Steam Engine Time 10

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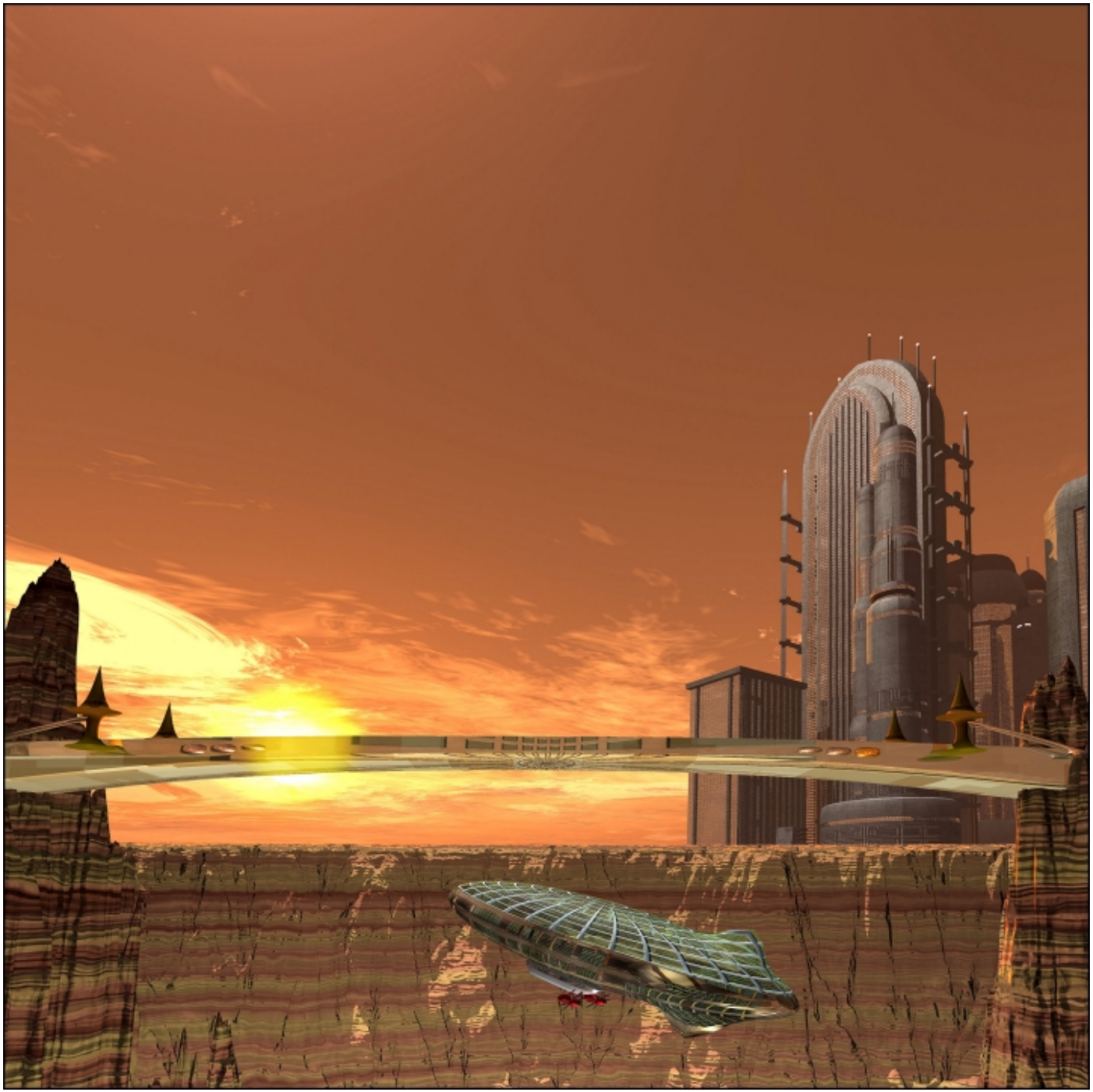
MARCH 2009



Steam Engine Time

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If human thought is a growth, like all other growths, its logic is without foundation of its own, and is only the adjusting constructiveness of all other growing things. A tree cannot find out, as it were, how to blossom, until comes blossom-time. A social growth cannot find out the use of steam engines, until comes steam-engine time.

— Charles Fort, *Lo!*, quoted in Westfahl, *Science Fiction Quotations*, Yale UP, 2005, p. 286

Swimming upstream

Editorial by Jan Stinson

Discovering science fiction in seventh grade changed my life, and continues to do so as SF itself changes. I've lived through the New Wave, cyberpunk, steampunk, the Space Opera revival, and other 'movements' within the SF world. For over a decade, I didn't read anything but Ellison and Cherryh, a self-imposed isolation resulting from the (to me) vast outpouring of retreaded SF and fantasy that couldn't cut itself loose from Tolkien's magic apron strings.

But life is change, and there is hope out there. Among the books I reviewed for publication last year (for other magazines), I recommend *Keeping It Real* by Justina Robson, *Demon Theory* by Stephen Graham Jones, *The January Dancer* by Michael Flynn, *All the Windwracked Stars* by Elizabeth Bear, and *Fools' Experiments* by Edward M. Lerner. Of those writers, Bear is the only one I was familiar with from reading other of her works. 'But wait!' a reader might cry out. 'You didn't tell us what genre those books are from!'

They're from the 'good read' genre, folks. Deal with it.

There are also lots more books of recent vintage to recommend, but I don't think I should spoil all the fun. Go forth, search, discover (remember the local library!) the books that will stretch your mind. Swimming upstream is a good thing.

Then write about them, and send what results to us. We really do want to know what you think.

Bruce has said (on p. 4) what needed saying about print copies of *SET*. Unless one of us wins a lottery (of the non-Shirley Jackson kind), that is all there is to say.

Thanks to everyone who sent in articles and locs for this issue. I wasn't quite as enthused as Bruce about how *SET* 10 came together, as I was dealing with intense personal difficulties, but it now looks like a strong set of articles, a hallmark of *SET*. My personal life has settled down, my health has vastly improved, but the battle with depression continues (even while I'm on meds for it; there's no magic pill, friends). At least now, I'm pushing back. It feels good.

— Jan Stinson, 10 February 2009

Editorial by Bruce Gillespie

This issue is dedicated to Earl Kemp, who took the trouble to put me in touch with Michael Moorcock and Rob Latham; and Kirsten Gong-Wong from *Locus* magazine, who put me in touch with Michael Chabon. As always, this issue is also dedicated to Bill Burns, creator and unquenchable curator of efanzines.com.

In forty years of fanzine publishing I had never made contact with Mike Moorcock, not even in *SF Commentary*'s heyday, although he had sent letters to John Bangsund's *Australian Science Fiction Review* during the 1960s. Thanks to Earl's thoughtfulness, I've been able to swap emails with a person I might have found intimidating back in the seventies, but who obviously feels easy with fandom these days. He attended Corflu in Austin, Texas a couple of years back, and writes delightful letters. Exchanging emails with Michael Moorcock, as well as with Rob Latham, George Zebrowski, and the other people who appear in this issue, has given me back much of the excitement I used to feel in the 1970s.

Jan and I send all correspondence to each other, so I hope she caught my feeling of excitement as an issue built itself from the accumulated responses to the previous issues. On the other side of the world Jan was rather busy with other matters, whereas I was *not* busy with paying work. Although work had dribbled in during most of 2008, the flow stopped in the middle of December. The brakes were off. Full speed ahead, *Steam Engine Time* 10.

I had never forgotten that the fortieth anniversary edition of *SF Commentary* should appear in January 2009. For a long time the job was behind me. I had to resurrect a vast sunken *Titanic* of a fanzine from the depths of electronic and paper files that had been submerged for nearly five years. The salvage job had to be done all at once, or the ship would sink forever. As I dived and burrowed and sorted, the *SFC* 80 edifice rose to the surface.

But *SF Commentary* 80 is vast. It is not the 40-page issue that Robert Lichtman and I were planning to publish as the final chapter of the Bring Bruce Bayside report. Last I counted, it is 120 pages long. Two large issues. Far too expensive to print and post, so I will have to publish the main edition electronically. But refloating the *Titanic* is now possible, even if the official release date of January 2009 has already vanished.

One problem remains: neither Jan nor I can afford all this fanzine publishing. I sent emails to many people telling them that *SET* 9 had appeared on efanzines.com. 'Please download the issue, but if you really do need a print copy, I will send you one.'

Sucker me. Lots of people want print copies, but they do not want to pay anything, either in time or money. I had to print an extra 50 copies, without much to show for it. Respond, people! That's what fanzines are all about; that's what fandom is all about. You get a print copy if you send a publishable letter of comment, review or article; if you trade paper fanzines; if you send review copies of books or other publications. Send a $50 note; you'll be surprised how grateful we are. But I won't be sending a copy merely because you can't be bothered spending the money to print your own copy, or whatever. Times are hard, but with a bit of goodwill we can keep the great conversation going.

— Bruce Gillespie, 7 February 2009

Meteor Inc.

Meteor Incorporated was established in August 2007 to accumulate cash donations and bequests until enough funds are available to:

- preserve and manage a collection of science fiction and fantasy memorabilia (books, magazines, fanzines, and electronic media) by acquiring premises and hiring qualified librarians/custodians; and
- provide a resource for research into science fiction and fantasy literature and culture.

This is a long-term project requiring ongoing cash donations from SF fans.

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Letters of comment

Feature letter of comment: MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Bastrop, Texas

Had a correspondence with Damien Broderick a long time ago, as I recall. Didn't know he was in San Antonio. I still have a few mates drawn from the SF world, but don't really have a lot to do with SF, as such. Sounds like he doesn't, either. I still stick up for SF, as does Ballard on occasions (did you read his beautiful memoir?). He's doing all he can these days to keep cancer at bay.

Michael Moorcock, 2003.

I don't feel hugely worried about offering my version of events, since my version's about as valid as anyone else's. I've spotted a few minor errors of fact hardly worth mentioning, and which I've mostly forgotten already. One thing about the drunken talk I gave at an SF convention, quoted, is that I wasn't so much posing as drunk or whatever; I was getting desperately bored with the whole thing. I often argue with my own notes in that way because I can see the arguments against my opinions and really don't think I have a hold on the truth. I used to get irritated by the likes of Terry Jeeves, or Don Wollheim, both of whom I liked personally, because of their inclination to ascribe motives, with no proof at all that those were my or anyone else's motives, and because they hadn't read the writers they would mention as posers.

We're all, after all, posers. Or not. At social gatherings, like conventions, where I had many friends, who are still my friends after 50 years or so, I'd become confused. *I wasn't trying to improve SF/fantasy*. I think I'm clear on that now. You'll note that the large-size issues of *New Worlds* (including the ones from 1977 not mentioned) made no reference that I can remember, either in editorials or reviews, to the SF world. I wouldn't let writers address the SF world, but insisted they address the general reader. When Ballard and I used to talk about fiction from around 1960 on, we talked about SF conventions revitalising modern fiction. This was later interpreted by Don Wollheim (whom I liked and who published a lot of my work) to suggest that we were trying to introduce modernist methods and themes into SF. I think the best way of describing the difference between what we were trying for in the UK and what they were doing in the US is that we thought SF literary conventions could bring an added relevance to 'the mainstream'. Now, I have to admit I became confused when talking to SF readers and writing for fanzines, in that I was hoping to persuade the SF community to my ideas, largely, I think, because I had so many friends there. I still do. Now, though, I won't let ideas get in the way of friendships. I write a regular letter of comment to Pete Weston's *Prolapse* and have recontacted several old friends (including George Locke), even talking of doing projects with them.

I'm essentially sociable, and only after 1967 or so did I begin to move away from the SF world altogether. That didn't stop me still attending the odd convention, but I no longer got involved in controversy. By then I was learning to separate my working life and my social life.

Somewhere it was suggested I changed the title of *Science Fantasy* to *Impulse*. It wasn't me, but was probably Kyril Bonfiglioli.

It was also suggested Ballard turned to the likes of *Ambit* and *Ronald Reagan* as opposed to *NW*. I, too, contributed to *Ambit* and *RR*. Martin Bax, the editor/publisher of *Ambit*, was a regular at John Brunner's parties where we both met him. In those pieces William Burroughs's inspiration wasn't mentioned much, nor the influence of the absurdists on me in particular — Burroughs, Jarry, Vian, Firbank and, indeed, Peake — rather than surrealists. Ballard and I disagreed on surrealism to a degree. Also, Bradbury was Ballard's chief influence, and you can certainly hear echoes of Bradbury in a lot of Ballard fiction. His favourite SF writer. Almost the only one he'd mention in interviews.

It's nobody's fault, of course, but nobody writing here has taken much notice of the non-SF publications we contributed to, including magazines like *Golden Nugget*. Newspaper pieces ...

At random: Lang Jones didn't exactly retire to the country. He was always primarily a classical musician, still writes music, and for many years was involved in local party politics as a councillor. (He's on a record about to be issued next month, playing piano on *The Entropy Tango* with me and Pete Pavli).

I remain pretty much as disappointed in most SF/fantasy as I always was, but since the 'mainstream' has now absorbed the best conventions of SF, I'm not disappointed that what I originally hoped for hasn't happened.

Garbled story about John Brunner — I wasn't actually present when a glass was thrown at him by Labour politician/publisher Mike Dempsey with the words 'How dare you compare your tenth-rate poetry with that of Tom Disch!' (whom Dempsey was publishing). Much of this, of course, has been garbled by alcohol (pints of gin and Guinness, half and half, were the cause of that one — several of us (including Mike) had turned up at the con, felt depressed by what we found, turned round and headed for the nearest pub where they had no champagne, so we took Dutch/Irish courage in our version of black velvets).

I think a few references to absurdists might also mean something when reading the 'Blood' sequence. Also the comic *Michael Moorcock's Multiverse* (DC) acts as something of a coda to that trilogy. Intro gives a clearer explanation. I was also a bit surprised that none of my non-SF/fantasy got much of a mention, since they're generally pretty ambitious, nor comedies like 'Dancers at the End of Time'. The Pyat books and Cornelius books are probably the best books to see how I use characters from one book to another and why — not so much *Gloriana* or *Mother London*. Anyway, I do most of my proselytising now via *The Guardian*, *Telegraph*, etc. where I do occasionally still recommend new SF/fantasy writers I like, and I still try to give good genre writers a bit of a boost. I am still castigated for writing pulp stuff, but it doesn't always stop me, but I'm not sure I think out Elric and Co. In my eyes I think I go on using that stuff for my own purposes, just as I use comics. I like the idea of using generic pulp forms to carry 'serious' notions, arguing that it's better than using posh literary forms to carry shallow, pulpish notions.

I haven't read a *lot* of genre fiction in the last thirty or forty years, though, with a lot of time to kill lately in doctors' waiting rooms and too much medication to be able to concentrate too well, I've gone back to read *all* my childhood literary heroes, like Sexton Blake, P. G. Wodehouse and Edgar Rice Burroughs. I thought I might as well revisit the wellsprings. And I'm thinking of doing one more issue of *NW*, since I'd like to remember close friends like Disch, Barry Bayley and Burroughs.

Incidentally, I agree about Cele Goldsmith, whose editorial policy and mine were a bit similar, partly because she wasn't much of an SF fan and I, by the time I came to do *NW*, had rather lost interest. Disch and Zelazny were godsends. Disch said he'd never have written with the same level of ambition (esp. *Camp Concentration*) if he hadn't been writing it for *NW*. I rejected Roger's first Amber book, which I found disappointing. One of the things I like to think I did was raise the bar. We didn't always come up to it, but we did raise it.

Was David Masson mentioned? His whole career, he said, was based around *NW*. First time I rejected a story of his, he stopped writing. I also introduced pop artists like Paolozzi to people like Ballard. Blending, as I'd hoped, various forms. It didn't have an awful lot to do with SF, and

its development (apart from slightly improved overall writing I don't think it has improved much) but we did help, I think, to accelerate what was happening in general fiction. Richard Hamilton, of course, thought Ballard, Disch and I had 'ruined' SF. In recent years, I have tried to plug the likes of Pohl and Kornbluth, Sheckley and several other writers associated with *Galaxy*, who have been placed unfairly in Dick's shadow. Dick was writing in a genre they helped create, and gets far too much credit for originality which simply wasn't his. You won't catch me saying anything nice about Heinlein, though. I still think he and his ilk were pretty banal. My rapprochement with Pete Weston hasn't quite gone that far!

It's strange that I devoted so much time to trying to improve fiction when a large part of me has always found it a completely absurd activity to put little black marks on sheets of white paper and then sell that paper to someone. That I had a facility for writing imaginative fiction seems just as odd to me as the discovery that I had a talent for playing and singing twelve-bar blues. Something best done in the privacy of your own room but you shouldn't really expect people to pay you for doing it. And yet it's even odder to discover that on occasions I actually have a passion for doing it!

I'd better close this down and hop off to bed. Thanksgiving Day tomorrow, when the Americans thank God for the Puritans arriving and the Brits thank god the bastards left. I once had an idea for a video game — Save America from the Worst Blight ever to Invade Her Shores. The game was called SINK THE MAYFLOWER. But a spot of turkey and a decent Bourdeaux aren't to be sneezed at. If there's anything I've forgotten to address, please remind me. Or I will.

27 November 2008

I don't see *Extrapolation*, so it was good to see Rob's piece. Same goes for the other pieces.

27 November 2008

Couple of minor comments so far: *Tarzan Adventures* was a professional juvenile weekly. The cartoon was done for my sixtieth birthday. I hope I wasn't that grey in the sixties!

27 November 2008

There have to be *some* readers out there interested in pre-1990 SF/ fantasy or there wouldn't be sales for the various 'classics' series, of which *Planet Stories* is the latest, while the 'collectors edition' Elrics have been selling well here in the US. Same goes for music and movies. Enough of a market to sustain quite a lot of reissues. But I agree that the majority are only interested in what's current. This could be part of the process where peers like to share 'discoveries', which can be as massive as *Star Wars* and Harry Potter, or something genuinely marginal. I think it happens with every generation — they want something to be their 'own'. D&D also had this appeal. I think fashion has a lot to do with the whole thing. Coming from commercial magazines, I have to admit I factored this into selling *New Worlds* — making the magazine fashionable enough so that half the people who bought it probably were scarcely reading it. Contrary to what's often said in the SF histories, we actually did well commercially, a least until Smiths and Menzies stopped distributing us (which is why copies didn't make it through to Australia, South Africa and other Anglophone countries). Anyway, shared fashion seems to be a big factor — then there are people like us who become interested in the whole history of whatever enthusiasm we have. To some extent this is exemplified by the number of people buying *Astounding* and the number who made up fandom, say, in 1958.

29 November 2008

[*brg* A major function of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club was to bring in American books (quite illegally, because of currency restrictions until 1959).*]

Same in London. Plus we had Les Flood's lending library. But I read my first true modern SF book in Paris, where American paperbacks were actually easier to find — *The Stars My Destination* by Bester. Up to then I hadn't been able to read US SF. Still never finished a Heinlein novel, hardly started a Clarke and read a couple of Asimovs. I still can't read (or watch) space fiction. The Bester was the nearest.

29 November 2008

[*JGS: I recently coaxed my 16-year-old son into reading *Stars* (my introduction, along with Andre Norton's *Moon of Three Rings*, to science fiction when I was in junior high school), and he had enthusiastic praise for it. A book published the year I was born

still has the power to ignite the imagination of the current adolescent generation — what an amazing testament this is to Bester's talent!*]

ROB LATHAM
English Department, University of California,
Riverside, CA 92521

I'm no longer in Iowa City. I now teach at UC–Riverside, where the Eaton Collection is housed.

I've been trying to figure out some way to respond to Moorcock's comments, but I'm afraid I'm stymied. It seems to me he's arguing more with his younger self than he is with me. I'm not sure it would serve much purpose to throw more 1960s quotations at him. I will wait and reply, if I feel moved to do so, in a subsequent issue.

20 January 2009

LEIGH EDMONDS
12 Raglan Street, North Ballarat VIC 3350

Very impressive. The photos of the covers of old issues of *New Worlds* brought back many memories. I'm looking forward to getting the hard copy so I can read some of the articles on my regular trips to the Tax Office.

I liked the landscape format. It looks very good on the screen in PDF and I'll be adopting it for next year in the closest I get to publishing a fanzine these days — actually it is a fanzine in intent but the members of the club don't know that. Copy attached for your bemusement. The point of the mention of French aeroplanes on the back page is that I threaten club members that I will fill up the pages of the newsletter with photos of French aeroplanes if they don't write anything. So far it has worked pretty well.

27 November 2008

[*brg* Thanks, Leigh, for the PDF copy of *Model Maker*, November 2008. The subject matter is not quite my thing, but I can recognise a fanzine when I see one. My sister Jeanette edits *Folk Vine*, the magazine of Folk Music Australia, which is also a fanzine in all but name.*]

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. I went off to find the photos you were interested in and found that I hadn't filed them where they were supposed to be **[*brg* Including the only photo of me delivering my Fan Guest of Honour speech. *Sigh*]**. After a lot of shuffling through my computer's memory I came to conclusion that I must have failed to save them because I can't find anything where they should be or where they might have been misfiled. I've some lovely photos of the Dash 8 that we flew back from Canberra in, but I guess they aren't what you wanted.

12 December 2008

I took *Steam Engine Time* 9 on the train with me today, and on the way down to Melbourne read the bits I thought would be interesting, and read the rest on the way back. I got through more than I expected because the train came to a halt just outside Bacchus Marsh and sat there for 20 minutes or so before the staff informed us that the signals between there and Ballarat had stopped working, so they were organising coaches for us for the rest of the trip. Another 10 or 15 minutes later they told us the signals were working again, and on we went. By the time we got home I'd read just about every word.

I was reminded of one

thing in particular that I sometimes forget — I'm not a great sercon fan. I think I can understand that a person would like some writing so much that they would feel compelled to write more about it, but it doesn't really work for me. That's the truth of it, I guess. I've actually read a bit of stf this year (that's what going to a convention does for you), but the ability to then write stuff about it that makes an argument of some kind and makes a point beyond that of the initial work, just doesn't happen for me. Maybe that's why I ended up studying and writing history. Same basic activity, different field with different modes of operation, etc, etc.

I did enjoy your convention report. Your comments on the height limit on buildings in Canberra is one of the reasons why Valma and I were attracted there at the end of the 1970s. I had the feeling that you could actually see the sky in Canberra, which you can't when you're in the Melbourne CBD. That's one of the advantages of living in a regional centre like Ballarat: the tallest buildings are the hospitals, which are four or five storeys high. I was taken by your description that I was in Canberra 'starting a freelance writing job', which is something that I hadn't thought I was doing. It's probably a difference in what words mean in various milieus; I take 'freelance' to mean that I'm working on spec or something like that, whereas the Tax Office call me a contractor, because I have a contract with them to research and write a history book for them. The contract was an impressive document but, at the moment, the only things that are certain is that I am going to write a book for them that will be launched on 11 November 2010 and they are paying me buckets of money to do it.

I was quite looking forward to Rob Latham's article. The title promised a lot, to discuss the New Wave and to talk about fan culture. The words are right there in the title. But I don't think I got that, and I'm not sure what I did get. I have to come back to the idea of different milieux or modes of discourse, because I have the feeling that what I am about to write is not the kind of commentary that would be expected on an article like this. I have no idea who Rob Latham is, and if he has academic training, but the way in which this article is written suggests the use of a number of academic conventions — but ones that I as a historian do not commonly use — and there are extensive footnotes, one of which says that (some of?) the research was conducted using grant money. The fact that the article was published in a journal attached to a university also suggest some academic connections. So perhaps I'm about to put my foot right in it.

Okay, so my impression is that this article is couched in the language of literary criticism; it reads much like some of the other writing in this issue. However, it is not long into the article before it becomes clear that what the author is trying to do is make some connection between the New Wave and fan culture, and he then goes on to tell a story about what happened, who the historic players were, and notes a little of what they did. What he is setting out to do is write a form of history. The trouble is that this article really does little more than roll out a chronology of what happened when, with some linking commentary. Perhaps, this genre of academic writing is closely linked to the literature it generally criticises, and so the argument it makes is couched in nuances and hints, and it is left up to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about what it all means. If that is the case, this might be an excellent article, but it doesn't work for me.

The point of the second paragraph (do you count long quotes as paragraphs?) seems to be that there does not exist a 'compelling narrative' of what happened in and around fandom and the New Wave, and Latham is going to write it for us. The problems begin right at the beginning, with the introductory ideas about Ellison and what he said. Not only is it a rather lame device to open up the discussion, but in this case it is a distraction from what I take to have been the purpose of the article. Far better, I think, to begin along the lines: 'We need a compelling narrative of contemporary fandom's participation in perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most rancorous, dispute in SF history.' The reason for this opening would be that the author would then have had to explain why such an article was necessary — I don't recall reading it, at least not expounded clearly so folks like me can follow the argument the author is trying to put together. Without such an argument poor readers like me are left wondering what the point of reading all this stuff is.

The fluffiness (dare I used such a word?) of the argument goes downhill from the beginning of the following paragraph. 'A useful way to begin', we read, 'would be to determine how, where and when the New Wave conflict originated'. No. No. No! The place to begin is with the question of 'why' the New Wave conflict occurred. You will recall the thing we learned about in school about the 'learned men who taught me all I know ...' 'Why' is the most important, and perhaps the only important question we can ask. 'How', 'where' and 'when' are only tools to help us learn 'why'.

So, here I am only a few words into the third (or fourth) paragraph and the train has come right off the rails. All I know is that, for some spurious reason to do with Harlan Ellison, I'm going to read a 'compelling narrative' about fandom and the New Wave. Already I'm confused, but I grit my teeth and read on. And on and on. What I read is a series of ideas linked more or less chronologically, progressing from the beginning of the debate through to the time when it finally runs out of steam. Then there is a kind of coda about Michael Moorcock at conventions promoting the idea of *New Worlds* and the New Wave. Since I have had a lot to do with fanzines over the years and have done a lot of historical research over more recent years, I have no doubt that the research that has gone into this article has been difficult and time consuming. But what counts is not the quality of the material you've got but what you do with it. When historians get together at the end of a long day's conferencing over a few reds, they are apt to use the word 'antiquarianism' to describe such writing. It lacks a supporting argument to give it shape and meaning. If those historians have had a few more reds in convivial company they might be heard to use the phrase 'sterile antiquarianism', which barely needs explanation.

In concluding (before I've hardly got started, but it's been one of those days), I found this article uninteresting because it wasn't about anything. It was an antiquarian exercise in stringing together a lot of historical evidence about who said what to who about what and when. But it doesn't add up to anything. The evidence suggests that there was a link between fans and the New Wave, but what was its dynamic, why did it occur the way that it did, how much did the personalities involved have to do with the way the whole thing played out? The evidence quoted here is open to all kinds of interpretations, but I can't recall that the article offers us one.

There are a couple of things in the article that also bothered me. I'm not sure whether Latham is what you might call a fan, in particular the kind of fan who published fanzines, joined apas and attended and ran conventions. I raise this point because when the article ventures near the idea of fandom, it is as though all the nuances and complexities of fandom have been sucked out. I get this image of the earnest researcher trawling through piles of old fanzines looking for the material that will help him write this article and yet missing the point of all the other material in those fanzines. However, it is often the case that the answers to questions (sometimes relevant questions we had not thought to ask) often lie in the material we come across and discard when we are trawling. Fandom was (and still may be) a vast, complex and ever-changing thing, which seems to be used in this article as though it were merely a mode of communication between a bunch of people, not a whole seething organic thing of which the New Wave was only a part.

In the case of fandom, I think Latham might have usefully understood fandom as a performance space. He seems puzzled by how Moorcock and others act at conventions and in fanzines, not perhaps understanding that almost everything that goes on in these spaces is a form of performance. I wonder if this idea might help to give some meaning to a lot of the fannish material that he refers to.

The other thing that puzzled me was that the article dealt only with the New Wave and fandom. However, both were so closely immersed with the spirit of the times that I can't see how you can understand the immediate subjects of the discussion without the larger perspective — even if only touched on, there are techniques for doing this kind of thing. We are, after all, talking about the mid 1960s, when the established culture was under attack on a myriad fronts, and everyone who was involved in fandom and in the New Wave was aware of the struggle. My memory of the zeitgeist was that the New Wave and *New Worlds* were ways of trying to understand and find a place in the changes that were taking place. As a fan and a stf reader, I did not understand or care about most of the discourse of the times surrounding the New Wave, but I knew it had to do with the making of a new world, and therefore I could not ignore it.

I could go on at length about this article, but it's really not worth the effort. It got me so annoyed that I spent most of the day thinking about it rather than doing the work that I was supposed to be doing — about Catholic culture in Australia. It turns out that the article's main value lay in making me think about this stuff and about why it didn't work. If the point of the article was to make me think a bit, then your author has achieved something. But I doubt that the line of thought my thinking took had much to do with what he intended to achieve.

14 January 2009

[*brg* Rob's article was really exciting to me because of the direction he had taken in looking at the evidence, as opposed to

several other directions he could have taken. Most academics, in looking at the New Wave, would have investigated only statements made in the pages of *New Worlds*, the *SFWA Bulletin*, and other professional or academic publications. They would have interviewed only professional writers, editors and critics who described themselves as pro- or anti-New Wave in the 1960s and 1970s. They would probably be quite unaware that the main debate raged in the fanzines. I would have thought that a clear exposition of the fanzine debate, in order, featuring all the important correspondents, is so new and valuable a piece of research that we should fall on it with great pleasure. I did. Also, I realise that this article is only one of several that Rob Latham has published in recent years, and one would expect that the final volume will be exactly the volume of history and literary appreciation that is required by the subject matter.*]

DARRELL SCHWEITZER
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I know Tom Disch could be difficult, and was reputed to sometimes have behaved inappropriately, but I can only say that whenever I met him he was friendly, gracious, and witty. I did a long interview with him in the eighties for *Thrust*/*Quantum*, and he was very pleasant about it. He seemed in good cheer the last time I saw him, at Readercon, where he was giving a reading (or revelation) of his sudden discovery of his divinity.

His early stories, particularly 'The Squirrel Cage,' made a big impression on me, as did *Camp Concentration*, as they did on, I am sure, many other readers. He was also one of the very few people in our field to have a genuine, independent career as a poet, rather than just to be someone in SF who wrote poetry (which would be sold to SF fans). No, Tom was a real poet. He had made it in the mainstream of poetry and even wrote criticism for *Poetry* magazine.

That he apparently lived in poverty and desperation is, alas, not all that surprising. He had come out with a charming book recently, but the publisher was a specialty press. I cannot imagine a huge amount of money is involved. If you don't see a writer turning out novels from major publishers steadily, it's a good bet he is not making a living off his writing. It had been a while since the last real Disch novel. I don't know how much of his back list was in print.

I went looking through his blog. There is a lot of really good poetry there. Tom apparently spoke Poetry as effortlessly as an Elizabethan, and sometimes typed in two or three a day, some of them funny, some quite moving.

How is this to be preserved? Presumably at some point whoever was hosting Tom's blog takes this all down, and then, presto! all those poems are gone as if they never existed, save that they probably exist on the hard drive of Tom's computer. What someone needs to do, now, is archive them, and then put together a book of them. They are a kind of last testament from an important and talented writer. Maybe someone should start a project just to print them all out, from the screen, and turn over the results to a university somewhere.

This is worse than after Emily Dickinson's death. She at least had everything on paper, wrapped in neat little bundles. Fortunately her immediate heirs didn't say, as so many illiterate modern Americans might, 'Just throw out that old junk.' But if Tom's computer perishes before it gets into the hands of someone who appreciates his work, what might we lose?

I might also point out, for you ambitious specialty-press publishers out there, that there is a Disch novel that has (to my knowledge) still never been published as a book. It's called *The Trolls of Surewould Forest*, and is a rather indulgent but actually quite funny satire on SF and fantasy, with what looked to me like specific parodies of, among others, Niven et al.'s *Dream Park* and Delany's *Dhalgren*. It was serialised in *Amazing* in the eighties or nineties, in a couple of those top secret and virtually uncirculated glossy issues.

The Trolls of Surewould Forest is of course not facing immediate oblivion, so this isn't quite as pressing a matter. Those issues will physically exist (because they were on good paper) for several centuries, very likely, although they're already rare.

The blog poetry is a more immediate issue.

8 July 2008

Thomas Chatterton. Eighteenth-century poet. He was taken up by the Romantics as the ultimate example of the exquisitely talented person driven to suicide at a young age due to critical neglect. Chatterton

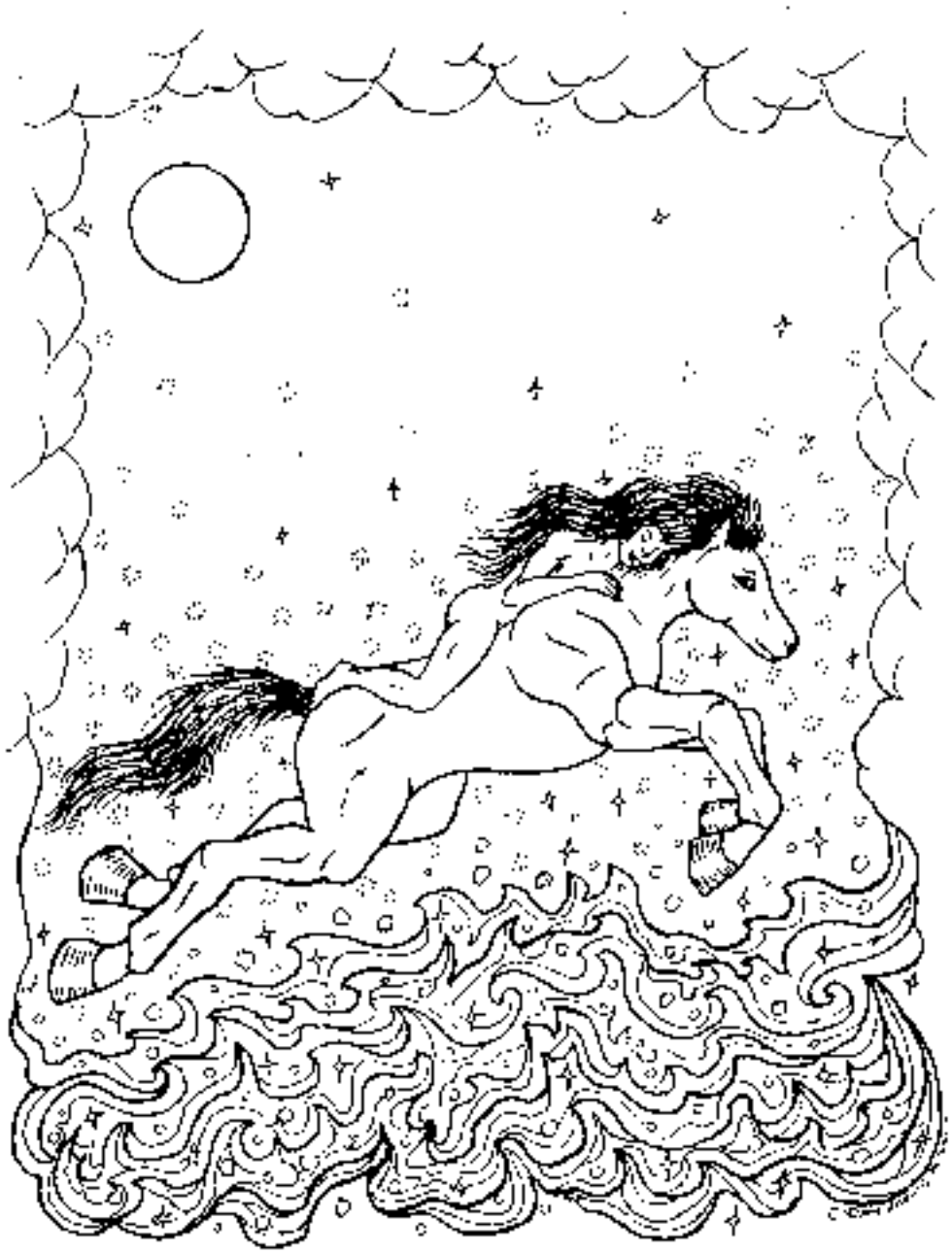
committed suicide at seventeen to avoid death by starvation. He actually was an established poet by that age. Also something of a literary forger.

