

# NOVANAZENI

Issue Tre - March 2010

## Musings from Under the Mountain

Here's a puzzler for you... What does your editor have in common with Sir Arthur C. Clarke? Hmm... Lovers of science fiction, yes... Both are English, yes... But he's famous and I'm not. Actually, the answer was that we were both born in the English county of Somerset—he was born in Minehead, and I was born in Frome.

While I can't say that I agreed with everything he ever wrote, I do have considerable admiration for the man and his body of work. I'd go so far as to say that among his short stories are some of the best ever written—in any genre. (I've read some of the non-SF short stories foisted on English students—and aside from the Edgar Allen Poe ones, I've found them to be decidedly dull and dusty—the short story is definitely one literary form where SF excels). I suppose my favourites would be "The Nine Billion Names of God", "Expedition to Earth" and "The Star". The great thing about all three stories is that they haven't aged. They're still as relevant now, as they were when I first read them, forty years ago.

Clarke's novels are a mixed bunch—generally the first one in any given series is a cracker—but you have to wonder about some of the sequels. I'd definitely recommend "Fountains of Paradise" or "Songs of Distant Earth" over the Rama sequels for example. It'd be an interesting argument as to which is Clarke's best novel. I'd probably plump for "A Fall of Moondust", but I know some would vote for "Rendezvous with Rama" - a book I didn't particularly enjoy, although I did find it memorable.

Then there's the movies— first there was "2001: A Space Odyssey", one of the most significant SF movies ever made. And one that we loved, while it confused our parents—just ask Keith. Then there was the largely under-rated "2010", which is a rare example of a hard SF movie, one where the science at least tries to make sense.

I was never been lucky enough to meet him, although others have., and found him a very nice person—unlike some writers I will not name. I wish he could have visited with us, virtually if not in person, but sadly that wasn't possible. We will remember him as one of the all-time greats of our favourite genre—and the creator of the idea of the communication satellite, without which our 21st lives would be much poorer.

Jacqui Smith

## From the Cramped Office

Holy moly – it's that time again. Not only do I have to write another Presidential address, but the AGM has snuck up on me too. Of course, I expect everyone to baying for blood, standing to be president, or treasurer, or crew member. Or not, whatever you Stella Novitiates want to do. I'll take the opportunity to thank the out-going crew for doing a magnificent job. I will also express good luck and best wishes to our now departed (but definitely not "dear departed") treasurer Teemu for being so conscientious and wish him all the best for the future.

So, what is the new crew going to look like? Human, says the cynic in me. Are we going to get an injection of new blood? Does anyone care? I, for one, do. The club survives on the activity of its members. So get involved.

On a more positive note, the Presidential entourage will be feeling smug as we will have been to Wellington, caught up with friends, heard Neil Gaiman speak during the Festival of the Arts, and been to a Mexican restaurant – run by real Mexicans. But we won't be suffering from Montezuma's Revenge. Oh, the joys of intra-national travel.

Steve Litten

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**Caridad Pinerio**  
**Sins Of The Flesh**  
**Piatkus Fiction**

**Reviewed by Jan Butterworth**

A mercenary, Mick, is hired by a company to hunt down the person who committed the horrific murder of one of their scientists. The killer is Caterina, a woman who tore the scientist to pieces barehanded. It turns out the company was carrying out an experimental treatment to repair optic nerves damaged by her terminal brain cancer. They also used patients as guinea pigs to try out genetic manipulations. After capturing Cat, Mick starts to doubt she carried out the murders and is baffled by her super strength and ability to change her skin colour to blend with surroundings. He enlists the help of his doctor sister to treat Cat while he finds out why the company wants her dead.

There is a little too much testosterone floating about, with Mick and another psycho mercenary hunting Cat and trading barbs. While the story was slow to start with, I became very interested in the scientific what-ifs the author explored. What if scientists genetically altered people to have super strength and multitude of talents, such as the chameleon ability to blend into the background? What if they created superior soldiers or thieves that were for sale to the highest bidder? What if a good technology is perverted for profit? And she used scientific advances, such as green fluorescent proteins being crossed with cats, creating cats that glow in the dark. Scary.

