

# PROBE 181

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY SOUTH AFRICA





## **PROBE 181**

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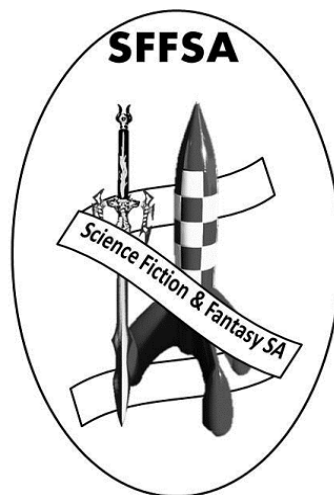
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Email: [gailjamieson@gmail.com](mailto:gailjamieson@gmail.com)

*Probe* is typed by Gail Jamieson and other contributors.

Cover: "Wanderer 1" Lothar Bauer

Cover finalisation by Michael Haitel



Layout is by Gail Jamieson and Ian Jamieson

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# PROBE 181

Spetember 2019

- 3. Editorial
- 4. Chairman's Note
- 5. L.O.C Lloyd Penny
- 6. Nova 2018 3rd Place Patrick Coyne "The Peace Rose"
- 27. Book Reviews Ian & Gail Jamieson, Tony Davis
- 33. Nova 2018 Highly Recommended Eben David  
November "Guardrail"
- 43. Magazines Received
- 43. Books Received
- 44. Nova 2018 Highly Recommended Gary Kuyper  
"Carte Blanche"
- 54. "Origins. 4 Solution" Tertius Carstens



# Editorial

# Gail

SFFSA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary has come and gone and gone and life goes on.... I'll do a report back on the great Anniversary dinner we had in PROBE182.

This issue is mostly back to Nova 2018 and we publish the 3<sup>rd</sup> placed story by Patrick Coyne and a couple of the stories which were highly recommended by Alyson Kreuter, our final judge.

We've also got lots of Book Reviews, and plenty more to come for the next issue. And we also have a review from Tony Davis in Canada.



Lloyd Penny, also from Canada has sent a request for story submissions from the "Amazing Stories" website. It would be great if a couple of South African SF&F authors had their stories published there. Please see his L.O.C. for details

In September the Astronomical and Telescope Society held their annual exhibition, SCOPEX, at the South African Military Museum and invited SFFSA to host a table to support them and to advertise SFFSA. So eight members of SFFSA offered a couple of hours of their time and helped us out. We had copies of "The Best of SFFSA volume III", and newer and older PROBES on offer as well as short Story competition entry forms and Club Application forms as well.

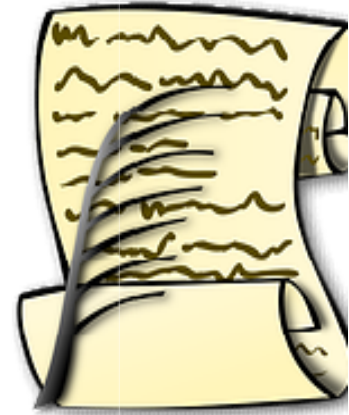
Personally I had a couple of interesting conversations with members of the Astronomical society as well as with other people who had come to see the exhibition. Some enjoyed mixing fiction with Astronomical science and others felt that there was too much happening in the Astronomical world to spend time on Speculative fiction. To each his own I guess, but my world would be a lot more unexciting without Science Fiction and Fantasy.

SCOPEX was intriguing for me. We were in a hall that exhibited huge military vehicles, mostly tanks which was a little surreal. Sci-Bono were there with puzzles, mainly for children but I saw some adults as well. There was a model of the International Space station, with all its new additions; Astronomical photographs; models of the solar system; telescopes from the small to the very large and what was really interesting to me was a "Camera Obscura". I'd only seen one on TV before and it was "neat" to see how clearly the camera was able to be focused on the exhibits scattered around the grounds of the museum and project them onto the table inside the tent. A worthwhile and entertaining afternoon.

## Chairman's Note

Andrew Jamieson

Ah, computers, bane or boon of mankind? They have actually been around a long time, if you consider computers as simple calculation machines, an abacus could be one. If you want to talk about modern, digital computers, then well, yes, that did come much later. Alan Turing, considered by many as the father of computer science, came up with the design for a stored-program computer of which one of the first designs was in 1945 for the Automatic Computing Engine (apparently in homage to Charles Babbage, another some also consider a father of computer science, and his Difference Engine an automatic, mechanical calculator).



Of course. it did take a few years more before computers

could be small enough and cheap enough to be used in homes, and that only came about in the 1970's. However, if you call it just about 50 years later, and consider the computers some of us worked on as a teenager versus what we work on nowadays, that is one heckofa difference.

In high school I was lucky enough to go to Christian Brother's College in Boksburg where they actually had a subject Computer Science that was taught as part of the school curriculum. I have always been a computer buff and being able to learn about computers (which I had previously only played with a bit on my Commodore 64) was just awesome. I still remember learning at school the programming language Logo, which was very basic, and just moved a triangular "Tortoise" around the green, monochrome screen, on a computer that ran at only 4.7Hz - please note the missing "G" there, as in hertz, not gigahertz. The computers took a long time to boot up, but it least we had computers we could work on.

From these slow, slow computers I worked with at school, at university I finally got to work with VGA computers, with colour graphics, and since it has just been faster and faster processors as the years roll by. From those humble, and slow, computers, the current computer I am typing this note on runs at 3.30 GHz! So in a matter of just over 30 years computers have increased processing speeds to just ridiculous levels... and yet we still think they often run too slow!

So where will computers be in another 30 years? There is something called Moore's Law that basically observes that "the number of transistors on a chip doubles about every two years", or, doing a very roughly translation, computer chips double in speed about every two years. It is not perfect, but has shown to be pretty close to what has happened in reality, so if computers increased by about another 700,000 times, just what will our computers be doing then? Maybe they can finally accurately

predict the weather, or perhaps your own computer can search billions of articles almost instantly. For me, computer games should look amazing by then as the computational power to generate realistic environments can only get better.

However, a common idea of where computers will go (as there are various fundamental problems of making things smaller and smaller in the same space, something about electrons and interference when they are so close together) is to head into realms like quantum computers, optical computers, and even DNA computers (for mass storage).

Quantum computers use the mechanics and properties of quantum particles to basically to check all probabilities of a problem, then narrow down the results to just a few (hopefully just one) for the answer(s). Since a quantum computer can therefore basically check for all results at once, instead of a digital computer which has basically to check each potential result one at a time (excluding parallel processing), it means it could possibly be many times faster than a digital computer. Only thing is, we are still years away from anything even close for a quantum computer considering how difficult it is to work with quantum states. Also, it seems that a quantum computer may not be something you will find replacing your current computer, the problems it solves are not what a digital computer can do better, namely accurate mathematical calculations. So we will have to see where this technology goes.

A potentially more likely replacement for the silicon chip is an optical chip, as in a chip that uses light to transfer information around the circuit board. Whilst electrical signals can, apparently, travel very fast, as in nearly the speed of light; there are physical issues in ensuring everything works properly. The biggest problem currently seems to be heat, something which will mostly disappear when light is used. Light can be faster, allow more data to be transferred and require less power. Of course, working with light at such small scales has their own problems, so again, expect something only years away.

No matter where computers go in the future, we know they are here to stay, they are practically everywhere nowadays (potentially even on your wrist), and making them faster, well, I guess it cannot hurt being able to do even more with the modern computer.

## L.O.C Lloyd Penny

Hello, Gail... I attended our annual literary SF convention, Ad Astra, in Toronto, this past weekend. You might know that Amazing Stories has been revived once again, this time by Steve Davidson of New Hampshire. He's had the Amazing Stories website going for some years, but the magazine version is a going concern. The editor-in-chief is an old friend, Ira Nayman, who happens to live here in Toronto, so I

volunteered my services to Ira as a copy editor and proof-reader. That started with Issue 2, and I have just finished my initial edits to him for the fifth issue.

Anyway, I talked to Ira this past weekend about writers in South Africa, and he definitely encourages people from all over the world to submit to Amazing. So, with that in mind, and this is directly from the Amazing ad in the Ad Astra programme book...

### **CALL FOR AUTHORS!**

Amazing Stories is looking for short stories that are fresh and new. We want to be surprised. We want your stories to be amazing. We want to be blown away by your style, your grand ideas and the substance and depth of your writing.

<http://submissions.amazingstoriesmag.com>

If you could put this in the next issue of Probe, I am sure there are plenty of South African writers who will have a look at their website. Probe has benefitted from so much good writing, but a pro magazine like Amazing could be the next step for one or two. Many thanks!

Lloyd Penney

**Nova 2018**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

## **Patrick Coyne The Peace Rose**

Professor Rosemary Fallon, 30, parked her car outside Columbia University's Nevis Research Centre and checked her appearance in the driver's mirror. She knew some of her colleagues called her 'beautiful, but married to her Science', or worse, 'the Ice Maiden'. She glanced down at the yellow rose-bud she wore on the lapel of her smart business suit. It had been given to her that morning by Dr Robert Niven. He was the one colleague she felt she could talk to on any matter, not just scientific ones.

As she walked into the building, Rosemary gathered her thoughts. In a few minutes' time she was to present to the Nevis Research Committee the project she hoped would be part of their programme for the year 2029. There was a problem: Professor Arthur Helmasburger. So far, he had resisted everything she had tried to do at Nevis. Taking her place in the Committee Room, Rosemary made a conscious effort to

banish negative thoughts: she must simply ignore Helmasburger. If that were possible...

The Chairman, Professor Maxwell Deans, said, 'Our first business this morning is to consider proposals for this year's research programme. The first proposal: Professor Rosemary Fallon, you have the floor.'

'Thank you, Mr Chairman,' said Rosemary, standing. She took a deep breath.

'Ladies and gentlemen...Before I was invited to work at Nevis, I was involved with the Square Kilometre Array in South Africa. In the ten years the SKA project has been fully operational, it has done excellent work in pushing back the limits of astronomical exploration. Perhaps the most important of these was establishing that, of the seven planets orbiting the star Gliese 581, three appear to have an earth-type temperature range and evidence of surface water.'

She checked her notes. 'But,' she continued, 'vitaly interesting as these observations were, they did not satisfy my hopes for any future research. As everyone knows, those radio telescopes normally look only at the universe as it was in the *past*. And the deeper into space they venture, the further back in the past are the objects they are seeing, as they were, thousands, millions, billions of years ago. Frankly, I found the prospect rather inadequate, and - '

'Mr Chairman!' exploded Professor Helmasburger, 'I must protest! By calling the SKA project "inadequate", Dr Fallon reveals once and for all the limitations of her scientific outlook. The SKA does not only find earth-type planets. It opens up exciting new areas of research into the origin of the Universe, dark matter, cosmic magnetism, and much more. I hope she is not going to waste our time by -- '

The Chairman raised his hand. 'One moment, Professor,' he said. 'There is no evidence that Professor Fallon is wasting our time - yet. Please continue, Rosemary.'

She said, 'Thank you, Mr Chairman. In answer to Professor Helmasburger's interruption, I must point out that I did *not* call the SKA project inadequate. I said I found the prospect for personal research on my part rather inadequate...'

'So, to continue, during the last year I have been considering the whole field of faster-than-light particles.' (Helmasburger gave a scornful laugh.) 'I have studied the work done by this university's own scientist, Gerald Feinberg, who named these FTL particles "tachyons" - '



‘Mr Chairman!’ Helmasburger interrupted. ‘The existence of faster-than-light particles has *not* been proven. Anyway, the idea violates Special Relativity and therefore Causality.’

Rosemary sighed and said, ‘Fried and Gabellini have recently stated a very strong case for tachyons, saying that special relativity does *not* entirely preclude their existence!’

Helmasburger said, ‘It is pure speculation, and belongs in the realm of science fiction!’

Rosemary said, ‘Mr Chairman, before I continue, I can’t help reminding Professor Helmasburger that one of the publically stated aims of the SKA is to search for extra-terrestrial life! Some would say that’s in the realm of science fiction... (*laughter*) To continue, I would further remind the Professor that in 1958 Feinberg predicted the existence of a *second* type of neutrino, which at that time was also thought to be “pure speculation, and in the realm of science fiction”. Its existence was later *confirmed* by the Columbia University scientists Lederman, Schwartz, and Steinburger, who got the Nobel Prize for their work.’

