

TBS&E Issue No. 26 'Letter to the Editor'

By Garry P Dalrymple
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NSW 2007 AUSTRALIA

For the April 2008 ANZAPA Mailing

On Thursday March 20, 2008 my
third letter was published by the
Sydney Morning Herald.

What they published was;

As an amateur astronomer I read your front-page offer of the chance to win a '\$20,000 solar system' with great interest. I would certainly like my own set of sun and planets, rather than sharing with the rest of Earth's 6 billion or so inhabitants, but I would be prepared to lend it to the Sydney Observatory when it was doing something newsworthy.

Garry Dalrymple Earlwood

It was in response to a banner advertising a competition to win a \$20,000 Photo-voltaic home power installation.

It read 'Win a \$20,000 Solar System'

As you will read below there was quite a bit more to my original letter than was printed on Thursday. If my letter had been one letter higher on the letters to the Editor page then it would have been printed on the back of the late great SF writer **Arthur C. Clarke's** Obituary, a brush immortality of a sort?

The following gives you the full picture, what I originally sent, and some background on the 'Letters to the Editor' process.

To score a letter to the editor you usually have to be quick off the mark, 'clever' and address an issue that is still going to be 'tomorrow's news'.

I believe that at the Sydney Morning Herald they receive towards 500 submissions a day and they have space to publish about 20 each day.

Getting published isn't always easy to do, as you have to be lucky to be the first or the best to express sentiments on the issue in question. I've written and sent in letters similar to others that were published, but I doubt that a traditional 'pen on paper' letter stands much of a chance these days, its either email or fax to get your letter in before the early afternoon deadline for next morning's paper.

According to my email Sent folder I have sent in 30 or so 'letters' resulting in three SMH publication credits to date! Before I looked it up I had expected the number to be much greater than this, 40 or 50 attempts etc. Each time you 'score' you presume that the next success is only an email away, that your average success rate is going to rise, but then after a few more emails the excitement falls away, the average success rate drops off until you are again surprised by a success.

The sequence of events went like this.

1. My original email

From: Dalrymple, Garry
[mailto:Garry.Dalrymple@det.nsw.edu.au]
Sent: Wednesday, 19 March 2008 11:53 AM
To: SMHLetters Mail
Subject: \$20 000 Solar System offer

Dear Editor

I read your front page with considerable interest this morning. You headlined with an offer of winning a \$20 000 Solar System.

As an amateur Astronomer of long standing I would certainly like to own one of these, my own set of Sun and Planets etc. rather than having to share with the rest of Earth's 5 Billion or so inhabitants, although I would be prepared to lend it to Dr Nick Lomb of Sydney Observatory when it was doing something newsworthy.

It does beg me to ask, 'Where on Earth (or elsewhere) are you storing these Solar Systems for the eventual winners?'. They would have to take up a fair bit of 'Space'

Wishing you well in all things.

Garry P Dalrymple

1 Eulabah Avenue
Earlwood NSW 2206
Home Phone (after 7 pm) 02 9718 5827 BH 02
9707 6284

2. The Letter to the Editor's response

From: SMHLetters Mail
[mailto:smhlettersmail@smh.com.au]
Sent: Wednesday, 19 March 2008 1:07 PM
To: Dalrymple, Garry
Subject: RE: \$20 000 Solar System offer

Hi Garry

Thanks a lot for your letter - it made us laugh and cringe at the same time. Could I suggest shortening it slightly as shown below? Thanks

Mike

Mike Ticher
Letters co-editor
Sydney Morning Herald
02 9282 2984

As an amateur astronomer I read your front-page offer of the chance to win a '\$20,000 solar system' with great interest. I would certainly like my own set of sun and planets, rather than sharing with the rest of Earth's 6 billion or so inhabitants, but I would be prepared to lend it to the Sydney Observatory when it was doing something newsworthy.
Garry Dalrymple Earlwood

3. My reply to Mike Ticher

Dear Mike,

By all means please do.

If you publish this, in any manner at all that puts me at 3, ahead of my late Uncle 'Gladys' Rhead who managed 2 letters to the SMH Editor during his life.

I'm also a committee member of the Sydney City Skywatchers, who meet at Sydney Observatory AND

I went to Clemton Park Public school, a few years after a younger Dr Nick Lomb.

Wishing you well in al things

GPD

Late News

On Thursday March 27, 2008 I received my Autumn 2008 issue of the Skeptic. My report of the 'Weird History Symposium is featured on on pages 57 and 58, the same text as you will find in this issue. That's two publication triumphs in one month!

Bookshelf news

The monster is finished and is currently sitting in the Garage, Tardis like, with 31 of its 32 shelves occupied. It is holding all of my 'Single Author Fiction' that I can locate. That is, about 12 lineal metres of books in a four sided, door sized rotatable and wheeled thing. Some of these I may cull for Paradox Auction books ahead of the 2008 Freecon. Also I have separated out my Fiction written by Australian and New Zealand (8 ea books!) Authors (5 metres) and the bulk of my non-single Author Anthologies (4 metres) are due to migrate back into my bedroom and fill a small behind the door book case that I made years ago. Most importantly though I'm beginning to be able to sort and eventually shelve 'sorts' of books with a view to dedicating single shelves to single 'sorts' of books or in some cases, deciding to delete these from my virtual library listing.

I have also been looking for and finding more wood, with a view to building an improved version of the monster, one that is pretty enough to be seen in the house.

Mailing Comments for ANZAPA mailing 241 February 2008

Postponed!

To get this issue out in time I have had to put off reading and reviewing the February mailing. I was about half way through and only one working day to wrap it up!

Will try harder when I have more time, possibly a mailing comments only issue before June?

Traveller's Tales

After taking my mum to the 'Imaging' centre for a

scanning appointment I had time on my hands wander around parts of Campsie that I do not get to frequent during daylight on weekdays.

- For example I counted Fifteen Bicycles chained up at Campsie Station at Mid day, usually there are about ten to be seen at around 9 am and 6 pm when I pass through the station before and after work.

- Near the imaging centre there was a heap of techno-trash by the pavement, the usual chopped up computer. There was also several pieces of bent sheet metal, mentally re-assembled this proved to be the six elements of a **small satellite dish**. I was very tempted to gather it up and take it home, flat-ish metal has got to be useful for something? And so it goes, in Campsie Satellite dishes have joined TVs, computers and white goods as 'disposable' household items.

- I also found two magnetic car P Plates, joyous discards by a newly qualified unlimited license holder? I have used these as magnetic patches to rust holed steel roofing.

- On another day in Campsie, from the bus coming and going I noticed a **Buddhist monk**, in robes and sandals pacing up and down Beamish Street to and from the Railway Station. Have I got it wrong I wondered?

Blinded by materialism and an attachment to possessions have I overlooked that **Nirvana** is a station that can be found on the Bankstown line? Or perhaps **enlightenment** might be found underfoot on Beamish Street, in the gaps between the council's paving slabs?

- **The Bankstown Station Cats** have done well so far (mid February) one afternoon I counted eight to ten of them. Dunno how many will

Can you carry a double bed on a bus?

Is this a chaser challenge? Well, yes you can! I've done it, and I'll tell you how and why. Behind the Starr Bowkett Building there was a heap of discarded stuff, including the woodwork supports for a double bed Futon base, about \$30 worth of raw wood! With a bit of screwdriver disassembly I was able to reduce mass of wood to four support blocks and two 195 cm long support rails, which I was able to carry away and onto a 423 bus for the ride home.

The cats of Bankstown Station seem to be doing OK so far this year, I counted eight to ten mostly grown ones sunning themselves one afternoon in mid February as I was waiting for the train to go home. Winter is some month away, and a cold weather thin out is inevitable.

Doors - Last night while walking the beast under full moon light, I came across a skip topped up with many useful shaped pieces of wood, so I gathered up an armful before disappearing into the night.

Examination in full daylight revealed that the bits were all uniformly one and three centimetre wide slices of a door, evidently the difference between an Imperial door shaped hole and a new metric sized door. Uniform pieces of real wood I can always use! NB these pieces proved to be essential in stiffening the stuff I had cut to size to use as shelves on the monster four-sided bookshelf I have built.

How big a bookcase can you carry on a bus?

It cost all of \$15 from the Salvation Army shop (\$50 Delivery charge), a very good price for a real wood, 4 by 4 foot by Bookcase, so I paid for it, put my shoulder under it and walked it to the Station. On the train I told people looking up from their books 'I like to read on the train too – A Lot!' Getting it on the bus, round the doorway took some angling but was achievable.

Mum, as ever was surprised at the price and at my pick up and tote ability. Next weekend this bookcase moved out to the garage where it now houses my Australian and NZ books.

- A few weeks after this, I noticed a discarded 2 by 6 foot Ikea type melamine chip board bookcase, on a slow day I dragged it into the office and using my re-chargeable electric screwdriver reduced it to a flat pack state within half a lunch break, taped it together and it went home with me, under one arm. The parts of this bookcase will be 'insurance spare parts' against my next bookcase building exercise, the indoor 'Monster' – stay tuned for more details.

Book Reviews

ISBN 0-340-73483-3, World War - Homeward bound by **Harry Turtledove**, 597 pages, © 2005.

I only bought this book as the cover promised 'The enthralling climax'. The end of this book was however about as 'enthralling' as the conclusion to the last Amtrak Wars book, a bit of a so so let down. Most of the characters of the previous books are by the time of this story years dead. The exception being the family of the Science Fiction loving ex-baseball player Sam Yeager, who was there when the Lizard conquest fleet first arrived on Earth. The great attraction of the earlier books was largely absent. That of following the lives and fortunes of characters made familiar in the earlier books as the conflicts of WW2 were interrupted by the Lizard invasion and where human adaptability and ingenuity fought the Lizards to a standstill and an uneasy status quo. The 'Action' of this book concerns the consequences of the first Earth Space ship

arriving at the Lizard home planet. In this there is the book's redemption of its SF ness, the big 'What if', is the reaction of the all conquering lizards receiving visitors for the first time in their 100,000 years of recorded history who are approaching an equality to their technology. The what if is twisted a little further, when the arrival of a second ship from Earth is evidence that the Humans now have faster than light space travel, i.e. technological and in effect Military superiority over the Lizards for whom the message to their Earth occupation fleet to 'exterminate' all life on Earth would take eleven years to arrive, while the human's spaceship could return to Earth in a matter of weeks and visit upon the lizard Home world Earth's counter strike within a few months! A bit much for the rigid Japanese style Imperial society of the Lizards to adjust to, much as the powers of Earth had to adjust when WW2 was interrupted by the Lizard's conquest fleet. A longish book that could have been punchier for being much shorter. A good read and (hopefully) a conclusion to the 'World War' story.

ISBN 0-948456-35-3 'Robotman Takes Off', by Jim Meddick, a cartoon book without pages, © 1985

Bought as a curiosity, a cartoon book about a Robot, it is at times mildly amusing as it gives the point of view character's 'Martian's perspective' on aspects of American life. I have noticed these cartoons appearing in an ANZAPA newsletter recently. Each of the cartoons in this book are a four frame adventure, two to a page, and as they are described as being '© United Features Syndicate', presumably they appear in some newspapers somewhere. Each cartoon bears a date in the American format, so it appears that what is presented here is a February to December run of six days a week features?

