SF COMMENTARY 84

November 2012 **80 pages**

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SF COMMENTARY 84

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SF COMMENTARY No. 84, November 2012, is edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough, VIC 3068, Australia. Phone: 61-3-9435 7786.

Preferred means of distribution .PDF file from eFanzines.com at http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC84P.PDF or from my email address: gandc@pacific.net.au.

Front and back covers: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'The Aliens'
A version of the back cover first appeared as the front cover of *SFC* 80A, which did not have a print edition, and was posted only as a PDF file on eFanzines.com. At that time, **Dick Jenssen** gave it the title **'The Alien'**. It was based on an idea by **Vida Weiss** (Yvonne Rousseau's daughter). She set the following problem: 'If you stood at the centre of a (regular) pentagonal room with mirrored walls, how would your reflection appear?' Dick answered this by using Vue 8 graphic modelling software. The result reminded Dick of **Murray Leinster**'s classic SF tale **'The Aliens'**. A full explanation of both the process involved in producing the graphics and the stories they suggest can be found in *SF Commentary* 80A, pp. 5–6.

Graphics
Grant Gittus (p. 9); Robert Mizerek (p. 11); Anders Sandberg (p. 12); Sheila White (p. 14); Carol Kewley (p. 26); Jack Kirby (p. 52).

Photographs
Mervyn Binns (pp. 3, 5, 7); George Turner Collection (p. 6); Jennifer Bryce (p. 8); Helena Binns (p. 8); David Boutland (p. 13); Peter Weston (p. 16).

I must be talking about my friends

At school in 1961, I had two friends. One was the co-publisher of my first fanzine, before I had heard of science fiction fanzines. After our family moved from the city to the country, I lost contact with that friend, but kept in touch with the other until he left for Sydney in 1972. I didn't hear from him again, but I discovered that he died in 1994.

At Melbourne University, 1965 to 1967, I had two friends. We would meet for coffee in the afternoon at the Baillieu Library coffee shop. One of them kept in touch until his marriage broke up in 1979. During the 1980s he cut contacts with all his old friends. The other lived in my area. We would meet occasionally on the street in Fitzroy, but we moved to the suburbs in 2004, but I've not seen him since.

Late in 1967, the year I finished my degree at Melbourne University, I wrote to John Bangsund, the editor of the magazine *Australian Science Fiction Review*, enclosing two articles I had written about the works of Philip K. Dick. John rang me at Bacchus Marsh from Ferntree Gully, inviting me to meet the gang — the editorial collective of *ASFR* — a few weeks later. In December 1967, I met many of the people who would have the most influence on my life for the next 45 years.

During that weekend, John Bangsund was amiable, but I found it hard to talk to him. Lee Harding, a published author, and one of the best writers for *ASFR*, was delighted to meet me. I stayed at his place on the weekend when his wife Carla was in hospital, having just given birth to their third child. Rob Gerrand was my age, friendly. He had just been appointed assistant editor of *ASFR*. Damien Broderick seemed inscrutable. George Turner was the star critic of *ASFR*, and a published novelist. His face and manner were craggy, and he was very difficult to talk to. John Bangsund's delightful first wife Diane, however, had no trouble talking to George.

The next day I met *ASFR* co-editor John Foyster and his first wife Elizabeth for the first time, and they seemed hard to talk to. I got along well with Tony Thomas, who was engaged to John Foyster's sister Myfanwy.

Auctioneer Dick Jenssen (standing), 1968 Melbourne SF Conference held at the Melbourne SF Club; with (l. to r.): Tony Thomas, Lee Harding, John Foyster. The name tags show the penny-farthing symbol from the Patrick McGoohan *Prisoner* TV show. (Photo: Mervyn Binns.)

Was there ever such a group as this? Not in my experience. Australia has had groups of writers, usually centred on university departments or the literary magazines. It has had readers' groups, usually meeting as Council of Adult Education book clubs. The science fiction world has been unique: writers mixing with readers; readers publishing their own amateur magazines, called 'fanzines'. Most of the people who were not published authors called themselves 'fans'. *ASFR*, a fanzine, was also an authoritative journal of fine writing about its field, the very model of the type of magazine I wanted to find a way to publish.

During Easter 1968 I attended my first SF convention, called the Melbourne SF Conference. Everybody's name tag showed the shape of the penny farthing bike, the publicity image for Patrick McGoohan's TV series *The Prisoner*, some of whose episodes I had been able to watch at a friend's place in Bacchus Marsh late the previous year. I witnessed for the first time panel discussions and the auction conducted by Dr Dick Jenssen, an effervescent wit. I tried talking to the members of the *ASFR* team, the only people I knew, but they were too busy during the convention to talk to a neofan such as me. I made some new friends, including Tom Newlyn and Alf van der Poorten from Sydney, and Pedr Gurteen from Melbourne. I lost contact with Tom in 1971, and Alf died a few years ago. Pedr popped upon Facebook recently.

At that convention, most of us were fans, people who published fanzines, went to conventions, and and hung out together at places such as the Melbourne SF Club or the front counter of McGill's Newsagency, presided over by Merv Binns, president of the Club, or around John Bangsund's kitchen table.

The few published authors at the convention tended to gather in a corner, conducting vigorous conversations, laughing a lot, or glowering at each other. They included David Boutland (who published under the name David Rome), Lee Harding, Wynne Whiteford (a freelance journalist whose first published story had appeared in the 1930s), Damien Broderick, and Jack Wodhams, who had travelled from Brisbane to be the Guest of Honour. He was being published regularly in John Campbell's *Analog* magazine, based in New York, a clear step above being published in Britain in Ted Carnell's *New Worlds* and *Science Fiction Adventures*. Lee, Wynne, and Damien had been published mainly in Carnell's magazines before they were taken over by Michael Moorcock in the mid 1960s. Most of the writers were much easier to talk to, and made me feel much more welcome, than did most of the fans.

In 1968, I did my best to enter fandom in Melbourne, although I was also trying to finish a Diploma of Education as the final part of my training to become a secondary teacher. I was living with my family in Bacchus Marsh, an hour's country train ride away from Melbourne. The last train home left at 6.20 p.m., so I could not attend meetings of the Melbourne SF Club. I did visit John Bangsund's place several times, and there got to know Damien Broderick and George Turner a bit better, talked to John Foyster, and began to talk to Leigh Edmonds, with whom I had most in common. Leigh was about my age, also a bachelor who found that being an SF fan was more than a bit of a barrier to finding a girlfriend, and enthused about many of the books and records I enjoyed. He published a good fanzine, *Rataplan*, and he had Big Plans. In 1968 he started ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association), and included me as a member, although I still had no way to print my own fanzines.

In 1969 I was sent to Ararat Technical School to attempt to teach secondary school. This was my first real job, so I hoped I would have the money to start my own fanzine. Most of the articles and reviews were kindly donated by John Bangsund, who was in the process of closing *ASFR* and starting a new fanzine, *Scythrop*. George Turner was the first writer to send me newly written reviews. John Bangsund offered me his mailing list. However, I still did not own a duplicator that I could use to print the issue. I typed 66 stencils for the first issue of *SF Commentary*. Lee Harding, John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds actually printed, collated, and sent out the first and second issues — a mighty task, a debt of time and effort I could never repay.

I wanted to publish a fanzine that reached out to the SF community throughout the world. More than half the addresses that John Bangsund had given me were in America, Britain, and Europe. At first *SF Commentary* was meant to be a touchstone critical magazine, but I didn't have the resources to make it look like Peter Weston's *Speculation* or John Bangsund's *ASFR*, let alone the dazzling layout and artwork of Richard Bergeron's *Warhoon*. *SF Commentary* looked modest, aimed not so much at the fledgling academic critics of the early 1970s as at the ordinary readers who wanted something much more substantial written about their favourite reading matter than the puffery found in newspaper or prozine reviews columns.

The rewards of publication were quick and startling. *SF Commentary* 1 had been mailed out a few weeks before my second convention, the 1969 Easter Convention, held both at the Melbourne SF Club and out at the Capri Theatre, Murrumbeena. As I walked up the narrow wooden stairs to the clubrooms on my first day of that convention, local fan Bernie Bernhouse announced from the top of the stairs: 'Here's Bruce Gillespie!' The year before, nobody knew who I was. Suddenly everybody wanted to meet me. It must have been at that convention I first talked to Robin Johnson (down from Sydney) and Bill Wright. Later in the convention, Damien Broderick drew me aside for a chat. He liked my magazine, despite the embarrassing fact that first issue had been typed on an unsuitable typewriter and was nearly illegible.

George Turner enjoyed speaking on convention panels and stirring the readers to strong reactions. John Foyster could match his wit and virulence. The New Wave was in the air; Science Fiction was finally turning into Literature. Science fiction was finally going to blow down the barriers between it and 'the mainstream'. At the same time, Ron Graham, a rich businessman from Sydney, had begun publishing a new magazine, *Vision of Tomorrow*, to consist of equal proportions of space by Australian and British writers. Lee Harding had given up his job as a photographer on the promise of this steady writing work. John Bangsund was the Australian editor of *Vision*, although the magazine was being printed in

Merv Binns' SF shop SPACE AGE BOOKS
(Melbourne's first SF bookshop)

hosted MSFC meetings and was the centre of much Worldcon bid related activity, including the making of the 'Aussiefan/Antifan' film.

Britain. The first few issues were expected soon in Melbourne.

At that time there was one fandom in Australia, with Melbourne a major centre, with new groups already active in Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane, and Adelaide, but with everybody knowing each other. From the beginning of 1971, everybody who visited Melbourne dropped in on Space Age Books, Merv Binns' new science fiction bookshop, which he established after he left McGill's Newsagency.There was also a small group of writers who knew and visited each other. Bert Chandler (A. Bertram Chandler), a British ship's captain who became an Australian citizen, who had published much fiction in America and Britain, dropped in on meetings.

During 1969 and 1970 I realised quickly that I was not cut out to be a teacher. Eventually I resigned from the department, only to be offered the bribe of a position in the Publications Branch of the Education Department. But that was in January 1971, after I had published the first 18 issues of *SF Commentary*. In July 1969 I had been able to buy a duplicator in Ararat. I met Stephen Campbell, who helped me to duplicate and collate the issues published in 1969. The letter response was astonishing. I lived in two worlds: the world of my chosen profession, where for two years I felt a terrible failure; and the world of my hobby, where I seemed to be making a mark. *SF Commentary* was collecting a group of superb writers from all over the world.

The advantage that I and my Australian writers had during those first years of publishing *SF Commentary* was that most of us had not yet met the writers whose works we were analysing. We could be ferocious and sardonic; damned critical! as Henry James put it. We could demand that the writers improve their writing and that the publishers should distribute the good stuff in Australia. What kept the tone of *SF Commentary* consistent, by and large, was that my critics and reviewers were mainly talking about overseas writers, some of whom we had met, but most we didn't until Aussiecon 1 in 1975, the first world convention to be held in Melbourne.

However, I and most other Australian fanzine fans and writers were promoting the concept of Australia in '75. John Foyster formally announced the bid at the 1970 Easter convention in Melbourne, and chose a bidding team. In 1973, I undertook my world tour (four months in America and one month in Britain), beginning with leading the Australian delegation to Torcon 2, the world convention in Toronto, where we won the bid to hold the 1975 World convention in Melbourne. We succeeded in our five-year campaign, but paid for it with a loss of innocence. Even George Turner, Australia's most ferocious critic, changed his approach in some ways after he met many of the SF writers, both in 1975 in Melbourne and in 1979 in Brighton.

Worse, Australian convention organisers from 1975 onwards became besotted the idea that Australian conventions must import overseas guests of honour. Not only did this push up convention admission costs, but it also led to a conspiracy of buddiness that eventually helped destroy the atmosphere of in-depth criticism that characterised Australian writing about science fiction.

What if most the writers whose works we are criticising were also our friends? It hadn't mattered much in 1968

and 1969, because the only writers we knew were struggling to maintain a foothold in the overseas magazines and anthologies. What if we were to hang around the bar with the top overseas people on the field, whose books were supposed to be reviewing in our magazines?

What did we really think of our friends' work? And should we say what we thought? Nothing held back John Foyster. He was as remorselessly hard on stories by friends such as Lee Harding as he was on the latest outpouring from J. G. Ballard. I liked a lot of what Lee Harding was doing at the time. I remember writing little about Australian fiction. George Turner tried to remain as rigorously detached as ever, which meant that he and Damien Broderick and Lee Harding could get quite tetchy with each other from time to time during convention panels.

But there was no circle of SF critics, either in the fanzines or the newspapers, who could claim to inhabit a world totally independent from that of the people they were criticising. Nor could there be. George Turner wrote the Science Fiction column for *The Age* for some years, and handed on the job to Damien Broderick. Van Ikin began to review for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and Terry Dowling gained a gig in *The Australian*. These were all people who knew, and were often friends of the writers who started to emerge during the 1970s, mainly as a result of various writers' workshops and the beginnings of the small press movement.

When Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrand, and I began Norstrilia Press in 1975, we also became part of the industry that until now I had been able to write about from a position of independence. Our aim was to publish books that could not possibly appear from major Australian publishers. We kept hoping for maximum exposure for our books, but the only people who might review those books were people like George Turner and Van Ikin. Van had also begun his own magazine, *Science Fiction*, and took some trouble to review all the books published by Norstrilia Press. Fortunately, there was a much wider range or reviewing venues than exist today. They included the major newspapers in every state, and even the literary magazines.

One of our models was Hyland House, established by Ann Godden and Al Knight. One of Australia's first small presses, it publishing some enterprising fiction, including Lee Harding's novel *Displaced Person* and his anthology *Rooms of Paradise*, but relying for its profitability on popular nonfiction titles, such as cooking and gardening books.

In 1976 Paul Collins and Rowena Cory started Cory & Collins, for nearly ten years the other Australian small press specialising in science fiction and fantasy. It seemed to be the rival of Norstrilia Press, but we helped each other in many ways; for instance, I typeset quite a few C&C books. Paul had little patience with the concept of disinterested reviewing. If you disliked his books, you could easily become his enemy. In his view, reviewers were there to support Australian books, and Australian SF readers were there to buy them. The fact that quite a few Australian SF readers remained indifferent to books from both Cory & Collins and Norstrilia Press continued to be a source of irritation.

There was a polite ignoring of a fundamental problem: that the Australian SF scene had developed a 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' culture. Would we have wanted it otherwise? One could not obtain a review of an Australian-published SF book without having that book reviewed by a writer who knew the person being reviewed. But who would want reviewers who did not know the field they were talking about? Insiders know what SF writers are talking about, but reviewers from the literary magazines and most newspaper reviewers don't.

George Turner, 1979, Seacon (World Convention, Brighton, England). (Photo: George Turner Collection.)

The 1990s produced a new movement: Australian SF writers and publishers who thought they were reinventing the wheel. *Eidolon* and *Aurealis* were the new magazines that appeared, published by people who seemed to have little knowledge of the long history of science fiction writing and publishing in Australia. New technologies helped. No longer was it a potential investment disaster to publish 1500 copies of new book, as it had been for Norstrilia and Cory & Collins in the 1970s, and for Peter MacNamara's Aphelion Books in the eighties. Suddenly there were a whole range of new small presses, taking advantage of new technologies and marketing models (especially Print On Demand). Writers' workshops and university writing department began to turn out a huge number of enthusiastic younger writers who knew little about the history of literary science fiction or fantasy in this country and were quite sure they were contributing something entirely new to the Australian SF scene.

The Australian SF boom destroyed the model of critics versus practitioners. The new magazines published little that could be called independent criticism. Boosterism ruled the field. Nobody wanted independent reviewers; it almost became necessary for the people writing about the field to be friends of the writers. Indeed, it is now the case mainly that writers write about other writers.

And this phenomenon might have destroyed SF in

this country, except that the new small press model had some unexpected effects. On the one hand, it became almost impossible to find out what was being published, because of the enormous number of new anthologies and novels being published. Few of them were sent to newspaper reviewers; even fewer have been distributed to regular bookshops; and during the last twenty years *SF Commentary* has rarely received review copies of new Australian books. (Canberra SF Guild and Orb Publications have been honourable exceptions.) But because of the sheer quantity of publication sources, however small or poorly paying, some authors have gained the experience to emerged as internationally known Australian writers. True, few of these would call themselves science fiction writers; for some reason, fantasy and horror writers have made the greatest impact in this country. But one could not deny the style and panache of the work of people such as Kaaron Warren, Cat Sparks, Deb Biancotti, Lucy Sussex , Terry Dowling, Sean Williams, Sean McMullen, Angela Slatter, and many others.

In the 1970s, the university societies, and then the media groups, operated as separate entities, but by the end of the decade many of their members joined the main stream of fandom. The state groups operated separately, but often sent large delegations to interstate conventions. Only in the eighties did true balkanisation begin. I and my magazines were ignored in Australia for a decade. Then as now, most of friends of *SF Commentary* live outside Australia. By the time of Aussiecon 2 there was little sense of Australian readers forming a separate critical entity. That function went to Britain, with its *Foundation*, *Vector*, and *Interzone* magazines, its John Clutes, Dave Langfords, and Brian Aldisses. It became a social crime to think and write *about* SF in Australia. Australian critic and encyclopedist Peter Nicholls came home to Australia, and few people recognised his talents.

Norstrilia Press stopped publishing after 1985, and George Turner became increasingly well known as a science fiction novelist rather than as a critic. Western Australia's reclusive genius, Greg Egan, had published his first novel, *An Unusual Angle*, with Norstrilia in the early 1980s, but he had to wait until after he began publishing in Britain's *Interzone* before his career took off. Peter MacNamara (Aphelion Books) also encouraged a whole new group of authors, include Terry Dowling and Sean McMullen.

In what way do we all remain friends? Most Australian writers would not know about me or *SF Commentary*, although the magazine has been going for 43 years. I do not recognise most of the newer writers at conventions. They do seem to assume that I will know them, and they don't know me, perhaps because I commit the ultimate crime of *not writing fiction*. This is such a bizarre turnaround of the situation in 1970 that it always seems laughable. Are there now no readers, only readers who are wannabe writers? Who reads the new writers? My own friends are largely people I've known for thirty or forty years, including the people who still love writing and publishing fanzines (in ANZAPA). Most of the people who recognise what we are doing here in *SFC* live overseas.

And what has happened to those pioneer writers who huddled in a corner at the 1968 and 1969 Melbourne conventions?

(l. to r.) Damien Broderick, David Boutland (David Rome), and Lee Harding; at the 1969 Melbourne SF Convention. (Photo: Mervyn Binns.)

Damien Broderick

Damien Broderick, 2005. (Photo: Jennifer Bryce.)

When in 2010 Damien Broderick was given the A. Bertram Chandler Award for his lifetime service to Australian SF, many people at the awards ceremony must have wondered who he was. The younger members of conventions in Australia would never have met him, because Damien has been living in San Antonio, Texas, with his wife Barbara Lamar for more than ten years. Even before he moved overseas, he had not been seen at Australian conventions for some time.

Few Australian readers — and probably few overseas readers — would be aware that Damien Broderick has used the new technologies (internet and Print On Demand production) to make himself Australia's most prolific author, editor, and critic. He has also suffered from the side effects of PODitis. His publisher, Wildside Press, does not send out review copies, apart from one or two to *Locus*, and none to *SF Commentary*, *Foundation*, or *Vector*. When Damien included my essays in several recent anthologies he has edited, he had to send me his own contributor's copies.

So let me give you some idea of why Damien was awarded a Chandler Award. As **Russell Blackford** wrote in his citation that accompanied the award:

A. Bertram Chandler Award presented to Damien Broderick

In 1963, a local religious magazine published Damien Broderick's first short story: a non-SF piece entitled 'Walk Like a Mountain'. However, his real breakthrough came a year later with a much longer story — definitely science fiction this time — 'The Sea's Furthest End.' Damien received the acceptance letter for this ornate, melodramatic space opera when he was only nineteen, and it soon appeared in the UK, in the first of John Carnell's *New Writings in SF* anthologies ... This launched Damien's international literary career, and I'm tempted to claim that he never looked back. That, however, would be doubly misleading. First, because financial exigency kept him selling mainly to Australian markets during the 1960s, then led him into a career as a journalist and magazine editor. Second, he actually does look back: although he's always found new interests and experimented with ideas and forms, he often finds opportunities to deepen, extend, and update earlier narratives.

Damien has long been at the forefront of Australian science fiction — even since moving to San Antonio, Texas, where he's been based for several years now. He's won numerous awards, including his first of several Ditmar Awards for *The Dreaming Dragons* (1980) (this book was also runner-up, to Gregory Benford's *Timescape*, for the John W. Campbell Memorial Award). During the 1980s, Damien completed a PhD from Deakin University, with a doctoral dissertation on the semiotics of literary and scientific discourses, paying particular attention to science fiction. Thereafter, he emerged as a major commentator on the implications of advanced technology, and on the complex boundaries and relationships between literature and science.

Any attempt to come to terms with Damien's overall achievement would require an understanding of his extraordinary breadth of reading and concern. A full critical study would examine his work as a radio dramatist, journalist, magazine and anthology editor, critic, literary theorist, and public intellectual. The totality of it all is breathtaking. But for all that, the productions that have most defined his

Russell Blackford accepts the A. Bertram Chandler Award on behalf of Damien Broderick, at Aussiecon 4, Melbourne, 2010. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

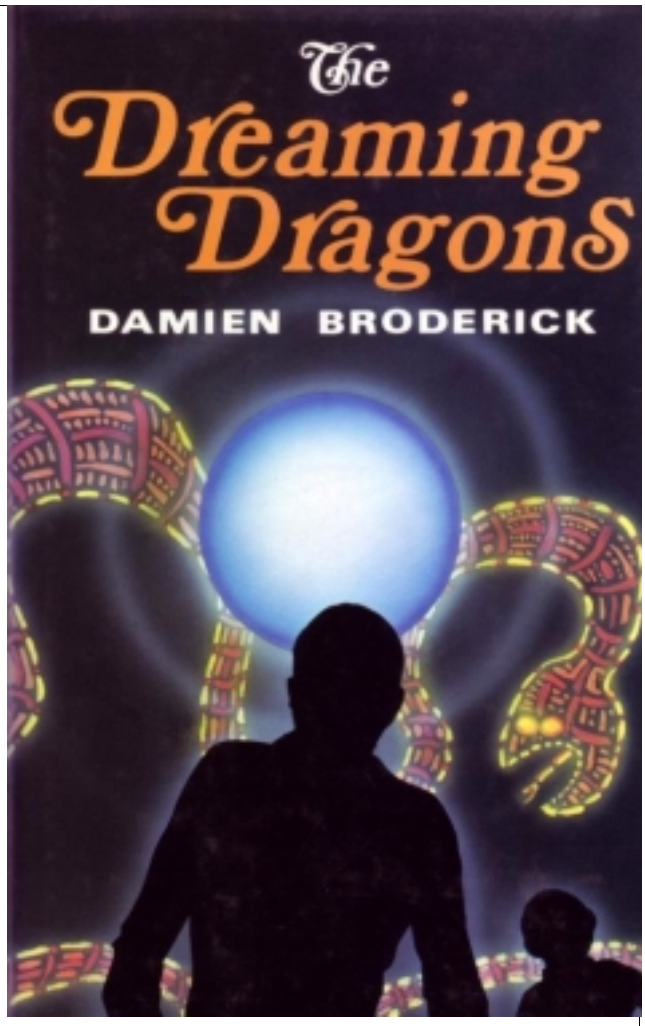
career, and perhaps his self-understanding, have always been his novels and short stories.

Over time, Damien has grown as a storyteller and wordsmith: he has developed an increasing sophistication of technique and a deeper vision. His narratives often depict extraordinary travels in space and time, with a particular interest in the paradoxes of time travel and intertemporal communication, and in related themes such as parallel or altered realities. Something of this is apparent in 'The Sea's Furthest End,' where there is a sort of split-level reality; but it is most explicit in such novels as *The Dreaming Dragons*, *The Judas Mandala* (1982), and the more recent diptych of *Godplayers* (2005) and *K-Machines* (2006). He is also imbued with mainstream literary values, and his fiction is remarkable for the many techniques and voices that he has employed to express his vision.

Damien's novels and stories can be enjoyed for their clever accounts of extraordinary adventures, for their author's ever-deepening personal philosophy, and most certainly for his gift of humour. I've emphasised his serious concerns, but many of Damien's narratives are surprisingly funny, employing irony, wordplay, and even slapstick comedy.

Over the years, since his precocious beginnings as a professional writer, Damien Broderick has developed a mastery of style, technique, and voice. He renews his central themes each time he takes them up, and displays a versatility that marks him out as a writer of exceptional value and interest. His diverse and extraordinary achievements in the science fiction field make him an outstanding recipient of the A. Bertram Chandler Award.

— Russell Blackford, 1 August 2010



Norstrilia Press hardback edition (1980) of *The Dreaming Dragons*. (Cover: Grant Gittus.)

And that's not the half of it. Here is the Wikipedia list of Damien's recent publications, rearranged to show the date of publication. Damien was born in 1944; his first book of short stories appeared when he was 21.

1965

- *A Man Returned* (short story collection).

1970

- *Sorcerer's World*. Revised and expanded: *The Black Grail* (novel).

1977

- *The Zeitgeist Machine: A New Anthology of Science Fiction* (edited SF anthology).

1980

- *The Dreaming Dragons*. John W. Campbell Award 1981, runner-up. Revised edition: *The Dreaming* (2001, 2009) (novel).

1982

- *The Judas Mandala*. Revised 2002 (novel).

1983

- *Valencies* (1983). With Rory Barnes (novel).

1984

- *Transmitters*. Revised 1985, Revised and re-imagined edition: *Quipu* (2009) (novel).

1985

- *Strange Attractors: Original Australian Speculative Fiction* (edited SF anthology).

1988

- *Striped Holes* (novel).
- *Matilda at the Speed of Light: A New Anthology of Australian Science Fiction* (1988) (edited SF anthology).

1991

- *The Dark Between the Stars* (short story collection).

1992

- *The Lotto Effect: Towards a Technology of the Paranormal* (nonfiction).

1993

- *The Sea's Furthest End* (novel).

1994

- *The Architecture of Babel: Discourses of Literature and Science* (nonfiction).

1995

- *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* (nonfiction).

1997

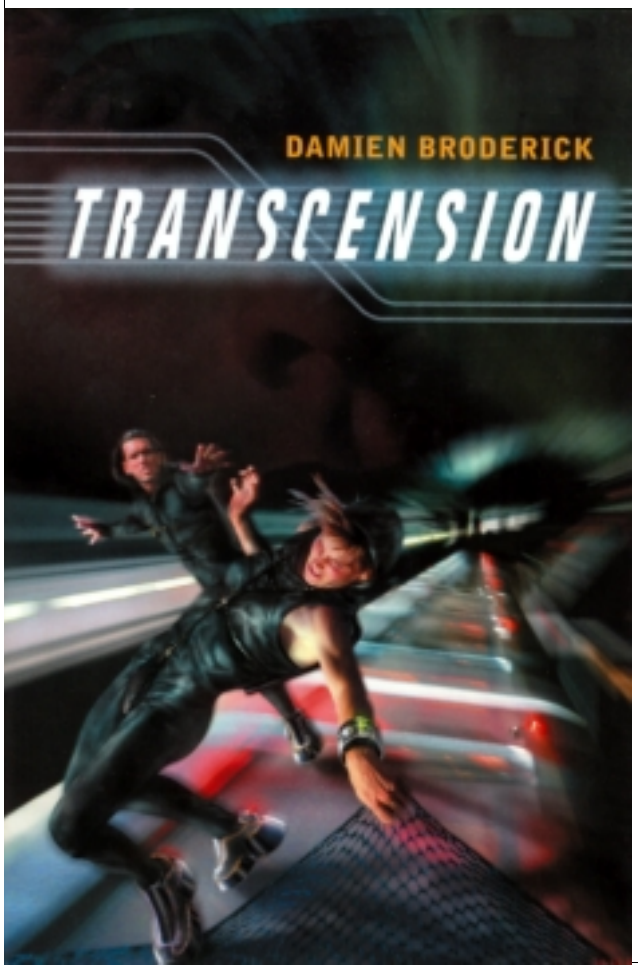
- *The Spike: How Our Lives are being Transformed by Rapidly Advancing Technology.* Revised 2001 (nonfiction).
- *The White Abacus.* Ditmar Award 1998 (novel).
- *Zones.* With Rory Barnes (novel).
- *Theory and Its Discontents* (nonfiction).

1998

- *Not the Only Planet: Science Fiction Travel Stories* (1998) (edited SF anthology).

1999

- *Stuck in Fast Forward.* With Rory Barnes. Expanded in 2003 as *The Hunger of Time* (novel).
- *The Book of Revelation.* With Rory Barnes. First US edition: *Dark Gray* (2010) (novel).
- *Centaurus: Best of Australian Science Fiction.* With David G. Hartwell (edited SF anthology).
- *The Last Mortal Generation* (nonfiction).



2000

- *Transrealist Fiction.* About Transrealism (nonfiction).

2002

- *Transcension.* Ditmar Award 2002 (novel).
- *Jack and the Aliens* (children's novel).
- *Earth is But a Star: Excursions through Science Fiction to the Far Future.* Ditmar Award 2002 (edited SF anthology).

2003

- *Jack and the Skyhook* (2003) (children's novel).

2004

- *x, y, z, t: Dimensions of Science Fiction* (2004) (nonfiction).

2005

- *Godplayers* (2005) (novel).
- *Ferocious Minds: Polymathy and the New Enlightenment* (2005) (nonfiction).

2006

- *K-Machines.* Ditmar Award 2006 (novel).

2007

- *Post Mortal Syndrome.* On-line serialisation. No longer available for download from *Cosmos* magazine. With Barbara Lamar; first print edition (2011) (novel).
- *Outside the Gates of Science: Why It's Time for the Paranormal to Come In From The Cold* (2007) (nonfiction).

2008

- *Year Million: Science at the Far Edge of Knowledge* (2008) (edited nonfiction anthology).

2009

- *I'm Dying Here.* With Rory Barnes (novel).
- *Uncle Bones: Four Science Fiction Novellas.* Introduction by George Zebrowski (short story collection).
- *Chained to the Alien: The Best of Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series)* (edited nonfiction anthology).
- *Unleashing the Strange: Twenty-First Century Science Fiction Literature* (nonfiction).

2010

- *Human's Burden.* With Rory Barnes.
- *Climbing Mount Implausible: The Evolution of a Science Fiction Writer.* Foreword by Russell Blackford (short story collection).
- *Skiffy and Mimesis: More Best of Australian Science*

Fiction Review (Second Series) (edited nonfiction anthology).

2011

- *The Qualia Engine: Science Fiction Stories*. Foreword by Mary Robinette Kowa (short story collection).
- *Warriors of the Tao: Best of Science Fiction, A Review of Speculative Literature*. With Van Ikin (edited nonfiction anthology).
- *Embarrass My Dog: The Way We Were, the Things We Thought* (nonfiction).

2012

- *Science Fiction: The 101 Best Novels, 1985–2010*. With Paul Di Filippo (nonfiction).
- *Gaia to Galaxy* (forthcoming, 2012) (film/radio script).
- *Restore Point* (forthcoming, 2012) (film/radio script).
- *Adrift in the Noösphere* (forthcoming, 2012). Foreword by Rich Horton (short story collection).
- *Xeno Fiction: More Best of Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature*. With Van Ikin (forthcoming 2012) (edited nonfiction anthology).
- *Building New Worlds: New Worlds Science Fiction. The Carnell Era, Volume One*. With John Boston (forthcoming, 2012) (nonfiction).
- *New Worlds: Toward the New Wave. The Carnell Era, Volume Two*. With John Boston (forthcoming, 2012) (nonfiction).
- *Strange Highways: Reading Science Fantasy*. With John Boston (forthcoming, 2012) (nonfiction).

2013

- *Fantastika at the Edge of Reality: Yet More Best of Science Fiction, A Review of Speculative Literature*. With Van Ikin (forthcoming, 2013) (edited nonfiction anthology).

In preparation

- *Other Times, Other Spaces: Dialogues with the Imagination*. With Van Ikin (edited nonfiction anthology).
- *Intelligent Machines, Uploaded Minds*. With Russell Blackford (edited nonfiction anthology).
- *The Science of Psi, Vol. I*. With Ben Goertzel (edited nonfiction anthology).

Not dated

- 'Cultural Dominants and Differential MNT Uptake'. Essay at Wise Nano (nonfiction).

At this steadily increasing rate of production, Damien Broderick will soon be up to producing 20 books a year. But will you have heard of any of them, let alone read them?

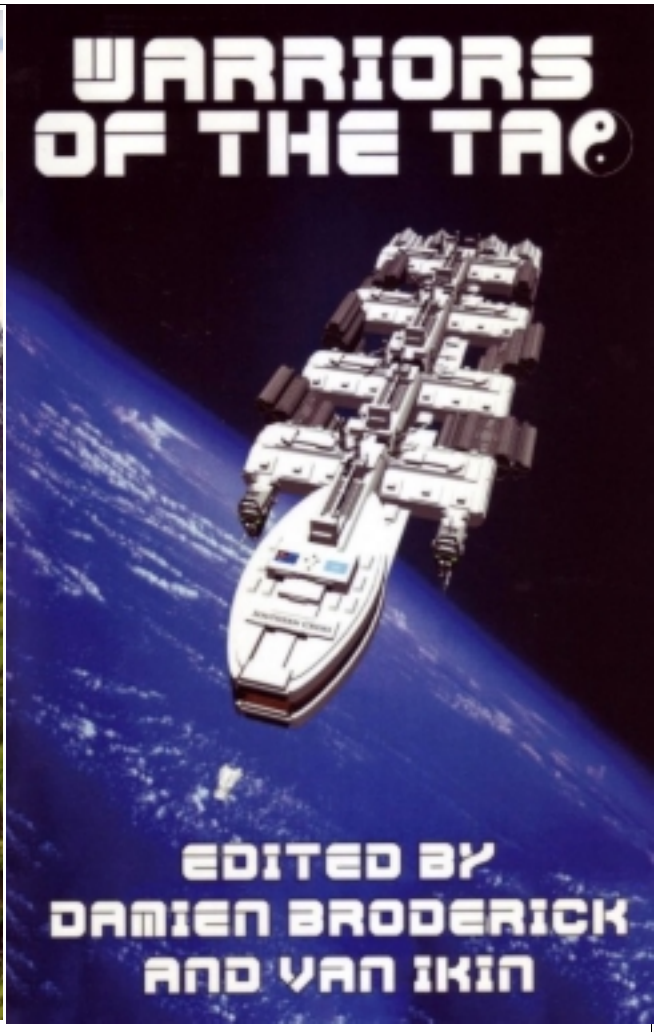
I had not heard of most of the above items until I read the list. Is it that Damien does not become involved in self-publicity stunts and nationwide reading tours? Should he have to? Isn't it the publisher's job to distribute the books and do whatever it takes to sell it? Not under the POD model, it seems.

Cover: Robert Mizerek.

I became aware of the ever-increasing rapidity of publication and range of interest of Damien's output only because he sent me the books that include articles of mine. These anthologies, comprehensive collections of articles and reviews from *Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series)* (1986–1991) and Van Ikin's *Science Fiction* (1977–now), aim to tell the history of Austalia's contribution to SF criticism for the first time.

ASFR (Second Series) was edited from by a collective that included, at various times, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau, Jenny and Russell Blackford, Janeen Webb, and Lucy Sussex. The editors wrote much of the magazine themselves. In ***Chained the Alien: The Best of Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series)*** (Borgo Press; 2009; 227 pp.; $US24.95), Yvonne Rousseau discusses the work of, among others, Joanna Russ, Philippa Maddern, and Josephine Saxton, in her article 'SF and the Dirty Little Virgin', and Robert Heinlein in 'Walking Through Walls'. Russell Blackford contributes articles about Samuel Delany, Wynne Whiteford, John Calvin Batchelor, and Keith Taylor. John Bangsund also contributes a tribute to Wynne Whiteford. Jenny Blackford writes about Gene Wolfe, and Janeen Webb about vari-

Cover: Anders Sandberg.



Cover art: Anders Sandberg.

ous Women's Press publications. John Foyster reviews Brian Aldiss's *Trillion Year Spree*; and in a different article, Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* and Brian Aldiss's *Forgotten Life*. George Turner writes about 'The Real Science Fiction', and a whole group of us (Bruce Gillespie, Yvonne Rousseau, John Baxter, Russell Blackford, Martin Bridgstock, Damien Broderick, and John Foyster celebrated (or otherwise) the first publication of George Turner's most important SF novel, *The Sea and Summer*, which was released about the time that *ASFR (Second Series)* was making its mark.

Skiffy and Mimesis: More Best of Australian SF Review (Second Series) (Borgo Press; 2010; 284 pp.) includes a lot of material by the editors, but that's partly because in this book Damien Broderick makes a point of covering two of the epistolary disputes that made reading *ASFR* (both series) such a bracing experience. In a section labelled 'The Ambiguities of Utopia', Yvonne Rousseau, Gregory Benford, John Foyster, and Norman Talbot argue about right- and left-wing utopias in science fiction. In the section 'Skiffy and Mimesis', Damien shows how two trenchant articles, in this case by John Foyster and George Turner on Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime*, could develop into an exchange that left nobody's egos unscathed. George Turner says that Shepard got war wrong (i.e. he hadn't been there, whereas George had, during World War II), and Lucius Shepard replies that the Vietnam War, the inspiration for *Life During Wartime*, was nothing like World War II, and George should pull his head in. John Foyster then weighs in, and is particularly unsparing in his reply to George. Which leads to a fair amount of bleedin' cut and thrust. This is the sort of critical sparring that anybody involved in Australian SF should be reminded of.

Other riches in *Skiffy and Mimesis* include Jenny Blackford on Kim Stanley Robinson's short stories and Robert Holdstock, Norman Talbot on Cordwainer Smith, Yvonne Rousseau on Ursula Le Guin, Michael Tolley's epic articles about Philip K. Dick's short stories, Zoran Bekric on Watchmen, Janeen Webb on Margaret Atwood, Douglas Barbour on Frank Herbert, and George Turner on 'New Directions in Science Fiction'.

Warriors of the Tao: The Best of Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature, edited by Damien Broderick and Van Ikin (Borgo Press; 2011; 309 pp.) is the beginning of a three-volume project: an anthology of reviews and articles from Van Ikin's magazine *Science Fiction* from its beginnings in 1977 to the present. Van Ikin had the advantage over members of the *ASFR* Collective of being an academic at the University of Western Australia. Not that this seems to have helped him materially to produce each issue, since he publishes it irregularly as his own

fanzine and not as an organ of an English Department. But Van has always used well the contacts he has made throughout the world, resulting in a contents page that is rich in names of contributors and subjects covered.

Contributors include the omnipresent Russell Blackford (on and with David Lake on sexuality in science fiction and Greg Egan; and in conversation with Darko Suvin, Sylvia Kelso, and Van Ikin), Bruce Shaw on Peter Goldsworthy, Sylvia Kelso on Lois McMaster Bujold, Tess Williams on the Hydra, Terry Dowling on Samuel Delany and Cordwainer Smith, Bruce Gillespie on the non-fiction novels of Philip K. Dick (yes, *that* article, itself a reprint by Van from earlier sources), Sean McMullen on 'The Golden Age of Science Fiction' (1930s through to the 1960s), David Medlen on Norma K. Hemming, Yvonne Rousseau on Gerald Murnane, Van Ikin interviewing Helen Merrick, and George Turner on 'Imagination, Fantasy and Fiction' (in answer to John Baxter).

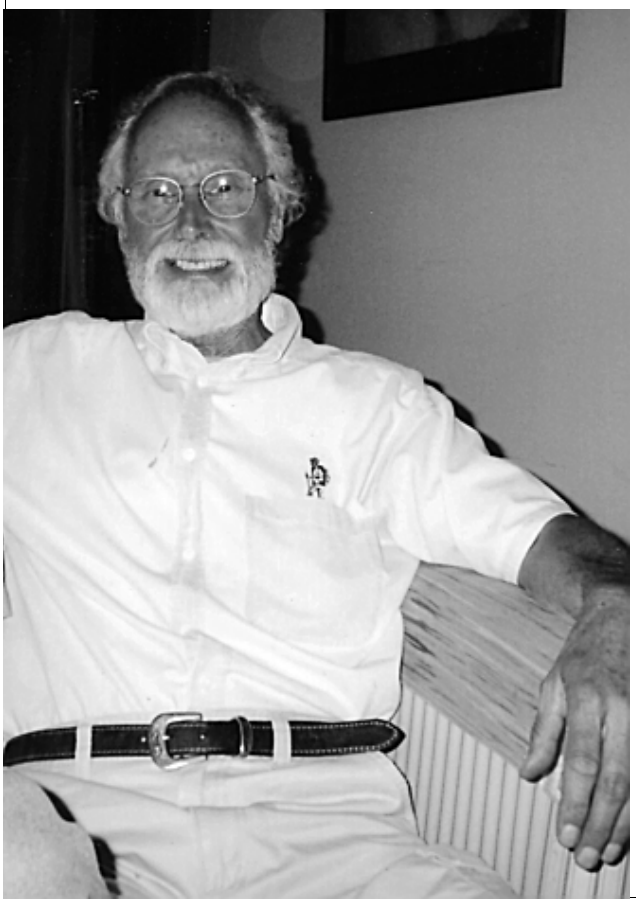
Some of these authors will be familiar to readers of *SF Commentary*, and some have never made contact with me, presumably because I am not an academic. Some of the articles from both *ASFR* and *Science Fiction* have that unmistakable academic sound to them, but most do not. All are people who like a good argument, which is why these volumes are highly recommended.

Why do I not have all of Damien Brodericks's volumes? I have a personal phobia about sending funds via the internet, which is the only way to buy them. They don't appear in any Australian bookshop, not even in specialist SF shops such as Slow Glass, Infinitas, and Gaslight. You can't fondle them or flip through the pages. On the Barnes & Noble site, you cannot even find a list of contents. Something has gone dreadfully wrong with bookselling.

But if I do break down my phobia to send some money over the internet, the new Broderick volume I'll buy first is ***Science Fiction: The 101 Best Novels, 1985-2010***, with Paul Di Filippo. This book, which is already published, is a sequel to Dave Pringle's famous ***Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*** (Carroll & Graf; 1985). It will be interesting to see if Broderick and Di Filippo have taste as impeccable as Pringle's in 1985.

David Boutland

In 1963, I bought a book called *7th Annual Edition: The Year's Best SF*, edited by Judith Merril. Among the 32 stories and poems in the book, only one story came from the pages of E. J. Carnell's English magazines. It was 'Parky' (from *Science Fantasy*), a short story by David Rome. Merril's story introduction does not say that David Rome's real name was David Boutland, or that his story was one of the very Australian SF short stories published in America before the late 1960s. About the same time as I bought this anthology, I read an author profile of David Rome in *New Worlds*, and then was amazed to meet the same person in Melbourne during the 1968 convention.



David Boutland, 2005. (Photo: David Boutland.)

