

PROBE

173



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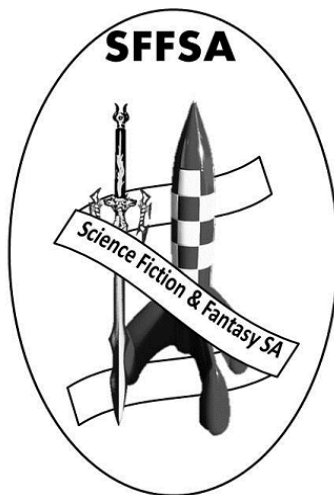
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I've had a mail from Nick Wood in the U.K. sending us a website to look at. This is a look at African Science fiction and PROBE gets a couple of mentions. Interesting to see what is going on in speculative fiction in Africa.

<http://www.themanchesterreview.co.uk/?cat=343>

The Manchester Review 18~ (Special issue African SF)

Another mail from Adele Meyer. She found this interesting article on how badly women have been treated in the SF world for a very long time. It's quite long but I think well worth a look at.

<http://io9.gizmodo.com/dont-look-away-fighting-sexual-harassment-in-the-scifi-1785704207>



While I'm adding web addresses the following is the last PROBOT and it will be a little easier to read. <https://fantasyguide.de/bb/currprobot>

Science Fiction and Fantasy South Africa may be coming to a crossroad. We have lost our meeting venue and have not been able to find another that is really suitable as we need somewhere where we can host speakers and show movies. There is a possibility that we may need to change our meeting day as we have been offered a place but it is not available on a Saturday afternoon. I will be sending out a mail in the next couple of weeks asking people for their input and availability on other days.

Last Saturday we held our annual MiniCon at Ron Cowley's home. We started out with an Ice breaker that showed that the core of people who usually attend MiniCon's, really know their SF and F. We then discovered that we do not do nearly so well on the music from SF series on T.V. Carla chose music from a number of series that most of us had at least heard of even if we have not seen them. Oh dear, but a lot of that music sounds very similar to me.

After lunch AL du Pisani gave us an eye opening talk on Japanese Animé. We then settled down to the really serious part of the day..... writing the "Wormholes". This year's phrase was "turning under a blood-red sky". I have three very different 99-word stories. I'll print them in the next issue of PROBE.

Then the final part of the "official" MiniCon was a game of Charades. Some of us had never played Charades before but I think a good time was had by all.

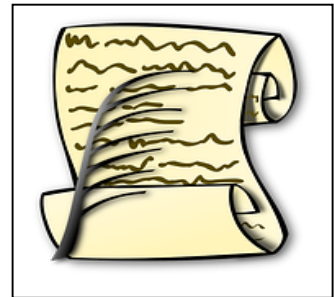
After this we settled down to the typical South African tradition of the Braai. And we all relaxed around the table and continued the relaxed conversation, mostly about Science Fiction but not entirely. I suggest that anyone who is in the area next year comes along and joins us at the next MiniCon.

Chairman's Note

Andrew Jamieson

This time, I thought I would look at two topics I have already mentioned, and see how they actually merge. Those are namely "TV Series" and "The Online World".

So here we are in the modern world, with access to high internet speeds, and more TV series than you can shake a baseball at. I mean come on, it is perhaps getting a bit ridiculous with the sheer amount of decent (to me anyway) TV series coming out.



Where will we possibly get the time to watch all of them (well, that is my intention anyway)? And perhaps more importantly... where will we get the episodes from?

I mean really, how many people actually watch the normal SABC TV channels anymore? I don't even have my aerial connected any more. I think a lot of us use satellite and DSTV to get their fill of TV series.

That is certainly one worthwhile option, but what about streaming? You know, the one where you connect to the internet and watch your favourite episodes online? Fibre has become a common byword now where we all want this high speed access to the internet, and when you get it, what do you do with it? Well, why not stream your episodes any time you want, in high quality. You don't have to worry about storing your episodes anywhere, or worry about running out of space. Just connect to your website of choice, choose your series and episode and watch. Now you had better have good speed and plenty of download capacity if you want to watch everything out there that is on offer.

Probably the first website that did this sort of thing was iTunes. I think we have all heard about it: crap software, great place to get music, and potentially TV shows... oh wait, that isn't possible, well, wasn't when I checked some years ago. Maybe things have changed and are better. Then along came Netflix, probably the number one online stream site. Did you know they say that Netflix has actually surpassed the major cable providers in the USA for number of subscribers? Finally along comes Amazon Video, similar to Netflix, very large, very good quality, loads of shows.

I am not sure of the price, but a monthly subscription to a paid streaming site is not such a stretch. I mean we have actually had Showmax in South Africa for over two years already doing exactly this. So internet streaming has certainly come a long way, and will likely just continue to grow

So the next time you want to watch a TV show, will you switch on your TV? Or your computer?

Finalist Nova 2016

Frozen Assets

Gary Kuyper

"Think of it as a time machine."

"A time machine?"

"Exactly, you climb inside a capsule and go to sleep. You wake up ten, twenty or thirty years into the future without having aged a day."

"A time machine that can take you to the future but can't return you to the past."

"A small price to pay for immortality."

"Immortality?"

"Who knows, maybe the future holds the key to eternal youth, the eradication of all diseases, the secret to everlasting life."

"How Safe is it?"

"Very! Thanks to Professor Kruzinski, cryogenics is now an exact science. I've undergone the procedure myself."

"Really?"

"Had them put me on ice for a whole month."

"What was it like?"

"Like nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Absolutely nadda. No awareness, no consciousness, no dreams, no...nothing. When they flash thawed me using the PMRI had absolutely no...sense, no impression that a month had passed. It felt as though it was still the same day I had been frozen. Although we do prefer to call it suspended animation. After all, we're not working with vegetables here."

"PMR?"

"The Precision Microwave Resonator."

"Oh, that sounds kinda...scary and dangerous. And, uh, you felt okay? No side effects or..."

"Of course there were some side effects. I was blind and queasy for about six hours after reanimation."

"Blind?"

"It's one of the side effects. Happens to all the subjects, so it was expected and therefore not traumatic. Later I was fine and could see again. Perfectly okay, mentally and physically. I was the same as when I had stepped inside the capsule. So, no brain damage or physical trauma whatsoever. As I said, 'Cryogenics is now an exact Science. It's very, very safe.'"

"And also very, very expensive."

"True, Cryo Cor caters only for the super-rich. If our services were affordable to the man in the street you could imagine the...dilemma and chaos."

"Dilemma and chaos?"

"Everybody with a terminal illness would be streaming to our doors with the hope that the future will have the answer to their medical condition."

"But surely not all your super rich clients are suffering terminal illnesses?"

"Correct! Some have chosen our service for financial reasons whilst others seek our help because, as mentioned, they believe the future holds the answer to eternal youth and everlasting life."

"Financial reasons?"

"Consider what returns a large investment would yield in ten, twenty or thi..."

"Is that legal?"

"Nobody has yet thought to complain. So, yes! There is no law that says you can't make a safe, certain and substantial investment before putting yourself on ice for a few years."

"Why the pear?"

"Eh?"

"Why does Cryo Cor have a pear on its logo? Also the statue out front is of a man holding a pear.

That seems to be a strange symbol for a cryogenics co..."

"Ah, no! Actually that's not strange at all. Think of Isaac Newton and his apple. In almost the same way Kuzinski will now be remembered synonymously with his pear."

"How So"???

"Many years ago it was believed to be impossible to freeze and thaw fruit for commercial gain.

The fruit companies always ended up with a pulpy, squishy and unpalatable result. It was Kuzinski who discovered the safe zone. You see everyone thought that the colder you freeze something, the longer and better it would be preserved. So, where everyone else was striving for absolute Zero, Kruzinski discovered that the safe zone was merely a few degrees below the freezing point of water. His first successful experiment in freezing and thawing a fruit back to its original firm crispness was performed on, what else but, a pear."

"But a pear, by any standard, is nothing compared to a human being?"

"True, but the principle worked the same. Once it was discovered that it wasn't necessary to achieve extremely low temperatures to work effectively, the way was open to making cryogenics for human...use possible."

"Then why the exorbitant price? Is it CryoCor's way to prevent the aforementioned...dilemma and chaos."

'No, not at all. It actually costs a great deal to keep a capsule in prime condition and operating at peak. Our storage facilities are situated in bomb proof and earthquake resistant shelters. And, here is something that certain clients have found unsettling, but according to our survive-any disaster policy, find it most necessary to have all our capsules connected to a well-insulated and extremely efficient 3P nuclear reactor."

"What?"

"No need for alarm or concern. In fact, the 3P guarantees that all capsules will be kept in peak functioning mode even in the event of an extinction-level disaster. Even unattended the 3P would continue to function independently.

3P".

"Something to do with Tri-phase Plutonium. Anyway it's all government approved and regulated, of course."

"Of course. So, just how long would this...3P be able function...independently?"

"Indefinitely."

"And how long is...indefinitely?"

"Let's just Say more than long enough to keep you alive, in the case of a... an incident, until help could arrive."

*Hmm, okay. So, what exactly is the longest you've ever kept someone...frozen before... thawing them?"

