



N O V A N Z E N

Ah'ma gotta ... Blink!

(Photo by Keith Smith at Armageddon 2014 — more pictures page 4)

Issue XLIV - Oct/Nov 2014

Musings from Under the Mountain

I confess that I was a little dismayed to see the long queue of cars stretching all the way back from Greenlane past Greenwoods corner on the Saturday of Armageddon this year, as I was ferrying Keith into the show. Fortunately, I spotted the traffic jam with sufficient warning to turn and take an alternate route, across Manukau Road and through Cornwall park. But it did concern me. Is our hobby becoming, on some level, simply too popular for comfort? Or is it just me getting older and grumpier?

Keith had purchased a three-day pass, but by the time I ferried him home after the Sunday's outing, it was obvious that he was all armageddoned out. So, properly equipped with Keith's camera, it was my turn to be dropped off on the Monday, with intent to attend a panel on Women in SciFi, to browse the exhibit hall, and to photograph people in costume.

So, after arriving just after lunch, I started by having a look around the halls, and amusing myself by photographing cosplayers. I was relieved that it was not as unpleasantly noisy as I remembered, nor too crowded to tolerate, although it did prove remarkably easy to get lost! I managed to find a couple of small items to purchase—a book by Robert Rankin which I was later able to get signed, and a present for Keith.

I got back to the big theatre in time for the Women in SciFi panel which featured Helen Slater who played the lead in the *Supergirl* movie, Sarah Madison who played the Weeping Angel in *Doctor Who*, Mira Furlan who was Ambassador DeLenn in *Babylon 5*. It was a fascinating panel, and I was interested by the way the other actresses and the audience reacted to Mira Furlan's story. I was amazed to hear how she grew up in the former Yugoslavia and how her talents as a actress were utilised by the communist government. Fortunately, she escaped the turmoil of the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991 to the West, and gained international fame in the role of DeLenn, and later as Danielle Rousseau on *Lost*. The other remarkable thing was her reaction to the audience question about how she dealt with DeLenn's "dark side". "DeLenn doesn't have a dark side," she stated emphatically. "She is a good person". Which says something about how the genre has changed, and not necessarily for the better. Must every character have a dark side? Can't some be simply good people, trying to do the right thing?

Heading out from the theatre, I noticed that doors straight ahead and to the left were open, and I ambled off in that direction to see what there was to

see. I was glad I did. It was here I found author Terry Brooks, and got his autograph and a nice photo. Although I'm not a huge fan of Shannara, I found him a likeable person, and a good choice of a writer guest for Armageddon—and I look forward to seeing more authors being invited in future years. I'd suggest Ben Aaronovitch for his Doctor Who connections, which means he's involved in media as well, but that's just me. Then I went and found Robert Rankin—and got his photo and autograph. He struck me as more than a bit crazy and flamboyant—just like his books!

Finally, I had to get back to the main auditorium in time to get a good seat for the final costume parade. There was a small problem—it meant I was stuck in there during much of the preceding program item, which was an eating contest. Now, I know that some seem to be amused by this American import, but as far as I'm concerned this is not my kind of food fight, and the Americans can have it back and bin it. I don't see how it fits into the cult SF&F theme of Armageddon, but then I don't see how the "wrestling" events fit, either.

I got a lot of photos, some of them better than others (I didn't have the big lens so I had to sit down the front which didn't give me the best angle). I was very impressed by the winner, a young lady who presented as Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* with three costume changes right there on stage. Beautiful.

And to cap it all, at the end the cosplay sponsor brought out a bag of plushies and threw them out into the audience. One practically fell into my lap, and when I stated, "My plushie!" all the other reaching hands fell away. Wooh! This kind of thing rarely happens to me. And so I have a permanent souvenir of what had proved to be an excellent day. (Oh, I asked around and discovered that the plushie has a name—it's called Tifa—and is a character in *Final Fantasy VII*).

Jacqui Smith, Editor

Contents

Editorial	2
Presidential Address	3
Armageddon 2014 in pictures	4
Sky at Night	5-6
Obituaries	7-8
Reviews	9-13
Reconnaissance Update	14
Upcoming Events	14

Reversing Extinction:

Recent news has seen the reappearance of a fairly science-fictional concept that has surfaced in the media from time to time; the idea of using the DNA of extinct species to return them to life. If it ever does happen, it almost certainly won't be anything like *Jurassic Park*. Although Michael Crichton's plot device of extracting dinosaur DNA from blood preserved in mosquitoes has some basis in fact, the degradation of information over hundreds of millions of years means that we'll almost certainly never have more than small fragments of any dinosaur genome to study.

The species that may be contenders for restoration from extinction are those that have disappeared recently enough that their full genomes are still accessible, and where related species may be able to act as surrogate parents. Amongst extinct New Zealand species, the lack of prospective foster parents means we'll almost certainly never see the moa restored to life, but the huia, with available DNA and closely related species still extant, may be a contender for restoration. Across the Tasman, there has been talk from time to time of restoring the Tasmanian tiger; the species became extinct in the 1930's, and with embryonic specimens still preserved and available today, it may be possible to take a clone and foster it with another species, most likely the Tasmanian devil. Perhaps the most ambitious prospect under consideration is restoring the mammoth; there are a number of well-preserved specimens under the Arctic permafrost, and Asian elephants may be close enough to the mammoth to carry a mammoth embryo to term.

There will no doubt be many problems to overcome in the process of reversing extinction; the long history of unsuccessful attempts at mammalian cloning before the successful birth of Dolly the sheep indicates that many attempts will be necessary to achieve the rebirth of an extinct species. There's also the question of whether cross-species parenting is feasible; in the case of modern proboscideans, the Asian and African elephant species are different enough that they're hostile to each other if they happen to meet. An Asian elephant bearing a mammoth could well reject the calf, leaving human researchers with the added challenge of hand-rearing the mammoth baby.

The issues being debated around the prospect of reversing extinction include not only the practicalities of whether it can be done, but the ethical dimension of whether it should be done. On one level, it's an optimistic sign that human society

has moved forward enough that our collective conscience has led us to seek to reverse the species loss that our ancestors caused. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen if species restoration is feasible, and even if it can be done, whether it will be large scale enough to restore entire populations to their former environments, or whether restored species will only ever amount to a small number of individuals kept as curiosities for zoos and wildlife parks. One school of thought holds that a more effective use of resources than attempting to revive extinct species may be to pursue conservation efforts to maintain the extant populations of species that are currently endangered, but not yet extinct. It remains to be seen whether we'll ever see the huia and other extinct species return, even if only in small numbers, or if both practical and philosophical considerations mean that the best we can do is continue our efforts to preserve the fairy tern, the kakapo, the Maui's dolphin, and other species that so far, at least, haven't gone the way of extinction.



