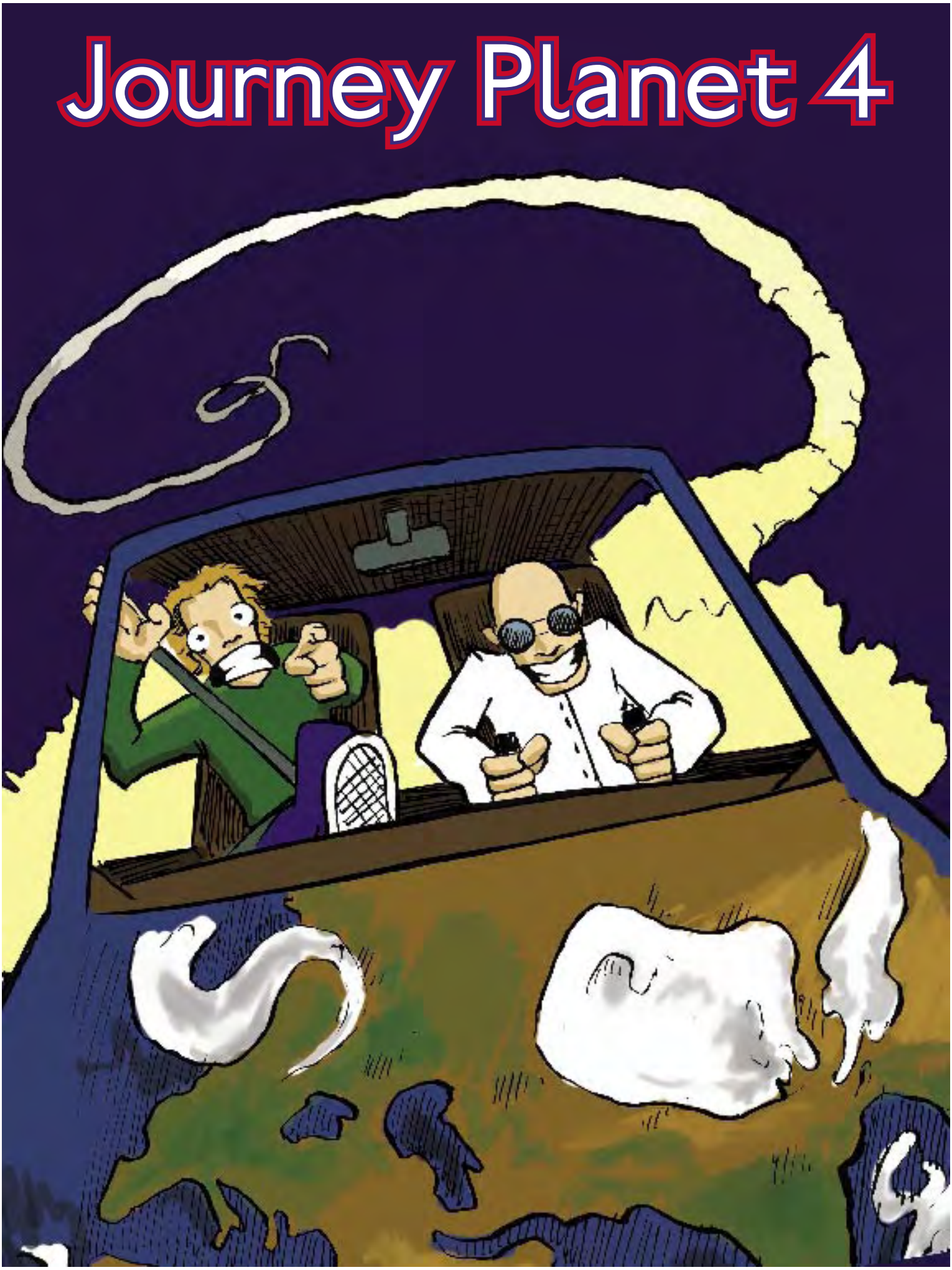
Journey Planet 4



Journey Planet Issue Four
Editors- James Bacon
Claire Brialey
Chris Garcia

Journey Planet 4 July 2009

JourneyPlanet@gmail.com

Journey Planet Table of Contents

Art Credits

Cover/BaCover by Scott Aleric
Striogi.deviantart.com
Page 41 - Katerina Belinskaya
Avine.deviantart.com
Page 25 - Rachel Bowman
Oriana32.deviantart.com
Page 40 - Sophie Collier
vkacademy.deviantart.com
Page 33 - Kurt Erichsen
Page 27 - Femtyechrome
femtyechrime.deviantart.com
Page 39 - Brad Foster
Pages 8 & 10 - Genevieve
Page 12 & 22 - J.J and Lee MacFaddin
Page 20 & 44 - Selina Phanara
Selinaphanara.com
Page 22 - Kevin Richter
Kevinrichter.com
Pages 13, 15, 18 & 19 - Bill Rotsler
Page 26 - Wyn Ryder
Page 4 - Robert Sandberg
Page 2 - Mo Starkey
Colmahouse.deviantart.com
Page 34 - Brandi Thomas
Amirea.deviantart.com
Page 29 - John Toon

UK Physical address: 59 Shirley Rd. Croydon, CR0 7ES, United Kingdom

One

US Physical address: 962 West Wed-dell Dr. APT 15, Sunnyvale, CA 94089

Science Fiction Fanzine: Editorial by Claire Brialey

I'm a science fiction fan.

I find myself pointing this out quite a lot – although not outside fandom. No, there I cheerfully mention that I read science fiction, and enjoy quite a lot of SF TV shows and films, but I don't specifically describe myself as a fan; to lots of people outside fandom, that's more likely to be a pointer towards one of a range of stereotypes that are ultimately going to be unhelpful to either them or me.

Oddly enough it's within SF fandom, where it ought to be self-evident and completely commonplace, that I feel the need to identify myself as a science fiction fan. From context, it's because of the sort of fan I am – and this isn't about fannish elitism; I'm not trying to identify myself as a fan in order to exclude anyone who I think isn't. It's rather that I almost always feel the need to go on to say 'the sort that actually still likes science fiction'. Because we're led to believe that isn't such a given.

Isn't that just a lazy stereotype too, though: the idea that science fiction brought people into fandom and then we found we didn't need science fiction any more? I've never actually known whether there was a single pattern implied here, either that we only read SF because we were lonely and then we found all these friends, or that we found lots of people in fandom with whom we had lots of other interests in common and so SF became less significant, or that SF provided the gateway to fandom but then we outgrew SF while still mostly enjoying the social side of things. Or something else. In any case, it's a truism that science fiction fans never read or talk about science fiction, unless perhaps they have to interact with some new science fiction fans who they don't know and this is one of the reasons so many of us are so bad at doing that.

Most SF conventions, of course, have lots of programming about science fiction, or at least the big ones do. But then it's also a truism that real fans don't go to the programme, preferring to hang out in the bar or in room parties with their existing clique of friends. And fanzines are meant not to talk about science fiction either. Well, actually I've lost track of what's in vogue there, insofar as that concept's in any way relevant given how much of a niche[1] interest within fandom producing this sort of semi-traditional fanzine has become. Probably it's not now completely beyond the pale to mention SF in your fanzine, but it's still probably a bit gauche. Unless it's postmodern and ironic.

Look, I really have no idea. I'm a science fiction fan who reads and watches SF, and writes and reads fanzines, and attends and runs conventions, and doesn't participate in quite a lot of other fannish activities (about at least some of which I've got my own stereotypes and even prejudices), and I have no idea what sort of attitude towards science fiction is deemed to be either normal or acceptable by the majority of other SF fans or even the hypothetical reasonable fan who inevitably can exist only as an oxymoron.

I have certainly heard the view expressed that many people in SF fandom don't actually like SF any more – and I've heard a range of reasons for that, including preferring reading about SF, having acquired a stronger taste for another brand of fiction (usually crime), not managing to read much at all these days, finding modern SF inferior to whatever they liked about the SF they first encountered, or having just lost touch. I've attempted to promote discussion in fanzines and convention programme items about all of this, and indeed to encourage former SF readers back into the fold at least a bit. But I've also encountered variants of that opinion that SF is what gets you here but it's everything else that makes you want to stay, with science fiction itself falling by the

wayside; and I've certainly heard it said of specific individuals that they never particularly liked SF, but simply came into fandom with a friend or partner and found to their relief that knowledge or approval of SF was not in fact obligatory.

None of which entirely serves as an effective introduction to an issue of an SF fanzine that is specifically themed around SF; instead, it tries to grapple with the sense of fundamental wrongness I'm experiencing that science fiction is a one-off theme for a science fiction fanzine. In fact it's not quite as bad as that sounds. Every previous issue of *Journey Planet* has contained at least some writing about SF and about speculative fiction more broadly; it's just that this one is aimed at placing it more squarely in the foreground of the picture.

James in particular is keen that each issue of this fanzine should have a theme – he has plans far into the future, you know, which I realise will come as no surprise since James is (a) a science fiction fan and (b) James – and I suspect we could have an editorial debate about every single one of those. When James and Chris decided it would be really cool to have an issue written almost entirely by (and in many cases about) women, I personally felt there were subtler ways of going about it than by stating it up-front as a theme for contributors and readers alike. But at least I got to write about that too. Similarly, I incline generally to the idea that a science fiction fanzine should not merely be located within the SF community, or by and for people who are fans of science fiction, but rather should always feature material about science fiction – but that it seems a rather blunt instrument to reserve an entire issue of the fanzine to cover what should be its intrinsic subject matter. My fear in this, I realise, is that this issue might be taken to imply that we're getting that tedious ol' SF stuff out of our systems now and thus you can relax safe in the knowledge that we won't be troubling you with it again.

Having created my straw man I won't take you through every step of destroying it. Each of these theme issues is clearly intended to be a showcase rather than a ghetto, and there will definitely be articles about science fiction in future issues of this fanzine too. But sometimes you need to state what should be obvious in order to avoid people making their own assumptions, and some people feel that if gentle encouragement isn't working then you need affirmative action. So this is the science fiction issue of *Journey Planet*.

As for what exactly that means: well, this is a fanzine that includes articles and some artwork explicitly about science fiction. That's what we asked people to write, or asked them if we could reprint, and that's what we've got for you this time.

We also asked a whole load of people some questions about SF – whether they still read it, why they read it, what it means to them – and asked them to pick one or two to answer, and some of them answered and many of them didn't. (And we don't know whether that's more to do with the subject matter or with us or with the people we asked or with what else is currently going on with them, so we can't draw any specific conclusions about attitudes to SF just from that.) James has explained elsewhere in this issue why he thought we should set those particular questions, and what really interests him about attitudes to SF.

I'd originally thought I might get greedy and write an article that wrapped up my own answers to all of the questions, by way of introduction not only to this issue but to what everyone else had to say on the subject; but I realised that I've written too often before about what made me start reading science fiction and I couldn't do that again. Instead, I've decided to reprint an article that many of you won't have seen and many who did will have forgotten, which revisits the story that kicked it all off for me.

I realised in reading through that article that I've been reading science fiction now for thirty years, which sounds quite respectable all of a sudden, and I'm living in a science fictional future. There's still a lot of future out there in the science fiction I've read and that I've yet to catch up with, and science fiction today is still telling stories about both the future and the present. Science fiction often operates at the margins and at points of change – although it's not the only fiction to do that, or else what would most stories be about – and I'm not sure I've seen a science fictional future that I really want to live in (everyone's utopia is someone's dystopia, after all). It's been said that SF is now part of the mainstream, that most people watch and even read SF without thinking anything of it; but maybe that's the point. Science fiction is important to me because I'm reading it consciously, because it makes me think, and because it's telling me stories that are compelling and chilling and funny and clever and full of wondrous things.

It's also important to me personally because through science fiction I met many of my friends and my partner. And I talk about SF with them, and indeed with my parents, and I read it and watch it and participate in fandom about it. Because, y'know, I'm a science fiction fan. The sort that actually still likes science fiction.

(Endnotes)

[1] Or was it core?

Four

The LoC Box

edited (with comments) by Chris

We need to do some clearing out of material on issue two, so let us start with Steve Sneyd!

Dear editors,

On the "better a realtime WAHF than a gemlike sometimenever vapourware LOC"…

Read *JP* 2 while listening to R3's Amanda Dalton radio adapt of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* so, as well as a multimedia experience, appropriate to be accompanied by dark fantasy by a female author reshaping the work of male film scriptwriters.
I found that radio play and was quite impressed. I've always loved the movie.

Cover art neatly post-ironic in context of this ish's theme, i.e. it takes a male to cast light on a female's reading?! V. struck by difference in style (and even sig) to striking backcover art credited to same artist – re: latter can't be sure (? From colour orig) of what entity she's relating/relationing to – eating a side of bacon from a mega *à la* Chicken Little of Pohl and Kornbluth tale, or a furry fandom adapted whale, or …?
It's actually from a series Mo did of semi-erotica. Sadly, in my recent computer crash, I lost it so I don't remember what it was called.

Added the Glyer book re: Inklings to list of what shd/hope to read (despite spatchcock of community into title – does everything have to be a "community", dammit – even heard "the ASBO community" in some radio discussions). Eagle & Child, at least in '04 when I got in, still "a proper pub", if a bit too overrun by Inklings-traces-tourists like me.

Awed at folk who do all the statisticals – I've now added to a list of things to look up that ought to check gender breakdown of 32 years of winners of Rhyslings (Science Fiction Poetry Association awards), tho suspect will end up another sometime-never, as things on list been there years undone.
This note is from a postcard that Steve subsequently sent:

As stalling device to avoid getting on w. various horribles, got down to checking gender breakdown of winners of Rhyslings, footnoting yr Hugo etc. analyses. In 1st 30 years of awards ('78 to '07), figures are 57 male winners, 14 female, 2 w. names which cd be either. (2 categories per year, long and short poem, but ties and collab. poems boost numbers). i.e. (assuming my maths functional - cold hands warm brain?) M 78% F19% A 3%

Lot of other things could respond unintelligently to in one way or another, but wd hardly indicate valuable/valid enlightenment capability, so as a token gesture to balance low LOC quality, by way of mini-exchange encl. latest *Data Dump* – if, as is probable, doesn't match yr areas of interest, pass along/file under W for wastebasket/whatever.
Best, cheers,
Steve Sneyd

Thanks, Steve!

And now, on issue 2 as well, Pamela Boal:

Dear Claire, James and Chris,

Wow, a rare treat, not only a zine on paper but one which is happy to have LoCs by snail mail. Thank you for *Journey Planet* 2, sad I am that I did not get 1.
We'll have to try to rectify that!

First let me say that my reaction would have been similar to the one you received from Max. Being a wife, a mother and grandmother I am undoubtedly of the female persuasion but I do not label myself a woman any more than I label myself disabled because I use a wheelchair. I would certainly resent other people labelling me. Most definitely, amongst many other things, I am a fan but that is not me in my entirety and I would not enjoy meeting other fans if they only had one facet.

I prefer mixed company and would not normally have been drawn to a single gender zine. That said, you have gathered together a whole raft of excellent articles. Would they have been published in a mixed gender zine? I'm sure they would if they had been asked for. So maybe there is some point in all the navel gazing on the subject of female participation in zines and publishing in general. Perhaps there is a question to be asked: do zine eds solicit articles from female fans? If they do not, is it possible that female fans do not put themselves forward and thus eds are not aware of the talent out there?
That's one of the most interesting things about the issue, looking at it in the rear-view mirror. I think we had an amazing number of articles from people who I seldom see in zines and whose stuff is fantastic. I think it just had James casting his net a little wider than usual. I usually don't solicit

articles: I just wait by the eMail and hope one shows up!

All the articles deserve comment but alas time and energy is in short supply. Having a grandson working in the Science Museum in London and a daughter-in-law working in the Tate Gallery I'm happy to tell Tubewhore that museums are moving on well beyond the dusty behind glass do not touch days. Our grandson mounts exhibits in which visiting school children actively participate. The Tate is currently preparing an extensive exhibition of art work that visitors are encouraged to touch. Though I do agree Acton is a very special place.

It's odd as a guy who has worked in a museum for 10 years, but I'm incredibly traditionalist in how I view museums.

Special thanks to Ulrika. I am involved in an international discussion group and rather jokingly I started a topic of an American/English Dictionary. To my surprise it garnered a good many examples with a quite serious attitude towards the subject. I can now add so many more examples.

I had serious trouble in the UK on my TAFF trip. It's more than just a vocabulary; it's how things are stated that confused me greatly. Half-six? What the hell does that mean!

My first Con was in '73, after four years of writing for a zine. Females in fandom really did have cause to feel umbrage. For the majority of male fans in those days you were either a wife accompanying a husband and not considered a fan in your own right, or a groupie there to be chatted up by the real fans, male of course. Naturally there were many exceptions to that male attitude. Older women such as Ethel Lindsay and myself without male escorts were accepted as fans. The accepted route into fandom was books; even though *Star Trek* bloopers were much enjoyed at Cons, Trekkies were considered a race apart. The intermingling of media and book fans has in my opinion been a good thing but you can well understand how I feel that it's a different world when I read the interviews. My feeling of being an odd one out is enhanced when I read that Kari was just seventeen in '79. Our two eldest who accompanied me to that World Con were in their twenties and our youngest was eighteen.

Finally Mo Starkey has a brooding talent in her art that I really admire.

Mo is one of my favorites and I'm glad that I've been able to use so much of her art. She's a regular in the pages of Jim Baen's Universe as well.

Thanks for a fine zine,
Pamela

[Pamela's comment about taking her grown-up children to Seacon '79 makes me feel quite young again - a rare experience while doing a fanzine with James and Chris; as well as being literally a few years younger than me, their enthusiasm and energy makes me feel approximately 103. But in 1979 all of the JP *editorial team were under 10. - Claire]*

Scientifiction - a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.

Hugo Gernsback

How about a postcard from Steve Sneyd, the description of which Claire sent and it sounds awesome: *[On homemade card, featuring Berger & Wyse cartoon from the* Guardian *Saturday magazine: giant monster breaking off lighthouse as salt shaker to season fishing boat it's evidently just about to crunch…]*

Dear Claire,

Ta for *Journey Planet* 3/note. When *Guardian Media* said investigative journos going back to snail mail to communicate w. their informants, as harder for powers-that-be to crack than e-communication, shd've added they shd communicate via Shirley Rd, as yr singularity wd serially disappear the evidence totally.