David cut a dashing figure, the very model of a modern writer. In fact, his success was based not on his occasional sales of SF stories, but his ability to break into TV writing. He was contributing episodes to several Australian TV series, most notably the ABC's *Bellbird*, which ran for years. During my holiday in September 1970, David showed me over the huge ABC studios in Ripponlea, and we had afternoon tea with one of the stars of *Bellbird*.

The next year, David's first marriage split up and he went off to Sydney. He was at the launch party for Space Age Books, but I doubt if I saw him again after that.

Therefore, thanks to Rob Gerrand providing a contact address, I was astonished to receive in 2005 the following letter, and the photo that accompanies it:

DAVID BOUTLAND
405 The Ridgeway, Lisarow NSW 2250

For interest, I enclose a photo of me as an old bloke (now 66); enjoyed seeing yourself not much changed, and Harding ditto.

Thank you also for the two fanzines. I have to confess that they are a bit rarefied for me these days. I'm still stuck

David Boutland's online collection *Return to New Worlds*, available for Kindle.
Cover painting: *Red Orb* by Sheila White.

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in the past, just finished rereading *The Day of the Triffids*. I was delighted that Rob Gerrand chose 'Parky' for his *Best Australian Science Fiction Writing: A Fifty Year Collection*, especially for the nostalgia trip. Some great stories in his selection — personally I loved Lee Harding's 'Dancing Gerontius'.

I can't say I've ever really understood why 'Parky' was so well received — maybe a kind of endearing dumb kindness shown by the carny boss (a bit like my old friend David Rome, who is also kind of dumb); also, we could do with a 'Parky' then, now, and in the future? Thank you too for your very kind comments about my story, and my writing.

I've definitely quit TV forever, about one step ahead of it quitting me. I tried writing short stories for the American market and actually did get some real interest from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* — but too many writers and too little space available in the mags. Three months waiting to hear, one sign of interest after a lot of submissions, uh-uh. I've just now completed a novel, *Pelican Dance*, 140 thousand words and trying to find an agent. It's the toughest work of all, this book-length fiction — and again, an overcrowded market. Guess I was lucky to find a way to make a good-enough living writing TV drama.

On the personal side, my partner of 34 years Cheryl — you may have met her once in Melbourne — is now helping to keep me in the manner I've become accustomed ... working part-time at DJs. We live in a rather jerry-built old house on a couple of acres a few miles inland from the coast. Still poor, like most writers' families (never did earn those huge fees everyone thinks we did in telly). Have a son, Matthew, aged 21, just finishing his trade (sign-writer). Health's good. Might live til 90. Mainstream reading: have discovered Virginia Woolf. But as always, writing is the thing. Compulsive masochism.

21 September 2005

brg I sent David some more fanzines, and he sent a letter or two, but we didn't return to regular correspondence until he wrote to me six years later that he had collected his short stories into an online volume called *Return to New Worlds*:*

Thank you for the package of reading which arrived yesterday and was picked up this morning, on a rainy Saturday. At first glimpse, I'm impressed by the art work (I wish I'd had Dick Jenssen to design a cover for *Return to New Worlds*) and more so was reminded of the volume of work you've put into the fanzines over the years. Once I eventually finish my final-final-final edit of *Return* I look forward to some long hours of reading.

My own enthusiasm for SF has been — rekindled. Gathering together the old Nova mags, plus *Galaxy* and *Amazing Fact and Science Fiction*, and preparing the collection has been a journey back in time. Turning musty pages brings back feelings of how it was opening a brand new copy of *New Worlds*, fifty years ago, and seeing a David Rome story. Or checking the Post Mortem page and finding him at or near the bottom of the readers' list! I've relived how it was labouring at the typewriter, with so much hope and certainty. Were those hopes realised?

Looking back, I can't think of anything I'd rather have done. All I ever wanted from the age of about 15 was to *be a writer*, and it's those early years which evoke real nostalgia. TV is all about deadlines and budgets. Professionalism is the priority, then creativity. And obviously it's a collaborative medium. But of the 250 or so scripts written a few remain memorable. If you've ever watched *Halifax FP* you might have seen my telefilm in which Garry McDonald played a 'time traveller'! 'First Child', one of the three new stories in *Return* is, as I say in the Kindle collection, based on a story I proposed to a producer but which was never scripted. On the collection, I hope you enjoy the thirteen stories. I've made some small changes and discovered a few more typos since I sent down your 'review' copy. Also, I'm still trying to get a cover done. I'll snail mail a disk to you when that's ready. I'm pretty much computer illiterate and not on the internet at all. My brother John has done all the work in hunting out mags and finding out how to go about uploading to Amazon.

I'd like to subscribe to *SF Commentary* if you continue to publish hard copies.

28 September 2011

brg The following letter shows that there was quite a bit of discussion between us about David's attempt to get his science fiction back before the public by publishing on the internet. I think I did warn David that not many SF readers might now remember 'David Rome'. He needs a website, a Facebook page, the usual stuff that writers need these days to put themselves on the map. But David himself does not have an email account ...*

Misty morning, rained all night. Don't sleep so well now I'm truly aging. 73 in a couple of weeks. The bonus is that for the past year since I turned 72 I've been thinking of myself as 73 so I feel, hey! I'm only 73. Another bonus —

of not sleeping — is hearing the night sounds in the bush surrounding us on three sides. The owls. Fruit bats screaming and fighting for palm nuts later in the year. Mysterious rustles. Frog-croaks. Sometimes the cry of some poor creature swept up to its doom, though. And this morning, at first light, the lyrebird down in the valley, going berserk, imitating whipbirds and lawnmowers, and singing those golden notes that only clichés can describe.

Which brings me to David Rome. Not good news on the Kindle front. So far haven't sold enough of *Return to New Worlds* even to *begin* to pay for the purchase of the site. Of course, collecting those has been a journey in itself, as I wrote you earlier. But lack of interest is disappointing. There's no way of knowing how many potential readers have browsed and decided not to buy, of course. David Rome was pretty much an unknown. I started with a price which might have been a bit high for Kindle. I've now dropped that to the minimum you can ask and still get 70% royalties — 3 USD. I'm also hoping of course that your review if favourable might have some impact when it hits the e-waves. I wonder what the market is like in real-publishing land? Did Rob Gerrand's *Fifty Year collection* sell?

Anyway, today's news — eagerly awaited planet-wide — is that Rome with paltry ego bruised, has decided to 'show them'. He's typing away on his old Royal at this moment, rattling out a slightly re-vamped version of *Squat* — sexual adventure on other planets. When he's satisfied (he's easily satisfied) I'll set it up for him on my new Toshiba and it will be uploaded to Kindle. He reckons that if the sexual adventures of a fat grey toad and a fighting man like Yale won't sell, nothing will. Also he reminds me that it received a Ditmar nomination. Hmm? Further, I warn you, he plans to write more of this stuff — which incidentally John Carnell, when acting as his agent, surprisingly refused to handle, commenting, 'I don't handle this stuff.' Rome reckons that if he writes a couple of *Squat* books a year (in the old days of selling to Horwitz Books he sometimes wrote ten thousand words a day) he can get a score of them up on Kindle before he goes. Costs nothing after all. And maybe he's right — maybe they will sell. His latest atrocious idea is, wait for it: *Squat PI: Interplanetary Private Investigations*..

Rainy days and nearing another birthday have produced some gloom recently. Reading the letters in your publications makes me gloomy too. So many of us left stranded in time, those great times when we believed, and no amount of rejections could convince us, and reading the magazines we really did have a sense of wonder. Reminds me of the old Billy Joel song 'Goodnight Saigon': 'We're all going down together ...'

Well, mebbe not all of us. I'm occasionally intrigued and impressed how you've been able to live from doing what you loved to do. I guess that's the thing, some of us were able to stay out of or escape the life of commuting to office buildings where the real people dreamt their dreams which never came true.

30 November 2011

I've been wondering what response you might have had to the ad for *Return to New Worlds*, wondering whether you have read the stories in said story collection and what response/reaction you have had to them, favourable or otherwise. I got a copy of *Science Fiction News* sent snail mail to me by Graham Stone. Plenty of nostalgia in its few pages. A good read.

D. Rome did begin retyping more stories from his old wags with the thought of uploading *Return to New Worlds 2*. However, the black hole his earnest endeavour has apparently been sucked into has dispirited him, and he's usually to be found nowadays taking rock and roll lessons at the Over Fifties Leisure and Culture Club.

I'm at work on the fourth and final volume of my autobiographical novel series. Volume 1 starts in 1933 with the meeting of the mother and the father. Volume 2, *The Children*, covers my childhood in Australia, early days of sales to the K. G. Murray magazines, my return to England to write SF and comics, and eventually re-returning and starting work in TV. Volume 3 is a much shorter piece in which Cheryl and I meet — interesting; her boss threatened to shoot me. Volume 4, our son Matthew is on the scene, as well as my daughter Deborah, family drama and tragedy common to us all, the finding of this beautiful place where we now live, and its pages will take us to— the end.

Do David Rome know what is happening, if anything. He does have a mild psychosis, as anyone who has read 'The Cleaver' knows, and can't be entirely trusted.

23 April 2012

brg This issue of *SF Commentary* was supposed to appear a year ago, along with the above piece about of the work of David Rome. More than most other writers, in these stories from the 1960s he captures the essence of the entertaining kind of science fiction that E. J. Carnell's English magazines specialised in. Most of the stories seem a bit short (or short of breath) for today's market, where a bit of ponderous self-importance goes a long way. Carnell liked deft, entertaining stories to balance the very good novellas that he published. Download David's collection from amazon.co.uk, and you can make the contrast between David's stories and today's rather heavyhanded SF. David Rome knew (and still knows) how to write the kind of entertaining story that I could never manage (which is why I stopped writing fiction 30 years ago). I just hope there is still a public out there for his older stories as well as his new material.*

Other pioneers

Whatever happened to those other friends I met first in 1968 and 1969?

I haven't heard anything of or from **Jack Wodhams** for many years. Paul Collins published his work during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and might well keep in touch with him. He must be in his mid eighties (since he was about forty when he travelled to Melbourne in 1968), and might even be still writing.

I had thought that **Lee Harding** had stopped writing fiction some years ago, but now I hear otherwise. I would

welcome a new book from him. I keep meeting writers who were prompted to begin their SF and/or fantasy writing careers by memories of Lee's 1979 novel *Displaced Person*, winner of the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award in 1980, and which stayed in print for more than 20 years. It would be good if that received a new edition, as well as favourites of mine, such as *The Weeping Sky* (1977).

George Turner, as you know, died in 1997, and made me his literary executor. I'm not too good at literary executions, but fortunately he also bequeathed me his American agent, Cherry Weiner (an Australian who has lived in New Jersey for many years). Through her, Gollancz have recently bought the rights to a new edition of *The Sea and Summer*. I'll tell you more as soon as I see a copy.

Wynne Whiteford died in 2002, but not before a revival of his career in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to publisher **Paul Collins**, agent **Cherry Weiner**, and DAW Books in New York.

From the members of the *ASFR* critical community, we have lost **John Foyster**, to cancer in 2003 and **George Turner**, to a stroke, in 1997 (see above). Because of ill health we've heard little from **John Bangsund** during the last 15 years. However, it has been delightful to read John's postings on Facebook during recent months. He's still my favourite writer about whatever he wants to write about, whenever he feels like writing about it.

I keep saying that SF criticism is in a bad way in Australia these days, until I look at some of the Australians who write for *SF Commentary*, reviewers and critics such as **Tim Train**, **Ray Wood**, **Yvonne Rousseau**, **Jenny Blackford**, and **Gillian Polack** — and the astonishing **Colin Steele**. A great crew to have on board, but they receive almost no kudos for the work they do. Otherwise, contributions to *SFC* pour in from overseas writers. Granted, there could well be Australian academics who are writing interesting material, but if so, they are not shedding their pearls widely. The only glimmers of light can be seen in tne work of newspaper reviewers, such as **Colin Steele**, **Ian Nichols**, **George Williams**, and **James Bradley**, or in the efforts of *Overland* assistant editor **Rjurik Davidson** to publish regular articles about SF in Australia's most distinguished literary magazine.

This wasn't quite the note I wanted to end on, but it's where it has ended anyway. What I've just said makes me feel all the more grateful to those friends who stay the course. The previous pages are just part 1 of a proposed survey of my own heroes of the local scene. I've run out of time and room. Let's end with this tribute from one old friend to another old friend, recently lost in action:

Brian Aldiss's tribute to Harry Harrison (1925–2012)

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

Harry's first published novel was *Deathworld*. This established him as a punchy writer of intelligent action adventures. *Deathworld* was accepted for *Astounding*, edited by John W. Campbell, with whom Harry established a firm relationship, though without sharing John's increasingly radical views. He plonked down the payment from *Astounding* on the desk of a travel agent. He and his wife Joan and their two children took a flight to the UK,

Harry Harrison, Peter Weston, and David Langford. (Photo: Peter Weston.)

in time to join the first World SF Con ever to leave the States for foreign parts. Was that 1952? We were pretty hard-up in those days.

For the rest of his life, Harry and Joan were living around in a very European way, either in England or in Denmark, and travelling to various other countries.

He and I set up World SF during the Cold War. Under this aegis we were able to travel around behind the Iron Curtain. We were hospitably received in the Soviet Union. Later, I borrowed £6000 from Harry to fly to China, where I fell for Chinese women.

We engaged in many enterprises between bouts of novel writing, including publishing a critical magazine, *SF Horizons* and a long running series of *Best SF Stories*, an annual series, with Harry — I must admit — doing most of the work. We brought science fiction to a new readership.

When Harry and family were living in Denmark my wife and I often visited them, and toured all Scandinavia. It was always wonderful to find a new country. New friends, new food, new drink.

Harry was making a great name with comic novels such as the very funny *Bill the Galactic Hero* and many other comic novels, mainly of them involving the Stainless Steel Rat. His serious novel *Make Room! Make Room!*, dealing with overpopulation, was made into the film *Soylent Green*, when Harry became friendly with the star, Charlton Heston.

Harry and I have had some high old times round the globe, including China and the now defunct Jugoslavia, and behind us both were our families, who also enjoyed mad

trips abroad. Harry was particularly fortunate in his learned daughter Moira, who has been looking after him.

Of course we are desolate that this bright and rampageous spirit is no longer with us. More than desolate. Rocked to the foundations.

Sincere regards,
Brian

(17 August 2012)

brg Thanks, Brian, for sending us your tribute. Elaine and I also have fond memories of Harry Harrison, who died on 15 August 2012 at the age of 87.

In the early 1980s, Harry was Guest of Honour at a Swancon in Perth. When he mentioned visiting Melbourne to catch up with Merv Binns and all the gang from Space Age Books, Merv and Paul Stevens quickly booked a large room at a Melbourne hotel and put on 'HarryCon' for the weekend. Harry and Joan were wonderful guests. At some point during proceedings Harry drew from his bag a large green block of lucite (similar to the Ditmar monolith shape, but greener and brighter) and presented it to me. It was the 'Harry Harrison Award for Promoting Science Fiction Internationally', awarded at the previous year's World SF meeting. At the end of the convention, Harry and Joan visited our house in Collingwood, and our best cat Solomon sat on Joan's lap.

We were saddened when we heardthat Joan had died, and dismayed by news on the internet about Harry's illness this year. It would have been wonderful to catch up with them again, but it was not to be.

I always thought *Bill the Galactic Hero* was one of the few great comic novels in SF (but did not like the inevitable sequels), and Harry wrote many other pieces (especially his short fiction) that I enjoyed. I was specially privileged when many years ago a kind reader sent me photocopies of the only two issues of *SF Horizons*, edited by Brian and Harry. I own five volumes of their annual *Best SF* volumes, and *Nova 1*, a superb hardback original fiction anthology edited by Harry in the seventies. Thanks for your life and work, Harry. (Bruce Gillespie, 24 August 2012)*

Mark Plummer

The strange case of *Bruce R. Gillespie*

brg From the Editorial, *Banana Wings* 46, June 2011, edited by Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey.*

We are here concerned with Bruce R. Gillespie of the Greensborough Gillespies. Back in *Banana Wings* No 45 — it all seems so long ago — I mentioned whimsically that 'One of these days I will compile a definitive bibliography of Bruce Gillespie fanzines'. Robert Lichtman said in a subsequent email, no doubt equally whimsically, 'I so look forward to your fulfilling your desire', and that was enough of a prompt to have me hauling boxes out of the storage system, cross-referencing our holdings against Robert's, Greg Pickersgill's, and Kim Huett's, and generally getting all bibliographical and trying to get my head around the numbering system of **brg**.

Robert had identified two different **brg** No 7s and concluded, perhaps not unreasonably, that one of them was in fact a misnumbered **brg** No 6. But we had a real **brg** No 6 that Robert didn't, 6 pages dated October 1992. This was then followed by the true **brg** No 7, 2 pages, February 1993. But what's this? Two months later there's another No 7, the False Seventh **brg**, 11 pages of canine knees implanted in the groin of ANZAPA No 151 in April 1993. This is the one that should have been No 8, although there would later be a real No 8 in ANZAPA No 153 in October 1993. So does this explain the missing No 54? Because **brg ** has within recent history careened anumerically from No 53 to No 55. As there were two No 7s, **brg** No 53 was in fact the fifty-fourth **brg**. By skipping No 54, No 55 was thus the fifty-fifth issue and order was restored, albeit 15 years after the original misnumbering.

I've long known that I did something similar with my apazines, where the numbering all went a bit mad in 1994 and only recovered in 1997 by me feigning ignorance of the number 29. This marks me out as a rank amateur fan editor, only able to sustain this kind of illogicallity for three years, whereas Bruce kept it up for fifteen. What a pro. I think I will retrospectively claim that my own excursion into apparent basic innumeracy was in fact a homage to the Mighty Bruce.

But deeply fascinating as all this is, it is as nothing to the Strange Case of *Bruce R. Gillespie*.

We have a fanzine in the collection that I had originally catalogued some time back as *Bruce R. Gillespie*. Well, we have three issues of *Richard E. Geis*, so why not? *Bruce R. Gillespie* is 12 pages of duplicated twiltone. The 'front cover' has 'BRUCE R. GILLESPIE' at the top and 'BOOKS' at the bottom and the beginning of a 4-and-a-half-page review of Joanna Russ's *And Chaos Died* dated

July 1970. Then there's an uncredited F*rdinand F*ghoot story with a Jefferson Airplane pun, a page of reviews by 'LISA' and another 7 pages of reviews by 'JWL'. The back page is speculation about what the author might nominate for the Hugos — and this is where it becomes apparent that whoever it is it isn't Bruce as it's somebody who was going to be in Amsterdam when the ballots came out. Our mystery editor liked *Energumen*, *Outworlds*, *SF Commentary*, and *Focal Point*; Terry Carr, Bruce, Sandra Miesel, Arnie Katz, and Greg Shaw.

The back page also implied that this was an incomplete fanzine. It begins, 'As I said in the finale of the regular section of the magazine, the next issue will most likely lie dormant till I return from Amsterdam ...'. Despite the date of Bruce's column, most of the books reviewed and the Hugo recommendations look to be 1971 works. So this means that whatever it was it probably dated from 1972.

I assumed, then, that I simply had part of a fanzine, which as most collectors know is not that unusual. However, I saw that the Horvat collection at the University of Iowa has also catalogued something called *Bruce R. Gillespie* from 1970, presumably doing exactly the same thing I did. I mentioned this to Robert and he checked the online catalogue of the Eaton collection at UC Riverside. They also have a fanzine they call *Bruce R. Gillespie* from 1970, although they have the editor down as Joanna Russ. Obviously, for all her considerable writing talents, Ms Russ was something of a neophyte fan editor who'd forgotten to put her name and address in the colophon, or indeed to include a colophon. That or it was just a piece of sloppy cataloguing, and I took consolation in the knowledge that the professionals at Iowa and UC Riverside were no better than me.

But what was this fanzine?

OK, I knew that it probably came out in late 1971 or early 1972, it had contributions from Bruce, 'JWL', and 'Lisa', and its editor was heading for Amsterdam at the time of publication. Not a lot to go on — and in case you're wondering, yes, I'd asked Bruce and he had no idea beyond assuring me that he'd never been to Amsterdam.

But then I was browsing through what (I think to be) the only issue of *Invisible Whistling Bunyips*, a letter overspill from *SF Commentary*. The correspondence included a number of letters from Jerry Lapidus, and from somewhere, I know not where, flashed the thought that his middle initial was W. And hadn't Lisa Tuttle once a been a contributor to and possibly a co-editor of his fanzines?

I checked through our incomplete collection of *Tomorrow And...* (including No 6, which 'features what I think is the first fanzine appearance of Dan Steffan, a young artist and cartoonist living near Syracuse. You'll be seeing more of his work both here and elsewhere') and this confirmed both beliefs. He even credits himself as JWL on his own table of contents.

Tomorrow And... No 8 is dated December 1971. In the editorial Jerry says, 'What this all means is that unless something goes wrong, by the time most of you get around to reading this I'll be in Amsterdam...'. And, the clincher, on the inside back page it says, 'One mistake I want to correct right now. On the first side of the second page of Bruce Gillespie's review of *And Chaos Died* the last line should read ... "of conversation whatsoever".' I checked the review in The Fanzine Formerly Known As *Bruce R. Gillespie*, and it does indeed not say that — although it would in practice make more sense if it did.

God, if only we could work out a way of making money out of this. The Fishlifter Fanzine Detective Agency. We also walk dogs. Or at least squirrels.

— Mark Plummer, June 2011

brg It is one thing to support various fanzines of another editor with generous cash donations, as some people have done. It is quite another to spend many hours tracking down and listing every fanzine ever published by somebody other than oneself. I was astonished that Mark Plummer would attempt such a task. I'm even more astonished at his success at finding traces of nearly all my fanzines — perhaps all of them — whereas there is no way I could carry out the same task myself. For instance, I no longer have copies of the issues of *Norstrilian News* that I edited after I took it over from John Foyster in the early seventies. But it turns out that a complete record of all issues of *NN* exists. Yes, I'm astonished, and glad, so here is the list.

And the mystery magazine that Mark was trying to identify? It was indeed Jerry Lapidus's *Tomorrow And ...*, No 8, December 1971, and it did include in a long article I wrote about Joanna Russ's *And Chaos Died*, some sections of which will be included in a longer article in an upcoming issue of Rich Coad's *Sense of Wonder Stories*. A copy of it is almost certainly somewhere in the giant stationery cupboard that includes all my other classic fanzines. The confusion arises because Jerry published that issue in two sections, one we would now call in 'portrait' aspect (longer than wider) and the other 'landscape' aspect (wider than longer). They were stapled together, but I recall that the staple was unreliable, and the two halves separated easily. This spoilt the effect that Jerry intended: producing a magazine that looked as good as *Energumen* and read as well as *SF Commentary*. The recipient of the magazine was left scratching his or her head: 'Where on the shelf do I store this thing?'

The first and last time I met Jerry Lapidus was at Torcon 2, the world convention held in Toronto in 1973. Jerry was very enthusiastic about a bubbly lady who became Mrs Lapidus soon after. It was her aim, one gathered, to extricate Jerry from this peculiar morass called fandom as soon as possible. Which she did. Jerry produced no more fanzines after 1973, and he gafiated. Thanks to the internet, I was able to make contact with him in the late 1990s, but by then he and his family had moved to Florida, and he showed no interest in rejoining fandom. You mean there is more to life than producing fanzines? (25 July 2012)

Mark Plummer:
Bruce Gillespie's fanzines, 1968–2012:
The complete catalogue

*** = Items not sighted by Mark Plummer. Information supplied from other collectors/information bases.**
ANZAPA = Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association. Most recent mailing: August 2012.
APA45 = Apa (amateur publishing association) for people born after 1945. Defunct.
CAPRA = Cinema Amateur Publishing Association. Defunct.
KH = Kim Huett, Canberra, ACT.
RL = Robert Lichtman, Oakland, California.
GP = Greg Pickersgill, Haverfordwest, Wales.
Horvat = Mike Horvat Collection, Iowa.

TITLE	#	YEAR	MONTH	WHERE	COMMENT
*Marshian Chronicles, The	1	1968	10	ANZAPA 1	from David Grigg ANZAPA index
*Marshian Chronicles, The	2	1968	12	ANZAPA 2	from David Grigg ANZAPA index
SF Commentary	1	1969	1		
*Marshian Chronicles, The	3	1969	2	ANZAPA 3	from David Grigg ANZAPA index
SF Commentary	2	1969	3		
SF Commentary	3	1969	6		
*Marshian Chronicles, The	4	1969	6	ANZAPA 5	from David Grigg ANZAPA index
SF Commentary	4	1969	7		
Marshian Chronicles, The	5	1969	8	ANZAPA 6	
SF Commentary	5	1969	8		
SF Commentary	6	1969	9		
*Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	1	1969	10	ANZAPA 7	from David Grigg ANZAPA index
*The Nonalarmist		1969	10	ANZAPA 7	from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index (but no page count and not in the Grigg index)
*Muckman		1969	10	ANZAPA 7	from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index (but no page count and not in the Grigg index)
SF Commentary	7	1969	11		
SF Commentary	8	1969	12		
SF Commentary	9	1970	2		
*Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	2	1970	2	ANZAPA 9	from David Grigg ANZAPA index
SF Commentary	10	1970	3		Guest editor: John Foyster
SF Commentary	11	1970	5		
Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	3	1970	6	ANZAPA 11	
SF Commentary	12	1970	6		
SF Commentary	13	1970	7		
SF Commentary	14	1970	8		
SF Commentary	15	1970	9		
Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	4	1970	10	ANZAPA 13	
SF Commentary	16	1970	10		

SF Commentary	**17**	**1970**	**11**		
SF Commentary	**18**	**1970**	**12**		
SF Commentary	**19**	**1971**	**1**		**Reprint of John Foyster edited *exploding madonna* & *Journal of Omphalistic Epistemelogy (JOE)***
***Norstrilian News**	**22**	**1971**			**from KH list -- previously ed: John Foyster**
***Norstrilian News**	**23**	**1971**			**from KH list**
***Norstrilian News**	**24**	**1971**			**from KH list**
***Norstrilian News**	**25**	**1971**	**2**		**from KH list -- month from Horvat collection**
***Metaphysical Review, The (first series)**	**5**	**1971**	**2**	**ANZAPA 15**	**from David Grigg ANZAPA index**
SF Commentary	**20**	**1971**	**4**		
***Norstrilian News**	**26**	**1971**			**from KH list**
***Norstrilian News**	**27**	**1971**	**5**		**from KH list -- month from Horvat collection**
SF Commentary	**21**	**1971**	**5**		
***Norstrilian News**	**28**	**1971**			**from KH list**
***Norstrilian News**	**29**	**1971**	**6**		**from KH list -- month from Horvat collection**
Notes of a Naif Son	**1**	**1971**	**6**	**ANZAPA 17**	
***Norstrilian News**	**30**	**1971**	**7**		**from KH list -- month from Horvat collection**
SF Commentary	**22**	**1971**	**7**		
***Norstrilian News**	**31**	**1971**	**8**		**from KH list -- month from Horvat collection**
Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	**6**	**1971**	**8**	**ANZAPA 18**	
***Norstrilian News**	**32**	**1971**	**9**		**from KH list -- later ed: John Foyster -- month from Horvat collection**
SF Commentary	**23**	**1971**	**9**		
SF Commentary	**24**	**1971**	**11**		
Notes of a Naif Son	**2**	**1971**	**12**	**ANZAPA 20**	
SF Commentary	**25**	**1971**	**12**		
Notes of a Naif Son	**3**	**1972**	**4**	**ANZAPA 22**	
Invisible Whistling Bunyips	**1**	**1972**	**4**	**APA-45**	
SF Commentary	**26**	**1972**	**4**		
Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	**7**	**1972**	**4**	**ANZAPA 22**	
SF Commentary	**27**	**1972**	**6**		**Guest editor: John Foyster**
SF Commentary	**28**	**1972**	**7**		
Notes of a Naif Son	**4**	**1972**	**8**	**ANZAPA 24**	
SF Commentary	**29**	**1972**	**8**		
Metaphysical Review, The (first series)	**8**	**1972**	**10**	**ANZAPA 25**	
Notes of a Naif Son	**5**	**1972**	**10**	**ANZAPA 25**	
***Solitary Man**	**1**	**1972**	**10**	**APA-45**	**from RL list -- continues as Solo**
SF Commentary	**30**	**1972**	**10**		
SF Commentary	**31**	**1972**	**12**		
SF Commentary	**32**	**1973**	**2**		**Guest editor: John Foyster**
***SF Commentary**	**33**	**1973**	**3**		**from RL list**
***Notes of a Naif Son**	**6**	**1973**	**3**	**ANZAPA 27**	**from RL list**
SF Commentary	**34**	**1973**	**5**		**Guest editor: John Foyster**
***Notes of a Naif Son**	**7**	**1973**	**6**	**ANZAPA 30**	**from RL list**
SF Commentary	**35& 36& 37**	**1973**	**7**	**ANZAPA 33**	

*Solo	2	1973	7	APA-45	from RL list -- was Solitary Man
SF Commentary	39	1973	11		
SF Commentary	40	1973	11		Original, undistributed edition: Ed Cagle.
*Chiaroscuro	1	1974	4	CAPRA	from RL list
*Chiaroscuro	2	1974		CAPRA	from RL list
*Dear Everybody		1974	4	ANZAPA 37	from ANZAPA index
Wordy-Gurdy	1	1974	8	ANZAPA 40	
SF Commentary	38	1974	9		Guest editor: John Foyster
SF Commentary	40	1974	9		Second edition.
SF Commentary	41& 42	1975	2		
SF Commentary	43	1975	8		Tucker Issue, first edition
SF Commentary	44& 45	1975	12		
SF Commentary	46	1976	5		
SF Commentary	47	1976	8		
*Supersonic Snail	1	1976	8	ANZAPA 51	from RL list
SF Commentary	48& 49& 50	1976	10		
*Supersonic Snail	2	1976	10	ANZAPA 52	from RL list
SF Commentary	51	1977	3		
Supersonic Snail	3	1977	4	ANZAPA 55	
SF Commentary	52	1977	6		
Supersonic Snail	4	1977	10	ANZAPA 58	
SF Commentary	53	1978	4		
*Wordy-Gurdy	2	1978	4	ANZAPA 61	from RL list
*Wordy-Gurdy	3	1978	10	ANZAPA 64	from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index
SF Commentary	54	1978	11		
SF Commentary	55& 56	1979	1		
SF Commentary	55.5	1979	6	ANZAPA 68	
SF Commentary	57	1979	11		
SF Commentary	58	1980	2		
SF Commentary	59	1980	4		
SF Commentary	60& 61	1980	10		
Collingwood Capers		1981	4	ANZAPA 79	
SF Commentary	62- 66	1981	6		
*Mellow	1	1981	10	ANZAPA 82	from GP list
Mellow	2	1982	2	ANZAPA 84	from GP list
Mellow	3	1982	6	ANZAPA 86	
Mellow	4	1982	12	ANZAPA 89	
*Shark-Infested Custard		1983	6	ANZAPA 92	from RL list
Science Fiction	15	1983	9	Publisher: Van Ikin	Guest Editor: Bruce Gillespie
Kisses Sweeter than Cactus		1983	12	ANZAPA 95	
*Sweetness and Light	1	1984	6	ANZAPA 98	from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	1	1984	7		
Dreams and False Alarms	1	1984	8	FAPA	from RL list
Dreams and False Alarms	2	1984	11	FAPA	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	2	1984	11		

Sweetness and Light	**2**	**1984**	**12**	**ANZAPA 101**	**from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index**
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**3**	**1985**	**5**		
Sweetness and Light	**3**	**1985**	**6**	**ANZAPA 104**	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**4**	**1985**	**7**		
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**5&6**	**1985**	**10**		
***Raw Bits**	**1**	**1985**	**12**	**ANZAPA 107**	**from KH list**
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**7&8**	**1986**	**5**		
Raw Bits		**1986**	**6**	**ANZAPA 110**	**presumably 2**
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**9**	**1986**	**8**	**ANZAPA 111**	
Raw Bits	**3**	**1986**	**8**	**ANZAPA 111**	**included in TMR #9**
Dreams and False Alarms	**3**	**1986**	**8**	**ANZAPA 111**	**included in TMR #9**
Raw Bits	**4**	**1986**	**12**	**ANZAPA 113**	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**10**	**1987**	**3**		
Raw Bits	**5**	**1987**	**6**	**ANZAPA 116**	
Dreams and False Alarms	**4**	**1987**	**8**	**FAPA**	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**11& 12& 13**	**1987**	**11**		
***Raw Bits**	**6**	**1987**	**10**	**ANZAPA 118**	**from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index**
***Raw Bits**	**7**	**1987**	**12**	**ANZAPA 119**	**from KH list**
Raw Bits	**8**	**1988**	**4**	**ANZAPA 121**	
Raw Bits	**9**	**1988**	**8**	**ANZAPA 123**	
***Raw Bits**	**10**	**1988**	**12**	**ANZAPA 125**	**from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index**
SF Commentary	**67**	**1989**	**1**		**Twentieth Anniversary Edition.**
Dreams and False Alarms	**5**	**1989**	**2**	**FAPA**	
***Raw Bits**	**11**	**1989**	**8**	**ANZAPA 129**	**from RL list**
Good Night, Sweet Prince		**1989**	**10**	**ANZAPA 130**	
Raw Bits	**12**	**1989**	**10**	**ANZAPA 130**	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**14**	**1989**	**11**		
SF Commentary	**68**	**1990**	**3**		
brg	**1**	**1990**	**10**	**ANZAPA 136**	
***Raw Bits**	**13**	**1990**	**4**	**ANZAPA 133**	**from KH list**
***Raw Bits**	**14**	**1990**	**4**	**ANZAPA 133**	**from KH list**
SF Commentary	**69& 70**	**1991**	**1**		
brg	**2**	**1991**	**6**	**ANZAPA 140**	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**15& 16& 17**	**1991**	**8**		
brg	**3**	**1991**	**10**	**ANZAPA 142**	
brg	**4**	**1992**	**2**	**ANZAPA 144**	
SF Commentary	**71& 72**	**1992**	**4**		
brg	**5**	**1992**	**6**	**ANZAPA 146**	
brg	**6**	**1992**	**10**	**ANZAPA 148**	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	**18**	**1993**	**3**		
***** **brg**	**7**	**1993**	**2**	**ANZAPA 150**	**from RL list**

* brg	7	1993	4	ANZAPA 151	from Marc Ortlieb ANZAPA index
* brg	8	1993	8	ANZAPA 153	from RL list
SF Commentary	73& 74& 75	1993	10		
* brg	9	1993	10	ANZAPA 154	from RL list
* brg	10	1994	2	ANZAPA 156	from RL list
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	19& 20& 21	1994	7		
brg	11	1994	8	ANZAPA 159	
brg	12	1994	12	ANZAPA 161	
brg	13	1995	6	ANZAPA 164	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	1	1995	6	Acnestis	
brg	14	1995	8	ANZAPA 165	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	2	1995	8	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	3	1995	10	Acnestis	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	22& 23	1995	11		
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	24& 25	1995	12	ANZAPA 167	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	4	1996	1	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	5	1996	4	Acnestis	
* brg	15	1996	4	ANZAPA 169	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	6	1996	5	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	7	1996	7	Acnestis	
* brg	16	1996	8	ANZAPA 171	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	8	1996	10	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	9	1996	12	Acnestis	
* brg	17	1996	12	ANZAPA 173	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	10	1997	2	Acnestis	
* brg	18	1997	4	ANZAPA 175	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	11	1997	5	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	12	1997	8	Acnestis	
* brg	19	1997	8	ANZAPA 177	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	13	1997	11	Acnestis	
* brg	20	1997	12	ANZAPA 179	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	14	1998	4	Acnestis	
brg	21	1998	6	ANZAPA 182	
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	26& 27	1998	7		
Metaphysical Review, The (second series)	28& 29	1998	8		
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	15	1998	9	Acnestis	
brg	22	1998	10	ANZAPA 184	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	16	1998	12	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	17	1999	3	Acnestis	
* brg	23	1999	4	ANZAPA 187	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	18	1999	5	Acnestis	
* brg	24	1999	6	ANZAPA 188	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	19	1999	8	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	20	1999	10	Acnestis	
* brg	25	1999	10	ANZAPA 191	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	21	1999	12	Acnestis	
* brg	26	1999	12	ANZAPA 192	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	22	2000	3	Acnestis	
Steam Engine Time	1	2000	4		with Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller

* brg	27	2000	4	ANZAPA 194	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	23	2000	5	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	24	2000	8	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	25	2000	9	Acnestis	
SF Commentary	76	2000	10		George Turner Issue
* brg	28	2000	10	ANZAPA 197	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	26	2000	12	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	27	2001	2	Acnestis	
* brg	29	2001	2	ANZAPA 199	from RL list
brg	30	2001	4	ANZAPA 200	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	28	2001	4	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	29	2001	5	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	30	2001	6	Acnestis	
* brg	31	2001	8	ANZAPA 202	from RL list
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	31	2001	9	Acnestis	
SF Commentary	77	2001	11		
Steam Engine Time	2	2001	11		with Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller
Steam Engine Time	3	2001	12		with Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	32	2002	1	Acnestis	
brg	32	2002	2	ANZAPA 205	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	33	2002	4	Acnestis	
brg	33	2002	8	ANZAPA 208	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	34	2002	8	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	35	2002	11	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	36	2003	1	Acnestis	
brg	34	2003	2	ANZAPA 211	
SF Commentary	78	2003	2		
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	37	2003	4	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	38	2003	7	Acnestis	
brg	35	2003	8	ANZAPA 214	
brg	36	2003	10	ANZAPA 215	
John Foyster: The Continuum Tribute		2003	10	ANZAPA 215	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	39	2003	11	Acnestis	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	40	2004	2	Acnestis	
SF Commentary	79	2004	2		
* brg	37	2004	4	ANZAPA 218	from RL list
Year of Living Frantically, The		2004	8	ANZAPA 220	
brg	38	2004	8	ANZAPA 220	included in YOLF
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	41	2004	8	Acnestis	included in YOLF
brg	39	2004	12	ANZAPA 222	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	42	2005	1	Acnestis	
Steam Engine Time	4	2005	1		with Jan Stinson
brg	40	2005	2	ANZAPA 223	
brg	41	2005	4	ANZAPA 224	
brg	42	2005	6	ANZAPA 225	
brg	43	2005	8	ANZAPA 226	
Great Cosmic Donut of Life, The	43	2005	9	Acnestis	
brg	44	2005	10	ANZAPA 227	
So that was 2005		2006	1		from RL list
brg	45	2006	4	ANZAPA 230	
brg	46	2006	6	ANZAPA 231	
Steam Engine Time	5	2006	9		with Jan Stinson
In Midair:2006		2006	12		
brg	47	2006	12	ANZAPA 234	
brg	48	2007	4	ANZAPA 236	
Steam Engine Time	6	2007	8		with Jan Stinson

brg	**49**	**2007**	**8**	**ANZAPA 238**	
Steam Engine Time	**7**	**2007**	**10**		**with Jan Stinson**
brg	**50**	**2007**	**10**	**ANZAPA 239**	
brg	**51**	**2007**	**12**	**ANZAPA 240**	
brg	**52**	**2007**	**12**	**ANZAPA 240**	
*** How 2007 Stole Christmas**		**2008**	**1**		**from RL list**
brg	**53**	**2008**	**2**	**ANZAPA 241**	**note: no #54**
Steam Engine Time	**8**	**2008**	**5**		**with Jan Stinson**
brg	**55**	**2008**	**6**	**ANZAPA 243**	**note: no #54**
Steam Engine Time	**9**	**2008**	**12**		**with Jan Stinson**
brg	**56**	**2008**	**12**	**ANZAPA 246**	
brg	**57**	**2009**	**2**	**ANZAPA 247**	
Steam Engine Time	**10**	**2009**	**3**		**with Jan Stinson**
brg	**58**	**2009**	**8**	**ANZAPA 250**	
brg	**59**	**2009**	**8**	**ANZAPA 250**	
brg	**60**	**2009**	**10**	**ANZAPA 251**	
brg	**61**	**2009**	**10**	**ANZAPA 251**	
brg	**62**	**2009**	**12**	**ANZAPA 252**	
Steam Engine Time	**11**	**2010**	**2**		**with Jan Stinson**
brg	**63**	**2010**	**2**	**ANZAPA 253**	
Steam Engine Time	**12**	**2010**	**3**		**with Jan Stinson**
brg	**64**	**2010**	**4**	**ANZAPA 254**	
brg	**65**	**2010**	**6**	**ANZAPA 255**	
SF Commentary	**80**	**2010**	**8**		**40th Anniversary Edition, Pt 1**
SF Commentary	**80A**	**2010**	**8**		**40th Anniversary Edition, Pt 1A. PDF edition only: eFanzines.com**
brg	**66**	**2010**	**12**	**ANZAPA 258**	
brg	**67**	**2011**	**2**	**ANZAPA 259**	
brg	**68**	**2011**	**2**	**ANZAPA 259**	
brg	**69**	**2011**	**4**	**ANZAPA 260**	
SF Commentary	**81**	**2011**	**6**		**40th Anniversary Edition, Pt 2**
brg	**70**	**2011**	**6**	**ANZAPA 261**	
SF Commentary	**82**	**2011**	**8**		**40th Anniversary Edition, Pt 3**
brg	**71**	**2011**	**8**	**ANZAPA 262**	
brg	**72**	**2011**	**10**	**ANZAPA 263**	
brg	**73**	**2011**	**12**	**ANZAPA 264**	
brg	**74**	**2012**	**2**	**ANZAPA 265**	
Steam Engine Time	**13**	**2012**	**3**		**with Jan Stinson. Last issue.**
brg	**75**	**2012**	**6**	**ANZAPA 267**	
brg	**76**	**2012**	**8**	**ANZAPA 268**	

"You can come in."

Illustration by Carol Kewley. http://carol-kay.deviantart.com

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Ray Wood

Dark Matter in the US film *Let Me In*

So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;
Evil, be thou my good;
— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV, 108

1

THE SWEDISH WRITER John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel, *Låt den rätte komma in*, came out in 2004. It was translated into English in 2007 as *Let Me In*, or *Let the Right One In*, depending on the edition. The Swedish film, whose English title is *Let the Right One In*, appeared in 2008.

Then in 2010 came the US film *Let Me In*.

The Swedish film's cinematography and editing aren't as polished, and it's more diffuse and tentative. The US film is more single-minded, seamless, and coherent, and its dialogue more purposeful yet more complex. It also does without several of the novel's characters that the Swedish film incorporates, but this strengthens rather than weakens it. And the Swedish film is too often brightly lit, while the US film is set in a more appropriate darkness; even its characters' faces are at times so dark that you can make out little else than their eyes.

However, the US film *is* closely modelled on the Swedish one. But I think that the American director, Matt Reeves, benefited by being able to distil Tomas Alfredson's Swedish version in his own script, especially by refining its dialogue to make his own clearer and more purposeful. There's also a greater interconnectedness in his version created especially by a prolific use of motifs, and strengthened by frequent and powerful ironies.

