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A Girl, a Furry and a Dalek

(Photo by Keith Smith at the Conclave 2 Masquerade)

Issue XLI - Apr/May 2014

Musings from Under the Mountain

Well, the convention is over... And it all went remarkably smoothly, thanks to everyone who helped, especially Norman, Maree, Marie, Kelly and most of all, Keith. The only thing it really needed was more people... but we've been over this ground before. How to draw more of the fans out there into fandom is an issue for all of us who wish our hobby to continue, and I only hope that Andrew proves to be better at it than I was.

Part of the problem seems to be the rise and rise of fantasy, especially urban fantasy, and the apparent decline in anything one might reasonably call science fiction. At the root of this seems to be a growing fear of science and what humans have used science to do to the world around us. There is a desire to return to a bucolic green idyll which not only never existed, it never could have existed. Certainly not now, on our increasingly over-populated, polluted and resource-depleted planet.

The future looks increasingly bleak to many people, and writing about that future is hard. So is reading about it. Or making movies about it. Instead of which, people are looking to speculative fiction to lead them off to a comforting fantasyland, peopled as often as not with vampires that sparkle metaphorically if not literally. Bram Stoker would be truly horrified at what has been done to his creation!

This is not the way it was back in the 1960's when both Star Trek and Doctor Who were born. With the space race in full flight, there was a far more positive public perception both of science and the future. Admittedly, we were more worried about the possibility of nuclear war than global warming, but on the whole, science was seen as a good thing, part of the progress that we were all enjoying. Now, that same scientific progress is demonised by many groups in our society, both on the extreme right and the extreme left. Some of it is simply a lack of understanding. Now, I must confess that even with the benefit of a scientific education there is plenty I don't understand about modern technology that I use every day, beyond the basics of making it work for me. But there's a difference between that and deliberately choosing to be ignorant. Or stupid.

Don't believe me? Think about the people who deliberately choose not to have their children vaccinated, on the basis of some dubious and discredited research. Vaccines are proven to work, they save lives... and these

people want their kids to remain unprotected against killer diseases like whooping cough, because some misguided person has decided to blame poorly understood conditions like autism on vaccines?

Then there's the people who think that gluten-free products are healthier, somehow more natural, without understanding what gluten is... it's simply a protein found in wheat flour, that helps form the bubbles that let bread rise. Personally I'd be a whole lot more suspicious of the weird stuff you have to put in bread so that it rises without gluten. Certainly some people suffer from coeliac disease... but it's no more than one in a hundred though, so how come so many people are convinced that they are "gluten intolerant", and so many more insist that "gluten-free is healthier"? Makes me suspect that yet this is another massive "health food" scam, designed to get people to pay more for bread products and cakes. I'll just carry on making my own, thanks.

One of the strangest anti-science conspiracies is the claim that humans did not go to the moon in 1969. Now, I'm not entirely sure why they came up with this one, because it makes no sense. Why deny events that so many people remember so vividly? It's just not possible to get that many people to lie about something that consistently for that long. I've seen the excellent Mythbusters episode on the subject. There are photographs of the landing sites showing the landers and even the astronauts' footprints. But, one of the more interesting stories on the subject, recently doing the rounds on the internet, pointed out that while we had the technology to go to the Moon in 1969, we didn't actually have the audio-visual technology to fake it! Here's the link so you can check it out: <http://gizmodo.com/5977205/why-the-moon-landings-could-have-never-ever-been-faked-the-definitive-proof/+jesusdiaz>

But possibly the most dangerous conspiracy of denial is the refusal to believe that climate change is real, and that human activities are contributing to it. If people can convince themselves that climate change isn't happening then they can excuse themselves from having to do anything about it... and consequently they don't do anything about it. And yet climate change is one challenge that will require all of us to make changes to how we live our lives, as individuals, as corporations, and as nations. It's pointless persuading people to change to electric cars if that electricity is generated from dirty fossil fuels such as coal! Even people who consider themselves "green" need to change their thinking in some areas, notably where their electricity comes from (opening their minds to the idea that nuclear energy might be a valid option would be a good start).

And everything else... The idea that unlimited economic growth is possible in a world of finite resources is patently ridiculous, so why is it so highly valued? As for unregulated population growth... that is obviously not sustainable, not while we inhabit only one planet. Which is one reason why we need science fiction; not just to define the nature of the apocalypse, but to suggest an alternative; the conquest of the final frontier, and the possibility of human expansion into infinite space.

Jacqui Smith, Editor

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by
Jacqui
Smith

Nuclear Winter or Carbon Summer?

The field of science fiction and fantasy has often seen the Apocalypse arriving in various guises. Often destruction has come from alien invaders, from H.G. Wells' Martians to the invaders of *Independence Day* and beyond. Sometimes the destructive force has been celestial impact (in written sf in *Lucifer's Hammer* by Niven and Pournelle, and on screen in *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon*), and sometimes it's come from the Earth itself (several recent novels have seen the Yellowstone supervolcano erupting).

