SF COMMENTARY 83

GUY SALVIDGE on
THE NOVELS OF PHILIP K. DICK

October 2012

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Cover: Fenna Hogg

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Front cover
Melbourne graphic artist **Fenna Hogg**'s cover does not in fact portray Philip K. Dick wearing a scramble suit. That's what it looks like to me. It is actually based on a photograph of Melbourne writer and teacher **Steve Cameron**, who arranged with Fenna for its use as a cover.

Graphic
Carol Kewley (p. 78).

Photographs
Damien Broderick (p. 4); Guy Salvidge (p. 7); Jim Sakland/Dick Eney (p. 50); Jerry Bauer (p. 51); Helena Binns (pp. 59, 80); Mark Atkins/John Baxter (p. 70); Yvonne Rousseau (pp. 57, 73); Ray Wood (p. 76); Frank Weissenborn (p. 79); Cath Ortlieb (p. 80).

I must be talking to my friends

The state of the fanzine

In February this year I produced the final issue of *Steam Engine Time*, No 13. *SET* had its own style and place in the world of fanzines, but co-editor Jan Stinson could no longer participate in producing it. I placed the .PDF version on Bill Burns's efanzine.com site — then waited four months before I could afford to send out copies of the print version. I decided that if I had to part out $1200 again to produce a fanzine, I would have to give up publishing altogether.

The alternative? All-online publishing. Chris Garcia does it, and they gave him a Hugo Award for his trouble. Not only does he produce lively fanzines, but he can produce them prodigiously (once a week). I too could be prodigious, even profligate, in production if only I didn't have to pay for the printing and postage bills, especially the horrendous cost of overseas postage.

Can I quit printing copies altogether? You'll receive a little notice from me asking you to download my magazines from http://efanzines.com. More importantly, email Bill Burns at billb@ftldesign.com. Ask him to place you on his email notification list.

SF Commentary returns ... online.

Download your copy of No 83 and all later issues in PDF format: http://efanzines.com

Make sure you know when each issue is published. Email Bill Burns at billb@ftldesign.com. Ask him to place you on his email notification list.

I can no longer afford to print issues of my magazines. The printing and international postage costs are too high. Now I'm going all-online, *SF Commentary* can again appear regularly.

- **If you cannot download and must have a print copy, get in touch with me, Bruce Gillespie, at gandc@pacific.net.au or 5 Howard Street, Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia. I will have to charge you $A100 — unless you are a frequent contributor of articles or artwork, or supply me with review books or other goodies.**
- **You have a current subscription for the print edition, of which you have ..... number of copies left before your sub expires. Please download copies after that.**
- **We currently trade paper fanzines. I wish this could continue, but as you also place your fanzine on efanzines.com, could we 'trade' online?**
- **We currently trade paper fanzines, and you do not publish a downloadable version. Could we please continue to trade?**

I still have some print copy obligations, especially a few substantial subscriptions and some trades for magazines that are not posted online. But I am hoping most people will stay with the online version.

I like editing, but I would prefer fanzine editing, which pays me nothing and costs me everything. If I could publish my fanzines solely on efanzines.com, I could settle down to a life of quiet ease, publishing each issue regularly (perhaps every week), reading all the books that are on the shelf, listening to the vast number of CDs I've never heard, and watching the DVD and Blu-ray movies that have piled up. Instead, life will remain the same for me ... unless, of course, the publishing industry changes as radically as I suspect it will in the next few years and I will be left with no paying work. Oh well. Elaine and I don't have a car, a mortgage, or kids, so between us I suppose we can survive.

BRIAN ALDISS
39 St. Andrews Road, Old Headington,
Oxford OX3 9DL, England

It's very good of you to keep sending me *SF Commentary*, not to mention *Steam Engine Time*, when I failed to make any response until now.

The democracy in which we are fortunate to live always depends on a lack of corruption in high places and a circulation of money. The former factor is one I readily subscribe to, but on the question of money I am more uncertain. I never wrote for money, but rather for what was on my mind. One of the great virtues of the SF community — never sufficiently extolled — is it often has scant regard for money or profit. I guess your *SF Commentary* is hardly likely to make a large profit. One has to eat, of course ...

What you might think of, pretentiously, as my 'greatest work' is something no one has seen or thought about. I mention it now because I realise my future years are limited. My Journal is something I have written for over 40 years. It is manuscript and goes into hardbound A5 uniform volumes. More and more frequently, the later volumes are illustrated. I am now writing volume 72, to be stored away with previous volumes in a massive German safe, here in my house. It's easy to work out that 72 volumes of this sort will occupy about 2 yards of shelf space. The Bodleian Library, which is as it were the Buckingham Palace of old literatures is eager to have this work, where it will be looked after.

Virginia Woolf says that if you want to be read two centuries from now, keep a diary. Only recently have I had this in mind. No money is involved, but at the end of the day there's pleasure to write a page or two of reflection. A life not reflected upon is rather an impoverished life.

This is meant to be a reflection and not a sermon. Science fiction would never have survived had it not been for this intense money-free support from fans and writers, so thanks again for your magazines.

The celebration of John Clute in *SF Commentary* is particularly apt. You just have to look at the electronic version of his *SF Encyclopedia* to see the extraordinary amount of work and knowledge involved in that great achievement.

(20 March 2012)

Damien Broderick, Rudy Rucker, and Brian Aldiss, ICFA Conference, Florida, 2005. (Photo supplied by Damien Broderick.)

brg Dear Brian

Thanks very much for your letter. It cheered me up greatly.

However, even while I've been trying to arrange for the government to give me a pension that I might live on (having reached the age of 65 on 17 February) I received the largest editing job I've been offered since the mid 1990s. This took up most of my waking hours until I finished the job last Wednesday. The author of the previous two editions of the book asked that I edit the third edition. It is the encyclopedia of its academic discipline, and eventually turned in at 460,000 words, 930 single-spaced pages. When the cheque comes in, it will be the exact amount that I might possibly expect for a whole year of an old age pension. If I could depend on continuing freelance work, I would not bother going through the infinite hoops that I've had to jump through (without success, since the status that Elaine and I have as a small company seems too difficult for them) and would simply keep working. But I've had long periods of 'resting' during the last five years, so let's hope I can satisfy the requirements of the bureaucrats.

All this is to explain why I might no longer be able to send paper copies of my magazines to anybody overseas in future, not even people such as you who've always received them. If I want to live within my means from now on, I will have to give up such essentials as buying CDs, books, DVDs and Blu-rays, and international postage. I will have to publish PDF documents posted on http://efanzines.com. The only reason why I've been able to live beyond my means during the last five years is that my mother left me enough money to let me carry on spending. Now that legacy has run out, reality reigns.

To return to your letter ... I have never made any profit from my magazines. Over the years, I suppose they have cost me several hundred thousand dollars in the equivalent of today's currency. This has led to the perpetual seesaw of my life: when I have the money to publish fanzines, I'm so busy with paying work that I don't have time to publish; when I have time to publish, I don't have the money. But somehow, miraculously, the magazines have kept appearing.

I must admit I've been wondering how you've been getting along during recent years. Your books have been rather hard to find, although my friend and financial

agent in England (Mark Plummer) has just bought a copy of your *An Exile on Planet Earth* and sent it to me. I borrowed a copy of *The Cretan Teat* from my friend Tim Train (somebody I met through the Brian Aldiss e-site, which seems no longer to be operating), and enjoyed it greatly, but have not been able to track down my own copy. I hope you are still reaching your audience, but it would be a lot easier if your books appeared regularly in bookshops — the few that are still operating. (The collapse of the Angus & Robertson–Borders chain in Australia has withdrawn bookshops of any kind from most suburban shopping centres in Australia.) It's very encouraging that you are still writing regularly.

Also interesting that you have followed the same path in later years as my friend Gerald Murnane. He has spent the last five years writing and collating all his personal recollections into a set of large filing cupboards. Even while publishers have been slow to publish his last two books (despite winning a recent prize for his life's work, and even being listed one year by Ladbroke's as a Nobel Prize possibility), he feels that his collected journals will be as interesting to future literary historians as many of his books. I don't know whether he already has plans to place these filing cabinets with a particular library. I know that several of the main libraries have made tentative enquiries.

A huge amount of the work on the new *SF Encyclopedia* has also been done by Dave Langford. It only took writing two or three short entries for him for me to realise what an amazing enterprise this has been. The sheer amount of cross-referencing, checking, and styling needed for just a few hundred words makes contemplation of working with the other three million words seem an impossible task. I just hope Dave, John, and the others have been adequately paid for their work, but I suspect not. I just wish I had a print copy of the third edition, though — I will still be reaching for the books of the second edition, plus *Trillion Year Spree*, long into the future, rather than trying to negotiate the internet version of the new *Encyclopedia*.

I've been lucky in my health. Being diagnosed diabetic type 2 three years ago made me reassess my diet. Losing 15 kg seems to have kept my blood sugar levels at average level, and none of the other diabetic symptoms has appeared so far. I had a very sore leg for some months after I tried working out on an exercise bicycle, but eventually that returned to normal. The moral is: avoid gym machines and walk an hour each day. I find that as long as my health holds out, I really don't feel much different from forty years ago. But uncomfortable things keep happening to friends, and the death toll has started to hit my generation, not the following one ... all this lies before me. Elaine is well, though, after a few health problems during the last five years, and she isn't allowed to retire for another six years. From now on we must (as Warren Zevon intoned before he died at the age of 58) 'enjoy every sandwich'. Which we do.

(29 April 2012)

TARAL WAYNE
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Funny you should editorialise about *The King's Speech*.

I saw the movie on a used DVD I bought about a month ago ... It was very impressive. For a film with few events and no action, it was nevertheless absorbing. Colin Firth and Geoffrey Rush were magnificent.

Odd how monarchy seems to be in the movies, lately. I liked *The Queen*, also, though not so much as *The King's Speech*. Then there was *Elizabeth*, another fine movie, though it played fast and loose with the facts. (The sequel was a letdown.) Although *The Madness of King George* is quite old by comparison, it seems to belong to the category also. I might even add *The Last King of Scotland*, although that was more about a homicidal maniac who started his career as a sergeant in a Scottish regiment and went on to tyrannise an African nation. Yet, it showed a side of monarchy that we don't see so much of — what it's like to be Caligula, Richard III, or Adolf Hitler.

Oddly enough, a month or two ago I wrote a very long article for Guy Lillian about the Royal Family and what Royal Pains in the Ass they can be.

Yet, there's the CBC and millions of silly people fawning over William and Kate, as though they were something special. I can't understand it. William is not even the heir to the throne at present. His father, Charles, is. I can deal with a royal visit by the Prince of Wales and heir apparent ... but Willy, who is nobody and won't even step into his father's shoes for many years? Some people must be desperate to suck up to Royal Ass. As well, Willy is such a dull lump! Why can't he do more, like his father, and take up go-cart racing, campaign to save the shark, or lecture the public on its addiction to soap operas? That's what I always liked about Charles. He was a lovable British crank. But William is as interesting as refrigerator art in a school for the blind.

But, you were talking more about Lionel Logue. Interesting chap. Of course, I went immediately to the *Wikipedia* article to read up on him. Apparently he was self-taught, gaining experience in dealing with speech impediments by treating patients after the Great War. He was scoffed at by the professionals, of course, who couldn't cure anyone but knew better.

When I was young, the monarchy was as much part of

Anglophile Canada as beavers, maple syrup, and ice hockey. But as I grew older, it seems to have faded away, until it is someone else's traditions, not mine. I don't begrudge the British their crown, nor feel they should abolish it. I just think it should be quietly shelved in Canada. After all ... nearly half the people in this country were born in some other nation. What conceivable link could they have to the Queen of England? It barely registers on me, born and bred here.

Since I've been very busy, lately, finding and revising old fan articles of mine from zines going back to the 1970s, I realise that I could probably have used a Lionel Logue of my own. I had a way with words, no question about it ... but I would only go so far before committing a hideous sin against the English language. And I never did learn to spell or punctuate properly. Today I have a regular proofreader, who puts 'the' and 'and' in their proper places, catches simple mistakes that I can't see for knowing what ought to be there, and occasionally sorts out tangled tenses for me. I badly needed him in 1978! I might have been the next Walt Willis or Charles Burbee with the proper guidance ... but had to settle for just being me.

More than 30 years later, that's not so bad, at least. I'm the very best me there is.

'There seems no point to writing fiction unless you write something nobody else could possibly have written.' Words for the wise ... unless you're satisfied as a commercial writer, then writing just like Poul Anderson or Hal Clement is probably the winning ticket.

So far as I know, when I write fiction, it is very much something nobody else could possibly written. The problem is, people repeatedly tell me that my fiction could not possibly be published. When I ask them why, they um and ah and tell me its not because it's badly written, but because it isn't like anything else being published, therefore it is unpublishable and nobody wants to read it. This depresses me a great deal. If I can't be me as a writer, why go on? I don't want to be Harry Turtledove and I'm pretty sure I can't be Greg Benford either. That's probably why I still slum around fanzine fandom — it gives me a sense of false security that somebody is reading what I write.

Which may be one reason I appreciated the kind words while you reviewed *Banana Wings*. It's one of my favourite zines too, and I make it my business to try to appear in every issue I can. *Trap Door* is another one of my favourites. Much as I'd like to write something for Robert, I don't seem to fit into his fannish universe the right way, and much as he likes my work, I have never submitted anything he thought was right for *Trap Door*. I'm about convinced that I will have to think up some subject that involves 1960s fandom, the Bay area, the counterculture, or Carol's health if I'm ever to succeed. It's a tough challenge. I don't know that much about any of those subjects and have less to say. I haven't entirely given up hoping.

But, at times, I really do wonder why I spend so much time and effort writing for fanzines. It seems the more I write, the more I'm taken for granted. I don't think I'm the only one who has these flashes of existential angst. I was talking with Eric Mayer through the magic of e-mail, and he seems to feel much the same way, that his best work is usually passed over in favour of commenting on some detail of the last Novacon or Harlan Ellison's latest temper tantrum.

Have you noticed how few competent fanzine reviews there are? Most issues of most fanzines are never reviewed by anyone, anywhere. And a few editors I talk to complain that they don't get many locs. They have to print almost every one that comes in the mail, no matter how inane or unremarkable. My view of this is that it's the inevitable product of the greying of fandom. Everyone wants to be a fan writer and to publish. But nobody has the energy to also to write letters or review fanzines. I've been told by some fans — in complete confidentiality, of course — that they don't even have much interest in reading other people's fanzines. They want to write and publish, and let someone else do the work of providing all the egoboo. We have too many Indian chiefs but not enough braves.

Of course, blogs and chat groups soak up a lot of fandom's attention, too, like apas but ever so much worse!

In any case, it all comes down to eFanzines.com, it seems. If Bill is ever hit by a loaded tank-carrier, speeding down the highway at 92 mph, that may well be the end of the site. Or, suppose his infinite storage space turns out not to be so infinite, and one day he informs fandom that the site is full; we can't post there anymore? And, as you say, file protocols change all the time. Computer geeks call this progress. The automotive industry used to call it planned obsolescence, and made no bones about its purpose being to force the consumer to replace perfectly good products long before they wear out. I also have the strongest feeling that, apart from a half dozen or so popular titles, most of the fanzines posted to eFanzines.com are almost never downloaded. They're free for the taking and only a click away ... but still the world will not beat a path to fanzine fandom's door. There are much more interesting things on other URLs like the dancing sock puppets and clips stolen from *Family Guy* and dubbed over.

Enough ... I'll be opening my veins next, and I've probably half-convinced you to look for your razor too.

(8 July 2011)

brg Fanzine publishing is what I do, so my only razor-slashing contemplations concern ways of paying for what I like doing. However, you outline very well the disadvantage of publishing on efanzines.com, or anywhere else online. Why should anybody download my writings? I can notify some people using Facebook, and others using the various Yahoo e-groups I'm in, but I have no way of notifying everybody who might be interested every time I publish. I'll just have to trust that there are some people out there who are still interested.

I would much prefer to give and receive paper fanzines. I believe they will be the only remnants of our work in twenty or thirty years, despite Bill Burns' best efforts. Something will happen in the software industry to make most current files unreadable. But I ... just ... cannot ... afford ... to ... print ... more than a few copies. I keep waiting for my ship to come in, but it never does.

Your attitude to writing fanzine articles seems differ-

(Continued on page 44)

Guy Salvidge

Discovering Philip K. Dick

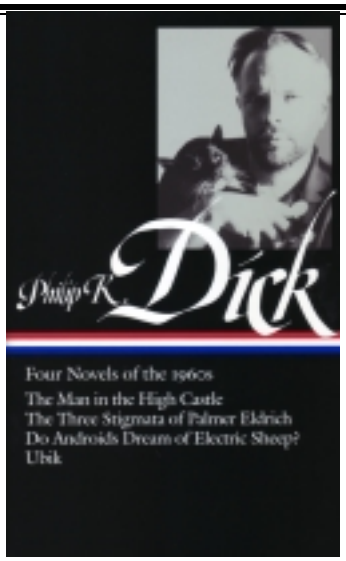
Guy Salvidge writes: I was born on 3 August 1981, and though I wouldn't know it for a long time, that meant I'd only share this Earth with the man who'd later become my most cherished writer for a day short of seven months. I'm the right age to be the baby PKD spoke of in his bizarre 'Tagore letter' (except I'm not the Chosen One ... at least if I am I'll be as surprised as anyone). A lot of things in my life have been like that; quite often I've felt myself to be several decades late to the party that was (and perhaps still is) science fiction. My Honours thesis, completed when I was barely 21, was on PKD and the New Wave, but it wasn't until 2008 that I tried to write about the great man more seriously. By that time I'd done what just about every man or woman with a liberal arts degree and not much sense of what they wanted to do with their life has done — started teaching. I taught high school English in Merredin and then in Northam, both in Western Australia, but all the while my thoughts kept coming back to a strange man who died in 1982. I take it there are number of others around the world who feel the same.

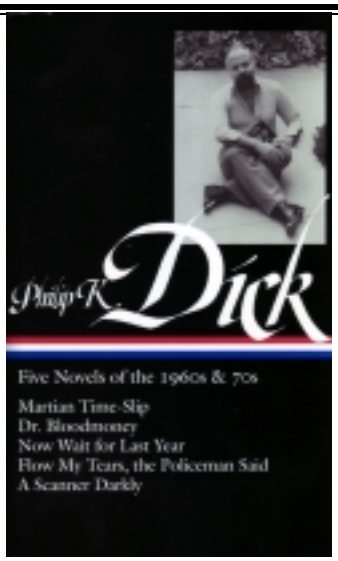
I remember clearly the day my reading life changed forever. The year was 1999 and the location was the Angus & Robertson bookshop at Whitford City, Western Australia. I was 18 years old and I was tossing up between buying Stephen Baxter's *Titan* and Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*, the latter being the first in the Orion/Millennium Science Fiction Masterworks series. I enjoyed *The Forever War* and vowed to buy the entire 24-volume series, which was scheduled to be released two per month throughout 1999. Little did I know then that the series would run well into the seventies of volumes over the course of the following decade. During 1999 I was exposed, through the Masterworks, to the works of Alfred Bester, Ursula Le Guin, J. G. Ballard, and Cordwainer Smith, and of course others, but it was the work of Philip K. Dick that had the most impact on me. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* sat unread on my bookshelf for months, but it was number 13 in the Masterworks series, *Martian Time-Slip*, that really grabbed my attention.

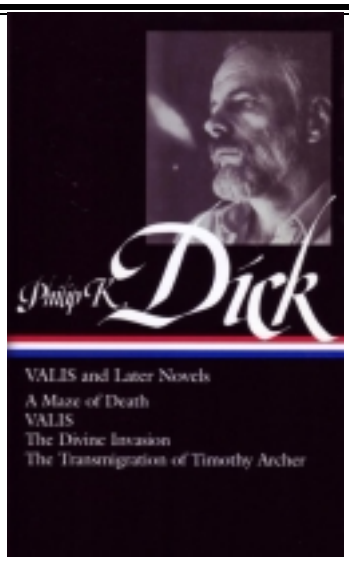
I've written extensively on *Martian Time-Slip*, so I won't attempt to recapitulate my thoughts on the novel here, but suffice to say that the book changed my life forever. It immediately set me on a course of hunting down, buying, and reading each and every one of Philip K. Dick's 40-plus novels over the course of the next year or so (with one very small exception — *Gather Yourselves Together,* which I've never read). Back in 1999, the Philip K. Dick renaissance was in its infancy, meaning that this search necessitated the purchase of many old and yellowed editions of obscure titles like *Vulcan's Hammer, The Man Who Japed,* and *The Ganymede Takeover.* Many of these titles were sourced on the World Wide Web, which was itself in its infancy in 1999. I spent much of my admittedly meagre life savings on this endeavour, and I enjoyed every minute of the search (although not, it must be said, every word of PKD I read). And then, one sad day, it was over. I had read the novels, the short stories in their original collections, the essays, the biographies, and the books of interviews. Over the following decade, I re-read many of these books, and I came to know the life of Philip K. Dick better than any life except my own.

I never thought I'd find myself writing about Philip K. Dick. Others had done that already, extensively and often expertly. But eventually it became easier for me to write than not write, and so my Wordpress blog was born. I was my own boss and I didn't have to worry about deadlines. I didn't have to adhere to anyone else's idea of what tone I ought to adopt or what

length I ought to aim for. What I ended up writing were pieces that existed somewhere on the spectrum between standard reviews and more formal essays. In time I was introduced to Dave Hyde (aka Lord Running Clam) and Bruce Gillespie (editor of the seminal *Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd*), both of whom were kind enough to provide me with the encouragement to continue. I continued to the tune of 22,000 words and there's probably more to come. The blog, which isn't entirely limited to reviews of PKD-related work, can be found at **guysalvidge.wordpress.com**. Philip K. Dick was a special writer and a special man, and I've found that PKD fans tend to be equally interesting. I'd love to meet some more of them.







The Library of America novels (in order of appearance)

The Man in the High Castle
The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
Ubik
Martian Time-Slip
Dr Bloodmoney
Now Wait for Last Year
Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said
A Scanner Darkly
A Maze of Death
VALIS
The Divine Invasion
The Transmigration of Timothy Archer

Other works by Philip K. Dick

Time Out of Joint
Voices from the Street
Humpty Dumpty in Oakland
Ubik: The Screenplay

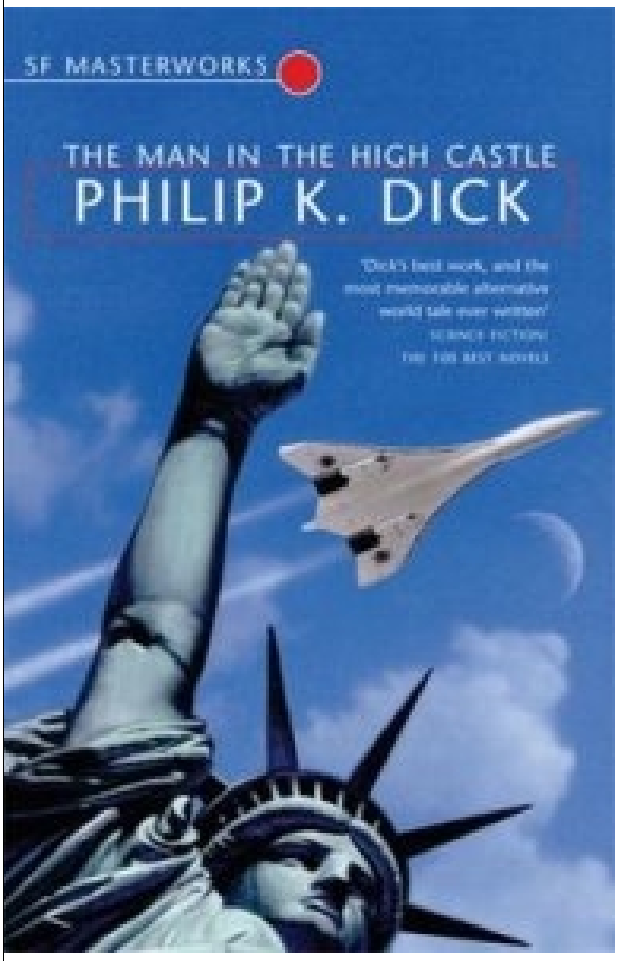
Works relating to Philip K. Dick

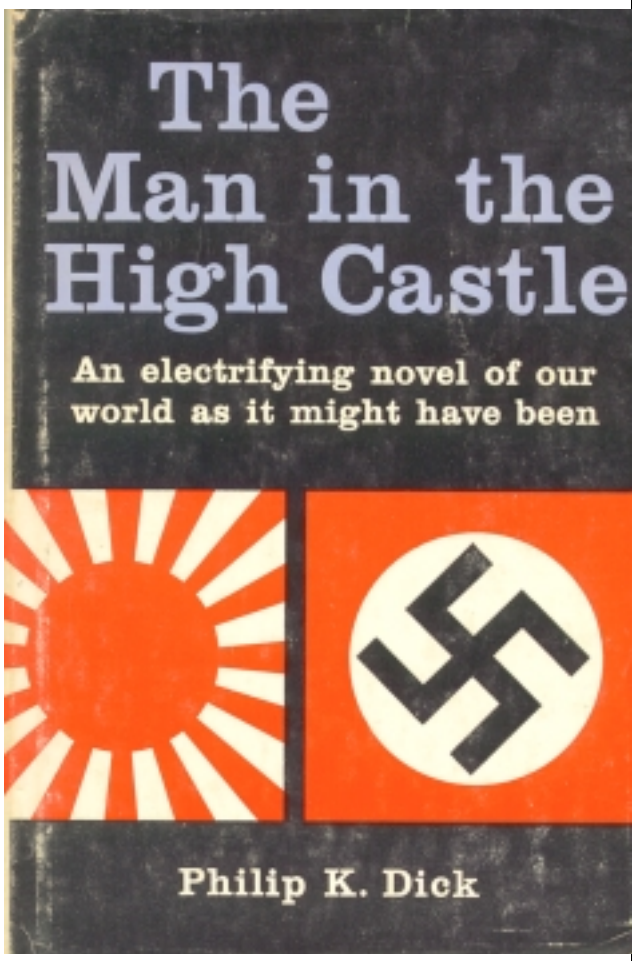
What If Our World is Their Heaven?: The Final Conversations of Philip K. Dick
Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick by Lawrence Sutin
Search for Philip K. Dick by Anne R. Dick
The Owl in Daylight by Tessa B. Dick
The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick by Umberto Rossi

The Library of America novels

(in order of appearance)

The Man in the High Castle





(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2009)

I first read ***The Man in the High Castle*** (henceforth ***Castle***) in 1999 during my first exposure to the world of PKD, and at a guess I'd say that I'm up to my fourth reading by 2010. There aren't many books I've cared to read four times, but the best of PKD definitely warrants this kind of attention.

Castle is a unique work in PKD's vast opus for a number of reasons. Written in 1961, when the author was a tender 32 years old, it is in part an attempt to fuse the speculative riffs of earlier SF novels such as *Time Out of Joint* and *Eye in the Sky* with the gritty realism of the author's then-unpublished mainstream novels such as *Mary and the Giant* and *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. Philip Dick tried to do this a number of times during his career, with limited success, but *Castle* must stand as a very significant exception. The novel is unique, in that it is PKD's only alternate history novel, set in a world where the Axis won World War II. The third unusual thing about *Castle* is that it is much better written than most of PKD's work. By 1961, the author had written no fewer than 25 prior novels (according to Lawrence Sutin in his indispensible biography *Divine Invasions*), a staggering number. This is neither the work of an apprentice nor the work of an amphetamine-fuelled madman/genius/hack who pumped out 12 novels in two years. This is a work of craft, and it is the novel I'd point to in defending PKD from the allegation that he had good ideas but couldn't write. PKD could write, so well that his

work is still being pored over nearly 30 years after his death, but he rarely produced something as polished as this. And the fourth reason *Castle* is unique in the master's oeuvre is that it was the only one of his novels to win a major award, the coveted Hugo in 1963 (*Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* did win the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, but the Hugo was the biggest in those days). To an extent, this book saved and remade PKD's career. Without it, he may never have gone on to produce novels such as *Martian Time-Slip*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Ubik*, and *VALIS*.

Before I go on, I want to explain how influential this novel has been on me personally. In it, several of the characters use the Chinese oracle, *I Ching*, to guide them through their daily lives. I hadn't heard of the thing in 1999, but I obtained a copy henceforth (the Richard Wilhelm translation with the introduction by Carl Jung) and have used it since. In *Castle*, PKD has his characters actually sitting down and using the *I Ching* in a way that serves as a good introduction to the oracle and the ideas contained within. After using it extensively for several months, I became interested in the ancient Chinese philosophy of Taoism and especially the writings of Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi in pinyin). One version, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Parables of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Victor Mair, is one of the ten books I'd take with me to a desert island if I was to spend the rest of my life there. After that, I read some of the classics of Chinese literature, most notably the epic *Three Kingdoms*, as well as a number of books on Chinese history. This led me, in time, to modern China and the writings of Ha Jin, Xinran, and my favourite, Ma Jian (whose novel *Beijing Coma* I reviewed in 2008 — the review easily has the most hits on my blog to this day). Ten years of inquiry, maybe even of enlightenment (even if only of the personal kind), can be traced directly back to Philip K. Dick and *Castle*. Without it, I would not have been exposed to Taoist philosophy in 1999 and may never have proceeded down this path. So if I or anyone else ever questions the value of literature in people's lives, I need only to point to my own example.

Castle opens in San Francisco with an odd little man by the name of Robert Childan, a man of limited intelligence and sympathy, who runs an antique shop full of pre-war American kitsch. His main customers are the ruling Japanese, who apparently can't get enough of the stuff. In the next couple of chapters, we are introduced to no less than four other viewpoint characters (I'll explain what I mean by viewpoint characters below). Frank Frink is a Jewish man living in the same Pacific States of America who has recently lost his job and, prior to that, his wife. Nobusuke Tagomi is a high-ranking Japanese official who needs a gift for an important visitor. Juliana Frink is a judo instructor and Frank's ex-wife, living in the Rocky Mountain States. And Mr Baynes is a Swedish plastics maker arriving by Nazi rocket in San Fran to meet Mr Tagomi.

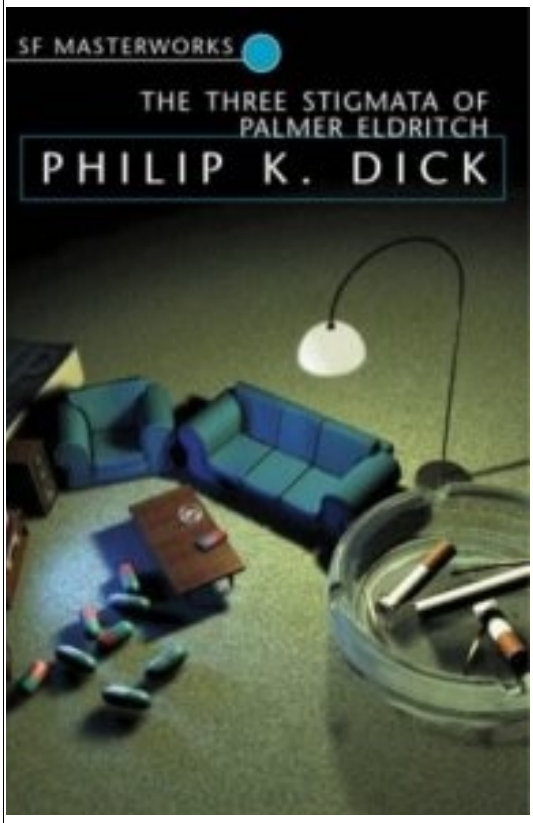
This is PKD's technique and he makes it work exceptionally well in *Castle*. The technique is to have a large number of characters who narrate shortish sections (there are often two distinct sections per chapter), giving the reader an insight into their states of mind. This is *not* the same as having an omniscient narrator who has access to the thoughts of all characters and moves in and out of those minds at will. Omniscient narrators tend to impose a certain monolithic narrative that gives precedence to the perspective of that godly narrator, and in turn the author. PKD does not do this. Instead, he sets a number of individual minds into motion, all with differing opinions and concerns, and basically pits their interests against one another. The characters will come into contact with each other in varying ways, and will ultimately directly influence each other's lives. So Childan and Tagomi are on opposite sides of an important transaction, Frank and Juliana on opposite sides of the country (and a broken marriage), and the mysterious Baynes ties it all together. I like this technique so much that I've spent a decade trying to teach myself to write like this myself.

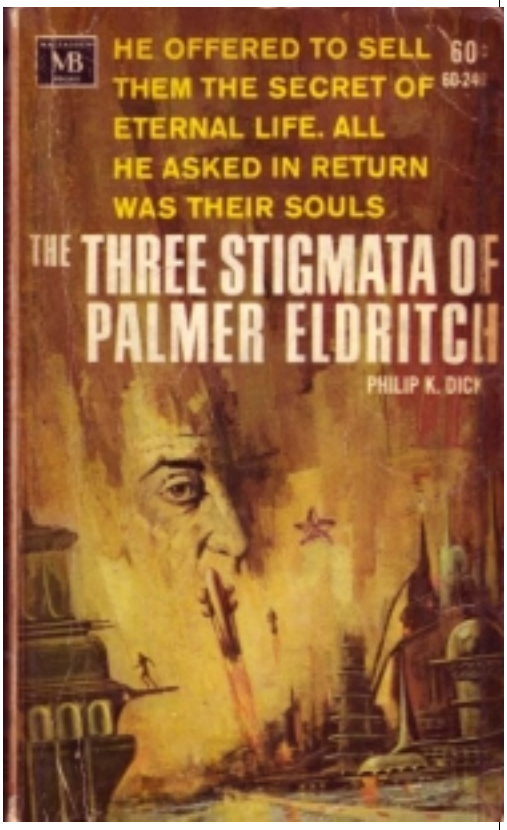
What surprised me this time around reading *Castle* is that the narrative moves very slowly to begin with. Largely the early chapters consist of the characters just thinking about their lives while they attend to mundane tasks such as shaving or cooking breakfast. The interest derives from the world they are thinking in and about. Very rapidly we are given to understand that the Japanese and Germans not only won the war but have conquered and divided the United States among themselves. The novel is supposed to be set in PKD's own time (let's call it 1962, the year the novel was published), meaning that fifteen years have passed since the war ended in 1947. Furthermore, the Nazis have already remade much of the globe in their image: purging Africa of its natives, hurtling across the sky in their super-fast rockets, filling in the Mediterranean Sea, and conquering the solar system. They've made it to Mars already, for example. This is supposed to be 1962 or thereabouts. And here we run into PKD in wild speculation mode of a kind that would not usually be found in an Axis-won WWII narrative. This is the same PKD who, in his next novel *Martian Time-Slip*, had a fully functioning colony on Mars in 1992. If the rapid conquest of the solar system can be explained away in *Castle*, then it is only by imagining the crazed Nazis at the helm.

The story finally gets going in Chapter 5, but it does so in an oblique way. Frank tries and fails to get his job back, and a colleague called Ed McCarthy tries to convince him to go into business alone. It turns out that Frank has been in the business of making fake Civil War antiques that are eventually sold to the Japanese. When a man supposedly from a Japanese aircraft carrier comes in to Robert Childan's shop on the pretext of wanting to buy 12 antique pistols, he examines one of the pistols carefully and declares it to be a fake. Enraged, Childan tries to get to the bottom of how *he* was sold a fake pistol, and the discovery ends up having a negative influence on Frank and Ed's employer, as was their intention (there was no aircraft carrier). But the employer suspects Frank and Ed of being behind the sting, and vows to pay them off and find a way to get at them subtly. Such as telling the Nazis that Frank is really a Jew (his real name is Fink, not Frink). In this chapter we also have an extended discussion on the nature of the real versus the forged, and the ultimate inconsequence of such categories. Here, too, we are introduced to a book called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* by one Hawthorne Abendsen,

which is an alternate history in which the Allies, not the Axis, won WWII. Only PKD could have thought of that. And here is the genius at work, putting the reader into a disorientating bind of reality versus illusion in a far more subtle way than he would do in any of his other novels. I won't spoil the rest for those who haven't had the pleasure of reading this yet.

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch





(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2003)

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch (henceforth ***Eldritch***) is often touted as Philip K. Dick's best novel, which is some recommendation, given that he wrote around 40 of them in his lifetime. First published in 1965, it is a fast-paced 'alien invasion' narrative with a few significant twists. PKD imports a whole heap of his stock material from other novels (precogs, the Printers, 'Pre Fash' consultants, drug-induced time travel, and more) and ends up blending the material into one of the most impressive creations he put his name to.

Eldritch opens on an Earth rapidly heating up for some unspecified reason. Consequently, spending time outdoors in the daytime is impossible and Antarctica has become a resort community. Our main character's name is Barney Mayerson, a typical PKD everyman who works for one of the most powerful men on Earth: Leo Bulero, owner of P. P. Layouts and trafficker of the illegal drug Can-D. At novel's opening he is waking up beside Roni Fugate, his new offsider who will end up displacing him in Bulero's regime. This relationship mirrors a similar one in the slightly-later *Ubik*, except that here Roni turns out to be a reasonable person after all. We are also introduced to Richard Hnatt and his wife (who is also Barney's ex-wife) Emily. Finally, we have Leo Bulero himself, a man who seems to echo Arnie Kott from *Martian Time-Slip*. What I'm trying to say here is that the characters are 'PKD types', and while each is crafted carefully, none is particularly unique in the author's oeuvre.

It's worth noting that while a number of PKD novels, even some of the best ones, take a while to really get going, there is no such time-wasting in *Eldritch*. It's probably as close to a flawless book as he produced in the sixties, which is really saying something, as this novel was written during a two-year period in which PKD produced 11 novels. That's one every 60 days. No wonder they don't always make sense.

What we get in the early part of the novel is PKD's standard intermingling of narratives, all the while bombarding the reader with information about what life is like in this unspecified future time. We are given to understand that most of the Solar System has been colonised, and that Leo Bulero's empire is founded on two things: Perky Pat and her boyfriend Walt (they are

dolls, like Barbies) and the drug Can-D, which allows users to enter the lives of Pat and Walt. (PKD is imagining *The Sims*, basically.) Meanwhile, on a hovel on Mars, wretched colonists unlucky enough to have been drafted to the service by the United Nations cling desperately to their empty lives. Their only salvation? Perky Pat and Can-D.

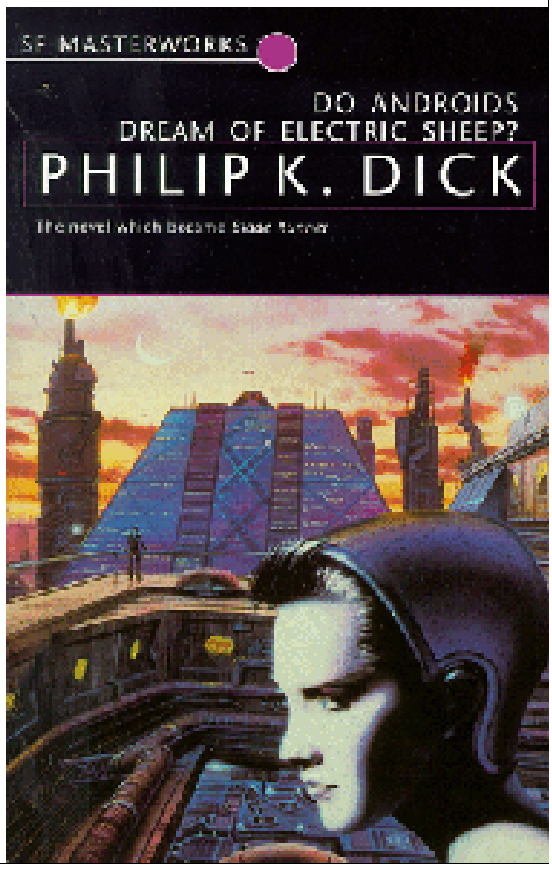
All of this is subject to change when the mysterious Palmer Eldritch, who departed for the Prox system a decade ago, returns to Sol. It seems Eldritch wants to go into competition against Bulero using his own drug, Chew Z, which promises to deliver eternal life. To my mind, Leo Bulero is the real protagonist in this story, not Barney. (As a small aside, it seems to me that the relationship between the two men is fundamentally the same as that described in PKD's mainstream novels *Voices from the Street* and *Humpty Dumpty in Oakland*). Leo gets himself entangled in Eldritch's web of illusion, from which there can be no real escape. This is where *Eldritch* shines the brightest, as these chapters are pure magic. The illusion world allows PKD to dispense with any responsibility to depict events in a realistic way. At heart, this is a strange kind of fantasy writing, not science fiction that someone like Robert Heinlein would have recognised.

As the novel progresses, Palmer Eldritch comes to dominate proceedings to a greater and greater extent. By the end, he appears to have taken over most of the Solar System. The reader is left on an extremely uncertain footing, never knowing what is real. Barney Mayerson, in trying to navigate the illusory world before him, is desperately trying to get back together with his wife Emily, but behind every face lurks the metal eyes of Palmer Eldritch. It's the stuff of nightmares. There are a number of parallels drawn between situations in the story and Christianity and the Holy Sacrament. There's talk of sin and atonement in a way that is absent in PKD's other novels. But for me the real highlights of *Eldritch* are the drug worlds themselves, especially the one Barney gets lost in toward the end of the book. And then PKD throws us yet another curveball in the revelation that Barney and Palmer have traded places, and that Barney will the one to be killed by Leo.

This book is hard, perhaps impossible, to fault. From start to finish, this is a well-constructed and disorientating novel. While it's true that the characters are simply PKD's stocks, there is something unique to this book in the author's canon. That thing is the presence of pure evil in the form of Palmer Eldritch. I can't go quite so far as to declare this to be PKD's best novel, though. It's certainly a prime candidate, but for me, on this reading at least (it's probably my fourth reading in ten years), there was something that failed to inspire. Ultimately, there's something about *Ubik* that will continue to fascinate me, and I don't think *Time-Slip* will ever be displaced in my mind as being at the top tier of PKD's novels. But *Eldritch* would be in everyone's top ten, and thus on weight of numbers it's probably destined to be remembered as the master's greatest work.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 1999)



For some reason, I never thought a great deal of ***Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*** (henceforth ***Androids***) until now, more than ten years after I first read it. There was always something perplexing, even troubling, about the book as a whole. I didn't like or understand the stuff about Mercerism, and I felt the action scenes in the book to be inferior to those in the film *Blade Runner*, which was famously based on this strange little book. But now, on perhaps my fourth overall reading in ten years, I've changed my mind.

The first thing that struck me about *Androids* this time was its simplicity of structure. At a little over 200 pages, and with all the events taking place on the same day, PKD employs two main viewpoint characters and two only: Rick Deckard and J. R. Isidore. This austerity seems especially stark when compared to the book of PKD's I read mostly recently before this: the unruly *Dr Bloodmoney*. The second notable thing about *Androids* is the highbrow, even scholarly tone adopted herein, which sets it apart from most of this author's other books. SF critic and writer Stanislaw Lem once labelled this novel 'a counterfeit coin', feeling that it paled in comparison with *Ubik*. I used to think I knew what Lem meant by this, but now I'm not so sure. What I see here is an enjoyable, fast-moving police thriller that economically (even ef-

fortlessly) meditates on the nature of the real in a more immediate way than in, say, the slower paced *The Man in the High Castle*.

In the aftermath of World War Terminus, Earth is a shambles. Most of the survivors have emigrated to the Martian colonies, and most of those who survive are 'specials' or 'chickenheads' whose genetic code has been scrambled by the radiation. J. R. Isidore is one of these. I should point out here that PKD has basically exported Isidore from the earlier (but then unpublished) *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. There and here, he is an idiot savant with a good heart. Here he works for a Vet Clinic that specialises in repairing false animals. Strangely, and only barely logically, almost all of the Earth's animals are extinct. Those that remain are highly sought after, status symbols in themselves. Sidney's catalogue lists the prices and availability of all creatures great and small, many of whom are thought to be no more.

It is for this reason that Rick Deckard and his wife Iran have an electric sheep on their balcony. The electric sheep is far cheaper than a real one, but Rick Deckard longs for the real thing. In the first chapter, we learn that that won't be possible unless two things happen. One, he will need to retire a vast number of 'andys' (*Blade Runner*'s replicants), and Two, another bounty hunter, Dave Holden, will need to be out of the way. Both of these things come to pass in Chapter 2, which helps to cast a little light onto the economical (but very effective) plotting at work in this novel.

What follows for the bulk of the narrative is Rick Deckard's work day, a day in which he must try to do the unthinkable and 'retire' all six remaining Nexus 6 andys. A few of the scenes, such as the one where Deckard interviews Rachel Rosen and identifies her as an andy, are familiar from *Blade Runner*, but others, including perhaps the best in the whole novel, were omitted from the film. The scene I refer to is one where Deckard is arrested and taken to a fake police station, complete with a fake police chief but, crucially, a human officer who isn't in on the plot. That officer, Phil Resch, comes to question his own humanity when pressured. Nowhere in PKD's novels does he express the 'What is Human?' question as succinctly as he does here.

It's not all quite as good as this, however. It's difficult not to read *Androids* alongside *Blade Runner*, as much as I try. The showdown between Deckard and Roy Baty is extremely anticlimatic and short-lived here. More interesting is the scene before this when the androids trap the spider J. R. has found and begin to snip its legs off. J. R. gets upset and flushes the spider down the sink, before Mercer appears and gives him a new spider (or is it the same one?). I say 'appears', because that's exactly what Mercer, an old man climbing up a hill in some hazily defined simulation, does. Is Mercer God? If so, why is he trying to help Deckard (as he does when Pris is about to set upon him) and why is he being denounced as a fraud by Buster Friendly and his Friendly Friends? PKD has no answer here. Ultimately, he's less concerned with the thriller aspect than the philosophical implications, and that becomes all too apparent here at the plot's crescendo.

And then it ends. By the final pages, Deckard seems to have sunk into some existential gloom from which he might never recover. His brand new goat has been thrown off of the balcony (by Rachel Rosen, for reasons unknown), he's indebted to the goat dealer and he's not far off being a murderer, in his own mind at least. Forlorn, he flies in his hovercar up to the Oregon border where he finds a toad. Thinking it's his lucky day, he takes it home to Iran only to discover that the toad is a fake. And that's the real end of the novel. But what does it all mean? Maybe I do know what Lem was on about after all in terms of *Androids* being a counterfeit coin. There's a sense of PKD, for want of a better term, 'faking it' here (although what 'it' is isn't clear). Where *Ubik* seems genuinely mystical, *Androids*, in the end, is just a tired dead end.

