



The Road to Peace on Earth...
(Photo by Keith Smith.)

Issue XXXIII - December 2012

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Musings from Under the Mountain

Christmas has come and gone—and we have a new word to add to our vocabulary... “Geekgasm”. Which I take to mean the sensation experienced when a Geek meets a cool new thing. That aptly describes a number of incidents in 2012. Moments like opening the little box with the Yoda Christmas tree ornament I’d just bought and discovering batteries—it talks, it does! Or the Doctor Who books we’d bought the man child for Christmas. The “Doctionary” is quite excellent, but the “History of the World in 100 objects” is a Whovian’s dream. It’s beautifully presented and full of fascinating bits and pieces from time and space, and from all the doctors, not just the newer ones. There was finding the new edition Star Wars Cookbook (with cookie cutters) at the Scholastic sale. And there was going to see The Hobbit in 3DHR... and that was just December!

Then there was the Total Solar Eclipse... the world gone dark in the morning. Although, of course, this was not a prelude to the end of world. The Mayan calendar turned a page and life went on. For now.

There have been a few geek-downers as well. A number of geek favourites have gone to the stars this year—including such notables as Ray Bradbury, Harry Harrison, Elizabeth Sladen (Sarah Jane), Michael O’Hare (Commander Sinclair in B5), Patrick Moore, Neil Armstrong, and most recently Gerry Anderson. I shall be devoting the January issue to the memory of Mr Supermarionation, so please start writing!

Another recent geek-downer was “The Unofficial Narnia Cookbook” from the library. It should not have been... but while the author may have read the books, she has failed to grasp the context they were written in. Case in point... early in “The Last Battle”, the children share their sandwiches with King Tirian—egg, cheese, and “two with some kind of paste in them”. Now, anyone who grew up in Britain in the post-war years knows what Lewis was talking about—Salisbury spread! Not peanut butter, and certainly not tuna, as the author surmises. Of course, she’s American, and judging by her photos, under 30... That’s not the only error—she gets the Calormene culture all wrong, more Italian than Middle Eastern. I suppose that what’s really bugging me is that I didn’t think of it first, because I’m pretty sure I could have done a better job. Maybe I’m going to have to write an Unofficial Middle Earth cookbook... Oh ghods... according to the web, somebody already has—and judging by the reviews, it’s even worse!
Jacqui, Editor

The View from the Comfy Chair

Here we are near the end of another solar year, having survived the end of the Mayan Calendar. Apocalypse—what? I mean, just cause we have to get a new calendar at the end of each year doesn’t make it a world shattering event. If the Mayan civilisation was still around, I expect they’d have carved another rock by now.

Why do people persist in believing what doomsday prophets are saying? While distrusting scientists (and others) who say there’s nothing calamitous about to happen. It could be a case of ‘better safe than sorry’ and ‘be prepared’. There’s a lot of people out there preparing for the worst. Which seems to involve laying in stocks of supplies, building underground bunkers and building up a large stash of guns and other weapons of minor mass destruction. People were saying that NASA and all the astronomers all over the world were hiding the ‘facts’. As one said, if he knew something was going to happen, he’d be off with his wife and kids rather than trying to debunk the conspiracy. That sort of thing is just too big to hide – same with this planet Nibaru. If it was as big as Mars and going to crash into the earth, we would have seen it coming months ago. And even if it was invisible and/or made of dark matter, its presence would have detected by gravitational perturbations. But people seem to prefer to believe in conspiracy theories. Mind you, I was amused by the cartoons afterwards that implied that the Doctor had stopped the apocalypse from happening, and did he get any thanks? Oh well, I guess a Time Lord’s job is never done. It may be a dirty job, but someone has to do it – and it’s nice to know that the Doctor has our backs. Thanks Doctor – Who-ever you are.

But yeah, enough about the state of the world – it’s too depressing. People seem to be more angry these days, which may explain things like road rage and mass shootings. Maybe it’s time for society to slow down and smell the roses, to remember the simple pleasures of life. Speaking of which, the holidays are coming up—time to relax and plan for the year ahead. So, let’s hear your ideas for the new year.
Keith, Stella Nova President

Contents

Editorial and Presidential Address	2
Total Solar Eclipse	3
Sky at Night	4
Obituaries	5
Patrick Moore	6
Uncorked	7
Quiz (answers on page 9)	7
Reviews	8-11
Notices and Upcoming Events	10

We flew out to Coolangatta at the southern end of Australia's Gold Coast, and caught a bus to the top end where we spent a few days visiting the theme parks. Then we hired a car, and drove to spend the next night at Andrew Ivamy's house in Caboolture, the northernmost suburb of Brisbane. Then we set forth on the long road north towards

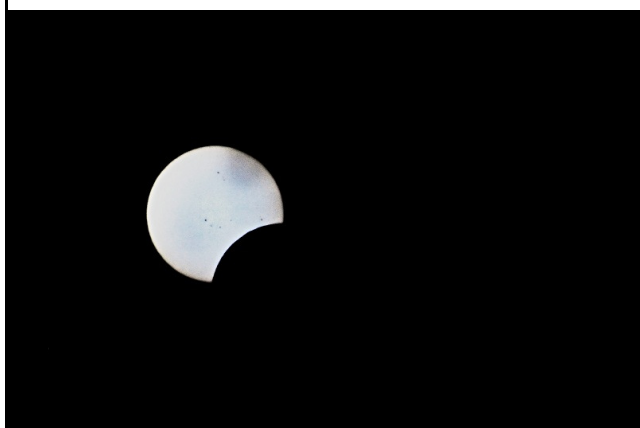
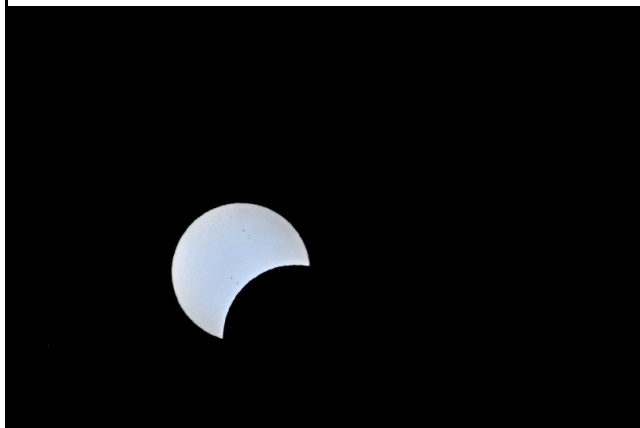
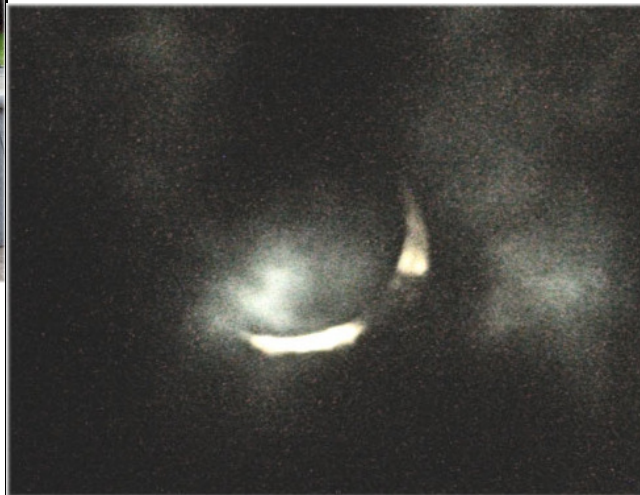
Cairns, reaching Rockhampton just after nightfall. Next morning we realised two things, first we had more time than we had thought, and secondly, we had spent that night just a few hundred metres south of the Tropic of Capricorn. And while we'd crossed the Tropic several times by plane, it was the first time we got to stop and take a photo.