As the festive season draws close again, I trust that everyone in the club will have an enjoyable Christmas and New Year, keep safe and well over the summer season, and let the crew know what you'd like the club to do as we head into 2015!

Alan Parker, President, Stella Nova

The extinct Huia

Letter to the Editor

Hi Jacqui,

Didn't get to Armageddon this year, but from what I have heard, it was a good one, and some of the glitches were sorted out, or at least well publicized this time.

My one complaint - same as it has been for the last several years! - is the eating contest. This is something I strongly object to (and yes I do make my concerns known to Armageddon and to the pizza/ice cream co etc). Why? In no particular order:

- Eating is NOT a sport.
- What sort of example does it set for those with eating disorders?
- The money/food wasted on the eating contest would be better used and more appreciated by any local food bank.

That's the short version of it. Not quite sure if it's what you were wanting for NovaZine, but you did ask for our thoughts...

Cheers,
Terri Doyle

by
Alan
Parker

ARMAGEDDON

2014

Photos by Keith & Jacqui Smith



Star of the Show... Jenna Coleman

Author Terry Brooks



Author Robert Rankin.... Going Kiwi!



And those Cos-play heroes....



The Sky at Night December 2014

The big space news at the moment is about Rosetta, Philae, and their encounter with Comet 67P Churyumov-Gerasimenko. It is certainly a tremendous feat, landing a probe on a comet and getting the data back. Curiosity had its 'seven minutes of terror' as it landed on Mars, but for Philae, it was seven hours of anxiety.

Comet 67P was discovered by two Soviet-Ukrainian astronomers in 1969. It takes 6.45 years to orbit the sun and will reach perihelion at 13th August 2015. It is a faint object, requiring a large telescope to see. Even at its brightest it only reaches magnitude 11.

Rosetta was launched by the ESA on the 2nd of March 2004 on an Ariane 5 rocket. It took ten years to reach its target, flying by Earth twice, and Mars once, in order to get enough speed. On the way, it took pictures of asteroids 2867 Stein and 21 Lutetia, then in order to conserve power, the probe was put into hibernation for 31 months and woke up last January.

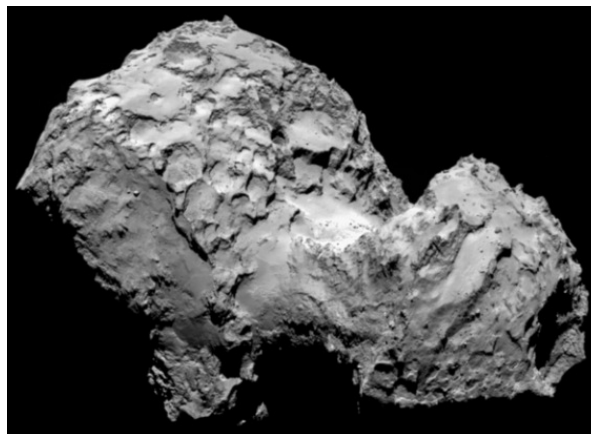
But 67P wasn't the original target. Rosetta was scheduled to fly on 12 January 2003 to reach Comet 46P/Wirtanen but problems with the launch vehicle caused postponements. By the time the problem was fixed, 46P was more difficult to reach, and so 67P became the target. Rosetta's name came from the Rosetta Stone while Philae came from the Philae Obelisk. Both objects gave important clues in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics, and the names reflect the mission objectives of deciphering the nature of comets, being parts of the original composition of the Solar System.

Upon arrival, Rosetta discovered that 67P was a two lobed comet, as if two objects had come together and stuck. Some observers described it as looking like a 'rubber ducky'. A series of complicated manoeuvres followed, to slow Rosetta down and go into 'orbit' around the comet to image it and select a landing site for Philae. Because of the very low gravity it was planned to use harpoons, thrusters and screw drills in order to hold Philae in place at the moment of landing. But, since the composition of the surface was unknown - powdered ice or a rocky slush - it wasn't sure that these devices were going to work.

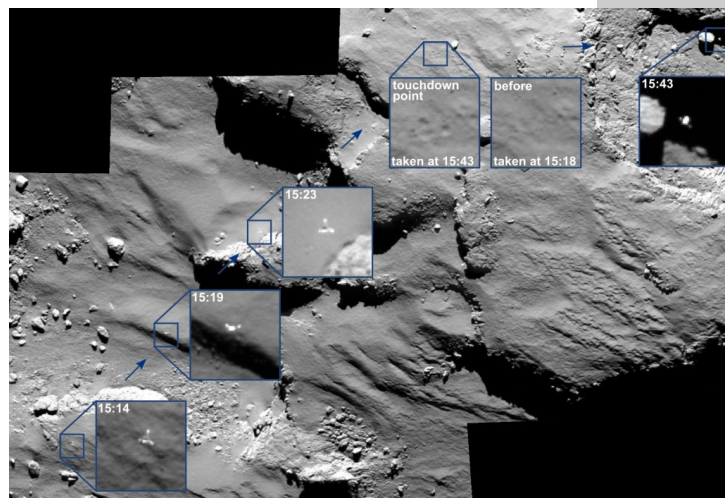
Philae was released from Rosetta on the 12th of November and descended towards the comet at a relative walking pace, taking seven hours to reach the surface. Unfortunately, the harpoons and thrusters didn't fire and Philae bounced up again; doing that twice, before coming to rest near a cliff, leaning on a rock with one leg in the air - and to make matters worse, in the shade. This meant that Philae had to rely on its internal battery because it was unable to get enough light from the solar panels to recharge. It was then a race to get as much science done before the power ran out. In spite of these problems, a lot of data was received. One result revealed the presence of organic molecules on the comet which supports the theory that life bearing compounds may have arrived on comets.

Philae is now sleeping, but it is hoped that, as the comet gets closer to the sun, that enough light will fall on it to recharge the batteries and wake it up. Meanwhile, Rosetta continues pacing the comet so it can observe what happens to the comet as it gets closer and closer to the sun.