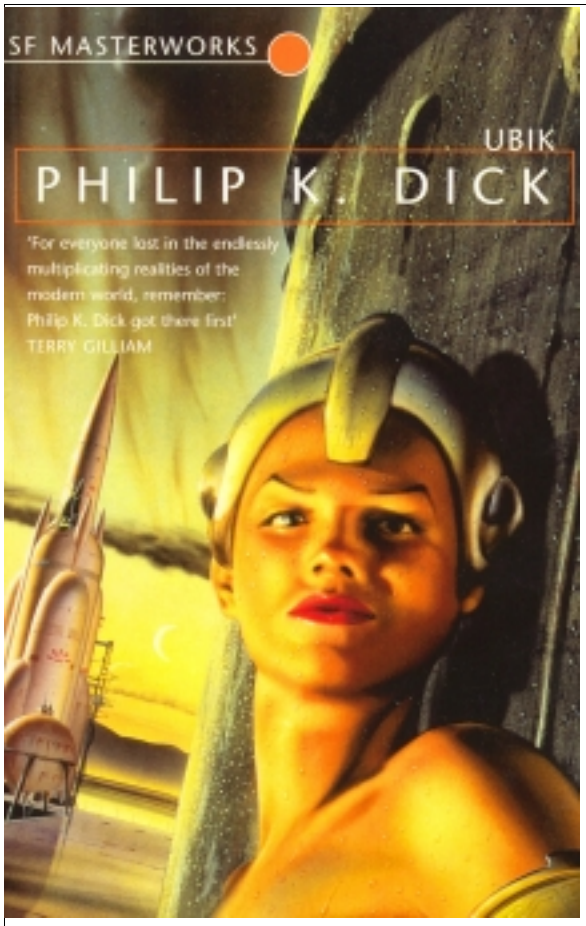
Ubik

(Edition referred to: Vintage, 1991)

Ubik, written in 1966 and published in 1969, is widely regarded as one of PKD's best novels. But if you were to only read the first 70 pages or so, it would be hard to imagine why. More on this later. At the time of *Ubik*'s composition, PKD was living with Nancy Hackett, who would soon become his fourth wife and bear him his second child, Isa. Thus his life was *relatively* stable, which is a surprise, as *Ubik* is nothing if not a train ride (some might say train wreck) through a realm of uncertainty and despair.

The start of *Ubik* is unpromising. In the year 1992 (a mere 26 years into PKD's future), a man called Glen Runciter heads an organisation that employs telepaths, precogs (as in precognitive), inertials, and other people with psionic powers. Runciter's organisation is engaged in a struggle against a rival organisation for control of the psionics market. Right. Runciter's young wife Ella is in 'cold-pac' (a form of cryogenics) in a facility in Switzerland. There's another boy in cold-pac called Jory who is starting to invade the half-life world of Ella Runciter. But the main focus is on Joe Chip, one of Runciter's employees who appears to be Dick's attempt at self-parody.

Joe Chip is in fairly dire straits. His life is a mess (he's indebted to his front door, among other things) despite the fact that he works for Glen Runciter. There is an amusing interlude in which Joe has to argue with his door over the need for it to open. This seems to prefigure the kind of humour that Douglas Adams would make famous in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Part of Joe's job is to interview new talents, such as Patricia Conley, who apparently has a unique gift: she can alter the past.



This would make her of great interest to Runciter. Pat is a typicial PKD 'dark-haired girl': a young and attractive, but emotionless and manipulative woman. This is pretty standard PKD fare. Pat decides to alter the past so that she and Joe are married, although it goes without saying that she does this to gain control over him.

I'm making this sound a bit more promising than it actually is. To illustrate my point, I want to give an example of how PKD describes G. G. Ashwood, a minor character: 'Square and puffy, like an overweight brick, wearing his usual mohair poncho, apricot-colored felt hat, argyle ski socks and carpet slippers, he advanced toward Joe Chip' (p. 25). This is surely a crime, not just against fashion, but against correct grammar as well. The other characters are dressed in similarly ridiculous garb. PKD isn't taking his novel seriously at this stage. There's nothing in the first five chapters to suggest that *Ubik* is going to be anything other than another PKD potboiler. To this stage of the novel, it's pretty much on a par with *The Zap Gun*, a completely undistinguished PKD romp. But then something happens. Before I go on with the plot, I want to discuss a couple of side issues.

PKD often spoke about the idea of the 'God in the gutter' or finding jewels (or insights) in the trash. This is an important idea. He recognised that his novels *are* trash, but that he fashions this 'kipple' (a neologism from another novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) into something worthwhile. You can actually see this process at work in *Ubik*. It's almost as if PKD has piled up all this SF detritus deliberately, only to transmute it into something worthwhile. But it's a mistake to think that *Ubik* is deliberately poor in its first third. One must keep in mind that PKD was churning out novels through the 60s in order to feed his family. Many of these novels are poorly written (*Ubik* included), and many are just poor. *Ubik* totters on the edge of a writerly abyss that would consume many other PKD novels. But then something happens: 'Squeaking in his metal-insect voice, Stanton Mick floated to the ceiling of the room, his arms protruding distendedly and rigidly [...] His rotund, colorful body bobbed about, twisting in a slow, transversal rotation so that now his feet, rather than his head, extended in Runciter's direction. [...] The bomb exploded' (p. 67).

The situation preceding this explosion is quite dull. Runciter decides to send a team to the Moon to do a job for Stanton Mick, a shady character who may in fact be Runciter's competitor. Joe Chip is to lead this team. But the explosion, which is curiously reminiscent of a moment in the film *Total Recall* (which is based on one of PKD's stories), signals the real beginning of the novel. To gain an insight into Ubik's composition, we will briefly turn to Emmanuel Carrère's 'biography' of PKD: ***I Am Alive and You are Dead: A Journey into the Mind of Philip K. Dick***. Carrère's book is a curious attempt at getting into the mind of PKD. Overall it seems somewhat less successful than Lawrence Sutin's ***Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick***. One major (and I think warranted) criticism of Carrère's book is that there are no footnotes, endnotes, or bibliography; in short, no references at all. Thus it is difficult to tell where 'fact' ends and Carrère's opinions begin. But there are some areas in which Carrère's book is superior to Sutin's: namely with regard to the genesis of *Ubik*.

Carrere speaks of the 'kipple' that had invaded PKD's own life, of the 'termites' that he got to write his novels for him. By this, Carrère means that PKD had learned to write novels on auto-pilot, completely devoid of soul. The beginning of *Ubik* was written by termites, then. But the termites did such a poor job that the novel threatened to collapse entirely: 'The program wasn't working. What point was there trying to pile up the words, one on top over another, only to have them come crashing to the floor, as his letters were doing now, with a hostile recalcitrance that terrified him. [...] And if he didn't get them moving, his zombies would be stuck on Luna forever' (p. 162). Apparently, PKD got up in the middle of the night to write the section after the explosion, and wrote in a trance-like state. I know from experience that writing in this kind of state can be very effective, but it's not a state of mind that you can just simulate.

Okay. So there was an explosion and now Runciter needs to be put into cold-pac like his wife. Unfortunately, Joe Chip and company start seeing some strange manifestations that seem to suggest that something is wrong. The air is cold, cigarettes crumble to dust, and phone numbers turn out to be obsolete. Even coins seem to be regressing to earlier kinds of currency. It would appear that some entropic force is working on Runciter's employees. Concurrently, however, there is another movement: Runciter is trying to communicate with them, even though his body is lying in a half-life coffin. A minor character, Don Denny, explains this dual phenomenon: 'I think these processes are going in opposite directions. One is a going-away, so to speak. A going-out-of-existence. That's process one. The second process is a

coming-into-existence' (p. 106). But what is coming and what is going? What on Earth is happening to Chip and company? There's a scene in which another minor character, Al Hammond, sees an elevator regressing to a 1910 version. Joe Chip sees nothing except a 1990s style lift. This is important: things are regressing at different speeds for different people. One by one, the members of Chip's team are shriveling up and dying.

There's a wonderful scene in which Hammond and Chip go to a urinal and see a message from Runciter on the wall: 'JUMP IN THE URINAL AND STAND ON YOUR HEAD. I'M THE ONE THAT'S ALIVE. YOU'RE ALL DEAD' (p. 120). This is a crucial message, as we begin to understand why the world is devolving: it seems that Runciter, instead of being the one who died, is actually the only one who survived the blast. It is thought that the 'going-out-of-existence' is the entropic process engendered by being in cold-pac, and the 'coming-into-existence' is Runciter's attempts to help them. And Runciter's tool in helping them is Ubik, which isn't mentioned in the body of the story until page 127. But what is Ubik? Ubik is another way of spelling *ubique*, which means everywhere. Ubiquitous. But what, specifically, is Ubik supposed to be in the context of this story? It comes in a spray-can, and later in very different form, but Ubik appears to be a benevolent force of some kind. A 'coming-into-existence'.

When Joe Chip sees his apartment reverting to one that might have been found in the 1930s, he raises an interesting point: 'But why hadn't the TV set reverted instead to formless metals and plastics? Those, after all, were its constituents; it had been constructed out of them, not out of an earlier radio. Perhaps this weirdly verified a discarded ancient philosophy, that of Plato's ideal objects, the universals which, in each class, were real' (p. 132). This is where *Ubik* really warms to the task, so to speak. Time has reverted to 1939 or so. Joe Chip is trying to find a can of Ubik, but even that has regressed to an 'Elixir of Ubique'. This is a bad sign, as it would seem to suggest that the forces of entropy are winning. And Joe suspects that it is Pat Conley who is doing 'this' to him and the other employees. A word of warning. Nothing in *Ubik* is clear or easily understood. I suspect that PKD was as much trying to interpret his own strange visions than trying to weave an elaborate web of competing ideas. But it works. On this occasion, it *works*.

The situation basically boils down to Ubik and Runciter on one side, and entropy and Pat Conley on the other. Joe Chip is the helpless object of this tug-of-war. There's a magical scene in which Chip tries to buy some Ubik from a drugstore that *no longer exists*. When he looks intensely at the site of the drugstore, it comes back into existence. This is mysterious and highly effective, but not very science-fictional. Then there's a second explosion when Chip and company confront Pat about her role in what is happening. Then we get to the masterpiece chapter: Chapter 14, in which Chip tries to get back to his apartment, harassed at every step by Pat. This is SF as only PKD could write it, and here he has triumphed over the kipple, over the termites that had been writing his novel. Now *Ubik* soars. Runciter comes to the rescue with a handy can of Ubik, saving Chip from certain death. And then there's a twist or two in the tail.

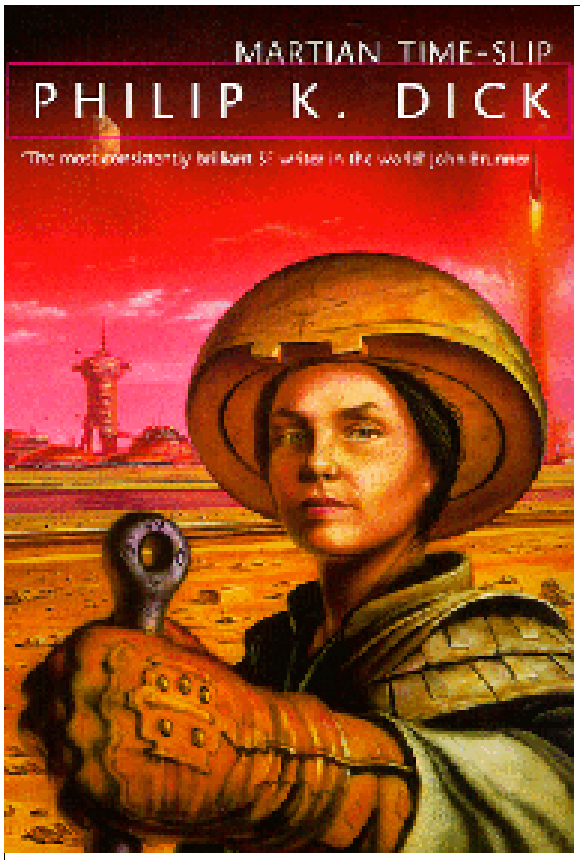
For a long time, it had been suspected that Pat represented the forces of entropy that was causing the world to devolve. Now it transpires that it isn't Pat who has been doing it after all. The antagonist is in fact young Jory, the half-dead boy who was taking over Ella Runciter's half-life reality early in the novel. This makes sense. If Chip and comapny are in half-life, then it follows that Jory should be the one influencing their world. And now it is revealed that the whole 1939 set is being animated by Jory himself. This is where *Ubik* starts to read like another PKD masterwork, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. Jory is everything and he is everywhere. Worse, he is malignant and vengeful. But not omnipotent. Ella Runciter makes a late entry into the novel proper with another can of Ubik. Chip manages to ward off Jory's attempts to finish him off. And then there's one more twist, which isn't explained. The final chapter shows Runciter, in his apparently 'real' world, discovering that he now has a pocket full of Joe Chip coins.

What does it all mean? It seems significant that PKD himself did not think much of *Ubik* at the time of writing. He only began to see its value in later years, when others convinced him of its importance. One French critic claimed it was one of the best five novels ever written. Surely not, but I see what he meant (it's possible as well that the French translator cleaned up the prose somewhat). *Ubik* is about two competing forces, one representing growth, and the other decay. In this sense, there's a smattering of Taoism here, which PKD explored more fully in *The Man in the High Castle*. The actual manuscript presented as the novel *Ubik* itself seems to mirror this dual process. I'm sure we've all read novels that start well and fade out badly, but how many novels begin poorly and then heat up as dramatically as *Ubik* does? It's a shame that PKD did not have time to work on the MS of this book further, as it is crying out for some revision. PKD would get a second chance at *Ubik*, however, in the form of a screenplay. Ubik represents a fantastic achievement in the face of gruelling adversity. It's hard not to envy a writer who could produce such luminous work in such trying circumstances.

Martian Time-Slip

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 1999)

Martian Time-Slip (henceforth ***Time-Slip***), first published in 1964, is widely regarded as one of PKD's top-tier novels, although most people probably don't think of it quite as highly as I do. I will explain why this is so. *Time-Slip* was re-released in 1999 as part of Orion's SF Masterworks series, when I was 18 years old. This was the



right book at the right time, and it had a profound effect on me. I once described this book's power as 'like a bomb going off in my head'. After reading *Time-Slip*, I was compelled to spend the next six or so months hunting down virtually every novel and story collection PKD had written.

What is *Time-Slip* about? The premise doesn't seem especially promising. In the 1990s (!), there is already a flourishing colony on Mars, which appears to be something akin to a cold, blustery desert, but certainly nothing like as inhospitable as the real Mars. This colony is populated by a relatively small number of Earth immigrants, as well as native Bleekmen, which seem extremely similar to Australian Aborigines. The settlements are connected by a series of canals, and most travel seems to take place via helicopter. Mars is officially run by the UN, but in a practical sense is actually dominated by small-time feudal barons representing various unions. In short, this is a Mars of PKD's imagination only. As was his custom, PKD subverts SF conventions for his own ends. In the case of *Time-Slip*, this is done to spectacular effect.

In *Time-Slip*, PKD perfected a narrative technique that is deployed in extraordinarily successful fashion. His technique is to have a large number of viewpoint characters, swapping from one to another every few pages. Furthermore, the story told in this novel is intricate: each character comes into contact with the others in a variety of different ways, in different contexts. Thus we get to read snippets from each character's point of view, creating an overall tapestry that drives the narrative forward. PKD did not invent this technique, but he surely perfected it. He is able to pit the prejudices and intentions of characters against one another by giving us an insight into their states of mind.

One of the great strengths of PKD, and *Time-Slip* in particular, is the characters. Jack Bohlen is the schizophrenic repairman who emigrated to Mars because he could not handle the pressures of an overpopulated Earth. His wife Sylvia is a bored housewife who slumbers her life away in a drug-induced haze. Jack's father Leo is a land speculator intent on buying up vast tracts of Mars. Norbert Steiner is the suicidal health-food salesman who would rather face oblivion than confront the reality of his autistic son Manfred. Otto Zitte is Steiner's handsome offsider who starts up his own black market operation, which includes seducing bored housewives such as Sylvia Bohlen. Dr Glaub is the ineffectual psychiatrist whose attempts to influence people backfire horribly. Doreen Anderton is Jack Bohlen's lover and confidant. But the greatest character in *Time-Slip* is its ambivalent antagonist, Arnie Kott.

PKD had a particular talent to imagine the inner lives of other people. Throughout his career, he created a series of ambivalent antagonists, and none is better realised than Arnie Kott. Kott is not an evil man. He is sexist, racist, and exploitative, but he is also generous, cultured, and adaptable. He is a gentle tyrant, a small-time crook with a soft underbelly. Kott is the Supreme Goodmember of the Water Workers' Local union. In other words, he's a big fish in a small pond. And it's not long before he has drawn Jack Bohlen, who might in theory be regarded as this novel's protagonist, into his sphere of influence.

The plot of *Time-Slip* is quite complex, and I'm not sure it would serve to fully outline it here. Suffice to say that while the 'plot' is interesting enough, it is PKD's technique and deeper purpose that are more enlightening. The narrative technique has been discussed above, but what of this deeper purpose? What is *Time-Slip* really about? The basic idea seems to be that the mental illness known as schizophrenia is in fact some kind of 'derange-

ment of time'. We learn about this in a number of ways. Autistic Manfred Steiner lives in a world outside time, where he can see people, including himself, in death. Jack Bohlen himself had a schizophrenic episode in which the sequence of cause and effect seem out of order. Late in the novel, Arnie Kott travels back in time in order to get the jump on his adversaries. But there is something terribly sinister about all of this, like the Public School teaching simulacrums, which break down and begin to repeat themselves. We read of something called the Tomb World, a dead place where nothing further can happen. It is the place of psychosis, a maelstrom that Jack Bohlen feels himself being drawn into. And when Manfred draws a picture of the future Martian settlement, a decaying ruin, we begin to see that this world outside of time is in fact death itself.

PKD pulls off a narrative trick in the middle section of the book that few writers would even dream of attempting. What we have is a series of garbled accounts of the same event told from a multitude of different perspectives. The event itself is not especially meaningful: it is just a conversation between Jack, Doreen, and Arnie. Crucially, these accounts are mediated and moderated by Manfred Steiner, whose presence hangs heavily over these pages. It seems that Manfred might in fact be able to control time, and thus the lives of those around him. And hereabouts is the ever-present 'gubbish', which is never defined. Is gubbish time, or is it decay, entropy, death? Whatever it is, we sense that the characters are in imminent danger of being swallowed up by the Tomb World. Even Arnie, who is usually contemptuous of Jack's schizophrenia, cannot but sense the dislocation.

And then we get a fairly routine ending. Arnie decides that he needs to travel back in time to fix a number of mistakes, and to repay a number of debts, but he ends up getting lost between real worlds and imagined ones. Needless to say, it doesn't end well for him. Jack is reunited with his wife after his adultery with Doreen, and Manfred Steiner returns from the future to thank Jack for helping him. The end. Or is it? *Time-Slip* is a book that defies easy description. There seems to be an enigma at the heart of this book that even PKD cannot answer. Why does Manfred see living people as though they are dead? What is gubbish, and how is Manfred able to influence the realities of those around him? These mysteries remain unresolved.

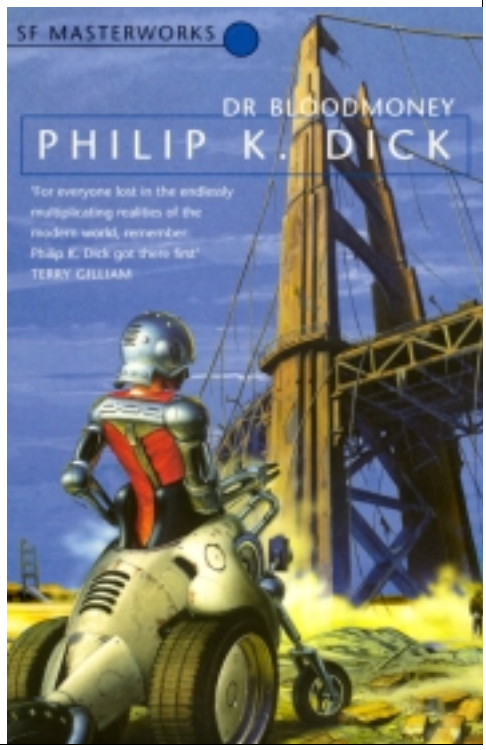
Time-Slip isn't a perfect novel by any means. Some of the dialogue is quite wooden. The setting is basically unconvincing. Furthermore, PKD's depiction of women is terminally mired in the 1950s. Women 'fix' iced-tea, they lie on their backs and allow men to have their way with them, and they cheat on their partners at every opportunity. This is a fairly fatal flaw, and some passages are cringeworthy. But I suspect that we can forgive PKD for his primitive attitudes toward women. PKD would write dozens more novels after this one. He would write better storylines with more rounded characters and develop his philosophy more fully, but he would never make narrative work for him as completely as he made it work in *Time-Slip*. PKD was a genius. There is a lot we can learn from him.

Dr Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along after The Bomb

(Edition used: Millennium, 2000)

Dr Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along After the Bomb (henceforth ***Bloodmoney***) is one of the novels Philip K. Dick wrote in the early sixties when he was living in Marin County, California with his third wife Anne. But as far as post-apocalyptic novels go, this must rank as among the strangest ever. Just as PKD had no interest in depicting a realistic Martian colony in *Martian Time-Slip*, so *Bloodmoney* makes no effort to imagine a realistic post-nuclear world. Instead PKD subverts the genre for his own ends, and the resulting story is more fantasy than science fiction.

Bloodmoney is an odd book in PKD's oeuvre. Longer than most of his novels at 290 pages, it suffers (to my mind) from a sagging middle and an overly large cast of characters. Despite these flaws, it is fondly remembered as one of PKD's better novels, and having just finished re-reading it I am inclined to agree that it probably deserves to scrape into the top thirteen SF novels as adjudged by Jonathan Lethem for the Library of America editions. *Bloodmoney*, in some sense, is an attempt at fusion between PKD's literary efforts of the fifties and



early sixties, and his then-blossoming SF career. More sedate than *Martian Time-Slip*, but more zany than *The Man in the High Castle*, the book occupies an uneasy space between realistic and fantastical modes of writing (and thinking). It is the latter mode than wins the day here to considerable effect in the final 80 or so pages.

Before that, though, we are introduced to a situation that will seem familiar to readers of PKD's mainstream novels. Stuart McConchie is a black television salesman (and street sweeper) who looks to be the archetypal 'little man' character in *Bloodmoney*. Jim Fergesson is Stuart's employer and owner of Modern TV Sales & Service. Doctor Stockstill is the psychiatrist working across the road. These are all PKD stock characters. But Bruno Bluthgeld ('Bloodmoney' in German) is anything but; he's a deranged physicist whose delusional state pits him against the rest of the world. And Hoppy Harrington, the phocomelus (he has no arms or legs, and appears to be a thalidomide baby), is a unique character too. Petty and otherworldly, Hoppy casts an increasingly long shadow over the novel's proceedings.

Bloodmoney fairly rapidly builds up to the dropping of the hydrogen bomb on San Francisco. The day of the attack (it's not certain who is responsible) is told from the perspective of several important characters, including those above (Fergesson dies) and also Bonny Keller and Andrew Gill. Herein lies one of *Bloodmoney*'s failings: there are simply too many point-of-view characters. I haven't counted, but there'd be more than ten. Too often, there's too little to distinguish one from the other. This problem intensifies when the West Marin County setting is introduced. All of a sudden, we are forced to grapple with a whole host of new characters, such as Orion Stroud, the schoolteacher Mr Austurias (and his replacement Hal Barnes), Edie Keller (and her brother Bill), Jack Tree (who is really Bluthgeld), Eldon Blaine, Cas Stone, Earl Colvig, June Raub, and one of the novel's most important characters, Walt Dangerfield. Dangerfield and his wife were supposed to be heading to Mars on the day the bombs fell, but their spacecraft ended up circling Earth indefinitely instead. Dangerfield's wife commits suicide, leaving Walt to act as a sort of DJ for the post-apocalypse.

Even more confusingly, PKD alternates between various time periods in the early chapters. Most are told in the time leading up to E-Day, but a few take place several years later, when life has apparently settled down. A few occupy an interim zone (such as when Mr Austurias is still alive). Finally PKD seems to settle on West Marin, about seven years after the bomb, and things become less confusing. A number of the characters who seemed to live in and around Berkeley before the bomb end up in West Marin, including Stuart McConchie, who now designs 'homeostatic animal traps' for the legions of altered animals that roam the Californian landscape. In short, we've entered a fantasy world that bears no resemblance to what a real post-nuclear landscape would look like.

If the first third of *Bloodmoney* is interesting but confusing, the second third is slow moving and somewhat dull. PKD gets bogged down in the endless to-ing and fro-ing of the West Marin community. The residents are concerned about Dangerfield's health, and they continue to flock to their radios to listen to his reading of Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. Over time, we begin to understand that Hoppy (who is the local West Marin 'handy' — a repairman) is increasing in power and malicious intent. It seems he can manipulate objects remotely, with increasingly murderous effect (see the death of Eldon Blaine in Chapter 10).

It is not until the emergence of Edie Keller's brother Bill (who lives inside her in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of the situation in the film *Total Recall*) that we finally come to understand what this novel is about. Finally we have a cosmic struggle worthy of the name. There are no fewer than four major characters in *Bloodmoney* who can, one way or another, influence events remotely. Walt Dangerfield is the ailing but goodhearted orbiting DJ. Hoppy Harrington is the phocomelus who threatens to become so powerful than no one can stop him. Bruno Bluthgeld is the delusional physicist who believes he can have the bombs begin to drop again. And Edie Keller can commune with the dead. Walt and Edie would appear to represent the forces of good, while Bruno and Hoppy represent evil. It's not quite as clear cut as this, of course, but the situation begins to resemble that of *Ubik*, in nebulous form.

The final chapters are pure fantasy. Walt Dangerfield, it transpires, is being psychically attacked by Hoppy. Bruno wants to destroy Walt using hydrogen bombs (in a startling twist, there appears to be some sense that these bombs actually exist, although they seem more like phantom bombs than real ones). Edie wants to swap places with an animal or person through some kind of psychic transference. We do get something approximating a happy ending with the deaths of Bruno and Hoppy, but *Bloodmoney* left this reader feeling profoundly uneasy.

In the final analysis, *Bloodmoney* must count as a failure of a novel. PKD jams far too many characters into his novel, and the narrative is unruly, uneven, and contains several dead ends. But it is a fascinating failure, and one that prefigures more successful visions like *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *Ubik*.

Now Wait for Last Year

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2000)

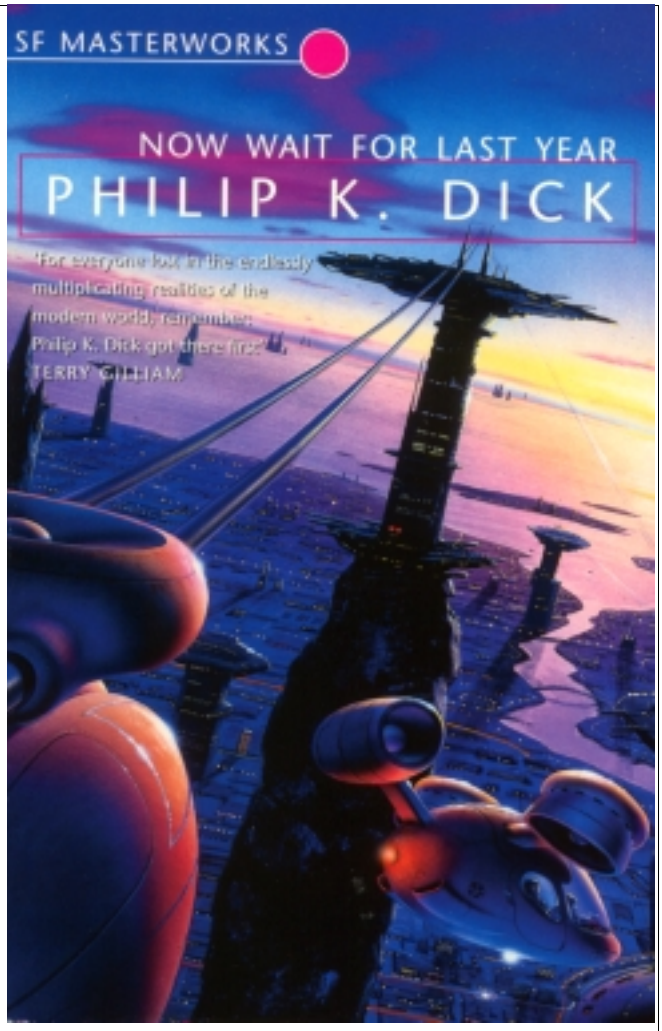
I like to think of ***Now Wait for Last Year*** (henceforth ***Now Wait***) as the quintessential PKD novel. Not many people would regard this as an 'essential PKD novel', and yet most PKD fans regard this as a 'good' book. I've always had a special liking of this book. I'll try to explain why. Firstly, the setup is both classic PKD and yet interestingly

unique: a guy called Eric Sweetscent is an 'artiforg' surgeon (short for 'artificial organs' — one of PKD's better neologisms) who works for Virgil Ackerman, head of a company called Tijuana Fur & Dye. Eric has a wife called Kathy, who appears to be a thinly drawn portrait of PKD's third wife, Anne. There is an interstellar war going on between Terra, the 'Starmen of Lilistar, and the buglike reegs. The war aspect is the least interesting and least inspired aspect of the book. PKD clearly had little interest in trying to imagine a real interstellar war. He still speaks of 'fronts' in a way that seems terminally mired in World War II. What is interesting, however, is the head of the Terran defence, a man called Gino Molinari.

Now Wait is nothing if not uneven. The beginning of the novel is not especially promising, featuring a conversation between Eric and some of his associates. Here we see PKD the stylist in full 'overblown' mode, replete with overly long sentences and verbose descriptions. It's fairly whimsical and trivial stuff. There's something about 'Wash 35', which is a mini-reality constructed from the trinkets of the past to simulate Washington from 1935. But PKD doesn't spend much time on this, and the promising idea is all but forgotten (to be picked up again in later novels, to be sure). *Now Wait* doesn't really get going until Chapter 4, which consists of a wonderful conversation between Eric and Gino Molinari. The subject? Eric's marriage to Kathy Sweetscent. *Now* we're getting somewhere.

This conversation feels like one of the true 'genuine' things in this novel, and one is sorely tempted to attribute this to the fact that it serves as a cipher for Phil's then-rocky relationship with his third wife. I won't try to recap the content of this conversation, but suffice to say that it is written with real feeling. By this stage of the novel, Kathy has already tried the new drug JJ-180, the effects of which will basically drive the rest of the novel. One of the 'great' aspects of this book is the depiction of Terra's ailing leader, who is painted as stern but human, fallible and yet wise. It turns out that Molinari's strategy for avoiding having to deal with Terra's ambiguous ally, the 'Starmen, is to become so ill that he can't negotiate the 'Starmen's covert takeover of Terran industries. This is where PKD's talent for weaving apparently unrelated factors comes into play. We have an ailing leader, an 'artiforg' surgeon, an interstellar war, and a drug that sends its users into a multiverse of futures. By the end of the book, these four factors will have become interminably intertwined.

The second half of the novel basically consists of first Kathy, and then Eric Sweetscent descending into the drug world of JJ-180. What this consists of is a multiple trip, into alternate and contradictory futures that resemble nothing if not the *Back to the Future* films. This serves to highlight how prevalent PKD's vision would become in the years after his death. In some universes, the war is going better than in others, and some realities see Terra allied with the reegs, not fighting them. Eric's immediate

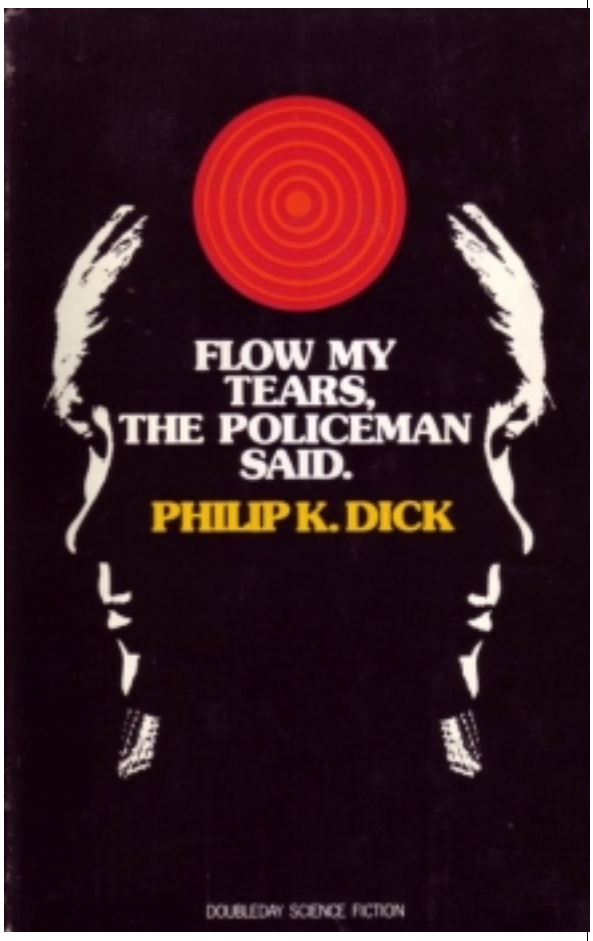


goal is to find a cure for the extremely addictive JJ-180, which he eventually does. PKD uses a somewhat lame device, that of the talking taxi cab ('I'm Johnny Cab,' anyone?), to facilitate the plethora of confusing realities. What I'm saying is that there's a fair bit of telling, not showing. But perhaps it can't be helped. It turns out that there are a whole heap of alternate Molinaris from different universes, some of which never became Terra's supreme leader, who end up being used in our own universe. The novel ends on an optimistic note, with Terra trying to ally with the reegs, and Eric vowing to stay with his drug-wrecked wife.

And that's the end. This is a rollercoaster ride of a novel, teetering on the edge of incomprehensibility. But PKD manages to pull it off in a way I believe he failed in books such as *The Simulacra*. Time travel stories offer plenty in the way of time paradoxes, but PKD manages to run roughshod over these concerns with admirable panache here.

Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2001)



It's been ten years since I read ***Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*** (henceforth ***Flow***), mainly because I didn't think a great deal of it the first time around. Well, nothing's changed. It's certainly an interesting read, and it's a book that occupies a fairly unique space in PKD's canon, coming at the tail end of the massive production of his sixties work, before the more measured (and far less prolific) work of the seventies. More than anything, though, this is a book about despair. Like *A Maze of Death*, this is a very dark tale.

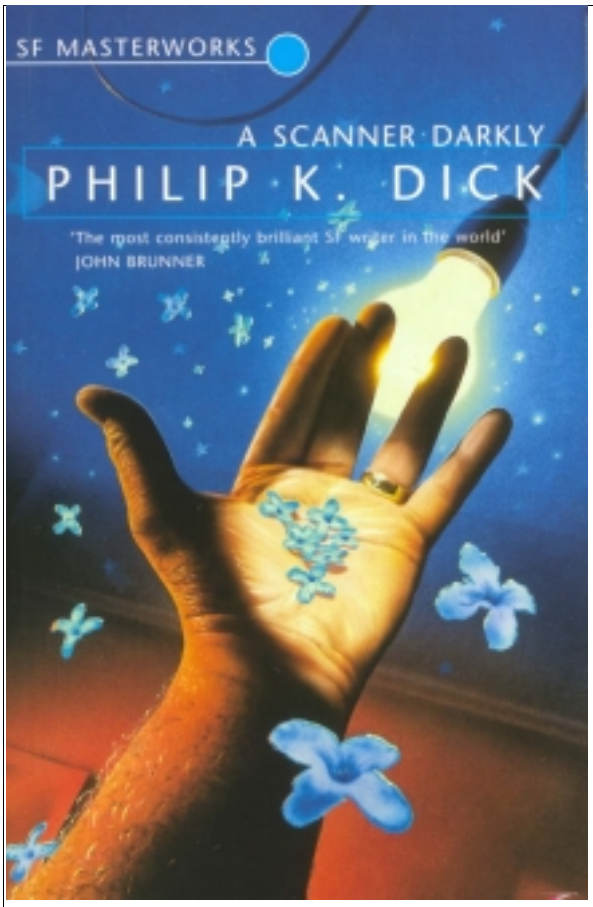
In *Flow*, Jason Taverner, a famous singer and variety show host, is attacked by an enraged ex-lover and henceforth finds himself in a world in which he's an unknown entity. He's become a nobody, and that's a problem, as he's living in a police state where one must carry ID of various kinds at all times or risk being thrown into a work camp. Nothing seems to have changed in Jason's world except that all memory of him has been erased, and so henceforth he is forced to buy the services of Kathy the counterfeiter, an unstable young woman who betrays people to the authorities in the hope of buying the freedom of her husband, who has been incarcerated in a work camp. It turns out that Kathy's husband is in fact long dead and she herself on the brink of collapse. She soons plays a part in turning Jason Taverner over to the 'pols'.

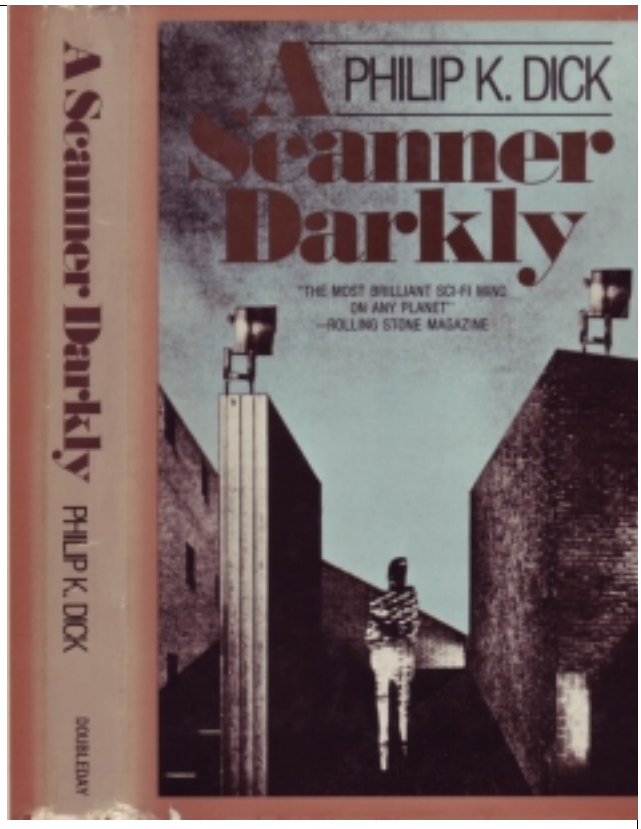
What starts as a fairly intriguing but thinly detailed police state thriller takes an unexpected turn in the middle third of the book, where we are introduced to Felix and Alys Buckman. Felix is a police chief and all-round good guy (he's negotiated for the lives of thousands of starving students when others would have had them shot) and Alys is some kind of leather and bondage freak (and a lesbian too, we are told). They are brother and sister, and also husband and wife. Jason Taverner eventually becomes embroiled in their strange world, and Alys ends up dead after a mescaline trip. Moreover, when Jason sees her, she's actually a skeleton.

Let me say that this book comes across as utterly unconvincing in these and other ways. It just doesn't make a lot of sense. Late in the novel, there is some attempt to explain Taverner's condition by virtue of the existence of an experimental drug called KR-3 which warps the timeframe of the user or some other bullshit. But PKD had already done the experimental drug time travel thing in *Now Wait for Last Year*, to far greater effect. So KR-3 is a lame excuse for an explanation.

Eventually the plot peters out. There's a few interesting scenes near the end where we see Felix Buckman, grieving not only for his dead sister but also (we understand implicitly) for Jason Taverner, the man who he himself has decided to frame for his sister's death. He stops his 'quibble' at a gas station, sees a black man, draws him a heart with an arrow through it on a piece of paper, hands it to the man, drives off, returns, hugs the man, and leaves again. And then, instead of a satisfying conclusion, we get a epilogue where PKD summarises the fates of all major (and a few minor) characters over the next 100 or so years.

There's a fair bit of interesting stuff in this book, I guess. PKD has filled his novel with numerous asides about an eclectic range of topics, ranging from snuff-boxes, to seventeenth-century music, to antique pistols. But I'm afraid it's all filler. It's difficult for me to understand why this novel is so highly regarded (it won the John W. Campbell Memorial Award in 1975). It's not a *bad* book, by any means, but I don't believe it to be in the best thirteen PKD wrote. I would have omitted this from the Library of America collection and would have included *Time Out of Joint* instead.





A Scanner Darkly

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2003)

A Scanner Darkly (henceforth ***Scanner***) just about stands alone in PKD's career. None of his other books is written quite like this, which is a strange thing, given that he wrote well over 40 novels, and most of them run together into one 'meta-novel'. *Scanner* is different, at times very different. And its very successful. The theme is drug abuse, the subject a thinly veiled description of PKD's own experiences of the late sixties. This is as close to an overtly political novel as PKD ever wrote (*Radio Free Albemuth*, written directly after this, also springs to mind).

The characters in *Scanner* are fascinating. We start with Jerry Fabin, a drug-addled man who believes that aphids are crawling all over his house, on his skin, and in his lungs. He buys can after can of bug spray, showers constantly, and spends his time collecting the make-believe aphids in various containers. It's not long before he's carted off to one of the dreaded federal clinics. Charles Freck is another stoner, and ultimately a character peripheral to the main events featured here (although he does have one amazing cameo concerning a botched suicide attempt). But our main three characters, the inhabitants of a particular house in Southern California, are the schizophrenic Bob Arctor, the sinister Jim Barris, and decrepit Ernie Luckman. Donna Hawthorne is the fourth major character in the novel; she takes the role of drug dealer, love interest in Bob's case and, later, federal narc. It's a strong cast and one based, apparently, on actual people PKD knew during this late-sixties period.

Another interesting thing about *Scanner* is that it differs in tone and often in execution from practically all of PKD's other work. For example, the novel is littered with what William Burroughs called 'routines' or short anecdotes that play out in the minds of the various dopers, to comic effect. In an important sense, the plot of *Scanner* doesn't move forward very quickly in the first half of the novel, because PKD is focusing on the idle stoner speculations of the various characters. Much of this is hilarious and true to life, but as I said, it's very different from PKD's earlier work.

The plot doesn't really get going until the second half, when Bob Arctor begins to forget that he is also Fred, the police nark who has been assigned the task of surveilling *himself*, i.e. Bob Arctor. His identity as a nark is protected by a nifty thing called a 'scramble suit', which is practically the only SF trope in the novel (in fact, there's very little that's science-fictional about this book at all — and one might argue that PKD could just as well have ditched the SF trimmings altogether). Increasingly, 'Fred' (Bob's nark identity) sees Bob as a potentially

dangerous character, and ends up fully participating in the machinery of 'justice' that would arrest or even 'snuff' Bob altogether.

There's a whole host of long philosophical monologues (and occasionally dialogues) in the middle third of the book. Fascinating as these are, I have the feeling that they do somewhat bog the narrative down. On the other hand, this kind of speculation (mainly in regard to the functioning of the two sides of the brain, and the corpus callosum that connects these hemispheres) is relevant to the events unfolding, mainly but not exclusively in Bob/Fred's head. PKD inserts several apparently unrelated passages into the narrative mid sentence, many of these intrusions being in German, to show Bob/Fred's increasing confusion. Here the humour goes right out of the story, and we are reminded of PKD's central point here: that while the drug world might seem like fun and games for a while, eventually the name of the game is Death with a capital D (in this case Substance D).

The narrative gets moving again in rapid fashion in the final third. I won't spoil the plot for those who are yet to read this most poignant and sad of PKD's novels, but suffice to say that the old master has more than a few curveballs in store for the reader who felt him or herself to be on stable ground at last. The ending is devastating. There's no other word for it. *Scanner* will be long remembered, long read and viewed (in its film version), and represents one of the real triumphs of PKD's career: he lived through this to tell the tale.

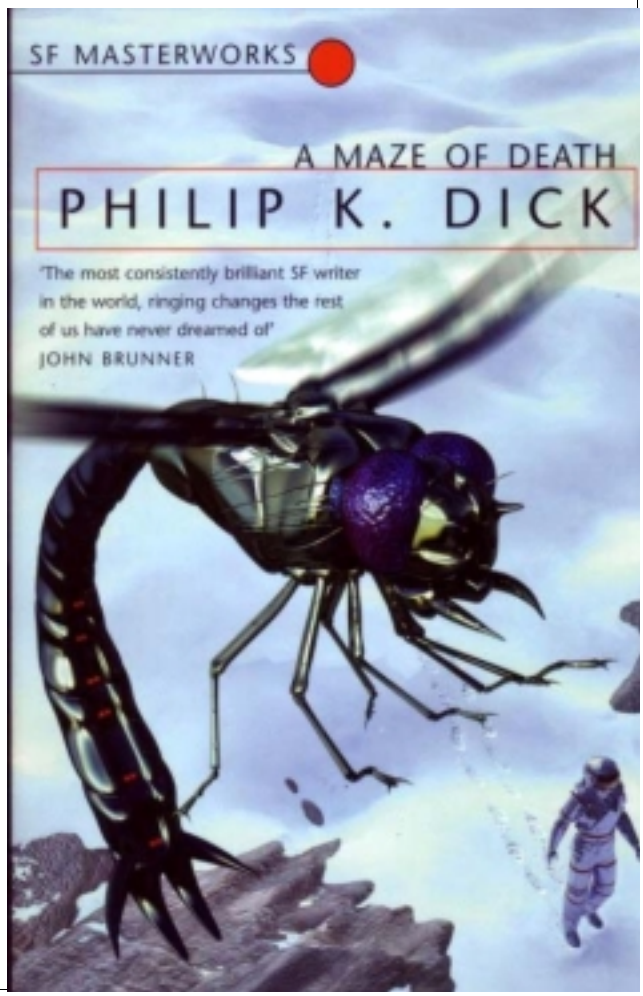
A Maze of Death

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2005)

A Maze of Death (henceforth ***Maze***) is the kind of book that seems initially appealing but doesn't stand up to subsequent readings. When I first read this in 2000, I was impressed and even exhilarated by the breakneck pace of the plot and the multitude of twists and turns along the way. I especially liked the ending. Now, ten years later, I still like the ending but I'm not a fan of what comes before it. It seems to me now that *Maze*'s reality twists are less a genuine exploration of what constitutes reality, such as can be found in PKD's best work, and more a frantic attempt to fill up the pages as quickly as possible.

Maze is set on the as-yet uncolonised world of Delmak-O, a harsh landscape that does not significantly differ from PKD's depictions of Mars or any other non-Terran world. PKD was never much interested in depicting what an alien world would actually be like, and so here he fills up the landscape with tiny electronic bugs (seen also in *The Simulacra* and possibly elsewhere), the printers (although they aren't named as such here), and the tench (a jellylike oracle that answers questions submitted via scraps of paper). There's also a river that appears and disappears at will, and a mysterious Building that seems to phase in and out of existence in order to conceal its true location. In short, this is the kind of material that Stanley Weinbaum introduced to the SF world in his seminal story 'A Martian Odyssey' in 1934. By 1970, when *Maze* was published, this stuff had already been recycled by PKD and others a hundred times over.

