



Hugo Awards over the Years...

(Photo by Alan Parker at Loncon 3—see article page 3, more pictures page 4)

Issue XLIII - Aug/Sept 2014

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Musings from Under the Mountain

“Democracy is a poor system of government at best; the only thing that can honestly be said in its favour is that it is about eight times as good as any other method the human race has ever tried.”

- Robert A. Heinlein.

Recent events both in science fiction and fantasy fandom and in the mundane world have caused to wonder whether democracy is starting to fail us. Or, more accurately, whether we are failing our democracy. When a third of eligible voters choose not to vote in a general election something is very wrong. When the vast majority of people eligible to vote on the Hugos apparently didn't bother, and much the same for the Sir Julius Vogel awards, then that's hardly a good thing.

The consequence in the political situation is a government elected by a minority, which is unpopular by definition. And that amounts to not wanted and not trusted by the majority. Now this situation might make the media happy, but it's hardly good for the country. It doesn't matter where on the political spectrum that government stands, if two-thirds of the nation fails to support them, either actively or passively, they don't have the confidence of the people. But how can you expect people to vote when they don't see anyone they want to vote for? (Which seems to be the main excuse I've been hearing).

I confess that I am saddened and confused by the number of people who chose not to vote. Voting is a right hard won by our ancestors, and not just by the suffragettes who campaigned for votes for women. In classical Greece where democracy was invented, only land-owning freemen could vote—women, slaves and foreigners were excluded. Many men as well as women suffered through the years as the right to vote was extended first to the privileged few, then to all men, and finally to all adults, to men and women of all races. There are still plenty of nations where autocrats and absolute monarchs continue to rule, and places where their idea of democracy is more in name than in reality. Take Hong Kong, where many people are protesting for the right to a full democracy where they can freely choose those they can vote for.

Government, like all human institutions, is part of world-building in science fiction. Will future human societies go in for democracy? I remember Arthur C. Clarke in “Songs of Distant Earth” giving us a society that was in some ways more democratic than modern representational democracies, in which electronic technology would be used to facilitate

regular popular votes on many issues. It's even more interesting to speculate on ways alien societies might organise themselves.

The consequences of non-voting in fandom is far less significant in the scheme of things, but that doesn't mean it doesn't matter when people receive accolades for work which really isn't up to the standard readers have a right to expect. Now, as some of you are aware, I do a lot of reviewing of both fiction and non-fiction. Consequently, I think I have a pretty good idea of what's good and what isn't. And the stories that got onto the Hugo ballot for short stories were all quite dire—and the one that won was by no means the least terrible. The contention in some quarters is that various individuals were utilising social media to persuade people to vote for particular stories for reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of writing. Now, if enough honest voters had bothered to read the stories and vote then the result might have been fairer—and even more so if they have got involved in the nomination process. I admit that I didn't, and in hindsight I quite possibly should have.

There are contentions that something similar has occurred with our own Sir Julius Vogel awards, that voting has come down to the most popular rather than the best. There have been suggestions that there should be a voting panel instead of a popular vote, or possibly some combination of the two. Personally, I'm not sure about judges for these awards ... they could go too far in the direction of formal literature, and overlook some of the special qualities we look for in the best of science fiction and fantasy. But for now, while we retain the popular vote, please, next time... vote! Oh, and they tell me that nominations are now open, so if there's a story, a novel or a movie that you consider worthy, I encourage you to exercise your right to nominate. And don't forget those fan awards!

Jacqui Smith, Editor

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London Calling!

In my previous column, I mentioned my forthcoming trip to Loncon 3, the 72nd World Science Fiction convention due to take place in August at the Docklands in London. Since then, I've completed my travels successfully (including post-Worldcon visits to Edinburgh for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and to New York City on the way home, although that may be another story to tell at another time.)