The Rosetta Probe on its fueling stand



Recent image of the comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko



Rosetta's OSIRIS camera captured Philae's bumpy landing on Comet 67P. Over half an hour, the camera snapped photos of the lander drifting over the surface, bouncing and drifting away.

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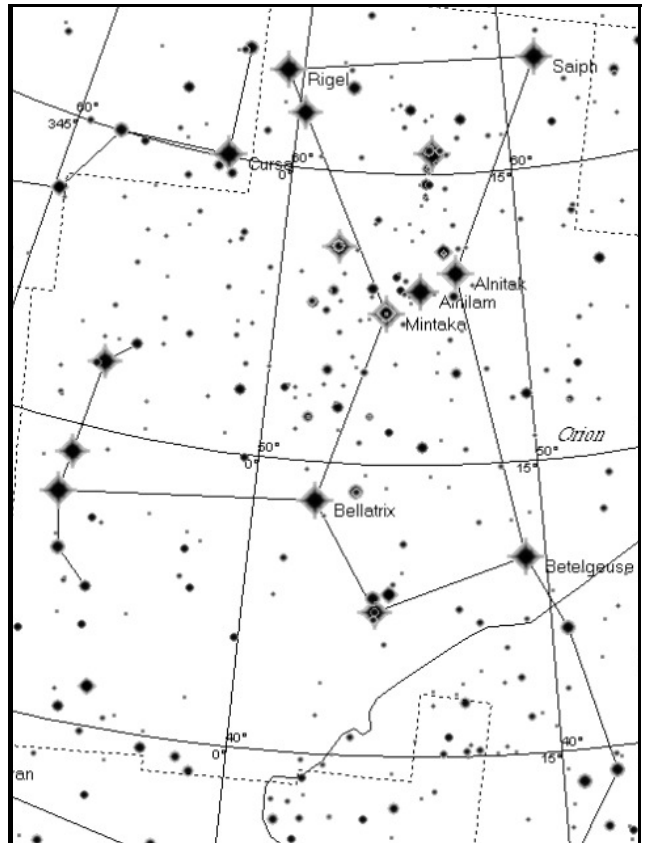
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by
Keith
Smith

SKY AT NIGHT

So, once all these pesky clouds get out of the way, what can we see? This is the time of year that I started learning the night sky, many years ago now, and the constellation I started with was Orion, currently located to the north east. This is easily recognised as three stars in a row surrounded by four fairly bright stars. The one on the top left (Rigel) is very bright, with the bottom right star also quite bright, but red (Betelgeuse). From our viewpoint, most constellations are upside down (since they were named and identified in the Northern Hemisphere). So Orion is standing on his head waving his legs in the air. His right foot is marked by Rigel, and his left shoulder is Betelgeuse. His belt are the three stars and, hanging up from the right hand side is his sword. The middle star in the sword looks fuzzy and that's because it isn't a single star, but actually the Orion Nebula (M42). The really bright star higher and to the right is Sirius, the brightest star in the sky. Above Orion is the fainter constellation of Lepus the Hare and to the left is Taurus the Bull. The 'V' shaped group is the Hyades Cluster, but the bright reddish star on one end of the 'V', Aldebaran, is not actually part of the cluster, but just happens to lie in the same direction. The Pleiades cluster (otherwise known as Matariki, Sabaru, or the Seven Sisters), is a more compact grouping a bit further to the left. The map on the right names many of the stars in Orion.



To the northwest you should see a square. This is the Great Square of Pegasus. Three of the stars belong to Pegasus, but the lower right one is actually the head of Andromeda. The constellation of Pisces runs above and also to the right of the Square, while Andromeda extends towards the horizon from the lower right star. If you're in a place with a dark northern horizon, you may be able to see a fuzzy blob which is M31, the Andromeda Galaxy. It and our Milky Way Galaxy are rushing towards each other and should merge in roughly four billion years.

To the south, the Southern Cross is low to the horizon which leaves the bright star of Achernar high in the Southern Sky. Near overhead is Fomalhaut and Canopus is lower to the south east. The two Magellenic Clouds are still high in the sky with the SMC just past the meridian and the LMC crossing the meridian later in the evening.

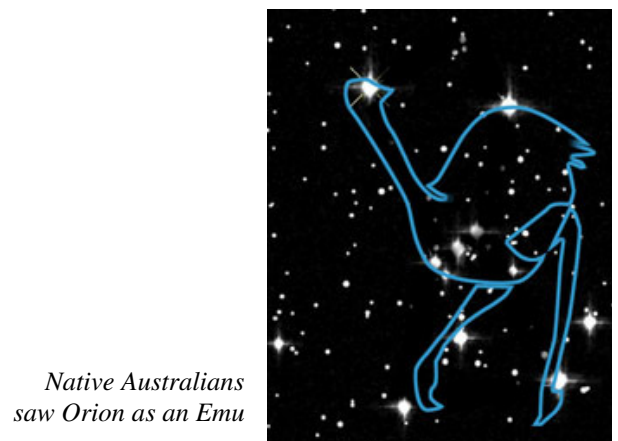
Planetary wise, the only three that can currently be found in the evening sky are Neptune, Uranus and Mars. Neptune and Uranus are dim, but can be found in the early evening, if you know where to look. Conversely, Mars is a striking red object in the constellation of Capricorn, setting about mid evening. Jupiter, currently in Leo, rises around midnight. It reaches opposition on the 6th of February. Venus and Mercury also make an appearance in the evening sky, after sunset, in the later half of December while Saturn starts to appear in the morning sky just before sunrise.

The Moon in December 2014:

Full Moon—7th December
 Last Quarter—15th December
 New Moon—22nd December
 First Quarter—29th December

The Moon in January 2015:

Full Moon—5th January
 Last Quarter—13th January
 New Moon—21st January
 First Quarter—27th January



Native Australians saw Orion as an Emu



Maori people saw Orion as a New Zealand pigeon reaching for the ripe berry that is Sirius

by
 Keith
 Smith

Obituaries

September 1

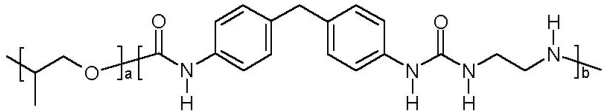
Hugh McGregor Ross, (aged 97),

English computer scientist and theologian who was involved in the standardization of ASCII and ISO 646 and worked closely with Bob Bemer. ASCII was first known in Europe as the Bemer-Ross Code. He was also an expert on the Gospel of Thomas and wrote several books about it.



