



Trudi Canavan at UnCONventional  
(Photo by Keith Smith.)

**Issue XXVIII - June 2012**

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## Musings from Under the Mountain

It's been a busy time, what with the convention, the Guild meeting and Paul's fourteenth birthday, all one weekend after the other. Yes, Paul is fourteen now, as tall as me, but I have to say that he's not a typical teenager, and neither are his friends. They are all geeks in the making... you can tell.

His birthday party went off rather well—in spite of the venue for the planned entertainment suffering a major fire in the early hours of the day before! Fortunately, later that same morning GrabOne served up \$8 a head for an hour on driving simulators at VR Racing on Dominion Rd—so after checking that a time was available on the Saturday afternoon, vouchers were grabbed, parents contacted with the new time, and happiness was restored. Gotta love that technology!

Then it was all go on the day. Final tidying up and readying the house, packing the loot bags, and icing the cake. It was in fact a Minecraft cake, with red squares against white fondant icing. The eight young teens inhaled an oven tray sized home-made pizza, a tray of sausage rolls, a bowl-full of cocktail sausages, more than a kilo of roasted breaded chicken nibbles, a tray of oven chips, and sundry nibbles, followed by a big bowl of trifle, a tub of ice cream and that cake! They played with Paul's Wii, his new Scalextric track, and Munchkin. We set up the projector and watched "Puss in Boots" on the 100-inch screen in the living room. Love that technology, too...

Yes, the kids all had a lot of fun, and so did we. Okay, so youthful exuberance resulted in a broken light fitting (kids don't always realise their reach at this age). But these aren't the young teens you see on the news getting into trouble. These are the kids that give you hope that maybe that bright future we SF lovers have always looked forward to might be possible after all.



Oh, and here is the obligatory kitten photo—she's grown some more, and she's off to the vet today to be neutered... No kittens for our little Kit-Kat, she's too small, according to the vet.

Jacqui

## The View from the Comfy Chair

It's all grey and 'orrible out there – so I'm glad I'm in here. However this weather isn't helping getting the garden done – or the concreting. Yep. Going to have a go at laying a concrete path and building a new patio, hopefully in time for BBQs at our place during the summer. There are also the raised gardens (more concrete and mortar) to finish. As Jeremy Clarkson says, "How hard can it be?"

Also before summer, I'd like to get the downstairs lounge done up with new carpet and the sliding door out to the patio replaced. However, as I said, the weather has been rather cold and wet so it's in the chair with a warm laptop and, sometimes, a warm purring cat. Mind you... I got two cats who want to give me a massage before settling – and sometimes that's really annoying. Stargazing around here has also been much of a no-go although the weather did clear enough to see the beginning of the Venus transit. The rest of the day we watched it on the big screen via a live feed from Slooh.

Attendance at the meetings has been down, but I suspect that's just because of the cold and wet weather. Hopefully it'll pick up once Spring arrives. UnConventional went well, at least what I saw did. Looks like Terri did a good job of it – and now Jacqui is talking about Conclave II in 2014. I think that means that every year this decade is being bid for: Au Contraire II for 2013, Conclave II – 2014, Reconnaissance – 2015, I can't remember who was going for 2016, might be Au Contraire III, and I think there was talk about 2017 as well. Still, it'll be good practice for what works and what doesn't work before the 2020 Worldcon bid.

Anyone got ideas for things to do club wise please email them in. I'm likely to forget if told verbally. Probably getting absent-minded in my middle age. Which reminds me, I still have to figure out how to do a Stella Nova club page on Facebook. Better get on to it – along with the other things that should be done like tidying the library and office.

See you at the next event, Keith

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I heard Ray Bradbury speak once—at the LA Con IV, which was my first WorldCon. I even took a photo, though I haven't yet succeeded in finding it, though I have found a similar photo on the internet:



At the time he would have just celebrated his 86th birthday. He spoke quite well, mainly as I recall, of his inspiration in stage magic and such like. I do remember thinking that he held some rather strange ideas about the nature of reality. Perhaps so, but there is no doubt that Ray Bradbury was one of the great writers in twentieth century science fiction and fantasy.

For all that, I can't say I've read all that many of his books. I found his often surrealistic style rather unpleasant to my tastes when I was younger, and I haven't gone back to look at them again. Perhaps I should. I know that I've read "Fahrenheit 451", and some of the short story collections—or at least the short stories contained therein. I do think of "A Sound of Thunder" as one of the most important time travel stories ever (it is also believed to be the most re-published science fiction story up to now). Pity about the movie, which was pretty awful, and missed the point really. There was a rather better, but difficult to find (I haven't seen it) 1966 adaptation of "Fahrenheit 451". However, your best source for Bradbury on screen would have to be "The Ray Bradbury Theater". All 65 episodes were written by Ray Bradbury and many are based on his short stories or novels. Evidence suggests that some of the episodes were filmed right here in Auckland, but I've been unable to find out which. In any case the entire series is available as a boxed set for \$US10 on Amazon.

I can really only make reading suggestions from what others recommend. Certainly the novels, "The Martian Chronicles", "Fahrenheit 451", and "Something Wicked This Way Comes" would be worthwhile, as would the short story collections "The Illustrated Man" and "The Golden Apples of the Sun", and indeed any collection where you happen to find "A Sound of Thunder" which is one of those must-read short stories. Bradbury hated electronic media, so it's hard to find e-copies of his stories, but you can try poking around on <http://raybradbury.ru/library/stories/> (especially if you happen to be Steve and can read Cyrillic).