David Lindsay. The author of *A Voyage to Arcturus*. Lindsay desperately wanted to be a full-time 'literary man.' To this end he tried to make himself commercial, even though his natural mode of expression was so bizarre as to make Thomas Ligotti look as accessible as Edgar Rice Burroughs. In the interests of commercial success, Lindsay systematically and tragically suppressed everything that made him unique, finally achieving a mediocre swashbuckler romance, *The Adventures of M. Dumailly*, which is the only book of his which no one reads anymore. (It was, however, the only book to get a second printing in his lifetime.) Lindsay fell into despair and depression, and finally died of gangrene of the jaw, when he neglected to get treatment for a tooth abscess.

In both cases, the mistake was putting the focus on the *career* rather than on the writing. My idea of a smart career model is Gene Wolfe's, who edited a trade journal until he retired, or that of T. S. Eliot, who had a safe and secure job at a bank while writing his famous poetry. Do not allow yourself to become dependent on your literary work until you discover that you are actually making so much money from writing that you are losing money by going to your day job. Factor medical benefits into this. For most SF writers, even successful ones, even Hugo winners, this day (of going truly freelance) will never come. Get used to it. Redefine 'pro' in your head as 'someone who publishes professionally' instead of 'someone who writes for a living'.

I myself have not managed to follow the Wolfe/Eliot strategy very coherently, but I have resorted to Plan B, which is a classic for creative people: by the time you are about forty, marry someone who has a day job with benefits. I make far more money off eBay than I do from writing, so I have not been entirely idle in any case. I used to pay my own Blue Cross insurance, when I was single.

I can't help but wonder how much happier Tom Disch would have been if he'd had a secure university job, which his reputation as a mainstream poet could doubtless have entitled him. We can also note that his circumstances are a clear illustration of how discrimination against gays hurts people in concrete ways. If Tom Disch and Charles Naylor had had the legal rights of spouses, the landlord couldn't have gotten that eviction ruling so easily, because presumably the lease would have been with



both of them.

9 July 2008

[*JGS: So why not pitch the idea to a publisher and edit it yourself?*]

The new *SET* is a handsome production. I continue to regret that so few physical copies will exist in the future. I am sure this will be a sought-after collector's item someday.

Alas, there is something wrong the third paragraph of my LoC this issue. A word or maybe even a couple sentences seem to be missing. This is a kind of typo I find occurring only since the advent of the computer. It could be that I inserted something, hit the wrong key, moved into overstrike mode, and overwrote part of my own letter. Or else something disappeared for some mysterious reason or another. I know there is a temptation, when all the content is in electronic form, to just plug it in where it goes like a post on a bulletin board, without proofreading it carefully. *Fosfax*, which was very badly edited, was notorious for this. For *SET*, this is a rare lapse, but even I am not totally sure what is being said in that paragraph. Something about how the magazine is like an Old Fans Retirement Home, with all the same people we encountered 30–40 years ago talking about pretty much the same things. At least it's not our ailments and bowel movements. Be thankful for small favours.

I enjoyed your article about the New Wave. I think you and I may be closer to one another on this than you realise. My objection, unlike Lester del Rey's or J. J. Pierce's, was never ideological. If *New Worlds* violated the protocols of Campbellian SF, I did not much care, because I was also a reader of the late Campbell *Analog*, which to my immature mind at the time (and to my mind now, still immature or otherwise) seemed like a petrified forest. There was indeed a need for change. The literature of the future and of new ideas should not be conservative, but often it is. I am a great admirer of Ben Bova as an editor, who brought *Analog* to life again as it had not been alive for perhaps 25 years.

I particularly appreciate your point that the great work of J. G. Ballard, for which he is still read and revered, was largely written *for Carnell*, and was done by the time the New Wave got into high gear. Since then he's been rather like Samuel Delany (about whom, more in a moment), who has a large readership who remembers what he once was and still hopes against hope that he may one day return to form. I have met fans who are unaware that Ballard is still alive or has written anything since the sixties. To them, he is an admired figure of the rather distant past, like Cordwainer Smith.

Ultimately, this New Wave business is about content. Does a story have content or doesn't it? My friend Lee Weinstein, who likes to ask awkward questions will go right to the heart of the matter if you mention a purported New Wave story. 'Does it have any content?' he will ask.

In this same issue you see me discussing Niven and Pournelle's *Inferno* at great length. Now readers might opine that I am mistaken in my conclusions, or that the book is rubbish and not worth this kind of analysis, but the key fact is that such an analysis is possible. I am clearly talking about the book's content. That is because it *has* content, just as James Blish used to insist. ('Science fiction must have content,' he wrote in one of his essays. 'It must be about something.')

You can't do this with the SF work of James Sallis or Langdon Jones, to cite the two failed Wavers you bring up. I except Sallis's mystery fiction, which I have not read, but otherwise their work has no content. It isn't about anything. It is just white noise on the page. The New Wave had a lot of that. That was why Merv Binns had that reaction toward *New Worlds* that you report. No content equals no readers. It's very basic.

In one of his essays, Samuel Delany tried to demolish the whole concept of content, insisting that style was all, i.e. that the way the reader experiences the words on the page equals the 'story'. I have always insisted that when an author indulges in literary theory, he ends up writing about himself. The essay tells us a good deal about why Delany stopped telling stories. But it tells us almost nothing about the rest of literature. A friend who took Delany's idea entirely too seriously once admitted to me that he had no idea why some books sell and others do not. The answer is, of course, content. They contain something that people want to read about.

There was no possibility that the New Wavers could have blown away the Old Guard. To quote another Weinsteinism, 'Even the most lowly hack has something the New Wave writer does not. He can tell a story.' This is a pretty narrow definition of New Wave, I will admit (it excludes all of the works of Thomas Disch, for instance; Disch could tell a story),

but again it gets right to the heart of the matter. The New Wave self-destructed because too often it did not deliver stories. Readers just walked away. The average reader, you must realise, does not read literary criticism and does not care about literary theory. He will simply say 'This is incomprehensible crap', and not buy anything like that again. As I have suggested, when the New Wave (at least in America) became associated with a specific style of book cover (which I quite liked), that style had to be radically changed, because it had been so negatively imprinted upon the public consciousness. The whole point of a Rowena Morrill cover, circa 1978, was not to look like New Wave.

This is not to say that the idea behind the New Wave was not a good one and that it didn't have a liberating influence. There *was* a need to shake SF out of the conservatism it had sunk into by the early sixties. It was perfectly valid to try to bring it in line with the culture of the sixties, when sometimes the field seemed stuck in a weird limbo of 1948. But it is still necessary to remember the need for a story. *The Stars My Destination* could push in all sorts of new directions, because it still had a strong story with interesting characters. This is why we still read Bester and not Langdon Jones or James Sallis.

I am amused to note at the end of your piece that you seem more reactionary than me. I didn't have any trouble with early William Gibson. There is a story in *Neuromancer*. The narrative tropes are actually old ones, mostly derived from forties noir fiction. Their marriage to science fiction is very similar to the effect attempted by the New Wave writers, but Gibson made a shrewder choice of source material, which is why *Neuromancer* is still read and *Report on Probability A* is not.

Incidently, I read *Dhalgren* cover to cover. *All* of it. I did this in the interest of giving Delany a fair hearing. I didn't find the prose all that hard to get through. His style had not seriously deteriorated yet. I did conclude that it was a formless and self-indulgent book, largely about nothing, and I would not recommend it, but I did not find it an unreadable one. *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand* I found unreadable.

13 December 2008

GREG BENFORD
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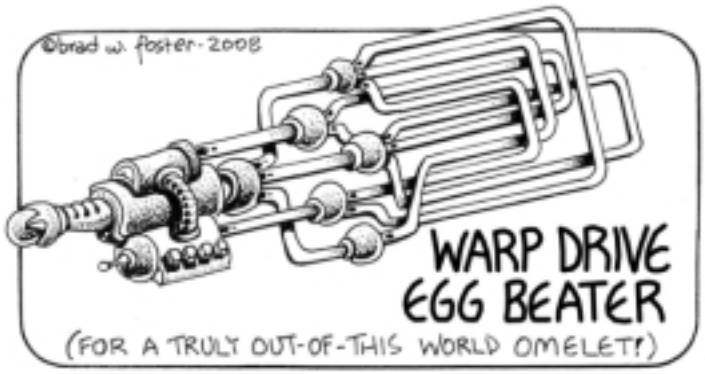
Another fine issue of *Steam Engine Time*, and yes, I'd like to see it win a Hugo.

[*brg* Nothing easier. All the people who would like *SET* to win a Hugo should nominate it, then vote for it. This could happen any year, but never does.*]

Much to enjoy here. Rob Latham's excellent examination of the New Wave, concluding that 'The New Wave controversy was not, contra Ellison's self-serving claim, a mere fannish concoction, but it cannot be understood in its full dynamics without careful attention to the ways that fans, in fitful collaboration with authors and editors, helped to frame, articulate, and sustain it' — is completely right. The greatest strength of our genre is the fan–pro dance, and its impact on creativity is still obvious. I've felt it throughout my career, from 13-year-old fanboy to grey-haired fan *and* pro. (Hell, I still belong to an apa.)

More sobering is how the Wave has crashed. Tom Disch's suicide renders in bold the collapse of so many New Wave writers. Zelazny dead, Ellison nearly silent, Russ gone, Sladek dead. But at least we have Ballard active but dying, Aldiss still a full force, Moorcock still productive. Most of their books are out of print, and the rhetoric long gone. I doubt anybody much believes the New Wave line, now. It echoes of Arts Council rhetoric, to me. Some, like John Clute (the best critic to emerge from the Wave), have never recovered from it, alas. He seems burned out. The Cyber-



punks have held up better, so far.

Meanwhile the resurgence of hard SF that began in the 1970s continues on, gathering strength. Space opera is back with a political edge, too — so there's vitality in the genre, even as writers fade.

George Zebrowski's memorable pieces on Galouye and Lem take the High Church road, while your essay on Chabon catches a career in progress. I knew Mike Chabon pretty well when he was a grad student here at UC Irvine, and stay in touch. He's elated that the Coen brothers have bought rights to *Yiddish Policemen' Union*, and I can think of none better to get Mike's vagrant sense of humour onto the screen. Even if it's the fate of every great SF author to get only one novel into a movie, that would be a good choice.

29 November 2008

TIM TRAIN
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I was especially interested to read the retrospective articles about Mike Moorcock's career. He's an author I very much like, and there must have been a point in the sixties or seventies, between the formation of his Elric character and the writing of the Jerry Cornelius books, when it seemed he could almost pull anything off. It seems to me that Rob Latham gets it pretty much right in his portrait of Moorcock, the 'New Wave' writer, performing different roles for different audiences — he performs all the time in his books; that's how he's able to work in so many authors, and make you believe in his 'multiverse' concept, often in spite of yourself.

I do wonder how often Moorcock believes in his own performances. One story about him I remember (which I came across in the introduction to a book I didn't buy that I found in the depths of Gould's Bookshop in Sydney) involved him very slowly and carefully destroying all the glass windows in a Soho restaurant in the late sixties, in a drunken rage. It concluded with the lines, 'Afterwards, the doorman apologised to me.' I wonder if that is true, if it's an exaggeration, if it's a self-glorifying lie, or if the doorman really did apologise to Moorcock afterwards. Great story, though! And I have similar problems with his books, especially his later ones — I'm less and less able to believe in their conceits. The stylistic mannerisms seem more and more exaggerated, and they don't seem to have a point. Mike Moorcock, the anti-hero with a thousand faces, perhaps?

To my question: my friend Alexis is currently working on a paper about artificial intelligence and robots in popular culture and film; it may or may not develop at a later point into a more substantial project about this and related themes. At the moment she's looking around for science fiction literature, film, or criticism that deal with the idea of slavery. Are you aware of any science fiction books, films or criticism that link the theme of robots/artificial intelligence with slavery? There don't seem (to me at least) to be too many. At the moment, we've identified the films *Blade Runner* and *I, Robot*. Somewhat surprisingly (to me, again), the only classic science fiction story in which slavery of robots is a prominent theme seems to be is in Karel Capek's *Rossum's Universal Robots*. Maybe I'm missing something?

[*JGS: One of my favourite SF movies is *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1969, Universal Studios, dir. Joseph Sargent, based on D. F. Jones's novel *Colossus*), which I think could fall into this category, since it's about two supercomputers that end up essentially enslaving humanity. Harlan Ellison's 'I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream' is another example. Both feature computers, not robots, but perhaps that falls into the AI side of your question?*]

Any suggestions you could offer would be most helpful, especially older zines that discuss this or related subjects, or indeed any criticism that deals with the theme of slavery and robots.

29 November 2008

[*brg* It was Stanislaw Lem's contention (in 'Robots and SF', in a 1970 issue of *SF Commentary*) that all robot stories are about slavery in one way or another, especially Asimov's *I Robot* stories, and their Three Rules of Robotics. Those three rules are built into the structure of the robots by a ruling class, the humans. The robots are created to be slaves. If robots gain real awareness, actual artificial intelligence, they become persons, and therefore Asimov's Three Rules of Robotics can no longer apply.*]

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER
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You are quite right to reprint Rob Latham's fine article. For decades, *Extrapolation* and *Science-Fiction Studies* have come with skull-and-crossbone warnings attached to them, stating, 'Warning! Impenetrable academic jargon. Do *not* read if you're not a professor.' As a result, most serious readers of SF ignore anything published in these two journals. But they shouldn't ignore Latham, who is a good writer who is well worth reading — and who gets many, many chutzpah points for getting grants to read fanzines.

I knew a fair amount of what Latham had to say, but not everything. I hadn't realised that Ted White was at least initially opposed to the New Wave. It didn't seem to me that *Amazing* and *Fantastic* under his watch were anti-New Wave magazines, but that doesn't surprise me. And the footnote I wish Latham would expound on further was that 'longstanding social and personal divisions among the Futurians' led to splits among them 30 years later on the New Wave. One can easily see Wollheim and Asimov coming out with their Old Wave support, based on their longstanding taste in SF, not out of a desire to stick it to Knight and Blish one more time. (And, of course, Asimov was only barely a Futurian and not part of the inner circle.)

Bruce brings up the issue of which New Wavers survived and had careers. Could it be that the writers who learned traditional storytelling principles — Aldiss, Ballard, Disch, Moorcock, Spinrad — survived while the writers who stuck to nonfunctional word patterns perished? I've always thought that Norman Spinrad, for example, combines radical content with traditional structure, and readers will put up with a lot of pretty wonky ideas if there's a good tale behind them. Even in *Bug Jack Barron* and *The Iron Dream* you can see a writer who's memorised the Scott Meredith plot skeleton. (This is also true of Spinrad's direct literary descendant, Bruce Sterling, who also combines very interesting ideas with very traditional storytelling.)

I enjoyed Bruce's report on his adventures in Canberra. But what is the difference between the Canberra Science Fiction Society and the Canberra Science Fiction Group? Canberra isn't that large of a town, and one wonders how it can support two clubs. Here in Washington we have the Washington Science Fiction Association (WSFA) and the Potomac River Science Fiction Society (PRSFS), which split off from WSFA in 1975 because they felt that WSFA was more interested in partying and running cons than actually talking about books. The two clubs have stayed apart ever since. (One fan strenuously tried to reunite them, but both clubs resisted his efforts.)

31 December 2008

[*brg* The CSFS has history on its side — forty years of history — but I got the impression from chatting to Helen and Leigh Hyde in October that it has stayed an entity unto itself during the last few decades. The CSFG appears to have started independently about ten years ago, and decided to begin the tradition of Canberra SF conventions all over again. I suspect that nobody in the CSFG was aware of the older society for some time, but the groups seem to coexist happily these days.*]

STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England

As distraction from the maddening lurgi (I could cover the house front with a snow scene with the paper hankies used) and dread onset of St Marketingmasstide, I have been enjoying reading *Steam Engine Time* 9 properly.

Re the mentions of Moorcock's musical involvement: there are still a very few copies left, I understand, of Brian Tawn's book *Dude's Dreams: The Music of Michael Moorcock* (Hawkfan, Spring 1997, 106 pp.), which is particularly useful since, as well as a detailed account of Moorcocok's playing 'career', discography, and art by Andreas Stiture, it includes the words of Moorcock's song lyrics and poems, including those, like the 'Entropy Tango' sequence, that appeared in the novels. (Hawkfan's address is 27 Burchett Road, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2PR, England.)

I hope that the comment that Rob Hansen's *Then* series of UK fandom histories is an ongoing work-in-progress means that, after a long gap, he is working on it again, going forward beyond the 1970s (*Then 4*), which appeared in paper form in 1993. At the time I recall vaguely a statement from him that for personal reasons he didn't want to tackle the 1980s. It would be good if that block could be overcome, as the first four are a most useful resources for the 1930–70s, so it would be good to have their equivalent for the 1980s and 1990s.

Danny Lovecraft may be the only person with that surname in the world, let alone Australia, albeit his name is borrowed plumage. Years back, when I was helping out with the English end on Ken Faig and Langley Searles's researches into H. P. Lovecraft's ancestors, the vicar of Broad-hempston, Devon, the village where a Lovecraft couple had kept the pub in much earlier decades, put me in contact with an elderly lady whose grandparents had included a Lovecraft. She said she knew of none with that surname alive, and there were none in any UK telephone directory; and Ken Faig drew a blank on the internet for the USA. He was excited to learn of Danny Lovecraft until he discovered that he wasn't a Lovecraft by descent. It looks as if the name is extinct.

I was intrigued to see a mention of the glass-throwing incident at the 1970 SciCon poetry reading. When I was in contact with John Brunner while writing articles about his poetry, I asked him about this. He wouldn't give me the name of the thrower, saying he knew who it was, but as the man was dead, it was a matter left. He did say he'd responded to the assault by reading his poem of insult, 'The Flyting of Mr X', although it had not been written about the miscreant specifically.

Rob Latham's article cites Terry Jeeves as a protagonist in the New Wave wars on the 'conservative' side. He tended to provide knee-jerk rather than ideological objections to any change to his parameters, at least in my experience. For instance, he systematically objected to any presence of poetry in fanzines. This had been a catchphrase of his since at least 1955 in *Now and Then*, and in the 1970s in his *Erg* (in an editorial later reprinted in *Ugly Duckling* to raise debate), calling for action to drive poetry out.

I'm not digging this up to have a go at Terry, but to suggest that the tidy ideological framework of such disputes tends to fall apart at the level of individuals and their personal agendas.

If I gave the erroneous impression that I was involved the New Wavers at any time, apologies for being misleading. I was just a reader of the Moorcock period *New Worlds*. My contacts with Moorcock, Aldiss, Butter-worth and others came well later, when I was gathering information to write about *New Worlds* poetry and poets. The few anecdotes I've heard, other than the widely known ones, are heard second or thirdhand. Bryn Fortey, for instance, who was in London at the time, described a typical party scene where Judith Merril was in attendance. It was like the proverbial bees around a honey pot, as all the New Wavers swarmed around her hoping to be included in her anthologies.

22 December 2008

The history of poetry in SF goes back to Gernsback's pre-SF radio tales magazines — much of it filler. Several SF pros had poems as their first sales: Sam Youd (John Christopher) and Robert Silverberg are examples that come to mind, and there are always pros who were or are also poets, including ones much more serious than Asimov with his limericks (though he deserves thanks for ensuring that the magazine that bears his name uses poetry). Aldiss, Bradbury, Brunner, Disch, Le Guin, Haldeman, Moorcock, Pohl, Watson and Zelazny are just many names in a long list.

Did Campbell and Gold use poetry in their magazines? Campbell used on poetry in *Astounding*/*Analog*, though he did in *Unknown*. Gold used none

in Galaxy. See the Introduction, Scott E. Green's *Contemporary Sscience Fiction and Horror Poetry: A Resource Guide and Biographical Dictionary* (Greenwood Press, 1989). Green points out that *Astounding* was the 'only major exception' among 1920s–40s pulps in not using poetry, while Gold probably didn't use it in *Galaxy*, as he was trying to differentiate his magazine from 'the old pulpish tradition'.

As you say, generally the SF community has taken little interest in poetry (for instance, the absence of a poetry Hugo, partially covered by the SFPA's Rhysling Awards, which are included in the Nebula anthologies) except for a liking for the wannabe-humorous light verse.

I did do a history of the field, which appeared in *The Zone* some years back. In total about 25,000 words, they would be a bit long for reprinting in *Steam Engine Time*. You might better reprint some of my separate articles on separate aspects of SF poetry.

16 January 2009

MICHAEL CHABON
San Francisco, California

Your article ['The Amazing Adventures of Michael Chabon'] was great ... I'm blushing a little. Thank you for sending *Steam Engine Time* 9 along for me to enjoy.

One funny thing: I was never at Potlatch! Don't know who that dude was with my name tag!

3 December 2008

[*brg* Thanks to Kirsten Gong-Wong of *Locus* for putting me in touch with Michael Chabon so I could send him the *SET* 9 article about *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. Thanks, Michael, for replying. No thanks for spoiling the dining-out story that came out of my 2005 Bring Bruce Bayside trip: how I nearly got to meet Michael Chabon.*]

STEVE JEFFERY
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I picked up a couple of older *SFC* issues from the fanzine table at Novacon: *SFC* 58, with Turner's trashing of Delany's *Triton*, and responses to the same in the *SFC* 61/62 double issue (just look at the names in that lettercol! Le Guin, Aldiss, Priest, Disch, Lem ...), and a 1989 *Metaphysical Review*: No 14: The Music Issue.

30 November 2008

In *SET* 9, It's weird reading what I wrote back then, and even more so to realise that I have only just got round to watching the first episodes of both the *Edge of Darkness* and *Battlestar Galactica* DVDs I mentioned all those months back.

I also started to watch something called *Crusade*, a *Babylon V* spin-off I'd also had on the shelf for a long while. It was rubbish. (I have never been a fan of *B5*, though I loved *Farscape*, largely because it knew how to send itself up.)

I know that you're not a comics fan, but I'm dead pleased with one of my Xmas presents from Vix: Brian Walker's *The Comics Since 1945*. Not entirely unexpected, I have to admit. (Our presents to each other rarely are; that way avoids disappointment and the embarrassment in trying to find the receipt.) I came across this in Borders bookstore a couple of weeks before Xmas, and somehow left a note with the publication details lying carelessly on the coffee table.

4 January 2009

The print copy of *SET* has been back and forth to work a number of times (though reading on a bus, bouncing along at 40 mph on some very rutted country roads, is just a bit difficult). There are times, such as in the middle of Rob Latham's fascinating article, when I'm almost grateful being stuck in a slow queue of traffic so I can read in peace. Almost: it's already a one-and-a-half-hour commute each way, and I tend to get impatient a lot more quickly in my old age.

SET 9 was jam-packed with fascinating and interesting stuff, and much as I enjoyed the articles on Lem, Chabon, Disch and the New Wave in particular ('Fun in Canberra' was good too, although I've already read this in **brg** 56), I find it doesn't leave many comment hooks. I also wondered if I noticed a pattern to the articles in this issue. Lem, Disch and — to some extent — Aldiss are respected, but not really loved by the SF community (readers and professionals alike), because of their

insistence that SF grow up, tidy its bedroom of its old and broken toys, and get out and find a real job.

Coming back to SF in the mid seventies when I moved to West London and easy access to specialist bookstores like Forbidden Planet — at university I was reading studentish 'improving literature' like Hesse and Kafka, although this is also where I first read *Gormenghast* and fell in love with Fuschia — I encountered the New Wave pretty much after the main fuss had largely blown over. At that time I tended to side with the New Wavers, amassing a collection of Ballard, Moorcock and Aldiss paperbacks, and Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthologies. I still have a lot of those taking up several yards of shelf space, along with the *New Worlds Quarterly* and *Orbit* anthologies and Women's Press titles from writers like Saxton and Russ, though I haven't read many of them for decades. As with most things, posterity tends to win out over the strident and confrontational editorials and manifestos of the time, and while some of it was original and fresh and did change the course of SF, a lot more, mostly from the acolytes and hangers-on, is now seen as pretentious and embarrassing rubbish. The same is largely true of every movement, from the New Wave to cyberpunk from prog rock to punk, dada and surrealism to Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin.

Cy Chauvin has been the BSFA's US rep ever since I became a member, but despite seeing his name occasionally in letters columns, I've never known much about him up to now. The issue of utopias was discussed some time back in Acnestis and since then, in discussions elsewhere, I've come to regard a real utopia more as a process, a journey towards a goal, than an actual place or state. As Cy points out, and writers like Le Guin, Delany and others have shown, a utopia envisioned as a place is often only utopian for some, and may be positively dystopian for those who, for various reasons, don't or refuse to conform or fit. Although Iain Banks has made a good stab at depicting a utopian post-scarcity Culture, it sometimes seems trivial (we rarely see what normal people do when not subverting planetary governments or blowing them up for Special Circumstances). The only one I ever felt I really would like to live in, to be part of, was Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Mars' trilogy. To paraphrase Wordsworth, 'to be alive in that time would be wonderful, but also to be young would be very heaven'. Perhaps this is my science background: to feel committed to and part of a great project, one that will literally change the world, and see it happening around you. (And yet 'Mars' also has its dissenters, who see that change as destructive, and KSR's achievement is to evoke sympathy for them as well, and explore the search for a middle way.) But my allegiance is with Sax, more than Anne, and — with more than a passing amount of envy — with the first-generation Martians most of all.

I'm also intrigued by KSR's twist — which I don't think I've seen before — that you 'buy into' a project group and a role in it, which implies both an ideological and financial commitment rather than seeing work as a nine-to-five drudge, forgotten as you leave the car park. (We are all 'stakeholders' now, in current PC terminology, rather than bosses, employees or customers.)

What KSR glosses over is what happens to the less-than-first-class talents in such an arrangement. There must be some, doomed merely to be of average ability, even if highly motivated. As someone who was nearly always last at being picked for games, or because of shyness forever on the edge of interesting conversations, I always feel for them. Would they be demotivated at being pipped for the interesting and prestigious jobs? Would they just give up, or would that turn to active resentment? Does Mars support people who elect not to work, or let them starve — or asphyxiate, air being probably a more precious resource than food and water? Robinson never really seems to touch on this. His characters are all players, on one side or the other, but rarely the bystanders, the 'Mrs Browns' that Le Guin writes about ('Science Fiction and Mrs Brown' in *Language of the Night*), whose presence signals that a work of SF is a novel rather than an adventure story.

I'm not sure what to make of Darrell Schweitzer's argument in 'Going to hell with a slide rule in hand'. Whatever it did, it didn't fulfil (or really attempt to) the promise in the opening two statements, and especially the second, that 'Virtually all science fiction is religious in nature'. Whichever way you cut it, you can't demonstrate a claim of 'virtually all' based on a single work. (Farah Mendlesohn's observation that 'science fiction is that last bastion of Gothic literature' probably says more about SF's tendency to evoke the sublime.) Even so, the argument fell apart for me, not much further on the same page, when Darrell excuses Matheson' s hand-waving as unimportant in passing a horror/fantasy off as science fiction. Far from being unimportant, hand-waving is a con-juror's device that signals that something else is going on; that you are, in effect, being duped. This is fine in a stage magic show when you know that someone is not really being sawn in half or skewered with a dozen

swords, but admire the skill of the performance, but when encountered in a work of fiction, more often signals a contempt for the audience, an attitude that 'I can just make up something that sounds impressive; they'll never notice'. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) a lot of us do.

11 January 2009

BRAD FOSTER
PO Box 165246, Irving, TX 75016

Got in my gorgeous print copy of *SET* 9 this weekend. It looks good on the Web (and appreciate the extra work done to reformat so much material to the computer screen there!), but nothing like holding this hefty publication in my hands. I'm pleased you let me be a small part of it. Hope you like the accompanying bits of weirdness, and can use these.

[*brg* Jan and I very much appreciate artistic contributions, especially filler art. Thanks, Brad, Amy and others who have offered art for this issue. :: The efanzines.com version of *SET* is the *first* edition; I then attach to the pages, in Ventura, a different stylesheet, and play with the page layout in order to generate the print version.*]

As usual, lots of great reading in this one. I appreciated the Chabon article. I've not seen much talk of his *Summerland* novel, possibly because of the YA label, but I enjoyed it tremendously, especially for the updating of fantasy characters away from the usual suspects of elves and centaurs and using American icons and myths. Great, great reading.

Thanks to Lyn McConchie for mentioning the Nora Roberts/J. D. Robb series 'In Death'. Cindy has read and enjoyed a number of Roberts books, but was totally unaware of these, so I think I'll be seeking out a few of those as gifts down the line.

Re one of your comments to Darrell Schweitzer regarding how abstract painters were often quite good at making real pictures, too (to paraphrase you slightly). Way back mumble-mumble decades ago I took an advanced-level painting course, where we basically were given hours of studio time each week, and had to be there and working. Techniques, subject, materials were all up to us; just had to create. There was an instructor on hand to answer questions and give some direction if needed. One student set up a large canvas against one wall, would whack it with a paintbrush to make a mark or two, march all the way to the other end of the long studio to look at it for a while, then back and whack at it again. This went on for the entire first day. On the second day, I was close enough to hear the conversation when the instructor approached this student and said he had a request. He wanted to student to paint something in a realistic manner. It didn't have to be large, and it could be anything the student wanted. But the point the instructor made (and which I loved) was that he wanted to see that the student was creating this type of work because it was what he *wanted* to do, not that it was the only thing that he *could* do. I don't recall what the student came up with, but it was enough to make the instructor happy, and let him continue as he wished.

And thanks so much to David Russell for the more than flattering comments on my own work, and my slim *Elegant Ladies* collection. I blushingly appreciate the kind words. (*Elegant Ladies* and other of my art pieces are still in print and available from my vulgarly commercially orientated site at http://www.jabberwockygraphix.com. Buy now, and buy often!)

I'd like to pass along my 'good luck' to Jerry Kaufman on dealing with his ailing mother. Cindy and I pretty much turned over our lives to taking care of her father in the last four to five years of his life, slowly working through levels from her living with him for a while at his home to care for him, then getting some professional help to come in as it got tougher. Then had to move him to a full-time care facility, and finally into our own home the last year to really be able to keep an eye on him. There are a *lot* of people and

businesses out there to help at every level, more and better than there were even ten years ago, as this becomes a larger and larger problem. It just takes time to research what you can get in your own area. But, what else is there to do, this is our family, and we care for each other.

15 December 2008

CASEY WOLF
14-2320 Woodland Drive, Vancouver, BC V5N 3P2

[*brg* Until recently I had thought Casey had published only one short story. Late last year she arranged to send me an entire collection of her fine stories, published as by 'C. June Wolf', called *Finding Creatures* (Wattle & Daub Books, Grandview RPO PO Box 78038, Vancouver BC V5N 5W1, Canada; 236 pp. Enquire: www.wattleanddaubbooks.ca). I will review this book as soon as possible.*]

Oh, how wonderful! I'm very glad you liked *Finding Creatures*, and that you want to review it. Yahoo!

PodCastle is a free podcasting site that features fantasy short fiction. Its sister sites are EscapePod (SF) and Pseudopod (horror). I've just discovered them through my new addiction, LibraryThing.

I didn't actually have an old addiction. I just came across LT, started getting into it, and found endless enjoyment in its many rooms and corridors. Then someone on LT mentioned PodCastle, and I'm snared again. There are so many ways to have fun that I never dreamed of!

Speaking of which, I've been asked to help coordinate an SF and fantasy reading night at a local coffee house. We're starting in February. I'm looking forward to it. (All part of my evil — if somewhat poorly thought out — plan to take over the world.)

27 November 2008

GILLIAN POLACK
Chifley, ACT 2606

I sent your Fan Guest of Honour speech on to the Conflux committee, with much joy. It's a lovely speech. You got me thinking about my early fan days. Fandom in the late 1970s wasn't nearly as welcoming to my shyness as it was to yours, earlier, and I dropped out when I decided I was a bad writer. I'm not sure the MUSFA just then knew how to handle Arts students, because a lot of the men (who seemed to be all doing engineering) were just as shy as me, but didn't have the Arts veneer of talking. Anyhow, it was then I first met *SFC* and came across your work: a guy I knew was an addict, and he let me read his copies. I loved it then, I still love it now, and I am very, very glad you were our guest at Conflux!

Now I want to spend a quiet few minutes thinking about the SF of my childhood. My father loved 'Doc Smith', and the bookshelf at the end of the hall had Lensman books two shelves above Dad's *Playboys*. We didn't bother with the *Playboy*s (Dad said he got them for the articles, of course) and read those Lensman books about the same time we read Enid Blyton.

2 December 2008

I was at Melbourne Uni from 1979 to 1982 and actually had a story or two in the Melbourne SF Club's magazine *Yggdrasil*. I met Dennis Callegari, but I can't remember the other names. I'm bad at names, though, and it was a long time ago. I doubt anyone remembers me — I was desperately shy in MUSFA because I cared so much about writing. I was much less shy elsewhere.

I don't think you and I met — I went to the daytime meetings in the union building and almost no-one talked to me except Peter Brown (who I knew from MUDS — Melbourne University Dramatic Society), so I gave up the social side as a bad job. Everyone was articulate and thoughtful and interested in the things I was interested in, but I just didn't seem to fit. As I said, I was shy. I kept my membership, turned up to daytime meetings from time to time, sent occasional half-baked stories to *Yggdrasil*, but I was never properly active. The clubs I was more active in were the Debating Society, the French Club and the Jewish Students' Society (this last one kept my family happy).

I had stories accepted for publication elsewhere in that period, but the

magazines all folded (five accepted my stories and then promptly folded — I decided I was a curse on all magazines — one of the things that prompted that funk of mine!) I have written very few short stories since then. I lost the stories when I moved (the five years after Melbourne Uni were spent living in Sydney, London, Paris and Toronto, so lots of things went astray) and I have always wondered if my missing stories would appear in someone's archive, sometime. Anyway, it means that you may have read an early piece of mine, sometime, without knowing it. I don't know if this is a good thing or a bad thing.

I saw *SF Commentary* through Peter, who loved it. He used to lend me his copies and I used to also read them avidly. I never thought it was possible to actually own my own copies. (I love the Net — now I can download your fanzines as fast as you can produce them!) I didn't get to keep copies (Peter wanted them back!), so I don't have a collection, but I read them, with much pleasure. (Now you have me wondering what happened to Peter — it's been 20 years or more since I last saw him.)

I still have a bunch of *Yggdrasil*s, somewhere.

2 December 2008

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

I like big fanzines, so I ought to really like *Steam Engine Time* 9. Best to stay inside, as there's a raging snowstorm going on outside. Not sure if it's already hit your area, Jan; you must miss the warmth of Florida.

[*JGS: Nope, I'm a northern lass, but we've had more snow this year than I've seen since I lived in Alaska in '59, and that's saying something. I'm tired of shovelling the darned stuff, even with my son's help!*]

I hope that my interest in science fiction will never wane, although as it changes, I find less to connect myself to SF. A trip to the used book store or to the To Be Read shelf at home usually brings me back, especially if it's something from my own Golden Age, the 50s and 60s. In fact, I just read some more of Bert Chandler's 'John Grimes' stories. When we were kids, and had but a few pennies in our pockets, how many of us had parents who thought we were wasting it by buying comics or those horrible sci-fi books? Lots of us, I suspect.

Hello, Jan ... I'm glad things are better for you. It takes time and effort and patience to consciously change your way of thinking, and the way your brain works. Stay positive and keep smiling, and your son loves you enough to push you to get that treatment.

