



Spotted down south—Invasion of the Snow Dalek!

Issue XIX - August 2011

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Musings from Under the Mountain

In the car leaving school today, my son announced that it had been the “best Monday ever”. Of course, the inevitable parental question following a statement like that is: “Why?”. The response was perhaps a little startling—or would have been if I hadn’t been listening to the news. It had been snowing! In Auckland! And Waikowhai Intermediate School had, it seems, been party to this freak meteorological event. In fact, following the announcement that the white stuff outside wasn’t actually hail... but in fact *snow*, the entire school exited their classrooms to experience at first hand the cold wet stuff. Although the radio report said the last time it snowed in Auckland was 1976, other sources insist that the last time was in the 1930’s. Either way, it is most certainly a once-in-a-lifetime event! Not that I saw it...

Of course, if you listen to the doomsayers, this unusual weather is not just a freak of nature, but a portent of worse to come, as climate change send the world’s weather systems into a tailspin. I’m not so sure. I do believe that inadvertent large scale experiments with the only planetary atmosphere we’ve got are a bad idea, and that continuing to pump megatonnes of carbon dioxide into the air probably isn’t a good thing, but it’s very difficult to convince people to stop when the consequences are less than obvious. Maybe they’ll stop when the Maldives go under the waves... and Bangladesh, and Tonga. But hopefully someone will come up with a technological solution before then, or more likely a group of solutions, to what is after all, a technological problem.

Right now, it’s bitterly cold, so there’s still a chance of more snow, and I’m very glad we haven’t planted our seed potatoes yet. That isn’t the only reason. We’ve just been told that they’re bringing in workers to do over the gardens, and we have to get all our vegetables out by Thursday. This explains the six or seven cauliflowers cluttering my kitchen, and the dozens of carrots. I’ve come to the conclusion that supermarket carrots aren’t real carrots, because of their perfect conical symmetry. Real carrots grow in many forms—the trousers form is popular, and you really should see the loving couple... or the wiggle carrot. Makes me wonder how many perfectly edible, but visually imperfect vegetables go to waste. And I have to say that home grown, freshly picked vegetables are especially tasty, even for a confirmed carnivore!

Jacqui Smith

The white stuff at Auckland Zoo!



The View from the Comfy Chair

I’m looking out the window and, you guessed it, I’m looking at clouds again. Seems like every month I’m complaining about clouds, but it’s been rather frustrating for this amateur astrophotographer. I’m actually contemplating subscribing to Internet telescopes in other parts of the globe in order to get pictures. There was one break in the clouds the other day so I decided to take advantage of it as the guys were going to image the Eagle Nebula – the one containing the famous Pillars of Creation that Hubble showed so well (more in the Sky at Night column). We got the telescope set up, aimed at the target, started the focusing run to make sure the image was being sharp, and it was then the clouds returned. To top off the evening, I managed to break the car a bit so I’m looking at this very expensive photo I didn’t get.

The rain is certainly making the garden grow, including the weeds, but we are now eating our own produce. If you ever try growing carrots, make sure the seeds are spaced out when you plant otherwise the carrots get crowded and they don’t have room to get big. Still they’re delicious, and so is the cauliflower. Something to be said for eating something you’ve grown yourself.

Speaking of gardens, I’ve been cleaning up the back of our section. The weeds, including a couple of woolly nightshade trees, are now gone. I even managed to dig out two of the stumps. (Got the pros in to remove the third stump, it was just too difficult). The idea is to put in a selection of fruit trees and make an orchard. We’re also thinking of putting in a raised garden. If anyone in the club is good with laying concrete (for paths) or building brick walls, please let me know. If anyone’s keen on helping clean up the mess we could have a working bee followed by a barbeque. There’s still a lot of work to do and I’d like to be planting this spring.

Not much club news at the moment. Ideas for events and club nights are always welcome. See you all at the next meeting.

Keith Smith
President – Stella Nova

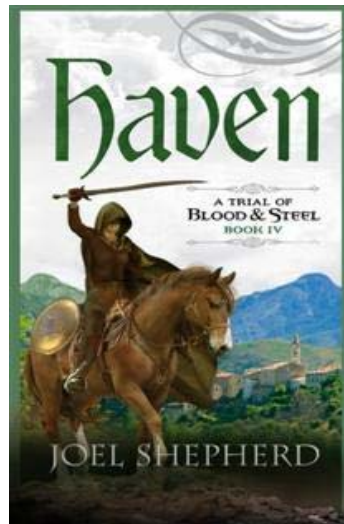
Contents

Issue 19—August 2011

Editorial	2
Presidential Address	2
Book Reviews	3-4
Movie Reviews—HP7 pt2	5
An Evening with Nalini Singh by Simon	6
Name that Star!	7
Sky at Night	8
Obits	9
Uncorked	9
Upcoming Events	10

Haven: A Trial Of Blood And Steel Book IV

by Joel Shepherd
 Published by Orbit
 Supplied by Hatchette
 Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