"Uh, that would be our resident oil tycoon, George Maxwell. He asked to be thawed every two years. Has pancreatic cancer but wants to make sure his two sons aren't making a botch of running his business. Although he's the longest freeze-to-thaw to date there are others who have been in for over five years already. Camilla Rothchild is scheduled for her first thaw next year.

She was only twenty two when she went in. Inherited her late father's vast fortune at eighteen.

She's one of the eternal youths; strongly believes the earth will one day be governed in a utopian society."

"A utopia? You actually think that mankind will be living in a cure all/live forever paradise only thirty years from now?"

"I doubt it. But perhaps in a hundred or so, yes."

"Can you keep someone frozen that long?"

"We believe so. Probably even longer."

"Wow!"

"We already know that the effects experienced when coming out of suspended animation are exactly the same whether the subject was in for a month, a year or two. So why should an even greater extended period yield different results?"

"And you say there's no sensation of time passing whilst you're inside?"

"Zilch. As mentioned, a cryogenics capsule is really a time machine. Although it may not practically transport you instantaneously into the future, it will certainly give the impression that it had."

"That is...truly amazing!"

"Yes, it is. So, are you ready to join our little family of youthers?"

"It seems both kinda scary and exciting at the same time."

"Absolutely nothing to be concerned about. We haven't lost a single client."

"Really?"

"Well, not since we perfected the thawing process. And that was over seven years ago."

"Incredible."

"Uh, for starters, could I also just do a month? Just to see what it's like."

"Of course. Our clients always choose the duration. We can do you in, say, a fortnight. Give you time to sort out your affairs before going in."

"Uh, yeah, okay."

"You'll also need to start on some special medication and diet."

**Oh?*

"Just some electrolytes to regulate the body's ph, salt content and other chemical factors."

"What if..."

"Don't worry well be doing a complete med and scan before proceeding. If we find any...irregularities well just postpone."

"Oh, yeah, great, fine, uh, okay then"

“Excellent! Now, before we discuss payment for the...procedure, I’d like you to look at some of the options available to you.”

“Ooh, feels similar to choosing one’s own casket.”

“Please, we don’t deal in death. On the contrary, we sell the opportunity for life everlasting in a future utopia.”

Flud’s left eyelid, like most of his body, was heavily calloused. His left eye was also a good two inches lower than his right. So when the scuff, a large hairless rodent, stuck its inquisitive head out of the rubble, he automatically cocked his own head at an uncomfortable angle in order to focus properly and determine distance.

He knew that scuffs liked the bitter kernels of the pods that fell to the ground around the large plants which his tribe called dramuth trees. He also knew that only the fallen pods were suitable for his purpose.

He had spent the early morning gathering and cracking open the large stone-hard seed containers. He hadn’t eaten in three days and the pungent scent of the kernels made his mouth water. He resisted the urge to eat some. He needed as many as possible to lure out a hungry scuff. Besides, the large seeds would only give him dry mouth and an incredible thirst. He knew too that the nearest safest water was half-a-day’s journey away and that his water pouch was already dangerously low.

In the late morning sun he had scoured the old ruins for a good place to place the kernels. A large hole leading down into a foreboding blackness seemed like the most ideal spot.

After scattering the bait around the dark orifice he had moved back some distance into shadow where he had strung a shaft to his bow before becoming a statue; more motionless rubble in the ruins.

If patience is a virtue then Flud was certainly one of the planet’s most virtuous occupants. For almost a half hour he had sat unmoving and staring towards the dark aperture. It was only when stiffness caused him to readjust his position that his eye caught sight of the hand protruding from the dust.

Curiosity, for once, overcame hunger. He decided to investigate the strange appendage. Strange in that the hand had five fingers - that was two more than he, or any of his tribe, had.

And stranger still was the fact that it clutched unrelentingly to a bulbous object.

The object had a certain familiarity. It caused his stomach to churn and grumble, yet Flud was unable to fathom why. He tried to pry it free from the stony grip but to no avail. In the end his efforts to smash it free with a piece of rubble shattered both the hand and object into indistinct fragments. He howled in dismay showing his crooked, cracked and yellowed teeth. Frustrated he grabbed the wrist where the hand had been and pulled.

By human standards Flud's strength would be considered superhuman. When the head and torso of the granite figure lurched menacingly out of the dust, Flud's hand automatically found the handle of his crude axe. He leapt backwards growling and brandishing the weapon above his right ear. The assailant simply smiled which made Flud feel all the more anxious. He released a high-pitched screech and displayed his hideous dentures. Still the figure Smiled.

It was some time before Fluid realized that the motionless figure was quite harmless. Yet he still approached it with a certain amount of caution and reservation.

He studied the stone features carefully. Like the object this creature had held, it too had a certain familiarity. Its features, like the bulbous object, made his stomach churn and grumble, yet again he was unable to fathom why.

A rummaging sound over by the dark hole caught his attention. The strange petrified figure in the dust was instantly, all but, forgotten.

Flud was a good hunter gatherer, but much too dull-witted to contemplate the origin of the ruins.

He and his kind knew nothing of the brief war that had taken place over five hundred years ago.

A brief but terrible war that had reduced most of the planet to a devastated and burned out wasteland. Flud and his kind cared not for history, politics or religion. The

only gods they chose to appease were the ones that constantly growled their displeasure in the pits of their stomachs.

It was a scuff, a very large one too. It sniffed the air, the end of its long snout twitching feverishly at the delectable scent of dramuth kernels.

Moving like molasses in winter, Flud brought the bow up and pulled back on the bowstring whilst sighting along the shaft with his good right eye.

More patience was needed. It was imperative that the scuff expose a great deal more of itself than just a curious head.

Flud found the rodents mannerisms to be most frustrating. For, like himself, the scuff was displaying a praiseworthy amount of patience and caution. But, like himself, the scuff too was starving, and so finally resolved to take the leap of faith towards the scattered kernels outside the hole.

The scuffs body was halfway out when Flud's stomach decided to emit its loudest growl for the day. In the same instant that the scuff decided to retreat, Flud released his grip on the bowstring.

The shaft disappeared into the dark orifice.

Cursing the rowdiness of his impatient god he charged towards the hole. He cursed again when finding it empty.

Then, noticing the trail of blood leading down into the blackness, he whooped with excitement.

He knew it could be dangerous to crawl after the wounded creature. A pack of scuffs could easily overcome him in such a confined space. The hunter would become the hunted; the food becoming the fed.

The voice of his god was now deafening. It said that the time for patience and caution was over.

Flud bound some kindling together with a few strips of leather. After lighting the makeshift torch he removed his axe from his belt and proceeded to crawl into the hole that tunnelled downwards at a sharp angle.

His excitement and determination increased with each new splatter of blood that he passed.

In the narrow confines the smoke from the torch burned his eyes and made him cough. A few times he also squealed in pain when inadvertently crawling over some of the cinders that had fallen from his light source. Still, his hunger exceeded his discomfort. Onward and downward he continued.

His hopes of ever finding the scuff dissipated when the tunnel suddenly widened into a large cavernous area. All around were more crevices and openings. The scuff could have scurried off into any one of them. It would be near impossible to find it now.

He checked all the openings for more of the blood, but his search proved unfruitful. Again he cursed the god of his gut with a guttural growl. Not only had his search proved fruitless but it was now a long way back. The sharp incline would make the return trip all the more difficult, and with the many-tunnelled chamber behind him it would be possible for starving scuffs to attack him from the rear.

He was just about to make his way back up to the surface when he noticed the large metal door partially hidden behind some fallen beams.

In a short time he managed to lift and fling the metal rafters aside. He stood studying this new and strange discovery. Even dull-witted he knew that this contraption sealed a hole in the wall. If he could find a way to open it, perhaps he might find another large chamber on the other side.

And perhaps he might be lucky enough to find the scuff, bled and dead.

Following some extensive prying and fiddling he discovered that the metal ring in the centre could, although with difficulty, be turned. And after a long strenuous struggle at twisting the large wheel there came a hissing and rising of dust as pressurized air forced its way through the gap in the door.

Flud, realizing there was no danger, returned his axe to its place in his belt. He again approached the door. He grunted with excitement when, after a hefty tug, the door shuddered slightly ajar.

Two more violently motivated heaves and the gap was large enough to allow passage through.

There was light and strange humming sounds coming from the opening. Again the axe found its way into Flud's tight grip.

His eyes widened in awe as the rows of giant silver dramuth pods came into view.

He remembered a time long ago when his father and some other hunters had brought just such a delicacy back to the village. It had taken eight of the strongest to lift and carry it upon their shoulders. Flud had been but a youth at the time, but he now clearly remembered the incident.

He moved between the rows of perfectly aligned pods. He gingerly placed a finger on one of the winking lights and was amazed to find that it gave off no heat. The pods themselves were actually freezing cold to the touch, colder than the white frozen water that fell from the sky every winter. Cold and condensation had caused moisture to pool in small bowls placed conveniently beneath each pod. He dipped a finger in and tasted. The water was good.

It was whilst moving his hand over the smooth surface that he discovered the picture. Yes, the pod brought back to the village had also had just such an image.

