SF COMMENTARY 81

40th Anniversary Edition, Part 2

June 2011

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THE COLIN STEELE SPECIAL

COLIN STEELE REVIEWS THE FIELD

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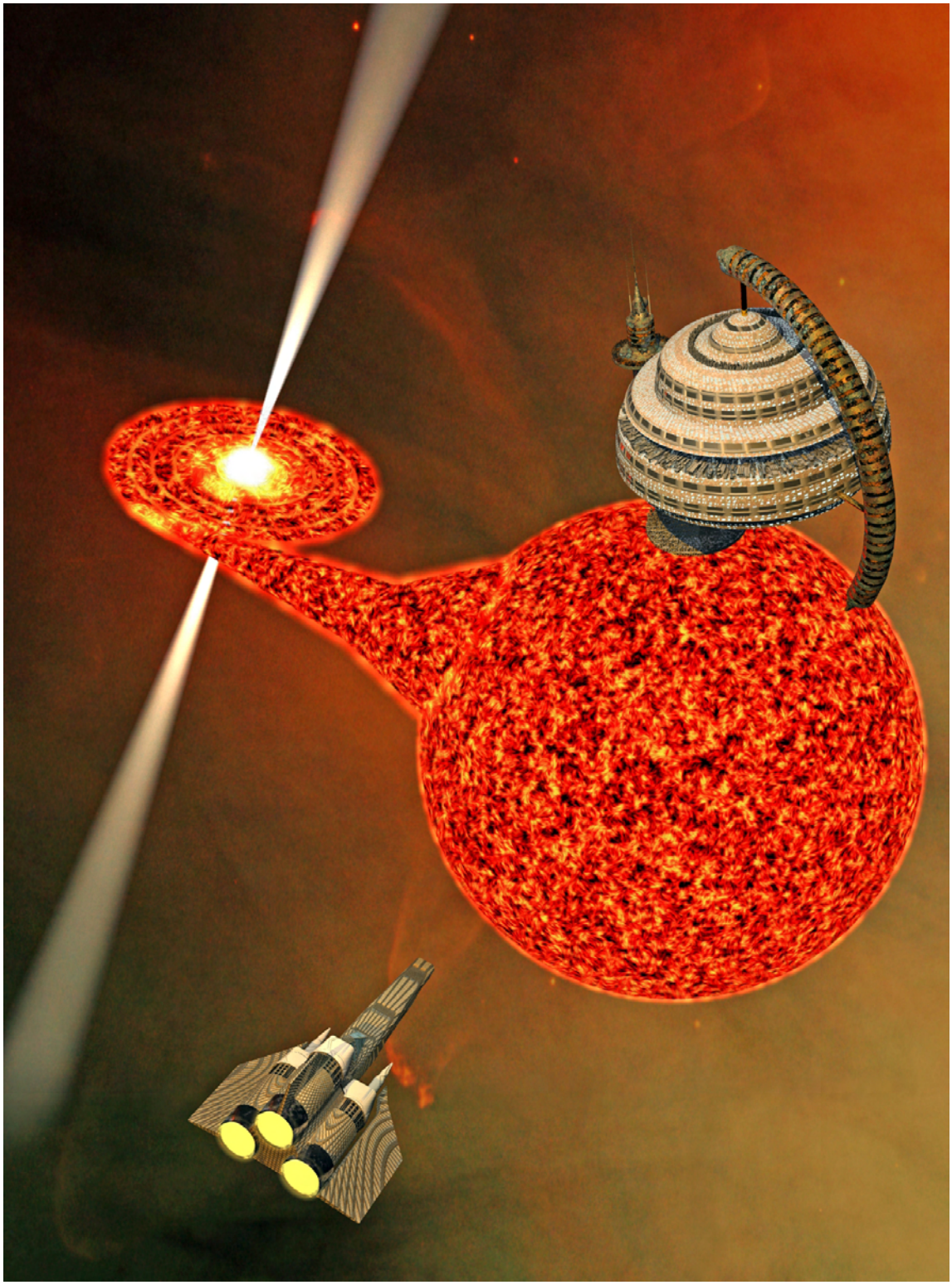

SF COMMENTARY 81

40th Anniversary Edition, Part 2

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Photos: Colin Steele (p. 5); Cath Ortlieb (p. 7); Leigh Edmonds (p. 68).

Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

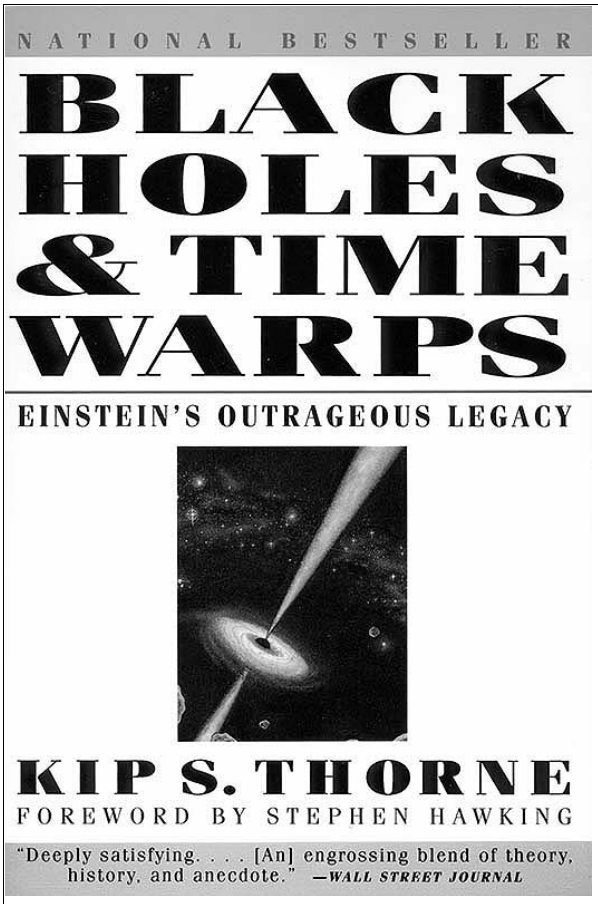
This issue's cover:
Binary exploration

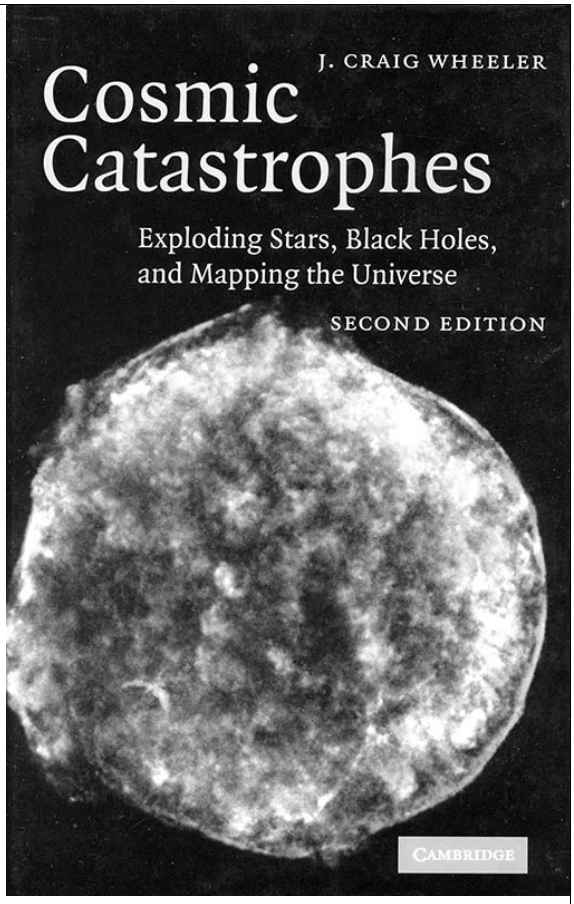
The story *implied* by the cover graphic is quite simple. As we all know as SF readers, travel to remote areas of our galaxy, or indeed any other galaxy, will be accomplished relatively soon by any number of means — faster-than-light travel, wormholes, space-folding, modifying the shape of space so that 'surfing' at super-luminal speeds is possible ... As a consequence, the investigation of unusual astronomical events will become a matter of course, and so, when a suitable binary star is discovered, scientific teams will be sent to explore and amass and assess any relevant data so that current theories may be tested or amended and, perhaps, new ones developed. What the cover illustrates is such an expedition.

The binary star is moderately unusual in that the large, red giant, star is losing mass to its small white dwarf companion. Parked in orbit near the red giant, but outside its *Roche Lobe*, is the science station, a somewhat large structure housing some 5000 personnel — scientists, technicians, support staff. It's nowhere near as massive, nor as complex, as *Sector General*, but being 'deeper than a well and wider than a church-door, 'tis enough, 'twill serve' — to grossly misquote the Bard. (James White's stories of *Sector General*, by the way, is my favorite SF series). In the lower left of the graphic a supply ship can be seen approaching the station ...

The story *behind* the cover is rather different. Some months ago I read Kip Thorne's ***Black Holes and Time Warps***, which is one of the best 'popular science' books I have read. This stimulated me to explore other books on, and around, the subject, and in my trawling of Amazon.com I came across (amongst others) Craig Wheeler's ***Cosmic Catastrophes*** — which turned out to be yet *another* book to find a permanent place on my shelves. Wheeler is President of the American Astronomical Society, and gives a course at the University of Texas called Astronomy Bizarre. This is aimed at undergraduate students who have a minimum, or no, mathematical and/or physics background. So while *Cosmic Catastrophes* qualifies as a textbook, it reads as 'popular' science — in fact, unlike many popular texts, it contains *no* equations whatsoever. It is not a difficult read by any means, but it requires attention, and so is not a swift read. Both of these books are *highly* recommended for those SF fans for whom the science in a story is an important factor.

In discussing binary stars — on which he is an expert — Wheeler points out that if one of the pair is a red giant, and the other a white dwarf (as a rather specific example, the gravitational field surrounding the pair may be characterised by *Roche Lobes*. For those who now may be muttering 'Roche Lobes', the following diagrams should be some clarification. As the captions indicate, if the red giant grows (as it usually does) and becomes larger than its Roche lobe, its matter essentially squirts through the 'inner Langrangian point' into the gravitational domain of its white dwarf companion. Because the two stars are moving and rotating, it is also highly probable that the matter expelled will orbit the dwarf. Frictional effects will cause the matter to spiral in and at the same time heat up. As the gas nears the star it radiates at higher and





higher frequencies before finally being incorporated into the white dwarf. Some of the radiation will still be in the visible, and this is what is depicted in the cover illustration.

Technical notes

The celestial background is a Hubble Space Telescope image of 'a bow-shock near young star' and is from the Hubble internet site. The rocket and space station are freebies from the site www.3dcafe.com, which were imported into Vue6Infinite and then texturised (with some difficulty) by using and tweaking the software's material interface. The spiral is actually a Mandelbrot image, from djFractals, read into Vue, converted into a terrain and then, along with the red giant, textured as glowing 'lava'. The red giant is simply a cone affixed to a sphere. The main problem with the final image — leaving aside all aesthetic considerations (!) — is that the spiral is too thick. Forgiveness by the onlooker is a prerequisite.

— Dick Jenssen

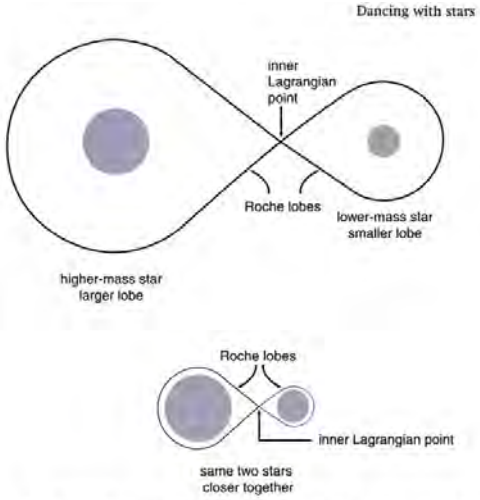


Figure 3.1 The upper diagram shows the Roche lobes, the regions of gravitational domain, around two orbiting stars. The lower diagram shows the same stars in closer orbit. Note that the Roche lobes are always roughly as large as the distance between the stars, but that the star with the larger mass always has the larger gravitational domain and hence the larger lobe. Both of the lobes are smaller if the stars are closer together.

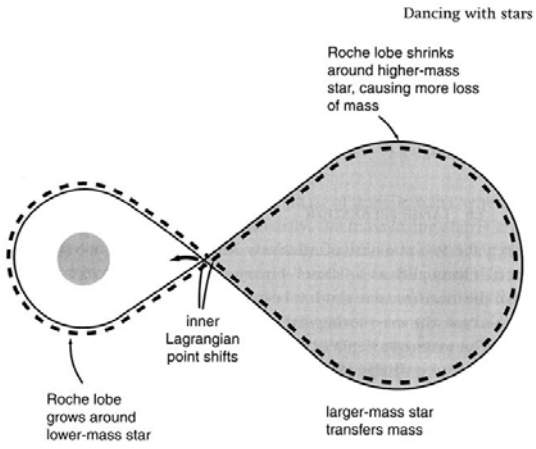


Figure 3.2 When the more massive star in a binary system loses mass, the process is unstable. As the more massive star loses mass, its Roche lobe becomes smaller, thus biting more deeply into the mass-losing star and causing even more mass loss. This effect is exacerbated because the requirement for angular momentum to be conserved also forces the stars to spiral closer together, making both Roche lobes smaller. As mass is transferred, the location of the inner Lagrangian point shifts to reflect the changing balance of the mass.

I must be talking to my friends

I dreamt last night that I was watching a movie. It was a science fiction movie that for years had been praised by my younger friends. They were all visiting a large cinema in a multiplex to see it on the big screen again, and had dragged me along.

The film had a one-word title that I now cannot remember. The appearance of the film's title at the beginning caused ecstatic anticipation to ripple through members of the audience.

It was an adventure film whose action sequences moved as fast as those in the original *Star Wars*. At first I thought it was merely an offshoot of *Star Wars*. The characters were warriors in a army defending itself against planetary invaders — all for one, and one for all; one exciting battle after another.

However, the more the goodies fought against the invaders (never glimpsed in the film), the more territory the invaders gained.

Not only was I watching the movie, but I became part of it. I was one warrior of the defending army. Most of us were now destroyed, and our territory had been reduced to the capital city. The president and his council were wandering around the city dazed, instead of commanding the forces.

The atmosphere of the film should have been becoming sombre, even tragic. Not so. We were all somehow high on enthusiasm. My soldier buddies were quite sure they could still win. I knew they couldn't, but the tone of the film stayed upbeat, with bright colours; lots of flash.

Colin Steele.

In the dream, I was not just *within* the film, not just *watching* it, but also *reading the book of the film*. I found myself closing the book. It was 220 pages long, but I had closed it at page 180. What was the end of the story?

Did it all end badly, or was there some amazing surprise ending still to come? Is that why my friends loved the film and the book? All I felt was acute disappointment. How could these people become so jumped up about a story that could have only one ending: death and destruction?

But I found myself walking along the street with my friends. They were still burbling about seeing the film, but somehow *I* had not yet seen the film.

I woke up. I was still wondering: what possible rabbit could have been pulled out of a hat to save the situation.

What was the point of my dream? What was its origin?

I am being constantly being told I must watch *Alien*, the film. The only thing I know about *Alien* is that it has the single most horrifying moment in SF/horror film history. I can't even guess why people want to watch a movie they know will shock them silly.

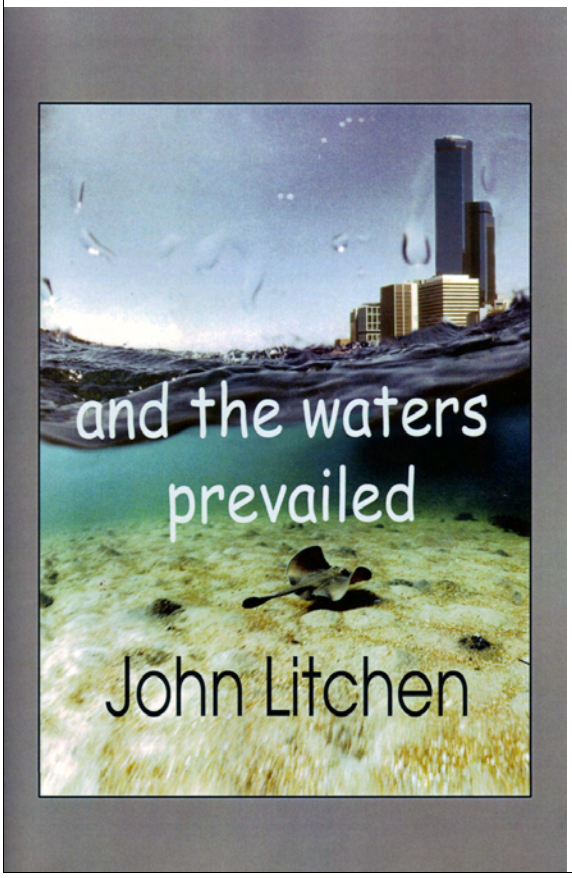
In the dream film I've described above, there seemed to be an acute contradiction between the sense of anticipation felt by the audience, the *feeling* in the film (a giddy enthusiasm created by the lightning-fast editing and whipcrack dialogue that is common to most 'sci-fi' films), and the direction that its plot was taking. If all these characters were about to be wiped out, why was the film so exciting to audiences? If there were to be some surprise ending, it must be the best-kept secret in SF. Any piece of entertainment can be sold to anybody using the current hysterical rah-rah tone.

How then must **Colin Steele** feel when he reads the vast quantities of science fiction, fantasy, and horror books that he ingests when writing his reviews for the *Canberra Times* (many of which you will find reprinted in this issue of *SF Commentary*)? I might well put the same question to **Ian Nichols** from Perth, who has reviewed SF and fantasy regularly for the *West Australian* for the last 17 years. Friends, how do you put up with that reading schedule: not just the bad writing, poor characterisation, and silly plots that afflict you, week after week, but that super-technicolored, over-excited atmosphere that I've tried to describe in my dream?

In my own SF reading, I've been increasingly annoyed by that same thick, sickening quality of automatic enthusiasm, even transcendentalism, that seems required in most books that still call themselves science fiction. It's a quality that varies all the way from the mindless action that has always been a staple of SF and fantasy, through to a high-flown hyped-up hope that irradiates many works that could otherwise be considered well-written 'classics' of our field. Two novels that come to mind from

my reading of recent years are **Geoff Ryman**'s *Air* and *The Child Garden*: both excellent novels with engaging female lead characters, one set in a near future when we all become totally connected to the world internet, and the other in a future when things have rather gone to seed. Both would fit my definition of an ideal science fiction novel — a realistic novel that happens to be set in the future (or alternative past or present) rather than in the present or the past — except that in both cases Ryman feels that he has to end the novel in great gassy hopefulness. These endings don't take anything away from the rest of these novels, but they did make me feel rather say under my breath: 'Oh no, not again!'

Since I've been publishing *SF Commentary*, one of the main arguments among SF reviewers, whether in fanzines or academic journals, has been between the advocates of optimism versus those of pessimism. Few writers other than **Brian Aldiss** and **Thomas Disch** have been willing to advocate pessimism as the more useful attitude when writing fiction, but many of us have regarded unquestioning optimism as a useless attitude when thinking about the future. If science fiction actually has anything to say about real futures, it does seem wisest to consider that the worst that can happen, to enable us to look at hardheaded ways of solving or avoiding situations. It would seem at the moment, for instance, fairly stupid to deny that we are currently in the middle of a gigantic scientific experiment called 'climate change', that atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are rising much faster than they should even in a thousand-year period, let alone in the past decade, and that the situation, if left unaddressed, is going to leave not many of us or our descendants alive or in very good condition by the year 2100. Yet the only really good look at how such changes might affect us can be found in two Australian novels, **George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* (*Drowning Towers*)** from 20 years ago, and in a novel nobody knows about, **John Litchen's *And the Waters Prevailed*** (Yambu Press), which has had little distribution so far. Litchen simply shows how the flooding of one of Australia's coastal cities will affect everybody who lives there. The book was published just before two enormous cyclones flooded large sections of Queensland, and their tail ends flooded a great stretch of northern Victoria. I fully expect that as Australia's climate becomes less stable in the next few years, 'tropical' cyclones will sweep down past Sydney and possibly reach central and eastern Victoria.



Not that I'm advocating either optimism or pessimism as *useful* or *useless* attitudes. Both are *aesthetically irritating* attitudes. Any novelist who forces the material of the novel into either the territory of giddy optimism or that of unrelenting pessimism is undermining the enterprise. The most satisfying novelist is one who deals with his or characters either with perfect objectivity (equally unfair to all their characters, like Evelyn Waugh) or with complex irony (Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* always comes to mind, although I haven't read it since 1965). I'm really struggling to think of novelists other than **Brian Aldiss** who are capable of true irony that is aesthetically pleasing. **Philip Dick** seemed to achieve it in his best novels, but many of his followers wanted him to wave a magic wand of the transcendental, which Dick himself was trying to do only in *VALIS*. Even **George Turner** succumbed to the temptation of the transcendental once, at the end of *Genetic Soldier*. To be fair to Turner, though, I can't think of any other SF novelist, except Stanislaw Lem, who was so determined to show how things really might turn out in the future.

In the end, I protest against the mindless searching for the big flash bang of joyous hope that SF fans have traditionally craved, and which seems endemic in American culture in particular (an attitude outlined in **Joe Bageant's *Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir***, a revelatory book that I've just finished reading). Your house has just burned down, your daughter has just been killed in a car accident, and your son has just enlisted to fight in Afghanistan, but you're supposed to think that things will still turn out for the best. SF would seem to be the one literature best prepared to show why things won't turn out for the best, or even the worst, and why considering all the possibilities is more satisfying than waving magic wands.

Having suffered from a gutful of glory in my fiction over the years, I'm very grateful I've never committed myself to reviewing SF, fantasy and horror books in the quantities taken on by **Colin Steele**. I'm very grateful for the trouble he has saved me. With rare grace and poise of expression, he manages to review hundreds of books in such an evenhanded way that I can tell whether I would enjoy the book or not, but somebody with other prejudices could do the same. Judgmental reviewing has its place — it's my kind of reviewing technique — but it is great to read prose that is non-judgmental yet filled with information about the quality of the books in our field.

— Bruce Gillespie, April 2011

Colin Steele

Terry Pratchett: A (disc) world of collecting

I didn't introduce **Colin Steele** properly in *Steam Engine Time* 9, when I was talking about Colin's appearance at Conflux 5 in Canberra in October 2008. His qualifications include (take a deep breath) MA, GradDipLib, FAHA, FLCIP, FALIA, and KtCross Spain. He is an Emeritus Fellow of the Australian National University, where he has held such positions as Director of Scholarly Information Strategies (2002–2003); University Librarian, ANU (1980–2002); Deputy Librarian, ANU (1976–1980); and Assistant Librarian at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (1967–1976). He is Convenor of the National Scholarly Communications Forums, and author/editor of a number of books, as well as over three hundred articles and reviews. He has been writing SF reviews for *The Canberra Times* for many years, and been contributing to *SF Commentary* since the 1970s.

The following article was first published in *Rare Book Review*, October–November 2008. It is reprinted with permission. Colin and I added the bit about Terry's New Year's knighthood.

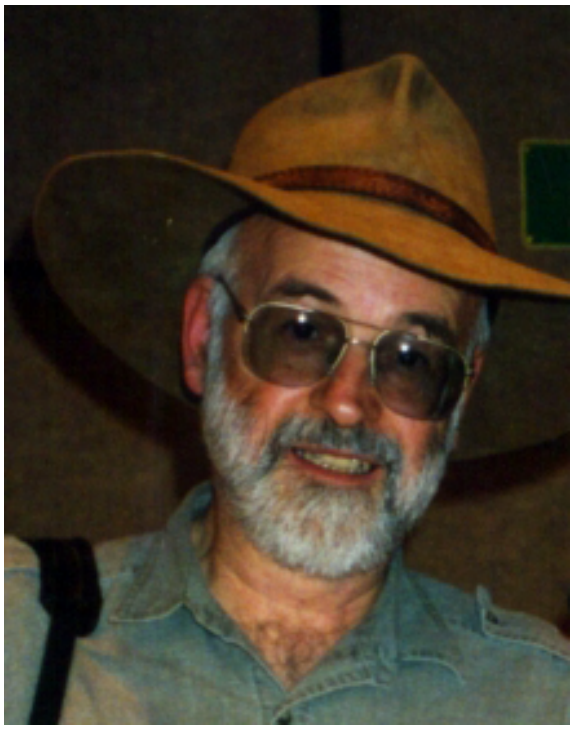
Background

Terence David John Pratchett — Terry Pratchett — now Sir Terry Pratchett — is the author of the phenomenally successful Discworld series, and is one of contemporary fiction's most popular writers. Since Nielsen's records began in 1998, Pratchett has sold around 10 million books in the UK, generating more than £70 million in revenue. Colin Smythe, his agent and original publisher, says that Pratchett has either written, co-written or been creatively associated with 100-plus books, notably Discworld titles.

Despite this prodigious output, Pratchett is one of the UK's most collectable authors, particularly for his early books and special editions. Pratchett's first book, *The Carpet People*, was published in 1971, while his first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*, appeared in 1983. Thirty-six more Discworld books have followed, many of which have topped the UK hardback and paperback lists. Pratchett's novels have sold more than 60 million copies, and have been translated into 33 languages.

Until Pratchett's recent diagnosis of an early stage of a rare form of Alzheimer's disease, he usually wrote two books a year, which reputedly earned him £1 million each. When asked 'What do you love most about your job?', Pratchett replied, 'Well, I get paid shitloads of cash ... which is good.' Pratchett donated £500,000 towards Alzheimer's research in March 2008.

Pratchett anticipates dictating novels from 2009 onwards due to his illness. He recently told the BBC that, compared to his once rapid typing, that he now types 'badly — if it wasn't for my loss of typing ability, I might doubt the fact that I have Alzheimer's. It's now hunt and peck.' Pratchett reflects, 'Merely catching a variant of Alzheimer's has propelled me onto more prestigious chat show sofas than I have ever seen in 25 years of quietly writing the Discworld series.'



Terry Pratchett is known for many things, not the least of them his many visits to Australia — the only place he can buy a decent hat. This is Cath Ortlieb's photo of Terry at Aussiecon 3, 1999.

Well before J. K. Rowling became popular, Pratchett straddled the bestselling divide between young and adult literature. In 1989 *Truckers* became the first children's book to appear in British adult fiction bestseller lists, while *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* won the UK Carnegie Medal for children's fiction in 2001. *The Wee Free Men* (2003) began the highly successful

Paul Kidby's version of Discworld. Originally in the illustrated version of The Last Hero (Pratchett & Kidby; Gollancz); also available in Kidby and Pratchett's The Art of Discworld (Gollancz; 2004).

Tiffany Aching series.

Pratchett was awarded an OBE in 1998 for services to British literature. His interpretation: 'At best, it's kind of a knighthood light.' On New Year's Day 2009, he received a real knighthood. His reaction: 'There are times when phrases such as "totally astonished" just don't do the job. I am of course delighted and honoured and, needless to say, flabbergasted.'

Nevertheless, he sometimes gives the impression that he feels neglected by the literati. Alison Flood, in an interview earlier this year with Pratchett for the UK *Bookseller*, identified 'a chippiness there, an irritation at the way he can be viewed by the literary establishment'.

Pratchett in a way occupies a sort of literary blind spot, because his books sell; has a high productivity rate (and thus faces the quality versus quantity fallacy); his books are humorous, and they are set in a world which on first sight may appear ridiculous. Discworld itself is a flat world that rests on the back of four elephants, which in turn are on top of a giant turtle sailing through space (see above).

Pratchett responds, 'There are mainstream novels that have more fantasy than some of mine ... The point is that any fantasy in a book will turn it into a fantasy, whereas a murder in a book will not turn it into a murder mystery. I've written police procedurals, romances, and murder mysteries; but because the person murdered is a dwarf, it becomes a fantasy.'

Like Jonathan Swift, Pratchett uses his (Disc) world to hold up a distorting mirror to our world, providing a satirical perspective in novels which have ranged over xenophobia, militarism, rock 'n' roll, quantum physics, religion, and opera! Pratchett has given readers versions of Homer and Dante (*Eric* 1989), Shakespeare (*Wyrd Sisters* 1988 and *Lords and Ladies* 1992), *The Phantom of the Opera* (*Maskerade* 1995), and pop music (*Soul Music* 1994). In *Moving Pictures* (1990), Pratchett parodies celebrity culture and Hollywood films, while *Small Gods* (1992) tackles religious fundamentalism.

Bibliographical background

Colin Smythe's (Pratchett's first publisher and now agent) website http:// www.colinsmythe.co.uk/ terrypages/tpindex.htm is indispensible for the details of Pratchett's publications. It is particularly important for the complex details of the early editions. Smythe provides bibliographical details of all of Pratchett's publications, including foreign translations, cover illustrations, and collaborations.

Three articles on Pratchett in the UK *Book and Magazine Collector* are extremely useful, providing overlapping information, and constitute Pratchett collecting time capsules in terms of public appreciation and prices. The initial top price for *The Carpet People* (1971) was gradually eroded as the early Discworld novels gained in popularity.

The first article was by M. J. Simpson in the *BMC* issue for May 1995; the second by David Howard in the May 2003 issue, while the latest comprehensive survey was by renowned critic and bibliographer Mike Ashley in the December 2005 issue. Ashley made some subsequent additions and corrections in the *BMC* letter column, as a result of contact with Colin Smythe. The complex printings of *The Tourist Guide To Lancre* (1998), the third book in the Discworld Mapp series, are highlighted.

Early biography

Much of Terry Pratchett's early biography can be found on Colin Smythe's web page: http://www.au.lspace.org/about-terry/biography.html.

Pratchett was born on 28 April 1948 in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. A recent American appreciation of Pratchett termed him a 'baby boomer', although Pratchett never seems to fit the popular conception of a baby boomer. Pratchett passed his 11-plus examination in 1959, but instead attended High Wycombe Technical High School rather than the local grammar, because he felt 'woodwork would be more fun than Latin'. At this time he had no real idea of what he wanted to do, and remembers himself as a 'nondescript student'.

He writes ironically in retrospect, 'I had a deprived childhood, you see. I had lots of other kids to play with and my parents bought me outdoor toys and refused to ill-treat me, so it never occurred to me to seek solitary consolation with a good book. Then Tolkien changed all that. I went mad for fantasy. Comics, boring Norse sagas, even more boring Victorian fantasy. I even bought and read all the Narnia books in one go, which was bit like a surfeit of Communion wafers. I didn't care any more.'

Terry's first non-fiction appearance in a science fiction magazine was in the British Science Fiction Association's magazine *Vector*, with a letter entitled 'Science Fiction in Schools' in the September 1963 issue. Issues of *Vector* occasionally turn up as fans throw out their magazines. Mainstream collectors would often not be aware of Pratchett's presence in this issue, and therefore a chance to obtain a rare item is always possible.

My interest in Terry Pratchett began early. I subscribed to the magazines *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* in the 1960s, Pratchett's first published story was the short story 'The Hades Business', which appeared in his school magazine when he was 13, and was subsequently reprinted in *Science Fantasy* magazine in 1963, for which he was paid £14. Pratchett bought a typewriter with the proceeds.

His second published story, 'Night Dweller', appeared in *New Worlds* magazine (issue 156, November 1965). It is one of the few items that Pratchett has never allowed to be republished, allegedly because of the immaturity of the writing and plot. Consequently, the price of this piece of Pratchettiana will be higher than that for 'The Hades Business'. On the positive side, copies of both these magazines turn up reasonably regularly within sets of *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*. Usually these are to be found in general secondhand bookshops, as SF bookshops usually know what they are doing in this area.

I also subscribed to the excellent critical 1960s fanzine *Zenith*, which had regular contributions from authors such as Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, and J. G. Ballard. I still have a Pratchett signed copy of issue 6 (September 1964), in which Pratchett was a co-author of a feature on Colin Kapp, entitled 'The Unconventional Cavalier'. This is a rare item, which even unsigned is probably worth about £100, as it was selling at around £50 several years ago in one of Andy Richards' Cold Tonnage SF catalogues.

Having obtained five O-levels and started A-level courses in Art, History and English, Pratchett decided to become a journalist, and left school in 1965. In October 1965, Terry, under the pseudonym of Marcus, began writing stories for the 'Children's Circle' column in *The Bucks Free Press*, the first of which, spread over 13 weeks, featured characters from what would become *The Carpet People* (1971). The chances of finding issues of these articles are perhaps very remote, but would certainly bring high prices if found. Another rare item to look out for from that period is a Colin Smythe magazine *The Psychic Researcher*, in which Terry had a comic strip entitled 'Warlock Hall', about a fictional governmental paranormal research facility.

The Carpet People, Pratchett's first book, was published by Colin Smythe in 1971, with a launch party in the carpet department of Heal's in Tottenham Court Road. *The Carpet People* describes the adventures of little people living in a carpet. This foreshadows Pratchett's 'Bromeliad' trilogy, comprising *Truckers*, *Diggers* and *Wings* (1989–90), which also features little people who live within a department store.

The Carpet People, despite being the first Pratchett book, is not the Pratchett book that brings the highest prices, partly because of its larger print run, although if one were to find the several copies in which Pratchett hand-coloured the illustrations, they would certainly give the prices of his Discworld first editions a run for their money. A facsimile reprint of this first edition specially bound in carpet was presented in a special case to Pratchett by Transworld Publishers on his fiftieth birthday. The 2005 boxed signed limited edition comprised 1000 copies.

I bought a signed copy of the 1971 first edition of *The Carpet People* in 1997 from a Blue Mountains bookshop in Australia. This was advertised as a signed copy, but the signature bore no resemblance to the Pratchett signatures in my other signed books. I therefore contacted Pratchett and faxed him a copy of his signature in that book.

His response of 9 September 1997 is as follows: 'Looks pretty much the way my signature used to look; this was probably signed more than ten years ago when I had time to shape every vowel! Andromeda Books in Birmingham have a visitors book signed by me twice a year since the mid 80s and its chilling and instructive to see how my sig has simplified over the years.' Pratchett then sent another email saying, 'I've looked through some old stuff and this may be one of the one s igned back in the 70s.'

Pratchett's signature, as can be seen from the title page illustration from my copy of *The Carpet People*, has morphed into even more of a quick signature in the twenty-first century. Pratchett is a prodigious signer, with his book-signing queues lasting between two and six hours. In 2001, when he received an honorary Doctorate of Literature at Portsmouth University, he said he thought he had signed over 300,000 books!

In his early *Discworld* signings, Pratchett signed in full and often embellished his signature with a caption, a drawing, and often for younger readers, a Pratchett stamp on the title page. Pratchett had his own 'library' stamp, which he carried around in a pouch. These were perhaps more enjoyable signing times for him, in that he had more time to chat. In more recent years it's often

been head down and fast signings, although to give Pratchett his due, he often rarely baulked at the vision of unkempt youths approaching him with large collections of paperbacks.

Pratchett emailed me on 6 November 2007, 'I think the key drawback of signing tours is that they put you, via jetlag, missed meals, suitcase living and randomised stress in a situation where you fall prey to any bug going. And then you sit in front of a line up of 300 fans, who breathe foreign germs all over you.'

Pratchett's illness has prevented him coming to Australia in 2008, as part of the 25th Annual Discworld Tour. This has prevented him signing my collection of Pratchettiana, which has accumulated since his last visit. He responded to my query about signing bookplates: 'I appreciate your dogged determination to have every printed item of mine, but I really hate signing bookplates and bits of sticky paper. These seem to me to negate the very basis of book signing. I like to sign for people where I can see the whites of their eyes.'

Pratchett had signed his books for me from in Australia 1990 onwards, that is, from his first Australian tour. At this time, I was reviewing his books on a regular basis for *The Canberra Times*, and organised his first literary events outside of book signings.

We arranged a literary lunch, but the majority of the audience were somewhat bemused as his then publisher publicity was billing Pratchett as a mixture of Evelyn Waugh and P. G. Wodehouse! Pratchett is a wonderful speaker, but he was not the suave English gentlemen that the ladies who lunch quite expected! On future occasions, Pratchett and I, whenever possible, talked on stage at the Australian National University. These regularly attracted audiences of over 600 people, the capacity of the lecture theatre.

We even managed to persuade the British High Commission to hold two receptions, one under the banner of Pratchett being a major British export earner, which indeed he is. This latter reception was hosted by a rather bemused Sir Alastair Goodlad, the then British High Commissioner, who clearly had not heard of Pratchett before his briefing.

Pratchett gave a condensed version of his 2004 World Science Fiction Convention speech about a recent operation and his waking on the operating table shouting for sandwiches — what Pratchett called 'a near sandwich experience'. Pratchett's English humour seemed to leave a number of foreign ambassadors, especially the French Ambassador, somewhat bemused, but it did not prevent many of the guests forming an impromptu book-signing queue afterwards.

The publications of the 1970s and 1980s

The Carpet People was followed by two SF novels, *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981). *Strata* parodies Larry Niven's *Ringworld*, and foreshadowed the idea of the Discworld. *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976), first edition, unsigned, can reach between £550 and £650, while *Strata* is in the £450 to £550 bracket.

Neither book, however, at the time, made enough money for Pratchett to give up his full-time job. He continued to work as a journalist, eventually moving to the *Western Daily Press* and the *Bath Chronicle*. In 1980 he left journalism entirely to become a press officer for three nuclear plants under the direction of the Central Electricity Generating Board, a job he was able to give up after the success of the early Discworld novels.

The Colour of Magic (1983), which launched the Discworld series, is usually considered his weakest novel, yet because of its small print run of 506 copies in the UK, it is the most collectable Pratchett item. Smythe notes, 'The book was typeset in the UK, but printed in the US for us through St Martin's Press, as at that time printing costs were cheaper there than here and there were only about 500 copies with our imprint.' As most of the copies went to public libraries, pristine copies of the first edition are very rare.

The exact bibliographical details of the publication of *The Colour of Magic* are complex between the UK and US editions (and between the St Martin's Press and US SF Book Club editions), and reference needs to be made to both Smythe and Ashley for details.

M. J. Simpson, in his *BMC* article for May 1995, quotes Barry Phelps writing in the May 1993 issue of *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* (*Rare Book Review*'s previous title) that 'the only copy I have ever seen is the one in the British Library. Many advertisements in the *Book Dealer* failed to provide me with a copy and I judge that the first one to reach the Bloomsbury Book Auctions will fetch over £500. The first edition of *The Colour of Magic* in good condition can now realise over £5000.

Stephen Briggs has 'converted' almost half of Terry Pratchett's novels into plays. The early mimeographed editions of the plays are scarce and very collectable. Thus, *The Colour of Magic* play adaption, originally performed by the Cambridge Amateur Dramatics Company, comprised originally only eight copies of the scripts, by Richard Artley and Mark Syddal, collated in ring bindings with soft covers. A copy can bring, according to Ashley, between £750 and £800 in this scarce 'publication'. Similarly, the 1996 play script of *Mort*, by Artley and Syddal, can bring up to £500.

The Light Fantastic (1986) is the only direct sequel in the Discworld series. Reference also needs to be made to Smythe and Ashley for the exact publication details of editions of *The Light Fantastic*, which had a first UK printing of 1043 copies. Copies of the British edition can now reach up to £2500. At the time of writing, Cold Tonnage Books lists a copy for £1650, while SuzyQ books in America has one for £1607.

Other early Discworld books, such as *Equal Rites* (1987), *Mort* (1987), and *Sourcery* (1988), are also very collectable, with prices ranging from £800 maximum for the former to £250 for the latter. Later Discworld novels had much larger print runs, so that by the time of *Jingo* (1997) the print runs exceeded 100,000 copies.

Signed copies of these early books may well fetch more, although it should be noted that a Pratchett signature is far from rare. Having said that, most Pratchett fans tend to keep their signed books rather than dispose of them. The value of Discworld novels that retain their associated promotional items are also much enhanced. Thus *Pyramids* came with a black mug with the slogan 'Mummies don't do it in Pyramids'. The paper-

back version of *Sourcery* was packaged with the mug in a cardboard box labelled 'The Terry Pratchett Cup and Sourcery'. Other promotional material came with *Good Omens* (1990) and *Mort* (1987).

Recent years have seen Discworld novels issued in signed, limited editions, in addition to the normal trade copy. Although 'limited' can be defined as 2500 copies! *Making Money* (2007) is on sale at the moment in the limited edition, signed by Pratchett and the illustrator Paul Kidby, at £500.

As always, unusual copies may bring higher prices. Thus a copy of *Pyramids* (1989) has been listed at £150, as it was signed by both Pratchett and Boy George! Allegedly the previous owner was travelling on the London Underground with the book in 1989 and Boy George was sitting opposite him. *Pyramids* was the only piece of paper available for signing, so possibly a unique signing occurred. 'Samplers' were also issued for several of the Discworld books, and are very collectable, as are proofs.

The selling of proof copies is a contentious issue and, with authors like Pratchett, proof copies of each new work induce a collecting frenzy. In recent years, proof copies have either been used for auction purposes to support Pratchett charities or have surfaced on E-bay at extremely high prices, prior to publication, as was the case with Pratchett's latest novel *Nation*. At the time of writing, a signed proof of *Mort* was listed at £595 by Fine Edition Books in Kent.

Some Pratchett non-Discworld items

There are too many Pratchett collectables outside of Discworld books to document in this article. The following therefore is only a Pratchett pot-pourri. *Good Omens* (1990), co-written with Neil Gaiman, is more valuable in the first edition if signed by both authors. Gaiman, himself a collectable author, has written, 'Terry and I wrote a book together. It began as a parody of Richmal Crompton's 'William' books ... but rapidly outgrew that conceit and became about a number of other things instead ... It was a funny novel about the end of the world.'

An unusual publishing experiment was Gollancz's 1995 four hardcover compact editions of Discworld books, each with a page height of 8.7 cm. They were printed in China, and Colin Smythe comments, 'The complications involved in producing these were the reason that no more volumes have been produced to date.' These volumes are not that easy to find, even though produced in significant numbers.

An unusual limited edition is *Sharpe's Trafalgar* (Scorpion Press, 1999), which was a limited edition of Bernard Cornwell's book with 99 numbered copies signed by Cornwell, and included an appreciation by Pratchett. There were, however, a further 15 lettered de luxe copies, signed by the author and Terry Pratchett, produced for private distribution.

You Can Save Mankind (1992) began the 'Johnny Maxwell' trilogy, and won the 1993 Writers' Guild of Great Britain Best Children's Book Award. *Johnny and the Dead* was shortlisted for the 1994 Carnegie Medal. After this book's publication, ten copies were bound in quarter dark blue artificial leather and cloth boards and signed by Terry Pratchett for a competition run by Books Etc.

Once More with Footnotes, the collection of Pratchett short stories, speeches, and travel notes brought together in 2004, is now out of print and very collectable. A copy on ABE, which is publicised as signed by Pratchett and one of the illustrators, Omar Rayyan, is priced at £1250. This collection contains an essay on his Australian tours, entitled *No Worries*, in which this author features anonymously at the Australian National University function. Pratchett gave me a 'Librarians Rule Ook' badge.

There are many other Pratchett collectables, such as diaries, almanacs, quiz books, film tie-ins, and companions that need to be covered in a comprehensive collecting portfolio, a 'Terry-Go-Round'. The depth and breadth of the Smythe web bibliography is staggering in this regard.

The Pratchett phenomenon shows little signs of abating. and prices will no doubt continue to rise, as issues of *BMC* on Pratchett have clearly shown over the last decade.

Postscript

The best accessible collection for Pratchett scholars is probably that generously donated by Colin Smythe to the University of London Library (Senate House): http://www.ull.ac.uk/specialcollections/pratchett.sthml.

It brings together all editions of the published writings of Pratchett, and includes book proofs, typescripts, associated publications, and merchandising, with a selection of writings about Pratchett. Not only does it hold the standard printed material — novels, short stories, and journal articles — but also expands to include audio books, graphic novels, play texts, screenplays, maps, diaries, calendars, videos, DVDs, games, computer games, jigsaws, posters, prints, cards, bookmarks, bookplates, wine and alcoholic beverages, newsletters and fanzines, models, tee-shirts, key-rings, and publicity material.

Colin Steele

Sir Terry at the Sydney Opera House, 2011

ANU and the *Canberra Times* held its first Literary Lunch with Terry Pratchett in 1990 and we had difficulty filling the Hall of University House. Now, Pratchett, one of the world's most successful authors with more than 70 million books sold, can quickly fill the Sydney Opera House, as he did on Sunday 17 April 2011.

I met up with Pratchett at his publishers, Random House, in North Sydney, after he had attended Nullus Anxietas, the third Australian Discworld Convention. Despite his condition of posterior cortical atrophy, a rare form of early-onset Alzheimer's disease, he regularly attends major Discworld conventions so that he can keep in touch with the fans.

The Discworld Convention, held at the Penrith Panthers World of Entertainment April 8–10, pleased Pratchett, as it 'punched well above its Discworld weight'. He felt, moreover, the convention had significantly raised the cultural profile of Penrith, noting there were lots of meat trays being raffled. Money raised from the Convention will go to the Garvan Institute, which conducts research into Alzheimer's, the Orangutan Foundation, and sponsoring an orangutan at Taronga Zoo. Librarians will understand the orangutan reference.

The convention took its physical toll on him, he said, as he was the centre of attention for three days and nights. Pratchett was accompanied, because of his condition, by Rob Wilkins, who is Terry Pratchett's 'travel companion', although as Pratchett says 'no-one's entirely what that actually means'.

My first question was how to address him. He said that he is officially now Professor Sir Terry Pratchett, OBE, DLitt. (times six!). He has six honorary doctorates, the latest one from Trinity College, Dublin, where he is also an Associate Professor. He said it's 'great' being an Irish Professor as you get lots to drink! During our interview, Pratchett sipped brandy and water, as he believes it helps with his condition.

Pratchett is being treated by Professor Roy Jones, Director of the UK Research Institute for the Care of the Elderly. Pratchett said, 'Brandy is in the British Pharmacopoeia', the official collection of standards for UK medicinal products. Jones indulges him, saying in a UK *Sunday Times* article, 'Alcohol, moderate alcohol, is one of the things we would probably recommend for people in this situation. In general, what's good for the heart is good for the brain.'

After his diagnosis, Pratchett donated £500,000 to the Alzheimer's Research Trust, and has become something of a figurehead for dementia sufferers worldwide. Pratchett says he's become much more famous for having Alzheimer's, 'although being famous is all the rage these days; it's fame I could do without'.

Pratchett's intellect remains undimmed, as those who saw him with Leigh Sales on the ABC'S *7.30* program will have noticed. He has, however, problems with his short-term memory, typing, and some coordination activities. He was unable to unscrew a top off his brandy flask at the interview, while his signature, which had become much condensed because of the size of his signing queues, has now become even more hieroglyphic. 'I can't write my name. Well I can, but it would look about as good as the average company director's.'

Pratchett deplores the low level of research funding that goes into Alzheimer's and dementia research, and not just from a personal point of view. He wryly observed that a cure for Alzheimer's seems always 'five years off'. He intends 'to die sitting in a chair in my own garden with a glass of brandy in my hand and Thomas Tallis on the iPod. Oh, and since this is England, I had better add, If wet, in the library. Hopefully the doctor will have been around earlier to give me the appropriate injection.'

Pratchett's campaign for 'Dying with Dignity' has aroused passions both pro and con. He noted that British politicians 'run for cover' from debates on assisted dying, even though a recent poll revealed that more than three-quarters of people in Britain approved of assisted dying for the terminally ill. Pratchett said he would like to ask Julia Gillard why assisted dying is banned in Australia, but obviously wouldn't get the chance. A March Newspoll survey, commissioned by Dying with Dignity, into public attitudes on voluntary euthanasia, also found that an overwhelming majority of people in New South Wales think that terminally ill individuals with unrelievable suffering should be granted assistance to end their lives.

Pratchett said he had had received considerable support from younger doctors in Britain, but they needed to work within approved NHS frameworks. At the moment, those who wanting assisted dying could travel to Switzerland or the Netherlands, but the cost meant the option was only open to the rich. It thus becomes a means test for dying, with some even using their life savings to facilitate assisted dying. He currently believes that most people in England have now become 'Jesus-lite', in that they embrace a basic concept of being 'excellent to one another', but they didn't go in for the formal 'smells and bells' of attending church.

Pratchett dictates his novels speech-to-text program, which incidentally persists, he said, in transcribing Alzheimer's as 'old-timers'!

Pratchett's new Discworld novel *Snuff* will be out in Australia in October. Pratchett says it will follow in the British crime tradition that whenever a policeman or detective takes a holiday a crime is committed on their

holiday patch.

The *Snuff* blurb will state, 'According to the writer of the best-selling crime novel ever to have been published in the city of Ankh-Morpork, it is a truth universally acknowledged that a policeman taking a holiday would barely have had time to open his suitcase before he finds his first corpse. And Commander Sam Vimes of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch is on holiday [with his wife and son] in the pleasant and innocent countryside, but not for him a mere body in the wardrobe, but many, many bodies and an ancient crime more terrible than murder. He is out of his jurisdiction, out of his depth, out of bacon sandwiches, occasionally snookered and occasionally out of his mind, but not out of guile.'

Pratchett recently agreed to a major CGI Ankh-Morpork Discworld TV series. While there have been three successful Sky adaptations of the Discworld books — Prachett agrees *Going Postal* was the best — this is the first time that Pratchett has granted a production company the rights to his characters and world for the creation of new stories. He said he will retain overall editorial control, particularly as his daughter Rhianna is part of the production team.

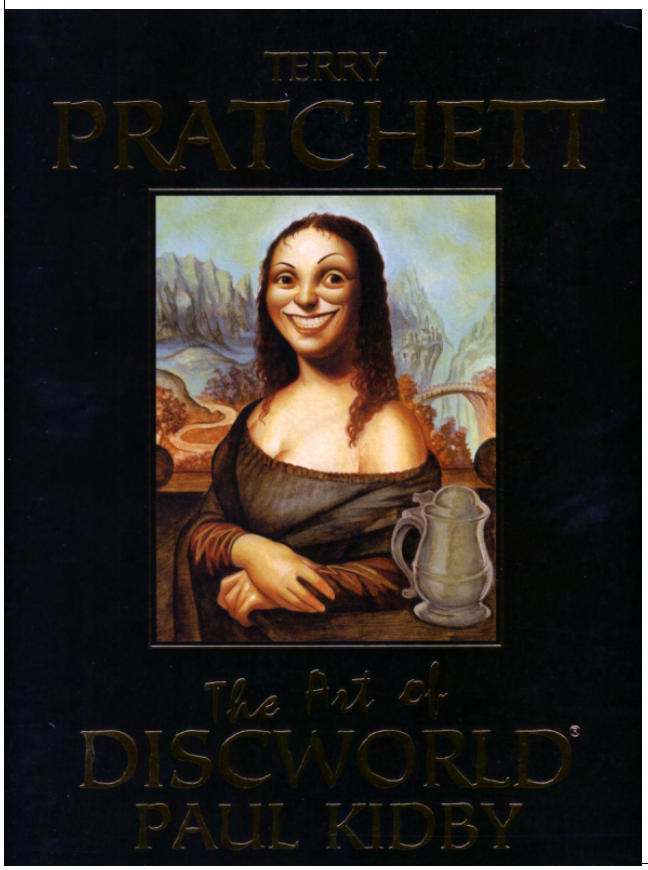
Rhianna, who terms herself 'scriptwriter, story designer, and narrative paramedic' on her website, also has her father's blessing to continue the Discworld series, if she so wishes, after his death. Pratchett made some cutting comments here about other children of famous authors, who did not have Rhianna's creative experience, which perhaps better not be repeated in print!

Pratchett's last words to me were 'See you on the other side'. Decidedly ironic, given his previous comments, 'I can't find a shred of fear about actual death. As for loss ... yeah, I fear that. But I don't fear death because there is nothing there. I don't think you wake up and the heavenly host is looking down on you going, "Hah! You got that one wrong, didn't you?" And not having that fear is a great release, I find. But I do fear a protracted death and loss of senses and loss of control and total dependence on other people. Of course I do.'

One of Pratchett's favourite authors, G. K. Chesterton, once said, 'Humour can get in under the door while seriousness is still fumbling at the handle.' Pratchett's proven humour is now well aligned with seriousness. There are few stumbles as he opens the doors to debating the life and death issues he feels so strongly about.

— Colin Steele, in *The Canberra Times*, 23 April 2011

Colin Steele reviews some recent Pratchett publications



One of many, many items associated with Discworld is this indispensable collection of Paul Kidby's illustrations for various Terry Pratchett novels, The Art of Discworld (Gollancz; 2004).

Making Money
Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; 349 pp.; $49.95)

Terry Pratchett satirised the British postal services in *Going Postal* (2006), well before the October 2007 British postal strikes, which seriously disrupted mail deliveries. ***Making Money***'s UK publication coincided with the crisis in British banking, exemplified by the run on Northern Rock. Other British institutions, like the National Health Service, must be worried over the subject of Pratchett's next fictional foray.

Pratchett has said of *Making Money*, 'A lot of the book is ... about what is money? What is it that makes us believe that this little piece of paper with a picture on it is actually worth a good meal? What would happen if we stopped believing that?' Pratchett's main character, semi-reformed conman Moist von Lipwig, as in *Going Postal*, is once more the unwilling fixer. The Administrator of Discworld's Ankh Morpork, Lord Vetinari, says, 'The city bleeds, Mr Lipwig ... and you are the clot.'

Lipwig does not have an easy task in reforming the banking system and replacing gold with paper money, as

the coin makers are used to taking their work home at night! The new Bank Chair is a dog who has been left the majority of the shares by the deceased Chairwoman, the other Directors are unscrupulous, while the Chief Cashier is named Mr Bent.

Pratchett throws in various subplots involving golems, necromancers, and a number of familiar Discworld characters, such as members of the City Watch and the Unseen University, but the whole banking scenario proves rather flat by Pratchett's very high comic norms. *Making Money*, overall, lacks the *joie de vivre* of his recent Tiffany Aching books.