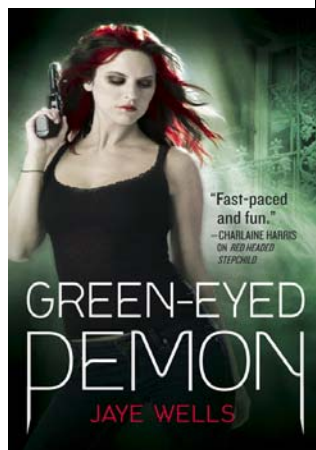
The Lenayin army is defeated from their last battle, though the feudal army of the Regent Balthaar Arosh won the war. The Lenayin king is dead and most of the army is humiliated. They realise they are marching with an army displaying no honour and committing atrocities against both serrin and human. Sasha leads her brother Damon and three quarters of the army of Lenayin to defect and fight for Saalshen. This leaves her brothers, Koenyg and Myklas, with the nobility and the Verenthane fanatics to fight for the Regent. The final battle that will determine the fate of the Bacosh is in Jahnd. A city of human refugees in Saalshen, its serrin hosts have allowed it to build into a major power over the centuries. The mountainous land of Ilduur, Saalshen Bacosh's third province, refuses to come to the aid of its neighbours. Most of Ilduur is against joining the war as the mountains protect them from the battles to the north. For Sasha and her allies to defeat the enemy they need the Ilduurian Steel to fight with them. Sasha leads a delegation south to plead with the Ilduur to send troops.

Sasha has to become a true Lenay warlord to save Saalshen. She must be feared and hated by her enemies, uncompromising and all conquering. Her own people are now insisting that she, and not her brother Damon, should assume the Lenay throne. 'Haven' is the final in the 'A Trial of Blood and Steel' political military fantasy. It is a fitting climax to this fantastic series. The story line is fast-paced and full of action. The armies of both sides meet for an epic battle that will determine the future of the Bacosh.

The only parts I didn't like are the horses getting hurt in battle. The humans chose to fight, whereas the poor horses did not. Apart from that, this is an exciting book to read. It could be read as a standalone, as it covers the series plot well. It is a satisfying to ending to the Saalshen Bacosh war, while leaving loose threads for future stories.

Green Eyed Demon: Sabrina Kane Book 3

by Jaye Wells
 Published by Orbit
 Supplied by Hatchette
 Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



"If I'd learned one thing, it was that killing people who annoyed me generally

created more problems than it solved." Sabina's sister, Maisie, has been kidnapped by their vampire grandmother, Lavinia. As part of the plan to rescue Maisie, Sabina, her demon servant Gighul and Adam Lazarus the mage kidnap Tanith, the vampire Dominae. Though she intended to snatch Persephone to extract information, the Dominae makes a deal with the Queen of the Fairies.

After the mages hear that Lavinia is in New Orleans, Sabina, Adam and Gighul (AKA Team Awesome thanks to Gighul) set off to find them. Adam's aunt arranges for them to stay with voodoo priestess Zenobia and her friend Brooks, a changeling drag queen, so they have extra help on their mission.

The Fae Queen is taking advantage of the Mage's circumstances by establishing dominance over them, while this is happening. She expects all Mages to fall in line like little minions. With everyone seeming to be against them, it's up to the three of them to save Maisie before it is too late. And also to kick Lavinia's ass!

The usual suspects are present, mages, demon servants and vampires. The new characters are very colourful and unique; Mac, a werewolf who reluctantly helps Sabina, Alodius, a human butcher who has a strange clientele, and Brooks, aka Pussy Willow, a cross-dressing faery. The book is funny while being action packed. There is also romance and flirtation, and not just for Sabina. The series is very addictive and I am eagerly awaiting book 4! Jaye Wells knows tells a really good story. If you want a character that never ever changes, don't start this series. Wells lets Sabina grow and not always in a very heroic way. But it's always believable.

Born of Shadows

by Sherrilyn Kenyon
 Published by Piatkus
 Supplied by Hatchette
 Reviewed by C A Hargreaves



Caillen is shocked to find out that he is the son of the Emperor of both Garvon and Exeter systems. Desidearia is the daughter of the Queen of Qillaq, and has a tentative spot in the Queens Guard. They are thrown together when they are framed for killing his father the Emperor and her mother the Queen. They and a few of his friends have to evade the Enforcers while trying to work out who was behind the murders.

This book rocked, it was action packed and full of adventure with enemies coming out of the woodwork. The story was well thought out with well developed characters. It kept me interested the entire time. The only thing I didn't like was that it was too hard to put down.

