough at major airports with planes coming and going only minutes apart. To have every Tom, Dick, and Harry with a personal flying car zipping up and off anytime they felt like it, would be nothing short of disastrous. It's a fantasy, a nice one, but



nevertheless a fantasy, and it could never happen without some kind of gravity-neutralising drive.

One of the most memorable stories for me that Blish wrote was 'Surface Tension', a novelette I first read in a small Australian magazine, and later when it was collected with a group of stories in a volume called *The Seedling Stars*. They were all about humans being adapted to live on different planets and in different environments. They were wonderful stories, but the most outstanding was 'Surface Tension'. If you haven't read it, please do: the twist at the end will blow you away. My cheap hardcover copy of that collection turned dark brown as the paper oxidised and it started to fall apart, so reluctantly I had to throw it away some years ago. If James Blish is remembered for anything, it has to be for that story, and for his marvellous novel *A Case of Conscience*. He is also famous for his commentaries on science fiction, but not under the name of James Blish. He used the pseudonym William Atheling Jr, in whose name an annual Australian award on SF criticism and commentary was established in 1976.

There were so many writers, and I read most of them. Most are long forgotten, but some stand out, such as those already mentioned. I didn't like Heinlein because I thought he was too jingoistic, although I did read him later and found some

good stuff. There was Murray Leinster, A. E. van Vogt, whose stories were often creepy, or convoluted to the point of not being comprehensible, Vargo Statten and Volstead Gridban, made up names for many different authors who put out in a line of pulp paperbacks from England that disappeared by the mid 60s as more publishers saw the potential with the SF genre and started putting out both hardcover and softcover books. I had them all, stacked in makeshift shelves in my sleepout, my own room that had once been the veranda.

I had my drums in that sleepout as well as books. I had a turntable with a small amplifier and some good speakers so I could play records. Often while Mum and Dad were in the lounge room watching that huge Admiral television set I would practise conga drums in my room. They are quite loud, and the stuff I practised was basic: just sounds initially, how to slap, hit an open tone, a closed tone, a bass sound, and so on. Then basic rhythms and counter rhythms, sometimes to music, sometimes not. It must have driven my parents nuts because they couldn't escape the sounds.

Once, the girl who lived across the road made a recording with her portable tape machine from inside her lounge room at the front of their house of me playing drums in my room at the front of our house. The recording was clear and it was easy to distinguish the various rhythms and sounds I played. So the sound of my playing must have been very loud in our lounge room, which was behind the windows that once opened onto the veranda which was my room.

Later I used the records to study what the conga drummer did at different points. Since recordings of the music I was interested in were not available in Australia I had to send to the USA for records, and in quite a short time had quite a collection of fantastic material that no one else in Australia had heard at the time: recordings of Mongo Santamaria, Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, Rene Touzet, and many Cuban groups that played authentic Cuban music, records that I played so often I wore them out.

Having had some lessons at this stage from Albert as well as Armando, I found it easy to figure out what was being played and could separate the sound of the drums from the other sounds of the music, and could thus study those parts and learn to play them. I could also hear how the bass lines and the piano lines were actually extensions of either drum tonal melodies or the extended form of the clave pattern played by the sticks on the timbales and kit drums.

I would study and learn specific drum solos, then later in the clubs where I played I would try and replicate those solos. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes I got lost and quickly had to revert to a basic pattern to find where I was. Eventually I didn't need to replicate other drummers' solos,

because I began to understand that they are made up of short melodic riffs that you can combine in many different ways, depending on how you felt at the time. You could evolve a solo using a short stated theme, then expand on that before returning to the same or a similar theme. It was almost as if you were writing a short piece of music. It wasn't and shouldn't be a lot of fast noisy playing to show off, but it should have space and structure, theme and resonance, before coming back to submerge into the general song or piece being played. The master conga drummers do this, which is why they can sit out on the stage as Armando Peraza did when Santana was here. They all walked off the stage and left him there with four conga drums, which he played for almost 15 minutes, creating one of the most incredible solos ever performed live. When he finished there was a standing ovation, which only stopped when the rest of the band returned and they continued whatever it was they had been playing before. No one had seen conga drumming like that before in this country. Armando was so far above the others that he set the standards to which a lot of younger drummers aspired. But I already knew that long before he joined Santana and came back with him to Australia.

When I was 14 and 15 I also read westerns and private investigator stories, such as the Carter Brown series. These seemed exciting at first, but soon they seemed to lack any depth. Perhaps the writing was atrocious, although I would not have known at the time. More than likely it was because the backgrounds were so ordinary, so familiar, that no imagination went into delineating them, and unless the story dealing with the characters was very good the whole thing would be bland and uninteresting. As a contrast I loved Western movies, which were often filmed in magnificent places like Monument Valley, the Painted Desert, or the Sierra Nevadas, when they weren't shot on a back lot in Hollywood, like most of the interiors. The better movies had an otherworldly appearance, which hinted at a very different life style and set of rules that had to be followed. The westerns as books were often filled with local vernacular, which I found more off-putting to read than when you heard it spoken in a movie.

Those books were often found at the back of the newsagent's shop, where there were comic books, of which *Superman*, *Batman*, *The Phantom*, and other superheroes I liked dwelled among other ordinary characters such as *Archie and Jughead*, *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck*, and that spinach-eating naval hero, *Popeye* the sailor man. I lost interest in comics and westerns and detective stories when I started reading the weekly supply of SF books.

As a contrast, SF stories were well delineated because their backgrounds were so different—alien, or technical—that a lot of description was needed to set the scenes in which the usual very

human and ordinary actions took place. As I grew older, and especially after I came back from Darwin, I discovered other authors, such as Poul Anderson and Jack Vance, whose stories set on other worlds or on far future ancient Earth were for me mindboggling. Anderson has such a beautiful way of describing background, and blending it with story and action, that for years his work surpassed all that I had come to expect from SF stories. Jack Vance, also in later years, was an all-time favourite. His stories set in the most bizarre worlds had that sense of adventure and excitement that I craved, but also he was an engaging writer who often used the most unusual words which I had to look up in a dictionary to see what they meant or if they were being used in the right context. Often they seemed out of place, but thinking of them in the context of the time they became a part of the English language, they were not out of place at all, and they gave a whole different perspective to the scenes Vance was describing.

With all my reading and drum playing there was no time for watching TV. During the first two years after returning from Darwin I virtually never looked at the TV set that sat so prominently in the lounge room.

My other great interest was skin diving. With my friend Brian we had been venturing into the ocean since we were 16 and 17 respectively. We had made our own wetsuits and spearguns, and we ventured out initially from the back beach at Williamstown, or out from the Crystal Pool, which in those days was full of fish. As we became braver and more confident, we would go to Barwon Heads or Queenscliff to dive in the ocean, which was a much more dangerous and exciting place than the Bay behind Williamstown. For some reason I could not manage to shoot a fish. I always missed, but Brian didn't. He kept both his parents and mine with a good supply of fish to eat at the weekends when we went diving.

One of the boys from our next door neighbour's house was also into skin diving and surfing. I never became interested in surfing, but it was he who gave me a copy of *Diving to Adventure* by Hans Haas, which I devoured with enthusiasm. I immediately went and bought a copy of this book for myself.

It was this book that inspired me to shoot film underwater. I had recently obtained a 16 mm Bolex camera with three lenses, but no housings were available, so the only solution was to make my own. Hans Haas had to make his own housings. Cousteau also did the same, and it was their original designs that became the models for first commercial manufacturing when diving enthusiasts demanded cameras they could use underwater. But this wasn't to happen for some time, so I had no recourse other than to make something I could use myself.

After much thought, I came up with a solution.

It was very simple. Stick the camera in a bag of some sort that was waterproof as well as pressure proof to a degree, because water pressure increases very rapidly the deeper you go. What was strong and flexible and could withstand pressure? An inner tube was made of strong flexible rubber, but it would have to be a big inner tube like those used in truck tyres rather than the smaller ones used in cars. They were very expensive, so I put that idea on hold. Then I had another idea: what if I used a tube that had been punctured and was basically only good to throw away? I didn't need the whole inner tube, only a small section that wasn't punctured. I went back to the garage and asked what they did with punctured tubes. Could I have one? 'Why not?' the guy told me. 'There's a heap of them outside. Help yourself. They're no good to us. Someone comes and takes them away to a factory in Geelong Road where they shred them and use them in making retreads.'

Out the back was a pile of old inner tubes and bald tyres, but only a couple of the inner tubes were big enough for what I wanted. The Bolex had to sit up in the tube, so the tube had to have at least 10 inches of height. I took my two tyre tubes home, but only one was big enough. I cut off a section a few inches longer than the length of the camera and stuffed the Bolex inside to see how it fitted. So far so good. I had already decided I needed some plate glass to seal both ends so I could hold the camera in the tube in front of my face as I swam along and could see through the tube to what the camera was pointing at. I found a glass factory in Footscray, and got the people there to cut me two oval pieces of heavy plate glass. At a hardware store I found a couple of those flat wire clips with a screw head built into them that a plumber would use to join a rubber hose to a metal pipe by screwing the metal clip tight with a screwdriver. It turned out they did make them big enough to join large drainage pipes together using a rubber seal so I bought a couple of these.

I fitted the first piece of glass to the tube, slipped the camera in, and made sure the wide-angled lens (set at its widest aperture and with an *f*/stop of *f*/8) sat tight against the front glass. I then fitted the back piece and tightened it to a good seal. After testing it in the bathtub to see if any water leaked in, and whether the thick rubber was flexible enough so I could depress the button that made the camera run, I undid the back, took the camera out, and wound up the spring as far as it would go. It looked like it would work fine.

I headed to the beach. With the camera all set up and ready I ventured out into the shallow water at the Williamstown backbeach, which was clear and easily accessible from the rocks along the shore. The makeshift housing didn't leak, and I shot 40 seconds of film before the camera had to be rewound. I had to come out of the water, dry off the housing, undo it, and remove the camera

to rewind it again for the next 30 to 60 seconds of filming. Replacing it back into the housing I ventured again into deeper water and shot another minute of film while swimming among schools of tiny fish and a flotilla of baby squid. I shot some images of scallops snapping and bouncing along the bottom as they tried to escape the menace I represented. This was fantastic stuff: I was excited even though I had to exit the water after every minute of filming, dry the housing, take the camera out, and rewind it before replacing it in the housing and again enter the water.

I couldn't wait to see the results. As soon as I could I sent the film off to the Kodak processing plant in Coburg to be developed.

In the meantime I scribbled some notes for a documentary on basic skindiving and got hold of my brother-in-law Fred. We headed off to the beach around the Bay from Brighton where the water was deep enough, but close to the beach so I could get out every time I needed to change a roll of film, or more specifically, to rewind the camera, because it was a springloaded mechanism and each wind only gave a bit over a minute of filming. With four minutes on each roll of film, that meant at least four trips back to the beach for each roll of film shot.

It took such a long time, however, to shoot a really short piece of film that this idea for a documentary about the basics of skindiving never got finished. I ended up with about 10 minutes in total after a whole afternoon of in and out of the water. Not a practical way to make a film.

There had to be a better way of filming, a way that enabled me to rewind the camera every time it needed without having to exit the water to do so. And that of course meant money to have an underwater housing designed that enabled me to use the camera more efficiently.

And that was something that would have to wait awhile.

Diving in deeper water immediately presented a problem with the camera housing. Because the rubber was pushed inwards by water pressure, my fear was that it would leak in and flood the camera. The solution was to remake the rubber part by using a part of the tyre tube that had the valve used to pump air in. Once this was done, I could use a hand pump to pump some air into it, which made the tube bulge as the pressure increased, but as soon as I got into the water it came back to normal as I dived below the two-metre mark which allowed me to push the shutter button to shoot film. But it was ridiculously limiting, because every time I had to rewind I had to exit the water, and sometimes that was quite a swim back to the beach or the shoreline. It would have been easier from a boat, but none of us had boats at that time.

Although I was happy with the results of the little filming I had managed underwater, I was nevertheless unsatisfied in general because none of what I shot matched the underwater sequences

from a recent Cinemascope film I had seen at the Regent. It was called the *Twelve Mile Reef* or *Beyond the Twelve Mile Reef*, or a name something like that, and it starred the famous Gilbert Roland (a great Mexican actor) and a very young Robert Wagner. It was a story about Greek sponge divers off the Florida coast and their rivalry with American conch divers who worked the same area some twelve miles offshore. The Greek divers used oldfashioned helmets and hoses connected to the surface while the brash Americans used SCUBA (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), as developed by Captain Jacques Yves Cousteau.

In 1942 Cousteau went to an engineering friend Emile Gagnan and asked him to design something that could regulate the air intake while under pressure. He wanted air to be delivered at the ambient pressure of the water so it would be easy to breathe. Gagnan had already been working on a reduction valve to feed fumes from burning charcoal or natural gas into car engines because there was no petrol available. It was the early stages of the Second World War and there was no petrol in France. It took Gagnan only a few weeks to modify his design and build a working model in metal that could be attached to the twin tubes of compressed air Cousteau called an aqualung. Modern scuba diving was born.

The *Twelve Mile Reef* film opened in Cinemascope with an unbelievable close-up shot of a gigantic vicious looking Barracuda. This is a very dangerous and predatory fish. It floated across the screen in magnificent colour with the sunlight glistening off its scales and I swear it sparkled once on the fish's needle sharp teeth. The camera panned to the depths below to find a diver with heavy boots and weighted to stay on the bottom, clumping along, disturbing clouds of sand with each step, breathing noisily through a long tube that connected his helmet with a boat on the surface, but he was only wearing the helmet and not a full diving suit. The diver was Gilbert Roland, who was collecting sponges.

I don't remember much of the story, which was the usual forbidden romance between the strict Greek family's beautiful daughter, and the brash young American scuba diver, the son of a conch shell-diving family. There was rivalry between the divers, someone got killed, someone got beaten up, but in the end love prevailed and two rival families ended up grudgingly respecting each other and uniting as the two children, one from each family publicly proclaimed their love, etc, etc.

I can't remember who the patriarch of the American family was, but I have a vague recollection it may have been Robert Ryan or perhaps the actor who went on to be the lead in the original *Mission Impossible* series on TV. What I do remember is that half of the film had been photographed underwater in the clear seas off the Florida coast and it was absolutely outstanding. It made me want to be able to shoot film like that

underwater. It also made me painfully aware that I could never do it with a camera housed in a rubber tyre tube with pieces of glass at either end.

Cousteau had similar problems with taking photos and shooting movies underwater, but because he had financial backing, or at least had the ability to generate money through his articles and underwater archaeological work, he could have camera housings custom made. Eventually finding these inadequate and time consuming, he developed the concept of a self-contained underwater camera, sealed and waterproofed so he didn't have to worry about housings, but could simply jump straight into the water with it. It would operate in the same way as any still or movie land camera, plus the ability to jump straight into the water with it. He employed enough engineers or skilled people to build anything he envisioned. The *Calypso* (named after his research and dive boat) underwater 35mm camera, which was his design, was later manufactured in France for general sale as well as licensed to Nikon, and became the famous Nikonos camera. I wasn't to see one of those for a few years, but in the meantime I had to manage as best I could with my rubber bag housing.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon included quite a bit of underwater photography, but somehow it didn't seem at all exciting. In that same year (1954) we saw Walt Disney's version of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* with James Mason, Kirk Douglas, and Peter Lorre in diving suits that were self-contained yet had an appropriate nineteenth-century primitive look to them: a kind of retro-diving suit that looked modern but wasn't. And the submarine *Nautilus* was fabulous too, with its 'steampunk' gothic appearance that really did give the appearance that it would work. There was some great underwater stuff in this film, but some awful effects that almost spoiled it. The film still holds up well against some of the other filmed stories involving Captain Nemo and the *Nautilus*.

