

NOVEMBER



Omega Centauri (NGC5139) - CIHM



Omega Centauri...

(Photo by Slooh and Keith Smith—see Sky at Night page 5)

Issue XLII - Jun/July 2014

Musings from Under the Mountain

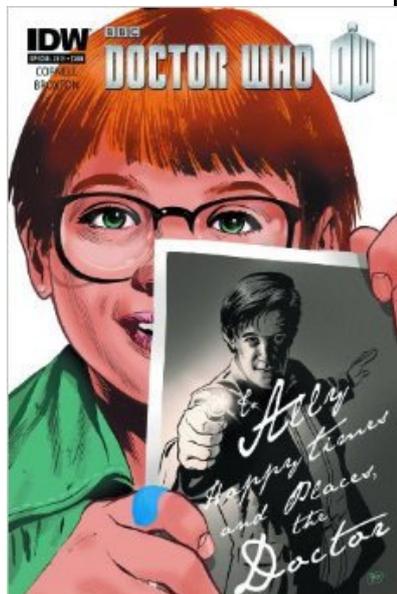
It's that time of year again—it's a month out from the WorldCon and although we can't attend in person this year (Paul is in Year 11 and we really shouldn't take him out of school) we still planned to vote on the Hugo awards. Which means I had some reading to do.

As usual, I'd left it too late to more than nibble at the novels and novellas, just a taste to see what was edible and what would give me a case of mental indigestion. I immediately ruled out Sanderson's finishing off of Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, because that particular series ground to a halt years ago for me at least, and after sampling the other offerings decided that the Stross novel was the most promising, followed by the Correia (which may have been the third book of a trilogy, but the publishers has seen fit to supply the other two, which wasn't a bad idea). The other factor in favour of Stross and *Neptune's Brood* was that it looked to be what I think of as proper SF, futuristic and out of this world, with big innovative ideas.

Stross claimed my vote in the novellas as well. I have a weakness for his *Laundry* stories, so as soon I realised *Equoid* was one of them, and it had me chuckling by the end of page one, it wasn't a difficult decision. The novelettes proved to be more of a challenge as they managed to be very different from each other and yet still quite good. In the end I chose Brad Torgensen's *Exchange Officers* for its chilling vision of a very possible future. The short stories, however, were a disappointment, being universally awful. In the end, I settled on *Selkie Stories Are for Losers* by Sofia Samatar as the least worst of a bad bunch. But I suspect that something needs to be done to improve the selection process in this category, because if these were the best of all the short speculative fiction written in 2013, I'd be very surprised! Not to mention appalled.

(And If Dave Freer is correct in his latest Mad Genius Club post—<http://madgeniusclub.com/2014/08/18/a-different-modest-proposal/>, it might not just be the short stories where the selection process is broken. And that is a real concern. Used to be that "Hugo winner" on a story was a sure fire recommendation that this was one I'd want to read. Now I'm not so sure.)

It was among the graphic novels that I found a real gem... Paul Cornell's *The Girl who loved Doctor Who* was an absolute delight, so with apologies to

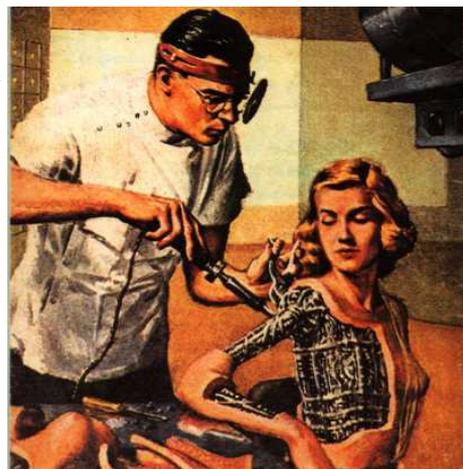


Girl Genius, he gets my vote. Doctor Who also got my vote in short form dramatic presentation—I plumped for *The Day of the Doctor*, over *The Name of Doctor* and *An Adventure in Space and Time*. The latter struck me as more a “related work” than science fiction, and the Christmas special simply wasn't as good as the 50th anniversary. Of course, having multiple nominations for Doctor Who episodes is liable to allow the Game of Thrones fans to have their way on this one. Again.

In long form dramatic presentation, I wanted to vote for *The Hobbit: Desolation of Smaug*, but to my consternation, it hadn't made the list. I wasn't going to vote for *Gravity*, although it won't surprise me if it wins, for all its flaws. So I listened to my son, and voted for *Frozen*. Have to say that at least with the Hugos, as opposed to the Oscars, they were all popular movies and ones that I'd seen, albeit mostly on the small screen.

But my labours of picking and choosing were not over. This year there were also the 1939 Retro Hugos to be voted on. The Hugo Awards didn't start until 1953, so in the mid-1990's the Retro Hugos were instituted to be handed out at Worldcons held 50, 75, or 100 years after a Worldcon during which no Hugos were awarded. It's now 75 years since the very first Worldcon in 1939, so Retro Hugos for that year are to be awarded.

