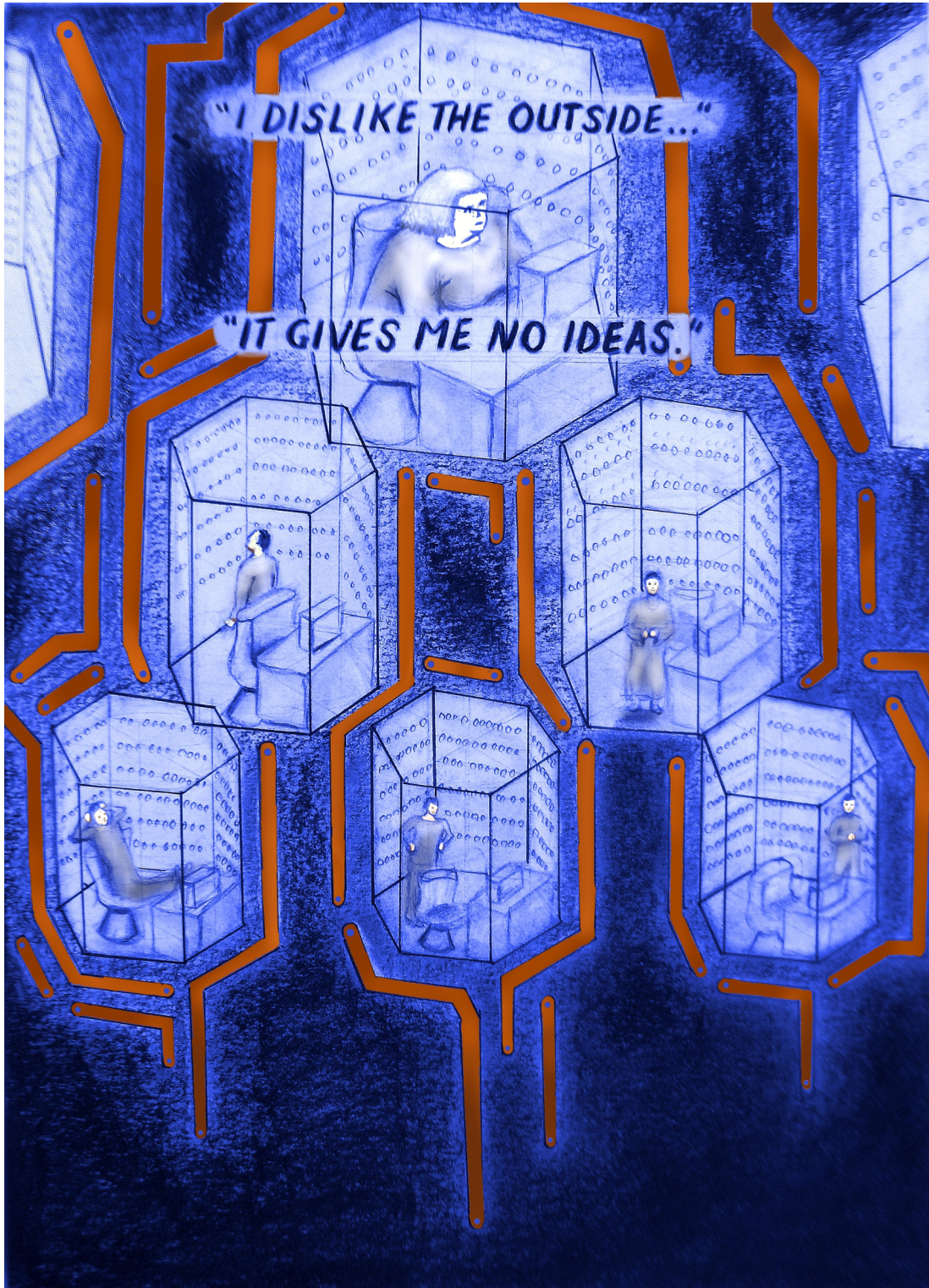


SF Commentary 105

March 2021

80 pages



Carol Kewley: 'The Machine Stops'.

SF COMMENTARY 105

March 2021

80 pages

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<https://efanzines.com/SFC/index.html>

FRONT COVER: Carol Kewley: 'The Machine Stops'. BACK COVER: 'Experimental Pendulum'.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Pat Virzi (p. 3); Elaine Cochrane (p. 5); Lee Harding (p. 18); John Litchen (pp. 21–2).

ILLUSTRATIONS: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) (pp. 3, 8); Dan Steffan (p. 8); Brad Foster (p. 10); John Bangsund (p. 20); Denny Marshall (pp. 24, 49); Lewis Morley (p. 30); Giampaolo Cossato (pp. 46–7).

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The modest Pat Virzi reading her copy of *Outworlds 71/Afterworlds*. The *Afterworlds* section was supposed to be printed back to back, like an Ace Double, but the printer couldn't do it. Pat Virzi from Texas supplied this photo, and is one of the four co-editors of this ultimate fanzine. Readers of *SFC* will notice that the front cover of *OW71* is by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).

Celebrating Bill Bowers's greatest achievement *Outworlds 71/Afterworlds* — all 504 pages of it!

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08N9CNPJ>
S?pldnSite=1
<https://tinyurl.com/y34n2pyu>

The text for *Outworlds 71*, Bill Bowers' classic fanzine, was mostly assembled and ready for layout when Bill finished his personal run on April 17, 2005. Fifteen years later, the zine has been completed, with **Pat Virzi**, **Jeanne Bowman**, **Alan Rosenthal**, and **Rich Coad** as co-editors. This double volume includes *After-*

worlds (an 'eclectic' collection of commemorations to Bill, plus a compilation of his fanwriting over the years).

OUTWORLDS 71:

Cover Graphic by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).

Contributors include Gregory Benford, Bill Bowers, William Breiding, Joe Haldeman, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Devon Leigh (Interview with Tanya Huff), Stephen Leigh,

Denny Lien, Susan A. Manchester, Chris Sherman, A. L. Sirois, Skel, Sherry Thompson, Bob Tucker, Harry Warner, Jr.

The Lettercol (as of 3/26/99) includes Lenny Bailes, Gregory Benford, Sandra Bond, Syd Bounds, Richard Brandt, William Breiding, Ned Brooks, Brian Earl Brown, rich brown, Marty Cantor, Joe Christopher, Buck Coulson, Al Curry, Gary Deindorfer, Larry Downes, Carolyn Doyle, Ahrvid Engholm, George Flynn, Brad W. Foster, E.B. Frohvet, Bruce Gillespie, Mike Glicksohn, Merlin Haas, David R. Haugh, John Hertz, Irwin Hirsh, Lee Hoffman, Alan Hunter, Dick Jenssen, Karen Johnson, Arnie Katz, Jerry Kaufman, Linda Krawecka, Robert Lichtman, Dave Locke, Joseph T. Major, Susan A. Manchester, Art Metzger, Murray Moore, Lloyd Penney, Patty Peters, Curt Phillips, Dave Rowe, Chris Sherman, Skel, Bob Smith, Dale Speirs, Milt Stevens, Mae Strelkov, Sherry Thompson, Roger Waddington, Michael W. Waite, and Harry Warner, Jr.; **WAHFs** from Harry Andruschak, John D. Berry, Sheryl Birkhead, Jeanne Bowman, G. Sutton Breiding, Kevin L. Cook, Dick Geis, Ed Gorman, Terry Jeeves, Randy Mohr, Jodie Offutt, Al Sirois, Craig Smith, Toni Weisskopf, Paul Williams, and Billy Wolfenbarger.

Interior art by ATom, Randy Bathurst, Sheryl Birkhead, Grant Canfield, Derek Carter, Jackie Causgrove, Jim Cawthorn, Vic Kostrikin, Kurt Erichsen, Brad W. Foster, Jack Gaughan, Mike Gilbert, Derek Grime, David R. Haugh, Alan Hunter, Terry Jeeves, Ivor Latto, Linda Michaels, Randy Mohr, Peggy Ranson, William Rotsler, Stu Shiffman, Craig Smith, Steve Stiles, Taral Wayne.

Photos by William Breiding, Christina H. Hionides, Stephen Leigh, Andrew Porter, Chris Sherman, Skel, Michael W. Waite.

AFTERWORLDS:

Cover art by Rick Lieders.

Contributors include: Alyson Abramowitz, Steven Black, William M. Breiding, Cy Chauvin, Larry Downes, Carolyn Doyle, Michael Glicksohn, D. Gary Grady, Andy Hooper, Rob Jackson, Denise Leigh, Stephen Leigh, Susan A. Manchester, Patty Peters, Chris Sherman, Leah Zeldes Smith, Geri Sullivan, Pat Virzi, Billy Wolfenbarger, Joel Zakem, and (of course) Bill Bowers.

Memories, Musings, Classic Letters of Comment (old and new), and more, from Gregory Benford, Dick Bergeron, Sheryl Birkhead, Sutton Breiding, Wm. Breiding, rich brown, Linda Bushyager, Grant Canfield, Terry Carr, Derek Carter, Buck Coulson, Al Curry, Michael Dobson, Brad W. Foster, Mike Glicksohn, Mike Glycer, John Hertz, Arthur Hlavaty, Norm Hochberg, Frank Johnson, Jerry Kaufman, John M. Koenig, Tim Kyger, David Langford, Hope Leibowitz, Devon Leigh, Robert Lichtman, Eric Lindsay, Dave Locke, Rich Lynch, Sam McDonald, Art Metzger, Paul Novitski, John Purcell, Dennis Quane, Schirm, Chris Sherman, Skel, Rick Sneary, Suzanne Tompkins, Taral Wayne, Billy Ray Wolfenbarger, Susan Wood, Joel Zakem.

Interior Art/Filios by Sheryl Birkhead, Bill Bowers, Jeanne Bowman, Grant Canfield, Derek Carter, Al Curry, Alex Eisenstein, Kurt Erichsen, Connie (Reich) Faddis, Brad W. Foster, Bill Glass, David R. Haugh, Alan Hunter, John Ingram, Terry Jeeves, Tim Kirk, Stephen Leigh, Linda Michaels, Pat Mueller, Peggy Ranson, William Rotsler, Dave Rowe, Schirm, Stu Shiffman, Dan Steffan, Taral Wayne.

Photos by Fred A. Levy Haskell, Andy Hooper, Rob Jackson, Denise Leigh, Stephen Leigh, Rich Lynch, Sam McDonald, Andrew Porter, Jeff Schalles, Chris Sherman, Skel, Joel Zakem.

I must be talking to my friends

Cautious steps

January has been a month that promised much and delivered little. But here and there Elaine and I can see signs of cautious steps toward post-lockdown life.

The first few days of the new year give me the pleasure of concocting my Favourites Lists for 2020. This year it took a week. I was going to find time to write detailed comments to accompany each list. I don't have room to run the list here, with or without scrappy comments, but if you want a preview, I will send you a PDF file of **brg** 114, my fanzine for ANZAPA.

I vowed to finish *SF Commentary* 105, but it quickly spread out into *SFC* 106 and probably No. 107 as well. Four weeks later, I'm still knee deep in mailing comments, 75 pages of them. I have banked-up mailing comments on issues 102, 103 (the John Bangsund Memorial Issue), and 104. But I also have letters about Issues 99, 100, and 101, letters that didn't arrive until the beginning of 2020. Put them together and they become an account of people's survival strategies during 2020.

In Victoria we have had three lockdowns. In other countries, fans suffered initial lockdowns, were told that the Covid-19 crisis had passed, and

now are confined to quarters again. Every month has brought changes of lifestyle to most of us; many have spent nearly a year confined to home, working, or not, unable to catch up with friends in person. However, our inconveniences seem very trivial compared with the fate of our friends in other countries. We peer at your illness rates and death tolls rather like stray people on a beach staring out to sea at a tidal wave that has not yet reached our shore.

Because the letter column is very long I've divided it into half. Add the first half of those letters to Colin Steele's regular column and you have little room for anything else in *SFC* 105.

Start *SFC* 106 with the second half of the letter column, add the 'Best Of 2020' lists from me and friends, and you have an issue already bursting at the seams. Meanwhile, people keep sending me contributions. The excitement of it all!

I have always had a yen to write about Things. Just Things — People and Places and Books and Films and CDs. Not the Big Issues. Not my personal complaints, although I have a few. I like dipping into tales of the kind of Things that people write



Chloe and Zelda: 'We really don't like each other.' (Photo: Elaine Cochrane.)

At last! 51 years of *SF Commentary* for your reading pleasure

At last the early years of *SF Commentary* — its best years — are available for your reading pleasure. Thanks to Edie Stern and Joe Siclari, and scanner Mark Olson at Fanac.org, you can now read PDF copies of the classic duplicated and typeset issues.

The fully digitised issues of *SFC*, *Steam Engine Time*, and *Scratch Pad* can still be found at Bill Burns's eFanzines.com.

Now all that's needed is an index for the lot. In the other 24 hours in my day.

In Fandom Tonight

Did I tell you I won a Ditmar Award for *SF Commentary* in 2020? You didn't know there were Ditmar Awards in 2020? You're not alone. The Ditmar Awards were the only skerrick left of Swancon (which was going to be the national convention) after it was cancelled at Easter. Publicity for the nominating and voting processes seems to have been very limited. No matter! I was very pleased to receive a Ditmar for the year of the 50th anniversary editions of *SF Commentary*.

Murray MacLachlan made a successful attempt to maintain Nova Mob meetings although we have not been able to meet at the Kensington Town Hall since February. I felt rather intimidated by Zoom procedures, especially as on the first attempt Murray spent three hours trying to connect me and failed. However, we did manage to hold the John Bangsund Memorial Meeting for John, which included several people from the

editing profession as well as quite a few fans.

I suspect I'm not ready for Actual Meetings with Real People yet.

The Friday Night Group has been Zooming as well, but without my participation. They won't be able to resume meeting at the David Jones Food Hall Basement. Last time I looked, all the tables and chairs had been removed.

Roman Orszanski is also quite good at organising Zoom meetings. He rounded up a small group of international fannish identities for a special meeting about Fanzines. In this way I finally got to 'meet' Alison Scott, having squibbed her DUFF virtual tour of Australia in the middle of the year. Christina Lake, Claire Brialey, and Mark Plummer also joined us. I couldn't quite see the purpose of the event itself (since we are all fanzine fans), but the two-hour natter was enjoyable.

Equally enjoyable was the beginning of the Twenty-four Hour New Year's Eve Party, which Roman organised in cahoots with Alison Scott in London and Mike Ward and Karen Schaeffer in California. I joined a small group from our time zone from midnight to 2 a.m. New Zealand had started proceedings two hours earlier. New Year's Day was stressful for me, so I failed to show up for the end of fun, when NY Eve was finally celebrated in California late on our New Year's Day. I'm told that 100 people joined the party at various times during the 24 hours.

ANZAPA is cut adrift from my benign dictatorship for the first time in 16 years. Since David Grigg has been able to convert the apa to PDF-only distribution, he has also taken over as OBE. What a relief! The only trouble is that each PDF mailing now stretches to 500 pages every two months.

about on their Facebook pages. Trivial stuff, but enjoyable. Prime example is Michael O'Brien's Facebook page, full of delightful little bits and pieces about wandering around Hobart searching through op shops with Keith Curtis, playing croquet, and attending trivia nights — stories always well told, with charming photos. Michael has become the perfect fanzine writer who no longer writes for fanzines. I would like to have Michael's natural style.

But apart from my favourite contributors, nobody much seems amused any more on Facebook (although some Friends remain amusing). Everybody is so bursting with Indignation and

Righteous Wrath about something or other that the pleasure has gone out of their stories. I became involved with Facebook because on it John Bangsund was publishing his new and old essays. But John has left us, including his Facebook Friends. I stay involved to keep in contact with both my sisters — Jeanette, living in Guildford, near Castlemaine, and Robin in Maleny, and later Brisbane — and many old fannish friends. I started the SF Commentary Facebook group so that there I could release news about the magazine and any other SF-related activities. I haven't written much, but it's satisfying when other people post news of their own publishing activities (or in the case of Perry and David,

podding activities). I feel as if I'm keeping in touch with My Kind of People.

But despite all that, I find the ideal way of keeping in touch with people is still through 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' in *SF Commentary*. People write better here, they have a wider viewpoint, and they write in a more personal, analytic, and amusing style than anybody does on social media. Thanks for staying with the fanzine way of writing.

What is happening at Chez Cochrane–Gillespie? We have been worrying about highly valued friends who have quite different but equally serious illnesses. Elaine has been very worried about them in her usual practical way. Meanwhile, she has had plenty of paying work, a spate of activity that began not long after the first lockdown in the middle of 2020. I've been offered only one indexing freelance job in a year and a half, so I continue to be worried about financing myself in the style I've never been able to afford.

Social activity? We'd nearly forgotten what that was. However, since the end of November Elaine and I have also been pleased to take advantage of the gradual lifting of activity restrictions in Victoria. My first meal in a restaurant for eight months was at the end of November. Ten people who had once worked for the long-defunct Publications Branch of the Education Department gathered at a very good Chinese restaurant in Malvern. Ten people can fit around one round table, so we were able to hear ourselves speak. At most years' reunions, twenty of us make more noise than any pack of teenagers, and nobody can hear anybody else.

An experiment that worked was inviting two of our oldest friends for lunch at our place in early December. In early January, my sister Jeanette travelled down from Guildford for lunch. It was the first time we had been in the same room for about two years.

After Christmas, Elaine and I went to our first restaurant event for 10 months, a lunch during which Elaine and her two sisters celebrated their birthdays, which are close together. The restaurant, called Stix 'n' Stones, is in Lower Plenty.

During the first lockdown relief in the middle of 2020, Carey and Jo Handfield, who live nearby, visited for Sunday afternoon cakes and coffee. They brought the cakes and we supplied the coffee. A few weeks ago, Elaine and I went for our first Cakes and Coffee back at Urban Grooves restaurant in Greensborough. An enjoyable return to our Sunday afternoon tradition, which goes back many years to the 1990s, when we used to walk from Collingwood on a Sunday afternoon to Jasper on Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.

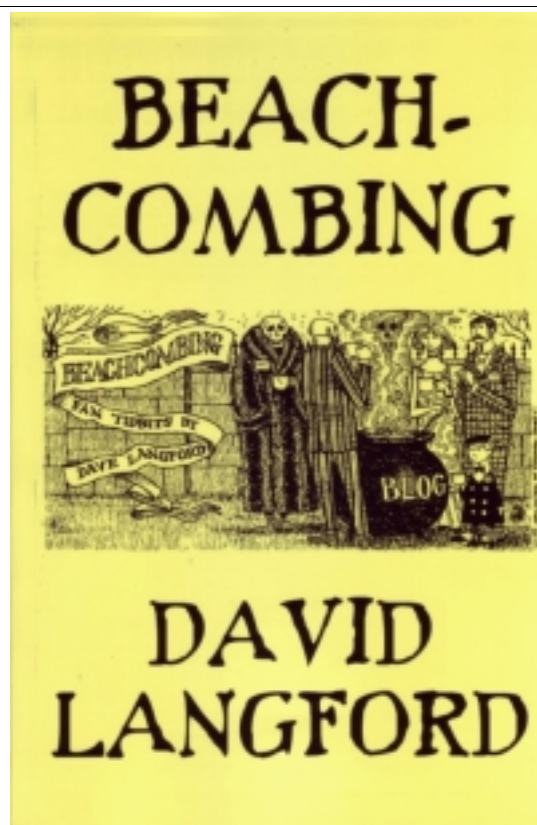
During lockdown we bought takeaway meals several times from Urban Grooves, and once each from Cafe Spice and Shiki, but these restaurants could not replicate the quality of their sit-down meals. A week or so ago, we were pleased to discover that Shiki Japanese Restaurant (in Grimshaw Street, Greenborough) has not gone off the boil during 2020. Our meal was one of the very best we've had there.

A couple of weeks ago I had lunch with Bill Wright at Leo's Italian restaurant, just across Acland Street from his place. I had to deliver to him nearly two years' of books and magazines that I had not wanted to send through the mail. For a man who had spent most of 2019 in hospital because of three different accidents, and who had also undergone cataract surgery, he seems remarkably chipper. (I remember eating with a fannish group to Leo's Italian in 1971 and 1972. It hasn't changed.) (Thanks to Bill for the very generous contribution he has made to the *SFC* Sinking Fund.)

I've been more cautious about resuming other activities. I haven't been to a cinema for more than a year. In Melbourne cinemas have been shut most of the time since March, and I don't relish the thought of wearing a mask for two hours while watching a movie. On the other hand, few successful movies are receiving a DVD/Blu-ray release, so I'm missing out on the current lot. For technical reasons, I can't access movies and TV shows from the streaming services. I could stop watching movies altogether — but I have several thousand DVDs and Blu-rays still unwatched.

There are still few Melburnians catching trains, but I'm still required to wear a mask when travelling into town or Carlton. During my last expedition into Melbourne I seemed to spend much of my time taking off my mask while walking in the street, then putting it on when entering shops.

All could change at any time. The Victorian Government, after doing such a good job during the second lockdown, has just imported 1200 tennis players and staff for the Australian Tennis Open. Already (4 February) we find that this has not gone well. Nobody can plan anything substantial (such as memorial gatherings for Merv Binns, John Bangsund, or Phil Ware) because such gatherings could be cancelled at a day's notice. Several months ago Elaine and I were deeply shocked to hear of the sudden accidental death in Warrnambool of Lindsay Russell, David Russell's father. David's family could not hold a funeral because David's brother could not travel from Brisbane to Melbourne because of Covid restrictions.



The postie rings occasionally

I'm trying to maintain a column about the printed publications that nice people send me — when and if they arrive. However, mail deliveries to 5 Howard Street have become irregular, to say the least. We hear reports of parcels and letters piling up in American post offices, first, because of Trump's strategy of slowing the mail so that he could claim postal votes to be illegitimate; and now because mail depots are understaffed by anything up to 90 per cent because of Covid illness.

But some items are getting through the Australian, British, US, and Canadian postal systems. The following 'reviews' are letters of gratitude.

OUTWORLDS 71/AFTERWORLDS

Bill Bowers posthumously edited by Jeanne Bowman, Rich Coad, Pat Virzi, and Alan Rosenthal (InWorlds20@gmail.com and Outworlds 2020@gmail.com)
(<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08N9CNPJS?pldnSite=1>)

When **Bill Bowers** died in 2005, he left not only the legacy of all the great fanzines he had published over the years but also an unpublished gigantic issue of *Outworlds*. Few thought that it could be

brought into existence, but the team of **Jeanne Bowman, Pat Virzi, Alan Rosenthal**, and **Rich Coad** decided it could be done, and did so.

A pleasant surprise for Australian fans has been to find that the gigantic new issue (504 pages) has as its front cover one of Ditmar's (Dick Jenssen's) best graphics, which had appeared twenty years ago only in black and white.

See the details of *Outworlds 71/Afterworlds* on pages 3 and 4.

BEACHCOMBING AND OTHER ODDMENTS

by David Langford

(Ansible Editions; 2020; trade paperback and ebook from ae.ansible.uk)

Dave Langford has spent much of his time during the last 20 years writing and editing entries for the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (5 million words and still rising) and producing the newszine *Ansible* every month. He has also become an online publisher, Ansible Editions, whose proceeds go to both TAFF and the Langford Sinking Fund. *Beachcombing and Other Oddments* is one of his 2020 publications.

The *real* Dave Langford is the superb writer with a natural humorous style who has published such

The Jonbar Point

Essays from *SF Horizons*



Brian Aldiss
Introduction by Christopher Priest

fanzines as *Troll-Ddu* and has written for a wide range of fan, professional, and semi-professional magazines over the years. My favourite Langford pieces are his review and critical articles, many of them already collected in such volumes as *All Good Things: The Last SFX Visions* and *The Complete Critical Assembly*. In *Beachcombing* he selects a wide variety of humorous pieces from 1979 to 2020, most of which I've not read until now.

Many pieces that would have been an ideal length for magazine publication seem a bit short in book form. The longer articles are the ones I enjoy most. They include 'Four Million Sandflies', about the Langford family's annual holiday expeditions to an uncomfortable beach in North Wales; 'Live Thog's Masterclass', a speech that Dave delivered at Aussiecon 3 in 1999 in Melbourne; and 'The Secret History of *Ansible*'. There are also many scientific articles, many exposing the idiocies of the pseudoscientists, and others telling us how to blow up things. Never a Chemistry student myself, I enjoyed this information a lot.

I think that Dave Langford should also write an autobiography, because he doesn't really tell us a lot about himself in these pieces. His humour is fine pitched, but he tells us more about the peculiarities of British fandom or the odder corners of the science fiction world during the last 40 years than

about himself and his own interests. But I suspect that *Beachcomber II* is already being planned.

THE JONBAR POINT: ESSAYS FROM SF HORIZONS
by Brian Aldiss; Introduction by Christopher Priest

(Ansible Editions 2020; trade paperback and ebook from ae.ansible.uk)

Over the years many of us have hoped to come across copies of *SF Horizons* 1 and 2, the only two editions of the critical magazine edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison in 1963 and 1964. I've read a photocopy of No. 1, but have not seen a copy of No. 2. As **Dave Langford**, the publisher of *The Jonbar Point*, tells me in a letter, the permissions problems of dealing with the literary estates of such authors as William Burroughs, Kingsley Amis, and C. S. Lewis would have proved nightmarish. It was difficult enough to nail down the rights to the two long essays by **Brian Aldiss** that appear in *The Jonbar Point*.

The two long essays are 'Judgement at Jonbar' and 'British Science Fiction Now: Studies of Three Writers'. They do not appear in any of Brian Aldiss's many collections of reviews and critical articles, probably because they are too long for such anthologies. As Christopher Priest writes in his Introduction, 'Both essays should be read more widely — they reverberate with ideas, insights and fine critical analysis. Quite apart from anything else, they are energetically written from a position of caring knowledge, and are hugely enjoyable to read.'

A 'Jonbar point' is the SF equivalent of a 'sliding door moment', but on a cosmic scale. The concept of single alternative moments in history by which the whole direction of history is changed was named by Jack Williamson in one of his early novels, *The Legion of Time*. In 'Judgement at Jonbar', Brian Aldiss examines the novel, not only to reveal the failings of the standard SF novel in the 1930s, but also to show why we can pass over such failings and still be dazzled by its originality.

Of the three British writers discussed in the second essay, Brian Aldiss finds little dazzlement in the works of two of the authors, Lan Wright and Donald Malcolm, who published regularly in Ted Carnell's magazines *New Worlds*, *Science Fantasy*, and *Science Fiction Adventures*, until the magazines were transferred to the editorship of Michael Moorcock in 1964. British SF of the 1950s and 1960s needed much improvement.

Aldiss then writes about a new author who was suddenly writing better SF than anybody else in Britain in 1964 — J. G. Ballard. In 1964 Aldiss notes some failures in Ballard's approach, failures that



Brad Foster's cover for William Breiding's *Portable Storage 4*.

later could be seen as his greatest strengths. Aldiss's essay remains interesting in 2021 because, without realising it, he predicts the shape of the literary revolution that was about to overtake British SF. Suddenly in 1965 Ian Wright and Donald Malcolm had no market for their stories (at least until Carnell started the *New Writings* series of anthologies). A fleet of new writers were invited to invade *New Worlds* and its companion magazine *Science Fantasy* (renamed *Impulse*). *Science Fiction Adventures*, my favourite, bit the dust. Aldiss's 1964 explication of the early works of Ballard must have been a major factor in creating the *New Worlds* revolution.

PORTABLE STORAGE 4
 edited by William M. Breiding
 (portablezine@gmail.com)

Recently I reviewed William Breiding's *Portable Storage 3*. The magazine has been the brightest object in 2020's star-spangled firmament of fanzines.

However, PS 3 is confined to tales of Ye Olde San Francisco, subject matter a bit limited for a wide range of readers not quite so attuned to the San Francisco legend.

In *Portable Storage 4*, Breiding casts his net much more widely in range of content and contributors. He's been very successful in reaching out and finding such legendary fan writers as Alva Svoboda, Jeff Schalles, Jeanne Bowman, Peter Young, Bruce Townley, Gary Hubbard, Cheryl Cline, and many more. I wouldn't have a clue how to go out and grab such a cast of the past greats. (I just wait for stuff to arrive by email.)

My favourite article in the issue is Andy Hooper's 'Paper Lives'. Hooper acknowledges that his 'focus on long runs of fanzines from decades in the past has been a fairly transparent means of armoring myself against the grief caused by the death of so many fanzine fans in the recent past'. Some of the fanzines he mentions I have received, and many I haven't, but it is wonderful to see them being woven into the great carpet that is fanzine fandom.

The very best piece of writing in the issue is Phil Paine's letter of comment. He expresses everything I tried to include in my editorials for the last few *SFCs*, but I remained far too tentative in my response. I was afraid of upsetting all those people who distress away on Facebook. Phil celebrates the flavour of 2020 for those of us (being 74 years old and all that) who are afraid of the virus but welcome the opportunity to reshape life and remove distractions.

Most of the other locs are also superb, especially those from Edmonds and Plummer.

LANGUAGE AT MIDNIGHT

by **Billy Wolfenbarger** (*Portable Storage*; 76 pp.; portablestorage@gmail.com)

Is **William Breiding** about to make himself into the new Dave Langford? The Dave Langford of Ansible Editions, anyway. In the last year or so, William has made himself a master of small press publishing with *Portable Storage* magazine. Now, it seems, he is embarking on a program of publishing interesting books by old friends. **Billy Wolfenbarger** is only a name to me, known mainly from his contributions to Bill Bowers' *Outworlds* magazine. *Language at Midnight* collects Wolfenbarger's columns. Breiding writes: 'As an addendum to Bill Bowers/Pat Virzi's *Outworlds* 71, I have the great honor to present Billy Wolfenbarger's *Language at Midnight*. It may not be the book Bill Bowers envisioned or intended but it is lovingly dedicated to Bill, as well as Jim Adams and Sally Bethea Pollack.' I haven't had time to

read the book yet, but it is a present you might give yourself if you've received and read *Outworlds* 71.

INCA 18

edited by **Rob Jackson**; 48 pp.

(from **Chinthay**, Nightingale Lane, Hambrook, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 8UH, UK; or robjackson60@gmail.com or jacksons_hambrook@uwclub.net)

Inca 18 is one of the few print fanzines still sent to me, so of course I make comparisons with my own puny efforts. A major difference between the print editions of our magazines is that **Rob Jackson** can afford interior colour printing, and he has superb design skills. I can't and don't; but readers can always print a colour version of SFC from the PDF. Rob includes some very nice personal articles, such as those in *Inca 18* from Taral Wayne ('When Bubble Gum Was a Nickel' — let's hope Alan Stewart never reads this article) and Curt Phillips' 'The Baby-Sitter's Club' (about the vital importance of the pleasures of reading during childhood), and a selection of entertaining pieces culled from the InTheBar e-group about Corflu Heatwave, March 2020, the last bums-on-seats convention held anywhere in the world.

I don't publish enough personal and fannish pieces because I don't receive a lot of them; Rob doesn't publish reviews and critical articles because, I assume, people don't send them to him. We both receive long and absorbing letters of comment. Every time I wonder whether I'm allowing



my correspondents too much freedom to rabbit on, I can look at Rob's letter column and be reminded that great fanzines are based on great (and voluble) letter-writers. (But I wish *SFC*'s friends would send slightly more reproducible photos. And why don't Claire Brialey or Joseph Nicholas write to me as well? We fanzine editors are a jealous bunch.)

EVERY SECOND TUESDAY: STORIES BY ELWOOD WRITERS

edited and written by Jennifer Bryce, Margaret McCaffrey, Helen McDonald, and Barry Lee Thompson
(Rightword Enterprises; 192 pp.; enquiries to elwoodwriters.com)

Every Second Tuesday is not a fannish enterprise, but its authors/editors are empowered by a very similar assumption: that the important thing about writing is the writing itself, not the likelihood of commercial success.

Jennifer Bryce is a long-time friend, and like the other three members of the **Elwood Writers group** has spent many years in gainful employment waiting for the time and energy to become a productive writer. Retirement has offered group members the opportunity to work hard on their skills. Their methods seem to be much more formal than those

of any SF writers' group I've heard of: 'We gather every second Tuesday in the seaside suburb of Elwood in Victoria. Over the years we have tightened our meetings to include an agenda, minutes, and a rotating chair person. This might seem extraordinarily formal, but it means we're able to accomplish a great deal in these sessions. Year by year our literary output and achievements have grown, with recognition for our work in Australia and overseas'.

The anthology includes 41 stories and poems, of varying quality. I've already told Jenny Bryce that I don't want my remarks to cause bad blood between the four members of the group. I can safely say that I enjoyed all the poems without finding any that really hit me between the eyes.

All four members of the group write fine short stories. **Barry Lee Thompson** has the most distinctive attitude to life, one of intense self-absorption mixed with interesting dramatic skills. His 'Interrupter' is the most original story in the collection. All four writers speak much about loneliness of one sort or another, which I found surprising in people I take to be about my own age. I remember my late teenage years, before I discovered kindred spirits, as the years most afflicted by feelings by loneliness. Not enough stories are humorous — but humour is not something I would attempt if writing within a group, so I can understand this bias. However, my favourite contribution is a very funny story called 'Three Sisters-in-Law in a Mercedes' by **Jennifer Bryce**. Jenny also includes in *Every Second Tuesday* 'Benjamin', her masterpiece story, which has appeared in a few other publications.

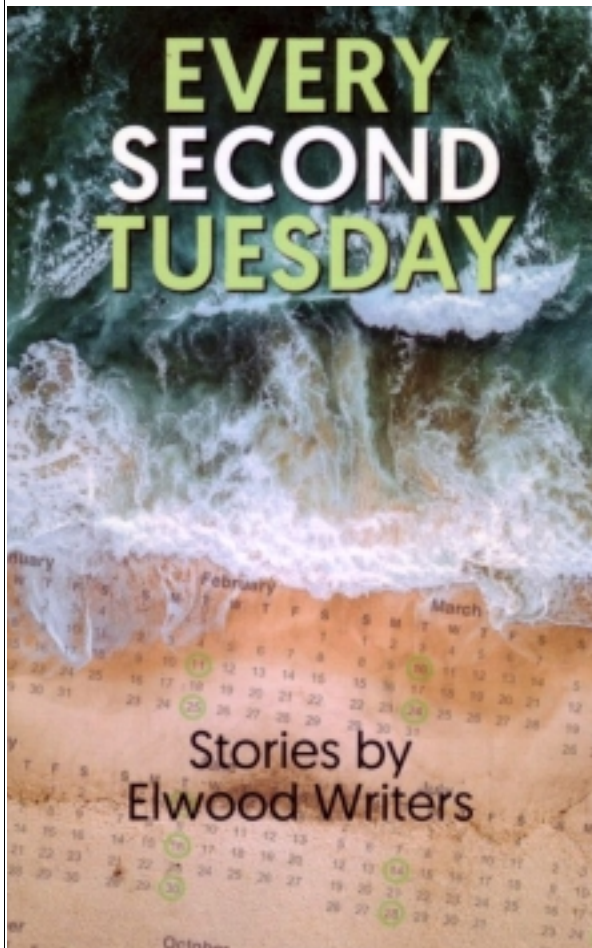
Every Second Tuesday is much more enjoyable than most collections of Australian short stories and poems. It's worth seeking out.

Not read yet ...

Friends have sent me far more books and magazines in the mail than I've had time to read or discuss. Thanks to **Kim Huett** for numerous fannish items, including a book and some old Gillespie fanzines I can't find in my collection; **Dick Jenssen** sent me the Mark Musa translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Penguin edition); **John Litchen** has sent me Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry of the Future* and other books; **Colin Steele** has sent me Clarke's *Piranesi* and other books; **John Thiel** sent me an issue of *Pablo Lennis*; **Mark and Claire** sent me two Stephen Baxter books; and ...

I've run out of room. This column will return in *SFC* 106 — or be knocked on to 107. See ya.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 7 February 2021



The 2020 voyage, Part 1

The letters of comment about recent *SFC* issues tell of the various ways in which the events of 2020 have affected the lives of letter writers. For me, 2020 gave me lots of extra free time. Four issues of *SF Commentary* appeared during the year, instead of the usual two. Some of you also commented on Numbers 98, 99, and 100.

Let's begin out of chronological order:

The conversation about John Bangsund: *SF Commentary* 103

SF Commentary 103

October 2020

36 pages

TRIBUTE TO JOHN BANGSUND (1939–2020)

SALLY YEOLAND, JULIAN WARNER, STEPHANIE
HOLT, DAVID GRIGG, JOHN LITCHEN, and BRUCE
GILLESPIE
raise a glass to our departed friend John
plus
four articles and two poems
by JOHN BANGSUND



John Bangsund, photo ©Sally Yeoland

SF COMMENTARY 103, a Tribute to John Bangsund (1939–2020), October 2020

Cover photo by **Sally Yeoland**. Back cover photos of and by Many Hands.

Tributes to John Bangsund from **Sally Yeoland**, **Julian Warner**, **Stephanie Holt**, **Bruce Gillespie**, **John Litchen**, and **David Grigg**, plus a much-too-short sampler of some of John's best work, including four articles, two poems, and two pages of cartoons.

LEANNE FRAHM
Seaholme VIC 3018

Thank you so much, Bruce, for sending me a hard copy of John's tribute. It's very, very special to me.

John wasn't a major factor in my becoming a writer — he was the *only* one. Without him I would never have known about this network of wonderful science fiction fans and the opportunity of writing. So everything I've done in this field is simply due to John.

(8 October 2020)

ELI COHEN
440 West End Avenue, Apt 14E, New
York, NY 10024, USA

I never met John Bangsund. Most of what I know about him comes from Susan Wood's stories, and reading things he's written — such as 'John W. Campbell and the Meat Market', which Susan reprinted in *Genre Plat 2* in 1977. In fact, what I know about John is so entwined for me with Susan that it came as a shock — for some reason it hadn't clicked until I read it in *SFC* 103 — to see that John died on 22 August, Susan's birthday. What a strange coincidental linking of birth and death, for two

prominent fans who died almost 40 years apart!

I keep seeing other connections. For example, your picture of 'The Three Johns' reminded me of Susan's crack about Australian Johns in *Warm Champagne* 3, July 1976 (which I recently scanned and uploaded): 'And I've just finished a column, for Andy Porter's *Algol*, on British fanzines, in the course of which I think I managed to sort out all the Ians. The real problem for a non-Australian, of course, is keeping all the Johns straight. Sensible of you to ship John Brosnan off to be rude to the British fans.'

As did John's remark in the 'Meat Market' essay (which I've just re-read), 'I think his name was John. Everyone seemed to be named John or Jack.' (I only counted three Johns in the meat market, though, not counting the author. Or John W. Campbell, for that matter.)

Susan's introduction to that essay is itself a lovely appreciation of John and a memory of their friendship, e.g.

I, and half a dozen other people, spent three days in Canberra with John and Sally. The conversations and the red wine never ran out; the time did. The wattle tree in the back garden tossed golden streamers in the spring sunlight; we laughed and hugged each other; I felt I'd come home.

A good many competent people could write little books about North-West Tasmania, or edit the ghastly memoirs of a minor Australian politician. Only John Bangsund can write me glorious chatty letters about Sally and Vonda McIntyre halfway up a tree picking almonds, about sf, the meaning of success, Robertson Davies and St Paul, and make connections that start me thinking freshly. Only John could have written the article he enclosed (Leigh Edmonds is to publish it, alas) which moves from kittens and deadly spiders in the laundry room, to Tennyson, and a priest with 'a High Anglican super chortle' and manages to be about what life means to John Bangsund. He has that rare gift of being able to take the specifics of his life, make connections out of an eclectic and well-stocked mind, and than make connections with you, so you see something new. Or see something familiar, newly — that's harder.