From the genesis of nuclear weapons at the end of World War Two until the end of the Cold War, many authors considered the question of how our own technology could bring about the end of the world. Some stories, from *On The Beach* to *The War Game* to *The Day After*, were morality plays that indicated why it shouldn't happen; others, like *Fail Safe* and *Red Alert* by Peter George, filmed as *Dr Strangelove*, were cautionary tales that warned exactly how it could happen. (Although a black comedy, the general assessment of the experts is that *Dr Strangelove* is one of the most technically accurate depictions of how a nuclear war could have occurred.)

Although *The Day After* is credited with helping end the Cold War by raising awareness of the horrors of nuclear war throughout Eighties America, all the way up to the Reagan White House, the depiction of the physical effects of nuclear weapons is now known to be somewhat inaccurate, as it predates the nuclear winter model that Carl Sagan and several of his colleagues worked out in the mid-eighties. Although later projections suggested more of a nuclear autumn than a nuclear winter, the scientific consensus remains that the ash from multiple nuclear detonations would reduce sunlight reaching Earth's surface and initiate an era of global cooling.

Although in the post-Cold War world, the likelihood of nuclear war has been reduced (although not necessarily eliminated entirely), available evidence suggests that human technology may be leading to a different kind of Armageddon, that's been building up almost imperceptibly over the course of the Industrial Revolution. The increase in carbon dioxide, and the contamination of our water, soil and atmosphere with various toxins from centuries of fossil fuel burning, have had sufficient impact that some researchers are suggesting that the cost of industrial civilisation may be a loss of biodiversity extensive enough to constitute the sixth great extinction event in the Earth's history. What we're doing to the world we live in could be as destructive as the Cretaceous mass extinction that ended the dinosaurs' era, or even the most destructive event of all; the Permian mass extinction when over ninety per cent of the species then living on Earth disappeared.

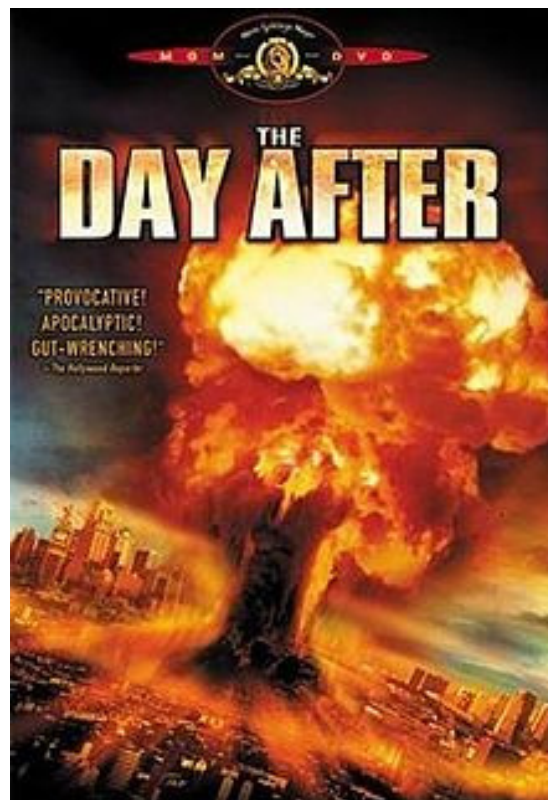
Ironically, the eco-catastrophe that now seems to be the most likely means for global devastation to arrive seems to be the possibility least explored by sf writers. Although a few novels have discussed possible ecological disasters, and there's been a bit of an increase in stories of that theme as the problem becomes more evident, other means

of destruction that make for more compelling storytelling have usually drawn the most attention.

Even though the problems of global warming are serious, they may not be insurmountable. Perhaps we've reached a tipping point where the world's survival will be a process of adaptation to increased temperatures, rather than stopping or reversing warming (the acidification of the seas from dissolved carbon dioxide may already have affected enough coral reefs to bring about major food-chain collapse), but that doesn't mean humanity can't find ways to preserve the ecosystem in a post-warming world. Although there are many voices of climate change denial funded by the fossil fuel industry, there are still many others who are aware of the problems and are taking action, from across the political spectrum. Throughout the world there are some 'blue-greens' on the political right who, although conservative in other areas, still recognise environmental problems and are willing to tackle them. Perhaps even the free market will have a part to play in the process, if green industries can be proven to be profitable.

Although the SF community may not have paid much attention to environmental issues in the past, that doesn't mean we can't contribute to resolving the problem now. Along with everyone else, we can make a contribution, even if it's only a small one as individuals or small groups, by taking steps to reduce our consumption and support initiatives to move beyond fossil fuels and otherwise clean up the environment. Perhaps, if the whole world has the courage to address the problem, a time will come when the prospect of destruction from a 'carbon summer' will fade into history alongside the prospect of a nuclear winter. Still, no doubt the sf writers of the future will find other stories to tell about how the world might end...