If the setting is derivative, then the characters are no better. Fourteen colonists have been sent to Delmak-O for reasons unknown to them, and none of them knows each other except for Seth and Mary Morley, husband and wife, who are emigrating from a kibbutz on the colony of Tekel Upharsin. Seth's a marine biologist but there's no water on Tekel. Not that there's much more on Delmak-O, as we soon discover. I'm not going to list the other twelve characters and their occupations, but suffice to say that there is very little that distinguishes them from cardboard cutouts. There's a character called Ignatz Thugg, for example, who is clearly a 'bad' man and likes to think about dogs and women having sex together, among other things. A handful of these characters have some interesting features. Betty Jo Berm springs to mind, and Glen Belsnor is reasonably well drawn, but most of the others are very two-dimensional. Dr Milton Babble, for instance, does not seem to differ



in any meaningful regard from doctors in earlier PKD novels, such as the better-drawn Dr Glaub in *Martian Time-Slip*. And this is a problem in *Maze*, as we're supposed to care for the fates of the colonists as they begin to be picked off one by one by some unknown force.

Onto the plot then. I guess you could say that the plot of *Maze* is the strong point here, but don't try to make logical sense of what transpires. I don't think it will help. Once all the colonists have arrived on Delmak-O, they hook into the 'slave satellite' to receive their instructions from General Treaton and Interplan West. The message is garbled, however, and the colonists are left to their own devices. Then they start to die. Seth Morley, who is basically our protagonist as the story moves into the middle third, goes on an expedition with six other colonists to locate the mysterious Building. When they arrive, we are treated to short sections narrated from each character's point of view, each of them seeing the sign on the Building's exterior differently. Thus one character reads the sign as WINERY, another as WITTERY, a third as STOPPERY, a fourth as WITCHERY, and so on. What PKD is trying to tell us here, as he's told us many times before, is that knowledge is subjective and that we all inhabit our own *idios kosmos* (personal reality), which may or may not overlap with the *koinos kosmos*, or shared reality. But I can't help but feel that he did this much more effectively (and less crudely) elsewhere, for instance in *Martian Time-Slip*, where he repeats one section three or four times from the points of view of various characters.

In the second half of the book, Seth Morley manages to get himself injured at the hands of the thuggish Thugg, and thereafter we spend a bit of time with Morley as he tries to discover the reality of the situation. Some mysterious outsiders appear, who may or may not be trying to help Seth and the other colonists, and Seth ends up piloting a 'squib' to an abandoned city that may or may not be London, on Earth. Then it transpires that all of the colonists have a tattoo with the words 'Persus 9' on their persons (why wasn't this mentioned earlier?) and the remaining colonists march off in the direction of the tench to discover the answer. The tench doesn't like this question and thus explodes in a shower of circuitry, and then the whole world of Delmak-O comes apart. Finally, in a twist that impressed me immensely the first time around and still impresses me to a certain extent now, it turns out that Delmak-O has been a virtual reality. None of the 'colonists' are actually dead, but their real situation is no less grim: they are trapped in a crippled spaceship with no hope of rescue. The virtual reality simulations are simply a way of expunging their hostilities toward one another, and a means of wasting time. Seth falls into a deep depression and nearly kills them all by opening the vents into space, but then, in a final twist, the Intercessor appears and persuades Seth not to kill the others. It grants him his one wish: to become a desert plant asleep for a thousand years in the sun. Seth disappears and the others go back into Delmak-O simulation.

There's a little more to *Maze* than this, but not much. One of the more interesting aspects is the invented religion based on The Book: A. J. Specktowsky's *How I Rose From the Dead in My Spare Time and So Can You* (PKD deserves credit for this hilarious title.) In this religion the Intercessor, Mentufacturer, and Form Destroyer create, regulate, and destroy the myriad things of the universe, and the Walker-on-Earth appears to mere mortals with items of advice. There's a nice scene early on where the Walker appears before Seth and tells him not to go to Delmak-O aboard the 'noser' 'The Morbid Chicken'. All of this is quite well done, and gives *Maze* a deeper level of meaning it would otherwise lack, but it's not ponderous.

On the other hand, there's one (in my opinion) disgraceful characterisation that I can't help but comment on: that of Susie Smart. Susie Smart is the 'colony whore' (by her own admission) who seems to have something fatally wrong with the part of her brain that is supposed to stop her from attempting to have sex with every man she meets. The other colonists call her 'Susie Dumb'. Seth has the hots for Susie (she's got big boobs after all) and she attempts to seduce him, and would probably have succeeded if not for the intervention of Seth's wife Mary, who catches the pair of them in the act. Seth insists that he was trying to get away from Susie, not have sex with her, and the matter is basically dropped thereafter, as there's a convenient shifting of attention to more urgent life or death matters. Before this, one of the characters (I think it's Belsnor) says that it's a shame that Susie wasn't killed. When Susie is later killed, everyone seems to be quite pleased, although there is a small section of narration in her defense. Ursula Le Guin complained in the late seventies about PKD's inability or unwillingness to create positive female characters in his novels, an accusation that persuaded him to create the wonderful Angel Archer of *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. The feminists, particularly those interested in speculative fiction (such as Joanna Russ), would have had a field day with Susie Smart, and with good reason.

Maze isn't a bad book, and it does have some interesting and perhaps original ideas that would be picked up by later writers and filmmakers and deployed more effectively. But it's nowhere near the top tier of PKD's work, and I'd been surprised if it was truly in the top thirteen of PKD's forty- plus titles as selected by Jonathan Lethem for the Library of America editions. Lethem isn't the only one to have rated this highly: Gollancz in the UK has seen fit to publish it in the SF Masterworks series (as shown above — this is the edition I currently own). So maybe there's more to *Maze* than I've been able to discern on this reading.

VALIS

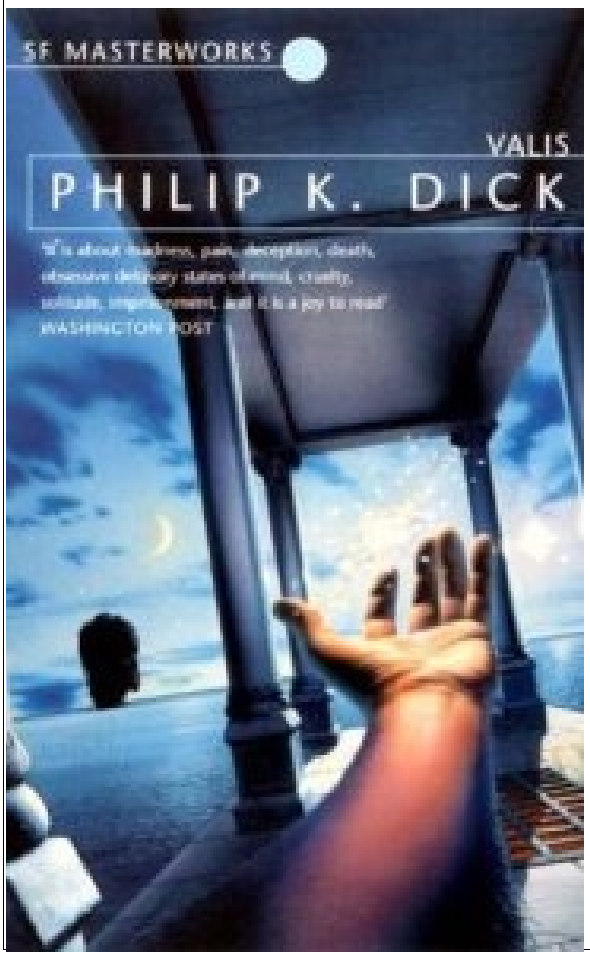
(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2001)

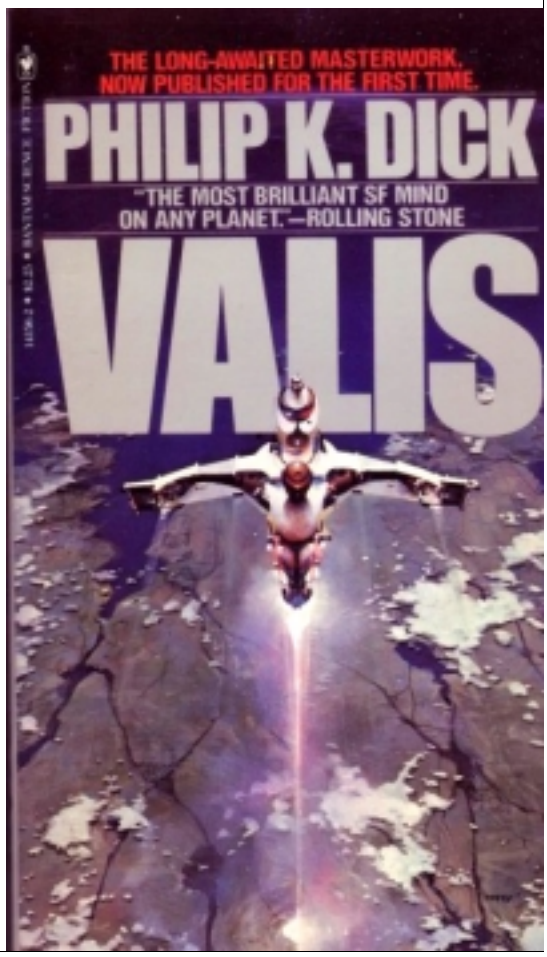
I fell out of love with ***VALIS*** by degrees. When I first read it in 1999, at the age of 18, I was entranced. I distinctly recall starting to read it late in the evening and continuing almost until dawn. But over the years, on subsequent readings, I have grown increasingly uneasy with the status of *VALIS* as one of PKD's best novels. Now, on perhaps my fifth reading, I cannot say that I share the high opinion many other PKD fans have of this book.

What is *VALIS* about? Herein lies one of the problems. The 'plot' (what little of it there is) goes something like this: during the 1970s, a man by the name of Horselover Fat has a strange experience, in which he is bombarded by a pink beam of light. Fat spends years trying to work out what has happened to him, spinning outlandish theories with his friends Phil Dick, Kevin and David. During the course of the novel, we are treated to some stories of Phil Dick/Horselover Fat's unsuccessful attempts to save the suicidal Gloria and terminally ill Sherri, as well as the aftermath of his own suicide attempt. Eventually, the four friends go to see a film called *Valis*, which seems to corroborate much of what Horselover Fat experienced during March 1974. After this, the four friends go to meet the filmmaker, Eric Lampton, and his wife Linda, who claim to be beings from another star. They also claim that their two-year-old daughter is a Saviour in a line that includes Elijah, Jesus Christ and a few others. Phil Dick and Horselover Fat realise that they are one individual, not two, and the three friends return to their homes, whereupon they learn that the two-year-old Saviour has died. There's more to it than that, of course, but that's the bare bones of the actual plot.

In many respects, *VALIS* picks up where *A Scanner Darkly* leaves off. Both novels are about the after-effects of the sixties drug subculture, and both address the themes of suicide and despair. Crucially, both books also detail a 'splitting of personalities': whereas in *A Scanner Darkly*, Bob Arctor ends up narking on himself, in *VALIS*, Philip K. Dick himself splits into two personalities, one rational and the other deranged. In fact, there is a novel that comes between these two in terms of composition: ***Radio Free Albemuth***, which PKD originally called 'Valisystem A'. That book (which wasn't published until 1985) also addresses the theme of split personalities, although it does so in a slightly different way. Thus I find it useful to speak of a 'split personality trilogy': *A Scanner Darkly*, *Radio Free Albemuth*, and *VALIS*.

In *VALIS*, PKD seems to be spinning a metafictional





web that appears, in some respects, to take the form of quasi-autobiography. After all, those who know PKD's life will be aware that he had an incident with a 'pink beam of light' in February and March of 1974. Many of the characters in *VALIS* appear to be based on real people in PKD's life: Beth is based on PKD's fifth wife Tessa; Kevin is based on K. W. Jeter; David is based on Tim Powers. But PKD has presented *VALIS* as fiction, and thus I will read it as fiction. Therefore, I will not make any further attempts to align events in the novel with events in the writer's life. Crucially, PKD has created the alter-ego of Horselover Fat, whom he uses as a speaker in the third person to gain 'much-needed objectivity' (p. 11). I'm sure that PKD enjoyed blurring the boundaries between fictional worlds and 'real' ones.

The bulk of *VALIS* basically consists of a series of conversations and interior monologues on the nature of the divine. This is in response to the 'pink beam of light' incident. All of this is quite interesting, but it's not really a novel in the normal sense. What few events there are have taken place in the past, mainly dealing with the consequences of suicide and attempted suicide. It's not until around 150 pages into the book that we get the first forward movement in time: namely the watching of the film *Valis*. Before this we get a number of bizarre and outlandish theories. 'Every day he developed a new [theory], more cunning, more exciting and more fucked' (p. 36). Most of *VALIS* basically consists of extended discussion on these theories, which include but are not limited to: the universe as information; the universe as a hologram; a two-deity cosmology in which an inferior creator wreaks havoc on the world while the superior deity tries to fight back; humanity as descended from a race of three-eyed beings from Sirius; two realities interposed, one being Rome circa 70 CE, and the other the US in 1974; a notion of the universe as a 'Black Iron Prison' from which we cannot escape. All of this is very interesting, rather bewildering, and ultimately (for me anyway) less than enlightening. And I suppose therein lies the crux of my argument against *VALIS*.

At one stage, there is even mention made of the fact that Horselover Fat's theories about the universe tie in with PKD's own primal loss: that of his twin sister Jane, who died at six weeks of age from malnutrition. This *is* interesting, as it helps to unravel the complexities of PKD's theories. One strength of the early part of the novel is the juxtaposition of these outlandish theories with the terrible realities of life in the 'Black Iron Prison'. There is one moment early on where Fat is drawn back from his world of ideas by a woman trying to retch into a tub in front of him. This is in a psychiatric ward. This juxtaposition of the high and low is further reflected in the relationship between Horselover Fat, the creator of wild fantastical ideas, and Phil Dick, the skeptical science-fiction writer. This is an effective technique and may serve as a kind of 'self-interrogation' of PKD's mind. One might speculate that this inner dialogue might be seen to represent the two hemispheres of the brain: one rational, the other deranged; one grounded in a mundane reality, the other residing in a higher world of ideas. But of course, with PKD, the question always becomes, 'How can I tell whether any of this is real?'

What can we take at face value in *VALIS*? It's really hard to say, as PKD as an authorial voice neither confirms nor denies the truth of what is described. For example, there is an extraordinary conversation between Horselover Fat and Dr Stone, a psychiatrist at the mental ward. This conversation covers a vast number of highly eclectic and intellectual topics relating to the nature of Gnosticism and reality itself. It's a stunning piece of work, but it places several demands on the reader in terms of 'suspension of disbelief'. Are we to believe that this conversation actually took place as written within the world of the novel? Are we to interpret it as the deranged fantasies of Horselover Fat? There is, of course, no way of telling. Herein lies PKD's greatest strength as a writer and possibly one of the weaknesses of *VALIS*. We simply don't know what to believe. Now, a young and very enthusiastic PKD reader, such as I was at the age of 18, is inclined to accept even the most outlandish of ideas as feasible, but an older and more tempered PKD reader is given to wonder.

What I am trying to say here is that I now have some reservations both about the usefulness of the ideas presented in *VALIS* and also about the quality of the novel as work of art. In *VALIS*, PKD has almost but not quite abandoned the vehicle of fiction itself as a means to present his ideas. Much of what we have here could just as easily be presented in essay form. There's precious little plot in *VALIS*, virtually no attempt at characterisation or description of settings. I know that many PKD acolytes are inclined to claim that PKD was 'beyond' the realms of proletarian fiction by this stage of his life and career, but I remain skeptical. PKD wrote this as a novel because that is what he did for a living. As a novel, I'm not sure that *VALIS* can be deemed a success. As a snapshot of PKD's mind, however, it is fascinating. This is both an attempt at autobiography and a 'selection from the exegesis,' long before Lawrence Sutin's ***In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis***.

My sense of unease with *VALIS* is reflected in my attempt to write about it. Am I stupid to question this book? Am I unable to think on the level required? But the book itself seems to question its own findings: 'Fat's encounter may not have been with God, but it was certainly with *something*' (p. 120). As proof of the 'reality' of *VALIS* (or God, or Zebra), PKD cites an experience from his own life: his miraculous diagnosis of his infant son's serious medical condition. We are on uncertain ground here. How much of this is to be believed? Even if we do believe it, we are being asked to consider something beyond the scope of the book itself: Christopher's condition and subsequent recovery. This seems perilous to me. The notion of three-eyed invaders from Sirius is particularly difficult to swallow. This reflects nothing if not Kurt Vonnegut's time-defying Tralfamadorians from his novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. There's only one difference: Vonnegut was joking; PKD, apparently, isn't: 'We are talking about Christ. He is an extraterrestrial life form which came to this planet thousands of years ago' (p. 125).

At long last, the 'plot' actually gets going when Horselover Fat, Phil Dick, Kevin, and David go to see the film *Valis*. This psychedelic film seems to corroborate much of Fat's ravings, and suggests that the US circa 1974 is in fact a 'Black Iron Prison' that God is trying to

reconquer. (As a small aside, the US circa 2010 seems to reflect nothing if not a Black Iron Prison. Most of PKD's fears have been confirmed.) After the film, the four friends go to see the filmmaker Eric Lampton and his wife. It turns out that they believe they are Godlike aliens. Furthermore, their two-year-old daughter is in fact a Saviour in a line including Jesus Christ. At least, at this late stage, the novel starts to question the veracity of these wild claims. Horselover Fat and Phil Dick merge back into one entity, and the (now reduced) group of friends retreats back to their homes. Not long after, it transpires that the infant Saviour has died, which seems to cast the entire framework of ideas into doubt. And then Horselover Fat makes a late reappearance, leaving California to search for the next Saviour around the world. He sends postcards.

I like something that Phil Dick says to Horselover Fat so much that I will transcribe it in entirety here:

> 'There is no "Zebra", I said. 'It's yourself. Don't you recognize your own self? It's you and only you, projecting your unanswered wishes out, unfulfilled desires left over after Gloria did herself in. You couldn't fill the vacuum with reality so you filled it with fantasy; it was psychological compensation for a fruitless, wasted, empty, pain-filled life and I don't see why you don't finally fucking give up' (p. 245).

I guess here we are getting down to *my* beliefs, not PKD's: I am more inclined to believe this 'version of events'. But I suspect that *VALIS* is as much a book the reader helps to create as any other. You can take or leave anything you find here.

Wow, I'm a little shocked that I've done what is essentially a hatchet job on this novel. It's not that I think that PKD had lost his mind, or that he'd lost his abilities as a writer. His last novel, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, serves as a testament to that. The latter novel is beautifully written, sombre, searching, and *controlled*. *VALIS*, on the other hand, is unruly. The character of Phil Dick himself admits at one stage that the material is starting to get the better of him. It's this lack of control and lack of shape that troubles me.

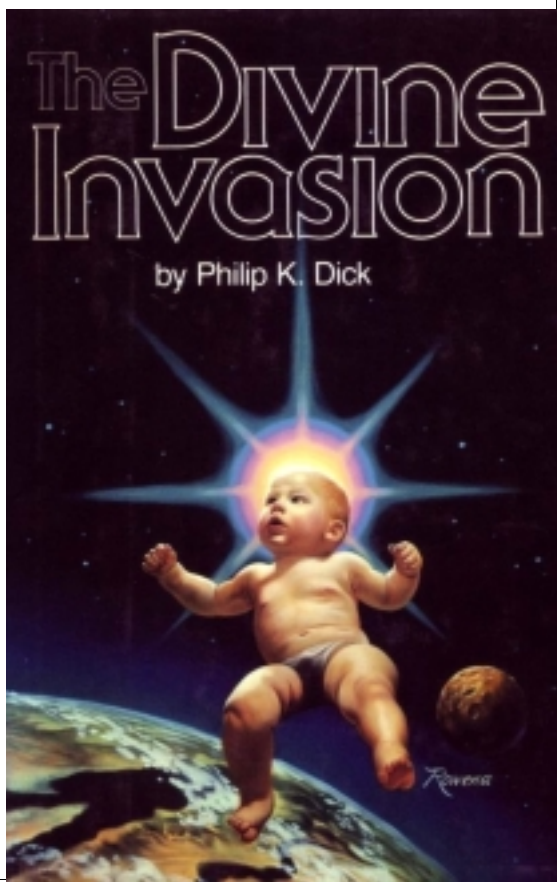
The Divine Invasion

(Edition referred to: Timescape, 1981)

I first read ***The Divine Invasion*** (henceforth ***Divine***) a little over ten years ago, and I haven't thought about it for a decade. I know this for sure because there's a review of mine on Amazon.com dated 9 February 2000. I didn't much like it then, and while I've probably qualified my dislike on the second reading, I still feel this to be a failure of a novel.

The first 40 or 50 pages are quite interesting. On the barren planet in the CY30-CY30B star system, Herb Asher lives alone in a dome with only a host of 'Clems' (the native species) as company. There's another colonist, Rybys Rommey, in an adjacent dome, but she seems to be suffering from multiple sclerosis. In my opinion, the narrative is best when it focuses on the trials of Herb Asher, a typical PKD everyman trying to figure out whether he's alive or dead, married or unmarried, on Earth or in cryogenic suspension. We are told that in fact Herb *is* in cryogenic suspension, which seems to cast doubt over the veracity of his entire narrative, but in true PKD fashion this is never fully established. During this early section, we are introduced to Elias Tate, a 'Wild Beggar' who tells Herb and Rybys that they will be married and that Rybys will bear the son of God. There's some discussion about the local God — Yah (meaning 'God') — who may be responsible for various unexplained phenomena, such as a pink beam of light that assails Herb. PKD expanded much of this early section from his short story 'Chains of Air, Web of Aether', and it's possibly the best part of the book.

This narrative thread folds up and is replaced by a later narrative on Earth that concerns the fate of Rybys' son Manny. This seems to take place about ten years after Herb Asher's initial narrative, by which time Manny, the son of God, has successfully been returned to Earth through clandestine means. The description of the return itself is reasonable, if formulaic and harking back to PKD's work of at least two and possibly three decades



before. We are introduced to two new characters, Cardinal Fulton Statler Harms, Chief Prelate of the Christian–Islamic Church on Earth, and Nicholas Bulkowsky, Procurator Maximus of the Scientific Legate. These two are supposed to represent the powermongers on Earth, which is said to be a fallen world ruled not by the true God but by an inferior god. You can see that PKD is trying to provide an insight into the Black Iron Prison that is Earth in similar fashion to his novel *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*. But it doesn't work — the characters are cardboard cutouts and PKD isn't really interested in them anyway, so they are relegated to the sidelines in the cosmic battle that is to follow.

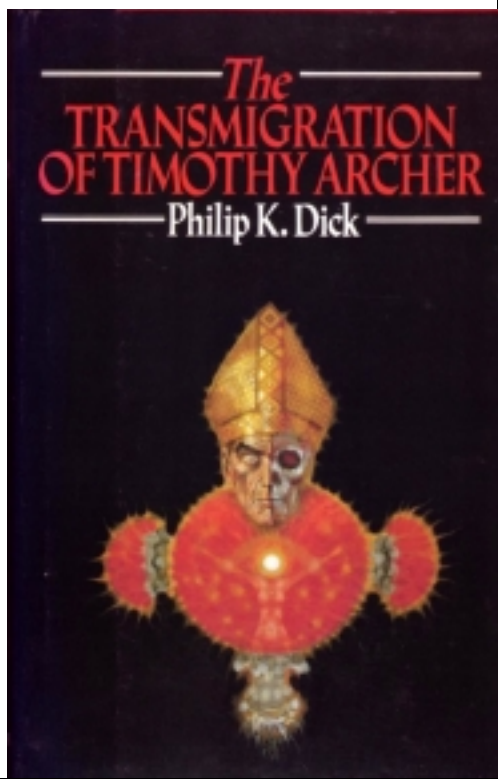
Where *Divine* really gets bogged down, much to the detriment of the narrative flow, is in the seemingly endless discussions between the boy Manny or Emmanuel and his friend Zina. I'd hazard a guess and say that these discussions take up at least a third of the pages in this book, which is far too much for what is essentially a series of talkfests on the nature of the divine. By 1980, when PKD was writing *Divine*, he probably knew more about religion than all but a handful of people in the world. He obviously has an immense breadth and depth of religious knowledge that simply bewilders and befuddles mere mortals such as myself (an atheist to boot). But this isn't good fiction. Herb Asher's narrative grinds to a halt under this barrage, as we come to see that Manny and Zina are basically pulling the strings that control the whole universe, and that poor Herb is just a pawn in this struggle.

Toward the end of the book, the narrative is dominated by Herb Asher's desire to meet and maybe become romantically involved with a rising singer by the name of Linda Fox (who is apparently styled on a real singer called Linda Ronstadt, of whom I am ignorant). This seems to take place in a false world imagined by Zina, who Manny can't quite get his head around even though he is the true God. Here *Divine* takes on a sort of sub-*Ubik* half-life, but it's all too late to save this story. The stuff about 'the Fox' is interesting enough, but it's hard to say what role it serves in a novel that is ultimately about the struggle between two gods. And in the latter regard, PKD's second-to-last novel has something in common with one of his first, *The Cosmic Puppets*, in that the actual lives of the small characters are overshadowed and made irrelevant by the greater struggle above. Ultimately, this is why *Divine* fails. I knew this ten years ago and I know it now: PKD's second-last novel is the least distinguished of the so-called *VALIS* trilogy.

This is not to say that I feel that this novel fails *because* it is about religion. After all, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is fuelled by religious speculation and conjecture. The problem is that in *Three Stigmata* and *Ubik* PKD poses a number of theological questions for which there are no easy answers, or perhaps even no answers at all. In *The Divine Invasion*, however, the answers are there on the page, apparently. (I don't feel qualified to evaluate them, but I'm certainly not convinced.) And this is this where PKD's second-last novel fails, as it ultimately fails to weave a compelling narrative out of the strange and disparate elements the author has cobbled together. I'm sure this novel has its defenders. I'd be eager to hear their rebuttals.

The Transmigration of Timothy Archer

(Edition referred to: Timescape 1982)



PKD's last novel, ***The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*** (henceforth ***Archer***) is a unique work in a number of ways. In part it is based on the life and death of Bishop Jim Pike, but it also marks PKD's attempt, in response to criticism levelled by Ursula Le Guin, to create a living, breathing female protagonist: Angel Archer. Often thought of as the third in the *VALIS* trilogy, *Archer* reads more convincingly as PKD's final mainstream novel. It is one of his most successful, and even though we know from interviews that PKD never intended it to be his swansong, it serves as an effective eulogy to an astounding career.

Archer is about death, and yet it is not a depressing read. Opening on the day of John Lennon's death, the novel portrays the deaths of most of its important characters: Angel's husband Jeff, her father-in-law Timothy, and her best friend Kirsten. Edgar Barefoot is a guru that Angel seeks out for spiritual guidance, and Bill Lundborg is an *idiot savant* reminiscent of Jack Isidore from *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. It's an interesting caste, but Angel is the star attraction throughout.

There's very little you could label science fiction in

Archer, but no lack of speculation. Timothy Archer is on a quest to find the root of Christianity, which he believes to be contained in the newly found Zadokite scrolls, which point to the existence of a prophet who lived long before Christ. He's on the lookout for the anokhi: a special kind of mushroom that is thought to have hallucinogenic properties. The anokhi is referred to in the Zadokite scrolls, and may demonstrate that the tradition of the Eucharist has its origin in drug experimentation. This is PKD at his most mischevious and, as in *VALIS*, we are left on extremely uncertain ground as readers as to the nature of the real.

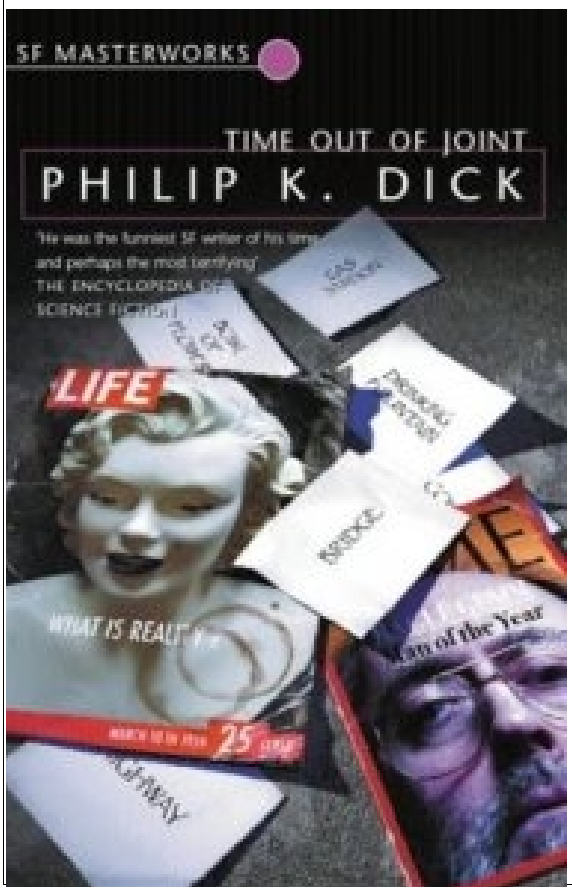
Archer pulses with a heartbeat different to most of PKD's novels. It contains no obviously SF tropes, and yet ends up being just as outlandish in its Christian unorthodoxy as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. It is consumed with speculation regarding death, and yet it is not bitter. It shows its author, if not at peace, then at least approaching something like acceptance of his fate and the fate of us all.

Other works by Philip K. Dick

Time Out of Joint

(Edition referred to: Millennium, 2003)

Time Out of Joint (henceforth ***Joint***), first published in 1959, was the first of PKD's novels to successfully pose the 'What is Reality?' question in a form that was both complex and entertaining. It also represents an attempt on the author's behalf to fuse his mainstream and speculative outputs, and in this case that fusion is only partially successful. But more on that later. PKD had tried to pose the question of what constituted reality in several of his previous novels, most notably *Eye in the Sky*, but here he hit upon a method that made for a more or less successful novel, even it wasn't a publishing success at the time.



Joint is a classic tale of paranoia, set in suburban fifties America. The book features a strong (and small) cast of main characters. Vic Nielson works in a grocery store, while his wife Margo stays at home and looks after their son Sammy. Disrupting this nuclear family is Margo's brother Ragle Gumm, a strange older man with a bizarre occupation. Living next door is Bill and Junie Black, the former of whom might be more than a city worker, the latter a potential adulterer. There are other characters, but these are the most important ones. Here is a strength of *Joint*: in focusing on these two households, PKD not only sketches a picture of fifties America that has stood the test of time, but also exposes the dark side of suburbia decades before such a line of thinking became a cliché in its own right.

Ragle Gumm is our protagonist, and its hard not to read him as a cipher for the author himself. Forty-six years old (15 years older than the PKD who wrote him into existence), Ragle's occupation is a bizarre one. He earns his pay by completing a 'Where Will the Little Green Aliens Be Next?' quiz in the daily paper, a task that occupies most of his waking hours. We learn that Ragle is under increasing strain to keep up his unbeaten run in the competition, and that he considers this line of work to be juvenile, even somehow shameful. Ragle's quiz and PKD's own occupation — writing science fiction stories and novels — share a lot of similarities. If Ragle is PKD's self-portrait, then it is a self-portrait of a (then) future PKD, and a curiously prescient one, as Lou Stathis points out in his (otherwise inflammatory) afterword to this SF Masterworks edition.

Ragle is a man on the cusp of a nervous breakdown, not only due to the strain of his job, but also because of the puzzling phenomena he keeps encountering. Early in the story, when attempting to seduce Junie Black at the local swimming pool, Ragle witnesses a soft-drink stand fading out of existence to be replaced by a piece

of paper with the words 'Soft-Drink Stand' on it. Turns out that this has happened before; Ragle has a collection of similar slips of paper. Here PKD is thinking of the troubling relationship between words and objects. To make matters worse, it seems that young Sammy has found a few of his own at an empty lot (the Ruins) where he plays with his little friends. Ragle soons pays a visit to the Ruins himself, where he finds part of a phone book and a few old magazines. But none of the numbers in the phone book seem to be connected and the magazines feature a young starlet (Marilyn Monroe) who no one, except for Bill Black, has heard of. Here *Joint* comes to resemble the film that is loosely based on it, *The Truman Show*, and if this starts to read like a familiar story, we need to remember (as Terry Gilliam says in a quote on the cover of several of these SF Masterworks editions) that PKD got there first.

After the phone book incident, we learn from the point of view of Bill Black that in fact there *is* something going on, and that Bill himself is an agent of those who would keep Ragle and his family in the dark. Sammy builds his own crystal radio, which he uses to tune into the frequencies nearby. There's a classic scene where the whole family is in Sammy's treehouse huddled around the radio. Bill and Junie Black start snooping around down below, and Vic pretends to shoot Bill with a toy gun. Terrified, Bill raises his hands only to discover that the gun is not real. Here PKD frames his 'What is Reality?' question perfectly, in a form that is embedded in narrative (unlike, for example, the way it is posed in *VALIS*), and in a way that makes the paranoia and hostility inherent in suburban life palpable.

If *Joint* begins to lose its momentum henceforth, as it unquestionably does, it is because PKD has to try to find an answer for the almost cosmic paranoia he has brought to life here. The further it goes, and the more the plot is revealed, the less convincing the book gets. This is a shame, as the first half and perhaps two-thirds is first rate. When Ragle and Vic escape their ersatz existence aboard a goods truck, they discover that the US of 1997 (the real year) is in the midst of a war against the Lunatics, or human moon dwellers. Turns out that Ragle's daily predictions are in fact tied to the daily Lunatic bombings, and that the whole 50s suburban setup *has* been constructed for his benefit, after a mental breakdown. Ragle and Vic fall in with a group of teenagers with strange hair and (a laughably poor attempt at) a strange way of speaking. Finally a minor character, Mrs Keitelbein, makes a reappearance, and it is said that Ragle had intended to side with the Lunatics before he had his nervous breakdown. As the novel draws to a close, he begins to remember his true intentions. Not only is this entire setup completely and utterly unconvincing and unbelievable (we are being asked to believe that 1600 people have voluntarily been brainwashed to form part of Ragle Gumm's private world, for example), but the ending descends into a talkfest. Worse, there's absolutely no attempt at explaining how and why a soft-drink stand dissolved and was replaced by a piece of paper. None. Modern readers would assume that Ragle was in a computer simulation, but here we are being asked to believe that in some crucial manner the soft-drink stand *actually disappeared*. PKD drops the ball big-time here, and it costs him the first real success of his career.

One of the mind-bending aspects of reading *Joint* in 2010 is that we are placed in an even more complex time-bind than PKD intended. We are reading a novel written in 1958, set for the most part in 1958, only to discover that the real year in the novel is 1998. We are separated in time from PKD's 50s America, but at least we can perceive it to be 'real'. PKD's 1998 is just ridiculous, however, and wafer thin. And thus, in the end, we are left with two-thirds of a truly outstanding 'novel of menace' (as the original Lipincott hardcover said on the cover), and one-third pulpy sci-fi. PKD couldn't quite reconcile the contradictions between the two genres he was trying to straddle in *Joint*, much to the novel's detriment. It would be another four years, with the publication of *The Man in the High Castle*, before PKD could achieve this fusion.

Voices from the Street

(Edition referred to: Tor, 2007)

This book represents an impossibility: a new novel from a man who died in 1982. But here it is, ***Voices from the Street*** (henceforth ***Voices***), a novel PKD wrote in 1952–53, when he was around 25 years old. This is not the earliest surviving PKD manuscript; that honour goes to ***Gather Yourselves Together***, which must surely be the great man's earliest and most obscure work. Even I haven't read it, given that it was published by an obscure small press in 1994. *Voices* is the last of PKD's manuscripts to be published. This represents, as one reviewer said, PKD's belated induction into the American literary canon.

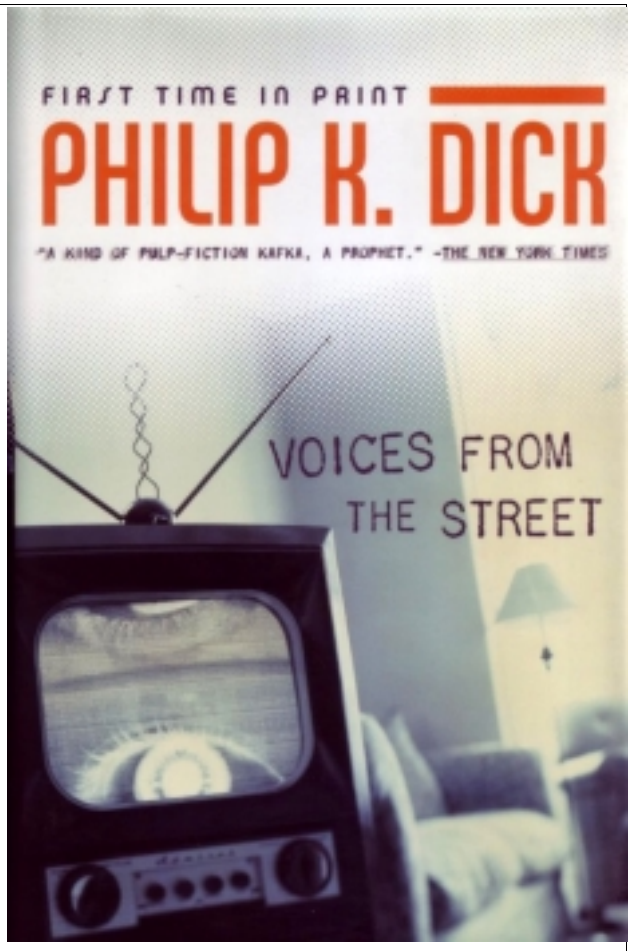
So what is *Voices* about? It isn't a SF novel, for a start. No, it's about a young man called Stuart Hadley who works in a TV store. This is 1952, in a small town called Cedar Groves, California. Given this novel's vintage, that fact is interesting in itself. Here we get an insight into a world that must surely now have been buried under the nightmare of modern Californian life. In fact, I have often thought that the California of the 50s PKD describes is not altogether unlike the Perth, Western Australia I grew up in from 1990 to 2003. Hadley works for a man named Jim Fergesson, a middle-aged worrywart who plans to expand his business to a second store. This relationship is based on PKD's own relationship with a man called Herb Hollis, whom PKD worked for the in late forties and early fifties. Hadley is married to a young woman called Ellen (perhaps based on PKD's then current wife, Kleo). At the beginning of the novel, Ellen is pregnant with their first child. Hadley has it all: a wife, a child, a job, and yet he has nothing.

When we first meet Hadley, he's in a jail cell, having gone on a bender the previous night. We soon learn that Hadley is well and truly going off the rails. He doesn't apply himself in his job, he isn't very nice to his wife (he loses money and stays out all night drinking), and he complains about pretty much everything. In fact, it's hard to feel a great deal of sympathy for him. Herein lies the novel's first weakness: the protagonist is a whining asshole. *Voices* represents a divergence from PKD's usual sympathetic (although often pathetic) protagonists. The PKD of this novel is an angry young man indeed, and there's precious little to smile about here. PKD would make the 'quest for the human' his mantra, and yet Stuart Hadley represents nothing if not the 'inhuman' android personality PKD wrote about so often.

This novel starts out bleak and goes downhill from there. By page 124, I found that I *hated* Stuart Hadley. He is an absolute prick to his wife, his boss, and his friends. Astonishingly, there's a fair bit of racism in this book, and I'm not sure it can be said to be disendorsed by PKD. Hadley thinks of his friends, the Golds, as sub-men (they are Jewish). He describes them as dirty, pathetic, and dwarf-like. Later, he calls them kikes. There is a black preacher called Theodore Beckheim, who is part of the Watchmen of Jesus, whom Hadley goes to see speak. Later, when Hadley discovers that Beckheim is sleeping with a white woman, Marsha Frazier, he calls him a 'big black n[redacted]'. And there are some neo-Nazi types in the book, too, who are treated with ambivalence. In other words, it's hard to me to understand how the PKD I know — the man who had a black spaceship captain in his first novel *Solar Lottery*, the man who said evil was 'actual, like cement' in reference to the Nazis in *The Man in the High Castle* — could have written this.

There is so much hatred and angst in this book. Hadley has a sister called Sally, for whom he apparently has (or at least once had) incestuous feelings. Sally is described very sensuously, in much more loving detail than Hadley's wife, Ellen. In fact, the baby growing inside Ellen is compared to a tumour, and her pregnant condition is said to be 'obese'. Sally's husband is even more offensive than Hadley himself. But his greatest crime would appear to be that he has taken Sally away from her brother. Characters are considered to lack their own reality: they are in fact projections of certain parts of Hadley's personality (at least according to Hadley himself). There's an awful tumult in this novel, one so searing that it made me feel ill reading it. The second half of the book focuses on Hadley's relationship with Marsha Frazier, a thin thirtyish woman who edits a fascist, anti-Semitic magazine called *Succubus*. Hadley does in fact rail against Frazier's anti-Semitism, but this doesn't stop him from considering himself part of a higher race than the likes of the Golds.

It's not all bad, however. One of the strengths of this book is in the physical description of the TV store Hadley works in. This a real, concrete location, a solidity against the terrible flux of the world at large. But Hadley is so bored of his life that he is susceptible to virtually any kind of fad or scam: hence his interest in the Watchmen of Jesus. There is a section in which Marsha takes Hadley up the coast to meet Beckheim, his idol, but the meeting disappoints him. Hadley tries to submit to Beckheim



and/or Marsha herself, but finds himself back at home, late at night, ripping up his membership card for the society. At this point I wondered if Hadley's angst was based on some kind of sexual repression, but the novel seeks to defeat such speculation. When Hadley finally does cheat on his wife with Marsha, the outcome is shocking.

Hadley's fall in the final third of the novel is piteous and horrifying. Hadley takes Marsha to a hotel to sleep with her, but he ends up raping and beating her brutally. At one point, Marsha's pathetic submission is compared to that of a small child (when he forces her to drink some bourbon out of a paper cup). This is quite shocking to me. Today, such behaviour would be termed aggravated sexual assault. Hatred flows outward in all directions, and Marsha becomes Hadley's victim. He steals her car, leaving her at the hotel, and goes home. But it isn't over. No, Hadley then proceeds to snatch his infant son from his cot (Ellen is fast asleep) before going on the mother of all benders. Then he gets horribly drunk, ends up in a fight or perhaps a series of fights. He calls his friend a kike, tries unsuccessfully to see Beckheim again (he isn't allowed into the meeting as he's ripped up his membership card) and stumbles around. During this time, Hadley's son Pete is still in the stolen car. Hadley goes to the TV store late at night, where Fergesson is playing cards with some friends, and demands the $100 he is owed. He gets the money, gets himself fired, and goes out drinking again. This goes on for several hours. Eventually Hadley ends up at a gay bar (!) but he resists the overtures of the 'fairies' who try to care for him. Eventually he is hit by a car, taken in by some kindly Germans,

before escaping and checking into a cheap hotel with the last of his money. Hadley goes back to the stolen car, finding that the window has been smashed and the baby removed. Then he goes to a car yard, tries to buy a car (but he has no money) and then decides to steal several hundred dollars from his now ex-boss.

The final scene of destruction is incredible. This is, in fact, powerful writing. Hadley goes to the TV store, finds that Fergesson has changed the lock, and sees Fergesson in the upstairs window. Then we switch to the older man's point of view for the finale, in which Hadley basically uses his body as a human battering ram to get into the store. First he throws a brick through the window (at which time Fergesson calls the police) but he can't get through. So he smashes his way through the broken glass, to the horror of all concerned. At this point, Hadley is no longer human, and nothing will stand in his way.

Then we get the aftermath. It's several months later and Hadley is in poor shape. He's horribly disfigured and is now blind in one eye. Incredibly, Ellen has taken him back, and they are moving in to an extremely small and filthy dungeon of an apartment. Hadley is too weak to work so Ellen gets a job, and Hadley putters around the apartment, fixing the place up. He is calm now. But something terrible has happened to him. Hadley is still technically alive, but his soul is dead. He's an android, devoid of emotion, operating with only half of his brain (the other half is said to be silent). The book ends with Hadley planning to open a new repair business.

I don't think I've ever read as disturbing (and disturbed) a novel as *Voices***.** It's a distillation of hatred, fear, and misery, and comes as a complete surprise to me. I've read something like 50 books by PKD, and not one of them comes close to being so terribly inhuman. It's almost as though this book served as some kind of purgative for the youthful PKD. He wrote all of his rage, all his racism and violent tendencies, into this novel. This is not the PKD I know. This is a disturbed young man whose demons overcame him. Never again would he write something as awful as this. I'm glad to have read it, as it does shed some (unflattering) light onto the young PKD, but it's disturbing nonetheless. It's a good job PKD never got this published during his lifetime, nor, I expect, would he have wanted to.

Humpty Dumpty in Oakland

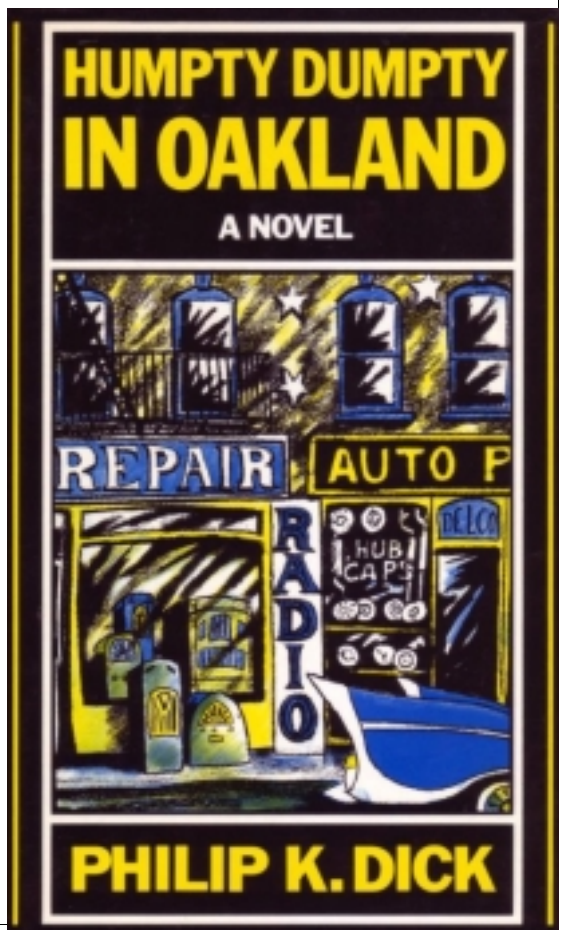
(Edition referred to: Tor, 2007)

Not everyone likes PKD's mainstream novels, almost all of which remained unpublished in his lifetime. They are often criticised for being bleak, dull, or meaningless. There are plenty of people who say that they love PKD's SF, but hate his mainstream works.

I am not one of those people.

I have been, and remain, fascinated by the worlds PKD created, either SF or mainstream. For me, his mainstream novels have a sort of 'slow burn' that complements rather than contradicts his zany SF worlds. ***Humpty Dumpty in Oakland*** (henceforth ***Humpty***) is not the most well known of these mainstream efforts, most of which were written in the fifties, nor is it the best. It is, however, the last PKD would write. After this, in 1960, PKD would write *The Man in the High Castle***,** the book that won him a Hugo Award and a sense that he could merge his mainstream and SF interests into one career. So *Humpty* represents the end of the line for PKD's mainstream career.