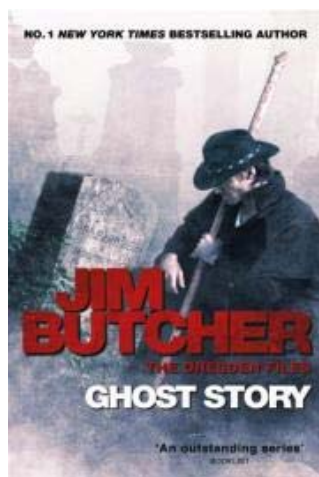
Soulless
An Alexia Tarabotti
Novel
 by Gail Carriger
Published by Orbit,
291pp
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jacqui
Smith



Now, those who know me will know that I have little liking for much of what passes for urban fantasy these days – in particular that dire sub-genre I like to call “vampire schlock”. So, when you find me reading a novel that is described as “supernatural romance” and enjoying it immensely, you can be certain that it’s something special. This IS a supernatural romance, very much so, but it’s also part comedy of manners, and part mystery, with a healthy dash of steampunk. Yes, dear reader, there are vampires, and werewolves, ghosts and zeppelins - and yet Victoria is still very much Regina. The author makes it absolutely clear that this is an alternate history, and unlike so many, she has put some thought into it, and given her world that internal logic essential to good fantasy, be it urban or otherwise. And what’s more, she spins a pretty fine sentence.

It begins when Alexia Tarabotti is accosted by a vampire at a private ball, and inadvertently manages to disanimate him with her parasol. Of course, the vampire should have avoided her altogether, for Alexia was born without a soul. So, the question is where did the hungry, and rather uneducated, vampire come from? Therein begins a tale... and the romance begins when Lord Maccon, Earl of Woolsley, and Alpha of the local werewolves, arrives to investigate...

Ghost Story
Dresden Files Book 14
 by Jim Butcher
Published by Orbit, 477pp
Supplied by Hatchette
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



I’m going to have to begin this review with a spoiler alert: If you’re a fan of the “Dresden Files” and you haven’t read “Changes” yet, then stop reading now (and go and read “Changes” first).

You see, at the end of “Changes”, Dresden was shot dead... and “Ghost Story” is the story of what happens next. Dresden returns to awareness as a ghost in a shadowy version of Chicago, and is sent to haunt the Chicago he knew, in order to find his murderer. Where it is still winter, in May...

What follows is a memorable and haunting tale, told from

the ghost’s point of view. It isn’t nearly as frenetic or violent as “Changes” though not lacking in action. The Corpsetaker is back, she’s a ghost, and she’s after a body, and of course, Dresden has to stop her. But Dresden is severely hampered by his ghostly state, there’s a lot he simply can’t do. No fireballs freely sprayed around the neighbourhood this time. That is just one of the factors that make this book a unique addition to the “Dresden Files”. Another is the unusually philosophical slant to the tale. Butcher surprised me by making a distinction between “soul” and “spirit” that is rare enough in theology, never mind urban fantasy. Then there’s the whole theme of actions and consequences, and what happens when a power vacuum is created. These are deep waters, that few authors care to explore – and yet Butcher somehow manages to do so while maintaining his usual light and entertaining touch. There is a reason why he’s an acknowledged master of urban fantasy, and this book is one of his absolute best.

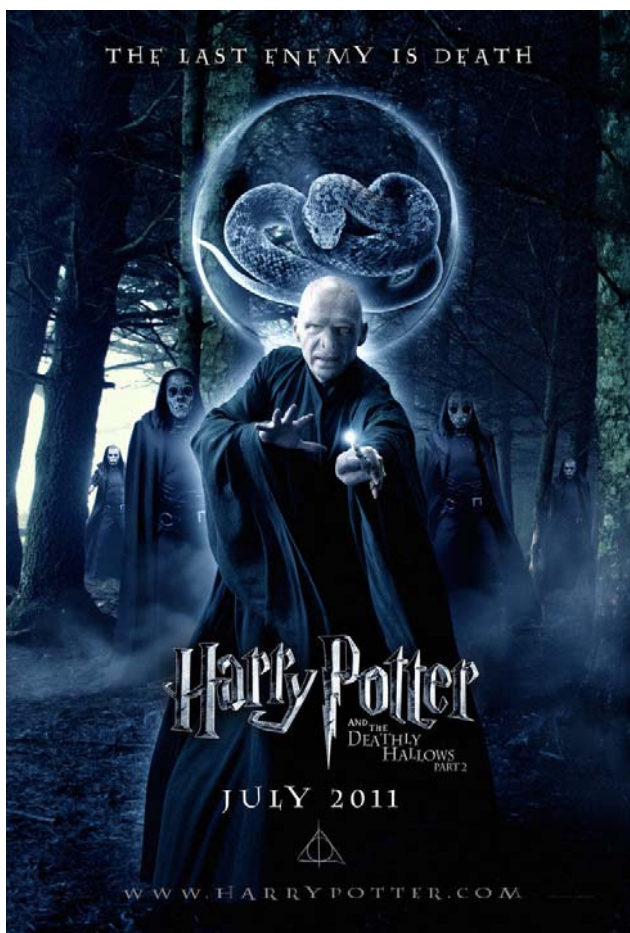
Phoenix Rising
 A Ministry of Peculiar Occurrences Novel
 by Philippa Ballantine & Tee Morris
Published by Harper Voyager,
402 pp
Supplied by Auckland City
Libraries
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



The stack of completed reviews has run out—and the only book I have left to review is the one Steve passed on to me just last night, and I have this gap to fill... so I’ll review a library book. Not just any library book, either, but one by a New Zealand writer, which I expect to see on next year’s SJV ballot (if it’s allowed, being a collaboration and all). Not that the library seems to be aware of this, since the “NZ” sticker is conspicuous by its absence.