[JGS: Thanks. Actually, my son asked to start back to therapy again for himself, and I get my own appointments when I need them. Due to recent incidents, my son's therapy is now covered through the county mental health dept., with the same therapist; the poor kid is going through more than was initially diagnosed. I feel so bad for him; at 16 he shouldn't have to deal with this stuff on top of being a teenager, so I support him with love and am stricter with rules and boundaries, and he's responded well to that. I'm guilty of a lack of discipline, which I now see for myself. Depression masks so many things. Now that we're both on meds for it, things have improved a lot and life is much less stressful.*]

Hello, Bruce ... it has been a while since we've been guests at a convention. It's always fun, and a balm to the ego, but I think we've become virtually unknown to the newer people who start attending local conventions. I am finding that even though you may have a pretty good idea of what happened way back when (especially seeing you were there at the time), there are others who are younger, and who weren't there, who scoff at your version of things, and here's what really happened ... Even though you may object to this treatment, suddenly you become too old to trust or listen to. I am not sure how you get the word out to those you want to tell about fanzines, Meteor Inc., etc.

[*brg* When we became involved in fandom, we were desperate to find out more about the history of fandom, its great fanzines and fanzine editors, tales of the great conventions, etc. I can't understand people without curiosity, who really think the moment they live in is the only moment there is. It's epistemological brain meltdown.*]

If achieving a dream in science fiction is to keep writing, perhaps I've been successful in some way. I suspect I will be writing letters and offering criticism and news as long as fanzines keep coming out, whether on paper or via electrons, and as long as people want to hear from me.

I knew a while ago that Geneva Melzack was emigrating to Australia, but I hadn't heard anything more. I hope she's found a fannish group, and maybe she might produce a fanzine again? Good to hear she's landed someplace.

I have some Galouye and Disch books on my shelves, but again, they are authors who I should read more of, but ... never enough time, never enough money; just read what and who you can, and enjoy what you can read. Harlan Ellison's opinion from the sixties notwithstanding, I find that some fans enjoy stirring trouble, but for the most part, fandom can be an effective marketing department for some professional writers. Jan, I figure that's what you'd done for Carolyn Cherryh in your own fanzine *Ribbons* (which I shall loc soon, even if it is the last issue). Conventions promote authors to promote authors, and vice versa. and a convention is still one of the best places to promote your latest book or publication in a magazine.

[*JGS: Due to the low number of readers and contributors throughout its run, *Ribbons* probably never helped Ms Cherryh much in the marketing sense; she has name recognition now — after over 30 years of publication, so she doesn't need my help. *Ribbons* was started to gather her readers into a community in fanzine form, but the creator of Shejidan.com had already done that, so I decided that *Ribbons* was moot and closed it. Twenty years ago, it might have found a wider audience.*]

When Judith Merril moved to Toronto, she did some television work at the local educational channel, TVOntario. She became The Undoctor, and critiqued episodes of *Doctor Who* as they were broadcast, plus other words of wisdom. I never found her as charming as most others did, and we rarely talked.

I found more work, finally. Since early September, I have been working for Southern Graphic Systems, an American printing company that purchased some Canadian companies. Right now, I am a packaging proofreader at SGS, and I proofread packing for consumer goods. I now know the reason for all the little codes you might see on a package or box. It's an area of publishing that might not be what I'd like to have, but right now, the worldwide financial crisis is killing the Canadian publishing industry. At least, I am working. I am on an extension of my original three-month contract, and I am still hoping that they might yet hire me. If everyone's finances are in such trouble, a full-time job would sure help me out.

I expect I will probably see Darrell Schweitzer in Niagara Falls, New York, in the spring at Eeriecon 11. Money is always the determining factor for just about anything we do, or want to do, if only we could afford it. I should ask David Russell for some art for the fanzine I am planning.

I'll wish you both, and your families, the best Christmas ever, and a Happy New Year, too. May we get what we want, but more importantly, what we need. Thank you both!

9 December 2008

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI
15 Crannell Avenue, Delmar, NY 12054

Many thanks for the new issue. My Campbell speech has had the same reaction in your letters column as it did over here: universal praise — and silence from the publishing world.

Except now from Greg Pickersgill, who seems unsure of whom and what he wants to speak. But he is typical of a certain foot-in-the-mouth speaker who wants to have it both ways: he knows not and says so but speaks anyway. My work since 1999 has been nearly universally praised, nominated and awarded. As I have said, I don't need more praise. Pickersgill speaks with a hedge but speaks, spreading misleading good cheer. I wonder how people can be this thoughtless, usually beginning, 'This is only my opinion; I may be wrong', but then they want you to believe it anyway. I shouldn't even reply, but hope springs, much too often, that some light may be spread about.

I wrote an afterword to the new anniversary edition of *Macrolife* from Pyr Books, and think that this short essay might be of interest. Happily, the new edition was treated almost like a new book, with lavish praise, far exceeding the good comments for the 1979 Harper edition. One comment simply said, and I paraphrase, that most writers would give their right arms to have an old book reissued. But good is good and cannot be denied, the writer added.

I'm reminded of a comment made by Otto Klemperer, the conductor, about when he was a young man and conducted like an angel, but could

never do anything right for the critics; now, as an old dinosaur, he could do nothing wrong.

The Walker edition of *Solaris* is now worth some $3000 to collectors.

I haven't mentioned it, but I have written some two books worth of film criticism, the newest in James Gunn and Marleen Barr's *Reading Science Fiction* from Palgrave. I have written about Tarkovsky there. I'll try to send you some of my film writings as soon as I can.

16 December 2008

BEN INDICK
428 Sagamore Avenue, Teaneck NJ 07666

I received and read *SET* with pleasure, although as usual, there is no steam engine in sight on the cover. It looks like an agglomeration of kitchen gizmos over one of those grand space shots the Hubble scope spews forth. I enclose a most attenuated issue of my apazine *Ibid*. The last few have been as slim, denoting my illness. At 85, about all that one can expect is bad, and, at best, my problem is one of balance. I do not get out, have given up driving and am totally in my wife's control. Worst of all, I am slave to my walker!

I have a copy of Zebrowski's *Cave of Stars*, still unread, and I had some Lem, but did not care for the latter and gave it away. I doubt that I'll try digging it up. I liked Tom Disch, particularly *On Wings of Song*. Your article was excellent, Bruce, with well-chosen quotations.

I admired *Kavalier and Clay* as much as *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* by Chabon, although the latter could have been much better without the tiresome working out of the mystery. You say you do not read comics. I recommend you try Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*. Wonderful! He and Chabon form a Jewish writerly renaissance recalling the halcyon era of Singer and Malamud.

Just when I was about to give up on the listed appearance of Darrell Schweitzer, there he was, on the final pages. And no less welcome.

30 December 2008

ROBERT ELORDIETA
20 Custer Circle, Traralgon VIC 3844

I finally saw the James Bond movie last night at the cinema. It was good. Lots of fighting, violence and explosions. It has been about three months since I last went to the cinema. Sometimes there hasn't been much on at the cinema or it screened a movie at the wrong times for me.

17 December 2008

Another interesting cover by Dick Jenssen.

I recognised some of the characters in the picture of 'Unusual Suspects (Bruce)' (Ditmar). Bruce (of course), The Terminator, Robbie the Robot. It was easy to recognise Robbie the Robot. Who could not forget the classic movie, *Forbidden Planet*?

I'm glad to hear that Jan Stinson is starting to feel better. Having family support helps a lot.

'Fun in Canberra' was great. I always like reading convention reports. It is always interesting to see what the person did at a convention and also to see his or her personal views on panels and everything else. I've been to the Australian War Memorial myself and I always find it a fascinating place. It has been a few years since I last visited Canberra.

I met Ross Temple for the first time at Convergence 2 (Natcon) last year (2007) in Melbourne. He is a nice bloke. Ross and another New Zealander came to Convergence 2 to see the guests and at the same time to tell convention attendees about the upcoming New Zealand Natcon (Easter 2008). I heard that Ross's fellow New Zealander got told off by hotel management for having a very loud room party. It must have been a good room party.

I've also met Richard Harland and Jack Dann before. I have bought Richard's *Black Crusade* novel and Jack's two *Dreaming* anthologies.

It must have been a real pain in the backside, on your first panel, 'That's not science fiction: it's too good', to find all the old clichéd defences of science fiction being brought out. Especially when you have been hearing the same thing over and over again for the last forty years.

[*brg* From the back of the room, Ian Nichols said lots of things

that were unfamiliar to the panellists and audience, but he wasn't allowed to make his real points. It's not so much what is repeated year after year that is irritating, but the defensive tone in which it is said: 'If we are so good, why aren't we accepted by the mainstream?' Yet the people who adopt such a tone of voice do not want to write 'mainstream' books, and would hate themselves for writing them. The people who buy books of general fiction buy them because that's what *they* want! Our difficulty as SF readers is to find what *we* want; we have to travel strange paths to hidden-away bookshops in faraway suburbs, or Google the websites of odd small presses on the other side of the world. So why be defensive? If SF becomes accepted by 'the mainstream', it will be because it has *become* mainstream, so we won't want to read it anymore. We live in a different fiction-universe, so why not enjoy ours?*]

It's a pity that most fans at the convention were not interested in aspects of fandom, have little idea of its history or what it represents, and don't want to know more. If it wasn't for early fandom we wouldn't have conventions, fanzines, prozines, apas, books, clubs, etc.

It sounds as though the Conflux period banquet went well and was well researched. The movie that comes to mind is *The Untouchables*, starring Kevin Costner, Robert De Niro, Sean Connery and Andy Garcia.

You do have a valid point when you mention, with global finances collapsing day by day, the ability of people from overseas to afford to visit Australia in 2010 for Aussiecon 4. Especially when conventions rely on early subscriptions to be able to secure a venue, guests, advertising, the convention book, and all the other associated costs involved when running a convention. The overseas attendees, as well as paying to attend the convention, also have to factor in the cost of flights, accommodation, food, buying merchandise in the dealers room, etc.

The tributes of Stanislaw Lem, Daniel F. Galouye and Thomas M. Disch were good. Unfortunately I haven't read any books from these authors. I enjoyed the movie *The Thirteenth Floor*, which was adapted from a Daniel F. Galouye novel called *Simulacron-3* in the US and *Counterfeit World* in the UK.

I thought that Thomas M. Disch only wrote fiction. I didn't realise that he also wrote poetry.

Who would have thought that the revoking of Stanislaw Lem's membership to the SFWA would become known as 'The Lem Affair'? It comes as no surprise to me that the SFWA's recent online obituary for Lem glosses over the case.

Even though I haven't read any of J. G. Ballard's books, I have seen the movie *Empire of the Sun*, directed by Steven Spielberg. I enjoyed it. The singing was great. I didn't know that the background for the book came from J. G. Ballard's experiences as an civilian interned in a Japanese civilian POW camp during World War II, in China.

23 December 2008

MATTHEW DAVIS
15 Impney Close, Church Hill North, Redditch B98 9LZ

Again another wonderful and rich issue of *Steam Engine Time*. I liked its theme with the various 'New Wave' pieces. Your appreciation of Tom Disch was very good, and I didn't know he had a brief spell on Australian radio.

Tom's last book of poetry was *The Size of It*, from Anvil Press, a proper mainstream poetry publisher in the UK, so you should probably be able to get a copy order for Australia. It includes 'In Praise of Obesity'.

When I was first researching about Tom, I had lots of his articles that I'd bought online from newspaper archives. All I can find saved, since my computer has died several times, is the latter half of his career as an art critic, before Charlie died. Hope you enjoy reading them.

[*brg* Thanks, Matthew. Tom's poetry criticism has now been collected into two volumes, but none of his art criticism seems to have been collected. And didn't he write a huge amount about music?*]

A while ago I put together a much-expanded biography of Tom (about 6–7000 words) which you find at http://ukjarry.livejournal.com/1440.html

Has Baz Luhrman's *Australia* made much of an impact where you are?

Since there's already had quite a bit of advance promo-ing of it over here, I suspect it's like living in the bull's-eye of some non-stop hype holocaust in Australia?

17 December 2008

[*brg* I haven't seen *Australia*, but I'm just being sniffy. I didn't like Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge*, and the reviews of *Australia* have been pretty dire here in Melbourne. Besides, I've been lazy about watching films in real cinemas. I should see it on the big, big screen, since I'm told that the scenery is the film's great strength.*]

While trawling the internet, I found somebody had put Tom Disch's *Amnesia* online. You can already find places where you can download the game itself, but this is the complete manuscript with all Tom's work: http://ascii.textfiles.com/archives/1455

3 January 2009

CY CHAUVIN
14248 Wilfred, Detroit MI 48213

Beginning a fanzine with a convention report is an excellent way to start things off! I have sympathy with your complaint about four-track programming for a convention with only 150 attendees. (Perhaps they were expecting more?) It seems better to weave in multi-interests into program items, so people attending find out about possible new interests, but then there is the problem with the broad program item leading to something like the one on how people outside the genre perceive SF — a topic I thought had been done to death. But grouping the guest of honor talks together can be effective and interesting, and you may come to know about someone you'd not encounter otherwise.

Yes, you can't make the mistake of taking a 'ten-minute rest' in the early evening at a con. I've made that mistake many times myself, and find myself waking up much too late (or the next day). Time-zone changes make the matter worse! I have tried going for long walks before a con to prepare myself, but even now, as I try to walk every day at lunch time, nothing can quite prepare me for a convention and its late hours, constant walking and standing, and wonderful intellectual and people buzz. Your description of Canberra makes it sound like an interesting place to visit as well, too.

I once saw Thomas Disch in person. He was a very big man in the very tiny lobby (it had perhaps three chairs) of a hotel in Toronto, the guest of honour of the convention of which Taral Wayne would remember the name. 'He doesn't look at all like I expected Thomas Disch to look!' I know I was expecting someone thin, and with an angular face — a young James Blish perhaps! Your article was good. He wouldn't seem so much a pessimist today, but he was for the 1960s and 70s. (I remember arguing in my mind with his premises in *Mankind Under the Leash*.) I agree with you that SF readers optimally should want challenges, but also ultimately (and I begin to think this is truer and truer) we all return to writers with whom we want to spend time, whose characters and writer's voice or persona somehow mesh with our own. And maybe the reputation he built, as being too challenging and too dark, did Disch in: maybe the real focus of a look back at his work should be to show he wasn't all dark. You did a nice job in doing that with his poetry. But to be very honest, I don't think I could face reading *334* or *Camp Concentration* again. His last published SF story, 'Around the Walls of the World', didn't appear so dark to me, although it was hardly a light romance.

Thank you for publishing my article on Joanna Russ/Fritz Leiber: I hardly expected you and Jan to publish it so quickly. I think I may have found one of Joanna Russ inspirations for 'Nobody's Home': in *F&SF*, November 1971, she reviews *The Dialetic of Sex* by Shulamith Firestone. She mention in her review that the book offers 'some fascinating alternatives to the family', and quotes the following: 'Childhood, a fairly recent invention, will vanish. The family will die — that is, the parental role will be diffused to everybody, just as the "feminine" role will be diffused to everybody.' Interesting — it would be good if Advent or some other publisher collected all of Joanna Russ's reviews and essays on SF. She wrote such excellent stuff, still very readable and relevant today.

24 December 2008

[*brg* Liverpool University Press has gathered Joanna Russ's essays about SF in a substantial volume called *The Country You Have Never Seen* (2007; 305 pp.) It includes her essay 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials', the single most interesting essay on SF, and other genres, that I've ever read. It's probably difficult to buy in America, but presumably can be found on

amazon.com.uk.*] [*JGS: The University of Chicago Press is the US distributor for this book; the URL for orders is www.press.uchicago.edu*]

FRED LERNER
81 Worcester Avenue, White River Junction VT 05001

Bruce's article on Tom Disch's poetry has made me eager to find and read more of it. I'm very fond of Marilyn Hacker's work, and the Disch poems you quoted seem to share a sensibility and attitude with hers. That's not surprising: as you noted in that article, they collaborated (with Charles Platt) on a small collection of what Platt calls 'collaborative sonnets' that they composed while driving across the United States. (Platt recounts the story on page 12 of the May 2008 issue of the *New York Review of Science Fiction*.)

I bought a copy of *Highway Sandwiches*, a stapled collection that might easily have been mistaken at first glance for a fanzine, for 25 cents at a bookshop in the neighborhood of Columbia University. Disch and Platt were unfamiliar names to me, but that was not my first acquaintance with Hacker as a poet. A few years before, I had just read Samuel R. Delany's *Babel-17*, whose chapter headings were identified as verses by Marilyn Hacker. I had never heard of her, but I liked those verses very much, and wanted to find more of them, or at least find out more about the woman who had written them. At the time I was in the army, stationed at a sleepy Alabama post called Fort McClellan. I spent one Saturday morning combing the literary resources of nearby Anniston, but a small southern city in the late 1960s was not the best place to find anything by or about a young lesbian poet married to a bisexual African–American science fiction writer. It was not until Hacker began to win acclaim — and hardcover publication — two decades later that I was able to satisfy the interest that *Babel-17* had aroused. Now she is one of America's best-known poets, and a few years ago appeared at Dartmouth College, which is just across the river from me. Her visit came while I was on a long-planned trans-Atlantic trip, so I have yet to hear her read in person. I hope someday to have that opportunity; but, alas, I shall never hear Tom Disch read any of the poems to which *SET* has introduced me.

Rob Latham's article on 'New Worlds and the New Wave in Fandom' made — and demonstrated — a point that I have long maintained: the impossibility of understanding modern science fiction, and of writing intelligently about its history and development, without some knowledge of the history and sociology of fandom. His article stands as an eloquent rebuttal to those sceptics who question the value of fanzine collections in research libraries. And its republication in *Steam Engine Time* provides a valuable bridge between fandom and academe — which is precisely what those of us who founded the Science Fiction Research Association back in 1969 were hoping to accomplish.

3 January 2009

JAMES DOIG
36 Tinderry Circuit, Palmerston ACT 2913

I had a chat with Graham Stone today, who is in Canberra for a week — very nice chap who has arcane knowledge of early Australian SF, fandom, book selling etc etc. He has sold most of his collection, but still has a set of 70 or so *Astoundings*, mostly from the 1930s, and *Wonder Stories*. If anyone is interested write to him at 205/24 Victoria St. Burwood, NSW 2034. He also has copies of his amazing *Australian Science Fiction Bibliography*, which he prints off and binds himself. He tells me he is working on an updated edition, which is terrific.

28 December 2008

JOHN HERTZ
236 S. Coronado St., No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057

Stephen Campbell's steam engine on the back cover is inspiring, as well as Ditmar's cover.

Origen, long before Lewis, said Hell was not permanent, nor Heaven; until the end of the world demons could amend and rise, angels could collapse and fall. This was heretical, and Jerome said it wasn't really Origen, only interpolations by pagan scribes to besmirch him. But science fiction is not a pulpit. An idea of theology no more than of physics is a story.

To me also is Gerard Manly Hopkins tremendous. If you're looking for argument in favor of *Don Quixote*, try Nabokov's *Lectures on Don Quixote* (posth. 1983): penetrating, revelatory, like his criticism generally, pointing out what we could have seen if we read better.

Sanctimony is sad stuff, particularly sorrowful when we fall into it; Horace said it was annoying to see even Homer nodding off. The mundane world likes to say we fans are fanatics, possibly because as life goes there it is so unimaginable to take an interest in anything that whoever does must be compelled by an overwhelming zeal. Let us not feed the enemy propaganda line.

2 January 2009

TIM JONES
87 Ellice St., Mt Victoria, Wellington 6011, New Zealand

My connections with New Zealand fandom these days aren't all that much more intensive than yours! I try to catch up with fans from Dunedin, my former home, when I'm down there, and in fact I probably have more and better fannish contacts in Dunedin than in Wellington, where I now live. I did attend a day of New Zealand's last NatCon, but it's been a long time now since an NZ NatCon offered anything out of the ordinary. Still, attendances seem to be holding up, which is good.

Kay, Gareth and I are all good — Gareth, our son, is now 12 and will start high school in a few weeks. Most of my creative effort now goes into my writing (fiction and poetry) — in my latest short story collection in particular, I seem to have settled somewhere in the hinterland between SF and literary fiction, causing occasional bafflement to both parties.

11 January 2009

KATE YULE
1905 SE 43rd Avenue, Portland OR 97215

Thanks much for the zine. Greg Pickersgill said it just right: 'It is so much fun to see grown-ups talking about science fiction as if it mattered.' I feel completely out of my depth with much of the analysis, but I enjoy having a go at it — open to the possibility of deeper understanding.

David Lake writes that 'We don't need yet another tract about slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe did that very adequately 150 years ago.' And yet there is still human trafficking; there are still slaves. Evidently there remains some glimmer of relevance to the topic.

Gian Paolo Cossato's letter has fascinating passing references, things we will likely never hear more about — pumice poisoning, Italian POWs in Tanganyika, cooking spaghetti for an audience that he implies didn't know exactly what to expect from it. He says that France's 49 or 50 nuclear reactors, some just across the Italian border, make 'laughable our decision to ban them for fear of what might happen.' It could be argued that a neighbour's living with toxic waste makes as much hygiene as possible at home all the more necessary.

I wonder if there is any chance Colin Steele (encountered in Bruce's Conflux trip report) might be at the 2010 Worldcon? Surely we can get him more of the audience he deserves?

Michael Chabon's sentences are marvellous, aren't they? I didn't particularly enjoy the subject matter of *Yiddish Policeman's Union*, but read it anyway (a) for our neighbourhood book group and (b) for the sheer delight of the words rolling past.

Bruce's observation that Damon Knight's *The Futurians* 'would have been our *Kavalier and Clay* if he had written it as a novel' — dead on target, as the excerpts show. Gosh wow.

17 January 2009

PHILIP TURNER
10 Carlton Avenue, Romiley, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 4EG

[*brg* Philip Turner let me know that his father HARRY TURNER died recently at the age of 85. Harry had become an enthusiastic supporter of *Steam Engine Time* only in recent years. He was well known as a top British fanzine artist, and his involvement in British fandom went back to the 1930s.*]

I was just going through a small heap at my Dad's bedside, looking for his contacts, and I came across the September 2006 issue of *SET* — which, I was interested to notice, contains an editorial by Jan Stinson on *Babylon 5*. As someone who bought the 'Big Box' of *Babylon 5* (containing 46 DVDs) as a personal birthday present last year, I found the article very interesting. And my Dad also watched every episode at least once on the digital TV channel Sci-Fi when it was broadcast from 1999 onwards. He, too, was a big fan of this groundbreaking series.

17 January 2009

[*JGS: Glad you found my words of interest. I'm happy to know you and your father shared an enthusiasm for the series, something that not all fathers and sons could claim (a shared liking for *any*thing). I'd like to write more about the series, but have no concrete direction just yet; there's a lot there to ponder.*]

ANDREW WEINER
26 Summerhill Gardens, Toronto, Ontario M4T 1B4

Just back from Thailand and Hong Kong ... only 10 hours or so from Australia, but I doubt I'll ever get there.

I just read Chabon's *Gentlemen with Swords*: good beach reading, but not really much more. *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, on the other hand, is a great book, although not one that I really thought of as f/SF. Too good, maybe? Or just associational, like that Roth book about Lindberg, which one day I will read.

[*brg* To me, alternative histories, especially those as detailed and lived in as *Yiddish Policemen's Union* and Roth's *The Plot Against America*, are a satisfying stream within science fiction. Speculation is what SF is all about. What if all our assumptions were proved false? What is the carpet we can't live without if it is whipped from under us?*]

Got your flier about efanzines. This obviously makes a lot of sense, economically and ecologically. And generally I would be quite happy just to page through your new productions online. Given my diminished interest in SF these days, this would not usually take me too long. But when I tried this with *Steam Engine Time* 9, I hit a serious problem: this is the fattest, densest Gillespie (co-)production in years and there is quite a lot I would like to read in it — the Galouye and Disch tributes, your Chabon article, and the New Wave pieces just to start with. That's way too much eye strain to read online, and printing off a 100-page document doesn't seem too ecologically sound. I guess I could print off selected pages. But first I thought I would see if I could get a copy of the real thing. How much is *SET* for a single copy, via the usual slow boat mail?

[*brg* I've sent you a copy, Andrew, but I would like to remind readers to make it worthwhile for me to send print copies. Send letters of comment, send articles or send other contributions. Money would be helpful ($50 a subcription). But I still hope I can reduce the bloody print run! If I still have to print 150 copies an issue, I'll stop because I will have run out of money. Many readers have regular incomes, and I don't. Anybody who can, please download!*]

20 January 2009

We also heard from ...

EARL KEMP (Kingman, Arizona), who 'pointed out this current issue to both Rob Latham and Michael Moorcock because I wouldn't want either of them to miss it'. I've thanked you in the Editorial, Earl. You're a hero.

KATHLEEN JENNINGS (Brisbane, Queensland) is a recent correspondent. We met at Conflux, and she has since sent me lots of information about getting into blogging. I started to edit *SET* 10 and *SFC* 80, and haven't done anything about blogs — sorry, Kathleen. 'Thank you for your very kind words about my reading. I've been convicted to talk to more people and organise some eclectic dinner groups at the next convention I go to. I'm starting to know people and have a bit more confidence initiating conversations so I've no excuse for next time! I hope to see you around at conventions in the future, and also that your questions about blogging get answered. '

RICH COAD (2132 Berkeley Drive, Santa Rosa, CA 95401) asked for a paper copy; I had already sent him one. We trade paper fanzines. Rich edits *Sense of Wonder Stories*, a magazine that anybody who likes *Steam Engine Time* would enjoy.

LYNC (North Coburg, Victoria) asked for a print copy.

ROBERT LICHTMAN (Oakland, California) reports that 'the next *Trap Door* (No 26) is taking shape with contributions from William Breiding, Gordon Eklund, Gary Hubbard, Dave Langford, and a posthumous piece by Ron Bennett, artwork by Dan Steffan, Steve Stiles and Craig Smith. No 26 will be its 25th annish and also my personal 50th annish, as I'll write of in my editorial. Yeah, break out the manual typer, the quire of stencils and a gallon of Corflu!'

MICHAEL GREEN (Dandenong, Victoria) also asked for a print copy.

GUY LILLIAN (Shreveport, Louisiana) has honoured me by allowing me to be one of the few people with whom he trades paper fanzines: 'Mailed a copy of *Challenger* #28 your way this afternoon. Cost as much as a used car. Enjoy!' I have enjoyed it, but I still haven't written that letter of comment.

RACE MATHEWS (South Yarra, Victoria) asked for a print copy. He can have anything he asks for. He and Iola have been hosts to our monthly film-watching group for 14 years! We do appreciate your hospitality, Race and Iola.

JENNY BRYCE (Elwood, Victoria) likes to keep in touch, and writes brilliant articles for my ANZAPAzine **brg**. However: 'My life has been dominated by having to look after my mother, who had the inevitable 90-year-old fall; fractured her hip and terribly nearly lost an eye. She is recovering remarkably well, but, as she still lives alone, I have spent a lot of time staying at her place. I can now spend about half time back at home.'

TONY THOMAS (Ferntree Gully, Victoria) asked for the print version. Of course; he was a contributor to last issue's Tom Disch tribute.

RAY WOOD (Quorn, South Australia) asked for a print copy. With any luck he'll send another article soon.

ANDY SAWYER (Liverpool) has arranged a print copy for him, and then for the Foundation Collection in the Liverpool University Library.

JOHN THAWLEY (Eaglemont, Victoria) runs the Grisly Wife Bookshop in Eaglemont (specialising in Australian literature): 'I introduced my 87-year-old Dad to George Turner's work about 4 years ago. He has since developed a keen interest in science fiction.' I found some spare copies of the Turner Issue of *SF Commentary* last week, so I sent one to John's dad.

MARTIN DUNNE (Adelaide, South Australia) said 'hi'. He is a Downloader.

GIAN PAOLO COSSATO (Venice, Italy) sent some much-appreciated Euros, and enjoyed 'lots of Gillespie and Zebrowski' in *SET* 9.

MARK PLUMMER (Croydon, London) said 'hi' and he and **CLAIRE BRIALEY** sent yet another brilliant issue of *Banana Wings* (No 36), with a generous tribute to 40 years of *SF Commentary*.

TOM FELLER (Nashville, Tennessee): 'My current project is a review of Stephen King's *Just After Sunset* for *Magill's Literary Annual*.'

DORA LEVAKIS (Yarraville, Victoria) is very busy. She and her friend Lance from the Northern Territory called at our place recently, and she showed us her portrait of Lance. Impressive. She has had paintings chosen several times for the *Salon des refusés* exhibition associated with the annual Archibald Prize for Portraiture.

COLIN STEELE (Hawker, ACT): 'Many thanks for the kind words — a mammoth edition.' Vast numbers of Colin's pithy reviews will be in *SF Commentary* 80.

LOCUS PUBLICATIONS' KIRSTEN GONG-WONG (Oakland, California) sent me Michael Chabon's email address. Thanks, Kirsten.

CAROL KEWLEY (Sunshine, Victoria): liked the article on 'Standing

up for Science Fiction', and has offered more art for our pages.

DENNY LIEN (Minneapolis, Minnesota) sent me a copy of the one *Star Science Fiction* that I was missing: the first. He sent it to me for 'Nothing. Pay It Forward. *Star Science Fiction 1* not an uncommon title in the States; Uncle Hugo's had a couple of cheap used copies, and I have more store credit at Hugo's than I'm likely to use anytime soon, and I was shipping an M-bag of books to Alan anyway.' Some fans like Denny are really worth staying in touch with.

AMY HARLIB (New York) sent artwork and some book reviews. Slight problem: I still haven't published the book reviews she sent me about five years ago. They will be in *SF Commentary* 80.

JOSEPH SZABO (Forest Hill, Victoria) has given me permission to reprint more of his fabulous artwork, but usually I can't afford the colour to do justice to the work.

PAUL ANDERSON (Grange, South Australia) sent me lots of personal news from his Adelaide home. He finds he is enjoying his job, just at the age that, until recently, he would have been forced to retire (65). Brenda is writing fiction, and the kids are now finding out about the world of work. I might even get back to Adelaide to catch up with them some day. I last saw Paul in 1980.

TOM WHALEN (Stuttgart, Germany) asked for a print copy.

NICHOLAS WALLER: 'I like the not-well-known Dan Galouye, though I have only read *Dark Universe*, *Counterfeit World* and the *Project Barrier* collection. I mention *Dark Universe* (set 99 per cent of the time in a post-nuclear-apocalyptic underground city bunker where the lights have gone out generations before, and the people "see" by echo-locating clickstones) whenever someone asks for suggestions of SF books that should not be made into movies. :: J. G. Ballard has always been one of my favourite writers. I read his autobiography earlier this year, which ended with a rather elegiac, farewell tone.'

LIZ ARGALL (Hunter, ACT) wanted to see what I said about her in *SET* 9. No explosions yet. 'Things have been going well since October. I have my musical *Comic Book Opera* being performed for the first time. The libretto and book are by me, score by Michael Sollis, for the Young Music Society Summer School in Canberra.'

LEIGH BLACKMORE (Wollongong, NSW) wanted a print copy, which I sent as soon as I tracked down his snail mail address.

JULIAN FREIDIN (East St Kilda, Victoria) remembers 'Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* ... always been one of my favourites, and I recently found a first UK hardcover edition at a bookshop in Point Lonsdale. I proudly showed it to Justin Ackroyd, who was very unimpressed!'

LAWRIE BROWN (Chisholm, ACT) will check out *SET* 9 when he gets home late in January. I used two of his photos of Conflux 5 from the net without asking first: kind of naughty, but he's forgiven me. I should have taken my own photos of Conflux, but didn't.

CURT PHILLIPS (Abingdon, Virginia) is willing to stay a Downloader. Good man, Curt. But... 'I've greatly enjoyed the beautiful magazines you've produced over the years. I'm very fond of The Tucker Issue, particularly. I have some hope of getting over for the 2012 Australian national convention (thought I'd give DUFF a try then ...)'

JANICE MURRAY (Seattle, Washington) asked for a print copy. It was good to catch up with her through Facebook.

JERRY KAUFMAN (Seattle, Washington) is 'mired in the effort to remember what was going on in Seattle from 1980 to 1985, as Suzle and I (with, so far, only John D. Berry's help) have to speak about ... that period' at this months' Corflu in Seattle. I wish I were there.

CHRIS PRIEST (GrimGrin Studio, 32 Elphinstone Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 2EQ, UK) is selling four of most recent books — beautiful POD productions — from that address.

— 22 February 2009

Leigh Edmonds, Bruce Gillespie, Gillian Polack and Colin Steele

Conflux 5, Canberra, October 2008, part 2

Leigh Edmonds

A convention report, of sorts

brg* It is an honour to welcome back Leigh Edmonds, one of our greatest Australian fan writers — back to where he belongs: the pages of a general-circulation fanzine. Not that he has disappeared completely since 1986, when he sort of formally/informally stopped publishing. He and Valma Brown have attended conventions occasionally. For about 40 years he has been a regular contributor to SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society, one of the oldest amateur publishing associations). The following Conflux report has just been published there. My own Conflux report appeared in *SET* 9. Leigh's article is an introduction to the three articles that follow it.

At the beginning of October Valma and I went to Canberra for a week to work on the Tax Office history. As it turned out, the weekend before we were due to be there was also the occasion of Conflux, the annual Canberra convention, so we organised ourselves to go to that too. The arrangement was that we would fly up to go into the office to get Valma signed in (getting security clearance to enter or work in Tax Office buildings is a challenge in itself) so that she could get a 'building pass' that lets you wander around the Tax Office in search of historical material.

Leigh Edmonds, Brisbane, 2006 (photo: Eric Lindsay).

Unfortunately, at Melbourne Airport the aeroplane that was supposed to take us to Canberra was feeling sick so they had to get another one, which just happened to be a 737-800 that was coming in from Perth. This was nice, because the 737-400s that usually do the Canberra route are a lot less comfortable than the long range -800s, but it meant we had to wait around the airport for an hour or so, which meant that we were late in getting into Canberra, so there was little more we could do on Thursday afternoon than go down to the main Tax Office building to say hello to people. We also learned that since the name 'Valma Brown' is relatively common, the security checks had thrown up a red flag — which meant no building pass for Valma until that was cleared up.

After all that, we went shopping for all the necessary provisions prior to a convention and a week in another city, and tottered back to our motel room.

Next morning I was up not so bright and early to go to work. There's plenty in the Tax Office archive and library to look at and not too much time to look at them so every minute counts. Our motel was right next to the convention motel, so I dropped in to see what was happening. The answer was, breakfast, and there were three old-time fans, Bruce Gillespie, Jean Weber and Bill Wright, at ease around a breakfast table. I had time for a brief chat to remind me what conventions are supposed to be about (in my world anyhow), which is meeting people. Then a quick walk down into Civic for a morning in the library looking at some of the more recent annual reports, a process over which we will draw a quiet curtain for fear of boring all my humble readers insensible.

This convention offered a number of what it called workshops, most of them for aspiring writers. One suggested it would be about learning how to write 'more dynamic characters', and since part of my business is in bringing historical actors to life, I thought it might be interesting. So I left the office around noon to attend it.

Let me give you a brief outline of the set-up. The venue was your fairly standard motel, two or three storeys high facing onto Northbourne Avenue (the main road into Canberra from anywhere civilised). It has the usual facilities, including a bit of a bar behind the reception area and a restaurant along the front. The convention facilities was a large square box built in the rear of the motel that was divided up into five separate rooms, one for hucksters and the others for multi- strand programming.

As an aside, this was a convention with 100 or so attendees and yet they multistrand programming, sometimes with five things running at once. This seemed rather extravagant to me, but then I don't organise conventions these days, so I can't complain.