It is perhaps fitting that a man who once wrote of an unusual event on the planet Venus (in the short story "All Summer in a Day") should die during the recent Transit of Venus, itself a rare event. It will certainly make for an interesting bit of trivia... Which is my cue for a quiz.

## Quiz: Ray Bradbury - Life and Works

1. Ray Bradbury was born in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois, but when he was 14, his family moved to which American city where he was to live most of his life, and would eventually die?
  - A. Las Vegas
  - B. Los Angeles
  - C. Phoenix
  - D. San Francisco
2. Which Ray Bradbury short story collection was his first published book, released in 1947?
  - A. Dark Carnival
  - B. The Golden Apples of the Sun
  - C. The Illustrated Man
  - D. The October Country
3. Which novel was Bradbury referring to when he said, "I've only done one science fiction book"?
  - A. Dandelion Wine
  - B. Fahrenheit 451
  - C. The Martian Chronicles
  - D. Something Wicked This Way Comes
4. 451° F is what Bradbury understood to be the auto-ignition temperature of which material?
  - A. Cotton
  - B. Gasoline
  - C. Magnesium
  - D. Paper
5. Which Bradbury short story is about the demise of a robotically-controlled house?
  - A. There Was an Old Woman, 1944
  - B. There Will Come Soft Rains, 1950
  - C. They Knew What They Wanted, 1954
  - D. The Thing at the Top of the Stairs, 1988
6. What is the name of the creepy carnival in the scary novel "Something Wicked This Way Comes"?
  - A. Coney William's Fearful Festival of Fun
  - B. Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show
  - C. Cooper Devil's Insane Clown Carnival
  - D. Copper Dan's Amazing Amusement Arcadia
7. A crater on the moon was named in honour of Bradbury' by the Apollo 15 crew in 1971. What is it called?
  - A. Carnival Crater
  - B. Dandelion Crater
  - C. Fahrenheit Crater
  - D. Martian Crater
8. Which of the following honours has NOT been awarded to Ray Bradbury?
  - A. An Asteroid named for him
  - B. A Nobel Prize for Literature
  - C. A Retro Hugo award
  - D. A Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame

"There are worse crimes than burning books. One of them is not reading them".—Ray Bradbury

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# The Sky at Night – June 2012

Winter Solstice is, or was by the time you read this, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June. The days are short and the nights are long – and hopefully free of cloud. Starting to dominate the eastern sky in the evening is the distinctive hook shape of Scorpius, the Scorpion, with the bright red star of Antares at its heart. The Maori know it as 'the fishhook of Maui' for obvious reasons.

If the sky is dark enough the viewer will see the Milky Way arcing its way up from Scorpius and onwards through Centaurus and Crux before dropping through Carina. Near the tail of Scorpius a 'knot' of stars can be seen. This is the cluster M7 and nearby is a smaller cluster M6. Both look spectacular through binoculars but adding more magnification actually decreases the effect. Another Messier object, the globular cluster M4 can be found near Antares and M80, another globular cluster can be found between Antares and the scorpion's claws.

Next door to Scorpius, following the Milky Way, is Sagittarius the Archer. Some people identify it as the Teapot, as the brighter stars in that area sort of look like one. The Galactic Center is located in this area of the Milky Way, together with a big black hole. This was detected by the movement of the nearby stars and is located roughly 27,000 light years away. Sagittarius contains quite a lot of interesting telescopic objects such as the Lagoon Nebula (M8), the Omega Nebula (M17) and the Trifid Nebula (M20). M8 and M20 are located very close to each other. The other interesting thing to science fiction readers is that Alpha Sagittarii is the star also known as Rukbat, that Pern revolves around.

High overhead are the two pointers, Alpha and Beta Centauri marking the forelegs of Centaurus. Between Centaurus and Scorpius is the constellation of Lupus the Wolf. Between Scorpio and Sagittarius, another constellation dips its foot into the zodiac – literally. This is Ophiuchus, the serpent bearer. It is depicted holding the constellation Serpens, which is counted as one constellation but is on two halves: Serpens Caput (Serpent's Head) and Serpens Cauda (Serpent's Tail). Ophiuchus contains several star clusters such as M9, M10, M12, M14, M19, M62 and M107. M5, a globular cluster can be found in Serpens, as well as M16, otherwise known as the Eagle Nebula. Technically, M16 refers to the associated star cluster while the nebula itself is catalogued as IC4703 however, both objects are usually collectively known as M16. The Eagle Nebula is the location of the 'Pillars of Creation', made famous by the Hubble Space Telescope.

The Southern Cross is standing straight up this month. The dark area between the leftmost and bottom star is known as the Coal Sack. This is a large, dark, gas cloud that obscures our view of the

stars beyond. Near the left most star is a fainter 'star' which is really an open star cluster known as the 'Jewel Box' (NGC4755).