Alan Parker, President, Stella Nova



by
Alan
Parker

CONCLAVE 2



Opening Ceremony

Guests of Honour
Lyn McConchie
Dave Freer
Paul Scoones
helping me cut the cake!



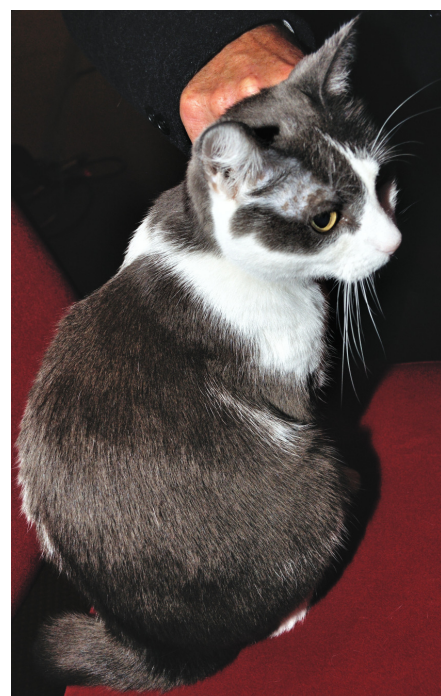
Dave Freer GoH Speech



Just an SF Minute....
(Yes, I was thinking hard, okay?)

Steve quietly reading....

GM the Hotel Cat, gets a pat from Dave Freer during the Banquet!

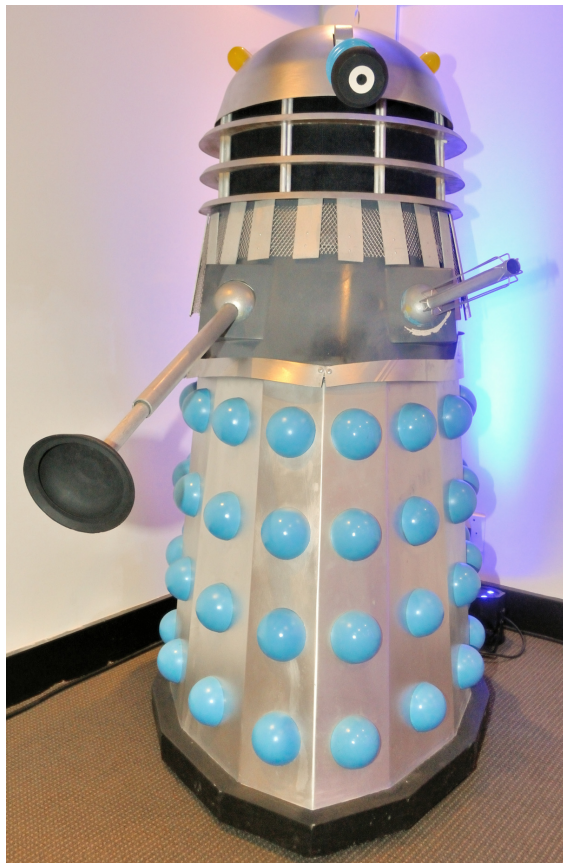


Text
by
Jacqui
Smith

Pictures
by
Keith
Smith



Masquerade Winners



You know it's an SF convention when there's a Dalek in the corner

CONCLAVE 2



Closing Ceremony

Wherein I handed over the hat to Andrew!

Lynelle and
Norman announce
the Sir Julius
Vogel Awards



SJV Award
Winners



Sir Julius Vogel Award Results 2014

Professional Awards

Best Novel:

Heartwood

by Freya Robertson

Best Youth Novel:

Raven Flight

by Juliet Marillier

Best Novella/Novelette:

Cave Fever by Lee Murray

Best Short Story:

By Bone-Light by Juliet Marillier

Best Collected Work:

Baby Teeth edited by Dan Rabarts & Lee Murray

Best Professional Artwork:

Emma Weakley for the cover of *Regeneration: New Zealand Speculative Fiction 2*

Best Dramatic Presentation:

The Almighty Johnsons (Season 3)
South Pacific Films

Best Professional Production/Publication:

Wearable Art Craig Potton Publishing

Fan Awards

Fan Publication:

Phoenixine

Fan Writing:

Tied between:

Alan Parker *Presidential Address* in *Novazine* and
Lynelle Howell *Presidential Sweet / DuhVice* in *Phoenixine*

Fan Artwork:

Carried over until the 2015 awards

Special Award Results

Best New Talent:

Dan Rabarts

Services To Fandom:

The League of Victorian Imagineers

Services To Science Fiction, Fantasy And Horror:

Helen Lowe

Further details may be found here:

www.sffanz.org.nz/sjv/sjvResults-2014.html

The Sky at Night

June 2014

Get yourself to a dark sky site because the Milky Way looks really spectacular this time of year – but don't forget to wrap up warm because it's getting decidedly chilly at night. If you do, you will see the arc of the Milky Way stretching from one side of the sky to the other. The Astronomical Society did that a few weekends ago at the Ramarama School, just off the Southern Motorway. The sky was clear, dark, and absolutely amazing.

