

Scratch Pad 54

October 2003



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Based on the non-Mailing Comments section of **brg** No. 36, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the October 2003 ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) mailing. Front cover: 'Galaxy Portal' by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).

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BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

Books read since 21 July 2003

Ratings

- ** Books recommended highly.
- * Books recommended.
- ☹ Books about which I have severe doubts.

** **CORALINE by Neil Gaiman**
(2002; Bloomsbury 0-7475-5878-7; 171 pp.;
£5.99/\$A14.95)

A Hugo winner? I suppose it's better than many other Hugo winners, yet not quite as convincing as the claims made for it by members of Acnestis. *Coraline* tells of a girl who moves into an old house, which seems to promise safety and rest. Coraline goes through a door into another part of the house — or the house itself in some alternative world — and this journey proves to be very dangerous. Needless to say, Coraline overcomes danger, but the forces she meets through the door are so ambiguous that one begins to suspect that there never was a 'safe' version of the house. What does one make of Coraline, and her parents, and the decision to move into this house? By the end of the novel I felt I had been gulled in some way. I felt that there *never had been any danger*, because Coraline herself is the dangerous force in this world. If that's so, what kind of a world is it? *Coraline* ends where it should begin. The writing style seems too smooth — too unencumbered — to tell the story that should be told, so the book seems itself to be a cardboard

cutout version of the story it should be telling.

** **TAYLOR FIVE by Ann Halam**
(2002; Dolphin 1-85881-792-7; 177 pp.;
£4.99/\$A14.95)

Both *Caroline* and *Taylor Five* are marketed as Young Adults novels. Both are published in Britain. The former is £5.99 in Britain, and the latter £4.99. Yet both are sold at the same price in Australia. So how artificial (i.e. overblown) are the prices of other British books distributed here?

Taylor Five is subtitled *The Story of a Clone Girl*, yet it is not about cloning. It is a very powerful story about a girl who is persecuted, whose support group is killed, because, apart from being an ordinary but very resourceful girl, she is the product of an experiment in cloning. Escaping from her burnt-out home in Borneo, she undergoes a wide variety of ordeals, all of which are written about convincingly. Ann Halam is a pseudonym of Gwyneth Jones. Why, then, is *Taylor Five* and other Halam novels I've read much better than Jones's Clarke Award-winning *Bold As Love*?

* **DIFFERENT HOURS by Stephen Dunn**
(2000; Norton 0-393-32232-7; 121 pp.;
\$US12.00/\$A22.95)

Recently I wrote several pages in praise of Stephen Dunn's *New and Selected Poems, 1974-1994*, so I read *Different Hours* with high hopes. A good poet is a good poet, and much of the poetry in the earlier

collection is brilliant. I regret to say that Dunn seems to have lost much of his brilliance. He has settled into a nice routine of making nice poems. Nothing wrong with them; but almost nothing I would want to quote, either. The good life in America has leached the life out of the poet. The only poem that rings a bell with me is the final one: 'A Postmortem Guide: For my eulogist, in advance'. I'd like to think I was a good enough writer to prepare my eulogy in advance. Dunn makes a bit of fun of himself: 'Do not praise me for my exceptional serenity./Can't you see I've turned away/from the large excitements,/and have accepted all the troubles?' But surely a poet must be impelled by *some* 'large excitements', or there's no point keeping on? Still, I can forgive Dunn anything for the last stanza of the poem (and the book): 'You who are one of them, say that I loved/my companions most of all./In all sincerity, say that they provided/a better way to be alone.'

**** PHASES OF GRAVITY by Dan Simmons**
(1989; Bantam Spectra 0-553-27764-2; 278 pp.; \$US4.50/\$A7.95)

Stephen Baxter praised this novel in his *Omega-tropic*, his recent book of essays. It's easy to see how it inspired *Voyage*. Fortunately, I had bought *Phases of Gravity* when it appeared. It may turn out to be my novel of this year. It's not science fiction, but any science fiction reader would enjoy it. Richard Baedeker is an ex-astronaut whose whole later life is made pallid by his recollections of the one great experience of his life, his journey to the moon. Almost nobody in his later life is interested in his memories. He can no longer talk to his son, who has entered a hippie colony. During his pilgrimage, first to India, and then throughout America, Baedeker slowly sees signposts to a new perception of life, and also meets people who have traced similar paths. The ending is transcendental, but the power of the novel is in its bedrock perception of the reality of people who are old enough to seek that moment that follows the Big Moment in life. Much humour here, a lot of gripping adventure — and one nice Tuckerism: a character named 'Tucker Wilson'.

**** A POUND OF PAPER: CONFESSIONS OF A BOOK ADDICT by John Baxter**
(2002; Doubleday 0-385-60368-1; 417 pp.; £15/\$A45.00)

I could easily call this 'Confessions of a Scalliwag', as we have only Baxter's word that he did all these impossible things in the first sixty or so years of his life. But what the hell! Even if he's embroidering the truth a bit, what could be more fun than the life that John Baxter tells us he's led? Unpromising beginnings in Sydney (although he was already famous in the world of fandom, hardly mentioned here), then early attempts at freelance writing, temporary employment with legendary self-proclaimed pornographer Ron Smith (who later moved to Melbourne, where I met him), then semi-poverty in London, and a developing career in secondhand bookselling that led eventually to a life of conspicuous riches in Paris. It also seems too easy, too everybody-should-be-as-wonderful-as-me, yet Baxter also offers lots of tips about the book trade (be totally unscrupulous, but at least do the research so you know what is collectable and what is not), and repays friendships by including contribu-

tions from people such as John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau and Lucy Sussex in the book's Appendix II ("If your house was on fire . . .": An informal poll). A sequel has been commissioned. Baxter's greatest surprise is his naming of Gerald Murnane as Australia's most interesting writer. Baxter also notes, sadly, that Gerald is someone whose books are 'not yet collectable'.

**** UP THROUGH AN EMPTY HOUSE OF STARS: REVIEWS AND ESSAYS 1980-2002**
by David Langford
(2003; Cosmos/Wildside 1-59224-055-0; 310 pp.; \$US21.95/\$A40.00)

In the great old days of *SF Commentary*, say, in the period from 1969 to 1975, I would have dashed off a 2000-word essay as soon as I read this book so that I could pay adequate tribute to it. I don't seem to have the energy to dash off 2000-word reviews these days, so Dave Langford, everybody's favourite fan writer and (I hope) everybody's favourite SF reviewer, will have to wait for a detailed reaction from me or another SFC contributor. This book needs to be read alongside *The Complete Critical Assembly*, Dave's collection of a wide variety of reviews from many sources, because the only failure of *Up Through an Empty House of Stars* is that it often talks about books that are companions to books Dave has discussed elsewhere. For example, his review here of Chris Priest's *The Prestige* is useful, but I hope that his long essay on all of Priest's work will be reprinted soon. Another instance: Langford's review of George Turner's *Vaneglorry* is penetrating and comprehensive, but I would rather see his reviews of *Beloved Son* and *The Sea and Summer*, the two highlights of Turner's SF career. So much for the ifs and buts. *Up Through an Empty House of Stars* contains more than fifty single-book reviews plus a fair selection of Langford's long essays, including his brilliant essay about James White that was reprinted in the most recent *SF Commentary*, his survey of the fantasy novels of G. K. Chesterton (the source of the book's title), a number of discussions of the recent work of Gene Wolfe, and useful guides to slightly more esoteric authors, such as Ernest Brahmah and Nero Wolfe. Langford's writing is always precise, humorous, and unpretentious. He abhors Big Whacking Generalities, and loves an eccentric writer or even a complete nutter. His tribute to Frank Key is my highlight of the book. Key, who, we are assured, is *not* a Langford invention, promised that his Malice Aforethought Press would soon publish "'The Big Metal Fence", "Obsequies for Lars Talc Struck by Lightning" and "Unspeakable Desolation Pouring Down from the Stars"'. The last title is a perfect Gillespie fanzine title. *Up Through an Empty House of Stars* inspire in me one sad feeling, the same feeling: how can one man willingly endure the misery of reading most of this crap? Langford says that he enjoys particular books by, say, David Brin, Orson Scott Card or Greg Bear, or yet another non-Asimov Asimov pastiche; he describes what is in these novels; and I thank David Langford from the bottom of my heart for doing so, for now I need never open the covers of any of these books.

*** CITIES edited by Peter Crowther**
(2003; Gollancz 0-575-07504-X; 292 pp.; £12.99/\$A39.00)

I had my brief moment of glory by placing with

Continuum photos by Helena Binns



Opening ceremony (left to right): Fan Guests of Honour Marilyn Pride, Lewis Morley and Nick Stathopoulos; Pro Guests of Honour Tracy Forsyth and Chris Lawson. Modern dance routine by Danny Heap (convention chairman).



Fanzine panel (left to right): Bill Wright, Bruce Gillespie, Aaron Jacks, Lily Chrywenstrom, and Russell Farr. I'd been told I was convener of the panel, but somebody else seems to have told Lily that she was convener. Nobody agreed much on what a fanzine actually is, but we agreed that they are a lot of fun to publish. This panel gave useful publicity for the Fanzine Room. During the convention, there were eight fanzines produced on the equipment in the Fanzine Room, including one by an ten-year-old.



The John Foyster celebration panel (left to right): Miranda Foyster, Dick Jenssen, Merv Binns, Jenny Blackford, Bruce Gillespie and (standing) Perry Middlemiss. Proceedings will be published, because Myfanwy Thomas (John Foyster's sister) brought along a microphone and cassette recording equipment. As people spoke at the microphone, they joined the panel.



Above (left to right): Myfanwy Thomas, Bruno Kautzner, Merv Binns and Miranda Foyster. Captions invited for this photo.

Right: Danny Heap, the convention chair. He had so much fun he wants to do it all again next year.



The Nova Mob panel (left to right): Ian Mond, Andrew Macrae, and Bruce Gillespie.