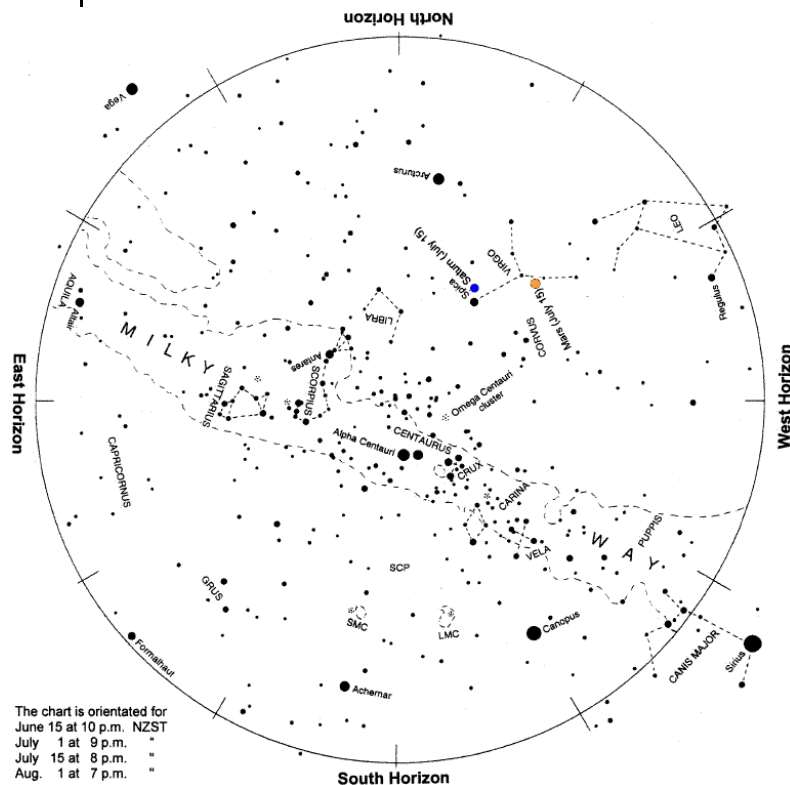
Look at the rightmost pointer star (Beta) and gaze further on up, at a bit more than a right angle to the line of the pointers. You should find another fairly bright star (Gamma). Continue on that same line for the same distance and you should see a fainter point of light. This is Omega Centauri (NGC5139) but it's not a star. It's a globular cluster, a densely packed mass of stars which looks really good in binoculars or a small telescope. It has been theorized that Omega may be the leftover core of a dwarf galaxy that was swallowed by our own.

Further along from the Southern Cross is the Diamond Cross, the top star (the one closest to the Milky Way) is the brightest star in another open cluster known as the Southern Pleiades (IC2602). Near this, deeper into the Milky Way is the nebulosity surrounding the star Eta Carina (NGC3372). It is actually four times larger and brighter than the Orion Nebula.

Saturn and Mars are still visible in the evening sky. Venus, having transited last month is starting to appear in the morning sky along with Jupiter. Both Venus and Jupiter will be lurking close to Aldebaran this month: Venus on the 9<sup>th</sup> and Jupiter on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Mercury starts the month being easy to see in the evening sky but gets lower and lower in the sky as the month proceeds finally disappearing mid-month.

Events:

- Full Moon: 4<sup>th</sup> July
- Last Quarter Moon: 11<sup>th</sup> July
- New Moon: 19<sup>th</sup> July
- First Quarter: 26<sup>th</sup> July



# Obituaries

May 18

**Alan Oakley**, (aged 85), British bicycle designer from Nottingham who worked for "Raleigh Cycles". He designed the company's best selling Chopper bicycle.



May 20

**Eugene Polley**, (aged 96), American engineer, beloved by couch potatoes everywhere for inventing the wireless TV remote control for Zenith electronics in 1955.

May 21

**Otis Clark**, (aged 109), Oldest known survivor of the 1921 Tulsa race riot, who went west to Hollywood and became butler to the stars including Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin, and Joan Crawford. He was ordained as a minister in 1946, and was the oldest living practising evangelist at his death.

May 28

**Matthew Yuricich**, (aged 89), American special effects artist who worked on numerous genre movies including "Forbidden Planet", "Soylent Green", "Young Frankenstein", "Blade Runner", "Ghost Busters" and "2010". Yuricich won the 1976 Academy Special Achievement Award for visual effects in the movie "Logan's Run". He was nominated for the best visual effects Oscar for his work on "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" in 1977.

May 29

**Jim Unger**, (aged 75), English-born Canadian cartoonist best known for the syndicated comic strip "Herman" which ran for 18 years in 600 newspapers in 25 countries.



May 30

**Sir Andrew Huxley**, (aged 94), British physiologist and biophysicist, awarded the 1963 Nobel Prize in Medicine for his experimental and mathematical work with Alan Hodgkin on the basis of nerve action potentials, the electrical impulses that enable the activity of an organism to be coordinated by a central nervous system. His half-brother was the novelist Aldous Huxley.

May 31

**Paul Pietsch**, (aged 100), German Formula One and Grand Prix race car driver, first such to reach the age of 100.

**Paul Sussman**, (aged 44), British journalist (CNN), archaeologist, and author. His novels are set mainly in Egypt, where he worked for many years as a field archaeologist, notably in the Valley

of the Kings. Among other finds, he unearthed the only items of pharaonic jewellery to have been excavated in the Valley since the discovery of Tutankhamun in 1922.