This is a straight steampunk novel, no vampires, werewolves or magic here. Just weird science, secret societies, Babbage machines, and a very high zeppelin count (too high for a realistic late Victorian setting, but so very steampunk). There’s also a very strong (perhaps somewhat overdone) New Zealand flavour, even though none of the action occurs here. One of the main characters, Eliza Braun comes from Wellington, and her partner is called Wellington Books! And we all know in which city the real Phoenix Society is based. However, much can be forgiven when the character in question is such a wonderfully sassy, and dare I say, explosive young woman! (Bit of a role reversal there—the librarian is the bloke!)

The story can only be described as a convoluted plot about a convoluted plot to take over the world ... which Eliza and Wellington aren’t supposed to be investigating, but they get mixed up in anyhow. Of course, they must infiltrate the secret society, foil the villains, and do so in great style. It’s all very cleverly done, and nicely written. Damn fine job, chaps! Oh, and thank you for placing your version of “Warehouse 13” in the proper place for such an archive of weird things—London!



Directed by David Yates
 Produced by David Heyman, David Barron
 Screenplay by Steve Kloves
 Based on Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows by J. K. Rowling
 Starring Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Tom Felton, Helena Bonham Carter, Jim Broadbent, Robbie Coltrane, Warwick Davis, Ralph Fiennes, Michael Gambon, Alan Rickman

Review by Maree Pavletich

I can't say I wholly agree with the rational of splitting the final book into two movies.

The first part felt like, well, half a movie and the second effort consequently felt padded. Not something we expect to feel at an HP movie.

Having said that, it was entertaining and lots of fun, with most of the iconic moments of the book mercifully left in. But they didn't have the scene where Professor McGonnigall animates the tables and chairs of Hogwarts and pounds off down the corridor yelling, Charge! (Grumble)

Is It Just Me or do you play "spot the roller-coaster ride" during movies? In Tangled (a surprisingly sensitive retelling of Rapunzel) the ride will consist of the escape through the old mine works; in HP the swooping, soaring, goblin's bank trolley will be a hit with those who love leaving their stomachs at home.

You may have guessed from this that I found the movie a bit disjointed. It had some excellent set pieces, well worth going to see as a closer to ten years, and I do hope the blu-ray has more scenes.

The "nineteen years later" piece at the end, was exactly what it said on the box. But it lacked the humour of the book and seemed rushed. I expected Ron to urge his brainy daughter, Rose, to beat little Scorpius Malfoy in every test and it would have been nice to find out a little more about what our heroes had been doing with themselves in that time – other than having children.

Go see it, the special effects are terrific – we paid the extra to see it in 3D.

Review by Nicolette Lever

The final Harry Potter film was good, dramatic and sometimes genuinely scary to watch, where Harry and friends rush to find and destroy the last Horcruxes that contain pieces of Voldemort's soul – even though a high price may have to be paid.

The trio were good in this, their last film. They have certainly come a long way since the first one. The trip into the depths of Gringotts bank to find a Horcrux was edge-of-the-seat stuff, especially when the trio escape the bank on an albino dragon they have just freed, or rather, Hermione was responsible for freeing (go, girl!). The final battle/seige takes place at Hogwarts and the scene where a magical shield is summoned to protect the castle was impressive special effects, I thought.

The supporting cast is good as always - I thought Helena Bonham-Carter did a good job playing 'Hermione disguised as the evil Bellatrix', especially when she nearly ruins everything by saying something out of character like 'good morning' to someone. Maggie Smith was amazing in this film and wasn't afraid to have a kick ass and take names attitude. Oh, and let's hear it for Neville Longbottom, Action Hero! He gets his turn to shine in this film. Alan Rickman's performance as Severus Snape reminded me again why he's my favourite actor. He looked very much the Evil Headmaster of Evil in the Great Hall scene where he's asking those helping Harry Potter to step forward (I wasn't sure though about his Evil Dark Eyeshadow, I thought it was a bit overdone). The scene where Harry finally learned the secrets and the past of Snape was poignant, though.

Harry faced Voldemort for the last time... but whose idea was it for Harry to grab Voldemort and jump off a tower with them at the start of their final battle? Hmm. Ralph Fiennes as Voldemort was both mesmerising and creepy to watch, though. The final scenes of the film brought things back full circle in a way to the first film and was a fitting way to end the series.