Calling *Let Me In* a vampire film is misleading. It's likely to put off from watching it anyone who's grown tired of the plethora of vampire films of the last couple of decades. It's nothing like them, and it'd be better to say that it's not a vampire film at all. Reeves even wanted to avoid using the word 'vampire' in it. But he did once, only because Kodi Smit-McPhee, playing Owen, asked the question 'Are you a vampire?' more convincingly than any of the alternatives that they tried.

It's rather a film about outcasts from society, and the vampire is more a metaphor for them than the kind of vampire that you usually get in such films.

I don't think it's even a horror film, though that's how it's described. Horror films usually set out to scare you, but the horrific elements in *Let Me In* aren't the reason why it was made. Each of the three vampire attacks is essential to the story, and is not designed merely to scare. The scenes that make me most uncomfortable are not those attacks, but when Owen slices a knife into his thumb to make a pact with Abby, and when Virginia sucks blood from her own arm.

Reeves says that 'Lindqvist was really taking the vampire story and doing it as kind of a metaphor for the pain of adolescence', and he describes his as a 'coming-of-age film'. Ritchie Coster, who plays the sports teacher Mr Zoric, says that 'The true horror of the piece is the hell that the kids go through at school'.

In one way the film is a mystery in which Owen gradually discovers who and what the vampire girl Abby really is, and from that who and what he himself is. He learns from her example of living as an outcast, that the outcast role his society keeps forcing on him is all that he can ever expect. And so he ends up accepting the life of an outcast fully — and even happily, no matter how grim his future's likely to be.

In another way the film is a romance in which two people fall in love despite how alien they are to each other, and despite being star-crossed. So often love grows in the most unlikely places amongst the unlikeliest lovers, as it does here. In this film it's a love between two children not yet even started on puberty.

In fact, the difficulty in figuring out just what kind of film it is suggests that it's not a genre film at all.

2

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS in the US film are a misfit, the bullied boy Owen; and an outcast, the vampire girl Abby. 'Abby' and 'Owen', 'A' and 'O', the Alpha and the Omega who seem at the start to be so far apart: they're a twelve-year-old vampire girl who's lived for 250 years, and a twelve years-eight months-nine days-old schoolboy as he himself puts it. But in the end they find out that they're scarcely different from one another at all.

The film causes you to wonder not only about society's misfits and outcasts, but also about its bullies. Back through evolution we humans have always been a weak and slow animal compared with most other animals our size. But we compensated for this by becoming a social animal, which was how we became Earth's top predator. You might argue that it was because we invented tools, but teaming up would have occurred much earlier, and was therefore the primary reason.

Abby (Chloë Grace Moretz), and Owen (Kodi Smit-McPhee), in the film *Let Me In*, hug each other after she's entered his apartment though he refused to invite her in. It caused her to bleed profusely until he did hastily invite her in to stop her bleeding.

Now if you consider the human as essentially a social animal, you can also see that a society needs its guards against those who fail to fit into it. And on the simplest level these are the self-appointed bullies rather than governments, and their laws, and police.

The never-ending presence of bullies among us may even be due to evolution too. They may have evolved as a way of keeping human societies together by persecuting

Abby (Chloë Grace Moretz) has flown from the hospital where her old 'father' has just died, because he offered to let her feed from him. The bloodstains by her mouth are from her feeding. She's knocking on Owen's bedroom window to wake him, and ask him to Let Her In.

anyone who doesn't fit in. The science fiction writer and critic, James Gunn, talks about 'the *conforming* society as the natural evolution of the human species' (my italics). And the film persuades us to examine both society's misfits — those who fail to conform — and the bullies who so savagely attack them.

All the characters in the film engage our empathy. There are no villains, though there's less emphasis on creating empathy for the bullies. Our empathy extends to not only the detective, even when he's a threat to Abby, but also to her protector and to Abby herself, despite both of them being brutal serial killers.

But Abby is helpless in that being turned into a vampire 250 years ago through no fault of her own controls her life. When Owen asks her, 'Are you a vampire?' she simply says, 'I need blood ... to live'. She doesn't even know if a vampire is what she is. When he challenges her to come in without his permission, and she does, and starts bleeding as a result, he frantically invites her in to stop it. Then he asks her what would have happened if he hadn't. But all that she can say is, 'I don't know. I just know this is what happens if you don't invite me in.' Her voice and face are so sad and hopeless as she says that.

In the deleted scene on the DVD, 'Be Me',[1] that shows her being made into a vampire, she tells Owen that she doesn't even want to live like she does: 'I do it because I have to. To survive.' Why her life is like this is beyond her, but if she wants to live — and who *doesn't* want to live? — then this is the only way that she can.

(I believe that this scene should not have been edited out despite Reeves's reasons for dropping it, that it didn't fit into the flow of the film, and that Abby and Owen had already bonded. It enriches Abby's character and the whole film so much.)

Owen is helpless, too, in his case specifically against being picked on by his society's bullies, but also against the disintegration of his family. And like Abby he doesn't understand why he's a victim of all of that. What the film does is make you examine the causes of Abby's and Owen's helplessness, and it does this especially through the bullying.

The bullies aren't simply villains, but are somewhat humanised at times. At the end in the climactic scene at the swimming pool, they twice try to stop what Jimmy's doing to Owen, because they think that he's going too far. More significantly, when you examine the bullies' ringleader, Kenny, you see that he's been turned into a bully by his older brother Jimmy. You could say that Jimmy corresponds to the vampire who made Abby a vampire centuries ago.

Jimmy contemptuously calls Kenny a girl in the same way that Kenny calls Owen a girl, and that Owen calls the imaginary victim that *he* pretends to bully a girl. So because of how the role of bully is being passed along, you have to wonder who made Jimmy a bully too.

1 You may argue that considering deleted scenes in discussing a film isn't relevant, yet why do directors include them on their DVDs if they are not to be taken into account? These days I think you should regard the deleted scenes on a film's DVD as part of the whole work of art. Is there any difference in doing this, and taking into account varying editions of a novel, such as Dickens's alternative endings to *Great Expectations*? or discussing a novel usings its writer's diaries and notebooks?

Owen (Kodi Smit-McPhee) is sitting on the ziggurat-shaped jungle-gym in his apartment block's courtyard, eating his favourite 'Now and Later' sweets, watching Abby's 'father' set out to hunt for blood. He's wearing the 'space-suit' parka that he hides in most of the time.

Consequently this forces you to wonder who created the vampire who turned Abby into a vampire. You're therefore made to look beyond the labels 'bully' and 'vampire' at how they came to exist in the first place.

The film looks remorselessly at the structure of a human society, and its techniques for keeping all of its members in place. And it forces you to sympathise with everyone involved: with both the society's insiders, and the misfits who are marginalised by it but trying to survive within it; and even with the outsiders, those who have been cast out but still lurk within its boundaries. You see everyone as victims of this structure rather than as villains. But though they're all made out to be victims, does this mean that the film lets the ones who behave villainously in various ways escape from being punished? Not at all.

In the end not only are the bullies killed, but although Owen escapes from them by teaming up with Abby, he's done so only by becoming her new protector, recruited by her to murder and supply her with blood. So he's lost any chance he ever had of becoming part of his society. His overly religious mother and adulterous father have already lost each other, and now lose Owen as well. Abby's old murderous protector dies, Virginia dies, and even the detective dies though he doesn't behave as a villain. Of course, Abby has already lost so much of what originally made her a human being.

Abby as an outcast has had centuries of experience in dealing with societies that have shut their doors against her. So she understands Owen's predicament, and tries to help him cope with it. Then to get him to understand her, in that deleted scene she implores him to 'Be me a little ... Just for a little while ... Be me'. She's pleading for a return to her of the empathy that she's shown for him. So at first she helps him in his battle with his society, but in the end persuades him to abandon it altogether, and join her as an outcast too.

What he's going to become is shown near the film's end by Abby kissing him with her bloody mouth, and sharing that blood with him. It's the blood of the detective whose death they both took part in moments before, though Owen was involved in it by standing back and letting it happen, rather than taking an active part in it as Abby did.

In the basement scene it was Owen who wanted to seal a pact with Abby by mingling their blood through clasping hands. But he failed. Now Abby does seal the pact with him by more intimately and meaningfully kissing him with the blood of their first shared kill.

The last scene is of the two children finally fleeing from society. Owen is now an outcast too, exiled from society forever, like her.

3

BUT THE FILM goes further than examining the structure of one specific human society, its guardians, misfits, and outcasts. Such an examination deals only in human codes: the internal customs, morals, and laws that bind a single society together in its own particular way.

The film places the various codes of different societies within a religious setting that aims at turning them into absolutes: into good and evil. These absolutes are set up by religion to encompass all human societies, to be the same for the entire universe, and to be eternal rather than transient — that is, to be for ever unchangeable.

Religious references to good and evil saturate the film, specifically Christian ones. Here's a list of some of them.

Twice on the hospital TV you hear the US President — Ronald Reagan at the time the film is set in March 1983. He's giving his famous 'Evil Empire' speech. He talks about how

> that shrewdest of all observers of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, put it eloquently after he had gone on a search for the secret of America's greatness and genius — and he said: 'Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the greatness and the genius of America. America is good. And if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great'.

You hear different parts of his speech each time, the first at the film's beginning. It makes certain that you see the film in a religious light.

You're reminded of it by the Oath of Allegiance recited by Owen's class at school, 'one nation under God, indivisible'; by the religious grace spoken over meals twice by Owen's mother, asking God to 'protect us from evil'; by his mother being a pious woman, who listens to religious radio broadcasts: 'The young people are beginning to turn back to God, who's waiting on them. If the Lord calls you, then the Word comes, and the Word comes from the Lord'; by the picture of Jesus on her mirror that watches Owen as he steals money from her purse, and that he sneaks a guilty look at as he takes it; and by his tearful telephone conversation with his father when he asks him, 'Do you think there's such a thing as evil? ... Can people be evil?' that his father misinterprets as no more than his mother's 'religious crap'.

Twice the detective suggests a reason behind the murders he's trying to solve: 'Are you a Satanist? Are you involved in some kind of cult?' and 'Some of them might be involved in some sort of Satanic cult'. Then in the climactic scene at the swimming pool the teacher, Mr Zoric, welcomes Owen jocularly: 'Ah, speak of the devil! There he is.' (It's one of the most pointedly ironic utterances in this irony-laden film.)

The detective when he first appears answers the Nurse's 'He can't actually talk' with, 'All right ... Jesus!' When he looks down in horror at the body of Abby's protector spread- eagled in the snow, he whispers 'JesusMaryJoseph' in a single word. It evokes Jesus as a family man in a film where family has broken down. At the end in the bathroom as he's letting in the sun that would kill Abby, Owen cries out to him, '*No no, stop!*' And he spins around, almost shoots Owen, and again exclaims 'Jesus!' only moments before he dies. You might say that they're simply common oaths, but why are they so strategically placed? — 'Jesus' is almost his first word, and *is* his last word. It's also interesting that he's a good and upright member of his society, but uses such blasphemies. On the other hand, Abby as the 'Satan' that

An ancient Middle-Eastern ziggurat, the pyramidal temple with a single room on top, where the worshipper was finally brought level by level by a priestess to unite with the Goddess.

twice he's suggested has something to do with the murders, does not.

Michael Giacchino's musical background often sounds religious when it accompanies Abby's vampiric behaviour. There's the children's hymn-like music when Abby first appears, which is so ironic for her entrance.

When Abby kills the detective you hear a child's high keening song, a single wordless note that gradually enriches near its end before returning to the same single note. You know that it's part of the vampire's kill and not merely background music, because when it gets louder Owen blocks it out in horror by clamping his hands over his ears. And he takes them away as soon as it stops.

You might call it a song of triumph over the kill, a ritual chant from the vampire part of Abby. It's shockingly eerie too, coming immediately after Abby's savage screaming during her attack. It's also used to set the atmosphere very effectively at the start of the film during the titles.

There's a variation upon this keening music while Abby's body is weeping blood from her entering Owen's home uninvited. You hear the word 'Alleluia' elided as 'Allelu-Allelu-Allelu' sung insistently over and over on a single note; it grows louder and louder, and reaches a peak when Owen finally does invite her in to stop her bleeding. The word 'Alleluia' means 'a song of praise to God'.

It's ironic that the music accompanying Abby's vampiric behaviour so often sounds religious as if to say how holy she is. It shows how inadequate religion is to decide whether Abby is good or evil. And it shows how difficult it is to separate good from evil, and to decide who exactly should be blamed for evil.

All of the great number of examples above illustrate the film's absorption in the nature of evil. But the chief problem with Christianity's good and evil has always been with how evil began, despite theologians' endless attempts to make sense of it.[2]

Who do you blame for the Fall of humankind from Christianity's original State of Grace into evil ways? Eve gets the blame and the greater punishment for it, but how unreasonable is that? And why was Eve rather than Adam the first to be tempted? Who put the tree and its forbidden fruit in the very centre of Eden in the first place? Having done that, who tempted them both with the oh-so-enticing warning *not* to eat its fruit, and then promptly created the serpent that tempted Eve to eat it after all? Before the Fall neither she nor Adam had the slightest notion or experience of good and evil, therefore what defences did Eve have against the serpent's blandishments? And if Adam and Eve were not innocent from the moment they were created, if they contained right from the start the *potential* to be evil, then who inserted that potential in them in the first place?

Yet in the Christian story of good and evil this 'Original Sin', as it's called, contaminates every human from then on for ever afterwards. We humans ourselves, who would regard that as a far too 'cruel and unusual punishment', are nowhere near as vengeful as whoever imposed such an endless and horrific punishment on the whole of the human race until the end of time.

These are the kind of questions that the film *Let Me In* asks you, because it forces you to wonder who created vampires and bullies way back in the beginning. At the start of this article the epigram from *Paradise Lost* gives Satan's words: 'Evil be thou my good.' And one of the ways that the film leads you to ask such questions is by reversing good and evil so that the Abby who is in fact a murderous demon is shown as also being a source of good. I'll now look at this.

In the light of the film's determined and constant emphasis on good and evil, the jungle gym in the centre of the pure white snowy courtyard might be the tempting 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' in the centre of Eden (*Genesis* 2: 16–17). But here it's a tree that also stands for the tangled relationship between right and wrong, good and evil, Owen and Abby.

The Rubik's Cube that Owen lends Abby to figure out, the puzzles that she says she likes solving and that are jumbled in a heap on a table in her apartment, and this jungle gym that Abby twists herself around with such agility, are all connected. That Owen can't solve his Rubik's Cube, but that she can, suggests that she's going to be the key to solving his other and much larger problems. The same is suggested by her so often slithering easily around the jungle gym (like the tempting serpent, too, by the way), while he merely sits on it; and by her almost always being higher up on it — the 'King of the Castle' of children's games you might say — while he's almost always lower down.

After he's left and she swiftly sorts out his Rubik's Cube, she leaves it for him centred on top of the jungle gym. So the whole structure including the Cube on top is now in a way like an ancient, stepped Middle Eastern ziggurat, a many-storeyed temple whose single top room was its holiest. The top room was where the worshipper was finally brought by a priestess to become united with the Goddess.

2 St Augustine of Hippo (354–430) formulated the classic Christian theory of free will in attempting to explain why evil exists. Theodicy is the name given to attempts to justify the existence of evil where a single supreme God is concerned, but such attempts do little more than play clever tricks with words.

The camera shows Owen through the jungle gym's bars as if he's trapped inside them, and then moves up to the top of it to show the now solved and triumphantly ordered Cube. So the camera moves from the disorder of Owen's life up to the order of Abby's, from Owen's life as a struggling misfit up to Abby's as an outcast who has accepted her fate, from Owen mired in evil up to Abby who might be seen as the temple priestess who's to conduct him to the Goddess herself. As he climbs to the top to retrieve the Rubik's Cube, his face is filled with anxiety, but when he grasps it his look slowly changes into one of delight, and his eyes finally turn upwards as if he's looking to heaven, and thanking it for this wonderful gift from Abby. It's like a religious epiphany for him.

Or, to return from the ziggurat to the Garden of Eden image, Abby might be seen as a God who has placed the tempting fruit at the top of the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil', except that she's going to help Owen escape from the evils permeating his life instead of seducing him with them.

The symbolic nature of this scene is emphasised by the Garden of Eden sound of birds chirping, and by its taking place in the bright light of early morning unlike almost all the courtyard scenes — at the dawn of the world, you might say. You also hear birds chirping when Owen looks for Abby out of his window after they've spent their innocent and Eden-like night in his bed, and she's agreed to be his girlfriend. And the sound of the toy bird in Abby's apartment at the end is an ironic reminder of those earlier birds in the children's Garden of Eden. But this time it's artificial: a product of human society; a warning to Abby and Owen of society's looming retribution in the shape of the detective; and an omen of Owen's being about to be cast out of any kind of Eden for ever.

There's a further reversal of good and evil in that the real birds, the natural birds, the birds of Eden are associated with two children who are guilty and evil in their society's eyes. But the artificial bird is associated with a detective who's the official representative and guardian of that very same society, and who's innocent and so earnestly good in its eyes — and in the viewer's eyes too.

Another point about Owen's Rubik's Cube is that its colours are those of the spectrum: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, but white instead of indigo and violet. Significantly, on top of the ziggurat the white side is uppermost, pointing up to heaven. It's the white of purity, and the white of the snow, the same snow that's heaped on top of it in a pyramid similar to a ziggurat. When Isaac Newton discovered that white light was composed of all the colours of the spectrum, the Christian Church was appalled, because in its theology only white was pure. It was the 'colour' of God, and couldn't possibly contain any of the lesser, impure colours. Yet again this shows evil Abby's handling of the colours of good and evil, and that her mastery of them is for good.

It seems too obvious to be accidental that Abby of all people — in Christian terms the most Satanic — solves and then places the Rubik's Cube in precisely the way that she does with the white side, the side of God, pointing up to heaven, rather than the red side representing the blood that is so much a part of her entire life.

Yet another point about the jungle gym is that when Abby and Owen meet on it after he's retrieved the Rubik's Cube, he asks her, 'How did you do it?' and her answer is 'I just ... twisted it'. The word 'twisted' suggests how like the serpent she is, yet also how she may also be the one who untwists Owen's life. When a few moments later he says 'I still don't get how you did this', she says 'Want me to show you?' and he says 'Yeah'. Until this she's always been up on the jungle gym's second level and Owen down on the first. But now for the very first time she *descends* to the same level that Owen's on, and sits *next* to him. It signifies their coming together to sort things out: she the supposedly evil one offering him good instead.

Jungle gyms come in all shapes, and the one in the Swedish film isn't a geometrically shaped ziggurat, but lopsided, and is not nearly as suggestive. That Reeves has chosen to make his jungle gym a pyramidal, three-stepped ziggurat-shaped one, seems to me one of the many ways in which he benefited from studying the Swedish film in advance of making his own.

It's significant that the film's last shot to do with the apartment block and its courtyard is also of the jungle gym where Abby and Owen first met, that was so central to their growing relationship, and that has all through the film symbolised so much. It reminds you that the first apartment block shot was of Owen sitting low down on the jungle gym, and that the first time he and Abby met she was standing up on it.

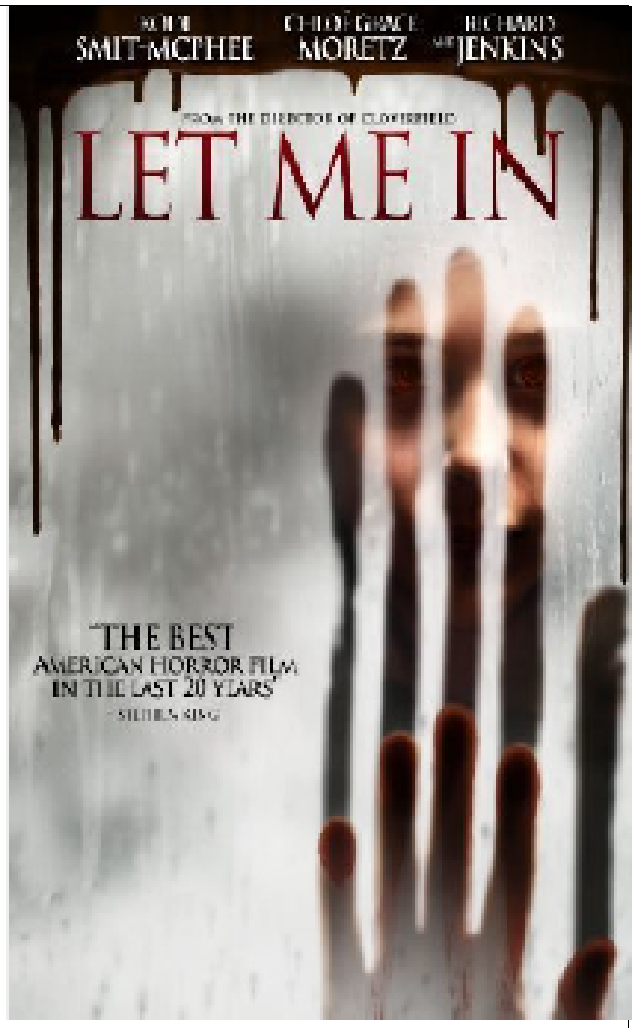
There are also significant reversals in that when you first meet Owen you don't even see him but only hear his voice singing the 'Eat some now, save some for later' jingle in total darkness. Then he gradually emerges from the darkness into the dim artificial lights of night. So *he's* therefore a creature of the darkness, which Abby's supposed to be. And when Abby first meets Owen she's heralded by a gust of wind. So *she's* come to him as a cleansing wind. When she leaves the apartment block the last time, a similar gust of wind follows from the courtyard after her.

It doesn't matter if these allusions I'm making to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and to a ziggurat, are far-fetched: the reversals of good and evil themselves are certainly present. The constant religious references, the meticulous and detailed care evident in the film's structure, and the arrangement and filming of this 'ziggurat' scene as I've called it, certainly suggest that these reversals of good and evil are intended.

The film makes great use of repeated images such as these, recurring motifs that trace connections back and forth across it like the complex and intermingled patterns in a Persian carpet. To show how much it does, here are four further examples of them.

When Owen first goes into Abby's apartment, he looks at the jumble of her puzzles on a table. The nearest to him is a primitive, darkly wooden kind of Rubik's Cube, and he picks it up to examine it. Later, Abby uses it as a paperweight to hold down her letter to him the last time that they're together in her apartment. One of the three deleted scenes on the US DVD, significantly titled 'Solving the Puzzle', shows a lonely Abby playing with this same primitive Cube while she's waiting for him to make his final visit to her apartment.

One of the DVD covers of the English language version of the 2008 Swedish film, *Let the Right One In*, directed by Tomas Alfredson. It shows Lina Leandersson as the 12-year-old vampire Eli, the boy Elias who was castrated and turned into a vampire 250 years ago. She has just fed, and blood stains her mouth and chin.



The DVD outer cover of the 2010 US film, *Let Me In*, directed by Matt Reeves. It shows Chloë Grace Moretz as the 12-year-old vampire Abby behind a frost-smeared window, seen through glass cleared of frost by the fingers of her hand drawn down it. Blood drips from the top of the window.

His own Cube is a sophisticated, dazzlingly coloured, plastic version of Abby's primitive, darkly monochrome wooden puzzle. They suggest the daylight world that Owen exists in but can't find a way to live in — he couldn't solve his Cube — and the night-time world that Abby's been imprisoned in but has successfully made her own for 250 years.

Second, when Owen sees Abby's naked footprints in the pristine snow early in the film, he looks up from them at the cardboard-covered windows of her apartment. In exactly the same way the detective looks up at the same cardboard-covered windows from his shoe prints in the just as pristine snow near the film's end.

Third, the beckoning sound of trains is insistent throughout. You hear them at Abby's and Owen's first meeting; twice during their first date; and also when Owen sneaks out to join Abby in her apartment. A passenger train goes over the level crossing when her old protector strangles the first victim for blood. And a passenger train carries the fleeing children away after Owen has become her new protector. Throughout the film these trains constantly invite them to escape.

And fourth, Owen's first and last words are the inane jingle about his favourite sweets, 'Eat some now, save some for later.' You hear him sing the whole jingle the first time you see him, with its ironic words, 'For all-day children's fun.' You hear it on the radio after the news-flash telling Abby that her protector is terribly injured and is in the hospital. And when Owen sings it at the end on the train as they escape, they're the last words in the film, and forcefully point out that he and Abby are still only twelve-year-old prepubertal children despite all the horrors that they've experienced.

Abby wrote her *Romeo and Juliet* note to Owen at the end of their bedroom scene on a 'Now and Later' wrapper. It has you wonder how their new romantic relationship 'Now' will turn out in the future, 'Later'. But when Owen turns the note over and sees the 'Now and Later' message on the other side, you have to shake your head because he smiles happily at it instead.

And as he sings the jingle on the train at the end, there are even empty 'Now and Later' sweet wrappers on top of the trunk inside which Abby's hidden from the daylight, ominously suggesting how empty their future life together is likely to be. They're a reminder of the similarly empty sweet wrappers that Owen buried secretively under the snow when you first met him, stamping on them as if to hide the emptiness of his life from himself. And of course the very name of the sweets, 'Now and

Later', is an ironic prediction that 'Later' their lives are probably not going to be any more trouble-free than they have been 'Now'. But at least at the end he isn't trying to hide the empty wrappers as he did at the start, since now they're openly exposed on top of Abby's trunk. Significantly, she's hidden curled up immediately underneath them.

The film is so richly patterned with motifs like these[3] that you're encouraged to pay close attention to the repeated and prominent use of the jungle gym and the Rubik's Cube.

But if you asked Reeves if he deliberately made these allusions to Adam and Eve and to a ziggurat, and he said that he didn't, that wouldn't discount them. Creative people often do things in their art that they aren't conscious of, and are often surprised when they discover what they've done. As the US poet, John Ciardi, says, 'Nothing is more powerfully of man than the fact that he naturally gives off forms and is naturally enclosed by them'. Artists, whose lives are constantly involved in turning the chaos of daily life into the artifice of order, come to automatically give off 'forms' again and again without even being aware that they are.

An example of accidentally achieving form in *Let Me In* is the mechanical bird at the end. As I said, it's a powerful comment on the Garden of Eden birds heard earlier. However, it was never planned, and after that scene had been filmed it was suggested by the boy acting Owen, Kodi Smit-McPhee. Reeves eagerly seized upon his idea, and filmed it when filming had ended, using his own legs instead of Elias Koteas's, who'd played the detective.

I can recall an excellent example of fortuitous form in another film, David Slade's 2005 *Hard Candy*. The actress Ellen Page selected a hooded red parka from several different coloured ones that she was offered for her final scene. But not one of the film's makers realised the significance of this until after the film's release, when it was so much admired by critics for the aptness of its Red Riding Hood symbolism. It turned out to be a richly powerful symbol for the entire film.

But in working out what a film actually says and where it really takes you, you must go by the film itself, and not by what the director intended to do. If the director says he intended to do something, but the film does something else, well the *film's* got to be where it's all at.

To conclude this section then. First, the film *Let Me In* examines the nature of evil as applied to the structure of society, in a way that throws the blame for Abby's murderous way of life off her, and on to the vampire who turned *her* into a vampire. This therefore throws the blame back further still onto the vampire who created him, and so on right back through time. And it also throws the blame for the bullies who torment Owen on to whomever bullied them in turn, also back to the beginning of time. Second, the film turns good and evil on their heads by making good evil, and evil good. And trying to explain all of this therefore leads you, despite millennia of theologians' excuses, to consider that God himself may be both the original vampire, and the first bully of all.

In Lindqvist's more recent novel, his 2010 *Little Star*, after Theres's adolescent girls bury each other in a coffin and, when she psychically hears their screams they dig them up again, comes this (Theres and Teresa are two different girls):

> 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?
>
> It would depend who you asked. Teresa couldn't imagine a single person, institution or authority who would have given their blessing to what they had been doing for the past five hours (p. 479).

It illustrates Lindqvist's continuing interest in the nature of evil.

4

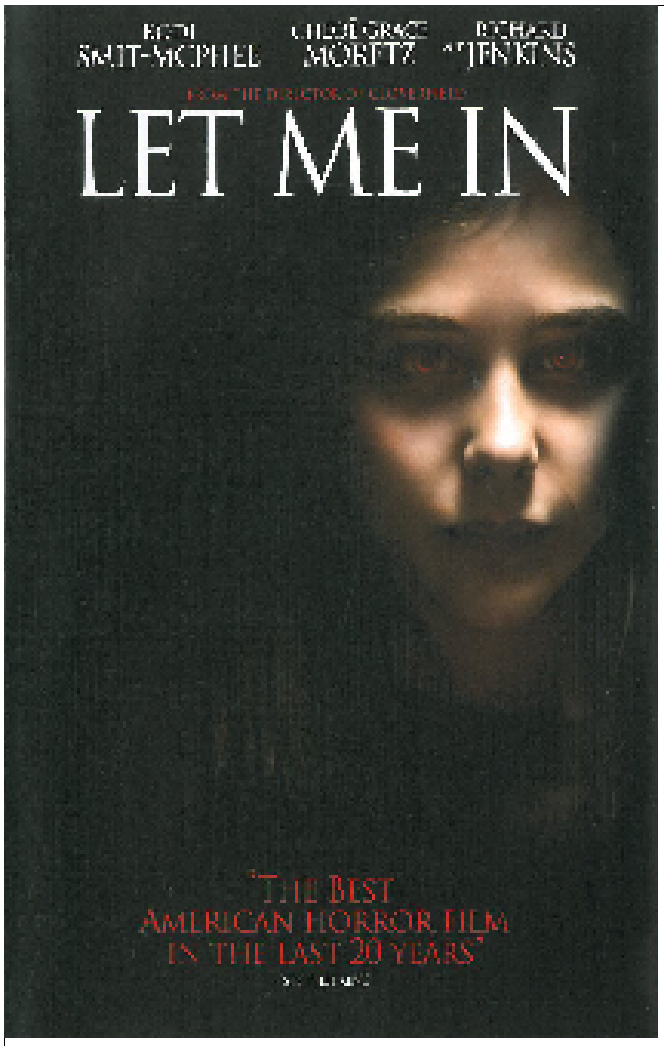
ABBY'S BODY contains not one but two beings: a twelve-year-old child, and a savagely murderous demon. You see how the child is helpless at controlling the demon inside her in the basement scene. When Owen's blood drips on to the floor from his thumb he's just cut, she struggles to keep the monster within her from seizing control of her body, but fails.

With the last fragment of her control she warns Owen to flee from the monster she's turning into: '*Go away!*' she growls in a suddenly deep, hoarse voice. When he can do no more than stand there shocked, she saves him by herself fleeing. But the monster is now in full and frenzied control, and attacks the passing Virginia instead, drinks her blood, and turns her into a vampire too.

How Abby is depicted here, a child helpless in the hands of the demon inside her, is crucial to the film's take on good and evil. It's also very Jungian. Jung argues that there's no way of knowing what's good and what's evil, and that even if you could recognise them it's arrogant of you to think that you could separate them. Jung actually suggests that Jesus and Satan are brothers, and that God without Satan being an essential part of him would be incomplete.

In Christianity, evil is an absolute that exists outside you. Christianity even personifies evil externally as the Devil, or Satan, who tempts you, and whom you have to fight against, whom you must not succumb to. If evil infects you it's as an invader who must be repelled: 'If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire' (Matthew 18: 9). However, the film makes you identify with Abby and Owen, and therefore leads you to accept that evil is not external, but is inextricably part of you, that there's no way you can ever escape from it. How can Abby possibly cast out the monster from within her? And how can you cast it out of yourself either?

3 They are so interlaced, and so often have more than one possible meaning, that this article suffers from repetition in places.



The DVD inner cover of the 2010 US film, *Let Me In*. It shows Chloë Grace Moretz as the 12-year-old vampire Abby, studying you intently from the dark. The outer cover shows parts of her face seen here through the glass of a window cleared of frost by the fingers of her hand drawn down it.

You might still try to say that evil is not actually built into Owen until he accepts it as a permanent part of himself at the film's end, that until then there's no monster inside him in the way that there is in Abby. In Christian terms you could argue that the Devil has not taken possession of him until then. Yet this would ignore one of the most extraordinary images in the film, one of its earliest, when you first see Owen in his bedroom.

In it he's threatening his own self in his mirror with a kitchen knife saying, 'Hey, little girl! Are you a little girl? ... Huh? ... Are you scared?' He's imitating what the bullies do to him. So what is he? Is he as much a bully as those who bully him are? Or is it that they're turning him into a bully? In other words, is evil being foisted upon him, or is it inherently part of him, similar to how the monster is part of Abby?

The image is made more extraordinary because he's wearing a mask as he stabs himself/the 'girl' in his mirror. Is it to hide his fear that inside himself he really isn't a boy after all? Is it to hide from himself that evil is inescapably part of him in the way that he learns later on a vampire is inescapably part of Abby? Even more extraordinary still is that his mask is semi-transparent as if to show that there's no hope of him hiding for ever from discovering what's really inside him.

(A venerable tradition in art is the 'Vanity Painting', showing a young and beautiful woman looking at herself in a mirror, and seeing herself as old and ugly. It's a warning to women against self-admiration. A famous example is Picasso's painting of his young mistress, Marie-Thérèse Walter, his 1932 *Girl Before a Mirror*. The masked Owen looking at himself in his mirror and seeing himself as a girl whom he should kill provides an interesting twist on this ancient subject.)

The complex image shows that he doesn't yet consciously realise how evil is inextricably part of everyone, including himself, that he and Abby are one and the same. The difference is that Abby is fully aware of the monster inside her body, while Owen is still hiding from the monster that lurks inside him, even if he isn't hiding from it very successfully.

But then he pushes the mask up on top of his head when the real world outside his window diverts his attention from the fantasy world of his mirror. Ironically, the event outside his window that leads him to lift the mask off his face so that he can watch it through his telescope may be an adulterous affair in the apartments opposite that later on appears to end in murder — an adultery echoed in his father's affair with Cindy.

There's an image near the film's end that shows he's still not quite ready to accept the monster within him. Abby is savagely feeding off the detective in her bathroom while Owen watches in horror through the door. And the detective stretches out his hand, his eyes pleading for help. Owen's hand slowly and hesitantly reaches out, and you think that he's about to take hold of his bloody hand and help him. But he grasps the door handle instead, and closes the door, abandoning the detective to his death. Then he turns his back to the door as if to further shut the sight out of his mind.

Before this, the 'Be Me' scene was originally to have come after Abby has bled all over from entering Owen's apartment uninvited, and Owen has stopped her bleeding by finally inviting her in. At the start of this omitted scene she too reaches her bloody hand out, and places it on Owen's cheek as she pleads with him to *be her*. And after that, as he actually experiences her becoming a vampire, her hand 250 years ago reaches out as if pleading for help too, her fingers clawing into the carpet. Both of these 'Be Me' hand images are echoed *and* combined in the detective's bloody hand reaching out for help shortly afterwards, and in his other hand being clawed like hers was 250 years ago.

This image of the extended hand is a motif repeated significantly several times, in particular when it's towards another person's face.

When Abby reaches out to touch the plaster on Owen's cheek that covers where the bully slashed him, his hand jerks up momentarily as if to stop her, as if to hide it, as if to reject such an intimacy.

How poignant it is the last time her old protector is about to go out hunting for blood for her, that she rests her hand on his arm, and he slowly turns to face her. Then she moves her hand up to caress his cheek, and he puts his hand on top of hers to hold it there. They stand

like that for a while, looking at each other, saying so much without words, and it's clear how powerful their feelings are for each other.

Then once he's dead, and she's lying in Owen's bed immediately afterwards, she agrees to go steady with him. And she reaches her hand out, takes hold of his, and holds it on her cheek exactly in the same way as hers was held on her old protector's cheek. Ironically her cheek that she places Owen's hand on top of is the one that's striped with the blood of her old protector that she's only just drunk. Though he doesn't realise it yet, and probably takes it to be nothing more than a sign of affection, the identical nature of these two images says plainly that she wants him to be her new protector as well.

Additionally, the fingers of her hand on top of his that she's holding on her cheek, are clawed in precisely the same way that they're clawed into the carpet in the deleted 'Be Me' scene as she's being turned into a vampire. This suggests that he too is to be turned into something like a vampire.

Throughout the film, what a powerful general symbol these extended hands also are, for the simple human social act of reaching out not only for help, but most of all from our eternal desire to do no more than make contact with other people, with anyone at all.

Now, as to the monster inside Owen that he's yet to accept, he has his own murderous feelings about his bullies right at the start. When Abby first meets him she surprises him stabbing a tree. He's saying, 'Are you scared? Are you scared little girl? Huh?' But Abby doesn't make anything of it later on. In the Swedish film where Eli also catches Oskar doing the same thing, *she* turns it back on him later when he protests that *he* doesn't kill like her. She mocks his protest by repeating what he said when stabbing the tree, and adds, 'But you'd kill if you *could*. To get revenge. *Right?*' forcing Oskar to agree that he would.[4] Which is just as true about Owen, even though Reeves doesn't have Abby say what Eli does, I think because he makes Abby gentler towards Owen than Eli is towards Oskar.

You might still try to defend him because later on he desperately tries to find out about evil, first from his mother who's too drunk to wake up, and then from his father over the phone — 'Do you think there's such a thing as evil? ... Can people be evil?' he pleads. But he doesn't get any help from either of them. So immediately after that, he intentionally begins to enter Abby's dark and dangerous world. And at the end he *has* become her new protector, and future provider of blood through becoming a murderer like her. Therefore he's finally accepted the evil that's been inside him all along.

And so the film remorselessly joins Owen to Abby as identical where evil is concerned. The vampire within Abbey stands for the evil not only within her, but in Owen as well.

4 The dubbed English, and the English captions of the Swedish film on the US DVD of it that I'm using, vary considerably between each other, so this is an approximation. The US film's DVD captions are accurate.

5

Can Abbyor Owen escape from what they are? It doesn't seem so. Abby has no hope of escaping except by killing herself or letting someone catch her, or kill her. And should she be expected to do that? Should you condemn her for wanting to go on living?

And can Owen escape? Does the society he lives in offer him any help, though its Oath of Allegiance says that it's 'one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all'? Does his nation help him battle the evil he's surrounded by, when its President himself says that evil doesn't exist in America, but only outside it? Can the police stop him being bullied, despite telling the schoolchildren, 'Your safety is our number one concern'? Can the school's teachers protect him, when Mr Zoric is twice diverted from helping him when danger threatens him, and jokes about him being the Devil? Can the school's principal protect him when she vilifies him for defending himself against the bullies' attacks? Can his father protect him, who's taken off with some woman called Cindy, abandoned his family, and isn't even willing to find out what Owen wants to know about evil? And can his alcoholic mother protect him, though she says, 'I hate to see my baby hurt'? None of them can. Is it any wonder that he steals money from his mother to buy a pocket knife for defending himself — ironically little more than a toy?

America is well known for its Mom-worship — the American mother is the most important guardian of the child. Yet not once in the film do you see Owen's mother's face, except one time in the distance, and other times in blurry, distorted ways. Mostly you see only her body — she's in effect faceless. This is an ironic comment on the person who should be Owen's chief protector of all, as also is showing her with a bottle of wine each of the three times you see her.

She can't talk to his father over the phone without reaching for her glass of wine. When Owen needs to ask her about evil, the camera significantly moves in on the empty bottle and wine glass beside her bed, and he's unable to wake her up. It's ironic that she's also asleep with a wine bottle and glass beside her when he sneaks out to spend the night in Abby's apartment, while the TV is showing the message, '10 p.m. — Do you know where your children are?'

Another potent image of the relationship between her and Owen is when she's on the phone to his father on the left side of the screen, grabs her glass of wine, and returns to the right side. And the phone's cord stretches tightly across the screen all the way from left to right as they argue, guillotining Owen's body: first his knees, then his chest, then his neck, and finally his face as he sits there, miserable because of his mother's more and still more agitated words.

Owen's absentee father is for him no more than a voice over the phone, one that doesn't understand or even try to understand what he needs from him. As well, his father only *might* see him some time soon: 'Maybe next weekend', he says. And he offers him faint and false-sounding words of cheer before abruptly hanging up after Owen says, weeping, 'I love you.'

Owen's mother when you first meet her twice calls

him 'honey', and says 'Owen, sweetie'. In her note about his dinner being in the freezer she calls him 'Sweetie' too. The receptionist at the hospital twice calls Abby 'Sweetie'. The man in the tunnel who offers to rescue Abby from her pretended helplessness, addresses her once as 'honey', and twice as 'sweetheart'. Far from having a sweet heart, she's about to devour his blood, and break his neck. Such endearments are so inadequate in the light of the lack of sweetness in the children's lives.

The only one who seems able to protect Owen instead of just talking about it is herself an outcast from the society that can't, or won't protect him: Abby. And Abby is the only one of all those around him who actually does step in to rescue him from his society's tormentors. All the adults who are so close to the children, and who are supposed to protect them, are blind to the horrors that the children in their care are immersed in every day.

Although at the start Abby and Owen seem so different from one another, there are a great many clues to how they're really much more similar than they appear to be at first. Here are some of them.

There's a play on both Abby's and Owen's faces that connects them in different ways. Abby obviously has two faces, her usual one and her vampire one. But Owen mirrors this in sometimes having two faces, too.

Early on he wears the semi-transparent mask, which gives him two faces. Ironically, the face on the mask is the face of Abby's protector. It foreshadows Owen's future role.

Another time, after he inadvertently prompts Abby to attack and feed off Virginia, you see his face move back and forth between one face and two. This is caused by a rain-wet window. It shows his discovery that instead of there being only the one dangerous world that he lives in, there's now another one, an even deadlier world. Later on when you see him weep because Abby's fled, his face is also doubled by a window's glass. This time it reflects his trembling undecided on the fulcrum between his previous and future worlds.

Early in the film when he's spying on his neighbours through his telescope, the light coming through it makes his eye look exactly like Abby's and Virginia's vampire eyes, their outsider eyes. This suggests that he's a vampire like them in the way that he 'feeds' off the lives of others.

It's easy for us to see that what Abby is — a vampire — clearly cuts her off from being part of society anywhere. She can live outside only during the night; she has to murder people for their blood which is all that she can live on; and as she tells Owen, she has to move from one town to another often — obviously because of the trail of dead bodies that her feeding on people creates. But there are also plenty of clues to show that Owen is cut off from his own society too, similarly to how she is. Here are some of them.

Early on, his masked self watches society from the shelter of his bedroom through a telescope, and through his windows. He's not part of his society; he's no more than outside it aching to belong to it, unable to be much more than an onlooker, a voyeur.

The distant sexual image of Virginia's breast being fondled that he spies on, is mirrored later by his peeping at Abby when she's naked in his mother's bedroom. Ironically, in between these two spying episodes, when Abby's naked body is cuddled into his in his own bed, his back is turned to it, and he doesn't see it at all. However, this *is* because she's told him emphatically not to look at her: 'No no no, wait wait. Don't look at me'; and then before she starts undressing, 'Close your eyes.'

You also see him watching his society from outside it when he stares at the two lovers embracing in front of a Ms Pac-Man machine, an early computer game in the store where he buys his sweets. Their embrace and his longing look at it suggests that what they have is not for him.