The Discworld Graphic Novels:
The Colour Of Magic & The Light Fantastic
Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; 272 pp.; $49.95)
The Unofficial Companion to the Novels of Terry Pratchett
ed. Andrew M. Butler (Greenwood; 472 pp.; $59.95)
Secrets of The Wee Free Men and Discworld
Carrie Pyykkonen and Linda Washington (St Martin's Griffin; 269 pp.; $21)

Terry Pratchett continues to project future books, despite his diagnosis with an early rare form of Alzheimers. He wrote recently, 'Currently I'm working on *Nation*, which is a non-Discworld book for kids ... It's set on an alternate Earth with minor differences ... everyone the young hero knows dies within the first 15 pages. And yet there's humour throughout the book, not jokes. I think that's my style now — humour can exist in the most dreadful trials. In fact, often that's where people need humour the most; somehow that gets them through.' Having watched Pratchett recently on British television, he is clearly also using humour to confront his own illness.

Pratchett says he has a number of other projects planned for 2008, 'and they include cracking on with *Unseen Academicals* (the next Discworld book) ... It satirises the world of football — Jesus, though, how could you satirise modern football? Talk about a target-rich environment.' He's planning to dictate the next novel after *Unseen Academicals* because of his loss of typing coordination.

The first Discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*, was published in 1983. A not entirely successful Sky film adaptation was shown early in 2008 in the UK, starring David Jason, and was released on DVD. To celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Discworld, Transworld has now released the graphic novel versions of ***The Colour of Magic*** and ***The Light Fantastic*** in one hardback graphic 'super' novel. They were both originally released in parts, in 1991 and 1992 respectively, but have long been out of print.

Two new guides to Pratchett differ in scope and quality. Dr Andrew Butler's ***Unofficial Companion*** to Pratchett's work brings together a number of well-known writers, such as David Langford and Andy Sawyer, to provide a fascinating *vade mecum* to Pratchett's work. Pratchett, unlike J. K. Rowling, did not take legal exception to this textual mining of his work. Pratchett, quoted in *The Independent*, said, 'In fantasy writing, accusations of copying are very difficult to make ... You know who invented wizards? Who invented goblins? If we were going to start paying royalties for nicking one another's ideas, we'd have all given our life savings to the Tolkien family a long time ago.'

Butler's *Companion* ranges widely, perhaps in places too widely, covering not only the books, characters and places within Discworld, but also artwork, TV adaptations, plays, and collaborative work. Other articles discuss the themes underpinning Pratchett's work, such as coming of age, drink, religion, nationalism, and racism. Entries are often lengthy and authoritative, with numerous references given for further reading. There are some rather tenuous links to topics such as the 'Carry On' films and *1066 And All That*, but overall this is a minor quibble.

The Unofficial Companion also draws direct comparison with Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs' official ***Discworld Companion***. The latter tends to stick with the specifics of the Discworld novels, while the Butler team covers a much broader canvas. Comparisons of entries in both *Companion*s, such as entries on the characters in Discworld, show significant differences as well as commonalities, so Pratchett fans really do need both books.

Secrets of the Wee Free Men is not in the same Discworld league as Butler's compendium. Subtitled ***The Myths and Legends of Terry Pratchett's Multiverse***, it also adopts a thematic approach to Pratchett's work, but it is clearly aimed at a younger audience and thus adopts a suitably chatty approach. Pyykkonen and Washington place Pratchett in somewhat unusual American personal context, and I haven't seen Pratchett referred to before as a baby boomer! If some of the references in Butler's work could be seen as tenuous, the tables in *Secrets of the Wee Free Men* are even more so; for example, linking Commander Vimes with numerous literary detectives, ranging from Morse to Maigret, strains credibility somewhat.

Nonetheless their enthusiasm for Pratchett is undoubted, and they emphasise Pratchett's novel for young adults *The Wee Free Men*. Pratchett has said '*The Wee Free Men* is probably the best book (overall) that I have written, and the series continues to be incredibly successful. Rereading it, I found myself laughing in places. Then I thought, "I can't laugh. It's my own gag!"' Let's hope Pratchett will be able to make his readership laugh for a long time to come.

Nation
Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; 300 pp.; $49.95)
The Illustrated Wee Free Men
Terry Pratchett; illustrated by Stephen Player (Doubleday; 251 pp.; $45)
The Wit And Wisdom of Discworld
comp. Stephen Briggs (Corgi; 304 pp.; $24.95)

Terry Pratchett's ***Nation***, a young adult novel which has already topped the UK bestseller fiction lists, is a surprising change of subject from his normal Discworld novels, although Pratchett notes, 'This is definitely a one-off.' A number of UK reviewers have seen *Nation* as an allegory of Pratchett's recently diagnosed Alzheimer's condition.

Pratchett, however, has denied this, proving that reviewers can read too much into novels. 'There are some people who research my work obsessively, who claim that they can follow the philosophy of my life by reading my books consecutively. I don't really agree. *Nation* had its nascence, oh, quite a few years ago now ... little of this book was written by a man with Alzheimer's.'

Nation takes place on a parallel world Pacific island in the late nineteenth century, and is a Pratchett variant of *Robinson Crusoe meets Blue Lagoon*. Pratchett says, 'I wanted to write a book about a boy left orphaned of family, clan, and culture by a huge tsunami that hits his island. I had the Krakatoa explosion in mind, and I knew that the heart of the book, the very centre of it, was the image of my young hero, barely into his teens, lost and alone, standing on the scoured beach and screaming defiance at the universe ... The trouble is, we call these things acts of God. And I realized that my boy on the beach was, from the depths of his soul, asking his gods for answers — and was on fire with rage because he was getting none. He had a name now: Mau, and there was the soul of the book, right there'.

Mau returns to his ravaged island, where he confronts a shipwrecked well-bred young Victorian girl Daphne, a 'forthright soul in the tradition of young English heroines', who fits easily in the mould of Pratchett's strong female characters, such as Tifffany Aching and Granny Weatherwax. Pratchett says 'There's a lot of things they [Mau and Daphne] have to come to terms with! It's the meeting of two worlds. Neither of them has got their culture to back them up ... they can't understand each other's language.'

Nation is about growing up, self-discovery, and the responsibilities of nation-building. Pratchett implicitly denounces the worst effects of colonialism, and reffirms the need to respect indigenous cultures as the plot unfolds. Mau and Daphne realise that their survival depends on helping one another, an underlying theme in the Discworld series. While they engage, says Pratchett, in a 'strange but interesting dance', the reader knows their relationship 'can't go on for ever ... it ends appropriately in ways that both are content with'.

The Wee Free Men (2003), which began Pratchett's acclaimed Tiffany Aching series, is reprised in a sumptuous new illustrated version by artist Stephen Player. The novel contains a scene inspired by the painting *The Fairy Fellers' Master-Stroke* by Richard Dadd, in the Tate Gallery in London, which features in Pratchett's new postscript. ***The Illustrated Wee Free Men*** will make an ideal Christmas present for Discworld fans, particularly younger readers. Corgi has also released the paperback version of selections from Pratchett's books in ***The Wit and Wisdom of Discworld***, with numerous references to the Tiffany Aching books as well as the entire Discworld series.

I Shall Wear Midnight
Terry Pratchett (Random; 347 pp.; $49.95)

I Shall Wear Midnight is the fourth, and sadly the final, book in Pratchett's bestselling Tiffany Aching series, which comprises *The Wee Free Men*, *A Hat Full of Sky*, and *Wintersmith*. The title is taken from a quote from *A Hat Full of Sky*: 'When I'm old I shall wear midnight, she'd decided. But for now she'd had enough of darkness', which in turn reflects 'When I am an old woman, I shall wear purple', the opening line of Jenny Joseph's now famous 1961 poem 'Warning'.

I Shall Wear Midnight is marketed as 'child fiction/teenage reader' but, as with the other books in the series, it is far more than that, and will appeal as ever to all of Pratchett's Discworld fans. Pratchett has said of *I Shall Wear Midnight* that it is 'more adult than young adult because she [Tiffany] grows up ... it's probably true to say there is not a massive difference between my children's books and my adult books. I mean, there is no explicit sex. Never been any good at that sort of thing, you know.'

Tiffany, a young 'chalk witch', began the series at the age of eight and grows up during the four books. She seems at times a lot older than her nearly 16 years. The responsibilities of a witch and her duties weigh heavily on her. Pratchett writes: witches 'were also apart; Tiffany had learned that early on. You were among people, but not the same as them ... Everybody needed the witches, but hated the fact that they did.' There is thus less of the narrative *joie de vivre* in *I Shall Wear Midnight* that characterised the early books, but teenage readers will empathise with Tiffany and coming-of-age issues.

The plot begins with the old Baron dying and Tiffany's agreement to travel to Ankh-Morpork to find his son, Roland, with whom she has grown up. Tiffany's and Roland's relationship is now a little frosty, particularly when Roland's bride-to-be Letitia comes onto the scene. Pratchett has said in an interview: 'Tiffany has had a relationship, which is clearly over, and she thinks kind of bitchy thoughts.' Tiffany reflects that 'only blonde and blue-eyed girls can get the prince'.

To add to her troubles,Tiffany gets imprisoned in Ankh-Morpork and, more worryingly, is pursued by the mysterious supernatural 'Cunning Man', who is determined to terminate the power of witches in general and to possess Tiffany in particular. Tiffany knows she must battle the Cunning Man alone, forsaking the help of the older witches Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg, and the infamous small blue Nac Mac Feegles, well known for their drinking and Scottish swearing.

The only letdown in *I Shall Wear Midnight* is that Pratchett builds up the sinister powers of the Cunning Man so well that, when the final confrontation takes place, it is over so quickly as to be something of a narrative anti-climax. The novel concludes with a potential romantic deus ex machina in place for Tiffany, and an interesting 'Author's Note' from Pratchett on his childhood experiences behind the Tiffany Aching quartet.

Pratchett, despite suffering from an Alzheimer's condition, is already writing a 2011 'Night Watch' novel, *Snuff*, and completing, with the help of Stephen Baxter, his unfinished SF novel *The Long Earth*. Pratchett says that it is based 'on the quantum theory idea, that the earth is one of an immeasurable number of earths ... supposing we can step to the world next door — to all the words next door. And let's see what people do, faced with this ... Of course, being writers we can play with what we know about mankind — offered an absolute paradise, he will find some way of cocking things up.'

Colin Steele

The field: Reviews

Reference and non-fiction

Discussed:

A Pound Of Paper: Confessions Of A Book Addict
John Baxter (Doubleday 0385 603681; 2003; 417 pp.; 15 pounds/$45 Australian)

John Baxter's delightful ***A Pound of Paper*** is a combination of autobiography and exposition of bibliomania. Baxter has had a fascinating life from his youth in a remote small town in New South Wales, Australia to his current upper level apartments near Boulevard St. Germain in Paris. His career has ranged from being a relief railway clerk, to established biographer of movie stars and directors, such as Kubrick and Spielberg, and regular television and radio commentator.

Throughout this period, he has been an avid buyer and seller of books. Baxter's early collecting, which began with the purchase of *The Poems of Rupert Brooke* when he was eleven, was largely in the science fiction field. Kingsley Amis, who features in a marvellous vignette in the book, once said that lonely teenagers in the 1950s often succumbed to science fiction and jazz. Baxter then stumbled into the world of SF fandom in Sydney. He subsequently accumulated one of the best science fiction collections in Australia (and yes, there was more than one!). Baxter, when he was in Sydney, soon gave up his job and moved in slightly seedy circles, including involvement with a fledgling pornographic filmmaker. Baxter's biographical interludes closely resemble those of Clive James's *Unreliable Memoirs*, which roughly covered Sydney at the same period, although James was more involved with the Sydney University bohemian set of Robert Hughes and Germaine Greer.

Baxter's biography is subsequently based around his moves from Australia to UK and back again and his book collecting. He focuses initially on his collecting of Graham Greene material, which was ultimately sold in Swann Galleries in New York in 1982. But as one collection disappears, as bibliomaniacs know, another takes their place. Baxter's move to Paris in 1990 has seen him collecting expatriate writers of the 1920s and 1930s, a move perhaps inspired by his physical proximity to the flat of the legendary Sylvia Beach, owner of Shakespeare and Company.

Baxter was often a 'runner' as well as a buyer, so that he is particularly knowledgeable as to market values, including the dotcom type idiosyncracies of the modern first edition market. An article in the UK *Financial Times* of 6 December 2002 quoted Peter Kraus of Manhattan's Ursus Bookshop stating that 'the Harry Potters, Tolkiens and Ian Flemings are now going off into the realms of Hemingway and Joyce and prices are being inflated to the point of irrationality. Modern first editions are in a tremendous bubble at the moment, which I don't think is sustainable.'

Baxter's own book has already sold out in the first edition and nearly doubled its purchase price. Baxter places particular emphasis on the acquisition of signed material which he was able to increase during his time as a radio interviewer. Being Australian, he said, meant that he had no inhibitions in London asking his interviewees to sign books! His meetings with Kingsley Amis were facilitated by the purchasing of whisky. Perhaps as a result of this lubrication, Amis gave Baxter a signed, annotated proof copy of Ian Fleming's of *You Only Live Twice*, which Baxter now believes is worth more than three thousand pounds.

A Pound Of Paper is dedicated to Martin Stone, a former rock musician, fugitive from justice, drug addict, and book runner extraordinaire. He flits across Baxter's pages as an almost Gollum-like character. Baxter's pen portraits of the 1980s 'bookrunners' range from the now noted novelist Iain Sinclair and the idiosyncratic book dealer Driff Field. Early descriptions of now established booksellers range from Rick Gekoski in UK to Nicholas Pounder in Australia, while later references include such notables as Simon Finch, Ralph Sipper, and Larry McMurtry.

Baxter has much less involvement with the traditional firms such as Quaritch, Bertram Rota, or Maggs; the latter he refers to as 'suppliers of books to the Gentry and the Royal Family'. Subsequently, however, he admits, 'many treasures aren't found in skips and thrift shops but on the shelves of specialists'. Nonetheless, Baxter one feels is more at home with the lure of the chase, which takes him from the North London alley book stalls and flea markets to musty warehouses. Throughout this, the love of the chase is paramount, and is even more attractive if lots of money can be made.

Baxter is particularly harsh on librarians, although without libraries he could not have done much of his

childhood reading or later research. He says 'most librarians don't like books anymore than butchers like pork chops'. One hopes that most of Baxter's antipathy to librarians is because, for a collector, nothing is worse in a bookseller's catalogue or stock than the 'ex-library copy', with its date stamps and discarded or glued dust wrappers. Baxter says in a recent interview, 'restoring a library book to collectable condition is like trying to return Kentucky Fried Chicken to the state of health where it can lay an egg'. In the same interview he says he hates libraries because 'they are like mausoleums'. He clearly hasn't visited some of the wonderful Information Commons cum libraries, such as the University of Queensland and the University of Calgary, where students can be found working in most attractive contemporary settings, including coffee shops and restaurants.

Baxter's appendix is entitled 'If your house was on fire', that is, what books would you take in the case of your house burning down? Until the horrible bushfires in Canberra, Australia, in January 2003 I had thought this to be an academic question. Ray Bradbury said that he would take a copy of George Bernard Shaw's *Prefaces* (London, 1934). Baxter, in a recent interview, has said that he would have taken the limited signed 1953 edition of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* bound in a form of asbestos and now allegedly worth $US55,000.

A Pound of Paper is beautifully produced, although the pressed flower image on the flyleaf was not Baxter's idea. He would have preferred a dustjacket photograph of a beautiful woman lying naked, covered in books, and had arranged for a photo to be taken, but his publishers wanted something 'more baroque'. Whether the ultimate result is baroque or not is questionable. What is not questionable is the spirit, verve, and bibliophilic life that imbues *A Pound Of Paper*. Long may Baxter continue to collect.

Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stepehen King
Lisa Rogak (JR Books; 310 pp.; $49.95)

Stephen Edwin King's career is a classic rags-to-riches story. Lisa Rogak's ***Haunted Heart***, an unauthorised biography, provides a useful workmanlike account of King's life and his major books. Rogak writes, 'Steve [as she calls him] told his friends they could talk with me', but most of her source material seems to be drawn either from published sources or from King's many interviews and nonfiction writings, such as *On Writing* (2000).

Haunted Heart, nonetheless, constitutes a useful reference source for fans and libraries. Rogak has included a timeline, footnotes, a bibliography, and photos of King, including one of King playing guitar at an American Booksellers Convention event in Anaheim in 1992 as part of The Rockbottom Remainders, a group who also included Amy Tan, Dave Barry, and Barbara Kingsolver. I attended that session, and can attest to both the quality of his guitar playing and the friendliness of someone not always happy with his celebrity status.

Haunted Heart alludes to King's troubled childhood after his father deserted the family in 1949 when King was two. King's mother had to rely on relatives and often two jobs to support the family. King says, as a result, 'As a kid, I worried about my sanity a lot.' He grew up, mostly in Maine, an area that he says he both loves and hates: 'There's a bitter feel to the real country of Maine. Most people think of Maine as lobsters and Bar Harbor. But the real country is poor people with no teeth, junked-out cars in front yards and people who live in pup tents in the woods with great big color tvs.'

King, like many other poor children, benefited from access to public libraries. King met his future wife Tabitha in the Fogler Library at the University of Maine, where they both worked part time. King says, 'I married

her for her body, though she said I married her for her typewriter.' King graduated in 1970, and he received an honorary doctorate in 1987 from the University, which now houses his papers, screenplays, manuscripts, and correspondence.

By 1972, King was a teacher, working in a laundry during the summer, with some short story sales to men's magazines. He threw out a manuscript about a troubled teenager with supernatural powers but Tabitha rescued *Carrie*, and the rest is history. Paperback rights went for $400,000, and Brian De Palma's film became the first of many film spin- offs, notably *The Shining*, *Misery*, and *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Tabitha's intervention again proved crucial when she forced King to confront his alcohol and cocaine addiction, which were causing blackouts and personal problems. King says, for instance, that he has no memory of completing the novel *Cujo*. King's feared, like authors before him, that giving up drink and drugs would mean losing his creative ability. He faced a similar fear in 1999 after he suffered severe injuries when he was hit by a van as he was walking on the road in Maine. King later bought the van and had it destroyed to prevent it becoming an e-Bay trophy.

Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction
ed. Jeff Prucher (Oxford University Press; 342pp.; $69.95)

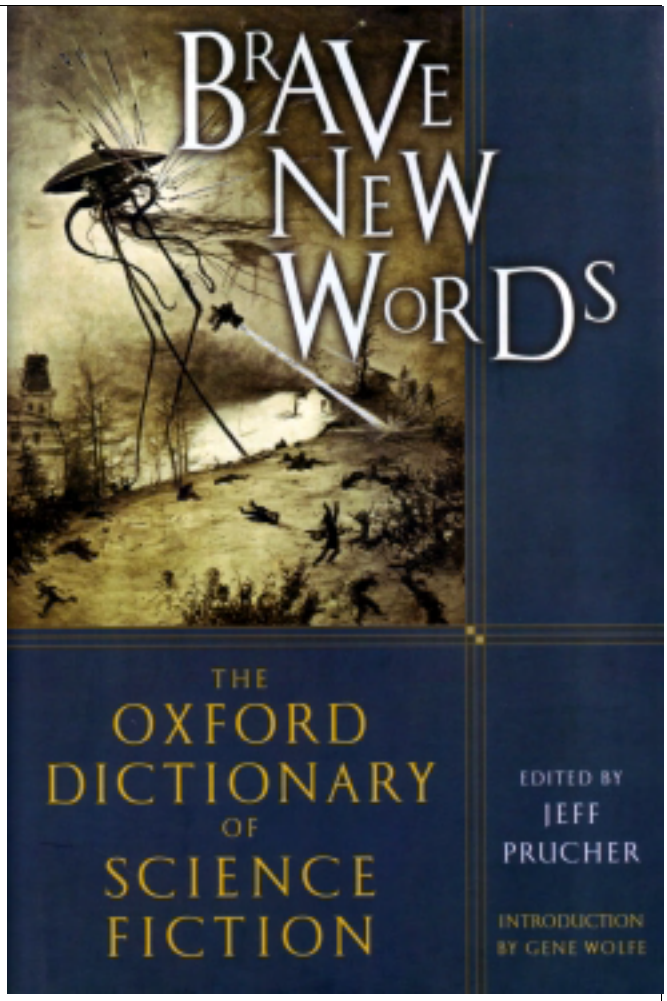
Jeff Prucher, in the excellent ***Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction***, notes that the first use of the word 'cyberspace' was in Gibson's 1982 story 'Burning Chrome', although it was Gibson's award-winning 1984 novel *Neuromancer* that gave it popular parlance. Prucher provides an excellent *vade mecum* to SF's leading words, ranging from 'sense of wonder' (Lovecraft, 1935) to 'smeg' (Grant and Naylor, 1988) to 'psionic' (Williamson, 1951). Prucher notes that while 'sci-fi' (Heinlein, 1949) is commonly used, its use within the science fiction community is derided, 'and its use may brand the user as an outsider'. (Foxtel Sci-Fi Channel, please note).

The Devil Is A Gentleman: The Life and Times of Dennis Wheatley
Phil Baker (Dedalus; 699 pp., $95)

If you faced this question at a literary trivia night, posed by novelist Jeremy Duns, what would be your answer?

'He was one of the most popular thriller-writers of the 20th century, but his literary reputation has faded in recent years, with critics lambasting his novels as xenophobic, sexist fantasies. And he created a suave but ruthless British secret agent who was orphaned at a young age, expelled from his public school, smoked exotic cigarettes, had a scar on his face, bedded beautiful women and repeatedly saved the world from the threats of megalomaniacal villains.'

If you said Ian Fleming, you would be half right, but Dennis Wheatley would be equally correct. Wheatley, like Fleming, straddled the fictional and real worlds of



intelligence, was a member of the British Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet from 1941 to 1944, and was friends with Maxwell Knight, the rightwing, antisemitic MI5 spymaster and part inspiration for Fleming's 'M' character.

But who now remembers Dennis Wheatley (1897–1977), except for male readers of a certain age, for whom the name summons up memories of their teenage years, and recollections of 'naked virgins splayed across altars, goats' heads, chalices of blood and fat men in robes'? Wheatley wrote over 70 books, which sold over 50 million copies in 28 languages.

In the 1960s, his UK sales for his eight occult novels, which include *The Devil Rides Out*, *To the Devil—A Daughter*, *The Haunting of Toby Jugg*, and *They Used Dark Forces*, had an average annual sale of 80,000 copies per title. His other 65 books include the Gregory Sallust secret agent novels and the Roger Brook historical adventures, which all contributed to his annual sales, in that same decade, of over one million copies a year in the UK alone. He has been called 'arguably the twentieth century's greatest non-literary writer' after Agatha Christie.

Drawing on much unpublished material, Phil Baker's comprehensive and illuminating biography brings Wheatley back to life, warts and all, and offers a major reassessment of his significance and place within British popular culture. Wheatley, born in south London in 1897, was expelled from Dulwich College and effectively schooled on board a naval training ship. His First World War seemed to see nearly as much action in the the brothels of Amiens as the Front. After the War, Wheatley

was influenced by a decadent scholarly conman, Eric Gordon Tombe, who was murdered in 1922. Tombe was one of a number of colourful figures that Wheatley would use when he turned to fiction writing in 1933 after the family fine wine business faltered.

Probably his best book, *The Devil Rides Out*, appeared in 1934, and was soon declared by Lost Horizon author James Hilton, as 'the best thing of its kind since Dracula'. He authenticated occult elements from the media's 'wickedest man in the world', Aleister Crowley. Wheatley wrote: 'Crowley gave me much useful information ... but never attempted to draw me into his occult activities. Later, when Tom Driberg asked me what I thought of him, I replied, "Intellectually I think he is quite wonderful, but I don't think he could harm a rabbit".' Other contacts included Montague Summers, a gay satanist, who dressed as a priest, and Rollo Ahmed, a Jamaican occultist who claimed to be Egyptian and had been convicted for fraud. While as a part of Wheatley's occult books they were only a small part of his overall output, they are, as Baker says, 'the part he is likely to be remembered for'.

Wheatley was assiduous in researching his backgrounds, which, with his narrative strengths, and vivid if stock characteristions, ensured he held a certain reading public 'spellbound'. Wheatley once said, 'people who live in miserable rows of grim little houses don't want to read about other people who live in miserable rows of houses'. Wheatley's books, as Baker writes, were 'the absolute incarnation of "the luxury traditions of the cheap novel"'.

Elements of Wheatley's rightwing views, however, were becoming increasingly out of tune with the times, and after his death his books began to fall in popularity. Wheatley increasingly linked satanism to his pet hates of communism, black power, trade unions, and the working class. His novels, however,made him a very wealthy man, and allowed him to replicate the clubland snobbery and country house ambience of rare books and fine wines of his character the Duc de Richeleau.

Given the current election framework, Dennis Wheatley's views on democracy, as outlined in his memoir *Drink and Ink* (1979), are also revealing: 'Every male and female over the age of eighteen now has the right to vote in favour of the party which he or she thinks would govern the country best. But what are their qualifications for this? The standard of education of the vast majority is distressingly low. They do not read the serious papers, have little knowledge of what is happening in other countries, no knowledge at all of economics and have few interests outside local problems. How can it possibly be maintained that young fellows who tear up the seats of railway carriages or girls whose only thought is to have as much fun as possible without getting put in the family way should be allowed to have an equal right in electing a government as, let us say, a university Professor? Everybody should have one vote, but (additional) qualifications should entitle anyone to extra votes ... so that it would be possible for exceptional people to have up to six votes. This system would ensure a continuance of democracy, but give greater weight to the opinions of people really qualified to judge the issues.'

As Baker concludes, Wheatley 'has moved from merely dated to postively vintage'. Baker believes, however, that 'to study Wheatley is to study British popular taste. More than that, it is to study the shadowier side of recent British history.' Baker's excellent biography places Wheatley squarely in his historical context, with the devil in Baker's fascinating details.

The English Ghost: Spectres through Time
Peter Ackroyd
(Chatto & Windus; 276 pp.; $35.00)
Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England 1750–1920
Shane McCorristine
(Cambridge University Press; 275 pp.; $49.95)

Peter Ackroyd is nothing if not prolific, with over 32 fiction and non-fiction books, as well as several TV series, to his credit. While ***The English Ghost*** reflects his long-standing interest in English antiquities, there isn't a clear reason in the book as to why he embarked on an anthology of English ghostly sightings and events. Some of the stories are retold by Ackroyd, while others are reproduced from a variety of sources, such as newspapers, diaries, letters, and pamphlets.

The English Ghost is essentially an antiquarian primer of nearly 100 accounts, divided into seven sections, such as 'The Wandering Ghost' and 'Clerical Souls', rather than an analytical compendium. Ackroyd's ghosts largely date from the seventeenth century onwards, and are fairly conventional, although there are some unusual spectral animals. Ackroyd ponders, 'What strange disorders of the night can prompt these accounts?' Ghosts also appear in the usual places, such as at the end of beds and walking along battlements, but the 'phantom of the A38', who causes motorists to swerve, stands out.

Ackroyd highlights how the nature of ghosts has changed through the centuries, with the nineteenth century being 'perhaps the golden age of ghosts'. The Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1882, lent 'credibility to the quests for spirits'. An 1894 questionnaire, sent out by the Society, revealed that 673 people, admittedly out of 17,000 surveyed, indicated that they had seen a ghost in one form or another, although, as Ackroyd states, 'The majority of them could not identify the spirit in question.'

Ackroyd sits on both sides of the spectral fence, concluding that the people in his accounts 'fully believed in the reality of what they had seen or experienced. Whether the reader chooses to believe in it is another matter.' Ackroyd neither refrains from scientific or psychological analysis, nor extrapolates on the decline in ghostly sightings in the twentieth century to an increase in alien and UFO visitations. Coleridge once said that he didn't believe in ghosts because he had 'seen too many of them'. Ackroyd may have read too many of them.

For a more academic study of ghosts and human interpretations, particularly in the nineteenth century, interested readers need to seek out Shane McCorristine's reworked doctoral thesis ***Spectres of the Self***, which explores the view that a ghost is 'reflective of the haunted nature of the self'; that is, 'a psychological phenomenon'. McCorristine's main hypothesis is that

the ghosts 'which haunt the modern world should be considered spectres of the self, that is, figures which are both more real and less real than the haunting ghost of traditional Western culture, clanking chains in an old castle. They are more real because they involve all the senses ... But they are less real in that for the past two centuries thinkers have been exploring the way in which it is the mind itself which must be considered a haunted entity — that it is the mind which projects the phantoms of its own production onto reality.'

McCorristine observes that the ghost had a purpose and place in medieval society — that is, as part of an ordered religious framework — which to some extent disappeared at the Reformation. The Enlightenment relocated the ghost from 'a theologically structured world' to a 'psychologically haunted world of personal experience'. McCorristine, therefore, examines the culture of ghost-seeing itself rather than the 'validity of ghost-belief'.

McCorristine is aware that trying to approach the cultural history of ghost-seeing is, as Daniel Cottom has noted of spiritualism, like 'trying to nail Jello to a tree', so he is selective in his content. *Spectres of the Self* still retains elements of the thesis in the language and bibliographical apparatus, but he covers some fascinating topics, such as the nineteenth-century discussion on why ghosts wear clothes. McCorristine's main section, with extensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, relates to evidence of the 'scientific-naturalists' of the Society for Psychical Research. McCorristine concludes that the ghost ultimately represents 'a symbol of the psychological hauntedness of modern experience', a phenomenon that certainly hasn't diminished in the twenty-first century.

The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made
David Hughes (Titan Books; 350 pp.; $21.95)

David Hughes' ***The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made*** examines 21 of the most significant examples of SF movie 'Development Hell'. The Foreword by *Alien* artist H. R. Giger, describes his own involvement in several aborted movie projects. Hughes provides detailed insights into other failed projects, in chapters resonating with black humour, not least when $20 million was spent on a *Superman* project that Nicolas Cage abandoned. One movie that many SF fans would long to see, but which has fallen over a number of times, is Alfred Bester's novel *The Stars My Destination*. The unmade *Star Trek* movies are recounted in 'Where No One Has Gone Before', while Frank Herbert's *Dune* is covered in 'Profits Of Dune'. Hughes cogently reveals why good projects are so often stuffed up by celebrity egos and studio executives totally divorced from the creative process.

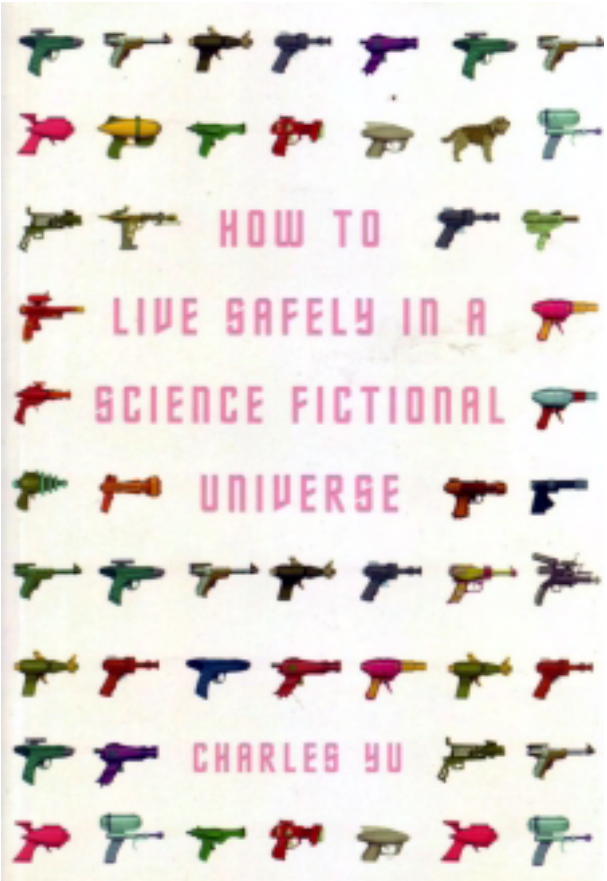
Red Planets
ed. Mark Bould and China Mieville (Pluto Press; 293 pp.; $65.00)

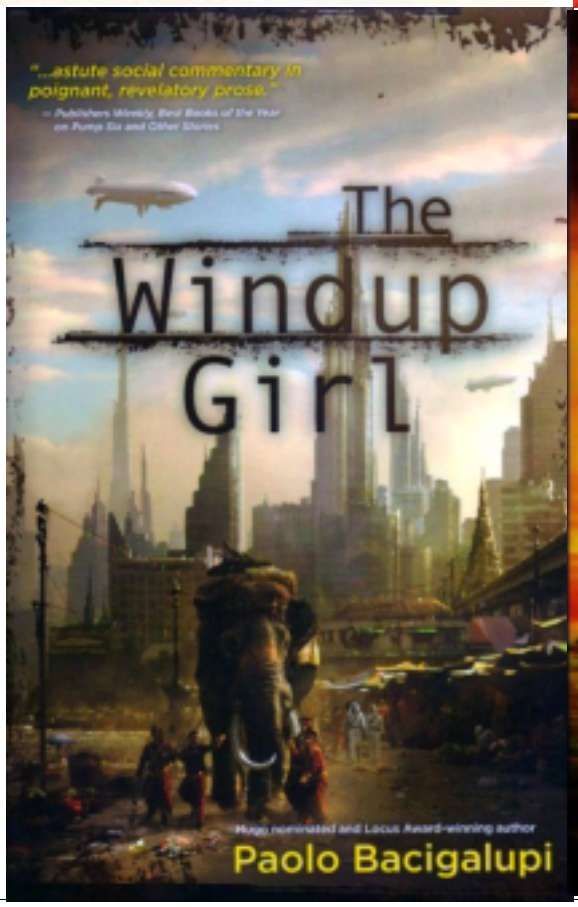
Red Planets, part of the publisher's Marxism and Culture series, whose rationale is 'investigating Marxism as a method for understanding culture', is essentially for the academic market. The general reader has to plough through a good deal of academic verbiage, such as Mark Bould's sentence, 'This fantasy of informationalisation, which seeks to disavow the processes of commodification it euphemises, is paralleled by a fantasy of linguistic dematerialisation, which seeks to disavow human intersubjectivity'. This, however, should not deter SF readers completely, as there is much to ponder in the relationship between SF and Marxism, as well as examinations of the writings of many authors, including Cordwainer Smith, Charles Stross, and Ken MacLeod.

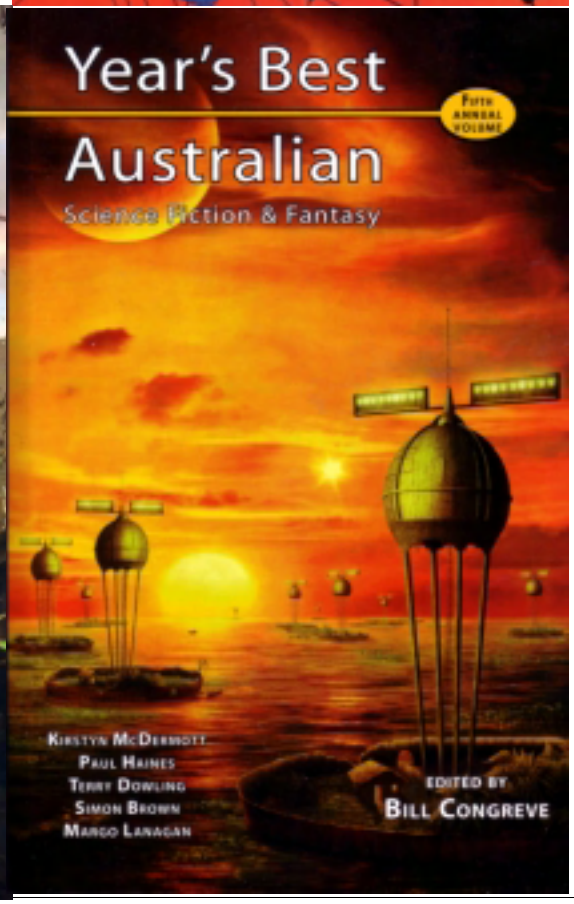
Worlds Apart: An Anthology of Russian Fantasy and Science Fiction
Alexander Levitsky (Overlook Duckworth; 656 pp.; $65)

Worlds Apart, a huge single-volume anthology, covers the topic from historical folk literature up to the 1957 *Sputnik* launch. Half of the stories and poems included are represented by new translations. Authors include Pushkin, Turgenev, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, and Zamiatin. Levitsky, Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at Brown University, provides a lengthy and authoritative introduction, but the academic ethos is badly let down by numerous misprints and spelling errors, not least on the title page. The stories and poems highlight recurring themes of myth and fairy tale and utopianism and dystopianism. *Worlds Apart* should be bought by all libraries and individuals with an interest in Russian literature of the fantastic.

Science fiction







The Quantum Thief
Hannu Rajaniemi (Gollancz; 330 pp.; $35)
How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe
Charles Yu (Corvus; 238 pp.; $29.99)
The Windup Girl
Paolo Bacigalupi (Orbit; 508 pp.; $21.99)
Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy: Fifth Annual Volume
edited by Bill Congreve (MirrorDanse; 384 pp.; $24.95)

The Quantum Thief is a remarkable debut novel, set in the twenty-fifth century, from Finnish author Hannu Rajaniemi, who has an Edinburgh University PhD in quantum theory. Rajaniemi says, 'The science part in science fiction really comes from taking this scientific process seriously — the subject matter and expertise is really very secondary.'

Rajaniemi's early reading heroes include Verne, Wells, Conan Doyle, and especially French author Maurice Leblanc, whose gentleman thief Arsène Lupin influenced aspects of the plot of *The Quantum Thief*. Rajaniemi's Jean le Flambeur, a post-human 'mind-burglar' cum conman is imprisoned in the virtual 'Dilemma Prison', where a sort of groundhog day death sequence is supposed to lead to prisoner redemption.

Rajaniemi has said, in an interview, that le Flambeur is 'never going to succeed, that the pull of the illicit is too strong. He can break the rules, but in the end he's also imprisoned by some higher order of rules, rules of identity'. Jean is sprung from prison and transported to 'Oubliette, a moving city of Mars' for a theoretically last job that will also invoke lost memories. This short plot description does not do justice to a literally mind-boggling pot-pourri of high-tech, post-cyberpunk SF and Victorian crime noir.

American author Charles Yu, in another debut novel, explores more time and space anomalies in ***How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe***. Yu has said that after his first child was born, 'sleep was destroyed, with the second kid, any kind of personal space or time was destroyed', so Charles Yu named his main character after himself. Yu is both a time-machine repairman and author of the manual *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe*. Yu says, 'Time machine repairmen are important, just like finance people. The Death Star needs accountants, too, and an HR department.'

Yu, who lives in 'Universe 31', interacts with his software interface Tammy, Ed, a 'non-existent yet ontologically valid dog', and an AI boss, Phil, who doesn't realise that he's a computer program. Think Douglas Adams here? Yu is searching for his lost father, while his mother is in a time loop. *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe* is not simply a clever SF comic creation, but also an observant treatise on the nature of memory and how to find oneself in an incomplete universe.

The nature of identity also plays a key part in Paolo Bacigalupi's first novel ***The Windup Girl***, which has won numerous awards, including sharing the 2010 Hugo Best Novel Award with China Mieville's *The City and The City*. Backgalupi's future world is one where global environmental disasters have occurred, resulting in severe energy shortfalls and food shortages, the latter accelerated by gene plagues. American 'agropolies' have replaced national powers.

Thailand is the focal point, where Anderson Lake, a cynical experienced executive, is AgriGen's 'calorie man'. Anderson becomes involved with 'a windup girl', Emiko, whose jerky actions identify her as a bio-engineered artificial human. Emiko, who was conceived as a Japanese geisha, has ended up in a Thai brothel, but still dreams of an individual freedom.

Anderson's and Emiko's story is played out against a grim vision of the future, where greed and corruption are juxtaposed against loyalties and the quest for personal salvation. Anderson is very reminiscent of a Graham Greene character, Bacigalupi has said he was influenced by *The Quiet American*, 'Stuff about idealistic people doing stupid stuff in foreign countries has always sort of fascinated me ... people doing the best they can under hard circumstances.'

While SF writers flourish overseas, Australian science fiction output has sadly languished in recent years, perhaps partly because Australian publishers follow the fantasy and vampire money trail. Bill Congreve's commendable annual anthology, ***The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy: Fifth Annual Volume***, did not appear in 2009 for economic reasons, so the 15 stories appearing in the 2010 volume date from both 2008 and 2009.

'Truth Window: A Tale of the Bedlam Rose' is set in Terry Dowling's 'Wormwood' SF cycle, in which a xenoformed Earth is under alien governance. A misunderstood reference makes the mythical Lady Mondegreen, a reference to Sylvia Wright's 1954 aural malapropism, a symbol of resistance.

Paul Haines's 'Wives', a 38,000-word novella, has won several awards, including the 2010 Ditmar Best Novella. 'Wives' is set in a depressed rural Australia, affected by an economic downturn and environmental changes. 'Wives' was inspired by Haines's trip to China, and the preference there for male births over female. Women are in short supply because of previous 'poor selective breeding decisions', but can be bought at a premium for sex and marriage from the ruthless Melbourne 'Cartel'. Haines effectively extrapolates from current moods of hatred of 'the other', as well as the ingrained misogyny of Australian mateship. 'Wives' is a brutal, bleak, yet searing and compelling story, reminiscent of George Turner's best, which deserves to be recognised by a wider reading public.

Incandescence
Greg Egan (Gollancz; 300 pp.; $35.00)
Zendegi
Greg Egan (Gollancz; 332 pp.; $32.99)

Western Australian writer Greg Egan's previous books, *Axiomatic*, *Distress*, *Quarantine*, *Diaspora*, *Luminous*, *Permutation City*, *Schild's Ladder* and *Teranesia* ($24.99 each), were all re-released by Gollancz in early 2008. ***Incandescence***, Egan's first novel for six years, reaffirms his place as one of the hardest of hard SF authors. Egan's 'hard drive' science narrative is set a million years hence, linking posthuman and insectoid characters in their

respective scientific quests. Egan's website, an essential supplement to the book, indicates that '*Incandescence* grew out of the notion that the theory of general relativity ... could be discovered by a pre-industrial civilization'. *Incandescence* engages intellectually, although the infodumps ensure that emotionally it is as sterile as a scientific laboratory. Egan fans, however, know their author has always been more of an ideas than a character man.

Egan has said in an interview: 'People with no interest in science are very well catered for in science fiction; 99% of SF is written for them. I make no apology for contributing to the 1% that treats science as something of interest in its own right ... I'm interested in science as a subject in its own right, just as much as I'm interested in the effects of technology on the human condition. In many things I write the two will be combined, but even then it's important to try to describe the science accurately.'

Zendegi, according to Egan, 'involves brain mapping, virtual reality, and the coming of democracy to Iran' — a heady mix indeed. Egan decided to visit Iran in 2008 after meeting 'some of the Iranian refugees whom my own loathsome government had seen fit to inter in remote detention centres for many years'.

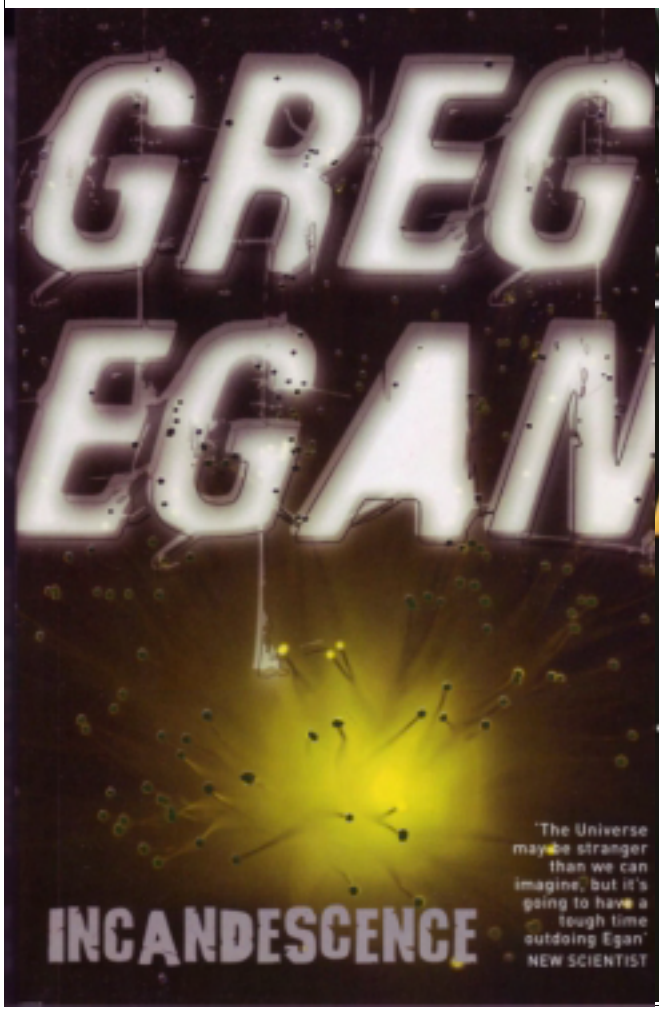
Zendegi covers two interlocking stories. The first follows Martin Seymour, an Australian journalist sent to Iran to cover the 2012 election. Some 15 years later, having settled and married in Iran, Martin, confronting terminal cancer, is desparate to leave some permanent memories for his young son. The second story follows Nasim Golestani, a young exiled Iranian scientist, who is working on mapping neural brain connections, the 'Human Connectome Project'. Egan says, 'Brain mapping is going to be an immensely interesting and important field. In practical terms, it will lead to all kinds of assistive technology for people with disabilities, and in the longer term it's going to shed light on the nature of every mental process'.

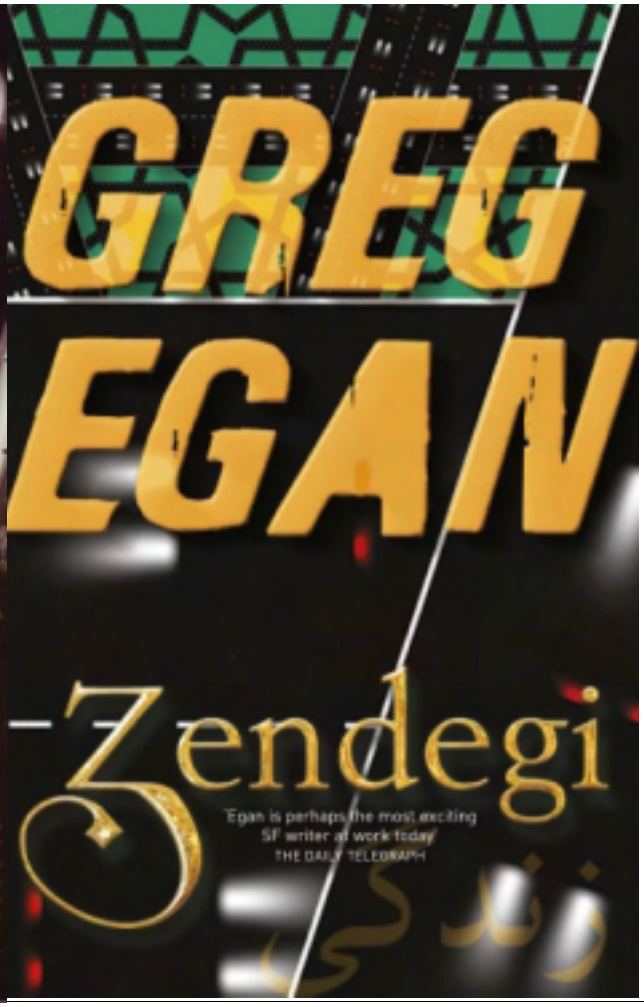
Nasim eventually returns to Iran, working on the virtual world Zendegi, a powerful tool for entertainment and business. The now-dying Martin wants Nasim to use Zendegi software to preserve a copy of his consciousness, but Nasim, apart from technical problems, also has to combat powerful hackers who believe that AI 'proxies' should have rights.

Egan's passionate and balanced portrayal of the Iranian people injects a welcome human note into his usual clinical narrative. *Zendegi* is a thought-provoking novel, which juxtaposes individual fates, while the creation of artificial consciousness impacts on the nature of humanity overall.

Anathem
Neal Stephenson (Atlantic Books; 937 pp.)

Neal Stephenson is a cult author par excellence. *Salon* magazine called him the 'poet laureate of hacker culture' after his breakthrough novel *Snow Crash* (1992). *Cryptonomicon* (1999) is a massive tome with the backdrop





of historical cryptography, while the 'Baroque Cycle' (2003–2004), a three-volume, nearly 3000-page epic, tackles no less a topic than the birth of the 'enlightened' modern world.

Stephenson's new book ***Anathem***, which has been eight years in the making, is not for the weak of heart or mind. It comes with a glossary of over 20 pages, and three appendices, on top of its nearly 1000 pages of text. Reading *Anathem*, Stephenson says, 'will involve developing an interest in the history and content of all of geometry, physics, mathematics, philosophy and quantum mechanics, each of them expressed in a new language, and set in an imagined society'!

Anathem is a mind-boggling book on several levels. Its seriousness and invention is undoubted, but its underlying philosophical frameworks may restrict its audience beyond the core Stephenson readership. Mervyn Peake's 'Gormenghast' trilogy is in some ways the closest comparison to Stephenson's imaginative construct.

I talked with Stephenson from London, where he was finishing a British book tour, as to the background to the book. Stephenson said the initial hook for the book came because 'I could never get the notion that society in general is becoming aliterate, out of my head ... people who write books, people who work in universities, who work on big projects for a long time, are on a diverging course from the rest of society. Slowly, the two cultures just get further and further apart.'

Stephenson has perceived an 'hostility to the lettered elite' in the recent American election campaign. He says 'as far as culture and politics are concerned, the important theme is long-attention-span vs short-attention-span thinking ... If we had more bankers who adopted a long-term view of their responsibilities, we might not be in the middle of a financial crisis that is blowing away 150-year-old investment banks'.

Stephenson believes people are increasingly stressed, 'they're tired from a long day, they just want to veg out — they collapse in front of the big screen TV, they watch a television show or they play a video game or something. The whole idea is to do something that's as easy as can be; it places no demands on your brain or your attention span'. *Anathem*, however, requires an attention span of some dimension.

Anathem is set on the planet Arbre where 'avouts' have lived for centuries in monastic 'concents' (a mix of 'concentration' and 'convent'), segregated from the outside 'saecular' world. Avouts only emerge through predetermined chronological 'aperts', which range from a year to a millennium. Outside the concent walls, a society, not dissimilar to modern America, exists, where people are 'starving to death and dying of obesity at the same time'. The 'extramuros' population eat at fast-food outlets, buy unnecessary consumer goods in megamalls, despoil the environment and embrace evangelical religion.

Fraa Erasmas, an 18-year-old trainee 'avout', who was 'collected' when he was eight, takes advantage of his ten-year 'apert' to the outside world, but finds it not only alien but also one that is being visited by an alien presence. A global catastrophe looms, which calls into question the virtue of the concent's pure 'mathic thinking'. Erasmas becomes a key player; but will thought be more important than action in the resolution?

There are decided longeurs in *Anathem*, and even Stephenson admitted in his interview that the first two to three hundred pages can prove 'slow going'. Having said that, if the reader successfully embraces Stephenson's Socratic world, the journey will ultimately prove rewarding, particularly as the pace picks up in the second half.

Stephenson reflects, 'It's paradoxical to write a great big huge book about the fact that we don't read great big huge books anymore, but that's kind of what this is.' As ever, Stephenson is a maddeningly talented author. (Those who want to probe even further into the world of *Anathem* should consult Stephenson's very detailed website at http://www.nealstephenson.com/anathem/acknow.htm.)

Lavinia

Ursula K. Le Guin (Gollancz; 279 pp.; $32.99)

Ursula Le Guin turned 80 in October 2009 but thankfully her literary output shows no sign of abating. Le Guin, a five-time Hugo and Nebula Awards winner, has published 20 novels, including the acclaimed 'Earthsea' series.

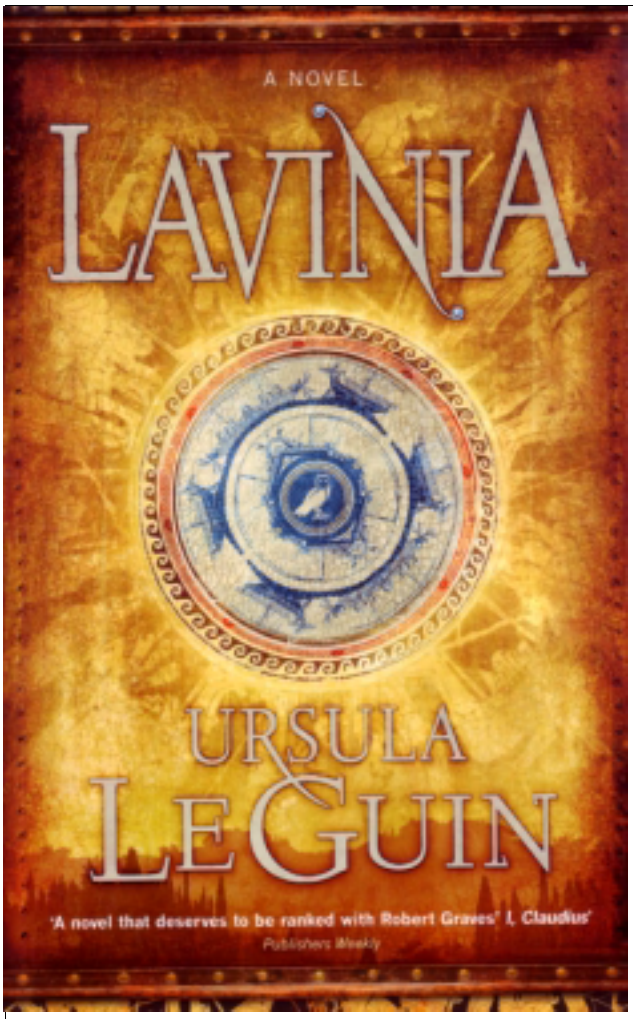
Le Guin now turns to Virgil's the Aeneid for the inspiration for her new novel ***Lavinia***. Le Guin's deliberately spare narrative style provides a fascinating complement to Virgil's original. Le Guin says of the novel, 'It isn't like anything else I've done. But the dignified style is the way I used to write, in the first Earthsea books. Some of the cadences are storytelling rather than story writing.'