Which morphs to *1984* issue – v. interesting, but so many decades since had jag of reading Orwell (for reasons I now forget, partic. taken with *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and not just for name. As I recall, *1984* somehow seemed déjà vu from other SF I'd read dystopia-wise) left lacking in meaningful response.

Animal Farm *is required reading in California schools during 8th grade, and that was my first experience with Orwell. Oddly, at the time, being a huge fan of Russian history dating back to my early Elementary School days, I absolutely loved the thing. Sadly,* 1984 *has somewhat eluded me over the years.*

I have a Penguin cover (*The Big Sleep*) mug, and the 13 house in San Jose brought back memories of hearing tale of some mill in Lancs where hooter went 13 times for noon, tho forget why (as O. got to Wigan, maybe inspired him?) but that's little return LOC-wise for a cover-to-cover good read. So it goes.

The Winchester House is a fantastic place and, if you ever visit Silicon Valley, is well-worth a trip.

Best, cheers,
Steve

PS: Wd've thought Tolkien fandom wd still be largest single fan scene?

Well, Harry Potter and* Twilight *Fandom are both pretty huge at the moment…

[On front of postcard] PPS: Re Orwell's drawing on colonial Indian experience, on a recent R4 'Thinking Aloud' mention that use of biometrics in crude form began in colonial India, way for ruling Brits to tell natives apart, well before Bertillon spread fingerprinting in Europe.
I've seen some of those forms in books about data collection. There was a huge biometrics movement in the 1870s-1900s.

And now, a pair of cards from John Birchby, first on* Journey Planet *#2:

Dear James,

Please accept my apologies for taking so long to respond to the copy of *JP* 2 that you kindly sent me.

As for as I am concerned I was tremendously impressed with the quality of writing and artwork that you, Claire and Chris assembled between you.

The Editorial Triad has set a very high standard and I will look forward to seeing future issues.
I do a lot of zines, and when asked which one I love the best, I say* Journey Planet *because, somehow, we get amazing stuff. James and Claire are amazing folks to work with, and I'm not just saying that because I run late too often! Those folks work their heads off getting all of this great material and Claire does an amazing job making me and James sound like we knows whats we're doin'. Sometimes, I just think I need to say how lucky I am to be a part of such a tremendous team, and I'm glad that y'all are enjoying our efforts.
Kindly give my regards to Claire and Chris.
V.T.Y.
John Birchby

And now, John on issue 3:

Dear Claire,

Many thanks for *JP* 3. Another good issue with interesting articles and graphic art.
Pete did an amazing job. It's a bit intimidating to have to follow that layout!

Perhaps James might lead the Orwell walk for us sometime?
James, do it before Eastercon so I can go on it!

Good to see you are now in the House of Lords. You will bring them a sense of integrity.
Claire's in the House of Lords? I had no idea. Do I have to bow or something next time I see her?
Kind regards to all,
John

[Yes, Chris. Yes you do. Actually I've often thought I would like to be a Lord – in the Parliamentary sense – when I grow up. As things stand I merely have some appropriate stationery… – Claire]

Text of newspaper clipping John sent (review of restaurant mentioned by James in *JP* 3):

Meeting for brunch can be a nightmare if you don't fancy a greasy spoon, which is why I had to write in about my recent visit to Le Pain Quotidien (72-75 Marylebone High St, W1, 020 7486 6154). We rocked up at about 11 am on a Saturday and snagged a spot right by the window. It was full of good-looking couples and groups of friends reading the papers. The menu was lush, I ordered organic porridge with honey and banana (£4) and my chap had two organic soft boiled eggs with bread (£3.90). Seeing as we were both slightly hungover we ordered the fresh orange juice. We finished off our brunch with croissants (£1.95) and coffee and left with him promising to buy me something from Space NK just down the road – a right result!
Abbie, W4

Now, here's a lovely piece of comment from Jim Linwood on JP3:

Many thanks for *Journey Planet #3* - a fascinating edition dedicated to one of my favourite authors.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a novel that changed my life; or, more precisely, Nigel Kneale's TV adaptation that was transmitted on my 14th birthday on 12 December 1954. I knew it was some sort of science fiction as it was set in the future and bore the name of Quatermass's creator: a sure sign of excellence. What was unexpected was the subsequent uproar by the prolefeed press led by the *Daily Express* (who claimed that a woman had died of fright while watching the play) resulting in Tory MPs tabling a motion that the repeat be banned. They were upset by "horror comic TV", particularly the scene in which Winston Smith (an emaciated Peter Cushing) is shown the rats by O'Brien (Andre Morell) in Room 101. When the play was repeated, again live, on the following Thursday, the scene was much toned down and this is the version that appears on the still circulating bootleg tapes and DVDs of the original telerecording.

As a result of the uproar, most newsagents throughout the land stocked copies of the Penquin edition of the novel, which became a best seller and my first introduction to Orwell in print – although a student teacher at school had read *Animal Farm* to us. I lapped up everything I could find by him in the library. From then on I became a non-doctrinaire socialist in the Orwell mode.

The interest generated by the TV version resulted in the 1956 film with the Newspeak title of *1984*. This featured two Hollywood stars: the well-fed heavy Edmund O'Brien as Winston and femme fatale Jan Sterling as Julia. For obvious reasons, Inner Party member O'Brien became O'Connor played by Michael Redgrave. History was rewritten for the target American audience with a defiant Winston shouting "Down with Big Brother" as he is mown down by the Thought Police at the end of the film.

As a teenager, I made several friends of members of the Young Communist League who could never understand why I didn't join them, especially as Stalin was dead. As they believed that the proletarian revolution as foretold by Marx was inevitable, they didn't engage in too much agitprop to bring it on, unlike their Young Socialist counterparts who were a bunch of nasty Trots. In Nottingham, the party line seemed to be enforced by a middle-aged woman who lived in the upper-middle class Park Estate and was responsible for ensuring that every left-wing or peace march was led by two comrades carrying a party banner, unbeknown to the rest of the marchers.

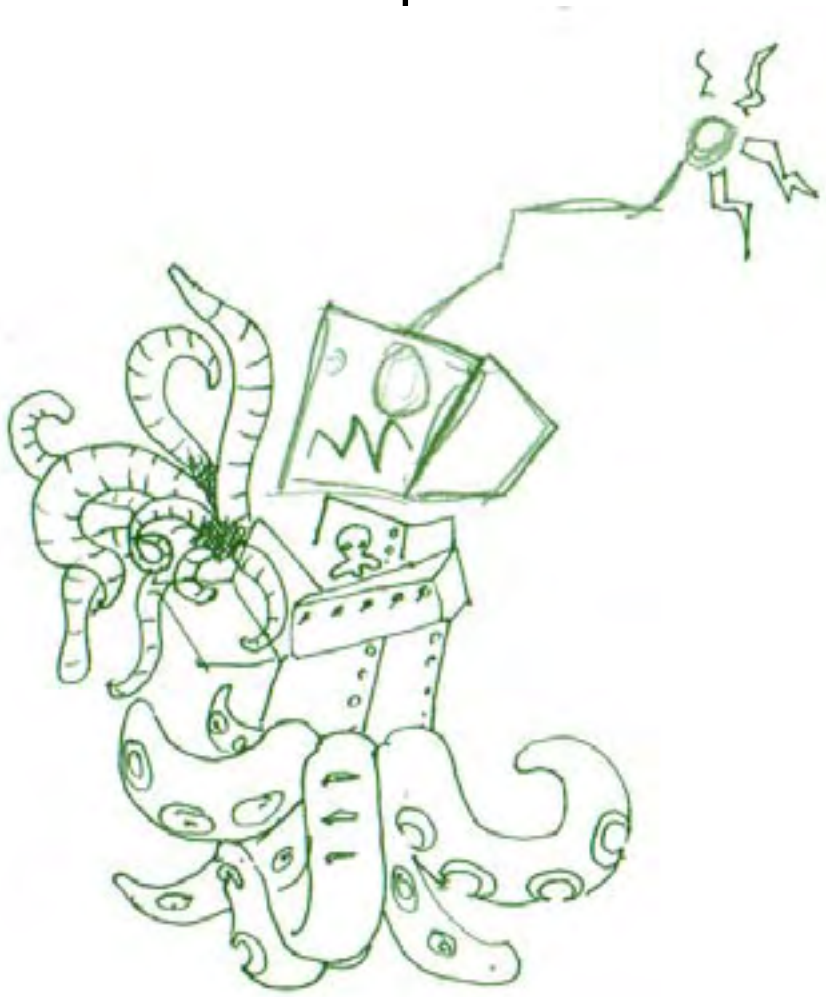
Of course, Orwell's fears were never realised and the best criticism of the book is a quote from Orwell himself about (from memory) "if fascism comes to England it won't be of the jackboot variety but the slimy, bowler-hatted kind." It's difficult to imagine the average Englishman embracing the principles of Ingsoc who, according to Orwell, just wants to be left alone and read his newspaper in a pub.

I was pleased to see L. J. Hurst giving John Mair's forgotten classic *Never Come Back* as an Orwell influence. I picked this up on one of those bookstalls under Waterloo Bridge after reading that Orwell saw in it the beginnings of a new kind of thriller. Although in the mould of John Buchan, the hero, Desmond Thane, is no Hanney but a cowardly anti-hero. His adversaries are a shadowy political organisation comprised of men who have been thrown out of Stalinist, fascist and Nazis parties for being extremists and are now planning to take over wartime Britain. Mair had a similar background to Orwell and was killed in an RAF training flight in 1942.

Kind Regards

Jim Linwood

Mair is certainly an underappreciated writer. I was given a couple of his books to auction off for TAFF, and I read* Never Come Back *and was quite impressed. I've had a few friends who were parts of different flavors of US Communist/ Workers Parties. I think by admitting that, I'll be cast out of my Republican coven!



And now, Pamela Boal!

Dear James, Chris, Claire, Pete,

Thank you. If ever there was proof that the electronic age has not impaired fans' ability to write well this is it.

That's a wonderful compliment!

As a guy who is becoming more and more electronic as the years go by, I'm glad that my kind can provide excellent customer service!

I couldn't do

justice to every article in one LoC unless it nearly equalled the length of the original zine. I will just comment on those that have a personal reference for me. Orwellian London was my teenage London. To think I cycled around those streets, unaware that an author who would one day get my attention in fearful fascination lived and worked there.

"Talking George Orwell with Blair at Our Feet" is even more poignant. My daughter in law's father is buried there; her mother still lives in Sutton Courtenay. I found the photo of the headstone rather sad, there is an air of neglect about it. Who will know in the future that Eric Arthur Blair was George Orwell, a man who contributed two very significant novels to English literature.

In his most interesting article on the Penguin covers James makes no mention of a supposition that comes to mind: I wonder how many of the later covers were influenced by the film?

In "Chris Garcia's 1984" we are continents and generations apart. In my 1984 I learned that our first two grandchildren were on the way; they both turned out to be boys in 1985. On one point, though, I can correct Chris: *The Dukes of Hazzard* was well understood and greatly enjoyed by we Brits.

Again, thanks,

Pamela

I had always heard that us Yanks were the only ones who appreciated the Dukes (and* The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres *etc.). It's sad the state of most headstones these days. I'm actually working on a project of documenting thousands of headstones of pioneers in the history of computing, a field less than 70 years old, and the state of many is depressing.

David Redd now weighs in:

Wow, handsome production of quality material – I should have expected something this good but somehow didn't. Sorry, people.

Understandable. Peter is the greatest layout guy I've ever had the chance to work with and this was an amazing issue.

Also apologies to Chris, Claire and in fact everyone involved who isn't James for not including you in the thanks last time. You're all thanked this time, right? A few stamps in appreciation are on their way to the address on the envelope - ah, James again. Spend them wisely lad. Your Penguin covers piece was great for bookworms like me.

This is a *1984* issue rather than an "Orwell" issue, so I'll avoid side-tracks and say that I found much that interested or enlightened me. Hadn't realised that Orwell, too dismissive of the work of Charles Hamilton ("Frank Richards"), was nevertheless quite perceptive about certain not-obvious virtues of Jack London. Or that the Appendix was still part of the argument.

Chris's piece on *his* 1984 makes me think well, we had Thatcher, and I can't remember and don't want to remember a year such as that in too much detail. The media? A year with *Cagney & Lacey* in can't have been all bad, and in those days pop videos were still made for people who weren't brain-damaged (e.g. delights such as Jesse Rae's *"Over The Sea",* although a quick reality check says that one was 1985) and *Interzone* had started... But, overall, 1984 for me was the year progress had stopped. Our local Esso refinery, opened in 1960 with the look of pulp-SF hardware and a promise of attendant prosperity, had closed in 1983. So 1984 was the year I realised our future had been switched off. As I've muttered elsewhere, in following years other aspects of 20th century progress tiptoed away from our area; offices closed when firms such as the Prudential pulled back their operations to more central locations. Thatcher was unstoppable, and North Sea oil was being burned quickly for profit rather than being used as a window of opportunity for developing a replacement energy source. This wasn't a George Orwell situation, of course. I just got the feeling - which took a while to develop after that first Esso closure - that the progress-type future I'd grown up to expect wasn't going to happen. Not that the new future was that bad. The grim repressive vision in *1984* hadn't hit us and wasn't likely to; in fact in its year the novel seemed rather old-fashioned. Odd - I think it seems less old-fashioned these days, perhaps because it now shows us a *different* world rather than a *predicted* one.

Thanks to all. Can't imagine what your fourth issue will feature, or look like.

Best wishes

David

Well, now you know! My 1984 was so different than many folks' because 1) I was in the Silicon Valley and there was an explosion going on, and 2) I was ten and the world still seems magic at 10.

Mr Lloyd Penney, come on down!

Dear Claire and Chris and James, and Pete, too:

Seeing you're going with the Orwell and *1984* motif… every month in Toronto fandom, we have two fannish pubnights, and the second one is held in the west end of the city at Orwell's Pub and Grill, established 1984. Great pub restaurant, and we've been going there monthly for more than 13 years.

This Orwell/*1984* motif certainly came to

mind through 9/11 and the eight years of the Bush administration. Civil liberties were blown away or simply ignored; I don't need to go into the details that we all lived through as observers. Barack Obama still has a lot of cleaning up to do with Guantanamo Bay, the abuses of the Department of Homeland (In)Security, so much more…

Sadly, Obama's promised shake-up hasn't happened yet, but there's still time. But I've heard about the planned screening area for the new San Jose terminal and it sounds more and more Orwellian.

1984 saw one of our first Worldcons, L.A.Con II, and one of our best introductions to the behemoth we know better as American fandom. At the time, we were heavily into costuming, and we participated in the Masquerade. Chris, you were there? You were at the Masquerade? Do you remember someone in dark green makeup and someone else dressed as an octopus? That was us! We did some programming work for Bjo Trimble, especially a slide show on how to recreate movie and television costumes and uniforms.

Nice to see you back having some fun, Pete… If you get back across to this side of the Atlantic, look us up. Maybe we can take you to Orwell's…

Being human beings, we unfortunately seem to need someone to look down upon. The lit fans look down on the media fans, many look down upon the filkers, and Chuck Connor mentions the furries. I know some of the local furries, and they look down on the plushies. (As an exercise, I will let you find out who the plushies are…) And if there's any group the plushies look down upon, I don't want to know about it. I am finding that just about anything has a fandom surrounding it: there's a local group that stages a TransformersCon, and several hundred people go to it each year. I've been doing a lot of voicework lately, and one of the gig I had was for a fan animated movie for fans of *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. Go ahead and roll your eyes; there are more fandoms than we've ever suspected.

I've quietly become a part of* Twilight *fandom. I completely understand…

My loc: those 53-hour weeks I complained about, I'd happily have back again. I was laid off by Southern Graphic Systems at the end of February, so the job hunt is on again, the resumés stream out, the employment insurance payments stream in (whew!) and while I am job searching, the voice work continues to keep spirits up, and gets me out of the apartment fairly regularly. In fact, I have another audition this afternoon as I write at York University. They aren't paying gigs… yet.

"Captain Airstrip One" is Orwell to extreme, British society to a lesser extreme, and American society, at least to where I thought it was going until sanity prevailed and Obama was elected President. Don't let the Captain know about the current abuses of tasers by police services, or he'll get one himself.

Mathspeak is difficult enough to think about and talk about, but to typeset? Now that's the toughest part. I see monuments to Orwell in these pages, but the greatest tribute to him would be to keep his books in print, and I suspect they are not. The falling levels of literacy are double-plus ungood. I shudder when I look for used book stores, only to find that there are now fewer than 30 of them in the greater Toronto area. (Used to be 80 or more, but they go away, being more of an expensive hobby than a proper business these days.)

I would probably side with Tony Keen's essay… Orwell wrote about the abuses he saw coming, and used extreme examples to warn his readers about those abuses, and to watch out for what might happen. The cautionary tale is good, but this also assumes that the public is vigilant. I have trouble believing that the public is even conscious.

Having Google Earth watch you is causing some controversy here. The cars and 360-degree cameras they use are trolling the streets of Ottawa, and will probably be in Toronto soon. It raises privacy issues, and it's possible that there might be an injunction raised against the Google team to stop them from their city scanning.

Great cartoon at the end… Yes, George, you told us so. And did we listen? Noooooooo…

Off this goes to the lot of you, and wish me luck with the audition today! Keep sending out the double-plus good zines.

Yours,

Lloyd Penney

I love Science Fiction by James Bacon

I do. I love a lot of odd fiction really, sometimes even books that I've found in the general 'fiction' section. Of course, science fiction is hard to tie down, but I knew what it was when I found it. I was young, and the first real SF story I read was in a comic called *Battle*. A war anthology, famed for stories such as "Charlie's War" and "Johnny Red", it also contained what was for me a most horrifying read: "Invasion 1984".