Even at school he's more an onlooker than a participant. He only watches while the students are swimming. When they go skating he merely stands at the edge of the ice, watching them all at play. When they're all absorbed in the film *Romeo and Juliet*, he's copying the Morse Code from a book, while the students are fascinated by the sexual encounter of the lovers on the screen. And he hastily hides from, and spies on the bullies around a building's corner.

The children's apartments provide more clues to how similar they really are. Owen's isolation is emphasised by the enormous poster of the Moon's surface that covers the wall between his bedroom and Abby's apartment, and by how he almost always hides himself in an overlarge padded silver parka as if in a space suit. From the Moon of his bedroom he surveys the society below him that he can't be a part of through a telescope. In one scene you see the distant full planet Earth on the wall behind him, as if it's too far away for him to reach from the Moon where he is. And he communicates with Abby using Morse Code, tapping out messages to her through the same wall, as if his only contact with Earth is by long-distance radio.

(The irony of his space suit parka extends to other clothing in the film. At one point he's lying on his bed wearing an *Empire Strikes Back* sweater,[5] when striking back is something he's afraid to do. And Abby wears a *KISS* T-shirt when she enters Owen's apartment uninvited. How ironic is that when you consider the deadly nature of a vampire's 'kiss'!)

On the other hand Abby's apartment is bleak, bare, and dim, with scarcely any furniture. There are mattresses on the floor though she sleeps in the bathtub. You see money stolen from her victims in a heap on the uncarpeted parquet floor; stolen jewellery, wallets, and credit cards on one table; and her collection of puzzles that she fills her empty life with on another. And the windows are blocked with cardboard to keep the daylight out. Yet it's as alien a living space as Owen's, though bare where his is full. But his bedroom illustrates the pretence of his life, while her apartment is as empty as her life is, yet honest about it.

Still more clues are provided in Owen's and Abby's first date at the store.

The Ms Pac-Man game in the store is itself an ironic comment on the lovers embraced in front of it, because in it monsters' bodiless heads devour everyone around

5 You can't see it clearly in the film, but do on the *Internet Movie Database* in one of the images that was perhaps cut from the film. This image is Photo 56 at <http://www.imdb.com/media/ rm88375552/tt1228987>.

them. It reminds you of the failing or failed sexual and marital couplings, including his parents' and Virginia's, that he watches from his isolation. The computer monsters suggest the Eat-or-be-Eaten nature of societies. It also reminds you of the *real* monster, Abby, who's lurking right in the midst of this society that she's just moved into.

The game is even more ironic in that Owen confidently shows Abby how to play it, yet it's a *Ms* Pac-Man machine, and *she* watches him play it, but *lose*. The irony's compounded further still by him buying his sweets a moment later from a bisexually dressed Boy George look-alike. And it's an irony doubled by the same sweets he buys from such a person causing Abby to vomit immediately afterwards. However, the 'Boy George' significance of this is not clear except in retrospect later on, when you discover Abby's real gender. When he's buying the sweets the irony extends to him saying to her so generously, 'You can have *anything* you want.' It's so untrue of almost everything in her life since there's so much that humans want that she can't possibly have.

You *might* say that they at least have in common their embracing each other as lovers do. But he embraces her for the first time in the falling snow immediately after their evening date is disrupted by her vomiting. The second is when she lies in Owen's bed cuddled into him, but she's bloody, naked, and frozen, just come from causing the violent death of her old protector. The third when he embraces her, and the last when she embraces him, are both also when Abby is dripping with blood. And so every time that they embrace you'd have to say that they've come together in far more violent ways than the usual lovers' embraces that he's spied upon. His and her embraces take place inside a circle of sickness, violence, blood, and death.

Owen's watching society through windows, telescope, and mask extends to him seeing Abby dismember the bullies only through the swimming pool's water. All that he sees and all that you see are the bullies' torn-off limbs and heads and trunks sinking through it, and legs thrashing in the water as they die. But after she's killed the bullies he emerges from the water struggling to breathe as if newly born. Then all you see are Abby's bloodstained feet drifting slowly down from flying above, and landing each side of his head. And you see her disembodied bloody hands reach down, and turn his face up to look directly at her.

Now at last *he* sees her fully for the first time ever. She's in her complete winged, blood-dripping, vampire body. It's as if she's forcing him to recognise exactly what she is. She's smashed the mask, the telescope, the windows, and the water that up to now he's only ever watched society through.

She's saying by this that she's offering him her 'society' in place of his that he's never been a part of. But she's also saying that it's one that, if he wants it, he can join only totally, and for the first time in his life honestly, without kidding himself that he's something else, without trying to live in an imaginary world, and without any hope of ever becoming part of any human society at all.

Yet even now at the very last, her ultimate demonic form is ambivalent. She's taken on an angel's winged shape, that could be both a fallen angel of hell, of evil; or an angel of heaven, of good. Its ambivalence is indicated by the earlier references to Satan, and to the God/Goddess of the Rubik's Cube and the ziggurat. So you're finally led to see that separating good from evil is not as easy as you might have thought. Indeed, in the film's terms it's not possible at all, and the film has brought you all the way around to accepting this.

After all, exactly who *are* you barracking for when you reach this swimming-pool climax: the bullies? Owen's parents? the murder victims? the police? society itself? Or for Abby and Owen.

You don't see Abby's face as he looks at her at the end. His own face is blank, too exhausted by everything to show any emotion at all. But you can imagine that she's searching his face to see whether he'*s* going to commit himself to her at last, and become her new protector. After all, she's just proved herself to be *his* protector from society's bullies, as she'd earlier promised him she'd be.

His answer to her question comes immediately after this when you see the two of them escaping from the town on a train: Abby is hidden in her trunk from the daylight, and Owen is taking care of it, so he has now fully committed himself to being her new protector, and to being an outsider like her.

But there's something else that's crucially important in this climactic swimming-pool scene. When Owen looks up at her, he looks directly into the camera, directly at you the viewer. This puts *you* into the vampire's body, and makes *you* the vampire. It's as if to say that *you* too, are as guilty of these crimes as Abby is, and as all of our society is.

It was also significant earlier that when Abby was being turned into a vampire, and when the detective was dying as Abby feeds on him, and both of them reach out for help, their hands were also extended towards *you* the viewer, as if then asking for *your* help too.

And so the film says finally and clearly that we are all, all of us, not only bystanders at the creation of vampires, not only the vampires' victims, but the vampires themselves as well. There is, after all, no escape for either Abby or Owen or even for you, from what they and you really are.

It was always clear that there can be no escape for Abby, and it becomes clear at the end that there's no escape for Owen either. But to understand why there's none for Owen, you had to track him down across this great Persian carpet of complex and intermingled clues.

6

HOWEVER, THE PROBLEM of good and evil as a greater form of the more relative codes within a society, is seen by the film against a larger backdrop still. Right at the beginning you're told that the film is set in of all places, Los Alamos. It's a town that was planned from its very start, and was built for the finest scientists in the world — you might say that it's a society at its most promising and most orderly. And incidentally, though the film doesn't itself say so, it just happens to be 'blessed' with a greater number of churches than is usually the case.

But most of all it's the place where the world's first atom bombs were created that destroyed the cities of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki — ironically Japan's two most Christian cities. It's a town that was constructed during the Second World War, and was designed for total warfare.

Here were first created the world's most powerful weapons of mass murder, and this town was therefore responsible in 1945 for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in Japan in only a few seconds, as well as the great number who died more slowly and agonisingly from the radiation later on. Abby's vampire killings look small against such a gigantic bloodletting and suffering as that, though that's not to say that hundreds of thousands of killings excuse the much fewer that she's responsible for.

The name 'Father of the Atom Bomb' was given to the American scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who was Director of the Manhattan Project that built the bomb. When he saw the first-ever nuclear bomb tested near Los Alamos on 16th July, 1945, he recalled a line from the *Bhagavad-Gita*: 'I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds' (XI, 32).

One of the more horrifying aspects of that first Los Alamos test is that the scientists who built the bomb, and were about to test it, weren't entirely sure whether or not the chain reaction would destroy our entire planet. Yet that didn't deter them from testing it. And by 1983 when the film is set, the world had enough of the bombs first created in Los Alamos to destroy the whole planet and all its life many times over. How ironic it is that by 1983 the acronym for this threat of planet-wide destruction was MAD, standing for 'Mutually Assured Destruction'!

So, because of where the film is sited, you wonder the same thing that Owen forces you to wonder by staring directly into the camera when he looks at Abby at the end: Who, after all, *is* the vampire? Who among us is or isn't a murderer, a feeder on the blood of others?

This juxtaposition of Los Alamos as the atom bomb town that caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, and might cause the death of the whole planet; and Abby's murdering to survive, is made clear when you see the first of her vampire killings. As her victim walks along the tunnel towards where she's huddled near its furthest end, you see a lit-up graffito filling the outside wall opposite the exit. It's a sketch of an atom bomb's mushroom cloud. And the camera then shows a silhouette of her body curled around her reeling victim's head and shoulders, a silhouette that looks like a mushroom cloud too.

You're obviously intended to see her crime in the light of the town's far greater crimes. Reeves himself describes the tunnel as like a birth canal, though you scarcely need him to say that to see it as such yourself. It's ironic that the tunnel's entrance is decorated with flowers. They show that these two unnatural things — the vampire and the atom bomb that are both situated at the tunnel's exit — have been born out of the natural world through this birth canal, but have emerged from it as unnatural, as monstrosities. It's as if to say that all of us humans right from our birth itself inevitably contain demons inside ourselves, and that we are born into societies that create further demons — that this is an unavoidable part of simply being alive.

So, just as the film leads you to accept that good and evil are inextricably part of you, it leads you to accept that societies are inextricably both good and evil too, and further, that nations are as well. Of course, this is not what people normally believe. Most believe that they and their town and their nation are good, and that it's other people and other towns and other nations that are evil, exactly as Reagan's 1983 speech says so bluntly that the Soviet Union/Russia is an 'Evil Empire', but that America is good.

The constant use of the words 'good' and 'evil', together with Reagan's quoting 'America is good' and placing evil outside the US; and the siting of the film's action in Los Alamos of all the places in America that might have been chosen, could hardly be more ironic when you're led to wonder who's responsible for Abby's and Owen's sufferings and crimes. Is it all right for a society as a whole to commit murder on an enormous scale? and all right for a society to force its misfit members to be outcasts? but not all right for those outcasts to do whatever is necessary for *them* to survive?

On the surface in this tunnel scene there's the contrast between the human and the vampire. There's also the contrast between the two societies — the supposedly normal and religious one of Los Alamos, and the murderous one the town represents as well. Both are imaged by the flowers at one end of the tunnel — the birth canal — and the mushroom cloud and vampire at the other. But they're also imaged throughout the film in an overall way by the purity of the white snow, and the many sudden eruptions of red blood, sometimes right on the white snow itself.

It's a contrast echoed in a small way by the initial appearance of Abby's naked footprints in the snow as if of a newborn child, an innocently naked animal; and the final appearance of the detective's shod footprints in the snow as he comes to take her prisoner. He *is* society's chief representative in the film, an official enforcer of its codes, unlike the bullies who are its unofficial enforcers. Both times the footprints are the only disturbances in the otherwise virginal snow.

So the brutality and bloodiness of the film is seen taking place in a landscape of purely white snow, and through the gentle falling of this virginal snow descending as if from heaven itself. But the film insistently shows that these contrasts are only surface manifestations, and that in reality they're not different from each other at all.

The film goes against the conventional Christian idea of evil as originating outside not only ourselves, but also outside our societies; against it being something that might infect us from a distance if we let it. It suggests that externalising and personalising evil does terrible damage to us, and to our society. This is done by showing how it affects both our children who suffer so horribly from it, and also the adults who can't even see the damage done to the very children that they're supposed to look after, and care for.

What this might imply is that if you accept that evil is built into you and into society, you might be better able to cope with right and wrong, with good and evil, than you are if you externalise and personify it as Christianity does. But the film doesn't go into this.

However, people in a largely Christian society prob-

ably never question the Christian concept of good coming from a God, and evil coming from a Satan, as if it's the only concept possible, though in fact to take that for granted may do you terrible harm. Perhaps it's valuable that we come to accept that other concepts of good and evil are possible, such as the one in *Let Me In*.

The inseparable nature of good and evil in both humans and their societies is something that you find in Asiatic religions. For example, you can see it as long ago as in the 2300-year-old Chinese sacred poem, Lao Tsu's *Tao Te Ching* (Ostwald's 1985 version of Richard Wilhelm's 1910 translation):

> If all on earth acknowledge the beautiful as beautiful
> Then thereby the ugly is already posited.
> If all on earth acknowledge the good as good
> Then thereby is the non-good [ie, evil] already posited.
> For existence and non-existence generate each other.

7

IT'S A DISTURBING STORY. On its surface it's just a simple story about two of society's marginalised children trying to survive, similar to the old Marooned-on-a-Desert-Island stories like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Lord of the Flies*. Nor does it bluntly moralise; it does not say outright that the evil in the story is either good or bad. Looked at in this way, you might say that all that the film says is 'This is how it *is*', nothing more than that, just as Abby says bluntly to Owen at their first meeting, 'That's just the way it is'.

But there's all of what I've called the film's 'dark matter' hidden inside it just as the vampire's hidden inside Abby. And there's *still* more about Abby and Owen to examine than I've touched on so far.

One question that the film causes you to infer is, What is 'normal'? These two — misfit and outsider — incur the wrath of supposedly normal humans. Normal society can't bear them, and has to punish them for not fitting in. It's obvious why Abby should be punished, because she kills people, but it's not so clear why Owen has to suffer, except that he isn't normal to the bullies, he isn't a regular boy. It's easy to argue that the detective trying to track down Abby is a normal member of society, working to preserve it, but are the bullies normal too?

Yes, you can say that Abby has no option but to be what she is, while you might say that Owen still does have the option of continuing to try to fit in. Yet you can also see that he's been driven by normal society to a point where opting out is the only choice left to him: the bullying reaches such an extreme at the swimming pool that he might have had an eye gouged out, or even drowned if Abby hadn't rescued him.

But regardless of what you think 'normal' means, the film does turn the usual concept of normal and abnormal on its head. It engenders your sympathy for the murderous vampire girl, and the savagely bullied boy whose intentions towards his tormentors are murderous too. And you're clearly on the side of their forlorn, dark, and desperate love.

Fiona Gruber, in her 22–23 October *Weekend Australian* review of Lindqvist's novel *Little Star*, says that:

> Lindqvist-Land is an instantly recognisable contemporary or near-contemporary terrain that just happens to be populated with bloodsuckers, werewolves or zombies. It is part of his skill and vision that he makes regular society look sicker than the misfits within. His characters' dissatisfaction with everyday life might have something to do with needing fresh human blood or a wolf mother, but whether vampire or spotty teenaged emo, society is fringed with the solitary and marginalised.
>
> Strip away the violence and paranormal overlay and Lindqvist, like Stephen King, with whom he has been compared, offers finely crafted and psychologically sharp parables of a cracked society.

Both films and Lindqvist's novel *Let the Right One In* that they're based on turn the concept of a normal person and a normal society inside-out and upside-down.

In a general way the US film has been described as Shakespearean, more so than because of any overt comparisons with *Romeo and Juliet*. It has a large sense of both Shakespearean tragedy and to a lesser extent triumph about it, such as how in *Romeo and Juliet* the lovers die, yet as a result the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets responsible for the tragedy is brought to an end.

There's great tragedy in *Let Me In*, encompassing the suffering and deaths of so many people. Yet there's also the minor triumph that the two children do survive it, and even if not unscathed do escape from it, no matter how forlorn their future life together is probably going to be.

You can guess that their future may be unpleasant from what Abby's old protector says to her in her vampire form in their apartment. This is after he's failed to bring back any blood for her. She yells at him, 'What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to go out and do it myself? Huh? ... Answer me!' And he mumbles to her in despair, 'Maybe I'm getting sloppy ... Maybe I want to get caught ... Maybe I'm just tired of this.' And he's able to raise his eyes to look at her only as he says he's 'tired of this'. So it seems likely that this is how Owen will end up too.

But more specifically Shakespearean, Abby and Owen are truly 'A pair of star-crossed lovers', the term that the play's prologue uses to describe the ill-fated Romeo and Juliet. And twice in the film you hear the stark words from the play, 'I must be gone and live, or stay and die.'

The first time is when Owen's class watches the 1968 Zeffirelli film of the play. It was very popular in schools at the time the film is set. In the bedroom scene they're Romeo's words to Juliet when he's risen from her bed (III, v, 11). The sun is about to appear that would lead to him being discovered by the Capulets, and killed for deflowering her.

The second time Abby has written them for Owen on the back of one of his 'Now and Later' sweet wrappers. Day is about to come in *their* bedroom scene, where she's lain with him in his bed, and as she's a vampire the

daylight threatens to kill her like Romeo, too.

There seems to be a difference in that the words 'I must be gone and live, or stay and die' are spoken by the boy to the girl in the play, but written by the girl to the boy in the film. Another difference that also has to be qualified now, is why in the play their love has been consummated sexually, but in the film no more than emotionally, when Owen asks Abby to go steady with him, and she agrees.

The two bedroom scenes, and seeing the children as star-crossed lovers, only seem similar. But there's something about Abby's originally being turned into a vampire that isn't made as clear in the film *Let Me In* as it is in the novel, and in the Swedish film. You might miss it altogether, though there *are* numerous clues to it in the US film. Here are the clues.

When Abby first offers to help Owen against the bullies whom he's afraid to fight, he says, 'But ... you're a *girl*!' She answers him, 'I'm a lot stronger than you think I am.'

When Owen first hugs Abby after she vomits up the sweet, she asks him, 'Would you still like me even if I wasn't a girl?' But when he wonders why she's asked him this, she opts out of explaining by saying forlornly, 'No reason.'

Only moments before, when Owen bought the sweets inside the store, he was served by the young man dressed androgynously as the singer Boy George. It's a most suggestive image, though you mightn't realise this at the time. (It's yet another example of fortuitous form, because the Boy George idea was suggested by the actor Colin Moritz playing the part, and was not in the script.)

Later, when Abby lies naked alongside Owen in his bed, he asks her to be his girlfriend, but this time she says more firmly, 'Owen, I'm *not* a girl.' He's surprised, and exclaims, 'You're *not* a girl?' and she says, 'No'. But when he asks her, 'What are you?' she turns away from him silently for a while, until she says with great sadness, 'I'm nothing'. In her pause before answering she compresses her lips for a moment, and both the pause and her lips suggest that she's wondering whether to say something else. And you wonder what it could have been.

Of course you might think from these four incidents that she means only that being turned into a vampire is what has made her stronger, as well as a 'nothing' — you could say that she's no longer even human, and that's why she's no longer just a girl. You might also assume later on when Owen asks her bluntly if she *is* a vampire, that that's what he'll conclude about her too.

But after she's come into his home without being invited, and her body has bled all over, she takes a shower to clean herself, and comes out wrapped in a towel. Her own clothes are bloody, so Owen tells her to go into his mother's bedroom, and put on one of her old dresses. Then he can't resist peeping around the door at her and you see his eyes widen — she's off-camera, and you assume that she's naked. And he hastily turns away, and leans against the wall, bemused. You might assume that he's seen a girl naked for the first time in his life.

In reality what Abby is, was originally a boy. The vampire who centuries ago turned him into a vampire, also castrated him. In the Swedish film Oskar sees the boy standing naked on-camera, and you see the scar from the castration in his crotch. And 'she' calls 'herself' Eli, which the novel tells you is short for Elias, his original boy's name.

Reeves decided not to actually show the castration in *Let Me In*, and you're left somewhat in the dark about it. The deleted scene, 'Be Me', showing how Abby was turned into a vampire, is fragmented, cut rapidly, and out of focus so that you can make out little of what's happening. However, the vampire's attack upon him *is* shown as being in two parts. In the first he's on his bed where the vampire has woken him up and it's mostly shot around his face and neck. Then for the second part he's down on the carpet with a blanket up to his chin so that you know it no longer involves biting his neck. But you do twice catch a glimpse of his bare legs thrashing about, suggesting that he's being castrated as well.

The scene where Abby comes in without being invited and bleeds is just before the 'Be Me' part was to have come, and continues after 'Be Me' with Owen spying on her naked in his mother's room and seeing she's a castrated boy. It's actually the only scene titled 'Let Me In' on the DVD's scene list, maybe to show that it *is* the scene where they go a long way towards letting each other in to their own so-far secretive lives.

But if you'd previously read the novel, and/or seen the Swedish film, you'd recognise this deeper meaning in what she's been saying all along about not being a girl. However, since Reeves avoids any obvious distinction between Abby being either a castrated boy, or a 'nothing' because she's a vampire and no longer human, both interpretations are possible. And you can take Owen's reaction as caused by nothing more than his seeing a girl naked for the first time, despite all the clues that suggest otherwise.

You might argue that giving you the option of either interpretation strengthens rather than weakens the film. Reeves also says that he felt that actually showing the castration would have overpowered it. But I think that making Abby clearly a castrated boy would have been better. It would not only make 'her' less human still, but also make 'her' and Owen's relationship stranger, and more powerful. For instance how more appalling would her sadness and despair be then, when she says, 'I'm nothing.'

As well, Kenny's calling Owen a girl would become more meaningful, and more complex if Abby were clearly shown to be a castrated boy. It *is* most significant that the bullies who torment Owen always call him a girl. In the first bullying scene Kenny says, 'Hey little girl ... Are you a little girl? ... That's why he won't go swimming. He doesn't want everyone to see what a little fucking girl he is.' Then he gives Owen a vicious wedgie as if to crush his genitals, which echoes Abby's being castrated. And given what Abby is, Kenny's word 'fucking' is ironic too.

The novel and the Swedish film do not have the bullies call Oskar a 'girl', but a 'pig' instead. That Reeves changes 'pig' to 'girl' does seem to indicate a deliberate attempt on his part to emphasise these boy–girl reversals in both Abby and Owen. The change from 'pig' to 'girl' certainly adds more depth to *his* film.

One reason why Reeves cast Kodi Smit-McPhee as Owen was that at the time he looked so vulnerable, so much like a little girl with a small frame and a beautiful

face. And he still had the soprano voice of a prepubertal boy that could have been a girl's voice, too.

So not only is Abby neither a boy nor a girl, but Owen's sex is made out to be indeterminate too, as it also was by him being masked and stabbing himself as a girl in his own bedroom much earlier. It also suggests why there's nothing sexual between them in their bedroom scene, rather than because they've not yet started on puberty.

All of this helps to explain why, after Owen sees Abby naked and castrated as 'she' is getting into his mother's old dress, he's then *bemused* as he leans against the wall. You'd expect a different emotion from him instead if he were seeing merely a naked girl for the first time, such as guilt because he's spied on her, or pleasure at having his curiosity satisfied. And significantly, when 'she' comes out from his mother's bedroom wearing the old dress, his eyes immediately glance down at 'her' now-covered crotch. Would he have given himself away with such an obvious glance as that, if he'd seen only a naked girl?

The first time that Owen hugs Abby after she's vomited the sweet, he has no idea that she's really a boy when she asks him, 'Would you still like me even if I wasn't a girl?' But he does say, 'I dunno ... I guess.' It suggests that it won't alienate him when he sees her naked if he does see that she isn't a girl after all, and realises that what she's been saying all along is literally true.

I think that Reeves provides enough clues to show that Abby's a boy, if not quite enough to show that he's been castrated too. But I feel that he could have made both things a little more obvious.

Making both Abby's and Owen's sex indeterminate emphasises their being together in their isolation from the society that they don't really live in, but only struggle to survive in. It adds a further level to Abby being a social outcast that 'she' is no longer either a boy or a girl, and is in 'her' own words a 'nothing'. It makes her more alien still than the human that she once was. And the bullies' treatment of Owen as not a boy but a girl allies him with Abby: 'he' is alien in a similar way to 'her'.

So Abby and Owen, and their star-crossed love, could hardly be further from the usual meaning of 'normal'.

Abby right from the start *knows* that she's not normal: she can have no doubts about that whatsoever. But Owen, though not normal in the usual sense his society sees it, and though knowing that he's not being treated as normal, is most of the way through the film not ready to accept that he really isn't normal. He still wants to be accepted by his society, if he can only find a way to achieve that acceptance. And so what you look at now is how Owen gradually comes to accept his abnormality, to accept that he's as alien as Abby. And it's Abby herself who pushes him towards accepting how alien he is.

The bedroom scene that I've mentioned before is the pivotal one in their relationship. It's where they start to move towards committing themselves to one another. It's where they begin to accept one another despite each of them being so alien, and where Owen decides that he wants to enter her world even though he's yet to find out exactly what her world is, and exactly what she is. You might say that it's where they become 'engaged', though they've got quite a way to go yet before getting 'married'.

There is a further point about this scene. Her previous protector has just died, sacrificing himself to her for the last time. And she's flown through the sky directly from his death to Owen's bedroom, undressed, and crawled into his bed with him. Her nakedness suggests that this is *her*: she's offering not only her castrated self but also her whole vampire lifestyle to him. She's no longer wearing her disguise as a human and as a girl. But now she needs him not only as a friend, not only as someone to go steady with, but as her new protector too.

However, she's still not entirely sure if he'll accept her for all that she really is, and so though she's made herself naked she also asks him to keep his eyes shut as she gets undressed, and then asks him not to look at her. But she *is* hovering on the edge of revealing all of herself to him. She shows this when he asks her how she got into his room, because the window that she came through is high up and inaccessible from outside. And she answers by saying, 'I flew.' It reveals that she's more than human, even though he takes it as being only a joke, saying 'Yeah, right', and then a little later, 'You know, it's okay if you don't want to be my girlfriend. You don't have to make stuff up.'

You might think it sexually suggestive that she takes off all her clothes before getting into Owen's bed. But her clothes would be bloodied from drinking her old protector's blood at the hospital. When she drinks a victim's blood she's always splattered with it, and while she's lying in Owen's bed you do see bloodstains on her face.

Yet you might still wonder just how innocent her crawling naked into his bed is. But when he exclaims, 'Hey, you're not wearing anything ... And you're freezing', she asks him, 'Is that gross?' That's hardly a sexually suggestive thing for her to ask, and is rather an attempt to fit herself into Owen's life socially than sexually. Despite being turned into a vampire 250 years ago she's still only twelve years old, as she herself emphasises to him twice. So mentally, emotionally, and sexually, she's no older than a prepubertal twelve, as Owen is too: maturity's been denied her by her forever being twelve.

Her asking, 'Is that gross?' also suggests that crawling naked into his bed may not be a tactic she's used before in finding new protectors, and that therefore the growing love between her and Owen may be new to her as well. And that, taken along with her earlier anxious question, 'Would you still like me even if I wasn't a girl?' has you think how inhibited being a castrated boy must have made him/her throughout those 250 years of not growing up.

As I've pointed out earlier, the last time that she was with her old protector before he ended up in hospital and she killed him, you saw her intimately and sadly clasp his arm, and then caress his cheek. And he placed his hand on top of hers, and held it to his face. Now, lying in bed with Owen, after she agrees to go steady with him she takes his hand in hers, and clasps it to her cheek identically to how her former protector had held her hand to his cheek. The similarity shows that she wants Owen to be her next protector, although he doesn't know it yet. One protector's dead, and she needs to find another one.

When he visits her in her apartment later on, and finds out that she's a vampire, he asks her, 'But how old are you — really?' And her answer is, 'Twelve ... But ... I've been twelve for a very long time.' Then he sees an old photo of her with her previous protector, who was then a boy like him while she looks exactly the same as she does now. Only when he sees it, does he realise that she wants him to be the next in her long line of protectors, and to devote his entire life to it. She shows how anxious she is about him finally understanding this by her eyes flicking nervously to the photo he's holding, back to him, again to the photo, and then back to him yet again.

He's shocked by it, and immediately wants to escape. He says emphatically, 'I want to go now. I want to go.' When she blocks his way, he insists, 'Are you gonna let me? ... What are you gonna do with me?' It's as if he's challenging the vampire in her to attack him, and destroy him. But she reluctantly stands aside instead, saying forlornly almost to herself as he flees, 'I told you we couldn't be friends.'

His challenge here also shows his trust in her not to attack him. There's no fear in his voice as he issues it. His trust in her is echoed shortly after when she shows her trust in him by entering his home without being invited. She knows that she'll bleed, and that her life will depend on him stopping her bleeding. Both therefore demonstrate that they're willing to put their lives in each other's hands.

Though he backed away in horror from the sight of Abby drinking and killing the detective, he doesn't flinch when she immediately after comes up behind him and wraps her arms around him, hugging him, her arms still in his own mother's old but now blood-stained dress. Then she and Owen stand facing each other, and she says, 'Owen, I have to go away.' But again he doesn't flinch when, her face all bloody too, she kisses him on his lips for the first time ever, though her lips are also covered in blood that now stains his. So now he's on the very cusp of accepting what she is, and of learning what he is too. Yet he *still* hasn't seen her in her absolute vampire form.

But after she's slaughtered the bullies, she turns his face up, and forces him to see what she truly is. And it's only now that he accepts her fully at last, and accepts his fate.

This climactic scene is outstanding because Reeves does not show you what her ultimate form is. It's a masterly directorial touch. It's as if he's saying that 'she' is too alien for us ordinary mortal viewers to look upon. 'She' is, after all, a winged, demonic, bloodstained serial killer, neither male nor female, not fully human any more, and immortal too.

8

PART FIVE of Lindqvist's novel quotes a 1997 Steven Morrissey song, *Let the Right One Slip In*:

> Let the right one in
> Let the old dreams die
> Let the wrong ones go
> They cannot do
> What you want them to do

He took his novel's title from it, *Let the Right One In*. It's ambiguous, though not as much so as the US film's title is, which is shorter and therefore more encompassing and more complex: *Let Me In*.

Most obviously, the US film's title *Let Me In* is a vampire's dangerous plea to be invited into a human's home. But it could also be Owen's yearning for friendship of any kind with anyone at all, even with this strange, secretive, and defensive young girl who's just moved into the apartment next to his.

Or it could be his searching for someone to love and love him back when he asks Abby if she'll go steady with him.

On a deeper level it could be Owen's forlorn desire to be let in to the society that he merely exists in but is not allowed to be part of, his dream of being accepted as an ordinary person like everyone else.

Yet on a deeper level still it could be both Abby and Owen warily circling each other, anxiously preserving their secret lives from one another, but all the same each wondering whether to let the other one in. And so, little by little they each allow the other to discover more about him/herself, ever so warily since they've both lived solitary lives for so long, lives that they've learned with so much suffering to hide from the society around them.

But on the deepest level of all what they've learned is that they're both so far from being 'normal' human beings, that there's no hope whatsoever of their ever being let in to society, let in to the human company surrounding them — in other words let in to a 'normal' life.

And so at the last they've accepted that to humans, to human families, and to human society, they're each of them a monster. And in society's terms they're especially evil too. This is despite those humans and their society being shown to us to be just as monstrous and evil as they are.

So finally the title's words, 'Let me in', is each of these children's invitation to the other. They end up inviting each other into each's own strange world: two worlds now become one exclusive world with a population of no more than the two of them. They are now triumphantly together but forever tragically alone.

— Ray Wood, August 2012

Tim Marion has been in and around fandom for almost 43 out of his 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-oriented 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).

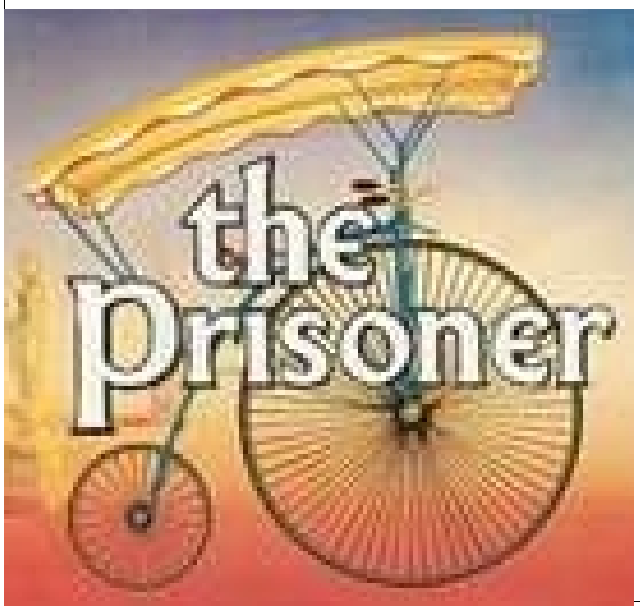
Tim Marion

The Prisoner recaptured:

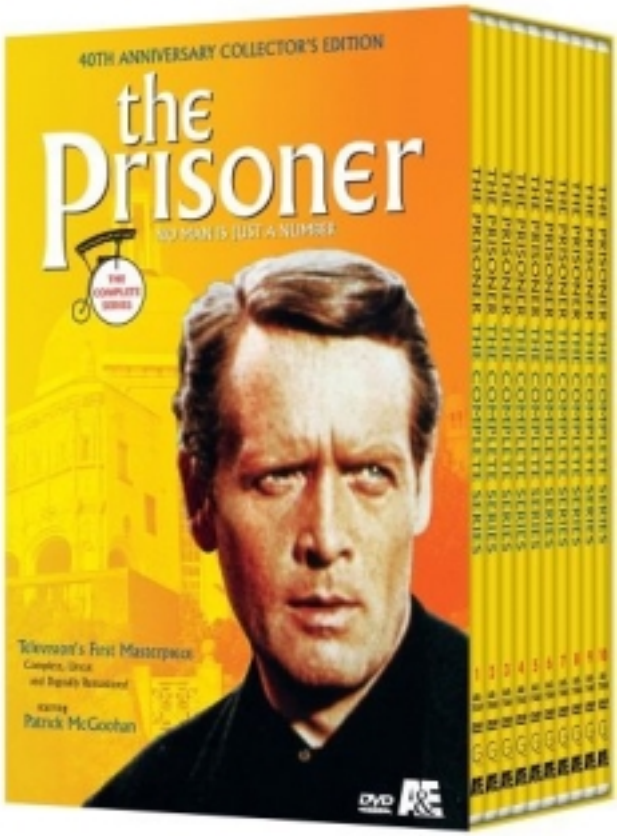
a review of the Fortieth Anniversary Collector's Edition DVD set of *The Prisoner*

(and subsequent thoughts thereon)

Since ***The Prisoner: No Man Is Just a Number*** claims that it is a fortieth anniversary edition of the series, this time in DVD format, I assume therefore that it was released in 2008 and that I purchased it soon afterwards. Since I have had some time on my hands (having been unemployed for over two years so far), I thought that now might be a good time to review the series 45 years after its initial release, as well as this relatively new DVD set from A&E. (Bruce Gillespie tells me that there is now also a Blu-ray edition, but I still haven't seen the value of that format.)



I also dare to think that my perspective from late middle age on what people who were then much younger than me (with the exception of scripter and co-creator George



Markstein) were creating might be interesting — McGoohan and Markstein gave birth to a new, and seemingly enduring, mythology of television.

Since the inception of this remarkable TV series in the late 1960s much has been written about it, both in fan and in public press. Many of the insights that I will offer here may seem familiar in theme to questions that were asked then; some may not. Although I came to enjoy this series when I had occasion to watch it again in my late teens, for the most part I want to concentrate on the last three episodes of the series, the ones where the series seems to descend into nonsense.

Since moving to New York City over 32 years ago, I have had several occasions to view *Prisoner* episodes on cable TV, and thus have become quite familiar with the series. Before that, when I lived in Virginia, it was only a vague, albeit vaguely pleasant, memory. When it first appeared on American television, I was merely a tender lad of nine who was totally nonplussed by this new series, and did not at all find it to be an adequate replacement for the *Secret Agent* series, which *TV Guide* (my Bible at even that young age) had informed me it would be.

All these years later, I would have to still admire the futuristic look of the sets, the colour, and the music, but there's no way I can consider this to be the pinnacle of Patrick McGoohan's television career. I submit that the series, which became known in the US as *Secret Agent*, was a superior series, even if it wasn't necessarily 'science fiction'.

The Prisoner has become so popular over the years, as both a science fiction and suspense classic, that I honestly feel embarrassed attempting to explain the premise of the series. This 17-episode mini-series about a recently retired British secret service agent (who is identified as 'Drake' in only one episode of this show, which is the

The Prisoner in literature

In 1969, Ace Books released three mass market paperback volumes of *The Prisoner*. These were untitled except for the name of the TV show. The first was by Thomas M. Disch, the second by David McDaniel (who was also, pseudonymously, Los Angeles fan 'Ted Johnstone'), and the third was by Hank Stine (his novel later retitled *A Day in the Life* when reprinted). Although I have read all three, it's been quite a while, and I'm not going to take the time to reread them all for this article. Suffice it to say the McDaniel and Stine novels are serviceably good, but the Disch novel is, in my opinion, incredibly excellent. It is written in a sort of unconventional, 'New Wave' style (which, of course, assumes I even know what 'New Wave' *is*), and really made an impression on me. If you only have time to read one out of three of these novels (and I'm sure they've all been reprinted at least once), then I strongly suggest you choose the Disch.

identity he had in both the *Secret Agent* and *Danger Man* series), who is gassed upon the eve of his departure and conscripted into a seemingly idyllic, but achingly artificial, hidden microcosm ('The Village'), speaks for itself, in the sense that it is open to virtually any interpretation.

Once Drake arrives in The Village he is not aware of what has happened to him, as he awakens in a simulation of his London flat, albeit with a door that opens electronically (with a corresponding, futuristic-sounding hum) and seemingly on mental command. Each week he attempts to escape The Village and get back to England, and each week he is pummelled with questions by 'Number 2', who desperately seems to need to know why Drake resigned. 'We want information,' Drake, or Number 6, is told at the beginning of each episode. After he tells his questioners that they won't get it, we hear the voice of the Number 2 of that week replying, 'By hook or by crook, we will.' The entire episode is usually spent on that hook or crook, usually a trick to break Number 6 and get him to confess all his Secrets. Frequently they trick him into thinking he actually *has* escaped.

On those occasions in which it seems as though he has escaped, his response is greeted with disbelief by his superiors and he is asked, after informing them about the constant interrogation of The Village, 'Well why then *did* you resign?' Ah, but if they are really who they say they were, wouldn't they remember from when he resigned so angrily? And suddenly, before he can say Bob Vaughn is The Man from UNCLE, he finds himself back in his faux home in The Village.

My main contention with the DVD set is the order in which it shows the episodes. The first disk has only 'Arrival' on it, a 50-plus minutes show. No question, that's the first episode. But why such a short diskette? Perhaps because instead of what would follow chronologically as the second episode, the set includes the so-called 'alternate' version of 'The Chimes of Big Ben'. I forget exactly what excuse was offered for releasing this 'alternate' version back in the days when all we had was VHS, but there is very little of any consequence (some music perhaps) that is different between this so-called alternate version and the regular version, which comes later in the series. Oh yeah, I remember the excuse now: it was to make money.

But these, as they say, are mere minor quibbles. My real disagreement with the programmers of the DVD set begins with Discs 4 and 5, in which the order of the episodes seems all scrambled around, from my perspective. Disc 5 has 'The Schizoid Man', during which Drake is faced with an identical duplicate of himself who claims to be 'Number 6' (Drake's appellation within The Village). Drake, the 'real' Number 6, is brainwashed during his sleep through the use of both drugs and futuristic brain wave technology (located in a ceiling lamp that conveniently lowers itself to wrap around Drake's head) into believing that *he* is the dark-haired, left-handed (and thus, of course, sinister) Number 12. The 'real' Number 12, meanwhile, as previously mentioned, is now attired as Number 6, and since they have the same face, no one knows for sure which is which, not even their hairdressers. The only way to tell them apart is by the individual passwords each is given — the real Number 12 has the correct password. At first, under the influence of heavy, mind-altering drugs, Drake actually begins to crumble, suffering from an identity crisis. He eventually throws off the drugs' influences on him and recalls his brainwashing. When cornered by the giant weather balloon that acts as the Village watchdog (referred to, appropriately enough, as 'Rover'), Number 6 gives the correct password — 'Schizoid Man' — and Rover wanders away and apparently smothers Number 12 to death, despite his repeated recitation of the same password.

The temporary leader of The Village, Number 2 (usually played by a different actor, and presumably, different personage, each week), thus has no recourse but to conclude that Rover has accidentally killed Number 6, upon whom all of his mindgames had been hatched. Still, he isn't certain. On the way to the helipad to see off 'Number 12' (who is really 'our' Number 6, Drake), he carefully quizzes him. He says that although it's too bad Number 6 was accidentally killed, at least he would have some information for The General. 'Yes, I look forward to reporting to The General,' the phoney Number 12 (our hero still, remember) says. Number 2 looks at him with overly emphasised perplexity, obviously becoming increasingly suspicious. 'Report to The General? What on earth do you mean?' Of course Number 2 knows what is to be revealed in a subsequent episode, that 'The General' is their highly complex computer; not a person to whom one actually reports.

On the back of each disc's box there is a section called 'Episode Order Debate'. The episode order debate is not a new one, you see; it's almost as old as the series. The excuse offered for putting this episode on Disc 5 starts with:

> A February 10th date is shown at the start. The story goes up to February 21st, when 'Many Happy Returns' begins. This date can be determined by the 27 days in which 'Many Happy Returns' takes place (including 25 days at sea), and then by counting backwards from The Prisoner's birthday.

Whew! That sure is a lot about a little. That's really as much as I can quote.

One more thing:

> 'The Schizoid Man' must precede 'Many Happy Returns' and must be shown after 'The General', as there is a Number 12 in the former story as well.

Yeah, and The Prisoner is called 'Number 6' because he has six pieces of lint in his bellybutton, too.

I think all that about the calendar and the dates is merely circumstantial. Perhaps these dates reflect better the dates the stories were being filmed as opposed to the order in which the stories make the most sense chronologically.

The previous disc, Disc 4, has 'A, B and C', then 'The General', in that order. The first 'Episode Order Debate' states:

> After The Village failure in 'The Chimes of Big Ben', drugs could conceivably be the next step in determining why Number Six resigned.

In other words, they're suggesting, because of his attempted escape as freight inside a wooden box didn't work (he was mailed back to The Village and into an office with tape recordings playing simulations of a busy London street), the leaders of The Village are then trying to extract information through drugs. The next 'Episode Order Debate', following 'The General', reads:

> Having the same Number 2 (Colin Gordon) as 'A, B, and C', it seems that this interrogator was given another chance to break Number 6.

Well, no, not likely.

Each episode begins with an angry Number 6 demanding of his captors, 'Whose side are you on?!' And also: 'Who are you?' The answer is always a smug, sanguine response, 'I am Number 2', from whichever smarmy, oily, unctuous villain is playing the Village

The Prisoner in music

According to the July 2002 issue of the magazine *SFX*, in the late 1960s the band Iron Maiden recorded two songs about *The Prisoner*. Both quote dialog from the series: 'I am not a number, I am a free man' and 'Questions are a burden for others, answers a prison for oneself'.