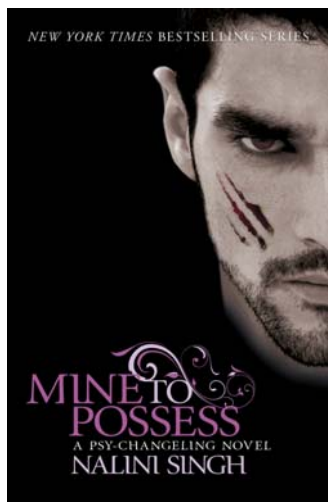
In real life, I recently learnt that Alan Rickman had donated a signed box containing Snape's wand to Ebay Australia, to raise money for two schools that had been damaged in Christchurch's earthquake. I told you he was my favourite actor.

An Evening with Nalini Singh

Two years ago, at the national SF convention in Auckland, I was lucky enough to meet the author Nalini Singh. We were standing in line for something and I failed to recognise the person standing next to me. Working on the assumption that this was a first time convention attendee, I threw caution to the wind and struck up a conversation with this anonymous young woman in an attempt to show that SF fans do have some social skills (NB none is a subset of some) and ease her into the social frenzy that typifies SF conventions. In short, I elected to be the test case nut job if she hadn't worked out what fans were really like. Around about two sentences into the conversation I discovered that I was talking with Nalini Singh, she was there because she is an SF&F fan and I was able to admit that I had read one of her books (the first of the psy-changeling series) and I had wished her well for the Sir Julius Vogel (SJV) awards for which she was a nominee in two categories. As Nalini didn't suddenly remember an urgent appointment elsewhere so I probably passed under the nut job radar.

Roll forward to July this year and I discover, by way of the community newspaper, that Ms Singh is giving a talk at the Dowse art gallery in Lower Hutt (tickets \$5) on a night I am able to attend. Suitably chaperoned and armed with tickets I fronted up to the talk.

The talk was one of a week of events arranged by her non-US publisher (Hachette) to meet her fans within NZ. Her fans will have noticed that her books are now readily available in a wide range of bookstore sporting fancy new covers—half a fashionably stubbled face (Yes, men's faces—after all the genre is paranormal romance not horror), sometimes the left sometimes the right half, with a scratch or three on the cheek.



Many things struck me as the event unfolded. First was the size of the turn out; the venue had been sold out, with around sixty people in attendance. Second was that apart from Nalini, her agent, and my partner, I knew no one else there. Third was the ethnic diversity and gender bias of the audience – there was a very visible ethnic diversity, which is something most SF conventions lack; and the audience was at least ninety per cent female.

After a quick introduction, including mention of Ms Singh winning an SJV, it was time for the star turn. Nalini gave a brief trip report on her travels in the USA (during May and June this year) and her personal highlight of visiting the mausoleums and burial vaults of New Orleans the evening became a question and answer

session. At this point the audience became something I knew for SF conventions past: the raving fan base overjoyed to meet a favourite author as typified by the questions asked.

Where to from here for this series? *A personal limit of about seven books in a series.*

Who is your favourite character? *Only at the time of writing. Then I have to let the characters go for the next project.*

How do I get your out of print books? *There are plans to re-release these.*

Any plans for film or TV series of your works? *None yet, but I think the Archangel series could make a good film. Any advice for new writers? Have more than one project on the go at once. Don't wait for the acceptance/rejection letters before starting your next work.*

Favourite authors? *J D Robb, Ilona Andrews, Meljean Brooks, Thea Harrison, Joss Ware.*

At the close of the question and answer session there was the opportunity to buy her books at a good discount and if one exercised a small amount of patience get that book, and any others one brought along, signed by the author. Not being in the queue for book or signature I availed myself of the finger food on offer and had an interesting conversation on stormwater drainage with my local councillor.

A personal highlight of the evening was being recognised by both Nalini and her agent (whom I thanked at the end of the evening for organising the tour) who separately came up to me and my chaperone and said hello. Excuse me while I bask in the glory of personal recognition of a New York Times bestselling author and a lovely person to boot.



by
Simon
Litten

Quiz—Name That Star!

1. Ford Prefect came from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of what star?
2. Which star is the planned destination of the Robinson family, when they are hijacked in “Lost in Space”?
3. In Larry Niven’s “Known Space”, the planet called We Made It circles what star, also known as Alpha Canis Minoris?
4. What is the home star system of the “Visitors”?
5. The Babylon Five space station orbits the third planet of which star?
6. The planet Caladan, home of Paul Atriedes in the Dune series, is the third world of which star system?
7. Which nearby star is orbited by planet “Aurora” and its two asteroid satellites in Isaac Asimov’s “Foundation” series, by “Anarres” and “Urras” in Ursula K. Le Guin’s “*The Dispossessed*”, and is the capital of the Hegemony of Man in Dan Simmons’ “*Hyperion*”?
8. In the introduction to the *Dragonriders of Pern* books, Pern’s Sun is identified as “Rukbat”. This is the brightest star in which constellation?
9. The planet Beowulf in the Honor Harrington universe circles which star, also featured in the notorious “Spock’s Brain” episode of *Star Trek*?
10. Near which star was there a major battle between the Federation and the Borg in “Best of Both Worlds”?