June 2

**Richard Dawson**, (aged 79), English-born American actor best known to NZ audiences for playing Corporal Peter Newkirk on Hogan's Heroes.

June 4

**Stan Jolley**, (aged 86), American art director and production designer, and one of Disneyland's original designers. He left Disney in 1960, but then worked on the iconic "look" of TV shows including "Mister Ed", "Land of the Giants", "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea", "Get Smart", and "MacGyver". He was later nominated for an Academy Award in the category Best Art Direction for the 1985 film "Witness".

June 5

**Ray Bradbury**, (aged 91), American science fiction and fantasy author. Writer of award-winning novels including "Fahrenheit 451", and "Something Wicked This Way Comes", but also known for short stories including "A Sound of Thunder" and as a screenwriter with his own show.



**Caroline John**, (aged 71), British actress best remembered for her role as Liz Shaw in "Doctor Who". She played the companion in 1970 opposite Jon Pertwee's Third Doctor. Shaw was a scientist and understood much of the Doctor's technobabble. This was a problem for the character, since the role of the companion in Doctor Who is to ask the questions!

June 7

**J. Michael Riva**, (aged 63), American production designer who designed sets for "The Goonies", "Lethal Weapon", "Spider-Man 3", and both "Iron Man" movies among others (including the yet-to-be released "Amazing Spiderman"). He was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Art Direction the 1985 film "The Color Purple".

June 13

**Sam T. Beddingfield**, (aged 78), American aerospace engineer who had a long career with NASA during its early manned space programs. He retired from NASA as the deputy director of shuttle operations in November 1985, becoming an advocate for the space program and a frequent commentator on TV during shuttle launches.



Terri and Trudi cut a cake at the Opening Ceremony

**Contest results:**

The short story contest was won by Charlotte Kieft for 'Below' and Sierra Southam's entry 'Smoke' was given a highly commended.

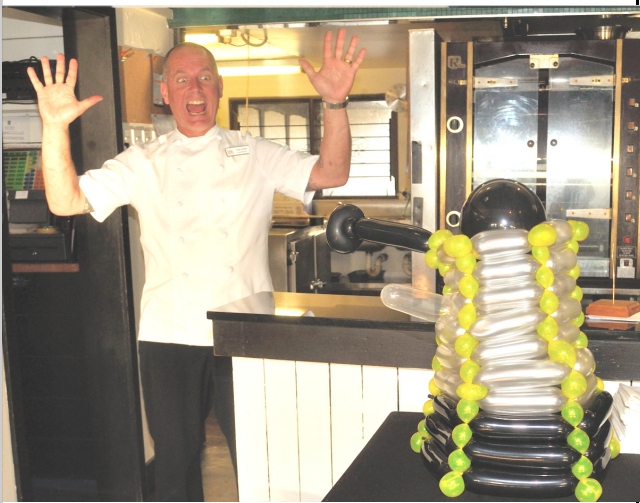
'Leadership' by Josef Hurtubise took the drabble prize, and newcomer Martin Gouric's 'The Head' sculpture was judged the winning art entry. Congratulations to all the winners and thanks to all who entered.

**Costume awards:**

Norman Cates (The Gentleman), Tom Joychild (Zombie) and Judy Fletcher (Medieval Matriarch) hobbled, lurched and walked away with the costume prizes. Bonus extras were awarded to Maree Pavletich for 'volunteering' to be the mummy, Matthew Pavletich for leading the charge against the zombie (piñata) and Brighid Hurtubise for her philosophical take on matters of the supernatural and unnatural!

**And a new award:**

The ConCom of unCONventional decided to award a prize to the one who contributed most to the atmosphere of the con. Congratulations Fir McGrevy-Gilmore (the young lady with all the hall costumes) who was nominated by several con-goers.



A Dalek met a chef... "You will be cooked?!"

Maree was mummified....



Photos by Keith (and Paul) Smith



There was Fan GoH Lorain Clark



There was a hotel cat, called G.M.



There were Panels...



And Andrew had a sign.

# Sir Julius Vogel Award Results 2012

## Professional Awards

### Best Novel:

*Samiha's Song* by Mary Victoria

### Best Youth Novel:

*Battle Of The Birds* by Lee Murray

### Best Novella/Novellette:

*Steam Girl* by Dylan Horrocks

### Best Short Story:

*Frankie And The Netball Clone* by Alicia Ponder

### Best Collected Work:

*Tales For Canterbury*  
edited by Cassie Hart and Anna Caro

### Best Professional Artwork:

Frank Victoria  
for the cover of *Oracle's Fire* by Mary Victoria

### Best Dramatic Presentation:

*The Almighty Johnsons*  
Produced by Simon Bennett for South Pacific Pictures

## Fan Awards

### Fan Publication:

*Phoenixine*

### Fan Writing:

Simon Litten

### Fan Artwork:

Nick Kim

## Special Award Results

### Best New Talent:

K. D. Berry

### Services To Fandom:

Jacqui and Keith Smith

### Services To Science Fiction, Fantasy And Horror:

Ripley Patton



Keith and Jacqui received the SJV for Services to Fandom

## Uncorked

by Broderick Wells

I have the horrible feeling I'm going to have to recycle my acceptance speech from last year – once again I am a bridesmaid and not the bride vis á vis the SJVs. But that was not the worst aspect of the weekend. Like many people at this time of the year, directly after the con I came down with a thunderous cold. A persistent cough and a bit of a snuffle still linger. Naturally, being the kind and generous sort that I am, I've tried to share it with all and sundry. Ms Significant Other, always happy to share everything of mine, took a fair sized helping, as have one or two at work. If they try and give it back I'll have to insist it was a gift and there is no right of return.