**Robert Buetter**  
**Orphan's Triumph**  
**Orbit, 354pp**

**Reviewed by Jacqui Smith**

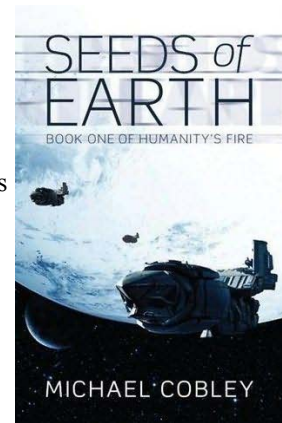
You know exactly where you are at, when the first three words of a book are “BLAM – BLAM – BLAM.” This is military SF, and actually rather good SF all up. I suspected that I’d have problems with this novel because it’s the fifth and last of a series, and I wouldn’t understand what was going on, but Buetter got me into his situation and his characters without resorting to one of those tedious introductions that some authors favour. Instead, he went for the tactic of tipping the reader in with the characters at the deep end, and then explaining how they got there. It was immediately obvious that there was a war on, and that humans were fighting against varieties of alien slug. I liked the way Buetter uses the various epochs of Earth’s prehistory to create alien worlds that actually made sense. Like him, I have long been of the opinion that trilobite ought to be tasty, and should make excellent bisque. But that is only the background to a powerful story of one human being caught up in a galactic war for the survival of humanity. And the ending is unusually satisfying. Yes, I really liked this book, and not just because our heroes get to kill some especially nasty neo-Nazis...



**Michael Cobley**  
**Seeds of Earth:**  
**Book One of Humanity's Fire**  
**Orbit, 488pp**

**Reviewed by Jacqui Smith**

I was surprised to find that this is Michael Cobley’s fourth book, and not his first, because it definitely lacks a certain polish. No shortage of ideas though. The basic concept is that the Earth is attacked by Bugs in around 2126, and a trio of spaceships are sent out to find their way in the Galaxy, before another bunch of aliens get to bail us out. These aliens are not as trustworthy as they may seem, and in particular they’re showing an unhealthy interest in one of the human colonies, hidden deep in the Huvuun Deepzone, which already has native aliens of its own, and is coincidentally where the remnants of an ancient civilisation are being woken up. There are lots of bizarre alien species, brave humans, and Lord knows what going on here. Bits of dead universes lurking somewhere in the lower levels of hyperspace, anyone? I really don’t know what to say about this one, except.... Interesting.



**Karen Traviss**  
**Gears of War: Aspho Fields**  
**Orbit, p385**

**Reviewed by Jacqui Smith**

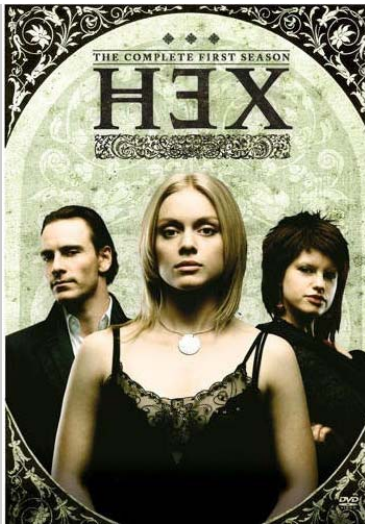
You have to wonder when 12-year-old boys at Intermediate School display interest in a book about an R18 computer game and ask why I’m reading it. Of course I explain that I’m reviewing it. But it’s obvious that the “Gears of War” game is reaching a target audience way younger than its official rating. Of course, that means that it’s likely that the books will also reach a younger teenage audience, and it’s important that the writer and publishers realise this. This book is undoubtedly violent, not surprising because it’s set in the violent war-torn world of “Gears of War”, but not unnecessarily so. It certainly enriches the background of the game, and I think keen players would most likely enjoy this book. “Aspho Fields” intermingles events from the past of the games with events in the present, filling in the backgrounds of the key characters, Marcus Fenix and Dominic Santiago, and following their development as men and as soldiers. This culminates in the climactic Battle of Aspho Fields, the deciding conflict of the Pendulum Wars, and the self-sacrificing death of Dominic brother, and Marcus’ close friend, Carlos Santiago. What impressed me was just how credibly this was written, and then I checked the author’s details, and realised that Traviss had been a real life defence correspondent. Furthermore, she is English, and that rather explains a certain grittiness in this novel not always found in Military SF. War isn’t clean, it’s messy, and good people get hurt. Bad people too – including the Locust. I rather hope Traviss gets to explore the coming of the Locust in a later novel. That will be interesting.



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Books  
Provided  
by  
Hatchett

Reviews  
by  
Jan  
Butterworth  
and  
Jacqui  
Smith



## HEX Season 1

Review by Jan  
Butterworth

"Plenty of men have devilish qualities. You don't have to pick the real thing."