That intro even included a nice synopsis of John's early years in fandom:

John's been the editor of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, a much-admired serious fanzine which seems to have been a focal point in the growth of the modern Australian sf community. He's edited, and folded, a variety of personal,

eclectic magazines with names like *Scythrop*, *The New Millennial Harbinger* and *Revolting Tales of Sex and Super-Science*, most of them available only through FAPA or ANZAPA. Through the late '60's and early '70's, he started and abandoned any number of fannish projects and mundane jobs, while moving from address to address in the Melbourne area. This practice led Australian fen to regard him with a curious mix of affection, admiration and exasperation. In particular, he was instrumental in this period in persuading Melbourne fen, Down Under feeling out of things, that yes, they should indeed bid for a worldcon, and should moreover invite that interesting new writer, Ursula K. Le Guin, to be the Guest of Honor.

They did.

John then moved to Canberra.

I see that this has turned into a Susan-LoC on *SFC* 103, or maybe a memorial to both of them. Thank you, Bruce, for putting together such a wonderful tribute. Sadly, there is now one less John in Australian fandom.

(30 September 2020)

MARK PLUMMER
59 Shirley Road,
Croydon CR0 7ES, UK

I don't now recall my first encounter with John's writing. Maybe it was when Greg Pickersgill sent me a selection of good sercon fanzines in 1995 including at least one *ASFR* and some issues of *SFC*, and of course I remember that fine piece about John and Sally you published in *The Metaphysical Review* 22/23, November 1995. We came to fandom too late to have received any of his fanzines directly, but we've picked up a fair few over the years and from various places, many of which came from the collection of Dave Piper, and there's a stack about six inches tall on the coffee table behind me right now.

The various discussions about John just lately got me wondering, though, just how many fanzines did he produce? John himself published a kind-of list in *Philosophical Gas* 50 of 'all the fanzines (and other fan publications) I can recall publishing', running from the first *ASFR* in 1966 to *Hanrahan* 1 in January 1980. He lists the titles, the number of issues he believed there to be, and the issues for which he had file copies. It added up to 218 publications across 13 years and seven months, one every 23 days, for an estimated 3000 pages, based on the thickness of the file.

John may well have had a more detailed list for

his own reference but I thought I'd try to compile one for myself, just out of curiosity and because it's actually quite enjoyable. John's list in *PG* 50 is certainly a useful basis for a bibliography, as it includes some items to which I can find no reference elsewhere (four issues of the *Halliford House Newsletter?*), as well as some pointers to what might be called apocryphal items. For instance, there is a *Lodbrog* 6, but John thinks there wasn't a No. 5, while the only issue of *The Cosmic Dustbug* he had was No. 10, but he didn't think he produced as many as 10 issues.

[*brg* It's my memory that John included *Cosmic Dustbug*, a newszine, in the envelopes along with subscribers' copies of *ASFR*, and that most of the overseas news came from Andy Porter. However, I subscribed to *ASFR* only in late 1968, so received only one issue, which seems to be lost in my fanzine collection.*]

But it's only a basis, because John carried on publishing after January 1980 if nothing else. I have a number of sources of information. We have our own Bangsund collection as a reference point, just shy of 100 items. Marc Ortieb has indexed ANZAPA, where over half of John's fanzines appeared. I have a copy of Kim Huett's catalogue of Australian fanzines up to 1975, and that includes everything where a copy is known to exist somewhere in Australia, as well as Kim's catalogue of his own collection as a source for post-1975 items. Robert Lichtman's catalogue is also useful, as it also includes paper size, repro method and page count, and Greg Pickersgill has similar details in the online list of his own collection.

There remain a few challenges. There are some items that logically should exist, and John's list implies they exist, and yet none of the sources have a copy. *Philosophical Gas* 21, for instance, although later issues say that the print run of the original version was deliberately destroyed, and while John meant to start again nothing ever came of it. Kim has *From the Dead Centre* 2 (1972), and that's not on John's list but it's possible that there wasn't strictly speaking a No. 1, which was rather a (possibly) circular letter later incorporated into *Philosophical Gas* 11. Nobody has a copy of *Revolting Tales Of Sex And Super-Science* 2, but I found a reference to it in *Son of the WSFA Journal* 112, implying it was distributed with the 144th FAPA mailing.

I'm currently up to 288 items. Work continues.
(1 November 2020)

[*brg* I have a woefully incomplete set of Bangsund fanzines, so can't be of much help. At one stage, Irwin Hirsh had perhaps the greatest stash of them, given him by John many years ago

to sell to raise funds for the Jon Bangsund Sinking Fund. Sally probably has the other most complete collection of Bangsund fanzines. Many of my own copies are contained only in ANZAPA mailings, and I dropped out of ANZAPA several times during the 1970s.*]

TIM TRAIN
8 Ballarat Street, Lalor VIC 3075

One of the snippets of Bangsund writing that I encountered on John Bangsund's Facebook page — and I'm not sure whether he recycled it, as was his wont, or it was a new piece — was a brief reflection on one of his early jobs, fresh from training for the ministry, for a new church with a new congregation, with neither John as minister nor the congregation knowing very much how to go about proceedings, but doing so anyway. Not sure if that rings a bell? I suppose I had better comb Facebook to find it again.

I discovered recently I could revive almost all of John's website *Threepenny Planet* (which was absolutely lovely) by use of a web archive service (*The Wayback Machine*). But then, I suppose you probably have a complete collection of his zines somewhere!

Must go now as daughter Elspeth is trying to pull down the house around me (including the computer I am typing on), but thanks as ever for the latest copy of *SF Commentary*. Hope you and Elaine and the cats are doing well!

Bruce, I found it! It's from November 2017, and I include the comments (three, an exchange between you and John) for full effect. It's attached below, though the anecdote as originally published is directly below as well:

[*brg* Tim sent me this extract from John Bangsund's Facebook page:*)

On a pleasant Sunday morning in 1957 at the Jordanville Church of Christ

On a pleasant Sunday morning in 1957 at the Jordanville Church of Christ the reader of the New Testament lesson had struck a problem. 'Eloi, Eloi — I can't pronounce this, I think it's Latin.' 'I think you'll find, George, that it's Amharic,' said a helpful member of the congregation, and it looked like turning into a polite discussion of language, until the minister, who had troubles of his own and didn't know whether to be amused or dismayed, said a few kind and appropriate words, and the reading went on and Jesus went on being crucified.

BARBARA SHARPE

Melbourne Shakespearean magazine, c/o 260 Faraday Street, Carlton VIC 3053

Vale John Bangsund

1939 – 22 August 2020

John Bangsund, the esteemed fanzines and literary editor who penned occasional lines of verse, has died at age 81 of COVID-19.

Born and schooled in Northcote*, he went to work with words, variously as a clerk, bookshop assistant, librarian, printer's reader, publisher's rep, reporter/subeditor (*Age*, 70s), and notably as founding editor of *Australian Science Fiction Review* (60s-70s), assistant editor and editorial consultant for *Meanjin* (1988-2005), and editor of the Victorian Society of Editors Newsletter. He also wrote articles (sometimes under other names) for journals he worked for.

Tony Thomas counted John as one of his oldest friends. They met in 1966 when Tony first came to Melbourne, and were closely associated through *Australian SF Review*. Tony enjoyed his friend's sharp-witted humour. He worked with him on his book, *John W. Campbell: An Australian Tribute* – one of the publications that made John 'Australia's sci-fi ambassador to the world'.

Barbara Sharpe first saw the name 'John Bangsund' in print in the early 50s, when her older sister, at Preston Girls' School, attended 'socials' at Northcote High School (then for Boys) and got exchange copies of the *NHS* magazine. Decades later Barbara made acquaintance with John online, after enjoying his *Wordplay* verses, some of which he contributed to our *Shakespearean*.

For those who have been missing warmth and romance during Melbourne's gloomy winter lockdown, here's John Bangsund on what may come:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
High pressure system centred over the Bight,
A total fire ban, light breezes on the Bay?
Synoptic charts and satellite photos say
Another dinkum scorcher's on the way.
Yeah, that sure sounds like thee all right. [1982]

John would have some wry words to say at the thought of becoming a statistic – another aged male with 'a pre-existing medical condition' who'd succumbed to coronavirus. But his loss is felt, by family, sci-fi fandom, and fellow editors. In tribute to him, we reprint his lines in memory of another John:

Farewell, dear Gielgud!
O man of rare delight!
He acted rielgud,
Made me fielgud,
Now gone, that gentle good knight. [2000]

**Other Northcote High School alumni to have died in 2020 are the former Victorian premier John Cain, the poet Bruce Dawe (see our June issue), and James Mollison, former director of the NGV and founding director of the NGA.*

.(John Bangsund, 29 November 2017)

[*brg writing in 2017* Neither of us would know whether conversations like this still take place during Sunday morning services at Churches of Christ. Almost nobody is left from my parents' generation at Oakleigh CofC.*]

Jordanville (later Chadstone) had only been going for a short time when I was posted there, and its congregation literally didn't know how to behave in church. I enjoyed that, wherever I found it.

[*brg 2017* Jordanville was famous in the 1950s because the Oakleigh congregation had put up the shell of the original chapel in one day during a working bee in 1953. A similar attempt was made to put up the original chapel at Glen Waverley, but it was a bigger building, and only half the work was done in the afternoon our family was over there. Mr Coates from Oakleigh took a 16 mm colour film of both building operations. The Glen Waverley film showed me and my sisters (when very young) very briefly. But I suppose Mr Coates' famous movies, shown every now and again at church functions around the area, have long since disappeared.*]

(25 September 2020)

The difficulty with the *Threepenny Planet* website is that the web host has now closed. Fortunately there are internet 'archive' machines — I think they scan the web regularly to capture a record of how the web was on a particular day. I suppose it's best thought of as a kind of internet-based microfiche or something like that. Anyway, I went to the site *The Wayback Machine* and found an almost complete copy of John's *Threepenny Planet* using that site, and even copied it all into Word (except for the last section, which was mostly visual puns or abstruse jokes which, I thought, might take a bit more thought as to publishing and formatting — and, of course, the novel-length *Voltaire Variations*, which perhaps some day a mad publisher might like to put into print). And here is the Word file, attached to this email!

I did send this file in to Sally Yeoland. She replied that she'd managed to save most of *Threepenny Planet* for herself anyway.

One thing I particularly appreciated about *Threepenny Planet* of course was something evident in its name — a very clever and slightly absurd literary allusivity, drawing in two little words references to Weil and Brecht (and before them, I suppose, John Gay) and the whole SF genre!

You are correct about Facebook being difficult to search and not really good at archiving material, not really being designed for that sort of thing — I

had a little look for the piece in question this morning on John's page. The search results I got back seemed to be the most popular posts of John, none of which was the piece in question. Still, I am interested now in getting my way around this block presented by Facebook, and will try a little of this and a little of that. I hope that I'll be able to retrieve the piece in question!

(27 September 2020)

[*brg* Thanks very much, Tim. As you will have gathered from the extract and my 2017 exchange with John, the most astonishing thing I discovered when I first met John at the end of 1967 was not only had we both been brought up as members of the Churches of Christ, a small evangelical Australian network of congregations, but that John had undergone the full training in their College of the Bible, only to quit his commitment to becoming a CofC minister a week or so before graduation. Sally discovered recently that he was at the College between the ages of 17 and 19.

The other two fans I know of who have been members of the CofC are Jenny Blackford and John Alderson (who died some years ago). John Alderson had maintained his membership of the Bet Bet Church of Christ until its chapel was closed.

I doubt that John has written about the resemblances between the organisation of the Churches of Christ and SF fandom, but I wrote about them in ANZAPA many years ago. The main resemblance is in the democratic structure of individual congregations (each selects its own minister from among those known to be available) and the assumed equality between members. I have no idea how things are in today's supposedly more prosperous times, but in the 1950s and 1960s most members were parts of families that were just keeping their heads above the breadline (if that's an allowable metaphor) — in other words, the respectable lower middle class, who in the 1950s trusted in God and Mr Menzies. Nobody drank alcohol, and few members smoked. And if you were like my parents, you put all your spare time into the work of the local church. It's the commitment to high individual activity level, without thought of profit, that forms the link between my childhood and teenagehood in the Church and the rest of my life in fandom.*]

**ANDREW PORTER
55 Pineapple St., Apt 3J,
Brooklyn NY 11201-6846, USA**

I was just thinking about John Bangsund yesterday!



Ferntree Gully, late 1967 or early 1968: *Standing, l. to r.:* Tony Thomas, Diane Bangsund, John Bangsund, John Foyster, Elizabeth Foyster, Miranda Foyster. *Seated, l. to r.:* Leigh Edmonds, Paul Stevens, Merv Binns. (Photo: Lee Harding, I assume, since he's not in the photo.)

He was my Australian agent, and I his US agent, for years starting in the 1960s. I had numerous letters from him, which I brought to Australia in 2010 and gave to Bruce Gillespie — Bruce, you should scan these in! — published numerous letters of his, and much material by him. The Cordwainer Smith material from his excellent *Australian Science Fiction Review* became the basis for the *Exploring Cordwainer Smith* chapbook I published.

It was John who started the idea of having a worldcon in Australia.

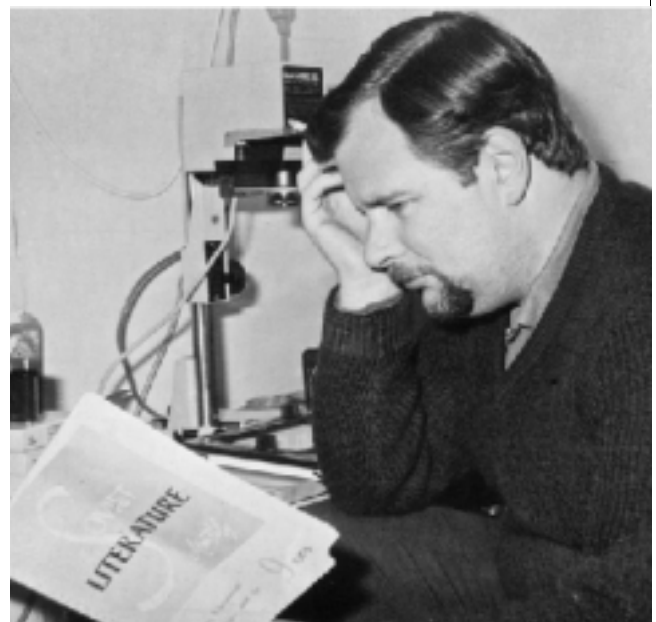
And, because he'd become a recluse, I never did meet him, even on my sole trip to Australia for Aussiecon 4 in 2010.

Here's a photo of John with a bunch of others Aussies in 1967. Bangsund is the one in the red shirt holding the glass of wine.

Also a photo of John from 21 September 1968, at The Hideaway restaurant, Sassafras, Victoria:

(25 August 2020)

[*brg* I was very grateful for the Porter/Bangsund correspondence that Andy



John Bangsund, 21 September 1968, taken at the developing room of the Hideaway restaurant, Sassafras, Victoria. (Photo: Lee Harding.)

handed to me when he visited our house in Greensborough in 2010, just before Aussiecon 4. However, I hadn't realised that Andy had expected me to scan and publish his large stash of interesting historical material. I now have an up-to-date scanner, but it doesn't quite work the way I would like it to, so I haven't carried out this scanning task.

I felt very disappointed on your behalf, Andy, that when you finally made it to Australia in 2010 you could not visit John at home. Sally reassures us that even by 2010 John was not up to holding long conversations. I'm not even sure John and I have met since 2010, although we did once run into each other in Lygon Street, Carlton.

Thanks for the photos. Lee Harding has explained on Facebook that the second photo you sent me was taken when John was working for Don Symons in his photo studio at the Hideaway, one of the many upmarket restaurants to be found in the Dandenong Hills near Melbourne. Don and Lee would take the photos of patrons to sell to them, and John would quickly process the photos before they left.*]

ADRIENNE RALPH
Northcote VIC 3070

Thanks for sending me this news of John Bangsund. While I never met John, I think I recall contacting him regarding a freelance job. I'm not sure how that panned out; I think he was too busy doing more interesting projects than anything I could offer. But I do remember reading his offerings for the *Society of Editors Newsletters*, and referring to his edicts as reliable and erudite authorities that guided and inspired my work and my teaching of students of editing at RMIT.

I'm very sad that he was taken by Covid-19, which has shortened the lives of so many.

He sounded like a wonderful friend to you and so many others. My condolences on your loss.

(26 September 2020)

[*brg* Of those people who joined the Zoom internet 'meeting' of the Nova Mob on 7 October — the John Bangsund Tribute meeting — the people who expressed the deepest sorrow at his passing were the members of the publishing/editing industry, for whom John worked as a freelance editor from the 1970s until 2005. Everybody who was in the industry then, including Elaine and me, enjoyed and treasured the issues of *The Society of Editors Newsletter* that John produced over about 20 years*]

DOUG BARBOUR
11655-72nd Ave, Edmonton,
Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada

I just wanted to send my condolences on the death of John Bangsund. I know he was a stalwart of Aussie fandom, and I think a close friend. A first major loss from Covid-19 for you (at least I hope that's the case). We do see in the news that Victoria seems to be the hardest hit recently, with a resurgence (as in parts of Canada, not least Alberta, especially Edmonton, so that we have to be extra careful). John's death has affected many fans, not just in Australia but also around the world, from what I've seen in response to the death notice on Facebook. I'm afraid we're going to be seeing more such notices closer to home as this pandemic rages on.

(26 August 2020)

I'm listening to some of Sibelius's piano trios as I write, partly to say that the print copy of *SFC* 103, your lovely tribute issue to John Bangsund (who might have written about such) has arrived. I have been listening to much of both the Sibelius and the Dohnanyi CDs. They are all terrific in their various ways. Of course, I hadn't really heard of Dohnanyi (until Naxos began its program of recording all those late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century lesser known composers), but I love Sibelius for his violin concerto and his works for orchestra, so why did I not think to check out the chamber music before now?

I did just order a big box set of Mariss Jansons conducting the Oslo Philharmonic in many of the well known orchestral works, but also a slew of works by composers unknown to me, sounding pretty Scandinavian. I do have the boxed set of him conducting the St Petersburg Philharmonic playing all the Rachmaninoff symphonies and piano concertos, which is very fine, indeed, so I'm pretty sure I'll enjoy these.

I'm assuming, hopefully, that you there in Melbourne are continuing to take care, and are still satisfied with your leaders' dealing with the pandemic. If only that was the case here.

(1 December 2020)

JOHN LITCHEN
PO Box 3503, Robina Town Centre,
QLD 4230

Since you are going to run an extension to the John Bangsund issue I'm sending you the PDFs of the

pages that I have from the *Philosophical Gas* 'Gas Filosófico' issue.

John used to receive (among many other overseas fanzines and other publications) a semi-prozine from Spain called *Nueva Dimension*. This was both a fanzine and a magazine that printed science fiction stories in Spanish as well as English originals translated into Spanish. Two-thirds of the magazine had stories and illustrations as in a traditional SF magazine and the back third was devoted to fan articles and letters. It was published in Barcelona, was very popular, and ran for some years. John gave me a couple of copies since he knew I had been in Mexico for a year and could speak Spanish (to a degree). I subsequently subscribed to that magazine.

It was about this time that Monica came into my life, and she was from Chile. What I didn't know at first after meeting Monica was that her older brother Hugo was a journalist and a writer in Chile. When Monica showed me a couple of books written by Hugo I realised that he was a writer of science fiction. In fact, he was Hugo Correa, the first science fiction writer in Chile, and the first to be to be published overseas as well as locally.

When I told John he was over the moon at this revelation and immediately suggested I write an article about him. This happened to be when *Nueva Dimension* issued a special issue devoted entirely to the work of Hugo Correa, which John gave to me. A few years before I met Monica, Hugo had been invited to lecture at a university in America (I can't remember where now), invited by none other than Ray Bradbury, who was instrumental in having two of Hugo's short stories translated into English and published in America. So I wrote the article, which John published in his *Philosophical Gas* fanzine, changing the title to Spanish for that issue only. He also drew the delightful cartoon for the cover. At that time I had neither met Hugo nor spoken with him, but I had read two of his novels and a collection of his short stories, along with some of his articles, in a monthly magazine that Monica had brought with her from Chile, as well as the special issue of *Nueva Dimension* devoted entirely to his work. In fact I did not meet any of her family until her mother came to Australia to be with us when Monica was pregnant and gave birth to our son Brian. I finally met Hugo and the rest of the family when we went Chile for three months in 1990. We went to the USA, Mexico, Argentina, finishing up in Chile for three months. We were away for five months altogether at the end of 1989 into the first three months of 1990.

(12 September 2020)

You won't believe this: I was looking through the boxes in which I keep my 16mm movies, and

discovered I do have the only copy of the short colour film that features John Bangsund.

Not only that, when Merv closed Space Age Books and moved what was left over to his house, he gave me the copies of the films he had, which were the original work print of the *Antifan* film and the master edited version used by the film lab to make the release copies that went overseas. Included in that were the magnetic sound track made by the lab and a marked-up copy for synchronising the image and sound. That is all I thought I had.

But what is even more remarkable is that there is also a copy of the second film, made in Sydney for the Sydney in '83 bid, which I never knew I had. I was sure the committee had kept whatever copies were made. They must have given their copy to Merv and he had put it with the other films. I now have them all here.

I imagine the work print and the master copies are reasonably pristine, while the prints used for projection over time in the USA will most likely show wear and tear.

Any ideas about what in the future should be done to maintain preservation of these films? They are, after all, valuable items of fan history in Australia.
(23 September 2020)



The Canberra Antifan film, 1973: John Litchen's photos

As John Litchen explained in *SF Commentary* 103, John and Monica Litchen went to Canberra on their honeymoon in the middle of winter 1973 to film some scenes for a proposed second *Antifan/Aussiefan* film in colour, after the first one was completed in 1972 and was already being used to promote the Australia in 1975 Worldcon bid. Here are some stills from that shoot, which feature John Bangsund. *Middle: left:* Robin Johnson; John Litchen directs John Bangsund. *Right:* Sally Yeoland, who had recently met John Bangsund, and Monica Litchen. *Below:* Overlooking Lake Burley Griffin: Sally Yeoland, Robin Johnson, John Bangsund being a toreador, the children of Leigh and Helen Hyde (Canberra fans), and John Litchen.



The other *Antifan/Aussiefan* films: John Litchen's photos

In his letters here, John Litchen gives some background to the photos below, from the shoot for the Sydney in '83 Worldcon bid *Antifan* film. *Top: Left: Paul Stevens as Antifan; Right: Andrew Brown as the Zombie.*



*Below: Left: John Breden as the Messenger (the message reads 'Yngvi is a louse'), Malcolm Hunt as as Aussiefan. Below: Right: a 'crowd scene' from the first *Antifan* film: Paul Stevens, Robin Johnson, Peter House, Leigh Edmonds, Merv Binns, John Breden, and Bill Wright, outside the National Gallery of Victoria.*



The shot of Antifan standing on the anchor was the link between Melbourne and Sydney. It has Melbourne in the background: Melbourne as I remember it. I saw lots of aerial shots of Melbourne during *Halifax*, new series, and the city is totally unrecognisable to me because I've now been up here for 25 years. We had Antifan disappear from the anchor and reappear in Sydney near the Opera House.

The shot of Andrew Brown as a zombie was taken in Melbourne at Space Age Books. He acted as Antifan's assistant in Melbourne, before the disappearing act.

The shot of John Breden and Malcolm Hunt in their costumes was a scene in the first film. At the City Square, John Breden gives Malcolm Hunt an important message regarding Antifan, who is about to bomb Space Age Books, which sets in motion the final climactic scenes of the film. John Breden does not appear anywhere else in the film, only that one scene. I think he just wanted to show off his fabulous costume. They did not appear in the Sydney film at all.

Andrew Brown as the Zombie is a shot from the second film, The other two are from the first film.

You may remember that the National Gallery of Victoria was used as the location for John Foyster's palatial home. The interior shot where he is 'pulped' by the collapsing shelves of pulp magazines was shot in the old Space Books back room.

PS: I had forgotten that John Breden appears briefly in the crowd scene on the steps of the State Library during the Aussiefan presentation. There just weren't enough people to make that scene bigger ... still, it worked.

(30 September 2020)

If you look at the photos I sent you, when Paul Stevens is in the water at Williamstown, Carey Handfield appears in some of the photos. He is also in a couple of the photos where Antifan emerges from the water before heading for Sydney.

Can Carey tell us his involvement with the Sydney film? Was he a go-between Melbourne and Sydney to coordinate filming? Or was it simply that on the day we took the photos and shot the film sequence he happened to be with Paul and came along? Did Carey supply me with the film to shoot the scenes we did at Williamstown? I can't recall who supplied the film. I know it wasn't me. We must have had some rolls of film or we would not have been able to shoot the Williamstown scenes before we flew up to Sydney. Or perhaps we didn't shoot those beginning scenes until after we'd been to Sydney.? But I'm sure we shot them first, and then we went to Sydney to do the rest of the film. The Sydney committee did the editing and produced the final release print, because I had nothing to do

with that part of it.

(30 October 2020)

Bill Wright appears in the 'crowd scene' at the end of the first film. He is the only one on the Aussiecon bidding committee who is not eliminated. He appears in an early scene as the mysterious gentleman in the back alley who hires Antifan to eliminate the bidding committee for Australia in 75. Bill also appears in the various funeral scenes as each of the committee members are laid to rest as well as several scenes where the committee is travelling around Melbourne looking at likely sites to hold the convention.

(30 December 2020)

LEIGH EDMONDS
46 Hocking Avenue,
Mt Clear VIC 3350

SFC 103: You're right: we owe John Bangsund a great deal, more than I think most of us could possibly put into words. It's just that some of my memories of John are soured by some of the things that he did that will probably go unrecorded. I don't mind that. We all have our flaws and weaknesses and I think John had more than most. I'd just prefer to let somebody else try to write honestly about him.

Perhaps you've come across the one piece of fan writing of his that I have yet to find that I really liked. It is about the trip that he and Diane and Paul and I made to Sydney to see Jack Williamson and instead recreated Sydney fandom. No doubt I will come across it sooner or later. Just not yet.

The history of Australian fandom is coming along nicely but slowly. I've drafted the essay about the formation of AFPA, which runs to about 10,000 words, but I'm letting it rest while I get on with the next essay, which is about fandom in Sydney from the reformation of the Sydney Futurians in 1947 up to the end of the second convention in 1953. At the moment I'm note-taking from the Sydney fanzines I have from that period. After that I will have a second look at the AFPA essay and, when I'm happy with it, see what Dick, Lee, and Race think and if they want to add in any additional information or perspectives. I'm hoping not, because 10,000 words is quite enough. (I have a new respect for Lee after researching and writing this essay.) Then I will publish another issue of *iOTA* with the draft essay attached for general consumption. I could let you have a sneak preview if you want, but I'd prefer to let Dick, Lee, and Race have a go first.

At the moment I find myself reading a lot of Graham Stone's writing in the early 1950s, and it's



giving me a new way to think about *SF Commentary*. But you'll have to wait quite a while to see how this perspective works out because I'm just starting to play with it myself.

You and I, Bruce, are in what Geoff Bolton would call 'the second rank'. John had the talent to be in the first rank. I like your comment that John was waiting for greatness to be thrust upon him. I'm waiting too, but I don't expect the telephone call to ever come, and I know why. Perhaps what John lacked was drive, and that is what we both really lack, as well as real talent. You publish *SF Commentary* and I do history, at least that's something positive to hang our hats on. Particularly at this rather desolate time in our history.

(16 September 2020)

[*brg* The first part of Leigh's *History of Australian Fandom*, dealing with AFPA and the 1950s in Melbourne fandom, can be found in *iOTA* 18, downloadable as a PDF from efanzines.com; and the second part in *iOTA* 19.*]

**ANDY SAWYER
10 Kingsway West,
Chester CH2 2LA, UK**

The thing that amused me most about *SFC* 103 was Muphry's law (I'm inclined to add, from personal experience, 'Any article that criticises shoddy research is going to have at least one egregious and

completely checkable falsehood in it. The sharper the criticism, the more obvious and embarrassing the falsehood.'). which sparked me to wonder if there is some similar 'law' along the lines of 'The more you research something, the more you realise how much more there is to research and that what you have written so far is seriously incomplete.' Perhaps the word I'm groping for is 'procrastination'.

I never knew, or corresponded with, John, and much of his work outside *ASFR* and various Australian fanzines that came my way, but this was a fine tribute.

Congratulations on the Ditmar Award in 2020! We are beginning to reach 'interesting times' again in the UK, with even some of his strongest supporters wondering where Boris Johnson has been hiding himself. We are both well, but hiding as much as we can (though tomorrow is a trip to London to see grandchildren we have only seen once since lockdown) and currently in a frantic week of various online (mostly Zoom) lectures and courses we have signed up for.

(25 September 2020)

**FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060 Wien,
Austria**

Thanks for the tribute to John Bangsund. I never met him (like most fans), but I remember fondly the time when he was publishing. Soon *Quarber Merkur* 121 should be out, another big issue of some 304 pages.

One hears too many deeply disturbing things about Australia, some naturally made, others the results of government inaction. It seems that most countries today are ruled by brainless people, and many seem to follow the example of the American Taliban, formerly Republic Party, and their religion of the Holy Gun of the NRA.

[*brg* Australia seems to have dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic better than most countries other than New Zealand, and all credit must be given to the conservative Federal Government for certain kinds of financial support to people suddenly unemployed. However, entire categories of employees have been left in the lurch, especially those from the arts and the universities. The state governments have had to do most of the difficult work of closing internal borders and persuading people to take all the personal safety measures.*]

I hope that you can keep busy enough to survive.

And I am not doing much these days, but I am glad to report that things Strugatskyish move much better than Lem's ever did. *Roadside Picnic* has now sold close to 100,000 copies in the USA, *The Inhabited Island* and *Lame Fate/Ugly Swans* have just been published, Penguin has reprinted *Definitely Maybe* under its original Russian title *One Billion Years to the End of the World* and Chicago Review Press has contracted for the two sequels to *The Inhabited Island: Beetle in the Anthill* and *The Time Wanderers*. There will also be a Russian remake of *The Inhabited Island* film and *Monday Starts on Saturday*, and perhaps a TV serial based on *Hard to be a God*. And lots of new translations and reissues in other countries, most notably in Brazil, China, and Korea.

(25 September 2020)

GIAMPAOLO COSSATO
Cannaregio 3825, Calle Fontana,
30121-Venezia, Italy

Sorry to hear of John Bangsund's death. The number of the old SF guard is sadly dwindling. And the virus is tipping the scale. I had corresponded with him few times in the 1960, and have some issues of *Australian SF Review* that he sent me. I met his sister Joy here in Venice when somehow she managed to reach my address back in 1973 (or 1974; memory fails me).

John was the stepping stone that led me to you and your *SF Commentary*.

I have been living almost in isolation since the end of February. During March and April the lockdown was total. To go out you needed a document proving the reasons for doing it. Now there is a certain relaxation, but masks and distancing is still required in many instances (inside shops totally compulsory, same in restaurants, bars, pubs and the like, except when eating). At the beginning Italy was the worst-hit country in Europe. Now we are among the 'best', but the virus is again on the uptake.

I have followed the news about Melbourne and what happened there.

I haven't seen my daughter since last Christmas. Caution suggests that we stay apart. Now is even worse, with Belgium declared a red zone. The European Commission had practically stopped all activities for almost three months. My daughter employed the time to improve her knowledge of Danish and French, hoping to add both to her curriculum next year and bring the total of her languages to eight. Now she's working again, but with a lot of limitations; teleconferencing becoming the norm.

About my health. I try to pay the least possible attention to it. I have plenty of things to do. Old documents to recover, pictures to classify (mine and from other sources, including several thousands of Venice and surrounding areas going back to the 1800s); books to read; some music; and movies and TV to enjoy. (Recently I saw *Operation Buffalo* about the atomic bombs exploded in Australia in the 1950s. I didn't realise there had been so many.) I used to dine out with some friends — no more advisable. But there is still the telephone, with which I also talk to my daughter every couple of days. And there are the visits to the hospital, which cannot be avoided, unfortunately.

Venice, like all tourist places around the world, has been hard hit by the virus. San Marco Square, the beating heart of Venice, is now ghostlike with all the shops gradually closing. And the tide season is approaching. Last year in November was catastrophic. Should there be a repeat this year, or even worse, it might spell the end of Venice as a habitable place for the majority of the few inhabitants still remaining. A sad addition to the California and Australian fires, the hurricanes, and all the rest that Mother Nature is meting out to the undeserving us.

On the bright side (assuming a word such as this can be used nowadays) I found myself the subject of an article in the local on-line 'paper' *La voce di Venezia*. Specifically it was about my Solaris Bookshop: <https://www.lavocedivenezia.it/libreria-solaris-strada-nuova-venezia-perduta>. A nostalgia piece.

(1 October 2020)

TIM MARION
c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway,
#1201B, New York NY 10002, USA

I wanted to say how sorry I was to hear about John Bangsund. To me he was a very familiar name over the years, and I almost certainly interacted with him twice in FAPA (during the early 1980s and early 2000s). But I understand that to you he was a seminal influence and an important part of your life, so I wanted to acknowledge this significant loss. So many lost lately, it feels like the remainder of my life is to be spent memorialising them.

And of course, with the rise of fascism and the seeming efforts to dissolve the postal system in this country, I am very worried about the future state of apas and fandom in general. I suppose if apa 'mailings' can no longer be mailed out, they can be sent electronically, but that certainly makes them more of a pain to read. And I wonder how much longer the internet will remain at this rate.

Sorry to be so gloomy. Elaine may have told you I have a new cat to console myself with. I'm not sure she's correct that I am recovering from the supervirus, but I did suffer from something a few months ago that, at least so far, has not affected my lungs. I admit it *does* feel like I am suffering from a profound (lack of) motivation, so much so that it takes many cups of coffee to do almost anything, including a simple letter like this. Of course, at this point you're going to tell me that you drink coffee in order to sleep. I guess it's starting to work that way on me too, as I get so wound up I crash hard soon afterwards.

(1 October 2020)

LLOYD PENNEY
1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke,
Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

I wish *SFC 103* was for a happier occasion than the passing of your friend John Bangsund. I knew John to see, but I do not recall ever meeting him, or conversing with him via the Web, so he may simply be another person in our fandom I wish I could have met.

As he died of Covid-19, the fannish count is getting up there. For a while Dave Langford was marking in *Ansible* with an asterisk any deaths caused by the pandemic. I would hope there might be a special pandemic issue of a fanzine where we can honour and recognise all fans who were claimed by the virus.

In this issue I see so much love for the man, a creative force for all, and a good friend to have around. He seems to have been generous with his money and time, and his knowledge. He seems to have been the one person you'd invite first to your party, and he'd have a good time, and provide a good time for all around him. Why are these the people who die? Why can't they live beyond our usual allotment? They are wanted and needed, and you'd hope that would be sufficient to keep them around.

I have been an editor like John, and I am attempting, perhaps late in life, to become the SF editor I wanted to be. Better late than never, I suppose. I am not sure if anything I might publish on my own would be received well at all in Ontario. My previous threats to publish were met with other threats, so I didn't do anything about it.

(5 October 2020)

ROMAN ORSZANSKI
PO Box 3231, Rundle Mall,
Adelaide SA 5000

Here's a Keats and Chapman story, written for the special Nova Mob Zoom 'meeting' to celebrate the life of John Bangsund, Wednesday, 7 October 2020:

Chapman's Device

It was a bright and sunny day when Keats and Chapman were visiting the Royal Exhibition Building, in the Carlton Gardens, Melbourne. There was a Maker's Fair, with special section on zines. 'I brought you here to show you this curious device,' said Chapman, removing a dust cover to reveal an old Roneo 750. 'You remember, Keats, how that Bangsund chap manages to astound his readers with tales about us?' Chapman shows a cut stencil. 'He writes on this stencil, cutting holes in the wax.' 'Looks as if it would tear with a quill pen, though' notes Keats. 'Precisely why he uses a typewriter.' 'Wouldn't the ribbon get in the way of a clean imprint?' Chapman sighs. 'You must remove the ribbon first.' He loads the stencil, grabs the handle and — making sure there's some paper in the tray — turns it to print a page. 'See, simple!' Keats remarks, 'Ah, that's why his stories are so impressive.' Chapman nods, 'It clearly allows John to wax poetic, then.' Keats wanders over to the zine table and returns, bearing copies of *Philosophical Gas*, *Scythrop* etc. 'I got a bargain price for these four.' 'A shilling's worth, I'd wager.' said Chapman.

(6 October 2020)

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

I was particularly taken with John's riff on Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (or 'Prufred Alfrock' — and I've only just noticed that proof-read pun in John's revised title). I say riff on Eliot, but there's Conrad (by way of Coppola) and Beckett by way of Tolkien, Orwell (ah, that Blair, not Tony the Bliar), Wilde, and more Eliot than just poor Prufrock. Truly, the gang's all here.

(16 October 2020)

STEPHEN CAMPBELL
20 Bostock St.,
Warrnambool VIC 3280

Today I saw the arrival of *SF Commentary* 103 announcing the departure of John Bangsund. I had been told of his death by David Russell, and tonight David and I had planned to have a meal at Proudfoot's at six o'clock.

Then David rang me at 5.30 p.m. to inform me of his father's accidental death only hours earlier.

David is strong and was holding up when I visited him this evening, but my heart aches for his loss. I don't want to intrude on his private grief, but I feel a need to give him some moral support and distraction over the coming weeks. I am now sitting in my caravan and cogitating over my reading of *SF Commentary* 102, which you sent me what seems like recently.

SFC 102: 'After the Deluge', including Leigh Edmonds' section, is the first serious critical commentary I've received for my artwork exhibited at the Warrnambool Art Gallery until Covid-19 closed the exhibition. Your review and Leigh's critique are true egoboo to me, and I thank you for this evaluation, which helps shore up my eroding confidence in the validity of my work. The achievements of many SF fans are literary rather than visual, and it gave me satisfaction to see my work as an article and not just a filler or decoration.

Reading of science fiction was the progenitor of many of my thoughts about the modern world, which is the world I seek to express, not only in my graphic novellas, which are more conservative in style, but also in the paintings in the form of something felt but not seen. Much of the good science fiction I read expressed what I felt. Poetry does the same thing to me, and so do the visual arts. Surrealism has been the strongest agent of this impulse, with its relationship between the human psyche and the bewilderment the art activated. This is the same bewilderment (and beauty) that I get when I read Cordwainer Smith or Philip K. Dick. It hits me in the guts, and I can't even work out why.

I was surprised to read that John Bangsund died of Covid-19. I did not expect anyone I knew to succumb to this pandemic, and John's death made it more real to me in my isolation here in the country. Apart from wearing face masks, life in Warrnambool has been much like normal, except that the neighbourhoods have been quieter. I was appalled to hear of the curfew in Melbourne until recently. I spent most of my later years in Melbourne outside during the nocturnal hours.

I hope that the fictions of science will help us understand the absurd facts of our current civilisation and help us escape our messes through imagination and wonder.