It was set in 1984, at that stage in my future (I was about 8). I remember sweating and working out how long away that was and asking Mom if we would be OK. Aliens, with strange Cthulhu-like faces, used germ warfare on the planet, and then entrapped and enslaved the population – some cowed, others fighting. Wonderfully, I vividly remember people volunteering for the aliens, joining a queue, and going into the mother ship – only to find, once into a secluded room, a spinning drill bit aimed directly at the forehead.

Comics were my source of SF, war, fantasy, horror and even sports, and it was much later I found SF books since war novels were initially my staple. I was in a state of ecstasy when, as a teenager, I met people who would talk not only about comics – and the ones I liked! – but also recommend titles and tell me what else I should be reading. Soon these same folk were recommending SF books, as well as authors such as Hunter S Thompson and Flann O'Brien. This was fandom. Not with a capital F, you understand, but it was fandom.

I was soon reading or rather devouring books, and meeting the authors I loved on paper and finding they were pretty cool. Going to a con as a fifteen-year-old can do that. Although I am pretty sure Harry Harrison was not impressed with my verbal gushing about how wonderful the Stainless Steel Rat comic was, in *2000 AD*. I never even mentioned the book.

Irish fandom was odd, though. In 1995, I was 23 and went to Worldcon in Glasgow. I reckoned then, and feel now, that Worldcon was not a complete representation of Fandom, but is still very representative of it. All aspects of Irish fandom could be found: the semi-hopeless prozines, the clubs and societies, the drunks and party-goers, the fans who liked fun things, the wispy beards who debated things, the art show, the convention. Yep, maybe only 30 Irish people were there, maybe it was more, but the con was like what we did and had at home, just much, much grander and bigger.

SF can be speculative fiction? Pah, if you want; but really for me, SF means books like James Herbert's *48*. It may look like horror, and include a blood virus, but it's a blend of alternate history and science fiction. I just enjoy the story, the intense moments of revelation, the chase, the adventure.

I was surprised at the people we asked our SF questions who gave a response along the lines that they were not really that much of a reader of SF. That is OK, but in a sense I wondered then what the point of their involvement with fandom was. I only ask people who I like to contribute, so these are people I consider good folks. I daren't make reading SF compulsory for those who go to SF conventions, but then maybe I should run a convention just for readers of science fiction, where the only discussion is about SF.

What a week. It's all happening, I tell you. Mostly on the internet, which is fine, but even so.

I read a few words by Al Reynolds which I reprint here, and this made me, in a way, a bit sad:

"A typical con invitation might say that 'we know there are a lot of fans keen to meet you' or suchlike. Accordingly, during the opening ceremony we've gone out of our way to declare ourselves to be open and available for chat and discussion at any time, not just in the formalised context of panels and talks. And yet, by and large (there are always welcome exceptions) this doesn't really happen. It seems that there is a large constituency of con-goers who simply aren't interested in interacting with writers or critics, but are there primarily to hang out with other fans and talk about real ale, knitting, con-running, whatever. No great surprise I suppose, but it's always a bit of a let-down when you've been led to expect the opposite."

I am often the one doing that inviting, and of course the reason I do that is because I enjoy seeing other people enjoying themselves. Now, although I admit that some folks might be a bit shy – and perhaps a special badge with "I want to talk about science fiction" could break the ice there – the idea that an amazing author would not be engaged in the social space at a science fiction convention is just sad.

Like, I remember James White putting up with me for hours. And then, the year later, bringing a mini suitcase of books to get signed, and chatting about each one. And then the year after having a friend get them signed, since I was running about, but making time around the con to spend a lot of time with James, talking about books and science fiction. Oh, and naval stories. Oops.

It's good that writers like Al, who are true friends of fandom, feel that they can say this. It's actually a very important and poignant reminder to us fans that, well, we should be fans, not just organisers. It's something we need to come back on line with. I spoke to Mark Plummer, a local voice of reason, and he assured me that at LX (this year's Eastercon) at least, if we stripped away all the programme that was not SF, we would still have been left with an fairly full and sound programme.

Maybe we should have done that.

I must talk to Al next time I see him – ask him what he likes in the way of SF. I am also in a way grateful now that I am not on too many panels at Worldcon; I can go to more panels and hopefully talk to more authors about SF. And for every author who is gruff or rude or too busy or just not interested, I will force another half hour of me talking about *2000 AD* upon Al Reynolds.

I expect they will be nice really.

I was full of mirth when I saw that Kindle had crept into people's virtual bookshelves and stolen *Nineteen Eighty-Four* back. That's something else. I was dead impressed by a quote in the New York Times, thus:

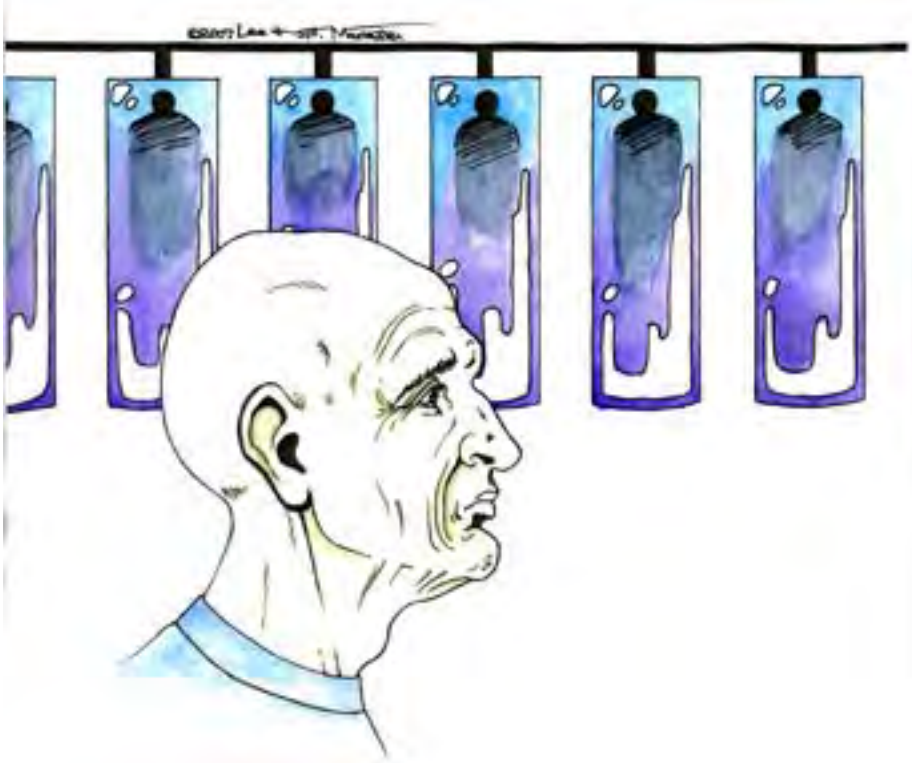
"It illustrates how few rights you have when you buy an e-book from Amazon," said Bruce Schneier, chief security technology officer for British Telecom and an expert on computer security and commerce. "As a Kindle owner, I'm frustrated. I can't lend people books and I can't sell books that I've already read, and now it turns out that I can't even count on still having my books tomorrow."

Wonderful stuff, really. Like Kindle is right down on my list of things I will never buy. Why would I want one: books, the physicality and beauty of them, are what I enjoy. On the Tube, in bed, on the bog, in an airplane that is taking off, where my plug won't fit into the socket. A moment of schardenfraude there, I am afraid.

And then there are the Hugos; apparently, as a voter, I suck. Ah well. More bollocks from an academic who wants to treat fans like school children. And we should look at the Clarke Award to see a good list. Jesus wept. The Clarke, in my opinion, has its own flaws. They do not judge all SF books published; they only judge what is submitted. And some of the administrators admitted that they went out to seek some books for submission. I'd much rather be a Hugo voter that sucks than a Clarke administrator that thinks they know which books are worth chasing.

Of course, this has all been online and is mostly a bit of fun, although I noticed that there was some fannish collateral damage as fans aimed at one another; and those involved in the actual work of making the Hugos work seemed to be not so much losing the battle – their points are well made – but just wasting time talking to ignorant people who want to denigrate the Hugos. Fuck 'em.

There were, according to the *Financial Times Weekender*, 4.6 million science fiction books sold in the UK in 2008. That's a lot of books. A lot of readers. Only a small percentage go on from reading to be active hobbyists, but I thought that it would be a nice idea to look at what SF those hobbyists read, and why. I like recommendations and insights into authors and books. I am grateful to esteemed academic Edward James, who recommended Howard Waldrop to me. I love that: a



good word and suddenly lots of new worlds.

I like the escapism of science fiction, and also that for me it is a literature that includes other genres – so military action, naval engagements, adventure, crime all fit in somehow – and the space that authors seem to find to play with new worlds is brilliant. It's a sand pit, and they just have so much fun with it, especially the big worms.

I'm probably not that good in words at articulating my love for the genre, but I can enthuse to beat the band. Although ideas are important to me, it is also about the characters; I love to watch characters grow – Doctor Conway in James White's books springs to mind, for instance. Concepts subtly embedded in the story, and attitudes that appeal to me are important too. Yet it's also good readable writing; a lot of SF that I like is not too hard on the eye.

So, the questions. Well, I wanted to know what people thought. You know, get them to focus on the core of our hobby, the science fiction books. They are stock questions and perhaps stumped a few people by their lack of imagination – my fault if so. This is what we asked:

• Why do you read science fiction?

An important question. Surprised by those who responded that they don't. Bit of a shocker there; not that it's a problem as such, but I may mention it a few times. Personally I read to escape. I run cons to escape; I do lots of things to escape. No worries about bills or work or anything as I bang on this keyboard, only my fear at not articulating that I enjoy science fiction and that's why I read it.

• Why do you write science fiction?

I always like to know.

• What made you start reading science fiction?

Where we come from is important to me, as it

shows the diversity of background, and defies the attitude that we all came from reading SF books. Media, tie-ins, filthy not-hard-SF humour books, all have brought people to SF. For me it was in the comics I liked, *Battle* and *2000 AD* especially. *Rogue Trooper, Judge Dredd, Halo Jones* who I adored, *the VCs, Strontium Dog, DR and Quinch*. Then mates gave me the books, and I found that imagining the pictures was just as enjoyable, but in a different way.

• Is there a classic book that you love dearly (or did love once), but that you reckon would never get published now? Why wouldn't it make the grade today, and do you agree?

I wonder if Robert Rankin's *The Antipope* would get published now; it's a fantastic book, but small. That was from 1981 so may not yet count as classic SF, but I wonder. *Starship Troopers* seems too simple, but that's its beauty and why I love it; it manipulates my hatred and I love it for that, but I don't know if it would wash now. I wonder if *The War of the Worlds* would get published. I wonder what makes publishers think. Overall they do a good job, obviously, but I look forward to the day of smaller books.

• Which author do you think is unjustly overlooked, that you think more people should read but who most people don't seem to rate or even know about? Which of their work would you recommend as a starting point or just a must-read?

Popes and Phantoms by John Whitbourn is fantastic: a great read, amazing, and yet out of print. And despite publishing seven novels and lots of stories, John is not being published now.

• Is there a novel or story that you think should have been award-winning but missed out?

The Silent Stars Go By, by James White. It's a phenomenal book, and he should have got a Hugo for it. Not his year, as he said himself.

It's odd; I feel much more angry at the ineptness I perceive in the Clarke award than at the occasional blandness of the Hugos. Is it some sort of strange mythical ingrained memory that allows me to remember that it should have been Bob Shaw who won the first Clarke Award?

• Is there a book that was published or publicised as mainstream but that you realised as you read was science fiction? Do you think that matters?

I am not really a fan of the mainstream that is really SF. It's an odd feeling I get when I see another quote from Margaret Atwood. Of course, in that case are *Nineteen Eighty-Four, Brave New World* and *The Day of the Triffids* science fiction? And, if so, why do booksellers put them in the fiction/literature/mainstream/not pointy-headed freaks section?

• Did you ever read a science fiction story that made you think it was about your life, your present and perhaps your future? What was it and how did you react?

Yes, I nearly always feel like the protagonist. I have no idea why I asked that; my answer makes me look self-centred, venal, vain and nasty. Maybe I am.

• Do you have a favourite J G Ballard novel or story, and why does that one stand out for you?

Not a novel, but his collection of short stories, *War Fever*, blew my brain when I was a teenager, and I haven't looked back since. I wanted to see if any of the folks I asked had read any Ballard; he is rather important in many ways, despite not feeling exactly like a genre writer.

An afterword from Claire

What James, in his characteristic enthusiasm, didn't quite mention is that between us we emailed about 50 people we know around the world, asking them to pick one or two of the ten questions and reply in up to 200 words.

What follows, therefore, are the replies we received from the 14 contributors who wanted to play this time. A few others responded with initial good intentions but for various reasons didn't quite manage to get it together to reply properly in the end; one or two offered us separate articles instead (or as well!). Only a couple said explicitly that they didn't feel able to comment what with not really reading the stuff, and several more were too busy at the time we asked them; you'll have to draw your own conclusions about the rest. As you'll see, a few people picked more than two questions and we've mostly let them get away with that, especially where their answers were quite brief.

Although we're not now seeking further sets of answers to the questions in lieu of other comment, we wouldn't want to discourage anyone from relating particularly remarkable, entertaining or otherwise thought-provoking experiences; and in any case we hope you will ponder the opinions revealed here, applaud, question or disagree, or just generally speculate about what it all means…

The Answers

Why do you read science fiction?

John Purcell

Why the heck not? Seriously, though, I enjoy the ideas and the extrapolations of known science trying to ask that "What if?" question. SF is a lot of fun to read, and I enjoy it. I also enjoy a good fantasy, mystery, and historical fiction as well, so for me, if a story is told well, then chances are good I'll enjoy it.

Jay Crasdan

I grew up reading the books that lived in the front stacks of the library at Hale Middle School. There was Bradbury, Lewis and the Xanth series. I used to take out whatever was on that front rack, starting from the upper left; working right, then down. There was a lot of sci-fi in there, some fantasy, too. I read it all and I fell in love. I met Jack Chalker when he came to speak at my high school. That made me a fan for life.

Adrienne Foster

As someone whose interest in science is light, I prefer to use the term speculative fiction, which broadens the **genre** to the whole realm of the fantastic. I suppose my first introduction to actually reading speculative fiction was comic books. They were such a big passion for me while I was growing up. I loved Wonder Woman and those "imaginary stories" where Lois Lane married Superman. Spider-Man was kewl too. Television also had impact on me. Back in the 60s, shows seemed to be more creative. *The Avengers* and *Star Trek* had so much influence over me and shows like *The Munsters* and *Bewitched* were fun too. A lot of these "What if?" scenarios really appealed to my fancy.

Emma J King

That's easy: escapism. Which is the same reason I do most things that I find fun, really; the opportunity to spend a few minutes away from the real world, with tax returns and mortgages and insurance and deadlines to worry about, and to go somewhere much more exciting. Although I do occasionally read other genres, I find that SF&F is best for this because you're not just putting yourself into the shoes of someone who lives a more exciting life, or who has particularly interesting things happen to them; you're temporarily transported into an entirely different world where technology or magic make all sorts of amazing things possible.

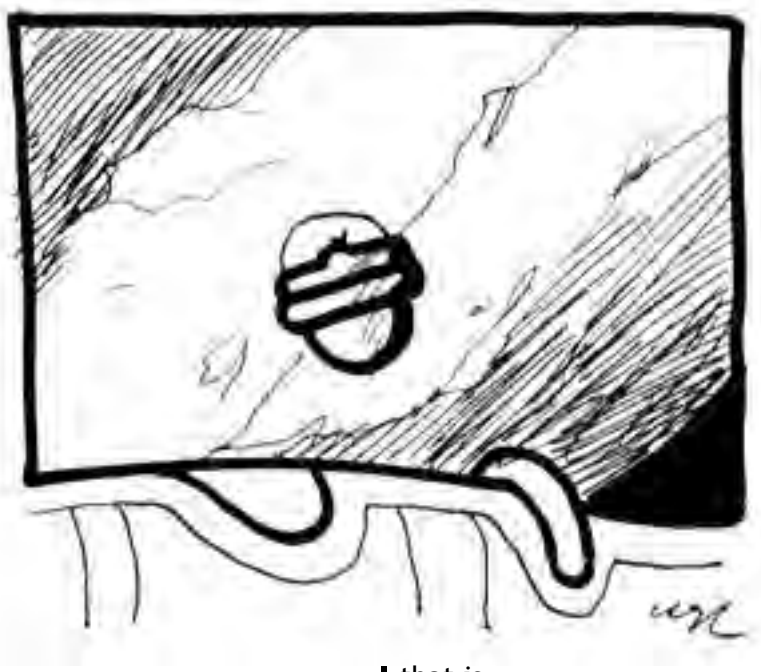
Glen Glazer

Because I **enjoy** it and it makes me think.

Maura McHugh

I like fiction that entertains me and stretches my imagination.

Steve Green



Imagination is a muscle. If it isn't exercised, it atrophies.

Why do you write science fiction?

Steve Green

Actually, I no longer do. These days, I'm drawn more to the shadows lurking at the corner of our mind's eye, which I guess means I write dark fantasy. When I actually write fiction, that is.

Alastair Reynolds

I can't imagine writing anything else. I'm a voracious reader and try to read widely across genres, but the only thing that really fires me up when I'm sitting at the keyboard is SF. I couldn't, for instance, write a straight crime novel – much as I love the form.

What made you start reading science fiction?

Steve Green

I can't understand how other people get through life without ever wondering "What if…?" My father is a voracious library user, and he used to pick up stacks of Gollancz SF hardbacks to last me through the school holidays. One unexpected consequence was that if he was in a rush, he'd sometimes grab crime novels by mistake (same yellow livery), so I got to read a lot of Christie amongst the Heinlein and Asimov.

If you don't read science fiction any more but still read about it, why is that?

Colin Harris

The short answer: life caught up with me.

And the longer answer? Well, to start with, I do still read science fiction – but not much. More to the point, I don't read much of anything, compared to when I was young and scoured the local library for yellow spines.