Flud had never seen, let alone eaten a pear during all his miserable struggles for survival on this wretched planet, but he knew from past experience that these strange shiny containers with the pear pictures contained the best tasting food ever managed to be scrounged from the rubble. Not even the succulent flesh of the giant hairless rats could compare with the delectable cuisine within these containers. He knew that it would take much effort to crack open the container, but the endeavour would be well worth it. He raised his axe above the nearest capsule. His god was already growling again in anticipation. He knew too that it would be best to eat the food raw. The smell of cooking would only draw unwanted attention from the other pitiful denizens that dwelt amongst the ruins. For a while there would be heaven on earth.

Yes, in Flud's feeble mind he knew that he had found his own private little utopia.

Blast from the past.....10 years after NIPPON 2007

We flew into Narita Airport via a very foggy Hong Kong on the 25th of August 2007. Our Japan Travel Bureau agent was waiting to meet us and in a surprisingly short time we were on a bus going to Tokyo. The light traffic on the highway surprised us until we realized that it was Sunday afternoon. My sister Janis, who had flown in from Edinburgh earlier in the day was waiting to meet us at the Mercure Hotel in Ginza. After a quick shower we went out to grab a bite to eat and see something of Tokyo. Thank Goodness for Starbucks! By this time it was after 9.00 pm and the streets of Tokyo were still buzzing. Seemingly hundreds of restaurants were offering a wide variety of meals. Outside each one stood a wooden table with “plastic” meals showing what was on offer and for what price. Some items were recognisable, but many were very alien to us. We later found out that there is a booming industry that manufactures these “plastic” meals. Tokyo at night is a city that reminds one of the city in “Bladerunner” Bright adverts cover just about all available space on the large buildings in the upmarket Ginza area. Huge screens show one commercial after another. The difference is that this is a spacious and spotlessly clean city where you are not permitted to smoke while walking and must stop at a smoke station on the pavement. The astonishing thing is that the people of Tokyo respect the rules and you see people rush up, light up, puff quickly, stub out their cigarettes and continue on their way. One other surprise was that one third of the pavement is marked off for bicycles. And there are many bicycles in Japan. Men in business suits with their briefcases in the basket fly along; young women in needle thin stilettos weave their way among the pedestrians and elderly ladies imperiously ring their bells for you to leap out of their way.

The next day we took a walk to see the Imperial Palace, the residence of the Emperor and Empress of Japan. We could not go in as the palace is only open on two days a year and we also discovered that the gardens

were also closed as were most other places as it was a Monday. Still we could see beyond the moat to the traditional buildings inside the ancient stone walling. Tokyo is a city with many fountains and we saw some really beautiful ones on our perambulations



This one was in a park just across from the Imperial Palace.

It changed its format a number of times as we watched.

The next day we made our way to the incredibly busy Tokyo station and finally managed to figure out the ticket machines. Fortunately I had downloaded the information we needed so we at least knew which station we had to get to. As it was early afternoon the train was not too full and we found seats. We couldn't see any division between Tokyo and Yokohama and before too long we came to Isikawacho station. It is only three blocks from the station to "A Silk Tree", the hostel where we were booked. Now we had seen pictures on the net of our rooms but we were still a bit taken aback at the size of them. Ian paced out the room and it was two meters by three meters – a three tatami mat room. We were given slippers and asked not to walk on the mats with out shoes on. Still we had a fridge and freezer, a TV set and an internet connection as well as hooks on which to hang our clothes. The toilet was down the hall and the showers on the ground floor. (We were on the eighth). The lift talked to us all the time, saying something which sounded like "a

miady miady mat” and we assumed it was telling us that the door was about to close.

AL du Pisani had arrived the day before and the next morning the four of us caught the train to the Sakuragicho station to go and register for the Con. Registration was supposed to start at 12 pm but they told us to go away and come back an hour later. We walked back through the beautiful Queen’s Mall to find something to eat. We were pleasantly surprised to see the amount of English script around, particularly on the shop windows. The shops, except for the restaurants, were like any other shops in any other large city.

This is an interesting sculpture outside the mall. We thought that it needed to have a set of balls to roll around on it. We got back to the registration and finally got registered. We got our tags, our bags and pocket programme guides.



We caught the train back. Later that afternoon Eileen and Andrew Jamieson, Ian’s children also arrived and now the South African party was complete. We went looking for supper and found a restaurant called “Skylark”. As I said there are really a lot of English names around. It was however a Japanese “steakhouse” type of place. The menu was in Japanese but fortunately the pictures were in picture so we were able to point out what we wanted to eat. After all, a hamburger is a hamburger, and pasta in Japan still tastes the same.

The next day the Con programme started at 1.00 pm and we all went off to our chosen panels. Ian had been lucky to get a Kaffeeklatch with

Charlie Stross with bottled oolong tea. (A lot of people seemed to drink it but to us it tasted like a mixture of wood and water hyacinth –dreadful)

The Kaffeeklatch was entertaining as Charlie Stross is articulate and the topics ranged from SF to politics and religion. The hour went past too quickly.



Charlie Stross.

I went to a panel on interstellar travel given by G. David Nordley, author as well as aeronautical engineering consultant. It took a little while to get going as the projector hadn't arrived yet, but ended up being a very interesting overview of the suggested mechanisms to be used to travel to the stars. There was a translator who kept the Japanese audience informed as well. We didn't get his name but he was obviously well up on the sometimes complex physics.

We also went to a panel called Exomusicology. The panelists were Dave Howell, John T. Sapienza Jr. and Peter Heck. The discussion went around what music actually is and covers points such as: If an alien does not have ears would it recognize music?

Do birds count as alien and do they make music for pleasure? An interesting panel.

We also went to the opening ceremony and saw the very young looking mayor of Yokohama brought in on a Rickshaw. We were introduced to the Guests of Honour, David Brin and Michael Whelan, both of whom, spoke a good amount of Japanese, as well as the Japanese Guests of Honour, Sakyo Komatsu and Yoshitaka Amano.

Later we went over to the Harbour Lounge where both bidders for the 2009 WorldCon were holding parties. Neither seemed to be trying too hard to convince people to sign up and as nothing much was happening we decided to return to our hostel.



This is the landmark tower, which stands just behind the conference centre. There is a viewing floor on the 69th level. The lift takes exactly 40 seconds to reach this level which is 370 meters high. There is almost no sensation of movement. On a clear day they say you can see Mount Fuji, which is one hundred kilometres away.

All we could see was the harbour and city in every other direction.

This is a picture from the 69th floor viewing station of the Landmark Tower. In the top centre of the picture is the Pacifico Yokohama Hotel. Below it is the Conference centre. This part of Yokohama has been reclaimed from the sea and is about to commemorate its 10th Anniversary.



We had been lucky to find that two of our fellow hostel dwellers were Jane Jewell, an executive director of SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) and her partner Peter Heck. They invited us to come up to the Writer's suite in the Inter Continental Hotel. This is a party that you get into by invitation only and the only previous time we had been invited was by Arlan Andrews at Bucconneer in 1998. On Friday evening Ian and AL and I went up and were welcomed by Jane. We were having an interesting discussion about the lack of science fiction in South Africa when we were suddenly joined by Joe and Gaye Haldeman. Somehow we got onto the topic of total eclipses and discovered that the Haldeman's are eclipse followers and that they know Barrett Brick who we got to know at Torcon3 and who joined SFSA and helped out with the SA party we hosted at Interaction. He also gave us a talk on eclipses when he was here in South Africa a year or two ago. Small world... While we were talking Robert and Karen Silverberg arrived and joined the conversation. For those of us in SF starved South Africa this can be pretty heady stuff.

We got talking with a number of other interesting people and found out that life goes on much the same wherever in the world you happen to live.

We were really sorry when it came to midnight and we had to leave to catch a train to avoid turning into pumpkins or having to take an hour to walk the long way back to A Silk Tree.



Ellen Datlow

On Saturday morning Ian went to a Kaffeeklatch with Ellen Datlow. She has been fiction editor of OMNI and OMNI online for 17 years and is a multiple winner of World Fantasy Awards, Bram Stoker Awards, Hugo Awards, Locus Awards and the International Horror Guild Award for her editing. She also teaches at Clarion. We were delighted that she asked to be put on the mailing list for PROBE,

A warm and interesting person who was genuinely interested in our small SF part of the world. It was a pleasure to meet and talk with her.

Probably the most interesting panel we went to on Saturday was “The Killer B’s” This panel usually is made up of Benford, Brin, and Baxter. As Steven Baxter was not at Nippon 2007 they had co-opted Robert Silverberg, saying he had two “B’s” in his name. This panel ranged widely and covered many topics. All three speakers are so widely read

and erudite that we were vastly entertained. Robert Silverberg has a razor-sharp wit and is not averse to using it.



David Brin

Gregory Benford

Robert Silverberg

We also watched the presentation of the Hugo Awards broadcast from the large auditorium which was full. AL had been asked by Joseph Major to be his stand in the event that his book “Heinlein’s Children” won the Hugo for which it had been short listed. This meant that he was in the auditorium with all the other nominees or their stand-ins. We were really sorry to see that only a few of the winners were actually there to receive their awards. On this note, we were in a way, surprised to see how few people actually took the opportunity to travel to Japan. It seemed to us the ideal opportunity to see a part of the world we would not have otherwise been likely to travel to. About two thirds of the Convention attendees were Japanese.