(24 September 2020)

Today I went to Ricky Bourke's Hotel in the small town of Koroit about 10 kilometres from Warrnambool to meet and talk with Claudia and Gerard, who are now living there. This was a warm and stimulating conversation, and reminded me why I liked Claudia Mangiamele back when I was only 17 years old and new SF fan. She has lost none of her strong presence, and Gerard and I got along well. Koroit is on a plateau near the edge of an ancient volcano and is the town of my father's birth (a fact I found out only after his death). I am seriously considering moving there from this caravan if it has a place for me to rent. I love Warrnambool's geography, but in recent years its city-emulating suburbanism and over-pricing of itself is outgrowing my ability to stay here comfortably. I'll keep you posted about my decision.

Not far from Koroit I stopped over to greet a fellow I met through Claudia, Ross Altman, and spent fruitful hours looking at his enormous display of stone sculptures that he has been creating over the past few decades after he gave up being a brick layer. We talked mainly about what it means to devote oneself to such a precarious existence and the lessons of the struggle.

I get the impression that there is actually a fertile art culture in this area, and because of my exhibition I am now ready to meet it and possibly contribute to its nurture. I look forward to seeing how the coming year (post-covid?) will unravel.

(7 October 2020)

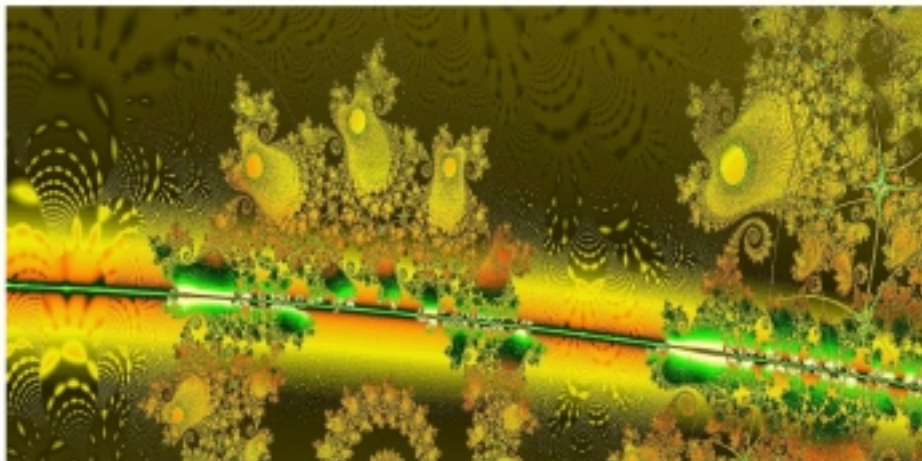
The 2020 voyage, Part 2: SFCs 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, and 104

When you're reading this letter column, you might have some difficulties remembering the contents of particular issues. No confusion, please. Here's a brief synopsis of each issue.

SF COMMENTARY 100

50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION Part 3

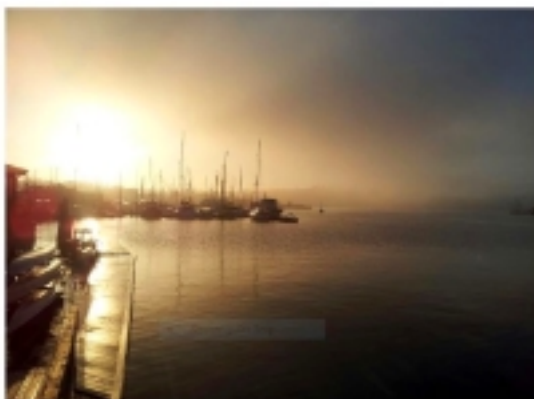
DERDA * BLACKFORD * BRYCE * HOLMBERG * STEELE *
KING * SALVIDGE * TRASN * RUDD * GILLESPIE



Cover: Ditmar (Dick Jensen): 'Dancing Around Bead'.

SF Commentary 99 50th Anniversary Edition Part 2

July 2019 80 pages



Cover: Rashi Dean: 'Winning Glory'. Photograph.

SF COMMENTARY 99, 50th Anniversary Edition, Part 2, July 2019

Covers by Randy Byers and Ditmar (Dick Jensen). Tributes to Vonda McIntyre, Gene Wolfe, Randy Byers, and Harry.

Lots of **letters of comment**, including from Gerald Murnane, Patrick McGuire, and Yvonne Rousseau.

The History of the Nova Mob, by **Bruce Gillespie**, plus help from many data providers.

The most popular article in the issue was **Yvonne Rousseau's** account of her first encounter with the Nova Mob and fandom in general.

SF COMMENTARY 100, 50th Anniversary Edition, Part 3, November 2019

Cover by Ditmar (Dick Jensen).

Colin Steele's 'The Field', his regular round-up of recent SF and fantasy book releases.

2018's Best of Everything lists and comments

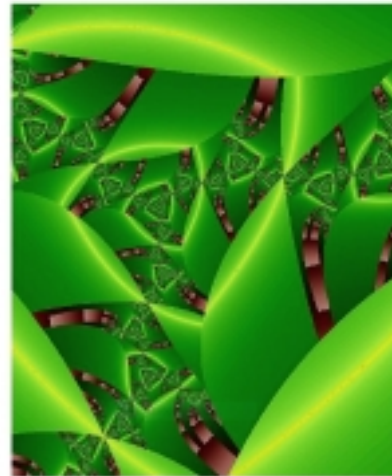
February 2020 80 pages

JAMES BROWN GERTY ALLISON NORMAN CAMPBELL ROBERT BLAKE
 FORD RUSSELL BLACKFORD ELAINE COCHRANE GUYMAS COCK
 JENNINGS ELLEN HERRINGHAM DAVID KIMMEL STEVE STILES TIM
 TRAM CRAIG JUNE WOLF AND MANY OTHERS



Divine (Dick) Thompson: "Demagogue"

2010 – THE YEAR BEFORE THE DELUGE
BRUCE CAMPBELL • KENNETH COLE • DAVID GARCIA • HENRY MARSHALL •
JIMMYE (JACK) JORDAN • HENRY LARRO • LILIAN LORONCO • COLIN STEELE •
DENY MARSHALL



Dinner (Tide Jansen): Beyond Infinity?

SF COMMENTARY 101, February 2020

SF COMMENTARY 102, July 2020

November 2020 92 pages



Dennis Marshall: "Voyager"

SF COMMENTARY 104, November 2020

Covers by **Denny Marshall**.
Bruce Gillespie Talks to His Friends.
 Tribute to **Phil Ware**.
Edwina Harvey and **Robert Day** report on the

2019 and 2020 World Conventions.

Personal stories from **William Breiding, Jennifer Bryce, Robert Lichtman, and Guy Salvidge.**
Poetry from **Michael Bishop, Jenny Blackford,**
and **Tim Train.**

Article-reviews from **Paul Di Filippo, Cy Chauvin,**
Guy Salvidge, Henry Gasko, Murray MacLachlan, Ian Mond, and Michelle Worthington.

LYNC

PO Box 104, Coburg VIC 3058

I loved reading the 50th anniversary issue, *SFC* No. 98! As I read about your early days in fandom, it brought back such vivid memories of my own starry-eyed early days when, 10 years later, I attended my first convention and was too shy a newbie to tell George Turner how much I appreciated his talk on SF criticism, and when confronted with Roger Zelazny, one of my favourite authors, was too tongue-tied even to say hello! Yes — it was the convention when both Brian Aldiss and Roger Zelazny came to Australia — Unicon IV, Melbourne, 1978. But unlike you at your first convention, I did already know some people because I was a member of the hosting organisation: the Melbourne University SF Association (MUSFA). Not only did I know the organising committee and some attendees, I also found myself providing local knowledge and assistance to total strangers, and getting to know people that way.

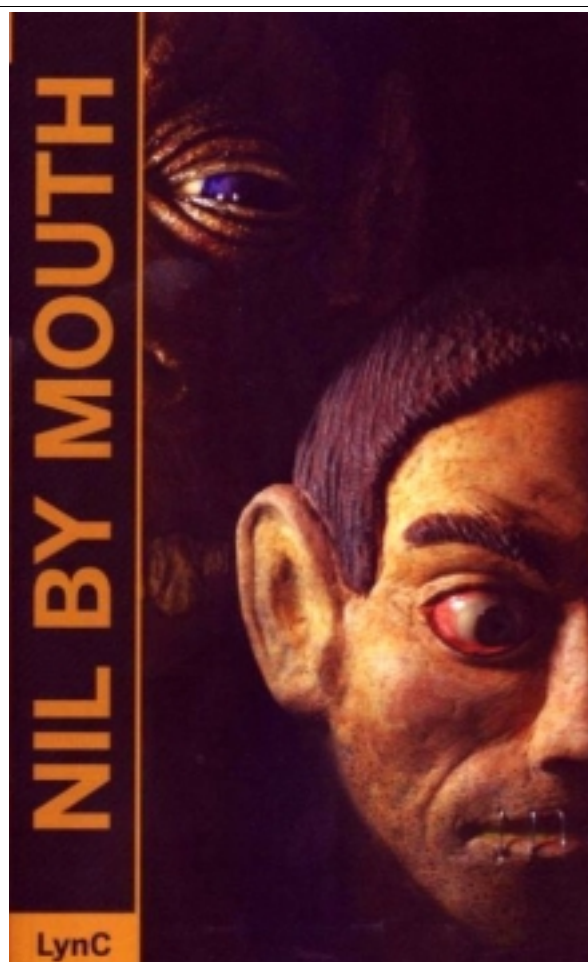
That was the con I first saw Lewis Morley, with Marilyn Pride and Nick Stathopoulos. At that point in time, I was too shy to do anything but worship from afar, and buy a tiny Marilyn Pride rock with my life savings. Now, of course, Lewis is the 3D artist who created the cover of the second edition of my novel *Nil by Mouth*. He was worried I wouldn't like it, but he understood my protagonist and his arch-nemesis so perfectly, how could I not appreciate it?

I read all those obituaries with interest, but I had never met any of them, or read their work. (The one I tried to read, Kate Wilhelm, I gave up on.) Now, of course, I never will meet them.

I read Tim Train's Aussie Poem to my daughter. She agrees that Kit Kats are Aussie, and on hearing the alternative verse declared we were all a bunch of degenerates, and no wonder we were friends.

800 contributors over the years! *Wow!*

(1 December 2020)



LynC: *Nil By Mouth* (2nd edition; Shooting Star Press). Cover: Lewis Morley.

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

**PO Box 8093, Silver Spring,
MD 20907, USA**

SFCs 97 and 98: You mention that Damien Broderick wanted you to issue a *Best of SF Commentary*, but you couldn't because of the rights issue involving the Stanislaw Lem split-up with Franz Rottensteiner. But hasn't Fanac.org's industrious posting of back issues of *SFC* proven an alternative? In the past month they have posted over 20 of your early issues online, and they say they have posted 83 per cent of the back issues of *SFC* up until the point the issues on efanazines take over. Doesn't this solve the problem? (And why was there an eight-year gap in issues between 1981 and 1989?)

[*brg* Yes, and by now Joe Siclari and Edie Stern at Fanac.org have posted all the back issues of *SFC* that are not already hosted by efanazines.com. Now everybody can catch up on *SFC*'s best years.*]

Ray Sinclair-Wood says that schools ‘try to pull culture down to the age of the students’. I’m not sure which schools Sinclair-Wood is talking about, but here is an example I found after reading Robert Pondiscio’s *How the Other Half Learns*, an account of how he spent the 2017–18 school year observing Success Academy, a very successful charter school chain in New York City. (I don’t know what the Australian equivalent of charter schools are, but in the US they are government-funded schools with a great deal of independence in what they teach and whom they can hire and fire.) Pondiscio shows that the schools are very good at getting low-income and minority students to behave in the classroom, work hard, and achieve test scores that are equal or superior to those offered by schools in richer suburbs. He shows that the teachers are very compassionate in telling students about the hardships they overcame in life. But he offers no evidence that anything the students read is given to them because the teachers thought they would enjoy it, or which offers students something inspiring or by a great writer. What I got from reading Pondiscio’s book is that everything done in Success Academy is done to pass required tests, including the giant rally held in Radio City Music Hall the week before the statewide tests take place. At 61, I am ancient enough that I read *David Copperfield* and *Silas Marner* in high school, but I can’t imagine students doing that now.

Ray asks: if you go to a classical music concert should you be expected ‘to come away with information’ in the same way you would if you attended a lecture by Stephen Hawking? Last month I went to a concert of the Maryland Lyric Opera that consisted of arias from great composers. It concluded with a trio from *Der Rosenkavalier*, which is probably the best part of Richard Strauss’s greatest opera. The great advantage of going to a concert hall with good acoustics is that you get the music undiluted and you can concentrate on it. What I heard was 10 minutes of great and uplifting beauty that put me, for that moment, on a higher plane of existence than where I normally reside. That’s different from ‘acquiring information’.

My anecdotes about Brian Aldiss aren’t as interesting as Greg Benford’s. I met Aldiss twice, at the Netherlands in 1990 and in Glasgow in 1995, and both times my comments were along the lines of ‘You’re Brian Aldiss! Ook ook! I’m your number one fan!’ However, Jerry Pournelle gave me my start as a professional writer. In 1982 I attended a conference at the Library of Congress on science and literature, which mostly featured Jerry Pournelle versus a group of pretentious English professors who didn’t understand him. My memory of the event is Pournelle bellowing and explaining that he had become deaf because of a Korean War

injury and that the representatives of the humanities were showing they didn’t know anything about science. I dutifully wrote it up and mailed it to *The American Spectator*, which got a response along the lines of ‘Wow! Who the hell are you?’ They published it in their May 1982 issue, which was the first time I had ever appeared in a magazine.

I share your enthusiasm for the writings of Michael Dirda. What I like about him is his passion and enthusiasm for what he reads; he’s always well informed. I am also amazed about the number of relatively obscure Victorian and Edwardian novels he has reviewed; I don’t think anyone else would, for example, have published a Dornford Yates appreciation in the *Washington Post*.

The best play I saw in the last year, *The Heiress*, adapted into a movie in 1948 that won Olivia de Havilland an Oscar, was very well done and very satisfying and makes me eager to read *Washington Square*, the Henry James novel on which the play is based.

(18 November 2019)

SFC 100: I very much enjoy Colin Steele’s reviews, but he should know that Tade Thompson is British, not American. I also question his claim that Sir Philip Pullman’s ‘Dark Materials’ books failed to be filmed after *The Golden Compass* because of religious pressure in the US. I think that American evangelicals are numerous enough to support films by buying tickets, which is why there was a second Narnia film, but not numerous enough to cancel films. Moreover, I believe the *Catholic Herald* is a British publication, not an American one.

I always enjoy your best-of-the-year lists. With books, the only one on your 2018 list that I read this year was Philip Reeve’s *Mortal Engines*, which I picked for the book club I belong to because of the movie. I thought the film had great backgrounds and set design and an inferior plot, which was taken from the book (except the endings are different). I don’t particularly like steampunk, because I’d rather read real Victorian fiction than contemporary fiction set in Victorian times. But I thought Reeve’s book was imaginative and entertaining, although I doubt if I’ll read the eight or nine sequels.

Films: You mention Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*, which I finally saw two years ago thanks to the American Film Institute. I gather the film had a lot of technical problems, including having to be re-shot because the photographer had used an advanced Kodak film that Soviet laboratories couldn’t handle. In addition, I gather Tarkovsky stripped most of the sf elements from the film because he hated sf. I thought the result was a bleak mess. I don’t have to see again.

In 1987, I called a meeting of the Silver Spring

Depressing Science Fiction Film Society to see Tarkovsky's last film, *The Sacrifice*. Our group attended films that were sf, foreign, and life denying. 'This film won the Palme D'Or at Cannes,' I said. 'It's about a Swedish family that undergoes psychological collapse in the dead of winter until they face the white-hot fury of a nuclear holocaust!' We spent three hours taking in the nails-in-the-head depressing action and enjoyed ourselves because the film is sf, foreign, life denying, and ambiguous because you're not sure if there's a nuclear holocaust.

I agree that *Roma* has to be seen in a theatre because of its great cinematography, particularly in the scene in the water.

Annihilation was not a Netflix film in the US. I thought it was a good film that strained to be a great one, including a good performance by Natalie Portman, but I didn't understand the last 20 minutes. In baseball terms, *Annihilation* was a double where the runner was thrown out at third.

(27 December 2019)

MICHAEL DIRDA
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Having finally gone through the mail that accumulated during my week away in San Diego, the highlight is *SF Commentary 100: 50th Anniversary Edition, Part 3*. Thank you, Bruce, for including my Aickman piece in the company of essays by chum John-Henri Holmberg (on *Frankenstein*) and many other distinguished contributors. I have my nightstand reading — and very elegantly presented reading at that — all set for the next several evenings.

(1 February 2020)

Greg Benford asks if *Bound to Please* is my favourite of my own books. I like them all, of course, though I dislike the subtitle insisted upon by Norton for that book: *A One-Volume Literary Education*. My subtitle, more bland but less pretentious, is: *Essays on Great Writers and their Books*.

Because Greg asks, here's a rundown on my books.

- *Readings* collects columns that appeared in the *Washington Post* under that rubric in the 1980s and 90s. It's an old-fashioned hodge-podge of essays about books, collecting, and literary stuff, very personal. Subtitled *Essays and Literary Entertainments* — several pieces are funny (I think).
- *An Open Book*: A memoir of how reading shaped my early life. It covers my childhood and

adolescence in working-class Lorain, Ohio and my first two years at Oberlin College, then ends with me in Paris during the summer of 1968. Covertly modelled on Stendhal's *Vie de Henri Brulard*. It won the Ohioana Award for non-fiction. Hardly the Hugo or Nebula, but a nice surprise.

- *Bound to Please*: a big collection of my longer essays and reviews, covering all kinds of mainstream writers from around the world. It's the most 'scholarly' of my books.
- *Book by Book*: a small breviary-like volume based on my commonplace book. It assembles favourite lines and passages from my reading, supplemented with brief essays and book lists. 'Old age is the most unexpected of all the things that happen to a man' (Trotsky).
- *Classics for Pleasure*: Harcourt Brace Editor Andre Bernard wanted an updated version of Clifton Fadiman's *The Lifetime Reading Plan* but I persuaded him to let me produce a kind of supplement to it instead. The hook here is that I juxtapose pieces about canonical figures and books — e.g., Sappho, John Webster, Icelandic sagas, Arthurian romances — with pieces about classics of genre literature by, among many others, M. R. James, Georgette Heyer, Lovecraft, and Phil Dick.
- *On Conan Doyle*: This was for a Princeton series called 'Writers on Writers'. It's essentially a 200-page essay on Conan Doyle and his work, not just the Sherlock Holmes stories. I include a pastiche I wrote in which Langdale Pike — a gossip columnist from the worst Holmes story, 'The Three Gables' — consistently solves Holmes's cases for him, as well as others such as the mysterious disappearance of the Darling children. Langdale Pike is my investiture name in the Baker Street Irregulars. OCD won an Edgar in the biographical/critical category. Another nice surprise.
- *Browsings*: For a year I produced a weekly blog essay for *The American Scholar* describing my life as a reviewer, reader, and collector. *Browsings* assembles those pieces, which were all written quickly and consequently possess a kind of devil-may-care breeziness.
- Forthcoming is *The Great Age of Storytelling*: this is the book I'm trying to finish now about the emergence of genre fiction in Britain at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The proposed title is a variant on Roger Lancelyn Green's *The Age of the Storytellers* (which Mike Ashley also used for his book about the magazines of the era). Writers covered include pioneering figures like Dumas and Verne, but mainly those who flourished between 1880 and 1930: Stevenson,

Haggard, Weyman, Griffith, Wells, Meade, Corelli, Hope, Freeman, Nesbit, Machen, Blackwood, Florence Marryat, Morris, Buchan, Sabatini, Benson, Dunsany, Eddison Wren, Mirrlees, Wright, Chesterton, and many others, the sort of writers that *Millions* magazine used to focus on. This book is now three years overdue and I must finish it this spring. It's not scholarly; it's a work of appreciation, aiming to remind twenty-first-century readers of how good these writers are. I'll acknowledge the usual biases and prejudices of the era, but no more than that (except in a few egregious instances).

I've got ideas for a couple of more books after *The Great Age of Storytelling*, but one step at a time. Let me add that I've never had a grant or fellowship, so I've never been able to focus entirely on my book projects. I was a staffer for 25 years at *Book World* but have been a contract writer for the past 16, producing a weekly review. I also teach occasionally as a visiting professor (University of Maryland, Bread Loaf, University of Central Florida, McDaniel College), give lots of talks, and write for various papers and journals besides the *Post*. Anything for a dime. Martin Wooster often mentions my fictionmags-related pieces from the *Post*, but over the years I've also contributed scores of reviews to the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Review of Books*, *TLS*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Barnes and Noble Review*, and several other places.

So, I do work hard, but it's not as though I'm working in a steel mill (where my father and grandfather worked and where I worked as a teenager), and certainly no harder than many of the other unretired chums who live by their pens or try to combine writing and editing with a fulltime job. Years ago I read Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station* and decided that one chapter title in it described how I'd like to go: 'Karl Marx Dies at His Desk.' Work also keeps my tendency to fall into melancholy at bay. Thirty years ago I asked Harold Bloom why he had accepted an appointment at NYU while still teaching at Yale. He answered, in his typically weary-hearted way, 'It's better to go through exhaustion than depression.'

(4 January 2020)

LEIGH EDMONDS
Address already published

SFC 100: That Ditmar cover! On my nice big screen I can see it all in glorious colour and read the text easily. It glows at me. It's just a pity that I can't carry this screen around with me.

I liked all the book reviews and mentions of books. It made me feel quite nostalgic for the days when I could knock back a couple of medium-sized novels in a day — not being your terribly deep reader like Daniel King. You made Russell's book sound quite intriguing and I would get myself a copy to see if I agree, but I already have more books that I want to read than is good for me. The same for Colin Steele's reviews, which always encourage me to think that I should do less of other stuff and more reading. And, being envious of Jennifer and what she's going to is not the half of it.

I received an email from Carey Handfield last night saying that you and he had been off to Monash to talk about the stuff in their Rare Books Collection, which all sounds very promising. Although I'm not finished with other work yet, I've set aside a day and a bit to spend at the National Library with my little camera snapping pictures of the pages in the John Ryan collection there, and probably catching up with Kim Huett too.

The book *Aussie Fans* has been published, including my chapter giving a theoretical perspective on early Australian fandom. I was going to have a look at the rest of it during my trip to Canberra but I lent it to Robin, so I wonder when I will see it again.

(12 November 2019)

Like you and Elaine, we aren't having much trouble being isolated. We haven't seen much of Robin now that a crowd is defined as two people. I haven't been out walking the past three weeks, having picked up a chest bug, but antibiotics seem to have sorted that out so I'm looking forward to my morning walk again when nobody else is about.

You haven't seen me on Facebook because I haven't had anything much to write about. Life plods on much as always. I reckon I have about 500 pages of fanzines I want to read, but other distractions have distracted me. I got the manuscript of Volume 3 of my civil aviation history off to the publisher early this week and since then I've been trying to get myself back into the history of fandom again. At the moment Kim and I are working on the list of Australian fanzines, which might progress more quickly than planned because Kim is unemployed at the moment. I reckon that I've written and rewritten around a quarter of a million words in the past year. I think it might be a while before my writing battery has got enough charge in it again.

Chunga arrived, via you. Thank you. We haven't been down to Hocking Ave for the past week or two for obvious reasons. The architect has the project out to tender with builders at the moment but we have no idea how this rotten virus will affect progress. I had hoped that we would be watching

this year's Tour de France at our new place, but there may not be a Tour this year.

(4 April 2020)

SFC 101: Your editorial: In some ways humans are quite adaptable and in other ways creatures of habit. Last Tuesday, for example, I had something of an adventure when I went to the doctor shop to pick up a simple script to take to the chemist. What with this virus crisis, they've got the place organised so you have to pass through a checkpoint to get in to the building with a couple of nurses who interrogated me about why I was there, where had I come from and did I have a cough or sore throat etc, etc. When I told them I had a chest infection they seemed a bit nonplussed for a while, but I was told to put on one of their face masks and go and sit on the chair in the corner. Some time later a nurse dressed in protective gear appeared with my script and a little later another nurse appeared with a couple of pages of instructions, hot from their printer, about what to do in case of Covid infection, and a telephone number handwritten on a scrap of paper (these people were prepared). So I went back to the car and rang the number, which turned out to be the Covid testing centre at the Base Hospital here in Ballarat. A nice woman there explained that there were new government regulations that morning — anyone over 65 who presented with symptoms such as a cough would be referred for Covid testing. She took my details, and said a nurse would ring me back in under two hours to ask me some triage questions. I sat in the car and waited, listening to the news on the radio, which was only about two things, Covid and Cardinal Pell. After about half an hour I got bored and decided to go into Coles to see if they had any UHT milk. Getting into the supermarket these days is a bit of a drama too, what with queues, security guards, and sanitary hand washing, but just as I was discovering that there was no low-fat UHT milk on the shelves the phone rang — it was a very cheerful nurse. (Do they give these people injections of some kind of cheerfulness drug?) She ran me through the questions, that told her this chest infection has been hanging on since February and that I rarely leave the house. After a little thinking she told me I was not eligible for a Covid test. I was slightly disappointed because it would have been interesting to see how they have set up their testing systems, but not being tested was fine by me because I'd already had enough stuffing around for one day.

I mention this little episode only because it illustrates the changes that we rapidly adapt to in taking for granted something that would have seemed very strange and intrusive two or three months earlier. Of course, Covid is an immediate threat to life while climate change is something that is going

to happen some time in the future, even if some of the signs indicate that the future is rushing up on us quicker than we'd like to think. There could be many deep philosophical lines of thought leading from these different kinds of change, but I leave them to somebody better equipped to express them — Russell Blackford, for example. Apart from my experience on Tuesday, the current state of affairs has little effect on Valma and me. We are largely stay-at-home people these days. I'm glad that my life these days revolves around researching and writing history, reading and loccking fnz, and making scale-model aeroplanes, so being forced to stay indoors is a boon rather than a punishment.

While I was out driving on Tuesday the talkers on the ABC car radio discussed the kinds of things people could do to fill in their time while stuck at home in splendid isolation. One was to take up the lost art of letter writing. I didn't know it was lost. They suggested that the letter should be hand written (they haven't seen my handwriting these days; even I can't read it) and that it should be sent through the postal system (which doesn't sound so safe to me). When I got back to Stalag Hemsley I found shoved into my letter box a piece of paper suggesting a few ways of filling in the hours of isolation. One was to write letters, and another was to write a journal (with instructions about what to write in it). Another suggestion was dragging a chair out into one's driveway and yelling at neighbours, who were also to sit in their driveways yelling back.

The suggestion that I found strangest was to wrap a book in newspaper and take it down to the community centre where you could pick up a book that had been left there by somebody else. A week later you could bring that book pack and pick up another one. This suggests to me that most people don't already have more books in their house than they could read in a lifetime and that most people are very slow readers. It also suggests that most people, in Stalag Hemsley at least, still read newspapers.

Which brings me, in a strange sort of way, back to *SFC 101* which is, in my estimation, a very good issue. I write this having got only to page 29, with more thoughts in my head than I will have time or inclination to write about. I enjoyed your editorial comments about your new little friends, which could have inspired from me a long description of the lives of Tristan and Isolde and how they dominate our household. They are both very affectionate cats. Little Isolde comes up and looks at you as if to say, 'Can I please have a cuddle', which I can't refuse, and big fat Tristan yells at you to get attention and a cuddle if he is so inclined. I have scratches on my legs, not from any fighting but from his efforts to climb up to get his cuddle. They

get on fairly well together but if Tub (Tristan) get too physical Isolde jumps up to the higher levels of the shelves or the curtain rails where Fatso cannot follow. We've lashed out and bought an automatically cleaning cat-litter machine and an automatic cat-feeding machine which makes life very pleasant most of the time.

The highlight of the issue so far, and I cannot imagine that anything else in the issue will top it, is Russell Blackford's magnificent and beautifully written and reasoned 'Science Fiction as a Lens into the Future'. There were two things I liked about this. One was the clarity of his thought and expression in showing us what he thinks, something that I would love to be able to emulate but lack the skill. He explains to me, more clearly than I could have expressed, why I find history and science fiction the things that I like to read the best. This can be found in the section about H. G. Wells and his *The Discovery of the Future*. All we have of the past is evidence about what happened then, and all we have of the future are some ideas which we have gleaned from historical evidence. So both are malleable, which is probably why I like writing history and Russell writes about the future. Russell's idea that stf is a 'lens into the future' rather than a predictor of it is, I think, a very useful one. His referral to Wells's ideas about viewing humanity as grains of sand and the ability to predict the future is of great interest. It has always seemed to me that one of Wells's most useful predictions comes in *The Time Machine*. When the time traveller goes to the far future he finds that the process of capitalism has worked itself out into the eaten and the eaters, then goes even further forward to the end of the Earth when there is nothing left of humanity at all. His paper gives us plenty to think about, and it would have been interesting to be a fly on the wall at the discussion that followed his presentation. So thank you, Russell, for writing the paper, and thank you, Bruce, for publishing it.

Then we have Jenny's delightful and thought-provoking poem. You did that deliberately, didn't you? What a treasure Jenny and Russell are.

(25 May 2020)

SFC102: One of the highlights of this issue was your section 'Good things arrive in the mail', with excellent reviews of three books that I will read for sure when they introduce the 36-hour day. Jennifer's book sounds very attractive. I liked your comments in the second paragraph about the alien nature of society in the period around the end of World War I. It seems to me that most people think that people in past eras lived and thought basically as we do, so their motivations and experiences are those of modern-day people, but living in a novel

environment (a bit like those people who, on visiting a foreign land, seem to think that deep down everyone understands English). Even the world of the first decade of the twentieth century is quite different from our modern world in many ways. I had to drop into the text of my most recent work the occasional sugar-coated pill of information about that world for present-day and future readers. (Speaking of which, my history of Haileybury has received the Principal's approval so we move on to publication, though that is probably more than a year away yet.)

I liked your comment on John-Henri's speech in *Trap Door* and his quote about science fiction saying that wishing won't make things better but fantasy says it will. It seems that the Age of Enlightenment has come to an end in our lifetimes and we are now moving into another Dark Age in which the magic of modern technology makes life seem magical.

I will pass over your '2018: Best of everything' except to note that you must already have a 33-hour day at your place, given that you read, listen to, and look at so much. I noted that you put *Spitfire* in your list of favourite documentaries. Even though I am very interested in aviation I haven't bothered to look out for this one, because it is one of a whole genre of documentaries about famous aeroplanes, only apparently on a more lavish scale. There are not too many good clips of World War II aviation combat because it was so fast and so dynamic in three dimensions that it was virtually impossible to capture with the technology of the times. If you want to get some idea of what it was like go back and have a look at the old *Battle of Britain* movie made decades ago, in which the action has been specially choreographed and filmed to capture some of the sense of what aerial combat was like. As most of this action was arranged by people who had been in the fighting it has the sense, if not the reality, of what the battle was like. Unfortunately the flying sequences are disrupted by some not-very-appealing acting, but you can't have everything.

The highlight of this issue was Jennifer Bryce's concert reviews. She sets the scene of each concert to give it context, and her description of the playing is very well informed. I noted that she only wrote about concerts in which the music was mainly contemporary, and it is very gladdening to read that what we used to call 'new' music is still being written and performed. I assume that Jennifer has also taken herself to concerts of the 'classics', and if she does, I hope she will mention one or two when she writes up her 2019 musical adventures. (I do wish that I'd been at that Britten concert, which sounds very enjoyable, even though not particularly 'new' these days.)

Which brings me to the Michael Dirda review of

Tales of Love and Death. I started off enjoying reading this because it seemed, well, so literate and enjoyable. But as I read on I got crankier and crankier, I began to get the feeling that whoever Dirda was writing for, he wasn't writing for me to read. Had I been a student of litcrit, and probably a postgraduate too, I might not have had so much trouble with the ways in which he chose to express his ideas, for the insiders rather than an outsider like me. Then I came to the sentences that made me really cranky — and I hope you know it takes a lot to make me really cranky. It is on page 46 and goes: 'Clearly Aickman, that melancholy fabulist, belongs in that line of mystical poets and sufferers that extends from Novalis and his elusive Blue Flowers, through the visionary gleams of Wordsworth and Keats, to the spiritual odysseys described in the fiction of George MacDonald, Algernon Blackwood and the various Inklings.'

If you can explain to me what this means, in simple words without allusions and metaphors, I would be very grateful. I had to look up the meanings of some of these words to decipher his coded message but I gave up in the end because I was too agitated at being lectured to from on high. It seems to me that one of the roles of a good writer is to convey to the reader their ideas and feelings as effectively as possible, but all this passage really says is that 'I'm smart enough to know all this stuff, and stuff those of you who aren't as smart as me'. Being treated in this way is not going to encourage me to have a look at Robert Aickman's work. I go back and reread the passage and the unnecessary phrase 'that melancholy fabulist' grates on my nerves as being an unnecessary and distracting phrase; it certainly distracted me from whatever else the passage was trying to convey. I stopped reading at this point and had to go off and do something else while I calmed down.

[*brg* A few pages bacj, Michael Dirda explains succinctly what he does and describes the books he has published, so I am sure he can defend himself much better than I can. Robert Aickman is one of my favourite short story writers. Michael sums up his work fairly well. To describe Aickman as a 'melancholy fabulist' is accurate. The tone if Aickman's work is melancholy, which is my favourite mode; and his stories read like fables, not realistic stories, but never point to neat conclusions. I'm hoping Michael might allow me to reprint some of his other essays. My favourite book of his (so far, since I haven't yet read them all) is *Browsings*.*]

In comparison, John-Henri Holmberg's contribution was enjoyable and informative. Then you published Daniel King's review of the *Galactic Pot-*

Healer, which I recall as not being among Dick's most absorbing works. However, he put me right off side when, in the first paragraph, he writes, 'In this essay I shall in fact argue ...'. I've read enough undergraduate essays and been to enough cultural studies conferences where I read and hear that kind of statement that I'm about to have some kind of severe allergic reaction to what follows. I won't deny that King makes his point but half way through this essay I was about to beg for mercy, 'You've made your point already, move on...'

So I did, and came to Colin Steele's reviews and comments, which I always enjoy. 'The Age of Enlightenment is strong in this one,' Yoda would say. I found a lot to agree with in Colin's comments on literary conflabs. Apart from stf conventions, the Word Festival was the first 'literary' event that Valma and I had been to, and we enjoyed it as a participatory event — which may have had something to do with the way that we got to do some hanging out with a couple of well-known and experienced writers. Later on we went to a few of the literary festivals in Fremantle, but stopped going after a while because they seemed to be events at which the audience was a consumer rather than a participant in the proceedings. (It may be that one of the reasons we lost interest in stf conventions is because they headed in the same direction, with the creators a separate crowd from the consumers.) I think that whether or not events like this are worthwhile has a lot to do with the sense of participation. If my memory serves me right, Colin also organised a very sercon event, with a small membership, at the ANU about stf around the same time. It sticks out in my memory as one of the most electrifying events I've been too, even though I have barely a sercon bone in my body.

I also agree with Colin on the remarkable cost of some books these days, and I wonder how much of that inflated cost makes it way back to the author.

By the way, the conference at University House last week was very enjoyable and useful, with a couple of little projects emerging for me. By the second day the conference membership (not quite 200, I'm told) had discovered the delights of the courtyard and there were little groups dotted all over the lawn between sessions. On a couple of occasions I gave a little thought of indebtedness to Colin for, in his own way, bringing me to that particular place and time.

(21 November 2019)

As you may have gathered from other sources, we are not at our new place yet though I am always delighted to receive mail there when I drop in. It's the place in Hocking Avenue that looks like a Swedish gaol. We are going to add to that by putting a barred gate at the front of the verandah with a

camera so I don't have to jump up and run (or totter might be a better word) through the house to see who is there every time the front door bell rings. Most of the work we're getting done is to accommodate old folks and cats, but everything is happening at a glacial rate.

I enjoyed Casey Wolf's brief discourse on visiting Europe. I reckon everyone who doesn't live there should drop in for a visit to see where we all in the Western World diaspora come from. There's so much variety and so many people in such a little space, no wonder there have been so many wars there. If I lived in close company with so many other people I'd be stropky too. (Of course, most of us come from the Anglo-Saxon diaspora, but that will be part of Europe until the end of this year.) I haven't been to Italy (we almost made it but there was a train strike that day) so I can't comment on the cleanliness of the streets, but I can tell you that they were pretty good in Uppsala, Budapest, Paris, and Luzern when we were there. The grottiest place we saw was London. What struck me most were scars of the Blitz that were still obvious — not broken buildings but buildings built on the ruins of older and probably bombed-out buildings. As I say to people who haven't been to Europe: you have to go and see it for yourself to appreciate how lucky we are to live in Australia.

Andrew Darlington's description of his canal-side walk was a pleasure, including his little jaunt as a lock operator. Walks in the semi-rural landscape can bring a great deal of pleasure. I've discovered many walking paths in the area around where we live at the moment. They are leftovers along the old creeks from the gold rush era. About this time last year I took my camera with me and took photos of many of the features on many of the walks and put edited versions on my website. I had expected to be gone from this area by now, but it seems that we will be here through autumn 2020. I'm told that there are some good walking paths down at our new place. One runs right behind our back fence, so I'm looking forward to trying them out later this year.

I'm appreciative of Doug Barbour's recommendation of Vagn Holmboe, I looked him up on Youtube and have taken in his first string quartet. I agree with Doug that this music has something of Bartok in it, but not quite so craggy around the edges, though this was only the first quartet that I heard, so others might have developed that tendency. That's the trouble with what they call classical music (and somebody called 'Western art music'): there's so much of it and there are so many composers and performers who have been left in the bywaters and who repay a good listen to. I get the impression that you and Doug do listen, but keeping up these days has become a real struggle

since composers have discovered tonality again and the listening public is lapping it up.

It was nice to see Doug Nicholson in the letter column. You note that he lives somewhere in Sydney, which is true, but I couldn't tell you where. The time I visited him I caught the train out to Edgecliffe on the Bondi line and he picked me up from there. I wandered around the streets near the station for a while beforehand. Across from the station is, I recall, a string shop — string in the sense of string quartet — where I spent a few minutes poking around, and bought the score for the Bach Sonatas and Partitas as a memento. I could not tell you how to get from the station to Doug's place because there is no logic to the roads in that area. We had a grand time and I learned a great deal about Sydney fandom in the 1950s to stand alongside the Molesworth/Stone view of the period, which I am looking forward to unpacking. I stayed so long that, as Doug said, Valma rang up to find out how the visit had gone, and was I was still there? As I recall it, she rang again and I was still there. This was not long after my blood clots in the lungs problem and she was concerned that I was not taking care of myself. I might not have been, but I was having fun.

I enjoyed too John Litchen's recollections of making the Aussiefan films. And Cy Chauvin's, and your, comments about the Le Guin Guest of Honour speech at Aussiecon. As I'm sure I've already told you, that is the aiming and concluding point of my history of Australian fandom. Many years earlier Felix Werder taught me (at the CAE) that when you are composing (or writing) you have to know what the final chord will be when you start out on the journey. I recall standing at the back of the hall during Le Guin's speech and thinking that I was hearing something that people would remember for many years. Apparently I was right.

Patrick McGuire is right in his summation of what I meant by 'counterfactual'. I think I might have used the term in a less than technically correct way. He is also right in saying that you really don't have to know about past events to be able to enjoy fiction written about them. His mention of de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* is a great example. All I know about that period in European history I learned from that book. You might also tell Patrick that *Death in Paradise* ends on a happy note, and is worth following to the end.