The Milky Way, near the highest point, looks like it bulges. That is because we're looking towards the centre of the galaxy. This area is quite rich in objects and even a decent pair of binoculars will reveal many of them. The Milky Way also sweeps through the Southern Cross which is getting close to the zenith by now, and this area is also rich in clusters and patches of nebula. There are just too many to mention, but objects such as the Lagoon Nebula, the Jewel Box and the Eta Carina Nebula can easily be found and observed.

As Scorpio is rising in the east, easily distinguished by its fishhook shape, and the red star Antares in its heart, Gemini and Leo are setting in the west. Between them is the constellation of Virgo. The area between Virgo and Coma Berenices to the north may look quite sparse to the naked eye, but telescopes show that there are hundreds of galaxies in that area. A bit below that is the bright red star Arcturus, denoting the position of the constellation Bootes the Herdsman, sitting on the northern horizon. Just to the right of Bootes is an arc of stars which is Corona Borealis, the Northern Crown.

Planetarywise, Jupiter is very low on the western horizon, but reddish Mars is high in the sky in Virgo, and is very distinctive compared to the whiter shade of Spica. Further along towards Scorpio is the yellowish hue of Saturn in Libra. Saturn is a really good sight in a telescope as the rings are fully tilted.

Getting back to Scorpio, one can see a couple of stellar 'clumps', near the base of the tail, being two open clusters. The brighter one is the Ptolemy Cluster (M7) while the fainter one is the Butterfly Cluster (M6). These are best viewed in low power telescopes or binoculars. A globular cluster, M4, is also in Scorpio and is located near Antares.

Following the line of the Milky Way to the horizon, through the bulge gets you to Sagittarius as well as passing through objects such as the Lagoon Nebula (M8), the Eagle Nebula (M16), the Swan Nebula (M17) and

*M6
Butterfly
Cluster
in
Scorpio*



the Eagle Nebula (M20). Sweeping back the other direction towards Carina and the Southern Cross, you'll find the Jewel Box (NGC4755) just off the left most star of the Cross (the Cross is currently the right way up), the Coal Sack nestled under the Cross, then along to the Southern Pleiades (the top 'star' of the Diamond Cross – IC2602), past the Eta Carina Nebula (NGC3372), and the nearby open cluster NGC3532 – both visible to the naked eye. There is also a quite obvious open cluster just below the long arm of the False Cross. This is NGC2516.

Definitely lots of things to look at.

The Moon in June:

First Quarter—6th June

Full Moon—13th June

Last Quarter—20th June

New Moon—27th June

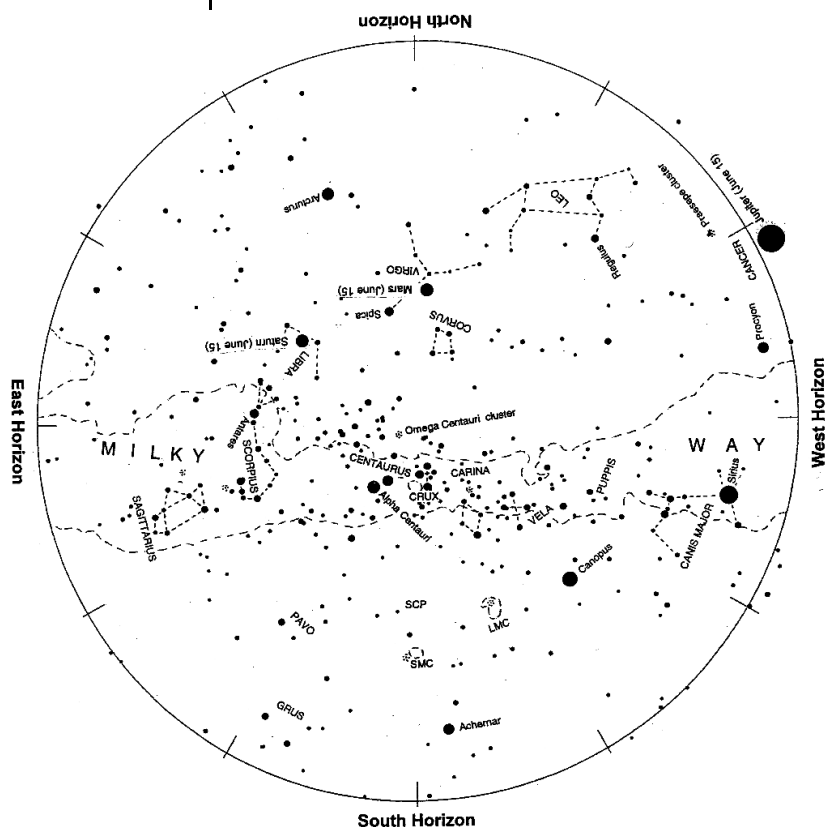
The Moon in July:

First Quarter—5th July

Full Moon—12th July

Last Quarter—19th July

New Moon—27th July



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by
Keith
Smith

O B I T S Obituaries

March 3

William R. Pogue, (aged 84), American astronaut and test pilot who was also an accomplished teacher, public speaker and author.

He was one of the 19 astronauts selected for the Apollo program and served as a member of the astronaut support crews for the Apollo 7, 11 and 14 missions. He was scheduled as Command Module Pilot for the cancelled Apollo 19 mission. Instead he went to Skylab, America's first space station, and was pilot for Skylab 4.



March 4

Jack Kinzler, (aged 94),

American aeronautical engineer, the former chief of the Technical Services Center at NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, known within the agency as Mr. Fix It.. He was awarded the NASA Distinguished Service Medal for creating the solar shield that saved Skylab after the original micrometeoroid shield was lost during launch of the station. His other contributions included the flagstaff and plaques used on the moon for each of the Apollo program moon landings and the special six iron golf club head with which Apollo 14 astronaut Alan Shepard made his two famous golf drives on the moon.

March 4

James Ellis, (aged 82),

Northern Irish actor who became famous as PC Lynch in *Z-Cars*, and went on to play many other roles including that of Peter Warmsly in the *Dr. Who* story *Battlefield*.



March 10

Cynthia Lynn, (aged 76),

Latvian-born American actress best known in the role of Fraulein Helga in the first season of *Hogan's Heroes*.



March 13

Vince McGlone, (aged 97),

New Zealand seaman and television personality who was one of the last survivors of the Battle of the River Plate and New Zealand's oldest naval veteran.

March 13

Hugh Lunghi, (aged 93),

British military interpreter who accompanied Winston Churchill to meet with other world leaders. Lunghi was the first British soldier to enter Hitler's bunker in Berlin in 1945. He kept one volume of *Hitler's Brockhaus Enzyklopädie* from the bunker as a memento!

Compiled
by
Jacqui
Smith

March 16

Mitch Leigh, (aged 86),

American musical composer and producer who won a Tony Award for composing the music for *Man Of La Mancha*. He was also nominated for a Tony Award as the director of the revival of *The King and I*. He received the Contemporary Classics Award from the Songwriter's Hall of Fame for *The Impossible Dream*.



March 17

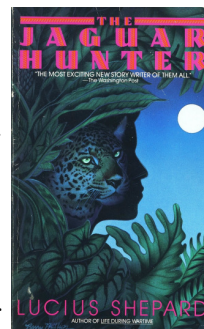
Oswald Morris, (aged 98),

British cinematographer whose career spanned six decades. He devised many stylish effects through the use of diffused and filtered light, fog, and bold colour choices for *Moulin Rouge* (1952), and his innovations drew critical praise from the critics. He received three nominations for the Academy Award for Best Cinematography, for his work on the musicals *Oliver!* (1968), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), and *The Wiz* (1978), and won the award for his work on *Fiddler on the Roof*. He also did the cinematography for *The Dark Crystal*.

March 18

Lucius Shepard, (aged 70),

American science fiction and fantasy author, known for magical realism. In 1985 he won the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer, followed in 1986 with a best novella Nebula Award for his story *R&R*, which later became part of his 1987 novel *Life During Wartime*. His novella *Barnacle Bill the Spacer* won a Hugo in 1993. Two early collections of short stories won the World Fantasy Award for best collection: *The Jaguar Hunter* in 1988 and *The Ends of the Earth Collection* in 1992.



March 21

James Rebhorn, (aged 65),

American character actor of many roles, including that of Albert Nimziki in *Independence Day*.



DAT

March 24

David A. Trampier, (aged 59),

American fantasy artist and writer whose artwork for TSR Inc. illustrated some of the earliest editions of the *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing game, including the cover of the 1st edition AD&D *Players Handbook*. He was also the creator of the Wormy comic strip that ran in *Dragon* magazine for several years.



March 27

Derek Martinus, (aged 82), British television and stage director who directed several Doctor Who serials, *Galaxy 4* (1965), *Mission to the Unknown* (1965), *The Tenth Planet* (1966), *The Evil of the Daleks* (1967), *The Ice Warriors* (1967) and *Spearhead from Space* (1970), the first to be made in colour. Martinus believed the Daleks had to be shot "very carefully and from exactly the right angle". "If you shoot them without care they do look rather tame and ordinary," he explained in an interview for a series fan site. "You had to build up a Dalek's entrance. I used to make them lurk in the shadows." He also directed the Blake's 7 episodes "Trial" and "The Keeper" (both 1979) and over 50 episodes of Z-Cars.