‘That was different!’ said Helmasburger.

‘That’s a matter of opinion... What was apparently *not* different, was the ongoing conviction of many scientists that the so-called laws of Physics were immutable – that they could never be changed. Before 1942 the physics textbooks all stated firmly that *the atom was indivisible*. Enrico Fermi – also originally of this university - could never have proved that *the atom could be divided* if he had listened to people like my colleague here.’ Helmasburger gave a gasp of disgust. ‘In 1964 Peter Higgs made the very daring suggestion of a particle with an imaginary uncondensed phase. The so-called “Higgs boson” was confirmed to exist on 14 March 2013. So – in science there is no such thing as “immutability”! My project will include research into other elementary particles that Feinberg called “psychons”, and which Hans Berger proposed were the agents of psychic energy that could be transmitted any distance and through all obstacles - ’

‘Mr Chairman!’ roared Helmasburger, ‘First it’s superluminal particles, now it’s *telepathy* she’s talking about! I cannot believe that this respected Committee will seriously consider approving Dr Fallon’s project. Columbia University is famous for its tradition of practical scientific research since 1754. It must *not* have its reputation

damaged by such unscientific, speculative pursuits. I demand that this be put to the vote at once.'

'Mr Chairman,' said Rosemary, 'do I have to put up with these rude interruptions? For Professor Helmasburger to call the work to which I am referring "unscientific" or "speculative" shows the limits of *his* scientific outlook.' She ignored the rude word the Professor muttered. 'I would remind him first that Albert Einstein was very encouraging towards telepathy experiments and actually wrote the preface to a book on the subject. Further, does the Professor not know that during the last ten years the success rate in scientifically controlled experiments in telepathy has risen to 92%? I must also point out that analysts have recorded that during the fourteen years from 2015 to the present, much of the focus in scientific research has shifted away from the purely technical to the development of the powers of the human mind ...'

Professor Deans interrupted, 'Excuse me, Rosemary, I'm sorry, I have been asked a question and I must act on it.' He looked round at the senior Faculty Members. 'Well, do you agree that we vote on this question - *now*?' Many heads nodded. 'Right. The question is: does this Committee approve Professor Fallon's project for our planned 2029 research scheme? Those in favour? Those against? ... Sorry, Rosemary, your proposal is dismissed.'

'They threw it out?' asked Dr Robert Niven

'Almost unanimously,' said Rosemary, conscious that she sounded bitter. 'Those conservative old Faculty Members, easily persuaded by Helmasburger...'

'You're not going to give up, are you?'

'Give up? Rob, you know me better than that. But where on earth could we work?'

Niven said, 'Wait a minute... Rose, I believe old Hiram would let us use his laboratories.'

'Hiram?'

'Hiram P Bell. His research department is having a slack time right now. And he owes me.'

Rosemary knew that the Bell Laboratories had used the results of Niven's work in the past for production of their computer elements. 'Do you really think we could work there?'

Niven raised a non-committal eyebrow and reached for his phone.

Rosemary pinned on to her lapel Rob Niven's latest yellow rose-bud. She smiled fleetingly at him, and gazed round at the team of post-doctoral research scientists and graduate students assembled for the first time in the premises of Bell Laboratories. 'Well, folks, at least we have a home! Now, here is the background and the scheme of our programme. You must know (it was public knowledge: the media carried it world-wide) that on 9 October 2008 the Ukraine National Space Agency aimed a high-powered radio signal at the star Gliese 581. Probably, to be more precise, at its planet "g" which was regarded as being the most earth-like of Gliese's seven planets. (Some people have called it "Zarmina's World". This was the name that one of its finders, Vogt, gave it unofficially, after his wife.)

'The signal consisted of a sort of "digital time-capsule", full of pictures of our cities plus five hundred messages composed by people selected from thousands of volunteers. This year, 2029, is the year when that signal will arrive (or has recently arrived?) at Gliese 581 g - it being twenty point three light-years distant from us. *If* that earth-like planet is inhabited by sentient, intelligent beings, then now is the time that they could answer that message. But, I, for one, do not propose to wait another 20.3 years for their answer to arrive on Earth!' She waited for the laughter to die down.

'As you may know, much research has been done into the existence of the faster-than-light particles that Gerald Feinberg called "tachyonic particles". By the way, I must remind you of the important fact that recent research into a more complete Quantum Field Theory has resulted in Particle Physics taking on a whole new direction. Now, what the Nevis Lab committee *refused* to recognise, but what interests *us*, is that amongst these tachyonic particles, Feinberg proposed the existence of elementary particles which he called 'psychons'. As Hans Berger proposed, these particles would be the agents of the electrical energy of the human brain transferred to "psychic energy". He suggested that this psychic energy could be transmitted over any distance, through any obstacles, and independently of the limitations of the speed of light.'

Rosemary looked round at the intent faces. 'Most of you will have kept abreast of world research into telepathic communication, and its recent rise in success rate.'



She glanced at Rob Niven with raised eyebrows and got his nod. 'As some of you may know, under Dr Niven, a small team of top telepathic operators - who are present among us today - succeeded in making telepathic contact with some of the Mars colonists. At least, those Mars colonists who were able to tear themselves away from entertaining TV viewers here on Earth! But, here's the vital fact which we have *not yet* revealed to the media, and which I must ask you to keep confidential for the time being... We were able to prove, through precise time-keeping, that a telepathic message reached Mars an average of twelve minutes *earlier* than a radio message sent at exactly the same instant. It reached a planet as close as Mars apparently *instantaneously*. I don't need to emphasize how important this discovery was. We have proved that the speed of telepathic communication, through its psychons, is measurably, or even infinitely, faster than the speed of light particles. Over vast distances there is a tiny delay, but for our purposes it can be regarded as instantaneous.' There was a burst of applause. 'Now, to back up our telepathic team we shall need a versatile computer department capable of recording, designing, and creating graphics and text – at short notice... So there will be opportunities for all your various talents and experience... We think we'll call ourselves the "Bell Laboratories Outward Group". But let us all now join in with the exciting experiment of attempting to make the first contact with Gliese g!'

When the day came for the first test, Rosemary was as nervous as any of her team. With Rob Niven she made a final inspection of the set-up. In five separate, sound-proofed studios, five of the United States' best telepathists each sat in front of a large screen showing a graphic of the Libra constellation containing a prominent depiction of the star Gliese 581 and its planets as seen apparently from Earth.

Back in the Control Room, she spoke into her microphone, 'Count down - thirty seconds from Transmission One... Prepare to send Graphic "A"... five, four, three, two, one, zero! Out.' At the same precise instant, the five telepathists concentrated the considerable power of their minds on 'sending' the picture they were concentrating on to Gliese 581 g.

After three minutes, Rosemary ordered, 'Screens blank! Stop sending! Prepare your minds to receive! Out.'

The telepathists now opened their minds to receive any possible answer from the planet. As the moments ticked by, those in the Control Room fixed their gaze on the CCTV screens that showed what was happening in the studios. The telepathists had been provided with touch screens on which they could record whatever telepathic answer they received, and they had audio channels so that they could talk direct to those in the Control Room. All touch screens were blank. Rosemary and her monitoring team looked at each other. Was the experiment to be a failure? She felt tired and looked away from the screens.

Several minutes elapsed. Then, Rob Niven said, 'Look at number three screen! Something's happening!' The number three telepathist, whose name was Beth, was carefully drawing on her touch screen a large circle. At the same time they saw that telepathists nos. 4 and 5 had also begun drawing. Soon, 1 and 2 were drawing. Meanwhile, Beth had completed her circle and was drawing a line across it to represent the diameter. After a few minutes the watchers saw that every one of the five telepathists had drawn the same diagram, and were gazing at it. Suddenly, Beth began putting dots around the line forming the circumference of her circle, dividing it into 22 equal sections.

Niven whispered, 'That's one of the diagrams sent to them in 2008!'

The remaining four telepathists now did the same.

Niven said softly, 'Wow! So, there *are* intelligent beings at Gliese 581 g! They're telling us at least that they received the message!'

As he spoke, Beth's hand began moving again. She was putting marks along the line representing the diameter. The watchers held their breaths, counting the marks.

When she was finished, there were 6 marks.

Niven said, '*Six* marks divide the line into *seven* equal spaces! Bingo! 22 over 7 – which of course is *pi*!'

They soon saw that all five telepathists had drawn the same diagram illustrating the universal constant of the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. Cheering broke out in the control room, but Rosemary stopped it. She said into her intercom microphone, 'All telepathists – prepare to concentrate on sending Transmission Two: "Feelings of welcome, friendship, and invitation to take part in extended communication between our worlds" – five, four, three, two, one, zero! Out.'

Rose and Rob watched the screens in the five studios. After a few minutes the telepathists began looking round blankly. The minutes dragged on and on. Finally, Rose said to Rob, 'Better give it a rest, don't you think?' Rob nodded. Rosemary called up everybody, ran a brief post-mortem, and then dismissed the staff for the night. She felt run-down and depressed. Was her project going to end in failure – when it had at one time looked so promising? She noticed that lights were still on in no. 3 studio. She peeped inside, and saw that Beth Stevens, the brilliant twenty year-old, youngest of the team, was still there, sitting at her desk, head in hands.

Rosemary said: 'Beth! Why haven't you gone home?'

Beth looked round, startled. 'Oh, Dr Fallon! I couldn't leave. I hoped that someone – just someone in Gliese 581 g – might want to talk to us!'

Rosemary said, 'Have you tried transmitting to them again?'

'No. Er, I didn't have your permission.'

'Well, you have it now. I'll sit here quietly while you try again.'

'Thank you, Dr Fallon.' The girl assumed her 'transmitting and receiving' position, head in hands.

A few minutes later she said, 'Oh! There's something coming through! I get the feeling that this time, it's, er, *unofficial*... It has the quality of being more of a private message than before.... There's even something - *secret* - about this one! ...'

'Beth,' put in Rosemary, 'that's fine! Reinforce the idea that this is a private communication...'

A few minutes later, Beth said, 'I'm getting a voice... no, not a voice... more of an audible thought... saying a name?... "A-DUNA"...?'

Rosemary said, 'A-duna... That must be his – or her – name! Send yours!'

Beth said, 'Transmitting: "My name is Beth"...'

There was a long pause. Then Beth said, 'Oh! I'm receiving: "BETH!...

GREETINGS!... THAT SUPERIOR BEING WHO IS PRESENT WITH YOU... WHAT IS ITS NAME?"'

Rosemary said, 'Tell him: "Rose"'

Beth said, 'Er, I'll send a picture of a rose. What colour?'



Rosemary said, 'My favourite is yellow, with pink edgings. The "Peace Rose". I just love its scent... But it has a great story behind it, dating back to World War 2.' She glanced down at Rob's 'daily rose' pinned on to her lapel.

Beth said, 'Transmitting it ...'

There was a pause. Then Beth said, 'Oh! I'm receiving!... A-duna says: "YOUR BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF... er, VEGETATION? IS INDEED – *PEACEFUL*." Er, now I'm getting a comment on my mention of "peace". She – or he – feels that it is highly, er, commendable (?), to honour peace. As opposed to war. And here, she seems to find it amusing, though I don't hear any laughter, and... here she hints that *my ancestors* must have made war. Like savages...'

'Oh, oh,' said Rosemary. 'Hmm. Better change the subject... That's enough for tonight, anyway.'

Beth said, 'Okay. I'll send: "Till tomorrow, then." Done...' Beth paused patiently.

Then, 'Whoa! She doesn't understand me! She asks me to explain what I mean!'

Rosemary thought for a few moments, then said, 'Doesn't understand "tomorrow"?' Wait a bit... Oh, I know. Gliese g is, we think, the kind of planet that always shows

the same face to its sun. Like our Moon, always facing the same way towards the Earth. They've got no night and day! Better leave it – till tomorrow!'

Beth said, 'Oh, well, anyway, A-DUNA has to stop now. Or *go* now, I can't differentiate. She's sort-of *signing off*. Er, it sounds silly, I know – it seems like:

"CATCH YOU NEXT TIME...!"'

'Beth, it's not silly. It's a breakthrough! And your achievement will go down as one of the most important in world history!' said Rosemary, hugging the girl with tears in her eyes. Beth smiled and dabbed at her own eyes. Then Rose looked at her watch.