In the Aeneid, Aeneas's first wife Creusa dies in the siege of Troy; then comes his passionate love affair with Dido, Queen of Carthage, which ends in her suicide. Compared to Creusa and Dido, Lavinia, who is Aeneas's second wife and daughter of the king of Latium, hardly gets mentioned, except for one scene in the Aeneid when her hair ignites in a supernatural portent.

Le Guin comments, 'In the Aeneid, Lavinia is a mere convention, the blond maiden, a background figure barely sketched. Yet this is the woman the hero is commanded by the gods to marry. She so evidently has a voice, and Virgil knew how to listen to women; but he didn't have time to listen to her. He's in the war part of his story and has to get all the battles fought. So all Lavinia gets to do is blush. I felt it was time she got to tell her view of things. Inevitably this is also an interpretation of the hero's story, in which I think Virgil shows the price of public triumph as personal tragedy ... I didn't feel I was correcting Virgil, but here was something he didn't have the time to do, and I did.'

Le Guin now places Lavinia's story in the foreground, with the dying Virgil fleetingly recalled from the future to account for his omission. Virgil appears to Lavinia in the sacred forest, Albunea, where spirits communicate with the living. Here they discuss 'his poem' and Lavinia's place within it. Virgil regrets his overlooking of Lavinia in the Aeneid, but he says in mitigation 'you can't have two love stories in an epic'.

Le Guin has previously commented on how old age renders women invisible in contemporary society. Lavinia becomes the symbol of a Virgilian female restora-



tion, where she is the true hero not Aeneas. Virgil begins the Aeneid by invoking 'Arms, and the man I sing', but rather than a book about the glory of men's wars, Le Guin provides a realistic and bittersweet tribute to the role of women in turbulent times.

Le Guin says, 'Aeneas has a destiny. He's a hero. So does Lavinia. She's destined to marry the hero. But from her point of view, and I think from Aeneas's too, both of them are just trying to see what their duty is and do it. It consists mostly in their responsibility to their people — family, friends, companions, fellow countrymen. That hasn't changed much, I think, in 2800 years. And it might be a theme running through my fiction — trying to figure out what you ought to do and how to do it.' *Lavinia* is one of Le Guin's best books, which is high praise indeed, given her illustrious literary output.

The Gone-Away World
Nick Harkaway (Heinemann; 538 pp.; $24.95)

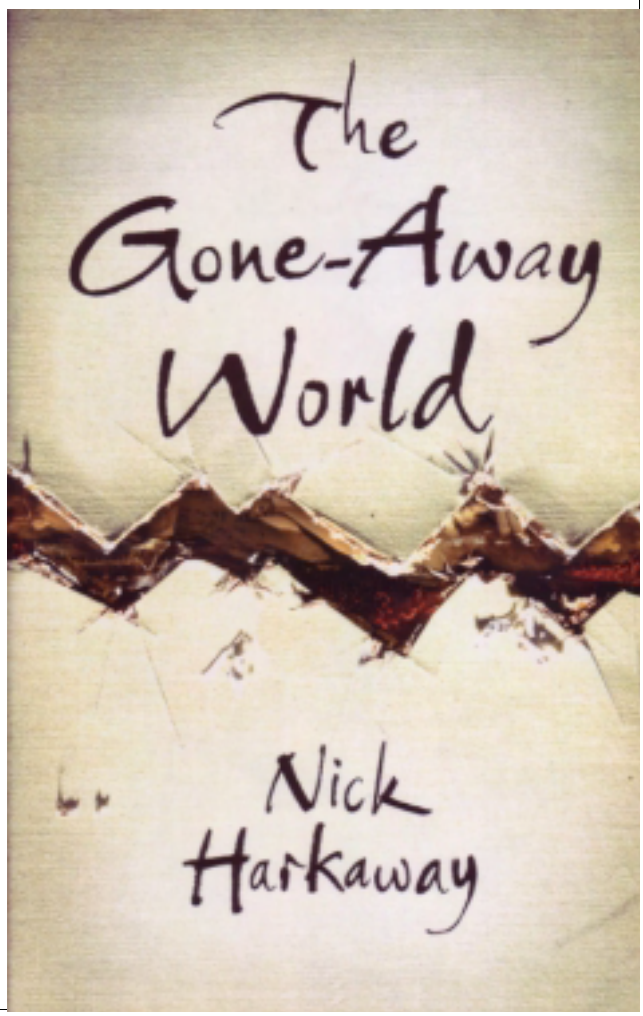
Nicholas Cornwell's first novel, ***The Gone-Away World***, part of a A$300,000 book deal, is published under a pseudonym, but then so were his father's books. Nick Harkaway is the son of John le Carré, aka David Cornwell.

When asked about the choice of name, Harkaway has said in a UK interview that he felt his own name would be 'lost among all the Patricias and Bernards' on bookseller shelves. He found, however, in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, an entry on Jack Harkaway, the fictional hero of a series of *Boy's Own* tales of derring-do. Certainly there is a lot of derring-do in the futuristic genre smorgasbord of *The Gone-Away World*.

The reader is transported far away from his father's historical Cold War scenarios to a future in which the world is reduced to a 20-mile global band, where everyone human lives following the apocalyptic 'Go Away War'. Harkaway says, however, 'it is immediately recognisable as our world, where the majority of us live in a sanitised and vaccinated stretch of land, too frightened to see what's outside it ... It's more like tomorrow if today was a really, really bad day'.

Human survivors live around the Jorgmund Pipe, a network of life-support systems pumping out the chemical 'Fox', which counteracts the effects of the bombs that destroyed the world. The Jorgmund Pipe is, however, on fire. The anonymous narrator, and the other main character, Gonzo Lubitsch, have the task, with their troubleshooting team, of extinguishing the fire. Before this section unfolds, however, the narrative extensively backtracks to relate how the two friends met and their picaresque lives to that point.

Harkaway comments on the novel: 'It's an adventure, a big, rolling piece of fun. It has a serious side, of course, ... because the world we have is very murky and alarming ... but I wanted it to be something you read smiling ... So it's about two friends with a huge task in front of them: save the world from a catastrophe. Except, perhaps inevitably, they're being lied to. The job in hand isn't what



it seems to be.'

The Gone-Away World is a zany fictional ride, with the text also reflecting Cornwell's cinematic background. There are echoes of *The Matrix*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Karate Kid*, *Apocalypse Now*, and most decidedly *Mad Max*, all tinged by P. G. Wodehouse, whom Harkaway credits as a major literary influence.

Throw in ninjas, pseudo-pirates, and mime-artists, and the end result is a literary confection that could have been created if Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, and Douglas Adams had got together. *The Gone-Away World* certainly needed more ruthless editing, but is enough of an ambitious satirical romp to ensure many readers will undoubtedly be Carréd away!

Brasyl
Ian McDonald (Gollancz; 382 pp.; $32.95)
The Carhullan Army
Sarah Hall (Faber; 209 pp.; $29.95)
Black Man
Richard Morgan (Gollancz; 546 pp.; $32.95)
Land of the Headless
Adam Roberts (Gollancz; 275 pp.; $32.95)
The Prefect
Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz; 410 pp.; $32.95)
The Dreaming Void
Peter F. Hamilton (Macmillan; 652 pp.; $35)

There have been a number of 'golden ages' in science fiction, such as in America in the 1940s, led by Asimov and Heinlein, and the 1960s in Britain, with Ballard, Moorcock and Aldiss. The first decade of the twenty-first century is witnessing another resurgence of British SF creativity, which includes the authors under review.

The future is not, however, what it used to be. Instead of the relatively optimistic SF dawn of the 1940s, we now have darker tomorrows, where humans remain Hobbesian, despite genetic engineering and advanced technologies. Richard Morgan, the author of *Black Man*, has said in a recent interview, 'Greed, revenge, xenophobia — welcome to the human genome. Human nature simply is not civilised in the sense that we understand that word, and we only stand a chance of avoiding a dystopic future if we recognise that fact and get on top of it'.

The time frames in the six books under review range from the near to the far future, but all comment on issues of concern to present-day society, such as threats to civil liberties, climate change, corporate corruption, and religious zealotry.

Ian McDonald's award winning last novel *River of Gods* (2004) was set in India. The title spelling of ***Brasyl*** indicates a Brazil that is both familiar and unfamiliar. McDonald interlocks three strands of a Brazilian past, present, and the future, in an intriguing and challenging fictional mix. In present-day Rio de Janeiro, an unscrupulous reality TV producer is intent on tracking down Barbosa (in real life dead), the goalkeeper who became a national scapegoat after Brazil lost the 1950 soccer World Cup final, so she can humiliate him in a TV retrial.

McDonald's second strand is set in Sao Paulo of 2032, with society under constant surveillance, cameras 'tracking movements down to a single footstep, logging every transaction'. Criminal 'quantumeiros' use quantum computing to circumvent the rules. The third strand takes place in Brazil in 1732, when a Jesuit priest travels into the jungle's heart of religious darkness where a native drug induces access to the quantum 'multiverse'. McDonald cleverly explores the nature of reality in universes of multiple possibilities. Make time for this stimulating cross-temporal SF novel.

Sarah Hall's third novel ***The Carhullan Army*** has echoes of earlier Women's Press SF books, although this feminism is decidedly hard edged. Hall's stripped-down prose reflects her bleak near-future Britain, where the social fabric has collapsed due to climate change and global politics. The story is told through the prison memoirs of a woman simply known as Sister, and her fight against an oppressive male government, 'the Authority', which has fitted women with contraceptive devices, as childbirth is as restricted as civil liberties.

Sister escapes from her repressed life in down-at-heel Rith (Penrith) in order to search for Carhullan, a rumoured female rebel community in Cumbria. This turns out to be no rosy physical enclave, and one where women plan to answer violence with violence. The Carhullan Army is a decidely bleak dystopia, but Hall's compelling narrative and Orwellian brooding framework establish its place in the feminist SF genre.

Richard Morgan's novels are also noted for their dark, violent setpieces. Morgan's first novel, ***Altered Carbon*** (2001), has recently been released as part of the excellent Gollancz 'Future Classics' series. The main character, Carl Marsalis, in ***Black Man***, retitled ***Thirteen*** by the US publisher, is a 'variant thirteen', people who

have been genetically bred, particularly mentally, to become killer soldiers. A peaceful, if segregated US society, now regards thirteens as outcasts. Morgan does not use Marsalis' colour in *Black Man* as the issue; rather he is extrapolating prejudices of the twentieth century to reflect genetic prejudices of the future.

Against a background of 'the predominance of supranational bodies and corporate interests', Marsalis is hired by the United Nations to track down a murderous rogue thirteen, who has escaped in *Blade Runner* style from Mars. Morgan juxtaposes the violent manhunt with Marsalis' inner conflicts, and what it is to be human.

A similar question is raised in Adam Roberts' dark satire ***Land of the Headless***. Jon Cavala, like Sarah Hall's Sister, faces a harrowing journey of self-discovery, but his extra travel burden is the loss of his head! Cavala, a poet, on the planet Pulse, is beheaded for alleged adultery in a society dominated by a religious fundamentalist code based on the Old Testament and extreme Islam.

Cavala is fitted with an 'ordinator', a device that will take over the function of his brain, and basic sensory equipment. Like Marsalis, the only job that he can get is as a soldier, fighting a pointless war on a neighbouring planet. *Land of the Headless* satirises the futility of many wars, religious fundamentalism and self-delusion. At the end, the reader is still not quite sure whether Cavala is as flawed as the religions that oppress him. Whatever the conclusion, SF hats off , if not heads up, to Adam Roberts for a Bunyanesque tale.

Alastair Reynolds' ***The Prefect*** is a prequel set in the same universe as his first four novels, *Revelation Space* (also recently released in the Gollancz 'Future Classics' series), *Chasm City*, *Redemption Ark*, and *Absolution Gap*. Tom Dreyfus, an interstellar policeman/prefect, is sent to investigate a mass destruction of a space habitat, which appears straightforward in motivation, but turns out to be far from simple. To tackle both political corruption and the crime effectively, Dreyfus has to consider going outside the rule of law. Reynolds examines the balances permissible within a democratic society against the backdrop of a crime SF mix. Reynolds' science expertise is as solid as ever, but his narrative is overlong, and contains so many info-dumps that it prevents *The Prefect* becoming an SF Dux.

Brevity has also never been a trademark of Peter Hamilton, who has been termed 'the master of wide-screen SF baroque' by Brian Aldiss. ***The Dreaming Void*** is a sprawling multistrand space opera, the first in a trilogy that follows on from the events in the far-future 'Commonwealth' described in *Pandora's Star* (2004) and *Judas Unchained* (2005). The 'Dreaming Void' is an artificial black hole at the centre of the Commonwealth universe, slowly consuming the galaxy. Religious fanatics known as the Dreamers believe that the Void encapsulates heaven, and begin planning a massive pilgrimage. Most, however, believe that this will trigger a total galactic catastrophe. Hamilton, like Reynolds, is adept at the scientific big picture, and in this case a multiplicity of human and alien singularities, but readers should be aware that they are in for a science fiction long haul, whose resolution is in a galactic trilogy conclusion still far far away.

Yellow Blue Tibia
Adam Roberts (Gollancz; 326 pp.; $32.99)
Cyberabad Days
Ian McDonald (Gollancz; 313 pp.; $29.99)

British science fiction is currently undergoing one of its periodic bursts of creativity. Adam Roberts and Ian McDonald, two of the leading SF authors, certainly don't lack for imagination in *Yellow Blue Tibia* and *Cyberabad Days*.

Roberts's ***Yellow Blue Tibia*** begins with the premise that Joseph Stalin, whose interest in UFOs is documented by Roberts, ordered a group of Russian SF writers in 1946 to create a scenario for an alien invasion of Russia. Stalin believed that the threat from America would wane and that the nation needed a new enemy to keep it together. Stalin says, 'I do not find that America unites the people in hostility, the way the German threat did.' The writers oblige, but then Stalin suddenly demands they forget the whole exercise on pain of death.

One of the SF writers was the idealistic young Konstantin Skvorecky. By 1986, however, he has been an alcoholic and Gulag prisoner, and is now working as a lowly translator. The news, however, that the long-forgotten scenario of alien invasion might be actually be happening provides a new purpose in life. Is the KGB trying to implement Stalin's plan or has there been actual alien invasion, and what has this to do with the Chernobyl and the Challenger disasters?

Yellow Blue Tibia is overly ambitious, incorporating an SF mystery involving UFOs and scientology, a comedy of the absurd in a Gogol-like satire of the Russian bureaucracy and a multiverse, 'quantum alternatives that radiated', conclusion. Roberts provides a *Wikipedia*-style biography of Skvorecky at the end of the book, in which Skvorecky's alternate history echoes the textual teasers and the ambiguities of the plot. Philip K. Dick would have been proud of Roberts, with the latter's hint that maybe the twentieth century was only an invention!

More big ideas in ***Cyberabad Days***, a linked collection of stories set in the future India of McDonald's award-winning novel *River of Gods* (2004). McDonald says, 'When I finished *River*, I realized that there was much more to my near-future India than just that book ... The events that lead to the Balkanization of India, the Water Wars and the Sex Wars and the genetically enhanced Brahmins, who live twice as long half as fast, their stories hadn't been told ... *Days* is a companion volume to *River* in one respect, but in another it's a sequel.'

Cyberabad Days, a deliberate echo of *The Arabian Nights*, is set in India of 2047, which is divided politically into a dozen states, struggling with climate change and transformed by nanotech and cybernetic technologies. McDonald's characters, often young children ot teenagers, struggle to survive in a population where males outnumber females four to one.

In 'The Dust Assassin', feuding families in a *Romeo and Juliet* plotline fight over water rights, but find that revenge is a double-edged sword. 'The Djinn's Wife', which won a Hugo award in 2007, recounts the marriage between a female dancer and an 'aeai' (artificial intelligence), but a virtual heaven can disintegrate into a physical hell. McDonald says, 'It's not about realism —

that most pernicious of Western values — it's a show ... There are dance routines in the "The Djinn's Wife" (and it ends in a Bollywood melodrama bloodbath).' In 'Sanjeev and Robotwallah' a young boy finds a role supporting robot warriors, but when the conflict ends what is left for him?

McDonald's bittersweet stories abound with life and vibrancy, while his Hindi netspeak dazzles. He is confident about India's future. 'I don't go for that "eternal unchanging India" stuff, but Indian culture has evolved over thousands of years to provide stability and family survival in a ferociously competitive society, and it's a culture that as easily and readily absorbs other cultures as it exports its own. Alien threats in this worldview can be easily absorbed.' Danny Boyle would be a natural to film *Cyberabad Days*.

Black Glass
Meg Mundell (Scribe; 282 pp.; $32.95)

Melbourne author Meg Mundell's debut novel ***Black Glass*** has received considerable acclaim in the mainstream press but, when viewed within the context of the Australian dystopian SF corpus, its hyped originality comes back into line. Mundell says 'I wasn't thinking of it [the novel] as genre, it just happened that way. I read a lot of John Wyndham as a kid and I guess that rubbed off.' She thus falls into the category of fiction, which P. D. James and Margaret Atwood have espoused, that is writing SF that is not SF.

Black Glass is set in a run-down near-future Melbourne, and follows the almost Dickensian fortunes of two teenage sisters, 13-year-old Tally and 15-year-old Grace, who become separated after the death of their fugitive father. They make their way from regional Victoria to a Melbourne divided between legal workers and the 'undocs', citizens without registered identities, who struggle to survive on the edges of society. Tally is befriended by a young homeless Indigenous boy Blue, who helps her become streetwise, while the older and yet more naïve Grace becomes involved with a fringe artistic community.

Mundell is strong on character, less so on the background of government control and surveillance in Melbourne and the national and global situation. The novel's fragmented format style fits in well, however, with the overall atmosphere of twenty-four-seven surveillance and individual dislocation. *Black Glass* effectively highlights Mundell's concerns on attitudes to refugees, the homeless, and the marginalised, for whom hope is essential in the struggle to survive.

Mundell's secondary characters include freelance journalist Damon Spark, whose editors in the 'journotainment' industry demand tabloid stories rather than real news. Mundell says, 'Damon is my very cynical take on where freelance journalism is going. He's drawn from my own experience of having been in a position where journalism occupied one place but has drifted to an-

other, something towards entertainment.'

Milk, who is the most original character, is a 'moodie' who specialises in controlling or 'tuning' the mood of a crowd via subliminal manipulation of sound, light, and smell. The authorities seek his skills to influence crowd behaviour as civil unrest grows. As Mundell says, 'Crowd control is a logical next step, because public space is now a commodity.'

Mundell's Melbourne is always intriguing, as the real and the imagined coalesce. Mundell also gradually weaves together the narrative strands of the disparate characters, leaving open the possibility of a sequel, particularly in the context of the reunion of Tally and Grace. Conclusion: ignore the hype and simply savour Mundell's Melbourne through a glass darkly.

The Mammoth Book of Apocalyptic SF
edited by Mike Ashley
(Robinson; 500 pp.; $22.95)

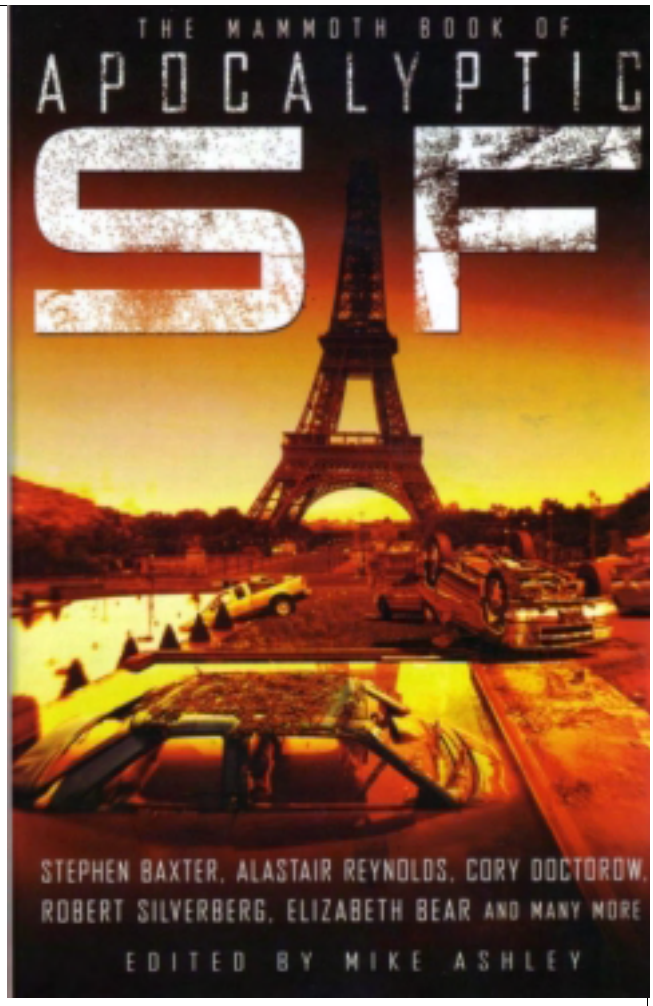
Well-known British anthologist Mike Ashley brings together 24 original and reprinted stories covering the usual cast of apocalypse suspects. These range through nuclear disaster, climate change, cosmic catastrophes, and global pandemics, but also include new threats such as a 'nano-techdoom'. Standout stories include Alastair Reynolds' 'Sleepover', part of an unfinished novel, in which 'transcended machines' battle it out as 'time and causality get all tangled up', while the non-sleeping remnants of humanity struggle to survive. Eric Brown's 'Guardians of the Phoenix' follows a small group of survivors in a devastated burntout world struggling to reach Tangiers where they hope an abandoned space mission can provide salvation.

Sunshine State
James Miller (Little Brown; 344 pp.; $32.99)

Sunshine State by British author James Miller portrays a near future in which climate change has wreaked havoc 'warping and bending [it] into unrecognisable shapes'. The United States is dominated by extreme rightwing Christianity, and Florida, 'the storm zone', is supposedly an uninhabitable no-go area. Nonetheless, Florida has become the haven for dissident groups, including Islamic extremists. Retired British spy, Mark Burrows, is reactivated and sent to Florida to find a former Iraq colleague who is now a threat to what remains of Western civilisation. There are clear references here to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, while the Miami landscape is full of Ballardian images of derelict hotels, empty swimming pools, and burntout cars. The end result, however, falls short of apocalpse now, because of Miller's almost caricatured characterisation.

The End of the World
edited by Martin H. Greenberg
(Skyhorse Publishing; 328 pp.; $29.95)

Another prolific anthologist, American editor Martin H. Greenberg, also covers the end of the world in 19 stories, defined by subject such as 'The Last Man' and 'Life after



the End'. Unfortunately, many of the stories are somewhat dated reprints, and some have been anthologised a number of times, such as Norman Spinrad's 'The Big Flash'. John Wyndham's 1952 short story 'The Wheel' leads onto his famous 1955 novel *The Chrysalids*, and depicts a post-disaster world in which the creation of a small wheel by a young boy becomes a blasphemous and deadly act. Michael Swanwick's 1980 short story 'The Feast of St. Janis' documents the annual 'reincarnation' and sacrifice of Janis Joplin as a way to assuage societal tensions in a brutal world.

Kraken: An Anatomy
China Miéville (Macmillan; 481 pp.; $34.99)
Declare
Tim Powers (Corvus; 567 pp.; $23.99)
Apartment 16
Adam Nevill (Pan; 400 pp.; $22.99)

China Miéville, a guest at both the Melbourne Writers' Festival and the World Science Fiction Convention in early September, is a three-time winner of the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award (for *Perdido Street Station*, *Iron Council* and *The City & The City*).

Miéville, who is still only 37, and has a PhD from the London School of Economics, has been labelled the primary exponent of the 'new weird' fiction, fiction that attempts to subvert the form, content and function of traditional fantasy and SF along secular and political

lines. Miéville probes the excesses of capitalism, the nature of democracy, the corruption of authoritarian forces, multiculturalism, and the plight of the urban poor within his fantastic settings and plots.

Kraken is set in Miéville's darkly magical London of 'dissident gods'. Miéville has described *Kraken* as a lighter work, 'a shaggy-dog story. Well, a shaggy-god story ... a kind of a romp'. It begins when a giant squid is stolen from the Natural History Museum in London — a 'squid-napping'. Curator Billy Harrow becomes the central player, knowingly and unknowingly, on a journey in which he is both hunter and hunted. The FSRC — the Fundamentalist and Sect-Related Crime Unit — ensures that Billy will never be able to return to the 'squid pro quo'. The search for the missing squid becomes, moreover, the catalyst for not just one apocalypse, but possibly a multi-apocalypse.

Billy's picaresque flight through London brings him into contact with warring Lovecraftian religious cults, a union led by an Egyptian spirit and a gang lord who is simply a large tattooed face on someone's back. Ideas and bizarre creations cascade into Miéville's episodic narrative but, in such a profusion, ultimately they prevent total engagement with the characters. *Kraken* can only be classified as pure Miéville.

More Lovecraftian supernatural comes in Tim Powers' 2001 award-winning novel, ***Declare***, which is now reissued in paperback by the new British imprint Corvus. Powers has said of this novel that he was 'taking the whole intricate history of the Cold War and cooking up a supernatural secret explanation for everything ... it is sort of Le Carre characters in a sorcerously torquered spy setting'.

It's certainly a homage to John Le Carre's spy novels. The real life spy Kim Philby plays a major role in the narrative, alongside the main character ex-academic Andrew Hale, part of a highly secret group within British intelligence. Locales shift between London, Moscow, Kuwait, Berlin, and ultimately Mount Ararat, where a larger cosmic war is played out. 'Tradecraft Meets Lovecraft' sees the rise and fall of communism played out against another apocalyptic background.

British author Adam Nevill evokes more supernatural elements in ***Apartment 16***, but within a more traditional horror framework. A young naive American girl, Apryl, arrives in London to clear out her Great Aunt Lillian's flat in Barrington House, an apartment block that contains dark secrets. Why do noises emanate from apartment 16 if it has been empty for years, and why have several of the elderly residents died mysteriously, or are in fear of their lives if they speak to Apryl?

The story of Barrington House is revealed through the characters of Apryl and Seth, the Barrington House night porter and frustrated daytime artist. Seth, a far better defined character, struggles between redemption and damnation as his part in the supernatural evil in Barrington House is revealed. The trouble is that Nevill's meandering narative pace takes nearly 400 pages from the initial scene setting to reach the admittedly gripping denouement, by which time a lot of readers would have left this particular building.

The Margarets
Sheri S. Tepper (Gollancz; 384 pp.; $32.99)

Sheri S. Tepper has been termed an 'eco-feminist' SF writer, her novels often passionately reflecting on the destruction of the environment and how women might do a better job of preserving it. ***The Margarets*** depicts a future overpopulated and resource-ravaged Earth, with people sent to other planets as slaves or colonists. Margaret, 'plain Margaret', an only child of two scientists on Phobos Station, creates six imaginary, yet increasingly crucial, companions, who may ultimately determine the fate of the human race. This undoubtedly gives split personality a new meaning! *The Margarets* is classic Tepper, only marred by her recurrent tendency to caricature anti- environmentalists. Tepper, nearing 80, proves that old age clearly does not weary nor dull her eco-fiction.

Saturn's Children
Charles Stross (Orbit; 371 pp.; $39.99)

Isaac Asimov would seem to be the natural godfather to British author Charles Stross's robot novel, ***Saturn's Children***, but Stross also pays homage to Robert A. Heinlein's later novels, with their focus on sex and immortality. The main character and narrator of *Saturn's Children*, Freya Nakamachi-47, is a robot courtesan, in a world where humanity has died out. Freya wonders what's the point of it all, although she is prevented by the Third Law of Robotics from self-destruction. This future robot world turns out to be just as hierarchical and class focused as the human one. The references to P. G. Woodhouse throughout are deliberate. *Saturn's Children* is essentially a caper novel, with Freya's escapades resembling the 'Perils of Pauline'. *Saturn's Children* is an intriguing mix of SF homage and imagination.

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
Sean Williams (Titan Books; 319 pp.; $39.95)

Another massive SF epic to be continually mined is the *Star Wars* series. South Australian author Sean Williams' ***The Force Unleashed*** is the fourth novel he has written for the *Star Wars* franchise. In it, he creatively 'novelises' the much-hyped 2008 LucasArts *Star Wars* computer game of the same name and its storyline by Haden Blackman (http://www.lucasarts.com/games/theforceunleashed/). Williams says of the novel, which reached number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, 'It's a game with a story, not just a sabre-fest: Darth Vader has sent his secret apprentice on a mission to wipe out the last of the Jedi, but he inadvertently brings about the birth of the Rebel Alliance.' *Star Wars* fans won't be disappointed in Williams being 'allowed to play with George Lucas's toys'.

The Annotated Flatland
Edwin A. Abbott (Perseus Books; 241 pp.; $35)

Professor Ian Stewart of Warwick University provides a superb annotated version of the mathematical SF classic ***Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions***, published

pseudonymously in 1884 by an English clergyman and headmaster Edwin A. Abbott. Flatland is a two-dimensional world, 'an infinite Euclidean plane', inhabited by intelligent creatures shaped like geometric figures. The novel is divided into two parts, the first describing Flatland's customs, history and society, where Abbott delightfully satirises Victorian customs; while the second introduces the concept of the fourth dimension. Stewart annotates the text with great aplomb and erudition, resulting in a book that will become the standard edition.

The Stone Gods
Jeanette Winterson (Hamish Hamilton; 209 pp.; $32.95)
Spook Country
William Gibson (Viking; 371 pp.; $35)
Cowboy Angels
Paul McAuley (Gollancz; 390 pp.; $32.95)
Hunter's Run
George R. R. Martin, Gardner Dozois and Daniel Abraham (Harper; 394 pp.; $29.99)

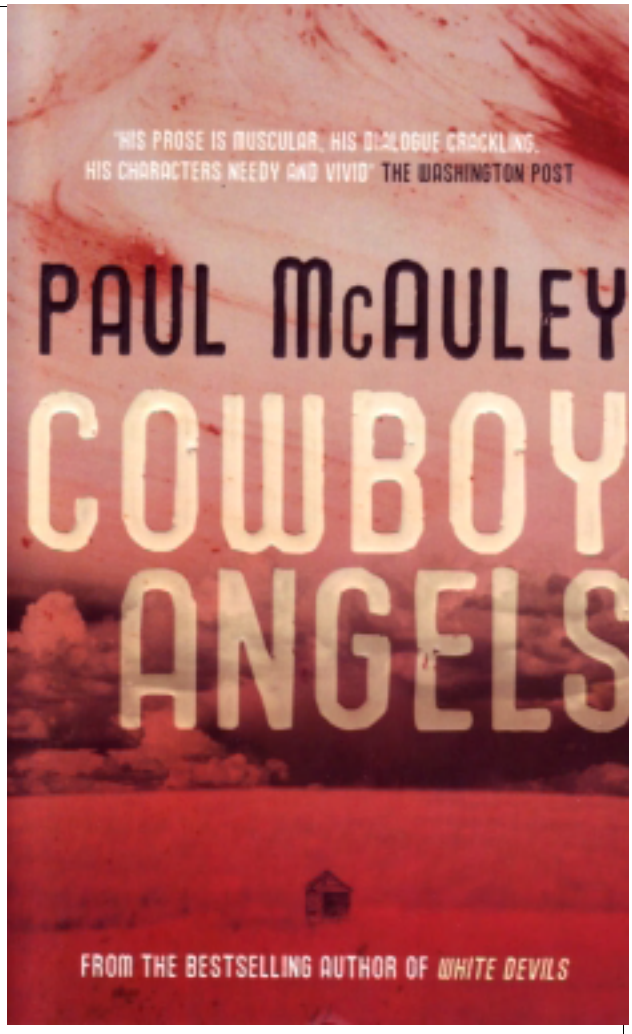
Jeanette Winterson and William Gibson established their reputations with their first novels *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985) and *Neuromancer* (1984), and have since capitalised, in more ways than one, on that initial success. Gibson lives in an exclusive secluded suburb in Vancouver, while Winterson, according to a recent *Financial Times* profile, owns two houses, a Porsche 911, and a fridge full of Bollinger champagne.

Winterson has said she doesn't believe in 'agenda fiction', but ***The Stone Gods*** has a number of agendas, and is avowedly polemical. Winterson has commented in a recent interview, 'I was brought up in a Gospel tent, and I want to change the world.' In *The Stone Gods*, Winterson takes on the destruction of the planet (we 'just fucked it to death and kicked it when it wouldn't get up'), the war on terror, government surveillance, media manipulation, the cult of the celebrity, and even overbearing parking meter inspectors!

The Stone Gods' four loosely connected sections all reflect humanity's ability to destroy the worlds we live in and the power of love to provide at least partial redemption. Winterson finds linear narratives 'claustrophic', and has compared her writing to painters like Tracey Emin, with their 'fluid exploratory processes'. Winterson thus includes narrative sections that reflect actual occurrences, such as when she left a major part of the manuscript of *The Stone Gods* on a London tube train.

Winterson's main character is Billy/Billie Crusoe, who alternates between genders, and features in past, present, and future worlds. The near-future society of the opening dystopian section sees a dissident Billie Crusoe establishing a strong personal and physical relationship with an AI robot before seeking a new world. Winterson's sentiments on hedonistic self-obsessed societies are clear, even if her future predictions are taken to extremes at times, for example, in sexual and media mores.

The second of the four segments has Billy Crusoe becoming another Robinson, stranded from Cook's expedition in March 1774 on the ecologically devastated Easter Island, with its massive stone gods. Worshipping



false gods, whether of the religious or the consumerist variety, is clearly to be avoided in both the past and the future. *The Stone Gods* is never dull, but Winterson's scattergun indictment of humanity's faults is overly strident within her diverse fictional canvas. Doris Lessing did it better in her 'Canopus in Argos' series.

As Winterson moves into the future, William Gibson has retreated, in both ***Spook Country*** and his last novel *Pattern Recognition* (2003), into the present. Gibson has said in an interview that he now feels the present is as strange as the future: 'I have become convinced that it is silly to try to imagine futures these days ... the future is already here, it is just not evenly distributed.'

William Gibson's *Spook Country* is another deliberately fragmented narrative, this time related through the perspective of three shadowy, almost virtual, characters. Gibson, who covers the term 'spook' in all its contexts, juxtaposes question of personal identity with the blurring of geographical boundaries and national security issues.

Gibson questions the fragility and permanence of fame, via a female freelance journalist investigating the 'locative art scene'. Artists create 3D virtual reconstructions, on the exact physical spot where celebrities such as River Pheonix, John Lennon, and F. Scott Fitzgerald died. Other characters include 'dislocated' Cuban and American spooks, who, despite being well connected in an IT sense, remain isolated individuals, inhabiting what Gibson calls 'liminal spaces', the anonymous worlds of

hotel rooms, airport lounges, and disused warehouses.

With Winterson, what you get is what you read, but nothing is what it seems in *Spook Country*, including the underlying plot focus on the search for a mysterious shipping container. *Spook Country* would make a great hyper-linked netbook, as it probes below the surface of today's hi-tech reality.

British writer Paul McAuley quotes Gibson in a recent interview, in the context that the SF genre provides a universal fictional 'tool kit'. Books need not be set in the future, 'but the imprint is there whatever you write'. Gollancz's marketing department has termed ***Cowboy Angels***, McAuley's fifteenth novel, '*Stargate* meets *24*', which captures both the pace and the portal-driven plot.

'Turing Gates' are wormholes that link parallel worlds or 'multiverses', a word that was first used, according to Jeff Prucher (in *Brave New Words*; see review later in this column), by Michael Moorcock in 1963. The Turing Gates link 'Real America' to other Americas, which include fascist, communist, and nuclear-devastated versions. 'Real America' wants to bring the other versions of America back into line. McAuley implies that in whatever multiverse, America can't resist 'messing with politics'.

Adam Stone, a former CIA 'cowboy angel', is reluctantly persuaded out of retirement to hunt down his old partner, who is killing, in the various worlds, the 'doppels' of a leading female quantum physicist. *Cowboy Angels* is a fast-moving engrossing cyberthriller, although at times a little mindboggling, as it twists and turns inside itself like a fictional Moebius strip.

Hunter's Run, in contrast, has an almost Golden Age SF narrative simplicity. The three authors, who passed the manuscript baton to each other over 30 years, create a distant planet, largely populated by Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian settlers. The main character, Ramon Espejo, flees a diplomatic murder into the hinterland only to unearth an alien presence. Prucher's *Dictionary* notes that the term 'alien' was used as early as 1820 by Thomas Carlyle.

Ramon learns the hard way what it is to be human, something that Gibson has explored since 1984, when, to use words from *Spook Country*, he began 'everting the world'.

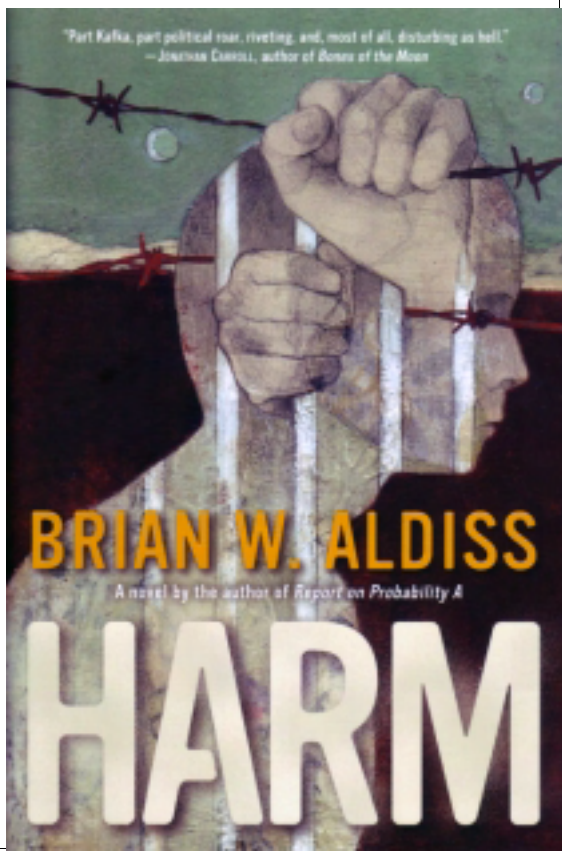
The Daughters of Moab
Kim Westwood (Harper Voyager; 389 pp.; $22.99)

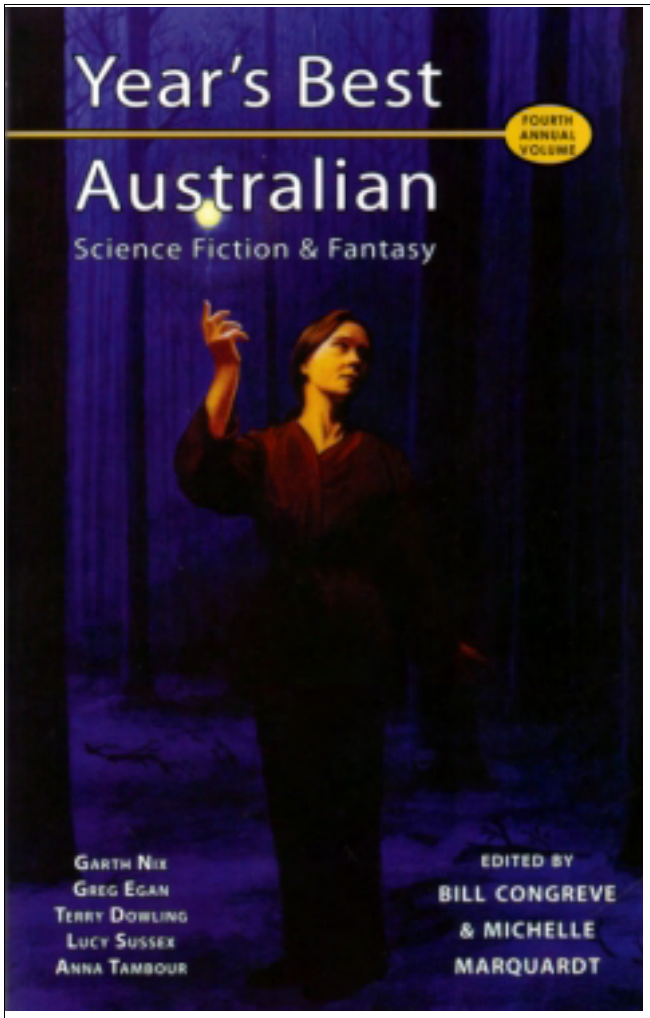
The Daughters of Moab is the first novel from Canberra author Kim Westwood, although she has won several short story awards. Westwood says that her writing is in the mode of 'poetic apocalyptic ... a preoccupation with humanity's capacity for destruction and equal instinct for survival, while the rhythms and nuances draw inspiration from the language of poetry'. *The Daughters of Moab* encompasses these in a perhaps ultimately overambitious combination. The omniscient narrative voice, with its implications of immediacy, sits uneasily at times with the often lush prose in nearly 400 pages. Nonetheless, Westwood's post-apocalyptic vision of a devastated Australia, affected by climate change, authoritarian racial oppression and genetic manipulation, is an impressive debut that echoes the best of George Turner.

The Last Theorem
Arthur C. Clarke and Frederik Pohl (Harper; 299 pp.; $32.99)
HARM
Brian W. Aldiss (Duckworth; 229 pp.; $49.95)
The Quiet War
Paul McAuley (Gollancz; 439 pp.; $32.99)
City at the End of Time
Greg Bear (Gollancz; 470 pp.; $32.99)
The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy: Fourth Annual Volume
ed. Bill Congreve and Michelle Marquardt (MirrorDanse; 284 pp.; $19.95)

The Last Theorem is the last book of Arthur C. Clarke, who died in March 2008 at the age of 90. Frederik Pohl, now 89, is also an SF legend, but his best work dates from the 1950s and 1960s, especially in his collaborations with C. M. Kornbluth, such as *The Space Merchants*. *The Last Theorem* is largely Pohl, based on original notes by Clarke, who apparently saw the final manuscript not long before his death. A young Sri Lankan mathematician, Ranjit Subramanian, constructs a simple proof of Fermat's last theorem, and becomes a leading figure in a world peace framework: Pax Per Fidem. His life and global events then interact with a familiar Clarke plot device of an alien threat to Earth.

Pohl says, 'The book isn't really about the theorem. Its about a boy ... and about what happens to him and even to his galaxy after he does.' The two plot threads, however, never really connect, and the book also crams in too many of Clarke's predictions, such as a space





elevator, AI devices and omniscient but flawed aliens. The concluding 'First Postamble' resembles a simplistic Golden Age SF ending. Its a pity Clarke had to go out with an SF whimper, but his SF 'big bangs' of the 1960s and 1970s will survive.

Another SF great Brian Aldiss, now 86, is in better senior creative form in ***HARM***, which stands for the British Hostile Activities Research Ministry. Paul Ali is a British citizen held as a political prisoner in a Guantanamo Bay-type detention camp — because Ali's novel joked about the assassination of the British Prime Minister. Ali escapes from his torture by either inventing, or schizophrenically inhabiting, a far-off world Stygia (an allusion to Milton), where insects are the dominant life form. Ali becomes a man named Fremant, but this is no paradise regained. Aldiss's account of Ali's life on Stygia emphasises that 'there is no escape anywhere in the universe' from fanaticism, genocide, torture, and authotitarian regimes. Aldiss says in an Afterword that *HARM* 'is the sort of book I have been writing over the last half-century: *Non-Stop, Greybeard, Forgotten Life, Super-State*'. Aldiss remains a superb polemical and inventive writer.

Paul McAuley's ***The Quiet War*** recalls the darker tones of his early novels. It is set in the twenty-third century, with humanity split into two competing and ultimately warring blocs: the conservative, feudally organised regions of Earth, who have survived the traumatic environmental and economic collapses of the twenty-first century, and the Outers, whose inventiveness in genetic modifications and loose political structures have allowed them to establish loose city-states on the moons of Jupiter and Saturn.

McAuley outlines his characters, such as the 'gene wizards' (gene genies would have been nice), in bold simple strokes, rather than by subtle revelations, as the characters are lesser players to the big themes on show. McAuley's work as a research biologist comes through in an impressive array of genetic speculation.

Greg Bear has said in an interview that ***City at the End of Time*** is an 'homage to writers such as Hodgson, Moorcock, and Aldiss'. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* and William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land* are the two novels that spring to mind as influences. The three main characters, living in present-day or very near future Seattle, learn they are 'fate-shifters', imbued with the ability to cross time and perhaps become the saviours of a dying universe in Kalpa, a city of the far future.

Bear has said that *City at the End of Time* 'is an adventure story set in a universe coming apart at the seams', with its real underpinning being multiple universes. The dual narrative of present and far future take a little while to gell, and Bear needed to reduce the number of ideas, musings, and infodumps to fashion a successful whole. Nonetheless *City at the End of Time*'s considerable inventiveness remains to intrigue, not least with its subtheme of books, libraries, and storytelling.

Bill Congreve and Michelle Marquardt are both the publishers (as MirrorDanse) and editors of ***The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy***. They read over 500 stories, not only print but also from e-sources, to make their selection. Congreve told me, at last year's Conflux conference in Canberra, that they had read everything by every Australian published in the genres. They recognise that their small press has troubles in publication distribution, which is a pity, as the general quality of their books is excellent, and they boldly go where other Australian publishers fear to tread.

Well-known authors in *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy* include Greg Egan, with 'Glory', where human observers witness a conflict on an alien planet, and Lucy Sussex, with her award-winning story 'Mist and Murder', which reprises a classic nineteenth-century murder mystery from Mary Fortune. Sussex seasons Fortune with *Pirates of the Caribbean* in the future setting of New Ceres. Another award-winning story, Garth Nix's 'Sir Hereward and Mr Fitz go to War Again', sees a world-weary pair, a knightly Don Quixote with a non human Sancho Panza companion, tackling gods who devastate local communities. *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy* confirms that Australian SF and fantasy competes well in the global speculative arena.

The Execution Channel
Ken MacLeod (Orbit; 307 pp.; $59.95)

Scottish author Ken MacLeod's near-future novel ***The Execution Channel*** supports the view that 'in a war on terror only terror can win'. MacLeod has said in an interview that his novel contains elements of current fears, namely 'nuclear attack, terrorism, [and] torture'.

The Execution Channel is as politically engaged as MacLeod's other nine novels, but is far from a didactic polemic.

A near-future world sees Britain having endured a devastating flu pandemic and being riven by racial tension. Russia and China are gradually returning to traditional Communism, while fighting after an Iran invasion has spread across the Middle East and Central Asia to the borders of China.

The US has been weakened through war, debt, and climate change, with millions of people in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) camps. The mysterious 'Execution Channel' seeks out and streams CCTV images of murder, execution, and torture. Numerous national agencies disseminate false information through the Net to distort the truth. It's a bleak post-9/11 world, even if 9/11 itself was different.

James Travis, an IT software consultant, is disillusioned with Britain's obeisance to the US and turns to intelligence gathering for France. Travis explains: 'At some point England had simply failed itself ... the incompetence and lack of preparation for the pandemic that had killed his wife and half a million others; the hollow justifications for the attack on Iran', and more especially 'being in the dark about what was going on; being kept in the dark — that was his grievance'. References to contemporary Britain, Guantanamo, and government disinformation are clear.

Travis's peace activist daughter Roisin, while camping outside a US base in Scotland, photographs an apparent nuclear explosion that kills over a thousand US servicemen and their families and nearly as many civilians. Was it a terrorist attack, an accident or the first strike in World War III? The authorities attempt to trace James, Roisin, and his soldier son Alec, all of whom they suspect of complicity in the explosion.

No holds are barred in the chase, as the 'spooks' are let loose. MacLeod explores, through the Travis family in particular, the disregard by governments of the basic rights of citizens in times of terror, and a belief in 'legitimate torture', as Travis's son finds himself on the Execution Channel.

No one is sure who launched the attack on the US base, nor subsequent disturbances. This causes old diplomatic allies to fall out and global war to loom. MacLeod also hints at new weapon developments, extrapolating from the work of the reclusive German physicist Burkhard Heim and his 'Heim Field Generators'. This scientific twist, 'spinning' back to American writer James Blish's 'Cities in Flight' quartet, sets up an unexpected and surprising conclusion. *The Execution Channel* combines British traditions of the disaster novel with the spy thriller, resulting in a thought-provoking mixture of J. G. Ballard and John Le Carre.

The Ice People
Maggie Gee (Telegram; 319 pp.; $26)

Maggie Gee's ***The Ice People*** was first published in 1998 to much acclaim. Its republication will now bring the novel to a new readership even more attuned to climate change. In the middle of the twenty-first century, a northern hemisphere ice age has followed a few decades of high temperatures from global warming. Relations between men and women have also cooled dramatically with both sexes preferring being 'segged'. Both plot lines are personalised in the story of Saul from youth to near death, reflected in the decline of his rare marriage to Sarah, and culminating in his kidnapping of his young son and their attempt to reach the warmth of Africa. *The Ice People* is a bleak but stunning portrayal of yet another apocalyptic future.

Saturn Returns
Sean Williams (Orbit; 291 pp.; $32.95)

Adelaide author Sean Williams says ***Saturn Returns*** is his 'gothic-noir gender-bending space opera thriller', but don't let that put you off! This first book in Williams' 'Astropolis' trilogy is an ambitious far-future epic, partly inspired by Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). The main character, super mercenary Imre Bergamasc, wakes up in the body of a female some 200 years after his own murder. He has been reconstructed by a hive mind, but for what purpose, and what was his role in the galactic disaster of the Continuum? Williams intriguingly retrofits Imre's life, while exploring his new future with old enemies still around. *Saturn Returns* probes the nature of what it is to be human against the wider backdrop of the rise and fall of civilisations.

Daywards
Anthony Eaton (University of Queensland Press; 343 pp.; $24.95)

Walking the Tree
Kaaron Warren (Angry Robot; 525 pp.; $20.99)

Local Canberra authors Kaaron Warren and Anthony Eaton may not be familiar names to the wider reading public because the focus of their fiction writing has been in the science fiction, young adult and dark fantasy genres.

Anthony Eaton, lecturer in creative writing at the University of Canberra, completes his award-winning 'Darklands' trilogy with ***Daywards***, which is set in a future Australian landscape devastated by climate change and human indifference. The narrative follows the interaction of members of the small isolated 'Clan', who unknowingly hold the genetic key to the survival of the remnants of humanity in the fallen sky cities, where 'Nightpeople' shelter from the impact of solar radiation.

While Eaton and the publishers have indicated that each book of the trilogy can be read separately, and that is certainly true, full appreciation of Eaton's creative achievement only comes with all three, linked by the key character of 'Ma' Saria. Eaton says, 'The whole project was supposed to only take three years to complete and it's ended up taking 10 years. It's meant the story has resolved itself slowly over time.'

Eaton also has strong female characters, such as Saria and the main character in *Daywards*, Dara, who learns of her powers to tap into the 'Earthmother'. Dara's struggles to learn the true nature of her world means that ultimately she will have to come to terms with the 'skypeople', who need her more than she feels she needs

them.

The 'Darklands' trilogy is a compelling narrative underpinned by Aboriginal and environmental messages. *Daywards* effectively portrays a world in which hardships have to be overcome and difficult choices made, in order to ensure a future that offers hope from a greater understanding between disparate communities.

Kaaron Warren uses her experience of living in Fiji to good effect in ***Walking the Tree***. Set in the future, the narrative takes place on the island of Botanica, which is one of the last refuges of humanity after the impact of climate change and a global pandemic. The original science'ark' settlers are now distorted memories, but their legacy is 'The Tree', which provides sustenance in a variety of forms for the communities that live around it. Each community has its own set of of creation and death myths, which feed into their behavioural patterns.

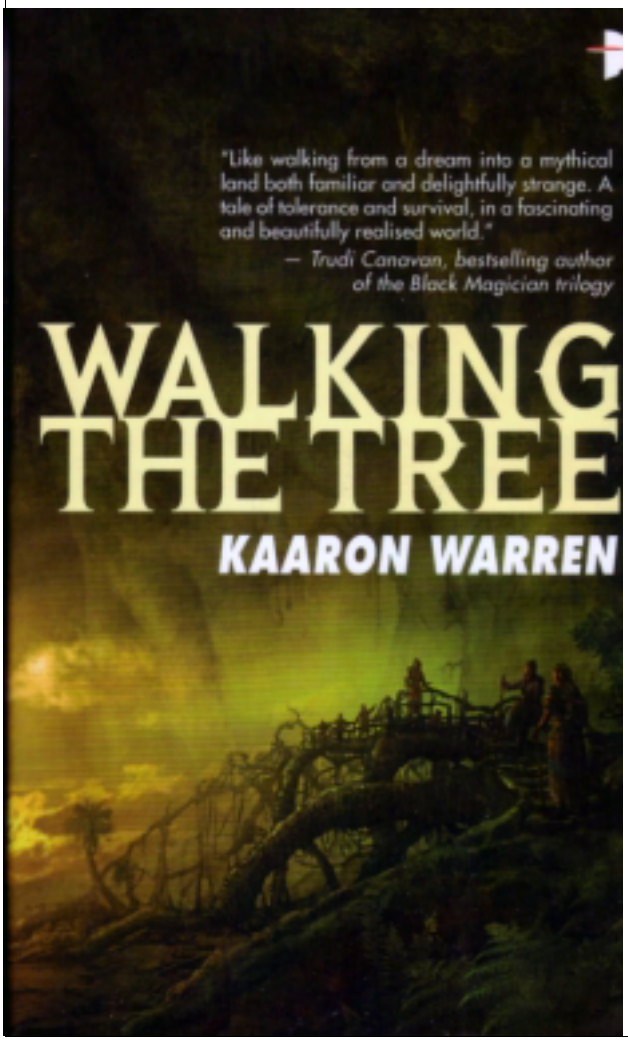
Education consists of children walking around the Tree, with their young female teachers, a journey that takes five years. The females are replaced as they find a mate among the communities they visit. Lillah, a new teacher, is the main character, and her journey through the communities will ultimately reveal the origins of the settlements and the 'ghosts' within the Tree.