Not much Science Fictional content about them, apart from the initial premise of a robotic extraterrestrial visitor, no more so that a Garfield like talking animal I guess. My verdict is, mildly amusing at times, wouldn't rush out and buy other ones in the series.

ISBN 0-671-03306-9 'Cosmic Crashes' (The incredible story of the UFOs that fell to Earth) by Nicholas Redfern, 328 pages, © 1999.

I must say, with some regret that this is probably the last UFO book I shall read with anything other than very strong skepticism. As a child much of my out of school reading was UFO books, Astronomy and

Spaceflight books, Comic books and some Science Fiction (which was easier to find in those days). I guess they each gave some sort of an insight to the 'real' world, the more vivid world that we were going to grow up to live in. A more vivid, more interesting and more 'real' world than the mundane suburban life of our parents. Nicholas Redfern is said to be a highly regarded British UFO researcher, so I started reading this book with some enthusiasm, it seemed to promise the 'real deal', compared to the hokum served up by US based 'Contactees' and 'Experiencers' and even by that failed SF Writer, and idea borrower Mr Whitney Schreiber. The premise of this book is that Roswell type crash incidents have taken places in the UK since the 1940s, lots of them! Mr Redfern seeks to document them all and then draw conclusions about the aperatus of the state that must necessarily exist (like Torchwood?) to clean up after them. I was expecting rigour, well organized evidence and objectivity, as Mr Redfern was reported to be among the best of the best in this field. The book consists of Fifteen chapters, several photographs (of witnesses etc.) and footnotes, better than 'testimony' type story telling. The book starts with the death of Marilyn Munro, yes, in the face of all other available evidence, she was killed only because she threatened to go public with pillow-talk tales of the Kennedy Brother's misgivings about what they were being told about UFOs by the Military/Security establishment. It went down hill from there. There was a 'trail' followed to a UK UFO incident, details supplied by a helpful South American Government source. i.e. no investigation of the motive for this release, such as 'Yeah our Government jails, tortures and rapes school children, but Your Government isn't too good either, it lies to you about Little Green Men!'. Then there were accounts of nearly battalion sized military operations to recover a succession of crashed UFOs. All achieved with water-tight security that takes decades to unravel. Most on or near Military bases, over several decades, without the hint of a suggestion that these might in fact be 'home goals', military SNAFUs rather than Galaxy crossing Alien technology going wrong mostly above this one small island. The writer assumes that there must be a 'Majestic 12' type conspiracy taking place in the UK to deal with this constant rain of UFOs, stranded dead aliens and Alien technology over the British Isles. A thorough search of declassified UK government records uncovers nothing of substance, so the conclusion is that there must of necessity be a very much higher level of conspiracy to cover up the group so that it is undetectable, rather than, well there just might not be any such a group at all!

Trawling through such records as can be found, Redfern found that there are people in the Military and security establishment that deal with 'UFOs', but that their level of interest is only to establish whether it 'was it one of ours', Aviators acting badly, Aviation disasters, Space Junk crash landing, Astronomical phenomena or the undefined, non-threatening and too difficult to investigate 'other'. I.e. UFO claims / sightings are seen as an Occupational Health and Safety type concern for those charged with supervising Civil and Military aviation rather than as potential Alien invasion type stuff. Well worth reading to put a nail in the coffin of feelings that there must be something out there. To me all the documentation dug up suggests that the 'Authorities' just don't care about this issue enough for systematic 'Men in Black' type adventures, however, claims of 'UFO landings' left un-contradicted, are a ghostrail for security types. To cover up all manner of SNAFUs involving security sensitive or just plain embarrassing incidents.

Why I can no longer believe in 'UFOs'

1 – Logic suggests that if most of the UK UFO incidents took place adjacent to military bases, or were 'reacted to' in force at very short notice, then they are most likely mostly to do with 'own goal' type military incidents that unscheduled alien visitations.

2 – If a passing Alien or time traveller was kind enough to provide the full specifications for an advanced technology invisible supersonic spacecraft, then making one or two in complete secrecy might be possible, but assembling a fleet of them would inevitably be detectable as the technology passes through many hands in the construction of a fleet of 'secret' aircraft. Militarily, the threat of an 'invisible fleet' of unknown size is nearly as potent a deterrent as real invisible aircraft.

Having read this book and the *Stealth / Area 51* books recently, I'm left with the feeling that the whole UFO 'conspiracy' Alien bodies, crashes and technology etc. is a convenience for the military. The whole point of the exercise being to provide an attention misdirecting cover, i.e. the technology that the military really wants to keep secret is not the incomprehensibly 'alien' advanced technology (that they do not have), but the 'slightly advanced' technology that their bright boys have been able to figure out. If the 'other side' gets a clear understanding of what this slightly improved technology can do, then their own 'bright boys' could probably duplicate it some time soon. If it is understood to be 'alien' sourced, then what chance do the enemy's bright boys have in designing counters for it?

ISBN 0-9586583-9-0 Written in Blood, by

Chris Lawson, Cover Art by Shaun Tan, An Anthology of 13 stories and articles, Published by Mirrordanse Books, 153 pages, © 2003

This is not an entirely easy book to review, being a mixture of opinion piece interviews, fact articles and fiction etc. It doesn't have the continuity of a novel or even the homogeneity of a single author's anthology of short stories, as it is a selection of the writer's best Fiction pieces, some author interview material and some pieces drawn from a blog. It is however a rewarding enough read if you take it piece by piece and allow enough time for some reflection in between. It would be ideal reading for a fortnight's worth of long public transport commutes.

The closest thing to a single theme is 'reflections on modern life', or the near future implications of Science applied to the same.

It really wouldn't do justice to this selection of material to attempt to list and précis each of the stories or articles. They are all pretty good, fact or fiction in service of a point of view, and they seem to give you a tour of a piece of Chris Lawson's mind, the bit that concerns itself with computer 'intelligence / consciousness', Migraines, brain implants, how other cultures think, reproductive cloning, Millennial thinking, The evolution of Creationists species, drug assisted athleticism and the possible consequences of gene tinkering and Genetic fingerprinting.

Looking over what I've written about this particular book, It makes me wonder why Bill Congreve hasn't moved some of the material that he publishes as Mirrordanse Books into some format of 'Author reading' talking books, as this book is really a series of conversations with the author by article or short story and so would be ideal for this sort of format? © GPD 21Feb, 2008

ISBN 0-75381-087-5 The Templars, by **Piers Paul Read**, 350 pages, © 1999 – The dramatic history of the Knights Templar, the most powerful military order of the Crusades

The Templars, by **Piers Paul Read** offers a bit more than the subtitle (above) offers. Over several chapters it provides essential background material needed to understand the 'fall' of the Templars, the evolution of Christianity up to the Crusades, the evolution of the Christian monastic orders, the travails of the papacy and a great deal

on the dramatis personai of the Crusades once it was clear that the Crusades in the middle East had concluded.

This book starts with the emergence of organized monasticism from unregulated the early Christian tradition of the holy hermits. A cycle emerged of Orders of monks initially living lives of seclusion and austerity, before being corrupted by 'worldly' prosperity as a consequence of their piety. For the Templars however, caught between a French King and a Pope with expectations of supremacy, the Templars and their wealth and influence attracted doom, by much the same process as had been meted out to the 'enemies of Christ', the Jews and the Cathars.

Some Templars did survive, some of their property was passed on to religious orders and some Templar like orders (controlled by kings rather than having borderless autonomy) did emerge out of their dissolution, but the main legacy of their fall has been to provide the semi- mythical characters and the alleged treasures of an unending series of recently revealed modern day conspiracies theories and Weird Histories. Immortality of a sort, certainly more so than the French King and the Pope that did them in.
© GPD 21Feb, 2008

ISBN 0-352-30694-7 England Invaded,
An Anthology of Six early SF stories,
Edited by **Michael Moorcock**, 245
pages, © 1977

This book, the second in a series includes several SF stories that were written before SF was invented, if we believe the birth of SF to be in 1926 in America with the pulp magazines. That Moorcock has been able to find this material, enough for a second book, confirms the view that SF really did start with the British popular magazines of the second half of the nineteenth century, such as the Strand Magazine and its many rivals. The elements cited for America in 1926 pre-existed in the UK, an almost universally literate generation, new printing technology (the steam press) and a commercial imperative to try to fill these magazines with every possible kind of story, in search or readership.

I found each of these stories to be more 'mature' than what I can remember reading in late 1940s/ early 1950s pulp/ serial SF, of 'The Inventor, his attractive Daughter and the Dashing hero save the world' type of story. As the stories in this Anthology are unlikely to be known to most readers of this review, I will give you some idea of the content of this book, more detail than I usually expend on the stories in a more modern Anthology;

The uses of Advertisement by **Tristram Crutchley**, 18 pages long, published in Pearsons' Magazine,

July 1909 – is a story with an inventor, a daughter and a naval officer, but the dashing hero, aviator is the daughter of the inventor. The story concerns the demonstration of an improved aircraft and involves the 'kidnap' of the naval officer, the 'biscuit bombing' of a British Naval fleet and the delivery, by air, mid ocean, of the dashing young naval officer to his ship.

When the New Zealander comes, by **Prof Blyde Mudderstnook**, 14 pages long, published in The Strand Magazine, September 1911 - is a play on a line of the poet **MacAuley**, to the effect that a truly objective perspective on the (then) British Empire will only come about after it is gone, and sought to be understood by people as distant in time and understanding as a nineteenth century Briton surveying the ruins of Roman, Greek or Egyptian relics.

The Monster of Lake Lametrie, 18 pages long, published in Pearsons' Magazine in September 1899 - Lake Lametrie in a remote and hard to get to part of Canada is a Symes Hole type portal to the pre-historic world of an inner Hollow Earth. Things bubble up from below. Following **Jules Verne**, but predating **Edgar Rice Burroughs Pellucidar** stories and at least two Dr Who adventures by 75 years (?) as this story is leavened by a body/brain exo-transplant, an injured and dying human's brain into the damage resistant body of a hulking dinosaur, which does not end well, as the 'primitive brute nature' of the dinosaur resurges, it overwhelms the civilized mind in the Monster's body.

The abduction of Alexandra Seine, by **Fred C. Smale** 14 pages long, published in Harmsworth's Magazine, November 1900 - is an improbable story of Lost Daughter/Lost Girlfriend recovered, involving abduction by an evil scientific mastermind villain, super-fast airship chases and bomb throwing etc. This story seems to me to be the 'least' of the stories in this collection.

Is the End of the World near?, by **John Munro**, 8 pages long, published in Cassells' Magazine, January 1899 - has Lord Kelvin musing on the threat to continued life on Earth of Industrialization. If the Empire continues to clear land and burn coal surely the concentration of Oxygen in the air will decline to the point that it is no longer breathable? No mention of Global Warming, but amusingly prescient of popular concerns a century later.

The final and longest story I started, but was uninterested in finishing.