That evening we got to Airlie Beach, off the Whitsundays, where we stayed at a motel right by the lagoon, by the beach. This wasn't an actual lagoon, but a large pool pretending to be a lagoon – the problem is that swimming in the sea isn't an option along the tropical Queensland coast for much of the year on account of the stingers—the poisonous jellyfish that infest those waters during the summer. Next night was in a cabin at a caravan park at Mission Beach, just a few hours south of Cairns. Here we did venture into the sea, because the caravan park had a stinger net to keep the jellies out.

When we got there, Cairns was hot and crowded, and we made the mistake of not checking out the lie of the land, so that when we went down to the waterfront before dawn the next morning for the eclipse, as the sun rose we saw that there was a large and obnoxious cloud sitting on a peninsula which obscured the eastern horizon. We did get a couple of peaks at the sun in partial eclipse, but when totality came, it was obscured by cloud. Nevertheless, a total solar eclipse is a remarkable experience. The world was abruptly plunged into darkness, and we spotted Venus, far higher in the sky than you normally see it. It was quite eerie.

After the event, as Paul and I starting walking back, the clouds cleared and Keith was able to get some clear photos of the Moon moving off the face of the Sun—as you can see on the right. Later that day, we drove up to Port Douglas where we learned that they had had a prime view of the whole show, darn it! That's where we got our total solar eclipse t-shirts—they'd run out in Cairns (and somebody missed out on a great business opportunity). We spent a few more days in Cairns, sweltering in the heat, going to the Zoo, and taking a harbour trip and a cruise out to the Great Barrier Reef (if you wants to swim among the coral and the little fishies the Cook Islands are better, and not so uncomfortably hot!)



S O L A R E C L I P S E

Text by
Jacqui
Smith

Photos by
Keith
(and Paul)
Smith

The Sky at Night – January 2013

We missed a month cause we were in Australia attempting to view the total solar eclipse at Cairns. Unfortunately the day dawned mostly cloudy but we were able to catch glimpses of the partially eclipsed sun in gaps in the cloud. It was disappointing that the moment, literally, of totality was obscured by cloud but it was an eerie sight seeing the sky suddenly go dark as if it was night. Certainly an experience to remember and we're already talking about having another go at another eclipse – probably from the deck of a cruise ship.

Summer is here, although looking at the weather one may find it hard to believe but the summer constellations are back in the evening sky. Orion is the most noticeable – and probably the most well known. Sirius shines brightly in the evening sky although it looks like it's being outshone by a very bright star in Taurus. That bright 'star' is actually Jupiter. A decent set of binoculars or a small telescope is enough to show the four Galilean moons and it is interesting to watch them move around the planet from night to night. Mercury is too close to the sun to be seen. Venus is visible in the morning sky. Mars is very low in the evening sky while Saturn is starting to dominate the morning sky. That means that the only planet prominently placed in the evening sky is Jupiter.

Orion is located in the plane of the Milky Way and hence contains a lot of interesting nebulosity. The Orion Nebula (M42) (the fuzzy star in Orion's sword) is probably the most famous, and is also a spectacular sight in binoculars but there are several others such as the Running Man Nebula (NGC1977) located just above the Orion Nebula, the Flame Nebula (NGC2024), located next to the rightmost belt star and the Horsehead nebula (Barnard 33) which is backlit by IC434. For fans of the TV series 'Andromeda', the Witch Head nebula (IC2118), where a famous battle took place that marked the fall of the original Commonwealth, is located in the nearby constellation of Eridanus and is lit by the star Rigel.

However, for the main subject of this article, the Birds of the Southern Sky, we need to look southwards. These stars weren't part of Ptolemy's