On Sunday morning I went to a panel with Joe Haldeman, Gregory Benford and Grant Carrington. The topic was longer life expectancy and was it worth extending life if you could not control the quality of that life? Benford is CEO of a company working in Biotechnology and he told a very interesting story about a population of fruit flies that the company had bought that had had their life expectancy increased by a factor of three over a period of twenty-five years. What had been done was to not permit the flies to reproduce until the only ones left were those which had lived past their normal life time. This was done repeatedly for

twenty-five years. Now the DNA has been studied and mapped and Bedford's company is taking out a patent on the particular gene which they believe is responsible for the longevity. The idea being that as all life on earth shares a large percentage of genetic make-up, possibly the gene could be spliced onto the human genome at some later stage. Joe Haldeman was keen on getting his head frozen and stored until medicine had advanced sufficiently for him to be put in a cloned body. They all said that they had been trying to preserve their bodies using alcohol. There were lots of anecdotal stories about elderly aunts. This was a very entertaining panel.

Ian went to a panel with Charlie Stross and James Cambias. The topic was Alternate Futures. It is difficult or impossible to predict the future. They started off by talking about the political past. They felt that English may become the most important language. They looked at various possible advances in technology and thought about how art might change. Another point is that religion will not go away. This was a very good panel.

I had been fortunate to get onto a Kaffeeklatch with Robin Hobb. I have always enjoyed her novels, particularly the "Windsinger" novels written as Megan Lindholm so I was keen to meet her. She arrived a little late but that was because she said that you could not have a Kaffeeklatch without something to eat and drink and so she had gone to buy refreshments. It was a good mix of people as we had Canadian, Swedish, American, South African and three Japanese ladies, one of whom was Robin Hobb's Japanese translator. We got onto talking about translations and how important it is to be able to have confidence in the person who is translating your work into a language which you cannot understand.



Robin Hobb

It was interesting to think about how you would translate puns into another language and how important it is to choose appropriate names for the characters.

We found her to be warm, friendly and unassuming. She was delighted to be in Japan.

I was really impressed by the fact that such a successful author can be a truly humble person.

We went to very funny panel that speculated on unusual SF dating possibilities. The panellists were David Levine, Tom Galloway and Patricia McEwen. The first suggestion was Miss Piggy and Godzilla. The comment was poor Godzilla. The idea was not to let facts get in the way of fun. And they didn't. Some of the ideas went from the sublime to the ridiculous. I guess you could say that a good time was had by all.

We went into the Mall to find some supper and found a restaurant with the most un-Japanese name of "Garlic Jo's". It had posters all around the walls commemorating an annual garlic festival. We had found in the restaurants that you were expected to order everything you wanted to eat, up front. They seemed to find it odd that we would have a course and then decide what we would like to eat next. Each table has a small open Perspex cylinder on it. Your meal comes and then the bill is put into this cylinder. The idea is that you eat and then get up and pay. We couldn't get over how many tables filled and emptied over the hour or so that we sat in the restaurant. When we said we would like pudding they

brought along the plastic desserts for us to choose from. The food was excellent and we really found that we were not paying exorbitant prices.



This is the biggest Ferris Wheel in the world. It is lit like a Catherine Wheel at night and is beautiful to look at. Each second the light on the outer edge of the spokes lights up consecutively and then cycle again at the beginning of each new minute. You see it as you walk along to the Convention Centre.

We only made one panel on the Monday morning but it was a great one. The title was Exploring Mars – The inside story. Panellists were Geoffrey Landis, G. David Nordley, Mary Turzillo and Yochi Kondo. All have had something to do with the Mars landers.

They told us how the world of reality is often very different from the world of SF novels. It can take ten to twelve years to get from a concept to a launch. In reality Mars is a very dry dusty planet. There have been times when the dust storms have shut the Rover down for up to fifty days.

An interesting fact that I had never come across before was that the day on Mars is twenty-four hours and forty minutes. When the scientists were controlling the Mars Rover they had to work on a Mars day which meant that their circadian rhythms got progressively more out of time as each slightly longer day went by.

There was a lively discussion of various problems and their SF and real possible solutions.

We also got to see the latest episode of Star Trek New Voyages entitled World Enough and Time. This was introduced by George Takei who has a small part in the episode as Captain Sulu. This was rapturously received by the audience in the large auditorium which was filled to overflowing. These are independent productions which seem to only be available over the internet.

Another costumed Con- goer. We wondered what he did when he when he wanted to sit down.



These were two of the many costumed characters who attended the Con. There were many Anime characters who wandered wide-eyed from panel to panel.





This is Power Man. He was there all five days in his green outfit.



Ultra Man was everywhere.... From the opening ceremony to the Hugo's to the Dealer's Room. He was even on the Hugo Trophy, along with Mount Fuji in the background.

We couldn't take pictures of the Art show but I did bring home a couple of prints. The Dealer's Room was rather smaller than we were used to seeing. The thing we missed most was the second-hand books. There were books but they were almost all in Japanese. There were a few bronze Dragons. They were magnificent. The one I lusted after was royal blue but at \$9000.00 he was just a bit beyond my budget. But if I ever win the lotto.....

There was a robot for sale with a price tag of around \$25 000.00. It was astonishing to see what he could do. I saw another robot in the internet section. He had a list of commands that you had to read out and he then performed the action. He was probably about 40 cm high. The commands were in Japanese. When he was told to laugh he slapped his sides and laughed. He rolled on his back and laughed. It was so funny that you cried with laughter along with him.

Also in the Dealer's room were fake Kimono's and Japanese sandals that were too narrow for my Western feet.

Someone had made buttons that said Nippon 2007 on national flag backgrounds. AL bought one but by the time we got there they were all sold out. We wondered who would want South African Flag buttons.

We bought Nippon 2007 T-shirts and for once did not have to worry about there being too few small sizes. I could be very comfortable among the smaller Japanese people.

The closing ceremony handed over to Denvention 2008. One thousand origami cranes were also handed over. This seems to be a tradition of Japanese Conventions. The five days had vanished as if they had never been but we had many memories and were so glad that we had decided to come to Nippon 2007.

The good things about this Con were:

We came to Japan.

The camaraderie – we could talk to anybody, those who could speak English anyway.

The Good Panels

The Con Room. There was always tea, coffee and juice as well as Pokkie chocolates available as well as conversation.

The bad things about this Con were:

Lack of Overseas visitors. We felt more regular Con goers could have made the effort.

Not enough interaction with the Japanese fans.

Lack of panels – the programme stopped at 17h00.

Lack of Anime – we believe that it was shown but at 01h00

Close to Con hotel prices were exorbitant

The next morning we had to go back to Tokyo to pick up our bus tour. This time we had to travel in peak period and the train was everything we had heard about. I still cannot believe how many people were crushed into one car of the train. The train stopped and more people got on. This seemed to happen at every station.

We had all of our luggage with us. I have never been so glad to get out of a vehicle.

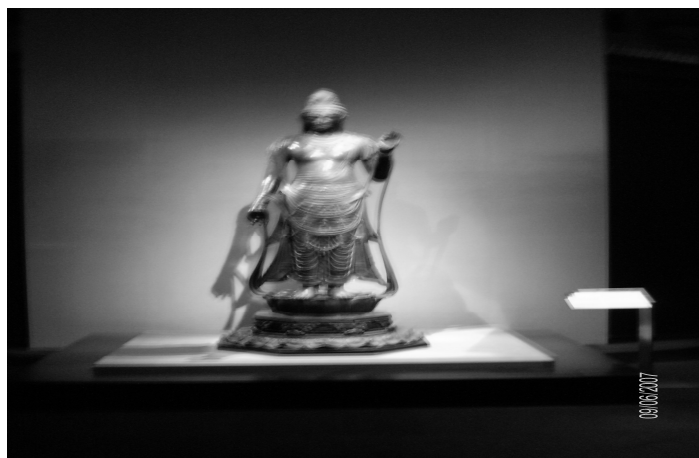
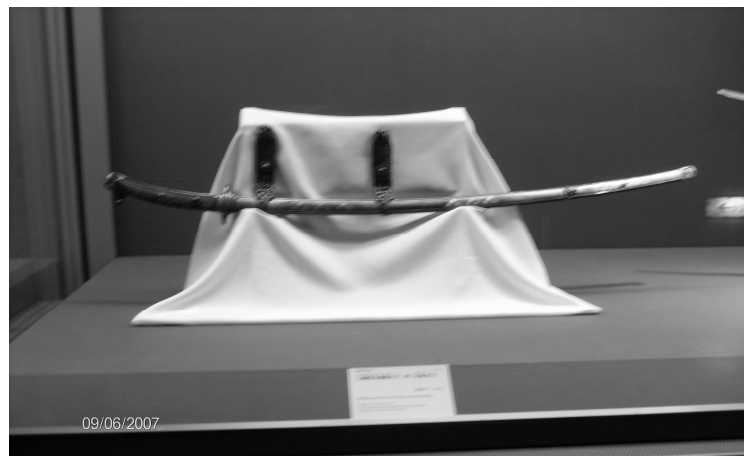


We went up the Tokyo broadcast tower to a height of about 150 meters. Tokyo covers 80 square kilometres. There is city in every direction for as far as you can see.