But recent event has got me thinking about how heroes are portrayed in SF and Fantasy. You know the sort, they take a massive pounding and ten seconds later they're gallivanting around the countryside oblivious to the pain. This is totally unrealistic. Enter Exhibit A, myself. I give two examples from direct personal experience of pain, and to quote Linus van Pelt, "Pain hurts." Back when I was a high school student I had the misfortune to break a collarbone (let's hear it for being a primate). Generally speaking, it wasn't mind-numbingly painful, although taking my rugby jersey off and putting my school shirt on was an experience I'd rather not repeat. It can be assumed I turned paler than a pale thing and much controlled heavy breathing was undertaken. Nett result – a trip to the hospital and a figure eight bandage to hold the bone in place while it mended. All well and good, right up until the third day of my recovery when I sneezed. The adage "pain is a good teacher" is true – I didn't sneeze again for six months.

The second example is more recent. Living as I do in a First World country, naturally I heat my house with a fire. I'm not talking internal fire Mk I. No, I have the new and improved internal fire Mk III. There's actually a Mk IV version, with piezoelectric fans driven by the heat differential from the fire to help circulate the warmed air, but that's too flash for the likes of old Brodders. I had to cut some firewood, and my neighbour had recently upgraded their pantry, so I had a pile of laminated chipboard to saw. Unfortunately, it had one of those plastic coatings on it that gets just a little slippery when a light coating of sawdust is applied. I discovered this fact when vertical suddenly became horizontal. Not normally a problem, but part of horizontal included a vertical: to whit my saw table heavily disguised as an upended drainpipe. The point of contact was just above the floating ribs. The other point of contact was battery driven saw in the chest, but more on that later. Let us return to my ribs. Now, I'm neither the fittest nor fattest person on the planet, and I do have a reasonably high pain threshold, but for a short while I was rendered speechless. In fact the first word I uttered was "Oooh," and that was about thirty seconds after lift off. Breathing became a subject of active concentration, not least from the parts of the brain devoted to symptom recognition. Mercifully, there was none of the white hot nerve activity I associate with broken bones, nor any disconcerting gurgling. I hadn't landed on the brandy flask I carry in

cold weather. And nor were the lungs punctured. About then I decided I cut enough firewood and it was time to pack everything away. This took slightly longer than normal. I managed to out-pace a passing sloth, but only just. And the wood box was heavy.

Once inside Ms Significant Other wanted to be moved, and I discovered more about where I'd misplaced the reciprocating saw. First time ever that a boob in the chest has hurt. Lifting madam wasn't the most fun manoeuvre either. However, this level of discomfort (mild really, sort of like wearing shoes that a size too small and being out of breath at the same time) palled in comparison to the gymnastics that had to be performed when I chose to get horizontal at the end of the evening. Equally graceless were the movements required to get vertical again when Nature called midway through the night. Turning over was an exercise akin to The King's Speech. Two other things became apparent the next day: coughing was definitely a planned event and limited to one, count it, one cough. Secondly, going up the moderate incline that is Grafton Rd was breathtaking, literally. I was damned glad the lights for Symonds St were against me.

Now, I would translate this set of injuries (one really good hit to the ribs and a blow to the chest, bruises yet to show) as a mild beating. There is no way I'm going to get up, turn my assailants into a pretzel, carry my disabled sidekick half a mile and then go nightclubbing till all hours after one of them. I'm not even going for a nice lie down. Sit down, yes. Lie down, no. I repeat, pain hurts, and it also robs you of some of your vitality. But how many heroes have you seen who can shrug off a beating and carry on like nothing's happened? More than you think, I'll warrant.

Meanwhile, during my enforced idleness, I read a couple of books. First was K. J. Parker's *Shadow*, the first instalment of the *Scavenger* trilogy. A man wakes up after his semiconscious mind has an argument with itself, resulting in amnesia. He becomes a travelling god, embroiled in a conflict between forces of the distant emperor, the emperor's rebellious cousin and raiders. People seem to recognise him, both positively and try and help, and negatively and try and kill him. Frustratingly, no-one

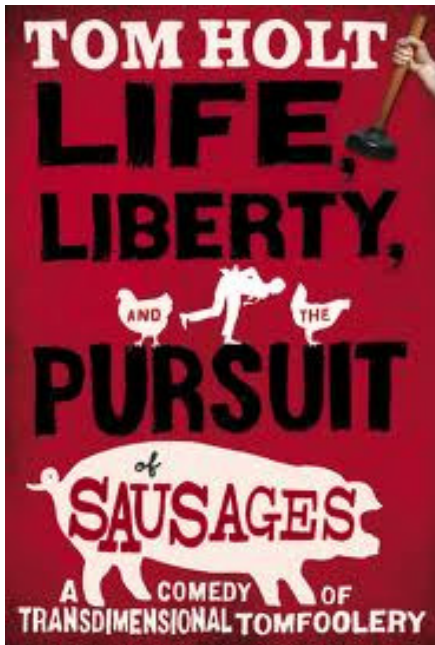
bothers to tell him his name. It's typical Parker, no magic or demi-humans, but with less of manufacturing and more travelling. The story was good enough for me to blow \$10 each for the other two in the trilogy, *Pattern* and *Memory*.