When William Came, by **H. H. Munro (Saki)** is a novel length 168 pages long and was published in 1913. It involves living in a Britain defeated and occupied by Germany. The martial German Empire's fleet with its new ships and aircraft has defeated the naval fleet of the military spending

averse British and by dint of a Blockade achieved capitulation (i.e. no land war) in a time frame fast enough to thwart alliances and agreements with allies. The King and court has fled to India, those with the ability to do so are leaving for the colonies. I stopped reading about half way in, as beyond the original SF-ish innovation, that of England defeated and occupied, this story soon became a memoir on the vanished Edwardian way of life of Britain's ruling class, life among the 100 or so 'best families' of the Empire rather than a full treatment of a nation and population 'under the jackboot' and an exploration of Resistance or Collaboration issues etc. The story leads to a dinner party where presumably the Royal Germanic William shows up (I guess). © 07 March 2008 – GPD.

ISBN 0-7333-0686-1 Pleasant Avenue, A book version of a series of 2JJJ radio scripts, by **The Sandman**, 188 pages, © 1999 This book concerns itself with the events surrounding the Author's twenty-first birthday and leaving home in Eastern Sydney suburbia. The main adventure however is a sort of 'gaining of wisdom', in that the Sandman discovers the answers to a suburban mystery, to do with the activities and interests of his next door neighbours. Tedious at times, I suppose it is suburban verite of the 1980s of a sort.

© 17 March 2008 – GPD.

ISBN 0-246-13773-8 Dracula Unbound, by **Brian Aldiss**, 199 pages, © 1991 Quite an engaging read, a millionaire US inventor has a sort of time machine, that puts matter out of phase and therefore out of reach. His intention is for this technology to be a way of getting rid of intractable waste, biological and radioactive etc. At much the same time his archaeological chum digs up first one and then a second humanoid filled coffin, underneath the KT layer implying that they were around and buried during dinosaur times. They observe a passing immaterial UFO and decide to try to join it by using the new technology and a late night helicopter ride! Meanwhile Bram Stoker is busy writing his book Dracula in 1896, which is 'inspired' partly by observations of the consequences of Syphilis. At the very end of time, captive humans are planning an escape. They are prisoners working on a power system for the UFO, actually a time train that chews up most of the power of a dying Sun. The Time Train is controlled by Vampires, they started their life sucking on Dinosaurs and through the use of this time train they are able to pop up in history as they wish, eventually enslaving mankind after the twilight of a comet strike. The hero seizes control of the Time Train (the only one in existence) travels to 1896 to enlist Bram Stoker and his

gardener as allies. They then do what they can to carry the fight to Dracula and the other Vampires. They steal a nuke that the Vampires were planning to use to finish off human resistance in about 2500 AD (after a Comet strike) and set about nuking the Vampires own Dinosaur blood-fest in late Cretaceous times (before another Comet strike!). Knowing that the power of possessing the Time Train will lead to corruption and that it is a development of his own research, he destroys it, by colliding it with itself! A very enjoyable and absorbing read, at times I was put very much in mind of **Richard Harland's The Black Crusade**, as the adventurers careered over space and time doing slightly incredible things. © 17 March 2008 – GPD.

ISBN 0-352-30694-7 Binary Star number 4, two stories, **Editor James R. Frenkel**, Legacy by **Joan Vinge**, 130 pages, ©1976 & 80 and The Janus Equation by **Steven G. Spruill**, 130 pages, © 1980

With this book format the Editors have attempted to match two contemporary (1980s) short novels and to have each author comment on the other's work, the format is intended to be an improvement on the Tor double header format, of usually unlinked stories, or one Old and one New story. I can't say that the format really impresses, writers talking to other writers in after words doesn't do that much for this reader, however I am grateful to be getting two better than average stories in one slender paperback.

In Legacy the setting is a solar system some generations on from a civil war that destroyed most of the system's technology and nearly all of its population. The main business of the survivors is to recover pieces of old technology that are still in working order. The 'adventure' of the first half of the story is the flight to recover a prospector who has discovered a cache of important software. The son of an oligarch commits murder to obtain it. The second half sees the survivors of this expedition re-united in quest to prospect for more technology. They find it and Lurve (sigh!) as they travel the Asteroid belts.

The Janus Equation was a bit of a disappointment. Paul Essian is in a bother, he is a mathematician who is trying to invent time travel by composing an equation that explains time (how?). He has 'issues' because he had two mothers and no-daddy and then he discovers that his best friend (male) loves him but disagrees with

his project to invent Time Travel. There is also a mystery woman stalking him who he is falling in love with. Rival corporations want him and his 'invention' and he is consumed with worry by his gender identity 'issues'.

A kidnap / escape incident brings everything to a conclusion. The friend dies in heroic self sacrifice for his chum during a rescue attempt. The mystery woman who makes him a 'real man' turns out to be a cross sex future version of himself (err what?) who has come back in time to help him over his issues and to help him past his mental block in inventing the Time Travel machine. Full speed ahead and damn the paradox torpedoes!

If the Author had been qualified, surely this should have been worth a 'Lambda Prize' nomination for GL&T-S SF? It just seemed too contrived a story to me. © 23 March 2008 GPD.

ISBN 0-95345730-3-7 The Barrow Uncrossed, by **Philip M. O'Neill**, 133 pages, ©1998, subtitled Father Peter O'Neill, and the events in East County Cork during the 1798 Rebellion, which surrounded his arrest & transportation.

This slender book is fairly accurately described by the subtitle above. It has been written by a descendent of the Father O'Neill above and gives some background to the origins of the United Irishmen lead 1798 uprising of which Father O'Neill's transportation was a minor outcome. The United Irishmen were a secret society broadly representative of Irish society of that time who expected French aid for Irish home rule. They were not an exclusively Catholic group, Quakers, Presbyterians and other Protestants were among their leadership and some were distinctly anti-clerical, as was the French Revolution. I bought this book as I was curious to see if there was much said that showed a light on the subsequent Irish led rebellions of early NSW history. In this respect the book was a disappointment as during his incarceration in NSW he was kept isolated from the bulk of the transported Irish by being sent off to Norfolk Island and was able to play no role in the life of the colony. The story is that Farther O'Neill was accused of involvement, after the fact, in the murder of two informers to the Authorities on the activities of the United Irishmen secret Society. He was imprisoned and flogged confessions of guilt were allegedly made and after a time, he was transported to NSW, just ahead of the legal documents granting his immediate release! The 'Crime' of Father O'Neill seems to have been ambivalence, he did not endorse the two murders, neither did he condemn them. This was compounded by the fact that he lived and worked adjacent to Youghal an

Orangeman dominated area where he had made enemies. Also, the establishment of the Irish Catholic Church was against the United Irishmen, possibly in fear of seeing a local episode of what the anti clerical mobs had done to France's Catholic establishment. The Bishops were calling for loyalty to the British Crown, irrespective of what some parish priests may have been doing. The town of Youghal was an enclave of Loyalists surrounded by counties where incidents of the uprising and United Irishmen sympathies were widespread. It was presumed by the Youghalites that as a Parish priest O'Neill must have had a leadership role and so 'improving the evidence' against Father O'Neill was seen by some as a civic duty. At the time that was enough to fall under suspicion and be imprisoned at a time when 'such was the irritated temper of persons in this Country that light surmise was often considered equal to full evidence'.

What I have learned from all this; that the Irish revolt of 1798 was more ecumenical than I had expected, but that it was the end of this attitude to reform in Ireland as most of the Non-Catholic leaders of the United Irishmen were identified and politically neutralized leaving the field to more secretive and anti-protestant elements. Oh yes, on page 27 there is an enigmatic and unexplained reference under a heading of 'Agrarian Terror' of a letter being sent to a **General Dalrymple**. © March 26, 2008 GPD.

Rough notes on the Weird History Colloquium at Wollongong Uni. held on Friday February 1, 2008.

After seeing an article in the Sydney Morning Herald about a free symposium on 'Weird History' I booked a place, took a day off work and the train ride down to Wollongong.

It seems that Wollongong University has chosen to differentiate itself from the other closer to Sydney Universities by being 'Innovative'. A courageous move at any time!

The first presentation was by **Greg Melleuish** to explain the nature of what they mean by 'Weird History' and that a reason for this Free Symposium was that he and his colleagues were interested in teaching an academically rigorous course in 'Weird History', as there is so much of it about at the moment, Da Vinci Code, 1421 etc. being promoted without much sign of any critical evaluation.

Captain Philip Rivers, '1421: Voyages in a parallel Universe', is a Malaysian Academic with

Maritime and Navigational expertise discussed in great detail the many yawning improbabilities required for the 1421 premise. I.e. that massive Fleet/s of enormous Ming Dynasty Chinese junks, crewed by tens of thousands of individuals, managed to perform voyages of long duration and great speed currents to just about everywhere on the face of the planet, against prevailing winds and currents without being noticed until the present. Captain Rivers has met the 1421 author and it seems that when faced with the discovery of another improbability that would serve to prohibit the passage of his adventurous Ming Dynasty Fleets, he seeks inspirational advice from the no less a person than the Blessed Virgin Mary, after being fortified with Bacon sandwiches (and presumably washed down with 'Lashings of Ginger Ale?').

Konstantine Sheiko and **Stephen Brown** gave a presentation on 'Did the Mongols invade Russia', which was partly to do about the very significant gaps in records about Russian History and partly about the rise of Mr Fomenko, a veritable one man powerhouse of revisionist history that is in tune and in service to the current Russian Nationalist political sentiments.

Denis Gojack, an Archaeologist, spoke on 'Two Hundred years of secret visitors: the history of a pseudo-archaeological concept'. The talk was in two parts, there is real evidence, artifacts, that can be interpreted as being 'proof' of European pre-Cook, or of Pre-Cook era artifacts being carried to Australia. There are also a great many natural formations, incorrectly dated and fraudulent 'discoveries' that imply that Australia's pre-Cook history was crowded history's full cast of civilized visitors. In the 18 and 19 hundreds (Australian Joseph Smith 'Wanna bees?) many sought to see evidence of a 'greater' Australian past, or sought some sort of morality play effect, with the fate of 'degenerate' and 'soon to be passing from History' Australian Aboriginal to be a warning to we British, that what we too had achieved, could be in time be lost without the strict observation of 'Values'. Wrong on several accounts I would say. The end of the line for this line of reasoning has not been permanent, as 'Independent Researchers' have discovered, resurrected or re-interpreted evidence, as a part of Conspiracy theory, i.e. only those outside the academic system (Conspiracy) can be trusted to tell you the truth about stuff, their conclusions more valid than 'mere' experts.

'Conspiracies in Australian History', was the title of **Glenn Mitchell's** talk. His extensive (internet) research (the night before) uncovered heaps of conspiracies of an authentic theme. From these he was able to show many of the elements common to conspiracies in general and in particular to

demonstrate that with remarkably little real world research, most of these conspiracies can be seen to be made of very flimsy construction based on false foundations.

In his talk 'Walking to China: Convict Escape Mythology in Colonial Australia', **David Levell** gave a level headed treatment of what was the original 'Irish Problem' in the early days of the penal settlement of Sydney. He has a book out shortly. Among mostly Irish convicts it was commonly believed that China and a warm welcome, or possibly Timor was but a few days walk away from the Sydney settlement. The first Governors made much effort, through expeditions to demonstrate that this was not the case. Some expeditions returned with reports of having met Aboriginals who claimed that there were indeed white men living further away. This may have been garbled accounts of Timor or Batavia passed down Aboriginal trade routes, or just natives cautiously agreeing to the leading questions put by the strangers. In spite of the persistent defection and dejected return of convicts this myth might have inadvertently served to keep the peace in Sydney, as Irish (political) convicts may have delayed attempts at serious uprisings, while the phantom of 'escape to China' still had currency.

