

PROBE 164

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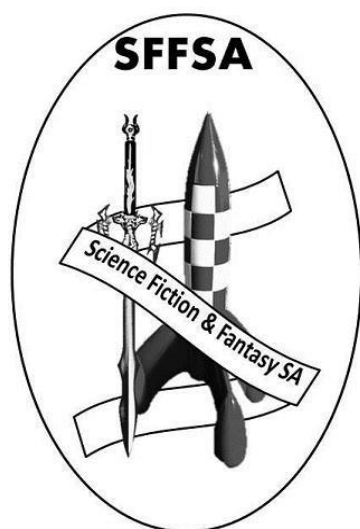
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Editorial

It is that point of the magazine again. Last thing to do is to write an *E*D*I*T*O*R*I*A*L*. Somehow for me always the most difficult part to complete. There are always stories to print, interesting articles to choose from, the fun of reading through old PROBES and choosing one of the previously printed items to use as a “Blast”. Checking I have the correct number of pages and that they fit in aesthetically; typing up the index. Then I have no more options.... I have to write an editorial.



So here goes..... Last issue we had to note the passing of “Dr Spock” who we know was really Leonard Nimoy. This time around the much loved author Terry Pratchett has gone to that Great Turtle in the Sky. This should not really have been a surprise, we knew that he was ill but it still is painful to think that Granny Weatherwax will dominate no more. That Sam Vimes will no longer feel the cobblestones of Ankh Morpork through the thin soles of his beloved boots. Rincewind will no longer be the most inept “Wizzard” around; Lord Vetinari will no longer terrorise the citizens of Ankh Morpork; We will hear no more of Cherry Littlebottom and her fellow dwarves. And Nanny Ogg. Oh dear. Oh dear. No more descriptions of the delectable offerings of C.M.O.T. Dibbler. And Death, who is so artfully depicted and a much beloved, if misunderstood character. Sad to think that we will not read the final chapter in the “love” affair of Captain Carrot and Sergeant Angua, not to mention the many, many characters who peopled (dwarved, trolled, vampired? etc) the fantasies of Sir Terry Pratchett. There is not enough space to list all of the characters we have to say farewell to. Although I do believe that there is still one more episode of Tiffany Aching and the Wee Free Men in the pipeline.

And the librarian. I will never forget one evening when we hosted Terry Pratchett that he told us a story about how, because of his “expertise” on the subject of orang-utans he had been invited to an expedition in South America, if I remember correctly, and how his one enduring picture was of a very large male orang-utan taking the camera gently from the petrified cameraman and staring at him from other side of the lens.

He had been staying at “The Michelangelo”, a very “posh” hotel and was pleased to join us in steak, eggs and chips as he was really tired of “cuisine”. He had arrived with his signing hand wrapped in a towel with ice, but just for a change he asked us to sit in a circle and then went around and signed a book for each of us. He was a most entertaining guest and as a tribute to his very clever and entertaining novels I have re-printed an interview with him that was published in PROBE 100. He will be greatly missed.

Nova 2014 Special Mention General Section

String Magic

Leon Louw

It’s a well-known fact that biting on tinfoil leaves a stinging, metallic taste in your mouth. It’s also a well-known fact – for Timothy at least – that he didn’t allow a stray cat to disembowel a gutter rat in his mouth. So why the foul, metallic, stinging taste? And why the bloodshot, baggy eyes? It looks like a heavy night of drinking. And smoking. Only he didn’t drink. Not like that anyway. And he doesn’t smoke.

He focussed his tired eyes on his watch. Twenty minutes before the shift bus leaves. If he’s late for another shift, he’s off the blasting team. And then he can’t get a blasting ticket, which means he can’t become mine overseer, without which he can’t get a bursary to go and study, to get a degree, to finally leave this dump.

He ran all the way to the bus stop, knowing he’s already just that little bit too late. At least the subsequent ten minute wait for the bus in sub-zero, slightly windy conditions, eased his headache a bit. He sat on his own, partook only sparingly in the normal lively conversations. Not that the usual topics of booze, boobs, bikes and – since it’s winter now – hunting, requires much effort to partake in.

ΦΦΦ

The day was highly uninspiring, as usual. He unlocked the front door, slumped down on his couch. Dusty, sweaty, tired – and still with this nagging headache. And for what? To become a better miner? He hated being a miner. A third generation miner, no less. But the mine grabs you, never let’s go. Even him, who doesn’t fit in – being brought up in English by his English speaking mother – after his father left.

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Apart from the nagging headache, his head seems completely blank, as if his thoughts were sucked into a vacuum. Only one thought clawed its way to the forefront. Food. Mexicanos. A nasty place, full of miners. At least they do decent nachos. He forced himself off the couch. If he goes there now, it will still be quiet.

The heavy drinking only starts around eight.

The door to Mexicanos swung open just before his hand reached it, followed closely by a Boer. Faded rugby shorts, old vellies with rugby socks, severely faded Kaktus oppi Vlakte, suip tot jy FaktUS '03 t-shirt, the lot.

'You're late. But let's go. It's better if we talk somewhere else. I got us food.' He indicated the paper bag in his hand, grabbed Timothy by the shoulder. As soon as he touched him, the sharp metal taste was back, the nagging headache immediately replaced by a sharp metal feeling in his brain, like déjà-vu on steroids. Dewald.

Dewald Pieterse. How the hell do I know his name? What the hell is going on?

Dewald stopped, sighed and smiled reassuringly at him. 'Confuses you, doesn't it? And the headaches are... well, not really painful, but at least slightly weird.'

He flashed the stranger – whose name he seems to know – a look of noncomprehension.

'Listen, sorry about the headache. And the confusion. I had a hard time getting into your dreams last night.' 'Getting into... what?' Weirido?

'By the way. That dream about the two bears... scary stuff man.'

'Dream about... but... I haven't dreamt that since I was six!' Psychic weirido? 'Seven, actually.' He sighed. 'It confused the crap out of me as well, till somebody explained it to me.'

'Explained what?'

'Everything. Well... most of it anyhow. I can't explain women, and I definitely can't explain cats. But I'll explain why it is that you can control your dreams. And why you have so many déjà-vu's.'

The same reassuring smile appeared again. Genuine. Comforting. Psycho killers should at least look a bit more... well... psycho, shouldn't they? Not like somebody who's just finished milking the cow.

Then Dewald added the magic words. The ones he should have said right at the start. The ones – Timothy feels – should be elevated to the UN peace negotiation lexicon. 'I've got nachos.'

'Where are we going?'

'To the lookout. My bakkie's just around the corner.'

Of course he drives a bakkie. An older model Hilux, smelling slightly of sheep and looking like it may have been driven by one.

The lookout is usually abandoned this early in the evening. It's still too early for the lovers and much too early for the boozers to be here. He reverse parked so they could sit on the load-bin lid. The mine – a huge, gaping hole, surrounded by dilapidated buildings and a myriad power lines and dumps – is strangely beautiful in the orange twilight of a Kalahari sunset.

Dewald took two Styrofoam containers and two Cokes out of the paper bag, handing one each over to Timothy. 'Well, dig in. You'll handle it much better with some food...', his eyes suddenly focused on Timothy. 'Wait...', he went to the front, dug in the glove compartment, came back with a white plastic bottle, '...take some of these. Three or four at least.' He read the raised eyebrows, answered the silence. 'Krill oil. Omega three. You need it... well... your brain needs it. Last night's dream would have been a bit rough on the old grey stuff.'

Timothy, looking slightly worried, nevertheless took out three of the red translucent capsules, downing them with a swig of Coke, then looked over at Dewald. 'So, Dewald... apparently... what the hell is going on?'

Dewald smiled faintly, sighed. 'OK, let's start with the dream. Sorry. That was me. I had to prime you for our meeting just now.'

'How? And why?'

'How? Easy. I tune my thoughts to yours. And then just suggest a few things. Sort of like heavy meditation. Why? Well you wouldn't just follow any bugger up a hill just because he has nachos, would you?' Timothy nodded slowly, not wanting to admit that – in his particular case – he may have just done it.

Dewald looked Timothy straight in the eyes, nothing but sincerity in his own. 'Can you believe that?' Timothy squinted, hesitated for a while, then shrugged. Maybe he's some kind of hypnotist?

'Good, 'cause if you get stuck on that, you'll have a hard time with the rest.'

'Try me'

Dewald smiled, seemingly impressed with his eagerness. 'OK, here goes... With a bit of training... you'll be able to do magic!' It's obvious he expected more response than the blank stare now facing his way.

Timothy felt something was expected of him. 'What... you mean like card tricks?' A look of total exasperation flashed across Dewald's face, quickly replaced by the never-ending smile. 'You're thinking of magicians. Ego-bloated actors full of tricks and disappearing bunnies. Think wizards instead.'

'What...? You mean like...?'

'No. No broomsticks, no wands, no unicorns and no special schools. Those are just children's stories. This is real.' Not for the first time, he got the feeling that Dewald can read minds. Dewald's next response sent chills down his spine.

'No. I try to avoid it. And it's considered rude, anyhow. Reading faces and situations is easier than reading minds. Reading a mind is like trying to listen to somebody whistling in a hurricane. Your thoughts aren't a coherent string of words. It's a jumble. And most of what your brain does is background. You know, keeping you alive and moving. Nothing to hear there, but makes a hell of a noise. Your thoughts just float through that like daisies in a storm drain. If you try and read minds, you can count yourself lucky if you hear more than one word before it's swept away.' Timothy took a long, deep breath. 'Fine. If it's not... that kind of magic... explain what is it then? And explain the other thought that just... floated through the muck.' Dewald smiled, nodded. 'Let's start with the other thought. It sounded something like "grammar", or something like that? You're wondering why I don't sound like a Boer?' Timothy nodded.

He pointed down, to the Kaktus shirt, tapping on the US part of FaktUS. 'After Maties, I did some postdoc studies in England for almost five years. Astrophysics. Neutronstars.' He looked at Timothy with a sly smile. 'And the reason why I look like Sakkie-vannie-plaas, is because I am. I was just about to take a fellowship to do work in particle physics when my father died. So I took over the farm. I enjoy farming more, anyhow. But the SKA radio telescope will be just down the road. Sort off. I'll look for work there... eventually.'

He took a deep breath. 'But this isn't about me. It's about magic.' His eyes sparkled as he looked down at the heavy, cheese laden nacho that Timothy was about to take. It

slowly started to levitate. Timothy stared at it with a mixture of surprise and scepticism engraved on his forehead. His hand moved in underneath it, as if by itself.

Dewald smiled knowingly. 'Yeah, it could just be a parlour trick. But not this.' It dropped the few centimetres to Timothy's hand; but was suddenly heavy, metallic – and bright yellow.

Timothy, startled by the sudden change, took a while to register what happened, then looked at Dewald, his mouth now unashamedly open. Dewald grinned friendly. 'The alchemist's dream. If only the poor buggers knew how easy it actually is.' In a comeback that even surprised himself, doubt still entered Timothy's mind. 'OK... you could be a bloody good... magician. This still doesn't prove-

'How big was the biggest diamond in the world?'

'What?'

'You work on a mine. How big was the biggest diamond?'

'It's like... I don't know... something like... fff... fist size?'

'Was it shaped like a can of Coke?' Without waiting for an answer, he lobbed his can of Coke at Timothy. 'Catch.'

He instinctively caught it, got taken by surprise at its unexpected weight and coldness, but above all by the fact that it was clear as glass. He could even see the level that the liquid was at before it got... crystalized? Somehow the word didn't do it justice.

This time he just stared at Dewald, only one word escaping his mouth. 'How?' 'Seen enough?' Timothy nodded slowly.

'Then I'd like my Coke back please. And careful you don't drop the cheese off that nacho.' Both had returned to normal. 'Now, without reading your mind, you're probably wondering if I ain't still messin' with your head.' He looked sternly at him, the smile suddenly gone. 'So, are you coming with me tomorrow?'

'Where?'

The smile returned. 'I like a man who asks the important questions first.' ☐☐☐

The road to the farm is bad. Really bad. No wonder everything on the bakkie rattles. Dewald tried to explain about dreams, but after a while – hoarse from trying to be heard over the cacophony – he resorted to pointing out wildlife. Once they reached the farm and could drive slower, one thing became immediately clear – why an astrophysicist will leave the lab and come to the farm. Dewald was like a little boy,

excitedly showing Timothy around, telling him statistics about lambing percentages and rainfall patterns.

After a short drive around, to check water levels in the troughs, they headed straight for the kitchen. Anna – the slightly stout, extremely friendly domestic worker – had apparently prepared a little something for lunch. It turned out to be enough food for a rugby team. They put in a whole-hearted effort.

‘Well now. Since we’ve almost eaten ourselves into a coma, I think we should start straight away.’

Timothy gave him a slightly flabbergasted look. ‘I thought the afternoon nap is a proud tradition around here?’ He tried to smile but was afraid the food will see his open mouth as a weakness and launch an escape.

Dewald only smiled, got up, beckoned to the door. ‘Come. I need you to be near asleep. It’s the only way you can access the right brain rhythms. To begin with, at least.’