The other was Tom Holt's *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Sausages*. Polly Mayer works as a lawyer for Blue Remembered Hills Developments plc. She has the feeling her office is haunted, as someone is drinking her coffee, rearranging the files on her desk, and making notes in her diary. To complicate life further, the dry cleaners where she took her dress has moved. As in, the entire building has moved, and nobody noticed. Her boss, Mr Huos, has lost a small brass object that may be a ring, or a pencil sharpener, or something else. And two knights are having a continual contest to the death to decide which came first. The problems require the assistance Stanley Gogerty, weirdness consultant, to solve. This is typical Tom Holt. If you like his style, you'll like this book. If you don't, then don't bother reading it.

Amusingly, I found an interview of K. J. Parker by Tom Holt when I was hunting images for this column. Here's the web address: <http://subterraneanpress.com/index.php/magazine/summer-2010/interview-with-k-j-parker-by-tom-holt/> Enjoy.



## DRAGON AGE II

Developer(s) BioWare  
 Publisher(s) Electronic Arts  
 Composer(s) Inon Zur  
 Engine Lycium  
 Reviewed by Brett Peacock

One sentence summary: A great game engine (with caveats), let down by a rushed, buggy and, worst of all, bland game plot. I'm kind of glad that I waited until Dragon Age II appeared in the bargain bins, because after 20 hours or so of playing it the best I can say of it is somewhat underwhelming. The original Dragon Age: Origins & Awakening expansion were very good games (I still have them installed and play them). Dragon Age II however appeared with a blast of trumpets and hype... then sank almost without trace. It's been just a year since release, but I found this copy in a \$25.00 bargain bin. The engine looks very nice and works very well, with a few caveats. (For example, modding is easier but much more limiting without an SDK released. The engine is a upgraded DA I engine, but differs significantly, so DA I tools will not adapt.)

So what IS the problem? After a little digging around on the net I discovered an interview with one of the primary developers who stated that EA (the parent group) insisted on a sequel to Dragon Age being ready within 18 months of the original release...from scratch. Bioware had Dragon Age in the works for almost six years- including writing the "bible" for the Dragon Age universe. They felt it was do-able, but would have liked to have had 24 to 30 months, even so. EA refused and moved the date forwards another 3 months! The result is a buggy game (in the quest workings etc and some aspects of gameplay) and a plot that just lacks the 'Epic' feel of DA: Origins and Awakening.

The plot itself sounds promising, takes place over a 10 or 11 year span, and involve a family escaping from the destruction of Lothering (a major plot point in Origins). But then almost at once you discover that 70 percent of all gameplay takes place in one city, Kirkwall, in the Free Marches, or in the immediately surrounding area of that city. And there is a problem. In DA: O you could explore most of Ferelden, a whole nation, with one major city and several large towns. Kirkwall is only one of several cities referred to in the Free Marches. And while it has a multiplicity of locations, they are seemingly ALL related to the immediate plot, even the merchants. (And there is No MAP! Just a screen for moving around in.)

Then we get to the plot: You have to gain admittance to the city, rise to the nobility and become a "Champion" – All of which is framed by a flashback sequence of an interrogation of one of the main NPCs. (Who tends to exaggerate (and fib) a bit... not a good idea as his interrogator is essentially a Chantry Inquisitor). I'm sorry, but that device is pretty much a cliché, now, and the whole sequence(s) add nothing to player immersion... rather the reverse, in fact. But essentially the biggest blunder is that Bioware (and EA) thought that having a player run around solving quests and getting stronger for TEN WHOLE YEARS constitutes an actual plot.



PC Game  
 Review by  
 Brett  
 Peacock

*Dragon Age II contd.*

There IS an actual main quest there, but most players, like I did, will lose the thread after about 6 hours. It IS that forgettable. The whole effect is that there a host of subplots drowning the main plot out.

Now we get to my main gripe: the BUGS! The rushed development shows in the number and nature of bugs and “oddities”. First oddity: During many major fights and battles, enemy reinforcements arrive. Ordinarily that’s not a huge deal, but these ones DROP OUT OF THE SKY! I kid you not. They don’t arrive at a run, they drop out of the sky, RIGHT NEXT TO YOU!!! Being able to move the viewpoint makes it look even worse: In a cave they drop through solid rock to join in. Then there’s the play bugs. For example: IF you solve a quest out of a-b-c order, that quest becomes impossible to mark as complete. Some locations have several quest markers and you have to decide which one is YOUR current one, choose wrong one and you may mess up another of your important quests – or even the main quest. The next minus point is more subjective: The design changes. And there are a number of these that can be seen as mirrors - good or bad. The Qunari (large warrior race with grey skin) return from DA:O. But now they have big Buffalo-like horns on their head. And they are bigger, over 2.5m, relative to humans. They are still grey skinned, but also now wear Body paint, like Native Americans. Is this Good or Bad? My jury is still out.