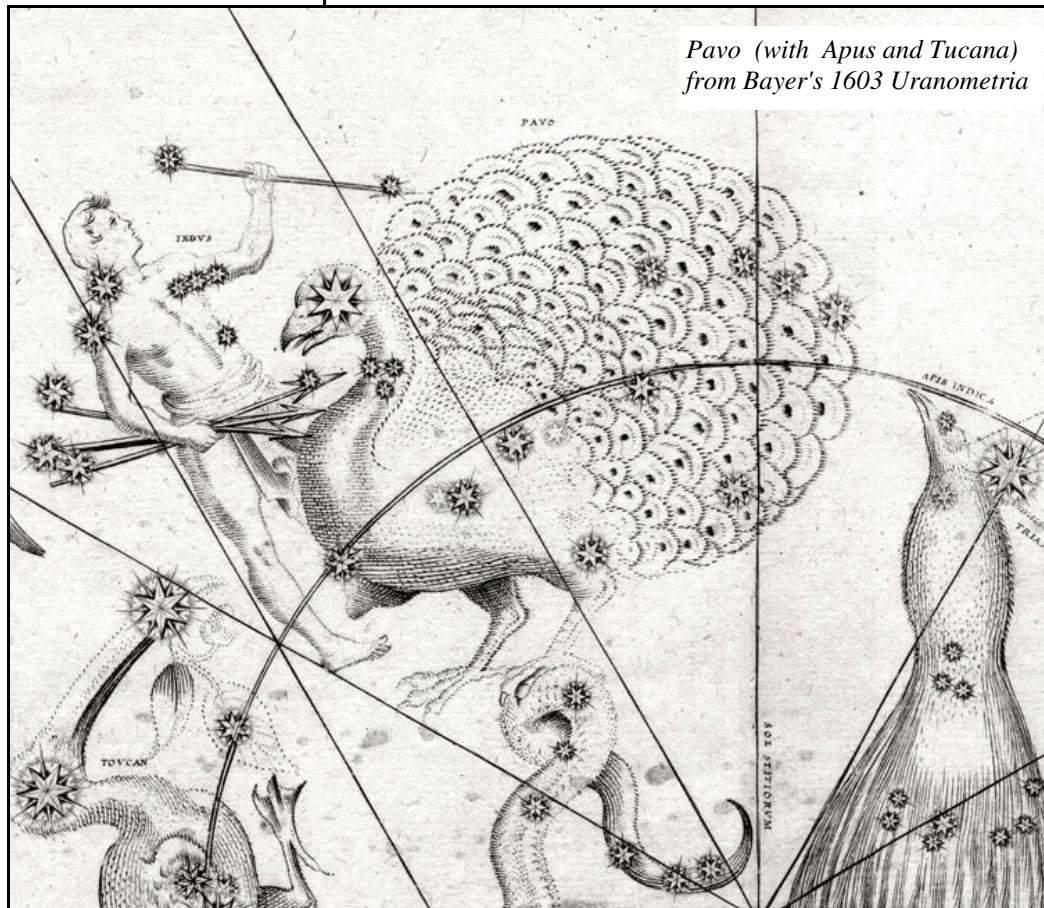
original constellations as they never appeared above the horizon. The southern sky wasn't mapped until the end of the 16th century when observations were made and compiled by Petrus Plancius (1552-1622), a Dutch astronomer and clergyman. He added 12 new constellations which were incorporated in Johann Bayer's sky atlas, the Uranometria, in 1603. In 1612, Plancius attempted to add eight more constellations to the sky, trying to fill in areas with dim skies but only two, Camelopardalis and Monoceros, are recognised by the IAU. Plancius used natural history for his inspiration which is why there are a lot of animals, birds and insects in the southern sky. The birds are: Pavo, (Peacock), Tucana (Toucan), Grus (the Crane), Phoenix and Apus (the Bird of Paradise). Nearly all of them are located on the other side of the southern sky from the Southern Cross and since they are composed of mostly faint stars, you will most likely require a map. Apus is rather small and separated from the others so it is the other four that are grouped together as the Southern Birds.

The only easy way to find this area is to start with Alpha Pavonis which can be located by starting at Alpha Centauri, through the brightest point of the Southern Triangle (the star on the other side of the triangle from Centaurus) and onwards to Alpha Pavonis. Continuing that line onwards will reach a brighter star, Formalhaut, in Pisces Australis. Tucana lies next to the SMC as well as being between Pavo and Phoenix. Meanwhile between Pisces Australis and Tucana is Grus.

Phases of the Moon:

- Last Quarter—5th January
- New Moon—12th January
- First Quarter—19th January
- Full Moon—27th January

*Pavo (with Apus and Tucana)
from Bayer's 1603 Uranometria*



by
Keith
Smith

Obituaries

October 31

Brian Cobby, (aged 83), British actor who was the voice of the speaking clock from 1985 to 2007.

November 6

Clive Dunn, (aged 92), English actor, comedian, singer, artist and author, best known for his role as Lance-Corporal Jack Jones in *Dad's Army*. He also sang the theme song, and even had a number one hit single with the song *Grandad* on his 51st birthday in January 1971.



November 7

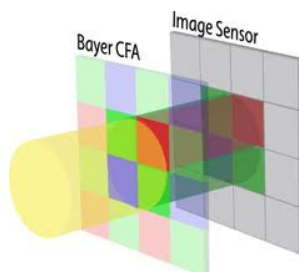
Kevin O'Donnell, Jr., (aged 61), American science fiction author, who was deeply involved with SFWA, and wrote several novels, including the series *The Journeys of McGill Feighan* and *ORA:CLE*.

November 8

Lucille Bliss, (aged 96), American voice actress who voiced the title character of the very first made-for-television cartoon, *Crusader Rabbit*, Smurfette on the popular 1980s cartoon *The Smurfs* and Ms. Bitters on the Nickelodeon animated series *Invader ZIM*.

November 13

Bryce Bayer, (aged 83), American scientist who invented the Bayer filter—an arrangement of RGB filters used to create the image in most modern digital cameras.

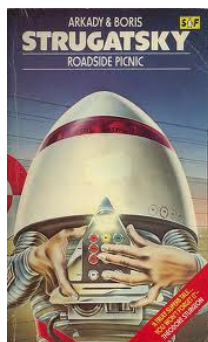


November 17

Yao Defen, (aged 40), Chinese villager who held the record as the world's tallest woman. She stood at 7 ft 8 in tall (2.33 m), weighed 179 kilograms (390 lb), and had size 26 (UK) / 78 (EU) feet.

November 17

Margaret Yorke, (aged 88), British crime fiction writer, creator of Oxford don sleuth Patrick Grant, who first appeared in *Dead in the Morning* (1970), and author of numerous stand-alone novels. She received the CWA Diamond Dagger in 1999.



November 19

Boris Strugatsky, (aged 79), Russian science fiction author, who wrote a number of novels, many of them with his brother Arkady, including such classics as *Noon: 22nd*

Century. Their famous novel *Piknik na obochine* was translated into English as *Roadside Picnic* in 1977, was nominated for a John W. Campbell Award for best science fiction novel of 1978 and won second place

November 23

Larry Hagman, (aged 81), American actor best known for playing ruthless oil baron J. R. Ewing in the 1980s TV soap opera *Dallas*, and befuddled astronaut Major Anthony "Tony" Nelson in the 1960s sitcom *I Dream of Jeannie*.



