

TBS&E 34

March to May 2009

Produced by Garry P. Dalrymple as a contribution to ANZAPA mailing No. 249, of the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Press Association.

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Editorial

The overall sense that I get in reading through mailing #248 is that we are all inevitably getting older, members going off to retirement homes rather than college, worrying about our parents rather than complaining about them. Not much we can do about it except draw support and comfort from our mutual discomfort. Could a solution be a 'youth rate' or the active recruitment of a cadet set of younger newsletter writers, clawed back from the all triumphant blog-o-verse?

This edition features a Centre Fold feature, Elizabeth Pastor's review of the current new Star Trek Movie, as discussed at the May Sydney Futurian meeting.

At work I have been clerically pooled, a change of work circumstances I may choose to return to in future issues. We are involved with the NAPLAN, which is a Federal Dept. of Education initiative to apply the same educational bench marking across all Australian States and Territories, (but not 'League Table' carpentry, no not at all) consequently it is a bit of a compromise between past practises and best practices, with new technology and processes, much to make life difficult for Principals and bottom of the heap clericals like myself. How many days could you go answering constantly ringing phones with a cheery phone manner to apologise to highly stressed Principals, Teachers and School assistants for the system's failings and then suggesting it might be working properly tomorrow, without adding a maniacal cackle before hanging up? Been

about three weeks so far, might be clear of this by July?

Garry P Dalrymple May 29, 2009

Something of an Index

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Mailing Comments on mailing Number 248.

If your newsletter title is in bold then I'm replying to your comments.

1. Official Bloody Organ #248 - **Bruce Gillespie**
RAEYCBNCATT

2. TBS&E number 33 - Garry Dalrymple
 Modesty forbids me to discuss this newsletter

3. Bookmark 18- **Michael F Green**

Cover image - There was a sunset rather like this on the evening of the 2008 Sydney Freecon, the air and the shadows were the colour of blood, the reddening effect was a consequence of Sunset's last light being reflected and refracted by cloud layers.

Attempting in good faith to make sense of the inconsistencies of any religion is an exercise of some futility. I have been reading several books about the origins and growth dynamics of Religion, there is a consistent model that they all follow, which is usually a wide departure from how internal dogma assembled after the fact states as 'Gospel'. This disconnuity explains why apparently 'new' religions can emerge, or why few long lasting religious traditions do not have 'reform' periods.

Reyc - You may now know what a Basenjjs looks like, but after twenty plus years I can assure you that I still do not entirely 'know' what a Basenjjs is.

Reyc to Dan McCarthy - The Vatican has to some extent been more forthcoming on the matter of the Knights Templar. The Turin Shroud (or what inspired it) has been accepted as having been in the possession of the Templars and that it was slung over a pole, to display front and back images and then on special occasions venerated by them as an image of Christ, giving the basis of the claims of worship of 'Baphomet', under the gentle and persistent persuasion of inquisitors. See my review of The Shroud Mafia .

4. Necessity 87:Harvey - **Jack Herman**

RE global warming, I'm not a sceptic on global warming, but there is an interesting but unproven implication about Global cooling that has turned up at the May Sydney City Skywatchers meeting.

As ever interested in your Press Council adventures, If the Romans ever had a Ghod of 'Transparency' perhaps they would still be running Europe?

5. Kingdom of the Bland - **Eric Lindsay**

I hope that all your necessary nesting improvements were achieved before the weather closed in. **The Futurians** are 70 this year! Well not the current lot, but I have hopes that meetings will continue for some years longer.

As for the Freecons, last year did indeed throw up a few 'missing link' type survivors of previous Sydney SF fandom, I hope that this too can be continued.

6. Jeanzine 2009-1 - **Jean Weber**

Details of Carlyle Gardens seen interesting, hope the relocation works out for you and Eric. The idea of living in a planned environment seems an ideal, seems a shame that for most people we only get round to doing it as a retirement option? The South American journey sounds interesting, I fantasise about learning Spanish to do the same sort of trip myself - one day.

7. From the Lair of the Lynx 53 - **LynC**

More photos of Cats, I'm sneezing already!

8. Panopticon 53 - **Dan McCarthy**

That cover image is a bit disturbing, can't quite make out your Astronauts 'parts', but there seems to be a few too many for comfort. On classes of relics and a good background on the issues they raised in the Western Christian tradition I commend to you 'The Shroud Mafia' which is mostly about the Turin shroud and it's 'Biography'.

9. Land of 10,000 Loons - **Jeanne Mealy**

Winter time again and Wintertime in America as the world lurches into an economic downturn? There is an Add on TV at the moment, for an insurance company with Black swans descend on a line of stopped cars and making off with insurable possessions before moving off. I suspect that it is a re-make of a US / Canadian original depicting an event of urban mythic proportions featuring migrating Canada Geese?

Thanks for your thoughts on Mystique.

10. Ping! - **John Newman**

I'm sure I share the concerns of other list members at your brush with death. I hope that all is well now and for the foreseeable future.

11. YRKYHWYFAWIYB 122 - **Cath Ortlieb**

Pleased to see your level of activity to take part in the Masters games. Lets hear it for the Endorphins! I hope the pains and strains are only minor.

12. Far 3 - **Marc Ortlieb**

RAEYCNCATT

Canal 3 - **Marc Ortlieb**

Have read some Eric Frank Russell and enjoyed it immensely, wish I'd been able to encounter it when younger. To your reading list you will no doubt have to add J. G. Ballard (late of this parish) not quite as cheerful but 'timeless' SF of the weird variety.

13. Bara Brith 2 - **Eunice Probert**

I've never paused to consider the retirement prospects of laying chickens. I have no idea if they are available for pet/adoption in Sydney. I would presume that their retirement is looked after by Mr McDonalds and KFC. I still have a chook shed at the bottom of the back yard, partly filled with junk.

14. OZ SF Fan - **Lucy Schmeidler**

Commiseration with your loss and wish you every joy with your impending family changes. I note your list of 'Death in Children's Literature' may I suggest that you raise 'Seven Little Australians', as the book climaxes with the death of Helen, the oldest child.

15. ANZAPA 770 - **Roger Sims**

Your retirement lifestyle as described seems impeccable

16. Interstellar Ramjet Scoop - **Bill Wright**

I always fear that I do an injustice to your newsletter (and it's several contributors) so much breadth and effort goes into it and all I usually comment on is the cover art. The Norma K. Hemming award sounds like a good idea, given the volume of published Australian Fantasy writers Vs Science Fiction ones all encouragement should be considered.

17. Les Chattes Parties 100 - **Sally Yeoland**

Re – Bushfires, I know of a family that very nearly lost their (egg producing) family farm but for a last minute change of wind direction. For about two years the fire it was photo albums and telling the tale at all social occasions. The experience was something that just had to be talked through. At its simplest I guess it is a matter of reasonable expectations. Live in a bushfire prone area and you really should consider having a fire proof shelter on site, or an expectation that 'the government' will clear a 100 m wide fire proof escape route to one or more Community maintained shelters large enough to hold the entire population. The lesson of the 1939 fire was – appropriate on site shelter equated to survival. This year how many people needlessly died as a result of the false presumption of self reliance, i.e. that you would always be able to get

out in the family 4WD if it looked like you house wasn't going to survive?

Book Group Meeting Notes Garry's Notes from the Men only Book Group meeting held at Campsie Library, 6.30 to 7.55 pm on Wednesday March 18, 2009

Book Discussed: Tim Winton's Breath

Who was there - Six men, including one new member 'Bo' who has recently moved into the area and curiously is a student studying Sci-Fi Genre Fiction of all things.

I presented all present with a copy of my review of 'Breath' (with a review of **Neal Stephenson's 'The Diamond Age'** on the back) to all present. Both published in TBS&E # 33.

It becomes very evident that what you take into the reading of any book refracts your impressions and conclusions of the book. As I read Science Fiction and Non-Fiction predominantly I clearly had a different approach to this book than did the other members of this group. The following impressions of this book then are clearly going to be different from those of my review. The following are individual reactions to the book, each person present was asked for their view, this rotation was occasionally broken by some 'supplementary' comments that were made in response to other reader's responses.

Individual Impressions of Book

Tea Vs Coffee Drinking, a cultural thing, comparison between the staid British / Anglo-Australian tradition of Tea drinking Vs the (then progressive) instant Coffee US influenced consumer generation. There was once an 'age' before which 'adult' coffee would not be offered to a 'child'.

The book takes a **Very long time to get to the point**, clearly made up of separate pieces that do not seamlessly knit, but knowing the Author's other works, this reader was prepared to read on until denouement was reached. Knowing the writer, would not have preferred to read these elements as Short Stories.

Biographical? Which parts of the story are Biographical, some discussion of what is known of the life of the Writer's life. The West Australian coast does feature in other Winton works. However the story is very much the story of the development, growth, development of self awareness 'maturity from teenage years to Middle Age. Fictional or Factual not really the issue, 'the play is the thing' etc. (GPD consider applying the 9 stages Fantasy template to this story?). Other Winton books like 'Cloud Street' are set on the WA coast and involve Water and Drowning.

Surfing Adventures? Enjoyed as 'Authentic' surfing / life by the sea experience. Also enjoyed as a story of a childhood described in retrospective by the Adult produced by this childhood. The Structure of the story is important, the leitmotif of surfing to extreme surfing being used to explore a young man's development and relationships, Pikelet and other male relationships explored.

A character driven narrative, strikingly few people involved, Main Character, barely described parents, Best Friend, Guru Surfer, Guru's Wife, the Main Character's disposable teenage girlfriend (female roles very scant). The story gets darker as it goes on until a point of apotheosis is reached?

The Main Character's Relationship with Ando - The most important relationship of the book? Ando's attraction to MC is? That he is a man of Mystery, an extraordinary figure in an otherwise gray world. A Mentorship, Priest / Acolyte Guru / Disciple sort of relationship is evident and there is also the question of the 'beauty' of Surfing. Surfing is the only beautiful thing that the Main Character sees the men in his doing, all else is base and ordinary. In later life Ando achieves 'Ordinariness'? through surfing the big waves of Eco tourism, achieving big business ecstasy? Is this a success or a betrayal of the earlier relationship?

The Best Friend? - Backing off from challenges, his mate was competitive beyond sensitivity. Ando's choice of travelling companion, loonie more detachable from his home life. Winton's writing in context, frequently writes about loners

A sub-text of **remoteness** and detachment is detected, an isolated town of State at the corner of an empty continent that is isolated by sea and land from the rest of Australia / the world. Adventures usually take in place at locations that are devoid of other people, the Geography (Oceanography?) plays the part of a recurrent character. The Main character is an outcast by parentage, migrant father and choice to be a surfer.

The Language used to tell the story is not ornate. It is direct and does not place barriers in the way of the story by using local terms? In a Universal Australian dialect rather than reflecting authentic regional West Australian idioms?

Appreciation of the writer's sensitivity, connection to and attention to describing Nature, Waves Weather and Water conditions.

The Ambo dissonance - The book starts with a 'slice of life' a day in the life of an Ambulance man, then it leaps off into a story of a childhood that initially seems to have no connection to the Ambo story. The Main character translates his appetite for life challenging thrill from surfing to Ambulance work in later life, enjoys life or death situations that would traumatise other Ambos. The book finishes with the Ambulance Man narrator's return and wrap up. The edges didn't quite meet to the satisfaction of all.

Meditations on Breathing (and on not breathing) are a repeated feature of the story breath holding under the pier, sleep Apnoea, diving deep under the sea, auto asphyxiation incidents. Journeys to the edge of death and back, well explored within a surfing context. Auto asphyxiation, the motivation for Eva's interest in Auto asphyxiation is not fully explained, risk taking for thrill, but no disclosure of emotion, the boy being used as an accomplice and an 'appliance' rather than a sex partner. MC goes on to develop guilt and fear of the loss of a stronger prior relationship with Ando Vs the transitoriness of Sex.