The first few pages are so similar to the opening of *Voices from the Street* that I wondered whether it was a recast of that earlier book. I am both right and wrong in this assertion. *Humpty* does feature a character by the name of Jim Fergesson, same as the earlier novel, but here his trajectory is very different from that of *Voices*. There can be no doubt, however, that PKD cannibalised the opening scene of *Voices* for *Humpty*. There are several things that are virtually identical in both books: the Negro as an 'early morning street sweeper', Fergesson 'killing the nightlight with his hand', and the health food store across the street. There's one important difference, however: now Fergesson runs an Auto Repair shop, not a TV & Radio store. And there is no Stuart Hadley working for him, although *Humpty*'s other main character, Al Miller, might be a recast of Hadley. No, it seems that *Humpty* is in fact a recast of a lost novel called *A Time for George*



Stavros (according to Lawrence Sutin's essential biography). But elements of *Voices* remain. Those two novels stand at opposite ends of PKD's fruitless mainstream career: *Voices* from 1952–53 and *Humpty* from 1960.

There are other important differences between the novels discusses above. *Humpty* is set in Oakland, California, and Fergesson (who has aged a decade since we last saw him in *Voices*) is selling his shop, not buying another. His relationship with Al Miller is an unhappy one: the younger man rents a section of the old man's lot for 'Al's Auto Sales'. Unfortunately, Al's cars are wrecks, and Al himself is an unlikable con man. Al Miller doesn't exactly work for Fergesson, but the relationship is a parasitic one. PKD alternates chapters between Fergesson and Miller, although he isn't adverse to sticking with one character for a few chapters when the need arises. Here, again, we see PKD's genius for weaving the lives of his characters together. A third major character, Chris Harman, is introduced subtly. Harman is a businessman of some kind who comes to Fergesson to get his car looked at. But it seems that Harman is also the producer of 'dirty records', a fact Miller seeks to exploit through blackmail.

Meanwhile, Harman has a proposition for Fergesson. Fergesson has already sold his auto repair business for around $40,000 (which must have been a tidy sum in 1960) and he's planning on retiring, as his health is failing him. But Harman convinces him to invest his money in a new repair business in the newly developed Marin County (where PKD himself lived during this time). Thus we have a situation where Harman is trying to sweet-talk Fergesson, while simultaneously Miller is trying to blackmail Harman. It's an elegant setup, and one PKD runs with for all it's worth. I noticed at this point that there is an awful lot of interior monologue in this book. We are privy to the innermost thoughts of Fergesson and Miller, which mostly consist of various plans and concerns and (for Miller) get rich schemes.

Chapter 6 is probably the highlight of *Humpty* for me. Here we see Fergesson driving out to Marin Country to investigate the location of the proposed new business. He drives through an unearthly maze of freeway constructions (which remind me of the developments I have seen here in Perth in the 1990s and 2000s) until he finally reaches Marin Gardens. We get a sense that there is a terrible void opening up beneath Fergesson. His heart is labouring, his palms are sweaty, and he might not live out the day. But when he reaches his destination, he meets a young salesman who seems to want to discuss science fiction, not business! The young man is reading Anderson's *Brain Wave*, a once famous but now obscure novel. When Fergesson finally convinces the salesman to show him around, the old man takes a tumble. Sensing his own mortality, he gets back in his car and heads home. For a man of 32 or so, PKD sure knew how to imagine the fragile life of an older man on the brink of a heart attack. We feel Fergesson's condition viscerally, as it is ourselves who are dying.

Meanwhile, Al Miller's scheme for blackmailing Harman appears to have backfired, and in a strange twist, Miller ends up working for Harman's Teach Records. Initially, it seems he is to manage a new classical music line, but then it appears that his job is to travel around California looking for a new barbershop quartet. I kid you not. Miller is happy enough to go along with this, as is his long-suffering wife. Unfortunately, Miller is a complete fuck-up. He's actually insane, in a calm way. He doesn't appear to be able to 'level' with anyone. As Harman eventually realises, he's a bullshit artist, not a real man. Even more scathingly, Miller's friend Tootie Dolittle calls him 'Humpty Dumpty', in the sense that he just hangs around on his wall, waiting to fall off. And fall he does. Eventually we come to a scene in which Miller is at Harman's extravagantly built house, about to head off to look for that barbershop quartet. But then Jim Fergesson arrives in a terrible state; by this stage he is so ill that he can barely speak. And then sparks fly.

The antipathy between Fergesson and Miller is pretty much the main core of this novel, and here it comes to a head, to the detriment of both parties. Harman says something about not mixing business with friendship, but it is too late. Inexplicably, Miller commits a kind of professional suicide by admitting that it was he who tried to blackmail Harman (Harman thinks there is a Negro conspiracy against him). Furthermore, Miller claims to be an agent of some shadowy organisation out to get Harman. This is just insane stuff, and Miller fails in this strategem. But not before old man Fergesson dies of the heart attack he so feared. In a complex resolution, Fergesson's widow Lydia appeals to Miller for help: she wants to stop the cheque that the old man had written to Harman just before his death. Miller succeeds in this aim, but becomes a targeted man as a result. His only valuable car, a 1932 Marmon (whatever that is or was), is smashed up by unknown assailants. Then Lydia, seeing this, offers to pay Miller $2000 for the car, as a way of saying thank you. Miller is happy to take the money, and begins to plot his escape.

And so Miller and his wife get on a Greyhound bus and get the hell out of California. They don't get far. It isn't long before his wife decides to leave him for good. Miller is arrested shortly after by the police in Salt Lake City, and returned to Oakland. His crime? Swindling Lydia Fergesson out of $2000 and then leaving the state. He is forced to pay the money back, and then receives an unexpected visitor: Chris Harman. Harman, far from seeking to finish Miller off, instead offers him a reprieve, and a job. Miller is happy to accept, but he is a broken man. His friend Tootie tells him so, and then we find Miller in an abject state at his car lot, filling a bag with sand. It is like this that the Negro realtor Mrs Lane finds him. She recognises that he is in a poor state, and offers to drive him home.

It's hard to imagine a less satisfactory resolution to a book than the last third of *Humpty*. The two 'protagonists' (if they can be called that) are petty and mean. One of them dies of a heart attack, and the other has his dreams broken. There's very little sense of redemption here. No, this is a bleak and dark book, and it's no wonder that the publishers of the day were not interested. This novel reads like a dead end. But PKD's next book, *The Man in the High Castle*, would prove to be an extraordinary new beginning.

Ubik: The Screenplay

(Edition referred to: Subterranean, 2008)

Philip K Dick's ***Ubik: The Screenplay*** has long since been an obscure, out-of-print collector's item for hardcore PKD fans like myself. First published in 1985 (three years after the great man's death), the screenplay is difficult to obtain secondhand and exorbitantly priced. So I was pleased to discover Subterranean Press reissuing the book in hardcover (1500 copies) and lettered, signed hardcover (26 copies, very expensive). Being the PKD-phile that I am, I went out and ordered this from Amazon. I wasn't disappointed.

I first read ***Ubik: The Screenplay*** in 2000, and I recall being impressed by PKD's reinterpretation of his essential but often horribly written *Ubik*. PKD was commissioned to write the screenplay in the 1970s by a French filmmaker, but the film was never made. Apparently, a film of *Ubik* may be on the horizon, but I wouldn't be holding my breath. *Ubik* would probably be one of the most difficult PKD novels to film, and his screenplay actually makes things even harder for the would-be filmmaker. An amazing film it would be, but I'm not confident I'll ever see it.

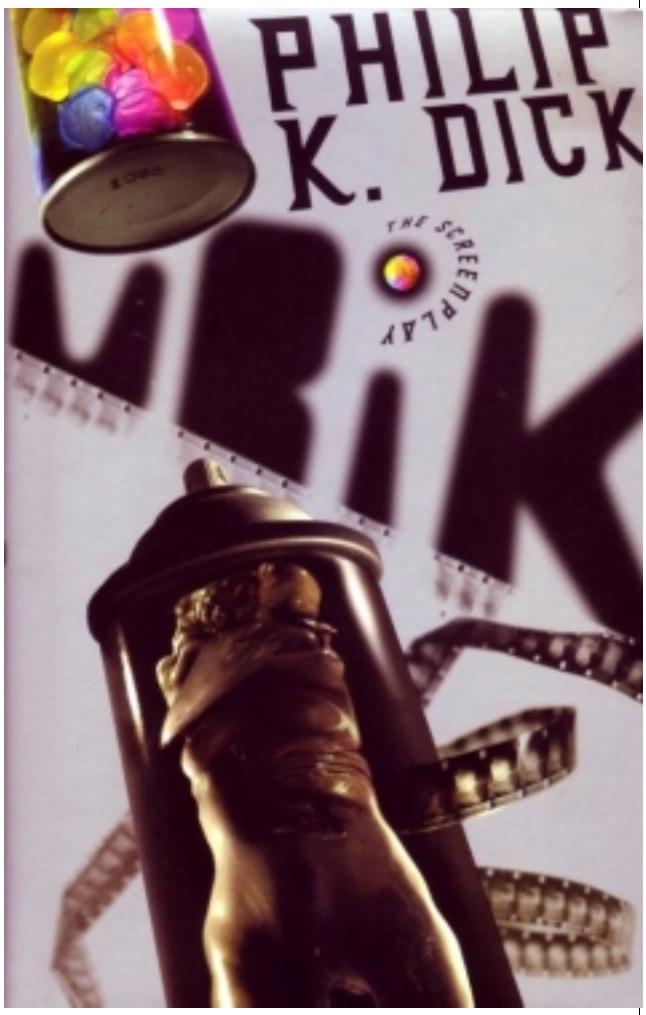
I'm not going to run through the plot of *Ubik* here, as I've already done so in my detailed review of the novel. In terms of the design and production of the book, Subterranean Press cannot be faulted. If only PKD could have lived to have seen his work revered in this way.

The main problem with the novel *Ubik* is that the first 60 pages or so are quite poor. About as good as a much less well-known PKD novel called *The Zap Gun*. I've charted the writing of *Ubik* in my novel review, but suffice to say that here PKD gets a second crack at it, and for the most part he improves on the overall story. *Ubik: The Screenplay* is full of strange filmic oddities (most noticeably the 'Andy Warhol' Ubik can intrusions) and spacetime slips. It's pretty psychedelic stuff.

As I've read the novel version five times or more, I was able to pick up instantly which material PKD had added. I noticed a 'self-serve abortion clinic', a pregnant minor character whose child becomes the new Ella Runciter (much in the fashion of the film ***2001***), and a punch-up between two characters. None of the new material is important or even particularly good. It might even be said that some of the new material is slightly jarring or inappropriate, but that's debatable. For the most part, however, PKD sticks to the story of the novel, removing a lot of wastage in the early part and focusing on the far superior later scenes.

One thing I noticed this time around is how modern and *Matrix*-like *Ubik: The Screenplay* is. This is really sophisticated fare, full of incursions into reality on Runciter's part and truly mind-blowing scenes, like the one with the drugstore phasing in and out of reality. This truly would make an excellent film if it could be done properly. The central mystery of *Ubik: The Screenplay* is and remains Ubik itself. What is Ubik? We never find out. Therein lies the allure and possibly the frustrating aspect of the most elusive of PKD's stories.

Ubik is an essential PKD novel, and *Ubik: The Screenplay* is an essential read for hardcore PKD fans.



Works relating to Philip K. Dick

What If Our World Is Their Heaven?: The Final Conversations of Philip K. Dick

(Edition referred to: Duckworth, 2006)

Reading this book — which is basically a transcript of a long interview with Philip K. Dick — is like catching up with an old friend. These interviews, which were recorded by Gwen Lee, have the distinction of being the last interviews in Philip K. Dick's life. That's this book's first claim to fame. The interviews were recorded in January 1982, just six weeks before PKD's untimely death. That's strange, because according to the blurb on the back of this edition, the interviews took place from November 1982 onwards. It's a typo, obviously, but definitely a phildickian one. I have been meaning to get this book ever since it was first released, but it wasn't that high on my list of priorities. Having now read ***What If Our World Is Their Heaven?*** (henceforth ***What If?***), I have satisfied my curiosity, but I don't really feel like I've learned much that I didn't already know about PKD.

This book's second claim to fame is that it contains pretty much the *only* discussion on PKD's unwritten SF novel *The Owl In Daylight*. *Owl* would have been an interesting novel, had PKD lived to write it. It was to be a story about first contact between an alien species and our own. The catch is that the aliens are totally deaf (and yet regard our music as heavenly) and we are 'deaf' to their sense of colour. The novel was to be a Faustian tale involving biochip technology (and apparently nanotechnology) as well as a hack composer who becomes a genius.

Much of the rest of *What If?* deals with PKD's reactions to what he had been shown of the then soon-to-be released *Blade Runner*. PKD had a love–hate relationship with the filmmakers, but he is in 'love' mode here. His description of *Blade Runner*'s beginning reminds me how powerfully it affected me when I first saw it. This section is interesting, because it's a great shame that PKD died before the film was released. There's a real 'sense of wonder' about PKD here; he's bewildered that someone could go to so much effort to flesh out one of his novels like this. If you are interested in *Blade Runner*, you will appreciate these details.

Other topics in this book include PKD's *Exegesis*, the experience of '2-3-74', and discussion about the book that turned out to be PKD's last, ***The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*** (henceforth ***Transmigration***). I am an ardent supporter of *Transmigration*, and thus I was interested to read that PKD had found the book extremely difficult to write, and that he questioned its value. There's an interesting point to be made here. When we think about the lives of dead people, we tend to want a 'beginning, middle, and end'. *Transmigration* is such a beautiful novel that it seems an ideal final testament to PKD's life, and yet here we have the man himself, *six weeks* before the stroke that would kill him, planning another book and working himself into the ground. And he knows it. One wants to scream out across these pages: 'STOP IT, PHIL! JUST RELAX! DON'T THINK ABOUT WRITING!' But, of course, it's too late. Philip K. Dick died on 2 March 1982. I was born six months before his death. PKD fans tend to have accepted the master's death by now, but this book brings it back into shocking focus.

There's a lot of PKD's personality here: his sense of humour, his flirtatious nature, his wide-reaching imagination and extraordinary intelligence. What we find here is a literary genius at work, albeit slaving away at a

doomed task. I've often felt that PKD threw away enough ideas for someone to make their own career out of. PKD often spoke about the information he felt was being fired into his brain. Well, he spent a fair bit of time firing information into the brains of those around him.

I've talked myself around. I started off trying to say that *What If?* wasn't worth the bother, but now I'm not sure I agree with my own assertion. I will need to re-read this carefully. The only real downside to this book is its length. It's been padded with wide margins and a large font, as well as blank pages, a foreword, an introduction, and a fairly redundant bibliography, and it's *still* only 200 pages. But it's worth it all the same. This is hardly an essential PKD book for everyday readers (I would rate Paul Williams' book of interviews, ***Only Apparently Real***, ahead of this one) but it's an essential book for the hardcore PKD fan.

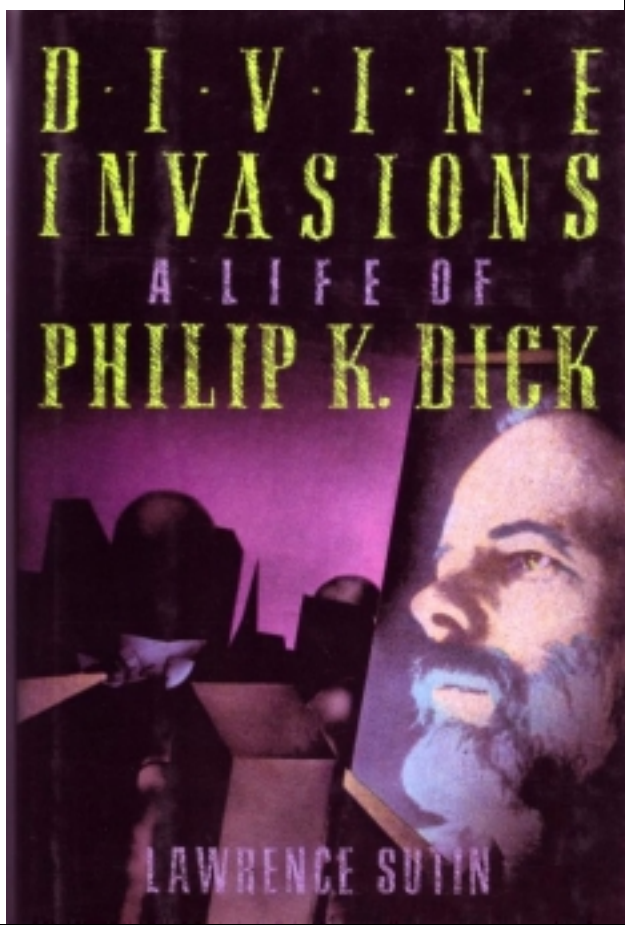
Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick by Lawrence Sutin

(Edition referred to: Gollancz, 2006)

There are but two books in the world that I have used so often that they literally fell apart and had to be replaced. The first is the *I Ching*, and the second is Lawrence Sutin's biography of Philip K. Dick, ***Divine Invasions***. It is not going too far to say that this book is an essential tool for any would-be PKD scholar. Over the past decade, it has become my habit, whenever I re-read one of PKD's novels, to also read the accompanying section in *Divine Invasions* alongside. For me now, the most essential part of this book is Sutin's 'Chronological Survey and Guide', which serves as a primer for each of the 59 (that's right, 59) books PKD wrote in his life (many of these have been lost). This section of the biography is worth the price of entry alone, for here one can discover some fascinating PKD trivia, such as some of his excreble original titles for his novels. (One of the alternative names for *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* was *The Killers Are Among Us! Cried Rick Deckard to the Special Man.* No joke. Apparently.)

But of course the main part of *Divine Invasions* is the biography itself, which covers the 52 or so years of PKD's life in fairly even detail. My only complaint here is that I wish the biography was longer, much longer. I don't suppose we're ever going to get a 1000-page PKD biography, but if we did, then it should be Lawrence Sutin to write it. He seems to have done an excellent job of interviewing various people who knew (many of whom were married to) PKD. His style is light and irreverent, and he always portrays PKD's life as the rollercoaster ride it must have been. In other words, he gets it right.

Divine Invasions isn't the best biography I've ever read. That distinction goes to Julie Phillips' *James Tiptree Jr: The Double Life of Alice B Sheldon.* But it's the best biography on PKD I've read by a considerable margin. While there have been other biographies, none is widely available. For instance, Gregg Rickman published a biography called *To The High Castle* (which was to be Part 1 of two volumes), but it is long out of print and almost impossible to find for a reasonable price. Emmanuel Carrère's *I Am Alive and You Are Dead: A Journey into the Mind of Philip K. Dick* is interesting, but lacks the academic rigour of Sutin's book. Tessa Dick's *Remembering Firebright* casts a personal light on part of PKD's life, but it lacks Sutin's scope. And Anne Dick's *Search for Philip K. Dick* has also been languishing out of print for many years now (although this recently been remedied with the book's re-release). Another memoir, *A Family Darkly: The Final Passions of Philip K. Dick*, was supposed to be released a couple of years ago, but it was withdrawn before publication at the request of the Philip K. Dick Trust. Finally, there was supposed to be a new biography of PKD by a guy called Darryl Mason released in 2006 or so, but it never materialised. In this void, *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* has been *the* Philip K. Dick biography, and I'm not expecting that to change anytime soon.



Search for Philip K. Dick by Anne R. Dick

(Edition referred to: Point Reyes Cypress Press, 2009)

Search for Philip K. Dick (henceforth ***Search***), a memoir–biography by PKD's third wife Anne, was first published in 1993 but was so obscure and expensive that it was almost as though it wasn't published at all. That situation changed in 2009 when Anne republished *Search* in an affordable edition by Point Reyes Cypress Press. I was eager to read this work, which is said to have been influential on Lawrence Sutin in the preparation of his biography *Divine Invasions* (he read it in manuscript form), and I wasn't disappointed.

One of *Search*'s best features is the scholarly, even investigative way Anne Dick has gone about researching her material. The book is divided into three sections: Part I covers the period 1958–64 (during which Anne met and then married Phil); Part II details Phil's life from 1964 to 1982; and Part III investigates Phil's early life (1928–58). The first part is necessarily the longest and most detailed, given that this is the period during which Anne knew Phil the best, but this is not to say that the other sections are without merit. Anne interviewed a whole host of people who knew Phil at various stages of his life, and she weaves their accounts into her narrative most effectively.

Part I brings the Philip K. Dick of the Point Reyes years to life in a way that only someone who knew the man so intimately could ever do. As a result, Anne recreates the flavour of their life together in compelling fashion that goes far beyond the scope of an ordinary biography. Here the reader will find a wealth of information relating to the circumstances in which the couple to be first met, as well as a sense of the encompassing love that grew between them. Anne seems to have fallen deeply in love with this warm, attentive, and intelligent man, and there's apparently nothing of the mental illnesses that plagued Phil for most of his life to be found here. Anne also provides an insight into the composition of many of Phil's novels of this time (many of which are considered by most, including me, to be among his very best). Thus it saddens the reader to hear of the sorry circumstances leading to the breakup of Anne and Phil's marriage by 1964. Anne's thesis basically seems to be that Phil's latent mental illnesses precipitated this breakup, and that he threw away his best chance of happiness in severing this bond. Having read about PKD's life extensively, I am inclined to agree. Phil would never be happier than he was in the early years of his marriage to Anne.

In Part II, we are told a tale that will be familiar to readers of Sutin's *Divine Invasions*, that of the chaotic remaining years of PKD's life. There's not a great deal of new material here, although it is true that Anne independently interviewed many people who knew Phil during this period. Another possible reason for the overlap is that Anne says that Sutin borrowed a great deal of information from Anne's then-unpublished memoir. For me, the highlight of this section were the details of Phil's dealings with his ex-wife and daughter Laura, both of whom he appears to have treated poorly indeed. Anne seems to have gotten on well with Phil's second and fourth wives, Kleo and Nancy, but it's clear that considerable antipathy exists between Anne and Phil's fifth wife Tessa. Thus there's less about the final decade of Phil's life than one would hope to find in a fully fledged biography.

Anne eschews conventional chronology by having Part III deal with the years leading up to her meeting with Phil in 1958, by which time he was almost 30. Here, again, the narrative is not as fully fleshed out as I would like, but then what I am really after is a 1000-page biography of PKD, which does not and probably will never exist. This section is about on a par with similar chapters in *Divine Invasions*, although I do feel that Anne told the story of Phil's father Edgar better than Sutin does.

In summary, *Search* is a fascinating portrait of Philip K. Dick from the unique perspective of Phil's third wife, Anne. It will be required reading for PKD scholars in years to come, and offers a fascinating insight into what were almost certainly the best years of Phil's life, during which time he produced much of the work for which he is famous today. Anne Dick's memoir also excels in its attention to detail. While not as well rounded as *Divine Invasions* overall, it offers the most complete insight into the life of the man who wrote *The Man in the High Castle*, *Martian Time-Slip*, and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* as we are ever likely to get.

The Owl in Daylight by Tessa Dick

(Edition referred to: CreateSpace, 2009)

When I wrote my review of *Voices From the Street*, Philip K. Dick's last published novel (25 or more years after his death), I said I was surprised to be reading a 'new' PKD book and that I found the matter 'phildickian'; that is, *strange* and entirely in keeping with the man, his work, and his life. How much greater my surprise is, then, to be reviewing ***The Owl in Daylight*** (henceforth ***Owl***), PKD's fabled and entirely unwritten final novel. When reviewing the long interview ***What if Our World is Their Heaven?***, I discussed the plot Phil envisioned for ***Owl***, which was to be, not his last book, but simply his *next* book. Now I hold ***Owl*** in hand and ponder the unlikely (and somewhat regrettable) circumstances that have caused this book to appear now, 27 or so years after

PKD's death.

The author of this book is, of course, PKD's wife Tessa, and the publisher is not a mainstream house, but Amazon.com's self-publishing department, Create Space. All of this came as a complete and utter surprise to me, as I had been following matters phildickian closely over the past decade or so, and had no inkling that Tessa Dick was about to publish, not one, but at least five or six books, including a memoir on PKD and that famous unwritten novel, *Owl*. It also seems that Tessa has run afoul of an organisation known as the Philip K. Dick Trust (I'm not making this up) and that 'they' (a consortium run by PKD's descendants, including, it seems, her own son) were threatening her with legal action over the use of the 'Philip K. Dick' name and associated rights. It would appear that Tessa is now suing the PKD Trust in response over proceeds to some of the late author's later works, most notably *A Scanner Darkly*. No, I'm really not making any of this up. It seems that Tessa B. Dick's *Owl* will be something of a collector's item, given that only a limited number have been sold, and that there remains some threat of the book being withdrawn (as occurred with the memoir of another PKD relative, Anne Mini, whose book *A Family Darkly* was withdrawn before publication, apparently due to the ubiquituous PKD Trust).

'But is *The Owl in Daylight* any good?' I hear you ask. There was a part of me that was afraid to start reading, in case the words were awful, the plot plodding. But thankfully, Tessa has pulled it off: not only is *Owl* a fitting tribute to her late husband, but it's actually a strong novel of its own accord and — wait for it — in the opinion of this humble reviewer, superior to PKD's *VALIS*. I'm not so much a fan of *VALIS* anymore, as my review will attest to. *Owl* reads much more like a direct sequel to that novel than *The Divine Invasion* ever did.

Owl concerns, for the most part, a hack composer by the name of Arthur Grimley. (Somewhere, probably on Tessa's blog, she explains that the name Arthur is because he's an artist, and Grimley as his is a grim situation.) Arthur longs to write serious music, but his trashy stuff pays the bills and ends up adorning various B-grade slasher films. It's hard, perhaps impossible, not to read much of this as standing symbolically for PKD himself, and indeed there are many similarities between Arthur and a younger PKD, the young man who wrote 'Roog!' and *Solar Lottery*. Grimley's latest music is intended for the film *Bad Moon Rising*, a great title that Tessa incidentally seems to have used for another of her novels. This is the first of the similarities between *VALIS* and *Owl*.

I haven't mentioned the Archons and the alien slugs, but that's half the fun of the novel, so I won't try to explain that in too much detail. Suffice to say that whereas in *VALIS* we had an ancient satellite and a pink beam of light, here we have an alien implant and some 'men in black'. Early in the novel, Arthur loses consciousness for some unknown reason, which proves to be the beginning in a psychedelic and disorientating sequence of events that recalls PKD's best work, namely *Ubik*, *Martian Time-Slip*, *A Maze of Death*, and the obscure *Radio Free Albemuth* (which students of PKD will recognise as the original 'VALIS' novel). Arthur recovers from his episode to some extent, and here we discover the extent of his similarities with the younger PKD: both worked in a record store, both had a domineering mother, both had some fear of turning out to be homosexual.

Here I thought it prudent to mention one aspect of the novel I found a little perplexing. Arthur's memories of his childhood appear to have taken place in roughly the same period as PKD's own life (i.e. as a young adult in the early 1950s). And yet the older Arthur appears to inhabit our own times (there is even some brief mention of the global financial crisis), which is more than 50 years later. I certainly didn't picture the older Arthur as being over 70, so perhaps the author intended this discontinous sense of time, this fracture, as a clue to the fundamental unreality of time (as per *VALIS* — The Empire Never Ended, etc.). There's even an old hobo holding up a sign that says precisely this early in the novel. I thought that this was a subtlety that might easily be missed by an unwary reader. In fact, I wonder what someone who hadn't read *VALIS* and PKD's other work would make of *Owl*.

I quite enjoyed the beginning section of the novel, but in Chapter 2 the narrative really took off for me, and before I knew it I had read half the book. The plot is too phantasmagoric and shifting to describe in detail, but it includes elements such as: strange mathematical equations; a motorised wheelchair; alien slugs and a flying saucer; a theme park; an ersatz reality; the process of anamnesis, and Dante's *Inferno*. Here we learn of a young man named Tony and the woman he is fated to marry, Candy. Meanwhile, Art Grimley lies in a coma in the theme park.

By page 108, at the beginning of Chapter 6, we can no longer be sure what is real and what fake (like the famous ending of *Ubik*, in which Joe Chip realises that he may not have reached true reality after all). Tony's narrative, a narrative that seems very much in keeping with PKD's own life, is a delight to read, but the 'alien slugs' are 'anxious to accelerate the game' (p. 112), setting the narrative into free fall again. Somewhere in here, Tony starts to look for his lost 'Lorelei', who turns out to have a surprising double later in the story. The weakest part of the novel, to my mind, centres around the Ordeals, beginning in Chapter 7. While Tony battles through various ordeals (with a friend called Bobby), surgeons in our own times are preparing to operate on the tumour in Art Grimley's head.

Things pick up again in the final third, when Art wakes from his coma to find that he now lives in a small apartment. His wife Edna tries to help him, but all he can say is something about the Plasmate (which the reader knows is the alien slug). Somewhere in here are the Archons, who are forever a step behind the sneaky slug. I couldn't help but think of the *Men in Black* films hereabouts, and in general I thought the Archons could have been fleshed out better or gotten rid of entirely. On page 177 we are introduced to the character who forms the final piece of this novel's puzzle: the madman Kelvin Waggle. PKD pretty much perfected the character of the idiot savant in a number of novels, from Ragle Gumm in *Time Out of Joint*, through Jack Isidore in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, and finally a similar character in *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. The character type was immortalised in the film *Blade Runner*, as Sebastian. Anyway, Tessa Dick deploys this character type to excellent effect

here, in the final section of *Owl*.

It couldn't be a *VALIS* novel without the appearance of Sophia ('the embodiment of God's Holy Wisdom on Earth', p. 203), who turns out to be a cipher for Lorelei *and* Angelica. (The reader really needs to pay attention!) Sophia seems to represent the cool 'feminine' voice that guides and shapes the narrative, and finally helps Arthur to recover from his ordeal here at novel's end. I've managed not to mention that Arthur has composed some beautiful 'Golden Mean' music while under influence of the alien slug, and that he and his wife now live partly on the proceeds of this music. This reminds me of PKD's own '2-3-74' experiences, which I'm sure the author had in mind here. Tony, Bobby, and Candy even manage to make a late reappearance, but the novel's final image, and one very true to PKD's vision and especially the 'note of humility' he tended to end his novels on, is brilliant. I guess I shouldn't spoil it, but suffice to say that Arthur and Kelvin Waggle finally meet, but with an inconclusive outcome. Then in the Appendix we discover just how similar the minds of these two characters are (both having been occupied, at different times, by the alien slug).

Owl isn't a perfect novel by any means. The presentation is frankly a little sloppy in terms of typos and small inconsistencies (I counted at least 20–30 small errors), but there again the resemblance to the work of PKD himself is uncanny. This is a novel that demands a great deal of the reader in terms of piecing together various clues in order to make meaning of the overall narrative. But *Owl* actually has something that so many of PKD's novels *do* have but *not*, in my opinion, *VALIS*: a ripping storyline. I found this to be a thoroughly entertaining read and I would highly recommend it to the legions of PKD fans around the world. On a more personal note, it seems that Tessa Dick has fallen on hard times of late and is living to some extent on the proceeds of her self-published novels. So before you think about picking up yet another copy of *Ubik* or *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, spare a thought for the great man's widow and muse, Tessa Dick. You'll be glad you did.

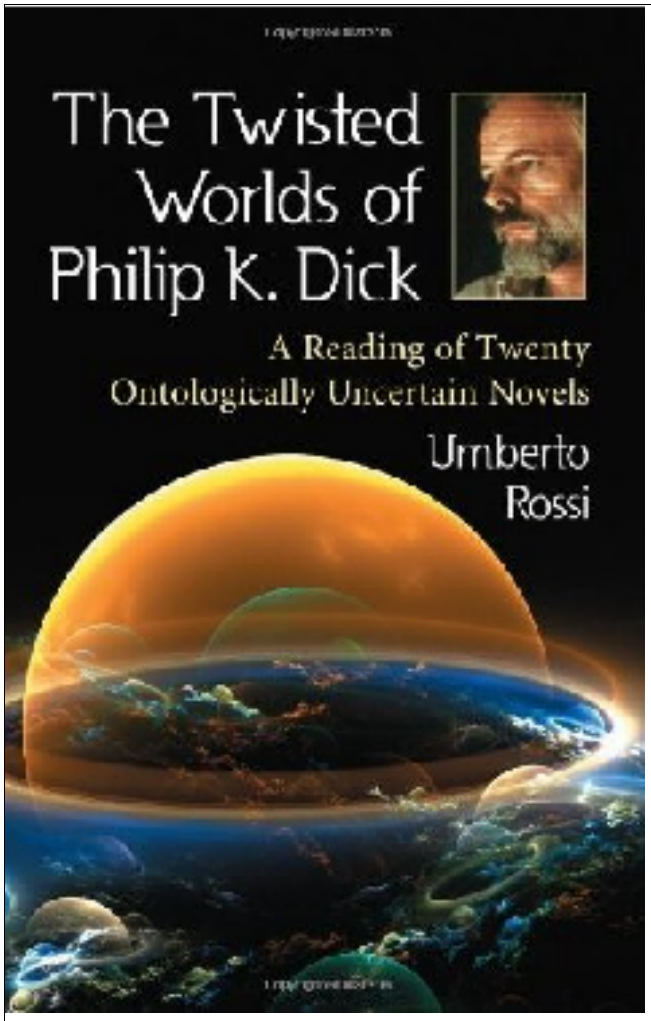
The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels by Umberto Rossi

(Edition referred to: McFarland, 2011)

Umberto Rossi's ***The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels*** (henceforth **TW**) is a welcome breath of fresh air in the world of Philip K. Dick criticism, after a number of critical works that have failed to satisfy hardcore fans for various reasons. Rossi never tries to shoehorn PKD's work into any particular theory, other than in demonstrating that the writer's work is dominated by the condition of 'ontological uncertainty': that is, uncertain states of being. Rossi's text provides fans of PKD's work with a knowledgeable and detailed study of twenty novels, arranged thematically, not chronologically (although it is true that there is a degree of overlap anyway). I found the style of TW admirable, in that it is highly readable without being fannish, and exhaustive without being tedious. Furthermore, Rossi sheds light on a number of underappreciated PKD novels, as we shall soon see.

One of the great strengths of Rossi's work is that he is well versed in what has gone before in the world of PKD criticism. Thus there is extensive reference to critical works by the likes of Kim Stanley Robinson, Darko Suvin, Frederic Jameson, and others, references to biographical texts by Lawrence Sutin and Gregg Rickman, and reference to the author's letters. In short, Rossi knows his subject inside out, which has not always been the case in previous studies of this writer. Rossi also utilises Jonathan Lethem's concept of 'finite subjective realities' (FSRs) from his novel *Amnesia Moon*, in explaining PKD's craft. As Rossi explains in his introduction, PKD's novels are peculiar in that they blur inner worlds (*idios kosmos*) with so-called reality (*koinos kosmos*), with often startling results. Furthermore, Rossi explains how PKD deployed what Thomas Disch dubbed 'The Game of the Rat', in which the author frequently changed the rules of the fictional game, not only destabilising reality but also set genre distinctions using frequent 'shunts.'

Chapter 1 starts us off with two rarely discussed works by PKD, *The Cosmic Puppets* and *The Game-Players of Titan*, the former of which Rossi asserts to be an important, if early, work. In part this is because here, in PKD's early work, we find evidence of a dual godhead, represented by Ormazd and Ahriman, which can be seen as a reinterpretation of the Zoroastrian tradition. Rossi also shows how PKD uses a 'shunt' to shift the narrative from a mystery–paranoia mode to outright fantasy. It is Rossi's contention that the novel, far from being unimportant, is a key work. The same cannot be said for *The Game-Players of Titan*, written during PKD's creative burst in the early sixties, but Rossi's discussion does shed light on PKD's genre 'shunt' technique, which he uses extensively in this minor novel, stacking the deck in the Game of the Rat so as to leave the reader utterly bewildered. Rossi helpfully includes the first of many tables he uses to illustrate the use of genre shunts in the novel.



Chapter 2 discusses two early novels that have long been regarded as critical in PKD's oeuvre, *Eye in the Sky* and *Time Out of Joint*. The former, written in 1955, displays a well-imagined 'ontologically uncertain' environment in that the characters who are knocked unconscious by the Belmont Bevatron inhabit each other's *idios kosmos* as though it were the *koinos kosmos*. Here, for the first time, PKD deployed the basic narrative strategy that he would repeat again and again over the course of his career. Rossi uses Lem's concept of finite subjective realities to explain PKD's methodology in *Eye in the Sky*. *Time Out of Joint* is somewhat different, in that it deploys a very significant genre shunt around three-quarters of the way through the narrative, shifting us from paranoia–mystery to fullblown science fiction. Rossi discusses the troubling issue of the disappearing soft-drink stand at length, which can't be explained within the framework offered in the latter part of the novel (that is, that Ragle Gumm's environment is being physically, not virtually, simulated).

Chapter 3 is devoted to *The Man in the High Castle*, although it does begin with a brief discussion of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, the only one of PKD's mainstream novels to be published in his lifetime. *Castle* deploys a somewhat different narrative strategy from that of PKD's other SF novels, namely alternate history, as a means of creating ontological uncertainty. But as Rossi explains, PKD adds layers of complexity not normally associated with this genre in the form of the novel-within-the-novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, in which the Allies, not the Axis, won World War II. The role that the Chinese oracle *I Ching* plays is also discussed, especially insofar as PKD claimed that he used the oracle in plotting his novel. Lastly, the presence of a multitude of fakes in *Castle* creates still another layer of ontological uncertainty, as the reader is never sure who or what anyone in the novel 'really' is.

Chapter 4 discusses three novels, *Martian Time-Slip*, *Dr Bloodmoney*, and *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, all of which use mental illness as a way of projecting ontological uncertainty into the texts. Rossi discusses PKD's multiple viewpoint method, which found its high point here in his novels of the early sixties. He explains that in *Martian Time-Slip* PKD pitted the *idios kosmos* of many different characters against each other, some of whom are suffering from mental illnesses such as schizophrenia (Jack Bohlen) or autism (Manfred Steiner). The fact that PKD's Mars seems very much like sixties California is also addressed. Time travel is used as another means of creating ontological uncertainty, but not in as full-blown a fashion as in some of PKD's other novels. *Dr Bloodmoney* works in a similar fashion, in that the *idios kosmos* of certain characters can be seen as deranged (Bruno Bluthgeld and Hoppy Harrington), and the ontological uncertainty stems from the influence these characters appear to have on the *koinos kosmos* of post-apocalyptic California. The third novel discussed in this chapter, *Clans of the Alphane Moon* (which has normally been regarded as a minor work), similarly uses categories of mental illnesses as a means of structuring the novel.

In Chapter 5, Rossi focuses on three novels 'which have generally been considered as minor works': *The Simulacra*, *Now Wait for Last Year*, and *The Penultimate Truth*. The first of these, *The Simulacra*, seems to suffer from an overloaded narrative in which too many different story arcs compete and do not necessarily coalesce. Nevertheless, ontological uncertainty abounds, and the reader cannot be sure what is real, not even the President. *The Penultimate Truth*, perhaps the most political of PKD's novels of the sixties, postulates a situation in which the poor live underground, supposedly because of a war which has ravaged the planet, while the rich cavort on the Earth's surface. In *Now Wait for Last Year*, PKD uses drug-induced time travel and the historical figure of Benito Mussolini as a way of heaping uncertainty upon uncertainty as alternate futures collide. All three of these novels feature characters who are somehow 'outside of linear time': Bertold Goltz in *The Simulacra*, David Lantano in *The Penultimate Truth*, and the many versions of Gino Molinari in *Now Wait for Last Year*.

Chapter 6, which discusses the novels *We Can Build You* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, shows how the concept of what is or isn't human can create ontological uncertainty, demonstrated first by PKD in his story 'Impostor'. Here we have an interesting discussion of one of PKD's underappreciated works and the highly celebrated noir police thriller that sprung from the ashes of the unloved earlier novel (a situation similar to that regarding *Radio Free Albemuth* and *VALIS*). As Rossi explains, in these novels PKD unsettles our concept of the human, rather than the world itself, as a means of creating ontological (and narrative) uncertainty.

Chapter 7 features four of PKD's most celebrated novels, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Ubik*, *A Maze of Death*, and *Flow, My Tears, The Policeman Said*. In *Eldritch*, PKD uses the drugs Can-D and Chew-Z as a means of creating FSRs, with differing results. The increasingly ubiquitous figure of Palmer Eldritch himself is also discussed in detail. A somewhat similar situation is found in *Ubik*, where the half-lifer Jory seems to be running the show, and Glen Runciter keeps trying to tell Joe Chip that he is alive while Joe and his colleagues are dead. *A Maze of Death* is somewhat similar to the earlier two novels, except that here PKD is on the verge of degenerating into self-parody, and the situation at the end of the novel, in which the characters discover that they are on a doomed spaceship, is possibly the bleakest ending to a PKD novel. The novel *Flow, My Tears, The Policeman Said* is seen as a transitional work, incorporating the reality dysfunctions of PKD's sixties novels and the more explicitly metaphysical thinking of the novels written in PKD's final period.

The final three chapters in TW deal with the 'VALIS trilogy': *VALIS*, *The Divine Invasion*, and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. Rossi goes to some length to justify the existence of a VALIS trilogy, especially seeing as many followers of PKD (myself included) think of the unwritten *The Owl in Daylight* as the third in the trilogy, with *Archer* being a mainstream offshoot. I can't do justice to Rossi's argument here, except in saying that he provides an extremely stimulating and enlightening discussion on the three novels, particular in terms of the genre shunts PKD deploys in these novels (and especially in *VALIS*).

The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels should soon be seen as a key work in the world of PKD criticism. As I've said, it's both highly readable and theoretically sophisticated. It helps to explain PKD's methodology in producing his greatest works. It synthesises earlier critical discussions and addresses weaknesses in such studies. It discusses neglected works in the PKD canon and rehabilitates them (and encourages them to be re-read). And finally, is it a fitting tribute to this most loved of twentieth century science fiction writers. Buy it, borrow it: serious PKD fans and scholars must read it.

Afterword: The Canonisation of Philip K. Dick

The 2009 publication of the third volume in the Library of America's collection of thirteen of PKD's novels represents the final canonisation of the work of this most seminal of science fiction writers. No one, and certainly not PKD himself, could have imagined that his posthumous career would be so successful. This success is revealed most plainly in the plethora of Hollywood film adaptations of PKD's work, but also in the numerous reissues and rebranding of PKD's novels by publishers such as Vintage, Millennium, and most recently Mariner. The Library of America editions add the final imprimatur.

When I read my first PKD novel, *Martian Time-Slip*, in the Millennium Masterworks edition in 1999, I could not myself have predicted that a decade later virtually all of this author's novels would be in print. As recently as 1999, around half of PKD's novels were not widely available and had to be hunted in secondhand bookstores and online. No longer. PKD died just as the movement that would propel his work into worldwide fame was gathering momentum. Impoverished and obscure for most of his lifetime, he is now destined to be remembered as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. It is a reward that is richly deserved. I only wish that he could have lived long enough to know that his legacy in the canon of twentieth-century authors was secure.

— Guy Salvidge, July 2011/July 2012

Tim Marion has been in and around fandom for almost 43 out of 54 years. During the 1970s he achieved a mild degree of notoriety for publishing hundreds of fanzines, mostly apazines (including those for REHUPA, the Robert E. Howard apa he started in 1972), and for attending hundreds of conventions, both local minicons and the larger, regional affairs (including attending both BaltiCon and MiniCon during Easter weekend 1977). During the early 1980s his interest in fandom slacked off as his interest in comic book collecting grew back, and in the late 1980s he began devoting himself to his new hobby: viewing (and in many cases, reviewing) every movie and TV show he had ever desired. Because of this background, in his post-2000, newly restored fanac, 'TiM' has justly dubbed himself 'Marion the Media Mavin' and has published a media-orientated zine (*Terminal Eyes*) for FAPA as well as a 'personalzine-com-genzine' called *So It Goes* (hard copies of two issues of which are still available, and they're also on efanzines.com, but there you won't see the fancy 3D cover on one of them).

Tim Marion

A glimmung of an idea:

A review of *Nick and the Glimmung* by Philip K. Dick

Crudely charming (or charmingly crude?) illustrations by Paul Demeyer.
First published by Gollancz in UK, 1988
Piper edition (mass market paperback) published 1990 by Pan Books, Ltd.

I'm not sure I would have enjoyed this book when I was eight or nine as, although I had just started reading both juvenile and adult science fiction along that time, I had never heard of Philip K. Dick. If I had picked up this book expecting something similar to *The Spaceship Under The Apple Tree*, I would have been very disappointed by all the philosophy and seeming caprice to the story. I mention the above 'Spaceship' series, not only as an excellent example of juvenile science fiction, but also to remark on the fact that the many simple yet strangely effective and evocative illustrations by Paul Demeyer almost remind me of Slobodkin's somewhat cartoony style.

The conflict of the story is based on the fact that young Nick owns a cat. Owning a cat, or any pet of any sort, has been illegal since 1992 in the Earth of this book (it does not say what year it presently is). The emphasis on philosophy is heavy here, as Dick is obviously making a statement about extinction of animals and how poorly we humans are treating them.

Nick's father courageously decides that, rather than give up the cat, the family (father, mother, son, cat) will move to another planet: Plowman's Planet. The father waxes on in a somewhat delusional fashion, expecting the planet to be a vast, Eden-like frontier where they can start over. He has already long since been tired of his job; perhaps his entire reasoning for letting his son have the cat in the first place was to force this decision (my speculation). Once Nick's cat, Horace, has been discovered and reported to the law, Nick's father finally makes himself decide to leave.