Funny thing is, I quickly found that I was considerably more familiar with the novels of 1939 than I was with those of 2014. I knew all the titles and two of them I know very well I've read—we've got dusty copies sitting downstairs. I recognised famous names and titles in other categories as well. The 1939 short stories were a whole lot more memorable



Helen O'Loy (Astounding Fiction, 1938)

than what was on offer for 2014, among them some absolute classics of the genre. For example, Lester del Rey's *Helen O'Loy* has been often cited as one of the great robot stories of all time. Certainly, its core concept of a robot gaining emotions and falling in love has spawned enough imitations. Will it be possible to say the same in 75 years time of any of 2014's short story nominees? Somehow I doubt it.

Perhaps it's just that there are no new stories to tell, just variations upon tales already told. And maybe I've read them all. But I don't think that's true. I refuse to believe that SF as we know it is a dying genre, with nothing to say to this generation or the next. On the contrary, there is much that needs be said, still an infinity of possible futures to explore. So, why do so few go that way, instead of retreading the myths and horrors of times past? Perhaps it's just because those paths are easy to write about, and the future is hard.

Oh, and by the way, the mice lied.

Jacqui Smith, Editor

by
Jacqui
Smith

On the Matter of the WorldCon

It's not too much longer to go, as I write this, until the 72nd World Science Fiction Convention, Loncon 3, will take place in London in August 2014. I'll be attending the convention, and a fair number of other Kiwi fans will be either supporting or attending. On current numbers, Loncon 3 is shaping up to be the biggest ever Worldcon outside North America.

The reasonably high number of Kiwi fans attending is an important factor at this point in time. It's only six years to go until 2020; the year that New Zealand is seriously considering bidding to host the Worldcon. Although Norman has done a sterling job of doing the initial groundwork (to say nothing of investing a vast amount of his own time and money in travelling to Worldcons to learn the ropes) since the idea for the bid was floated four years ago, no event the size of Worldcon can ever be a one-man operation.

Although in today's wired world, it's easy enough to make events like Worldcon global, with fans all across the globe working for the con online, cyberspace con running will only work so far. Ultimately, this is a convention taking place in the real world at a physical venue, not an Internet chat room, and any nation hosting Worldcon needs to mobilise its own fan base as much as possible to do the real-world preparations on the ground. Basically, if this is going to happen, we need everybody who is active in New Zealand fandom to step up and make a contribution to the worldcon if it's to take place here. Norman has recently sent out an e-mail to all fans calling for their support; six years may seem distant, but it's not that long a time to prepare for an event the size of Worldcon. New Zealand fans need to start making commitments to support the bid now if the con is going to happen.

Although there will be a reasonable number of Kiwi fans at Loncon 3 to raise the profile of the bid, we'll also need to rely on Kiwi attendees at every single worldcon taking place between now and 2020 to keep the momentum going and raise awareness of the con amongst global fandom. The crunch point, of course, will be the 2018 Worldcon, when the 2020 Worldcon will be ratified. I haven't heard yet of any bids for 2018, but wherever it takes place, we'll have to rely on a sizable number of Kiwis travelling there to present the bid for the vote!

On the subject of convention ratification; it seems likely that New Zealand won't hold a separate Natcon in 2020, so the business of the New Zealand Natcon, such as the SJV awards, the SFFANZ AGM, and the ratification of the 2022 New Zealand Natcon, will take place at Worldcon. Presumably, the New Zealand Worldcon bid will also have to present itself for ratification as the New Zealand Natcon for 2020 at the 2018 Natcon.

So, in summary, now is the time to decide if New Zealand is serious about bidding for the 2020 Worldcon, or if we decide it won't work and we need to graciously step aside for an alternate bid. If it's going to happen, let's all step up to the plate now and offer Norman as much support as we can, in whatever capacity we can!

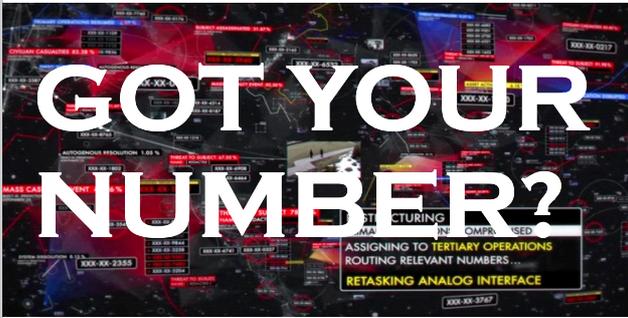


So, those are my thoughts on New Zealand 2020. In the meantime, by the time the next NovaZine comes out, no doubt myself and other Kiwi fans will have plenty of traveller's tales to share from Loncon 3...