I read once that Harold Macmillan read a book every night during the Suez crisis. And in that fact is an important truth. After a day of intellectual effort, the world divides into those who want to escape by stretching their minds in different directions, and those who want to switch off and let the world drift by. And I'm not sure we get a choice about which group we're in.

I know when it started too. I went to university and suddenly had (literally) stacks of textbooks to be read and absorbed. And my leisure reading slowed down. And then I went into IT and into management, and stared at screens all day, and it slowed a bit more. And so now I am reduced to parasitism, living off blogs and reviews and conventions, and telling myself every day that tomorrow, or the next day, or maybe at the weekend, I'll get the habit back and start on that room full of books that's patiently waiting for me.

Is there a classic book that you love dearly (or did love once), but that you reckon would never get published now? Why wouldn't it make the grade today, and do you agree?

Maura McHugh

You can't get away with hand-waving the science in SF novels any more. Partly because we're better educated, and people can fact-check via their mobile phones. We're living very science fictional lives. Some of the classic SF books wouldn't cut it with today's modern *au fait* readership. Yet those novels often possessed a spirit of adventure that is missing from today's SF, which veers towards cynical. The recent *Star Trek* film (despite its flaws) tapped into this lack.

There are days when I want a good action yarn set in the future in a couple of hundred pages. More fun in less words would not be remiss.

Emma J King

Everything by John Wyndham. His books are fabulous; I remember reading *The Chrysalids* when I was about twelve, maybe thirteen, and being entranced by it. And of course books like *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Midwich Cuckoos* are proper classics; we even studied *The Day of the Triffids* in school, which is surely the mark of great literature! But it seems that the trend is towards bigger and bigger SF&F – I have heard it said that first novels in this genre need to be of the order of 150,000 words to have a hope of being published these days – and John Wyndham's books always jump out at me as being really very slim volumes, almost lost amongst the big fat SF&F on my book shelf or in book shops. But despite their small size they are unarguably awesome stories, and the same is true of a lot of early SF&F, which means they would probably never be published today. And yet I would consider them significantly better than much of the stuff that is. Bigger isn't necessarily better.

Alastair Reynolds

Hmm… tricky one. *Childhood's End* or any of the classic Clarke novels of the '50s and '60s would probably struggle, but if they were being submitted for publication *now* they would have been written recently as well, so they'd be fundamentally different books.

Which author do you think is unjustly overlooked, that you think more people should read but who most people don't seem to rate or even know about? Which of their work would you recommend as a starting point or just a must-read?

Vincent Docherty

Olaf Stapledon's novels *Star Maker* and *Last and First Men* describe the entire future history of the

universe and concern the struggles of successive species of humanity and other intelligences in an indifferent cosmos. I read them when I was very young; the resulting "sense of wonder" stays with me and I still love hard SF.

Stapledon was a philosopher and his writing could be dry, but his ideas were huge and many became SF staples, such as group and super-minds, Dyson spheres, terraforming and multiple universes. Stories on this scale are often still described as "Stapledonian". His work was admired by and influenced Clarke, Aldiss, Huxley, Mitchison, Woolf, Lem, Lessing and many others. Most current SF writers and critics acknowledge his importance to the field. Despite recognition such as the first Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Award, and the continuing support of the SF Foundation and the University of Liverpool which holds his archives, Stapledon is currently not nearly as widely known or read as Wells, Verne, Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke, and I think he deserves to be recognised alongside them. Some of his books remain in print and I urge you to seek them out.

Key novels by Olaf Stapledon: *Last and First Men* (1930), *Odd John* (1935), *Star Maker* (1937), *Sirius* (1944).

Liam Sharp

The one book I have mentioned to people again and again that nobody seems to have heard of is a beautiful, sprawling and intensely visual hard sci-fi beast called *Neverness* by David Zindell. The scope is astonishing, taking us from the self-exile of carked Neanderthals, through the harsh mathematical schooling of journeyman pilots in the frozen city of Neverness, and beyond into space and to a being that has evolved into a kind of Goddess. It literally covers the entirety of mankind's imagined evolutionary passage from ape to godhood. The big concepts are all discussed here: life, death, friendship, loss, treachery, wonder, love. It also, curiously, follows the adventures of a dark-haired boy with a lightening-bolt scar on his forehead through a kind of wizard school... (I'm not saying anybody copied anybody, but rather the archetypes exist. Get over it.)

The trilogy that follows is no less grand, and Zindell still manages to startle with high concepts, (he reduced me to a sobbing mess on a couple of occasions too), though I dearly wish it had had a fearless editor attached as it rambles interminably by the end. For me, though, the stand-alone *Neverness* is not only inspirational, it's an un-sung classic I cannot recommend highly enough.

Jay Crasdan

Jack Chalker is the writer I think of when I think of under-appreciated writers. He was an amazing author. The Dancing Gods books just pulled me along, forced me to read them all. I think that he's been forgotten too soon; he was pretty much forgotten by the time he died.

Start with *A War of Shadows,* and then choose a series and just ride that all the way out. You'll find yourself unable to stop, no matter which one you choose.

Maura McHugh

I'm going to concentrate on a handful of books that resonated strongly with me when I read them and have lingered in my mind ever since. I can't say what will work for other people, because the reason you love certain novels is that they were right books for you at that exact moment in your life. You can't always replicate that enthusiasm for a book with anyone else. Timing is everything.

First is *The Shockwave Rider* by John Brunner, who invented Cyberpunk before it was a movement. I suspect Brunner set me up to like that style of fiction: near-future thrillers, with conspiracies and gadgets. Basically, futuristic detective fiction with cool gear.

I should give *1984* by Orwell a shout-out for its brutal brilliance. Philip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* remains a classic.

Two other writers that staggered my imagination in completely different ways were Octavia Butler – her Xenogenesis series was my introduction to her work – and Dan Simmons with *Hyperion*. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* scared the bejaysus out of me at a formative part of my life, and guaranteed I'd never take my simple human rights for granted. *The Snow Queen* by Joan D. Vinge is a fantastic novel. In recent years I loved the Rifters saga by Peter Watts, Maureen McHugh's fabulous collection *Mothers and Other Monsters*, Jon Courtenay Grimwood's Arabesk trilogy, and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*.

I could go on, but I've kept it to SF stories that continue to occupy my mind from time to time. I don't keep up with the field as well as I would like because there are so many terrific writers on the shelves, I read other genres as well, and I have a passion for cinema.

Is there a novel or story that you think should have been award-winning but missed out? Why do you think that was, and does it say more about the award than about the work?

Maura McHugh

Award decisions are made either by a small committee or by a popular vote, and that means they often don't tally with my personal opinion. Popular doesn't equate to quality, and a committee sometimes comes to a decision out of compromise. There are always omissions every year because you just can't nominate every text that's deserving.

What's increasingly obvious is that the authors who maintain an active online relationship with their readers often feature strongly in nominations for awards. Gifted writers should take note of this development within the industry.

Alastair Reynolds

Did *Schismatrix* ever win an award? [[It was nominated for the Nebula – Claire]] Speaking personally, I don't think there's been a more quietly influential SF novel in the last quarter century. What won the Hugo award in 1986? *Ender's Game*. And the Nebula went to *Speaker for the Dead*. Says a lot, doesn't it?

Is there a book that was published or publicised as mainstream but that you realised as you read was science fiction? Do you think that matters?

Colin Brush

This is a question about marketing. Marketing matters to publishers and retailers who want to sell as many copies of their books as possible. To readers, marketing is a means by which publishers and retailers try and convince them to spend their money on something which, depending on whether the reader has carefully examined the product or not, may or may not be what he or she wanted. To authors, marketing is about pigeonholing: it gives access to a certain audience predisposed to the kind of thing the book is marketed as, at the same time as cutting the author off from all those who look at the cover/blurb/format and decide that this is not for them. Thus, marketing is a gateway providing access to some while also being a barrier to others. Does it matter? It matters to everyone when the publisher and retailer get it wrong and a book fails to reach its potential audience. When it works and a book is read avidly by its potential audience everyone is happy and congratulates themselves on a good purchase/piece of publishing/bit of salesmanship/telling of a story. But until the sales figures are in no one knows anything, all is guesswork.

Christina Lake

I'm usually aware when a mainstream novel has some SF elements, but occasionally I'm taken by surprise. For example, the first book I read by Haruki Marukami was *Norwegian Wood*, which is the most realistic of his novels, so I was quite surprised to discover a more surreal and fantastical side to his writing. More recently I read Daphne Du Maurier's *The House on the Strand* which is about a scientist and his friend experimenting with a drug that helps you travel through time. But because they travel back in time to a medieval world, it tends to be categorised with Du Maurier's other Gothic romances. Yet to my mind the framework of scientific experimentation and the attempts at finding a logical explanation for what is happening make it science fiction.

It doesn't particularly bother me that these crossover books are often not categorised as SF, because they don't use the genre tropes of SF and have a target market of non-SF readers. But I get very annoyed when this difference is used to suggest that SF is only the inferior stuff with spaceships, and that if something is well written and intelligent then it can't be SF.

M Crasdan

Michael Chabon. He wants so badly to be a science fiction writer, but once your name is read off the Pulitzer scroll, you can never be a science fiction author again. Does it matter? Probably more to him than to us. He makes a lot more money selling as a mainstream author than as a science fiction author. Same reason Vonnegut denied us: zeroes at the end of checks.

Glen Glazer

Most of the work of Borges and Eco that I've read seems to fall into this category. Also a number of "classics" seem to be in here too: *Frankenstein*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Gulliver's Travels* and so on. I would add that I think Bradbury is the reverse: mainstream lit pubbed as SF.

It doesn't make a difference to me, though. I enjoy what I read regardless of what the marketing dweebs think it is.

Steve Green

I was already familiar with his work, but it would have been entirely possible to read Christopher Priest's *The Affirmation* as a mainstream novel if you'd never encountered the earlier Dream Archipelago short stories. Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory*, on the other hand, contains no overt SF elements, but there was something about the style and content which set off alarms for both Ann and myself – suspicions confirmed when Iain was invited to Mexicon II and discussed his non-mainstream ambitions.

Did you ever read a science fiction story that made you think it was about your life, your present and perhaps your future? What was it and how did you react?

John Purcell

An interesting question. I would have to say *Behold the Man* by Michael Moorcock. That short novel really grabbed me and I've never really forgotten it. The idea that a man from Earth's future (or modern day America or England) created a means for traveling back in time and answering the question once and for all if Jesus Christ really existed was one that made me stop and think. At the time I read this I was essentially an agnostic, so the plotline appealed to my philosophical frame of mind. That story's closing image still lingers in my mind when I think of the book. Needless to say, it was read in one sitting.

Do you have a favourite J G Ballard novel or story, and why does that one stand out for you?

Colin Brush

I don't have a favourite Ballard novel or story. This is partly because Ballard was essentially writing the same story over and over, from different positions or perspectives. He wanted to strip off the straitjacket of civilization and see how we reacted, what we became when the rules broke down or were forgotten.

For a while I did not appreciate that it was not his protagonists that were mad, as they tried to create or find acceptance in a hostile or transformative environment. Rather, it was all the associated characters, determinedly responding rationally and clinging to the wreck of all they have known, that were insane. Certainly, his protagonists appear mad by our standards, but that is to judge them by the wrong criteria. We must judge them by their response to their environment, and rarely do they appear lacking.

Essentially, Ballard's body of work was one story: that of the human condition in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. If I was asked which story to start with I would say start at the beginning. *The Drowned World*, his second novel (the first being unavailable).

Why I Read Science Fiction
by Cheryl Morgan

The idea from this article came from two encounters I had with writers at a convention in Auckland, New Zealand, this year. The first was a panel on writing fiction featuring *New York Times* best-selling author Nalini Singh (a Fijian living in New Zealand). She has built her career in the romance genre and has recently started writing paranormal romances, so she was trying out SF conventions. The piece of advice that stuck with me was that the writer should always cut out anything non-essential. If a scene doesn't develop a character or advance the plot in some way then it has to go. And the reason that advice was so memorable for me was that earlier in the convention I had received very different advice from another successful writer.

Russell Kirkpatrick is a fine writer of fantasy trilogies. Donna Hanson and I had been gently teasing Russell about the thickness of his books, but he defended the practice. The fantasy reader, he said, is passionate about world building. If his readers don't get lovingly detailed descriptions of the fantasy world in his books then they won't buy them, so he gives them plenty of what they want.

Who is right, Nalini or Russell? Well of course they both are, for the markets they are serving. The reader of a romance novel is primarily interested in the characters and their interaction. He doesn't necessarily care whether the hero and heroine fall in love in New York, on safari in Kenya, in a casino in Monaco, or on the bridge of a starship exploring a far-off galaxy. The reader of a fantasy novel has different expectations. She wants the author to create a vibrant and detailed world in which the action can take place. She may even want to start up her own role-playing game set in that world. The more detail she can get about it, the happier she is. Thank you for all of those appendices, Mr. Tolkien, sir.

Those of us who work in the genre literature fields understand issues like this. Indeed, the only people who apparently don't understand them are the highbrow literary critics. For serious writers and consumers of literary fiction only one thing matters: examination of The Human Condition – in other words, character. All else, even plot, is irrelevant. Indeed, it can be argued that a novel that has a discernable plot is clearly not realistic because in real life people's lives don't follow neat story arcs.

In a recent guest posting[1] on Jeff VanderMeer's Amazon blog, Omnivoracious, China Miéville lampooned literary fiction's obsession with interiority, suggesting that a radical wave of LitFic young lions might take the fight to the market by creating a LitFic genre in which the typical self-obsession of the LitFic hero is set against a variety of colourful backgrounds. China is riffing off romance here, which has taken a formulaic plot and successfully colonised just about every setting there is. It is an amusing idea, but if I were having a go at the LitFic mob I would have been tempted to take a different angle, creating an extremist wing of Literary Fiction that eschewed any form of making things up, insisting only on writing about real characters in real situations. Because, you know, the whole point of "mimetic" fiction is to mimic real life, and what better form of mimicry can you have than the original object? I might call this new school of fiction "journalism" (except, of course, that these days journalists spend as much time making things up as fiction writers).

I can see the attraction of LitFic. There is definitely a challenge to be found in setting out to do something simple very well. The more boundaries you set for yourself, the more refined and focused your artistic endeavour becomes. I can even see me enjoying that sort of thing if we were talking about creating the perfect sonnet, or the perfect Ramones song. But in fiction? No thank you. I'd find it rather

like watching artists desperately trying to paint the perfect vase of flowers, one that was so true to life it might be a photograph. Such people would be desperately in need of a Van Gogh, a Picasso or a Dalì to come along and produce a vase of flowers that has meaning as well as, or more likely instead of, photorealism.

Most fiction, then, is concerned about something in addition to character. Typically it is plot, and stories written within strong genres such as romance, mystery or quest fantasy are expected to follow a very predictable formula. If the girl doesn't get her man, the detective not solve the mystery, the farm boy not get to be king, then the reader will feel cheated and get upset. Science fiction, on the other hand, does not have an expected plot structure. You can find examples of science fiction stories that are romances, mysteries, quest fantasies, and any other type of plot formula you care to imagine. The important point about science fiction is not what happens, or even what tropes you deploy (it can be cyberpunk, steampunk, space opera…), but rather the fact that the story is not set in our world.

That is a rather broad definition of SF, and I have chosen it deliberately. After all, if I'm going to be poking fun at Literary Fiction for being too narrow in its focus I can't fly the flag for a narrow version of SF. There are those who still believe in the Gernsbackian idea of science fiction as a teaching tool. By that definition, a story cannot be "science fiction" unless the telling of the tale somehow explains or explores a specific scientific idea. A corollary of this is that the science in the story has to be accurate, and any extrapolations thoroughly justified and believable. While I am happy to defend the right of people to create such stories, I probably won't enjoy reading them unless they have a lot more to them as well.

The most common LitCrit complaint against science fiction is that it has poor characterisation. Well, if the sole purpose of having characters in your story is to explain a scientific idea then it is no wonder that they don't have believable motivations. A story still has to be a story, not just a lecture. Getting science lessons is not why I read science fiction.

A more broad definition of SF is the old concept of the "literature of ideas"; that is, that SF is a literary form (perhaps the only literary form) than can be used to explore philosophical and political concepts. It is an interesting formulation, particularly as the term has been used before in the history of literature. It places science fiction writers as the inheritors of a tradition stretching back to the likes of Rousseau and Voltaire – the men whose ideas as to how society might be differently ordered inspired the French and American revolutions. I have some sympathy for that argument. After all, when Rousseau and Voltaire were writing the idea that societies could exist that were not ruled by kings or popes, but by the democratic will of the people, was a sort of science fiction.

But I still don't want to get caught in too narrow a definition. It is perfectly possible to write a science fiction story that is pure horror. That doesn't involve any examination of great ideas. It simply requires the writer to create atmosphere. Horror is all about hitting the reader in the gut, not in the head.

So I'm going to stick with a very loose definition of SF, one that simply involves making stuff up. After all, that's what fiction writers do, isn't it? I read science fiction because it is a form of literature that gives writers maximum free rein for their imagination. Not only do they get to make up characters and plots, they can make up whole new worlds and whole new species of creatures to inhabit them. Some of them even make up new laws of physics, new universes, and new gods to oversee them.

> **Few people realise the immensity of vacancy in which the dust of the material universe swims**
> **- H.G. Wells in "The War of the Worlds"**

I guess it all goes back to the idea of Sense of Wonder. Many of the key moments in the history of science fiction have happened when someone has done something new, someone has caused a bunch of readers to think, "Wow, that's awesome, I've never read anything like that before." Classics of science fiction don't always stand the test of time, because the first person to come up with an idea doesn't always make the best job of it. Other, more technically skilled writers may come along later and improve on the basic concept. That's OK; that's part of what The Conversation is about. Every science fiction book that is written builds on what has gone before. But that process of refinement doesn't take anything away from the fact that science fiction is a field in which writers are encouraged to exercise their imagination to the fullest extent.