‘Brain rhythms?’

‘Brain waves, Karmic state, Zen... call it what you want. You want epsilon waves. Which is the one and only thing that allows us to do magic. You, me... and a few other people you’ll meet later on. But very few people have them.’

Dewald started walking out, towards the yard. ‘Basically... and this is back to what I told you on the way about dreams. You want to be close to a dream state. You want to be in the déjà vu state.’

‘Yeah... what was that you said yesterday about them not... being real?’

‘All that happens in a “déjà vu”...’, he mimed the quotation marks with his hands, ‘... is that for some reason, your brain is in delta mode then. Close to dream state, that is. Then, when you see something slightly familiar, you think you remember dreaming it.’

‘So not a vision of the future at all?’

‘Not even close. Basically made up on the spot and then not so much remembered as “retro-membered”. But you need to access that kind of state to get the epsilon waves you need.’

They stopped beneath a large eucalyptus tree a distance away from the house. There appeared to be a grave beneath the tree. Dewald indicated to it. ‘Old Sias. He

taught me. Just came here one day, two years back. I thought he was looking for a job. Couldn't even read or write, but he taught me more than what I learned in twelve years at varsity.' The smile portrayed a definite tenderness toward the deceased. He sighed. 'And then the flu got him. He was really old.'

He looked up, the sullenness gone. 'Well... magic. Technically... it's not magic. It's science. How much do you know about string theory?'

'String theory? Isn't this about magic?'

'It is. It's just... science.'

'Eh... well, uhm... you know like...', Dewald's encouraging smile suddenly made him remember Dewald is a postdoc physicist, '... strings... they vibrate. And depending on how they vibrate, you get... you know... different things?'

'Close enough. What do you know about brain waves?'

'It's like... sort of... oscillations?'

Dewald nodded. 'See a connection there?'

Timothy squinted at him. 'So they're the same?'

'Not really, but... if you tune your brainwaves correctly, you can pick up the... call it the resonance frequency of the strings. Any strings. Well... there's only one type of string. That's the whole point. But once you've tuned in to it... well you can always just play a different tune on the string. Persuade it to be something else.'

'The gold. And the Coke... diamond. Yesterday.' Dewald nodded. 'And the levitation?'

He shook his head slowly. 'Yeah... technically that's impossible. Gravity's a bitch.'

His smile beckoned Timothy to ask. 'So how'd you do it then?'

Dewald sat down, pulled his feet in to sit cross-legged, apparently oblivious to the fact that he was half a meter off the ground. 'You see, lots of people have tried. Usually some bugger sitting on a mountain top somewhere, trying to be one with the universe. The usual way is to create a wind or some force to push you upward.' Timothy looked down. The dust and leaves were motionless. 'And suckers like me spend years and billions building facilities to try and pick up gravity waves...', he shook his head slowly,

‘...turns out all I needed to do is gently persuade some air molecules to become anti-gravitons. Of course, I still can’t prove they exist. Not scientifically, anyway.’ He got down of whatever it was he appeared to be on. Timothy had to resist the urge to feel for some invisible pedestal. Dewald read his mind. Or just followed his gaze. ‘You know, invisibility is also possible. You just...’, he looked down at his hand, starting to become translucent, ‘...persuade the light to go through. Most of what’s inside an atom is empty space anyhow. The trick is just to let the light realise that.’ The effect was really freaky, especially the blood, spurting out rhythmically a few millimetres before apparently disappearing into oblivion.

‘So... it’s just... mind over matter?’

Dewald shrugged. ‘Sort of. I don’t like the term, but it’s not too far off.’

‘So... you need epsilon waves to do this... and not everybody has those.’

‘Exactly. With some training, you’ll learn to pick it up in those who have it.’

‘OK, so... do I need some kind of wand... or something?’

‘What does Wanda want a wand for? Need a dress... oh sorry, I mean a robe as well?’

Dewald stooped down, picked up a twig.

‘I told you, no wands. But if you insist, you can use this.’ Timothy’s look of contempt for the twig prompted more response. Dewald sighed. ‘A wand is fine. But you really can use anything. Use a porcupine... spike? What do you call them?’

‘Quills.’

‘Yeah, use a porcupine quill if it feels more like African magic. It’s only to focus your mind. It keeps you on track, like training wheels. Once you’re good, you don’t need it anymore. So no; you’re not going to find one made from sapient pearwood wrapped in dragon skin that used to belong to Merlin. Or something like that.’

‘And... uhm... spells? Special words.’ Timothy suspected he knew the answer already. He was disappointed to learn he was correct.

‘No. You may swear a lot at the beginning. But there’s no special language. No words. No magical books. Yes, the odd obscure book may contain some information, but...

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magic is not a property that... something can't be magic. Magic is something that happens. It's... a type of force, if you have to call it something. And no, not The Force... but something close to that. So no, unfortunately – I know I would have liked it – there are no magical swords. Or light sabres. Would be rather silly anyhow. Worse than taking a knife to a gunfight.' Timothy nodded slowly, looking slightly disappointed that magic – apparently being real – may turn out to be quite boring. 'So probably no magical creatures then? No pet unicorns or guard-dragons for me?' Dewald smiled reassuringly, shook his head. Timothy faked a sigh of relief. 'Well, at least I can take my bed off the bricks.'

Dewald's eyes widened. 'Oh no. Tokeloshes are real. Crazy little buggers.' He indicated with his head to a tree a few meters away. Two gnome-like, bearded, extremely hairy little guys were sitting on the ground. One was smoking a pipe, the other taking a swig out of a small hipflask. They waved cheerfully at him.

Timothy's hand was half-way up to wave back when his mind caught up. He looked at Dewald, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly. Dewald shrugged. 'Don't worry. They're harmless. Well, mostly. Careful they don't steal your gold though. And bricks don't work. Even if you throw it at them. I've tried.' He looked back towards them, Timothy following his gaze.

The two creatures, suddenly dressed in bright green, were doing something between a tap-dance and a gumboot dance. Dewald addressed them. 'OK, fine.' He turned to Timothy. 'Leprechauns steal gold. These buggers steal booze.' He shook his head, shrugged. 'Don't know why, anyhow. They make pretty decent stuff themselves.'

Timothy was still biting air. 'They... what the ... What?!'

'Parvusculi.'

The look he got made it clear that the answer was hopelessly insufficient. Dewald knew it, of course. 'We... them and us, usually just call them shorties. But officially, they're Homo Parvusculus. Known singly as parvusculus, plural parvusculi. At least

that's what they said. And you never know, lying little buggers. I think it's a joke they're playing on me.' 'And Leprechauns then?'

'Same thing. Don't worry. They're not magical creatures, as such. I think they're a subspecies of human, like the Neanderthals used to-' 'Oi!' said of the Parvusculi.

'Sorry. We're the subspecies. According to them. That's why they all have epsilon brain waves and only very few of us do.' 'But... why don't anybody know about them?'

'No, everybody does. Gnomes, Leprechauns, fairies, tokeloshes. All Parvusculi. The differences between them is just a bit of genetics and a lot of myth. And they created most of the myths themselves to stay hidden. Secretive little buggers. They only show themselves to wizards and crazy people. Oh, and there's only a few million all over the world.'

Timothy sighed. 'How do I make a graviton chair? I really need to sit down. My head's starting to spin.'

'Anti-graviton. Don't want to fall even harder, do you?' Timothy looked too tired to protest.

Dewald smiled again. 'Listen, let's just go sit with those guys. They're the ones that sent me to fetch you. Got to be important if they're here so soon.'

Timothy followed him cautiously, sat down so that so that he could see all of them.

Dewald introduced the two – which would reach about half-way up his thigh – as Siku and Penya. They look friendly enough, albeit mischievous. Penya even offered his hip flask to Timothy, who carefully took a small drop of what turned out to be eyewateringly strong mampoer. 'So, what's up guys?' said Dewald.

Siku lit his pipe again, spoke with smoke coming out of his nose. 'Came to help you train this guy. We think he has the potential.'

Timothy felt uneasy, talking to what appeared to be a living garden gnome with a slight Zimbabwean accent. 'Potential? For what?' 'Dark magic. You could be a dark wizard. One of the best.'

They all looked at him sternly for a few seconds, then burst out laughing. Dewald put him at ease again. 'You should see your face right now. "Oh, but I thought we're the good guys!" he slapped him on the back, shook his head with laughter. 'Don't worry. Everybody falls for that one.'

'But... you mean... dark, as in...'

Dewald, wiping a tear from the corner of his eye, tried to hide his smile. 'No. Not dark as in the bad guys. Dark as in dark matter. Dark energy.' Timothy's look of relief was short lived, as it changed over to confusion.

'If you're smart... which I know you are, you should be wondering why I don't live in luxury on some tropical island. I mean I can just change the... the bird droppings, for that matter, into diamonds.' Timothy nodded. The thought did cross his mind.

Yesterday. When he thought things still made a bit of sense.

'The thing is... there's got to be balance. You can't just... it's like the universe is made up with a set amount of everything and if you go and bugger too much with it...', he shook his head slowly. 'Not a good idea.'

'So that's why you changed it back yesterday?'

Dewald nodded. 'One of the reasons yes. Also, you don't want to get caught with a lump of gold in your pocket, believe me.'

He absentmindedly took a small swig out of the flask handed to him, looked sharply at Penya. 'Hey! This is mine! I knew I had more bottles.' Both of them just grinned sheepishly at Dewald, who continued his explanation unabated. 'Dark matter is like the stem cells of the universe. It's blank. It can become anything. Without upsetting the balance.'

'So why not always use it?'

'It's spread out over the whole of the universe. Gathering it is difficult. And – by the way – goes against everything science teaches us about going faster than the speed of light. But that's another problem. The main problem is backlash.'

'Backlash?'

‘Yeah, see, you’re pulling it in from... well, depending on what you want to do, it could be a few light years around. If you lose your grip on it... well suffice it to say you’ll end up spread out rather thinly. Across the milky-’

Siku interrupted him. ‘Listen. We can explain later. Took you a few weeks to understand everything. Only we don’t have a few weeks. We’ll have to start now. And right now is perfect. I see he’s nice and sleepy from what was probably a very nice meal?’ The last part sounded almost pleading.

Dewald smirked. ‘Yes, you can have some leftovers. But please, this time, just go when Anna is asleep. I don’t want her fainting again. But why the rush?’

Penya took a deep breath, faced Timothy, suddenly looking stern, the mischievousness all gone. ‘Timothy. We just joked with you about dark magic and dark wizards. You get that?’ Timothy nodded slowly. ‘Well... turns out some wizards do go bad. Mad, more than bad, usually. Their brains can’t take the strain of tuning all those strings and then...’, he looked at Dewald. ‘Jonathan’s gone rogue. We need to stop him.’ He looked at Timothy again. ‘We’ll have to train you fast. We’ll bypass your eyes and ears and just work straight with your brain. Basically a type of telepathy. Siku here is a master of that technique.’ Timothy didn’t even realise Penya’s lips weren’t moving during the last sentence.

‘But why me? I don’t see why it involves me.’

‘Jonathan has already gone looking for you. At your house. About an hour ago.’

‘But... who is he. And why’s he after me?’ ‘Apparently he’s your half-brother.’

ΦΦΦ

He kept replaying it in his mind. But I don’t have a brother. Half-brother. Yes, but it’s only ever been me and my mother after my father left... The realisation dawned slowly. They explained, but no explanation was needed. His mother always told him his father was unfaithful, unreliable. A typical appy on the mine, she said. He only once dared ask her why she hooked up with him in the first place then.

But that was two weeks ago. Since then he has undergone intense training under the guidance of the two shorties. He gave his 24 hour notice to the mine. Not like there's any turning back anymore. He didn't even go there, just phoned his line manager. He expected at least a proper swearing session, but it almost sounded like they were glad he's leaving. Though not half as glad as he was that he won't have to see the mine ever again.

Training was hard, but fulfilling. For the first time in his life, it felt as if his brain was working. On that first afternoon, he held Siku's tiny little hands as he guided him into a near comatose state. And then... it was as if his mind suddenly expanded, like a crumpled up balloon being filled with air for the first time. Except it wasn't air, it was knowledge. Vast amounts of knowledge about subjects he had hitherto not even been aware of.

He awoke in bed two days later. Siku was there, handing him a glass of orange juice. He explained the long sleep. Apparently his brain needed to sort through the data, to categorize it and form the necessary neural connections. Each person's brain is wired differently, making it impossible for Siku to place the information in exactly the correct place. Most of the remaining time of the last two weeks was spent with exercises, designed to help his brain categorise.

But that was then. This is now. He forced himself to focus on the discussion. They were sitting under the tree again. Apparently that's their caucus area.

'Maybe we should try to lure him in.'

'Nachos.' They all looked at Timothy, with looks suggesting that they were wondering if his brain is still somewhat loosely wired.

He smiled, looking slightly unhinged. 'No, I'm just saying, he's my half-brother. Maybe he also likes nachos.' They continued staring for a while, until he burst out laughing. 'Come on guys! Where's your sense of humour? You lot have been harassing me for the last two weeks. It's high time I got back at you.' Relief flowed over into laughter.