December 3

Eileen Moran, (aged 60), American visual effects producer, team leader at Weta Digital, who worked on the effects for several movies including *Avatar*, *King Kong*, *District 9*, and all three *Lord of the Rings* movies. She was most recently co-producer of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*.

December 7

William F. House, (aged 89), American physician, developer of the cochlear implant which has given over 200,000 deaf people, many of them children, the ability to hear.

December 8

Rusty Mills, (aged 49), American animator and director, best known for his work on *Animaniacs*, *Pinky and the Brain*, and *The Replacements*. He was a five time Emmy winner, receiving a Primetime Emmy for his work on "A Pinky and the Brain Christmas".



Sir Patrick Moore, (aged 89), British astronomer, broadcaster and lover of cats. He was an inspiration to a great many astronomy geeks and inspired a whole generation to look up at the sky. He also wrote a vast number of popular books.

December 8

Norman Joseph Woodland, (aged 91), American inventor, co-creator of the bar code. Patented in 1949, it was an idea that was years ahead of its time—the first item scanned was a packet of chewing gum in an Ohio supermarket in 1974.

December 14

Kenneth Kendall, (aged 88), British television broadcaster, who apart from reading the news for many years, appeared in a cameo role as a newsreader in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as well as in the Doctor Who serial *The War Machines*.

December 20

Larry L. King, (aged 83), American writer and playwright, best remembered for his 1978 Tony Award-nominated play *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*.

PATRICK MOORE

It came as a bit of a shock when I heard about Sir Patrick Moore's passing. I have been interested in astronomy for as long as I can remember and I found his books on the subject very interesting and an easy read. He was very good at explaining stuff. I must have collected as many books that I could find and afford. One of his books was my Dux prize at High School. I got it signed a while back by the man himself, when came to Auckland several years ago on a lecture tour, late 80's I think. Unfortunately, I don't have a photo of that event.

As well as being a prolific author, he popularised astronomy through his long running monthly series "The Sky At Night". It wasn't screened in New Zealand – we had Peter Reid's 'The Night Sky' instead. The series passed the 700-episode mark recently and had been going for over fifty years – and in all that time he only missed doing one, the July 2004 episode, owing to a bout of near fatal food poisoning from a bad goose egg. Pretty impressive, really! The 'Sky at Night' started broadcasting in April 1957.



It wasn't just the Sky at Night that had Sir Patrick on television. He's appeared in other shows, mostly documentaries, but was also in a few episodes of the Goodies and, lately, the 'Eleventh Hour' episode of Doctor Who that introduced the 11th Doctor.

His other legacy is the Caldwell Catalogue of astronomical objects, which was published in the December 1995 issue of 'Sky and Telescope'. It was supposed to compliment the Messier Catalogue which only covered objects visible from France (where Charles Messier lived) and included objects that Messier missed and those he couldn't see. Like the

Messier Catalogue, it has 109 confirmed objects in it (some say that M102 is an error and Messier's notes do not describe the object that currently bears that designation, but instead he duplicated M101). The reason it is the Caldwell Catalogue and not the Moore Catalogue is that M was already being used for the Messier objects so Patrick used his other surname.

His full name is Sir Patrick Alfred Caldwell-Moore and he was born on the 4th of March 1923. His interest in astronomy began at the age of six and joined the British Astronomical Association at the age of 11. He fought in World War II, after lying about his age, and served in the RAF Bomber Command, from 1940 to 1945, rising to the rank of Flight Lieutenant. An oculist told him that his right eye was weaker than his left so he began wearing his iconic monocle in 1939 at the age of sixteen.

He covered all the Apollo missions for the BBC and was a keen observer of the moon. Asteroid 2602-Moore was named in his honour in 1982. He got his OBE in 1968 which was upgraded to a CBE in 1988. The knighthood was bestowed upon him in 2001 and in the same year he was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society. He even got a BAFTA award in 2002, presented by Buzz Aldrin. He is also an honorary member of the Auckland Astronomical Society.

Unfortunately, worsening arthritis, and an old spinal injury meant that in January 2012 it was reported that he was unable to operate a telescope. He's in the Guinness Book of World Records as being the longest running TV presenter and, from 2004 the Sky at Night was broadcast from his home, as he was unable to travel to the studio owing to the arthritis. Before then he travelled around the world a lot.

He died on the 9th of December 2012 at his home and is survived by his cat, Ptolemy. He never married or had children because his fiancée was killed during the war and he still remembered her.

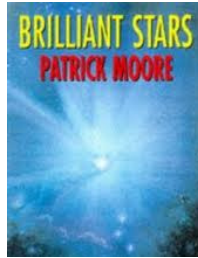
RIP Sir Patrick – you will be missed. Hope the view is really good up there.



by
Keith
Smith

A Brilliant Quiz!

In honour of Sir Patrick Moore, I give you a quiz drawn from his book "Brilliant Stars", a copy of which I gave to Keith for Christmas (in 1998).



1. Sirius (Alpha Canis Majoris) is the brightest star in the night sky. How far is it from Earth?
 - A. 4.4 light years
 - B. 8.7 light years
 - C. 36 light years
 - D. 1200 light years
2. The Maori call the second brightest star Aotahi. What do Europeans call it?
 - A. Canopus.
 - B. Capella.
 - C. Carina.
 - D. Castor.
3. Third brightest is Alpha Centauri. Which constellation do Alpha and Beta Centauri point to?
 - A. Circinus.
 - B. Columba.
 - C. Corvus.
 - D. Crux.
4. The light of the fourth brightest star was used to open an exposition in Chicago in 1933—forty years after its predecessor. Which star is also known as Alpha Boötis?
 - A. Achernar.
 - B. Aldebaran.
 - C. Altair.
 - D. Arcturus.
5. This star makes up the Northern Hemisphere "Summer Triangle" with Deneb and Altair. Which is the fifth brightest star?
 - A. Fomalhaut.
 - B. Regulus
 - C. Spica.
 - D. Vega.
6. The sixth brightest star is the brilliant binary Alpha Auriga or Capella. This name is Latin for which animal?
 - A. Cow.
 - B. Ewe.
 - C. She-goat.
 - D. Swan.
7. The seventh brightest is the blue-white star Rigel. It was mistakenly given which designation?
 - A. α Orionis
 - B. β Orionis
 - C. α Tauri
 - D. β Tauri
8. The eighth brightest star is the Little Dog. What is its formal name?
 - A. Peacock
 - B. Polaris
 - C. Pollux
 - D. Procyon

(Answers on Page 9)

Uncorked by Broderick Wells

Good Lord, Yule has been and gone! Even more impressively, so has New Year. No excuses for tying on a bender. Foiled, I tell you, foiled. But wait – what about using the Julian calendar? That's it – come 13 January, it will once again be 31 December 2012. Woo-hoo! And those of you reading this early will be able to exchange presents and have a right pig-out on 7 Jan, the Julian 25 December. Yes folks, with the right calendar anything is possible. However, those predicting the Mayan Apocalypse have been doubly (or is that quadruply) disappointed. You still had to buy those presents or kiss whichever relative it was you don't like kissing. But who ever said life was meant to be easy.