An English boarding school (with overly friendly teachers) houses a socially awkward student, Cassie, who is cursed by the past. She

discovers she has dangerous powers and can use them to manipulate people. Everything has a price though, and she has to deal with a fallen angel who ritually sacrifices her best friend and has an evil plan involving Cassie.

Some questions the story made me ask were;

- How can students become popular with yucky hair styles?
- How can students leave boarding school to dink and party?
- Don't they get carded in England?
- Why can ghosts cast shadows?

A lesbian ghost, a witch and a fall angel make an interesting cast of characters. Sure, the plot's weak, but the fallen angel, played by Michael Fassbender (from Band of Brothers), is a great reason to keep watching. Wow. Hot. For the guys there's quite a bit of girly action. Their clothes are a bit too much but I don't think that'll matter.

## My Arthur C. Clarke Quiz

Quiz by Jacqui Smith

1. Arthur C Clarke's only non-science fiction novel "Glide Path" was based on his World War II experiences in which service?

- Royal Air Force
- Royal Army
- Royal Marines
- Royal Navy

2. What innovative concept did Arthur C Clarke publish in "Wireless World" in October 1945?

- Astronomical satellites
- Communications satellites
- Global positioning satellites
- Weather satellites

3. Arthur C Clarke's first professionally published short story was called "Rescue \_\_\_\_\_."

- Flight
- Mission
- Party
- Ship



4. In Arthur C Clarke's "The Sentinel", near what named location on the Moon was the Sentinel found?

- Mare Crisium
- Mare Fecunditatis
- Mare Imbrium
- Mare Tranquillitatis

5. What is the name of the new star that was created in the implosion of Jupiter in Arthur C Clarke's "2010: Odyssey Two"?

- Apollyon
- Icarus
- Hesperus
- Lucifer

6. What was the name of the lunar sea across which tourists traveled aboard the Selene in Arthur C Clarke's "A Fall of Moondust"?

- Sea of Dust
- Sea of Hunger
- Sea of Pain
- Sea of Thirst

7. What structure is being constructed in Arthur C Clarke's "The Fountains of Paradise"?

- Launch platform
- Lunar base
- Space elevator
- Space station

8. Which Arthur C Clarke novel describes New Zealand as a hotbed of political innovation?

- Childhood's End
- Imperial Earth
- Songs of Distant Earth
- The City and the Stars

9. Which Arthur C Clarke story ends with the line "overhead, without any fuss, the stars were going out"?

- Expedition to Earth
- The Nine Billion Names of God
- The Star
- The Wind from the Sun

10. The "Fountains of Paradise" is set on the fictional equatorial island of Taprobane. Which real world island is Taprobane "about ninety percent congruent" with?

- Borneo
- Madagascar
- Mauritius
- Sri Lanka

# OBITS

(in no particular order)

## **Hisashi Asakura, age 79**

One of the two great translators of SF into Japanese.

## **Ralph McInerny, age 80**

Mystery novelist, best known for his Father Dowling series. Also used the pen name "Monica Quill".

## **Jim Harmon**

By Ian Randal Strock February 17, 2010

<http://sfscope.com/2010/02/authornostalgist-jim-harmon-di.html>

Andrew Porter reports that author and popular culture historian Jim Harmon died 16 February 2010. Born 21 April 1933 in Mount Carmel, Illinois, he published many sf stories in the 1950s and '60s, but he was also known for his writing about the Golden Age of Radio (for which he was sometimes known as Mr. Nostalgia).

His stories appeared in magazines including Amazing Stories, Galaxy, If, and F&SF. Some of them were reprinted in Harmon's Galaxy in 2004 (Richard A. Lupoff introduced the collection). He wrote only one sf novel, The Contested Earth (1959), but it wasn't published until 2007, along with seven of his short stories.

## **Ian Carmichael OBE, age 89**

Long-time television actor, equally adept in comedy and drama. Made his stage debut as a robot(!) in 1939. Early television success as Bertie Wooster. PG Wodehouse claimed that Carmichael was the best actor who ever played Wooster. (Though there have been some good ones since Plum Wodehouse died.)

## **Lionel Jeffries, age 83**

Long-time character actor. Jeffries's SF films include "First Men in the Moon", "The Quatermass XPeriment" and an unjustly-neglected steampunk movie with several titles, including "Rocket to the Moon" and "Blast Off!". Fantasy films include "Camelot", "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" and one of the very early talking-baby movies, "Bobbikins".