After a bit of flailing around I found myself in the appropriate room, where there were a dozen or so people gathered and a sole leader sitting up on high behind the table. It didn't promise to be very exciting or interactive. After a while it turned out that what the person running the panel meant by 'dynamic characters' was actually the process of inventing characters for multi-volume fantasy novels, which are apparently all the go these days. I'm no fan of these; they remind me of Wagnerian epics where people carry on about nothing for great periods of time, but usually put off getting to the point until late into the piece. I was bored and uninterested, so I made my departure at some point not too far into the proceedings.

Something may have happened for the rest of the afternoon but it can't have been very exciting, since none of it surfaces in my memory now. In fact, I have to note that a great deal of the convention turned out to be fairly tedious so I either can't remember much about it or it's not

worth spending keystrokes on, if I can. But there were some highlights.

On Friday evening, Valma and I embarked on a food-finding expedition with two West Australians, Dave Luckett and Ian Nicholls. Dave has a Masters in history and is probably one of the most popular and well-paid stf writers in Australia, but you wouldn't know about it from his presence on the program at the convention. At some point during the rather convivial evening we had a brief discussion about the writing business, in which his world is quite different from mine. He lives on royalties and income from the library payment system while I live on commissions from clients. As a result he has to be more positive in promoting himself and his books, while I can forget about what I write after it has gone off to the printer. I think I prefer my arrangement.

The other participant in our expedition is, according to some sources, a acquired taste. I find that the quality of his company depends on which Ian Nichols you are talking to, and these days I find him one of the more interesting and enjoyable people you will meet at a convention. Ian does his share of fiction writing too, but it isn't his day job.

So we hurtled up Northbourne Avenue to the Dickson shops, which has grown out of sight since we used to go up there to splurge at McDonald's and eat on the lawn. There is now very little lawn and lots of options for food addicts, but we found our way to the Workers' Club where, for the payment of a nominal joining fee, we were let loose in their rather pleasant environs. The wine, the food and the company were all highly pleasant, spoiled only by the impediment that we had to shoot through early because Ian was on the program for the evening.

This turned out to be the not-new innovation of the Great Debate. The panellists did their best, and Russell Blackford put on a particularly fine display, but as for the content, the only thing that I can now recall was the pie-in-the-face episode.

After that the convention had three more days to run, with Monday being a public holiday in Canberra. I must have gone to quite a few panels, but most of them have now evaporated from my memory. Overall I got the impression that conventions are no longer run by fans for the entertainment of fans but are run for the deification of people who want to become writers, perhaps big-name writers. There were apparently some important editors and authors of these multivolume Wagnerian epics floating around but I didn't get to meet any of them — so far as I know.

There were lots of books on sale, so I picked up three, which is a bit of record for me, not having bought a book for years (if you don't count that volume of women's reminiscences of the English Civil War). The first was a slim volume of Ian Nichols' short stories. He prints them off in small batches — which is a very convenient thing to do these days — and sells them himself when the opportunity arises. The second was a huge doorstopper of a collection put together by Jack Dann, which is mostly a who's who of who is writing stf in Australia at the moment. The Ian Nichols collection is a little ripper, full of crisp, tightly written and focused stories; I'd recommend it to anyone. On the other hand, the Jack Dann collection reflects the editor's own interests and is full of crafted pieces with often flowery and sometimes florid prose, which is enough to put me off. I read the beginnings of most of the stories and found myself bored with most of them before I got too far. The third book I bought was a collection of Australia's best stf for some recent year. It fell somewhere between the Nichols collection and the enormous Dann edifice, but I left it lying around somewhere at the convention so it never got finished.

I find myself, these days, attracted to the idea of writing some fiction, if nothing else as training exercises for writing better history. I recently came across a computer file that has fifteen or so drafts of short stories in it, some of which are interesting ideas but are not very interesting to read. So the convention and what I read at it set me thinking about what I like to read, in fiction anyhow. If, as seemed to be the trend, people are being paid good money from writing Wagnerian epics, I find myself more interested in what happened after that in music, with Schoenberg and the Second Viennese school. All I have to do now is find the time to go about rewriting some of those story ideas in the fashion of Webern or Berg. However, commissioned histories pay a lot better than most fiction writing, so it takes priority at the moment.

There were a handful of events that did attract my attention and stay in my mind, so I can mention them here. Two were put on by Bruce Gillespie and were perhaps the most interesting and thought-provoking items of the whole convention. Sadly, almost nobody attended, because the slant of the convention was on how to become a stf writer and not on the history and traditions of stf and fandom. Only a handful of people were at Bruce's Guest of Honour speech so they missed an interesting,

informative and sometimes lightly humorous (in the Bruce Gillespie style) presentation about his life in fandom and his contribution to the milieu that was Australian fandom (not that he set out to achieve the latter). Even less attended and even more rewarding was a conversation between Bruce and Colin Steele, a delightful fellow who had knocked around with the likes of Aldiss, Ballard and the New Wavers when he was in England and who became the Librarian at the Australian National University, reviews with skill for the *Canberra Times*, and organised one of the most memorable sercon conventions I've ever been to. What an enjoyable hour to spend in the company of such enjoyable and erudite company. Sadly, only a handful of people were there. Their loss.

At one time during a desultory afternoon I found myself in the company of Dave Luckett, who was talking to a man who, it turned out, was at the convention to pick up a couple of people to talk on his session on the local public broadcasting station. The other person didn't turn up, so I invited myself along. Having recently given a paper at a seminar on broadcasting in Australia I was curious to see what broadcasting was like these days. The three of us wandered down Northbourne Avenue chatting, learning that our radio presenter had worked for the National Library until his retirement, and he now occupies himself in doing things like this. The 2CR radio studio occupies a few rooms in a new building in Civic overtowered by Tax Office buildings on either side. It was, I think, Sunday afternoon, so there was very little activity as we waited for awhile until the studio was vacant, and he ushered us in. For the first half of the talk he quizzed Dave on a few things, but it was fairly clear that he hadn't done much preparation, and didn't know what kind of questions to ask, so during a break I invited myself in to a microphone as well. After twenty minutes or so our moments of fame were over and we wandered back to the convention.

Valma and I didn't go to the banquet, which was apparently amusing at times and dull at others. We went with Marilyn Pride and Lewis Morley (who, we're pretty sure, we first met at a convention organised by Jack Herman in Sydney in the early 1980s). We ended up at the Ainslie Football Club, which was not as convivial as the place in Dickson, but who could not enjoy talking to Marilyn and Lewis?

On Monday afternoon there was another dose of workshops, most again aimed at people who want to be writers. The one that caught my attention was about how to raise money through grant applications. This was given by somebody who has been filling out grant forms for a long time and knows most of the tricks of the trade. I've done a bit of this but not for some time, so this was interesting. Knowing that I was going to have to give a similar presentation to professional historians a week later I bought myself a notepad and took copious notes that I could pass on. Sadly, I lost the notepad before the end of the day.

Last was the usual end-of-convention closing ceremony, which also makes more sense to the people who ran the event than the general convention attendees. However, who would deny people who put in so much effort a little bit of self-indulgence? There was apparently a dead-dog party, but we were feeling a bit too dead to attend, and instead stayed in our room and watched an episode of *Midsomer Murders* on the box.

The following day it was back to work ...

— Leigh Edmonds, January 2009

Images: My real life as a fanzine editor

Bruce Gillespie's Fan Guest of Honour Speech, Conflux 5, Canberra, 5 October 2008

This is not exactly what I said during my Fan Guest of Honour speech at Conflux 5. It's what I remember having said, plus what I wish I had thought of saying at the time. I was speaking from rough notes, and nobody recorded the speech. The speech as delivered was improved and shaped by occasional interjections from the floor, mainly from ANZAPA's founder Leigh Edmonds.

Time, it seems to me, is not as it is often presented, a river in which the present moment surges ahead like a boat, and the past is merely a bow wave speckled by the froth of failing memories. Instead, it seems to me that the events of one's conscious life form a series of rocks in the river. The 'present' is actually the bow wave in the river as it surges into the future. Those rocks are the primary images of our lives: those ineradicable moments when our lives change.

Here are some of the images of my life, the ones that might interest people attending Conflux.

Image 1: Discovering the moon flower.
Sometime in 1952 or 1953
I am five or six years old. I am sitting on the floor in the living room of our house in Haughton Road, Oakleigh, a Melbourne suburb, listening to the ABC's Children's Session. The radio in front of me is about a metre tall, made of wood, and is very heavy. It is powered by valves, and its round dial shows all the major radio stations of Australia. I listen to the new serial story on the Chidren's Session. Written by G. K. Saunders (Ken Saunders, who lives in Canberra if he is still alive), it is called *The Moon Flower*. Day by day, it takes me through all the stages of preparing an expedition to visit the Moon. Eventually the rocket takes off, and lands on the Moon. At the end of the story, the explorers find one remnant of the life that once existed on the Moon: a tiny flower in the deepest cave on the Moon. The events in the serial overcome

me with pleasure at the thought of escaping from Earth and travelling beyond its atmosphere; of being free from gravity while flying to the Moon; of exploring a totally different environment; in short, at the thought that was somewhere else much more exciting than dull old Oakleigh with our ordinary family in the dull 1950s.

Image 2: John Carter flies to Mars.
Sometime in 1956

I am nine years old, and I'm standing in shadowy, musty children's section of the Clarement Library, Malvern. It is one of the last of the commercial lending libraries, although I do not realise then that the arrival of television in 1956 has already condemned it to redundancy. The kindly old lady behind the desk lets the kids from our family borrow anything up to ten titles each time to visit, and she never charges us late fees when we finally return the books. I've read all the Enid Blyton books in the library, some several times over. I've read many of the other children's books, but find that are anywhere near as exciting as Blyton's. I pick up a book called *A Princess of Mars*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Except for the occasional comic book, such as *Brick Bradford*, this is the first time I've found any reading matter resembling the marvellous G. K. Saunders space fiction serials that I hear occasionally on the ABC. The book shows a man with a sword, which doesn't seem to have much to do with space fiction. The next day I read the book at home. I am enthralled and appalled. Everybody knows you can't just stare at Mars and wish yourself there! But John Carter does this. Surely Mars is not populated by strange creatures roaming the dead sea bottoms! My common sense tells me this is silly stuff, but my love of a good story tells me that I have discovered a world of new concepts and adventures. Within a year I have read all the Mars books twice, as well as several of the same author's Tarzan books.

Bruce Gillespie in 1962, aged 15 (photo: Frank Gillespie).

Image 3: Philip K. Dick jumps off the shelf.
Sometime early in 1959

I am standing in the Claremont Library. I am now twelve. I have started high school. Recently we moved house to a suburb that is not directly linked by rail to Malvern, so it has become much more difficult to visit the library. I have read all the books in the Children's section of the library. I take one of those great steps of life: into the Adults' section of the library; specifically the Science Fiction section. I know none of the authors who appear on the shelves. I pick one at random. The blurb makes it sound interesting: it tells of a future Earth ruled by chance, not by elections. It is called *World of Chance*, by Philip K. Dick. It is not quite as easy to read as I had expected, but it introduces to me many concepts with which I had been unfamiliar. (Only years later do I find out that I have been reading the British abridgement of *Solar Lottery*, Philip Dick's first novel.) A few weeks later I return it and exchange it for *The Humanoids* by Jack Williamson. Here is ultra-exciting fiction quite unlike any other I have ever read. I have become a science fiction addict.

Image 4: Philip K. Dick jumps off McGill's counter.
Late 1959

I am standing at the front counter of McGill's Newsagency, Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. I have discovered on this counter a treasure trove of science fiction magazines and books. I receive a bit of pocket money each week, so I decide to buy my very first science fiction magazine: *New Worlds*, from Britain. It contains a serial called *Time Out of Joint*, by Philip K. Dick. Reading that serial will make me a Philip K. Dick fan for life. I have discovered McGill's, among a number of other bookshops and newsstands, because I had contracted an annoying skin condition that made it necessary to visit a specialist in St Kilda Road every week for several months. This had the advantage of taking me away from school on sports afternoons, and also allowed me to discover the main shopping streets of Melbourne. I did not realise at the time that McGill's was the best bookshop in Melbourne because it was managed by Mervyn R. Binns, who also ran the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. The club's advertisements were placed on little slips of paper in every copy of every SF book sold at the shop. I was not free to join the club, because it met on Wednesday nights in the city, and I knew my parents would never let

me make such a journey at night on a schoolday.

Image 5: Mastery of the keyboard
Summer 1960–61
I am sitting in front of my father's old black Underwood typewriter. My father has allowed me to type occasional essays on it in for some years, as he now uses it rarely. I am attempting to learn to touch-type. I have borrowed my Auntie Linda's typing manual, which she had kept from the days when she was learning to type during the late 1920s. I cover the keys of the typewriter so that I cannot see the keys, and began to peck away, following the exercises in the manual. By the end of the summer school holidays, I can touch-type.

Image 6: When is a fanzine not a fanzine?
First week of term 1961
I am standing around in the school ground at Oakleigh High School, Form 3 (Year 11). I'm talking to my friend Ron Sheldon, the sort of boy who has an air of competence. He also tells jokes well. He is interested in some of the things that interest me, including pop music and science fiction, and he has built a radio station that 'broadcasts' throughout the interior of the Sheldons' house. I mention that I would love to start a magazine. He says that his father has a duplicator, as well as a typewriter. A week later I visit Ron's place in North Carlton, and Mr Sheldon, who is a school teacher, gives us some spirit duplicator stencils and allows us to use his duplicator. During the year we produce 26 issues of the magazine, sell it to fellow school students and the occasional teacher who is interested, and make 7s 6d profit for the year. It is the last time I will make a profit on a fanzine. At the end of the year Ron's parents announce that we will have to abandon the magazine, since both Ron and I face a much increased homework load in Form 4 (Year 12). In 1962, I continue publishing, using carbon paper, for me and three friends, but eventually give up.

Image 7: Life's purpose discovered.
Somewhen in 1961 or 1962
I now buy the SF magazines as regularly as I can afford. In *If* magazine, Lin Carter writes a regular column about the mysterious world of 'fandom'. I get the idea that in America and Britain there are many science fiction fans, and that they are constantly busy. The main thing they do is publish 'fanzines'. A fanzine is a magazine in which one publishes exactly what one likes. I decide that there can be no greater purpose in life than to publish a fanzine, but I realise I will not have the income to support one until I'm earning a regular income.

Image 8: Discovery of intelligence in the SF world.
July 1966
I'm standing at the front counter of McGill's, as I do every week while I'm attending Melbourne University (1965–68). I notice a new magazine there. It seems to be typed with a regular typewriter, maybe even duplicated rather printed, and is quite thin. It contains essays and reviews about science fiction. It is *Australian Science Fiction Review*, No 1. I hesitate, not sure whether I can afford the price of 3s 6d. I don't buy the first issue, but next month I cannot resist buying No 2. My view of science fiction is transformed. These writers are funny, articulate, angry at their favourite reading matter while loving it — in short, they show all the literary qualities missing in the review columns of the pro science fiction magazines. For some time I had felt that the critical methods I had been learning at Melbourne University could be applied to science fiction books. Now I found people such as John Foyster, who were writing this type of article. In *ASFR* 10, I started reading George Turner, the critic who best exemplified every quality I would most like to bring to writing about science fiction.

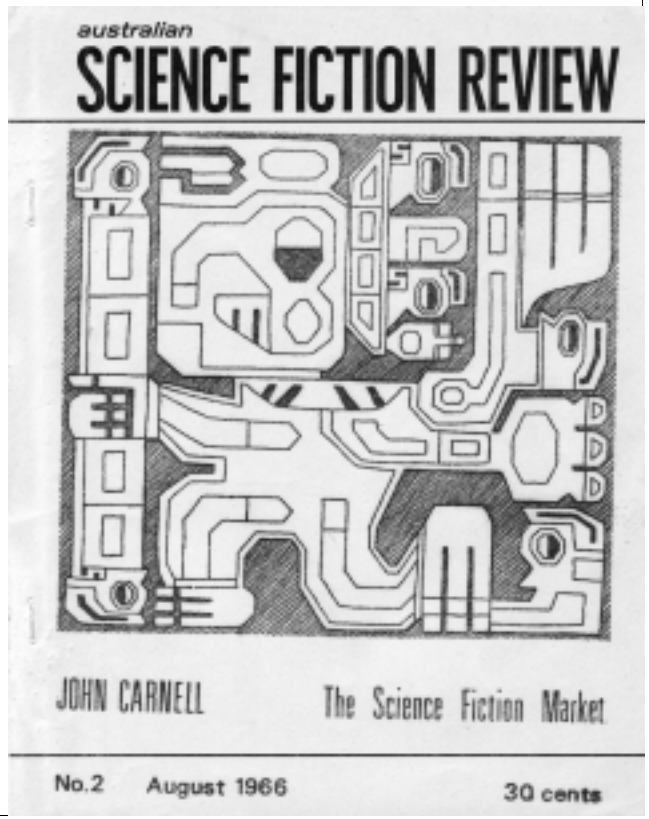


Image 9: First steps along the PKD critical trail.
End of November 1967
At the end of November 1967, I had just finished the last university exam of my degree. Usually af-

Top: Mervyn Binns at the duplicator
Bottom Left: Paul Stevens and The Lift
Bottom Right: Mervyn Barrett and The Lift

Photocollage: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen). Photos probably taken by Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen or Lee Harding.

Merv Binns, manager of McGill's for many years and ruler of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, outside the Somerset Place entrance to the Club, 1968 (photo: Binns collection.)

ter I finished end-of-year exams I suffered several weeks of intense headaches. In 1967 I settled down with the typewriter and began to write the first of my long essays about the novels of Philip K. Dick. The headaches disappeared. I became more and more excited by what I was writing. When I finished the first essay I sent it, along with a subscription, to John Bangsund, the editor of *Australian Science Fiction Review* (*ASFR*). A few days later I answered in Bacchus Marsh a phone call from John in Ferntree Gully. 'We really enjoyed your essay,' said John. 'We'd like to meet you. Would you like to visit us for the weekend?' In 1967 I was still a very shy person. It took all my courage to accept the offer.

Image 10: The gods themselves.
Second weekend of December 1967
It's the Sunday of the weekend I met the 'ASFR crew'. I am sitting around very nervously at the home of John Bangsund and his first wife Diane in Ferntree Gully. Legendary people begin arriving: John Foyster and his first wife Elizabeth and their small daughter Gillian Miranda; Tony Thomas; Rob Gerrand; Damien Broderick; Lee Harding; and finally the man who was actually the reason why the gathering had been summoned: George Turner. Although George had been writing for *ASFR* since the middle of the year, nobody except John had met him until that day. Nobody quite knew how to talk to George, but Diane and Elizabeth got along with him well. I was nervous and said little. Nobody knew what to say to me. I made friends with Rob Gerrand. On the Friday night, Lee Harding had already welcomed me to his place in The Basin. His first wife Carla had just given birth to their third child, and she was still in hospital. Lee and I nattered half the night, talking about SF, music, fanzines and his good friend, the SF and film writer John Baxter, who had a home cinema at his place in Sydney. Next day Lee played LPs for me and showed me his book collection. I had entered fandom.

Image 11: Little boy lost in Wonderland.
Easter 1968
I entered the sacred portal of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club to attend the first day of the 1968 Melbourne Science Fiction Conference. The Melbourne SF Club was as much Merv Binns's kingdom as was the front counter of McGill's. The portal was a door in the side of a warehouse in Somerset Place, behind McGill's Newsagency. I walked up a very narrow wooden staircase to a landing, walked along the landing, then

I'm not too sure who took these photos — probably Ruth Bangsund. They were taken in December 1967, during the first weekend when I first met all these people (l. to r.): John Bangsund, Leigh Edmonds, Lee Harding, John Foyster, Tony Thomas, Merv Binns, Paul Stevens.

went up an even steeper staircase to the top floor of the warehouse. I had to follow this tortuous path because several months earlier the Club's famous water lift (elevator) had broken down. It had been the last operating water lift in Melbourne. When I reached the loft, I found old theatre seats set up for the seventy or so people expected for the Conference, with a stage in front. Behind was a perilous balcony, where a strange elf-like man named Kevin Dillon was serving coffees and selling refreshments. A perilously steep staircase right up the back led to the loos. As people arrived, it became plain that not everybody would fit. Nobody minded. I was very shy, and had nobody much to talk to. I did talk to David Penman, an enthusiastic student representing the Melbourne Grammar School Science Fiction Society. David eventually wrote reviews for me, and thirty years and four wives later became known throughout Melbourne as 'Jim Penman', of Jim's Mowing, Jim's House Repairs and many other franchises. The program was highly entertaining, the most memorable item being the auction conducted by Dick Jenssen, who sold vast amounts by rubbishing the books and their contents. John Foyster, Lee Harding and Tony Thomas conducted proceedings. This for me was the mythical *first convention*, the one in which the neofan feels a complete outsider; he knows that somewhere here are the people he wants to meet, but he hasn't quite found them yet.

Same weekend, same photographer (l. to r.): Leigh Edmonds (sitting), Tony Thomas, Diane Bangsund, John Bangsund, Paul Stevens (sitting), John Foyster, Merv Binns (sitting), Elizabeth Foyster, Gillian Miranda Foyster.

Image 12: Magic moments.
May 1968

John and Diane Bangsund changed houses several times during those years. By May 1968 they had moved from Ferntree Gully to a terrace house in Redan Street, St Kilda. The surrounding houses had been torn down, and their own place was about to be demolished to provide playing fields for a private school. They were sharing the house with Melbourne's two most interesting fans, Leigh Edmonds and Paul Stevens. I remember visiting one night when Leigh Edmonds was there, and another when he wasn't. Leigh wasn't sure what to make of me, but eventually we started talking. John Bangsund wasn't sure what to make of me, but he made me feel at home. On the first night I visited, I entered a living room furnished from floor to ceiling with John Bangsund's book collection. Someday, I said to myself, I will also have an entire wall of books. Little did I know that eventually Elaine and I would have

quite a few rooms full of books. Damien Broderick and George Turner were also visiting that night. I listened open-mouthed as the three of them went into comic overdrive, trying to out-humour the other. It was the funniest night I ever was at, and I can't recall a single line. While the talk burbled, John Bangsund was playing in the background some magnificent music. I had never heard it, because my father never played classical music from the twentieth century. It turned out to be Vaughan Williams' 9th Symphony. 1968 became the year when I discovered classical music as well as being initiated into fandom Melbourne style.

Image 13: 40th anniversary of a great institution.
September 1968

By September I am now part of Melbourne fandom. A group of us stand outside the Plaza Cinema in Collins Street, Melbourne's cinema for showing films in Cinerama format. The new attraction is *2001: A Space Odyssey*. To add to the excitement, Leigh Edmonds announces that he is going to start an Australian apa — an amateur publishing association. Those interested in publishing fanzines would contribute to a collective mailing each two months. I still could not afford to buy a duplicator. How could I join? 'You type the stencils and we'll run them off for you,' he said. This is how I came to be in the first mailing of APA-A, as it was initially called. It quickly changed its name to ANZAPA. Not only am I still a member, but I'm currently the official editor. ANZAPA has just celebrated its Fortieth Anniversary.

The Melbourne Science Fiction Conference, Easter 1968. Dick Jenssen conducts the book auction. Helping him are (l. to r seated): Tony Thomas, Lee Harding, John Foyster (photo: Merv Binns).

Melbourne fans talked about *2001: A Space Odyssey* non stop for a year after it was released. It's been my favourite movie since the *second* time I saw it; I did not know what to make of it at first. Its soundtrack made such an impression on me that I bought Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the first LP of my classical music record collection.

Image 14: Origins of a great fanzine.
December 1968

I am standing in a Hades-hot phone booth in North Carlton. I have walked from the flat I've taken for a month, believing that, now I have finished by Diploma of Education year, I will gain a teaching placing in a metropolitan school. However, nobody from my year is given a city school first year out; we are all sent to the country, so a few weeks after this phone call I will be posted to Ararat Technical School, about 200 km west of Melbourne. I'm phoning George Turner to ask him for contributions to my new fanzine, *SF Commentary*. I plan to publish the first issue because for the first time in my life I will be receiving a salary that might support a fanzine. John Bangsund had just announced that he is closing down *Australian Science Fiction Review*. He has handed to me his address list and the articles that were still unpublished, including my still-unpublished long essays about Philip K. Dick. Over the phone, George says 'yes'. A week later he sends me a sheaf of newly written reviews. During the summer holidays before I travel up to Ararat, I type stencils at a great rate. Unfortunately, I have typed them on an Olivetti portable, which cuts stencils badly.

Ditmar presentations, Syncon 2, August 1972. Photo taken by the Capricorn Graphics, the official photographer. Right in the front are (l. to r.): Gary Hoff, who took a full set of colour photos of the same convention, A. Bertram Chandler (Bert Chandler), Ron Graham. Next row back: Ron Clarke, Sue Smith (later Sue Clarke, later still Sue Batho). Behind them are Joy Window and Alan Sandercock. Across the aisle are John Bangsund (pensive), Leigh Edmonds (smiling), Carey Handfield (pensive), David Grigg (smiling). Glimpsed way back on the left side are John Alderson (bearded), Bill Wright (grinning, right at the back), Bruce Gillespie (collar and tie!), Eric Lindsay (facing sideways), Alf van der Poorten (looking up), Paul Stevens (looking down) and Merv Binns (facing sideways). Many other famous fan faces are obscured.

Probably the first costume party held at an Australian convention: Syncon 2, August 1972. (Both photos: Capricorn Graphics.)
Top (l. to r.): Shayne McCormack, Lee Harding, Carla Harding, John Bangsund, Bob Smith.

Image 15: Mighty engines.
February 1969
This image I did not see. If I had been able to, I would have been doing all the work. The now ex-*ASFR* crew had offered to run off the stencils I had typed for *SF Commentary*. I delivered to them 66 stencils, all of them difficult to read. Despite this, Lee Harding, Leigh Edmonds and John Foyster printed, collated and sent out 300 copies of *SF Commentary* 1. I still don't know why they did not turn me down, and I am still grateful.

Image 16: Message from a far god.
early April 1969
I feel as if I am floating down the main street of Ararat. I have picked up my mail from my box, and am walking back to school during my lunch break. An envelope contains a letter from Philip K. Dick, disagreeing with the first of my articles about his novels (but in an affable way), and saying that he has arranged for Doubleday to send me copies of three of his recent novels. I suspect I never came closer to fannish heaven, unless it was the day later that year when I received my first letter from Brian Aldiss, or a while later, when Bob Tucker sent his first letter of comment.

Image 17: Welcome to Valhalla.
Easter 1969
Melbourne Easter convention time, one year later. Again I walk in the door of the Melbourne SF Club, walk up one tiny staircase, along the narrow landing, and up another staircase. At the top of the staircase is Bernie Bernhouse, his hair wild and bushy, like its owner. 'Loved your fanzine, Bruce!' said Bernie. 'Great to catch up with you.' I had met Bernie through Leigh Edmonds during 1968. At one time we all thought Bernie was going to be the next great Melbourne fan writer. (He had almost disappeared from sight by 1971.) The previous Easter, nobody except John, John and Lee knew who I was. Suddenly, a year later I became a minor celebrity because of publishing the first issue of *SF Commentary*. (I don't know how a neofan could make such a splash these days. Yes, you could write a brilliant blog, but how do you let everybody in fandom know about it?) By the time I had got within a few feet of the door, I had shaken hands with a dozen people, most of whom I now knew by name, but few of whom I had met in person. Later in the convention, I was astonished and honoured that Damien Broderick (one of the few published SF authors at the convention) wanted to natter to me. I met wonderful people, such as Tom Newlyn and Alf van der Poorten, who have long since faded from the scene. All I had to do now was to buy my own duplicator and keep publishing issues of my fanzine.

Image 18: GelatiCon.
New Year 1971
Fans find themselves tightly packed into a single room at Melbourne University. The occasion is Boys Own Convention. The committee is made up of the co-editors of *Boys Own Fanzine*, John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds. Eventually the complete proceedings will be published in *Boys Own Fanzine* 3. Every facility on campus is shut. The nearest loos are over 100 yards away, across campus, across Lygon Street, and in the back of a house owned by the university's Meteorology Department, courtesy of Dick Jenssen, head of the department, who had also arranged for us to use the room on campus. It rains most of the weekend. We are trapped at the convention, which gives to proceedings a spirit of camaraderie greater than any I've experienced at any other convention, except for Advention 1. At the beginning of a panel on SF films to be given by Merv Binns, Paul Stevens and Peter House, Lee Harding appears at the side door of the convention room. 'There's a little man out here selling gelati,' he said. Within a few seconds the room empties. There is at least one photo of everybody queueing to buy a gelati, with Leigh Edmonds and John Foyster organising the queue. The convention was renamed GelatiCon.

[I looked at my watch. I had nearly filled the hour. Leigh reminded me of the other highlight of GelatiCon: John Bangsund's talk as Sir Humphrey Tape about the art and science of ektachriasomes. These are the run-off grooves at the end of each side of an LP record. Each one is different. Sir Humphrey Tape purported to find great musical significance in each groove. As he talked, he played a tape of the ends of his various records: the Wagner ektachriosome, the Beethoven ektachriosome, etc.

Leigh then called out: 'August 1972: Syncon 2': just the right place to end the talk:]

Final image: Bliss.
August 1972
I have just arrived at the Squire Inn, Bondi Junction, for Australia's first convention held in a hotel. As a collective Australian fandom, we need to get this right, because in three years time we plan to hold Australia's first world convention in Melbourne. I check in, and meet people in the

corridor. Alan Sandercock and some of the other Adelaide fans approach me. 'Come and meet Lesleigh Luttrell,' said Alan. Lesleigh was the first winner of DUFF, the Down Under Fan Fund. She had just arrived from Madison, Wisconsin, to stay two weeks in Australia. We know each other, sort of, from reading each other's fanzines. We shake hands, and I go weak in the knees. After a few minutes of talking, I could feel the entire plane of my life swinging around and changing direction. I had fallen in love, really fallen in love, for the first time in my life. Until that moment I had thought of myself as a kind of priest devoted to science fiction. Since I knew that no girl could ever be interested in me, I had never overcome my natural shyness to let anything happen. When Lesleigh arrived in Melbourne a few days after Syncon, I got so desperate that I said my piece. She was very flattered. She was, however, married, and due to fly back to America in a week's time. But we spent several days together, much to the relief of people like Leigh and Valma, who found it difficult to talk to Lesleigh — who was only twenty-one and very shy. This overwhelming experience changed the direction of life, sending me on a path that led me to finding Elaine. But that's a whole other story.

— Bruce Gillespie: spoken version 5 October 2008; written version 30 November 2008

Syncon 72 was notable for many things, among them (left) Bruce Gillespie receiving his first Ditmar Award, for *SF Commentary*, from John Bangsund; and (right) meeting Lesleigh Luttrell, the first DUFF winner. (Photos: Gary Hoff, and Capricorn Graphics.)

Gillian Polack

The tale I was not going to tell: Guest of Honour Speech, Conflux 5, October 2008, Canberra

This isn't the tale I was going to tell. The Conflux committee has given me an important affirmation in a troubled year, so my thoughts have turned to deep things. That's what you're getting today: deep things. I'll try not to cry, if you promise to laugh at each and every one of my jokes. There is a gratuitous *Star Trek* joke in there, somewhere. Just one.

When I was at school, debating was all about choices. Would you cure cancer or build a warhead? Would you save children or whales? The choices implied that when we grew up we would have those choices. Simple ones. Powerful ones. And that life was about simple and powerful choices.

Two of the guests of honour at Conflux 5, Canberra 2008: Cat Sparks (l.) and Gillian Polack (photo: Leigh Blackmore).

When I grew up I discovered that agency and change and being oneself isn't so straightforward. War and cancer aren't alternates in most of our universes, nor are children and whales — they exist alongside each other in complex ways.

I can't choose to stop cancer dead in its tracks. I would if I could. Cancer has dogged my whole life. Too many people I care for have come through it or are in it and far, far too many of those close to me have died. That's one reason the fiction I'm working on now contains so many types of ghosts. I can talk about the ghost writing later — ask me any questions at the end.

The deaths that haunt me help define me — I want to understand the parts of our lives that we can control. I want to understand choices.

I spent twenty years in the women's movement, doing mostly behind the scenes work, trying to open things up so that more people in Australia had better choices for their lives. I talk about my twenty years sometimes. I write about it sometimes. I nightmare about it sometimes. And yes, I cleared out a bunch of my archives in late August, so right now I wonder if I actually did anything in that time. Ten years of my life was just recycled, in a fully environmentally sound way.

I didn't change the world in those twenty years. The whole way government and lobbying and change agents work is that inroads are slow and painful and effects are hard to measure.

One thing I got out of that time was a very good understanding of how change happens in societies. Being an historian helps. My brain is wired for it. And, for the record, I still teach what I learned when I was writing position papers and negotiating. That part of my teaching isn't related to speculative fiction, so if anyone has an interest, ask me over coffee. It's important to me, though, that I still do this empowering and this educating: it's another way of recycling my past in a sensible manner.

It's also important to me that at the time I was in the women's movement, I was useful. My particular strength was helping with the dreams of others. I helped to get some really good dreams off the ground back then. Stuff that had to happen. Cool stuff.

The dream I got off the ground for myself (myself and my friends Helen and Lulu) was to give Australia a Women's History Month. I keep telling people: in the US, it took an Act of Congress, and in Australia it took Helen inviting us to share coffee at Gus's. When change finally breaks, it can take you in the most unexpected directions.

I left the women's movement because a friend died. Helen Leonard. Helen. Helen from that table at Gus's. Her death made me realise just how much everyone in our circles was overextended and that we were forgetting something basic. Something I probably knew when I was at school and arguing over cancer vs war.

My world has to be about me, not purely about the needs of others. It's not much use opening up a choice for someone else, if I deny myself 20 years of life in the doing.

Helen's first choice for her life was always political. Her little black address book was full of names that echo history. What I realised after her death, was that — though I am a political being — my first choices are not Helen's. Look at my FaceBook Friends list and you'll see that the inner Gillian is only partly political.

I was sitting on National Boards and asking the Attorney-General and the Minister for Immigration embarrassing questions at Parliament House and I was not enjoying myself. I was doing things I felt *ought* to be done, rather than things that *I* needed to do. I obviously did them reasonably well, but writing, research, thinking, teaching, friends — they're the heart of me, not annoying Phil Ruddock.

Helen's death made me realise that my own choices were just as important as those of others. Just as important as anybody's. I'm the sort of person who people tend to want on committees, but committees aren't where I achieve my dreams. It was a big realisation.

My choice then was to come out of a fifteen-year funk, and to let the world see my fiction.

It was the right thing to do. I'm still on committees — but they're very different committees and everyone on them understands the importance to me of my next novel.

I still feel guilty saying that. I feel *guilty* saying that! I still feel that the dreams of others ought to be more important than my own dreams. Than my own self.

What I'm doing now is just as powerful as the politics in change agent terms — it operates differently. But it does change the world. Fiction is an incredibly powerful thing. It's wonderful and it's amazing.

Novels for me are part of my own little black address book. That little black address book is more important than the ego trip. That little black address book is far more important than being dutiful.

This is where my historian/activist understanding of cultural dynamics and change *can* make a difference for me. I know the value of what I'm doing. Intellectually, I know it. I just have to remind myself a lot.

What I'm doing doesn't count for much compared to what Helen did — but it's hardly innocuous. Fiction has power. *Life through Cellophane,* for instance, works through some quite evil choices facing middle-aged women. Do we fade, or do we use the pressure of fading to transform ourselves into something rich and wondrous?

For me there's always been magic in small things, like the mirrors we choose for our lounge rooms, so it's not surprising that I write and I care and I dream about the magic of small things. And it's not surprising that I turn them into a fantasy novel when I want to understand and explain the cultural fading forced on middle aged women.

Eneit Press is bringing *Life through Cellophane* out next year, which brings me much joy.

One of the reasons I took the feminist path for so long was to try to reduce the pressures on people, especially when they have it tough. Those pressures that force people to fade. To dwindle. To be marginalised. I used to talk about this all the time. It's still my passion, but I don't need to talk about it so much when I'm finding solutions through my fiction.