And of course in 1964 Johnny Rivers' hit song 'Secret Agent Man' was used as the theme song to the American release of the hour-long *Danger Man* episodes, marketed here as merely *Secret Agent*. The refrain of that song includes the line, 'They're giving you a number and taking 'way your name', which is an almost direct inspiration for numbers rather than names being used for the inhabitants of The Village.

leader (and chief inquisitor, apparently) this week. Colin Gordon is one of the few (two) actors who played the role more than once. At the beginning of 'The General', when Number 6 angrily inquires at the beginning as to whom he is speaking, the response given is 'I am the *new* Number 2' (emphasis presently mine, albeit also in the audio as well). At the beginning of 'A, B, and C', however, in response to the question from Number 6, he responds with the usual and perfunctory response of merely, 'I am Number 2.' And after all the drugging of Number 6 and then Number 6's subsequent outsmarting of all of them, it is obvious by Number 2's response to the hotline ringing at the end of the episode (his angry and impatient superior(s) calling him) that he is at the end of his rope with them. Therefore, obviously, these two episodes should be reversed.

Moreover, 'The Schizoid Man', from Disc 5, should actually have been on Disc 4 before 'The General', as The General is referred to by Number 2 in 'Schizoid Man' and then no longer exists after the events in 'The General' (Number 6 confounds it with illogic and makes it blow up, or some other silly, conventional, TV logic for the destruction of the evil super computer).

No more quibbles with the DVD set after that; everything seems pretty much straightforward. I was just cruising along, viewing all these episodes, when I was once more struck by the third-to-the-last episode, 'The Girl Who Was Death.' My first surprise was that, despite my advanced years, every time I see this episode I am almost knocked over by the beauty of Sonia (actress Justine Lord), who plays the titular character. Her legs are long, muscular, tan, and almost always *bare*. Bare, bare, bare! Just incredible. And the camera angles always seem to spotlight these legs, too. By the time this episode was filmed, miniskirts were definitely on the rise.

This was the beginning of a set of three extremely satirical and silly episodes, this one taking place in the format of a tale within a tale — this is supposedly a children's story being read to children in The Village by Number 6, but really it's probably meant to be more of a broad, off-target satire of *Secret Agent* and spy stories in general, however much it may come across as more like *Get Smart* than *Secret Agent*. (I later discovered that the episode was meant to be a satire of *The Avengers*, which is a bit hard to see without the male–female pairing of Steed–Peel, as well as the fact that *The Avengers* was already a bit of a satire.) What makes this episode so remarkable — and it is unfortunate that I have never read anyone else write about this — is that it is the only episode in which Number 6 is identified as Drake, in circumstances which I am about to describe. At one point Drake assumes a 'disguise': he outfits himself as what one is supposed to assume is a silly parody of Sherlock Holmes, replete with an inappropriate deerstalker cap and cloak on a London city street. Dressed thus, he is following the eponymous wonder-legged lady into a carnival when he is suddenly and unexpectedly conscripted into a boxing match. The referee introduces the champ of the bout, but then suddenly announces slurringly, the way a carnival barker would slur or draw out, 'And in this corner, Mizzzz Drake!' It seemed to me as though he was saying '*Mister* Drake' (emphasis definitely mine) but was slurring it for melodramatic effect. The result of his announcement is that a startled Drake is suddenly grabbed from the audience by the boxing match officials and his ridiculous sore-thumb deerstalker cloak is whipped off of him as he is whisked to his feet, preparatory for the match. And then, and then a commercial break. Back from the commercial break, Drake is already in the opposing corner, and the referee once again announces, 'And in this corner, Mizzz Drake!' just to make sure we remember where we left off. So that definitely makes *two times* that Number 6 was referred to as Drake in this series, albeit not totally clearly. Why does it seem like I am the only one to notice this?

Instead, all anyone notes is that a contact for Number 6's character is 'Agent Potter' (actor Christopher Benjamin), the same character who appeared in one of the last *Secret Agent* episodes.

Little can be said about the penultimate episode, 'Once Upon A Time', except that it should only be viewed that way — once upon a time. To me it seems like little more than weak, tedious, boring nonsense. Patrick McGoohan apparently scripted this episode as well the last one (and other episodes during the rest of the series, but those made sense).

The events of 'Once Upon A Time' lead directly to the last episode, 'Fall Out', and for that reason, I feel that both should be on the same disc. Apparently somebody at A&E felt differently.

At the very beginning of the last episode, words appear on the screen which tell us for the first time where the actual location of the *real* Village is — the show was filmed in a resort on the island of Portmeirion (no relation to your present writer) off the coast of Wales. The owner had allowed them to film there on the proviso that the location would not be revealed until the final

episode. Parts of the episodes were filmed in England on sets designed to mirror the Portmeirion location.

Bruce Gillespie and numerous others have asked me, over the years, whenever the subject would come up, what was my interpretation of the last episode? McGoohan's character tells the controllers, now that he has outwitted, and apparently defeated, Number 2 (played by Leo McKern in a recurring role), that he wishes to meet Number 1. He is led to a tower, where he confronts a diminutive and maniacally laughing figure in a hooded white robe and a white–black split-face mask. Number 6 whips off the white–black theatre mask to find the mask of an ape underneath, who is apparently still laughing maniacally at him. He then whips off the monkey mask and sees his own face underneath. He chases the white-robed version of himself around the tower, but only one of them emerges.

So ... what does it all mean? Mr Natural might have the best answer ('Don't mean shit!'), but over the years I have come up with a set of different theories. Indeed, I have read that McGoohan himself has stated that he wished all this to be open to a variety of interpretations.

My first theory was that this represented Number 6 meeting the man who is the author of both his miseries and his miniseries — the character John Drake is meeting the scriptwriter Patrick McGoohan.

More recently I kicked around the idea that Drake was Number 1 all along, had been a Russian agent who was a double-agent, spying on the British, but who had to get so deeply undercover that he allowed his Russian superiors to brainwash him into thinking he really was British. This creates a split personality where, as Number 1, he would be constantly trying to set up situations that would make Number 6 reveal information that was locked into that part of his personality and inaccessible to Number 1.

My most recent observation is that the figure he confronts in the tower is so much shorter in stature than himself that it had to be another person (even if that isn't what the story intends). No, his captors obviously had the technology to alter a man's face to look like another's, and this was just another attempt to confuse Number 6.

And maybe, just *maybe*, Rover hadn't actually killed Number 12 during the climax of 'The Schizoid Man'. Not only was his death faked, but Number 12 was Number 1 all along. Once the ruse fails to confound Drake as to who he really is, Number 12–Number 1 wants to remove himself from the playing field and go back to merely being an observer and commander behind the scenes. And even if they *did* kill the identical-looking Number 12, they apparently have the technology to resuscitate the dead, as they do with Leo McKern's Number 2 character in the final episode, as well as the young antagonist from the 'Living in Harmony' episode (arguably one of the finest episodes of the series, despite the fact that it was made as an afterthought to increase the count of episodes from 12 to 17). This young villain, played by Alexis Kanner, is resuscitated and then starts gleefully reciting and singing 'Them Bones' over and over, driving a pseudo-judge and a mock-jury seemingly to the point of distraction. I wasn't far behind them, actually, and at that point it began to seem to me as though the scriptwriter (McGoohan himself, remember) had his head-bone connected to his butt-bone.

Whatever. Number 6 leaves The Village, accompanied by the young villain (now an ally in madness, revolution and escape) and the ubiquitous, obese, diminutive domestic (the butler who did *not* do it, played by actor Angelo Muscat). He returns to London and his flat, which is apparently waiting for him. (Earlier in the episode we see someone removing a 'For Sale' sign in front of the property.) He enters his apartment. The door closes behind him with a telltale electronic hum. McGoohan at this point seems to be daring his audience to guess: did Number 6 escape in actuality, or is it all another trick, another mindgame being played on him? As these last three episodes are all so silly, to me it doesn't matter. To me, it seems more symbolic. Just as The Village is a reflection of the authoritarianism and conformity that face us in everyday life, likewise the 'real world' has become a reflection of the artificiality and oppressiveness of The Village; almost analogous to the proverbial result of gazing into the abyss.

Although there is much room for conjecture here, and perhaps deservedly so, I still recommend almost any episode of *Secret Agent* over almost any episode of *The Prisoner* on almost any day, despite the mod sets, the science fiction, the colour and the shorter skirts.

PS:

A review of *The Prisoner: No Man Is Just A Number: The 40th Anniversary Collector's Edition* would not be complete without mention of the fabulous 60-page colour booklet inside, billed as 'The Ultimate Series Companion Guide'. This is a wonderfully printed booklet with many colour photos, including a description of each episode. Each episode gets four standard write-ups: 'Synopsis', 'Hidden Mysteries', 'Trivia', and 'Episode Notes'. It could be that each of these sections has been written by someone different, because almost invariably each contains repeats of the same information. It's almost as though the editor of the booklet decided that, since the package was being prepared for viewers and not readers, the viewers were only likely to read one of each of the above-named sections (instead of someone like myself, who would read the entire page each time). Still, this is an invaluable booklet because of its photos and descriptions.

With the booklet is a 'map of your village', such as was handed to Number 6 in the first episode, 'Arrival'. This contains what is apparently a painstakingly reproduced map based solely on its appearance within the episodes. On the other side are more lovely photographs, as well as a description of the labor-intensive project of reproducing said map.

Patrick McGoohan: a mini-biography

Patrick McGoohan was born in 1928 in Astoria, Queens (a borough of New York City), but at a very early age had enough sense to move with his parents back to Ireland.

He performed a number of jobs during his early and late adolescence, including chicken farmer, a bank clerk and a lorry driver, before getting a job as stage manager at Sheffield Repertory Theatre. His acting career apparently began when one of the actors became ill and McGoohan filled in for him.

In the early 1960s the handsome young actor was offered the role of John Drake, the *Danger Man* agent of NATO. These half-hour, black-and-white episodes did not prove to be quite as popular as anticipated, but nevertheless had a small following.

During this interim (between TV series) and under contract to Walt Disney, he made three movies: *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, *The Three Lives of Thomasina*, and a movie I prefer to call *The Scarecrow of Romney Marsh*. These last are two of my very most favourite movies of all time, and *The Scarecrow* is almost certainly my favourite of Patrick McGoohan's heroic roles.

It was also during this time that McGoohan was offered the James Bond film role, and refused it. However, it was probably interest in the James Bond films that prompted a revival of *Danger Man* in 1964. McGoohan was offered the lead in the hour-long TV series known in the US as *Secret Agent* (which came with a Johnny Rivers hit song as the intro theme) but still marketed in the UK and Australia as *Danger Man*. Although Drake now had graduated to working for MI5 (British Intelligence), his episodes were still in black-and-white (until the end of the series, when the last two were in colour).

Patrick McGoohan was a devoutly religious man who felt that kissing a woman other than his wife, even in the course of a performance, would be both sacrilege and a breakage of the marriage vows. This might almost have seemed to have made some television situations a little awkward, since he portrayed a single man, when one considers the normal TV clichés of the playboy hero. Indeed, I know personally, in the case of my sister, a fairly typical, red-blooded, all-American teenaged girl, McGoohan's character came across as just a little *too* aloof, too cold, too stuffy. For the rest of us, McGoohan represented the thinking man's hero: not someone whose car could turn invisible or suddenly take flight (after functioning for a while as a submarine), but someone who could leave taped messages inside an electric razor, or take pictures with a manual typewriter (when that carriage return hits ding, the film is exposed, as well as the potential agent).

But despite having his way about not kissin' the wimmen and not carrying a gun and other such things that made him unusual, he eventually became jaded by the seeming formula of the show, and wanted Something More. When the actor came to understand, after the last two colour episodes of *Secret Agent–Danger Man*, that they would be going on, business as usual, he pitched to them an extension of the old idea. What would happen if his character was captured, put into a sort of alternatively artificially idyllic and high-tech, science fictional setting, pumped for information, and not made to understand clearly which 'side' has him?

Somehow he got the producers and George Markstein, the story editor for his previous series, to go along with him on this, just as he previously had so much cooperation from them before. He also obtained the cooperation of the owner of Portmeirion Island (which lies off the northern coast of Wales) to allow the company to film there, the owner's only proviso being that no one should know where the filming was taking place until the final episode, as he was not yet ready to open the tourist attraction to the public. Filming crews arrived and began work without having even any

working scripts. It is a credit to Patrick McGoohan's intelligence, perseverance and overall vision that the stories have held together as well as they have.

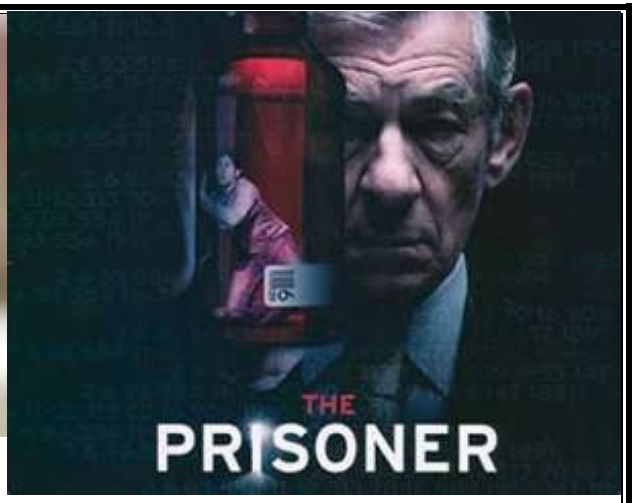
His original plan was for a miniseries of only 12 episodes, but this was almost unheard of in those days of late 1960s TV pioneering. Usually the idea was to produce 26 episodes so that a series would then have 26 episodes for repeating, thus filling out a year. McGoohan eventually agreed to do five more episodes and hired more writers (after writing several scripts himself under the pseudonym of 'Paddy Fitz' and other names, including his own). The five newly created episodes included 'The Girl Who Was Death' as well as 'Living In Harmony' — arguably, two of the most interesting episodes in the entire series.

Apparently not just this writer, but many others were similarly dissatisfied by the seemingly symbolic (if not outright silly) ending to the relatively serious series, thus generating quite a bit of negative criticism in the direction of McGoohan.

Perhaps as a reaction to this criticism, McGoohan rarely ever played another sympathetic role. It would seem to this writer that almost always, after this, he played the adversary in a drama, and quite a villainous one at that. It is a credit to his incredible talent that, where once he was able to make us see that deep down, he was an agent of incredible conviction, fortitude, ethics and character, he now made us see him as the most dastardly, most ruthless and chilling villain. Indeed, despite the pleasant auburn–blonde helmet of early 1970s grown-out hair, he could be downright *scary*! During this time, he performed villainous roles in such movies as *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Silverstreak*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask* (the latter with Richard Chamberlain and Jenny Agutter).

In addition to more classical villains, McGoohan has also played two different murderers on two different episodes of the US TV series *Columbo*, each about a year apart (in the late 1970s). His characters here were much more urbane and charming than his cinema villains, but no less effective. (Wikipedia reports that he actually played a murderer *four* different times on that show and directed several episodes as well.) He also played the lead role as a doctor in the US TV series *Rafferty*, about which I know nothing.

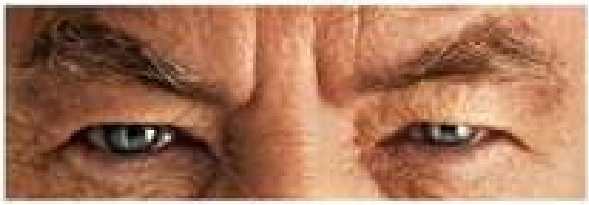
He died in 2009, only a year after the release of this 40th Anniversary DVD package which I'm reviewing here.

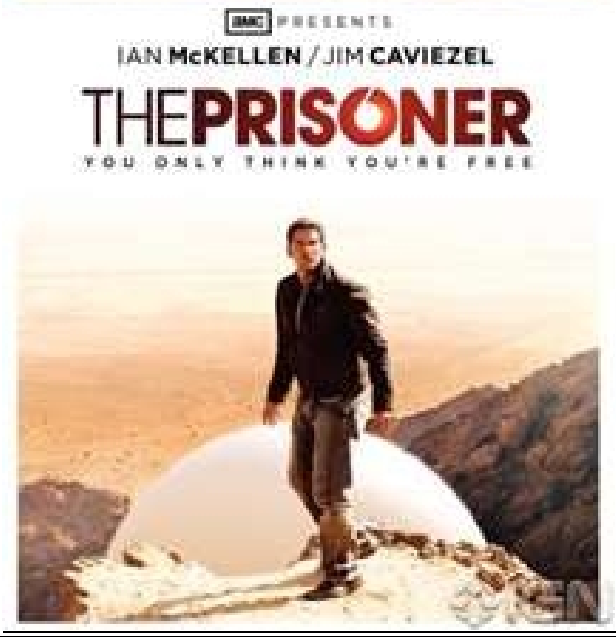


The Prisoner Number 2009

There was an attempt, in recent years, to revive the concept of *The Prisoner*. Very little beyond the title seemed to remain. This new miniseries did not even begin to have the depth, the charm or the soul (such that it was) of the previous series. Indeed, to call this new series an aborted attempt at reviving the show would be true on at least a couple of different levels.

Jim Caviezel and Ian McKellen, as Numbers 6 and 2, respectively, are the two actors drafted by the producers of this new series. As Number 6, Caviezel seems to have little to do except to stand around and be either puzzled or disturbed by the goings-on. The location of this Village, you see, is totally Virtual, and inside the mind of the Dreamer (whoever is chosen to dream the dream at the time; the role changes once during the course of the series).





If one truly has nothing better to do than watch Caviezel stumble around and look puzzled amidst a sandy, blasted landscape littered with modular housing, then watching this might make a good existential head trip. As British TV drama goes, it almost certainly beats the winner from the mid 1970s, *Sapphire and Steel*. But of course, that isn't really saying very much: surely watching paint peel off of walls would be more exciting than watching *Sapphire and Steel*.

Towards the end of this new *Prisoner* series, the characters' developments start moving toward a sort of seeming profundity. Number 2, played by Ian McKellen, decides at least temporarily to throw off his role of Number 2 and just go wandering through The Village. At this point, he seems to get some sense of how The Other Side lives, and perhaps gains some humility, or at least insight. This is suddenly destroyed, however, by an announcement from 'Number 2' that a man has stolen his likeness and is wandering through The Village. This impostor is declared to be dangerous and is to be apprehended at all costs. From a lesson in humility and understanding, this particular story suddenly seems to shoot into the question of identity. If it were an impostor directing the hunt for the real Number 2, or if the 'Number 2' we saw at the beginning of the episode is the actual impostor, is never directly addressed or determined. Which quickly becomes yet another reason for major dissatisfaction with this 'revival': lack of both focus and resolution.

One particular pitfall is that characters seem to have a great deal of trouble with the occurrence of vast sinkholes in the sand. This becomes a particular problem when one couple's young daughter drives her tricycle into the sinkhole, never to be seen again. Initially this is seen as tragic, because it is; but eventually the viewer comes to understand that, as the couple were experiencing The Village as part of a shared virtual dream, likewise their daughter was only a part of that dream and not someone who is a part of the outside, objective reality dreaming up that place. The couple, however, are driven apart by their grief and never seem to accept or even realise the virtuality of their present existence.

But, unfortunately, what's really depressing is that, long before the miniseries ends, the viewer is wishing *all* the characters would take a flying leap down the nearest available sinkhole.

The Prisoner in comics, part 1

If the reader is aware of the great visual appeal of *The Prisoner* TV series, as well knowing about my own predilection towards comic books, you may very well be inclined to ask, 'TiM, wasn't there ever a comic book adaptation of *The Prisoner*?" The answer? There were at least *two* that I know of, the first perpetrated by the 'king' of comics, Jack Kirby.

Jack Kirby's fascination for *The Prisoner* was evident in Marvel Comics' *Fantastic Four* Nos 84–87, issues that appeared concurrently with the American release of the show. There, the Fantastic Four were isolated in a charming Latverian village where the inhabitants were all polite and friendly but ultimately unhelpful with any information as to where they were. (Since they were in Latveria, obviously they were prisoners of the despot of that tiny nation, Doctor Doom). As the Marvel style of scripting frequently included the penciller, or artist, plotting and designing the book for the scripter to fill in later, it can be very well supposed that this inclusion of elements from the TV show was almost, if not completely, Kirby's idea (as was the idea, apparently, of most of Marvel Comics in its infancy).

It has been theorised that Kirby identified a great deal with *The Prisoner*. He, even more than Stan Lee, was almost single-handedly responsible for creating every one of Marvel Comics' characters back in its heyday in the Silver Age (early 1960s). Although well paid, he received neither the recognition he felt he deserved nor even his original art returned to him. Eventually, despite his long-time association, he resigned and 'defected' to DC Comics. There, he discovered he was once more a victim of an evil, capricious empire. Dissatisfied with how both he and his popular creations were being treated, Kirby once more moved, this time back to Marvel.

It was during this return tenure at Marvel, in the mid 1970s, that Kirby wrote and drew 17 pages of a *Prisoner* comic. For the most part, the story seems to be a straightforward adaptation of the first TV episode, 'Arrival'. Some of these pages, mostly unfinished, appear in *The Kirby Collector 11*, and represent quite a departure from the normal slam-bang style of storytelling for Jack Kirby: here, the mood is built up slowly without a lot of action, with a concluding next-issue blurb that promises more thrills. For whatever reason, the story was never finished, although many panels were remarkably inked by Mike Royer.

(Thanks to John Morrow (of TwoMorrows Publishing) and his excellent magazine *The Kirby Collector* for the above information.)

The Prisoner in comics, part 2

In 1988, comics creator Dean Motter (with Mark Askwith on story and Richmond Lewis on art) took a go at *The Prisoner* in a series of four prestige-edition comic books for DC Comics. 'Prestige' editions are rarely printed by comic book publishers nowadays, but basically they are like a double-plus sized edition of a comic book (what we would have called a 'giant' back in the Silver Age), where the covers are of a paperback cover stock and the interior paper is usually of a slick and superior stock to most other comic books. Dean Motter was an illustrator–writer who went on to create many other graphic stories that were successful both in terms of critical reception and popularity. Unfortunately, I am not familiar with any of his other creations (such as 'Mister X'), and thus cannot claim to be a Dean Motter 'fan'. Simply because I enjoy reading and collecting comic books does not mean that I am familiar with everything that has ever been published on my watch.

As a first exposure to Dean Motter, I must say that I am not particularly impressed. His style is very simple, but effective enough to tell the story, which I gather was his aim as someone who considers himself a storyteller first. The only real detail is seen occasionally in a few close-ups of character's faces.

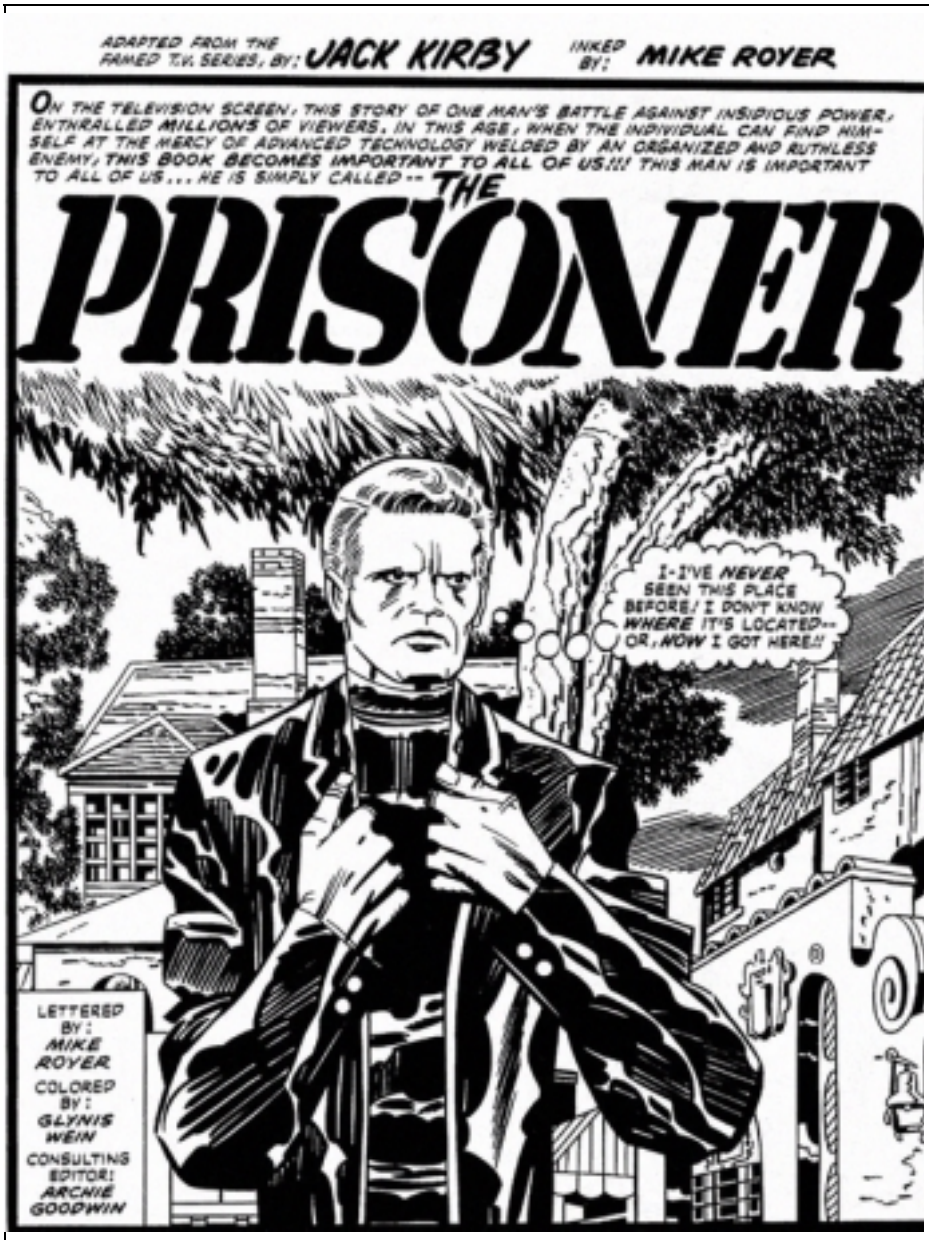
I must admit to a mild prejudice against comic book adaptations of TV shows and movies anyway, as too frequently the art chores are given over to a new or relatively styleless artist whose resultant work can never approach the beauty of what we had known on our TV (or movie) screens. A particularly abysmal example would be, years later (again), DC Comics' lacklustre comic book series of *Babylon 5*. They would need one of the very best comic book artists ever to illustrate the majesty and beauty of that series, someone such as Al Williamson or Paul Gulacy, but instead it was immensely forgettable, flat-looking art.

Indeed, I would say this rule about my interest applies to most comic books in general. If I find the art to be bland and uninteresting, chances are I will also find trouble maintaining my interest in the story. The proper combination for a comic book, of course, is to contain both scintillating story as well as fabulous art. This seems to be a combination too often lacking.

The best pages of this *Prisoner* comic occur when they are actually reprinting old black-and-white photos from the show. However, this, in turn, accentuates the simplicity of the art, and thus almost appears incongruous. The only good thing I can say about the art is that, although simple, it is *not* excruciatingly ugly; just very bland and unexciting.

The storyline involves a perpetually unnamed woman who wants to Get It Away From It All. She has left MI6, left her husband (who is still a part of MI6), and put her daughter into boarding school. Her plan is to sail around the world in a schooner with a computer navigational system. While she sails away, she reads from a book called *The Village Idiot*, which is a tell-all diary from a previous Number 2 about the goings-on in The Village. Meanwhile, in England, there is much intrigue with her husband (still a part of MI6, remember) who is tacitly given carte blanche to pursue his own investigations, whatever they might be.

A hurricane blows our female protagonist off course and, well, you can guess the rest. She arrives washed up on the beach of Portmeirion. Assuming she started her sail-around-the-world from England, sailed west, and got blown off-course considerably to the north, this seems almost reasonable. There, in a totally deserted, powerless Village, she eventually enters The



Green Dome and meets her host. Sitting in the mod-looking, modular, egg-shaped chair is the man we knew as Number 6, albeit with a very long red-to-white beard. He greets her and tells her that *she* is Number 6.

Apparently the old Number 6 had been hiding and living on the island for twenty years, ever since the place was first exposed to the world and then abandoned. This more-or-less ignores some of the events in the last episode of the TV series.

The long-bearded McGoohan figure proceeds to give her a tour of The Village, a cup of Darjeeling tea, and a long and philosophical conversation, and has her accompany him while he catches fish for them both to eat. When she thanks him for hospitality, he gently disavows being responsible for the tea. He gives her his jacket when she shivers, but then seems to disappear. Soon afterwards, The Village suddenly starts to come to life again. The electronic eyes light up in the busts of Pallas; busts that sit on small, Corinthian columns that rotate on their bases to follow the motion of whoever walks by them in the park. Even a huge Rover eagerly bubbles forth to the surface, with a seemingly menacing stance toward the new Number 6. She soon finds her out her host is actually the Leo McKern version of Number 2, who has seemingly reappeared along with The Village's sudden and mysterious reimpowerment.

Back in England, political machinations and intrigue reveal that the new Number 6's husband actually *wanted* her to find The Village. Are we then to assume that he somehow manipulated her into leaving their marriage and taking the trip around the world in a schooner? Presumably he was also, then, responsible for the hurricane that blew her off course. Apparently his aim is to score points for his one-man department by revealing the secrets that the *previous* Number 6 has kept hidden all these years.

From there, more unexplained (or perhaps, unexplainable) nonsense follows, including actual fisticuffs (a dignified way of describing rolling-around-in-the-mud) between the geriatric versions of the old Number 6 and the Leo McKern Number 2. The new Number 6 is not impressed, and who can blame her?

In the late 1980s, when this first came out, I was reading more comic books than I ever had before in my life — around 20 a week. It's really no wonder this only made a brief blip on my radar and then faded away into my subconscious. I had all but forgotten about it. Reading it again for a second and third time, I can see why. The best thing I ever could ever possibly say about this TV story pastiche is that, if this were a world in which all creative endeavours were either bad or interesting, this definitely qualifies as interesting. And even then, only on occasion.

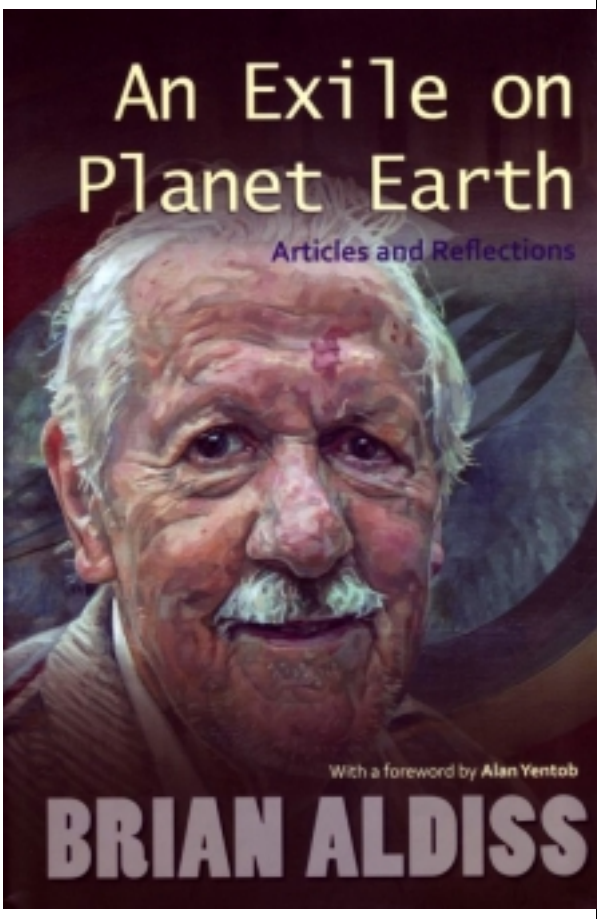
Colin Steele's qualifications include MA, GradDipLib, FAHA, FLCIP, FALIA, and KtCross Spain. He is an Emeritus Fellow of the Australian National University, where he has held such positions as Director of Scholarly Information Strategies (2002–2003) and University Librarian, ANU (1980–2002). He has been writing SF reviews for *The Canberra Times* for many years, and been contributing to *SF Commentary* since the 1970s.

Colin Steele

The field

BOOKS ABOUT SF AND FANTASY BOOKS

An Exile On Planet Earth
by Brian Aldiss
(Bodleian Library; 179 pp; $49.95)



The Bodleian Library in Oxford, to celebrate Brian Aldiss's substantial donation in March of his literary and artistic archive, has published ***An Exile on Planet Earth***, containing twelve 'personal and revealing' essays. Aldiss's archive now sits alongside other recent literary donations covering Philip Larkin and John Le Carré.

Peter Carey, the recipient of the Bodleian Library's 2012 Medal, recently said, 'As we enter a warmer, darker, more turbulent age, the Bodleian Library will assume an importance far greater than anything we are yet prepared to imagine. I would be honoured to be even a footnote in the history of this great institution.'

Aldiss, now 86, has written over 75 books and 300 short stories. He began his writing career at *The Bookseller* with a column that became *The Brightfount Diaries*, a fictional diary about the life of a bookshop assistant in Oxford during the 1950s. Aldiss subsequently became literary editor of *The Oxford Mail* and a key figure in the 1960s 'New Wave' fiction with J. G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock.

The HarperCollins imprint 'The Friday Project' has just acquired more than 50 titles by Aldiss, which they plan to publish in e-books and print editions over the next four years. There will also be six new titles, including 'All the Planets of the Zodiac', the final novella in the 'Supertoys' series, which was made into the film *AI* by Steven Spielberg. Aldiss says, 'Everything seems to be coming together, including my work as a poet and a social observer, as well as the works of "metaphysical realism" — the label I prefer to use rather than SF, which now seems dated ... I understand that my writings appear diverse but that is only to accommodate my thinking.'

To Aldiss, 'Science fiction is the new old business of holding a mirror to nature!' Aldiss has perhaps suffered, in recent critical appreciation, as being seen mainly as an SF writer, even though some of his classic novels, such as *Hothouse* (1962) and *Greybeard* (1964), are powerful fictional evocations of extreme climate change and life without children respectively.

The twelve essays include five original pieces, while the seven reprints have been lightly revised for this book. Aldiss provides significant biographical reflections, although the best personal sources still remain his lengthy autobiography, *The Twinkling of an Eye* (1998) and the book, authored with his late wife Margaret, *When The Feast is Finished: Reflections on Terminal Illness* (1999).

The most poignant essay in the current collection is 'Paradise Square', with Aldiss 'down and out' in early 1960s Oxford after his first marriage breakup, living in

a single room in a dilapidated house. Other essays recall his childhood in Norfolk and his time in World War II in Burma and India, before returning to Britain's 'alien land ... I had adjusted to the squalor and poverty of India, I hated the squalor and poverty, allied to a depressing climate, of my homeland.'

An Exile on Planet Earth reinforces Aldiss's constructed view of himself as a 'outsider', with the exile theme being especially reflected in the essay on Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. Other essays, on Thomas Hardy, H. G. Wells, and the film *Zulu*, are interesting but largely fillers. It's the biographical detail that commends this volume.

The Inner Man: The Life of J. G. Ballard
by John Baxter
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 377 pp.; $50)
Terry Pratchett: The Spirit of Fantasy
by Craig Cabell
(John Blake; 246 pp.; $55)

J. G. Ballard, Terry Pratchett and John Baxter were all virtually unknown in the early 1960s when their stories were being published in the British SF magazine, *New Worlds*. Pratchett is now Sir Terry and Britain's best selling novelist. Ballard, who died in 2009, is a major British literary figure, whose archive was recently bought by the British Library. John Baxter is a well-known Australian ex-pat, now living in Paris, with books on that city and book collecting, and biographies of film directors such as Spielberg, Lucas, and Bunuel.

Baxter now disavows the stories that he published in *New Worlds* and, in ***The Inner Man***, he now seems almost to disavow Ballard himself. Baxter approached Ballard several times before his death in 2009 to write his biography but, like others, he was turned down. This surely cannot be the basis for Baxter's overwhelming hostile take on Ballard which has aroused major controversy in literary circles and has been termed 'a bileography'.

J. G. Ballard began writing SF short stories in the mid 1950s. His two most famous novels are *Crash* (1973), highlighting the eroticism of car accidents, and *Empire of the Sun* (1984), his fictional reimagining of his Japanese internment in World War II. The success of the Steven Spielberg movie of *Empire* ensured that Ballard's wealth at his death was over £4 million, although for most of his life, he lived relatively modestly in a three-bedroom, semi-detached in Shepperton, England.

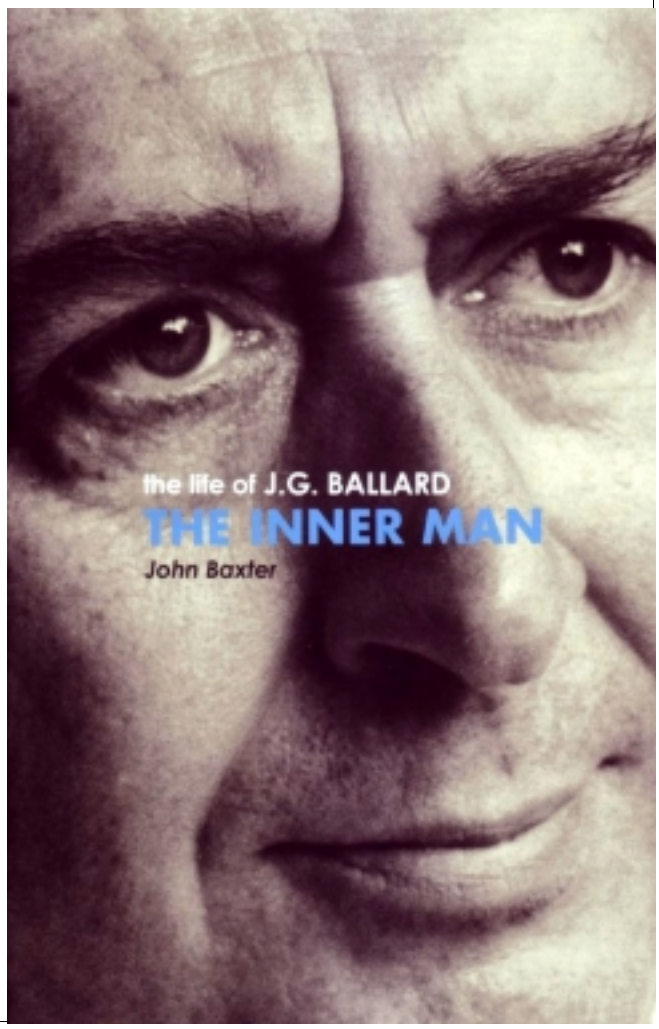
Ballard brought up his three young children in Shepperton after the death of his wife Mary in Spain in 1964, but this only gets grudging acknowledgment from Baxter, who highlights Ballard's whisky drinking after the children left for school. Clearly something happened between Ballard and his son, who, in the will, was only left £100,000. While Baxter says this 'signified his long estrangement from his father', the reader is not told when or why this alleged estrangement occurred.

Baxter begins his biography in 1970 with Ballard seeking out 'automobile pornography' from his Danish translator for his 'private delectation'. Baxter begins as he intends to go on! Ballard's bibliographer David Pringle contends that Ballard's interest was 'germane to the project he had in hand [the novel *Crash*] ... in my view. John Baxter's use of it to suggest that Ballard had some deep personal kink with regard to sex and cars is quite unjustified.'

Baxter argues that Ballard's suburban amicable front was just a façade. Baxter, who refers to Ballard throughout as Jim, writes, 'In person, Jim presented a veneer of good-fellowship, slick as Formica and just as impermeable', a 'master of self-promotion', and a 'troubled personality', who could turn violent. Baxter sources author Michael Moorcock, in reporting that Ballard's partner Claire Walsh, 'appeared at parties with facial bruises, usually hidden behind sunglasses'.

Moorcock has since refuted this claim in a letter to *The Sunday Times*, writing, 'At the time he [Ballard] did drink too much and make lousy black jokes, but people who cared about him had a clear idea what was happening. After he met Claire Walsh, he eventually returned to his old, generally affable self. He was certainly not the man characterised.' The author Emma Tennant has also been provoked to break her silence on her affair with Ballard, 'He was always extremely affectionate and old-fashioned in his ways. Never any hint of any violence.'

Other authors quoted by Baxter, such as Christopher Priest and Charles Platt, have also disputed or qualified Baxter's interpretations of their comments. Bea, Ballard's daughter, says, 'An image manipulator? A psychopath? ... These claims are ridiculous ... It's very interesting that he waited for my father's death before



publishing his material.' Bea has also compiled a six-page list of 'the most obvious factual errors in the biography'.

This is not to say that any author, like Ballard, is immune from detailed personal scrutiny or literary re-examination, but Baxter's over-the-top vehemence tips any biographical balance. Baxter is best when highlighting the period of Ballard's life between returning to England in 1945 and his literary success in the late 1960s. Ballard, was at one stage, a door-to-door encyclopaedia salesman and editor of British Baker. Baxter details Ballard's SF pulp magazine beginnings and his somewhat uneasy relationship with the then SF stars Arthur C. Clarke and John Wyndham.

Baxter has little praise for Ballard's literary achievement or his early, but now increasingly accurate, dystopian visions. William Boyd recently wrote in *The Sunday Times*, 'Ballard's unique dystopian vision of the 20th century has found its francophone alter-ego in Houellebecq's bleak depiction of the 21st. Houellebecq is French literature's J. G. Ballard. There can be no higher praise.' The adjective 'Ballardian' now immediately conjures up images of violence-prone shopping malls, derelict high rise flats, a consumer culture fascination with celebrities and motorway crashes, all with their consequent psychological and sociological effects.

Baxter misleadingly uses Ballard's fiction as source material for biographical comments, such as, 'How happy was Jim with married life. If his fiction tells us anything, not very.' To accuse Ballard of racism simply because 'His characters ... are entirely white' and that, 'in adulthood his few friends were entirely Anglo-Saxon', is also stretching source credibility. *The Inner Man* is ultimately more about Baxter's inner self than Ballard's.

Whatever one's criticism of Baxter and his viewpoint, he is always an writer who engages, whereas Craig Cabell, in another biographical first, namely of Terry Pratchett, is essentially a biographical journeyman. Cabell has written 17 books on various topics, including *Dr Who*, *Blackbeard*, Ian Rankin and World War II. He clearly sees his Pratchett biography as an opportunity for cashing in on a significant literary figure, whose recent support for assisted dying has increased a public profile.

Cabell says his book is 'not an unofficial biography and not a *Discworld* companion. It is a tribute', but that does not excuse the mundane commentaries and almost total use of secondhand material already in the public domain. Pratchett himself has said, '*Terry Pratchett: The Spirit of Fantasy* is not officially authorised in any way. The writing of my personal account of my life is well under way, including all the saucy bits and lies I can now tell because the people who know otherwise are now dead.'

Cabell makes little attempt at original research, trawling instead much of the biographical material posted on the web by Pratchett's agent Colin Smythe. A true biographer would have sought out more detail of Pratchett's early life; for example, interviewing family, fellow school pupils, teachers, early work colleagues, etc., and thus the influences that established the character.

