

# TBS&E Issue Number 24 'Practical'

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Released in time to meet Minac  
and the Next Anzapa Deadline

## Editorial - Not a Good time at all!

To quote **Kurt Vonnegut Jr.** - Busy Busy Busy.  
So much to do and so few days to do it all.

At this time the Freecon has my major attention, a great deal of text that I will be generating will inevitably find its way into future issues of TBS&E once things settle down. I do intend to be out and about Sydney's various SF&F meetings (Freecon outreach!), so there will be meeting accounts sometime soon - AND a whole stack of 'Traveller's Tales'. The full story of what I get up to in organising a Sydney Freecon would fill a fat book, I meet and converse amicably with far more people on the way to the Freecon than I ever meet on the day of the con, but that is news for other issues, once the 'emergency' is over, perhaps.

**Mailing Comments for ANZAPA mailing 238 August 2007. Sorry to be so brief, but I will try to at least reply to your mailing comments. GPD**

## Bloody Bored Student

Ah! If you think you are bored now, just you wait until you are no longer a student and have to become a productive citizen and a fully employed 'work unit'. Thank you for your comments about the **Sydney Freecon** it takes place in November. It is the nature of Society these days that there are expectations for 'Free' and 'Expensive' products. I do not see the Freecons as competing against the like of say Conflux at Canberra, which will cost me some change out of a Thousand dollars to attend, rather, as email / chat room / and internet information is also substantially free to the consumer, I see Freecons as competing against these, meeting in the flesh as a slightly better idea than electronic intercourse.

## Garbage Tip Rhubarb

Ah the local Tip, the happy holiday hunting ground of my youth. I appreciated the many comments, but there seems nothing in need of a reply. Passing strange that I received two copies of your newsletter this mailing?

## Bookmark #8

Like the woodwork on the front cover, some day soon I'm going to make my own trebuchet and an atlatl (or woomera, the atlatl having entered the language much earlier). Among Ms Atwood's more famous genre denial statements was one to the effect that her books could not be SF coz her books did not involve Rockets or Giant talking Squids.

**Kinokuniya** is a vast Japanese owned Bookstore, it is huge and at times its range of books can be quite puzzling. Buying and stocking decisions are made mostly in Japan. It's well worth a visit just to be reminded that not only do non-US/UK people write SF&F etc., but what they think is good SF&F even if it is written mostly by US/UK writers.

I too was surprised by what I started to find when I started to read through the **Bert Chandler** that I collected ahead of the Freecon, fruity stuff indeed, but not that dated!

## Necessity 77

Yeah! In reading about the book I did pick up that **the movie version of 'Rebecca'** was free of a lot of the things that I complained of about the 'full' story in the book, a clear case that a short story usually better translates to a movie treatment?

**The missing fragment**, was to the effect that all the Passey cousins (my mum's relatives) had come down with Measles, very much pre-immunisation. **On Olive**

**Dickenson**, the putative NZ source of genealogical knowledge about Captain Cook's descendants, the Captain Cook link came up briefly during a conversation with a member of the Mormon side of the extended family, so there might yet be something to it after all, a Cook cousin or grandfather or something.

**Kingdom of the Bland**

The plaques were appreciated, even though I didn't get to hand them out in person (or deliver the speech on my mum to an Audience. That weekend Lake Macquarie was flooded the camp site's internal roads were under water, the power out, total catastrophe etc. Each **Plaque** came with a year of birth penny, I hope to do more of them as birthdays and anniversaries permit.

**Panopticon 43**

Funny you should mention that. On the whole, given recent experiences I too would MUCH prefer to do these speeches with the person present, rather than posthumously!

**Arbitrariness - fourth Instant**

Yeah, **Star Trek**. As much as I can see the down side of being a trekker would have to be fairly mild at most, beyond looking a little goofy. The **Freecons** are what the Freecons are. This years will be a refining of a formula that I plan to try to repeat year in and year out, rather than discarding it and moving to a 'higher' form of SF convention. I'm looking forward to a 'clear' year, when I can assemble the bits for a Sydney Freecon over 9 or 10 months rather than a ghod awful rush over two and a bit. When I was younger I had a friend who served up this strange dark stuff, a cola cordial. It was years before I figured out that this stuff was supposed to be similar to '**Coke-A-Cola**'. It could be the brutality of the CO2 from carbonation, or the acidity of it and the phosphoric acid in the stuff. There are colas that I will drink, usually 'flat', but flat 'Coke-A-Cola' just doesn't do it for me either.

**Land of 10,000 Loons**

As you will read in this issue, **the Transplant** did not go well. The family get together did not take place, and then a bare few months later the family was called together by my brother's funeral. It wasn't a wussy little '**Brush Fire**', it was a real Aussie Bush Fire, a sort of Dresden in Arcadia type of thing. The meaning of the missing Fragment issue is covered in my response to Necessity 77. Mystique passed her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday without incident. We drove home to Sydney through even more bad weather, so her sleeping arrangements were undisrupted. **All Americans do look like Trekkers**, sadly this is

not a joke at all. Sorry to let the secret out of the bag, that's why Australians watch so much US TV, it's a scream!

**Ping!**

Thanks for the thoughts on both topics.

**ANZAPA 770**

I was apparently born very young, you write with a very young appearing font.

**Les Chattes Parties 90**

Thanks for the thoughts on all topics. Responses elsewhere answer the same points raised in your comments

Garry's notes of the  
Infinitas meeting of  
July 05, 2007 - Topic:  
When SF&F jumps the  
shark

**Present were:** Garry Dalrymple, Kurt Frank, Mick Ousley and Brian Walls.

**Apologies** phoned in by several people, 'Twas a dark and stormy night'!

The night after Gale force winds caused a train to be stalled on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and consequently all Sydney public transport to be 'Late and running out of timetable order'. The Aircraft Carrier USS Kittyhawk was also in port, another distraction for SF fans, some to admire the Technology, some to decry the Politics and others, perhaps, to way lay the Sailors? The cold and windy winter months in Parramatta do little to encourage people to meet and talk about SF. Kurt Frank, Mick Ousley and Brian Walls were joined by Garry Dalrymple (after 7 pm?) to talk about recent SF / Sci-Fi and Science news, and just to shoot the breeze about matters Science Fictional.

**SF Nal Science and fannish News of July 2007**

- A new SF / Sci-Fi Magazine called 'Death Ray' is being published, by the people behind the general Movies / TV magazine 'Empire'.

- **Ovum Banking** choices have been in the news of late, A mother banking eggs on behalf of an ovary deficient daughter, nine year old girls undergoing cancer treatment cryogenically preserving ovarian tissue against future infertility, some young women storing eggs in their teens and twenties to allow for greater career and study options.

- **Fred Saberhagen** is dead. The Author of over sixty books, both SF and Fantasy styles. To my mind the most important being the 18 books about the interaction of Berserker Machines and Humans.

- The occasional Sci-Fi actress **Mala Powers** ('The Colossus of New York', 'City Beneath the Sea' & 'The Doomsday Machine') is dead.

- The local broadcast of the TV series Heroes is at an end, although a third series is to be shot next year.

- The TV series Hero's and 'Lost' are each reaching a series conclusion. Hero's we will miss, the other is forever a lost cause to us.

- There was a **Writer's Festival** on recently in Sydney, but we didn't go. Not much on offer of interest to us, very few people who we know invited? Why is this so year after year? We buy and read books don't we?

- A **Sydney Dr Who event**, an afternoon with **Sylvester McCoy** will take place on Sunday August 5, 2007, at \$40 and \$50 for the day this is considered to be good value.