‘But listen, seriously... I don’t know him, but... I don’t think I can...’ his voice trailed off, too afraid to mention the words.

Penya stared at him for a while, realised the problem. ‘Don’t worry. I’d say there’s a ninety-nine percent chance we can bring him in peacefully. We definitely don’t want to kill him, just try and fix his brain.’

‘But... why the combat training...?’ A lot of the training was focused on fighting. Both hand-to-hand and magical.

‘We don’t quite know what state he’s in. Or if he’ll be alone.’

‘So what happened to him? I mean, why did he go... crazy? If that’s the correct word.’

‘No idea. That’s why we need to bring him in. If we wanted to, we could have just... disabled him.’ ‘You mean kill him?’

‘No. Disable his epsilon waves. But it may cause permanent brain damage. He may end up...’, he sighed dramatically, ‘...it’s hard to think about, but if we’re not careful, he may end up becoming... an accountant.’ They all made different sounds of faux disgust. Dewald brought them back to the issue at hand.

‘So how do we lure him?’

Siku blew out a smoke ring, indicated with his head in Timothy’s direction, who responded.

‘What. Use me as bait?’

He shook his head slowly. ‘No. There’s two more things I need to teach you.’

‘That being?’

‘Dreams... and how to stun him. Safely. And that’s why you’re the best for this job. Being related to him, your brainwaves will be the closest match possible – except if you were twins, of course.’ He puffed slowly, blew another smoke ring. Nobody interrupted him. In the leaderless ranks of the parvusculi, he seemed to be some kind of unofficial leader.

‘You know the dream Dewald planted in your head was a bit... fuzzy?’ Timothy nodded. ‘Of course, he’s just sloppy... stingy bugger not giving us more mampoer...’,

he had a twinkle in his eye, ‘...but mostly it’s because – in terms of brainwaves – you’re not a great match.’

‘So... what? Do I tell him in his dream where he can find some raunchy girls and then just pull a stun-gun on him? Or one of Dewald’s cow prodders?’

Siku smiled. ‘We could try that, yes. But to start with, you just need to find him.’ He held out his hands towards Timothy. ‘Time for your final lesson... for now. And it’s going to be a bit of a rough one.’

ΦΦΦ

And that was three days ago. Now they – him, Dewald and Penny – are waiting in the garden of quite a luxurious mansion in Sandton. Apparently Jonathan – having gone rogue – decided to invest in a gold mine. Wizard style.

Dewald came along, because apparently he’s really good at shielding their brainwaves so Jonathan won’t pick them up before he’s really close. Timothy’s job is to stun him, part of the final lesson.

It’s because of the stun training that they had to wait three days. The lesson was a rough one, but he was fine after an hour, so they decided to test his ability. He successfully stunned Siku and Dewald, but was slightly out of synch with Penny, from whom the stun rebounded – somewhat amplified – knocking him out cold. At least now he knows how to aim for a knockout.

Penny’s part in the mission was not explained to him or Dewald, who mentioned that it’s a bit unusual for a shorty to join a mission in such a heavily populated region.

Penny moved, restlessly.

‘Sit still. It’s more difficult to mask a moving signal.’ Dewald, whispering urgently. ‘Easy for you to say. There’s an ant here trying to figure out if it’s a normal, peaceful, hardworking ant, or if it wants to be a balbyter.’

Timothy stifled a laugh. Dewald was about to complain, when the gates opened and a 7-series BMW pulled in. They could hear him stopping in front of the garage, get out and walk along the footpath to the front door, where they were hidden behind the

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bushes. So far so good. There were numerous discussions about what they should do if he veers off his normal routine. If, for instance, he wasn't alone. Or went through the garage, instead of along the footpath. Mostly their fall-back plan involved calling off the mission.

They still couldn't see him, but could hear him drawing closer. He suddenly stopped, right next to their bush. Dewald, sweat beading on his forehead from keeping up the shield, indicated to Timothy.

It suddenly felt as if his heart rammed into his throat. What if it doesn't work? What if he has a dog? He overcame the fear, stepped out, grabbed the half-brother he's never met before by the shoulders and sent out the mental shockwave. He crumpled in his hands. Dewald, released from the burden of keeping up the shield, came to his aid, caught Jonathan before he hit the ground. Penny also came forward, grabbed a hold of Jonathan's one hand.

It suddenly felt as if the whole universe, the four of them included, got pulled through a very narrow, very dark tunnel. The darkness lifted slowly, revealing the smiling face of Siku looking down at Timothy. He tried to speak.

'wha happnnn...?'

'Don't worry. You're back on the farm.'

Timothy blinked his eyes slowly, waiting for his brain to catch up to his body. Dewald was a bit quicker, albeit just as confused.

'Huh?'

'Teleportation.'

'Can't happen... not possible... did the math... too much data...'

'Fine. Call it a wormhole then. Same result.'

'But... how...' he sighed, too exhausted to finish the question.

Penny explained. 'Easy. You just bend space in the fifth dimension, bringing the points you want to connect close together...', he indicated with his hands coming together, '...then just knock a temporary three dimensional hole through it.' His tiny fist punched

forward. 'Of course it's rather small and it closes quickly. Which is why it feels like you've been sucked through a straw... which you have, in a way. But the first time is the worst. It gets better.'

'Why didn't... you never told me...' he finished with a sigh again, but Penya understood the question clearly, answered it straightforwardly.

'You never asked.'

He tried one last avenue of questioning. 'But why drive there in the first place? And what about the car?'

'You needed to be fresh for the mission. And hopefully somebody steals it. Then I'll just go teleport it here.' Dewald flashed him a look of utter confusion. 'Well, it's not as if a chop shop can report some small bugger grabbing a car and magically disappearing with it. That's exactly the kind of thing we do to keep the myth alive. If we're lucky, it may even get reported in the Sun.' 'Timothy.' Siku called him.

He sat up slowly, blinked a few more times, saw Siku kneeling by Jonathan, his hands on his temples. For the first time, he got a good look at his face. The family resemblance is unmistakable, but not to the point of being uncanny. Siku, a look of concern on his face, looked at Timothy.

'It's... bad... not quite what I expected.'

Timothy's heart sank. 'Sorry, was it me? Was the knockout too strong? Did I-'

Siku shook his head. 'No, the knockout was perfect. The problem lies... deeper. On a lower level... he didn't get this way himself.' He smiled. 'But that's a good thing. If this was magic gone wrong, it may have been permanent. This is magic... used wrong. There's a sort of... blockade in his brain.'

His brow furrowed as he closed his eyes. 'OK, everybody shush now, I'm going to fix it and then wake him up so we can hear what happened.' They all sat motionless, staring at Siku, who started sweating with the effort. Timothy thought he saw wisps of steam rising from his hands, still firmly in contact with Jonathan's head.

Siku gave a sigh, opened his eyes, and took a deep breath. 'OK, he'll be fine. He'll wake up in a minute or so. But we'll have to get Sias in to come and have a look.

He's the only one with that kind of experience.

'Dewald, using his speak-slowly-to-the-forgetful voice, pointed out the obvious.

'Uhm... are you talking about the Sias buried over there?' He indicated with his head to the grave a few meters away.

'Yeah, except he ain't dead.'

'But you helped me burry him.' Confusion was creeping into his voice.

'Which is true. He said it was rather moving little ceremony.' He had a sparkle in his eyes. Dewald, seemed to have a thunderstorm in his.

'What!?'

Siku smiled as he explained. 'He's a parvusculus. But brilliant at deception... making you see what isn't really there. He came here to teach you, but he thought it best if you saw him as an old guy, rather than a shorty. Mind you, he is old, just not human.'

'But... the flu. He was sick... was that all just a trick? Why not just tell me?'

'Yes, he was sick. And he needed treatment. So he couldn't stay here. He was becoming too sick to continue keeping up the illusion.'

'Fair enough, but he could still have just said, Sorry, I tricked you. Here's my real form. I mean, I knew the two of you by then.'

Jonathan started groaning, slowly opening his eyes. Siku looked at him, back at Dewald. 'Look, ask him when he gets here. He's the mind expert. He said you needed to believe the illusion a little while longer for the knowledge to set.' With the explanation given, he turned his attention to Jonathan. As did all of them.

Jonathan blinked, clearly not focusing correctly. The smiling face of a parvusculus looking down at you has a tendency to hasten anybody's awakening. If he's smiling, he may be planning to play a trick on you. Or steal your booze. Jonathan took a deep breath, sat up slowly.

'Siku. Thanks.'

Siku nodded acceptance. 'Do you know what happened?'

He shook his head. 'No. But I think it was a Fiver. It came at me.'

Siku and Penya looked concerned. Dewald voiced his and Timothy's confusion. 'A what?'

Jonathan turned to him. 'Hey Dewald.' He turned to Timothy. 'And you must be Timothy... I think... only heard of you a few weeks ago. Sorry we meet like this.' He offered Timothy a clammy hand. He shook it, not knowing how to reply.

Penya broke the awkward silence. 'A Fiver is a... being, if you want to call it that, from the fifth dimension.' He turned to Dewald. 'And that's why I haven't told you about knocking holes through the fifth dimension. If you're not careful those buggers tend to jump through.' This last part sounded like an admonition aimed at Jonathan, who responded.

'Yeah, except it wasn't me. If you teleport, you go straight through. That thing jumped at me through a one-way hole.'

Penya sighed, rubbed his forehead. 'Not again.'

Siku answered their generally confused stares. 'It's happened before. People start messing with the Fivers.' 'Why?' Dewald asked.

'If you can control them, it can give you immense power.'

Penya snorted. 'Except you can't. Not for long, anyhow. The power comes from harvesting the fifth dimension. You're containing a Fiver in four dimensions. There's all that power from the fifth dimension and nowhere to use it. But they usually learn to break free after a while.'

Dewald sighed, trying to make sense of it all. 'So... if it breaks free, why doesn't it just... go back? Or can't it.'

'We don't know if it can, actually. They've never done it. They always stay here. It relishes the power it has here. In its own dimension, it has no more power than we have in ours. In here...' Siku left the words unsaid, but they were pretty clear to all. It needs to be stopped.

Jonathan, looking as if he still felt a bit guilty – even though he just proclaimed innocence – asked the question on everybody’s lips. ‘So how... what do you do about them?’

‘Find them, stun them, open another hole and kick them back. Just be careful another one doesn’t come through when you do the kicking.’

Dewald, the scientist, saw a loophole in the argument. ‘So what’s to stop it from just coming back? You know... making its own hole.’

Siku shrugged. ‘It can’t. Don’t really know why. Some inverse logic... maybe you can figure it out some time... but a higher dimension can’t open up a lower one. Only the other way round. Probably if it could work the other way round, all dimensions would eventually merge and collapse and we’d end up a singularity. Again.’ He smiled at Dewald. ‘Tell you what. Do your next PhD thesis on it.’ Dewald responded with a sarcastic smile.

Penya cleared his throat. ‘Well, it seems the three of you are in luck.’ ‘Luck?’

Timothy said it, but their faces all showed it.

‘For some reason, humans are better than shorties at handling Fivers. Probably blissful ignorance of the true dangers...’, he had a mischievous smile, saying those ominous words, ‘...anyhow, so we’re going to have to get Sias here quick-quick. And he’s going to have to teach you some proper magic.’

‘And then?’ Timothy felt he needed some clarity. He thought he knew the answer, but he didn’t like it.

Penya smiled. ‘And then you go monster hunting.’ Timothy sighed. ‘Thought as much.’

ΦΦΦ

And that was three months ago. They were taught whole different fields of magic, their minds expanding exponentially. It became apparent that previously they were only

shown the tip of the iceberg. The training was intense. Six days a week, twelve hours a day.

And then the time was there to find the Fiver. Jonathan, already having had contact with it, searched for it. The look of concentration on his mind was almost enough to give the others a headache. A faint smile appeared.

'I think I've got him.' With his eyes still closed, he pointed with his right hand. 'But... it's like he's very far away... the signal's seriously weak. Like he's...', he opened his eyes, looked at where he was pointing. '...on the moon?' A half-moon was just visible above the mid-day horizon.

'Could be.' Penya sounded a lot more certain than they looked. 'Remember, it doesn't need air. It only looks three dimensional, it doesn't need to breathe or eat. Oh, and by the way, it can look like anything. Usually they choose something scary like a ghoul or a banshee. If it has time, it tries to find out what's scary to you specifically and then look like that.'

Jonathan considered it for a moment. 'Fine, but how do we get it then? We can't ask NASA for a spare Apollo suit, can we?'

'No. You don't have to go there. You can bring it here and then kick it from here.'

'OK... firstly, you keep saying kick...?'

'Yes. Kick it like a ball. If it's too big, force it to change its shape so you can kick it.'

'Yeah, but... why?'

'Your foot is the furthest point from your head. You don't want to give it a chance to reach your brain. You can use an energy blast, but by the time you've constrained it, believe me, you'll feel like kicking it.'

'Fine... secondly then, how do we bring it here.'