Jeffries also directed some movies with children as the lead actors, notably the first film version of E. Nesbit's "The Railway Children", Noel Coward's favourite movie.

## **Alexander Haig, age 85**

US Secretary of State and NATO Commander-in-Chief. An honest man in the Nixon Cabinet, for which he deserves credit, even if you disagreed with his policies.

## **Jack Babcock, age 106**

Last Canadian veteran of WW1. Third-last worldwide.

## **Andrew Koenig, age 41**

Star of "Growing Pains", but appearing here as Walter Koenig's son...

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/SHOWBIZ/TV/02/25/growing.pains.actor.dead/index.html>

## **Aaron Cohen, age 79**

Former director of NASA's Johnson Space Center in

Houston, died after a lengthy illness.

[http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2010/feb/HQ\\_10-053\\_Cohen\\_dies.html](http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2010/feb/HQ_10-053_Cohen_dies.html)

## **Ian, the Macneil, age 80**

by F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

Ian, the Macneil of Barra, 46th Chief of the Clain Macneil, 26th Macneil of Barra.

Born in the United States to the 25th Macneil, Ian Macneil divided most of his long life between a legal career in the USA and his hereditary duties as laird of Barra, on his ancestral estate in Scotland's remote Outer Hebrides. Ian Roderick Macneil studied law at Harvard and began his legal career as a clerk of the US Court of Appeals, ultimately becoming one of the world's leading experts on contract law. (Basically being the real-life version of Professor Kingsfield in 'The Paper Chase'.) He was professor of law at Cornell, at the University of East Africa in Dar es Salaam, the University of Virginia and Northwestern University.

In 1988, as visiting professor at Harvard, the Macneil (his proper title since 1970) predicted that one of his students -- Barack Obama -- would become President of the United States. Last year, the Macneil was invited to President Obama's inauguration but was unable to leave Barra due to ill health. In 2000, the Macneil donated his family seat Kisimul Castle to the government for a "peppercorn rent": £1 per year plus one bottle of malt whisky ... \*Scottish\* whisky, och aye!

An astonishing man who touched many lives (including mine), and a benevolent landlord and laird well-beloved by his tenants. Wa-hey the Macneil!

## **Robert McCall, 1919-2010**

According to Bob Eggleton, Robert McCall died on February 26.

McCall was the artist for the iconic poster for Kubrick's 2001: a space odyssey. He also created the posters for Star Trek: The Motion Picture, Meteor, The Black Hole, and Tora, Tora, Tora.

During World War II, he served as a bombardier after being rejected as a pilot due to color blindness. After the war, he became a commercial illustrator in Chicago and New York. His interest in aviation led him to become an illustrator for NASA in the 1960s.

## **Barbara A. Feist, 1916-2010**

Mother of Raymond Feist.

## **Corey Haim, age 38**

Actor. Accidental drug overdose, after a lifetime of addiction problems. Best known for genre films made as a youth, SILVER BULLET and THE LOST BOYS. Like many child actors, did not age well and did not experience the same popularity as an adult, but he was working regularly.

## **Bernie Kowalchuk, age 66**

Non-genre, but inspirational

<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/life/>

Ordinary+made+difference/2678512/story.html

## **Peter Graves, age 83**

Star of Mission: Impossible, Airplane! and so many other shows & movies.

## New Zealand March Board Game Releases

This month more than half of the new games (though not expansions) have a dungeon crawl theme. Mostly due to the fact that most of them are from AEG. Well-known as RPG publishers, they're new to the realms of board games and not surprisingly have chosen to specialize in that sort of game (but not exclusively).

### Martians

Designed by:  
Todd & Kerry Breitenstein  
Published by :  
Twilight Creations, Inc.  
No. of Players: 2 – 5  
If you didn't like the theme Zombies!!!, it's now redone with a Martian theme. So let the dungeon crawling continue along the suburban streets.



### Claustrophobia

Designed by: Croc  
Published by : Asmodée  
No. of Players: 2 – 2  
Ages: 12 and up  
Two player demons vs humans dungeon crawl. The boardgamegeek.com reviews all say it's a quick, fun game with awesome components.



### Thunderstone

Designed by: Mike Elliott  
Published by : AEG  
No. of Players: 2 – 5  
Ages: 12 and up

Easiest way to describe this game is it's the lovechild of last year's hit Dominion and any adventure game (eg Talisman or Runebound), with Magic the Gathering as the Godparent. It's a dungeon crawl game without the map or tiles, only cards which, once you are familiar with them, won't take the hours that the adventure games do. It's all about building your deck (buying stuff) and battling monsters. I imported this the moment it was released and am really enjoying it. Recommended.