When I did finally obtain the first model of the Nikonos released in Australia I remember we had loads of fun on the rocks by the crystal pool or on any beach wherever we went. I would take some photos on land, usually of us getting ready to go in for a dive. There would always be people around watching with great curiosity. When we were ready to go in I would leave the camera hanging by a strap around my neck and climb down the rocks to get into the water, or if we were going in off a beach I would just wade in. The consternation this caused when people saw a camera hanging around my neck was priceless. They would run after me and yell out stuff like: *You've got a camera around your neck*, or they would gesture with wild movements as if taking a picture and then point at their chest or point at me, waving their arms to get my attention, and when obviously I didn't get what they were trying to say they would throw their hands up in despair. The Nikonos looked exactly like an ordinary 35 mm cam-

era. As I slipped under the water, camera and all, I smiled inwardly. It's hard to smile physically with snorkel or a scuba mouthpiece in your mouth.

I usually explained to the beachgoers when I came back out (if they were still there) what kind of camera it was. It didn't long though before more people had bought these cameras. They were completely sealed, all-weather cameras that could be used in snow or in sandy dusty conditions as well as underwater down to a pressure of at least three atmospheres.

The novelty of seeing someone swim with one underwater soon wore off. But it was fun for a while

Eventually I met another photographer who had a camera housed in a clear Perspex casing through which there were controls sealed with tiny O-rings that allowed him to wind the film on, push the shutter button, and change the focus. His camera was a Hasselblad, and expensive, so I'm sure his housing worked perfectly. In America there were some manufacturers making housings for various cameras as the idea of underwater photography became popular, but the cameras were too expensive to import. This guy had not imported his housing but had it made locally. I got the name of his manufacturer, and asked them to build me a similar perspex housing for my Bolex. At last I could stay underwater and work the controls of the camera, only surfacing to change rolls of film. The beauty of a transparent housing was that I could see in, and if even the slightest drop of water got in I could surface immediately and remove the camera before any damage could be done. At least that's what I thought.

With this housing I shot quite a lot of film on abalone diving and starfish predation for Channel 9 news. I took it with me to Tahiti. Somehow it must have been knocked about in the luggage because I didn't realise it had a hairline split in it. When I started to dive in the lagoon at Moorea, water rapidly leaked into it because of the pressure a couple of metres down. Before I could get back up to the outrigger canoe the housing was half full and the Bolex ruined.

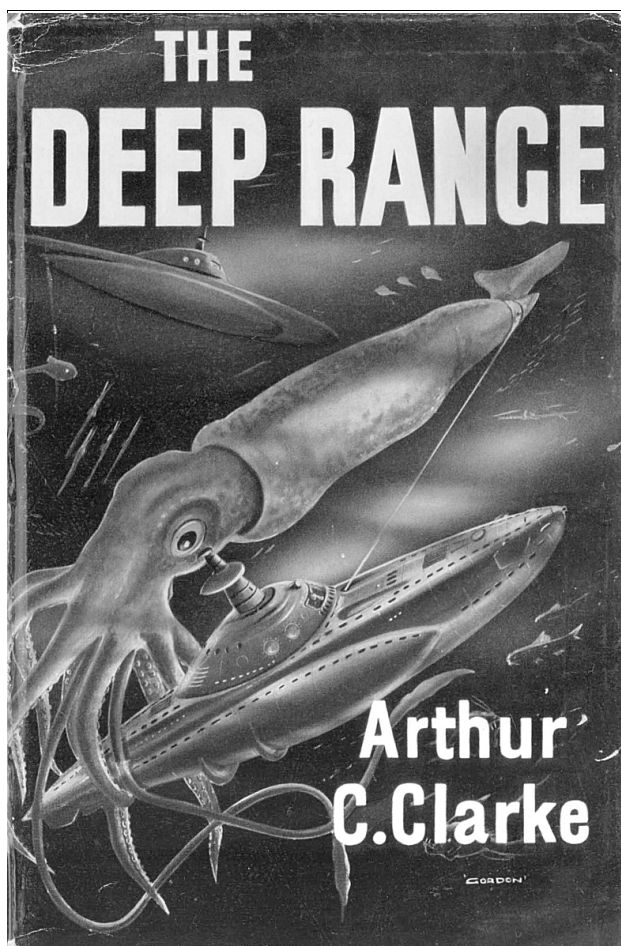


John with the Bolex camera at Lake's Entrance (c. 1962).

I was really pissed off about that. I had intended to take the housing on to Mexico and use it there in Acapulco, and later in the Bahamas, but it was now useless. I threw it away, and dried the camera out as much as possible. Although it worked for a while it seized up a day later because of the salt encrusted inside.

I didn't throw that away though. I took it to Mexico City, where a specialist cinema camera place cleaned it and repaired it. After that it worked fine.

Similar ideas come up more or less simultaneously. Perhaps it has to do with research and the fact that many science fiction writers also read science journals and whatever popular science magazines they could get their hands on. In 1957 two books appeared: Arthur C. Clarke's *The Deep Range*, which I have already mentioned, and Kenneth Bulmer's *City under the Sea*. Both novels dealt with similar subject matter: exploitation of the undersea realm through farming, herding,



mining, and colonisation.

To quote from the blurb to *The Deep Range*:

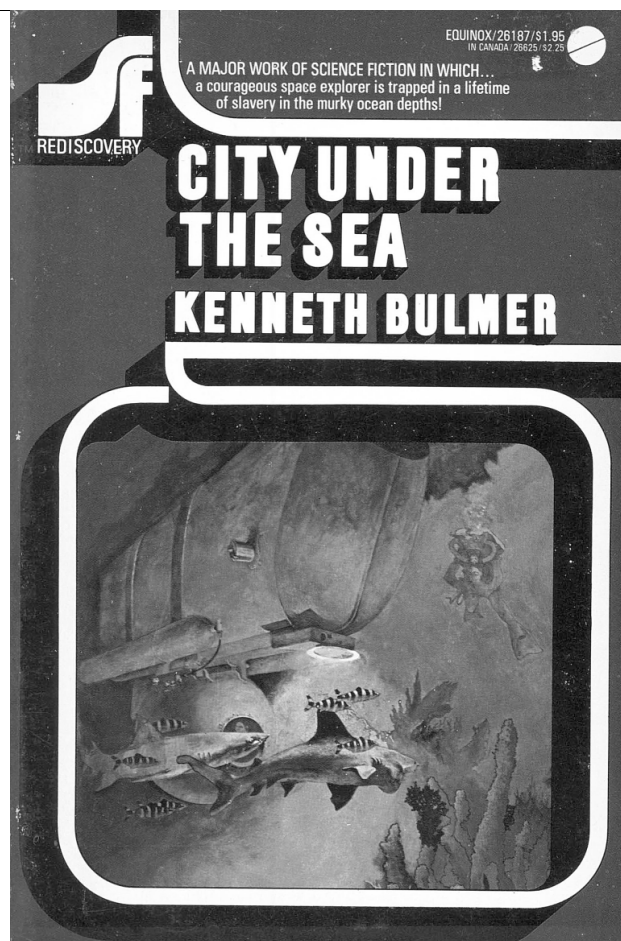
an exciting story of the not far distant future, when Man begins to cultivate the untouched two-thirds of this globe, and to fence the Oceans so he can herd his greatest cattle — the whales ... Walter Franklin and undersea warden who goes on to become Director of the Bureau of Whales discovers that despite all the resources of science and technology, there are times when man is helpless against the sea, and that it still holds many mysteries. He also learns at the risk of his life that the ocean's ultimate depths hide creatures that match even the whales in size.

The publisher claims that he (Clarke) is 'the first novelist to write a story based on the fascinating theme of organised cultivation of the sea's vast food resources'.

A very similar claim is made for Kenneth Bulmer's *City under the Sea*. It is

more than a spellbinding futuristic novel of adventure and survival that is the first to incorporate the ideas of undersea farming — and its chilly implications in a world desperate for alternative food sources — into the realm of science fiction.

Set in the far future, when mankind owes



its survival to a vast network of ocean farms it tells the shattering story of a man doomed to mindless, anonymous serfdom in a colony of underwater slaves controlled by savage armed overseers and squadrons of man controlled killer fish. Escape seems impossible but Jeremy Dodge is a man driven to survive — for the only alternative is living death.

Two very different books in structure and tone and plot, yet they deal with the same subject. Which one came first? Does anyone care now?

Both publishers claimed to be the first to have books dealing with what is now loosely called aquaculture. But for me — aged 18 or 19, having bought them in 1959 or 1960 — they were absolutely thrilling. I was into skin diving, and had devoured whatever diving/adventure books that were available, such as *Diving to Adventure* by Hans Haas, *The Silent World* by Jacques-Yves Cousteau, *The Blue World* by Folco Quilici, and other related books, such as *The Kon Tiki Expedition* by Thor Heyerdahl and *Shallow Water Diving and Spearfishing* by Hilbert Schenk and Henry Kendall (a technical book that we used as a bible to help us with our diving), to find science fiction novels that dealt dramatically with the future of the sea and mankind's attempts to live in and under it. What more alien environment could you have that was so readily accessible?

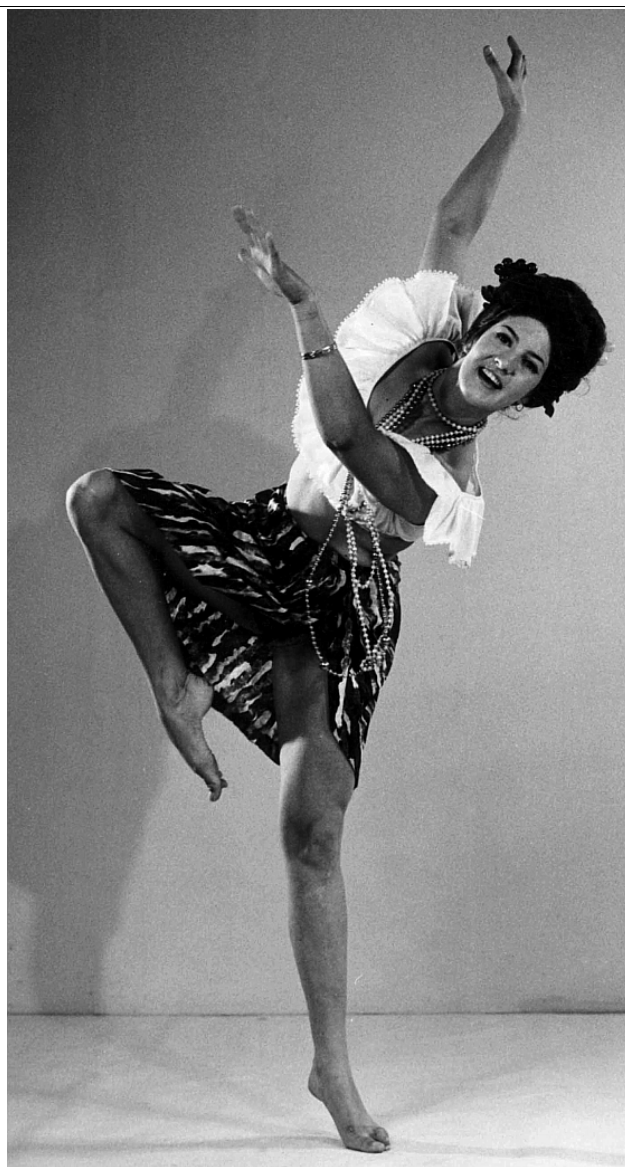
In *City Under the Sea* Kenneth Bulmer coined

the term *aquiculture*, which he used a few times throughout this book. I suspect the term had not been used at that point and Bulmer was original in inventing it. I do think he read Cousteau, who called his scuba divers *menfish* and dreamed of them being able to breathe underwater without the use of scuba or hookah or any other system that supplied compressed air. Bulmer's descriptions of diving procedures, decompression, and other deep-diving activities seem accurate, and I suspect he actually did some diving and had experience of it. The story was quite an adventure, very pulpy and melodramatic, and bits of it seemed too fantastic to be possible — turning humans into water-breathing menfish, then a working slaves so they could never go back on the land again— but to the person that I was at the time it seemed to be one of the most exciting books I had read.

Clarke, on the other hand, was a very good diver, and had already spent months exploring the Great Barrier Reef. He wrote a book about it before he wrote *The Deep Range*. His underwater descriptions and extrapolated use of equipment was cutting edge at the time, but whale herding? That wouldn't be accepted today, and even 54 years ago it might not have been an acceptable idea. The general hunting of whales has only recently been stopped — except for a few countries that claim to need it for *scientific research* — so possibly he merely extrapolated the idea of hunting whales as a herded source of food.

What both books had in common was the idea of a time that the oceans could be exploited for man's benefit, and that development of the ocean realm was as possible as development and exploration of space. Both books had a central character who came back to earth from space and ended up one way or another living on, in, or under the ocean. Both books demonstrated through their plots the possibilities of fish farming, whale herding, and general control of the ocean's resources. I think, however, that Clarke's was the better book overall.

Most science fiction around 50 years ago was written by young men many of whom were not much out of adolescence, and if they weren't writing wish-fulfilment stories for themselves they were writing for an audience of young men who were either teenagers or in their early twenties; boys who were mechanically or scientifically minded or who yearned for adventure. These books were often simplistic in theme and relied mostly on action, adventure, solving scientific puzzles, space travel, alien contact, and other themes that required no emotional depth or characterisation, but in which an individual triumphed against all odds. There was plenty of excitement, descriptions of how things worked, and thrills a minute. It was little wonder that science fiction became ghettoised, looked down upon by those people who claimed to write and read literature. The few quality SF novels written



Zara dancing in our floorshow routine, 1960.

by famous mainstream authors at that time were not marketed as SF. (And still aren't.) Readers of these books frowned upon SF but happily exclaimed how wonderful the books by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, although *Brave New World* and *1984* were clearly SF. They didn't even mind H.G. Wells or Jules Verne, each of whom established the parameters that every other SF writer used in subsequent stories. But the kind of SF that people like me read — that was discarded out of hand. As far as I was concerned it was their loss, not mine.

I continued to gig around various nightclubs, in some places just sitting in with the resident band, in others, doing the floor show. My sister Zara had a job at nights in the chorus of the girls at the Tivoli theatre. These were scantily clad girls who posed in elegant phalanxes across the stage, sometimes even performing group choreography in between the various acts. The Tivoli was a variety theatre that was basically a modern exten-

sion of vaudeville. The shows did not have quite the sleazy feeling of early vaudeville, but were much more tasteful. They had lead acts such as Winifred Atwell, the pianist, who was always popular. Her shows were invariably packed out. Albert La Guerre borrowed my bongoes to do one of her shows because there was some calypso involved, and he didn't own any bongoes. Nat King Cole's brother Ike also performed there.

Harry Belafonte (performing to a packed Palais Theatre on St Kilda Esplanade) was all the rage with his interpretations of calypso from Jamaica and the Bahamas, and many local singers performed his songs. I played bongoes for Kamahl at one show not long after, and he sang calypso amongst his more romantic songs. I didn't mind calypso, as it had lots of percussion, but I didn't think it had the depth of Haitian and Cuban music, perhaps because it was sung in English. Calypso's origins were vaguely similar to those of Haitian and Cuban music, in that it was the result of an amalgamation of African and the colonial power's culture and language via the slave trade, but somehow English seemed inappropriate compared to using the more romantic Spanish and French.

In jazz, Dave Brubeck had an enormous hit with his piece 'Take Five' in 1959. The local groups who all played it in some form or another. I remember doing a floor show at the elegant Embers Nightclub in Toorak Road. Garry Hyde was the drummer, with his group. (Garry's father Billy Hyde also did floorshows there.) The singer that night was Johnny Summers, who did shows at Birdland. I went to The Embers because Johnny asked me to come and sit in. I knew the guys in the band because they also played at other venues around town, so they didn't mind one extra sitting in.

That night everyone wanted to play 'Take Five', because it was the latest hit. Gary said to me before they started, 'You can do a solo in this, okay?' I agreed. I had heard the piece but never actually played it. Most musicians found it difficult because the count was in 5: each bar had 5 instead of the customary 4 quarter notes, hence the notation of 5/4. It was usually broken into 2 groups: one of 3 followed by one of 2, which made it easier to count. The piano played a repeated phrase made up of that 3 and 2 structure. The first solo was the trumpet before the saxophone came in, then it was my turn

I think Garry was trying to embarrass me, thinking that I would come unstuck in the piece, and that they would have some fun ribbing me afterwards. He forgot that I grew up with Greek heritage, so we often listened and danced to music that was in odd time structures. With the piano repeating the one bar 5 beat phrase, similar to a *montuno guajeo* in Cuban music, all I had to do was lock the melody of the phrase in my mind and play around based on that structure. It was easy. I think I did a good solo without getting lost, much to the surprise of Garry, who later told me he was impressed.