'Open a hole through 5D, like normal, but have the bit on his side enclosed around him. Think of a bicycle air horn. Open on one side, closed on the other. Then just squeeze the closed side so he'll come shooting out this side.'

Dewald thought he saw a quick way out. ‘Why not just open the hole on that side and push him through?’

‘Never open a hole that far away. You need to see if something wants to come through so you can stop it.’

That seemed to settle it, so they took a few final breaths to focus their minds and proceeded in opening the hole to get the Fiver to them. Everything went to plan. The Fiver looked like some kind of gremlin. While Jonathan mentally restrained it, Siku tried to question it, but questioning a Fiver turned out akin to reasoning with a tornado. So they just kicked it back. Dewald opened the new hole, Timothy was on the lookout for Fivers wanting to come out and Jonathan kicked it. Hard.

As a last ditch effort to stop them, the Fiver chose a cute and cuddly form, turning into a squirrel. For a moment, it looked both genuinely scared and very relieved, as if wanting to go back. Luckily this happened in a secluded spot, so nobody could get upset with the apparent animal cruelty, although – had there been any other people – they would probably have been distracted by the huge gaping hole into nothingness.

The group was about to start celebrating when a new hole opened and two unknown parvusculi appeared. Apparently they were known to the other two, who greeted them with – for them – an unknown reverence. They didn’t have time to introduce the newcomers before one – a female, the first any of them have ever seen – started talking.

She smiled at them. ‘Good work guys. Sorry we missed it.’

They didn’t respond, taken aback both by their sudden appearance and by what should have been rather obvious – the existence of female parvusculi.

‘My name is Lianlu, this is Wookiee.’ Her companion, rather hairy and was slightly taller than the rest of the shorties, nodded at them. Knowing parvusculi, it’s obviously a nickname, but nobody had time to ask, as Lianlu continued. ‘We know all your names, so we can get to formal introductions later on. Right now, we need to know if you will help us.’

‘Help with...?’ Dewald asked.

‘Let me guess. You had very little resistance from the Fiver?’ They nodded in unison. ‘It seems somebody’s been bringing in Fivers against their will. Usually they like it here, but... something is different this time. They’re afraid. That’s why they’re happy to go back.’

‘Why would they be afraid?’ Siku sounded as confused as they all felt. This is not how a Fiver was explained to them, although it does explain their easy success.

‘They’re scared of Sixers. And it seems at least one Sixer came through.’

The words brought gasps from the shorties and confused stares from the humans.

Dewald, ever the scientist, asked the obvious question. ‘What’s special about a Sixer.’

Lianlu smiled at him. ‘Apart from the additional power? You’re a scientist. See if you can figure out what you would achieve by knocking a hole through the sixth dimension.’

His brow furrowed. He moved his hands a bit, shook his head. ‘Wait... if you move through five dimensions, you can get out anywhere in three dimensions.’ He looked at her, who nodded eagerly at him. ‘So... moving through six... you can get out anywhere in four dimensions?’

She beamed at him. ‘Exactly.’ Her smile faded immediately. ‘Time travel. It could be serious. There could be some major upsets in the balance if somebody doesn’t stop... well, that’s why we’re here. We need to find who’s been doing it and stop him.

Or her. Or it.’ She shrugged. ‘Keep an open mind.’

Timothy, ever the careful one, needed clarification. ‘So what exactly do you want from us?’

Wookiee, in a calm, surprisingly deep voice, talked for the first time. ‘A permanent team needs to be formed to find all the Fivers. And the Sixers, if there are more of them. We need humans for that. We will form a parvusculus team to find out what’s causing all of this. You will get more training. Lots more. From us. And the other trainers. The real masters. You’ll be the first humans in centuries to get such training.’

He let the words sink in. Questions flooded their minds. More training? Real masters?
The first in centuries?
'So are you in?'
Of course they were in. It's not like there was any turning back now.

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Books Received

Book Promotions/Jonathan Ball

Kazuo Ishiguro. The Buried Giant Faber and Faber R275.00
John Connolly A Song of Shadows. Hodder UK. R300.00
Brandon Sanderson. Worlds of Radiance Part One. Orion UK R195.00
Brandon Sanderson Worlds of Radiance Part Two. Orion UK R195.00
Justina Robson. Glorious Angels. Orion UK. R370.00
Karen Maitland. The Ravens Head. Headline UK. R280.00

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### Chat with John Connolly

Ian Jamieson

Author of the Charlie Parker thriller series of novels and two young adult science fiction novels, "Conquest" and "Empire" (both written with his partner Jennie Ridyard) John Connolly is an Irishman who commutes between Ireland and Maine in the USA. Being an author is a pretty lonely business, stuck behind a keyboard all day, and most seem to be pretty reclusive. John is the exact opposite.

My wife, Gail and I, first met him in January 2014 when he was doing a promotional tour her in SA after the publication of his first SF novel "Conquest". Together with his

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SA born partner, Jennie Ridyard, we spent an enjoyable couple of hours chatting. John enjoys promotional work, and he particularly enjoys visiting schools and encouraging children to read, often using visual aid to assist him.

John has a target of reading 100 books a year, and last year he almost made it, but far more important is setting realistic deadlines for writing a novel, and sticking to it. The promotional work occasionally gets in the way and has to be worked into his deadline schedules.



I have just finished reading the latest Charlie Parker novel, “A Song of Shadows”, and am happy to report that it is extremely well written and entertaining. I can now understand why he is such a popular author. The Parker novels are set in and around Maine, USA, where he and Jennie now own a house. What did surprise me was the supernatural element in the novel. This was my first dip into the world of Charlie Parker, but not my last and John explained that they all contain some element of the Supernatural, some a great deal more than others.

John obviously enjoys talking to people, and I enjoyed talking to him, short through the time was because of his tight schedule.

A special thank you to Andrea Marchesi of Jonathan Ball for fitting myself into his busy itinerary.

Ian

Information streamed silently from John as he rode along the track. His speed, direction, heart rate and a clutch of other facts flowed in a river of bits and bytes to some unseen destination where it was silently stored and processed. Vast banks of computing power received the information, manipulated and calculated, and shelved it away for future use. John just kept on riding. Feeling rather pleased with himself at beating his personal best, John stopped by at the sport centres in house cafeteria and rewarded himself with a milkshake. After all, he thought, he had enough leeway in his health makeup to afford it. His annual check with the doctor last week had confirmed that - sugar levels, blood pressure and heart rate were all staggeringly normal. Thanks to his medical history contained somewhere in the endless data cloud, he knew that this had been true for several years. He couldn't help feeling a little smug as he saw other enthusiastic trainers at the centre fretting over a few calories this way or that. "Day's about to start", John thought to himself and hustled his way to his driverless car parked outside. While it silently escorted him to the fourteen story office building where he worked, John browsed around on his tablet that he seemed to carry everywhere. It was fun to surf quickly through the latest news; he didn't even mind the targeted advertisements that were delivered to him as part of the experience. After all, it was uncanny the way that they seemed to know exactly what he'd be interested in and he had taken advantage of that on more than one occasion. Even better, he was more efficient because of it. Just yesterday, he had updated his grocery list and arranged for delivery of everything directly to his home. Again, this information was all fed into the endless storehouses somewhere in the ether. Where he went, what he liked, what he chose and bought and all the things he said out loud. All the actions that defined him. John was no blind participant in this process, though. He knew that almost everything he did was being collected, collated and analysed. "Feeding the machine",

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he called it. Of course, everyone said they were doing it to “improve your experience”, to make your life “seamless and sure”, but he knew there was more to it than that. He knew.

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“Yeah, I’ve got some theories on that”, Paul had said when they met for dinner a few weeks ago. Paul was one of the software engineers at Google, the massive tech company responsible for most of the data collection and processing that was going on in the world. “I work on the targeted ads side and we got a curious request the other day. Usually we’re trying to refine our algorithms to focus on making sure the ads suit the individual, but this time top brass wanted something different. They wanted us to do some calcs to put individuals into clumps. It’s almost as though they’re trying to come up with the perfectly representative consumer - Mr Average, y’know?” “Okay, I’ll bite”. John was curious. “Why would they try to do that?” Paul leaned forward with a happily conspiratorial look in his eyes. “It’s this idea I got from a story I read - Franchise, by Asimov. There, one guy gets chosen to be the only voter for a whole country and a computer decides what the result of the election will be after he answers a whole bunch of questions. The whole messy process of organising votes and endless campaigns and all the rest goes away, see? Much more efficient, you just need decent computing power, good data sets and the right algorithms.” “I’m not seeing how it applies now, though”, said John. “Are you saying they’re going to fiddle with the election system?” “Nah. Well, I don’t know about that, but I’m thinking something commercial. Think about it. These companies spend millions trying to figure out what people like, setting up focus groups, experimenting with this product or that one. All costs big bucks and there’s huge risk for them in launching anything new. Imagine if they could find just one guy who was absolutely representative of the whole country and they could figure out exactly what people were going to like and what they weren’t just be the way he reacted to things. It would save them a bunch, wouldn’t it?” John caught on. “Cool idea. I guess they know enough about us all now, what with all

the info that they're collecting. It actually makes sense! They'd save time too. Whoever got that right could have a real advantage. But maybe it's not even the companies that are trying to get this. Could be Google itself, right? They could sell this person's services to the highest bidder and it would still be cheaper for the companies." "Maybe, maybe. Tell you what, though. It would be a pretty sweet life for whoever that guy was. Imagine it: get all the latest things first, all the best. He'd never have to work - they'd actually be paying him to use all the latest and greatest." Paul sat back. "It's just a guess, but the more I think about it, the more I think this is where it's going." And from that moment on, John just knew. He was going to be that guy.

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"You sure like your gadgets", said Sloane as he watched John arrange all his devices on the desk. "Can't say I do." Sloane was a big man, dynamic and energetic, with a keen eye for opportunity. He had, however, a profound mistrust of the technology that John embraced. He was, John had often thought, a little paranoid. "Come on, Sloane, you worry too much. You worry about everything. You worried that our boardroom was bugged. You worried about us getting hit by a meteor after you saw that disaster movie. You even panicked about that West African virus issue last year. And it never got here, was never a threat. The guys at the top kept it under control." "We dodged a bullet there with that virus, John, I'm telling you. No cure, no vaccines, nothing. They were lucky. Anyway, I reckon this technology thing is different. The guys at the top aren't facing a threat, they are the threat! They want to peek into every corner of your life and know everything about you. You're telling them everything you think! I don't know what they want to do with all of that, but I don't trust them." "Threat to what?" John looked round his small and rather featureless office. "My privacy? I don't know what you think I've got to hide. It's not as though my life really stands out at all and I'm hardly a threat to them. I'm Mr Average. No, I'm gaining more than I'm losing here."

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Besides, he thought, I have a feeling that I'm going to benefit even more than you can imagine, Sloane.

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Wednesday. Always the longest day of the week. John dragged himself out of bed and put on his watch. Heart rate was good. Exercise targets for the day flashed across the tiny screen and prompted him to get dressed and off to the sports centre for his busy start. By this stage, he didn't even need to tell his car where to go or what he'd want to be doing on the way. Automation was a beautiful thing. Finishing his breakfast at the cafeteria, John thought he saw someone watching him from another table. Silly, he thought. I'll be getting as paranoid as Sloane soon. Although...perhaps this was the start of it? Was he being marked? Maybe a little real world observation taking place to confirm that he was really the ideal consumer? He felt a slight thrill run through him and decided to keep an eye out for any potential observers. John climbed into his car, confident that it would know from his online diary just where he needed to be and when, and was soon absorbed in the tailored news feed on his tablet. It was some time before he noticed out the corner of his eye that the buildings around him had an unfamiliar look to them. He put down his tablet. Where was he? This wasn't the route that he thought he'd be taking. Perhaps the car had rerouted to avoid traffic. He waited a few more minutes before checking his actual position on his watch. Strange - it wasn't reporting any location at all. Neither was his phone or his tablet. And this was definitely a completely different part of town. John was tempted to hit the override switch on the car, but without any way to navigate back, he hesitated. Outside, everything was becoming decidedly seedier and he didn't really want to interact with the people he saw outside. He was sure he could trust the technology in the car and decided to just ride along for a few more minutes. Eventually the car slowed as it approached a rundown building on the intersection of two streets. Definitely not his

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office building. What was going on? Deaf to his nervous questions and then strident orders, the car entered through smoothly opening entrance and came to a halt on a large concrete slab. The car doors remain locked. With a slight lurch, the slab began dropping down, down and down until it came to a rest and the car moved forward a little way. Under cool fluorescent lighting, John could see dozens of other cars around him, all driverless and without any occupants either. There must have been fifty of them. After only a few minutes, John saw movement. Figures approaching from the end of the large room in which he was parked. As they neared, he could see they were in uniform. They reached the car and the doors unlocked, as if the car had been waiting for them. John got out unsteadily, suddenly short of breath, and began demanding answers. The uniformed men were as unresponsive as the car had been, though, and he had no choice but to be hustled along a long, sterile looking corridor at the end of the room. They stopped at a room close to the end of the corridor and John was unceremoniously bustled into it. Behind him, the door clicked shut. On one of the two beds set up in the room lay a man of average build with a weary, resigned expression on his face. He shifted onto his elbow and looked at John. "You've been chosen too, I see. You look about right." Chosen? Could this be it? Everything about it was wrong! "What do you mean? What's going on? Where am I? Who is doing this?" The man on the bed gave a short, flat laugh. "You'll see," he said. "Yes, you look right. They know so much about you already. You'll see that. They should - we all give them so much information about us all the time and I bet you've been the same. Congratulations, you've been selected as a perfectly representative human being, just like the rest of us." "Representative?" I was right, he thought. "So it's true? I'm going to be like the ultimate focus group? We're a shortcut for market research. Why is everything like this, then, and why won't whoever this is talk to me? If they want my opinion, this is a really bad way to get started." "Opinion? That's not what they want, my friend. We're a short cut they think is vital, but forget market research. They've got higher plans than that. They need us to be representative so they can cut down on the time, which they

don't think they have any more. What used to take years is going to take just weeks now." "What are you talking about? What are you saying?" Dread was beginning to rise through John like ice cold water. "It's the new war. And we're at the frontline. They don't want our opinions or our minds, buddy. They want our bodies. The enemies are viruses and bacteria and we are their short cut testing beds for cures and vaccines. Welcome to your life as a lab rat."