Science Fiction MEETINGS

Notes from the January 17, 2008 Infinitas Book Review meeting

Present were: April and Julie-anne, Mark, Garry Dalrymple, Danielle, Dr Kowalski and Tim Martin. Discussion of Temeraire by **Naomi Novic** and Company of the Dead by **David Kowalski**

Both of the books discussed at this month's meeting were on an 'Alternate History' themes, although treated very differently. This meeting report is in two parts, for reasons that will become obvious shortly.

Temeraire is an Alternate History set during a Dragon fixated Napoleonic Wars period (spot the POD) this book is part of a series. **Mark** read books one and two to try to understand it better, but ended up not liking it. The story line is; an intercepted ship is found to be carrying a dragon egg of a previously unknown type, intended as a gift to Emperor Napoleon of France. On hatching, as dragons do, it fixates on a promising young British Naval officer. Effectively terminating his naval career by means of a transfer to the lower status 'Air Wing', presumably the Commonwealth Dragon Detachment? The writer makes great efforts to quarantine the causality effects of there being 'real', jumbo jet sized dragons playing a part in military history! A bit of a stretch I would have thought. **Danielle** liked it, impressed by the 'out of station' life experiences caused by the point of view character's reluctant involvement with dragons and the turns of circumstances resulting. **Cheryl Morgan** (Emerald City) has reviewed the book and likens it to **Hornblower** meets The Dragon riders of Pern. Probably not a book for everyone, unless you like both Dragon and Military SF stories!

Company of the Dead by **David Kowalski**

This book sets up its Alternate History Point of Departure being the supply of a pair of infrared binoculars (Influenced by the magic spectacles in The book of Mormon?) to the lookout man on the Titanic. It is an enormously long book and a first book by its author. The Titanic misses the Iceberg and does not sink, however the subsequent loss of life during WW1 is huge, because they never got round to providing enough lifeboats, as they did, after the massive preventable loss of life after the Titanic sank! **John Astor** did not die with the Titanic, he goes on to become US President. In this new reality, the US and the UK are estranged by the Titanic incident, and there are Aircraft carrier Airships! The outbreak of the Spanish Flu effectively ends WW1.

Mark and Tim read it and enjoyed it greatly, in spite of the length and complexity of the story they could see no parts that could be edited out without lessening the impact of the whole book. Time travel / causality effects are played straight in the story, circular time effects include a gun that is in two places at once. The battle scenes are scarce, but they have an authenticity as feelings and emotions are fully explored.

Shooting in tunnels scene were notable. The Story

is very long, but it is difficult to see where cuts could be made or the story could be divided into Book 1 and Book 2. David has had some advice from **Sean McMullan** on selling books to American publishers.

Just as we had just about run out of steam (part way through page two of my notes) in discussing this book we received a 'house call'. **Dr David Kowalski** turned up at the bookshop in surgical scrubs from Westmead Hospital, available (between contractions) to talk about his book and his experiences in writing it!

House call - The writing of Company of the Dead

A continuation of the notes from the January 17, 2008 Infinitas Book Review meeting

I think this account suffers for the amount of time between taking down these notes and writing up this account in late March. This account should be read in conjunction with the other notes of the January Infinitas book review meeting.

Just as we had just about run out of steam (part way through page two of my notes) in discussing this book we received a 'house call'. **Dr David Kowalski** turned up at the bookshop in surgical scrubs from Hospital, available (between contractions) to talk about his book and his experiences in writing it!

The book evolved over about nine years. David had been writing it part-time and in moments between engagements during his day job. He took his time with some story elements because he wanted to get scenes right.

For many historical matters he was greatly helped by the Australian historian **Geoffrey Blainey**. Beyond the people and dates, David was influenced by Blainey's theory of how peace breaks out during War-time. When countries go to war they 'know' that they will win and during the war that follows there is a conflict between these expectations and the revealed reality that becomes history. This is the basis if the Germany Vs Japan conflict in this book. Incidentally much of this cooperation and help occurred during an extended lunch on a Melbourne Tram that's set up as a Restaurant!

An aside - The influence of reading on writing; when most readers experienced their SF&F through magazines short stories were 'it', now that most people get their SF&F through thick novels

then thick novels are the starting point of the new writer.

On battle scenes David took considerable pains to get it right, feeling that in setting up a strange alternate world minor inconsistencies (like the fifteen shot 'six-shooter') of inessential details are jarring and barriers to getting the plot.

Those who have read both books say it is miles Better than **John Birmingham's** World War 2.1 etc.

Most of the book involves a world having four great powers and where Proxy wars take place on what we know to be US territory, rather than having the US of North and South US as major players. This world continues the antagonisms of our history, to the effect that the major powers never learn the lessons of WW1 and WW2.

The Technologies of the world are different as well, with different technologies, neither old nor futuristic, but extensions of the nineteenth century as if the needs of the twentieth had not intervened? It is the technology that this world needs rather than copies or versions of our own types of technology.

The crash at Roswell and an artifact leads to time loops, with some players in the book having pre-knowledge and others acting to pre-empt the 'initial' extent.

In writing this David's influences include **Mary Gentle, Harry Turtledove, Alistair Reynolds** and **Robert Read**. People who enjoy Company of the dead, would probably also enjoy **Ian M. Banks**.

The American Indian 'Ghost Dancers' have an out of this time stream perspective on what is going on in this book, one alternate reality out of many in their Amerind view of time as a circular phenomena. David also was attracted by their ideology of honour, and has characters doing things knowing that they will die, because it is the honourable path.

The initial draft was ~1,000 pages long, but it was edited down by 15 or so percent. Originally it had a different ending with a 'don't do it' / 'it could all be a bad dream' confrontation, but a better much punchier ending came from the writer's subconscious via a dream (spooky?). Subsequently a 'do nothing' character was inserted into the story, camouflaged as a servile figure, but a character who is necessary to do several small but essential things for the story to proceed. There is only one villain in this book (a **Kurt Vonnegut** influence?) all other characters are acting true to their ideals.

The power of a Medical degree - David was able to

make contact with Geoffrey Blainey and get through to **Stephen Spielberg's** secretary by leaving recorded 'Dr Kowalski called and would like you to call back' messages.

In writing this book David had a minor epiphany. Previously he believed in conspiracies, the more the better, but after having plotted and written this book he now realizes that the keeping of secrets that is essential for a conspiracy to work is just too much of an effort to pull off in real life.

At the time of taking down these notes this book has sort of been sold for US publication and David is currently working on a new unrelated (Fantasy) book. If you want to better enjoy the book, as a gift to the reader there is a website set up giving Dramatis personai and other additional details of the characters and the world of the book.

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Garry's notes from the January 18, 2008 Sydney Futurian meeting

Topic: **Your Best and Worst (SF&F) of 2007**

Present were: *David Bofinger, Garry Dalrymple, Diane Fox, John Fox, Cynthia Ma, Elizabeth Pastor and Paolo Rech*

2008 starts in a curiously Science Fictional way.

Two movies, I am Legend and Cloverfield which features some unseen monster stomping New York have just been released. **Tom Cruise** is getting more publicity for his Sci-Fi religion than is good for his Sci-Fi Movie career.

Fannish News

JF - Many of the scenes in LOTR were first 'shot' with a wooden Camera. I.e. they were animated from the point of view of a fictional war correspondent and then filled in with computer graphics, as if it had been 'live'.

JF - Visited (and brought along the exhibition guide book) the UFO inspired display at the Penrith Art Gallery. The exhibition is Free Entry but a long way from the station.

DF - Other Alien books were on display as well.

GD - I attended last night's Infinitas Book Review meeting and **Dr Kowalski**, the Author of one of

the two 'Alternate History' sub-genre books being discussed dropped by (between contractions!), and spoke to us. I was so impressed invited him to take part in the 2008 Sydney Freecon. He said he would enjoy the opportunity.

GD - There is a Dr Who day on Sunday January 20, 2008, at the Drummoyne RSL club, their first public meeting for the year.

GD - **The 2008 Freecon** - I favour an 'Alternate History' theme and as a Science / SF theme, 'Mars Past Present and Future'.

GD - Futurian news - Finally I have a working PO Box again, after stuff up after stuff up since Oct. 2007! It is: **Post Office Box 152, BEXLEY NORTH NSW 2207.** I intend to use it for Freecon and Futurian correspondence (amongst other things). Please feel free to write me a letter!

GD - My list of 2007 Sydney Futurians - I believe that the following is an accurate list of the 2007 Sydney Futurians, i.e. a list of those who attended one or more of our 2007 Friday night discussion meetings.

In A to Z order;

David Bofinger, Kevin McKern, Garry Dalrymple, Diane Fox, John Fox, Anne Rankins, Paolo Rech, Ross Mitchell, Ted Scribner, Brian Walls and narrowly missing out due to misadventure, Stephen Bingle.

My apologies if I have missed anybody out, but I am convinced that there were one or two more, did someone bring a friend? I think I missed two meetings, any suggestions anyone.

GD - We have 2008 meeting topics and dates!

The Sydney Futurian Dates and topics for 2008 are;

January 18, Topic: **'The Best and Worst of 2007, SF&F Books, Movies, TV, Comics, SF fan events etc.'**

February 15, Topic: **'Technology Sci-Fi and the 'Cyberpunk' Revolution'**

March 14, Topic: **'Women and Girls in SF&F, Archetypes, Stereotypes and Iconoclastic characters** due to International Women's day? One Week early to avoid Good Friday and a clash with this year's Perth Natcon.

April 18, Topic: **'Religion and Atheism in SF&F stories'**

May 16, Topic: **'Police and Law Enforcement in SF&F stories'**

June 20, Topic: **Memorable Weapons in SF&Fantasy stores, Weird, Magical, Extreme Technology, or just opportune'**

July 18, Topic: TBA, but possibly something about Humour in SF or Canadian SF writers (are there any?) because Canada and International Joke day are both on July 1!

August 15, Topic: TBA but possibly something about SF Economies as August is 'Budget' Month

September 19, Topic: TBA

October 17, Topic: TBA

November 8 and 9, the 2008 Sydney Freecon
November 21, Topic: TBA but possibly something about Scottish SF / SF writers as Nov 30 is 'Burns Day'?

December 12 (one Week early to avoid Xmas), Topic: TBA

About 2008 Futurian meetings

In addition to the Freecon this year I hope to organize two or three 'Special Meetings', in conjunction with the SMSA membership. If these meetings and or the 2008 Freecon impresses the SMSA committee / membership, then the Sydney Futurians might in future gain a home for meetings and an opportunity for a following among the 1200 or so SMSA members.

Given what I have seen of the SMSA membership, if a dozen or two Freecon people or 'Old Fans' were to decide to join the SMSA (\$15.50 per year or \$10 for a library right) all could be secured.

The SMSA committee and membership seem to be a very broad church and open to encouraging pretty much anyone who wants to do something 'Cultural, Educational, Literate or Scientific' and that's SF to me.

Lower on my list of priorities this year is to approach the UTS Students Association with in effect a reminder of our 'something for nothing' Futurians offer and see whether they would now like to offer us a meeting place so they can offer students and staff a cost free SF discussion club.