I'm still political. I'm still a change agent. I just stopped preaching and started listening to my own words. My life is rich and strange, and my novels are rich and strange, and yes, it all suddenly came together when I retired from the women's movement.

I didn't make that choice about my writing by myself. In fact, I assumed my writing was so appalling that no-one would publish it. This is despite a small but respectable publication history before that fifteen-year funk.

What was that funk? Well, in my twenties, when my father was dying for the second time, I did the stupidest thing a writer could do: I believed my own doubts. I'm someone who works from passion and has little real self-confidence, and that's a dangerous thing.

In fact, it was Tamara Mazzei of Trivium Publishing who forced the issue and made me realise that maybe I had been an idiot to think no-one would ever want to read my fiction. She's from the South and she used some very colourful language. I found out all about opening cans of whoop-ass. They were, apparently, to be opened on me.

Tamara knew me as an historian; we were doing a project together. That project is still on the back burner, because both of us are just busy. It's a fiction writers' bible for the Western Middle Ages. Felicity Pulman has a sneak copy and can tell you all about how terrible it is that it isn't in print, but I keep up the research and I use it to teach and to advise writers, so it's not several years' work wasted.

It never will be. I love the Beast. I still want to see it available to fiction writers who need to know, urgently, what Lincoln green really looks like or what form lighting might take in a private room in twelfth-century London. I can haul it up on my computer during the Con, if anyone wants. Pretend I'm wearing a label 'Ask your Medieval questions here.'

Anyhow, Tamara told me in no uncertain terms that I could write. She was only supposed to have read a section of my fiction along with some non-fiction so that we could work out the natural place where our styles met.

That conversation will be with me for the rest of my life. It's evidence that the right words at the right time can change someone forever.

Trivium Publishing didn't exist then. It was planned, but I didn't know that. Tamara was waiting for the perfect book to launch the imprint. *Illuminations* was apparently that perfect book. She sold her dream car to start the business up faster in case I sold the manuscript elsewhere.

I was saying to her 'You're mad. No-one would want to read my writing.'

And she was saying to me 'You're mad. Go away and write more fiction. But not before you sell me your manuscript.'

I have a photo of both of us beneath my name in lights on a bookshop in Austin, Texas, as proof that her madness is much more powerful than my madness.

Her dream book wasn't *Illuminations*, at all. You need to know this. *Illuminations* was the book to start the imprint, but it wasn't the book that cried to her soul. That book was *The Art of Effective Dreaming*. The one with the dead morris dancers and the bored Canberra public servant.

I still can't believe Tamara's reaction to reading *The Art of Effective Dreaming*. That reaction is what we had to hold us solid when the universe aligned itself against its release. *Effective Dreaming* is coming now, soon.

The drought is breaking on all fronts, in fact. 2009 will be my year of truth. It starts with a short story in Sharyn Lilley's *In Bad Dreams 2*, then there is an anthology I'm editing with Scott Hopkins for the Canberra Speculative Fiction Guild, and there are the two novels.

And we've only explored one part of my choices. Choices are so much more complex than they seem in a debate at school.

I chose not to be a regular academic, after all, while remaining a practising historian. You have to understand that this is not a normal state of affairs. You also probably ought to understand that the sort of historian I am is not the purveyor of cute anecdotes that most people regard me as. It's important, because my history, too, leads back into my fiction and ties very closely in with why the choice to share my writing was probably the single most difficult and important one I could make.

Kaaron Warren and I joke that I see the world through history-coloured glasses. The history that colours those glasses isn't the history you read in schoolbooks. In every university I attended, I ended up with the

theoreticians, the historian's historians. The people who wrote the stuff that shapes and changes and shifts the way we see the world. I chose them for what they had to teach me. The only theoretician I refused to study under was Jacques Derrida. I studied paleography one Toronto summer rather than do a Derrida course. This is because Derrida proposed systems that limit rather than encourage an understanding of dynamics and how societies change through time. I'm all about how people and culture and societies change through time. My history-coloured glasses are powered by strange temporal dynamics.

What most people know me for, in terms of history, came later. I broadened the way I thought about the cultural baggage we all carry and where an understanding of it can be found. I *started* with historio-graphical texts — my doctorate was about forms of history and how people interpret themselves in time — but now I add things like food and governance and toilets and what makeup was proper for a Jewish girl to wear on the streets of a small town near Rouen in 1105. This all came later, when I had sorted out how historiography fitted with what I actually do in my occasionally odd brain. I was sorting this out at the same time I was being the dutiful feminist, and it resulted in some truly curious motivational lectures for women's organisations.

The combination of thinking one thing and doing another gave me a breakthrough moment. I gave a keynote speech somewhere on choices. I was trying very hard to explain why the cultural stuff we carry with us everyday can be limiting. Why the choices we make for ourselves count for so very much.

I hadn't worked out what now seems really terribly obvious. I hadn't told myself 'I tell stories about people; why aren't I explaining things that way?' I did realise, in that crucial speech, the importance of biscuits.

'Telling detail' is a nice bit of writerly terminology. Writers use telling detail as a type of example to communicate a ton of information in a very few words. 'Biscuits' was my telling detail. Every single woman in that room understood the implications of their political choices and the relationship with their personal choices when I explained it in terms of biscuits. For the rest of the conference women came up to me and said so. And I learned from that. I started dumping the university language and started using my words.

'Writing voice' is another of those good terms. I already had my writing voice, but I had overlaid it with a trained one from all those degrees. It took a lot of training to mask my voice. Supervisor after supervisor, editor after editor called my writing 'discursive'. I asked them what precisely they meant and they said 'We're not supposed to enjoy reading it.'

Personally, I think that if I can make a complex hermeneutical analysis of the word 'geste' sound interesting, that this is not a bad thing, but my approach to language caused scoldings. I got lectures on it in Sydney, in London and in St Andrews.

I also got a fascinating conversation in French in Montreal where I was told that he [name of very senior scholar deleted for print version, sorry] would never have approved of the thesis topic, that I was twenty-five years too young to do it, that it looked as if it was going to work and please not to come to him for a reference. It was very elegantly said.

What this means is that I was something no female scholar in the eighties could afford to be: I was a hot potato. My writing style didn't help, but it was my brain that was the problem.

It got really interesting in 1987. Everyone agreed I was doing what I did very well. I was paid to do it. But crucial people thought that it was just a bit too challenging. And the rest I don't talk about in public. Let's just say it got nasty.

At the same time this was happening, my father was dying for the second time.

I was 26. I had submitted my doctorate. I was supposed to find a job in the US (the only place there were jobs then). I had no academic publications, because my sole accepted one had been switched at the last minute for a satire of mine by the editor.

In 1988, then, I chose Australia over the US. I chose to be near my father in his final months. This means I chose a safe job. The public service gave me a choice and I picked the job that seemed to most value my strange brain.

In August 1988, my father died. Around the same time (either that year or the next — it's a long time ago now) I missed my first meeting of the National Council of Jewish Women. I had gone to a function of theirs a

few weeks before to make my grandmother happy. The day after the missed meeting, I got a phone call saying 'Congratulations, you're now the Canberra President.'

I have to admit, it made my grandmother ecstatic.

It also shoved me further into the women's movement at a suddenly senior level. The movement discovered my good committee soul and that I care about the dreams of others, and you know the rest. I was too crushed emotionally by moving so far away from my vocation, by a catastrophically failed romance, by my father dying, so I just accepted what I was given and thought 'This is my life. I am someone who does stuff for other people.'

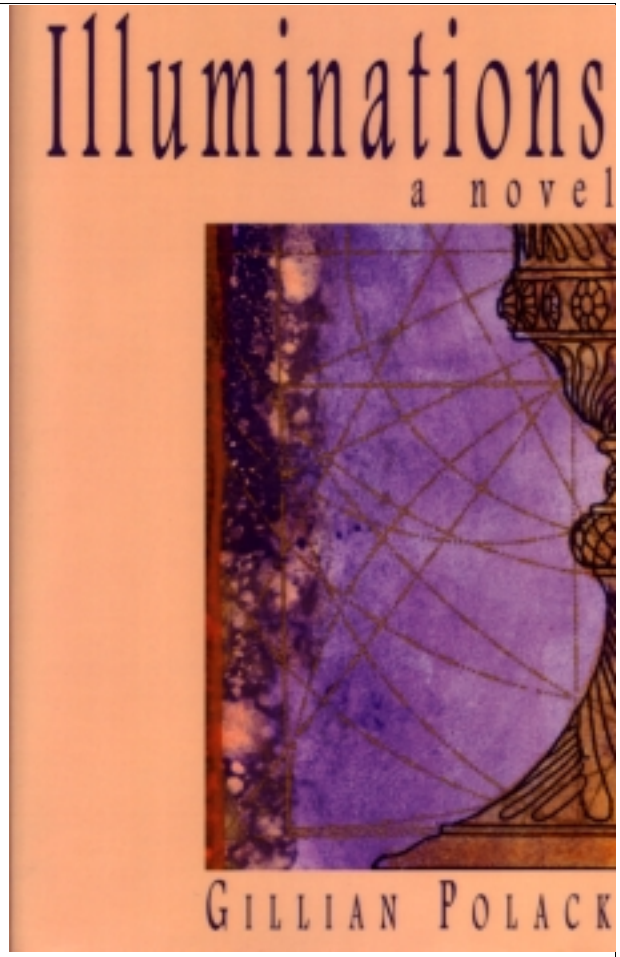
It wasn't a series of choices. It was the culmination of a great deal going very wrong and of me feeling very battered.

Retrospectively, the academic career collapse was a good thing. It gave me time to find out that it's not the end of the world to challenge people. I still don't like being controversial, but I will do it these days. My next academicish essay is going to rattle quite a few bones. It's in the forthcoming *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy* encyclopedia. And yes, it's about the Middle Ages. And yes, I am very boldly saying what no-one has said before.

Active choices, wise choices: these things lead to a life that fits who one is, not who one wishes one were. That writing thing? The telling of stories? The explaining of the world through narratives about people? That makes up the pages of my little black address book. Those pages make the whole world understandable to me.

Within those pages, I'm the person who is always aware that learning is not learning unless it's shared. That biscuits and green jelly and dead morris dancers are just as important to understanding as philology. I like it that I can enjoy analysing the qualities of thirteenth-century ghosts and then take that analysis and say 'Now how to apply this to a bushranger ghost in the Monaro — does it make him corporeal? And if he's corporeal, is he interesting enough to flirt with?'

For me, everything is linked. Always. Everything is part of a thousand stories. I tried not to link things. I tried not to share my stories. I tried to be dutiful. I tried to do what people expected. Of course it failed.



Helen's little black book showed me a soul that was amazing. Around her the world was a better place.

Around me, back then, I gave people tools to help them make the world a better place. I wasn't a direct agent. Even when I thought I was being that, I wasn't. This is because other people's projects are their projects. Other peoples' souls are their souls.

I still care about other people's projects. The health of people's souls is desperately important to me. That person who believes that the world is a better place if we all achieve our dreams is me. It's just not the whole of me.

I know some more things about what's in my little address book. I know that I need people in my life and that also I'm happy alone. I know that I'm still someone who would rather help than sit back and let other people do all the work. I know that I refuse to give up my sense of humour.

I know that my body is far too frail and my brain far too strange, but they're me and that people have just got to deal with them. I know that I shall always think like an historiographer.

Mostly, I know that it wasn't just Tamara's confidence in my writing that made what she said my turning point. Tamara gave me the realisation that there is one factor that binds all of me together. Those pages of that notebook.

You see, even in my fifteen-year funk I never stopped writing. I never stopped thinking about writing. I never stopped reading. I never stopped finding stories to tell. I never stopped learning more about how to tell stories. I have so many stories to tell: I've always told them.

I thought I was fine, telling them to myself. Tamara taught me the importance of readers. My choice isn't to write fiction or not to write fiction. It's to share, and to enjoy the sharing.

I have known I was going to write fiction since I was eight. There was yet another of those defining moments. My old primary school had a little school and a big one, for the different grades. I had just graduated to the big one and I was walking through the hall of the little one, past my old Grade Two teacher's class and I waved at her room 'Hi Miss Lawson' I said in my mind. 'I know what I want to do when I grow up. I'm going to write.' Children sometimes have a clarity in their lives.

Then things change. When I was nine, my father was dying for the first time. My tenth year was scarred by the six weeks he spent in intensive care.

I had two childhoods: one before and one after those six weeks. The one before was a good one and it gave me that clarity. The intervening years, what my father called the bonus years, were difficult. I spent them learning about the needs of others. All I knew is that I was relied on all the time and that what I had to give would never be enough. Not ever. I was a dutiful child and I kept on trying.

It wasn't till 1988 that I gave up. Then it wasn't till later again that I found the resources to say 'Look, me. I have a place in the world.'

I'll be honest with you. I may never know if I'm the writer I want to be. Or if I can write well at all. Sometimes I balance the outward stuff — do those honorable mentions in year's bests count or is the fact that I've never been shortlisted for a Ditmar or Aurealis important? Sometimes I focus on rejection letters and sometimes that my short stories get into print easily. Then I pull myself up. I remember my choices. I remember why I made those choices and I remember how very deep they are.

I value my fiction because I am alive when I write. I love the friends who live in my mind during the life of a novel. I love sharing those friends and that life with readers. That's why I write novels — I love the depth and the extended contact and the challenges. And I love sharing. I want you to meet Fay from *Effective Dreaming* and I want you to meet Miss Elizabeth Smith, Spinster from *Life through Cellophane*. I want to find more people for you to meet and I want to tell you their stories.

The content of my little black address book changes every day, because the theoretical structures that govern my intellectual life change. I'm still that academic theorist and I always will be. I won't write about those things, though. Why should I? I can write about the same dynamic change and make it *real*. Why would I want to be known as the person who once spent three paragraphs defining sempiternity when I could be here, talking with you?

A schizophrenic once told me that the medication she was on gave her the choice between staying up all night, listening to the voices in her head; or waking up every morning, half a person, too tired to live. That period when I gave up the women's movement and chose my writing, I made an active choice to come off drugs. Drugs that I thought were good for me. Duty. Security. Public affirmation. I was half a person.

It was a terrifying step to take, to choose to be myself. My only question now is why on earth it took me so long.

Books in my life

Colin Steele

***brg* I didn't introduce Colin Steele properly in *Steam Engine Time* 9, when I was talking about Colin's appearance at Conflux 5 in Canberra in October 2008. His qualifications include (take deep breath) MA, GradDipLib, FAHA, FLCIP, FALIA, and KtCross Spain. He is an Emeritus Fellow of the Australian National University, where he has held such positions as Director of Scholarly Information Strategies (2002–2003); University Librarian, ANU (1980–2002); Deputy Librarian, ANU (1976–1980); and Assistant Librarian at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (1967–1976). He is Convenor of the National Scholarly Communications Forums, and author/editor of a number of books, as well as over three hundred articles and reviews. He has been writing SF reviews for *The Canberra Times* for many years, and been contributing to *SF Commentary* since the 1970s.**
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They say bibliomaniacs and bibliophiles are usually born rather than made, although neither of my parents were great book collectors. Morris Dunbar once defined a bibliomaniac as 'a victim of the obsessive compulsive neurosis charac- terised by a congested library and an atrophied bank account', while a bibliophile is a 'victim of a markedly less acute and dehabilitating condition'.

Thomas Dibdin, writing in 1809, queried whether bibliomaniacs ever read books. Certainly this one does. Bibliomaniacs read books in the gym on exercise bikes and running machines. Bibliomanics never travel without books, as they alleviate what Dr Johnson called 'the great vacancies of life', particularly those suffered due to transport delays when time often seems to stand still. While many travellers spend time choosing shirts, dresses, etc, bibliomanics spend two minutes packing clothes and the majority of their time selecting books for the journey.

My childhood in the 1950s, in the North-east of England, was enriched by a love of books, similar to that described by Professor John Sutherland in the 1940s in his recently published book *The Boy Who Loved Books,* although I hasten to add my childhood was within a much richer family support system than Professor Sutherland's.

. The 1950s was a decade in which television was only slowly penetrating UK households. Books, comics and cinema were the predominant cultural influences. One recognises today the alternative attractions to the book that the multiplicity of media and the Net provide for teenagers in particular and the population in general. Reading books in the 1950s like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* required imagination rather than relying on digital simulations.

Back in the 1950s, although book collecting was a relatively low priority in Hartlepool, wide reading was possible through a wonderful public library, unlike today when many public libraries regularly weed their stock after several years and seem to be morphing into leisure centres or Internet cafes.

UK public libraries in the 1950s were almost quasi-university libraries in the depth of their nonfiction stock. My aunt was chair of the Library Committee and subsequently became mayor of West Hartlepool. Her house was a book refuge. I remember she invited Doris Lessing to her house in the late 1950s. I recalled this with Lessing when she was a guest of the National Word Festival which I chaired, here at University House, in 1985. Little did we think in 1957 or even in 1985 that Lessing would win the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature.

My uncle succeeded my aunt as Mayor of West Hartlepool — nepotism was not the case, rather it was and is a Labour stronghold. Peter Mandelson was also parachuted in as the local MP under Tony Blair. Locally Mandelson became notorious for mistaking mushy peas for guacamole dip in a Hartlepool fish and chip shop!

Colin Steele.

A slight digression here, on mushy peas from the 'Dead Men Left' blog of 2004: 'Mushy peas — Virulently green, lumpy, and generally served in a small poly- styrene cup. Like cloth caps, Vimto and rugby league they are an emblem of the northern proletariat. Guacamole, on the other hand, is what soft southerners consume at poncy dinner parties, probably in Islington. The cultural resonances of all this are very important indeed.'

My uncle was a science fiction devotee and I devoured his library, notably his magazines such as *Galaxy* and *Astounding* and his Science Fiction Book Club editions. SF provided an escape to other worlds from an extremely polluted Hartlepool and Teeside, with its plethora of chemical and steel works. The books of Arthur C. Clarke, such as *Childhood's End* and *The City and the Stars,* provided particular inspiration and led to a lifelong reading and collection of SF. My large SF library went a couple of years ago to Sydney University Library, where Garth Nix helped launch the donation.

The other alien or alienated world of that time is encapsulated by the French Nobel Laureate author Albert Camus, whose novels such as *La Peste* and *L'Etranger* we studied for French A level. The relatively exotic settings of the Camus novels were not easily envisaged on the damp North East Coast of England.

An enlightened Hartlepool town council, however, twinned Hartlepool with the French Mediterranean coastal resort town of Sete. The Grammar School sixth form went there two years running, although I do not think the following year's cessation of the twinning was our fault. While we got oyster beds, vineyards, Paul Valéry and sun, they got steel works, coal mines, Newcastle brown ale, Andy Capp, whose creator Reg Smythe lived in Hartlepool, and a cold North Sea. Camus, however, remains an ever present with me through his examination of the nature of the human condition.

Liverpool University followed Hartlepool and appeared nearly as exotic as the south of France. The period 1962–66 was an exciting time in popular culture in Liverpool. I remember, for example, seeing the Beatles and other groups at the Cavern before they were famous. I still have the Beatles first LP (but wish I had got them to sign it) and my first edition of John Lennon's *A Spaniard in the Works,* although I still have signed items by Ringo Starr and Brian Epstein.

In my last year in Liverpool I shared a flat with Ian Kershaw, now Professor Sir Ian Kershaw and the renowned biographer of Hitler. When I bought the second volume of Kershaw's Hitler book, I casually remarked to the book shop assistant that I had once shared a flat with the author. She obviously wasn't listening and then looked at me incredulously and said:

'Did you really share a flat with Hitler?'

Ian and I then went on to Oxford, he to continue his DPhil at Merton College and I to take up a position at the Bodleian Library at Oxford. My book collecting took off at Oxford University in the late 1960s, although like many collectors I wish I had been able to buy more than I did,

particularly from the bargains which Richard Booth had at his bookshops in the early days of Hay-on-Wye.

I organised the Bodleian coach trips to Hay-on-Wye. In 1972 Richard Booth promised book bunnies on board the buses, but they never materialised! I remember on one trip the Oxford English don, Francis Warner, a friend of Richard Burton, saying to a clearly inexperienced relative of Booth's 'How much for this first edition of Raleigh's *The History of the World [1614]?',* and he saying, 'This is really old, I'll have to charge you fifteen pounds' (then I think around 25 Oz dollars).

Ten weeks later the *Sunday Times* in Britain reported Warner attending the fortieth birthday bash for Elizabeth Taylor in Budapest in 1972 and her congratulating Warner for his expensive gift to her of the first edition of Raleigh's *The History of the World* BUT WE KNEW!

Close friends in Oxford were Dr Tom Shippey, the expert on Tolkien and then SF Reviewer for *The Guardian* and the *TLS,* and the author Brian Aldiss. As a result of these contacts, I arranged for the archives of Brian Aldiss and Michael Moorcock to be deposited in the Bodleian in the mid 1970s.

In the Bodleian I was in charge *inter alia* of Latin American and Spanish purchasing. And so there were some wonderful books that I was allowed to handle and read, such as the first edition of *Don Quixote.* The Bodleian had bought two copies of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* on first publication in 1605 because they knew it would be popular with the students and one copy would soon be worn out! An early example of multiple copy purchasing!

Another treasure, also located in Duke Humfrey's Library, was the sixteenth-century pictographic manuscript *The Codex Mendoza.* This unique manuscript is a major source of the history of Aztec civilisation, whose tortuous path from the Valley of Mexico to Oxford I covered in my 1975 book *English Interpreters of the Iberian New World.*

I recall the visit of one Mexican ambassador who, after inspecting it, told Bodley's Librarian that he was taking it back to Mexico in the style of the Elgin Marbles, but of course the *Codex* is a more portable item. He put it inside his overcoat and strode out of Duke Humfrey and into the Bodley quadrangle. Given the understandable angst of Bodley's Librarian, Dr Robert Shackleton, he returned it with a smile saying 'It was only a joke' to much collective relief.

I wish I had started collecting signed books in Oxford, as Tolkien used to wander through the Reading Rooms, as did Auden, Larkin and many other famous literary figures.

I invited one of the leading first edition booksellers in the world, Dr Rick Gekoski, to Canberra a couple of years ago to speak at the National Library. When I came to Bodley, Gekoski was still a postgraduate at Merton College. Gekoski recalls in his 2005 book *Tolkien's Gown and Other Stories* that he also kicks himself every day for not getting Tolkien to sign first editions of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings,* which today, depending on condition, he feels would fetch around $100,000 to $150,000.

Gekoski found out from the Merton College porter that Tolkien was getting rid of things from his room as he moved into retirement in Bournemouth in 1969. Gekoski was disappointed when he found no first editions, but he did rescue Tolkien's old college gown, with its name tag, rejecting his shoes and tweed jackets! In the 1980s, when Gekoski was putting out one of his book catalogues, he decided to sell the gown, which he described as 'original black cloth, slightly frayed'. It eventually sold for £550 to an eccentric academic in America who claimed he was going to wear it at the annual university commencement exercise.

Julian Barnes, then a young novelist, complained in the *Times Literary Supplement* that perhaps Gekoski would soon be in the market for D. H. Lawrence's underpants and Gertrude Stein's bra. Gekoski was not amused, and was relieved he hadn't catalogued the shoes as well, but he did note that he had sold a cutting of Sylvia Plath's hair from when she was two.

In Oxford I met at a Bibliographical Society meeting the Cambridge bibliophile, Dr A. N. L. Munby, who wrote in a now famous essay, 'Floreat Bibliomania': 'The education of collectors' wives must be started early, suggesting that a visit to at least one bookshop a day throughout the honeymoon is to be recommended.' Munby goes on to describe the great book collectors such as Sir Thomas Phillips, whose wife once complained in a letter: 'I am booked out of one wing and ratted out of the other.' Munby concludes that, when bibliomania becomes too much, collectors face the problem of whether to retain 'one's books or one's wife'.

John Baxter, who has written, like Gekoski, a wonderful bibliophilic memoir, *A Pound of Paper* (2002), reflects how bewildered he was by his second wife's behaviour when she accompanied him on his fanatical book-buying trips. Baxter complained: 'She'd take down a book from the shelf and just sit and read.' He felt this was a 'colossal waste of time' in that she could help him search for treasures in the bookshop.

Baxter, perhaps needless to say, is now remarried — to a French TV presenter. Baxter's flat in Paris is a treasure trove of great works of literature in their first editions. We visited him earlier this year in Paris. To get to his top floor flat we climbed the same staircase that Hemingway took in 1944 to 'rescue' Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare and Company fame.

In occupied Paris, Beach had refused to sell her last copy of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* to a high-ranking German SS officer, so her store was closed down and she got friends to hide her books all over Paris. Hemingway in 1944; at the front lines of the Allied forces, drove his jeep to Rue de l'Odeon, Baxter's current address, and officially 'liberated' Shakespeare and Company.

Historic libraries, like the Bodleian, face constant financial crises. Professor Terry Eagleton had a satirical 'Don's diary' in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* for 1995 in which he came up with novel ideas to raise funds for the library: 'Arrive at the Bodleian at 9:10 to find all the 2 pound fifty seats taken. So had to take a 50p squat on the stairs of the Radcliffe Camera. So annoyed I ordered up the wrong book by mistake, three pound down the drain. Found someone with the book I wanted, bid four pound fifty, but was trumped by a rich American. Rented a cushion from the library hostess for one pound twenty and dozed off.'

I used this quote in 2002 when I was invited to give the after dinner speech at Keble College, Oxford, for the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Bodleian. Sarah Thomas was appointed earlier this year as Bodley's Librarian — she is the first woman and first American to hold that post. I recently sent her Eagleton's piece to which she appropriately replied: 'If you want an email response from me it will cost you fifty dollars.'

Characters in the Bodleian were more eccentric in those days than they are now. A Keeper of Oriental Books was nicknamed Inspector Clouzot because of his propensity to pursue errant undergraduates who, he believed, had stolen books from the Bodleian — a non-lending library. His major investigative triumph involved tracking down who was mutilating famous manuscripts. As it transpired, one of the female stack attendants was cutting out signatures, such as those of Elizabeth the First, from manuscripts and selling them at Sothebys. One won't comment here on the lack of a search for ownership and provenance. It was ironic that when sentenced the convicted girl was made Librarian of her UK Open Prison.

The key books after coming to ANU in 1976 would take too long to recount. My taking over from Alison Broinowski of the Chairmanship of the National Word Festival in 1983 and the organisation of ANU literary lunches did bring me in touch with many authors, ranging from Terry Pratchett and Patricia Cornwall to Raymond Carver and Richard Ford.

I am currently enjoying reading the beautiful Yale University library exhibition catalogue of Rudyard Kipling entitled *The Books I Leave Behind.* Bibliomaniacs, to return to the beginning, have to be careful about the books they leave behind, but that's another story.

My wife's favourite author is Jane Austen. Mr Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* said to his daughter Mary, whose harpsichord playing left something to be desired: 'You have delighted us long enough'. On that note, I should conclude, and hope I have provided some delight from some of the books and places in my life.

— Colin Steele, 2007

Dan Simmons section

Elaine Cochrane

The major SF works of Dan Simmons

This paper was first delivered as a paper to the November 2008 meeting of the Nova Mob, Melbourne's SF discussion group. Elaine Cochrane is a Melbourne-based freelance book editor, specialising in maths and science. Her most recent appearance in *Steam Engine Time* was with 'If You Do Not Love Words' (No 1, April 2000), which discussed the works of R. A. Lafferty.

Dan Simmons, 2002 (photo by Beth Gwin, courtesy Locus Publications.)

Dan Simmons was born in Illinois in 1948, and grew up in various places in the Midwest. He majored in English at Wabash College in Indiana, one of only four remaining mainstream all-men's liberal arts colleges in the United States. Wabash has a very high academic reputation, and Simmons won a national Phi Beta Kappa Award during his senior year for excellence in fiction, journalism and art.

Then, as he says in a 2001 interview on writerswrite.com, 'I avoided the Vietnam War through a last-minute *deus ex machina* and found myself in an experimental, 8-person graduate program for teachers at Washington University in St. Louis'. There he did his Masters in Education and then went into teaching primary-school-age students. He taught for 18 years, including, for his last four years, teaching writing to gifted primary students. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by Wabash College in 1995 for contributions to education and writing.

He does not preach it, but the impression he gives through his writing is of someone who cares rather more than is fashionable about people,

about poverty and social justice and equity.

I

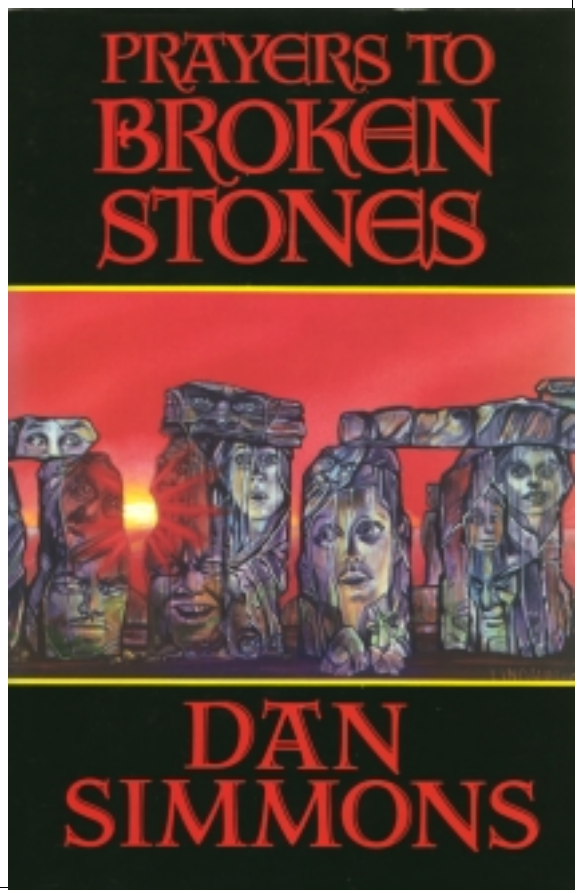
His first published story was 'The River Styx Runs Upstream', in 1982. His website lists a couple of dozen short works, some of which were the seeds of later novels, and 26 novels or collections—I think this breaks down to 21 novels and five collections, but it's hard to tell from the list. Another novel, *Drood*, is listed for publication in 2009. An interview with *Science Fiction Weekly* in about 2000 lists three more short stories, one of which, 'Orphans of the Helix', won a *Locus* Award. A number of Simmons' works have been optioned for film, some progressing as far as screenplay, but it appears that none so far has made it to the cinemas.

Simmons won a Hugo for the 1989 novel *Hyperion*, and he has won 12 *Locus* Awards (not counting the one he doesn't list), four Bram Stokers, as well as World Fantasy, British Fantasy, British SF, and a sprinkling of other awards including in France and Japan. *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990) was nominated for the Nebula. Four works, *Carrion Comfort*, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and 'This Year's Class Picture', all from the short period 1989 to 1992, collected 17 of the 33 awards he lists on his website. It would be a pity of the relative lack of gongs for his more recent work reflects reduced interest from readers in what he is doing, because much of his work is very interesting indeed.

The works are within the genres of SF, fantasy, dark fantasy, horror, crime, historical fiction, and what could be called mainstream, although Simmons, in his introduction to 'Remembering Siri' in *Prayers to Broken Stones* (Dark Harvest/Bantam Spectra, 1990), objects to pigeonholing:

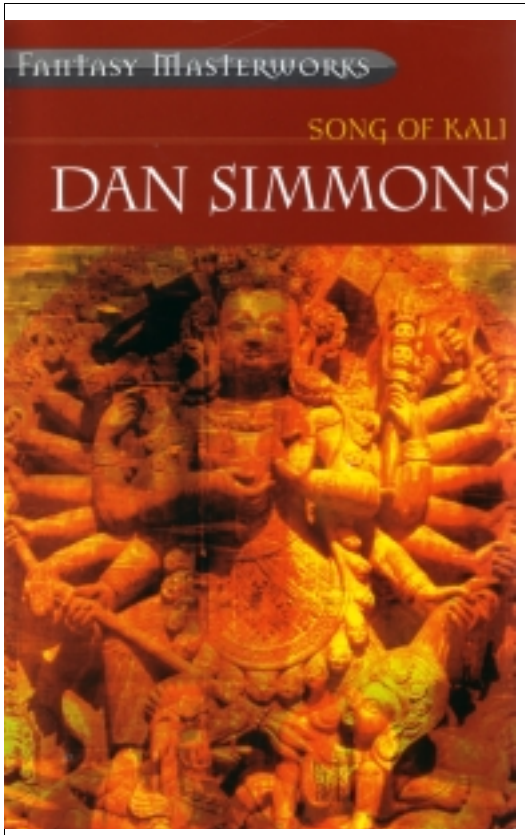
> I'm interested in how few writers cross the osmotic boundaries between science fiction and horror, between genre and what those in genre call mainstream. Or, rather, I should say that I'm fascinated with how many cross and do not return.
>
> Part of it, I think, is the vast difference in states of mind between dreaming the dark dreams of horror and constructing the rational structures of SF, or between tripping the literary light fantastic and being shackled by the gravity of 'serious' fiction. It is hard to do both—painful to the psyche to allow one hemisphere to become dominant while bludgeoning the other into submission. Perhaps that's why readership of SF and horror, genre and New Yorker fiction, overlap less than one would think. [skip]
>
> 'What's wrong with just writer?' [Ellison [that's Harlan] says softly in his most cordial cobra hiss.]
>
> Well, what's wrong with it is that the semiliterate have feeble but tidy little minds filled with tidy little boxes [skip]
>
> How do you explain that every modifier before writer becomes another nail in the coffin of your hopes of writing what you want? What you care about?

However, in the *Science Fiction Weekly* interview, he admits that writing across several genres causes problems with book chain computer-ordering systems. He also admits that, while authors sometimes cross genre boundaries, readers tend not to. I'm going to add my weight to that claim by concentrating on his sf/fantasy novels, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *Endymion*, *The Rise of Endymion*, *Ilium*, and *Olympos*. I rarely read horror, and still less often crime, so I simply am not in a position to assess his contributions to those genres. I will, however, mention briefly those non-sf works that I have read. The two sf/fantasy series are big, complex, and ambitious, and provide more than enough material for this talk.



II

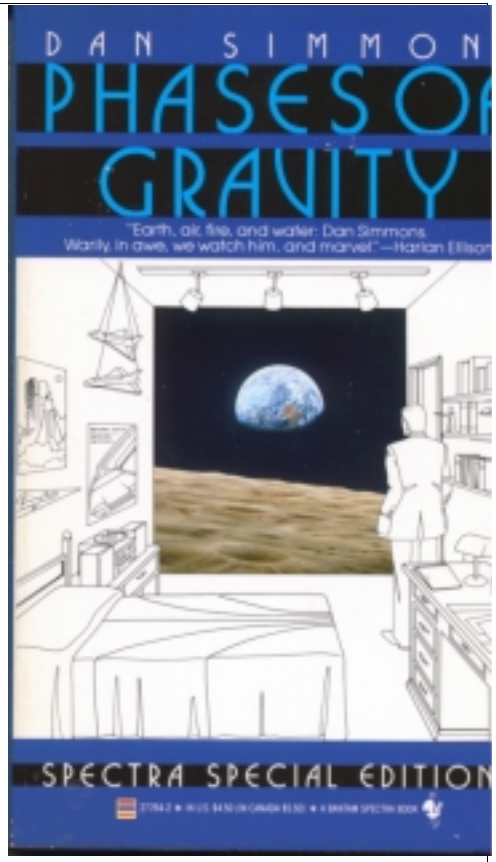
According to his story intros in *Prayers to Broken Stones*, Simmons began writing **'The River Styx Runs Upstream'** in 1979. Over the next couple of years he had only rejections, and was feeling dispirited about his



chances of ever getting anything published. In that mood, he enrolled in a writers' conference in Colorado in 1981, where he submitted 'The River Styx Runs Upstream'. He ended up in the workshop led by Harlan Ellison. Simmons' and Ellison's accounts differ in the language used, but they agree that Ellison saw the merit in the story, and that Ellison told Simmons that he was destined to be a writer no matter what. At Ellison's instigation the revised version of the story was entered in the *Twilight Zone Magazine* short story contest for unpublished writers, and it shared first place. The story is SF, in that the mechanism that allows the events to take place is technological, but the mood of the story is quietly creepy. It also introduces one of his recurring themes, the relationship between parents and children, which reappears strongly in *Song of Kali*, *Phases of Gravity*, 'Entropy's Bed at Midnight', and *Ilium/Olympos*.