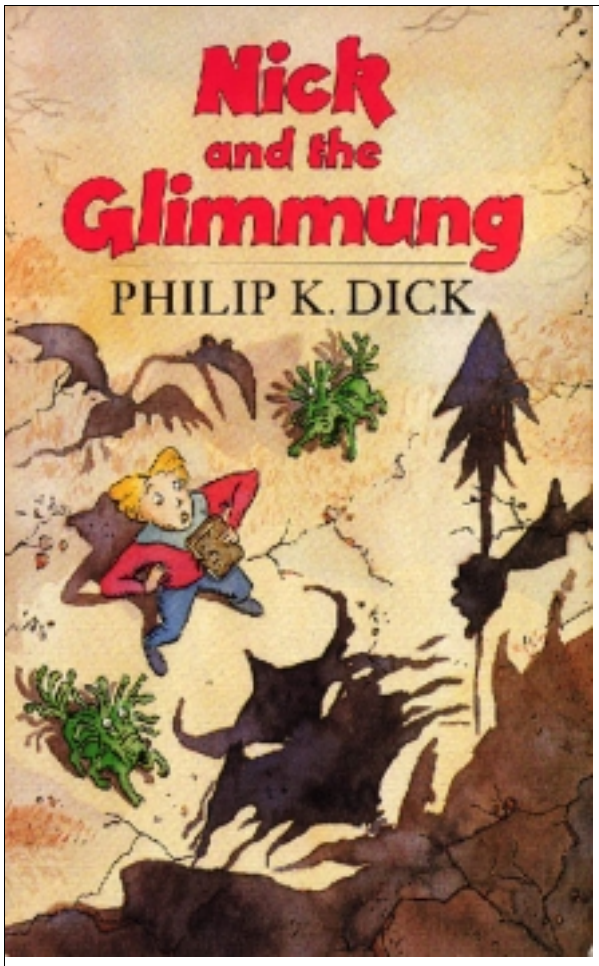
Here, much of Dick's philosophy regarding society and vocations comes into play. Apparently jobs are much in demand:

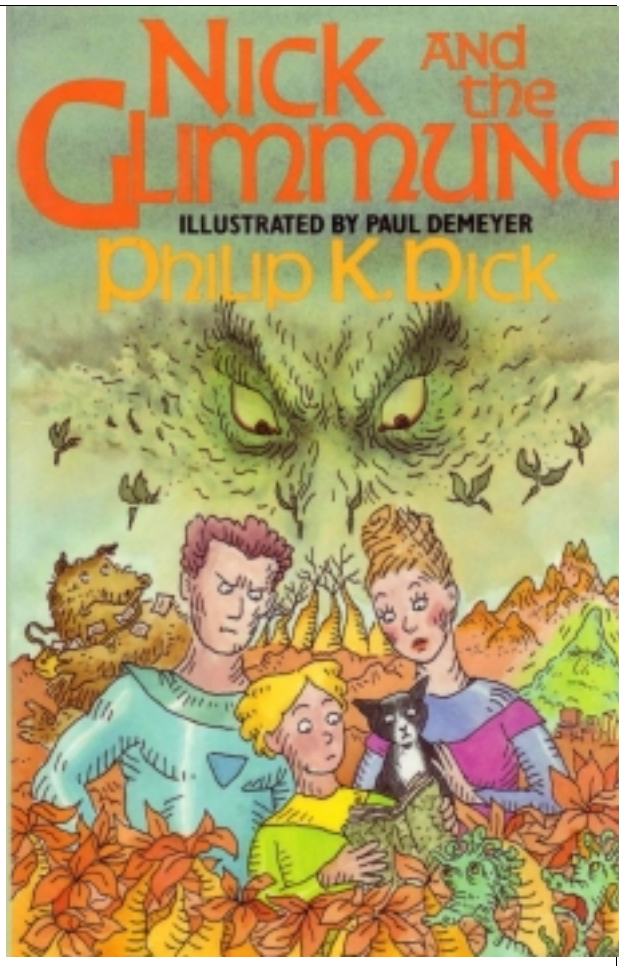
> Nick's dad worked fifteen hours a week, a special privilege; most people were allowed to work no more than ten hours a week. There were, in the world, certain lucky persons who were permitted to work twenty hours, and, in the case of extremely wealthy or powerful persons, twenty-two hours. To be allowed to work was the greatest honour a person could receive because there were so many people alive now that not enough jobs existed to go round. Many unlucky people had never worked a day in their lives. They filed applications, to be sure; they begged to be allowed to work. They wrote out long accounts of their training, their talents and qualifications. The applications were punch-coded and put into great computers ... and the person waited. Year after year passed, and still no jobs showed up; they waited in vain. So Nick's dad, by present standards, was quite fortunate (pp. 18–19).

They seem to have almost as much trouble as I am having at finding work!

Nick's father, however, somewhat paradoxically, seems very dissatisfied with and discouraged about his job, as evinced on page 20:

> 'What am I for? Do I exist to do a job? No. The job exists merely to give me the illusion that I am doing something. But what in fact do I really do? Ed St. James, at the desk to my right, examines documents





and then, if they are correct, he signs them. After he has signed them, he passes them to me. I make sure that he has not forgotten to sign them after seeing that they are correct. In four years Ed St. James has never made a mistake; he always signed the documents before passing them on to me ... What if Ed St. James does not sign a document? Will our company collapse? Will terror reign in the streets? The documents don't mean anything. They exist to create jobs. One man dictates them. Another man or woman types them up. Ed St. James signs them and I make sure he has signed them. I then give them to Robert Hall, seated at the desk to my left, and he folds them. To his left someone sits whom I have never seen; that indistinct individual places the folded documents in envelopes, if they are to be mailed or away in the file, if they are to be filed.'

One wonders why jobs should be so much in demand if they really are as meaningless as Dick makes them out to be. Perhaps Nick's father, at this point, represents Dick as one of the very few 'true-seeing' individuals who realise what a sham work really is (in Dick's philosophy, that is).

But the real reason it's difficult to recommend this as a successful novel for children is that, although he does manage a light-hearted and whimsical tone, Dick still doesn't seem to manage the right 'voice' or understanding for his intended audience; instead, all the heavy-handed philosophy and word definitions come across as annoying and condescending. Children are quick to understand and resent when they are being talked down to.

I recall that, as a child always learning to read more and better, if I didn't know a word, I would either look it up in the dictionary, or, better yet, pester my older sister for a definition. Then, for real fun, I could look it up in the dictionary and come back and tell her how wrong she was, if she was. (Usually my sister would get it right and my parents would get it wrong.)

But seriously, the last thing I wanted in my childhood reading, whether it was in a book specifically intended for children or even in a comic book, was a load of useless definitions. Text with too many definitions was both demeaning and distracting, and particularly in the majority of cases where I already knew what the word meant. Latin, of course, was different, as it was all Greek. Or Chinese. Or whatever. But there is no need to tell us that 'M.O.' means 'modus operandi' and what that term means if we've already been reading tons of *Detective Comics* and juvenile (and adult) mystery novels.

On occasion I still enjoy reading a good juvenile fantasy or science fiction novel, and tend to enjoy now, in my middle age, pretty much the same sort of stories and styles that I enjoyed, first as a child and then later, as a young adult, still exploring the genre. I would like to think this does not qualify me as a clinical moron, however. And in many cases, my tastes have grown and I have become jaded from reading so much, as occasionally happens to the more sophisticated reading palates of older readers. But, in general, I would like to feel that I still have that same ol' 'sense of wonder' that enabled

me to enjoy both good juvenile and adult science fiction novels when I was a child.

To give you an idea as to how annoying the definitions are:

On page 12, Dick defines the word 'emigrate', albeit in the context of a classroom, making it fit into the story better than the following.

On page 22: 'Long words had always annoyed Nick. He knew that much smaller words would do as well, if not better.' What prompts this? Mr Deverest the newspaper man (interviewing the family regarding their possession of an illegal pet) has warned Nick about Plowman's Planet and 'Animals for whom peculiar names exist, names testifying to their unnatural natures?' To which Nick responds, 'Do you always use such long words, Mr Deverest?' Come on!

From a dialogue exchange on pages 28 and 29: Mr Deverest, the newspaper man, composes aloud what his proposed copy will say regarding the anti-pet man:

> 'What an ignominious end to a functionary of officialdom.' ... 'What does that mean?' Nick asked Mr Deverest.

By page 34, blissfully, Dick seems to get tired of over-explaining everything to young readers:

> 'Cats take a dim view of any change. They have what is called a high inertial quality, or rather an introversion of their psychic attitude.'
>
> 'What does that mean?' Nick asked.
>
> His dad replied, 'It means nothing at all. It was just a random thought that came into my mind.'

Dick doesn't seem to give much credit to the normal reader of the age group for whom the book is intended, as such a reader would almost certainly have been exposed to the word 'inertia' during science class.

Much of a potential reader's interest in the story is in the making certain of Horace's safety, no matter what the cost. This in turn produces no small amount of anxiety when Nick and his father (and subsequently, the reader) constantly have to worry about the perils for the pussy on the planet.

Before they leave, Mr. Deverest warns Nick that on Plowman's Planet a 'werj' may carry off Horace. Nick's father discounts the idea as unlikely. 'Werjes' (plural) appear to be mischievous and mildly malicious pterodactyline creatures, somewhat crudely but very effectively drawn by Demeyer.

Almost as soon as they get to Plowman's Planet, Horace is grabbed by a werj. Thankfully, the werj is persuaded to let Horace go. Nick is able to see into the soul of one of the werjes and sees that within him is the semi-omnipotent entity known as the 'Glimmung' (sounds like a sword from Scandinavian legendry). The Glimmung is a being from another planet who has come to Plowman's Planet and has brought his war with him. For some reason, this Glimmung-possessed werj takes a liking to Nick and tells him that, in the war, the 'printers', the 'nunks', the humans, and the 'spiddles' are all against the Glimmung, but that the 'trobes', like the werjes, were on the side of the Glimmung. For no other reason than seemingly to advance the plot, this werj gives Nick a manual (named, innocuously enough, *One Summer Day*) to everything past, present, and future that will occur on the planet . Although it is the Glimmung who is almost certainly directing this giving, said Glimmung later decides to go on a murderous rampage and destroy anyone and anything that has ever touched this book. This Nick finds out the hard way when he comes across the water-seller (to whom Nick had traded the book) who had been brutally murdered while driving, presumably by the Glimmung in a futile attempt to find the book. Fortuitously, it occurs to Nick to check the glove compartment, a secret cavity that a being such as the Glimmung would not know about. Nick then takes repossession of this all-important tome.

Much of the rest of the book concerns the conflict of Nick trying to keep the book away from the Glimmung who gave it to him, who now wants it back for fear its knowledge could be used against him (duh), trying to rescue Horace from trobes, and Nick's realisation and quick-thinking decision regarding the 'father-things' (pod creatures similar to those in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but they stand upright like bamboo stalks). Nick manages to dispatch the pod duplicates for his father and mother (which were almost fully formed), but the one for himself was apparently enterprising enough to hoof it before he could be shovelled and spaded to death.

Dick's treatment of Horace's personality makes him seem very convincing as a cat, up until the final few pages. It seems Horace is being held in the arms of the perambulating Faux Flora Nick (my appellation), and is just as content as though he is being held by the Real Nick. *That* I cannot imagine; surely Horace would notice that Faux Flora Nick smells like a plant, not like the sour, meaty smell of a real, warm human being: *his* human boy. How Real Nick and Faux Flora Nick subsequently deal with each other forms the ultimate climax of the book. The result is unexpected, but ultimately somewhat satisfying. Upon seeing the Faux Flora Nick, Real Nick is obviously having an identity crisis not unlike those experienced by many of Dick's other protagonists.

Conclusion: If you are a dyed-in-the-wool Philip K. Dick completist/collector/reader, you should definitely read this book to get a further peak into the mind of Philip K. Dick. If you are a young reader who is experiencing one of the first books of what could become a lifetime of science fiction reading, you probably will not care anything about Dick, much less appreciate all the needless explanations, gaps in plot and logic, and Dick's philosophy; many of Dick's more interesting ideas almost get drowned out by these. Cat fanciers, however, may appreciate it as a novel about a family that travels to another planet rather than give up their beloved cat.

— Tim Marion, January 2011

(Continued from page 6)

ent from mine. I write for my own pleasure, then hope somebody reads what I write. The easiest way of ensuring this is to publish my own fanzines, containing everything I write. I notice that recently you've also started publishing your own on-line fanzine, *Broken Toys*. But I doubt if one can write for other people, unless you aim for a clearly defined paying market. In Australia, it's very hard to place nonfiction pieces unless one is already famous for fiction publishing or some field unrelated to writing. Australia's only full-time freelance critic is Peter Craven, and I cannot see how even he makes more than a very small living. The paying market for light-yet-serious 'personal journalism' (my term) in Australia is probably as small as it is in Canada.

ERIC MAYER
somewhere in America

I can relate to your opening article in *SFC* 82. Oh can I ever. Like you I have always been painfully aware of what I cannot do, which is almost everything. I am even frustrated that I am not smart enough. I have had to go through life with a mediocre brain. How cruel. What would it like to see the world through a superior intelligence? Or, how cool would it be, just once, to be able to hit those notes Roy Orbison does? Or even a single note? My nephew taught himself to play guitar. He once tried to teach me to play the Kinks' You Really Got Me which, I think, is three chords. I couldn't even play the first chord right.

Alas, I am also useless at practical things, like changing tires. I once replaced a headlight and until I got to a garage I had a brilliant view of the power lines and treetops along the highway. Yes, I can write a little — only as a co-author — which is fun.

You are absolutely right, though, about how many people with nothing to be proud of are malignant narcissists. Writers and artists can be the worst at self-delusion and obnoxiousness. The internet is filled with self-publishers strutting about trying to impress one another. Not the friendly, communication-oriented self-publishing we have in fanzines but publishing designed for self-aggrandisement. In fact, most amateur publishing seems to be for ulterior, ego purposes. SF fanzines publishing is unusual. Mini-comics publishing was another rare place where the creators were involved mostly just for fun.

Then again, don't forget how much enjoyment SF readers have had from your publications over all these years. You certainly know how to do something!

(3 August 2011)

I would have to sell my house to be able to print *SFC*! No way could I publish a paper zine today.

I have to admit that I am a little disappointed by fandom's treatment of paper vs electronic zines. I realize that printing and mailing a paper zine involves much more effort and cost than sending a pdf file to Bill Burns, and so, in a way, it makes more sense that fans feel more obliged to repay the greater effort with a loc. However, that also puts pressure on fans, many of whom can't afford it, to strain to put out paper zines when that is absolutely unnecessary.

It almost seems that some fans who are well enough off financially to print their zines don't want to cede their 'advantage.' I think fandom would be a lot better if paper fanzines and electronic zines were treated equally so that participation would not depend partly on expenditure.

On the other hand, I don't know if you would prefer, or even want to publish an all electronic zine. But I gather you wouldn't mind cutting your expense to some extent.

(4 August 2011)

Feature letter

Mark Plummer remembers the Tucker Issue ... and that Tolkien movie

MARK PLUMMER
59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CRO 7ES, England

I've been meaning to write to you about *SFC*, ever since the first of the fortieth anniversary issues arrived. The first prompt was my embarrassment at seeing that No 80 featured letters from just about everybody in the SF fan community apart from me. I thought I'd better ensure I was present in your next letter column, or at least in the WAHFs, if I wasn't to lose whatever fan credibility I have. I maintained this resolve and even managed not to be bitter in the face of my subsequent discovery that I did so write a letter in response to the Tucker Issue even if it seemingly didn't even rate a mention alongside the 111 people you also heard from ...

(1 September 2011)

brg And, lo! it transpired that Mark Plummer did not appear in *SFC* 80 because the internet did not drop his letter of comment into my email letterbox. After we uncovered this fundamental fact, Mark sent me his email again ...*

That's a wonderful photo on page 5 of *SFC* 79. I've seen it before — there's a cropped version in *A Wealth of Fable* — but I still marvel at that incredible duplicator. Makes the old Gestetners we used to use, machines that were

already regarded as antiques, look like cutting-edge technology.

And I was also drawn to that painting on the wall behind Tucker on the left. Looked familiar: a magazine cover illustrating an ERB story, I thought. I looked it up in a few art books and found a copy: J Allen St. John's cover for *Amazing Stories*, August 1941, illustrating 'Yellow Men of Mars'. Fannish or what?

Anyway, after looking at the sci-fi pics in *SFC* 79, my first reaction was to dig out my copy of *SFC* 43, the original Tucker Issue. I hesitate to say this — I'm clearly still conscious of the apparently dismissive nature of my 'gosh, big, isn't it?' comment about *TMR* several years ago — but *SFC* has certainly come on in the last twenty-eight years. Which, I would stress, is not to say the it was ever bad but ... well, I just wonder what Tucker 3 is going to look like in, er, 2032. If I had one of those PDA things I'd make a diary note now to look out for it.

But all this inconsequential stuff is basically an attempt to disguise the fact that I don't know much about Tucker's fiction. I do have a copy of *The Lincoln Hunters*, a Reader's Union hardback edition that is currently in the loft and thus pretty much inaccessible. I remember finding it in a charity shop in the south London suburb of Beckenham back in early 1989: in a rundown building that was little more than a shed, tucked away at the end of an alleyway off the main road — the kind of shop you're unlikely to find unless you know it's there. But I found it, and its stock of mostly-Book-Club SF novels — the Tucker, John Brunner's *Timescoop*, Richard Cowper's *The Road to Corlay*, *A Wreath of Stars* by Bob Shaw, and Robert Silverberg's *Thorns* (not a Book Club edition, that, but the Rapp & Whiting UK hardback from 1969) — and I bought the lot, or at least those that weren't too ravaged by damp and other noxious diseases of the printed page, for a few pence each. Read most of them over the next few months too — this was back in the days when I was reading almost as quickly as I was buying — including the Tucker in July, just after finishing *The Eye of the Lens* by Lang Jones and as a warm-up for, um, Doc Smith's *Skylark Three*.

Before you become overwhelmed by the prodigious feat of memory that this implies, I will concede that — as you may suspect and as I may have previously told you — I keep lists too. But I did remember that Beckenham charity shop and buying the book without needing to refer to my notes, and I do remember reading *The Lincoln Hunters*. However, I don't actually remember a single thing about what went on between the covers, not even after reading your review as a memory jogger.

This is all rather embarrassing, although, if it's any consolation, I can't say I remember any more about *Skylark Three*, and I read that more recently, if only by 24 hours or thereabouts. But I think *SFC* 79 has convinced me that I need to properly look at Bob Tucker's fiction. I didn't realise he'd written so much, either, so I thank you for that, as do the secondhand booksellers at Eastercon, who will presumably benefit from this newfound enthusiasm.

We went to see the theatrical version of *The Return of the King*, the first theatrical release we'd seen since *The Two Towers* (it seems we don't get to the cinema much these days). Unlike you, I think it was worth it, although I'm not yet a convert to the extended DVD versions, or indeed DVDs at all. ('Get DVD player' is another item for the list of Things To Do This Year, Or Maybe Next ...) Yes, the wide-sweeping shots are wonderful and there are some really jaw-dropping images, but unlike you, I really like the battle scenes, despite the fact that in some respects they're the most badly done part of both the second and third films. It may seem ridiculous to denounce a fantasy film for its lack of realism, but there are several aspects of the battle sequences which are just plain wrong if you know anything at all about the mechanics of pre-gunpowder warfare.

I think Tony Keen has written something about this in *Cries Like a Very Tall Building*, often managing to deploy phrases that make it sound like he's channelling me (or maybe I've been channelling him) so I won't bang on about it here, but it does grate. However, I can forgive all the infelicities for the sight of the Rohirrim arriving on the Pellennor Field before Minas Tirith, something that left me thinking, christ, *that's* what a cavalry charge looks like ...

I tend to view the multiple endings of *RotK* as an acceptable compromise between what's acceptable in commercial cinematic terms and a true and faithfully on-screen rendition of the text. It seems to me that, had the former view held sway, the Battle of the Pellennor Fields would be conflated with the battle before the Black Gate, and run in parallel with Frodo's destruction of the ring, and then — as a kind of epilogue — there would be the coronation. End. It seems to me that that would make sense structurally on the screen, and if it's not like that in the book, well, the book's clearly wrong and what does this Tolkien guy know about it anyway? And can we get him to write *LOTR 4: The Return of Sauron*?

I can't really say whether you're right about the harbourside scene's incomprehensibility — I really do know the books too well to approach the films as a separate entity, and I'm sure that I fill in any gaps from memory — but I can see that, yes, you could lose it entirely and I suspect it's only included through the desire to retain *some* of the post-coronation events from the book. I have some sympathy with the view (Tony again, I think) that the latter sections have been cut too hard and that there is an important dimension to the book's 'Scouring of the Shire' scene that is lost: the sense that you can never go back, that the world really has changed, whereas the film leaves The Shire seemingly untouched by the epic events elsewhere. However, I can also see the drivers of commercial cinema are such that it had to go.

(somewhen in the mid 2000s)

Feature letters from Patrick McGuire

PATRICK McGUIRE
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Columbia, MD 21046, USA

Re *SFC* 81: I had thought that you and I had made contact only when I was in grad school. At least I have a memory of sitting in the dorm room of my first year of grad school (academic 1971–72) and reading a letter from you stating that a package of several fanzines you had sent me must have gone astray — incidentally, the only fanzine package from you to date ever lost in the mail. But obviously we must have been in some sort of touch before that memory, or you would not have sent the package. If you were reading Jerry Lapidus's *Tomorrow And* ... (p. 88) you may well have run across my name a few years before that, since my first piece for a fanzine appeared in *TA* in something like 1968 or 1969. As I vaguely recall, it was a parody of the movie *2001*, which film was released in 1968. (I imagine I still have the issue with that piece, although it would take considerable digging to find it.) I don't remember if I ever had anything else printed in the zine; I might have locced it, if nothing else. Jerry refounded the dormant University of Chicago Science Fiction Society, which was my route into fandom. Fairly soon afterward, he gafiated, whereas I have been chugging away at a low but relatively steady level of fanac for the last forty-plus years. I seem to recall that Jerry transferred away from UC and graduated from another school. I don't remember seeing an issue of *TA* while in grad school (September 1971 on), so evidently either his zine was a 'highlight of the fanzine scene of the early seventies' in the very early seventies, or I stopped receiving it while Jerry was still publishing.

I had thought I might be obliged to defend myself as one of the unspecified people George Zebrowski accuses of making an *ad hominem* attack on Stanislaw Lem (p. 85), but, on further examination, perhaps Zebrowski did not have me in mind. The only thing I said about Lem in the preceding *SFC* 80 was that, whatever Lem's personality defects, he wrote well, if not quite so well as Lem himself thought he did. Elsewhere, namely in *SET* 11, I did remark upon the things that Lem did to make himself unpopular in certain quarters (and popular in others, such as the USSR), but I did so only after presenting an evaluation in strictly literary terms. In general, I think that Lem, like Galileo and various other notables of intellectual history, suffered from personality defects that made it hard for many of his contemporaries to give his work an objective evaluation. Presumably, as with Galileo, with the passage of time it will become easier to separate the work from the personality. On a related matter, I would very much like to know more about the 'morons' and 'monkeys' identified by Zebrowski who collectively were capable of seeing that Lem was 'driven into silence', despite his high standing in many different countries that rarely see eye to eye on cultural issues (Poland, Germany, Russia, US, UK, etc.). Are these monkeys and morons perhaps all Freemasons or Illuminati united in a global conspiracy?

Steve Jeffery (p. 76) suggests that we will know in 50 or 100 years if some SF has 'literary merit' by seeing, in part, if such works are still on the library shelves. Apart from the technological side-issue (will there still be libraries? will they still have shelves with physical books?), I see a more straightforward problem here. Collections of Sherlock Holmes stories are still on the library shelves a century after the stories were written, but despite their staying power, I would guess that few adherents of High Literature would concede that they have any great literary merit. Then there are authors who are still reprinted after 50 or more years, but who frequently do not even get as far as the library shelves, such as Agatha Christie or Edgar Rice Burroughs. Or even Heinlein (who had written most of his classic work by 50 years ago) — my local public library system (which has won awards as one of the best in the country) has almost no Heinlein books. That library stocks a lot of contemporary SF, but seem not to see it as part of its mission to make any effort to retain in its holdings the classics of the genre (or, in analogous situations, classics of other genres). Nonetheless, I think that after the Sherlock Holmes books have survived for yet another hundred years (which they almost certainly will), and if the concept of High Literature also survives that long, then the guardians of High Literature will have to find some way of demonstrating that Conan Doyle was writing material of literary merit after all — or at least of some sort of merit giving it survival value. I suppose they could then argue that mere survival is not indicative of literary merit, but this would tend to contradict the Judgment of the Ages theory that often guides artistic evaluation. (Except when it doesn't — *Gilgamesh* is back in the canon, but had dropped out for millennia and needed to be dug up on clay tablets, and *Beowulf* and *The Lay of Igor's Campaign* were each found in a single manuscript copy, but were restored to the canon to fill in chronological gaps. The Judgment of the Ages had found none of them worth keeping in circulation, but this does not unduly disturb literary historians.)

Yvonne Rousseau advances (p. 75) the experiences of people who have undergone a sex change as evidence that social factors (rather than inherent differences) are sufficient to explain the small numbers of 'female geniuses'. I see various weaknesses in that line of argument, but I keep waffling as to whether the weaknesses invalidate the whole line of argument. I think I will merely say that Yvonne provides food for thought. Perhaps more reliably than with SF and High Literature, time should tell on the more general issue as to whether we see predominately an innate difference or a socially constructed one. Surely women in the West encounter fewer social obstacles today than previously, even if they are still at a disadvantage, so if the explanation is largely social, then the proportion of identifiable female geniuses should increase markedly. Researchers would face a messy measurement problem, both since it is not clear exactly

what we mean by 'genius' and since scholars are now trying harder to identify underrated female geniuses of the past and present, but eventually things should get clearer.

Leigh Edmonds (p. 68) comments on his Qantas breakfast. Probably part of the logic of the sliced apple was that it does not require a knife. Some people, including young children, can't or won't eat apples whole. A knife sturdy enough to easily handle an apple might represent a security concern in these sorry times. The airline could also save a little weight and a garbage problem by avoiding apple cores, and a flat bag of apple slices might fit into an airline-sized meal storage slot where a whole apple would be too tall. I had some difficulty identifying the other contents of the breakfast from the photo. I first thought the white plastic bottle must contain yogurt, but I eventually remembered that I had seen individual servings of Oz milk packaged in bottles like that, and with enough zoom I could indeed read 'Milk' on the bottle label. The thing in the handled cup seems to be a package of orange juice stored there for serving (although presumably the cup itself is for tea or coffee). I've had juice so packaged myself on airlines in this hemisphere. The flat thing in the middle front seems to be a pat of butter or margarine, but I see no breadstuffs in the photo. Is a roll hiding behind the apples? Will it be served separately, like the tea or coffee? Something, I think a small half-cheese with a rind, seems to be resting on the apple package. Could it instead be something in the bread family, so that the white 'rind' is really flour or powdered sugar? Or is it just an apple slice inside the bag, with reflection off the bag making the skin look white? Could the flat thing be something else entirely, not butter at all? It's labeled Eurpak. Wouldn't Qantas get its butter for domestic flights from Oz or NZ rather than Europe? Or is it packaged for sale mostly for sale in Europe, with Qantas as a minor customer? Perhaps I'll google 'Eurpak' when next on line. Under sufficient magnification, the round package on an onlooker's left in front proves to be labelled as fruit muesli, for which some of the milk is intended (the rest may be for tea).

I don't have anything to say about Colin Steele's short reviews, any more than I did about the short reviews in *SFC* 80A, so I jump all the way to the front. As I remarked in some past loc, I, like you, am not one of those people who enjoys being scared, and I've never seen the whole of *Alien* (p. 5), although I've watched bits and pieces when it was on TV. (At least I don't enjoy being scared in the way that horror films scare. I do mildly enjoy roller-coaster rides, not that I've been on one for years.) On the other hand, unlike you (pp. 5–6), I don't like being depressed. Or, at least, in the same way that the fans of horror films probably do not extract from such films the same emotions that I do (and therefore enjoy them), what I extract from 'pessimistic' 'worst-case' works of SF is a feeling of futility and depression. In discussing this, I am at a bit of a disadvantage in that, although you say that excessive optimism pervades SF, you bring forth as a specific example of 'great gassy hopefulness' the endings of two novels by Geoff Ryman, whose works I have not read. On a more theoretical level of worldview, I could also make arguments parallel to those in Tolkien's 'On Fairy Stories' that (some or most) humans have a wired-in intimation that the basic nature of reality is ultimately optimistic, although obviously we encounter a lot of the contrary on the way, and that, therefore, while a 'happy ending' may be unrealistic, or at least atypical, in the perspective of the here-and-now, it often feels artistically fitting because it points to the intuited true culmination of things outside of the here-and-now. But it is not obvious to what extent temperament follows from worldview and to what extent it's the other way around.

Even many fairy tales have unhappy endings, and some entire cultures seem to prefer that sort.

In a loc to **brg**s 67 and 68, I mentioned biographical parallels between American SF author Cordwainer Smith and Dutch historical–mystery author Robert van Gulik, and my realisation that they had lived in Chungking and later Washington at the same time during and immediately after World War II, and therefore almost certainly knew each other, if only slightly. I have since discovered that there is another link between van Gulik and SF — there is a Russian series of alternate-history mysteries that displays a strong van Gulik influence, to the point that one of the protagonists has a cat named Judge Dee, and the pseudonym of the author (in actuality, a collective) is based on van Gulik's name and the notional author has been given a 'cover' biography resembling van Gulik's. The pseudonym is 'Holm van Zaichik'. 'Holm' is a surname in several European countries, but not a first name. Even so, it evidently sounds like a Dutch first name to Russians, and also represents a nod to Sherlock Holmes. Zaichik sounds a bit like Gulik, and also probably represents a pun on 'Robert'. The latter sounds a bit like 'rabbit', which in Russian (with a diminutive ending) is *zaichik* (which could be variously spelled, depending on the transliteration system used).

The series itself is a bit like 'Judge Dee meets Lord Darcy', with added dashes of Sterling's *The Peshawar Lancers* and Turtledove and Dreyfuss's *The Two Georges*. In the thirteenth century, Alexander Nevsky, dealing from a stronger position than he had on our timeline, voluntarily merges the unconquered western part of Russia with the Tartar Golden Horde on an equal footing, and the combined state (Horde-Rus, eventually compressed to 'Ordus') later absorbs China, thereby reconstituting most of the original Mongol Empire. It becomes heavily Sinacised (whence my comparison with *The Peshawar Lancers*, where the ruling British have absorbed much of Indian culture). The Mongols/Tartars allowed the free practice of religion, and over the centuries this has extended into a general toleration of various ways of life within one empire, but at the time of the series (circa 2000 AD), Ordussian society remains more hierarchical than in our timeline's contemporary West (or, openly, contemporary Russia), a nostalgia for hierarchy the series shares with the Darcy stories, Lancers, and Georges, and of course with the historically set Dee books.

Except for a little woo-woo around the edges, the series is SF rather than fantasy (as far in it as I've read, anyhow), and centres on the investigations of two police detectives (or rather their nearest equivalents in Ordussian society). A total of nine novels were planned, but the series stalled out in 2005 with only seven completed. As far as I've gotten, the plots revolve around ancient artifacts and conspiracies against the Ordussian

state. It is probably more wish-fulfillment on the part of the authors than a realistic consideration of the possibilities to conclude that in the depicted society the Orthodox Church would condone polygamy — on our timeline, most Orthodox lived under Moslem domination for centuries without the Orthodox Church caving in on that point — much less that it would condone marriages agreed from the beginning to be temporary. (In the first book, one of the heroes, a devout Orthodox, contracts a three-month marriage with a number-two wife, a beautiful, adventurous French grad student who figures this will be a good way to experience Ordussian culture from the inside.)

The Russian series seems to be getting in digs at those parts of the former Soviet Union that had the temerity to declare independence. The collective authors seem insufficiently aware that Soviet, and earlier Imperial Russian, rule was singularly lacking in the degree of enlightenment shown by the Ordussian rulers. The authors are also rather overfond of infodumps, sometimes presented as footnotes, a form that Russian readers of fiction tolerate better than Angloponle readers do. But I still find it interesting enough to want to keep reading.

(8 July 2011)

PS: I just remembered to google 'Eurpak.' When I combined that with 'butter,' Google suggested I meant Lurpak, which on reexamination of the Edmonds photo turned out to be correct. Lurpak is a Danish company, and importing Danish butter to Australia still seems to me like coals to Newcastle. (New Zealand butter I could understand!) But I did find a site confirming that (1) Lurpak butter is for sale in Oz, and (2) it's imported from Denmark, not produced locally by a Danish-owned company. I find on the internet that Lurpak butter is marketed in the US too, but not something I would expect to see on a US-based airline, particularly on a domestic flight. (Leigh was flying Melbourne to Canberra.) We live in an odd world.

(9 July 2011)

After getting into a regular deskwork schedule, I let the regimen lapse for a while because of successive household repairs that had to be taken care of quickly, and because of some other time-consuming stuff going on more or less simultaneously. However, now I am going to make an effort toward restoring normalcy, at least by letter-writing as a gradual lead-in to resuming semi-scholarly writing. There are other things requiring more physical exertion that I could and perhaps should be doing, but the weather is too confounded hot. Even indoors with air conditioning, the outside heat exerts some sort of baleful effect that makes it hard to lay out much physical effort. I have been more or less keeping up my exercise program, by walking outside in the morning before it heats up too badly, or occasionally walking in an airconditioned shopping mall. Neither is an optimal solution — a morning walk does not mesh particularly well with my schedule or biorhythms, but I need to drive to get to the mall and hence I generally only do my walking there when I'm in the vicinity for another reason. In cooler weather I walk after lunch, when my brain is befogged anyhow and when, with luck, exercise may wake me up again.

Ah well, Northern Hemisphere autumn will be here in a couple of months, and in the meantime, even the summer weather is forecast to moderate a bit in a few days. I may at least get more indoor housekeeping done then. Later: and in fact, before I finished this oversized letter, the temperature was back to something more bearable, if still unpleasantly hot.

The most reportable thing that I have done recently is to buy a Kindle. You will recall that I already owned an obscure brand of e-book reader whose main virtue was that it would read Russian. I decided that the price had come down enough on Kindles to justify getting one of those as well, mostly for use with purchased digital rights managed (DRM) books as opposed to free non-DRM ones. (Even my old reader will handle purchased DRM-free books, but I had not actually bought any of those before the Kindle.) Ironically, Amazon effected another price drop only a few weeks after I bought the Kindle, but I suppose that is par for the course with new technology. Otherwise, I am pretty well pleased with the Kindle. It seems to be easier to read than my other e-reader, evidently because of a better anti-glare coating on the glass, a slightly larger screen, and a background (notional white) that is a slightly lighter shade of grey. The Kindle turns out to have much better capability than I had thought to display non-Amazon books, such as public domain ones from Gutenberg or promotional ones from the Baen Free Library. A lot of these freebies are now downloadable in Kindle-compatible formats, and there is also conversion software available free on the net to convert from one e-book format to another (admittedly this only works with non-DRM books). They can easily be moved from computer to Kindle via an included USB cord. (There is a proprietary plug on the Kindle end of the cord, so if the included cord ever gets damaged I will presumably have to buy another one from Amazon.)

It turns out that the latest model of Kindle on the US market even has some rudimentary capability with Cyrillic — it will display Cyrillic books, but I have not yet discovered any properly Kindle-formatted dictionaries available for them (so that one could, as with Western-alphabet languages, move the cursor to a word in a text and get a pop-up definition or translation), and there is no way to switch the Kindle keyboard to Cyrillic, so one can't use the Search function. (Well, no way that does not void the warranty. I discovered that amateur software is available online to supply a Cyrillic keyboard, but I'm not yet ready to use it and risk trashing my machine. Maybe I'll buy a second Kindle someday and will be willing to experiment on the spare.) My other e-book reader handles Cyrillic better, allows Russian dictionary use, will read more file formats without conversion, and in certain respects handles even English .pdf e-books better than does the Kindle, so it's not obsolete for my purposes, which is just as well, since I only bought it about ten months ago. It also has a built-in cover for the screen (to protect the glass). Kindle wants you to spend maybe thirty dollars on a separate case or cover. For now I'm just storing it in the box it came in.

Since I am still using dial-up, I bought the more expensive Kindle model with free 3G access (as with a smartphone). This turns out to connect me not only to Amazon to buy e-books, but to the general internet. The

tiny screen and lack of colour limit the utility of this option, but it works well, say, to look up a quick fact in the Wikipedia.

In poking around in the 'Kindle Store' (Amazon's inventory of Kindle e-books), I have been struck by the vast number of not-necessarily-professional works published either directly by the author or by tiny publishers that in many cases probably are just a front for the author. SF does not seem to be heavily represented here by anything other than obvious junk, as best I have been able to determine to date, but there seem to be a lot of low-end, pro-quality, and semiprofessional 'urban fantasy' (under its recent narrow definition), and also romance (including paranormal romance), thrillers, detective stories, female-oriented erotica, etc., plus a lot of semiprofessional reference works. Sayers's *Whose Body* is now in the public domain. I spent 99¢ on an annotated version of it, and found the annotations to be far from perfect but worth that much money. (This semipro publishing is not necessarily closely tied to Amazon. I recently poked around a bit on smashwords.com, one of the major outlets for non-DRM small-press e-books, and found actually a somewhat wider selection, including easier access than at the Kindle Store to promotional free e-books — often the first book in a series, or an attempt to interest customers in a given author, much like the free e-book offerings Baen has on their own website from fully pro SF/F authors.)

If, as some people claim, SF, or at least SF more serious than space opera or media tie-ins, is losing commercial viability, I suppose the genre might end up in same marketplace of electronic self-publishing or small publishers as are the largely semipro, predominantly female-audience offerings out there in cyberspace already. SF might even turn out to be fairly viable in that environment in an artistic sense, and might bring its more popular authors as much inflation-corrected income as the average pro SF writer managed during the Golden Age. (For that matter, I recently heard on the radio a news item that the most successful author of self-published romance e-books was making millions, although she had recently signed a contract with a conventional publisher so she could spend more time writing and less time formatting and marketing ... After writing that, I came upon another reference — the author in question is one Amanda Hocking, who has written paranormal romances among other things, and therefore has come pretty close to genre fantasy.)

Added later: While this loc was in progress, I poked around more in the Amazon Kindle Store and in smashwords.com. After downloading various partial samples and promotional complete free items, I found several authors in the cases of which I ended up paying money (paperback-book prices or less) to see the rest of a story, or to read other work by the same author. Often these works differed from the trends in big-league publishing, although I say that hesitantly, since I obviously haven't read close to everything issued by major publishers. Typically the proofreading (misspellings and incorrect or inconsistent capitalisations), and sometimes the formatting, were inferior to a print book but tolerable.

(In formatting, the biggest problem was incorrect indents, but also annoying were absent italics or quote marks.) I ended up enjoying several items well enough to read them a second time shortly after the first read. Onto my (already well overpopulated) to-do list goes the idea of writing an article on small-press or author-published SF marketed mostly or entirely in e-book format. Added even later: at that, the small-publisher reservoir may be shallow — additional days of poking around have turned up only one interesting small-press SF author beyond the ones I found in the first week, and she to date has written only one SF book.

Re *SFC* 82: I saw *The King's Speech* shortly before reading your remarks on it, when the long waiting list for a public-library DVD finally worked down to my name. I enjoyed it, but it didn't inspire personal reflections for me the way that it did for you, Bruce (p. 3), despite the fact that I suffer from the lack of most of the same skills and talents as you do. My rote memory is a bit better, I do have a small but finite singing ability, and I enjoy a tiny fiction track record — back in my twenties, when I was trying to write fiction, I made one pro sale and got 'almost-but-not-quite' letters from several pro editors on other manuscripts. On the other hand, I've never pubbed an ish, I've written far less SF criticism than you have, and I think your musical appreciation is deeper than mine, as demonstrated by the fact that you are willing to spend more time and money on music than I am. I just ran across in the library, and borrowed, the biography written by Logue's grandson in conjunction with the more narrowly focused film, but I haven't read it yet.

I enjoyed your fanzine reviews. I will certainly see if several of the ones mentioned are on eFanzines.com, and if they are not, I may write and request sample copies. I haven't done that in years, but as a retired person I now theoretically have more time (not that it doesn't seem to fill up quickly!). I've previously seen the Susan Wood photo you ran but whose source you could not recall (p. 6). Unfortunately, I can't remember where I saw it. Would Google Images be any help with that sort of identification? ... After writing that, I tried Images myself. By name, 'Susan Wood' mostly turned up pictures of some actress, and 'Susan Wood Glicksohn' got the right person but not the right photo. Google Images does have a new feature whereby you can drag-and-drop an image and it will search for similar ones, but one cannot capture an image from a .pdf file to drop it in the first place. You presumably have the Susan Wood image in other formats, so you might try that. I used to letterhack *Energumen* and Susan and I corresponded a little on the side, but I only met her in person briefly in passing at one or two cons. I knew nothing about her substance-abuse problems until a considerable time after her death.

You once again mention how impressed you were by *Arslan* (p. 10). A while back but within living memory, I followed up on some recommendation or other (possibly yours in *SET* 3, published in December 2001) and got the novel out of the library. I did read it to the end (I find via desktop word search that Cy Chauvin said in *SET* 4 that he had not managed even that) but I found the work implausible (not that the author was trying for naturalistic verisimilitude) and too much of a downer. Some people seemingly enjoy being frightened and others seemingly enjoy being depressed, but I generally fall into

neither camp. In *SET* 4, in reply to Cy, you claim that the novel is an exercise in irony, which if true would probably soften the impact of the violence and depressingness. If so, the irony seems to have gone over the heads of Cy and myself, not to mention Clute and Nicholls (per their joint annotation in the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, 1st edn). Clute's expanded solo entry on Engh in the second edition calls the novel 'subtle, seductive and very frightening', but still says nothing about irony. I can believe that I and even Cy are too literarily unsophisticated to apprehend the novel, but that seems less credible with Clute and Nicholls. It might in any case earn you scholarly glory, Bruce, if you wrote an essay convincingly demonstrating the irony. Later: I just reskimmed your article in *SET* 3, and you don't appear to have addressed the irony issue directly there, so a further essay seems called for. But skimming your *SET* 3 essay made it clear how much I have forgotten about the novel. Luckily, I rested most of the above comments on authorities other than myself.

I enjoyed Terence Green's memoir, but since this loc is already preposterously long, the only thing I will comment on is his mention of children's series books (p. 30). I thought he was wrong in including Rick Brant among the Stratemeyer books, since I seemed to remember reading a volume of the Brant series, owned by a childhood friend, that had a different physical format than I remembered from various Stratemeyer books. From there things got complicated. Further research (ah, the internet!) demonstrated that (1) I was right (at least Rick Brant is absent from the Stratemeyer series list in the *Wikipedia*), but (2) the book I remembered reading was not in fact a Rick Brant book at all, but a Rip Foster one, *Assignment in Space*, aka *Rip Foster Rides the Gray Planet*. This was set up to start a series, but it actually was the only Foster book published. Both the Brant books and the Foster one were written by the same person, Harold L. Goodwin, under the respective pseudonyms John Blaine and Blake Savage. I am still not sure why my memory associated the Rip Foster book with Rick Brant. The two series were written under different pseudonyms and issued by different publishers. Perhaps it was a matter of coming to a nearly right conclusion via a purely false association. I don't remember reading any of the real Rick Brant books. In the course of my research, I discovered that the Foster book now has something of a cult following from those who read it as kids, and is available from Gutenberg (the publisher bought all rights from Goodwin and evidently neglected to renew the copyright). I downloaded the novel but have not yet reread it. There is also a fan site devoted to Rick Brant on the internet.

I am unconvinced that you, Bruce, did the life of the mind any favour in placing Benford's pseudo-review of the imaginary *The Einstein Code* (p. 59) among the real reviews. You may end up confusing generations yet unborn, who will then curse your name. Also, upon research I found that the Benford piece had an uncredited earlier appearance, in *Challenger* for Winter 2004–05, and that there the pseudobook's publication date was given as 1 April 2004, clearly marking Benford's article as an April Fool's joke. You have unsportingly docked that date to just April. Even the month admittedly is still a clue of sorts, especially since the only books to actually list the publication month seem to have been not biographies, but those SF books that formerly included the month for easy bookkeeping on awards eligibility, and even that practice seem to have ceased, now that the rules have changed so that the publication year alone is sufficient information. But I missed that clue on first reading. Benford had me going for a paragraph or two, but by the end of his piece I didn't see any real point to the exercise. Not that it's easy to argue productively about what is or is not humorous, of course.

brg I confess that I published Greg Benford's piece without realising that it was a spoof review. I did not mention that it had first appeared in *Challenger* because I'm fairly sure Greg did not tell me.*

Cath Ortlieb, in a review originally published in 2008, calls Lukyanenko's *Night Watch* series a 'trilogy' (p. 62). Actually, the fourth volume, *The Last Watch*, came out in Russian in 2005 (and I think has since been translated into English, although I've only seen the original). Its final line (which in context more or less makes sense internally to the novel, as well as being addressed to readers) is something like, 'You didn't think this was really the last watch, did you?' And indeed, after a gap during which the author was writing other things, occasional excerpts from a new 'Watch' novel in progress started appearing in Lukyanenko's (Russian-language) blog in 2011. I'm not sure whether the title used in the blog, *The New Watch*, is intended for publication, or is just a throwaway working title.

(18 August 2011)

brg To finish this letter with a flourish, I offer the following footnote supplied by the omnipresent ...*

MARK PLUMMER

Re the Susan Wood photo on page 6 [and reprinted left], which is 'a portrait take by Jim Saklad, with Dick Eney's camera, printed by Eney, of me-on-Monday-at-the-Worldcon [Discon II, 1974], after wining a Hugo and liberating the pool at 6 a.m. and not sleeping for, it seemed, several weeks'. So wrote Susan in *Amor* 8, May 1975.

Feature letter:

Franz Rottensteiner looks behind the Stanislaw Lem mask

brg There might be some *SFC* readers who do not remember that for many years Franz Rottensteiner was Polish author Stanislaw Lem's agent in the West, and also his most tireless promoter. He translated quite a few of Lem's articles into English, several of them appearing in *SF Commentary* from 1969 to 1973. A few years before he died, Stanislaw Lem hired another agent in the West, dumping Franz Rottensteiner peremptorily although his efforts had given Lem a fame in English-speaking countries that could well have eluded him forever. After that, Franz admitted to discovering negative aspects of Lem's character and work that he had not previously acknowledged.

The following letter is in answer to George Zebrowski's recent advocacy of Lem's work in *Steam Engine Time* and *SF Commentary*.*

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
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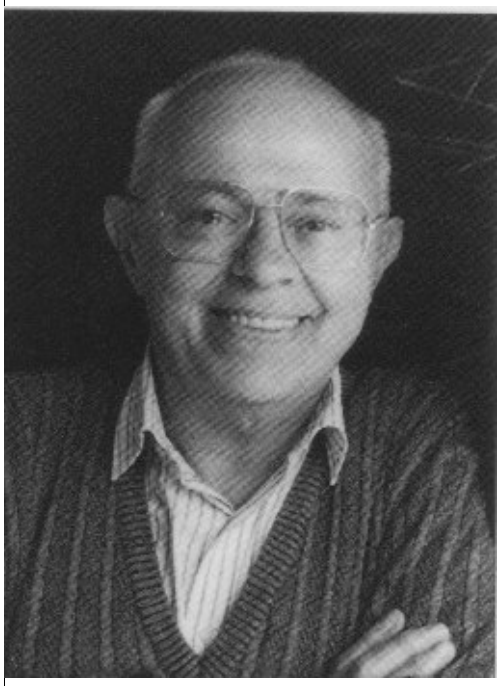
I am afraid that George Zebrowski feels like a Polish patriot, but he does know little of Stanislaw Lem, for instance, when he writes: 'Lem was driven into silence by the marching morons and their publishers' monkeys.' How so? Implicit in this statement is, among other things, that the American SF community is the navel of the world, and thus that he could be driven into silence by SF writers, fans, or publishers. Aside from a few letters in *SFC* and *SF Studies*, the only piece that Lem ever wrote specifically for the USA (but not specifically for an American audience) was the autobiographical piece that was commissioned by Gale Research for the first volume of their Authors' Autobiographical series. He wrote a huge two-volume study of SF, *Fantastyka i Futurologia* (of nearly a thousand pages), published in 1970, and all the things published in English are either preliminary pieces for those tomes, excerpts, or commentaries he wrote to books that he edited in Poland (*Roadside Picnic* by the Strugatskys or *Ubik* by Philip K. Dick). I drew his attention to writers like Dick, Cordwainer Smith, or J. G. Ballard. After that he read almost no science fiction, and wrote little about SF, except in a couple of paid reviews commissioned in Germany. He certainly didn't keep up with the development of SF: it didn't interest him, and he just made disparaging remarks about SF and SF writers in his many interviews (mostly in Germany). Nobody could have forced him into silence, for he certainly could have published anything he wanted in Germany or Poland. If he didn't continue with his criticism of SF, he did so out of arrogance and disinterest, not because he 'had been driven into silence'. His knowledge of SF stopped around 1970!