Donna Corbin is offering to help set up a fannish website for the Futurians / Freecon. I'm inclined to accept her kind offer, but I think we should discuss what we want/need in a new website.

Futurians and Past-urians?

During 2008 I intend to aim to post a monthly and a week before reminder of meetings / topics at the

beginning of the month and in the week before the Futurian meeting.

Who do you feel I should contact? The people who are likely to show up and the people we 'owe' to keep advised of our meetings?

There is also the question of 'Past-urians' Futurians of previous years who we may not expect to see at meetings but who wouldn't mind still being linked with our activities.

Next year, 2009 is the 70th anniversary of the first Sydney Futurian meeting, I feel we should mark this with a semi formal dinner for old and new SF fans and work towards a policy of making a big thing about holding these dinners every 10 year anniversary.

January's Science Fictional Science News

- The Messenger spacecraft photographing Mercury in detail for the first time. A local angle is that as in the Moon landings, pictures go through Tidbinbilla.
 - Chimps are not people according to a German court, so they can't have property, heading off attempts to have a trust set up for two chimps made homeless by the bankruptcy of their home, an animal shelter.
 - Cloned Animals are 'fit for human consumption' according to the FDA
- Ahead of the **Science Freecon** I have been noticing a number of Science Fictional Science items in the SMH and the Fortean Times breaking news web page of late.
- New ground -to-Space craft for the zero to 100 Km end of 'Space tourism'.

Recent SF / Sci-Fi on TV

Not much on Free to Air, there seems to have been a migration to 'HD', some the ABC and Channel 10 HD Channel.

The only remotely relevant ones seem to be; The perennial Goodnight Sweetheart, Cyber Girl and Silver Sun on ABC TV, with Moonlighting on Channel 9 at a moving target timeslot.

Discussion of the topic: Some of the Books I have read during 2007

Stainless Steel Visions (Anthology.) by **H. Harrison**
Sudanna Sudanna by **Frank Herbert's son**
Infinity's Shores by **David Brin**
Catweazel by ?
Tek Money by **Ron Goulart** (Bill Shatner)
Revelation Space by **Alistair Reynolds**
Station X (WW2 History) by **Michael Smith**
Travels in Dreamland (Area 51, Roswell and

conspiracy History) by **Bill Patton**
Rebecca by **Daphne Du Maurier** (Crap)
Dumbest Criminals by (press clippings)
Berserker's Throne by **Fred Saberhagen**
Window on the Future 1960s SF Anthology Edited by **Douglas Hill**
Kairos by **Gwyeneth Jones**
Worlds that Weren't (Alt Hist Anthology)
Hawaiin UFO Aliens by **Mel Gilden**
Warpath by **Tony Daniel**
Scatterlings by **Isobel Carmody** (Aust!)
The Vonnegut Statement (KVg essays)
Bram Stoker's Dracula, By **Fred Saberhagen** (book of the recent Movie)
Stardoc by **S.L. Veihl**
Joshua the Man they called Jesus, by **Ian Jones** (Aust!) Biblical history
Skunkworks by ? (history of Stealth bomber)
Mary the Spanish Tudor, (UK History) by ?
The Goblin Reservation by **Clifford Simak**
 And various issues of the Skeptic, The Fortean Times and some second hand SF magazines.

Good Books

DB - Air by Jinman
 DB - Bad Air by Jeff Ryman, the internet arrives in the back end of Asia. Mundane SF movement, similar to 'Dogma 85' of SF, No SF with impossible Technology, but wire cutting by 'mind power' . Respect for the story, but not the Author
 GD - I guess I would have to go for Infinity's Shores and Warpath. Most of the rest of the SF books had their imperfections.
 GD - My best 2007 Non-Fiction read would have been Joshua the Man they called Jesus.
EP or DB? - Blood Ties by **Pamela Freeman** (met her at the Freecon), a bit slow but very good - may the peace of the snail be upon you.

Bad Books

DF - Bad Fan Fic, mostly putrid Harry Potter Slash stories. Bad SF can be uniquely bad. Also The Runts of Cygni 69, a book I have read and reviewed?

Good Movies

GD Movies I have Seen in 2007, None Really, so no I have no opinion or a 'personal best' in this category to report.
 DF - The Cave, but only for the incidental documentary footage of real caves.
Elizabeth Pastor's view of recent movies
 - I am Legend is more of a Zombie flick and sequel to the movie 28 weeks later that was screened not that long ago. I am Legend starts off as an Omega Man re-make for the first two thirds. The movie fails as the Zombies fail to be fully realized or be 'fleshed out'. A side comment made to the effect that comedy

Zombies (Shawn of the Dead) are better realized than horror ones, coz you have to be able to understand what they are on about to get the joke.

- The Golden Compass ended with a 'stay tuned' for next episode scene (unsatisfying?) and featured a song that was more annoying than **Alison Durban's Bright Eyes**. It featured a Polar Bear that sounded a lot like Gandalf (doing a Bundaberg Rum commercial?). The intelligent talking animals in this movie have a civilization, but apparently, unlike people, have no external soul.

Also discussed at some length, the ethics of converting books into movies. The Golden Compass movie compared to the book was very much 'Atheist Light'.

- **A Best Movie** - Déjà vu, a time travel movie where they are able to do four day 'Back steps', into the recent past to stop bad things from happening. They do try to explain the consequences of their time meddling and how it works etc.

PR - Cloverfield is more of a road movie than a Monster Movie.

JF and DF - mentioned enjoying watching Bubba Hotep, recently out on DVD.

Good SF&F TV

GD - TV Programs that Impressed me during 2007; Dr Who, Torchwood, Battlestar Galactica, Moonlighting, Journeyman and Heroes. I think I would have to choose **Journeyman** as a best, the others are 'same as last year'.

Worst SF&F Movie / TV?

No mentions of Beowulf or 300, so I guess these must have been 'bad' movies.

DF - The Relic, Monster juice at the Museum, brains being sucked out by giant Beetle / Gecko type things.

PR - **Worst Film nomination** - Alone in the Dark, a video game script masquerading as a movie

Best and Worst SF&F events for 2007?

GD - The January 2007 Kinokuniya event, the 2007 Sydney Freecon (naturally) and the Book section at the Sci-Fi and Wrestling dominated 2007 'Supanova' event. On the basis of most people served / most needed, I would have to go for **the Book stand at the Supanova event as the best for 2007**

DF - Started his certificate in writing course, two 'C's in popular Fiction, good tutors, including **Gadrial Carey** and **Jean Bedford**. Also attended a NSW Writer's Centre course with **Terry Dowling** as the instructor. This included writing about sex and for Game publishers. Another 'personal Best' for John was retiring (from the UTS) last year.

EP - **'Worst'** SF&F event of 2007, **Terry Pratchett's** Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Cynthia is into Multi-dimensional SF, adventures set among higher planes / realities etc.

Paolo - attended this month's meeting on whim, bringing Cynthia with him.

The topic of the next Sydney Futurian meeting is; Technology Sci-Fi & the Cyberpunk Revolution, February 15, 2008.

Garry's notes from the Infinitas SF&F Discussion meeting of February 7, 2008

Present were; Daryl Addams, Dan Cotton, Garry Dalrymple, Danielle, Kurt Frank, Andrew Johnson, Wil Kenedy, Tim Martin, Mick Ousley, Rebecca, Charmain Spears and Brian Walls, with apologies received from Henry Chatroop.

This meeting was the first for the year and traditionally the discussion Topic for the evening was, **'Your Best and worst for 2007'**

News items discussed included:

- It was pointed out that most of those present had missed out on meeting the Aurealis award winning writer **Dr David Kowalski** at the December Book Review meeting.

- The cinematic speaking roles of **Marcel Marceau** (there were two)

- The much lamented death of the **Prophet Hinkley**, Mormon President

- The claim that there was an internet organized campaign of bothering Sci-Fi fan events turned out to be a misreading of postings about some anti-Scientology events.

- The partial (20% from Sydney) **Solar Eclipse** that took place earlier this afternoon was obscured by clouds and heavy rain.

- The **Messenger spacecraft's** current mission to map the Planet Mercury.

- Several recent near misses from passing Asteroids in the past few years, the last only last week, on the night of January 31, 2008.

- Fond memories of a performance of (the Sci-Fi influenced) **Tripod's** 'Hot Girl in the Comic book shop'.

- There is to be (after 20 / 30 years?) a sequel to the movie 'Tron'

- At a convention, **William Shatner** (an actor) stated that he believes that the Kirk character was killed off too early in Star Trek. He was told to shut up.

- The trailer for **the next Star Trek movie** was being played during screenings of the motion sickness provoking 'Monster Trashes New York' movie 'Cloverfield'.

- The US writer's Strike has delayed the shooting of several TV series.

- The 'jaunting' movie 'Jumpers' will be screening shortly, apparently the cops can harpoon Jumpers through their portal / continuum scar and haul them back for termination - ouch! SF or part of a pre-emptive establishment dis-information campaign? No mention of 'Tiger Tiger' or **Alfred Bester** noticed in reviews?

- **Heath Ledger's** final movie, (Batman) 'The Joker' has been well received.

- A second **Evangelion** movie is coming out.

- **Garry** has a page (a whole page!) coming up in the next issue of The Australian Skeptic **Also**

- There was a discussion of the consequences of becoming a judge for the Aurealis awards, a lot of reading to do if you take the responsibilities seriously. For the year you lose any sense of being able to read what you like, under the deluge of eligible titles that are directed to you to read and pass judgement on. If you want your work to be read by the judging panel, then it is far better to publish / claim eligibility early than to leave it up to the last minute.

- **Dan Cotton**, a SF fan from Newcastle, who was attending his first Infinitas SF&F discussion meeting. He is currently working three days a week at Macquarie University and commuting back home to Newcastle (ouch). Dan has organized short SF story writing competitions and has just completed a Phd. He has found 'no conclusive link between Sydney Weather and Sunspot activity'.

- **Over Heard**, a comment on the actions of overly litigious religious organizations who respond to any sustained criticism of their doctrines or activities with threats of legal action - *'Then Cry Havoc and let loose the Dogs of Law'*

Books - Good

DA - Rynamon by **Terry Dowling**

DA - East of the Sun, West of the Moon, by **John Ringo**

DA - The Jennifer Morgue by **Charlie Stross**, an 'Atrocities Archive' sequel

DC - listened to several 'Escape Pod' podcasts which featured SF readings

GD - I guess I would have to go for Infinity's Shores and Warpath. Most of the rest of the other (20 or so?) SF books I have read during 2007 have had their imperfections.

CS - 'Anything by **Scot Westerfield**'

CS - 'Elsewhere' by? A Young Adult story about a post death existence where life is observed to be running backwards, death to birth etc.

BW - Rainbow's end by **Vernor Vinge**

BW - Post Singular by **Rudy Rucker**, who acknowledged being inspired by **Charlie Stross**

Books - Bad

WK - Seven Ancient Wonders, by **Matthew Reilly**

TV and Movies - Good

DA - Golden Compass, the religious bits were OK

DA - Stardust The book was OK.

DA - 'Solid State Society', the second Ghost in the Shell movie

GD - Dr Who, Torchwood, Battlestar Galactica, Moonlighting, Journeyman and Heroes. I think I would have to choose Journeyman as a best, as all the others are to some degree 'same as last year'.