### Infinite City

Designed by: Brent Keith  
Published by : AEG  
No. of Players: 2 – 6  
Ages: 10 and up  
Tile laying game where you are constructing your own

futuristic city. Extremely simple rules, cause most of what you need to know are the instructions clearly written on the tiles. I describe this as a Chaos Management game, cause control of tiles are always in flux due to people moving tiles & tokens around all the time. Not for people who need to be in control all the time, or if you are an eye for an eye player, best played light hearted always going after the tall poppy. I imported this one too, and am very pleased with my purchase.



### The Adventurers

Designed by: Frédéric Henry, Guillaume Blossier  
Published by : AEG, Dust Games, Pegasus Spiele  
No. of Players: 2 – 6  
Ages: 12 and up  
It's Indiana Jones all wrapped up in a board game.

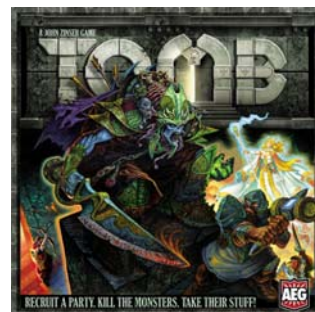
There's all the necessary challenges an adventurer needs— a large boulder constantly bothering you, lava pits, slowly closing walls, raging rivers, but don't forget the treasure. Boardgamegeek.com reviews say it's a light, fun, quick game which can be played with younger children.



### Tomb

#### Tomb: Crypt Master

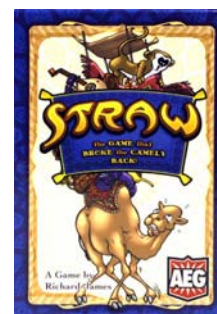
Designed by: John Zinser  
Published by : AEG  
No. of Players: 1 – 6  
Ages: 12 and up  
Tomb is a dungeon crawl game that gets mixed reviews; either you love it or hate it doesn't seem to be much middle ground. Instead of the usual control one human or the monster hoards, you control your party of people and as long as one is still alive you've still got game. It has an expansion, Crypt Master, which can be played as a stand-alone game.



### Straw

Designed by: Richard James  
Published by : AEG  
No. of Players: 2 – 6  
Ages: 7 and up

A light family card game. The objective is to see how much you can put on a camel's back before the inevitable happens.



By Louise McCully

## The Isle of Doctor Necreaux



Designed by: Jonathan Leistikow  
Published by : AEG  
No. of Players: 1 – 5  
Ages: 10 and up  
A cooperative game for 1-5 players (not sure if it can be called cooperative if played solo, unless you like arguing with yourself). The aim of the game is rescue the scientist kidnapped by the evil Dr. Necreaux, but if you don't do it in time the doomsday device will explode while you are still on the island.

## Rush n' Crush

Designed by: Charly Cazals, Frédéric Henry  
Published by : AEG, Rackham  
No. of Players: 3 – 6  
Ages: 8 and up

It's a racing game where you choose which psychopath driver to control. There is explosives, machine guns, armour shielding to name a few of the fun toys you get to use against your opponents while flying around the track. Looks interesting, if someone owned this I wouldn't mind trying it.



## Runewars

Designed by: Corey Konieczka  
Published by : Fantasy Flight Games  
No. of Players: 2 – 4  
Ages: 12 and up



It's an adventure game pitting players to battle one another in a fantasy universe (same one as

Runebound & Descent). Rather than just overwhelming each other with armies, you also need to collect runes by completing quests, only this way you will get what you need to beat your opponent.

## Expansions:

Pillars of the Earth: Builders Duel  
Kingsburg: To Forge a Realm  
Game of Thrones: Wolves of the North  
BattleLore Creatures Expansion  
Cosmic Incursion

The list of games was taken from the list at [www.pixelpark.co.nz](http://www.pixelpark.co.nz). All pictures in this article were found at [www.boardgamegeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com) and I thank those who spent their time taking them.

# Uncorked Broderick Wells

I've taken to playing an RPG, wherein we are assuming the characters of *Marvel* superheroes, similar to Spiderman and the Hulk. And during the set up of my character, I came to realise something – most comics, and superhero comics in particular, suck. Now, one or two of you will take issue with this opinion. That is your right. You are entitled to be mentally defective. Please indulge me as I argue my case. Then you can pillory me as much as you like in the pages of *Novazine*.