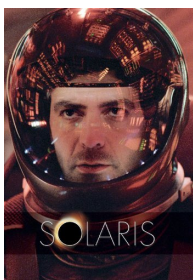
Joseph Shivers, (aged 93),

American textile chemist who was best known for his role in the structural development of Spandex (also known as Lycra), a thermoplastic elastomer, in the 1950s, while employed at DuPont.



September 3

Zeus, (aged 5), American Great Dane, world's tallest dog. Standing on his hind legs Zeus stretched 2.2 metres. He died of natural causes related to old age.



September 4

Donatas Banionis, (aged 90), Lithuanian Soviet actor, remembered for his performance in the lead role of Tarkovsky's *Solaris* as Kris Kelvin.

Joan Rivers, (aged 81), American actress, comedian, writer, producer, and television host noted for her often controversial comedic persona. She came to prominence in 1965 as a guest on *The Tonight Show*. By 1986, she had her own "Late Show" becoming the first woman to host a late night network television talk show. Later, she hosted *The Joan Rivers Show* (1989-1993), winning a Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Talk Show Host. As for genre work—she was the voice of Dot Matrix the droid in *Spaceballs*.



September 5

Noel Hinners, (aged 78), American geologist and soil chemist best known for his work with NASA where he worked in a variety of scientific and administrative roles from 1963-1989, including two years as NASA Chief Scientist.

September 8

Jane Baker, (aged ??), British television writer who, with her husband Pip was known mainly for their contributions to the BBC science-fiction series *Doctor Who*. They scripted four serials for the programme in the 1980s: *The Mark of the Rani* (1985), *The Trial of a Time Lord* (1986), Parts 9–12 and 14, and *Time and the Rani* (1987).

September 9

Graham Joyce, (aged 59), British writer of speculative fiction and the recipient of numerous awards, including the O Henry Award and several British Fantasy Novel awards for both his novels and short stories. He won the World Fantasy Award in 2003 for *The Facts of Life*.

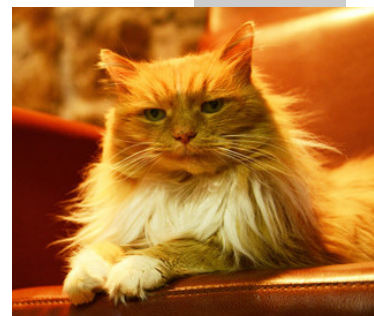


September 10

Richard Kiel, (aged 74), American actor, voice artist, and comedian, best known for his role as Jaws in the James Bond franchise.

September 11

Hamish McHamish, (aged 15), Scottish celebrity ginger cat who lived a nomadic life in the town of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland. He came to national and international prominence after the publication of a book entitled *Hamish McHamish of St Andrews: Cool Cat About Town*



September 12

Sir Donald Sinden, (aged 90), English actor in theatre, film, television and radio and also author. Achieving early fame as a Rank Organisation film star in the 1950s, Sinden then became highly regarded as an award-winning Shakespearean and West End theatre actor and television sitcom star. In *Two's Company*, he played the English butler, Robert, against Elaine Stritch's American character, Dorothy. In *Never the Twain.*, he played the snooty antiques dealer Simon Peel who lived next door to his competitor Oliver Smallbridge (played by Windsor Davies).



September 13

Douglas E. Smith, (aged 54), American video game designer, best known as the author of the 8-bit game *Lode Runner* (1983). This was considered a seminal work of the 1980s, and was one of the first games to include a level-editor.

September 15
Nicholas Romanov, Prince of Russia, (aged 91), French-born Russian claimant to the throne of the House of Romanov (since 1992).

September 20
Anatoly Berezovoy, (aged 72), Soviet cosmonaut, who flew as Commander in 1982 on Soyuz T-5 on the first mission to the Salyut 7 space station, returning to Earth on the Soyuz T-7 after 211 days 9 hours.



September 27
Eugie Foster, (aged 42), American short story writer, columnist, editor, and cosplayer. Her stories have been published in a number of magazines and book anthologies, including *Fantasy Magazine*, *Realms of Fantasy*, Orson Scott Card's *InterGalactic Medicine Show*, and *Interzone*. Her story *Sinner, Baker, Fabulist, Priest; Red Mask, Black Mask, Gentleman, Beast* won the 2009 Nebula Award.



September 30
Martin Lewis Perl, (aged 87), American physicist who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1995 for his discovery of the tau lepton.

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October 2
Carlos Lopez, (aged 26), American stunt performer, whose credits included *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Olympus Has Fallen*, as well as the TV series *The Vampire Diaries* and *Banshee*. While on vacation in Portugal on October 2, 2014, Lopez attempted to perform parkour from his hotel room to a balcony across the street, and fell to his death.

October 11
Gary McLarty, (aged 73), American stunt performer and stunt coordinator for film and television. His abilities earned him the nickname "Whiz Kid" in Hollywood. McLarty performed stunts in over 150 films between 1966 and 2004, among them *The Wild Bunch*, *Little Big Man*, *The Longest Yard*, *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *Jurassic Park*, *Heat*, and *Collateral*.

Bob Orrison, (aged 86), American stunt performer who worked on the original *Star Trek* series doubling for Leonard Nimoy and DeForest Kelley on several occasions. He was the primary stunt driver of the General Lee car on *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and doubled for George Peppard in stunts performed for *The A-Team*. (No, it is not a weird coincidence, McLarty and Orrison died together in a traffic collision).



October 14
Elizabeth Peña, 55, American actress and director, who among many parts, provided the voice of the character Mirage in Pixar's animated film *The Incredibles*.

October 19
Lynda Bellingham, (aged 66), Canadian-born English actress, broadcaster and author, who starred in the long-running series of "Oxo Family" British TV adverts between 1983 and 1999, the drama series *All Creatures Great and Small* and in the comedy series *Second Thoughts* and *Faith in the Future*. She starred in the 14-part *Doctor Who* serial *The Trial of a Time Lord* in 1986 as the Inquisitor.