A few more short stories followed, and then, in 1985, his first novel, ***Song of Kali***, was published (Bluejay Books/ Tor). This was published as horror, and won the World Fantasy Award. On sfrevu and other sites he denies it is fantasy. I haven't been able to find the reference again, but somewhere I found him quoted as saying that it was not horror, it was a novel about Calcutta. (Simmons had spent a year in India on a Fullbright scholarship.) Well, yes, but it all depends on your definition of horror. *Song of Kali* is story of horrors set in the horrific setting of Calcutta. Science Fiction Weekly describes it as a suspense novel.

Everything in *The Song of Kali* is seen through the eyes of one character, the US poet Robert Luczak. Luczak is commissioned to go to Calcutta in search of the Indian poet M. Das, whose new work is 'The Song of Kali'. Luczak's mentor has warned him 'Robert, don't go, I tell you, Robert don't go.' (I'm paraphrasing.) But of course Robert does, taking his Indian-born wife Amrita and their infant daughter with him, and of course things go horribly wrong. Simmons makes noises about exploring the relation between violence and power, and the propensity to evil in us all, but fortunately he doesn't really pursue this. A stronger, more interesting theme, one that recurs in others of his novels and stories, is his exploration of one man's response to that evil.



Simmons' next published novel was ***Phases of Gravity*** (Bantam Spectra, 1989). Although this came out from an sf imprint, it is in no way sf. The *Science Fiction Weekly* interview describes it as 'a mainstream novel dealing with middle age and spiritual transcendance'.

The novel concerns a retired astronaut named Richard Baedecker. He is divorced, and he has few emotional points of contact with his college-age son or with much else of his life. The novel principally concerns Baedecker's pretty aimless search for himself and the people who in one way or another provide guidance — a woman named Maggie Brown who talks about 'places of power', the two astronauts who were part of his Moon mission, and others who pass through his life, but it is really about relationships — not only Baedecker's — between fathers and sons.

The Crook Factory (Avon, 1999) is another non-sf, non-fantasy, this time a spy story constructed around Ernest Hemingway's activities in Cuba during the Second World War. It is known that Ernest Hemingway and a diverse group of his associates formed an espionage ring in neutral Cuba in 1942 and called it the Crook Factory; its activities included monitoring German submarine activity in the Caribbean. It is also known

that the FBI under Hoover kept files on Hemingway and many others. Most of the Hemingway files were still classified when Dan Simmons wrote this book, although Hemingway, and Hoover, had been dead for many years. Simmons has had to work hard to construct a fictional story around such interesting real events and people. He has also suffered from too much information: the real world is messy, and the cast of real people who parade through the book is too large, too unwieldy, to fit into a tidy novel — Hoover, Hemingway, the young JFK, Ingrid Bergman, Gary Cooper, Marlene Dietrich, Ian Fleming (pre Bond), known German agents, the people who made up Hemingway's Crook Factory, Hemingway's family, the Roosevelts. Most of the characters are there because the historical record shows that they were, but they have no flesh in the novel. It's a good read, but the impression is that the real story, including what is in the still-secret FBI files (and every other agency's files) would make an even better read.

So what is Simmons trying to do? In the interview on scifi.com he says it 'might be called a "biographical literary mystery" in the sense that at the heart of it is the question, "Just who the hell was Ernest Hemingway?"' That is certainly part of it, but also I think he has a genuine concern that a country like the US can let itself be ruled by one man's paranoia (in this case, Hoover's). He ends the book with a collection of transcripts from FBI files and brief accounts of how the various real people in the book ended up, some 15 pages. Simmons clearly knew when and where the novel ended, but sees this further documentation as part of the story that had to be told. As he says in his Author's Note, the book is 95% true.

The Terror (Little, Brown 2007) is also based around real events. In May 1845, *The Terror*, under the command of Captain Francis Crozier, and *Erebus*, under the expedition leader Sir John Franklin, set sail from England in search of the Northwest Passage. The two ships were state-of-the-art of their time, they carried provisions that were meant to be sufficient for several years, and they were not seen again after a chance encounter with whalers in late July that year. It is known that their canned food was of poor quality, contaminated with lead, insufficiently cooked, and badly sealed. A few graves from the expedition were found on Beechley Island in the Canadian Arctic, two notes were cached on King William Land; a few artefacts have been found. It is known that the crews abandoned their ships to try to walk to safety some time after the first winter, but when, where, and under what circumstances is not known. Ships sent to search for them found some of the local Inuit with items from the expedition and were told of starving white men; some of these men may have been adopted into Inuit clans.

What does Simmons add to the very real horrors of the crews trapped in their ice-bound ships, beset with darkness, scurvy, food poisoning, lead poisoning, malnutrition and frost-bite, and then desperate enough to try to trek across rough sea ice, hauling heavy sledges? He gives them faces and voices, supplies characters for the names on the lists of the ships' crews, inventing back story where records do not provide it, making you care about what happens to each of them. And he gives them something malevolent out there on the ice.

That something malevolent — a bogey from Inuit mythology — just seems unnecessary, as do the details of the attempted rescue missions. The story he constructs of the men and the ships is strong enough without it. Worse, Simmons uses this bogey to make some heavy-handed comments on the damage to come to Inuit culture and to the Arctic environment, beyond the time-frame of this book. I don't doubt his sincerity, but these future events are another story.

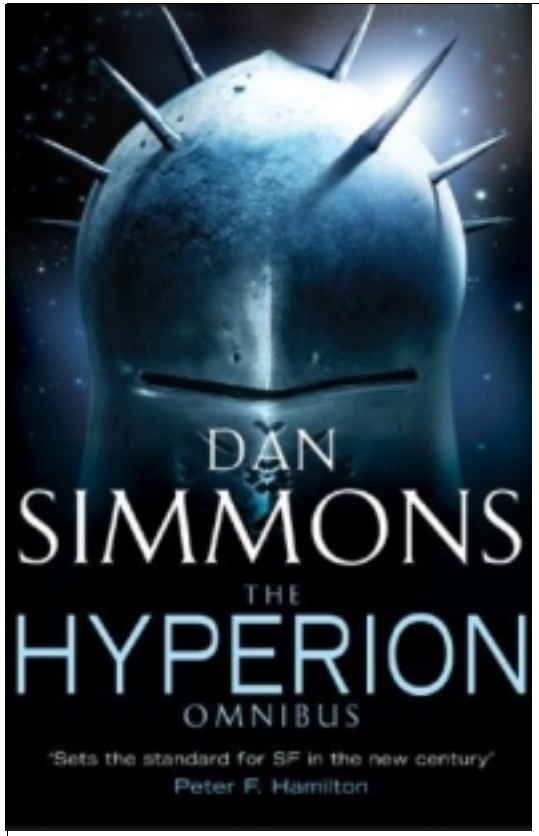
III

And so to *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *Endymion*, *The Rise of Endymion*. (*Hyperion* (1989) (first 350 pp. of *The Hyperion Omnibus*, Orion, 2004, 779 pp.), *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990) (next 429 pp.), *Endymion* (1996) (first 431 pp. of *The Endymion Omnibus*, Orion, 2005, 983 pp.), *The Rise of Endymion* (1997) (next 552 pp.)

The genre of this quartet could be described as space opera with elements of horror/fantasy. It's essentially one long novel, so I'll refer to it as ***Hyperion/Endymion*** for convenience where appropriate.

In ***Hyperion***, seven pilgrims are on a pilgrimage to the Shrike, a mysterious, murderous metallic entity inhabiting part of the planet of Hyperion and worshipped by some as Lord of Pain. Six of the seven tell their stories: the Consul, the Priest, the Soldier, the Scholar, the Detective, and the Poet. The only tale we don't hear is that of the True Voice of the Tree Het Masteen, captain of the treeship *Yggdrasil*, the ultimate in wooden spaceships.

The device works to provide a huge amount of back-story and makes a

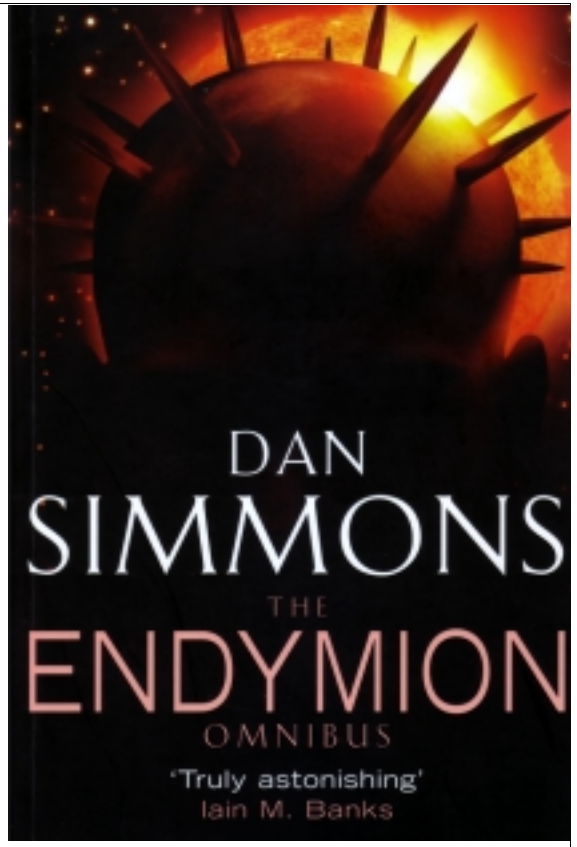


very enjoyable read, but it doesn't create a satisfactory novel.

Essentially, Earth has been destroyed some centuries earlier and humans have fled into space. The 176 Web-worlds, linked by matter transmitters called 'farcasters' and the river Tethys, form the Hegemony, which also has some 200 colonial and protectorate planets, and is just as nasty and ruthless and divided in its politics as any other empire. There are also the Ousters, humans who for generations have lived in deep space and who play the role of barbarian hordes; as the book begins, they are poised to attack Hyperion. The Hegemony is governed by the Worldweb All Thing, which appears to be a sort of parliament but which also involves the Core, a conscious and self-aware real-time network inhabited by thousands of AIs. The AIs are undertaking the Ultimate Intelligence Project, which aims to be able to predict everything, but something about Hyperion, and the Shrike, mucks up their equations. For reasons of their own, they, or some of them—the AIs are also split into factions—have created an embodied AI (a 'cybrid') that is a reconstruction of the poet John Keats. All these parties, human and AI, are involved in ruthless machinations and politicking.

In ***The Fall of Hyperion***, we leave the pilgrims and concentrate on the politics and warfare of the Hegemony, Ousters, and Core. Events are related by a cybrid named Joseph Severn, a duplicate of the Keats cybrid of Hyperion. (The real Joseph Severn, an artist, was a friend of the real John Keats, and nursed Keats when he was dying.) Everyone double-crosses and triple-crosses everyone else, and the book ends with the deliberate destruction by the (human) Hegemony CEO Meina Gladstone of the farcaster network, and hence of the Hegemony itself, in an attempt to destroy the Core.

The Fall of Hyperion does appear to tie up many of the loose ends from the first book, but it is in no way a completion of the story. We are left, like the pilgrims, wondering if Brawne Lamia's unborn child by the Keats cybrid is the answer to life, the universe and everything. This despite 'Somehow I suspected that the entire war, the movement of thousands, the fate of millions — perhaps billions — depended on the actions of six people in that unmarked stretch of orange and yellow.' (*FoH*, p. 381)



Endymion is set several hundred years later. A repressive church, with the pilgrim priest from *Hyperion* as pope, has stitched together remnants of the Hegemony to form the Pax. It is at war with the Ousters, and, outwardly at least, it abominates the Core. The planet Hyperion is under the influence of the Pax but not yet governed by it. Raul Endymion, an inhabitant of Hyperion, is recruited by the pilgrim poet from *Hyperion* to prevent Brawne Lamia's child, Aenea, falling into the hands of the church. (There's been lots of resurrections, rejuvenations, and moving around in time in the previous few hundred years.) He and Aenea, with the android A. Bettik from *Hyperion* and spaceship that belonged to the consul from *Hyperion*, skip from planet to planet using farcasters that come alive for Aenea and no one else, pursued by the Jesuit captain Federico de Soya in the archangel-class FTL ship Rafael. They're safely out of reach at the end of this long chase.

In ***The Rise of Endymion***, Aenea has grown and sets out on her ministry. This involves a lot more skipping between worlds. The Pax is

shown to be in league with the Core, the Ousters turn out to be goodies after all, and the price of bringing down the Pax is what you'd expect from a Messiah.

Again, there are loose ends apparently tied up, but a lot are left dangling. We are told more about the Shrike, but still not the how-why-where of it. Although we are told a little of the who, what we are told simply makes no sense in terms of *Hyperion*. There are lots of explanatory recapitulations from the two *Hyperion* books, but there is also some selective rewriting, some of it contradictory. One of the worst of these involves a major plot element, the cruciform parasite that resurrects those who bear it. In *Hyperion*, the pilgrim priest, Lenar Hoyt, carries his own cruciform and that of Father Paul Duré. In ***The Fall of Hyperion***, the Shrike kills Hoyt (p. 388), who resurrects as Duré, who in turn carries his own cruciform and that of Hoyt (p. 460). Then, on p. 605, the Shrike removes Duré's cruciform, so that (Duré speaking) 'I still had Hoyt's cruciform. But that was different. When I died, Lenar Hoyt would rise from this re-formed flesh. I would die. There would be no more poor duplicates of Paul Duré ... The Shrike had granted me death without killing me.' Yet, in *Endymion*, and *The Rise of Endymion*, Hoyt/Duré carries two cruciforms again, and is resurrected as one or the other as the plot dictates—and the plot does dictate that one, then the other, be resurrected, not once but several times.

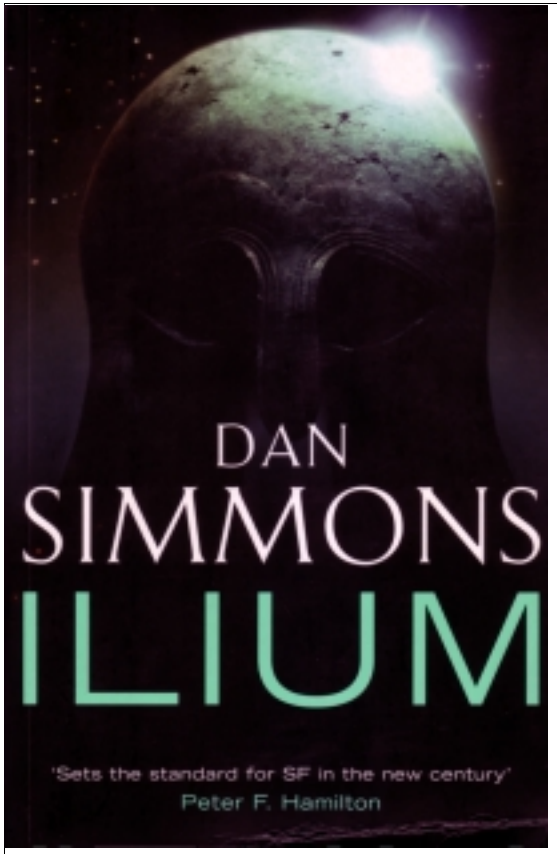
One of the most intriguing and powerful images from *The Fall of Hyperion* is the Tree of Pain on which the Shrike impales its victims while they are simultaneously lying in suspended animation, hardwired into some sort of strange building (*The Fall of Hyperion* pp. 728, 762). The Tree of Pain and the hardwired victims are simply not mentioned in the *Endymion* books, and, if they were, they would be dismissed as 'Uncle Martin's poem isn't always accurate'. Instead 'Tree of Pain' is a name given to a Templar treeship (in which the Shrike happens to be a passive passenger). The Shrike is a slice-and-dice time-shifting bogey in *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, killing large numbers of people for reasons of its own or of its makers (suspected, but not proven, to be a future Core); those killed, with few exceptions, are essentially bystanders and cannon fodder. In *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*, all of the actions of the Shrike are directed against Aenea's enemies. We get an offhand snippet that it is no longer under the control of the Ultimate Intelligence, and learn that Aenea has some influence, but not control, over it, even that it might be controlling itself (p. 384). However, in *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, we are told that the Shrike is travelling backwards in time with (but not controlled by) a woman named Moneta. Since *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* are supposed to have taken place some centuries before *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*, that means that the well-behaved killing machine has somehow gone rogue when it passes from Aenea's company to Moneta's. But there's no mention of it travelling back with Moneta in *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*, and the person Moneta turns out to be in *The Rise of Endymion* has precious little connection with the person of that name in *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*.

So what is Dan Simmons trying to do with these novels? In *Hyperion* and to a lesser extent in *The Fall of Hyperion*, he has talking heads discussing the relationship between worshippers and their god, whether the worshippers create their god, whether god evolves, Teilhard de Chardin and the Socinian heresy, the meaning of the story of Abraham and Isaac, the nature of poetry and the role of the poet. (*FoH*: 400, 442–3–4, 488, 600–1) The *SF Encyclopaedia* makes great claims for the profundity of the *Hyperion* books. Although I don't think they are nearly as profound as the *Encyclopaedia* claims, I do think that Simmons is making a serious attempt to explore these ideas. In the *Endymion* books there is no such attempt apparent (p. 351 but not much else). The *Hyperion* books are clearly unfinished and call for a sequel. While Simmons acknowledges that by writing the *Endymion* books, he seems to have slapped together these hundreds of pages to put an end to something that he is no longer interested in. There are numerous continuity lapses in addition to those I've already mentioned, some trivial, but some with bearing on the plot. There is lots of action and a high body count, but the only thing approaching depth is an architectural interlude (pp. 462–3) that is more an indulgence than integral to the plot. The whole thing ends in mush.

In the writerswrite.com interview, Simmons says:

> When I finished *The Fall of Hyperion*, I knew that there was much of the large canvas yet unfinished, but I waited another four years until writing the bookend volumes, *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*. Since I hate endless sequels that provide diminishing returns for the reader, I've vowed that these will be the last novels ever set in the still-fecund Hyperion universe.

That four-year gap may explain much of the disconnect between the two

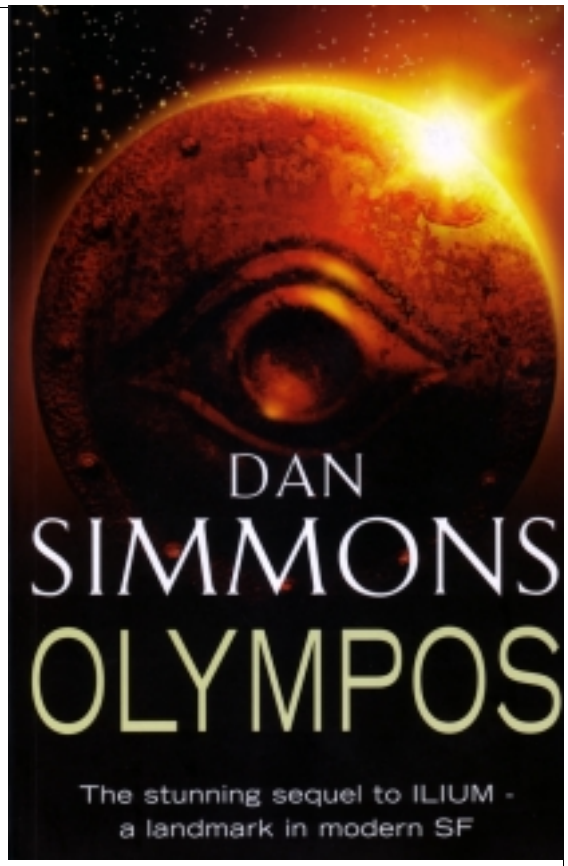


parts and why so much of the richness and strangeness of the *Hyperion* books is lacking in the *Endymion* volumes.

Ilium (HarperCollins 2003) and ***Olympos*** (HarperCollins 2005) are also space opera with elements of horror and fantasy. They form a much more successful double, perhaps because they were conceived as one whole.

Thomas Hockenberry, a resurrected 20th century Classics professor, is observing the Trojan war so he can report on it to the gods on Olympos — in particular, so he can report any divergence from Homer's account in the *Iliad*. Meanwhile, the moravecs — 'autonomous, sentient, biomechanical organisms seeded throughout the outer solar system by humans during the Lost Age' (*Ilium*, Dramatis Personae, p. 575) — have recorded disturbing quantum fluctuations around the suddenly terraformed Mars, where little green men called zeks are circling the seas with great carved stone heads. The moravecs send an investigation team that includes Orphu of Io, an eight-ton crab-like Proust scholar, and Mahnmut, a three-foot plastic-and-metal submariner from Europa who has made a particular study of Shakespeare's sonnets. Back on Earth, the eloi-like 'old-style' humans party on, served and guarded by the silent voynix, draping 'turin cloths' over their faces to watch events at Troy, and believing that they are watched over by the long-vanished post-humans or 'posts', until one of them becomes curious and precipitates the collapse of their world.

Ilium is a fast-paced romp, and Simmons interweaves these strands skilfully. It took me a second reading to see just how successfully he brings them all together in *Olympos*. A major argument, which sounds trite but which is used to great effect, is that a work of artistic genius is process of creation; one theme among many is a sort of coming-of-age, as the old-style humans begin to take responsibility for their own lives.



IV

What are the characteristics of Simmons' writing? His style is immensely readable, although I could quote some truly awful paragraphs. (I won't.)

He enjoys word-play and playing with allusions; for example, Baedecker in *Phases of Gravity* says 'I'm no tourist'. In *Hyperion* there are 'googlepeds' (p. 182), and 'woman-grove root', and, unfortunately, in *The Fall of Hyperion* (p. 395), 'Gladstone and her military ganders'. In *The Rise of Endymion* (p. 552), describing Mars: 'little more than spindly brandy cactus grew where the great apple orchards and fields of bradberries had long ago flourished.' and (p. 658) there are 'pack zygoats'. In *The Fall of Hyperion* (pp. 585–6), one of the AIs is speaking: 'The first message our UI [ultimate intelligence] sent us was this simple phrase//THERE IS ANOTHER\\/Another Ultimate Intelligence'. Anyone recall *The Forbin Project*? On p. 722, 'It pains the Core to take any human life ... or, through inaction, to allow any human life to come to harm.' and in *Endymion* (p. 152) the android A. Bettik says he has 'certain inhibitions ... One, of course, is to obey humans whenever reasonable and to keep them from coming to harm. This asimotivator is older than robotics'.

Much of *Ilium*/*Olympos* is allusion, explicit and otherwise, to various

literary works, and there is less word-play. For example we are told (*Olympos* p. 459) that in Robert Browning's poem *Caliban upon Setebos* Setebos is described as 'many-handed as a cuttlefish'; much of Caliban's speech is directly taken from that poem. There are some nice bits, for example in *Olympos* (p. 228) the moravecs strike problems trying to patch a damaged human because his cells are copyrighted and copy-protected, p. 333 has a book with the title *Ramayana and Mahabharata Scripture Revised According to Ganesh the Cyborg*, Orphu has a subscription to *Scientific Ganymedan* (p. 452). Achilles is often portrayed to humorous effect: 'It does not surprise the Achaean in the least that Oceanids and the formless spirit in the murk down here of Tartarus speak his form of Greek to one another. They're strange creatures, monsters really, but even monsters in Achilles' experience speak Greek. They're not barbarians, after all.' (p. 529). Earlier (p. 381), Achilles has forced the god Hephaestus to fly him in his chariot halfway around Mars and is earbashed the whole way. '"Are we there yet?" interrupts Achilles.'

I've already mentioned that *Hyperion*/*Endymion* has many continuity lapses. *Ilium*/*Olympos* has a few — a Greek warrior killed in *Ilium* (and in the *Iliad*) is alive in *Olympos*, an old-style human killed on p. 259 of *Olympos* is alive from p. 365 onwards — but these are minor lapses of no great significance to the plot.

Simmons's science is dodgy. I don't have the slightest problem with forcefields or quantum teleportation surfing on quantum wavefronts or a ship 'comprised primarily of buckycarbon girders, with wrinkled radiation-shield fabric wrapped around module niches, semiautonomous sniffer probes, scores of antennae, sensors, and cables'that is 'notably different from Jovian-system machines primarily because of its gleaming magnetic dipole core and its sporty outrider deflectors four fusion engine bells and the five horns of the Matloff/Fennelly scoop.' (*Ilium* pp. 51–2). This is science *fiction*, after all. Where I do have problems is where he should know better, e.g. *The Terror* p. 232 he implies that sodium nitrate and calcium chloride are the same substance: 'As to the cooking, Mr. Goldner bragged of a patented process in which he adds a large dose of nitrate of soda — calcium chloride —into the huge vats of boiling water to increase the processing temperature primarily to speed production.' In the short story 'The Great Lover' (*Lovedeath* collection), the main character notices the scent of hibiscus, and in *Rise of Endymion* the characters catch a whiff of methane, which is just as odourless as hibiscus flowers. In *Hyperion* (p. 241) Keats describes the planet Madhya as 'only light minutes' from the Web-world Parvati. Given Earth is 8 light minutes from the Sun, that would imply that Madhya had to be in the same solar system as Parvati, and since both planets are Earth-like, they would have to be in similar orbits. Yet the existence of the planet is a well-kept secret. And so on, particularly in the *Endymion* novels. Carelessness of this level is particularly irritating because Simmons has taken obvious care with details of helicopters (*Phases of Gravity*) and boats (*The Crook Factory*, *The Terror*, *Olympos*), and he takes great care with his use of literature — including in *Ilium* a quotation from Proust that refers to Renoir as an 18th century painter; that error is Proust's own.

Despite the readable style, Simmons has some very annoying habits. His expository lumps are often, well, lumpy. He can be carelessly repetitive; for example in *The Crook Factory*, p. 108: 'Her hair was rich and black'; p. 109: 'Her hair had been cut at shoulder length but was rich and black'. p. 121: 'Hemingway was singing a song which he said had been taught to him by his friend the priest, Don Andres'; p. 124 'Father Don Andres Untzaín, the composer of Hemingway's morning song'. He doesn't trust the reader to remember important points; for example in *The Terror*, p. 4 there is a hint that Franklin is dead; p. 29 Franklin has a premonition of his death; p. 98 we are told that he is dead; p. 184 he is actually killed (after a few more mentions that he's dead); after many more mentions, including the circumstances, on p. 391 we are reminded 'Sir John Franklin, First Lieutenant Gore, and Lieutenant James Walter Fairholme had all been killed by the thing on the ice'.

He can be clumsy in other ways: *Endymion*, p. 217: 'The android's soft voice almost made me jump; I had forgotten he was on the raft with us.' This after the three fugitives (Aenea, Raul and A. Bettik) have been travelling on the raft together for several days, across a couple of worlds, through assorted dangers, and he forgets who is with him? The same problem occurs in *The Terror*: p. 137: A party of eight people set out on a sledge a trip that takes five days. Their camp is struck by a storm, during which one of the party sees the thing from the ice, so they start searching their surroundings. They've been tramping around looking at giant pawprints in the snow for ages before one of them notices they are only seven. What? Only eight people to start with, they've been working as a team for five days, and they don't notice someone is missing?

Recurrent images/language/devices include drowned bodies (*Song of Kali*, *Phases of Gravity*, *Hyperion*), poverty in India, particularly Calcutta

(*Song of Kali*, *Phases of Gravity*; cf also the poverty described in 'Dying in Bangkok'), the effect of standing in front of huge bank of speakers ('Eyes I Dare not Meet in Dreams', 'Vanni Fucci Is Alive and Well and Living in Hell'), yellow mucus-streaked eyeballs and lamprey snouts ('Metastasis', 'A Shave and a Haircut, Two Bites'), cablecars between mountain peaks: *Hyperion* and *Rise of Endymion* (p. 713) and *Olympos* (journey beginning pp. 336–7). Some stories are explicitly anti-war, and there are anti-war themes in 'Carrion Comfort', *Hyperion*/*Endymion* and *Ilium*/*Olympos*. He doesn't like TV evangelists ('Vanni Fucci Is Alive and Well and Living in Hell', 'Vexed to Nightmare by a Rocking Cradle', also *Phases of Gravity*). They all come from Dothan, Alabama. In *Endymion*, *Rise of Endymion*, the born-agains are Catholic of (plot) necessity, but the worst of them are closer in spirit to the TV evangelists.

In *Phases of Gravity*, Baedecker—or rather the woman Maggie Brown — talks about 'places of power' where a person can come into some sort of spiritual knowledge. In *Endymion*, writing of Zen Christians: 'Personal pilgrimages were fun. Places of power, finding one's baedecker point, all of that crap ' The wraiths of Sol Draconi Septem (*Endymion*) morph into the polar bear monster in *The Terror* (or do both derive from the same Inuit mythology?). The Shrike appears in the story within a story in 'Death of a Centaur' before it appears in *Hyperion*. Then the story within the story reappears in *Endymion*. A number of his short stories have become seeds of novels, although without the novels being merely expansions of the short stories.

Poets and poetry, and writers and writing, feature as a creative force and generally: *Song of Kali* (Das and Luczak) 'Vanni Fucci Is Alive and Well and Living in Hell' (Dante's *Inferno*), *Ilium* (Homer, *Iliad*, as well as Shakespeare's sonnets and *The Tempest*, Proust, Blake, Browning, Virgil etc. are integral to the plot), *Hyperion* (Keats as character, Ezra Pound as an incidental off-stage character; and a structure explicitly based on the *Canterbury Tales*). The titles *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *Endymion* are also titles of Keats poems, and character names are derived from Keats: Brawne Lamia — Keats's great love was Fanny Brawne and he wrote a poem titled 'Lamia'; the poet Leigh Hunt was a friend, as was the artist Joseph Severn. The rebellion against the Core could be argued to reflect the rebellion against the Titans in Keats's poem. 'Carrion Comfort' is a phrase from Gerard Manley Hopkins; 'The River Styx Runs Upstream' begins with a quotation from Ezra Pound. 'The Great Lover' is a synthesis of many of the First World War poets. *The Crook Factory* includes passages where Hemingway is talking about writing that are not relevant to the plot but reflect Simmons' interest in the process of writing and how writers see writing.

Simmons' next novel, *Drood*, is a dark fantasy and again features writers — Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. The Drood of the title is presumably Edwin Drood, from Dickens's last, unfinished, novel. It will be readable, intelligent and interesting, but what I look forward to is another wrist-breaking space romp.

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Barbara Roden talks with . . . Dan Simmons

If there were a dictionary entry for the phrase 'genre-crossing author', Dan Simmons's picture might well stand alongside it as an illustration. Born in 1948, Simmons spent eighteen years as an elementary school teacher, and did not become a professional writer until 1987; since that time he has consistently refused to be pigeonholed in any one genre. His first published short story, 'The River Styx Runs Upstream', won the Rod Serling Memorial Award and was published in *Twilight Zone* magazine in 1982. His first novel, *Song of Kali* (1985), won a World Fantasy Award; his second novel, *Carrion Comfort* (1989), won a Bram Stoker Award from the Horror Writers of America; and his first science fiction, novel, 1989's *Hyperion*, won a Hugo Award. Since then his work has continued to traverse a wide range of genres: contemporary literary fiction, psychological suspense and horror, hardboiled noir, the supernatural, and science fiction. His most recent novel, published in January 2007, is *The Terror*, which again crosses genres and contains a strong supernatural element; it is reviewed on page of this issue. First published in *All Hallows*, No. 43, Summer 2007.

Your new novel, *The Terror*, is based on the historical tragedy of the Franklin Expedition, and you write that the idea came from a brief note in a book you were reading about the race to the South Pole. What was it about this footnote that inspired you to find out more about the Franklin Expedition?

Everything.

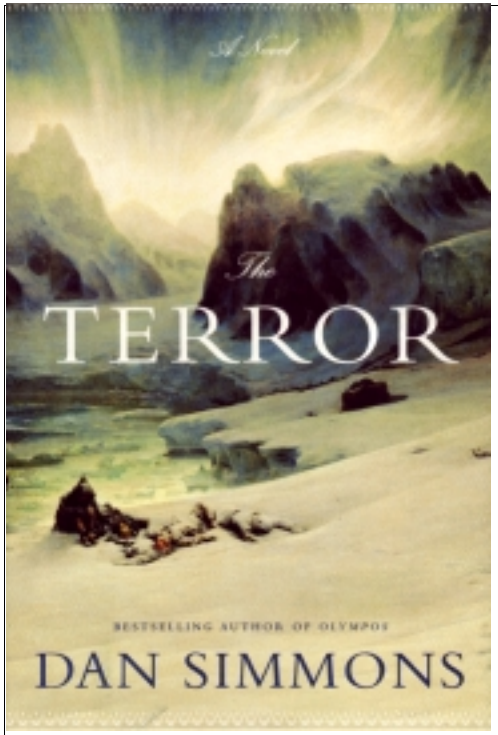
The actual historical characters were interesting, the situation was perfect, the setting in time and space was right, and the type of Arctic nightmare was exactly what I'd hoped to write about. Most intriguing, of course, was the fact that source of the Franklin Expedition tragedy, unlike that with so many other polar expeditions gone terribly wrong, was still a mystery. There was precisely one note, written on twice, from the doomed crew. Unlike Scott's expedition and almost all others, there were no log books, no diaries, no final letters to family and friends, no narratives at all by those who'd taken part in more than three years of rising terror. It was, and remains, a mystery within a mystery. Perfect for a novelist.

How much reading about the Franklin Expedition did it take before you realised that the material would provide the basis for a novel?

I knew I was going to write about it when I read the footnote. Sometimes — as I explain to beginning writers who have been taught that everything in writing has to be a series of cautious, successive approximations (rather like whittling Jello) — the slam-bang gestalt *is* the right way to do something.

A book like this, which is based on real people who took part in a well-documented tragedy, must have taken a good deal of research. How much reading did you have to do, and how long was it before you felt able to start the novel?

I spent a month or two gathering more books, more materials, and finding more ways to the few primary sources I could get to, but I'd already started the novel. The publisher with whom I'd been with for quite a few years and to whom I owed one more book on a multi-book deal wasn't interested in the topic — I think the actual phrase used was 'Why would anyone be interested in reading about people who've been dead for 150 years?' — so it took me a while to buy back that last book



I owed them (and also, in order to have the proper time to research and write *The Terror*, to buy back another book I owed another publisher in a hardboiled mystery series I'd started as a lark.) Then I spent the rest of 2005 writing the novel, researching as I went, and went looking for a publisher only when the book was completed.

My accountant said nothing but raised one eyebrow to his hairline when he looked at my year of negative income. For some reason, he hadn't heard of the idea of *buying back* one's own presold books. 'Think of it as an investment in the future,' I said.

He raised the other eyebrow. 'When does this investment pay off?' he asked. This was in late autumn of 2005.

'They're thinking of publishing this in early 2007,' I said.

He had no more eyebrows to raise.

Were you still doing research while you were writing the novel, or did you complete your background reading before putting pen to paper?

I always reach what I consider a critical mass of preliminary understanding on a topic, enough to have my bearings in that world, and then I step through the chronosynclasticinfidibulam door and leap in, continuing to research as I go along. The serendipity aspect of researching-while-you-write is wonderful (although not as wonderful as it used to be when the card catalogue was part of libraries).

Although Francis Crozier is in many ways the main voice of the novel, you tell the story from the points of view of many different characters. This is an approach you've taken before in your fiction; what made you decide to use it again in *The Terror*?