The first pointer to their suckiness is - how many comics are reprinted? Or even are available as a second edition? Very, very few. The majority that I have seen in reprint are, oddly enough, *Commando* and the like; gripping tales of heroics from World War Two where honour, decency and self sacrifice are stressed over thwarting unlikely opponents. If comics are such great vehicles of popular culture, why don't they get reprinted? From what I have observed of the culture of comic collectors, rarity seems to be sign of inherent merit. The whole business model seems to be driven by the collectors.

Next we move on to the physics in comics. I'm willing to suspend my disbelief and allow the Hulk to be enormously strong; so strong that he can pick up a tank. Well, I'll let him pick up a light tank, something in the 10-20 tonne range. But first, let's think about how he's going to do this. First of all, he's got to be able to get a couple of decent hand holds – tanks aren't designed for lifting by stray superheroes. The tracks aren't a quality hand hold, too flexible for starters and liable to come off. Same goes for the mudguards or fenders.

But let us assume the Hulk has managed to get a grip and then does the lifty thing – where should he be standing? At the centre of balance, of course! Hulk's 200 kg and bad attitude is no match for 10 tonne and the fulcrum effect. Our boy the Hulk is going to be working his arse off making sure the tank is balanced—and that's before he tries to throw it!

At this point the material scientist sitting beside me points out that he'd better try this only from a concrete pad; otherwise he's going to be hip deep in dirt really quickly. Yep, got to think of that too. While a tank spreads its mass over several square metres, the Hulk is spreading his over his own two feet. He picks up a tank on wet ground, he's going to become the world's angriest tent peg.

Comics routinely ignore the inverse square law, friction, and inertia for the sake of telling a story. It may make for drama, but the resulting pictures are just laughable. At least the Phantom's purple suit gets ripped occasionally....

*This story is intended as an homage to the great writer Arthur C Clarke, who passed from us also exactly two years ago, on 19 March 2008 (aged 90). In it I have deliberately echoed some of his stories, and mixed in some of my own ideas. While I know I'm nowhere near up to his standards, I hope you enjoy it.*

## The Guardian

By Jacqui Smith

The Machine woke.

It had been asleep for uncounted eons, ever since the last time intelligence had arisen on the blue-green planet below and announced its existence to the Universe. It was the stirring of that communication that had roused the Machine from its age-long sleep. Its sensors had detected radio waves, and not random static, but the modulated signals that denoted meaning. The Machine deliberated in its hidden redoubt among the mountains that the beings on the planet below called the Montes Haemus, on the rim of Mare Serenitatis, on their Moon. Then it began the tedious and difficult process of establishing just what that meaning was, even as it alerted its Sentries in the Asteroid Belt.

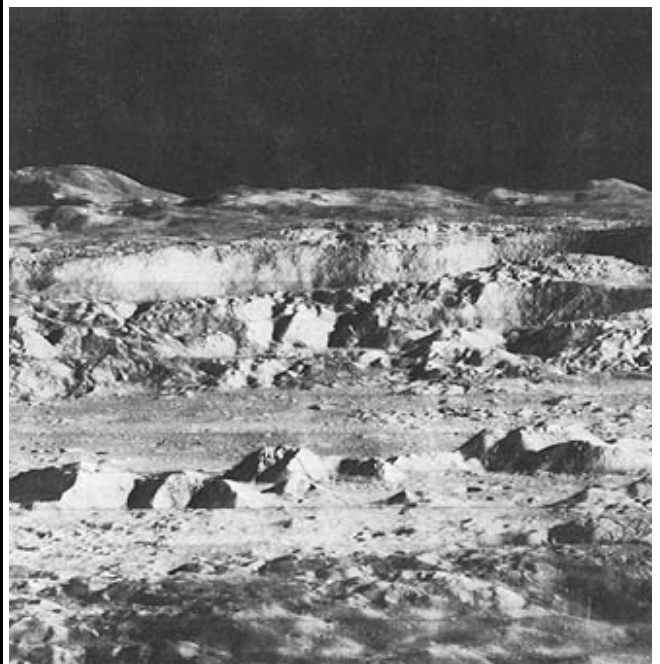
To begin with the signals were encoded in a series of dots and dashes. While this was helpful in establishing the alphabet the beings used, it was initially confusing until it became apparent that the beings themselves communicated in a number of different languages. As the years passed the beings began broadcasting in their various languages, and not just navigation data, but news and entertainment. What made the Machine's task so very challenging was its lack of cultural referents. It started to crack the form of communication called "English" since so many of the broadcasts were in that language. But what was a "Daisy?" And why was the being "crazy"? And what of a "marriage", a "carriage" or a "bicycle"... The Machine was somewhat relieved when the beings invented television. Translating the signals into a pictorial representation was a trivial exercise, and by comparing the pictures with the audio signal, the Machine was able to greatly increase its vocabulary. It learned that a daisy was a flower, a marriage was a form of contractual agreement, a carriage was a device for transporting the young, and a bicycle a form of two-wheeled transport. This was not entirely helpful.

