

# Steam Engine Time



**ERIC RAYMOND DEBATE  
HEINLEIN'S 'STAR BEAST'  
REVISIONIST VIEW  
of LE GUIN**

**Zoran Bekric  
Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)  
E. B. Frohvet  
Bruce Gillespie  
David J. Lake  
Yvonne Rousseau  
David Russell  
Jan Stinson  
and many others**

Issue 6

August 2007

# Steam Engine Time 6

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Covers of various books and magazines discussed in this issue; plus photos by Philip Harbottle (p. 3); Jenny Blackford (p. 9); Yvonne Rousseau (pp. 10, 12, 15, 17); Eric Lindsay (p. 11); Jason Von Hollander (p. 27); John Baxter (p. 34).

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E. B. Frohvet

Patrick McGuire

Steve Jeffrey

Joseph Nicholas

Lloyd Penney

Gary Dalkin

Franz Rottensteiner

Tony Keen

and many others

## GILLESPIE FANZINES GO ELECTRONIC

Because I cannot afford to continue supporting the cost of printing and posting my magazines from my irregular income, I am changing the distribution pattern from now on.

### STEAM ENGINE TIME

I will honour all subscriptions paid for paper copies; regular trades for magazines sent by post; regular suppliers of books for review; plus a print copy for each contributor.

All other readers are pointed towards the 'Bruce Gillespie' section of <http://efanzines.com>, where you will find each issue in .PDF format as it appears. If you let me know by email on [gandc@mira.net](mailto:gandc@mira.net), you become an official Downloader. I will email you when each future issue is published.

### SF COMMENTARY THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

The only hope I have of reviving these magazines is to make them available only on [efanzines.com](http://efanzines.com). Watch that space.

Editorial by Bruce Gillespie

## Farewell to Syd — and changes here at SET

Late last year I received the following email, which passed on a message from British agent, writer and fan **Phil Harbottle**: 'It is with profound sorrow that I announce the death of **Sydney J. Bounds**. Syd died peacefully in his sleep this morning, Saturday 24 November 2006, after just one night in a hospice, after leaving hospital.' Syd Bounds had just turned 86. He died of cancer.

Few readers or writers in Australia will have read Syd Bounds' many stories or novels. They appeared mainly in *Nebula* and *New Worlds*, the best-known English SF magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, or from smaller British publishers, such as Robert Hale, rarely distributed here. I've only ever found one of his books in a secondhand store. Readers of my magazines, especially *SF Commentary*, will have noticed that Syd Bounds wrote a letter of comment to almost every issue that he received. Because I did not receive a letter in reply to *Steam Engine Time* 5, I knew something was very wrong with him. A year earlier he had written to me that his landlord in Kingston-on-Thames, South London, was trying to throw out him and his collection. A few months later, *Ansible* reported that Syd had moved to an

address in the country, presumably a nursing home. I sent *SET* 5 there, but he was probably already too ill to reply to it.

Why notice the death of Syd Bounds when the year has been filled with news of the deaths of notable figures in SF and fandom, especially **Arthur Wilson (Bob) Tucker**, one of my favourite SF writers, and the mightiest fan of us all (subject of two different issues of *SF Commentary*), **Lee Hoffman**, the first and greatest female fanzine editor (*Quandry, Science Fiction Five Yearly*), **rich brown**, long-time fan-nish fan, **Dick Eney**, publisher of the *Fancylopedia*, and **Jack Williamson**, whose publishing career extended from the late 1920s until now? (More than any other novel, his *The Humanoids*, read when I was twelve, made me a lifetime SF reader.)

I'm paying special attention to Syd Bounds because of his wonderful quality of self-effacement (the rarest quality among writers) and the great kindness he offered me when I visited England in January 1974. Syd actually let me sleep upstairs in his bed in his tiny house in Kingston for a week while he slept on the settee downstairs. He also provided directions for making my way to central London during



Sydney J. Bounds, 1920–2006.  
(Photo: courtesy Philip Harbottle, Cosmos Literary Agency.)

a week of tube-system strikes. After surviving my visit, he was kind enough to keep in touch, often exhorting me to take up fiction writing (hah!), and sending a constant stream of news about the 1950s–60s British writers (such as Ted Tubb and Ken Bulmer) who were still alive.

The death of Syd Bounds has a symbolic importance. He never bought a computer. He kept himself solvent by writing everything on a portable typewriter. As I said in an email when he died: 'I keep saying that I publish



paper copies of my fanzines for people like Syd Bounds who are not on the net. With Syd gone, the temptation to rely purely on the internet for distribution becomes a lot stronger.'

**Dave Langford**, editor and writer of the monthly newszine *Ansible*, replied: 'Syd was one of the reasons to keep producing the paper *Ansible*. There are still a few others, but very few. It's a wrench each time an old, familiar name has to be removed (e.g. **Ken Bulmer**).'

The death of Syd Bounds gives strength to my arm in changing the distribution of my magazines so that I can afford to keep publishing them. Readers don't take me seriously when I say that my real income has been dropping steadily since the mid 1990s. In 2006-07 I earned about a quarter as much, in real terms, as I did in 1979-80. That year was the last time I published *SF Commentary* monthly, ending in Number 62/63/64/65/66, which was the last for eight years. (I didn't earn much in the early eighties.)

I feel that most readers can now download *SET*, *SF Commentary*, and even a long-promised revival of *The Metaphysical Review*, from PDF files on <http://efanzines.com>. Quite a few readers have paid subscriptions to ensure receiving paper copies of these magazines. I will honour *SET* subscriptions, but I plan to revive *SFC* and *TMR* as internet-only magazines. This will free me from the enormous economic weight I feel each time I think about publishing a magazine. It costs at least \$450 (printing and postage) to publish a 20-pager and \$900 to publish a 44-pager. I no longer have that kind of spare cash.

I still haven't said nearly enough about Syd Bounds. Truth to tell, I knew little about his life and career until he died. *Locus* paid him a fine tribute in the January 2007 issue:

Born November 4, 1920 in Brighton, Sussex, Bounds became hooked on SF when he read a Jack Williamson story in a 1936 issue of *Astounding*. He joined the Science Fiction Association in 1937, meeting Arthur C. Clarke and other fans. During WWII he served as a corporal in the RAF, and worked as an electrician on the Enigma machine. While in the service he co-founded SF fan group the Cosmos Club, and published his first stories in their

fanzine, *Cosmic Cuts*. After the war he worked in a factory, and since he loathed the job, he began working more seriously as a fiction writer in hopes of making a living that way. In the '40s he started writing hard-boiled crime novels and selling 'spicy' stories to the pulps, and he remained a working writer for the rest of his life, producing fiction under at least 24 personal pseudonyms.

Among those who paid him tribute was his agent and friend **Phil Harbottle**:

I spoke to Syd to thank him for all his friendship and literary support over nearly 40 years (he has been a cornerstone of my career as an editor/writer/agent) and told him of all the forthcoming books, and that he would be remembered etc., etc., fearing it might be a last conversation. Syd's voice was amazingly clear, his memory of the past events I touched on, sharp. I spoke to Mike at the end of the call and commented on how well Syd sounded. He said that Syd had 'rallied for the call'. Syd himself spoke of getting back home and hoped I could rearrange my trip to see him after Xmas. I've just sold his last western novel, *Savage Rides West*, to Robert Hale, who asked Syd to expand his last page a little. I said I'd agree this with Syd and insert it as a proof correction. Syd assured me he would be doing this when he got home!

Long-time British fan **Andrew Darlington**, in an interview (in *zone.sf.com*) with Syd conducted before he contracted cancer:

He considers that, 'unlike the young writers at the World Fantasy Convention who specialised, who wrote fantasy only and were like gods in this one tiny field', to him weird tales are only one aspect of a diverse lifetime's fictional output. He also writes for that most neglected of genres — the western — with some twenty prairie-pounding titles currently in print, as well as crime (including contributions to the long-running 'Sexton Blake' series), 'spicy' magazine stories, horror and fantasy. Then there's a profitable parallel line in

juvenile fiction.

In fact, when it comes to fingers in pies, Bounds only seriously loses out in the not-enough-pies for his multi-talented fingers part of the equation. 'People think writing is not work. But it's bloody hard work if you're doing it full-time. I used to wonder why am I sweating blood to get a few pounds, when I could walk into a factory job and have it easy? But of course, it's more interesting. Even though very few people make real money out of it.' So which, among his diverse spread of styles, is the most important priority now? SF? 'Well, it was when I started,' he chortles. 'Now, my main interest is surviving until the undertaker calls . . . !'

Writing is a solitary vocation. How does he deal with that? 'You get used to that, as a writer. Since my mother died I've always been on my own. It doesn't worry me.' Now, 'I've finished number seven in the "Savage" series of Robert Hale westerns, for the libraries. I'm just trying to work out some kind of outline for number eight. But it's hard going. . . . The books go direct into the libraries. They don't pay much, but the point is you get something out of PLR (public lending right). Plus there's a chance they'll be taken up by large-print editions. I think there's three of my westerns that have gone into large-print so far, and [my agent] Phil Harbottle has started re-selling some of my old 1950s' crime books to large-print. They, of course, go into the library too, and then you get more PLR. Over a period it adds up. It's a useful pension these days. And people are reading them, because when the PLR comes through they provide a list of how many times it's been out, at 2.4p each time anyone takes one out of the library. Which adds up.

Imagine living like that, year after year, on bits and pieces from work sold to the lowest-paying markets in Britain, returning to odd jobs when absolutely necessary, yet always optimistic, always working, always planning the next project? No wonder I never tried writing as way of earning a living; no wonder I'm honouring the memory of Syd Bounds.

## Afloat on a sea of books

A flood of books has been arriving at my house since last autumn, and what with illness and other life events getting in the way, I've gotten rather behind on writing about them all. This column, which may become a regular feature of *SET*, is one way to deal with the deluge.

***I Am Alive and You Are Dead:  
A Journey into the Mind of Philip K.  
Dick***

by Emmanuel Carrère (Translation from the French edition. 1993) (Picador, New York: 2004. 315 pp., tpb. ISBN 0-312-42451-5)

Philip K. Dick has had a lot of his books made into movies, some good, some not so good (it's mostly a matter of taste). But Emmanuel Carrère has written a sort of biography about PKD that uses a very interesting method: he writes in a third-person intensive, which allows him to get inside PKD's mind, as it were, and live his life through the writer's eyes. It's an amazing trick to try, and Carrère pulls it off brilliantly. I've not read many of PKD's novels (I can't remember even reading one, in truth), but this book made me want to go out and read all of them. I am not that easily led, people. This is a great read, even if you don't care for PKD's fiction. Highly recommended.

***A Rumor of Gems***  
by Ellen Steiber (Tor, New York: 2005. 459 pp., hb. ISBN 0-312-85879-5)

Ellen Steiber's first adult fantasy novel is an urban fantasy with street smarts, cool attitudes, and a fantasy plot just enough off the beaten path to be interesting to someone as jaded as me. In our world, precious and semi-precious stones have been touted as bearing special powers. In the port city of Arcato, 'somewhere in our modern world', gemstones have begun to appear, and they have all the mystical powers that humans have attributed to them over the centuries. So why is this a problem? Well, no one's controlling how the powers are delivered, nor to

whom they go. Gods and deceivers are also on the loose, and the four lead characters are each affected to different degrees by all this unearthly business. Readers who like Charles de Lint will eat this book up. I'm one, and I certainly did. Highly recommended.

***Dark of the Sun***  
by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (Tor, New York: 2004. 460 pp., hb. ISBN 0-765-31102-X)

***States of Grace***  
by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (Tor, New York: 2005. 332 pp., hb. ISBN 0-765-31390-1)

*Dark of the Sun* and *States of Grace* are the two 'Count Saint Germain' novels most recently in print. For those few who may not be familiar with Yarbro's most famous character, Francisco Ragoczy de Saint Germain is a vampire who's been alive since before the fall of the Roman Empire. Yarbro uses him as a method of exploring both what it might be like to live for centuries and not have one's most vital secret revealed, and the day-to-day lives of people in the merchant and upper classes in various time periods. *Dark of the Sun* is set during the sixth century CE, and uses the effects of Krakatoa's volcanic explosion to examine the power of superstition and the life of a trader. *States of Grace* takes the reader back to the Reformation era in Venice, Italy and in the Spanish Netherlands, where Saint Germain establishes a publishing house that becomes the target of the Spanish Inquisition.

I was put off from the Saint Germain novels many years ago, when I tried to read one set in Victorian England. I did not read another until *Dark of the Sun*, and was more than happy to move on to *States of Grace* after finishing the former. Both are excellent. It helps that the historical periods involved are of interest to me, and I suspect that's true for any reader. But the characters seemed more fully drawn here, and St. Germain's droll zombie assistant provided piquant humor when needed. I'd certainly search out more in this series, and avoid the time

periods I don't like. Highly recommended.

***The Collected Short Fiction  
of C. J. Cherryh***  
(DAW, New York: 2004; 640 pp., hb; ISBN 0-7564-0217-4)

C. J. Cherryh is best known for her novels, but she's written a fair amount of short fiction (one of her stories, 'Cassandra', got her her first Hugo). This tome contains all the contents of *Sunfall* (a collection of short works on what major Earth cities like London and Paris might look like in a far future), *Visible Light* (various short fiction), and a bunch of other stories from various anthologies (and the NESFA Press book *Glass and Amber*, now out of print, as well as one of the Darkover Grand Council program books). Intensity of viewpoint has been her forte for nearly all of her writing career. While it's on display to its greatest range in her novels, it's also in her short fiction, and is the linchpin of everything she writes in this collection. It's well worth having (and studying, for writers). She's written an introduction for this as well, and for those who have trouble waiting for new CJC verbiage between novel publications, this is a welcome distraction. Highly recommended.

***The Carpet Makers***  
by Andreas Eschbach (translated by Doryl Jensen) (Tor, New York: 2005 (this version only); 300 pp., tpb; ISBN 0-765-31490-8)

German SF writer Andreas Eschbach has built a solid reputation in his home country, but very few people know of him in the US. Orson Scott Card deserves our thanks for getting Tor to publish Doryl Jensen's translation of this novel into English. What a lovely thing it turns out to be. The novel works like one of those nature films that start in a drop of dew and zoom backwards into space to a view of the entire planet. From the personal to the galactic, Jensen brings Eschbach's prose to vivid life in his translation, and the story of an industry based on fabrication (of more than one kind), its

collapse and the reasons for it, as well as the effect this has on the people involved, is fully realised in all aspects. I really like this book a lot; can you tell? Highly recommended.

**Four and Twenty Blackbirds**  
by Cherie Priest (Tor, New York:  
2005. 285 pp., tpb, ISBN  
0-765-31308-1)

This is a ghost story in true Southern Gothic mode, full of skeletons rattling in closets and people with crazy ideas stuck in their heads.

Eden Moore is an orphan who was raised by her Aunt Louise and Uncle David. Her mother died in a mental institution and Eden never knew her father. Like many kids growing up, Eden got in her share of trouble at school, but the reasons for it were far beyond the usual: Eden has been chaperoned, off and on, by the ghosts of three women, and they all seem to have a connection to Eden's paternal grandfather. The young woman's search for the truth about her ancestry — and the three ghosts who strive to clue her in and protect her from an especially evil person — are just the bare bones of a richly imagined, supernatural novel.

Priest has steeped her novel in swamp water and humidity, and it has produced a work of such verisimilitude that it makes one sweat to read it. It could be a beach novel, for that reason, but not the kind usually hung with that label. Sassy, streetwise prose hangs like Spanish moss from this book, and Priest makes no wrong turns. Highly recommended.

**Gaudeamus**  
by John Barnes (Tor, New York:  
2004; 320 pp., hb; ISBN  
0-765-30329-9)

This is a John Barnes novel that isn't like any other of his novels that I've read (*Mother of Storms*, *Orbital Resonance*) in terms of subject matter. The best associations I can think of are the 'Illuminatus!' trilogy by Robert Anton Wilson (for the conspiracy theory novel subgenre), Hunter S. Thompson (the wild-eyed storytelling style, toned down a bit here), and *The Further Adventures of Halley's Comet* by John Calvin Batchelor (for the 'wow' factor evidenced by the characters, but toned down in the Barnes book).

Barnes is playing around with metafiction, a type of fiction that self-consciously addresses fictional devices so as to remind the reader that he

or she is reading a work of fiction. It has some variety in flavour: a fiction about writing fiction, or about the structure of a type of fiction, or where the author is a character in the story. If you're still not sure what this means, some examples of metafiction include *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman, *If on a Winter's Night A Traveler* by Italo Calvino, and *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut.

Barnes uses himself as the primary viewpoint in this novel about government conspiracies, punk bands, alien visitations, and what happens when your old college buddies show up on your doorstep with a wild story to tell. He mixes his personal facts (writer, teacher of theatre at a college near Denver, Colorado, has a close friend named Travis Bismarck, once married to a woman named Kara, etc.) with fictional ones (Travis is a private eye for corporate hire, working a case of industrial espionage for some companies with oddly similar names, seven women selling the Earth to an alien on the \$24 and a bunch of beads method, etc.) to create a story that sometimes reads like the 'Illuminatus!' books, and at other times reads like one of Hunter S. Thompson's more hallucinogenic tales.

*Gaudeamus* should please readers thirsting for more conspiracy fiction than they can shake a stick at, to include the wise-ass attitude and noir aspects of the Robert Anton Wilson books. Thompson aficionados will also find plenty to appreciate here. Way fun. Recommended.

**Quag Keep**  
by Andre Norton (Tor, New York:  
2006 (first published 1978); 272  
pp., tpb; ISBN 0-765-31302-2)

This was the first novel based on the Dungeons and Dragons (TM) world, written by Norton after the game's creator, E. Gary Gygax, gave Norton the opportunity to play the game in his world of Greyhawk. This D&D session inspired her to use the game's background, and elements of Gygax's Greyhawk, to write this novel. One could call this a media tie-in novel and not be outrageous, though that label is most often used for novels written in the fictional worlds of popular movies and TV shows.

Norton certainly knew how to play D&D, as reflected in this book; I've played once, it took me three hours to get into the game and less to get killed off, and I never played again. Of

course, I never found any other D&D gamer groups, either, but I wasn't looking very hard. She uses a wizard and an unremovable bracelet on her main characters to compel them to do what she wants them to do, and oddly, it doesn't really seem unbearably *deus ex machina*.

Six young gamers are transported to the world of Greyhawk by one of their number grasping a two-inch-high fantasy miniature figurine as they prepare for an evening of war gaming. There's very little setup in the gamers' world — just enough description of actions and characters for the reader to know the book opens in the 'real' world. The change to the world of Greyhawk takes less than three pages, which is a good move, considering the story is supposed to be that of the characters as war-game fantasy players (the elf, the Swordsman, the spell-master, the wereman, etc.) in a war-game world.

The players are tasked by a wizard to breach Quag Keep, and compelled to do so by those previously mentioned bracelets, which include multiple-sided dice that spin of their own accord when the players are about to confront a major event. This is a clever bit of invention to tie the story to the world of D&D, and works well. The wizard's quest for the players is to stop the Evil Being from tying together the world of Greyhawk and our own world, which could result in the usual unimaginable consequences. Not only are the bracelets compelling them, but the Evil Being has put all of them under a geas to join together and come to Quag Keep. The wizard gives them the information they need to find this place and fend off potential obstacles from the Evil Being, and Norton deftly wraps the back toward its beginning while staying true to the basic principles of gameplay in D&D.

This isn't for readers who are seeking a high level of character development or a noble high fantasy tale. It's D&D based, folks, and if read with that in mind, the tale is satisfying. What isn't satisfying is the lack of copy editing done on this version; one hopes the original printing wasn't as full of spelling mistakes, excess and missing words as this one is. Book editors, take note: it is more than worth the time and money required to get a good copy editing job done on every book published. Readers don't like stumbling. Recommended for stout-hearted gaming types and those who really like Norton's work.

## When will the men return? or, Non-standard spaces

Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

'Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'

Charles Dodgson:  
*Alice in Wonderland*

'The horror of that moment', the King went on, 'I shall never, never forget'. 'You will, though', the Queen said, 'if you don't make a memorandum of it'.

Charles Dodgson:  
*Alice in Wonderland*

The laws, concepts and methodology of physics and mathematics share many common features. It seems that no matter how abstruse or abstract some aspects, or indeed whole branches, of mathematics may be, these findings and techniques will eventually become a necessary part of physics. Complex numbers, matrix mechanics, vector spaces, group theory, topological manifolds and ever more esoteric mathematics are needed in order to understand reality. Or at least that which we believe to be reality — the model that the brain/mind creates from its sensory inputs. For some people this 'unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics' (as Nobel Prize winner Eugene Wigner phrased it) is a philosophical conundrum. But even though physics and mathematics share many common features, the fact that physical theory is concerned with the concrete 'what is', while mathematics deals with the abstract 'ideals', means that there are mathematical constructs that can never physically exist. For example, fractals such as the Koch snowflake — a closed curve that bounds a finite area, yet has an infinite length. Every point of this curve — every infinitesimal point — is a cusp (to which no unique tangent may be drawn). This object may be imagined — and its properties and consequences discovered and examined — but it will never be seen, because reality (physical

space) cannot be subdivided into infinitesimals. At the Planck length (about  $10^{-35}$  m), the (Heisenberg) uncertainty in the energy of space becomes enormous and quantum theory fails.

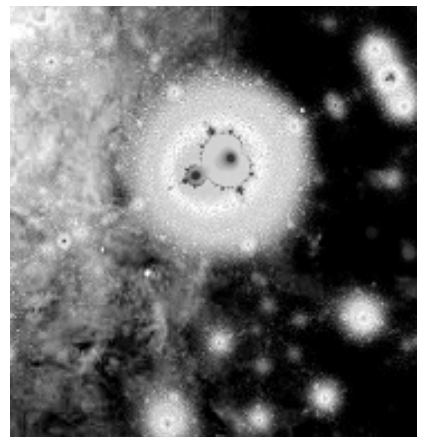
But not only are some mathematical objects ideal (and can only be approximated), there are physical objects that may never be seen — only their effects can be experienced. Quarks, for example: the strong force tells us that trying to pry two quarks apart will only result in the creation of more quarks. As physics develops, it seems that it moves ever more increasingly into the realm of science fiction, where unobservables such as extra dimensions acquire ever more validity and eventual reality. String theory, and not it alone, invokes hidden dimensions for its structure — these dimensions were assumed to be incredibly tiny, but there is reason, as recent theory has shown, why they may be infinitely large. Other theories — the dynamics of inflation and big bangs, for example — suggest that part of our universe may 'bud off' into new universes. And these offshoots could — almost certainly — have physical laws different to ours. Or there may be a plurality of other universes coexisting with ours. Even Kurt Gödel, over 60 years ago, showed that under appropriate conditions, in an appropriate universe, time travel was possible.

As ever, science fiction is ahead of science — even if the margin is narrowing at an exponential rate, due, most likely, to the burgeoning fraction of contemporary scientists who are SF readers — but over 40 years ago, Jack Vance wrote a story, 'The Men Return', that postulated a pocket of space in which the laws of physics were mutating randomly. Having recently reread that story, and Fredric Brown's 'Placet is a Crazy Place', and a few popular books on modern physics, it was inevitable that I should try to see if I could

envisage a nonstandard region of reality. Which is the cover illustration — containing how many impossible things?

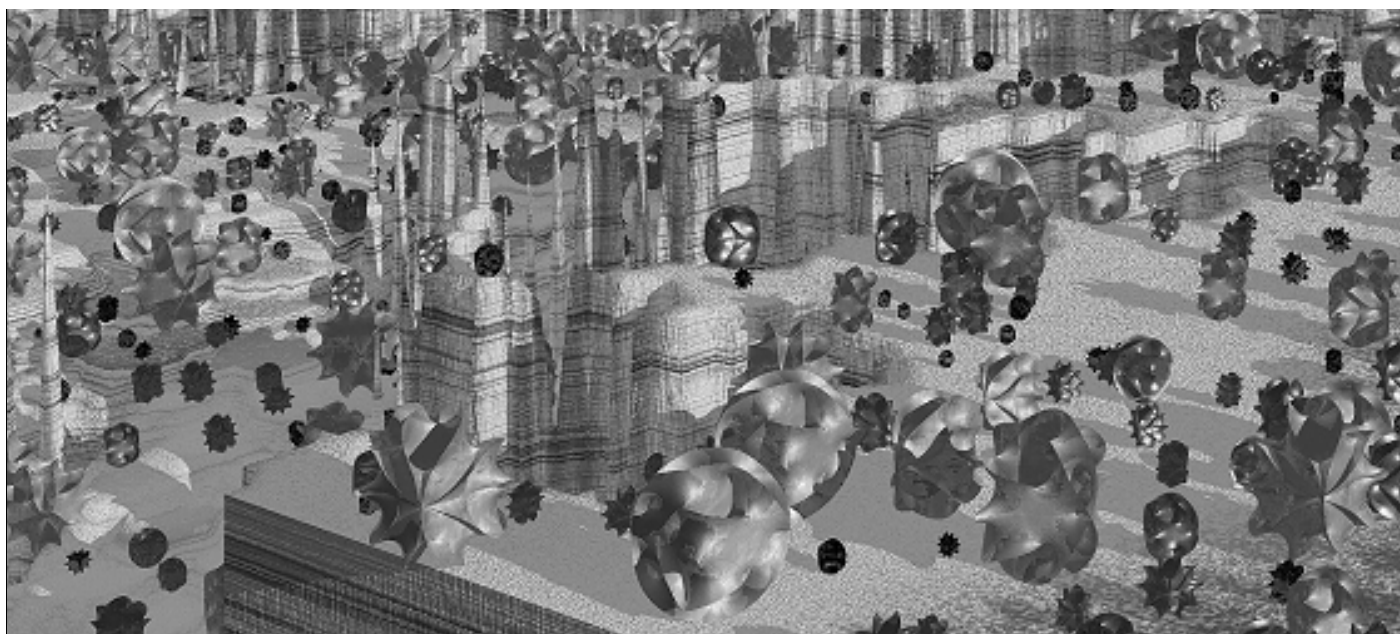
Well, let's see: in the spacetime of the cover graphic:

- Fractals exist. The stars are fractals and the landscape is fractal, so that no matter how much we magnify them, they will appear self-similar.
- The interior of stars can be seen from well outside the star. There is



a good example of this: the typical 'Mandel Man' is clearly visible in the detail below. Only when reality is not ours can this occur.