Death - All but two of the main characters die by the end of the book. In each case the news of their death is introduced to the reader in an indirect / diffuse manner and results in only a muted reaction by the main character.

In conclusion - the book is about a 'Bruised' life as the Main Character set his life to an ideal, experienced part of that life but left that scene without a sense of completion? Ordinarity claims him back in spite of his transitory but formative early extraordinary experiences.

Other views - Comment on a Dutch Website; a bloke was reluctantly convinced to seek out and read 'Breath', going to his local library he discovered that he was number 47 on the waiting list for this book! Long Winters in Holland apparently.

ISBN 0-593051122 The First Casualty, by Ben Elton UK, 381 pages, © 2005. Read between April 4 and 5, 2009.

An agreeable read, a reasonably good murder whodunit set during WW1, with boys own adventures on the fields of Flanders via Wormwood Scrubs prison and the Old Bailey. The reliance on overly convenient coincidences saves it from being 'Great'. The main character of the story is a Scotland Yard Police Inspector who resists the draft on principle and consequently finds himself on trial and then in jail, in Wormwood scrubs High Security prison, where as an ex-copper and a 'Conchy' his life expectancy can be measured in days. Considerable time at the beginning of the book is spent / wasted on assembling the main character's rather anachronistic sounding bona fides. His opposition to war service is based on lofty philosophical / legal principals rather than on any life long pacifism or political convictions. 'Fortunately', after surviving a first beating incident in prison he is set up to be officially killed while escaping, a plot engineered by the Military secret service to allow his release from imprisonment and availability for a politically sensitive investigation.

A war hero has been killed in France, a popular War Poet famous for a patriotic song, a Viscount with

political family connections to the very top of society. His death is murder rather than the publicly announced KIA and possibly he has been killed by a communist trade union member. The revelation of the circumstances of his death could only lead to 'bad news' for the Military and division in the consensus that governs war weary Britain.

The Unions could go on strike at the hint that the Military Police has framed one of their own for the death of the son of a Lord, and as the deceased is the son of a Conservative Party powerbroker, uncomfortable questions could be asked in the house if this 'political assassin' is set free. A confidential investigation is needed and a disinterested / neutral investigator is required to conduct this sensitive investigation.

The recently deceased conscientious objector Inspector, now 'Captain Christopher Marlowe Military Police', is the (dead) man for the job. The investigation proceeds in France, just behind and at the front, with Kit Marlowe going 'over the top' twice in pursuit of vital evidence, and discovering that in France during war time even the dead can find love? But the still shell shocked, proven to be 'innocent', and reprieved can be packed off back to the front and sent off 'over the top' to nearly certain death.

There were more than enough likely motives for the War hero's murder or suicide, he was a public figure who was Gay and he was about to turn anti-war at a critical time during the progress of the war, the French were 'out', the British were war fatigued and the Americans due to turn up in some months. So several suspects have to be investigated and eliminated. In the end, the murderer is unmasked by a missing boot!

- Was the victim killed by his own Colonel for the 'good of the Regiment' because he was threatening to resign from the war and going pacifist?
- Was he killed by the Socialist as an act personal vengeance for a field punishment inflicted days before or revolutionary justice?
- Was he killed by his new gay lover over poetic differences, overly tough literary criticism or rejection matters?
- Could it have been the suicide of a soldier hollowed out by war?
- Or was he bumped off by Military security for any or all of the above reasons?

The main character uncovers the true killer's identity in a scene that sets up the killer's own death, rough justice as a consequence of his swinish behaviour to women in general and one nurse in particular. Then, which is the hardest bit to believe, he manages to blackmail the entire system

with what he knows and he manages to be resurrected and returned to his family as his own 'Missing in Action', now deemed to have escaped POW brother and presumably they all get to live happily ever after, even while WW1 still has two more years to run!

Conclusion – I get the impression that the writer is attempting to portray that the main 'Tragedy' of WW1 is the impending extinction of the UK upper / ruling classes from which officers are drawn, rather than the massive losses of 'other ranks' from the rest of the population. This in essence is also the Main character's protestations at his trial, that the War if continued will consume even it's victors.

I found it curious that from a British perspective, War service in this book is being seen as a corrosive and destructive experience within the empire, as opposed to the Australian experience of it being a national identity building event and where in the absence of a ruling / officer class, citizen soldiers were able to rise through merit and ability rather than through inherited social position, connections and 'breeding'?

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Garry's Book Review, ISBN
0-7336-1709-3 Windmill Hill by
Michael Jacobson, Australian,
361 pages, (c) 2002,
Read May 11 to 14, 2009.

Not a book I was able to enjoy reading as much as the group's previous selection, **Ben Elton's 'The first Casualty'**. Physically I found this book to be another of those artificially thinned out 'modern' books, 25 mm thick, with fewer words per line, fewer lines per page, two pages of blank paper at each chapter's beginning / end etc., in order to create the impression of a satisfyingly thick book out of a slight story? I've read and enjoyed thinner and more densely printed 500 page books.

- I can see why the Woman's Day would rave over it, it contained a bit of WW1 adventure, a bit of small town and family relationships drama, a (fair) bit of garden porn and a Mystery of sorts to be resolved. A mixture of Very Mild Stuff to a SF reader but 'novel' and astounding to someone who doesn't read much at all apart from Women's magazines?.

- I found the story to be disjointed and slightly confusing rather than engagingly divided, as the story chopped between several lines of narrative and created a sense of 'Mystery' by simply delaying disclosures that should have been made earlier in the story to help the reader understand why some of the back story and continuing story was important to

the resolution of the book, setting up the events that compelled Grandson and Grandfather to want to go and build a garden near Queenstown, among the hills denuded and devastated by decades of mining and refining.

- I read this book immediately after reading 'Myths of the near Future', an anthology by the very recently deceased UK writer **J.G. Ballard**. These were some of his late 70s and early 80s short stories (very cheerful? - Not!). In this collection he vividly explores over several stories characters with 'misplaced' and displaced minds. Minds out of step with the present times and frequently about people alternately interfacing with past wars and imaginary future space faring, so Blink's mental displacement of this book hardly raised a metaphorical eyebrow in this reader. **J.G. Ballard** does it Soooo much better, weird and 'real life' detail at the same time. I've also recently spent time with elderly people, people with more vivid and accessible memories of the distant past than the recent /current present.

- Initially I thought this book was going to be substantially about Launceston's Windmill Hill, a now neglected site where once a great community endeavour was enacted. Most towns and Suburbs have one of these, sites bypassed by technology and the diminished sense of community currently abroad. There are several Windmill Hill like places I could show you within Basenjis walking distance of where I live.

- My second impression was of a disjoint and grating time scale, a WW1 veteran, his retired 70 plus year old son (too young for WW2) and a 30 to 40 year old grandson. It just doesn't seem to fit together. I simply do not see how it could all fit in; it drives the events too close to the present decade. My Grandfather was a WW1 veteran, who married late (died 1976, aged 87 when I was 12). My father was a WW2 veteran who also married late, so by my family yardsticks 'Angus' is extracting his 100 plus year old grandfather from the nursing home for a spot of intensive hands on gardening? I mention this because according to the back page the Author was born the same year as I was. It just doesn't wash!

- My third impression was frequent incidents of 'how on earth does the book know this', as first person eminences from people long dead and unmet by the narrator rolled on for page after page. This was resolved on nearly the last paragraph with a bland statement to the effect that 'and later we exchanged a great deal of family history'

- The Mysteries in this book were why was 'Angus' named after his grandfather's lost war time companion, (the Main character / narrator's childhood accident with a gun that killed an Uncle, leaving him 'stranded on the wire' like a

WW1 casualty), Why was Blink was so affected, because he felt that he had betrayed a friend who had saved his life, by leaving him stranded on the wire.

- **Side excursions** - pre-WW1 enlistment life in Tasmania, Suburban and Queenstown - the life and times of a Queenstown entrepreneur (and knocking shop magnate).

Convenient but credibility stretching elements of this book, the real Angus wounded and completely voiceless, surely not. Blink's psychosis and mental displacement never being the object of any repeat attention, 1919 to the book's present.

Conclusion - After reading this book cover to cover I still really do not understand why Blink needed to build a garden and why it had to be near Queenstown. I can understand his remorse, but not the urge to garden at that location, a regard this as a failing of the book. **GPD (c) May 2009**

Garry's Notes from the Sydney City Skywatcher's meeting of Monday May 4, 2009, at Sydney Observatory

No Guest Speaker tonight, instead it was a night for the discussion of Member's Projects and observations

Who was there; About 15 people present

Members Observations and Projects

Monty Leventhal's Sunspot observations – Not much going on at the moment when it comes to Solar activity, Sunspots or Solar flares / Prominences. Recent events include two small Cycle 24 Sunspots seen going over the limb but not seen 10 days later when that section of the Sun's photosphere was again visible from Earth. Two fairly faint prominences were seen one rose to 192,000 km above the sun's surface and there was a fairly spectacular derached prominence that was stretched out over 177,000 kms long. At this time, with low Solar activity and only smallish objects to be seen then there is some difficulty making out Prominences, against a background of convection cell granulations.

Frank Lowery – A new member! Was given a small Telescope as a child (snatched away very shortly by a brother) and consequently hooked for life on Astronomy. Currently he is using (to great effect) a 75 mm refractor and a webcam for some photographic observations and a 20

cm Newtownian telescope for some deeper Space object hunting. The images he presented this evening were all recorded using a digital camera. He was able to do his photography from a Northern beaches balcony, and he commented that more time / difficulty was spent in the after exposure processing (stacking four or five 4 minute exposure images to produce the ones he showed off) He presented several very well received images, star fields open clusters and a rather fine view of Eta Carina.

GD - The last image I believe rather benefiting from Sydney's 'Dust Filter', as background features of the Eta Carina nebula were quite clearly seen, better than eyepiece view, as a consequence of the three brightest features being slightly blurred out by dust. i.e. the contrast being smoothed out between foreground stars and dimmer background. Very encouraging to see a new-to-the-club member so confidently observing and making very good use of limited observing opportunities.

Alan Plummer Has recently been awarded a Corbold Grant towards a 16 inch (40 cm) telescope to aid his variable star work. He is also due to deliver a talk to a meeting in Istanbul, via Skype so unfortunately no airline tickets include!

The object / observations he chose to present tonight concerned ZC Ma which is a 16 solar masses protostar / Binary variable object and something of a mystery. Viewed photographically this object has a distinct asymmetrical 'tail'. This object has only recently emerged from a shrouding envelope of dust and gas, consequently it is a very young star. It's companion is an Fu Orionis type object, an accretion disk that is subject to outbursts of increasing brightness. A graph of brightness estimates, 1941 to the present, was shown, a period, lots of noise / biased estimates or some evidence for accretion disc flickering?

GD – An observation from the back row, the plots of brightness when graphed suggest a leaning picket fence (or pogo sticks?) with random 'weeds' of activity above and below the fence. This effect could be real, in the sense of observer related seasonal variations, or possibly a periodicity relating to a rotating protostar disk?