### **NOVA 2015 South Africa's only SFF Short Story Competition**

Are you one of the elite/pedantic/smug SF&F fans, who knows the difference between "A Game of Thrones" and "A Song of Ice and Fire"? Did you spot the literary omissions from the screenplay of "Lord of the Rings"? Do you enjoy reading SF&F as much, or more, than viewing it? After all, you are reading Probe now. Well, have you tried your hand at writing? Do you sometimes think you can do a better job than some of the authors that you read? Take a look at some of the stories written by our winners in this and recent issues of Probe. Download older copies of Probe from our website (for free!) if you don't have them in your possession. Can you do better? Of course you can! So, prove it! Enter our short story competition and face judgement day.

Prizes to the value of R3500 are up for grabs. AND your story could get published in this world-famous fanzine. Stories must be in the SF&F genre, between 2000 and 8000 words. There are a few other rules as well - we want original, unpublished short stories. Download all the rules, and an entry form, from our website at [www.sffsa.org.za/Nova.html](http://www.sffsa.org.za/Nova.html). email the organiser at [nova.sffsa@gmail.com](mailto:nova.sffsa@gmail.com) if anything is unclear.

And if you need more inspiration, why not purchase "The Best of South African Science Fiction, Volume Three" for only R55? Details on our website. Or email [secretary@sffsa.org.za](mailto:secretary@sffsa.org.za)

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Our library has overflowed recently, thanks to fourteen boxes of SF&F books donated by Leon le Roux of Pretoria East. It'll take some time to sift, process and catalogue them, but we would like to extend our thanks to Carla and Eileen for the backbreaking work of packing and transporting them to their new home in Edenvale. If any of our readers feels inspired to help sort and, at the same time, have sneaky preview, please contact [librarian@sffsa.org.za](mailto:librarian@sffsa.org.za).

Once again, we wish to extend our thanks to Leon. Your contribution is gratefully accepted on behalf of the club.

## Magazines Received

Via email:-

Newsletter of the Middle Tennessee SF Society (aka The Nashville SF Club)

Reece Moorhead [reecejbm@gmail.com](mailto:reecejbm@gmail.com)

Issue 149 March 2015

Issue 150 April 2015

Issue 151 May 2015

David Langford [news@ansible.co.uk](mailto:news@ansible.co.uk)

Ansible 332 March 2015

333 April 2015

334 May 2015

## **Blast from the Past. PROBE 100 August 1966** **An interview with Terry Pratchett**

**Conducted by Gail Brunette, Ian Jamieson, James Dean and Franz Tomasek  
on 30/11/1993**

SFSA: Terry, if you don't mind us asking, why are you here? Why South Africa?

TP: Why am I here? Why am I here?

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SFSA: In the distinctly narrow sense. Not in the greater cosmological set of dimensions designed by a Creator with mechanical aptitude.

TP: Oh dear, quoting me. Towards the end of last year Glenda was at a sales do in Cypress. I got talking to her and she said, "Why don't you do a signing tour of South Africa?" And I said "Yes fine, why not?" So that's it. They said "Would you like to come?" and I said "Yes". It's very simple. I'll go anywhere for a buck.

SFSA: OK. I thought authors were allergic to signing tours.

TP: I do two a year. I got on the plane on Monday. I had Sunday off; I just finished answering my mail. I finished a signing tour on Saturday. I think of it as a kind of after sales service. The writing does not stop when you have completed the book. I have always done it. How can I put this delicately? I didn't know how things were going to go in South Africa and things aren't going to be the same as they are in the U.K. Authors are allergic to signing tours when 6 people turn up.

SFSA: Right

TP: When 300 people turn up, you feel quite happy about it. After a week of it you're losing contact with reality

(Judging by the queues to see Terry this afternoon, he must have been quite happy, if a little tired, after signing several hundred books!)

When I started the tours six people did turn up. I kept on touring, you see. "Quotes Monty Python." ...I did another tour; 5 people turned up; I did *another* tour; 1 turned up, fell in the swamp, and I still signed his Book.

SFSA: That's an interesting quote. Would you cite Monty Python as one of your largest influences?

TP: Wrong question, because I am old enough to be influenced by the

same things Monty Python was influenced by. What you also have to Remember is that..... What are you doing this for?

SFSA: This is for publication in the local fanzine

TP: A lot of Monty Python is crap. They didn't know how to finish sketches. Everyone remembers the twenty-five really good ones and forgets the Really embarrassingly humiliatingly awful crap. But a lot of it was good. I think I am influenced a lot by the same things that influenced them.

SFSA: A high sense of the ridiculous?

TP: A high sense of the ridiculous inherent in the ordinary. An understanding that the perfectly normal mundane world you see around you is just a lot of ridiculous things, all stitched together, and we are very careful not to notice this so we can get on with our lives.

Someone asked me about this recently and I said, what does worry me is that occasionally I flashes of reality. You know how people are supposed to have slight moments of insanity, if you suddenly look and around and start noticing the realness of everything and you just think, what the hell's it all about.

Like the human race, which is basically just another kind of monkey, got It together enough after thousands of years, *to do a fizzy drink in a can*. You look at that and think. Well, that's kind of weird. That makes magic look very small beer by comparison.

SFSA: Just on that sense of reality, in the Discworld, every time you have Those metaphorical tears in the fabric of reality that's where our reality starts to seep in.

TP: Or something like in "Moving Pictures" I just wanted an excuse....

SFSA: to rip Hollywood?

TP: Yeah. But I could also say things that Hollywood was definitely

magic. But it did other things. For the first time ever, it was possible for a young woman with nothing more going for her than good looks to be the most famous woman in the world.. When has that ever happened before .

It turned everything upside down. There were all these things to do that no-one had ever done before. The very early days of Hollywood were superb because everyone was learning how to do it all at the same

time. It must have been great to be there then. Everyone was working it out as they went along. That sort of thing doesn't happen very often. I suppose it's happened again with computers, but in a more drawn-out kind of way.

SFSA: Not so drawn-out sometimes.

FP: Have you read Casey Kidder's book, "*The Soul of a New Machine?*" SFSA: Yes, I love it.

TP: The puzzlement of the bosses as they had to go around at midnight turfing the staff out! No, no, go home, we'll let you come back to work tomorrow. People were bringing camp beds and everything..... I'm sure you're familiar with the commitments that people make in your name?

SFSA: Yes. I'll make a deal, you don't ask me any questions about mine and I'll try not to ask you any of the standard interview questions.

TP: OK

SFSA: Speaking of standard interview questions, do you regard writing as a profession, or a calling; is it just a job now? Has it changed over the years?

TP: .....

SFSA: How did it all get started?

TP: I would like to come the big professional and say it's a job. In some

ways it's a very honest thing to say, it's a job you try and do in the best possible way that you can. But I have to say now that I don't think of it as a job. I think of it as what I do. I suppose in the same way as a policeman would say that you are always a policeman, even when you are off duty.

Being a writer is kind of what I am. Mainly because even before I was Writing full-time, I earned my living by arranging words in a certain pleasing order. It's just something I associate with my working day.

SFSA: To live is to write?

TP: Yes, well I'm trying to avoid saying that sort of thing. The writing isn't Hard, it's faking the artistic integrity that's difficult.

SFSA: Quote! Quote! Somebody screamed "Give the Booker to Terry."

TP: Oh yes, you heard about that. I distrust that sort of thing. You might not know this but in the last few months I have become a kind of favourite flavour of the month in the U.K. I mean, I've been getting good reviews for years, but now I'm getting big spreads in the *Guardian*, and the *Sunday Times* was finding nice things to say, and the *Daily Mail* was Calling me the Dickens of the twentieth century.

SFSA: Oh dear.

TP: The whole thing is the empty can is being put on the fence and everybody is going to back off and get out the airgun's. Don't say anything  
and let me carry on selling lots of books.

SFSA: Which of course makes lots of lovely money?

TP: Yeah, but here I get kind of serious. Beyond a certain point the money is just a way of keeping score. What's nice is that for most of my life I've never been poor.

SFSA: Did you ever think you'd make a living writing?

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TP: I did say to Lynne, when I was about thirty-six, that I would like to be able to make a living writing by the time I was forty. That happened. When the big money started to pour in, I had never been raised to deal can go and buy a six-pack of really big cars and a swimming pool in the shape of your nostrils or something, or you can go on doing what you've always done but a little bit more enjoyably. I haven't bought a bigger car, because I realise that I'm forty-five. They say things about men who buy big cars when they are forty-five but I'm quite convinced that my willie is long enough.

So, I like to travel. I do a lot of travelling for signing tours and, if possible, I try to get a holiday out of it as well. I pay the extra and take the family.

SFSA: Computers and the Internet?

TP: In "*Soul Music*", the one coming out next year, I have this scene in the Unseen University with what is clearly a computer, which is operated By ants running along glass tubes.

SFSA: I love it!

TP: Well, you've seen that it will only work if you've got a lot of bugs in it. I think people appreciate this because the senior wizards can't understand it. Here's a situation where the students don't want to bother to learn magic but seem to spend all their time doing this. They're worried that the students have found something they really enjoy doing. Well it's amazing how many people I know who make their living with computers. This will be less the case as time goes on.(?)

SFSA: We have had the suggestion by one of our radio presenters where He said forget about literacy, we have a 60% illiteracy level in South Africa.

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TP: Nearly as bad as America.

SFSA: Not quite.

TP: True. Functional illiteracy is very high in the States.

SFSA: Anyway, forget about literacy, go straight on to computer literacy.

TP: There's a spurious argument in there somewhere and I'm not certain I can put my finger on it. If I wrote it down I could spot it. Computer literacy is a highly specialised form of literacy.

SFSA: True

TP: I think the trouble is there is a difference between literacy and the ability to read and write with some measure of understanding, which is not exactly the same thing.

Et cetera et cetera for another 60 minutes.