- The hidden extra dimensions of space are no longer invisible. The first attempt at incorporating additional dimensions into physics theory was made by Theodore Kaluza (1919), who showed that writing the equations of general relativity in five dimensions (four plus time) allowed Maxwell's equations of electromagnetism to emerge in a natural manner. In 1926 Otto Klein modified Kaluza's ideas by assuming that the extra space dimension was curled up into a tiny circle at every point in three-dimensional space — it exists, but is so minuscule that it is hidden



from us and our probes. And so the Kaluza-Klein theory emerged. Recently, the idea of even more hidden dimensions has been invoked by, for example, string theory — here an additional six dimensions are required, all wrapped into a microscopic bundle in the shape (one of many) of a Calabi-Yau space. Superstring theory adds another dimension. (Recently, group theory suggests that even this number of extra dimensions may not be enough.) In the cover graphic, the objects dotted over the surface are three-dimensional representations of the Calabi-Yau spaces. Their details are hard to spot in the illustration, so a portion of the latter is magnified above.

- Hidden dimensions are — unlike within our universe — *solid* objects, and of different surface textures.
- Solid objects can pass through each other — which, unless one has the technology described in Harry Harrison's marvellous short story 'Rock Diver', is not a possibility for us. Look carefully at the illustration above, and you will see Calabi-Yau solids emerging from the cliffs.
- Spatial dimensions can seemingly spontaneously disintegrate or de-structure, as is evidenced by the large floating object, once a six-dimensional infinitesimal space, but now a macroscopic object, apparently decomposing into individual bricks.
- Entropy can decrease. For us, organised objects do not spontaneously arise out of chaos, and yet the deteriorating floating Calabi-Yau

has a well-organised structure (even if it is in dissolution) as is clear from the bricks from which it is constructed, and from the detail of those slabs.

And that lists *seven* impossible things; so without looking for more, we already are ahead of Alice's Red Queen, and can safely settle down to breakfast. With, however, one mystery of the Universe potentially solved — that of *dark matter*. As the physicist, and Nobel Prize winner, Frank Wilczek points out, any *brick* in deep space (and the meaning of brick here is that of everyday experience) would be virtually impossible to be seen with our present technology and location — sufficient amounts of such bricks could easily account for what is now termed dark matter. The cover illustration shows, with irrefutable Dalinian logic, that the region of space therein depicted is clearly a source of such *dark matter bricks* . . .

Finally, another example of SF preceding science. Wilczek, who works in QCD theory, believes that because there are so few constants that need to be determined by experiment (he says six) before every physical law follows, then it is likely that a final theory will need no arbitrary input, and that all will be explained uniquely. Well — in the April 1935 issue of *Astounding Stories*, Stanley G. Weinbaum's yarn 'The Lotus Eaters' describes an alien plant species of incredible intelligence that simply by observing any fact in its environment can deduce a likely universe. By examining more and more facts, the unique nature of the entire universe is exposed — and it is clear to

these vegetative vegetables that there is only one possible universe.

#### Technical notes

The terrain is a standard Mandelbrot fractal; the stars are a *Magnetic* Mandelbrot. Both were generated using my program djFractals, and imported into Eon's Vue Infinite 3D world-modeling software. The Calabi-Yau spaces were generated using Wolfram's Mathematica 5, and also imported, where they (and the mandels) were texturised and manipulated. The small CY objects have a metallic surface, the floating CY was given a brick wall surfacing (with turrets). The final image was tweaked in Adobe's PhotoShop CS2.

#### References

Apart from the SF stories mentioned, the following books were in the back of what is laughingly referred to as my mind:

- Derbyshire, John: *Unknown Quantity*. Joseph Henry Press, Washington, 2006.
- Randall, Lisa: *Warped Passages*. Ecco (HarperCollins), New York, 2005.
- Ronan, Mark: *Symmetry and the Monster*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Susskind, Leonard: *The Cosmic Landscape*. Little Brown, New York, 2005.
- Webb, Stephen: *Out of This World*. Copernicus Books, New York, 2004.
- Wilczek, Frank & Devine, Betsy: *Longing for the Harmonies*. W. W. Norton, New York, 1987.

— Dick Jensen



## Critical Mass versus Eric Raymond

by Yvonne Rousseau

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Yvonne Rousseau is a short-story writer currently at work on a novel — but her other publications include *The Murders at Hanging Rock* (1980) and a chapbook about Cherry Wilder's science fiction, *Minmers Marooned and Planet of the Marsupials* (1997). As a member of the Science Fiction Collective editing *Australian Science Fiction Review* (2nd series), she assisted in publishing articles by Critical Mass members Zoran Bekric, Jeff Harris and Roman Orszanski. In her current Critical Mass report, she is far less reliant on consultation than in her long-distance report of the famous Cochrane-Gillespie Keele Street garden party (*Metaphysical Review* 18, March 1993). Nevertheless, she incorporates slight amendments from Zoran Bekric, Ian Borchardt, Jeff Harris, and Juliette Woods. In addition, she suggested to Zoran and Bruce that it was impossible to do justice to Zoran's comments except by publishing them in full — and she is delighted by the outcome.

Critical Mass is an SF discussion group in Adelaide, South Australia, and was founded by the late John Foyster in October 1987. Like its older Melbourne counterpart, the Nova Mob (founded in 1970, also by John Foyster), Critical Mass meets on the first Wednesday of most months to hear and discuss a paper by a speaker whose name and topic are announced well in advance.

On Wednesday, 1 November 2006, Jacq Felis (proprietor of Known Space Books) had intended to speak about Neal Asher's works. Instead, on Sunday 29 October, Critical Mass's convener Zoran Bekric emailed that Jacq had been unexpectedly required to transfer her bookshop to different premises, and had no time to prepare the advertised talk. The following day, Zoran emailed a suggestion from Roman Orszanski: 'There's actually a very interesting article in the latest *Steam Engine Time* [No 5, September 2006]: Eric S. Raymond (of "The Cathedral and the Bazaar" fame) has a piece "A political history of SF" in which he makes various outrageous claims.'

As a result, November's Critical Mass transformed itself, at short notice, into a 'First-Wednesday Essay Club'. Bruce Gillespie in Melbourne is co-editor of *Steam Engine Time*, and I thought he would like to know of our plan to discuss an essay from the latest issue. Indeed, Bruce instantly perceived that a cassette recording of the discussion 'could prove to be the ultimate letter of comment'. He even offered to transcribe and edit such a recording 'into an "answer article"'.  

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At 8 p.m. on 1 November, nine of us gathered around a table at the South Australian Writers' Centre: Zoran Bekric, Ian Borchardt, Neil Cooper, Brian Edwards, Jacq Felis, Jeff

Harris, Adam Jenkins, Roman Orszanski, and I (Yvonne Rousseau). Since none of us could provide a cassette recorder, I'm basing this report instead on my own handwritten notes of the meeting.

As ever, Zoran's email had supplied a number of URLs relevant to the topic of the month — unseen on this occasion by Neil, whose computer had crashed. Neil therefore learned of the evening's topic only when he arrived at the meeting, where Zoran had supplied everybody with a printed copy derived from Eric S. Raymond's website. He had enclosed in parentheses a recently inserted paragraph that did not appear in the 2002 version printed in *Steam Engine Time*:

Many accounts have it that Heinlein *invented* SFnal exposition by indirection, but credit for that innovation may be due to none other than Rudyard Kipling, whose 1912 story *With the Night Mail* anticipated the style and expository mechanics of Campbellian hard science fiction fourteen years before Hugo Gernsback's invention of the 'scientifiction' genre and twenty-seven years before Heinlein's first publication. Heinlein professed high regard for Kipling all his life and included tributes to Kipling in several of his works; it is possible, even probable, that he saw himself as Kipling's literary successor.

Brian (sitting across the table from me) had brought his own printout, adorned with copious annotations — most of which were kept secret from the other members. Beside me, Jeff produced a couple of fluorescent highlighters and began marking paragraphs in the copy Zoran had supplied: some of them in orange ('1970s hippie stuff!' I opined) and others in pink ('Communist bits!').

Thanks to Zoran's URLs, most members had now read Raymond's earlier comments on the *Encyclopedia of*



Yvonne Rousseau (photo: Jenny Blackford.)



Adam Jenkins (l.) and Ian Borchardt (r.), January 2007. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)

*Science Fiction* (ed. John Clute and Peter Nicholls, 1993). This material (sent to John Clute by Eric Raymond in 1997) helped us to clarify some of the essay's arguments. In addition, I mentioned how taken I had been by Raymond's saboteur-suggestion for Bruce W. Ronald's entry in the *Encyclopedia*: to add a reference to 'Len Deighton's James Bond novels'. (Although nobody spoke it, the name 'Ian Fleming' doubtless flared in everybody's mind.)

As further background information, Adam mentioned the current popularity of *Everybody Loves Eric Raymond*. This is a webcomic created by John Leach, where Raymond is imagined as sharing an apartment with other campaigners for open-access software. By contrast, two Critical Massers have met Raymond in a real-world setting: Damien Warman and

Juliette Woods, at the 2002 World SF Convention in San José. As Roman reported, Raymond's interest in guns then became clear during one of the panel discussions at the convention.

Discussing Raymond's definition of libertarianism, Zoran summed it up as rampant individualism where everybody should own guns, and the State is always evil. To Zoran's surprise, this American political ideology managed to combine the worst excesses of individualism and anarchy, while completely avoiding the more admirable aspects of either.

Ian raised the question of how this kind of individualist would defend copyright. In the suggestions that Raymond offered to the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, he named a vital libertarian principle that is not mentioned in his essay: the "Non-Aggression Principle", i.e. first use of force or fraud

is always wrong, no matter who does it and no matter what the motive'. Critical Massers decided that violating copyright is a metaphorical attack, and thus that Raymondian libertarians would consider themselves entitled to retaliate by shooting the violator.

Roman believed that Raymond's article was powerfully wrong, but interesting in all sorts of ways. He was prepared to argue against Raymond's claims for the centrality of Campbellian SF, and his assertion that libertarianism is implicit in Campbellianism.

Critical Massers agreed with Roman that Raymond excluded many works that British and Australian readers would perceive as 'core' SF. In particular, they were astounded by Raymond's belief (more explicit in his *Encyclopedia* suggestions) that Philip K. Dick had only a minimal influence on SF.

Raymond named four contemporary winners of the Libertarian Futurist Society's annual Prometheus Awards for SF: Neil Smith, F. Paul Wilson, Brad Linaweaver, and J. Neil Schulman. He claimed that their works 'sell astonishingly well' (even when they are 'shrill and indifferently written polemical tracts'). Yet Roman himself had never read any of these authors. Zoran and some others reported having read them, however, and Jacq and Neil confirmed that they sold well.

Jacq Felis (l.) and Neil Cooper (r.), of Adelaide's Known Space Books, at Critical Mass, February 2007. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)





Roman Orszanski, at Continuum 4, 2006.  
(Photo: Eric Lindsay.)

Since Raymond saw these writers as continuing the Campbellian SF tradition, Zoran found it interesting that they were inclined to diverge from SF into other genres: horror, in particular.

Jeff said that the concept of 'hard SF' was derived from the 1950s, and that when Raymond attached this label to Campbellian science fiction, he was viewing the 1940s through the lens of cold-war politics. Campbellian writers were progressive thinkers at the time when they were being published. Isaac Asimov, with his rigorous extrapolation of his robotic laws, is probably a better example of the Campbellian ideal than Heinlein, with his technotropic approach.

While Zoran agreed with Raymond about Heinlein's influence on SF, and his application of rigorous extrapolation from scientific fact, he reminded us that Campbell also edited *Unknown*, where he was publishing fantasy during his peak years as an editor. Jeff named Henry Kuttner, Theodore Sturgeon, L. Sprague de Camp and A. E. Van Vogt as contributors to *Unknown*.

Jeff said that Raymond had missed the point that the Campbellian revolution failed. John W. Campbell began his editorship of *Astounding Science-Fiction* in 1937, but by 1949 his leadership was over, with the appearance of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and then Horace Gold's *Galaxy Science Fiction* in 1950. Writers had turned from *Astounding* to seek publication in these magazines instead. Indeed, Critical Massers were surprised that Raymond's history failed to mention Horace Gold's influence.

Earlier, Roman had said that Ray-

mond's own definition of failure seemed rather curious. Diagnosing three 'failed' revolts or revolutions 'against Campbellian SF' in the past, Raymond classed the Futurians and the New Wave as failures because their 'techniques and concerns' were 'easily' or 'rapidly' absorbed into 'the larger SF field'. On the other hand, cyberpunk was a failure because it 'attracted more notice outside the SF field than within it'.

Jeff disagreed with Raymond's view that the Futurians were in revolt against hard SF. Rather, they were trying to get back to Campbellian standards. Similarly, the New Wave writers were rebelling against a science fiction that had grown dull at that time: its writers simply spinning the wheels and not thinking things through. While rigorously developing the consequences of their assumptions, the Futurians extended Campbell's ideal by extending their range of assumptions: making them social, political or economic.

Jeff said that Campbell had flourished when atomic energy and rocket flight were hypothetical. When they became matters of fact, Campbell betrayed his ideals. 'Betrayed' is a word Jeff is usually loth to apply, but it seemed to him appropriate for Campbell's promotion of Dianetics, psionics and other pseudo-science.

As Zoran reminded us, Campbell refused to buy any story (no matter how rigorously extrapolated) where aliens triumphed over Earthmen. Zoran therefore wondered why Raymond found it necessary to attach the concept of 'rock-ribbed objectivism' to Campbellian SF. It seemed to be merely Raymond's preference: not intrinsic. Like Jeff, Zoran felt that the Futurians, the New Wave and cyberpunk were not rebellions against Campbellianism, but were notable for the Campbellian ideal of strong extrapolation from assumptions.

After Ian had described the Campbellian hero as the self-reliant man, Zoran discussed Howard Scott's founding of the Technocracy Movement: a two-month wonder in major American newspapers and magazines in December 1932 and January 1933. This technocratic vision of a government controlled by scientists, engineers and other experts was superseded later in the 1930s by fascist and communist models. But it seemed odd for Raymond to omit technocracy from a political history of SF, since early SF drew very much on techno-

cratic ideas, with the engineer as the competent man.

Adopting Raymond's use in his essay of 'America' as shorthand for the 'United States of America', Zoran concluded that Raymond viewed politics through an America-centric and libertarian-centric prism. As for Raymond's 'telling' point that the Prometheus Award is unique as a 'politically inspired award' for SF, Zoran said that this need not imply libertarian strength. When socialists overthrew various governments, they felt no need to establish an award for best socialist SF. When Roman joked about a 'Best Socialist SF' award to rival the 'Prometheus' award, Jeff amended this to the more authentic-sounding 'the People's Best Socialist Scientific Romance'. He later added that this parahistorical award would have been called the 'Yevgeny' or the 'Zamiatin'.

According to Raymond, 'the post-*Star Wars* boom' transformed SF into 'the second most successful genre after romance fiction'. This interested Zoran not only because of the local romance writers who insist that they, not Critical Mass, are naturally entitled to the better of the two meeting rooms available in the SA Writers' Centre. In addition, Zoran was surprised that, in reporting how *Star Wars* 'took the imagery of pre-Campbellian space opera to the mainstream culture', Raymond failed to mention the big revolution that this brought about. The fans attracted by *Star Wars* don't extrapolate from what they see, and have no notion of the Heinleinian technique defined by Raymond as 'description by indirection' and as 'subtly leading the reader to fill in by deduction large swathes of background'. Hard SF is a minuscule part of the contemporary field, where laser guns and the like are featured merely as tropes. One might as well be in company with John Carter on the Mars depicted by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

The next topic was raised by Roman: whether 'radial category' was a useful concept for defining SF, and whether Raymond used it appropriately. In Raymond's example of the category 'fruit', he specified the 'apple' as the 'central prototype' and placed 'coconut' and 'avocado' on the periphery. But Roman and Zoran agreed that Raymond had failed to name the prototypical core of SF: his 'classics of hard SF'.

Adam suggested that 'faceted classification' (used, for example, by



Jeff Harris, at Critical Mass, February 2007.  
(Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)

librarians) might be a better model, because it acknowledges more than one facet to everything. Thus, it allows 'this book is SF — and — and —' instead of merely 'this book is SF'. While Jeff and Zoran were disagreeing with this analysis, Brian took up Raymond's example of 'fruit' as a radial category — whereupon a slight argument developed about whether a coconut is a fruit. Jacq was emphatic that a nut is not a fruit.

Zoran was reminded of heated arguments about whether a dolphin is a fish. By linguistic analysis, it's a fish: by biological classification, it's not. Zoran then described a linguistic study conducted by Professor Eleanor Rosch, who argues that radial categories reflect the way the human brain classifies things. North American school children were asked specific questions in order to define their concept of a bird: 'Does a bird have feathers? Does a bird have a beak?' — and so on. When the answers were toted up, the researchers concluded that a North American child thinking of a bird is thinking of a robin. (Note, however, that this American robin is not the insectivorous little creature familiar in Britain and Australia but a larger bird — a type of thrush — often to be seen hauling worms out of the grass.) In adulthood, a person is likely to answer the questions differently, taking into consideration (for example) flightless birds.

Discussion turned to Raymond's claim that 'rock-ribbed objectivism' and 'ornery insistent individualism' were core tropes of SF. Zoran said that, at the beginning of any genre, it takes time for imitators to work out which

elements in the original model were important to its success. Thus, the earliest superheroes inspired by the *Superman* comics were likely to wear glasses or to be employed as reporters because it was not yet clear which features of the prototype were crucial. This was the reason why (as Jeff pointed out) the same things were gone through over and over again in so many superhero stories.

Jeff mentioned the model of memes: either domesticated (where the traditions of the genre are well developed) or wild. In this context, Zoran spoke about the failure of attempts to establish a 'jungle book' genre based on the 'Tarzan' novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. The imitators failed because people didn't want to read about other jungle heroes: they wanted to read about Tarzan.

As for the 'ornery insistent individualism' which Raymond claims as a trait of 'SF's libertarian tradition', Critical Massers agreed that in the world around us we need look no further than the typical political dictator for an example of ornery insistent individualism. Ian also said that exponents of libertarian SF have appropriated heroes created by authors who were not setting out a libertarian scenario.

Nevertheless, Roman pointed out that individualism is natural in the SF genre, since the heroes are likely to be explorers or adventurers, who need to be capable people. Moreover, the thinking inquisitive individual is a useful story element. Zoran mentioned that, because the various genres evolved in the pulp magazines, there was strong commercial pressure to establish rigid categories. Nevertheless, Zoran perceived a big overlap between the genres, since (for the dramatic purposes that Roman had outlined) they all featured the same kind of hero.

Raymond had named the polemical writer Ayn Rand (who founded the Objectivist philosophy) as an inspiration to libertarians. Zoran therefore thought it relevant to mention that the Ayn Rand Institute's current advice is to nuke all the Muslims.

Raymond mentioned approvingly the role of libertarian SF authors in Ronald Reagan's 1980s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and named Robert Heinlein and Gregory Benford. Jeff pointed out that Jerry Pournelle also played a prominent role. Although others describe Pournelle as 'libertarian', Raymond repudiates him

for writing 'carnographic conservative military SF'. (Jacq particularly admired this example of Raymond's way with words.) To illustrate the SDI attitude, Jeff mentioned what happened when Arthur C. Clarke came along to one of the meetings about ways to stop incoming missiles from reaching America. Clarke believed this plan was nonsensical, but that the technology could be developed instead to protect the whole planet from the threat of comets and asteroids. He was told to butt his nose out of American politics.

Having mentioned the USA's refusal to put money into some Russian Space Agency projects related to the International Space Station, Ian also mentioned SDI's role in fragmenting the L5 Society (formed in 1975 to promote the establishment of space habitats that would orbit equidistant from the Earth and the Moon at the L5 or L4 Lagrangian points). Among the members supporting SDI, Jerry Pournelle and Jim Baen were both on the society's board of governors.

On the topic of space colonies defending themselves against the Earth, Ian and Jeff discussed misunderstandings of the mass driver used by the Loonies in Heinlein's 1967 novel *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. Some enthusiasts had envisaged dropping rocks into space without ensuring their acceleration to escape velocity. This reminded Ian of the pacified Moon in a story that Jeff also knew and later identified as 'Men of Good Will' (*Galaxy*, June 1964), written by Ben Bova with ballistic advice from Myron R. Lewis.

In 'Men of Good Will', Russians and Americans were fighting each other all over the Earth and in space: everywhere except on the Moon. When a United Nations representative arrived to find out how the two sides managed to live in peace on the Moon, he learned that the opposing bases had fired off several thousand very-high-velocity bullets in an early battle. 'As in all battles, most of the rounds fired were clean misses.' These bullets had continued 'in rather eccentric satellite orbits' around the Moon, and kept returning to 'shoot the living hell' out of both bases. Thus, the Moon was peaceful because both sides already needed all their computer capacity for tracking the current bullet storms, without firing any more bullets.

Returning to Raymond's essay, Roman mentioned the 'Radical Hard SF' promoted by David Hartwell and



Kathryn Cramer in *The Hard SF Renaissance* (2002). Raymond classed this as a fourth rebellion against 'Campbellian SF', where the proponents mistakenly supposed that libertarianism was 'a right-wing phenomenon' and that 'approving of free markets somehow implies social conservatism'. Roman had brought with him the latest *Monthly* magazine (No 18, November 2006), which contained a relevant article by Kevin Rudd: 'Howard's Brutopia'. Rudd discussed the Australian Prime Minister John Howard's conflicting policies, which promote both 'traditional conservative values' and 'unrestrained market capitalism'. Howard had neglected to explain 'how traditional social values of family, community and country are compatible with the ruthless economic utilitarianism of a market in which rampant individualism is dominant. [...] Howard, of all people, knows full well there is nothing sentimental about unrestrained self-interest.' Thus, Roman agreed that the free market is not socially conservative: it is perhaps the greatest threat to current social structures.

In Jeff's opinion, Raymond omitted from his essay the points that would have made sense of his analysis. In spite of spending years in Britain, continental Europe and South America (as mentioned in his comments on the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*), Raymond seemed to have a very blinkered viewpoint. Zoran also thought that, even in an American context, Raymond's view seemed very naïve.

Among the models opposed by Raymond's libertarianism, Zoran mentioned the planned economy in the 'Culture' novels by Iain Banks. In his *Encyclopedia* suggestions, Raymond invoked the 'Hayekian calculation problem' to dismiss the Culture's economy as unworkable. Against this, Jeff pointed out that the Minds of the Culture are so brilliant that they could make anything work. Zoran felt that Raymond was inclined to declare various ideas out of limits simply because he didn't like them.

As for military SF, Jeff mentioned Baen Books — publisher of 'awful military potboilers', according to Raymond in his *Encyclopedia* suggestions. Ian said that since Jim Baen's death (on 28 June 2006), things had become even worse. There were whole categories of military stuff. Zoran felt that while Baen had understood that military SF was popular, he had not necessarily been an advocate of it. Jacq confirmed

that it sold well.

Zoran said that Raymond discussed the politics in SF not at all. This was just as well, because most SF favours hierarchical systems on the grounds that they have more dramatic possibilities. All you need is the good counsellor, the good King, and the bad counsellor.

Among the texts that Raymond defined (in his *Encyclopedia* suggestions) as 'proto-libertarian', Ian mentioned Eric Frank Russell's '... And Then There Were None'. Critical Massers all seemed fond of this story, set on a planet colonised by weaponless Gandhists who live by the motto: 'Freedom — I won't!'

Poul Anderson was another of Raymond's proto-libertarians. Jeff admitted having a soft spot for Anderson's work. He found his politics hard to take, but less obnoxious than some others: quite readable when not pushing his barrow. Jeff saw no reason why you can't enjoy reading someone whose politics you don't agree with.

Roman thought that it was odd to settle on libertarianism as the core of SF: why not socialism? In contemporary SF, Roman mentioned Kim Stanley Robinson as presenting a socialist worldview. Raymond has claimed that Campbell would have been a libertarian if he had lived beyond 1971, the year when the Libertarian Party was founded. Zoran pointed out, however, that Campbell was the man who ended up promoting Dianetics.

Raymond approved of SF's 'celebration of individualist anti-politics': its storylines where 'scientific breakthrough and free-enterprise economics blend into a seamless whole'. Jeff mentioned novels by H. Beam Piper as examples of this theory of space travel, where private enterprise does better than the State. By contrast, in the real world it took a major State operation to get to the Moon.

Ian and Zoran then discussed *Lone Star Planet* (1958) (aka, *A Planet for Texans*) written by H. Beam Piper with John J. McGuire. This novel is another of Raymond's proto-libertarian examples: set on the planet of New Texas where everybody has seriously heavy armaments (required by the ranchers to deal with the planet's supercows), and citizens have the right to assassinate politicians. In the New Texan legal system, such a killing is not inherently wrong, and it is prohibited 'only to the extent that what happened to the politician was in excess of what he deserved'. The novel's ambassado-

rial hero has to prove that the assassination of his predecessor was inherently wrong because a diplomat is not a politician. A subplot involves evil aliens plotting a Pearl-Harbor scenario. Piper implies in this novel that, given enough people of good will, you can force any system to work.