GD - No SF&F Movies seen, so I have no opinion or a 'personal best' in this category to report

MO - Sunshine, for the atmosphere, reminiscent of 2001? That they all died to save the world?

CS - Liked Dr Who, over Torchwood

CS - Enjoyed the movie 'Enchanted'

MO - Cloverfield was clever, but not everyone could take the camera work

BW - The Bionic Woman

TV and Movies - Bad

DA - Battlestar Galactica series 3, the Cylons had a plan, but then they lost the plot!

DA - Sunshine on so many levels it Sucked Big time, a dying Sun, Why and How?

DA - Eureka, short episodes, unlike Battlestar Galactica, pleasingly high body count

DA - Flash Gordon sucked, cheapness of the sets used failed to impress

DC - No favourites, all movie / TV seen last year failed to live up to expectations.

MO - Battlestar Galactica series 3, too much pontificating, more action please.

MO - 28 Weeks Sucked because of the ending

BW - Flash Gordon sucked

Best / Worst other

Universally awarded - **The Perennial 'worst'** goes again to the network programmers. Late night SF&F shows placed into 'now you see it, now you don't' slots, overruns and delays, terminations mid series etc.

GD - A 'Best' SF&F event for 2007

- The January 2007 Kinokuniya event, four Australian SF&F Authors, at the wrong time of the year, very little publicity, but quite a few people showed up!

- The 2007 Sydney Freecon (naturally)

- The Book section at the Sci-Fi and Wrestling dominated 2007 'Supanova' event. On the basis of most people served / most needed, I would have to go for **the Book stand at the Supanova event**.

GD - My best 2007 Non-Fiction read would have been Joshua the Man they called Jesus. Charmain has also read this book as well and thinks highly of it. © G Dalrymple February 2008

Garry's notes from the February 15, 2008 Sydney Futurian meeting

Topic: **Techno SF & Cyber Punk**

Present were: Garry Dalrymple, Diane Fox and John Fox and Kevin McKern

News

LB & JF - CSR or the CSIRO has announced a process to convert 'Green waste' associated with Sugar Cane into a crude oil replacement, i. e. Ethanol from the sugar and additional stuff from the other 'waste' material.

GD - **Paddy McGuinness**, Sydney Journalist, has died. The SF-nal significance of this is that there are reports of Paddy getting into Politics by following a group of like-minded Sydney SF fans into the Sydney Push. It is possible that Paddy attended the first Sydney SF convention (as a schoolboy!), and there are some reports that he had a SF book published under another name. If I get the time I'll look into this and report back.

GD - **Three Science Fictional things** noticed on the way in to the meeting, 1. There is a Scientology organize 'Anti-psychiatry' display across the street in the old bank building - see it and see if what **Tom Cruise** says makes more or less sense? 2. **The Agincourt Hotel** on the corner is now 'Greenhouse Neutral', so don't burp or pass wind in the vicinity, as you may need to be 'neutralized', 3. **'Good Games'**, a shop and venue board games and RPG etc has opened. It has a street front door and a narrow set of steps up. It is between KFC and McNasty's. A visit for fit and narrow fans only?

GD - Much of my time recently has been spent dealing with book-shelf issues. A \$15 real wood Bookshelf (125 by 91 cm, four shelves and carried home on the train and a bus!), now set up in the garage, has allowed me to start to put into one place all of my Australian SF&F books. The spirit of organization, as ever, moves among us!

GD - On Friday March 1, 2008, I attended an all day 'Weird History' Symposium at **Wollongong University**. I was able to spend some time with **Cat Sparks, Rob Hood** and **Richard Harland's missus**. Topic of conversation, mostly about Fannish friends old and new and dealing with the 'joys' of aging in a SF present. My notes on the papers presented at the Symposium are to be published in the Australian Skeptic (a whole page - for me!).

GD - I'm working on upgrading my book SF&F meeting email into a bulletin about all the Sydney Book discussion club meetings. I'm discovering that Sydney has organised **Jane Austen, Bronte Sisters, Charles Dickens, Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling**, and **DH Lawrence** 'fan group meetings'.

How many of these sorts of meetings take place in Melbourne?

GD - By this afternoon's paper, the US is going to shoot down a big satellite over Australia - serves us right for voting out George's friend, **John Howard**? Collateral damage estimates are? **Who's sorry now Kevin?**

DF - Visited the 'Sex and Death' display at the Botanic Gardens. It's about some curious plant fertilization methods and some examples of carnivorous plants. Dianne was impressed by a 'Bat Plant' with white 'wings' and whispers. A discussion of Sundews followed.

JF - John is chuffed that he has been able to buy a Fox decorated pocket watch on ebay. It has an analogue display that he can read with or without glasses.

JF - Is starting not one, but two professional editing courses shortly, will be doing a week of work for the UTS and is thinking of joining 'Toastmasters'

JF - During the next few weeks he will try to negotiate regaining control of the Futurians website, which has been in limbo since late 2006.

JF - Now that he has done 'being retired' he's now looking forward to going back to school!

Discussion of the topic: **Techno SF and Cyber Punk**

An observation was made that sub-genres of SF emerge not when first imagined by the first writer to conceive of the central theme of the sub-genre, but when the ideas suit the times, hence you can find some recognizably 'Cyber Punk' SF stories well before the 'discovery' of 'Cyber Punk'.

Cyber Punk stories should involve

1. Technology, computer based or frequently biological, usually with an interface between the two.
2. A subversive sub-culture, a separation from the mainstream enabled by the technology at 1. A technology-based sub-culture in a manner similar to a drug or religion based sub-culture. Elements of conspiracy.
3. Enhancements of and extensions of the human experience enabled by 1 & 2.

A Contentious Chronology leading to 'Cyber Punk' SF

1940s and 1950s - **Golden Age SF**, Space Opera, The inevitable march of Science, Big Universe stuff, **Isaac Asimov** et al

1960s - **British 'New Wave' SF**, reaction against Golden Age themes of 'Ever onwards and

outwards' possibly inspired by UK writer's war experiences and National Service in a British Empire eclipsed and falling away, **Brian Aldiss**, **JG Ballard** and **John Brunner** etc.

Possible US equivalents might include **Joseph Heller** (Catch 22) and **Kurt Vonnegut Jr.**?

1970s - **Harlan Ellison's** 'Dangerous Visions' Anthologies, following the British trend or leading the American trend?

1980s and 1990s - The emergence of 'best selling' American and Canadian SF writers such as **William Gibson** (several books), **Neal Stephenson**, Snow Crash, Diamond Age (the twin tombstones of Cyber punk?)

2000 and onwards - Cyberspace has become 'real' and big business lives and makes deals on the internet and through 'Second Life'. The last of the Cyber Punk novels graduate towards the mainstream, or become fodder for hack Techno thriller writers?

William Gibson has claimed that the Science Fictional Future is already here, only at the moment it is unevenly distributed.

Techno SF

We resolved that for a story to be 'Techno SF' there had to be an invention or innovation that was central or enabling of the story. I. e. the TV series 'The Six Million Dollar Man', wouldn't have had a metaphorical leg to stand on without the technology, the same with the 'Terminator' series of movies. Consequently 'Techno SF' would have to be there at the beginning of SF. Clearly, **Mary Shelley's** 'Frankenstein', **Jules Verne's** 'Men on the Moon' and '20,000 Leagues under the Sea' and **H. G. Wells** 'The Time Machine', wouldn't be a story without the central or enabling technology that immediately comes to mind when you mention the name of the story.

Some unsatisfying Techno SF was discussed.

HG Wells The Time Machine (Time machine used once or twice, mostly it was left out in the night air for the Bogans / Morlocks to slash tyres / graffiti?), Dinosaur Park, Time Portals just are, then on with the animated Dinosaurs. The Time Tunnel (1960s BW TV series!), just an excuse to wander the corridors of time and intrude (seamlessly) with picturesque historical events and even **Isaac Asimov's** Fantastic Voyage.

In each of these cases we would have been happier if the working of the machine was better explained or explored. I.e. Good Techno SF should not only use the central innovation, but it should explain how

it might work and the implications of it/the world it causes. This is a key distinction between Techno SF and its imaginatively poorer mainstream cousin, the Techno-Thriller.

In a **Techno-Thriller** you might be told about a cyberspace enabled crime and that's it, no deep view of the background 'world' of the hacker / cyberspace, their motivations or origins etc. The 'Sci-Fi' setting is just another crime venue for a detective's quest, with emails instead of blood stained notes found clutched in the hand of the dying.

Recommended - **Greg Egan's** short Stories for their fresh perspective of new technologies

In conclusion, Techno SF will be with us forever, as long as there are new technological innovations (or until the Spike?).

Incidentals and Deviations

- The Earliest SF (pre-1900) was referred to a '**Scientific Romance**', although there wasn't much boy-girl, boy-Android, Android-washing machine romance action going on. Could the origins be found in faulty translation? In German a novel is a 'Roman', with or without the implications of lovey dovey Romance.

- The word '**Amok**' is of Malayan origin, no English / Anglo Saxon equivalent, closest being the Viking loan word 'Berserk', but a Berserker is a very different thing to running amok. Running amok is possibly a release mechanism in rigidly hierarchical societies that are socialized by Shame or Guilt. I. e. when things get to much you can run amok with a meat cleaver, chop up most of your family and no one ever says 'Society is to blame' or questions the stress inducing nature of the social set up, he just ran amok.

- **Kevin** made some observations about Islamic Society, the role and status of the Imam drawing social authority through a claim to be an intermediary or interpreter for Ghod. I pointed out a few Islamic / Mormon parallels which quite surprised him.

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Garry's notes from the March 6, 2008 Infinitas SF&F Discussion meeting

Present were; **Daryl Addams**, **Henry**

Chatroop, Garry Dalrymple, Kurt Frank and Brian Walls

This meeting was uncharacteristically brief by reason of there being no appointed topic. Instead we discussed SF&F news and went our ways earlier than usual.

Science Fictional News

DA - Has seen season 2 episodes of Torchwood, developing better than season 1's 'snogfest' episodes.

DA - The current version of Dr Jeckle and Mr Hyde (on ABC1) is not too bad, it may be 'pussywhipped' at times, but it still has its pride.

HC - The US Democratic primaries are giving Americans a Star Trek like choice of Presidential contender, do you go for the **Sisko/DS9** or the **Janeway/Voyager** option?

HC - Other commentators have said that it's usually the Black or Woman President the news cameras show when the US is threatened by Tsunamis or Alien spacecraft colliding with the statue of Liberty etc.

HC - Much amusement had by the US's 'High Tech' vote counting procedures. An internet video intending to showing how secure the 'new' voting machines were was scanned and copies made of the secret key that opens the back of the machines widely distributed!

HC - Wikipedia is fast becoming the predominant source for SF TV resources and reviews.

HC - A kit plane powered by batteries and an electric motor has flown for 75 minutes in France. Its 48 Kg of batteries provide a power to weight ratio equivalent to 2% of that of Petrol, but costs two Euros for a 'full tank' of electricity.

GD - **Futurians and Freecon websites** up thanks to **Donna Corbin**.

GD - **Graham Stone** has a new list of books for sale.

GD - Currently playing - the Movie Shadow of the Moon, interviews with most of the surviving Apollo Astronauts.