Brubeck went on to introduce his *progressive* jazz, with its odd time structures in 7/4 and 9/8, to a wide audience, but often his music sounded almost like some classical music and the improvisations at first seemed contrived or mechanical. It wasn't easy to *swing* in rhythms that had odd time structures; one of the problems initially with jazz musicians was that they tried to count rather than simply feel the structure. Once they got beyond counting they became more comfortable with playing in those times, and these days music is often infused with odd time structures that everyone seems to find perfectly natural.

I also did some gigs around town with my sister Zara. We had some musical arrangements of popular songs with which Australians were familiar, written for small groups. Between us we choreographed some routines that fitted to the music, and to a drum solo that was meant to appear improvised but was written down and learnt, so it could be repeated exactly each time we did it. This way it fitted the dance, so the musicians of whatever group we may have performed with could follow it on paper as we did it. In that way they didn't get lost and knew exactly when to come back in for the finale. The whole thing only went for about five minutes and we were usually part of a floorshow that included other singers. We did these gigs at hotel lounge bars where people stayed for dinner and could also drink with their meals, so it was more like a cabaret setting than a nightclub.

Then *West Side Story* came to Melbourne. Zara got a job in the chorus line with that fabulous production, and that was the end of our cabaret shows.

— John Litchen, August 2011

Letters of comment

MIKE WARD

San Jose, CA 95126 USA

Thanks for printing the photos from our drowned-rat visit to your place (it was great!). The Uluru visit photos are at wet-desert.blogspot.com. I'll put a lot more online at MikeAndKaren.org in a while; it's a massive job.

(1 October 2010)

Thanks for **brg*72*, your ANZAPazine about Mervyn Peake. Seeing that it cost you \$2.35 to send (!), I should hurry to say we will be quite happy to deal with the PDF versions for future zines (including *SFC* et al.). Our big problem last year was that our phones could not cope, but we have other options here.

brg* But you did give me quite a decent subscription to the print versions of my magazines, even while showing me how well the pages of the landscape-aspect version of *Steam Engine Time* look on an iPhone.

I must admit that I am almost totally unfamiliar with Peake's writing. I have the Gormenghast trilogy sitting on a shelf, but it has stood there for many years and seems likely to do so in the future ... except that now I have received an costly kick in the awareness and must investigate.

(31 October 2011)

ROBYN WHITELEY

10 Brady Street, Richmond VIC 3121

As I was reading the program for last night's Australian Chamber Orchestra concert, and then listening to the concert, it occurred to me that you might enjoy reading the program, which is a much better use for it than my just throwing it out. I'm now also wondering if I have sent you these programs before, because the thoughts and words seem a bit familiar. If I have, I hope you enjoyed them then, and I hope you enjoy these now. We didn't go to the Viennese Masters concert — we were in China — but the friends who used the tickets saved the program for us.

Last night's concert was another unusual Richard Tognetti triumph to my mind, and I think to many in the audience. I met Gwen Rathjen, who was in Music Branch and then Publications Branch in the 70s and 80s, and she didn't enjoy the spoken links in the midst of the musical presentations. 'I could have done without the angst,' she said, 'I just wanted to get on with the music.'

A 'play' based on Tolstoy's novella 'The Kreutzer Sonata' was 'performed'. A man and a woman sat on the stage presenting words based on the Tolstoy story, relating to the Beethoven sonata. In the second half, the same story was presented from a different point of view, interspersed with the movements from the Janacek quartet. John liked the Beethoven but not the Janacek. I wouldn't have recognised the

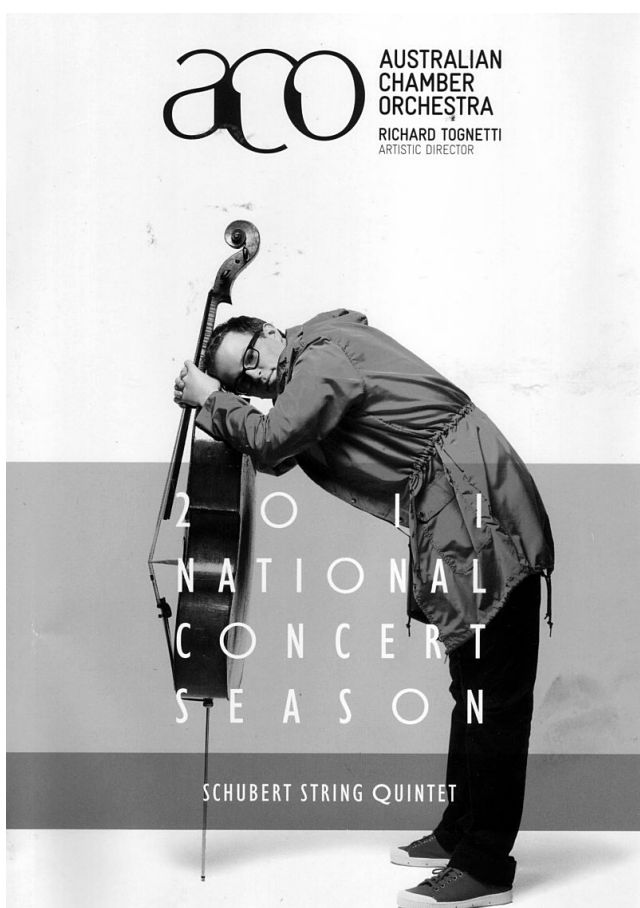
sonata as Beethoven, but then I don't know a lot about music generally, and classical music in particular. I did enjoy the sound of the Beethoven better than the sound of the Janacek, but a neighbour who grabbed a lift home with us loved them both.

brg* Beethoven's 'Kreutzer' was one of my father's favourite pieces, so I knew it and loved even before I admitted to liking classical music. I've enjoyed almost anything I've ever heard by Janacek.

It occurred to me last night during Richard Tognetti's brilliant performance that he really has achieved the most egotistical of positions, building a wonderful chamber orchestra a round him so that his brilliance shines even more brightly. I suppose every performer is an egotist in one way or another, and we have to be thankful that such is the case, or we'd never have quality performances or quality organisations like the ACO.

The subscription to the ACO is really John's thing, not mine, but it's certainly broadening my musical education and appreciation. If you enjoy the programs, the subscription would be well and truly worthwhile.

(16 November 2010)



brg* I haven't seen Richard Tognetti working a stage with the ACO, but I buy all his CDs. The recorded sound of the ACO is brilliant, so I would imagine the sound in the Elisabeth Murdoch Recital Hall is even more exciting.

Joy! I have found the top of my desk under the pile of stuff that has accumulated since April, I think. Amongst it was this packet of goodies that I've been saving for you because I know you are interested. Several times I've written you a letter in my head but now I'm actually committing it to paper. Years ago, when I was working on *Interchange*, I wished someone would invent a typewriter attached to the brain that would just chatter out the thoughts you have (when you wanted it to do so) and I reckon I could have produced some wonderful prose. By the time I actually get around to writing, the brilliant phraseology is often lost. Such is the case today.

We've had a mixed year with the Australian Chamber Orchestra. We missed the first concert in February because we were in Tasmania. John's younger son, Don, and his wife, Anne, went, and I think they reported favourably on the concert. The next one was modern (twentieth-century) music, which John has never much liked. At the end of the first half he said, 'Well, that was pretty awful.' Having read ahead in the program, I was able to say, 'Well, you aren't going to like the second half, let me tell you', so we came home early.

The program for the third concert is enclosed. It was a much better concert, but from my point of view the most memorable thing was that the second movement of the Ravel String Quartet (rearranged for the ACO) was, I was sure, used for a TV theme. '*The Chamomile Lawn*,' I hissed at John. We have a set of the videos of this 1980s BBC program, videos that I must have bought for Mum. Sure enough, the theme was based on the Ravel String Quartet, but we had to watch one episode's credits to tell me I was right. And then we watched the second episode because we'd got intrigued all over again. I called a halt when John suggested a third episode and it was already after 11 p.m., but later that week we did indeed watch the last three episodes in one hit, and loved the story all over again. I even went to the library to get the book (in large print!) and we both read that. Who says the ACO doesn't promote culture?

The most recent ACO program was in June, and John wasn't well, so Don and Anne used the tickets again. It was Brahms and Mozart, I think, or maybe Schubert. Don described the concert as 'sublime', so it was a pity we missed it, but that's the way the cookie crumbles. I didn't get a program of that one to send to you.

I think we have one or two more concerts left for the year. I hope we make those and I hope we like them!

I caught a cold about eight weeks ago, which is still causing me to sniff. John got it much worse and finished up with an upper respiratory tract infection. He spent a week in bed, the next week not going outside the house and a third week starting to feel a bit better. He's still deaf in the left ear, which he hates. I hope he comes good soon.

(15 July 2011)

***brg* Sounds like our winter. My mild-but-persistent cough/cold lasted three months. Elaine had a cough that sounded bad and lasted more than a month. :: Thanks very much for the programs, reminding us of a whole life of concert going that Elaine and I left behind at the end of the 1980s. We find that concerts are too expensive these days. The only ones I've been to in recent years have been jazz concerts, thank to free tickets given to me by my friend Dave at Reading's. I did enjoy the Branford Marsalis concert at the Forum, and Charlie Hayden at the Recital Hall, but might have enjoyed Beethoven/Janacek even more.**

As a PS, to the above, Dave did hand Elaine and me tickets to Angela Hewitt playing Bach's French Suites, an afternoon concert of a month or so ago. First time we've had a chance to listen to the exciting sound of the new Recital Hall.*

JULIAN WARNER

13 Frederick Street, Brunswick VIC 3056

Showing off wilful eclecticism ... To answer one of Bruce Gillespie's perennial questions: 'What have you been listening to lately?' I have the following answers in a kinda sorta reverse order:

- *The Essential George Gershwin*: with a whole bunch of famous performers doing their interpretations of George
- *Skara Brae* by Skara Brae, still one of my favourite Irish music albums, and treasured for pre-figuring the Bothy Band
- *The Crow in the Sun* by Dáithí Sproule, the guitarist from Skara Brae
- *Joseph Spence: Complete Folkways Recordings 1958*: the Bahamian guitarist who inspired Ry Cooder, Davey Graham, and sundry others.
- *The Madison* by the Ray Bryant Combo, as taken from the original *Hairspray* soundtrack
- *Lamp Fall* by Cheikh Lô, which still ranks highly with relatively recent African music
- *Alchemy* by Richard Lloyd, some old post-Television stuff
- *When I Stop Dreaming: The Best of the Louvin Brothers*: for families who pray together I guess
- *Nigunim* by Frank London, Lorin Sklamberg and Uri Caine: in my opinion some of the better neue klezmer
- *Sky* by Sky: which is partially an excuse to hear Mr Williams on guitar
- *Oceanic* by Isis, which steers somewhere between metal and Tortoise post-rock and Albini skronk
- *Wilderness Heart* by Black Mountain, which continues that happy novohippio vibe (man)
- *Black Masses* by Electric Wizard, which continues to demonstrate how metal can reverse into the future
- *Black Dub* by Black Dub, which is really an aggregation of Daniel Lanois and his usual honchos with Trixie (daughter of Chris) Whitley. Her voice has matured since those background snotty protestations at being put up on stage by dad.
- *Mary Hopkin: The Early Recordings*: in Welsh!
- *The Soft Boys' A Can of Bees*, to continue the

- recent obsession with Robyn Hitchcock's stuff
- *Sun Ra: The Heliocentric Worlds of, Vols 1-3*, and either you dig Sun Ra or you don't
- *Sound* by Roscoe Mitchell: one of the earliest AACM groupings which predates the Art Ensemble of Chicago
- Ricky Nelson: *Lonesome Town: Complete 1957-1959*, partly because I've only heard his stuff secondhand as interpreted by other folks like Alex Chilton
- Eddie Cochran: *The Singles Collection: 'I'm Having a N-n-n-nervous Bre-a-akdown'*
- A coupla CDs of guitar and lute on Glossa
- and a fair slew of Captain Beefheart: *Vale*.

(12 January 2011)

brg I printed a list of my favourite popular CDs, January to June 2011, in a recent all-mailing comments issue of **brg**. The end of the year is rushing nigh, so I will finish the list then. A recently received contender for No 1 is Anna and Kate McGarrigle's *Oddities*, a set of 20-year-old outtakes that might have put them on top of the charts if they had been released when they were recorded.*

MALCOLM McHARG Kilaken Bay, NSW 2283

It's the delinquent one. I've read of events in your life and your zine successes. I've also read of happenings such as Type 2 diabetes that, given a choice, you would much prefer didn't happen. I've passed your zine material on to Fraser. I was mentioning you to Fraser around Christmas. He told me that you had met, recently, in a bookshop.

brg Yes. Slow Glass Books. I must admit I did not recognise Fraser (and he did not recognise me), since we haven't seen each other since 1977 or 1978.*

I was thinking of you last week when watching the film *Duel*. It would have been '71 or '72 when you came into the office in Queens Road and said, 'Malcolm, you've got to go and see the film *Duel*. Mark my words (or something along this line), the director will be one of the great directors.' Noteworthy prescience. The special features part of the DVD presented Steven Spielberg describing how he came to make this movie for TV: time budget of 10-12 days for shooting (it took 13 days), three weeks for editing to completion. Spielberg used 'car chase' technology developed for *Bullitt*, a quality thriller (English director, Peter Yates) famous for its car chase sequences (and one of my favourite films from the late sixties). The longer cinema exhibition version of *Duel* was originally intended only for overseas markets.

To the best of my knowledge I'm in good health. I've been taking medication for elevated blood pressure for a year or so. I did get my weight down to a respectable level (which, in turn lowers the BP), but it has crept back up. You probably know I have a significant pituitary adenoma (and may have had it for many years). It's about the size of the end of my thumb and protrudes into the right sphenoid sinus. Other than it exists, it doesn't seem to be creating

any problems. It hasn't grown from when first detected in '03. In my optometry days, signs consistent with a pituitary adenoma were something that we were responsive to (restrictions to peripheral vision due to pressure on the optic nerves where they cross can be an early sign). Pituitary adenomas were considered rare, but modern imaging technology (CAT scan, MRI) has shown them to be quite common.

I find these days the brain doesn't always snap to attention on command and may even go AWOL; a recent example was spelling the name of the poet Philip Larkin as Phillip Larsen. I also find a certain stiffness on first arising in the morning. C'est la vie. I'm so, so lucky compared to when I had my back complaint. Helen recently showed me of photo from the bad back times and I was most taken-aback (no pun intended) by the stressed look on my face. I'm fortunate to have had normal day-to-day living restored (you may recall my falling from a 12-foot ladder, landing on my head and being knocked unconscious).

I've been reorganising my office: business and personal files to be kept, others dispatched to recycling (permanently retiring much that once was important). There are memories both good and painful, of joy and sorrow, and reminders of lost opportunities. Some of the material was associated with you. There are photos (some going back to growing up in New Zealand) many of which I had long forgotten. Positive memories of good times with Julie, the children, and our extended families, are accompanied by a sense of grief — even although 15 years have passed from when Julie died.

brg A lot of history covered in one paragraph. Malcolm and Julie gave me a lot of freelance work during the 1970s, before they moved to Sydney in 1979 or 1980. Their (then) young children were Fraser and Justine. When eventually Malcolm caught up with us about ten years ago, I discovered that Julie had died much too young, and that eventually Malcolm had married Helen (we've not yet met), and was planning retirement on the south coast of New South Wales. Fraser had stayed in Melbourne, and but Justine had moved to NSW with her parents. Among the many files that Malcolm might well have dumped recently could have been copies of *Health Action*, a small company-promotion magazine that I edited for Malcolm until 1976. I still have my own files somewhere in the house.*

The U3A choir of which I'm a tenor recently sang at the Sydney Town Hall. One of the songs we presented was 'My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose'. This got me thinking, for no particular reason, what memories would I like to take with me when I die. (Please excuse the cognitive dissonance in this statement.) Reducing the complement of files and books, and putting order into those that remain, is part of this process. I want to lessen the burden on Helen, Justine, and Fraser.