'You've done enough for today. You must go home now.' Beth nodded, picked up her briefcase, and went out.

Rosemary noticed that her rose-bud had been slightly bruised in the embrace, and there was a faint but definite scent coming from it. She detached it from her lapel, and held it to her nose, her eyes closed. When she opened them, she saw Rob Niven standing in the doorway, briefcase in hand. He said, 'I couldn't help hearing all that.'

Congratulations, Rose!'

Rosemary said, 'Thanks, Rob. We've just proved that a rose is a wonderful means of reaching out and communication between two life-forms!'

After a pause, Rob said, 'Do you mean, for example - between you and me?'

Rosemary said, 'I might.'

He held out his hand. She walked towards him, reaching out her own hand, the rose-bud still held in it. When their hands touched and clasped, the rose-bud was between them.

As they walked towards her car, Rob said, 'We've got a decision to make.'

Rosemary thought, Oh, no, he's going to spoil the moment.

But Rob went on, 'We've got to decide when to go public on Beth's achievement.

And how much to tell them.'

'Them?'

'Look, Rose, do you believe that scientific discoveries should be shared between all the world's scientists?'

'Well, yes, but only when the discoveries have been proved.'

'Ye-e-es...' Rob looked at her and said, 'And ours haven't been proved yet?'

Rosemary frowned. 'No.'

'Okay. We'll try again tomorrow. But Rose, each telepathist must keep any contact that he or she makes confidential. Otherwise we risk real trouble.'

Next day, Rosemary held a conference of all the staff, telling them that Beth had managed to make individual contact with a being on Gliese 581 g, but not going into details. She passed on Rob's warning, explaining that the results of any contact that an individual telepathist made were to be known only by the staff in the control room, and were therefore not shared among the others. This obviated the possibility of 'suggestion', implying that a telepathist wishing to succeed might involuntarily exaggerate his or her contact experiences, if any, or even copy the experiences of others without thinking. In any case, they could not make their discoveries public unless completely scientific methods had been maintained. That was the reason that the five studios had been made strictly soundproof and with no digital connection between each. She reminded them that any communication between an individual telepathist and the control room would be recorded and kept separate.

As the telepathists took up their places in their studios, Rosemary switched on the universal channel, saying, 'Right, folks, relax. I want you to try your luck with a general enquiry aimed at any receptive intelligent being on Gliese g, inviting him, her, (or *it*) to reply, on the same lines as yesterday. Start now. Out.' Then, using Beth's personal channel she said, 'Beth, that doesn't apply to you. You will obviously try to contact A-DUNA again. Out.'

Rosemary and Rob settled down as before with the other senior staff in the control room, keeping their eyes on the telepathists' screens. After six minutes Rob said, 'Watching paint dry is more exciting.'

Rosemary called up Beth on her personal channel, 'Beth, have you made contact with A-DUNA?'

'No,' answered Beth. 'Oh, wait a minute. A-DUNA is answering at last! She (or he) says: "HELLO!" Or a greeting... Then she asks: "WHY HAVE YOU BEEN SILENT FOR SO LONG?"'

Rob muttered to Rosemary 'A-DUNA has obviously no idea of a delay of only one night!'

Beth continued, 'A-DUNA now refers to the suggestion that we have had war on our planet. She says: "DO YOU APPROVE OF WAR? ARE YOU ALL LIKE THAT?"... Dr Fallon, I don't know what to send!'

Rosemary answered, 'Beth, just send the sort of things that you would say to any new friend on Earth. Just be yourself! Understand? This is the only way!'

Beth paused, then answered, 'I'm sending: "No! Not at all! Millions of us human beings hate war and its violence!" She's answering: "I BELIEVE YOU. BUT WE KNOW YOUR, er, HISTORY (?). WE KNOW EVERYTHING."'

Rob said, 'Rather arrogant, isn't she?'

Rosemary said, 'Maybe she means – everything about our wars.'

Rob said, 'Could be.'

Rob said, 'Listen, Rose, there's a possibility that these "Gliesans" are not *individuals* in the sense that we are. Maybe they have a universal, common intelligence.'

'You mean, like ants. Or bees?'

'Well, yes. But just a bit cleverer!'



'Wait a bit,' said Rob. 'Let's go back to what happened yesterday evening. If A-duna "knows everything", as she says she does, how is it that she doesn't understand the meaning of day and night?'

'Hmm,' said Rosemary. 'Then, let's do some tourist advertising. And I think we must include all the telepathists.' While the others in the Control Room stared at her, Rosemary opened the universal audio channel: 'To all studios: We want all of you to send the following: mental pictures of Earth, its day and night, its seasons, its vegetation, its oceans, its beauty spots, its mountains and its rivers. Send visuals of your favourite countries. Your favourite foreign peoples. No strings attached. You could also ask for reactions. Take as long as you like. Out.'

Thirty minutes later, Rob said, 'I've had it. Isn't it about time that we checked with the studios to see what reactions they've had, if any.'

Rosemary said, 'Well, none of the telepathists have contacted us. But we can try. You take the even numbers. I'll take the odd numbers. Okay?'

Rob contacted studio two. He frowned, and tried studio four. Rosemary tried studio one. The telepathist said, 'Sorry, I can't talk now. Busy transmitting and receiving.' Meanwhile, Rob said, 'Two and four are busy.'

Rosemary said, 'I'll try studio three. Beth seems to work faster than the others.' She tried Beth's audio channel, 'Hi, Beth?... Beth?... Beth, can you report, please?'

After a pause, Beth replied, 'I can't...er, I can't tell you on the audio channel. It's too difficult.'

'Then come to the Control Room!' Rosemary looked at Rob with raised eyebrows. 'What on earth?'

Rob said, 'Perhaps you should rather say "What on Gliese g?"' After a delay, Beth knocked on the door of the Control Room and entered.

She looked round wildly, her blonde hair disarranged as if she had been running her hands through it.

Rosemary said, 'Come in, Beth. Sit down and relax.' Beth sat or rather, collapsed, into a chair. 'You look tired.'

Beth hid her face in her hands and said, 'Sorry, Dr Fallon. I've just had an experience that seems to have blown my mind.' She took several deep breaths, and then looked up. 'I don't know where to start.'

Rosemary said, 'I'll ask you a question or two... Did you send the thoughts that we arranged?'

'Yes. All about Earth and its topography. Its beautiful oceans, seas, lakes, beaches, mountains, forests, cities, day and night scenes, seasons. All that.'

'And did you get a reaction? From A-duna?'

'Yes.'

'What sort of reaction?'

'All sorts of reactions... First, I detected surprise, then disbelief.'

'Disbelief? But Gliese g must have received films of Earth?'

'Well, I gather that most of what they received were newsreels, mainly of war scenes. And that message we sent out was mostly about cities.'

'Yes, but if Gliese g beings are so advanced, I wonder why they found it difficult to believe what Earth was like?'

'Because – because their own world is so vastly different!'

Rosemary looked at Rob and the other staff in the Control Room. She said quietly,

'Tell us what Gliese g is like, Beth.'

Beth said, 'Well, it faces the sun all the time, as you said. So of course they don't have day and night. (Or seasons. Gliese g isn't tilted over like Earth.) The side that faces *away* from the sun is a deeply frozen ice-field. The side that faces *towards* the sun is a flaming hot desert with temperatures way above what is safe for living creatures. So Gliesans live in the permanent borderline region between the two.'

'Wonderful, Beth!' There was a pause. 'Why don't you go on?' said Rosemary. 'What kind of creatures are they?'

'You may not believe me! I thought I was being clever and said my pulse-rate was 65 at rest. I asked her what hers was. A-duna said she doesn't have a heart! She says her blood is circulated round her body by the action of, er, "gastro vascular cavities".'

'No problem,' confirmed Dr John Durer, their resident biologist. 'Some of our creatures manage without hearts. They use their *guts* to circulate their blood!'

'But, no heart!' gasped Rob. 'No wonder they don't have the concept of time that we have! No pulse-rate. No seconds ticking away all their lives. No minutes, no hours, no days and nights...'

'No hearts?' said John. 'Wait a second. Where do they live?'

Beth looked at him. 'A-duna says she lives in the sea. They all do.'

'In the sea!' said John. 'Wow!... Our sea spiders don't have hearts. Is that what they look like? Sea spiders?'

'No. Not spiders.'

'Jellyfish, then?'

'No. Not jellyfish.'

'What, then?'

'I don't know. Perhaps whales? No, not whales. Dolphins? No, not dolphins.

Something like, er, "manatees"?'

'Ah, manatees, now you're talking,' said John. 'They're those human-looking sea mammals. Sometimes called dugongs. Right?'

Beth said, 'Well, I'm afraid I couldn't follow what she was saying very well. All I know is that they are sea creatures, and very, very intelligent. Oh, and – A-duna thinks our world is a *paradise*...'

Rob said, 'Rose, I think it's time we had a full staff meeting.'

'Why?'

'I'll handle it. We've got to find what the others received. And it's time they all knew what was going on.'

'All right,' said Rosemary. 'Call them in.'

Rob looked at the staff who had collected in their largest room. He said, 'Dr Fallon and I have decided that the time has come to pool all that we know. But first a reminder that what is said at this meeting must be regarded as strictly confidential.' He looked round. 'All agree?' There was a general nodding of heads. He went on: 'I shall briefly describe what Beth Stevens received from Gliese g, then ask the rest of the telepathists to speak in turn.' And all listened with close attention as Rob repeated what Beth had told them previously.

'Now, Studio no. 1 – Chris Carter. Chris, what did you receive?'

'Well,' said Chris, 'mostly what Beth got. But my contact told me – as far as I could understand him – that the beings on Gliese g moved round in three dimensions as we do, but with the er, superior (?), difference that they can go *upwards* and *downwards* with ease.'

'Expert swimmers, in fact?' said John.

‘Yes. But the interesting thing is that their attitude towards the fourth dimension, time, was rather mysterious. I couldn’t get my guy (Wa-POOD, I think his name was) to enlarge on this. It was – it was almost as if we were talking about something *holy*. Like a *deity*.’

Rob said, ‘A deity? Sounds as if they have some sort of *reverence* for the concept of time. We’ll go into that more later. Okay, thanks, Charles. Now for Studio no. 2 – Caroline Deutch?’

Caroline said, ‘I didn’t get as much as that. But I agree with Beth that they think Earth is a paradise compared to their world.’

‘Thanks, Caroline. Studio no. 4 – Marlene Smithers?’

Marlene said, ‘I got most of what Beth said, too. The only thing extra was that my contact seemed really clued up on the state of the physics that we’ve reached on Earth. His name, by the way, seems to be SA-DAROS. He thinks our physics is really rather primitive. He seemed to want to tell me more, but physics was never my best subject at school!’

Rob said, ‘Never mind. That sounds very promising, Marlene. Now, Studio no. 5 – Clark Morissey? Clark?’

Morissey, a skinny youth with a somewhat nervous manner, answered, ‘Uh, well, I can’t add much to what the others have told you. My contact didn’t seem very forthcoming. Sorry.’

Rosemary was watching the other telepathists while Morissey was talking, and she could not help noticing the surprised look that no. 4, Marlene, gave him.

Rob said, ‘Right, thank you, everyone. That wraps up this meeting. See you tomorrow.’ And to Rosemary he said, ‘Maybe tomorrow we should also get down to some serious discussion on how to tell the media and the scientists at large what we’ve been doing?’

Rosemary said, ‘I suppose it’s time we did...’

Next morning the whole staff turned up as usual on time, but without Rob. He burst into the Control Room half an hour later waving a newspaper. He shouted furiously, ‘Special Edition – New York Daily News!’

Rosemary said, ‘What about?’

Rob flung the paper down and said, ‘It’s all here! Read all about it!’

The senior staff gathered round to look at the huge headlines: 'SCIENTISTS CONTACT EARTH-TYPE PLANET! FIRST CONTACT WITH INTELLIGENT ALIENS!' The reporter went on: 'The Daily News has reliable information that two cosmologists, Dr Rosemary Fallon and Dr Robert Niven, have been carrying on secret research into communicating with planet Gliese g, in the constellation of Libra. When he heard about this amazing revelation, Professor Arthur Helmasburger of Columbia University's Nevis Research Centre said, 'I regret to say that what Dr Fallon has done is to secretly proceed with research which my university in fact had unanimously rejected as part of its programme for this year. But, if these reports are true, which I for one seriously doubt, then in any case, Dr Fallon and her fellow conspirators have acted quite illegally. Several years ago the World Governments Committee on Extra-terrestrial Research agreed that protocols should be drawn up detailing courses of action that scientists and governments should follow in the event of extra-terrestrial contact with aliens having been made. One of these was that the Secretary General of the United Nations must be kept fully informed. This has obviously not happened!'