David Pringle at *Interzone* magazine (March 2003 issue) my essay about novellas, especially the series currently being edited by Peter Crowther, first for PS Publishing, then gathered together in four-novella volumes for Gollancz. I'm glad I did not have to write about *Cities* in that article, because it betrays the praise I heaped on *Foursight*, *Futures* and *Infinites*. Paul de Filippo's 'A Year in the Linear City' is the most memorable of the four novellas, but is so obviously a chunk from a novel that I was quite annoyed by its inconclusive end. Its main idea — a vast riverside city stretched along some sort of underground riverworld — is vivid, and the characters engaging, but I waited in vain for real themes and concerns to emerge. Maybe the novel, when it appears, will be more satisfactory. 'The Tain' was not a very happy introduction to China Miéville for me. The world has become filled with dangerous shadowy beings that emerge out of mirrors. The doom-laden tone is nice and thick, but the thickness obscures any real meaning. A novella should work within its own length: it should not point so obviously to some later, longer work. 'Firing the Cathedral' seemed as unreadable as Moorcock's 1960s and 1970s Jerry Cornelius stories, so I didn't finish it. Only Geoff Ryman's 'V.A.O.' has any pizzazz, with its mixture of high-tech and low life, but the story has already appeared elsewhere, and is hardly a good reason for paying a lot of money for *Cities*. I hope the next Crowther collection is a return to form.

**** SMALL TOWN by Lawrence Block
(2003; Orion 0-72283-842-3; 374 pp.; \$A29.95)**

I thought this was going to be Lawrence Block's Big Novel about New York. It is a big novel, in the sense that it covers a lot of characters and even more of the New York streets than one usually finds in a Block mystery. However, it also includes elements of cavalier wish-fulfilment, ranging from the details of a book bidding war, by which an agent drags a failing author from the depths of poverty to millionaire status, to the adventures of a super-sexy lady who gets away with nearly everything, and its main character is, as the blurb puts it, 'an unlikely mass murderer waging a one-man war against everyone'. The most original feature of *Small Town* is its view of the events of 11 September 2001. Block shows that the fall of the towers did not depress New Yorkers, but gave the survivors a willingness to change direction, try new possibilities, and get on with that greatest of all enterprises: living in New York.

**** P IS FOR PERIL by Sue Grafton
(2001; Ballantine 0-449-00379-5; 370 pp.; \$US7.99/\$A14.00)**

I had read only the first of Sue Grafton's alphabet-titled books until an American friend recently sent me *P Is for Peril*, the (let me count on my toes) thirteenth in the series. Most mystery authors are flagging badly by the time they hit unlucky thirteen, but not Sue Grafton. Her vigorous grasp of life in its full Californian peculiarity is only matched by the sly way in which she gets around to her plot. People first; plot second. I doesn't really care whether all the ends are stitched up at the end; I just wanted to find out what happens to these slightly weird people. Not that they are seriously, Dickensian weird; you get the feeling that they are no odder than the people Grafton meets every day.

Their houses are too big, they have too much money, they lean on each other too much — Grafton is wonderful at hinting that something has to give, without making too much too obvious. Kinsey Millhone, her detective, is also in trouble, falling for the wrong guy yet again. Yes, she solves things, but you feel that she never comes near to solving the riddles that drive her own engine. The others in the series stay in print; I must catch up with them.

*** WHITE APPLES by Jonathan Carroll
(2002; Tor 0-765-30388-4; 304 pp.; \$US24.95/\$A57.95)**

I'm becoming very annoyed with Jonathan Carroll's novels. If anything, they are even better written than the early novels; they are a lot weirder; they are very vivid; and they are starting not to add up to anything. In *White Apples*, Carroll is spinning through life, death, purgatory and whatever else, to the extent that the fate of his characters disappears down the cosmic infundibulum. If reality is quite as plastic as this, who care what happens to whom? Yet some of the characters are so interesting that we do care, but not if they are really not dead, or perhaps they are . . . ? Judging a Carroll novel has gone way beyond the reach of anybody who would claim to do literary criticism; we're now in the territory of the spiritually distressed. Do we offer therapy to the characters themselves, or to the author? And if it's just a cosmic game, why bother? All correspondence would be welcomed from anybody who claims to know the mind of Carroll these days.

**** THE SECRET OF LIFE by Paul McAuley
(2001; Tor 0-765-34193-X; 413 pp.; \$US7.99/\$A19.99)**

If I said this is a Big Serious Novel about the Big Serious Issues of Our Time, you might think I'm taking the piss. And I would be if I didn't think it's quite a serious SF adventure about the fate of life on earth — and on Mars. This is near-future extrapolation done just about right. The influence of Stephen Baxter's *Voyage* can be felt all over the book. Baxter got his hero to Mars; now he hands her (with a different name and identity) to McAuley, and she flies. Mariella Anders is on the spaceship to Mars that is following the second Chinese expedition, whose discoveries have already somehow led to environmental catastrophe on Earth. Mariella's enemy on her own ship works for the corporation that provides most of NASA's funds in twenty years' time. Pure science takes a back seat to chicanery, which in turns leads to a wonderful Mars adventure, which sends Anders back to Earth, hot on the heels of further nastiness. The genetic science sounds plausible to me, the characters are vivid, if a bit too Noble or Nasty, and only the sequel-inviting last few pages are disappointing. *The Secret of Life* should have won every award, since it's one of the few real SF novels I've discovered in recent years.

**** THE ROTTWEILER by Ruth Rendell
(2003; Hutchinson 0-09-179951-1; 342 pp.; \$A32.95)**

As Ruth Rendell's writing improves, she seems to have more fun writing her books, and she cares less and less about manufacturing climaxes. The first half of *The Rottweiler* is an elaborate social comedy centred upon an antique shop whose owner lets the rest of the house to a wide range of guests. Each guest has a sordid secret, and is pretty good at

hiding it. They don't realise that one of them is a reluctant serial murderer (he spends most of the novel trying to psychoanalyse himself to find out why he commits murder), but as that situation becomes plain, everybody is forced to reveal his or her secrets or make accommodations for uncom-

fortable truths. I feel that Rendell would like to write novels that are solely about individual characters, but her mystery-reading public won't let her go. She's nearly let them go.

— Bruce Gillespie, 9 October 2003

JOHN FOYSTER'S GREATEST HITS, Part 2

John Foyster

Melbourne diary, 31 October 1971

Today Australian makes a great leap forward: with the exception of backward areas like Western Australia and the Northern Territory, Australia moves into Daylight Saving Time. This may not be revolutionary in other parts of the world, but it is the first time that such an exciting change has been made down here. Even now there is considerable reluctance in some parts of the East Coast to make the change. Formerly this was concentrated in the northern areas, for Queenslanders have so many hours of sunshine that there'll hardly be a change for them. Today, however, tiny pockets of resistance are springing up all over the South; bold citizens are refusing to be bullied into accepting ruthless butchery of their lifestyles.

Like me, for instance. My watch is still set on Eastern Standard Time, or God's Natural Time, as I like to think of it. Of course, to be quite consistent I should use Eastern Standard as adjusted for Melbourne's geographical displacement from the 150E meridian (which would then be Genuine God's Natural Time), but I am prepared to make some concessions to my fellow citizens.

But advancing my watch is a different matter. After all, if God had really wanted us to move to this unnatural system he would have made the sun rise an hour earlier.

When you get right down to it, that's the problem. Maybe people don't mind getting up at 6.30 a.m. if they can pretend it is 7.30 instead. One could achieve exactly the same result as that obtained by Daylight Savings Time merely by advancing all the activities of the day one hour — start work at 8 instead of 9, knock off at 4 instead of 5 — but this is too simple an approach. Governments decide they must kid the citizens along that everything is as before — rise at the same hour, work at the same hour and so on.

Perhaps the ultimate argument is that people can't bring themselves to get up an hour earlier in the morning. Maybe so. In the 9 September 1971 *Village Voice*, Michael Zwerin has an article about the problems of getting it up at all (Joanna Russ has some book reviews in the same issue, but let's not be too parochial). Zwerin knocks around his subject a little, relating Richard Neville's story about writing up his visit to a brothel for his school paper. Neville omitted only one point from his article — the fact that he couldn't get an erection. Zwerin takes over from this point and relates his own sad story

(which doesn't read too badly, looking at it fairly closely), which is basically that his formerly stalwart prick 'went unreliable . . . for most of a year'. It is worth quoting some of Zwerin's descriptions of his feelings:

I leered at every woman who attracted me, consciously reducing them to objects as therapy so that I could once more relate to them as people in bed. During the worst of it there had been women I wanted and might have had but shunned . . . women with whom I feared stage fright, heavy women on the scene, women with whom failure might be broadcast. Not realizing in my temporary insanity that she might consider it *her* failure and thus have as much interest in secrecy as I would. Or that any such failure might be her *fault*.

I close this little episode by reporting that our hero seems to have recovered from his temporary difficulties.

Now, what would L. Ron Hubbard have to say about this? Not specifically Hubbard, perhaps, but the Hubbard syndrome-sufferers, who view mankind and men as Machines. It is particularly interesting to speculate on this following the recent publication of Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, as the distinctions between Skinner's ideas and those of Hubbard/Scientology are not great: man is a machine which can/must be controlled and perfected.

The point about machines, of course, is that they don't make mistakes too often. Campbell's great line on auto accidents was that it was all the fault of the driver — the 'nut behind the steering wheel'. Accidents occurred because of human error, not because autos were designed incorrectly.

How carefully the point is made for me! The plain assumption is that humans make mistakes only when they malfunction, and such malfunctions are 'their fault'. One of the grosser idiocies of our times is the pretence that humans don't make mistakes, and if they do there are always obvious explanations beyond the control of the malfunctioner.

This is ridiculous, of course. But it is convenient. For a start, workers in the 'soft sciences' would be out of a job if the assumption man-as-machine were to be dropped. Governments would be unable to function in their present authoritarian manner.

But suppose, instead, we were to assume that humans normally and naturally make mistakes, and tried to work out a society to fit that (actual) situation. Motor cars would have to be designed so that when the drivers made their expected errors, they would suffer little damage — or as little damage as possible. Psychiatrists might find it hard to earn a crust when everyone learned to expect to make mistakes and not to feel guilty about them at all. Michael Zwerin wouldn't worry too much when he failed to get an erection.