Much of Cabell's analysis of Pratchett's literary output comes from the early books, which is disappointing given that that significant issues for discussion are to be found in the later books. Cabell also pads out the relatively short large-type main text with side references to topics such as Pratchett's love of cats and to his choices on *Desert Island Discs*. Cabell's appendices include a bibliography and a collector's guide, but these are less comprehensive than those to be found on the web. For Pratchett, too, we must also await a future, more balanced, biographer.

Distrust That Particular Flavor
by William Gibson
(Viking; 259 pp.; $29.95)

William Gibson is one of the leading figures in the contemporary science fiction pantheon. He coined the phrase 'cyberspace' in 'Burning Chrome', a 1982 short story, and then reused it in his best-selling debut novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), which he famously wrote on a 1927 Hermes portable typewriter. Although he is often quoted as a cyber-prophet, this is not a label Gibson embraces.

Distrust that Particular Flavor, a collection of 26 non-fiction short pieces, which Gibson rightly calls a 'box of scraps', includes a 2010 talk he gave at Book Expo in New York. Here, he admits that *Neuromancer* had 'A complete absence of cellphones, which I'm sure young readers assume must be a key plot point'. He notes, however, that 'imaginary futures are always, regardless of what the authors might think, about the day in which they're written. Orwell knew it, writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1948 and I knew it writing *Neuromancer*.'

Gibson felt that writing nonfiction would detract from his fictional creativity, dramatically evidenced in his 'Sprawl' and 'Bridge' trilogies. The lure of commissions and free air tickets for travel pieces, memoirs, and opinion pieces led, however, to 'violations of that early prime directive'. The pieces in *Distrust* are a veritable curate's egg. It's almost as if either his publisher or his agent said, since no novel has appeared since *Zero History* (2010), let's get your nonfiction 'scrap box' out.

Distrust needed more care and attention from both publisher and Gibson, although Gibson is aware of the ragbag nature of the 26 disparate pieces from the last two decades. One 1999 essay, about collecting watches, leads him to comment, 'Gosh, but could this article ever do with a haircut ... Sorry about that', while another now seems to him 'phoned in' and a 'shameless rehash'. 'Googling the Cyborg', a hometown Vancouver speech, is listed in the text as being delivered in 2008, but the credits list it as 2002. It surely wouldn't have taken Gibson long to provide more addenda, such as to his 1996 short essay on the net, and to summarise his current thinking.

'Googling the Cyborg' spins off Vannevar Bush's famous 1945 memex concept, which Gibson sees as a 'proto-cyborg', leading into ubiquitous data storage and global connectivity. Gibson says, 'Technology has stopped us, and technology will take us on, into a new evolution, one Mr Bush never dreamed of, and neither, I'm sure, have I.'

The essays, which include Gibson's music favourites, also cover travel pieces, notably about Japan, which he calls 'the global imagination's default setting for the future'. Gibson called Singapore 'Disneyland with the death penalty' in his 1993 article for *Wired* magazine, which led to a ban on the magazine in Singapore.

He now says, in a recent interview, 'In retrospect —

and I really didn't think of this until after the book had been put together — I think when I went to Singapore I reacted against my first experience of a new kind of (primarily Asian) capitalism, which we now see doesn't necessarily lead to liberal democracy. At the time I wrote that article, China wasn't really happening in the same way; China hadn't gotten that way yet, although it certainly has now. Singapore was Patient Zero for that kind of capitalist experience. Encountering that for the first time was a shocking experience, and accounts for the vehemence of my coverage. If I went to China right now, I would expect it to be that way — it wouldn't shock me.'

The best pieces are the autobiographical memories, especially of his childhood, 'a world of early television, a new Oldsmobile with crazy rocket-ship styling, toys with science-fiction themes'. The regular fixes of SF magazines and books became his 'native literary culture' and helped in his rural Virginian retreat after his father died when he was six. When his mother died when he was eighteen, he quotes Gene Wolfe, who said, 'Being an only child whose parents are dead is like being the sole survivor of drowned Atlantis.' *Distrust that Particular Flavor*, despite its faults, is for these autobiographical pieces a must for Gibson fans, until such time as Gibson decides to reveal his full 'zero identity'.

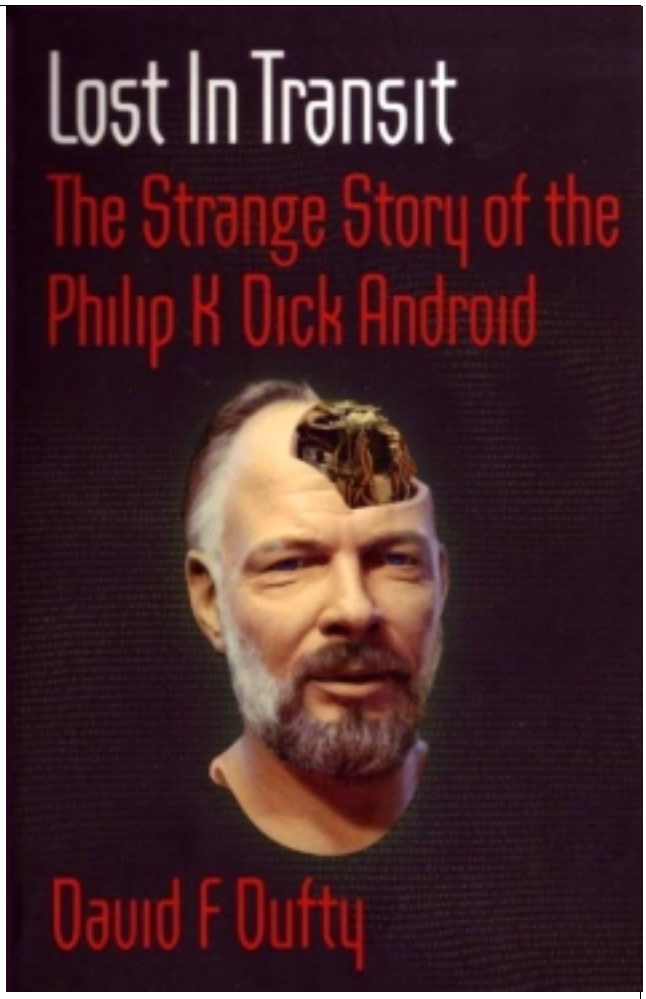
Lost In Transit: The Strange Story of the Philip K. Dick Android
by David F. Dufty
(Melbourne University Press; 258pp.; $29.99)
Robopocalypse
by Daniel H. Wilson
(Simon & Schuster; 347 pp.; $29.99)

Do robots and androids get ideas above their station and can they come back from the dead? In ***Lost in Transit***, Canberra author David Dufty explores the strange but true story of a Philip K. Dick android that lost its head, while Daniel Wilson's *Robopocalypse*, which has been optioned for filming by Steven Spielberg, is in the Terminator tradition of a robot uprising against humanity.

Philip K. Dick, who died in 1982, is one of the great SF icons of the twentieth century. In 2004, a group of young American researchers and artists who loved his writings, especially *We Can Build You*, decided to make a Dick replica, combining robotics and artificial intelligence with artistic sculpture.

Dufty, who now works at the Australian Bureau of Statistics in Canberra, was then a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Memphis, and became a confidante of the android builders, notably David Hanson, the founder of a fledgling company, Hanson Robotics. Dufty says, 'all events in this book are true ... occasionally I have extrapolated beyond the facts to infer inner thoughts of the people involved but I've been true to my knowledge of the situation and the participants' own attitudes as related to me'.

The final lifesize facsimile of Dick, which was able to conduct conversations about Dick's work and ideas and make facial expressions, began winning prestigious awards, but then disaster struck. In January 2006, an exhausted Hanson, en route to a demo at Google, left



the head in a bag in the overhead locker on an America West flight from Dallas to Las Vegas, where he had to change planes. The bag with the head was last traced on a flight bound for Orange County, ironically where Dick spent his last years. Did it have a head start?

Hanson reflects, 'Did it go on to another city [from Orange County]? Did it get mistagged? Did it end up in a warehouse? ... What happened? It broke my heart.' The scenario is certainly Dickean. While the rest of the android's body, which was shipped separately, had arrived at San Francisco safely, the loss of the head meant the Dick project went into abeyance for several years.

Dufty didn't want the project to be forgotten: 'I felt a need to immortalise it somehow.' *Lost in Transit* will have a wide appeal as a popular science book, with fascinating insights into the creation of the Dick android, and then the trauma when the head disappears. Dufty concludes with the eventual rebuilding of the android, but his manuscript was completed before the wave of international publicity in January this year, when the second Dick android was officially launched.

Dufty says that the current resurrection is not quite the same, as it has different AI capabilities. Judging, however, by the video at http://io9.com/5731075/the-lost-robotic-head-of-philip-k-dick-has-been-rebuilt, it doesn't seem that the android would pass the *Blade Runner* Voight-Kampff test, which distinguished humans from replicants.

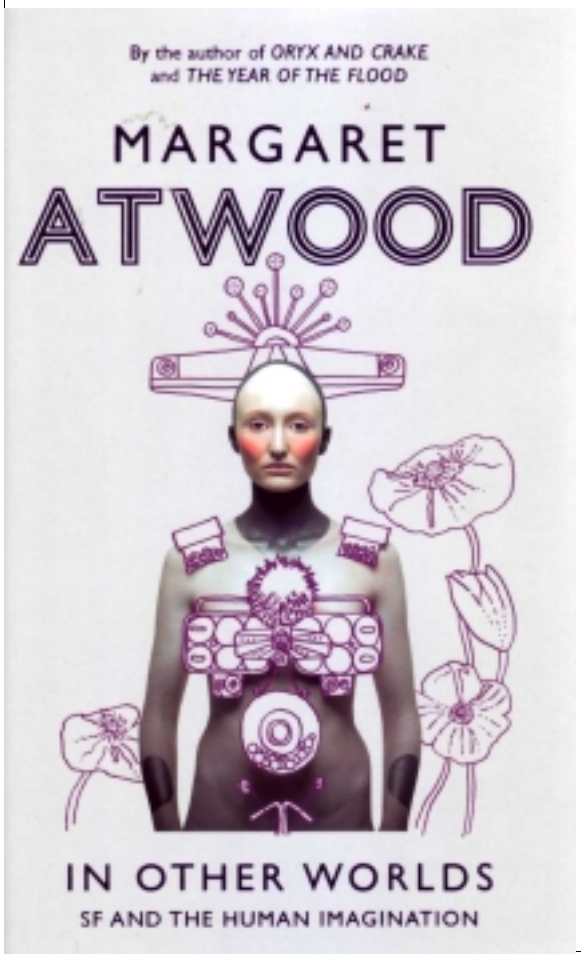
Daniel Wilson's ***Robopocalypse*** chronicles, in Terminator

style, a robotic war on humanity, launched by Archos, a powerful AI network that infiltrates every computer chip. Wilson says, 'Someday we will have to share the planet with intelligent machines. Hopefully, the birth of this new species won't be as violent as the one I describe in Robopocalypse.' The narrative is told retrospectively, after a terrible global conflict, through vignettes of key characters, but unfortunately Wilson's characterisation is limited and their first-person voices are often indistinguishable from each other.

Wilson has a doctorate in robotics, and has written nonfiction books such as *How to Survive a Robot Uprising*. Unfortunately, Wilson dumbs down his technical knowledge in favour of action scenes, so that *Robopocalypse* reads more like a movie script than a convincing robotic novel in the traditions of Asimov and Dick. Since, however, film rights have been optioned by Spielberg, Wilson is perhaps not so dumb after all. A commercial, rather than a literary head, on his young shoulders?

In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and the Human Imagination
by Margaret Atwood
(Virago; 255 pp.; $40)
The Gothic Imagination: Conversations on Fantasy, Horror, and Science Fiction in the Media
by John C. Tibbetts
(Palgrave Macmillan; 416 pp.; $39.95)

Margaret Atwood won the inaugural Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987 for *The Handmaid's Tale*, but she was clearly uncomfortable, as with *The Blind Assassin*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Year of the Flood*, with her novels being labelled science fiction. For this, she was taken to task by many, not least Ursula Le Guin, who commented that Atwood seemed to want to 'protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awarders'.



Atwood responds in her introduction to ***In Other Worlds***, comprising lectures, reviews, and short stories, that the misunderstanding arose from minor differences in their interpretations of the terms 'science fiction', 'speculative fiction', and 'fantasy'. Irrespective of that debate, Atwood has clearly had, as she recounts in her three 2010 Emory University lectures, a fascination with SF from childhood, beginning with superhero comics and ending up writing what she terms 'ustopian' novels.

Atwood recounts how she creates her 'Ustopias — these not-exactly places, which are anywhere but nowhere, and which are both mappable locations and states of mind? Why did I jump the tracks, as it were, from realistic novels to dystopias? ... Tackling a Ustopia was a risk. But it was also a challenge and a temptation', which was played out in her four Ustopian novels.

Atwood believes that such novels are more relevant than ever because 'Now we see a United States weakened by two draining wars and a financial meltdown, and America appears to be losing faith in the basic premises of liberal democracy'. Atwood concludes, 'We're stuck with us, imperfect as we are; but we should make the most of us. Which is about as far as I myself am prepared to go, in real life, along the road to Ustopia.'

The rest of *In Other Worlds* comprises eleven 'deliberations', which range over authors such as Orwell, Ishiguro, Piercy, and McKibben; five SF fictional 'tributes', including the short but stunning resume of Earth's decline, 'Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet', and two appendices. *In Other Worlds* is an informative insight into Atwood's Ustopian novels and her 'tangled personal history' with SF that should appeal to all readers, irrespective of genre.

The cover and title of Professor John Tibbetts's ***The Gothic Imagination*** perhaps do his contents a disservice by masking its wide-ranging collection of interviews with, and commentaries on, some of the leading authors, filmmakers, artists, directors, and actors in SF, fantasy, and horror. Names covered include Ray Bradbury, Brian Aldiss, Maurice Sendak, Ray Harryhausen, Greg Bear, William Shatner, Tim Burton, James Cameron, and Terry Gilliam. Mars is the subject of an interview with Robert Zeuschner on Edgar Rice Burroughs and Kim Stanley Robinson on his Mars trilogy. 'The Lovecraft Circle' sees Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, Ted Klein and others examining the writings of H. P. Lovecraft.

Tibbetts combines scholarship with obvious enthusiasm for his subject matter. British biographer Richard Holmes, in his introduction, reflects that 'John C. Tibbetts' wild and exuberant anthology of interviews will certainly test your synapses as well as your literary prejudices'. Like Le Guin, Holmes prefers readers not to place genres in ghettos, while 'The demand for human reimagining is endless'.

The Science of Avatar
by Stephen Baxter
(Gollancz; 273 pp.; $35)

James Cameron's *Avatar* is the biggest money-spinning film of all time. *The Science of Avatar*, however, is no ephemeral spin-off to the movie. Noted British SF writer Stephen Baxter, with director James Cameron's support, examines in detail the background to Pandora's landscape, ecosystems, avatars, and the background to the Na'vi tribe itself. Baxter also takes a wider imaginative perspective beyond *Avatar*, describing Earth's transition to the mid-twenty-second century and the science behind achievements such as interstellar travel and neural networks. Baxter's 35 short chapters deliver interesting and always accessible science, although the four pages of colour illustrations add little to the excellent text.

Out of this World
by Mike Ashley
(British Library; 144 pp.; $36.95)
Science Fiction Writers
(British Library; CD; $24.95)
The Man Who Invented the Daleks
by Alwyn W. Turner
(Aurum; 356 pp.; $39.95)
TARDISbound
by Piers D. Britton
(I. B. Tauris; 245 pp.; $38)
The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction
by Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint
(Routledge; 247 pp.; $39.95)
The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction
edited by Mark Bould et al.
(Routledge; 554 pp.; $54.95)

'Science fiction', or 'SF' (never 'sci-fi'), is often interpreted in many different ways by writers, filmmakers, scholars, and publishers, but without doubt it plays an increasingly important part in literary and popular culture.

The British Library's major 2011 exhibition on science fiction is remembered in Mike Ashley's ***Out of this World***, a profusely illustrated 'exhibition catalogue', which is organised thematically into topics such as 'Alien Worlds', 'Time and Parallel Worlds', and 'The End of the World'. Ashley notes that SF is essentially the literature of ideas or the literature of change, but above all it is the literature of 'otherness'. The exhibition, in addition to literature, covered SF films and television in imaginative displays. The British Library exhibition drew upon its formidable collections in this area, including the recently purchased J. G. Ballard manuscript archive, but it also borrowed from other public and private collections.

Ashley's subtitle, *Science Fiction But Not As You Know It*, is a reference to Star Trek's 'It's life, Jim, but not as we know it', indicating the wider perspective that SF has assumed in recent years. While *Out of This World* traces the SF line back to AD 170 and Lucian of Samosata, most SF historians, like Brian Aldiss, see Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the beginning of the genre. Ashley's book reminds the reader of the power of prediction of SF, which have included the atomic bomb, communication satellites, the internet, and the iPad. Recent fiction has stressed the idea of the 'singularity', when technology will become autonomous and self-aware.

SF isn't always, however, about predicting the future. As Ursula K. Le Guin cogently comments, it often reveals significant truths about contemporary society. Le Guin is one of the speakers on an accompanying British Library CD. This contains short speeches by ten SF writers, including Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke. While the CD has short speaker notes in an accompanying pamphlet, the short talks are more of a historical record, taken from a variety of old recordings, rather than a coherently linked SF history.

Doctor Who was a popular display in the British Library exhibition. Alwyn Turner's comprehensive biography of Terry Nation, ***The Man Who Invented the Daleks***, refutes the myth that the Daleks name came from an encyclopaedia volume titled from DAL to LEK. The Daleks, which first appeared on British TV in 1963, were partly inspired, according to Nation, by his watching a performance of Russian dancers gliding across a stage. But, according to Tony Hancock, the famous British comedian for whom Nation once worked, the design of 'an inverted cone, covered in ping pong balls and with a sink plunger sticking out of its head' had been his. The rest, as they say, is history. In 2010, readers of science fiction magazine *SFX* voted the Daleks the all-time greatest SF monsters.

Terry Nation (1930–1997) was essentially a professional scriptwriter rather than a SF devotee, although his childhood reading of the novels of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells was constantly recycled in numerous tele- vision scripts of *Doctor Who* and another cult series, *Blake's 7*. Nation also wrote a number of episodes of *The Avengers*, *The Saint*, and *The Persuaders*. Turner is less interested in personal and psychological revelations than in a comprehensive and entertaining analysis of Nation's writing and his place in popular culture.

Piers D. Britton, an Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Studies, explores more popular culture in ***TARDISbound***. This covers the whole *Doctor Who* spectrum, including the TV series. Focusing on post-2005 episodes, the 'audio adventures', original novels, and short story anthologies, Britton moves beyond fandom in a very readable examination of issues such as class, ethnicity, and gender. His comments on Matt Smith, the 'quasi-adolescent' Doctor, seem spot on.

As Will Brooker recently wrote in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, *Doctor Who* is 'About ageing, growing up, death and departure ... love and losing friends ... *Doctor Who* is, at heart, about understanding what time means to humans. This is reflected in the continuing loss of his companions.' The actual death in April this year of Elisabeth Sladen, who played Sarah Jane Smith, adds to this melancholic framework.

A concise framework for SF comes in ***The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction***, in which Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint provide an excellent introduction, particularly for those readers not familiar with the genre. Their short history of SF prior to the twentieth century is

followed by analysis by decade, under such headings as 'Cold war, consumerism, cybernetics: the 1950s', and 'New politics, new technologies: the 1980s and the 1990s'. Bullet points in each chapter provide links to further readings, as well as in a comprehensive bibliography.

Having graduated from the excellent *Concise History*, fans and readers should move on to ***The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction***, first published in hardback in 2009, at a price only libraries could afford, but now released in paperback. Bould and Vint are joined as editors by well-known SF writers and critics Andrew M. Butler and Adam Roberts. Fifty-six essayists range over a wide range of subjects, including Gwyneth Jones on 'Feminist SF', David N. Samuelson on 'Hard SF', and China Miéville on 'Weird Fiction'.

This exciting and exhaustive collection of essays covers major writers, movements, and texts within four general sections: history, theory, issues and challenges, and subgenres. The *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* is an essential purchase for libraries, and necessary reading for anyone interested in SF, its past, present, and future.

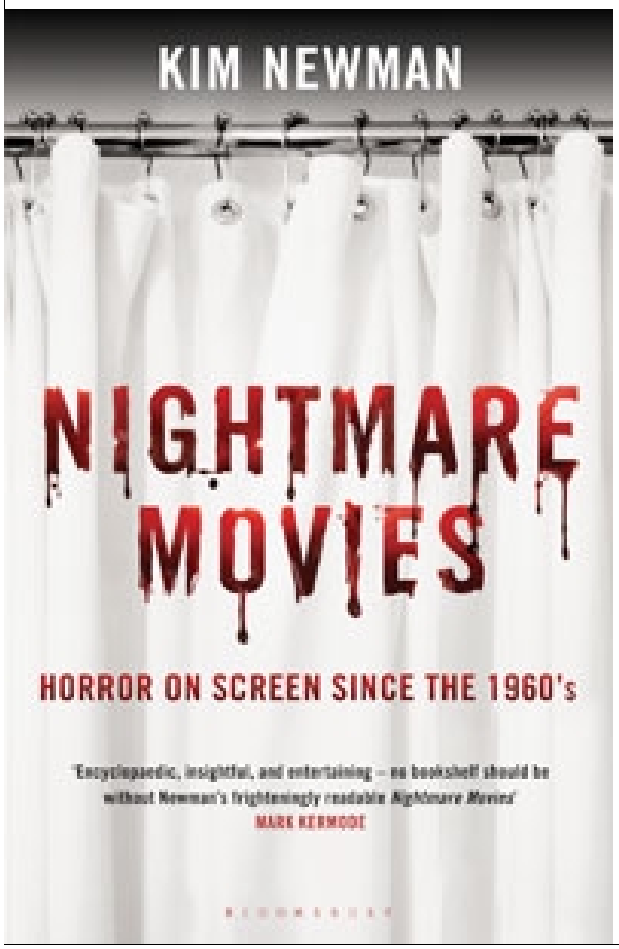
Thor: Myth to Marvel
by Martin Arnold
(Continuum; 225 pp.; $48)

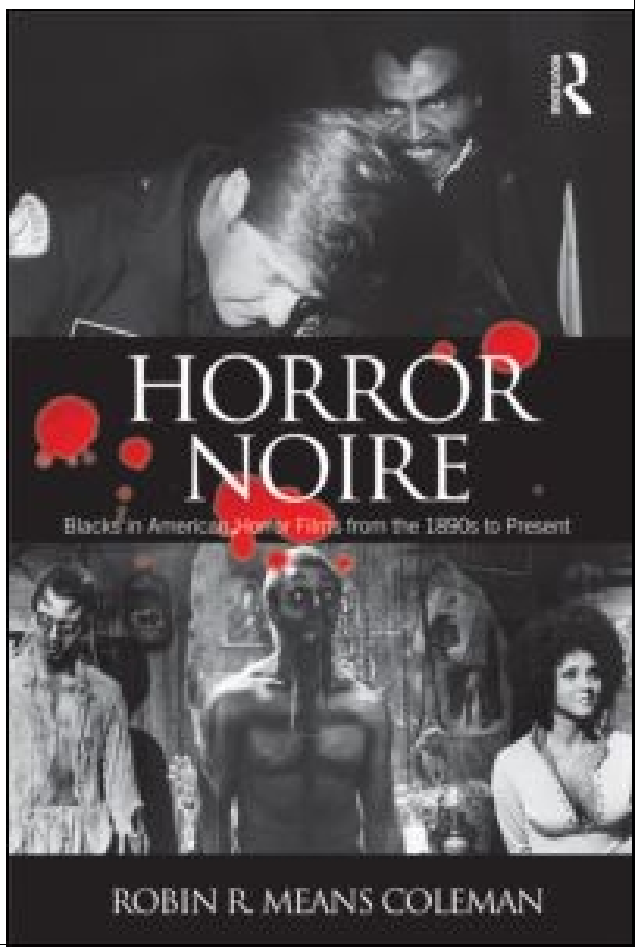
Martin Arnold, Professor of Scandinavian Literature at Hull University, cogently explores in ***Thor: Myth to Marvel*** how the legend of Thor has been adapted and transformed through the centuries. Arnold begins with Thor's origins in Norse mythology, but then demonstrates how Thor became central to issues of national romanticism and a symbol of extreme nationalism. In the twentieth century, Marvel Comics created *The Mighty Thor*, their character also highlighting concerns about male identity and American foreign policy! Kenneth Branagh's 2011 box office movie success *Thor* has since added another layer to the redoubtable cultural mythography of Thor.

Nightmare Movies: Horror on the Screen since the 1960's
by Kim Newman
(Bloomsbury; 633 pp.; $59.99)
Horror Noire
by Robin R. Means Coleman
(Routledge; 272 pp.; $59.95)

Kim Newman is a well-known British film critic and broadcaster. ***Nightmare Movies***, last published in 1988, has now been comprehensively updated and expanded with nearly 300 new pages to reflect horror's increasing importance in film history.

Newman's original approach was thematic, and this approach has been repeated in the extensive new edition. Newman's chapter headings cover such topics as 'The Indian Summer of the British Horror Film' and 'Fun with the Living Dead' in the first section, as well as analysis of directors such as David Cronenberg and Brian De Palma. In the new second section, chapters are de-





voted to 'The Lecter Variations', 'Vampires and Other Stereotypes', and 'Zombie Apocalypse Now', as well as further directorial analyses, including those for Guillermo del Toro and David Lynch.

In total, Newman covers just over two thousand films that, as he admits, range from the excellent to the abysmal. In this latter category, he cites James Kelly's *The Beast in the Cellar* (1971), with a 'ridiculous plot about a geriatric World War I draft-dodger who kills hunky young soldiers and hayloft heavy petters with his long fingernails'. Newman doesn't pull his punches either on 'defective' big budget movies, such as *I Am Legend* (2007), where 'every decision made in adapting the book [Richard Matheson's original novel] cheapens the material'.

Newman places the horror films within overall cinematic contexts, as well as detailing the influences on particular films and subgenres. Adding to the comprehensive nature of *Nightmare Movies* is its extreme readability, with numerous acute observations, such as when Newman calls *The Shining* (1980) 'a grand Guignol remake of *I Love Lucy*'. The only fault is the lack of a hardback edition, as its content is going to be referenced on a regular basis by horror fans and cinema historians, all of whom owe Newman a vote of thanks for his wide-ranging authoritative work.

Robin R. Means Coleman, University of Michigan professor, in ***Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present***, traces the 'characterizations of blackness' in horror film and documents, with much detail that will be unfamiliar, American historical reality against cinematic portrayals from the beginning of the twentieth century. Means Coleman therefore provides not only a perspective on the horror film genre, but also insights into American social history, reflecting racial fears and oppression.

Means Coleman argues that, at times, the horror film has allowed the black community 'to challenge racialized imagery in separate media outlets, and allows a greater range of portrayal within the very concept of blackness'. The 'Blaxploitation' movies of the 1970s ushered in a short-term improvement in racial stereotyping, but this did not last. Overall, 'horror for Blacks continues to be a study in racism, exoticism, and neocolonialism in which Black Americans are portrayed as outside of western images of enlightenment, while being subordinated to a system of primitive images — political, economic, cultural, religious, and social'.

Professor Steven Berry indicates, in his Foreword, that in the 1980s, 'if a black character was allowed on the screen he or she was dead by the time the credits rolled'. Means Coleman concludes that we must ultimately ask ourselves through 'the conversation of blackness ... what is scarier, flesh-eating zombies or what we are doing to each other on a daily basis?' Horror, like science fiction, is often the barometer for social and political reality.

Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema
by David A. Kirby
(MIT Press; 265 pp.; $42.95)

The subtitle to David Kirby's ***Lab Coats in Hollywood*** seems at first sight almost an oxymoron, given movies like *2012*, which Kirby says has 'had scientists going crazy'. Kirby, in an authoritative and illuminating survey of science in the cinema from Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Moon* (1929) to *Iron Man 2* (2010), proves that science and the cinema also interact for mutual benefit.

Kirby, Lecturer in Science Communication at Manchester University, equally at ease with cinema history and science, supplements his analysis with interviews of key film directors and scientists. *Lab Coats in Hollywood* is revealing in the detail that it provides on many film productions. Some directors, such as Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, and Ron Howard, are usually keen to involve scientists early in their production process.

Films that have benefited from scientific assistance include *Deep Impact* (1998), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), and *Finding Nemo* (2004). For *Nemo*, a marine biologist was brought in only near the end of production, but quickly pointed out that kelp only grows in cold, not tropical, waters. Every frond of kelp was subsequently removed from each relevant scene. Kirby, realises, however, that scientific accuracy is often only supported if it assists the overall product, as it undoubtedly did in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which many have claimed is the most scientifically accurate film ever produced.

Kirby says scientists also 'generally love *Contact* (1997), the Jodie Foster film based on the Carl Sagan novel. Because Sagan originated the project and continued to work on it on his deathbed, the filmmakers felt a real commitment to making the science as accurate as possible'. In terms of image, scientists tend to be depicted as the 'mad' Einstein-looking scientist, as in the *Back to the Future* trilogy, or as capable backroom researchers who advise presidents and prime ministers in times of crisis.

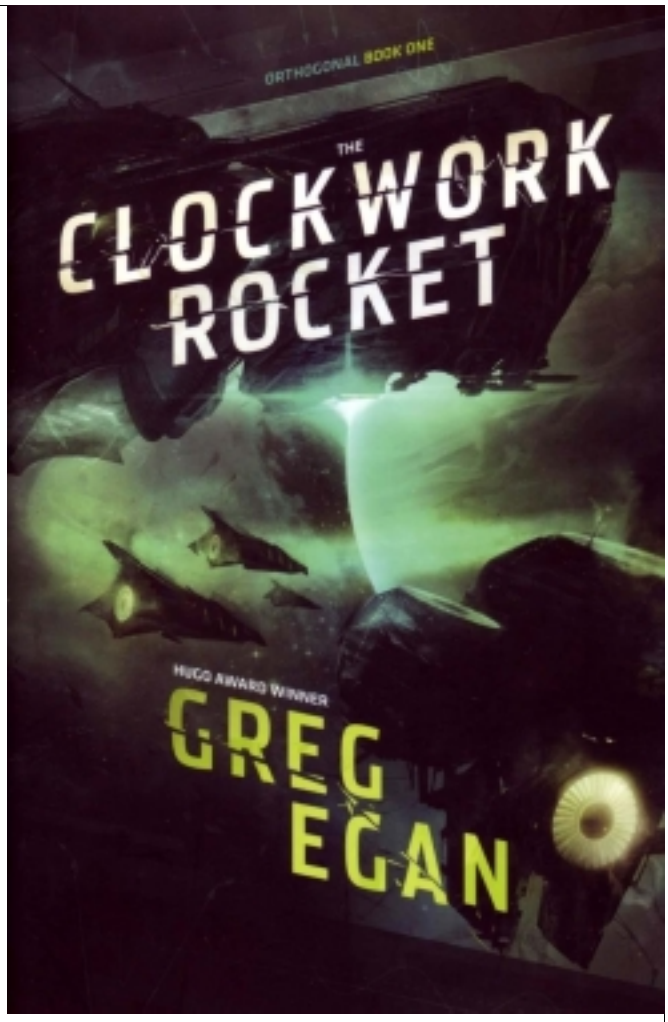
Sometimes the public perception overrides the reality. Thus, in *Mission to Mars* (2000), the landscape remains reddish, because red Mars is embedded in public consciousness. Other films, however, are beyond rescue, such as the 'fudged science' in the asteroid-threatening-earth film *Armageddon* (1998). Kirby says Arnold Schwarzenegger's *The 6th Day* (2000) also lacks credibility, as it 'didn't bring any science consultants on. The science in that movie is totally ludicrous'.

Kirby finds that cinema can influence scientific policy and direction, although sometimes with both positive and negative outcomes. With an informative ability to integrate science and the cinema, he reaffirms the continued necessity for 'lab coats' to be in Hollywood and for scientists to promote their public image and the research they undertake.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

The Courier's New Bicycle
by Kim Westwood
(Harper; 331 pp.; $22.99)

It must be a sign of the public mood that dystopian novels are proliferating. Clare Corbett's *When We Have Wings* recently depicted a future Australia devastated by climate change and divided into enclaves. Kim Westwood's ***The***



Courier's New Bicycle is set, like Meg Mundell's *Black Glass*, in a Melbourne where the fabric of society is breaking down.

Canberra author Kim Westwood's second novel, *The Courier's New Bicycle*, is, like her acclaimed first novel *The Daughters of Moab*, set in an Australian dystopian future, this time in a near-future Melbourne with rundown buildings, power disruptions, fuel rationing, and curfews. Westwood says that her new novel is 'a very different creature, made in a very different room of my imagination. It's a much faster ride — there's a mystery to solve, after all, and time is of the essence.'

In *The Courier's New Bicycle*, a rogue vaccine to tackle a flu pandemic has severely damaged Australian fertility, although not apparently the rest of the world. A fundamentalist government admits no fertility solution except the power of prayer. This has led to a boom in underground fertility treatments, often using dodgy hormones, and surrogacy arrangements within blurred gender lines.

The main character, androgynous Salisbury Forth, a bicycle courier, regularly sallies forth from his/her boss's small firm to deliver safe, but illegal, hormonal drugs. Sal's boss goes missing, however, and Sal's friends are threatened, as someone wants the business closed down, Sal's life is in danger, but, in classic PI mode, Sal must find the culprits and save the business. *The Courier's New Bicycle* is, at times, *Underbelly* rewritten with a feminist tinge.

The overall global background is again undefined. Melbourne is almost an isolated microcosm, created by Westwood to reflect concerns as varied as religious fundamentalism, climate change, economic downturn, animal rights, sexual polymorphism, and genetic manipulation. What, however, ultimately carries the day, is Sal, Westwood's strong central empathetic character, and the darkly humorous, fast-paced narrative.

The Clockwork Rocket
by Greg Egan
(Gollancz; 368 pp.; $29.99)

Greg Egan often gets frustrated when reviewers indicate that his readers need a science degree to reach his base fiction camp. ***The Clockwork Rocket***, the first in the 'Orthogonal' trilogy, has extensive explanatory material, including videos, on Egan's website gregegan.net to explain its physics and mathematics. The main character, Yalda, lives on a very alien planet where light has no universal speed and its creation generates energy. With the planet under threat from destructive meteors, Yalda and her scientific colleagues plan an interstellar voyage in order to slow time and gain the knowledge to avert disaster. *The Clockwork Rocket* is cerebral hard SF at its best and also its most formidable.

Rotten Gods
by Greg Barron
(HarperCollins; 458 pp.; $29.99)

Greg Barron, former Wagga Wagga resident, debuts with ***Rotten Gods***, a novel that deliberately echoes the work of authors such as Alistair MacLean, Tom Clancy, and Robert Ludlum. In the near future, climate change has accelerated natural disasters, increasing poverty, famine, and inequality. World leaders congregate in Dubai as the UN makes a last-ditch effort to avert global catastrophe. Terrorists, however, take all the world leaders hostage and threaten executions if their demands are not met. Barron's protagonists, including a feisty female Australian intelligence officer with an ANU degree, gradually come together in a dramatic conclusion where perceptions of right and wrong are fundamentally questioned.

BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION

Angelmaker
by Nick Harkaway
(Heinemann; 568 pp.; $32.95.)

Clocks and clockwork automata seem to be the 'in' cultural artifacts at the moment. Both the award-winning Martin Scorsese film *Hugo* and Peter Carey's new novel *The Chemistry of Tears* feature clocks and a clockwork automaton. Nick Harkaway's main character in ***Angelmaker***, Joe Spork, is a London clock repairer, whose life is turned upside down when he is asked to repair an unusual automaton, which turns out to be a 1950s doomsday machine.

Harkaway, the son of David Cornwell, aka John Le Carré, has said he didn't want to use his own name for his writing, not because of his father, but rather he didn't wish to compete with the two Cornwells, Bernard and Patricia. He took the name Harkaway from the late nineteenth-century Victorian penny dreadful hero Jack Harkaway.

Angelmaker is certainly full of *Boy's Own*-type derring-do. Harkaway acknowledges other literary influences from the past, such as Dumas and Conan Doyle, but in the present, Neil Gaiman, Neal Stephenson, and Douglas Adams come to mind as influences, although ultimately Harkaway is decidedly his own voice.

Harkaway's acclaimed first novel *The Gone-Away World* (2008), also an imaginative genre mash-up, was about the end of the world, while *Angelmaker* is about avoiding that fate. It begins with reclusive, thirty-something Joe Spork trying to forget the amoral legacy of his notorious London gangster father 'Tommy-Gun Spork' by burying himself in clock repairs. That peace is shattered when octogenarian super-spy Edie Banister deposits a mysterious clockwork automaton for repair at Joe's workshop. Joe is soon threatened by a diverse cast of characters, including a dastardly Asian opium lord, fanatical hooded Ruskinite monks, and sinister government officials, all of whom want to get their hands on the 'Apprehension Engine' doomsday machine.

Harkaway says, in his Australian publicity material, that *Angelmaker* 'isn't just about the high days of crime. It's about families and fathers and sons. It's about the messes we get ourselves into for love. And this being one of my stories, it's about old mysteries, secret agents, Art and Crafts period submarines, murderous villains, doomsday devices and the showdown which will save or destroy us all.'

Joe's main allies in trying to save the world are Edie, accompanied by her ill-tempered blind pug dog Bastion, and the self-confident Polly Cradle, known as the 'Bold Receptionist', with whom Joe develops a growing relationship. Joe's anger, at the threats to his life and those of his friends, forces him to shrug off his cloak of mildness, like Neil Gaiman's Richard Mayhew in *Neverwhere*, and plug into his father's literally underground criminal world.

Harkaway says Le Carré deliberately rejected the 'adventure feel' of James Bond and Bulldog Drummond and turned instead to 'the real, sad, thoughtful, grey world of men like George Smiley'. Harkaway, however, deliberately aims for a state of adventure, wanting 'people to have fun'. There's no doubt, however, that *Angelmaker* is more than just fun.

Harkaway's significant underlying messages relate to the war on terror and its implications for the individual and the state, the legacy of colonialism, and the need to reject power for its own sake. After a somewhat stuttering start, *Angelmaker* ultimately works like clockwork, becoming a fictional artifact of exuberant complexity and dark comic precision.

Then
by Julie Myerson
(Jonathan Cape; 296 pp.; $32.95)

Recent Australian dystopian novels seem relatively idyllic compared to Julie Myerson's eighth novel, ***Then***. Julie Myerson's last book, *The Lost Child*, which traced the eviction of Jake, her drug-addicted son, from the family home, attracted considerable media attention and led to her being dubbed 'the worst mother in Britain'.

Myerson has said of *Then*, 'It is true that, if one were rationally deciding what to publish after *The Lost Child*, it wouldn't be this.' There may, however, be conscious or subconscious elements in *Then*, with Izzy, a traumatised amnesiac middle-aged woman, struggling to survive in a post-apocalyptic ice-covered London. There is a strong undercurrent of emotional turmoil, maternal angst, and moral ambiguity in Izzy's first-person disjointed narration, which moves back and forth in time.

The reasons for the rapid apocalyptic disaster are never articulated for the London locale, let alone for the rest of the world, in terms of climatic chaos and social anarchy. Izzy squats in an abandoned office with a small group, which may or may not include her children whom she often physically abuses. Izzy, in turn, is sexually threatened and abused by men. Dead babies stare out from frozen puddles on the street, where scavengers chop fingers off frozen bodies to retrieve rings for an undefined black market.

As the novel progresses, Izzy recalls more and more of her family suburban life and marriage breakdown, but, given that *Then* relies on individual and collective vagueness for its surreal unsettling atmosphere, the reader is never entirely sure what is real and what is not. The past or future could be hallucinations of Izzy's disturbed mind. *Then* undoubtedly conveys a powerful dark disturbing vision of outer and inner hells, but ultimately there is nothing in *Then* that hasn't already been covered by SF writers, such as by J. G. Ballard, or by Cormac McCarthy in *The Road*.

The Departure
by Neal Asher
(Tor; 498 pp.; $49.99)

Neal Asher says that the title ***The Departure*** has a double meaning, in that it is a departure from his well-known Polity novels. It begins a hardback series about the 'Owner of the Worlds', set in a bleak overpopulated future Earth, where an Orwellian government uses the brutal Inspectorate to cull the population. It doesn't count, however, on the revenge planned by an agent it had previously tortured and tossed out, who, now enhanced by an artificial intelligence, seeks to overthrow the regime. Asher's usual pace and violent action scenes are to the fore as ever, but his characterisation is unusually flat.

Manhattan in Reverse
by Peter F. Hamilton
(Macmillan; 260 pp.; $32.99)

Peter Hamilton says, in the introduction to ***Manhattan in Reverse***, his second collection of short stories, that his huge SF trilogies take up so much time that 'I get to write about one story a year, if I'm lucky'. 'Watching Trees Grow', an intriguing multigenerational murder mystery, is set in an alternate world, where the families of the Roman Empire still retain influence. 'The Forever Kitten', which first appeared in *Nature*, highlights the cynical sacrifices needed to gain biological longevity. Three of the seven stories in a solid SF collection relate to Hamilton's acclaimed 'Commonwealth' series.

Railsea
by China Miéville
(Macmillan; 376 pp.; $29.95)

China Miéville is one of Britain's most innovative writers, with award-winning novels such as *Embassytown* (2011) and *The City and The City* (2009). ***Railsea*** is his second young adult book, after *Un Lun Dun* (2007), but the novel's underlying complexity will amply reward an adult readership.

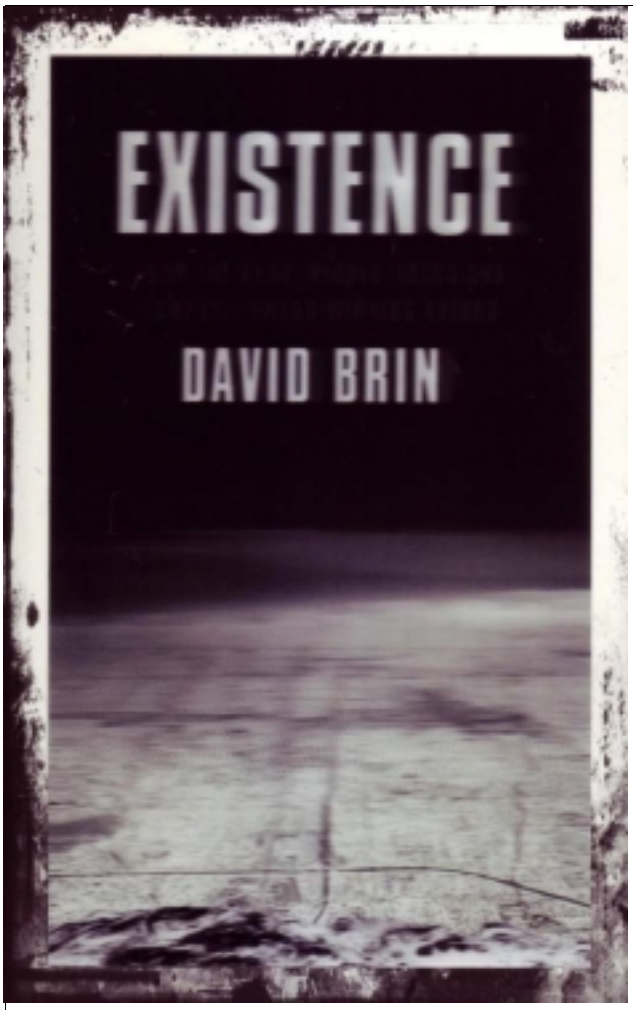
Railsea deliberately echoes the sense of discovery in nineteenth-century exploration narratives, in this case, the depiction of a far future Earth, where the seas have been eroded and rail tracks crisscross the arid seabeds, 'the railsea'. Miéville's line drawings, inspired by Charles Darwin's notebooks, outline the strange creatures that live both below and above ground.