October 24
Marcia Strassman, (aged 66), American actress and singer, best known for her roles in *M*A*S*H*, as Julie Kotter in *Welcome Back, Kotter* and as Diane Szalinski in the 1989 feature film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* and its sequels.

October 31
Michael Alsbury, (aged 39) American test pilot for Scaled Composites, killed on test flight PF04 of the Virgin Galactic SpaceShipTwo VSS Enterprise on 31 October 2014. At the time of his death, he had 1800 flight hours, 1600 of them as a test pilot and engineer with Scaled Composites. In 2013, he was the co-recipient of the Ray E. Tenhoff Award from the Society of Experimental Test Pilots.

In Memory Of
Alison Roberts

8 June 1938– 29 October 2014

Mother of club member Dale Roberts

She passed away following a prolonged illness.

Our sincere condolences go to our friend Dale.



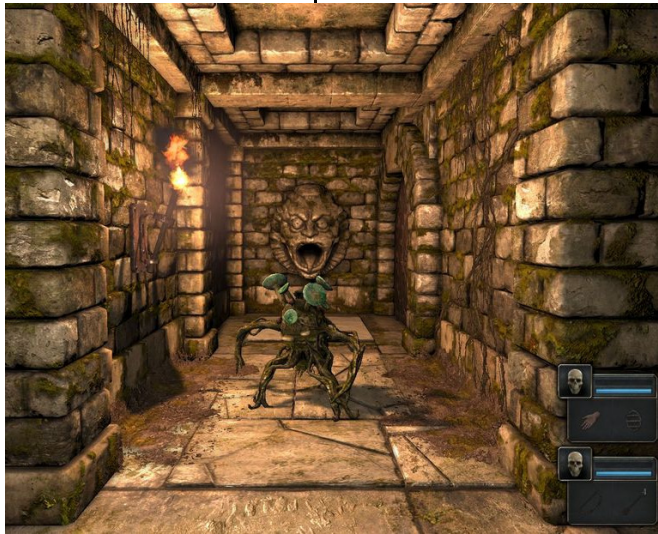


The Gameplay is exactly like the first Legend Of Grimrock (Here after: LOG)- there is S+W+N+E movement only – Like the classic games of yore (the 90’s) such as Eye of the Beholder/ Dungeon Master/Ultima series. But with a new added feature - you can now press and hold a mouse button and look anywhere. Along the

Published by Almost Human Software
Reviewed by Brett Peacock

way you’ll find a shovel. Take it. You see, in the best tradition of Island adventures, there is buried treasure to find.... But as a weapon it fails.

Some may recall that I gave the original game a favourable review here some time ago, and now here comes the sequel. And this is how you make a sequel: Keep what works and improve the game mechanics, make a new setting and update the world engine, keep the puzzles but lose the ones that were not welcomed. And that, my friends, is EXACTLY what Almost Human Software have done.



The puzzles are logical and challenging (always), but there is less of the split second movement timing found from the first game. And, just like LOG1 you need to stock up on food, because as soon as you party starts to get hungry, bad things happen - regeneration of health and or mana slows, then stops as you starve. Plus, using it up accelerates and you become slower and weaker. You can also

You (all 4 of you) have been shipwrecked in a cage on an island. You start by choosing your race (out of 6, now including Ratmen) your class (Warrior, Mage or Rogue) and your traits and stats. Then you smash the lock of the cage and you are free to explore the island...well you would be if it was not the domain of the Island Master (Like a Dungeon Master but with a nasty sense of humor! He leaves cryptic notes around to tease you.)

become injured and this also slows and hinders the whole party (Cure is via healing potions, which you can make using herbs you find IF you have some skill in Alchemy.)

The game alternates between dark, nasty dungeons and even nastier “open areas” under the sky, a change welcomed from LOG 1, with the above ground areas having a day/night cycle.

All of this in a game which clocks in under 1GB in size and under \$NZ30.00 retail (I bought mine from GOG. Com online, also available on Steam and Gamersgate for a similar cost.)

So, to keep this short and sweet, I really did like what the developers did with LOG 2, and, IF you liked the first game in the series then this one is even better, and just as worthy of your time and money. I rate it at an easy 8/10.





Published by Bandai/Namco (PC version on Steam)

Reviewed by Brett Peacock

Apparently this was actually released over 18 months ago for game consoles (PS3 & PS4, Xbox) and did quite good business. The PC version is both overly tardy and under-promoted. I bought this on Steam for US\$5.00 – on sale down from US\$19.99. Many of you will recall my review of Crisis 2 which I generally lauded, but with caveats about the Console styled game-play and engine quirks. (Set paths, Lots of visual clues for the paths, ammo resupply being just a bit “Convenient”, save-game only by checkpoint, etc.) And this one is the same, but in some ways it’s just a bit less annoying and I do not know exactly WHY that should be so... unless, it’s because I had nothing to compare it with, as I did with Crisis2. So, let’s go on to the game itself, then....

You play a Biker type called “Monkey”, who is built kind of like the Hulk without the Giant & Green, but with the same pants. He also has a really bad (as in vomit inducing) Anime haircut (Notice the developers – Japanese). Fortunately, that is the only clearly “Anime” style choice in the game, the characters themselves are exquisitely modelled and animated. Monkey gets armed with a hi-tech Quarterstaff, which (when refuelled) doubles as a Plasma gun. Just the thing for destroying your enemies - and there is no shortage of them.

You have to escort a fellow escapee, a young woman named Trip, some 300 miles back to her home after the Slaver airship you are both in, crashes in old New York. (BTW it’s been 200 odd years since the world went to hell in a hand-basket.) You don’t have a choice about it, while you were out cold, she fitted you with a slaver head band which can kill you if you disobey her – and you can’t take it off, and if you kill her, or she dies, it explodes, creating a bit of a mess of your head. But it does have some advantages – she has hacked the system running it, so you can tune in to her drones and open up security fields. And, it’s upgradeable. You can also receive telemetry from the drones, and spot minefields before you step into them. You know, useful stuff. Still, all things considered, it was a Really Lousy Monday when you met her...

There aren’t many folks around in old New York. That would be because the city is the domain of Killer

Mechs, kind of like the ones from “The Terminator, but uglier, less friendly, and fond of laying minefields, setting up killzones for automated weapons and patrolling the city on the off-chance that some dumb human wanders in. Like you and Trip just have. Even worse, they call for reinforcements, if you attack them.