Rob Niven said, 'Helmasburger! How on earth did he get involved?'

Rosemary said, 'Let's rather ask how on earth he got to hear about our work!'

'Someone blabbed,' said Rob.

'Who?'

'We'll find out eventually,' said Rob. 'Let's call a general staff meeting.'

Rob looked round at the intent faces of the staff. 'Is everybody here?'

Rosemary said, 'It seems we have a full attendance.'

But Marlene Smithers put her hand up. 'Dr Niven,' she said, 'er, it looks like Clark Morissey isn't here.'

Everybody looked around. 'You're right,' said Rosemary. 'He's missing.'

Rob said, 'Does that mean something – or nothing?'

Marlene said, 'Dr Niven, Dr Fallon, I should have told you before.

But I didn't think it was important at the time. I'm sorry.'

'What should you have told us, Marlene?' asked Rosemary.

'Well, when you asked us all to report on what we had received yesterday, Clark said he'd got nothing. But I'm almost sure he did get a lot. You say each studio is insulated from the next... That's not entirely true. We sometimes get "reflections"



from other telepathists' communications. And I kept getting reflections from his studio – and to me it sounded just like the sort of communication I was having. So, on the way out I taxed him with this, as a sort of joke. But he seemed secretive, and nervous. Also – you know, I'm quite good at detecting emotions that other telepathists are feeling? Well, I am positive that Clark was feeling – a real emotion of *guilt*... He was considering doing something that he felt definitely guilty about!' 'Marlene,' said Rosemary, 'you've been very helpful.'

Next day, two events of importance happened. One of the telepathists reported that Clark Morissey was seen driving a brand new Mustang convertible, whereas up till then he had always seemed to be short of money. Rob said, 'Looks as if the Daily News paid out good money for that story...'

The second event was that Dr John Durer mentioned that he was an old friend of the Chairman of the World Extra-Terrestrial Research Society, Dr William Kenton. John said that Kenton's society were extremely sympathetic to the work that the Bell Laboratories Outward Group had done. They wished to hear more. Finally, if we agreed, John said, they would hire the Carnegie Hall for every member of their society who could attend. They wanted to hear from Rosemary's and Rob's own lips what they had achieved.

Rosemary said, 'That sounds very generous. I wonder how many would come.' 'Well,' said John, 'The Carnegie holds two thousand, eight hundred-odd...'

Two weeks later, when Rob peeped through the Carnegie Hall stage curtains

Rosemary said, 'How many in the audience, Rob?'

Rob said, 'It looks as if John's estimate might be a bit conservative. To me it looks as if every seat has been sold. And more are sitting in the aisles! Anyway, it's time for you to talk to them. Are you nervous?'

Rosemary smiled at him and said, 'Yes. No! Not if you look at me like that...'

As the curtains opened, the audience saw the staff of Bell Laboratories Outward Group seated in rows on the stage, with the name in large letters above them.

The Chairman of the Society, Dr William Kenton, came to the lectern and adjusted the microphone. 'Dr Rosemary Fallon, Dr Rob Niven, staff of the Bell Laboratories Outward Group, fellow members of the World Extra-Terrestrial Research Society: I

am so glad so many of our Society have been able to attend what I am sure will be a momentous meeting. I am aware that many of the world's media are represented here. I would ask you to restrain your zeal – there will, I believe, be an opportunity for questions to be asked - and answered, at the end of these proceedings. Now without any further ado, I ask Dr Rosemary Fallon if she will be kind enough to address us.'

*(applause)*

Rosemary started by recounting what had caused the need for the Bell Laboratories Outward Group to be formed. When she described the antagonism of the Columbia University's 'old brigade' to her planned project, there were hearty laughs from those in the audience who had had experience of their conservatism in the past. After introducing Rob as her co-worker and co-leader in the Project, she moved on to the background to their research, namely the proven discovery that communication by telepathy was infinitely faster than the speed of light, that it was, in fact, to all intents and purposes instantaneous. This caused wild cheers and clapping. Emboldened, Rosemary went on to describe the results of their communication with Gliese g. As she recounted Beth's initial success in contacting A-duna, the hall went quiet, with the stillness of breath-holding wonder. Then, as Rosemary told of the communication achievements of the other telepathists, there was further clapping and cheering, which came to an abrupt halt as a voice called out stentoriously, 'Prove it!' Searching for the source of the voice, Rosemary saw that it had come from a familiar figure who was leaning over the railing of the second balcony. It was Arthur Helmasburger.

Rob Niven dashed forward as if to protect Rosemary from the interruption and deal with it, but she waved him back, saying softly, 'No problem, Rob. I can handle him.' Then she looked up and said, 'Well, I am surprised that Professor Helmasburger has graced this meeting with his presence, that in fact he even recognises it as a meeting of scientific minds, considering that it was his influence that persuaded the University Research Committee to throw out any idea of supporting this project.'

*(laughter)*. 'But that brings me naturally to the practical part of my talk.'

Turning, she said, 'Rob, please show our audience the demo studios.' As she spoke, Rob pressed a button causing two smaller sets of curtains to open, one on each side of where the staff were sitting. They each revealed a miniature version of the studios in Bell Laboratories, namely, a large CCTV screen with controls, plus a table and

chair, and equipment for audio communication. Each 'studio' was softly lit by a spotlight. Seated in the left-hand studio was Beth Stevens, and in the right-hand studio, Chris Carter. Rosemary introduced them to the audience as two of the country's most brilliant telepathists. When the audience clapped, the two remained seated and bowed only slightly.

For the first time Rosemary hesitated. This next bit was going to be dicey... Then she said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, what we are going to attempt now has never been done before. A public demonstration, in front of this huge audience, of the power of telepathic communication between this planet and a planet twenty-odd light years away, namely, Gliese g.'

She looked at her spellbound audience. 'I ask you to remain absolutely quiet during the demonstration, as the telepathists need silence to concentrate.'

'First, we watch as Beth Stevens tries again to contact the Gliese g being who – or *which* – is named, we think, A-DUNA. Beth has communicated with this being several times. There are two ways we can share in the results of Beth's communication – either by viewing her smart screen or by listening to her audio channel, depending on what happens.'

The auditorium lights dimmed, as did Chris Carter's spotlight. The only illumination now was a spotlight on Beth's table, where she sat, head in hands. The audience waited in breathless silence. Rose nodded to Rob who pressed a button, causing soft, slow, peaceful music to fade gradually in. Part of Rose's brain was distracted enough to recognise the famous cello solo by Saint-Saens, 'The Swan'. It seemed an age before Beth began to speak. She said softly into her microphone, over the music, 'Communication beginning to be established...Yes, it's A-DUNA again... Oh, things are different this time... A-DUNA knows I'm not in my usual studio... She sees - or senses – that there is a great audience present... She "says" that she can sense that there is an antagonistic element present... But she acknowledges that *our* communications have always been positive and empathetic...'

Rosemary spoke softly into her audio channel microphone, 'Beth, I want you to ask A-DUNA two questions: First, ask her how we of Earth can help the beings on Gliese g. Second: ask her how Gliese g can help us human beings here on Earth...'

Beth said, 'Dr Fallon, I'll do my best...' There was a long pause. The music played on.

At last Beth spoke, 'I'm getting a strong sense that A-DUNA is having difficulty in answering... Oh, now she says that we can help Gliesans by letting them see more pictures of the beautiful, er, paradise in which we live... But we must promise (?), no... guarantee (?), no... pledge (?), – that we shall cherish (?), and conserve (?), or preserve (?), - the beauty of our world... if we don't do those things, then they *won't* help us.'

'How could they help us, Beth?'

'Er, I'm asking her that... She says that they will teach us to value peace, and also value, um... er, I can't understand her!... A-DUNA now says that Chris Carter is communicating with a Gliesan who can explain better!... Or maybe she means that Chris will understand better? How did she know about Chris? I'm sorry, Dr Fallon.'

'No, don't apologise, Beth. You've done wonderfully well.'

The audience burst out clapping.

Rosemary said, 'Now we move to the other studio where Chris Carter is waiting to attempt to communicate with his contact, "WA-POOD".'

The spotlight on Chris Carter intensified, while Beth's light dimmed.

Chris waited, head bowed, while the audience quietened down again.

Chris said at last, 'I'm getting a message from my contact to the effect that he believes we (Earth) are seeking help from Gliese g... He asks if that is true... I answer in the affirmative...He says that he thinks we telepathists are too primitive (?) to understand their concepts of physics. But if we can get together a group of advanced (?) human beings, maybe he could try to explain...'

Rosemary said, 'Explain what, Chris?'

Chris said, 'I'm asking that question... Oh, oh, this is difficult. He says that he will explain... I tried to tell him that we haven't got a group together yet, but he's already started.'

Rosemary said, 'Tell him to wait! We'll get a group of physicists together!'

'Okay, Dr Fallon...Er, he's waiting.'

Rosemary said into her public address microphone, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure we have some scientists, physicists, or cosmologists in the audience who will volunteer... Oh!' She stopped as a group of about fifteen middle-aged and elderly

men stood up and started moving eagerly toward the stage. Among them she recognised the faces of some of the most famous physicists in the United States. The audience stood up and started clapping. The applause went on and on. Rob courteously ushered the group close to Chris Carter's 'studio', where they could all see the smart screen.

Rosemary waved smilingly to the audience to quieten down, then said, 'Right, we can proceed. Remember, everything that Chris receives is recorded on our no.1 hard drive. Also, any images or maths can appear on his screen. Carry on, Chris.'

Chris Carter said, 'My contact is proceeding anyway.... Just a moment...'

'Wa-pood says: "I WILL EXPLAIN..." There's a pause... Now he goes on:

"HERE IS AN ELEMENTARY VERSION OF WHAT YOU HAVE - HOPEFULLY (?) CALLED 'THE GRAND UNIFIED THEORY'... OR, 'THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING'..."

He says: "BEGIN WITH THE 'M-THEORY'". He goes on: "I ASSUME THAT YOU ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF ELEVEN DIMENSIONS"... Oh, no! Now he's going into some maths that I can't follow... Okay, there it is on my screen.' The physicists began hauling out their tablets and tapping on them while whispering excitedly to each other.

Suddenly Beth said, 'Oh, Dr Fallon? A-DUNA says that the "antagonistic element" is no longer present!'

Instinctively Rosemary looked up at the second balcony. The seat where Arthur Helmasburger had stood up was empty.

Rob said, 'Don't worry, Rose! I saw Helmasburger slink out five minutes ago! ...

Congratulations on a huge success!'

He held out a yellow rosebud, but as she reached out to take it, he kept it out of her reach, swept her into his arms and kissed her soundly. The entire staff of Bell Laboratories Outward Group burst into enthusiastic applause. The huge audience responded in like manner, standing up and cheering. The physicists did not look. They were too busy.

Rob held out the rose-bud again and said, 'Here's a "peace" offering! I'm sure you won't refuse it!'

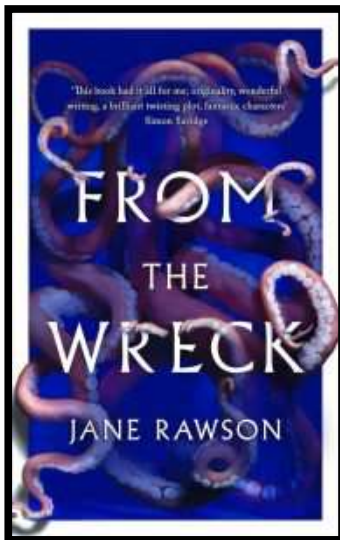
Rosemary took it and said, 'How could I refuse a rose-bud? I'm not *arguing* with you anyway. The very opposite, in fact!'



She returned his kiss, and as she did so, the yellow rosebud imprisoned between them once again gave off its familiar perfume of peace.