Harry Roberts – It has recently been discovered that a considerable amount of neutral Hydrogen is ejected from the Surface of the Sun during mass Ejection events, in addition to the electron stripped Hydrogen Protons that have been known for as long as 'Space Weather' has been measured. What effect might this be having on Terrestrial climate, some or none? Having previously delivered a talk on his drawings of Coronal Mass ejections, which lead to speculation of what occurs after the flare is over, Harry now presented some data / graphs comparing Solar activity over several cycles to Global Temperature records of the past hundred years or so. The observed trend of years of very low flares, over several Solar Cycles, when compared to global temperature measurements seems to correspond to years where global cooling has been observed. As flares and other Solar phenomena is at a minimum are we about to observe a period of some years of global cooling? Accepting for the moment that there might be up to a decade of climate cooling due, what then after this period is over, an unprecedentedly savage heating spike? The overall trend of recorded global temperatures remains onwards and upwards despite these now explicable brief cooling interludes.

Sarah – Observations on Science Fiction and Astronomy

Sarah found that reading **Kim Stanley Robinson's** Mars Trilogy, 'Red Mars', 'Green Mars', 'Blue Mars' and 'Rainbow Mars', (started in 1985) in the Spanish translations to be thought provoking and predictive descriptions of the way of life in the (then) future that we are currently living through.

Also mentioned – **A. C. Clarke's** endorsement of **K. S. Robinson** (GOH at the next Australian Natcon/Worldcon?).

Considers him to be the **Jules Verne** of this century. She is currently re-reading the Mars Trilogy in English and I think she has also read something of **Ben Bova's** series of books, each set on a different Solar System object, from Mercury to the Oort Cloud.

GD – Talking about Science Fiction at an Astronomy meeting? How shocking and out of place? It works for me though.

Garry Dalrymple – My own report on observations and projects were fairly brief. I

wished everybody an International Starwars⁷ day greeting - '**May the Fourth be with You**', handed out some copies of the Tiros Space news newsletter and mentioned that I had recently been able to do a partial sort of newspaper clippings (several years worth), which include Space and Astronomy interest items. I do hope to develop these into a 'The year that was' type listing of Astronomical matters that came to public attention. It might also discern the newspaper's preoccupation with certain sorts of Space / Astronomy stories over time.

Garry's notes from Sydney SF&F meetings of March, April and May 2009

Notes from the Infinitas Bookshop SF&F Book Review meeting of Thursday March 19, 2009.

Books Discussed;

SF Book - The Event by **David Lynn Golemon**

Fantasy Book - The Lies of Loch Lamora by **Scott Lynch**

Present were; **April, Julieanne, Garry Dalrymple, Tim Martin, Mark and one other.**

The Event by **David Lynn Golemon**

There are many Science Fiction stories about the consequences for the world of some ancient horror being inadvertently dug up or defrosted, coming to life and visiting horrors on all. This is not the plot of this story, however it reads as if C grade SF Writer, who missed seeing the 1940s 'Golden Age' of SF, was somehow re-animated and set to writing a SF adventure, speculating on the 'new' 1947 Roswell incident. It reads 'OK' as an action thriller writer's attempt to borrow unaccustomed SF tropes, but it is poor SF. The story is that two duelling UFOs encounter a 1950s Aircraft carrier group, both are brought down. They are in fact combatants in a Cosmic civil war between 'Little Green Men' and 'Greys'. This is of course also explains the 'true' basis for the Roswell incident. Ho hum, end of story, well not quite. One of these UFOs was carrying a creature in it's

hold, a supercharged Gojira / Aliens type monster, fast breeding, invulnerable and able to 'swim' through soil and rock (like in Tremors!). Clearly this was a delivery for Tokyo intercepted. These beasts are used by the aliens to ethnically cleans planets they plan to colonise as they have the ability to 'compost' existing inhabitants (No Flesh and blood living creature is without its vulnerable points, 'Sven break out and issue the tapered exploding suppository rounds and the Vaseline, I need One volunteer to stay behind!')

Defects - There were quite a few mentioned. There are appallingly poor / wrong instances of Science - the creatures are denser than matter 'known on Earth' (enabling them to disassociate matter ahead of them when they 'swim' through the ground), misdescribed / anachronistic military technology, lizards that can leap '400 feet' to snatch jet aircraft out of the air!

The most noticeable fault is of course the setting, a world that ends at the US Canadian border. There is no mention of these beasts troubling anyone else in the world. The US military is the only hope of the entire world etc. The book is the SF equivalent of Vogon Poetry, with more cliches unturned than chapters! For example the plot to lure all the monsters to a single spot and then Nuke them with a time delay set bomb. Yes they have to send in a team to disable the unstoppable bomb as the timer counts down.

Conclusion - There was speculation was that for the faults listed above, this novel might be read seriously by (some) Americans, but for other readers it would be read as a screamingly hysterical satire (let those without irony cast the first review?) read out of sense of curiosity of 'how bad can it get? There is apparently a sequel out and a series envisioned.

It was also noticed that this book was written in a very visual way, i. e. scenes and set-ups that would easily translate to a very trashy Late Night Sci-Fi movie, that could, like some of the original Dr Who episodes, be loved for it's trashyness, and best appreciated when the viewer was 'trashed' by end of week tiredness or recreational intoxication. © Garry Dalrymple April 2009

The Lies of Loch Lamora by **Scott Lynch**

This story is set in a conventionally Medieval / Dickensian society that lives among the abandoned buildings and infrastructure of a departed super civilisation. A band of Orphan thieves, 'The Gentlemen Bastards', are only one guild or gang among many, but uniquely this group makes it's living by exploiting the rich and powerful, contrary to the prevailing expressed concord of the society they live within. The authorities allow the gangs to plague the 'Lesser' classes with relative impunity, but not the 'higher' classes. The story jumps from member to member of this gang. The Gentlemen Bastards are the bright boys of the thieves guilds, clever enough to get away with breaking the rules because they alone are capable of blending in with or impersonating the ruling classes. What the do they do for sport, more than for mere survival. The career development of some gang members are seen, from childhood potential to adulthood professionalism. Behind this group is a Religion. They ardently worship the thirteenth God of the official Twelve God pantheon of their Society. Members of this guild are thieves And also Priests of this God, making at times impoverishing sacrifices in the name of their God. In fact for them, at times, acts of criminality are an enjoyable Religious act. A Civil War / war between City States occurs during the book. Major characters on either side of their own conflicts agree to set to one side their difference and whole heartedly cooperate as the share a sense of Humanity and affirm to a code of conduct that considers some of the things that are likely to occur during this Civil War to be above and beyond their toleration.

Minor points

- Swearing, bad language not religious, is a frequent feature of this story.
- There is an unseen, undescribed Love Interest of the main character, he is severely hung up on her. To be resolved in book 2 or at series end?
- Interesting significant characters are killed off without remorse by the writer or the need to set them up for 'meaningful' deaths.
- The Competency of incidental characters is remarkable. They are not just cardboard or single instance Strawmen for Main Characters to plough through in the service of the book's major plot themes.

- There is a Book 2, unresolved details to be resolved, or the suspense to be extended?
- Some intelligent lines / scenes encountered, reminiscent of **Richard Morgan's** 'The Steel Remains' (reviewed in a previous issue of TBS&E)

Conclusion - A highly recommended read, Fantasy you can stick your teeth into but not to be read by members of the merchant and retail classes, as issues and situations depicted may disturb. Would appeal to readers of **Raymond Feist**, but the writing is a bit more serious and thought provoking. © Garry Dalrymple April 2009

Notes from the Sydney Futurian meeting of Friday March 20, 2009, Topic: Religion and Philosophy in SF Stories

Present were, **Stephen Bingle**, **Garry Dalrymple**, **John & Dianne Fox** and **Kevin McKern**.

Apologies and contributions were received from - **Jules**, and **Brian Walls**

News

SB - Discovery of parts of a Dalek in a London pond, relic of early outside episodes of Dr Who, or evidence of a Time slip or / Time rift?

- Mention in this afternoon's Mx Newspaper, 'Terra' for Planet Earth is from pagan Mythology, so by this most Space going SP has pagan references, comments about 'War on Terra' and we are all 'Terra-ists' were provoked.

- Will be going to the Sydney show of the (at a Parramatta hotel, near Infinitas) **Peter Davidson** Dr Who event on Sunday.

- No reading of note but has been watching a fair bit of (dated?) Sci-Fi on video recently, '3rd Wave', 'Space 1999', 'Dragon's Lair' (St. George story re-told) and Voyager episodes.

GD - **The John Hinde Award** - The late broadcaster (Movie Reviewer) John Hinde has bequeathed \$500,000 for an annual award to celebrate the best Australian SF screenplay, TV or film production. Awarded for the first time on 15 August 2008 as part of the **Augies**, tonight a speaker representing the Australian Writers Guild discusses the John Hinde Award, at the

Melbourne SF Club

- Bloke replaces missing finger with USB data stick, 2 GB seeking upgrade - path to Cyberman style upgrading? What body parts aren't you using to full data stream capacity at the moment?

- Computer display 'Wall paper' announcement from Japan / Korea

- Tim at Infinitas says he has recently met an authenticated Elvis!

Reading - **Neal Stephenson's** 'The Diamond Age', and a book about the Pagan origins of much New Testament traditions (borrowings from the teachings of the various pre-AD Greek philosophical schools and Osiris/Dionysus mystery cults).

DF - Two GM related Science News stories, smokable GM Tobacco as an insulin injection alternative for Diabetes and a Low G. I. sugar replacement 'Logicane' Tm (or GM?).

- Has been reading (and passed around) the short story behind the currently on release 'Benjamin Button' movie. A very short story, made up as an illustrated children's book to make it big enough to sell?

JF - Undersea volcanic action near Tonga is about to give it a new Island? Solution to loss of islands to sea level rises, pray to your local pagan Volcano Ghod - But Tonga is Methodist, not much chance of success there!

Reminded John of a story from (18th century?) naval history. A new Island formed by volcanic means off the coast of Italy once provoked preparation for a war over suzerainty. However it took some months to organise the troops and ships, by which time the island had sunk back under the sea.

Recent reading - mostly to do with Photo shop and Digital photography text books.

Jules - Firstly, let's not forget the ongoing fan boy abuse explicit in the news that the Sci Fi channel is re-branding: <http://io9.com/5172449/25-other-names-the-sci-fi-channel-could-rebrand-with>

KMcK - Recent Genetic decoding of species on the 'Tree of Life' has revealed a great deal of cross branch transference of genetic characteristics, rather than strictly by line descent. I.e. Transgenic GM across unrelated species is perfectly 'Natural'. Saw 'The Day the Earth Stood Still' found it to be not as bad as expected. Did like the bugs that erased all human constructions.

Reading - selections from his 'cache' of pirate

booty.

Was able to make a connection with his medical practitioner via SF, member of a band called 'Atrocity Exhibition' inspired by two **J. G. Ballard** novels, recommended **Alfred Bester's** 'Tiger Tiger' and 'The Demolished Man'.

Chance for New Beginnings?

Following Futurian Meeting Advice emails of February and March some interest has been expressed in having Daylight Weekend Sydney Futurian meetings and some venues were suggested. Given the relative rates of response, it looks to me as though a Saturday Morning meeting could be as popular as our Friday Night ones. I'm inclined to suggest (and announce), 'First Saturday every second month, Choice of two Futurian / Infinitas Topics to be discussed', starting May? This would be a meeting for people who just can't do Infinitas or Futurian Friday Night meetings, get to Parramatta (Infinitas) or just happen to miss one discussion that they particularly wanted to take part in. i.e. a 10 am to 12 ish meet to discuss a participants choice of two of the four topics of the preceding two months, squatting at the UTS (for continuity) or the Customs house Foyer (new ground), And then seek a permanent meeting place rather than delaying until whenever. That could be Saturday May 9, July 11, September 12, and December 5 (clear of the 2009 Sydney Freecon?).