Those questions formed the first section of the quiz at ConText, and was presented again at the last club meeting. Here are the answers with some commentary.

1. **Betelgeuse**
Also known as Alpha Orionis, because it is sometimes brighter than Rigel, Betelgeuse is a variable Class M red super-giant. Its apparent magnitude varies from 0.2 to 1.2. It’s believed by astronomers to be only 10 million years old, but has evolved rapidly because of its high mass, and is likely to explode as a supernova within the next million years or so. It is huge—over a thousand times the diameter of our sun, but mostly a red-hot near vacuum. Life-bearing planets are not an option, so one can only assume that “somewhere in the vicinity” means somewhere orbiting a nearby star!
2. **Alpha Centauri**
The second nearest star is actually a binary star system, about as far apart as the Sun and Saturn. Alpha Centauri A is a G2 yellow dwarf, and B is a K1 yellow dwarf, so that’s all good. Some models for planetary formation suggest that they could have terrestrial planets—but they may well be too dry for life to evolve because of a likely lack of gas giants (so much for Avatar’s “Pandora”).
3. **Procyon**
Another binary, with Procyon A being a white F5 star, thinking about swelling up to become a red giant in some million of years. It’s not likely to support life, because its white dwarf companion, Procyon B, closing in to 8.9 AU (about the distance of Uranus) is unlikely to allow any stable orbits in the habitable zone (around 2.7 AU from the primary).

4. **Sirius**
The brightest star in the sky is actually just 8.6 light years away. However, its spectral class is A1, and like Procyon it has a white dwarf companion, also orbiting at about the orbit of Uranus. Given that said companion was a red giant only 120 million years ago and the whole system is only around 230 million years old, don’t expect any “Visitors” from Sirius any time soon.
5. **Epsilon Eridani**
It’s 10.5 light years away, is a K2 orange dwarf, and is the closest known star that hosts an orbiting gas giant planet. It is also thought to have two asteroid belts. Whether terrestrial planets (or moons—or space stations) orbit Epsilon Eridani is still unknown, but this star is a good candidate for life.



Epsilon Eridani
(as the artist sees it).

6. **Delta Pavonis**
You’d think that one of the closest sun-like stars (G8 and just under 20 light years away) that definitely isn’t part of a multiple star system would turn up all the time in SF, but such is not the case. It’s also rated as the best SETI target among nearby stars—but it is starting the process of becoming a red giant.
7. **Tau Ceti**
One of the favourite stellar destinations in SF, Tau Ceti, is a more-or-less solitary, stable G8 star, just ten light years away (it may have a dim distant companion). Astronomers have yet to find any gas giants, but there is a good chance of terrestrial planets.
8. **Sagittarius**
Rukbat aka Alpha Sagittarii, is a blue, class B dwarf star, twice as hot as the Sun and considerably more massive. It’s only just reached the main sequence, so it’s probably too young for life.
9. **Sigma Draconis**
Another good choice, Sigma Draconis is a G9 star with no known companions, 18.8 light-years away, and is 7 to 8 billion years old. Plenty of time for any terrestrial planets to evolve life.
10. **Wolf 359**
A red dwarf star in the constellation Leo, Wolf 359 is just 7.8 light years away and the fifth nearest star (after Proxima, Alpha Centauri A&B, and Barnard’s Star). It’s one of the faintest and lowest-mass stars known, a flare star, and less than a billion years old. Have to wonder why the Borg wanted it...

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by
Jacqui
Smith

The Sky at Night – September 2011

Spring is coming, although it doesn't seem so sometimes, but there are daffodils in the parks and the days are definitely getting longer. The Spring equinox is on the 23rd of this month. This is when the path of the Sun crosses the celestial equator making the day and night of equal length.

Last month we concentrated on Scorpius and Sagittarius. This time let's look at a few other objects about. I did mention M7 last month, but recently I was under a darkish sky at Kumeu and found that I could see it with the naked eye as a bright patch near the curve of Scorpius's tail. However, that wasn't our target for that night. What we were hoping to photograph that night was the Eagle Nebula (M16, NGC6611). This is located in the constellation of Serpens and has been made famous by the Hubble photograph of the 'Pillars of Creation'. These pillars can actually be seen in a reasonably sized telescope and it was those we were attempting to get an image of. M16 consists of an open cluster that contains the nebula. It is located 7000 light years away and has an apparent magnitude of 6.1, so it's visible in a good pair of binoculars and small telescopes.