Flemeth (the Witch of the Wilds) also makes a return early on in the game, still voiced by Kate Mulgrew (Capt Janeway, ST- Voyager) But where she was a simple peasant looking woman, she is now a Valkyrie! Bad!! VERY BAD!!!! That alone threw me straight out of the world. Flemeth had survived mostly by being a legend – and by being “invisible”. That’s to say, she did not draw attention to herself – she blended into the locals, by looking and acting like them, only revealing herself when push came to shove. The new Flemeth would stand out in ANY environment. That is not a survival trait.

Well, I’ve covered the major minus points of the game – and make no mistake they may prove to be a deal breaker for many of the players out there. What about the positives? The game looks great, even better than DA:O, with a more vibrant colour palette and better rendering of animations and objects. Levels are bigger, but the restricted movement paths seem a little narrower in comparison. Gameplay has been streamlined, largely successfully (with a few niggles) and the Character generation is Superb. But still not perfect – there is still no “Dress me” step, where you should be able to choose optional clothing to your own taste rather than being stuck with the game’s rather bland defaults.

There are still moral choices, but the consequences of them seem to have been “nerfed”. In other words you can try to play an Evil Adrian B’Stard but you’ll end up on the side of the angels anyway. DA:O made you feel every choice in some way, later in the game.

I tried to like this game, but in the end, I have to say it’s something of a misfire, made all the more obvious by

being a sequel to the Origins. I have to be generous though and say it is a solid game, earning about 5 out of 10 for the things it DID do well.

Dragon Age II – 5/10 Stars



DISTINCT RACIAL PHYSIOLOGY IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT STANDARDS OF BEAUTY

## Empire of the Saviours

by A J Dalton

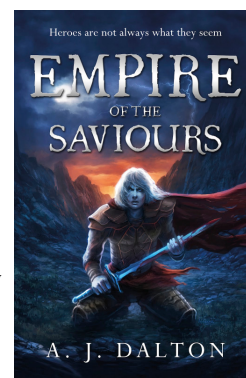
Published by Orbit

Supplied by Hatchette

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

I have to admit that I found this book easy to start – but it was not so easy to finish. There were a number of problems that gradually became more and more annoying. First, it became apparent that contrary to expectation, this was not a stand-alone fantasy, but the first of a series. Note to publishers... please put this kind of thing on the cover! Second was the author’s peculiar use of certain words, “peculiar” being one of them, and “geas” another. A “geas” is a mystical obligation, a kind of curse or doom, from the Irish “geis”. It has nothing whatsoever to do with “Gaea”, the Greek goddess of the Earth, so why does Dalton insist on calling his version of “Gaea” the “Geas”? More aggravating still was the New Ageist subtext. The idea of “old gods = good”, “new religion = bad” is not only historically simplistic, it has been done way too often and is getting so far past old, it’s stale and crusty.

The plot was simple enough, too. A young boy, Jillan, discovers he has powerful magic by accidentally killing a bully, gathers a motley bunch of off-siders and ends up defeating great evil, in the form of the local representative of the “Saviours”, the grossly nasty and vampiric “Saint” Azual. In the process Jillan somehow goes from being a boy to a teen spouting wisdom far beyond his years. Not what I call credible character development. And let’s not mention geography... According to Dalton’s website, he is endeavouring to invent a “new” sub-genre he calls “metaphysical fantasy”. It’s apparent that he cares little for the history of the fantasy genre, which was born out of a desire to tell stories that could not be told in any other way. Good fantasy is intrinsically metaphysical. There is absolutely nothing new about dialectic in fantasy – it’s there in Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams. But the story should be paramount, the philosophising secondary. Other reviews suggest that some people actually like their fantasy burdened with a heavy dose of quasi-religious pontification – but believe you me, I don’t.



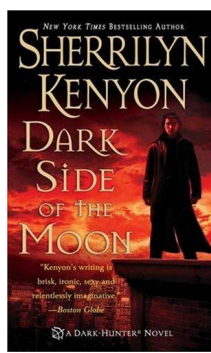
**Dark Side Of The Moon:  
Dark Hunters Book 10**

by Sherrilyn Kenyon  
Published by Piatkus  
Supplied by Hatchette

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth  
Ravyn is a Dark-Hunter who's also a were-hunter. He was killed by his family after inadvertently getting his village massacred. He sold his soul to Artemis for retribution against those responsible for the massacre but his surviving family still hate him. The were-hunters are cousins to the daimons, who the Dark-Hunters were created to destroy, so they're sworn enemies of each other. So Ravyn has a hard time being both were- and Dark-Hunter.

Susan is a reporter with no credibility, who has been reduced to working for a tabloid for the paranormal in order to pay the bills. Stopping by an animal shelter to talk to her best friend, Angie, about a conspiracy her police officer husband has uncovered, Susan takes a cat home as a cover story for her visit. Once home the cat turns out to be a gorgeous, well built shape shifter - Ravyn. He and Susan work together to uncover the conspiracy and figure out what the daimons are planning, which is to take over Seattle completely by killing the Dark-Hunters off one by one.

A perfect mixture of action, mystery, and romance, this is a must-read for Dark-Hunter fans. Ravyn and Susan are an unlikely pair (she's allergic to him), but grow on you. There's also a bunch of squires as interesting secondary characters and we catch up with previous characters, such as Archeron, Savitar, and Nick. I really don't like Nick in this book; he's starting to sound like a whiny brat. Like all Dark-Hunter books it is a bit steamy at times. There's a great amount of information important to the series in this book.