March 2009 SF&F TV

Dr Who repeats, Starwars Clone Wars (animation), Lost (perhaps?). I did notice that **Joss Weedon** was listed as Director for at least one episode of the US version of 'The Office' and that Buffy (repeats) are now on channel 10 at a floating 12 to 2 am timeslot on Channel 10. Why? Is it that 'Willow' is on Channel 7 at Prime time in 'How I met your Mother'. Summer and Winter time Sport being broadcast instead of Sci-Fi? Good weather for reading.

The Topic Discussed - Religion and Philosophy in SF&F

Last year (2008) we did discuss a 'Religion in SF' topic. With tonight's meeting I hope we can concentrate more on the Philosophical side of tonight's topic?

By 'Philosophy' in Science Fiction these days we generally mean Religion or Politics?

Have there been many non-political philosophical SF novels recently, post Milton who was around before 'Political' Parties were formed in the English speaking world and government cliques were made of figures of like 'philosophy'.

Does Fantasy 'do' Politics or Philosophy at all? Fantasy does feature Religions, the exercise of Ghodlike powers, Scripture like writings and Traditions / Superstitions etc. but Philosophy as such?

Some Sorts of stories that would fit the bill?

1. **Religions in SF books** - Dune, of course, but more for the potential encoding of occult, commonplace, secret societal features within the narrative. Also interesting use of Judaism later in the series. **Ursula K. LeGuin** did some interesting counter-intuitive things here; true-naming animisms, etc. Nice use of **Lovecraftian** religious ideas in 'The Cloud of Hate' by **Fritz Leiber**.

2. **Religions with SF trappings** - Aside from the usual **Scientology** angle, let's not forget the flying saucer cults, and their sexed-up, heavily-sponsored front runners the **Raelians** (and perhaps the slightly more herbal **Billy Meier** gang). Also, let's not forget all the signed-sealed-delivered-by-angels movements over the years: all three Abrahamic faiths (Abe, Mary, Mohammed), Mormonism, **Alistair Crowley's** various fronts, etc.

3. **Religious characters in SF&F stories** - When not treated as figures of fun, these can be very troubling: to what degree is their instantiation a product of chance, unknown and implacable factors pushing against history from beyond human knowledge, or self-directed ego?

- In the Honor Harrington Universe a fairly fundamentalist culture of Grayson divides, with the extremists departing to Masada, which turns out to be a more comfortable Planet. Jihad against the heretics becomes a possibility, allies sought from among the various interplanetary 'infidels'.

- In **Aldous Huxley's** 'A Brave New World' there is a religious conflict, the 'Anti-nature' Religion, the worship of the Ford and the use of Soma as the new opiate of the people? Is

triumphant and Christianity is a relic religion practised only by a few people living on the 'primitives' reservation.

- In Star Trek DS9 the trans-time worm hole dwelling entities were the basis of the Bajoran Religion and cultural identity.

- In Space 1999 the inhabitants of 'Penultima' could live for 800 years, as long as they didn't step off the planet, then your age caught up with you! They were rather keen on converting the Moon Base people to their wonderful religion.

Planetary based Religions are apparently a hazard of Space Travel, when encountered they soon want to convert your crew and use your ship for essential 'Missionary Work'. The usual deal is convert or die (coz Ghod says so) give us your shiny spaceship and ability to freely travel the universe and settle into our impoverished and backward religious community.

4. **SF&F stories that are an opportunity for the writer to expound on his or her Philosophy** - (Starting with **Milton**, or **Dante?**), like **Robert Heinlein** and his libertarian political to naturist and sexual inclinations? Also **A. Bert Chandler**, advocate for Naturism (and Airships) in some of his books. **Orson Scott Card**, racial views, Right wing thoughts?

- **Lee Modestitt Jr**, weaves into 'The Parafaith War', Tree-hugger 'Californian' style eco-Philosophy and Mormon societal setup. SF&F stories that are an opportunity for the writer to expound on his or her Philosophy - **H. G. Wells**, 'The Shape of Things to Come' anyone? Platonic masters triumphant?

- **Isaac Asimov's** three laws of Robotics are idealised versions of the human 'Golden Rule' / the basis of moral religions. In various books and short stories the implications of these three laws are explored.

- **Isaac Asimov's** Foundation Trilogy (since extended posthumously) was based on a philosophy that Science would lead to a nearly Ghodlike ability to predict the future. Which informed Star Trek and Dr Who, each of which had a stated 'rule' of non-interference and the consequences of breaching this rule was sometimes depicted.

- The philosophy of 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few' was given an outing (and a thrashing) in the **Star Trek Movie** 'Insurrection'.

Star Trek does do Philosophy by stealth,

occasional 'issue' episodes do register, rare among US TV Sci-Fi or not.

- Is Captain Janeway of Star Trek Voyager nearly the perfect embodiment of the perfect Platonic Ruler / Philosopher King? Plato's golden haired girl? She rules a money free meritocracy.

- The '**Starfleet Way**' is the American way writ large over the Universe, an idealized fantasy of American Soft Power?

- By way of contrast, Star Fleet Philosophy Vs the less kind form of American (MBA) corporate way, a way of life consigned to the **Ferengi**. **Klingons**, **Romulans** and the **Vulcans** each have their own defined philosophies within the Star Trek Universe, or were the Vulcans just our de-nazified cold war Germans while the Romulans were the Soviet Block's East Germans?

- The Agnostic and rigorously Scientific philosophy of the Vulcanians as seen in 'Classic Star Trek' degenerates to 'Vulcan Religion' in later Star Trek?

- In Babylon 5 both the 'Good' and the 'Bad' aliens seem to have infiltrated the religions and religious texts of space going features, appearing as Angels or Demons, Ghods or powerful spirits etc.

5. The increasingly 'mainstream' and commercial '**Faith Based**' **SF&F subgenre** (starting with **C. S. Lewis'** 'The Lion The Witch and the Wardrobe'?). More to it than 'End Times' or 'Left Behind' (a series) stories of life conforming to prophecies that some see in Christian scriptures

- Overt (and Occidental) mind control for the anxious suburban nuclear family.

6. All those Alternate history stories where they explain **what _Really_ happened** at some Religiously important moment in History, or History and Religion altered by an incident

- More interesting for the subtle cognitive relativism these engender in formative minds, I'd argue. Still, I liked 'The Man in the High Castle' by **Philip K. Dick**.

Continued on Page 14

Elizabeth Pastor's Review
of the New Star Trek Movie

Well, this is a lot LESS like it"(to juxtapose a NY-Times critic from 1982). At least J. J. Abrams hasn't killed, just insulted and brought low this great franchise, and outraged lifelong fans like me. I sat unable to suspend my disbelief, even visiting the amenities halfway through, and ended up livid. That's because this is eye-bubblegum for 2+hrs. Extremely forgettable the minute it's over, nobody could discuss the plot for more than a sentence just 1/2hr later.

Once its predecessor ST-X:Nemesis broke the even-numbered-charm by losing money, Star Trek(2009)'s seven producers should've known better than to again create a badly-justified revenge-seeking Romulan who imperils The Federation. They marched into this trap of repetition precisely because they began their plot ideas for (Bennett's) prequel there. Time travel had to be in the mix to acculturate the younger actors, so....we got what we got.

We quickly lose hold on the plot because action dominates (the film is unbalanced); time-travel pragmatics are glossed-over (for novelty-seekers with no patience for science); the set-up for location is poor when young Spock enters old Spock's ship and the computer recognizes him; we're unprepared for Spock marooning Kirk "accidentally" on the planet where, preposterously, the older Spock is also marooned, and from where Spock could see(?) Vulcan imploding; and cadet Kirk gets promoted much too quickly to, erm, Captain.

The plot-points stay buried to keep the screenplay ahead of the audience; too many "shiny" elements seem mere excuses for SFX/CGI; and there's far too much lightning-quick action, matched by outrageously optimistic results. I loathe such cinematic choices, they result in bubblegum, and it's IN THE WRITING. Case in point: according to ST-II(1982), young Kirk wasn't a ne'er-do-well at all, just a Lothario "crazy for space". In ST(2009) he's been rewritten the generic loser who somehow wins, in an overdose of writers' optimism.

Worst of all, the assembled uniforms at the end, combined with the Iowa cop's stentorian look/attitude (borrowed from Judge Dredd (1995), for Chrissakes) contribute to make the Starfleet assembly look like a Nazi convention. This struck tone brings Star Trek (2009) low enough for storm-troopers!

Did Star Trek deserve that? Clearly Abrams-et-al are out of ideas.

Let's not forget this screenplay was written with George.W still in office; a time when the terrorist angle must've seemed irresistible for geeing-up audiences. Although this plot line can be--and in ST-II:Wrath of Khan(1982) HAS BEEN--done well, its belaboring has also typically been at the root of several unpopular Star Trek movies. Abrams nevertheless felt the.....need to ramp-up audience dread with a stupidly implacable Romulan riding a needle-fronted ship--a motif thoughtlessly regurgitated from Babylon-5, where at least it made sense.

The dull score is forgettable, barring the reworked ST:TOS end theme which enhances/is enhanced by the nebulae and planetary visuals. The OPENING could've used that.

I've sat with 3 audiences seeing it for the first time now. Two failed to laugh at the paltry jokes; the only titter was raised by Uhura's smooching of the Vulcan, because it was so ridiculous and unexpected. Clearly these were fans who didn't know what hit them.

This is the filmmakers' calculated reversal-of-fortune planned for Spock as the--now--sexier one. Unfortunately Zoe Saldana's assumption of an almost selfish, demanding relationship--but unexplained history--with young Spock doesn't instantly work for the audience, so this (mis)calculation becomes unintentionally funny.

Simon Pegg, too, creates a silly buffoon for Scotty that's nothing short of a "crack in the Star Trek canon"(Scott Weinberg). It undercuts the kindly engineering geek that Jimmy Doohan spent decades crafting. Ridiculous: no buffoon matures INTO a geek.

Pegg's unwelcome postmodernist characterization further adds an unwelcome flourish with a Jar Jar Binks-ripoff sidekick, who has no lines, but annoys both "Scotty", and us. This must be the failed rework of Gerrold's tribbles.

Winona Ryder also is missing gravitas--and screen time--as Spock's mother Amanda. Her death is unmissed, except by John Cho's Hikaru Sulu, whose powerful reaction shot isn't

enough.

Only Zachary Quinto (Sylar from "Heroes"(TV)) has imbued his performance with many of Nimoy's reticent nuances. Not surprisingly, Nimoy actually worked with him for weeks to achieve this, but it was the first honest work I could see in the film.

Let's acknowledge Abrams' producers, i.e. the only people who knew the lore: I enjoyed their incorporation of Kirk's middle-name into his birth and the fleeting exposition of his lowan childhood; that it was originally his Starfleet biological dad who didn't "believe in the no-win scenario"; as well as McCoy's acquisitions of his nickname and fear of transporters, etc.

Lore maintenance was good; it's the revamping that went wrong.

Scott Chambliss' wonderful production design for the Enterprise interiors deserves special mention. His plexiglass and flexible spot-lamps are brilliant and new while reminiscent of ST:TOS. We could've lived without the heavy girders, plumbing, and the ridiculous smelt-works locations, though, which borrow too much from the ST:Enterprise look.

The third audience I sat with was the most animated, being an evening audience well-lubricated with champagne, but none of them had any exit opinions to offer either. They just slinked out, obviously TRYING to like this. Even so, nobody clapped, like they did for ST-II(1982). We have an obligation to compare this reboot to that high-water mark, because not only have writers Alex Kurtzman & Roberto Orci--and the seven producers--had 7yrs since ST:Nemesis to refine their screenplay, but also 30yrs to learn hindsight from.