- **Sylvester McCoy** was seen robbing a betting shop on the Bill, a doctor fallen on hard times?

- 'Blake' of 'Blakes Seven' was seen on Torchwood as an elderly murderer, and soon after on 'Midsummer Murders'.

- **Harlan Ellison** has out a newish book (essays?) 'The Second Glass Teat', a sequel to 'The Glass Teat'. He reasons that TV these days is so bad coz it's all the media's fault, good shows no longer get to air, NB not 'Media Fans'. Brian had a copy of the original TGT to hand.

- For no particular reason it was announced that following the success of Battle Star Galactica, the seventies singing sensation 'Cylon and Garfunkel' are thinking of re-forming and going on tour.

Hyperdrive (2)

Heroes (7)

Stargate SG1 (7) War with the Ori

Torchwood (10)

Anthology of interest (31)

The Schlocky Horror Show (31)

And no doubt various Afternoon Children's programs

**'Shark Jumping moments in SF&F'**, an explanation - The topic itself refers to an episode of the US Sitcom set in the 1950s, 'Happy Days' where the event of the episode was where 'The Fonz' was to jump his motorbike over a shark's pool. The significance of this act / episode is that it was a point where many fans of the program gave up watching the program. Hence the metaphor of 'to jump the shark' referring to an allegiance altering incident, usually in a TV series.

**The following are my notes on what was said.**

- The TV series 'Lost' sets records for 'early and often' shark jumping, notably jaw dropping events like the fuel less jet engine running for hours after the plane crash, and the invisible levitating Polar Bear monster.

- 'Happy Days', set in the 1950s (post Korean War) is apparently a sequel to the Movie 'American Graffiti' set in the 1960s, to avoid the 'not so feel good' feelings attached Vietnam War era.

- In the series 'Millennium' the shark jumping moment was, at the end of the countdown, the death of the main character's wife, not much point too it, dictated by the need to have a story arc that lead up to an event.

- In the 1970s series of 'Battlestar Galactica' the arrival on Earth and the 'Battlestar Galactica 1980s' each deserve recognition as shark jumping moments. The recent 'Battlestar Galactica' series shark jumping moment was probably when some human type Cylons just decided to change the Cylon's policy of long standing to 'Exterminate all the Humans'.

- 'The Hulk' Movie franchise's shark jumping moment was the realization that it was just The Fugitive in green body paint and shorts

- The shark jumping moment for any number of TV series is when the unresolved sexual

**Current (July 2007) SF TV**

Dr Who (2)

Goodnight Sweetheart (2)

tension between Male and Female leads gets 'resolved'.

- In 'Knigh Rider', a shark jumping moment was the discovery of Kitt's evil twin talking car.
- In 'Dark Angel', a shark jumping element in the second series was the 'deletion' of the first season's rationale - That a Terrorist Nuke kills America's Technological advantages and blows all of the US into third world living conditions.
- The shark jumping moment for 'Blakes Seven' was disputed, as the seasons without Blake ('Avon's Six'?) had their own charm inspite of the different direction post Blake.
- 'Mork and Mindy's' shark jumping moment was when their series literally laid an egg. It hatched and their baby who grew up to be a comedian?
- The shark jumping moment for the current (on ABC TV) Robin Hood is constant, repeated and jarring instances of Anachronism in most episodes. I mean, Gunpowder and Muslim women on the loose in England during the First Crusade? I really do not think so. We are talking 150 years pre-Cadfael!
- The shark jumping moment for 'Alias' was the 'cliff hanger' episode that turned out to be Sydney rolling over in bed and waking up from a dream (the whole season / story arc!).

In books and Comix there are shark jumping moments but the consequences are different.

In SF books, with some writers, at some times there are continuity or factual errors that when encountered devalue your reading experience. You might chuck that book decrying the waste of time spent reading to that point, but you would probably still read that Author. On Fantasy books (and to some extent in series SF books) the Quest Trilogy that fails to resolve at the end, or just serves to be a set up for the next Trilogy or 'Cycle' is a shark jumping moment, not for any one series or Author, but for the whole genre of that sort of book.

- Having met the Author in London, Brian sought out and read the final episode of the **EC Tubb** Dumerest Saga (over 30 books?). The series is a quest by the main Character to find the long lost Mythical human Home world 'Earth' (opposed by the Cyclan and decades ahead of Battlestar Galactica and Cylons). The shark jumping moment was

Brian's discovery that the series ends - with the set up for another 'Quest'!

- The shark jumping moment for 'The Survivalist' series comes at about book 9 of this 26 book series, the Earth is destroyed, surely enough reason to end the series there?
- In one of **E. E. Doc. Smith's** the Lensmen series of books the M and F characters go away on in their spaceship on an adventure honeymoon complete with Philipino Houseboy. Part way through the book the houseboy vanishes, not killed, he is just never spoken of after the first third of the book.
- In **Robert Heinlein's** 'The Moon is a Harsh Mistress' we learn that a recurring character and a proportion of the long living Howard families are and have always been black, we are just told this, they are not written as black people.
- In a (**Naomi Mitchison**, Minerva Press?) Feminist SF novel about a revolution that follows Dogs starting to becoming Women and Women becoming Dogs (and at the very end of the book Men start becoming dogs and Dogs start becoming Men), one secondary character was a Basenjjs. She transforms into a woman, a second in charge of the Revolution. The Shark jumping point for me was that the character was written about with absolutely no sign of 'Basenjjs-like' characteristics, either as a Woman or as a Dog becoming a Woman. If she got this bit sooo wrong, why bother with the rest of what she describes in the book? A mere five minute acquaintance with or all the literature about them stresses that Basenjjs just ain't 'normal' dogs.

In Comix the shark is jumped frequently, usually by the death of the comic's eponymous main character and then next year / next issue it is revealed how the character cheated death in order to have the adventures depicted in 'Super Something number X'. Because six months or a year frequently passes between issues, the comic buyer seldom boycotts 'Super Something' number X plus 1', or seldom feels gypped that the character 'died' in several other previous issues. A conclusion was that a shark jumping moment frequently occurs when the

direction and resolve of the show flinches from the set up of the first series, the writers might have run out of material, or 'The Suits', producers etc. decree a change to pursue a different demographic.

The Topic selected for September is:

## 'Dogs and other notable companion animals in SF stories'

With only four people present on a weather and train disruption affected night the meeting was less formally structured than usual, more of a conversation between fans in and around the topic than our usual discussion of a topic to exhaustion.

### On the Topic

'**Jumping the Shark**' (from an infamous 'Happy Days' episode) and is usually taken to mean an episode where the writers behind a TV series has clearly run out of anything sensible to say, i. e. beyond this point stories no longer reflect the promise of the show's original concept. It is a point that critical fans of a series may be excused from following future episodes and look for some new fixation.

Some '**Jumping the Shark**' (JtS) moments that were discussed included;

- 'Alias', the season two Cliffhanger, when it was resolved that the preceding series 'had all been just a dream ....'
- The TV series 'Lost' was a veritable shark fest of JtS moments from start to finish, or from start to the point where you stopped bothering to tape it and play it back later. The earliest JtS moments were technical, such as the magic jet engine of the opening scene, which was capable of surviving impact and still running without fuel for several hours afterwards. The matter of invisible jungle dwelling Polar Bear (sure, lots of tropical Islands have em) was my JtS moment with this series.
- The recent ABC 'laddish' and PC 'Robin Hood' program (real one running on Channel 31 at the moment) where Anachronisms appear, such as Gunpowder and wandering armed Muslim women abroad in Sherwood Forest!
- The final book in the long running Dumerest saga, a quest to reach Earth by **E. C. Tubb** ends with a JtS moment. It announces the

start of another quest!