## **Nova 2014**

### **Paige Unturned**

## **Finalist General Section**

### **Marinda Botha**

Thursday morning, Mark Lawrence's life changed forever, and not for the first time. He sat at his old, rough wooden desk, in front of his ancient, box-like laptop and opened a document. It was a partly written piece on the war going on in the Middle East that he had written for work, which was due the next day. Mark worked as a freelance writer at a South African news magazine called Interval. That day, like every other day, Mark set a small silver timer clock next to his laptop. He then placed his black, plastic rimmed spectacles on the bridge of his nose, sat back in his chair and took a deep breath. His chest rose and fell slowly and he concentrated hard. Then something peculiar happened. The gust of wind that blew through the window of Mark's study stopped, his brown-gold curtains stopped in mid-air in front of him. A dusty old grandfather clock he had inherited from his father also stopped ticking in that moment. A deafening silence filled the room. The kids playing outside had gone silent. The birds were no longer chirping, and the neighbour's noisy dog had also stopped barking. Mark opened his eyes and smiled, pleased with the peace and quiet he had become somewhat addicted to throughout the years. He set the timer for one hour. He knew his peace and quiet would run out in exactly 60 minutes, like it always did. Mark has

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been able to freeze time since as far back as he could remember. Although it was frightening at first (he remembered times as a child when he would talk to his mother, who would stand as still as a statue, not responding to anything he said and after a while continue a conversation he had been having with her long before), he learnt how to control it and use it to his advantage. Sometimes to skip the queue in Spar, other times to frighten somebody who gave him a hard time. He thought he was quite undeserving of a gift so rare. Mark had no intention of either “saving” or “destroying” the world. He was just Mark, Mark Lawrence of Verwoerdpark, Alberton. His mother hadn’t even given him a fancy second name to compensate for his boring existence. In fairness though, he thought, it wasn’t exactly her fault, he had decided to live a content and unobtrusive life. If anything, she tried to season his life with the Facebook drama and goings-on of family members he avoided for most of his life. His mother couldn’t understand that he couldn’t care less. Mark sat upright and carried on writing his piece on the Middle East, when he heard a strange noise outside. The noise itself wasn’t so strange, he thought. The thing that made him uneasy was the fact that it was the first time he heard a noise in frozen time that he wasn’t the cause of. Mark stood up from his wooden chair and made his way around his desk to the big window. He pushed aside the curtain and it moved stiffly in the air, out of his way. He gazed outside into the park across the road from his beige complex wall. A plump lady with a floral dress and a pink apron was carrying a box of mielies on her head, frozen in her step. A young boy of about five, with a shaved head and lit up tekkies ran after his champagne-coloured Labrador, the both of them were frozen in time too. Mark pulled his computer spectacles off of his head and scrunched up his face to try and see a figure at the far end of the park. On the concrete ground of an aging netball court that had been there since Mark was a little boy. He saw a girl of about ten, wearing a pink and black T-shirt, a pair of khaki long pants, rolled up to just under her knees and a pair of flat, black shoes. She was bouncing an orange basketball, her long brown hair was loose and she jumped to make a shot through one of the hoops. She was playing alone and seemed oblivious of what had just happened. Mark peered closer. He also saw an older woman, maybe in her early thirties behind the girl. She was long, lean and attractive. She sat on the hood of her car, looking out at the girl, but she too, was frozen like the rest of them. Mark couldn’t believe his eyes as it darted back to the girl with the basketball. She had thrown the ball into the hoop and raised her arms in the air, ‘Woohoo!’ Her voice was loud and echoed in the stillness around her. He hurried out of his study and out the front door. He rushed out of the half-open electrical complex gate. The security guard stood frozen, waving at one of Mark’s neighbours who had driven in with her dark blue VW Polo. Her eyes looked hostile under her

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massive brown sunglasses. It didn't seem likely that she would wave back. Without looking for oncoming traffic (under the circumstances, it seemed obvious), Mark resembled a grasshopper as his long and wiry body rushed over the road, past the lady with her mielies and the boy with his dog, straight to the girl and her basketball. She saw him coming and stood with the basketball under a lazy arm, holding it up with a pushed out hip. She cocked her head to the side, frowned at the tall man with his light brown hair and deep-set lines around his mouth. Mark stopped a few feet in front of her with his hands on his knees as he tried to catch his breath. Breath caught, he stood up straight. She offered him a bottle of water she had stuffed in the back pocket of her khaki pants without saying anything. He nodded in thanks and gulped a mouthful of water before handing the bottle back to her, which she went to set down on the ground next to the car. 'What's your name?' Mark asked as the girl made her way back to the netball court. She frowned at him. 'Paige,' she answered. Mark looked over at the woman who sat on the hood of her white Camry. She was an older, fair-haired version of Paige, dressed in tight black jeans and a blue buttoned-up shirt. She had a sense of familiarity about her, but Mark couldn't put his finger on it. 'Is that your mother?' 'Yes,' she said, following his gaze. 'She wasn't really watching me play. Her thoughts are somewhere else. She thinks I don't know, but we didn't drive here all the way from Cape Town for a game of basketball.' She turned to look at Mark again. He was still looking at her mother. 'What's your name?' 'Mark,' he said and turned back to face Paige. She shifted the ball to her other arm. 'So,' the boy with the light-up shoes caught her attention. 'Did you do this?' Her tone was curious, interested as she looked around to see several people frozen in time. Mark nodded. He gathered it would be quite pointless to lie to someone who could see exactly what he had done. 'Oh good.' The tone of relief in her voice confused Mark. 'What?' 'Well, when I didn't do it, I wondered what was going on.' 'Hang on?! Can you freeze time as well?' Paige nodded. 'Does your mother know?' 'No,' she uttered, looking down, 'She has bigger things to worry about.' Mark felt it wasn't his place to ask her what they were, albeit he was curious. He tried to sneak a peek at the mother's hand to see if she was single or not, he doubted it. But if married, why didn't her husband make the long trip with them? Maybe Paige's father had to work? Maybe he had other things to do? Maybe Paige's mother was, in fact, single. Something about her body language – the childlike and distracted way she sat on the hood of her car – certainly insinuated it, although he was not one to jump to conclusions. 'How- how long have you been able to freeze time?' Saying it out loud, Mark realized how ridiculous it sounded; even saying it to a ten year old. 'Since I can remember,' she said, 'You?' 'Me too.' Paige pondered this for a second, looking down at her shoes. 'Do you think it means something?' Mark shifted

his weight in his tatty black Superga's. 'Perhaps.' He wanted to elaborate that he didn't think it meant that they needed to save the world or something ridiculous. He felt that she knew that, because even though she was young, she by no means appeared stupid. 'Make of it what you will,' he said, 'it definitely makes life a lot easier.' Paige shrugged, 'and harder.' 'What do you mean?' Paige turned around to face the netball hoop then turned back to him. 'Tell you what,' she said and bounced the ball once, 'since we have – what, half an hour left to kill –, I challenge you to a game of "one on one."' She presented the ball to him in one hand and grinned. Taken aback, Mark furrowed his brows with a small, confused grin on his lined face. This, Paige thought, made him look even older. 'Well I could try, but I'm in terrible shape,' he said and took the ball from her. The warmth of the sun heated the ball, making it feel like a hot water bottle in his hands. From this he gathered that Paige and her mother must have been out there for a while. He looked down at the ball like it was the first time he'd seen one. He started bouncing it under him. He felt as if his height would count against him; like the ball would take longer to hit the ground than it should. He dismissed the thought, as basketball players were tall and he was, in fact, playing against a girl of ten. How hard could it be? He crouched a little bit and picked up the pace of his bouncing, but before he could enjoy it, Paige snatched the ball out of his grasp. She was like her own version of Speedy Gonzales, he thought. She twirled like a fairy, running right under the hoop with the ball bouncing all the way. She made the basket before Mark knew what hit him. 'Ok,' she said and laughed as she turned to face him again. Her laugh was small, like the sound you would expect when pushing the belly of a baby doll. 'Let's call that one practice.' 'Practice?' Mark snorted, 'I didn't even do anything!' 'Exactly. Now try again.' Mark laughed at his young contender. She leaned over and bounced the ball at an unhurried pace, mocking him. Mark leaned forward too, holding his knees and ignored her mocking. She picked up the pace and the game was on. Mark jumped out of his stance and pushed the ball out of her grasp, almost falling over his big, clumsy feet. Paige thought fast though, and with a well-aimed hit she smacked the ball out of his grasp. She did her little twirl again, and scored. 'Well this is going nowhere fast,' Mark exclaimed, throwing his hands up in the air. Paige giggled again. 'Come on. Just try one more time.' Mark shrugged, 'My dignity's in the toilet already, I might as well.' Paige started dribbling the ball at a decent speed and Mark surprised her with what he did next. He pretended to lunge to her left and as she moved to the right, he moved to her right instead, snatching the ball and scoring a goal. 'Ha!' He cried before he could stop himself. 'Well done,' said Paige, sarcastically, 'You've finally scored against a ten year old, and you're what? Forty?' She surprised Mark at being such a bad sport. He smirked at her. 'Thirty-five.' Paige rolled her eyes and threw back

her hair as she went to sit on the hood of the car next to her mother. Mark picked up her basketball and followed her. 'Why does it make life harder for you?' Mark enquired. Paige looked up, puzzled. 'You said before, that stopping time makes life harder for you.' 'Oh, that.' Paige sighed loud and turned her head to look at her mother. 'She's not married, you know.' Mark looked at her mother's left hand saw a gold Claddagh ring that stared back at him from her ring finger, stating otherwise. 'It's just a promise ring,' Paige said, as if she could read Mark's thoughts. 'But we both know that Uncle Jimmy's not good at keeping promises,' her voice trailed off. From someone so young, Mark thought, hearing such despair in her voice was disturbing. 'Uncle Jimmy knew we were coming here – I heard my mom crying over the phone to him – she said that we were coming here to find my real dad. I pretended that I didn't know. I always pretend to not know any of these types of things, to make it easier for her.' Mark nodded as he listened; frowning to himself. 'He swore at her and told her; "fucking go then, but don't expect me to be here when you get back",' a tear ran down her cheek, 'I always knew he was an asshole.' She wiped the tear away, cleared her throat and looked up at Mark. 'Once, when me and my mom went to visit him, we saw a car parked in his driveway. It was a red Picanto, you know, a woman's car. I froze time and ran into the house and saw something I'd never want my mom to see. Uncle Jimmy was "busy",' she made quotation marks in the air with her fingers, 'with another woman. It was sick. I grabbed a juice out of his fridge and went back to the car. Anyway, when time started back up, I used the juice to pretend I'd thrown up out of the car window and told my mom I needed to go to hospital.' Mark felt sick just listening to the story. He could only imagine the revulsion Paige must've felt walking into a scene like that. 'I've never liked him since I met him, three years ago, but since that day, I had reason to hate him, you know?' She put a hand on her mother's leg. 'I'll protect her from anything. I suppose this gift is to protect her. I mean, don't get me wrong, she's a tough cookie,' Paige laughed as if remembering something her mother did that earned her the "tough cookie" status. 'I just can't see her hurting anymore.' Mark looked at the woman next to Paige and suddenly his heart skipped a beat. 'What's your mother's name?' He asked. 'Belinda,' she replied and watched as the colour drained from his face. 'Why?' Something dawned on him that he had never considered before. He remembered Belinda in her youth with her golden brown hair, plaited in two, reaching the small of her slender back. He remembered her round, pink sunglasses and the long, white hippie dress she had worn to the Oppikoppi Festival of '03. She and three of her friends – none as beautiful as her – made their way past the crowd. They asked if they could move in front of some of them, using their height disadvantage as their excuse. Most were male, so of course, they moved for the girls.

When Belinda found herself faced with a snobby girl that refused to move, she turned to look at Mark. He remembered wondering how bad he looked and smelled, being so close to the hippie goddess. She smiled at him and he felt himself melt under her gaze. Then she ran her dainty fingers through his shoulderlength black hair and kissed him. It took him a minute to catch his breath. 'Please can I sit on your shoulders? I can't see anything.' He lifted her onto his shoulders and one thing led to another. Next thing Mark knew, the golden haired beauty had made off with his backpack (filled with booze) and his heart, never to be heard from again. Until now. As he was contemplating this, he heard a sigh. He looked up and noticed Belinda had stood up. Time had resumed as normal again. 'I told you I'd find him,' Paige said and smiled from her mother to Mark. His jaw dropped. 'It's good to see you again, Mark.' After the shock had worn off, Mark thought it was only polite to invite the ladies back to his house for tea. 'Coffee for me please,' Belinda said as she sat with long, crossed legs on his leather couch. She told Paige to go play outside with her basketball, and she obeyed. 'I'm sorry,' Belinda said as she watched him boil the kettle and place cups on his granite-topped kitchen nook in the open-plan kitchen. He looked up at her. 'Firstly,' she said, 'for stealing your backpack. I'm sort of grateful I did though, otherwise I would never have found out who you were. Your university...' '...student card was in there, I know.' Mark sounded annoyed. 'Yes.' She shifted uncomfortably on the couch, 'secondly, for not telling you about Paige. I didn't quite know how to tell you. We didn't know each other.' He snorted. 'Lastly,' she said, 'for springing it on you now.' Mark finished making the coffee and handed Belinda's cup to her as he sat on the wooden coffee table in front of her. She took the coffee in both hands and sipped, looking up at him from under her eyelashes, he was glaring at her. Belinda was just as beautiful as she was eleven years ago, he thought, if not more so now. 'Why bother "springing" it on me now? I gather you had no intention of doing it before.' 'No,' she said, 'but Paige wanted to meet you.' Mark's expression stayed impassive. 'She likes you, you know. She wouldn't have left me alone with you if she didn't. She's very protective.' Belinda set her coffee cup down. 'I'm dying.' 'What?' Mark's expression finally changed. 'I don't have any family and Paige needs someone to look after her when I'm no longer here.' Mark jumped up. 'You look fine to me!' 'I have pancreatic cancer,' she said, taking the cup in her hands again to sip the coffee. 'I only have a year left to live.' He stared at her. Her face now seemed gaunt to him and he noticed dark rings around her eyes, realising that it had not been from aging, but from a hard life lived with cancer. He wondered how long she had known about her disease. 'Shit,' he said and sat back down. He placed a hand on her knee. 'I'm so sorry.' 'Don't be,' she shrugged. 'Just promise me you'll look after our daughter.' He hesitated, but looking

at the hopelessness in Belinda's eyes, what choice did he have? He closed his eyes and nodded once. 'Thank you,' he heard her say in a soft voice. He opened his eyes to tell her that he promised to think about it, but she was gone. He jumped up and called her name as he looked around for her, she was nowhere to be seen. 'She left,' Paige said, standing at the front door, 'but I'm ready for a second round of "one on one", Dad.'

## Book Reviews

## The Jamiesons



**The Mammoth Book of Best New SF 27. 2014. Editor Gardener Dozois. Jonathan Ball R270.00**

32 stories, of which 29 are short stories, and two novellas, and with 30 different authors, some of whom I have known for years and some, to me brand new.