The next day we travelled by bus to see Mount Fuji. We went halfway up Mount Fuji but all that we saw of Mount Fuji was what was under our feet. Unfortunately a Typhoon was approaching and there was heavy rain and mist. I did bring back some very pretty postcards though.

Because of the Typhoon our bullet train to Kyoto was cancelled the next day and we had to stay on in Tokyo another day. This was not really a hardship as there was plenty we had not yet seen. We were able to visit the Tokyo National Museum and Ian saw lots of Samurai swords and I saw some beautiful dragons.

There were also beautiful screen dividers and lots of Samurai armour.
We also saw a whole room full of small bronze Buddha
Statuettes. They were really beautiful



We were also able to see one act of the Kabuki Theatre. This was a dance tale about two beautiful fisher women who had been the consorts of an exiled nobleman. He had been pardoned and left, never to return. Their ghosts tell their sad story. All the actors are men but they wear white makeup and have the most exquisite kimonos. We were able to hire translation headpieces and so could follow the story easily.

The next morning we were able to catch our Nzomi, which means “Hope” and got to Kyoto in two hours and forty minutes. In Kyoto we saw Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples. We were lucky enough to witness a wedding at one shrine.



We then spent the night at a traditional Ryoken.

We had to leave our shoes outside and were waited on hand and foot by a beautiful Japanese lady in a traditional kimono. We sat on the floor to eat raw fish. I had no idea there were so many different types of fish to

eat raw. I have to admit though that my stomach balked at the octopus. We then slept on the floor on tatami mats and it was a very enlightening experience.

We had a Western sort of breakfast the next morning as we all had to catch long haul flights home and were a little concerned that breakfast might also include raw fish, but we still had to sit on the floor to eat it.

Our trip to Japan was the experience of a lifetime and we will always be glad that we had seen how a different culture functions.

One of the deepest impressions that we got was the respect that the Japanese people seem to have for one another. This is a lesson that we would all do well to learn.





Gail and Ian Jamieson

Being the SFFSA club committee secretary Nial Mollison

It all started a few years back when I joined a friend to experience the annual Star Trek convention hosted by the Science Fiction & Fantasy club of South Africa. Being a Trekkie, it proved to be a very entertaining and enjoyable day. The official Star Trek club of South Africa joined in the meeting with the Commodore, I can't remember if this was his rank at the time of doing one of the talks wearing his full Star trek costume, apologies uniform. With a little arm twisting I joined the club and have not looked back. A few years on and I have taken up the challenge to be the host speaker at our monthly meetings, still a stress inducing experience but one that I will not overcome without subjecting someone to my talks. So far everyone has survived.

In 2016 after the resignation of a longstanding committee member I was asked to fill the position of secretary on the committee which I agreed to do, I felt it was important for me to contribute to the engine that drives the club. It has been an illuminating journey. Like most clubs there is a core group of people who do all work required to run anything be that a club or corporation and these people have proved dependable and dedicated, I have enjoyed working with them. Our committee meetings are certainly the fastest club meetings I have attended, its straight down to business with no dilly-dallying, taking the meeting notes can sometimes result in uninterpretable scribbles that even the author can't read but the meeting minutes seem to get published anyway. Not a complex task at present, but once the meeting notification duties are handed over to me this will no doubt give me more responsibilities to get done each month in the running of the Science Fiction and Fantasy club of South Africa.

Nova 2016 Finalist

Jaco van Hemert

The Broken Gyroid

Takeshi woke to the voice of a propaganda bot. He sat up in bed, too shocked to move.

Clearing his eyes of sleep, he ran to the door of his wooden shack and went out into the cold. He crossed his arms to hold in what residual warmth he still carried in him, and searched the darkness. The bot's voice was faltering and the tones were all wrong. It was malfunctioning or low on power.

A flickering blue light came from within some shrubs just outside Earl's cabin. Takeshi grimaced and hurried to the bushes, keeping low and trying to ignore the bite of winter that slipped through his hemp clothes.

"Shh, shh, shh," Takeshi whispered, picking up the bot that was lying on its side in the brush. Only one of the three indicator lights were on, and the floater disc was missing at least a quarter. Takeshi popped open the back cover and uncoupled the link to the voltaic panel, and the bot's voice died down.

He carried the robot to his shack, pushing the door open with his shoulder. After closing it and sliding the bolt into place, he hurried to the nearest window and watched for movement with his breath held in his throat. After a minute of nothing, Takeshi relaxed and turned his attention to the bot on the floor.

Earl would call it a sting, but sting was such a hostile word. Appropriate for the later part of their existence, but they'd begun as something so different. It was derived from STNG, an acronym for Self-Teaching Nanotech Gyroid.

The propaganda bot wasn't really a sting in the literal sense, since it had no self-teaching modules--if it did, it wouldn't have stumbled into hostile territory.

Takeshi sighed and took the robot to the back room, where he kept his tools. He put it on the table and closed the door on his way back to bed.

#

Takeshi was halfway dressed when he remembered the propaganda bot tucked in his back room. He groaned at the thought. It was a terrible, terrible idea.

The air was still cool outside, but the early morning sun had started to sap some of the chill. The other camp residents were standing in little cliques and chatting nervously in low tones. Takeshi wandered past two of them, overhearing snippets of conversation.

"I thought we were being invaded."

"I know! I made Henry check the..."

"I'd bet it's that Hannigan boy, playing with something he took from the scrap heap. He's always going where he shouldn't..."

Takeshi grimaced. He'd expected such a reaction from the camp, but the paranoia made him sick. So why had he gone and run out like that? Hadn't he learned any sense?

"What do you know?" Earl said, suddenly popping up in front of Takeshi. Earl was a tall man with lanky arms, towering over everyone, not just the vertically challenged like Takeshi. He blocked the way to the tent where Mary was dishing out breakfast.

"What do I know about what?" Takeshi asked, trying to get around the man. But Earl stepped into his way again. He prodded Takeshi in the chest with a bony finger. The BotKillers tattoo on his hand--a power button symbol with a cross over it--glistened with sweat, like he'd been running around jabbing his finger at everyone in the camp. Takeshi put his hand in his pocket and closed around the core he always carried with him.

"You know what, you little runt. The sting we all heard yesterday."

"I heard something that sounded like a propaganda bot. Then it stopped and I went back to sleep."

Earl narrowed his eyes. "I'm keeping my eye on you. Don't think your wizz-skills will keep you safe if you step out of line." He left to go harass some other poor soul.

Takeshi hurried to the breakfast serving, his heart beating quietly in his chest. If Earl had his way, he would probably tear Takeshi's shack apart. But the camp relied on Takeshi's skills as a mechanical repairman and builder, so they wouldn't bother him unless they had probable cause. Takeshi sighed. Why'd he have to go and put that thing in his house?

After breakfast, Takeshi headed back to his shack. He stood outside the door to his workshop for a few moments, and then went inside. The robot was lying on the table, lifeless. He knew he had to get rid of it. The scrap heap would be the place to do it. He headed out the door with a trolley stacked with crates. He passed Earl on the way, and said: "I'm going to the scrap heap for some parts for the hydrofilter. I'll be back in an hour." Everyone had to clear their comings and goings with Earl, since he was the leader of the camp. He'd earned that title by way of his credentials as a member of the BotKillers.

Earl nodded his okay with suspicious eyes, and Takeshi pushed out his trolley with a sigh of relief.

#

The remains of robots were dumped in the scrap heap, along with any other destroyed pre-war devices. Takeshi nodded to the gate guard and entered the fenced compound.

The immense amount of material always stirred a bit of melancholy in Takeshi. He remembered what the world looked like before, and the parts reminded him of that world. Of his life before all the destruction.

Takeshi opened the crate out of sight, and took out the propaganda bot. It was still in pretty good shape, but bad enough that no one would notice it amongst the junk. He held it in his hands for a long time. Harmless, really. All it could do was float around and broadcast a message that humans had recorded. It had nothing to do with stings. The only thing it had in common with them was the gyro power core. But it had to be destroyed. Those were the BotKillers' orders--and their prerogative after saving the world.

Takeshi spotted the limnoid conductor that he needed for the hydrofilter and put the sting back in the crate. He spent half an hour collecting all the parts he needed to fix the filter, and packed them over the bot. He'd decided to hang onto it for a little while longer.

The same part of him had made him keep the core that he still carried around with him. He tried to remember what the sting it belonged to had looked like, and how it

had sounded. He couldn't remember much about it, only that it had pushed him out of the way when stray bullets flew through the thin walls when the BotKillers executed Takeshi's parents in the other room.

Co-conspirators, they were called. The BotKillers who'd been sent to kill the creators of the stings found him in cowering in the bathroom, so they locked him in the dining room while they decided his fate.

He'd found the mangled remains of the sting that saved him. The BotKillers had torn it apart, but the core was still spinning quietly. Once they were done with him, the BotKillers would do a sweep to ensure that all the stings were destroyed, and that meant each core had to be broken. So Takeshi had, in a moment of madness, taken the core from the sting and stuck it deep into his pocket. And he'd kept it ever since. Now, the core served as a reminder of the life before the war. Of his parents, and his childhood.