Stanislaw Lem (1921–2006). (Photo: Jerry Bauer.).

The greatest mistake of my life was that I wanted Lem to come to Austria when he decided to leave Poland after martial law had been declared on December 1981 in Poland. Lem liked to give in public the impression of a superior, wholly rational intellect. In fact, in one of the earliest German pieces on him in *Der Spiegel* he called himself a 'slave of logics'. But nothing could be further from the truth. He could be very charming and hospitable when he wanted to, but when I got to know him better as a person, I found a man full of prejudices, aversions, superficial judgments, anxieties; someone who was highly paranoid, childish in many of his judgments and decisions, someone who had never grown up, a person unsure of himself, compensating for this with fits of temper. And often he was a very vicious child. In fact, somebody I would never have wanted to have contact with, if he hadn't been a writer of some importance. His idea of negotiations was that he started by throwing a tantrum that he was being cheated or about to be cheated, and only gradually he would grow calmer. But if spoken against he would escalate into the most absurd arguments — and not only one time, but again and again, and bring up the same subject obsessively next time. His favourite saying was '*amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*' (an excellent pretext when he wanted to say something nasty about somebody), and I should have been warned that somebody who so stresses his own commitment to truth is a con man who wants to take you for a sucker. Lem's achievements were formidable, but he was never satisfied with them, and wanted to appear more

than he was, and in many respects he was a swindler. It is interesting in this regard that he criticised Anthony Boucher's 'A Quest for Saint Aquin', in which the esteemed saint turned out to be a robot, for the fact that he lived a lie: he pretended to be a human being, and that was a lie. In the same sense it can be said that Lem was living a lie: politically and scientifically. For instance, he liked to claim that the could talk for half an hour with a scientist in any field, before that scientist noted that he was not talking with a colleague: the achievement of a trickster. I think that was to some degree due to the fact that he was socialised in a Communist system that he hated. He made no bones about his hate in private letters or conversation, but when asked abroad about it he always made elegant evasions; he never committed himself. He said that he was writing letters of protest to the Polish authorities, but that was just an alibi action, for he must have known that as long as he didn't go public, his letters would just be filed away and ignored. (But in any case it was more of a risk to protest against the political powers in a Communist system than to attack a couple of SF writers — or the structuralists, to whom he felt equally superior.) He used to say that he had no intention of becoming a martyr. But in any case, Poland wasn't the Soviet Union; the situation of the Strugatskys, for instance, was much more difficult than Lem's ever was, who was pretty unassailable because of his international standing. He also often said that there were no genuine communists in Poland, only a lot of opportunists pretending to be communists. It is no chance that the most prominent symbol in Lem's fiction, as Rafail Nudelman has noted, is the mask, and his work is full of camouflage, disguises, cyphers, and codes.

As far as *ad hominem* arguments are concerned, I can give a few interesting examples that show Lem's prejudices:

After I had translated Lem's essay for Gale, I sold it to *The New Yorker*, where it appeared as 'Chance and Order'. After that publication Ursula K. Le Guin wrote Lem a letter in which she expressed her worries that it would contribute to cementing prejudices against SF in intellectual circles. (It didn't; as far as I can tell, it had no effect at all.) She also apparently complained that he didn't mention her as an exception to the dreary state of SF. Lem replied, he said, that this was a piece about his development as a writer, and that she had played no part in that. So far, so reasonable. But that was just the starting point for Lem, for when he had told me that, he continued with a harangue that women (all of them) had second-rate imaginations and that they could never equal the achievement of male writers! That apparently was so important to him that he wanted it transmitted to posterity (which I am doing herewith).

Lem and women are a special case. As far as sex was concerned, he was an incurable philistine. Occasionally he wrote of visits to sex shops: he described them in terms of expeditions of a representative of the realm 'higher culture' to the low realms, purely out of scientific curiosity, never because of prurient interest.

A German who described him as a 'misogynist' he called a 'liar'. But there is a passage in *Peace on Earth* where he makes a crack that the representatives of 'women's libs' have become this because they are so ugly. And in *Fiasco* there is a passage (not connected in any way with the theme or plot), deleted in the English versions at the insistence of Harcourt's editor, where Lem says that women, as child-bearing vessels, have no place in space travel, going well back behind John W. Campbell Jr., who allowed women at least as relaxation for the good, clean boys. It is also typical that the only two 'women' of any importance in his fiction are a robot (in 'The Mask') and a simulacrum (in *Solaris*). The latter novel, commonly interpreted as a romantic love story of 'they couldn't get together' is really an elaborate vehicle to eliminate women: Rheya (Harey) is a creature patterned by Kris Kelvin's unconsciousness, i.e. a creature made the way he imagines the dead woman to have been, but not the Rheya/Harey she was as an authentic, independent human being.

Another example, not connected with SF, is to my mind an indication of *ad hominem* arguing — and intellectual dishonesty.

In a German magazine a number of people were asked what their reaction would be if they knew that they were to die soon. Would they feast and make merry to get the best out of the rest of their lives? I think that such a question makes little sense, for the answer would be very different if you were to die alone, or if a group of people or whole mankind were condemned to die; if you were dying of a terminal illness or were to be executed; if you had a family or other dear persons dear to you, or were an isolated individual. Among the people asked were Lem and the philosopher Paul Feyerabend. Lem said that Feyerabend had no moral right to answer such a question since Paul Feyerabend had been a lieutenant in the German Army (and made no bones about the fact that as a young man even considered joining the SS), whereas he, Lem, had sometimes visited the Jews in the ghetto of Lemberg and therefore had had personal experience (and by implication, the moral right on his side). He said the Jews in the ghetto knew that they were going to die, and they knew how they would die, only not when, and their only worry was about the fate of their children, whom they wanted to save. It is true that after the occupation of Lemberg the Germans rounded up the university professors and other representatives of the intelligentsia (including many relatives of Lem) and shot them, and that the extermination of the Jews would not have been possible without the military victories of the Wehrmacht.

But it should be noted that Lem survived, with forged papers, the war as an employee of the Wehrmacht. He said as much in his autobiographical essay, and he once remarked to me that even he might be accused of having been a collaborator, since he was engaged, in the 'Beutepark der Deutschen Luftwaffe', with repairing captured trucks and cars. Collaboration is not the point here, but something else is. As you can read in Simon Wiesenthal, working for the German Army offered a certain protection, since not all German soldiers were Nazis, and the Wehrmacht often wasn't interested in looking too closely at the papers of its employees. Thus Lem may owe his own survival to the same Wehrmacht in which Feyerabend served and which disqualified him, in Lem's opinion, to take part in such a discussion. This is arguing ad hominem and intellectually dishonest.

On another occasion he claimed that because his

relatives had been murdered by the Germans in the war, a German editor had no right to reject an essay commissioned by them. He had been invited to write a piece on AIDS. At first he didn't want to do it. I was to write that piece for him along clues provided by him, but then he wrote it in a hurry himself, and was mightily proud that it was so 'scientific'. This scientific correctness was no great virtue, since a physician working on AIDS working for the UN was a Lem fan and supplied him with lots of material on AIDS. But the editor had wanted imagination, not scientific facts (for the fee offered, any Nobel Prize laureate in theoretical biology or physician with practical experience treating AIDS patients would have gladly dictated such a piece). Aside from that, he didn't understand what 'double-spaced' meant and his piece was much too long. At the time he also castigated SF authors that they showed no interest in this 'grave and terribly important' problem — but aside from that piece, Lem also never wrote about AIDS, as far as I know. (At one earlier occasion he had formulated his own thoughts on AIDS, which were very curious; and apparently it satisfied him enormously that the infection was connected with sexuality.)

His statements got really ridiculous, when he, for instance, denied Gregory Benford, a physicist by profession, the competence to write about matters of space.

Lem claimed that he read only the best, Nobel Prize winners and books of this calibre, and *Scientific American*, whereas SF authors, in his opinion used *Scientific American* only to wipe their asses with. In his arrogance he was lamentably out of touch with real science. He thought only in terms of books. But by the time scientists get a Nobel Prize, they may well be beyond their creative phase, and it takes some time before the newest science gets into books. Einstein's books have no bearing on his reputation as a scientist! And there are many SF writers who can read and do read genuine scientific papers and not just popular simplifications. His feelings of superiority had often very little relationship with the true nature of things.

(17 June 2011)

Feature letters

from Patrick McGuire, Yvonne Rousseau, Murray MacLachlan, and Mark Plummer

Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear*: The debate continues

Patrick McGuire

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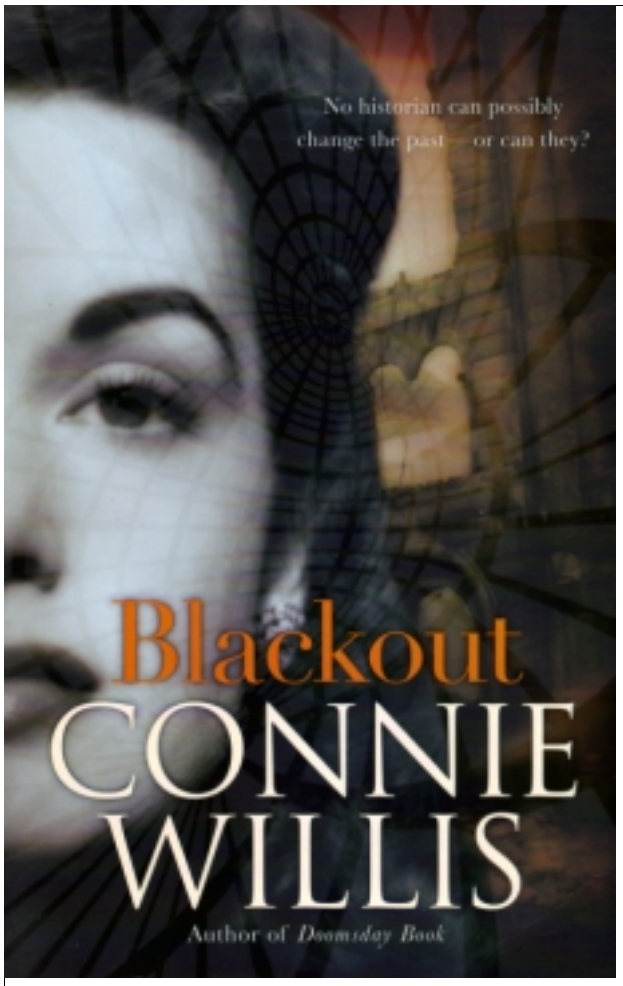
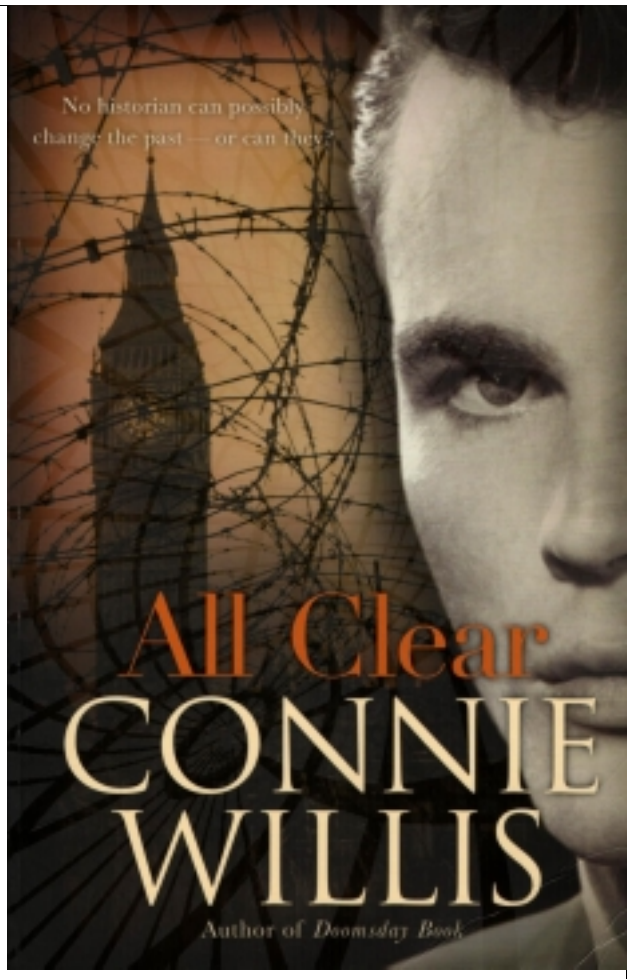
Just as expected, I enjoyed Yvonne Rousseau's essay in *SFC* 82 on Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear*. (I should confess that my wording in this section on has been slightly modified to take account of Yvonne's offline response to an earlier draft of these comments.) I sent you, Bruce, my independent reaction to the novel in my last loc, so you can see that we were similarly dissatisfied by Willis's near-overt use of Divine Providence to generate a fairly happy ending. I definitely would have preferred a more ingeniously ambiguous means of getting to the ending. However, I don't think that this reliance on coincidence or Providence expels the novel from the SF genre altogether, as Yvonne contends (p. 27), any more than does the famous listing of navigational dumb luck that provides a happy ending in Heinlein's *Orphans of the Sky*. It's just a flaw that likely will lower the reader's estimate of the work in question. No one (that I know of) claims that the many nineteenth-century mainstream English novels whose plots rely on Providence or coincidence thereby turn into fables or fantasies, even if we think the less of their artistic worth because of it.

I would not have had the patience to give the combined novel as close a reading as Yvonne did, and I missed most of the other points she mentions. Contributing causes to my lack of patience include the facts that, as I previously mentioned, the novel is about four times as long as one would expect for the amount of plot it contains, which made me lose interest in places and skim, and my gradually increasing dissatisfaction with the fact that a lot of the padding seems to consist of demonstrations that British civilians were heroic under German bombing, while completely ignoring the fact that the German and Japanese populations, although supporting a patently evil cause, behaved (as best I can determine) at least equally heroically under even more horrific British and American bombing. Physical courage is all very well, even indispensable, but moral courage is the real issue. The British did display a great deal of that too, although not always and everywhere, but moral courage





(on larger issues than helping out one's fellow sufferers without heed to danger or material cost) is not what Willis shows us, except incidentally.

It just struck me that even *The King's Speech* may display more insight than Willis seems to provide into the true roots of British victory in World War II, even if we confine ourselves to the level of why Divine Providence might be on the British side, or, more properly put, the British might be said to have finally placed themselves on God's side, in belatedly standing up to Hitler's aggression. The only significant SF about Axis victims of Allied bombing that I can think of is *Slaughterhouse Five*, which expounds a worldview diametrically opposed to Willis's. I don't really expect that Willis the Anglophone will be inclined to perform the research necessary to write a novel about the German or Japanese civilian experience and the moral issues and seeming paradoxes contained therein, but it would be a good thing if she did, or if someone of a similar philosophy of life undertook the task.

But I digress. Some of the points identified by Yvonne in her assiduous close reading show Willis to have been playing with the significance of details on a micro if not nano level that we, within SF, would expect only from Gene Wolfe. I croggle. This ability to play on the Wolfe nanoscale once again demonstrates Willis's versatility.

On incorrect Briticisms: My impression is that in the case of major US authors, the UK editor gets involved in the manuscript-preparation process at a fairly early stage. If that was the case here, one wonders why the British editorial staff did not intervene to correct such problems. Or perhaps Willis did have her British editors, or beta-readers fluent in Britspeak, go through the manuscript, and the errors that Yvonne points out are merely the ones that survived undetected — like the typos that, despite repeated proofreadings by multiple proofreaders, inevitably show up only after a work is in print.

Patrick O'Brian inserted a note in one Aubrey Maturin novel defending himself against an accusation of anachronism in a previous novel by saying that it was not at all unlikely that the term 'Cologne water' had been in use a few years before the earliest record that had come to the notice of the lexicographers. I thought it plausible that the same was true of 'disinformation', which Willis has downtimers using in 1944, years before the 1955 citation Yvonne found (p. 20). But we now have at our disposal online resources such as Google Book. I first searched there on the years 1940 to 1944 and found several hits, including one in Hasjurgen Koehler, *Inside the Gestapo*, Pallas Publishing Ltd., 1940, and one from a 1941 report issued by the US Congress that Google for some reason titles simply 'Congressional edition'. Encouraged, I searched on earlier years, then still earlier, then still earlier yet. I think the earliest hits I found, from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, might be OCR errors, but there seem to be many pre-1940 valid-looking hits, including one from the Australian Parliament from 1928 and one from the British Parliament in 1901.

Moreover, I had always, perhaps mistakenly in light of

this early English usage, taken 'disinformation' to be a borrowing from Russian *dezinformatsiya*, and if so it seemed perfectly plausible that the term might have been in use in British intelligence and strategic-deception circles (where Willis depicts its employment) long before it came to the attention of the general public. I think that for Russian, Google Books has OCRed only the relatively few Russian books held by participating American libraries, but even so, I found hits on *dezinformatsiya* going back to 1920, and a stray hit on the same Cyrillic word in Bulgarian from 1907. The 1940 citation in the book on the Gestapo suggested the word was also in use in Germany. I found from my big bilingual dictionary that 'disinformation' is *Desinformation* in German. (I soon also discovered that there is an identical word in French that I assume means the same thing, although French abounds in false cognates, so I wouldn't bet the farm on it.) There are umpteen pre-1940 hits in Google Book for that word in German (and, without the initial capital that German puts on all nouns, in French), making it perfectly plausible that 'disinformation' could have become British professional jargon by WWII even if there had been no previous English usage. So Willis delivers a crushing blow to Rousseau on that word. O irony, since Yvonne reproaches Willis's character Colin for failing to make use of the internet (p. 26).

Yvonne responded to me that even if the word could have been used that early, it will still sound like an anachronism to the reader, which is the important thing. Fiction is not allowed to be as strange as truth. I once heard an author of medieval mysteries, I think Sharan Newman, say on a panel at a mystery convention, that her editor had made her take out the expression 'I don't give a rat's ass.' She protested that this idiom did indeed exist word-for-word in medieval French, but the editor responded that it didn't matter; it still sounded too modern. So is 'disinformation' like Newman's 'rat's ass'? It's a judgment call. The usage didn't bother me, but I am only one reader.

Digressive rant by me: in any case, the historical errors that Willis does make are on a scale far smaller than those one encounters in a lot of historical novels these days. One boner I am increasingly noting in such works is projection backward in time of the use of the enclitic objective-case form '(with) he and I'. This barbarism became acceptable American standard usage — God help us — somewhere around 2000, but novelists depict it as standard in the early twentieth century and before. I recall that in some novel, I think *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Heinlein has a character to use this form because Heinlein wants to demonstrate the character's low level of education combined with his desire to project a cultured image. That subtlety is presumably now lost on the degenerate younger generation. Also, 'siblings' was used only by anthropologists until maybe the 1980s (I'm guessing without checking online), but I see it now appearing in historical novels where in context it should be 'brothers and sisters'.

Another possible example of critical excess on Yvonne's part: Surely Connie Willis has read Dorothy Sayers and has learned from her, if from nowhere else, of the intricacies of 'Lady Caroline' versus 'Lady Denewell' (p. 21). As Yvonne herself admits after three paragraphs of reproach, Lady Caroline may have become Lady Denwell only shortly before the 1944 scene. Then only the vicar's reference has to be explained away. I am assuming, without going back and checking, that the vicar had known the woman as Lady Caroline for years, so the clergyman may simply have slipped. This is my preferred interpretation, since it preserves Yvonne's theory that Willis is holding back for a later revelation the fact that Lady Caroline and Lady Denewell are the same person. The final possibilities, as I see them, are that Willis herself slipped because of a momentary lapse, not out of ignorance, or that she deliberately cheated, using the wrong title in order to hold back the information. I'm not sure what Willis's record is on taking deliberate liberties of this latter sort, but, as we are about to discusss, I think that facts adduced by Yvonne constitute fairly convincing evidence that Willis took liberties with the title of one mystery novel, and if Willis could bend the truth about a book title, perhaps she could do the same about an aristocrat's title.

My bet would be that Willis knew she was using the wrong title for *Murder on the Orient Express* (p. 21), but thought she could get away with the onetime American title as artistic licence. (Nowadays *Murder on the Orient Express* is also the American title, and only one of my three mystery reference books, all edited by Americans, even mentions the original US title, *Murder in the Calais Coach*.) This is the sort of liberty that historical novelists often confess to in afterwords, and I would have preferred to see that done here if it applies. I had originally raised the possibility that the reference was to a particular copy of the American edition that had found its way to the UK, but Yvonne cited to me offline additional evidence that this cannot be the case. The remaining possibilities seem to be that an edition under the title *Murder in the Calais Coach* was once widely available in the UK, even though standard reference works fail to mention it; that for some reason Willis mistakenly thought such an edition had circulated in Britain; or that it 's a deliberate artistic liberty. If the last, I strongly deplore the absence of an afterword with a confession.

Regarding another mystery novel, Yvonne states that *The Dawson Pedigree* is the American title of Dorothy L. Sayers's *Unnatural Death* (p. 21). DeAndrea's *Encyclopedia Mysteriosa* claims *Dawson* is the British title, and the other is the American. Yvonne appears to be correct — examining my bookshelves, I find *Unnatural Death* in a New English Library listing of Sayers titles, and *Dawson* in a corresponding US Harcourt Brace Jovanovich listing. But some title variation may have confused DeAndrea, and DeAndrea could have confused Willis. And in fact, a 1986 US Perennial Library edition of another Sayers book lists *Unnatural Death*, not *Dawson*, among the Sayers titles. Sorting this out with help from the internet is left as an exercise for the reader. Moreover, who knows, time-traveller Merope may have read an American edition in her homewhen, or the British publisher may have shifted to the American title by that time, for instance to avoid confusion with a by-then-well-known later novel also titled *Unnatural Death*. Merope's usage is scarcely, as Yvonne charges, 'inexplicabl[e]'. It is at most unexplained.

I agree with Yvonne that we could really use more of an explanation of why Oxford has a time travel monopoly (p.

21). It seems to be clear after all these years of writing, however, that Willis does not intend to give us one, perhaps because she can't think of anything convincing, and that we are supposed to simply accept the monopoly and get on with the story. The bungling donnish inefficiency (p. 23) may in part reflect a genuine part of the British reality, at least one within my and Willis's experience from the late twentieth century, if not necessarily one representative even of the early twenty-first century, much less of 2060. (I had originally listed 200 words of examples of onetime British inefficiency here, but I delete them to spare the reader. None of them was 'donnish,' just a matter of my experience as a visitor to UK on business or pleasure, and in fact at the time I attributed some of them to the fact that UK sales clerks and such often had, at least in those days, less education than their American counterparts.) But beyond the reality, I think that Willis exaggerates the bungling for comic effect, and expects to get a 'humour' exception from the obligation for verisimilitude.

From very early in the Oxford time travel books, Willis has made changes in the background ('retcons' in the comic-book term that is starting to find circulation also in SF circles). As I said in a loc to another fanzine in 2000 (the joys of desktop word-search again), 'in some Connie Willis story, I think "Fire Watch", there is a brief allusion to the events that become *The Doomsday Book*, but the details are incompatible with the novel.' I presume that what happened was that Willis went back to a tossed-off idea and started expanding it into a novel, but decided she wanted to change some aspects. (Heinlein, an acknowledged influence on Willis, famously did the same thing when he expanded an incident described briefly in Space Cadet into 'The Long Watch'.) I think that the moving of the date of the nuking of London from 2007 to 2015 (p. 20) is another retcon, probably performed so that the reader may imagine *Blackout/All Clear* to be set in our own universe, not in an alternate that branched off in 2007 or earlier. The 2007 date, like the details inconsistent with *The Doomsday Book*, are from 'Fire Watch'. If we could solve everything by simply declaring 'Fire Watch' to be uncanonical, I would be in favour of that solution. (I once interpreted an ambiguous remark by Boris Strugatsky to decree something similar for one particular story vis à vis the Strugatsky future history.) However, Yvonne adduces other inconsistencies (pp. 20–1) to either deliberate retcons or simple continuity errors. I agree with Yvonne that these assume greater importance once Willis has also challenged the premises of the previous Oxford stories by raising the possibility of changes in the temporal continuum. Since the retcons and continuity mistakes were already out there in earlier works for the reader to see, perhaps Willis should have had second thoughts about raising the within-the-story possibility of continuum changes in the first place. I think *Blackout/All Clear* could have been written successfully with a slightly different driver for the plot. The main thing Willis needs is a set-up of downtimers going about their lives with matter-of-fact heroism, while time travellers react to the situation more like we ourselves might.

Of course, I think, without having performed Yvonne's close reading, that by the end we are in reality back to a single unchanging timeline, one which from the very metatemporal beginning has included a loop to ensure Allied victory in World War II, and that all the timeline changes that the travellers thought they were seeing were the result of incorrect records in their homewhen or simply of their own unsupported fears. A metatemporally permanent time loop would be much like the situation we see by the end in Heinlein's 'By His Bootstraps' or 'All You Zombies'. But even if there have been no continuum changes in reality, the reader has been confused along the way by the author's unintentional inconsistencies that might seem to point to timeline changes.

I am not sure to what degree Willis and/or her unconscious creative muse intended it, but some of these points become richer when seen in the context of Christianity. (In other contexts, Yvonne herself discusses some aspects of the Christian references in the novel, and even provides an appropriate quote from Ephesians, p. 27, and she adduced additional examples to me offline.) The reverse causality of a time loop resembles the concept of predictive prophecy and prefigurement in Judeo–Christianity. This seems to me to be particularly clear in Catholic theology, where, for instance, the Eucharist performed at the Last Supper atemporally derives from the Crucifixion, or the Virgin Mary's freedom from Original Sin atemporally derives from that same salvific event. However, reverse causality also may figure in the Protestant theology that Willis, as a Congregationalist, presumably adheres to, for example in the way that predictive prophecies sometimes help to bring about the thing prophesied.

Also, the idea that 'all of it, every moment, in us, [is] saved for ever' in memory ('Fire Watch,' quoted by Yvonne on p. 27) seems to have its significance reinforced if looked at from a Christian perspective. Compare Tolkien's 'Leaf by Niggle', in which the artist Niggle is unable to complete most of what he wanted to create, both because of conflicting duties and because of his own faults, and where most of what art he does finish soon ends up being destroyed. But when Niggle gets to Heaven, he finds that it all has been preserved, improved, and expanded in God's sight and mind, and it is there waiting for him and everyone else to enjoy. Similarly, Polly's lost friends, and London's lost St Paul's, are really preserved not merely in Polly's and Dunworthy's memories, and not merely even in their metatemporally permanent place on the timeline, but, more importantly, in God's mind, and these lost people and things will be returned to them in the new Heaven and new Earth. Willis is more sparing even than Gene Wolfe in the amount of Christianity she chooses to expose on the surface of her SF, but one generally does not have to dig very far to find it.

(18 August 2011)

Yvonne Rousseau replies

YVONNE ROUSSEAU
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Dear Patrick,

Thank you for letting me see your comments to Bruce Gillespie about my review of Connie Willis, *Blackout/All Clear* in *SF Commentary* 82. As in the days of *Australian*

Science Fiction Review (2nd series), I always enjoy hearing from you!

I do agree with you that in World War II 'the British civilians were only as brave and enduring as were the German and Japanese civilians'. I wonder whether you have read Nicholson Baker, *Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2008), where Baker documents (pp. 5–6) the reason why famine persisted among German civilians after World War I had ended:

> Winston Churchill, now England's secretary of state for war and air, rose in Parliament to talk about the success of the naval blockade. It was March 3, 1919, four months after the signing of the armistice that ended the Great War. 'We are enforcing the blockade with rigour,' Churchill said. 'It is repugnant to the British nation to use this weapon of starvation, which falls mainly on the women and children, upon the old and the weak and the poor, after all the fighting has stopped, one moment longer than is necessary to secure the just terms for which we have fought.' Hunger and malnutrition, the secretary of war and air observed, had brought German national life to a state of near collapse. 'Now is therefore the time to settle,' he said.

Yvonne Rousseau, 2003.

I also agree that nobody is likely to claim 'that the many nineteenth-century mainstream English novels whose plots rely on Providence/coincidence thereby turn into fables or fantasies'. However, Connie Willis wrote *Blackout/All Clear* in the twenty-first century, and created future twenty-first-century characters who share in the SF time-travel genre's interest in the possibility of creating alternative universes and who attempt to act as their own 'time police', preventing time paradoxes. In this context, I do think that the unmasking of chaos theory as Divine Providence involves a change of genre — where this particular book becomes an enjoyable 'fairytale love story'.

Meanwhile, your quoting of Patrick O'Brian's self-defence against 'an accusation of anachronism' is very useful: 'that it was not at all unlikely that the term "Cologne water" had been in use a few years before the earliest record that had come to the notice of the lexicographers.' I must admit that I relied on lexicographers to have sifted out the first use of 'disinformation' — and am therefore greatly surprised that you found earlier usages on 'Google Book'. But, of course (self-defence), I was positing a reader who relied (like me) on lexicographers when I suggested that, in a different style of interpretation, 'a reader might cry: "Ha! He's one of those historians from the 21st century!" — since etymologists place the first use of this word in 1955'.

You say that 'Surely Connie Willis has read Dorothy Sayers and has learned from her, if from nowhere else, of the intricacies of "Lady Caroline" versus "Lady Denewell"'. The novels of Dorothy L. Sayers do provide such fascinating information as that the commoner Harriet Vane becomes 'Lady Peter Wimsey' when she marries the younger brother of the 16th Duke of Denver. Nevertheless, although Sayers and some friends entertained themselves by inventing and documenting the Wimsey ancestry and heraldry, they did not claim to instruct their readers in all the complications of the Peerage. Illustrating this, C. W. Scott Giles, *The Wimsey Family* (1977), mentions that after Sayers' death, 'Mr Valentine Heywood, author of British Titles, drew attention to the apparent discrepancy that the 16th Duke was described as "a peer of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland", and so created after 2 July 1800, while the history showed that he came of a line of dukes, formerly earls, going back to the fifteenth century and properly described as "peers of England"'.

Taking up my suggestion that Lord Denewell might not have inherited 'his title until very late in their marriage', you suggest that when the local vicar uses the wrong title after Lord Denewell's death, 'the vicar had known the woman as Lady Caroline for years, so the clergyman may simply have slipped'. Against this, I argue that Anglican vicars of that era were very punctilious about using the correct titles for their parishioners — and that the vicar was not engaged in mere conversation but was writing a letter announcing to Merope the death of Lady Denewell's son (AC 114). However, I feel that only Willis herself can know whether (as I suggested) she used incompatible titles for the same woman 'merely to surprise readers by the change in the lady's character brought about by the salutary wartime loss of both husband and son within less than a fortnight'.

Like you, I considered it plausible that the title of

Murder in the Calais Coach (the American title for Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*) might have appeared 'on a particular physical copy' because 'a few copies of the American edition could have passed hand-to-hand in Britain, or could have shown up in British used bookstores'. However, when Michael hints to some ladies that the name of one of Agatha Christie's novels might contain a clue about Britain's secret plans, he obviously intends an allusion to the generally available title, since he recommends that all of Christie's books should temporarily be taken 'off the shelves' or 'have their titles painted over' (AC 98). When a 'horsy woman' deciphers Michael's riddle, she tells her friend Mrs Wembley (AC 99), 'It's set on a train, dear' — whereupon Mrs Wembley identifies it as 'the one where everyone did it'. But Mrs Wembley and her friends would have read it under the title *Murder on the Orient Express*: not the title that the horsy woman teasingly begins to recommend to Mrs Wembley's husband: 'you must read *Murder in the Ca*—'

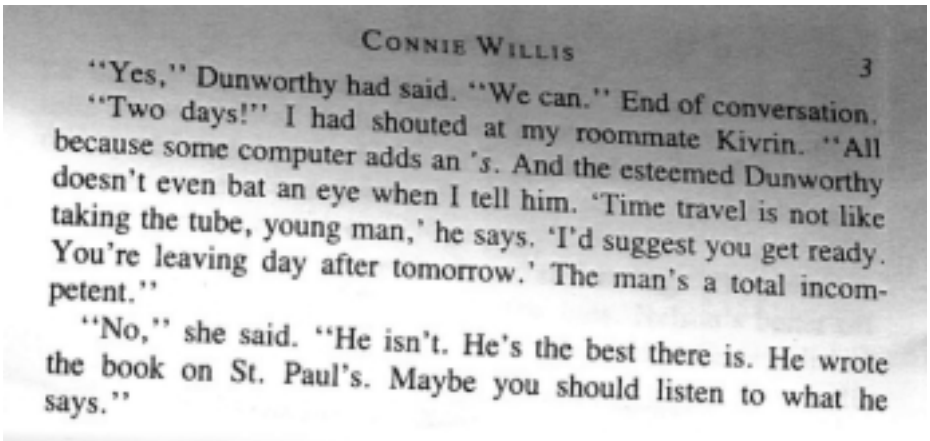
Meanwhile, how extraordinary that you found DeAndrea's *Encyclopedia Mysteriosa* wrongly identifying *Unnatural Death* as the American title of the novel by Dorothy L. Sayers, and claiming that *The Dawson Pedigree* was its original British title! You suggest that when Merope gives the American title: 'who knows, time-traveller Merope may have read an American edition in her home'. This is certainly not the explanation, however, for her use of the wrong title by Agatha Christie. Instead, she is delighted (AC 53) that the Holborn librarian 'had heaps of Agatha Christies. "Look," she said excitedly when they reached the emergency staircase, showing Polly a paperback book. "*Murder in the Calais Coach*!"'

I agree with you that Willis exaggerates British 'bungling for comic effect, and expects to get a "humour" exception from the obligation for verisimilitude'. I also agree 'that the moving of the date of the nuking of London from 2007 to 2015 is another retcon, probably performed so that the reader may imagine *Blackout/All Clear* to be set in our own universe, not in an alternate that branched off in 2007 or earlier'. In my review, I noted that 'In the course of her writing, Willis has obviously changed her mind about several aspects of 21st-century time travel'. About the consequent discrepancies, you say: 'I agree with Yvonne that these assume greater importance once Willis has also challenged the premises of the previous Oxford stories by raising the possibility of changes in the temporal continuum.' You make some interesting suggestions about Willis's options here — whereas I mentioned the discrepancies simply because they are part of the record, not because I could see any way to integrate them successfully.

Finally, I am very interested in your idea that 'some of this temporal business becomes richer when seen in the context of Christianity' — where it allies itself with 'predictive prophecy and prefiguration'. As a Low-Church Anglican atheist (different from a lapsed Roman Catholic or from an atheist brought up in freedom from Christian indoctrination), I noted in my review my feeling that 'Merope and her colleagues appear to have been obeying the apostle St Paul's instruction to the Ephesians (in its King James Bible translation): "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,/Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Having accomplished this redemption, they need no longer fear having "undone the future out of a desire to help" (AC 407).'

As for Christian imagery, when Polly joins Colin in the centre of the flaring light of the drop, her final quotation is: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' — the caption of William Holman Hunt's painting of Christ as *The Light of the World*, in which Polly has detected many different messages during her exile. She has also compared the plight of the stranded historians with the castaways in J. M. Barrie's play *The Admirable Crichton*, and with fairytale maidens shut away from the world (*Rapunzel* and *Sleeping Beauty*). However, the door in *The Light of the World* carries the strongest associations for her: resembling the drop in remaining unresponsive — crumbling away in a fire-damaged print (AC 310) 'so that Christ's hand was raised to knock on nothingness' — looking anachronistic (AC 155) when she notices that 'the door Christ was about to knock on was medieval. Neither it nor the lantern he was carrying could possibly have existed in 33 AD. /He must be a time traveler like us, Polly thought. And now he's trying to get back home and his drop won't open either.'

Polly expects Holman Hunt's image of Christ to look 'done in' and 'defeated' (AC 314) on the fire-damaged print, but instead finds the face 'filled with kindness and concern'. When she is finally rescued by Colin, the image of Christ looks to her (AC 639) 'as if he was where he wanted to be, doing what he wanted to do. [...] Exalted. Happy./ To do something for someone or something that you loved [...] wasn't a sacrifice at all. Even if it cost you



CONNIE WILLIS 3

"Yes," Dunworthy had said. "We can." End of conversation.

"Two days!" I had shouted at my roommate Kivrin. "All because some computer adds an *'s*. And the esteemed Dunworthy doesn't even bat an eye when I tell him. 'Time travel is not like taking the tube, young man,' he says. 'I'd suggest you get ready. You're leaving day after tomorrow.' The man's a total incompetent."

"No," she said. "He isn't. He's the best there is. He wrote the book on St. Paul's. Maybe you should listen to what he says."

your freedom, your life, your youth.'

(20 August 2011)

PS: Of the two corrections I wondered about for my Willis review — the closing of the bracket after (AC 398) and before the colon should be done: but the strange punctuation in 'Fire Watch' is (I've now checked) as it appeared in the published story. See attached scan [see bottom of previous page].

(8 July 2011)

Murray MacLachlan: Rousseau, Willis's *Blackout* and *All Clear*, and even a little *Star Wars*

MURRAY MacLACHLAN
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In *SF Commentary*, August 2011, Yvonne Rousseau investigated Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear*, and concluded that the various authorial jiggery-pokeries meant that the novel was 'not science fiction' but was an engaging fairytale love story. Fair enough, although we should note that the Hugo voters were not dissuaded, and four weeks later *Blackout/All Clear* won this year's Hugo. One can only conclude that *SF Commentary* is not all that influential, alas, and no doubt the editor regrets.

Even so, any article by Yvonne Rousseau is welcome, particularly one that applies the scrupulous gimlet scrutiny that had previously been directed to Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Keen readers with deep pockets are referred to Rousseau's out-of-print and collectible *The Murders at Hanging Rock*, which expounds four quite reasonable hypotheses as what happened to the missing picnickers at Hanging Rock, given that Lindsay's narrative itself simply does not cohere and, in the breach, valid explanation is warranted. After all, the author presents the story as a puzzle story; such stories travel with a promise between writer and reader that a reasonable explanation will be forthcoming; and Lindsay did not deliver.

In her critique of *Blackout/All Clear*, Rousseau makes plain that readers of Willis are dealing with a similar situation. The case is argued — convincingly — that inconsistencies and narrative incongruities undermine Willis's story to ultimate loss of science-fictional effect.

The case, however, is overstated in one aspect, and it is to make this minor observation, something of a footnote, that I write. I refer to the critical card played under the heading, 'How love can rot up your research', which discusses the soon-to-be lovers Polly and Colin meeting (after a bit of time-travelling) during the Blitz:

Meanwhile, Colin appears to have been so distraught about Polly that he has lost his former skills as a researcher. When the small girl Trot identifies him at the rehearsal as Sleeping Beauty's 'Prince Dauntless', she asks: 'Did you look for Polly for a hundred years?' Colin's reply is 'Nearly' (AC 596). But there was surely no need to spend so much labour in visiting the past and 'sitting in libraries and newspaper morgues' (AC 609). By his own account, 'We couldn't get anything before 1960 to open or anything after 1995, when we could have gone online, so I had to do it the hard way' (AC 633). He appears to have forgotten that his own 21st-century life is 'after 1995'.

We readers live in the 21st century, and know that astonishing quantities of old newspapers and other printed records (including censuses, parish records, electoral rolls and military files) have already been scanned into searchable digital electronic mode — both officially and by selfless volunteers. The 'Fortitude South' papers that became available to the public in 1976 would surely have been downloaded on home computers all over the world long before the originals were vaporised by the pinpoint bomb of 2015, and thus would have remained available to Colin in electronic mode in 2060. There was no need for so much drudgery 'in archives, hunched over volumes of yellowing newspapers, over a micro-film reader' (AC 633) — 'those long months spent in the reading room' (AC 502).

For a precedent we turn our attention to *Star Wars*, where lurks a similar lapse, but far greater by orders of magnitude.

For many people *Star Wars* is the epitome of science fiction. In commercial terms it is a hugely successful franchise. It has entered the commonplace of popular culture. The main body of work consists of six

Murray MacLachlan, 2007 (Photo: Helena Binns.)

feature-length films split into two trilogies. The first released film, *Star Wars* (later re-branded as *Episode IV: A New Hope*) was released in 1977. In internal sequence it is the fourth film, and is preceded by the first trilogy of movies, being *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith*.

The venue for *Star Wars* is a galaxy 'far far away', where a galaxywide civil war sees a republic fall and an empire arise to replace it. The galactic empire is administered via sectors and clusters of sectors. Sectors are governed by 'Moffs' and multiple sectors or 'over-sectors' by 'Grand Moffs'. A startlingly large *Star Wars* canon is documented on-line, and part of the canon is *Star Wars: The Essential Atlas* (2009) by Jason Fry and Daniel Wallace; they give the size of the *Star Wars* galaxy as 400 billion stars and a sector as having a maximum of 50 inhabited star systems.

So it's a big galaxy. The sentient population is pretty large, too. The human portion dominates, including at the hegemonic (Moff etc.) level (assuming the movies representatively show the galaxy's sentient species, and political representation mirrors population).

A significant break occurs between the two trilogies, politically and for plot purposes. *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* closes with two birthings — the galactic Empire forms and the twins Leia [Organa] and Luke [Skywalker] are born to Padmé Amidala. According to *Wookieepedia*, 'the Star Wars wiki':

> Amidala was the democratically elected Queen of Naboo before representing the Chommell sector as a Senator in the Galactic Senate. As Queen of Naboo, Amidala fought bravely to liberate her people during the Trade Federation's invasion in 32 BBY, thus becoming one of the most respected political figures in the galaxy.

We are told the Chommell sector possesses 36 star systems of sufficient size to be represented at the galaxy's ruling body, the Galactic Republic, and has an 'additional 40,000 settled dependencies'. The capital of this sector is Naboo, of which Amidala is the elected Queen and later the sector representative at Empire level. Amidala is a significant political figure, locally and when measured in galactic terms. We are to believe that no-one except her co-conspirators knows she has been pregnant. Nor that she has given birth. Every other sentient being remains ignorant — all the billions under her direct rule, and the bystanders in the rest of the galaxy looking in on doings in the strategically interesting Chommell Sector.

Amidala's secret is central to the second trilogy. Major plot points turn on Luke Skywalker's father remaining ignorant of the fact he is a father; of Luke not being aware that his father went over to the Dark Side of the Force; and Luke and Leia having a mutual attraction that may blossom into love.

The universe of *Star Wars* must have no equivalent of our current news media and their approach to privacy. Neither yellow press nor tabloid journalists. Nor does it have celebrity groupies, security cameras, webcams, mobile phones, or paparazzi. Nor are there the people who consume news and gossip 24/7: the idly curious, the vaguely interested, the prurient, rumour-hounds, news junkies, or stalkers. Nor do these people have the mercantile arrangements that give rise to the demand for something — anything — around which to wrap the advertisements that make up a large part of newspaper and television content. Nor do politicians accountable for 300,000 stars have people to do their time management and run their private lives for them, later to write their own reminiscences, or to leak their views in unguarded interviews with professional biographers. In *Star Wars* there are no equivalents to Andrew Morton.

The parallels with Willis's text are obvious. Rousseau ought not to have dismissed out of hand the loss of all relevant English historical records in *Blackout/All Clear*. In *Star Wars* an entire galactic sector has lost all historical records about a critical event. Willis's writerly tweak is minor by comparison.

It seems to me that successful science fiction writers are comfortable creating universes where parts of the historical record are completely expunged, and where newspapers, web records, files, archives, biography, diaries, rumour, and folkloric storytelling don't exist.

I speculate that Willis may well have reflected thus: if it's good enough for George Lucas to play merry hell with continuity, then it's good enough for me. Who are we as readers to decry this? (Well, for a start, we are people with considerably fewer Hugos and a distinct shortfall in the number of California ranches in our possession.)

Some records are bureaucratic in nature; we are asked to believe that in *Star Wars* such red tape can be eradicated. This facet of the *Star Wars* universe, hitherto almost unremarked in the critical literature, ought to be celebrated, for it brings to a close the long-running debate whether *Star Wars* is science fiction or fantasy. Red tape is eradicated? Ergo: *Star Wars* is fantasy. Further: conspiracy can remain undetected? Ergo: yes, definitely fantasy.

In fairness, *Star Wars*' creator, George Lucas, goes to considerable lengths to persuade us that his sleight-of-hand is not mere jiggery-pokery. Amidala marries in secret and gives birth in secret. Her co-conspirators are sworn to secrecy (one suspects these people might also be the folks who run her diary). Two androids know of the twins. One, C-3PO, has its memory wiped. The other, R2-D2, does not, but it communicates in a machine language unintelligible to humans. Senator Amidala dies not long after the twins' birth, so reducing by one the number of people who know the secret.

Even though *Star Wars* portrays the Republic as the good guys, the fact that there is no public hint of pregnancy and birth by a politician known and apparently loved by billions is compelling evidence of media control significantly more far-reaching than any Orwellian nightmare. The Republic's totalitarian control of all communication channels is breathtaking in scope. The Empire merely stepped into the existing apparatus, it seems.

There is more. By the end of *Return of the Jedi*, R2-D2 is the only surviving character who knows the full story of Amidala's children. But he doesn't tell Luke — about Leia, Amidala, his father, or Obi Wan Kenobi (one of Amidala's co-conspirators). If the droid had just said something, or written in the sand using a stick, a laser or in big letters using its wheels in a sand dune, burned an alphabet into a cliff-face and pointed at letters in turn, or showed Luke

its recording of Luke's mother giving birth, there would have been no need for *The Return of the Jedi* and many lives would have been saved.

The droid has much to answer for, and may well be the worst villain in *Star Wars*.

Lucas's rationalisation for all this is found off the main sequence of movies, and so is not apparent to the many people who have seen just the films. Apparently in the depths of the expanded *Star Wars* canon is the 'Dark Nest Trilogy' written by Troy Denning. Readers are referred to *The Joiner King*, *The Unseen Queen*, and *The Swarm War*. In these novels (so my research tells me) we learn that R2-D2 was almost human in its decision-making and chose not to reveal its knowledge to Luke because it feared the trauma would cause Luke to go over to the Dark Side of the Force.