Unfortunately this calculated, frenetic pap through rose-colored glasses plays as if Data/a Vulcan--or a human Asperger's Syndrome-sufferer--simply learned how to fake sincerity. Bad Robot!

Abrams has served us up a "soylent green"-Star Trek. For hopeful/thoughtful fans it's just a whole bunch-o' NO fun.

If Abrams' "vision" pulls in newer generations AND future directors restore things to a less Fascist, truer Star Trek feel, then fine; but if

even "average" audiences soon turn away, then all this action-ridden pap.....won't have been worth it.(5/10)

WHO IS Lizziebeth-1:

She is I, Elizabeth Pastor, "famously" from Sydney, Australia – I get a lot of email asking me if I'm the Lizziebeth from Spain. Apparently I have a double on the Internet (too, and another in the First World who apparently LIVES in Sydney and looks just like me. I frequently get that surprised reaction from shopkeepers that I've come back for the second time that day – and NO, I hadn't).

I am a Star Trek fan.

I don't like to call myself by any de rigeur term such as Trekker, because I wish to be thoroughly integrated into regular society in order to infiltrate them. I've made it my mission of sorts to "normalise" Star Trek's vision as just that which is expected of regular, well-educated, kind people, who almost always populate Star Trek fandom anyway, but there is still a pejorative perception in the wider community that we are somehow "different".

We are not.

Furthermore, I am proud to say I found my segue into film critiquing – and an abiding interest in astronomy and astrophysics as well as a reverence for the dearly departed Dr Carl Sagan, via Captain Kirk – that is, Bill Shatner, on reruns. I discovered IMDb – the Peak Internet Movie Database body I write for – when I first got my personal computer, and watched it become a powerhouse like Google. Not entirely of the same order, but still. I quickly figured out that if I wanted to get proper access to filmmakers and directors, I had better create something that struck them as better than mere petulance – and so the rest is history.

Continued from page 11

7. Writer's of faith whose **convictions** are **noticeable in the themes** of the stories that they write, **Fred Saberhagen**, Catholicism

influenced redemption in Dracula and 'Humanness' in and **Orson Scott Card's** 'Speaker for the Dead', Mormon themes ?).

Tolkein? sure, there's the Catholic angle as at <http://tolkienandchristianity.blogspot.com/> but what about his resonance with brooding, problematic Teutonic myth?

8. 'You wouldn't believe it' moments of true history recounted as Fiction.

- When not played for comedy, can be very interesting. Potentially enabling also, when we realise that history is being made around *us* right *now*, if we had the will to engage in its moment-by-moment transformation.

9. **Utopias and Dystopias**, the consequences of a World based on a particular philosophy or political trend carried on to it's logical conclusion. **Milton** 'Paradise Lost' to **Adam Smith** 'The Wealth of Nations' to **George Orwell**, in 'Animal Farm' and '1984'

10. **Apocalypses**, some based on the logical conclusion of a trend, but more usually an opportunity to build a new world on the ashes of the old, a world following an Author's philosophy of choice?

11. **Counter culture stories**, Survivalists and Conspiracy theories done up as techno thriller books? 'The Turner Diaries'

12. **Stories About Philosophers**: **Lewis Carroll's** 'Alice in Wonderland' and 'Alice through the Looking Glass', a Satire of don-ish philosophers told as a children's story?

13. Instructive, frequently allegorical Fantasy - **CS Lewis'** 'The Lion The Witch and The Wardrobe' - Jesus Stuff, 'Wicked' - Expose, exploration of the philosophical assumptions behind the world of the **Frank Baum's** 'The Wizard of Oz' series of books

- Do we include most of the writings of **Philip K Dick**, seemingly inspired by a personal philosophy of paranoia and imposturism?

- What about **Harry Harrison's** 'Make Room, Make Room' a commentary on the ultimate consequences of the Catholic Philosophy of opposing birth control?

Odds & Ends, mainly SF Philosophy

- The novels of **Ian Banks** contain some Religion while the essential drama of the **Ian M. Banks** SF 'The Culture' novels ('Consider Phlebus' etc., are about a conflict between two philosophies.

'The Culture' is hedonistic, pluralistic and machine supported while 'The Others' tripod form aliens, are a society organised around a Fascistic Religion who detest The Culture and all that it stands for. For example, they have a fleet of armed Starships, each called 'Hand of God number xxx'. The Philosophy behind the culture is much discussed at a **Ian M. Banks** related website.

- In 'State of the Art' an agent sent to explore a small planet called 'Earth', ahead of formal contact has to be retrieved coz he likes it there so much he goes 'native'.

- Observed that 'End Time' literature flourished before the end of the century just ended, a subgenre of Evangelical Christian SF, the 'Left behind' series features otherwise righteous individuals in travail during these 'end times', as a result of their minor philosophical shortcomings making them ineligible for 'salvation'.

- At the 19th / 20th century crossover things were rather different, optimism about Scientific progress and the 'Golden Dawn' of Spiritualism and the receding of Biblical fundamentalism? And then the First World War happened, pretty much as horrible as described in advance by early SF pioneers?

- The Mechanists Vs the Shapers in **Bruce Sterling's** 'Schizomatics' stories, differences between the parties being philosophical. Similarly in **Alistair Reynold's** stories about the Post Colonial Cybers Vs the rest.

- A new Sociology emergent in some SF? Seeing humans as Naked Mole Rat like hive dwellers, where individuality is lost to hive imperatives.

- In **Stephen Baxter's** 'Incandescent' Biology is encoded Philosophy, with 'altruistic' genes implanted. This leads to a galactic conflict between the societies inhabited by these genetically diverse and hence separated societies.

- There's Heaps of Religion (but Philosophy Free?) in Buffy as Demonology is trimmed to fit episodic contemporary adventure Fantasy.

Brian Walls offers

My thoughts go to **Robert Heinlein's** 'Stranger in a Strange Land' where **Manson** was inspired by the hero to act out the reality. I believe tho' that the original cult of S.I.A.S.L. was started in Northern California about 1964 in a commune &

Manson merely copied it - it all seems a bit incestuous...

Yours, Brian (King of Trivia) Walls

© G Dalrymple March 2009

Notes from the Infinitas bookshop SF&F Discussion meeting of Thursday April 2, 2009,

Present were – Henry Chatroop, Garry Dalrymple, Kurt Frank, Mick Ousley, Charmaine Spears and Brian Walls.

Topic: Science Fiction Stories where Astronomy is Essential

SF and Science News for April

- An Asteroid lands in Sudan, being the first ever to be tracked in flight, impact observed and pieces (2 kg) recovered by Sudanese University Students set to search the sandy desert, presumably wearing 'sand shoes'.
- The Star Trek Movie's official premier took place in Sydney, the why of this not fully explained.
- SF&F Writer Philip Jose Farmer has died
- The Movie 'Monsters Vs Aliens' is now showing, it features a 50 foot Woman.
- The Movie 'Knowing' is now (and briefly) showing. It is about several pages of binary code found in a Time Capsule. Decoded it lists date, location and megadeath casualty list figures.
- Buffy / Angel news, Willow (Alyson Hannigan) has had a bub, Lorne Greene has died.
- Angel is showing at 1 am (ish) on Sunday mornings

Discussing the Topic

Some Types of Stories we discussed included;

1. **Disaster Flics**, a Hollywood staple since? Earth is threatened by Asteroid or Comet impact, The Sun going Nova or a 'Death Star' appearing and threatening to pass close by and burn or eject the Earth from it's comfortable orbit.
2. **Hard SF stories** of exposition or exploration of the implications of a newly discovered Astronomical phenomena

3. **Detective like stories** where the resolution of a story relies on some small item of knowledge about Astronomy

4. **Just plain weird and incomprehensible stories** that are 'explained' by the presumed effects of some sort of Astronomy

5. **Scenery**, Adventures that take place with scenic Astronomy as the back drop to what takes place in the Space ship (usually) but is not the main act of the Story

6. **Space Opera** – Cowboys and Indians in Space, stretching the laws of the Universe to allow these adventures?

Examples;

- In the **Marion Zimmer Bradley** 'Darkover' stories the Planet's Red Sun is dying.
- In The Dark Crystal (fantasy?) the three Suns come as one every 1,000 years.
- In the Australian made movie 'Pitch Black', with photophobic predatory animals, the survivors of a crash landing are very concerned with light and darkness producing astronomical phenomena.
- In The (**McCaffrey?**) Pern book there is a thread that falls from the sky (Astronomical feature? Decaying planetary ring?)
- In the Movie ??? Earth is threatened by Bruce Willis' wooden acting and by a crystalline comet that needs to be nuked. This is exactly NOT what current Astronomical advice would recommend!
- The World and the Society depicted in **Bran Aldiss**' 'Helleconia' series of books is shaped by it's 400 year long great seasons, the consequence of having three stars as a 'Sun' during 1600 year long cycles.
- The inspiration for **Arthur C. Clarke's** '2001' was an astronomical conjunction, as viewed from the Mars of Earth Moon and Sun in alignment.
- In several of **Isaac Asimov's** 'Space Ranger / Lucky Starr' books Astronomical circumstances are part of the investigation, i.e. in one the behaviour of a murderer in hiding evidence is dictated by that person's Planetary / Asteroidal origins. In the Singing Bells, long term exposure to Moon, Earth or Space Gravity reveals the guilty party.
- The variability of gravity, and it's physical effects on the surface of a very peculiar spinning high gravity Planet is the main character in **Hal Clement's** 'Matter of Gravity'.
- In the Movie 'Sunlight' the adventure is to

attempt to re-ignite the Sun! By Nukeing it of course.

- In the 1950s movie 'When Worlds Collide' (they didn't) a rogue Sun passing through the Solar System is going to fry Earth, the only escape is by a space ship to a planet orbiting this new Sun, that might be life supporting.

- Australian SF&F writer **Sean Williams** has a series of books that follow the consequences of an Astronomical pulse of Energy

- In the series of books jointly written by **Larry Niven** and **Jerry Pournelle** curious constructed or Astronomical worlds are features, i.e. The Mote in God's Eye and the 'Ringworld' stories.

- Much of the business of 'Star Fleet' is Astrographic, charting the Universe, particular attention is at times paid to 'Spacial Anomalies' whatever they might be.

- **Edgar Rice Burroughs** (Tarzan) wrote series of books of adventures ranging across most of the Solar System, Barsoom, Venus, Jupiter etc. Also Hollow Earth adventures?

- In Babylon 5, rarely for a Sci-Fi series, the fights in space obeyed the laws of physics, Starwars and Star Trek usually didn't.

- SF stories that make use of 'Jump Drives' usually have to move away from gravitational masses (why?) before jumping.

- **Ben Bova** has a series of books, one per Planet, working out from the Sun. Some were so good he even did sequels!

Black Holes used and abused

- **Fred Pohl's** Hee Chee Saga books make two uses of Black holes. The alien species that created the transportation system have been hiding for 10,000 time dilated years or more in a black hole, that they have the technology to escape from at will, while Human users of the transport system are 'caught in amber' at the event horizon, stored for later episodes?

- Who can forget the Disney movie 'Black Hole', but who can be bothered remembering what it was about?

- Numerous episodes of Stargate SG 1 episodes use as a universal bad guy disposal method those Stargates that are connected to worlds that are too close to Black holes. The equivalent of 'blow the airlock'.

Next Month's Infinitas Bookshop SF&F Discussion Topic: Sex in Science Fiction Stories

Notes from the Sydney Futurians

Meeting of Friday April 17, 2009,
Topic: Torture, Punishment, Prisons, Imprisonment & Restraints in SF&F (An Easter special?)

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

SF&F and Science News items

SB - Macquarie University Open night / Star night this month, an Astronomy talk and a number of Telescopes to look through.