Ian suggested that libertarians want to be frontiersmen, but that (as Brian also said) the only frontier left now is Space. Zoran commented that the notion of delayed gratification gets thrown out of the window by libertarians: lots of self-interest, but not much enlightenment. For more on this subject, Adam referred us to *Leviathan* (1651) by Thomas Hobbes: man as a purely selfish creature, seeking only his own advantage and resisting the competing claims of others. Without social covenants, there is 'continual fear; and the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.

Jeff commented that the American social system is very fractured — needing intermediaries to bridge the gaps. The superhero is the mediator to save the poor and the powerless (although courts can sometimes act as a bridge). In Australia, there is better integration between judiciary and parliament, which are nevertheless able to monitor one another.

Zoran said that the big advance of civilisation is the idea that we can resolve differences in a way that doesn't result in fatalities. By contrast, the libertarian idea is to sort things out by shooting one another. Recalling John Foyster's opinion that the lead characters of cyberpunk were adolescent wish-fulfilment figures, Zoran said that admiration for the rugged individualist is also very adolescent. For a brainy powerless person, Sherlock Holmes provides a role model who looks more feasible for carrying over into adulthood. His promise that being clever makes you really successful is a welcome change.

In conclusion, Critical Massers agreed that Raymond's essay remained secretive about his grounds for the points he made. His definition of SF appeared to derive from his own preference, and works were then graded as passing or failing this definition. As Brian summed up the process, 'It's not that we're exclusive or anything: it's just that they aren't libertarians.'

— Yvonne Rousseau, 4th amended version, 21 January 2007

## Notes on Yvonne Rousseau's article

by Zoran Bekric

Dear Yvonne,  
Some notes for your report:

### On the definition of Libertarianism

Actually I summed it up as an American political ideology that manages to combine the worst excesses of individualism and anarchism while completely avoiding the more admirable aspects of either. It's also a political party that (i) maintains the government is always evil while (ii) using a large, government-maintained statue as its symbol — all without any apparent sense of irony.

This led to a brief exchange with Ian Borchardt, who objected that the Statue of Liberty was actually a gift from France. Who, he acknowledged, after a bit of prodding, is also run by a government.

I don't remember saying anything about guns, but I probably did. It sounds like the sort of crack I'd make.

I do recall Roman harrumphing at the suggestion that anarchism could have 'worst excesses'.

### On the Technocracy movement

The name of the founder of the Technocracy movement which I couldn't remember on the night is engineer Howard Scott. The movement was a two-month wonder in December 1932 and January 1933, with editorials and columns discussing it in all the major American newspapers and magazines. *The ABC of Technocracy* (1933) briefly became a bestseller.

The movement itself dates back to 1919 and, surprisingly enough, still exists. But then, so does the Prohibition League. It advocated switching to a price system based on energy — with units of ergs and joules — and putting those who understood modern technology — scientists and engineers — in charge. It was this last aspect that appealed to many SF readers of the time, and it was probably the most overtly influential political idea in what Raymond calls pre-Campbellian SF. If I recall correctly, Heinlein even referred to it in a story — 'The Roads Must Roll' (1940) — though he didn't care for it because of some of its socialistic share-the-wealth tendencies.

### On radial categories

I agree with Raymond that radial categories are a useful way to look at SF. He even goes further, suggesting that radial categories are a useful way to look at all the genres that developed in the pulp magazines during the first half of the twentieth century.

While Adam Jenkins is probably correct in saying that 'faceted classification' is a more effective way of cataloguing SF, the advantage with radial categories is that they seem to reflect the way the human brain classifies things. That is, the brain takes some central model and defines a category around it, grouping things around the model based on how much they resemble it. According to Professor Eleanor Rosch, this provides 'maximum information with the least cognitive effort' — which sounds like something evolution would select for.

That's why you can still get into arguments about whether or not a dolphin is a fish. According to the way the brain organises things, a dolphin falls into the linguistic category of 'fish' because that's what it most resembles. According to biology, though, a dolphin is a mammal, not a fish. Those who think about it are likely to go with the biological classification and say a dolphin is a 'mammal'; those who don't think about it will go with the brain's natural tendency to lump dolphins into the linguistic category of 'fish'.

Higher and lower levels of classification are organised logically. Thus, superordinate categories are collections of basic (radial) categories: furniture includes chairs, lamps, beds, tables, etc. Subordinate categories are divisions of basic (radial) categories: deck chairs, bar stools, high chairs, thrones, etc.

The history of the development of various genres follows this pattern. There is a central story, which serves as a model, with new stories being graded in terms of similarity to that model, which determines their status as good or poor examples of the genre.

To step outside of SF for a moment, the prototype western for the first half of the twentieth century was *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) by Zane Grey. This defined a set of conventions that most subsequent westerns followed, and were different to those found in earlier westerns, such as *The Virginian* (1902) or the stories of Buffalo Bill found in the dime novels. Similarly, the prototypes around which the superhero genre was built were the

early *Superman* stories.

Even Hugo Gernsback goes along with this approach. In his editorial in the first issue of *Amazing Stories* (April 1926) he describes SF, or 'scientification' as he called it, as being 'the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story — a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision'. Gernsback thus identified the works of those three authors as being the core from which the genre radiates.

This, of course, is where Raymond's essay falls down. He doesn't identify what he considers to be the core works that define SF, instead just vaguely referring to 'certain classics of hard SF'.

And Eleanor Rosch, professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, was the one who did the research with children that determined that the linguistic prototype for 'bird' is the robin, at least in North America.

### On *Lone Star Planet*

I brought this up because Raymond specifically includes it as a proto-libertarian text, but it doesn't seem to be one to me. While the story involves heavily armed, tough frontiersmen, the actual plot revolves around a court case. That is, it's about settling things through the use of a government institution; a way of settling differences without fatalities. I also pointed out that what are probably Piper's best-known novels — *Little Fuzzy* (1962), *Fuzzy Sapiens* (aka *The Other Human Race*, 1964) and *Fuzzies and Other People* (1984) — are all also built around trials.

Also, I didn't mention it on the night, but I remember a scene in *Little Fuzzy* where members of the military garrison on Zarathustra's outer moon are complaining about how the law prevents them from intervening in 'that mess down there'. I don't know about Raymond, but I like the idea of having a government structure that prevents the heavily armed from just taking over whenever they feel like it. A little personal politics there.

In that sense, I question Piper's inclusion on Raymond's list. He seems more conservative than libertarian to me.

### As for 'best socialist scientific romance'...

I may be misremembering, but what I think happened was: I mentioned Raymond's claim about the only 'politically inspired award presented annually at the World Science Fiction

Convention' being for libertarian SF. I then pointed out that the socialists created by the late-nineteenth-century literature Raymond refers to didn't go off to found literary awards; they went off to found political parties and revolutionary movements that actually achieved power. Once in power, they took over the various organs of academia and gave out official literary

awards with real economic and critical clout. That is: they gave out literary awards as a consequence of achieving power, not as an alternative to it.

Jeff picked up on that and said something about (paraphrasing from memory) 'Best Soviet SF', and Roman amended that to 'Best Socialist Scientific Romance'. Or it could have been vice versa. I'm not sure.

So, there is no specific award for socialist scientific romance, though it could be said that, to the extent that every government body and official institution is dominated by non-libertarians, every literary award other than the Prometheus is for socialist, liberal, moderate, conservative or fascist works, including SF.

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## The Eric Raymond debate, part 2

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# Why libertarian politics don't have much to do with SF

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by Zoran Bekric

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When asked to describe Zoran Bekric, a friend once offered the summation 'Imagine Jupiter wearing pants'. A remarkably accurate assessment since, like that celestial body, Zoran not only shines mostly by reflected light, he also puts out an inordinate amount of chatter. Fortunately, his signal strength is low enough that he only occasionally interferes with the reception of more interesting communications nearby. In preparing to write this biography he has done many of the things people who write brief biographies usually do, of which the most pertinent are that he has acted as convener of Adelaide's Critical Mass, on and off, for several years and, once upon a time, made slight contributions to the second edition of Clute and Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.

If Eric S. Raymond had titled his essay something like 'A history of libertarian SF' I don't think anyone would have a problem with it. After all, as Raymond notes, there is a strong libertarian stream in SF, with a number of overtly libertarian writers and works. I'm even willing to go along with Raymond's assertion that modern libertarians draw some of their inspiration from the politics of John W. Campbell Jr and Robert A. Heinlein. The problem is that I don't think that those politics have anything much to do with SF.

That is, Raymond asserts that SF is inherently libertarian, but there's nothing in his essay to support that idea. In fact, if anything, all the authors he mentions — Asimov, Pohl, Korn-

bluth, Moorcock, Ballard, Aldiss, Farmer, Ellison, Leiber, Pournelle, Vinge, Haldeman, Gibson, Stephenson and Sterling — who wrote highly effective SF without being libertarians, suggests that SF, like science itself, lends itself to any number of political persuasions.

I agree with Raymond that Campbell did establish a dominant style of SF — we can even call it a 'revolution' if you like — but I think his achievement was primarily aesthetic, not political. This can be a little hard to tell sometimes, because as editor of *As-tounding*, Campbell published stories that reflected both his aesthetics and his politics, so the two are often found together. But I don't think there's any necessary link between them, and Raymond doesn't establish any such link in his essay.

So, what is this SF aesthetic? I would suggest that SF is primarily built on what J. R. R. Tolkien called 'subcreation': the presentation of a vividly realised world, different from our own, that the reader experiences vicariously through the work. Often, this alternate world is connected to the real one in some way — it's the real world with something added, or characters can travel from the real world to the alternate one. In early works in the genre, the only thing that distinguished SF from fantasy was that SF explained the differences in terms of science and technology, while



fantasy used elements traditionally associated with fairy stories, superstitions and mythology.

Some stories used the subcreation to present extrapolation. Rather than just presenting a world that is different from our own, an author takes the difference as a premise, works out what consequences would follow and presents their conclusions in the story. In stories like *The Invisible Man* (1897) and 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' (1898), H. G. Wells established the style, presenting the ruthlessly working out and presenting consequences that were very different to what wish-fulfilment fantasy might suggest.

Hugo Gernsback picked up on this element of extrapolation and emphasised it in the magazines he published: *Amazing Stories*, *Science Wonder Stories* and *Air Wonder Stories*. Gernsback was primarily interested in applying the extrapolation to technology. He wanted authors to anticipate how the technology of the day – aeroplanes, radio, bigger and deadlier weapons – would develop, and then present those developments in the form of stories. That is, he saw SF as, at least in part, a way of predicting the future.

Now, this approach has never been a big part of SF, but it has strongly influenced how those outside the field view it. Even now, some eighty years later, outside commentators still refer to SF as the literature about what life will be like in the future.

Campbell built on Gernsback's emphasis. He too wanted strong extrapolation; only he broadened the approach to include the social and cultural changes that would flow from a development in science or technology.

Campbell introduced a style of SF characterised by:

- rigorous extrapolation from a premise
- an emphasis on the social, cultural and even legal consequences rather than just the technological
- protagonists who were ordinary inhabitants of the imagined world rather than legendary heroes
- presentation of the details of the imagined world through indirection and allusion rather than blocks of exposition.

All these elements can be seen in Heinlein's first published story 'Life-Line' (1939). A scientist develops a way of predicting exactly when someone will die, and the consequences that follow involve the efforts of the life insurance industry to discredit and destroy the scientist and his

discovery.

Actually, Campbell went further: he ditched the idea that the premise had to be scientifically or technologically plausible. In 1939 he launched *Unknown*, a magazine that applied the approach to fantasy. Stories like Heinlein's 'Magic Inc.' (originally 'The Devil Makes the Law', 1940) took the Laws of Magic identified in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) and applied an engineering sensibility to them, extrapolating consequences as if they were actual physical laws. Such stories highlight that it's the extrapolation rather than the science that's important.

Further, I would suggest it is the level of the extrapolation that constitutes the 'hardness' in SF. There is a spectrum running from stories with a strong emphasis on rigorous extrapolation (hard SF), through those with milder extrapolation and an emphasis on other elements of the story (soft SF) to those with almost no extrapolation, just pure subcreation (scientific romances). All parts of the spectrum are enjoyable, and various authors have moved back and forth along it over the course of their careers.

As Raymond notes, Campbell was very lucky in finding a group of writers who shared his aesthetic and who were capable of delivering a steady series of good stories. However, Campbell never published only hard SF. Alongside the writers Raymond lists, he also included stories by writers like A. E. Van Vogt, E. E. 'Doc' Smith, Jack Williamson and Fritz Leiber.

The problem with Raymond's thesis is that none of the subsequent waves of writers challenged this Campbellian style. The Futurians, the New Wave writers and the cyberpunks were all producing the same sort of mixture of hard and soft SF as Campbell had published. The Futurians and the New Wave writers could be seen as competitors to Campbell's *Astounding*, in the sense that they were associated with other magazines – primarily *Galaxy* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* for the Futurians, *New Worlds* for the New Wave. However, the competition was entirely commercial, not political or aesthetic.

If anything, these subsequent waves of writers built on Campbell's legacy, extending the process of rigorous extrapolation to the soft sciences (ecology, linguistics, medicine, psychology, sociology, cybernetics), not just the hard ones favoured by Camp-

bell's writers (physics, chemistry, astronomy). This is more of an evolution than a revolution.

Where Raymond sees a series of revolutions, I would suggest there was only the ebb and flow of the genre. Each of the revolutions Raymond identifies consists of a group of new writers appearing and reinvigorating the genre. Each wave had an element of self-promotion and posturing that Raymond seems to take more seriously than I think is warranted. Each wave appeared with a burst of creativity, but slowly lost steam and became a bit stale, setting the scene for the next group of writers to make a splash with their debut. If anything, this series of waves is what's kept SF a vital genre. There's always something new coming along.

The interesting thing is there was a revolution against the Campbellian style. *Star Wars* came out in 1977 and, as Raymond notes, set off a boom that made 'SF the second most successful genre after romance fiction'. This boom has played itself out in films, television, computer games, specialist magazines, novel franchises and so on. It covers a range of properties, and is watched, read and consumed by a far larger audience than even the most successful SF novel. To the vast majority of people, it is SF.

If anything has a claim to being the SF mainstream, it's the material that makes up this boom. Original written SF is a very small slice of this much larger market. And works that are eligible for something like the Prometheus Award are an even smaller subset of that slice. For Raymond to refer to that subset as the 'SF mainstream' is either extremely parochial or the best bit of absurdist humour I've seen in a long time.

What makes this material revolutionary, in terms of this discussion, is that it rejects pretty much all the elements of the Campbellian style. It features protagonists who may start out as relatively ordinary, but who soon become legendary figures and are acknowledged as such within the narratives they inhabit. It's all about subcreation, almost completely ignoring extrapolation. And, no matter what elements are introduced, they have only a superficial impact on the social, cultural, economic or political structures portrayed.

The audience for this material has little ability to make inferences from what's presented in order to develop a picture of how the world being por-



trayed is different from the one we live in. Actually, parts of the audience are actively hostile to even trying to read the material in that way. I know my attempts to do so have been dismissed as just being a demonstration of my inability to treat 'fiction as fiction' (whatever that means – I was never able to get a straight answer).

This *Star Wars*-inspired boom was a revolution against the Campbellian style of SF and, what's more, it was a highly successful one. The vast majority of SF produced and consumed these days has very little to do with the type of material produced by the cyberpunks, the New Wave, the Futurians, Campbell's group of writers or even the material promoted by Hugo Gernsback. Campbellian-style SF has been reduced to just being a source routinely mined for wild ideas and exotic visual imagery that can be used to spice up the worlds presented in this mainstream.

Rather than Campbell, or even Gernsback, the most influential person on the mainstream of modern SF is probably Alex Raymond, creator and the initial artist on the *Flash Gordon* comic strip.

The other problem with Raymond's essay is his rather odd approach to politics. Raymond refers to Campbellian SF as having a 'political aura', then goes on to describe a series of elements that, as far as I can tell, are simply features of adventure fiction.

To take them in the order Raymond presents them:

#### Ornery and insistent individualism

Pretty much all literature focuses on the individual and his or her needs and desires. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the two title characters put their mutual love ahead of the demands of their feuding families, but that's less of a political theme than a psychological one – or, at least, it's difficult to figure out what Shakespeare's politics were from the play. Confronting characters with familial and societal pressures that conflict with their own wants is a staple of literature.

Even the protagonists of the socialist utopian fiction Raymond refers to – by which I presume he means novels such as *Angel of the Revolution* (1893) by George Griffith or *The Iron Heel* (1907) by Jack London – displayed a strong sense of individualism. They needed to, because the protagonists spent much of their time moving in circles dominated by their



Brian Edwards (l.) and Zoran Bekric (r.), Critical Mass, February 2007. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)

ideological and political opponents. On that basis, one could argue that individualism is as much a feature of overtly pro-socialist literature as it is of pro-capitalist (or pro-libertarian) fiction. Or, one could just recognise that heroic characters tend to be strongly individualist because that's the way adventure fiction works, no matter what the political inclinations of its authors or readers.

As Alexis de Tocqueville noted in his *Democracy in America* (1835), individualism is a strongly American trait. Given that, one would expect that any genre produced mainly by Americans – such as SF – would reflect it.

I must admit that the term 'ornery' is one that I know only from American movies where it's generally applied to mules. However, there are any number of literary figures who are disagreeable and contrary without being libertarian. Gregory House, in the television series *House MD* (2004) is ornery – or he may go beyond regular ornerness to become cantankerous, curmudgeonly or even misanthropic, depending on the episode – but I don't see any political dimension to that. The character doesn't play favourites; he's disagreeable with everyone, no matter what their social, economic or political position. As far as I can tell, most of the protagonists in SF are similar, if not as extreme. If anything, such an attitude represents an adolescent anti-authoritarianism that is a common feature of genre fiction. Nothing especially political about it.

#### Veneration of the competent man

On this one Raymond is on very shaky ground. Again, it's a common feature of adventure fiction that protagonists be competent. After all, they're expected to overcome a series of obstacles and that's hard to do if they're

not competent. Even the heroes of the socialist utopian fiction Raymond refers to are not only competent, but praised and admired for that competence – in contrast to the capitalists they oppose, who depend on others to do things for them.

However, as I noted above, the Campbellian style featured relatively ordinary inhabitants of the worlds they lived in. While such characters were competent in their areas of expertise, they fell well short of the super-competent characters that had dominated pre-Campbellian SF. Just think of John Carter from Edgar Rice Burroughs' Martian novels, or consider this passage from chapter 7, 'DuQuesne's Voyage', of E. E. 'Doc' Smith's *Skylark Three* (1930):

'You're faster than I am, and that's saying something. You're chain lightning.'

'Well, Seaton is at least that much faster than I am. You've never seen him at work – I have. On that Osnomian dock he shot once before I started, and shot four times to my three from then on. I must have been shooting for a full second after he had his side all cleaned up. To make it worse I missed once with my left hand – he didn't.'

Now, that's competence! The only Campbellian writer, other than Smith, whose work seems to display a consistent veneration – rather than just a simple respect – of competence is one that Raymond doesn't mention: A. E. Van Vogt. All the others, including all those Raymond does mention, featured much more ordinary protagonists.

Raymond refers to the Futurians as 'de-emphasis[ing] individual heroism', but he also describes much of

their material as 'sharply satirical in tone'. The question is: was the de-emphasis on individual heroism a function of the Futurians' politics? Or of the satire? Personally, I think it was the satire. Incompetent characters are simply funnier than competent ones. When I watch the Three Stooges or Abbott and Costello wrecking a bathroom while working as plumbers, I don't see it as a political statement. It's just a comedy routine. And funnier because of the characters' creative incompetence.

A respect for competence is a feature of any society. The difference is in what types of competence are respected. It's a class thing. Among labourers, it tends to be physical prowess. Among craftsmen and the middle class, it's technical know-how. Among the managerial class, it's financial and organisational skill. Since most SF tends to be aimed at a middle-class audience, the competence that tends to get featured is mostly technical know-how. But that doesn't mean that members of other classes don't appreciate competence; it's just that they don't value that particular type of competence quite as much.

### **An instinctive distrust of coercive social engineering**

As far as I know — with the possible exception of the works of S. M. Stirling — no-one's in favour of *coercive* social engineering. This is hardly a distinctive feature of any type of SF.

If anything, SF writers and readers seem to be big fans of *manipulative* social engineering. The number of stories that feature characters who manoeuvre and, basically, trick others into doing things the way they want them to is legion. But then this is what one would expect from a genre that appeals mostly to those who are technically adept, but politically and financially powerless.

Also, I would point out that coercion is a function of resistance. If a population likes and supports socialism, then introducing a socialist political system will be easy and won't require any coercion. On the other hand, if a population opposes and distrusts libertarianism, then introducing a libertarian political system is going to require a great deal of coercion to overcome the resistance. Most political fiction assumes that the general population supports and agrees with whatever political position is being advocated, and so the attainment of the desired political structure is simple

and straightforward, with force only being needed to thwart the evil designs of those opposing the idealised system. Thus, in the utopian fiction Raymond refers to, socialism is achieved without coercion; in libertarian fiction, libertarianism is achieved in the same way. It's all in the assumptions and, not surprisingly, an author who supports a particular political ideology generally assumes everyone else does too — or will, once it's been properly explained to them.

### **A rock-ribbed objectivism that valued knowing how things work and treated all political ideologising with suspicion**

Taking these three points in reverse order, I would agree that most readers are suspicious of political ideologising, but would point out that refers to overtly libertarian ideologising as much as it does to any other sort. However, I would point out that a suspicion of political ideologising is not a political position; if anything, it's an anti-political position — a type of political agnosticism.

Valuing a knowledge of how things work is simply the respect for technical know-how that I referred to above. It is indeed a feature of SF, but it's not a political one. During the Second World War, all the major combatants employed aircraft, and the engineers and mechanics responsible for building and maintaining those aircraft all had a deep respect for knowing how they worked. They had to. Yet, their politics covered a spectrum that included Western democracy, Soviet communism, German nazism and Japanese imperialism.

Which brings us to 'rock-ribbed objectivism'. I don't know what Raymond means by 'rock-ribbed' — though Yvonne Rousseau suggested it might mean that it's either 'fossilised' or 'petrified' — but objectivism is the philosophy developed by Ayn Rand. Given that Rand did most of her work in developing and promulgating objectivism in the 1950s and '60s, I don't know how applicable it is to Campbellian SF that appeared in mostly in the 1940s. Still, it is the most political aspect of the aura Raymond describes and, I think, the most wrong-headed.

Objectivism is a philosophy built on a set of axioms — 'existence exists', 'consciousness exists' and 'A is A'. Raymond's phrasing suggests that he is distinguishing an objectivism that values 'knowing how things work'

from one that doesn't. The problem with that is there is no version of objectivism that values knowing how things work — well, not things outside of objectivism, anyway.

Going by Ayn Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1967), objectivism believes that all true knowledge can be gained by a process of theoretical deduction from its core axioms — a grander version of what Euclid does in his 'Elements', only applied to everything, not just geometry. It's not the first philosophy to take this approach, and it probably won't be the last. However, as a consequence, it's quite antithetical to active investigation or using experimentation to test ideas. It assumes that if the premises are correct and the logic valid, why, then, the conclusions must be true. This is at serious odds with the scientific method esteemed by most SF, which is only too familiar with the sentiment expressed in Thomas Huxley's famous quote 'The great tragedy of science — the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact'. The real world has a way of not cooperating with our ideas about how it should work.

While the process of logical deduction resembles the rigorous extrapolation I listed above as a feature of hard SF, I think it's much more likely that SF got it from the scientific process of forming a hypothesis than from Rand's philosophy. SF is much closer to Ernst Mach's notion of a *gedanken-experiment* ('thought experiment') than to any type of axiomatic philosophy.

While there may be SF writers and readers who are objectivists, objectivism is no more necessary to SF than scientology is.

Part of Raymond's problem is that he seems to assume that because libertarianism sprang in part from SF, that must mean that SF is somehow inherently libertarian. I suppose if he had written 'A religious history of SF' he would have conclude that, because scientology had sprung from SF, the natural religion of all SF readers must be scientology — with various heretics and schismatics trying to divide the One True Faith. After all, L. Ron Hubbard was one of Campbell's writers, and Campbell was an early advocate of dianetics, the precursor to scientology. That would have been an interesting essay to read.

I don't know how serious Raymond is about objectivism, but I will point out that his discussion of radial categories is decidedly non-objectivist.

(Continued on page 25)

# Jurisprudential difficulties in Heinlein's *The Star Beast*

by E.B. Frohvet

JS: 'E. B. Frohvet' is the pen name of a fan who lives in Maryland, USA. A reader of science fiction since childhood, he has been professionally published as a fiction writer and been active in fandom, on and off, for more than 20 years in conrunning and fanzines, including his own *Twink*. He has also had articles and reviews published in numerous other fanzines.

For those not familiar with the plot of *The Star Beast*, a very large alien creature has been living on Earth for over a hundred years, tended and guarded by several generations of the Thomas family. Its name is Lum-mox, and it likes to eat a wide variety of things. One day, Lummox wanders into town, and cause quite a commotion among the townsfolk despite its friendly and gentle behavior. Its appearance frightens and angers the people of the small town; the town's government is unable to decide what, if anything, to do with Lummox, and a special agency called the Department for Spatial Affairs steps in to determine a punishment for Lummox and his teenage owner, John Thomas.

A host of legal issues are raised in Heinlein's *The Star Beast* (1954), but many of them are, at best, highly questionable.