Miéville follows Melville in his depiction of a world in which rail captains chase the 'moldywarpes' or giant moles, including an elusive ivory one, who erupt through the earth as whales did from the sea. Frank Herbert's sandworms in *Dune* also spring to mind in this context.

Railsea follows the adventures of Sham ap Soorap, a young doctor's assistant, on a rail train commanded by the Ahab-like character of Captain Naphi, who is obsessed by her chase for a moldywarpe that caused her to lose her arm. Sham aspires to become one of the 'salvos', people who salvage material from derelict wrecks.

His life, however, is threatened when various factions seek the images from an ancient memory disc that Sham has found. Will it reveal the truth of the past, which Miéville documents in part as 'The Plastozoic, the Computational Age, the Heavy Metal Age'. Sham is captured by pirates and faces many other dangers in a journey that may lead to the end of the line, 'the world beyond the railsea'. While Miéville clearly follows Melville, there are also deliberate homages to Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, and Ursula Le Guin's 'Earthsea' books.

Railsea, which at the discovery and excitement level will certainly attract the young adult readership, operates on several levels. Miéville demonstrates once more, as in *Embassytown*, his gifts for linguistic invention. The prose is packed with creative wit and literary references. One typographic feature is that every appearance of the word 'and' has been replaced by an ampersand. Miéville notes



that the ampersand's looping shape emulates the curving path a train takes to change direction.

Railsea is also an indictment, through its allusions to the past, of modern capitalism and its dependence on unlimited growth through rampant consumerism. The toxic future landscapes also highlight the need for environmental responsibility. Miéville's political messages, however, are never strident. Railsea, overall, displays a wonderful sense of adventure and literary ebullience.

AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION

Existence
by David Brin
(Orbit; 560 pp.; $29.99)
2312
by Kim Stanley Robinson
(Orbit.; 561 pp.; $29.99)

David Brin and Kim Stanley Robinson are two of America's leading SF writers. Their latest novels tackle today's big issues and imaginatively project them into twenty-first and twenty-fourth century futures.

If there is a criticism of both books, it is that they are so full of ideas and info-dumps that narrative flow is affected. To some extent, this is clearly intentional, as they, particularly Robinson, reflect the collage technique of John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* trilogy and John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*, whereby lists, data, and stream-of-consciousness elements are mixed into the narrative framework.

David Brin's first novel for ten years, ***Existence***, set in 2050, sees humanity having survived numerous global crises, including extreme climate change and nuclear terrorist attacks. The net has become an augmented reality 'The Mesh', and artificial intelligence, so far benign, has been created.

When a garbage astronaut retrieves an egg-shaped crystal artefact, whose virtual intelligences say 'Join Us', humanity's chances of survival could be on an upward path. Is humanity being offered membership of a galactic federation? But then why haven't the aliens come in person? Is it because few civilisations survive their own adolescence? Brin tackles head-on the Fermi paradox, which ponders why intelligent life is apparently so scarce in the universe.

But after another artefact seemingly contradicts the first alien message, global confusion and apprehension increase. Are the artifacts 'worldstones' of hope or 'demonstones' of despair? *Existence* may well become a hard SF classic, as Brin stunningly intertwines the themes of 'Why are we alone?' and 'Can humanity survive?'

Kim Stanley Robinson's ***2312*** doesn't quite reach Brin's heights, falling awkwardly between several plot lines and juggling macro- and micro-narratives. Nonetheless, Robinson is always thought-provoking in his reflection of current ecological, political and societal

challenges in future scenarios.

Robinson portrays a 'Happy Space, Sad Earth'. Robinson's future Earth is even more ravaged by climate change than Brin's, with most of the population of eleven billion living in poverty, 'under the thumb of late capitalism'. It is only in space where humanity really flourishes, with terraforming having taken place on Mars and Venus. The terraforming of Mars recalls that in Robinson's classic 'Mars' trilogy.

Robinson says he started *2312* when he had the idea of a relationship between a mercurial character from Mercury and a saturnine character from Saturn, who actually turns out to be from Titan. The developing relationship of these two not-quite-human people, transformed by medical advances and artificial intelligence, provides a personal backdrop to a plotline of growing interplanetary political intrigue. Robinson's widescreen SF vision can never be doubted, even if his narrative structure creaks at times.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
by Philip K. Dick
(Gollancz; 193 pp.; $20)
Dune
by Frank Herbert
(Gollancz; 609 pp.; $20)
Flowers for Algernon
by Daniel Keyes
(Gollancz; 238 pp.; $20)

The SF 'Top Ten' hardbacks from Gollancz, released to commemorate their fifty years of publishing, contain some of the twentieth-century classic SF 'imaginings'. All have new introductions by leading SF authors. Included in the ten are ***Dune*** (1965), which mixes ecological concerns and intergalactic conflict with considerable verve, and ***Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*** (1968), which, as Paul McAuley notes in his introduction, is about 'empathy, identity and memory'. In appreciating the novel, however, we need to 'unremember', as McAuley says, the changed emphasis of the filmed classic *Blade Runner*. The film *Charly* derived from ***Flowers for Algernon*** (1966), in which Keyes poignantly follows the rise and fall in intelligence of Charly, a man of low IQ, recruited to take part in a scientific experiment to enhance brainpower.

As Charlotte Williams recently stated in the *UK Bookseller*, mainstream publishers can 'no longer afford to ignore' SF and fantasy. Orion group deputy publishing director Jon Wood said recent auctions have seen market leader Gollancz having to compete for titles against some unexpected publishers, such as Faber. He says: 'I think people realise the borders are more porous ... and it's about having that really big idea.'

The Revisionists
by Thomas Mullen
(Mulholland Books; 435 pp.; $29.95)

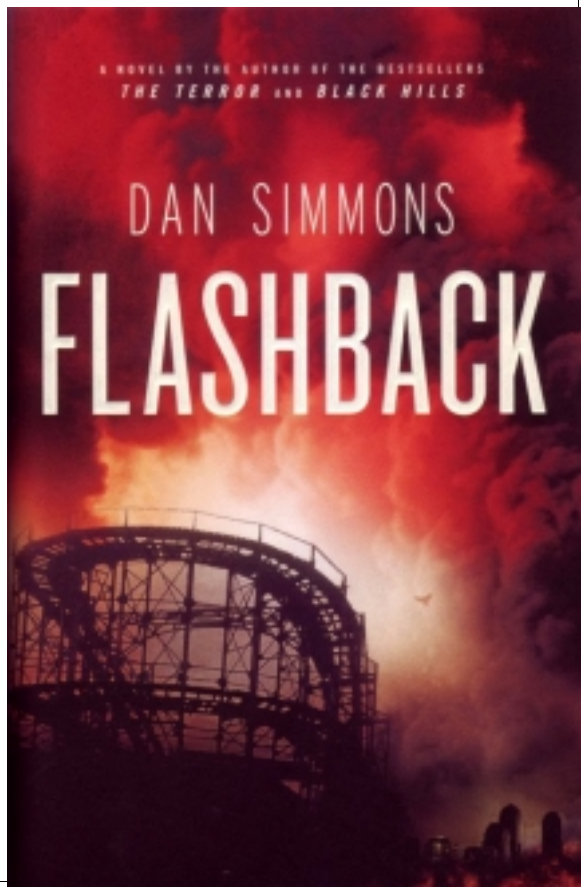
American author Thomas Mullen is a name that will be unfamiliar to many, although his two previous semi-historical novels have received critical acclaim. ***The Revisionists*** sees Zed, from a future Department of Historical Integrity, sent back in time to ensure that history unfolds correctly, so that a future 'Perfect Present' can be maintained. Nearly all of the action takes place in present-day Washington, which becomes almost a character in itself. Zed's self-belief slowly erodes through his personal interactions with the present. Mullen probes the nature of race, religion, and belief in a novel that closes in an ambiguity that echoes the film *Inception*.

Reamde
by Neal Stephenson
(Atlantic; 1006 pp.; $35.00)

Neal Stephenson is one of SF's major talents, and one of its least predictable, as evidenced in novels ranging widely in time and content, such as *Snow Crash*, *Cryptonomicon*, and *Anathem*. Stephenson in ***Reamde*** uses the springboard of a Chinese hacker virus, let loose via an online game T'Rain, to follow the fortunes of the game's creator, a multi-millionaire and ex-marijuana dealer, and his niece, kidnapped by the Russian Mafia. *Reamde* is an SF thriller bouillabaisse, a little perhaps over-rich in ambition, and in need of some editorial stirring, which ultimately leaves, however, an impressive real and virtual after-taste.

Flashback
by Dan Simmons
(Quercus; 553 pp.; $27.99)

Dan Simmons has a distinguished fiction record, winning numerous awards. ***Flashback*** is more likely, how-

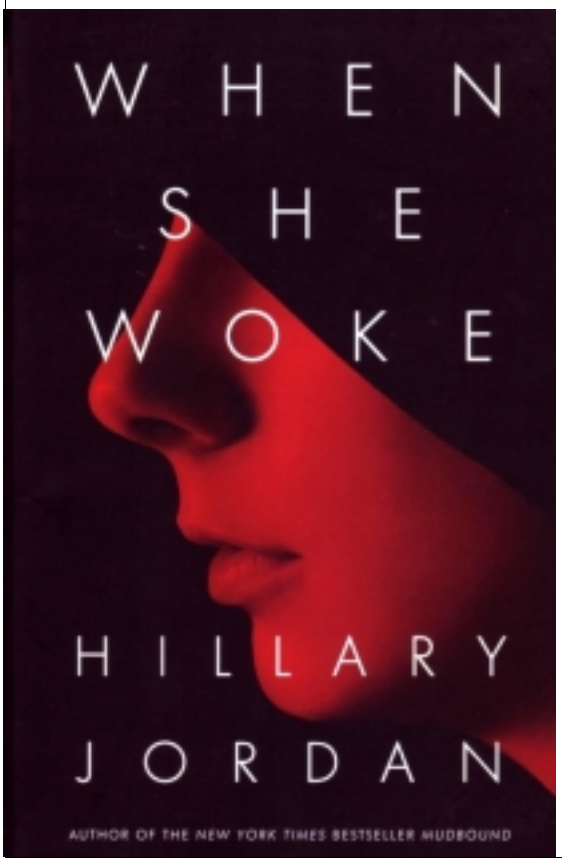


ever, to be a contender for a Tea Party SF prize. Simmons depicts a 2036 bankrupt America, with only 44 states, facing a 'Global Caliphate', a decline attributed to extrapolated Democrat 'socialism' and not to reckless banks or the costs of the Iraq war. Most citizens are addicted to the drug 'flashback', which allows them to remember happier times. This jarring political dimension is unfortunate, deflecting attention from a compelling SF noir story in which a retired Denver detective tries to solve the six-year-old murder of a Japanese billionaire's son.

When She Woke
by Hillary Jordan
(HarperCollins; 344 pp.; $27.99)

Hillary Jordan's first novel *Mudbound* won the 2006 Bellwether Prize for Fiction, awarded biennially to a debut novel that addresses issues of social justice, and was long-listed for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Prize. Her second novel, ***When She Woke***, is set in a bleak future America, a novel that deliberately spins off Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

Jordan says she was 'struck by the many parallels between the world that Hawthorne described, the Puritan society of the late 1600s and post-9/11 America ... where some of the policies currently being advocated and enacted by the far right might lead us to ask, Do we really want to go there? The outcome I show in WSW — an America where church and state have merged, our constitutional right to privacy has been all but eliminated, abortion is illegal in most states and criminals are punished by being hideously stigmatized — is an extreme one, obviously. But that's what a dystopia is: an extreme, dark vision of the future designed to provoke people into asking questions.'



In *When She Woke*, fundamentalists exercise theocratic power after 'The Great Scourge', which, until a very recent cure, had caused female sterility. That's why babies are valued more than ever. Hannah Payne, aka Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, is a devout Texan Christian, who falls in love with a married high-ranking clergyman and becomes pregnant, but refuses to name and shame him after an abortion, 'Hard is loving a man you can never have. Hard is asking someone to kill your child and then holding still while they do it.'

Hawthorne's 'A' now stands for abortion. The 'Scarlet' now refers to the practice of 'melachroming', injections that colour the skin, the colour determined according to the nature of the crime. Abortion is red for murder. Hannah 'was red. Not flushed, not sunburned, but the solid, declarative red of a stop sign.'

Hannah's nightmarish prison regime is followed by a life as an outcast, open to fundamentalist rage and male sexual abuse. Hannah decides to flee to Canada, using a feminist escape route with safe houses, along the lines of those set up in the American Civil War for slaves and the Vietnam War for draft evaders.

Hannah is told, 'However hard you imagine the road to be, it will be more hard. The feeble and the doubtful do not survive it. You must not take it unless you are absolutely certain.' Unfortunately Hannah's road to Canada and eventual possible 'unchroming' lacks tension, with the journey largely serving as a platform for Jordan's polemics. A short melodramatic reunion with her former lover, who never seems more than a caricature, as indeed are most of the males, also ensures the dramatic originality of the first half of the novel is further dissipated. *When She Woke* ultimately falls far short of the level of similar dystopian novels, such as Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The Age of Miracles
by Karen Thompson Walker
(Simon & Schuster; 373 pp.; $29.99)

American author Karen Thompson Walker has received over one million US dollars for her debut novel ***The Age of Miracles***. Several years in the future, a massive earthquake has shifted the Earth on its axis. As the Earth's rotation slows, the days slowly lengthen, eventually more than doubling. Heat and radiation increase, while food and energy supplies dwindle. 'The slowing', as it becomes known, is recounted through the perspective of Julia, a young Californian girl on the 'cusp of adolescence'. *The Age of Miracles* has a dystopian freshness, with Julia's domestic and school experiences providing an effective and often moving framework for the gradual unravelling of society.

The Technologists
by Matthew Pearl
(Harvill Secker; 488 pp.; $32.95)

Matthew Pearl sets ***The Technologists***, like his bestselling debut novel *The Dante Club*, in nineteenth-century Bos-

ton. The time is 1868, and Boston has been hit by a series of planned attacks, which range from the destruction of ships in Boston harbour to the dramatic melting of all the glass in city centre buildings. Nobody knows the motivation of the terrorist, who becomes known as the 'The Experimenter'.

Four young students from the newly founded MIT, including the school's first female student, Ellen Swallow, band together to uncover the scientific cause of the disasters. Pearl says, 'My starting point was MIT and that first class', which also gave him the 'challenge to think about science and technology from an 1868 perspective'. Pearl emphasises the tensions between MIT and Harvard, and also echoes the Harvard conservatism he depicted in the *The Dante Club*. In this instance, Harvard wishes to close down its fledgling rival, although since we all know that MIT survives, the dramatic tension of this particular plotline is weakened somewhat.

Pearl provides an 'Afterword' on 'The History and Future of the Tech Boys', which places his fictional and real characters in context. He also inserts the actual words of real historical figures, such as Robert Richards, Louis Agassiz, and Charles Eliot, which helps verisimilitude, but slows down the pace of the first half of *The Technologists*.

Professor Louis Agassiz plays a key role, in not only trying to derail the investigation of the MIT student 'Technologists', but also in trying to refute the science of Darwin's theories. MIT is seen by many as the 'Devil's work'. Agassiz says of MIT, 'Over there they will teach atheist machinists and the sons of farmers alike. The knowledge of science in such individuals cannot fail to lead to quackery and dangerous social tendencies.'

While Pearl's narrative supports some big themes, such as science versus religious intolerance and the struggle for the rights of the working class, overall character development is largely left at the ripping yarn level. The pace certainly picks up in the second half of the book with the race against time to track down 'The Experimenter' before all of Boston is threatened. *The Technologists* is an ultimately flawed, yet always interesting, mix of history, mystery, and steampunk genres.

CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

The Fat Years
by Chan Koonchung
(Doubleday; 381 pp.; $32.95)

As shown in Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, fiction can be as effective a mechanism for societal criticism as non-fiction. ***The Fat Years***, Chan Koonchung's powerful debut novel, originally published in Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan in 2009, is banned in China.

The Fat Years, in a very readable translation by Michael Duke, is set in 2013 when China is the world's undisputed financial superpower. The US has suffered a major financial crisis in 2011, with the US dollar depreciating 30 per cent and gold reaching $2000 an ounce. In Chan's imagined 2011 the financial crisis caused political disarray and social unrest everywhere except, apparently, in China.

Dr Julia Lovell, in an extensive introduction to the English translation, reflects that *The Fat Years* describes a China that 'to a degree, already exists'. To Chan, the Party is 'the elephant in the room of contemporary China ... the country's like a Rubik's cube — enormously complex but with one organizing principle: the Party'. Chan's Orwellian framework reminds the reader of the power and exclusivity of the Chinese Party elite, dramatically documented in Richard McGregor's *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers*, shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Non-Fiction Literary Award in 2011.

The Huxleyian element is exemplified in the collective amnesia of the 'happy' 2013 Chinese population, who have no memory of 28 days in 2011 when 'uprisings, lootings, food shortages, martial law, vaccinations' took place, and nobody remembered any of this. Everyone has forgotten, except a small group who come to gravitate around the central character, Old Chen, a writer, who is jolted out of his comfortable life in Beijing's Happiness Village Number Two, when he is told by two friends, Fang Caodi and Xiao Xi, of the missing historical period.

History has been rewritten in the official record. Orwell famously once wrote, 'Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past'; and that is crucial to the plot and message of *The Fat Years*. Chan says, 'We're still talking about the Opium War, but we forget about the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution.' And Tiananmen Square becomes simply a location, not a seminal event.

Yan Lianke's *Dream of Ding Village* has similarly fictionalised the cover-up of the blood-selling scandal and subsequent AIDS epidemic of the mid 1990s, Julia Lovell notes. Chan confronts 'the marriage of mass acquiescence' and 'political intimidation' that exists in China. *The Fat Years*' political commentary is enshrined, for most of the novel, in a mystery cum SF framework, but the implied criticism of China's use of the death penalty, the crackdown on dissidents, police surveillance, and internet censorship is ever present.

Members of Chen's diverse small group collect information, but in the end drastic steps need to be taken. They kidnap He Dongsheng, a senior government official, to try to extract the truth from him. What they get, however, is a very long, confident, almost lecture, from the Politburo member, on how 'we totally rewrote the history of those twenty-eight days', concluding that 'the people fear chaos more than dictatorship'.

Chan has said, 'I am trying to create a scenario that is a logical extension of the present system; it's one step ahead. If the present system does not change it may end up looking like this. It's not all positive.' Chan reflects, 'China today is filled with intellectuals, and they have mentally adjusted themselves to stand on the side of the government, and not on the side against the government ... Everyone knows about the sorrows and troubles of the society, but as long as the system absorbs me, I might as well accept your correction and your control.'

Chan, like Yan Lianke, is clearly frustrated by the younger 'me' generation of Chinese, exemplified in the book by Xiao Xi's son, Wei Guo, a law student and ambitious party member. Chan says, 'I'm afraid of Xiao Xi's son, the elite university student, or rather, the one

who considers himself an elite. He is a rat and an opportunist, all in the name of "national fate".'

The ambiguous ending of *The Fat Years* lets the reader decide Xiao Xi's central question about contemporary China, 'Between a good hell and a fake paradise — which one would you choose?' This may be just as well for Chan, given the increasing global impact of his novel in English. He says of criticising the Chinese state, 'It is like playing with a cat. You never know when its claws will come out.'

SWEDISH FANTASY

Little Star
by John Ajvide Lindqvist
(Text; 533 pp.; $32.95)

John Ajvide Lindqvist is the Scandinavian star of horror fiction. His novel *Let the Right One In* was published in eleven countries and adapted into two feature films, one in Swedish and one in English. His next two novels, *Handling the Undead* and *Harbour*, received critical acclaim. ***Little Star*** is his darkest and most horrific novel to date.

An abandoned baby is discovered barely alive in the woods by a washed-up pop singer Lennart. He decides to keep her, calls her Theres, and, with the reluctant agreement of his wife, brings her up in a locked basement in case the authorities find out. Theres's perfect musical pitch encourages Lennart to groom a musical genius but Theres, isolated in childhood, slowly becomes more and more disturbed. Eventually, when able to use the tools in the basement, Theres takes the opportunity to kill and dismember Lennart and his wife.

Her older adopted brother Jerry blackmails her, however, into entering a Swedish X Factor competition, where she becomes a pop culture phenomenon. *Little Star* has much to say on idolisation and its influence on the naïve and unsuspecting. Lindqvist may also be reflecting on the blind devotion of terrorism, where violence is seen as the only answer to a problem.

Theres befriends another damaged girl, Teresa, and they provide a rallying point for other 'lost' girls, who become 'The Wolves of Skansen', intent on violence to undo their collective angst. *Little Star* reaches a horrific climax at a music concert. Shades here of Stephen King's *Carrie*, with both the apocalyptic conclusion and the depiction of the backgrounds that lead to the transformation of the girls into 'wolves'. *Little Star* will not be to everyone's taste, but in the literary horror field, Lindqvist certainly hits all the right notes.

AUSTRALIAN FANTASY

Sea Hearts
by Margo Lanagan
(Allen & Unwin; 343 pp.; $19.99)

Margo Lanagan is one of Australia's most gifted writers, but because she is often categorised as writing 'young adult fantasy', her work has often been overlooked by mainstream readers. ***Sea Hearts*** sees her writing at the top of her powers, a fact which has been recognised by the Adelaide Festival dedicating the 2012 Writers' Week to her, an honour previously awarded to writers such as Judith Wright, A. D. Hope, Jessica Anderson, and Thomas Shapcott.

Sea Hearts, which is being published under the alternative, but less satisfactory, title, *The Brides of Rollrock Island*, in the UK and the US, spins off the Scottish selkie legends. Lanagan describes *Sea Hearts* as 'A heart wrenching story about selkie women ... all soaked in tears and sea-water', which had its origins when Lanagan 'bought some knitting-wool that had a very sea-weedy quality to it, colour-wise and texture-wise ... I started to wonder, if a person were to start knitting up sea-weed, why would they be doing so? And then I had the idea of a witch knitting up sea-weed blankets to throw over selkie-women to relieve their desperate need to return to the sea.;

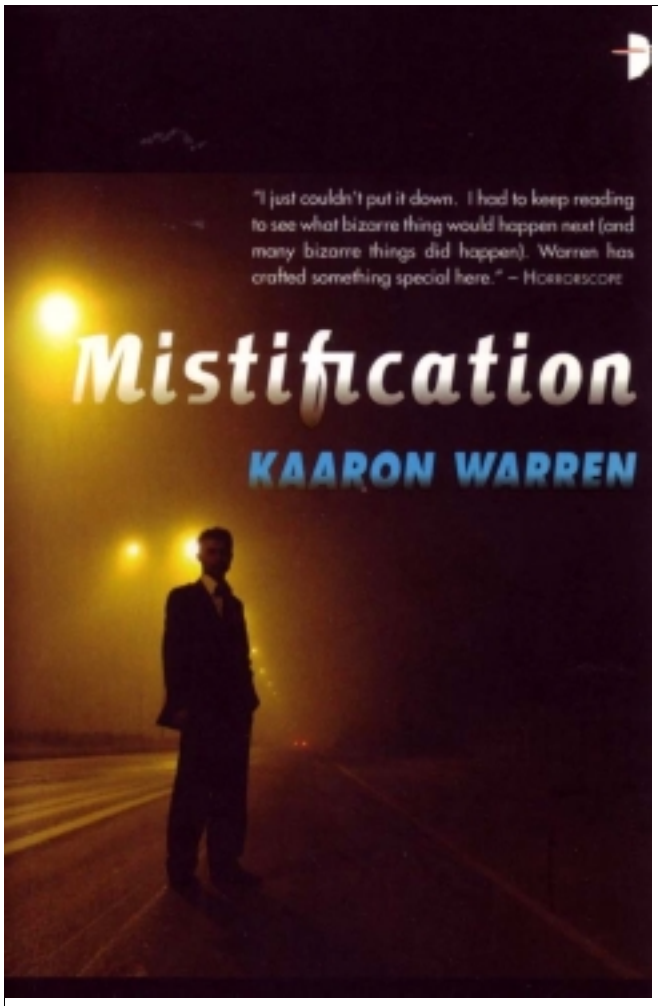
Sea Hearts, expanded from a 2009 award-winning novella, tells the story through a three-generational, multiple-viewpoint narrative. The central character is the 'sea-witch' Misskaella, who can draw a woman from the heart of a seal to capture in turn the hearts of the men on the remote, sea-battered Rollrock Island. Lanagan writes, 'Any man seeing this maiden's lips would want to lay kisses on them; he would want to roll in the cushions of those lips, swim the depths of those eyes, run his hands down the long foreign lengths of this girl. Oh, I thought, women of Rollrock, you are nothing now.'

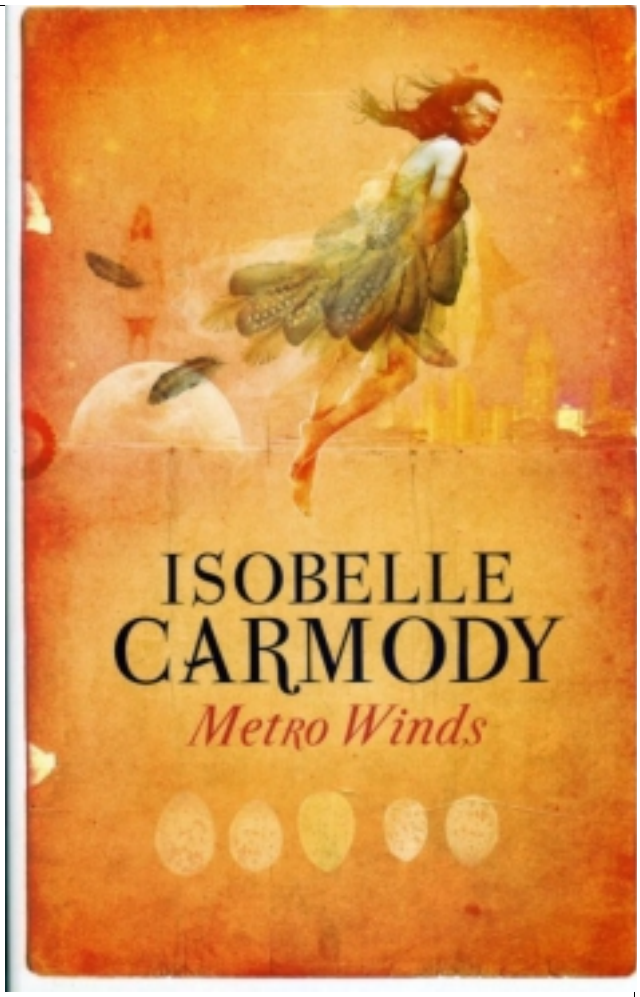
The men abandon their wives, or reject their girlfriends, for their new seductive 'sea-wives', who themselves are trapped, their sealskins having been taken from them. The stange unions mean that only male children are born, girls born to the selkie don't survive. The selkie themselves are victims, but the reader is only given a few glimpses of their personal feelings. Misskaella, whose actions are responsible for the torment on Rollrock, is not a totally black figure, as Lanagan sketches in Misskaella's sad and persecuted childhood, which partially explains how magic can turn in on itself.

Overall, Lanagan weaves a story of family, especially of relationships when love occurs that defies reason. *Sea Hearts*, hauntingly and darkly atmospheric, is a beautifully moving story in which the emotions of desire and revenge ebb and flow like the sea the reader can almost smell through Lanagan's words.

Mistification
by Kaaron Warren
(Angry Robot; 444 pp.; $15.99)

Canberra author Kaaron Warren's latest novel, ***Mistification***, is a powerful dark fantasy told in her trademark elliptical style. A young boy, Marvo, spends four years hiding from the military in a small attic room. Knowledge comes from scavenged books and then, when he is finally able to emerge, he learns from people, 'seeking stories like they were drugs'. Marvo slowly realises he is a 'magician' with life-and-death powers that could be used for good or evil. A religious metaphor comes with Marvo's ultimate sacrifice for humanity. Warren, as ever, is a thoughtful and challenging novelist with the stories





within the story intriguingly link, like a moebius strip.

Metro Winds
by Isobelle Carmody
(Allen & Unwin; 389 pp.; $24.99)

Isobelle Carmody, one of Australia's best literary fantasy writers, is in top form with her six short stories in ***Metro Winds***. Carmody originally intended to 'write a set of four stories about the four archetypal ages of women — Child, Princess, Queen, Crone ... but Crone would not come — maybe because I am not quite there yet'. The stories, whose settings include Prague and Paris, cover journeys and personal transformation. In the title story, a young girl crosses the world to find her true self in the 'lost' tunnels of the Metro, while 'The Man Who Lost His Shadow' has Prague as a backdrop to a moving exploration of loneliness and self-discovery.

Vanishing Act
by Mette Jakobsen
(Text; 222 pp.; $23.95)

Vanishing Act, the debut novel from Danish-born, Australia-based author Mette Jakobsen, is an impressive haunting fable. A twelve-year-old girl, Minou, lives on a wind-ravaged 'tiny island in the middle of nowhere', with her pedantic, philosophy-obsessed father, Priest, an eccentric cleric, and Boxman, a former circus magician, and dog No Name. When a dead boy's body is washed up on the beach, it provides the catalyst for Minou's exploration of her mother's mysterious disappearance a year earlier. *Vanishing Act*'s surreal dreamlike quality is juxtaposed with Minou's struggles to understand the realities of an adult world. As in Kaaron Warren's *Mistification*, love is the key in final resolution.

The Hall of Lost Footsteps
by Sara Douglass
(Ticonderoga; 232 pp.; $25)
Matilda Told Such Dreadful Lies: The Essential Lucy Sussex
(Ticonderoga; 514 pp.; $35)

Sara Douglass, who died in September after a long battle with ovarian cancer, was one of Australia's best-known fantasy writers. She twice won the Aurelius Award for Best Fantasy Novel, and her book *BattleAxe* sold nearly one million copies in Australia alone. HarperCollins Voyager publisher Stephanie Smith has said, 'Sara was one of the leading lights in taking Australian fantasy writing to the world.'

The Hall of Lost Footsteps, which collects her short stories, was seen by Douglass in proof, although she was too weak to re-read the text. Devotees of Douglass's 'The Axis Trilogy' will find six short stories relating to that world. Karen Brooks, Douglass's friend and carer in her last days, provides a biographical and literary back-

ground to Douglass's 15 stories, which cover ' love, birth, death, illness, relics, saints, superstition, magic, revenge, honour, the role of religion and faith in everyday life and fallen and falling women'.

Many of the stories reflect Douglass's doctorate in medieval history, This expertise informed the dark fantasy realms of her novels, and made them credible, if somewhat grim, worlds. Douglass has never been afraid to portray the brutality of medieval life and gruesome deaths in her stories.

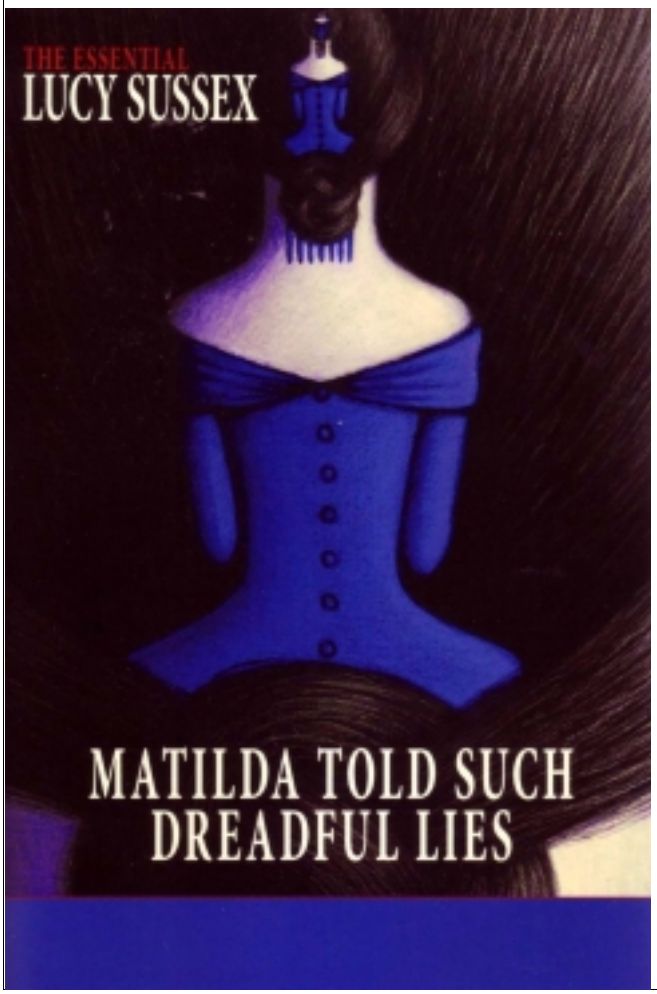
Humour, however, comes in 'Of Fingers and Foreskins', in which a jousting duel to the death takes an impish twist. Much darker is 'The Mistress of Marwood Hagg', in which a grieving nobleman's widow takes dramatic revenge by literally muddying pregnancy waters. Since *The Hall of Lost Footsteps* is Douglass's last book, it is appropriate that it ends with 'The Silence of the Dying', in which Douglass emphatically and movingly rejects the Victorian ideal of a stoic death.

Matilda Told Such Dreadful Lies: The Essential Lucy Sussex brings together 25 of the best stories from Melbourne-based writer and critic Lucy Sussex. Sussex's stories deliberately cross genres, which has perhaps prevented her from receiving a wider appreciation outside of the fantasy and SF fields. Sussex says she views her stories as 'feminist, playful, po-mo (but never po-faced), using realism and non-realism in a way that was yesterday called slipstream, today interstitial. Two blokes said my stories were too clever — since when is a woman too clever, I ask?'

Stories include 'Matilda Told Such Dreadful Lies', an ebullient re-telling of 'Waltzing Matilda' through the eyes of a bunyip. Delia Sherman, in her Introduction, writes that Sussex 'deconstructs the familiar narrative of swagmen, jumbuck, and billabong ... a fine send-up of colonial cultural myopia and self-importance'. In 'Kay and Phil', Philip K. Dick and Katherine Burdekin, in a story reflecting feminist and racial issues, astrally debate their novels of a Nazi Germany victory.

Sussex often shakes the fault lines between past and present. Thus 'Duchess', which encapsulates Sussex's dry humour and her love of the 'fashionista', sees a fashion journalist wondering whether a woman is a reincarnation of the feminist pioneer Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623–73). In 'Frozen Charlottes', a couple renovating an old house find dozens of nineteenth-century porcelain dolls and memories of a woman who disposed of unwanted babies. Issues of fertility and death and the historical cheapness of life are subtly juxtaposed.

'Absolute Uncertainty' also plays with time, as a class with an 'interactive template' is able to study the moral dilemmas of Karl Werner Heisenberg, of Uncertainty Principle fame and Nazi atomic bomb research. As in 'Kay and Phil', Sussex probes the actions of people in the



past while noting the difficulties of omniscient moral judgments from the present.

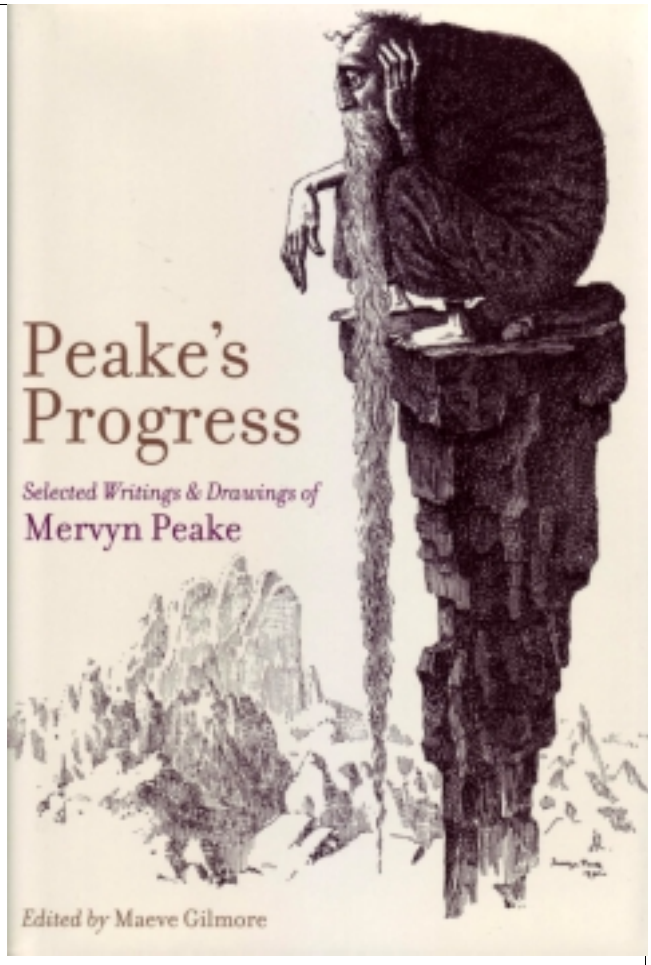
Matilda Told Such Dreadful Lies is another well produced book by Western Australian small press publisher Ticonderoga, which, like Lucy Sussex, deserves to be better known among the general reading public.

The Wicked Wood
gathered by Isobelle Carmody and Nan McNab
(Allen & Unwin; 349 pp.; $27.99)

The six reworked fairy stories in ***The Wicked Wood***, 'gathered' by Isobelle Carmody and Nan McNab, contain much that is darkly resonate. It's good to come across a new Victor Kelleher story. 'Birthing' is set in an Amish-type society that houses, but barely tolerates, a fringe community of apparent tinkers and horse traders. The main character, a midwife, slowly learns the secrets behind the strained relationship of the two communities, including strange pregnancies. Secrets, however, do come at a price.

McNab's 'Glutted' is based on the Czech story 'Otesanek'. A lonely farm widow allows a talented, but selfish and uncaring artist, to invade her life, her finances and ultimately her body. McNab says that this tale of 'greed and self-indulgence' could easily be seen as 'a parable for the era of rampant consumption'.

The Wicked Wood brings together accomplished storytelling in which not everything can be ultimately explained or rationalised.



BRITISH FANTASY

The Illustrated Gormenghast Trilogy
by Mervyn Peake
(Vintage; 943 pp.; $49.95)
Titus Awakes: The Lost Book of Gormenghast
by Maeve Gilmore
(Vintage; 265 pp.; $24.95)
Peake's Progress
edited by Maeve Gilmore
(British Library; 576 pp.; $49.95)
Peake's Progress
by Mervyn Peake; read by Sebastian Peake and Fabian Peake
(British Library CD; $29.95)

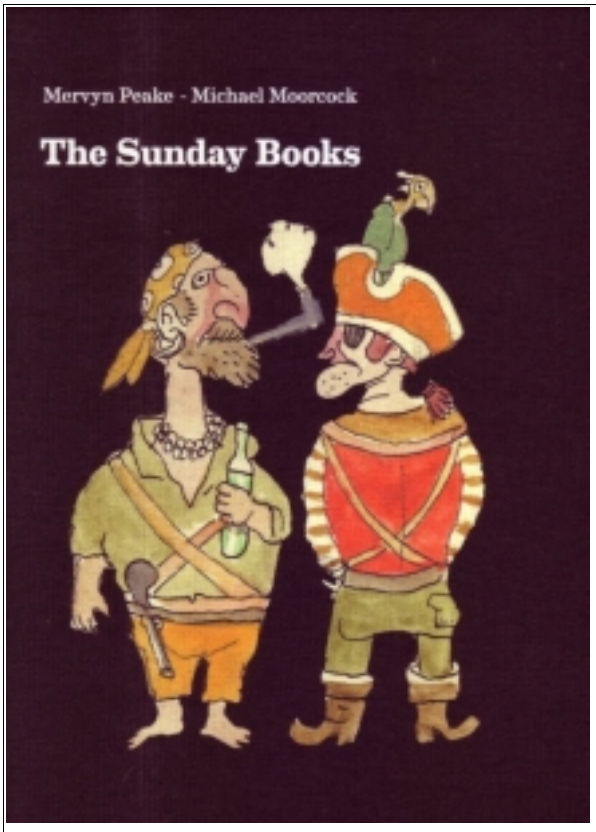
2011 was the centenary of Mervyn Peake's birth. Peake, a painter, illustrator, poet, novelist, and playwright, who died in 1968, is now perhaps best known for the 'Gormenghast' trilogy, a surreal imaginative masterpiece juxtaposing dark humour with tragedy. Peake's centenary has been celebrated with a number of books, an exhibition at the British Library, and many events documented at http://mervynpeake.blogspot.com.

China Mieville, in his introduction to ***The Illustrated Gormenghast Trilogy***, an omnibus hardback edition, enhanced with one hundred of Peake's mostly unpublished drawings, observes that the trilogy 'evades classification'. Peake's contraction of Parkinson's disease meant that his intention for a longer series than *Titus Groan* (1940), *Gormenghast* (1950), and *Titus Alone* (1959) was unfulfilled.

Gormenghast is an isolated labyrinthian castle cum city-state, whose formal rituals no longer have seeming purpose. Its physical landscape owes much to Peake's childhood environment in China. Many readers will have their Gormenghast images from the critically acclaimed BBC series, made in 2000 from the first two books, with a young Jonathan Rhys Meyers as Steerpike, the anti-hero, scheming against the Groan family in general and, ultimately , the young heir Titus. In *Titus Alone*, in which Peake's writing was affected by illness, Titus leaves Gormenghast and enters the 'real' world.

Titus Awakes is somewhat misleadingly subtitled ***The Lost Book of Gormenghast***. In 1970, Peake's widow, the artist Maeve Gilmore (1917–1983), took a two-page Peake draft and expanded it into a novel. Gilmore made no attempt to publish her manuscript, and it remained unknown until recently, when it was unearthed by her grandson Christian in a cardboard box in the attic of her London home.

Titus Awakes is not a 'lost book'; rather, it is Gilmore's homage to her husband in an episodic series of Titus vignettes recalling actual events in Peake's life, such as in a mental hospital. In the final chapter Titus sails off to an island, based on Sark in the Channel Islands where the Peake family once lived. Sebastian Peake, Mervyn's son, says, 'It was where the family was at its happiest ... Titus metamorphoses into Mervyn Peake and comes home to where he wants to be.' Brian Sibley, in his



introduction to *Titus Awakes*, writes, 'What makes this coda so poignant is the realisation that home is not the crumbling, time-eaten towers and turrets of Gormenghast castle, but the mind and heart of the man who built it in his imagination.'