As a graduate student in mathematics, I guess I can be expected to perform better than average on mathematical calculations. But I am extremely likely to make a mistake on any given calculation. The only thing which keeps me going is that I *expect* to make mistakes, and act on that expectation. When one is willing to see a mistake at every turn, one usually gets fairly close to the truth, in the end.

Yesterday I took a bus down to John Bangsund's to try to straighten out some DUFF and Australia in '75 problems. On his door was pinned, 'Please do not adjust your mind — the fault is in reality'. Oh well, I thought, quotations from Chairman John Foyster are better than nothing. Inside I managed to spend several hours with '75 Australians discussing the attempts of various groups of American fans to sabotage our bid. (Maybe that doesn't read quite as it should, but it is quite close to the truth.) On the way home (JB drove me) I described to him the events at my daughter's athletic sports. It was

a wonderful shambles, as anyone who has tried to arrange races for three- and four-year-olds will know. Although these young children were supposed to be divided into three races, they all wanted to run together, and eventually there were two heats, some children holding hands, others walking, all bumping into one another and no one running much.

At the end they all got a prize — a piece of chocolate.

'It's not very realistic, you know,' said John. 'It won't prepare them for life in society.'

I agreed, because John was leading into another of my standard pieces.

Of course John was right; maybe the point is not simply that, but that things should be done differently. At present all countries spend a lot of money on 'educating' children, in preparing them for life in adult society. Perhaps we would be wiser and even save money if we were to do things the other way around. Perhaps we should make society a fit place for children. Having done it once, it should not be necessary to re-do it often. George Wald has a similar argument on pollution/population problems. Our main task, in Wald's view, should be to make the world a fit place for children — or at least a better place for children than it is now.

But when you start talking about making the world a suitable place for children, you get all kinds of weird responses. Like now, for instance.

— John Foyster, 11 October 1971, reprinted in Jerry Lapidus's *Tomorrow And . . .*, No. 9, 1973

John Foyster's Greatest Hits, Part 3

John Foyster

George Turner's passion play

Perhaps what children and adults read tells us something about the kind of culture in which they live. Of course it would be rash to expect too much, but some hints or suggestions may emerge. Taking this line of thought a little further, we might be able to regard the popularity of a particular class of literature as an indicator of the quantity of some aspect of the culture.

The British comic paper *Eagle* survived with a quite high circulation for some twenty years from 1950, which suggests that whatever *Eagle* served its customers was a reflection of a relatively large proportion of the culture of those readers. The recent publication of a collection titled *The Best of Eagle* provides us with an opportunity to glance quickly at this latter-day *Boys' Own Paper*.

Eagle was intended, according to its first editor, to make use of the appeal of comics of the American kind, but without the 'deplorable, nastily over-violent and obscene' content, in order to 'convey to the child the right kind of standards, values and attitudes'. These 'children' ranged in age from 10 to 16 years, which may be a little surprising to the modern reader, for the contents of the collection seem a little unsophisticated for 14–16-year-olds.

What was it that *Eagle* conveyed? Well, the violence may be absent from a few stories (whether in prose or comic strip form) but in most of them it is up front. There is violence and there are violators — for most of the historical protagonists in *Eagle* stories, fact or fiction, are murderers or exploiters whose actions advance one empire or another. All this is written in a vicar's idea of how boys think and speak.

The fictional characters aren't very different, and the greatest of them was undoubtedly 'Dan Dare (Pilot of the Future)', which was for many readers the *raison d'être* of *Eagle*, and which also reflected the constant theme of *Eagle* — that goodness is associated with wealth and power, while wickedness is associated with poverty and foreignness.

'Dan Dare' may well have introduced many readers to science fiction. Although superficially not similar to the bulk of the science fiction of the period, it did share enough characteristics with the dregs of science fiction for readers of *Eagle* to feel relatively at home in the pages of *Authentic Science Fiction* and *The British Space Fiction Magazine*. In the section reprinted here, Dare and company are battling the niggers ('You know our green

friends then?) with the aid of the noble Aryon Therons. The purpose of all this battling is, of course, to establish a colony which will thereafter exist to produce food for the old country.

Since 1950, science fiction has been moving away from this goshwow sort of imperialist rubbish, and it would be difficult, though still possible, to find science fiction of this kind.¹ Some science fiction novels are relatively sophisticated, and it is pleasing to find an Australian novel in the advance guard. George Turner's *Beloved Son*, just published by Faber & Faber, is so much better than almost all of its contemporaries that one cannot help but wonder whether its virtues will be recognised.

Technically the book has vices as well as virtues: but let us first give some attention to other characteristics of the novel. The basic plot is a fairly standard one — the space explorers, sent off on a long voyage, return to find a much changed Earth — a much reduced population as a result of international violence and a society lacking some of the technical expertise of the earlier period. As a concession to his origins, George Turner has made one of the main characters an Australian, and in fact most of the novel takes place in a devastated Melbourne.

One by one the characters, whether explorers or Earthmen, achieve power of some kind upon this new Earth and are then corrupted — empires wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce. In the end *all* are brought low. The various actors in George Turner's passion play are sufficiently different to each excite our attention and sympathy, and each fall is for the reader a little dying.

Unfortunately *Beloved Son* is very much a science fiction *mystery* story. The first puzzle is that explorers cannot make out why the captain (the Australian) is in the exploration team at all. Now what they found on their excursion turns out to be of no importance at all, while the question about the role of the captain is the key to the whole story, and I cannot talk more about the events without answering questions which the reader should have the pleasure of dealing with. I will say only that the plot is fast-moving — but that introduces one of the vices to which I referred earlier.

I am tempted to assign the virtues to George Turner's writing and imagination and the vices to the science fiction genre. Consider, for example, this widely accepted statement of Theodore Sturgeon's about science fiction:

A good 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.

Beloved Son matches that closely — it could not have happened *at all* without its scientific content.

On the other hand, despite a firm allegiance to this scientific standard, George Turner's main interest in the novel is the human characters and the nature of their humanity, and not in the 'science'. The people in *Beloved Son* suffer real pain — the reader feels it — and they struggle to understand their changing environments — a problem with which we can sympathise. But just as we begin to involve ourselves in the human

struggle, George remembers that he is writing a science fiction novel and drags another bloody scientific rabbit out of the hat. Now it isn't that these changes are unnecessary — they are essential to the plot, as I've already indicated — but that they are disturbing: they interfere with the reader's interaction with the characters and their environment, and they do so violently.

It could be, of course, that George chose this particular structure deliberately to force the reader to confront problems of the kind (though not the magnitude) which his characters face. Just as we and they think the game is sewn up, another false wall moves, revealing further intricacy.

I believe that the tension between science and fiction in *Beloved Son* weakens it somewhat. The fault lies, however, not in George's arts but in science fiction itself, which subordinates life to pseudo-science.

Despite this, one may hope that *Beloved Son* will be recognised for what it is — a brave step in a new direction for science fiction. One opportunity for some initial reaction to *Beloved Son* will be at a science fiction convention to be held at the Melbourne Town House this Easter. George Turner will be one of the speakers — and there will be some pretty big guns from overseas as well. Brian Aldiss will be visiting from England, and Roger Zelazny is coming from the United States. A confrontation between these three would be worth travelling quite some distance to see.

— John Foyster, 3AR, 16–18 March 1978, published in *Anzapparatus*, ANZAPA, April 1978, as 'Dare to struggle, dare to win', plus the endnote reprinted below.

Note

- 1 Except, of course, in Australia. It is difficult to see what benefits derived to the writing and reading of science fiction in Australia from the publication of *Australian Science Fiction Review* and *SF Commentary*. It is not just that the fiction published in *Void* (or, more particularly, *Envisaged Worlds*) and *Boggle* is in general of a lower standard than that published in *Thrills Incorporated* (1950–52) but that Australian readers, for whatever reasons, nationalistic or simply fuggheaded, have deliberately blinded themselves to the inadequacies of this trash. At one extreme one finds the loonies like the chap at La Trobe University who, in a piece in the one issue of *Argo Navis* sent to me (and that only one issue was sent is something for which I am grateful), compared this stuff favourably with the contents of *Analog*. (Not, of course, that I think *Analog's* fiction is worth much, but that it is *possible* to publish worst fiction than *Analog* publishes, as is demonstrated by *Void* and *Boggle* in particular.) At the other extreme, and I include myself here, are those who have preferred, when writing about these books and magazines, to seek frantically for encouraging things to say about these publications, and have ignored the overwhelming amateurishness (in the *worst* sense of the word) of the whole business. Well, I think I've had about enough: in future if I am forced to write about Australian science fiction, it is going to have to be warts and all.

Bruce Gillespie

Reading Science Fiction: Beginnings

[This is a longer version of the talk I gave to the Spaced Out club meeting on Saturday, 15 February.]

This talk is a result of attending last year's Annual General Meeting of the Spaced Out society. During that meeting I became aware that many of those attending did not seem to realise that there was any science fiction before *Star Trek* hit the airwaves in the late 1960s.

My experience is entirely different from that of 'media SF' fans. I did not live in the same house as a TV set until I was 33 years old, and even now I am completely unfamiliar with such series as *Babylon 5*, *Blake's 7* and *Dr Who*. In 1973 I did see five episodes of re-runs of the first series of *Star Trek*. Since I haven't seen these series, I won't make any judgments about them. I'll just relate what science fiction means to me.

I'll take you back to 1952, the year before I began school. I'm listening to *The ABC Children's Session*, as it was called then. A radio serial begins. It is called *The Moon Flower*, and is written by G. K. Saunders. In that serial, a group of what sound like fairly ordinary people take off in a rocket and travel to the Moon. After much exploring, they find, at the very bottom of the deepest cave on the Moon, one tiny flower. We know now that that is unlikely, but in 1952 scientists still thought there might be some form of life on the Moon.

It is hard to describe the impact that that serial had on me. For a start, it was presented as being based on 'real science'. The serial was often slowed down for little lectures on travelling in free fall in space, or the extreme temperatures on the Moon, and stuff like that. It was all new to me. It offered at its end that thrill of discovering a tiny piece of life on the Moon — in an era when few people expected humans to travel in space until the year 2000.