Alan Parker, President, Stella Nova

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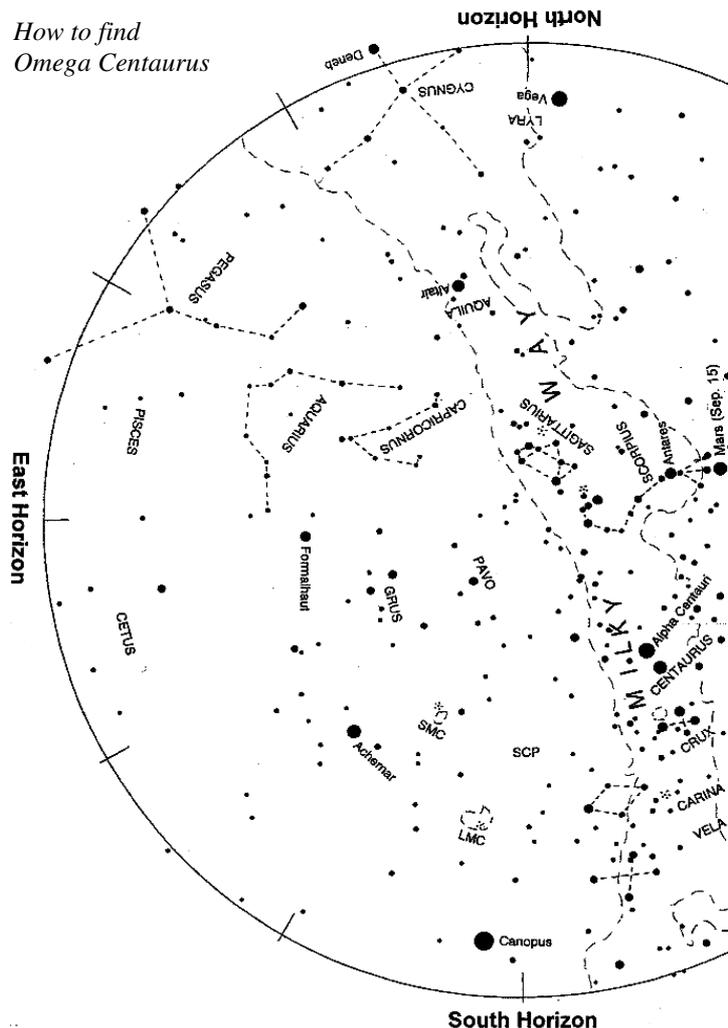
At the July club meeting, I presented a little quiz about numbers in science fiction and fantasy, inspired by the curious fact that those of who were born in 1957 are now 57 years old (there's at least two of us). Here it is again, for those of you who missed it.

- What was the unusually alphanumeric title of the first movie made by George Lucas?
 - THX 1133
 - THX 1135
 - THX 1136
 - THX 1138
- At what temperature in degrees Fahrenheit does paper burn according to Ray Bradbury?
 - 251
 - 351
 - 451
 - 551
- Which Network was the setting for *Max Headroom*?
 - 23
 - 25
 - 27
 - 29
- The Master of Disguise in *Dangermouse* was which Agent?
 - 51
 - 53
 - 55
 - 57
- The Master Chief in *Halo* is which Spartan?
 - 110
 - 111
 - 113
 - 117
- What is the speed in miles per hour that the DeLorean in *Back to the Future* must reach to travel in time?
 - 80
 - 84
 - 86
 - 88
- In *Logan's Run*, your lifeclock runs out at what age?
 - 25
 - 30
 - 35
 - 40
- What number is shared by the Sergeant in *Terrahawks* and Neo's apartment in the *Matrix*?
 - 99
 - 100
 - 101
 - 110

- What is the NGC number of the USS Enterprise?
 - 1600
 - 1601
 - 1700
 - 1701
- Finally, what number is the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything?
 - 41
 - 42
 - 43
 - 44



How to find Omega Centaurus

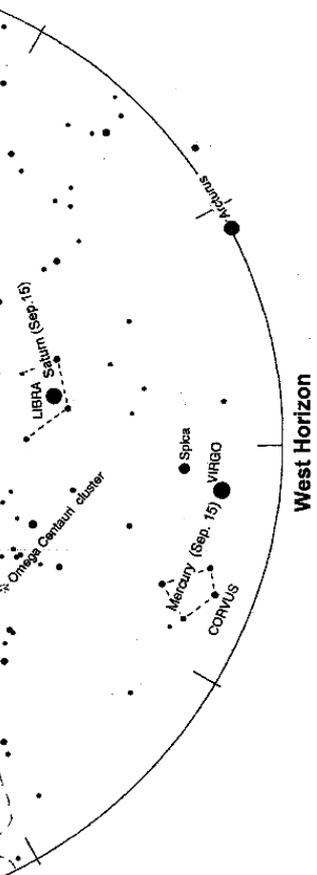


The Sky at Night September 2014

Believe it or not, Spring is on the way. It's getting warmer, we're past the Winter Solstice, there are daffodils blooming in the garden and the Milky Way is arcing high overhead in the evenings with Scorpio near the zenith in the early evenings. Orion is now clearly visible (when it's not cloudy) in the sky before dawn. Speaking of sights in the morning sky, Jupiter and Venus are, apparently, very close together at the moment. I'd have a picture except for two problems (1) it's been persistently cloudy and (2) I don't really do mornings.