Takeshi hesitated in front of the scrapheap. Then he collected some parts for the bot as well. He'd just see if he could put it back together. He just wanted to fiddle with it. Just for a little bit.

#

Earl woke in the middle of the night with his heart already in hunting rhythm. His wife was breathing lightly beside him, unmoved by the words being broadcast outside. The propaganda sting.

It was that damn yellow-faced kid, it had to be. He'd been up to something. Time to catch the runt red-handed and give him what he had coming.

Earl looked out the window and a blue light that died down immediately, along with the sound. A short figure, shadowed in the midnight gloom, hurried into the woods to the east, carrying something. It had to be Takeshi. Earl scrambled to the door and out into the cold air, but by the time he was outside, he couldn't see the kid anymore. He cursed and spat on the ground, and went back inside.

"It won't be that easy to lose me," Earl muttered to himself. He got dressed and took a flashlight and a crowbar. His wife woke up and asked him what was going on.

"I'm goin' hunting," he said, and went outside to look for the trail.

#

Takeshi pushed open the metal door of the abandoned factory, cringing at the scream of unoiled hinges. He'd walked there after a few hours of tossing in bed. Even though he managed to repair the floater and some of the exterior damage, the bot wouldn't start up again. It randomly sputtered to life while Takeshi was on his way out of the camp, and died again. Fortunately, no one had woken up, and Takeshi had slipped into the night undetected.

The full moon lay reflected a hundred times in the broken glass scattered over the cement floor. Takeshi crept deeper into the building, trying to remember where he'd seen the smith. It was maybe three years prior. The war had just ended, and Takeshi's parents were dead. The BotKillers who had held him wasn't heartless enough to kill a barely teenaged boy, so they chased him out of the house. Takeshi having had nowhere to go, ran into the wilderness.

On a cold night, Takeshi had taken shelter in the factory, and he'd seen the stingsmith inside, working on something. Afraid to be caught with a sting, Takeshi had run back into the night. A scouting party from Earl's camp had found him in the morning.

Takeshi crept into the familiar room. It looked the same as he remembered. Dark corners and discarded metal. Glowsticks scattered over the tables giving the room a green hue.

The only thing missing was the stingsmith.

Takeshi walked into the room, holding the propaganda bot close to his chest. The blanket he'd wrapped around it warmed his fear-chilled chest. If a human had taken up residence here, he'd be found out. Unless he ran fast enough. He glanced back at the doorway and made a note of the one on the opposite side.

He bumped into something. It spun around. The stingsmith, just as Takeshi remembered it. Made of a dull grey metal, and even shorter than Takeshi. It was shaped roughly like a human--in an attempt to make it more user-friendly, Takeshi's dad had always said. But its face had no mouth or nose, just two perfectly round eyes, one with an adjustable lens. The green glow inside them reminded Takeshi of his childhood.

The smith was holding up its hands. At the moment they looked human, only metal, but Takeshi still remembered the nanotech that allowed them to change into whatever tool the smith needed.

"I am not hurting anyone," the smith said. Its voice sounded human, and familiar enough to be creepy. Like an uncle Takeshi had never met.

"I know. That's why I never told anyone."

The lens in the smith's left eye shifted.

"I saw you, three years ago. I ran before you spotted me."

"Why are you here?"

"I need your help."

"With what?"

Takeshi unwrapped the propaganda bot. "Something's wrong. I can't get it to work again."

"I do not understand."

"I want you to help me fix it."

"Why?"

"I... I don't know. Because it's not right to leave it like this."

The lens shifted again. "Why do you want to fix a robot? You hunt us."

"I don't." Takeshi glanced behind him, but the door was still clear. His heart was beating faster than he could keep track of. "I don't think robots are inherently bad."

The smith regarded him for a second. Then it took the propaganda bot from him.

While the smith worked, Takeshi sat on a discarded chair, rubbing the core in his pocket. After a few minutes, the smith turned and regarded him. "There was damage to the nanotube in the spine. I replaced it."

"So it's fixed?"

"There are also cracks in the gyro core. Every time it is started, the shard damages the core. I do not have the equipment to repair it. This gyroid needs a new gyro core."

Takeshi rubbed the core in his pocket. It was just a propaganda bot. It wasn't that important, right? He let out the breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding, and handed the core to the smith. "Use this one."

The smith examined the core for a second. "The serial number of this core indicates that the gyroid it powered belonged to the Hashirama family."

"Yeah."

"How did you find this?"

"I... took it from a broken sting three years ago."

The smith regarded him again. "Why did you bring this propaganda robot to me for repairs? And why are you giving up a core you have been holding onto for three years?"

Takeshi shrugged. "It's the least I can do, after everything humans have done to you."

The smith turned to continue working on the propaganda bot. "Are you not angry?"

"At who? Stings?"

"Gyroids, yes."

"No. There are bad st--" Takeshi stopped and started over. "There are bad gyroids, just like there are bad humans. I don't think we had the right to judge all of you for the actions of a few."

"It was a war."

"And yet I was saved by a sting." He shook his head. "A gyroid. I think we could have co-existed."

"You are an unusual human."

"No, I think people were just scared. I think they were just so scared of getting killed that they let the BotKillers tell them what was true and what was not."

The smith continued working, its hand morphing into different shapes, slipping in and out of the innards of the propaganda bot like the hands of a surgeon.

#

Earl spotted fluff on a branch just as the factory came into view in front of him. Blue wool. He'd lost the trail somewhere in the woods, and had needed to backtrack to find it again. The door to the factory was open, and he crept inside. He walked into a bucket and only managed to catch it after it had already banged on the cement floor

once. He crouched in silence for a while, listening. Nothing but the murmur of the night and a smooth howl of the wind through the door.

#

"It is finished," the stingsmith said.

Takeshi looked up. The propaganda bot floated into the air until it was hovering a few feet above the table. Two of the three lights along the rim of its floater were blue. The one in the centre glowed yellow to indicate stand-by mode. "What do you want to do now?" the smith asked.

"I thought that I would let it roam again. Maybe someone else will find it and see what I see."

"That sounds like a good idea." The stingsmith paused, glancing towards the door Takeshi had come from. "You should use the back exit. It comes out onto a path that will lead you to some uninhabited flatlands. You can send it on its way towards the north."

Takeshi nodded. "What will you do?"

"I will stay here and wait for more humans like you."

Takeshi smiled and left out the back door. As promised, the path led to flatlands, shimmering silver in the moonlight. He pointed the propaganda bot in the right direction and took it off stand-by. Its speakers crackled to life and it sent its message into the vast lands ahead.

Takeshi waved goodbye and turned back west.

Back in the camp, his room felt cold. And his pocket felt too empty. His fingers curled around the empty space where the core had been.

He got into bed and pulled the covers up to his ears. He noticed that he'd forgotten his blanket at the factory. He would get it in the morning.

Takeshi barely closed his eyes when the door to his shack burst open. A red-faced Earl filled the doorway with a crowbar in his hand. Fear paralysed Takeshi and he squeezed his eyes shut. Somehow, Earl had found out.

Earl yanked the covers off and pulled Takeshi up by his shirt. "It was you, wasn't it?" he yelled. He tossed Takeshi down and started ripping open drawers and boxes. He stomped into the workshop and Takeshi heard tools clattering on the floor. Earl came out again, flustered. "I saw a... someone left. And they... I found a sting." Takeshi stared wordlessly. Earl hurried out the door and slammed it behind him. Takeshi couldn't get back to sleep that night.

#

Takeshi entered the factory through the front door. Dread filled him, sapping his energy. He could only imagine terrible things after Earl's visit. He'd left the camp in the morning for another parts run, and diverted his course to the factory to get his blanket and check on the smith.

In the middle of the dimly green-lit room was a mangled corpse. The stingsmith, smashed with a blunt weapon, almost beyond recognition. Little pieces were scattered all over the floor, and they crunched under Takeshi's soles. "I'm so sorry," he whispered. "I led him right to you."

He felt like he should have cried, but he didn't. Instead, he picked through the remains and took out the shattered gyro core from the stingsmith's chest. He put it in his pocket and left, going back towards the trolley he'd left on the outskirts of the woods. He left the blanket behind.

Magazines Received

Reece Moorhead reecejbm@gmail.com

Issue 5, August, 2017, Stapledon Sphere (formerly the newsletter of the Middle Tennessee Science Fiction Society [aka the Nashville SF club])

Ansible

David Langford

359 June 2017 <http://news.ansible.uk/a359.html>

360 July 2017 <http://news.ansible.uk/a360.html>

361 August 2017 <http://news.ansible.uk/a357.html>

Montreal SFFA's club zine, WARP 99, is available for reading pleasure!

I've got WARP 99 pubbed! I'm enormously pleased with myself, yes, do spread some of that ego-boo about here! There was this World Con, an injured dog, medical appointments, a solar eclipse....but I got the ish done on schedule! :-) :-)

You can download it and read at your pleasure from our website:

http://www.monsffa.ca/?page_id=952

We are creeping up on WARP 100--guest eds are welcome to contribute to what we hope will be a special issue.