Helen's spiritual group recently asked for a small poem. (I attach my endeavour.) I gave the matter preliminary thought before allocating an hour for writing (it was, after all, for a small spiritual group). As a poem, it requires substantially more work. The most difficult part was getting the structure approxi-

mately right. I don't take credit for all of the thoughts expressed; some are too clever for my creativity. Whether they came originally from Philip Larkin, Shakespeare, Keats, or Milton, I'm unable to say.

The love of you all

Love, for me, is the power to communicate:
thoughts, desires, passions and delights.
From trivia to tragedy, the many landscapes of
life,
are rendered more beautiful through love.

Through love, when young,
I learnt how to embrace life, how to live.
Now that I'm aging,
with death both so sad and so strange.
Deep with love and wild with regret,
I'm learning how to farewell life.

What I want to take with me,
when the days are no more.
What I want to take with me,
are your thoughts, desires, passions and
delights.
What I want to take with me,
is the love of you all.

Written largely with a select few in mind — family, friends and anyone else that I love and/or care for; you as a good friend and colleague are a member of this tribe under, 'What I want to take with me (includes) your thoughts, desires, passions and delights'. I don't know exactly what these thoughts say about me other than that my parents gave me a good start in life and Julie enhanced it. Without exception, however, those that I love and/or care for (as adults) all have a shared passion for some combination of work, food, wine, music/literature/art/theatre, and dialogue.

You may recall that when Julie and I married the marriage came with a cockatoo named Cocky. Without any hyperbole, knowing Cocky, too, was one of life's great experiences. One of our next door neighbours in Kilaben Bay has a young son, Zane. Their house has a flat roof. Zane's balls — tennis, rugby, soccer — accumulate, regularly, on the roof. One morning about three weeks ago, three sulphur-crested cockatoos were each tearing 'their own' tennis ball apart. Then two of them diverted their attention to the rugby ball and enjoyed a game of beak rugby.

May every best wish be with the two of you. I genuinely hope to see you in 2011.

(17 January 2011)

brg I hope you don't mind me sharing these thoughts with my readers, Malcolm. The group who read the paper version of my magazine are friends. :: I'm not sure what I would like to leave with other people when I die. I can hardly be responsible for the impressions I've made on other people. I hope I can scan all my major magazines for the internet in the next few years. The real Bruce Gillespie can be found there. :: I'm more worried about the things that will die with me: all my most intense, unrepeatable experiences, ranging from childhood

memories of living in Oakleigh, to my most poignant memories of lost friends and relatives, to memories of first discoveries of great books, music and films, to great Roy Orbison songs that often run through my head. I'd better write all this down soon.*

LEE HARDING

Moonee Ponds VIC 3039

Your comment on watching *Stagecoach* for the first time on TV triggered a similar memory for me: I had seen *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* several times on its initial release, but when I saw it on TV — in the later fifties — it was minus the first 20 minutes or so, leaving out entirely the getting together of the main characters. The TV print began with the bandits attacking the train.

TV stations did terrible things to movies in the old days, and still do.

(12 February 2011)

TIM MARION

c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway,
Apt 1201B, New York NY 10002, USA

Bruce, I just stumbled across **brg** 62 (along with some of your other publications) the other night and bagged and boarded them. You say that Taral has been in fandom longer than you. Since you have been in fandom longer than me, and I've been in fandom longer than Taral, I doubt it. He told me recently that he got into fandom around 1974. I seem to recall finding an issue of *Synapse* published by an Ontario club in 1973 with his name.

(15 February 2011)

Ditmar's review of *Solomon Kane* made me realise I didn't know such a movie existed. I ordered it and was very pleased with it all the way round — thanks, Ditmar! I also noted his review of *Black Shield of Falworth*, one of my favorite old movies. Tony Curtis may indeed have said, 'Yonduh lies da cassle of ma fadda!' I do know that in *Spartacus* (starring Kirk Douglas) he proudly stands up and proclaims, 'I'm Spotty-cuss!'

I'm still unemployed with no prospects, the only difference being that I may not be getting unemployment insurance money any more.

D. Gary Grady is supposed to send me his fanzine collection. If he does, I'll see if there's anything in there that might interest you.

I thought there was a page limit in ANZAPA?

(2 April 2011)

brg There probably should be, but the members decided to put up annual fees rather than limit the size of contributions, mainly because we cannot do without our bimonthly Bill Wright fanzine, which often runs over 30 pages. Many years ago, Marc Ortlieb instituted a ban on genzines that are unconnected with ANZAPA. I realise that **brg** runs close to the limit. I could say that (a) most issues of **brg** contain *only* mailing comments on previous ANZAPA mailings; and (b) **brg**, even in the form you are reading at the moment, would not exist without ANZAPA to coax it into existence. As 1970s SF

Commentary readers know, I'm quite willing to pack everything in which I'm interested into a fanzine that is nominally about science fiction and fantasy.*

JOHN LITCHEN

PO Box 3503, Robina Town Centre QLD 4230

You are right in thinking that the book I remembered was *The Time Masters* by Wilson Tucker. I read through your piece in the Tucker issue of *SF Commentary* (79), as you suggested, and I do think it was that story, although I don't remember it being as complex as that. It might have been a shorter version that was serialised.

I have never seen that book since, and have never even thought about it until I started thinking about the time I spent in Darwin more than half a century ago. No wonder the details were mixed up, even though the basic idea remained in my mind. I would like to see that book one day and read it again to see how it holds up after all this time.

The book of Tucker's that always stuck in my memory was *The Long Loud Silence*. Somehow that one has resonated with me over all those years, and I probably also read it 45 years ago.

It just goes to show how fickle or unpredictable memory can be. It makes me wonder, though: how much do we actually remember that is accurate rather than fanciful?

As I said in my intro to *Fragments That Remain*, most of the stuff in that book is a collective memory combining elements from the memories of my brothers and sisters as well as incidents told to us by other family members whose recollections we have adopted as our own. Perhaps life is nothing but a long slow novel without much of a plot.

(23 February 2011)

Years ago I wrote some poems for John Bangsund in Spanish and English. (See his fanzine *Philosophical Gas*: a special issue called *Gas Filosofico*, from probably the early or mid 1970s). Those two poems were also published by Eva Windisch in *Tirra Lirra* in the late 1990s. She also published one other one I wrote in Spanish and English.

Since then from time to time I write what I call word pictures which are kind of mental photos, or momentary things that I see as an image, a substitute for a photo.

You opened a can of worms by publishing poetry recently for the first time, so I thought just for fun I'd send you a couple of my word pictures. My idea is to accumulate enough of them to compile a small volume which I would also complement with added photographs, but that's something for the future.

(16 April 2011)

brg* Astute readers will notice that one of these poems, and the photos that went with it, accompany Part 4 of John's memoirs in this issue of *brg*.

I've just received my second order for *Aikido Basic and Intermediate Studies*, via my website and Redhen. I've had the website up for over a year, and in the last month have actually sold something from it.

I got a cheque from the USA Trafford Publishing for e-book sales of the *Aikido* book, but the bank sent it back because it was drawn in Canadian dollars on a US bank and it had to be verified. After a six- to eight-week wait, no doubt the bank will send it to me after taking out a hefty commission. Sometimes it's not even worth cashing the cheque.

The only book I've done that has actually sold in reasonable numbers is the *Aikido* book. Over a five-year period it continually sells mostly in the USA, between 5 and 15 copies per quarter. Here in Australia I've sold maybe 150 copies over the same period: to students of Aikido, of course. There's a street party in Mudgeeraba coming up at the end of October and a few writers that I associate with and me will have a stall to promote and sell our books.

(16 August 2011)

JOHN BANGSUND

Collingwood VIC 3066

Thanks for the issues of **brg**. I'll look forward to reading them when I get my new glasses. I had a preliminary test last week, which found a cataract in the right eye (no surprise), and I have another tomorrow; then a couple of weeks from now I should have the new specs. And do I have a pile of reading to do with them! Most of the reading I've done lately has been subtitles, and not just with foreign films. I read my way through the entire five series of *The Wire*.

(23 February 2011)

brg* Good to catch up with you and Sally a few months ago, however accidentally. Your note explains your statement at the time that you were not reading much during your retirement. :: I am also trying to catch up with both reading and watching DVDs, but find that often I can only watch half a film at a time. I look at the CD shelves and reflect that I should spend half of each day listening to music. For me, the trick is to find a way to afford to retire so I can do all these things.

CY CHAUVIN

14248 Wilfred, Detroit, MI 48213, USA

The two recent issues of **brg** arrived safely despite all the mammoth snowfalls we've had here, and they've been welcome reading, helping to divert my mind for everything else.

I was especially delighted to see the photo of Mary Ellen Murray in your garden. I just saw Murray and Mary Ellen a month ago at our local SF con, but they didn't tell me that they made it to your and Elaine's backyard! I certainly would have quizzed her further for details if I had. They are certainly very nice people, so I'm glad you met them. Murray was one of the first people I corresponded with in fandom; we were both in a teenage correspondence fan group called The Future Terran League! That probably would have been about 1970. He wrote his letters on a typewriter that had a blue ribbon; the only other correspondent who did that was James Tiptree Jr.

(25 February 2011)

I can't imagine how I managed not to write a comment

about John Lichten's article in your last issue, when it was my favorite article. I saw a television program about the Ghan train, but he provides so many more personal details about the trip to Alice Springs that it really comes alive as a story. So many times the actual physical trip is as important as the destination. The Ghan somehow seems the anthesis of any normal train, where you expect reliability or at least stability, and a railroad where the tracks are regularly re-laid during the normal course of a journey is amazing. I did go on a train journey as a child from Saulte Ste. Marie to an isolated canyon in Canada; we rode through some hair-bending turns and across some gorges, and dropped off some fishermen and canoeers along the way (there were no roads there), but the tracks were very much intact.

His second part is equally as good — it was more absorbing than both the Greg Bear and Daphne du Maurier books I was reading at the same time. Did he have a diary or any other written records to help him remember all the detail of his trip?

I think you are right about his story being about the life of the mind, and that of the body and spirit. Those long isolated journeys do offer that time to think and speculate as well. The long cross-country trips I took by Greyhound seemed like that, although since most of the destinations were to visit other fans, the life of the mind didn't seem quite as divided from the life of the body.

I think I knew in passing that Darwin had been attacked by the Japanese during World War II, but I was surprised at the extent of the attacks, and that he still found evidence of it when there in the 1960s. He seems to have played a small part in the green revolution (working on the experimental rice farm); I couldn't have endured the leeches. I remember those at the lake we used to visit, and it made me lose interest in wading along the shore after I found those attached to my legs.

I noticed that you have difficulty finding books that really satisfy you. I know that very feeling. While I will read a wide variety of books. I also have periods where nothing seems to satisfy, and start several books and abandon them all. Nonfiction books I find easier to read when I'm in that state, but they don't have that particularly engaging quality of a good novel or short story, the quality that sucks you into a particular person's life or place and time. That's often when I re-read a book that I loved in the past. That will be almost to satisfy, even if the element of surprise is missing. Actually, there are some already read books and authors that are dangerous for me to leave lying around, since if I re-read a page or two, I will be caught up in it, and read it instead of a new book (or making dinner, etc.). Re-reading is the real reason for owning books!

I saw the same film series about the Galapagos Islands, but on ordinary broadcast television. I would thought there had been more than just three episodes, simply because it just had such a dramatic sweep for a nature series, as well as beautiful photography. (The series was repeated just after **brg** arrived.) I enjoyed the cold, epoch-like voice of the narrator; the story of the islands moving on the tectonic plates from their birth to their destruction; even the strange detail that the Galapagos Island bee

(one variety) only really likes yellow flowering plants, and so nearly all the plants on the islands have yellow flowers. The Galapagos are so exotic, they have the feeling of an alien planet, especially because they show the alternatives to life as we know it. But I have also read a memoir by someone who grew up on Flores, one of the Galapagos Island, in the mid 1920s, when the island was mostly deserted. The nature series all make you believe that people never appreciated the islands as they were, but the particular book I read made it feel rather different — much more in harmony with the surroundings.

I don't think I've read any William Golding (his novels did not sound appealing), and I'm not surprised that his biography turned out to be more interesting than his novels, but I wondered if you read his biography first? I've surprised myself by counting how many writers whose life stories I read before any of their fiction: Daphne du Maurier (her autobiography), Charlotte Bronte (by Mrs Gaskell), and Arthur Rimbaud.

brg* Any Australian or British teenager who could read seemed to have read Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* in the fifties and sixties. I found a certain fascination in being told how ghastly teenage boys could be, even while I was one. I found the novel too diagrammatic; its action too inevitable. The book never came to life for me, but Richard Brooks' film (1966) did. The Golding novel I liked much better was *Free Fall*. I borrowed it from the school library in my last year of school (1964), did not buy a copy at the time, and haven't seen it around. :: Golding labelled four of his novels as science fiction, he loved reading science fiction, yet SF fans did not adopt him as one of those Mainstream Writers Who Are Really One of Us.

I have just finished reading *The Lottery and Other Stories* by Shirley Jackson. I enjoyed the stories (remarkable how many were very short, in the heyday of short fiction publishing by major magazines). 'Women coming to terms with madness' is a good way to summarising her stories. If you say that she wrote horror stories not about supernatural terrors but ordinary life, that explains why no one comes to terms with madness. In a horror story, the revelation of the horror is the climax. In the usual literary story, it's a revelation about life or a character.

I don't think I have ever read *Galactic Pot Healer* by Dick, although I remember ordering the book. I wish you had given a few more details about *Greener Than You Think* by Ward Moore; I was disappointed in *Bring the Jubilee*. So it would be interesting to know about what you liked about the novel. (Actually, the one part of *Bring the Jubilee* I liked was the last chapter, set in Gettysburg; it seems scary and real.)

brg* *Bring the Jubilee* is one of my Top Ten SF novels, because of the subtlety with which it immerses the reader in an alternative present, and because it is one of the few SF novels with a memorable female main character. Also, it's a superb time travel novel, and I love time travel novels.

I enjoyed Ditmar's discussion of the French silent

C.M. KORNBLUTH



*The Life and Works of a
Science Fiction Visionary*

MARK RICH

film. I did not appreciate silent films until I saw *My Best Girl* last year at the Redford Theatre; what a great movie! Perhaps it appealed more than others since it was a romantic comedy, but it had scenes that perhaps wouldn't work as well in a talkie, yet its sensibility seemed both modern and timeless. No wonder Mary Pickford became the first real movie star. I read her biography afterwards, and found it interesting that she was mobbed in St Petersburg — silent films posed no language barrier. I was fortunate enough to see the film in a theatre with live organ music, and when a reel of the film was put in backwards and had to be changed, the organist simply improvised.

This letter is rather late. Too many unfortunate and busy things happening (the worst: hitting another car (my fault!) and making my own car nearly unusable).

(25 May 2011)

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI

15 Crannell Avenue, Delmar, NY 12054

Greener Than You Think (Ward Moore) in the 185-page edition you cite reading, is severely abridged, by one-third or more. The first hardcover is complete, as is the edition I reprinted at Crown in the 80s. Two different books in these editions.

Ward Moore also wrote some brilliant contemporary novels. In SF he ranks with Tenn, Davidson, Kornbluth, and Lafferty; and of course their territory is better known through the milder critics, Sheckley,

Brown, and Pohl.

Kornbluth is the subject of Mark Rich's 'magisterial biography', which ends with a chapter, 'The Moral Stance', which amounts to an indictment of SF as a commercial field. There are also a few revelations about the editions of collaborations with Pohl. *The Space Merchants* is quite different in the Galaxy serial from the Ballantine book.

brg For some reason, the little American paperback of *Greener than You Think* was all over Melbourne second-hand stores during the late sixties and early seventies. I've never seen any other edition for sale. For many years, Penguin kept *The Space Merchants* in print; that's the edition I have. I have a copy of the biography of Cyril Kornbluth, but haven't read it yet.*

The Moore was also a Quality Paperback Book of the Month Club selection. If you Google the author and title, you'll find copies available from all over, at varying prices. I may have an extra somewhere.