BW - Has seen 10,000 BC. It is a really dumb movie. He nearly fell asleep watching it.

BW - Attended a Freud exhibition at Sydney University, only just resisted the urge to try out the couch!

BW - There is a UFO conference in Sydney this weekend. (**GD** I looked this up, it seems that the physical and objective 'nuts and bolts' study of UFO-ism is over, this convention is more about subjective and 'spiritual' UFO-ism, supporting the experiencer / survivor of psychic contact with spirit plane UFO entities etc.)

If I might be so bold, it might be a useful idea in future to make a list of the topics discussed at last year's Natcon and to use this list as a default random

topic generator for these meetings. Any topic in advertised in advance is a better than trying to decide on the night, 'what's the topic for tonight?'

Garry's notes from the March 14, 2008 Sydney Futurian Meeting

Topic: Women and Girls in SF&F, Archetypes, Stereotypes and Iconoclasts (in honour of International Woman's day?)

Present were: Garry Dalrymple, Diane Fox, John Fox, Anne Rankins, and Graham Stone. Apologies were received from Donna Corbin, Anthony Peacy and Brian Walls
Virtual Contribution; Nisaba

March SF & F News

GD - Since last meeting I have exchanged emails with **Michael McGuinness** (brother of **Paddy McGuinness**) an old Futurian now living in the Blue Mountains (how many more 'old Sydney SF fans' are there up there gafiating?). Graham is of the view that the Blue Mountains SF fan set has scattered.

- I have exchanged emails with **Frederic Pohl's** webmaster. Fred was a (New York) Futurian.

This might result in my past Futurian meeting notes being seen by a wider audience.

- You may be aware that I now have to hand a monthly listing of all Sydney book interest meetings, well beyond just SF meetings, details ready for February to December. If you know someone who you think would be interested in receiving a copy by email or by post, let me know and I'll send them one.

- Much appreciation to **Donna Corbin** who has put much work into both a Futurian and a Freecon website.

- I already have nearly Thirty books at present for the **'Paradox Auction'** (as time goes on the prices get smaller!), formerly Front table Auction, but would like more. Could you bring a couple of SF&F or general books that you can spare to each meeting? The website list of these books will go 'live' in April, I'm hoping that a diversity of books on list will encourage people do donate other books and to attend the Freecon for a chance to get books similar to ones that they read!

- My (garage dwelling) four side bookshelf is currently operational, allowing me for a first time to lay out my single Author SF books A-Z in one

place. Oh the Duplications! No less than three copies of **Joe Haldeman's** Worlds and Time Enough. Ah! The joy of being able to at last being able to look the books up and down searching for a particular book that you remember involved 'Women who used to be dogs'. Discards there will shortly be. See the Paradox Auction list for future developments!

- And finally, if you haven't already received a copy from Graham in the post. I will bring several copies of his latest catalogue of books for sale (lots of German SF!) to the meetings above.

- **A Sydney Dr Who event** will take place on **Sunday March 30**, from 11 am to 6 pm, at the DRUMMOYNE RSL, 162 Victoria Rd Drummoyne (Upstairs function room). The event will feature an appearance by **David Banks** who has played the role of Cyber Leader in Dr Who episodes on several occasions.

JF - Back at UTS as a student, doing professional editing courses. Lecturer / Tutor seems to be a published SF&F writer, according to the evidence of a copy of a recent (US) SF&F magazine that John had to hand.

DF - Currently gorging on cheap Anime books found at the nearby Basement Bookshop. Also bought a copy of **Gene Wolfe's** (750 page long) Book of the Short Sun, several books in one volume?

- Her health (back) is improving, and she hopes to be able to return to more active pursuits shortly, botanical field work and martial arts.

AR - Ann has just finished reading Sand Worms of Dune, by **Brian Herbert** (son of **Frank 'Dune' Herbert**). She feels that this book contains enough fresh leads for a start to another 16 books in the Dune Cycle. Mostly though she has been reading Crypto-Religious techno-thrillers like The Da Vinci Code, currently reading one provides insights on the Hebrew context of early Christian writing.

GS - Graham stated that he had no news. However he has a new list of books for sale that seem to be moving well. He has managed to get some worthwhile material preserved, placed into research libraries and been paid for it.

I consider this to be both newsworthy and praiseworthy!

Nisaba - **Terry Pratchett** claims to backs up text by having a guy come around each Friday to carve the words into stone and then bury them in the garden. (very pertinent to what occurred with this file!)

Recent Science Fictional Science News

- ESA has flown its **Jules Verne** automated (single use) space freighter vehicle to the international Space Station. It allegedly burns up completely on re-entry, disposing of 'disposables' from the Space Station.

- Claim has surfaced that all the Neanderthals died

of Mad Cow disease, based on one set of defleshed skeletal remains and a diagnosis of Cannibalism leading to an implication that a prion based disease would have got them! Not so, I saw some on TV at Camden protesting about a new Islamic private school.

- **The Flores Hobbit** isn't. According to one team of researchers they are just the remains of a population of seven or eight deformed dwarves (OK so where's Snow White supposed to be buried?)

- **The Cassini space probe** is shortly going to pass through and sample a hot water geyser above Enceladus, at an altitude ~150 km above that satellite's surface.

- We are all going to Die. A Binary Star Gamma Ray Burster is lined up on Earth and is likely to sterilize life on Earth 'as we know it' if it blows.

Recent SF / Sci-Fi on TV

- SG Atlantis (7) is back – ho hum.

- The Sarah Connor Chronicles (9) is on. I'm getting tired of it already, is it just 'The Fugitive' with killer robots? Doesn't seem to be about much more than running away from killer robots?

- Good Night Sweetheart (2) finishes this week. Garry Sparrow has one life (and Wife) in the WW2 1940's and one in Tony Blair's 1990s, accessible to him through a time portal / hole in the fence in the lane way behind his 1940s memorabilia shop

On the topic.

Of course, Women are perfect.

Much text lost here due to software failure

or does it just reflect the trend across all other Literary genres, initially male predominant and then more lately less gender im balanced? I think that in the past, where a story has a single or main point of view character, all the other characters, including female characters, are likely to be less carefully drawn. Also, getting on with exploring the exciting of the 'What If' of the story is frequently the prime objective of the SF writer, ahead of fully describing the feelings of the story's minor characters?

Worth mentioning is **Justine Labalestier's** Phd which was re-worked into a book. It covers the history of Women and SF, Women SF fans, Women as SF writers and Women as SF characters. It can be described as a battle for space, as misogyny ruled in the boy's club that formerly was SF in times past.

Womyn's SF / Feminist SF

- There's SF that lets the story make an incidental social comment, like some books by **Ursula K. Leguin** (The Dispossessed and?)

- I also rather enjoyed **Joanna Russ'** 'The Female Man' with its exploration of the personality and circumstances of alternate Alexes in Alternate worlds, it's character's experiences made me look at the world from a different perspective. John and Diane mentioned enjoying aspects of this book as well. And then there's Womyn's SF / Feminist SF where the whole 'What if' is an exploration of a set up that appeals to a feminist sub-set agenda. They give prizes for this, meanwhile some other women write award winning, that is, good SF.

- **Nicola Griffiths'** 'Slow River' and **Melissa Scott's'** 'Shadow Man' come to mind. A 'High Literary Standard' is set or is this just playing for an audience, just like other SF&F sub-genres?

- My personal beef with the Womyn's SF / Feminist SF that I have read is that 'not much happens', but they keep telling you how the characters feel about the 'not much' that is happening all around them.

Women writing Mainstream SF

- There are lots of them these days, several of them winning the big annual awards recently. **Lois McMaster Bujold** brings a different sort of Space Opera hero, Miles Vorkosigan, to the Hugo and Nebula award winning stage?

- Also **Mary Gentle** and her Ash related stories. It used to be that Women wanting to write SF had to adopt a pseudonym. Now (they just write unending Fantasy) they do not have too. Frequently in recent SF you can read a SF story that reads as if it was written by a woman or SF that you wouldn't know (or care) about the writer's gender.

Women who write pointed SF and Fantasy

- **Sheri S. Tepper** – All (in her stories) men are evil slugs who should be killed as slowly and painfully as possible. SF that the female separatist **Andrea Dworking** would approve of?

- **Elizabeth Moon** – Are the female characters in her book tougher and harder than men? Is this the point of her writing SF as a writer who used to be a real 'God damned United States Marine'? I do not want to labour the point here, but in storytelling generally 'bad things' happen to good people (story characters), so male or female, most 'interesting' Characters have difficulties that they have to triumph over to win through to the conclusion of the story

Crossover SF Romance stories

- **Lois McMaster Bujold's** Miles Vorkosigan series has gone 'mushy' and she has turned her hand to writing Crossover SF Romance stories, or so it would seem. On the other hand, if you read Ethan of Athos, you could equally argue that she was just returning to her starting point. An emerging and prosperous sub-genre in the US or so it would seem.

Lesbian Vampire Detective SF

- All TV Vampire Detectives are Male, such as in Forever Knight, Angel and Moonlighting, but apparently (I'm told) most book Vampire Detectives are Female (and Lesbian). Why is this so? I have no idea?

Female characters in SF

- **John Norman's** female characters in the **Gor series**, are all sexual playthings to be exalted in their degradation, which the eventually embrace. Plots you could spray paint on the side of a panel van.

- Not really what we SF fans understand as SF, but the image in the minds of some who criticize 'Sci-Fi Books'. They represent the other end of the spectrum from the staple of Quest Fantasy stories, the rightful Princesses?

- **Robert Heinlein's** Adult female characters in his later books are (mostly) much of a sameness, possibly the result of a re-imagining of the Writer's second wife?

- Star Trek has had a lot to say about Women, the then 'Future Women' and some throwbacks. I have in mind the episodes involving 'Mudd's Women'

Archetypes

– **Deja Thoris** in **Edgar Rice Burrough's** John Carter of Mars series, a Princess of the twin towers of Helium on ancient Mars, suitable consort to a Hero, like **Tarzan's Jane**?

Mother Power

- **Riley** from Aliens, SIMILARLY MOTIVATED 'Mother Power' as in **Grendel's Mum** in Beowulf.

- The 'Mom' – **Mrs Robinson** from Lost In Space, or **Mrs Jetson**

- **Honor Harrington** from **David Webber's** Honor Harrington series

- Princess Leia from Starwars, (more of a Fantasy than a SF heroine?)

- What are we to make of Captain/Major Sam Carter of Stargate SG 1 / Atlantis. A skinny blonde who has a mastery of all Sciences known to man / Alien at her fingertips, but no boyfriend as befits a 'nerd-girl'?

Sexbots, Robot Girlfriends, programmed to please! - The Bikini Machine an all too frequent feature of Sci-Fi, someone's view of what some men's idea of what a 'perfect' woman would be (why no gay converse). Guest appearances in the movie Cherry 3000 and in two (or three?) episodes of Buffy.

Women Transformed

In SF things can happen, SF things that result in the point of view character or his/her world being transformed. In SF, the central big 'What if' could be a world without men, or other circumstances that require a female character to

be something more than usual.

- Stories set in Worlds or Societies without Men are common, these require Women to adopt 'men's' roles, such as in **DG Compton's** 'No Mansland'.