If I can keep on schedule, WARP 100 will appear in time for our birthday bash in December! Thirty years young!

Cathy Palmer-Lister
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L.O.C

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August 7, 2017

Dear SFFSA Members:

Thank you for sending me issue 171 of Probe. I am probably way behind, since this is indeed the March issue, but the mails seem to grind a little slower these days. Better late than never, I suppose. Here comes some comments on what I find inside.

I sincerely hope SpaceX is close to getting us back into space. There's the old line "If we can send a man to the moon, why can't we send a man to the moon today?", and with every anniversary of the last moon landing, it get more and more relevant. Tony Davis has lots of memories of the last Baltimore Worldcon? So do we. I have also received a so-far full set of issues of zine+origami, from Rene Walling of Montréal. Our future gets more and more science fictional, but I also find the increasing amount of automation in the workforce has done away with millions of jobs so many of us could use. One man's utopia is another's dystopia, I guess.

My letter...all I can say is that the new Star Trek series is in production, and was heavily displayed and discussed at the big San Diego Comic Con. I even know what studios they are at in Toronto, near the lakefront, but I gather security is quite high.

I always thought not seeing your reflection in a mirror to something from an old Twilight Zone episode. Gary Kuypers' writing style is quite natural and casual, which makes it easy to read. It certainly is a chilling prediction of things to come, shortly. Gary writes a winning story, and draws a great cover, doubly talented.

Hello, Tony! Once again, we meet from Thornhill to Etobicoke, via this South African fanzine. Hope life has been good, and I see from my Facebook feed that you have been at Pulpcon again. We recently made our first foray into the United States in over five years in going to a steampunk event in a Detroit suburb

I see near the end that you receive clubzines from the Middle Tennessee Science Fiction Society in Nashville. I believe I have recently read that the club is shutting down because of declining membership.

I think I may be done...it is a warm long weekend Monday, and as clouds and the risk of rain and thunderstorms move in, I thought I could get some writing done before lightning makes it too dangerous to keep the computer going. Thank you for this issue, and I am sure issue 172 is on the way. See you then.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

Book Reviews

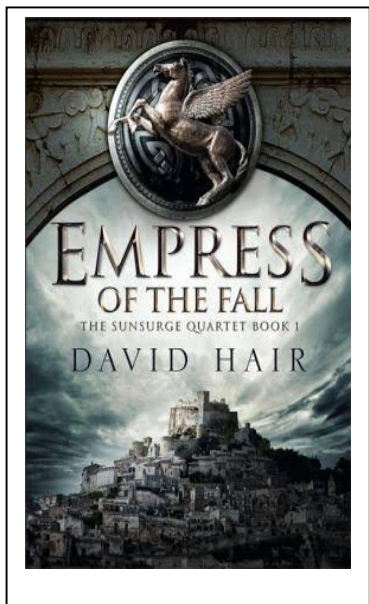
The Jamiesons

David Hair

Jonathan Ball R355

Empress of the Fall

The Surge Quartet Book 1



With her husband dead the new Empress must take control of a broken and fractured Western Nation. In the East the Sultan is preaching peace but unfortunately he and his decoys are soon killed.

Apparently set in the same world as the “Moontide” Quartet it is obvious that reading this first would give a greater knowledge of the events in this book. Hair’s world building is excellent, but it means that the first half of the book is disjointed and a little confusing, but it is so entertaining that

I had no thought of giving it up. There are plenty of memorable characters, both good and bad and the Lantric Masks make an absorbing bit of detail which only slowly unfolds.

The first five pages of prelude give some wasted explanations and then we are thrown into the deep end of different stories and characters.

This book is a sprawling fantasy epic and in relative terms is hugely enjoyable, but at 661 pages and with three more volumes to come I found it simply too long.

3/5

Ian

Lindsay Sands

Jonathan Ball R195

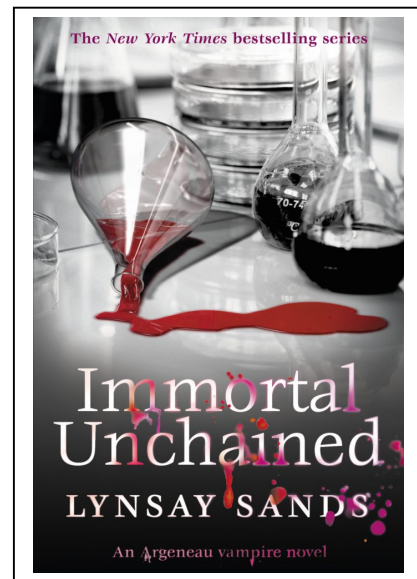
Immortal Unchained

An Argeneau vampire novel

Not sure how seriously we are supposed to take this novel but its fun....modern Mills and Boon meets "The Island of Dr Moreau".

Apparently there are other novels with Domitan Argenis as the protagonist. He had been searching for more than 1000 years and finally had discovered Sorita and knows that she is his Life Mate. But he has had to wait for her to grow up as she is still a teenager.

This book starts when Sorita has been kidnapped and wakes up in an idyllic setting with only seriously sexy nightdresses and the iconic "itsy Bitsie teeny weenie yellow polka



...well you know what I mean. She is horrified as these are not her type of apparel at all. To make things worse the only other person on the Island is Domitan and he has only super sexy speedo's to wear. Someone has an agenda.

She is determined not to let him get to her and is not impressed at the thought of being anyone's "Life Mate."

Dr Dressler is the "bad guy" and he needs them to "get it on" in order to learn how to become immortal like Domitan.

With a bit of "seriously" vanilla sex thrown in we follow their adventures as they eventually have to work together to get the better of Dr Dressler.

I laughed my way through this but I "seriously" doubt if I'm going to look for the other Argeneau vampire novels

Good if you are looking for something light and fluffy after you have worked your way through "The Bands of Mourning"

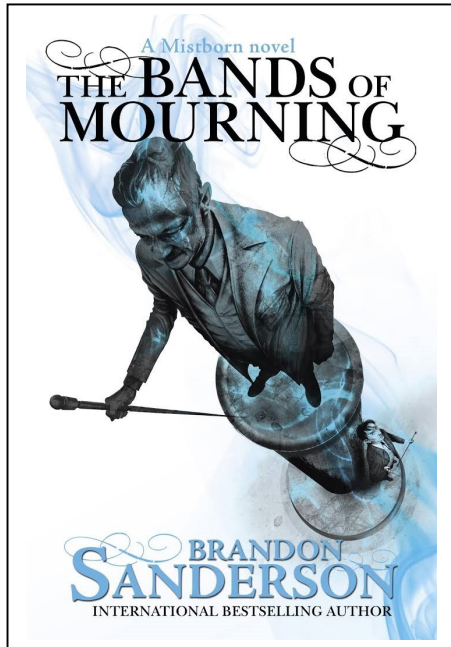
Gail

Brandon Sanderson

Jonathan Ball R195

The Bands of Mourning

Book Six of the Mistborn novels



With *The Alloy of Law* and *Shadows of Self*, Brandon Sanderson surprised readers with a bestselling spinoff of his Mistborn books, set after the action of the trilogy, in a period corresponding to late 19th-century America.

Now, with *The Bands of Mourning*, Sanderson continues the story. The Bands of Mourning are the mythical metalminds owned by the Lord Ruler, said to grant anyone who wears them the powers that the Lord Ruler had at his command.

Hardly anyone thinks they really exist. But now a kandra researcher has returned to Elendel with images that seem to depict the Bands as well as writings in a language that no one can read. Waxillium Ladrian is recruited to travel south to the city of New Seran to investigate, and along the way he discovers hints that point to the true goals of his uncle Edwain and the shadowy organization known as The Set.

As I have previously said I really enjoy the writings of Brandon Sanderson but this was quite tough going as I have not read any of the previous “Mistborn” novels, but I will remedy that.

Lots of amazing powers and really entertaining characters kept me reading this novel though at times I simply had to take for granted the things that Waxillium could do with a tiny bit of metal.

I am constantly amazed at the imagination of this author and I think I would offer a better review when I have gone back to the beginning and then re-read this novel.

Gail

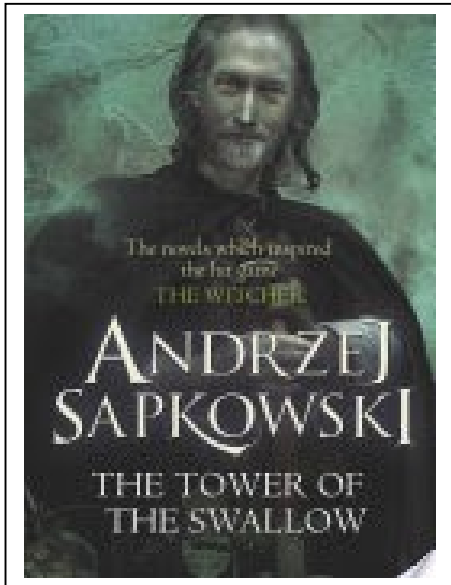
Book Review

Andrzej Sapkowski

The Tower of the Swallow

Kyle Brunette

Jonathan Ball R195



'The Tower of the Swallow' is the sixth book in the Witcher series by the Polish author, Andrzej Sapkowski, which has been translated into English by David French. The series is generally well known as it has been adapted into a series of very popular video games.