In order to assess a legal finding, one must consider the legal system involved. In Afghanistan under the Taliban, flogging, stoning, beating women in the street, were all legal. As reprehensible as most people in civilised countries found that, let's face it, many of us really didn't give a shit until September 11th. Even then our principal concern was that the Taliban were giving aid and comfort to our enemy. Had they turned over bin Laden and denounced Al-Qaeda, which they were given an opportunity to do, we would have let the Taliban go on beating women to their hearts' content.

(There's an old slang in politics: 'Afghanistanism', meaning, great attention to events in a distant and unimportant place.)

While there's a North American Union, not a United States of America in *TSB*, the legal system described is one that, with some slight modifications, any American would recognise.

In Chapter 1, the police officer Sergeant Mendoza demands that the protagonist John Thomas Stuart XI come with him. The boy responds, as by reflex:

'You got a warrant or something?'

Nonetheless, he goes along, recognising it's in his own best interest to cooperate. In Chapter 3, when John is roused at an ungodly hour to present himself and Lummox at court, Chief Dreiser came prepared with a warrant — technically, a summons. Even then John, with a typically American resistance to arbitrary authority, reads it and calmly points out:

'It says ten o'clock. It doesn't say I can't eat breakfast first, as long as I'm there by ten.'

Ignore Betty's absurd quibble about 'homesteading.' I doubt if any Ameri-

can court has decided a case on homesteading law in sixty years. (Still, this is what precedents are for. According to a quirk of the law in Howard County where I live, a bed-and-breakfast inn can only be licensed in a historic building. A couple who had filed for such a licence in a modern building had their application rejected. Their lawyer, obviously a man with a sense of humour, creatively refiled under long-disused statutes relating to boarding houses, leaving the county's puzzled officials thumbing through old books: the zoning board had not had to rule on such a case in decades.)

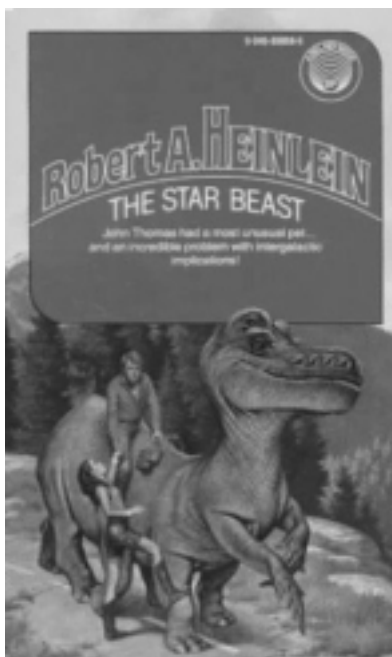
Sergei Greenberg, who assumes special jurisdiction of the case in *TSB* on behalf of the Department of Spatial Affairs, is an attorney. Still, he blows the whole thing in the first five minutes, before court is even in session.

It's a question of what Heinlein chooses to call xenology, the study of sentient aliens. But it's a matter of xenology as it bears on legal concerns. The people of any planet with which Earth has a treaty have human status under Earth law. Less than citizenship, certainly, but recognition as 'people'. At the outset, Greenberg observes that Lummox can speak: not merely parroting words, but using language meaningfully, conducting conversations. The lawyer himself observes:

'It is a truism among xenists [sic.: a member of an alien race is a 'xenian,' the adjective is 'xenic'] that speech centers are only found in nervous systems that use them.'

There's a general precedent, quoted in Chapter 10, so basic it's taught to schoolchildren.

Granted, as Greenberg later admits, he was misled by the lack of manipulative appendages (hands). Still, the fact that Lummox uses language meaningfully, even if in a limited fashion (and not even his own language), should have set off loud alarms in Greenberg of all people, a man who deals with sentient aliens for a living, to the possibility of Lummox



being a person in the legal sense, not a mere animal. At the least, he should have continued the legal matters indefinitely while that issue was pursued.

Perhaps Mr. Greenberg was influenced by the local magistrate, Judge O'Farrell, who says:

'I don't like last-minute postponements . . . It has always seemed unfair to me to order busy people to gather together, to their expense and personal inconvenience, then tell them to come back another day. It doesn't have the flavor of justice.'

That's an admirable sentiment, but one that appears excessively naive in a judge. The reality is that any lawyer can get nearly any action postponed, for any reason or no reason at all, for weeks or months at a time. It's a standard tactic, to keep delaying trial as long as possible, in the expectation that witnesses will get bored or pissed off and fail to show up, or be less certain in their testimony. And judges are so afraid of providing any reason, however frivolous, for an appeal (however frivolous) that they generally allow it. The convenience of witnesses, victims and jurors is rarely a consideration. Most of the time, unless it's a case that has attracted substantial public interest, it's the clerk of the court that sets the docket anyway.

Then there's combining criminal and civil issues in the same trial: a mistake, as the standards of evidence differ. Most civil matters can be decided on what laws call 'preponderance of the evidence'. In some limited instances of special import, civil findings may have to meet a requirement of 'clear and convincing' evidence. The evidentiary standard for criminal trials is 'beyond a reasonable doubt'. This is a distinctly tougher standard, and is supposed to be.

It's evident that Sergei Greenberg sees the whole affair as a waste of his time; he bulls ahead, trying to get it all over with in one day so he can get back to his real work. Thus he compounds the initial error.

Consider who's present at the trial. Greenberg himself presides.

Judge O'Farrell is present, but plays no significant role. The same is true of the bailiff and the clerk of the court, who are supposed to be there, but impartial and inconspicuous.

John Thomas Stuart is there, as defendant in the criminal actions, and in his presumptive capacity as legal

'owner' of LummoX, regarded as a chattel.

Mr Schneider is present as counsel for the damaged department store, Bon Marché, and for its insurer Western Mutual Assurance.

Mr deGrasse, the store manager, attends but plays no large role in the trial.

Mr Ito, younger, is there representing his elderly father, owner of the damaged greenhouses; also the attorney, not named, for his insurance company. That's a potential conflict of interest right there: the interest of Mr Ito and his father may not at all coincide with those of the insurer. All Ito wants is for the farm's loss to be made good. The insurance company almost certainly wants either to pin the whole blame on Johnnie, or to get the incident declared an act of God, in legal terms 'an event which no reasonable foresight or precaution could have prevented', either of which will get them off the hook.

Marie Stuart is present as John's mother and guardian.

Mr Postle is described as 'the Stuart family lawyer'. If Postle is willing to act as the boy's attorney, he has made zero preparation for the duty, not even having spoken to his putative client. That's obviously inadequate representation, if not — again — conflict of interest (Mrs Stuart's interest not being identical to her son's).

Mr Lombard, city attorney for the municipality of Westville, is present, which is fair in view of the city being an injured party. Also Chief of Police Dreiser, on behalf of the public safety; Sergeant Mendoza and Officer Karnes are witnesses.

The public defender, Cyrus Andrews, is one of the few who shows much sense in the matter; he is willing to act as John's lawyer, saying,

'I'll need a recess to consult with my principal.'

Then there's Mrs. Donohue, witness and damaged party (her rose bushes), and *her* attorney, Mr Beanfield.

There's Betty Sorenson, who proposes to act as Johnnie's counsel despite the fact she is also a minor, and not a lawyer. Greenberg gives far too much credence to this ridiculous notion; he should have booted her out the door. (Betty does at least have the wit to point out yet another conflict of interest, that Lombard and Andrews share a private law practice.) If John

insists on proceeding *pro se*, without an attorney, having refused both Postle and Andrews, that's his problem.

There are at least three reporters, whom Greenberg orders back to the spectator seats, but makes no effort to have them removed. Again a very American notion, that court is a public place. I can go up to Howard County courthouse any day, go through the metal detector, and sit down in any court to watch. It's well known to anyone who works in a court that there are 'regular' spectators who come nearly every day, it being their principal hobby. Indeed it's rather striking that in an event of such obvious local interest, few people have turned up to observe the proceedings.

Finally there's Dr Esklund, a nut case who styles himself *amicus curiae*, a 'friend of the court', prompting the humorous but apt response from Greenberg:

'This court insists on choosing its own friends.'

Sensibly, he is ejected.

That's twenty-three people, including eight lawyers, almost all of whom have different interests in the case. Too many.

Betty's suggestion that LummoX be called as a witness, and Greenberg's rejection of it on grounds the 'star beast' is not a competent witness, is yet another mistake he could have spared himself by removing her from court in the first place. He threatens Esklund with being held in contempt, demands order when someone laughs at Mrs Donohue, but allows Betty to deliver an impassioned rant.

And we're still at the stage of merely establishing the facts. Any competent attorney representing John Thomas Stuart would have disputed the facts, disputed the admissibility of the facts, and disputed the relevance and interpretation of the facts, right down the line. Inadequate representation again.

Moving along to the conclusions, Mr Greenberg begins by denying two petitions to destroy LummoX. One apparently got lost along the way, or else Chief Dreiser never got around to formally submitting his. While I have no sympathy for the 'Keep Earth Human League', that their petition was denied unread (unless Greenberg is a speed reader and skimmed it while his attention should have been on the trial he was conducting) suggests an obvious ground for appeal.





Greenberg then dismisses all criminal charges on grounds that:

'No criminal intent can be found . . .'

That's arguably true, but may not be relevant. This is something of a grey area in law. Minors under a certain age, and the mentally deficient, can be presumed to lack *mens rea*, criminal intent; but they can still commit crimes and still be confined as a public safety measure. The difference between murder and manslaughter is largely one of intent, but you can still be prosecuted for killing someone even if you did not intend to. (See the related concept of 'felony murder': any death that results from the commission of a crime is murder, even if there was no intent to cause death.)

To his credit, Greenberg does consider the possibility of whether Johnnie was criminally negligent in allowing LummoX to get free, all else following from the alien getting out; ruling that the youth exercised 'due prudence' based on experience to that point. This is one aspect of the ruling which actually makes sense.

In the civil litigation, he denies all punitive and exemplary damages, and then (far too late) continues all civil actions pending further investigation. As Heinlein wittily comments:

A fly would have had his choice of open mouths.

If that's not enough, Mr Schneider blurts:

'Where does that leave us?'

Mr Greenberg then drops another brick, with the proposal that specimens from the *Trail Blazer* voyage were government property, and therefore LummoX, if a chattel, may not belong to John Thomas Stuart at all:

'The source of relief may be a matter of more involved litigation.'

In other words, come back later: the very problem he was trying to avoid by barging ahead in the first place.

Note, no one raises on Johnnie's behalf the suggestion that the government has failed to pursue any claim to LummoX for more than a century, and is therefore barred from asserting such a claim now under the doctrine of estoppel. Further, that the Stuart family have established ownership (or guardianship) of LummoX by prescriptive right, the same having been consummated by use and acknowledged by civil authority: it has already been stipulated that LummoX was left to John Thomas XI in his father's will, Mrs Stuart's interest being only indirect through her son.

I hate to keep harping on this phrase 'inadequate representation', but like the proverbial elephant in the room, it's difficult to ignore. Any competent attorney having John's interest as his principal concern would have jumped all over those two points with both feet. My point is that no one is filling that role: certainly not Betty, who is unqualified, and not Greenberg, who despite blather about

advising you as to the law,

has fish of his own to fry.

In short, this is about as complete a jurisprudential botch of evasion, double-talk, and inconsistency as one could imagine. Mr Greenberg, though technically a lawyer, obviously has very little trial experience; and he is motivated throughout by impatience, an arrogant sense of superiority over these local yokels, and in the end, greed, the desire to acquire LummoX as a specimen for the Department of Spatial Affairs. (While we can suppose that Greenberg had no financial interest, it could hardly fail to be to his professional advantage to secure such a unique

specimen. Having inserted the Department into the matter as one having an explicit, privy interest in the outcome, rather than an impartial dispenser of justice, he has created such a conflict of interest as should clearly require him to recuse himself.)

What should he have done? For an obvious start, Greenberg ought never to have let anything go to trial while the status of LummoX, either as person or chattel, was in any doubt. Failing that, he should have adjourned the trial as soon as it became apparent that he was in over his head, with too many interests at odds with each other. Or he could have minimised the damage by agreeing to separate trials, as suggested by Mr Ito's attorney.

That Mr Greenberg does none of those things indicates a complete absence of judicial prudence. John Stuart recognises, though he might not be able to articulate it clearly, that he has received neither justice nor equity. Thus his decision to blow the whole thing off and flee, at least to buy time, is a reasonable one under the circumstances. Finding an attorney of his own, as Thorby Rudbek eventually does in a similar situation in *Citizen of the Galaxy*, or Valentine M. Smith does in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, would have been an excellent next step.

In retrospect, John would have been well advised to take an attorney to his meeting with Mr. Kiku as well. However, that's a matter of diplomacy rather than jurisprudence, and therefore outside the scope of this article.

— E. B. Frohvet, 2005

# Grouches on Gethen: Improbabilities in *The Left Hand of Darkness*

by David Lake

David Lake writes: 'I'm basically OK; pretty fit at 77, occasionally writing poetry or short prose pieces. I am also teaching a good deal in various voluntary ways. One is, I help a certain intelligent foreigner improve his English by reading with him texts we both enjoy. We've recently done *Cat's Cradle* and *The Wizard of Earthsea*, and are beginning *The Left Hand of Darkness*.'

I first read *The Left Hand of Darkness* (henceforth, *LHD*) soon after it was published in 1969, and I was bowled over with admiration. (I was going through a Taoist phase at the time, which probably helped.) Later, for many years I taught the book in an SF course at the University of Queensland. Each time I re-read it (I've lost count how often), I was again awed. I once published an article in *Science Fiction Studies* on its profoundly symbolic sets of images. I have written to Ursula fan letters, to which she has graciously replied. At the moment I am in a sense teaching it again, reading it with a young foreigner who wants to improve his English. We have read four chapters, but I have leapt ahead of him and re-read the whole book again. I have also recently read or re-read the related short stories 'Winter's King' and 'Coming of Age in Karhide'. Once more, I am impressed by the richness of the poetry, the depth of the themes.

And yet: each time I am uncomfortably aware of the improbabilities in the story. They do not destroy the greatness of *LHD*; but they do irritate this reader.

This is not a problem confined to Le Guin's work. It is perennial. Several acclaimed works of literature have very dodgy plots. Aristotle noticed this, about 330 BCE. In his short book *Poetics* he twice remarks (chapters 15.10 and 24.20) that *Oedipus Rex* is based on a glaring improbability: why hasn't Oedipus, through all the long years of his reign, inquired into the details of the murder of Laius? Aristotle, however, says that writers can get away with such things if they tuck them away in the background before the story starts. He is more severe on inconsistencies within the stories

themselves. Yes, indeed: and I get annoyed by one or two such things in the tragedies of Shakespeare. In *King Lear*, for instance, the good guys treat Lear, even after his fall, with enormous respect, and we are supposed to believe that he has been a great and good king – yet in Act I he behaves like a tyrannical old fool, cursing and banishing the people who love him. This is a serious internal problem, worse than the Oedipus thing: yet we swallow the contradiction for the sake of the wonderful poetry based on it.

In *LHD*, there is a great deal of contradiction or improbability to swallow.

I am not now referring to the two big *impossibilities* that form a necessary basis for this and for Le Guin's other 'Hainish' novels. Those two are:

- 1 The ansible, the 'radio' that allows instant communication across countless light years. This violates Einsteinian relativity, which forbids any information travelling faster than light.
- 2 The postulate that we humans, and the Gethenians, are really Hainish colonists planted long ago on planets with unrelated life-forms. The close relation between our DNA and that of all other life-forms on Earth is just a huge coincidence: we are not related to chimpanzees. (Wow! Worse than the ansible.)

These two impossibilities are necessary for Le Guin's novel; and anyway, they precede the main story. Aristotle would have approved. And you've got to allow SF writers one or two crazy postulates: that is fundamental to the genre. The ansible and the Hainish colonisation don't bother me at all.

What *does* bother me is the series of subsequent oddities: some six improbable things you have to believe before you can sit down to breakfast on Gethen. Here they are:

- First (a mild bother) the Ekumen, formerly known as the League of Worlds: a confederation of 83



Leo and Diane Dillon's cover to the first edition of Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Ace Science Fiction Special paperback, 1969).

planets and some 3000 nations, with headquarters on the planet Hain. This is a super-UN, pursuing a completely benevolent policy through hundreds of years; and inviting other planets to join when they are judged ready for it. I know this is a great SF cliché, but it still jars on me. The Ekumen and all its representatives are completely saintly, and several sacrifice their lives in approaching new planets. All right, we have to believe this; but our present UN on Earth doesn't inspire much confidence in such organisations. Has there been a change in human or Hainish nature? Is there no danger of corruption in this long-lived bureaucracy? Apparently not.

- A much more serious problem concerns the saintly envoys themselves: for example, Genly Ai, the Earthman, one of the two heroes of *LHD*. He is presented as a *normal* male Earthling, well-meaning, dedicated, if a bit stupid. Yet how *normal* could a man be, who dumps for ever all his family and friends on Earth, to cross 80-odd light years, and only return to Earth (perhaps) after a couple of centuries? We are given these facts clearly at the beginning of chapter 16 (Ace edition, 2000, p. 221). Genly's parents are 'seventy years dead', and though (you can work it out) in lived time he is 26, he was born on Earth 'a hundred and twenty years ago'. This is not much like the Apollo astronauts, who were all carefully selected as normal family men, all married, to ensure that they were mentally stable. Le Guin actually picked up on this problem in a short story, 'Vaster Than Empires And More Slow', first published in 1971; that is, two years after *LHD*, and collected in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (Bantam, 1976). This story concerns a Terran expedition to a far planet — farther off than Gethen, but not significantly so. On the first page of this story we read: 'All the volunteers to the Extreme Survey shared one peculiarity: they were of unsound mind. No normal human being who had experienced time-slippage of even a few decades between League worlds would volunteer for a round trip of centuries. The Surveyors were escapist, misfits. They were nuts.'

Well, but Genly too has experienced a time-slippage of more than a few decades; his 'round trip'

would be well over a century. Is he not, therefore, an escapist, a misfit, a nut? Could the Ekumen trust him to remain sane on Gethen?

There is one way out of this problem. It is, that Genly is basically of the temperament of a priest or monk. He is supposed to be a normal male; yet on Gethen, for years, he enjoys no sex whatever. He has at least two chances, but he avoids both: once in the prison-truck with a Gethenian in female 'kemmer', that is, oestrus (chap. 13, p. 171), and again with Estraven on the Gobrinn Ice.

One presumes, therefore, that in Genly the Ekumen chose an under-sexed loner who had broken with his family, and his friends (if he ever had any). One can only hope he is not unbalanced.

- Karhide, the nation on the Great Continent of Gethen which is the great rival of communist Orgoreyn. For me, Karhide is a great problem, full of inconsistency. It is supposed to be feudal and anarchic, and, up to Genly's arrival, incapable of war. (There is no word for 'war' in Karhidish.) But that is very far from the impression it makes in the early chapters. The King, Argaven XV, decrees the banishment of his good prime minister Estraven (Genly's great friend). He does this without consulting his parliament. The decree states that Estraven must be out of Karhide in three days, or die; and nobody must help him; and at once, almost everyone obeys the decree. Except for his lover Ashe, no one dares to approach him or give him a lift in any vehicle. This is not a feudal anarchy: it is very much like a Tsarist autocracy. The kings of Karhide seem to be absolute monarchs.

I know that Karhide is said to be *changing* in this direction, under the rule of the new prime minister Tibe; but it looks very much as though it changed long ago. There have been kings in Karhide for 1700 years; and 700 years ago King Argaven the First moved out of his old capital Rer, and took the new capital Erhenrang, when he crossed the Kargav Mountains and 'settled the great valley of the West Fall' (chap. 5, p. 53). That move and 'settlement' looks again like a violent piece of autocracy. Gethen has been industrial and developed for at least 3000 years (chap. 3, p. 28), so when Argaven the First took the

West Fall (the large area that borders on Orgoreyn), there must have been people living there. If not Orgota, then who? This 'settlement' must in fact have been a conquest; and conquest implies war.

Not only Karhide, but also Orgoreyn has been a nation (a Communist one, at that) for 'several hundred years' (chap. 8, p. 115). So both nations on the Great Continent have been well organised for that time. We know there is plenty of violence at least in Karhide — murders, assassinations, 'forays' between the tribal groups called Hearths. Well, an organised nation acquainted with violence on a small scale is surely capable of organising it on a large scale: that is, capable of war.

So I find it very hard to believe that before Genly there have been no wars on Gethen. Yet Genly's mission is largely to save Gethen from war . . .

I also find it hard to understand the organisation of Karhide. How did the often mutually hating Hearths ever combine into a nation? What *intermediate* structures are there: dukedoms, provinces, states? We never find out. The Hearths with their surrounding Domains are easier to understand: they are aggregates of matrilineal families, with one family usually noble, that is, lords of the Hearth.

- But then we have the peculiar incest law, or rather half-incest law. Siblings are allowed to have sex with each other until *one child* is born to one of the pair. After that they must separate, and never do it with each other again.

A law like this takes my breath away. Among us humans, all incest is usually tabu, for good Darwinian reasons. Some societies have allowed it (such as Ancient Egypt). But the point is, incest is either allowed altogether or forbidden altogether: this 'one child' law is incredible.

This law is not structural in the *plot*. But we know why Le Guin put it in: to reinforce the betrayal-and-exile theme. Estraven is betrayed by and separated from his dead brother Arek (they have violated the law); and at the end of the story Genly has taken the place of Arek, with once more, themes of betrayal and separation (this time, again, by death).

Beautiful symbolism: but the law itself is incredible.

- In Orgoreyn, there is a major plot problem. Karhide and Orgoreyn are having a 'cold war' arising out of a border dispute. Estraven, prime minister of Karhide, suddenly loses the King's favour and is exiled on pain of death. He escapes to a port of Orgoreyn, where he is recognised by local officials. But then he is ignored by the government of Orgoreyn for four months! He is granted residence, and works for three months in a fish market, after which he 'calls' the government. Then he becomes a secretary to one of the inner ruling group. But still he is ignored. It is only one month later that he is called up for an interview concerning Genly, who has applied to enter Orgoreyn (chap. 6).

This is not how things used to be done in Moscow! A prime minister of a rival nation who defects . . . Why is he not immediately interrogated? Perhaps an explanation lurks in Gethenian psychology. But it is not in the text; and I am left incredulous. The case is like that of Oedipus, who doesn't ask relevant questions for years. The Orgota don't ask relevant questions for months. But the case is worse in *LHD*, because it occurs in the midst of the story. (Oh, Aristotle!)

- And now for the biggest improbability of all, which is also central to the whole plot. This is the method used by the Ekumen in making contact with new planets, such as Gethen. The Ekumen sends in secret Investigators, who learn the world's lore and languages. Then a biggish starship is despatched, with some dozen people aboard. But the starship remains invisible, in an orbit far from the planet. From the ship one Envoy, the Mobile, descends in a little rocket-lander, and says, in effect: 'Take me to your leader. I represent 83 planets in Outer Space. We would like you to join our federation.' To back up this claim the Mobile (here, Genly) has only himself (slightly alien-looking), and his small rocket, and a bag of hi-tech tricks, including one ansible. He is unarmed and en-

tirely at the mercy of the natives.

The results of this policy are often not very pleasant. At the beginning of chapter 3 (p. 27), we learn that on some planets at least one envoy has been killed, and three in succession 'locked up with madmen'. Not very surprising. If *we* had one human-looking alien land in a small flying saucer, and make such claims, would we believe him? The best policy would probably be polite 'protective custody' until confirmation arrives that he is indeed an accredited Envoy, and not some criminal or madman on the run from his home planet.

All this is done so as not to frighten the natives. In chapter 15 (p. 209), Estraven asks the obvious question: 'Why did you come alone?' Genly replies 'One alien is a curiosity, two are an invasion.' Are they really? I don't believe it. Two unarmed aliens might be much more reassuring than one. On Gethen, a loving pair, a man and a woman, would be both convincing and acceptable. They could pretend at first to be a kemmering couple; and after that, all would go well. Especially if their starship were clearly visible overhead.

The obvious best way for the Ekumen to approach Gethen would be to place the starship in orbit round the planet itself, circling for months. The Gethenians have no SAM missiles, so the ship would be safe; but they do have radios. There could be a long dialogue and negotiations by radio before anyone descends to the planet. This need not be very frightening. The Ekumen would show that they certainly had great power, but were not using it in a hostile way. Then the little rocket-lander could come down in a place designated by the natives, and the nice couple would come out — and all would be well. And approaches like that *have* been made in other SF novels. (I did something like that in my novel *The Gods of Xuma*.) Le Guin does something quite singular. Why?

I believe the answer is, that she wants a great tragic drama of faith and loyalty versus unfaith and betrayal. And she achieves that. But

she does so in a story that is very odd, coming from a self-proclaimed atheist. I would say that (unknowingly?) Le Guin has written a variation on the story of Christ. Genly comes down from heaven like an angel (angels are God's messengers), saying 'Believe in me, and you will be saved' (from war or other unpleasantness). But hardly anyone does believe in him. Jesus had at least twelve believers (Genly has eleven, but they are tucked away in his invisible starship). On Gethen, Genly has only one: Estraven. Who actually saves the Saviour, risking his own life and finally dying in what may be considered a blood sacrifice. It is like a rewrite of the Gospel of John, with the Beloved Disciple being martyred instead of his Master.

It was said of the Charge of the Light Brigade: 'Magnificent, but not war'. I am tempted to say of *LHD*, 'Magnificent, but not SF'. Of course, that would be outrageous; but could not a similar tragedy of love and self-sacrifice be written of some place on Earth? A historical novel, perhaps. Estraven is to Genly rather what Pocahontas was to Captain John Smith. And Genly, priest-like Genly, is essentially a *missionary*. One could imagine a Christian missionary placing himself among a warlike tribe of native Americans, and being nearly martyred, but saved at the last moment by a loving native woman who gives her own life instead. Probably stories like that *have* been written, or filmed.