- Watching a few Space 1999 videos recently

- New Look **Dr Who** (and companion?), for 2010

GD -A Sydney Futurian listed as a supporting member as per Aussiecon 4 PR number 1

JF - Started to read **Sean McMullen's** 'Centurion's Empire' and 'A household guide to dying' (in addition to coursework reading). Dressed in a suit to achieve some sort of tribute to the surrealist painter **Rene Magritte's** 'This is not a Pipe'.

Robots have taken over a Sydney Art Gallery! Art Express students have been cutting up and transforming computer bits and pieces to create spider-like (non-functional) Robots.

DF - No News at this time

KMcK - Has become a Facebook friend to the **Kepler Space Telescope**, which will search a five degree wide patch of space, down a spur of our Galaxy, for G type (Sun like) stars and any occasionally eclipsing extra-Solar Planets.

Intends to set up some sort of Futurian Face Book presence. Is currently reading a book 'Aztec' by **Jennings**, this is subsequent to reading **Harry Harrison's**, 'Captive Universe', a SF novel featuring an Aztec civilisation sent on a long space flight inside an Asteroid.

An image of the astronomical feature known as 'The Hand of Ghod' was shown in one of Stephen's newspaper clippings, looks more like a Vulcan greeting to me.

Discussion of the topic: Torture, Punishment Prisons, Imprisonment and Restraints in SF&F Stories.

- In reading **Harry Harrison's**, 'Captive Universe' (?) several forms of Imprisonment and restraint are on offer. Two villages / tribes are imprisoned on a hollowed out Asteroid that has been sent on a many generations space flight, they are restrained from mixing their two gene pools by simulated Aztec Ghods (Robots actually). The unseen managers of this biosphere 'restrain' population growth by simply dumping more poisonous snakes into the fields and homes of the villagers when the population rises beyond a predetermined level!

- In Space 1999 the perils of the lonely space wanderer are frequently laid bare. One episode the crew of an Eagle (spacecraft) are detained by an alien, he was just lonely and wanted the company. In another, John Koenig is snatched away and continually bothered by Humans that are Two Million years advanced on present day humans, able to create matter at will, walk through walls etc. These would be 'post spike' humans?

- In an episode of Star Trek Next Generation a Moriarty figure escapes from a Holodeck drama, control of the Enterprise and is tricked into fleeing into a hard drive that has been set up as a simulation of the real universe. Imprisonment in a hard drive, a long time after first demonstrated in 'Tron'

- Through the Star Trek original series adventures Kirk is frequently imprisoned, as is Khan (and that worked out well didn't it). In the Trials and imprisonment abound.

In an unstated story, criminals are routinely punished by dropping them off back in time, during 'interesting times' and tortured by repeatedly snatching back just as they are about to be killed.

- Also (borrowing from next month's deviations), story not stated, two **punishment scenarios** from SF stories that cropped up; 1. dropped back into time so that you are not only alone in the world but that anything that you touch or create in the life left to you will be erased by time so that no one will ever know you existed. 2. Person is infested with nannites and you are dumped in the desert to die of thirst. When you die the nannites re-build you so you can die of thirst again and again.....

- In **David Weber's** Honor Harrington Universe, Honor leads a break out from a Planet that is set up as a POW camp. The plant and animal life of this planet is toxic to humans so that food supply is enough to maintain discipline.

- Similarly, in **Lois McMaster Bujold's** Barrayer series, Miles Vor Kosigan liberates a POW camp under a pressure dome surrounded by poisonous atmosphere.

- Un-named satirical SF story (might have been by Eric Frank Russell), in an overly PC society with strong views on conspicuous consumption 'rebels' choose to over eat. Gastric tything is in place, i.e. via stomach to stomach matter transmitter technology the well fed feed the underprivileged.

- From many Arabian nights style Fantasy stories, the genie imprisoned in a bottle. Three wishes granted and then it's time to ask, 'I can't believe you can really fit in that bottle, show me again'.

- In **E. C. Tubb's** Dumeresque of Earth series (fifty plus books?) about a well travelled lost in space Earthling in search of the mythical human Homeworld 'Earth', the main character is pursued by the Cyclan a monk like re-nunnciate order who reduce their connection to the real world to a single nerve!

- The Torture of the **George Orwell**, '1984' (written in 1948) era in SF is sooo last century. Messing with your mind without violence is in.

- See **Ira Levine's** 'This Perfect Day' (written in 1968) for details of what social conditioning and drugs can achieve without the threat of 'rats to the face' type violence or physical harm.

- Another example of this might be the **Woody Allen** movie, where torture is to be locked into a cell with only an Insurance salesman for company!

- An untested hypothesis is that Science Fiction is more interested in Rehabilitation than Punishment (the Horror genre does innovative punishment better and more frequently). The reverse is so for Fantasy? Since 7/11 there is / will be more examples of torture turning up in SF stories? I.e. as seen in '24' the TV series.

- In the Sci-Fi series Stargate the Go' ulds punish friends and enemies by use of the life regenerating Sarcophagi. This allows them to torture you to death endlessly, just like a Sci-Fi marathon on cable TV? Also the Symbiotic relationship between host and parasite, hosts freed from a Go'uld have no immune system.

- The Neck Torques in **Jack Vance's** Durdain series (including 'The Servants of the Wankh') if you disobey the laws of Ghod your neck torque explodes taking your head off. Essential for the maintenance of public order apparently

- An extremely distasteful form of punishment is displayed in 'Consider Phlebus' by **Ian M. Banks**. An impressive days long banquet of rich and exotic dishes are set, guests are invited and the torturee is chained up in the latrine tank! It fills to the proverbial lower lip before the character is rescued by the Tripodal aliens!

- In **Alfred Bester's** 'Tiger Tiger' the facial tattoos are a method of restraint, bonding the wearer to the tribe of outcasts. The main character has to develop extraordinary restraint to be able to 'pass' in polite society, if he ever gets angry his face will flush, revealing the de-inked needle marks of his outcast tattoos.

- A theme re-visited in enough SF stories to be a sub-Genre is that of 'Space Botany Bay' the shipping off of convicts, or though more usually social dissenters, to settle new worlds.

A. Bert Chandler's 'Botany Bay' to name just one example.

- **Net Nannying**, a form of restraint / punishment by restriction of access to all possible ideas?

In **Lafferty's** (?) 'The Coins of Murph', in a post apocalyptic society destroyed by poor decision making? People surrender their Free Will to be bound by the rules of chance, i.e. you state the proposition and flip a coin rather than make your own decisions, of course the priests of this new order have their own double sided coins and get to state the propositions!

- Suggested but story details not understood, The Scrimshaw suite in **Alistair Reynolds's** 'The Bridge One'?

Notes from the Infinitas bookshop SF&F Discussion meeting of Thursday May 7, 2009

Topic Sex in SF&F stories

Present were? – *Henry Chatroop, Garry Dalrymple, Kurt Frank, Mick Ousley, Charmaine Spears and Brian Walls.*

Arrived at this meeting only after most of the SF&F News had been discussed.

Discussing the topic: Sex in Science Fiction and Fantasy

Sex and SF are problematic bedfellows, on one hand the ever extending opportunities produced by scientific progress produce an ever expanding

range of Sex and Reproduction issues that SF can propose and explore the consequences. On the other hand though SF as a genre (until fairly recently) has been severely constrained as to subject matter and language as it was viewed as being 'juvenilia'. A situation existed where **Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein** and some other 'Adult' SF writers wrote nearly annual juvenile SF stories to guidelines approved by the American Librarian's Association because if it had their mark of approval it guaranteed a volume of hardback sales that guaranteed the commercial success of the paperback editions. There is still something of a market based limit to sex in SF, it can't / won't sell?

But the form of Fantasy known as 'Paranormal Romance', Vampire sex with the dead / undead does?

Apparently, as SF is a predominantly English language culture it shares Anglo Saxon inhibitions (see Lexx and Barbarella for exceptions?)

Aspects of Sex in SF

Eugenics – Nazi Eugenics learnt much from their US predecessors, eliminating the reproductive potential of the 'unfit' and even having 'best of breed', dog show like exhibitions of excellent American families at county fairs! Some trace of this can be seen in **Aldous Huxley's** 'A Brave New World'?

Lois McMaster Bujold treats several forms of reproduction in her Barrabar books, four armed 'Quaddies', uterine replicators, a womb in a can, Hemaphrodite populations and the ever popular SF resort – Cloning (every body gets their own evil twin?). The basis of Cetagendan culture is selective breeding, Queens of the gene pool rule! While on the Beta Colony, a harsh environment dictates population / reproduction limits.

- In **HG Wells'**, 'The Time Machine', humans have diverged into two subspecies, the day dwelling Eloi (the upper / leisured classes) and the nocturnally active Morlocks (Working Classes?) with the Morlocks eating the Eloi!

- The consequences of sex determination technology (India) and then selective abortions and the one child policy (China) on population imbalances brought about social decisions about 'preferred gender' reproductive decisions, lead to discussion of the 'Sci-Fi' implications of 'girl drought' societies.

Euro SF and Sex?

- In the movie treatment of Barbarella, SF from a French comic series, physical sex is avoided for a more 'cultured' form of sex in a pill, or sexual pleasure used as a means of destruction, such as in the orgasmatron which Barbarella burns out.
- More recently the Euro SF series 'Lexx' has besotted robots, social misfits punished by being re-formatted (in body and mind) as enthusiastic 'love slaves'.

'Deviant' Sex in SF?

- Some of the stories of **Philip K. Dick** overtly and covertly include incest issues.
- In **David Gerrold's** 'The Man who folded himself' deals with sex and crossing the timeline / time paradoxes and taboos as well?
- In The Watchman series (of Comics?) comments on the proclivities of 'Caped Crusaders', considers that anyone who dresses up in a cape and costume mostly to beat other people up, probably have a fair few sexual issues to work through.
- James Bond, espionage adventures with SF overtones and strait sex perks or 'on the job' sex and sadism fantasy.
- **Charlie Stross's** 'The Jennifer Morgue', (not read by me) has some sort of sex in it?
- If you want a bibliography of gay and trans gender issues in SF then you should look up the **Lambda Sci-Fi Bookshop's** catalogue or annual **Lambda awards** for gender bending SF.
- In a **Philip Jose Farmer** story a spy chief has a perfect disguise, simply by acting and dressing as a woman he manages to misdirect scrutiny.
- An interesting 'only in Sci-Fi' option is sex with a female hive minded individual, much more discomfoting than 'dating' a girl who discusses everything with her Mother?

Sex for Robots?

- In **Ira Levin's** 'The Stepford Wives' a form of Android sex gains popular exposure? Robots for pleasure feature as far back as Original Star Trek?
- In **Fritz Leibers** the 'Silver Eggheads' robots do have sex and are shy and secretive about it.
- A special detachable section of this issue is devoted to Red Dwarf's Kryten, with a detachable penis (a twenty minute running gag, that he can't control his penis, just like an ordinary man or that revolting beer add?)

Sex used to sell?

- See the covers of **Pulp era SF magazines**, notorious for the cover art of scantily clad Space

Girls writhing in the embrace of Bug Eyed Monsters!

Flash Gordon Vs Flesh Gordon, parody SF with athletic and enthusiastic sex scenes.

Alien Sex?

In the Aliens series of movies the Alien is having sex, not human sex, but each incarnation of the movie sees the alien engaging in genetic exchange and reproduction, toward a more human form? Rip-offs of this subgenre include 'Inseminoid', 'Demon Seed', 'Galaxy of Terror', 'Species' and 'Killer Condom'. Rather more of this about.

Consequences of Sex in a SF setting?