I've been thinking about something to write about, along with what to talk about the next astrophotography meeting, i.e. things to photograph in the Spring Sky. Currently, I'm inspired by Slooh Messier marathons. When we do these, we plan to capture all the nebulosities and such when Scorpio and Sagittarius are at their highest and, by the time we've finished that, it seems to be one globular cluster after another. So, let's talk about those. If you take your gaze to the farther star of the two pointers (Beta Centaurus) then extend the gaze northwards at roughly right angles to the line of the two pointers (roughly sixty odd degrees angled to the Cross) you'll strike another star (Lambda Centaurus). Extend that line the same distance again and you'll find a faint star that looks a bit fuzzy. Well, that's not one star but a giant ball of tightly packed stars, i.e. the brightest globular

cluster in the sky, Omega Centaurus. Globular clusters lie outside our galaxy and orbit the galactic centre. That's why you see many more of them in that direction. They are composed of mostly red stars, stars that are old and have burnt much of their fuel. Any blue stars, known as 'Blue Stragglers' are thought to be formed when two stars collide to form one big hot one. Star formation is virtually absent in globulars and once formed, gravity is strong enough to keep all the stars together over millions and millions of years. More about the origins and physics of globulars can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globular_cluster and <http://messier.seds.org/glob.html>. It's estimated that the Milky Way has about 150 orbiting. The next brightest and easy to find is 47 Tucanae (near the Lesser Magellanic Cloud), while the third brightest is M13 in Hercules. It's also rather easy but it's low on our northern horizon at its best. The rest of the one hundred or so that are visible are fainter and need a good pair of binoculars or a good telescope to see and appreciate properly. It was the distribution of globulars in the sky that led to the realization that we weren't at the



centre of the galaxy, but way out towards the outskirts. Many of the bright ones are Messier objects as Messier kept running into them while comet hunting. There's 29 in his catalogue. Because his telescope wasn't that powerful, he didn't realise what they were, in fact he described them as 'round nebula', although he was able to resolve stars in M4. So, here's the order of Messier objects in our Marathon from Sagittarius to Orion. I bolded all the globulars: M8, M26, M27, M6, **M71**, M25, **M28**, M39, **M22**, M7, **M69**, **M70**, M73, **M72**, **M55**, **M30**, **M15**, **M2**, M74, M32, M110, M31, M33, M77, M76, M34, **M79**, M103, M45, M42. The rest of them are clustered between the Virgo Galaxies and Sagittarius being: M60, **M53**, M102, **M3**, M104, **M68**, M83, **M5**, **M13**, **M92**, **M12**, **M107**, **M10**, **M80**, **M4**, M57, **M14**, **M9**, **M19**, **M56**, **M62**, M23, M16.

Before we leave the subject of globular clusters, there's one often neglected, that's located on the other side of the SMC from 47 Tucanae. That's NGC362. So, with Scorpius and Sagittarius overhead, eastwards leads us in the direction of Capricorn and Aquarius (where M2 is). We can see a large triangle of bright stars – assuming the northern horizon is low enough as two of them (Vega and Deneb) skim the horizon. The other one, Altair, is rather high. It's known as the Summer Triangle in the Northern Hemisphere and mark the locations of the constellations Lyra, Cygnus and Aquila respectively. The Milky Way runs through Aquila and Cygnus so take a pair of binoculars and see what you can see as you dip towards the northern horizon. Near Deneb, and with a bit of luck and a dark sky, you might see the North American Nebula (NGC7000), a large glowing piece of nebulosity. Albireo (Beta Cygni), in the tail of the Swan, is actually a double star and looks really nice in a small telescope, a blue star next to a contrasting orange one. Lyra has M57, the famous Ring Nebula, located between Gamma and Beta Lyra. It can be seen from here although it is very low. I nearly got a photograph of it with my telescope in the back garden, but the tracking was off – plus I was shooting through light pollution. I have a new mount and a light pollution filter to test so I intend to have another go at it – just because it's there. Saturn is still in Libra, and can be seen low in the eastern sky after dawn. Mars was lower still having passed Saturn on the 25th and 25th of August. At their closest, they will be just over a moon's width apart. Mars spends the month speeding through Libra and passes close to Antares on the 27th of September. Since both objects appear red, it should look interesting. Jupiter (in Cancer, near M44) is getting higher and higher in the morning sky. Venus is basically following the sun as it is about to pass behind it, so it will be hard to see. Mercury appears low in the western horizon after sunset and will be at greatest elongation on the 21st of September. The Spring equinox itself occurs on the 22nd of September. Mercury itself will be passing very close to Spica at this time.

The Moon in August:

New Moon—24th August

The Moon in September:

First Quarter—2nd September

Full Moon—9th September

Last Quarter—16th September

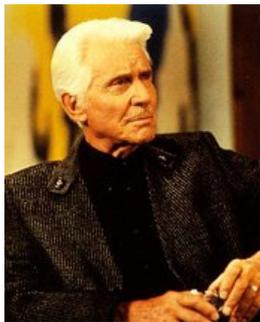
New Moon—24th September

O B I T S

Obituaries

May 2

Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., (aged 95), American actor, who made his name solving crime in the 1960's as Stu Bailey in *77 Sunset Strip* and as Inspector Lewis Erskine in *The F.B.I.*, Later he became the voice behind the character Alfred Pennyworth in *Batman: The Animated Series* and played William Edgars in *Babylon 5*.



May 2

Dick Ayers, (aged 90), American comic book artist and cartoonist best known for his work as one of Jack Kirby's inkers during the late-1950s, including on some of the earliest issues of Marvel Comics' *The Fantastic Four*. He was the signature penciler of Marvel's WWII comic *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, drawing it for a 10-year run, and he co-created Magazine Enterprises' 1950s Western-horror character the *Ghost Rider*.