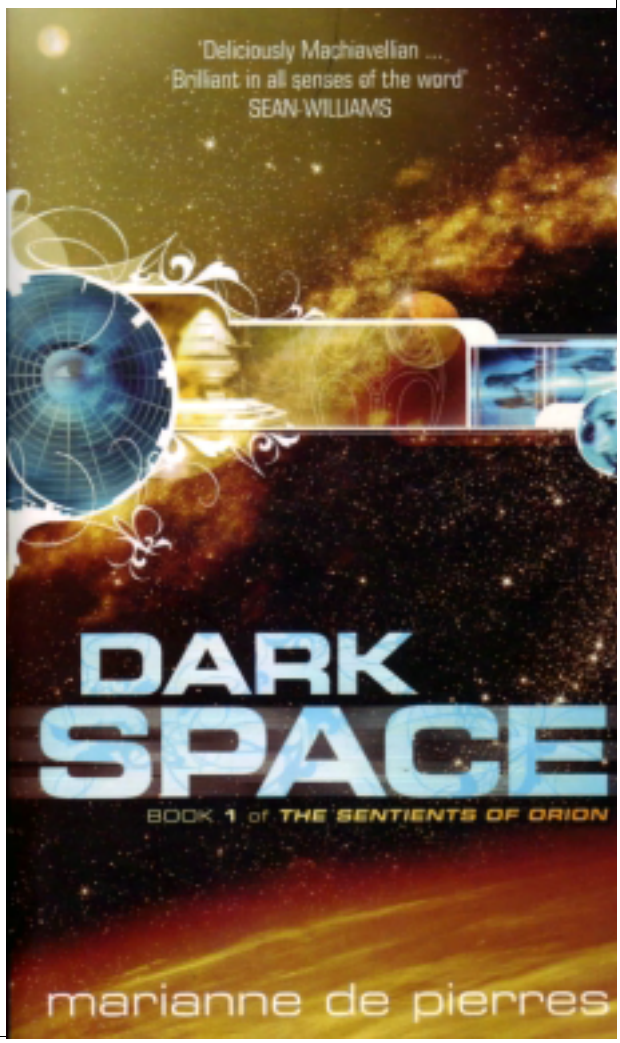
Walking the Tree has echoes of Ursula Le Guin, with its strong female characterisation, its sense of place and its messages about tolerance of differences and ultimately the environment. Lillah learns from her experiences, although not without significant traumas. One consistent belief amongst the diverse communities is that illness must be punished, often by death, a memory of the global disease. Lillah's protection of Morace,an allegedly sick young boy, provides another danger on her journey.

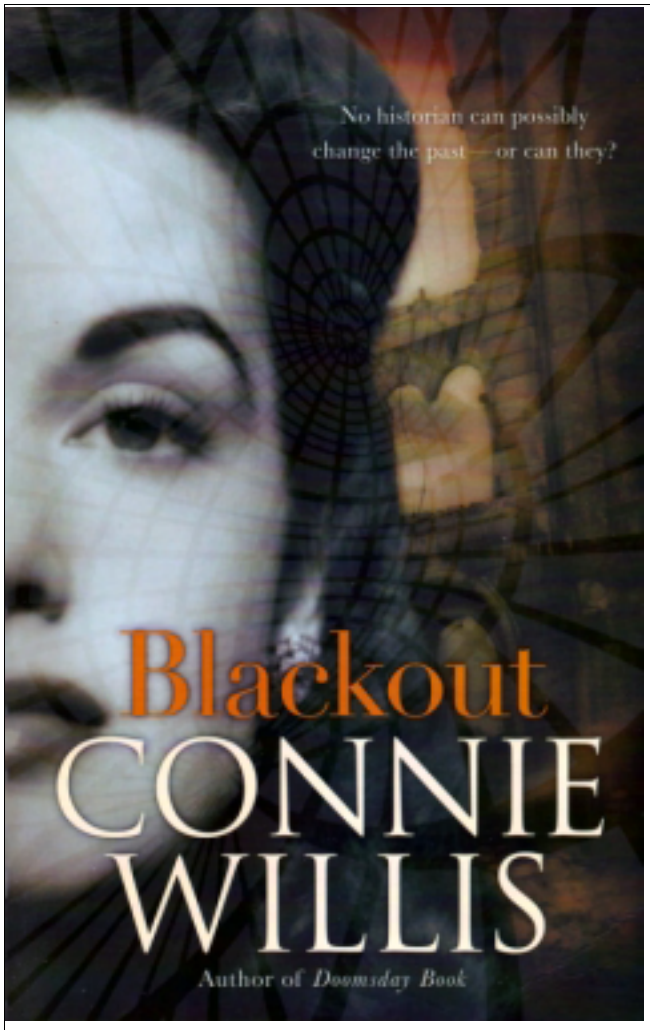
An added bonus to an intriguing novel comes with Warren's background notes, and a web link that gives access to an online novella that tells the story from the viewpoint of Morace. See: http://army.angryrobotbooks.com/?page_id=93

Dark Space
Marianne de Pierres (Orbit; 416 pp.; $19.95)

Dark Space, the first of the 'Sentients of Orion' quartet, is set largely on the tough feudal mining planet of Araldis, which Marianne de Pierres says is 'a direct extrapolation of my time living in the iron ore mining town, Paraburdoo'. *Dark Space* mixes various diverse characters and plots, but not always successfully in this first book. An alien intelligence is discovered in space. Many believe it to be God, while life on Araldis takes a decided turn for the worse with the invasion of the Saqr, voracious insectlike creatures. Mira Fedor, a strong-willed Italianate baronessa in Araldis' patriarchal society, had enough problems of gender inequality before the Saqr invasion, but she now faces her own destruction. De Pierres provides a strong feminist perspective in another ambitious Australian SF novel.







All That Follows
Jim Crace (Picador; 276 pp.; $32.99)

British writer Jim Crace was a guest at this year's Adelaide Writers' Week, where he outlined the background to his tenth novel ***All That Follows***. Crace says that, unlike his other novels, which include the award-winning *Continent* (1986), *Quarantine* (1998), and *Being Dead* (2001), *All That Follows* was a 'problematic' novel.

There are clearly elements of autobiography in the story of jaded jazz saxophonist Lennie Lessing. Crace, who said his 'natural voice is not a courageous one', recounted, to his large Adelaide audience, his working-class background in a free-thinking, yet puritanical, left-wing family. As a teenager, he joined protest groups, such as the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament. A deciding moment came when he joined a sit-down protest outside the Brize Norton RAF base. Crace said that he kept one foot on the road and one on the pavement, so that when the British police and American security forces arrested his colleagues, he moved his 'road foot onto the pavement' to join there the the 'other -isms, the rheumatisms'. While he regretted his lack of courage on that occasion, Crace wondered, 'is the boy on the pavement better than the man of action?'

Lennie Lessing similarly opts out of a political protest in *All That Follows*, which is set in an England of 2024, and flashes back to George Bush's Texas of 2006. Crace's world of 2024 is disappointingly not all that different from today's, but Crace's focus is on moral dilemmas rather than societal change. In 2006 Lennie is persuaded by activist Maxie Lermontov, the founder of Snipers Without Bullets, and Maxie's then partner Nadia, to participate in a protest against Laura Bush in Austin, Texas, which leads to Nadia's arrest and her daughter Lucy being born in prison. Lennie, however, prevaricates and slides back into the crowd.

Fast forward to 2024, where Lennie, semi-retired from his jazz career, has become a 'sofa socialist', increasingly alienated from his wife Francine, who is depressed since her teenage daughter Celandine ran away from home. Lennie's recognition of Maxie on the TV news in a local hostage siege leads to his reluctant involvement in a bizarre kidnap scheme. The now teenage Lucy wants Lennie to kidnap her in a tit-for-tat deal to get Maxie to release his hostages. Lennie's earlier relationship with Maxie also causes him to be suspected of being a terrorist. Ultimately Lennie muddles through to a sort of personal and family redemption: 'life's not perfect but it's better than it was'.

Crace said that he originally intended to call his book *Heroes* as 'the four heroes in the book are all women ... but since we don't have a female word which means heroes' he changed to the final title. One woman in the Adelaide audience shouted out, 'Why can't you call the book *Heroines*?', another example perhaps of Crace's avowed timidity. *All That Follows* exhibits some of Lennie's overall listlessness, and never really fires as a 'political book' exploring whether 'timid bourgeois liberalism is preferable to violent political action'.

Blackout
Connie Willis (Allen & Unwin; 491 pp.; $32.99)
Retromancer
Robert Rankin (Gollancz; 341 pp.; $32.99)
Time Riders
Alex Scarrow (Puffin; 425 pp.; $16.95)
Black Hills
Dan Simmons (Quercus; 487 pp.; $32.95)

Connie Willis began her time travel novels with the award-winning *Doomsday Book* (1992), in which research students from Oxford University travelled back to fourteenth-century England, only to be stranded in the middle of the Black Death. Willis's time travellers, who in theory cannot change history, are meant only to observe events, blending in with the local population.

Events go awry in ***Blackout***, which is set in England the early years of World War II, as one turns up in the wrong location — Dunkirk instead of Pearl Harbour — are injured, lose their 'retrieval points' and may in fact ultimately be changing history. Given the Heath Robinson elements of the Oxford laboratory settings, these mishaps are perhaps not surprising, while Willis's Oxford University of 2060 seems more like the 1960s in its attitudes and settings.

Willis has said in an interview that her time travellers 'suddenly find themselves stranded and they have no idea why. Have no idea what is going on in their own future. Don't know if something has malfunctioned in

the time travel itself ... They're coping with much of the same uncertainty as those in the Blitz.' New readers of Willis may not appreciate the slow pace of the historical scene settings and the factual inaccuracies in aspects of rationing, transport, and currency, but Willis has legions of fans, who have been waiting expectantly for her new time travel book. Even these fans, however, may be disappointed that *Blackout*, which ends on a cliffhanger, is only one half of the story, which was not be completed until *All Clear* was published later last year.

World War II, and a possible Nazi victory, also feature in Robert Rankin's ***Retromancer***, a direct sequel to *The Brightonomicon* (2005), which reaffirms British author Rankin as 'the father of far-fetched fiction'. His quirky, zany humour is exemplified in several trilogies, including The Trilogy That Dare Not Speak Its Name. *Retromancer* features one of Rankin's recurring main characters, Hugo Rune, whose young assistant Rizla wakes to discover SS officers on the streets of Brentford of 1967, Brentford being a regular Rankin location. The Wife's Legs cafe is serving Bratwurst rather than black pudding and sausages. Nazi Germany has won the Second World War and North America is a 'nuclear desert'. Hugo Rune has to go back in time to war-torn London, to solve 12 'cosmic conundra', in order to return the world to normal. Rankin humorously sets the world to rights, amidst a plethora of puns, 'gastronomic excesses', and evil characters, notably Count Otto Von Black.

British author Alex Scarrow looks for direct reader involvement at the TimeRider website (www.time-riders.co.uk), as he begins a young adult nine-part series ***TimeRiders***, which plays fast and loose with time travel paradoxes. His three young main characters are plucked from impending deaths in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in order to became 'time agents', recruited 'by an agency that no one knows exists, with only one purpose — to fix broken history'.

From a base within a 'time bubble' under a bridge in New York just before 9/11, their main task in the first book is to prevent a physicist from the future alerting Adolf Hitler to the dangers of invading Russia, so that Hitler can win World War II. Scarrow's teenagers seem to differ little, even though they are plucked from environments a century apart, but given Scarrow's fast-paced narrative scenarios, this will not have an impact on his intended readership. Nonetheless, Scarrow says, 'I didn't want to write frivolous books for kids. If you get them to wake up to reality, toughen them up, it may help prepare them for what might lie ahead.'

Dan Simmons is a prolific American author, whose 27 books could never be called frivolous or conventional. Simmons has recentlly admitted that his fictional versatility has 'definitely been a hindrance' in his career. His novels have spanned many genres, including science fiction and crime, while his last two books, *The Terror* and *Drood*, covered respectively the lost 1845 Franklin Expedition to find the Northwest Passage and horrors in Dickensian London.

Black Hills begins in 1876 when a young Sioux Indian boy, Paha Sapa, whose name means Black Hills, touches the dying General Custer at Little Big Horn and collects Custer's ghost for the rest of his life. Black Hills jumps in time from the distant past to the future, but largely focuses on Sapa's interactions in 1876 and 1936, when, as a much older man, he is working on the Mount Rushmore sculptures, which he hopes to destroy in an act of revenge.

Paha Sapa is a kind of time fulcrum, bringing together real figures such as Custer's wife, Crazy Horse, President Coolidge, and Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum. Simmons places Sapa's interactions within a framework of 'vision quests', reflecting that cultural and environmental survival depends on collective responsibility and action. Black Hills certainly adds to the imaginative corpus of Simmons's writing, as well as the difficulties of establishing the time and place of his literary reputation.

All Clear
Connie Willis (Allen & Unwin; 641 pp.; $32.99)

Connie Willis' time-travel sequence, set in World War II England, which began with *Black Out*, is now completed in ***All Clear***. But, as Willis says, 'They're not two books, or a book and a sequel ... They're one book', which means reading both books is essential. In addition, Willis has extra material on her website http://www.sftv.org/cw/. *All Clear* continues to follow the 2060 time travellers from Oxford, who are stranded in England, having missed their jump portal. Willis' continuing World War II historical inaccuracies, as well as an excess of conversation over action, make this one of her weakest time travel novels to date.

The Left Hand of Darkness
Ursula K. Le Guin (Orbit; 275 pp.; $29.99)

Ursula Le Guin's multi-award-winning novel ***The Left Hand of Darkness***, first published in 1969, is considered by many to be her best work. Le Guin provides a new introduction to this 40th anniversary hardback edition, supplemented by her notes and sketch maps. The book, set on the icy isolated planet Gethen/Winter, recounts the impact of an interplanetary envoy on the androgynous inhabitants. Le Guin questions the distinction between male and female and 'how much of the behaviour supposed to be the result of our gender is really a result of what our society expects of our gender'. A classic, groundbreaking SF novel.

Terminal World
Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz; 487 pp.; $32.99)

British author Alastair Reynolds notes that 'in real life, technological development doesn't stand still', but in ***Terminal World*** it certainly does for the different world zones inhabiting Spearpoint, a huge spire in a far future Earth. Passage is difficult between zones, which differ greatly, for example, from nanotechnology to steam-powered societies. Reynolds's main character Quillon, a winged posthuman, or 'angel', from the Celestial Levels, has been adapted to function on lower levels. His mission, however, goes awry, and his flight into many dangers ultimately leads to a decision on the fate of Spearpoint itself. *Terminal World* is an enjoyable and

original steampunk romp.

Ultimatum
Matthew Glass (Atlantic Books; 433 pp.; $24.95)
Ark
Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; 457pp.; $32.99)
Freedom
Daniel Suarez (Quercus; 407 pp.; $32.95)
Makers
Cory Doctorow (Harper; 416 pp.; $32.990)
Wake
Robert J. Sawyer (Gollancz; 360 pp.; $32.99)

Ultimatum is the debut novel of Matthew Glass, the pseudonym of an Australian-born doctor living in Britain. *Ultimatum* is set in 2032, when Joe Benton, the newly elected American president, learns that the full impact of climate change has been hidden from the American public, even though radical relocation plans have already been drawn up for Florida and Southern California.

Realising that environmental devastation is at 'the tipping point', Benton engages in secret negotiations with China, still the other major global polluter. Benton has to juggle informing the American public of the increasing dangers without causing panic and allaying Chinese fears that his radical carbon plan does not mask other motivations. Glass's novel, which was written pre-Copenhagen, effectively extrapolates the US–China tensions there. Most of *Ultimatum* is taken up with geopolitical intrigue and diplomatic brinkmanship, particularly in the White House and with the Chinese leadership, rather than climate change detail. *Ultimatum* is sobering in its conclusion. Let's hope some elements of this particular prediction are not prophetic.

Stephen Baxter imagined an even more dramatic climate change future in *Flood* (2008), with dramatically rising sea waters resulting in only a small proportion of the world's population surviving. ***Ark*** overlaps the timeframe of *Flood*, as Baxter describes the decades-long attempt to build a starship to enable a small number of the human race to survive. Baxter focuses, like Glass, less on the science and more on the political and social frameworks in the construction of the space 'ark', the selection of the necessarily young crew, their interaction on the long journey, and their final fate. Baxter places humanity in an unrelenting universe with his final cold logical message, that we must change or perish.

Daniel Suarez's concerns in ***Freedom***, the sequel to his bestselling first novel *Daemon*, relate to the misuse of power by corporate America and government bureaucracies. Suarez has said, 'I'm not anti-corporate. I'm against unanswerable concentrations of power, whether that be government or private industry or religious figures — anybody who is not accountable to the larger social climate or society for the power they wield, that concerns me.'

The novels document the dramatic impact of a software 'Daemon' after it is released on to the net after the death of its creator, who wants to stimulate a new world order, 'a chance to start over'. A Wall Street collapse and record high unemployment in the US provide a realistic contemporary background. The Daemon's influence is supported by techo-acolytes forming the utopian 'Darknet'. *Freedom* begins with the dramatic removal of corporate leaders, but distinctions between good and evil are significantly blurred. Government agencies combining in Operation Exorcist to eradicate Darknet are just as ruthless in the power struggles. Darknet's offer of medical care, retirement benefits, green industries, and debt relief, contrasted with corporate greed, will resonate with many in Suarez' readership circle.

Canadian author and tech blogger Cory Doctorow echoes some of these themes in ***Makers***. Doctorow has said that *Makers* is about 'people who hack hardware, business-models, and living arrangements to discover ways of staying alive and happy even when the economy is falling down the toilet'. Doctorow's usual themes of the dangers of the surveillance society, the need for open access to information and the issues relating to post-scarcity economics all come to the fore, with the situation placed against the backdrop of the decline of America.

Doctorow's small group of software and hardware innovators, the 'shockwave riders' of creativity, attempt to reinvent the American economy. Their hi-tech community startups constitute the 'New Work', a sort of 1930s New Deal for the digital era. Unfortunately, the plot runs out of steam, and Doctorow's characterisation has always been weak compared to his big ideas.

Doctorow, to his credit, follows his open concepts in practice. *Makers*, as with his previous novels, is available free on the net through a Creative Commons download.

Another Canadian author, Robert J. Sawyer, achieved considerable success with his novel *Flashforward*, the basis of the recent TV series. In ***Wake***, the first volume of a trilogy, young blind mathematical prodigy Caitlin Decter is the trial for a radical new Japanese eyePod implant. The initial experiment is not successful, but does provide the catalyst to link Caitlin to a slowly emerging conscious web and the development of a collective intelligence. Sawyer, unlike Doctorow, fashions believable characters, juxtaposing Caitlin's teenage angst, her mother and father's relationship, and the University of Tokyo's Dr Kuroda, as he struggles between continuing his scientific experiment and the need for commercial spin-offs. *Wake* certainly whets the appetite for the next two volumes, and Caitlin's role as the link between humanity and the 'Webmind'.

The Evolutionary Void
Peter Hamilton (Macmillan; 726 pp.; $34.99)

The Evolutionary Void concludes Hamilton's massive *Void* trilogy, but again new readers will need to refer to previous volumes, and perhaps even Hamilton's earlier 'Commonwealth Saga', to see the full picture. Hamilton's far future Commonwealth is spread across hundreds of worlds, with many forms and variants of human existence. It may be destroyed, however, if millions of the 'Living Dream' cult movement enter the galactic 'Void', believing it to be a heavenly paradise. In an SF blockbuster, Hamilton links epic space opera to hard science and reflections on evolution and change.

Xeelee: An Omnibus

Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; 893 pp.; $35.00)

The Xeelee Omnibus is a welcome compilation of *Raft*, *Timelike Infinity*, *Flux*, and *Ring* (1991–94), the quartet that established Stephen Baxter's SF reputation. Baxter says these 'earlier Xeelee books were really about the beginning and end of the story of that universe. We move out from the planet, come in contact with the Xeelee and other species, and then fast-forward to the end, where we've been through a million-year war with the Xeelee and we're defeated.' Baxter's landmark cosmological SF series examines the future of humanity through the morality of wars and thus survival in an unrelenting universe.

Plan for Chaos

John Wyndham; edited by David Ketterer and Andy Sawyer (Liverpool University Press; 256 pp.; $149.95; available from DA Information Services, Melbourne)

The Chrysalids

John Wyndham (Penguin; 187 pp.; $9.95)

John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris (1903–1969) used the pen name John Wyndham for his 1950s classic novels *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), *The Chrysalids* (1955) and *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), which have remained in print ever since. ***The Chrysalids*** has now been reissued as part of the excellent value Fifty New Popular Penguins collection, while ***Plan for Chaos*** is a newly discovered unpublished Wyndham novel.

The Chrysalids comes with a new introduction by M. John Harrison, the noted British science fiction writer. Set in a post-apocalyptic future, *The Chrysalids*, according to Harrison, 'is driven by Atomic Age terror of accidental genetic mutation'. While it's clearly a novel of the 1950s, when 'molecular biologists were unwinding the DNA spiral; the new science of radio astronomy had filled the sky with invisible objects; quantum physicists were able to reveal that God does, after all, play dice with the universe', these themes resonate even more today.

In 1997, the University of Liverpool, with UK Heritage Lottery Funds, acquired the Harris manuscript archive, among which Professor David Ketterer and Andy Sawyer found *Plan for Chaos*, 'a ground-breaking cloned Nazi thriller', written simultaneously with *The Day of the Triffids*. According to the editors 'before May 1998, almost no-one was aware of the existence of *Plan for Chaos*, which is publicised on the title page as the 'Prequel to *The Day of the Triffids*'. In one sense this is misleading, as it is not a direct precursor in narrative terms, although it certainly is in terms of technological links and especially genetic change.

Ketterer writes, in his long introduction to *Plan for Chaos*, that 'the two novels shadow or mirror one another thematically. There are no Nazis in *Triffids* but genetic experimentation is the causal factor in both narratives. More importantly, however, *Plan for Chaos* throws into relief a thematic aspect of the *Triffids* that has largely escaped notice — fear of the female'.

Brian Aldiss once termed Wyndham's books 'novels of cosy catastrophe', but recent commentators, such as Harrison and Ketterer, have substantially revised this impression, seeing Wyndham as a far more 'subversive' novelist. These new interpretations, including Ketterer's analysis of 'Wyndham's respect for strong females (and anxiety about female sexuality) are enough to give his major works — particularly the series of novels initiated by *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) — a revisionary cast'. *Plan for Chaos* now turns out to be Wyndham's third novel featuring cousins in love, according to Ketterer, who places this plotline within a detailed analysis of Wyndham's life and loves, both real and thwarted.

Ketterer argues that *Plan for Chaos* 'is at least as original as *Triffids* if not more so. Perhaps it was too far ahead of its time'. Wyndham probably started writing *Plan for Chaos*, which is set sometime in the 1970s, in early 1948. The novel begins in America, but Wyndham's America never rings true. Wyndham never visited America, and the dialogue seems to come from B movies. Ketterer says the novel was initially rejected in 1951 because American 'publishers just didn't find Wyndham's version of America convincing'.

Plan for Chaos begins as a sort of hardboiled crime thriller as Wyndham's narrator–protaganist, photographer Johnny Farthing, of English stock but Scandinavian ancestry, stumbles across the mysterious deaths of individuals who closely resemble himself and his cousin Freda. The plot takes off, after some longeurs, when Johnny and Freda are taken to a remote Indo-China sanctuary where Nazi scientists, who survived World War II, have cloned replicas of Johnny and Freda as part of their attempt to reconquer the world. Wyndham's use of cloning predates that in Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil*, while his Nazi use of satellite technology shows that he had assimilated Arthur C. Clarke's 1945 writings on the topic.

An unexpected feature of *Plan for Chaos* is the setting of its conclusion, which turns out to be Australia, identified by phrases such as 'the bint's a yank but this one sounds like a pommy to me' and 'my cobber here fell for the furphy'. The last words of the novel certainly provide an intriguing scenario for the repopulation of the Australia of the 1950s. While the American and Australian dialogue jars at the beginning and end of the novel, readers should overlook this aspect, as the core of *Plan for Chaos* is a work of considerable imagination.

Plan for Chaos was certainly deserving of contemporary publication, although the pricing policy of Liverpool University Press almost certainly ensures that its current publication reach is limited. While LUP are to be commended for publishing *Plan for Chaos*, the price of £65 in the UK and $149.95 in Australia places it out of the range of most Wyndham fans. Clearly LUP are intending to recoup costs via a small highly priced print run sold to a number of larger and specialist libraries. One wonders whether a paperback priced at $29.95 would have not been a better commercial decision in terms of both sales and financial return, as well as allowing Wyndham fans and others to get heir hands on an intriguing and prescient, if flawed, 'new' novel by one of the SF greats of the twentieth century.

Horror, dark fantasy, and gothic

Blockade Billy
Stephen King (Hodder; 132 pp.; $24.99)

Stephen King's books usually come in doorstop format, so it is a surprise to see that his latest book, ***Blockade Billy***, is a novella paired with a short story, 'Morality'. *Blockade Billy* builds on King's long-term affection for baseball in general, and the Boston Red Sox in particular. King says, 'I love old-school baseball, and I also love the way people who've spent a lifetime in the game talk about it. I tried to combine those things in a story of suspense.'

King takes the reader back to the late 1950s, in a story told to 'Mr King' by an old baseball professional living in a nursing home: a 'zombie hotel'. George 'Granny' Grantham tells the story of William Blakely, an unknown small town baseball player, who stands in spectacularly for the New Jersey Titans when two regular catchers suddenly drop out. But who is William? Why does he wear a plaster perpetually on his finger and why are all the games in which he played now deleted from all baseball records?

King, as ever, weaves a convincing story with a dark underside, a theme taken up also in the much shorter 'Morality', which turns on the eternal question: what would you do for money? A young couple, Chad and Nora, are struggling financially. Chad is an occasional relief teacher and would-be writer. Nora is a nurse offered $200,000 by one of her patients to carry out a minor but shocking assault — but at what cost? King probes the nature of morality and what constitutes right and wrong. King never errs in his ability to catch the reader's attention.

Harbour
John Ajvide Lindqvist (Text; 499 pp.; $32.95)
Dark Matter
Michelle Paver (Orion; 243 pp.; $26.99)

John Ajvide Lindqvist's 2004 novel *Let The Right One* has been an international bestseller, translated into 28 languages, and adapted into a multi-award-winning Swedish film. The American film version of the novel, titled *Let Me In,* has recently been released. Lindqvist says that he is 'very happy' with the American take, 'It's more of a horror movie than the Swedish one. All of the things designed to scare you are more elaborate. Which I love, because I am a horror writer and I want to scare ... it's in-your-face, but in a very good way!'

Lindqvist believes there's 'an immense amount of rubbish' written on vampires. His novel, while it has a definite vampiric element, concentrates rather on adolescent relationships in a bleak Stockholm suburb. Lindqvist has said, 'If a child was a vampire, having to kill other people and drink the blood in order to survive, what would existence be for this child? It would just be a lonely, loathsome, terrible existence.'

Harbour, also to be filmed, builds up its horror slowly, after the opening, when a young couple's six-year-old daughter Maja mysteriously disappears on the snowbound Swedish lighthouse island of Gåvasten. Lindqvist says he used to fish with his father, 'And then he drowned ... I think this was one of my starting-points for writing horror ... I don't really have to excuse myself for writing about terrible things.' The sea becomes an elemental evil force in *Harbour.*

Two years after Maja's disappearance, her father, Anders, returns to the neighbouring island of Domarö following the breakdown of his marriage. Trying to overcome his alcohol addiction, he revisits the failed police investigation, but the small local community is unresponsive. Lindqvist says, 'Nobody can move to a small community of any kind without getting this feeling — that everybody is hiding something. I'm exploiting that feeling to the extreme.' What dark secret is it harbouring?

Lindqvist says, 'This is the story where I have very carefully examined my own fear of my child disappearing.' Anders comes to believe that Maja is trying to communicate with him, and the discovery of her abandoned snow suit accelerates his fears and hopes. Lindqvist ranges back and forth over time as he slowly reveals the small community's deadly pact with the sea. *Harbour* effectively mixes the societal tensions found in Scandinavian crime with the supernatural horror of Stephen King.

Michelle Paver provides a shorter and more concentrated blast of chilly horror. Paver's children's series *The Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* has sold over two million copies worldwide and was instrumental in her recently winning the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize, one of Britain's most prestigious writing awards. ***Dark Matter*** is a novel for adults but is accessible to a young adult readership. It's 1937, and 28-year-old Jack Miller is in a deadend clerk's job in London. As the Depression has prevented him from pursuing a research career in physics, he jumps at the chance to join a small expedition to the Arctic as a radio operator. Jack, an introverted figure, is the odd man out in the five-man expedition, being both poor and non-Oxbridge.

Paver says in an appendix that she modelled the journey (not the outcomes) on the Oxford University Arctic Expedition to northern Spitsbergen of 1935–36. In fact, Paver's characters almost fall out of a precursor to that fullscale Oxford Arctic survey. Paula Burns recounts in *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead* how Waugh joined a small group, including Hugh Lygon, on that expedition which Waugh later described as 'hell — a fiasco very narrowly rescued from disaster ... the first time I ever despaired of my life'.

In Paver's expedition, troubles begin early, as one of the five drops out before the expedition sets out. Another falls and breaks his leg on the ship, while Jack is left alone on the forbidding Gruhuken island base after illness forces the other two men back to relative civilisation. It's clear that the Gruhuken base, like Domarö has a dark past, initially revealed when the Norwegian ship's captain is reluctant to stay longer than

is necessary to unload supplies.

As the Arctic dark falls, Jack's diary records a growing apprehension that there is something or someone out there in the dark. Paver's ability to conjure up realistic natural settings was fully exemplified in the *Chronicles*, and is again well to the fore in *Dark Matter*. The reader empathises with Jack, who has to overcome not only class hurdles, physical deprivation, and the fear that his isolation will trigger a psychological breakdown. Are Jack's fears of a *genhanger*, 'the one who walks again', real or imagined?

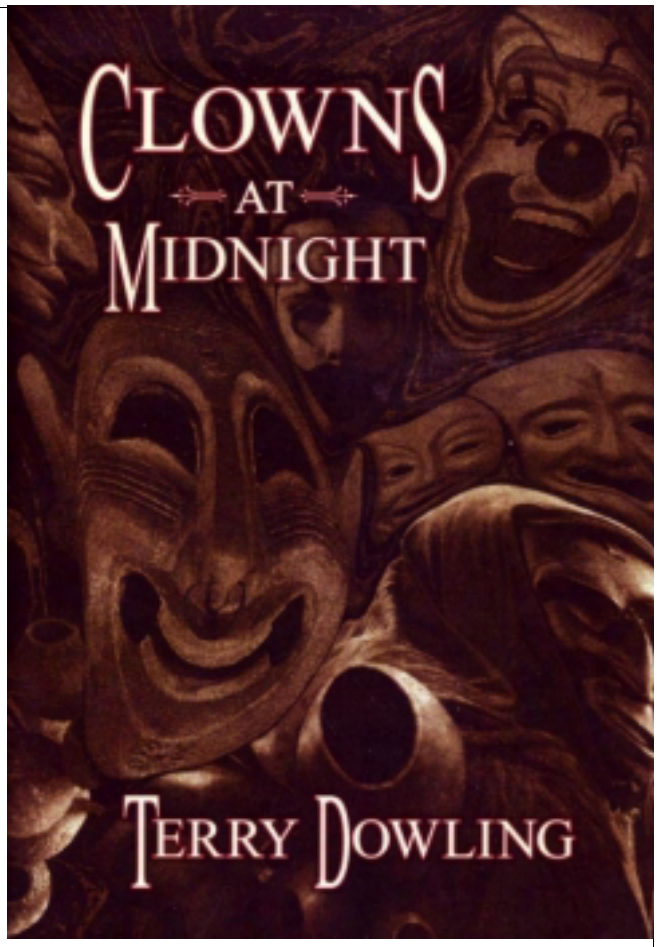
Paver concludes in her Appendix that many who have travelled in the Arctic, and walked there alone, will get the 'uneasy sense that you're being watched; when your mind creates images you would rather not confront. It's a feeling I've experienced many times. It's what made me write *Dark Matter*'. Paver's ability to mix fact and fiction results in an enthralling read.

Clowns at Midnight
Terry Dowling (PS Publishing; 260 pp.; £20)

Following the breakdown of a long-term relationship, crime novelist David Leeton retreats to remote New South Wales, where he finds himself accepted into the local community and befriended by urbane Sardinian farmer Carlo Risi, an expert on European folklore and ancient religions. Leeton is a coulrophobe: he has a terrible phobia about clowns and related images. Over the course of weeks, eerie happenings disturb his peace of mind: a masked figure from Sardinian folklore lurks in the bush, and a blood-covered sewing dummy appears in his attic. Dowling controls the mystery with subtle sleight of hand: is narrator Leeton losing his mind, or is the outback community complicit in some arcane ritual beyond his understanding? With its acute observations of a parched landscape, and its blending of the everyday and the forces of myth, ***Clowns at Midnight*** is an exceptional work that bears comparison to John Fowles's *The Magus*.

The Silent Land
Graham Joyce (Gollancz; 248 pp.; $49.95)

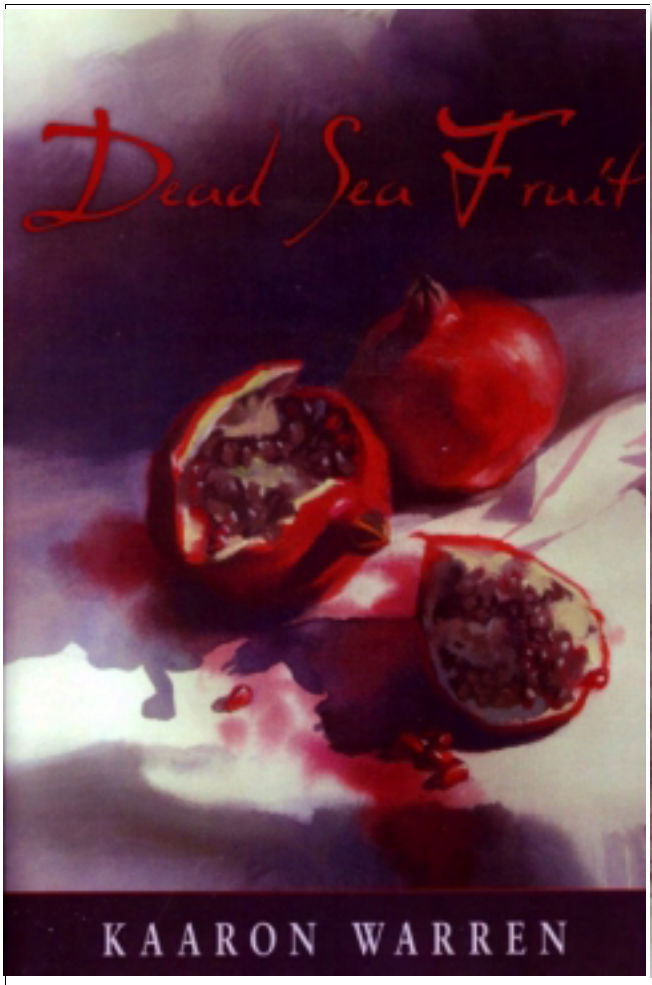
British author Graham Joyce is known for the genre diversity in his eighteen books to date. Joyce has said of ***The Silent Land***, 'It's also a milestone because for many years I have wanted to write something that is a ghost story and a love story at the same time ... it might very well be my best book to date, but whether it is or not readers will decide.' *The Silent Land,* whose title comes from Christina Rossetti's famous poem 'Remember', begins as Jake and Zoe Bennett, celebrating their ten-year marriage with a skiing holiday in the French Pyrenees, narrowly avoid being submerged in an avalanche. Returning to their hotel they find it and the village deserted. There are echoes here of John Christopher's 1964 classic novel, *The Possessors,* in which a group of British tourists are trapped by an avalanche in the Swiss Alps and something malevolent stirs. Joyce is less explicit as to physical horror, concentrating instead on the couple's growing fears and their emotional state, as they realise they are trapped, with all escape routes

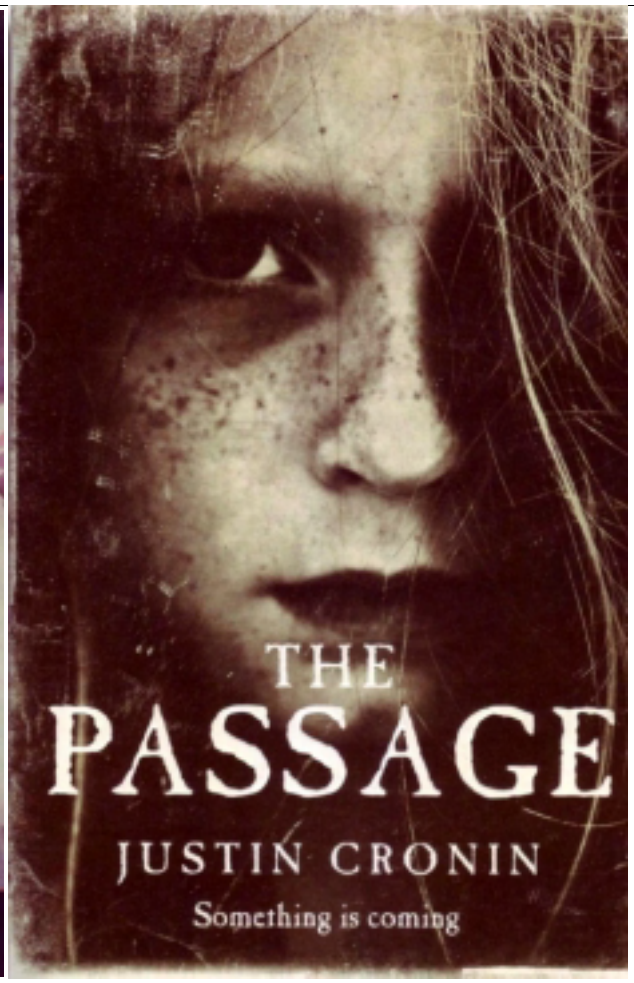


leading them back to the ski village. Joyce convincingly depicts the traumas of an essentially decent couple in an increasingly claustrophobic and worrying situation. Are half glimpsed creatures real, or simply hallucination, and perhaps they died in the avalanche after all? But, as Zoe reflects, 'If this really were death, or some version of an after-life, then why should it not be populated?' Joyce ratchets up the tension while deepening our appreciation of Jake and Zoe's relationship. Ultimately their love for each other prevails, reflected in a sobering, realistic, and moving denouement. *The Silent Land* says much on the nature of love, and ultimately death, and may indeed be Joyce's best book to date. One can see why it has been optioned for filming. The only downsides to *The Silent Land* are the rather washed-out cover art and the high Australian hardback price.

Scary Kisses
edited by Liz Grzyb (Ticonderoga; 208 pp.; $25)

Scary Kisses falls below the usual Ticonderoga high standards, partly because the stories by 14 authors vary in quality, and partly because many, such as Canberra author Nicole Murphy's 'The Anstruther Woman', need greater length to develop plot and character. Murphy's imagined closed community of Barrengarry, whose farm stock is threatened by outsize dogs, and is the backdrop for a woman's developing relationships, deserved more space in that context. Angela Slatter and L. L. Hannett, with 'The February Dragon', benefit from a greater length, as a young girl, a hybrid of dragon and human, struggles to find her true home in a misogynistic and brutal society. *Scary Kisses*' title, and a blurb that promises





'paranormal romance with bite', seem at odds with the content of a number of the stories.

Dead Sea Fruit
Kaaron Warren (Ticonderoga; 422 pp.; $35)

Ticonderoga Publications is an excellent small Western Australian publishing house. ***Dead Sea Fruit*** collects 27 stories from award-winning Canberra author Kaaron Warren, ranging from already critically acclaimed pieces, such as 'The Grinding House' and 'Fresh Young Widow', to new stories, such as 'Sins of the Ancestors' and 'The Coral Gatherer'. American writer Lucius Shepard deftly introduces Warren's dark unsettling stories, with their 'bleak dream logic', while Warren herself provides very useful background to each story in her Afterword. Warren and Margo Lanagan are our two best dark fantasy writers, who deserve to be sought out by mainstream readers.

On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears
Stephen T. Asma
(Oxford University Press; 351 pp.; $39.95)
The Passage
Justin Cronin (Orion; 766 pp.; $35)
Dracula's Guest: A Connoisseur's Collection of Victorian Vampire Stories
edited by Michael Sims
(Bloomsbury; 467 pp.; $39.95)
Dead in the Family
Charlaine Harris (Gollancz; 311 pp.; $32.95)

The contemporary world seems to be awash with monsters, both fictional and factional. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair restated earlier this year his view that 'Saddam Hussein was a monster'. Stephen Asma, Professor of Philosophy at Columbia College in Chicago, in his excellent analysis ***On Monsters***, quotes Nietzsche: 'He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster.'

Asma reflects that he hasn't been able to come up with a single uniform definition of 'monster', because he doesn't think there is one. Asma notes that, as the word 'monster' derives from the Latin meaning 'to warn', our view of what is a monster has changed historically as our perceptions of fear have changed. Asma thus highlights, for example, the transformation from Frankenstein to Freud, when the narrative turned 'from anxieties about external monsters to anxieties about inner monsters'.

Asma believes there has been a shift in the way we think about monsters; now 'we think of them as churned out by abstract alienating systems'. Within the context of the latter are to be found fundamentalist religions, extreme political ideologies, and even science itself in areas such as artificial intelligence and genetic engineering. How we handle monsters, Asma ultimately reflects, is 'how we handle uncertainty, ambiguity, insecurity'.

Asma ranges, in five sections, from 'ancient monsters' through 'scientific monsters', culminating in twentieth-century racists, torturers, and serial killers. The twentieth century, Asma notes, was one characterised by racial and

political 'monsterising', such as by the Nazis or Pol Pot. Asma concludes with a section on 'future monsters', such as robots, mutants, and posthuman cyborgs.

No wonder novels on the apocalypse and doom proliferate. Peter Y. Paik, in ***From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*** (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), stresses how the 'dark side' of science fiction forces us to address the failings and limitations of human society and behaviour.

Cue Justin Cronin, with his extremely readable dystopian blockbuster ***The Passage***. Ballantine Books paid US $3 million before the book was even completed, while Ridley Scott has paid US $1.5 million for the film rights. Commentators on Cronin's success have noted the narrative precursors of Stephen King's *The Stand*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*. Cronin has, however, cited Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* as a key inspiration, with its message of 'man's sudden ability to eradicate himself in a few hours'.

In *The Passage*, a secret US military experiment in 2017 goes horribly wrong, resulting in most of the US population dying from a viral plague or being killed by transformed superhuman malevolent 'virals'. Cronin never specifically refers to them as vampires, giving them nicknames such as 'Smokes', 'Jumpers', and 'Dracs'. In a link to Asma, Cronin says 'they're the monsters that make you afraid, they draw on traditional vampire details, although often reversed. They're not your teenage daughter's vampires, they're not romantic figures. They're purely tragic figures and they are enormously lethal and scary.'

Cronin moves forward nearly 100 years, to a small, heavily fortified settlement in California, permanently lit at night to keep out virals, although the power is starting to run down. A surprise visitor, a young teenager, Amy, is to be the key, if often silent, figure in the story. Amy, like the virals, is also ageless, but unlike them, she is on the side of humanity. Amy's arrival triggers a dangerous trek back to the original remote Colorado military laboratory and hope of a final solution.

Cronin leaps back and forth in time, which is dated AV ('After Viral'), through the use of various narrative devices such as diaries, newspaper articles, and conference proceedings such as the 'Third Global Conference on the North American Quarantine Period' at the University of New South Wales, Indo-Australian Republic, April 16–21, 1003 AV. Readers, however, won't know how that stage was reached until the eventual trilogy is completed. Cronin says, 'In each [book], you go back to Year Zero, for some period of time, to see something that you either glanced at or did not see the first time, something you did not know was as important as it was, that resets the terms for the ongoing story of my main cast of characters'.

Michael Sims's sumptuous hardback ***Dracula's Guest*** is a collection of more traditional vampire fiction, with some nonfiction. Sims argues in his lengthy introduction that 'the vampire story as we know it was born in the early nineteenth century, as the wicked love child of rural folklore and urban decadence. But ... Byron and Polidori and company were refining the raw ore of peasant superstition. And the peasant brain had simply been doing what the human brain does best: sorting information into explanatory narratives'. A linkback to Asma once more, as Sims covers the historical interpretations of death and how the undead might have come into existence: 'If your soul didn't sleep peacefully in the arms of the Lord, what might it be up to?'

While subtitled *Victorian Vampire Stories*, the stories actually range back into the late eighteenth century and forward into the early twentieth century. Classic stories include John Polidori's 'The Vampyre', M. R. James's 'Count Magnus', and Aleksei Tolstoy's 'The Family of the Vourdalak'. The collection ends with Bram Stoker's 'Dracula's Guest', an early unpublished draft from his classic novel.

The third season of the HBO success *True Blood* is currently showing on the Showcase channel, while more than 500,000 copies of Charlaine Harris's 'Sookie Stackhouse' series have been sold in Australia and New Zealand to date. The covers of the entire book series, of which ***Dead in the Family*** is the tenth, have been repackaged to tie in with the TV series.

In *Dead in the Family*, Sookie faces many 'family' problems and dangers and, as a result, Harris's portrayal of Sookie continues to become much darker. Not least of Sookie's problems is that her vampire boyfriend Eric is being threatened by his 'maker', the Roman Appius Livius Ocella and his deadly young vampire companion, Alexei Romanov, a member of the massacred Russian royal family. Eric's loyalties are dramatically torn, as his and Sookie's lives are threatened. Harris effectively places often monstrous acts within contemporary mores by a clever use of language and character.

A New Heritage Of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema
David Pirie (I. B. Tauris; 254 pp.; $48)
Frankenstein. Character Studies
David Higgins (Continuum; 106 pp.; $35)
Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft
(Gollancz; 882 pp.; $32.99)
The Servants
M. M. Smith (HarperCollins; 233 pp.; $29.95)
The Ninth Circle
Alex Bell (Gollancz; 264 pp.; $32.99)

David Pirie's critically acclaimed *A Heritage of Horror*, which famously proclaimed British horror films as 'the only staple cinematic myth which Britain can properly claim as its own', has been out of print for over thirty years. Now, with ***A New Heritage of Horror*** Pirie has extensively revised and updated his original book.

Pirie, an acclaimed screenwriter and critic, as well as being a former film editor of *Time Out*, provides a comprehensive overview of UK horror cinema into the twenty-first century, placing his analyses squarely within historical and contemporary gothic traditions. In 'The Characteristics Of English Gothic Literature', Pirie identifies Hammer's key films 'within an anti-realist agenda'. Classic Hammer films of the twentieth century are detailed, but Pirie also examines the latest horror boom, via films such as *28 Days Later*.

Pirie has a chapter on the British cinematic approaches to Frankenstein. David Higgins' ***Frankenstein*** is one of a series of studies tht aim 'to promote sophisti-

cated literary analysis through the concept of character'. *Frankenstein* is clearly intended for the student market, with Higgins, lecturer in English Literature at the University of Leeds, providing an accessible readable framework to a focused character analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Higgins overviews the historical and literary contexts, while chapters analyse in detail key characters, such as Walton, Frankenstein and the Creature.

Pirie acknowledges in his book the re-emergence of the 'great English horror myths'. One of the great creators of horror myth is H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937), a controversial figure in his own time and even more since then. The *H. P. Lovecraft* book in the Library of America classics series has sold 11,860 copies to 2008, placing Lovecraft between Jack Kerouac and Edmund Wilson, two eminent figures of the American literary pantheon.

The huge Gollancz edition, ***Necronomicon***, cannot even encompass all of Lovecraft's works, but does include many of his famous stories, such as 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth', 'The Mountains of Madness', and 'The Call of Cthulhu'. Editor Stephen Jones' 50-page afterword on Lovecraft profits from his access to the archives of Arkham House and Lovecraft's estate. While Lovecraft's stories are undoubtedly powerful, and have influenced many horror writers from Stephen King to Ramsey Campbell, they do have significant racist and misogynistic elements, which may have an impact on new readers. The size of the collection seems, however, intended mainly for Lovecraft fans and libraries.

International Horror Guild Award-winner Michael Marshall Smith's ***The Servants*** is a poignant story about an eleven-year- old boy coming to terms with his parents' divorce, his mother's cancer, and having to move from London to Brighton away from his friends. Mark and his mother have moved into his new stepfather's rambling dilapidated Victorian house, where Mark meets an elderly lady in the basement flat. Here he learns of the house's grander days, when servants would unobtrusively maintain the house like unseen ghosts.

As Mark explores the decaying basement rooms and kitchen, he learns that the servants haven't left at all, and they too are not happy! Mark's resolution of the past gradually intertwines with the present through the medium of the house. While *The Servants* is on one level a ghost story, it is also a story about the resolution of personal problems. Smith has said that writing the book was partly 'my reaction to the death of my mother. So probably the main theme is the love that exists between the generations — passing in both directions — and the scariness of its intensity'. *The Servants*, with its unexpected, yet decidedly uplifting conclusion, will again put Smith in the running for genre awards.

The same, unfortunately, cannot be said for young British author Alex Bell in her debut novel ***The Ninth Circle***. The lack of originality starts with its Bourne-like opening where a man, Gabriel Antaeus, wakes up injured in a Budapest flat with a large amount of money and total amnesia, continues with a *Rosemary's Baby* subplot, and ends with a battle between angels and demons. Bell has said in an interview, 'I love the magical side of the story because it's much more unpredictable. It's the story of a man trying to find out who he is, and how he gets caught up in the supernatural events that he doesn't understand.' *The Ninth Circle* goes around in too many fictional circles in an uneasy blend of genres. Milton did it far better.

The Twilight Watch
Sergei Lukyanenko (Heinemann; 440 pp.; $32.95)

The Twilight Watch is Russian author Sergei Lukyanenko's third volume in his bestselling 'Watch' quartet. The series is set in post-Soviet Russia, where 'Others', humans who possess supernatural powers, uneasily compete to 'balance' Earth's history. The Others can assume a variety of forms, such as vampires and werewolves, and divide into either 'Light' or 'Dark' factions, although these terms do not simply equate to good and evil. The lurid book cover, and an absurd promo link to J. K. Rowling, do not do justice to the depth of Lukyanenko's imagination. In the three interlinked stories in *The Twilight Watch*, Anton Gorodetsky, the main character, finds life in the twilight zone increasingly dangerous. *The Twilight Watch* sits squarely in the Strugatsky tradition of 'heroic characters facing moral dilemmas'.

Season of the Witch
Natasha Mostert (Bantam; 432 pp.; $32.95)
The Darkness Within
Jason Nahrung with Mil Clayton (Hachette; 377 pp.; $32.95)

London-based South African author Natasha Mostert's fourth novel ***Season of the Witch*** could perhaps best be termed a contemporary gothic thriller. Mostert says in an interview, 'I suppose my books are hybrids, which make them difficult to peg: a dash of romance, a scoop of mystery, a seasoning of mysticism and a dollop of the paranormal make for an unpredictable brew'.

And like most such genre fiction, its focus is first mystery, then revelation, and then resolution, although with respect to the latter, Mostert says, 'I do not necessarily subscribe to conventional, happy endings.' Her main character, Gabriel Blackstone, is a successful 'information pirate' who hacks into corporate secrets. He also has an ability for 'remote viewing', that is, to be able, on occasion, to read minds.

Gabriel is asked by his ex-lover to investigate the disappearance of her stepson in the Chelsea house of two wealthy and beautiful sisters. The sisters, who occupy a rambling multidimensional Victorian house, a 'memory palace', claim to be 'solar' witches, descendants of the Elizabethan magus Dr John Dee. The sisters combine ancient alchemy and modern technologies to attain the 'Art of Memory', and thus power. Mostert says, 'The search for enlightenment and the lengths people will go in order to achieve an enlightened mind, forms the backbone of the narrative in *Season of the Witch*.'

Gabriel is gradually drawn into a dangerous vortex of magic and murder, as he falls in love with one of the sisters, even as he realises that one of them may be a murderer. Mostert sets her well-rounded characters in a realistic framework of contemporary London, although the sisters perhaps remain too enigmatic for a total

empathy with the resolution of *Season of the Witch*.

The Darkness Within, the first novel from Brisbane journalist Jason Nahrung, now living in Melbourne, with assistance from Mil Clayton, is a more routine supernatural thriller. Impoverished Sydney photojournalist Emily Winters, suddenly and, naturally to her, rather disconcertingly, finds herself descended from a line of witches and threatened by an ancient 'Cabal of elemental magicians' — although these are far from the Tolkien archetype.

The best elements of *The Darkness Within* occur in the first half of the novel, as Emily and her companion Brett grapple to understand Emily's increasingly dangerous mental and physical inheritances within the context of their gritty outer Sydney suburban environment. The basic plot is, however, ultimately too limited to sustain the narrative over 377 pages, while the supernatural conclusion favours stark gothic horror.

'Darkness within' of a more subtle variety can be found in *Season of the Witch*, supplemented as necessary by Mostert's web memory game at http://www.seasonofthewitch.com/game/start/index.php.

The Terror
Dan Simmons (Bantam; 771 pp.; $32.95)
Ghostwalk
Rebecca Stott (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 290 pp.; $32.95)
Ysabel
Guy Gavriel Kay (Simon & Schuster; 421 pp.; $29.95)

Time not space is the final frontier in these four novels that cross genres. Pigeonholing in genres, such as crime, romance, history and science fiction, often leads to good novels being overlooked by the general reading public, and cross-genre novels face even more difficulties. Nonetheless the four titles under review are well worth seeking out.

American author Dan Simmons is best known for his *Hyperion* SF and his Joe Kurtz detective novels. ***The Terror*** retells, with an historical accuracy that has gained the praise of Canadian historians, the doomed Arctic expedition of Sir John Franklin (1786–1847) to find the Northwest Passage, but with a decided Inuit supernatural twist in the tale.