Primary field of view is a straight Console OTS, with a side helping of platform movement for some of the obstacle courses that make up sub-levels. It doesn’t take long to spot that the

camera shifts out of the OTS (Over the Shoulder) view when the transition to platform begins, but it is still a little jarring because Forwards (W) become a set direction (N-E-W-S or UP) depending on the puzzle) Once you get used to this shift it soon becomes simple to control. And in fact, you can begin to anticipate the shift from the surroundings. And all this is achieved with the Unreal Engine! (By the way, I have only played through chapters 1 & 2 of the game – Escape the Ship is Chapter 1, and New York is Chapter 2, so there seems to be quite a bit of game here. We are heading for the crashed ship to find my Bike, if it survived the crash.)

The “look” of the game is very, very nice, indeed. The ruins of New York are stunning in every almost photo-real detail. (It had better look that good - it’s a 13 GB download....) I do not have the fastest PC around (2.8Ghz Quad core Athlon, some 4 years old now, and an Nvidia GT550 1GB) but this game plays very smoothly and easily on my system. The game is well voiced (IE - the characters do sound like, well, actual people) and the world seems to be fairly coherently developed I have to report that the game is Fun to play - Because it is action packed, requires thought and observation and a modicum of timing and quick reflexes. It’s very nice to look at, and the world seems very coherently conceived. And all of this comes in a game I’d never heard of, seen reference to, or have observed others playing. To sum up, I was more impressed by it that I had thought I COULD be. Which is a GOOD thing – I would not have paid US\$20 for a game I’d never heard of, but for US\$5 it seemed to be a fair risk to take. Would I now pay Steam the full \$20 for this game?

The Answer is “YES”.

And that earns this console port a score of 7.5/10



Time and Time Again

by Ben Elton

Published by Bantam Press

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Steve Litten

If you had the opportunity to correct one event in the past 100 years, what would it be? For Hugh Stanton, it is the assassinations that started World War One, and then the militarism that seemed to drape every aspect of German life. So along with the aid of group of Oxbridge dons, he sets out to prevent the idiocy that was the First World War, only to discover he is not the only one changing history, and what he has done has had terrible ramifications in the timeline.

Ben Elton is a clever chap. And he wears his politics on his sleeve. Unfortunately he likes to show off both and the story suffers from it. I was also annoyed to spot two historical clangers in the first 60 pages. Considering these were spouted by a Cambridge history professor, my opinion of the story and Ben Elton dropped a few notches. The initial interleaving of past and future action is interesting and works to maintain a certain level of tension. But the constant blatherings of Professor McCluskey regarding Marxist historical theory are well off, and another black mark against Elton.

However, the biggest failing is not that the story starts on page 100, but rather this is a short story dressed as a novel. The main character of Hugh Stanton shows very little development, and the subsidiary characters are spear-carriers. Unfortunately this sort of writing gives science fiction and science fiction writers a bad name. When committed by a mainstream author, which is how I classify Ben Elton, it compounds the damage. You can read it if you like, but there aren't any jokes to leaven the afternoon you will waste.

The Science of Discworld IV: Judgement Day

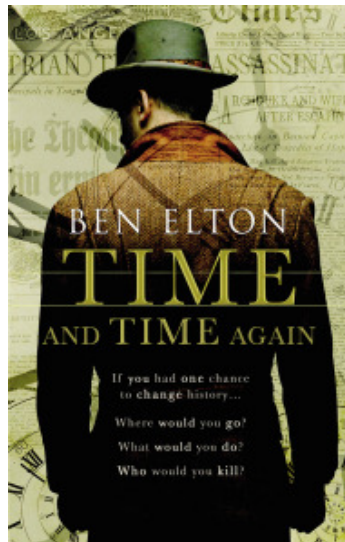
by Terry Pratchett, Ian Stewart & Jack Cohen

Published by Ebury Press

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Steve

This is the fourth in *The Science of Discworld* series, and if you haven't caught the gist by now, here it is: Roundworld science is explained by reference to Discworld magic/physical laws. Terry, Ian and Jack supply the text and try to expand on the Roundworld experiment that Hex, the Unseen University's Magic Collider/Computer, created in the first place. This volume explores the doctrinal argument of what science has a right or duty to explore and whether religion can proscribe that right or duty. This makes the book more philosophical than the previous three in the series, and perhaps a bit more... I want to say turgid, but that is not the right adjective especially when



dealing with Terry Pratchett... dry than the others.

The structure is much the same as the previous volumes, a chapter of story followed by a chapter of exposition on a concept raised in the story chapter. The story this time around is that of Marjorie Daw, a Roundworld librarian drawn into the theological argument brought on by the Omnians as to who owns the Roundworld experiment (and the artefact known as Roundworld). This debate is presided over by Lord Vetinari, which he handles with his usual caustic irony. Marjorie's testimony on the witness stand may be invaluable to the Wizards' cause, but it is completely overshadowed

by a later witness's.

For those who enjoy Pratchett/Stewart/Cohen in any combination, this a great book concerning the Church v. State debate. And the term "quantum" does make an appearance, much to the disappointment of Lord Vetinari. But these are modern times and he'd much rather you got your information of the case first hand via the book, rather than second hand via me.

Solo: James Bond#38

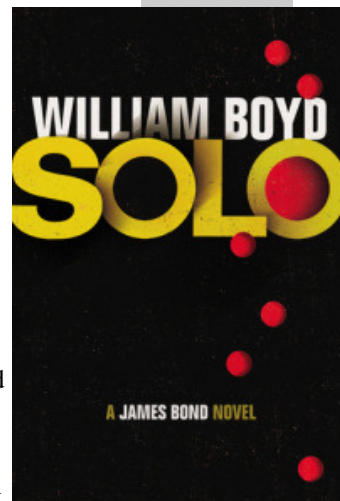
by William Boyd

Jonathan Cape

Supplied by Random House New Zealand

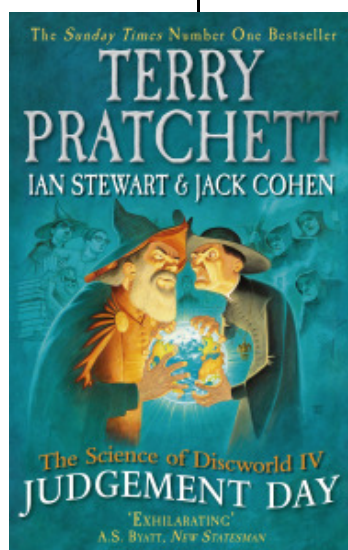
Reviewed by Jan

An experienced agent, James Bond is dispatched to stop a civil war in the small West African country of Zanzarim. A beautiful woman is to aid in his mission, which is to take out the leader of one of the warring parties. Everything goes pear-shaped and Bond is kidnapped, badly hurt, and the mission a failure.