(25 May 2020)

SFC 104 has so much writing about reading books and the only book that I've read that your contributors have also read is *The Berlin Project*. Cy and I might have read the same book but it doesn't seem so from reading this. We may both think it's a good, almost a great book, but he wanders off into fields

of speculation about alternate history that I find difficult to follow. I have also seen *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and I think we might have seen the same film there. I've never watched it on a small screen and I can't imagine that would work very well there, so I may never see it again. Never mind, it is one of the most memorable movies I've seen. It's a pity that most sf movies follow the *Star Wars* model instead.

I agree with your opening comments, Bruce. For Valma and me, 2020 has been a year of waiting to move into our new place but also a year of getting things done. Apart from going down to Melbourne on the train occasionally, and not venturing down the street simply because I forgot to buy the cheese yesterday, and wearing a mask, life trots on much as usual for us. Also like you I find it interesting that so many people depend on others for their stimulation and for their sense of well-being. Still, that is how most people are conditioned to live, so it is not surprising that they suffer so much when that stimulation is withdrawn.

However, I was struck by the last word in your comment, 'idleness'. It's not a word that gets much exercise these days, perhaps it has fallen out of use because of its connotations. In days of yore it was the 'undeserving' poor who were 'idle', and perhaps the idea of being 'undeserving' has become unfashionable, and so has the adjective that goes with it. (No doubt the idea of 'idle and undeserving' bubbles at the edge of consciousness in our government, but it's not the kind of thing that one would say out loud.) All this leads me to the conclusion that in your mind the words 'idle' and 'undeserving' poor are linked. Not poor in the sense of money but poor in the sense of internal mental resources, leading to idleness. We, on the other hand, having those internal mental resources, are deserving and therefore not idle. Make sense? I thought I should also look up a dictionary definition of idle too and I see the word 'lazy' in there. So idleness can mean laziness. That does make us look and feel good, doesn't it?

[*brg* Hardly the way I would have thought of it. I've never had any time for the concept of the 'undeserving poor', since I see poverty as being a function of the way the economic system as a whole works. This was very apparent during 2020, when vast numbers of people who wanted to do nothing more than work suddenly lost their jobs — and the most deserving of them, the musicians, artists, writers, university workers, and hospitality workers, were dumped into dire poverty by a federal government that tried to pretend it was helping keep everybody from disaster. I liked being able to think and work uninterrupted, especially during a year when it

seemed that the new virus might wipe us out before December. The more severe the lockdown, the more my feeling of excitement at having been given the opportunity to do the things I really like doing, and not doing things merely out of obligation. Covid restrictions even meant that ANZAPA became a PDF-only organisation, which has led to David Grigg taking over the Official Editorship and freeing me from that obligation for the first time in 16 years. Now that some formal restrictions are lifted, my life has lost some of its direction. Good old *SF Commentary* files — always sitting there waiting to be edited.*]

Jennifer Bryce's story about her years of torment at a technical college (and your comments) made me mightily glad that I didn't have to go teaching at primary or secondary schools. My short stint at tertiary teaching was enough to tell me that I wasn't cut out for it. I didn't mind giving lectures, but trying to run tutorials for a bunch of people who hadn't done the reading was an exquisite form of torture. I did quite like the academic life, but universities are much better when the students aren't there. On the other hand, Valma liked teaching and relating to the kids. All the teachers I talked to at Haileybury seem to love their jobs; they must, because they work very hard to keep them. Do they still have technical colleges? I never went to one of those, but in high school there was metalwork and woodwork, for both of which I had no skill at all. I sort of imagined that the life of a boy at a technical college would be like that all the time.

[*brg* Victoria's technical school system, which began in 1910 and seems to have been closed down during the 1990s, was meant to provide an satisfying schooling for kids who enjoyed a wide range of practical subjects. The system was still working well in 1969 and 1970 — for the students, and the teachers of practical subjects and the sciences. However, students had little time for Social Studies, and I was the bunny who was asked to teach most of the Social Studies courses at Ararat Tech. The few English classes I was given worked well. The 'clever kids' at Ararat worked very hard to get into either of the state's two agricultural colleges. The others found meaningful jobs in the railways or other industries around Ararat. But the railway yards have disappeared from Ararat, and I read somewhere that the agricultural colleges have become mere cogs in the university system. In 1970 a gigantic new super tech school was being built at Ararat while we still occupied two wings of Ararat High School. I don't know what happened to the sooper-doooper new building after it opened in 1971, or the later generations

of kids who had to try to find jobs during the late 1970s and beyond.*]

Thanks also for running the poetry. Almost all poetry whizzes right past my brain; it seems I don't have the poetry gene. But I can see why Jenny Blackford has won awards, I did enjoy her writing, particularly 'Quantum String', because it is short and clever.

That William Breiding is a deep fellow, or perhaps was, because age seems to mellow out some of our more emotional tendencies. I now feel that I know a little bit more about what has led him to produce his big fat fanzines full of a diversity of interesting and emotionally rich material. It would never occur to me just to go driving for the sake of driving just to see what I think about it and about myself. Perhaps I might have done so during a few years at the end of the 1960s, but when I heard that a bunch of Sydney fans (including John Brosnan) were going to drive a bus to London (the bus turned up at Syncon 70, as I recall) I could not imagine why anyone would want to subject themselves to such an ordeal. Maybe I wasn't very adventurous, or perhaps I didn't feel as alienated as many young Australians did in those days, so alienated that they had to be somewhere else, no matter what the cost.

Doing history is, of course, an adventure of a kind. You start on the road with a great deal of potential and learn things as you go along, mainly about other people, places, and times, but also about yourself. Then there's the rare delights of field trips. The photo on page 34, of the dirt road heading off across the plain to the range in the background, reminded me of a trip when I was doing the Main Roads Western Australia history. A supervisor picked me up around dawn in a big white car from the motel in Port Hedland and we headed inland along the Great Northern Highway across the plain towards the Hamersley Ranges about 70 kilometres away. Our objective was to see the Munjina Gorge, which brings the highway down from the inland to the coastal plain through the ranges on the road from Newman to Port Hedland. It's a major engineering achievement, but you wouldn't notice it unless you knew to look out for it.

The supervisor decided that he wanted to show me Wittenoom — closed to visitors because it produced asbestos — so we turned off and drove along a gravel road like the one in the William's photo. A very enjoyable day, but I'd entirely forgotten it until now. I have a photo I took as we drove across the plain. The scrub is less than wheel high, and a burnt-out car that was about the tallest thing on the landscape.

(11 November 2020)

ROB GERRAND

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The Guardian has listed its top 10 Australian films of the last 10 years. There are many excellent films to choose from — Aussie film-making has had a great decade, and for me it's too hard to whittle the list down to ten. So here's my list of 40 very well-made Aussie films of the decade 2010–2019:

- *Animal Kingdom*
- *Australia Day*
- *The Babadook*
- *Beneath Hill 60*
- *Bran Nue Dae*
- *Don't Tell*
- *Down Under*
- *The Dressmaker*
- *Emo The Musical*
- *Eye of the Storm*
- *Goldstone*
- *The Great Gatsby*
- *Hacksaw Ridge*
- *Healing* (in my opinion it should have been called *Jailbirds*)
- *Hotel Mumbai*
- *Judy and Punch*
- *The King*
- *Ladies in Black*
- *Last Cab to Darwin*
- *Lion*
- *Mad Max: Fury Road*
- *Mrs Carey's Concert*
- *The Mule*
- *Mystery Road*
- *Oranges and Sunshine*
- *Paper Planes*
- *Partisan*
- *Pawno*
- *Predestination*
- *The Rocket*
- *The Sapphires*
- *Sherpa*
- *Snowtown*
- *Sweet Country*
- *Tanna*
- *That Sugar Film*
- *These Final Hours*
- *Top End Wedding*
- *Upgrade*
- *The Water Diviner*

(14 December 2019)

[*brg* I've seen 13 of these films. Of these, eight are four-star films, and the best is the least 'Australian' of them, *Predestination*.*]

SFC 102: Please reprint the Aldiss treatment and partial script of his adaptation of *Martian Time-Slip* that he sent you. (I wish you had printed it back then, after the project was cancelled.) Publishing it now will ensure it is not lost to posterity.

[*brg* Doesn't anybody believe in copyright any more? Any attempt to publish would bring down the Aldiss estate on my neck. Also, it's much too long to publish in a fanzine — at least a hundred pages. In it, Aldiss tries to impose a realistic superstructure on Philip Dick's Mars, including an entire episode devoted to the viewpoint of the Bleekmen. All too ambitious and expensive for TV producers, then or now.*]

I love the Stephen Campbell art in the Warrnambool exhibition; they are extraordinary and beautiful. Thanks for reproducing some of the images.

You mention the two new Lian Hearn (Gillian Rubinstein) novels set in an fictionalised world resembling feudal Japan. These are successors to her five earlier novels in the Otori series 2002–2007: *Across the Nightingale Floor*, *Grass For His Pillow*, *Brilliance of the Moon*, *The Harsh Cry of the Heron*, and *Heaven's Net Is Wide*. They are superior imaginings, beautifully written, with great sense of character, filled with a feeling that she had lived in the old Japan, with a great understanding of the politics of the time. There's a similarity of feeling to the novels of Guy Gabriel Kay, which are set in an imagined feudal China.

In the Covid-19 lockdown environment, people are making lists of 100 great novels. Here's 100 I've read that I like (only one title per author):

- 1 Brian Aldiss: *Helliconia*
- 2 J. G. Ballard: *Empire of the Sun*
- 3 Vicki Baum: *The Weeping Wood*
- 4 Honoré de Balzac: *Père Goriot*
- 5 Alfred Bester: *The Stars My Destination*
- 6 Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451*
- 7 Peter Currell Brown: *Smallcreep's Day*
- 8 John Brunner: *The Shockwave Rider*
- 9 Anthony Burgess: *A Clockwork Orange*
- 10 Italo Calvino: *Cosmicomics*
- 11 Elias Canetti: *Auto da Fé*
- 12 Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- 13 Miguel de Cervantes: *Don Quixote*
- 14 Lee Child: *Killing Floor*
- 15 Agatha Christie: *Absent in the Spring*
- 16 Arthur C. Clarke: *The City and the Stars*
- 17 Colette: *Cheri*
- 18 John Crowley: *The Translator*
- 19 Jack Dann: *The Silent*
- 20 Daniel Defoe: *Fanny Hill*
- 21 Len Deighton: *The Ipcress File*
- 22 Philip K. Dick: *Confessions of a Crap Artist*

- 23 Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*
- 24 Thomas Disch: *The Priest*
- 25 Feodor Dostoevski: *Crime and Punishment*
- 26 Lawrence Durrell: *The Black Book*
- 27 George Eliott: *Middlemarch*
- 28 James Ellroy: *LA Confidential*
- 29 Philip Jose Farmer: *Riverworld*
- 30 F. Scott Fitzgerald: *Tender Is the Night*
- 31 Karen Joy Fowler: *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*
- 32 George MacDonald Fraser: *Flashman*
- 33 Elizabeth Gilbert: *City of Girls*
- 34 David Gemmell: *Morningstar*
- 35 Stella Gibbons: *Cold Comfort Farm*
- 36 William Golding: *Lord of the Flies*
- 37 Ivan Goncharov: *Oblomov*
- 38 Günter Grass: *The Tin Drum*
- 39 Robert Graves: *I, Claudius*
- 40 Graham Greene: *The Quiet American*
- 41 Harry Harrison: *Captive Universe*
- 42 Jaroslav Haek: *The Good Soldier Svejk*
- 43 Joseph Heller: *Catch 22*
- 44 Ernest Hemingway: *The Sun Also Rises*
- 45 Russell Hoban: *Angelica Lost and Found*
- 46 Aldous Huxley: *Point Counter Point*
- 47 Jerome K. Jerome: *Three Men in a Boat*
- 48 Graham Joyce: *The Facts of Life*
- 49 James Joyce: *Ulysses*
- 50 Franz Kafka: *Amerika*
- 51 David Karp: *One*
- 52 Arthur Koestler: *Darkness At Noon*
- 53 Jerzy Kosiński: *The Painted Bird*
- 53 R. A. Lafferty: *Past Master*
- 55 Violet Le Duc: *La Bâtarde*
- 56 Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Dispossessed*
- 57 Harper Lee: *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- 58 Stanislaw Lem: *The Futurological Congress*
- 59 Elmore Leonard: *Touch*
- 60 Doris Lessing: *The Golden Notebook*
- 61 Frederic Manning: *The Middle Parts of Fortune*
- 62 Colleen McCullough: Roman series
- 63 Compton McKennzie: *Whisky Galore*
- 64 Sean McMullen: *Souls in the Great Machine*
- 65 Herman Melville: *Moby Dick*
- 66 Henry Miller: *Tropic of Cancer*
- 67 Rohinton Mistry: *A Fine Balance*
- 68 Alberto Moravia: *The Two of Us*
- 69 Liane Moriarty: *Nine Pefect Strangers*
- 70 James Morrow: *Towing Jehovah*
- 71 Vladimir Nabokov: *Lolita*
- 72 Patrick O'Brian: *Master and Commander*
- 73 George Orwell: *Animal Farm*
- 74 S J Perelman: *Crazy Like a Fox*
- 75 James Purdy: *Cabot Wright Begins*
- 76 François Rabelais: *Gargantua and Pantagruel*
- 77 Erich Maria Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front*
- 78 Philip Roth: *Portnoy's Complaint*

- 79 Tom Sharpe: *Riotous Assembly*
- 80 Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*
- 81 Murasaki Shikibu: *The Tale of Genji*
- 82 Georges Simenon: *The Man Who Watched the Trains Go By*
- 83 Cordwainer Smith: *Norstrilia*
- 84 Martin Cruz Smith: *December 6 (Tokyo Station)*
- 85 Christina Stead: *The Man Who Loved Children*
- 86 John Steinbeck: *The Grapes of Wrath*
- 87 Jack Trevor Story: *The Trouble With Harry*
- 88 Elisabeth Strout: *Anything Is Possible*
- 89 Jonathan Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*
- 90 J R R Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings*
- 91 Steve Tolz: *A Fraction of the Whole*
- 92 Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- 93 Jack Vance: *Lyonese*
- 94 A E Van Vogt: *The Weapon Shops of Isher*
- 95 Kurt Vonnegut: *The Sirens of Titan*
- 96 Martha Wells: *The Murderbot Diaries*
- 97 Nathanael West: *The Day of the Locust*
- 98 Patrick White: *The Vivisector*
- 99 P G Wodehouse: *Pigs Have Wings*
- 100 Emile Zola: *Germinal*.

I realise that of course I've left out many, many others, including Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* — not novels — and *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole, Trent Dalton's *Boy Swallows Universe*, John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* (which edges out *The Day of the Triffids*), Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and H. G. Wells's *History of Mr Polly*.

(17 July 2020)

[*brg* The 2020 project to end all projects! You must have had even more lockdown free time on your hands than anybody else. For me to make such a list, I would have had to trawl through all my Favourite Books lists since 1962. That makes 58 years of lists. Even I was hardly up to such a task during 2020.

Of your list, I've read 47 of them, and would give four stars to 38. Often I would have chosen a better novel from the same author. Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland/Through the Looking Glass* is my permanent favourite 'novel', but I've had to reassess my list in recent years as I've begun to re-read my favourites. I'd always listed Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* as my favourite novel, but couldn't get past page 100 when I went back to it recently. I had a similar difficulty when re-reading Elias Canetti's *Auto da Fé*. Also now missing from my Top 10.

Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* improved with reacquaintance, so that's my No. 2. Other contenders for the Top 10 include Patrick White's *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*, Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of*

Richard Mahony. Gerald Murnane's *Tamarisk Row* remains my favourite of his 'fictions'. My favourite SF novel is Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse*, and favourite fantasy novel is Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore*.

It's hard to pick a mystery/crime/suspense novel that is also a great novel: Dorothy Sayers' *The Nine Tailors* comes closest.

Several prominent SFC readers will cast nasturtiums at me for not placing Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* at the top — but it is now 49 years since I finished reading it. It took me three years (1969 to 1971), and I'm not sure if I have the time or energy to re-read it.

Overall, I suspect that you and I, Rob, have similar criteria for choosing those novels that remain important in our lives. Thanks for your trouble.*]

**WILLIAM BREIDING
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I have a Dell desktop computer with Microsoft Windows 10. As part of the package with that purchase they threw in Microsoft Publisher, which is what I used for both *Portable Storage* Numbers 2 and 3. *Rose Motel* and *Portable Storage* 1 were simply done as Word documents while we screwed up the nerve to play around with Microsoft Publisher. As it turns out, Publisher is a fairly intuitive piece of software. Grant Canfield swears by it, and he's an architect who has used all kinds of software. Publisher can be purchased as a separate entity for something like \$US150.

I received *SFC 101* on the same day I received Pat Charnock's *Raucous Caucus*. You did send me a brief note when *Portable Storage* 3 hit Melbourne.

Meanwhile, I have been trying to get *Portable Storage* 4 together during the time of the Covid. Most of the writers and artists have gone mum, so I have been sending out emails trying to kick-start them back into writing and drawing. I have every intention of keeping to my twice-yearly schedule, so the autumn release will happen regardless of how many of my contributors come through. I already have a 20-page letter column, with more added every day. Keeping fingers crossed for another great issue.

(25 May 2020)

Yes, MS Publisher was a rip from Pagemaker without all the benefits, but they've done a substantial amount of work with Publisher since early times. Once you get to know its foibles you can become very quick. *Portable Storage* 3 took only a minimal

amount of time to design once we had done all the pre-production, think, and prep work. I try to keep the design simple but pleasant to the eye. Seeing the latest *Chunga*, post-Randy, made me slaver at carl juarez's layout ability.

We too were already isolaters — Gail works from home with an occasional trip to San Francisco, which is now on hold indefinitely; I work out of doors and away from people, so feel confident about staying safe from exposure.

I have been bullwhipping my contributors (as, unlike you, I don't have a backlog!) but am feeling crestfallen that I won't meet my original expectation of the issue — but that's okay. Every issue so far has taken on a life of its own, and the fourth ish is turning to be no different.

(23 May 2020)

[*brg* Microsoft Publisher was not part of the suite that was put on my computer when I bought it. It was a very awkward program in its early stages — basically a rip-off of Pagemaker, which was already in decline. But you might remember that Paul Kincaid did wonders with it when he edited the first three issues of *Steam Engine Time*. Not sure whether to bother, since I have a Quark XPress 7 program now on this Windows 10 machine.

I had been in some despair, but my tech guy has fixed the old computer for the time being. He warns me that the hard disk is failing (surprise! after 22 years), but it is working today. I've been investigating DTP programs, but they all seem equally unsatisfactory, compared with my ancient Ventura 4.1.*]

**DAVID BOUTLAND (DAVID ROME)
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Thank you for the *SFC* 50th Anniversary editions, the copies of **brg**, and also the much appreciated *Last Steam Engine Time* with its long, fascinating piece on Theodore Sturgeon, written by Matthew Davis. And also for the copy of my story from *Vision of Tomorrow*, No. 3! The nostalgia of it all took me — and David Rome — way back to the days of being huddled over my typewriter in a cottage in the midst of a Derbyshire winter high in the Pennines. By some strange twist of fate David Rome's first sf story, 'Time of Arrival', bought at that time by John Carnell for *New Worlds*, accompanied the last episode of Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X*. The date on that faded copy of *New Worlds*, No. 105, 1961, reminds me it was almost 60 years ago.

Reading through the packages you sent me, I

found your output impressively produced and engaging — numerous bits and pieces on authors — scholarly reviews with a sharp cutting edge — literary chat, special friendships, and sadly, the loss of special friends and talented people. Plus illustrated bios of illustrious fans, plus news of Ozcons and Worldcons. And especially, to me, the Letters of Comment, the lives revealed therein, diverting and enjoyable, also. But ... after a while I reached a place where the longer I read through the pages, the more I began to feel the extent of the gulf between your readers and a professional toiler like Rome. Of necessity, to survive, Rome's brief science fiction-writing time was fitted in around his work on countless short stories for the men's magazines, plus his paperback pulps, *Fleetway* and *Commando War* comics, and so on.

And in my TV-scriptwriting years beginning 1968, any vestigial sense of wonder and love of sf was overwhelmed by merciless deadlines, budgets, and demanding story editors. It wasn't until retirement from TV that I wrote a number of new stories to add to Rome's *Return to New Worlds* collections on Kindle.

As an example of the small-screen's demands, take the mini-series *Alice To Nowhere*, an adaptation. While I was still at work on the scripts for the four-part series, hundreds of thousands of dollars were already being outlaid, including building a replica of the truck described in Evan Green's novel, scouting desert locations, casting to soon begin, etc, etc. At least two drafts of each episode to write. Delivery on time, and even more importantly, on budget, or there goes a chunk of reputation. And reputation was everything.

The pressure was always on: and I mean pressure. While I was writing the telefilm-length pilot episode for a 1970s show called *Crisis* I was going through a crisis of my own. I wasn't sure I could go on with the script or get through without a crack-up. The Producer had pretty much everything he owned invested in the deal. And what the Producer produced was a loaded revolver and a threat to shoot me if I didn't meet his deadline. He got his script, thanks to my old friend Ron Smith. We worked 48 hours straight at his house in Melbourne, each of us taking a four-hour shift then grabbing four hours' rest. A rough first draft done, I rewrote the whole thing from end to end for consistency; my new partner C. L. Bayne re-typed it. Met the deadline. Shared the loot, and Ron got a co-credit.

So much depended on delivery of an on-budget script on-time that it became part of a writer's makeup to always deliver. When our son Matthew crushed a cervical vertebra in his neck high up, C6, the quadriplegia zone, in a bad-wave surfing accident, he was airlifted to Sydney. Ten hours later he

came out of surgery with his future uncertain. I sweated my way through a scene breakdown sitting on a balcony of the North Shore Hospital waiting to hear what turned out to be OK good news from the surgeon. To meet a deadline was by that time in the DNA, but some said that I was never the same writer again after, and I wasn't. What is important in life hit home.

It is well known that despite the pressure, the need to write takes hold like a drug, a dangerous drug that prematurely kills many of those addicted. At one time the Writers Guild looked at the possibility of having some kind of superannuation fund for freelancer scriptwriters. The idea was abandoned when they checked the stats on life-expectancy of their members. Few lived long enough to collect. Thirty of my own writer comrades, all of them good friends, are gone. Thirty. Memorable all!

We small-screen scriptwriters, like sf writers, are accustomed to being lowly regarded, but I worked with dedicated people. Ex journos, a Cambridge scholar, a former Scotland Yard detective, a much-loved cartoonist were among the 'new chums'! In the very early days, though, most were former radio writers. For them, along with producers, story editors, and actors, the golden years of radio drama had crashed virtually overnight. Television was the new medium they had to learn. And despite no arc light ever shining on us, there were considerable rewards. To see a script turn into a living production on-screen, to find the perfect line that truth-tells, and to be a part of the push to Make It Australian, fighting the commercial networks whose profits came from mostly US product. Today, local production and content abound, and our dramas match any in the world.

On reading your Letters of Comment written by so many good people not afraid to self-reveal, I was touched most of all by a hope that your outward reaching space-ark journey will continue, whether its upper and lower deck passengers, and its hydroponics experts and star-gazers see the journey to its end or not.

I think it will go on. I think the Control Room was found secretly by *brg* long long ago, and one day he will bring the Great Ship down through the mists to land on a green world of fertile creativity where all of us strivers searching for The Word will live forever in mutual respect.

Kindest regards, Boutland and Rome.

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I wonder if the absence of aircraft will in fact significantly lower the amount of CO₂ that goes into the atmosphere. I understand that airliners are major contributors to the problem and long-distance overseas travel is a major part of that.

I'm glad you and Elaine are able to work at home during this pandemic, and I'm assuming that Down Under you've had shelter-in-place or social-distancing orders (or recommendations) of your own. Here in the States, the South as a geographical bloc hasn't been taking some of these as seriously as we should, primarily because of the distances that many of us have to travel to buy food and other necessities. And the local stores are packed with people, because of that fact, and that's a violation of the major restriction on maintaining space among ourselves. Still, Pine Mountain is not a bad place to be, and we feel awfully fortunate, given that we are retired from our day jobs and find plenty to do keeping up the yard and the household. We also walk, by the way, and our early April weather is still quite cool, after some fairly hot days in March, and that's a good incentive to get out and do it: walking, I mean.

(4 April 2020)

I've already glanced into *SFC 104* to find 'Jamie's Hair,' and I very much appreciate the way you've presented my introduction to it and the poem itself. And I'll certainly enjoy reading the entire issue in the days to come.

My second immunotherapy infusion is on Thursday, December 3, and I'm happy to tell you that the first one (on November 12, my 75th birthday) went well and has produced no conspicuous side effects, so far. I'll have a third infusion, if our counting of days is correct, on December 24, Christmas Eve day here, unless the doctors/nurses/schedulers all decide that it should fall after that date. Things seem to be going well, but I will confess to some annoying low-level pain every day that I can escape at night by taking a couple of Tylenol, stretching out in bed, and falling asleep. It's hard to get up in the mornings because I know that the pain will worsen over the course of the day ... although not unbearably, not unbearably. I am grateful for the ability to rise, stand upright, walk, and work during each fresh day.

(27 November 2020)

The Bishops: Christmas 2020

The year opened with intimations of a scary new virus infecting folks in China, but few of us paid much heed to them, and on New Year's Eve, 2019's last day, Jeri and I hosted our traditional get-together with Randy & Renner Loney, who dropped in for dinner and the merry stripping and dismantling of our tall, fake, but still luminous, Christmas tree.

Jan.–Feb.: I continued revising my novel *Unicorn Mountain* for Fairwood Press and Kudzu Planet Productions, and Jeri and I spent evenings at Jeri's mom's Breezy Pines unit watching DVDs on her large-screen TV, a crucial help to Miss Minnie, given her chronic macular degeneration. Most of our DVDs come from Netflix, Redbox, or the Harris County Library. (Clearly, though, we need to learn more about streaming.)

Two Jan.–Feb. films featured character actor Steve Buscemi in vital supporting roles: *Lean on Pete* (a male teen cares for an aging racehorse of that name) and *John Rabe* (a German industrialist saves more than 200,000 Chinese during the 1937–38 Nanjing massacre). Buscemi, whom I love for his work in the 2001 film *Ghost World*, also showed up in August on Miss Minnie's screen in Judd Apatow's *The King of Staten Island*. *Lean on Pete*, *John Rabe*, and *The King of Staten Island* had detractors as cinematic art, but we enjoyed them all anyway.

In February, our church held its last Wednesday-night suppers owing to the pandemic and the need for social distancing and mask wearing. Jeri and I have worked for 20-plus years with the kitchen-crew, and though we relish breaks from that weekly labor, we never expected the meals to totally cease. But the times were a-changing and as I write at least 16,500,000 cases have been confirmed in the US. Vaccines are now at hand, but too late for far too many Americans.

In March, to counteract those sad statistics, as nearly all our interactions began to take place virtually or in lockdown, we watched two films about Fred Rogers, who came to fame on PBS's *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*: *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* (a documentary about Rogers) and *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, in which Tom Hanks credibly assumed the role of the beloved Presbyterian minister and educator.

Fairly early in April, Jeri worked industriously weeding and mulching our outsized yard. After I mowed and raked that same anthill-infested yard, night sweats made me fear that I'd contracted COVID-19. A tear-jerking nostril-jab test outside a LaGrange pharmacy certified me virus-free, but an infected surgical wound from 2017 soon provoked an abscess in my right thigh that had to be surgically drained on the 19th. Afterward, I moved into our

downstairs guestroom to benefit from Jeri's tender wound-dressing and that of Emily Rogers [no kin to Fred], a home-healthcare pro who worked with us during my recovery from the earlier soft-tissue-sarcoma wound. I also had sessions every week through July 13 at the Wound Care Center in LaGrange.

Like nearly everyone else, we took no long trips, except to physicians in Atlanta, Columbus, or LaGrange. Jeri always drove me. I could walk and did so every day, but tried not to climb stairs and often stretched out to read on the sofa in the porch-side room just off our kitchen. (How we sacrifice for our health.) While Jeri slaved away cutting back shrubs, digging weeds, and raking up magnolia cones (activities she claims to like, if not all equally well), I read NY Review of Books Classics: Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Corner That Held Them*; *Heaven's Breath*, a study of wind's multitudinous effects, by Lyall Watson; *Tarka the Otter*, a British nature classic by Henry Williamson; Ben Sonnenberg's memoir *Lost Property*; and *Malacroix*, a French classic by Henri Bosco. By this reading I reduced, a bit, my pile of neglected NYRBC titles.

For me, May was notable for trips to the Wound Center on the 5th, 12th, 19th, and 26th, a day after George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, an event that lit nationwide protests. This Christmas, we pray that we can resolve these so often divisive issues as a unified people of faith and goodwill, as hard as that outcome may be to imagine.

On June 3, Miss Minnie fell in her Breezy Pines unit, broke her wrist, and fractured her hip in a couple of places. She went to one hospital for treatment and to another for rehab. On June 8, Dr Cardona told Jeri and me that a recent biopsy of an enhancing sarcoma nodule in my leg must soon be removed. Jeri, bless her, was back and forth to hospitals and our house on a stressful daily basis, one complicated by pandemic restrictions that made her the only person who could physically visit her mama in hospital. On June 18, she took me to Atlanta for a two-part surgery: excising the nodule and injecting tiny antibiotic beads into my infected right femur. Both were accomplished in Atlanta on an out-patient basis, and I had to relearn how to put on and take off my right sock.

On the sofa again (on some occasions with Jeri mowing our lawn), I read two novels by Jeffrey Ford, three by Zola Neale Hurston, *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez, and an older title from my stack of unread NYRB Classics, i.e., *Paper, Scissors and Other Stories* by Maxim Osipov. Also, through all these weeks, we watched videotaped sermons (not always on Sunday) by our pastor Kaylen Short here in Pine Mountain, and by Stephanie, our daughter, now the interim pastor of Fairview Presbyterian Church in Lawrenceville,

Georgia. We missed, and still do, going to church, but still follow social-distancing guidelines owing to Miss Minnie's and my vulnerability to the virus yet amongst us. Steph wears a mask, as do we, when visiting one another, for she's often with other people and always takes pains to protect her elderly folks from infection. This is hard for everyone, of course, but necessary in our minds to avoid putting others inadvertently at risk. Finally, in late July, my revision of *Unicorn Mountain*, a novel about the 1980s medieval-feeling AIDS pandemic was released without fanfare amidst the clamor of far more important concerns.

In August, at the invitation of our friends Bob Patterson and Ernest Koone, we ventured out for two picnics, one at Sunnyside two miles off Exit 30 on I-185, and the other at the Overlook in Callaway Gardens, with Linda Straub along as a participant. At the latter event, we doffed our masks, shared a meal, and looked out on azaleas and a placid lake. In August, Jeri and I also had some electrical work done after an accidentally cut cable by a hedge near our kitchen blew out our microwave, DVD player, and boombox. In September, I handwrote letters to registered but infrequent voters urging them to turn out for the national election on November 3, but didn't mail them until late in October.

On October 9, I learned from Dr Cardona after an MRI on the 3rd that my cancer had returned and that it would be inadvisable to attempt surgery again. He passed me along to an immunological oncologist, Dr William Read, and on November 12 (my 75th birthday), I had my first infusion. But October was also notable for meetings with grandson Joel soon after this diagnosis and with Annabel, his older sister, near the month's end, our first face-to-face visits since the start of sheltering-in-place, and both meetings occurred at Steph's small house in Atlanta. We shared food, took photos, talked, even laughed.

Out of space before I'm out of year! But we wish you, our friends, a peaceful but joyous holiday season and a 2021 healthier and saner than 2020, but just as loving as 2020's amateur and pro caregivers, some of whom forfeited their lives in selfless service.

Blessings from the Bishops!

Michael & Jeri

(19 December 2020)

[*brg* Thanks for your wonderful letter of comment, summing up your own career so succinctly, and summing up mine. What I've been doing has never generated an income, but has had to be paid for by my other career of freelance editing and indexing. All the rewards are in my production of magazines and your response to them.*]

ROBERT DAY
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Your weather and the bushfire situation have been at or close to the top of our news here over the past few days. I suspect that even the news professionals are getting sick of domestic politics. Meanwhile, our own weather continues to behave strangely, with almost monsoon-intensity rain lasting for days on end, with flood warnings across large parts of the south-east. (Of course, this usually means that the news media treats stuff happening in the south-east as happening everywhere else, and stuff happening anywhere else not happening at all. I suppose our recent election put a stop to that.) And no-one is commenting that autumn came about two months late this year. Even now, we have had very few really cold days.

I owe you a loc or five. The trouble is that the end of the year is always busy, as I have to collate the year's competition results for our model club and get prize certificates printed out before our December Awards Night. This year, I was also very busy at work as we hosted a major international user conference at the end of November, and I not only had to help getting the demo version of our new product available, but also had to give a presentation and demo myself. The presentation side was OK, but the demo surprised me by not being as easy as it looked. In my time, I've given off-the-cuff speeches to audiences of 2000-plus, but actually doing that for about 30 people when you've also got to make a clever piece of software work the way it's supposed to before their very eyes took more preparation than I expected.

(23 December 2019)

I realise that I'm lucky on the job front right now. I test software for a company that produces specialist timetabling software for universities — so you can imagine that we aren't reliant on shifting hundreds of units of product each week. We've actually been managing reasonably well on licence fees for ongoing users (some of whom are in Australia and NZ). More to the point, we've been working for the past three years on a major revision of our primary product to bring it up to date with the latest architectures, and to switch to a hosted service using Cloud technology. So the company knew that we'd have to rely on our own resources for a while and planned for this. The company's been going for 35 years; it started when our Chairman, Aubrey, who was a lecturer at Warwick University, was moaning one night about how he was

struggling with his timetabling, and his son (now our MD) said, 'Dad, I can do that for you on the computer.'

So he did. And Aubrey's colleagues saw it and said 'Can we have some of that?' And 35 years later, there is a family firm of some 50 people, with worldwide sales. They've only ever grown the company organically, so there's no external shareholders or business partners wanting their share.

What would be a concern would be if universities started having cashflow problems through not being able to enrol sufficient students for the new academic year, though our customers have been fairly upbeat so far, especially as we've been thinking about how to adopt our existing product to cope with classes held in multiple venues simultaneously to cope with social distancing, or doing online lecture sessions. I have the feeling that sort of thing will be coming across my virtual desk over the summer.

You write about learning new stuff later in life. I've been in this job four years now, and I work with a bunch of testers who are mostly in their twenties and early thirties. I'm 63 now (no idea how that happened!) but the company took me on because my skill set and experience were different from the rest of the testing team. I have to say that I have enjoyed the job immensely: I've taught the other testers all sorts of business stuff I've picked up across my working career, and they've taught me more about testing in four years than I ever learned in the previous twenty! And the company have paid for me to do a further training course later this month with one of the top people in software

testing, who rejoices in the name of Michael Bolton. (No, not that one.) So they, at least, reckon that you can teach old dogs new tricks!

(14 June 2020)

GIAMPAOLO COSSATO

Address already published

I have much appreciated your 50th Anniversary Editions. Thanks for your very touching 'Farewell to Harry'. I vaguely remember a cat that was roaming the house when I was two or three years old. Then 'he/she' was there no more. No idea what happen to 'him'/'her'. A couple of pictures out of focus is all that reminds me of 'its' existence. My father never elaborated. Unhappy times.

Sadly, the word 'unhappy' can be easily used nowadays too. Is it climate change or a sequence of unfortunate events on a global scale? I bet on the first.

For 45 days in a row Venice has been subjected to daily tides, most of them very damaging, and one catastrophic. We had another one this morning and tomorrow we are bracing for the same. But Venice's occurrences are just a small cog overshadowed by much more significant ones.

In 2004 a Spanish illustrator I had become friends with, left me the following original drawing before leaving Venice where he had spent a couple of months. Not even Spiderman can save Venice.

(25 December 2019)





Now the Covid-19 virus is turning SF into reality. You might have heard that Italy is now ranking among the firsts for number of cases (which makes us very proud): 821 in the whole country at the moment, 18 of which are in Venice. The tourists have disappeared and the town is now in the hands of the 52,000 remaining Venetians. In other circumstances it would not have been such a bad thing.

The UK is now suffering the worst floods ever seen, while in Italy rains have become very rare (drought is taking over) and winter no longer deserves to be called such.

The document with the logo of the firm 'Angelo Pozzana' depicting an oldfashioned WC is an in-

voice of the works done by the aforementioned firm on behalf of my paternal great-grandfather: Cav. Andrea Pitteri, who at the time (1900) was a pharmacist and also mayor of the island of Burano (a title that today no longer exists; now we have just one mayor for all the islands and the mainland Mestre). He owned the pharmacy (of Napoleonic origin) where the works were done. Cav. stands for 'cavaliere', the honorific 'knight'.

The second document is the first page of an edict by the municipality of Venice (in the name of the then King Vittorio Emanuele II) stating that, because of the decision to create a new wide street, the buildings impeding the realisation of such project had to be demolished (with compensations

paid to the proprietors and sometimes, if possible, with more floors added to those still partly standing). The document belongs to the archive of my family going back to the beginning of 1800.

Along the centuries Venice has been subjected to a lot of changes, specially with the landfilling of many canals, but this project (in a town that, in the 1800s, had almost reached its physical saturation) was a really major one. The original idea was to create a sort of 'highway' leading from the train station (the building of which started in the 1860s when Venice was still part of the Austrian Empire) to San Marco Square. It never reached San Marco Square, but what is now called 'Strada Nova' became reality.

I have enclosed three images that give you an idea of the radical changes that took place.

The red dots, first in the 1729 map by Ughi and then those in the modern one, give you an idea of what was done. Which is better illustrated in the Papadopoli proposal which I have highlighted in green (red and yellows, this last a work in progress, are also mine). The CO stands for 'conte' 'count'. A Venetian noble family of Greek origin.

'Strada Nova' (in Italian 'nuova' 'new') was a compromise reached after the Second World War when, to maintain the name of the king (at its inception it was called 'Via Vittorio Emanuele II') was no longer acceptable, and even less 'Via Ettore Muti' as it was called during the infamous 'Repubblica di Salò' (September 1943–April 1945), when Mussolini retook part of the North of Italy with the help of the Germans.

About my health. Well, what I have previously described at great length is still clinging, plus few minor additions to make the picture more compelling. What cannot be cured must be endured, says the proverb. At the moment the enduring is still manageable.

The future does appear rather bleak. Or it might be what is needed to convince the stubborn that a universal common goal (in all matters?) may represent a way out.

(1 March 2020)

The inoculation campaign is now on the way all over Europe, but high hopes have better to be kept in check. And there are also the variants to consider. Apparently we can now 'proudly' boast a just-discovered Italian one.

At the moment the whole of Italy (and most European countries) are in Red Zone, and to move around you need (again) a specific document.

Cases have been spiking and so have the daily number of deaths.

And my daughter is still holed up in Bruxelles.
I find it hard to use the words 'happy', 'best',

'merry' ... I can only embarrassingly whisper them.
(27 December 2020)

LLOYD PENNEY

Address already published

Thanks to the luck of the resurrection of *Amazing Stories* magazine, and the further luck of the editor-in-chief being local and an old friend, I am hoping to relaunch myself as a book editor. I have edited and proofread four issues of *Amazing*, and then edited and proofed a book which is part of the *Amazing* subscription (*Captain Future in Love* by Allen Steele), and then a large manuscript from Montreal horror writer Nancy Kilpatrick, and now a YA manuscript by local writer and old friend Shirley Meier. I now have some experience, and a couple of recommendations. Rob Sawyer recommended that I get myself the newest *Chicago Style Manual*, which arrived only today, so I have some studying to do, to make sure that I know what Chicago (and the whole publishing industry) demands. This could be a steep learning curve.