Grading the students' exam papers took me longer than I wanted – over a day. Most had fairly easy handwriting. The cryptography skills only got called in for a couple of pre-med students (or lawyers). I swear they take advanced classes in scrawl. At least it was in biro, not fountain pen. Now that's a piece of technology that is really rare these days – the old fountain pen. Those of you old enough to remember having "flick fights" with a loaded Schaeffer can join the rest of the old fogeys in the bar. The key phrase is "Try telling that to the young people of today and they won't believe you." Meanwhile the Wells household decamped for Sunny Otaki to visit Mater and frater. Okay, Wells major doesn't live in Otaki, but that is where we celebrated Christmas. But firstly, I had to rectify some shortcomings in the *KüBELSITZER*. I had lost the *Tankdeckel* and as a consequence the *Fahrzeug* was likely to get much reduced mileage. Off to the *Autowerkstatt* to get the requisite part. The buggers spoke English, which certainly helped, as I'd left the German-English *Wörterbuch* at home. As it was, I almost fled in terror when the price of the *Tankdeckel* was mentioned - ~\$90 + GST (that's almost 60€!). Mercifully, the nice man behind the counter let me have it for trade – I gave him a used credit card, he gave me a fuel cap. We both felt a lot better off. And the new one had this lovely little strap thingy on it with a pin on the end, the pin fitting exactly in the hole below the fuel cap. What's more, the pin works – the fuel cap doesn't fall to the ground. Having just been to the Škoda dealer around the corner (on the grounds that a Škoda is exactly the same as my car but in a peasant dress, and therefore the parts should be cheaper, only the scrotes who worked there were as much use as the proverbial appendages on a male bovine), I was surprised at how helpful the Authorised Dealer was. Pity about the price, but this serves me right for having *Quality German Engineering*. Next car could well be a case of Лада Калина, моя машина (That's "Lada Kalina, my car" for those a little challenged by Russian).



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Directed by Peter Jackson
 Produced by Carolynne Cunningham, Zane Weiner
 Fran Walsh, Peter Jackson
 Screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens
 Peter Jackson, Guillermo del Toro
 Based on The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien
 Starring Ian McKellen, Martin Freeman
 Richard Armitage, James Nesbitt
 Ken Stott, Cate Blanchett, Ian Holm
 Christopher Lee, Hugo Weaving
 Elijah Wood, Andy Serkis
 Music by Howard Shore
 Cinematography Andrew Lesnie
 Reviewed by Various

It's "The Hobbit". You know the story—only you don't. Without Tolkien's grandfatherly storytelling narrative, and with the magic of the movies, it's become a lot more grown-up. Has it lost something essential? Probably, but it's gained somewhat too. Radagast, for example, has grown from a seminal mention to a fully realised wizard of the woods. Many aspects of the movie are much as I had imagined them when I first read the book when I was only ten or eleven. In particular, the dwarves' song is hauntingly familiar... but the goblins' mocking lyrics are gone, and they have a new leader, who has a bone to pick with Thorin. Who isn't quite the dwarf I had in mind—not stocky and dwarf-like, unlike the others. As for the technical aspects... we did see it in 3D HFR, and for me it was the matte paintings that suddenly jarred—they looked like weirdly fake landscapes with bits that moved. I suspect that it's a very individual thing, and that time will tell if this is the way of the future. Speaking of time, I have to admit that after two and a half hours I was beginning to wonder at what appropriate moment Jackson was planning to end it! Jacqui

Well, it's not the same as the book, but I can see why the changes were made to make the story flow better and be more interesting to the movie audience. Looked good in 3D although there were a few places I instinctively ducked—flying pinecones on fire came to mind. Keith.

I AM A DWARF AND I'M DIGGING A HOLE,
 DIGGY DIGGY HOLE. I'M DIGGING A HOLE!
 5 Stars ;). Paul Smith

Well, its not as bad as I feared it Could have been. But, then again it's not as GOOD as it might have been.. But it IS a Good movie. I think the arguments over the HFR/3D

are really a matter of perception. I had no problems with either. A friend of mine went to a 2 pm session of the Hobbit and the 6 pm session of Skyfall. He commented on the difference as "like going back to an old CRT TV after watching a 100 MHz HDTV". Plus, as new technology often means that people's perception of what it does differs from what it actually does achieve.

The HFR definitely alleviates any problems with the 3D system. After 2 hours I usually start to get mild eyestrain in any 3D movie, after almost 3 hours in the Hobbit, my eyes were still fine. The movie is never boring, but I do agree that it could stand to lose about 10 to 15 mins of running time. 4 out of 5 from me. Brett

I enjoyed it... It looked a bit orange—I saw it from the side, and it seemed a bit blurry in places. My parents saw it and they liked it (although they were taken in by The Onion's headline... "Bilbo Takes 53 Minutes to Figure Out What to Pack"!) Jon

I was very happy with the first instalment of the Hobbit. I deliberately didn't reread it before I went as I'd heard comment that people thought it was long-winded (considering it only covered the first sixty pages). I thought the treatment of the back-story was excellent. It filled in the gaps visually that your imagination would normally be doing if you were reading the story - a skill that Peter Jackson excels in. The time flew by and the film was over before you knew it. The story paused at a logical point and made good use of the extra material, to turn two films into three. It was lovely to see Frodo at the start, re-visiting the party preparations. I'm looking forward to Episode Two, it's just a long time to wait between drinks.