Believe it or not, there are actually 13 constellations that are on the zodiac line, but astrologers conveniently ignore Ophiuchus, the serpent-bearer, extending between Scorpius and Sagittarius. But this is astronomy, so we won't forget this interesting constellation. There are a collection of globular clusters in there, four of them in two pairs of two. M12 and M10 are close together as well as M62 and M19. Two others are M9 and M14. Also in Ophiuchus is Barnard's Star, the fourth nearest star to the Solar System (after the Alpha Centauri binary star system and Proxima Centauri). It's just left of β Ophiuchi, but has a dim apparent magnitude of about nine, so is not visible with the unaided eye.

Heading more to the north and northeast, three bright stars arranged in a large triangle are starting to appear. These are Deneb in Cygnus, Vega in Lyra and Altair in Aquila. They are known as the 'Summer Triangle' in the northern hemisphere. Altair is the southern most one and would be the highest in our skies while Vega skims the northern horizon. Deneb is the last one to rise and also stays close to the northern horizon. To the south, the Southern Cross is now in the three o'clock position and over in the nine o'clock position (facing south) is the bright star Achernar. The Magellanic Clouds are also rising at this point. Canopus is skimming the southern horizon.

Saturn is getting lower and lower in the west now but Jupiter is rising about 10pm. The other planets are rather close to the sun. Mercury and Venus sets in the west just after sunset while Mars rises around 4am and is still low at dawn. Near the end of the month, Saturn and Venus will be close together in the evening sky while Mars will be close to the Pleiades.

Events:

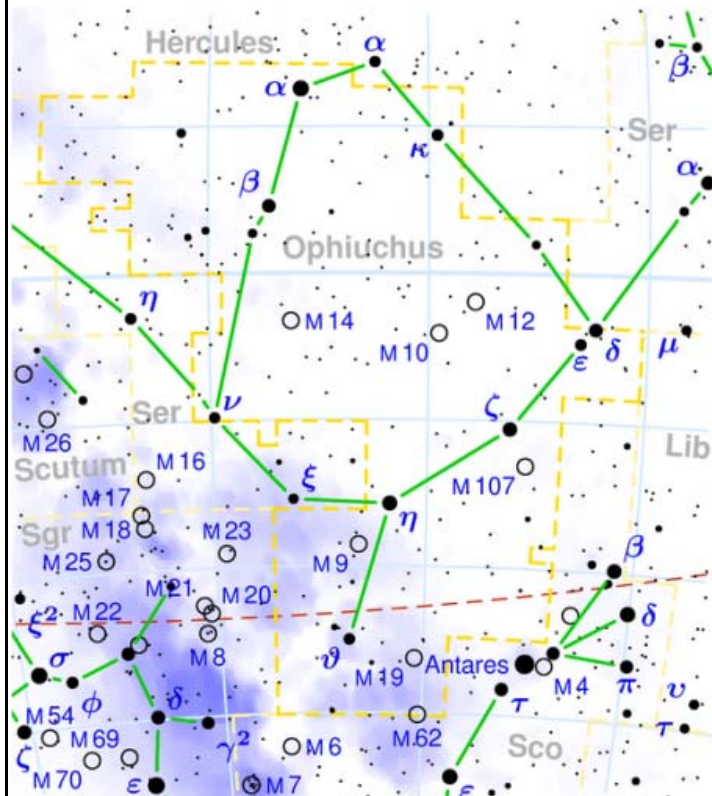
- 5th September – First Quarter Moon
- 12th September – Full Moon
- 21st September – Last Quarter Moon
- 28th September – New Moon

More information can be found at:

- <http://www.astronomy.co.nz/pub/home.asp>
- <http://www.astronomy.org.nz/>
- <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/index.html>



The Eagle Nebula



Ophiuchus

Obits

July 15

Ed Flesh, (aged 79), American art director, inventor of the “Wheel of Fortune” wheel.



July 17

Alex Steinweiss, (aged 94), American graphic designer, inventor of the album cover—making a virtue out of necessity since the new LPs needed a protective sleeve to prevent the grooves being damaged when the discs were stacked.

July 21

Elliot Handler, (aged 95), American businessman, co-founder of Mattel and toy developer, involved with the creation of including Barbie dolls, Creepy Crawlers and Hot Wheels. Barbie was named for his daughter, Barbara.



July 26

Sakyo Komatsu, (aged 80), Japanese science fiction writer, best known for the novels *Japan Sinks* (1973) and *Sayonara Jupiter* (1982), both of which were made into movies. He was GoH at the Nippon 2007 Worldcon.



August 2

Leslie Esdaile Banks, (aged 51), American author of the *Vampire Huntress Legend Series* and numerous other paranormal romances, romance novels and mysteries.

Andrey Kapitsa, (aged 80), Russian geographer and explorer, who discovered and named Lake Vostok, the largest subglacial lake in Antarctica, 4000m beneath the icecap.