- In **Aldous Huxley's** 'A Brave New World' is also notable for the consequences of consequence less sex?
- In **George Orwell's**, '1984' control of sex is a form of Big Brother's sanctioned social control, 'Artsem' is the way of the future for party members, the Anti-sex league is out enforce to enforce that you will love no-one other than Big Brother.
- In the 1921 Russian story 'We' people have government issued sex partners.
- In the book 'Sex Max' by someone Cooper, the evil feminist cabal drives men to an early and exhausted death (by Snoo Snoo as in Futurama) by the age of 48 by mandating a vigorous sex life for all and their control of society also ensures that older women have first call on young men (no, this was not written by **Germaine Greer**)
- The Sex magazine 'Play Boy' earns an honourable mention in respect to SF, many thoughtful SF stories published, paying relatively well and taking SF at times out of the Genre ghetto?

Sexy Cartoons?

Chakin's comics feature lots of sex? But Japanese Anime has explicit '**Hentai**' comics

Garry's Guide to the Sydney Writers' Festival May 16 - 24, 2009
A listing of some Science Fiction, Fantasy, History Astronomy and Cosmology talks at the festival

Some People We Know?

Isobel Carmody - Fantasy

Marcus Chown – UK Cosmologist
Kate Forsyth (Humphrey) - Fantasy (Mystery)
Kate Grenville – William Dawes Biography
Richard Harland – Science Fiction Fantasy
Catherine Jinks – YA SF?
Margo Lanagan - Fantasy
Matthew Levinson - Radio FBI
Gabrielle Lord – Salt
Garth Nix – Fantasy Artist
Therese Scott - Librarian
Fred Watson - Astronomer

Nearly that time of year again in Sydney, a constellation of local and imported guest writers covering all genres of writing except for Science Fiction? While I freely accept that Science Fiction isn't everyone's cup of tea, but with 340 listed events, 'hundreds' of Writers et al, couldn't they at least find as many local SF&F writers as I can find for a Sydney Freecon? A year and a bit out from an Australian Worldcon it really is an inadequate effort. Perhaps there is a need for a Fringe Festival? Anyway, for those of you who might be considering a between Swancon / Natcon trip to Sydney, the following is a list of 'People We Know' who will be appearing at the Sydney Writers' Festival. **NB** if you happen to be planning an interstate Natcon or a Worldcon then this list might be a useful picketing / handing out leaflets guide.

Saturday May 16 to Sunday May 24

Saturday May 16

Event 4 – Writing Fantasy, with Richard Harland, **Saturday May 16**, 9.30 am to 4.30 pm, **State Library of NSW** \$140/\$130

Event 5 – The Carrington Blue Mountains Book Bazaar **Saturday May 16**, 10 am to 5 pm, **The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba** FREE

Sunday May 17

Event 7 – Writing Fantasy, with Richard Harland, **Sunday May 17**, 9.30 am to 4.30 pm, **State Library of NSW** \$140/\$130

Event 13 – EMILY RODDA Talks **Sunday May 17**, 3-345 pm **The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba** Not Free, must book!

Tuesday May 19

Event 48 – Auburn Rising. The Sky Belongs to everyone I, **Tuesday May 19**, 10-11 am, **Auburn Town Hall** FREE

Wednesday May 20

Event 61 - Science Biography (Darwin theme) - **Wednesday May 20**, 4-5 pm Macleay Museum University of Sydney - FREE but bookings essential, 02-9036-5253 macleaymuseum@usyd.edu.au

Event 63 – Catherine Jinks at Penrith Library, **Wednesday May 20**, 6-7pm **Penrith City Library** \$2, bookings essential 4732 7891

Thursday May 21

Event 114 - Fact and Fiction, Negotiating the Borderlands - **Thursday May 21**, 3-4pm **Sydney Dance Company Studio 1**, FREE

Event 139 - The Imperial Panda Festival presents: Erotic Fan Fiction **Thursday May 21**, 7.30-9pm, **Heritage Pier Café Stage**, \$15/\$10

Friday May 22

Event 162 – Children's Literature for Adults, **Friday May 22**, noon – 1 pm **Sydney Dance Company Studio 1**, FREE

Event 165 – David Hill, 1788 – History, **Friday May 22**, 1 - 2 pm, **The Mint, Macquarie Street** FREE

Event 167 – Losing My Religion, **Friday May 22**, 1 – 2 pm **Sydney Dance Company Studio 2/3**, FREE

Event 186 – Launch UTS Writers' Anthology, 'On the Side', **Friday May 22**, 3.30 – 5 pm, **Bangara Theatre**, FREE

Saturday May 23

Event 210 – Marcus Chown in conversation with Fred Watson – Astronomy, **Saturday May 23**, 10-11 am **Heritage Pier, Main Stage** \$15/\$10

Event 212 – Auburn Rising. The Sky Belongs to everyone II, **Saturday May 23**, 10-11 am **Bangara Mezzanine** FREE

Event 255 – Ask Marcus Chown ANYTHING! Cosmology? **Saturday May 23**, 3-4 pm **Sydney Dance Company Studio 4**, FREE

Event 271 – An evening under the stars with Kate Grenville, Astronomy / William Dawes, **Saturday May 23**, 6-8.30 pm **S. H. Ervine Gallery, National Trust, Observatory Hill**, \$30/\$26

Sunday May 24

Event 291 – Kate Grenville in conversation, William Dawes, **Sunday May 24**, 11.30-12.30 pm **Sydney Theatre, Hickson Road**, \$15/\$10

Event 210 – Marcus Chown in conversation with Fred Watson – Astronomy, **Sunday May 24**, 10-11 am, **Heritage Pier, Main Stage**, \$15/\$10

Event 297 – Don't tell the Teenagers: Young Adult Fiction that's 'Too Hard' for Young Adults, **Sunday May 24**, noon – 1 pm, **Sydney Dance Company Studio 1**, FREE

Event 304 – The Secrets of writing Fantasy for Young Adults, **Sunday May 24**, 1.30-2.30 pm **Sydney Dance Company Studio 1**, FREE

Event 326 – The Science of Parallel Universes. Could there be copies of YOU Out there? A Café Scientific Event, **Sunday May 24**, 4-5.30 pm, **Bangara Theatre** FREE

Event 328 – Auburn Rising. The Sky Belongs to everyone II, **Sunday May 24**, 4-5.30 pm, **Sydney Observatory, Observatory Hill** FREE

Event 335 – Debating Darwin, **Sunday May 24**, 4.30 - 5.30 pm, **Sydney Dance Company Studio 1**, FREE

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Garth Nix – Fantasy Artist
Therese Scott - (Librarian)
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VENUES DECODED

SDC1 , SDC2/3 and SDC4 – Sydney Dance Company Studios
HP-MS – Heritage Pier, Main Stage
HP-CS – Heritage pier Café Stage
TM – The Mint, Macquarie Street
BT – Bangara Theatre
BM – Bangara Mezzanine
SHE – S. H. Ervine Gallery, National Trust, Observatory Hill
ST – Sydney Theatre, Hickson Road
SO – Sydney Observatory, Observatory Hill
CHK – The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba
ATH – Auburn Town Hall
PCL – Penrith City Library
SLC – State Library of NSW

Random Notes

Do you remember the Days of the Old School Yard? Part II, Notes on the Open Day held on Saturday March 28, 2009 for the 50th Anniversary of Kingsgrove North High School (KNHS)

I was vaguely aware that something like a 50th was due for KNHS sometime this year, but I only really became aware of that the event was on this weekend on the Friday Night immediately before, when Mother pointed out the small notice in a local paper. I couldn't decide then whether to go or not and even next morning, I still had mixed feelings about attending. In the end I decided to swallow my misgivings and show up because this is something my late brother might have liked to have considered attending, but is now unable to.

Being a 50th the anniversary it was going to be a very different set up to the recent 75th anniversary held for Clemton Park PS. With a 50 year one it was realistic to expect that some number of opening year Ex-students might attend, likely that people from all graduating years would put in an appearance.

The following then are my notes on the day;

In previous years I would just have walked, able to retrace the route I used to get home on sports afternoons and other early finishing days. On foot it is a fairly direct route to KNHS through the grounds of Clemton Park Public School and then along a few quiet residential streets. I would

have been there in fifteen minutes or so, but no longer, as Clemton Park PS has recently been fenced (at great cost but to what additional security?) around it's perimeter with two metre high pointed bars and locked gates, requiring a significant detour to get around the several hectare school block. In the past I have walked four consecutive dogs through the grounds of Clemton Park PS without giving offence, and spent parts of many nights on the school playground over thirty years of occasional Astronomical observing. So this time I caught the 423 instead, or rather I waited about half an hour for the 'due every to 20 minutes' bus. I arrived at the school well after all the 'grand opening' and speechifying was over, to find ant nest like busyness around the main quadrangle / Assembly area.

Impressions and observations – The school was set up thus - there were several registration desks set up in the gap between the library block and the Principal's office / School office block. Seemingly one table for each of the five decade groups, 1960s, 70s, 80s, 90s and the current decade. Some doing great business, the others (the more recent decades?) were largely idle. The set up as I encountered it was, going clockwise (look that up you digital watch generation!) Registration desks – School mementos stall – Marshalling point for tours of the school – a Café area at the end of a corridor in the former Partially sighted wing – A Sausage and Cans of Drink stand – A (too tight) cluster of Market stalls with decade group yearbooks & school photos on display – Much the same stuff on display in the school library. Shortly after registering I ran into **Michelle Nethercote** (Librarian?) and her friend (year below). As I was on the way out I ran into **Mende Damcieski** (now known as 'Mike', Stamp Collector and Photographer turned Real Estate Agent. Spent some time talking to **Debbie Bloomfield** (my year, mother of ?) and **Steven Henry** (year below, train Driver, **NB** not the **Stephen Henry** of my year) while I was copying down some notes of my impressions of the event. The only one of my teachers I noticed was **Mr Roach** (my Economics teacher), who was looking rail thin and fragile with age. All apart from Debbie Bloomfield were people that I had encountered in after school life, through standing at elections for the **Australian Democrats** or at my Astronomy poster stall at Glebe Market. As another illustration of this effect, while Mike (Mende) was talking to me he spotted a familiar face in the crowd, who turned out to be the brother of someone whose wedding he had attended as official photographer.

In the crowd there must have been a few teachers, of other year's students, but they seemed to blend in with all the previous students rather than stand out from them.

There were odd clumps of people, mostly in small groups of up to four or five, but no larger, pairs of friends, brothers and sisters, mostly people who had come to the event together rather than people meeting again. I was rather surprised not to see more intergenerational family groups, with grandparents, parents and school age children in tow, or families with pre-high aged children checking out the school for the future.

At the memento's stall I bought some of the cloth KNHS school badges, intending to offer one to my niece. I have no idea if she will appreciate it, a memento of her father's high school days.

Mood and feelings – I had this rather numbing feeling that we were mostly all ghosts of individual pasts circulating and in passing in the narrow school corridors, seeking but failing to make connections, moving with expectation but failing to not meet anyone who knew our names or circumstances.

Separating from the tour group at times, I got the impression that my memories of school life were mostly about what took place in the spaces between the classes and the classrooms, and not much from the official parts of school life for which records and images remain.

Very soon I became aware of the very great difference between this event and a school re-union. The people you might enjoy seeing again could be anywhere on the school site, scattered among unfamiliar faces and people seen only from the front or the back. With an average of four classes for each of Fifty years of operation that meant towards 200 potential class or affinity groups scattered across the school. Were your friends doing the tour? Were they in the library? Off having a coffee? Did they plan to arrive later, or had they already left?