To summarise, here is a very simple distinction. Mimetic fiction is all about writing so well that your book appears to be taken from real life. That requires a lot of skill. Science fiction, on the other hand, is all about writing about something totally unreal and making it seem believable. That, I submit, requires even greater skill. Many SF writers fail at it, often because their skill at imagining

something different exceeds their technical skill at presenting that something to the reader. Ah, but when they get it right, or even when they come up with something fabulously new and different, then it is truly wonder-full. And that is why I read science fiction.

(Endnotes)

[1] http://www.omnivoracious.com/2009/06/neither-a-contract-nor-a-promise-five-movements-to-watch-out-for.html

An Independent MInd by John Hertz

An independent mind is a wonderful thing to have. It's a terrible thing to waste.

Perhaps science fiction promotes independence of mind. We are the *what if* art. Perhaps to ask *what if*, and build a story or a painting on it, calls for an independent mind, or strengthens one; perhaps both making the art, and viewing it.

J. R. R. Tolkien said – and so did Larry Niven not knowing Tolkien had – that the art of SF is harder than art in the mainstream. If a mainstream artist writes about or draws an umbrella, the audience knows. Niven writes about thrints. Tolkien writes (I use the literary present tense) about elves, which not only don't exist other than as the product of his art, but aren't the elves in the previously customary fantasy art.

What do you care what other people think?

Legend says a 19th Century cattleman named Maverick left his calves unbranded. After that, a maverick was a calf lost from its mother; after that, a lone wolf (sorry, cattlemen) sort of person away from the crowd, an independent mind. There are a lot of mavericks in SF.

If SF is particularly strong in Britain and the lands Britain has touched, perhaps that is because these are home to mavericks. The United States may now and then feel the British are stodgy conformists, and Britain now and then (sorry, countrymen) feel *vice versa*, but as Churchill used to say this is a matter of emphasis. Plenty of both go off trails.

Or so say we all.

During my college days revolutionaries were about. I should have considered myself a radical if that had not been seized by others who somewhat self-servingly appropriated it to themselves. I liked to seek the roots of things. The revolutionaries were in the overturning business. It seemed to me I was reading more SF than they were.

Some time later I saw Lin Yutang had said, some time earlier in his 1947 biography of the eleventh century poet Su Shih, "Hatred is an expression of incompetence." This I pondered. Do I hate what I can improve?

Perhaps as long ago as Su two monks, we are told, who were under strict vows against women, walked in the forest after heavy rain. They came to a swollen stream. A woman spoke. "O monks," she said, "I must get across this water, but with the rain it is deep and wide and fast. I'm too weak. You are each bigger and stronger. Won't one of you kindly carry me across?" The first monk ignored her and began to ford. The second monk said nothing, but picked her up and put her onto his shoulders as he made his way. At the opposite bank the first monk was out of sight. Still saying nothing the second monk set the woman down, wrung out his robe, and trudged ahead. As soon as he was within hailing distance the first monk turned on him. "We're under strict vows!" he cried. "We're not to touch women, speak with women, think of women! But you picked up that woman! You carried her!" "You," said the second monk, "are still carrying her."

Independence, independence – which certainly had been the reason for the vows.

In the world outside our community (which I do not hesitate to call mundane, our old pejorative; being mundane is a state of mind, which one can always give up, unlike, say, being tall) the most distressing thing about SF seems to be independence. We constantly hear we don't have it. Instead we are "into" SF (a preposition I don't accept; if anything, SF is into me) because we believe, or dream, we are its characters; we like it for its preaching sermons we want to hear; we squander our precious resources upon it for the gratification of seeing it reward our friends and punish our enemies.

Heinlein – who at his best, of which there is a bushel, was one of our finest writers – had another view. To his fellow writers he said, "We're competing for their beer money."

These days Heinlein is wrongly applauded and wrongly attacked. His praisers and blamers keep talking about the opinions of his characters. During his life, when asked how he could simultaneously write *Starship Troopers* and *Stranger in a Strange Land* he said, "I'm a science fiction writer. I make things up." The 2007 World Science Fiction

Convention had a Heinlein-centennial discussion. I was present. After a great deal of this I said, “Had he not been such a good writer nobody would care what his characters thought.”

As it happens, many Heinlein characters, like both of those monks, strive for independence.

The notion that good art is what promotes correct opinions is millennia old. This may explain, though not justify, people’s falling for it today. Here is Lin again: If I have something to say, shouldn’t I say it? If I believe I can’t say it well, shouldn’t I get better? If I want help saying it, shouldn’t I ask? If I believe it’s so horrid it must be sugar-coated, shouldn’t I review the situation, and think it out again?

If agents of the King say good art promotes loyalty, and revolutionaries say good art promotes rebellion, what’s the difference? And are we getting anywhere? And wouldn’t you rather have another beer?

The great 20th Century writer Vladimir Nabokov said, “An original author always invents an original world, and if a character or an action fits into the pattern of that world, then we experience the pleasurable shock of artistic truth.” Also, “Read books not for the infantile purpose of identifying oneself with the characters, and not for the adolescent purpose of learning to live, and not for the academic purpose of indulging in generalizations, but for the sake of their form, their visions, their art.”

We are more mundane than we like to admit. We absorb it through our pores. That isn’t very independent-minded. To the mundane mind the only conceivable interest is a special interest. A man’s wife is on a baseball team so he follows baseball. A woman’s father served on a submarine so she reads *Run Silent, Run Deep*. I hope for less of this from SF fans, but I’ve come to expect it.

Fanziners, realizing I may leave the Fanzine Lounge at a Worldcon to go judge the costume competition we call the Masquerade, can’t understand it since I don’t sew. Costumers, realizing I may leave the Costumers’ Guild suite to go hear the home-made music we call filksong, can’t understand it since I don’t sing. Classically the fannish mind ran, “I don’t know what this is, so I’ll have a look in case it might be fun.” The mundane mind runs, “I don’t know what this is, so I’ll have nothing to do with it.” That isn’t very independent-minded.

Here I should note that some fans have been pros, some pros have been fans, neither necessarily excluding nor aspiring to the other. Some of us have ranged so broadly (of whom I shall name just two I have been acquainted with, Bruce Pelz and Bjo Trimble) as to be called omnifans. At the 2008 Worldcon the Fan Guest of Honor, Tom Whitmore, one of few persons who has been both a Worldcon chair and a Worldcon guest of honor, told Teresa Nielsen Hayden who conducted his GoH interview that he was making his internal avatar Rudyard Kipling’s Rikki-Tikki-Tavi for “Run and find out.” If their achievements must be rare, must their outlook?

On my path, finding much to read, I try to carry a book. If I’m reading while waiting somewhere, it tends to draw mundane comment. “That must be a really good book.” “You must be a teacher.” After a while I gave these jeers thought. Perhaps for the jeerer’s mind to rouse an interest in anything is so extraordinary that it can only occur under compulsion. Who would read unless the book was really good? Who would read that wasn’t a teacher?

Let me recommend breadth. It is itself nourishing, a various diet and like that. It’s good exercise: cross-cultural contact is homework for science fiction – oh dear, I uttered the dread word “homework”; goodbye, readers. It’s insurance. It may be a better road than rebellion – heresy again – to independence.

Once upon a time, there was a Martian named Valentine Michael Smith.

“Stranger in a Strange Land” by Robert Heinlein

Of all these shocking thoughts “a various diet” may least need my leaping to explain. Cross-cultural contact came wonderfully to us with the 2007 Worldcon in Yokohama. Japanese wanted to meet Westerners – for this purpose Australia and New Zealand counting as West, and in fact from the Japanese point of view I had come from the East – because Westerners were strange; Westerners *vice versa*: we were not disappointed. “If we ever meet extra-terrestrial aliens,” I said, “it will no doubt be even stranger; let’s start now.” Just by reading much can be accomplished – although Jon Singer plays *gamelan* and I dance at St. Mary’s Macedonian Orthodox Church (being neither Macedonian nor Orthodox). Jane Austen wrote English two hundred years ago in another world. Two hundred years before that, Shakespeare.

In *Freddy and the Baseball Team from Mars* Mr. Hercules Boomschmidt, a circus strongman, is puzzled and asks, “Lumme see, who don’t Uh know?”

The question is only superficially foolish. Rephrase it as "What haven't I thought of?" and it can be the most important question. It is notoriously hard to answer. We can manage it by taking out insurance: forming and maintaining contact, carrying on exchange, with different people, places, activities, indeed as different from ourselves as we can bear (actually Freddy is a pig, but never mind). The price is the shock and strain of dealing with these differences. "How could you do that?" *and "How could you think of such a thing?"* can be fruitful questions if we indeed ask them. More often we do not ask, we only utter the sounds by way of telling people they're no good, and of crying in pain. That isn't very independent-minded.

Rebellion, however vital, has the notorious danger that one tends to carry the master with one. In the extreme case if one meets the Buddha on the road and kills him, one is then a Buddha-killer; not good *karma*. Short of murder many wise folk have taught *What you resist you become*. Also we thus invite others to manipulate us. If one is so moved by annoyance with father that one wants nothing more than to oppose him, the door is open for some advertiser to sing "This is not your father's Oldsmobile." What, as the director of that campaign conceded later, if Dad's was better?

Broaden the horizons. Take up motorcycle maintenance as Mom does – why spurn valuable expertise? – but also ice-skating as she doesn't. Work for Uncle Bill in the pin factory but also go to the fair making balloon animals. Write idiosyncratic modern novels, teach nineteenth century literature, and pursue a career as an entomologist.

Freedom, let it respectfully be suggested, is the freedom to do or not do, have or not have, be or not be. If one must break rules, or must keep them, what's the difference? And are we getting anywhere? And wouldn't you rather have another beer?

The complement of freedom may be focus. The nexus of both may be noticing. In *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* Polynesia the parrot asks Tommy Stubbins, "Are you a good noticer?" Dr. Dolittle has no magic power; he learns animals' language by noticing. It can be exhilarating to study the art another culture regards as great and to make a point of noticing why it is regarded so. What a joy I found at the hands of the great translators Arthur Waley and Donald Keene, being introduced to Chinese and Japanese art and seeing how the practitioners reached heights, regardless of whether I cared to climb there.

Jane Austen warns us against making windows into mirrors. Shakespeare warns us against gratifying ourselves and calling it love. A woman at a Worldcon told me Shakespeare was an honorary woman. Aside from warnings there is a wealth of joy in these artists. It can be found by an independent mind.

I like SF and fandom. I have a good time here. I wish we were better. Perhaps we can be. Why be excellent when you can be superb?

When they unscrewed the time capsule, preparatory to helping temponaut Enoch Mirren to disembark, they found him doing a disgusting thing with a disgusting thing.
How's the Nightlife on Cissalda
by Harlan Ellison

What Science Fiction Did For Me by Peter Sagal

I love National Public Radio here in the US, and there's a fellow who hosts a show called Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me *(which was probably stolen from some English show with a name like* Thoughts, Gentlemen *or* I've Just About Thought It Up, You Festing Twit*) and he entertains me no end. His name is Peter Sagal, and I took a chance and sent him an email asking if he'd mind letting me know his thoughts on what Science Fiction has done for him.*

And amazingly, he wrote back!

So here now is America's #3 Publicly out SF Enthusiast (behind Stephen Colbert and Alton Brown) on what SF did for him! – Chris

I spent my youth from the '70s and '80s reading and watching – generally consuming – whole bales of science fiction, from endless *Star Trek* reruns to thousands of mass market paperbacks by Pohl and Asimov and Niven and Zelazny and dozens of others I've probably forgotten. I am proud to be the only person I know who remembers the bizarre, aborted sci-fi TV series *The Starlost*, created by Harlan Ellison. I am proud, at this late date, to know who Harlan Ellison is, and to be able to repeat this anecdote:

> *Bunch of guys at a science fiction authors' gathering in the late 1960s. They're talking about some young turk author new on the scene. Somebody says, "He's like a young Harlan Ellison." Somebody else says: "Let's kill him now."*

I imagine the appeal for me, just like every other unathletic brainy socially awkward kid who joined the sci-fi book of the month club was the implicit power of transformation. Sci-fi is predicated on a release from the strictures of reality: in sci-fi, the rules are changed, and limits are removed. You can go faster than light, or teleport, or use teleknesis, etc. and for someone who's not very comfortable in the world as it is, this is a compelling conceit. Any of these alternative worlds represented a place where I could have been more successful, or happier, than I was in the plane of existence in which I was caught: suburban New Jersey. (By the way, the truest and funniest and saddest expression of this longing is the song "The Future Soon" by Jonathan Coulton. Check it out.)

But now that I am older, and now that the sci-fi culture that once consigned me to an even deeper isolation ("Whatchoo reading, faggot?") has become mainstream (I loved *Star Trek* before it was profitable) I do look back on that period, and that addiction, and that stubborn insistence on escape, with some regret. Turns out that in addition to there being no jetpacks, there is no way to change the rules (or bend them, *Matrix*-like) of the world we live in. Further, and more importantly, it is a much more interesting and fascinating and rewarding world than I knew it to be, back then: more interesting, even, than Trantor or the Ringworld or even Amber, of which we are but a Shadow. I wish that I had engaged in it more, and learned to talk to people rather than trying to teach my dog Elvish. I wish I had gotten outside, once in a while, gotten some fresh air, learned to fish or play basketball. I wish I had read more books by authors who grappled with the world as it was – fascinating and heartbreaking and impossible as it is – rather than by authors who just threw up their hands and made up their own.

There is nothing absolute, here, of course. I loved and remember (as I think I've shown) a lot of the sci-fi I read, and learned a lot, and even, in a weird way, modeled myself on some of the things I found there. Sci-fi at its best shows a way of getting at real issues through fantastic means -- see the new *Battlestar Galactica*, for example.

Look at it this way: imagine a different version of *The Matrix*: a movie the fifteen-year-old who still lives within me loves beyond reason, by the way. In this version, the young protagonist who feels like he doesn't fit in, who doesn't understand the world, who believes, deep in his heart, that he is destined for something greater, gets a chance at revelation. If he takes the red pill, he'll know the absolute truth, for better or worse. And he takes the pill, and this is what he finds out: that the world is exactly what it appears to be. That there is no underlying conspiracy, and no simple (if sinister) explanation for his discontent, and that his destiny is not foreordained by blood or prophecy. And further, if he wants to be a hero, or escape his threatened fate, or learn kung-fu, he's going to have to do it here, in this world, and he's going to have to do it the hard way.

It wouldn't make a particularly good movie, but it's the one we're living out, so my sense now is: let's get on with it.

A science fiction story is a story built around human beings, with a human problem and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content

- Theodore Sturgeon

Look Back in Wonder by Claire Brialey

This article was originally printed in issue 12 of Banana Wings*, the fanzine Claire co-edits with Mark Plummer, in November 1998. It came as a bit of a shock to Claire that it was that long ago; she has heroically resisted the urge to edit herself but may be temporarily stuck in the third person.*

Nearly twenty years ago, about the same time as I was finding out the disappointing truth about pogo-sticks and was considering my first bra without any real idea about where *that* was going to lead, my father recommended a book to me which he thought I'd find interesting. I can't remember whether he told me then that it was science fiction, or even what SF was all about.

As I'm sure I've mentioned before, the book was Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), and until October this year I hadn't read it since. I think it scared me as much as it impressed me; in making me think about possible futures it also made me realise that not all the possibilities would be comfortable. But it was formative, all right. I think what engaged me so much was the fact that this was a future relating to books. It really stretched my mind to contemplate a future where books would be considered criminal, evil – and the simplest irony, that this was a story being told through the medium of a book, didn't go totally over my head. The very idea of burning books, and of enjoying the act of burning, was repellent but nonetheless intriguing. After a short time, I only remembered the most basic story: that there was a man whose job was burning books who got curious about what he was destroying, who got found out and then escaped to a community who had preserved books in their memories. I thought there was a girl in it somewhere as well; there usually was.

For years, though, I couldn't bring myself to re-read it; while cheerfully citing it as the book that got me into science fiction, I'd convinced myself that it was bleak and gruelling and I didn't quite want to go through something like that again. Last year, while writing about science fiction in more general terms, it occurred to me that I probably should read the book again. I had to be realistic, of course; I'd built it up to be something so significant that it obviously couldn't live up to it. But I could probably get a fanzine article out of it.

> *Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us. ... now do you see why books are hated and feared? They show the pores in the face of life.*

There was so much I'd forgotten: the backcloth of war which almost frames the main plot and which ensures that the society in which most of the book is set will not be part of the future; the Mechanical Hounds, which have cropped up in some form or other in so much SF I've read and watched since; the murder of Montag's boss and the framing of his colleagues, which is perhaps no worse than what they have done themselves but makes no real attempt to make Montag stand above them morally, even if he does so intellectually or emotionally; Montag's troubled relationship with his wife, which we first see in what may be her suicide attempt and ends with her flight, having betrayed him to his own authorities; the conspicuous Otherness of Clarisse McClellan which goes significantly beyond the (oddly normal) abnormality of her own family relationships. While I remembered the book-burning, perhaps inevitably, more clearly than anything else in the novel, I didn't remember the rationale for it. Reading it again, I'm not convinced it is a rationale; perhaps deliberately, it's not an argument I can follow logically – however much we might recognise now, just as clearly as we could in the 1950s, that the homogenisation of popular culture may indeed represent a threat to the sort of books we want to see published, to own and to read. And the 'nanny state' approach that we should be protected from conflicting ideas – and perhaps that the state should be protected from people who hold, or even worse can handle, conflicting ideas – can also strike as many chords now as ever.

All of these aspects do add a bleakness, and indeed a depth, to the story which goes far beyond what I remembered, but the most significant point I'd forgotten was how positive the conclusion is, in the longer term at least. Whatever happens to our society, something in society – something in us

– will always need what books can give us, including our history. Nor had I remembered that Guy Montag doesn't become *suddenly* interested in the books he's meant to destroy; he's been intrigued by them and hoarding them, for years. The stimulus he receives, having been exposed both to committed book-owners and to the free-thinking Clarisse, is actually to read them.