So my first meeting with SF was via the greatest medium of them all — radio. That's how the situation stayed. I could find almost nothing that gave me the same thrill except for further G. K. Saunders radio serials during the 1950s. In one of them, its main characters make the first trip to the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, and there find a planet filled with people much like ourselves — who have never invented music. I've never met this idea in any other SF story. Again I felt the thrill of coming across ideas that nobody around me would ever have considered — that the world, our civilisation, might be entirely different from the way we expect it to be.

I suspect that my enjoyment of science fiction has changed little from my first impulses towards it.

By travelling into the future, one could imagine life to be better than, or at least very different from, the present day. Since I found ordinary life, and school, and church, and home, very boring, science fiction offered a great imaginary playground.

By travelling imaginatively into outer space, I could encounter endless varieties of experience that could

never occur on Earth. One of the few media that offered this insight was a comic strip, long since discontinued, called *Brick Bradford*. Brick Bradford lived in a top-shaped machine called the Time Top, and travelled not only throughout the universe, but backwards and forwards in time. *Brick Bradford* appeared in the *The Sun* comics supplement on Fridays, and was one of the few highlights of my childhood, except for the books of Enid Blyton. Today, Blyton's children's books are thought of as very oldfashioned, but many of her books were fantasies of the 'what if?' variety.

When my sisters and I were children, we were very lucky in our supplies of books. We joined one of the last of the commercial lending libraries, the Claremont Library in Malvern, and every few weeks took out a stack of books to read. When I was about nine, I took out a book called *A Princess of Mars*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. It had been written early in the twentieth century. It had 'Mars' in the title, so maybe it was the sort of book I was looking for. I was rather puzzled by its beginning. John Carter looks upward to Mars with great yearning, and somehow miraculously travels from Earth to Mars. Very unscientific, I thought, but I kept reading anyway. For a few years after that, I was convinced that Mars actually did consist of ancient dried-up sea bottoms and great cities protected by vast domes, and that beautiful princesses and mighty warriors flew in their airships across the red deserts, pursued by strange creatures. Reading *A Princess of Mars* for the first time is a frustrating experience. It ends with a cliffhanger. I found the sequel to it, *Thuvia, Maid of Mars*, and the fourth in the series, but it was many years before I came across a paperback of the third in the series. You had to read each one as soon as you had finished the previous book. Series novels are not an invention of J. R. R. Tolkien.

I still hadn't discovered what I was really looking for. The nearest I came to it, other than the Mars books, were some films shown at our local church. Each film had the advertisement for God at the end, but most of the content of the films were good solid science, well illustrated with cartoons or documentary photography. I wanted to become a scientist — but soon discovered my mathematics was hopeless, so I had to give up that ambition.

In 1959, when I was 12 years old, I made a momentous decision. Bored with what was left in the children's section of the Claremont Library, I crossed from one side of the library to the other, to the Adults Section. And where better to start than the Science Fiction shelves? I picked a book called *World of Chance*, by Philip K. Dick. This, I learned much later, was the British abbreviated version of Dick's first novel, *Solar Lottery*. I was blown off my feet. Here were more ideas than I could handle,



Where it all began: New Worlds, February 1960, and Galaxy, October 1961.

about politics, power, telepathy, predestination, and all sorts of subjects I had never encountered before.

The next two books I borrowed extended my notions even further. They were Jack Williamson's *The Humanoids*, a 1940s SF classic that featured not only all-knowing, all-caring robots but a rebel group that operated by telekinesis; and *Fury*, Henry Kuttner's novel about the remnants of Earth's people. Having been forced to leave Earth, they spend their days in domed cities deep in the oceans of Venus, and try to clear outposts in the wild Cretaceous jungles of Venus's land areas so that human civilisation can get started again. *Fury* had wonderful characters as well as vivid landscapes; and it had (to me) quite new ideas about heroic effort and the nature of civilisation.

1959 also saw me do something very important for the first time: out my limited weekly pocket money, I placed 2/6 (2 shillings and sixpence) on the counter of McGill's Newsagency in Melbourne and bought my first science fiction magazine.

I knew nothing about the science fiction magazines, except that they seemed to be the only regular source of SF that I could afford. British paperbacks were 4 shillings each, and the few American paperbacks that appeared in McGill's were 5 shillings each. The two magazines I could afford were the English monthly *New Worlds* and bimonthly *Science Fiction Adventures*. I liked the latter better, as it featured two novellas (long stories) each issue, whereas *New Worlds* featured a novelette, several short stories, and an episode of a serial.

Nevertheless, my mind was again blown away by the first serial I read in a magazine, Philip K. Dick's *Time out of Joint*, which was serialised in *New Worlds* rather than any of the American magazines. The main character, Ragle Gumm, appears to live in a sleepy coastal town in the year 1959. Unemployed, he sits around all day solving the 'Find the Little Green Man?' puzzle in the daily newspaper. Each night, he sends off his solution



in the mail. As he wanders around the small town, he becomes uneasy. Nothing quite adds up, and he begins to suspect that some of his neighbours are not who they claim to be. He finds a copy of *Time* magazine, dated 1999, with a picture of himself on the cover. He escapes by hiding in the back of a truck leaving town. When he gets out at the end of the journey, he finds himself in the world of 1999. He finds that humans have travelled to the Moon, and are now in revolt, firing rockets at targets on Earth. When he was solving the Little Green Man puzzles, Gumm was actually predicting where the next group of rockets would fall. He could never have done this if he had known what he was doing; hence the fake town (a town that, incidentally, resembles the coastal town Philip Dick was living in when he wrote the book).

Here, then, was the mightiest theme in science fiction, the theme that still keeps me interested: that not only is the world and the universe more interesting than mundane society believes it to be, but it could well be utterly different from anything we believe it to be. Carry this one point further, as Philip Dick did in his later novels, and science fiction becomes the main sceptical device for undoing all our most cherished beliefs about society and reality. A friend of mine called this 'testing ideas to destruction'.

I'm not sure whether film screen writers or TV writers are willing or able to 'test ideas to destruction', but the recent film *Minority Report*, for instance, based on a short story by Philip Dick, has the authentic flavour of science fiction. I still find the exciting ideas I crave in the best of the current SF novels and short stories, especially those by Greg Egan, who lives in Western Australia, and Stephen Baxter, in novels such as *Titan* and *Voyage*. I read much else besides science fiction, and much of it is much better written than SF, but SF novels and short stories still have ability, every so often, to slam you up against the wall and make you say 'I never thought of that before!'

— Bruce Gillespie, February 2003



This is a longer version of the talk Dick gave to the Spaced Out club meeting on Saturday, 15 February 2003. Dick gave his talk after me. Serves me right for inviting him to upstage me.

Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

The word, the image

In the beginning was the image

I first came to science fiction through the visual media of comics and movies. I remember being enthralled by the intoxicating adventures of *Brick Bradford* and his Time Top; by more exotic time travelling with *Alley Oop*; by the beautifully drawn space operas of *Flash Gordon*; and above all by the promise of a glittering future where only adventure, villains, spaceships, beautiful women and derring-do existed, all in the world of *Buck Rogers*.

The comics

In 1942 I was at boarding school in Sydney overlooking the harbour, when on the night of June 1st we were all woken by sirens, searchlights brightening the sky, and explosions, for this was the night that three midget Japanese submarines had entered Sydney Harbour and were attempting to torpedo as many ships as possible and were also tossing a few shells around. Teachers herded us all into air-raid shelters which had been providentially constructed for just such a contingency. The main reason why I remember this night was not the important one of World War 2 unequivocally impinging on Sydney, but rather that this was the only time at school when we were allowed — indeed, encouraged — to read comics, and I can still recall both *Buck Rogers* and *Don Winslow of the Navy*.

The school was then evacuated to temporary quarters in the Blue Mountains, and once again one of my most vivid memories is of yet another *Buck Rogers* comic. Clearly, even though I was only seven years old, I already knew that SF was the real world, and of much greater

relevance and importance, to myself at least, than the existence which less imaginative minds held to be reality.

The flicks

There were also Saturday afternoon movies, and the main attraction there, week after week, were the serials, where I discovered new sides to *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon*, was introduced to *The Green Hornet*, and was overwhelmed by the most surreal serial which was ever made. This was the world's first, and only, all-talking, all-singing, science fiction, western, lost-world thriller — *The Phantom Empire* — in 12 delirious episodes. My dreams and waking fantasies were coloured by this Gene Autry spectacular, by the rousing martial music, by the lost world of Murania, 20,000 feet below the Earth's surface and powered by vast seams of radium, by the shining robots, by the malignant Queen, and by Betsy King Ross and the Thunder Riders. (Ross was billed as the 'world's champion trick rider', and I often wondered whether this was because she rode her tricks in such a champion manner, or if it was just that she was good at riding while performing a few stunts). I recently saw this serial again — it's available on Zone 1 DVD — and, sadly, the magic had all but vanished. Or I had, in spite of comments to the contrary, grown up a trifle. Nonetheless, any true SF fan should probably watch at least one episode once in their life, as a curiosity if nothing else.

And then came the word

The words of Science Fiction insinuated themselves slowly into my life, and again through the comics: but



these were British comics — *Hotspur*, *Rover*, *Wizard*, *Adventure*, *Champion* — and images were sparse indeed, for the comics were prose stories. A few fell under the rubric of SF, and these, of course, were the highlights. Even the staid *Boy's Own Paper* (a magazine not a paper) occasionally published Science Fiction. In the years that followed, magazines devoted entirely to SF appeared, but these were few indeed,

and the stories and prose were quite execrable — the paradigm of these bottom of the barrel scrapings was *Thrills Incorporated* — but no matter how bad the writing (and at the age of ten to fourteen I was bereft of absolutely any sense of criticism whatsoever), I still devoured them and they still fueled my imagination. Some years later, I discovered *real* SF in *Astounding*, *Thrilling Wonder*, *Startling Stories*, *Planet* (a great favourite, for I have a weakness for Space Opera), *Galaxy*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction* . . .

The word became dominant, but the image was always there, having receded because I was too old, so I thought, for comics, and because films of Science Fiction, or even fantasy, were very sparse indeed, and even the few which were made were horrifyingly bad. I was beginning, you see, to develop some critical faculty.