Simmons graphically details the fate of the crews of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, told largely through several key historical figures, notably the embittered Captain Francis Crozier, Sir John Franklin's second-in-command. Simmons contrasts the initial optimistic views of Franklin, erstwhile Governor of Van Diemen's Land, with Crozier's growing belief that nobody will survive the journey. In addition to scurvy, frostbite, and lead poisoning, the crew are also being picked off by some 'thing' out there, which is like a polar bear but much larger. SF fans, incidentally, will recognise that the names in Simmons's dedication all derive from the 1951 movie *The Thing From Another World*.

Crozier realises that 'The monster on the ice was just another manifestation of a Devil that wanted them dead'. The refusal by Franklin and the crew to adopt any of the Inuit techniques to survive is meant to highlight the clash of cultures and the arrogance of the white man, the 'kabloona'. Crozier is rescued by a tongueless Inuit girl, known as Lady Silence, who takes him to the world of the 'Real People', where he slowly learns of, and becomes part of, an alternate world. Inuit mythological elements resolve the plot in a surprising yet highly effective manner. The nearly eight hundred pages of *The Terror* constitute a cross-genre tour de force.

British academic Rebecca Stott also links time and space, fact and fiction in an impressive debut novel, ***Ghostwalk***. It opens with the drowning of Cambridge University historian Elizabeth Vogelsang in the river at the bottom of her garden, a glass prism still in her hand. Vogelsang was near to completing a controversial biography of Isaac Newton, documenting Newton's involvement in a clandestine network of seventeenth-century alchemists and suspicious deaths at Trinity College.

Stott uses quantum mechanics to explain the links between past with present and to connect murders centuries apart. Was Elizabeth's death the work of someone from the seventeenth or twenty-first centuries? Stott provides evocative descriptions of Cambridge, both past and present, through well-researched detail, such as on glassmaking, the Great Plague, and Newton's scientific experiments. *Ghostwalk* creatively expands history into a literary mystery with scientific underpinnings. Readers who loved Iain Pears' *Instance of the Fingerpost* (1998) should especially seek it out.

Canadian Guy Gavriel Kay understandably avoids the Arctic cold of Simmons in his tenth novel ***Ysabel***. Kay opted for researching a novel set in for Aix-en-Provence, which links history to the present day through an ancient troubled love triangle. Fifteen-year- old Ned Marriner, accompanying his photographer father to Aix-en-Provence's Saint-Saveur Cathedral, meets Kate Wenger, a young American exchange student. While in the Cathedral the young pair are confronted by a mysterious scarred man Phelan, who warns that they've 'blundered into a corner of a very old story'.

Phelan and his sworn enemy Cadell have fought a centuries-old battle for the hand of Ysabel, which has resonated through French regional history. Kay creates in Ned a classic fantasy adolescent figure with the need to grow up fast, one who is thrust from the digital arena of text messaging and digital cameras to a mythical spirit world. Ned is the fulcrum for life and death in an novel that ingeniously weaves fantasy and history together.

The New Dead: A Zombie Anthology
Christopher Golden (Piatkus; 500 pp.; $22.99)

There is no shortage of zombies in Bram Stoker award-winning author Christopher Golden's anthology ***The New Dead***. The 19 original stories tend to focus on the metaphorical, and even spiritual implications of the living dead, such as when John Connolly in 'Lazarus' retells perhaps the first zombie story in the history of the world.

Stephen King's son, Joe Hill, stands out out with another possible first, the first twitter horror story, 'Twittering from the Circus of the Dead'. Hill constructs a compelling, realistic and ultimately horrifying set of

tweets from a rebellious and bored girl during a dysfunctional family holiday that goes from bad to worse when, on their long drive home, they visit a rundown circus. Hill, like M. R. James, reminds the reader that short stories can be as chillingly effective as blockbuster novels to 'keep us here' reading.

The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror, Vol. 20
ed. Stephen Jones (Robinson; 541 pp.; $24.95)

The ***Best New Horror*** anthology, edited by Stephen Jones, now celebrates its twentieth anniversary. As usual, Jones makes this the definitive annual collection, with the 21 stories supplemented by his detailed overview of the year in horror in all media and the obituary/'Necrology' section with Kim Newman. Standout stories include Stephen King's 'The New York Times at Special Bargain Rates', in which a woman receives an unexpected cell-phone call from her husband killed in an air crash. Sarah Pinborough's 'Our Man in the Sudan' was nominated for the World Fantasy Award: Best Short Story, but is essentially a supernatural tale of horror in which an MI6 investigator is drawn into the desert after the mysterious death of 'Our man in Khartoum'.

The Dead that Walk
ed. Stephen Jones (Ulysses Press; 308 pp.; $32.95)

British editor Stephen Jones is well known for his groundbreaking original anthologies, but ***The Dead that Walk***, while a competent collection of 24 zombie horror stories, is clearly released to benefit from the current zombie publishing craze. Even Jones admits, in his introduction, that he wasn't sure that he could cap his previous huge zombie anthology, published in the early 1990s and still in print. Nonetheless, he feels *The Dead that Walk* reinstates 'the reanimated dead to their proper place in the horror hierarchy'. Unfortunately there are too many well-known reprints in the anthology, such as 'Haeckel's Tale' by Clive Barker and Stephen King's 'Home Delivery', to lift the fictional coffin lid, but there is a zombie Richard Nixon story!

Australian Ghost Stories
ed. James Doig (Wordsworth Editions; 206 pp.; $12.95)

Australian Ghost Stories is an excellent addition to the acclaimed well-priced Wordsworth editions of mystery and the supernatural. Canberra-based editor James Doig has already shown, in previous anthologies, an archival ability to locate Australian stories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focusing on the gothic and supernatural. Doig provides an authoritative introduction to the 15 anthologised authors. Selections include well-known stories, such as 'The Bunyip' by Rosa Campbell Praed and Henry Lawson's 'The Third Murder: A New South Wales Tale', as well as stories from less well-known authors, such as Ernest Favenc and Dulcie Dreamer, particularly reflecting the silent horror of the outback.

Tales of Terror from the Tunnel's Mouth
Chris Priestley (Bloomsbury; 260 pp.; $24.99)

Chris Priestley is becoming increasingly recognised as the author of quirky horror stories in the style of Roald Dahl. ***Tales of Terror from the Tunnel's Mouth*** is the third in his young adult series, illustrated by award-winning artist David Roberts, which began with *Uncle Montague's Tales of Terror and Tales of Terror from the Black Ship*. A young boy returning to boarding school by train in the late Victorian era is told stories, in his stalled railway carriage, by a mysterious 'Woman in White'. Why the other passengers in the carriage remain asleep throughout the telling of the tales is only revealed in a dramatic ending, which provides retrospective logic for Priestley's plot device linking his intriguing tales of the macabre.

New Moon
Mark Coota Vaz (Atom; 142 pp.; $26.99)
Nightlight: A Parody
The Harvard Lampoon (HarperCollins; 154 pp.; $14.99)
Tempted
P. C. and Kristin Cast (Atom; 319 pp.; $16.99)
True Blood Omnibus
Charlaine Harris (Gollancz; 722 pp.; $35)
A Touch of Dead
Charlaine Harris (Gollancz; 192 pp.; $29.99)
Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant

Darren Shan (HarperCollins; 512 pp.; $19.99)
Dracula the Un-Dead
Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt (HarperCollins; 424 pp.; $32.99)

2009 was the year of the vampire in publishing, at least in commercial terms, with 'vampire queen' Stephenie Meyer's annual earnings topping US$50 million, from global sales of over 70 million books, with nearly 3 million copies sold in Australia alone. British critic A. A. Gill has called the two 'Twilight' movies to date '*Grease* with transfusions'.

The 'Twilight' saga is certainly the most commercial books-to- screen transfer since J. K. Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series. ***New Moon*** is the official illustrated companion to the second film, containing numerous full colour illustrations, story boards, interviews, details of special effects and background details to the filming.

Anne Rice, the former vampire fiction queen, was recently asked as to why the current crop of vampire novels had become such a success, and why her books, while huge bestsellers in their time, had not tapped into the same global populist vein. Rice replied, 'It's too early to see clearly what caused the trend. It could simply be escapism, which may be we all feel we need because we are going through a bad economic time. All I know is that the concept of an outsider — of the immortal who you can talk to, who can seduce you — is a very appealing one and it always has been.'

Meyer believes her books appeal to 'Good kids: when I was in high school, the people I related to were Jane Eyre and Elizabeth Bennet. I know a lot of kids who relate to my books because they don't drink and are not sexually active. There are a ton of them but they don't get a lot of representation in literature or television or movies'.

Of course, for some people, *Twilight*'s success with teenage girls and older 'Twi-cougars' is all a bit too much, so the *Harvard Lampoon*'s ***Nightlight*** parody will be a welcome publication. The *Harvard Lampoon* team do, however, assume a familiarity with Meyer's characters and plots. Bella Swan becomes Belle Goose, Edward Cullen becomes nerdish Edwart Mullen, for whom 'direct phrasing gives nosebleeds'. *Nightlight* makes much of Belle's clumsiness, which often descends into slapstick, but overall it is a witty take on 'a girl looking for love in all the wrong places'.

The American mother-and-daughter combination P. C. and Kristin Cast have also had major commercial success with their young adult 'House of Night' series. The first five books have sold over 70,000 copies in just three months since their release in Australia, making the series the fastest growing teenage vampire books after the 'Twilight' books. In ***Tempted***, the sixth book of the series, 'fledgling vampyre' Zoey Redbird remains the archetypal young heroine who has to juggle an angst-filled teenage life, social relationships, and saving the world. No wonder Zoey wants to have a break in *Tempted*, but naturally in the end she remains 'typeCast'.

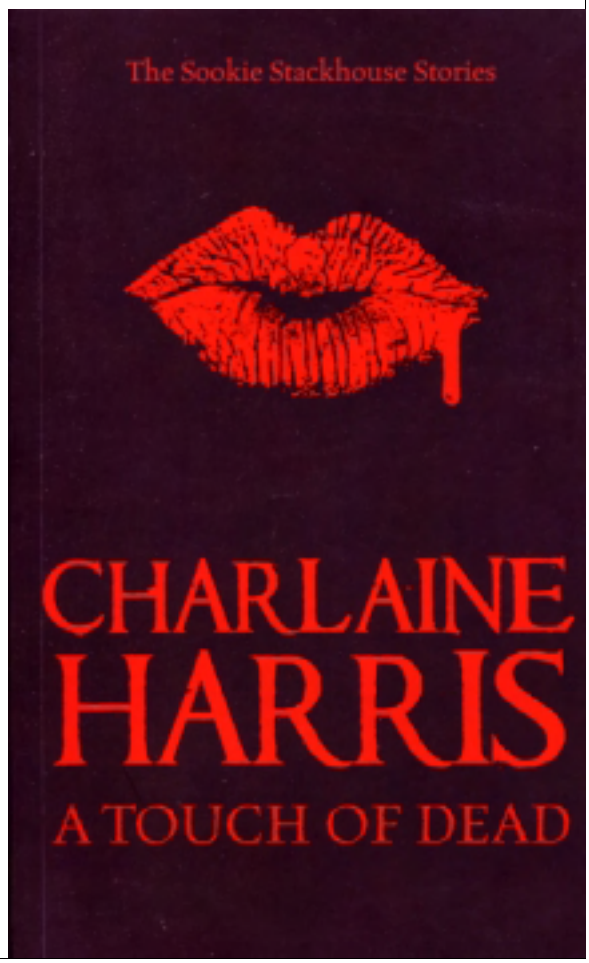
Anne Rice also says, 'I love what Allan Ball did with Charlaine Harris's books in (the TV series) *True Blood*.' New readers to Charlaine Harris will appreciate the ***True Blood Omnibus***, containing *Dead Until Dark* (2001), *Living Dead in Dallas* (2002) and *Club Dead* (2003); the first three Sookie Stackhouse books, which are much more sexually and creatively explicit than Meyer's books.

Harris writes on the first page of *Dead Until Dark* that New Orleans 'was a real center for them [vampires] — the whole Anne Rice thing, right? It's not that long a drive from Bon Temps to New Orleans'. So it's perhaps not surprising, in a world where vampires have 'come out' after the Japanese invented synthetic blood, that Bill the vampire turns up in Bon Temps, a small rural town in Louisiana, where he becomes entangled with Sookie, a telepathic bar waitress.

A Touch of the Dead brings together all of the previously scattered short stories involving Sookie, arranged in the order in which they occur in Sookie's life. They are essentially vignettes in the lives of the main characters, so the collection will probably appeal more to exisiting fans of the series than new readers.'Dracula Night', which Harris says 'was the most fun to write', sees Sookie at an annual Fangtasia celebration at which the Dracula who turns up may or may not be the real thing.

Irish author Darren O'Shaughnessy writes his highly successful young adult Cirque du Freak series as Darren Shan. The first three books of the twelve published to date, *Cirque Du Freak*, *The Vampire's Assistant*, and *Tunnels of Blood*, have now been resissued in an omnibus volume to coincide with their adaptation to the screen as ***Cirque Du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant***.

A young boy, Darren, after a visit to the Cirque du Freak, 'a place of magic', becomes a vampire's assistant and embroiled in a series of adventures both within and outside the circus. Shan has said that he 'wanted to play



with the whole idea of vampires. It starts off with Darren and Steve who both have their own ideas about what vampires are. They think he's a nasty creature of the night, they believe in all the old myths. I wanted to explode that a bit and have a vampire who was kind of human.'

Dracula by Bram Stoker is, of course, the historical base for Dracula spin-offs. Dacre Stoker, Bram's great-grandnephew, has combined with screenwriter Ian Holt in ***Dracula the Un-dead*** for what has been publicised as the official sequel. In their lengthy Author's Note, the authors reveal a number of motivations, presumably in addition to making money, such as resurrecting Stoker's original themes and characters, linking to the historical Prince Dracula story, and a realigning of timelines, which now brings Jack the Ripper to the fore.

Twenty-five years having passed since Dracula's apparent destruction. The main figures who defeated Dracula are now being hunted down, but by whom? One of the problems, however, perhaps because of the fast-paced narrative, is a lack of reader empathy with the main characters, who also battle their own personal demons. The main character, Quincey Harker, unfortunately comes across as more dead than alive. It might have been better if the authors had left Bram Stoker well alone in his Dracula fiction box.

Under the Dome
Stephen King (Hodder; 881 pp.; $34.99)

Maine's dark side is decidedly to the fore in ***Under the Dome***, a doorstopper of a book, which King admits has been pruned back to 336,114 words! Its hardback price at Wal-Mart in America of $8.98 may be a good local deal, but a real problem for conventional bookshops. Big doesn't always, however, mean beautiful with King. *Under the Dome* falls somewhere in quality between his best books, such as *The Stand*, and those that needed severe pruning, such as *The Tommyknockers*.

Under the Dome is set in the town of Chester's Mill, which is suddenly and mysteriously sealed off from the world by a dome- like force field. 'No-one gets in, no-one gets out'. As the air in the dome heats up and food and energy supplies begin to run out, 'Big Jim' Rennie, a used-car salesman and local fascist, seizes control of the town. Rennie says, 'Fearful people need strong leaders', as a motley 'liberal' group, led by an Iraqi war veteran and the editor of the local newspaper, provide a unlikely nucleus of resistance. King is clearly making comparisons, through the microcosm of Chester Mill, with the larger world, especially with reference to political manipulation, religious fundamentalism, and decline in resources.

While the tension in *Under the Dome* builds relatively slowly, it is not long before violence erupts and some of the large cast of characters begin dying in often gruesome fashion: 'She's doing seventy when she hits the Dome. The engine ... shoots backward and tears her in half. Her upper body exits through the windshield, trailing intestines like party streamers, and splatters against the Dome like a juicy bug.'

King states in his Afterword that he tried to write a book 'that would keep the pedal consistently to the metal', and certainly the pace is relentless until a typical King cliffhanger ending. *Under the Dome* continues King's tradition of bestselling books that tap into contemporary mores and concerns. Steven Spielberg and Stephen King have linked up since publication to develop it into a TV series.

Why has King been so successful? King's own comments, that 'America needs Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and Ronald McDonald, but it needs a bogeyman too — Alfred Hitchcock's dead, so I got the job for a while' and that he is 'the literary equivalent of a big mac and fries', are far too simplistic.

The National Book Foundation's Medal for 2003 to Stephen King for a 'Distinguished Contribution to American Letters' was an award that brought him into the company of John Updike, Arthur Miller, Philip Roth, and Toni Morrison. The NBF praised his writing as being 'securely rooted in the great American tradition that glorifies spirit-of-place and the abiding power of narrative. He crafts stylish, mind-bending page-turners that contain profound moral truths — some beautiful, some harrowing — about our inner lives.' King's place, in that context, is secure under the pantheon dome of literary popular culture.

Skin Trade
Laurell K. Hamilton (Headline; 502 pp.; $32.99)

Laurell K. Hamilton was out there before Stephenie Meyer had even thought of her first vampire. ***Skin Trade*** is the seventeenth novel in the 'Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter' series which is now to be filmed by Lionsgate and After Dark Films. Anita Blake is a tough, sexy (with perhaps too much explicit sex for Meyer first-date fans) vampire hunter in stories where vampires, were-tigers, and other supernatural beings are accepted as part of society. In *Skin Trade* Anita receives a severed head in the post from Las Vegas, which leads to a lengthy and violent struggle to track down and capture the serial killing vampire Vittorio. *Skin Trade* confirms Hamilton as the George Pelecanos of the paranormal thriller.

Dead and Gone
Charlaine Harris (Gollancz; 312 pp.; $32.99)

Charlaine Harris' 'Sookie Stackhouse' mysteries, featuring a telepathic barmaid with vampire friends, have rocketed in popularity since the *True Blood* HBO award-winning series, shown here on Foxtel. ***Dead and Gone***, which has topped the *New York Times* hardback fiction bestseller list, is the second in a three book multi-million-dollar contract. Harris says, 'This book is full of shockers, I think, and it's considerably darker than the other Sookie books. The Weres come out of the closet, and the war in the fae world spills out into the human world.' Sookie's small town of Bon Temps, Louisiana has an ever-growing community of vampires, weres, faeries and witches. *Dead and Gone* sees Sookie battling not only personal dangers but also a greater threat to society, while reconciling old and new vampire loves.

Handling the Undead
John Ajvide Lindqvist (Text; 364pp; $32.95)
The Forest of Hands and Teeth
Carrie Ryan (Gollancz; 310 pp.; $29.99)
Hater
David Moody (Gollancz; 232 pp.; $29.99)

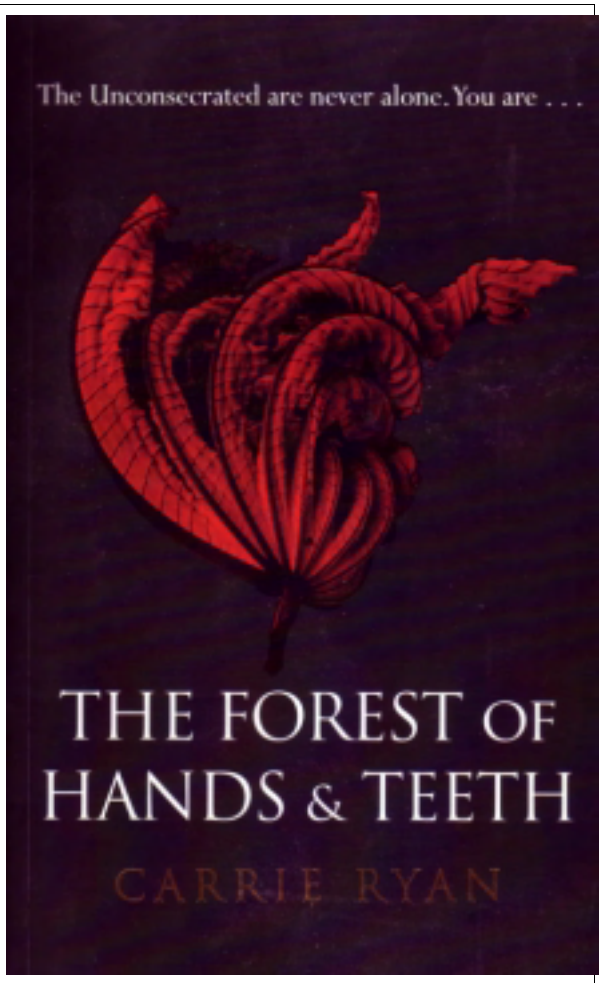
Scandinavian crime literature has succeeded in the last few years because of the success of authors such as Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson. Now Scandinavian horror is being promoted through the writings of John Ajvide Lindqvist. *Let the Right One In*, published in English in 2007, was a powerful mix of social commentary and vampire horror, and has now been filmed.

Handling the Undead moves from vampires to zombies, but, like the earlier book, only uses the horror settings as a framework for the examination of social and political issues. Lindqvist's 'living dead' who emerge in Stockholm are not the brainless killer zombies of many horror films, but rather real people arising from morgues and cemeteries. Relatives are torn between seeing recently departed loved ones return, albeit not quite whole, yet realising this 'reliving' is not the same as their being alive. Lindqvist, through a number of personal cameos, depicts both the horror and the attraction of the 'awakened dead'.

The 'reliving' have rudimentary brain functions clearly linked to a mysterious dramatic outage in the Stockholm power system. Lindqvist places his Stockholm crisis within the realistic structures of an emergency, with on-the-spot CNN reports and military and medical experts summoned to deal with the national crisis. Lindqvist realistically reflects the reaction of the authorities. If the dead are alive in some way, do they have posthumous rights, and can they return to their homes and families? The plot hinges more on how the living affect the dead than the reverse. *Handling the Undead* unerringly explores the nature of family relationships, how to cope with loss and literally the nature of life and death.

The Forest of Hands and Teeth, Carrie Ryan's impressive first novel, also involves zombies and a struggle for survival. There are echoes of many novels and films, especially M. Night Shyamalan's film *The Village* and those of George Romero, but Ryan is an original voice in her carefully constructed yet unadorned prose. Ryan has said in an interview, 'I tend not to think of *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* as a "zombie book", but rather a book that happens to have zombies in it. *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, which takes place generations after the apocalypse, is really about a girl (Mary) struggling with growing up, desire, and a controlling society set against the backdrop of a world with zombies (called "Unconsecrated") constantly pushing against the fences.'

When the zombies penetrate the village fence, Mary must choose between her village and its entrenched religious rituals, her family and loved ones, and her unproven belief in the existence of a wider world somewhere beyond the forest. Ryan says, 'I wanted to show how the characters in my book have been so isolated and controlled that ... they have no conception of the world.' As with Lindqvist, the living dead serve as a mirror for



personal challenges. *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, an often bleak but gripping narrative, follows Mary's struggle to survive in a journey of discovery and, hopefully, redemption.

Hater has had an unusual publishing history, being self- published by Moody in 2006, but now picked up by Gollancz. A movie version is in pre-production by Guillermo del Toro of *Pan's Labyrinth* fame. *Hater* is a fast-paced novel written in a staccato style that highlights the growing horror of a British society falling apart. The main character, Danny McCoyne, stuck in a dead end office job and suffocating commuting lifestyle, observes one of an increasing number of violent attacks in the street. Moody fills out this scenario through dark vignettes of violence by 'haters' who attack people without warning and without provocation. Moody conjures up an increasing atmosphere of suspense and paranoia, with society disintegrating into warring factions and McCoyne initially straddling the two.

The cause of the increasing epidemic of violence is largely unexplained. A 'hater' reflects, 'There is a fundamental genetic difference between us and them ... which, until now, has remained dormant ... it's now us and them.' Unlike the novels by Lindqvist and Ryan, as Moody says, 'What I've actually done is to write a zombie story from the perspective of the zombies.' Moody's twist is that the 'haters' 'don't lose their intelligence or feelings, rather they are convinced that everyone else are the bad guys'.

Moody extrapolates from current British fears about immigration, street violence, and terrorism to highlight

that fear is used in society to justify preemptive strikes. As one character says, 'We know who poses a threat to us and who is on our side.' While *Hater* lacks the depth of *Handling the Undead*, its relentless pace, tension, and graphic images will lend itself admirably to its film adaptation.

Just after Sunset
Stephen King (Hodder; 353 pp.; $32.99)

Death, actual and impending, is central to a number of the 13 stories in King's excellent new collection ***Just after Sunset***. 'Willa', the opening story, begins on a remote Wyoming railway station, where it slowly becomes apparent to the waiting passengers that they are dead, and existential emptiness lurks. 'The Things They Left Behind' is a poignant 9/11 story. An office worker with 11 September 'survivor guilt' finds objects belonging to his dead colleagues turning up in his flat and 'recalling' their owners at night. 'Ayana' links miracles and the afterlife in a story influenced by the death of King's mother-in-law.

Despite their bleak themes, King says about these stories, 'Reality is thin but not always dark', enabling a sort of final peace in each story.

PENGUIN RED HORROR SERIES

The Penguin Red Horror series continues the recent Penguin trend of reissuing classics at reasonable prices for a new generation of readers or for those whose earlier editions are lost or falling apart.

The titles in its the Penguin Red Horror series include obvious classics such as ***The Hound of the Baskervilles*** by Arthur Conan Doyle (214 pp., $14.95) and Bram Stoker's ***Dracula*** (402 pp., $12.95), but also less well-known titles, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's ***Lois The Witch*** (249 pp., $19.95) and Lee Vernon's ***The Virgin of the Seven Daggers*** (230 pp., $19.95).

The other titles comprise ***The Dunwich Horror*** by H. P. Lovecraft (201 pp., $19.95); ***The Haunted Dolls' House*** by M. R. James (202 pp., $19.95); ***The Spook House*** by Ambrose Bierce (233 pp., $19.95); ***The House on the Borderland*** by William Hope Hodgson (190 pp., $19.95); ***The Lair of the White Worm*** by Bram Stoker (232 pp., $19.95); ***The Masque of the Red Death*** by Edgar Allan Poe (170 pp., $19.95); ***The Haunted Hotel*** by Wilkie Collins (234 pp., $19.95); ***Frankenstein*** by Mary Shelley (279 pp., $12.95); and ***The Island of Doctor Moreau*** by H. G. Wells (131 pp., $14.95). Ten have specially commissioned two-tone covers designed by Coralie Bickford-Smith.

Professor John Carey of Oxford University has written that 'horror in English fiction is traditionally shrouded in Gothic gloom'. The books in the Penguin series, which largely date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contain elements of Gothic gloom, but also supernatural horror, tinged on occasion with uplifting or redemptive endings, as in Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm*.

Bram Stoker's ***Dracula*** has been analysed for its psychological and sexual undertones *ad nauseam*. ***The Lair of the White Worm*** has more than enough of these to be placed on psychology reading lists. Despite the monster serpent plot core, vampirism reappears: 'She tore off her clothes, with feverish fingers, and in full enjoyment of her natural freedom, stretched her slim figure in animal delight. Then she lay down on the sofa — to await her victim! Edgar Caswell's life blood would more than satisfy her for some time to come. What more can a person ask for?'

The novel is also of interest for its Australian main character, Adam Salton, 'the crackshot in the West Australian Artillery', and for inspiring Ken Russell to make his bizarre 1988 film adaptation, with a young Hugh Grant, which has become something of a cult classic.

In one instance, it's the author who provides the main mystery, namely Ambrose Bierce, who disappeared during the Mexican Revolution in 1913. Bierce ranks alongside Poe as one of the masters of American nineteenth-century supernatural fiction. ***The Spook House***, a collection of short stories of 'death delusion and the supernatural', amply reflects Bierce's minimalistic writing style, which provides a perfect contrast to the Gothic content.

Ghosts and gothic settings are standard fare in the nine short stories in the former Provost of Eton, M. R. James' ***The Haunted Dolls' House***. In 'Oh Whistle, and I'll Come For You, My Lad', the unintended invoking of a spirit from an archaeological site in Suffolk still constitutes an effective tale of horror, while the classic 'Casting the Runes', with its underpinning of revenge for academic rejection, has even more relevance in today's publish-or-perish scenarios.

Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) was a contemporary of M. R. James. Five short stories in ***The Virgin of the Seven Daggers*** take place in Italy, where decaying mansions and classical ruins provide appropriately sombre settings. Two stories, including the title story, recount the result of pacts with the Devil.

Elizabeth Gaskell takes her inspiration in ***Lois the Witch*** from the witch trials in seventeenth-century Salem, thus preceding Arthur Miller on this topic by almost a century. 'Lois the Witch', one of four stories in the collection, sees the newly orphaned Lois arriving in Salem, to confront not only hostility but also apparent satanic powers and an hysterical witch hunt.

Wilkie Collins's ***The Haunted Hotel*** has another troubled woman at its centre. When the apparently amoral Countess Narona marries another woman's fiancé and retreats to a decaying Venetian palace, strange events and her husband's death ensue. *The Haunted Hotel* effectively turns a ghost story into an early psychological thriller.

The Penguin volumes can be bought as a set or individually, but either way they represent excellent examples of historical horror.

Fantasy

HEROIC FANTASY BECOMES EVEN MORE HOBBIT FORMING

The release of *The Children of Hurin* by J. R. R. Tolkien and the resultant massive global publicity is a reminder of the massive influence (hobbit-forming?) that Tolkien has had, and continues to have, on heroic fantasy writing.

Tolkien's literary roots lie in the Norse myths, his experiences in the First World War and his nostalgia for a lost rural England with established values. Robert Blackham's ***The Roots of Tolkien's Middle Earth*** (Tempus Publishing, 144 pp., $29.95) meticulously captures and evokes the Birmingham area of Tolkien's youth with more than 170 photographs, 40 of them in colour. Many of Tolkien's residences and locales still exist even, if renamed and enclosed by suburbia and roads. Thus Bag End is now termed Dormston Manor. Local trees and woods are also identified as *Lord of the Rings* source material. This is an excellent guide for anyone wanting to seek out the real Tolkien locales.

Dr Heather O'Donoghue, Reader in Ancient Icelandic Literature and Antiquities at Oxford University, explores in ***From Asgard to Valhalla*** (Tauris; 224 pp.; $61) the Norse myths from their origins through the centuries. O'Donoghue believes that 'sagas are all about society and individuals who step out of line', as she demonstrates, in an erudite, extremely readable text. She ranges widely from the early Viking era to *Beowulf*, and from Wagner's 'Ring' to Marvel comics and Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*.

Of Tolkien, she says that 'the influence of Norse Myths is pervasive ... Tolkien's most obvious debt is to Norse heroic legend'. She sees *The Lord of the Rings* 'as a purposeful countering of Wagner'. O'Donoghue observes that while the adoption of Norse mythology has 'often led to its being associated with pernicious racial doctrines', this 'is entirely incidental to the substance of the myths themselves', which offer 'a perspective on the fundamental issues of human life'.

From Asgard to Valhalla reaffirms how Norse myths have had an impact in and shaped the Western cultural heritage. Many fantasy writers, despite the aspirations of their blurb writers, do not probe deeply into the fundamental issues of human life. Unlike C. S. Lewis, Tolkien did not build, despite some interpretations to the contrary, any religious messages into his narrative. O'Donoghue says, 'His hobbits are not Christians or even crypto-Christians.'

Terry Brooks has always acknowledged how much Tolkien influenced his bestselling 'Shannara' series, which Warner Bros has now scheduled for filming. The original 'Shannara' trilogy has just been republished in uniform hardback B format (***The Sword of Shannara***, ***The Elfstones of Shannara***, and ***The Wishsong of Shannara***; Atom; $24.95 each).

The Sword of Shannara (1977) was the first fantasy book to top the*New York Times* bestseller list. Brooks says of the series: 'What if Tolkien's magic and fairy creatures were made part of the worlds of Walter Scott and Dumas? ... What if our present knowledge had been lost, and science had been replaced by magic? But it couldn't be magic that was dependable or simply good or bad. And the right and wrong of things couldn't be clear-cut because life simply didn't work that way.'

The better fantasy writers avoid the simple clash of good and evil. Tolkien showed how power had the potential to corrupt. Stephen Donaldson, who also published his first novel, *Lord Foul's Bane*, in 1977, has seen ***Mordant's Need*** (Gollancz; 979 pp., $39.95) reissued in one volume. This brings together his two long novels, *The Mirror of Her Dreams* (1986) and *A Man Rides Through* (1987).

Terisa, the somewhat diffident main character, 'mirrors' back to a medieval world where political and military struggles are linked through the power of 'imagery'. Mervyn Peake is probably more of an influence here than Tolkien, as Donaldson explores through Terisa how 'problems should be solved by those who see them'.

Mythologies underpin much heroic fantasy. Greek and Celtic mythologies features strongly in Robert Holdstock's complex 'Merlin Codex' trilogy, which began with *Celtika* (2003) and *The Iron Grail* (2004) and is now completed in ***The Broken Kings*** (Gollancz; 357 pp.; $32.95). New readers probably need to start at the beginning to follow the complex trail of the near-immortal pre-Arthurian Merlin and his interactions with Jason, Medea, and Urtha Pendragon. Myth and magic interlock as Holdstock plays out the eternal themes of love, betrayal, vengeance, and reconciliations.

Kate Elliott, aka Alis A. Rasmussen, is best known for her 'Crown of Stars' fantasy series. It says on her website (and nearly every fantasy author has one), 'After reading *The Lord of the Rings* in eighth grade, she never looked back.' Elliott is based in Hawaii, and uses Pacific mythologies in ***Spirit Gate*** (Orbit; 630 pp.; $32.95) to underpin the first volume of seven projected in her 'Crossroads' series. Elliott carefully depicts a once prosperous, but now lawless, world threatened by a ruthless enemy.

Fantasy novelists such as Elliott, Raymond Feist, and David Eddings are nothing if not prolific, and some could be criticised for being overly prolix. Alan Garner and Ursula Le Guin set examples of textual fantasy tightness that others would do well to follow.

Sara Douglass's ***The Serpent Bride*** (Voyager; 659 pp.; $32.95) is the first book of her 'Darkglass Mountain' series. Douglass says, 'The Darkglass Mountain trilogy is a chance for me to bring back all my favourite characters', but the end result will take some digesting in terms of storylines. *The Serpent Bride* takes place approximately five years after the conclusion of *Crusader*, and incorporates characters and plotlines from the 'Wayfarer Redemption' series and the novels *Beyond the Hanging Wall* and *Threshold*. Douglass's trademark juxtaposition of 'bleakness and joy' remain well to the fore.

Miriam Allen deFord once said, 'Science fiction consists of improbable possibilities, fantasy of plausible im-

possibilities.' Fantasy now considerably outsells SF, which in one way is to be regretted, as excellent authors turn from SF in order to make a commercial return. Thus local author Maxine McArthur is currently working on a Young Adult fantasy set in a world based on medieval Japan. The 'Lost Shimmaron' series for 9-to-12s is a new shared-world fantasy project by McArthur and six other Australian authors, such as Margo Lanagan and Marianne de Pierres. The first published title is Tansy Rayner Roberts's ***Seacastle*** (ABC; $12.95), while McArthur's ***The Lute's Tale*** will appear as the fifth of the seven books.

The dictum here must be that if you can't beat them, join them, as the fantasy bandwagon rolls inexorably on in the publishing world.

Yellowcake

Margo Lanagan (Allen & Unwin; 241pp.; $19.99)

Margo Lanagan's excellent new collection of dark fantasy short stories, ***Yellowcake***, collects nine stories published between 2006 and 2009, along with one new story. All demonstrate Lanagan's surreal originality, as in 'Eyelids of the Dawn', which, in almost Shaun Tan style, follows an entire shopping mall, irritated by lice, as it decamps for a wash in the ocean. Lanagan notes that 'An Honest Day's Work' was inspired by a Baangladeshi shipbreaking documentary, but clearly whaling and *Gulliver's Travels* also come to mind, in the cutting up of a beached human-like giant. 'The Golden Shroud' is an exquisite version of Rapunzel, as the hair assumes a life of its own.

Tales from the Tower: The Wilful Eye

Gathered by Isobelle Carmody and Nan McNab (Allen & Unwin; 302 pp.; $27.99)

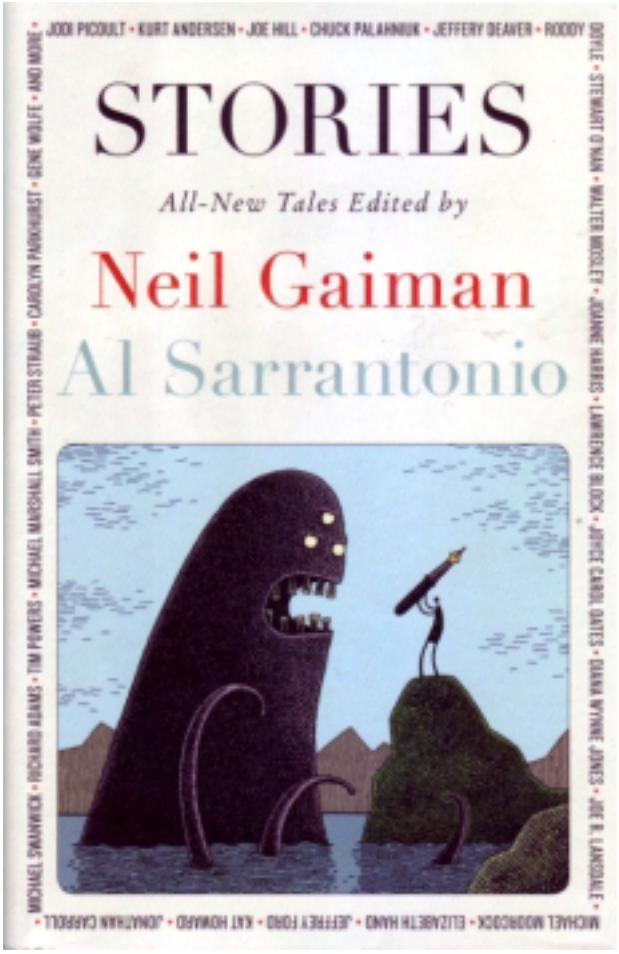
Isobelle Carmody and Nan McNab's bewitching collection contains six original novellas from Lanagan, Rosie Borella, Isobelle Carmody, Richard Harland, Margaret Mahy, and Martine Murray. All spin off well-known fairy tales, but reinvent them in vastly differing settings and themes. Lanagan reworks Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Tinderbox' in a tale of revenge and the corruption of power, while Carmody's take on Rumpelstiltskin, 'Moth's Tale', sees a resourceful young girl combating the impossible demands of a cruel king. Borella's very original take on 'The Snow Queen', 'Eternity', begins in a snowbound Sydney where a young couple struggle against the power of the 'ice queen', a witch drug dealer.

Stories

edited by Neil Gaiman and Al Sarrantonio (Headline; 428pp.; $32.99)

Anthologies are often difficult to review when the theme is relatively broad. Neil Gaiman and Al Sarrantonio gave their 27 distinguished contributors, who include Joanne Harris, Jodi Picoult, Walter Mosley, and Jeffrey Deaver, a wide brief: they wanted 'stories that made us care, stories that forced us to turn the page', leaving the reader desperate to know 'and then what happened?'.

The end result is a mixed bag of stories that all contain



elements of the fantastic, often tinged with a tone of despair or darkness. Some stories are far too short to be effective, such as Richard Adams's three-page story 'The Knife', which recounts a schoolboy murder at an English public school, and Roddy Doyle's 'Blood', in which a Dublin husband suddenly develops a craving for raw meat.

Michael Moorcock's 'Stories', almost a novella, echoes the anthology's title and also Moorcock's own life in the late 1950s and 1960s as a magazine editor. Moorcock's main character reflects on his literary and bohemian life and those of his fellow writers and lovers, effectively mixing the mundane and the tragic.

Joyce Carol Oates, in 'Fossil-Figures', tells the story of twin brothers from birth to death. One is healthy and successful, becoming a Congressman, while the other is stunted and sickly, becoming a reclusive painter. Oates cleverly juxtaposes their life stories, reuniting them in a bittersweet conclusion.

'Samantha's Diary' by Diana Wynne Jones is probably the quirkiest story. Jones retells 'The Twelve Days of Christmas', set in London in December 2233, as a young model Samantha returns home to find a partridge in a pear tree. Most Christmas traditions have long been forgotten, but the reader knows what will happen next, even if Samantha doesn't. The intriguing plot follows her struggles in accommodating all her gifts, including lords-a-leaping and French hens galore, and trying to find out who is sending them and why.

Arguably the best story in the collection is Elizabeth Hand's 'The Maiden Flight of Macauley's Bellerophon'. Friends try to recreate an alleged experimental plane

flight that predated by two years the flight of the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk to meet the dying wish of a former curator at the Smithsonian aerospace museum in Washington. Elizabeth Hand combines Ray Bradburyesque nostalgia with an element of the fantastic that emphasises the nature of true love and friendship.

Angelology
Danielle Trussoni (Viking; 453 pp.; $32.95)
Original Sin
Allison Brennan (Bantam; 453 pp.; $32.95)
The Liberators
Philip Womack (Bloomsbury; 298 pp.; $16.99)

Danielle Trussoni's acclaimed memoir *Falling Through the Earth* was named one of *The New York Times*' Ten Best Books of 2006. ***Angelology*** is, however, clearly aimed at a large readership rather than winning prizes.

Trussoni's debut novel involves a *Da Vinci Code*-type struggle between a secret society of angelologists and, as Trussoni says, a 'group of angels called Nephilim ... I was interested in this one group of evil angels. That became so much more interesting to me than this fluffy, Hallmark-card type of angel that you see most anywhere ... I wanted to take this one group that was clearly negative and bring them into the contemporary world'. Given that a 2009 Baylor University study indicated that 55 per cent of Americans, from their survey sample, believed they are protected by a guardian angel, then Trussoni has a captive market.

Trussoni's main character Evangeline (note angel within her name) is a young nun and library assistant/archivist in a convent in Hudson Valley, New York. The action begins as Evangeline receives a request to view the correspondence between a real-life figure, Abigail Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948), and a former abbess at the convent. The Nephilim, hybrids of humans and angels, believe that this archive will provide a clue as to the hiding place of Orpheus' lyre, which will restore the declining power of the Nephilims.

Trussoni's novel will appeal to 'angels and demons' readers, but her narrative sags in several places, not least by the lengthy descriptions of angelology background and in a diversionary back story set in the Second World War. *Angelology* has, however, the seeds of cinematic success in its wide-ranging canvas, and any novel that includes the Bible, nuns, and the Nazis will bring the sound of the music to cash registers. An openended conclusion has Evangeline, as Trussoni puts it, 'in quite a difficult situation at the end of *Angelology* and she will be working through the complications of this in the next book'.

Allison Brennan's ***Original Sin***, the first of a projected seven-book series, is another novel that has been hugely successful in United States, with an initial print run of over half a million copies. Brennan's success clearly reaffirms there is a market for the paranormal novel, particularly when laced with Catholic theology. Brennan has stated that she is trying to write 'real-world supernatural, paranormal stories that are believable', but her real world may be rather different if you don't believe in guardian angels.

Original Sin has a black-and-white, good-versus-evil theme, with the 'good' main character Moira O'Donnell in a life-and-death struggle with her 'evil bitch' mother Fiona, a powerful witch. Fiona is searching for the 'Book of Knowledge' in order to summon the 'living incarnations of the Seven Deadly Sins'. Brennan says, 'Since I believe in the existence of Hell, it was really easy for me to create a real-world scenario where demons are out to gather up human souls with the help of some bad people, and a group of noble, but very flawed, humans want to stop them.' Moira's small group of flawed humans include a former seminarian, a demonologist, and a tough female sheriff. *Original Sin* is a supernatural roller coaster, but like a roller coaster ride, once it is over the excitement of the experience quickly dissipates.

Some theological relief comes with British author Philip Womack's young adult book ***The Liberators***, which effectively blends the supernatural with the contemporary world of financial crises and acts of terrorism. Womack places his events within realistic frameworks of London geography and society. The main character, a young teenage boy, Ivo, is travelling on the Tube to stay with relatives in London when a small object is thrust on him by a man, who is subsequently gruesomely murdered in the next carriage. This object turns out to be a critical component in a cosmic struggle between good and evil, although these elements are subtly portrayed, unlike the black-and-white scenarios of *Original Sin*.

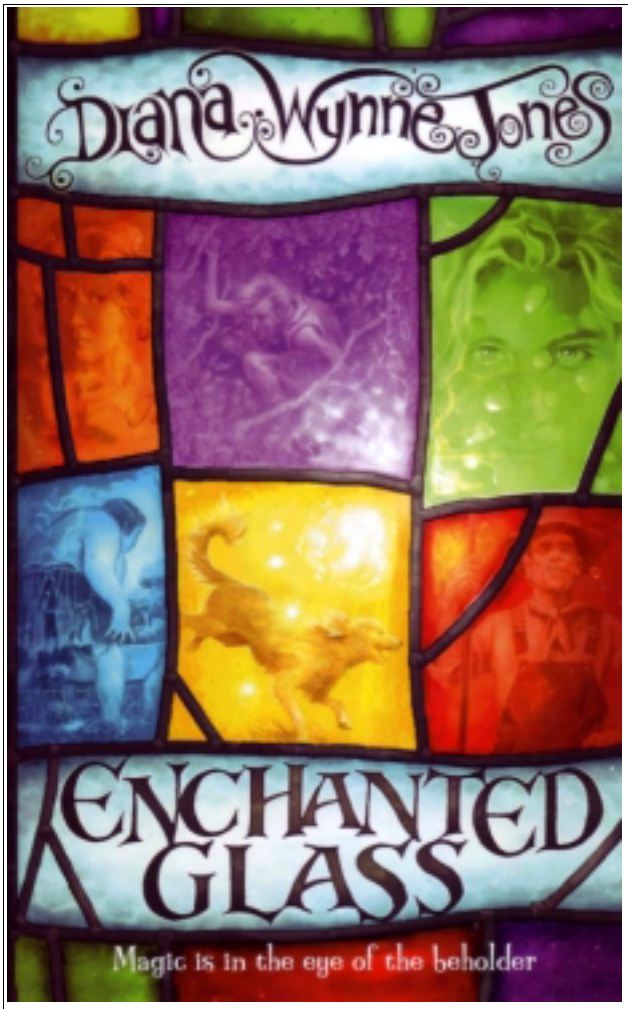
Ivo is the classic reluctant hero who, with his teenage friends, becomes, like Harry Potter, the fulcrum, for events that will decide the fate of the world. *The Liberators* will not repeat the success of *Harry Potter*, as publishers Bloomsbury hope, but Ivo is a believable character confronting powerful forces in a novel that will appeal to many YA readers. English parents who read this may, however, never let their young children travel alone on the Tube again, guardian angels not withstanding.

Hyddenworld: Spring
William Horwood (Macmillan; 505 pp.; $32.99)

William Horwood's *Duncton Chronicles* (1979–1993) were global bestsellers, while *Skallagrigg* (1987) became a 1995 BAFTA award-winning film. Horwood now returns to the fantasy field with ***Hyddenworld: Spring***, the first of a quartet, underpinned by environmental concerns. Horwood links the worlds of the small and previously Hydden people and humanity through Jack, 'a giant-born hydden' sent to our world when he is six years old, and Katherine, a young girl, whom he saves in a terrible car crash. Horwood signals that the fate of both worlds, and a quest to find four gems, rests with Jack and Katherine as they confront enemies and adolescence. As with all first books in a series, there is a lot to digest initially, but Horwood ultimately establishes an effective fantasy framework for the next three volumes.

Enchanted Glass
Diana Wynne Jones
(HarperCollins; 336 pp.; $24.95)

Diana Wynne Jones, termed Britain's 'Queen of Children's Fantasy', died recently from lung cancer. How-



ever, in ***Enchanted Glass*** her humour, wit, and invention are as evident as ever. Wynne Jones's website notes this is 'A stand-alone book ... there are the expected magicians, but it also includes giant vegetables, revenge by cauliflower cheese (?!) and fortune-telling using racing tips'. *Enchanted Glass* begins with a young academic, Andrew, inheriting his magician grandfather's strange household, warring domestic staff and a rich evil neighbour encroaching on his lands. Andrew's life gets more complicated when Aidan, a young orphan, arrives claiming he is being pursued by 'shadow people'. Throw in elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and this fantasy brew becomes even headier.

The Cardinal's Blades
Pierre Pevel (Gollancz; 373 pp.; $32.99)

Pierre Pevel has written seven novels, which have won several prizes in his native France. ***The Cardinal's Blades***, his first novel to be translated into English, is essentially Dumas with dragons. Set in 1633, Cardinal Richelieu, the *eminence gris* of Louise XIII, confronting the military threat from Spain and the 'Court of Dragons', desperately needs Captain La Fargue to reassemble his disbanded and disgraced 'blades'. The dragons play a lesser part in the narrative than might have been expected, but still ensure *The Cardinal's Blades* is an engaging historical fantasy romp.

Tolkien, Race and Cultural History
Dimitra Fimi (Palgrave Macmillan; 240 pp.; $45)
The Weirdstone of Brisingamen
Alan Garner (HarperCollins; 320 pp.; $14.99)
Against All Things Ending
Stephen Donaldson (Gollancz; 772 pp.; $49.99)
The Complete Lyonesse
Jack Vance, edited by Adam Roberts (Gollancz; 1027 pp.; $49.95)
Odd and the Frost Giants
Neil Gaiman (Bloomsbury; 127 pp.; $22.99)
Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth
William Gray (Palgrave Macmillan; 215 pp.; $53)

Many fantasy writers usually have huge fan bases, who are largely oblivious to the writings of the academy on fantasy. Dr Dimitra Fimi says, in a recent interview, it's also 'high time that academia starts looking at "genre" fiction ... as cultural products of their times and as important factors in the development of literary tastes in the 20th and 21st centuries. I hope that my book [***Tolkien, Race and Cultural History***] contributes to this new trend of re-evaluating in a serious scholarly way "genre" fiction.'

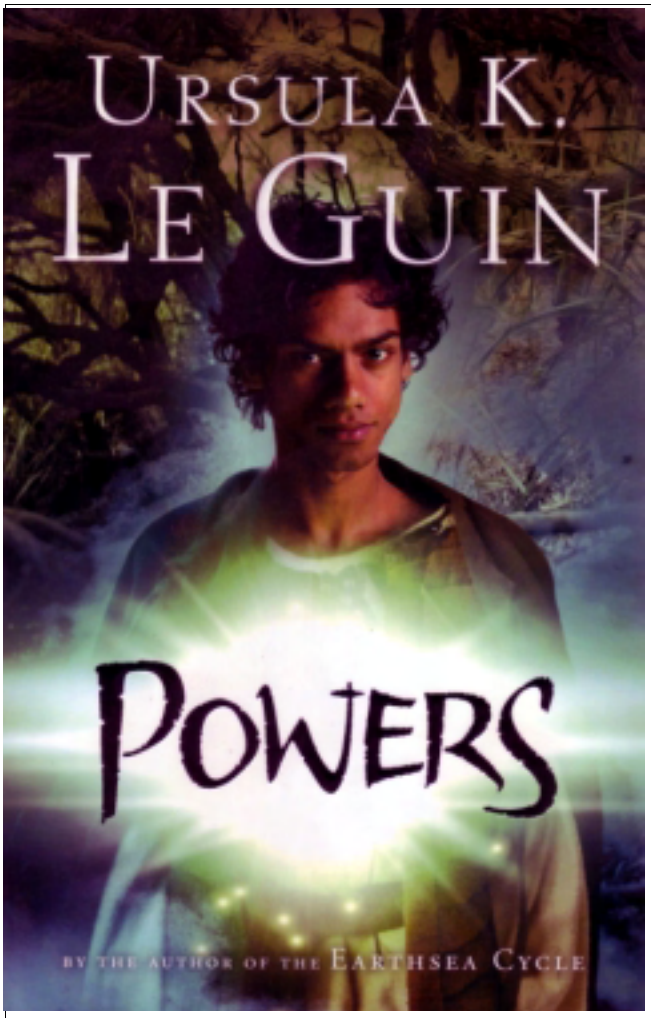
Tolkien, Race and Cultural History involved extensive research on Tolkien's unpublished manuscripts, as well as his lesser-known works, such as the 12-volume *History of Middle-earth* series, which, she claims, has received relatively little attention from Tolkien commentators. As a result, 'It has made me look at *The Silmarillion* as a work closer to Tolkien's heart than *The Lord of the Rings* ever was.'

Fimi attempts to place Tolkien's writing within his 'legendarium'; that is, a continum from his early poems in the 1910s to his last writings in the early 1970s. Fimi says, 'I wanted to examine Tolkien's work not as a peculiar and idiosyncratic one-off in 20th-century fiction, but as an integral part of it.' Fimi concludes her well-argued book with references to Tolkien's influence on Stephen Donaldson's 'Thomas Convenant' series and Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen.*

Philip Pullman has said of Garner that he is 'the most important British writer of fantasy since Tolkien ... And in many respects better than Tolkien — deeper and more truthful'. Garner has said, in a recent interview, how much he owed to ANU's Professor Ralph Elliott in facilitating his visit to the 1983 National Word Festival in Canberra. Many Canberrans will remember Garner's evocative and moving talk at University House, in which Garner told of his childhood illnesses and being pronounced dead on three separate occasions. But 'I was too angry to die'.

The Weirdstone of Brisingamen, originally published in 1960, has never been out of print, and is now reissued in a 50th anniversary edition, with a new introduction by Garner. Garner says that, 'This was my first book and I was wary about writing a story in which so many strange things happened. I was not at all sure how it would be received, but I took the view that if no one liked the book, I could at least say it was geographically accurate, down to Ordnance Survey precision.'

The Weirdstone effectively mixes the landscape and



folklore of Alderley Edge in Cheshire and the story of two children, Colin and Susan, and their fight against the forces of evil. The 'Weirdstone of Brisingamen', a lost magical jewel, makes the children the target of the 'morthbrood' in a bitter struggle that descends underground into a maze of mines and tunnels. Garner writes in his introduction, 'The Edge is a land of two worlds: above and below.' The 50th anniversary edition is available in both hardback and paperback versions.