Loncon 3 proved to be one of the biggest Worldcons ever. Total membership, both supporting and attending, set an all-time Worldcon record of over ten thousand, while actual physical attendance at the con, at over seven thousand, made for the second largest ever Worldcon, and the largest ever to take place outside North America. The world has changed a lot since the first London Worldcon in 1957; back then, the first ever non-North American Worldcon drew an attendance of less than three hundred, and flying across the Atlantic was much slower, much costlier, much less comfortable and much riskier than it is today.

Although not all of our science-fictional dreams from that time have come true (no flying cars or mass produced jetpacks on the horizon so far!), in many ways we live in a world that would have been unimaginable even a few decades ago. Loncon 3 wouldn't have been as big as it is without the advent of the relatively inexpensive mass air travel that we know today; as one of the speakers at a panel I attended at the con pointed out, millions of people every day are travelling through an alien environment that's hostile to human life, with one-quarter sea level air pressure and temperatures below minus forty degrees Celsius. The advent of the Internet has also made both running and attending cons easier than ever before. When I attended my first Worldcon, LoneStarCon 2 in 1997, the net was still relatively new, and much of what I did to register still involved snail-mail and costly long-distance phone calls; on signing up for Loncon 3, I was able to do everything with a click of the mouse, and all progress reports and other documents related to the con were in electronic form.

I've already shared some traveller's tales from the con at the most recent SPACE and club meeting. I met up with many fans and professionals from all over the world, some for the first time and some whom I'd met at previous cons, including Pat Cadogan, the GoH at Conspiracy in Wellington in 1997. Loncon 3 also provided a rare opportunity to attend two Hugo awards ceremonies, both the current Hugos and the retro-Hugos for the best science fiction of 1939. After the main Hugo ceremony, one of the recipients gave me an

opportunity to hold the award (and, yes, it was quite heavy!).

The video archive enthusiasts among UK fandom were also active at the con, screening a number of little known television productions at the con. Notable screenings included a sixties adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, starring Peter Cushing as Winston Smith, and a television play of similar vintage starring Michael Caine as a British Army officer pondering how his world would have turned out had Britain capitulated early to the Nazis in World War Two. As an alternate history fan, that was a particular highlight for me.

Loncon 3 also had plenty to offer in the realm of real-world science, including several items from the British Interplanetary Society, and a presentation from the British company looking to build Skylon, a spacecraft design that would use dual jet and rocket engines to reach orbit in a single hop. (If Skylon does make it off the drawing board and actually flies, it will be at least 2020 before it happens. Here's hoping the dream will come true!)

On the last day of the con, I also had the great privilege of meeting Brian Aldiss, who celebrated his eighty-ninth birthday that day. On speaking to him, I found him to be eminently approachable (and I did get a photo opportunity with him!).

So, those are just a very few of the vast number of experiences and memories I took away from Loncon 3. It was a great experience to attend my fourth Worldcon, and to see a bit more of the world as well. (In today's terrorism-conscious world, I also became well acquainted with the high level of security screening at airports, train stations and tourist attractions in the UK and USA; however, that, too, is another discussion for another time.)

On a final note about the con; I also attended the Worldcon business session, so I happened to be available to stand up alongside Norman and Maree P. to represent New Zealand for the 2020 Worldcon proposal. I've already written at length in my previous column about the New Zealand 2020 bid, so I won't extend this column any further by rehashing those issues. Still, I was pleased to play a role, however small, in raising the bid's profile. Here's hoping Kiwi fans will continue to have a strong presence at Worldcons in the years to come, and momentum will continue to build towards ratification in 2018, and the con taking place in 2020!

Alan Parker,
President, Stella Nova



by
Alan
Parker

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← Bigger on the inside?