From the future to the far, far future, to the furthest future these authors, these tellers of tales, weave a kind of magic that won't let go.

William Shakespeare in an alternate history following a different path. A tale of the dead (zombies?) like no other, an

alternate far future and a conflict between Chinese and Mayan civilizations, a battered old boxer who, much to his own chagrin, starts to develop strange superpowers, a short sharp shocker about a future plague and a lesson to be learned.

These and many more are some of the best SF to be published in 2013.

Did I enjoy them all? Of course not. A pity in a way that the one I disliked the most was a novella. Having said that every single story is exceptionally well written, some with very odd twists and turns.

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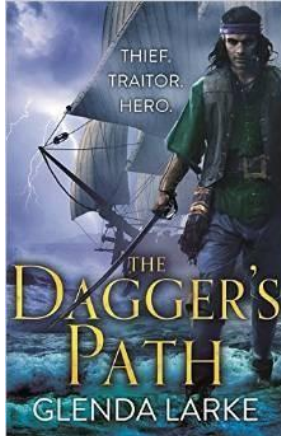
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This is my very first ever:

5/5



Ian.

**The Dagger's Path Glen Larke Jonathan Ball R185.00**

A magical plume of a magical bird, and now some plumes have been stolen, taken from their island home.

The islander Ardhi had allowed the plumes to be stolen, and now he must recover them, but before he starts out he must have a new knife. Using one of the magical plumes the blademaster Damardi must fashion a Kris, a

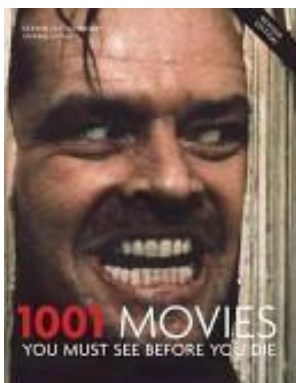
a knife that will guide young Ardhi on his journey.

There are others involved who will come together for various reasons; Geralda on her journey of discovery and the boy Peregrine, whose father had been brutally murdered and eaten.

The author writes well and although there is nothing particularly new in her novel, it is entertaining and enjoyable. It is a pity that the story simply stops with no ending in sight. Obviously a third book is on its way.

3/5

Ian



## 1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die. 2014

General Editor Steven Jay Schneider. Updated by Ian Haydn Smith. Jonathan Ball R350.00

With 923 pages and 1001 movies this is a remarkable book. I won't go into the method of selection, suffice it to say there was major disagreement among the more than 75 contributors.

Starting in the early 1900's up to 2014, there is a wide variety in both language and country of origin, but I find it strange that in the later years there is always at least one movie from that particular year. For some reason it's as if some of the movies were picked because of the year rather than their quality.

Do I agree with all the choices? Of course not. "Dark Star" is one of my favourite movies, but is not included, and everything I have ready about "Titanic", 11 Oscars and all, makes me give it a miss.

Having said that this is a wonderful book for all film fans. It is exceptionally well written by all the reviewers, with quality photos, stills and movie posters.

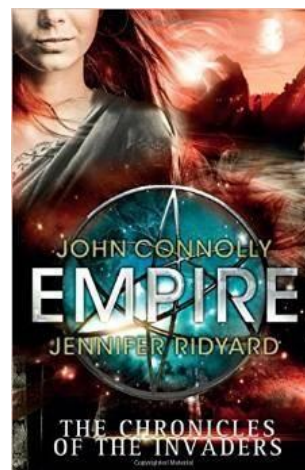
A very good read and a book to dip into at all times.

4/5

Ian

## Empire - The Chronicles of the Invaders. Book 2 John Connolly and Jennifer Ridyard

Connolly and Ridyard start off the second volume with a short summary of what happened in the first volume; "Conquest" "Empire" continues where Conquest left off. Human Paul Kerr and Illyri Syl Hellais are separated after their illicit cross-species love affair is discovered; he's assigned to the military Brigades far from Earth, while she's sent to study as a novice in the ancient stronghold



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of the enigmatic Nairene Sisterhood. Paul appears on the surface as if he is resigned to being part of the Illyri military but is constantly on the lookout for ways to escape and find Syl; while she more than suspects that the Sisterhood is evil and corrupt. She has to try to get to the base of the corruption, while always being alert to any chance of escape and having to hide her strong psychic abilities. This is part of a series aimed at young adults but I feel that the target market will also include fantasy fans of most ages. The story does not lose any of its interest by being directed towards older teenagers.

The two individual stories each progress and both protagonists discover that Illyri is an empire on the brink of civil war.

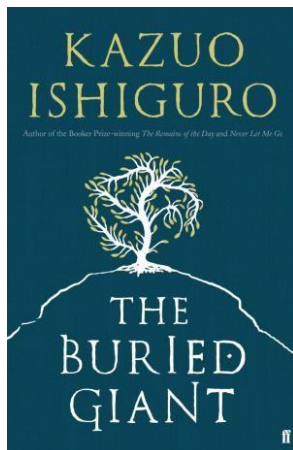
And there is a third complication, some of the Illyri are infected with an alien Parasite which enhances their abilities but takes away their “humanity”

Now Paul and Syl must somehow reunite in order to save everything they know and value. The romance between the protagonists is downplayed in favor of their individual plot lines, which focus more on military action, political intrigue, and futuristic exploration.

I found that I became more involved with the characters in this volume and so enjoyed it more than the first one.

So I look forward to the conclusion of the series.

Gail



## The Buried Giant Kazuo Ishiguro

“The Buried Giant” is set after the end of a war between Saxons and Britons; they now live alongside each other, but warily. A widespread historical amnesia grips the populace, erasing both recent and distant memory. Axl and Beatrice, two elderly married Britons, call this forgetting “the mist.” Even memories only a month or two old fade away. Axl and Beatrice once had a son,

disappeared, but neither can quite remember him, or why he left them. They embark on a journey to visit him, a quest that occupies the rest of the novel.

They find a dragon who they must vanquish as well as knights, ogres and pixies as well as threatening soldiers. This is an “Arthuresque” novel which I suppose, might be labelled as fantasy but I found it mostly tedious.

Gail



**Nova 2014 General**

**The Hunter**

**Section Finalist**

**Gavin Kreiuter**

inspired by: Strawbs - The Vision of the Lady of the Lake

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"She offered the boatman the meaning of life  
And love, if he could but conquer lust"

The Hunter's Moon shone brightly overhead, its reflected luminosity bathing the woods in a pale light that cast an eerie ambiance over the nocturnal tableau. The autumnal leaves lay scattered on the ground where the wind had left them. The light wind had barely disturbed the heavy mist that hung in the air, casting a haze that even the bright light of the moon failed to dispel. The hunter kneeled down, moving a dead leaf that had blown over a drop of blood. The spoor showed faintly in the hard ground, betraying the path taken by the wounded stag. His eyes followed the direction, and he frowned as he saw them approach a cave. The mist that surrounded him was disorientating, and he was no longer sure of his location. He had thought he was familiar with the area for miles around, but he had never seen the cave before.

His spine tingled as he once again sensed that he was also being hunted. Flitting shadows, a glimmer here, a hint of movement there; he could never be certain... and yet he somehow thought that a dire wolf was on his trail.

Dire wolf! He had never seen one in his life! So why was he so certain that it was such a creature which was trailing him? He had heard rumours of strange creatures being spotted over the last year. Creatures that certainly belonged to myth and fantasy. Yet the number of observations was increasing, and the observers no longer belonged only to the category of the inebriated. These were strange and unusual times. Even the brave were nervous; even the sceptical were uncertain; even the devout were doubtful.

Unsummoned and unwelcome, an image of Lilith appeared in his mind. He thought again of her dying moments, of the stillborn daughter that had caused her death, and the intensity of his loss threatened to engulf him once more. He made a conscious effort to shrug off the emotion, and stood up. He glanced around quickly, but did not see anything out of the ordinary. The stag beckoned. It was time to overtake it, to

complete the coup de grâce, and to return home. He might be a hunter, but he hated causing undue pain. An unusual jitter had caused him to miss the vitals as he had shot at the stag. His accustomed accurate marksmanship had deserted him at the crucial instant, as a sudden movement in his peripheral vision had distracted him. And had resulted in this prolonged pursuit.

He entered the cave determinedly, stubbornly refusing to allow superstition to sidetrack him. The cave narrowed to a passage that turned to the left. It was cold. Moisture glistened on the moss-covered walls, causing a musty smell to pervade the passage. As he followed the curvature, he stopped abruptly. The passage opened into a large chamber which continued on the far side. Strewn around the chamber were bags, overflowing with golden coins. The wealth in a single bag was more than he had seen before in his life. And there were countless bags. The nagging sense of foreboding returned with intensity. An earlier thought resurfaced: these were strange times indeed. This must be a trap of some sort, although he did not know the purpose, nor the agent.

The stag's hoof prints showed clearly in grit on the floor of the cave. He saw that the spoor continued into the passage at the far end. Staring warily, but not seeing nor sensing immediate danger, he walked slowly across the chamber. Without looking at the surrounding wealth, he inched along the trail taken by the stag. And found himself in another large chamber. This one was full of food.

He hesitated for a brief moment. He was hunting the stag for food, after all. And this was a cornucopia of victuals. Vast quantities of meat lay on a table; veal and mutton and beef, roasted to perfection, filling the air with a mouth-watering aroma. There were desserts as well. He had never had a sweet tooth, so the chocolates, cakes and puddings were inconsequential to him. The meat was, however, rich and enticing. But after a moment's thought, the temporary insanity evaporated. First a chamber filled with riches, and now this? Without question it was some sort of trap. Ignoring the

hunger pangs emanating from a demanding stomach, he walked through the second chamber to continue along the passage.

He entered the third chamber.

This time, he stopped in his tracks.

The chamber was not just large, it was cavernous. A lake lay in the centre, its water still and silent, like a gigantic mirror. But he hardly noticed it. Standing at the shoreline nearest to him was a woman. She approached him quietly, smiling all the while. It was Lilith.

Lilith was alive.

Lilith was smiling at him.

Except it wasn't Lilith. She was dead, dead, dead. And this creature was... he caught his breath: fabulous! Sensual, alluring... a siren. It spoke in Lilith's voice.

"Well met, Adam. You have conquered the first two of the Fatal Flaws. But three remain. You need to conquer them as well." She gestured towards his rifle. "That weapon will be useless here. You will need a more traditional protection". She held out a sword. Without thinking, he took hold of the hilt. It was indeed a sword of legend; heavy, intricately carved, keen. Magical? Such things were impossible! And yet this creature was not of this material world. Neither were the treasure and the food he had been tempted with earlier. These things were beyond his experience, and could only be explained by magic. What sort of magical powers were imbued in this sword? Frowning, he looked up at her - at it - again. "Who are you? What are you? Lilith is dead. You're not her."

Its - her - smile never wavered. "No, Adam. I am not she. But it was decided that this form would be the most familiar one to use to converse with you. You must listen to me. You have shown no susceptibility to Greed or Gluttony. You now need to confront Arrogance and Anger." She looked deep into his eyes, mesmerising him. "It is as well that Melancholy is a minor deficiency, and not one of the Five Fatal Flaws. The black



bile permeates your veins. I can see that you would be unlikely to survive such an encounter. Still, let us see how well you cope against these." So saying, she drew back, and an eagle soared into the cavern, its talons reaching out to grab him. He fell to the ground, and it flew over his head. He rose, and stared at it. He realised then that his first impression was mistaken. It appeared to be an eagle, but it had a magnificent tail that would have been the envy of a peacock or bird of paradise.

Closer inspection revealed a hybrid of various magnificent birds. He was spellbound at the sight, heedless of the danger as it circled, then swooped. The haunting cry of the bird, as it reached out for him once more, broke the spell. He slung the rifle off his shoulders, and fired. The bullet surely struck the bird in its chest; but it flew on as if he'd missed completely. He turned, but reacted too slowly. He was knocked to the ground, unable to avoid the talons from raking his back with agonising cuts. He lay still for a few moments, short-winded, the pain incapacitating him. He wondered why the monster hadn't finished him off. As the pain receded sufficiently for him to become aware of his surroundings once more, he saw the bird perched on a nearby rocky outcrop overlooking the lake. It was preening its feathers, while observing its reflection in the mirroring surface.

Arrogance! Arrogance was its vanity and would be its downfall! He picked up the sword and moved towards the bird. It ignored his approach. With an exultant cry, he swung the sword in a huge arc. The bird, startled at the cry, tried to fly off, but this time it was too slow. The blade sliced across its back, almost cleaving the body in two, and it fell into the water with a loud splash.

The hunter breathed heavily, gulping large volumes of air. Still panting, he stared at the Lilith-creature, who seemed unmoved. She returned his stare expressionlessly. "You said, 'It was decided'. By whom? Who decided? Who are you?", he asked her. "I have no name, although I might be called Prurience", she said. "You may call me Lilith, if it pleases you. No one 'decided'. At least, no creature did. We -" she gestured around her, her sweeping arm including the dead bird, "We were created by humans.