A similar fault is the series of books that are just toooooo long. In the 26 post apocalyptic '**The Survivalist**' books, by Someone?, the Earth is destroyed and gone by book 9. Thick Quest Fantasy Trilogy / Cycle books are similarly thought too long for some SF reader's comfort, but I would argue that they are not of this category, as they present repeated servings of the experience of a comfortable universe, like Romance books?

- There is frequently a Second Season issue, after the prime conflict of the first series is resolved, what do you have the characters do for 42 minutes on screen each week? Examples include the original 'Battlestar Galactica' and 'Dark Angel' where they discarded much of the first season's premise.

- Character appearances and disappearances lead to JtS moments, such as the Blake-less series of 'Blake's Seven', or in the case of 'Knight Rider', the discovery of an evil twin to Kitt, the car with more intelligence and personality than **David Hasselhof**.

- In 'Millennium' the dictates of the precious 'Story Arc' of the program demanded the fairly pointless death of the Main character's wife, an interest killing JtS moment.

- The 'Mork and Mindy' show laid an egg when the name characters had a baby together. A special case of the frequent JtS is the program fatal moment when the Male and Female lead characters get too close and blow the unresolved sexual tension issue, which usually has to be mended by some sort of a JtS intervention.

- Egregious plot developments and continuity errors are more common in SF books than TV series. For example, in **Robert Heinlein's** 'The Moon is a Harsh Mistress' or the Lazerus Long book? we learn that several of the secondary characters just happen to be black, the statement serving what dramatic purpose exactly?

- In an **E. E. Doc. Smith** 'Lensman' book, two characters go on their honeymoon on a family spaceship, with Poncy Ponce, their Philipino houseboy, until the third part of five parts of the book where he has just faded away without explanation, bare boilerplate

where his seat in the control room used to be?  
 - Comics and serial adventure TV series frequently feature JtS by 'cliffhanger endings to episodes repeatedly (apparently) killing off main characters only to have them re-appear in subsequent episodes. 'The Hulk' and 'The Fugitive' were suggested. But this is not such a big problem, there might be annual editions of a particular Comic title, or you might pick them up out of sequence, so the JtS effect of the continuity lapse is not such a big issue to the Comic consumer?

### **Garry's Notes from the Infinitas Bookshop SF&F Discussion meeting of Thursday August 2, 2007**

#### **Topic: Your choice of three 'desert island' (SF&F) books**

**Present were;** Darryl Adams, Gary Armstrong, Henry Chatroop, Garry Dalrymple, Kurt Frank, Damien Lund, Mick Ousley, Charmaine Spears, Brian Walls and Tim and Danielle from the shop  
**With some emailed comments received from;** Adam Browne, Mik Bennett, Drjon, Bruce Gillespie, Nicole Murphy and Mark Philips

#### **News**

As I arrived partly through the news session I missed out much of the news session, at the time I arrived there was an erudite discussion of the available return options for Dr Who villains, monsters and companions, as well as 'deep throat' style revelations about the Australian Sci-Fi TV and movie industry.

Mostly **GA** and **GL** - A Starwarz TV series will start shortly. May the Force be with us!

- The Dark Crystal II movie will be mostly digital imagery, with only some live action scenes.

- A sequel / re-shooting of 'Howard the Duck' was not mentioned at this meeting (John Howard is a Duck?).

- Much news from the massive San Diego Comics convention, the headline grabbing moment was news that **Angelina Jolie** (nude!) will play Grendel's mum in the new Beowulf movie, as a shape changing demon thingie. It makes sense, Angelina's adopting a monster, who else is there left for her to adopt! This movie might resurrect the fortunes of 'Grendel Grendel Grendel' an Australian animated movie directed by **Philip Adams!**

- The actor who played Sylar in 'Heroes' will play young Spock in the Star Trek prequel movie. No news on who will play Spock's brother Sarek, or his other brother also called Sarek.

- **Peter Jackson** continues to have legal battles over the rights to make a movie of 'The Hobbit'. It is likely that there is a rights expiry deadline coming up soon.

**HC** – The US is experimenting with a self contained truck mounted laser, to kill incoming mortar rounds mid air instead of shooting off 'Phalanx' type guns that 'collaterally damage' the vicinity where the mortars were fired from.

- The Iranians claim to have captured (and interrogated?) US infiltrators in Iran! They were camera equipped Squirrels! Meanwhile the British have to make do with terrorising Iraqi insurgents around Basra with Golden Badgers, apparently. This lead to a discussion of the use and successes of allied 'rat bombs' used during WW2, as opposed to the 'own goal' failure of 'bat bomb' incendiary bombs.

**GD** – Out Hummered! Germans are building two huge 10 metre wide, 20 metre long trucks which will be used to deliver 66 ea 115 tonne Radio telescopes with millimetre precision to a 5,000 metres high Llano de Chajnantor site in the Atacama desert in Chile, South America. They would also make great 'Pope Mobiles'.

- Drunk in Space. Some NASA astronauts have been going into orbit 'tanked up', Dutch courage?

- The Death sensing American dementia ward cat is probably already optioned to feature in the next **Terry Pratchett** book (just you wait and see!).

- Saturn's 60<sup>th</sup> satellite has been discovered and named (I remember when there were only 9).

- Three Welsh guys have a 'car exhaust to Biodiesel' invention, actually a box to store CO2 and other emissions that are emptied when re-fueling, these gases are then fed to algae, algae fermented ..... etc.

- Yes we do have a new Cyclotron! Newly installed in Melbourne this device has given rise to a rash of misquoted, clichéd and crap Science journalism. (I. e. .... 'It's a Microscope that's brighter than the Sun!').

- Robot insects can now fly! (see Lexx, we say, 'Bug Bomb, Bug Bomb!') military and police surveillance soon?
  - The teacher who was Christy McAuliffe's understudy is soon to fly on the Space Shuttle Endeavour, only 22 years after 1985!
- BW** – Mentioned the 'Masters of SF' TV series on US cable TV, the Watchers movie and William Gibson's new book 'Spook County' (see Futurians notes of July 20 for full details).
- A sequel to 'Death Race 2000' will be made.
  - The 2007 Worldcon is nigh and taking place at Yokohama Japan.

### Discussion of the topic

Rather than just listing each person's 'top three' books, and not everyone present could, there was a bit of a discussion of the criteria that you would want to apply to the decision if you really were to have to 'pick three books' to live with for an indeterminate period of time. Some things that the meeting talked about as things that you might want to consider in making your choice were;

- Stuff you haven't had the time to read, but you are assured they are 'Classic' SF&F.
- Stuff that you could endlessly re-read, presumably writing of great depth and complexity?
- Uplifting or practical and helpful stuff, **Daniel Defoe's** Robinson Crusoe, The Swiss Family Robinson or the Scouts / SAS survival manuals, books that would make a real difference to your well being.
- A book that you might need to base a culture on i.e. in real life the example of the Bounty Bible and Pitcairn Islanders, in Spec Fiction, a Navigation text book that for an Island (of one legged!) castaways was interpreted as being about 'moral navigation', even the Classic Star Trek episode when the Enterprise crew land on a world that has taken a 1920s novel about Prohibition era American Gangsters as a template for Society (a rip off of **Cyril Kornbluth's** The Syndicate or similar).
- Other practical uses for a book, such as writing paper (for messages in a bottle?), Fire starting tinder and toilet paper!
- A point was raised that if you expected to be marooned a sensible SF fan would have the resources to download an extensive library onto a data stick or similar.