## Book Reviews    Ian & Gail Jamieson & Tony Davis

### Jane Rawson From the Wreck



George Hills is a survivor of the shipwreck of the SS Admella, who is supported for eight days on a spar by a woman he believes is called Bridget Ledwith. However she is really a stranded alien who is desperate to be rescued and to return to her own home.

George marries but is haunted by what he believes to be the ghost of Bridget and when his firstborn, Henry has a large birthmark on his back, George believes this is the work of the ghost.

His life continues to be blighted by the alien and this is a very unusual book. The writer was researching

the wreck of the Admella as her grandfather had survived this incident and this led to the writing of this novel. It is almost a merging of Fantasy and alternate reality and this makes for interesting reading

Written by an Australian authoress the book also touches on the morals and structures of an earlier Australia. We follow the stories of young Henry and the women around him. Henry is different and has a voice in his head. The alien morphs into different shapes, living as cat in the home of the young Henry and then goes back to the ocean.

I'm not really sure about this book as it seems to vacillate between one theme and another, but it won Australia's leading SF prize and was shortlisted for Australia's most prestigious literary award.

I guess you should read it got yourself.

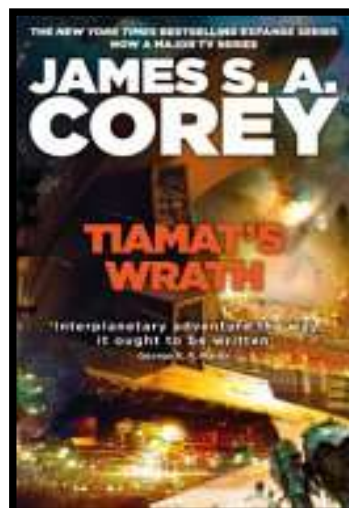
**Gail**

## James S.A. Corey. Tiamat's Wrath

This is the eighth book in the “Expanse” series, and not having read any of the first seven it is difficult at times to follow the main protagonists in their various adventures.

The story is told from five different points of view, and it is often difficult to keep them all in mind when reading this novel.

Humanity has discovered 1300 interstellar gates, and the Laconian empire is in total control of them, and of humanity. Although it is a benevolent sort of dictatorship there is an underground determined to



end the Laconian rule. They have a captured ship and some stolen technology, which is enough to keep hope alive. The Laconian hierarchy actually helps them by deciding to try and make contact with the alien engineers responsible for the gates and the protomolecule, by dropping a bomb between gates. How do you think the aliens feel?

A well, written, but somewhat disjointed, but nevertheless enjoyable novel, but I strongly recommend reading the series from the beginning

3/5

Ian

## Alastair Reynolds Shadow Captain



Book 2 of the Revenger Trilogy

Sisters Adrana and Fura Ness have been reunited on the pirate spaceship that once belonged to the feared pirate Bosa Sennen.

This book is set in the far future, or an alternate universe, or both, and Reynolds does an excellent job of making it both different, but realistic.

There are very strong rumours that the dead captain, Bosa, has hidden a huge hoard of treasure, and the sisters are determined to find it. But there is a problem....Most people don't believe Bosa is dead,

and are determined to find his ship and destroy it as they want revenge on him. Be warned this is YA book (nothing on the blurbs) and it shows. These sisters are continually at odds and ends and there is far too much inane yapping.

2/5 Ian

## Mimi Yu The Girl King



Two sisters, princesses, both know that Lu, fierce and independent will become Emperor and Min, always subservient, will be in her shadow. Except it does not happen. The dying Emperor declares their male cousin, Set, to be his heir. Lu challenges Set to a duel, but is set up and forced to flee for her life, trailed by hundreds of warriors. She sets off to found an army to regain her throne, and in the process meets Nokhai, the last surviving wolf shapeshifter. Nokhai is forced into an uneasy alliance with the girl whose family killed everyone he ever loved.

Meanwhile, back at court, Min is forced into marrying

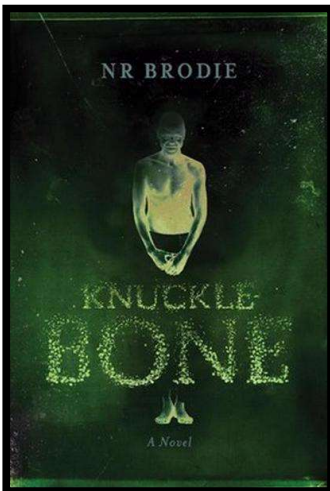
Set to help him be accepted as Emperor, but she has just discovered that she has hidden power. And this power is brutal and deadly, it could secure Set's reign or allow Min to claim the throne.

An interesting story of magic and destiny so it is a pity it does not end. Nowhere does it say it is book One of a series. But it is well written and enjoyable

3/5

Ian.

## N R Brodie Knucklebone



This is speculative fiction set in Johannesburg. It opens with a house robbery gone wrong and one of the thieves being shot dead by the home owner.

Ian Jack, a former police officer joins up with Reshma Patel to investigate but they soon discover odd links which seem to point to animal poaching and a monkey's paw leads them onto deeper and darker things. This is a thriller which at times verges on horror. Reshma find out about a "Witchcraft Indaba". Africa's first multi-national conference dedicated "to sharing knowledge and information about magical [referring to real magic] practices

around the continent!" – and gets in touch with the organisers to help her solve the uncanny puzzle Set against the background of a very believable

Johannesburg, with magical, spiritual and religious practises muddying the waters, this is a really good and entertaining Southern Africa novel.

Gail

## Stephen Donaldson The War Within



This is book Two of "The Great God's War"

But it can be read without going back to the first novel. Bifalt and Estie have married to bring an uneasy peace between the warring kingdoms of Belleger and Amika. But there is no peace between them. Bifalt is morally unable to consummate his marriage and Estie loves him in vain. (I think that Stephen Donaldson is unable to write about people who do not suffer from continual mental pain and self-imposed misery.)

But there are greater problems than this in the world and an unknowable and ancient enemy

has found the location of the Last Repository, which guards the magical knowledge which is the only thing which may allow the two kingdoms to survive.

There are many old feuds still mouldering and Estie and Bifalt have to convince their respective countries to work together to try and prevent the ancient enemy from gaining a foothold on the shore.

Stephen Donaldson has a great writing talent but this book takes a long time to get going and it filled with twists and turns.

Still, at the last, the enemy has breached the great stone strongholds that stand in the sea and is about to make it ashore and I think i will look out for the third volume to find out what happens next. (And if Estie manages to tempt Bifalt in to her bed at last.)

**Gail**

## Mayo Motayne Nocturna



In a land where magic rules, two very different people are inexorably brought together. Finn is a thief, a killer, and has the ability to change her own face at will. She falls victim to a mobster and is forced into an almost impossible task, steal the cloak of invisibility from Castellan's royal palace or lose her magic forever.

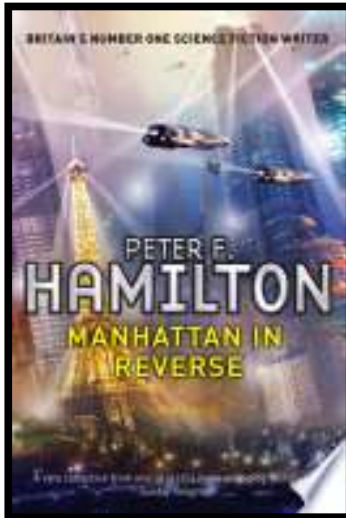
Prince Alfehr (Alfie to his friends) is desperate to find out what happened to his older brother. and if



possible bring him back, or resurrect him. In his quest Alfie accidentally releases a terrible black magic. He sets out to stop this magic, and enlists the help of Finn, who has her own dark secrets. He also needs the help of the very young woman who possibly killed his brother, if he can use her without exacting revenge, that is. This debut novel, first of three, shows promise but in places falls flat, especially near the end, and the continual use of “maldito” as a swear word becomes tiresome. It is well written and entertaining enough, but a little judicious editing would have helped a great deal.

3/5 Ian

### **Peter F. Hamilton Manhattan in Reverse and A Second Chance at Eden**



Two separate books of short stories, published thirteen years apart, by one of the best Science Fiction authors around. From blood sports with mechanical monsters, to his popular detective, Paula Myo, to the questions of eternal youth and the sacrifices needed to obtain it, Hamilton has written a series of very different but very entertaining stories. He really seems to enjoy writing detective stories with a Science Fiction twist. At least two of his stories are at first seemingly impossible murders with no clue as to who is the murderer. His answers always have a

Science Fiction bent, which is a bit of a cheat .Nevertheless two of the best books of Science fiction short stories I have read for some time.

4/5 for both Ian

### **John Scalzi The Consuming Fire**



This is book 2 of a trilogy: “The Interdependency”

Humanities’ interstellar empire is on the verge of collapse as the Flow, the force that makes travel between the stars, possible, is slowly disappearing. When it goes it will leave entire systems stranded, and most are now dependant on other systems as they have focussed only a small variety of items. The Emperox of the Empire has been convinced of the possible loss to the empire, but a lot of powerful people are not, and they start to conspire against her. There is a strong probability of civil war if



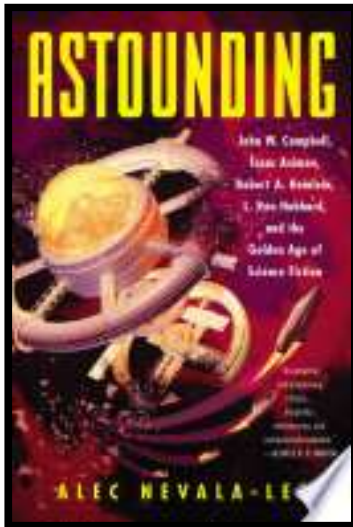
matters are not sorted out quickly.

John Scalzi has been writing for a long time, and while he may not match other author's outputs, he writes space Opera with zest and dark humour. His idea that the teenage Emperox decided to have religious visions and use them to promote the loss of the Flow, works out well in the book.

Always entertaining with a touch of dark humour

3/5 Ian

## Alec Nevala-Lee Astounding



This 528-page tome is subtitled “John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov, Robert A Heinlein, L Ron Hubbard, and the Golden Age of Science Fiction”.

John W Campbell Jr. was a science fiction author in the early days of the pulp fiction magazines in the United States and when he became editor of “Astounding Science Fiction” he managed the pulp, It’s staff and authors in order to advance his themes of science and the future. Much of earlier sf fiction in the pulp magazines focused on space opera fiction or Hugo Gernsback’s “scientifiction”.

**Astounding** is very biographical and detailed, delving into the professional and personal lives of Campbell and his major authors. Campbell is portrayed as being very influential and controlling in his role as editor, developing his key authors and their storylines. The “Golden Age of Science Fiction” covers the late 1930s into the early 1950s.

Hubbard penned fantasy stories, later leading to Dianetics (which Campbell would also espouse), Heinlein (who served together in the military with Asimov and Sprague de Camp in the States during WW2) wrote his future histories, military themes and young adult sf novels. Asimov brought his intellect and science to sf as well as his “Foundation” novels. **Astounding** also discusses the early roles of many other sf notables, including Del Rey, Clarke, Silverberg and Ellison.

The author researched publishing records, personal correspondences and also looks into the personal and family lives of Campbell and authors.

**Astounding** is a proverbial “must read” for readers of science fiction and fantasy. (The book is also available in trade paperback format.)

**Tony Davis**

# **Nova 2018 Highly Recommended**

## **Eben David November Guardrail**

The news hit Bradford Royce like a crash landing. For a moment, all he could do was focus on General Hammond's white moustache that hung so broadly it filled his holo-com monitor like the business end of a faded antique broom.

"Did I stutter, Lieutenant Royce?" General Hammond asked, scowling as ever. "Are you squirin' for a firin'?"

"No, sir," Bradford Royce said. "I was just—"

"Just be ready in ten. Your transport should be at your door by then. We're waiting for you at Capcom." With that the general cut the com-line.

Bradford glanced at his bedside clock. Its holo-screen sprang to life, displaying the time 02h22 AM.

Wiping the sleep from his eyes, Bradford reassessed the situation with no real change to his feelings. Before the general's com-call, he'd considered himself one of the luckiest pilots in history. Ten weeks. That's how close he was to realising his dream of being one of the senior helmsmen of the first ever generation starship to depart from Earth. A senior helmsman was what they called pilots who got the nod to serve on the Starship Icarus, a reward Bradford considered greater than any medal. He'd earned that dream ticket by serving his planet on half a dozen solar system exploration missions.