But *LHD* provides us with a richer experience than any such novel. Its virtues are perhaps not those of a novel at all, but of a highly original lyric poem, with its oddly paired images of light-plus-cold versus darkness-plus-warmth, signifying knowledge-and-destruction versus ignorance-and-life; and these image-pairings are maintained beautifully through the whole text. One can only be grateful to Ursula Le Guin for giving us all this — even though it is based on incredibilities.

I wonder what Aristotle would have said?

— David J. Lake, 26 June 2006



## Coda: Estraven's early life

One irritation for some readers of *The Left Hand of Darkness* is the nagging question: what actually happened between Estraven and his brother Arek, 20 years and then 14 years before the year of the novel itself? All we have are hints scattered across the text — hints followed by our guesses.

This is certainly intentional on the part of Le Guin: it is part of the 'darkness' of Ignorance, which is one great theme of the novel. But still, the left hand of darkness is *light*; and I think a little more light on the facts would be useful here. Therem Estraven is, after all, the real hero of *LHD*. He is the one who does the crucial deeds, and in the end, like a proper tragic hero, pays for them with his life. Genly, the Earthman, is more of an observer and a victim than a hero. He is the overall editor and main narrator of the story; but he himself admits that it is really Estraven who has controlled his movements (end of chapter 8, Ace, 2000, p. 121). There are some things we never get to know because Genly himself never knows them, perhaps never wants to know them. In the end he has metaphorically become Estraven's brother, taking the place of the dead Arek. But the focus of the novel is Estraven; we warm to him as a really heroic figure. And so we want to know if he was, or was not, guilty of serious wrongdoing in the past. On his planet, Gethen, *suicide* is the worst possible crime, as it is a betrayal of life and friends. So: is Estraven guilty of causing his brother's suicide?

One may add, also: in the end, does he commit suicide himself?

My verdict is no. Not guilty on either count.

One can dispose of the second charge briefly. Genly feels Estraven's death is a suicide-betrayal, but he is wrong. Estraven has to leave his country, Karhide, where he is outlawed and facing death at the hands of his enemy Tibe, the new prime minister. He is making for Orgoreyn, where he faces a grim fate (possible imprisonment in a gulag camp), but not necessarily death. As he reaches the border, he is blocked by Tibe's armed guards, who call to him to stop. He ignores the order, rushes on, and is shot dead. But if he *had* obeyed the order, the guards would certainly have killed him anyway. His action is like that of a soldier

throwing himself into an attack when he knows he has a high probability of being killed. But that is not *suicide*. Not guilty.

Now let us return to the business of Arek. Here too, I believe Estraven is completely innocent. But we need to get some facts clear before we can clear his name.

The big problem arises from the 'half-incest' law of all the nations of Gethen, pointedly including Estraven's Karhide. This law is stated in two non-narrative chapters, 2 and 7. Chapter 2 is a Karhidish legend, chosen and inserted by Genly because it is relevant, a significant parallel. In the legend, we read:

In those days, as now, full brothers were permitted to keep kemmer until one of them should bear a child, but after that they must separate; so it was never permitted them to vow kemmering for life (p. 21).

In chapter 7, a previous Investigator states: 'Siblings are not however allowed to vow kemmering, nor keep kemmering after the birth of a child to one of the pair' (p. 92).

Well, in the legend we are told that in the Hearth-and-Domain of Shath (north Karhide), two siblings violated this rule. The 'Lord of Shath commanded them to break their vow and never meet in kemmer again'. The sibling who bore the child then committed suicide; and the other 'brother', as guilty of breaking the law and causing the suicide, was driven with violence out of Shath into permanent exile from his Domain.

Now, let us look at the parallel happenings between Arek and Therem Estraven. (Actually, all the family are Estravens, but for simplicity I will reserve that name for our hero, Therem.)

We know that Estraven and Arek produced a child, for we meet him (Sorve junior) at the end of the novel. He is then aged, Genly thinks, about 19 or 20. We know that Estraven has been in 'exile' of some sort from his Domain of Estre for 20 years (ch. 19, p. 275). A few days before he dies, Estraven says to Genly:

But I haven't expected to see my home again for a long time now. I've been in exile for twenty years,

you know.

This sounds like a real, permanent exile from his Domain. Yet at the end of the story, at Estre, it is made clear to Genly that his family, his parent Sorve senior, Lord of Estre, and his child Sorve junior, have loved him, and now care deeply for his honour and public reputation. This is not like the case of Gethen, the man in the chapter 2 legend, who was violently and officially expelled from his family hearth-domain.

There is another detail that counts against any legal-official exile from Estre for Estraven. When he is publicly exiled from Karhide on pain of death, he first thinks: 'Why should I not go east and so come home to Estre?' (ch. 6, p. 72). He is deterred from trying this only by the near-certainty that he would be caught and killed by Tibe's agents. I submit, therefore, that he *could* have gone home, into hiding, and so he has not been formally exiled by his family.

And consequently, Estraven cannot be guilty of causing Arek's suicide (if that death was suicide). Estraven stays away from home for 20 years for other reasons, connected with Arek. Perhaps he prefers to avoid embarrassment and sorrow.

Did Arek in fact commit suicide? He may have merely died 'of a broken heart', or in ambiguous circumstances. Arek wrote a letter to Estraven, quoting the poem 'Tormer's Lay', 'before his death' (ch. 16, p. 233). But 'before' need not mean 'immediately before'. Genly, reading Estraven's diary, may suspect a suicide note, but he doesn't know. And neither do we.

One important thing is in Estraven's favour: he left Estre for good six years before Arek's death. For he left 20 years ago, whereas Arek has been dead only 14 years (ch. 18, p. 254). So it seems Estraven obeyed the law of separation after the birth of a child, and did not *immediately* cause Arek's death.

Another point: did Estraven violate the law by 'vowing kemmering' to Arek? The ambiguous evidence for this comes in chapter 6, page 74. Estraven tells his later kemmering-partner Ashe:

The only true vow of faithfulness I ever swore was not spoken, nor

could it be spoken, and the man I swore it to is dead and the promise broken, long ago.

From this it seems that Estraven did 'vow' and 'promise', but not in spoken words. The promise he made to Arek was therefore not a legally recognised vow. And so — he is not guilty of breaking any part of the incest law.

We can now reconstruct a chronicle of Estraven's life. But one more basic datum is needed: how old, exactly, is he during the events of the novel? I would say, about 37 or 38, with very little uncertainty. The Investigator says that Gethenians are fertile, at least in female phase, 'between seventeen and thirty-five or so' (ch. 7, p. 93). Much beyond 35, then, they would not come into kemmer; but Estraven does

so, during the Ice journey (chapters 16 and 18). If he had been fertile at age 17, and had borne or sired a child then or a year later, then 20 years later he would be 37 or 38 — near but not quite past menopause. We know that Arek was one year older (ch. 18, p. 254).

A minor point is that Estraven and Ashe began kemmering ten years before the events of the novel, and the affair lasted seven years. Ashe bore two children.

Here is the table of events I have constructed. Unlike the Karhiders, I will call the year of Estraven's love-making with Arek 'Year Zero'. And I will place the events of the novel within one year, which is roughly true.

Year	Events
0	Estraven 17, Arek 18. They meet in kemmer.
1	The child Sorve is born. Estraven leaves home at once.
7	Arek dies.
11	Estraven and Ashe vow kemmering.
18	Estraven and Ashe part.
21	Events of the novel.

One detail must remain a mystery. We cannot know whether Estraven was the father or the mother of young Sorve. The hints we have cancel out. Perhaps Genly never wanted to ask.

(I have my own preference, but, like Genly, *I'm not going to tell.*)

Praise then darkness.

— David J. Lake, 7 July 2006

### The Raymond Debate (from p. 18)

According to objectivism's Law of Identity — 'A is A' — a category such as SF would have to be defined as an abstract concept derived through a process of measurement omission (don't ask). A sort of 'SF is SF'. Rand's term for people who accepted such linguistic ideas as 'radial categories' was 'subjectivist', and her dismissal of them was quite scathing.

However, I think Raymond's discussion of radial categories is the most interesting part of the essay. What's more, I agree with him that radial categories are a very useful way to approach SF. I would go further and suggest that they are a highly effective way to approach almost all the genres that flourished in the American pulp magazines of the first half of the twentieth century.

The only deficiency is that Raymond doesn't identify what he considers to be the core works that form the

prototype. He just vaguely refers to 'certain classics of hard SF'. Contrast this to Hugo Gernsback's editorial in the first issue of *Amazing Stories* (April 1926) in which he describes SF, or 'scientifiction' as he called it, as being 'the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story — a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision'.

Even though he was unaware of the idea of radial categories, Gernsback zeros in on exactly what he considered to be the core from which the genre radiates. It's also a core that covers a broader spectrum than Raymond's vague reference and, if you add Edgar Rice Burroughs, I think you'd have a core from which pretty much all subsequent SF can be derived.

Finally, Raymond's claim that libertarianism isn't right wing is probably the oddest part of the essay. As anyone who has interacted with, or even just observed, libertarians online will

quickly discover, they constantly display a number of traits: they're intensely nationalistic; have a highly developed sense of exceptionalism; are preoccupied with macho posturing, wanting to always appear strong, tough and hard; have little empathy for the suffering of others; and have a strong belief in the efficacy of violence, generally advocate it as the first, and often only, response to perceived slights and frustrations. If you think of politics as a radial category, and you ask 'What other political ideologies display these traits?' you will find them all neatly clustered at the right end of the chamber. While I'm sure that the minor differences between libertarianism and other right-wing ideologies loom very large to those in the middle of that cluster, they seem very, very small to those in the gallery and who, in Raymond's own words, regard 'all political ideologising with suspicion'.

— Zoran Bekric, 2006

## Letters of comment

**DARRELL SCHWEITZER**  
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Perhaps we can understand my friend Ben Indick's doubts about my photo [in *SET 5*] on account of his youth. After all, a downy-cheeked lad of 82 may have a different perspective, and we must respect that. But the photo I gave you is my standard publicity photo, taken by I know not whom, but a good example of a black and white (easier to reproduce) with adequate contrast, and a not-too-goofy expression on my otherwise cacodaemonic visage. I do not photograph well. The problem is, of course, that the camera cannot be persuaded to lie.

In any case, that photo, which also occurs on four of my Wildside Press books, probably does need updating. I think it is from the late 1990s, which, as we all slip unto dissipated oblivion is, egad, almost ten years ago. I can't read the name of the con on the name badge, but I think this was taken at a Boskone about 1997. I am, right now, 54. I would have been in my mid forties in the photo. It is true that I employed the same portraitist as Dorian Gray with the same results, that my boyish appearance (I avoid the cliché 'good looks') was preternaturally prolonged, but the damn fool never did learn to use the right kind of preservative. On the painting, I mean. I am otherwise reminded of that great exchange from 'The Addams Family' in which little Wednesday tells the travelling saleswoman about cosmetic use in the household. 'Uncle Fester uses a spray-on preservative.' 'Oh . . . ? To keep young?' 'No, just to keep.'

Attached is a more recent and much more revealing photo, produced by the noted artist (and my sometime collaborator) Jason Van Hollander. I don't know why some people suspect that this has been touched up. I don't know if you can read the shirt. It says: 'VINTAGE PERSON. Been around long enough to be back in style.'

On another matter, I read the article about Australian censorship with interest, particularly the bit about *The Werewolf of Paris*. While one can never approve of censorship, I was impressed that Dr Allen took the trouble to actually read the book and attempt a close analysis of it. His report, while not favourable and decidedly



The *real* Darrell Schweitzer? (Photo: Jason Van Hollander.)

wrong-headed in some ways, could have made a publishable book review. I get the impression that in the USA most censors or would-be censors are just ignorant, bigoted and afraid. You know, the kind of people who object to *Huckleberry Finn* because it contains the n-word and therefore must be racist, who fear that Harry Potter will make your kid worship Satan, or who think that *Slaughterhouse-Five* will undermine patriotic values. That sort of thing.

But here we have a censor with some erudition and even literary understanding. He can cite other examples of werewolves in literature, from Petronius to Rider Haggard. He quotes Tennyson. His literary background is probably a bit old-fashioned, but this guy was neither entirely stodgy, nor ignorant.

As for what he was really driving at, I think that comes through clearly enough. He let himself be distracted by the Avon edition's notoriously lurid cover. You will recall that *all* Avon books of the period, even if pure as the driven snow, were made to look like the raciest pornography. It sold books. As an editor in our field explained to me years later, actual literary merit in a paperback 'must be carefully concealed' if you want to sell copies. How much more so in 1951, when most paperbacks were mystery novels with dead dames on the covers.

This was the era in which C. S.

Lewis's *Perelandra* was reissued by Avon as *Voyage To Venus* with a naked lady on the cover. Another Avon book of the time was famously banned, then exonerated, so that the publisher bandied it about in very self-important terms thereafter. They took a very ordinary volume entitled *Chinese Love Stories*, retitled it *Eastern Shame Girl*, and gave it the full Avon treatment. You can imagine the result. Rather like what Dr Allen describes for *The Werewolf Of Paris*.

I am afraid that at the end of the day, the good doctor judged the book by its cover. If it had been a Penguin, with a chaste cover, I am sure the matter simply would not have come up.

31 October 2006

I was active in fanzines as far back as 1968. I came out largely on the anti-New Wave side, though I would break ranks and write favourable reviews of *Stand On Zanzibar* or *Camp Concentration* or even *Barefoot in the Head*. I was the only American fan I knew who actually read *New Worlds*. My objection to the New Wave was not that of Lester del Rey or J. J. Pierce. I wasn't all that worried about its pessimism or even its anti-science, but more about its opacity. I didn't object to *Bug Jack Barron*, which is a comprehensible story, but to things like the Ballard condensed novels or Pamela Zoline's 'The Heat Death of the Universe', which do not seem to have any content. I looked at the Zoline again recently and it still seems pretentious and empty. Similar writers in *NW* would have included Michael Butterworth, James Sallis and Langdon Jones, not exactly names to conjure with these days.

**[BRG: I loved Langdon Jones's stories that appeared in *New Worlds* and *The New SF* anthology, because he wrote very good sentences, and some of his stories made deep metaphorical sense. (At the age of twenty-two, I knew what 'deep metaphorical sense' meant.) I wondered what had happened to him after 1971. A Google search found his website, where he reveals himself somewhere in the English countryside clumping about in his wellies. His website does not tell us what he actually does for a living these days. But why should I imagine that he ever earned any money from his fiction?]**

The conclusion I've come to is that there are brief times when, largely for critical/ideological reasons because no one wants to seem unsophisticated, writers like that can fake their way into the field without actually learning to write a story. But they do not survive. The New Wave is remembered more favourably precisely because these folks are forgotten, and we think of *Camp Concentration* or 'Behold the Man' instead, which are still powerful stories with actual emotional and intellectual content. People do not remember the actual contents of, say, *Orbit*, just the few classic stories that came out of it like Wolfe's 'Seven American Nights.'

**[BRG: Again I disagree. I remember *Orbits 5, 6 and 11* as being among the best anthologies of that Era of Great Original Fiction Anthologies. In those days, I read all the ones I could obtain, and took the trouble to write about them.]**

I have suggested of late that much of the literary fantasy and slipstream is repeating the mistakes of the New Wave era and it is again possible for some writers to get published, even widely, without being able to communicate anything. But I think that, say, D. F. Lewis will go the way of the minor New Wavers, for the same reason.

So maybe that makes me an unreconstructed Second Foundationer, but I doubt it. Remember *that*? J. R. Pierce started a crusade against the New Wave. It was largely a one-man movement, in the classic fannish manner. I am sure he counted me as a member and fellow-traveller, but I am not sure I did. It was more that he was willing to publish some of my stuff — including several juvenile and awful 'satires' — in his fanzine.

I have a few issues of *SF Commentary*. I certainly saw a few of them. But I guess I just reached a point of over-expansion and there were only so many fanzines I could participate in. I remember writing (nothing of any consequence) for another Australian fanzine of the period, *Gegenschein*.

Keep up the good work with *SET*. It is one of the best such publications going. I'd certainly rank it with *The New York Review of SF* or *Foundation*.

As for the gag photo, it is indeed more recent. There was a photo of me in *Locus* not all that long ago, some group picture from a convention. There are some photos of me online, including somewhere a set of 'before' and 'after' photos of me, showing what a lifetime

of SF can do to someone. What they don't realise is that in the adolescent-looking 'before' photo, I am actually thirty-six.

1 November 2006

**DAMIEN BRODERICK  
San Antonio TX 78212, USA**

Harry Buerkett allegedly wrote:

Since both authors abandoned around 1960 texts in favour of reworking the theme into 1963 final forms, it seems some text in the public domain for the first time after 1960, perhaps, might provide an answer to the riddle.

What would that mean in English? It's not entirely plausible that both Linebarger and Herbert abandoned one thousand nine hundred and sixty texts in order to write their novels. Could Harry mean something like:

Since in 1960 or thereabouts both authors stopped writing new texts in favour of reworking the old theme into final forms published in 1963, perhaps some third writer's text, entering the public domain for the first time after 1960, might provide an answer to the riddle.

Or maybe:

Since in 1960 or thereabouts both authors started reworking the theme of earlier texts into final forms published in 1963, perhaps some third text, influencing each of them separately, had entered the public domain for the first time after 1960, and might provide an answer to the riddle.

But neither of those recastings seems to fit reality.

3 October 2006

**HARRY BUERKETT  
507 West High Street,  
Urbana IL 61801, USA**

As to Damien's recasting of the sentence, it seems he got my meaning; and I absolutely agree it defies 'reality' as we know it. So the question remains (the reason for my paper): why are the texts so structurally similar, point for point, given the fact that the authors demonstrably did not collaborate, and yet they wrote their works simultaneously?

4 October 2006

I got a nice note from Karen Hellekson, who wrote *The Science Fiction of*

*Cordwainer Smith*, looking forward to reading the paper. And she loved the title.

The *Dune* people, the fanatical Fedaykin, on the other hand, have been a bit of problem. Their puerile pursuits will not admit of subtleties or mysteries beyond The Great Man, Himself (apparently). Two of them blocked me from correspondence, and another claimed difficulties in finding your eFanzines site (?), and has not responded since.

Ah, c'est la guerre!

6 November 2006

**[BRG: I gave out the wrong web address for eFanzines.com. Go to <http://efanzines.com>, then scroll down my section of the site.]**

I really loved the article by Eric Raymond about Libertarian SF, and find I agree with him on a good deal of it. I'm not as big a fan of 'technological fiction' as he is (The Killer Bs), and find (with Amis and Disch) most of the works revered here in the States to lack even a passing familiarity with literary conventions of style and characterisation, which should determine form and plot, respectively. It has become a convention for SF writers to force their characters' emotions and actions, thereby foisting the plot upon them (and the unfortunate reader), and it seems in most cases as if the novel were a grind to write (which certainly comes through in the reading). What's bothersome is not so much the execrable pulp stylings of so many writers in the field, inherited from their predecessors, as that the readers do not demand better. I've come to agree with Lem (and Amis, and Disch) that SF is a hopeless case — with exceptions (though they be few). Raymond, however, has identified a root cause for why the genre will not, maybe cannot, change: we look to SF for that frontier spirit, the can-do attitude, and not for literary complexity and depth of feeling; it's a gosh-wow! whiz-bang! sense of wonder kind of expression, not so much about how the universe works, but how we can work it (through the practical science of technology); not the science of knowledge and reason, but the technological know-how whereby, by God, we get our hands dirty! Anything beyond the didactic and pedagogical purpose of expounding that thought-experiment is considered at least dross, if not heresy, and is anathema.

17 November 2006



**[JGS: 'Literary complexity and depth of feeling' can be found in contemporary SF, you just have to know where to look. I suggest the SF novels of C. J. Cherryh (who's presently at work on another novel in the Alliance/Union universe, a sequel, I believe, to *Cyteen*), Elizabeth Bear (her Jenny Casey trilogy in particular) and Peter Watts (who has followed up the splash he made with the Riffers Saga (*Starfish*, *Maelstrom*, *Behemoth: â-Max*, and *Behemoth: Seppuku*)) with *Blindsight*, a current Hugo nominee), to start.]**

**CHRIS GARCIA**

**1401 North Shoreline Boulevard,  
Mountain View CA 94043, USA**

Right off the bat we get a Ditmar cover, which makes me happy!

Despite being an SF media fan, I'm not big on 'Babylon 5'. The Cinco, as I've often referred to it while on panels, is a good enough show, with complex takes on politics and religion, but I just never had much fun watching it, and that's what usually hooks me to a show.

Sadly, I too am having troubles with my printed issues of the various zines I do. Postage has been ridiculous (I used to spend about 40 bucks on postage sending out 25 issues of *Claims Department* before I took it to FAPA), and printing, when I can't get it for free at work, is insane. I love eFanzines.com because it allows me to do colour, and extra pages if I feel like it. It also allows for an unexpected reader base, and while that can cause trouble, it's always nice to have someone you know nothing about drop you a line all of a

sudden.

Eric Raymond and I disagree on a lot of subjects, not the least of which is the significance of the Free Software Movement and his views on Islam. On the other hand, he does present his ideas very nicely and in a highly readable style. Go figure. I totally agree with his view of Hard SF. I was on a panel with a few folks back at Con Jose where one of them said it was called Hard SF because of how hard everyone will be on you if you get anything wrong. To me, the real change in SF happened in 1951 when Farmer published *The Lovers* and changed SF forever, but that's just me.

Everything else in SF either rode a traditionalist horse or followed in the steps of Farmer and Sturgeon. Without Farmer and Sturgeon, you have no New Wave. Really, Cyberpunk is more or less traditionalist SF with a post-Farmer-Sturgeon worldview. **[JGS: From my readings of Cyberpunk (admittedly mostly Bruce Sterling's work), this doesn't parse. Care to expand on the idea in an article? I mean, you have so much time, right?]**

I love Cordwainer Smith. It was Howard Hendrix who really introduced his work to me, along with some of the personal writings of John Pierce. *Norstrilia* is my personal favourite. **[JGS: Oh, crap, now I really will have to find some of Smith's works. The stack of books will never disappear!!!]**

There is one giant difference between *Dune* and *Norstrilia*: I've never once come close to finishing *Dune*. I've tried. Oh My Ghod have I tried. The

comparison article is very well researched and presented. It makes me want to struggle into *Dune* again.

I love looking at fandoms that I have little connection to. The view of Roger Dard is wonderful, and it opened my eyes to exactly how much things have changed during the twentieth century. Even in China, where there's a quickly growing fandom that is nearly totally isolated, people are regularly ordering and reading issues of American prozines. That's in China, the People's Republic of China, where folks are getting some pretty radical stuff sent their way.

5 October 2006

**ALAN SANDERCOCK**

**2010 Desmond Drive,  
Decatur GA 30033, USA**

We are fine here in colourful Atlanta (the leaves are all changing and we move, finally, into cooler autumn weather). I appreciate your continuing to send the 'dead tree' issues of your publications, and certainly I'll accept the PDF version. It's much faster and cheaper for you as well and it really will suit me fine. By the way Jane was interested in the John Brosnan issue [of *\*brg\** 46] even though she had no idea who this person was. I think she was touched by the obvious fan enthusiasm that surrounded John, and how this could all finally result in a publication with photos and articles remembering something of his life and times. I only met him the one time, back in 1976 at a One Tun Pub evening.

At the moment I'm really anxious to



finally get to see what the film-makers made of Chris Priest's novel *The Prestige*. I think we are only about a week to ten days away from release here in the US, and by all accounts it's going to be an interesting film. It's curious that another film called *The Illusionist* (Ed Norton playing a magician/illusionist) has been released a few weeks ago and it's been doing very well. I recommend it.

16 October 2006

**[JGS: Both were, I thought, quite well done on all accounts, and told different enough stories to make both worth seeing.]**

**JEFF HAMILL**

**4903 Fremont Avenue North,  
Seattle WA 98103, USA**

Yes, it has been awhile. I've been fine, although I had heart surgery in June — an attempt to correct my erratic heartbeat(s). It's too early to tell if the operation was a success — my heartbeat is sometimes regular, sometimes erratic, and it can change from hour to hour. They tell me that it should settle down — one way or another — within a year.

I just got back yesterday from two weeks in Barcelona, where I went for a Walt Disney comics writers' seminar/conference, all expenses paid, which was very nice. (During the second week, after the seminar was over, I was joined by Agnes — my wife — and we spent that week sightseeing. We were on our own financially for that part, of course, but it was sort of her fiftieth birthday present.)

23 October 2006

I skimmed through the first part of Eric Raymond's 'A Political History of SF'. I find what I read very hard to take seriously. The idea that the Futurians were fellow-travellers of the Communist Party I can accept as plausible (I don't know enough about them to have an opinion on whether it's actually true), but the only well-known SF writers who I would have been willing to call Marxist were the Strugatsky brothers. Maybe.

**[JGS: There are different definitions of 'Marxist', too.]**

As for Disney comics . . . The chief editor at Egmont Creative (a children's book and Disney comics publisher located in Copenhagen, Denmark), Byron Erickson, is a good lifelong friend of mine. He invited me to try writing some Disney stories several years ago, once I became too ill to work regularly.

Since then I have cranked out a one or two a year, as a freelancer. (All the Disney comics writers for Egmont are freelancers, as are all the artists.) It's hardly enough volume to make a living at it, but it does help to pay the mortgage occasionally. It's rather ironic, since I am rather a hard-core Marxist communist to be writing for Disney, but I enjoy the challenge.