On the other hand, in a related manner, there are movies that they do not play on planes (Snakes on a plane) or on cruise ships ('The Poseidon Adventure' and 'Titanic'?), for fairly obvious reasons! In the same way, if you knew you were to be stranded on a desert Island there are a range of books you would want to have over the side before you abandoned ship, anything to do with cannibalism, and of course **William Goldings** 'Lord of the Flies', would not make for relaxing Desert Island reading. **Adam Browne** suggested (by email) another story to avoid under these circumstances, 'The Life of Pi'. **Drjon** suggested 'Max and the Cats'.

The more SF-nal version of this topic is of course the 'Space Lifeboat / Survival Pod' library. More mundanely, is there a need for a 'Lift accident / Blackout' book, something short (**Matthew Reilly** books were suggested) to read during the few hours until the firemen / lift guys come to let you out. Under APEC emergency conditions, and with the threat of terrorist strike on power and transport, a not to alarming SF book should be in every Sydney-siders' emergency response 'Go Bag'.

### Some People's Choices

**DA** – 'A Civil Campaign' by **Lois Mc Master Bujold**, 'Porn', Pre-Dragon **Anne McCaffrey**, Non-Honor Harrington **David Webber** (military SF?) books. Years ago he would have said **'David Eddings'** but he is quite over that now.

**HC** – How to books, such as the Scout / SAS survival manual, a really big SF Anthology and the same book in English and another language, so as to become bi-lingual during his castaway period (Wot? Two languages, but still no one to talk to on the Island?)

**GD** – I misread the topic as 'Stranded on a Desert Island', so I thought this month's topic was to be a Mormon books only decision, so I chose – The life of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Apostasy from the Divine Church and The life of Brigham Young, as you would! I decided to give the **Philip Jose Farmer** and **Orson Scott Card** books

the miss, as they are just too derivative of the other three.

My more realistic three choices would be a good Scout / SAS survival manual, a really thick multi volume Fantasy cycle (provided it was printed on large soft paper) and a comprehensive Physics / Chemistry / Science book so I spend the idle days on the Island learning something.

**MO** – A blank book, for diary / journal purposes, a big thick Fantasy book printed on large soft paper, his own religion / political tract to establish a personal 'perfect kingdom'.

**CS** – **LOTR**, the **Michael Moorcock** 'Melbione' Series, 'Something' by **Anne McCaffrey** or **Marion Zimmer Bradley**.

**BW** – Frank Herbert's 'Dune' (coz it's a 'Desert Island'), The complete Sherlock Holmes short story Anthology and the Boy Scout survival manual, Perry Rhodan book / books

**I put this topic up on some email lists, which resulted in several postings. They are;**

- Melbourne mage of SF, **Bruce Gillespie** was critical of the artificiality of the concept of 'Desert Island' choices for any thing. However he suggested that he could bear to read and re-read The Complete works of Shakespeare and the NESFA Press collection of **Cordwainer Smith's** writings, The Instrumentality.

- Sydney fan **Mark Philips** offered two sets of choices, with Multi volume counting as one choice he offered **Gene Wolfe's** 'Briah Cycle' (13 Volumes!), **James Gunn's** 'Road to Science Fiction' (6 volumes) and **John Crowley's** 'Aegypt' (4 volumes). If restricted to single volume choices, his list would be **Tom Shippey's** 'The Oxford book of Science Fiction, **John Crowley's** 'Little Big', **Ian McDonald's** 'River of Gods'.

- CSFG member **Nicole Murphy's** choices were; **JRR Tolkien's** **TLOTR**, **Margo Lanagan's** 'Black Juice' and **Trudi Canavan's** 'Black Magician' Trilogy (two Australian writers!).

- **Mik Bennett** offered **LOTR** and 'How to Escape from a Desert Island' by **Scott Orson Stephenson**. After this meeting it emerged that Hitler's collection of 'Desert Island Discs', packed with the intention of a withdrawal to a Bavarian hideaway, had turned up among the possessions of a dead WW2 Russian Soldier.

Apparently they feature some Musicians and Composers that Nazi ideology publicly condemned!

## Topics for next month's meetings might be;

**September 6, 2007**

– 'Companion Animals in SF'

**October 4, 2007**

– 'Anti-Heroes in SF&F'

**November 1, 2007**

– 'The Lure (Lore?) of Apocalypses and the Singularity'

**December 6, 2007** – 'TBA'

**Notes from the Infinitas Book Review meeting of Thursday August 16, 2007.**

## Book Choices to be discussed

1. **Fantasy** - Empress of Mijack by **Karen Miller** (a Sydney Writer)
2. **Science Fiction** - Tomorrow when the War began, by **John Marsden** (an Australian Writer)

The Infinitas Bookshop is host to no less than three SF&F discussion meetings each month, a general SF&F discussion group, a SF&F Writers self help group and this 'Book of the Month' style meeting. The dates and times of each of these meetings can be found in the monthly Infinitas newsletters on the shop's website. I chose to attend this meeting as I had business nearby and as the **John Marsden** book was one that I have had on my bedside to-be-read-soon stack for some time. Too late to 'try before you buy', but it is never too early to hear how other SF readers feel after reading the story before you read it yourself.

I arrived just after 7 pm, and was greeted with the offer of Wine and cheese. They were just starting and I was the fifth person present. Before talking about the two



books set for the night we discussed the relative philosophies of the various different SF&F discussion groups that operate in Sydney. This meeting picks one SF and one Fantasy title to read and discuss. An intention of this pattern is to extend their reading range beyond their usual preference for reading SF. I gained the impression that these are 'harder' Lit SF fans than the Sydney Futurians or even Infinitas' first Thursday SF&F meeting, in that they are much more into books than the broader range of Sci-Fi TV/Movies, SF&F Books and comics that the other two groups discuss. The in common with the other SF&F groups, their membership is mostly geographic / transport denominated, i. e. mostly from nearby or suburbs to the West of Parramatta. Most of the group have moved to Sydney from elsewhere, possibly they got the taste for a particular flavour or SF fandom elsewhere and have found in this group / meeting format, a good way to continue their interest?

In choosing books to read and discuss they are to some extent guided by the behind the counter experience of Tim and Dan, that is to say, Tim and Dan have an influence but not necessarily an Agenda! Consequently they have managed to avoid 'same old same old' Unicorn, Princess and Crystal Quest sagas in their Fantasy choices, and the SF they have read tends to range across most of the significant SF sub-genres. Ten out of ten for that!

### Empress of Mijack by **Karen Miller**

A starting point to review this book is the cover art, it has a Scorpion themed arena, and Scorpions and hand-to-hand combat are a recurring motif in this book. It is a very harsh and cruel world, where the Ghod in charge eats up blood, sadism, suffering and pain as due offerings. Mijak's Ghod prefers a massacre of innocents or a bloodbath to Hymns. He is the sort of Ghod that you can hear Philip Pullman muttering - 'I told you so!'

The social set up for men and women is even worse than in John Norman's 'Gor' series where at least the rise from the bottom of the social order through degradation and suffering is supposed to be 'enobling' on some primitive-ist

level. On Mijak the payoff is just less pain and suffering.

I can't conceive of a bloke writing this today and getting away with it! Girls are cattle and they are bred to breed more men, who are sold off as slave labour.