But this new mission screwed up everything. Bradford had his last ten weeks on Earth planned to the last hour. First, he was going to finish all the books he hadn't read and all the holo-series he hadn't watched as a result of the never-ending prep for missions. Next, He was going to see all the places on our big blue ball that he'd always wanted to visit. Finally, he was going to look up old flames for a final fling or three.

He had only completed a third of those plans before the general's call bombed those plans with orders to report for an unexpected mission. Bradford could not evade the feeling that the Icarus would blast off without him in ten weeks time.

#

The general gave the scrawny redheaded engineer the once over and looked out the window just before it became frosted.

“Levinson, you’ve been brought here, because of your work on the Phaethon shuttle,” General Hammond said. “That, and your planet needs you.”

“Thank you, General,” William Levinson said, giddy with excitement. “I must say what an hon—”

“On to why you’re here. What you’re about hear is highly classified. Just over thirty hours ago, near-earth satellites detected an anomaly approximately two thirds the distance between the Earth and the moon. Subsequent analysis revealed that the anomaly was a wormhole and a stable one at that. We sent a probe from the Pandora space station through the wormhole, but there was some unknown interference preventing the probe from sending back data. Around fourteen hours ago, a decision was taken to launch a manned mission to investigate. The mission was configured as a lone reconnaissance jaunt using a Phaethon shuttle. The pilot assigned to the mission was one Lieutenant Bradford Royce. After Royce got to the other end of the wormhole, he managed to locate the probe. However, when Royce attempted to beam data through the wormhole, that same interference returned. That’s when Royce broke protocol and sent a manual holo-communication.”

“I’m not sure why you’re briefing me on this, General. I just designed the—”

“Son, we know exactly what you designed.” General Hammond turned to an athletic brunette at the edge of the briefing room. “Miss Barnes, if you will.” Her grey uniform told Levinson that she hailed from the Directorate of Planetary Intelligence Operations. This had to be big for them to be involved.

She flicked her hand and a holo-projection node sprang to life.

*This\_\_gency communication\_\_tenant\_\_ford Royce report\_\_.*

*I’ve\_\_vered\_\_source\_\_rence. It’s\_\_g\_\_rail\_\_Get*

*Wil\_\_Le\_\_nson\_\_he’s\_\_expert.*

*\_Phae\_\_as\_\_rt.\_\_\_\_buil\_\_\_\_close\_\_means\_\_\_\_.*

“As you can hear, the interference makes deciphering his meaning a little tricky,” Miss Barnes said. “Techs have told us that there could also be distortions of the gaps in the message. Short gaps may actually be long gaps and vice versa. We can’t be sure. They’re running an algorithm on the holo-message, but their best

guess is that Royce wants you up there, because there's been some malfunction with the guardrail. I believe this guardrail of yours is partly robotic?"

"I just *designed* it. I can't go to space. I've never been."

"But you were space certified three years ago as part of your employment contract. Besides, you won't be going alone. Miss Barnes and two space marines will tag along."

#

*Think, Bradford,* he told himself.

He checked every angle, every vantage point, and every instrument. Everything indicated that it was gone. But he knew that it was still out there.

The sheer size of that vessel was still hard to wrap his pilot head around. It was perhaps twenty times as large as the Icarus, which held the record as the largest craft ever built in the history of human space travel. In an equation of physical dimensions, the mystery vessel Bradford saw a minute before stood as Goliath and his puny Phaethon shuttle might as well have been an insect buzzing around David.

*Suppose it has to be humungous to support those rails and their payload,* Bradford thought. *Can't see it. Probably using some form of cloaking capability,* he theorised.

"Hope Capcom got my message or at least most of it," He muttered. *Had to improvise a little and break protocol, but it's all I could do since regular systems weren't working.* Bradford knew that even his rigged communications array had now been jammed.

*Thank heavens I started on my Leaving Earth reading list before starting on my Leaving Earth holo-series watching list. Otherwise I'd never have read Icarus Species prior to my surprise call-up. Of course, now I'll never know how the last holo-season of Downtown Alley ends,* he mused. *That's it, Bradford, keep it light and positive. Positivity leads to creativity.*

Bradford's eyes darted around the cockpit, looking for anything to spark a course of action.

*Hope to goodness Capcom doesn't send anyone else up here before I come up with a plan. No need for anyone else to die up here. Felt this was a one-way ticket even before I came through the wormhole. Flyer's intuition rarely misses the mark. Come on, Bradford. Think. How can I close the wormhole forever? Wait-a-minute, the fuel cells...*

#

“One minute before we penetrate the wormhole,” Miss Barnes said. “From here on in we follow mission parameters to the letter.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” a space marine said.

“Once we make contact with Lieutenant Royce, you’re up, Levinson.”

“Sure,” Levinson said, but he wasn’t sure of anything. Questions whirled around in his head. *Should I be on this mission? How badly am I going to muck things up? Why were spacecraft always given terrible mythological names? We were on a shuttle named after Phaethon, a guy who took his sun god dad’s sun chariot for a joyride and died in a fiery crash landing when he couldn’t master the controls. In ten weeks time, the future of humanity was headed towards the stars in a generation starship named after Icarus, who plunged into the sea after the resin in his artificial wings melted. There’s even an orbiting laboratory station called Pandora, so named because it’s shaped like a box. I mean, really? Who’s in charge of naming for our planet’s space programme? Are they members of Nihilists Anonymous?*

The wormhole wrenched Levinson from his distracting thoughts. It glowed, but there was no rocking of any sort. He had expected something similar to earthbound turbulence for some silly reason. *How nonsensical of me*, he thought?

Three seconds later the shuttle reached the other side.

“What the hell?!” Miss Barnes said, taking in the debris field in front of their shuttle.

“Evasive manoeuvres!”

The Artificial Intelligence jumped into action, dodging the high speed metal shards in a way that made Levinson feel sick, activating shields where evasion was impossible. No human pilot could have done a better job in that situation. Still, their Phaethon shuttle sustained considerable damage to its exterior.

“Damage report,” Miss Barnes ordered.

“OUTER SHELL INTEGRITY AT 62% AND REQUIRES URGENT REPAIRS. LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS REMAIN UNDAMAGED. COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS REMAIN UNDAMAGED. NAVIGATION SYSTEMS INTACT. ALL SECONDARY SYSTEMS REMAIN FUNCTIONING.”

“What was the source of the debris?” Miss Barnes asked.

“ANALYSIS INDICATES TWO SOURCES OF DEBRIS. THE MAJORITY SOURCE WAS A PHAETHON SHUTTLE. THE MINORITY SOURCE WAS THE



PROBE LAUNCHED FROM PANDORA SPACE STATION.”

“Royce’s shuttle?” Levinson asked, his face still sporting a greenish hue.

“THAT IS CORRECT. PROBABILITY OF HIS SURVIVAL IS ESTIMATED AT 0%.  
LIEUTENANT ROYCE IS MOST LIKELY DEAD.”

“He’s the whole reason we’re up here,” Levinson said. “I was sent, because Royce needed troubleshooting with the guardrail. Now that he’s dead, does that mean—”

“That your services are no longer needed? That the mission is over and we head home? No. We still need to investigate what happened. In the meantime, we need your expertise since we’re going to use the guardrail to repair the outer shell.”

#

“General, on a hunch we ran our algorithm on the widest set of parameters and I think we came up an interesting alternative to the guardrail explanation,” an aide said. “Instead of ‘guardrail’ and ‘William Levinson’, the algorithm suggested that ‘God-rail’ and ‘Wilbur Lewenson’ are equally likely. The algorithm also suggested that the last part of Royce’s message could be ‘Close the wormhole by any means necessary.’ Of course, we can’t be 100% sure.”

“First of all, what the hell is a God-rail?” General Hammond asked. “Second, who the hell is Lewenson?”

“We don’t know what a god-rail is...exactly, but it’s a term coined by Wilbur Lewenson. From what we’ve been able to piece together Lewenson is a fringe author who wrote an obscure book entitled ‘Icarus species: The final generation’ in which he argues against interstellar travel. We’re trying to get copies so that our analysts can pour over it, but as I’ve mentioned his work is not mainstream—”

“Get this Lewenson over here to explain his work in person, so we can figure out why Royce might think we need him,” General Hammond said, irritated by the lack of information.

#

Levinson moved the guardrail into position, using its intelligent tether controls. At last, he felt useful on this mission. The rest of the team were attached to the guardrail, which in turn was attached to the shuttle. He had designed the guardrail as both a stationary safety feature for spacewalks as well as a mobile exterior shuttle repair platform.

“Let me know if I need to move the three of you,” Levinson said over the shuttle’s

com-system. "Over."

"Will do," Miss Barnes said. "For now, we're in the perfect position. Over."

The repairs would take a total of ninety minutes. Levinson estimated that the team wouldn't need him for the next twenty or so minutes, so he tried to relax his mind while he stared at the stars.

#

"Sir, our team has been unable to locate Wilbur Lewenson at his home," an aide said. "They're in the process of contacting his publisher for any supplementary contact details, but Lewenson is known to be fairly reclusive. There's something else, Sir."

"Well," General Hammond barked, "spit it out, son!"

"During a preliminary sweep of the Lewenson residence, operatives found a hidden cache of parchments. Our people at the Smithsonian say the parchments are mostly ancient Greek writings, some Egyptian, and even older Babylonian texts. One of the Greek writings has been dated eight century BC and the writing style seems to indicate that it may be a previously unknown epic authored by Homer. Another, dating back around 600 BC, seems to be some historical documents from Egypt written by someone called Sonchis. Those are just two of about twenty sets of *priceless* parchments and our background workup on Lewenson showed that he's anything but wealthy. But even if he is, the experts tell us the odds of even the richest private collector finding and then buying all of these priceless items on the black market are astronomical."

"That's interesting, but did they find anything that *actually* pertains to our wormhole mission?"

"Yes, Sir, we believe so. Among the hidden papers, our operatives also found a cylindrical device. The on-site team couldn't make heads nor tails of it, so they took it to our nearest secure lab. Analysis revealed that the device is a beacon, emitting some sort of signal. The techs say they've never seen materials used in its construction and scans of the device couldn't discern a power source."

"A beacon? Signalling what and to whom?"

"We don't know, Sir."

Another aide entered the General's office. "Sir, interviews with Lewenson's neighbours yielded some promising intel. One of them recalls seeing Lewenson

leave his home with nothing but a walking stick. That was the same day the wormhole appeared. Another witness in town swore she saw a man fitting Lewenson's description hiking up the local mountain trail. We have dispatched trackers to search the area."

"Good. Maybe we'll finally catch a break and bring him in."

#

*Drift? That can't be*, Levinson thought. They'd let their shuttle drift a short distance to conserve energy during repairs, but now he was unable to see a constellation of six stars he'd christened *the little dagger* just before he activated the guardrail.

"It's like something is blocking my view," Levinson muttered, "but all I see is space."

*The shuttle hadn't rotated and the drift distance wouldn't have changed our event horizon that much*, he reviewed the arithmetic in his head.

"Miss Barnes, I think I've discovered an anomaly...something really odd in the space in front of us. I'd like to run instrumental scans on our environment. Over."

"Permission granted. We're almost done out here. We'll let you know when to reel us in. Over."

Levinson didn't stand on ceremony, initiating tests of gravimetric, aural, and other varieties. Nothing.

After Barnes and the space marines returned, Levinson replicated his procedures, but something had changed. Suddenly, none of the instruments functioned.

"Oh my...What is that?!" Miss Barnes asked, pointing towards a vessel so large it was in front, above, to the left, and to the right of their shuttle all at once.

"It wasn't there a second...Wait, maybe it was there all along but just cloaked."

"Something's happening," one of the space marines said, pointing to a section of the large vessel adorned with two columns of protruding rails.

The columns of rails moved in a slow majestic fashion while a glow enveloped their surface. It made looking directly at it difficult, but for an instant Levinson saw that the rails were cradling something immense.

The rails changed colour to a cool blue. The faint outline of the giant cradled object vibrated and in an instant bloated to dominate their view.

Levinson's life did not flash before his eyes. Instead, he thought of the guardrail that brought him to space and all the machines he would never get to design.