An unexpected joy was being able to read this book as an adult, with a new perspective; remembering so little meant that there was a lot there to be discovered, part of which was entirely new since I just don't think I was in a position to appreciate it when I was young. I can identify with Clarisse now, in particular, even though she's meant to be about half way between the age I was then and the age I am now: walking in the rain, enjoying conversation, thinking too much, wondering if people are happy or in love. Clarisse seems the only real person in the city; Faber may be something of a guardian angel, but he's a fallible angel, an angel who could be hurt by firemen or Hounds or bombers. Clarisse vanishes, but Montag doesn't really believe her dead; or at least he believes her free. In fact she was free when she met him, and can show him the glimpse of freedom he can't immediately understand but which he comes to want. His freedom is realised through a combination of learning to appreciate books and in leaving the society which made him want to destroy them.

And the main thing is, it wasn't a disappointment at all. I came out of this book with a real sensawunda, convinced that this is what SF is meant to be about, feeling engaged and disoriented and stimulated. It may be partly nostalgia, but now I know *why* I became an SF fan.

> *I've had to read a few in my time, to know what I was about, and the books say* nothing*! Nothing you can teach or believe. They're about non-existent people, figments of imagination, if they're fiction. And if they're non-fiction, it's worse, one professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet. All of them running about, putting out the stars and extinguishing the sun. You come away lost.*

I'd never seen the film either. I'd decided I wanted to read the book again first; I know that makes it difficult to judge the film on its own terms, but then I'm not quite convinced that I want to judge film adaptations of books I've enjoyed on their own terms. For me, they need to complement the book, whether as a faithful adaptation or a deliberately different approach which captures the right atmosphere. This falls, unfortunately, somewhere between the two.

François Truffaut, who identified with Montag, had wanted to make this film for years and finally managed it in 1966. And then Oskar Werner apparently wanted to play Montag as a fascist.

There is very little sense, however, of a political structure in the film; even the war has a very minor presence, and does not have the key impact of destroying the society. We see a glimpse of *Mein Kampf*, to be burned without any comment along with the rest of the books, perhaps to highlight that despite Werner's accent and blond good looks in black leather, none of the political movements familiar to us have a particular status in this society.

It was Truffaut's first English language film, and the dialogue has been criticised as being stilted. It didn't strike me that

way, perhaps because I recognised some of the dialogue as coming directly from the book or from its narrative. It's the new elements of the screenplay which jarred with me, no doubt because I was so impressed with the book that I wasn't too open to attempts to improve on it. Julie Christie as Clarisse was ambivalent. She's too old; she's an adult with adult concerns. She has to be a teacher here rather than a student, and her part is built up to play a more significant rôle in Montag's life as well as being an influence on it. She is too specifically subversive, making him miss work and arousing suspicion in his colleagues.

This ambivalence seems to be carried through in the depiction of Montag's wife – Linda rather than Millie, perhaps to attempt to be modern enough to seem futuristic – as here Montag (for whom no one uses a first name at all) keeps the secret of his books from his wife until she accidentally discovers it, rather than challenging her to read and learn and change along with himself. The sex scene between Montag and Linda seems not only unnecessary but is, of course, entirely out of keeping with their cold and lost relationship in the novel. Here, perhaps, her lack of understanding of him and her subsequent betrayal are meant to come as more of a blow.

The scenes at the fire station are given more depth, showing the teaching of the students – making an interesting parallel both with Clarisse's lost position as a teacher and with the passing on of knowledge among the 'book people' – but without seeming to add a great deal of background or atmosphere. Montag's attempts to find the files on Clarisse and her uncle in the fire captain's office seem particularly inept, as does her own daylight return to her condemned home to destroy the records of other subversives. This is where the film shows the lack of Faber, whose rôle is mostly taken over by Clarisse – who, for all she knows about how the world should be, does not have his experience or common sense.

> **A process cannot be understood by stopping it. Understanding must move with the flow of the process, must join it and flow with it.**
>
> **Frank Herbert in "Dune"**

Clarisse in the novel, even though she is younger, is not bothered by her anti-social classification; maybe she is genuinely a bit weird, but it's a glorious, real, alive weirdness in a dead society. She is secure in herself, and identifies as Montag's daughter rather than as, we intuit, a potential partner. It works better when she merely escapes, through death or otherwise, with her apparent death being the final stimulant for Montag to rediscover himself and read the books he's hoarded. But in the film Clarisse must explicitly survive, which I find uncomfortable. Part of the point of this story, for me, is the long-term perspective: the books will endure into the future until their texts are needed again. The happy ending should be for society, for humanity, for the future; Montag's happy ending is that he can be a part of that, rather than merely finding a more sympathetic partner in exile.

But of course it is a film in its own right, and it has to work as a plausible film about the future – SF books can be more weirdly dystopian. The basic story is still there. It's another small irony that this seems to prove the perception that readers can cope with more challenging concepts than viewers.

When the film stops trying to gild the lily and uses its innate advantages to add depth to the story, it scores some points. Being able to see what the books are, rather than being sufficiently erudite to recognise them from quotes, is also a powerful image, although I prefer not to think too closely in this context about the captain's fictional comments on the downgrading of culture. Hiding books inside unused televisions was also a nice touch (Clarisse's neighbour points out that it was obvious she and her uncle were different, since their house had no TV aerial). And there are some other nice touches, not all related to the obvious strengths of the medium; the clear reference to the preservation of books in more than one language, for example. And I do like the way that the book people introduce themselves as the book they've memorised, something nearly realised in the novel but brought out fully and effectively in the film. And I suppose skiffy fans should be pleased to know that *The Martian Chronicles* survives.

The significant episode with the old woman who wishes to burn with her books is given due weight and works extremely well in the film. Fire and its destructive potential is very powerful visually, hence the effectiveness of Montag's ritual destruction of his double bed and his wife's television screen before he burns his own books in his last legal act as a fireman.

One of the potential problems with any visual medium, though, is that futuristic looks can date even more obviously than concepts. Yet the fire engine – a splash of red across the countryside – and the aerial commuter train could still be part of a future, or at least another country, which as we all know is much the same thing. The firemen looked right (by which I suppose I mean 'like the book

right (by which I suppose I mean 'like the book says' as much as anything), although the everyday costumes do date the film firmly in the 1960s. The hover-packs, while looking grotty compared to the CGI we're all used to now, add something of the air of menace in the pursuit of Montag which is lost through the omission of the Mechanical Hound – something I had thought would have been a gift to film. The pursuit, in fact, is not the point here; there is considerably more menace in the film before Montag makes his choices and runs than in the running, a relatively small part of the film. Truffaut aimed for a 'subtle constant tension' – influenced by Hitchcock who he was interviewing at the time – enhanced by the musical score (from Hitchcock's regular composer) and by effects such as the fire engine's siren. Once he flees, knowing that Clarisse may be waiting for him and with us knowing that the 'book people' are definitely out there, the film rushes towards its conclusion.

Above all, what I actually hated about this was that they really burnt real books. This may be all too symbolic of what I feel about most cinematic adaptations.

> *What traitors books can be! You think they're backing you up, and they turn on you.*

While I was failing to realise all those years ago exactly why I'd become a science fiction fan, I was also lost in blissful ignorance of the fact that my big irony was way off beam, since the original publication of this story wasn't in a book at all but was of course in magazine form with the inclusion of 'The Fireman' in the February 1951 issue of *Galaxy*.

I'm probably not a proper SF fan after all, mind you, because I don't read short fiction by the bucket-load and indeed I had to borrow the February 1951 *Galaxy* from Mark and didn't even know off-hand which issue I should be looking for. I've heard most of the arguments about how the short story is the best form for SF and I don't feel qualified to engage with them in general; I think it comes down to cases and if we're talking about, say, 'Flowers for Algernon' then I'll put my money on the short story every time. In this case, though, I personally consider *Fahrenheit 451* to be a better story than 'The Fireman': it's better structured, the characters are more plausibly drawn and more effectively introduced to the story, and the plot flows more easily in the novel than the novella. The novel is also more open; we have a stronger sense of complicity with Montag (Leonard in the novella) from the beginning, although it's only gradually that we learn about the extent of his cache of books. Clarisse McClellan also plays a more significant part in the novel, awakening Montag from his illusory contentment through both her life and her apparent death.

Only the Mechanical Hound seems to work better in the novella; the sense of inevitability inherent in its rôle in the novel fits well with the more transparent narrative, but the shock introduction of a Hound to the novella at a late stage not only injects some adrenaline to the chase which has otherwise been missing, especially after Montag's deployment of the flame-thrower against his colleagues, but is also less effective when retained in the novel since it merely replaces an earlier model of Hound which we have already seen defeated, despite Montag's fears about its abilities.

There are worse crimes than burning books. Not reading them is one of them.

Ray Bradbury

It's interesting, however, how much more SFnal the novel is, only a few years further on: full-screen interactive television and a Walkman-like radio ear-piece in place of what seems like standard TV and radio; radio communications across unlimited distance between Faber and Montag; the hand-identity entry to Montag's house; and the awesome capacity of the bomber planes. Most of these aren't even realised effectively in the film, a dozen years later. Now, of course, it's not these technological trappings which seem science fictional but the societal shift; the technology is not entirely outdated despite the absence of computer science, but without these developments to marvel at it's the changes in society which continue to engage us.

Perhaps science fiction fans – even those of us with palmtops, and mobile phones, and websites, and more email accounts than we really know what to do with – can never abandon their attraction to books, and to the written word. Maybe that's why the book is more charged than the film. Maybe that's why the story itself, in any form, will always fascinate me.

Above all, it's the opening to the novel which carries the impact: *It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and* changed.

I guess it changed me. And it still burns.

The Next Leap
by Abby Blackfox

As long as there has been a fictional universe, there has always been a fan. As long as there has been a fan, there has been one person – or a dozen – that stares at the costuming and thinks, "I can wear that!" That fan then makes the next leap, and becomes a costumer.

Be it *Star Trek*, *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*, themed conventions bring out the costumers and encourage them to put on their precious items in order to become someone else for a few days. Many of these fans, when pressed by outsiders and those who think science fiction ends when the credits roll, will call these items costumes.

A sub-group of these costumers take the next leap, calling it fashion.

A *Star Trek* uniform is still a *Star Trek* uniform at the end of the day, whether it be classic or *Next Generation*. That uniform, by definition of the person who designed it originally for the show in the 1960s, is a costume.

The definition established, don't tell Barbara Adams that. A *Star Trek* fan, she's better known as the juror who wore her classic commander's uniform to the 1996 Whitewater trial.

I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of the imagination.

"The Left Hand of Darkness"
by Ursula K. Le Guin

She was comfortable wearing that piece of clothing. She intentionally wore it to a legal proceeding, outside the safe world of conventions, costume balls, and Halloween. She wasn't doing it to draw the media's eye off the trial. Her dedication was pure, her fangirl status suddenly immortalized in the halls of Trekkie history, and also legal history.

For Barbara Adams, competent enough to sit on a jury and therefore theoretically competent enough to understand that *Star Trek* is a fictional universe, that uniform is fashion.

Take the example of more complicated costumery in a smaller pocket of entertainment industry fandom: the person who dresses for *Harry Potter* events and conventions. A newer universe and a newer fandom – many of them fans of other, earlier science fiction and fantasy universes – the most basic of its recognizable clothing is easy to find, off the rack, and closely related to clothing of the costume-free world. This, of course, is the Hogwarts school uniform: white button-down shirt, striped tie, cardigan and scarf.

The step after the slightly mundane uniform is to sew custom pieces, much like the early *Harry Potter* fans did before vendors started creating lines of wizarding wear. First projects, whether playing wizard or Romulan, are always to be admired and reminisced over, but they remain static over time. It is costuming, but it is also a step outside school uniforms and cocktail dresses. Costuming is a full body mask, covering the normal self on a stage larger than theater. They come and go on trends and surges of interest.

Costumes with damage don't make people sentimental and unable to throw out the tattered remains of their pre-Peter Jackson Bilbo Baggins. Costumes blend into a crowd of costumes, regardless of the riot of color. Their inspiration is one-dimensional, an echo at best.

The step beyond, sometimes expensive and always a labor of love, is what becomes fashion. Fashion allows embellishment and interpretation. Fashion stands out in a crowd. Fashion inspires others to strive for that same level, to emulate and identify with it. Fashion looks complicated and well thought-out, even when it's a very simple garment. Fashion drives the wearer to not only act as he is dressed, but to *be* as he is dressed. Lucius Malfoy is not defined by his expensive suits and lavish overcoats; he is defined by the man who wears them, who fills out the lines and transmits the body language of a man who knows who he is, and pities the fool who thinks otherwise.

Fashion also tells us when James Kirk is in the room, and if that's your hot green-skinned sister in the thigh-high dress next to you, it's best to lock her in the nearest utility closet if you don't want him hitting on her. A kid in a bad Kirk costume, however, copying William Shatner's speaking cadence will be mocked by your sister at the suite party later.

Fashion is also the ability to look at the outsiders

staring into the world of science fiction and fantasy fandoms and smile back at them with confidence. A person in a Klingon costume can be mocked by the stranger on the street. A Klingon in both clothes and attitude will scare the same stranger and send him on his way before he can shout, "Nerd!"

The point, in this vast and ever-expanding fan universe, is that where new science fiction and fantasy is coming out every day, there is a difference between Hallowe'en and Comic-con. Fans are constantly transcending film lot costume wardrobe into the daily clothes of a living character in a world as real as our own.

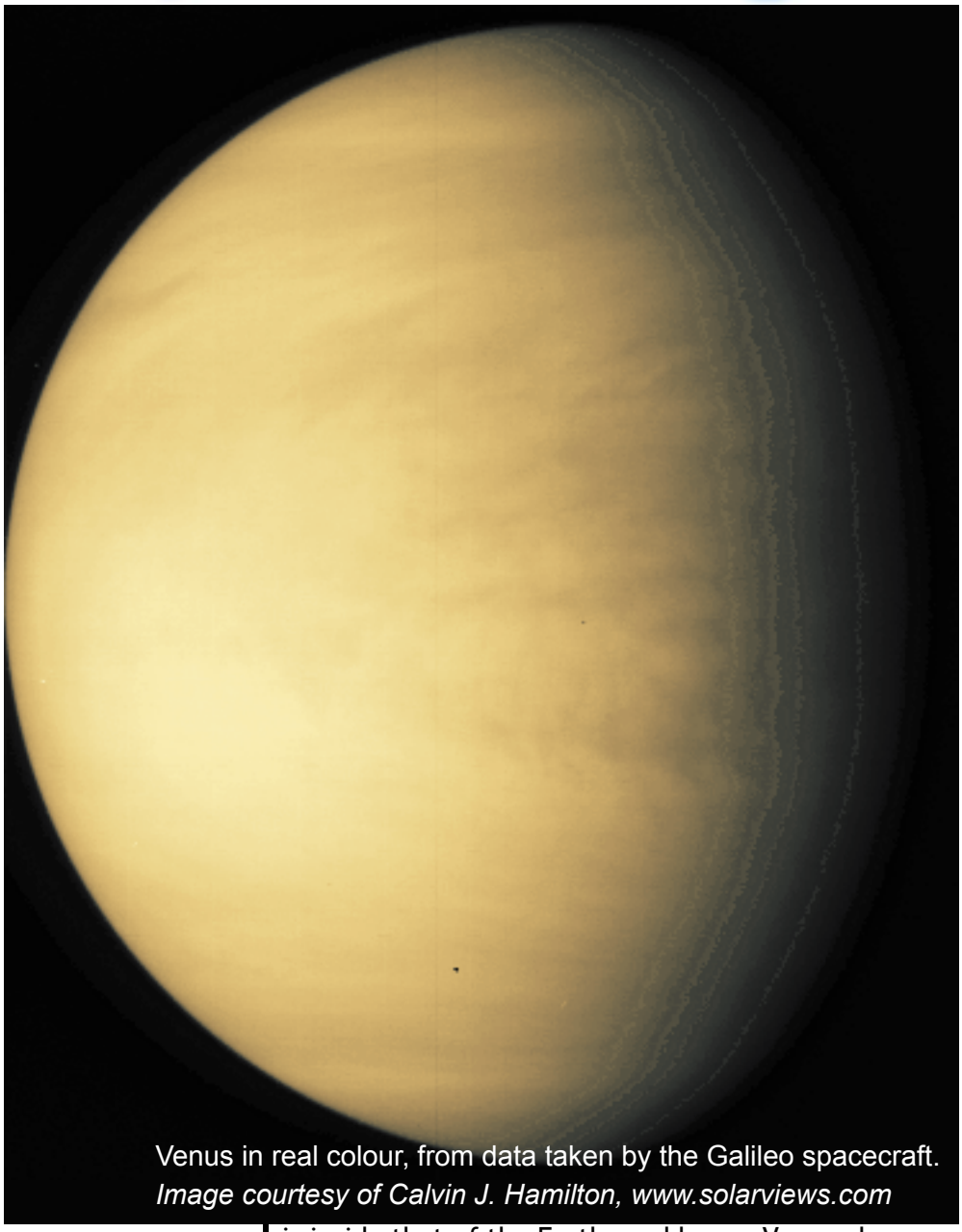
George scratched his head in abject puzzlement as he tried to figure out where he'd parked the rocket this time in the 100-acre parking lot of Nallmart 75B, but then he remembered that a ship-boy had taken his DNA key-but which one, the kelly toned humanoid or the atmosphere-of-Rylak-hued android; scanning the horizon, he at last turned to Babs and asked "how green was my valet"?

Leigh A. Smith
New Douglas, IL

A 2009 winner in the annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest run by San Jose State University.

Venus by Emma King

Venus is the only full planet in our Solar System to be named after a female figure. It is also the third brightest object in the heavens, after the Sun and the Moon, and consequently has played an important part in man's view of the cosmos since prehistoric times. Myths and legends surround it in almost every culture from the Babylonian, Mayan and Chinese civilisations to the Masai and Aboriginal peoples of Africa and Australia, and we have evidence of astronomical records of Venus that recount detailed observations which may have been made as early as 1600 BC.