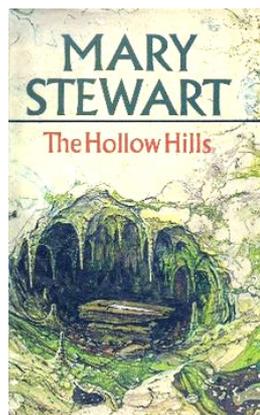
May 8

Roger L. Easton, (aged 93), American scientist who was the principal inventor and designer of the Global Positioning System (GPS). In 1955, Easton co-wrote the Naval Research Laboratory's Project Vanguard proposal for a U.S. satellite program in competition with two other proposals. Later in his career at NRL, he conceived, patented, and led the development of essential enabling technologies for the United States Global Positioning System (GPS). During the 1960s and early 1970s he developed a time-based navigational system with passive ranging, circular orbits, and space-borne high precision clocks placed in satellites. The idea was tested with four experimental satellites: TIMATION I and II (in 1967 and 1969) and Navigation Technology Satellites 1 and 2 (in 1974 and 1977). NTS-2 was the first satellite to transmit GPS signals.

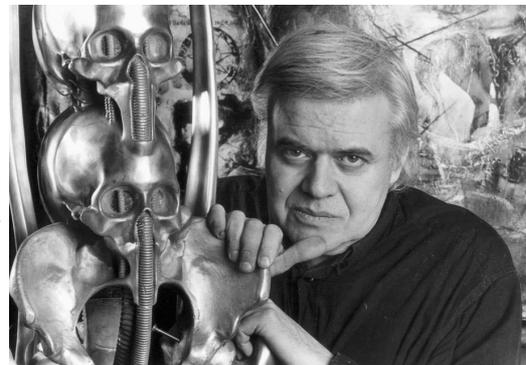


May 9

Mary Stewart, (aged 97), British novelist, best known (to me at least) for her historical fantasy Merlin series, starting with *The Crystal Cave* and *The Hollow Hills* which I remember reading in high school, so far ahead of her time, and far superior to a great deal of the more recent Arthurian fantasy.



May 12
H. R. Giger, (aged 74), Swiss surrealist painter, sculptor and set designer. He was part of the special effects team that won an Academy Award for Best Achievement in Visual Effects for their design work on the film *Alien*. Giger was named to the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame in 2013. His distinctive (and creepy) style will not be forgotten, for so many nightmares.



May 19

Michael Aldrich, (aged 72), English inventor, innovator and entrepreneur. In 1979 he invented online shopping to enable online transaction processing between consumers and businesses. In 1980 he invented the Teleputer, a multi-purpose home infotainment centre that was a fusion of PC, TV and Telecom networking technologies. In 1981 he developed the concept of interactive broadband local loop cable TV for mass market consumer telecommunications.

May 22

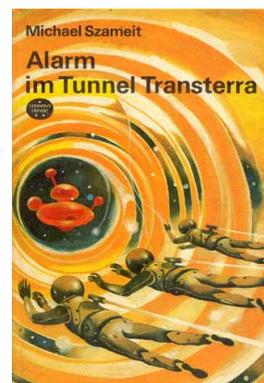
Donald Levine, (aged 86), American toy executive, developer of the first action figure. As Hasbro's head of research and development, Levine guided G.I. Joe through its design and development. He had served with the United States Army in the Korean War, and it was decided the toy should be outfitted in the



uniforms of the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force with their respective accessories.

May 30

Michael Szameit, (aged 64), German science fiction writer. His first short story was published 1976; his first novel, *Alarm im Tunnel Transterra*, in 1982. According to a poll held in 1990 by the club magazine *Transfer of the SFC Andymon*, he was at that point one of the four most popular science fiction writers in the then German Democratic Republic. However, as far as I can tell, none of his works have been translated into English. Which is a pity.



Compiled by Jacqui Smith

June 6

Eric Hill, (aged 86), English author and illustrator of children's picture books, best known for his character Spot the Dog. His works have been widely praised for their contributions to child literacy. He started writing about Spot the playful puppy in 1976 for his little son Christopher. In that first book, Spot was hiding behind little flaps which could be lifted by small children, an innovation which he devised.



June 9

William A. Bradfield, (aged 86), New Zealand-born astronomer, prolific amateur discoverer of comets. Bradfield joined the Astronomical Society of South Australia in 1970 and with a telescope bought from a member of the society he officially started hunting for comets on 1 January 1971. He discovered his first comet after 260 hours of searching in March 1972 - Comet C/1972 E1 (Bradfield). He went on to discover a total of eighteen comets, the last in 2004.



June 14
Sam Kelly, (aged 70), English actor who appeared in film, television, radio and theatre. He was best known as Captain Hans Geering in 'Allo 'Allo.

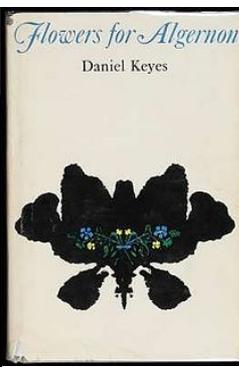
Francis Matthews, (aged 86), English film and television actor, best known for playing *Paul Temple* in the BBC TV series, but known to fans as the voice of Captain Scarlet for Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's 1967 Supermarionation TV series *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*.