After this Barcelona seminar, I have three story ideas to write up, which I need to do very soon. (We submit two- or three-page summaries of proposed stories to the editors, which, if approved, we can then turn into full scripts. If these scripts are approved, we get paid.) Most of my stories have some sort of low-level SF elements in them, and often some sort of 'message' is hinted at. For example, in one of my stories Scrooge McDuck replaces all his factory workers with robots; to his consternation the robots demand to be treated like people, and go on strike. Of course, being a Disney comic, you can't actually say that people are on strike, but when you have a bunch of workers surrounding a factory with picket signs and chanting demands, it is pretty obvious what is going on.

The days of anonymous writers and artists are over; all of us are given bylines when the stories are printed. I could write an article, 'My Life and Disney' — in fact, you just read it.

28 October 2006

**GREG EGAN**

**Perth WA 6001**

**[BRG, in an email to Greg:] I presume that in some important way you have been able to arrange a satisfactory settlement for the person you were helping in detention camp? The last I saw from you on the matter was the letter in *The Age*. Somehow I thought you might eventually relate the whole story in a magazine such as *The Monthly*. The fundamental situation, as far as refugee rights, still seems to me as horrifying as ever, but you might have much more information available to you than is available to the usual newspaper-reading public.]**

Peter Qasim was released from detention back in July 2005, mostly thanks to lobbying by Dick Smith [well-known Australian self-made rich person and philanthropist], after six years and ten months in detention. But he still doesn't have a permanent visa; he's on a 'removal pending visa' under which he could be re-detained and/or

deported at any time. It's unlikely that either will happen, but he's still suffering both psychologically and practically from the lack of certainty.

All the people I knew personally, and I think all the long-term detainees (three years or more), have now been released, but the policy certainly remains virtually as horrible as ever, and there's nothing to stop more people getting stranded for years.

I don't know if I'll ever write anything substantial about the refugee issue. It leaked into one short story — a lightly fictionalised account of refugees from alternative histories called 'Lost Continent', which will appear in a US YA anthology [in 2007] — but for the immediate future I'm just trying to be glad that all my friends are out, and get on with thinking about other things. Maybe in a couple of years I'll have enough distance from it, and the relevant people will be in safe enough situations, for it to be possible to tell some of their stories in more detail.

25 October 2006

**MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER**

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

Janine Stinson's comparison of 'Babylon 5' to a detailed, complex novel is not new. **[JGS: I was aware of that, specific to B5.]** About ten years ago, Martha Bayles, an American cultural critic, got into trouble with her peers with her claim that 'ER' and 'NYPD Blue' were not only great serialised dramas, but were more riveting than any fiction produced at the time. **[JGS: And she was probably right, if she was referring to contemporary 'popular' fiction.]** But the problem with Stinson's claim is, as I understand it, that 'Babylon 5' creator J. Michael Straczynski was not given approval for a fifth season until very late, so that the drama he envisioned actually ends after the fourth season, with the fifth being a sort of afterthought.

**[JGS: That is an incorrect understanding. JMS wrote the show outline as a five-year story, and had to do some scrambling with his episode scripts toward the end of the fourth season, when it appeared the show's network was going to cancel it. Fortunately, there was enough audience protest to allow for the planned fifth season, and those rewrites never had to happen.]**



I saw much of the first four seasons, but gave up on season five after seeing one unfortunate episode where the character played by Tracy Scoggins spent most of the hour complaining about her father's alcoholism.

**[JGS: Too bad you let one episode put you off the rest of that season. Only after watching the entire series, in episode order (thanks to Netflix) did I fully comprehend the extent of Straczynski's achievement. Each season had its weak points, but taken altogether, B5 was probably the most fully realised novel-as-TV ever aired, and certainly holds its own with shows like 'ER' and 'NYPD Blue'. With the end of the current 'Battlestar Galactica' series in sight, I look forward to re-viewing all its episodes to see whether it was able to hold to the high standard that B5 set for SF TV series.]**

Since Janine asked: I actually do watch a great deal of SF and fantasy on TV. I even spent an enjoyable half-hour at the 2003 World Fantasy Convention asking the chairman of the 2004 convention to summarise the first eight episodes of *Smallville*, all of which I had missed. I don't feel compelled to watch every episode of every SF drama on TV.

**[JGS: It would be beneficial not only to me, but to our readers, for you to add details like this in your locs. Supporting evidence of statements makes a position stronger in discussion. Since you seem uninterested in answering my question 'Why does the next question have to be "What sort of jazz?"', I won't ask it again.]**

Eric S. Raymond's article is provocative but wrongheaded. I agree with him that hard SF is the core of the field and that many hard SF writers are Libertarians. But there are many hard SF writers who were not Libertarians; Isaac Asimov, for example, was a man of the left. Today, Stephen Baxter is a popular writer with a PhD in a hard science who produces novels that are scientifically correct but very depressing. Moreover, Michael Moorcock, Raymond's nemesis, calls himself an anarchist, which I interpret as someone who is in favour of liberty but sceptical about capitalism.

**[JGS: That's the most unusual interpretation of an anarchist I've ever read.]** I also believe that the Sam Goldwyn rule — if you want to send a message, use Western Union — applies to SF. Readers who enjoy scientifically ac-

curate novels with competent heroes don't necessarily want a political message attached to their fiction. With the exception of Vernor Vinge, SF writers who are fairly explicit about their Libertarian politics (L. Neil Smith, Victor Koman, Brad Linaweaver) don't sell very well.

James Doig and Milan Smiljkovic's article on Roger Dard was a very interesting contribution to fan history. All I know about the Australian Literature Censorship Board is what these authors have told me, but they have found a very interesting archive that ought to be mined further. Dard comes across as someone who was eccentric and more than a little obsessive, but wholly admirable in his efforts to build his collection and defy some pretty stupid censors. I look forward to Doig and Smiljkovic's next article.

9 November 2006

**JAMES DOIG  
36 Tinderry Circuit,  
Palmerston ACT 2913**

Thanks Martin! It was good fun putting it together — and nice to link dry old censorship records with the reminiscences of 'real' people. My collector mate, Milan, did a good job chasing up Dard's shady acquaintances in Perth, but sadly never located his collection.

The other censorship article, first published in *All Hallows*, and reprinted in the same issue of *SET*, has also been picked up by a new Aussie publishing venture:  
<http://www.brimstonepress.com.au/adfh2006.htm>. Interesting to see a 'best of' anthology publishing non-fiction.

4 November 2006

**JULIAN WARNER  
13 Frederick Street,  
Brunswick VIC 3056**

I've been reading both *Steam Engine Time* and *Parietal Games*, the book of M. John Harrison's book reviews and articles about Harrison's writing. I am struck by a common theme in both publications of (mis-) appropriation or possibly (mis-)attribution of qualities to others' works.

Eric Raymond shares the same faults (or achievements) as his Marxist foes in bending the writings of others to fit his worldview and political aspirations.

I'm sure that most authors would not appreciate being used as an exemplar for ideas that they might not personally

support. It certainly helps when the author being so used is dead. **[JGS: Which is why 'Consider the source' is always an important guide to reading such material.]**

I've been considering doing a Nova Mob talk on SF critics for a while, but the theme needs developing. I don't want to get bogged down in criticising the tendency of some to be of the 'I've got a theory and I'm going to bang on about it endlessly' type.

27 October 2006

**[BRG: Early in 2007, Julian delivered an enjoyable paper about M. John Harrison, particularly his two recent novels, *Light* and *Nova Swing*, to a Nova Mob meeting in Melbourne. No sign of a written-out version yet, but we're still hoping.]**

**ART WIDNER  
35501 South Highway No 1, Unit 122,  
Gualala CA 95445, USA**

G'day Bruce (and Jan):  
Gotcher snile mile tother dye. U sed 'paying to send a fanzine oseas . . . financially daunting.' Yes, tiz, but considering what i'll b getting in return (hav alrede gotten 4 O!) of course i'll trade. I have a whole box full of Y 53 & 54 wch i pponed sending to UK & Oz bcoz of \$\$\$ . Wch ones r u missing? I had hoped to join Anzapa after Bill Wright so kindly sent me a sampl, but tween my travels & 3 apas, i cant wej it in. I'm scared to go to efanazines for fear i'll be inundated. i dont kno how to send the copy i have on computer since i still do some fizikl cutting & pasting after i printout. U wdnt get the flavor of the whole zine. I dont kno how to send pix either. i'll also send U Quarto (SAPS) & Web (Intercourse) altho theres getting 2B a lot of overlap lately. Arnie sends me *VFW* direct, so i read that.

Lately ive been trying desperately to clear up 50 years of kipple after a runin (row) w my 'eldest' (courtesy of CEB) gdotr, wch i think i told U abt. If i dont i fear the valuabl will wind up in the dump withe worthless. 'I have been to Ludlow Fair' & a' that. Hope i may see U agn some day . . . on this side, that is. Keep yer billabong up, mate, Art

31 October 2006

**[BRG: Assuming this issue appears before October 2007, I can wish you a happy ninetieth birthday, Art. West Coast fanzine fandom plans to descend on Gualala to celebrate the event. Thanks again for being a great host during my trip in 2005.]**

**SARA CREASY**  
somewhere in America

It was lovely to hear from you — my dad forwarded your letter to me in Tucson, Arizona. Yes, this is my new home. I got married last December after what you might call an internet romance, to one Mr Micheal Planck. We met early last year, accidentally, on an atheist discussion board (not something you'd want to proclaim too loudly here in God's own country) and I moved in November after some fairly painless, but endless, rounds of paperwork. We have two dogs, a few geckos running around the place, and a woodpecker in the backyard who likes to attack the ten-foot dead cactus. I'm very happy. I've been doing some long-distance editing for Heinemann, but Adrienne Ralph has left and the work may fall off. Time to think about a real job again.

I would love to read *Steam Engine Time* online and have browsed through the latest copy. I was interested in the editorial because Micheal and I just watched 'Babylon 5' from start to finish on DVD.

31 October 2006

[BRG: Sara Creasy put in an enormous amount of work on *Aurealis*, one of the two Australian SF magazines that dominated the scene during the 1990s.]

**TERENCE M. GREEN**  
154 Randolph Road,  
Toronto ONT M4G 3S4, Canada

[BRG: When he sent the following letter, Terry Green also sent a copy of his novel: *Sailing Time's Ocean* [<http://www.fitzhenry.ca/detail.aspx?ID=9916>] (reissue, retitled, early September 2006, of the 1992 novel *Children of the Rainbow*, with a new Intro, Afterword, etc.).]

I'd be flattered if you got around to using the autobiography [in a forthcoming issue of *SF Commentary* or *Steam Engine Time*]. Figured it was a small chance, given the economics of your ventures (I've already read *SET 5* — your editorial too), and understand completely. (I found the article about the censorship involved in getting books and magazines into Australia quite fascinating).

Something new: I've joined the faculty of the University of Western Ontario (London, Ontario — some two-hour drive from Toronto). One day a week (Wednesday) this old body and its

thirteen-year-old Honda Civic make the trip (I'm only part-time faculty, at the rank of Lecturer . . . that's plenty for me . . .). I teach 'Writing 211: Fundamentals of Creative Writing,' and enjoy it immensely (<http://www.uwo.ca/writing/>). This is the second year I've done it. The writing and the teaching have all come together nicely.

Daniel is six years old and in grade one. Amazing.

3 November 2006

**DORA LEVAKIS**  
16 Deakin Street, Yarraville VIC 3013

I was overjoyed to read that Gerald Murnane was nominated for the Nobel. That was Thursday, 12 October, the same time that a visual artist I had met, Patrick Moss, and had classes with (in 1980) was enjoying a near sellout of his current exhibition. I had met Gerald in 1981 and it tickled a big smile across my face to see that these two were right now being taken to another level.

[BRG: Long-time readers of Gillespie zines will remember that Gerald Murnane, my friend whom I met when he was working at Publications Branch, Education Department of Victoria, in 1971, wrote some reviews for *SF Commentary* in the 1970s, and that Norstrilia Press (which was Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrand and me) published two of Gerald's books: *The Plains* and *Landscape with Landscape*. His work, having gained many admirers in Sweden, has come to the notice of the judges of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and he was nominated for the award in 2007. Meanwhile, his work is still mainly ignored in Australia, where he was won no prizes other than the Patrick White Award.]

I'd submitted a self-portrait this year to the Archibald, painted onto a piece of the weatherboard entitled *The Colour Of My House Is Always With Me*. I flew to Sydney with it as hand luggage and when, surprise, surprise, I had to retrieve it some tourists took a photo of me with it in front of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

4 November 2006

**E. D. WEBBER**  
19 Leslie Avenue, Gorokan NSW 2263

In answer to Martin Morse Wooster's query why I think Americans don't eat much lamb, the answer is hardly science

fiction, and has to do with the range wars of the nineteenth century. Beef herders on horseback won out against shepherds on foot, and that's hardly fiction. Interesting too is that, as in Argentina, said range wars were financed by British capital while at the same time the same Australia was being capitalised to live 'on the sheep's back'. Proof of that is his stating that much of America's lamb actually comes from either Australia or New Zealand. Complicating things yet further is that Australian lamb tastes the same way that its artists paint it, in pastels, and New Zealanders are quite right in saying that if an Aussie wants to see what green really looks like he has to go to New Zealand. Weirder yet is that some of the best lamb I've ever tasted — and Wooster's never tasted? — is from northern Nevada and southern Idaho. Local wits say it's because Basques know how to talk to sheep, but I know it has to do with being free-ranged and all that sage brush and pine nuts they've been eating. Maybe because it's not in supermarkets across the country is why he's no idea what I think about Americans eating lamb.

[JGS: Um, well, I live in a 'small town' (probably less than 1500 in population) and the local grocery stores (within 5 miles of my home) both carry lamb regularly, so someone around here must be eating it. Or perhaps I misunderstood your statement, and you actually were referring to your own country?]

As for his, Janine Stinson's and Gregory Benford's quandaries about 'jazz as a way to define how ideas are passed from one generation to the next in SF' and/or any other means of expression, what should be said is that it became too intellectual for its own commercial good. Niches are like that; and a perfect example of that is that John Coltrane's 'My Favourite Things', aside from being mine as well, has always been a lot more intelligent than Julie Andrews' ever was.

Then again, the best jokes are invariably the ones nobody else gets.

30 October 2006

**STEPHEN CAMPBELL**  
2/29 Kelp Street,  
Warrnambool VIC 3280

*Steam Engine Time* received with gratitude and pleasure. Coincidentally, I've just recently re-read *Norstrilia*, which I found (to my surprise) in the

local library. Linebarger's writing is, to me, still some of the most entertaining speculative work I have read, either in recent years or from the past. He has managed to capture and understand core aspects of the Australian psyche that even most Australian writers still don't seem to appreciate or understand. The laidback attitude that we have to our own enormous resources and prosperities, as well as to the sophisticated 'securities' and regulating authorities that we have in place to protect that wealth, are part of this. It all still seems to come down to the spirit of: 'Is he an all right bloke?' and 'She'll be right mate'. I don't write this in a patriotic or nationalistic sense (we still have a lot of work ahead of us to shake off the American corporate propaganda viruses that threaten to undermine our peculiar identity), but these are some characteristics that we have that seem to be uniquely 'Australian'. I do get horrified by the phrase 'un-Australian', though that seems to be bandied about a bit at the moment — shades of that maniac McCarthy creeping into our vast, arid space that we live in here in relative peace and tranquil apathy. I have never understood how something can be protected by engaging in an antipathy to what it represents.

I tried to read a recent Robert Silverberg fantasy novel recently, but lost interest after forty pages, and a collection of American SF short stories left me similarly disenchanted. I did, however, become absorbed and entertained by *Singularity Sky* by Charles Stross. Hardcore old-fashioned SF written in 2004, published by Orbit Books (ISBN 1 841 49 3341). The 'Festival' and the 'Critics' who introduce a 'singularity' to Rochard's planet are hilarious, as well as the primitive attempts of the 'New Republic' to suppress it. Serious 'science' fiction.

I also recently received a copy of Bill Wright's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*. It seems that fandom reaches out to embrace me again after these decades of strange toil and learning that I've received, and that embrace leaves me with a warmth of familiarity that the uncertainty of my path has lacked. I reside here in rural Warrnambool, which is a world unto itself, and beneath its mundane exteriors lie unfamiliar and sometimes almost arcane culture, which I learn to appreciate. Did Cordwainer Smith get this far south? It seems that the Instrumentality did. Unfortunately, there is no C'mell here, and I continue to live monkish and hermit-like. This

existence has enabled me to finish my eighty-page 'comic strip' called *Transitoria*. It's innovative, and I hope it's readable. Very simple in design and structure, with little reference to any genre (it's virtually a genre in itself) but with enough ideas to generate further work to entertain myself with. I hope to have a 'dummy' photocopy of it soon (finance permitting), and when I do I will be curious to know your and Elaine's opinions of it.

I hope you and Elaine (give her my love) and your incumbent feline passengers are all well in your new spaceship out there in Greensborough.  
Late October 2006

**JERRY KAUFMAN**  
**P.O. Box 1835, Seattle WA 98346, USA**

Harry Hennessey Buerkett draws so many detailed parallels between *Norstrilia* and *Dune* that I'm tempted to reread both of them to see if I would agree with him. As it is, I'm ready to believe they were written in Non-Euclidean reality — the parallels appear to converge just over the event horizon. The basic story sounds as though it could have come from some nineteenth-century European novel, except for the stroon/melange and the ornithopters. Perhaps some alien world beamed its greatest novel to Earth, and only Herbert and Smith picked it up. What sort of fillings might they have had in their teeth?

Lots of very interesting stuff in the Eric Raymond political history of SF. I think he misses one revolution, though. He might have noticed that his revolutions come about one a decade, and he's skipped the 1970s. The revolution that fits in there is the feminist SF revolution. It had critics, writers, fanzines, programming at conventions. (At the end of the decade a specific convention was founded in large part to explore the topic, Wiscon, and both the con and the award it birthed, the Tiptree, continue to this day.)

6 November 2006

**[JGS: The first Wiscon was held in 1976, which is nearer mid-decade. I've only attended Wiscon 29, but found it both intellectually stimulating and plain ol' fun.]**

**IAN NICHOLS**  
**241 Hancock Street,**  
**Doubleview WA 6018**

**[BRG emailed to Ian: 'Western Aus-**

**tralian fandom, as a continuous stream of activity, seems to come into being in 1980 or thereabouts. That's when the first Swancon took place. In the 1990s, that state became the main publisher of new SF and fantasy in Australia.']**

*Au contraire*, the first Swancon was in 1976, in Tony Peacey's house, attended by a few notables. In fact, it was inspired by Aussiecon 1, in 1975, to which an intrepid band of voyagers made their way. There was a first fandom, of sorts, in Perth before that, going back to the sixties. I came into contact with them when I went to my first Swancon, number 2, in 1977. I've been to every Swancon since, and I hear tell that Swancon may be the longest-running uninterrupted convention in Australia. As far as the nineties goes, Ticonderoga and *Eidolon* were brave attempts, but I think *Aurealis* was out by then, and publishing more. Certainly Ticonderoga, as a small press, has to be matched up against other publishers, and the bigs were publishing a fair bit of SF. *Eidolon* had a great reputation, and had great promotion, but it was very variable and highly irregular; i.e., the issues didn't appear on time. It published a lot of good stuff, but the taste was idiosyncratic, to my mind.

6 November 2006

**JOHN BAXTER**  
**18 rue de l'Odean, Paris, France 75006**

Just to correct a couple of errors . . . The order of the people in the pic I sent is (left to right) Nigel Burwood, Bill Blackbeard and Martin Stone — not Burwood, Stone and Blackbeard.

And it's quite untrue that I was able to live in the UK during the 70s through the convenience of a British-born parent or grandparent. The last member of my family to hail from the Old Dart was a great-great-great-great etc paternal grandmother who was transported at the time of George III for the theft of a bucket — contents unknown. Plenty of 100% Australians like myself were able to reside in the UK if they knew the residency rules and didn't become a charge on the state (as, ironically, John Brosnan did, despite his status as legal resident).

I met scores of Australians passing through London while I lived there. Most, however, were as anxious to get back to the comforting warmth of Australia as I had been to escape. Some even turned down offers of residency



It's that picture again, courtesy of John Baxter. Correct order, left to right: Nigel Burwood, Bill Blackbeard and Martin Stone.

and work. I remember listening, aghast, as a young film director who'd been given an internship at the BBC explained that, though he'd been offered a full-time director's post, he preferred to return to Australia and raise a family. He subsequently made a few features, then disappeared into the twilight zone of TV. Another, now a prominent film reviewer in Australia, arrived in Europe at the start of an all-expenses-paid 'scholarship' that included visits with all his heroes, only to lose his nerve the night before the first interview, and flee back home. Maybe having to work for it is what made people like me hang on.

7 November 2006

**LEE HARDING**  
Toorak VIC 3142

If Rog Dard was indeed the Aussie rep for Operation Fantast, then he was my first fan contact in this country. We shared a long correspondence, and at one stage I was part of a group letter that also included local luminaries Lyell Crane (Sydney) and Bill Veney (Brisbane). Rog may also have passed on Race Mathews' address, though I seem to recall Race writing me as rep for some overseas fan organisation. Either way, the wheels were set in motion and the rest followed . . .

But what prompted that howler re John Baxter having English grandparents? Not so! In those days, many of us talked about going to England, but John actually did it. Grant him that.

11 November 2006

**[BRG emailed back: 'Thanks for the updates on various matters, including extra information on Roger Dard. I'm pretty sure Dard had one letter of comment in ASFR, but John Bangsund didn't get to meet him when he visited WA. Instead he met John Brosnan, and helped persuade John to move — anywhere. Which John did, to Sydney and then to London.**

**'John Baxter has already picked**

**me up on several matters, especially about his nonexistent British grandparents. By the time I felt I might like to move overseas (to try I-know-not-what), the immigration rules had become far more restrictive for Britain. The English-grandparent rule had come in by 1973. I was far more interested in trying to find some way to get into publishing in America, but I could see no way of beating the Green Card restrictions. I was always surprised that you did not use that Australia Council grant to go overseas, at least to meet the SF folks in America. Still, thanks to John you did get to see Paris and parts of France, and that's something I'm never likely to do. My second trip, last year, was a complete surprise, but it did have strings attached — I felt under obligation to meet fans on the West Coast, especially at two conventions in California, rather than cross the country. Seattle was a nice surprise — like Toronto, it felt like a city a Melburnian could live in. New York, which I reached in 1973, is the most exciting place I've ever visited, but I cannot see how anyone can afford to live there.']**

John took off for England in 1970, at the tail end of the Great Oz Migration (Germaine Greer, Clive James et al.). But it wasn't exactly a Plunge Into the Unknown. He had been promised digs with the guy who ran Zwemmer/Tantivy Press in London, having published *Hollywood In the Thirties* with Zwemmer in 1968; he had also sold his first novel, *The God Killers*, to Ace and Moorcock had serialised it in *New Worlds*; and he had sold a second novel, *Meadows of Capricorn* — alas, now lost — to *Vision of Tomorrow*, which subsequently ceased publication (the novel died with it). So he sorta left on a high, with the promise of movie work in London and on-going fiction sales to the SF mags.

Why didn't I go overseas in 1983–84 or whatever? Don't let the Oz Council grants fool you: not only did I have a wife and child, my interest in SF

plummeted around 1980 and has never recovered. But I hope to venture at least one more time to Europe, which remains my spiritual home.

PS: Ron Smith said to me (in 1985): 'I can afford to live in America, but I can't afford to die there.'

11 November 2006

**STEVE SNEYD**  
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Huddersfield,  
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England

The 'praise song' for 'Babylon 5' seemed to fall between two stools: too long for its essential message, 'This is/was great', too short to say anything new in any developed way. **[JGS: It was an editorial, and the title contains the word 'meditation'. Those two items should have clued you in; sorry you missed the bus.]**

The piece on Australian censorship seems to prove a point about work expanding to fill time available: a load of clerks reading loads of pulps and having to ban plenty of them to justify spending their working days so. Or was there popular support for this policy? Were there any opinion polls on censorship taken in those days? What killed this level of censorship in the end? There is room for a follow-up article.

**[BRG: A lot of Australian history has been written about our long tradition of ferociously puritanical censorship; most of the historical journal papers can probably be Googled these days. But James Doig might want to send us yet another entertaining article on the subject.]**

Raymond's Libertarian analysis of SF could well have concluded its analysis with the marketing viewpoint, briefly touched on when talking about why the New Wave faded out. The Libertarian viewpoint supports readers who are seeking a power fantasy **[JGS: Why no supporting facts for this opinion?];** however, the loner 'mad scientist' trope hardly accords with the way big science is actually done, through state or big corporation space programs **[JGS: Again, the lack of supporting facts makes this statement specious at best].** Even the countervailing forces, often criminal, which oppose the big government/big corporation approach, are big corporations in their own way.

Re: the intriguing *Norstrilia/Dune* piece: I was reminded most of the 'feral

scholarship' of Robert Graves' wonderful *The White Goddess*.

9 November 2006

**ROBERT ELORDIETA**

**20 Custer Circle, Traralgon VIC 3844**

I hope that I can catch up with you. It might be a while. The reason I say this is because I work at K-mart, Monday to Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. I have dinner at home with my parents. After working all day I must admit that I don't feel like driving for 2 hours and 30 minutes to a Melbourne Science Fiction Club meeting. Don't get me wrong; I do like the MSFC. I am just afraid that I will fall asleep behind the wheel of my car trying to get to a meeting. I don't like that at all because of the risk of either killing myself or killing someone else.