Serious SF, so often derided by the 'entertainment firsters' school of fiction as 'propaganda', is given a great boost by Rich's book. How did our most serious of all literatures become so degraded? 'Money turns everything to shit,' Asimov said before his death, and the method is the slippery slope.

I'm a great fan of the Powell films, beginning with *The Edge of the World*.

(27 February 2011)

STEVE SNEYD

4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England

I've just been listening to a radio program from the Chaplin archives, which mentions an extraordinary mass hallucination, on 12 November 1916. Chaplin was supposedly seen in 800 locations across the US simultaneously. A very Dickian, or proto-Dickian event: 'The Three Stigmata of Charlie Chaplin'?

If you get around to moving vinyl to CD, look out for a device called Vinyl2CD, which can probably be bought from a website somewhere.

I had never before seen a pic of John Hertz, let alone a top-hatted one. Now whenever I see a copy of his *Vanamonde*, I will imagine him donning his editorial top hat badge of office before compiling the issue.

Radio 6 was reprieved by the BBC after a public campaign. I was left wondering if the threat to shut it was a play to increase readership, as it has doubled since the high-profile campaign. It and other BBC radio stations are available online, as they get listener feedback from the USA, etc.

Bookshop survivors in Huddersfield consist of one selling remanders/discounted books, two chain branches, Waterstones, and an Oxfam charity shop with a pretty good secondhand selection. There are also book sections, mainly mass market paperbacks, in other charity shops, plus stalls at open-air markets. Compared with a lot of towns we are still well supplied.

The Litchen account had a hypnotic grip on me. Good clever writing, especially as initially I had zilch

interest in the subject matter: an abortive rice-growing project. I was puzzled about the water buffalo: why were they introduced to Oz in the first place?

(28 February 2011)

brg* I'll leave John to reply, although the answer can probably be found in Wikipedia somewhere.

With Peake admirers celebrating his centenary year, there have been various events in Britain. On radio, the books have been done as a Classics Special on Radio 4. It's many years since I read the trilogy, but it's still a shock how little of the plot I recalled (although, as you imply, the books are atmosphere rather than plot driven). I do remember Titus's reply, in *Titus Alone*, to the law officer's questions about the death of his father: 'Eaten by owls, m'lud!'

Peake's castle was discussed in another Radio 4 program, including his relationship with Sark, where in the last few years, because of various pressures, the feudal seigneuries have been modified in a more democratic direction.

I dug out my Penguin boxed set from 1970, and re-read Anthony Burgess's introduction. Interestingly, he mentions Peacock and Lovecraft, also unique. Burgess also notes the elements of 'ancient pagan remains ... the doomed ritual lord, the emergent hero'. I've just been read a very unusual mega-Arthurian fiction, John Cowper Powys' *Porius*, which has finally appeared in the author's intended form. (It was cut in the 1951 version.) *Porius* also features a closed, yet referential, ritual-jacketed world that draws on Celtic mythlore.

You talk about Gormenghast as a castle the size of a town, which is resonant of various places in central Europe, such as the complexes of Prague Castle or Hohen Salzburg, the kind of places Kafka had in mind when he wrote *The Castle*, where bureaucratic-aristocratic ritual lived on until the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, and in remoter corners until World War II. Perhaps Peake also had in mind such structural complexes and their locations as isolated worlds.

I'd forgotten how like a Roswell alien Peake made Steerpike look!

(26 October 2011)

brg* The name John Cowper Powys kept floating through my mind while I was writing the piece about Mervyn Peake, but I did not have time to follow up comparisons. They both produced gigantic eccentric novels in the middle of the twentieth century, filled with rich language and a non-modern view of Britain. However, it's over forty years since I read a Powys novel, and each of the ones I own is at least as long as each Gormenghast volume. Picador released several Powys blockbusters in the 1970s, but I have never heard of *Porius*, let alone seen a copy.

TONY THOMAS

486 Scoresby Road, Ferntree Gully VIC 3156

I haven't read *Moby Dick* for 35 years, or looked at it really, but my impression of the best bits is the same as yours — the details of the whaling, and whales,

which I suppose was the most unfamiliar to me.

From the nineteenth century in English, Dickens (some of) and Jane Austen are the only things I reread with pleasure. Other things seem to be a bit overblown now, or just longwinded. But in French of course, much better, with Flaubert Balzac, Zola et al. Not to mention the Russian writers ...

The new Kairastami (sp?) film, *Certified Copy*, seen last night is good, better than anything of his I can remember; though he's bored me so much in the past I've missed a lot. He still likes to play too many games for my taste, leaving one in doubt about what is happening too much (though not in a good way à la *Last Year at Marienbad*, but in a somewhat self-serving, self-congratulatory way, that I guess I dislike). *Certified Copy* has two great performances, a mostly good script, lots of the most beautiful shots that the director is noted for, and a suitably up-in-the-air ending.

(28 February 2011)

I greatly enjoyed your Mervyn Peake presentation last night at Nova Mob, if this wasn't totally clear at the time.

I thought you very clearly encapsulated his strengths and weaknesses, and the quotes were all very pertinent.

What continues to puzzle me is why he seems to be so readable — at least for some of us — when all the usual attractions of fiction — character development, and/or characters whom one can like, and/or plot movement and action — are mostly absent. Instead what is there are a strangeness of locale (very sfish, I suppose), great grotesques (very fantastic, I suppose, but owing much to Dickens as you remarked), and great sentences (most of the time). Perhaps this is enough.

(6 October 2011)

brg* During the Nova Mob discussion you spoke a sentence that I should have thought of: that the best sections of the Gormenghast books read as if one were watching paintings that have been put in motion.

ROBERT ELORDIETA

Unit 4, 15 High Street, Traralgon VIC 3844

Thanks for the brief report of Aussiecon 4 and the photos.

It was interesting what Jennifer Bryce's account of going to see the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra perform in Sydney.

John Litchen got up to a lot of things while working in the Northern Territory — fascinating. I didn't know that John has been to Moe. Moe is not far from where I live in Traralgon.

Re Steve Sneyd's comment about the Christmas truce of 1914: I would definitely read an alternative history story about that event, one in which the truce is held against the will of generals and governments. It is interesting to note that generals from both sides made sure that there would be no more Christmas truces in the following years of World War I. Thanks for mentioning my name, Steve. Besides loving science fiction and fantasy, I also love military

history.

I haven't read many poems. I hope that the **brg** poetry spot goes well.

(28 February 2011)

I tried reading *Lord of the Rings* at high school but I couldn't, so I gave up and thought I would try later. It has taken me more than 20 years to do so. I loved the movies, which I saw at the cinema.

My friend Catherine has lent me Robin Hobb's *The Dragon Keeper*, Book 1 of 'The Rain Wild Chronicles' trilogy.

(2 March 2011)

I haven't read *Moby Dick* or any of Charles Dickens' novels. I have seen a movie version of *A Christmas Carol*. I haven't read Jules Verne but I have seen the Walt Disney movie of *20,000 Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*. I've also seen the movie versions of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*.

Books I've read in 2010 and 2011 are:

- *Lords of the Golden Horn: The Sultans, their harems and the fall of the Ottoman Empire* by Noel Barber
- *Wizard's First Rule* by Terry Goodkind
- *The World from Islam: A Journey of Discovery through the Muslim Heartland* by George Negus
- The Word and the Void Trilogy: *Running with the Demon*, *A Knight of the Word*, *Angel Fire East* by Terry Brooks
- Age of the Five Trilogy: *Priestess of the White*, *Last of the Wilds*, *Voice of the Gods* by Trudi Canavan
- *Dead Men Do Tell Tales* by Byron De Prorok
- *In Quest of Lost Worlds: Five Archelological Expeditions 1925-1934* by Byron De Prorok
- *Digging for Lost African Gods: Five Years' Archaeological Excavation in North Africa* by Byron De Prorok
- *Mysterious Sahara: Land of Gold, of Sand, and of Ruin* by Byron De Prorok
- *The War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerrillas 1948-1960* by Noel Barber
- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne
- *Nylon Angel* by Marianne de Pierres
- *Ranger's Apprentice*, Books 1-10
- *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien.

I didn't like the Byron De Prorok books. He was more of an adventurer than an archaeologist. He liked to embellish his adventures.

(15 March 2011)

Thank you for **brg** 72, about the Gormenghast trilogy by Mervyn Peake. Thanks also for the pictures. You're right. From what you described of the storyline of the trilogy, I wouldn't be interested in reading these books.

(3 October 2011)

brg You would probably enjoy the *story* arc of the first two books in the trilogy, but not enjoy the prose. For me, the strength and texture of those great sentences carried me through.*

STEVE JEFFERY

44 White Way, Kidlington,
Oxon OX5 2XA, England

I love Taral's distinctive cover to **brg** 67: 'Travellers'. I don't think I've seen a full-page colour illustration from Taral before, though there are undoubtedly examples in efanzines.com. Both the scene, and the style remind me of Jeff Smith's *Bone* comic. (I love these, so Taral can take that as praise.)

Not quite sure what to make of Ditmar's cover, 'Evening Phenomenon' for **brg** 68. It's a curious and somewhat arresting mix of abstract and fractal forms, plus that glossy Pegasus riding high. I assume Ditmar used Bryce again for the fractal landscape. (I have an old copy of Bryce but have never come to grips with its quirky interface). For some reason, the yellow rounded forms peeking over the mountains remind me of Terry Gilliam's illustrations for Monty Python.

That photo of Elaine and guests encased in plastic macs while surveying the garden has ruined my inner picture of Australia as a permanently sunny, dry place. It looks almost English. (Well, certainly like a typical English summer.) I gather you and Elaine prefer to let your garden develop *au naturelle* rather than manicuring it within an inch of its life. Me too. Except for dandelions, which I root out without compassion.

When I see a slogan like 'God Cares/DNA kills', as recounted in Colin Steele's account of the response to Dawkins' appearance at the Adelaide Writers' Week 2010, I rather want to overwrite with 'and Religion rots brains'. DNA kills? Just what is that supposed to mean? Or is this some sort of neo-Manichean comment on the divide between the spiritual and the fallen material state?

'God cares/DNA doesn't give a toss as long as it can replicate' would be more stylistically and scientifically accurate. At least for the second half of the slogan. Having written which, I realise I sound like Charles Babbage in his pedantic correction to Tennyson, suggesting that he replace the line 'Every moment dies a man, every moment one is born' with the more accurate 'Every moment dies a man, every moment one-and-one-sixteenth is born'. Strictly speaking, the actual figure is so long I cannot get it into a line, but I believe the figure one-and-one-sixteenth will be sufficiently accurate for poetry.

Alec Ross has a new book, *Listen to This* (2010, Fourth Estate), which forays between classical (Schubert, Brahms) and to the eclectic end of pop (Bjork, Radiohead).

brg I enjoyed *Listen to This* a lot, as Alex Ross covered many of my own musical interests. I thought his best essays were on the careers of Verdi, Dylan, and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, but essays on Radiohead and Bjork were lost on me. I would love to read what Ross has to say about the music of Miles Davis, one of my minor obsessions. In his first essay Ross punches holes in the concept of 'classical music', but spoils this by using the term throughout the rest of the book, probably because it remains a useful term.

John Litchen's 'Humpty Doo' is wonderfully entertaining. Leeches, ugh. But they are medicinally even now (as are maggots, to clean wounds). We did a variant of John's fly-on-shirt experiment on a more modest scale during the height midge/thunderfly season last summer. One of my colleagues discovered that they are very attracted to bright colours, so used to hang out his hi-vis jacket on the smoking shelter whenever we went outside for a break.

Steve Sneyd mentions struggling to finish M. John Harrison's *Light*, but earlier, in a different context, also mentions Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Nova Swing, MJH's follow on to *Light*, features a mysterious area called The Zone, which where the laws of reality appear malleable. I don't know if this is a deliberate reference back to the film, but I wouldn't be surprised.

I have to admit that I'm still trying to get my head around the concept of a drive-though corner store, if I'm reading Cy Chauvin's letter correctly. That's either a very big corner store, or you'd have to be in a very small car.

I am constantly surprised by the amount of DVDs and CDs you buy and watch/listen to. Nearly all my acquisitions come from charity store gleanings these days (not through particular lack of cash — I've had a £30 HMV gift voucher in my wallet since Christmas — but more through lack of motivation to look for anything special). Kidlington threatens to be overrun with charity shops (we now three, enough to rival last year's outbreak of pound shops) but even so I am sometimes surprised at what turns up. Recent hauls have included Captain Beefheart, The Groundhogs, Zep's *Mothership*, Air, Reprazent, and Faithless as well as a brace of rather good roots reggae compilations (I-Roy, Junior Murvin, Toots and the Maytals).

***brg* Elaine would be the first to remind me that I buy too many CDs, DVDs and Blu-rays. I've been using the music magazines, such as *Uncut* and *Rhythms*, to make a list of my wants, then have been giving my list to Dave Clarke at Reading's Carlton. Dave usually can track down everything I order. This is the problem. I've run slap bang into a financial crisis during the last few months, because I thought I had much more in the account than I have. But of course I do not want to risk trying to find what I find by merely looking through the CD shelves or waiting for secondhand copies. The trick seems to be to make reasonable lists of wants. Hah! The predicted disappearance of the CD and DVD has not happened. CD resurrections have sprung up all over the Christmas lists: the complete set of remastered Pink Floyd albums; the remastered *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack, with an extra CD of missing tracks; a Miles Davis 10-DVD *Live at Montreux* pack ... As Ry Cooder sang all those years ago, 'How can a poor man stand such times as this?'**

The BBC seems to alternate between celebrity and makeover programs (if you could get a soap star to train an apprentice to redesign a celebrity chef's new kitchen — or vice versa — you could probably hit all the program scheduler's buttons at once) with some rather good documentary series on music, science, maps, and now books and novels. They are on less certain ground, though, when it comes to science fiction. The current offering is *Outcasts*, which is

proving both glacially slow and driven by both idiot plotting and lots of internecine plotting by apparent idiots. Perhaps it's a comment on the BBC's own lack of faith in their new baby that it's recently been summarily demoted from two prime time slots on weekdays to a single later appearance on Sunday.

(2 March 2011)

On the subject of happy chance discoveries in charity shops, I forgot to mention my most recent find, a hardback copy of Bryan Talbot's wonderful *Alice in Sunderland*, for the princely sum of £1.50. The ladies at the counter weren't sure whether it was a children's book or not, which would have bought it down to 60p, but I didn't have the heart to try it on.

Fifteen years' drought. That's pretty hard to wrap your head around in Britain. Claire, I gather, would have welcomed the rain, and probably gone out and danced in it, since she famously doesn't do 'hot'.

It took several shots out of the window to get one that showed those icicles in their full glory. A day later, the weather finally turned and they disappeared over the next few days, so it was lucky timing.

I just came across this quotation last night in the last chapter of Richard Holmes' *The Age of Reason: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (2008, Harper Press) — shortlisted for the 2009 Samuel Johnson non-fiction prize — and thought it might amuse you and Janine Stinson:

For ever since immortal man hath glow'd
With all kinds of mechanics, and full soon
Steam Engines will conduct him to the moon.

(*Don Juan* (Canto X): Lord Byron)

(5 March 2011)

Saw an intriguing American folk due on Jools Holland's TV show *Later*, who go by the name of The Civil Wars. Very impressed. Reminded somewhat of Alison Krauss, or Gillian Welch and David Rawlings.

Also impressed with Laura Marling, who I had heard of, but not actually heard before. Odd. But perhaps not as odd as reggae singer I-Roy's version of Nirvana's 'Lithium' as an upbeat ska number. That really did make me grin hugely. Apparently, there's a whole album of this.