Terry Richards, (aged 81), British actor and stuntman, best known for his appearance as the Arabian swordsman in the 1981 Indiana Jones film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. During his career, Richards worked on over 100 productions across film and television; worked in nine James Bond films; fought as a



stuntman in scenes with Indiana Jones, James Bond, Luke Skywalker and Rambo; and doubled for Donald Sutherland, Tom Selleck and Christopher Lee.



June 15

Daniel Keyes, (aged 86), American author best known for his Hugo award-winning short story and Nebula award-winning novel *Flowers for Algernon*.

Casey Kasem, (aged 82), American radio personality and voice actor who provided the voice of "Shaggy" Rogers in the *Scooby-Doo* franchise from 1969 to 1997, and again from 2002 until 2009.



June 17
Patsy Byrne, (aged 80), English actress, best known for her role as "Nursie" in *Blackadder II*.

June 19

Josephine Pulein-Thompson, (aged 90), British author and horsewoman, who along with her sisters, Diana and Christine, wrote dozens of pony novels over the course of half a century, beginning with *Six Ponies* in 1946. Their mother, Joanna Cannan, is credited with single-handedly inventing the "pony club" novel during the 1930s.



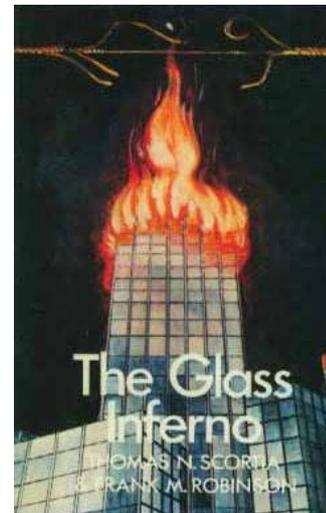
June 29

Don Matheson (aged 84), American television actor, best known for his continuing role as Mark Wilson in the Irwin Allen series *Land of the Giants*.



June 30

Frank M. Robinson, (aged 87), American science fiction and techno-thriller writer, best known for *The Power*. His techno-thriller *The Glass Inferno* formed part of the basis for the 1974 movie *The Towering Inferno*.



Compiled by
Jacqui
Smith

The Sovereign Hand

by Paul Gilbert

Published by Steam Press

Supplied by Steam Press

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

It is a hopeful sign of a growing maturity in the field of SF&F in New Zealand that this work of fantasy doesn't feel the need to scream "I am a New Zealand novel" although it was both written and published here.

Instead it whispers its kiwi roots in references to such things as feijoas and punga trees, which I'm sure is entirely deliberate. In fact, I suspect that a great deal of deliberation has gone into the writing of "The Sovereign Hand", in its clever and carefully measured prose, its meticulous setting, and memorable characters. That setting is quite unusual, an amalgam of High Fantasy and Steampunk, where science and magic both work, and can therefore happily pit guns and explosives against eldritch creatures of magic. And not just that, it is a socially and politically evolved magical society where non-human sentients like goblins, drakes and taureans are being steadily integrated into the Primacy. There's a reason why most fantasy authors maintain their societies at the pseudo-medieval – it's comfortable and familiar, a whole lot easier on both writer and reader. Gilbert has dared to be different, to do the difficult thing, and by and large, he succeeds. But it's not always an easy read. He likes to play with words, digging into odd lexicographical corners, and coining new words of his own, which can occasionally confound the reader. Never mind, this is a grand and highly original work of fantasy, a complete and exciting story in one volume (not just one in an interminable series of boring bricks).

The story centres around a group of variously talented young people, some more likeable than others, all of whom are called to defend the Primacy against the latest in a series of disasters called Galls. After a somewhat boggy start, the plot really gets going when the Hand are brought together and they go through the portal called the Gherensgate to find their fate. But after they return to Thorn they find that it's only the beginning, and then the story inexorably begins to build to a truly spectacular climax. Definitely recommended, and quite possibly one of the best works of fantasy ever published in New Zealand.

Brotherband 12: Slaves of Socorro

by John Flanagan

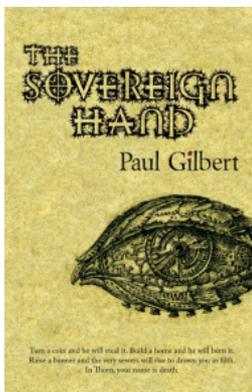
Published by Random House

Supplied by Random House

NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

There is a reason why Flanagan's "Socorro" sounds like Morocco... it is plainly based on the Morocco of the Barbary slave traders, who preyed upon the European coasts as far north as Iceland



through the 16th to 19th century (until they finally got pummelled by the Americans). Problem is that the Vikings raided and traded from the 9th to 11th centuries, so there is no way in our history that a band of Vikings would find themselves rescuing a bunch of Anglo-Saxons from Barbary slavers - which is essentially the plotline of this novel. It may be young adult fantasy... but I do find the constant anachronisms jarring. Flanagan has put a great deal of research into his sailing ships, but seemingly rather less into other matters – foodstuffs for one thing. Without magic or technology foods just don't keep unless you get into salting and pickling, so how Edwin's fillet of beef was edible after a sea voyage of some days I cannot guess. And let's not get into coffee and potatoes... But at the same time, Flanagan's prose is very readable, his characters memorable, and his plot, if a little obvious, is carried off with panache. He's fun to read, and I know he's popular with his audience. It's just that I wish he had been either more realistic or more fantastic in his world construction....