I have been describing myself as semi-retired, but not by choice. I have always been as active as we can afford, and of course, there is always the fact that we have been vendors of steampunk jewellery, and that has so far been self-sustaining. We fear the interest itself is fading, so our possible decision to shut down the business may be made for us. At least, it's been great fun. We still go to our regular Third Monday pub night, but fandom here seems to have faded away. We do send out notifications of our pub night, but we are still lucky to get five or six to the event. Fandom here always seems to break into small groups, so it really isn't doing anything new, I suppose.

When I see anything these days with Guillermo del Toro, I automatically think of his ex-wife. Del Toro lived in Toronto for some time with wife Lorenza, but his fame seems to have divided them, and they'd been married for some time. Lorenza travels, and may be in Mexico right now, but we do see her here, often in a steampunk setting.

(28 December 2019)

SFC 101: It has been a couple of years since we've had a summer of regular 30C+ days, although we have had temperatures close to 50C, but only for a day or so. Australia's been in the pressure cooker all summer, and there's been little or no relief. No wonder the whole continent caught fire. I hope this danger is gone now, but summer will return, and we shall see what happens then. We're now in spring, and we will soon be able to leave our heavy coats in the closet. I do wonder about our own

summer. We all have too many politicians who do not take global warming seriously, not to mention the coronavirus. All a hoax, they say. Time for Trump and Bolsonaro of Brazil to catch the coronavirus. (I have met David Suzuki. His greatest disappointment in his life is that he's been sounding the alarm about global warming for decades, and few have listened.)

Because of costs, I too have stepped away from Worldcons, and I suspect I'd keep that policy, even if there were simple Hugo-voting memberships. I again thank you for all the money you've spent on getting paper copies of this zine to me, but it's an awful lot, and storage of zines is becoming problematic.

Greetings to Leigh Edmonds — but I've checked my last few locs to *SF Commentary*, and I couldn't see where I might have written something about 'survivor guilt'. I certainly regret that my own fandom is flaking away, as many names in it pass on. It is a reminder of my own age and mortality, and seeing that I was a fan as early as age 18 (I turn 61 in June), I would hate to see a day where I am not involved in something and fandom is but a memory.

And greetings to Patrick McGuire. My tuckerisation in Rob Sawyer's *Illegal Alien* was a gift from Yvonne in 1995. Recently, Rob has mentioned trying to sell the movie rights to *Illegal Alien*, possibly writing the screenplay himself. I always say I am willing to play myself in the movie, and I will bring my own Hawaiian shirts. I may be too old now to play my 35-year-old self in that movie, but make-up and special effects can do wonders.

(29 March 2020)

SFC 102: I have heard of many authors saying that their next big book will be about the pandemic, or similar events, only much worse than what we're dealing with. Most of us couldn't have seen this coming, although when Trump did away with the US pandemic team, just before the pandemic arrived, some said 'Here it comes!', and they were unfortunately right. Good for New Zealand for doing the right thing. Here, we're told that it is for the most part under control, but we see the US death tolls, which make the 9/11 death toll seem minor, with little reaction from the population. I don't even pretend to understand all of this. I think you meant May 2020 in referring to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

Bored? We are not, not in the least. I am probably having one of my best years as an editor in my work with *Amazing Stories* magazine, as well as some voice work. Yvonne is busy making decorative face masks for this pandemic, and making a lot of Hawaiian-style shirts for future shows. We have a lot to do, and the pandemic passes us by mostly.

I used QuarkXPress 5 years ago, and I really liked it. I have a lot of files I'd like to use again, but later editions of QXP cannot open the QXP5 files.

[*brg* Send them to me — but don't stretch the resources of your server in doing so. Quark 7 will open the earlier files, but I don't know if today's Quark XPress, No. 10, will do so.*]

The RIP section in each monthly issue of Dave Langford's *Ansible* threatens to take over each issue. Our fannish and SFnal world is falling apart, bit by bit, name by name. Merv Binns, Earl Kemp, Frank Lunney, and so many more are gone, a reminder of my age.

Your comments on the earlier movie version of *The Handmaid's Tale*: the book was written by Margaret Atwood, not Marion. And, our local channels have started showing us episodes of *Vera* and *Pie in the Sky*, so we are enjoying those. I haven't read much, but a book I bought in London last year, Philip Pullman's *The Book of Dust, Volume One: La Belle Sauvage*, I much enjoyed. *Volume Two: The Secret Commonwealth* is a book I have been looking for. *The Midwich Cuckoos* edition here reminds me that the young boy from the movie on the book cover is one Kim Clarke Champniss, who grew up, came to Canada, and enjoyed a career in the national music industry here, was a VJ on our own local music channel, and is now retired and living in the Niagara Falls region.

(22 August 2020)

I can't say I am enjoying the pandemic and having to stay inside, but we have enough activities to make staying inside relatively bearable. You say you have a friend who has written 150 letters to friends and family during this pandemic. Well, I checked myself. Since St Patrick's Day, which is when I date the start of the pandemic, I have written 110 letters of comment, and this one is No. 111. I have also made dozens of pairs of earrings and necklaces, and I have edited a handful of books and magazines, so it's kept my sanity, such as it is. We don't have Netflix or Crave or any other streaming service, so there is a lot I haven't seen, and I am not missing it. I suspect that if we watch anything, it will be the entire run of *Babylon 5*, or possibly all 20 years of *Time Team*. There's a lot I can download from YouTube.

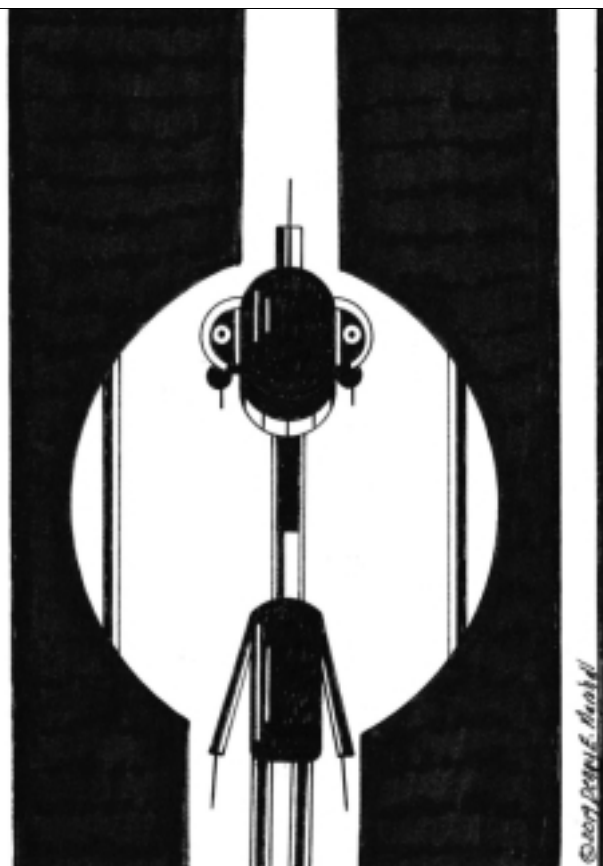
The Australian Book of Trains looks quite interesting. We've been indulging ourselves on information about the British train system, plus all the major train stations in London, such as Victoria, King's Cross, St Pancras, and Paddington, just to name a few, and we definitely know how important trains were in the creation of Canada, so this would pique our interest quite well.

Robert Lichtman's essay: I've always been a late bloomer, so I hope that's a sign I will live a good, long life. I came of age in the late 70s-early 80s, later than most my age, and it was mostly because we moved out of the little town I grew up in, and was very happy to get out of. We moved to the city of Victoria in British Columbia, on the Pacific coast of Canada, and life changed and blossomed. First girlfriend, first real job, and the opportunity to start looking for a university to go to. It all happened, but wouldn't have if we hadn't gotten out of that little town. I think of it whenever I hear Simon and Garfunkel's 'My Little Town': 'Whenever it rains, there's a rainbow, but all of the colours are black, it's not that the colours aren't there, it's just imagination they lack, everything's the same back, in my little town.'

(1 December 2020)

[*brg* I'm very impressed, not only that you write letters of comments to all or most fanzines, but that there are so many to which you can respond. It seems to me that you would be the ideal person to prepare the list of published fanzines that could be used by we poor bemused fanzine readers when trying to work out our FAAN Award nominations. I usually squib nominating and voting because I cannot remember which issues of which fanzines have been published in a particular calendar year.

Escaping from small towns is not so much an issue in Australia. Despite the bush legend about Australia's origins, Australia has been the most urbanised country on Earth since the 1870s. Most of my Australian readers would have grown up in or around one of the five major cities. It was different for my parents' generation. Both my mother's parents were dead by the end of the 1940s, leaving their children free to move to the city from the country town of Rochester. My father's father was obsessed with being a market gardener and flower grower, although I've always been told he was a hopeless businessman — but this meant that my father grew up in small rural towns until his late teens.



The influence of the country continued with some of my aunts and uncles. Several of them remained market gardeners on the fringes of Melbourne until they retired. Several of my uncles on both sides of the family bought small farms at a time when most people think of retiring, and continued to work hard on those farms into their seventies.

Which is a roundabout way of saying I did not need to escape from a country town. I did live in two of them (Melton and Bacchus Marsh) in my late teens and early twenties only because my father moved to the country to further his career as a bank branch manager. As soon as he and my mother could do so, they moved back to the Melbourne suburbs. And two years later I finally found a flat into which I could move — in an inner suburb of Melbourne.*]

The 2020 voyage: Part 3
See *SF Commentary* 106

Colin Steele is Emeritus Fellow at the Australian National University and former University Librarian. He has been a reviewer of science fiction and fantasy for the *Canberra Times* since 1979 and is *SF Commentary*'s longest-serving contributor.

Colin Steele

The field

BOOKS ABOUT BOOKS AND READERS

BURNING THE BOOKS: A HISTORY OF KNOWLEDGE UNDER ATTACK

by Richard Ovenden (John Murray; 2020; 308 pp., A\$32.99)

At a time when Australia's national cultural institutions struggle past annual government 'efficiency' cuts to preserve our national heritage, and access to reliable information is more important than ever, Richard Ovenden's *Burning the Books: A History of Knowledge Under Attack*, is essential reading.

Ovenden, Bodley's Librarian at Oxford University, heads a library founded in 1602 to be, as Francis Bacon said, 'an ark to save learning from the deluge'. Now, more than ever, we need to protect and support contemporary arks of knowledge.

Ovenden says that the inspiration for *Burning the Books* came in 2017 when it was revealed that the British Home Office had destroyed the landing cards of the 1948 West Indian 'Windrush migrants', which meant they had no evidence of their citizenship, leading to at least 83 people being deported.

The arbitrary culling of archives can thus have unforeseen social and political consequences. The destruction of many libraries and archives has, however, often been intentional. Ovenden traces, with chilling detail, ideological examples of the wiping out of the history of so-called inferior nations.

One of the earliest examples of 'culturecide' occurred with the Babylonian destruction of the Royal Library of Ashurbanipal in 612 BCE. Other examples include the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, which resulted in the destruction of 70 to 80 per cent of European library collections.

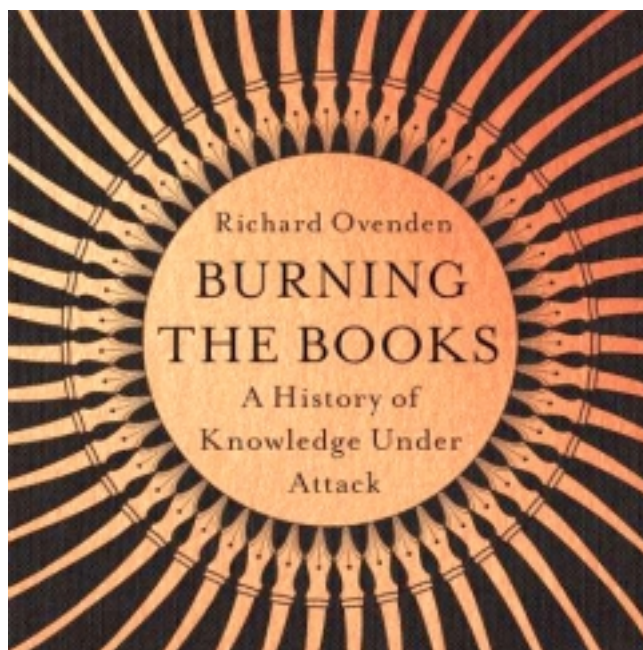
The British attack on Washington in 1814 included the burning of the Library of Congress.

The supreme example of culturecide comes in the Nazi burning of Jewish and 'un-German' books in Berlin on 10 May 1933. Heinrich Heine's words, 'Wherever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn human beings', came true with the Holocaust.

In August 1992, Library staff were attacked by Serbian military as they attempted to save books from the burning National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ovenden writes, 'Ray Bradbury reminded us in 1953 of the temperature at which paper burns — Fahrenheit 451 — but an entire library takes a long time to be destroyed.' In Sarajevo's case, it took three days.

Less obvious destruction comes from continuing neglect. Before the fire in 48 BC at the Library of Alexandria, significant damage had already been experienced 'through the underfunding, low prioritisation and general disregard'.

Ovenden uses this in the context of the huge cuts imposed on English local councils by the Conservative Government in the last decade. Many



libraries were closed, or services significantly reduced. In 2010, there were 4356 public libraries in Britain, but by 2019 the number had fallen to 3583.

Public libraries provide services to the more disadvantaged in society. In November 2018 a United Nations report confirmed that 'public libraries are on the frontline of helping the digitally excluded and digitally illiterate'.

The problem is not restricted to public libraries. University libraries globally have suffered from significant budget cuts in recent years, while at the same time having to discard or remotely store physical books, to provide student digital spaces.

The National Library of New Zealand has recently been in the news for 'rehoming' at best, and culling at worst, 625,000 non-New Zealand books, including the entire Holocaust collection, which fortunately has been claimed by the New Zealand Holocaust Centre.

The digital deluge poses even more problems of retention for under-resourced institutions. The UK National Archives, Ovenden notes, stores only 2 to 5 per cent of the records generated by a government department. Our national cultural institutions have urgent problems of digital retention and funding. So, what priority do we give to the future of Australia's past?

Vast amounts of data are stored by tech giants, such as Google and Facebook. Ovenden is saddened that 'the world's memory has now been outsourced to tech companies without society realising the fact or really being able to comprehend the consequences'.

It's no longer necessary to burn a library when the same result can be achieved through the 'delete' key. In 2017, Google-owned YouTube deleted thousands of videos documenting the Syrian civil war. Ovenden notes how the Vote Leave campaign in Britain deleted significant content from its public website, notably the false claim that Brexit would liberate £350 million per week for the NHS. Fortunately the UK Web Archive had separately captured the website.

George Orwell wrote in *Nineteen EightyFour*, 'The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth.' Today, that process is increasing, as in the fake news claims in Trump's America, and the systematic book censoring by Chinese authorities of Hong Kong public and school libraries, and bookshops.

In Australia, the funding of libraries, archives, and cultural institutions may not be as glamorous to politicians as government grants in marginal seats for sports stadiums and facilities, but, as Ovenden states, 'Libraries and archives are central to democracy because they are the storehouses of knowledge and truth.'

THE MADMAN'S LIBRARY: THE STRANGEST BOOKS, MANUSCRIPTS AND OTHER LITERARY CURIOSITIES FROM HISTORY

by Edward Brooke-Hitching (Simon & Schuster; \$45)

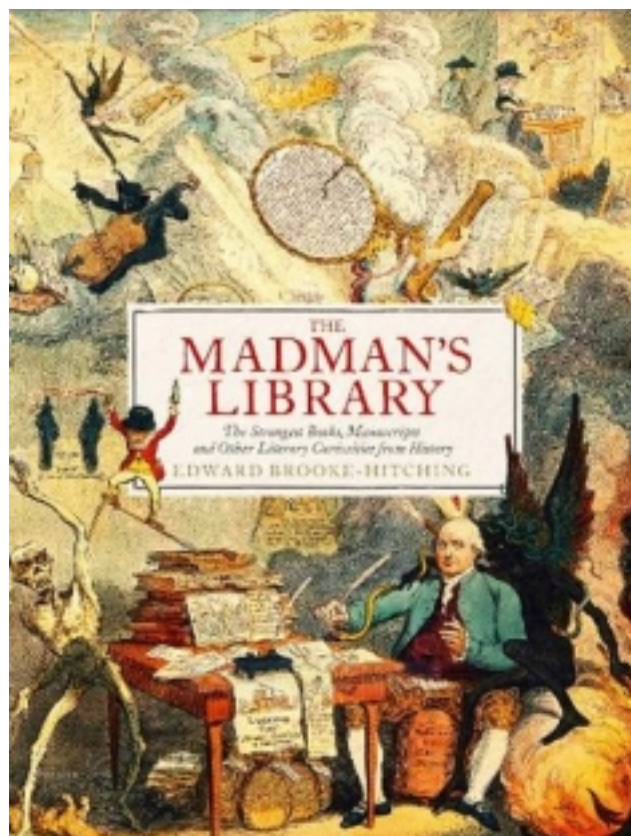
Edward Brooke-Hitching is an author, map historian, award-winning documentary filmmaker, and researcher for the TV's *QI*. That series' quirky and informative humour resounded in Brooke-Hitching's first book, *Fox Tossing, Octopus Wrestling and Other Forgotten Sports*.

Edward's father, renowned antiquarian bookseller Franklin Brooke-Hitching, often collected strange titles, such as *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* and *Through Persia by Caravan*. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Edward, growing up in a rare bookshop, has always been 'really fascinated by books that are down the back alleys of history'.

Brooke-Hitching thus asks in his preface to *The Madman's Library*, 'Which books would inhabit the shelves of the greatest library of literary curiosities, put together by a collector unhindered by space, time and budget?'

The result is a beautifully produced volume, with hundreds of colour illustrations, documenting the strangest and most extraordinary books from around the world and historical periods. Each book 'redefines, in its own way, the concept of just what a book can be'.

The ten chapters include ones devoted to



literary hoaxes, religious oddities, curiosities of science, and works of the supernatural. Brooke-Hitching reflects that ‘above everything, people have always been funny, been weird, been unquenchably curious in every possible arena. It can be gruesome, but it’s this other world of literature that normally never gets covered in books about books’.

The eclectic nature of the coverage is exemplified in the first chapter, ‘Books that Aren’t Books’, which includes Aboriginal message sticks, Chinese oracle bones, an Incan knotted quipu, and an American Civil War soldier’s diary inscribed onto the back of his violin.

The chapter ‘Books Made of Flesh and Blood’ certainly covers the gruesome; for example, the 605-page *Qur’an* written with 50 litres of the blood of Saddam Hussein. From 1997 to 1999, Hussein allegedly had 24 and 27 litres of blood drained from his body which were then chemically mixed to produce an ‘ink’ to write the 336,000 words encapsulated in 6000 verses.

After the fall of Baghdad, the *Blood Qur’an* was locked away, but it couldn’t be destroyed, being a *Qur’an*. It is now apparently locked in a vault that needs three separate keys held by three different officials to open.

Brooke-Hitching’s numerous footnotes are always informative. Appended to the *Qur’an* account, he notes that a French 16-year-old in 2018 became the first human being to inject himself with DNA micromolecules containing verses of the Bible and the *Qur’an*. The Bible verse went into his left thigh, which caused an inflammation, and the *Qur’an* into the right thigh, which didn’t! The injection was said to be ‘a symbol of peace between religions and science’.

Strange facts abound, such as when 2.5 million Mills and Boon novels in 2003 were shredded and mixed into the foundations of a 16-mile stretch of England’s M6 motorway to help bind the asphalt.

One of the strangest collectables must be *20 Slices of American Cheese* (2018) compiled by New York publisher Ben Denzer. Only 10 copies of a book, selling for \$200 US and containing 20 slices of American Kraft cheese, were produced. The University of Michigan library bought one and reported to Brooke-Hitching, ‘It’s “shelf stable” but ... we’ll see how long it lasts’.

Patria Amada (2014) by Vinicius Leoncio is thought to be one of the world’s largest books. Weighing 7.5 tons, with 41,000 pages and including all Brazilian tax codes to that date, it was compiled by tax lawyer Leoncio as a protest against Brazil’s ever-increasing and ever more complex tax laws.

At the other end of the size scale, Brooke-Hitching documents the ‘thumb bibles’ of the early seventeenth century and an Omar Khayyam that was

about quarter of the size of a postage stamp, with one copy being set in a signet ring.

The Smallest Book in the World, the size of a peppercorn, published in Leipzig in 2002, is the world’s smallest book in a published edition. Since then there have been nano books etched into micro-tablets of crystalline silicon.

Brooke-Hitching even covers books written from beyond the grave. Mark Twain is credited with writing *Jap Herron. A Novel Written from the Ouija Board* (1917) seven years after his death, while in 1884 Oliver Pettis produced an *Autobiography by Jesus of Nazareth*.

John Murray Spear’s *Messages from the Superior State* (1853) detailed the communications he received from ‘The Association of Electrizers’, whose spirits included Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

The 250 pages of *The Madman’s Library* constitute a sumptuous bibliophilic cabinet of curiosities with many unusual stories to tell. It is not a book to read cover to cover, but rather a book to dip into, to admire the numerous colour illustrations and marvel at Brooke-Hitching’s erudition while ‘expanding our sense of what it is we love about books’.

BIOGRAPHY

H. G. WELLS: A LITERARY LIFE

by Adam Roberts (Palgrave Macmillan; \$34.99)

INVENTING TOMORROW: H. G. WELLS AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

by Sarah Cole (Columbia University Press; \$74.00)

H. G. Wells (1866–1946) is more remembered today for his SF novels *The War of The Worlds*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Time Machine*, written at the end of the nineteenth century, than for his other novels or non-fiction books, such as his global bestseller *The Outline of History* (1920).

Professor **Adam Roberts**, Professor of English at Royal Holloway College in London and Professor **Sarah Cole**, Dean of Humanities at Columbia University, while taking different approaches, provide strong evidence for a Wellsian reassessment.

Wells was arguably the most celebrated intellectual in the English-speaking world in the decades between the First and Second World Wars, a role that has been largely forgotten. Wells met with many world leaders, such as Roosevelt, Lenin,

Stalin, and Churchill, who said that he knew Wells's works so well he could pass an examination in them.

Roberts highlights the impact of 'The man who invented tomorrow'. Wells envisaged in 1936 the concept of 'The World Brain', a precursor on microfilm of Google/Wikipedia, and foreshadowed, inter alia, the tank, the atom bomb, global warming, aerial flight, mass surveillance, germ warfare, laser beams, and cosmetic surgery.

George Orwell wrote in 1941 that 'Thinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells' own creation. The minds of all of us, and therefore the physical world, would be perceptibly different if Wells had never existed'.

Wells visited Australia in January 1939, addressing the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in Canberra's Albert Hall, against a backdrop of a heatwave and bushfires. Wells' comments in his speech, criticising Mussolini and Hitler, aroused the anger of Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, a supporter of Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. Lyons responded, 'The Federal Government is not to be associated with remarks which have been made by our visitor.'

Roberts sees Wells's non-fiction as irrevocably dated, whereas Cole, who views his 100 books of

fiction and non-fiction and 6000 articles as deliberately intertwined, writes that 'Wells felt no need to banish the pedagogic voice from his fiction'.

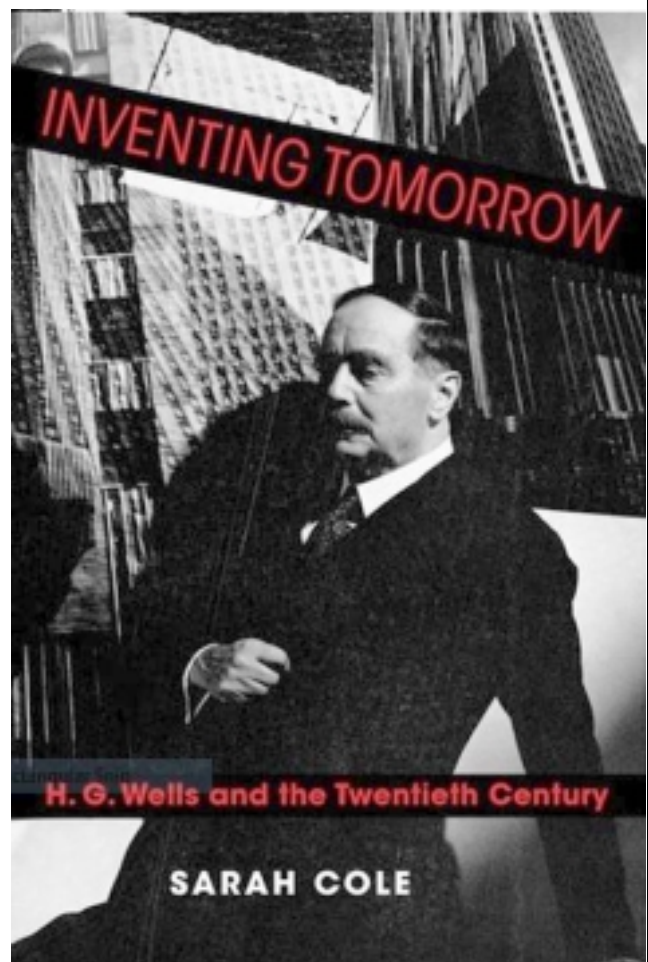
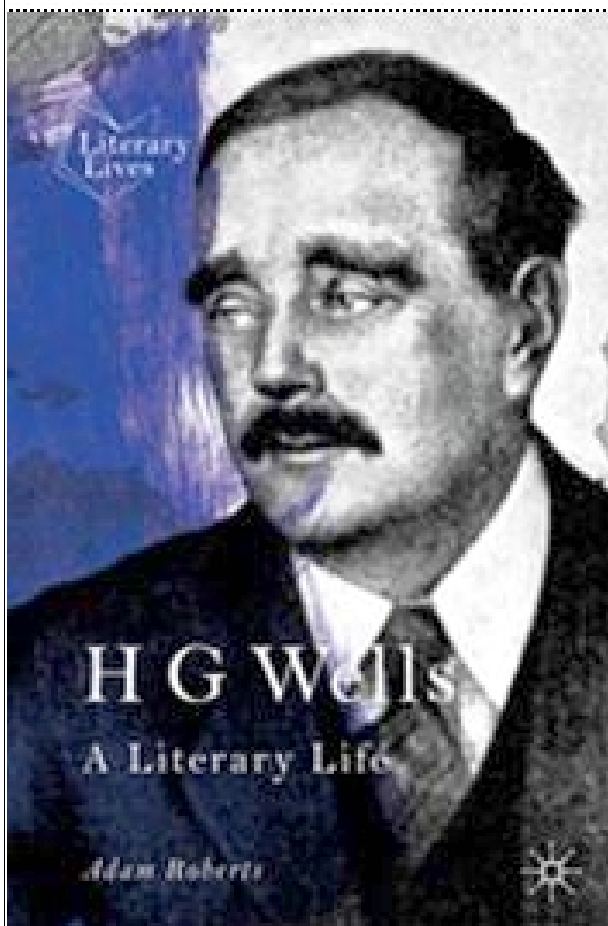
Cole sees Wells as a visionary radical, outlining the case for global unity, economies serving the 'common good', and universal human rights. Wells was the major drafter of the Sankey Declaration, a precursor to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Wells's ideas for global unity and a world state now seem less likely, with the rise of populism and the backlash against globalisation, although his attacks on autocratic leaders and dictators are still very relevant.

Equally, Wells's comments on the Black Death, 'a pestilence of unheard-of virulence', resonate today. 'Never was there so clear a warning to mankind to seek knowledge and cease from bickering, to unite against the dark powers of nature'.

Wells's last book, the short *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945), was foreshadowed in his Canberra speech, in which he said, 'humanity ... can't escape entire self-destruction as a species'.

Roberts sees parallels between *Mind* and his first novel, *The Time Machine*, revealing 'a psychopathological going over and over the same ground, like Lady Macbeth endlessly washing her own hands'.



Roberts, an acclaimed SF novelist and Vice President of the H. G. Wells Society, provides the first complete literary biography of Wells for 30 years, and the first to encompass his entire career as a writer. Roberts adopts a chronological approach to Wells's writing, leading the reader through Wells's life in books. He is particularly insightful on the scientific romances, seeing, for example, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) as the first great novel of the Darwinian 'revolution in thought'.

Cole argues that, while Wells 'rejected and was rejected by modernism, Wells' influence on the twentieth century novel was greater than is often assumed. His goals for literature were soaring, world-scaled. He believed that writing could and should change the course of history, to set humankind on a path toward unity, peace, and planetary prosperity'.

Both Cole and Roberts agree that Wells's lesser-known novels deserve rehabilitation, and especially praise *Mr Britling Sees It Through* (1916), which Maxim Gorky called 'the finest, most courageous, truthful and humane book written in Europe in the course of this accursed war'. Cole says that Wells 'took up the position of civilian in new and activist terms, first, as a matter of imagination, and second, as a matter of responsibility'.

Cole and Roberts, however, don't shirk from documenting Wells's faults, especially on eugenics, sexism, and in Cole's words, 'spasms of racism and callous complacency'.

Nonetheless, both authors make a persuasive case, through their different structural approaches, to restoring Wells's reputation and ideas in a world again under threat, with the need more than ever for a belief in democracy, faith in scientific knowledge, and the reaffirmation of human rights.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

MEANWHILE IN DOPAMINE CITY by DBC Pierre (Faber; \$29.99)

Australian-born **DBC Pierre** won the 2007 Man Booker Prize with his debut novel, *Vernon God Little*. He now lives in Cambridgeshire, where he wrote *Dopamine City*, a satirical dystopian novel set in the near future.

Lonnie Cush is a 36-year-old, newly redundant sanitation (a.k.a. sewer) worker, in a country resembling America or Australia, dominated by the tech corporation Octagon. He is a single father struggling, after his wife's death, to bring up his two children, teenage son Egan and nine-year-old daughter, the precocious and demanding Shelby-

Ann.

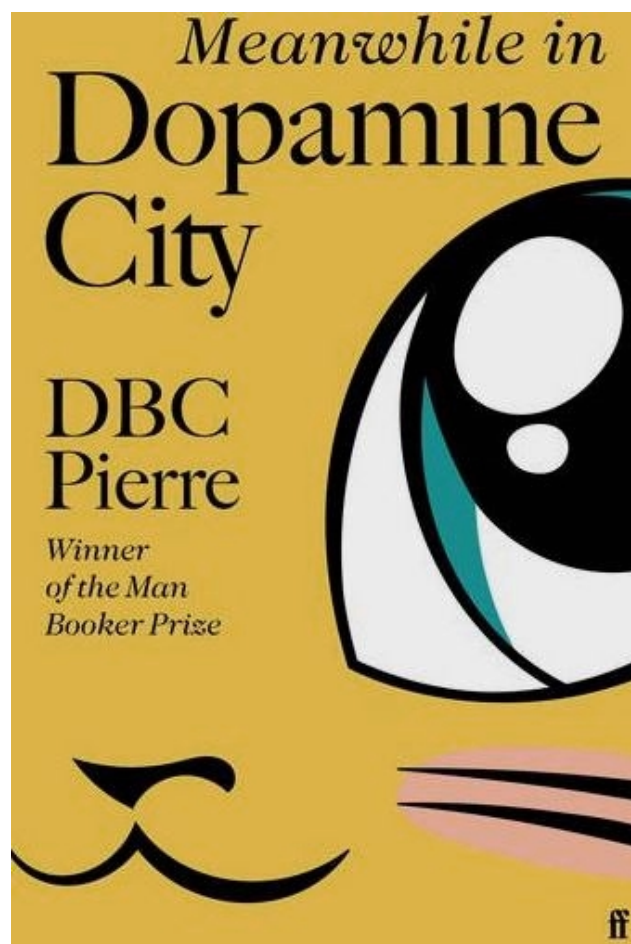
Lonnie's belief that Shelby is growing up too fast is confirmed after she gets a smartphone and descends into the 'hell' of the internet: 'the moment they [the kids] have a phone they're getting date-raped by corporations, farmed by a new kind of capitalism'.

What is Lonnie to do? Should he follow Shelby down the rabbit hole of the net, even though, according to Pierre, he is 'like a Commodore 64, and his code suddenly doesn't run on the modern system, whereas the kids are born with Windows 10, and he's got to work out that code'?

When Lonnie enters 'the binary life', the structure of the book changes and the text splits into two columns on each page. One column is made up of first-person narratives, told by the numerous different characters. The right-hand column has linked news stories, each relevant to the narrative in the adjacent column.

Pierre is here drawing attention to the ever-present 24/7 news cycle, declining attention spans, and the algorithms determining how we live our lives. 'Neuropsychology en masse' at one level, but also individually, as people 'clicked and liked and favoured themselves into their own hermetic worlds'.

Pierre has said such a narrative structure is 'not going to work for everyone'. The right-hand news



column is often easier to follow than Lonnie's increasingly fraught life and the multiple character storylines.

Pierre notes that Lonnie, like himself, 'was brought up in a liberal world of second chances. My life is built from second chances; I wouldn't be speaking to you but for having been forgiven and helped off the floor and back on my feet'. Lonnie and his family, in an appropriately bizarre conclusion, will also get a second chance as they seek freedom in an 'analogue' future.

Dopamine City often resembles a William Gibson novel, fizzing with technological ideas and satirical comment, and while never quite getting it together as a whole, is decidedly an original.

RISE & SHINE

by Patrick Allington (Scribe; \$27.99)

In *Rise & Shine*, Patrick Allington, South Australian author and Miles Franklin nominee, takes us to a near future, following an ecological catastrophe that has eradicated animal and plant life and has killed more than eight billion people. Allington does not dwell on the causes, except to write, 'no one who survived could really say whether it was a single big catastrophe or a series of small messes, or if it was just the slow grind of excess. Probably it was all of that'.

Now, 33 years later, war continues between two city-states, Rise and Shine, a war which is both manufactured and real, as 'no one could tell information from lies'.

Citizens receive their nourishment not through food but by daily watching through 'autoscreens' of human suffering. The war has been deliberately created and sustained in 'the New Time' by the two city leaders Barton and Walker, to maintain the common good.

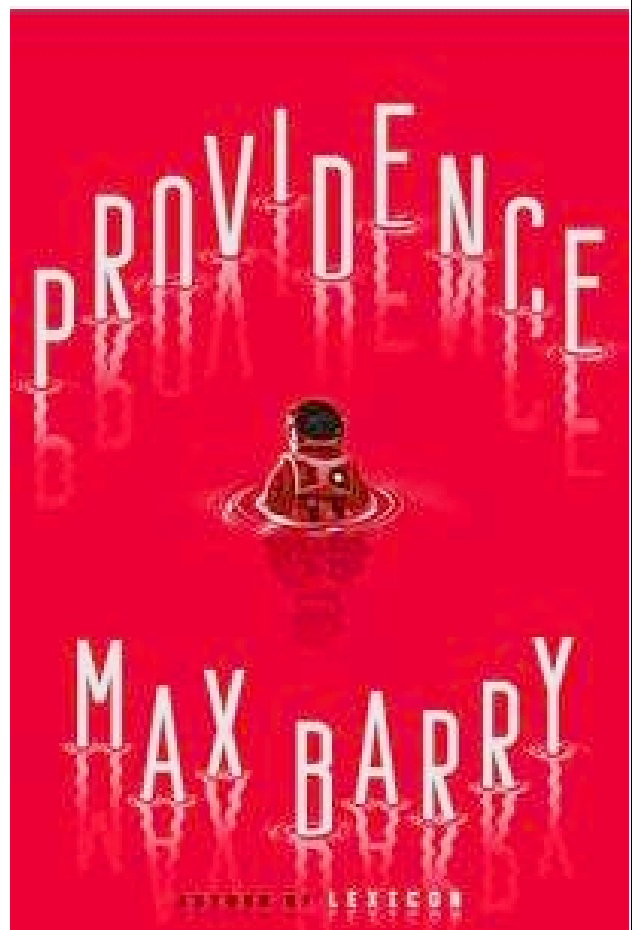
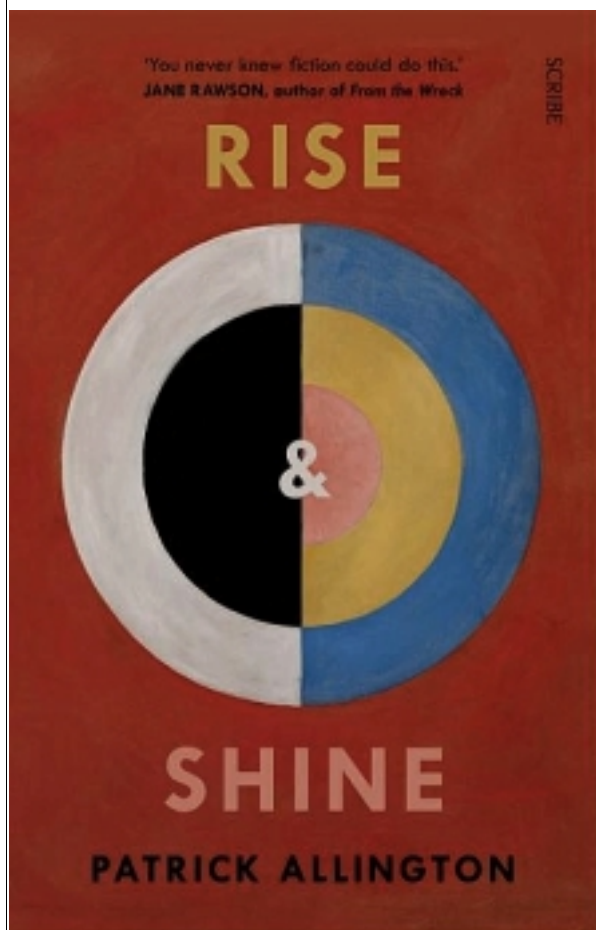
Allington's sketchy background detail lessens the ultimate impact of his dystopian vision, but the novel is certainly effective in highlighting contemporary issues of government surveillance, political manipulation, and the pervasive impact of fake news.

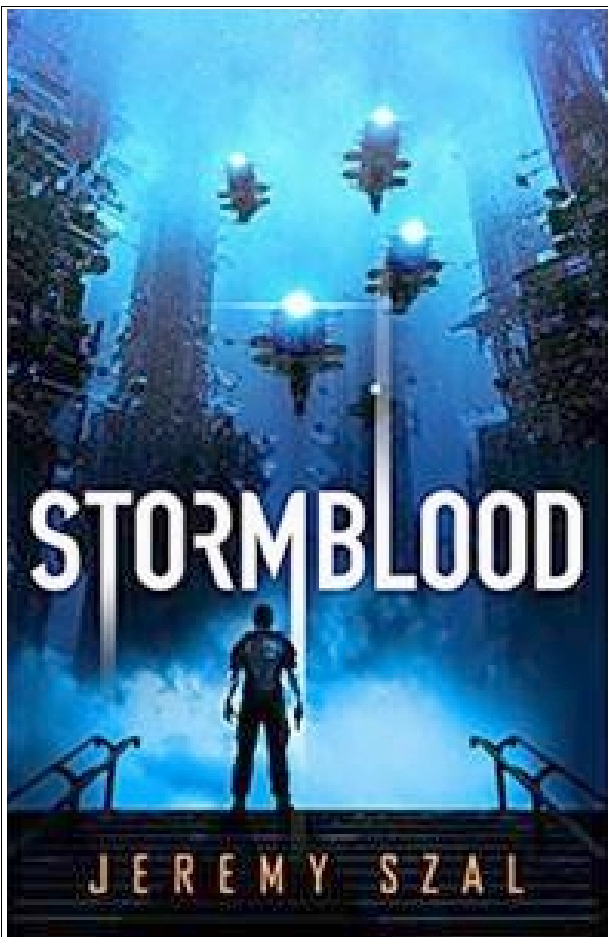
PROVIDENCE

by Max Barry (Hachette; \$32.99)

Providence, Melbourne author Max Barry's new novel, is a fast-paced military space opera that leans unapologetically on the influence of SF authors such as E. E. 'Doc' Smith and Orson Scott Card.