Bond goes on a 'solo' mission to exact revenge and ends up in the United States. He tracks down the bad guy who hurt him, a Rhodesian mercenary with a fondness for hanging dead people on tree branches. He also uncovers a horrible operation, one that is connected to Zanzarim. Alone and without the backing of Her Majesty's government, James Bond must crush the operation and save the day.....

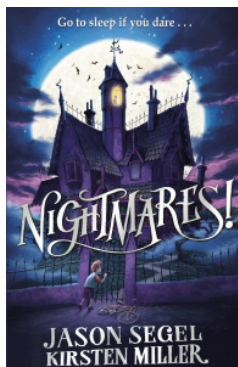
Lots of action and suspense in this tale of the ultimate spy. The plot has a lot of twists and red herrings that leave you breathless and wondering what could possibly occur next. An exciting read that is a lot of fun and a must for fans of Bond.



007

Nightmares!

by Jason Segel and Kirsten Miller
Published by Corgi
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

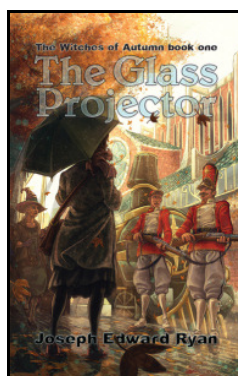


I really am in two minds about this book. On the one hand it is a well-written clever story, with a very positive message for kids about overcoming their fears. On the other, it never really grabbed me, never succeeded in fully taking me into its world... perhaps it's something to do with not having suffered greatly from nightmares myself. For me, unlike the authors, there is no clear dichotomy between nightmares and dreams, one can easily shift from one to the other, and a dream may have nightmarish elements without being a nightmare. And that might be one reason why I had trouble relating to this story. Another is that I've never liked horror stories, and I'm not sure that I'd have wanted to read this book when I was a kid.

It's the story of a young boy named Charlie, his brother Jack and his friends. Charlie's mother is dead, and his father has remarried to Charlotte, one of Charlie's mother's best friends. Charlie believes the stepmonster to be a witch and both hates and fears her. His fears lend him the ability to open the portal in the house of her ancestors and enter the world of nightmares in bodily form. His friends are drawn in through their own nightmares, and the authors pick up on typical childhood fears – of mockery, of authority figures and of the dark, and show how they might be defeated. Now, I know that some people will buy this book simply because it has Jason Segel on the cover, but honestly read it yourself before giving it to the kids, because it really will be too scary for some more sensitive souls. It helps that there is a comic side to the novel, and that it doesn't take itself absolutely seriously. There is mention of a sequel, although how they plan to make a series of this, I just don't know.

The Witches of Autumn 1: The Glass Projector

by JE Ryan
Published by Steam Press
Supplied by Steam Press
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



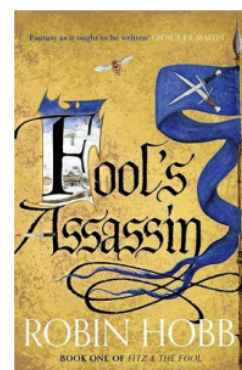
It is a bit of a departure for Steam Press to publish a work which is not only by a writer they have previously published, but also one which is the first of a series. Aimed at young adults, "The Witches of Autumn" is what one could define as an alternative steampunk fantasy. You can tell that it's steampunk because there are zeppelins, mad scientists, wondrous gadgets and a hearty dose of derring-do. There is even a proper old-fashioned villain with a twirling moustache! It qualifies as fantasy because it has that magical element, unusually inventive in that the magic is a product of the bond between magician and familiar, the familiar being a ghost who takes the form of an animal.

So you already know that this novel is definitely going to be different. The story is set in the city of Autumn which is engaged in an apparently interminable war with nation called Rumland, giving the novel something of a First World War background. But it's not a war story... It's more of a treasure hunt, a quest for a lost library of forgotten magic. It's the story of how a young magician named Thistle together with her familiar Mappo the bat, and her friends Mr Pepper the gargoyle, and Epona the snark become embroiled in the search for an ancient library once discovered by the mysterious Witches of Autumn. And naturally in the process they find the eponymous Glass Projector. But I'm not going to tell you what it does...

This novel has interesting and distinctive characters, a strong plot, and a unique background. It ends (appropriately for its genre) on something of a cliff-hanger, and I have to say that I am genuinely looking forward to the next one. What's more I'm quite certain I would have enjoyed this book as a child, and I suspect that it will appeal to many an imaginative young reader - and to older readers too.

Fool's Assassin Book One of Fitz and the Fool

by Robin Hobb
Published by Harper Voyager
Supplied by Harper Collins NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



Okay, it is without a doubt, a fantasy brick. It's a good 4cm thick, over six hundred pages, and the first of a new sequence in an on-going series. But it didn't take nearly as long to read as I expected. There's something about Robin Hobb's prose that just draws me in and makes me want to keep reading. Her characters really come alive for me, and there aren't so many of them that this reader becomes confused. Nor does she insist on killing them off just as soon as they get interesting! People die, certainly, but only when their part in the story is done. Her narrative is linear, it doesn't duck and dive all over time and space, even though there are two protagonists in this novel. Oh, and she does nice maps, too!

The tale returns to the Six Duchies and focuses on FitzChivalry, now well into his middle years, and known as Tom Badgerlock, lord of the country manor called Withywoods. To say who else the story belongs to would give away about a quarter of the plot, so I'll leave it at that. Suffice it to say that the title does finally make sense around about p560 – which is not coincidentally about where the excrement hits the air conditioning... the pace picks up rapidly and things head towards a shocking climax, and then ends on something of a cliff-hanger. Suffice it to say that I really am going to have to find the next part when it comes out, because I do need to find out what happens next. If there is any criticism one could back it is simply that it does take perhaps a few too many pages to get there, although I would be hard-pushed to suggest what might have been edited out. All in all, a great read, and I doubt seriously that fans of the Fitz will be disappointed.