March 28

Lorenzo Semple, Jr., (aged 91), American screenwriter responsible for the campy 1960's Batman, the Flash Gordon movie, and a number of more serious screenplays.

March 30

Kate O'Mara, (aged 74), English actress best known to fans in the role of the Rani in *Doctor Who*.



March 31

Bob Larbey, (aged 79), British comedy scriptwriter who, with John Esmonde gave us such gems as *Please Sir!*, *The Good Life*, and *Ever Decreasing Circles*.

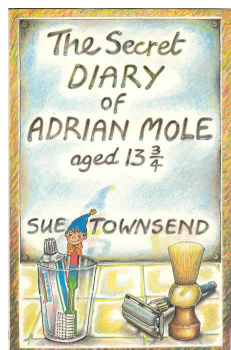


April 6

Mickey Rooney, (aged 93), American actor who appeared in more than 300 films and was one of the last surviving stars of the silent film era, having had one of the longest careers in movie history. He made his film debut as a child actor at the age of six, and his last role will be as Gus in *Night at the Museum 3: Secret of the Tomb* which will not be released until December.

April 10

Sue Townsend, (aged 68), British novelist and playwright, best remembered for the Adrian Mole series, which have since been made into movies.



April 20

Peter Scoones, (aged 76), British underwater photographer known for his work on the TV series *Life on Earth*, *Planet Earth*, and *The Blue Planet*. He was the uncle of Paul Scoones who was one of the Guests of Honour at Conclave 2. Our sincere condolences go to Paul and the family.



April 28

Bruce Woodgate, (aged 74), British-born American aerospace engineer, inventor and astronomer, who worked at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center for forty years. He was the principal investigator of the Space Telescope Imaging Spectrograph (STIS), a spectrograph and camera which was installed on the Hubble Space Telescope in 1997. Astronomers and other scientists have used the STIS to discover an "invisible high-speed collision" near SN 1987A, as well as new planets and black holes.

April 29

Al Feldstein, (aged 88), American writer, editor, and artist, best known for his work at EC Comics on titles including *Weird Science*, *Weird Fantasy* and *Tales from the Crypt*; and from 1956 to 1985, as the editor of the satirical magazine *Mad*. In 2011, he received the *Bram Stoker Award for Lifetime Achievement* from the Horror Writers Association.



Bob Hoskins, (aged 71),

English actor, director, and comedian, best known for playing Cockneys and gangsters. He appeared in films such as *The Long Good Friday* (1980), *Mona Lisa* (1986), and most memorably for SF fans, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988). He received numerous awards for his acting including a best actor BAFTA for *Mona Lisa*.



Compiled
by
Jacqui
Smith

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug Chronicles: Art and Design

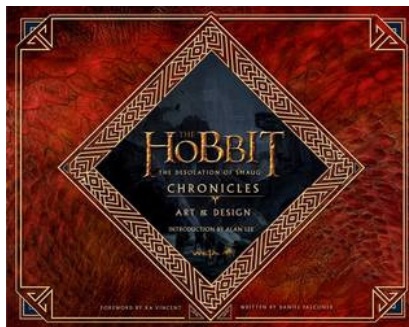
by Daniel Falconer

Published by Harper Design

Supplied by HarperCollins New Zealand

Reviewed by Jan

This book details the meticulous lengths the production team and craftsmen went to in order to tell the story of *The Desolation of Smaug*. The creation of various environments, cultures, creatures, and artefacts, like Beorn's home, the Woodland Realms, and Azog and the Orcs, are explored, telling us why it was envisioned like that and how the effects were achieved. This is a wonderful coffee table book with comprehensive documentation of the incredibly detailed process involved in making this movie. There are thousands of stunning images of the conceptual art involved and photographs supplied by cast and crew. An introduction by the concept art director Alan Lee and foreword by the film's set decorator Ra Vincent are included, along with a fold-out portrait of the Mater of Lake-town played by Stephen Fry. It shows him exactly as he appears in the film and is a unique and special feature of the book.



The Queen of the Tearling

(The Queen of the Tearling #1)

by Erika Johansen

Published by Bantam Press

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jan

Raised in an isolated cottage by foster parents, Kelsea is the future Queen of Tearling. Hidden from enemies to her throne, the Queen's Guard come for her on her 19th birthday to escort her to her city to be crowned. A lot of people want her dead and she is pursued by assassins on the journey, causing the Guard to split up so their trails are divided and harder to pursue. Kelsea then is kidnapped by a masked group who may or may not kill her. Striking a deal with the leader, Fetch, she makes her way to the city. Tearling is poor, its people starving while the aristocracy grow richer, and they live with the threat of the neighbouring country, Mortmense, and its tyrant-ruler, the Red Queen. Tearling has to provide tribute to Mortmense to stop it invading it again and Kelsea, horrified when she finds out what the tribute is, has to decide whether to do the right thing or turn a blind eye for the sake of her country.