In the past I always watched a lot of TV and I also read some books. I mainly read mainstream books like *The Three Investigators*, *The Hardy Boys*, Alistair MacLean, Desmond Bagley, Wilbur Smith, Tom Clancy, C. S. Forrester, Colin Forbes, etc. I did read some fantasy and science fiction, but not very much. I've read some of C. S. Lewis, such as *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. I remember reading a book in primary school but I can't remember the name of it. It was a fantasy book. It was about a staff and sword and how they both held great power and that the sword could defeat the staff. **[BRG: Many, many books fit that description.]**

I was born on 11 July 1971. So the first TV show that I watched which was science fiction was *Doctor Who*. It was a repeat run. At the time the repeat run was showing the third Doctor, who was portrayed by Jon Pertwee. I really enjoyed it.

In recent years I have started to read some more science fiction and fantasy. I have read some short stories by Ray Bradbury and Theodore Sturgeon. I haven't read Kurt Vonnegut, but he has been recommended to me. I've also read a 'Star Wars' book by Timothy Zahn. I've read a 'Mechwarrior' book by Michael Stackpole. I've also read the first trilogy that Raymond Feist did: *Magician*, *Silverthorn*, *A Darkness At Sethanon*. I really enjoyed that trilogy. I've read a 'Babylon 5' novel by J. Gregory Keyes. I still haven't had the chance to read one of your favourite authors, Christopher Priest. I've read some Harry Turtledove novels. Some of his novels are alternative history, and that is mainly what I read of his

collection.

I haven't read a great deal of science fiction and fantasy compared to you. I didn't even go to university. When I did my Year 12 (Form 6) in 1989, I was struggling with it. I got Ds, Es and Fs mid-year. When I was offered a full time job at K-mart, I saw the money and took it. I have no regrets that I did that. I've always struggled at school.

I don't know much about the Hard Science Fiction, The New Wave, The Old New Wave, Cyberpunk. etc. I've read one book by Robert Heinlein, called *Starship Troopers*, and I've read one book by Arthur C. Clarke, called *Rama*.

11 November 2006

**[BRG: Heinlein and Clarke are definitely from the Golden Age of SF (1939-54); recent Hard SFers include Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds; William Gibson and Bruce Sterling are usually considered the leading Cyberpunk writers (1984 onwards). The New Wave is now close to forty years old, so it is the Old New Wave. There doesn't seem to have been one since, unless you count Slipstream.]**

**ROBERT SABELLA**

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Since I am no longer sending out paper copies of *Visions of Paradise*, and saving considerable mailing costs in the process, I no longer feel comfortable forcing other faneds to send me paper copies when I can read their zines at <http://efanzines.com>. Instead of printing out paper copies, I can save them on the computer as well. So thanks for the offer, but I think we should 'swap' zines online in the future. Concerning Bruce's editorial, particularly Janine's exhortation, 'Publish electronically. Publish on Efanzone.com', and Bruce's retort, 'There are still many readers who do not have a computer': I underwent similar considerations when I decided to switch *VoP* to primarily an online zine rather than primarily a printzine. Previously I had about 80 non-FAPA readers who were receiving print copies, costing me great amounts of copying/collating time and \$100+ mailing cost each issue. Now I only send 16 copies to readers who do not have computer access, while the others have the choice of reading *VoP* online or reading an attached Word (or WordPerfect) version. I suspect I might have lost a few readers in the process, but I have already picked up several

new ones in exchange, so I guess it all evens out..

12 November 2006

I did not read Janine's editorial in *Steam Engine Time* 5 for a good reason. One of the gifts I got for Christmas was Season One of 'Babylon 5', which I had requested for several years since I never actually watched any of the original episodes. I don't spent much time watching TV, although there are several shows that look interesting. There are just too many books to read and things to write for TV watching to be a priority. The problem now is that I am slowly accumulating a collection of DVDs that I am not watching, such as *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, the complete *Fawlty Towers*, and concerts by Pink Floyd and Bruce Springsteen.

**[JGS: I watch a lot more TV now than I ever have, mainly because the two chronic illnesses I have, Meniere's disease and ulcerative colitis, force me (when their symptoms flare up) to lie down a lot. Meniere's often causes vertigo, so when it comes calling, I sleep (oddly, when my eyes are closed, the spinning sensation stops) because I can't read or watch TV at that time. With the UC, the pain meds make me too sleepy to focus on reading. Fortunately, I've excellent health practitioners available and the symptoms flare up less often; even then, rest is still required on a daily basis to maintain relative good health for me.]**

I enjoyed Eric Raymond's 'Political History of SF', but I generally disagree with his premises. He states that 'the first and greatest of the revolutions' was 1937, when Campbell and Heinlein drastically altered what was effectively a pulp genre at the time. While I generally agree that was the 'greatest revolution', calling it the 'first' takes as its natural premise that all pre-genre SF (that is, pre *Amazing Stories*) was basically one steady flow with only natural evolution along the way. I am not sure I agree with that. Certainly H. G. Wells engendered a revolution in science fiction, and probably Edgar Rice Burroughs did as well. The fact that SF faded into a pulp genre as a result of the splitting up of the all-fiction zines into category zines should not reduce the impact of those two pre-genre writers.

In Raymond's statement that 'the first revolt against hard SF came in the early 1950s', he gives all the credit to the Futurians (who were certainly

influential in that particular revolution), but he makes no mention of either H. L. Gold, or Boucher and McComas, who were certainly as important as Pohl, Knight and Wollheim. After all, they provided the venues, and the corresponding encouragement, for the writers of that era to place their fiction.

He mentions several times that SF 'absorbed' several of the revolutions, which he considers victories of the Campbell's hard SF. Instead I view them as the natural broadening of SF to the point where hard SF retreated from the forefront of SF to one of its categories; no longer the leader but one aspect among many equals. I do not agree that 'hard SF is the vital core of the field', but rather I view extrapolative future change as the core of the field, with hard SF as one of its aspects. Is hard SF important to the field? Definitely. But is a story any less SF because the scientific aspect is minor rather than all-encompassing? Not at all. A while ago I examined *Locus's* list of the top 50 SF novels of all time, and was not surprised to find that the majority of them held science in the background rather than in the forefront. Considering that science is always in the background of our technological society, it is hard to write any future without some science peeking through. But that does not necessarily mean the stories are themselves about science.

Overall, a good issue of *SET* with a fabulous cover. Keep up the good work. And if online publishing is responsible for more issues of *SET*, then I'm all for it!

2 January 2007

**LARRY BIGMAN**  
21 Bel Air Drive,  
Orinda CA 94563, USA

I am truly envious of folks like Paul Kincaid and Harry Buerkett who apparently have more hours in their days or are way more organised than I, allowing them to do detailed, repeated readings of texts, leading to their very interesting thoughts on Priest, Herbert and Smith. The bane of my existence is the chronic limitations of twenty-four hours in a day. Between my still being gainfully employed (which usually eats up 50-plus hours a week), my peculiar attachment to at least a few hours of sleep a night, and my wife's desire that I spend some time with her, I find that only leaves a few hours a day in which to try to be conscious. As the internet, cable TV, and music and book publishing have all expanded seemingly

exponentially over the last 10–15 years, I find myself dealing with Toffler's timely concept of future shock more frequently than I care to admit.

While my job allows me to have an income that can cover my reading/collecting urges, I am still limited in *time*! I cannot cover all these bases the way I used to, not because I am slowing down as I age (I remind myself I am *only* 52!), but because we have ready access nowadays to *so* much *so* easily. **[JGS: That's why I try to prioritise everything I do; otherwise, I'd never get any reading or writing done.]** I have come to realise that this is the true manifestation of the future, not the promise of space travel we all were so entranced by decades ago. *That* costs too much. A new PC or Mac is cheaper and appears to redefine Ballard's 'inner space'.

In some ways, I yearn for the halcyon days of hardcopy zines, so receiving *SET* is like a message through time. I have continued to pursue back issues of *SF Commentary*, and am very happy to tell you I only need No 68 now, having tracked down all the other numbers over the past couple years primarily via eBay, primarily from Mike Resnick, although most of those issues were Bill Bowers', may he rest in peace. I got to know Bill through his fanzine auctions over the past years, and he was clearly still an involved, dedicated guy who loved our field. I am happy to have had the opportunity to put together runs of various fanzines (including yours!) for the sake of posterity, but also because it allows me to take a trip back through time to when real books made of paper, cloth and leather existed and were treated with the respect they deserve. I cannot read long digital tomes without my eyes glazing over. I like being able easily to take a book with me wherever I choose to go. The natural materials of books keep us connected to our ancestors' views of information storage. The same is true in a more underground way about zines. As such, I hope you will finally publish *SFC* 80. After almost 38 years, I suspect you can hear the siren call still.

Anyway, I will continue to buy books and even find time to read some of them. Thank you once again, Bruce, for your contributions. As I told you at Potlatch, I hold you responsible for keeping interest in Phil Dick alive until the rest of the world also figured out how wonderful he was and is.

13 November 2006

**[BRG: That's very nice of you, Larry, but hardly accurate. Philip K. Dick always had important, vocal advocates, especially in Britain (Aldiss and Brunner), but nobody seems to have written at length about his works between the mid 1960s and 1969, when my essays appeared in *SF Commentary*. (I wrote them at the end of 1967.) Soon Phil had everybody on his side — *Science-Fiction Studies'* complete Philip K. Dick issue in 1973; also in 1973, Stanislaw Lem's 'A Hopeless Case — With Exceptions' (PKD being the exception); my own book *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* in 1975; and a flood of material soon after.]**

**E. B. FROHVET**  
4716 Dorsey Hall Drive #506,  
Ellicott City MD 21042 USA

The receipt of *Steam Engine Time* 5 is much appreciated. Presumably we can write off the twenty-one-months-between-issues thing as a problem on which we are unlikely to agree. You will say unavoidable; I will say unsatisfactory; no one is likely to gain much by extended discussion of the topic.

I will have to stand by my ignorant statement that science fiction is, and has generally been, an English-language event. (I also stand by my account that *manga* is not SF — and neither is *Magister Ludi*.) Name a major writer in the field whose work was written in other than English. Verne, certainly; Lem, depending on how one defines 'major'. Name another. It may well be that much SF, even by my definition, is being produced in other languages; the absence of rendering this into English, the obvious central language of the genre, makes its impact insignificant.

**[JGS: On a global basis, certainly. In their home countries, less so.]**

**[BRG: It's more that English-language readers are intellectually provincial, and becoming more so. Which means publishers cannot afford to translate more than a tiny section of the vast amount of SF being published in other languages. Which means we have no real idea who is out there waiting to surprise us. It's difficult enough to gain a snapshot of current English-language publishing. Encouraged by John Foyster, John Bangsund, Dick Geis and me, Franz Rottensteiner used to try to introduce English-language readers to up-and-**



coming European SF writers, but eventually Franz gave up.]

Eric Raymond would separate libertarianism from hard-right politics. Unhappily, in the US libertarian thought overlaps extensively with fanatic anti-government (and frequently racist and sexist) zealotry; as the case of the man who felt it an infringement on his 'rights' that he should need to be licensed to deal in high explosives. I accept Mr Raymond as a knowledgeable SF fan — though I suspect our tastes would not overlap much; and many of his points are convincing within his definition. I fear that definition has been custom-tailored for the purpose of the article.

The first thought which occurs to me about Gillian Polack's analysis of Cordwainer Smith is to wonder how Eric Raymond would fit Smith into his radial scheme of SF. Unfair question, I know.

The tale of Roger Dard is indeed a strange and rather sad one. It seems impossible in this day and age that minor clerks in government prohibited books — I sure would like to know what 'encouragement to depravity' means. If anything, the wheel has turned full circle: local religious leaders and some government officials have struggled in vain to evict Howard County's only pornography store. A statute to prohibit such businesses within a fixed distance of residences or schools was found unequal to the task under the doctrine of *ex post facto*. In the case of Roger Dard, unhappily, I would guess that his collection probably wound up in the trash.

The local libraries present an annual 'Read a Banned Book' program. It might (or might not) come as a surprise to many of these self-appointed protectors of the public morality, that one of the most frequently objected-to books was the Bible — sometimes on the basis of the Song of Solomon, but most often because it is not the exact translation favoured by a particular group. In the US, I would suppose that science fiction mostly escaped censorship from the outside because of self-imposed restrictions, for example, Heinlein's running feud with a prudish editor at Scribner's.

John Baxter's description of a literary gathering in London was so acidly funny that I enjoyed it, despite not really having much idea what he was talking about.

Lloyd Penney inquires whether American fans are turned off to find books 'set in a foreign land'. I would

think such an attitude would be an automatic disqualifier for an SF reader! However, even within the context of Earthbound books, no, I have read Wyndham and Wells and many other British writers successfully despite not knowing the exact geography. I recently cited to Sue Bursztynski in Melbourne the case of a mystery novel set largely in Australia and New Zealand.

Americans do eat lamb, especially for Easter. But probably not as frequently as in Australia. (There's a scene in, if memory serves, Sandra Miesel's *Dreamrider*, set in Illinois, where the main character sends back her meal in a snotty restaurant, claiming they offered lamb and served mutton.)

Claire Brialey reflects on 'the purpose of reviewing'. I see review and criticism as two very different exercises, with thematic analysis somewhere in between.

Everyone could make their list of 'great' SF, and then of 'favourite' SF — in my case there might not be much overlap, for whatever that says about me. Of Arthur Hlavaty's list, only one would make my 'great' list. I'll leave it as an exercise for the reader to guess which.

3 November 2006

**PATRICK MCGUIRE**  
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I thought 'Babylon 5' was a good show, as SF TV shows go (even the best of them being far less sophisticated and rigorous than good written SF), but it was not something I got fanatic about. However, Jan's editorial set me off on a tangent by its mention of the B5 material in *Wikipedia*. I still haven't gotten around to reading what *Wikipedia* says about B5, but I did poke around a little and found that *Wikipedia* has pretty detailed articles on many US SF writers, and even useful ones in English on some Russian SF writers. It is clearly becoming a repository of a significant amount of fanac. (Or amateur scholarship, if you like; authors of *Wikipedia* articles might in principle have no other contact with fandom, and we could argue about whether contributing to a general if voluntary encyclopedia in itself constitutes fanac.) Very little on Japanese SF, however, regrettably. I suppose more Russian fans than Japanese ones both speak English and are interested in contributing to an English-language encyclopedia.

Paul Kincaid's article on Priest's *The Separation* strikes me as focusing on small details that would be important only if some more basic questions were first answered satisfactorily. As described, the book clearly borrows from SF the device (or 'trope', as people insist on calling it lately) of the alternate world, but it does not treat it in a logical or self-consistent manner as in SF or even genre fantasy, and clearly will not satisfy the expectations of anyone reading the novel as if it were a work of SF or genre fantasy. It seems to fall into a category more like magic realism or dream-literature. So (1) why should *SET*'s readership care? Just because Priest has at times in the past written SF? Just because he borrows an idea invented, or at least long developed, in SF and turns it to an unrelated use? (he is, after all, far from the first author to do so); and (2) considering the novel on its own terms, what is, or might be, the point of this highly peculiar use anyway? What insight or emotional effect does it evoke in the reader?

Eric Raymond's article was interesting, and caused me to think quite a bit, but he puts forward his assertion with so many qualifiers (only 'Campbellian SF', only a 'radical category' admitting of major exceptions even at its core [Raymond admits that Asimov was no Libertarian], and so forth), that I think his contention is next to impossible to prove or disprove and of little help even as an organising principle. I marked a number of places where I could dispute details of the argument, but I'm running out of time, so I will only mention one glaring one. Raymond calls SF (after, evidently, the mid 1970s) 'the second most successful genre after romance fiction'. But this is the *publishing category* 'SF', which is, and was even in the mid 70s, mostly populated by *fantasy*. **[JGS: What, no statistics to back this claim? What's the genesis of this propensity of fen to make such statements and then provide no factual back-up for support? It's a bad habit.]** The category is only called 'SF' for historical reasons, coupled with the fact that many SF writers can also successfully write fantasy. Many of them also successfully write mysteries, but that was already an established category. This highly successful fantasy is probably on the whole much more socially conservative than is SF. (Along the same lines, note that two writers of socially conservative historical novels set in the period of roughly 1800–1825,

Patrick O'Brian and Georgette Heyer, have been adopted by the community as honorary SF writers.) A lot of the non-fantasy remainder of the SF publishing category consists of media spinoffs whose connection to Campbellian SF is tenuous at best. That leaves a little Campbellian SF hiding in the cracks, with, these days, many of the best authors being British and Australian, writing far from the birthplace of both John Campbell and the Libertarian Party. Campbellian SF hardly looks like the driving force of the *publishing category* SF, even if a slightly stronger case can be made for its role within the literary category SF.

Turning from Raymond's article to my own soapbox, I will add that I think SF would have a far better chance of reconstructing a Campbellian-like community for the exchange and development of ideas and the improvement of the genre if fantasy, like mystery, were recognised as a separate publishing category and allowed to live its own life, but I see no sign of that happening soon. [JGS: **With this, I wholeheartedly agree. I dimly recall seeing the word 'Fantasy' on the spine of paperbacks that I bought in the 1970s and 1980s, so for at least some publishers, fantasy used to be a separate publishing category.**] At least many bookstores are now alphabetising the media books separately from the non-media ones, thus pushing that distraction somewhat aside.

In trying to discern the effect of Australia on Cordwainer Smith and his work, as Gillian Polack does, a complicating factor is that Smith is recalled (somewhere in the material that Bruce has previously published on him) as saying that he liked 1960s Australia precisely because it was socially as the US used to be (probably in the 1920s or 1930s when he was a child or very young man, or even as he pictured it from the stories of expatriates — he lived abroad a lot). At that earlier time the US too had had protective tariffs. Outside of the big cities and a few ethnic farming communities, the northern states, at least, were still pretty Anglo and in the South the exception were the blacks, who in those days somehow did not count conceptually. So probably what struck Smith was not so much Oz values, but the fact that the values had lasted at least a few decades longer in Oz than the US. Recall also that Oz protective tariffs, like the older US ones, were

imposed in an attempt to promote domestic industry and domestic wage levels, not to keep Australians living an austere life for the good of their psyches, as on Norstrilia. That part was invented by Smith, or at least borrowed from the sumptuary laws and so forth of premodern or non-Western cultures. And of course there is an element of parody in Smith's view of Old North Australia (the full name of Norstrilia), with its reverence for Her Absent Majesty Queen Victoria. Smith may have liked Australia enough to consider retiring there, but he did not swallow it whole. (Polack does mention this mocking element, but only at the very end of her article.)

Since Smith had seen social change wipe away the America of his youth, I very much doubt that he would have been 'astonished by the current Australia'. He might have been a little disappointed at the enthusiasm with which Oz has embraced change recently, but I think he would have been hoping only for the old Australia to last out his lifetime, which to a significant degree it might have, even if he had lived to retire there rather than dying prematurely at age 53 in 1966. My understanding is that Australian values have changed rapidly and fairly recently. (The Doig-Smiljkovic and Doig articles certainly support this.) Even with better health, Smith would have been dead and buried long before the present.

Polack seems to be using 'High Church' in a different sense than mine and the dictionary's, and I have no clear idea what her meaning is. My dictionary says that 'High Church' is 'that party of the Anglican Church which emphasizes the importance of the priesthood and of traditional rituals and doctrines, as opposed to Low Church'. That is, the High Church inclines more in the direction of (Roman) Catholicism and less in that of, say, Presbyterianism or Calvinism. So why is it 'very High Church' to be 'abstemious and full of self-restraint'? That all sounds very Church-of-Scotland or Puritanical to me. Likewise, whereas I have elsewhere pointed out that D'Joan is transparently based on a Catholic saint, Polack here brings in D'Joan as an exemplar of someone 'chosen almost before their birth and with predestined accomplishments', and the emphasis on predestination again sounds somewhat Calvinist rather than High Church to me. (I do not deny that a High Church adherent could support abstemiousness and some mild variety of predestination, but I dispute that they

characterise the High Church position.) The Cordwainer Smith website run by his daughter says that, contrary to earlier-published information, Smith/Linebarger and his second wife only chose Episcopalianism (the US version of Anglicanism) after their 1949 marriage, because she had been a Catholic but had married the divorced Linebarger (and thereby excommunicated herself). The daughter says that Linebarger's grandfather had been a Methodist minister, and I gather from unclear wording that Linebarger himself had been raised a nominal Methodist, although his parents were not very religious. Methodism is not Calvinism, but it sure isn't High Church either. It's not impossible that with the zeal of a convert, Smith had become a thorough High Churcher in the ten years between conversion and the start of work on *Norstrilia*, but I suspect that Polack is not really talking about the High Church, and that perhaps we have all been misled by earlier biographical mistakes into overrating High Church influence, as opposed to more generalised Christian ones.

The 'Abba-Dingo' entry in Anthony R. Lewis's *Concordance to Cordwainer Smith* (NESFA Press, second edition, 1993) gives 'Abednego' as a possible origin, so others before Polack have considered this interpretation. For the Hebrew-Oz alternative, Lewis interprets 'dingo' not as the wild dog, but as 'Australian slang' for 'to betray' and thereby comes up with 'father of lies', which does not sound too convincing for something that can utter true prophecy. Given the Abba-Dingo's overt function as an arcade game, I wonder if Smith had in mind the popular song 'Paper Moon', which starts out proclaiming the artificiality and triviality of the world, asserting among other things that 'it's a melody played in a penny arcade,' but concludes 'but it wouldn't be make-believe if you'd believe in me'. (Quotes from memory; precise lyrics are doubtless out there in cyberspace somewhere.) Smith (using *eros* as a model for *caritas*) may be proposing that life is meaningless and futile unless religious faith gives it significance, just as faith preserved Abednego in the furnace.

Cordwainer Smith was known on occasion to base his stories on earlier works. I had more trouble seeing Frank Herbert doing that, but had never studied him in detail, and was willing to be persuaded.

Harry Hennessey Buerkett's leadup, explaining his theory of a common

source ('Q') for Norstrilia and Dune, sounded plausible. Cordwainer Smith, after all, was known on occasion to base his stories on earlier works. I had more trouble seeing Frank Herbert doing that, but had never studied him in detail and was willing to be persuaded. However, once I read far enough, I found Buerkett's detailed explications to be less than convincing.

Take the ornithopters. Are they literal and actually called ornithopters in Q? Then the source has to be science fiction, and almost certainly in a Western language. Did Frank Herbert even read any foreign languages? Unlike most Americans, a fair percentage of SF writers do, but nothing in the brief Herbert biographies in available reference works suggests that he was among them. (The idea crossed my mind that he might have been taught Japanese in the military in WWII and then served as an interrogator, but the *Wikipedia* says he instead was briefly a Seabee and then a military photographer.) If not, either Q has to be in English or there has to have been an English translation, and Buerkett by his own admission can't find any. The 1908 OED 'ornithopter' citation mentioned by Buerkett is in fact to an *ornithoptère*, with an -e on the end and italicised as a foreign word, presumably French, France being the centre of early ornithopter research. Linebarger read French, and if Herbert knew any foreign language it was probably French or Spanish, since those are most commonly taught in the US. But French science fiction is well researched, and if Buerkett has been at this since 1992, I would think that any French Q would have shown up. (For starters, there is no entry for 'Ornithoptères', or mention of them under 'Aviation', in Versins's *Encyclopédie*.)

Suppose they are not called 'ornithopters' or a cognate. Suppose they are instead either, say, 'bird-machines' in some piece of Chinese or Japanese proto-SF (Herbert having somewhere acquired an otherwise unattested command of Far Eastern languages), or something out of fantasy such as enchanted giant mechanical birds or even just human-bearing giant birds or dragons. Then it might be more plausible that the source has gone undiscovered, but the mutual use of the word ornithopter becomes irrelevant as a hint of Q's existence, since Smith and Herbert would each independently still have to decide to use the word in their fiction. The use of the idea of ornithopters is less of a pointer, since

by Buerkett's own admission other SF has wing-flapping flying machines (and still more SF has bioengineered or extraterrestrial flying animals capable of carrying humans, a possibility Buerkett does not mention).

When Buerkett says that both heroes undergo an ordeal in a Green Box, he sounds like he's on to something. Then we learn that, although there is a more or less literal green box in Dune, the object in *Norstrilia* is green only in that it flashes green a 'go' light and has plants inside. My computer monitor is box-shaped and has a green power-on LED, and working with it is often an ordeal! Buerkett then lists some similarities that in places look more convincing, but after this piece of Green Box oversell, he has lost me, and I retreat to probability theory. There are only so many ways to tell a story. It is not an amazing coincidence that out of all the years that SF has been written, in one of those years two novels would be published displaying parallels that could not result from one's copying the other. Especially when the inquirer gets to pick the parallels and to ignore all the features in the two novels that do not coincide. I am reminded of the long list that has been drawn up of the parallels between the presidencies and assassinations of J. F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln.

In the multiday course of writing this loc, I reread 'The Lady Who Sailed The Soul', and I saw that its basic idea is the same as that of Heinlein's *The Door Into Summer*: a romance doomed by age disparity is resolved when the man goes into hibernation while the woman ages to end the disparity. 'Lady's 1960 publication was three years after *Door's*, but if 'Lady' was written significantly before publication, as sometimes happened with Smith, perhaps we have here another 'amazing' convergence.

Later: I do, however, note that the *SF Encyclopedia* mentions the possible influence on Smith of an early twentieth-century German SF author I had never heard of, Alfred Döblin. Did Herbert read German? Does Döblin contain the elements required of Q? Versins has an entry describing only one of his books, as and the same book is covered in *Anatomy of Wonder*, second edition. Sounds a little like the period of chaos in Smith's future history before the Vomact sisters. No ornithopters mentioned. Anyway, presumably this is a dead end, since Buerkett cites the *SFE* article on Smith that mentions Döblin, and thus presumably knows about him.