#

General Hammond peered through the glass over the banks of engineers, scientists, and technicians working away below. He felt ill at ease. The wormhole mission seemed bound for hell in so many ways. They'd lost contact with a second Phaethon shuttle, didn't know why, and worse didn't know how Wilbur Lewenson fit into all of it.

"Stop standing there and come in!" General Hammond barked.

An aide sidled into the office. "Sir, I have an update on the search for Lewenson. I'm afraid it's not good. Our trackers picked up his trail near the foot of the mountain where the eye witness placed him, but near the summit his trail abruptly stopped. It's as if Lewenson hiked up the mountain and then vanished. The peculiar thing is the trackers found a circular patch of vitrified sand right where his trail ended."

"This just gets better and better. Any *other* great news?"

"General, we've managed to track down a few copies of the book," the aide said, handing him a copy of the book. "Unfortunately...they're all in old paperback book format. We couldn't find a holo-tab version. Our analysts have marked the relevant section."

General Hammond flipped open the book and started to read.

*From the discussion in the previous chapter, it should be evident that the warning issued by the genius Daedalus to his son Icarus is meant for all of modern humanity. This ancient tale among countless others warns humanity to concern themselves with earthbound matters. Icarus symbolises humanity, while his father symbolises an older wiser intelligence. How does one practically fly close to the sun? The answer is simple: One must leave the earth's atmosphere. In other words, one must undertake space travel. It is therefore my contention that "Do not fly too close to the sun" should be interpreted as 'Avoid space travel'.*

*Consider the following scenario. Let us suppose that there is a force or an intelligence that polices which species attain the ability to traverse the spaceways and which should not. There may be a variety of reasons for this intelligence to do so. Perhaps this intelligence maintains competitive advantage in this way, especially if we assume that there is wealth to be gained in space. Alternately, this intelligence only allows species who have reached a sufficient level of ethical development to undertake extensive space travel. By extensive space travel, I refer to interstellar endeavours such as launching so-called generation starships (i.e. those massive*

vessels taking earthlings beyond our solar system for colonisation and onboard which the first generations of humans will be born in space).

*But what might the penalty for venturing to the stars be? Since much of our contact with this intelligence has occurred in the distant past, leaving relatively few fingerprints, might we assume that such a penalty will be swift and quite possibly enacted anonymously from a vast distance?*

*To answer these questions, we need to discuss two variations of an often overlooked theory of how life on Earth began. According to mainstream science, life on Earth was kick-started by random collision of molecules, which resulted in simple life forms almost instantly, and ever since evolution has reigned supreme. Evolution has been largely accepted as the mechanism by which simple life forms eventually became complex life forms. However, the part about random combinations has raised serious questions around the probability of such precise combinations occurring by chance. Enter noted astrophysicist, Sir Fred Hoyle, and, the discoverer of the structure of DNA, Francis Crick. Both men realised that even simple life forms were already too complex for the random collision explanation to be likely. Hoyle proffered a theory (later called panspermia) which posits that bacterial life which later evolved into varied forms of complex life - including us - was carried to the Earth at random by interstellar comets. Crick, on the other hand, held another view called 'directed panspermia'. According to this theory, an extraterrestrial civilization intentionally seeded the Earth with alien DNA (which became the basic building blocks for life). Up to this point, we have sketched two scenarios in which life of Earth actually originated elsewhere. Ludicrous, mainstream scientists might say. However, the virtual opposite of such a hypothesis (i.e. global extinction caused by heavenly bodies) has become widely accepted. I am specifically referring to the contention that the dinosaurs were wiped out by an asteroid hitting our planet.*

*What does this have to do with that mysterious space policing intelligence? Quite a lot, I would say. Firstly, we've seen how an asteroid can play a major role in an extinction event. Secondly, if we split the difference between Crick and Hoyle's panspermic positions, it could be possible that a heavenly body (i.e. an asteroid) can be intentionally aimed at a planet such as ours. In both ancient literature and science fiction, weapons that can hurl gigantic objects through space or the sky at great speeds have been described. In fact, there has been considerable modern interest in*

*such a weapon that has been dubbed a rail-gun. A rail-gun derives its name from the rails into which an asteroid would be loaded. The rails act like the barrel of a gun, assisting with propulsion and aim.*

*Let us assume that the highly advanced space-policing intelligence gets wind of humanity's intention and capability of taking to the stars and that humanity has been deemed unfit to travel across interstellar borders. Let us also assume that the punishment for such infringement is extinction. It would be the easiest thing in the world for said intelligence to construct a rail-gun of such massive proportions that it could hold and then propel an asteroid ten times the size of the dinosaur-killer towards Earth. At this point in our discussion, I would like to propose that a rail-gun of such size should be called a rail-cannon or more appropriately a god-rail.*

*Let's not forget that the modus operandi of such intelligences (so-called gods of antiquity) has been to leave as few real fingerprints as possible. In antiquity, this meant dressing up their high technologies as magic and never teaching mankind how to construct these high technologies. During our time with our early 22<sup>nd</sup> century understanding (e.g. differentiating between technology and the supernatural; storing digitally recorded history off-earth), this would mean destroying humanity from a distance (i.e. outside observable range). The reasoning behind this may be similar to the reason why executioners wore hoods during certain period of human history. In addition, this intelligence may also not want to reveal its handiwork to other alien passers-by centuries or millennia after our extinction. Wiped out by a rogue asteroid is a fate that raises few galactic eyebrows. Therefore, the most prudent (i.e. traceless) way of using a god-rail weapon would be to use it in conjunction with a stable wormhole from the other side of the universe. A god-rail weapon plus wormhole combo would satisfy all criteria perfectly.*

*This leaves one question: what would trigger a god-rail attack on the Earth? The broad answer is when humanity reaches a certain level of technological advancement. The more specific answer could vary, but an educated guess would be when humanity launches its first generation starship or rather just before such an achievement.*

*But alas who will heed such warnings? Even now, during these final days, I still feel like the blind poet whose epics will only be appreciated once he has left. I am left to ponder a final question. When day turns to unexpected night, when it is far too late*



*for humanity to change its deadly course, will people finally recognise these truths with rueful souls?*

An alarm wrenched the general from his reading and the rest of the Capcom staff from their work.

General Hammond made his way down through the rows of technicians, engineers, and scientists toward the wall-sized real time monitor. "Can somebody tell me what that ruckus means?"

"It's the wormhole, Sir," an engineer said, pouring over the data on his screen. "It's expanding...at an exponential rate!"

In the midst of the flashing monitors and ceaseless alarms at the insular heart of Capcom, neither General Hammond nor his staff noticed the final darkness as it drove off the midday light with the swiftness of a messenger from the gods.

## Magazines Received

**Stapledon Sphere (formerly the newsletter of the Middle Tennessee Science Fiction Society [aka the Nashville SF club])**

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

Issue #27 June 2019

Issue #28 July 2019

Issue #29 August 2019

**Ansible** David Langford

June 2010 383 <http://news.ansible.uk/a383.html>

July 2019 384 <http://news.ansible.uk/a384.html>

August 2019 385 <http://news.ansible.uk/a385.html>

## Books Received

**JonathanMallPublishers**

Daria Song The Mystery Mansion Simon & Schuster UK R280.00

Michelle Paver Wakenhyrst Head of Zeus R295.00

Bryan Camp Gather The Fortunes Bloomsbury R210.00  
Maya Motayne Nocturna Hodder & Stoughton R325.00  
Terry Brooks The Stiehl Assassin: Book Three of the Fall of Shannara Little Brown R325.00  
Michell Harrison A Pinch of Magic Simon & Schuster UK R165.00  
Nnedi Okorafor Broken Places & Outer Spaces Simon & Schuster UK R215.00  
Terry Goodkind Hateful Things: the children of D'Hara Head of Zeus R180.00  
Cassandra Clare Queen of Air and Darkness Simon & Schuster UK R210.00  
Baoshu & Ken Liu The Redemption of Time Head of Zeus R355.00

## Nova 2018 Highly Recommended

### Gary Kuyper Carte Blanche

She came up out of the time-hardened earth of the ancient grave, a white swirling mist that materialized into a humanoid figure the hue of a wood grub. She seemed as a bleached sheet, devoid of all pigment, swaying in a gentle breeze...a ghost. But no, she was not some flimsy translucent spectre or ethereal phantom. Once formed into a slender, naked, body she was as solid and real as...well, you or I.

In the glow of moonlight she appeared as polished marble, having an eerie sheen. Fortunately, a cemetery at night is not a place that is often *haunted* by the *living*. Yet there had been incidents. On more than one occasion she had used her pallid appearance as a deception, flattening her hands together and kneeling motionless at the foot of a grave. She became a stone angel praying for the soul of the deceased. It was only when the inebriated grave digger cupped his hand over her petite breast that the truth was revealed. She had allowed him to lop off her head with the edge of his shovel, whereupon she had returned to formless vapour. The sudden jolt to sobriety had proven taxing; he had collapsed, unconscious. She had used this to her advantage, permeating first clothing and then warm, succulent flesh - a myriad of proboscides sucking and siphoning the red below the surface. She stopped when the hunger pangs ceased. She had no desire to terminate his brief lifespan, or that of any other sentient creature. She had considered the risk of allowing him to survive.

Common sense had won the day. The man would revive weak and confused. The memory would be nothing more than a vivid dream...a *drunken delusion*.

She gazed up at the full moon and sighed. Although she appreciated its beauty as a reflection of a sun that she could never again look directly upon, she cursed its revealing illumination. She waited, patiently, until a cloud had dulled the radiance before moving to the dead oak with the hollow trunk. She retrieved the dress, sandals, bottle of red wine, flask of absinth and jug of beer concealed beneath a layer of leaves. She downed half the wine before proceeding to don the long dress and footwear. By the time she was finished, her skin had taken on a healthy pink glow. With concentrated effort she was able to intensify the saturation of her lips. Her eyes, she knew, were now blood-red. Not the red that comes from weeping or imbibing too much alcohol – no, this was the very shade of her irises. She knew too that unless she did something to alter them, they would draw undue attention towards her...*otherworldly* appearance. She uncapped the flask and took a few enthusiastic gulps. Apart from a slight euphoria, the alcohol had little affect. It was not the alcohol but its pigment that she sought. Her eyes waned and waxed, brilliant rubies became dazzling emeralds. Lastly, after quaffing a large amount of beer, and applying special effort and concentration, the strands on her head goldened into a magnificent blond mass.

Time and experience had taught her a few...*tricks*. Being able to utilize the pigments in alcohol was one of them. Why it failed to work with other substances was a mystery – a problem to be solved.

She longed for *blue*. It was, after all, the original hue of her large eyes. Subtle blue shading above those enormous compelling orbs would enhance her...*unnatural beauty*. Also, blue veins would help to give her a more...*natural* appearance. One could say that she was *blue for blue*.

Long before discovering the ability to manipulate the pigments contained in alcohol, she had painstakingly applied cosmetics to hide and enhance her true appearance. Base, lipstick and eye-shadow. Gloves and a wig had helped for her hands and hair. The eyes had been a problem, but feigning blindness had had its advantages. Yet, she preferred to be attractive rather than pitied in order to delude her prey. Apart from a heated itch her victims were unaware that their life-sustaining fluid had been slightly diminished.

She replaced the containers back into the hollow before saying, "Time to appease that ancient, disgruntled god in the gut. Time to *feed*." She smiled remembering a line from a Dracula movie she had seen many years ago: 'I never drink...*wine*.' She shook her head. "Foolish! If only he had known of the practical applications. Then again, although wine works well, blood is better. It nourishes, preserves and gives the skin warmth, especially when caressing and intimacy are necessary."

#

"Good God!" exclaimed the man as he took hold of her hand. "Affie, you're as cold as...the *grave*."

Through the ages she had chosen many names for herself - tonight it was *Affie*.

"That's a rather...*depressing comparison*," she said displaying a forced glum countenance. "Haven't you heard the expression, '*Cold hands – Warm heart*'?"

"Can't say I have," he said beckoning the barmaid over to their booth. "You need to get something warm into you. If you get my meaning?"

"Oh, and just what did you have in mind?"

"A *liquid blanket*. Perhaps a sherry or maybe something stronger...brandy...gin and tonic? You definitely seem like a gin and tonic gal to me."