The main Character is a girl from the sticks who is sold off as a small child and is saved from immediate 'common' slavery coz she's smart and good looking, for other more lurid later prospects. She mistakes her slave trader's kindness (actually just 'value adding') for 'love'.

The consequence of this special treatment is that she escapes the usual slave mystic / magic hair colour change (the hands-on Ghod of Mijak is in on the slave trade!) which will allow her to 'pass' as free in Mijak society, a sense of having been betrayed and is an ever present motivation to kill anyone who suspects her real origins. She grows up to be a 'Strong Female Character' (or heartless bitch if you prefer!). She sets out to become a 'Knife Dancer' (a performance artiste or military classification?) member of the War Host. Making a break with her past she makes a deal with Ghod, slashes up her good looks, Blood and Pain as an offerings to Ghod to escape Slave status. She tries out in the Scorpion pit (arena) and having survived that and having had real visions from the Ghod of Mijak, she has Ghodspeaker status and the inside knowledge to go far in the kingdom. She gets up the duff by king, fails to produce an heir, seduces another Ghodspeaker, gets up the duff, passes it off as the King's and achieves Queen status. Ghod speaks to the king, 'A drought is coming, so conquer the other six kingdoms' (why couldn't the Ghod just fix the drought?). As this is advice from Ghod a nice 'Jihad' against the neighbours results. Ghod also says 'Have another son', so she seduces the high priest to give the king 'an heir and a spare'. First son, the heir, falls in love with a 'piebald girl', sends her back to mum with a bun in the oven. Son goes all peacenik (not what the Ghod of Mijak thinks is Kosher!), so Mum kills daughter-in-law, Son is exiled (Exiled 'True Prince', how original in a Fantasy story!). The book ends setting up for a war

against another continent as the next phase of the series.

**Notes on Mijak Theology** - The brutality is structured but not senseless. Dissidents from this order on Mijak are considered to be demon possessed. Ghod's hand in affairs is micro managed, i.e. all the king's attempts to have a child result in stillbirths, deformed monsters and worse, girl children, until she who will be Empress appears on the scene.

**Garry's verdict** - A book I'm too sensitive and frightened to read!

### Tomorrow when the War began, by **John Marsden**

Despite it's apparent length (towards 300 pages?) a quick and easy read book which seems to be a deeper and more thought out 'Young Adult' book than usually encountered. I keep seeing this book at Op shops where I source much of my reading material, possibly a consequence of it being on the NSW English Syllabus. The book is about how a bunch of country kids at first evade and then start to resist an armed invasion.

**What it is not** - It is not 'Red Dawn' the jingoistic movie about US High School 'Patriots' defeating the evil Sandinista lead Soviet invasion of the US, it's a lot more stumbling and realistic, possibly how real people, not cliches would react. Its not a **John Wyndham** or **Edmund Cooper** post apocalypse novel (the World ends, sensible people struggle to re-build / the World has ended, lets all go on a sex and drugs bender until all the hotels are trashed and the supermarkets are empty). It is written from a female, teenager's perspective.

The story is set in and around an Australian country town that has the misfortune to be strategically placed, on a road / rail corridor from a natural harbour. The seven teenagers are going away camping for a long holiday weekend (they should have gone to the Natcon instead!). They are 4 guys and 3 girls (there were to be 8 but at the last minute one couldn't go). The weekend of the trip being a combination of Anzac Day / Royal Easter Show week. As soon to be adults, they intend to investigate a place that was scary when they

were children. While they are away exploring this landscape of hidden caves, canyons and secret paths the 'Others' strike. They return to deserted homes, dead and dying and untended animals etc. Cautiously they investigate, finding all the adults captive at the show ground (a concentration camp with fairy floss and rides?) under fairly decent conditions. The group decides to re-stock with supplies and to hide out until they can figure out what to do. I. e. they decide to evade rather than to resist. With guards and guns out on the streets their first killing is unintentional, but after this they are fugitives, aided by a local's knowledge of the lay of the land. Towards the end of the book is their first act of resistance, they blow up the bridge that is a conduit for troops moving inland from the harbour.

**About the book** - The story is told from a female, teenager's perspective. A thing about the book is that the group makes mistakes as they go, their resistance is a gradual learning experience, their behaviour is 17 year old credible. The identity of the invading 'Others' are intentionally left unclear, (so as not to offend Indonesians?) avoiding racist stereo-types, even to the extent that one of the seven teenagers is of Chinese / Korean descent.

**Garry's verdict** - Immediate advancement five books up the to-be-read-soon stack, implying a review after the Freecon in November? The only apparent downside on this book is that it is the first of six or seven in a series, but after I read this I might do a 'compare and contrast' with **Patrick Tilley's** 'The Amtrak Wars' series.

Will I attend and report on future meetings of this group? Perhaps. Having not read either of the books I was attending as a Boswell / Sponge to record other's SF&F experiences. It was better than I had expected. This group deserves every encouragement, hence why I'm putting this meeting review up where hopefully it can be seen by more potential attendees.

I'm not sure I can find the time and effort to consistently keep up with this group's

meeting list. The other main drawback is that as it immediately precedes the Sydney Futurian meeting that could be up to ten pages of notes to transcribe / edit up on Saturday (i.e. follow Sydney SF&F fandom and spend your time writing up the past!). I would commend anyone with an interest in SF&F books to keep an eye on what books this group plans to discuss. If a book you have read turns up as one of next month's choices, it's well worth the trip to Parramatta to see what other readers have to say about it. In fact, Note to Tim, why not go through the book sales records and automatically notify all Infinitas shoppers who have bought a copy of 'Tales of X, The Quest for Y' of the meeting's details the month that the book is going to be discussed?

### Garry's Book Reviews

'Window on the Future', an Anthology of Six stories Edited by **Douglas Hill**, © 1966, 158 pages, SBN 330-02465-5. Read June 21 to 28, 2007. Surprisingly, for a 1960s Anthology, many of the stories and the ideas within the stories are still undated and futuristic. They are;

The Subliminal Mind by **J. G. Ballard**, © 1963 is about the logical consequences of a consumerist society 'aided' by subliminal advertising to reach the very peak of 'efficiency'.

The Disposal Unit Man by **David Alexander**, © 1966, is about an error of timing which leads to an encounter with a 'Soylent Green' type reality of a society committed to living within limits?

Wasted on the Young by **John Brunner**, © 1965, possibly the most interesting and timeless of the stories, the young are indulged, free to run up debts to society which have to be paid back through service in 'Adult' life. One man considers trying suicide as a form of debt avoidance and rebellion against the social order, doesn't work out that way though!

Categorical Imperative by **Arthur Sellings**, © 1956 is about human ingenuity and job creation in an increasingly robot run world.

The Facts of Life by **Martin Hillman**, © 1966, is about 'Feminism gone Mad', or just about a Man having a baby (men make such a fuss!).

Sense of Proportion by **E. C. Tubb**, © 1958, is about Exposing the truth on Feelie-vision about a nearly forgotten space exploration hero, on air murder for ratings?

Circulation of the Blood by **Brian Aldiss**, © 1966 is about Penguins, dead Whales, the implications and consequences of immortality. Makes for very worrying 'Greenhouse' Summer beach side reading!

Reading this book marks a personal turning point for me. I have several Douglas Hill Anthologies about the place. I am certain that have read this Anthology before but in re-reading it I had no recollection of what each of the stories were going to be about. In previous years I found it absolutely too painful to re-read novels or short stories previously read. I guess my brain is now so full that bits must be falling out the back when ever I start to read a new book!