In the lettercol, Bruce (p. 34) discusses SF in languages other than English, and opines that there is a great quantity of it out there. There is certainly some. Russian-language SF continues to be written and published, despite the increased competition from translations brought on by the end of censorship. I understand that one of the fantasy novels of Russian author Sergey Lukyanenko has been, or is to be, published in the UK, but he has also written SF, much of it worth attention. Some of his other SF, alas, consists of interminable adventure stories borrowing elements from role-playing games. I can't yet speak to other post-Soviet Russian authors, since I've only read a few to date. So far haven't found another author I really like, but I have by no means given up hope.

My German is not as good as my Russian, but the SF section in German bookstores still seems to be dominated by translations from English, and the domestic German work often seems to consist of military SF-adventure novels. **[JGS: Is Germany where Perry Rhodan novels are still very popular?]** There may be a few contemporary exceptions, of course, and Germany did publish quite a bit of native SF in the early twentieth century, little of which has been translated, so there may be a few undiscovered old gems. Outside of having sampled, all in translation, a little *anime*, *manga* and borderline SF such as *Inter Ice Age 4* and *Japan Sinks*, I know little about Japanese SF, and it seems I have missed reading an anthology or two of translations. The *SF Encyclopedia* says that about 400 original SF books, including reprints, are published a year (early 1990s data), but this broadly defines SF. One wonders how much new real SF is left once the borderline material is eliminated. *Anatomy of Wonder* (second edition) does list some works that seem to qualify, and probably there are newer ones. After Verne, the Romance-language countries seem to incline mostly to social satire and to fantasy. I've heard little word of good hard SF in Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, etc., although I'm sure a few undiscovered gems may lurk.

I eagerly hunted down a copy of Baxter's *A Pound of Paper* in Toronto, where the British edition was available. I had read and liked Baxter's book on SF movies. This one, as Darrell Schweitzer says (p. 8), is mostly about collecting. I am afraid I was rather set back by the glee with which Baxter recounts how he used his special knowledge to make sure

that he, rather than various heirs of collectors, got most of the value out of the collection. There are ethical issues here that Baxter never addresses. To a greater or lesser degree there is a lot of this going on with all collecting, but commercial dealers, such as used booksellers, having declared themselves to be professionals, seem to me to be fairer game than private individuals, and the proportionate losses involved are greater for the individual. Unlike some readers, I have trouble finishing a novel once the protagonist has lost my sympathy. I had similar problems finishing Baxter's memoir. It should, of course, also be a warning to all collectors to keep proper records and make proper arrangements for their estates.

13 November 2006

In my loc, I referred to Alfred Döblin as 'a German SF author I had never heard of'. Embarrassingly enough, when I looked him up in more general sources, it turned out that later in his career he wrote well-known mainstream works, including *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, which I'd never read, but certainly have heard of. His SF and possibly relevant Expressionist work evidently was more or less limited to what the *SF Encyclopedia* cites as possible Smith influences. Unfortunately I'm weak on German literature because I learned the language on my own and mostly with daily living in Germany and reading SF in mind. Thus every so often I trip up.

17 November 2006

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One of the advantages of PDF documents over paper is probably that they remain in pristine condition and don't go all wrinkly at the edges when you read them in the bath. But then there are probably other, more immediate, hazards at trying to read a PDF format fanzine in the bath that I am not willing to put to the test.

My immediate reaction on reading *SET 5* is that, apart from Paul's excellent article on Priest's *The Separation*, the historical articles on *Norstrilia* and censorship might equally have come from somewhere like *Fantasy Commentator*. This isn't a criticism; I find *Fantasy Commentator* fascinating in its own right, but both those sections had that scholarly historical quality.

I wonder, if the American pulps hadn't come across into the UK as

ballast on American ships (I've heard this often reported, but also disputed and it always struck me as an odd and rather inefficient form for ballast to take) whether British customs and censors would have taken an equally dim view of some of the more lurid and sensational covers and contents if they had been deliberately imported. As it was, it left its legacy of starstruck readers and would-be UK authors in the 40s and 50s. Possibly the UK authorities were more concerned with what they saw as dubious 'Continental literature' making its way into the UK at that time. I wonder if Dennis Wheatley's more sensational occult novels would have made it into Australia under C&E rules? I remember reading these when I was young, and I'm not sure one or more of them (*The Ka of Gifford Hilary?*) didn't even make it into that bastion of middle-class respectability, *Readers' Digest Condensed Books*. I was amused at the high literary tone of Australian censor L. H. Allen, dropping in references to and quotations from Coleridge and Tennyson when assessing whether certain works were liable to corrupt or deprave. If, as the saying goes, a critic is a failed writer, is a censor, then, a failed critic?

**[BRG: Peter Nicholls once applied for the position of Australia's Chief Censor, but at that stage he had not even finished working on the second edition of the *Encyclopedia*, let alone other critical projects, so nobody could have called him a 'failed critic' — today, he's a 'retired critic'.]**

I cannot truly recall whether it was SF writer Ken Macleod who wrote, 'politics in science fiction is an extended argument with Heinlein', but the phrase came back sharply when I was reading Eric Raymond's article 'A Political History of Science Fiction'. It sounds as if it ought to be convincing, and yet . . . Neither the New Wave nor cyberpunk (much less the New Weird, Mundane SF and other 'movements' of their ilk) were primarily intended to be political revolutions, but primarily stylistic revolutions against a form which, in their opinion, had become jaded rather than being seen as the crushing oppression of dominant ideology. (Did I just write that phrase? Gosh). I think it's also been taken for granted that the default political position of SF in the UK is left of centre, which is why, when author Karen Traviss identifies herself as both 'right wing' and unapologetically writing for the (US) market, it is almost pre-

sented as a double challenge. (To be honest, at the BSFA Open Day, when she made this statement, I think it was the second, the championing of SF as commerce over art, that caused more comment.)

As for Buerkett's 'Of Haggis and Hagiography', the point-by-point comparison of the plot development of *Norstrilia* and *Dune* sounds superficially convincing, although I haven't read either book in a long time, and my recall of *Dune* is now filtered largely through the film version. I am also wary when writers start throwing in numerological arguments for correspondence, and the statistician in me starts to rear up and point out you can add a bunch of unrelated numbers in all sort of ways to get them to come out the way you want (see *Figuring* by Shakantala Devi and *Mathematician's Delight* by W. W. Sawyer). It may be that both *Dune* and *Norstrilia* have an underlying model. This in itself is not really new or shocking. After all, many fantasy (and probably SF) texts derive from an ur-source that involves the basic elements, such as trial by ordeal, exile, and coming into power. Enough that Clute can build a generic model of fantasy-as-process and thread it throughout the *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*. The trick would be whether this level of correspondence was specific to *Norstrilia* and *Dune*, or whether it could also be done for any other two selected texts, in which case it might indicate a wider, although less challenging argument about plot and provenance. (Plot and Provenance: sounds like a lost Jane Austen title. Which reminds me, Molly Brown's just sent me a splendid new definition: 'Austentacious: A book written in the style of, or influenced by, Jane Austen. See Emma Tennant, Karen Joy Fowler.')

What would be interesting, and where Buerkett's article stops, is where this ur-text — if it exists — comes from. My own guess is some older, and probably non-Western, mythology or myth cycle that both had encountered at some point, maybe years before, and that unconsciously presented itself when they needed a frame to hang a novel on. But until anyone can identify it, that's just conjecture.

5 December 2006

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I can't say that I'm terribly surprised by your statement that you disagree with

Eric Raymond's 'A Political History Of SF'; so do I, so (I imagine) will most readers of *Steam Engine Time* — albeit that we probably do so for different reasons. So this is my take:

Raymond is open from the outset about the political vision he brings to his argument, but at the same time as he sets out his parameters he hamstrings himself by showing how myopic and one-dimensional that political vision actually is — and then hamstrings himself further by the various pretences and subterfuges to which he has to resort to carry his argument. To explicate: although his article purports by its title to be a narrative survey of all of science fiction's various political currents, it is in fact solely a history of American genre SF, from its origins in the pulp magazines through the Campbellian Golden Age to the satire of the fifties to the anti-Vietnam War of the sixties, blah blah blah: the same dull chronology we've heard many times before. But in this lies Raymond's first sleight of hand: because his political vision requires him to focus solely on American genre SF, that SF has to be presented as not just its core but as fully representative of science fiction as a whole — a conceit that by its nature has to pretend that the science fictions of all other cultures are merely satraps of the American hegemon, incapable of other than slavish replication of it.

Having perpetrated that legerdemain, however, Raymond then has to manage another two in order to shore up the political vision he wishes to impose. First, he has to create a template into which American genre SF can be procrusteanly forced — in this case, a Campbellian, hard-science, libertarian-individual, hero-technician, competent-man template with which (as sometime readers of American genre SF) we're all familiar. Second, having imposed this template, he then has to present the various alternatives to the Campbellian model that have flourished since the 1940s as attempts to 'overthrow' or 'break free' of it, all of which have (necessarily) ended in 'failure' — so demonstrating that it is the only template available, and thus inevitably and ineluctably 'proving' its accuracy, so (in turn) reifying it beyond question. As any kind of history, this is simply preposterous.

Thus, on the rare occasions when Raymond does mention some non-American SF writers — in fact, there's only one occasion, concerning some leading British writers of the

1960s [**BRG: And West Australian Greg Egan, whose work is praised highly**] — the position he has taken up means that he is required to ignore the fact that, because they have a different background (a different history, a different culture, a different set of traditions, a different understanding of identity) they are *not* working against his Campbellian model, either explicitly or implicitly, but appropriating SF tropes and metaphors in pursuit of a wholly different project that owed nothing to the American genre model. (After all, we Brits invented science fiction in the first place — it's the Americans who turned it into a genre.)

This refusal to consider science fiction except through the distorting lens of his argument actually makes some parts of his article mildly amusing: for example, his spending around a quarter of it trying to demonstrate how and why a 'radical hard SF' revolution had failed without once appearing to grasp that the term was invented by David Pringle in an editorial in an early issue of *Interzone* in the 1980s, not by David Hartwell in an anthology published a mere three years ago. In consequence, Raymond gets his chronology of 'failed revolutions' wrong too, because his historical schema forces him to present his radical hard SF 'movement' as a successor to cyberpunk rather than as one that ran parallel to it.

(And of course there are real laugh-out-loud moments, such as the assertion about halfway through that science fiction writers were responsible for the creation of SDI and thus for bringing about the end of the Soviet Union: 'The Berlin Wall fell three years later; science fiction saved the world.' To attribute the implosion of the Soviet Union to one single, solitary cause is, however philosophically satisfying, entirely too simplistic and unhistorical — and to advance Campbellian SF as having any actual role in that implosion is just ridiculous, a claim altogether too far.)

The other problem with Raymond's argument is that it seems to be hermetically sealed against the real world. For example, he seems to view scientific enquiry as an endeavour pursued by lone experimenters with unlimited private funding — whereas anyone who knows anything about the subject will know immediately that science has been a collective, even a corporate endeavour since at least the First World War. I suspect that part of

the reason for Raymond's cockeyed view of scientific enquiry may lay in the fact that genre science fiction itself arose at a time when science did appear to be dominated, at least as far as the public mind was concerned, by solitary inventors and experimenters — Nikola Tesla, Guglielmo Marconi, Thomas Edison, Ernest Rutherford, Albert Einstein, et al. As we know, however, that era has passed — indeed, it was passing even as they were defining science in the public mind — and while lone geniuses live on in genre science fiction they are now almost entirely unknown in the real world (indeed, the only modern example of one I can call to mind is James Lovelock, proponent of the Gaia hypothesis). [**JGS: So Stephen Hawking doesn't count?**]

One reason for this strange afterlife in American genre SF may be because so much of that science fiction takes its cue from American popular history, specifically that history's vision of the creation of the USA as the taming and conquest of a wilderness by small bands of self-sufficient pioneers — a vision which of course lives on SF's high frontiers and final frontiers. As a vision of a possible future history, however, it is so disconnected from the real world as to be surreal, since the cost of gaining the high frontier (if indeed it is ever gained) is so high that it could only be achieved by the governments of nation-states, not entrepreneurial individuals (or even multinational corporations, because the time horizons required for any return on the gargantuan investment would be so great that no shareholders or directors would risk it). But government won't spend the money necessary either, because they have no political will to do so and more pressing problems to attend to here on Earth (such as securing re-election).

**[JGS: Governments have spent plenty on space exploration and projects since the end of the Apollo era in the US, but the majority of it seems to have gone toward non-manned exploration (such as the Mars landers, the Venus lander, and Cassini and Huygens) over longer stretches of time than that needed to visit the Moon. Only recently has the Bush administration started talking up building a moon base for humans and sending people to Mars. Private enterprise has gotten more involved with reusable/recoverable human transport options to and through space via the X Prize and allowing**

paying passengers to travel into space, all within the last five years. Commercial interests will, in my view, certainly push space exploration in at least our own solar system once the financial costs are outweighed by the potential gains. It's simple economics. However, I don't think that'll arrive for some time (at least another decade).]

So that was my response to Raymond's 'political history'. May we expect yours in a future issue?

9 December 2006

[BRG: My line is that the various changes in science fiction (one could hardly call them 'revolutions') have been changes of style rather than basic political orientation. To move from reading Heinlein, to Vance, to Dick, to Le Guin, to Wolfe, to Priest, to Miéville is to move from one writer representing one particular style to another, rather than moving from one political-social thinker to another. Raymond's 'Libertarianism', to me, is just a variation on the adolescent wish-fulfilment fantasy structure that has dominated SF from its genre beginnings until now: the reader is invited to step into the role of saving the world singlehandedly. Occasionally some SF writers really try to look at individuals within their societies, but not often, and few have that sense of the organic and historical nature of societies that one finds in (say) the major nineteenth-century European novels. Indeed, that sense of the human endeavour been disappearing in modern literary novels as well. Over the last hundred years literary fiction has moved towards the genre fictions, rather away from them. Joyce Carol Oates, for instance, does what horror writers think they are good at, but much better — while retaining her sense of the jagged peculiarities of American society.]

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'Babylon 5' was the last SF TV show I watched faithfully. It compelled us to watch mostly because it had an interesting selection of characters (alien or otherwise), and once they were established, they were given back-stories, and they began to evolve. The story arc was revealed, and each episode, with few exceptions, drove the characters and us towards the

imaginative conclusions, and the fate of most of the characters we came to care about. The sequel failed, but the subsequent TV movies added more and more to the fabric of the B5 universe; yet, when Richard Biggs and Andreas Katsulas passed away, we knew that our full access to this universe would end. The demand for more passages into that universe is still there; a project called 'Babylon 5: The Lost Tales', has started production, with some of the actors involved in the series signed up to reprise the characters they played. I will be there to watch what happens.

I cannot make much comment on Eric Raymond's essay, except to agree with him on his comments on Greg Egan's *Diaspora*. This was the hardest book I've ever tried to read, but it was definitely worth the struggle.

21 December 2006

[BRG: And its author is Western Australian, not American or British.]

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I have to agree — people write more substantial and thoughtful pieces for an apa than a blog, and there is much more of a conversation in an apa, with everyone getting the latest instalment together. Blogs are, ironically, much more solitary, and I have very little time for them. Make that no time.

I've read the editorials and Paul Kincaid's piece on *The Separation*. I'm grateful for that as it helped me clarify my thoughts a little on a very difficult and confounding novel. I just re-read it a few weeks ago, along with *The Extremes* and *The Prestige*, and it struck me as a very different book from the first time I read it. Somehow, approaching it as a Christopher Priest novel, I completely overlooked the huge significance of the political dimension.

You may have noticed I've interviewed Chris in the latest *Interzone*. The interview focuses on *The Prestige*, but I began reading some of the excellent content on Chris's website and from there went on to read one of the books about Hess that Chris recommends: *Double Standards*. This is a truly astonishing book, which Chris only came across as he was close to finishing *The Separation*. I can only wonder what influence *Double Standards* might have had on *The Separation* had he read it earlier. It is the sort of book that makes one completely reconsider what you thought you knew about WWII. History

certainly is written by the victors, such an obvious truism we rarely stop to consider the implications.

29 December 2006

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

I read with particular interest the review of Christ Priest's *The Separation*, which seems to me to be his best novel yet; I was not so enthusiastic about some of his previous books, which to my mind followed too closely the pattern of the modern women's gothic. The other was 'Politics and Science Fiction'. Politics is a topic on which SF is not to be trusted, I think; much of the 'individualism' of SF appears as pure conformism from where I sit, and many Libertarian convictions appear to be a kind of fascism. I once noted that American SF had nothing to say on Communism, a political conviction that ruled a large percentage of humanity, with the result that I was called a Marxist, although I had just stated a fact, and I must confess that I never had much interest in Marxism.

The most blatant example of the 'political innocence' of science fiction was *Enemies of the System*, which so intelligent a man as Brian W. Aldiss offered as proof that you could write, in capitalism, about a future where communism ruled; whereas in communist countries you could not write in the same way about capitalism. Now if Aldiss had published a story in which he said not that Communism was the greatest political system ever invented (we will not exaggerate), but perhaps could be a humane and efficient system that should be endorsed, and get such a work published in the USA, that might indeed have proved something. But he just said what the mass of Americans think: that communism is a lousy and tyrannical system, and he wrote just another anticommunist pamphlet. No problem with publishing such a thing; even McCarthy would have approved of this story! Now it seems that many SF writers take a more sympathetic view of socialism; in more recent stories you can find more comments that are not disparaging, as in Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Mars' novels. I attribute this to the fact that the Soviet Union is no longer the big threat, and thus socialism can be used neutrally as world-building material. But the US government apparently cannot go without some 'empire of evil' or other.





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The great Libertarian novel of SF is of course not some Heinlein treatise but Cyril M. Kornbluth's *Syndic*, and this novel might be profitably read by the Neocon idiots who defend 'democracy' with bombings of civilians (who then become 'terrorists' by virtue of being dead), torture, concentration camps, the installation of Orwellian modes of surveillance and the curtailing of civil rights.

Hope you get enough jobs to survive; I am now retired, but still doing some things, including still editing my magazine.

5 February 2005

**TONY KEEN**

48 Priory Street, Tonbridge,  
Kent TN9 2AN, England

[BRG: Tony put this on his LiveJournal blog, which is why I didn't see it until he told me to look for it. A very pleasant birthday present, Tony . . . many thanks.]

According to Google it is now 1:32 AM on Saturday 17th February in Australia. Which means it is now Bruce Gillespie's 60th birthday. For thirty-nine of his sixty years, as and when finances allow, Bruce has been producing fanzines such as *SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review*. I say fanzines, and they are, for Bruce is not paid for them. But they bear about as much relationship to the A5 Xeroxed booklets I've put out in the past as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* does to *EastEnders*. Like that nice professional layout Pete Young does on *Zoo Nation*? Bruce does it better. Never mind *Banana Wings* getting all those Novas and FAANs and Hugo nominations — the best science fiction fanzine published in 2006 was *Steam Engine Time* 5. This is a top quality sercon SF publication, which can easily hold its head up with the likes of *Foundation* and *Vector*. Look at the contents: Paul Kincaid writing about *The Separation* in

a way that makes me want to go and read the novel all over again (had I but time!), a couple of articles on Cordwainer Smith, looks at censorship in Australia and politics in SF. All credit to current co-editor Jan Stinson, but one can't help but feel that a lot of the impetus is Bruce's — certainly the fact that *SET* survived the departure of Bruce's original co-editors, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller, must be down to Bruce.

And yet I also feel that *SET* is but a side-project to Bruce. The really important thing seems to be *SF Commentary*. He's right, of course. This is an iconic sercon fanzine, of a type that few produced in the past fifty years can hold a candle to (*Australian Science Fiction Review* and Peter Weston's *Speculation*, both long ceased, are the only ones that immediately come to mind). And it's good, as well. The first time I saw a copy, I was extremely impressed, both by presentation and by content. It is as essential a tool for the SF critic as *Foundation* or *Vector*.

Bruce doesn't write all of this himself, of course. But when he does, he manages to imbue discussions of the likes of the non-SF fiction of Philip K. Dick with his own personality. No one else writes sercon articles like Bruce Gillespie. Bruce Gillespie is, in my opinion, the world's greatest living fanwriter, and I will fight anyone who says different (unless they're bigger than me). That he's never won a Hugo is an injustice. The biggest disappointment of the 2006 GUFF race not going ahead was that I missed out for a while on meeting Bruce.

In short, Bruce is the measure by which we all, as fan writers, fanzine editors, or SF critics, judge ourselves (or if we don't, we bloody well ought to). Almost every time we will find ourselves wanting — and I'm sure Dave, Mark, Claire, Pete and many others would agree with me on this point. Bruce maintains his own standards by simply

not believing anything that I've written above.

Happy birthday, Bruce.

[BRG: Thanks, Tony, but I can't say I feel better for turning sixty. I agree with you in all but two things: (a) it was Jan Stinson who prompted me to re-start *Steam Engine Time* after Paul and Maureen lost interest; Jan restored my faith in *SET* as an international fanzine about SF, and has done her best to kick us along; (b) I cannot claim superiority to anybody at all. What I enjoy so much about fandom is that every active fannish writer has a special personal quality that no one else can copy or emulate.

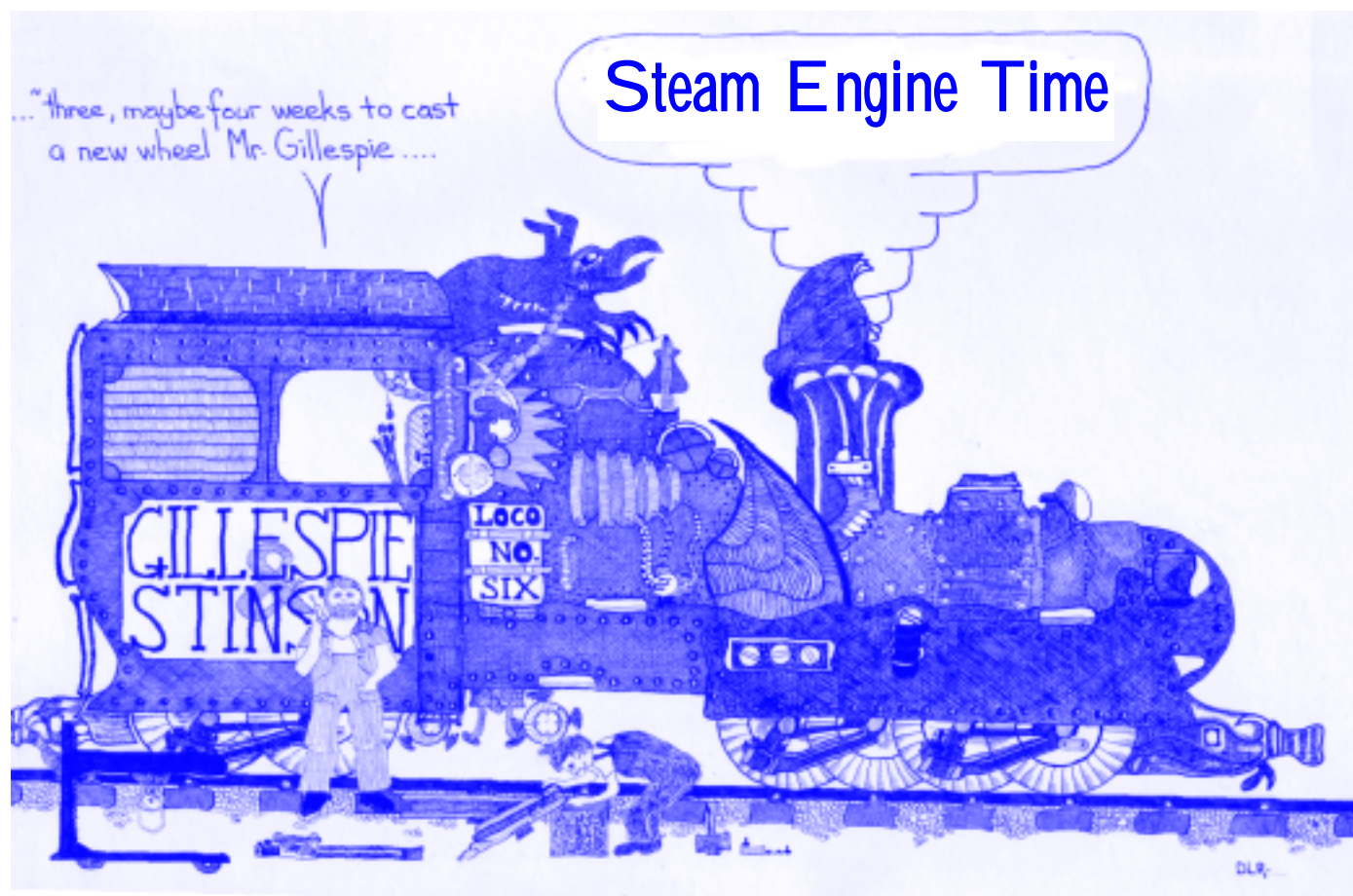
But deep inside, I know I'd trounce all the other fanzine editors if I had the money and time to publish regularly.]

[JGS: Um, gosh. I can't take all the credit for *SET*'s re-emergence; after all, Bruce could've said no. I'm very glad he didn't, especially because he wouldn't have read such glowing praise otherwise.]

[BRG: We also heard from GILLIAN POLACK (Canberra); LORNA TOOLIS (Toronto); MARTIN DUNNE (Adelaide); JAMES ALLEN (Gladstone Park, Victoria); ANDY SAWYER (Liverpool, England); NED BROOKS (Lilburn, Georgia); WENDY WARING (in transit); FRANK WEISSENBORN (North Caulfield, Victoria); ROB GER-RAND (St Kilda, Victoria); JOHN PURCELL (College Station, Texas); TERRY JEEVES (Scarborough, England); DAVID GRIGG (North Balwyn, Victoria); DAVID J. LAKE (Brisbane) (David's mighty contribution to *SET* is mentioned on p. 2); and DAVID CURL (Southampton, England)].

— 5 July 2007

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