Stephen Donaldson visited Canberra soon after Garner for a *Canberra Times* Literary Lunch. Who would then have thought that his 'Thomas Covenant' series would not conclude until 2013 with *The Last Dark*? The penultimate huge volume, ***Against All Things Ending***, is Book 3 of 'The Last Chronicles of Thomas Covenant'. Even though Donaldson provides a lengthy preface, 'What Has Gone Before', new readers will have to plough through the extensive narrative to date to comprehend fully Donaldson's dark and unrelenting fantasy corpus.

In 2009, Donaldson received an honorary Doctor of Letters from St Andrew's University in Scotland for his depiction and exploration of the 'themes of alienation, personal responsibility, power and its corruption, guilt, and hope'. To some readers, the angst for the leading characters has been drawn out far too long, particularly for Linden Avery and Thomas Covenant. Covenant's large and loyal following will appreciate the overarching detailed mood of despair, but many others will have broken their original Donaldson covenant.

Professor Adam Roberts states in an Afterword to ***The Complete Lyonesse*** that 'Jack Vance's Lyonesse books are the greatest fairy tale of the twentieth century ... Lyonesse is a great adult Fantasy novel *because* it is a great narrative of childhood'. A strong claim for the Lyonesse trilogy (*Suldrun's Garden*, *The Green Pearl*, and *Madouc*), reprinted here from the Vance Integral Edition Project, but there is no denying Vance's Arthurian invention, wordplay, and vivid characterisation. Vance fans and libraries should seek out this textually correct edtion, with illustrations by Les Edwards. Roberts' lengthy Afterword provides an analysis of Vance's creative world and place within the genre.

Neil Gaiman is still defining his place in the fantasy pantheon. Gaimain wrote ***Odd and the Frost Giants*** in 2008 for World Book Day, a program to inspire children to read. Certainly this republication, with new illustrations, will attract many new young readers. Odd, a lame 12-year-old Viking boy, runs away into the woods where he meets a fox, a bear, and an eagle, who claim to be Odin, Thor, and Loki, and have been ejected from Asgard by a Frost Giant. If they don't return to Asgard, an endless winter will ensue. Odd's confrontation with the Frost Giant on their behalf is logically and creatively played out within the folkloric tradition of children besting giants and defeating the odds.

William Gray, in ***Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth***, is critical of myths that are merely escapist fantasies. Gray thus explores the origins and tradition of 'fantasy or mythopoeic fiction ... in relation to a literary tradition that might broadly be described as Romantic'. Gray's analysis covers authors such as Hoffmann, MacDonald, C. S. Lewis, and Tolkien, culminating in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, even though Pullman has stated that his trilogy is not a fantasy. Gray argues that *His Dark Materials* 'may be seen as in certain respects the culmination of this tradition of mythopoeic fiction infused with ... a particular kind of Romanticism'. The short Postscript, 'Harry Potter, Hogwarts and All', unfortunately reads like an afterthought, and sits uneasily because of its brevity within the total thesis. Gary's lively interlocked analysis should have rested on its fantasy genre laurels.

Powers
Ursula Le Guin (Orion; 391 pp.; $28.95)

Powers is the third book in Ursula Le Guin's 'Annals of the Western Shore' series, intended for a young adult market but with clear crossover reader appeal. Each novel in the trilogy is narrated by a teenager who slowly learns that he or she has a special talent, but a talent that is more likely to be a problem than an asset — unlike the majority of fantasy novels, which are about obtaining magical power and holding onto it. Gavir, the main character in *Powers*, is a slave, who intermittently can 'remember' future events, but unfortunately without any detailed timeframes. Le Guin focuses on her main characters being able to find their place in diverse, and often harsh, societies and how they gain a kind of 'freedom', particularly through the liberating powers of books and education.

The Girl With No Hands
Angela Slatter (Ticonderoga; 210 pp.; $25)

Brisbane-based Angela Slatter writes in the magical dark fantasy mould of Angela Carter. Slatter believes 'colonised fairytales offer us a particular mode of living and interacting', which Jack Dann, in his introduction, says 'explode the patriarchal messages embedded in traditional fairytales'. Women thus strive to take control of their lives, for better or for worse. The overall standard of the 16 stories is extremely high, particularly the haunting 'The Jacaranda Wife', set in rural nineteenth-century Australia, and 'The Living Book', where a young woman is literally born to be read. Slatter also provides fascinating background to her stories in an Afterword. Slatter is an Australian author to watch.

Legends of Australian Fantasy
edited by Jack Dann and Jonathan Strahan (Harper; 548 pp.; $35)
The Infinity Gate
Sara Douglass (Harper; 533 pp.; $32.99)
Powerand Majesty
Tansy Rayner Roberts (Harper; 512 pp.; $22.99)
Pilgrims
Will Elliott (Harper; 507 pp.; $22.99)
The Ambassador's Mission
Trudi Canavan (Orbit; 513 pp.; $32.99)
Merlin: Knowledge and Power through the Ages
Stephen Knight (Cornell University Press, available from Footprint Books; 275 pp.; $65)

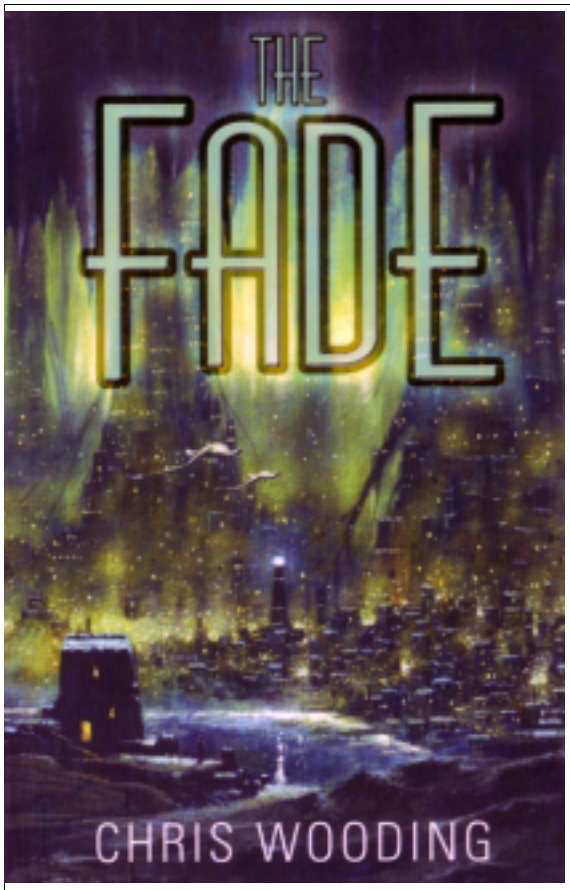
The 68th World Science Fiction Convention was held 2–6 September at the Melbourne Convention Centre. ***Legends of Australian Fantasy*** thus appears at an appropriate time. The eleven authors included, such as Garth Nix, Trudi Canavan, Isobelle Carmody and Cecilia Dart-Thornton, reflect the growth and strength of Australian fantasy writing in the last decade. The editors, Jack Dann and Jonathan Strahan, in their introduction indicate that they asked the authors to write stories 'set in their most popular "signature" universe ... or in a brand new universe that they are just starting to create'. This has advantages in that the authors build on existing 'comfort zones', but maybe blurs the challenges that original briefs might have offered.

Nix's 'To Hold the Bridge' is set in 'the established realm' of his Old Kingdom novels, while Canavan's 'The Mad Apprentice' tells the story of Tagin from her Black Magician settings and 'how black magic came to be banned by the Guild'. Carmody's 'The Dark Road', she says, focuses on a character 'who is almost completely invisible in the Obernewtyn Chronicles unless you know where to look for her'. Cecilia Dart-Thornton's 'The Enchanted' takes place in Erith, the setting for her Bitterbynde series. The one slightly out-of-place story is John Birmingham's alternate history segment 'A Captain of the Gate', in which World War II atomic bomb research fails with consequent changes in history.

One of Australia's premier fantasy writers, Sara Douglass, does not feature in *Legends*, but her traumatiic battle with ovarian cancer has surely has an impact on her output. ***The Infinity Gate***, an appropriately dark and complex book, finally completes her 'Darkglass Mountain' trilogy, with Axis and his colleagues facing almost insurmountable dangers on several fronts. Douglass has stated that this is her last but one fantasy book. After that, 'I seriously doubt I will ever write another fantasy novel. As so often happens, when you are faced with a life-threatening situation, your priorities change, and I am afraid that fantasy is part of the "out-the-door" changes.'

Another fantasy writer based in Tasmania, Tansy Rayner Roberts, sees fantasy as 'a particular kind of escapism', offering a 'dip into a world that is different without giving up our creature comfort, our twitter and our microwaves'. ***Power and Majesty***, the first of the delightfully quirky 'Creature Court' trilogy, is replete with 'cats, mice, dressmakers, power, madness, and naked men who fall from the sky'. *Power and Majesty* juxtaposes the two worlds of nox and daylight in Aufleur, 'a city of festivals, ribbons and honey cakes'. Roberts says the Creature Court, a secret society devoted to saving the city, is 'an elaborate social structure based around the idea that those few with the power to save the city of Aufleur are also doomed to be turned into monsters by that same power'.

Will Elliott came to prominence with his award-winning first novel *Pilo Family Circus* (2006), while his 2009 book *Strange Places* documented his ultimately successful struggle against mental illness and drug abuse. ***Pilgrims***, the first volume of his 'Pendulum' fantasy trilogy, looks at first sight to be yet another run-of-the-mill fantasy, but Elliott's off-beat humour and use of contemorary references within standard fantasy frameworks



ensures an impressive fantasy debut.

Elliott says he wanted 'to combine the grotesquerie of Mervyn Peake with the wonder of Tolkien, shading in the darker places with Lovecraftian shades ... The premise is nice and simple: there is a secret door under a graffiti-clad train bridge in the city' (Brisbane?). 'Our protagonist [Eric] walks past it every day on his way to work. One day, there's an eye at the key hole, peering at him as he goes past it.' Eric, a journalist working on a failing free newspaper, and Case, a grizzled gun-carrying alcoholic, make a cynical odd couple as they stumble into the warring factions and magic of the land of Levaal.

Trudi Canavan is the author of seven bestselling fantasy novels. Her eighth, ***The Ambassador's Mission***, the first volume of her 'Traitor Spy' trilogy, follows 20 years after the events in *The High Lord*, the last volume of the 'Black Magician' trilogy, which has sold a phenomenal 1.4 million copies worldwide. Canavan says in *Legends* that 'one day she will write a series that does not contain three books'.

In the meantime, readers of *The Ambassador's Mission* will require some knowledge of the previous books and the recurring characters, such as Sonea, Cery, and Dannyl. The plotline begins with 'Thieves' being killed mysteriously and, as Canavan has said, 'the underworld is not as nice as it was in the past'. Sonea's son Lorkin becomes a key figure in the plotline, ending with him finding an unusual Sanctuary. Canavan, as ever, has recognisable characters within a well- paced narrative with an underlying theme of the need for relationships to be based on trust.

Australian academic Stephen Knight is now Research Professor at Cardiff University. ***Merlin*** is an authoritative and detailed analysis of how the figure of Merlin grew out of Welsh myth and was then reimagined through centuries of literature and art, beginning with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (1138). As in the case of his earlier book on Robin Hood, Knight has little time for those who attempt to find a historical figure behind the literary creations.

Knight's subtitle reflects his analysis via Merlin of the tensions over the centuries between knowledge and power. Knight argues,in this context, the 2003 suicide in England of Dr David Kelly over Iraq 'truth' was 'a Merlin-esque end'. Knight's plot analyses from the twentieth century are, however, too condensed, given the need to cover the plethora of Merlin creations that expanded from print into media. Knight notes the BBC TV series *Merlin* has proved 'highly acceptable' in spite of, or because of, its 'banality' and emphasis on 'modern electronic substitutes for knowledge'. Knight reminds us once more of the different levels between fantasy and reality.

The Fade
Chris Wooding (Gollancz; 312 pp.; $32.99)

British author Chris Wooding creates in ***The Fade*** a subterranean world split by war between two human races, the Gurta and the Eskaran. Orna, an elite Eskaran warrior cum assassin, is captured and imprisoned by the Gurta. *The Fade* chronicles, in a brisk first person narrative, Orna's attempt to escape and to seek revenge on those she believes betrayed her and her nation. Chapter flashbacks retrace Orna's life as slave, wife, mother and warrior up to the point of her capture. While the story of the conflict between two civilisations forms the backdrop, the main plot focus is Orna and her physical and personal struggles to survive. *The Fade* concludes with an open-ended, if sobering resolution, perhaps indicating that Orna will not after all 'fade away'.

The Steel Remains
Richard Morgan (Gollancz; 345 pp.; $32.99)

The Steel Remains is Richard Morgan's first fantasy. Morgan has won the Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, and John W. Campbell awards with his SF novels, which Gollancz have recently reissued in standard paperback editions. In *The Steel Remains*, Ringil, a war hero/veteran, reluctantly embarks on a search for a missing cousin, rumoured to have been sold into slavery, a quest that will bring Ringil a confrontation with demonic forces and trigger traumatic memories. Ringil's open homosexuality, which sits uneasily with family and society, is only tolerated because of his military reputation. Morgan's dysfunctional characters are, as ever, full of suppressed rage at society's faults and oppressions, but it is the unrelenting framework of violence, language (including a plethora of f— words), and sexuality that reinforces the nihilistic fantasy character of *The Steel Remains*.

Pandora in the Congo
Albert Sanchez Pinol (Canongate; 441 pp.; $32.95)

Pandora in the Congo, by Catalan author Albert Sanchez Pinol, seems at first sight, with its aptly designed cover, to be just another Victorian imperial adventure yarn. It had a curious reception on the ABC's *Tuesday Book Club* where, except for Jennifer Byrne, panellists, including Richard E. Grant, seemed bemused by the genre mix, and persisted in calling it 'sci-fi' (sic). While it has echoes of Wells (Morlocks) and Verne (*A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*), it also encompasses the adventure novels of Haggard and Henty on the one hand and Joseph Conrad on the other.

The novel begins is London just before the First World War, when a young ghost writer, Thomas Thomson, is employed by a famous lawyer Edward Norton to write the story of Marcus Garvey, who is on trial for the murder of two aristocrats, Richard and William Craver, during an expedition to the Congo. Norton feels that publication of Garvey's tale and subsequent publicity will help him avoid a hanging.

Thomson fashions a fantastic tale of intrigue, strange creatures, greed, and exploration, but ultimately he begins to doubt the story he has written. Sanchez Pinol's book fashions a fictional novel within-a-novel, with characters offering differing views of what really happened in the Congo. *Pandora in the Congo*, while a Victorian adventure pastiche cum detective novel on one level, is also an anti-imperialist satire, exploring, literally and physically, hearts of darkness, all wrapped within the framework of authorial complexities. Sanchez Pinol's ingenuity deserved better from the *Tuesday Book Club*.

Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis
Michael Ward (Oxford University Press; 347 pp.; $49.95)
Tolkien On Fairy Stories
ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (HarperCollins; 320 pp.; $29.95)
Tender Morsels
Margo Lanagan (Allen & Unwin; 365 pp.; $27.95)
Now and Forever
Ray Bradbury (HarperCollins; 233 pp.; $22.99)

'The Chronicles of Narnia' have sold over 120 million copies in 41 languages since the publication of the first of the series, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). Just when one thought that there was nothing new to say about C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), Michael Ward provides significant new insights into Lewis's writing. Ward, Chaplain of Peterhouse College, Cambridge argues in ***Planet Narnia***, and on his extensive website (http://www.planetnarnia.com/), that the seven Narnia Chronicles' are based on the seven planets of medieval cosmology — Lewis's translation of the 'the planets into plots' thus provide 'the secret imaginative key' to the novels.

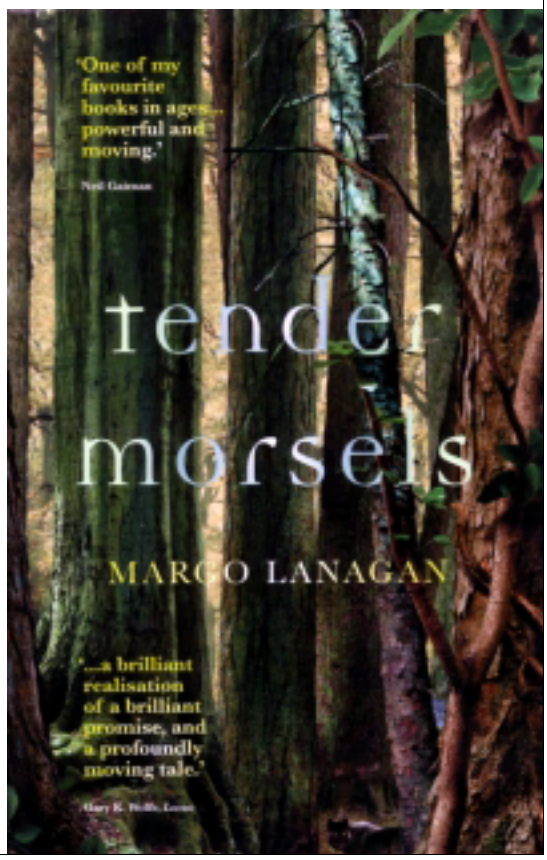
Ward acts as his own devil's advocate in his FAQ webpage on his cosmological 'solution'. In the medieval sphere, there were seven 'planets': Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn. Thus *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* corresponds to Jupiter, *Prince Caspian* to Mars, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* to the Sun, *The Silver Chair* to the Moon, *The Horse and His Boy* to Mercury, *The Magician's Nephew* to Venus, and *The Last Battle* to Saturn.

Ward writes: 'In *The Lion* [the children] become monarchs under sovereign Jove; in *The Dawn Treader* they drink light under searching Sol; in *Prince Caspian* they harden under strong Mars; in *The Silver Chair* they learn obedience under subordinate Luna; in *The Horse and His Boy* they come to love poetry under eloquent Mercury; in *The Magician's Nephew* they gain life-giving fruit under fertile Venus; and in *The Last Battle* they suffer and die under chilling Saturn.'

Ward details Lewis's fascination with the planets, beginning when he was six years old with a story 'To Mars and Back', and particularly his 1935 poem 'The Planets'. The 'Ransom Trilogy' (1938–45), *Out Of The Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*, contain many significant pointers to the Narniad content.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973) felt that Narnia was 'an ill-conceived hotchpotch', but Ward reclaims the Narniad in literary and theological frameworks. *Planet Narnia* is an important work of scholarship, and Ward's thesis is backed up with considerable erudition. *Planet Narnia* is written in such a way, however, that it will appeal to a wide audience.

In the meantime, *On Fairy-stories* has been reissued in another academic, yet accessible, edition, edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. Tolkien's essay 'On Fairy-stories', originally published in 1938, comprises about 57 pages of the 320-page ***Tolkien On Fairy-stories***. The rest of the book includes the editorial introduction,



notes on the essay itself, a history of its evolving text, bibliographies, and two holograph manuscripts. The editors emphasise that, for Tolkien, fairy-stories involve not merely 'fairies' but also the interaction of humans with Faërie itself.

Margot Lanagan, who is emerging as one of Australia's most interesting creative writers, juxtaposes human and Faërie in ***Tender Morsels***. Lanagan superbly continues the Angela Carter tradition of dark quirky tales extrapolating from the conventions of fairy tales to explore issues of gender, adolescence, and the nature of love. While *Tender Morsels* has been marketed overseas toward a YA audience, its strong content makes it as much an adult novel.

Liga, the main character, retreats, with her two baby girls, from brutal sexual oppression in her village to a non-earthly 'personal heaven'. Her two daughters, the quiet Branza and the tempestuous Urdda, grow up here protected from the 'real world'. The two worlds symbolise differing sides of humanity, one side brutal and uncaring, and the other safe and caring, yet the latter eventually proves stultifying for Urdda, who wants to escape to meet 'vivid people'. Has Liga been overprotective because of her traumatic teenage experiences and, as a consequence, will she be rejected by her daughter?

When the borders between the two worlds begin to fray, the three women journey back over time to the real world, where they must find happiness in their own individual ways amidst the dark elements of human society. Lanagan movingly explores, through well-drawn characters, and in carefully crafted prose, how individuals can ultimately confront evil and brutality, and in the case of Liga, Branza and Urdda, find an eventual family peace.

Ninety-year-old Ray Bradbury is a legend in the fantasy field. ***Now and Forever*** comprises two novellas, 'Somewhere a Band Is Playing' and 'Leviathan '99'. Bradbury originally intended the former as a vehicle for Katharine Hepburn, but this never came to visual fruition. A reporter arrives in a small isolated town in Arizona where no one seems to die. What is the town's secret, and will the reporter's discoveries and love relationship have an impact on its fate? 'Somewhere a Band Is Playing' is quintissential Bradbury nostalgia for small-town America and its values.

Bradbury wrote the screenplay for John Huston's classic 1956 film of *Moby Dick*. 'Leviathan '99', which began life as a 1968 BBC radio play, is described by Bradbury as '*Moby-Dick* in outer space'. Here the deranged blind captain of the 'largest interstellar spaceship ever built' is tracking a great white comet. The two novellas are not Bradbury prime, but capture well his fantasy sense of wonder, which won him a special Pulitzer citation in 2007.

Songs of the Dying Earth
ed. George R. R. Martin and Gardner Dozois (HarperVoyager; 660 pp.; $59.99)

Jack Vance, now in his nineties, is a giant of twentieth-century science fiction and fantasy. Dean Koontz provides an introductory tribute, while all the 23 contributors, in their afterwords, reveal Vance as a creative inspiration. Neil Gaiman, Tanith Lee, Robert Silverberg, and Tad Williams are among those with original stories in honour of Vance's 'Dying Earth' series, which co-editor George R. R. Martin ranks with Tolkien's Middle Earth as 'one of fantasy's most unforgettable and influential settings'. Despite similarities in the shared background, the stories are surprisingly varied in mood and interpretation. A good value anthology on several levels.

The Old Kingdom Chronicles
Garth Nix (Allen & Unwin; 1367 pp.; $35)

Garth Nix fans will be delighted that Allen & Unwin has issued, in one well-priced paperback omnibus, his 'Abhorsen Chronicles', the three award-winning dark fantasy books *Sabriel*, *Lirael*, and *Abhorsen* (1995–2003), supplemented with the 'Old Kingdom' novella, 'Nicholas Sayre and the Creature in the Case'. Nix has acknowledged that both Hadrian's Wall and the First World War influenced 'a fantasy novel that has elements of the historical novel ... and the Old Kingdom with its magic'. The plotline follows the Abhorsen necromancers as they fight to 'maintain the borders of life and death', and Lirael and her companions struggle to save the world from 'the Destroyer of All Life'.

The Kingdom of Ohio
Matthew Flaming (Viking; 322 pp.; $32.95)

Matthew Flaming's debut novel ***The Kingdom of Ohio*** has received much praise in the United States. It begins as an elderly antiques dealer in the present day unearths an old photograph that recalls a turn-of-the-century world he has been trying both to forget and remember. Peter Force is a young trainee mechanic in 1901, working in the New York subway, when he meets a young woman who claims to come from the parallel world of the 'Kingdom of Ohio'. Her belief in restoring the fabric of time brings them into contact with real historical figures such as the banker J. P. Morgan, Thomas Edison, and particularly Nikola Tesla. Flaming effectively interweaves historical fact, scientific discovery, and the nature of time into a fantasy love story and an exploration of memory.

Jasmyn
Alex Bell (Gollancz; 313 pp.; $32.99)

Jasmyn, the second novel by young British author Alex Bell, is a decided improvement on her debut novel, *The Ninth Circle*. Jasmyn is part mystery, part fairy tale, part romance, with the story of Swan Lake at its centre. Shortly before the novel begins, Jasmyn, the 27-year-old narrator, has suffered the sudden death of her husband Liam. When six black swans drop from the sky at his funeral, she quickly realises she hardly knew him at all. Liam's bad-tempered brother Ben reluctantly involves her in a global search for a unifying swansong. Bell skilfully depicts both Jasmyn's initial grief and isolation and yet resolute inner strength to unearth the truth in another alternate world.

Ghost stories

The Battle of the Sun
Jeanette Winterson
(Bloomsbury; 388 pp.; $16.99)
Pastworld
Ian Beck (Bloomsbury; 359 pp.; $16.99)
The Undrowned Child
Michelle Lovric (Orion; 417 pp.; $24.99)
Ghost Hunter
Michelle Paver (Orion; 245 pp.; $29.99.)

Jeanette Winterson, the award winning author of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit,* says she 'started to write for kids, because I wanted to delight my godchildren. I don't find it easier, or even different to writing for adults'. ***The Battle of the Sun*** is a sort of sequel to *Tanglewreck* (2006), in that they both feature the same young woman, Silver, and the plot involves elements of time travel.

The Battle of the Sun can, however, easily be read as a standalone book. Jack, a young apprentice in London in 1601, is unaware he is the key element in the attempt by a powerful 'Magus' to turn London into gold. Jack is kidnapped, and struggles both to escape from his captor and then to reverse the golden spell. Winterson conjures up some exotic creatures and characters, as well as real historical figures, such as the noted alchemist and historian John Dee, and Elizabeth I. *The Battle of the Sun* does not lack for pace and colour, although whether its underlying messages will be as evident to young readers is perhaps debateable.

Winterson reflects in a *Guardian* interview, 'The [financial] crash hadn't happened when I was writing it, but the crazy experiment to turn the entire planet into a money-making machine, regardless of the consequences, is nicely captured in the Midas-like greed that the kids have to fight in *The Battle of the Sun.* Yes, it's a book with a moral message — that the invisible things that can't be measured by GDP, such as love, friendship, compassion, happiness, a forest full of animals, a plate of food when you are hungry — are better than a stuffed bank account and a devastated world.'

In Ian Beck's ***Pastworld***, London is again the setting. London has been re-created by 2048 as a Victorian theme park following a global financial collapse. The Buckland Corporation has 'retro-fitted' London for thrill seekers to escape from the bland world of the future. Visitors, or 'Gawkers' as they are known, have, however, to abide by nineteenth-century laws, society, and morals.

While this is not an unfamiliar theme — think Michael Crichton's *Westworld* — Beck has created a believable world where many of the inhabitants have no knowledge of the outside world, especially a young girl Eve, who has no memory of her early life nor why she is being pursued by the Ripper-like 'Fantom'. Eve's story is intertwined with that of a young boy Caleb, whose visit to London goes terribly awry when his financier father is kidnapped and Caleb is falsely accused of murder. Beck cleverly juxtaposes Victorian crime and society with genetic experiments, which come together in a cliff-hanger ending.

Michelle Lovric lived in Sydney until the age of 18, when she went to live in England. She now divides her time between London and Venice. ***The Undrowned Child*** is her first book for younger readers, although she has written several adult novels, the third of which, *The Remedy*, was long-listed for the 2005 Orange Prize for Fiction.

The Undrowned Child is set in 1899 in Venice, a place which Lovric finds 'offers all the springboards for fantasy that any writer could ever want. How about a city that could be drowned at any moment? ... Of course, I have added "baddened magic" to the real historical setting, to intensify the frightening encounter between good and evil in *The Undrowned Child.*'

Eleven-year-old Teodora is the adopted daughter of two scientists who are visiting Venice, but, as with Winterson's Jack, she is quickly transported into another a magical world. This time it is linked to Venice, where a real historical character from the fourteenth century, Bajamonte Tiepolo, has returned to seize power. Teo's mysterious past is to prove crucial in the battle, both to save the physical Venice and its soul.

Lovric, again like Winterson, creates some memorable characters, not least Venetian mermaids, who not only run subversive printing presses (Lovric has a particular interest in printing history) but are also given to colourful language, which they have copied from sailors. Lovric may be a little too engaged in the history and culture of Venice to capture the youngest of readers, but *The Undrowned Child* will appeal to older teens, while adult readers who have visited Venice will appreciate the background details to locations listed in the appendix.

Ghost Hunter is the sixth and last part of Michelle Paver's 'Chronicles of Ancient Darkness' series, which have sold more than a million copies in Britain and 2.4 million copies globally, while Ridley Scott has bought the movie rights. *Ghost Hunter*, which Paver has said was the 'most emotionally intense to write', is, like its predecessors, an engrossing narrative. The series, set some 6000 years ago in Ice Age Scandinavia, has benefited from Paver's meticulous research in the British Library and her extensive travels to ensure both historical and scientific authenticity. While Paver argues that her books are 'not fantasy', a number of fantasy elements are present, especially the 'spirit walking' manifestations.

Her main characters, an orphaned boy Torak, his animal companion Wolf, and Renn, a girl of Torak's age, provide the continuing focus in their battle against the demonic 'Soul-Eaters'. *Ghost Hunter* constitutes a gripping conclusion, as they battle Eagle Owl Mage, the only surviving but the most powerful Soul-Eater. Paver's numerous fans will be pleased that her plans for future books include another YA book, although set in a different geographical part of the world and a slightly later period of prehistory.

The Small Hand
Susan Hill (Profile; 167 pp.; $24.99)

Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* has been running in London's West End for over 23 years, which illustrates Hill's ability to conjure up an effective ghost story.

The Small Hand, subtitled *A Ghost Story*, is little more than a novella, but this fits well in the tradition of supernatural fiction. Hill's main character Adam Snow is an antiquarian bookseller at the top end of the market, specialising in manuscripts and rare first editions, such as signed Virgina Woolf books. A Shakespeare First Folio in the library of the remote French monastery of Saint Mathieu des Etoiles becomes a prize pursuit in the novel.

In real life, one immediately thinks of ebullient antiquarian book and manuscript dealers such as Dr Rick Gekoski and Hordern House's Derek McDonnell. Snow, however, turns out to be somewhat antiquated in his own right, a reclusive bachelor, seemingly removed from the high-end book trade freneticism, although he does use email.

The narrative begins with Snow, en route to visiting one of his rich clients, taking a wrong turning on the English Downs and ending up at a deserted and decaying Edwardian 'White House'. As he enters the garden, he feels 'a small hand creep into my right one, as if a child had come up beside me in the dimness and taken hold of it ... its fingers curled themselves trustingly into my palm and rested there'. But when he looks down, there's no one there, echoing here perhaps W. W. Jacobs's classic ghost story 'The Monkey's Paw'. Snow subsequently has recurring occurences of an invisible young child grasping his hand and a consequent desire to commit suicide.

Hill links this growing fear to similar events in Snow's older brother's life and a long-forgotten event in the White House garden when they were small boys. Hill delivers a crisply told ghost story in the M. R. James tradition, which will certainly resonate on dark, cold, British winter evenings, but never completely chills, because Snow's remote character never engages fully. The name Snow may deliberately reflect coldness, while the name Adam implies the real danger of becoming a fallen man.

The Anthology Of Colonial Australian Gothic Fiction
ed. Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver (Melbourne University Press; 274 pp.; $34.95)
The Man in the Picture: A Ghost Story
Susan Hill (Profile Books; 145 pp.; $24.95)
The House At Midnight
Lucie Whitehouse (Bloomsbury; 378 pp.; $32.95)
20th Century Ghosts
Joe Hill (Gollancz; 389 pp.; $39.95)
The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts
Owen Davies (Palgrave; 288 pp.; $64.00)
Gothic Fiction
Angela Wright (Palgrave; 248pp.; $48)
The Routledge Companion to Gothic
ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Routledge; 290 pp.; $54)
Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic
Helen Hanson (Tauris; 251 pp.; $51)

Gothic novels and ghost stories can often be difficult to appreciate in the heat of the Australian summer. Ruined castles, haunted houses, dark nights, spectral figures, and the supernatural all seem better suited to northern hemisphere settings. Dr Owen Davies, in his introduction to *The Haunted*, quotes Joseph Addison, who believed that England was so ghost- ridden because the English were 'very often disposed by that gloominess and melancholy ... to which others are not so liable'. Australia does not possess these elements, of course!

Horror and unreason are not unknown, however, in the Australian landscape, as Melbourne academics Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver indicate in ***The Anthology of Colonial Australian Gothic Fiction***, published appropriately in the middle of the last Melbourne winter. The stories collected range from 1859 to 1932, with many stories evoking 'the bush gothic'. Rosa Campbell Praed, Marcus Clarke, Katherine Susannah Prichard, and Henry Lawson are perhaps the best-known authors in stories whose stark landscapes and 'repressed' violence still resonate.

More traditional ghostly settings appear in Susan Hill's novella ***The Man in the Picture***, with a plot focus reminiscent of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. *The Man in the Picture* begins in classic M. R. James style, on a dark cold evening in a Cambridge University college room where an elderly don highlights an eighteenth-century painting depicting Venetian masked revellers, but as the story progresses, how and why do new figures appear in the painting? Hill weaves a gripping story of intrigue and revenge, which comes to a logical, if terrifying conclusion, in the fogs of Venice. *The Man in the Picture* seems set to follow the success of Hill's long-running West End play *The Woman in Black*.

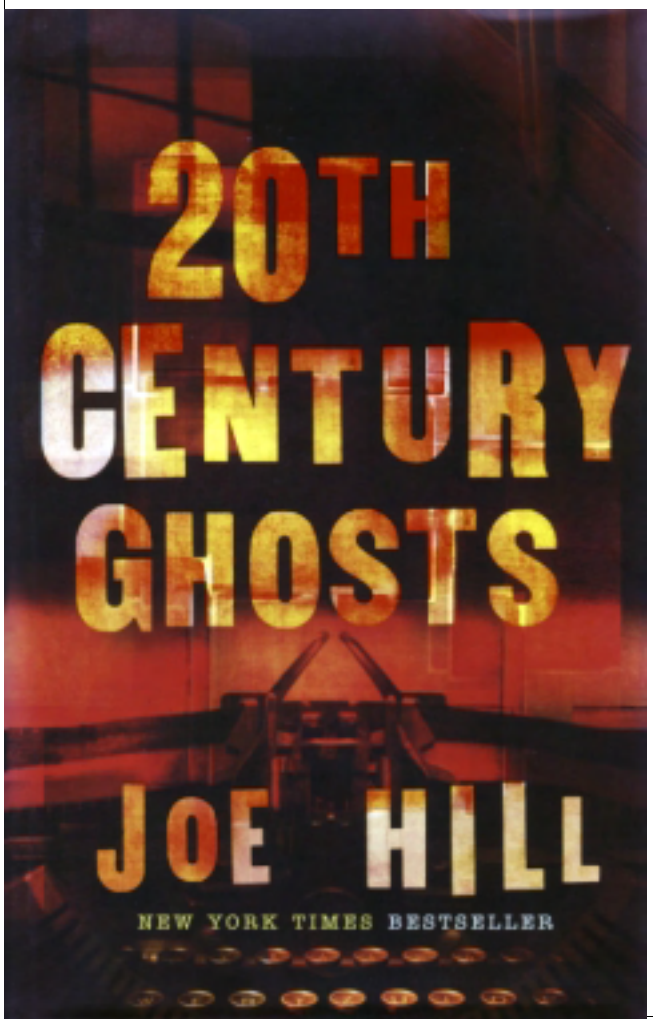
The House at Midnight, British author Lucie Whitehouse's debut novel, has been described by her as a 'psychological suspense with mythological imagery'. Whitehouse has been hyped in the UK as the new Donna Tartt, but *The House at Midnight* lacks the depth of Tartt's *The Secret History*. Whitehouse's main character Lucas Heathfield inherits Stoneborough Manor in Oxfordshire after the suicide of his uncle. Lucas invites a small group of his ex-Oxford University friends to stay, but their relationships at the house slowly disintegrate as past secrets and deaths seep into their lives. *The House at Midnight* is not high gothic, but reaffirms that houses do not have to be ruined to exert a disturbing influence over the inhabitants.

Another Hill, Joe, is the son of horror bestselling author Stephen King. ***20th Century Ghosts***, a collection of fourteen short stories, was in fact his first publication, although it is the second to be released in Australia, after *Heart-Shaped Box* (2007). Hill's cleverly constructed stories mainly focus on North American boyhoods, with the narrators poignantly recalling traumatic events. The title story, '20th Century Ghost', is a moving, and ultimately romantic, piece about a young girl who died during a showing of *The Wizard of Oz*, and her subsequent haunt-

ing of an decaying movie theatre. 'Last Breath', a story that rivals the best of Charles Addams, features an unusual museum that collects the last breaths of dying people. The final and longest story, 'Voluntary Committal', is a moving retrospective confessional that has the narrator rediscovering his mentally retarded younger brother's role in the mysterious disappearance of a school bully.

Dr Owen Davies' ***The Haunted***, subtitled ***A Social History of Ghosts***, is publicised as 'the first exhaustive cultural history of ghosts in England, Europe and America'. Davies, Reader in Social History at the University of Hertfordshire, suggests that no single definition can cover the term 'ghost' in an historical context. Davies compiles a fascinating narrative, which caters for both an academic and a general readership. He maintains a balanced viewpoint, emphasising he is not concerned with 'proving or disproving the reality of ghosts', but rather examining the changing perception of ghosts at different social levels over the centuries. With the current boom in popular culture of ghosts in series, books, and films, *The Haunted* is essential background to a perennially interesting subject.

The gothic is also clearly experiencing an academic boom, a phenomenon that has both pros and cons in the general context of balance in publishing trends in the teaching and research spectrum. ***The Routledge Companion to Gothic*** is clearly intended for that student market, with numerous 'bite-sized' essays from a variety of leading academic authors in the field. The four main sections cover gothic traditions, gothic locations, gothic concepts, and gothic media. This approach allows for a wide variety of subjects and approaches, ranging from Ken Gelder's condensation of the Australian gothic tradition; Ellis Hanson's analysis of queer gothic; and Andy Smith's overview of gothic and the graphic novel. The editors, Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, indicate that they have organised their collection of essays 'to avoid as best we can the old-fashioned list of dominant gothic tropes'. Nonetheless, it ultimately proves difficult for them to move totally away from historical gothic structures influencing contemporary concepts.



Dr Angela Wright's ***Gothic Fiction***, subtitled ***A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism***, focuses on the gothic novel's first wave of popularity between 1764 and 1820. As Wright notes, 'For the literary critics of the time, these Gothic novels represented a sign of the degradation of literary taste at the end of the eighteenth century'. The *Guide* analyses the controversy of gothic's increasing popularity in the 1790s and the publications of well-known writers, such as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, as well as exploring general themes, such as the aesthetics of terror and horror and the relationship between gender and the gothic. Wright overviews criticism from the late eighteenth century to the present day in a solid gothic fiction *vade mecum*.

Gender and the gothic loom large in ***Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film***. Dr Helen Hanson, Lecturer in Film in the Department of English at the University of Exeter, re-examines the heroines of Hollywood cinema in these two 'key generic cycles'. *Hollywood Heroines*, which provides fresh perspectives on the depiction of classic and contemporary Hollywood female characters, falls into the publishing category where the text is clearly written for an academic audience but the publisher hopes that it will cross over to a more general reading public.

Hanson's research brief includes an examination of 'how are female figures placed within the popular genres, such as the crime and gothic film? Why do certain female characters emerge at particular historical moments? How does the film industry exploit these figures? ... What currency do female characters have within the traditions and development of feminist film theory?'. Hanson is particularly strong on the 'endangered and dangerous female figures' through numerous films such as *Rebecca*, *Gaslight*, and *Basic Instinct*. From Ann Radcliffe to Sharon Stone may be a long, and occasionally tortuous, gothic road, but its well worth the journey.

A Dark Matter
Peter Straub (Orion; 399 pp.; $32.99)

American author Peter Straub has written 19 novels, many featuring supernatural or psychological horror settings. Straub's best novels include *Ghost Story* (1979), *Shadowland* (1980) and *In the Night Room* (2004).

In his latest novel, ***A Dark Matter***, the narrator Lee Harwell, a novelist suffering from writer's block, decides to base his next book on the events of a tragic evening in 1966 in Madison, Wisconsin. A group of young students who have become infatuated with Spencer Mallon,

a guru of the Timothy Leary variety, begin to dabble in the occult.

Straub has said in an interview, 'When I was in college during the early sixties in Madison, Wisconsin, now and then some wandering guru would pop up, camp out in student apartments, and lay out what he saw was the truth, the real deal. They talked and talked, and in the meantime they ate your food, borrowed your clothes, and had sex with your girlfriend. I thought it would be interesting to write about one of these guys, and have him lead some kind of ceremony that would go disastrously wrong.'

The infatuation of the students in *A Dark Matter* with Mallon culminates in a ritual that leads to the complete disappearance of one of the young students, a gruesome death for another, Harwell's future wife becoming blind, and the other three affected in various ways. The worst is Howard Bly, known as Hootie, who is institutionalised and largely communicates through literary phrases, notably from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

Harwell was sceptical of Mallon, and thus excluded from the ritual: 'I had missed the boat, definitively, and so had been spared the mysterious experience that came to define their lives. There was a magic circle and I stood beyond its periphery.' He now vows, decades later, to investigate what really happened that night in 1966 in a Wisconsin meadow.

A Dark Matter, which revisits the memories and consequences of that night through the perspectives of the surviving participants and of Harwell himself, is essentially a series of overlapping and interconnected recollections and interpretations. Harwell provides the catalyst to bring the participants to a sort of peace, ultimately expressed by Harwell's wife, 'I have the feeling that we've been set free.' Straub tantalisingly never fully explains the traumatic event, ensuring the overall ambiguity of *A Dark Matter* as a psychological mystery of reflections.

Alternative history

The Company of the Dead
David Kowalski (Macmillan; 748 pp.; $35.00)
Before the Storm
Sean McMullen (Ford Street; 262 pp.; $19.95)

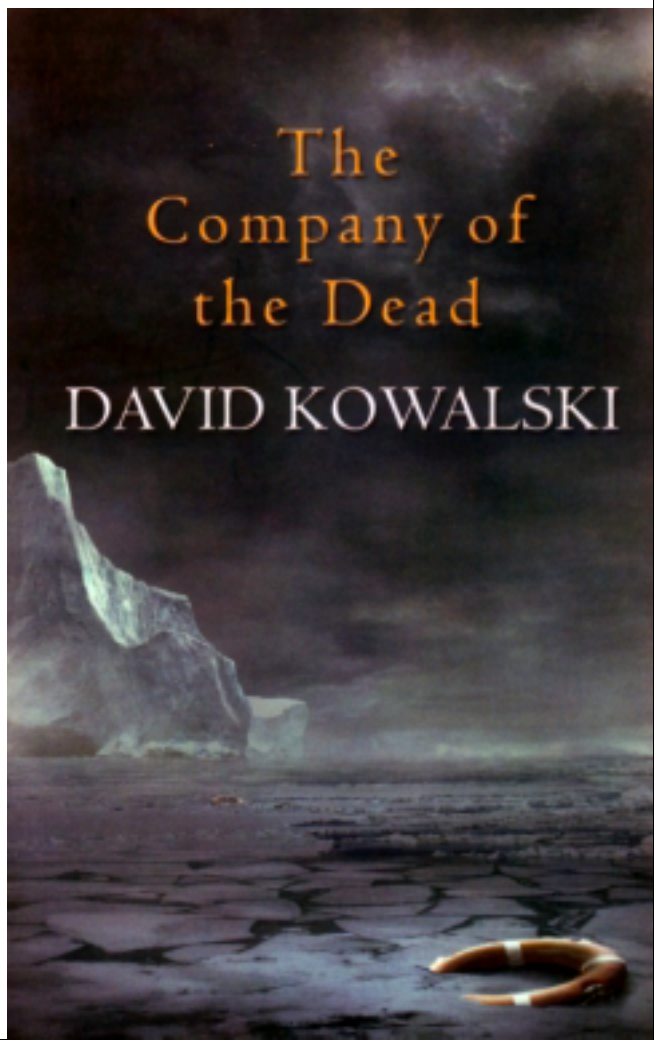
Cher's song 'If I Could Turn Back Time', famously delivered on the deck of the USS *Missouri*, serves as the theme of two novels by Australian authors.

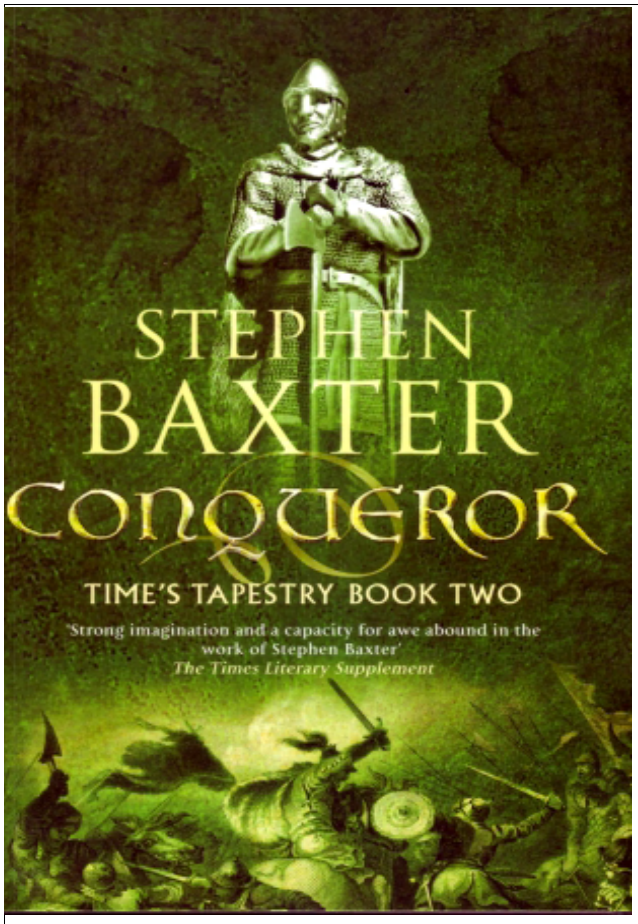
Sydney medical doctor David Kowalski spent eight years writing his first novel ***The Company of the Dead***, in which the history of the twentieth century is changed as John Jacob Astor (1864–15 April 1912) survives the sinking of the *Titanic*. Sean McMullen, in ***Before the Storm***, catapults two teenagers back from the twenty-first century to the 1901 opening of the Australian Parliament in Melbourne, so that the twentieth century as we know it can be restored.

Successful alternate or counterfactual histories are difficult to achieve. Kowalski and McMullen, while providing intriguing scenarios, fall well below the top rank of 'what if' fictional achievement, as reached by Kingsley Amis, Michael Chabon, and Philip Roth. Nonfiction interpretations of historical facts, moreover, can be often more stimulating than fictional creations, as, for example, outlined by Sir Ian Kershaw in his latest book, ***Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World, 1940–1941*** (Allen Lane), which cogently outlines how the Second World War could have turned out very differently.

David Kowalski began ***The Company of the Dead*** as a short story, but has ended up delivering to his readers 'the monolith you have before you'. Kowalski says he 'needed a seminal event from which to cast this alternate world adrift ... It occurred to me that at the birth of the 20th century the world was shocked and appalled and changed by the sinking of a ship. I had my framework.'

In Kowalski's alternate twentieth century, as viewed from 2012, the USA does not enter World War One. Astor, the richest man on the *Titanic*, becomes President of the USA in 1941, and World War Two does not happen. Nonetheless war is constant between the com-





peting global empires of Greater Germany and Imperial Japan. When another Joseph Kennedy discovers a journal in the wreck of the *Titanic*, revealing the interference of a time traveller, Kennedy must himself turn back time with an unexpected technological macguffin.

The Company of the Dead, while aiming to be an 'international novel' in sales terms, also focuses on the forces shaping history, events, and personalities. Such big picture reflections are, however, submerged by the minutiae of detail in 750 pages. With battles described exhaustively, a plethora of characters and side plots, the narrative pace often flags. A lack of ruthless editorial surgery may thus have prevented Dr Kowalski's rise in the alternate history rankings.

Before the Storm is the first young adult publication of enterprising Melbourne publisher and writer Paul Collins' Ford Street Press. Collins recently stated that he is 'dismayed at how many publishers are collapsing into one another', particularly alluding here to Lothian Publishing. His main goal, he says, at Ford Street Publishers, 'is to pick up on books that the major publishers are not willing to take risks on'.

There's certainly little risk in *Before the Storm*, as Sean McMullen is an established, award-winning writer with 14 novels and 60 short stories to his credit. *Before the Storm* is essentially a black-and-white teenage adventure story, despite the commendable web teacher notes http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com/images/bts-teachers-notes.pdf suggesting a deeper sociological and historical depth in the novel.

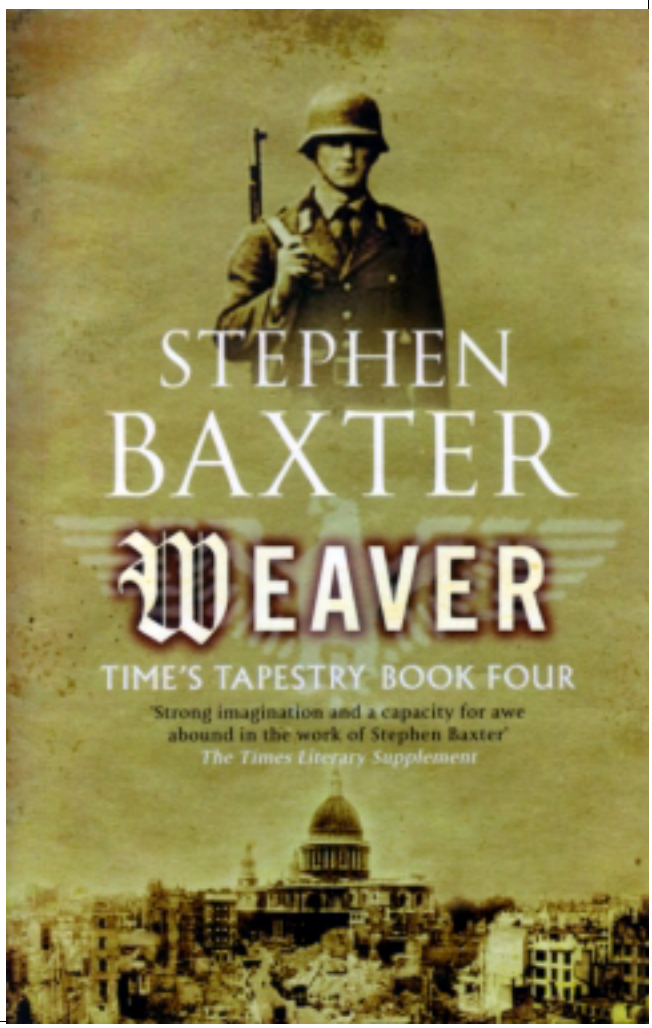
McMullen's two teenage British soldiers from the early twenty-first century take it upon themselves to return to Melbourne in 1901 in order to prevent 'the Germans' blowing up the Australian Parliament. They aim, as in Kowalski's novel, to change an alternate twentieth century of largely total war. McMullen uses language, gender, and class to emphasise the differences between the teenagers from the different centuries, but characterisation remains at a largely basic level. McMullen, however, even while on fictional cruise control, still provides enough in *Before the Storm* to make its reading time well spent.

Conqueror: Time's Tapestry 2
Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; 302 pp.; $32.95)

Dr Stephen Baxter's 'Time's Tapestry' quartet began with *Emperor* (2006), which followed the path of a Latin prophecy through the centuries of Roman Britain. The prophecy was apparently sent from the future by the mysterious 'Weaver' in order to influence the past and thus change the future.

Conqueror uses the same formula of historical vignettes and memorable characters to cover 'England' from the Saxon invasions of 607 to the Norman invasion in 1066, taking in key events, such as the sacking of Lindisfarne and the rule of Alfred the Great. ***Conqueror*** foreshadows in its conclusion a possible 'great empire of the North', an empire that, because of the Norman Conquest, never existed.

Baxter's strong historical descriptions here morph



into counterfactual history, which is clearly going to become stronger as the series evolves. *Conqueror* will be followed by *Navigator*, ending in 1492, to be concluded by *Weaver*, with Britain apparently under the rule of Nazi Germany. In the meantime, *Conqueror* stands as a strong colourful historical narrative before the alternate history unfolds.

Weaver: Time's Tapestry: 4
Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; 321 pp.; $32.99)
The H-Bomb Girl
Stephen Baxter (Faber; 268 pp.; $27.95

Alternate history, which historians such as Niall Ferguson call counterfactual history, is a subgenre of both science fiction and history. British author Stephen Baxter effectively straddles both in the 'Time's Tapestry' quartet's finale and in *The H-Bomb Girl*.

Baxter illustrates in both novels how history is often the product of chance, and how the outcome of key events change history. The first three books of Baxter's 'Time's Tapestry' series, *Emperor*, *Conqueror*, and *Navigator*, were essentially straight historical novels, whose place in the scheme of the whole is revealed only in ***Weaver***.

'Time's Tapestry' sweeps through British history from the Roman invasion to an England in the Second World War in which Dunkirk was a disaster for the British and the Germans have invaded Southern England; not an unusual alternate history topic, given such novels as Len Deighton's *SSGB*, Jo Walton's *Farthing*, and Owen Sheers' *Resistance*. Baxter places his alternate world, however, against the backdrop of a millennial stuggle for change involving rival groups sending coded messages back in time to attempt to change key points in history.

But will it be the Nazis or a Jewish boy, who is 'dream travelling' in a science experiment, extrapolated from J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, who will succeed in determining the past and thus the future? 'The Loom' combines human cognitive processes and quantum physics in order to 'weave' new time lines. Baxter's absorbing plot will make readers return to reread the earlier three books to fully savour a conclusion that is suitably enigmatic.

The H-Bomb Girl is set in Liverpool in 1962, where fourteen-year-old Laura Mann unwittingly holds the key to the future of humanity as the Cuban missile crisis brings the world to the edge of nuclear war. Baxter first sets the social backdrop, with a realistic view of Liverpool in 1962, where religious bigotry, racism, and gay bashing are contrasted with the emerging Mersey Beat scene and imminent cultural change.

Baxter has said of his motivations in writing *The H-Bomb Girl*, 'I was thinking about climate change and the end of the world predictions we have now, and if you were 14 or so, you've grown up with this apocalyptic stuff about the doom and gloom that's going to evolve this century, but for my generation it was atomic war that was going to come slamming down on us at some time in the future.'

Laura's parents' marriage is breaking up and, in a major plot improbability, her air force father has given her a key to a Vulcan bomber with a nuclear payload, which in the wrong hands could begin a sequence of events that will change the future, or rather futures. One nuclear future emerges, which is grim and realistic, both in general terms and for Laura personally. Look out for the Beatles, and particularly John Lennon, in a rousing denouement involving the 'military-industrial complex'.