'Kairos' by **Gwyneth Jones**, 262 pages, © 1988 and 1995 ISBN 0-575-06067-0. Read from July 1 to 10, 2007. **Gwyneth Jones**

is rather at the edge of what I'm prepared to read. She is British. She writes 'Womens SF' and I always feel a little disappointed after reading one of her books. The pay off is generally slight for the length of the journey, but I keep picking up her books when I find them and reading. The book is about four gay people, a child, a drug, a dog, an ersatz religion and ultimately a 'Quest' for 'reality'.

If I wanted to be unkind and superficially I could describe this as a 'typical Womyns SF novel', in that Not Very Much happens but you get told in exacting detail how every character feels about this and about how the other characters think about each other at every step along the way. There is fortunately a bit more to it than that. I would like to think it is in some way a kind of reply to the tradition of Edmund Cooper and John Wyndham type catastrophe novels where 'Something Happens', the World as we Know it ends all of a sudden and then the survivors either party on in the ruins or soberly get on with Robinson Carusoe-like struggle to rebuild civilised life. This book is all about the 'Something Happened' as lived through by four gay upper class University chums and their family connections. The four leave University, the boys 'get on', the girls don't, but they have a son and set up a Progressive bookshop. One of the boys' foster siblings get involved in a new Opus

Dei or Scientology like religion that has emerged out of a new age food supplement marketing venture. The new Religion is run by power hungry Crypto-fascists. They have the drug 'Kairos' (for 'Chaos' rather than like the Chi Rho of early Christianity?) that makes real your own personal horrors real, as in an Alternate Reality. Someone is plotting to release the drug and take advantage of the ensuing chaos to stage a coup. The idea being that as the new Religion's followers had already tried the drug, they would have greater resistance to its effects. However, the coup planners fail to take full advantage of the chaos, as the Drug is environmentally persistent and consequently with a little bit of mental backbone England ends up as a 'Write your own Fantasy' set of multiple realities rather than a fascist paradise. Where is this novel coming from? As it was written in 1988 and then revised in 1995, and set about now I can only assume that its 'things can only get worse' viewpoint is intentional, a post Thatcherite Leftist prophecy? Beyond the natural distance of personal experience that I feel from the four central characters, the book's cover is another puzzle. A sort of featureless Rhubarb vomit, that gives absolutely no idea (true or false) about what the book is on about. How is this supposed to help marketing? Or is the colour scheme some sort of 'in' branding. In conclusion, an 'OK' read, Science Fictional of a sort and not a complete exercise in impenetrable Womyns SF.

'Hawaiian UFO Aliens' by **Mel Gilden**, © 1991, 272 pages, ISBN 0-812-55318-7. Read July 14 and 15, 2007. This is a gimmick SF book. The hero of this story is a visiting alien with a Phillip Marlowe impersonation fixation who has settled into a household of surfers living on Malibu beach, so it is a Science Fiction detective story or a Detective story done as SF? While I was reading book, at the back of my mind was an always an image - 'ALF does Bogart'. The main event of the story is the arrival of some Aliens in a Top Hat (Magician's hat) shaped spacecraft on Malibu beach, who drop some 'Magic' onto a hapless Malibu Surfer who chucked a bottle at their ship. The ship was piloted by two aliens who are pretending to be Hawaiian Gods of magic (or perhaps they really were the basis of these Hawaiian Gods? Much reliance on the gimmick of Magic and frequent repetitions of the AC Clarke quote

about any display of advanced alien technology would be perceived as magic, as 'Magic' is as important to the story as imitation detectives. Turns out the critical component of the alien's Antigravity drive looks a lot like a fish spine bone, an object freely replicated in plastic and sold as an authentic souvenir of a Hawaiian holiday experience. Much running around and 'noir' sleuthing until it is determined that someone has knicked the component, in the hope of 'real live alien' endorsement of a psychic robot or a UFO nut club. Not brilliant as SF, probably not so great as a 'Marlowesque' detective story either.

'Worlds that Weren't' Edited by **Harry Turtledove**, © 2002, 298 pages, ISBN 0-451-52898-0 813'.0876608, Read July 10 to 13, 2007. 'Worlds that Weren't' is an impressive looking Anthology of four Novella length Alternate History stories, edited by Harry Turtledove. Turtledove's introduction about the nature of Alternative History stories broke for me the linkage between Science Fiction and Alternate History stories. Previously I had believed that all AH stories were inherently SF, but Turtledove makes the case well that AH stories are the fiction of old told by present day writers after 'progress' means that there are no longer uncharted kingdoms for these adventures to take place in, a matter of winding back the tape to find a Point of Departure that would allow you to write the story that reality has bypassed.

In **Harry Turtledove's** The Daimon, Socratese the Philosopher and Athenian Hoplite foot soldier follows the counsel of his own 'Daimon' and gives advice the leaders of Athens in his 'Socratic' manner which results in his own death (but not by Hemlock) and an outward focus for the Greek city States and Hellenic Culture centuries before Alexander the Great.

In **SM. Stirling's** Shikari in Galveston an opportunity for a hunting trip into the wilds of America by an off duty lieutenant of the Raj reveals that Kipling's 'Great Game' continues in the wilds of Louisiana. Russian agents have been arming and stirring up the cannibalistic swamp folk to attack (and eat) the (slightly more civilised) US settlers, who

are nominally citizens of the post British, post-apocalypse Raj. Somewhere in the background there will be Maxim gun and gunboat lead massacres of these mere 'savages' as yet another bit of ground falls into the Empire. Not very PC this AH stuff?

In **Mary Gentle's** The Logistics of Carthage, an inconsequential military engagement on the North African coast at a nearly inconsequential moment in time, involving a slave boy, a dead woman, religious scruples, a herd of Pigs and a change of sides mid-campaign results in two mercenaries deciding to adopt a foundling child, who is to become the central figure in the 'Ash' secret / alternate history saga. The two mercenaries have tiny bit parts in the author's recent major work.

In **Walter Jon Williams** 'The Last Ride of German Freddie' the German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche moves to the American West (for his health) and after identifying his philosophy with the ethos and the rapidly diminishing world of the American cowboy (as the New Romans no less), takes part in the events of the Gunfight at the OK Corral. Dunno if it's that good or not, I do not read cowboy stories and I do not get into Philosophy, so I do not know is the story really pulls it's weight as either. One consequence is that his books get into print without the Anti-Semitic posthumous additions of his sister and literary executor!

'Warpath' by **Tony Daniel**, © 1993, 295 pages ISBN 1-85798-077-8 Read July 16 to 28, 2007. It is a fairly impressive book for an author's first. It is partly about relations between Earth colonists (from Westpac!) and the people they encounter as they spread out into the universe, but it is mostly an opportunity to be Science Fictional about Uploaded / downloadable personalities, Human and Alien. There are several respectably SF McGuffins appearing in the book that explore the possibilities of Uploaded / downloadable personalities. Full or partial 'Copies' of human personalities are part of the prevailing technology, in that they are embedded into houses, run bars and even newspapers. I.e. you can download a threadbare copy of yourself to answer your mail or do your housekeeping etc. There are group mind entities that (Borg like) inhabit millions of bodies and who are beginning to be political active and there was a generation of pioneers

who volunteered to be scanned and broadcast into Space in the hope of re-constitution at the other end. Another big idea of this book is that the mysterious vanishing of the mound building Cuyahokia Indians of the American Mississippi valley (around 800 years before our present) was actually an exodus into space. The process goes like this, to travel to other Stars in a Space ship you have to traverse 'Hyperspace' or something similar, something beyond current Scientific understanding, these Indians discovered the process by their Non-Scientific means, hence they beat the white-man into space by paddling their canoes out into space on the 'astral plane' or something similar. As companion / protectors, some of these Indians also have 'Chokolakas', which initially seem to be powerful Spirit Souls that can inhabit human bodies, or affect matter and energy in 'magical' ways. It turns out that the Chokolakas are more correctly 'post spike' entities, who gave up physical form yonks ago for a disembodied existence. There's also a special type of clay, which has a mega microchip like data storage capacity, an extremely valuable commodity in these times, and the possession thereof is the cause of a war between (American) settlers and the Indians who own it. The government of Earth and its colony worlds at this time is called 'Westpac', so presumably Macquarie Bank does not get to own the Earth after all!