Still, the Machine was making considerable progress, and it watched with interest as the beings transmitted images of a major conflict involving the inhabitants of much of the largest land mass and of several groups of islands. From the broadcasts it established that the war was being fought over a question of ideology. One nation group apparently believed in the inherent superiority of beings of a certain appearance over all others. It was apparent this was not so, because that group lost. It was even more peculiar that their enemies on one island group looked as

much like that ideal as they did. Their allies on a distant island group did not fit the desired model at all. The Machine was content. The triumph of such an ideology would be unlikely to lead to the success in the challenges that lay ahead of the developing civilisation. And if it did, the result would likely be toxic. It was also useful that it was the speakers of English who triumphed, although by this time the Machine had mastered many of their languages.

It watched in some consternation as further ideological differences brought the beings to the brink of nuclear war, but that challenge was somehow met and overcome. If the Machine had believed in luck, it would have concluded that this was a remarkably fortunate race. It celebrated as the beings sent their first primitive craft into space, and applauded as they landed their own kind on the very Moon where it lay hidden. It was pleased as robotic probes were sent out to the far reaches of the planetary system, but was appalled at the plaques and recordings the beings placed on them. How could members of a species so knowledgeable in the ways of war be so very innocent?

It watched as conflicts came and went, wondering at the suicidal zeal that led believers in one religious ideology to crash laden passenger jets into towers used primarily for the worship of financial transactions. It listened to the preachers of the One God and saw little difference between priest and pastor, rabbi and mullah. It listened to political leaders of every stripe and wondered if any of them were up to the challenges that would face them, as resources dwindled and pollutants accumulated. And then it turned its attention once more to the deeper darkness of the space beyond the bounds of this system, for out there were the real devils, and in their ignorant enthusiasm the beings had surely summoned them.



The Carpathian Mountains on the Moon—  
as photographed by Orbiter II (photo from NASA).



"I've got one, I've one!" Trevor Murray danced into the bedroom in a state of considerable excitement. His wife Julie, not sharing his enthusiasm for telescopes at 3am in the morning, looked up at him blearily.

"Got what, dear?"

"A comet! Our very own comet! And we can get our name on it!"

"That's nice dear," she said, and buried her head in the pillow. "Can I go back to sleep, now?"

"Sure, sure.... I just gotta go make some calls, send some emails, stuff like that."

And so it came to pass that Comet C/2008 H7 (Murray) was entered into the computer records, and all those interested followed its passage towards the Sun.

"Hey, Joe, I got that orbit you wanted!" Phil Harris was one of those keen young students that older Professors like Josephus Reid always found irritating. It was generally best to keep them well occupied, and plotting the orbits of comets discovered by amateur astronomers was one guaranteed method for doing just that. Josephus stroked his beard and looked at the youthful enthusiasm... "Well?"

"It wasn't easy, Prof. Dratted thing is coming at us out of Sagittarius, with almost no angular deviation."

"Let me see that, boy..." The Professor's normal irritation had shifted to intense interest, as he took the sheets of printout from the student. "It's coming in a bit fast isn't it? And have you correlated this with the position of the Earth in its orbit?"

"Er... not yet, boss. You don't think?"

"We'd better be sure, darn sure of it, if it is."

They checked their calculations five times. They called in the rest of the Astronomy Department, and an assortment of people from the Mathematics Faculty as well. Then they called the IAA, NASA and because they doubted the politicians would have the foggiest idea of what to do, they called Civil Defence. The CD might actually have contingency plans for what to do if a comet hit the planet, after all. What they specifically did not do was call the media, but given that the object was still months away from any potential impact, and the number of people who knew the story, it was inevitable that it would get out. That widespread panic would ensue was also predictable, even though the astronomers, squirming in the limelight of public attention, pointed out there wasn't even any certainty that the comet would hit the Earth. They certainly refused to predict where it would hit. The only thing they were prepared to concede was that they would have more reliable information as time passed. The "comet report" became a news weekly feature. The public panic quieted down to a simmer, their attention diverted by the latest celebrity embarrassment.