I went to see the Hobbit in 2D but I do intend to go and see the 3D version at a later stage. I was one of the last people in the theatre as I stayed to see my nephew's name in the credits - does animation work for WETA :-)
 Marie Williams

A bunch of us went to the latest offering from Peter Jackson: *The Hobbit: an Unexpected Journey*. My first impression was "didn't the NZ scenery play its part well." Which is not what I should have thought. I should have been captivated by the translation of book to film, the faithful rendition of a children's story to the big screen and other such blather, all in stunning (and it was very stunning) 3D. Nope. I was admiring the scenery. Jackson, on the other hand, was having a bit of a job juggling between presenting a children's story (JRR wrote it for children, his son Christopher may have been the original intended recipient) and an adult film. Not easy, given the source material. This can be evinced by people complaining about the trolls being to comic and Cockney as a for instance. Unfortunately, this is where sticking to the book produces that sort of thing. Likewise the singing goblins as the Dwarfs get dragged off to the Goblin King.

There was a bit of "spot the Actor", and Sylvester McCoy did an excellent bit of hamming it as a raddled wizard. A nice film, but certainly not wee as the running time was 2 ¾ hours. Bit of a bladder buster. Oddly, I didn't see anyone rushing out during the screening, so the audience had admirable self-control. See it, and see it in 3D. The vertigo is worth it. Stephen Litten

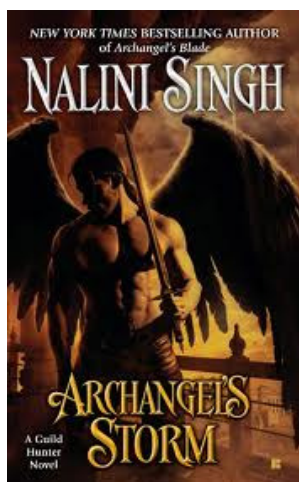
Archangel's Storm

by Nalini Singh

Published by Gollancz

Supplied by Hachette

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



Jason is a spymaster, an angel and one of Raphael's Seven. Very good at remaining unnoticed, he has the ability to merge into shadows.

Flashbacks to a tragic event in his past help you understand why he doesn't trust easily and is remote. The daughter of Nivriti (Neha's sister) and Eris, Mahiya was raised by Neha, the Archangel of India, who saw her as a constant reminder of her husband's betrayal. Used as a whipping boy for centuries, Mahiya has remained strong and managed to fool everyone into underestimating her. Now Eris is dead, Neha has no need to keep her alive to torment him with her presence.

This book takes place directly after Archangel's Blade and it is at the wedding of Dmitri and Honor that Jason discovers that there has been a murder. Eris, the Consort of Neha - Archangel of India, has been savagely murdered. Jason is asked by Neha to investigate - as long as he swears a blood bond to her first. The only available person is Mahiya. Stuck with each other, they begin to investigate Eris's murder, and then more bodies turn up. Along the way, Jason discovers Mahiya has an incredible strength of character, as well as plans of her own.....

A real who-dunnit with lots of steamy scenes, this is an exciting read with strong characters. We also get to follow Dmitri and Honor as she is made. Not my favourite in the Archangel series, which may have something to do with Neha being the Queen of Poisons and snakes are everywhere, this book is an interesting read.

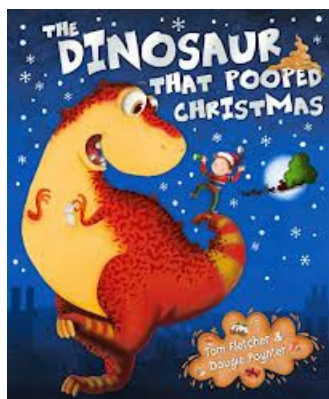
The Dinosaur that Pooped Christmas

by Tom Fletcher & Dougie Poynter

Published by Red Fox

Supplied by Random House

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



It was the night before Christmas and a greedy little boy was lying in bed, wishing for even more toys. So Santa decided to give him a special present.....

A cautionary tale of what wanting too much can get you, it shows how important family is and ends on a heart-warming note when everything turns out ok. The book is composed of cleverly written stanzas with rhyming and a great beat when read aloud. The illustrations are fantastic, colourful and conveying a sense of realism in each scene.

Written by Tom and Dougie from McFly, this is a wonderful, entertaining picture book that's perfect for reading to little ones as well as delighting adults with its

humour and clever illustrations. I highly recommend this book for any children in your life and even if you don't have any

Small Shen

by Kylie Chan

Published by HarperCollins

Supplied by HarperCollins

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth



A Celestial of the Qing Empire, Gold is a child of the Jade Building Block of the World, with the true form of a stone. He is also a mischievous troublemaker, playing jokes on others and not thinking about the

consequences. After tricking a prince and princess he's sent to serve the Tiger Lord, unable to take on human form as a punishment. Released after 100 years service, he ends up in Hong Kong.

Jade is the Dragon princess tricked by Gold; she agrees to his release provided he not come near her unless invited. 100 years later she needs his help and asks for a favour, one that has unintended consequences. For interfering in human matters they are sentenced by the Jade Emperor to serve in human form. They work well together and eventually end up serving the Dark Lord.

Xuan Wu is the First Celestial General, second only to the Jade Emperor. Known as the Dark Lord, he is immensely powerful with two True Forms - a turtle and a snake. He is married to Michelle, a human singer.

Gold and Jade have a new task; protect Michelle from the demons that would use her to control the Dark Lord. There's an interesting story for the plot, with a strong cast of characters and a new twist on demonology. I

liked Michelle at first but my opinion quickly changed. I found her to be silly, hysterical, and mean when she viewed her husband's True Form as monstrous and gets him to promise never to change, which quickly drains his energy. It was also stupid, as draining his energy means he can't protect her as well as if he had his full strength. He should have been able to change, just not around her, and why marry the poor guy if she couldn't accept all of him - though a snake, yuck!

Jumping from the present to background from the past, the story is told partly in cartoon strips and partly in written words. The Shen have a deep background and are part of a series, though this is a standalone story. I didn't like it at first then got pulled into the story. Worth a try if you have never tried graphic novels and are looking for something different.