Image vs. the word

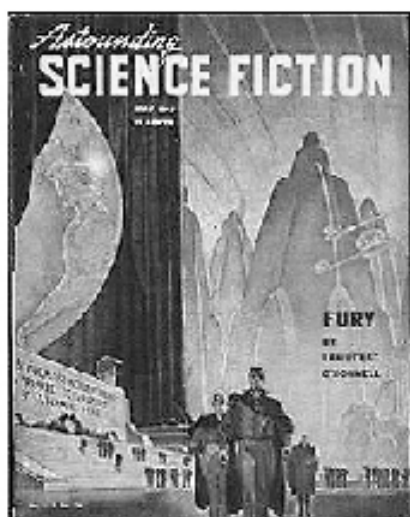
The differences between the word and the image were beginning to become clearer.

A *novel* is read at one's own pace — some are read quickly and require little thought, others are rich in detail or deal with more complex plots and ideas, and so require a more contemplative, thoughtful approach. Some present images which need to be nurtured in one's imagination and allowed to grow. Some have prose which demands rereading for the sheer pleasure of the

words and the sounds they create in the mind's ear (though such writing is regrettably rare in SF, indeed in literature as a whole) — works such as Jack Vance's *The Moon Moth*, for example, or Delany's *Neveryon* books, or, setting the way-back machine almost a century ago, some of Clark Ashton Smith, or Lovecraft's *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*.

In short, novels appeal to the *mind* and to *cerebration* much more than to sensory affects — their actions, their ideas, their resonances are all interior processes. While these may be emotionally stimulating, the emotions must be self-generated, and different individuals will have, may have, different responses.

Film, on the other hand, proceeds at its own, ineluctable pace — one second



per second, twenty-four frames worth in each unit of time. There is little, or no, time to pause, to reflect, to contemplate — all of which must be done once the film is ended. But, nonetheless, some films demand that images be retained in the mind's eye and recalled at a later time as the movie unfolds; words may need to be remembered; actions, even colours or camera movements must be recalled . . . As with the word, though, some films demand none of this, they are an accompaniment to the popcorn or the cola, and exist solely for the pleasure they give — which may be substantial even if ephemeral. Film (in the theatre or on television) is more than image, more than the visual — it also is accompanied by sound, and often (inevitably for larger-scale, popular works) the action is inextricably linked to music — the music may in fact at times be more important than the image. Film, as a whole, is thus a visceral experience, it appeals to the *emotions* and the *senses* much more directly than to the mind, the cerebral. Though, of course, exceptions abound. Some films demand attention to both the visual and the intellectual — *Mulholland Drive*, for example — others are satisfied with an appeal, even an assault, on the emotions or the senses.

Now the above are generalisations, and the better novels and films will always give these the lie — quality cannot be so rigidly constrained into either the heart or the head — but I believe that the word and the image are not always compatible or translatable one into the other.

The word and not the image

As an example, consider an early Ditmar winner — Italo Calvino's *Cosmicomics*. Here is a collection of stories all of which begin with a quote from a scientific paper or book before the story proper begins, and all are told by an entity, Qfwfq, who has existed since before time began. Some of the stories are fantasies, some are science fiction, some are metaphysical musings, but all are wildly surreal, and all force one to think and to try to embrace new concepts. For example in the story 'A Sign in Space', the quote is: 'Situated in the external zone of the Milky Way, the Sun takes about two hundred million years to make a complete revolution of the Galaxy', and the story follows:

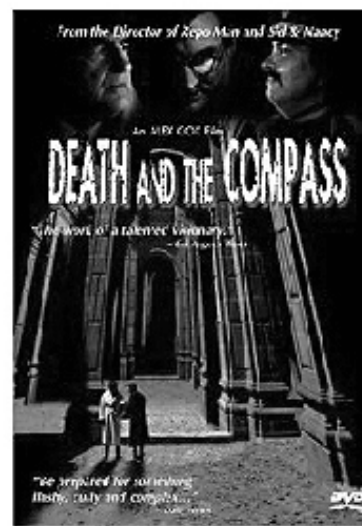
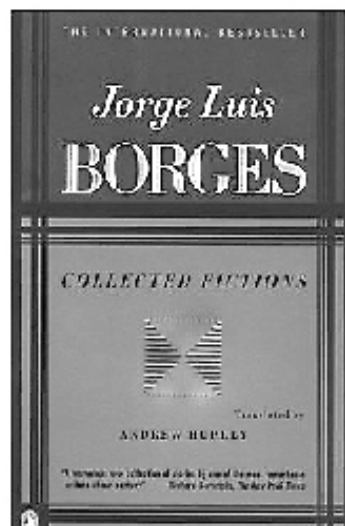
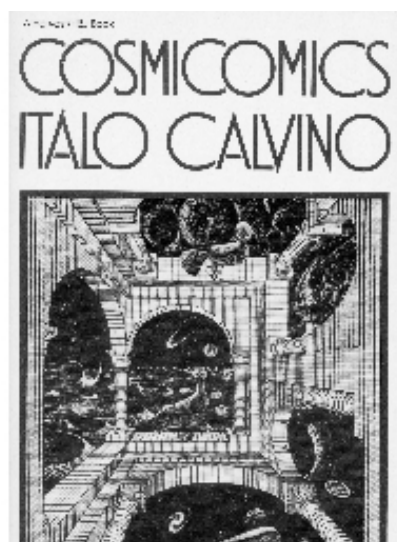
Right, that's how long it takes, not a day less, — Qfwfq said, — once, as I went past, I drew a sign at

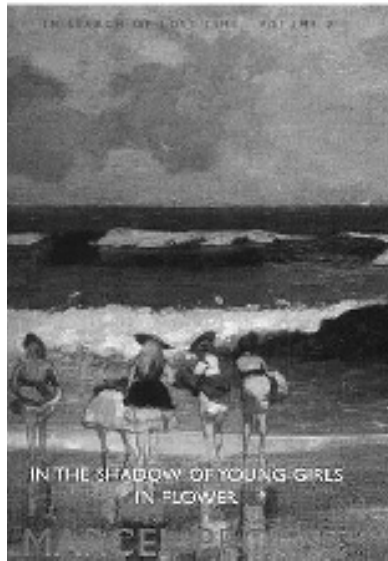
a point in space, just so I could find it again two hundred million years later, when we went by the next time around. What sort of sign? It's hard to explain because if I say sign to you, you immediately think of a something that can be distinguished from a something else, but nothing could be distinguished from anything there; you immediately think of a sign made with some implement or with your hands, and then when you take the implement or your hands away, the sign remains, but in those days there were no implements or even hands, or teeth, or noses, all things that came along afterwards, a long time afterwards. As to the form a sign should have, you say it's no problem because, whatever form it may be given, a sign only has to serve as a sign, that is, be different or else the same as other signs: here again it's easy for you young ones to talk, but in that period I didn't have any examples to follow, I couldn't say I'll make it the same or I'll make it different, there were no things to copy, nobody knew what a line was, straight or curved, or even a dot, or a protuberance or a cavity.

and so on... It seems mad, but, then, how *would* you make the very first sign in space when space is all the same — a void — and signs are not yet conceptualised? How *is* a *new* thought formulated? How is a new thought made real? How can potentiality become entelechy?

Another story begins with a quote that points out that Hubble's data show the Universe is expanding, and so, some billions of years in the past, the matter of the Universe must have been concentrated at one point; and when Qfwfq begins his narration, it's something like: 'You have no idea how crowded conditions were at that time' . . .

These stories may be read simply as surreal japes, or at a deeper level as criticisms of Science which, when it omits the human element, is arid, cold and lifeless — or, as many would pejoratively put it, 'academic'. Yet again, the stories may be read at an even deeper and richer level as saying that while Science without humanity is lifeless, when it involves the human, the combination becomes something greater than the sum of its parts — science and emotion (the head and the heart) meld synergistically. But, as the quote above shows, the stories are fundamentally elaborations of ideas, metaphysical themes, manifestations of the absurd in everyday existence, and as such, I can not see how they could





be transformed into a visual medium. Perhaps into animation, but so much of the intellectual content would be lost that the translation would be pointless.

More than a few of the stories of Jorge Luis Borges are SF or fantasy, and again, these are cut from the same cloth as *Cosmicomics* — metaphysical musings and mostly untransformable. In his story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (a Phil Dickian story well before Dick began writing) the events are presented as a dry, scientific report, like most of Borges' tales. It is found that two copies of the same edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* differ in that one has a reference to Uqbar and the other does not. In the following years, more discrepancies arise and more references to Uqbar, and then to the realm of Tlön, appear. Then an Encyclopedia of Tlön, followed by objects from these unreal regions, towns, countries are found, and as more people learn of the imaginary places through the now real artefacts, the customs and mores of the mythical world begin to take over our 'real' world. The story could be read as mass hysteria, or as how reality is determined by what we collectively believe, or as a parable of the way in which Science works (the Earth is flat — then round; it is the centre of the Solar System — then not; atoms do not exist — then they do; quanta are not real, just a stop-gap concept — then they are real . . . as more people believe in these ideas, they become real, and realer). Perhaps this story could be made into a film, but how would it be done? and how would it hold the interest? The story is only a few pages long, and its brevity is part of, a major part of, its impact.

The only Borges story that I know has been filmed is 'Death and the Compass', which was made into an independent movie under the same name. The story is told as a story (a relatively unusual process for Borges) and is in the genre of crime and detection. It is only a few pages long, but the film needs almost 90 minutes to recast it visually, and then misses some of the esoteric substrata. Available as a Zone 1 DVD, it is worth a look.

Finally — and to a novel which is not SF — the best novel I have ever read is Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* — a novel that is generally considered to be unfilmable, even though some have tried (usually attempting to treat about 10 per cent of the book only). The most successful attempt deals only with the last section *Finding Time Again*, but Ruiz's film of this (*Time Regained*) is incom-

prehensible to anyone who has not read the book. As the translator of the first part of the novel (*The Way by Swann's*) puts it:

Proust's work may be enjoyed on every level and in every form — as quotation, as excerpt, as compendium, even as movie and comic book — but in the end it is *best* appreciated in the way it was meant to be experienced, in the full, slow reading and rereading of every word, in utter submission to Proust's subtle psychological analyses, his precise portraits, his compassionate humour, his richly coloured and lyrical landscapes, his extended digressions, his architectonic sentences, his symphonic structures, his perfect formal designs.