By human thoughts, human beliefs, human emotions". Her gaze passed through him. "There is no morality in Nature. You have created us, the Five. As well the Six Strengths that aid you. You mortals seem to have selected the Strengths on skills for survival in the wild." She paused, and seemed to contemplate. "I see a future time when survival is not a daily undertaking. We Flaws will then evolve into breaches of etiquette, into imagined violations of artificial rules. Strengths will draw more on the ability to deceive or persuade, to overcome mentally rather than to overcome physically. When Life means Leisure and not Survival, then the whims of men will seem more important than the whims of Nature. Truth, Justice... these will become subjective."

She smiled mirthlessly. "But that is the Future, and one you will not see. For now, the Strengths are more literal: Fortitude and Might, Speed and Endurance, Morality and Honesty. Six Strengths to conquer Five Flaws. You may need them all, against the Flaws. Two of us still remain. The most powerful two of the Five."

"But why? What is it all about? What is the point of this?"

"There is no point. There is only the battle. You have created the conflict and the contenders. The Five against the Six. And so it is."

As she said that, another creature burst into the cave. No slinking here. It roared its presence for everyone to hear. It seemed to be half-bull, half bear. There was enormous strength in its four bear-like limbs that bore the massive ursine body. Bullnostrils flared in the bovine head. It reeked. The foul odour offended his nostrils, but that was the least of his troubles. Two mighty horns protruded from its head. Its eyes were glowing red, like angry flames. He smiled grimly. This must be Anger, and he had confronted it many times in the drinking halls. This was an easily-defeated Flaw; as long as one remained calm and refused to panic, one could avoid an angry onslaught.

The beast roared again in rage, so loudly that the walls of the cavern trembled, and fragments of rock cascaded to the ground. It lowered its head and charged, giving no

thought to its challenge. The rage consumed it, while filling it with incredible speed and strength. The hunter leapt swiftly to his side as the beast gored the air he had just vacated. He spun around immediately to face the beast, hoping to slash its back as he had slashed Arrogance, but it had run too far away from him.

He realised that he was falling victim to the Fatal Flaw he had just conquered: overconfidence was an aspect of Arrogance, and one he could ill afford. He thought quickly, knowing his life depended on it. Fair play was another human concept, an offspring of Morality, and another sentiment he could ill afford. He scrambled in the dirt, and collected a handful of grit. As the beast charged again, the hunter threw the grit into its eyes, and its blind rage was no longer a mere metaphor. It roared again, wondrously managing to exceed its previous levels of anger, but stumbled to the ground in spite of this. The beast shook its head wildly, trying to clear its vision, but remained rooted to the spot. The hunter didn't hesitate. The magical blade swung down, severing the spine of the beast. It fell to the floor of the cavern, and did not move.

"Your Strengths are powerful, Hunter Adam. Now there is one last Flaw you must conquer." So saying, she loosened the shoulder strap of her gown, and stood before him, resplendent in her nudity. "But it is not enough merely to disregard Prurience. You must slay it as well. Pierce my heart, Hunter!" She walked slowly towards him. Her movements were subtle and highly erotic, and he felt his body responding to her advance, aroused in spite of the lethal situation.

He remained silent, but his mind raced. Lilith! You were my heart and soul, my essence! But this is not Lilith. This is an illusion, the manifestation of a Flaw. And yet... she melts my resolve. I cannot harm her; I cannot fight the mirror of my love. He dropped the Sword, and turned around, fleeing in the direction of the entrance. He did not notice his surroundings, could not care what lay around, would not be able to tell if he passed the feast and the riches, did not care if they existed or nay; he just wanted to escape from the diabolical incarnation.

He saw the mouth of the cave ahead, and the safety and familiarity of the woods beckoned. His headlong rush had been made in panic, with the sole intent of exiting the cave. As he stumbled over the threshold into the clearing before the cave, his boots sank into the soft sand. He paused briefly, catching his breath, and finally took a moment to look behind him. He saw only the cave, and nothing more. Thankfully, he sank to his knees, taking deep, rasping breaths of the fresh, liberating air. He embraced the sunshine, feeling the warmth on his face. No trace of the mist remained. The ground of the clearing around him was disturbed, covered with large paw prints. This scarcely made an impression on his mind. He was engulfed by the sense of freedom, of escape; consumed by the memories of Lilith and the Lilith-creature; entranced by the horrifying magic of the cave.

He hardly felt the claws that raked his back, so suddenly did the dire wolf attack. His mind was still so filled with the events of the cave, that he was not conscious of the fangs that pierced his neck. He was blissfully unaware of his body being dragged this way and that in fearsome jaws; he was still murmuring, "Lilith...", as his throat was torn out. His final thoughts, as his life essence drained away, were on the senselessness of the phenomena he had experienced.

## Top Ten Must-Read SF&F Novels

**Gavin Kreuter**

It's a well-known fact that SF&F authors can't count. Or don't understand the meaning of the word "trilogy". The Anthony's Xanth trilogy comprises 39 novels, and will soon stretch to 41. While not quite as prolific, other trilogies include Adams' Hitchhiker (5), and Asimov's Foundation (7).

SF&F club members seem to suffer from the same malady. At the club meeting held on 18th April, three groups (yay, a "trilogy"! Oh, wait... Ian's list makes it four groups) were each asked to compile a list of the "Top Ten Must-Read SF&F Novels". The first violation was a sneaky attempt to include trilogies ("hey, it was published in a single collection!"); this worsened when entire series were included. Which means this brief article could expand into a tome, should every suggested title be included. Fortunately, I decided to use "trilogy" or "series" instead of listing each and every title.

There are many such lists available via an internet search. In fact, in Probe 159, the article on the SFFSA Library looked at how many books, on a few carefully-selected lists, can be found in the library. This article will also do that. Right now. Of the titles below, 15 (that is, 63%) can be requested by emailing [librarian@sffsa.org.za](mailto:librarian@sffsa.org.za) (members only! Join now!)

Of the four series in the list, we have two complete series, one incomplete series, and no books at all in the fourth.

As an exercise left to the reader, download the library from our website (<http://www.sffsa.org.za/library.html>), and see which series/titles we're missing. You might even feel motivated enough to donate the missing books to the library.

Now, getting back to the meeting. In the table below, I merged the trilogy of lists, but haven't indicated which were duplicates. Surprisingly perhaps, only two appeared in all three lists (and another three appeared in two of the three lists). Can you guess which two?

So here they are: the 24 Top Ten Must-Read Books, as chosen by SFFSA members (in alphabetical author order):

| Title | Author |      |                                                                        |
|-------|--------|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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|                                  |                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Foreigner                        | C. J. Cherryh                   |
| Doomsday Book                    | Connie Willis                   |
| Dune                             | Frank Herbert                   |
| The Book of the New Sun (Series) | Gene Wolfe                      |
| Animal Farm                      | George Orwell                   |
| The Time Machine                 | H. G. Wells                     |
| Foundation (Series)              | Isaac Asimov                    |
| Nightfall (Short story)          | Isaac Asimov                    |
| Harry Potter (Series)            | J. K. Rowling                   |
| The Lord of the Rings (Trilogy)  | J. R. R. Tolkien                |
| Araminta Station                 | Jack Vance                      |
| The Mote in God's Eye            | Jerry Pournelle and Larry Niven |
| Red Mars                         | Kim Stanley Robinson            |
| Vorkosigan Saga (Series)         | Lois McMaster Bujold            |
| Snow Crash                       | Neal Stephenson                 |
| Ender's Game                     | Orson Scott Card                |
| The Man in the High Castle       | Philip K. Dick                  |
| Stranger in a Strange Land       | Robert A. Heinlein              |
| Lord Valentine's Castle          | Robert Silverberg               |
| The End of Mr. Y                 | Scarlett Thomas                 |
| Night Watch                      | Terry Pratchett                 |
| The Left Hand of Darkness        | Ursula K. Le Guin               |
| Neuromancer                      | William Gibson                  |
| We                               | Yevgeny Zamyatin                |

Not to be outdone, here is a further selection of Must-Read books that could have been included, as proposed by our Meetings and Conventions Organiser:

| <b>Title</b>             | <b>Author</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Brave New World          | Aldous Huxley |
| The Stars My Destination | Alfred Bester |

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|                                               |                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| The Two Pearls of Wisdom (aka Eon)            | Alison Goodman        |
| A Clockwork Orange                            | Anthony Burgess       |
| Rendezvous with Rama                          | Arthur C. Clarke      |
| Downbelow Station                             | C. J. Cherryh         |
| The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Series) | Douglas Adams         |
| 1984                                          | George Orwell         |
| Make Room! Make Room!                         | Harry Harrison        |
| The Player of Games                           | Iain Banks            |
| The Forever War                               | Joe Haldeman          |
| Ringworld                                     | Larry Niven           |
| The Night's Dawn (Trilogy)                    | Peter F. Hamilton     |
| Fahrenheit 451                                | Ray Bradbury          |
| Nine Princes in Amber                         | Roger Zelazny         |
| Babel-17                                      | Samuel R. Delany      |
| The Colour of Magic                           | Terry Pratchett       |
| A Canticle for Leibowitz                      | Walter M. Miller, Jr. |

That makes a total of 42 books/trilogies/series in our Top Ten Must-Read List. **42...**  
that must be the answer to the ultimate question: How Many Books Should There Be  
In A Top Ten List?

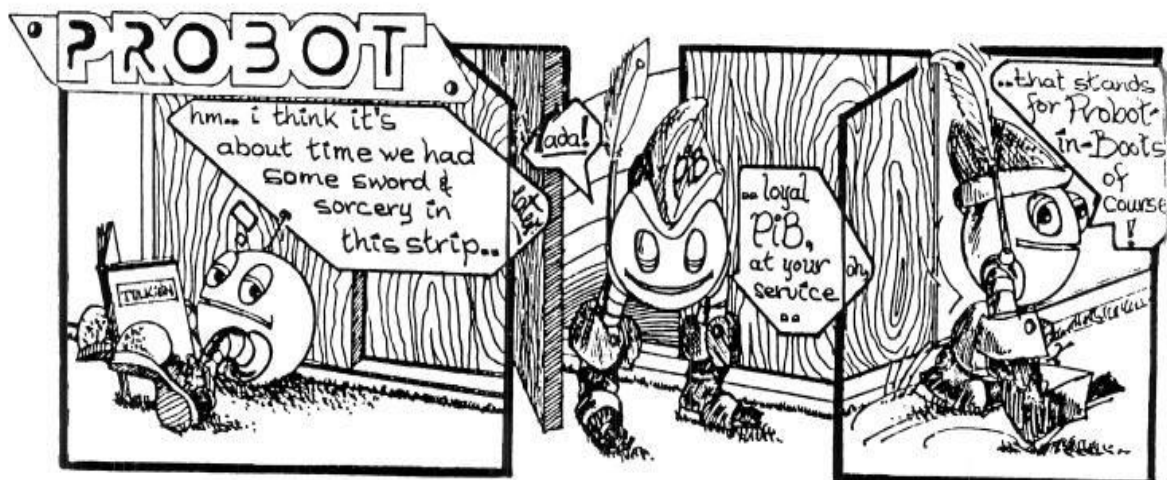
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## From “The Daily Galaxy” April 2015

Infant Galaxy Clusters --"May Reveal Role of Dark Matter in Shaping the Universe"

By combining observations of the distant Universe made with ESA's Herschel and Planck space observatories, cosmologists have discovered what could be the precursors of the vast clusters of galaxies that we see today. Galaxies like our Milky Way with its 100 billion stars are usually not found in isolation. In the Universe today, 13.8 billion years after the Big Bang, many are in dense clusters of tens, or even hundreds of galaxies.

However, these clusters have not always existed, and a key question in modern cosmology is how such massive structures assembled in the early Universe. Pinpointing when and how they formed should provide insight into the process of galaxy cluster evolution, including the role played by dark matter in shaping these cosmic metropolises.

Now, using the combined strengths of the Herschel Space Observatory and the Planck Satellite, astronomers have found objects in the distant Universe, seen at a time when it was only three billion years old, which could be precursors of the clusters seen around us today.

"Because we are looking so far back in time, and because the the universe is assumed to be homogenous in all directions, we think it's very similar to looking at the equivalent of what a baby cluster might look like," said Brenda L. Frye, an assistant astronomer at the University of Arizona's Steward Observatory who was involved in the research.

"In contrast to previous observations, for which the odd one or two baby clusters was found which one would put in a zoo, we now have found a real sample of 200 baby clusters."

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In the Planck all-sky map at submillimeter wavelengths (545 GHz) shown below, the band running through the middle corresponds to dust in our Milky Way galaxy. The black dots indicate the location of the proto-cluster candidates identified by Planck and subsequently observed by Herschel. The inset images showcase some of the observations made by Herschel's SPIRE instrument; the contours represent the density of galaxies. (ESA and the Planck Collaboration/ H. Dole, D. Guéry & G. Hurier, IAS/University Paris-Sud/CNRS/CNES).