Michelle and her friend craved coffee. Following then to the Café I had an attack of post-Mormonism (coffee aversion) and claustrophobia, so I left the (slow service) café area, bought a sausage and a drink and still had time to spare before joining them for the next tour.

- We saw the computer labs or rather the impressive outer defences there of, (in our day there was a punch card reading calculator that we started class at 8 am in order to use!)

- I get the impression that the school is now better laid out than it was in former years, each subject now seems to more clearly have it's 'quarter' of the school. I did notice that the current year 12 photos run to about 60 children, ours ran to 100 or 120, more room for spreading out?

– Astronomy theme posters about the Science labs and some other class rooms.

- Carpet on classroom floors more often than not.

- A taped off / blacked out area turned out to be other than the sensory deprivation lab I had expected, it was a School Theatre made out of two Classrooms!

- I encountered and spoke to a School Photography teacher in the Art section of the school (teachers are sooo young these days!) and I suggested to her some possibilities for some easy Astro photography, Star Trails and the like. An opportunity to mix colour appreciation, composition and some 'real' Science.

- At the far end of the school they have a Museum display room.

- A blocked off stairwell leads down to - A Gymnasium where the Armoury, bare concrete and the school Incinerator used to be.

- The industrial Arts section, Drawing, Woodwork and Metalwork laid out around their own quadrangle and not a space that was a mystery to girls?

- The library was much less impressive than it used to be. My year suffered the disruption of it's construction and got to use it only weeks before HSC exams. It has no doubt

been renovated since. The great fun thing we learned to do in it in my year was to shuffle your feet on the carpet building up a static electric charge, then zapping someone with a finger tip. Zzzzzapp! Blue sparks, bonus points if the victim knocks over their desk or passes out!

- I had a look at the school's playing field, the vegetation has changed greatly, less grass and clover. In fact there used to be a patch where you could usually find a four leaf clover after a few minutes searching, no luck this time, Also the 'up the hill running track (worn onto the side of the embankment was no longer there!

- During the tour the youthful tour leaders (prefects?) were at times a little stunned at how 'juvenile' their charges were acting, for the most part these were people older than their parents acting the goat. If the windows weren't locked I'm sure that some of them would have tried water bombing their friends down on the assembly area!

- A telling minor detail that testifies one of the differences between school life then and now was that I picked up the cap from a many megabyte data stick, in my day, with much less data for children to carry to and from school it would have been a pen top!

- When I entered the library I was met by recognition of a sort, in the form of a claim that, 'Your Brother broke my finger', I apologised on his behalf.

Mood and feelings – I had a feeling that we were mostly all ghosts circulating and in passing in the corridors, moving with expectation but failing to not meet anyone who knew our names or circumstances. Rather worse than that last day of the year at school, when it is all over but you can't find it in yourself to head off home just yet.

The Stare - At nearly every corner you would meet people who give you the stare as they walk past. They look past your face in search for a name badge with a name that they can recognize.

After the first few corridor encounters most people had given up on looking first to people's faces, as 20 or more years on, who remembers the faces of our friend's parents, the faces that we have lately grown into?

- Separating from the tour group at times, I remember strongly the impression that school life was mostly took place between the classes and the classrooms, the official parts of school life.

In the School Hall – you see these honour boards year in and year out when you are at school, they list the names that are familiar to you because their younger brothers and sisters are in your year and likely to be painted onto those boards the year after you have gone. The others are of almost legendary figures, someone you know might know them, or perhaps they went on to be the local Doctor or Dentist or some such. Coming back there are a separate set of names, the ones added in the years immediately after you left, there is this great chasm, who are these people, how do you pronounce That name, all unfamiliar to you whether you graduated in the 1970s or just a few years ago, but you see them listed up there, the best and the brightest of succeeding years.

- While I was reading the boards, facing away, a woman came up to me and greeted me in a familiar manner, seeing the group I was standing with and assuming I was

a student of her year. I turned and replied as best as I could, attempting to make the best of the situation by offering to serve as a stand-in for the absent other if there were any unresolved schoolgirl crush issues she needed help with.

At least it made her smile.

Honour Boards - On the few occasions I have returned to KNHS I always make a point of searching for one particular honour roll board in the school hall. I found it this year way off to the right, well away from the other boards, to the right of a side exit of the hall. This particular board bears only one name. One name when I was at KNHS and I hope to God one name only for the longest time. For he was someone's Son, someone's Brother, a life of promise cut short and someone who will be missed until the end of time.

The name is that of **Private Horne**, the board bears the legend – Lest We Forget - . Private Horne died on national service in Vietnam. Perhaps the hall should be renamed the Horne Memorial Hall to remind us that as our young all as they pass through KNHS and on to their presumably glowing futures to remind them that beyond the days of their school lives that long life and continued achievement is not guaranteed. I draw hope from seeing his name and his name alone on that board each time I see it, I feel I have seen the hand of the Angel of death stayed for a little longer.

Overheard – one age group (older than mine I think) were complaining 'not much of our stuff', a school fire was widely held to be responsible for this state of affairs.

Political – I was asked several times about the **Australian Democrats**, these were more hopeful inquiries about when they will be back rather than accusative rhetorical questions along the lines that 'They're finished aren't they?' Some people are dissatisfied with their 'replacements'.

On the way Home - On leaving KNHS (at about 3 pm?) I decided to walk home rather than waiting for a bus. With the aid of a pedometer I intended to measure out the distance for future reference. I found that it was about 2500 steps from KNHS to home if I detoured around Clemton Park PS and by calculation, just under 2000 steps if I had been able to walk through it! On the way, while walking the length of the school's long back fence I noticed that a girl / young woman was walking across the school grounds, so I paused to observe. She had entered the school grounds (as had the Basketball player?) through the bottom gate that was open to allow parking for the Church meeting / Saturday language classes etc. She was slight, fairly short and wearing fashionably tight jeans, boots and carrying a shoulder bag, i.e. not visibly athletic or dressed for agility, but unassisted she was able to climb over the fence at one of the gates and proceed on her way. All the while a (young) chap was playing basketball! Or 'Trespassing', so much for the long fence security!

Suggestions – Should I be invited to the next 50th year do, I would really like the decade memories stalls to be widely separated, like the pockets of a Snooker table, with seating, benches or seats set out with a year placard above each.

i.e. a place for the 1978 students to sit and be visible as such, between the 1977 and 1979 students, near the 'memories' table for the 1970 to 1979 students etc. It would provide a natural focus for those intent on trying to recognise those of their year, or their brother/sister's school friends. **OR** you could pass out colour codes Year Arm bands?

In Conclusion - It should have been a good day, I had just had just achieved the publication of my fourth 'Letter to the Editor' in the Sydney Morning Herald (March 25, Page 14, and also in the Sydney Telegraph the day after!) but I found it a profoundly depressing experience to go back to KNHS this way, had a really spent the best six years of my life at this place, to leave absolutely no lasting trace, while others on the honour roll boards have gone on to have profoundly successful careers etc. I'm supposed to be a fairly bright person, but couldn't I have made just a little more effort at some point to be recorded some where for something?

Traveller's Tales

The smallest commercial property I have noticed in Sydney is a small space that you would have difficulty parking a car on. It was a corner hived off from a larger block and for many years it served as a rather small public toilet. I used to see, on the corner where the 423 bus turns onto the main street of Marrickville. Progress, in the form of a new larger municipal toilet block rendered it redundant and so it was sold off and converted into – A travel agent's office!

Off late I see that it now sells Pork Rolls, not sure I would want to buy one from that shop knowing it's history.

There are several arcades and laneways that you can walk through to reach the Infinitas shop from Parramatta Station. I guess Sydney also had a fair few before 'consolidation' of city blocks for tall office towers wiped most of them out. The last one before Infinitas cuts through a restaurant. The other side used to be a restaurant as well, of late it seems to be offering Medical lectures And a dinner to round tables full of Doctors soaking up the good news and generosity of pharmaceutical / medical technology companies.

As you will read, from the book reviews, I have been taking part in the Non-Genre **Men's Book group at Campsie Library**. It is not a large group, usually five or six compared to the 'Open' group, a dozen or more women and two or three blokes. A recent joiner was '**Bo**', a young Chinese bloke doing a masters degree in popular culture. Family matters required a suspension of his studies and an immediate return to China. He is uncertain if or when he will be able to return to Australia and he is unlikely to be able to return to live in the vicinity of Campsie if he can return next year. His departure is a loss to the group, by reducing it's numbers and he was a 'success' as he admitted that the 'First Casualty' and 'Windmill Hill' were the first two entire books he had ever read in English! I think we were all looking forward to his point of view on these and future books.

It's the Drugs talking!

At the SMSA Christmas party / Ashton Art School Art exhibition event I had a few glasses of Red wine (a Shiraz I think) and I had a most peculiar reaction. I wasn't 'Drunk', three glasses of Red was all I drank at the time, but after I left the event, on the way to a bus stop I was overwhelmed by an intense flow of words and images, so much so I stopped, sat down and tried to write a few of them down on the back of a scrap of paper. As you can see, I wasn't too far gone to be able to scribble down some notes.

- A reaction to the strong sweet cherry smell of scented antiseptic – Fruit loops breath in a pub toilet, was my Brother ever drunk on anything other than 'The Spirit of the Lord'
- Live for the moment, for one day you will wake up and discover that the soundtrack playing in the background at the Supermarket is your generation's music!, this is your welcome to the Prime Consumer Demographic.
- Blindly walking book readers, better or worse than I pod deaf sensory deprivation?
- To be half drunk in the land of the sober, 'What vistas entrance the eye and fill the mind with unthought of colours'
- A search for Donuts on sale at Woolworths Town Hall becomes the text of a world within the void of casual meaning.
- I have a mind that hungers to meet it's equal and mate. It drags my body along with it as a poor translator, an odd couple in search of a date?
- As I sit and write these thoughts down at a street bench of quiet amid the evening peak hour rush, the heat of diesel fume exhaust as the first breath of Summer Holidays?
- My eyes may fail to resolve distant detail, but my vision is vivid and quick.
- I'm immobilised by the splendour of the ideas emerging, released, their bonds dissolved by alcohol.
- Words and ideas pass nodding with familiarity, intent on their own journeys like the pedestrian traffic after work on an early December night.

How does this strike you? Curious isn't it.

A List of Books Read Feb to May

Skeptical Inquirer
Diamond Age
The Jesus Mysteries
Breath
The Skeptic
Critical Threshold
The Shroud Mafia
First Casualty

1945 the World we fought for
Myths of the Near Future
Windmill Hill
The Forest of Hands and Teeth

Something of an Index

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March to May
Pages 6 and 7 – **May Astronomy Meeting Notes**
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Pages 19 and 20 – **Sydney Writers' Festival program, extract of SF&F and Science / Astronomy talks**
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Page 24 – **It's the Drugs talking, Basenjjs Tail Piece, Index and list of books read Feb to May 2009**

Basenjjs Tail Piece

- An encouraging recent event involving Basenjjs was a feature appearance on the TV News on Tuesday April 14. As this was the Basenjjs judging day at the (Sydney) Royal Easter Show this was likely to be a 'Best of Breed' or 'Best in Class' award. Not sure of any additional details.

- Rather more disappointing was the White House announcement of the acquisition of a 'Portuguese Water dog' (from Teddy Kennedy no less, so no 'Checkers' like incident is likely) as America's 'First Dog' instead of a splendidly African Basenjjs or for that matter the splendidly Irish Soft coated Wheaten terrier!

- During a cold snap in April Amber has been reluctant to go to bed, and reluctant for me to pick her up and carry her to her bed. I was bitten again! Plans to put her into jackets for the night will have to be put off again until next year.

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