Novel and film

But there are, of course, many novels that may be made into films, even if the basic nature of the novel (its appeal to the head) is not that of the film (its appeal to the heart).

My favorite SF novel is Henry Kuttner's *Fury*, which first appeared in *Astounding* under the by-line of Lawrence O'Donnell. To digress briefly, Bruce Gillespie recently told me that William Burroughs in one interview, when asked what SF had influenced him, replied that at the moment he could only think of Kuttner's *Fury*. Burroughs was the author of a number of books that were banned in Australia for being pornographic — novels such as *Nova Express* and *The Naked Lunch*. Kuttner's novel is complex and multi-layered and discusses the many strata of society in his imaginary world with marvellous economy. The differences of his future, compared to ours, are given often in throwaway snippets of background behaviour or customs or even items of clothing. The world he envisions has humanity dying — in luxury and hedonism — in 'keeps' (giant bubble-enclosed cities) deep within another planet's ocean. The land surface above is violently inimical to humans, populated by savage creatures with bizarre attributes and powers. Into this system of layers of society and layers of environments — reflecting the layers of the psyches of the protagonists — comes an antihero, tragically stripped of his birthright (of which he is ignorant) who becomes the villain-hero, the tainted saviour who rekindles Mankind's hope and energy and redeems humanity.

The novel is extremely visual in its description of the world above and the world below, it has incidental piled on incidental (and incident on incident), and has a multitude of characters from the bizarre to the aristocratic elegant. It is also well written. This is one novel that I wish would be made into a movie — and it could be done without losing anything of importance.

Film and novel

But, just as some stories are untranslatable into another medium, so some films are not capable of being transformed into novels without losing what makes them so powerful. Here, a very recent example is Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report*. This may have had its genesis in a Dick story, but so much in the film is quintessentially visual, so much of the story, and especially the *background society* is given us as image, that it transcends the original word and becomes its own self — virtually *sui generis*.

There are aspects of the movie which are there for effect and not for reasons of logic, but these illogical effects are to enhance the nature of the future society — its difference and yet its connection to ours. Some ideas (the computer) *could* be described in words, but to see Tom Cruise use it as though he were conducting an orchestra tells us more in a few brief frames of film than pages of words — and it tells us directly through our senses (sight and sound, for here music plays a key role) — and informs us as well of the brave new technological world he inhabits. Yet again, the 'spiders' seeking out eyes to identify (eyes as doorways into the soul) reveal, in their few minutes of screen time, much of the high technology of this brave new world, and the loss of personal freedom inherent in it, and the terror they invoke — much more emotionally than a description in words.

The film moves so fast, so breathlessly, that only after it is over can one engage the mind and think about what has been presented. For example, the loss of personal freedom and, in a way, identity — for no matter where one is, not only is Big Brother watching, but so is his relative, the Little Salesman. And the Salesman is insistent, shouting, inveigling, cajoling, all in the name of the big sell. Which is worse — to know that 'they' are watching, or to be inundated by the torrent of unstop-

pable, inescapable advertising? But the future is also awash with technological wonders, and so if these marvels come concurrently with the technology of surveillance, who would *not* relinquish, bit by bit, personal freedoms for these new pleasures? Even to us watching, the visual spell is so great that the question of what has been given up, and what has been gained, is peripheral to the adrenaline rush engendered by action, sound and music. Such questions come only with reflection once the film is over.

A film of some years ago was *Dark City*, and here, too, is an example of the visual having preference and a more immediate impact over the word. The eerie quality of the *Dark City* milieu could be described, but direct apprehension of it through the image is much more effective. The revelation towards the end of the film as to what the *Dark City actually is*, with the camera pulling slowly back and revealing the secret of Shell Beach — that there is no, can be no, such beach, because of the nature of the City itself — is so visceral and emotionally involving that 'mere words could not do it justice'.

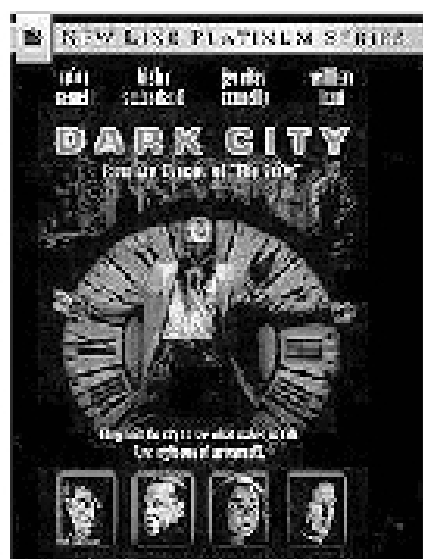
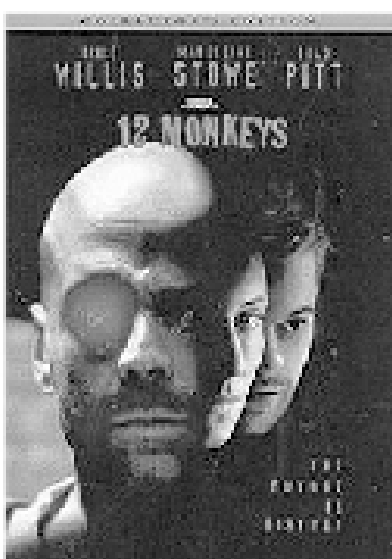
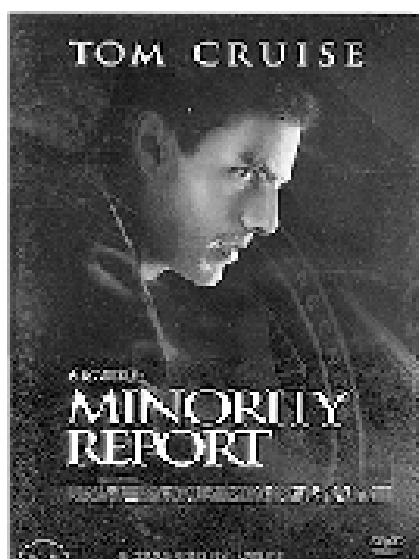
Perhaps the only paradox-free time-travel movie I have seen (and with a happy ending) is *12 Monkeys*, another film that could be a novel, but which would lose in the translation — especially for the music. A few frames of film as Cole looks up and sees the roof of the emporium change from past to present, wholeness to ruin, says more in a few seconds, and has more impact, than hundreds of words, because it tells us so economically of the changes wrought by the plague, of the loss of hope, and the death of humanity, and does it so emotionally.

The image and the word

I believe, and have tried to justify that belief above, that while the word and the image may speak to different components of any individual, they are not antagonistic, but complementary — two facets of that specifically modern branch of entertainment and thought known as Science Fiction. We, as humans, need, and respond to, both the intellectual and the emotional — the cerebrate and the visceral — the heart and the head.

We cannot deny either, but must embrace both . . .

— Ditmar (Dick Jenssen), February 2003



Thirteen Guests at Dinner

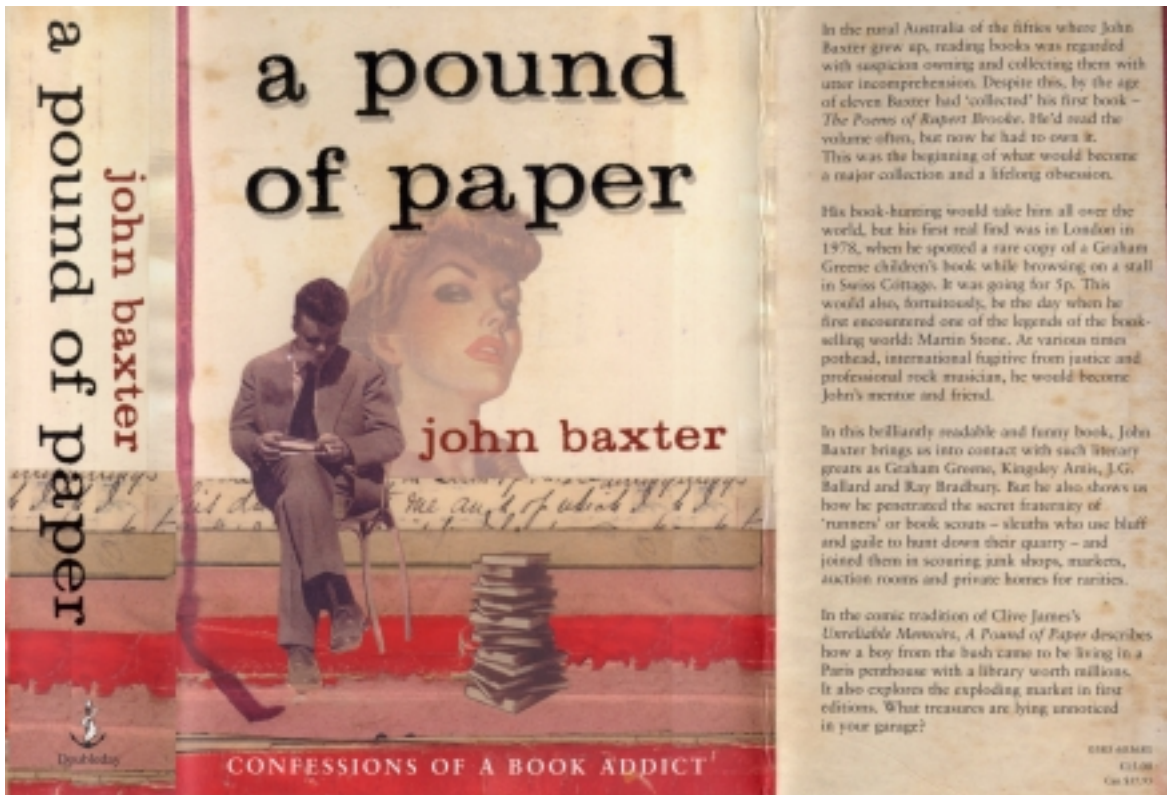
by Ditmar (Dick Janssen)

Until the mid sixties, or thereabouts, and before Hollywood discovered the immense profits to be garnered from the science fiction blockbuster, if you happened to be an addict you received your SF fix in the pages of the pulps. And, with the paucity of available material, dedicated fans could read almost everything that was written, and often not only did, but, indeed, read more than just the words of their passion, following their favourite authors into the fields of fantasy, detective, western and adventure fiction.