The venue ↑

Award winners at the Retro Hugo Award Ceremony →

Tent village in the exhibition hall ↓



Display at a panel of classic SF&F ↓ magazines

Alan with the great SF writer Brian Aldiss ↓



Photos by Alan Parker

The Sky at Night

November 2014

I was at a loss of what to write about this month until we got around to watching the first episode of the Brokenwood Mysteries – New Zealand's answer to Midsomer Murders. It's set in a small New Zealand town, presumably somewhere near Auckland, and, like Midsomer Murders, involves some really strange murders in out of the way places. I sometimes wonder if the area around Midsomer should be investigated by Torchwood in case there is some sort of 'alien influence' that's causing all these murders in one small area.

Anyway, part of the plot involved the victim being at the murder scene because he was watching the Leonid Meteor Shower, and a quick check told me that this occurs in November – which is just right for this article – so, this issue's topic is meteor showers.

Meteor showers are something that you do not need any equipment to observe – just a clear night, a rug (to lie on) and something to keep you warm. Then it's just a matter of lying back and watching the show as every few minutes of so, a faint streak of light flashes across the sky. How often this happens and the direction they come on depends on the shower and the time. What you should notice that the meteors in the show appear to emanate coming from one particular place in the sky, which is called the 'radiant'.

What is basically happening is that, when a comet travels in it's orbit, it's shedding fine dust and gas which spreads out along it's orbit, mostly happening at perihelion (the closest point to the sun). As time goes on, this dust spreads out along the orbit so, when the Earth intersects the orbit, the dust will fall into the atmosphere making it look like that it is all coming from one place. This also means that most meteor showers are associated with comets – the ones that aren't are most likely associated with old comets that have since broken up. This is also why such showers always turn up at the same time each year and radiate out from the same place.

The main meteor showers worth watching out for are listed in the table below. There are others, but they have longer times between meteors and will be less spectacular. The meteor trails are caused by those little particles of dust burning up in the atmosphere. Sometimes you can see something brighter, usually called a 'fireball', are caused by slightly larger objects.



One that fell to Earth—Meteor Crater, Arizona



The Holsinger Meteorite is the largest discovered fragment of the 150-foot (45-meter) meteor that created Meteor Crater.



Leonid Meteor, 2009

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by
Keith
Smith

Name	Date	Peak Date	Frequency (per hour)	Comet
Alpha Centaurids	Jan 28 – Feb 21	Feb 8 th	5-25	
Pi Puppids	Apr 15 – Apr 28	Apr 23 rd	1-40	26P/Grigg-Skellerup
Eta Aquarids	Apr 19 – May 28	May 5 th	60	1P/Halley
Delta Aquarids	Jul 12 – Aug 19	July 27 th	20	
Orionids	Oct 2 – Nov 7	Oct 21 st	20	1P/Halley
Leonids	Nov 14 – Nov 21	Nov 21 st	100+	55P/Tempel-Tuttle
Geminids	Dec 7 – Dec 17	Dec 14 th	120	

So, besides flashes of light in the sky, what else is going on in the night sky?

It's getting really into Spring now, as evident by all the rain, spring flowers, and the advent of Daylight Saving Time. The winter constellations of Scorpio, Sagittarius etc are low in the west in the evening sky, while the summer constellations of Taurus (including Matariki), Orion, Canis Major etc are rising in the east.

To the north, can be seen four bright stars forming a square. Three of the stars belong to Pegasus, being the wing, but the one to the bottom right, belongs to Andromeda, marking her head. If you're at a dark sky sight, then follow the chain of stars arcing from that star down and to the east towards the horizon. Two stars down, another star should be seen at right angles to that line, closer to the horizon and nearby, is a fuzzy patch. That's M31, the Andromeda Galaxy. This galaxy is approaching us and, will collide with the Milky Way Galaxy in roughly four billion years, finally forming a giant elliptical galaxy that has already been named 'Milkomeda'.

There aren't many bright stars in this area of the sky. Above the Square is the constellation of Pisces, depicted as two fish on strings that are tied together. The 'teapot' of Sagittarius is low in the west and above that is a triangular looking pattern of stars which is Capricorn. Looking to the east, are Ares and Taurus.