Peake's imagination for the trilogy came from various sources, according to his children. For Fabian, it 'refers a lot to the rise of fascism in Europe'; daughter Clare thinks it is 'China, watching the hierarchical world he grew up in', while for Sebastian, it was his father's traumatic experience as a war artist at the Nazi Belsen concentration camp. Sebastian believes that his father's meeting with convicted Nazi war criminal Peter Back 'just a few hours before Back was hanged certainly influenced aspects of Steerpike ... I believe now that the Holocaust was my father's "heart of darkness".'

The British Library's ***Peake's Progress: Selected Writings and Drawings of Mervyn Peake*** is a sumptuous hardback. Edited by Maeve Gilmore, with a preface by Sebastian, the selections cover every period of Peake's work as a writer and artist. 'The House of Darkstones' is a 1938–40 'prologue' to the Titus books, while the 1956 novella 'Boy in Darkness' is a dark allegorical story that begins when Titus runs away on his fourteenth birthday.

Other selections include two plays, *The Wit to Woo* and *Noah's Ark*; a broadcast version of *Mr Pye*; and a number of Peake's short stories, poems, and nonsense verses as well as his drawings. *Peake's Progress* is supplemented by a separate audio CD of stories and poems read by Sebastian and Fabian.

Sebastian concludes that Gormenghast is 'totally and utterly timeless ... All roads lead back to Gormenghast. We cannot escape death, or ourselves. But the beauty of Maeve's book, and of the Titus series, is that this message is not wholly melancholic. Once we have accepted these things, acknowledged and overcome the darkness, who knows what dreams may come?' The centenary volumes provide a fitting tribute to Peake's literary reputation which continues to grow.

The Sunday Books
by Mervyn Peake and Michael Moorcock
(Duckworth; 138 pp.; $35)

Michael Moorcock is, like Brian Aldiss, something of an outsider in the British literary establishment, as was Mervyn Peake (1911–1968). Moorcock says, 'Everything [Peake] produced in his lifetime has been reprinted many times over, apart from the "Sunday books" ... It has been my ambition for some years to put at least some of these drawings before the public and give perhaps a taste of the narratives and verses with which he might have embellished them.'

The Sunday Books has its origins in Peake's habit of drawing for his children every Sunday, when they lived on the Isle of Sark in the late 1940s, a period that Moorcock says was among the Peake family's happiest times. Moorcock writes, in his elegiac introduction, that 'There was little cinema on Sark, no television', so 'The boys would sit on the arms of his chair, watching as he called on his own boyhood memories and enthusiasms ... to draw pirates, cowboys, weird monsters and weirder characters of the sort who would later appear in his own nonsense books.'

The Sunday Books faithfully reproduces the original colour drawings of clowns, trains, outlaws, jungle animals, ships, and planes, to which Moorcock adds texts and verses. *The Sunday Books* is a delightful compendium, which should entrance both adults and children alike, although noting that Peake's portrayals of American Indians and African natives are somewhat politically incorrect by today's standards.

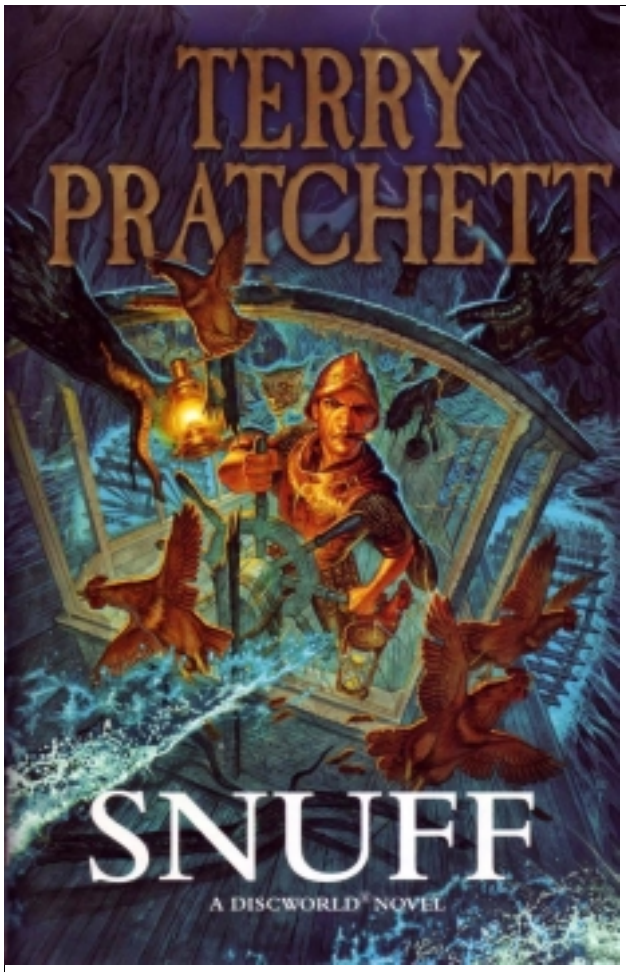
Snuff
by Terry Pratchett
(Doubleday; 378 pp.; $45)
Eric
by Terry Pratchett
(Gollancz; 155 pp.; $20)

Snuff is Terry Pratchett's thirty-ninth Discworld novel, which means that, with worldwide sales of his books now totalling over 70 million copies, most people will know what to expect. 2011 is also the fortieth anniversary of Pratchett's first novel, *The Carpet People*.

Pratchett is now a much more public figure as a result of his struggle with a rare form of Alzheimer's disease and his belief in planned death.

Snuff features one of Pratchett's well-known characters, Commander Sam Vimes of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch. Vimes has been forced by his wife Lady Sybil to take a two-week break with their six-year-old son Sam at their country manorial estate. For Vimes, this is the equivalent of hell, 'Two weeks holiday with every meal overseen by his wife. It didn't bear thinking about.'

The country setting allows Pratchett to evoke bygone British rural stereotypes, from the Lord of the Manor to



surly yokels in the archetypal village pub. Pratchett even throws in the six unmarried daughters of Sybil's friend Ariadne, all waiting for a young gentleman. Vimes's response to the statement that a gentleman is 'a man who does not have to sully his hands by working' is 'Oh a layabout'.

Needless to say, one of the bonneted daughters is called Jane, who by the end of *Snuff*, has written *Pride and Extreme Prejudice*.

It's all a bit obvious. *Snuff* is not one of Pratchett's more complicated novels. Chinese restaurants feature Bang Suck Duck and young Sam's favourite book is *The Boy who Didn't Know How to Pick His Own Scabs*. The riverboat is called *The Lady Fanny*, while even the lone Feegle, Wee Mad Arthur, is somewhat out of character, enjoying 'the occasional visit to the ballet'.

Pratchett's strength comes in his evocation of the local goblin community, which to date has only had limited attention among Pratchett's non-human communities, which include vampires, werewolves, trolls, and dwarfs. A brutal murder throws suspicion not only on Vimes, but also on the whole goblin community, whose habits are generally repugnant, specifically their practice of Unggue. Unggue is based on the belief that bodily secretions and waste, such as snot, nail clippings, and ear wax, should be stored for eternal life.

Vimes, a copper to the core, vigorously takes on rural corruption, drug-running trolls, and a psychopathic killer, while defending the rights of goblins to be treated as the same as the other Discworld communities. The plight of the goblin community allows Pratchett to reflect on the history of genocide and slavery. Pratchett's books have always reflected wider concerns, although in this instance the societal brush is fairly broadly applied. Snuff is a rollicking Discworld adventure, but don't expect too many subtleties.

British publisher Gollancz is celebrating fifty years of publishing with a 'top ten' classic yellow SF hardbacks. ***Eric***, first published in 1990, is now reissued with a new introduction by Adam Roberts. Pratchett fans will appreciate this first hardback edition and, in Pratchett's version of the Faust legend, selling your soul to the devil can be funny as well as tragic. Fourteen-year-old Eric's three wishes, 'To become the ruler of the world, to meet the world's most beautiful woman and to live forever' go hilariously awry as he summons instead Discworld's Rincewind, 'the most incompetent wizard in the universe'.

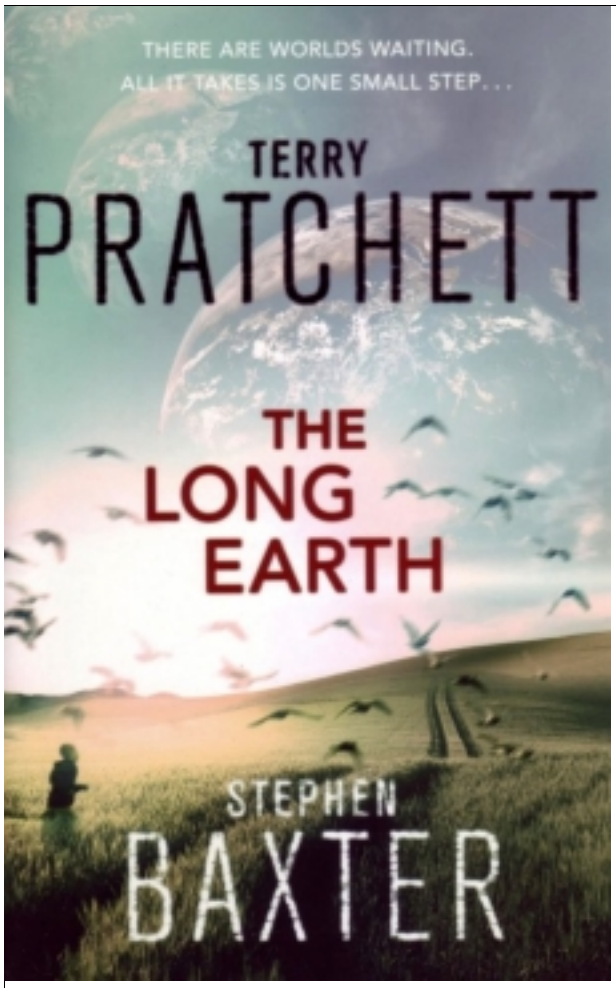
The Long Earth
by Terry Pratchett and Stephen Baxter
(Doubleday; 344 pp.; $32.95)
Half-Sick of Shadows
by David Logan
(Doubleday; 301 pp.; $32.95)
Apocalypse Cow
by Michael Logan
(Doubleday; 351 pp.; $32.95)
The World of Poo
by Terry Pratchett
(Doubleday; 118 pp.; $29.95)

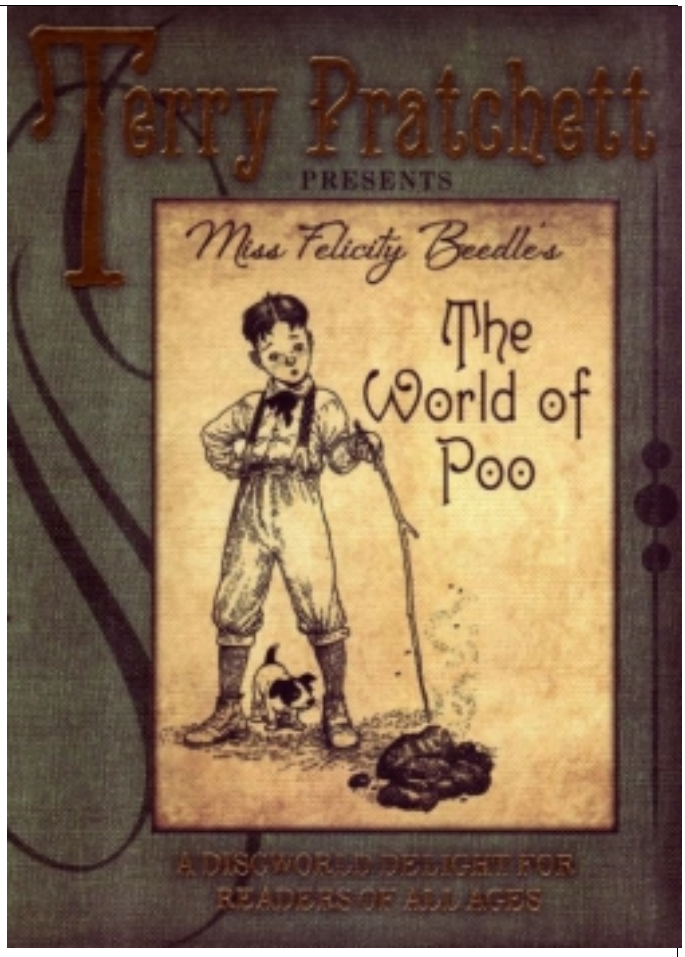
The Terry Pratchett phenomenon continues. Pratchett combines with British SF author Stephen Baxter in ***The Long Earth***, the beginning of a trilogy. David and Michael Logan, who are not related, are the joint winners of the inaugural 2011 Pratchett 'Anywhere But Here, Anywhere But Now' Prize. ***The World of Poo*** is a young adult spinoff from Pratchett's famous Discworld series.

Pratchett first came up with the idea of the Long Earth multiverse in the early 1980s, but set it aside as the Discworld books became increasingly popular. Pratchett says that the Long Earth concept 'Centres around a premise that's simple enough, albeit in a quantum-y kind of a way: what if our Earth was one of a chain of Earths, each existing in parallel universes, which stretched out either side of our world in a seemingly endless string of planets'.

Baxter provides the quantum science, but surely Pratchett is the inspiration for the mode of parallel transport, a 'stepper box' powered by a potato and some basic electronics. Their main character, Joshua Valienté, an orphan from Madison, Wisconsin, doesn't need the potato-powered device as he is a 'natural stepper'. Joshua is persuaded to explore the extremities of the 'Long Earth' worlds by Lobsang, a favourite Pratchett name, who, put simply, is a Tibetan hybrid artificial intelligence.

Baxter says of the parallel worlds, 'It's a bit like the dream of the old west, the endless frontier, because the other worlds are like ours but without humans.' Settlements on the alternate earths are rural and low-tech.





Steppers, for instance, can't carry iron with them. A clean fictional slate allows such questions as: 'What if we had unlimited natural resources?', 'Is crime and violence a result of overpopulation and poverty?' and 'Why are humans only found on the original earth, now called Datum?'

Joshua and Lobsang find other sentient creatures as they explore Long Earth, especially the mysterious entity 'First Person Singular'. There are homages here to Arthur C. Clarke. Joshua and Lobsang's travels recall Philip José Farmer's *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* in the use of alternate settings for explorations both physical and philosophical, although the Pratchett Baxter tone is less technicolor and more utopian than Farmer's. Their dramatic open-ended conclusion brings the main characters back to Earth in more ways than one and foreshadows future books.

The £20,000 Pratchett Prize for previously unpublished novelists sought 'Stories set on Earth, although it may be an Earth that might have been, or might yet be, one that has gone down a different leg of the famous trousers of time'. More than 500 writers submitted entries, with Michael Logan and David Logan chosen as the joint winners.

Half-Sick of Shadows takes its title from a line in Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott'. Edward and his twin Sophia, both 'a fraction short of five', live in an isolated and rundown rural Irish manse with a cemetery at the back. Their relatively happy life, albeit in desperate poverty, is poignantly imagined.

After her grandmother is buried, Sophia is told by her father, 'Never ever desert your mother, daughter. Never ever leave your home.' Sophia subsequently applies this edict literally, as, in Tennyson's words, she 'knows not what the curse may be'. The seeds of family destruction lie here. Logan says of his novel, 'At its simplest, it's about a girl who brings tragedy upon herself.'

Edward is packed off to boarding school where he encounters a mysterious boy, Alf, who may be a time traveller. Here the novel begins to lose focus, as time travel and the supernatural are juxtaposed on a dysfunctional family in which incest, rape, and murder occur. Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* comes to mind here, but Logan lacks Banks's gothic intensity.

Logan states he wanted to 'write the sort of book I'd enjoy reading: think Herman Munster, The Addams Family and a bit of Family Guy mixed with quantum physics and a cameo from Jean Paul Sartre'. Logan can clearly write, but perhaps the Pratchett prize guidelines caused him to subvert a traditional strong plotline by multidimensional and surreal ambiguities. *Half-Sick of Shadows* would have benefited from thematic culling.

Michael Logan's ***Apocalypse Cow*** is an 'udder' story completely! Lesley McBrien, a failed journalist on a local Scottish newspaper, inadvertently gets the scoop on a viral outbreak from a secret government laboratory. Sex-crazed zombie killer cows are unleashed on an unsuspecting British population. Logan's main characters

combine to evade the ruthless authorities and escape a quarantined Britain to inform the world. If you can accept that scenario, this darkly humorous, over-the-top bovine story will appeal. It's all a bit like *Shaun of the Dead* meets Tom Sharpe, with blood not cud to the fore.

Terry Pratchett Presents Miss Felicity Beedle's The World of Poo is the full title of a Victorian guidebook pastiche by Pratchett. Miss Felicity Beedle, Discworld's premier children's author, writes a cautionary introduction, while the back cover lists her other books, such as *The War With The Snot Goblins*, *The Joy of Earwax*, and *Melvin and the Enormous Boil*. *The World of Poo* derives from young Sam Vimes's interest in poo in Pratchett's last novel *Snuff*.

A young boy, Geoffrey, is sent to live with his grandmother in Ankh-Morpork as his mother is due to give birth. After a bird drops poo on his head, Geoffrey decides to collect as many kinds of bird and animal poo as he can, which results in trips to the Dragon Sanctuary and the Patrician's Menagerie. The latter visit enables the collection of kangaroo poo from the country of 'Fourecks'. Deposits end up in Geoffrey's poo museum aka garden shed. Pratchett's imagination and footnotes run wild, with real factual details interspersed with those of dragons and gargoyles. The extensive line drawings by Peter Dennis add to the appeal of the whole.

Pratchett clearly intends to write as long as he possibly can, despite being diagnosed with a rare form of Alzheimer's disease. *Dodger*, inspired by Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, will be out later this year, followed by *A Blink of the Screen*, a collection of short stories covering his writing from schooldays to Discworld. Pratchett concluded a recent interview, 'My wife and my PA have been told that when they find me slumped in front of my computer, the first thing to do would be to save the work in progress.'

The Night Circus
by Erin Morgenstern
(Harvill Secker; 387 pp.; $32.95)

Erin Morgenstern's debut novel, ***The Night Circus***, comes with much pre-publicity, a glowing cover recommendation by Audrey Niffenegger, and a film rights sale. *The Night Circus* is a magical fantasy with echoes of novels by Ray Bradbury and Susanna Clarke. While Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* also comes to mind, Morgenstern's narrative, while ingenious, never reaches the dark ambiguous heights of Carter.

Morgenstern says that her two main influences for *The Night Circus* were 'the topsy-turvy world' of *Alice in Wonderland* and the productions of the innovative London theatre company Punchdrunk. Morgenstern says, 'there are a few homages' to Punchdrunk through the idea of 'immersive entertainment'.

The Night Circus begins with the mysterious arrival in a field in 1876 of the Le Cirque des Rêves or Circus of Dreams. A sign advises that it 'Opens at Nightfall, Closes at Dawn.' Morgenstern's circus descriptions are colourful and exotic, with the mysterious circus tents including an ice garden, a desert, and a cloud labyrinth.

The two main characters, a young girl Celia and an orphan Marco, have been chosen by two unyielding immortal 'puppet-masters' to be the latest contenders in a magical battle that history shows only one can survive. Initially the two young children, as they hone their magical skills, don't even know who they are competing against. The circus over the years becomes not only their stage but also their creation, with circus audiences from London to Sydney unaware of their place in the game.

Marco and Celia fall in love, but the contest and their masters do not recognise love. Which one will die to save the other, or can they manipulate their destiny? That tension, however, is curiously muted, perhaps because Morgenstern's strength lies in visual description and scene setting rather than characterisation and narrative pace.

The Night Circus contrasts competition and collusion and fate and freedom in vibrant vignettes, but ultimately, while much fictional 'entertainment' is provided by Morgenstern, a final 'immersive' passion is lacking.

The Song of the Quarkbeast
by Jasper Fforde
(Hodder; 290 pp.; $22.99)

The Song of the Quarkbeast is the second volume in Fforde's 'Last Dragonslayer' comic fantasy trilogy. Fforde's zany plot, humorous allusions, and his empathetic main character, Jennifer Strange, ensures that the narrative is constantly engaging. Jennifer is the sixteen-year-old acting manager of Kazam, an employment agency for magicians, forced by hard times to predict the weather and deliver pizzas via magic carpet. King Snodd IV of Hereford pits Kazam, in a winner-take-all contest, against Industrial Magic, run by the dastardly head magician, Conrad Blix. Jennifer, her faithful assistant 'Tiger' Prawns, and her eccentric magicians, must battle not only Blix, but also the King, if they are to win the magical day.

The Woman Who Died a Lot
by Jasper Fforde
(Hodder; 384 pp.; $29.99)

Jasper Fforde's writing is always an eclectic mix of genre, notably humour, SF, and crime. His first novel, *The Eyre Affair* (2001), featuring his 'literary detective' Thursday Next, was an immediate bestseller. Of his ten subsequent novels, six have been in the 'Thursday Next' series. The latest instalment, ***The Woman Who Died A Lot***, is dedicated to 'All the librarians that have ever been [and] ever will be'. This will undoubtedly ensure even more library purchases.

Thursday is recovering from a near fatal assassination attempt. She now walks with a stick, has limited mobility in her left arm, and often suffers from double vision. She returns to Fforde's favourite town, Swindon, as Chief Librarian. But this is no conventional library. In Thursday's world, librarians are much feared and paid more than doctors and lawyers.

The Library special operatives recently shot dead a book thief, but since it was within the library boundaries it was 'justifiable lethal force'. Thursday is also expected 'to review the rules regarding spine bending and turning over the corner of the pages', which 'open the floodgates

to poor reading etiquette and a downward spiral to the collapse of civilisation'.

Thursday, apart from her physical problems, keeps finding she's not herself, being replaced by simulacra produced by the dastardly Goliath Corporation. It takes all the skills of Thursday's husband Landen to identify and destroy the increasingly sophisticated androids. And when she is herself, her nonexistent daughter, Jenny, is still with her as an implanted mindworm and needs to be purged.

With the Time Chronoguards disbanded, Thursday's son Friday learns his future, as a sort of redundancy package, and that he will kill someone within a week. Tuesday, Thursday's teenage daughter, meanwhile, races against time to prevent a deity 'smiting' Swindon into oblivion. Fforde's considerable worldwide fan base know what to expect, and will relish another outpouring of zany comic invention. Librarians everywhere will empathise and perhaps rejoice.

The Cold Commands
by Richard Morgan
(Gollancz; 407 pp.; $32.99)

Richard Morgan's ***The Cold Commands*** is another middle volume of a trilogy, following *The Steel Remains* (2009). This is a very dark fantasy journey involving, as Morgan says, 'thuggish back-alley violence in spades, dubious causes and alliances, lurid sex as a mainspring motivator, betrayals and trade-offs, corrupt social structures and endemic abuse of power, damaged anti-heroes and protagonist self-loathing to the hilt'. His three anti-heroes, Ringil, Egar, and Archeth, veterans of war, seek redemption in a novel that reflects the real world as much as the fantasy world in its depiction of violence and religious bigotry. *The Cold Commands* is sharp, gritty, and unafraid of offending conventional fantasy readers.

AMERICAN FANTASY

American Gods
by Neil Gaiman
(Headline; 658 pp.; $22.99)

Neil Gaiman's multi-award-winning fantasy novel ***American Gods*** first appeared in 2001, and now appears in a tenth anniversary edition that includes extra text, a new introduction, and an Epilogue of a long twitter feed with Gaiman in April. *American Gods*, which is scheduled for an extensive HBO television production, portrays the clash between the old-world gods and the 'new gods of credit card and freeway, of Internet and telephone' for the soul of America. Gaiman also imaginatively explores, in the ultimate fantasy Road book, the general 'immigrant experience, the experience of what it means to come to America'.

Vegas Knights
by Matt Forbeck
(Angry Robot; 381 pp.; $16.99)

Vegas Knights, publicised as 'Oceans Eleven Meets Harry Potter', certainly does not meet those literary and commercial aspirations. Nonetheless, taken at a lower hyperbolic level, *Vegas Knights* is certainly engaging, as two young American college students, tutored in mathematical magic, decide to take on the Las Vegas casinos. They are unaware, however, that their gambling success will unleash the dark underside of the casinos, which use the power of magic themselves. While the narrative pace does not allow in-depth characterisation, Forbeck creates some interesting characters, not least a back-from-the-dead Harry Houdini!

The Magician King
by Lev Grossman
(William Heinemann; 400 pp.; $32.95)

American author Lev Grossman's acclaimed literary fantasy novel *The Magicians* (2009) mixed the real and the imagined worlds. Grossman deliberately evokes the worlds of Rowling, Pullman, and Lewis in a novel with many clever allusions to the literature of fantasy and science fiction, involving him, he says, in a textual 'Stoppardian mud wrestle'. ***The Magician King*** sees the two main characters somewhat bored in the Kingdom of Fillory, but their return to Earth only foreshadows a more dangerous quest, which includes the future of magic itself. An inventive fantasy addition is Grossman's use of open source magic.

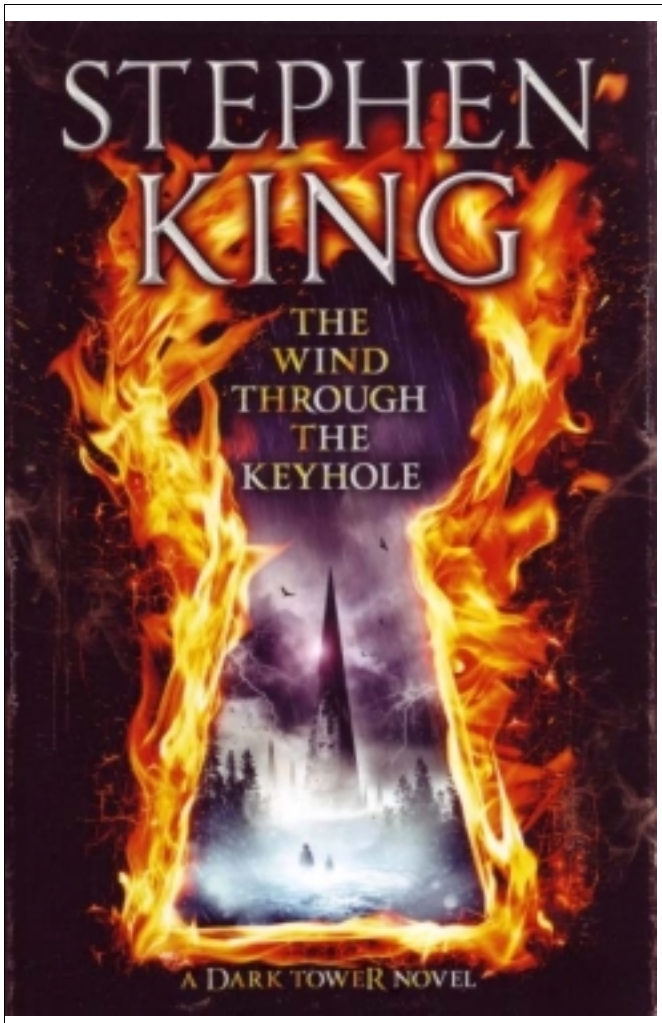
The Wind through the Keyhole
by Stephen King
(Hodder; 335 pp.; $32.95)

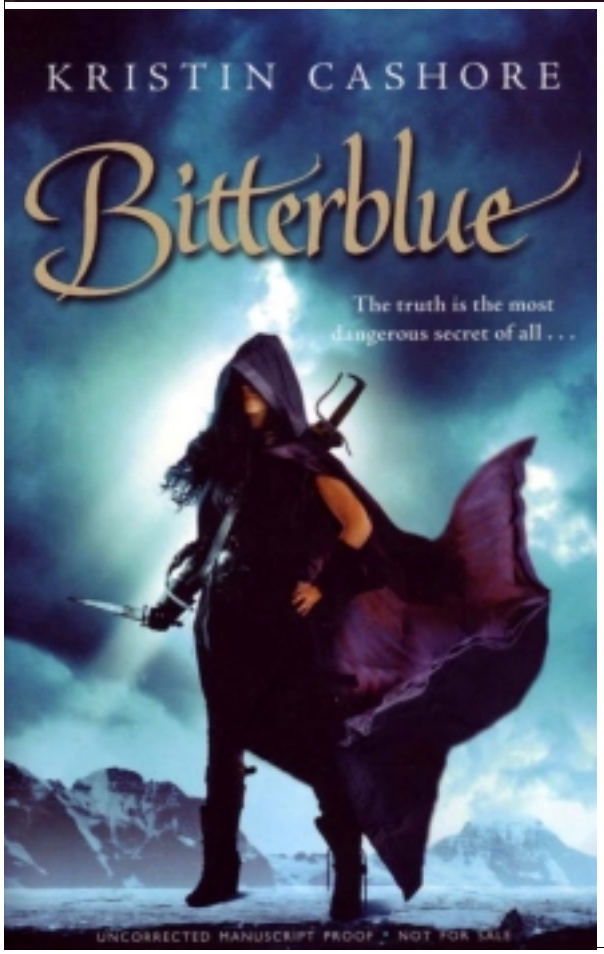
Stephen King's last book, *11.22.63*, a lengthy and absorbing quest to save President Kennedy from assassination through 'time as a keyhole', gained a wide circulation beyond even the huge King reader base. King's new novel, ***The Wind Through the Keyhole***, being set in the middle of King's massive 'Dark Tower' cycle, is unlikely to achieve the same result.

King clearly anticipated this problem, posing the question to readers in his Foreword, 'Can I read and enjoy this story if I haven't read the other Dark Tower books?' King believes they can, but that they need to 'keep a few things in mind' in relation to the background to this novel, which he calls, 'Dark Tower 4.5', set between *Wizard and Glass* (1997) and *Wolves of the Calla* (2003). The series was conceived when King was 22, spinning off Browning's poem 'Childe Roland' and Sergio Leone's spaghetti western *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

King's too brief series summary, and the dense opening to *The Wind Through the Keyhole*, lessens somewhat King's standalone reading claim. A completely new reader needs to appreciate that King has written nearly 4500 pages, in seven books, featuring Roland of Gilead, 'the last gunslinger'. King's gunslingers are a 'a strange combination of knights errant and territorial marshals', operating in the alternate 'Mid-World', a land, 'Very old, and falling to ruin, filled with monsters and untrustworthy magic'.

The Wind Through the Keyhole is a Russian-doll type of





book, with stories within stories. As Roland and his 'ka-tet' of four travelling companions take shelter from the 'starkblast', a vicious ice storm, Roland tells stories to pass the time. The first story, of novella length, leads to a second in which a young boy, who embarks on a dangerous quest to save his mother, confronts dragons, mutated 'mudmen', and a trapped tiger with unexpected links to Merlin aka 'Maerlyn'. King inserts numerous literary cross-references, ranging from the Grimms' fairy tales to Narnia to Arthurian legend.

At one stage, Roland says, 'A person's never too old for stories ... we live for them.' King can certainly tell stories, as *The Wind Through the Keyhole* amply demonstrates. It also reflects King's explorations of the individual under threat from unreasonable and evil forces. The consequent search for revenge and redemption includes acknowledging the burden of guilt and that ultimately forgiveness may be part of the process. 'I forgive', from Roland's mother, are thus the last two words of the book.

Bitterblue
by Kristin Cashore
(Gollancz; 549 pp.; $29.99)

Bitterblue completes Cashore's best-selling trilogy, comprising *Graceling* (2008) and *Fire* (2009). Both were named American Library Association 'Best Books for Young Adults'. Bitterblue is now the queen of Monsea, trying to remedy the traumatic legacy of her evil father, Leck, who ruled tyrannically for 35 years. Cashore says, 'Unlike Katsa [in *Graceling* and *Fire*], Bitterblue is just a regular person. She doesn't have any superpowers; she's only got her own courage, smarts, determination, her heart.' Cashore skilfully outlines the maturing of the young Queen as she tries to take her people forward, while at the same time uncovering more of the horrors of the kingdom's past.

RUSSIAN FANTASY

The Stranger's Woes
by Max Frei
Gollancz; 412 pp.; $32.99)

Max Frei, the pen name of Russian author Svetlana Martynchik, is also the main character in the 'Labyrinths of Echo' series. Eight books to date have been published in Russia, where sales have topped over two million copies. The first to be translated into English, *The Stranger* (2009), is now followed by ***The Stranger's Woes***. Max Frei, an insomniac, coffee-drinking, chain-smoking drifter, is transported into the regulated magical world of Echo, where he becomes 'Sir Max of the Minor Secret Investigative Force of the City of Echo'. The series is essentially in the Douglas Adams and Robert Rankin traditions of comic fantasy and is well worth seeking out, although new readers would be best advised to start with the first book.

BRITISH HORROR

Granta 117: Horror
edited by John Freeman
(Granta; 256 pp.; $27.99)

Granta 117: Horror follows the Granta model of stories and articles loosely linked to a subject. Granta publicity establishes their Horror context as follows, 'The same "monsters" that lived under our childhood beds can reappear, alive and toothsome, in our adult lives. And perhaps most frightening of all: without reason or apology, one person's fancy is another person's torment. *Granta 117* takes a stab at understanding the phenomenon that is horror.'

Will Self recounts, in the opening essay, 'False Blood', on the clinical disgorging of blood following a diagnosis of polycythaemia vera, a condition that causes the blood to thicken. As always with Self, this is a well-written piece, which includes regrets as to his early drug addiction, 'That horror has cast a long shadow over my lives and the lives of my family, and infiltrated my fictive inscape, poisoning its field margins, salting its earth.' Self's cross-references to Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* reminds the reader that Granta's horror is often as much internal as external.

Don DeLillo's 'The Starveling' is a disquieting story about a lonely cinemagoer who stalks a young anonymous female cinéaste only to find direct personal communication is ultimately impossible.

Paul Auster's 'Your Birthday has Come and Gone' poignantly writes of his mother's death — 'No other dead body was the body in which your own life began' — and consequent strained family relationships.

Rajesh Parameswaran's 'The Infamous Bengal Ming', sympathetically, if darkly, follows a tiger's escape from a zoo and its subsequent deathly journey.

Mark Doty's 'Insatiable' explores the links between Bram Stoker and Walt Whitman and the possibility that Stoker based Dracula on Whitman. Stephen King's *The Dune* is one of the lesser pieces of the collection, as a retired Florida judge finds individual deaths are spelt out on a remote sand dune.

The Greatcoat
by Helen Dunmore
(Hammer; 196 pp.; $27.95)

Orange Prize Award-winning novelist Helen Dunmore and Hammer Horror initially seem a strange combination. Hammer, which has risen from the cinematic dead with the success of filming Susan Hill's novel *The Woman in Black*, is now sponsoring a series of novellas in association with Arrow, part of the Random House group.

The Greatcoat is the first in the series by 'some of today's most celebrated authors', such as Dunmore, Jeanette Winterson, and Julie Myerson. Dunmore had initial doubts in tackling 'a tricky genre', but overcame them when she reflected, 'The imprint the past makes on the present is very strong in all my work.'

The Greatcoat 's World War II past certainly impinges on Dunmore's North Yorkshire in the winter of 1952, with rationing and fuel shortages still in full force. Dunmore recalls, in a *Foyle's* interview, 'The cold bedrooms, icy lino, bomb sites, open fires, kitchen stoves, daily shopping because there wasn't a fridge.'

In such a setting, Isabel Carey, newly wed to a young doctor, finds herself trapped in rundown lodgings in the small rural town where her husband Philip works day and night. Dunmore exactly captures the claustrophobic nature of a 1950s marriage in which the man works and the woman is expected to give up a career to stay at home and have babies. Bored, cold, and increasingly unable to sleep at night because of inadequate blankets, Isabel uses for warmth a heavy RAF greatcoat which she finds stuffed at the back of a wardrobe.

Dunmore recalls that she and her older sister would sleep under her father's old RAF greatcoat on cold nights. This memory became 'the key which unlocked the story' of *The Greatcoat*, as we soon learn that it once belonged to a local RAF pilot, Alec, killed during World War II. It is, therefore, not entirely unexpected to find that the mysterious figure who taps at Isabel's window one night, and who enters her life, turns out to be the dead airman, Alec. Is he a ghost or a fantasy figment conjured by Isabel in her depressed state?

Alec, with his 'Viking look of men from the far north-east', is not, however, a threatening figure, unlike Isabel's Miss Havisham-like landlady, 'All grey: grey pinafore, greying hair ... seamed face, pursed lips with tiny wrinkles all around them', who holds secrets from the war and seems to know more than she reveals about Alec's past.

Dunmore's strength in evoking the contemporary domestic and social milieus provides the detail to sustain the delicate balance of belief in Isabel's growing relationship with Alec and the traumatic events that gradually interweave his past and her present. Dunmore says, if 'There is a reason for a ghost to haunt, then there is also a reason for the person who sees that ghost to be haunted'.

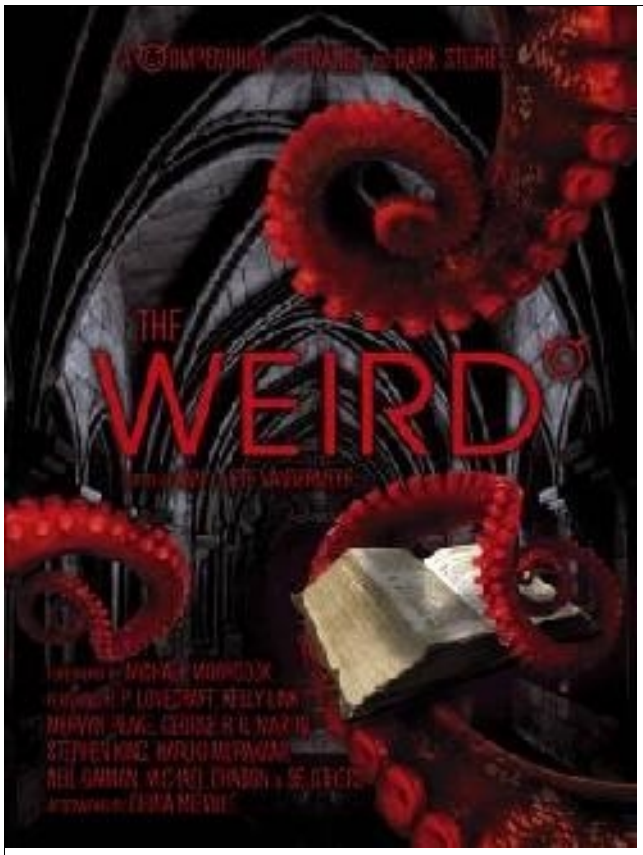
The Greatcoat, which continues to haunt the imagination after reading, is an accomplished and impressive beginning to the Hammer series, which will be continued with the planned publication of Jeanette Winterson's novella about the Lancashire Pendle witches.

AMERICAN HORROR

The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories
edited by Ann and Jeff Vandermeer
(Corvus; 1126 pp.; $39.99)

The Weird, a stunning, almost overwhelming, 750,000-word collection of stories printed in double column text, is almost a subliminal promotion for e-books. At over 1100 pages with a paperback glue binding, and weighing nearly three kilos, its short stories are ideally suited for selective reading on an e-reader.

What, however, is a 'weird' short story? In his 'Forweird', Michael Moorcock says weird is 'A term covering pretty much anything from absurdism to horror, even occasionally social realism', while China Miéville,



in his 'Afterweird', says, 'Weird is an affect. We know it when we feel it.' This definitional looseness thus allows for editorial flexibility. The chronologically arranged stories from the 116 authors encompasses classical and contemporary weird tales, including subsets of surrealism and the gothic. The editors hope readers will be 'entertained by the richness and variety, but also unsettled at times, and challenged at times'.

Authors include Mervyn Peake, Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, H. P. Lovecraft, Angela Carter, Ben Okri, and Haruki Murakami. Twenty nationalities are represented, and seven new translations were commissioned for the book, including Julio Cortazar's 'Axolotl' and Michel Bernanos' short novel 'The Other Side of the Mountain'. Many relatively unfamiliar names are included, such as Spain's Merce Rodoreda, Italy's Dino Buzatti, and Japan's Hagiwara Sakutaro.

Australians K. J. Bishop and Margo Lanagan feature. Bishop, whose story is the last in the volume, says, 'I'm pleased that Australian stories are identified as such. I think Australia has a funny position in the Anglosphere — English-speaking but far from the middle of things, with angles of our own from which we write, even if the material isn't overtly Australian, and it's nice to have one's difference acknowledged.'

The editors acknowledge that they couldn't get permissions to publish for some authors, including Thomas Disch, Paul Bowles, and J. G. Ballard. They note one author, 'who deserves a wider readership and is largely forgotten today, required over one hundred hours of negotiations for a very, very short story. Contemporary writers should give great thought to who will represent them after they have passed on. Because we also discovered estates represented by agents who had literally succumbed to dementia and were unable to negotiate.' Now that's weird.

Steampunk Poe
by Edgar Allan Poe
(Running Press Teens; 263 pp.; $24.99)

Steampunk Poe is a clever marketing ploy by Running Press, who take seven stories and six poems of Poe and wrap them around with macabre 'steampunk' artwork in full colour by illustrators Zdenko Basic and Manuel Sumbera. The publishers believe Poe's stories, such as 'The Raven', 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', and 'The Tell-Tale Heart', provide 'an essential framework' to the Victorian steampunk images of steam engines and aeronauts. 'The Balloon Hoax' particularly allows the artists the chance to introduce the genre trademark of fantastical airships. Both this imagery and the steampunk settings will undoubtedly bring Poe to a new, younger, audience.

Zombies: A Compendium of the Living Dead
edited by Otto Penzler
(Corvus; 810 pp.; $39.95)

Zombies: A Compendium of the Living Dead, edited by renowned anthologist Otto Penzler, is a massive compilation of 57 stories, printed in just over 800 double column pages. *Zombies*, fortunately or unfortunately, reveals that there is still life in the undead. The first story, W. B. Seabrook's 'Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields' (1929), set in Haiti, is now generally agreed to be the first modern tale of zombies, but the definition of 'zombie' is stretched a bit thin in using nineteenth-century stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Guy de Maupassant. *Zombies*, a Corvus blockbuster anthology, is a no-brainer Zombie essential purchase in more ways than one.

Zone One
by Colson Whitehead
(Harvill Secker; 259 pp.; $29.95)

Colson Whitehead has been shortlisted for both a Pulitzer and a US National Book Award, so his zombie take, in ***Zone One***, is naturally less bloody than the norm. 'Zone One' is the new name of a devastated Manhattan after a cataclysmic plague of the undead. The novel's main character, nicknamed 'Mark Spitz', is part of a small military tactical group to eliminate zombie 'stragglers', city block by city block. There's not much joy in Mark's life, but then there wasn't much, as flashbacks reveal, before the apocalypse. Whitehead reflects, 'everybody's f...ed up in a different way, just like before.' *Zone One* is darkly, almost existentially, impressive.

— Colin Steele, July 2011–June 2012

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Mark PLUMMER

Colin STEELE

Ray WOOD

Cover: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)