A character like Francis Rawden Moira Crozier is so complex and fascinating that the initial impulse is to tell the story from his first-person point of view. But first-person is usually a mistake, as one learns with experience, so once beyond that temptation, third-person with multiple viewpoints is one of the great sources of power in the novel form.

The trick is to know and to show some restraint. Too many bestsellers, as I explain to adults wanting to learn how to write for publication, have viewpoints that leap around like grasshoppers in a hot skillet. And for no real purpose or to no real plan. If a FedEx messenger shows up in the middle of a scene, suddenly we're in the mind of the FedEx guy. Why? Simply because it's possible to go there. I wouldn't mention any names, of course, but a certain book whose title rhymes with *The Da Vinci Code* was ripe-rotten with this kind of amateurish leaping around for no reason, to the ultimate absurdity that we, the readers, spent a Bible's length of time in the mind of one character who was the villain, but whose thoughts never revealed — even to himself — that he *was* the villain. Ridiculous.

With *The Terror*, it was absolutely necessary — if the tale was to be told to best advantage — that we have a dominant point-of-view such as Captain Crozier's, but that we also get parallel views of events, other characters, and of Crozier himself via glimpses through other minds and hearts.

A good deal is known about some of the characters in *The Terror*, while others are, at this remove, just names. How did you decide to give certain backgrounds to certain characters? I'm thinking particularly of the characters of Bridgens and Peglar, about whom we know very little, but to whom you give very detailed backgrounds.

The Terror is, first and last, a work of fiction. All of the historical personages in the story exist in the novel's holosphere of fictional reality. This is obvious, but when dealing with historical events and human beings, it's necessary to remind ourselves of that.

History tends to have a few details of a few chosen people, but only the 'important' ones — Lord Franklin, Lady Franklin, Captain Crozier, Commander Fitzjames — but even those historical records we have by and about these few selected individuals can't put us into their thoughts for

Dan Simmons (photo courtesy Zone).

a single second. As a novelist, I can presume to enter into such thoughts — but only by creating a completely fictional world in which those names on a faded muster sheet are liberated from the iron hand of history and biography. And in that fictional world, the thoughts of the lowliest able-bodied seaman, unrecorded in history as surely as most of us go unrecorded (since historians and chroniclers in all eras have an inevitable bias toward the lords and ladies of life), are as important as Sir John Franklin's thoughts. (And probably a good deal smarter and less self-deluded.)

This is not to say that I ignored biography or history in dealing with those characters about whom something was known. In truth, my efforts to keep my fictional world in compliance with every historical fact known about the men and their fates was a great part of the challenge and delight of writing such historical fiction.

When the reader of *The Terror* might read in a non-fiction source (or see on a Discovery HD special) that 'rescuers' searching for Sir John Franklin in the late 1800s unconvered a grave with the skeletal remains tossed around (presumably by curious Inuit), but with a beautiful silk scarf that had been carefully buried with the corpse and some minor medals inscribed to 'Third Lieutenant John Irving', my hope is that the reader would feel a pang of identification and even of sorrow. The author hopes that the reaction would be — 'We knew the man.'

You've said that 'What interests me is that human beings are almost always corrupted by the control they wield over other human beings.' This comes out most notably, in *The Terror*, in the character of Hickey. What made you decide to cast him as the human villain of the piece?

In any group of 126 men, there had to be a villain like 'Hickey' — the barracks lawyer, the incipient mutineer just waiting for his chance, the little man with dreams of absolute power, and the treacherous crewmate who will use any form of manipulation — including sex — to further his own secret goals.

When I first wrote the scenes with 'Hickey' in them, I used a fictional name. I knew nothing about the poor bastard on the ship's roster and labelling and libelling him as a villain was hardly fair. But then I realised that *all* of the characters I was creating from names on a 160-year-old ship's roster were fictional characters — heroes, villains, and in-between — and making this one exception would be violating the rules I'd set for this particular game. All these men's thoughts, emotions, actions, and even fates — after they disappeared forever from sight in Baffin Bay that August day of 1845 — are pure speculation, within only a few scattered skeletal remains and one note (which makes little sense) found in a cairn to suggest any specifics.

And when writing from 'Hickey's' point of view, more restraint than usual had to be shown precisely because his fictional pathology was so interesting. There's a reason why we enjoy Hannibal Lecters in our fiction, but an even more compelling reason why we, as both authors and readers, should enter into such minds briefly and lightly, if at all.

Iago is infinitely more interesting for his 'motiveless malevolence'. His silence at the end, even under the promised torture (one is sure), is a gift.

You're noted for having written books in a wide variety of genres: science fiction, horror, fantasy, mystery, and mainstream fiction. You've also talked about the need to tear down the walls separating genre and mainstream fiction. The events on which *The Terror* are based would seem to have enough drama to have made a 'mainstream' novel out of them; what made you introduce the supernatural terror of the Thing on the Ice, with its echoes of Algernon Blackwood and the Wendigo?

The Terror is a mainstream novel.

As one respected Canadian writer/historian pointed out in his review of

The Terror, not abiding by the current standards of 'psychological realism' (the assumed prerequisite for any 'serious novel' these days unless one had the good fortune to be born in South America), was a great risk — however clearly the 'Thing on the ice' is a mixture of metaphor, Inuit perpsective, and needed imaginative element in the overall scheme of the book. But that frequently false wall between 'mainstream fiction' and 'genre fiction' is a prejudice that I've been ignoring for years. And crossing it is a risk I constantly take.

Not long ago they made a major motion picture adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*. Besides being asked to believe that Brad Pitt was Achilles (and being forced to see his bare butt on a giant movie screen), we had to witness a complete (and inferior) rewriting of the tale in which ten years of glorious siege was collapsed into two weeks of petty skirmishing. Then we were coerced into watching characters get twisted out of all shape to fit Hollywood plotting, in which a slave girl was elevated to Achilles' 'love interest', where Achilles survived to see the Trojan horse gambit and to enter Troy in victory, and where Agamemnon was murdered before retuning home — thus destroying all of Aeschylus' works and most classical Greek theatre.

Finally, we had to put up with Hollywood's bow to 'realism' wherein Achilles and Odysseus and others spouted modern antiwar slogans (which violated every aspect of Greek thought in Homer's era) and — the *pièce de résistance* — the Greek gods were never present and hardly mentioned. It seems that the Greeks and Trojans were all left-wing Los Angeles agnostics.

This may have conformed to the 'psychological realism' of today's 'mainstream fiction', but personally, just between thee and me, I think Homer's approach was stronger.

Oh, and I should confess here that I've never read Algernon Blackwood, so any echoes there are incidental and accidental.

If a bookstore owner were to ask you in which section *The Terror* should be shelved, what would your answer be, and why?

I might answer the way a Zen master would answer a student who asks a question which can lead to no possible enlightenment, such as 'Master, does a dog have the Buddha-spirit?'

The only appropriate answer is 'Mu' — which translates as 'Unask the question.' Then the Zen master yells 'Kwatz!' and strikes the student hard with a heavy stick.

On the other hand, I'd enjoy seeing the same bookstore owner ask Norman Mailer (*Ancient Evenings*) or Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid's Tale*) or John Updike (*Toward the End of Time*) if their books should be shelved under skiffy (the proper pronunciation of 'sci-fi'.) The owner would be looking for his or her head for weeks.

When you were writing *A Winter Haunting* (2001), you said that you were heading back to 'Shirley Jackson or Henry Jamesian type of psychological horror'. What classic supernatural fiction did you read when you were younger, and which authors would you say had been an influence on you?

Well, Shirley Jackson and Henry James, for two. Most of the great authors touch on 'supernatural fiction' somewhere in their bodies of work without categorising it or limiting it to overtly supernatural explanations. Even Bram Stoker's clunky (but wonderful) *Dracula* found its deepest thrills in the ellipses and innuendo rather than the purely graphic.

A modern writer whose work I loved as a young reader was Richard Matheson. His novels such as *I am Legend* and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* held just the right mixture of fantasy and gritty realism for me. (Not long ago I had the honour of getting to write the intro for a re-release of *I am Legend* and, even more recently, a film studio asked me to do a screenplay treatment for a 1950s Matheson short story that he had adapted to a '60s *Twilight Zone* episode.)

Matheson's made-for-TV movie *Duel* — about a salesman (Dennis Weaver) driving home from somewhere who is suddenly attacked by a huge Mack 18-wheeler (it's not the truck driver, whom we never see, who is the villain, but the truck itself) — was, for me, a near perfect example of the short horror- fantasy tale that goes straight to our nightmares for inspiration. (And another example of Iago's motiveless malevolence.) It was also, if you'll pardon the pun, the perfect vehicle to jumpstart the career of the young director they gave this early-1970s made-for-TV Matheson tale to — Steven Spielberg. And his success with *Duel* put young Spielberg in line to direct the ultimate '70s film about unseen motiveless malevolence — *Jaws*.

And *Jaws*, to bring this meandering Montaigne-like digression full circle, has more than just an unseen white predator- monster in common with *The Terror*.

You've said that when you read *The Haunting of Hill House* as a child, it scared you. What other books or stories in the supernatural genre frightened you and have stayed with you?

I think I was older — no longer a child — when I read *The Haunting of Hill House.* It can scare people of any age. It certainly turned me into a child again; I remember sleeping with night lights for a while after reading Shirley Jackson's masterpiece.

I tend to find atmosphere the most effective element of anything an author has in his or her inventory to scare us, so just the foggy London of Dickens's *Bleak House* or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is more frightening to me than anything from H. P. Lovecraft. The subtlety of James's 'The Jolly Corner' was a bit beyond me as a kid, but the *feeling* of it persisted and soon infected my early attempts (i.e. eighth grade and beyond) to write scary fiction.

What frightened me most as an adolescent were not tales of the supernatural but nuclear doomsday books such as *On the Beach.* They haunted my dreams for many years.

When you were writing *A Winter Haunting* you said that you felt the ghost story was ready for a comeback. Do you think it ever went away?

It never went away, but for the wider readerships popularity (and quality) of ghost stories tend to ebb and flow like phantom tides. I remember thinking in the early and mid-1970s that the entire horror genre was getting a serious second wind through the efforts of one young writer — a certain Stephen King — and then Peter Straub widened that readership even further with his early works such as *Ghost Story* (which actually caused me to decide to try writing in the genre.)

As a 'rising star of horror' in the 1980s, I had a front row seat in watching a few publishers and a few specific young editors almost destroy horror as a genre. Their murder weapon of choice was Gresham's Law — simply dumping so much *bad* stuff on the market that it eventually (and rather quickly) drove out the *good.* (Or at least made the good almost impossible to find amongst the dreck.)

But ghost stories always come back. I've been interested to see the shift, in recent years, as the ghost story has been put to larger uses by African-American and ethnic writers.

Which contemporary writers of supernatural fiction do you particularly admire, and why?

I confess that I don't read that much in the genre of supernatural fiction per se. Young writers such as Tananarive Due and overlooked masters such as Steve Rasnic Tem catch my attention, but then I tend to return to the classic tales — often where the supernatural is just one colour in a broad palette of themes and effects. In recent years I've loved returning to Aeschylus and Virgil and Goethe and Dante, following them to Nabokov, Fowles, and their other heirs, all fictional realms where the universe is as fluid as a string-theory symphony in the middle of composing itself, and where the borderline between the natural and supernatural is very hazy indeed.

You're also hearing all this, you should be warned, from a rationalist who believes in absolutely nothing supernatural (religious, spooky, New Agey, or otherwise). And yet my novels are filled with religious and beyond-the-natural 'themes'. Go figure.

You're currently researching Charles Dickens, in preparation for your next novel. Can you give us any hints as to what sort of novel you're writing, what genre it would fall in?

No, no hints or clues as to the possible Dickens tale, or as to why I'm researching Henry Adams, Clover Adams, John and Clara Hay, Clarence King, Henry and William James, and Sherlock Holmes's 'lost three years'.

And as to suggesting a genre—'Mu.' (The 'Kwatz!' will be optional.)

George Zebrowski and Ian Watson

Two introductions and an afterword

George Zebrowski

Introduction to 'Solaris' by Stanislaw Lem (new edition)

George Zebrowski is the award winning author of *Brute Orbits* and *Macrolife*, both of which are included in the Masterpieces of Science Fiction from Easton Press.

Meet 'Solaris', the greatest alien in all science fiction. 'Solaris' is an intelligent ocean. It covers a planet circling a distant pair of blue and red suns. 'Solaris' is the central character of this novel, worthy of Melville in vastness, as much in quest as are the humans who come to it in the hope of 'contact.'

'Solaris' seems to whisper to the human characters, who do not hear, but it may be that 'Solaris' is doing no such thing, as its strange colloidal liquids throw up islands and bizarre structures, like a dolphin showing off its acrobatics. It teases us with its unknowability. As readers looking over the shoulder of the visiting human narrator, we sometimes feel that we know it is communicating, and sometimes we do not.

Lem has written that when Kris Kelvin arrives at the Solaris station to investigate what has happened there, the author knew as much as his character about what he was going to find or what might happen next; this exploratory suspense, at once personal and intellectual, is communicated to the reader from the very start, and sets the stage for the attempt to solve a mystery. The scientific inquiry has grown old and tired, giving Lem a chance to satirise the human bureaucracies that have grown up around the study of 'solaristics,' with all the foibles one might expect, inevitably mirroring human social life.

Lem's novel is subtle and critically fearless in facing the difficulties of an alien encounter. He recognises that given the large and vastly different

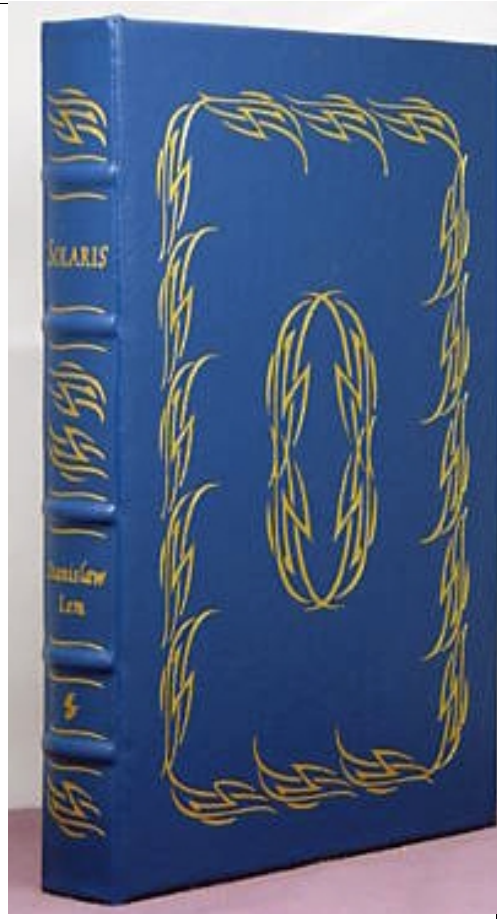
First American edition of Lem's *Solaris* (Walker Books, 1970).

physical and evolutionary backgrounds that are likely, the difficulties of talking to aliens may be formidable, if not impossible to overcome. He notes that there may well be alien cultures more like our own, but this is not one of them; and even there writers take the easy way out, by wishing into use a 'universal translator,' or a similar subterfuge, to help move the story along.

Cultural obstacles rather than physiological ones, as in anthropologist Chad Oliver's 1960 novel, *Unearthly Neighbors*, where the aliens are human-like and the culture is baffling, are not what Lem's narrator faces. Kelvin cannot even assume that 'Solaris' is intelligent. When it begins to mirror human feelings, the possibility remains that this is not a conscious intelligence at work, but some kind of mindless feedback process, as in Lem's other novel, *The Invincible* (1964), in which contact with a cybernetic civilisation produces a feedback loop in which the explorers find themselves struggling, not with a conscious intelligence, but essentially with themselves.

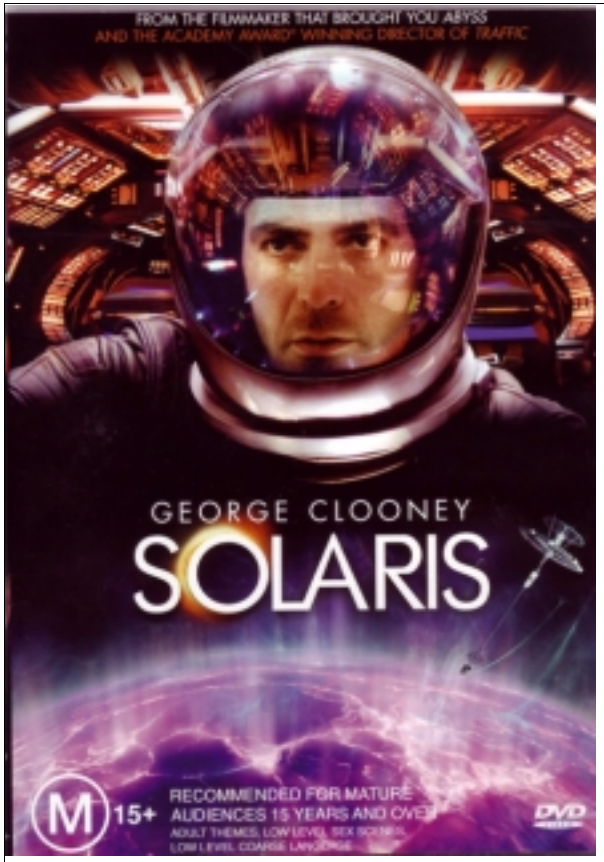
Contacts with the alien, a significant possibility awaiting our world, have not been as diverse as one might imagine throughout the nearly two hundred year history of science fiction. Lem's oceanic alien is a major attempt at originality. Lem reminds us that the alien may also be our human self, about which we still know very little, and through which we are forced to understand the 'other'.

Two notable alien contacts that Lem may have read (he was well aware of western science fiction in the 1940s, '50s, and early '60s) include the Ray Bradbury stories, 'Mars Is Heaven!' (1948) and 'Here There By Tygers' (1951). The first story is part of his Martian series, in which visitors from Earth encounter lost loved on Mars, only to learn that the Martians have recreated the dead from the wounded longings of the explorers. The disturbingly complex element in Bradbury's take on the idea is that the Martians seem to need this charade before they can kill the invaders from Earth and conduct a midwestern American burial. The second, more simply told, Bradbury story involves an intelligent living planet facing both human love and arrogance. Lem acknowledged reading this story. Another planetary intelligence story, 'Killer' (1953) by James Gunn, is told by the planet itself. Fred Hoyle's 1957 novel *The Black Cloud* features a vast alien. Later works that may owe to *Solaris* itself, among them Gordon Eklund's and Gregory Benford's 1977 *If the Stars Are Gods*, make the point that Lem's novel itself does not come out of nowhere, and has suggested later works, illustrating Kingley Amis's conclusion, in his pioneering 1960 study *New Maps of Hell*, that it is the work of many another writer that helps bring into being the notable figure, if not by example then by reaction to failures. They also serve who stand and fail, by degrees, of course, even at ambitious levels of accomplishment. *Solaris* owes to previously presented ideas, but differs in its treatment.



Recent edition of *Solaris* (Easton Collection), with new introduction by George Zebrowski.

In later years, Lem commented that the only kind of science fiction he



DVD cover art for the second film based on *Solaris*, Steven Soderbergh's (2002).

now read was the 'junky kind', because the ambitious work, although not lacking in the skills of language and construction, lavished so much effort and still failed.

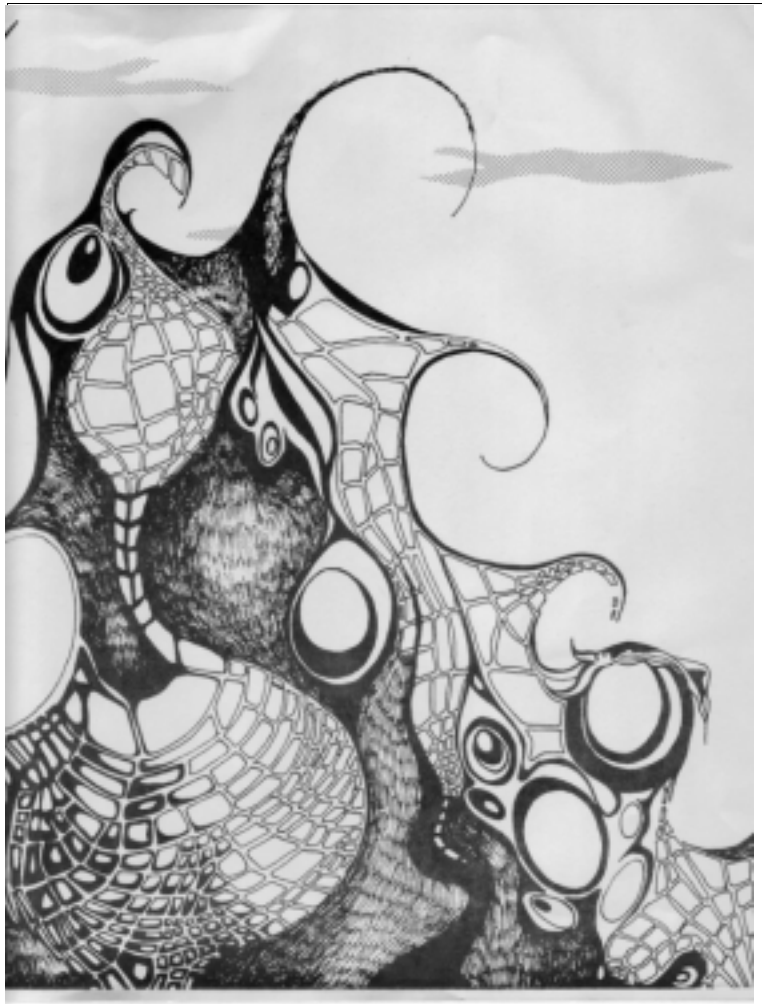
Science fiction has been a continuing conversation among its writers, so various takes on an idea appear, often critical of the previous versions, too often mere imitative repetition. The Russian collaborative masters, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, have written SF works that sometimes 'reply' to Lem. But contrary to the mistake made by literary critics unfamiliar with science fiction and fantasy, Lem did not invent all his ideas by himself. This notion, unfortunately, became yet another bludgeon with which to belittle the SF field, which is inevitably made up of writers of varying quality. Lem, who came up through ideological censorship, well understood the commercial writers who accept their lot, and despite the defensive emphasis that has been placed on his criticisms of the less accomplished majority, which is the same everywhere, as Theodore Sturgeon so often reminded us, had many good words for Heinlein, Dick, and Le Guin, Watson, Benford, Blish and Knight, among others.

But despite Lem's debt to his predecessors, the ocean of *Solaris* is rivalled perhaps only by Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937), which presented a powerful, god-like being, whom C. S. Lewis disliked so much that he labelled the depiction as 'devil worship.' Other notable aliens include Stanley G. Weinbaum's alien in 'A Martian Odyssey' (1934), John W. Campbell's shapeshifting invader in 'Who Goes There?' (1938), Theodore Sturgeon's mass mind in 'To Marry Medusa' (1958), and Jack Finney's pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1954).

Campbell's story and Finney's novel were both made into notable films, and *Solaris* into two motion pictures, one in 1968, directed by the great Russian filmmaker, Andrei Tarkovsky, and more recently by Steven Soderbergh in 2002. Neither movie is pure Lem, although the first rivalled *2001: A Space Odyssey* for attention in the late 1960s, and is a major work by the Russian director whom Ingmar Bergman regarded as one of the greatest filmmakers of the twentieth century. The film still gets high marks from most critics and viewers, but, as Lem noted, its conclusion is opposite to his novel's. The Soderbergh version, much shorter than Tarkovsky's, starred George Clooney, and is worthy, even though it reduces the novel, as Lem noted, to only one of its main themes, the love story. Lem was not enthusiastic about either film, but only for being untruthful to his novel, not as works unrelated to his own. Those who know the novel have an unfair advantage, because they know that the relationship of Kelvin to his resurrected wife, Rheya, is a parallel to his situation with the alien, 'Solaris,' so that side needed a larger presentation in both films, including the physical creations thrown up by the ocean, so naturally cinematic and a neglected feast for today's special effects teams. The oceanic being is making contact, we feel, and a splashier display of its effects would have brought that out.

Kelvin's 'new' relationship with Rheya is not unlike that of any couple: there are things that can be known at once, and other, more opaque features that stand between the lovers. Rheya, although she is a creation who seems to be a mercy bestowed by 'Solaris' as a way of communicating with its visitors from Earth, begins to live and grow into a person who wonders, as do we all, where have we come from, who are we, and where are we going?

The noted SF writer, James Blish, who wrote the only noteworthy review (in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, May 1971) of the novel by a science fiction writer in the West, missed nothing, and explains why the love story has attracted filmmakers. It is part of the problem of contact with the oceanic creature. 'Yet in a way,' Blish writes, 'it is in touch ... for from the recesses of each man's brain it recreates, in solid, living and sentient form, the one person to whom that man had done the most injury. Nobody ever finds out why the ocean does this ... or even



Irene Pagram's *Solaris* cover for *SF Commentary* 35/36/37, July 1973.

whether it is aware of doing so; but the resulting emotional tensions are what make the novel go. They are handled with ... tenderness and depth of insight ...'

This imitative action of the Solaris ocean might be compared to Poul Anderson's and Gordon R. Dickson's series of Hoka comedies, in which an alien culture of teddy bears imitates and reenacts various aspects of Earth culture, from operas, to pirate stories, to Sherlock Holmes; but one wonders throughout all the good-natured comedy what the alien culture is like behind its mimetic masks. The stories never asked the question. Science fiction authors, like jazz musicians, do talk to each other as they play, even when only one side is listening.

Alien contact has, to a lesser degree, the same problem as the theme of the superior intelligence, or superman; it has been said of the superman theme that it has nowhere to go, since by definition the superman is opaque to lesser beings. 'A cat may look at a king,' wrote Olaf Stapledon in *Odd John*, his 1935 novel of a superman in our midst. 'But can it really *see* the king?' John asks, setting out the problem. Stapledon's solution is having a superior who is not that far distant from us. A superior intelligence may well be incomprehensible to us, and one form of it may be an alien from another solar system. To imagine exobiologies, even exopsychologies, requires a feat based on the nature of our sciences and their methods, fact gathering, reasoning, experimentation — and a blatant imagination above all else; in other words, working each side of every street, along with a lot of guessing, with no more than a plausible outcome. At bottom, writing a fictional work about a close encounter with alien intelligences turns out to be more a work about ourselves than about real aliens. At best we suspect what it might take to present such a vision, failed or not.

Imagine what would it be like to be judged by an independent entity, one not born of our life here on Earth? It might be an artificial intelligence, developing on its own after we give it a start; it might be an alien anthropologist 'gone native' on our planet. Are there such here, invisible to us? We are easily chilled by the idea of our own history judging us through our children and grandchildren. Any major stepback from ourselves sometimes produces a critical shock of recognition. We strive for a self-correcting scientific approach, and move forward through failures.

Lem understands our desire to rip back the veil and see the alien plainly; it is the medieval desire to see the face of God, as 'superiority' was then imagined. The novel meets John W. Campbell's challenge to writers, to show us something that is as smart as a human being but is *not* a human being.

In an essay about his life and career Lem confesses that he wanted to write science fiction out of a recognition of mortality, 'from the resulting desire to satisfy, at least with hypotheses, my insatiable inquisitiveness about the far future of mankind and the cosmos.'

Solaris, Lem's sixth novel, was the one in which he found his own voice. Earlier, more utopian novels showed him searching for what science fiction could be and should be — less imitative of the herd, less bowed by commerce and a readership trained to accept much less than was possible by having been offered too little.

In *Solaris* Lem became 'strikingly original and rewarding on virtually every level,' Blish wrote, so much so that 'most other descriptions of 'alien' worlds ... seem positively homelike.' Blish wonders if this Lem was the same writer who first came into English with a pair of minor short stories. In 1971, unless one read Polish, it was difficult to guess that here was a European to rank with H. G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, and even Jules Verne (the unexpurgated Verne who ranks with Balzac, not the badly Englished and bowdlerised boys' book adventure writer). When he died in 2006, the obituaries of the world's major papers counted Lem with Wells and Verne, even as his English language competitors struggled to catch up on their reading.

'Lem knows the sciences intimately,' Blish wrote. 'There is not a word of double-talk in the novel, although some kind of faster-than-light drive is assumed in order to reach Solaris at all.' This is actually unclear; a relativistic ship might have been used, and Kris Kelvin, after the loss of Rheya, may welcome the displacement in time such a voyage might bring him.

'The story is slow moving in spots,' Blish continues, ' but this is not a defect in a philosophical novel; when Lem slows down, he wants the reader to slow down too, and *think*.' Is that not what science fiction worthy of the name is all about? Blish looks forward to many rereadings of a book that is 'going to become a classic'.

The novel lives. It thinks with us as we read, makes us feel, and fills us with a sense of wonder and mystery that cannot be dispelled, not only about the universe, but the unknown within ourselves. Melville's Ahab muses, 'let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky ... this is the magic glass ...' Arthur C. Clarke once revised Alexander Pope's lines to read that 'the proper study of man is not man but intelligence'. As yet we have experienced only our own and the animal life of our world, some of which, it seems, is more intelligent than we are willing to admit. Lem's novel paints an alien sky and a suggests a view through an alien eye, even as we long to glimpse ourselves from outside. Will we ever have a better view, we ask, as 'Solaris' whispers to us and we cannot understand it — except that we 'know' it wants to talk to us. There is an expert familiarity in Lem's novel. It suggests to us that we have always lived aboard the Solaris station, looking out at the silent universe in which we are embedded, out of which our consciousness was born. We look at each other and feel that we are, unprovably, alike inside. Mimetic in our own impulses, we imitate each other, and copy the world in our arts. We long and look for a god-like order behind the cosmic darkness, imagining what enlightenment might be like. We build libraries and databases that are not unlike the error-filled literature of 'solaristics', the accumulation of 'Solaris' studies, in which ignorance is itself a map, as the giant that is our universe goes on obliviously, in a vast process that seems to be doing something beyond our understanding.

In his last years Lem felt the weight of understanding and did not feel empowered by his large sales and translations. 'They will all vanish,' he said in a 2003 interview, 'since streams of new books are flooding everything, washing away what has been written earlier ... a book in a bookstore does not even have time to gather some dust. It is true that we live longer now — but the life of everything around us became much shorter. This is sad, but no one can stop this process. The world around is dying so quickly that one cannot really get used to anything.'

We must believe that some kind of winnowing is at work, because Lem has won his case in world literature and in science fiction, that all these decades SF has had its rare equal to Verne, Wells, and Stapledon, that Lem completed the work that was in him, and that the commercial camouflage of lesser works will wither and fall away, and that *Solaris* and his other works will persist not only in bookstores, but also treasured in the personal collections of knowing readers, for one reason alone, even if all the other excuses are forgotten except the one given by Oscar Wilde: 'One can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.' The uselessness of art is its beauty; it haunts us, and nothing else matters. So much of science fiction has the imagery of poetry, and *Solaris*, as Blish prophesied in 1971, 'is going to become a classic; it is inherently one already.'

— George Zebrowski, Delmar, NY, October 2007

Ian Watson

'Macrolife': Introduction to the new edition

Born in England in 1943, Ian Watson graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1963 with a first class Honours degree in English Literature, followed in 1965 by a research degree in English and French 19th Century literature. He became a full-time writer in 1976 following the success of his first novel, *The Embedding* (1973), which won the John W. Campbell Memorial Award and in France the Prix Apollo, and *The Jonah Kit* (1975), which won the British Science Fiction Association Award and the Orbit Award. Numerous novels of SF, fantasy and horror followed, and nine story collections. From 1990 to 1991 he worked full-time with Stanley Kubrick on story development for the movie *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, directed after Kubrick's death by Steven Spielberg, for which Ian has screen credit for Screen Story. His most recent novel is *Mockymen* (2003) (Easton Press). Stephen Baxter interviewed Ian Watson a few years ago. The interview appears in *SF Commentary* 80, the fortieth anniversary edition.

Macrolife
by George Zebrowski
Pyr Books; 2006
284 pp.
Hardcover 1-59102-340-8; $25
Trade Paperback ISBN: 1-59102-341-6; $15
Cover Illustration & Design: © 2004 John Picacio

Increasingly, and sadly, American science fiction continues to be dominated by what George Zebrowski has referred to as 'print television': by books conceived and written as if they are TV films rather than works which challenge and enhance the emotions and the intellect of the reader, examples of 'the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life'.

George Zebrowski's *Macrolife* is the latter kind of book, and that definition of a good book is almost 350 years old. It comes from the pen of the poet John Milton, in his long political pamphlet *Areopagitica*, which is also one of the masterpieces of English prose. Subtitled 'A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing', this pamphlet of the year 1644 attacked state censorship, which was implemented by requiring official approval for the products of a printing press.

Nowadays works of science fiction — a literature of such potential to liberate the imagination and the mind — are censored *commercially* by a virtual conspiracy of publishers, editors, voters for prestigious awards and, alas, by authors themselves. In many respects the pressures of commercial censorship are far worse than anything against which the author of *Paradise Lost* protested, because today's pressures train readers to think and to respond shallowly, to consume the intellectual equivalent of fast food while convinced that they are feasting on fine cuisine. Which average reader nowadays — the audience for Milton's polemic in *his* day — would get far beyond the title of that eloquent, finely wrought pamphlet? Even the title seems a bit of a mouthful.

George Zebrowski's *Macrolife* certainly isn't fast food.

Ian Watson, 2003.

'Print television' doesn't simply refer to the flood of zippy, slick adventure fiction on the book racks, clones of previous SF, clones of *Star Wars*, clones of clones. The phenomenon is more insidious than that. For adventure fiction merely represents the low-level consensus, of escapist entertainment. There also exists a high-level consensus consisting of literary work that is finely crafted, replete with a care for words and narrative tone and interactive dialogue that is both snappy yet unvulgar, populated with properly rounded characters, equipped with significant themes, laced with emotional concern, and with tasteful daring, and with a banner-waving show of insight and responsibility. Much of this work is also a sham, a confection. Too many budding writers write in order to see a well-wrought book in print with their name upon it, rather than to affect the consciousness of readers and even to change their lives in some minor or even major way (which, to me at least, is a principal reason for writing). Pretty soon those writers who do succeed become authorities on writing SF.

'Show but don't tell,' aspiring authors are advised. Learn how to sugar the pill until the pill is buried deep, lost in a cyst of saccharine. Endless workshops — which are commercial as much as literary since they are guiding the evolution of new authors towards survival and success in the consensus marketplace — and 'How to do it' articles by professional authors who have adapted to this ecological niche advise the young hopefuls how to cast narrative hooks like an angler fooling the fish, and the best way to slip exposition of ideas painlessly into a tale without clunky chunks of facts or ideas interrupting the smooth momentum of the story. A major crime is to let one's grasp on the reader slip for a moment or to hold up the onward rush of events. Thou shalt not discomfort the readers by making them slow down in the reading and actually *think*. They must simply experience the cunning, superficial semblance of deep feeling and intellection. Thus readers are conditioned not to think, so that ultimately they will not be readers of fiction but viewers. Thus writers are trained to think carefully about avoiding the appearance of rigorous thought.

George Zebrowski is an author who will make the reader think; and the ideas, the experience of his work, will not, therefore, slip away afterwards like some phantom of thought, some illusion which the 'viewing' of some subsequent book will presently eclipse.

This is why Arthur Clarke described *Macrolife* as 'one of the few books I intend to read again', adding that 'it's been years since I was so impressed. *Macrolife* manages an extraordinary balance between the personal and the cosmic elements. Altogether a worthy successor to Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*.'