A Rough Ride to the Future

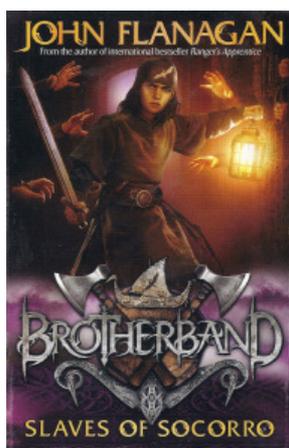
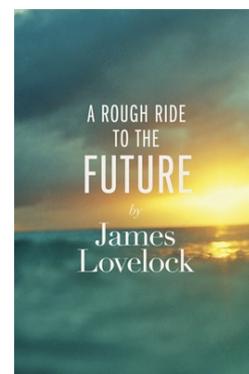
by James Lovelock

Published by Penguin

Supplied by Penguin NZ

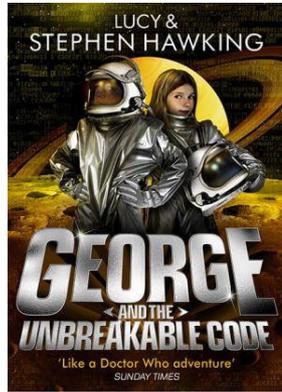
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

I don't review a lot of non-fiction, but for James Lovelock I'll make an exception, especially since this book relates very much to science and the future. If you've heard of James Lovelock you'll no doubt be aware that he is responsible for the Gaia Hypothesis, the idea that that living and non-living parts of the Earth form a complex interacting system that can be thought of as a single organism. Now, while this idea has been embraced by some of the eco-nuts out there with a religious fervour (all too literally in some cases), they seem much more reluctant to take some of Lovelock's other ideas on board – such as his support for nuclear power as being safer and far less dangerous to the environment than many alternatives. The book is, in fact, very much a collection of ideas gathered into chapters on more-or-less the same subject. I say more-or-less because Lovelock has a tendency to wander off topic and to reminisce. This is quite understandable, because the man is in his mid-90s (and if I can think and write as coherently and intelligently as he does at that age, I'll be impressed). But it is for those ideas that you should read this book. Lovelock updates his previous works, bringing his Gaia hypothesis into the 2010's. He addresses the question of why global warming hasn't been as apparent as expected – it comes down to the fact that we don't understand climate as much as we thought. He muses on the subject of the lone scientist, and whether the specialisation of much of modern scientific enquiry is a good thing. He presents the intriguing concept of the Anthropocene – the age of men, with its birth in the invention of the steam engine. But to me, the most important idea is the one that humans must try to survive through the rough times ahead, because humans are the mechanism by which Gaia can expand and grow beyond our Earth. And if that isn't a cool SF concept, I don't know what it is.



George and the Unbreakable Code

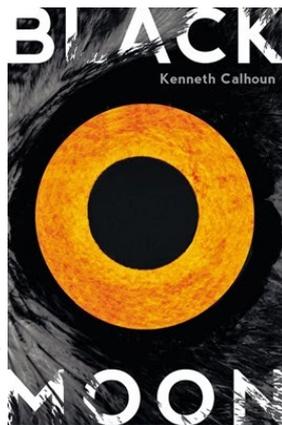
by Lucy and Stephen Hawking
Published by Random House
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



Stephen Hawking writing children’s fiction? Well, yes, along with his daughter Lucy, who is a trained journalist and an advocate for science education. This book is a mixture of a fictional story about a boy named George and his friend Annie with segments of non-fiction mainly on the subjects of astronomy and computer science. These non-fiction segments seemed rather more complex, and at a higher reading level than the fiction (they even used a smaller font) – and I’m sure that I’m not the only one who wishes that publishers would place these sections between chapters, and not in the middle of sentences, interrupting the flow of the story! That story is quite simple, as you might expect, with the children looking for the creator of a computer virus that is causing havoc across the world, and of course, cleverly defeating him in a very classic “Famous Five” manner. A number of McGuffins are used to advance the plot, and allow the children to wander the Solar System, principally a supercomputer called Cosmos that can create a space door to pretty well anywhere. Which does make this into something we see very little of, proper science fiction for kids, the kind that encourages them to become interested in the sciences, which is presumably the authors’ objective. By and large, they succeed, and you certainly don’t have to have read the earlier three books in the series. (However, I’m not sure that designating the villain’s title as “I AM” was entirely wise, since that is pretty well guaranteed to give offence in some quarters).