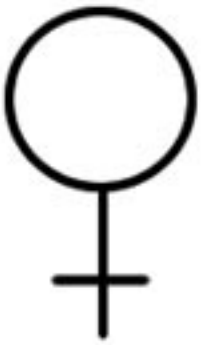
Venus in real colour, from data taken by the Galileo spacecraft.
Image courtesy of Calvin J. Hamilton, www.solarviews.com

Although it is from the Romans that we get the name Venus, the Sumerians named the bright star Inanna and to the Babylonians it was Ishtar, after their respective goddesses of love, so it has long been seen as the personification of womanhood at least in Western culture; to this day the astronomical symbol for Venus is the same as that used to indicate the female sex.

Despite this apparently gentle aspect, Venus has not always been seen as a kindly figure in the skies. Sumerian literature often described Inanna as a terrifying figure raining fire and destruction upon the Earth, and the Mesoamericans generally believed Venus to be a portent of evil; the Mayans devised a calendar based on its movements which was used to calculate the best times for war, while the Aztecs would offer human sacrifices to help avert the evil it might bring.

For large parts of man's early contemplation of Venus it had a somewhat schizophrenic personality, not only between its aspects as goddess of love and harbinger of terror, but actually being thought by most civilisations to be two entirely separate celestial bodies. The orbit of Venus around the Sun is inside that of the Earth, and hence Venus always sits close to the Sun in the sky, either in front of or behind the Sun depending on where it is in its orbit.

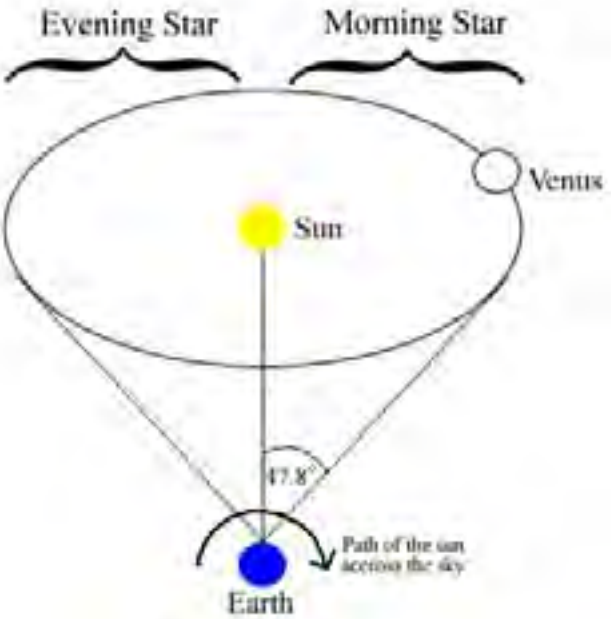
If it is leading the Sun, Venus rises into the night sky shortly before dawn and is the last star to vanish as day breaks. If it is trailing the Sun, Venus appears as the first bright star in the evening sky as the Sun sets and the skies darken, before following the Sun over the horizon. This led to it being thought of as the "Morning Star" and the "Evening Star" respectively, and the majority of ancient civilisations believed these to be two different objects. Pythagoras, usually remembered for his work in geometry, was also a keen astronomer



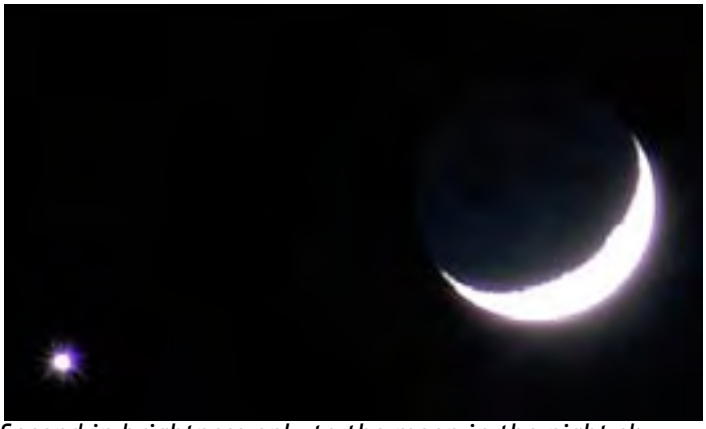
L*eft- The Mayan Dresden Codex included calculations of the movements of Venus in the sky. Middle- The Babylonian Tablet of Ammisaduqa, a cuniform tablet from the seventh century BC that appears to show earlier, possibly Bronze Age, observations of Venus.Image courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. Right- The astronomical symbol for Venus, also used in biology to indicate the female sex.*

and is credited with being the first to realise that the two, known in Ancient Greece as Phosphorus and Hesperus, were one and the same. The Greeks eventually christened this wandering star Aphrodite after their goddess of love, of whom Venus is the Roman counterpart.

Later, as our understanding of the heavens improved, Venus would play a significant role in the conversion from the geocentric view of the solar system, in which the Earth is at the centre, to the heliocentric view in which the planets orbit the Sun. It was Galileo's observations of the phases of Venus, which can be clearly seen through a small telescope, which finally proved that it, at least, must orbit the Sun rather than the Earth.



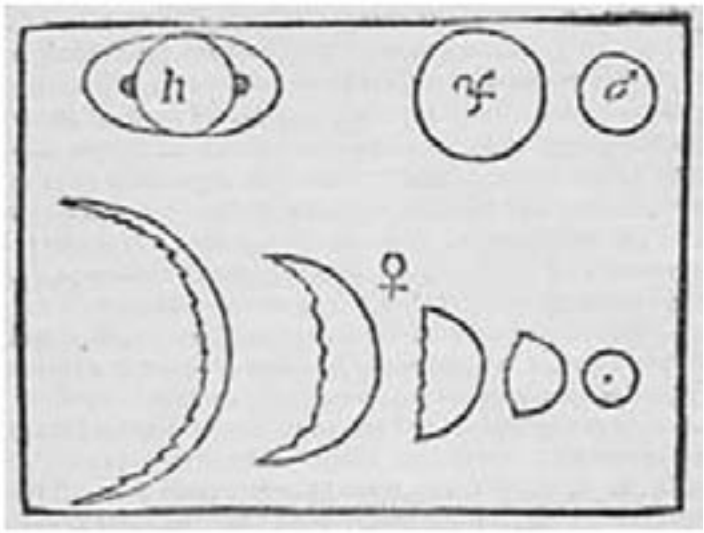
Viewed from the Earth, Venus always appears to be within 47.8° of the Sun. Not to scale.



Second in brightness only to the moon in the night sky, seen here as a crescent, Venus can often be seen just before sunrise or just after sunset.
Image courtesy of Aaron Adams, www.aaronadams.net

It is interesting to note that Venus actually appears brightest in the sky when it is a slim crescent rather than when it is full, the opposite to what one might expect; this because it is considerably closer to the Earth at this time.

Gradually, as telescopes improved and we began to gain a deeper understanding of this celestial body, it became clear that Venus is a planet superficially not at all dissimilar to the Earth itself. It is a rocky, terrestrial planet, very similar in size and mass to the Earth, being a mere 653 km smaller in diameter and having a surface gravity of approximately 0.9 g. It is also our nearest neighbour, with an orbit just 42 million km or so closer to the Sun than our own, which one would naïvely expect to give it a surface temperature only a little warmer, on average, than ours. These facts, combined with a thick layer of cloud which obscures the surface of



Drawings made by Galileo illustrating his observations of the phases of Venus. These observations conclusively showed that Venus orbits the Sun, not the Earth, as had been previously thought.

Venus completely from optical telescopes and which was generally presumed to be composed of water vapour, as on Earth, led to the idea that Venus was a tropical sister to our own planet, covered in oceans or steamy swamps, and that it could, potentially, harbour life not too dissimilar to our own.

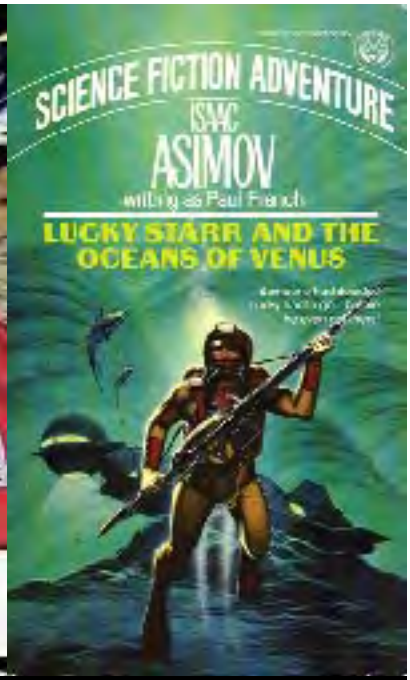
This image of Venus made it an obvious inspiration for science fiction authors in the first half of the twentieth century and many contemplated what might lie below those impenetrable clouds. Robert A. Heinlein's Future History series portrayed Venus as a hot, steamy swamp-planet inhabited by peaceful, primitive natives, while C. S. Lewis imagined it as a second Garden of Eden in *Perelandra*. To H. P. Lovecraft and Kenneth Sterling it was a muddy jungle inhabited by lizard men (*In the Walls of Eryx*), and to Isaac Asimov it was a water-world (*Lucky Starr and the Oceans of Venus*).

Countless other writers allowed their imaginations to run wild on the planet's hot, wet surface, and many '50s and '60s SF movies took inspiration from the goddess of the same name and populated it with improbably gorgeous races of Amazonian women who, on the whole, tended to either adore or despise men.

Another water-world vision for Venus was that of Roger Zelazny in "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth", but by the time that was written in 1965 Venus's status as a paradise planet was beginning to look less and less likely. On December 14 1962, after a couple of false starts, mankind's first successful interplanetary mission, Mariner 2, passed nearly 35,000 km above the surface of Venus and used the microwave and infrared parts of the electromagnetic spectrum to peer beneath its cloud cover for the first time. It revealed that although the tops of Venus's clouds were cool they concealed a raging inferno beneath, with an estimated surface temperature of 425°C – an estimate that has since been revised upwards to closer to 500°C.

This was the first of what would turn out to be many nails in the coffin of the idea of Venus as a life-supporting planet. Later missions were sent to penetrate the clouds physically and crash-land on the surface where they discovered an atmosphere so dense that the pressure is over ninety times that on the surface of Earth, equivalent to the pressure at a depth of nearly 1 km below the Earth's oceans. That atmosphere is composed mostly of carbon dioxide which, along with the thick clouds – which are, in fact, composed of sulphur dioxide belched forth from Venus's numerous volcanoes, rather than water – creates a runaway greenhouse effect. This explains why the temperature on Venus is even greater than the hottest temperatures on Mercury, despite being twice as far from the Sun.

By this point it had become clear that Venus



Left- Poster for *Queen of Outer Space* (1958), in which Zsa Zsa Gabor plays an evil queen who has banished all men from Venus. *This image is reproduced under the GNU Free Documentation Licence. Right-* Cover illustration of *Lucky Starr and the Oceans of Venus* by Isaac Asimov, showing an artist's impression of a water-world style Venus.

was not so much a tropical paradise as a close approximation to hell, with temperatures hot enough to melt lead, pressure so intense it crushed all but the sturdiest probes sent to investigate it, a significant amount of volcanic activity and a steady acidic drizzle from the sulphurous clouds above, through which little sunlight could penetrate. It is less Earth's exotic sister and more its evil twin – at which point it is interesting to note that the Latin translation of Phosphorus, the Greek name for the Morning Star which means "Bringer of Light", is Lucifer.

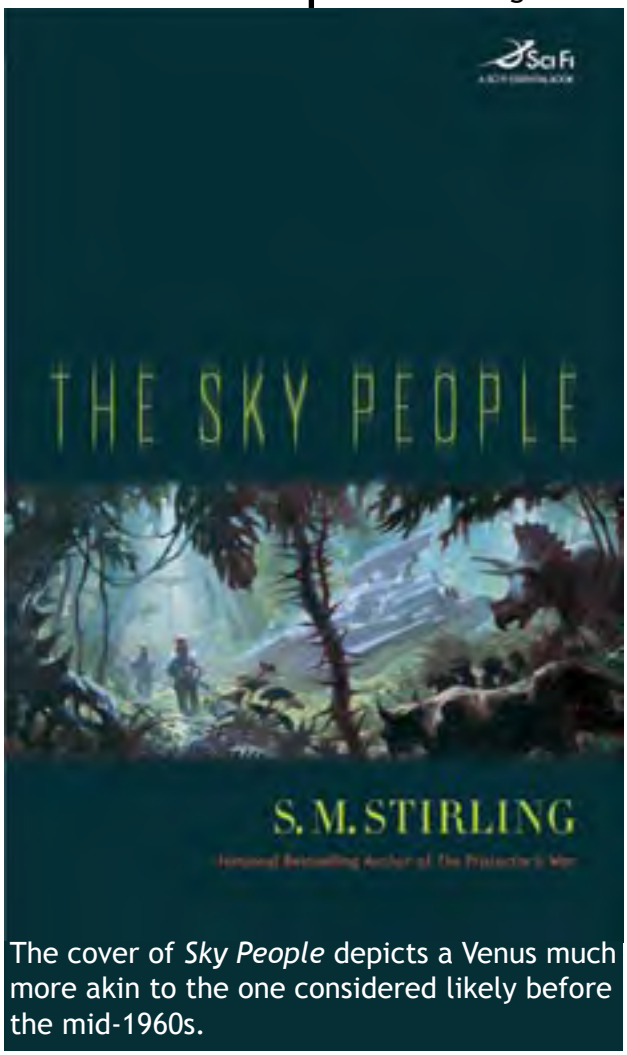
On the whole this new information signalled a change in fortunes for Venus, and the demise of its favoured place in SF, although its new, devilish aspect has attracted some stories of its own such as Larry Niven's *Becalmed in Hell* which, written in 1965, was one of the first stories to reflect the new knowledge of the conditions on the planet. Other writers, such as S. M. Stirling in his novel *Sky People*, have simply chosen to ignore the real universe and continue with the idea of Venus as a paradise planet, a nearby oasis in our solar system, with all the possibilities that holds.

There are other, more subtle, differences between Earth and her "sister" planet. A Venusian year is 224.7 Earth-days long, somewhat shorter than an Earth year as expected from its smaller orbit around the Sun, but its day lasts a massive 243 Earth-days, and is therefore longer than its year. Moreover, the slow rotation of Venus is retrograde – in the opposite direction to that of most of the planets in the solar system – meaning that the Sun, if it could be seen by someone standing on the surface of the planet (and assuming they had found a way to survive there for long enough to watch it) would appear to rise in the West and set, a couple of months later, in the East. This may simply be the result of a long, slow process involving tidal effects on Venus's extremely dense atmosphere, or it could be due to the planet having undergone an impact with a large comet or asteroid at some point in its history which altered its rotation dramatically.

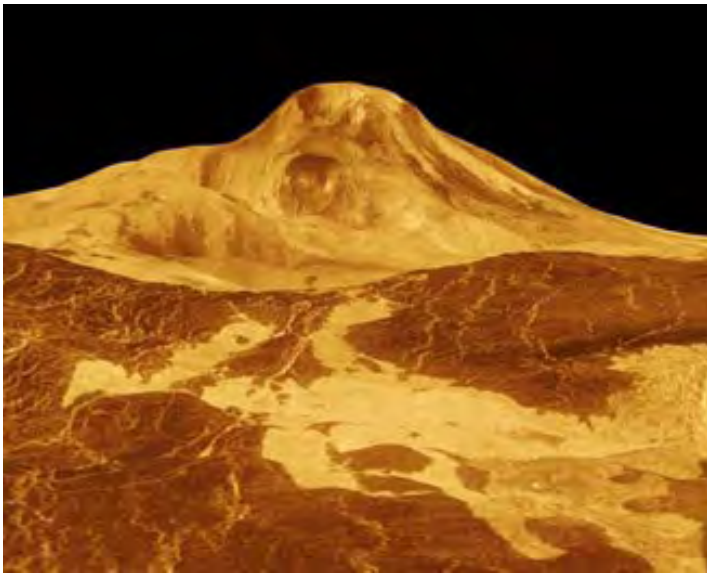
Detailed investigation of the planet's surface by radar has revealed a scattering of relatively recent craters, but no ancient ones, indicating that the planet has a uniformly young crust. This would not be particularly notable except that no evidence has been found of plate tectonics, the process by which the crust is renewed on the Earth. The current best explanation for this is that Venus underwent a total-resurfacing event, where the entire mantle and crust of the planet melted and reformed over the course of about 100 million years, somewhere in the region of 500 million years ago. It is thought that this event may be periodic, and a sort of replacement for plate tectonics which is also the method by which the Earth gradually loses the heat from its interior over time.

Another interesting difference between Venus and Earth is the apparent complete lack of a Venusian magnetic field. Within the Earth a massive dynamo operates, with electrical currents being driven in the conductive liquid core by rotation and convection, which in turn generate a magnetic field around the planet which protects it from cosmic radiation. This process, somewhat surprisingly, does not function on Venus; the most likely explanation for this is that there is no convection occurring in the core, possibly because of a lack of the sort of constant, slow cooling which plate tectonics facilitates on Earth.