Broken Homes

by Ben Aaronovitch
Published by Gollancz
Purchased from Book
Depository
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

When the publisher kindly sent me book five in the Peter Grant urban fantasy series for review, it seemed like a good idea to catch up by grabbing book four from the shelf downstairs and reading it first. It was. Events in this story are significant in the scheme of things magical in Aaronovitch's version of the city of London, but to say how would definitely take us into the realm of spoilers...

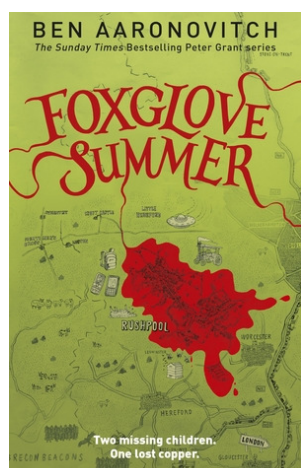
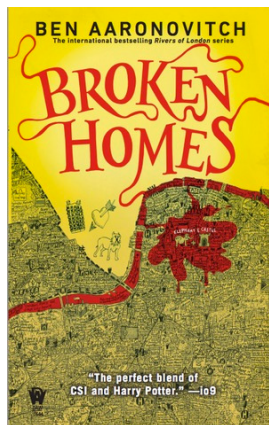
If you haven't come across the series before, suffice it to say that Aaronovitch hits the sweet spot right between the Dresden Files and British police procedural crime drama. Now, urban fantasy set in England and especially in the city of London has a distinct advantage in that there are millennia of history to draw on, together with myths and urban legends going back centuries. In the Peter Grant series, Aaronovitch mines that resource with consummate skill. Add to that, a distinctive and well-developed cast of characters and you've got a must-read series for lovers of the genre. I have to wonder when the BBC is going to start adapting this series for television (it has been optioned, but as far as I can tell, no action yet). Although the Beeb would have problems with the pissing contest...

You are pretty well guaranteed to find yourself laughing out loud at the wry humour in this novel. And when the title is "Broken Homes" that ensures some funny looks. That title is itself something of a pun, in that it does not mean what it usually does, and fulfils itself in truly spectacular fashion by the end of the book. Aaronovitch draws on rather more recent history than usual for the weird in this story, taking us to the London district of Elephant and Castle, and to some of the stranger architectural oddities that passed for housing estates in the 1970's, and of course, some of the current inhabitants thereof. There is an authenticity about the London of this series. I have only visited the city once, and then really only the touristy bits, but it rings true, and I don't see any Londoners complaining. The only thing that bugged me was the swearing, and it's not enough to put me off. Highly recommended to anyone who wants to read hard-edged, and utterly geeky urban fantasy.

Foxglove Summer

by Ben Aaronovitch
Published by Gollancz
Supplied by Hatchett NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

It should be just a summer holiday interlude in the country for Peter Grant, only it's not, because two young girls have gone missing, and Peter has decided it's his job to find them. Especially since there's something decidedly supernatural about this case.



He's a bit of a fish out of water in the English countryside, and I'm inclined to wonder if Aaronovitch is too... (You have to understand that I spent eight years of my childhood in a village in Somerset). But it does allow him to play with the farmers, the forests and the fae... Dead sheep and invisible unicorns, anyone? It also gets Peter out of his comfort zone, and into a story where he has to figure things out largely on his own (only assisted by Beverly, who is as much a distraction as anything else, until she has to pull him out of the deep smelly stuff he gets himself into – no, not that kind of ordure, I know what you're thinking).

I don't think this is the strongest story in the series so far, and it doesn't contribute a lot to the story arc, aside from some revelations about Molly. It's still a fun read, with plenty of geeky humour, and those carnivorous unicorns are going to have to show up in a role-playing game sometime, because they're unforgettably cool.

Spooks: A New Darkness

by Joseph Delaney
Published by Random House
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

Some people really don't know when enough is enough. After thirteen novels in the first Spooks series, Delaney has elected to continue the adventures of Tom Ward for another series. Having lost his mentor in the previous book, Tom is no longer an apprentice. So he acquires an apprentice of his own. Who is a girl, and the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, which is an interesting idea. Of course, girls aren't supposed to be spooks, which creates drama right there.

However, there is nothing here which can fix the flaws with the "Spooks" universe. Yes, there is a much better map, which would actually look like Lancashire, if it wasn't for the over-large labels. It would have helped if the map related to the new territories described in the book. And it's still this unemulsified amalgam of the real world and fantasy, exacerbated by the addition of a whole new menagerie of monsters. Unlike the boggarts and suchlike, the Kobalos and their pets don't appear to have any basis in any Earthly mythology I'm aware of (unless they're meant to be kobolds, in which case they're very unlike the kobolds of Germanic folklore – which are more akin to Dobbie the house elf). Furthermore, I can't see any logical reason why these monsters and their pets haven't already overrun all of Tom Ward's world...

This novel really has the feel of something tacked on, to extend a series which, for all its problems, has a great many fans. The addition of the girl spook seems to be largely an exercise in political correctness... she's way too much of a Wesley Crusher, by which I mean she's irritating and too good at solving Tom's problems for him. It's easy enough to read, but I was cringing...





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:

SPACE at the BEACH 2015

Friday 6th February, 6pm
 (Picnic at St Helier's Bay
 thence to Coen's residence).

Meeting

Wednesday 18th February, 7:30pm
 at Chez Smith

Next Quarterly Meeting:

Wednesday 18th March 2015, 7:30 pm
 Auckland Horticultural Centre,
 990 Great North Road,
 Western Springs



Upcoming Events:

January 24th - 25th

The Ink Forge Games

Remuera Bridge Club, 273 Remuera Road,
<http://battlecry.co.nz/ink-forge-games-2015-event>

February 21st - 22nd

BattleCry Tournament Convention

Remuera Bridge Club, 273 Remuera Road,
<http://battlecry.co.nz/events/battlecry-tournament-convention-2015>

April 3-6th 2015

RECONNAISSANCE

36th New Zealand National SF Convention
<http://www.timelord2067.com/convention.html>