The world building is interesting, you think it's a medieval setting then a mention of modern technology is dropped in and you gradually realise its set in the future after an apocalypse and these people had left to build a new land. Having all the doctors and nurses travelling in one ship, which sunk during the Crossing, seems really



rather foolish though.

The characters engage your sympathies and are likeable, except The Red Queen and bad guys like Thorne, and as with Javel, you see why good men do bad things. Kelsea grows up quickly and has to make some hard choices, but does what she feels is right. I was puzzled why the elite Queen's Guard, being hunted by assassins, would build a huge fire in the woods and get drunk though.

There was a lot of exciting action, and a mystery about the magical necklace that guides Kelsea. I look forward to finding out more about its powers and learning why it has a twin. I want to learn who The Red Queen is and see if my theories about the identity of Kelsea's father and who Fetch really is are correct. I was captivated with this book from page one and am eagerly awaiting the rest of the trilogy. A great debut novel from an author who is now on my must-read list. The film rights have been optioned by Warner Bros. Emma Watson will star and the producer worked on the Harry Potter films. Not sure if the beautiful Emma Watson can pull off playing the plain Kelsea.

Ranger's Apprentice 12:

The Royal Ranger

by John Flanagan

Published by Random House

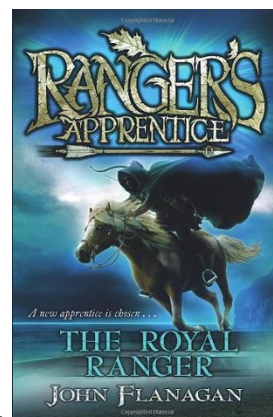
Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

For all that it is the twelfth and last book in a young adult fantasy series, I have to say this read remarkably well. It had a beginning, a middle and an end, and I had little trouble getting into it, without having read the other eleven. The major characters were well-developed, and the author puts words together in an easy flow. The plot is simple enough. Rebellious young princess, instead of being married off like most medieval royal offspring, is apprenticed to a Ranger. Much of the first half of the book revolves around her training and maturation into a civilised human being, learning important lessons about the consequences of her actions – such as getting drunk. The latter half focuses on her first mission as an apprentice, and the rescue of a group of kidnapped kids.

Flanagan's world was easy to get into... perhaps too easy. Too simplistic in too many ways, too fraught with anachronisms, and altogether too derivative. There is a clear lack of imagination and depth in world design when you have "Iberian" slavers speaking what is plainly Spanish, abducting children to be taken to "Socorro". Medieval fantasy worlds don't have restaurants or the germ theory of disease, they don't even have teenagers... that concept is a twentieth century invention. The Rangers are far too reminiscent of the Heralds of Valdemar, right down to the talking horses...

Of course, none of these flaws will prevent the intended audience from loving the book. And it is certainly an enjoyable read, with plenty to commend it. I just happen to think that young people deserve better. (Oh, and for those who are curious about such things, you can find the world map on line at <http://rangersapprentice.com/?entry=true&location=main-map>).



This House is Haunted

by John Boyne

Published by Doubleday

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

I get the distinct impression that in some kind of reaction to much of the anachronism found in modern Victorian fantasy, Boyne has decided to give us a proper Dickensian ghost story. The problem with that is that it has been done before, many times over. I am told that "This House is Haunted" shares many plot elements with Henry James' classic 1898 ghost story "The Turn of the Screw" and given the number of adaptations of said story, it's no wonder that "This House is Haunted" seemed strangely familiar and all too predictable. That said, I must admit that it is very well written, capturing the Victorian turn of phrase much better than many works set in the period. The central character's behaviour does seem a little odd... why doesn't she simply gather up the children and the other inhabitants of Gaudlin Manor and leave? The manor's state of disrepair gives her a plausible reason. Get the place condemned and get out! And why does it take her so long to figure out the identity of the second ghost? I found the novel a tad boring, and the ending unsatisfying, which is a pity because it started so well and had so much potential.