It is no surprise that *The H-Bomb Girl* was placed on the shortlist for best SF novel in the 2008 Arthur C. Clarke Award. This is the first ever Clarke Award shortlist to include a young adult novel, but, like all good YA novels, *The H-Bomb Girl* transcends the ages of readership.

— Colin Steele, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

Pinlighters

[*brg* Not only did **Stephen Campbell** provide me with one of the Guest Editorials in *SF Commentary* 80, but in his second letter below he provides me with a guest editorial for this issue as well. This makes my own effort at an editorial (p. 5) seem rather inadequate, especially as Steve says so well some things that have been boiling in my own mind. :: Also note the letter that follows, from **Damien Broderick**, the other Guest Editorialist in *SFC* 80.*]

STEPHEN CAMPBELL
Flat 2, 29 Kelp Street, Warrnambool VIC 3280

I do remember those times of frustration with the mimeogaph machine at Ararat Technical School, and I couldn't wait to have a go at it, even though I veiled my enthusiasm, as I didn't want to interrupt what I see now as the germination of something great from a passion. I remember trying to draw my first contribution for ANZAPA on the wax stencils that I called *Armageddon*. Even then I had been well schooled about the coming end of all things, and man was ready to set foot on the Moon. Very heady and wondrous times indeed, and I'm glad we managed to keep in contact all these years later.

I am enclosing a photocopy of some panels from *Transitoria*, which you might like to use in reduced size in your fanzines. David Russell suggested, 'I can't tell if there's gravity in here or not.' I have now completed this story, which has run to nearly 300 pages, and is as it stands. I have a little of those end-of-project blues, but I continue working on paintings to keep refreshing my home environment.

Thank you especially for the Aussiecon photographs; I can now put faces to names I've heard often for years, thanks to you and David.

I received a good letter from Bill Wright, and copies (one for David) of *Antipodean Areopagus* (Bill's new zine) and *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*.

When do we get to see another of Elaine's sensitive graphics? I always enjoy her sense of space and colour.

(23 February 2011)

I receive copies of your works with great pleasure always, and I am glad that we resumed contact on the day of George Turner's funeral in 1997. All of those years since I left school and lost contact with fandom while I sowed my seed and attempted to create morphogenetic fields of artistic thought were centred around St Kilda, and I remember being aware through those years of the people that I came to know through fandom, but thinking of that world as one that was lost to me as I explored the strange world of the artists as he/I developed/became the creature who decided to surrender to nature and see what nature would do to a human that consciously gave itself up to a specifically indefinable identity. So I thought myself living and ovserving change and the passing of time, as if the protagonist in a dark and foreboding science fiction story that could never be told or published because it is about the very powers that wish for this story to be unknown and remain secret. These powers are not political and have no sides; they merely serve to implement the

planet's judgments upon each of its being's intentional thoughts.

I know that when we remet my life was in turmoil, and that remeeting was a welcome beacon illuminating an important part of my past that had been submerged by the very manifestations of the realities that that past had excited and incited in me. A meeting with Bill Wright in later years (he did not know I lived in St Kilda) at an outside table in Fitzroy Street where we had coffee provided a stronger reconnection with fandom, and he even shouted me to a convention (Continuum 2), where I remet you properly and without the appalling news of a death, and where we could talk casually.

I enjoyed the rehumouring of my youth and a fresh look at fandom, but was disturbed if unsurprised to see the commercial cum hierarchical market machine exercising greater control over the convention goers, and luring people away from the fundamental fannish 'this world is ours' activities and thoughts towards the formal straightjacked gloss of the legal money hunters.

I'm not talking about the huckster room only either; we all like to acquire good shit. I'm talking about the restrictive protocols that infect and permeate the whole convention.

Are we fans of just things, or are we fannish about ideas of freedom, and freedom to practise ideas? Who's convening to do what? If science fiction conventions are to become like vacuum cleaner or armaments conventions, where a lot of money can be acquired through strict security and promotional talkathons about masses of product, where are the guts being examined about science fiction and the fandom that it generated?

At the conventions I attended in the sixties and seventies it was possible to see every panel, and it still should be so. The only professionals allowed into the fandom convention should be the guests of honour (two at most), not including any others into these intensely personal and intimate relationships with strictly amateur and inquisitive fandom. So it goes. The sequel segues into itself.

(24 April 2011)

[*brg* The convention that would fit your criteria is Corflu. Corflu Glitter will be held in April 2012 in Las Vegas , where organisers Joyce and Arnie Katz live.*]

DAMIEN BRODERICK
San Antonio, TX, USA

You (mis)remember 1968. You wrote in *SFC* 80: 'I did not so much meet Damien Broderick for the first time at the Melbourne SF Conference, Easter 1968 (my first convention) as witness his visitation. One day of the convention was spent in rural surroundings up at Boronia, in the lower reaches of the Dandenong Ranges. At the beginning of the authors' panel (reprinted in *SF Commentary* 3, transcribed by Tony Thomas, who is still with us), Damien swept down the central aisle, all long hair and beard, accompanied by people who seemed to be his disciples from Monash University, spoke his piece at the panel, then swept out again at the end, not to be seen again until the Easter 1969 Melbourne SF Convention.'

God knows who these alleged and unlikely disciples were. The closest thing I recall to any event like this would have been my getting a lift there with Angela, who was then about 20 and rather lovely. (She might have dragged me away early and over my protests for some appointment.) Bruce was probably gobsmacked by her and got it all madly muddled.

Or maybe just got it muddled for some other reason. Or I've completely lost track of 1968 — but I do find that hard to believe.

(29 July 2010)

[*brg* I remember that at that 1968 convention session you were accompanied by several friends as well as Angela. In 1968, I was quite impressed by the Broderick beard and long hair, and the comparison with a Christ-and-his-disciples visitation hit me. Intimations of divinity dissolved as we met socially, both at John Bangsund's place and at the 1969 convention. My main Broderick memories of those years were of occasions of outpourings of sardonic merriment.*]

LEIGH EDMONDS
Ballarat East, VIC 3350

For some reason buried deep in the fabric of the cosmos, your fmz seem to set off bouts of reflection when I have the opportunity to read them. In the past few years this has been mainly a matter of time, and I recall reading a previous issue on the train back from Melbourne. This ish I've read on a flight to Canberra. At this moment, I'm sitting in the Pancake Parlour out of the weather writing this while I wait to go out the airport to get back to Ballarat, the same establishment that I sat in almost exactly two years ago (it seems much longer) when I flew up for the day to talk to people about writing the Tax Office history. Things that go around come around. Today I've come up to have a final meeting with the editor (fine people, editors) and go to a meeting about the book design. The next time I come back will be for the book launch, by the Governor General so I'm told. A little fame at last.

So there I was yesterday contemplating what I would take to read in the trip and when I opened the letter box there was your 40th annish of *SFC*. Problem solved, and an email of comment, of sorts, for you.

I started reading the issue when I got into my seat in the 737-400 in Melbourne, and I was only half way through Damien's article when the wheels hit the runway at Canberra. How stfnal can you get! True, I was interrupted at one point when the cabin crew handed out what Qantas like to call a light breakfast. (I attach a photo for your amusement.) Most thought provoking was the plastic bag of slices of fresh apple. This was something new to me. I've found apples on the tray before, but never sliced up apple in a bag. I wonder what bright spark thought up this marvel of modern technology, and the resources that went into it. I don't recall reading about this kind of thing in the 'Lensman' series. Actually, I'm sending two images: one of the contents of the tray and the other of the view out the window. It's hard to say which is more amazing. Or is it that tiny camera I took the pictures with? Maybe it's the systems that let me send you all this without a single piece of paper having been used.

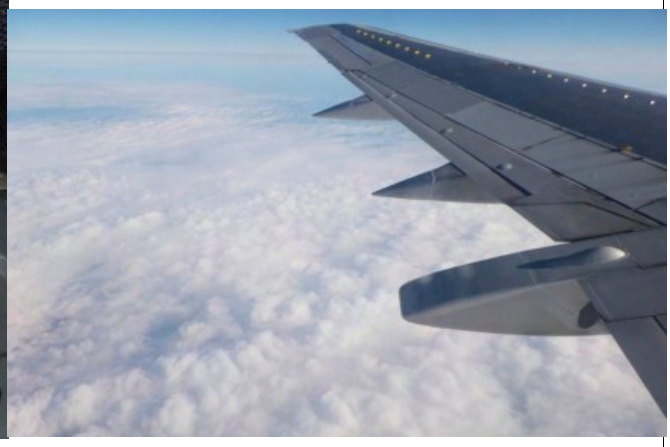
There is a taxi shortage in Canberra, so it took almost as long to get from the airport to Civic Centre as it had taken to fly up from Melbourne, and out in the open cold of a Canberra winter's morning, so I'd finished Damien and moved on to thoughts about Philip K. Dick by the time I arrived at the office. Then I stood around talking to the people I'm working for in the Tax Office for a while, had a meeting with the editor, and then had four or five hours to fill in before a meeting with the production team about the book design. I was found an office to sit in and read a great deal more of *SFC*. Excellent as usual; no wonder you have so many friends.

I found a lot of old friends in your pages too, some dead but most still living. I notice that the letter from Lesleigh is quite old. I wonder how she is faring these days? 1972 seems to be about three eons ago, but I still recall with some clarity the amount and quality of herbage growing around the house in Madison in 1974, but not much about the couple of nights Valma and I spent there. For some reason I also have a vivid memory of the rather grubby 727 that we flew from New York to Madison in.

[*brg* Lesleigh seems quite cheery and involved in all sorts of activities, and to judge from some photos on Facebook, looks much as we remember her from all those years ago. She's fairly definite about not getting reinvolved with fandom.*]

Having scanned the letters, I went back to the items on Dick and Tucker. Like you, and many of your writers, I have not re-read the works of either of them since I first devoured them in the 1960s and 1970s. I still recall *Ubik* as being one of the most stunning books I've ever read, but I couldn't tell you anything about what it was about now. My suspicion is that although we still have the books on our shelves (ours are actually in storage at the moment), I'd prefer to remember them from my 1970s perspective than from an older, tireder, and more world-weary perspective of 2010. One of these days I might test this hypothesis.

Apart from that, I don't have much more to add. I stand in awe of the ability of you and your contributors to dig so much meaning out of the words in a book and your ability to unpack all kinds of ideas from what you have read and what you think about it. Mid way through the



The Leigh Edmonds journey.

afternoon Andrew, the tax officer in charge of their centenary celebrations, came in for a bit of a chat about this and that and we talked about how people find different ways of drawing meaning out of their lives and the world around them. (There are some very bright and interesting people in the Tax Office.) Not too many historians put their evidence to the same kind of analysis that stf critics use, so we probably don't think as much as the writers of fiction do about the internal life of what they write. And I'd hate for somebody to do a textual analysis of one of my books, which, although they are driven by the historical evidence, still have a large amount of my personality in them.

I guess I'll see you at Aussiecon 4. Fancy that! The Tax Office history has taken up our time so we haven't been to any conventions since the Canberra convention where we last met. I bought several books there with the intention of trying to get a handle on where stf in Australia is at these days, and thoroughly enjoyed the little Ian Nichols collection I picked up, which was taut and terrific, and didn't get much joy out of the big anthology that was launched there, mainly because it seemed to me that the majority of stories were overwritten — rococo rather than classical, neo-classical, or minimalist, which is more my taste. At the moment I have no great projects in prospect, so I might even get to spend more time reading anything I pick up at the coming convention.

Back home again. Having exhausted the content of *SFC* during the day I read the latest issue of *Australian Aviation* on the way home. The trip was a lot longer than expected, so I got through most of it. The plane, another 737-400 (one tends to notice such things), was a bit late in to Canberra so we boarded late, and after they pushed us out we sat on the apron for a long time with nothing happening. I kept on reading, like most people in the cabin. Finally the captain came on the loudspeaker system and said that some gizmo in the cockpit (not his exact words) had broken and we had to go back to the terminal so the engineers could come on board and try to fix it. Eventually they did and off we shot. When you think about all the 'back story' to a simple little event like that, we live in an amazing world. This may well be why I find the world we live in so interesting and why researching and writing history seems to have captivated me. Like me, you probably write out a cheque to the 'Deputy Commissioner of Taxation' from time to time. I sometimes wondered who this person was and what they did, but now I know. Valma and I have met her and sat in her office, and talked about the social life of the Tax Office in Perth in the 1970s, among many other things.

(27 August 2010)

PATRICK McGUIRE
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In *SFC* 80, you ran my 2003 letter of comment written during the snowstorm of that year. I thought about that long-ago loc during the even bigger snowstorm we had in February 2010, but all I got written during what the media dubbed Snowmageddon was not locs, but some belated letters in lieu of the Christmas notes I had not managed to send. By the time of the 2010 snowstorm, I was retired and had no urgent need to go anywhere in a hurry (nor, for the first few days, were the roads ploughed out anyhow), so I worked very gradually on digging out my car, and at that moderate pace it took me over a week to emerge from the drifted snow, even with the assistance (finally) of the return of ploughs and front-loaders for a more complete digging out of the parking lot. My condo association had to levy a special assessment to pay for the unforeseen expenses of the digout and of storm-caused damages to the buildings and grounds. But we never lost power (unlike a lot of surrounding areas, Columbia requires power cables to be buried, where falling tree limbs cannot get at them), and we had less trouble locally than did many neighbouring communities.

In my 2003 loc, I also mentioned having read the first of Boris Akunin's 'Sister Pelagia' detective novels. I believe that the whole trilogy is now available in English translation, although I haven't read the translations, just the Russian originals. The second novel has strong elements of sf, and the third (in which Akunin winds up the series in a pretty decisive fashion) has elements of fantasy. Other Akunin mysteries, mostly set before the 1918 Russian Revolution, are also available in translation. Some of those books have a few sf elements, in a sort of retro-James Bond fashion.

(31 July 2010)

Phil Dick is not one of my favorite authors, the nearest exception being some of his early work that most nearly resembles standard sf, although I'm fairly sure he did not mean it that way. For instance, *The Man in a High Castle* fascinated me as a teenager in its capacity as an alternate history, whereas for Dick it was probably really more of some sort of head trip. I'm a little reminded of the way that many of Wells's scientific romances are in fact more or less social fables with sfnal enabling devices, but what the incipient sf community took to heart were the devices, not the fables.

I'm still figuring out what I'm going to do with *SFC* 80A. Hard to know how to handle that mass of short reviews of oldish books. It may prove to be a useful reference if nothing else. Google Desktop will make it easy to query on authors' names.

(4 August 2010)

[*brg* Since nobody launched into a fullblooded letter of comment on *SF Commentary* 80A, I assume everybody else thought as you did. I suspect its contents will become more interesting as it hangs around on efanzines.com and people slowly discover its reviews using Google. Or by using the Gillespie Fanzine Index, if such a gigantic project is ever finished, or even started.*]

Damien Broderick is not only 'Australia's senior science fiction writer' but also the holder of a 'PhD in literary studies' (p. 7) and, alas, it shows. Near-random examples of contrived, mannered language: '[T]he sixties would be a metaphor and icon for psychic unbuttoning' (p. 8); 'Most of these loony tunes — Dianetics, the ... Hieronymus Machine — were warbled by John W. Campbell Jr.' (p. 9); 'Slyly, Herbert had meant exactly to subvert this facile template' (p. 10). Such a style may be tolerated, or even

required, by the academic litcrit community, but it seems questionable in a work aimed at an even slight broader readership, whether the readership of its original appearance in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* or of its reprint in *SFC*.

In an earlier letter of comment, I gave you my few comments on Philip K. Dick. I do not have much more to say about Wilson Tucker, but for different reasons. From the early sixties on, I read enough Dick to conclude that he did not much interest me, despite his having become a cult figure for others. By contrast, I never ran across many of Tucker's novels. I've never seen any of his detective fiction. I have encountered only a few even of his sf novels, and the few that I read, I mostly read so long ago that I have no clear impression of them. Granted, between interlibrary loan and Internet booksellers, one can get hold of most books either free or at a tolerable price, but one can't read everything, and many unread books by other authors are already sitting on my shelves. (I do recall, with modest enjoyment, *The Time Masters*, which I have been through multiple times, although not lately.) However, I'll keep my eye out for Tucker-written targets of opportunity.

In an attempt to jog my memory, I just looked at the Tucker articles in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* and *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers* (first edition, 1981). I note that the latter article quotes one Bruce Gillespie from *SFC* 43.

In my younger days, I did run into Wilson Tucker's other incarnation, Bob Tucker the fan, at a few conventions, but it was a matter of seeing him either in program items or across the room at parties: I don't think I ever spoke with him. The 'smooothing' schtick got old fast, but that was as much the fault of the fans who demanded it as of of Tucker himself. John Hertz (pp. 37–8) mentions Bob Tucker's founding (long before my time) of the Society for the Prevention of Wire Staples in Scientifiction Magazines. This has a special topicality for *SFC* 80, since the staples holding that issue together proved too short for a fanzine of its size, and the centre page came completely loose. I managed to repair the issue fairly quickly by using a bulletin-board pin (the kind with a large plastic head) as an awl, and then putting in a couple of long stitches with needle and thread. In another attack of the staple menace, the centre pages even in the shorter *Steam Engine Time* are, in some of my issues, barely hanging on by one staple.

[*brg* And here I was aiming to stretch the limits of staplability by producing two 90-page editions of *SF Commentary* to be posted at the same time in the same envelope. I will speak firmly to Lindsay Bacon and the staff at Copy Place about this problem, but I suspect the fault is all mine. Will an 82-pager work?*]

Harry Buerkett (p. 47) argues that in a Tucker detective novel, fictional Boone may not be Bloomington, because Bloomington is mentioned by its real name. I can't speak to the specific instance (Buerkett does adduce additional evidence for Boone's being any of several other Illinois towns), but in principle I do know of cases from other authors where a person or thing appears in fictionalised form but where there is also a brief reference to the real name as being someone or something different. Perhaps the author puts it in as a defensive measure in case someone takes offence at the fictional portrayal.

I'm glad to find in Ahrvid Engholm yet one more person who sees a link between sf and mysteries (p. 61). As I have said before, I think that link is really at least as strong as the one between fantasy and sf, and that the fact that the latter two genres ended up as one publishing category is a regrettable historical accident. Publishers often claim that fantasy subsidises sf, but I suspect that more and better and better-selling sf would be written if the boundaries between genres were a little stronger, so that customers browsing bookstore shelves could easily perceive sf as an independent entity, thereby leading to a stronger sense of community. That would not mean that genre boundaries could never be crossed: there are already plenty of sf-mysteries and fantasy-mysteries. I'll bet there is an sf-fantasy-mystery out there somewhere, even though I can't think of one.

Probably a historical-naval-sf-fantasy-mystery-espionage-romance novel exists too, for that matter. If not, Naomi Novik could probably write one, if she researched her science a bit more thoroughly, which I think she could manage if she set her mind to it. I'll even suggest a plot: the mathematically inclined dragon Temeraire (who obviously runs on magic, since by physics he could never fly) develops a Babbage-type analytical engine, and the solution to a mysterious murder provides the first clue to an effort by Napoleon's spies to steal the engine, which discovery results in a long sea chase tearing Captain What's-his-name from his newfound true love, who for her part spunkily must save the brave Captain in such a fashion that she realises the depth of her own feelings for him, and that he overcomes his reticence and proposes marriage. The outcome ought also to advance the securing of civil rights both for the dragons and for British womanhood ... Needs a little touching up. For instance, the analytical engine must be essential to the plot, not just a McGuffin. Perhaps the engine, programmed by our heroine, could calculate navigational tables, resulting in the finding and the sinking of the French ship bearing away the spies with the plans. However, even that application would represent pretty much existing technology rather than sfnal extrapolation.

Something more ingenious would be better. But it's a start.

David Lake's poem (p. 76) questions celebrating birthdays once one is an adult and no longer *wants* to get older. Perhaps it's somewhat like celebrating Yule, Saturnalia, Christmas, or what-have-you during the darkest days of the (Northern Hemisphere) year. Or like a traditional Irish wake. When things are gloomy, people need a party to cheer themselves up.

A couple of bits of copy-editing curiosity:

- In *SFC* 80, sometimes, as in my printed loc, you convert lower-case 'sf' to upper case, which presumably reflects the Gillespie house style. However, at other times, as in the Broderick and Hertz articles, or in the locs of Martin Wooster, Cy Chauvin, Bob Smith, Sidney Bounds, Ahrvid Engholm, and probably others, you allow lower-case 'sf' to

stand.

- Adrian Bedford's loc (p. 74), in its first sentence, speaks of being published in Canada, which seemed to make perfect sense for someone right across the border in Washington, so I did a double take five paragraphs later when he spoke of being published only 'overseas'. Only then did I take note of the four-digit postal code, as opposed to a five-digit US one, as with Jeff Hammill's 'WA 98103' (p. 83) a few pages later. Both Washington state and Western Australia use the abbreviation WA. I'm not sure whether there is a graceful way to remove the ambiguity, short of spelling out both state names. One can't expect an Australian fanzine to end Australian addresses with a country name, even if the zine does have lots of American readers. (The fanzine does, however, show a lot of apparent inconsistency as to using or dropping country names in non-Australian addresses.)
- I thought I had spotted a similar potential future ambiguity between Alabama and Alberta, but upon investigation, the 'AL' in Doug Barbour's address (p. 43) looks to be just a typo, since I find that Alberta was already using the non-ambiguous AB long before his 2004 letter.

(9 August 2010)

[*brg* All these inconsistencies I admit, and I have no excuse for. Including in this issue: I will leave 'sf' in your letter, and attempt to update it to 'SF' (house style for now) elsewhere. I left out country names last time, because I had found in recent issues of *Steam Engine Time* I had been leaving out 'USA' for addresses from that country, but including them for other countries. I'm very easily confused, and last issue I was dealing with lots of stuff assembled over a number of years. Inconsistencies will continue, no doubt.*]

PETER KERANS
Bundeena, NSW 2230

I have been reading issues of *Steam Engine Time* on efanzines.com for a few years. They've been remarkably solid efforts, I have to say. After all the crazy rambles of my life, I think I had decided to reconnect face to face. Wasn't even sure I could make it to Aussiecon until a couple of days beforehand. Right now I'm doing a lot of reconnecting with old friends — I have a 50th birthday at the end of October.

Great to read about how Norstrilia Press came to be. I think I must have bought most of your titles (alas, not *Electric Shepherd*). I still have them. I remember writing a review of *Dreamworks* that I believe was read on 4ZZZ, the University station in Brisbane. I have the blue first-state dustjacket version of *The Plains*. *The Dreaming Dragons*. *Moon in the Ground*. *The Stellar Gauge*. It's all coming back!

It's one of the things that really got me interested in writing. I did postgraduate studies in writing at UTS in Sydney, in those days (late '80s) a writing school full of postmodern fervour. They seemed to like my fiction writing. To them it was discontinuous narrative; to me it was bite-sized pieces, all that I could manage, kludged together. The guy who taught genre fiction (whose name I cannot recall) wrote and delivered this amazing SF syllabus, where every SF twist and turn could be seen as a nod to the postmodern, all roads leading to 'The Terminal Beach' and the like. Ironically I could not finish the subject. The war, you know.

[*brg* Surely it must have been Terry Dowling who taught that course?*]

Through everything I did manage to keep reading SF, even though life had turned into some huge SF erotic horror hybrid. When the AIDS Council grew from a small organisation to a huge one in a couple of years, we moved to Commonwealth St near Hyde Park and Oxford St (the one-time gay 'golden mile'). I used to walk down to Galaxy Books on Castlereagh St (it has moved twice since) in my lunch hour. Those were times of sheer madness in the community. Death was striking en masse. But you know what? Great books helped see me through. Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden* I thought was amazing at the time, and seemed to be tapped into our nightmare at the source.

We had a new staff member — fairly senior — who one day chided me for reading an SF novel during a break. How could I indulge myself in such fantasy? he seemed to be saying. In some ways he was right. We were under siege. But I kept up my reading when I could. Then a few months later he approached me again, and I think at that time I had *Red Mars*, a book I found absolutely astonishing. This time he confided he thought I was the sanest person in the organisation!

I've compiled a list of books I have here that might interest you: a Gillespie dozen, for starters. Hope you find something you like.

- *The Course of the Heart* (M. John Harrison. Night Shade, 2004.) 1st US/HC. VG/VG.
- *They Fly at Ciron* (Samuel R. Delany. Tor, 1995) First printing. VG/VG
- *Pilgermann* (Russell Hoban. Cape, 1993.) 1st. F/F
- *Time's Arrow*. (Martin Amis. Cape, 1991.) Ist. Signed by Amis. Spine a little leaned.
- *The Parable of the Sower* (Octavia Butler. Four Walls, Eight Windows, 1993). 1st. A few library marks but in unread/NF condition.
- *The Cave* (Jose Saramago. Harvill, 2002.) 1st. F/F
- *Echo Round His Bones*. (Thomas M Disch. Hart-Davis, 1969.) 1st. G/G. Browning on endpapers, DJ price-clipped, but a solid copy.
- *Diaspora* (Greg Egan. HarperPrism, 1998). 1st US. F/F
- *Endless Things* (Aegypt #4) (John Crowley. Small Beer Press, 2007.) 1st. F/F.
- *Strange Travellers* (Gene Wolfe. Tor, 2000). 1st. VG/VG
- *Roadside Picnic* (A. & B. Strugatsky. Gollancz, 1978). G+/G+. Some browning/spotting to endpapers. DJ mildly sunned. Very clean and neat text block. A good copy.
- *Real-time World* (Christopher Priest. NEL 1974). 1st. NF/NF

Once again, Bruce, thanks for being so gracious on meeting again. You flipped me a copy of *SFC* in the blink of an eye! No questions asked.

(11 September 2010)

[*brg* A 'Gillespie list' indeed. I own copies of all of them except *Time's Arrow*, *They Fly at Ciron*, and *The Cave*. I'm lucky to have a copy of Hoban's *Pilgermann*, but still haven't read it. I've also not read *The Parable of the Sower*, or the Wolfe or Crowley. I know nothing about Saramago, so Peter sent the following:*]

Saramago is the Portuguese winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, some of whose later works are fabulations — a slippery descriptor, I know. In the late '90s he had a near-SF novel called *Blindness*, which is where I discovered him. I believe he died earlier this year.

I thought you would be likely to have most of those books. I found a nice US hardcover copy of *The Child Garden* a couple of years ago, but that went to my brother Sel, also an SF reader and collector. I'll keep an eye out. Perhaps you could put together a want list.

I have friends who are comix zinesters; they're mixing it up and using blogs to promote and discuss what they like, but it still comes down to the zines, the zines. They chat about the zine's production values, argue about the contents, wait with baited breath for the latest update from the printers, and the payoff happens only when the zine is in their hands! And the contents are the boiled-down best. So maybe the thing with *SF Commentary* is to evolve it. Because it really is a wonderful thing, you know.

(11 September 2010)

[*brg* This is the kind of excitement I still get from publishing fanzines. This is what I do. The new zinesters, the people who gather at the Melbourne shop called the Sticky Institute, obviously must know the feeling, although they don't know about the history of fanzines. What puzzles me is why the zing of fanzine publishing has disappeared among most SF fans, except for fans who publish on eFanzines.com.*]

All this PKD material in *SFC* 80 has seduced me back to all the current web material about Philip Dick — from back issues of *PKD Otaku* (now appearing on a German server) to totaldickhead.com (a blog-style semi-academic zine, with recent reports from the PKD festival in Colorado), frolix-8 (another blog-style effort using the interesting technique of linking to real-world stories that echo particular Dick novels/stories and essays), philipkdickbooks (a PKD library project that does include *Electric Shepherd* but no cover images of *SFC* next to those of *SF Eye* and other fanzines), the *PKD Project* (initially begun to note PKD texts where the author perceives Dick cannot describe a woman without referring to breasts(!) and now respectfully expanded to pull key quotes from his texts), and of course the official site, philipkdick.com, which I have been visiting for news for years now.

What a brew. Remarkable how it draws you back in, just when you thought you had escaped from Dick's mesmeric tentacles ... it was *The Penultimate Truth* that first laid its suckers on me, followed by *Androids* and *High Castle*.

Also astonishing is the sheer volume of new PKD-related books on the market — including recent titles *I Think I Am Philip K. Dick* (L. Rickels, 2010?); *The Postmodern Humanism of Philip K. Dick* (J. Vest, Scarecrow Press, 2009); *Philip K. Dick: Canonical Writer of the Digital Age* (L. Kukukalic, Routledge, 2008); and the unforgettably titled *Do Androids Sleep With Electric Sheep?*, critical perspectives on sexuality and pornography in science and social fictions from Re-search Publications, with essays and stories from Rucker, Tiptree, Kadrey, and Doctorow (no date stated).

Then there's a general background babble of non-PKD-specific blog stories, mostly linked to movies or prospective movies, or rumours of movies ... could this be the manifestation of a vast phildickian monster rising from the collective psyche?

PS: I have sent the link to enfanzines to philipkdickbooks regarding *SFC* 80. I hope you do not mind.

(11 September)

I've enclosed a money order for $50 for SFC. Back on board after a nasty bout of the 'flu.

I've read and re-read the Broderick piece. I want to see his take on the '90s to now! 'The seductive rise of mass-media "sci-fi" has torn sf away from its elaborated specialist roots, carelessly discarding its long, tormented history. Science fiction and its consumers now start from scratch, again and again.' There's a monster of a story waiting to be told with Broderick's perceptiveness right there. Because the SF influence is omnipresent. While it does bring a huge freight of the banal and cringeworthy, the mass media sci-fi can still provide pathways into SF reading, into the places where the edgy ideas and urgent voices hold sway, into books.

Did I ever tell you it was largely music that led me into SF? My brother brought home a copy of Hawkwind's *Space Ritual* (1973), a monstrous space rock extravaganza featuring Moorcock poetry. Hawkwind led to Moorcock, Moorcock led to *New Worlds*, Ballard, Aldiss, Disch. Which of course led me to *SFC*, where I picked up on Dick, Lem, the Strugatskys, Delany, and Le Guin. I can't imagine not having had those authors' books in my life.

I read with interest how you are leading your life with your publishing and freelance work. I seem to be moving on a parallel track, too, working on publishing and communication projects from home, commuting into the city for my casual job. I have been working at a big technology and design museum (the Powerhouse) in Ultimo, on the western side of Sydney CBD, for several years now.

I had done some work in magazines, and eventually got a job in the Publishing Unit (Powerhouse Publishing). We did a lot of coffee table-sized books and exhibition catalogues. Funding priorities meant the unit was put on ice a couple of years ago, a very sad and unpopular prospect for us — we had built up a substantial backlist, with a number of titles that kept going to reprint and an annual astronomy guide (the old Sydney Observatory at the southern end of the Harbour Bridge being part of the museum). It was a small boutique operation; most of our design, editing, and publicity was done out of house. We did a lot of co-published titles, and a lot of my time was spent organising shipments of books to and from printers and distributors here and overseas. I did a graphic layouts for flyers, book catalogues, launch invitations, posters. As a small team we had to cover a lot of bases.

The job had some great moments. I got to meet two former prime ministers. We had an exhibition on the Great Wall of China (which I think later travelled to Melbourne), and a lot of work went into putting together a 300-page catalogue. At the exhibition launch we had some advance copies from the printers, so saving embarrassment for all after a terribly foreshortened publishing schedule. Gough Whitlam launched the exhibition and book, which was a very Big Deal with Chinese state dignitaries on the stage. I met him, and what a sharp mind for a person of 90 years! Finally got to thank him for making the changes in government that allowed me fee-free access to tertiary study.

In 2006 we did a 50th anniversary book on the Sydney Opera House, complete with never before published images from the original opera-house design competition and introduced by Utzon. This was launched at the Opera House by Paul Keating. His launch speech was witty and knowledgeable; we were all waiting for his trademark barbs, which did come.

Commuting into the city for my casual job involves a ferry ride from Bundeena, where I live, a small township in the Royal National Park, to Cronulla; then a 50-minute train ride to the CBD, followed by a good 10-minute walk. Travel time is about 1 hr 40 mins either way. After work you can't dawdle in the city, as there are only two trains available to get you to Cronulla on time for the last ferry at 6:40. Otherwise you can't get home without $60 cab fare from Sutherland through the National Park.

(22 September 2010)

[*brg* As you will have seen from **brg** 67, Peter, your coming up to me at Aussiecon 4 and thanking me for all those fanzines was the highlight of the convention, and these letters again remind me (as if the other letters in this issue weren't enough!) of why I publish fanzines.*]

JERRY KAUFMAN
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The *SFC* 80 cover by Ditmar is both wonderful and a bit creepy. The human figure has a rather snake-like neck and odd-looking head. So it discomforts me.

Thanks for including Damien Broderick's piece as a Guest Editorial. I thought it full of insight.

I'm surprised that people keep having new things to say about Phil Dick, but the comparison of his experiences and books with the shamanistic experience is a new angle to me. I'm surprised at myself for not noticing it, because I've read quite a bit about shamanism myself. (Mircea Eliade's study of the subject is the best I've read, but there may be newer books I'm not aware of that could be its equal.)

The biggest pleasure of the letter column is seeing Lesleigh Luttrell in it. She was one of my first friends in fandom, though in her family it was her brother Chris Couch I was really close to. I have fond memories of visiting them and their wonderful family in St. Louis around the time of the 1969 Worldcon there.

[*brg* See my note to Leigh Edmonds about Lesleigh's getting in touch again a few years ago.*]

I have a checkmark next to Matthew Davis's comments on Maclaren-Ross and his writing career, because he reminded me of American writer Thomas Heggen. Heggen wrote a novel called *Mr Roberts*, based on his own experiences in World War II on naval cargo ships. He didn't write anything else (I think the novel was based on earlier short stories). I remember reading a book about Heggen and another American writer who produced one significant book, and have just googled around to refresh my memory. The book was *Ross and Tom: Two American Tragedies* by John Leggett. The other writer was Ross Lockridge, and his novel was *Raintree County*. Both novels were very popular and were turned into popular movies. Leggett's thesis was that success completely unbalanced and destroyed the authors.

I wonder what would have happened to Phil Dick if one of his books had that kind of success during his life.

(12 September 2010)

Speaking of people no one knows about, you print letters from Jeff Hamill, who lives quite near to one of our former houses, but whom no one here knows.

(13 September 2010)

[*brg* Jeff did travel from Seattle to San Francisco for Potlatch in 2005, when I was visited America. There's a photo of him in my trip report, *American Kindness*. But I was so overwhelmed by offers to get together with Seattle fans while I was in town that I forgot to try ringing Jeff. In 1973, when I was in New York, I introduced Barry Gillam to NY fandom. Maybe Jeff might like to get in touch with Seattle fandom.*]

JEFF HAMILL
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It seems that every letter I write should start with an apology for not having written something sooner, and this letter is no exception, so I'll skip the apology this time. This time, of course, procrastination is compounded with guilt, since I had promised you an article about Iain M. Banks ages ago and I am no closer to writing it today than I was back then.

The only science fiction book that I read in the last year — I keep a list of every book I read; otherwise I would forget — is Banks's *The State of the Art*. I had thought that there would be more. This (Banks's book) was part of my effort to make good on writing an essay about him for you, but I need more than one book per year for that.

To add to my sense of guilt, I opened up *SF Commentary* 80 and found ... that I'm the author of one of the two 'Feature letters of comment' and, on top of that, that I'm taking up more space in *SFC* 80 than anyone else, except for perhaps Harry Buerkett. How very surreal.

Of course, with that kind of prompting, it makes it all the easier to get a letter out of me.

But this time the letter will be pretty thin on content. Life hasn't changed much here for me personally; my health is about the same (no better, no worse); I find that I'm reading less than I was generally (not just science fiction) for reasons that aren't clear to me. There's always

excuses for not taking the time to read — volunteer graphics work for Pathfinder Press, scanning projects, house cleaning and repairs, friends to visit. That, and I've been trying to earn some money as a small-time book scout. Much as I love books, one might think that it might be a natural line for me to follow, but the frustrations attached must be familiar to everyone who loves searching for books — what you see is mostly garbage.

Enclosed is some US currency as a donation to your archiving work on *SFC*. Or to anything else you may need it for.

(18 October 2010)

[*brg* Thanks very much, Jeff, for the $100. I still hold hopes for receiving that article about Banks. Meanwhile, please see my note to Jerry Kaufman, immediately above your letter.*]

HARY BUERKETT
705 S. Anderson, Urbana IL 61801-4301, USA

Rosaleen Love's critique of Christopher Palmer's book I found delightful and funny — especially the question as to a Ganymedean Slime Mould's sex. Certainly Dick had his hangups about women. It's part and parcel of what made Dick Dick.

I very much appreciated the sentiments in Stephen Campbell's letter/editorial. The treasure has not been stolen, but lies buried. We dig it up where it can be found: in the used book shops (a myriad number of which can be found in the online markets). Of course, we're digging up a corpse, or perhaps a zombie. Our writing about it is what animates it, what keeps it alive in our memories.

Good article by Damien Broderick on the watershed of the New Wave. The best practitioners of the art largely found themselves sidelined in the 1970s (Dick, Lafferty, Lem, the Strugatskiis), as the 'New Wave writers' attempted to wriggle out of the death grip of genre. Some, like Dick, like Tucker in *Ice and Iron*, tried to do the same within the constraints of genre: but when you play with house money and by house rules — even if you bend those rules, even if you cheat — the house always wins.

Once the marketplace, or academia, defines a genre, that form is a fossil. Genre are for publishers and booksellers, not for writers. In writing to genre, writers have not just prostituted themselves, as Lem had it, but sold their birthright. And now we have the *New & Improved SF! Now with More Words! More Pages! User-Friendly Content!* — and it's gone beyond parody and pastiche to servile homage and bland rehash.

Science Fiction is dead. What's left to us is eulogy for a fallen friend we cannot bear to let go.

(1 August 2010)

I wanted to congratulate you on featuring Jeff Hamill's letters of comment. Bravo! Of course, I don't agree with everything he states, but we share a general sense of the field. I especially liked his points in connection with Lem's criticism, and the general 'throwaway' quality of American SF, due to market forces. And that those practitioners, like Bear and his ilk, who unquestioningly adopt the ethos of the market fare the best financially (which, going back to Lem's 'Hopeless case' scenario concerning Asimov, is in fact the goal of genre fiction). Hamill's point on the Russian Revolution being about economic issues is dead on: Marx was, after all, essentially a capitalist — he just disagreed with the moneyed interests on who should control das Kapital.

Speaking of Marxists: I laughed out loud at Hamill's comment that 'Darko Suvin's book (*Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction*) ... needs to be translated into English'. Very nice. Of course, it's very much in keeping with *College English*-type 'shop talk', which is in keeping with the Greg Egan quote on obfuscation on the following page.

Lots of good stuff on what science fiction should do (or should do more often or better) and should be. This all goes back to Lem's critique of the field, that it has no acknowledged definition and no critical theory specific unto itself. So (as Hamill points out) we import general literary theory, which may not be appropriate in genre fiction, in that it may not be particularly useful given the comfortable status quo of the field. I'm as guilty on this as the rest of us highbrows. Prescriptive edicts on what *should be* come fraught with dangers (pointed up by Hamill in the Lem/Le Guin and Disch/Le Guin slapfests).

Well done, Jeff. I've got your back.

(3 August 2010)

Errata in 'Ice and Iron: Wilson Tucker's fiction experiment in critique':

- p. 52a: 'A Reuleaux Triangle, ... spun *off-centre* in space ...'. Very important distinction, as any shape spun in space on its centre defines a circle; the Reuleaux Triangle shape is used in industry with drill bits, placed off-centre, to drill out nearly square holes (with rounded corners) — as defined in Tucker's text.
- Also: the illustration of the charcoal iron was left out, though the prompt '[see illustration]' was left in (also p. 52a).
- On p. 51a, I missed a typo in my original file: 'the ostrich cock ... incubates the eggs at night to *relive* his hens ...' should of course read 'to *relieve* his hens'. I think most readers will make the correction automatically.

(31 July 2010)

[*brg* I must admit that the illustration of the charcoal iron seems to have disappeared from my records.*]

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On page 85 (letter dated 27 January 2004), Jeff Hamill recalls a co-worker at an oil refinery who was keen on SF but didn't enjoy the loan of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*: 'When I asked him why, he said, "It made me think too much." If I had to sum up the distinction between fiction and literature in a few words, then literature is fiction that makes you think too much.'

Earlier this year, one of my siblings announced to me that she didn't like science fiction — except (it

incidentally emerged) for *Star Trek*, which, by contrast, interests me only as the inspiration for the wonderful 1999 movie, *Galaxy Quest* (written by Robert Gordon and David Howard, directed by Dean Parisot, and with Alan Rickman playing the Spock-like character's actor). Instead of watching my DVD of *Galaxy Quest*, however, my sibling and I both enjoyed watching my DVD of *Dean Spanley* — derived from Lord Dunsany's fantasy.

Since my sibling seemed genuinely bothered that I enjoyed SF, I sent to her Brittany address a copy of Edmund Crispin's first *Best SF* anthology (published in 1955). Among the stories I particularly recommended to her were 'Prott' by Margaret St Clair and 'The Ruum' by Arthur Porges. The more months that I wait for any comment, the more I wonder whether the trouble with this collection is that it fits Jeff's definition: it 'makes you think too much'. But silence is infinitely interpretable.

The other of Jeff Hamill's observations I've selected appears on page 84, dated 4 December 2003: 'The very small number of "female geniuses" can well be explained by the powerful social barriers that women have faced and (to a slightly lesser extent) still face. Sophie Germain is an excellent example: when she first wrote to Karl Gauss, she signed her letter using a man's name, fearing that Gauss would not take a letter from a woman mathematician seriously.'

In the 1990s, Arabella Weir wrote and acted a character called 'Girl Who Boys Can't Hear' in the BBC comedy sketch program *The Fast Show* (which was titled *Brilliant* when shown in the US). As she describes it in the *Independent on Sunday*, 11 November 2007: 'There'd be a sketch in which a given situation needed to be resolved; my character would be the one with the solution, but it was only when one of the guys repeated her solution verbatim that everybody else heard it. To my surprise, the character was recognised straightaway by our audiences. I had, typically for a woman one might say, feared that no one would get the joke.'

In another article, entitled 'The Pint Glass Ceiling' (*Guardian*, 20 August 2004), Arabella Weir recalls how 'blokey' the *Fast Show* atmosphere was: 'It was as a result of my experience of working with them all that I wrote the character Girl Who Boys Can't Hear, for our third series. This character would offer solutions to a problem, no one would respond, then a man would come up, verbatim, with the same idea which would be met with universal backslapping and congratulations. Ironically, Paul [Whitehouse] and Charlie [Higson] weren't going to include [Girl Who Boys Can't Hear] in the show until Simon Day, in an uncharacteristically sensitive mood, pointed out that this was how I was often treated.'

More recently, I've been reading *Shankar Vedantam, The Hidden Brain: How Our Unconscious Minds Elect Presidents, Control Markets, Wage Wars, and Save Our Lives* (Scribe, Melbourne, 2010). In chapter 5, 'The Invisible Current: Gender, Privilege, and the Hidden Brain', Vedantam writes: 'Transgendered people allow us to scientifically apply the research on sexism to the lives of individuals, because when a man becomes a woman or vice versa, the person's educational background, professional expertise, and life experience remain the same. If a woman who becomes a man suddenly finds himself privileged in all kinds of subtle ways, or a man who becomes a woman suddenly finds herself shackled, we can unhesitatingly — and scientifically — say sexism is to blame.'

In August 2006, in the magazine *Gender & Society*, the sociologist Kristen Schilt reported that the 29 South Californian transmen she studied between 2003 and 2005 overwhelmingly found that they were treated better as men than when they had been women. In 2008, with Matthew Wiswall, Schilt reported in *The B. E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* that 'men who became women reported a decline of 12 per cent in their earnings. Women who became men reported an increase of 7.5 per cent in their earnings.'

In more detail, Vedantem quotes two transgendered biologists at Stanford University 'who agreed to speak with me on the record about their experiences.' Each of them had made the transition late in life.

In July 2006, the transman Ben Barres (formerly Barbara Barres) wrote in the journal *Nature*: 'When it comes to bias, it seems that the desire to believe in a meritocracy is so powerful that until a person has experienced sufficient career-harming bias themselves they simply do not believe it exists ... By far, the main difference that I have noticed is that people who don't know I am transgendered treat me with much more respect: I can even complete a whole sentence without being interrupted by a man.'

The transwoman Joan Roughgarden was affected very differently. Earlier, publishing as a man, a controversial theory received 'harsh reviews', but the ideas were taken seriously and led to a tenured professorship and widespread respect. But when Joan Roughgarden (after years more experience) published another controversial theory, 'few scientists engaged with her' — except for shouting with rage in public. 'Every month or two, I will have some man shout at me, try to physically coerce me into stopping.' She told Vedantam that, as a man, 'I had never had experiences of anyone trying to coerce me in this physically intimidating and coercive way'. She found that male scientists simply assumed that they were 'smarter' than she was, whereas she wanted 'to be proven wrong, rather than dismised'.

The theory that enraged the scientists is to be found in Joan Roughgarden, *The Genial Gene: Deconstructing Darwinian Selfishness* (2009). Meanwhile, Joan Roughgarden 'is no longer on any university or departmental committee. Where she was once able to access internal university funds for research, she said she finds it all but impossible to do so now. Before her transition, she enjoyed an above-average salary at Stanford. But since her transition, she wrote in an email, "My own salary has drifted down to the bottom 10 per cent of full professors in the School of Humanities and Sciences, even though my research and students are among the best of my career and are having international impact, albeit often controversial."'

Returning to *SF Commentary* 80, Part 1: I'll list some typographical errors I happened to notice, in case they can be altered in the electronic version.

- p. 67, Dave Langford's letter: an extra 'r' in 'what ought to go into ther John Sladek collection'.
- p. 73, reply to Rich Coad: a 'does' instead of a 'do' in

'Some of the arthouse multiplexes [...], such as the Nova, does have much better sound systems.'
- Heading, p. 83, 'Jeff Hamill asks: can science fiction can be literature?' (In the 'Contents', the second 'can' is deleted.)
- p. 87, in Jeff Hamill's letter of 15–19 February 2005: letters missing in 'Philip Jose Farmer's answer to Lem's "SF: A Hopess Case [...]"'.
- p. 94, WAHF from Joseph Nicholas: word left out of 'I don't anybody other than Darrell Schweitzer'.
- p. 95, Jenny Blackford formerly lived in Albert Park, not Middle Park.

(7 August 2010)

[*brg* Oh dear. The rational part of my mind tells that it is a great compliment that somebody, especially Yvonne Rousseau, should read *SFC* as closely as this. The irrational part of my mind winces at boo-boos revealed.*]

I've only now downloaded *SF Commentary* 80A, August 2010, and have therefore only now seen Elaine's DJFractals back cover: wow! — terrifyingly seductive ...

(8 August 2010)

STEVE JEFFERY
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I'm intrigued by Jeff Hamill's distinctions and thoughts in the *SFC* 80 Feature Letter of Comment between literature and non literature and SF/non-SF. As with most things, there's no clear division: one person's literature can be another person's trashy entertainment, and distinctions and classifications blur and leak into each other at the edges. Even the centres can be contentious. Most people would place Shakespeare and Jane Austen firmly in the middle of the literature camp, yet there are people who dismiss them as unreadable. (There's a radio program over here, 'I've Never Seen Star Wars', hosted by comedian Marcus Brigstock, that challenges people to do something they've never done before. The book, film, and music challenges can be quite revealing.)

When Jeff writes, 'the more general problem I have concerns the claim by the SF community, fans and critics that there is no distinction between SF and literature', and quotes by example a passage from H. Bruce Franklin's *Future Perfect*, 'Science Fiction is a form of literature that developed as part of the industrial society ...', then a further muddying is inherent in the way the word literature is being used in each of these two instances. The first implies some value judgment between literature (good writing) and non-literature (trash), while Franklin's use of the word, to me, does not imply any judgment of worth or non-worth, but is used to a body of written work (as opposed, say, to architecture or dancing).

There are actually two threads to the argument over the worth of SF, and Jeff uses the quote from Franklin to tease them apart and examine them individually.

We can deal with the first reasonably simply. 'Is SF literature?' (does SF have 'literary merit'?). We have to be careful here to distinguish between those books that are consciously written as, promoted as, and read as SF from those by 'honorary' SF writers, works that have been adopted into the SF canon (sometimes against their authors' wishes) by evangelical fans and critics to lend an air or literary respectability to the genre. You might in fact argue that this latter move is an admission that the genre itself is on shaky ground, unable to cut it without the inclusion of professional 'ringers' to boost its batting average. But what of the former, those works written, read, and marketed as SF? Do they have literary merit? (We should leave the put the idea of 'literary respectability' to one side for one moment, as this is bound up with a more subjective set of criteria and prejudices.) And what do I mean by literary merit?

Are they well written? Do they repay re-reading? And outside the notion of entertainment, do they tell us something new about ourselves? (Would they upset Jeff's SF-reading workmates by making them 'think too much'?)

On that basis, I think we can say that there are a small number of SF works (I'm not going to attempt to name them, or even try to count them) that do indeed qualify as literature. We will know them in 50 or 100 years' time when they are still on the library shelves, or being discussed in the critical canon. Right now they are difficult to judge, but I would be surprised if Dick, Aldiss, and Le Guin were not up there, and disappointed if the list didn't also include Priest and Wolfe.

(Outside the strict definition of SF, I'd hazard that rather more fantasists might make the crossover, albeit an even smaller proportion of what's currently marketed as fantasy.)

If this sounds negative, I have to point out that, in my opinion an equally small proportion of either the mainstream or other genres (romances, historicals, thrillers, bonkbusters, and misery memoirs alike) can be regarded as literature, and the overwhelming majority will fall by the wayside into the dumpbins of history.

'SF is different,' comes the cry, teased out as the second thread in Jeff's letter, 'because it deals with humanity's relationship to science and technology.'

Unfortunately, when you take a good hard look at it from the perspective of someone trained and working in a science- and technology-based industry, very little of it actually does. Are there really any SF readers who claim that they learn anything useful about the social impact of technology through SF rather than through *Nature* or *New Scientist*? Most of the SF that makes you 'think too much' actually makes you think about things other than the science, such as politics, religion, ethics, colonialism, and gender. In fact most of the science in SF, and especially when it ventures into the shenanigans of corporate science and technology, is laughably bad. This is my day-to-day workplace environment, after all, and I don't recognise it in almost any SF. (Charles Stross, who has worked at the same coalface — he qualified as a pharmacist — is an exception, and often hilariously spot on at its institutional foibles and idiocies in the same way as Scott Adams' Dilbert strip.) I may — I do — often despair at the decisions of higher management, but they are not evil malevolent people obsessed with world domination. For a start they don't, can't, or aren't allowed to think that far forward. To make it a goer, world domination would have to be demonstrated as achievable with at least a 20 per cent return on investment within two years. The real problems of science and technology, such as environmental impact and carbon emissions, are

inherent in this short-termism, where — unless forced by government or regulatory agencies — there's no incentive to address or fix the problem, not threats from clones, AI robots, or alien invasion.

That's not to say SF doesn't have some good big thinky bits. Egan is full of them, and likewise Baxter and Stephenson. But these are more often intellectual puzzle games, thought experiments, often huge fun. They shouldn't be mistaken for a manifesto, never mind a solution, for SF as a literature of scientific and technological fixes for today's problems.

(23 August 2010)

I don't insist on 'fine writing' (I side with the writer — I forget who — who said that when a passage of your own writing strikes you as particularly fine, then strike it through immediately). Francis Hardinge's YA work *Gullstruck Island*, for example, is wonderfully written. It's not 'literary', but it a vivid sense of character, pace, verve, and more wit than I've seen in a lot of adult works.

But I'm struggling through Catherine Valente's *Palimpsest*, which is a far more self conscious literary and 'poetic' fantasy.

Unfortunately I haven't seen a copy of *Ice and Iron*. I'll have to re-read Buerkett's article.

(24 August 2010)

Vikki is confused by what appears to be a second adolescence on my part, resulting in a newly (re)discovered enthusiasm for trip hop, trance, techno, or whatever it's called (the terms mutate and morph faster than I can keep track of them). Specifically, this year, Gorillaz, Groove Armada, and Faithless.

I've like Albarn's Gorillaz project since the first album, and the dub-soaked 'Clint Eastwood'. But Faithless were this year's discovery for me, despite that they've been going for years now, and that, and coming across some retrospective and compilation CDs of several of the above bands, means that the house now occasionally shudders to electronic basslines and swirly keyboards. (Though mostly when Vikki's out.)

(8 August 2010)

Current Reasons to be Cheerful are:

- *Faithless — Outrospective CD* and several videos from BBC Glastonbury coverage (which I must transfer onto another tape; they are magnificent live), particularly We Come 1, Insomnia, and God is a DJ.
- Francis Hardinge's YA fantasy *Gullstruck Island*: awesomely well done. Vikki and both hugely enjoyed her previous books *Fly by Night* and *Verdigris Deep*, but this one raises the bar. I would seriously contend that with this, FH in the same Carnegie Award league as Neil Gaiman's *Graveyard Book*.
- Stephen Fry: *The Ode Less Travelled*. A handbook on the jargon and techniques of poetry. Found today in a local charity shop.
- News that there will be a new Arcade Fire CD at some point.

Reasons Not to be Cheerful: My father phoned the other night while I was out to say that my uncle, his younger brother, was in Intensive Care in hospital with pneumonia and complications and on a ventilator. Not good news at all.

(14 August 2010)

STEVE SNEYD
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The *SF Commentary* 80th (and a bit) issue is a good surprise, but dipping into it has put me even further behind with piles of things I should be dealing with, amid even greater than usual inertia, let alone tackling rampant garden growth, clearly determined to beat mankind to Mars and demanding constant pruning at this time of the year. (Usual retirement cliché applies: how did I ever find time to go to work?)

Great cover of the Winter King, the answer to the Green Man, whose leafy skin has shredded off.