Our perception of Venus has undergone a multitude of changes over the millennia, as we have incorporated our ever-increasing knowledge of it into our image of the planet which dominates the heavens. A number of missions to Venus are planned for the future, to further investigate its atmosphere, surface conditions and mineral composition, but whatever other surprises Venus holds in store it is unlikely that it will ever cease to capture our imaginations, not least

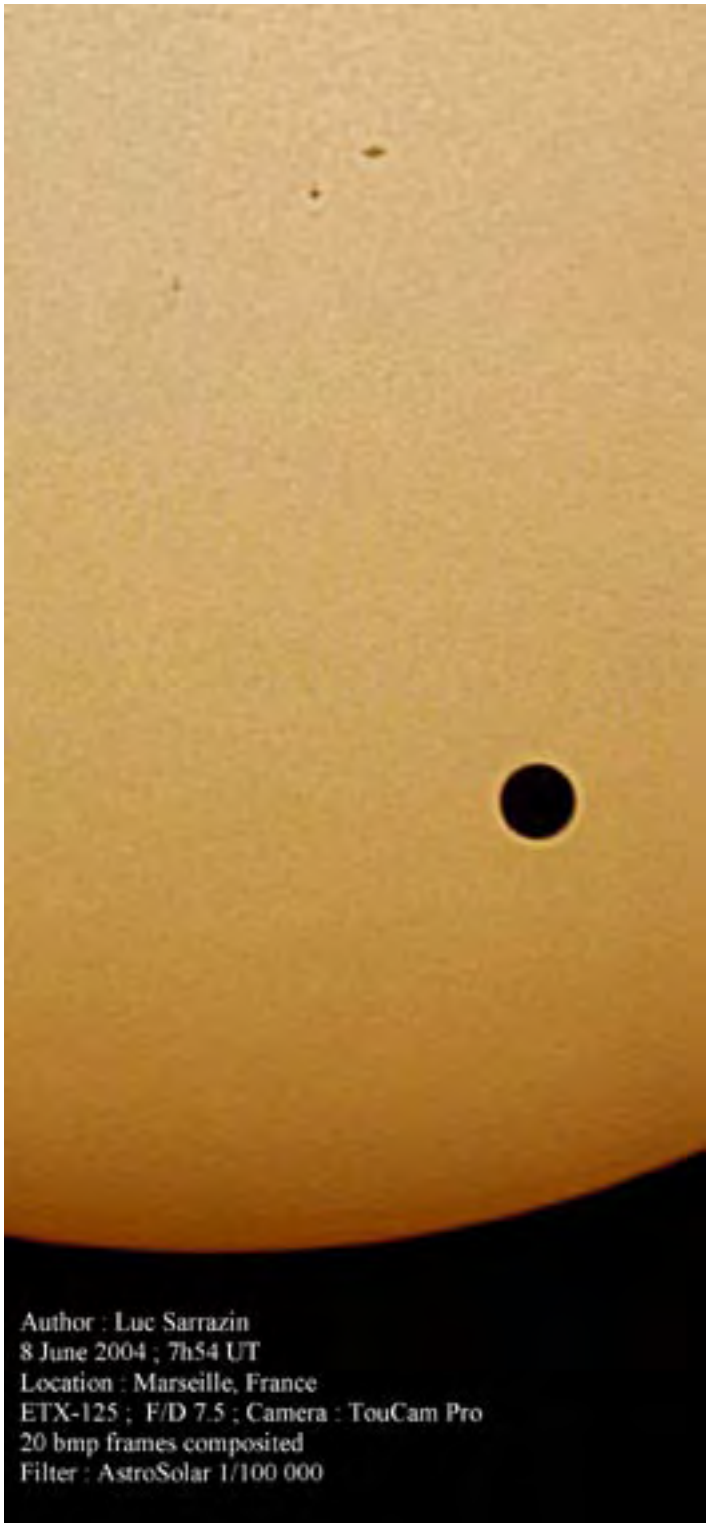


The cover of *Sky People* depicts a Venus much more akin to the one considered likely before the mid-1960s.



A simulated 3D view of Maat Mons, a 5 mile high volcano on Venus, constructed from Radar data from the Magellan spacecraft, and using false colour based upon images taken by the Venera 13 and 14 spacecraft.
Image courtesy of NASA/JPL.

because of its prominent place in the night sky. If you look up at dusk or dawn and see a very bright star, not too far from the rising or setting Sun, that's Venus; or if you would like a more unusual view of this planet, one will be available in 2012 when it will be making a rare transit across the disc of the Sun – an event which occurs twice every 120 years or so and won't be visible again until 2117.



The black circle of Venus making its way across the surface of the sun during the 2004 transit.
Image courtesy of Luc Sarrazin and the VT-2004 programme.

The countdown had stalled at T minus 69 seconds when Desiree, the first female ape to go up in space, winked at me slyly and pouted her thick, rubbery lips unmistakably--the first of many such advances during what would prove to be the longest, and most memorable, space voyage of my career.

-Martha Simpson, Glastonbury, Connecticut
(1985 Winner Bulwer-Lytton Winner)

Eight Science Fiction Novels and Eight Women

by Christopher J Garcia

I have a lot of memories tied up with science fiction novels. I have just as many tied up with the females who have been a part of my life in various ways. It would stand to reason then some of my memories would fall into both categories – although a couple of them (including a classic story about a copy of Snow Crash and a bottle of Grappa that ended quite badly) aren't appropriate for Journey Planet. Maybe I'll submit them to Earl Kemp for el.

And so, here are a few short tales of Women and Science Fiction intersecting and changing my world.

8) Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert Heinlein

"I hate Heinlein," I told her.

"I don't know anything else he's written," Hannah told me while she was turning to a significant passage.

"Why's this one so important?" I asked.

"Well, read this," she said, handing me the book.

I took a read. Indeed, it was interesting.

"It's kinda, I dunno, sexy," I said.

"I thought so," said Hannah.

Oddly, I don't remember much after that. We hung out once a week for a while after that. It was consistently the highlight of my week.

7) Venus Plus-X by Theodore Sturgeon

"What's the book?" she asked, taking a seat at the bar next to me.

"It's a science fiction book, from the '50s, I think," I said.

"You just started it?" she asked.

"Yeah, I bought it at an antique store on the way up."

She looked at me and at the half-empty glass of bourbon in front of me.

"You're from Sacramento?" she asked, setting her purse down on to the bar.

"San Jose," I said, lifting my glass and taking a sip.

"I'm Liz."

"Nice to meet you," I said. "I'm Chris."

"I've read some science fiction," she said. "I can't say that I've read any of his books. Mostly Asimov and Heinlein and Vonnegut."

"I love Vonnegut," I said, waving the bartender over our way. "I love *Breakfast of Champions*."

"I love those drawings he does," she said. "What's this one about?"

Liz lifted up the book, turned it over and looked at the back.

"Sounds like fun."

"You want it?" I said.

"What?"

"Well, I'd be happy to lend it to you. All you gotta do is drop me a phone number so I can call you and get it back sometime."

She looked at me. She had a lovely jawline.

"You know, I have to say that's the best technique a guy has ever used to get my phone number."

I took another sip, smiled straight ahead and then turned my head.

"Well, you wanna borrow the book?" I asked.

She took out a piece of

paper and a pen from her purse. Wrote down her number and then handed the piece to me.

"I'm home after 5 pretty much every day," she said.

I ordered us both a drink and we chatted into the night. I walked her out to her car and wished her a good night.

I never did get that book back.

His wife had held him in her arms as if she could keep death away from him.

Phillip Jose Farmer in "To Your Scattered Bodies Go"

6) Ringworld by Larry Niven

The airport bookstore managed to hold forty of us. St. Louis Airport had decent enough food to hold my interests for a two hour layover, but this was a four hour stay: not quite enough to make my way into town to hang out, too much to simply enjoying eating and a free newspaper. I headed into the bookstore, conveniently broken into sections for every genre. There was a Best-Sellers alcove in white, a Detective section colored grey, a red section that was Romance, a brown section that was Western, green for War and the blue glassy shelves that indicated Sci-Fi. I walked over there, pushing through the three dozen folks who were looking at the various other sections. I made it to the Sci-Fi section and there was only one other person there: a woman, taller than me and wearing tall heels.

I looked at all the books they had. Crap, all of it. There was Crichton, there was Heinlein, there was King. The only ones that made me interested were a series of "Classics" by names I knew. One of them was William Gibson and I picked one off the shelf, absent-mindedly.

"You haven't read *Neuromancer*?" she said.

"No, I haven't," I answered, looking into a lovely neck and then looking up and seeing a lovely face, maybe a couple of years younger than the 24-year-old me.

"It's really good. I love Cyberpunk," she said.

"I'm not big on that stuff. I mean, some of it's really cool, but I have trouble reading a lot of it."

She reached up to the upper shelf and pulled a book down.

"Have you read this?" she asked.

It was *Ringworld*, a book I had heard about but never read.

"I think it's the best science fiction book ever written," she said.

I took the book and looked up at her.

"Thanks," I said, and then hesitated. I had no idea where to go from there. I had once been a very confident young man. I once knew how to ask a girl for her number, to join me for a while as we waited for planes. Once, I had been able to do all that. Now, now I merely smiled, tipped the book like it was an Edwardian hat and went to the register to pay for it.

Years later, when I ran into Nora at LACon, I instantly recognised her as the girl from the airport. When I went to talk to her in the Montreal party, she instantly remembered that I fumbled.

These moments are the ones that remind me that I can be a perfect idiot.

5) Nostrilia by Cordwainer Smith

Laura and I only went out three times. The first time, we spent the entire date talking about T.C. Boyle's book *The Road to Wellville*. It was a lovely night; we met at a wine bar in Palo Alto, then walked to a Thai restaurant where we talked about Boyle's short stories, many of which have done incredibly well. We headed off for ice cream and then walked around in the cold, giving me a reason to take my coat off, drape it over her shoulders and put my arm around her.

The second date was all about Christopher Buckley's *The White House Mess*. This was one of my all-time favorite books and she had gone out of her way to read it when I mentioned it on the phone. We wandered about downtown San Jose

for a few hours talking about the book. It was cold again, and with a dress that short, I had to offer her my coat again. The drinks at the Fairmont helped too.

The third date we jumped from topic to topic while enjoying lovely Saratoga, but after we arrived at the Blue Rock Shoot, I mentioned Cordwainer Smith and told her about *Nostrillia*.

"Oh, I don't like science fiction," she said.

And I didn't see her again.

Two glass panes with dirt between and little tunnels from cell to cell: when I was a kid, I had an ant farm.

"The Star Pit" by Samuel Delany

---

4) The Anubis Gates by Tim Powers

On our way to Yosemite, Mr. Stuefloten driving us on our annual Wilderness Adventurer's Club trip, Sandra put her head on my lap as I read her the start of the chapter I was at.

"You read weird stuff, Chris," she said.

"It's fun," I said.

She turned and stared up at the ceiling.

"You know, I want to marry you," she said.

"So you've said," I noted.

"I'd marry you in a minute, if I wasn't17," I said.

"More importantly, I'm 16," she said.

I read her a few more paragraphs and she fell asleep in the back of the van.

"You know, Chris," Mr. Stuefloten called back, "you've got a very soothing voice."

"Thank you, sir," I said.

"I mean, it's almost about to put me to sleep. Please, read to yourself."

I stopped, put the book into the small nook to my right, and then took the rest of the trip to play with Sandra's hair.

3) Lord Kelvin's Machine by James Blaylock

Christine could not stand to be around my friend Mike. She was a lovely creature, Southern and eyes the colour of the cheap green plastic 1970s jewelry she tended to favor. Mike was a good guy, thin and bespectacled. He was a playwright, and a guy who read a lot of science fiction. Christine liked old movies and *Catcher in the Rye*.

We were in the dining common, Mike and I sitting at a large table that we knew would fill up as folks get back from classes all over the campus. Christine was the first of the others to arrive.

"It's a terrible book!" Mike said.

"What the hell are you talking about?" I said. "It's the best book I've read all year."

"Hey guys," Christine drawled.

"It's just a series of stupid vignettes all tied together with a lame story. Blaylock doesn't know how to hold a story," Mike added, with a bit more volume.

"It has characters and plot movement, unlike any of the crap you've loaned me. I mean God, every book John Jakes ever wrote."

Christine got up.

"Christ! That's why I hate eating with you two."

Luckily, Christine and I had a lovely and very public breakup just a few weeks later.

2) Blue Mars by Kim Stanley Robinson

"You can't have it, Chris."

"I'm the one who bought it, dear."

"You've never even read it."

"More reason it should come with me."

"I read it, it's my favourite. It stays here."

"No. It's coming with me."

"You don't even like Kim Stanley Robinson."

"I've only read one thing by him."

"The book's staying here, Chris."

I looked at her. I had loved her, very much, had thought of spending my life with her, but I had moved out two weeks ago, left almost all of my stuff there, stayed with my mother while I was

waiting to get a place of my own.

"Fine. You can have it."

I handed her the book. She wouldn't even look at me. She tossed it onto the couch.

I walked out the door. I didn't even say goodbye.

1) The Shockwave Rider by John Brunner

She liked being kissed on the neck. I liked kissing her on the neck. She liked to read. I liked to read. I liked to go over to her house after work, 8 or 9 pm. She liked to have me come over and when we finished kissing hello, she'd tell me about everything she'd read in recent days. She rarely left the house any more, something about the sun hurting her skin, making her break out. She had gone pale, deep pale. Porcelain pale. She needed people to get her groceries, to keep her company, to make her dinner.

And to kiss her on the neck.

She loved reading, loved science fiction more than I did. I'd bring her dozens of books and then she'd devour them. She had all the time in the world to read since she never saw the outside of her apartment.

One night, it was *Shockwave Rider*.

That night, I sat behind her on her magnificent couch and kissed her on the neck. My arms were wrapped around her and I could feel the slow, calm breathing she famed herself for managing at all times. She kept talking about the book. I wasn't interested. I was pretty sure I had told her about my reading it a few weeks before. I wasn't interested in anything other than kissing her long, perfect neck. She wasn't interested in anything but talking about the book. I could tell after a moment she was simply stalling best she could, and I stopped.

"Chris... I'm pregnant."

I paused. We hadn't done anything that would result in such.

"Who's the father?"

"Does it matter?"

I thought for a silent moment.

"No. I guess it doesn't."

We stayed there, silently for a moment. I could feel her crying in my arms.

"Tell me about what else you've been reading," I said, calmly, steadily.

She paused. She didn't turn around. The crying stopped.

"Well, I finally started reading *Stand On Zanzibar*..."

A while later, after we'd talked over-population, *Total Recall* and *Avenging Disco Godfather*, even getting to the point where we could make a joke about her pregnancy, I got up and made my way to the door. After an hour or so of talking novels and giving her a couple of DVDs and a few new books, I left her apartment, giving her a gentle kiss goodnight.

I cried rather violently in my car in the parking lot of her complex for another hour.

Gardens of the Sun: An Excerpt by Paul McAuley

Paul McAuley has worked as a research biologist in various universities, including Oxford and UCLA, and for six years was a lecturer in botany at St Andrews University. He is now a full time writer of science fiction and science thrillers. He lives in North London.

His first novel, *Four Hundred Billion Stars*, won the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award, and his fifth, *Fairyland*, won the Arthur C. Clarke and John W. Campbell Awards. His latest novel, *Gardens of the Sun*, will be published by Gollancz in October 2009.

Gardens of the Sun is set in the Solar System in the twenty-third century, ravaged by war between Earth and the Outers and looking forward to an uncertain future.

On the moons of Saturn, Earth's Three Powers Alliance consolidates its grip on the cities and settlements it fought and conquered in the Quiet War, Sri Hong-Owen hunts down the strange gardens abandoned in place by the gene wizard Avernus, and a spy searches for the woman he loved and lost. Around Uranus, Macy Minnot and other refugees from the war struggle to survive, while on Neptune's largest moon, Triton, a cabal plots to reshape history. And on Earth, in Greater Brazil, the democratic traditions maintained by the Outers have infected a population eager to escape the tyranny of the great families who have ruled them for more than a century.

After a battle fought to contain the expansionist, posthuman ambitions of the Outers, fresh conflicts on Earth, around Saturn, and the outer reaches of the Solar System threaten to shatter the human species. Only one thing is certain. No one can escape the consequences of war – especially the victors.

And its first chapter goes like this:

A hundred murdered ships swung around Saturn in endless ellipses. Slender freighters and sturdy tugs. Shuttles that had once woven continuous and ever-changing paths between the inhabited moons. Spidery surface-to-orbit gigs. The golden crescent of a clipper, built by a co-operative just two years ago to ply between Saturn and Jupiter, falling like a forlorn fairy-tale moon past the glorious arch of the ring system. Casualties of a war recently ended.

Most were superficially intact but hopelessly compromised, AIs driven insane by demons disseminated by Brazilian spies, fusion motors and control and life-support systems toasted by microwave bursts or EMP mines. In the frantic hours after their ships had been killed, surviving crews and passengers had attempted to make repairs or signal for help with lasers pried from dead comms packages, or had composed with varying degrees of resignation, despair and anger last messages to their families and friends. In the freezing dark of her sleeping niche, aboard a freighter sliding past the butterscotch bands at Saturn's equator, the poet Lexis Parrander had written in blood on the blank screen of her slate *We are the dead*.

They were the dead. No one responded to the distress signals they aimed at the inhabited moons or the ships of the enemy. Some zipped themselves into sleeping niches and took overdoses, or opened veins at their wrists, or fastened plastic bags over their heads. Others, hoping to survive until rescue came, pulled on pressure suits and willed themselves into the deep, slow sleep of hibernation. In one ship people fought and killed each other because there were not enough pressure suits to go around. In another, they huddled around an impedance heater lashed up from cable and fuel cells, a futile last stand against the advance of the implacable cold.

Many of the ships, fleeing towards Uranus when they'd been killed, had planned to pick up speed by gravity-assist manoeuvres around Saturn. Now they traced lonely paths that took them close around the gas giant and flung them out past the ring system and the orbits of the inner moons before reaching apogee and falling back. A few travelled even further outwards, past the orbits of Titan, Hyperion, or even Iapetus.

And here was the black arrowhead of a Brazilian singleship approaching the farthest point of an orbit that was steeply inclined above the equatorial plane and had taken it more than twenty million kilometres from Saturn, into the lonely realm where scattered swarms of tiny moons traced long and eccentric paths. Inside its sleek hull, a trickle charge from a lithium-ion battery kept its coffin-sized lifesystem at 4° Centigrade, and its mortally wounded pilot slept beyond the reach of any dream.

A spark of fusion flame flared in the starry black aft of the singleship. A ship was approaching: a robot tug that was mostly fuel tank and motor, drawing near and matching the eccentric axial spin of the crippled singleship with firecracker bursts from clusters of attitude jets until the two ships spun together like comically disproportionate but precisely synchronised ice-skaters. The tug sidled closer and made hard contact, docking with latches along the midline of the singleship's flat belly. After running through a series of diagnostic checks, the tug killed its burden's spin and turned it through a hundred and eighty degrees and fired up its big fusion motor. The blue-white spear of the exhaust stretched kilometres beyond the coupled ships, altering their delta vee and their high, wide orbit, pushing them towards Dione and rendezvous with the flagship of the Greater Brazilian fleet.

Journey Planet 4

A Croydon-California Fanzine