Eric's - Aubrey, a scientific researcher of parasites who has a relationship with Jayne; Miridin, a horrific looking man under a 200 year old curse by Randall Coin; Chogyi Jake, a Buddhist with zen-ish ways and mystical abilities; and Ex, a former Jesuit priest who may have a thing for Jayne (I haven't figured it out yet).

This book was interesting and had a new take on the supernatural theme. There was a lot of action, some mystery, and a great cast of supporting characters. M.L.N. Hanover uses a lot of foul language though. It fits the characters well, but you may not want tweens to read it. I really enjoyed Unclean Spirits and would recommend it to others who like urban fantasy. I'm looking forward to reading Darker Angels: Black Sun's Daughter book 2. M.L.N. Hanover is a pseudonym for Daniel Abraham - a Hugo nominated author. (And writer of "The Long Price" quartet, a series I thought were pretty good - Ed.)

**Heir of Novron:  
Riyria Revelations  
Book 3**

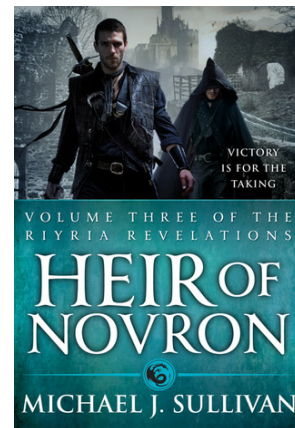
by Michael J Sullivan  
Published by Orbit  
Supplied by Hatchette

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth  
Royce and Hadrian are back!

Riyria perform a last job before Hadrian decides to retire and take a new path. Hadrian sets out to find the Heir of Novron and takes Royce with him, having thrilling adventures along the way. We met new characters, get reacquainted with old ones, see where they each grew up, and undertake a wild ride. The author isn't afraid to kill characters off either.

Wintertide is the first volume, where Riyria attempt to free Degan Gaunt, the Heir of Novron, from the palace dungeons in Aquesta. They discover Princess Arista is being held there too and attempt to free her as well. The second volume is Percepliquis, which has Hadrian and a reluctant Royce leading a party of familiar characters on a quest to find the Horn of Gylindora, thought to be in the ancient city of Percepliquis which had vanished. While they're away finding the city of Percepliquis, Empress Modina has to protect her people from a war with the elves. Along the way Hadrian and Royce face more 'certain death as prisoners in dungeons' situations. This one book holds all the missing pieces we didn't realize we were missing, yet piecing all the secreted comments throughout the series together to complete everything. Michael has taken a series to all different levels throughout this series, and this book is a fabulous ending to it all!

The ending was very grownup with the realistic planning for the future but with lots of 'wow, that was unexpected' moments, 'ah yes, that makes sense' realisations, and the very last page was 'light bulb moment!' Perfect! All loose ends were neatly tied up though I'd love to read more history of certain characters. I highly recommend the Riyria Revelations series to any fans of fantasy adventure novels. Michael J Sullivan, please keep writing. Your talent for producing awesome characters in exciting stories is wonderful.



**Unclean Spirits:  
Black Sun's Daughter  
Book 1**

by MLN Hanover  
Published by Orbit  
Supplied by Hatchette

Reviewed by Jan Butterworth  
Jayne (pronounced zha-NAY) Heller has just dropped out of college and is wondering what to do with her life. Her uncle Eric is murdered and she is shocked to find she's his sole heir. She's even more shocked to find out he's worth billions. Then she finds out he's been fighting supernatural beings for years and was about to assassinate the leader of a cabal of wizards, the Invisible College, that harness demon spirits for their own ends of power and domination. Even after a hit squad tries to kill her, Jayne is sceptical magic and evil demons exist. Then she encounters a possessed dog and becomes a believer. She decides to honour her uncle's memory by continuing his fight against the Invisible College and their leader, Randolph Coin. Jayne has a team at her back made up of friends of



# Au Contraire!

## 2013

science fiction † fantasy † geekery

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: TBA

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. Additionally, she has run a popular three year Larp campaign "St Wolfgang's Vampire Hunters," along with writing and running one-off games. Anna has also led the organisation of Chimera, the original Larp convention in New Zealand. Since its inception in 2008, it has grown to attract around 130 people annually. Chimera 2012 will be held on the 24th-26th of August. Anna is also a fantastic larper, costumer, cat herder, and a literary geek with her master's in Lovecraftian literature.



Charity:  
Wellington Women's Refuge



**WOMEN'S REFUGE®**

## CONTACTS

### Stella Nova Wiki:

[http://stella-nova.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://stella-nova.sf.org.nz/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)

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

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### This Month:

**BOOK** June 25th (at Chez Smith)

**SPACE** July 6th at 7:30 pm (at the Kremlin)

**DOS** Saturday June 23rd at 6:30 pm  
Steampunk movies at Chez Smith.

### Next Meeting:

Wednesday 18 July, 2012, 7:30pm  
Auckland Horticultural Centre,  
990 Great North Road,  
Western Springs

## CALENDAR



## Upcoming Events:

**July 12-14th 2012 Au Contraire 2013**  
34th New Zealand National SF Convention  
<http://www.aucontraire.org.nz/index.php>

## AU CONTRAIRE II UPDATE