**Scatterlings** by **Isobelle Carmody**, 239 pages, © 1991, ISBN 0-14-034767-4, A823.3 Read July 29 to August 11, 2007

A YA book that is SF by a significant Australian Fantasy writer, so I picked it up and started to read it out of a sense of duty and curiosity. Would this be 'great Fantasy' or great 'Australian Fantasy'? The setting seems to be a thinly sketched post apocalypse world, with people living without much technology and one ruined / abandoned city. The story starts off with a girl called Merlin surviving a car / ambulance / flyer crash. It develops into an investigation / quest for knowledge by Merlin aided by has frequently informative voices in her head, one seems to be a personality and the other seems to be an encyclopedia.

The setting is a girl in a futuristic (post apocalypse?) world. Merlin starts the story with no memories of who or what she is and a collar and chain around her neck. , she avoids re-capture. She has frequently informative voices in her head, she discovers that there are 'Scatterlings', living as outcasts, Clan people and the 'Citizen Gods' who have the technology, live in a sealed city and who demand an annual voluntary tribute of people from the clans as a substitute to hunting people down at random. The Scatterlings are clans people who have rejected this subjection to flee from the clans and fight against the Citizen Gods. Managing to avoid re-capture Merlin falls in with a band of Scatterlings and then meets up with clan people at an annual gathering on the occasion of the hand over the selected clans people to the Citizen Gods. Merlin meets the members of the anti-Citizen God resistance, from whom it is discovered that the 'Citizen Gods' maintain their rule over the clans and their Wardens through a drug addicted and dependent class of intermediates, the Lord Wardens. It turns out that over 1500 years ago things got really bad on earth Pollution, War, environmental collapse etc. the well off build domed cities and left the rest to rot. The City dwellers then build Spaceships and left for distant planets. One group of city dwellers remained on ice expecting to wait and see how long it would take the Earth to tidy itself up. A computer failure meant that they de-frosted 500 years ahead of their expected date and very few of them survived the process. These people awake about thirty years before the book's present and they became the Citizen Gods. These Citizen Gods had two problems, firstly the world outside was still toxic to them (perfectly fine to the Clans people though, Evolution wins again!) and their second problem was that their escape space ship was locked down for another 500 years! Their plan was that abducted clans people could be used to re-program the computer using their (recently evolved!) mental powers. An 'Empty minded' girl had been collected, sleep educated with a bit about computers, that is to say out point of view character Merlin, and the plan was that she would free the Space Ship. Well sort of. Is this a good book? I'm not sure. When I was younger and (briefly) reading 'Children's books' I do not recall books (like the Hobbit?) having so many gaps in the story. I mean how

exactly do the clans people make a living, are they a stone age culture, hunter gatherers, feudal or a technological society? Women just give up their babies to the clan to parcel out to foster parents. Why? I do not think that children these days are so dim as to miss these glaring plot faults. The book deserves some points for trying to be Science Fictional. A post apocalypse survival society, Technological survivors setting up a 'Ghods' over the primitives, Spaceships to new Earths etc., but I found that the faults in the telling of the story meant that I cannot say that I enjoyed the book.

**Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, Vol. 14 No. 8 (Whole number 159), July 24, 1990, ISSN 0162-2188, Read Aug 12 to 29.** The first item I read was **Harlan Ellison's 'Novella length Essay', 'Xenogenesis'**, an article about the darkest side of fandom as experienced by many SF writers. It was a very disturbing read for someone working through the set up of an annual Australian SF con, being all about American Fan Madness. We don't do that here do we? At least I certainly hope not! It goes a long way to explain why even 'risen from Fandom' SF writers are so frequently reluctant to fall in with fannish enthusiasms, and frequently guarded about giving their time to apparently worthy fan initiatives.

The Death Artist by **Alexander Jablov** - is about a society where the death of cloned bodies of immortals is considered an art form. It is also an identity drama, is the main character a murderer or a victim of his / her clone brother / sister.

Mrs Byres and the Dragon by **Kieth Roberts** - is about an Anglo-Indian woman who is a Witch and a Theosophist, who manages to manifest a small dragon in suburbia.

The Coon rolled down ....by **Mr Skunk** by **Dafydd ab Hugh** - Not sure if I read this at all?

Towards Kilimanjaro by **Ian McDonald** - is about a love story and extra terrestrial Symbiosis. Alien life lands on Earth, which then starts to grow and converts technology into sludge. Within the zone some people live with the alien life forms in a commensal manner while outside there is a gold rush of sorts as companies seek ways to adapt the alien processes to the aid of human

technology. A woman goes in search of her lover who is lost within the zone, and finds him as a human element within the greater alien super organism.

Stealing for the Record by **Robert Frazier** – Not sure if I read this at all?

Dry Niger by **M. Shayne Bell** - is about ecological desperation in dry times, the of having to recommend dilemma of aid funding for the Nuclear plant or the longer term re-forestation project. Drastic steps taken to achieve ZPG!

Bears Discover Fire by **Terry Bisson** - is about the consequences of global warming, in that enough bears manage to avoid winter hibernation and consequently have enough thinking time to figure out how to use fire. By the use of fire they no longer need to hibernate, instead choosing to migrate south for Winter etc. At the same time an old woman chooses to end her life out in the open, with the bears, instead of in a nursing home. Un-foreseen changes are afoot in the woods, as the bears will shortly be discovering the use of firearms?

## **My brother Robert Craig Dalrymple, a eulogy speech at St Aiden's Anglican Church on August 30, 2007**

**By Garry P Dalrymple**

I have been asked to tell you something about my brother Robert.

The best that I can think of is to say is that as much as I was affected by his death, I have been more affected by Robert's life in ways I am still trying to understand.

During this week I have come to have a closer understanding of how my mother felt a few years back when her brother, my Uncle Geoffrey Rhead, died so shortly after the loss of my father.

There is now no one else who shared so much of my early life.

A brother knows the stories of your childhood.

He was there.

When you re-tell the story to anyone else you have to explain so much.

There isn't enough time today for me to talk about everything in Robert's life, his family, his work, his contribution to this church or to the beach missions, but if you are here today, then you already know the essential details.

When I was growing up as a younger brother I didn't much enjoy being told much I looked like my brother, or on other occasion, how very different I was to him.

But having an older brother has advantages that you don't realize at the time.

He gives you a benchmark to equal or to better. If you can't be better at something than your brother, then you can try to move on to try to do different things.

As there were only the two of us, family discussion was frequently which of us was more of a Rhead or more of a Dalrymple, who would grow tall and who would be short, who would be more like Father or Grandfather etc.

So Robert and I shared a childhood and then as adults we grew slightly apart.

This is something that you need to do if you are ever to be able to see your brother as other people see him.