August 3

William Sleator, (aged 66), American writer of primarily young adult science fiction titles including *Interstellar Pig* and *The Boy Who Reversed Himself*.



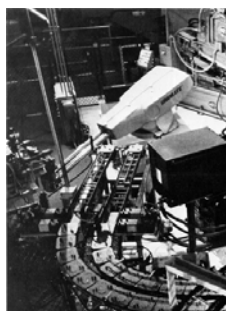
August 7

Nancy Wake, (aged 98), New Zealand-born Australian French Resistance leader—by 1943, she was the Gestapo's most wanted person, with a 5 million-franc price on her head.



August 11

George Devol, (aged 99) American inventor of Unimate, the first industrial robot, which worked on an assembly line for GM, welding die-cast parts onto auto bodies.



Uncorked by Broderick Wells

All right, we’ve just had winter – which means my liquor cabinet needs restocking. It also means that there are a few SF-type films on release at the moment, taking advantage of the North American summer holidays to make a buck. Unfortunately, I have only glimpsed parts of these, so I can’t give full reviews, but they have whet my appetite.

First up would be *Cowboys and Aliens*, starring Daniel Craig and Harrison Ford. It’s based on a graphic novel, but the reviews



suggest that unlike most comic-to-movie adaptations, this one works. Certainly *Empire* liked it, giving it 4 out of 5 stars. It has an amnesiac Daniel Craig fall out of the sky. On his wrist is what appears to be a high tech shackle but turns out to be a weapon capable of taking down the aliens. There are moments of levity in the trailer, but the impression I got was of grit and desperation – more along the lines of *Unforgiven* than *Shane*.

Shrek has generated a spin-off, *Puss ‘n Boots*, but the story of a cat with attitude won’t be hitting the big screen until December. Antonio Banderas is joined by Selma Hayak and Zach Galifianakis in the animated romp. The trailer has been released and it looks like fun. Puss must save the world from two villains who have found a device that will cause its destruction. He is accompanied in this quest by Humpty Dumpty (Galifianakis) and Kitty (Hayak). Unfortunately, the trailer showed little of the villains, but they sure looked nasty.



The First Avenger: Captain America has had variable reviews. Apparently it is visually brilliant, but the ending is a bit naff. This does tend to be one of the problems of comic-to-movie translations. The artistic team is stuck with story developed by the comic and will face ten gazillion disgruntled fans if they step more than a millimetre outside the accepted canon (witness the furore caused by having Stallone take off the trademark **Judge Dredd** helmet any time before the film ended). I’ve seen a few reviews of *Captain America* and some thought it the best thing in years and others thought it pretty average. I enjoyed watching the trailer and think that it would make an okay waste of \$15. The good news is that Josh Wheddon gets to direct the sequel, *The Avengers*, which features Captain America, Iron Man and several others from Marvel’s cinematic catalogue. Indications are they are played by the current movie star.

There, that should keep you happy for a while – you can write your own reviews of *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, *Cars 2* and *Real Steel*.



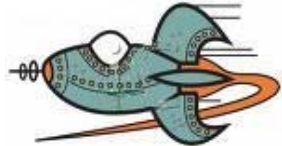
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compiled by Jacqui Smith

UnCONventional 2012

33rd New Zealand
National SF Convention
Auckland
1-4 June 2012



UnCONventional will be held at
“The Spencer On Byron”, located
in the North Shore suburb of
Takapuna.

We can announce that our Fan GOH is Lorain Clark. Lorain is a familiar face behind the registration desk of many a con, and she who works behind the scenes has not escaped notice either!

Our Guests of Honour have yet to be confirmed, but we are negotiating with a kiwi icon or two. We intend to use the convention to showcase the wealth of talent to be found in our own backyard.

www.unconventional.sf.org.nz

Look for us on Facebook.

This year, we have selected two
worthy charities:
WSPA and Breast Cancer NZ.

Both will appreciate your support.



Stella Nova Wiki:

http://stella-nova.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

Nova Zine Back Issues:

<http://stella-nova.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/StellaNova:Novazine-new>

Postal Address:

Stella Nova
PO Box 74-013, Greenlane, Auckland 1543

President:

Keith Smith
president@stella-nova.sf.org.nz

Editor:

Jacqui Smith
editor@stella-nova.sf.org.nz

This Month:

- BOG Saturday 20th August at Chez Smith.
- BOOK Monday 22nd August at Ex-pres Palace.
- SPACE Friday 9th September at Maree’s place.
- CREW Wednesday 14th August at Chez Smith.

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 21st August, 2011 at 7:30pm
Auckland Horticultural Centre,
990 Great North Road, Western Springs



Upcoming Events:

October 28th –31st Armageddon Expo 2011
ASB Showgrounds
<http://www.armageddonexpo.com/nz/>

June 1-4th 2012 UnCONventional 2012
33rd New Zealand National SF Convention
www.unconventional.sf.org.nz