Swallowing this means accepting that R2-D2 differed from all other droids in being quite close to sentient in its motivations and decision-making. We are told this arises because it has not received the memory-wiping regularly applied to all other droids. In which case, if all droids are capable of approaching sentience, the Republic's practice of regular memory-wiping to preserve droids as mere functional labour units is ethically appalling.

We hark back to the authoritarian control evident in expunging Amidala's pregnancy from the public records and realise we are not surprised.

Further, R2-D2's logic is that Luke would in effect say, 'Gosh! The Dark Side! I've just learned it killed my foster parents, my birth mother, crippled my birth father and is coming after me! I shall go over to it forthwith!' Or words to that effect.

It's all so much tosh.

Meantime, on the main sequence of the movies the R2-D2 droid withholds vital information for no rational reason and people die.

In *Blackout/All Clear* the expunging of the historical record is sufficiently significant to warrant the novels being treated as an alternate history or indeed as some form of fantasy — as Rousseau says, a fairytale love story. The same goes for *Star Wars*, for all its space opera trappings. Indeed George Lucas has been engaged in a project to re-write *Star Wars 1977* onward to make it more like a fairytale — I believe the term is 're-imagine' — an example of which is found in the remastered and altered Special Edition version (1997) and subsequent DVD and Blu-ray releases, in which Han Solo no longer shoots first (we refer to the cantina scene).

I beg your indulgence for any errors of fact in the above. I've had to do a bit of research in writing this article because I've only ever seen *Star Wars 1977* and its sequel *The Empire Strikes Back*. I dismissed *The Return of the Jedi* because that's the point when *Star Wars* irrevocably turns into a fairy tale. In it (I am told) Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa realise that they are brother and sister. Their love dies immediately, with no further ado. If this was Greek tragedy that would be the start of the story, not the end. So much for a narrative urgency that was meant to drive two-and-a-bit feature films. The authoritarian control of media channels and other matters of historical record in *Revenge of the Sith*, and the revelation of R2-D2's complicity, have merely reinforced my view that the franchise is a fairytale. But in compiling this article I have worked from secondary sources — they are widely available.

As for Connie Willis's work, I've always viewed her texts as a form of fantasy or alternate history, so the arguments of authenticity are irrelevant. Receiving books from UK and US publishers I have found there are national differences in voice and cadence. The narrative voice in my head when I am reading needs to change accent for effectiveness. For example, an unfunny joke in the 'narrative UK' voice suddenly becomes funny when read in a 'narrative US' voice. And vice versa. For all Willis's attempts at verisimilitude I can read her works only with my 'narrative US' voice on. The 'narrative UK' voice balks and I falter: the rhythm and cadence is wrong; the words selected are not quite right; the solecisms stall me.

In *Riverside Quarterly* 8/2 Earl Ingersoll compliments Willis thus: 'Your story "Fire Watch" had such a ring of authenticity that I checked the book jacket to see if you had lived in England.' I have never harboured such uncertainties, but have no problem accepting that a US audience would believe that the American Willis does a more-than-reasonable job of 'doing English'. To my ear, *To Say Nothing of the Dog* was homage to Wodehouse and Jerome, but, like *Doomsday Book* and her other works set in England, did not approach the Greenwich meridian any closer than the mid-Atlantic. But I have no issue with her American audience being persuaded. Stranger things have happened, including R2-D2 being seen as one of the good guys, and fantasies where the historical record has unexplained gaps being categorised as science fiction.

(30 October 2011)

Mark Plummer

MARK PLUMMER
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Thanks in particular for *SFC* 82, featuring Yvonne Rousseau on last year's Connie Willis double-novel. I was certainly keen to read that, possibly — and slightly embarrassingly — more keen than I was to read the second volume of the novel itself, but noting the prominent warning of spoilers I thought I'd better read *All Clear* first, and so I went through a couple of weeks of picking up *SFC* 82 and reading odd bits of it while trying really hard not to catch a sideways glimpse of a Willisian revelation.

It seems that most of us in the UK who have read *Blackout/All Clear* obsess on the not-quite-rightness of 1940s England as seen in these two books. Obviously enough, it easier for us to spot what I assume are unintentional deviations into an alternate world, and maybe we're predisposed to do it because Willis has form when it comes to research.

Oddly, the prevalent not-quite-rightness starts on the cover of the book, something over which the author presumably has no control. The jacket of the first volume features at bottom right a domed building shrouded in smoke or mist, and at top left a number of aircraft dropping bombs. The former is absolutely iconic, at least

to a British reader, although presumably not to the cover designer, who identified it on the back of the US first edition as 'St Patrick's' rather than 'St Paul's' cathedral. The message at least got through about that, as the photo is correctly identified on both the US paperback (which I have) and the UK editions (which I've seen).

More subtly, the aircraft are clearly four-engined bombers. I'm far from an expert of aviation, but I know that the Junkers 88s, Heinkel 111s, and Dornier 17s that blitzed London were all two-engined planes, and I'm pretty sure the Luftwaffe didn't have any four-engined bombers in 1940. The aircraft on the cover do look rather like American bombers, with the general consensus being that they're probably B29s. Given the way the historians in the novel are understandably preoccupied with changing history — or rather *not* changing history — this cover does hint at a way in which the Blitz might have been radically different.

These cover illustrations lead me to speculate on the existence of a condition we might call Secondary Willis. I take my inspiration for this from *Guardian* sketch-writer Simon Hoggatt. During the years of our last Labour government he would regularly highlight the notoriously mangled grammar of John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, but also note how those with whom Prescott interacted started to develop the same twisted speech patterns, much as Claire tends to develop an Australian accent when talking to Australians (although Hoggatt did not note this particular comparison). He referred to this tendency as Secondary Prescott.

And thus, I wonder, are those with whom Connie Willis interacts infused with a tendency to historical not-quite-rightness themselves? We have that cover as evidence, but also our beloved Yvonne, who twice notes (pages 23 and 25) that Mike Davis planned to visit Devon to witness the return of the evacuees from Dunkirk. I concede that until I looked at a map I hadn't entirely appreciated exactly where Dunkirk is — I thought it was a little west of Calais rather than a little east — but even an approximate sense of its location and a rough idea of British geography suggests that Devon is an unlikely destination for Dunkirk evacuees, as it would involve the small ships sailing over 300 miles along just about the entire length of the English Channel rather than making a short hop of about 50 miles across the North Sea to Dover. As I have PDF copies of both *Blackout* and *All Clear*, thanks to the Hugo voter pack, I can do a quick text search to establish that this reference to Devon isn't a simple perpetuation of a Willisism in the original text. I wonder, was it Yvonne's mistake or an editorial 'correction'?

Alternatively, and as Claire points out, it may just be an application of Muphry's Law. Whichever it is, I suspect it's the same thing that causes you to misspell Claire's surname on page 5 by transposing the 'i' and the 'a'.

It was good that Yvonne cited the editions to which she referred — not that I'd expect anything less — because there are signs that the text has undergone some evolution since the first US hardcover. A number of the more egregious errors have been corrected in the US paperback edition and carried through to the UK edition. Thus, the point where one character is told that a phone is only to be used for local calls which cost 5p, and that trunk calls should be made from the nearby 'pillar box', is corrected, as is the moment when a 1940 British doctor gives a patient's temperature in centigrade, while the references to the Blitz-era underground Jubilee Line (opened in 1979) have been expunged.

On which point, it's not clear to me how many of the errors in the final book should truly be laid to Willis. Presumably she was the one who failed to notice that there was no Jubilee Line until the 1970s — the clue is in the name, as an online commenter noted, although I suppose it's not inconceivable that somebody might think that the jubilee in question was Victoria's — but don't publishers employ copy-editors to catch this kind of thing? That's a genuine question, by the way; I don't know whether it goes beyond the copy-editor's remit, especially if it's a work of fiction. Or is that kind of detailed copy-editing now a luxury that publishers can't afford?

Aside from its questionable history, though, there's the sheer enormity of the book. *Blackout/All Clear* is, I gather, a single novel presented in two volumes. I don't know exactly why this was done, but I suspect it's simple logistics, given that the combined page count is 1,168. It's obviously not impossible to produce a single volume of that size — think *Clarissa* or *A Suitable Boy*, which are both 1500 pages or thereabouts — but, I don't know, maybe the prevailing opinion is that a single volume would be off-putting. Maybe the publishers thought they could gain from readers' anticipation through having to wait for the story's conclusion. Maybe they thought they could make more money.

But it seems to me that *Blackout/All Clear* is way too long, that it doesn't need to run to nearly 1200 pages. The Length of the Modern Genre Novel is a regular debating point in the Brialey/Plummer household, with my own preference for shorter books being attributed to me being old. It is not true that — as my views are sometimes presented by the opposition — I'm really only happy with novellas, but really I think 150–200 pages is just fine, thanks, and while anything up 300 is OK, 400-plus is starting to get a bit much. Given this context, the fact that I read all the way through both volumes, and reasonably quickly too, may say something about their readability. True, I was at least in part reading them so I could cast an informed Hugo vote, but I didn't have to do it; I did want to finish the story. But I really don't think *Blackout/All Clear* would have suffered had it been half the length. Indeed I feel sure it would have been a better book, especially if the cutting reduced the amount of time the characters spend blundering about, failing to meet one another and generally miscommunicating.

Overall, I think I take a middle view of a work that mostly attracts extreme opinions. Clearly a lot of people think well of the book: it won a Hugo, a Nebula, and a Locus Award. Equally — and based on the online commentary on the Hugos I've seen — there are many who think it's dreadful, the worst book on the Hugo ballot, the worst SF book of the year, maybe even lifting Mark Clifton and Frank Riley out of the relegation zone and scoring the not-so-coveted title of Worst Hugo Winner Ever. I just think it's OK; it could have been so much better — and Ian McDonald was robbed. But hey, at least it inspired a fine essay from Yvonne.

There's other good stuff in *SFC* 82 as well. Much of it has a distinctly retro feel, like that eight-year-old interview with Ian Watson, and initially I was hankering for something a bit more contemporary, more like the old *SFC*. But then I came round to viewing it as a valuable corrective. There are plenty of people writing about the new SF, such that a book that's even a few months old has been washed away by the coming wave-front. This year Beccon Publications may have published the fifth collection of John Clute criticism, but it's refreshing to see the second and third volumes foregrounded out of the deep past that is 1995 and 2003 respectively.

So thanks for the fortieth anniversary issues of *SFC*, and for the forty years-worth of issues that preceded them. Keeping talking to us, your friends ...

(5 September 2011)

Yvonne Rousseau

Thank you for letting me see what Murray MacLachlan and Mark Plummer wrote about my enquiry into *Blackout/All Clear*.

Murray classes his entertaining response as 'something of a footnote', and requires no additional comments from me about *Blackout/All Clear*. When I concluded that, although enjoyable, the novel was 'not science fiction,' I admit that I didn't mean to pronounce upon its eligibility for the Hugo ballot. I was merely classing 'science fiction' as something to aspire to — and thus defying the *hauteur* so crushingly documented by Dave Langford in *Ansible* under the heading 'As Others See Us'. However, I am pleased to have evoked Murray's observation that 'for many people *Star Wars* is the epitome of science fiction', and his evidence of George Lucas's inclination 'to play merry hell with continuity.'

Mark's letter does require a response from me: yes, I meant to type 'Dover' and instead I typed 'Devon' — twice over! I am grateful to Mark for his suggestion that a 'Secondary Willis' condition might be blamed for this error but, no, Claire was correct: it was Muphry's Law (John Bangsund's editorial application of the better-known Murphy's law) applying its first rule: 'If you write anything criticising editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written.'

In addition to enchanting me by noticing that Willis's illustrators depict anomalous 'four-engined bombers' (so far as I'm concerned, this invalidates his disclaimer, 'I'm far from an expert of aviation'), Mark mentions 'editorial "correction"': 'signs that the text has undergone some evolution since the first US hardcover'. Similar change occurred in at least one of Laurie R. King's Anglophile novels about Mary Russell, the wife of Sherlock Holmes. In the 'Endnotes' of *Ansible* 272, March 2010, Dave Langford referred to Paul Barnett's discovery (printed in the preceding *Ansible* under the Thog heading, 'Dept. of Flaunted Historical Reserch') of a 'currency glitch' ('one shilling, in 1915, equalling five pence') in Laurie R. King *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (1994). Dave then recorded my own subsequent news: 'Even before *Ansible* took notice, this novel's HarperCollins edition of 2000 describes Holmes (disguised as a gypsy) making up the shilling by which he has short-changed a stable-owner with (p. 107) "ten pennies, a ha'penny and six farthings" — an alteration which indeed causes the coins to add up to a shilling.'

I first noticed this kind of 'editorial "correction"' after I'd published the book that Murray recommends as 'collectible': *The Murders at Hanging Rock* (1980). In subsequent editions of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, I found that Penguin Books had silently tidied away some editorial errors that I'd used as clues to the kind of parallel universe that the novel's characters might inhabit. Each of the 'hypotheses' that Murray mentions was based on evidence in Joan Lindsay's novel but each entailed a different theory about the universe we inhabit: science fictional, European supernatural, Australian Aboriginal supernatural, or rationalist.

(25 July 2012)

Feature list:

Rog Peyton's top 100 SF novels

ROG PEYTON
Replay Books, 19 Eves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3QL, England

I'm so pleased that you liked Christopher Evans' *The Insider*. I've now read it three times and just love it! Yes, Malcolm Edwards does know about it but I don't think he is a fan — Chris's initials aren't PKD! The other 'lost' classic I've tried to interest him in is *The Journal of Nicholas the American* by Leigh Kennedy, but again, he shows no interest. I've sold a lot of copies of that on personal recommendation and got positive feedback every time. Now sold out. But it's well worth looking for.

My Top 100 SF Novels list is now completed in the Brum Group newsletter. Here are the books. If you want my little resume on each, please let me know.

PS: Have you not got Chris Evans' latest, *Omega*? Only in hardcover (PS Publishing) and sadly out of print; only 250 copies printed. And then there are the juveniles and the ones under pseudonyms.... see the *SF Encyclopedia* now on line.

- Brian Aldiss: *The Dark Light Years*
- Brian Aldiss: *Greybeard*
- Brian Aldiss: *Non-Stop*
- David Ambrose: *The Discrete Charm of Charlie Monk*
- David Ambrose: *The Man Who Turned into Himself*
- Poul Anderson: *The Enemy Stars*
- Poul Anderson: *Tau Zero*
- Isaac Asimov: *The Caves of Steel/The Naked Sun*
- Isaac Asimov: *The End Of Eternity*
- Isaac Asimov: *The Foundation Trilogy*
- Iain Banks: *The Bridge*
- Stephen Baxter: *The Time Ships*
- Alfred Bester: *The Demolished Man*
- Alfred Bester: *The Stars My Destination*
- Lloyd Biggle Jr: *Monument*
- James Blish: *The Seedling Stars*
- Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451*
- David Brin: *The Postman*
- Eric Brown: The Bengal Station Trilogy: *Necropath/Xenopath/Cosmopath*
- Eric Brown: *Engineman*
- Eric Brown: *The Kings of Eternity*
- John Brunner: *Telepathist* (aka *The Whole Man*)
- Algis Budrys: *Who?*
- Algis Budrys: *Some Will Not Die*
- Edgar Rice Burroughs: *A Princess of Mars/The Gods of Mars/Warlord of Mars*
- Octavia Butler: *Kindred*
- Octavia Butler: *The Parable of the Sower*
- Octavia Butler: The Patternist Series: *Wild Seed/Mind of My Mind/Survivor/Patternmaster/Clay's Ark*
- Octavia Butler: The Xenogenesis Trilogy: *Dawn/Adulthood Rites/Imago*
- Orson Scott Card: *Ender's Game*
- Arthur C. Clarke: *Childhood's End*
- Arthur C. Clarke: *The City and the Stars*
- Hal Clement: *Mission of Gravity*
- Edmund Cooper: *The Cloud Walker*
- Edmund Cooper: *A Far Sunset*
- Thomas M. Disch: *Camp Concentration*
- Christopher Evans: *Aztec Century*
- Christopher Evans: *The Insider*
- Jack Finney: *The Body Snatchers*
- Jack Finney: *Time and Again*
- Daniel F Galouye: *Dark Universe*
- David Gerrold: *When H.A.R.L.I.E. Was One*
- Ken Grimwood: *Replay*
- Joe Haldeman: *The Forever War*
- Harry Harrison: *Make Room! Make Room!*
- Robert Heinlein: *Citizen of the Galaxy*
- Robert Heinlein: *The Door into Summer*
- Robert Heinlein: *Double Star*
- Robert Heinlein: *Starship Troopers*
- Robert Heinlein: *Time for the Stars*
- Frank Herbert: *Dragon in the Sea*
- Frank Herbert: *Dune*
- Aldous Huxley: *Brave New World*
- Leigh Kennedy: *The Journal of Nicholas the American*
- Daniel Keyes: *Flowers for Algernon*
- George R. R. Martin: *Dying of the Light*
- Anne McCaffrey: *Dragonflight*
- Anne McCaffrey: *The Ship Who Sang*
- Ian McDonald: *Desolation Road*
- Vonda McIntyre: *Dreamsnake*
- Walter M. Miller: *A Canticle for Leibowitz*
- Michael Moorcock: *Behold the Man*
- Raylyn Moore: *What Happened to Emily Goode after the Great Exhibition*
- Ward Moore: *Bring the Jubilee*
- Edgar Pangborn: *A Mirror for Observers*
- Frederik Pohl: *Gateway*
- Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth: *The Space Merchants*
- Christopher Priest: *A Dream of Wessex*
- Christopher Priest: *Inverted World*
- Christopher Priest: *The Prestige*
- Christopher Priest: *The Space Machine*
- Daniel Quinn: *Ishmael*
- Keith Roberts: *Pavane*
- Kim Stanley Robinson: *The Wild Shore*
- Theodore Roszak: *Flicker*
- Mary Doria Russell: *The Sparrow* and *Children of God*
- Bob Shaw: *Orbitsville*
- Bob Shaw: *Other Days, Other Eyes*
- Bob Shaw: *The Two-Timers*
- Robert Silverberg: *The Book of Skulls*
- Robert Silverberg: *Downward to the Earth*
- Robert Silverberg: *Dying Inside*
- Robert Silverberg: *Shadrach in the Furnace*
- Robert Silverberg: *The Stochastic Man*
- Robert Silverberg: *A Time of Changes*
- Robert Silverberg: *Tower of Glass*
- Robert Silverberg: *Up The Line*
- Clifford D. Simak: *Way Station*
- Cordwainer Smith: *Norstrilia*
- George R. Stewart: *Earth Abides*
- Theodore Sturgeon: *More than Human*
- Walter Tevis: *Mockingbird*
- Jack Vance: *Big Planet*
- Jack Vance: *Emphyrio*
- Joan Vinge: *The Snow Queen*
- H. G. Wells: *The Time Machine*
- Kate Wilhelm: *The Clewiston Test*
- Kate Wilhelm: *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*
- John Wyndham: *The Chrysalids* (aka *Rebirth*)
- Jerry Yulsman: *Elleander Morning*

(1 December 2011)

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brg My reply to Rog Peyton, 1 Decmber 2011:

Your parcel [from Replay Books of Birmingham] arrived okay, and I have already read *The Insider*. This is an undiscovered treasure, isn't it? Not brilliant in a flashy way, but the essence of it is to tell the story of your ordinary average alien who finds himself in two strange situations and has to make the most of them. I wonder if Malcolm Edwards even knows about this one? I hope he plans to include Chris Evans' books in the Gateway project.

I will try to find time to write about Chris Evans' novels, now that I seem to have them all, thanks to you. The ones I have that you didn't sell me are *Aztec Century* and *Mortal Remains*. Yes, I have *Omega*. I didn't mention it because I thought I bought it from you, but I remember now that Chris himself sent me a copy. Again, a superb

book, perhaps even better written than *The Insider*, although it has much the same level of complexity.

Your Aldiss list doesn't have my favourite SF novel, *Hothouse* — yes, I like it even better than any Phil Dick novel.

The only books on your list that I disagree with are: *Ender's Game* (one of my pet hates in SF), *Dragonflight*, and *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, for me a failure compared with many other novels by Kate Wilhelm, one of my favourite writers.

Mention of Cordwainer Smith reminds me that my favourite book of SF, even ahead of *Hothouse*, is Smith's complete stories, in the NESFA collection *The Rediscovery of Man* — which again reminds me that in puttting together a list of SF books I would have to include some of the great short story collections. My wife, for instance, doesn't like the Dick novels, but romped through the collected Philip Dick short stories, especially the early ones from the 1950s.

Also missing is Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*. But I would also include *Bring the Jubilee*, one of the few SF novels of its period with memorable characters as well as a memorable situation. Missing from your list is one of my top five authors, Wilson Tucker. *The Year of the Quiet Sun* is very close to the top of my Top 10 SF novels.

I have no idea why you have so many Silverberg novels (most of the 70s novels I don't like at all) and no Philip K. Dick. But then, *SF Commentary* began in 1969 with my articles on Dick, and will probably end with a Dick special on my deathbed. Just as long as it's not until after the next P. K. Dick special, *SFC* 83. *

I would like to see the Bob Tucker issue of *SFC*, though. And you've spotted a book I missed in my Top 100: *The Year of the Quiet Sun*. How on earth did I miss that! Tremendous book. But I guess I've probably missed a few others as most of my books are in boxes stored in my garage so I can't run my eyes over the shelves to check — I've had to work from memory. I nearly missed David Ambrose altogether!

Your wife's attitude to PKD is like mine. Great short stories, especially from the 50s, but after the first few novels, he lost the plot — they got longer and more repetitious. *Do Androids...* remains one of the silliest books I've tried to read. That was the same week I tried *The Zap Gun* and that was just rubbish. I vowed never to read another PKD novel after that. *Solar Lottery* and *Three Stigmata* remain my favourites, but nowhere near my top 100.

Silverberg is my favourite US author, and those novels from 1969–75 for me epitomise the very essence of SF. They have everything. Most of them would be in my all-time Top 20. I've just started rereading them.

I can't get on with *Analog*: it's something to do with the short lines in two columns per page layout. The British Reprint Edition was reset to book-style layout, and I read every one, but in 1964 we got the US import with split column layout and I stopped reading it. The novel version of *Dragonflight* really is worth reading; far better than the Analog versions. I knew Anne McCaffrey for 40 years, and though I didn't get on with the later books, those early ones were excellent.

My list is Top 100 *Novels*, and I'll be doing another list of about a dozen great SF short story collections early next year — along with Recommended Fantasy (a short list!). The NESFA Cordwainer Smith will obviously be there alongside *The Best of Walter M. Miller*. I read the Smith about 10 years ago and read 'Scanners Live in Vain' for the first time – Wow! A truly wonderful collection. I'm with you on that.

(1 December 2011)

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

SFC 81: I liked Dick Jenssen's explanation of his magnificent cover, though what can I say beyond expressing my pleasure at the cover itself — which would have been a visual treat even without any words about it.

And I jumped ahead to Terry Green's contemporary review of Philip Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*. I read *Scanner* when it first came out in paperback, finding a copy in one of the bookstores in Nashville and seizing on it eagerly. I was still living on The Farm then, and had to put together bits of spare change to keep up with Phil's '70s output. I recall that while it was enjoyable it didn't strike me as one of his best — so I nodded with agreement near the end of Green's review where he disagreed with Phil that it was his masterpiece. I agree with him that *Flow My Tears* and *High Castle* are both superior, and Phil's anti-drug message directed at pills did nothing for me as resident of a community already shunning such stuff but devoted to cannabis consumption.

(13 June 2011)

HELENA (AND MERV) BINNS
PO Box 315, Carnegie VIC 3165

Thank you so much for continuing to send us the beautifully printed copies of your publications. *SF Commentary* 81 (Fortieth Anniversary Edition, Part 2), with its great Ditmar cover and erudite articles and reviews by Colin Steele, was most impressive. As well, I enjoyed your editorial, with its reflections on optimism vs pessimism in science fiction, and Ditmar's explanation of binary stars — a topic that has caught the imagination of many a young fan, and continues to fascinate many older ones as well. With its contributions from so many distinguished writers, this is an edition to be treasured. It is great that *SF Commentary* and your other publications can now be read on eFanzines.com, as well. Critical prose of that calibre deserves an international readership.

(27 June 2011)

IAN COVELL
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Thanks for the Rousseau review, based not just on the two new novels, but all the stories before them. Incredible review. Willis may not take note of it, but she surely should — it includes much she could look at again possibly before the paperback edition appears (and not just the typos). It has convinced me that I was formerly right; I really can't stay with a book as complex as that — it's a lack in me, and I admit it, I'd be losing track of characters every other page.

I have liked Willis in the past, and think I liked *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, which I think did right in sending up the time travel ramifications, while being just — well — just *too long* for the story.

I have got 50 pages into *Blackout*, but don't think I'll go on with it.

(8 July 2011)

Last year I mentioned the strange title of a book by Alison Goodman. Initially published in Australia in 2008 as *The Two Pearls of Wisdom*, it was published under the same title in the UK in 2008. At the end of that year it was issued in the US as *Eon: Dragoneye Reborn*. A month later (2009) it was published *again* in the UK in a young-adult hardback edition titled *Eon: Rise of the Dragoneye*.

The sequel was recently published. Announced in Australia as *Necklace of the Gods*, it finally appeared as *Eona*. Simultaneously it was published in the US as *Eona: The Last Dragoneye*. It has now appeared in the UK as *Necklace of the Gods*. and is due to be republished in the UK in a young-adult hardback next month as *Eona: Return of the Dragoneye*, so achieving four titles rather than the mere three of Book 1. I have no idea why this is happening, but I don't think it's A Good Idea.

(18 July 2011)

brg I've heard Alison Goodman speak several times about this retitling of her books — which is just as mystifying to her as to the rest of us. Her original title for the first book was *Eon*, but no doubt the Australian/British publisher thought there would be confusion with Greg Bear's book of the same name. It was renamed *The Two Pearls of Wisdom* for the British adult edition and (I think) the British Young Adult edition. But the American publisher changed the title again for its adult edition; then listed yet another title for the YA edition! However, Alison seems to have established that the title of the first book really was *Eon*, making it much easier for her to publish the sequel as *Eona*. But not in all editions, as you note. *

DAMIEN BRODERICK
San Antonio TX 78212, USA

SFC 82: Chiefly notable for Terence M. Green's moving mini-memoir full of tragedy overcome in domestic and artistic satisfactions. Yvonne's commentary on Willis seems at first a tad ... obsessionally nitpicky ... but in more important and useful ways than the usual 'The Stratford-on-Avon railway line was bombed to smithereens in March 1939 so couldn't have been used to escape the zeppelins on p. 995' sort of thing.

I'm wondering who Peter Ryan is, would-be demolisher of Greg Egan's rationalism? Not the rather crusty gentleman (b. 1923) who used to run Melbourne University Press, I imagine?

(16 July 2011)

brg No, our Peter Ryan is a friendly bloke, a bit younger than I am, a stalwart of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, who writes reviews whenever he has time.*

Hope it's okay to do a bit of shameless self-promotion: The near-future science fiction novel *Post Mortal Syndrome*, by me and my wife Barbara Lamar, is now available in trade paperback print: http://www.amazon.com/Post-Mortal-Syndrome-Science-Fiction/dp/1434435598/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1314645294&sr=1-1. An earlier version was serialised on the website of the Aussie popular science magazine *Cosmos*, and got some 100,000 hits.

We tried to do the impossible thing for a thriller aimed at the mass market: depict scientific developments and paradigm change in a (cautiously) *positive* light, and the enemies of life extension and human enhancement as the deathists they are.

(30 August 2011)

IAN WATSON
Daventry, Northants NN11 3SQ, England

What a delightful surprise to receive *SFC* 82 containing Steve Baxter's interview with me! How disconcerting to see that this happened eight years ago ... dear me, my moustache is now a mere memory; been gone for years.

I notice me saying that Spielberg himself interpolated the Flesh Fair sequence into *AI*. Um, doh ... in the course of producing the rather magnificent volume about the film, published by Thames & Hudson in 2009, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence: From Stanley Kubrick to Steven Spielberg: The Vision Behind the Film*, Jane Struthers of the University of the Arts, London, co-editor of the book with Jan Harlan, came to interview me after going through the Kubrick archives, prompting the revelation that actually I wrote several versions of the carnival of destruction of the robots. In my large cardboard box devoted to my work with Stanley, stuffed into my roofspace, there indeed lurked printouts as evidence (already seen by Jane in the archives): the Bad Moon Balloon Rising, Any Old Iron, and so on. Well, blow me over with a feather. And it came to me that Stanley hadn't wanted me to include this violent episode in the screen story I finally wrote — consequently I'd forgotten all about it. Even when I saw the film, some nine years after my screen story, bizarrely this didn't ring a bell. Maybe that's because I wrote quite a lot of possible scenes that never made it through. Fortunately, as well as using my screen story, Spielberg also went through excluded scenes, and resurrected the Flesh Fair (which I'd originally set in New York).

(14 July 2011)

Personally I viewed working with Stanley as a bit of a surreal comedy, which may be how I came out the other end intact. And I never really believed there'd be a movie, so I didn't obsess about the pie-in-the-sky bonus, which indeed due to not obsessing I finally got :-) See my 10,000 words about the experience, on my www.ianwatson.info site.

You haven't missed a lot of me since Gollancz threw me overboard (although in the past few weeks they've taken me back on board, in the sense of buying e-rights to all my books including ones published elsewhere). The main masterpiece (actually I do think it's one of my best books) is *Mockymen*, the best text being the Immanion Press edition, print-on-demand via their website, and I think Amazon too. Golden Gryphon published it first in the US (nicer-looking book, but with errors) and few people have read it in the UK.

GG and PS Publishing both did collections of mine (*The Great Escape* and *Butterflies of Memory*), both out of print now, but everything will be a Gollancz e-book soonish, including *Mockymen*, as also two volumes from UK's excellent small NewCon Press, *The Beloved of My Beloved* (co-authored with Roberto Quaglia, the *only*, I do believe, full-length genre fiction book by two authors with different mother tongues), also my *Orgasmachine* finally in English.

(14 July 2011)

STEVE SNEYD
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*SFC*s 81 and 82: The Ditmar cover art of No 81 is a particularly stunning feast: an example of a picture being worth a thousand words.

I'm a bit behind in my backlog, a situation made worse by general summer inertia and particularly by obsessive following of the ever-developing 'hunt the Murdoch' saga. I'm a news junkie anyway, but have a personal interest. Murdoch's victory over the print unions at Wapping in 1986 led other papers, including the one I then worked for, the *Manchester Evening News*, to jump on the bandwagon of staff cuts, and I was one of many made redundant from a job I really enjoyed.

I mainly felt, looking at the vast array of SF titles reviewed and explored in No 81, an intensification of my permanent sense of just how pitifully gappy is my acquaintance with, let alone real knowledge of, contemporary and near-contemporary SF. If it's a 'leopard-skin ceasefire', to use an ancient Vietnam-era term: the leopard has but few spots left.

Your mention (*SFC* 82) of Roy Kettle's visit to Pauline Ashwell (Whitby) and of a visit to Ashwell itself to interview her brought back a memory. Years back, I went to Ashwell with my brother to see the impressive Iron Age hill fort that overlooks it, then find the source of the name. In a side street I spotted in the window of a small bookshop (closed, as it was a Sunday) a newspaper cutting: 'Local author's new science fiction novel launched here'. I made a note of the author and the book's name, lost the note, forgot the matter utterly, and now, behold! you provide the answer to my puzzlement years ago.

In No 82, talking about fanzines, you did not mention the football zines. The only fan I can think of involved in both kinds of fanzines was the late Derek Pickles, whose 1950s *Phantasmagoria* was the first place where John Brunner's creative work appeared under his own name (a couple of poems). He had published a few poems elsewhere before then under pseudonyms. Many years later, Pickles wrote for the Bradford City Football Club fanzine. J. C. Hartley, who is an SF poet, writes for the Carlisle First Division Club's fanzine, but as far as I know has never had anything to do with SF fanzines.

Good to see Harry Turner's art on the cover for *Banana Wings* 45. He and Atom, both sadly no longer with us, were included in the recent University of Leeds exhibition of SF Art. The Rotsler 'Phnom Penh in 2010!' cartoon (*Banana Wings* 45, whose cover is shown in *SFC* 82) was a shivery bit of prophecy at the time. The BBC World Service carried news of many pilgrims to a festival on an island in a lake in Phnom Penh being forced into the water or drowned by a stampede on the causeway.

18 July 2011

Environmental change novels: to me J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* is an early as well as very powerful instance.

There are some aspects of American culture where the demand for a happy ending doesn't apply: a certain strand of country music, for instance. The Poe–Lovecraft-influenced dark fantasy has a more European sensibility. Poe was partly educated in England and Lovecraft was an ultra-Anglophile.

Your editorial speaks of the inhibiting effect of a lack of self-confidence. Two rules I wish I had adopted were 'You earn the right to do something by having done it' (Bukowski once replied to an interviewer who asked if he thought he had paid his dues, 'I would have done if there'd been anyone there to take them') and 'If a job's worth doing it's worth doing badly rather than not at all'.

You mention that you'd rather read a magazine that came in the mail than one received by download. In a recent *Ansible*, reporting the death of the BSFA's long-established newsletter *Matrix*, the editor was quoted as saying that reader response had dropped drastically when it went e-only.

Watson, on p. 41 of *SFC* 82, refers to Northern Rhodesia. It was in fact Southern Rhodesia under Ian Smith, the country that became Zimbabwe.

Reviews of books featuring the 1962 Cuba missile crisis brought back that very intense time. I was a night telephone operator then. On the peak night of crisis, the manager told us that at any time the switchboards of the exchange might go dead, which would mean conflict had started and control of the telephone system had been switched to the official nuclear bunkers. It didn't happen, but it was a loooong night.

I was cheered to find, among the reviews of many books I haven't read, one I have read: Adam Roberts' *Yellow Blue Tibia*, a vivid tale. I had the feeling that the author himself was in two minds about what was going on, with an odd ending. I was intrigued to read recently that the Roswell supposed alien landing might have been a Russian hoax, on Stalin's orders, to subvert US morale.

Good to hear news of David Hyde. His *For Dickheads Only* disappeared in the nineties, but now he is uploading lots, and living in a cabin in Colorado. (10 August 2011)

brg I was taken aback to find that Steve had stopped sending me his handwritten *Data Dump* because I had written to him that he could improve it greatly by putting some space between the lines of handwriting. (He would improve it best by typing it. I know Steve can type because I've seen one of his papers about poetry.) I can usually understand bits of *DD*, Steve! In *DD* 164, Steve recently ran a highly favourable review of the most recent issues of *SF Commentary*, concentrating on David Lake's poem in No 81. He also mentions Colin Steele's review of Ursula Le Guin's *Lavinia* and Adam Roberts' *Land of the Headless*. In No 82 he discusses the Ian Watson–Stephen Baxter interview, in which Ian Watson speaks of his increased poetry writing in recent years; and Steve Jeffery's comments about Dan Simmons.*

You asked about book-length SF poems other than *Aniara*. I didn't answer on that at the time, as a couple of other people had asked the same question. I did a brief article on the topic, which appeared eventually in *Pablo Lennis*. Here is a summary list, with brief annotations, of examples I'm aware of.

The oldest I know of (other than the 1837 William Dearden verse epic *The Starseer*, recently reprinted by a print-on-demand house, which is predominantly dark fantasy, but does have a proto-SF element: a voyage to a spaceship concealed in a comet head) is *At Midnight on the 31st of March* by Josephine Young Case (1938). A timeslip shifts a small US town into an uninhabited North America of massive forest. The poem covers the first year of the inhabitants learning to cope.

Later examples include:

- *The New World: An Epic Poem*, by Frederick Turner (1985; Princeton University Press; 179 pp.). In a fragmented future USA, there is conflict between the Riots (the cities), the Burbs they terrorise, the Mad Counties run by religious fanatics, and the Free Counties, armed chivalrous utopias. He draws on Arthurian themes, in particular the Fisher King. The immortalish, unhealable last US president, living under Hattan (ex-Manhattan) is a clear Fisher King figure.
- *Genesis: An Epic Poem* by Frederick Turner (1988; Saybrook Publishing Co., Dallas; 291 pp.), which deals with the terraforming of Mars, has a colonists' war for liberation from a tyrannical Earth.
- *Madoc: A Mystery* by Paul Muldoon (Faber; 1990): a fragmented account, framed by the extraction of information from the retina of a refugee from a future prison factory, of an alternative history of a nineteenth-century US where Coleridge and Southey have founded a pantisocratic colony on the frontier. Southey degenerates into a tyrannical–megalomaniacal figure. Coleridge, tagging along behind the Lewis and Clark expedition, embarks on a drugged hunt for the supposed descendants of a Welsh prince who founded a Mandan tribe in the fourteenth century.
- *The Chrysalis Machine* by Steve Littlejohn (Sput Publications; Batley; 1995; 52 pp.): a post-apocalyptic quest to discover the title device, in which the perfect woman, who will restore society, is being created.
- *The Return of Arthur* by Martin Skinner (1968; 520 pp.; original publication as three separate books): in a post nuclear-holocaust Earth, Merlin and Arthur are revived to liberate Britain from tyranny, and in particular disrupt the Mars launch.

There are a variety of other book-length poems that arguably could be considered, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Blake's *Jerusalem*: the full-length version. Each has, from our 'horizon of expectations', SF elements.

Erasmus Darwin's three-book-length verse epic of science knowledge of the late nineteenth century has SF elements without doubt. The three are now reprinted as *Cosmologies*.

To take two much more recent instances, Australian poet John Kinsella's (2000) *Visitants* has UFO encounters in the Outback as its theme; and Brian Aldiss wrote an opera libretto, *Oedipus on Mars*.

And there are two very different translations of *Aniara*, so I won't list details of them.

(4 February 2012)

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

It is high British summer at this end, as evidenced by the fact that we put out a tray yesterday to catch rainwater for our thirsty herb and vegetable garden (tomato plants drink water like marathon runners) and it was 2 inches deep when we went to empty it into the watering can. We both had a week off work last week around Vikki's birthday and it rained solidly and heavily for three days out of the five. Typical.

I checked Dick Jenssen's fully rendered front cover for *SFC* 82 on efanzines.com, and it's very impressive indeed. The Godrays component (for some reason I've always refer to them as God's fingers) certainly makes a difference, even if Dick does have to go away for a three-course meal and a movie while it's rendering.

Back in the early '90s I played with a piece of ray tracing software called Povray, which took a similar time of around an hour to render each 600 by 480 pixel image. It wasn't as complex as atmospheric diffraction and reflections. It does seem as raw computing power has advanced, programmers have similarly expanded the capabilities of software to take advantage and do even more complex things, in a digital Red Queen's Race, so it still takes the same amount of actual time. That probably explains why we are not all swimming in the hundreds of extra leisure hours a week we were promised from the shiny white heat of technological revolution. That, and that I spend as much, if not more, time wrestling with Word's increasingly complex and wayward style sheets on each upgrade than I do producing actual content. There seems to be a Parkinson's Law as applied to software as much as paperwork.

In another of those strange coincidences that seem to dog my steps, last night I was listening to an episode of 'Quote Unquote' on the radio, and that quote I mentioned in my 24 August 2010 loc in *SFC* 81 about 'when you see a passage of your writing that strikes you as particularly fine, you should immediately strike it out' turned up. Apparently it was Samuel Johnson, although he was in turn quoting someone else, although it didn't say who.

Speaking of Samuel Johnson, I finally got round to reading one of the books on the 2009 SJ prize for non-fiction: Richard Holmes' *Age of Reason: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (2008; Harper), a splendid and highly recommended tome. Coincidence and serendipity then did their usual things. Daisy Hays' *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and Other Tangled Lives* turned up on the library shelf a week or so later, and provided a different perspective on the same era of public and artistic fascination with science and natural philosophy.

Where does Colin Steele get the time, stamina, and patience to read, let alone review, that many genre books? Can it be bottled?

I was, however, fascinated to come across a reference to the Nephilim in Colin's review of Danielle Trussoni's *Angelology*. I wasn't aware anyone other than UK fantasy writer Storm Constantine (in her 'Grigori' trilogy, and possibly a passing reference, as 'Elohim' rather than Nephilim, in *Burying the Shadow*) had explicitly referenced this particular mythology. I don't know where Orpheus or his lyre are supposed to fit in though. That seems like a cultural miscegenation too far.

Yvonne Rousseau's comments are spot on regarding female invisibility. I may have seen the Fast Show sketch 'The Girl Who Boys Can't Hear' by Arabella Weir she mentions, and winced at its spot on familiarity. It echoes Joanna Russ's scathing analysis of the same subject (syndrome?) in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. And going back to Holmes's *Age of Reason*, who now remembers Caroline Herschel, William's sister, and arguably the better astronomer of the two?

I was also very interested in Yvonne's comments on transpeople from her reading of Shankar Vetantam's book *The Hidden Brain*, not least that they provide the same sort of cultural and social laboratory for exploration of issues of social–sexual conditioning and expectations that twin studies provide for arguments and theories about nature versus nurture and genetics versus environment. Evidence suggest that transpeople are still in the situation gay and lesbians were back in the '60s and '70s, and often, as Howard deVoto sang in the Magazine song of the same name, 'shot by both sides'. Sometimes there's none so oppressive as the liberated, although luckily, I'm not aware of any evidence of such distrust, even hostility, within the fan community as sometimes exists outside it.

Moving on to *SFC* 82, I note in passing that I have also recently read John D. Barrow's *Book of Universes* that Ditmar references in his cover notes on this issue. Some of the universes are indeed bizarre, and my brain went into neutral probably halfway in, at which point I stopped trying to understand what I was reading, and took the role of a wide-eyed passenger on a weird and wonderful journey.

I much enjoyed Terence Green's biographical article, and was particularly struck by his comment on his family's reading habits, 'we read as omnivores, taking whatever roads we stumbled upon' (p. 30). As I grow older, and less concerned about ideas of keeping up with the canon, prize-winning books, or keeping up with an ever-fragmenting genre, this describes my own reading more and more. I may never now read Tolstoy, Proust, or Zola. It no longer worries me. I am more guided — or sidetracked — by chance discoveries, coincidence, and serendipity, so that I am probably a more omnivorous, if less voracious, reader than I was in my twenties and thirties. (I have always had a tendency to be waylaid by odd and intriguing sounding titles; hence my early ambush by such writers as Moorcock and Delany.) I have become a browser rather than a planned reader. I was never much for plans anyway. In the same way that battle plans are said to rarely survive first contact with the enemy, my reading plans rarely survive first contact with the library. But if I had stuck to an agenda, would I have read Barrow's *The Book of Universes*, or Hay's *Young Romantics*, Simon Loxley's *Type: the Secret History of Letters*, or biographies of Brian Eno or Elizabeth, the 'Winter Queen' of Bohemia (Carola Oman).

Thanks for that interview with Ian Watson by Stephen Baxter in *SFC* 82 as well. It was good to hear China Miéville namecheck Watson and *The Embedding* (and Ted Chiang) when being interviewed on the Radio 4 recently about his new book, *Embassytown*, only fractionally after I had also uttered the same comment when the subject of alien language came up. It was a nice touch, though whether it'll be recognised or acted on by listeners outside the genre is a debatable point. I've put *Embassytown* on order. It goes back to a fascination with language and linguistics sparked by writers like Delany and Watson. At some point, someone will write an SF fantasy work featuring a cybernetic consciousness that manifests on the net as a viral angel embedded in linguistic code derived from the writings of John Dee and Giordano Bruno and it'll press all my genre buttons simultaneously. If and when it happens, I'm sure something or someone will guide me to it sooner or later.

(18 July 2011)

JOHN BAXTER
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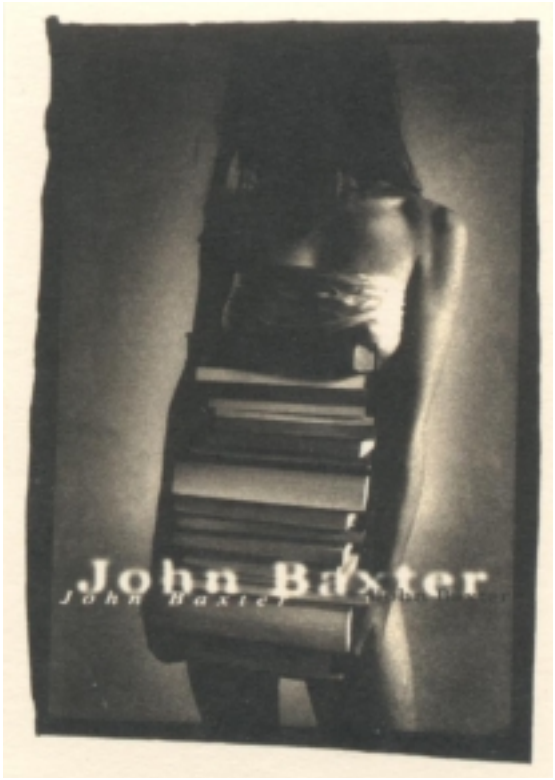
The sheer number and variety of the books in Colin Steele's summary of recent publications leaves one mildly distraught at the number one hasn't read — and, in my case, is unlikely to read, since I shrink from horror stories and have noticed, with advancing age, a tendency to nod off about page 50 of the more lapidary recreation of alien worlds. Even Iain M. Banks's latest plunge into the ineffable oddities of The Culture no longer causes the pulses to throb as heretofore, and William Gibson's last two books left me limp, even though part of *Zero History* takes place in our street, rue de l'Odéon. As for the wilder flights of China Miéville, Stephen Baxter et al., one is tempted to echo the comment of a *London Magazine* reviewer grappling with an early William Burroughs novel, who, faced with the concept of 'merging rectums', plaintively enquired 'But how?' I understand that the law of suspension of disbelief is supposed to save writers from criticism of their wilder flights. However, like many of one's suspensions, this one has sagged with age.

An honour, I suppose, to lead off the parade of Colin's reviews with his comments on *A Pound of Paper*, even if one does feel like one of those hapless prisoners of The Humungus tied to the front of the vehicles in *Mad Max 2*. But let me begin with one small correction. While it's true that I disliked the cover of *A Pound of Paper* and



suggested a very different one, even going so far as to have Marc Atkins shoot the image I had in mind, it's not the case that it depicted 'a beautiful woman lying naked, covered in books'. The beautiful woman was quite upright. In fact, I liked the image so much that I had it made into my personal bookplate. (See attached.) Despite my objections, Transworld went ahead with their design, which was universally hailed, suggesting that packaging is another aspect of publishing writers should leave to the pros.

It is a minor disappointment, incidentally, that, though there is an Italian edition, *Pound of Paper* has never been translated into French. In French, *livre*, as well as meaning 'book', is also popular terminology for half a kilo — roughly the equivalent of the British pound. In French, therefore, the title would be *Un Livre du Papier*, an agreeable pun.

Perhaps *A Pound of Paper* is rather hard on libraries. I've spent many happy hours in libraries (and librarians), and it's difficult to imagine having researched my books without their help. Wearing my collector's hat, however, one can hardly look with equanimity on the stamps and labels that deface library books, the dust wrappers glued down to covers, the overall slapdash conservation of even the obviously valuable and rare. Imagine the Louvre slamming a rubber stamp on the Mona Lisa and you have an inkling of how we feel.