What I have seen is good

I have been surprised at how well Robert developed. He has done so many good things that I would not have expected from the child Robert I knew. Much of this is Ruth's good influence, but I'm sure that a greater part was the goodness that resides within us all.

When my brother and I were young, we Dalrymples were few, so I used to draw a sense of a larger identity from my brother and I being two of five cousins.

It was better to be one of five than just one of two? There are times today when I still feel glad to be both a Dalrymple and a Rhead

Knowing how well Janene and her cousins get on I know that Janene will be able to draw strength from being both a Dalrymple and a Deasy.

Now in these few hundred words, no more than a few words for every season of my brother's 48 years, I can't begin to list all the things that could or should be said about his, but there is a single word that does have something lasting to say about my brother and this is it.

Robert was Practical.

To which, depending on how you knew him best, you can add another word, Helper, Worker, Christian, Husband, Father, Son, Brother, Uncle, or Cousin.

Mother and I will always carry a small piece of Robert forward with us.

We have these Robert moments.

For me it is a place that I carry up here.

Whenever I see an aircraft book, some electrical gadget, something that needs fixing or something in the garage that I don't quite understand, for a long time I'm going to be thinking, "Got to ask Robert about that"

Robert Dalrymple will be well remembered today and I would like to collect these stories.

If you have a memory of Robert or story about him you would like to share, please see me for one of these blue cards.

Thank you for letting me share with you something of how I feel about my brother Robert.  
GPD

### **My Thoughts on my Brother's Funeral and Memorial services**

Being a younger brother you always assume, in a distant sense that you will probably outlive your older brother. As my Father lived to be 80 and my Grandfather lived to be 86, thoughts of actually attending my brother's funeral wasn't

much on my mind even when his illness went bad. I had vaguely assumed that some day, thirty or forty years into the future, and under very different circumstances I might have to be present at my brother's funeral.

The funeral was to be at Woronora Cemetery and my brother was to be buried in its lawn section. This was Ruth's (my sister-in-law) wish, Ruth's father is also buried here. Mother met the full cost. This was to be the first burial that I had ever attended, as Dalrymple's and Rheads tend to be cremated. I found it a bit disconcerting; at a lawn cemetery funeral you stand on other people's graves while the ceremony proceeds. Two other jarring incidents were that as the Funeral commenced a jogger bounced by, apparently the park like nature of a lawn cemetery attracts this community use, the other disturbance was that during the service a sulphur Crested Cockatoo in a nearby tree interjected it's demonic raucous squawking commentary as the reverend gentleman was saying his piece about my brother. If I'd had a gun to hand I'd have taken a shot at it, the Cockatoo of course. The Funeral itself was relatively quick, a hymn, a few readings, a little recorded music and a few well chosen words from the reverend over the coffin.

One of the things going through my mind at the time was a quote I'd read somewhere, 'A grave is too small a thing to hold a human life'. The mechanically dug grave was so narrow that the Funeral director had to manually straighten the coffin as it rested on the tapes over the mouth of the grave so that it would descend without catching on the sides. Another was that I was very concerned not to pass out, as I tend to do at emotional moments (and when giving blood). I also take Micardis for hypertension, and if I walk up hill without preparation I can begin to 'see stars'. Family stories make it seem likely that this is something that my Maternal Grandfather suffered from as well. He also was apparently quite skeptical about organised Religion and church averse. I seem to suffer from 'Vaso Vagal Syncope', a fainting syndrome, (like Tony Soprano?) so I spent most of the service standing behind my mother leaning against a tree, and shifting my weight from foot to foot as the five grave



side seats were occupied by Ruth, Ruth's mother, my Mother, Janene and Ruth's good friend Ann (of the Eggs). The service ended, the coffin was lowered, roses were distributed to be thrown into the grave in lieu of handfuls of dirt and a green Astro-turfed board was placed over the grave.

For me the Memorial service was a bit of a trial. I do not do hymns. I don't do Karioke either. There were four or five Hymns and several bible readings. There were several more incidents of the jarring clash between 'NIV speak' and King James texts. Verses had been shifted about in order, and clear English meanings were 're-interpreted' into NIV-ese. It was at times difficult to follow what was being read from the lectern (not really a pulpet) with the prayer and service book texts. My niece Janene accompanied by a piano, played her Violin, a piece of music, by one of Robert's favourite song writers that I found comfortingly secular. Generally, the tone of the memorial service seemed to me to be about 95% about my brother as a 'church person' and seemingly the other 5% for all the other things that his life represented. This church has also done away with the hymn board and hymn books. Instead, the words of hymns to be sung are projected up on a screen, beside the Protestant empty Cross, just slightly more dignified than Karioke, are the words of the hymns to be sung. Inevitably, my brother would have had a hand in this, and immediately in front of me during the whole service was a 14 inch computer screen so the bloke up the front could see what the congregation was seeing. I immediately recognised the improvised clips holding the screen to the front of the pew, a pair of crudely bent 3 mm aluminium hooks, as my brother's practical handy work.

For me, Religion had been a barrier between me and my brother. My brother's faith included those 'Creationist' beliefs that I find so appalling. I cannot understand how anyone can honestly hold an understanding of the Jesus message of Love, Acceptance and Redemption together with a belief in Biblical literalism that ignores the context and variability of interpretation over time that those texts require. Consequently I was disturbed to hear that it was the universal view of the minister and congregation that Robert was

biblically well read. After my talk, and during the light lunch, two people tried to convert me after the service. I take it as their idea of a high compliment, that as they so greatly value their faith, they could think of no greater gift than to try to bestow the same on me at this time after my talk!

I had been asked to speak, but had been told to 'keep it short' and I had no idea what the other speakers would want to say. I wanted to say something secular about Robert's life, after all I had known him for nearly thirty years before he became religious, but I wanted to give no offence to those who knew him principally from his Church, Bible College and Beach mission activities. Looking back on it, I think I said hardly anything about my brother, but I did say a bit about brothers generally. I was up first, of four speakers and I think my speech was the shortest. In another of those 'Ghod moves in mysterious ways' moments on the day, I was profoundly hard of hearing and practically monaural. I said my piece and sat down. After the service people kept coming up to me to thank me for what I said. My speech seems to have gone down well. Some of my mother's relatives said that there was even some applause, but I honestly did not hear any audience response at the time.

**The Humpty Dumpty moment** - We were about the last to leave the church hall, Ruth's brother David had been capably organising (with Military efficiency?) the conveying of people home. As we crossed Ann called back, waving a carton of eggs, so our progress was delayed while someone got through the traffic to give my mum the eggs. As we passed by on the footpath, Me, Ruth, Janene and my mother there was a large tracky dacked individual, the classic suburban, usually harmless village idiot, greeted us and made some remark to the effect that my niece was pretty, so moving into 'acting alpha male' mode I moved to place myself between him and 'my' women, while they walked on, eyes ahead trying to ignore this individual. So mother was walking along, concentrating on holding the eggs in one hand and purse in the other.

The inevitable happened, attention divided, mum tripped on the uneven footpath and went down onto the concrete and grass with that wet 'slap' sound that I have come to fear. The results were; smashed eggs, a bit of blood, some grazing and the promise of bruising to come and an eighty year old lady on the ground. Between us we got mum up, Ruth did basic first aid and travel plans were altered, we went straight home, instead of to Ruth and Roberts, so mum could sit up at home rather than delay things any longer. The packet of frozen vegetables in the fridge did service as an icepack that night. Fortunately not much bruising emerged and there was no lasting damage. Looking back now, I wished that I had thrown the carton of eggs back across the road, as it was concentrating on these that lead to mum's fall.

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