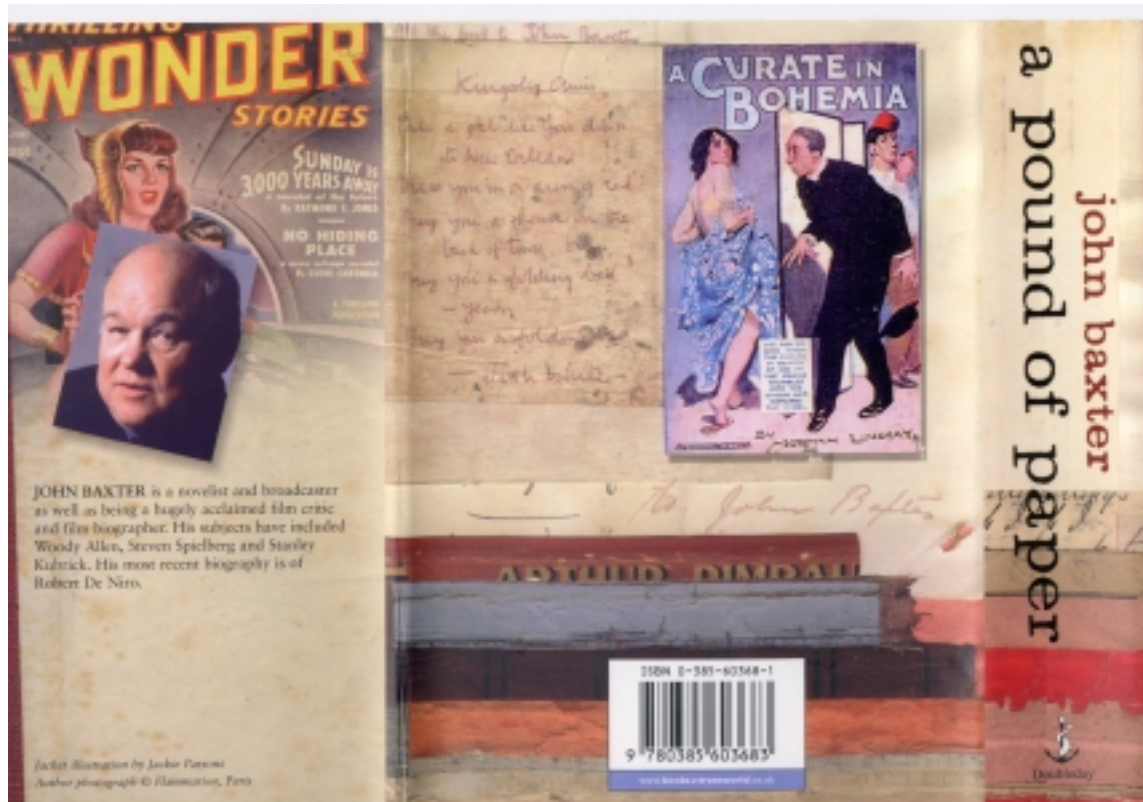
For many of us here in Melbourne, the love of the words of science-fiction, and the words themselves, stayed alive and with us throughout our lives. Some of us, like **Race Mathews**, moved into fanzines; others — **John Foyster**, **John Bangsund**, **Bruce Gillespie** — used those magazines as a forum for criticism of the field because their appreciation of the medium forced them to seek ways of improving the quality of that which they loved. Still others — **Lee Harding**, **Damien Broderick** — wrote their own stories. And brave souls, such as **Merv Binns**, spread the word by opening their own bookshops. Often, for the more energetic, their proselytising involved a mixture of these endeavours. But for some, their love of writing took them into other areas, and for **John Baxter** that meant the literature and biography of film and filmmakers.

In the early sixties, John tottered on the edge of Big Name Fandom, but before he crossed that line and, as some would have it, fell into the true, real world, he moved overseas to pursue film, film history and film criticism. When in Los Angeles he was, as he himself says: 'mainly a film journalist and so, a screenwriter. I used to write short stories. What I've written in the last ten years have been books about the cinema, books from the European perspective on the cinema, particularly American cinema'. When he moved to Paris in the winter of 1970 he found that he could 'write about Woody Allen in a totally different way than [he] would have in Los Angeles. [Paris] changed [his] way of thinking completely'. In short, 'John Baxter is a renowned author, lecturer, film historian and commentator for the BBC. He is also the *Dean of Faculty* in Paris for *Paris Through Expatriate Eyes*'.

John's books include biographies of Woody Allen, Steven Spielberg, Luis Buñuel and Stanley Kubrick. His latest offering is *A Pound of Paper*, which is a nostalgic reminiscence of his life as lover of words and print and books. It is a charming, delightful read, and I would hope, would like to imagine, that every SF reader has a copy of it in his or her library.



John recently paid a visit to Victoria, mainly, as I understand it, to gather information for a biography of the Australian artist **Norman Lindsay**. Lindsay was an iconoclast, and led what many of his day (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) believed to be a scurrilous, scandalous existence filled with, what was then, unorthodox sexual activity — living simultaneously with more than one woman, and maintaining at the same time a happy household. (A somewhat fictionalised account of part of Lindsay's life will be found in the film *Sirens*). One of my most beloved possessions, and an item that adds to the myth of Lindsay's reprehensibility, is a rare Fanfrolico Press edition of *The Complete Works of Gaius Petronius* translated by Lindsay. Since this includes the then notorious *Satyricon*, and since Lindsay himself illustrated it with lashings of bare-breasted nudes (who prefigure today's silicone-enhanced beauties) and some coy male nudity, it is a work that was reviled on its appearance, and so is to be treasured.



John is a generous person, and not having seen many of us for about thirty-five years, decided to throw a dinner for a select few, entrusting **Lee Harding** to select those fortunate few, and the venue. That venue was a Lebanese restaurant, the Kanzaman, and we were given the inner banquetting room, a large area only slightly smaller than the main dining area, on whose walls were murals copied from Academic and Romantic art of the nineteenth century — painters such as Lord Leighton, Casper David Friedrich and Jean-Leon Gerome — or so I thought. Now it was not Lee's fault, as the number of guests was initially fourteen, but, since **Iola Mathews** was ill, and had to miss the festivities, only thirteen of us sat down to dinner with John. It was not a last supper, except — as I fervently hope — in the sense that it will likely be the last time we fourteen will be together. But perhaps not.

The room, as I have said, was the banquet area, and the food was, indeed, a banquet. Wine was chosen by **John Baxter**, but since **Lee Harding**, **Bruce Gillespie** and almost everyone else was a self-proclaimed connoisseur, he had much help with the selection. With the food, the wine and the guests — especially the guests — the conversation was lively and grew livelier as the courses continued to arrive. How could it be otherwise when there were at the table such as **Janeen Webb** and **Jack Dann**? Jack, as we all know, is a likable person, effervescent, extrovert and overflowing with the ever-ready quick quip. Do I exaggerate? Very well, I exaggerate, I am large, I contain hyperboles (or am I misquoting there?). But, you see, some time ago I learned that Jack and I shared an epiphany in our adolescent years when we first read Abraham

Merritt's *The Ship of Ishtar*, and fell forever under its spell. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, not to like someone who shares one's esoteric passions.

With so many at table, John Baxter's time with any one of us was limited, but I still managed to get my fifteen minutes of discussion with him. And, inevitably, the talk began to devolve around film. John's favourite film, so I discovered, was *The Magnificent Seven*, which while it was a thoroughly enjoyable movie, was not quite as good as Cocteau's *Orphée*. So we disagreed there, but still managed to throw quotes at each other from the two movies. Having lived in Paris for so long, John was able to manage more snippets from Apollinaire than I . . . Talk then moved to restaurants.

It seemed, at the time, that we were a group of school friends at a reunion — we all had put on, as Proust described, wrinkled masks and grey wigs and, for some, a slightly stooped air, but these were only the accoutrements of the moment designed to add an air of slight mystery to the evening, and to banish any suspicion of the quotidian from the event. But, alas, on reflection — well after the party was over, and we had all dispersed — reality seeped back in, and I knew that we were now part of the old guard.

But what a guard. Almost everyone at the table either had a life in the world of words, or had publications to their name, or were part of the SF world of Australia. The only exception was Lee Harding's daughter **Madelaine**,¹ and that was simply because Maddy was too young for such exaltation.

In the real world of Science Fiction, there were **Jack Dann**, Nebula, Hugo, Aurealis, World Fantasy and Ditmar Award winner; **Janeen Webb**, Aurealis, World Fantasy and Ditmar winner; **Lucy Sussex**, Aurealis, Chandler Award and Ditmar recipient; **Julian Warner**, DUFF winner; **Merv Binns**, Chandler and Ditmar winner; **Lee Harding**, Ditmar and Australian Children's Book Award winner; **Damien Broderick**, Aurealis and Ditmar winner; **Dick Janssen**, Ditmar winner; and **Bruce Gillespie**, who has won more Ditmars than the rest of the table put together. The support staff comprised **Helena Binns**, who keeps Merv under control, and **Elaine Cochrane**, who manages Bruce. Elaine has been responsible, as editor, for quite a few books, but, with few exceptions, editors are the behind-the-scenes manipulators.