Looking overhead though, two bright stars do stand out. The more northerly one, and the fainter of the two is Formalhaut, marking the mouth of Pisces Australis. The other is Achernar, marking the mouth of the Eridanus River, which flows from it's source near Orion. This entire section of sky is full of constellations having a watery theme, including Aquarius and Cetus, the Whale.

The Southern Cross is grazing the horizon at this time which means that the Lesser and Greater Magellanic Clouds are higher towards the South. Near the LMC is the bright star Canopus and further to the east and south is Sirius.

We've lost Saturn in the evening but Mars is still visible in the early evenings, maintaining it's altitude above the horizon. Mars will later disappear from the evening sky but, in December, it and Saturn will start appearing just before dawn, joining Mercury in the morning sky. Jupiter makes an

appearance in the east around midnight while Venus starts to become the evening star again about mid November and all through December.

The Moon in November:

Full Moon—7th November
Last Quarter—15th November
New Moon—23rd November
First Quarter—29th November

The Moon in December:

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

Speaking of the moon, I hope to have some pictures of the Total Lunar Eclipse this month in the next issue but the weather doesn't look too promising at the moment. I guess we'll see what happens.

And here is what we saw in between the clouds:



Obituaries

O B I T S



July 6
Dave Legeno, (aged 50), English actor and mixed martial artist, who played the werewolf Fenrir Greyback in the last three *Harry Potter* movies. He was found dead in a remote part of Death Valley.

July 7
Dick Jones, (aged 87) American film and television actor who achieved success as a child performer and in B-Westerns. He was probably best known as the voice of Pinocchio in the 1940 Walt Disney film *Pinocchio*.

Sheila K. McCullagh, (aged 93), English author, whose work was first published in the 1950s. She went on to write many children's fantasy and educational books, including *Puddle Lane* which was made into a TV series in the 1980's.

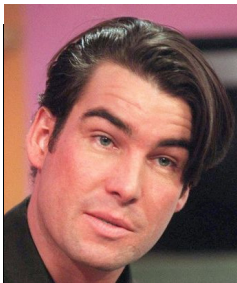
Anthony Smith, (aged 88), British writer, author, sailor, ballonist and former Tomorrow's World television presenter. He was perhaps best known for his best-selling work *The Body*, which has sold over 800,000 copies worldwide and tied in with the 1998 BBC television series, *The Human Body*.

July 9
Ken Thorne, (aged 90), British television and film score composer who won an Oscar for *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. He also did the music for the films *Superman II* and *III*, recomposing the music by John Williams.

July 11
Ray Lonnen, (aged 74), British actor who had a semi-regular role in the British crime drama series *Z-Cars* between 1972-77, and appeared in the Doctor Who story *Frontier in Space*, among numerous other roles.

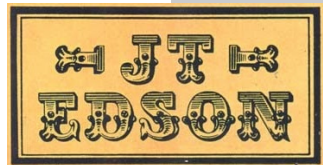


July 12
Tom Tierney, (aged 85), American paper doll artist, credited with reviving with what has been described by the New York Times as the "lost art" of paper doll making during his career which stretched from 1970s to his death in 2014. Over the course of his career, he sold over 4 million paper dolls and 400 paper doll books to readers all over the world.



July 17
Ross Burden, (aged 45), New Zealand celebrity chef who appeared on the British and New Zealand versions of *MasterChef*, but would have been most familiar to audiences as a regular chef on *Ready Steady Cook*.

J. T. Edson, (aged 86), English author of 137 novels, mostly Westerns, but also escapism adventure, and police-procedural novels. He openly claimed, though rather tongue-in-cheek, that he wrote for the money. In an article for Time magazine in February 1999, he declared that unlike such authors as Louis L'Amour, he had "no desire to have lived in the Wild West, and I've never even been on a horse. I've seen those things and they look highly dangerous at both ends and bloody uncomfortable in the middle." He delighted in using real-life and fictional characters as crossover "guest stars" in his works and often used the relatives of his characters to create spin-off series. He backs the existence of these guest stars with frequent references to Philip José Farmer's Wold Newton family.