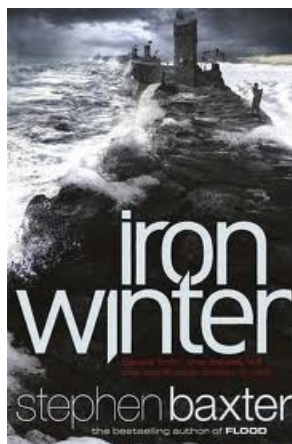
Quiz Answers:

1. B 8.7 light years
2. A Canopus
3. C Crux
4. D Arcturus
5. D Vega
6. C She-goat.
7. B β Orionis
8. D Procyon

Iron Winter

by Stephen Baxter
Published by Gollancz
Supplied by Hatchett
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

It seems that Baxter really does believe in torturing the inhabitants of his alternate history with natural disasters far beyond anything that happened in the actual past. In “Iron Winter”, in the equivalent of our fourteenth century, he ramps up the “Little Ice Age”, bringing in the cool climate change much faster and harder than actually occurred. Extelur rapidly ices up, and millions of people across Europe die or are displaced. The Hatti evacuate and head for Carthage (in this world, Hannibal won, the Romans lost) where they are not exactly welcome... It’s in the midst of this turmoil that Baxter sends one of his central characters, the aging philosopher Pyxeas, all the way from Extelur, across Europe and then along the Silk Road to Cathay, seeking the missing pieces of the puzzle that will explain why the world is cooling. I’m not entirely certain that Baxter’s explanation works to account for the full amount of variation from reality, but it’s credible enough for the story. This is an epic disaster movie of a novel – and I don’t mean that as a criticism. It has a great background, and strong characters, struggling to survive in a world that is rapidly turning hostile. Yes, that sometimes turns them against each other, but the great enemy is not in the least human, it is the implacable force of climate change. Are there lessons to be learned here, as our society faces a similar enemy? Quite possibly, and in any case, this is undoubtedly a good read.



Empty Space

by M. John Harrison
Published by Gollancz
Supplied by Hatchett
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

I have this thing about modern art – I know what I like to look at, and it generally isn’t the stuff that art critics seem to make so much of. And it seems to me that this book is a modern art installation in the form of a science fiction novel. The central image of a corpse, suspended in empty space, slowly fading away, surely belongs in an art gallery. I am sure that the literary critics will love this novel, and I’m fairly sure that many SF readers will find it as difficult to read as I did. It’s disturbing, it’s bleak, and it’s full of genitalia, many of them juvenile (which I have to admit I found very distracting, in an “is this really necessary?” sort of way). I have a sneaking suspicion that I’ve seen one of the other stories in this trilogy previously, but I’m not sure that it matters that much – “Empty Space” is presented as



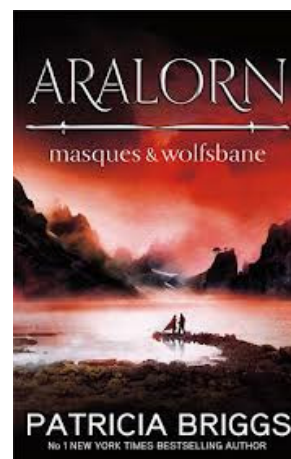
a stand-alone novel, although it clearly draws on “Light”, and “Nova Swing”. There are three main threads in this novel, one set in the near future, focusing on Anna Waterman, whose first husband, Michael Kearney, was a physicist who committed suicide in one of the earlier novels. What was most interesting about her (she’s quite demented in the medical sense) was the world of 2050 she lives in – much like the world we live in, except on the other side of an economic meltdown, beginning when China collapses in 2020. But most of the action takes place farther in the future, somewhere around 4510, in the worlds around the Kefahuchi Tract, a naked singularity hanging in deep space, spitting out quantum weirdness. Fat Antoyne works on the shady side of the law, and just now he’s got a job collecting mort safes and stowing them in the hold of the Nova Swing. Meanwhile, Epstein who is a cop, Gaines the EMC fixer, and the nominally challenged assistant are all variously trying to figure out what is going on and why Toni Reno’s corpse is floating in mid-air... At the end it all collapses together in a strange cross-temporal singularity, something I was starting to anticipate as the only way all this weirdness could end—though it did so abruptly and without quite enough exposition. That said, it is by no coincidence that this book is sub-titled “the Haunting”, because I guarantee it will haunt you...

Aralorn: Masques & Wolfsbane

by Patricia Briggs
Published by Orbit
Supplied by Hachette
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

This is two books – Masques is the first ever book by Patricia Briggs, and has been reprinted and published with it’s the sequel, Wolfsbane. When she went back over a book she wrote 20 years ago, Briggs was horrified and edited it extensively! The explanation of how the books were born is amusing to read.

As the writer’s husband said, the plot has been done before, but this is told in a refreshing, interesting story. I don’t want to give any spoilers so will keep this brief. Aralorn is a noble lady who gave up everything to become a mercenary, travelling the land and having exciting adventures. Having green (natural) magic through her mother’s side, she can shape shift and assume the form of many animals, an advantage when you’re a spy. In Masques, Aralorn is given the mission of gathering information on the powerful Geoffrey ae’Magi, the leader of all wizards. Wolfsbane has the story of her father dying and Aralorn returning to her family home to mourn him. An exciting story with action, adventure, evil mages, disposed kings, and dragons, good vs evil in this fresh new story. Any ages can read this book; Tamora Pierce fans will love it. Hugely enjoyable, these stories are different from her Mercy Thompson and Alpha & Omega series but just as compelling.



Hidden: House of Night Book 10

by PC & Kristen Cast

Published by Atom

Supplied by Hachette

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

Zoey and her circle are at the Redbird farm to recreate events magically, in order to find out how her mother died. After the ritual, during which Dragon is killed, they see the truth of how her mother was killed. Thantos, the High Priestess, is with them and finally sees Nerferat did it as she serves the Darkness now.

She lets the Vampyr High Council know the truth, so they can remove her from power.

Nerferat has sacrificed Dragons cat, Shadowfax, for a spell to break Zoey's circle. Setting the school's barn on fire as a distraction, she makes her escape. Luckily none of the horses are harmed, and the Horse Mistress recognises the new stable hand as her reincarnated true love and saves his life. As Nerferat's evil plans grow, the embers of House of Night must work together to defeat the Darkness, even trusting former enemies like Kalona. I keep reading this series as I really like the concept of a vampire school and the interesting mythology and hope the stories will get better. The books don't hold my interest though, the characters don't seem to grow and there are so many pop culture references it's painful. A character describing an event as humungous? And when something bad happens the first response is to argue about whose fault it is. You want to tell them to grow up. Teens that are fans of this series should like this book but if you're not a fan don't bother reading it.