Current reading: Alison Sinclair: *Darkborn*. First book in a fantasy sequence (to be followed by *Lightborn* and presumably *Shadowborn*) that has a similar premise to Sergei Lukyanenko's 'Twilight Watch' series, but without vampires, and with an added conceit, reminiscent of Mieville's *The City and The City*, that the three races exist completely separated from each other in the same towns and cities, since daylight and night are fatal to the darkborn and lightborn respectively. The plot is essentially a Victorian magguffin hunt melodrama involving kidnapped twins, murders and secret agents, but quite a lot of fun for that. It also appears to be Sinclair's (a friend of Sarah Ash, who is in turn an old friend of ours) first book in a long while, since the SF book *Cavalcade* back in 2006 or so, after she moved to Canada.

Also reading Tim Lebbon's *Echo City*, which reminds me of a cross between two other fantasy books

with oddly similar titles: Alan Campbell's *Scar Night* and Mieville's *The Scar* (and also a little of its predecessor, *Perdido Street Station*). It is a bit overly laborious in the middle, with rather too much traipsing around series of caverns and encountering different hazards, like a badly plotted D&D game. Still, it is (I believe) a first book, so perhaps he will tighten up later on.

(10 October 2010)

I share your passion for Peake's Gormenghast trilogy. Last month or so I listened to the new four-part BBC radio adaptation of the books, including the 'lost' last novel, completed by Peake's widow from his notes.

I have, but still haven't read, a copy of Winington's *Vast Alchemies*. I didn't know about Malcolm Yorke's *My Eyes Mint Gold*, but I do have a paperback copy of Peake's *Progress: Selected Writings and Drawings of Mervyn Peake* (1981, Penguin) by Maeve Gilmore.

Best Wishes, and Happy Halloween (I've just had a first trick-or-treat visit, from two somewhat underage witches, and had to raid my carefully guarded chocolate hoard).

(31 October 2011)

It's interesting that it took you several abortive attempts before you overcame the hurdle of the first few pages of Peake's Gormenghast trilogy. I came to it somewhat later than you and, as seems typical for me, in a different order.

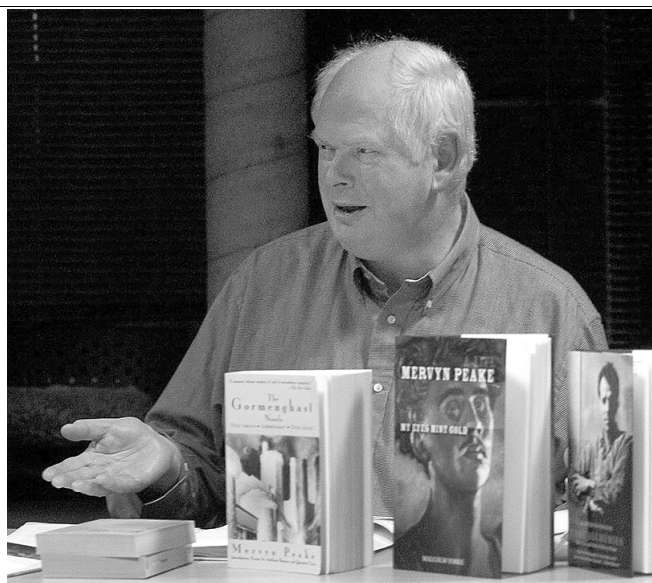
I read the second volume, *Gormenghast*, first, during my first year of university, which would be 1974, quite probably because it was the only volume on the shelf of the library at the time. I fell in love with it instantly.

Truth be told, I fell in love with Fuchsia. It's a little flame that has never quite died, as I discovered again while listening to the most recent BBC radio adaptation. Fuchsia, perhaps more than any other character in the book, is the vital heart of Gormenghast: intense, fiery, fiercely loyal at the same time she is difficult, self-centred, and wilful, and also (and this might be the key to my adolescent literary crush) childishly vulnerable. Against Fuchsia's maelstrom of emotions, Titus is something of a cipher, not helped by the fifteen-year-old age difference between the two.

I can't remember when I read *Titus Groan*, but somehow I always think of the first two books as one long novel in two parts, while *Titus Alone* (which I read much later, and, unlike the first two books, probably haven't re-read since) seems more of an extended coda, a digression that eventually comes back to where *Gormenghast* ended.

I may be doing the final volume a disservice, and perhaps I ought to read it again. My memory of the books is now completely coloured by the intervening TV and radio adaptations, and which are — even across six or more hours — substantially compressed and abridged to the point that I wondered how much sense they would make to people who didn't already know the novels.

What I do remember is that Peake's trilogy was probably the first 'adult' fantasy I had read. I had read *Lord of the Rings* a year or so earlier (working a



Bruce Gillespie delivers the Mervyn Peake talk at Nova Mob, 5 October 2011. (Photo: Art Bébé Promotions.)

mostly lax night shift in a paper mill, where we were obliged to be on hand mostly in case things went wrong and the line had to be cleaned before it could be restarted) but I suspect I came to it too late for it to be a defining influence on my reading. And I had read a lot of Moorcock's Elric and Corum fantasies, though I was more drawn to his 'Dancers At the End of Time' quartet, and starting to get to grips with the Jerry Cornelius novels and others like *Gloriana* and *The Brothel on Rosen-strasse*. (I had not appreciated the roles of Moorcock or Langdon Jones in getting Peake's novels back in print.)

LoTR and *Gormenghast* are often held up as twin (and sometimes opposing) poles for the development of modern fantasy since the 1960s, the one spawning endless xerox copies of cod medieval world-building featuring elves and wizards and dark lords — and cemented by Gygas's *Dungeons and Dragons* and the endless *Forgotten Realms* franchise, while the influence of Peake's darker, gloomier, and more idiosyncratic work seemed to languish through much of this commercial boom (apart perhaps from writers like Vance) to resurface as a significant influence on the New Weird, notably with the sprawling grotesquerie of Mieville's *Perdido Street Station* and perhaps in the shifting labyrinthine complexity of Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. I hadn't thought of J. G. Ballard in this context, but the fascination with empty decaying landscapes is obvious in retrospect.

But maybe as well it's a difference in form as much as content. The genesis of *LoTR* is primarily linguistic, almost an exercise in creating a world in which Tolkien's invented language could find expression. Peake's work is intensely visual. There is no map of Gormenghast itself — nor perhaps could there be; it is as seemingly endless as Steepike's rooftop view of the sky-field. (One striking image from that, seen by Steepike and later recounted to Fuchsia, is a lake on one of the roofs, across which a white horse is swimming.) But the characters spring to life through Peake's illustrations, in the same way I remember those of *Alice* (though through Tenniel, first) and *Treasure Island*.

Which raises an interesting question. If women are biased over men towards to more linguistic skills, and men to more visual/spatial skills, then you might expect to find a gender bias in fantasy readers towards Tolkien or Peake. Of course this is skewed by the relative sales of both works, but it's an intriguing thought.

I have caught up with the last two Ian M. Banks's Culture novels, *Matter* and *Surface Detail*, and went on, in a fit of misplaced enthusiasm, from there to Neal Asher's *Cowl*. It was like going from a Bach fugue to Napalm Death. An interesting experience, but not one I'm tempted to repeat. I don't know if Asher's later Polity novels are better, but *Cowl* is noisy, incoherent, and badly written on nearly every level: from descriptions that completely fail to give any idea what is being described, space-time metaphors that would make even Prof. Brian Cox choke, dialogue, some really clumsy 'as you are aware ...' info dumping, and a plot that requires the author to brandish a rabbit from a hat on two occasions, both of which require character to explain what happened to each other in order to justify it to the reader. If you haven't read it, avoid. If you have, my sympathies.

(21 November 2011)

DORA LEVAKIS

**Numbulwar, via Groote Eylandt,
Northern Territory**

11.00 p.m. Friday and, as normal of late, I am being dive-bombed by a multitude of insects. There's nothing I can do. So many find their way in here.

I witnessed the weirdest thing in the very early hours of two mornings ago. Was awoken by a loud thud. When turned in my bed, avoiding the temptation to see what cruel hour this was, I noticed what looked to be tiny fluorescent blue flashes/explosions at the ceiling height of one wall. Good heavens! Though I was dizzy, I had to investigate. When I turned on the light I could make out dark insects about a third of an inch long. Maybe five of them. I have so far forgotten to ask people about this invasion. As I sit here at the laptop I notice the Telstra broadband plug-in that I use for internet connection flashes the same blue. The laptop flashes the same blue to signal battery re-charging; and the 'on/off' button is a ring of fluorescent blue, as are the 'WiFi' sign and a ring around the power chord. It's a weird thought, but could the insects have decided to mimic these signals?

(5 March 2011)

I've been working a minimum of 12 hours per day and have to pull the reins on that. In the early hours of this morning I remembered the books I've brought



Absolom and his painting, which Dora has very kindly sent to me for custody. (Photo: Dora Levakis.)

with me and haven't as yet been able to read.

Had a ceremony here from midday Thursday: evocative singing and dancing. The day before a pile of sand was delivered to the school yard in preparation. I had lunch duty that afternoon and was amazed to see the boys running up and doing backward somersaults. After the break my kids were little maniacs. I wondered whether it was the high energy in the school yard that set them off.

Two weeks ago the local shop and council offices were closed for the day. Someone had placed a curse on the community. We had to wait until elders smoked the buildings before they could reopen.

Two community members went away for a week to Katharine. One was cursed before she left, so could not communicate with any other Aboriginal people during her week away. Apparently someone was able to clear the curse from her lower arms only, enabling her to at least make hand contact ...

(5 March 2011)

Our 'all weather' airport closed due to rain damage so I can't fly out tonight as planned and can't catch the flight home to Melbourne. Damn. We're all greatly



Lance with a crab. (Photo: Dora Levakis.)

out of pocket and drained by the time it is taking to try to change flights, pay for the changes, argue with flight companies ...

Term break was supposed to begin Monday. The kids have been told to come back; we're going to continue on until April 15.

And I have rationed my eggs to last until today.

(1 April 2011)

I hope you like this painting of Absalom's I sent you. He paints using a style particular to the Top End, and could only begin painting in 2009 after his father, who passed the skill to him, passed away.

Most of his paintings are painted to the edge, and are not square. I've resolved to regard them similar to being painted on bark.

(19 July 2011)

Lance wants me to show photos of the local mud crabs of which he traps copious amounts! The cooked ones are what we served our dinner guests, as entree, last week. Blue Salmon fillets followed as main. ... I am allergic to prawns so I didn't take the risk of eating these crabs. The crabs were caught in the mouth of the Rose River, where the Rose River joins the sea.

(13 August 2011)

Thanks for the Mervyn Peake article. It arrived yesterday. I'll read what I can of Mervyn Peake before I sleep in next half hour and revisit him in this way over next two weeks until the work pressure releases.

I'm exhausted at present. I took one day off last week, and was advised by the doctor to take three more before I 'hit the wall'. I couldn't/can't do it, as I'm in middle of assessments at present. I don't think I've felt this bad, though, for quite a long while.

(5 November 2011)

JERRY KAUFMAN

3522 NE 123rd Street, Seattle WA 98125, USA

I enjoyed Taral's cover on **brg** 67. Nice to see colour work from him, and I liked the way he designed the

large monochrome areas for inclusion of the zine title and contributor names. Ditmar's cover for No 68 is intriguing: the curvy areas above the rock cliffs look almost like sections of bodies. Am I projecting?

In No 67, I focused first on the Aussiecon 4 photos. I think you've mislabelled the one from your garden. The person on the left, in white and gesturing towards a plant, is certainly not Priscilla Olson — and from the angle of view doesn't even look like Karen Shaffer. More like Kate Yule, we think. (Not a royal 'we,' but the joint opinion of Suzle and me.) The person next to her, with hood up, must be Priscilla. If Kate wasn't at your home, then we'll take your word that it's Karen, and assume you just have Karen and Priscilla switched.

I enjoyed Jennifer Bryce's report of the Berlin Philharmonic concert. Our cable service carries the Classic Arts Channel, which shows short clips from DVDs of classical music and dance, jazz, classic movies (usually scenes with music in them), and other odds and ends. They've included Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic (one clip from Holst's *The Planets*), so I can say I've seen them, too. Seems doubtful, but within the realm of possibility, that one day they will tour and perform here.

I enjoyed and found very interesting most of John Litchen's memoirs this issue, though my interest flagged a bit towards the end. I don't know why experimental rice should be of any interest to me, especially since the effect of all the work came to no permanent results. But it was.

We do have a classical music station, KING-FM, which is fairly conservative in its play list. It's currently a commercial station but is going to switch to listener-supported soon. I'll be glad to hand them some money. Their afternoon/evening presenter often works in short pieces from his own collection, and offers his own opinions of composers and performers: much more interesting than simply announcing the pieces.

Doubtless you've been reading *Gramophone* for many years, while I only started two or three years ago. The only reason I know what the magazine used to be called is from glancing over a full page of old covers they ran a few issues ago. Our local Barnes and Noble carries not only *Gramophone*, but also another British magazine called *Classic FM*. I was struck by its resemblance to *Mojo*, a British pop music mag. Much less formal and (dare I say it) stuffy than *Gramophone*.

brg* There must be scope for a classical music magazine modelled on *Mojo* or *Uncut*, but I want reviewing/critical writing of the quality still found in *Gramophone*. *Gramophone* used to fit in far more words than it does now, but the layout might have been allowed some extra air because of the declining number of CDs the magazine needs to review every month.

To Ray Wood: the robot Maria in *Metropolis* is made to look and move like a real human. If I remember the 'Sarah Conner Chronicles' correctly, the Summer Glau character is also a robot made to look and move like a real human. So to me they're very similar.

In No 68, Taral comes first with what seems at

first an entirely facetious consider of the idea of the afterlife, but which he gradually turns to a more serious consideration. It's hard to imagine what an afterlife would be like, but on the other hand I find it hard to believe that our consciousness just stops. The idea of multiple lifetimes (reincarnation) is almost more plausible than simply going into a heaven — we have to go somewhere (rather than snuffing out like a candle flame) so why not into another body?

But that's possibly (probably?) wishful thinking. Still, I sometimes think our life is like our dreams. While in the dream we usually accept it as real, but when we wake up we either remember only the highlights or forget the dream entirely. By analogy, perhaps this life we live is itself a dream and when we die here, we wake up ... elsewhere.

You buy far more CDs than I do — and more box sets by orders of magnitude. But I download albums from the Rhapsody service (I have a subscription that allows for unlimited downloads I can play on the computer or on an MP3 device, but no ability to burn to CD). So I've listened to the Cyndi Lauper blues album and found it mildly enjoyable, and gave *Exile on Main Street* another chance, with the same result: it does nothing for me, while earlier Stones albums are much more to my taste. I even like *Their Satanic Majesties Request* better.

I actually have one of the classical albums you list, the Richard Tognetti et al. Dvorak album. How amazing. I also have the Paul Lewis Beethoven Piano Sonatas, but I didn't buy them all at once. They were originally issued in four small sets, with different numbers of CDs in each set.

Among my favourite albums of last year was Alison Bolcom doing Italian concertos. She plays Baroque and modern trumpet, and re-scored concertos for other instruments (like oboe) to fit her instrument.

I recommend a book, *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music*, written by Rob Young. I think it's only come out in the UK. I had Mark Plummer buy it for me and bring it to Corflu. It's about the effect of folk music and related concepts on classical and rock music in the UK: related concepts like the authentic soul of the British people, the peace and harmony of Britain's past, the value of farming and going back to nature. He covers the folksong collectors and composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, and John Ireland. Then he gets to the folk revivalists such as A. L. Lloyd, the Watsons, and the Young Tradition. Then the folk rockers, such as Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention, and all the groups started by the members of such groups. He finishes with people who didn't really take from folk music so much as used some of the same themes, such as Julian Cope and Kate Bush.

I was inspired by this to start exploring some of the people and groups he discusses. Yesterday I picked up Nick Drake's first album (I've only ever heard a few of his songs; better late than never is so true), an Arnold Bax album of folk-inspired music, and also a John Ireland. Also I bought the new Decemberists album, which I find to be in the same vein, although they are from Portland, Oregon, and

Vince Mira's album; not at all folkie, he's like a reincarnation of Johnny Cash: amazing voice and guitar work, and still a teenager. The album was produced by John Carter Cash. And violinist Lisa Batishvili's *Echoes of Time: Shostakovich, Part, Rachmaninov*. A fairly quiet album.