Black Moon

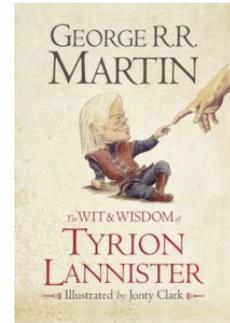
by Kenneth Calhoun
Published by Hogarth
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



The scenario is an intriguing one. People stop being able to sleep, which brings about an apocalypse full of madness, as insomnia erodes their sanity. Calhoun writes cleverly enough with his lucid descriptions and dreamy philosophical musings, but ultimately the novel failed me for two reasons. Firstly his characters although theoretically well-developed simply failed to gain my interest. And secondly, although I persisted right to the end (thankfully it’s a short book) there was no real resolution, and no satisfying explanation for the cause of the plague of sleeplessness. So, it’s very much a case of a potentially excellent premise that simply goes nowhere in particular. Maybe if I happened to suffer from insomnia, this book might have worked better for me, but I don’t...

The Wit & Wisdom of Tyrion Lannister

by George RR Martin
Published by HarperVoyager
Supplied by Harper Collins NZ
Reviewed by Jan



They say I’m half a man. What does that make the lot of you? Full of pithy quotes from Tyrion broken into sections - such as ‘On Being A Dwarf’ and ‘The Human Condition’ – this book is a selection of short quotes we’ve heard him utter. Tyrion is the dwarf with a brain the size of a planet and a heart of (tarnished) gold in the saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The illustrations by Jonty Clark are cleverly drawn and catch the image of the Imp for every section. It’s a great little book to carry around to give you a chuckle. Now excuse me, I’m off to re-watch my Game of Throne DVDs.

Brotherhood of Thieves #1: The Warden

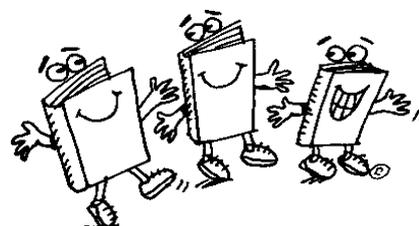
by Stuart Daly
Published by Random House Australia
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jan



A thief on the streets of Floran, Caspan picked the wrong pocket and was forced to run for his life, the punishment for theft being death. Captured by members of a secret military order, The Brotherhood, Caspan is invited to join other prospective members in passing a test in order to be trained for the order. The Brotherhood is a covert group of professional treasurer hunters that search for magical objects in the burial mounds of the Dray, an ancient race that had long left The Four Kingdoms.

Candidates for military service came from academies and they didn’t accept street urchins like Caspan. The Brotherhood would consider those with a recommendation letter from a current or former member of the order though, and he set off to a strange city for the test. After making friends during the test as well as gaining an enemy, Caspan arrives at The Brotherhood headquarters for training and soon the adventures begin.

Wow! Such a great story with the classic plot of a penniless orphan becoming one of an elite secret order and has many thrilling adventures. This book set the scene with the training required and comradeship forged and showed the alliances made. An intense adventure gives a lot of intriguing mysteries to solve and I’m eagerly waiting for the next in the series.





RECONNAISSANCE

#NZNatCon2015

Where: Rotorua
 When : April 3 – 6th 2015
 (Easter weekend)
 Venue: The Sudima Hotel
 1000 Eruera St, Rotorua

Guests of Honour:

Gail Carriger

Author, blogger & well-dressed Lady about town... When re-assured that she would be flown to New Zealand, Gail's response was: "Oh, really? Wow! I just got chills. Fly me, really? I'm even more excited. I really hope you win the bid! I'm so sorry to be so confused and dunderheaded about it. I was convinced you guys wouldn't be able to afford to bring little old me all the way down there. *bounce bounce* I've actually been to Rotorua! Lovely place. I am a sucker for hot springs. Sucker. Love them so. Oh, best of luck!"

Pip Ballantine and Tee Morris

"Tee and I are both very excited to be coming back to New Zealand, and bringing what we have learned in the jungle of American publishing with us. We've been to large cons like New York Comic Con and DragonCon, as well as too many steampunk conventions, but there is something special about New Zealand for both of us."

Alan Parker

Alan is currently president of Stella Nova and from all accounts is guiding the club quite nicely. He's run a convention in Rotorua, so it's only fitting that he is one of our Fan Guests of Honour (but if he gets out the Fishnet stocking one more time...)

Norman Cates

It's been many years since Norman held his Conquests, worked his way up to senior compositor at Weta Digital, but when was the last time you got to hear Norman talk about himself?

Charity:

Cancer Society of NZ

Early Bird Special:

\$75 full membership until the end of 2014

<http://www.timelord2067.com/convention.html>



Stella Nova Wiki:

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

Nova Zine Back Issues:

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

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This Month:

BOOK Postponed until September
SPACE Friday September 5th
 (venue TBA)

Next Quarterly Meeting:

Wednesday 19th September 2014, 7:30 pm
 Auckland Horticultural Centre,
 990 Great North Road,
 Western Springs



Upcoming Events:

October 24th to 27th
Auckland Armageddon Expo 2014
 ASB Showgrounds in Greenlane over Labour weekend. <http://armageddonexpo.com/nz/>

April 3-26th 2014
RECONNAISSANCE
 36th New Zealand National SF Convention
<http://www.timelord2067.com/convention.html>