The novel follows a small crew of four travelling on a giant Providence-class AI starship into interstellar space to combat reptilian alien 'salamanders'. The crew is largely redundant in the running of the ship. Their different personalities allow





Barry to emphasise the tensions between them, which occur when the ship's AI malfunctions. The ship proves to be as much an alien menace as the salamanders.

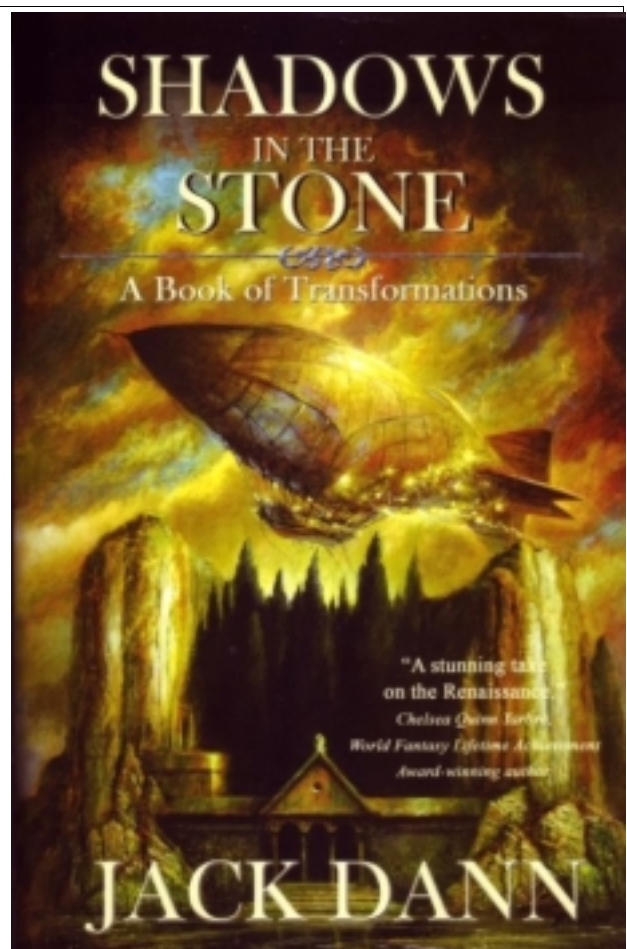
The crew are forced to evacuate to the hive planet of the salamanders. Can they band together, complete the mission, and get back to Earth? Barry realistically reflects on their fate and the nature, often perverse, of humanity, intelligence and sentience.

STORMBLOOD

by **Jeremy Szal** (Gollancz; \$32.99)

Stormblood is the debut novel of a trilogy by Sydney-based author **Jeremy Szal**. It is the first book in the trilogy featuring Vakov Fukasawa, a former 'Reaper', a bio-enhanced soldier. Reapers have been infused with an alien DNA to increase their levels of aggression in battle, but once the war ends they remain addicted and find it difficult to assimilate back into society.

When Vakov finds his former Reaper colleagues are being murdered, and his estranged brother is the prime suspect, his investigations lead him into many dark areas of his class-tiered asteroid world. Szal effectively highlights the issues of trauma, drug addiction, and mental problems for veterans in a



gritty, compelling SF story that establishes Szal as an author to watch on the global SF scene.

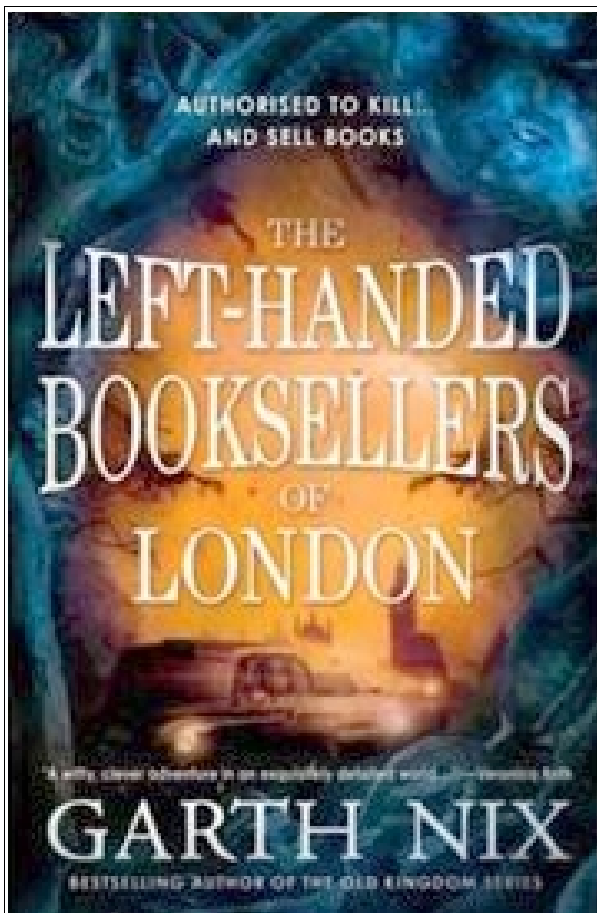
AUSTRALIAN FANTASY

SHADOWS IN THE STONE: A BOOK OF TRANSFORMATIONS

by **Jack Dann** (IFWG Publishing; \$46.99)

American-born **Jack Dann**, a long-time resident in Australia, has won numerous literary awards. The handsomely packaged *Shadows in the Stone: A Book of Transformations* (IFWG Publishing, \$46.99), which has its origins in Dann's 2016 doctoral thesis at the University of Queensland, is set in an alternative Renaissance Italy.

Dann says his novel, which spins off the concept of Gnosticism, 'is about upending all of our traditional ideas about traditional religion'. Dann's protagonists Louisa Morgan and Lucian Ben-Hananiah embark on an epic journey leading to a final cosmic battle between good and evil. *Shadows in the Stone* is a rich complex theological fantasy novel that works on several levels.



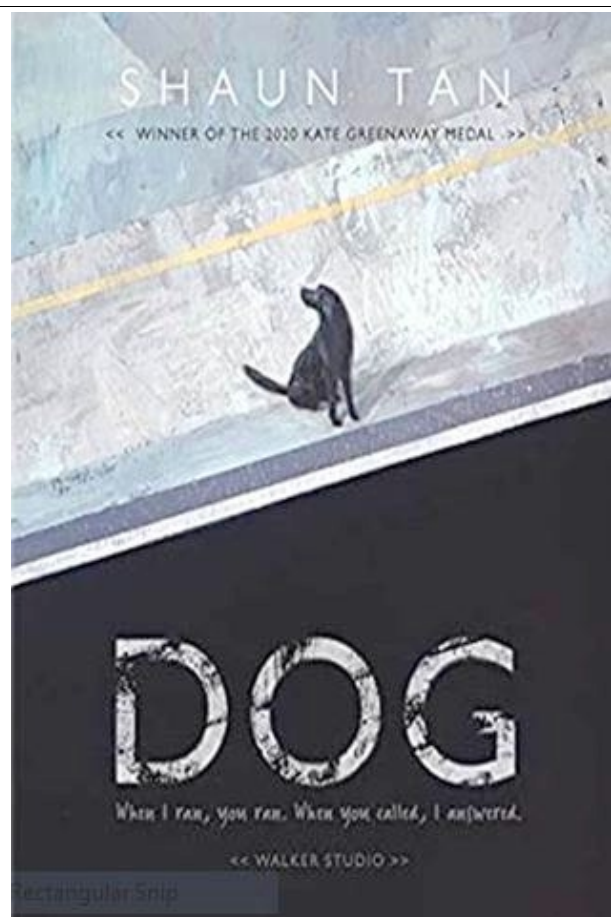
THE LEFT-HANDED BOOKSELLERS OF LONDON
by Garth Nix (Allen & Unwin; \$24.99)

In *The Left-Handed Booksellers of London*, Garth Nix draws on his early bookselling experiences in Canberra, although the novel is set in London in 1983. Eighteen-year-old art student Susan Arkham's quest to find her father in London sees her enter the world of magical booksellers, who are 'authorized to kill ... and sell books', traits used to fend off the deadly incursions of the mythical 'Old World'.

Susan bonds with gender-shifting Merlin St Jacques, a young magical bookseller, who, in turn, is seeking the truth of his mother's mysterious death. Their journey, while it will unearth unexpected familial truths, will prove extremely dangerous, with Susan needing to uncover her latent magical ability. Nix has delivered another imaginative and well-rounded fantasy.

DOG
by Shaun Tan (Allen & Unwin; \$19.99)

Award-winning author and illustrator Shaun Tan's *Dog* imagines, in verse and evocative paintings, 'the bond between humans and dogs as ongoing cycle of death and rebirth through different places and times, from prehistory to the present and future'.



Tan's tiny figures on each page may seem overwhelmed by their universes, but ultimately dogs and humans come together, 'walking side by side as if it had always been this way'.

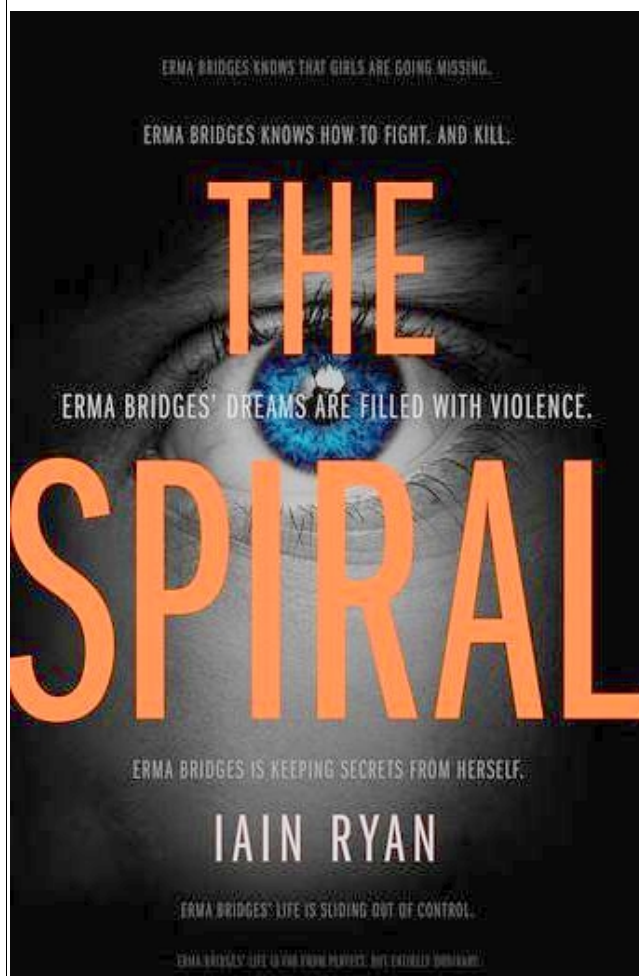
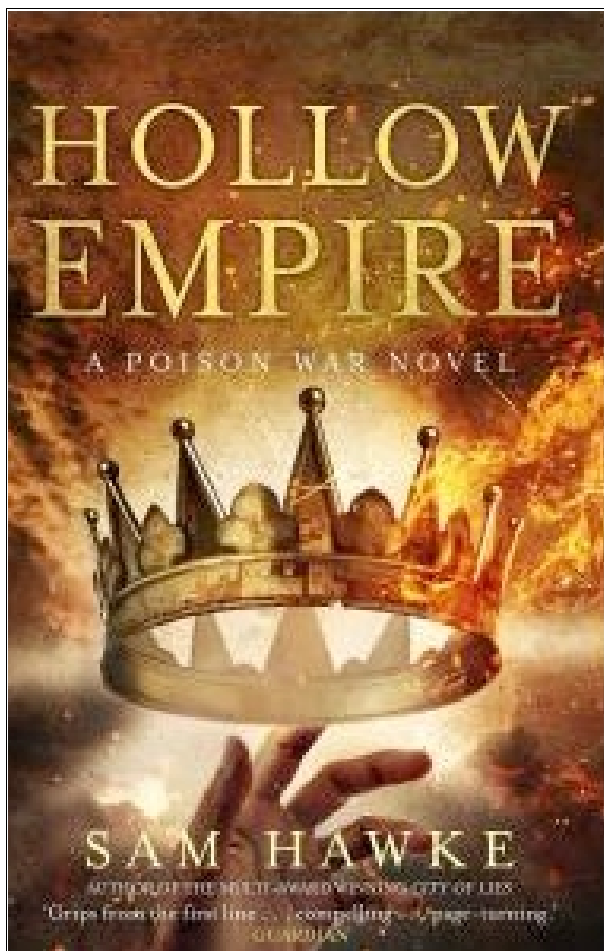
HOLLOW EMPIRE
by Sam Hawke (Bantam; \$32.99)

Sam Hawke is an award-winning Canberra author who deserves to be better known amongst the general reading public. Hawke's debut novel *City of Lies* (2018) won the Aurealis Award for Best Fantasy Novel, the Ditmar Award for Best Novel, and the Norma K. Hemming Award for excellence in exploring issues of gender, race, disability and class in SF and fantasy.

Hawke, who is also a lawyer, says that in *City of Lies* she merged, 'the transportive sense of possibility (and impossibility) in fantasy', with 'the suffocating tension and sense of danger of a closed room murder mystery, where you don't know who to trust and everyone's lying all the time'.

Hawke's closed room is the city of Silasta, where brother and sister, poison 'proofers' Jovan and Kalina, search for the traitor who is trying to kill the new Chancellor, Tain, and bring down the government.

The plotline of *City of Lies* is summarised in a play at the beginning of *Hollow Empire*, echoing a



similar device in *Game of Thrones*. New readers therefore don't have to go back to the first book to appreciate the 'Poison War' narrative, recounted alternatively by Jovan and Kalina.

Jovan and Kalina are far from stereotypical fantasy characters. Both have medical frailties: Jovan has OCD, while Kalina, more a diplomatic spy than poison taster, has an immune disorder that causes pain and chronic fatigue.

Most of *Hollow Empire*, 550 pages long, is again set in Silasta, but more crowded than ever through hosting neighbouring trading partners. New threats emerge from the multicultural melange as members of the three original founding families — Jovan, Kalina, and Tain — are targeted by an assassin, and Jovan is framed for a drug murder.

The deadliest threat, however, comes from outside: the forces of the Prince of Crede, who harnesses ancient racial grievances with a powerful spiritual power. Silasta will be destroyed unless the members of the three original families are given up. All the resources of Jovan, Kalina, and Jovan's erstwhile lover, the prickly Hadrea, will be needed, even as they battle their own personal traumas and self-doubt.

Hawke cleverly builds real-world issues into her plotline, such as the danger of fake history/news, religious fanaticism, and misogyny, as well as attitudes to mental issues.

Hollow Empire's strong narrative, detailed world building, and in-depth characterisation confirm Hawke's position as one of Australia's leading imaginative authors.

THE SPIRAL

by Iain Ryan (Echo, \$29.99)

Australian author **Iain Ryan** has twice been shortlisted for the Ned Kelly Award. *The Spiral*, his latest novel, also mixes genres, although not always totally successfully. It begins as a campus novel, with Ryan's main character, Queensland University academic Dr Erma Bridges, facing disciplinary charges relating to her relationships, while researching 1980s interactive adventure stories.

Bridges, however, is threatened as her life becomes intertwined with her research investigations. Parallel chapters feature Sero, a fantasy barbarian figure, battling in an alternate world, whose existence increasingly mirrors that of Erma. Erma's search for the truth leads to physical and mental darkness and a feminist denouement that would do Samuel Peckinpah proud.

AUSTRALIAN DARK FANTASY

FLYAWAY

by Kathleen Jennings (Picador; \$24.99)

Kathleen Jennings, award-winning short-story writer and illustrator, now lives in Brisbane, but was raised on a cattle property in Western Queensland. She uses rural outback settings to good effect in her debut novel, *Flyaway*, an impressive mixture of gothic and folklore; it's almost Jane Harper meets Garth Nix.

Jennings has commented, 'When I was small, the books available painted pictures of two landscapes: a lovely, green, myth-haunted North, and desperately grim Australian landscapes of terror and fire and a "dead red heart". But I loved the countryside where I grew up: it glistened and glimmered, and before I knew the bloody history of my own district, I learned to view it through a net of those borrowed enchantments. *Flyaway*, although set in a fictional part of the country, is about that terrible, thrilling beauty, and also a little about the power and danger of ignorance and imposed tales.'

Once a lively and rebellious young teenager, 19-year-old Bettina Scott is now buttoned-down,

'graceless and unlovely', living with her controlling mother Nerida in the small outback town of Runagate. This is a place full of dark secrets, where you'll find 'roses planted in wire-fenced gardens on the buried corpses of roadside kangaroos', a town where 'memory seeped and frayed, where ghosts stood silent by fence posts'.

Her 'mocking father' and two older 'unloving brothers' disappeared three years previously, but her mother has always parried her queries about their fates and Bettina has now repressed her memories of them.

When a note arrives, allegedly from one of her brothers, with the words, 'You coward, Tink', her nickname, she begins to question her mother's account of the past, a time when she wasn't always 'responsible and civilised and winsome'.

She begins, with the help of two former estranged friends Gary and Trish, to pull at the threads of her family's secrets. In the process, she hopes to find her true identity and 'take my life into my own hands'.

Short lyrical chapters, interspersed with accounts of eerie local legends and dark folklore, may seem a strange narrative structure, but it works well to evoke a growing sense of tension as Bettina and her friends investigate the possible murder of her father and the enforced disappearance of her siblings.

The starkness of the rural landscape emphasises the blurring of the boundaries between humans and nature. Jennings's black-and-white woodcut illustrations evoke memories, as does the novel's dramatic resolution, of Angela Carter's dark magical realism stories.

THE RAIN HERON

by Robbie Arnott (Text; \$29.99)

Tasmania is increasingly the location of novels of speculation, ranging from James Bradley's *Ghost Species* to Heather Rose's *Bruny*.

Tasmania is not explicitly mentioned in Launceston author **Robbie Arnott's** second novel *The Rain Heron*, but it is clearly the inspiration for the unnamed country in which a military coup has taken place.

Flames, Arnott's debut novel, won the Margaret Scott Prize in the Tasmanian Premier's Literary Prizes, was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Award, and shortlisted for several state fiction awards. *The Rain Heron* confirms his place as one of Australia's leading young novelists.

He has said of the novel, 'I wanted to write a book where characters who felt completely real, even if they were in an imaginary country, had their lives intertwined with a myth or a fable.'

'A more-than-magical tale of history's grip, the land's memory, and the harm we cannot help but do to ourselves and each other.' Margo Lanagan

Flyaway



Kathleen Jennings



Five years ago, Ren escaped a military coup and now lives a solitary, frugal life on a mountain, trapping animals and fish and trading skins. As a child, she saw the allegedly mythical rain heron, 'with feathers of mist and wings of rain', which can bring rain to lands devastated by climate change.

Arnott provides the back story to the rain heron in the first chapter. He says he wanted to create 'a creature that embodied both the beauty and savagery of nature. I wanted it to be captivating and astonishing, but also harsh and unforgiving'.

Life, which is certainly harsh and unforgiving for Ren, becomes even worse when soldiers, led by the ruthless Lieutenant Zoe Harker, 'a cold revelation in camouflage', arrive and torture her to find out the location of the rain heron, which the military junta wishes to capture in order to exploit its powers.

Harker's back story, told in the second segment of the book, also plays out against the harshness of society and nature, in this case the sea. Harker slowly emerges as the powerful, yet troubled, main character of the book. Her interaction with Ren is set against the story of the fate of the rain heron.

Both Harker and Ren suffer significant physical injuries and psychological trauma but, ultimately, Arnott brings closure in a form of redemption, mirroring, as Arnott says, 'the violence we commit

against each other and the violence we commit against nature'.

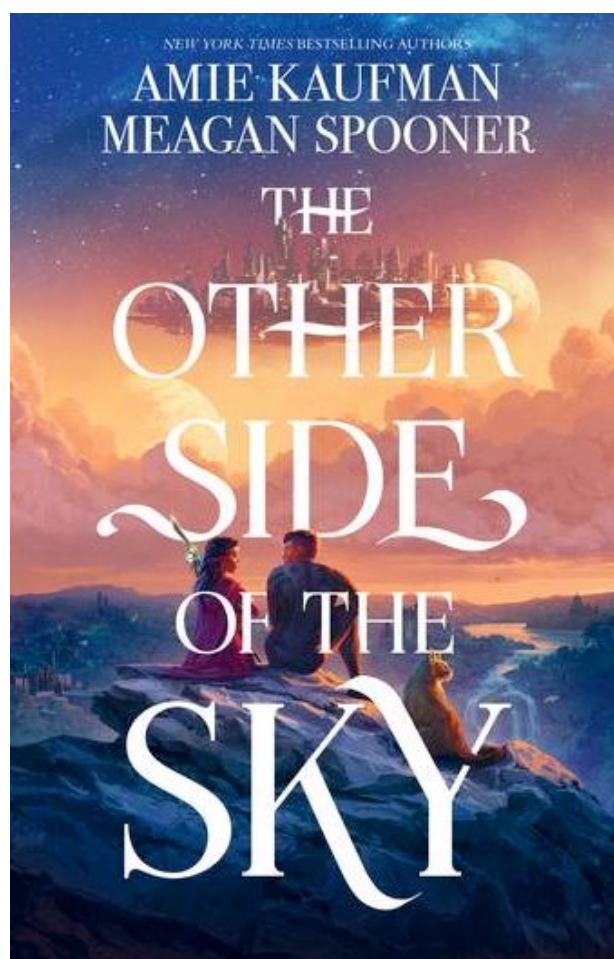
Contemporary issues resonate strongly in *The Rain Heron*—issues such as increasing nationalism and 'the quiet carnage' of the natural world. As myths collide with reality, Arnott's imaginative dark novel ends with a sobering uplift, reaffirming the sense that ultimately relationships and kindness matter.

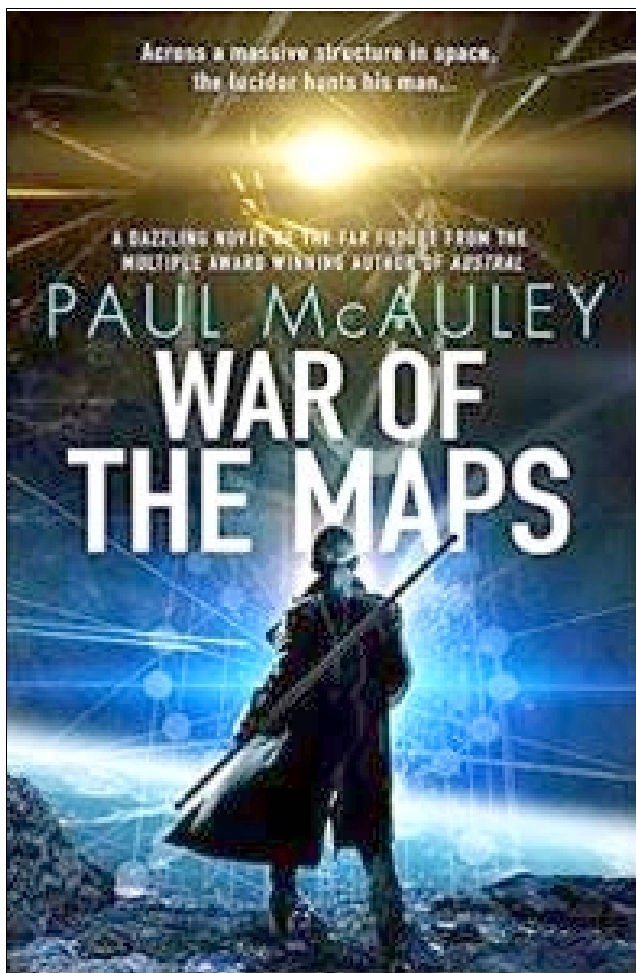
AUSTRALIAN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SKY

by Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner

The Other Side of the Sky, the first of a duology by Melbourne-based **Amie Kaufman** and American writer **Meagan Spooner**, is successfully targeted at a YA audience. The authors juxtapose two main characters: Prince North, who lives in a sky city, but has fallen to earth, with the goddess Nimh, who sees her divinity challenged. Both need to confront dissident factions of their communities, while seeking to resolve their differences, both personally and culturally, in order to survive.





BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION

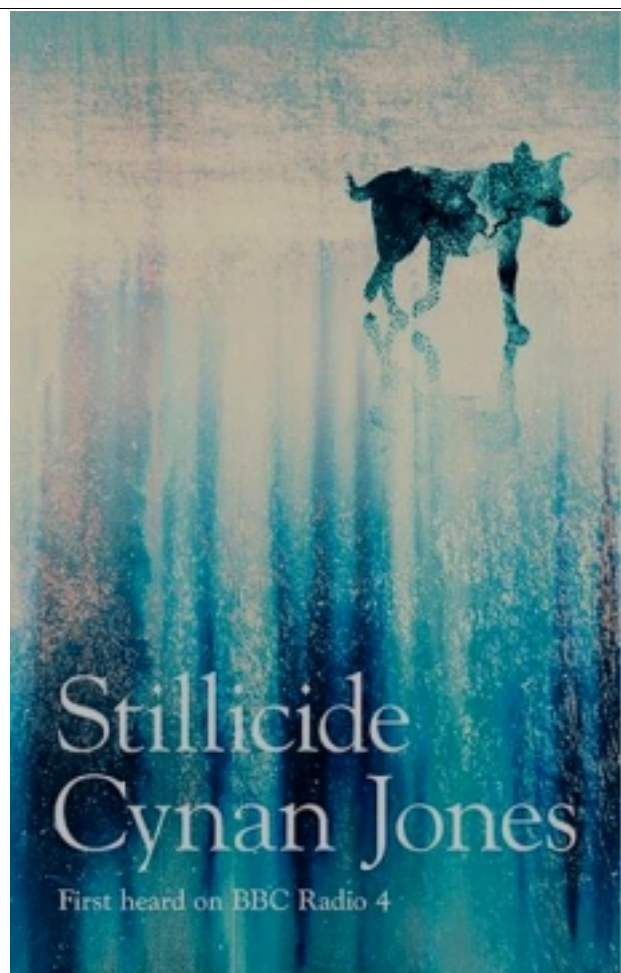
WAR OF THE MAPS

by Paul McAuley (Gollancz; \$32.99)

British SF author **Paul McAuley** creates a complex far-future world in *War of the Maps*, which has echoes of the works of Gene Wolfe and Jack Vance. His main character, Thorn, 'the lucidor', is a lawman who travels across the surface of a Dyson sphere in pursuit of a major biological criminal, Remfrey He, referred to by his full name throughout the novel.

This framework allows McAuley not only to describe the scientific nature of the Dyson sphere but also, through Thorn's travels, the complex societies and cultures that are under threat from a plague that 'infects plants and animals and people and turns them into strange new forms'.

Thorn is given the persona of the classic lone Western sheriff or Stephen King's 'Gunslinger', but it is McAuley's inventive array of societies and characters that linger longer in the mind than the personal vendetta.



STILLICIDE

by Cynan Jones (Granta; \$24.95)

Welsh author **Cynan Jones** won the Wales Book of the Year Fiction Prize in 2015 and the BBC National Short Story Award in 2017. *Stillicide* (Granta \$24.95), originally broadcast as a series on BBC Radio 4, portrays, through a pared-back narrative, a near-future climate-change world of alternating drought and flood, a world in which water is commodified.

In a future Britain, heavily armed 'Water Trains' transport water, ten million gallons ... at two hundred miles an hour', from the north of Britain to the unnamed capital city. But the trains face attacks from rural communities who want access to water. There is also resistance to a proposal to tow a huge Arctic iceberg to the north-east of England, which will result in the creation of an 'Ice Dock' displacing thousands of families from their homes.

Jones delivers a bleak, poetically structured story through a slow narrative of character interaction, especially from the perspective of John Branner, a sniper on the Water Train, who personifies the need for love in the worst of times.



BONE SILENCE

by Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz; \$32.99)

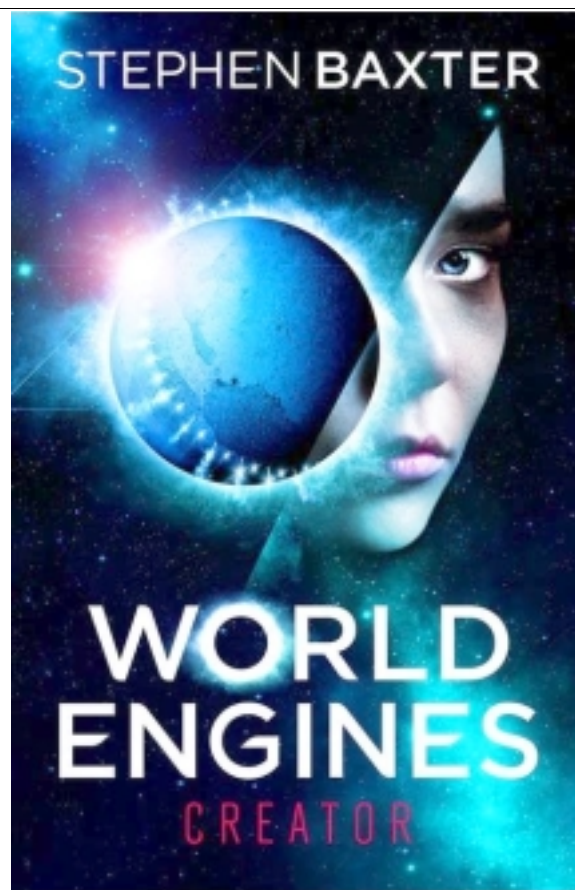
In *Bone Silence*, Alastair Reynolds concludes his far-future trilogy, which has been termed 'Pirates of the Caribbean meets Firefly'. Set 10 million years in the future, the galactic 'Congregation', which includes both humanity and aliens, is facing one of its cyclical collapses.

Reynolds's main characters, sisters Arafura and Adrana Ness, have become galactic pirates, but also fugitives, wrongly blamed for an event that could cause the next collapse of the Congregation. Reynolds is particularly good at creating exotic locales for the sisters' adventures.

WORLD ENGINES: CREATOR

by Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; \$32.99)

Stephen Baxter's *World Engines: Creator* completes a duology that began with *World Engines: Destroyer*. 'Bad child' astronaut Read Malenfant is woken from a cryogenic coma in the year 2469, after being frozen in 2019. Malenfant exemplifies selfishness and aggressive individualism, traits needed on an Earth in a managed decline. He is sent to investigate a multidimensional portal on the Martian moon Phobos in order to trace the 'World Engineers', who are tweaking the evolution of the solar system, a quest that continues in *Creator*.



Creator opens on Persephone II, with Malenfant and survivors from three separate timelines battling to survive but still exploring portals across space and time. Baxter's hard-science expositions and multiverse alternatives unbalance the narrative and blur character development.

BRITISH FANTASY

THE MAGIC OF TERRY PRATCHETT

by Marc Burrows (White Owl; \$45)

THE TIME-TRAVELLING CAVEMAN

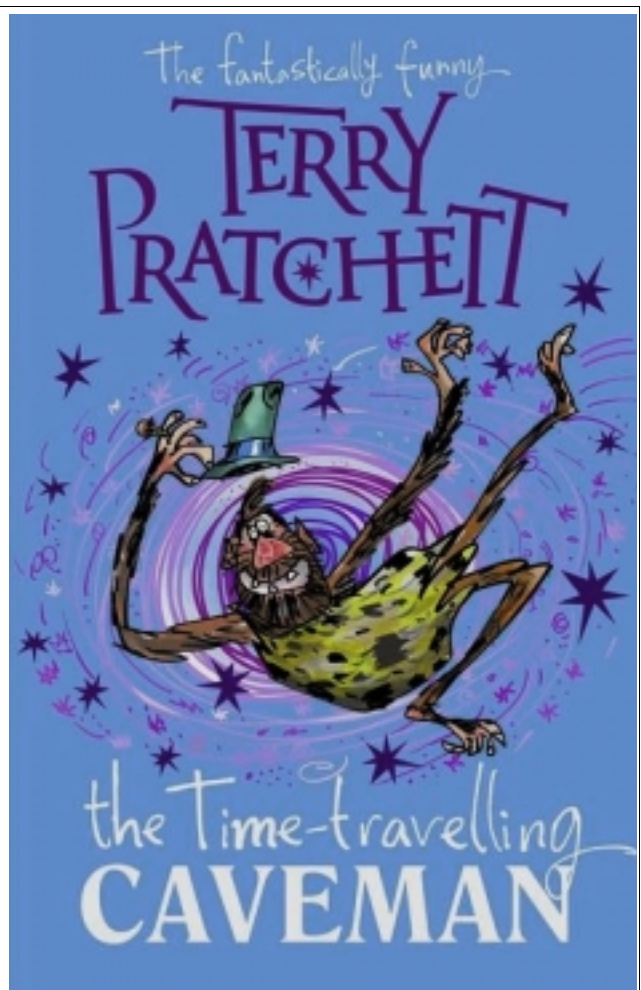
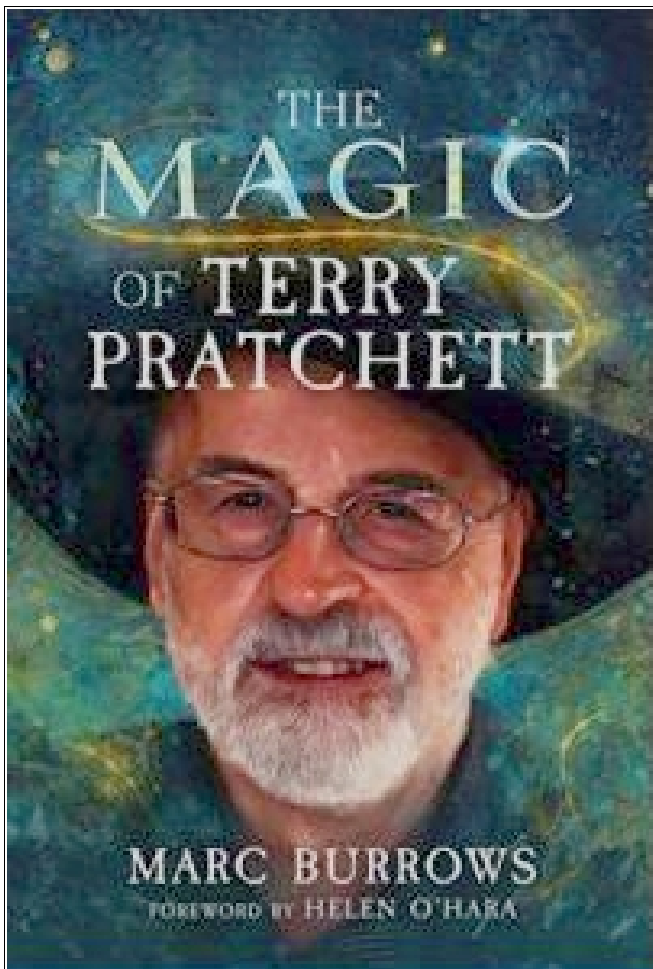
by Terry Pratchett (Doubleday; \$32.99)

QUIDDITCH THROUGH THE AGES

by J. K. Rowling (Bloomsbury; \$45.00)

When Boris Johnson interviewed Terry Pratchett in 1996 for the *British Daily Telegraph*, he wrote that he was 'baffled by the scale of his [Pratchett's] success'. Pratchett's Discworld series was often ignored by 'the literati', but Pratchett simply responded, 'Well, I get paid shitloads of cash, which is good.' A knighthood and four honorary doctorates also helped Pratchett's self-esteem.

Mark Burrows' *The Magic of Terry Pratchett*, which



is marketed as ‘the first full biography of Sir Terry Pratchett’, documents in detail Pratchett’s path to success. Burrows, however, never met Pratchett, so this is an account based on published accounts and interviews and a detailed analysis of his books.

Pratchett, born on 28 April 1948 in Beaconsfield, England, came from a working-class background. While Pratchett passed the crucial 11-plus examination in 1959, he chose not to attend the local grammar school, because he felt ‘woodwork would be more fun than Latin’.

He was, however, an avid reader, with favourite authors including G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, Mark Twain, and *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, which reveals his early love of words and how they could be manipulated.

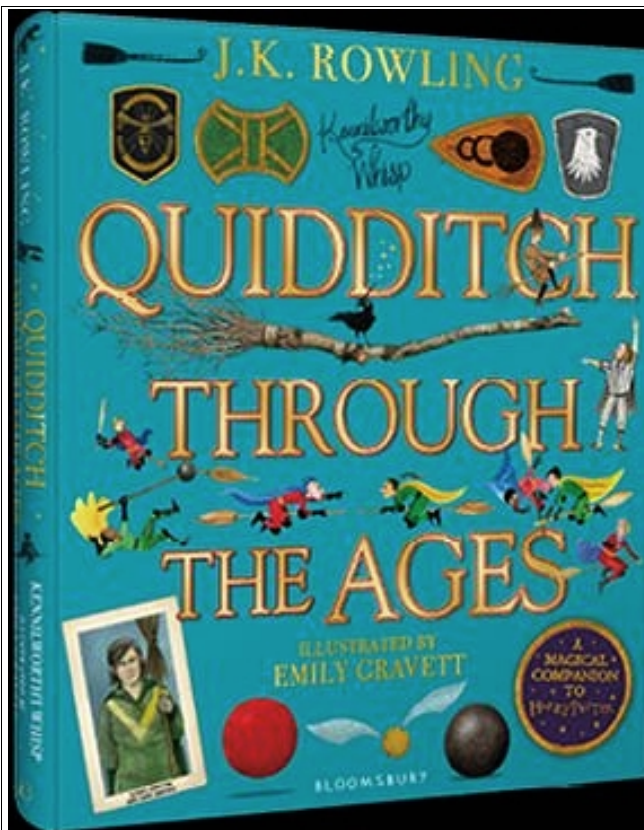
By the time Pratchett left school at 16 to become a trainee journalist at the local *Bucks Free Press*, he had already published two short stories in leading

British SF and fantasy magazines.

In October 1965, he began writing stories for the Children’s Circle section of his newspaper. Seventeen of these stories are now collected in *The Time-Travelling Caveman*. Pratchett fans will easily recognise early signs of his unique blend of satire and literary invention.

While most are set in the town of Blackbury, Pratchett also takes the reader through time and space with the title story, the delightful ‘Lemonade on the Moon’, and who could not like ‘Bason and the Hugonauts’. Numerous black-and-white illustrations by Mark Beech add to the book’s attraction.

Pratchett’s first novel, *The Carpet People* (1971), now a collector’s item, was published when he was 23, beginning his long lifetime association with publisher and agent Colin Smythe.



Burrows then follows Pratchett as a press officer for the Central Electricity Generating Board through to the first Discworld novel *The Colour of Magic* (1983). The success of the Discworld series enabled him to become a full-time writer by the late 1980s. In the 1990s, Pratchett was second only to J. K. Rowling in annual UK hardback sales. By the time of his death in 2015, he had sold 85 million books. The media attempted to stir up controversy between Pratchett and Rowling after Pratchett commented that there had been wizards and magic schools long before Harry Potter. Burrows covers in some detail how that ‘rumble in the fantasy jungle’ played out.