Daughter of Smoke and Bone

by Laini Taylor

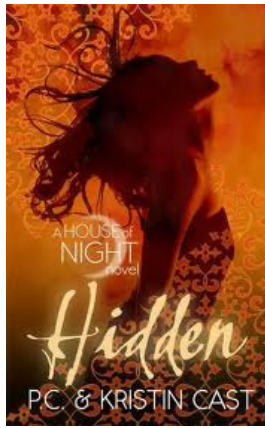
Published by Little, Brown and Company

Supplied by Auckland Libraries

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

Karou is studying art at a high school in Prague, filling her sketchbooks with stories, depicted in drawings of fantastic creatures. She has a puppeteer best friend, a stalker ex-boyfriend who's insanely hot, and the admiration of her peers for her talent. Karou also has naturally bright blue hair, a lot of tattoos, and a necklace of beads that give you one wish. Raised by a family made of chimaeras, Karou used various portals to slip in and out of the human world as a child and now runs errands for them; collecting teeth in exchange for wishes.

Azril is an angel, one of the beautiful men and women who have left irremovable black handprints on doors around the world before vanishing on unseen wings. The doors are portals to other worlds and the work of the devil. The angels are trying to eradicate evil from the world. Once every door is marked they are set alight and



close all the portals. Karou is cut off from her family, stranded and alone. But Azril has seen her, and fascinated, tracks her down.....

The book started off slow for me, only getting interesting toward the middle. The writing is fine, the plot unique and interesting, I just prefer more action and only found it halfway through. This is a story that young adults will appreciate. The first half built the background of Karou and set the scene, making you able to 'see' her. The characters are well formed and her family give you a different perspective, being able to love though evil and doing horrible things. The 'good guys' (angels) aren't so innocent however and have rewritten history. If you want to know what the teeth are used for, keep reading. It's a slow start but gets better. Off to read the sequel Days of Blood and Starlight.

Days of Blood and Starlight

by Laini Taylor

Published by Little, Brown, and Company

Supplied by Hachette

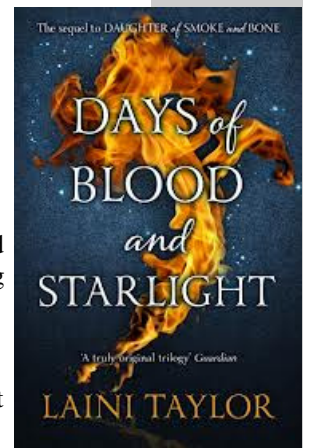
Reviewed by Jan Butterworth

Karou has fled after finding out what happened to Brimstone and her chimaera family. Betrayed by Akiva, she takes refuge in the desert and joins the chimaera revenants as their resurrectionist. She uses the portals to slip between the human world and Eretz, buying supplies for the revenants and gathering teeth for her work. Watched closely by Thiago, the general of the chimaera revenants, her skin crawls whenever he's near as he was the one to order Madrigal's execution. She's viewed as a traitor by most of the soldiers, for loving an angel when she was Madrigal.

Akiva is reunited with Liraz and Hazeal, after choosing Karou over them in Daughter of Smoke and Bone. They find they all want the senseless killing between the seraph and chimaera to stop and try to figure out a way to do it. Meanwhile someone is slaughtering the seraph, and using their bodies to send a message. In the subplot Zuzana finally figures out from Karou's cryptic emails where she is, and with Mik sets off to find her. They succeed and stay with the chimaera in order to help Karou with her work.

I really enjoyed this book, a lot more than the first which I found slow. Now I can see it was a lot of world building and setting the scene. The plot was tightly woven and there was quite a bit of action going on, with the fighting between the beasts and the angels. The political maneuvering was well thought out, with lots of little twists I didn't see coming. Karou is a bit too meek and accepting of being treated like dirt by Thiago I thought. I also felt sorry for Akiva and wished she'd give him a bit of forgiveness.

I recommend you read the first book before this one to get the full backstory, though you can dive right in. The twist at the end was brilliant, though unexpected, and it seems so right for the story. I'm eagerly awaiting the final book in this trilogy, especially after the last lines - Tomorrow they start the apocalypse. Tonight, they let themselves look at each other, just for a little while.



Au Contraire 2013 will be the 34th National Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention, and the second Au Contraire convention.

Where: Wellington

When : 12th to 14th of July 2013
(last weekend of university holidays)

Venue: Quality Hotel,
Upper Cuba Street

**Guests of Honour:
Jennifer Fallon**

Jennifer Fallon is the author of 15 full-length novels, and a number of published short stories. In addition to her own fantasy series - the Demon Child trilogy, the Hythrun Chronicles, the Second Sons trilogy, the Tide Lords quadrilogy, and the Rift Runners series - she has written both a tie-in novel and short fiction for the TV series Stargate SG-1, an official Zorro story for Disney, a novella for the Legends of Australian Fantasy anthology, and has her own superhero - the Violet Valet.



**Fan Guest of Honour:
Anna Klein**

The Fan Guest of Honour for 2013 has been instrumental in the development of both the Auckland and the wider national live action roleplaying community. She has been a driving force behind the New Zealand Live Action Roleplaying Society, a funding and advisory organisation for the hobby. Anna has also led the organisation of Chimera, the original Larp convention in New Zealand.



Charity:
Wellington Women's Refuge



WOMEN'S REFUGE®

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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>

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This Month:

BOOK Monday February 25th
(at Marie Williams')

SPACE At the Beach!
Saturday February 2nd at 4pm
(venue TBA)

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 20th February, 2012, 7:30 pm
Auckland Horticultural Centre,
990 Great North Road,
Western Springs



Upcoming Events:

February 17th-19th **Battlecry 2012**
ASB Stadium, Kohimarama, Auckland.
<http://www.battlecry.co.nz/>

July 12-14th 2013

Au Contraire 2013

34th New Zealand National SF Convention
<http://www.aucontraire.org.nz/index.php>