Henry Hartsfield, (aged 80), United States Air Force officer and a USAF and NASA astronaut who logged over 480 hours in space. He became a NASA astronaut in September 1969. He was a member of the astronaut support crew for Apollo 16 and served as a member of the astronaut support crew for the Skylab 2, 3, and 4 missions. He served as pilot on STS-4 in 1982, and was spacecraft commander on STS-41-D in 1984, and STS-61-A in 1985.

July 19
James Garner, (aged 86), American Hall of Fame actor, who starred in several television series over more than five decades, including such popular roles as Bret Maverick in the 1950s western comedy series *Maverick* and Jim Rockford in the 1970s detective drama series *The Rockford Files*. Garner also appeared in more than fifty films, including *The Great Escape* (1963), *The Americanization of Emily* (1964), *Grand Prix* (1966), Blake Edwards' *Victor Victoria* (1982), *Murphy's Romance* (1985), for which he received an Academy Award nomination, *Space Cowboys* (2000), and *The Notebook* (2004).



July 23
Dora Bryan, (aged 91), British film, television and stage actress best known as Aunt Ros Utterthwaite in *Last of the Summer Wine*. In 2001 she was a guest star on *Absolutely Fabulous* as June Whitfield's on-screen friend Dolly. She received a BAFTA nomination in 2002 for this role.



Compiled by
Jacqui
Smith

O B I T S

July 29

L.A. Meyer, (aged 72), American author best known for his young-adult historical series *The Jacky Faber Adventures*, also known as the *Bloody Jack* series.

July 30

Dick Smith, (aged 92), American special effects make-up artist (nicknamed "The Godfather of Make-Up") known for his work on such films as *Little Big Man*, *The Godfather*, *The Exorcist*, *Taxi Driver*, and *Scanners*. He won a 1985 Academy Award for Best Makeup and Hairstyling for his work on *Amadeus* and received a 2012 Academy Honorary Award for his career's work.

July 31

King Robbo, aka John Robertson (aged 44) English underground graffiti artist whose feud with the artist Banksy was the subject of a TV documentary called *Graffiti Wars*.



August 3

Tony Clunn, (aged 68), British army officer and amateur archaeologist, who rediscovered the site of the defeat of the Roman general Varus by Arminius at Kalkriese while

stationed in Germany, using a metal detector to find coins and sling shot.

Dorothy Salisbury Davis, (aged 98),

American crime fiction writer, author of the Mrs Norris and Julie Hayes series as well as numerous stand-alone novels. She was declared a Grand Master Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 1985.

August 11

Joe Viskocil, (aged 61), American visual effects artist, awarded an Oscar in the category of Best Visual Effects for *Independence Day*.

Robin Williams, (aged 63),

American actor and comedian, who rose to fame as Mork in the comedy SF TV series *Mork & Mindy* (1978–82). After his film debut in *Popeye* (1980), he starred in many acclaimed films including *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Aladdin* (1992), *Hook* (1991), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), *Jumanji* (1995), and the *Night at the Museum* series. He was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor three times and won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance as therapist Dr. Sean Maguire in *Good Will Hunting*. He received two Emmy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, and five Grammy Awards throughout his career.



August 12

Lauren Bacall, (aged 89), American award-winning actress, known for her

distinctive husky voice and sultry looks. She first appeared as a leading lady in the Humphrey Bogart film *To Have and Have Not* (1944) and continued on in the film noir genre, with appearances in Bogart movies *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Dark Passage* (1947), and *Key Largo* (1948), as well as comedic roles in *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) with Marilyn Monroe and *Designing Woman* (1957) with Gregory Peck. Her performance in the movie *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (1996) earned her a Golden Globe Award and an Academy Award nomination. In 2009, she was selected by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to receive an Academy Honorary Award "in recognition of her central place in the Golden Age of motion pictures."