Pratchett’s books, like those of Rowling, continue to remain popular. The latest version of **J. K. Rowling’s *Quidditch Through the Ages*** comes in a sumptuous full-colour edition with illustrations by Kate Greenaway winner Emily Gravett.

Gravett’s artworks, memorabilia, and gatefold spreads, allied to Rowling’s text, makes this the definitive Quidditch edition. Look out for the Australian teams, the Thundelarra Thunderers and the Wollongong Warriors.

Pratchett loved Australia and fondly satirised it in *The Lost Continent* (1998). His six ANU/*Canberra Times* Meet the Author events were bravura events. Pratchett knew how to create an image with his trademark ‘Man in Black’ clothes, white beard, fedora hat, and his love of banana daiquiris. To

many, he came across as a ‘jolly old elf’, but in reality, he was an intensely private person, and there was often anger beneath the geniality.

More generally, Neil Gaiman, his longtime friend and collaborator on *Good Omens*, has written of Pratchett’s rage against ‘stupidity, injustice, human foolishness, and shortsightedness’. Pratchett’s writing highlighted many major issues, such as racism, environmental destruction, religious persecution, and misogyny.

Burrows is excellent in providing a chronological framework for the books, their content and their reception by the critics, the public, and his ever-increasing fan base. We learn little, however, about his family — wife Lyn, whom he married in 1968, and daughter Rhianna, herself now a public figure with her videogame storytelling, writing — and overview of Pratchett’s creative output.

We will probably not see the ‘inner Pratchett’ until the anticipated biography from Rob Wilkins, Terry’s long-term executive assistant and friend, appears. Pratchett’s personal life became more public after the diagnosis in 2007 of what he called ‘An Embuggerance’, a rare form of Alzheimer’s, a condition that gradually worsened until his death on 12 March 2015.

That day Rob Wilkins tweeted this from one of Pratchett’s most famous characters, Death, ‘At last Sir Terry we must walk together ... The end’.

Pratchett wrote in *Reaper Man* (1991), ‘No one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away.’ The ripples from Terry Pratchett’s books will continue to spread for decades to come.

PIRANESI

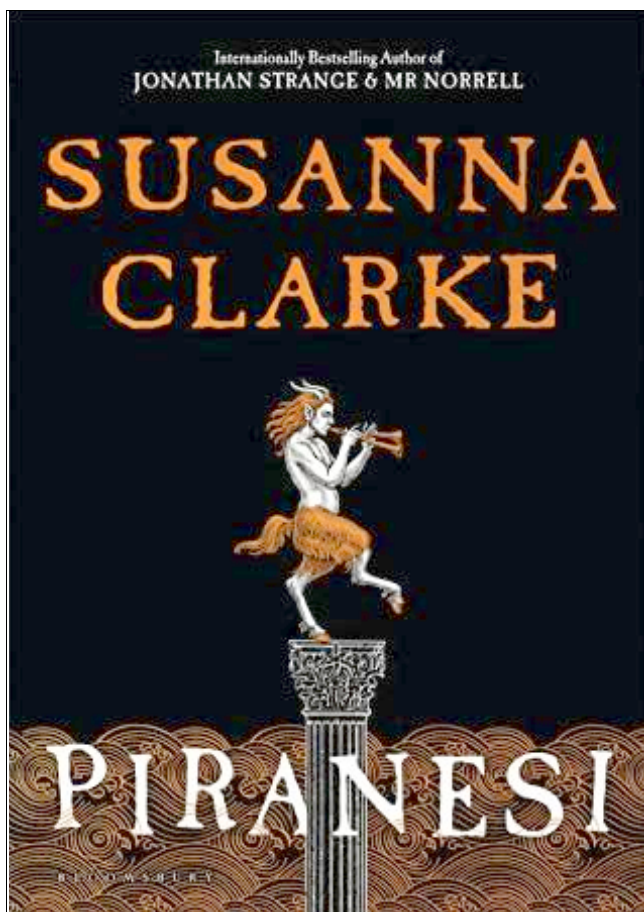
by Susanna Clarke (Bloomsbury; \$27.99)

Susanna Clarke’s debut novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* (2004) was published to huge international success and later made into a TV series. After travelling the world promoting the book, Clarke was struck down with acute Lyme disease, explaining why it’s taken 16 years for another novel to appear.

Piranesi is a completely different novel, but equally original. Clarke has documented her fascination with the eighteenth-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi and his etchings of Roman ruins and huge prisons, images which flow over into her novel.

Clarke’s main character Piranesi, who says ‘as far as I remember it is not my name’, lives inside the labyrinthine House, ‘an infinite series of classical buildings knitted together’, with an ocean full of marine life occupying the lower floors.

As the narrative evolves it becomes clear that Piranesi has gone through a traumatic experience



and sees the House as a refuge from a past that he doesn't wish to remember. Clarke notes that while Piranesi is 'in a very strange and in some ways inhospitable place, he doesn't feel it's inhospitable'.

The reader follows Piranesi through his journal, which begins in 2011. Piranesi wonders, 'Who is it that I am writing for? Are You a traveller who has cheated Tides and crossed Broken Floors and Derelict Stairs to reach these Halls? Or are You perhaps someone who inhabits my own Halls long after I am dead?'

Piranesi notes, 'Since the World began it is certain that there have existed fifteen people'. Thirteen of these are skeletons in the House, which have a particular significance for Piranesi, who is occupant 14. 15 is an occasional mysterious visitor, the smartly dressed 'The Other', who seeks the House's 'Great and Secret Knowledge' through Piranesi's explorations.

'The Other', who hides his access to the outside world from Piranesi, is concerned that another visitor, the 'patient, resolute and ingenious' 16, will unearth the truth of Piranesi's former life, which Clarke slowly reveals towards the end of the novel. When her illness was at its worst, Clarke returned to a childhood favourite book, C. S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*, in which she escaped to the alternate city of Charn, revelling in being 'alone in a place like that, endless buildings but silent'. Written before the arrival of Covid-19, *Piranesi's* strange isolation, she has noted, is now reflected in many people's situation around the world.

Piranesi is a stunning achievement, visually atmospheric and philosophically haunting.

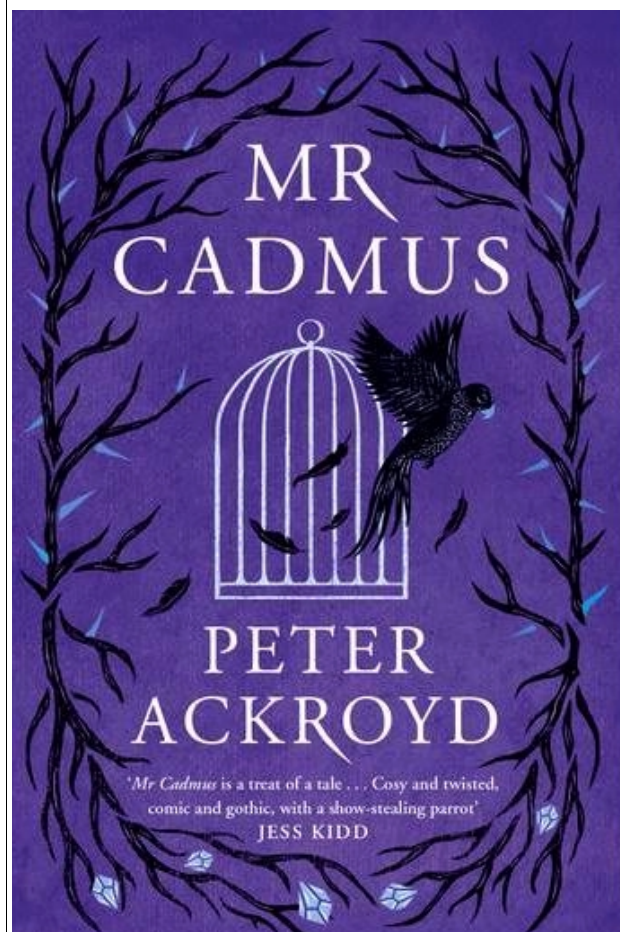
MR CADMUS

by Peter Ackroyd (Canongate; \$24.99)

Peter Ackroyd is the author of 18 novels, notably *Hawksmoor*, *Chatterton*, and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, 39 non-fiction books, including biographies of Dickens and Blake, and four volumes of poetry.

Now comes a slim novel, *Mr Cadmus*. It opens in a small Devon village, Little Camborne, in 1981, a time when Ackroyd owned a house in Devon near Barnstaple, an area that he surprisingly found 'too noisy, and too dangerous ... and the native populations aren't as rural and gentle as you'd imagine'. This viewpoint is reflected in *Mr Cadmus*, which starts out in E. F. Benson's Mapp and Lucia territory, but becomes an increasingly dark story.

Two unmarried cousins, Miss Millicent Swallow and Miss Maude Finch, wonder about the new resident who is buying the vacant cottage between their properties. It turns out to be an Italian from



the island of Caldera, Theodore Cadmus, arriving in a yellow car, wearing 'green trousers and a scarlet sweater with a plaid scarf tied loosely around his neck'.

Ackroyd says that he found his inspiration for the trio when he observed on London's Shaftesbury Avenue, 'two elderly ladies with this gentleman of Italian appearance with a curled moustache'.

Millicent comments, 'Even before he opened his mouth, I knew he was foreign', while Maud worries, 'Oh dear. I hope he doesn't have any habits.' Despite Mr Cadmus having a parrot Isolde that utters four-letter obscenities and eats strange food, he soon charms both Maude and Millicent.

As gossip proliferates in the narrow-minded, parochial village, Maude and Millicent show Mr Cadmus off to local residents and take him to church. The relative calm of the village, however, is turned upside down by the vicar running off with the church treasures, an armed post office robbery, and the sequential deaths of the surviving members of the World War II Little Camborne Regiment.

Ackroyd seems to be taking the reader into *Midsomer Murders* or *Miss Marple* territory, but then the tone changes as the victims seem to be linked to wartime atrocities in Caldera. Millicent and Maude also have dark hidden pasts that slowly emerge, and their relationship becomes increasingly frayed as they vie for Mr Cadmus's attention.

The narrative takes another abrupt switch when Mr Cadmus returns to the 'sacred island of Caldera, where mythical purple birds, rare amethysts, volcanic eruptions and supernatural happenings', which are linked back to Little Camborne. Ackroyd's convoluted dénouement is a genre step too far.

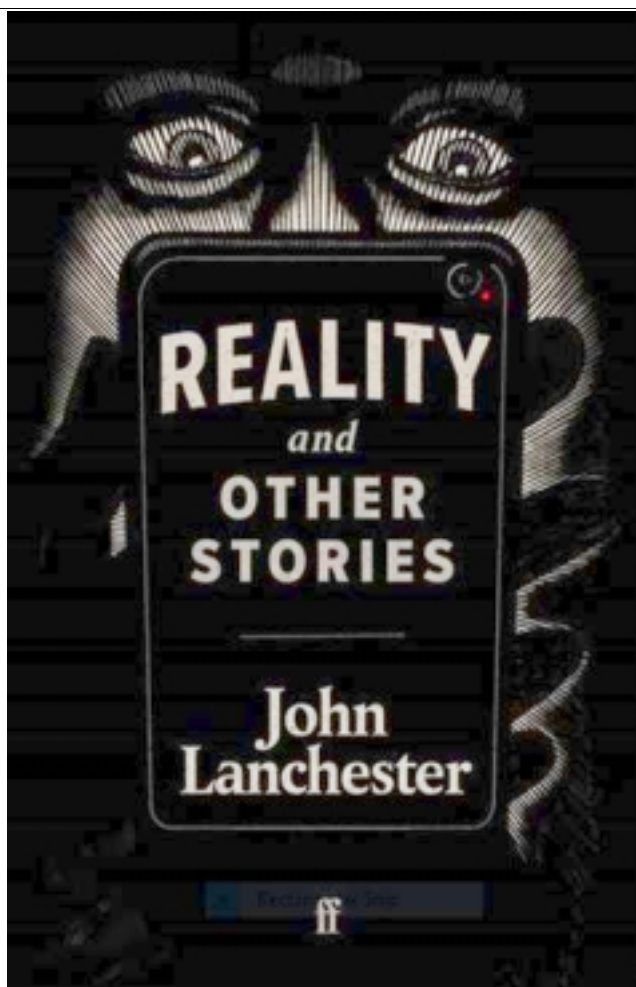
REALITY AND OTHER STORIES

by John Lanchester (Faber; \$24.99)

John Lanchester, whose last novel *The Wall* was longlisted for the Booker Prize in 2019, has won the Hawthornden Prize, the Whitbread First Novel Prize, the E. M. Forster Award, and the Premi Librer.

Now comes *Reality*, his first short story collection, eight stories that essentially reflect the technological ghost in the machine. Lanchester very effectively merges 'the unsettlingness about the new' into the classical ghost story frameworks of authors such as Charles Dickens and M. R. James. It's a collection 'from which you can't hide, you can't mute, you can't follow, you can't escape, this is reality'.

'Signal', the opening story, sees a father telling his nine-year-old son, before their visit to a wealthy



friend's Yorkshire estate, 'you aren't allowed to ask for the Wi-Fi password before you say hello.' The house is technological heaven for the children, but who is the strange tall man always staring into a mobile phone who seems to stalk the children? He is apparently not a house guest, and only the children seem to see him. *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James is here reinvented for the modern era.

In 'We Happy Few', a group of young philosophy academics, who regularly meet in a coffee shop, slam social media for its encouragement of 'the stupid' in believing global lies and fake news. They contemplate what if we were part of an 'all-encompassing artificial computer-created reality' and 'all the stupid people suddenly disappear'. 'Trolling on a cosmic scale', however, brings a resolution they didn't expect.

In 'Cold Call', a stressed female QC, looking after two young children while her husband is away in Africa, is plagued by constant mobile phone demands from Gerald, a father-in-law from hell. When she ignores the call that would have saved his life, retribution comes in the form of cold calls.

'Charity' begins with a woman bringing to a charity shop a box of her deceased husband's belongings, which contains more than old clothes and 'Clive Cussler paperbacks'. A selfie stick

brought back from the Congo produces a reverse Dorian Gray impact on the girl who purchases it. As in all the other stories, Lancaster underpins his narrative with comments on contemporary society. In 'Charity', he highlights European colonial atrocities and the selfie's curse on those that seek a perfect 'self-image'.

Lancaster's stories have a Roald Dahl sting in the tail, as well as providing dark satirical reality checks of society.

Jasper Fforde THE CONSTANT RABBIT (Hodder; \$32.99)

When British bestselling author **Jasper Fforde** spoke at the ANU/ *Canberra Times* Meet the Author event in 2019, he foreshadowed his new novel, *The Constant Rabbit*, which delighted the audience, although many expressed the hope that he would then return to his 'Nursery Crime' and 'Shades of Grey' series.

Fforde has the ability to take the fantastical and make it seem normal — in this case, an England of 2022 with six-foot talking rabbits following a Spontaneous Anthropomorphic Event in 1965, which also transformed some other species, such as foxes and weasels.

Fforde has clearly visited the Big Merino at Goul-

burn, as he describes the 1976 emergence of 12 human-size wombats at Goulburn, which were quickly disposed of by an Australian army mobile response team. The subsequent killing of Rambo, a merino, who tried to reveal the truth, so annoyed the Goulburn populace that they erected a memorial that stands to this day.

From the original 18 rabbits, there are now over a million in colonies across England with their own language, religion, and social mores, which angers Prime Minister Nigel Smethwick, aka Nigel Farage, who advocates 'Rabxit', involving forcing all the rabbits into a 'Mega-Warren' in Wales. The rabbits are seen by many as 'the other', second-class citizens, forced to take menial jobs and constantly abused by the UKARP (The UK Anti Rabbit Party).

The story is told by single father Peter Knox, who, while not running the local speed library team (cutbacks to public libraries only allow six minutes borrowing in a month), is a reluctant rabbit enforcement spotter working for RabCot (Rabbit Compliance Force).

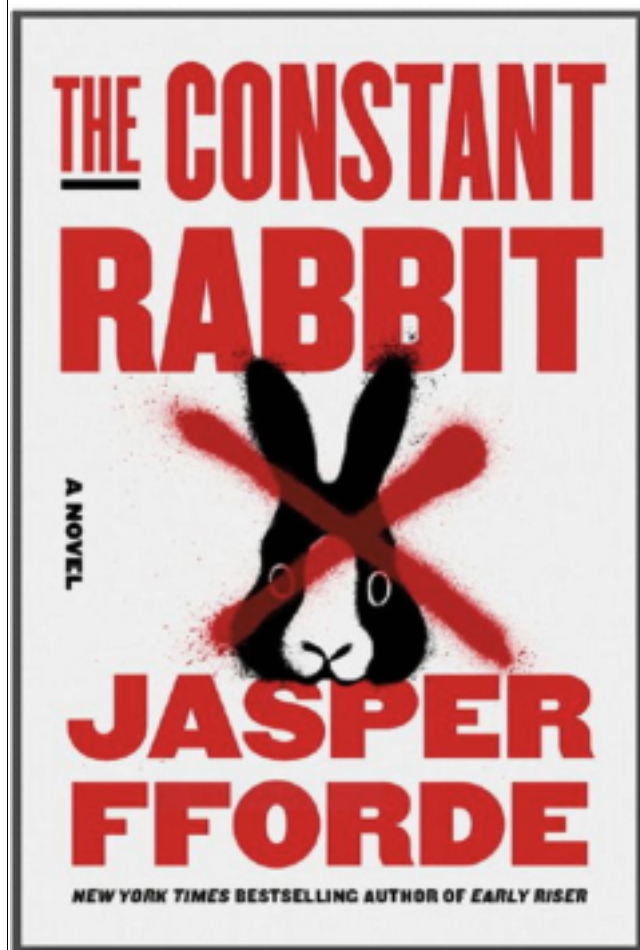
Knox lives in an archetypal English village, Much Wenlock in Hertfordshire, whose residents express hostility after a rabbit family, 'off-colony legals', come to live next door to Peter. The villagers detest 'their propensity to burrow, breed, and shameless levels of veganism'.

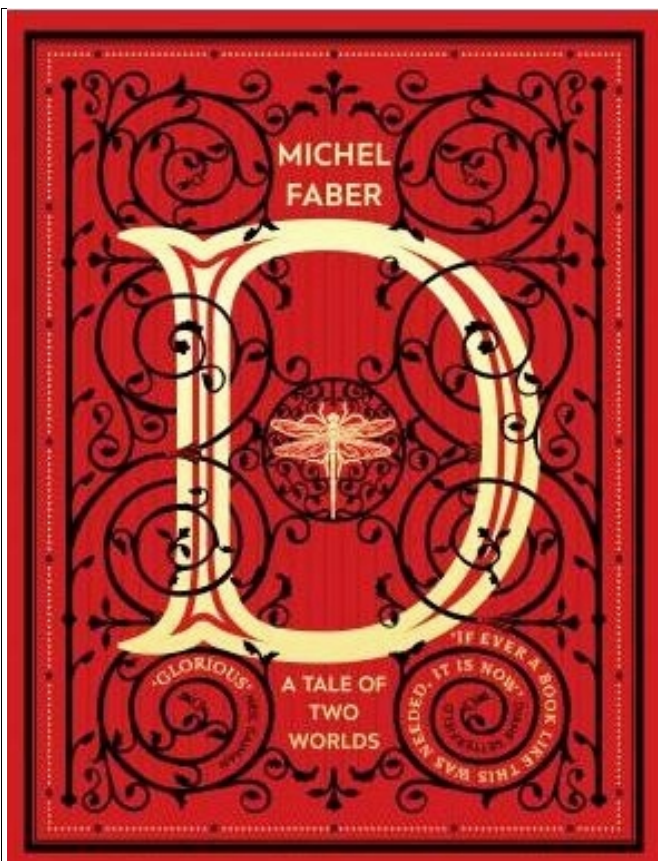
Peter and his daughter Pippa, given their friendship with their rabbit neighbours, soon have to choose which side to support as national tensions rise between rabbits and humans. Fforde has said that Peter's journey mirrors his own concern about 'discrimination ... fear, and fragility, privilege, and unconscious complicity', within a 'backdrop of rising populism, xenophobia and a worrying lurch to the political right'.

Fforde concludes, 'The most favourable outcome for me is that you laugh when you are reading this book, and frown a little when you have finished'. He certainly achieves both outcomes with ease.

**D: A TALE OF TWO WORLDS
by Michel Faber (Doubleday; \$32.99)**

Award-winning author **Michel Faber**, who grew up in Australia, says of *D: A Tale of Two Worlds* that 'I finished it just in time for the 150th anniversary of Charles Dickens's death'. Faber's heroine, Dhikilo, an adopted African refugee, has grown up in a small English seaside town, whose inhabitants suddenly find that the letter D has disappeared from the alphabet. Dhikilo goes in search of the missing Ds, via a portal leading to the Land of Liminus, where Dickensian references abound. Magwitches are real witches and the tyrannical dictator, the





Gamp, has echoes of Donald Trump. *D*, with intriguing literary and linguistic undertones, has echoes of *The Wizard of Oz*.

THE STRANGER TIMES

by C. K. McDonnell (Bantam; \$32.99)

Publishers constantly aspire to find the new Terry Pratchett. Manchester writer **C. K. McDonnell** has recently been touted as one contender, but *The Stranger Times* is closer to the urban fantasy of Ben Aaronovitch's 'Rivers of London' series than Pratchett's Discworld.

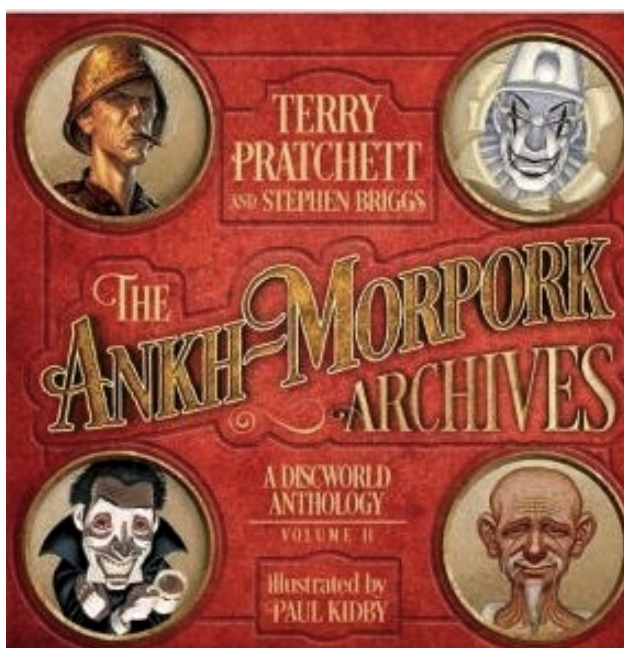
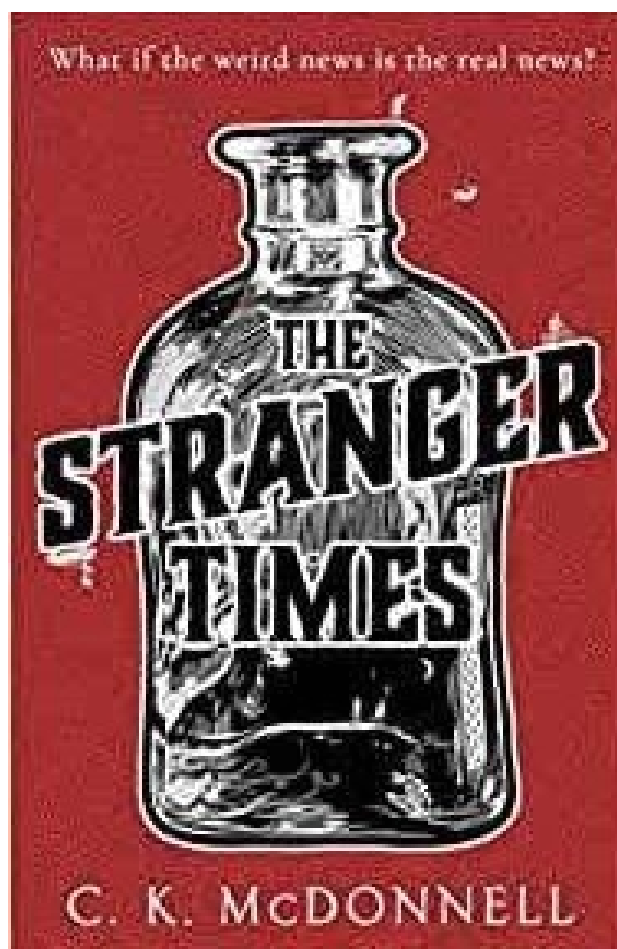
The Stranger Times newspaper, based in a de-consecrated Manchester church, is run by a curmudgeonly alcoholic editor and a group of journalistic misfits. The newspaper specialises in paranormal stories, such as 'Ghost Of Bowie Keen To Record New Material'. McDonnell also has a separate newspaper website, including an hilarious classified ads page.

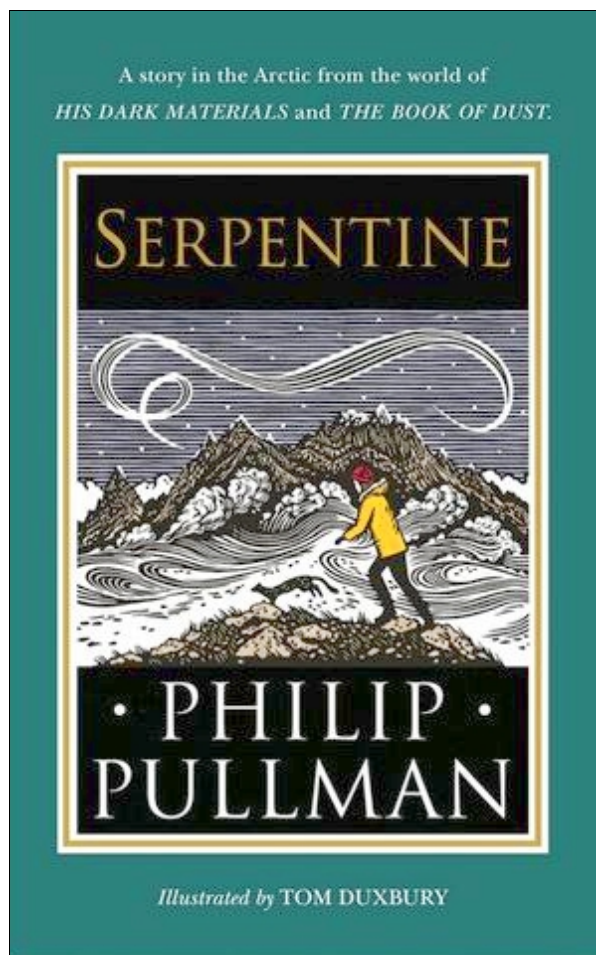
The novel begins with inexperienced Hannah Willis taking the job of assistant editor and finding that the paper's investigation into mysterious deaths has unearthed some very malign elemental forces. Strong characterisation and a carefully worked-out plot with humorous undertones makes this a successful start to a series.

THE ANKH-MORPORK ARCHIVES: A DISCWORLD ANTHOLOGY: VOLUME II

by Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs (Hachette; \$59.99)

Terry Pratchett's legacy is captured in *The Ankh-Morpork Archives: A Discworld Anthology: Volume 2* by





Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs, which brings together four annual Discworld Diaries in a sumptuous edition, including illustrations by Paul Kidby. This second anthology begins with Captain Vimes and the City Watch, and the three other sections cover the Fools' Guild, the Reformed Vampire Club, and the Monks of Discworld.

SERPENTINE

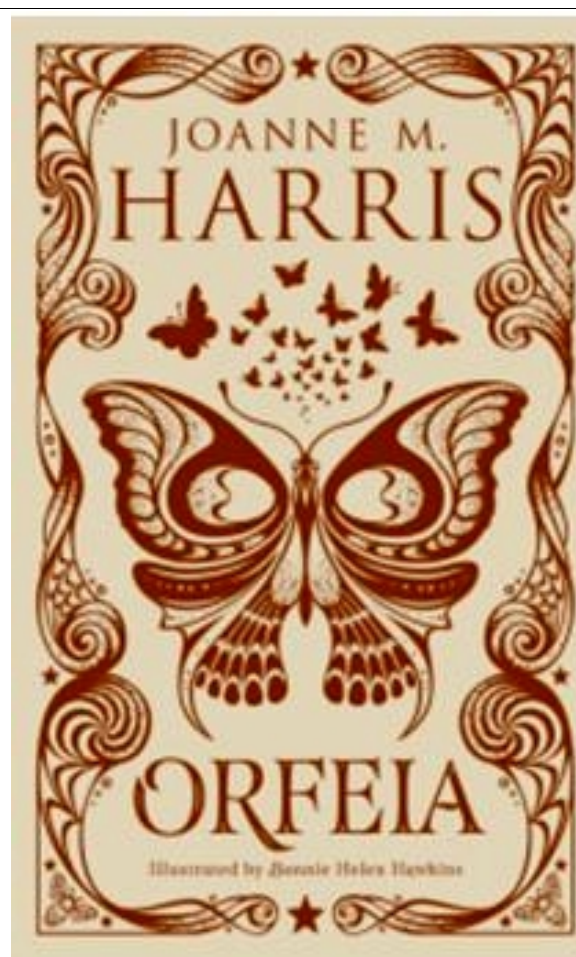
by Philip Pullman (Penguin; \$16.99)

Philip Pullman, a British fantasy great, has produced *Serpentine*, a slim hardback with linocut illustrations by Tom Duxbury, which was originally written in 2004, but never before published. It follows Pullman's main character, Lyra Silver-tongue, on a visit to an Arctic port. Set before the events of *The Secret Commonwealth* (2019), the novella allows Pullman to foreshadow Lyra's strained relationship with Pantalaimon, her daemon, highlighting the divided self between adolescence and maturity.

ORFEIA

by Joanne M. Harris (Gollancz; \$29.99)

Joanne M. Harris' novels include the bestselling *Chocolat*. *Orfeia*, beautifully illustrated by Bonnie



Helen Hawkins, is the third of Harris's folklore-inspired novellas. In a reworking of the Orpheus Myth, widowed mother Fay sets out to save her lost daughter Daisy, who, while playing the 'pavement game', falls through street cracks to 'London Beneath'.

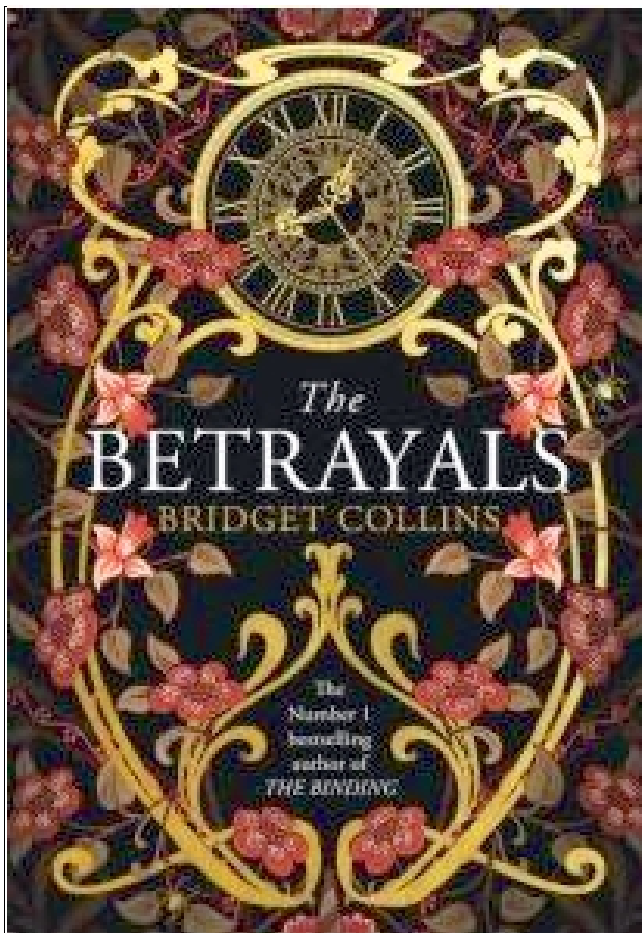
To save her daughter, Fay must travel to the Kingdom of Death — but who can she trust and what price must she pay to the Hallowe'en King to save Daisy? Harris creates a rich modern fairy tale that respects the dark traditions of the genre.

THE BETRAYALS

by Bridget Collins (Borough Press; \$32.99)

After writing seven YA fantasy novels, **Bridget Collins** achieved commercial and critical success with her first adult novel, *The Binding* (2019). The second, *The Betrayals*, takes its inspiration from Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*.

Montverre is an exclusive academy in a patriarchal, one-party European state, where the cleverest students play 'The Grand Jeu', the national game, that 'combines maths, music and ideas in an atmosphere of meditation'. Leo, a deposed former Minister of Culture, returns to Montverre, where the deceptions and betrayals of his student days have an impact on his relationship with Claire, the



Magister Ludi, and thus the college's place in national politics. An intriguing fantasy mix with echoes of Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*.

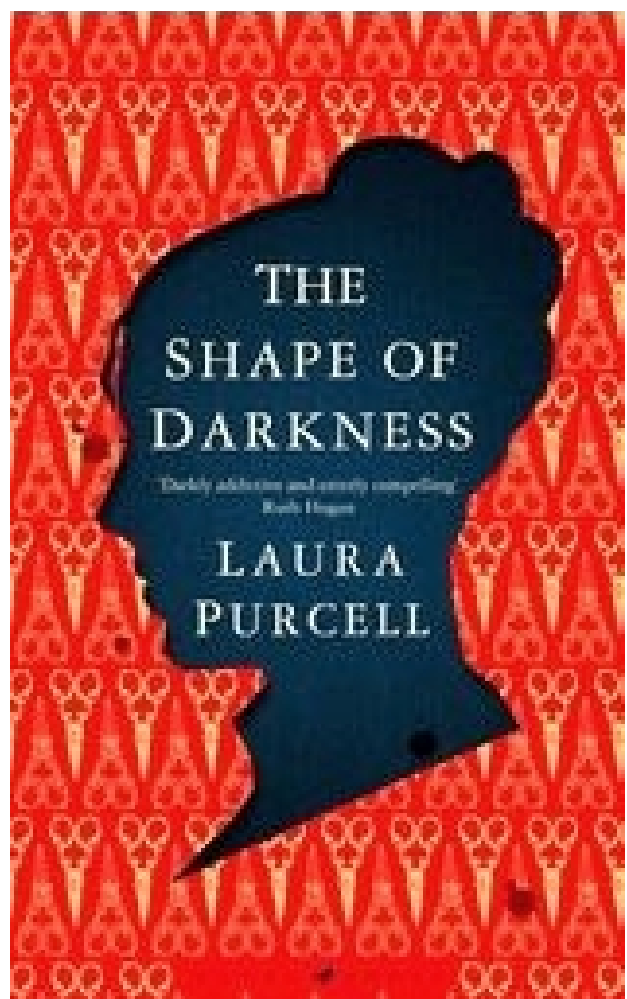
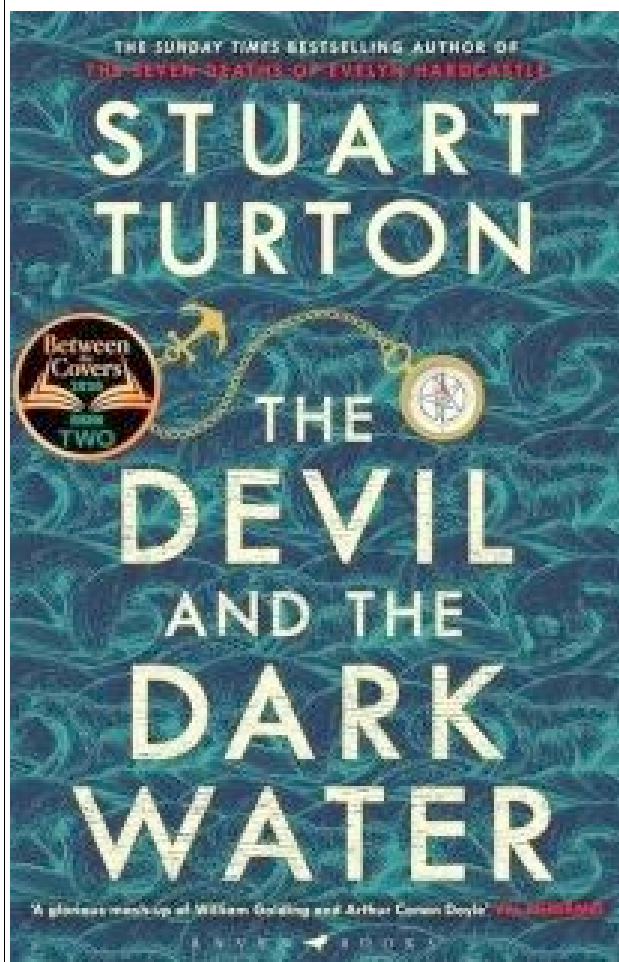
THE DEVIL AND THE DARK WATER
by Stuart Turton (Raven Books; \$29.99)

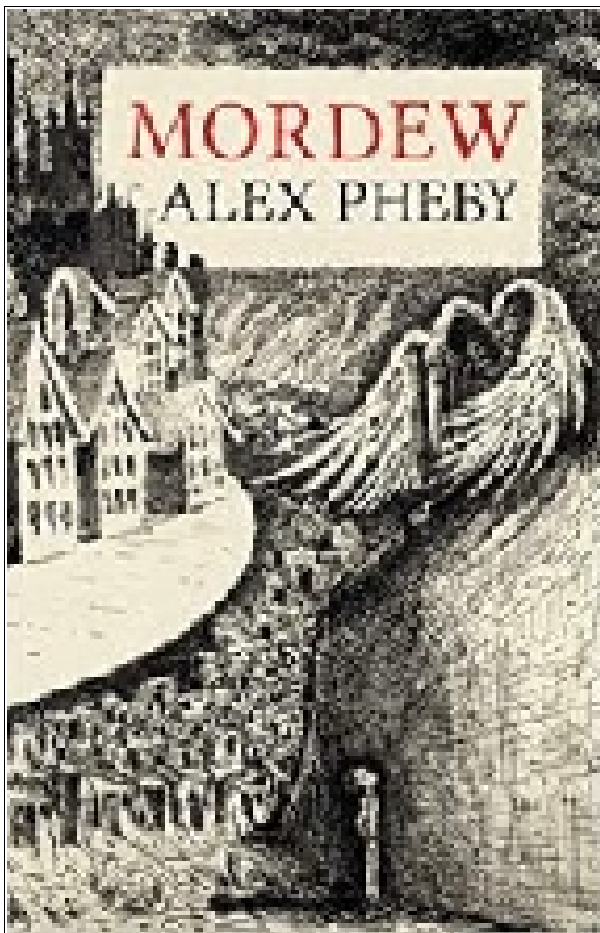
Stuart Turton's first novel *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* won the Costa first novel award in 2018. *The Devil and the Dark Water* is another genre-bending novel, blending historical fiction, the supernatural, and a murder mystery.

A 1634 voyage by the Governor-General of Batavia to Amsterdam is cursed before it sails. A symbol of a devil appears on the sails, replicating a scar on the hand of Lieutenant Arent Hayes, who with the Governor's wife attempts to unravel a locked cabin murder and to save the ship from an alleged demonic presence on board.