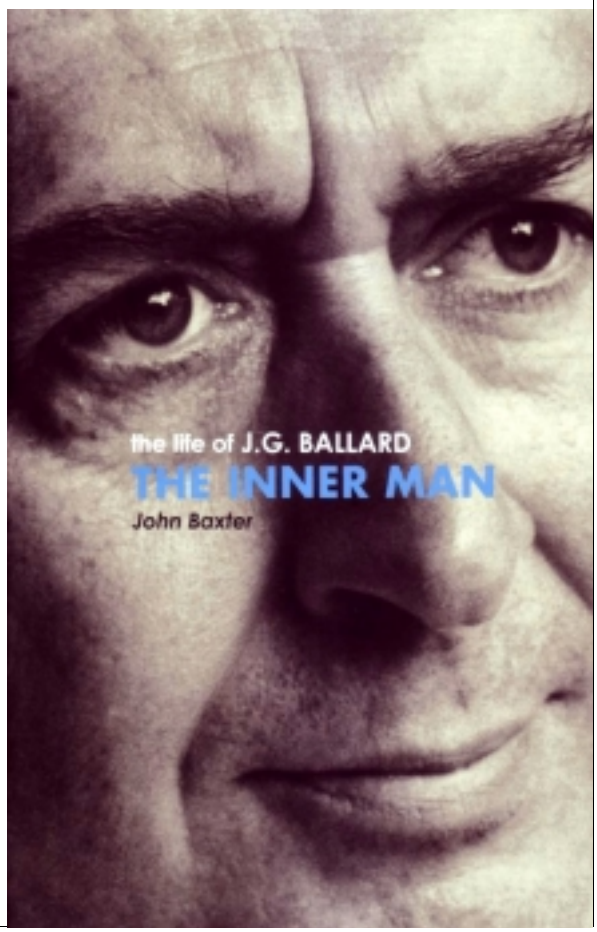
Colin is right, of course, when he points out that values in collectible books have plunged since the arrival of the internet, bearing as it did the news, dismaying to dealers, that their copy, which they had long thought unique, and priced accordingly, was replicated in the inventory of fifty other shops across the globe, and often for less money. Significantly, of the books listed as its top sellers on the major rare book site, www.abe.com, almost all are from the nineteenth century and even earlier. For an item to command a high price today, it must not simply be uncommon but unique, which excludes almost everything published in the last hundred years.

A number of items caught my eye, but I'll confine my comment to the review of Jeff Prucher's *Brave New Worlds: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, which delves into the derivation of 'Smeg', the all-purpose expletive of *Red Dwarf*. Despite the protestations of the writers, I don't doubt it derives from 'smegma', since 'smegma' already had currency in SF film and TV circles before *RD*. In *Mad Max II, aka The Road Warrior*, for instance, the collective name given by the film crew to the shambling derelicts of the wasteland was 'Smegma Crazies'. Once again, Australia leads the world.

(18 July 2011)

There were many points as I skimmed the reviews that I might have made a passing comment, but it seemed more useful to stick to a single point. John Clute, for instance. We talked at length about Ballard, Disch, Sladek, Pamela Zoline etc; Proustian moments, since we did so in the same warren-like house in Camden Town the last three shared.

One hopes the Ballard will attract attention, but biography is very much the low man on the literary totem pole these days. Genre fiction dominates the market because of its popularity in e-book form. Non-fiction is the poor relation. But I had personal reasons for wanting to do *The Inner Man*, as the Ballard is called. And fortunately, as Malcolm Edwards, who's an old friend and JGB's former editor, not to mention an ex-fan, is also deputy chairman of Orion, one didn't have to argue too hard. Moreover, Mike Moorcock has bought an apartment



in Paris, and is now here a few months every year, so I was able to spend many hours with him.

You're welcome to use things from *The Paris Men's Salon*. The Martin Hibble essay is OK, and the pieces written for the Salon. The Hibble was written for a festschrift compiled just after his death. I will send you a copy, since it contains a number of reminiscences by people who knew him better than I, or at least knew different aspects of him. For instance, Anton Crouch on his early days at a Sydney FM station (and his drinking) is particularly amusing.

(18 July 2011)

brg John has just reprinted his book of essays, *The Paris Men's Salon*, available from his website. It contains an essay on Martin Hibble, who died at the age of 50 from a heart attack. He was ABC-FM's most brilliant broadcaster, which meant that not only did he radiate knowledge about and enthusiasm for all forms of classical music, but he initiated remarkable radio programs that have never been resurrected since his death, in particular, a weekly two-hour journey through a major piece of music, when each of his guests presented different versions of sections of the piece in order to illustrate that even the most familiar piece of music can sound very different in the hands of different conductors or soloists. His best program was one in which his critics presented an astonishing variety of ways of interpreting the bleak songs of Schubert's *Winterreise* cycle, concluding with a jazz version, from the 1930s, of 'Der Leiermann', the bleakest song of them all. John Baxter knew Martin Hibble best from his days as a film fan and critic in Sydney. My reprint of the article was scheduled for an issue of **brg*/Scratch Pad* that is now more than a year late.*

DAVID RUSSELL
196 Russell Street, Dennington VIC 3280

Please find enclosed a gift: issues 23 and 24 of the graphic adaptation of Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. I believe I gave you an earlier issue of this series. Now all you have to do is find where you put that comic and combine the three in one location.

(19 July 2011)

On Friday I went on Saturday to Chapel Street, Windsor, intending to buy some comics at the Alternate Worlds shop. I'd missed being able to do that by a couple of months, since the shop has changed location to a 'superstore' at 11–13 Malvern Street, Bayswater. Bayswater is an outer suburb to which I've never been. I will have to find the shop the next time in Melbourne.

At the nearby Comics R Us shop I saw a graphic novel collecting five issues of a Philip K. Dick story, *The Electric Ant*, one part of which I believe I've already sent you. Please keep it and enjoy reading it. I found it much faster paced than the issues of Dick's *Androids* in comic book format I had read.

(16 August 2011)

NED BROOKS
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brg I take it we are still trading paper fanzines?*

Yes, but you are far more active than I am. The only thing I publish other than comments-on-comments apazines for SFPA and Slanapa is the annual *It Goes On the Shelf* (*IGOTS*), which is both paper and PDF, and you are on the mailing list for that. I could send you some of the books I published, or some of the duplicate books (other than the ones marked [for GHW]) and fanzines on the website — and hope they fared better than the box I sent Phil Ellis ten weeks ago. Is there an ongoing problem with Australian Customs or PO? I see your thick envelope made it here in about 2 weeks. US Customs as far as I know never even looks at printed matter. I once had a nineteenth-century copy of *Lempriere's Classical Dictionary* take three months to reach the buyer in Australia. Even if Customs was looking at books they wouldn't look at that for long — but if they look at all books, the pipeline will certainly clog up.

brg Last Christmas, printed matter articles sent airmail from America and Britain were taking at least a month to reach me, and one huge parcel from Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey took two months the previous Christmas. 'Airmail' can be a flexible concept these days.*

I still correspond with a few people who are not online — most notably Steve Sneyd who, in general, sends handrot, though for his last letter had fired up an ancient Amstrad. Dainis Bisenieks types. A man in South Carolina who is older even than I am (but nevertheless drove across the state and bought a Moon-Hopkins typewriter that weighs around 200 lbs and brought it back in the trunk of his Cadillac) writes me on whichever antique typewriter he has just repaired, including up-strike blind-writers over 100 years old. I just shipped a stapler with a 12-inch reach to a friend who likes to do half-page-size saddle-stapled apazines, typeset in TeX. But the handwriting is on the wall — PDF is a lot cheaper than postage if you have a PC anyway, and printing would cost the same at either end.

brg But *SFC*s 81 and 82 were a financial disaster, as you realise.*

Yes, I can imagine — I have never made any money publishing. I never even tried to make money on fanzines, and most of the books I published are still here in boxes. The one that that did sell out was the *Vaughn Bode Index* — I rather suspect it was because he died just as it appeared.

Looking at *SFC* 81, I like the review of Baxter's *A Pound of Paper* — I have a copy and enjoyed it. I once had a copy of the asbestos-bound *Fahrenheit 451* that Colin Steele mentions; I bought it from Rusty Hevelin at a small convention in Norfolk Virginia. But I did not like it — asbestos is not a good material for binding cloth — and traded it to Donn Albright for something else. Would mine have been worth $55,000 if I had kept it? Who knows ... As I recall, it had no dust jacket.

It will be interesting to see what Le Guin's *Lavinia* is 'about'. I have a copy but have not gotten to it. At one time I would have been dismayed how many of the books and authors mentioned here I have never heard of, but I have become resigned to that, especially as I suspect I would find many of them unreadable. I liked Jeanette Winterson's first book, and some of her stories, but *The Stone Gods* sounds too nonlinear for me.

I was startled in *SFC* 82 to find myself described as an 'unexpected quiet genius' — that was certainly unexpected ... Rich Coad asked me for the account of my professional life, and I suppose there was some 'sense of wonder', in what I could remember of it. But I am hardly a genius, or very quiet (though people who have heard me sing have told me to be quiet). I may have been unexpected in an odd way — some people seemed to expect to be able to predict my politics from my haircut, so that at a summer convention when I had a crewcut they took me to be rightwing, and in the winter or spring, when I had let it grow out, they took me to be leftwing.

James Morrow's *The Last Witchfinder* is a book that has found its way onto the groaning shelves here but is still unread. I am always interested in the social disease that we call 'witchhunting' even when there are only analogous 'witches' to be found — 'Reds' or 'gays' or 'hippies' or, currently, Muslims. Not too long ago I read the diary of Samuel Sewall, who became a judge in pre-Revolutionary New England and participated sincerely and enthusiastically in the hanging of 'witches' and Quakers.

(20 July 2011)

TIM MARION
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Bruce, thanks so much for *SF Commentary* 81 and 82. Rather than merely perfunctorily plastic bagging them and putting them into an unread fanzine box, I actually took them out of the envelope and left them laying around for me to read. This has never happened before, so I couldn't expect it to happen: any one of eight cats (Panda is kept segregated, so it could not have been him) vomited all over them. They are so grungy and stuck together that I've had to throw them out. I'm so sorry, Bruce.

brg The ultimate fanzine review!*

I would like to prevail upon you to possibly send me another set. Just please don't expect such reimbursement right away, however, as I quite literally do not have a penny to my name. My bank account is empty and I had only five hours of work last week. I haven't had it this bad financially (and morally and psychologically) for maybe half my life.

I most of the time feel so depressed that I'm surprised I'm actually getting this letter out to you. The only thing keeping me going is reading, so I've been reading like mad. Not just comic book collections, but, of course, fantasy and science fiction too.

I've been reading so much that sometimes I have difficulty casting around trying to find the next unread book I want to read. I want to read collections of short stories, I think; either by a single author or else anthologies of many authors. I tried reading a Brigadier Ffellowes book by Sterling Lanier ... big mistake. I thought since I liked that writer, and since I enjoyed the Ffellowes stories in *F&SF* a number of years ago, that I would really enjoy this collection. Did nothing for my depression. Ffellowes seems to belong to the 'What is it? Kill it!' school of mytho-zoological exploration. To give an example (this is not one of the stories), but if Ffellowes were asked to investigate the Loch Ness Monster, he would probably go to Scotland, find it, shoot it in the head with a bazooka, then commandeer a submarine and go into the loch and kill all of its babies. Then he would probably blow up the loch because 'things like that should not be living concurrent with man!' (That isn't an exact quote, just the sort of attitude I pick up from every story, and I'm most of the way through the book.)

So I tried an anthology, a collection of fantasy edited by Terry Carr from around 1971. The first story is by Peter S. Beagle, 'Farrell and Lila the Werewolf'. What a horrible story. Farrell is living with one girlfriend, Lila, while keeping a wolfhound or somesuch for another girlfriend vacationing in Europe. The wolfhound is used to sleeping with its mistress and so wants to sleep with Farrell, but of course hard-hearted Farrell (who purportedly is a protagonist in other works of fiction by Beagle) drags the poor, protesting dog up to the roof and chains him up there. The poor dog howls and whines all night, and all Farrell can think about is how much the dog is destroying his sleep. Sometime in the morning the dog stops howling abruptly and Lila enters thru the window in her wolf form. The worst suspicion is correct: Lila tore the poor dog's throat out. And it's treated almost like a joke, like haha, isn't that funny? Farrell's reaction is that he still likes Lila and he never liked the dog anyway! So he just ignores the entire occurrence.

I haven't been able to finish the Ffellowes book (which contained stuff worse than what I just described immediately above), and this fantasy anthology I just put back on the shelf unread.

So what am I getting into now? Well, I have a few Poul Andersons I haven't read. Am enjoying *Three Hearts and Three Lions*. Wish I had a copy of *Three Worlds to Conquer*, which I probably read when I was nine. And I've also read some Zelazny. Wish I had a copy of *Jack of Shadows*, which I've never read. I may see if I can't splurge and spend $12 on it (including postage) from Amazon.

(19 September 2011)

Colin Steele must read even more than I do!

I know you'll think this is unreasonable, but I have had a prejudice against Terry Pratchett ever since he stole Jeff Kleinbard's character, Cohen the Barbarian. (Not an unknown creation, either, since Jeff won an award or some honorable mention at the Discon II masquerade in 1974, as well as some amount of fannish fame for it.) Jeff's character also seems more interesting than the degenerate, decrepit character Pratchett created.

I can understand Lesleigh Luttrell not wanting to be involved in fandom any more, but I sure wish she would friend me back on Facebook. I miss having a little bit of Lesleigh in my life.

Curious that for some letter-writers you say '(somewhere in the U.S.)'. I assume that means that these

writers are either transitory in terms of geography or else they don't even want their locale to be known!

brg Eric Mayer is only on the internet, and won't tell people his snail mail address. Other people neglect to send me their addresses, or I know them mainly from an e-list or on Facebook.*

Curious also, and now I have some old, back issues to confirm this, but you never have spelled out 'Science Fiction' in a masthead logo for the zine, have you? A casual reader stumbling across it might assume that it's a commentary magazine on Sexual Freedom, maybe. Or maybe even Suffering Fribees? The possibilities are not endless, but nearly so. And, to be picky, since both 'commentary' and 'SF' are in all caps, it may as well imply that the word 'commentary' is an acronym for something as well.

brg The idea, even when I began the magazine in 1969, was that people could attach whatever meaning they pleased to the initials 'SF'. Even, these days, the barbaric-sounding 'Spec Fic'. However, more and more I feel it is a 'proud and lonely thing to be *Science Fiction* fan'.*

Love the cover by Ditmar! Thanks so much for your generosity for, among other things, sending me not one set but then another when the first was damaged. I'm thinking about putting them both into plastic bags right now, just in case they get tossed up on, or, God forbid, urinated on. What a life I lead.

(23 September 2009)

MARK PLUMMER
59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CRO 7ES, England

In No 81 my eye was caught by a minor point in Colin Steele's review of *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, and in particular the passing note of the citation for 'sci-fi' (Heinlein, 1949). I'm sure that is what Jeff Prucher says, but it's been established subsequently that Heinlein's apparent coinage of the term is a false positive. It's derived from a letter to agent Lurton Blassingame published in *Grumbles from the Grave* ('I have two short stories that I am very hot to do ... one a sci-fi short which will probably sell to slick and is a sure sale for pulp'). However, when the subject cropped up on Mike Glyer's *File 770* blog, Christopher Kovacs acquired a PDF of the letter itself, from which it's apparent that the version in *Grumbles* was a typo or a mistranscription. Heinlein clearly wrote 'sci-fic'. It's impossible to retrospectively correct all the copies of *Grumbles* that are out there, but I guess we can at least correct references to it.

I should say, by the way, that while I've got nothing against Colin Steele's writing, No 81 felt less like a *brg*-fanzine as a result of it. I haven't worked out the percentages to see whether you're really less evident within your own pages in this issue or whether it's simply that Colin is so visible as to render you seemingly less visible, but for all the merits of your outside contributors it's always the *brg* personality that I value. It means that all your various titles — and I suspect I may now be a world authority on your fanzines — are of a piece, a continuous narrative across forty-something years of Being Bruce.

(1 September 2011)

brg Which is Mark's segue into his account of putting together a Complete Bruce Gillespie Bibliography. The account, and the bibliography, will appear in *SFC* 84.*

DARRELL SCHWEITZER
6644 Rutland Street,
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These very handsome magazines you've sent have been staring at me like a guilty conscience. My wife had hip-replacement surgery recently, so I have spent a lot of time in medical waiting rooms, and have taken advantage of this to get at least somewhat caught up on this sort of thing. I continue to think that only if I were slightly more prolific as an essayist I'd be quite happy to appear in your illustrious pages. As is, most of my non-fiction goes to *The New York Review of SF*, which, I get the impression, is just a bit more widely read than *SF Commentary* or *Steam Engine Time*. Still, I will try. In any case, if there is something of mine you'd like to reprint, yes, by all means. I've got no less than two interviews with James Morrow done around the time *The Last Witchfinder* came out, for instance. One was done at a convention, for Card's *Medicine Show*, and is about to go into my book *Speaking of the Fantastic III*. The other is a transcript of a library presentation I was asked to do about a month later. Part of this was published in *Weird Tales* and part in *NYRSF*, but it was never published all together, so that would be at least somewhat unique, if you want it.

brg *NYRSF* has a wider circulation than any of my magazines, but don't assume much crossover of readership, especially not in Australia. The main difference is that *NYRSF*'s Dave Hartwell can pay a small amount for articles, and I can't pay anything. Until now, Dave has had to place severe page limits on articles for his maga-

Mark Plummer, 2010 (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)

zine, whereas I've had room for long articles. But as from August *NYRSF* will be forced to go online and will no longer be available in the printed form, so maybe it will suddenly look like one of your tubbier issues of *SF Commentary*.*

The greatest benefit I've gotten from your magazines of late has been your recommendation of the film *Dean Spanley*. This was not available in North America at all for a couple years — I could not find either a zone-free or NA-zoned copy on eBay — but it has shown up on cable TV recently. That seems to be a new niche for marginal productions, the way 'straight to video' used to be. Cable is the only place you will find, for instance, that less than classic film *The Trail of the Screaming Forehead*, which I saw the other night. It is an attempt by the cast and crew of the deliberately bad *The Lost Skeleton of Cadavra* to repeat the joke, with only limited success. *Lost Skeleton* is great stuff, a pastiche that is a genuine addition to the canon that includes *Robot Monster*, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, etc. *Screaming Forehead* has a higher budget, which enabled them to do it in colour (a mistake, actually), and even if the noted SF artist Courtney Skinner did design the alien forehead parasite, it's still not up to its predecessor. The best bit is a cameo by Kevin McCarthy, after the credits at the end. He's missed the film, the cast-members argue. He still demands his credit. So it flashes on the screen: KEVIN MCCARTHY as THE LATECOMER.

But *Dean Spanley* is a lovely, lovely film, easily the best cinematic fantasy in many years. Of course it could not be nominated for anything, because it didn't get enough exposure. My friend the artist Jason Van Hollander remarked on how extraordinary that such a film was greenlit at all. It's intelligent, subtle, and moving rather than merely sentimental. It would be very hard to market. It's not a dog film, for kids. It doesn't have explosions and CGI effects for the fantasy/science fiction market. It's sort of a 'literary' art film, which works fine if you are filming Jane Austen or Henry James, but Lord Dunsany is not well enough known to reach that market.

It's also one of those rare cases where the movie is better than the book. I don't know if you've read *My Talks with Dean Spanley* or not. It's basically a long whimsey, like an oversized Jorkens story. The Peter O'Toole character is not in it, nor are any of the issues he raises (the dead son, the missing childhood dog, the whole question of belated grief). The Dunsany book is very charming, but it is basically a joke. The movie turns it into real drama. Considering the usual fiasco that results when screenwriters try to 'improve' on their source material, this movie is even more of a small miracle.

Gregory Benford almost had me going with his review of *The Einstein Code* (issue 82). I have to conclude that this is a hoax, but it's a good one, far more impressive than the imaginary Alexandrian philosopher I made up in the course of the discussion of Wikipedia on Fictionmags. It ultimately fails the 'too good to be true' test, and of course it also fails the Google test. There is a book called *The Einstein Code*. That is not quite what it is about. I wonder how long it will take for this hoax to turn into a factoid and begin to be cited seriously. Sure, we'd all like to believe that Einstein was a science fiction fan. I

suppose the real slip here is the meeting with a young Isaac Asimov. Asimov was so vocal himself and so self-documenting, that if this had really happened you can be sure he'd have told us about it at considerable length. Disappointingly, the only thing I can think about regarding Einstein and science fiction was in the other direction. In Chip Delany's *The Motion of Light in Water* there is a description of a brief encounter with Einstein, in which Einstein tells a very young Delany to study real science, not that SF nonsense. Come to think about it, it would have been hard for Gernsback to have kept quiet about an association with Einstein either. Alas. There in a better world. One could well imagine some sort of retro-alternate history novel in which Einstein, science fiction fan, must thwart the pernicious influence of Adolf Hitler, science fiction writer (the author of *The Iron Dream*) from corrupting the genre.

(23 September 2011)

GREG BENFORD
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The beautiful 81 arrived and I enjoyed it ... so much to digest!

'This proves that simulating humanity would be the goal of artificial intelligence, because we are already within a simulation designed by an artificial intelligence,' says Ian Watson. But without any way to test whether we are, there's no proof of course.

Damien Broderick asserts: 'But science fiction is plagued more than ever with loss of memory, wilful or inadvertent. The more we can clutch up the past into our

responses, the richer will be our readings of the imagined future.' This is the main virtue of John Clute. He's read everything and connects it to parts of the genre that are a delightful surprise. But as Damien says, 'What do they, mild and ignorant makers unaware — get out of it?' Different things, some Clute doesn't connect with — especially, hard SF. He's our most artful reviewer, but his taste is far askew from most readers (whose faves don't often include, say, Gene Wolfe). Clute likes 'tricksters', but most readers don't regard fiction as primarily puzzles, but as ways to live other lives in surrogate. Indeed, literature is not a mere game; it should be an experience.

When Douglas Barbour in his insightful review says of Clute, 'no one in his or her right mind would agree with him about everything' — does this imply Clute is not of right mind? Or of a different mind: I too liked that in *Scores* he says that rereading himself, amid a review 'I have cut an entire paragraph here. I didn't understand a word of it.' — because that happens to me often in his reviews — his retreat into metaphorical theory, avoiding the text. Indeed, Clute's frequent failing is to not quote enough for the reader to see what he means.

Also, consider the view that Gibson announced — 'that SF has been overtaken by the future it looked towards, and it can no longer look outward but only reflect. SF can no longer speak of what we hope to become, but of what we are, now. We must learn to read the world as SF.' What a narrow view of the field! Our major problems are still stfnal, and SF has a larger role than ever in envisioning our choices and futures ahead. I gather Gibson has turned into more a reporter on style than on any useful ideas for our dark futures.

(28 September 2011)

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER
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SFC 82: I've never read any of Terence M. Green's fiction, but I was quite pleased with his autobiography and that he has found happiness and frustration with Daniel. I've heard lots of stories about how you can write with small children in the house. I've heard Esther Friesner say that having babies was a sure cure for writer's block, because the only time she had to write was when her toddlers were sleeping. I've also had writer friends who explained that they have explained to their children that when Daddy's office door is closed Daddy is working and can't be disturbed. It's possible to write with children at home but it takes a lot of discipline.

I haven't read *Blackout/All Clear* yet, so I can't comment on much of Yvonne Rousseau's analysis. But there are two points about the novels I wish she or someone should address. First, should this double-decker novel have been one volume? I have heard Connie Willis talk about this book, and I gather the reason it is two books is that she worked on the manuscript for a long time and the book got out of control. Should it have been cut? If so, where? Second, are there any glaring errors in the book? Do her characters act in authentically British ways or does Willis make mistakes? I am reminded of the glaring problem with *Doomsday Book*: that Willis wrote that novel before cellphones became common, so a crucial character in the future disappears completely into the Scottish wilderness and is absolutely unreachable. That character would have been findable now with GPS and smartphones.

I've read John Clute for nearly two decades. I disagree with much of what he writes, because I believe that it is possible to restore the traditions and grandeur of classic hard SF and he sees science fiction as largely a spent force, something that is now part of the past. But what Clute is essential for is forcing his readers to think about why they disagree with him. Clute is constantly challenging your assumptions about what the field means and where it is going, and this is his great strength. One thing I remember from *Look at the Evidence* is that Clute showed that, like him or not, Orson Scott Card was one of the preeminent SF writers of the 1990s. Clute's explanations as to why Card became so dominant in that decade gives his readers important critical tools to assess what they think of the state of SF a decade ago.

(28 November 2011)

SFC 81: I enjoyed Colin Steele's article on Pratchett collectibles. I have a copy of *Once More With Footnotes*, but it should be noted that the copies for sale at 1850 pounds are for signed copies. Unsigned it is a $300 book — still valuable, but not insanely valuable. One wonders why Pratchett won't allow it to be reprinted.

As for Steele's other reviews, the problem with them is that they are too short to provide any useful criticism. For example, his review of *All Clear* critiques Connie Willis for her 'continuing historical inaccuracies, as well as an excess of conversation over action'. But he doesn't have enough space to explain what, exactly, these inaccuracies are. It would have been better if you had limited Steele's reviews to longer ones, or ones where he interviews authors.

But at least the *Canberra Times* has SF reviews. *The Washington Post* used to have them, but now for the most part they only appear when Michael Dirda reviews an SF book in his weekly column. Shrinking pages mean that instead of John Clute reviewing SF, the column is only done twice a year by a friend of the current book editor.

(15 July 2011)

RAY WOOD
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I did read John Ajvide Lindqvist's latest novel, *Little Star*, and enjoyed it greatly. His fascination with the concept of evil continues in it. After each of Theres's gang of little girls has been buried alive and, when each girl couldn't stand any longer being in a coffin underground, and started screaming to be dug up again, he writes:

> An outside observer, a friend or relative or parent — especially a parent — would surely have been afraid, would have asked what terrible thing had happened. Because something terrible had happened after all. Each and every one of them had been part of something dreadful.
>
> But was it evil? (p. 479)

> And Teresa, after being one of the girls buried, ominously 'wandered through the trees, gently

> running her hands over leaves and stones; she walked like Eve through Paradise, knowing that everything was hers, and everything was good' (p. 500).

I don't usually enjoy the horror genre, but I certainly found *Little Star* compelling.

Since I'd enjoyed this book even more than his previous *Let the Right One In* (the English title of his novel has more recently been altered from *Let Me In*), I got hold of his earlier novel, *Harbour*. But it lacked any kind of spark at all, and I couldn't even force my way through it.

This Nordic/Scandinavian Renaissance, or whatever it's called, goes on and on. I found Stieg Larsson's 'Millennium Trilogy' wonderful reading, and the films of it just as marvellous, too. And the recent Nobel Literature Prize winner's Tomas Tranströmer's *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems* are magnificent. Here's a prose poem of his:

> **Madrigal**
>
> I inherited a dark wood where I seldom go. But a day will come when the dead and the living change places. The wood will be set in motion. We are not without hope. The most serious crimes will remain unsolved in spite of the efforts of many policemen. In the same way there is somewhere in our lives a great unsolved love. I inherited a dark wood, but today I'm walking in the other wood, the light one. All the living creatures that sing, wriggle, wag, and crawl! It's spring and the air is very strong. I have graduated from the university of oblivion and am as empty-handed as the shirt on the clothesline.

That's from his 1989 collection, *For the Living and the Dead*.

In a few weeks I'll be off with a mate for a seven-day hike in my 'blood's country', the Gammon Ranges, which are in the Northern Flinders Ranges. It's country standing up on end, and includes maybe as much as a hundred kilometres of sheer-sided narrow gorges — a great fan of them erupting from the Blue Range, the South-East Range, and the McKinlay Massif, which box them in on three sides.

I've attached a pic of what's called Bunyip Chasm in the Gammons. The only way into it is to climb Nightmare Falls. One hiker (not one to do with me) fell to his death in front of his wife a few years back, when climbing up these Falls trying to get into the Chasm.

It's a Chasm that screams when a north wind blows across it. Its Adnyamathanha name is Winmiindanha, which means 'Whistling'. It refers to the death screams in a legend of theirs about one of their women falling into it while picking yacca.

There are no roads, no paths, no trails, no civilisation at all in these Ranges. Only untouched, undamaged, unhumanised country. How little of that is left on Earth? I'm always reminded of this thought by something that George Eliot wrote in *Middlemarch*, where Casaubon says to Mr Brooke about his (Casaubon's) nephew, Ladislaw:

> But so far is he from having any desire for a more accurate knowledge of the earth's surface, that he said he should prefer not to know the sources of the Nile, and that there should be some unknown regions preserved as hunting-grounds for the poetic imagination (Book I, chapter 9).

(13 March 2012)

JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG
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Which SF authors' new books do I buy?

For purely nostalgic reasons, I do follow Joe Haldeman and John Varley. They've both spent the last decade rewriting the hard SF of the 1950s, but why not? Both have managed a couple of excellent novels while doing this; the others have at least in my view been entertaining if light. Honest work, honestly done. For brief spans, but for the same reason, I did buy three of John Scalzi's novels, but stopped; dishonest work, cheaply done, and a number of Alan Steele's novels, until he got stuck in the endless series rut.

For quality of work, I buy whatever Nicola Griffith publishes, though she's not written an SF novel for many years. The ones she does write, however, are excellent. I buy Tricia Sullivan's new books. I buy Bruce Sterling's; to me, Bruce is somehow the Neil Young of SF: always recognisable, but seldom repeating himself. I, too, buy Ursula Le Guin. I admire Peter Beagle, but unfortunately fantasy by now bores me to the point of my being unable to read it. (Still, I've been aware; I read *The Last Unicorn* in the late 1960s, then his earlier work.) I've slavishly followed Kate Wilhelm, even through most of her late crime fiction, and Gene Wolfe until the last couple of years. Jack Vance, though I suspect he won't publish another book. Karen Joy Fowler, on the occasions when

she publishes. Geoff Ryman. If Melissa Scott ever writes another novel, I'll get it. Same goes for Suzy Charnas.

But I think that's about it. There are a couple of writers who've only published one or two books, but whose next I'd get if there ever is one. Jennifer Pelland, without the slightest doubt; her short stories have impressed me more than virtually anyone else's during the last decade. Kelley Eskridge; her few stories and single novel I've liked very much indeed. Ted Chiang, most definitely, another writer who writes only when he actually has something original to say.

As for Brian Aldiss, I believe all his recent work is available from Amazon UK. But in all honesty, I haven't kept up with it. He can still impress, sometimes, but to be completely honest, I tend to think that his Squire Quintet is probably the best thing he has written: *Forgotten Life*, in particular, impressed me greatly. Though even in that as I understood it deeply felt novel, there was a distance impossible to bridge; Brian strikes me as a cerebral writer to the extent that his novels no longer work on any emotional level at all, and to me this detracts from them. I see he finally got his huge family saga out, *Walcot* (actually almost two years ago); perhaps I'll try to get that one.

(17 July 2012)

brg This discussion began on the Fictionmags e-list, but it ties in so clearly with what *SF Commentary* is doing, and has always been doing, that I'm glad John-Henri allowed me to reprint his comments. I disagree with him about Brian Aldiss's recent work; at least, those novels I've been able to obtain. *The Cretan Teat*, for instance, is as brilliant and heartfelt as anything he published in his heyday. But now I cannot find a copy of my own. The only reason why it was not published to bestsellerdom by a major publisher is that it did not appear immediately after the Horatio Stubbs trilogy, say, or the Squire quintet.

I keep saying that the two authors whose books I buy automatically are Ursula Le Guin and Christopher Priest. John-Henri Holmberg, however, reminds me of Geoff Ryman. Yes, I always buy his new books. And usually those of Dan Simmons, Kate Wilhelm, John Crowley, Gene Wolfe, and, only recently discovered, those of Peter Beagle. Among Australian writers, I track down new books by Kaaron Warren, Cat Sparks (a collection of her stories is promised soon), Deborah Biancotti, Angela Slatter, Kirstyn McDermott, and recently, Guy Salvidge. Failure to mention a name is not me being insulting, merely forgetful.*

You're right about Simmons. When I was in a position to do so, I published several of his books in Sweden: *Song of Kali*, *Phases of Gravity*, *Summer of Night*, *Children of the Night*. Though I nowadays think less well of his novels. But certainly *LoveDeath* was first rate, as well as a later collection, *Worlds Enough and Time* (2002). It contains a novella called 'The End of Gravity' that I thought absolutely brilliant. Since that book, though, I can't see that he's published more than a couple of short stories. (One, quite good, was 'Muse of Fire', in Gardner Dozois' and Jonathan Strahan's anthology *The New Space Opera*, 2007.)

If you do want something for *SF Commentary*, just say so. I'll add my normal caveat: I can be truly rotten at keeping deadlines, since paid work always must come first. I still have two high school children at home and too many bills to pay, and in my day I seem to have managed to alienate a large part of the paying market in Sweden in various ways, so I can no longer pick and choose for whom or when I write or translate. Much like the hero's father in *Have Space Suit — Will Travel*, fifteen years ago I had a large income and if not an ulcer, then at least an 18/7 working week; now I have an abysmally small income, no savings, and still not an ulcer but recurring attacks of panic whenever a new month approaches and the bills are due. Habits die hard, and unfortunately this household is still operating on annual expenses of at least US$70,000 or so. I suspect that Charles Dickens put it best when he wrote: Income: $100. Expenses: $102. Result: Misery. Income: $100. Expenses: $98. Result: Happiness. This month I've written profiles of Swedish translators for an online Translator encyclopedia initiated by the Authors' Union, translated a verse satire by German nineteenth-century humourist Wilhelm Busch, written a Ray Bradbury eulogy and not much else; if nothing more turns up, we'll run at a loss of at least 3000. That can't keep up for long. Last year, I promised an essay on Joanna Russ to an American fanzine, but still haven't written it though the issue was long since published.

I'm boring you and running on. Sorry. Please know that I do appreciate *SF Commentary* greatly. It's one of the last important fanzines, as is Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door*, though it represents another aspect of the fandom that once was. My conviction is that fandom as we knew it will disappear with the passing of the generation to which I, you, Robert and quite a few others belong. No great loss to the world, perhaps, but in our time we did something worthwhile, and in more than one way unique.

(17 July 2012)

brg Thanks, John-Henri. I feel a curious lack of worry about the next generation, just as long as *I* can find a way to keep publishing. My expenses are about one-seventh of yours, and everything is worth pursuing as long as there are people like you out there, thinking, writing, ever writing.*

WE ALSO HEARD FROM ...

David Grigg (Mill Park, Victoria): 'You might be generally interested in my blog, which I've been trying to write regularly for a couple of years, but since I'm so bad at self-promotion most of you probably don't know about it. I try to review most books I read, and to talk generally about digital publishing and similar matters that interest me. Here's a link, see what you think: http://rightwordsoft.com/blogs/?p=1035. Hopefully this will pull my light out from under the bushel. To be honest, I've never been quite sure what a bushel was, but apparently it is an old term for a box (something which was later used to measure wheat), so to hide one's light (such as a candle) under a bushel was to place it under a box where it couldn't be seen (and I imagine, create a significant fire hazard, but the Bible doesn't mention that bit).'

Kirsty Elliott (Melbourne, Victoria) offers cheers and

congratalutions on the fortieth anniversary of *SFC*, 'you stayer, you!'

James 'Jocko' Allen (Gladstone Park, Victoria) already downloads his copies of my fanzines, but 'I had a read of Melbourne Science Fiction Club's print copy last night. Enjoyed it a lot, even in the chilly library with only one working fluoro tube. I must admit I liked the feel of the printed zine, as I leafed through it.' So do I. If I had the money, I would be printing all copies.

Tony Thomas (Ferntree Gully, Victoria) is someone I haven't heard from all year. When last heard from, he had been in Sydney for last year's Sydney Writers' Festival 'where the star (in my opinion) was A. C. Grayling talking about his new secular bible, *The Good Book*' ... Also heard and caught up with Sean Williams, whom I haven't read but now met a couple of times. He spoke quite well about SF collaboration.'

Gillian Polack (Canberra, ACT) wrote to tell me about the British Science Fiction Foundation Criticism master class that she was about to attend in May last year. Since then she has returned, and written a nice article about the criticism class experience for **brg* / Scratch Pad*.

John Hertz (Los Angeles, California) writes: 'You're good to ask about my health: I'm so far indomitable. The delays in sending out [batches of my little fanzine] *Vanamonde* (outside of APA-L) are just a matter of hours and dollars. Sometimes I'm short. Sometimes I catch up a little. Hope springs eternal.'

David J. Lake (St Lucia, Queensland) read, but still overlooked one literal in his recent essay: 'In the fourth last para, beginning "The other obvious symbol", second line, "Bonononist" should of course be "Bokononist".' David also sent me an extraordinarily generous contribution to the Gillespie Fanzine Fund. 'I agree with you that the planet is already fucked. I try to be cheerful (a) by escapism, reading only books published before 1914; and (b) by finding something to do, such as writing an essay.'

Kat Templeton (Antelope, California) was arranging a trade with her new fanzine *Rhyme and Paradox*. No 1.5 recently showed up here; enjoyed, but I've not yet replied.

Connie Willis (Greeley, Colorado) sent a nice email: 'Dear Bruce: Thanks. Connie Willis.' Well, it was either that or answer Yvonne Rousseau in many thousands of words.

Guy Lillian (Shreveport, Louisiana) received his copies of *SF Commentary* 80, 81, and 82, and reviewed them. Guy's reviews are always very encouraging.

Carol Kewley (Sunshine, Victoria), a recent contributor of cover and interior art to *Steam Engine Time*, sent me an illustration: 'This is why cats don't get to sleep on instrument panels on spaceships.'

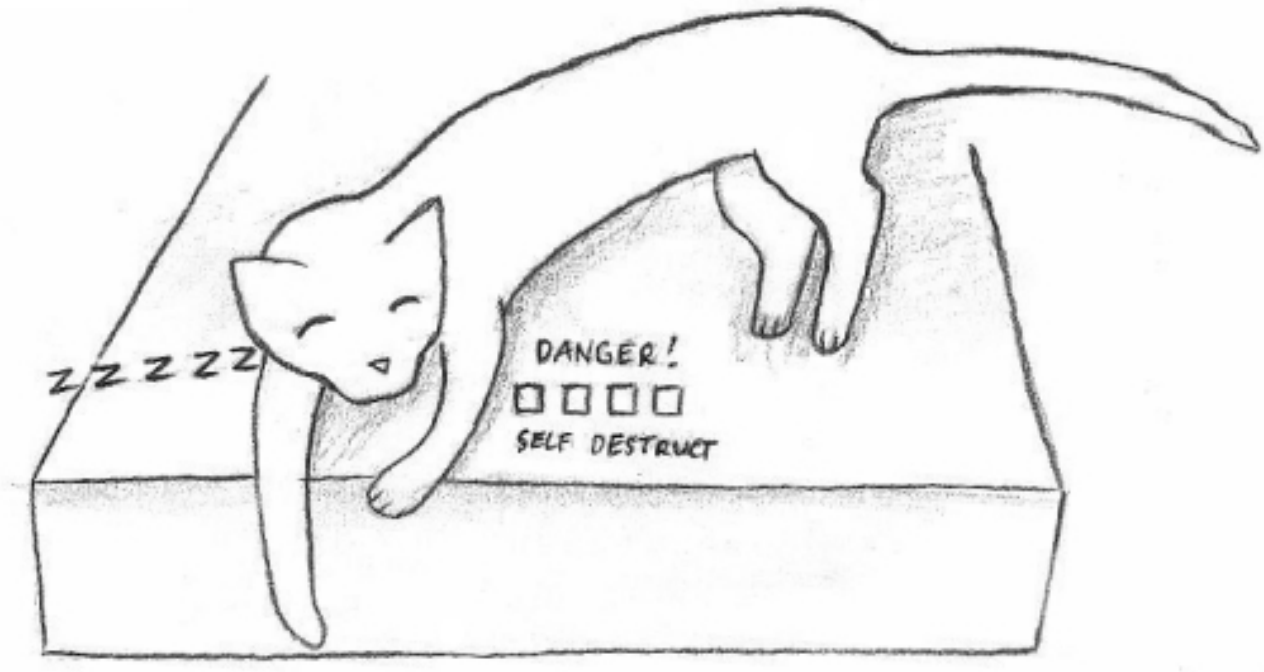
Robert Elordieta (Traralgon, Victoria) has been catching up on DVDs and Blu-rays: 'It has been a long time, quite a few years in fact, since I have seen the movie *Spartacus*, directed by Kubrick, with Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis in it. That was a great purchase, the Blu-ray collection of Kubrick, including the two extra movies.'

Moshe Feder (Flushing, New York), received *SFC* 81 and 82, but 'the envelope was open, so I hope there was nothing else in there that fell out.'

Jeanne Mealy (St Paul, Minnesota) had just received *SFC*s 81 and 82: 'Wow!!!!'

William Breiding (Dellslow, West Virginia) thanked me for 'the unexpected egoboo in your review of *Trap Door*. You are a perceptive reader. I was amused at how many people in the loccol assumed a homoerotic undertone (or subtext) when that was not the case. Men writing emotionally about men seems a no-no unless it has gay leanings. Very sad indeed!' William also sent lots of articles for upcoming issues.

Bill Burns (Hempstead, New York) hosts



PETS IN SPACE

eFanzines.com, which enables me and many other fanzine editors to continue publishing. I sent him print copies as well: 'Many thanks! I do like reading paper copies, but looking at the horrendous amount of postage on the envelope (not to mention printing costs) I'm sure that PDF publication is increasingly going to be forced on many editors.'

Larry Bigman (Orinda, California) is somebody I had not heard from for years, although way back then he had sent a substantial subscription. So he has now sent more money, to 'keep my *SFC* run intact (although still need No 68!)'. Anybody out there have a spare copy?

Werner Koopmann (Buchholz, Germany) is, if you remember, the translator into English of the most important Stanislaw Lem article that I published in the early 1970s ('SF: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions', the exception being Philip K. Dick). I lost contact with Werner for 35 years, but he tracked me down via the internet, and since has kept me up to date with his life and times (and also sent some very interesting booklets from the early days of SF criticism in the early seventies.) He is one of these people who has managed to retire, only to find himself busier than ever.

Robert Mapson (Kelmscott, Western Australia) is another correspondent I thought had disappeared, but he has been downloading issues.

Ian Nichols (Doubleview, Western Australia) had just finished his PhD thesis this time last year: 'The thesis was in two parts, a novel and an exegesis. The novel is entitled *The Bloodiest Rose* and is based on the production of Shakespeare's *Henry VII*, after the discovery of Shakespeare's fair copies in a big ball of wax washed up in Cuba. It's essentially a novel about the theatre, and what it takes to get a production up and running, with the added difficulties of people who don't want the production to do so. The exegesis is entitled "Truth, Fiction and History", and is, as the abstract says "An analysis of how fiction is able to form a framework by which the facts may be told differently, but still faithfully, as human truths". The entire thesis is called "Hybrid Texts and Historical Fiction". After that it gets a bit complex.'

Mike Meara (Spondon, Derby) enjoyed receiving three issues of *SF Commentary* all at once. 'Needless to say, you are now on my mailing list for ever, even if you beg me to stop. *aMfO* 9 is due out in late October.' Mike's *A Meara for Observers* is available from eFanzines.com, and is highly recommended. It won the FAAN Award for Best Personalzine this year.

Laura Hanley (Publicist, Little, Brown & Orion/Gollancz) thanked me for recent *SFC*s, and has begun sending us real SF books as review copies instead of all those three-part blockbuster fantasies that I had been receiving from Gollancz (Orion).

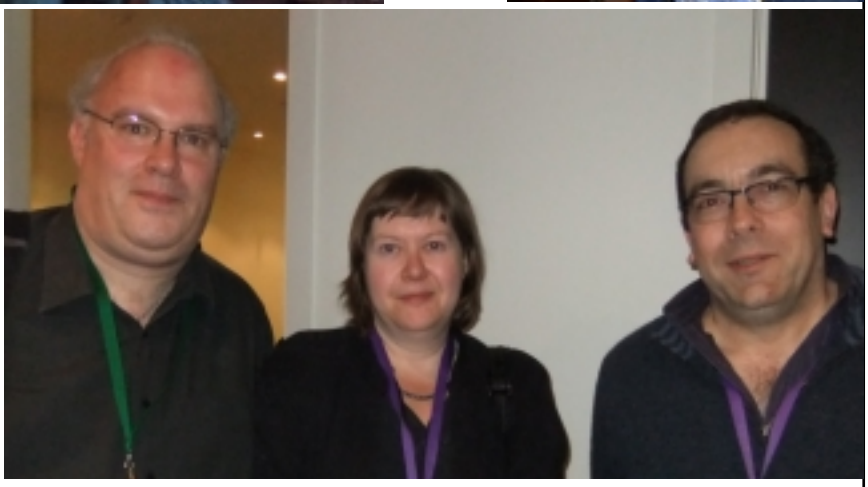
Frank Weissenborn (Caulfield North, Victoria) keeps in touch via Facebook, writes articles for me (his most recent article in *Steam Engine Time* was on the works of A. Bertram Chandler), and takes photos at conventions. 'Attached are two photos from Continuum 8: 'The Great Merv Binns' and 'Sue Ann Barber and Bruce Gillespie on the panel celebrating Melbourne Science Fiction Club's 60th Anniversary.'

— Bruce Gillespie, 22 July 2012

(l.) **Merv Binns** smiles: at Continuum 8, Melbourne, June 2012, Merv received the new **Infinity Award** for Achievement Forever (i.e. continuing life's influence) for his sixty years of starting, then supporting, then staying with the **Melbourne SF Club**; and (r) **Sue Ann Barber**, this year's Fan Guest of Honour, and **Bruce Gillespie** on the panel celebrating the Club's sixtieth anniversary. (Photos: Frank Weissenborn.)

People seen at Continuum 8, June 2012

A selection of the photos that **CATH ORTLIEB** and **HELENA BINNS** took at **Continuum 8, 2012**, which was Melbourne's annual convention, the Australian National Convention, and a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club.



Top: (*left to right*): **Jean Weber**, **LynC**, **Cath Ortlieb**, **Alan Stewart**, **Rose Mitchell** and **Carey Handfield**. (Photo: **Cath**.) *Top right:* Eric Lindsay. (Photo: **Helena**.)
Above: Our regular international visitors, **Claire Brialey** and **Mark Plummer**, with **Irwin Hirsh**. (Photo: **Cath.**)
Left: Merv smiles! Without forewarning, **Merv Binns** wins new **Infinity Award** for lifetime achievement. (Photo: **Helena**.)
Bottom: Left: **Carey Handfield**, **Nick Stathopoulos**, **Natalie Ortlieb** (photo: **Cath**.)
Middle: Continuum 8 Guest of Honour **Alison Goodman** (photo: **Cath**.)
Right: **Stephen Campbell**, friend of *SF Commentary* since 1969 (photo: **Helena**.)