Alliance

The Paladin Prophecy #2

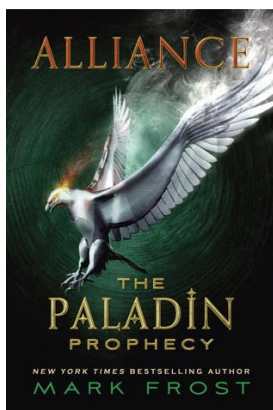
by Mark Frost

Published by Corgi

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

Why does it not surprise me to learn that Frost helped create *Twin Peaks* and the *Fantastic Four* movies? There is certainly something cinematic about his writing, and he has something of a talent for vivid description... but I am getting ahead of myself. First, let's admit that I hadn't read book one of the *Paladin Prophecy*, and that even with a massive data dump near the start, the thing is so damn complex that I had difficulty figuring out what was going on. This introduction certainly grabbed my attention: "Lyle Ogilvy had trouble staying dead" is a great first line, but then the tension and the interest drop rapidly into a confusion of conspiracies. We have the Center, a Hogwarts for genetically enhanced teens, we have a castle with a vast ancient city in a cavern below, we have demonic critters trying to break through and take over the Earth, Native American weirdness, adults with dubious morality and Nazi philosophies... it's all just a bit too much for one story. And some of it really strains the boundaries of credibility. Sometimes more is less, and perhaps that is a lesson for writers too. If you are intrigued by this series, I suggest you go read the first book, *The Paladin Prophecy*, first, it might make more sense.



The Forbidden Library

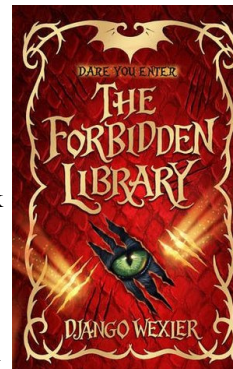
by Django Wexler

Published by Doubleday

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

Apparently Wexler's previous work was a series of sprawling fantasy doorstops called "The Shadow Campaigns" which I am not familiar with. This is a quite different beast, a fantasy novel with a historical setting for older children and younger young adults, and is consequently much shorter and more tightly written. For both of which we can be thankful! His clever trick to establish the period of the setting worked for me, having his characters discussing newspaper articles about earthquakes in New Zealand and Managua, and a war in Spain, although I question whether a younger audience would get it. But then our young heroine discovers the hidden magic in her world and the fun starts. I have to say that Wexler's take on libromancy works really well, better than I've come across before in many ways. His heroine, Alice, is well-realised, though I have my doubts about some of the supporting cast, whose motives are a bit obscure. I do think the choice of name was unwise - we already have our Alice; and we must blame the publisher for the blurb, which is so over-blown that it's truly off-putting. However, overall not a bad read, enjoyable by both children and adults; and with some truly memorable images, like the swarm and the evil wasp fairy! There is a talking cat with plenty of attitude... and it's all set up for a sequel.



The Forever Watch

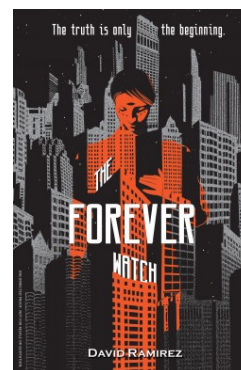
by David Ramirez

Published by Hodder & Stoughton

Supplied by Hatchett NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

On a generation ship, hundreds of years into a thousand year voyage, people are dying, in a very messy fashion. And Hana Dempsey, office worker in City Planning, wants to find the killer... That's how it starts. But that's by no means the only mystery aboard the Noah, and as Hana delves deeper, there are more and more secrets. This book has a plot layered like an onion with enigma upon enigma... There is plenty of action, a healthy dose of noir, and a frisson of horror, but this is primarily science fiction, and would count as hard SF if it wasn't for the heavy dose of psi. Unusually, it is written in the first person present tense, which did take a bit of getting used to. Ramirez writes skilfully and in the main, believably. A few times he pushes the psi powers a bit too far, and I'm not entirely sure about his biology, but I'm not that much of an expert in the field so I'll let it go. This is undoubtedly the most intriguing book I've read for some time. I suspect that most readers will find "The Forever Watch" an engaging, but disturbing read... the questions it asks about the balance between freedom and survival will stay with me for quite a while.



RECONNAISSANCE

#NZNatCon2015



Reconnaissance will be the 36th annual New Zealand National Science Fiction Convention.

Pack your riding gloves and a warm scarf for the views on the promenade deck of the R-101 because we're off to the Sudima Hotel at Rotorua for Easter weekend, 3rd - 6th April 2015.

Guests of Honour:

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Pip Ballantine

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This Month:

BOOK Monday June 23rd
(at Chez Smith)

SPACE Friday July 4th
(venue TBA)

MEETING Wednesday July 16th
(at Chez Smith)

Next Quarterly Meeting:

Wednesday 17th September 2014, 7:30 pm
Auckland Horticultural Centre,
990 Great North Road,
Western Springs



Upcoming Events:

October 24-27 2014

ARMAGEDDON AUCKLAND

ASB Showgrounds, Greenlane, Auckland

April 3rd-6th 2015

Reconnaissance

36th New Zealand National SF Convention
<http://www.timelord2067.com/convention.html>