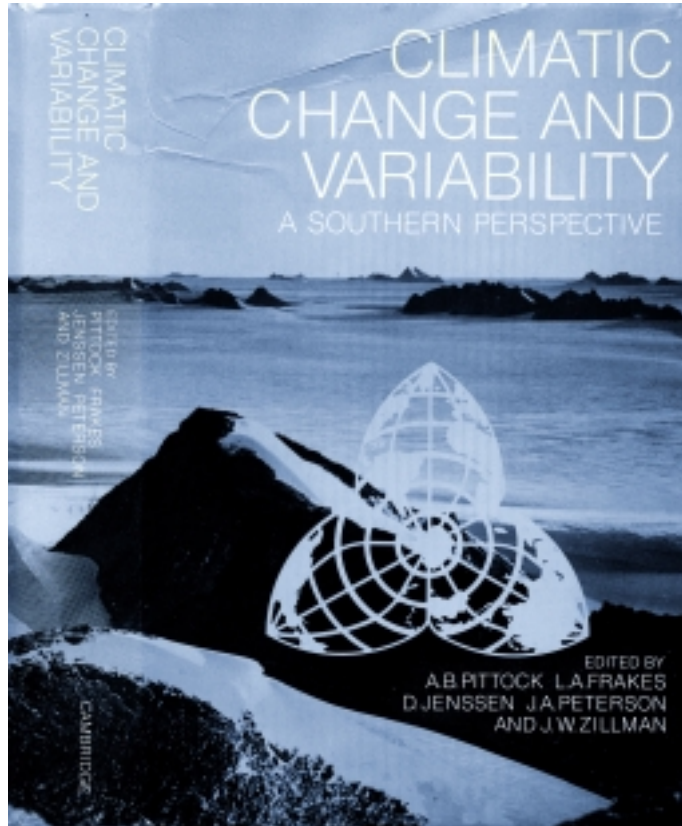
Some at table had books outside the SF world. **Race Mathews** (who was the founder of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club) has several books to his credit, the latest of which, *Jobs of Our Own*, won the Chesterton Society's *Outline of Sanity Award* for 2002. **Lucy Sussex** also writes mystery stories, such as *The Scarlet Rider*, biographies (*The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*), and has edited anthologies (*Altered Voices*).



And **Dick Jenssen** has several book-sized publications, only one of which, however, is both from a recognised publisher (*Cambridge University Press*) and is hard cover — *Climatic Change and Variability: A Southern Perspective*. Even then he is only one of five editors. I know that this is shameless trumpet-blowing on my part, but if I don't blow it, who will?

In retrospect, then, the evening was memorable for the food, the wine and especially for the pleasure of the company — a company predominantly old and grey, but comprising a group who have known each other for the bulk of their adult lives, some for over fifty-five years. Reflection brings home to me just how fortunate my life has been, and how lucky I am to have been blessed with such travelling companions.

Dick Jenssen



The Dinner *Photos by Ditmar*

John Baxter selects the wine



For some reason, and I suspect genetics, fen seem to possess a conflation of traits — amongst many other behavioural quirks, they are of the magpie mentality and find it impossible to discard anything, no matter how useless; they have a fondness for cats; they are masters of the forceful opinion; and they are wine connoisseurs. If, as here, they are also the Gracious Host, the selection of wine becomes a welcome joy — but also a task that must be performed with perfection when so many of the guests gathered are equally discerning. So John is fulfilling his duty with great care — a job which must be both apt and succinct, in order to satisfy the urgent needs of those at the table.

The Thirteen



If one looks carefully, all thirteen guests at the dinner may be seen or surmised. From left to right about the table we have: the hand of **Race Mathews** (all politicians, ex or otherwise, have outstretched palms), **Helena Binns**, **Merv Binns**, **Lee Harding**, **Maddy Harding**, **Julian Warner**, **Janeen Webb** (barely visible), *Mine Host* **John Baxter**, **Jack Dann**, **Lucy Sussex**, **Elaine Cochrane**, **Bruce Gillespie**, and the hand, discreetly reaching for the wine, of **Damien Broderick**. The unseen, but immediately inferable, thirteenth feaster is the photographer, **Dick Jenssen**. The attitudes of the guests attest to their personalities — some concentrate on food, others on wine, some prefer to talk, some to listen, and others to record events electronically . . .

Damien Broderick

A single hand hardly does justice to **Damien**, and so he has, uniquely amongst the guests, a photo devoted to himself alone. What more can I say? — except to read his works, bearing in mind the air of quizzical amusement displayed. Or perhaps that look is directed solely to the photographer, and his risible behaviour?





Lee is a doting father — and with a daughter as lively and attractive as **Madelaine**, who can blame him? Maddy brought youth and freshness to the gathering — the combined ages of those dining is conservatively estimated to be roughly 650 years (what a pity a few more were not present in order to bring the total to a full thousand!). Fathers tend to be doting, but even so, Maddy's gifts are fully appreciated by Lee . . .

Lucy

From the left: **Lucy Sussex**, **Janeen Webb** (still discreetly hidden) and **Jack Dann** standing: in front of them are **Elaine Cochrane**, **Bruce Gillespie**, and **John Baxter**. Lucy's relaxed attitude, smiling composure (and beautifully-coloured clothes) are complemented by Bruce's red-eyed intensity. The red is not because Bruce is desperate for the next bottle of wine — though that may be a contributory cause — but is due to the flash of the camera . . . the resulting image, though, looked too good to fix. A pity their feral quality cannot be seen in this small image . . .



Photos by Helena Binns

So fly our yesteryears...



Hands across the years. A 'long-time-no-see' moment as **John Baxter** and **Merv Binns** greet each other. Behind them, and adding more than a touch of aesthetic beauty to the evening, are some of the murals adorning the Banquet Room of the Kanzaman restaurant. The murals were copies of works of some of Merv's favorite artists — Gerome, Friedrich, Leighton . . . Inasmuch as Helena Binns and I also share Merv's fondness for these painters, the environment was immediately appealing — and made even more pleasurable by the guests as they arrived, and by the food and drink . . .

When shall we three meet again...



The effuse greetings completed, and the years broached, **John** and **Merv** are joined by **Lee Harding** for a 'holy triumvirate' photo. Merv, as ever (and like me), is wearing a tie. More and more frequently, we two seem to be only ones thus attired. Ah . . . the chains of early upbringing are difficult indeed to discard, but sometime before I shuffle off I must unshackle myself.

Eager and early



The early arrivals - from the left: **Dick Jenssen**, **Elaine Cochrane**, **Bruce Gillespie**, **Damien Broderick**, **John Baxter**, **Lee Harding**, and the beautiful **Madelaine Harding**. Although others are still to arrive, we few, we happy few, are already well into the wine and ensuring that our enjoyment of the evening will be one to remember (unless, of course, we imbibe too well).

Collusion, effusion and imminent contusion

Janeen Webb greets the off-screen **John Baxter**, **Jack Dann** and **Dick Jenssen** exchange smiles of recognition, while, almost obliterated, **Damien Broderick** displays his *sang-froid*. In a moment, however, Jack will bond with Baxter for a momentous decision . . .



Wine

. . . and that decision is, of course, *the wine!* I have no idea what the choice was, nor, indeed, what the choices were, except that they were excellent. You see, I am one of the minority of SF fans whose genetic disposition toward wine, and its connoisseurship, is sadly (and the word is well-chosen) lacking. I will drink almost anything placed in front of me, which is why, I guess, I do not drink much at all. My weakness is for whisky, and whisky alone. But not so the others dining that night! Glance again at the photos and see the joy on the drinkers' visages . . .



such as that on Elaine's face.² Though her smile *may* be directed at her husband **Bruce Gillespie** opposite who has clearly offered (perhaps, even, demanded) to taste the new bottle. **Lucy Sussex** is politely awaiting Bruce's approval. The waiter is also keen for Bruce's nod, and so is on tippy-toe, if not tenterhooks, thus striking a balletic pose.

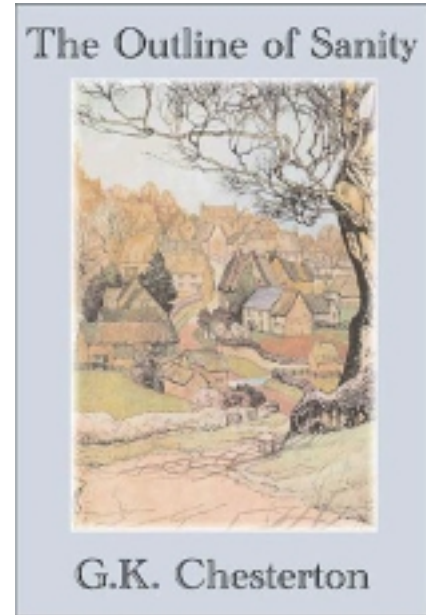
Those who walk not away from SF . . .

Major fan **Race Mathews** with Host **John Baxter**. Race's career is distinguished, and, like John's, has resulted in books removed from the world of SF. John's publications are more closely connected to SF inasmuch as the genetic coding responsible for an appreciation of, or more properly an addiction to, SF is also apparently linked to a passion for film, so that Baxter's books on film and filmmakers are not unexpected. Race's books are in the field of politics which is yet another example of his multitudinous talents. His latest book has won an award in the area of economic policies, and . . .



Sanity

... that honor is too important not to be seen. Here **Race Mathews**, at his home, is pictured with the American Chesterton Society's **Outline of Sanity Award for 2002**. The name of the award stems from the title of a book Chesterton wrote on Distributionism. On the mantel behind him is a photo of the latest Mathews — his grandson, Caleb Fabian. Not only fathers dote, but so do grandfathers.



Dick Jenssen

Editor's endnotes

- 1 Madeleine, I was told many years ago, was named after the restaurant much favoured by her parents, the Madelaine basement restaurant that used to be in Collins Street. In the 1970s and early 1980s, it was a favoured fannish gathering spot. It was at a 'Madeleine night' in the early eighties that John Flaus met Paul Harris, inviting him to join John in presenting 'Film Buffs' Forecast' on the new FM station, 3RMIT. On that station, now 3RRR, Paul Harris still presents the program long after John Flaus has moved to the country.
- 2 Unwittingly, Dick gives the impression here that Elaine still drinks wine. She would if she could, but in recent years she has been unable to enjoy the taste of wine (cause unknown). These days we don't buy bottles for the home cellar, so even I don't drink wine often. Besides, the northern Victorian and Yarra Valley wines I like have risen in price by as much as 1000 per cent since Elaine and I discovered them in the early eighties.