(7 March 2011)

I know I read *Titus Groan* many decades ago; I can't remember if I attempted *Gormenghast*. But your review/discussion of the books and Peake's life intrigued me so much that I looked for the books at Barnes & Noble on Sunday and came home with the same Overlook Press one-volume edition that you talk about. We'll see what I think about Peake's work, now that I'm (supposedly) all Groan up.

(9 November 2011)

DON ASHBY

PO Box 525, Mallacoota VIC 3889

I am sorry to have missed Aussiecon *again*. It takes quite a bit to get me out of Mallacoota. Friends and family will do it, though I am coming down to see Terry Pratchett's Wheeler Centre gig. I do tend to find large lumps of people intimidating, mostly because my eyesight is so crap that I can quite easily inadvertently snub someone and get into all sorts of trouble.

I am halfway through Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* at the moment and am struggling to work out why it won the Hugo and the Nebula Awards. Medieval history is a particular interest of mine, so the dirt seems a bit stagey and the conversation soapy. Time travel stories tend to annoy me because most writers can't seem to get their head around the notion that if someone goes back into the past that event is ipso facto part of the character's present. You can't change history, because if you have gone back in time you are already part of it. That is why we know it is impossible to interact with the past, because we do not record it in our history. You didn't go back and kill your grandfather because you haven't. Time travel stories are fantasy not science fiction.

I found an old copy of Robert Sheckley's *Options*: an amusing cross between Stanislaw Lem and Douglas Adams.

I read Baxter and Clarke's *Time's Eye*, Part One, and am wondering whether it's worth reading Part Two to find out if anything actually happens. This features time travel again, with the extra problem: what about the angular momentum of all the different bits of the Earth? If the aliens can control *that*, a bit of climate control and tectonic adjustment should be chickenfeed.

I love your lists, and am as usual in awe of how much you listen to, watch and read. I thought the new release of *Exile on Main Street* was good, and well worth doing. It made you listen to the stuff with new ears and realise all over again just how good the Stones were/are. Some of the interviews with various Stones around the release date were amusing and instructive.

I'm interested that *Zardoz* got on your list. That was really the first time I appreciated Sean Connery. (I was not a fan of Bond, books or films.) He plays

Sean Connery so well that it doesn't matter that a Soviet submarine commander has a Scots accent (*Hunting Red October*).

Most of my musical listening revolves around Australian contemporary stuff. I book lots of artists for local performances and manage the Australian content on our local radio station. I get heaps of stuff landing in my pigeonhole. I am always impressed by the amazingly high standard of most of it. I am also enraged at the lack of support for Australian material in the commercial media.

On Saturday we had Abby Dobson here: a delightful person who hadn't played Mallacoota since '98. She turned up with an awesome cello player called Mal Pinkerton. She just gets better and better. Her newish live album — *Live at the Spiegel Tent* — is minus all the studio jiggy pokery on her solo album *Rise Up*, and much better for it. The vocal intensity of her performance here left me exhausted. I was doing the sound mix and keeping a lid on her vocal transients kept me sweating. She had the flu, which didn't help. I haven't been affected by a performance so much for years.

We had Pugsley Buzzard the other week and I didn't know his work. He presents as a cross between Professor Longhair, Doctor John, and Tom Waits, and plays mean stride/rag keyboard.

Another artists who just seems to get better is Dee Jay Gosper, who is playing here Wednesday week: great jazz/blues voice, and plays the mouth harp to die for.

(8 March 2011)

brg* Don now lives about as far away from Melbourne as you can get (more than half a day by road) and still be inside Victoria, yet somehow he makes Mallacotta into the centre of the universe. Congratulations for persuading so many performers to visit your part of the world.

DOUG BARBOUR

11655-72nd Avenue, Edmonton,
Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada

No 67: I laughed at your description of the vast spaces in which Aussiecon 4 took place: sort of like a giant space station as long imagined by various SF writers, especially the ones that act as hubs.

I also enjoyed Colin Steele's commentary on Adelaide Writers' Week 2010. Nice to see Tom Shapcott honoured like that. Also nice to see some publishers still thriving, at least in Australia. And that the events apparently garnered good crowds. Something similar happens in Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary/Banff for their writer's festivals; our smaller, non-fiction festival in Edmonton has also been doing well.

That story he can't remember was Wilson Tucker's *The Time Masters*.

I enjoyed his capsule memory of Prince Philip as someone who 'never said a word to me or acknowledged me in any way'.

Cy Chauvin, my stationary bike is in the basement, which gets pretty cool in winter (especially one as cold and long as this one has been), but that just

makes me pedal harder for my hour. I have no problem sitting straight, riding no hands so to speak, and reading while I pedal.

I have reread the whole six Le Guin 'Earthsea' novels as well as the short stories. The early ones held up well, while the later ones made such interesting shifts in focus and ideology that the whole becomes far more than just the sum of its parts. In some ways Le Guin has just become wilder, in the best sense, as she's grown older. I feel that her concept of how magic works remains clear, intellectually provocative, and far beyond much the concept shown in the general genre works that have appeared in such numbers since she first wrote *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

Tarkovsky's film of *Stalker* is one of the great viewing pleasures: an important memory for me.

I have to read the Gormenghast trilogy. I've had that Penguin edition for years.

Although I do listen to a lot of contemporary orchestral and chamber music, I am not as enamoured of choral music as Steve Jeffery is; some of it, though, I do like it. One has only so much time (it's good thing I can listen and read at the same time). I like his icicles. Here, where we've had a terrible winter, we paid to have a huge amount of snow, from one really bad week, shovelled off our roof; that means no icicles, but the two-metre piles of snow around the house are worrisome.

I can't imagine that I haven't mentioned Tift Merritt, whose work you may know: a fabulous voice, and a good songwriter too. At Christmas, my nephew and his wife brought me a (far too short) CD by a group I'd never heard of, The Mynabirds, who have another of those stunning women with great voices fronting them. Laura Burhenn. A Canadian group, with two women as lead singers. Madison Violet is also good.

No 68: I enjoyed Ditmar's comments on his favourites for 2010, especially the less well-known ones. Yours are, as you suggest, unique, partly because you include books we outside of Australia would likely not see. The Paul Kelly collection sounds like a good read, to be sure (with the CDs too). I'm also unlikely to see the anthologies from Australia, although I did enjoy Jonathan Strahan's Short Novel collections for the SFBC (which seems, in Canada at least, to have gone into bankruptcy).

I'm pleased to see you've finally read *The Child Garden*, although I disagree with you about its transcendent failings — not that that may not be there, but so much else does happen, and the world as rendered is beautifully strange.

brg* I'm not sure whether or not Geoff Ryman 'failed' at the end of *The Child Garden*. His near-future world remains very real and detailed until near the end, then loses me. Other readers probably have no problems with it. I could argue that the ending of *Was...* is even more transcendent than that of *Child Garden* or *Air*, but it caught me in its spell. I'd rather read Ryman than almost anybody else writing SF at the moment.

The Rest Is Noise was a special read for me. It sent me in some interesting directions, especially Janacek's chamber music, which I love. At least one

person I know feels that Alex Ross leaves out too many recent women composers. Others have other complaints, but generally speaking, it's a superbly entertaining as well as provocative overview of twentieth-century classical music. Clearly Ross must have read just about every other book on the composers, then took the best parts, especially the gossip, to include in his version.

Using the local library I managed to catch up on just about all of Charles Stross's fiction this past year, and enjoyed it all. Stross produces ideas like a cornucopiac machine, but also writes well and can create interesting characters that fit into their strange new worlds. I also read more recent Alastair Reynolds, also thoroughly enjoyable.

I should try watching more films at home, as I don't get to many at the cinema. And I just don't watch music DVDs, although your comments certainly tempt me to do so. As for your CDs, especially the sets, I remain in awe. I can't see myself getting that Miles Davis set, as I have many of them already, including some of the boxed sets from an earlier iteration. And I don't necessarily want to listen to *everything*. Still, for someone who has little of his work, it sounds like a bargain, and he is one of the major figures.

I finally caught up with the Brahms symphonies and concertos, when given the Decca five-CD *Ultimate Brahms*. I can't definitely say these are the best performances, but they're certainly good and enjoyable. I also have a very interesting Walter Piston Chamber Music CD, from 'The 1999 Australian Festival of Chamber Music', and a delight. Also *The Ligeti Project II*, with some of his symphonic music. I have some friends who can't stand his music, but I like it. Just this weekend, I found an older CD of Lou Harrison's *Seven Pastorales*, which also includes works by Peggy Glanville-Hicks and Terry Riley: good stuff. And a rather delightful collection of smaller works by Johann Johannsson, *Englabörn*. I also listen to a lot of jazz, which doesn't interest you as much.

(15 March 2011)

NED BROOKS

4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn GA 30047, USA

Spectacular Taral cover on **brg* 67*.

The convention photos are depressing: we have all gotten so old! Are we the Last Fans? Where are the neos?

The No 68 cover makes me dizzy. Are those legs across the middle? Is that a skull at the back? What does the horse think?

Funny column by Taral on the possibilities of Heaven. I'm with Mark Twain, that they would be limited only by your imagination. Taral doesn't mention Kipling's 'L'Envoi'.

And no one shall work for money, and no one
shall work for fame;
But each for the joy of the working, and each,
in his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God
of Things as They Are!

Of the films mentioned, I have seen only *Agora*, on DVD. Hypatia's astronomer was wrong, of course, in saying that the elliptical path of the Earth around the Sun causes the seasons. It's the tilt of the polar axis that causes the seasons. But he was closer to the truth than the demented geocentrists.

(23 March 2011)

I happened across *Titus Groan* (Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946, with one corner of the dust jacket missing, for \$3) in a used-book store near the Georgia Tech campus in Atlanta in the late 1950s and was hooked ... I now have a couple of yards of shelving devoted to Mervyn Peake. This year's issue of *It Goes on the Shelf*, No 33, comments on some of the recent books.

I never got the other Reynal & Hitchcock volumes; I see that the copies with matching dustjackets are from Eyre & Spottiswoode.

Had I seen any German films of the 1930s or Disney feature films by the time I read *Titus Groan*? Probably only *Fantasia*. I still haven't seen a lot of old German movies, other than *Nosferatu* and *Caligari*. But the style of those movies was probably influenced by the German artists of the time, who, judging from the covers of the magazine *Orchideengarten*, were far more gruesome and grotesque than Peake ever was. He might well have seen those magazines. And he must have seen the work of Sidney Sime, always grotesque, but never with the gruesome bitterness of the German expressionists. And no doubt Aubrey Beardsley; have you read Peake's *The Craft of the Lead Pencil*, with its emphasis on the importance of the plain line?

(30 October 2011)

CASEY WOLF

**14-2320 Woodland Drive, Vancouver,
British Columbia V5N 3P2, Canada**

I very much enjoyed the article about the Berlin Philharmonic. Jenny Bryce can really write about music!

I deleted my Facebook account. I was just seeing the same people's postings all the time and never saw anything from you or Eileen or the people I joined FB to interact with, and no one much saw or responded to my postings anymore. We all have way too many 'friends' now. And I need to narrow my focus more, so I have deleted lots of internet involvements.

I also seem not to be doing much. I have posted on my writer's blog recently after months of not posting. Last year I only wrote three stories and haven't sent them out. My fatigue is just eating me up. (Oops, not quite true. One story, 'The Corpse Pose', was published in *Room Magazine* in December.)

But I do get to yoga and some meditation and visit nephews and some friends and have been reading as well. It's not enough but I keep working toward being able to work again. Very tired of being very tired.

(2 April 2011)



Tim Train (l.) and Bruce Gillespie (r.), Continuum 7, 2011.
(Photo: Helena Binns.)

ANDY ROBSON

63 Dixon Lane, Leeds LS12 4RR, England

Taral Wayne's worries about heaven apply to most of us. I feel much of the detail has been removed by centuries of puritanism and political correctness. But we're left with 'manna from heaven', which must be a sort of butter pudding, and 'nectar'. Of the latter I only know the nectarine, a sort of bitter lime fruit, and envisage a sort of alcoholic lime juice concoction not much removed from gin and lime. I could 'live' with that.

The emailing in advance for a comfy chair seems not to be on. Neither the Bible nor Richard Brautigan mentions furniture; presumably we float around on wings and hover indefinitely like sparrowhawks when it's time for a snooze. But I'm glad not to be Muslim: I couldn't face the virgins (all that nagging) or the figs (all those irritating seeds).

Poetry pages! No, you want to get rid of those!

Never did my mag any good. Actually, Tim Train looks fine to me.

Music DVDs often disappoint, but currently I'm enjoying *Jeff Beck's Rock 'n' Roll Show*, really a concert by Imelda May, featuring Jeff Beck playing in the style of Les Paul as a tribute.

Classical stuff I listen to on vinyl, but don't buy any more. Your other CDs are mostly stuff I would listen to if the stores ever stocked them. Those boxed sets are too expensive for me generally, and I know I'd never get the playing time out of them. (Even my double discs don't

get much time out.)

Hah! just as I feared — Australia looks like Croydon (but with much friendlier people). John Litchen's memories of Humpty Doo seemed to ring faint bells of something I saw on TV as a child — perhaps at the time of Prince Philip's 'bored' visit. I know there was a lengthy royal tour of Australia at the time, which was well covered on TV, no doubt to obscure the scandalous orgies of swashbuckling movie stars and lower echelons of the establishment.

I'm not really used to seeing Kim Stanley Robinson without a beard. (Surely facial hair is compulsory at conventions?)

(2 May 2011)

TIM TRAIN

8 Ballarat Street, Lalor VIC 3075

As my uncle once said, if you want to get people to talk, ask them about themselves. The same general principle applies here, I suppose, so here goes ...

I'm very pleased you like 'The Adventures of Chester Drawers', as the anonymous artist is, in fact, me (with some help from Lexi). My whole approach to putting *Badger's Dozen* together is cheerfully ad hoc, and it's in that spirit that I publish the *Chester Drawers* cartoons — I suppose I always assumed people would know! But perhaps 'artist' is an inappropriate epithet for the work that I do on *Chester Drawers*, seeing as the art typically consists of me drawing a box with handles (Chester)

The other fanzine fandom:
Sticky Institute Fair,
March 2011. (Photo: Tim
Train.)



and a few scribbles with trunks descending from them (trees) ... At any rate I think I'll keep it anonymous for the moment. It adds to the, er, mystery of the work.

The back page column for *Badger's Dozen 6* ('Badgers of Note') was written by Badger, who is of course the editor of the whole zine. As I explained to someone else, Badger stands to me in roughly the same relation as Dame Edna stands to Barry Humphries. (Badger, of course, also does the Badgertorial at the beginning, as well as assorted nonsense throughout.)

The other contributors are generally friends, many from the Melbourne poetry scene, some bloggers, and whoever happens to amuse me. I've plans to include Henry Fielding, Jerome K. Jerome, and Sumerian poetry, and who knows what else in upcoming issues. I still find I write a lot of the zine myself, but I'd really like to cut back on this; I'd like others to feel as if it's as much theirs as mine.

(27 June 2011)

I decline the idea for an article on zines/interview with Sticky Institute if that's all right! I would like to write something about the Melbourne poetry community/performance and pub poetry, as you suggested a little while ago, but I've been tossing and turning over in my mind what I'd like to say about it. Having that one unwritten article turn into two unwritten articles seems a mite perilous.

I'm curious about the alternative spelling of 'zine' you use several times in your email (i.e. 'zeen'). Is it an innovation of your own or does it come from somewhere? Perhaps I shouldn't be too prescriptive about the use of zine terminology as I myself have used the words 'zinester', 'ziner', 'zining', and possibly even 'zinearinos' from time to time — but I am quite curious about how terminology for — well — zining comes about, the reasoning behind the terminology, etc. (I generally love hearing about rules associated with neologisms, made-up words. Indeed, some of my happiest hours at work have been spent searching for the correct way to spell some of Dr Seuss's invented, nonsensical terms.)