- In Australian writer **John Brosnan's** 'Skylords Series', the main character is a survivor of a female dominant Society that rebelled against the Airship flying ruling class.

- Other's, such as the 'Aliens' movie Franchise have a woman, Riley, forced into a near superhero role, as defender of the species against the Alien, and the Corporation?

- In Carmen Dog, the story is of a sexual revolution, where the dogs start to become transformed into women who organise to assert their rights and lead to their own liberation. The story concludes with a new order in place and coincidentally, the men start to transform into dogs, or reverting to type?

- In **Ira Levin's** The Stepford Wives, real women being phased out by their husband's in suburban middle America for an improved High Tech model? Most people having only heard of the Movie the miss out on the fact that in the original story something was done to the Stepford Husbands first, to make them want the new model Stepford Wives.

- Similar but different, in **Eloise Engle's** Countdown for Cindy, the first girl to make it into the Astronaut corps, fights hide bound prejudice, does a terrific job at saving the day when disaster threatens Moon Base during her first assignment etc. Then naturally, she decides to give it all away. To re-train as a 'Space-Nurse', having come to the conclusion that the best way she can help the Astronaut 'Boys' is to leave the adventuring to them and for her to stand by to help mop their fevered brows in a support role (when they stuff up?).

Hard to accept now that this was ever written and expected to be taken seriously. An M and B romance pretending to be SF?

- The Six Million dollar Woman – They have the Technology, to transform an Eastender's Starlet into a hero with Sci-Fi gadget blood, and possibly some new and improved body parts that are just too disturbing to dwell on.

Stereotypes

Women Superheroes

Most of these are from TV via comic books

Wonder Woman – An empowered Princess from an ethical and Female lead society

Super Girl – a fellow refugee from Superman's world, so has similar super powers and presumably ethical perspective.

Bat Girl – A caped crusader, but not quite Batman's equal or equivalent

Dark Angel – A Genetically modified super soldier on the run

Buffy – the chosen one, empowered by ancient prophecy to fight evil, but still filled with teenager's

angst

Xena Warrior Princess

She – the antique female ruler from **S. Rider Haggard's** set in Africa novels

Dr Who companions – until recently the companion figures in Dr Who adventures were seldom full partners in the adventure and could usually be trusted to twist an ankle at 'run for your life' moments. They were frequently 'let me explain it to you' stand-ins for the viewing audience.

The Super Girlfriend Effect - All superheroes eventually meet up with a girl from their home planet with similar powers. Nothing memorable happens, this new comic book franchise never eclipses the original

Scoobie Gangs - usually TV cartoon series, usually has the attractive girl to match the attractive boy and the bright but short and dumpy girl.

Iconoclasts

Breaking the mould type characters in SF, only occasionally in commercialized SF&F publishing where Trilogies and Cycles are easier to sell than short stories? Can a character remain Iconoclastic over several consecutive adventures? In a competitive commercial environment, how soon is an Iconoclastic character just the first in a newly evolved sub-genre?

- In this respect I offer you two Sword and Sorcery Fantasy book characters, Red Sonja and Jirel of Joiry. Both were armed and armoured warrior women, fighting against both Men and Magic, 'unique' in their own worlds, so possibly they were the original 'Chicks in Chainmail', well before **Xena** (and Gabriel) and the highly successful Anthology franchise?

Robert Heinlein's Podkayne of Mars, was a real bright and 'Kick ass' type of teenage girl, a resourceful main character, as she finds herself kidnapped on Venus (JF mentioned this story as well).

In The Chrysalids by **John Wyndham**, there was a girl who became the leader of the pack of children. Quite an effective leader character.

In Australian Writer **John Marsden's** When the War Came series, **Elle** becomes the point of view character, and is a strong enough character to sustain two cycles of books.

- **Karen Miller's** The Empress of Mijak, has a female figure who rises from Gor like degradation to ultimate power, as Empress of a 'masculine' culture of aggression and violence, not your usual Quest Fantasy Princess.

- I would consider **David Webber's** Honor Harrington series to be Iconoclastic, with its stories from the career of a female Space Navy

hero, even though it is just 'Hornblower in Space'.

- Many of the books by **Octavia Butler** notably feature a female (of colour) main character. I lack the experience to be able to discern whether these characters would be Stereotypes or Iconoclasts.

Similarly, in most **Diane Wynne Jones** books (that I have read, like The White Queen) there is a strong and usually exotic main character who is a woman.

- I do recall hearing of a story / series of stories about the medieval type adventures of an 'Amazon', a seven foot tall giant of a Warrior Woman of great strength, who made her living as a Mercenary, as what other occupations would be available to her in those times?

- Memoirs of a Space Woman by **Naomi Mitchison**, features a woman who contributes greatly to first contact diplomacy by bearing alien children. Who better than a Mother to understand a child, a child who being full or part alien bridges the two races.

- Similar but different is the Martian Embassy by **Ian Watson**, men and women are recruited for a desperate planetary defence, their higher consciousness attained through Tantric sex, is essential to keep off the malign Alien entity hovering above the Earth like a galactic storm cloud. Turns out to be a multilevel conspiracy, the 'meditation' just a ruse to use the woman as the unknowing breeders of a new 'improved' human race with all sorts of 'powers'.

- Picnic on Paradise (?) mentioned by JF, is an iconoclastic SF survival story with a strong female character. It involves the stranded survivors of a space ship wreck. With no hope of rescue the band of survivors determine to become settlers as best they can in this harsh new world, except for one young woman, who is expected to be one of the few mothers of the new colony. She is more pragmatic, deciding that breeding would be futile, due to factors like the inadequacy of gene pool etc. So she commences to kill off all her fellow survivors. We learn this from the recording she makes for posterity and future visitors before she tops herself!

- **Susan Calvin** the Robot Psychologist from **Isaac Asimov's I Robot** short stories is hard to categorize, she was rather lacking in human qualities, a character set up to be a contrast to the Robots who were progressively becoming more 'human' as the stories progressed? There wasn't much about her in these stories that required her character to be female, would it be easier to visualise Susan Calvin as an Autistic male?

An unnamed story (JF), on a space wrecked and stranded space liner without prospect of rescue. There is going to be a brutal struggle for survival. One character is a pregnant woman with no appreciable survival skills. The story ends as rescuers break into the derelict ship many months later, after all stores of food have been exhausted. As the space suited rescuers enter, with the woman

tells her child 'Look baby', food!

- In another unnamed story there is a rustic pre-winter scene of preparing the smokehouse ahead of a long (decades long?) Planetary Winter. By default the society is a matriarchy. The Women will survive the long winter, most are pregnant and their children will be sustained through the years of long winter by preserved supplies including 'Pappa-Pork' or 'Daddy Ham'. 'Economy' and survival mean that living Males are an unnecessary burden to the community during the Winter years. The fathers of the spring time generation are in utero and will be born and raised without living men around.

Fantasy -

Stories about (good) witches, disinherited Princesses, wisdom / powers / amulets passed down the female line, battling powerful men (who are seldom in touch with their feminine side?) finding or becoming a champion etc. etc. Chuck in a few magical creatures and prophecies and you are about done.

The Amazon as legitimate a character from mythology as witches and princesses etc, but seldom represented with any depth in books or TV / Movies. Not many real flesh and blood women to be found here? It sells, but then again, so do (never to be used) cook books

Next month's meeting, Friday April 18, 2008, and the topic is;

Religion & Atheism in SF&F stories

Topics for future meetings may include:

- SF&F Stories involving Desert Worlds
- Kill all the Humans! SF stories of mankind's implacable foes
- Optimistic SF, onward toward Utopias
- Kill all the Aliens! SF stories of intentional or accidental extermination of Alien life
- SF stories of Human adaptation and adaptability
- World / Planet destroying stories or plans
- Cosmic Suicides and declines of races in SF

Contacts; Sydney Futurians Site

HYPERLINK "<http://www.sydneyfuturian.org/>"
 \o "<http://www.sydneyfuturian.org/>"
<http://www.sydneyfuturian.org/>

Freecon Site HYPERLINK

"<http://www.freecon2008.sydneyfuturian.org/>" \o
 "<http://www.freecon2008.sydneyfuturian.org/>"
<http://www.freecon2008.sydneyfuturian.org/>

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More Traveller's Tales

After taking my mum to the 'Imaging' centre for a scanning appointment I had time on my hands wander around parts of Campsie that I do not get to frequent during daylight on weekdays.

Near the imaging centre there was a heap of techno-trash by the pavement. The usual chopped up computer. There was also several pieces of bent sheet metal, mentally re-assembled this proved to be the six elements of a small satellite dish. I was very tempted to gather it up and take it home, got to be useful for something? And so it goes, in Campsie Satellite dishes have joined TVs, computers and white goods as 'disposable' household items.

- I also found two magnetic car P Plates, joyous discards by a newly qualified unlimited license holder or incriminating evidence to an opportunistic car thief? I have used these as magnetic patches to cover the rust holes on the steel shed's roof.

On another day in Campsie, from the bus coming and going I noticed a Buddhist monk, in robes and sandals pacing up and down Beamish Street to and from the Railway Station. Have I got it wrong I wondered? Blinded by materialism and an attachment to possessions have I overlooked that Nirvana is a station that can be found on the Bankstown, and might enlightenment be found underfoot on Beamish street, between the gaps between the council's paving slabs?

Basenjjs Tail piece

(Think yourself lucky, I ran out of time to write an Anzac Day influenced short SF story) While looking up things on the internet during March I encountered a reference to the book The Basenji Revelation by **Simon Cleveland**, published in 2004.

This fictional work has evidently been so successful that it has already been translated into Bulgarian. What is it all about I hear you ask? Why no less than the single most important secret of the world!

A US Weapons analyst hit top level security clearances is deeply affected after the bite of a basenjjs that has come to him after his mother's death.

It seems to be a sort of like a Da Vinci Code novel, but it spills the beans on the secrets and cover-ups of the Basenjjs rather than of the Roman Catholic Church and Albinos.

From the reviews I have read it seems to suggest that the Egyptian Ghod **Anubis** Lives! and walks among us in the guise of a Basenjjs dog. A

particular Basenjjs dog that is controlling the main character's mind for the darkest of all purposes!

The opinions expressed by people that have read the book and who have personal experience of Basenjjs behaviour and temperament is that the premise of the book is – Crap!

The characterisation of the dog is just not recognisable as Basenjjs. But then again if they were in on the Basenjjs secret they would say that wouldn't they?

This book was written by a bloke who migrated from Bulgaria to do a business studies degree at George Mason University (see the secret Masonic links!) and his website describes this novel as being in the service of 'Post Modern Multiculturalism', whatever that means. His second book, published in 2005, is titled Existential Meditation, make what sense of that what you will. The book climaxes tastefully with an incident of Basenjicide, where the aforesaid dog is beaten to death with a stick!

Verdict – This book would probably go down quite well in Borat's Khazakstan, just for the dog killing scene.

How on earth does this sort of stuff keep getting published when so many talented story tellers go unpublished? This book joins Carmen Dog as one of a body of literature where a distorted and spurious mischaracterisation of a rarely encountered personality type or animal in service of a false premise makes the story less comprehensible to people who know anything about the personality type or animal. A bit more research and surely a less credulity jarring story could have been written about the same central idea?

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For the April 2008 ANZAPA Mailing

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