THE SHAPE OF DARKNESS
by Laura Purcell (Raven Books; \$29.99)

When Stuart Turton and **Laura Purcell** toured together, Purcell reflected that their novels had 'a gothic link'. Purcell's fourth novel *The Shape of*





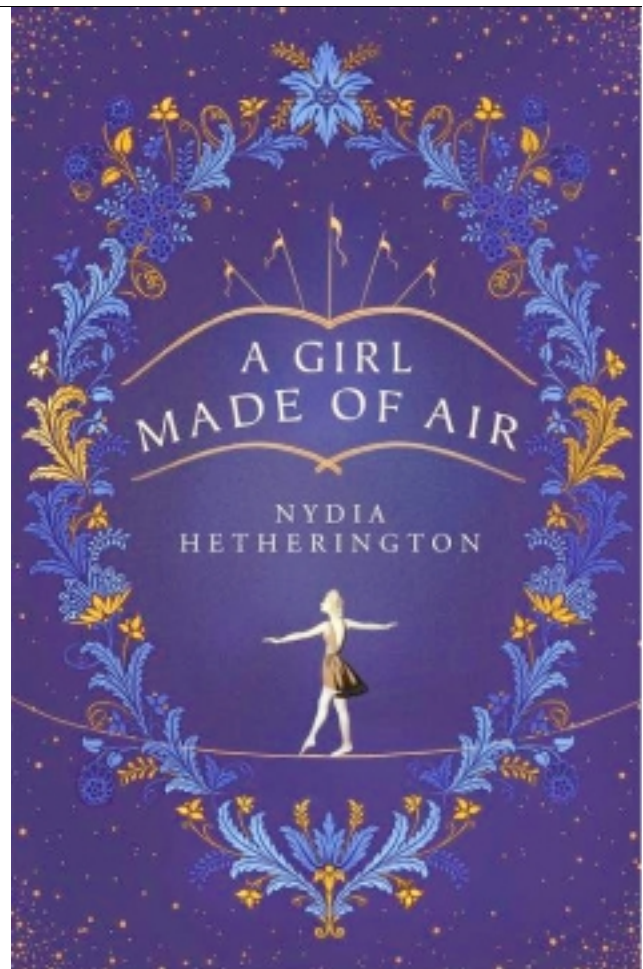
Darkness also mixes murder and the supernatural. Set in Victorian Bath, the novel tells of sickly Agnes Darken, who is a struggling silhouette artist, supporting her orphaned nephew and elderly mother.

Agnes struggles even more when she learns from the police that her customers are being murdered. She seeks the help of Pearl Meers, a young albino medium but, when the spiritual door is opened, Agnes's dark secrets emerge. Mesmerism and murder prove a potent mix.

MORDEW

by Alex Pheby (Galley Beggar Press)

British author **Alex Pheby's** *Mordew*, the first in a dark atmospheric trilogy, has drawn comparison with the novels of Mervyn Peake and Philip Pullman. The novel follows Nathan Treeves, a young boy living in the slums of Mordew, a sprawling, dark, patriarchal city, built over the dead body of the Weftling God. Nathan is able to tap into its powers to combat the Master of Mordew. With extensive glossaries, *Mordew* is a book to savour, as Pheby examines issues of social inequality and corruption of power within his elaborately imagined world.



A GIRL MADE OF AIR

by Nydia Hetherington (Quercus; \$32.99)

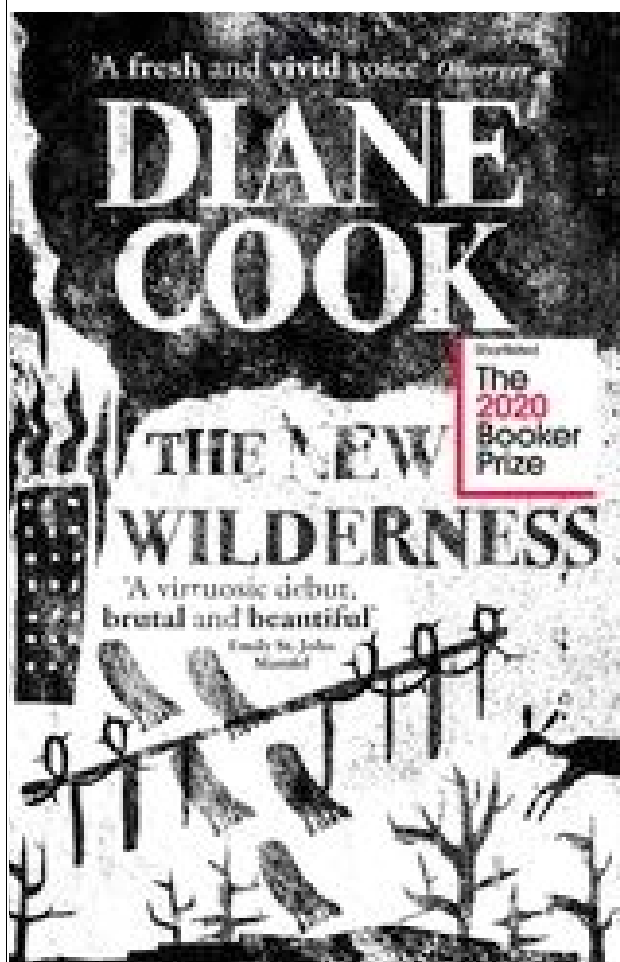
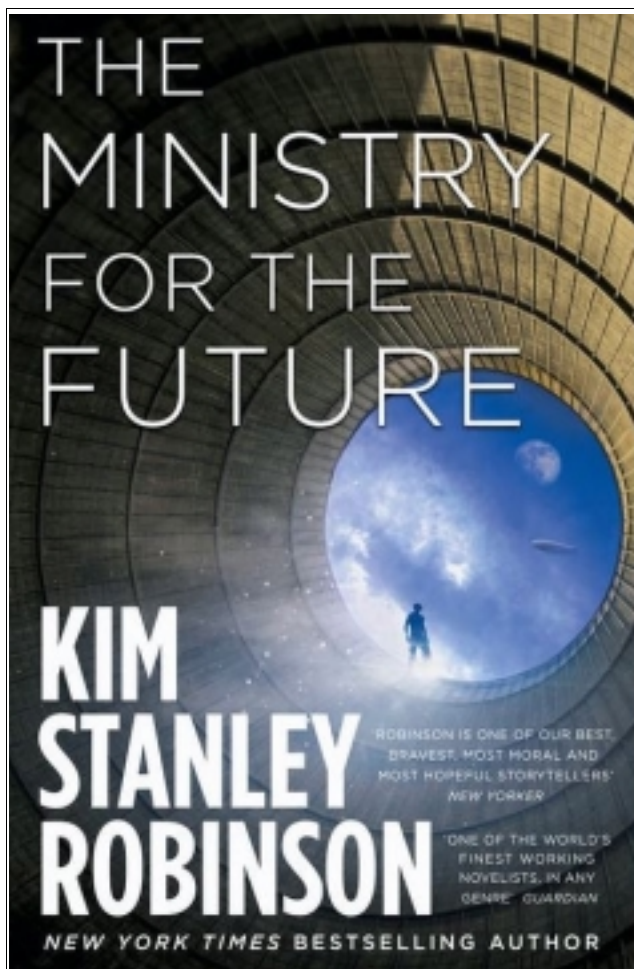
British author **Nydia Hetherington's** impressive debut novel *A Girl Made of Air*, a mixture of magic fantasy and realism, follows the life of 'Mouse', 'the greatest funambulist who ever lived'. Mouse, neglected by her circus family, is taken up by the charismatic and mysterious Serendipity Wilson, whose Manx folklore stories, published as separate chapters, provide sustenance for Mouse as she grows up. Mouse succeeds, first as a tightrope artist, and then as a celebrity in New York, but is always haunted by the need to find Serendipity's missing daughter. *A Girl Made of Air* is a redemptive story of love and loss.

U.S. SCIENCE FICTION

THE MINISTRY OF THE FUTURE

by Kim Stanley Robinson (Orbit; \$32.99)

Kim Stanley Robinson, a leading SF author for over three decades, has recently argued that 'science fiction is the only genre that treats seriously the complex effects of technological change on



humanity and confronts the ecological devastation of Earth by industrial capitalism’.

Robinson’s *The Ministry of the Future* is an avowedly political take on the need for climate change action. In 2025, a devastating ‘wet-bulb’ heatwave kills 20 million people in India and poses a major challenge to the newly founded UN Ministry of The Future.

Robinson’s complex narrative, underpinned by significant climate info dumps, includes traumatic Indian geo-engineering, deadly eco-terrorism by the ‘Children of Kali’, and some ruthless social and economic pragmatism to enable a potentially optimistic outcome.

THE NEW WILDERNESS

by Diane Cook (Oneworld; \$29.99)

Diane Cook’s *The New Wilderness*, shortlisted for the 2020 Booker prize, another powerful climate change novel, is set in a near-future world of ‘un-inhabitable regions’. Bea, her husband Glen, and five-year-old daughter Agnes leave a toxic city to be part of a small nomadic research group ‘The Community’ in an American ‘Wilderness State’, attempting to prove that humanity can live in harmony with nature.

The project, seen through Bea and Agnes’s turbulent relationship over the years, fractures because of tribal individualism, the harsh natural environment, and the surveillance of the hostile Wilderness Rangers.

THE SILENCE

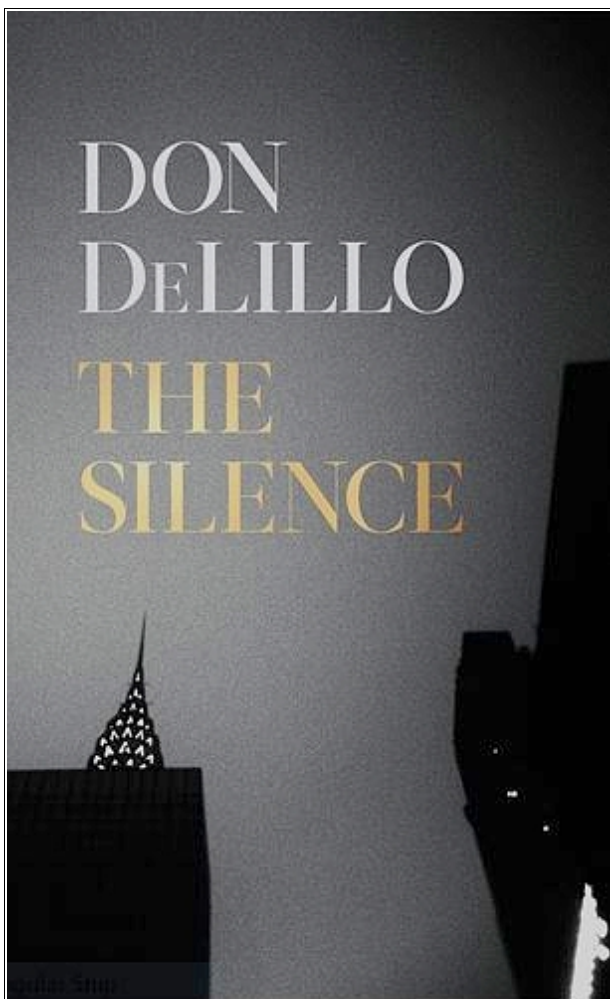
by Don DeLillo (Picador; \$29.99)

Don DeLillo is the author of numerous novels, including *Zero K*, *Underworld*, *Falling Man*, *White Noise*, and *Libra*. His many awards include the US National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and the Jerusalem Prize.

Now 84, his literary output is, perhaps understandably, becoming textually more concise. *The Silence*, a novella written before Covid-19, has been described as ‘Samuel Beckett for the Facebook age’.

The novel begins with insurance agent Jim Kripps and poet Tessa Berens flying back from Paris to meet up in New York with their friends Max Stenner, a building inspector, and Diane Lucas, a retired physics professor, along with Diane’s former student Martin, to watch Super Bowl on TV.

Suddenly a ‘communications screw-up’, which is presumably global and never explained, causes their plane to crash land at Newark airport. Jim and Tessa, after an examination at a medical clinic, which reveals only minor injuries, make their way



to Max and Diane's Manhattan apartment. When they arrive at the candlelit apartment, Max is watching a blank TV, 'trying to induce an image to appear on the screen through force of will'. Diane ponders possible reasons for the electronic black-out, while Martin is 'grinding out theories and speculations' from Einstein's 1912 *Manuscript on the Special Theory of Relativity*.

DeLillo, who has stated that *The Silence* had its genesis in a still image of a blank screen, prefaces his text with Einstein's words, 'I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones'.

Is the world collapsing? Tessa asks, 'What is happening? Who is doing this to us? Have our minds been digitally remastered? Are we an experiment that happens to be falling apart, a scheme set in motion by forces outside our reckoning?'

DeLillo is clearly reflecting on our mobile phone and tablet dependence and increasing separation from physical social interaction. 'What happens to the people who live inside their phones?' DeLillo's interest in quantum physics provides a framework for the temporal suspension of life in the apartment, presumably a microcosm of the outside world.

The Silence ends with no resolution, the charac-

ters, seemingly trapped in the apartment, spouting monologues, while 'determined not to look at each other'. This is surely Jean-Paul Sartre's version of hell in *Huis Clos*, 'hell is other people', as much as Beckett's 'non-knowers' oblivion.

RODHAM

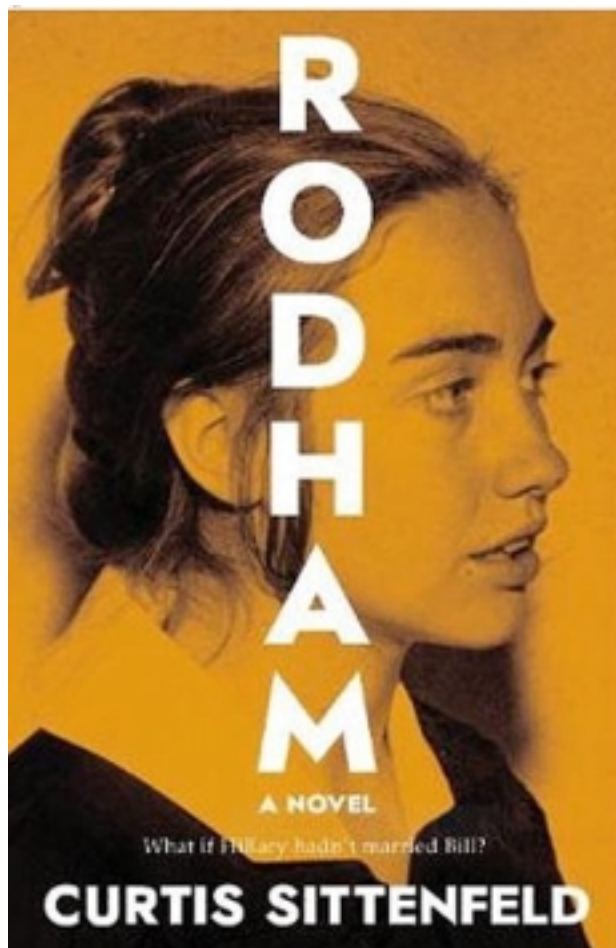
by Curtis Sittenfeld (Doubleday; \$32.99)

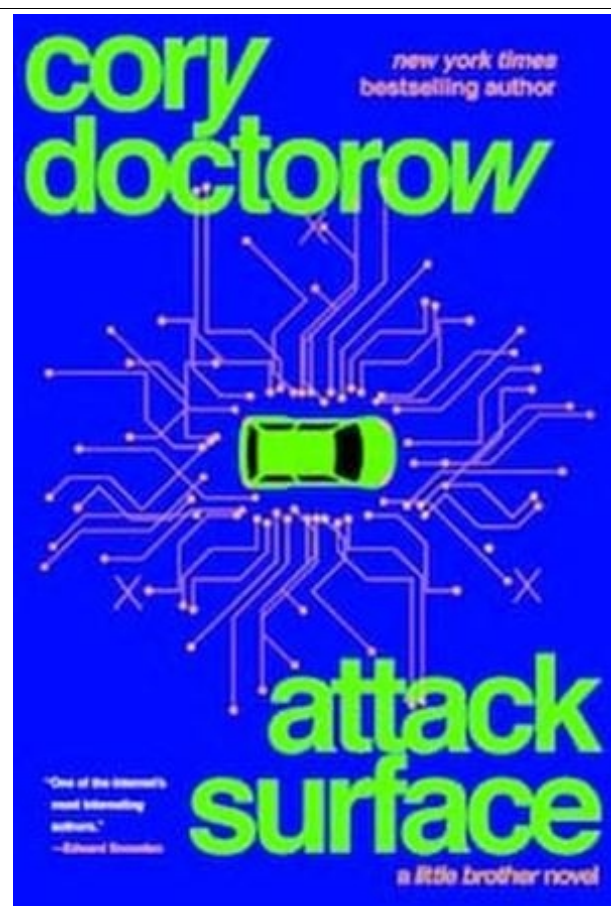
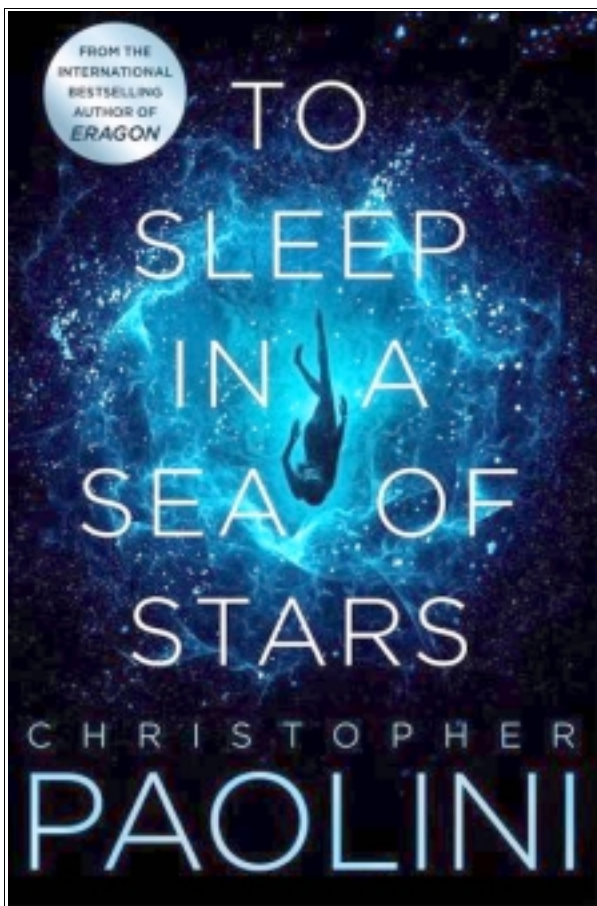
Curtis Sittenfeld had immense success in 2008 with her novel *American Wife*, a fictionalised retelling of the life of Laura Bush. Now comes *Rodham*, her much anticipated fictional portrayal of Hillary Clinton.

The basic premise of *Rodham* is 'What if Hillary hadn't married Bill?'. Sittenfeld has said, 'My main goal was to examine chance, fate, free will and the notion of parallel universes or other, un-lived lives.'

Sittenfeld's opening chapters closely follow actual events in Hillary's early life, such as her time at Wellesley College and Yale Law School and her first meeting with the 'handsome lion', Bill Clinton.

Their subsequent relationship takes the reader into unexpected graphic sexual detail. Bill plays his saxophone naked before sex ensues, leaving Hillary 'mindless, when Bill was inside me'. Sittenfeld has said, 'I have complicated feelings about the





sex I chose to include ... [but] I feel it makes the story.'

Bill and Hillary leave for Arkansas, where Bill plans to run for Governor. Hillary, as a young female law academic, has to confront local misogyny and Bill's 'talent for deceit' and serial infidelity. As a result, in 1975, Hillary decides to leave Bill, 'a hard dog to keep on the porch'.

The narrative then cuts to 1991 with Hillary, an unmarried, lonely, law professor at Northwestern University in Chicago. She is persuaded to run for the Senate in 1992, when Bill fails to become President. George H. W. Bush instead wins a second term, Jerry Brown wins in 1996, and then John McCain is President in 2000 and 2004, before Barack Obama wins in 2008.

Hillary struggles against a male-dominated American political scene, especially when she is running for President in 2016 against Bill, a sleazy Silicon Valley billionaire, still with a 'compulsive infidelity'. Hillary wonders if she will lose her moral compass if she accepts the endorsement of Donald Trump, who is no different a character in Sittenfeld's parallel universe.

Sittenfeld's Hillary often seems more a composite figure, representing the issues women face in politics, than a vibrant central character, while the reader also needs to constantly juxtapose the images of the imagined and the real Hillary Clintons.

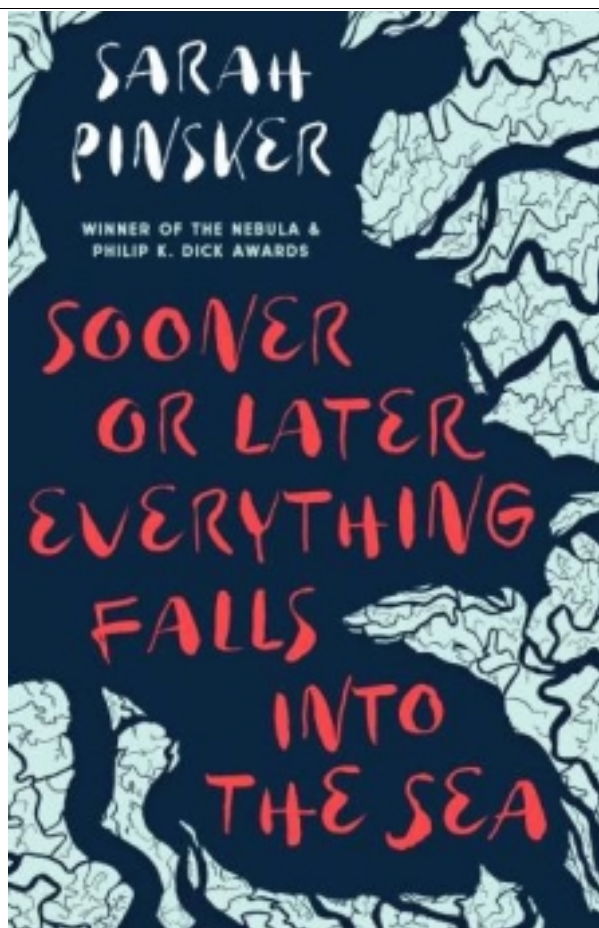
Sittenfeld, when asked if her book is a liberal revenge fantasy, replied, 'I don't think that the primary objective is political revenge.' While *Rodham*, at times, seems aligned to the genre of celebrity fan fiction, ultimately it is political fiction taking us to a counterfactual America most readers would prefer to contemporary America.

TO SLEEP IN A SEA OF STARS by Christopher Paolini (Tor; \$32.99)

Christopher Paolini's YA fantasy series, 'Inheritance Cycle', was a huge publishing success. *Eragon*, the first book of the series, was filmed in 2006.

Now comes *To Sleep in a Sea of Stars*, his much-anticipated entry in the SF genre, which reworks standard SF plotlines, including those of first contact and interstellar wars. Paolini says he wanted the book to be 'a love letter to the genre' and, unlike his fantasy series, he 'wanted to tell an entire story, beginning, middle, end, an entire series in one volume', so the narrative stretches to nearly 900 pages.

Kira Navárez, part of a xenobiologist scientific team on the moon Adrasteia, comes into contact with an alien structure, which infects her with a 'xeno' presence, 'the Soft Blade', leading to the killing of her colleagues, including her boyfriend. Kira quickly realises she must communicate and



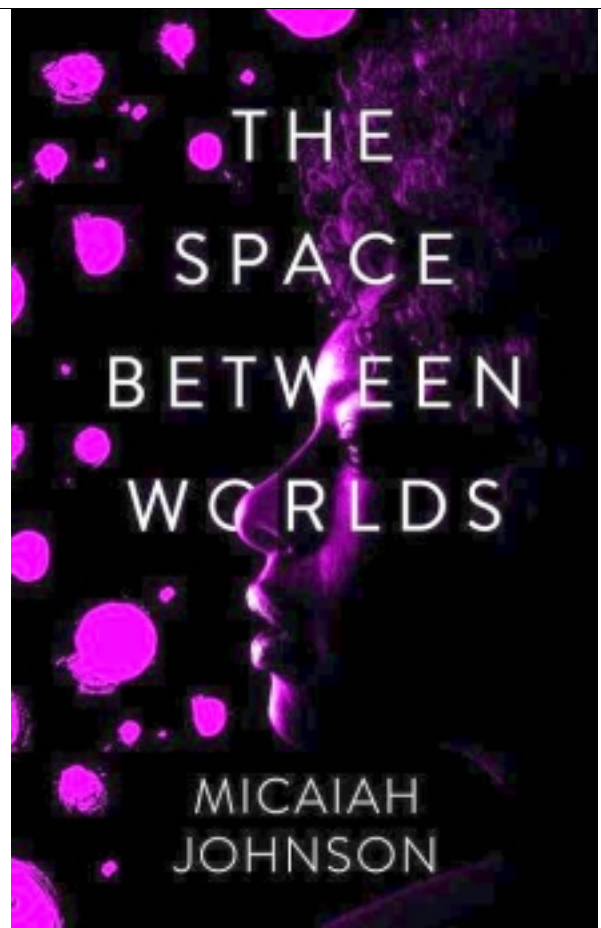
cooperate with her co-host, and use its powerful but dangerous powers to save herself and humanity, already involved in interspecies wars, notably with the biologically immortal Wranai.

To Sleep would have benefited from editorial pruning of both the narrative and its scientific underpinnings, but overall Paolini has successfully delivered in his first SF outing.

ATTACK SURFACE

by Cory Doctorow (Head of Zeus; \$32.99)

Cory Doctorow's *Attack Surface* is the third novel in his near-future 'Little Brother' trilogy. Masha Maximow is a high-level cyber hacker at an Eastern European multinational cybersecurity firm that assists authoritarian regimes to spy on dissidents. Masha, who also moonlights to support the rebels, flees to San Francisco when her duplicity is revealed. Here, she defends her friend against incursions of another cyber surveillance firm. Masha's complex personality makes her an interesting central character in a plotline often slowed down by Doctorow's info dumps. Doctorow's concerns about 'hacktivist culture' and digital surveillance are fully documented in the book's two Afterwords.



SOONER OR LATER EVERYTHING FALLS INTO THE SEA

by Sarah Pinsker (Head of Zeus; \$32.99)

Multi-award-winning author Sarah Pinsker brings together 13 stories in *Sooner or Later Everything Falls into the Sea*, with music and memory as overarching themes. 'Wind Will Rove' follows a multi-generational spaceship voyage in which the cultural past has been deleted, leaving 'fiddlers' to evoke the memories essential for survival.

How we want to live our lives is explored in 'Rememberry Day'. PTSD memories of a brutal war can be repressed for veterans by 'Veil' technology, but is it worth it because other memories are also repressed.

In 'A Stretch of Highway Two Lanes Wide', Andy, a young farmer, loses his arm in a farm accident. The prosthetic replacement has a 'Brain-Computer Interface', but unfortunately the arm's software was originally a Colorado Road monitor and keeps taking Andy there. Pinsker reflects the problems of wanting what you can't have.

THE SPACE BETWEEN WORLDS

by Micaiah Johnson (Hachette; \$32.99)

The Space Between Worlds, Micaiah Johnson's debut novel, is another multiverse novel. While 'Earth

Zero' is now a post-apocalyptic, socially unequal world, there are 382 other Earths that can be visited, although nobody can visit a world where their counterpart is still alive.

Cara, a queer, black, woman, a 'traverser', is able to collect data from alternative Earths as she has already died many times. Johnson, in a complicated narrative structure, examines questions of sexuality, identity, and nature-versus-nurture, as Cara painfully learns that her actions will determine the future, not just of Earth, but all the multiverses.

THE LAST HUMAN

by Zack Jordan (Hodder; \$32.99)

Zack Jordan's *The Last Human* is an ambitious debut novel. Sarya 'the Daughter', who is believed to be the last human alive, lives on an orbital space station protected by a giant spiderlike entity, Shenyra 'the Widow'. The universe is dominated by the Network, an alliance of intelligences that have maintained galactic peace for half a billion years. Humanity has been sidelined by the Network because of its alleged aggression and resistance to the Network.

Sarya goes on the run when her home is destroyed, but little realises her importance in a

universe of godlike entities and sentient planets. Sarya never emerges as a fully rounded character, but she provides the focus, as Sarya 'the Destroyer', for a galactic struggle over issues of free will and choice.

THE MOTHER CODE

by Carole Stivers (Hodder; \$32.99)

Biochemist researcher **Carole Stivers** begins her debut novel, *The Mother Code*, in 2049, 'on a planet Earth that was natural except for the almost total lack of other human life', as a result of a biological weapons apocalypse. The survival of the human race depends on genetically engineered children, incubated by 'mother bots', programmed with 'The Mother Code'.

In 2060, Kai must ultimately decide where his loyalty lies as his robot mother Rho-Z's existence is threatened. The Mother Code dramatically reflects, on several levels, 'what does it mean to be a mother?'

U.S. FANTASY

A DEADLY EDUCATION

by Naomi Novik (Del Rey; \$32.99)

Bestselling American author **Naomi Novik** begins her 'Scholomance' series with *A Deadly Education*, publicised as 'a twisted, super dark, super modern, female-led Harry Potter' novel. In a racially diverse magic school, without teachers, death is ever present from demonic forces, the 'mals'. Students either graduate or die. Novik's truculent main character, El Higgins, is an outsider with a deadly ability. 'Just give me a chance and I'll kill ... untold millions, and make myself the dark Queen of the world'. Novik takes a while to build a narrative, partly because of info-dumps interruptions, but builds to a strong conclusion.

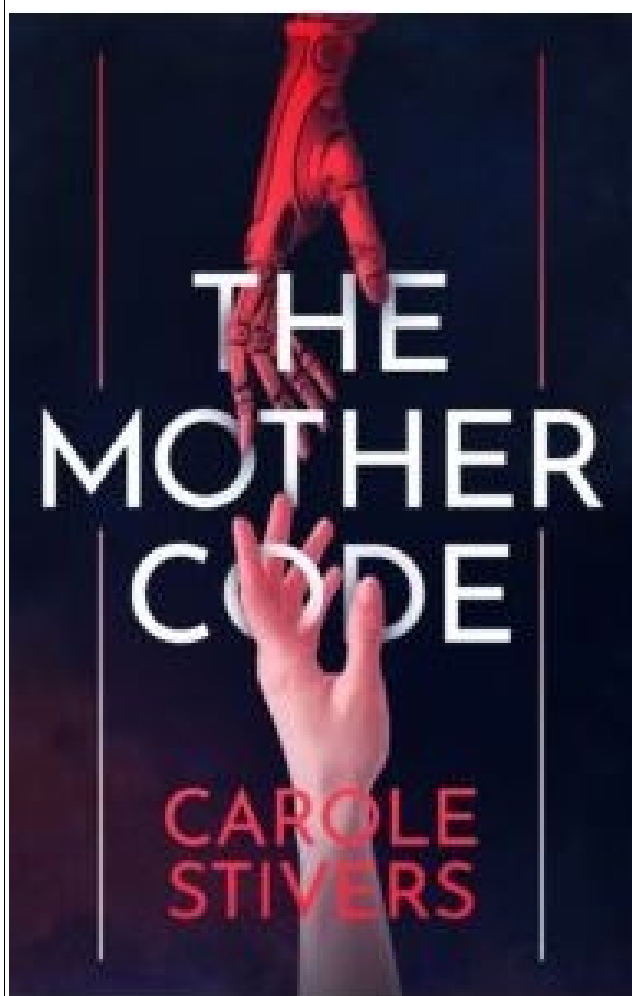
CANADIAN SCIENCE FICTION

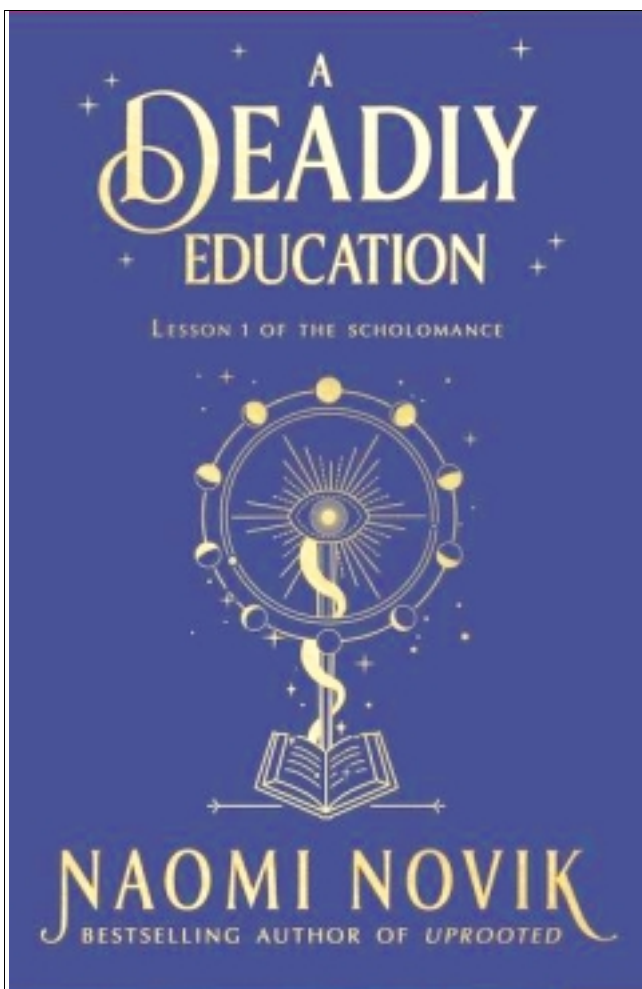
GREENWOOD

by Michael Christie (Scribe; \$32.99)

Richard Powers won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2019 for *The Overstory*, his tree-centric novel, which intertwined the life of its characters and nature. Now, in that mould, comes *Greenwood*, an impressive ecological novel by Canadian author **Michael Christie**.

Greenwood begins in 2038 with a world afflicted





by 'the Great Withering', a wave of fungal blight and insect infestations, which has destroyed nearly all the trees across the globe. As a result of rising temperatures and the lack of forests, soils have dried up, releasing 'killer dust clouds' resulting in 'rib-retch', a lethal cough. The majority of the world's books have been pulped for wood fibre to make dust masks and air filters.

With the global economy in ruins and cities turned to 'dust-choked slums', Canada is one of the last countries still functioning. Off the coast of British Columbia, Greenwood Island's 'Arboreal Cathedral' is an eco-resort for the ultra-rich in one of the world's last old-growth forests.

Dr Jake Greenwood, known as Jake, a graduate dendrologist, has taken a job as a forest tour guide on the island which bears her family name. The family money, however, accumulated by massive logging by Harris Greenwood, was dissipated in the 1970s. Jake, burdened with student debt, can't afford to lose her job, which will certainly occur if she reveals that some of the thousand-year-old trees are now diseased.

Christie, in a narrative concentrically structured like the rings of a tree, takes the reader back to 1908, when the fate of two boys will have an impact on the story of the family, and to an intertwined

history that will finally play out in 2038. The family history in the 1930s deliberately echoes the dust bowl described in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, foreshadowing Christie's greater dustbowl catastrophe in the twenty-first century.

Christie recounts each generation's story through flashbacks in which families, like forests, experience both loss and renewal. Jake is aware of how her own life is being pulled by 'unseen layers, girded by lives that came before her own'. Ultimately, she reflects family is 'like a forest, a collection of individuals pooling their resources through intertwined roots'.

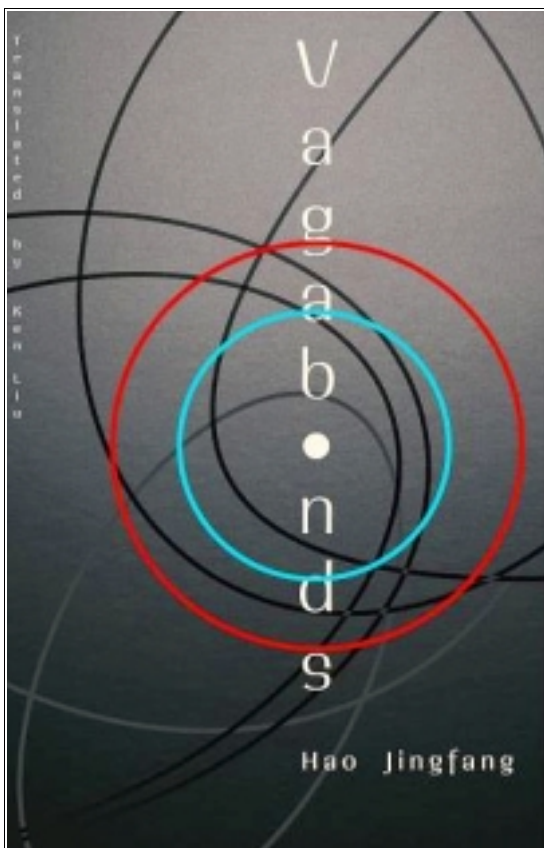
Jake will be the determinant of her own fate, confronting a major choice, as Christie puts it, of 'when do we choose self-preservation and when do we choose survival in a broader sense?' *Greenwood* is a moving novel of family sacrifice and love for a natural world.

CHINESE SCIENCE FICTION

VAGABONDS

by Hao Jingfang (Head of Zeus; \$29.99)

Vagabonds is the first novel by Hugo Award-winning



Chinese author Dr **Hao Jingfang** and translated by Ken Liu, another Hugo award winner.

Luoying, a young Martian dancer, is trapped between the clash of cultures of an independent Martian Republic and Earth, planets with radically different political and social systems and philosophies. Earth is ultra-capitalist, while Mars is a government-funded utopian democracy, although with rigidly enforced societal rules. Luoying's journey of self-discovery, and the truth about her family's history, will have huge implications for both planets.

Echoes resonate here of Ursula Le Guin's novels of contrasting societies. Jingfang's 600-page exploration of individual freedom in utopian and capitalist societies resonates strongly and reflects current ideological debates in China and America.

HOLD UP THE SKY

Cixin Liu (Head of Zeus; \$32.99)

The differences in philosophical approach between American writers and many non-Americans can be seen clearly in the 11 stories of *Hold Up the Sky*, by **Cixin Liu**, probably the best-known living Chinese SF writer. Liu's stories, dating from 1985 to 2014, superbly reflect his aim to 'to imagine the relationship between Small people and Great universe'. For instance, 'The Village Teacher', dying of cancer, works in an impoverished rural village, but his legacy lives on after his

teaching of basic Newtonian physics ensures that Earth survives an alien examination. Liu's stories present an optimistic view of humanity, 'a collective unit, rather than an assembly of different parts divided by ethnicity and nation'.

SOUTH AFRICAN SCIENCE FICTION

AFTERLAND

by Lauren Beukes (Michael Joseph; \$32.99)

Award-winning South African writer **Lauren Beukes'** *Afterland*, a dystopian fast-moving novel, focuses on a mother-child relationship. In 2023, a rampant HCV virus induces a prostate cancer that kills 99 per cent of the world's male population. Thirteen-year-old Miles, disguised as a girl, escapes with his mother, Cole, from a Californian 'Male Protection Facility'.

They are pursued across America by the authorities and Cole's manipulative sister, Billie, determined to sell Miles's valuable sperm on the black market. During their road journey they encounter matriarchal communes, female anarchist groups, and the Church of All Sorrows, where women apologise for their sins in the hope that men will return. While women take over 'PMdFs, Previously Male-dominated Fields', Beuke's message is that power is power and, ultimately, women can be just as ruthless as men.



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