[*brg* I thought it was fairly clear that the cover figure is female. Dick Jenssen prepared it originally for the recent Women's Writing issue of *Steam Engine Time*, but I had already accepted a cover by Carol Kewley. Dick's cover suited *SF Commentary* 80 very well.*]

In Broderick's article, he lists Michael Butterworth among the now-forgotten *New Worlds* authors. Coincidentally, I've just finished reading a Butterworth novel, a spin-off of the *Space 99* TV series, called *Planets in Peril*: a simplistic but page-turning hackwork. Fans of the evergreen space rock band Hawkwind might remember that Butterworth novelised them into the 'Hawklords' science fantasy novels. Those who recall the notable publishing achievements of Savoy Books, which Butterworth ran with Dave Britten, might recall a cult following for the 'Lord Horror' series of alternative Nazi-ruled Britain graphic novels that he and Britten created, which landed them in court in the hands of prosecutor unable to grasp that they were critiquing, not praising, Nazi racial craziness.

Broderick describes the protagonist of Delany's *Triton* as 'misogynistic'. He came across to me as an obsessive romantic, projecting onto a Zone object, without the ability to grasp her autonomy, a misogyny of a kind, but not within the usual meaning of the term.

You mention John Light. He compiled the 2007 *Light's List*, although it was published by Bluechrome. They were unable to distribute it successfully, and John Light has been too busy with his own writing since to try to revive it. Details of his novels, including SF and books for children, appear on his Photon Press website.

You say that had not reread many Dick novels, until you needed to read them for Potlatch 2005, for 30 years or more. It's about 10 years since I've reread any. The problem, I always find with Philip Dick, is that if I reread any one of the novels, I find myself compelled to reread them all, a huge time commitment. I can't think of any other SF writer who compels that sort of compulsive jag. Aldiss would come nearest; other writers who inspire the same effect include Chandler and Ross MacDonald, the crime writers. They deconstruct, with their PIs, the world of LA to reveal its deeper nature. This process has its

parallel with Philip Dick's unmasking of 'reality', and the novels of Franz Kafka.

(12 August 2010)

BBC Radio 7 (a digital station) has an SF slot. Usually it uses repeats, but it does occasionally (because of its small budget) commission new work. One such, ongoing at the moment, is a serialisation of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, accompanying each episode with brief comments by various people on Philip Dick's work. I mention this as a rare radio appearance of anything by Dick here, because it might be sold for retransmission on ABC Radio.

(10 November 2010)

[*brg* Steve also sent one of the many articles he has written about SF and fantasy poetry over the years, plus a catalogue of his and other articles in the field. This could lead to some coverage of SF poetry in *Steam Engine Time*.*]

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In this era of trilogies, neverending series, and monster books that could easily serve as doorstops, your sentence, 'If only we could return to the 220-page novel!' certainly rings true for me. I've said else where that authors like Cliff Simak wrote tightly, as a journalist like Simak should, and he could deliver an excellent story to you in 200 pages or less. I have read many of Dick's books, and in my years of reading about him, I have built an image of the man, but have not come to any conclusions about him and his work that I could put into any of the sweeping and comprehensive essays presented here. Dick is obviously the type of complicated man who seems to have had more books written about him than written books himself, an object of study that we still expand upon today.

Tim Marion's comments on cats reflects our own recent experiences — a cat we loved passed away at a ripe age. We mourned, and the cat wasn't even ours. Momcat was an affectionate tabby who lived with friends of ours near the border of Ontario and Michigan. When we were there, she spent most of her time in our laps, purring and rubbing up against us. She seemed to like our company; I hope I'm right. She even slept with us, and her purr would keep us up most of the night, but we didn't mind. Our friends offered Momcat to us to take home, but refusing was one of the hardest things we'd ever done. Another friend took her to the Ottawa area, and her health soon began to decline. She became blind, and died of cancer. I have a picture of her on the corkboard in my office. It's easy to say it was just a cat, but sometimes, the cat can be more. (She was called Momcat because she was originally a barn cat, and the source of most of the kittens that would show up in the barn. One day, she simply wandered into the house, and became instant housecat. Maybe she planned here retirement from motherly duties. Later on, when she had a few issues with other cats in the house, she was banished to the horse barn, and took to it like she'd never missed it.)

An interesting phrase from Jeff Hamill: literature is fiction that makes you think too much. We live in an era where thinking is almost bad. Literary pursuits, intense interests, just about anything intelligent, is ridiculed; it's not cool. We're nerds, geeks, dweebs, and other petty names that come mainly from the mainstream press, and now the press and the public assume that true to stereotype, we all live in our parents' basements. Never in the history of mankind have intelligent pursuits been so dishonoured. Dumb is cool, I guess. For many SF books I've read, they've made me think; therefore, it's literature by that definition. Other books are just a fun read, and I guess they're not literature by the same definition. Like the Lem essay, there are exceptions.

Terry Green, a short phone call away, asks how did we get old so fast. Creeps up on you while you're having a good time, but I think you also have to continue to indulge yourself with fannish and SFnal pursuits. As long as we employ our minds, and have the fun we all need to have, we may age on the outside, but still remain youthful on the inside. Could this be the secret to the appeal of fandom? I have seen children with humourless expressions, and they seem older on the inside than many of my fannish friends.

We were just starting to correspond with Arthur Clarke when he passed away. At the time, Yvonne was quite involved in space conferences. She purchased a large Book of Condolences from a local stationery shop, and got friends at a couple of local conventions to sign their condolences with the idea of sending the completed book to the Clarke family. We took it to the Corflu in Las Vegas, too. Then our friend Rob Godwin, who runs the Canadian-based Apogee Books, the biggest publisher of space books in the world, took the book to some space conferences, and got lots more signatures and notes. Yvonne and I were the first ones to sign the book, and the last was Buzz Aldrin. Rob then got the book to Arthur's brother Fred. Rob told us that the Fred and the rest of the family were amazed and touched by this gesture. There still seem to be plans for an Arthur C. Clarke museum in Somerset, and this book of condolences will have a place of honour there. There is a bid to bring Worldcon to London in 2014, and should they win, we have plans to go. I hope there will be something special there about our friend Ego.

The last issue of *Outworlds* that Bill Bowers sent out was a special one for me because I sat down to write a letter of comment, just as I am doing now, and when I had finished, the letter was 10 pages long. Did it without really trying, the issue was so full of comment hooks.

Michael Hailstone sent me lots of fanzines, and they always seems so pessimistic and despondent; I always got the feeling life had been very unfair to him. I hope he's found something to make him smile.

I know that Chaz Boston-Baden suffered a corrupted hard drive some time ago, and lost a good number of those pictures he's known for. He's spent some money getting the drive recovered, and a lot of pictures have been restored. Some fans have helped him out financially with this project, while others have been too busy wagging their fingers at him, shaming him like a child for not sufficiently backing up all those photos. There's rarely a situation bad enough where others can come in to make it worse.

I am sure Guy Lillian is pleased with you calling *Challenger* a Hugo-winning fanzine. It hasn't done that yet — win a Hugo — but I am sure Guy hoped to win in Melbourne. If he's going to lose the Best Fanzine Hugo, he hopes to lose it to a fanzine, and not a website or podcast. I can't fault him there.

I have asked Janice Gelb to accept the Best Fan Writer Hugo for me, should I be lucky enough to win it. I am now reminded to send her my acceptance speech. It is a pleasure and a thrill to be on that ballot, but Bruce, I know I speak for others when I say that you should have been there. Like I've written elsewhere, there are a lot of Canadians on the Australian ballot because the members of the Montréal Worldcon were reminded that they could nominate for the Australian Hugos, and I think many of them did to redress the question of who should have been on the Montréal Hugo ballot. I hope that members of the Australian Worldcon will be similarly reminded that they can nominate for the Reno Hugos, and we will see you on that ballot. You will have my nomination.

(15 August 2010)

I've already seen explanations of Ditmar front covers. With what software can do today, imagine what it might be able to do in 10 or 20 years? Three-dimensional covers keep the eye and mind busy.

Neal Barrett's *The Hereafter Gang* has the same idea as does the movie *The Sixth Sense*, where the fact that Bruce Willis' character is actually dead finally dawns upon the audience. The book came out in 1991, the movie in 1999, so I'd wonder if M. Night Shyamalan might have read the book and been influenced by it.

[*brg* It is a very old idea in fiction. With *The Sixth Sense*, once the Big Idea is revealed at the end, you can rewatch the film over and over again for its real subject matter: the subtleties of the relationship between the 'therapist' and the boy: two souls redeeming each other.*]

I do have a copy of Robert Bloch's *The Eighth Stage of Fandom*, and have read it several times, and gone back to read an essay or two in between. There's a lot of wisdom here for the dedicated fan, especially when you've been in fandom a long time. I think I've gotten into one of the later stages myself, but have tried my best to at least learn about what fandom is like today, and even try to embrace it.

Local fans remind me from time to time that Robert Charles Wilson is the same Bob Wilson who was on the Torcon 2 committee, another fan who made it into prodom. You may not have liked *The Harvest*, but books like *Spin* and *Julian Comstock* show that he's improved over the years.

As I go through the titles in *SF Commentary* 80A, there are so many Australian titles that I have never seen, and probably will never see reviewed, except here and in *Ethel the Aardvark* and other Australian zines I might get. I can barely keep up with Canadian science fiction, and current prices usually keep me from becoming any more enlightened about the Australian scene.

The 'Hitch Hikers' books: we met Douglas Adams at either the 1982 or 1983 Worldcon, and hailed him as we were strolling through the dealers' room. 'Mr Adams! We've just read the second Hitch Hiker's book.' 'Oh — wasn't very good, was it? Not to worry. The third one will be much better!' And it was. Douglas Adams died far too young, and should have been here to write lots more books in the trilogy.

I wonder if anyone would care to tackle a modern Science Fiction Resource Book? Many countries could use something similar, if there was someone with the time, the effort, the connections and the thick hide for such a job.

I knew Judith Merril a little when she was alive; she was at all local conventions and events, and she spoke her mind, often with little tact. At one point, after she opened her mouth about the management of a convention I was connected with, I blasted her right back about her arrogance, and speaking about things she knew nothing about. I was right and knew it; I knew not what she thought, and we rarely met after that. She had a small role on the provincial educational channel many years ago as The Undoctor. After TVOntario would run episodes of *Doctor Who*, she'd come on, tear the episode apart, and make some kind of comment that left a bad taste in many mouths. One year, the convention had Fred Pohl as a guest, and he arrived early to meet with Judith; I do not recall if she was invited to the convention that year. I have not met Emily Pohl-Weary, except to know that she lives in Toronto.

I have read all six 'Dune' books that Frank Herbert wrote; a hard slog at points, but the reward was a very three-dimensional universe, one we all seem to know. I tried reading the first of the Brian Herbert 'Dune' books; I just couldn't get through it. It looks like the son has now written more 'Dune' novels than the father; only the completists would buy them.

As I go through *SFC* 80A, I find there are some authors I'd like to read more of, such as Vernor Vinge and the late Charles Sheffield. I'd add Rudy Rucker, Greg Benford, and Greg Bear to that list.

(19 August 2010)

CY CHAUVIN
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I was surprised to get the 40th anniversary issue of *SFC*: I had forgot completely about you warning that it was coming, in *SET*.

A Scanner Darkly is not a Philip Dick book that I remember with any fondness — not that I remember it at all, actually. I did reread *The Man in the High Castle* within the past year; it was a case of finding the book while looking for something else, and thinking of rereading a few pages, and then being halfway through the novel and it was time for lunch. (Is there a better recommendation than that?) It wasn't entirely as authentic in its details as I remembered, but it is an alternate history novel that I never questioned the point of.

I received a short letter or postcard from Philip K. Dick in the 1970s. He saw my name in the lettercol of *Fantastic* magazine, commenting on Richard Lupoff's 'Ova Hamlet' spoof of his work, and asking me if a could mail him a copy of that issue of *Fantastic* (he even included a dollar for mailing). Perhaps more exciting was the time Joyce Scrivner and I were going through the garage of a vacant

house, where Howard DeVore stored various second-rate books and materials, looking for old fanzines. Inside one box were various manuscripts, including one for a Philip K. Dick novel! (*Solar Lottery*). Howard DeVore told us the MS had been brought to the 1959 Detroit Worldcon for the auction, but it never sold. (Dick was hardly a well-known author at the time.) It had languished there ever since. I don't remember the other manuscripts we found, but there were some perfect black-and-white photos from some early conventions (including Ted White at 19), and a mint issue of *Amazing Stories* from 1929. It had a beautifully printed Frank R. Paul cover, and I understood for the first time while the early *Amazing*s actually weren't categorised as pulp magazines according to collectors.

The 40th anniversary also made me go back and find the first issue of *SFC* I received: No 15. It's dated from 1970, when you still lived in Ararat. That means you must have published at least 15 issues in only 2 years! Stephen Campbell drew the cover. I reread quite a bit of it; most interesting (to me) was a review of *The Rose* by Charles Harness.

Most of your *SFC* 80 reviewers seem to be reviewing Phillip K. Dick as a person (as presented in the autobiographical work present) rather than the book itself. It seems a bit unfair! I enjoyed better the review of the Dick interview book, which gives a description of a novel brain-storm sessions during the interview.

(6 November 2010)

[*brg* I published the first 18 issues of *SF Commentary* during those two years living at Ararat while attempting to teach secondary school. This tells a lot about how much refuge I needed from teaching. I was young and enthusiastic, and lived in a house without a TV set. I would type stencils for *SFC* every night until 2 a.m., after I had finished lesson preparations for the next day. I would collect an issue's material every few weeks. After correcting the stencils and addressing the envelopes, the trick was to free up a whole weekend during which I could begin running the duplicator on Friday night, collate, and have every copy in its envelope ready to take to the post office on Monday morning.*]

LENNY BAILES
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I'm happy to be part of the scholarly dialogue on PKD in *SFC* 80. But I have to tell you: the first response I had when I reread my notes was: I need to re-proof everything I wrote to; clean up the version on the Potlatch website. I feel like the idea content of my notes may still have enough weight to be interesting (discussing Dick's role in the '50s as a literary gadfly, the Josh Lukin paper, etc.). But so many grammatical clumsinesses leapt out at me on rereading!

Everything I have has been at http://www.potlatch-sf.org/potlatch14/ pot14pro.html#boh for the last five years. What I posted on the Potlatch site is slightly more embellished, since I believe that I took Ian's commentary at the time and made some minor expansions. I thought I had mentioned this to you, earlier. I didn't add much — just some notes on my own comments of things I remembered that Ian hadn't included.

We don't have Howard's prepared notes on the *Scanner Darkly* panel. I asked him for them at the time, but I don't think he ever sent them. What he did send me was some notes on another panel: 'Transrealism and the Ghost of PKD.'

(30 August 2010)

[*brg* In all that time I did not realise that you had probably put the 2005 Potlatch material on your website, or I would have gone looking for it. I have little opportunity to look at websites, so I don't go looking for them. Readers of *SFC* 80 who want to follow up the *Scanner Darkly* material should follow the link. Or write further articles for *SF Commentary*.*]

GUY SALVIDGE
27 Lyon Street, Northam, WA 6401

I'm not much of a letter writer in the traditional sense (I doubt many people of my generation are) but I do write reviews, so here's my review of *SFC* 80 published on my blog: http://guysalvidge.wordpress.com/2010/08/30/magazine-review-sf-commentary-80/. I've also recently approached Alisa Krasnostein about doing some reviews for the *ASIF* website. I've sent her my review, but I'm not sure if *ASIF* will publish it or not. They seem to have a couple of reviews of *Steam Engine Time*, so I guess they might.

From my review: 'I remarked to Bruce recently, upon meeting him for the first time at his house in Greensborough, that I felt, reading the pages of *SF Commentary* and *Steam Engine Time*, like I was 40 years late to a conversation. It's a conversation that has been taking place for nigh on 100 years now, and we owe it to Bruce Gillespie and those like him for recording it so that latecomers like myself might listen in.'

(31 August 2010)

[*brg* Alexandra Pierce has been doing an excellent job of reviewing generally, and *Steam Engine Time* in particular, on the *AsIf* website, but Alisa might like to hand the job to you. I don't have a snail mail address for Alexandra, so I didn't realise she is in fact Victorian, not Western Australian.*]

TERRY GREEN
154 Randolph Road, Toronto, ONT M4G 3S4, Cananda

I read with interest all the Phil Dick stuff, naturally, and especially the *A Scanner Darkly* material. Back in 1977 (a mere 33 years ago), I wrote a review of the novel for the magazine *Unearth* (2/Spring 1977). After reading *SFC* I poked around in my closet and files until I found a copy of the issue and scanned that review into my computer. I'm attaching it here. You might find my assessment at that time of interest.

Also, there has been a recent reissue of my 1988 novel *Barking Dogs*, which I'm sending you.

Tomorrow, the world begins again. Schools open, and the streets will be filled with kids and teachers. It's a busy day here in our household (Daniel starts grade 5). And I'm

Terence M. Green reviews
A Scanner Darkly **by Philip K. Dick**
(Doubleday, Jan. 1977, $6.95, 220 pp.)

Reprinted from *Unearth*, No 2, Spring 1977.

The new Philip Dick book is out.

We have a new novel by one of the most fascinating writers that the field has produced — by a writer who has won the Hugo Award for Best Novel (1963) and the John W. Campbell Award for Best Novel (1975); the new novel by the man who has captured the minds and attention of the academic world — having donated his manuscripts and papers to the Special Collections Library, California State University, Fullerton — and who has shared with Ursula K. Le Guin the distinction of having an entire issue of an academic journal filled with scholarly observations regarding his fiction (*Science Fiction Studies*, March 1975); by the man who has had at least one entire book devoted to his writing *(Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*, ed. by Bruce Gillespie, Norstrilia Press, Melbourne), one chapbook *(Philip K. Dick and the Umbrella of Light*, by Angus Taylor, TK Graphics, Baltimore), and sundry other analyses and appreciations in both the professional and fan press. (I myself have even humbly tried to convey a parallax view on Dick, adopting a somewhat Dickian persona for the task, in *Science Fiction Review* 17 ...)

He fascinates as he perplexes as he frustrates.

If the book at hand were to appear from the pen of an unknown writer, we would all be reasonably impressed with the display of technical skill and the depth of feeling conveyed throughout the book; it would be free to stand on its own, and we would await further from this writer. But from the pen of Philip Dick, it must, of necessity, stand (ultimately) amidst his works, and invite comparison. It will also, inevitably, stand in light of what we know and what Dick has told us of his own personal experiences. In this particular book there is even an 'Author's Note', an epilogue, which attests to this fact.

A bit of simplistic plot summary first —

The novel concerns the drug subculture as it exists in a future USA. The place is — as always with Dick — California (this *is* the world for Dick); the time is summer, 1994. But you can be sure that what appears to be a future vision is really about what Dick believes is *now* — or, in this case, the mid and late 60s.

The protagonist is an undercover narcotics agent, Fred, who uses as his alter ego the name Bob Arctor. To maintain his cover, Arctor must take dope, and in so doing eventually destroys himself by becoming an addict and suffering permanent brain damage; he becomes, as Dick notes near the book's end, a vegetable among vegetables, working on a farm. The paranoid twist that is so characteristic of Dick's work emerges at the end when we discover that the farm on which he is employed is covertly growing the dope which addicted him.

What Dick has here is probably the ultimate SF book about drugs. And it is Dick's avowed intention to illustrate the absolutely destructive nature of drug addiction; yet it is just this intention that distinguishes this book's treatment of drugs from the treatment Dick has previously given to the subject in his other books. Dick wants us to be frightened and appalled at the physical and mental damage that can result from prolonged drug use and addiction, and this intention becomes overtly didactic in this book. As a result of this too overtly preachy and didactic approach to his topic, the vision is not as frightening as it might have been.

Let me try to explain this another way.

Dick's previous literary use of drugs *was* often quite frightening because he made it sound appealing or irrelevantly casual or harmless in his future societies; the characters often were not aware of how easily they were deluded — and we were uncertain as well, thus adding to our apprehension. But in this book he shows and tells us that drug abuse is absolutely destructive — something I believe *I already know*. Thus, the vision is not as frightening as many of his previous ones (the casual way that people pop pills in *Our Friends From Frolix 8*, for instance, is quite frightening because it is presented without comment, and at times humorously.)

Dick assumes we need drug education. Well, I concede that many obviously do need such education. But I would counter that those who are most in need of such education are not, I believe, to be found among the readers of his books. Surely they are, for the great part, a completely different audience. The readers of his fiction look for something else altogether.

There is nothing in the world of the novel *except* drugs, dopers, and narks. This does not ring true to me as a reader, nor does it comply with my personal experience of reality. It is *Dick's* reality we are exploring here, a very real subculture, very limited in scope, and not to be taken as metaphor (as were his previous visions).

This book is Dick's *personal* catharsis regarding his involvement in the drug scene. The subculture obviously became the world for *him*. Ultimately, I am not convinced it relates to the rest of us.

Now — does all this add up to a condemnation of the novel? The answer is 'no'.

The book is an organic and well-structured whole. Its plotting lacks the suspense that has previously operated so well in many of his books, but at the same time it is deliberately and subtly convoluted in the best Dickian tradition. There are the zany characters — crazies among the best of them. There are the ever-refreshing touches of the absurd — such as Jim Barris making a silencer for his pistol that is eventually louder than the original noise — or receiving secret federal funds via a Dr Pepper machine. And there are some absolutely first-rate bits of writing — such as the episode in chapter 7 wherein the authorities begin to determine that Fred is commencing his schizophrenic state via the tape that they have procured of a round-

robin discussion about a 10-speed bicycle.

There are metaphors and parallels and thing that could be interpreted as symbols throughout the book, all of which add to the appreciation and enjoyment of the novel and the writing. The ever-present Dick themes are here too: multiplicity as confusion as evil; man's inability to determine what is real or 'true'; man's entrapment in his own machinations.

Within its own limited scope, the book is excellent. It is merely the self-limitations of the scope and the slightly too serious approach to the subject matter that hold the book back from being more.

Dick's power lies in his wit and in his use of the accoutrements and paraphernalia of the traditional SF story in a new and surprising (and often absurd) way. Suspense and mystery have their place in his fiction too. In this book there is too little of the aforementioned items.

I am reminded of two other books when I contemplate *A Scanner Darkly*. It recalls Dick's non-SF novel *Confessions of a Crap Artist* — a fascinating yet not terribly powerful book; and Disch's *Camp Concentration* — for its single-minded, dogged (yet well done and limited) pursuit of a single idea to its bitter end. (Is it a coincidence that Dick is on record as an admirer of Disch's book?)

Dick is still one of the field's important talents. Don't let me deter you from reading this book. On the contrary — do read it. Read it as yet another changing stage in the career of a major talent.

I don't think it is as successful a novel as *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*, the last entry of Dick's into the field; but it does show a progression — one that commenced with that book – toward darker, more sombre visions.

Philip Dick has stated in a recent interview (*Science Fiction Review* 19) that *A Scanner Darkly* is his masterpiece — the only one he feels he will ever write. I invite you to compare it with *The Man in the High Castle*, the 1963 Award winner, the one that I still consider to be his masterpiece. I submit that it will emerge wanting in comparison. The canvas is much smaller here in 1977.

— Terence M. Green

back teaching at UWO (University of Western Ontario) September 15. And this evening, a dinner invitation out.

(7 September 2010)

BRAD FOSTER
PO Box 165246, Irving, TX 75016, USA

Got back from a weekend trip to Austin for ArmadilloCon to find the massive *SF Commentary* 80 taking up half of my small postal box. (Gone are the days when that was so stuffed that they would have to take everything out and just leave a little slip of paper, informing me I needed to come to the window to get my 'box' of stuff!)

Armadillocon is always fun — one of the first conventions I attended — and have been getting back to off and on for 30 years now. When you have writers like Bradley Denton, Joe Lansdale, Neal Barrett Jr, Howard Waldrop, and others who are just 'the local guys' wandering around, it can get to be fun. I even managed to work a trade deal for one of Joe's books with his lovely daughter, so can't go wrong there. (The only downside of going to conventions is seeing so many wonderful books laid out before me, and knowing my budget will allow for only one or two. We buy a lottery ticket on the Saturday of every convention we attend. If we should ever actually win, we will descend on the dealers' room the following Sunday like a tsunami of cash and scoop up so many books we'll have to hire a truck just to get them all back home!)

I went on line after reading it to check on *SFC* 80A, but only got part way through that when started having the same feeling of bittersweet sadness as I have when looking at all the dealers' room books, as mentioned above. Review after review here of titles that sound so interesting I have to read, but don't know if I ever will be able to. As an example, you've got reviews of a couple of Jonathan Carroll's books. I've read some of his early pieces, and was lucky enough this past month to come across a used copy of *Land of Laughs*. Reading that, I went back on line and found the huge body of work that he has created since. *sigh* A dozen more titles to add to the 'hope I stumble over these some day'. I do avail myself of the wonders of the library a bit more often these days, but still have that 'I want to keep this on my shelf' love of having the books I read in my life. I'll probably dip back into 80A later and add more to the list, though. Have to be ready when we actually do win that lottery! (I can then send *you* money for all the pubs you send out now from the goodness of your fannish heart.)

(1 September 2010)

Have fun at Aussiecon. Cindy and I are hoping to do Reno in 2011, but since don't have memberships yet, the cost of two of those alone, let alone getting there, hotel, etc, are making it look less likely. I'm still trying to save up to make a trip over to England one day. It's a big world, and it seems to cost a bit to get to see it!

I loved *Land of Laughs*, especially that ending. I also enjoyed *Bones of the Moon* a lot, though a bit more disappointed with *The Wooden Sea*, but mostly because I've now got high expectations for him. Still, with two out of three, I'll probably dip into a few more. (I've added *From the Teeth of Angels* to my Look For list on your recommendation.)

I know you've got seven art pieces on hand for *SET*, including those four Argent-Park designs you asked for, that I hope will get fit in somewhere. I wouldn't have thought to even send anything for *SFC*, since it doesn't look like you use any such stuff. However, since you asked, would love to contribute in some way with my weird work, so attached are two pieces, a bit more SF-related than my usual off-the-wall, I hope!

(9 September 2010)

[*brg* As 'payment' I'll accept Brad Foster artwork any time. Quite a privilege to be receiving regular contributions from a Hugo-winning artist. :: And I'm very pleased to have helped you in your search for Jonathan Carroll titles. I discovered him in the late eighties because Dave Langford had written about him in one of his columns, which I reprinted in *SFC*. *The Land of Laughs* is one of the few truly great fantasy books I've read during the last 30 years. *From the Teeth of Angels* is my other great favourite from among Carroll's novels.*]

SUE THOMASON
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North Yorks, YO22 5EN, England

I felt absolutely flabbergasted when I came across the loc I wrote in 2003. (Good grief! My spell-checker recognises 'loc' as a Real Word without prompting! What is the mundane world coming to?) I don't actually remember having taken an illicit substance immediately prior to writing that loc, but my goodness! Even more worrying is the idea that my brain used to be capable of doing that all on its own.

Most of this splendid tine (ah! the spell-checker doesn't recognise 'zine'. Perhaps all is not lost...) is, I'm afraid, beyond me. I've never read a novel by Dick, and perhaps I'm too stupid to start now. Even reading very carefully through Damien Broderick's guest editorial leaves me feeling 'Oh. Duh. Do I really believe that? Do I in fact understand it? Is that really what was going on?' Me just a simple reader of sensawonda-generating stories, often oblivious to big cultural issues and references which smack other people right between the eyes. Perhaps one needs to be slightly dislocated or estranged from the 'normal' culture surrounding one to enjoy non-mundane fiction. In my case this wasn't achieved by being brilliantly perceptive about cultural shortcomings, it was achieved by moving around a lot as a child, so that I don't think any of several cultural patterns ever really 'took'.

Books, in this situation, are immensely consoling and reassuring friends. They stay the same. You can go back and reread them 10 years later, and they haven't just got divorced, or found religion, or decided to reinvent themselves and never speak to you again. On the other hand, with many of my favourite books, every time I do go back to them I find something new. I can reread a book I've read 10, 20, 30 times before and find myself mentally saying 'Hey, I never noticed that before! I never realised that!' This also makes me feel stupid, but at least still capable of learning and taking in new information. But if I'm looking for consolation as well as wonder in my reading, perhaps I'm too old, or too cowardly, for real SF.

However, here I still am, not dead yet, and in fact in good health and good spirits. (I'm still running three times a week, and am at this very moment am immensely narked at the free BUPA 'runners' health check' I've just taken online. After giving this site 'a few personal details', including that I currently run about 10 km three times a week, I was recommended to enrol in their 5 km Beginners' Program — but lose some weight first. *Humph!!* Immediate unsubscribe from anything to do with BUPA, I'm afraid.)

Maybe *SF Commentary* 80 is too concentrated for me. (Some bit of the back of my mind keeps coming back to the description of the Bene Gesserit as 'Jesuits' in Damien Broderick's editorial — why had I never seen that before?) Most of my current concentration is reserved for preparing for the Milford SF writers' workshop in two weeks' time ...

(7 September 2010)

[*brg* You really nail the reasons why books, like favourite CDs, remain friends in a way most people do not. For all your protesting about the inadequacy of your brain functions when reading *SFC*, you're the one who braves Milford, and writes fiction to take part in it. I've long since concluded that fiction skills are absent from my own brain. I could probably write 80,000 words if I just sat down and wrote for long enough, but I could never put any heart or joy into Writing Dialogue, Inventing Plots, or all those other slogging tasks.*]

PAUL ANDERSON
17 Baker Street, Grange SA 5022

We have now returned from the trip. Very tired but OK overall, even if one bottle of Stephanie's facial toner did manage to get damaged. Switched cases to avoid being overweight, but then the case upset itself at every opportunity and broke in spite of all the clothing padding around it.

Managed to find a first edition of Dennis Lehane's *Coronado* in Salinas at a street market. Looking for stuff of interest to read, so picked it out. I will, most likely, send it over to you either by post or in person with my free trip courtesy of the Senior status from over 60.

We were in Salinas for the John Steinbeck museum. Not much else there, but there was a thrift shop that provided a Region 1 DVD of *Popeye*. Now need a multiregion player to play it.

On the way out at Los Angeles Airport, looking for the last-stop buys and plane reading, I found one of the many newsagent/bookshops had stuff by Michael Chabon, so picked up both *Yiddish Policemen's Union* and *Kavalier and Clay*, along with the joint Hugo winner, *The City and The City*. Brenda is loving the earlier book but discovered a printing fault in that one page was duplicated/omitted/replaced. She is not sure how to get a replacement copy.

(9 September 2010)

[* More of Paul's and family's adventures in America should appear in a future issue of **brg*/Scratch Pad*.*]

WM. BREIDING
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Writing about writing (as in critiquing fiction) is pretty much an impossibility for me. I lack the critical facility. You'll have witnessed this in the two 'books read' zines I've sent you. Even those lame attempts came in rare moments (or rare years) of lucidity. (I have scrawled notes for other years of reading that I look back upon in contempt.)

As with everything in my life, my reading in science

fiction has been scattershot. Even in those years when I was consciously working through a syllabus of stf as an autodidact I hadn't the time (nor the stomach, in some cases) to read everything I wanted, being a slow, slow reader, and having to work, and maintaining a life among friends. So I actually have nothing to add to the comments and critical analysis of PKD and Bob Tucker, having read only one short story collection by Dick (*The Preserving Machine*, Ace, 1969), and nothing at all by Tucker.

With Dick's recurrent popularity it is easy to find both 'vintage' paperbacks and more recent quality paperback reprints. I've found a half dozen of PKD's books at thrift shops to add to the collection. (Shortly after *SFC* 80 arrived, I found *A Scanner Darkly* in quality paper, fine condition, for 25 cents at the Lucky Attic.)

Tucker was already so deeply immersed into the mythology of fandom by the time I arrived (1973) that he seemed like some fable, even though he was an active and eager conventioneer at that time. Being a coastal California fan who attended few conventions (only one in the midwest, Autoclave, the original convention for fanzine fans, in 1977), I never had the pleasure of meeting or observing Bob in the flesh. Somehow I never took his novel writing seriously. I always thought of his main job as being a fannish legend; writing stf was the hobby. Because of this I've passed over many copies of Tucker's books, a mistake I regret now. Well, the ghods of book searching are fickle, contentious, and sometimes fortuitous and rewarding. I may yet run into a cache of Tucker books in some obscure bookstore or thrift shop. (While I still can, I prefer this method over an Internet search.)

I recently pulled out my collection of Fanthologies, and was tickled to note your piece on PKD's non-stf in Mark Loney's edition for 1990. (It's a testament against the general theory that fanzine fandom has always been small. I'd heard of neither Mark Loney nor his (co-edited) fanzine, *The Space Wastrel*, which had two runs, in the late seventies and again in the late eighties, and it sounds as though it had its own bright zeitgeist to be drawn to.) The Fanthology series leans heavily on the faanish and the personal. Seeing your 12 pages of limpid sercon was a wonderful and unlikely surprise.

(8 November 2010)

[*brg* Thanks for the generous amount of folding money, and I'm sorry I can't tempt you to write a personal essay for *SFC*, *SET*, or my apazine. Yes, I do realise that I have one Breiding article on file, destined for *The Metaphysical Review*. Since *TMR* hasn't appeared since 1968, despite *Overland* magazine's belief that it's the only magazine I publish, I need to find a way to incorporate the *TMR* overmatter file into the general stream of other Gillespie publishing. Just another job for my spare time.*]

DOUG BARBOUR
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Reading *SFC* 80 was like finding a time capsule, especially in the letter column, not just those who have died, but the dates of all the letters — we received the magazine after the Great Recession and the election of the USA's first black president, but the letters, when they get political, are all into the *enfant terrible* Bush and his temper tantrums in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is hard to keep up. Thus I enjoyed the 2010 editorial, remembering the beginnings of your fannish life and *SFC*.

It's been a long time since I read *A Scanner Darkly*, so my memory of it isn't strong. However bleak it is, it also has that aura of very black humour I tend to associate with Dick at his best. The range of commentary provides a lot of different ways to think about how we respond to his ability to 'get' a reader even through an often slapdash style.

I also enjoyed the 'Further tales of Tucker,' to learn just how fantastic a fan he was all his days. That's a great photo from the 40s, deep in the technology of the time.

I kept the Feature Letter of Comment by Jeff Hamill and Damien Broderick's 'New Wave and Backwash: 1960–1980' till the end. As a pair of strange (attractor?) brackets, they played off each other in intriguing ways.

The first few of Hamill's letters had me arguing with a lot of his comments, but as he further presented his political stance and reading protocols, I began to respond with more interest. Still, his (seemingly) absolute contrast of SF and 'literature' is one I no longer accept (although I'm also willing to admit before a court of my peers that I do like entertainment (however complicated my definition of 'entertainment' may be)). I certainly agree with him about Le Guin, but I also want to suggest some more reading to him, He clearly hasn't read enough Delany (says I; I know you're resistant to his work). He seems to have read some Russ; I'd recommend he read all. I can understand his resistance to some of the more 'theoretical' criticism, which does often seem to be written for theoretical cognoscenti, but there are a few more books out there than just the Clute/Nicholls *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (which is great): David Seed (ed.), *A Companion to Science Fiction* (2005), and nifty little Bould, Butler, Roberts, and Vint (eds), *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (2010), which provides short introductions to those 50 figures. There's also Damien Broderick's *Skiffy and Mimesis: More Best of Australian SF Review* (2010), a showcase of fannish sercon writing at its best (just like the stuff you've published in *SFC* over the years)).

I've always felt that there is not really any distinction between literature and SF (always assuming we're discussing the top 5 per cent of each). That's also what I take, among other historical aperçus, from Broderick's article. I note, and agree somewhat with, Hamill's critique of the lack of political awareness in a lot of SF (especially US SF, he says). Although he might resist somewhat the trend toward widescreen space opera among the best new British SF writers, I'd still recommend he read, say, Iain M. Banks and Ken MacLeod, both of whom bring a socialist point of view into a lot of their work. I've also

recently become a huge fan of Charles Stross, who certainly takes on 'politics' in a variety of guises in his incredibly wide-ranging work ... and economics, too, in his highly entertaining Merchant Princes series, which Paul Krugman recommends for its evisceration of capitalist ideology. But I also like these writers because they're fine stylists, and always provide high entertainment value (which I value).

Damien's piece, which comes from another useful volume, James and Mendlesohn (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003), provides a good overview. In its exploration of what the New Wave actually did and meant, it tends to back up what I was saying above. But then I'm one of those readers for whom Bester and Sturgeon were the brightest lights of my youthful reading, and who definitely fell in love with both such British marvels as Brian Aldiss when I discovered his early work, and the Ace Specials of Delany, Le Guin, Russ, and Zelazny novels, as well as many of the others he singles out for praise here. I suspect that his view, as a young and eager writer/reader in Australia, like mine from Canada, which at that time had only Phyllis Gotlieb, but now, like Oz, has a number of fine SF&F writers, provided a certain critical distance that comes with a slightly outsider status.

(19 February 2011)

Being officially 'retired' means I don't have to worry about obligations, but I am busy enough with NeWest Press; have another new MS to read this weekend (at least it looks really interesting and short; the last one was 450 pages, and was eventually rejected.)

At least, you're in a part of Oz that hasn't been drowned or blown away, right?

(20 February 2011)

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI
Delmore, NY, USA

The comments in *SFC* 80 about Lem being a grumpy old man and insulting people discredit themselves as ad hominen (don't these people know ad hominen is a logical fallacy?), and they fail to deal with the substance of his views, much less their truth or falsity in any kind of rigorous way. Gossipy ad hominem at best.

Lem stood up for genuine science fiction, purely and clearly, and that is mostly what we have never had, and still mostly do not have, only a label, aside from the merits of what we do have. Almost every major figure of note has said this at one time or another, and been shouted down by fans. If I could insult those individuals who speak in these ways, I would do so gladly; but a better way might be to leave them unanswered in their shameful ways, since they do not know how to answer anything.

Lem was driven into silence by the marching morons and their publishers' monkeys. What I will do, if I ever can, is make an annotated list of these people, for honorable public pillory.

Lem was right in what he said, but the consequence of accepting any of it was too terrible for the field to behold; all is worse and it's much later than we can accept. What SF has accomplished in its two centuries since Frankenstein pales in comparison to what it might have been — much, much more needed to be accomplished.

When I asked Clarke about whether Lem was the best, Arthur said, 'Yes, alas.'

Too many of us are happy with what we have liked, and continue to treasure it. It took genuine intellect and courage for Lem to dismiss his first half dozen novels, and then to see beyond the much better ones and feel disappointed. He left me a long single-spaced letter about all the SF themes that had been botched in one way or another (despite the skill of execution, which he always noted). One day, I may translate this letter and if lifetime permits try my hand at the directions to which he pointed.

(9 August 2010)

As you may have noted, I have my criticisms of Lem's ideas, and said so in public and to him; but this has nothing to do with personal attacks made in place of discussion. His defence of real SF was always genuine, his disappointment over what was claimed to be SF sincere; and his dismay at commercial publishing's burial of the even the merely good and well written by profits deadening.

Not everyone speaks like the people I noted in my last email. Readercon celebrated Lem last year. As you have noted, and which I now adapt: Liszt's music has outlasted the romantic gossip about him, and Lem's thought and writings will outlast the lies told about him.

(9 August 2010)

JOSEPH NICHOLAS
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London N15 4JU, England

'Joseph Nicholas asked to become a Downloader, but doesn't send letters of comment these days,' you remarked in the WAHF column of *SF Commentary* 80. I think the short answer to this would be that, when I asked to become a Downloader, I was under the impression that you'd be sending out e-mail notifications when an issue was ready — but whether or not that impression was correct, I can't recall ever receiving any such notifications from you. (I certainly didn't receive one for this latest issue of *SF Commentary*.) Thus I only ever find out that an issue is available on the infrequent occasions that I check Bill Burns's eFanzines.com website.

[*brg* That's a puzzle I can't solve. I did send notices to several hundred people individually, so I can only conclude that your email address has disappeared from the system.*]

The long(er) answer would be that, as I've said elsewhere, I am an infrequent visitor to Bill Burns's eFanzines website because I have too much else to read already (there was a long wail about this in a recent issue of *Banana Wings*), and if anything on there does pique my interest I'll never do more than skim through it to see whether I recognise any of the names and/or what the contemporary topics of discussion might be. (As I did with *SF Commentary* 80. I never print out copies of anything from the site, since that would merely add to

the reading burden.)

The other part of the answer, which may engage more directly with your particular interests, is that — for someone who was once so assiduous about staying abreast of what was happening, especially writing and talking about it — I seem to have virtually ceased reading science fiction, and indeed fiction of any kind. (In the past two years, I have read precisely one novel and four collections of short stories. All my other reading was non-fiction.) In theory I'm still interested in it; but in practice I find I have the same view of fiction as Judith (Hanna): why read about made-up people when real people are so much more interesting? (Especially (in my case) real historical personages who did real historical things with real historical results?) Ergo, I cannot comment because I have nothing to say.

In thus wise have I lost any 'ability' that I might once have had 'to stir other people' into writing letters of their own. Sorry!

[*brg* The short, inadequate answer is that one does not read something because of what it is *about*, but because of how well it is written. So how much fiction these days is better written than the best essays, history, popular science, etc? It's a problem that I keep arguing about in my own mind.*]

(Incidentally, I noticed that the contents page of *SF Commentary* 80 lists Alan Sandercock as departed, but also that his name does not appear in that section of your letter column. In case you didn't know, he's alive and well, and active on Facebook.)

(12 August 2010)

[*brg* Alan is not only not departed, but has been visited within the last year by at least two of his old friends from his days in Adelaide: Joy Window and Paul Anderson. I hope to publish their travel tales in a near-future issue of **brg**.]

DAVID LAKE
7 8th Avenue, St Lucia, QLD 4067

John Baxter's letter reminded me of Russell Hoban. I'm glad to see, from Wikipedia, that he's still alive at 85. When I last saw him in London he was in rather a bad way. I love his work: he blew my mind with *The Mouse and his Child* and above all *Riddley Walker*. I taught *Riddley Walker* in the 80s to my University of Queensland students, and many of them loved it. One even commented 'Easy to read' — which astonished me.

It was good of you to print my poem 'Unparty'. Much has happened to me since then; I can no longer write real poetry, only comic verse — I've attached one specimen, which may amuse you.

I'm going through a difficult time. My health seems remarkably good for my age (81), and I can still walk miles; I am having a really good group of students in my U3A tutorial group (we are now enjoying Shakespeare's sonnets). But apart from that, I seem to have lost interest in nearly everything. I can't read new fiction (SF or other), and the future for the human race looks black. My guess for the population figure in 2100 is — zero. Sometimes I think Homo was a mistake, a disaster for this planet. But any 'intelligent' species is bound to wreck its planet. SETI is quite useless — our problems will be their problems, and I expect they too would destroy themselves with religious wars. (They are bound to develop religions: those spring from the fear of death, and aliens also will be mortal.)

I think you know I have a partner, Ann Stephens. We are 'handfasted' by private vows. Well, she is in a pretty bad way — falls, crack-fractures. She is doing her best to keep her flat and keep out of a nursing home. If she fails, I think she will die quickly of a broken spirit. I probably won't be able to die without taking direct action. My GP says I have a 'longevity syndrome'. I never wanted to live to this age in the first place. Stop the planet! I want to get off!

(26 August 2010)

Design Faults

O for the eyes of a mollusc,
O for the lungs of a bird!
Where was the Wise Designer
when we the mammals occurred?

The octopus has optics
quite sensibly designed:
his optic nerves run backward
from retina to mind.

We vertebrates sprout fibres
that shoot toward the light,
then plunge down thru a blind spot
which part obscures our sight.

Some vertebrates have managed
to make the best of things —
prodigious sight have all birds
that soar above on wings.

And they have something better:
breath that draws down the air
to lower body cavities
then up thru lungs quite clear!

A one-way flow, not in and out,
not stuck in mucus sacs,
and making much more energy
than all our athlete hacks!

I wonder if a lung disease
plagues any single bird?
Do blackbirds get pneumonia?
The thought is quite absurd!

Ah, not for them, as for poor me,
the ailments that affright us —
no snuffles, coughing, poisoned lungs —
no skylark gets bronchitis!

DJL, 26 May 2010, 7–8.30 p.m.

NED BROOKS
4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047, USA

What a production! I see that you have sent me most issues of *SF Commentary* since 1970 — more than half my life. I had nothing before No 16 until Frank Dietz gave me Nos 3–6 and 8–17, which he had put in a binder. I had a subscription to *Astounding/Analog* that an aunt gave me in the late 1950s, and I kept it up for a long time — the issues filled a 3 by 7 homemade bookcase. I usually liked the cover art, and I never minded Campbell's provocative editorials or lunatic-fringe science articles. But as time went on I found that fewer and fewer of the stories held my interest. Finally, to free up the space, I sold the run to another fan. I liked *F&SF* better, and still have all of those to date.

I struggled through *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and remember little of it. I could not get into *Dune* at all, and disliked the movie. But I read *The Lord of the Rings* several times with great pleasure, and listened to the first BBC dramatisation on reel-to-reel tape, and thought the movie was about as good as could be expected. The great thing to me in the 1970s was Tanith Lee's *Tales of the Flat Earth*, which reminded me a lot of the fantasies of Lord Dunsany.

Philip K. Dick was another writer I had trouble with — he had ideas, but I could not enjoy his awkward prose. The only books I got through were *Counterclock World* and *Galactic Pot-Healer*.

I have had bad myopia all my life, now about 20/600. This is easily corrected with bifocals for ordinary purposes — but I have to use special glasses to use the PC, and no glasses at all to read *SFC*, switching back and forth to do a LoC by e-mail. Ed Meskys used to mimeo the lettercol in *Niekas* from stencils typed in microelite (16 letters to the inch) with an IBM typewriter, but the rest of the zine was in a larger font. I have not tried yet much LoC writing from a PDF file, though the Foxit utility brings up PDF very quickly and displays it at any size wanted.

I agree with Steve Sneyd that *The Anubis Gates* was the best of the novels of Tim Powers. I have read some of the others, but they just didn't flow as smoothly; the plots seem to churn. I have the same problem with the Stephen King doorstops: ideas are rehashed to a tiresome degree.

Here's to another 40!

(26 August 2010)

MURRAY MOORE
1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, ONT L4Y 1C8, Canada

Yesterday evening I went to hear Carl Hiassen talk about his new novel, *Star Island*. From there I went to see *Winter's Bone*, the movie adaptation of the Daniel Woodrell novel. Well, not a novel: by word count I doubt his novels are novels; more likely novellas.

But after leaving the Toronto Reference Library I noticed across Yonge Street one of those stores rented on a month-to-month basis and sometimes occupied by a seller of remaindered books. And in that store I found a copy of *Dreaming Again: Thirty-Five New Stories Celebrating The Wild Side of Australian Fiction*, edited by Jack Dann. I also have *Dreaming Down-Under* and *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction And Fantasy* volumes 1 and 2. What other collections and anthologies of Australian SF should I look for?

(31 July 2010)

[*brg* The obvious thing to do is get onto a major Australian site, such as Slow Glass Books, Infinitas Books, or Gaslight Books (with catalogues on line), and ask the person at the other end what is available. Gayle Lovett at Gaslight Books could be particularly helpful, but so could Justin Ackroyd at Slow Glass. A major new Australian anthology is *Legends of Australian Fantasy*, edited by Jack Dann and Jonathan Strahan, and there are various Australian horror anthologies. There are many anthologies coming out from the small publishers in Australia, and they would definitely be available only from the sites mentioned above.*]

We also heard from:

Colin Steele (Canberra): 'When will *SFC* 81 and 82 be out? In terms of Aussiecon? I'd like to pay you for five extra copies of the one with my reviews in, so can send cheque or catch up with cash at Aussiecon.' I didn't catch up with Colin at Aussiecon, but I do hope I sent him the extra copies of No 80.

Dave Langford (Reading): 'I'd forgotten writing all that about *Maps* (which I hope doesn't seem too self-promoting — it was more for your information than the world at large, though I'm certainly happy for the world to know) — or about Joseph Nicholas's mysterious remarks on Chris Boyce. But finding myself in the letter column helped me choke back the usual wave of guilt.'

Peter Simpson (London) had just received his copy of *SFC* 80. An Australian living in London, he re-subscribed. Thanks very much, Peter.

Steve Cameron (Mooroolbark, Victoria): 'The Philip K. Dick films currently under production that I'm aware of are: "The Adjustment Team" being made as *The Adjustment Bureau*; *Ubik*; *Total Recall* (being remade); *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*; and one I haven't seen yet: *Screamers: The Hunting* (released in 2009).'

Keith Stokes (somewhere in USA): 'Bob Tucker was a dear friend, but I am not his literary executor. I would be thrilled to see your Tucker issue(s). I recently had a treat in the mail: my contributor's copy of issue 203 of *Uchujin*, the magazine by the late Takumi Shibano. It included my obituary of Forry Ackerman. Not that I could have even told what page it was on, if his widow hadn't marked the page.'

Judy Buckrich (Gardenvale, Victoria): 'Amazing really — 40 years — will mention your oeuvre in my memoir for sure when I talk about George Turner.'

Sheryl Birkhead (Gaithersburg, Maryland): 'I'm so glad Tucker got the chance to read his tribute. Nice to see again the photo of Tucker pubbing his ish. On p. 95: Guy Lillian has not to my knowledge won a Hugo, and I am betting he is sensitive about that.'

Cheryl Morgan (often in midair between continents): 'Excellent, reading material for the plane trip. Thank you!'

Cherry Weiner (Manalapan, New Jersey): 'I will

browse when it is less crazy. Trust that you are okay and all is well.'

Alexander Nedelkovich (Belgrade, Serbia): '*SFC*s 80 and 80A come as a wonderful surprise and a great gift! It will give me the opportunity to study a large quantity of good material.'

Jerry Lapidus (Florida): 'Thanks for the update, Bruce. I envy your energy and diligence.' Jerry disappeared from fanzine fandom in the mid 1970s. His *Tomorrow And...* was a highlight of the fanzine scene of the early seventies. I found that he was living in Florida only when I made it to the Internet in the late 1990s. He seems to be doing well, and even attends the occasional convention, but has never returned to fanzine publishing.

Michael O'Brien (Hobart): '40th anniversary, eh? Where did the last 35 years go?' I've seen recent photos of Michael, who lives in Hobart, and I wouldn't have recognised him as the same bloke I met first at the Melbourne SF Conference of 1968, my first convention. He would probably say the same of me.

Michael Dobson (Bethesda, Maryland): 'I wrote three alt.history military novels for Forge with Douglas Niles; my bread and butter is technical nonfiction in project management. I've a few fanzines up at http://www.facebook.com/l/6ff76; efanzines.com. I wrote a Corflu 2005 report with Jay Kinney for *Chunga*, and had a recent piece in Nic Farey's *Beam*, but although I've been around in fandom since the mid 1960s, I've never been particularly active. Your work, of course, I known for many years.'

Dave Hyde (somewhere in USA) invited me to attend the first Philip K. Dick Convention last year, but (a) could offer no funds to help me get there, and (b) held the convention about the same time as Aussiecon 4. He sent photos later of a jolly gathering in the Colorado mountains — a sound basis for future conventions. I can't see how I could ever afford to attend.

Tim Marion (New York): 'I discovered that British edition paperback of *Carnacki the Ghost Finder* apparently now belongs to someone else. In other words, someone who was here (and I think I know whom...) decided that the book was better off in his possession than mine. I attempted to buy a new edition, which is a larger, quality paperback. I had too hard a time trying to read it, first because of the numerous typos, and then because, in the first story, Carnacki actually sacrifices a cat to a demon merely in order to observe the demon! Rather turned me off. :: The TV series I described, *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, is now available on DVD and is *highly* recommended to everyone who enjoys a thoughtful drama.'

Louis de Vries (Caulfield, Victoria): 'How great that this technology so facilitates the spread of fanzines that once cost so much more to produce. Are you keeping busy with editing and indexing?' Much too busy; hence the delay in producing *SFC*s 81 and 82.

Robert Elordieta (Traralgon, Victoria) writes to say he enjoyed everything in *SFC*s 80 and 80A, especially the covers.

Thomas Bull (Doncaster, Victoria) attended at least one session of the Melbourne Writers Festival, which was inconsiderately scheduled on the same weekend as Aussiecon 4. So, bizarrely, was an academic conference on Utopias. Needless to say, I attended no sessions of either. Thomas however, attended a session where Gerald Murnane starred. 'He mentioned that *The Plains* will be coming out in French in, if I remember correctly, February 2011.'

Brian Thurogood (somewhere in Europe) was the surprise show-up at Aussiecon 4. For years he published a fanzine called *Noumenon* in New Zealand, then went off to Europe. I last met him in 1977. As part of his whirlwind tour of Australia in September last years, he hit Canberra, then 'enjoying some r&r with fantastic cycling and walking tracks around the lakes and up the mini-mountains. Am heading to Naracoorte later this week and then on to Adelaide for a few days. :: Am returning to Melbourne area around the last week of the month and hope to see Leigh Edmonds for a long chat — AussieCon didn't seem to allow a lot of free time on most days. Am also planning to catch up with Colin Wilson in Melbourne, who you may remember drew many of the fantastic illustrations for *Noumenon* back in the seventies.' This all led to a great lunch in Greensborough after Aussiecon, with Brian, Colin, and Leigh, and with Steve Cameron, new Melbourne fan. I've no idea what Brian has been doing since then.

Dave Hartwell (Pleasantville, New York): 'Bruce, I have your subscription renewal, and I have extended your *NYRoSF* subscription by 10 copies for past graceful sendings. I look forward to the great reviews compilation.' This was a real cheerer-up of an email. Thanks, Dave.

Andrew Weiner (Toronto): 'No 80 — what a milestone, and at times perhaps a millstone. *SFC* was the first fanzine I ever saw and now it's the last one (apart from *Steam Engine Time* and your other productions) that I still read.'

Gian Paolo Cossato (Venice): Solaris, Gian Paolo's shop in Venice, closed a few months ago. I've printed his letter, and some photos in the most recent issue of **brg*/Scratch Pad*. Like Franz Rottensteiner, Gian Paolo is one of the few people with whom I've been corresponding for over 40 years, but somebody I've never met.

— Bruce Gillespie, 10 May 2011