Spurred on by peer fame in the form of Nebula and Hugo nominations and inclusion in 'Best of the Year' anthologies as well as by inflated advances for 'long-awaited' first novels or sequels to previous, much-loved confections, the concept of the award-worthy piece of fiction — one which possesses the magic ingredients of balance, artistry, characterisation, significance, *et cetera* — exists as a kind of abstract idol that now tends to condition, even if unconsciously, the kind of stories and novels that authors will write, and how they will go about writing these. This system trains writers not to attempt other things or even to believe that those other ways could be valid. And editors punish deviancy as being 'uncommercial', which is tragic for authors, for readers, and for science fiction itself insofar as American science fiction commercially dominates world markets. To many people in America, consensus science fiction seems the only conceivable kind.

Thank God, then, for George Zebrowski.

Or should we, perversely, thank that madman Hitler? For Zebrowski, child of displaced Polish slave-workers, only came to America courtesy

of the Nazi cataclysm, bringing with him a European tradition of literature, philosophy, and science which distinguishes him from most of his peers. He himself has commented that 'Platonic dialogue, the symphonies of Mahler, utopian fiction and Wellsian prophecy ... these are the personal and technical sources of *Macrolife*.' Brian Stableford, reviewing *Macrolife* on its first appearance, was moved to wonder what possible future there could be in the science-fiction field for a writer like Zebrowski. *Macrolife* was far more worthy 'than a dozen sickly novels of the species that currently dominate the American SF scene', yet the book seemed to Stableford to be a literary mule, something which just ought not to have been a novel. How deeply the divide has grown between fiction and non-fiction — even though historically this schism is of fairly recent origin, and was irrelevant, as Stableford points out, to 'the most ambitious works of the seventeenth century'.

Macrolife is certainly an ambitious book, if any book is, yet, though it is rooted in an older tradition of passionate thought, its own ambitions aren't those of the past at all. They are of the future, of the furthest futures conceivable.

If any book is a treasure in Milton's sense, here indeed is one, in a world where so many contemporary 'masterpieces' are like doughnuts, fresh sugary hot sellers today, stale and discarded by tomorrow. The first edition of *Macrolife* nonplussed several reviewers, but favourable opinion has prevailed, for instance in most major critical reference works and in *Library Journal*'s must-read list. *Macrolife* is one of Easton Press's Masterpieces of Science Fiction.

In Stableford's view, there is simply no way that a vision such as Zebrowski's can be presented using the narrative techniques of the novel, since — to take a couple of examples — these compel Zebrowski to have his characters lecture one another or require the protagonist to read a book of commentary 'in order that we can read it over his shoulder'. For the novel has become preoccupied with character and narrative whereas Zebrowski is concerned with future sociology.

Isn't it curious that one of the great classics of this century is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which O'Brien lectures Winston Smith at length and in which Smith reads page after page of *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, quotations from which occupy almost exactly *one-tenth* of the whole novel?

Yet Stableford's criticism is correct, if reformulated to express precisely what is wrong with much American SF, namely its betrayal of its own content in favor of novelistic tricks. Time and again, philosophical problems — of sociology, cosmology, the nature of existence, all of which are of the essence of science fiction — are presented, but then hastily sublimated into mere story. One opens so many SF novels with such high hopes only to find that the science — in the broadest sense, of *knowledge* — is the merest pretext for a fictional adventure.

Zebrowski, for his part, has diagnosed a fundamental anti-intellectualism in American SF. In his view too many of its authors believe that they are sages, full of wise opinions, whereas the truth is that they have never thought rigorously enough as part of their basic existence.

On the contrary, they have schooled themselves to conjure up a mirage, an illusion of intellectual rigour. Zebrowski himself studied philosophy at the State University of New York and might have become an academic philosopher. The best teacher in that college (in his opinion), one Robert Neidorf, was a philosopher of science, but also a science fiction reader. The two strands *could* combine. 'There should be more people,' Zebrowski has stated, 'who are moved by the ideals and examples of science, and who understand its sociology and history, its importance to human aspirations and survival. Most workaday scientists rarely think about these things either.'

Its importance to survival. To a life beyond life, to quote Milton again. Survival, the triumph over powerlessness, and life beyond life are indeed the themes of *Macrolife*. Just as the writings of its character Richard Bulero are harked back to by subsequent characters, as rational visions of the future of life in the cosmos, so too may this novel of Zebrowski's be harked back to aboard some space habitation out among the stars in the year 3000 as one of the founding texts, when other SF authors of today are as much remembered as medieval French court poets. If the future does follow a certain path, away from planetary surfaces into free space — as Zebrowski argues with a fierce conviction that it must — then he may well be regarded as a true literary seer. Few other writers are in the running for this sort of reputation.

Macrolife is a major vision of social intelligence transforming the cosmos. It is in three sections. The first focuses upon events in the year 2021, when the disintegration of the 'miracle' all-purpose building material

Bulerite destroys civilisation on Earth. The events that are set in train propel the first kernel of macrolife free of the solar system. The second and longest section deals with more mature macrolife of the year 3000. The starfaring habitat visits a degraded dirtworld to obtain raw materials with which to reproduce itself, then it returns with its new twin to Earthspace, where the first contact with alien macrolife occurs. The human race is accepted into the cosmic circle because people have learned how to link with artificial intelligence, thus overcoming — or at least taming — the instinctive passions inherited from dirtworld evolution. The final section begins a hundred billion years later when macrolife has filled the universe, but the universe is beginning to wind down back towards the point of final collapse.

The Bulerite calamity renders the Earth dramatically uninhabitable. Earth's very crust is cracked, recriminations trigger an all-out nuclear war, and to trump the doom the Earth and Moon are engulfed in a bizarre, other-dimensional bubble. At first glance this may seem a rather histrionic and arbitrary plot device to compel macrolife to set out on its journey of growth; almost a *deus ex machina* at the very outset of the novel? If it requires such a far-out set of circumstances to launch macrolife, then macrolife cannot be such an inevitable future, can it? Could it be, also, that Zebrowski deliberately lays on the apocalyptic action with a trowel so as to refresh the reader after some rather lengthy and serious philosophical conversations in Platonic dialogue mode?

A problem of substance? And a problem of style?

Zebrowski's concern with rebirth from out of cataclysm reflects his own background as a member of a mutilated nation. 'I feel the force of memory that pushes out from my parents,' he has written; 'it's always there, a shadow cast by a world gone insane.' His past was 'brutal, cruel, and stupid ... created by people ... who didn't want me to be born.' Dirtworlds are also brutal, cruel and stupid as environments; and the escape to a space habitat, which is free from the shocks to which planetary flesh is heir, may be emotionally patterned upon Zebrowski's own escape as a child from war-torn Europe to America. This, plus a subsequent pattern, which segued with his discovery of science fiction. For though he was an adoptive New Yorker, a temporary move to Florida from the gang-haunted, refugee-packed, decaying South Bronx presented him with warmth, cleanliness, light and a white marble public library, 'a place out of Clarke's *Against the Fall of Night*' (or something in the meadows of a macroworld), where he discovered endless shelves of early hardback volumes from Fantasy Press, Gnome Press, Shasta, Doubleday.

Thus there is an emotional pattern in Zebrowski, of salvation from apocalypse — not for everyone but only for the fortunate ones. There is an intellectual argument too. The Bulerite disaster is appropriate because it is an example (this particular one mixing natural calamity with human folly) of a whole range of disasters that can very easily overtake natural planetary life when all the eggs are in one basket. The very escape route from ravaged Earth — aboard the hollowed asteroid, Asterome — is a reminder of another possible disaster that was narrowly averted. Until diverted and moored at a libration point in the Earth–Moon system, this same asteroid had once been on a collision course with Earth. Nothing in our present day prevents a similar asteroid or comet from impacting with our planet at any time, as has happened repeatedly during geological history. Such an impact, releasing the equivalent power of thousands of hydrogen bombs, would destroy civilisation and probably cause a mass extinction of species, our own included. A planet-bound culture is also threatened by any instability in its sun, by the climate flipping into a new ice age, and it is challenged by its own success in the form of chemical and thermal pollution, as witnessed by the ozone holes and global warming.

At the moment we only have one single planetary egg with only a finite amount of nourishing yolk in the shape of resources, and only a finite ability to tolerate the stresses of the growing chicken of civilisation within itself before it cracks wide open, killing the chicken because nowhere else is available. The crack in the Earth's crust is a telling symbol. Likewise is Bulerite, that super-strong substance which allows lattice-cities to be built and the Empire State Building to disappear underneath layers of new New York.

Bulerite seems to strengthen the frail shell of the egg. But this proves untrue. Bulerite is unstable, and highly destructive when it releases its locked-up energies. Its exploitation by eager capitalism, which neglects to pursue the fundamental research work of its discoverer, is a complacent strategy, and complacent strategies are potentially lethal ones.

Bulerite will find its rightful uses later on, in connection with other scientific advances that permit space-warp travel. Thereby it is further

integrated into this well-designed, cleanly dovetailed book, not only as an instance of the false buttressing of the frail shell that is the Earth, but also as an appropriate example of future science — in this case, exotic states of matter and their applications.

Zebrowski does not allow his free-enterprise Bulero family simply to build higher and higher until they reach the stars. What sets macrolife on course is the failure by those exploiters of the wonder substance fully to investigate it; in other words, their treachery. Through the trauma of their 'crime' the Buleros are able to liberate themselves and a segment of the human race, leaving the solar system behind. A realist ever, Zebrowski acknowledges that even a millennium later the Buleros would be viewed by many people as renegades. The dramatic argument is a complex one, with no simple black versus white.

Nor are there easy black/white solutions to the possible sociological problems of space habitations. In various permutations Zebrowski explores not only the inevitable conflicts of interest between planetary and non-planetary dwellers, but also the unavoidable conflicts within a macroworld itself, which must somehow be channelled so that internal rebellion expresses itself as reproduction by consent. This was all some way removed from the rose-tinted optimism of many advocates of space colonies, with their vision of geriatric joggers happily trotting around the bent meadows of the profitable paradise in the sky, at L-5, where everyone is blissfully of accord.

And a problem of style?

Zebrowski has remarked that *Macrolife* is a meditative book, and should be read meditatively. Space stations may explode, cities may collapse, the Earth itself may convulse; however, the prose is meditative, just as the long-lived inhabitants of a future macroworld would be. 'Their minds are still, waiting for every ripple of space-time to register,' Zebrowski has commented. We are mayflies now, but they are not. Despite scenes of action and even violence, and notwithstanding limpidly beautiful descriptions, this is a book of thought, its pages turning with a measured sureness. For Zebrowski, the ideal reader is a 'performer', not a 'slave'. Himself a child of slaves whose Nazi masters wished to stamp their ideology upon the face of Europe, Zebrowski perhaps detects an analogy with those addicts of junk SF who expect an author to insert a cassette of thrills into their heads. For the *performing* reader, by contrast, 'the novel is a series of opportunities for thought, understanding, and empathy.'

Macrolife is an excellent novel to perform with.

Stylistically, much of the time a solemn, neutral mode of speech prevails. People don't swear or crack jokes or use slang. This isn't so much because a lot of the conversation is expository as simply that this is the chosen tone (with emphatics provided by occasional, italicised internal dialogue). Reviewers criticised the novelist Morris West for his neutral-sounding dialogue, to which West replied in an interview with a British newspaper some years ago: 'Listen, love, it is all deliberate. My dialogue is sedulously designed, not as real speech but as a cerebral vehicle for ideas in the novel. I want dialogue to be understood at once in every Anglo-Saxon country and to translate easily into the major European languages ... I elected this style.'

Likewise with Zebrowski. Yet there is a further reason beyond the aspiration to an international (and even interstellar) style. This crops up in miniature early on, when three of the characters discuss macrolife over a Chinese meal and a bottle of brandy. One of them, Sam, fades out of the discussion. Afterwards:

> 'I hope you followed some of what we said.' 'I really did, Orton. Inside I'm sober, really.' *How can frail beings like us think of doing the things Richard and Orton described?*

Certainly somebody can drift off into a brandy haze, yet in most novels they would become tipsily involved in the discussion. Sam does end up by knocking over the brandy bottle, yet he never knocks over the conversation. The point is that our irrational heritage from the evolutionary jungle of rape and murder — 'nature's agriculture of death' — must be opposed by rational intelligence if we are to survive and transcend ourselves. The style of *Macrolife* reflects its firm adherence to reason and to the power of rational persuasion.

It isn't the case that it would be vulgar to have the characters joking, swearing, and 'slanging' each other. Rather, the mood of the dialogue is the mood of the book's deepest beliefs, beliefs that are sincerely held rather than merely being adopted as a pretext to write a momentarily vivid but forgettable yarn.

Much trivia occurs in novels, a lot of it concerned with so-called character-building. Zebrowski's characters aren't flat; they are complex and imperfect, especially John Bulero in part two, no superhero but a study in failure who manages in the end to transcend his somewhat self-indulgent angst. Yet trivia as such are absent. Perhaps this reflects Zebrowski's relations as a child with his own parents. The Nazi war, and the sufferings of his parents and his people, 'cast its shadow over everything,' he confesses, 'preventing my problems from just being my own. I had no right to have lesser problems.' Personal trivia were as nothing.

In the second section, 'Macrolife: 3000', the cloned John Bulero is an old-style human being amongst a space-faring community of genetically enhanced specimens of humanity-plus — who link with the presiding artificial intelligence, and are now part way towards the larger mind-fusion to come. John's compulsive, if shy, adventuring upon the dirtworld Lea, which becomes increasingly bound up with his own erotic mesmerism by the planet-born young woman Anulka, comes to grief finally through failure of forethought on his part followed by a failure of rationality. Being ruled by the old drives — such as plain savage revenge, and the habit of pulling the wool over one's eyes — John may seem in some respects a more 'real' character than others who are genetically akin to him in the 'Sunspace: 2021' section. Yet he is, in fact, exactly as they were. It is only by comparison with the transhumans now surrounding him that he seems more familiar *to us*. This is actually an illusion, a product of our mesmerism by the old emotional drives, and of our consequent expectations as to how 'real' characters ought to behave, namely, to fly into rages, to sulk, to fight, to agonise, to act irrationally. Just as the personal must eventually be superseded and integrated, so 'personalities' should not be valued too grossly.

At the same time, John's errors — and the errors represented by the dirtworld — forcefully illustrate an important fact about evolution in any species, namely that individuals and species alike must not aspire to a wholly perfect state where they can no longer make errors from which to learn.

Macrolife first appeared in 1979. Just over a decade earlier another believer in the transmutation of humanity, Alexei Panshin, won a Nebula Award for his novel *Rite of Passage*, detailing the 27,000-strong society of another macroworld, an asteroid starship commuting around the dirtworlds, which were seeded before nuclear cataclysm destroyed the Earth due to overpressure in the egg. Zebrowski's 'factual' sources for *Macrolife* were such as J. D. Bernal and Dandridge Cole, but it's illuminating to examine the fictional evolution of the idea between *Rite of Passage* and the later book.

Panshin's society, like that of Zebrowski's original Asterome, is a two-tiered democracy with an executive council and the option of universal plebiscites. However, Panshin's macroworlders are quite rigidly conservative and opposed to change, and a power ethic prevails. In *Macrolife*, when the UN commander Nakamura attempts a coup to seize control and force Asterome to remain in the solar system to aid in reconstruction, we witness the misuse of conservative power. The moral is that conscious life must be willing to take giant risks, to engage in acts of wild faith such as the departure of Asterome and the consequent birth of macrolife.

Zebrowski adds spacious shells to the argument, just as Asterome itself builds shell upon shell of additional space. Panshin's macroworld remains a rock with the hard ideology of a rock. Thus its own population must be culled in Darwinian fashion by the rites of passage of the title: the dumping of well-prepared youngsters upon dirtworlds to see whether they can survive the experience. Many do not survive, to a large extent on account of the hatred and contempt of the 'mudeaters', locked up on their hardship worlds, for the privileged star-commuters who control the void-spanning hives of human knowledge, wealth and skill. Heroine Mia is helped to survive by an old radical of a mudeater who opens her eyes somewhat, though it is to a fellow macroworlder that she opens her legs on the planet, by contrast with John Bulero's sexual infatuation for a native. In the end the whole world of Tintera is destroyed by the peeved macroworlders, who have lost more juniors than desired during the rite of passage there.

Zebrowski's macrolifers do hate the past and what a dirtworld stands for — a chain upon the human spirit — but they are by no means so dogmatic, and John's voluntary rite of passage upon the surface is at once more lightly undertaken and more ambiguous in its lessons. The macrolifers wish neither to be philanthropists nor destroyers of worlds. The attitude they aspire to is one of empathy without overt altruism. Life must remain open-ended, all possibilities available. The macrolifers aspire to immortality — to life beyond life — whereas Panshin's élite merely live longer lives than ours, and basically their society and their mindset are closed.

Certainly Zebrowski's macrolifers do not inhabit a perfect utopia. Boredom and suicide are rather too common for comfort. However, there is enough challenge to shake them up and spur them to continue on the royal road towards multivalent, cosmic intelligence.

In the third section of Zebrowski's novel, 'The Dream of Time', macrolife must reconjugate the unmodified John Bulero from out of the collective higher mentality of which he has become part, because by this late date only such as he can decide on the error-liable risk of trying to survive the collapse of the universe through into the next cycle. Like the original founders of macrolife, he can make a blind decision of transcendent potential.

Bound up with this essential feature of the importance of error and of the capacity for error is the strange fact that the universe is both capable of being known, yet eludes being known in its entirety. The universe possesses a built-in incompleteness. Were it wholly knowable, thought and life would become static. Consequently those macrolifers who survive the collapse of the cosmos at last meet earlier, wiser macrolifers from a previous cycle of creation who suspect, for their part, that even higher, earlier entities exist. There are shells beyond shells.

If this is the case, surely macrolife must already exist in our universe? Surely the universe today must be teeming with macrolife? Why, then, is there no sign of it? When human macrolife first encounters alien macrolife in part two of the novel, that more mature civilisation is already a million years old, adept at concealment until it chooses to reveal itself. In cosmic terms, even a million-year-old civilisation is almost contemporary with us. As human and alien macrolife fuse and evolve, so do the old suns burn out and so are new stars formed, with new planets where new life forms can arise and in their turn develop intelligence, master space, and give rise to new macrolife. Our universe is very large, and time is long. Successive hierarchies, shells, are possible. This may equally be true of the succession of universes themselves.

This final, remarkable section — with its dialogue between the reconjugated ancient man and metalife falling apart under stress, with its triumph over time — is the most moving, sustained and poetic sequence in the novel (always with a *lucid* poetry). It opens up whole cycles of possibility, just as the hundred-billion-year 'gap' in the book's chronology leaves riches yet to be explored in subsequent, varied macrolife novels which Zebrowski plans.

Cave of Stars appeared in 1999, a fascinating and deeply thoughtful account of a giant habitat's fatal encounter with a dirtworld. Actually, to say 'giant' belies the reality, since a habitat a hundred kilometres long, constructed of concentric shells around an original asteroid core, contains more internal space than the entire surface of a planet, space enough for numerous alternative worlds, such as an entire sea-world especially tailored for adapted humans with gills, who have opted for an aquatic existence.

Other citizens exercise their freedom of choice by entering virtual realities; or they may need to enter these temporarily for medical reasons. Whichever the case, VR tends to become addictive, posing a subtle threat to such a habitat, namely that not enough citizens may remain in the real world to continue guiding its destiny, and make vital choices. Lotus-eating and virtual adventures may occupy all their attention. Indeed, certain philosophers aboard this particular habitat speculate that it in itself may be a virtual reality, a sophistical argument soon refuted by events — with all the brusqueness of Dr Johnson kicking a big stone to refute by demonstration Bishop Berkeley's notion of the non-existence of matter. Overconfidence in superior technology makes this habitat vulnerable to destruction by one bigoted dirtworlder, who also holds keys of power, for he is the Pope of a conservative Catholic Church which has survived upon that world, determined to prevent progress.

Arthur Clarke has variously observed that religion is a form of psychopathology — a neurological disorder — and that within a few centuries from now all the old religions will accordingly have been discredited, and that civilisation and religion are incompatible. In this sense a disciple of Clarke, Zebrowski destroys the last redoubt of Catholicism in spectacular fashion in *Cave of Stars*, although not before the last Pope has committed an ultimate atrocity.

Cave of Stars contains a neat definition of what macrolife is: 'a mobile organism comprised of human and human-derived intelligences. It's an organism because it reproduces, with its human and other elements, moves and reacts on the scale of the Galaxy.' It is larger inside 'than the surface of a planet. And larger still within its minds.'

Macrolife itself, the feature-length pilot novel (naughtily to adapt a TV

category), already spans the whole of time from the present to the end of the universe and beyond. Its sheer sweep, its grandeur of concept, its daring, integrity and rational intelligence put to shame those science fictioneers who can only fill up the next hundred billion years with space wars and other high jinks orchestrated by heroes who are only giant dwarfs, fantasy projections of our as yet rather primitive selves.

Integrity, yes, and honesty. Here is a piece of fiction which may well be more than fiction, which demanded to be written, and to be written in its own terms. *Macrolife* is a work of grandeur and intelligence. With it, George Zebrowski's career as mature prophetic writer really commenced, just as the real career of the human race may be only now commencing, just as we are still in the early youth of the universe itself. In times that sometimes seem trashy, yet are pregnant with glory, a book like *Macrolife* keeps our vision bright.

— Ian Watson

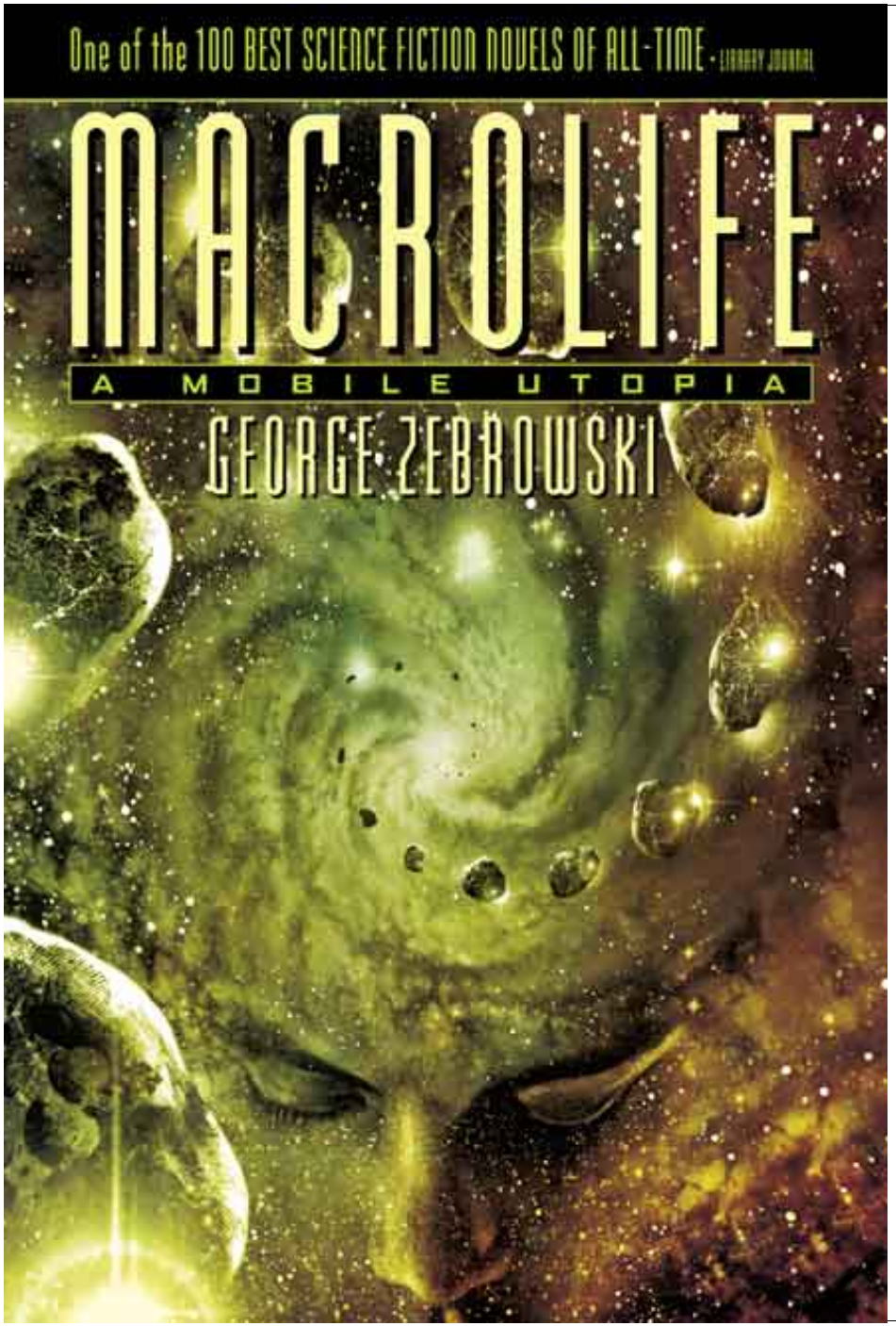
George Zebrowski

Don't read this first: Afterword to the new edition of 'Macrolife'

What can an author say about a novel he wrote in a bold mood of declamatory poetry over 25 years ago, a first novel that he dreamed about throughout his high school years, and which finally came to him in handsome publication? Well, one can observe and measure the past, and be gratified that this novel received high praise from its many readers, and continues so. At the end of his days, Isaac Asimov said to me, 'These stories about macrolife will be your Foundation Series. Don't neglect them!'

I was writing this book from about 1961 onward, struck by the social ideas of mobile habitats in the scientific/engineering work of Dandridge Cole, and developing his vision not only in its engineering aspect but also in the philosophical view of mobile habitats as the ultimately flexible societal organism, capable of great divergent development. No work of fiction had taken the ideas as far as I did by 1979; one had to look to the non-fiction of J. D. Bernal, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and Isaac Asimov, to various suggestions in the works of Olaf Stapledon, and to Cole's brief works, not to stories and novels. But one thing was clear to me even as a teenager: I took the idea as a reality waiting to be realised.

The writing of my novel, which presents three visionary snapshots in the life of mobile habitats and what they are *for*, swallowed my life for most of two decades. As Dante had been inspired by theological cosmologies to search out a context for human life, I was drawn to the deeper implications of space travel and to a critical reconsideration of a too easily accepted idea of settling the planets of other solar spaces. *Macrolife* also sang to me as a symphonic structure — a heroic part one, a slower middle movement, and a long visionary poem for the finale.



John Picacio's cover for the Pyr edition of George Zebrowski's *Macrolife*.

One criticism raised about the novel when it was first published claimed that it did not show 'how we get from here to there'. It was basically a dismissal of the utopian visionary ideals of the story, somehow forgetting that all of part one presents catastrophe as the midwife of change, if not progress, as it has always been throughout human history, if one reads and remembers that the fall of every major civilisation sows the seeds of the next. I would prefer that planetary disaster not be the midwife to the birth of macrolife; but it may in fact have to be so, whether it be ecological of our own making, cosmic (permitted by our own inaction), or sociopolitical. My contribution was in suggesting that a mobile civilisation would not fail, at least not as easily as our planetary cultures have fallen, and perhaps not ever.

'Ever' is a cosmological word deeply rooted in our apprehensions about reality, because we still come and go too quickly. I was thinking of Robert A. Heinlein's Future History Chart, from which I fondly recall the entry for 2600 AD: 'Civil Disorder, followed by the end of human adolescence, and the beginning of first mature culture.' I also charted a future history, for use in writing the novel, on a white board in black marker; one day I will revise it.

Another notable misconception involved the scale of my mobiles. One reviewer asked why they were called macroworlds, since they were so 'small', little realising that a length is not the same as volume and square surface area, which can yield an inner surface at least twice that of the Earth, as noted at the start of part two. One curiously derisive comment likened this novel to a famously difficult philosophical work, when in fact my novel's reading level has been measured as being that of mid-college. William Styron once said that a good novel should leave the reader slightly exhausted, and I say that a science fiction novel without actual thinking in it is not worthy of the name.

Much has been made of my Stapledonian influences. For sheer comprehensive vision, his body of work constitutes the single greatest achievement in science fiction's history. But the last lines of my novel answer Stapledon's *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker* by suggesting a music that will endure, one that does not come and go as in Stapledon's cosmic novels, but contributes to a growing permanence and a net gain, as new macrolife comes into being with each new cycle of nature and becomes aware of macrolife sweeping across from previous cycles. If there is a

physical forever to existence, then why not? Freeman Dyson has suggested an all but eternal survival of intelligent life through a thrifty, endless ratcheting down of energy use.

Clearly, *Macrolife* is a further development of the utopian novel, unnoticed despite some discussion of this in the novel itself that it is a 'dynamic utopia', in H. G. Wells's discussions of the shift away from the 'static' models that preceded him. So I have restored the novel's subtitle, 'A Mobile Utopia', and urge readers to keep in mind that there have been at least two meanings of the term utopia since the time of Wells, but too many still recall the static models of earlier writers.

Macrolife, although it can stand alone, is part of a broader canvas; between its three parts I have also set *Cave of Stars*, a darker, closer vision that still manages to oppose the darkness, despite the battering of our hopes in recent decades. Two published novelettes, which may yet grow to be parts of novels, deal with the conflict that the mobiles of 'macrolife' have with settling nature's planets.

I still feel that the central conception is poorly understood, dragged down by weighty pasts, perhaps because it looks critically upon, and rejects, nearly all of science fiction's past visions about settling other worlds. I see this dialogue going on in my mosaic of stories and novels until the question is resolved — probably by the year 5000 in my fictional chronology. It may never be resolved in reality. The question may never even be tested, but I hope that this is merely shortsightedness. As one endures, we are weighed down by the spectacle of human quarrels, by the blindness of our swarm, by the realisation that came to Napoleon that there was little he could do against privileged wealth and power, and maybe even less by the cat's cradles of familial knots.

Someone once said that there are no utopias that he would want to live in. I have always wanted to live in the macrolife culture and to continue learning throughout an indefinite lifespan, in epochs that would have their own emerging problems — but not those of the past. A room with heat, electric light, a television and a library, not mention online access to a library, would have been a utopian vision to Thomas Jefferson.

I now say, against a creeping darkness of doubt, that something like macrolife has to be the ultimate in social systems and in the survival of intelligent life, human life included. But even in the near-term, across the next millennium, our failure to become a spacefaring world may well be suicidal, when we consider what we can do for our world from the high ground of the solar system: energy and resources, planetary management, and most importantly, the ability to prevent the world-ending catastrophe of an asteroid strike. This last threat will happen; it is not a question of if but when. Today we are utterly helpless before such a danger, and would know of it only when it was already happening.

But the deepest threat to our survival lives inside all of us. The powers of the Earth today took power from previous powers, with cultures overlaying previous ones by force, and the latest always fear innovation unless they control it, since innovation would rearrange the rule of the planet. The struggle over energy resources may yet plunge us into a new dark age, if not extinction, by our own hands. We have not gone out into the solar system, or raised up our poor and powerless, because that would also change too much for our existing powers, who do fear that more for the many means less for the few. Virgil wrote of the Romans, 'To these I set no bounds in time or space/They shall rule forever', but today we are learning to reject a planetary minority as the Earth's master — and that is what the traditional masters fear most, that the future will not belong to their generations, to the devils they know within themselves. When confronted with the concept of space colonies in the second half of the twentieth century, politicians muttered, 'Uh, we can't have that. It would change too much. And it's too expensive.' Public interest waned by the mid 1980s, much as it had turned against space exploration in the early 1950s, until the political disaster of *Sputnik* in 1957 revived the idea, and I began to wonder what kind of planetary disaster would kick our world out of its cradle into genuine spacefaring and world-building. The view of the Earth from the Moon gave us a sense of our world's fragility. It is in fact a space colony, a skylife conglomeration of materials held together by gravity, and far from safe.

The test of a utopia is its treatment of the individual. A dynamic utopia, one that responds to the external universe and to the inner life of its people, must safeguard both itself and the individual, with legal, fully usable safeguards for both. Olaf Stapledon held that a society must deserve its individuals, *and* its individuals must deserve their society. That is the solution to the problem of the individual in society; it calls for responsibilities from both, so the solution is both profoundly conservative and radical at the same time, hinging on the *and* of that sentence being practiced. The economic social container has to be inviolate, since it

supports all that is possible without determining its content; but the true test would come in its tolerance of dissident and departing individuals, something the Soviet Union and many other governments have not been able to tolerate consistently. 'The State is for Individuals,' Wells wrote in *A Modern Utopia*, 'the law is for freedoms, the world is for experiment, experience, and change; these are the fundamental beliefs upon which a modern Utopia must go.' These great words sound the very theme of science fiction as an exploratory fiction, as a freedom of inner exploration and self-programming that our world has hit upon to help it see ahead. Fictional and imaginative, but aspiring to reality. The words of a novel, however, cannot guarantee any future reality's success; therefore, one cannot make of macrolife a failure unless we go out and try it out.

Utopian ideas, whether of the static or dynamic kind, are usually confronted, often with derision, with the evidence of human nature, which, it is claimed, requires conflict inherited from the evolutionary mill. Few critics of utopias care to admit that we can in fact see beyond the dramatic imperfections of our given physiology, that we can to a large degree question our biological constraints, that these do not completely block our imaginative efforts to step back from our humanity and see possibilities in freer, economically liberated measures of man.

Great fear is made of the lockstep of impoverished utopias not worthy of the name; that is why this has been a term of derision. Yet utopias remain as the great empty space on our maps, reproaches to our acceptance of who we have been given to be by nature. They have threatened and beckoned with creative possibilities, and shame the easy way with to which so many of us have turned away from the effort. What we are has its own inertia and a self-serving way of rationalising what should be questioned and perhaps even despised by a creative, adventurous spirit that has acquired enough plasticity and free will to make of itself its own project for the future. Our literatures, fictions all, have been a way of 'distancing' ourselves from ourselves, of seeing, as the historian Giambattista Vico saw, that much of what we ascribe to human nature is more circumstance and culture than nature, much of it made by ourselves, and that what we have made in one way we might make in another. Vico was generous with his vision of human freedom, but despite the catastrophe of the twentieth century, our creative freedom to remake ourselves through a growing knowledge does in fact await us, even if we can take only small steps; but if we believe that we are ruled by unreachable inner forces that will only subvert all the promise of our science and technology, that the complexities of our short lives transcend our ability to understand and deal with them, then we are indeed lost. We do have the choice to reject this view, even if it may be true, and bring the battle to a test that will defeat the past and grow a new freedom.

'The Ultimate Human Society', as Dandridge Cole presented the idea, is perhaps misleading, since the concept of macrolife is *one* thing only in its economic and technological sense, but an endless series of opportunities for cultural ways to grow on the basic life-support model. What more could intelligent life ask for? All of our planetary societies have tended toward it, in every form of community from village to city. Dandridge Cole had it right, but his visionary successors, from Gerard K. O'Neill to many a science fiction writer, did not consider the idea's full implications. It is not all engineering, hardware and 'big dumb objects,' but a waiting opportunity for a better human life. It has been my privilege to write novels searching out the human implications, as well as the implications for intelligent life, in the arena of the novel, which has traditionally been a central and complex court of human inquiry, and where so much of today's literature, in the words of Fred Hoyle, is myopic and shortsighted before the 'golden chances' that wait for us, and which we may lose. No planetary future for intelligent life is assured except through knowledge and action.

So I welcome this new edition of my early hopes, now darker, to help me confront my doubts as it reminds me of the Enlightenment values, which for me have always lived at the heart of science fiction's loftier but too often commerce-crippled life. The best of science fiction has increased human awareness of the future tense for some two centuries now, but we must remind ourselves how new such an impulse is, as it struggles to grow in the human mind, which is still hobbled by our inheritance from a survivalist nature.

All literature, at whatever scale of observation, has been a stepback seeing effort; and we must take it as a sign of hope that we have anything like this ability, not only to look back but to gaze forward, and not just to see what is merely possibly but even to make new things happen.

— George Zebrowski
Delmar, New York, June, 2005; January 2009