Meanwhile the Civil Defence boffins modelled possible scenarios. All agreed that an ocean impact was more likely, given that the planet had considerably more water than land surface, and that an ocean impact would be on the whole, much more destructive. People were advised to avoid coastal vacations that year. At NASA they started pulling out plans made long before for dealing with a potential cometary impact, and sifted through them. This could be their finest hour, and they had no intention of making a mess of this one. Even so, there

was nothing to be done until the object was much, much closer.

"That's peculiar..." Professor Reid muttered studied the latest photographs of the comet from the Hubble Space Telescope. He considered it to be something of a personal project, though he neither discovered it, nor was first to plot its orbit.

"What's peculiar, Prof?"

"Well, Comet Murray-Reid is past Jupiter and now approaching the inner solar system. It should be starting to show a visible tail by now."

"And it isn't?"

"No, it's not. See..."

"You're right.... It's not got a tail, and it's going too fast, and it's coming straight for us... You don't think?"

"No, I don't. And you'd better not, either."

Some weeks later, Comet Murray-Reid entered the region of the asteroid belt. And that was when Trevor Murray, Professor Josephus Reid, assorted students and professors, Civil Defence officials and rocket scientists had a collective apoplectic fit.

"It's gone!"

"What do you mean, it's gone? Comets don't just go away... well, they do if they hit something or they're heading out of the Solar System. This one was heading inwards, and the only thing it was going to hit was us."

"Not any more."

"So it would seem," Professor Reid said, looking through the series of digital photographs on the computer monitor.

"I wonder if anyone got anything between these two," he added, looking at one photograph that showed the object, and the next, which showed nothing.

Word went out to the astronomical community around the world. All they got back was a report from an amateur astronomer in Australia who was observing the object through his telescope at the time. He swore that he saw a bright flash as it vanished. The news media leapt upon the unfortunate fellow, trying for something more sensational, but he stuck to his story. Soon, they turned back to harassing the far less innocent politicians and entertainers who were their usual fodder.

The Machine watched with what might be termed satisfaction. It had discovered something they called the Discovery Channel some planetary years before, and had just viewed a documentary production about the object called Comet Murray-Reid. It had learned that the entities on the planet below plainly had no idea of what that object truly was, and what had actually caused it to suddenly vanish from their sight. There was some speculation that it had been destroyed, perhaps by a collision with an unknown object. But it was only one theory among many, and although the entities were correct in their guess that the object had been eradicated, they had no inkling that its demise was no mere celestial accident. Just as importantly, they had clearly acquired no knowledge of the very real nature of the threat that had been overcome. There would be no interference. Nothing to change their path. And that was precisely the way it should be.

# ConText 2011 SF Convention in Auckland

ConText will be held over Queen's Birthday weekend in Auckland, Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> to Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011. The venue is the Centra Auckland Airport Hotel.

<http://mymail.ezmsgs.com/em//message/email/view.php?u=5349&id=52063>

The con crew are currently in discussions with Catherine Asaro, an American author of both science fiction and fantasy novels, in becoming the GoH. The fan GoH will be Lynelle Howell, editor of Phoenixine and an active Wellington fan. The crew are also in negotiations with other potential guests.

This is a marvellous opportunity for anyone who enjoys science fiction to participate in 4 days of sharing their hobby with other fans. There will be discussion panels, organised gaming, costuming events, the Quiz, a video stream and a chance to buy science fiction related items. The winners of the 2011 Sir Julius Vogel Awards for Excellence in New Zealand Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror will be announced on the Sunday night at the Conjunction Banquet.

Full and day memberships will be available if you wish to attend for one or two days only. Organised events will be going into the early evening. The bar will be open all day until late.



**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)

**Nova Zine Back Issues:**

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

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**This Month:**

- BOOK Monday 22 March
- SPACE Friday 2 April
- BOG Friday 2 April

**Next Meeting:**

Wednesday 21 April  
7:30pm  
Auckland Horticultural Centre,  
990 Great North Road,  
Western Springs

Meet the new Crew!

**Upcoming Events:**

**August 27-29 Au Contraire**  
2010 New Zealand NatCon Wellington  
<http://www.aucontraire.org.nz/>

**September 2-6 AussieCon IV**  
2010 WorldCon in Melbourne  
<http://www.aussiecon4.org.au/>

**September 23-26 GenCon Australia Brisbane**  
<http://www.genconoz.com/>