"Not at all. I don't care much for...*clear stimulants*."

"*Clear*?"

"Bland...*colourless*."

"Oh, why's that?"

"I enjoy peering through my drinks. A glass of beer reminds me of warm sunny afternoons, a sweet rosé makes me think of all the lost sunsets."

"*Lost sunsets*?"

"How you mort...most *people* take the sunsets for granted. You should appreciate each and every one."

"My, my, but you are the romantic type."

"I...I've never been called that before." She smiled a brilliant set of white teeth.

"Thank you."

The barmaid grimaced, put a hand on her wide hip and asked, "You two lovebirds gonna order or what?"

"The lady would like something colourful."

"Colourful?"

"Yes, something bright and cheery."

"How about our *Blauwschloss Schnapps*?"

"No, no, that's cold. The lady is already *too blue*. Bring her something that hints of warm sunsets."

"Wait," said Affie, her large eyes becoming even more pronounced. "You have a *blue* drink?"

"That's right. It's pretty popular with the younger crowd. Don't care much for it meself, though."

"Since when?"

"You been livin' in a hole, ducky? It's been on the market for..."

"*Wonderful!*" interrupted Affie excitedly. "Bring me a large one!"

"We serve it in liqueur glasses. You want *large*...order *two*."

"Yes, *two*!" Then with added excitement, "No, make it three...four...*six*!"

"*Six*?"

"Yes, *six*!"

"Yer sure? That stuff is pretty potent."

"I'm sure, bring *six*."

The guy chipped in. "If the lady wants six, bring her *six*."

"Hopin' there's happy times for you if she gets on her ear? Just remember that a gentleman don't take advantage of a lady under the influence."

"Of course not."

"Hmm," she hummed narrowing her eyes at him. "What'll *you* be havin' then?"

"Just a single Guinness for now."

"A stout fella, hey? Need to put hair on yer chest and lead in yer..."

"That'll be all for now thank you."

"Please hurry," coaxed Affie impatiently.

"Your funeral."

"What?"

"Never mind. I'll bring yer a bucket as well, just in case yer need ta throw up after."

She headed off before either patron could voice a response.

"Cheeky thing," muttered the man. Then he turned to Affie. He was still clasping her frozen hand tightly in an attempt to impart some of his hot-bloodedness. "So...*Affie*? That short for something?"

"Aphrodite."

"*Aphrodite*? Your folks named you *Aphrodite*?"

"What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Reminds me of an old song."

"Oh?"

He sang it. "*Oh, you must have been a beautiful baby, 'cause baby, look at you now.*"

Affie forced pigment into her cheeks before declaring, "Mister Finn, you're embarrassing me."

"That's just *Finn*, my dear. *Finnegan* to most, but *Finn* to all my friends."

"Your first name wouldn't be Mickey by any chance?"

"Mick..." Realization made him smile. "Oh, you're a witty one. Witty *and pretty*."

There was a mischievous glint in his eyes. "Tell you what. You can call me Mickey Finn if I can call you Aphrodisiac?"

She laughed, a wind chime in a gentle breeze. "You're sharp. Sharper than most. What do you do for a living?"

"I study the dead."

An involuntary spasm jerked mind and body to attention. "Oh?"

Finn, mistaking Affie's tightening grip as a show of affection, slid closer around the semi-circular seat before proudly announcing, "I'm interested in antiquity, history, ancient and dead civilizations."

"Ah," sighed Affie and moved their hands beneath the table. There she would be able to appease the growing hunger, covertly and quite painlessly. "Go on," she commanded as the epidermis of her hand became a prying vapour with a single-minded objective.

Never once had she considered herself *evil*. There was no pricking of conscience. She merely did naturally whatever it took to satisfy her unnatural appetite. Humans were food...*cattle*. As such they could either be slaughtered or merely...*milked*. To forsake necessary nourishment would invite oblivion – a slow and agonising demise. To her eternal dismay she had once forgone feeding. It was her abstaining that had



permanently bleached her into the colourless entity which now materialized each night above the place where her mortal remains lie.

"I've been studying the Roman ruins on the hill."

"The ones behind the old church?" she asked whilst creeping up his sleeve. The more area she could cover, the quicker she could fill her need.

"The old abandoned church with the lych gate and dilapidated old graveyard? Yes."

"They still bury people up there, you know?" She reached an armpit. The skin was thinner here...easily accessible.

"Really?" said Finn shrugging his shoulder.

"Well, it's just that some of the old town folk have family up there that go way back. I guess they want to be *reunited*."

"I'm not sure if that sounds quaint or just plain macabre?"

"Oh?" she frowned as she moved across his chest. She caressed nipples delicately before proceeding down towards his abdomen.

"Well, you have to admit that it is a rather depressing place for a family reunion." He used his free hand to rub the heated sensation across his upper torso. "You said so yourself."

She smiled sadly. "So I did."

"I'm sorry, do you have any?"

"Family? Up there?"

"Yes."

"No, no family."

"Someone else?" he asked scratching his navel.

"Some...one, yes," she replied forlornly.

"Ah, someone who meant a lot to you? A dearly departed? Forgive my prying."

"No, it's just me." She moved further down.

"Just *you*?"

"The thought of graves and graveyards makes me somewhat...melancholy."

"That's because you need to see them in a new light."

"Oh?"

"Yes, like I do. Tombs, crypts, catacombs, sepulchres and mausoleums are windows."

"Windows?"

"Windows with a view on our past."

"Ah."

"Where others see death and depression, I see history...legacy...enlightenment...even *beauty*."

"Why, that's wonderful, Finn. I never thought of it like that before."

"Six *Blauwschloss Schnapps*es for the brave but foolish young lady," said the barmaid lining them up in front of Affie. "And a single Guinness for the *gentleman* next to her."

Affie closed an eye and lifted one of the glasses. She peered through the azure liquid and smiled widely. "Clear skies on a bright sunny day."

"For a pale gal like yourself you sure are a sunworshipper," noted Finn.

"Ah," she uttered tilting her head back and emptying the contents down her throat. She rapidly proceeded to do the same with the other five glasses.

"Good heavens, I didn't expect you to..."

"At last I can be complete again."

"Complete?"

"Did you know that white is an absence of all colour, and black is the presence of all?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"Are you talking about light or pigment?"

"Pigment of course. I'm talking about the paint of life."

"Paint of li..."

"Yes, I am paint, canvas and artist all in one. Do you have any idea of what I am now capable."

"Uh, no, I..."

"I will make the Mona Lisa pale in comparison to the works I will create."

"Sheesh, Affie, the barmaid was right about that blue-slush-stuff being potent."

"Yes, it's marvellous." She closed her eyes in delighted concentration.

Finn mistook her smile for one of intoxicated pleasure. He also mistakenly surmised that the heat about his groin was arousal. He leaned forward and kissed her.

"Strange," he acknowledged sitting back and licking his lips.

Affie opened her eyes. "What?"

"You taste like wine." He stared at her. "Stranger still."

"What?"

"I could have sworn your eyes were green."

"*Green? Never.* Maybe *you've* had too much."

"I haven't touched my drink," he said reaching for it.

She noticed the tattoo on his wrist. "Does that have meaning...special significance."

"What...this silly old thing?" he said pulling his sleeve away to reveal a skull with the words '*or glory*' beneath.

"*Death or glory.* You were a military man?"

"Merchant navy. All newbies must get one when they cross the equator for the first time." He took a hearty gulp from the glass. He wiped away the foam moustache with the skull before disclosing, "It was either this or a naked bimbo. "Would you like something else to drink? Maybe coffee?"

"Hmm, no, I am...quite *satisfied*. I feel most pleasant...*invigorated*."

"You do? I really wouldn't want to think I was taking advantage."

"Maybe it is I who is taking advantage."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yes." With uncanny swiftness the vapour retracted back into her hand which was now tinted with subtle blue veining.

Finn shuddered. "Ooh."

"What?"

"Someone just walked over my grave."

"That...happens to me quite often. Don't you just hate it?"

"Do *you* have any? *Tattoos*?"

She was about to say *no*, but swiftly changed her mind. It was time to test her new palette properly. "Actually, I do." She closed her eyes.

"Are you sure you're all right?"

"Quite fine, thank you." She released his hand in order to pull the dress off her shoulder. It revealed a magnificent butterfly on her upper arm.

Finn stared at the colourful rendering with astonishment. "That's...*amazing*. It seems almost *alive*. The artist was truly skilled in his profession."

"*Her*."

"It was a *lady*?"

"I did it...myself."

"Wow, impressive. Ah, now I understand your mentioning of pigments and *paint of life*. I..." He grimaced sadly and lifted his arm. "I hate this damn skull. Wish I could get rid of it."

"I would think it suits you? You did say you study the *dead*."

"The fellow who did this was the ship's cook, not a very good artist. No, it makes me seem like an ex-con or a gangster."

"Or a pirate."

"Exactly!" He downed the rest of his Guinness in frustration and disgust.

A thought entered Affie's mind. "It might just work."

"What?"

"Nothing, just thinking aloud." She took hold of his other hand. "It would seem that *you* could use another drink."

The surface of her hand dissolved once more to a fine creeping mist. This time it travelled no further than his lower arm."

#

Three more Guinness later and Finn found the courage to slur, "Sho, your plash or mine?"

"Mine. Definitely *mine*. A walk in the brisk night air will do you good."

"Where ish..."

"On the hill."

"Near the chursch?"

"Very near."

#

They approached the moonlit Roman ruins on the narrow path cutting through the hedgerow behind the old abandoned church.

"So, this is where you've been spending most of your time?"

"Yes," said Finn staggering. "Damn! I don't understand it. I can normally hold my liquor. I'm cold...dizzy...nauseous. The last time I felt like this was after donating blood."

"Sit for a while. Regain your strength." She pointed to a T-shaped wall. "If you dig there on the right where the two walls form a corner. You'll find a silver denarius of Aelius in rather good condition - my second gift to you."

"Ael...dig? What? *Second* gift?"

"You will soon discover the first."

"Oh, a surprise...a mystery. I like that." He pointed at a bright dot near the horizon.

"Look, the morning star. Sun will be up soon."

"I believe that is actually the planet Venus."

"Yes, quite true. Say, did you know that the goddess Venus is the Roman counterpart of Aphrodite?"

"Of course. Finn, I...I have to go now before the sun peeks over the hillock."

"Go? Wait, I thought you loved the sun?" He turned his gaze towards the reddening sky."

"I'm sorry, but I have to leave right away."

"Darn, well will I get to see you again?"

"Every single day."

"Eh?"

"My first gift to you." Her voice had a strange otherworldly resonance.

"*First gi...*" He turned to where she had been standing. There was only thick billowing mist. In the swirling vapour something like glitter, only much finer, settled towards the ground, twinkling and sparkling, a myriad of vibrant hues. Finn recalled a fact he had read about rainbows. "They only appear when the sun is close to the horizon." He turned to see it wink rosy rays across the ruins.

He sat until the sun was fully formed in a cloudless azure sky. Then he lumbered back towards the church. His arm was itching something awful as he passed the line of old graves. He pulled back his sleeve to give it a hearty rub.

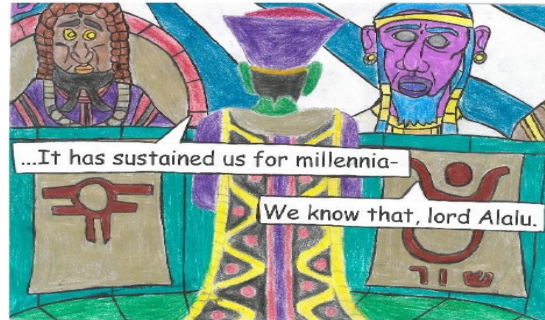
"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. The skull was gone, replaced with a most fantastic and realistic likeness of a naked woman. A woman whose brightly coloured features were undoubtedly that of Affie's. "How...when?"

Once the initial shock and surprise had subsided he smiled widely. There was now a spring in his step as he walked on loudly reciting, "'When the mighty deity Aphrodite puts on her flimsy see-through nighty,' declared lusty Pan, that horny half-man, 'tis a splendid sight ta see.'"

Beneath the dark ancient earth a wind chime tinkled.



# ORIGINS-4.SOLUTION -TERTIUS CARSTENS



TO BE CONTINUED...