The reasoning behind my own possible neologisms ('zinester', 'ziner', 'zining', 'zinearino') is quite complicated — I just made them up when I needed them.

(28 June 2011)

brg My only excuse is that I have heard 'zeen' said that way on radio, as if it had a double-ee, and I thought I had seen it spelt that way. Probably by an *Age* journalist, the kind of person who writes about 'sci-fi'.*

MARTY CANTOR
11825 Gilmore, Apt 105,
North Hollywood CA 91606,
USA

I believe that our first LASFS clubhouse, the one in Studio

City, was around 1100 square feet — but it never felt that big. Our second clubhouse, the one on Burbank Blvd. in North Hollywood, was about 2100 square feet. The Van Nuys clubhouse which we just purchased is about 4100 square feet.

(3 September 2011)

ROBERT LICHTMAN
11037 Broadway Terrace,
Oakland CA 94611-1948, USA

To say the least, I'm rather blown away with the egoboo washing my way across the vast Pacific. Clearly you 'get' what I'm doing, and I appreciate that more than I can say. Write-ups/reviews like yours and the 'better' letters of comment that come in go a long way towards my occasional despondence over what I consider inadequate response to most issues. Thank you so much!

I did notice, however, that you overlooked one contribution in each issue: Ron Bennett's in *Trap Door 26* and Paul Williams's in No 27. Any reason for that?

brg I wrote those reviews with the same stream-of-not-much-consciousness method that I use when writing mailing comments for ANZAPA: I write about what interests me, and don't worry about the rest. Looking back over that column, I'm surprised that I covered so much territory. Not sure when I'll return to fanzine reviewing.*

At this point, hoping/planning to get *Trap Door 28* out by the end of the year, I'm facing a shortage of material. Firmly in hand are another piece of faan fiction by Gordon, an article on Hugh Hefner and Bill Hamling by Earl Kemp (also a lot on Earl himself, inevitably), and a series of four sonnets by Dick Lupoff that springboard from Bloch's *Psycho*, the book and the movie. Promised is an article by Ted White on his history with guns (largely childhood) and a more tentative article by Gregg Calkins on

The last meeting at the old LASFS Clubhouse. I can't identify any of the individuals. (Photo: Marty Cantor.)



global warming. And that's it so far. I might find room this time to run another of the never-collected Burbee articles I have in reserve.

In the Anzapa zine, I was stunned at the new dues for non-Australian members. And I noticed that Knud Larn is now among you. He's been in FAPA for a year now, and done some interesting stuff there, too. And he might be a member of SAPS by the upcoming July mailing.

(28 June 2011)

Wm. BREIDING

PO Box 961, Dellslow, WV 26531, USA

Happy to hear that you have been buried in paying work. Crestfallen to hear that you have been under the weather, 'de-energised'. I was horribly sick with some sort of virus that lasted all of two months this summer (your winter) and still have a lingering congestion in my nose and ears. It's no fun getting older, is it? (I turned 55 last month.)

I understand you will have to dispense with hard copy fanzines one day soon. It will be a crying shame, at least for me. I never took to email or the internet, and find that access to it is ultimately unimportant. Around here high speed internet costs between 30 to 40 dollars a month. With rent taking up half of my small monthly salary I just can't see my way to its justification. Aside from the cost, I just don't plain like reading or spending a long time staring into a computer screen. Most of my letters are handwritten and then later typed into the computer (or not). So though it may be tempting, or even necessary, to many, on-line correspondence doesn't do a thing for me. (Probably why I don't have a girlfriend.) But to make things a bit easier for you I will send this letter as an attachment when I check my email.

As you can see, I have a tough time with Nick Hornby, both in his taste in music, and his novel. (I haven't read any of the others.) I'd be curious to hear your response to *High Fidelity*, should you ever get around to reading that omnibus of Hornby's novels. At my remark that I thought Hornby's book was a guy's version of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, my brother Sutton asked, 'Have you even read *Bridget Jones's Diary*?' Caught out, as I had only seen the movie, I went directly to the Library Sale and obtained a copy. Now three-quarters of the way through Fielding's book, I can say that my observation remains true (at least to me) about both books.

I would be thrilled to appear in **brg**, so please do consider all I sent you as a submission. I also sent 'About a Man' to Robert Lichtman. I was thinking that it was unpublishable, and just wanted to share it with you both. Now that Bill Bowers is gone I felt that my audience was also gone. (Bill once gave me the biggest compliment I ever received, saying that when I first started in fanzines I could barely spell, but by sheer pulling up of my boot straps I had become one of the best writers in fandom. I will treasure that comment to my grave.) In the unlikely event that Robert should eventually write and offer to publish 'About a Man', I will forestall that and write him a quick email to let him know you have it under consideration. And thank you for considering it,

Bruce.

brg* As you can see from Robert's letter, he hadn't filled *Trap Door* last I heard, and I am way overstocked with material for *brg* right at the moment until I can remove a log jam or three. Please tell me if you place the article with him or some other fanzine editor.

As to the other pieces, in *Letters from a Coyote*, they've appeared only in Apa-50, with a few extras sent to individuals. As to *The Anti-Libertarian Book Review*, I'm afraid that I am neither critic nor reviewer. Going back to reread the Anderson, Piper, and Wilkinson books to synopsis (is that a word?) and give detailed analysis of my thesis, it's just not going to happen. I'm not capable of it, as much as I would love to be on the contents page of *SFC*. (I realise that my take on libertarianism is unsophisticated. More a gut response to what is currently happening in American politics.)

I think your response to your friend's suicide was a pretty natural. I was so strongly affected by Kent and Mark's suicides that I nearly started volunteering at a suicide hot line in Tucson. For a number of years I was vehemently anti-suicide. Then common sense reasserted itself. Suicide is a personal option; that I understand — and my friends seem to be prone to it. (My very good friend Christina, who I've known for 30 years, recently wrote to tell me that I needed to get used to the idea that she would one day kill herself. If she weren't currently living on the North Sea in Scotland, I would go visit her.) If 'Suicide Ain't Painless' should be under consideration as well, I would be honoured.

You are right. There are so many difficult technicalities to writing a novel that I've nearly given up on it. This is aside from the fact that my writing is extremely plain at best, rustic at its worst. That said, I have about 30,000 words written so far on my book. Even though I believe it would/will be unpublishable I intend to try to finish it for my own sake. In July I wrote about 15,000 words and then came up against a wall, and have had no-thing but false starts on other chapters. Because I don't know what I'm doing I have to write out an entire scene or I lose it. (Forget doing 1500 words a day; I write it until the scene ends.) Two people are reading it as I go along. My brother Sutton confides that he finds it irritating, yet somehow fascinating. Gail said 'I think you're on to something. Forget about the plot for now; just write!' We shall see. The next Great American Novel it ain't.

As Bill Bowers used to sign his emails to me:
Hang tough!

(15 September 2011)

Your Peake article much appreciated. I am passing it on to my brother Sutton, who read Peake in the mid seventies, and was very much a fan. I have yet to read this epic.

After throwing down \$1500 on dental work I have had nothing but toothaches. I can't imagine what they did in there. They were supposed to make me feel *better*, not worse.

Stay healthy, no heavy lifting, and be sure to pet the cats.

(28 October 2011)

brg As if we have any choice. Archie now goes and stands next to my reading-and-watching chair in the living room to demand that I sit down so he can sit on my lap. Flicker does the same to Elaine.*

RACE MATHEWS

123 Alexandra Avenue, South Yarra VIC 3141

Thanks for your 'Gormenghast' paper. Enjoyed it enormously, and if the current queue of things waiting to be read wasn't so long I'd probably make a start on the first volume immediately. As is, it will be added to my list. And I'm in awe of all the good things you bring to your critical writing.

(14 October 2011)

PATRICK MCGUIRE

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

I am currently on (self-authorised) sick leave from my Serious Scholarly Writing Project, but recovering, so I will see if I can manage a loc as a lead-in to resuming the project in the near future. I caught the mother of all colds at Capclave in mid-October (symptoms appeared several days after I got back, which I take to have been incubation time). I'm now considerably better, but am still doing a lot of nose-blowing and a little coughing, over two weeks after the onset. I'm trying to resume normal activity very gradually, both because I'm still not very energetic and because I don't want to trigger a relapse or a secondary infection. I'm not looking forward to digging out from the housekeeping backlog created by the bug. I have started nibbling at it, but not in a sustained way yet.

Many decades ago, I quickly bailed out of an attempt to read the Gormenghast trilogy. My tastes have evolved somewhat since those days, but have not changed radically. I saw nothing in your essay to make me want to read Peake any time soon, but I often enjoy reading essays about authors who do not themselves speak to my condition. (For one reason or another, I have been reading a lot lately about Lovecraft, for instance.) Thanks to you, I think I will now have a better idea of what other people are talking about when they refer to Peake.

I'm not surprised that Peake was rejected in his attempt to become an 'official war artist' (p. 9), since there must have been only a handful of such posts, and high-prestige artists would have been competing for them and/or pulling strings to land them, but it's a little surprising that the military couldn't find something art related for Peake to do, given that he was hopeless at anything else and that he was not being forced, as might well have happened, to do some lowly job no matter how badly. Perhaps, given the British class system, as the child of a clergyman, Peake stood too high simply to be told to shut up and soldier, or else face very unpleasant consequences, as might well have happened in the World War II US Army. (You speak of his hopeless performance of 'menial and/or dangerous army jobs', so I presume they were not art related.) Peake may have balked at not being allowed self-expression (p. 8), but, after all, he must have successfully completed many obliga-

tory drawing and painting assignments in art school, and so I would think he could have been of use in, say, propaganda posters or camouflage design or something of the sort. (Illustrator Pauline Barnes, a young civilian, at the time was doing something art related involving naval charts, as I recall.) But then, the wartime military has never been good at matching jobs and talents.

brg That was the point of Winnington's discussion of Peake's role in World War II. His research revealed that a series of bureaucratic stuff-ups prevented Peake from becoming any sort of war artist. However, because Peake was given long periods of free time (sidelined because nobody knew what to do with him) from 1942 to 1945, he could finish writing the first draft of *Titus Groan*.*

If you reprint your essay, you might want to consider revising the second column of p. 8, and the end of that section on p. 9. To me this seemed partly confusing and partly unconvincing. Context eventually makes it clear that you are talking of two distinct influences, namely (1) B&W cinema, especially expressionism, and (2) Disney features, but this is not evident from your phrasing, and I first stopped to think if there were in fact any B&W Disney features. (Probably not, if we take 'features' to mean 'feature-length animated films', but some of the early short Disney cartoons were indeed in B&W.) But at the very end, you adduce *Snow White*, which was in colour, so it finally becomes clear that you mean to present two separate cinematic influences.

As for the unconvincing part, to me at least, the quote starting 'If Mr. Flay stalked' (p. 8) does not seem so cinematic as to demonstrate such an influence. It is inherently quite plausible that such an influence would exist, so my problem is with your illustration more than with your contention. Perhaps you could find a clearer example — one where motion would be simply described visually, not one where the narrator instantly draws conclusions about its nature (stalked vs. insinuated), or where we spend so much time inside a character's head (here, Flay's). What you quote is not at all, to my mind, a 'snapshot-like scene' (p. 8).

Your brief mention of *Titus Alone* (p. 11) says it is 'more Peake's *Brave New World*' than his *1984*. You made me curious enough to look up *Titus Alone* in the Wikipedia. To me, the salient feature of *Brave New Worlds* is that it presents a society (1) that might actually work, and (2) that many or most people, having slipped off the true path in one way or another, might find to be a very pleasant place, and a clear improvement over the world of the 1930s. The article in the Wikipedia does not make it seem that the outside world explored by Titus fulfills either of those conditions. I suppose it's still closer to *Brave New World* than to *1984* in that it's not unrelievedly horrible, but one could as well say on the same grounds that *Titus Alone* is closer to *Gray Lensman* than to *1984*.

(7 November 2011)

We also heard from ...

DICK JENSSEN suggested a few years ago that I write about the paperback of the Mervyn Peake trilogy that he had given me. Dick discovered (**brg** 72, p. 5, column 1, 15 lines from the bottom) that I had somehow listed Fuchsia as Titus's *brother*: Gillespie's boo-boo of the year.

FRANK WEISSENBORN thanked me for using three of his photos of Aussiecon in **brg** 67. Frank met Stan Robinson at Aussiecon: 'We're trading weather reports. He writes of the current La Nina winter across the Sierra Nevada's, that he's keeping an eye on things between sentences from the courtyard where he writes. He has a current deadline until March for his new novel.' :: It seems that in **brg** 68 I made a small mistake (only *one* mistake?): It was Frank who brought *Tin Men* to our monthly Film Night, not John.

YVONNE ROUSSEAU swapped news about DVDs. Recently she had her life unnecessarily upset by being bombarded by spam evidently from her own email address. 'Meanwhile I hope that Murray and Natalie MacLachlan and New Zealand fans aren't bereaved by the Christchurch earthquake. My sister-in-law Liz reports that her Christchurch-inhabiting brother was actually employed in attempting to make structures less vulnerable to earthquakes. One of his projects was the cathedral that was so spectacularly destroyed. He and his wife and children are all right, but a house and an office of theirs were demolished.'

WERNER KOOPMANN has sent lots of postcards from Germany as he and his wife travel around during their retirement. He writes, 'Most of my CDS

are older ones, including the Australian band Yothu Yindi. I have four of their CDs. I also like Kitaro, a Japanese. I also like Bonnie Raitt's 'Something to Talk About', about whom I read in a crime novel by Vachss.'

CHRIS NELSON thanks me for the review of *Mumblings from Munchkinland*, but 'I feel a little churlish pointing out that you've used our old address!' Oops! I had looked in my diary instead of my card index for Chris's address: 25 Fuhrman Street, Evatt ACT 2617.

GIAN PAOLO COSSATO writes: 'I very much appreciated the back cover. I did not expect to be honoured in a such a overvisible way.' Gian Paolo keeps sending me wonderful books and pamphlets about the geography and treasures of Venice. Yes, I would really like to visit you there, but still can't work out a way of doing so.

ANDREW MACRAE (Fitzroy, Melbourne) paid me the compliment of attending my Nova Mob talk about Mervyn Peake. We used to see him every week, but he's been busy finishing his PhD this year. He sent his snail mail address.

THOMAS BULL tells me that an *Alice in Wonderland* with Mervyn Peake illustrations was published in paperback by Bloomsbury in 2003. If anybody has a copy to sell, name your price. That doesn't mean I can afford it, but let me know.

CAROL KEWLEY has been busy on various art projects, so we haven't caught up with her for awhile.

RICH COAD had just received **brg** 72: 'I really like the copies of Peake's illustrations.'

— Bruce Gillespie, 9 November 2011

Help Save Science Fiction!



Meteor Incorporated was formed in 2007 with encouragement and support from the Australian Science Fiction Foundation to raise funds to acquire premises for a science fiction institution and research collection in Australia.

The aim is to conserve the sf treasures in private collections whose owners are aging and facing the prospect of downsizing their possessions.

Who will look after *your* collection when you can no longer do so?

The purpose of the Meteor Fund is to allow fans to unconditionally gift or bequeath all or part of their collections to the Meteor Incorporated Public Fund so that they can be properly managed for the benefit of this and future generations of science fiction fans. We need funds for this important project and rely on the generosity of fans. An additional short term objective is to assist local fans to save significant items in 'at risk' collections in collaboration with local sf clubs and associations.

Visit www.meteor.org.au for more information, including how to donate to the fund, and learn how to remember the Meteor Fund in your will: see www.meteor.org.au/contributions/bequests/.

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible (for Australian taxpayers only).

The Meteor Fund – preserving science fiction

Authorised by Bill Wright, Secretary of Meteor Incorporated

Unit 4, 1 Park Street, St Kilda West VIC 3181 e-mail: meteorinc@iprimus.com.au

***brg* 73**

December 2011

Jennifer Bryce Ditmar Bruce Gillespie John Litchen
Gillian Polack Joy Window and many others