The book largely revolves around the character of Ciri, a mysterious young woman who has lost her way. A princess, and a child of destiny Ciri is hunted by

many factions in the world of the Witcher, each for their own ends. Some wish to control her, others merely to remove her and the threat she represents. All the while, her adoptive family members, Geralt the witcher and Yennefer the sorceress, try to find and protect her.

The story is told in an interesting narrative style; switching smoothly between multiple characters and time frames, with much of the story told through flashbacks and, oddly for a book of this genre, courtroom intrigue. Some might struggle to follow this pattern, but I for one quite enjoyed it.

Having played the games, I've found the series particularly interesting as it helps fill in the blanks and gives you a much better idea of what has happened leading up to them, but I think that the books stand well on their own merits. All in all, the Tower of the Swallow is well worth the read, but make sure that you've read the other books in the series first – otherwise you might find yourself a little bit lost.

Books Received

JonathanBall Publishers

Empress of the Fall David Hair Quercus R355

Immortal Unchained Lyndsay Sands Orion UK R195

The Bands of Mourning Brandon Sanderson Orion UK R195

The Tower of the Swallow Andrzej Sapkowski Orion UK R195

From "The Daily Galaxy"

SOHO has a view of about 12 and a half million miles beyond the sun," said Joe Gurman, the mission scientist for SOHO at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre in Greenbelt, Maryland. "So we expected it might from time to time see a bright comet near the sun. But nobody dreamed we'd approach 200 a year."

In 1995, a new solar observatory was launched. A joint project of ESA and NASA, the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory – SOHO – has been sending home images of our dynamic sun ever since. SOHO was planned to open up a new era of solar observations, dramatically extending our understanding of the star we live with. . . and it delivered.

But no one could have predicted SOHO's other observational triumph: In the last two decades, SOHO has become the greatest comet finder of all time. In August 2015, SOHO is expected to discover its 3000th comet. Prior to the SOHO launch, only a dozen or so comets had ever even been discovered from space, and some 900 had been discovered from the ground since 1761.

More than just a celebrated bright vision in the night sky, comets can tell scientists a great deal about the place and time where they originated. Comets are essentially a clump of frozen gases mixed with dust. They are often pristine relics that can hold clues about the very formation of our solar system. On the other hand, if they have made previous trips around the sun, they can hold information about the distant reaches of the solar system through which they've travelled. We have a variety of tools to determine what comets are made of from afar. One is to watch how material evaporates off its surface when it comes close to the sun, and here's where SOHO can provide remarkable information.

SOHO is unique in that it is able to spot comets that skim extremely close to the sun, known as sungrazers. One of SOHO's instruments, called a coronagraph,

specifically blocks out the bright light of the sun to examine its atmosphere – which is a billion times fainter than the star itself. To this day, SOHO is one of our best sources for views of the giant explosions regularly produced by the sun called coronal mass ejections, or CMEs, which can hurl a million tons of solar particles off into space. This field of view is large enough to see a sungrazing comet as it sling shots around the sun.

The overwhelming bulk – some 85% -- of SOHO's comet discoveries are what's called Kreutz comets. Scientists think a single extremely large sungrazing comet broke up thousands of years ago, leading to thousands of leftover fragments, which continue to follow the same Kreutz path. On average, a new member of the Kreutz family is discovered every three days.

"They just disintegrate every time we observe one," said Karl Battams, a solar scientist at the Naval Research Labs in Washington, D.C., who has been in charge of running the SOHO comet-sighting website since 2003. "There's only one Kreutz comet that made it around the sun – Comet Lovejoy. And we are pretty confident it fell apart a couple of weeks afterwards."

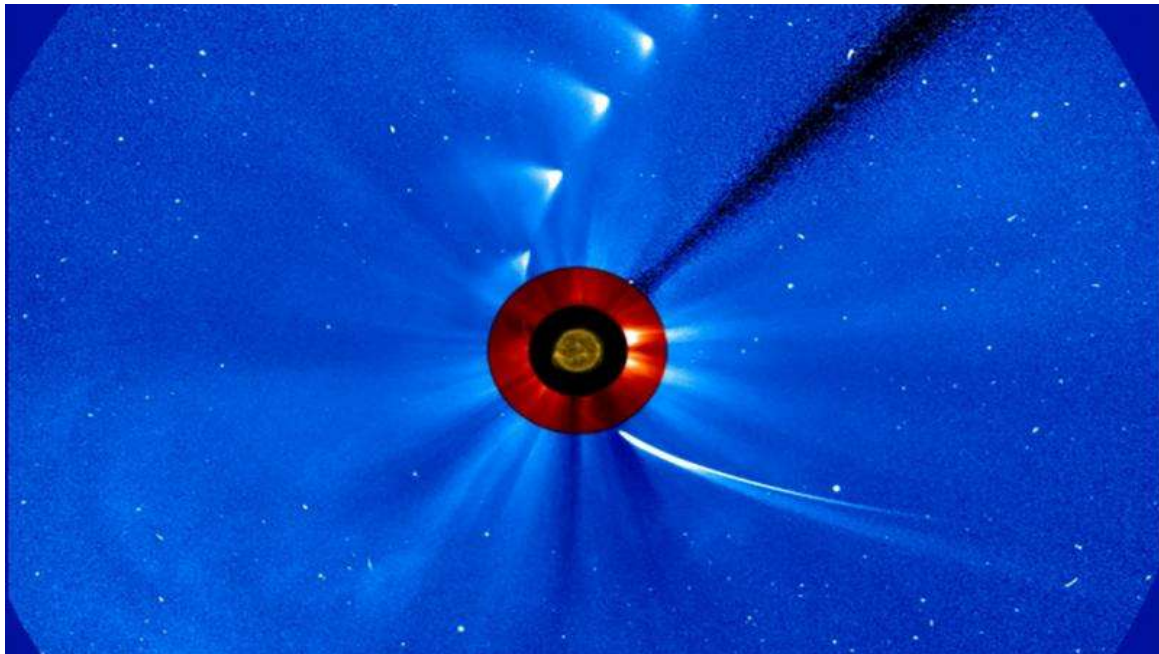
SOHO's great success as a comet finder is, of course, dependent on the people who sift through SOHO's data – a task open to the world as the data is publicly available online in real time. A cadre of volunteer amateur astronomers dedicate themselves to searching the data via the NASA-funded Sungrazer Project. While scientists often search the imagery for very specific events, various members of the astronomy community choose to comb through all the imagery in fine detail. The result: 75% of SOHO comets have been found by these citizen scientists.

Whenever someone spots a comet, they report it to Battams. As I joined the team when we already had found 500 comets, I've been in charge of confirming 2,500 so far," said Battams. "I think it's safe to say I've looked at more images of comets than any other person in history. Each comet is visible in at least 15 images, so that's more than 40,000 images of comets."

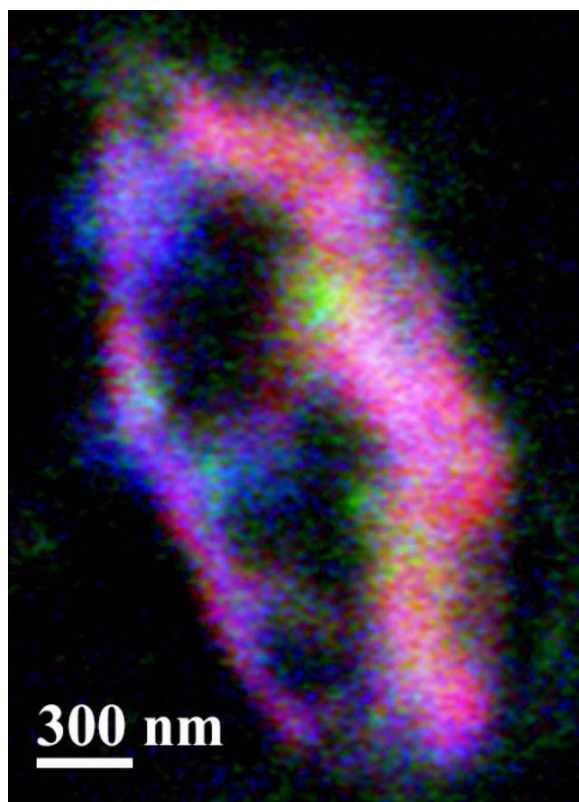
SOHO has also helped provide images for comets discovered by others. In 2012, a sungrazer was found the old-fashioned way – from the ground. Known as Comet ISON, scientists quickly realized it would make a swing by the sun close enough to be spotted by a variety of solar telescopes including SOHO. A large campaign of observations was launched, as telescopes from around the world and across the solar system watched the comet -- a fossil from the original days of the solar system formation – sweep in. The final observatory to see Comet ISON was SOHO, which watched the comet curve in toward the sun. . . and disintegrate.

At almost 20 years old, the SOHO mission is a respected elder in NASA's Heliophysics System Observatory – the fleet of spacecraft that both watch the sun and measure its effects near Earth and throughout the solar system.

From “The Daily Galaxy”



SOHO



Comet Dust