August 21

Steven R. Nagel, (aged 67), American astronaut, aeronautical engineer, test pilot and a United States Air Force pilot. Nagel was a veteran of four space flights: STS-51-G and STS-61-A in 1985, STS-37 in 1991, and STS-55 in 1993.



August 24

Richard Attenborough, (aged 90), English actor, film director, film producer, and entrepreneur. He was the President of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). As a film director and producer, Attenborough won two Academy Awards for *Gandhi* in 1983. He also won four BAFTA Awards and four Golden Globe Awards. As an actor, he is perhaps best known for his roles in *Brighton Rock*, *The Great Escape*, *10 Rillington Place*, *Miracle on 34th Street* and *Jurassic Park*.



August 29

George L. Little, (aged 63), American costume designer, who was best known for his work on *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty*, the latter of which earned him a nomination from the Costume Designers Guild Awards in the Excellence in Contemporary Film category. He was nominated for an Emmy Award for his work on the 1988 miniseries *Lincoln*. He also designed costumes for *Galaxy Quest*, *Transcendence* and *The Fantastic Four*.

August 31

Stan Goldberg, (aged 82), American comic book artist, best known for his work with Archie Comics and as a Marvel Comics colourist who in the 1960s helped design the original colour schemes of *Spider-Man*, the *Fantastic Four* and other major characters. He was inducted into the National Cartoonists Society Hall of Fame in 2011.



Directed by Robert Stromberg
 Produced by Joe Roth
 Screenplay by Linda Woolverton
 Based on Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*
 And *La Belle au bois dormant* by Charles Perrault
 Starring Angelina Jolie
 Sharlto Copley
 Elle Fanning
 Sam Riley
 Imelda Staunton
 Juno Temple
 Lesley Manville

Reviewed by Nicolette

I've read a few variations of *Sleeping Beauty* over the years. There's 'Spindles End' by Robin McKinley, told from the POV of a fairy-woman who tries to keep the young princess safe from an evil fairy's curse. Now this version is from the POV of the evil fairy herself and the film was better than I thought.

A human kingdom shares an uneasy border with Moors, a fairy kingdom. One day Stefan, a peasant boy, sneaks through the border to Moors to look for treasure. However, he is confronted by its spirited defender, a young orphaned fairy named Maleficent. They become friends and as time goes by, he eventually teaches her about True Loves Kiss.

Unfortunately for Maleficent, she is too good at defending her land and the elderly human king promises his crown and daughters hand in marriage to the man who can defeat the fairy. Tempted by darkness, Stefan has an idea... setting in motion a chain of events that leads the vengeful Maleficent to curse his infant daughter to fall asleep on her 16th birthday, a spell that can only be broken by... oh yes, that thing called True Loves Kiss. From then on, the story takes twists and turns of its own. Angelina Jolie was the perfect choice to play Maleficent, but her cheekbones didn't need that extra enhancing, really. Elle Fanning plays the teenaged Princess Aurora and is charming rather than cloying, while British actor Sam Riley provides some humour as the raven-turned-human that Maleficent saves from imminent death.

**William Shakespeare's
 The Empire Striketh Back
 (William Shakespeare's Star Wars #2)**

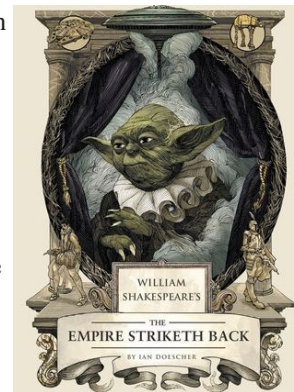
by Ian Doescher
 Published by Steam Press
 Supplied by Steam Press
 Reviewed by Nicolette

"Across the galaxy pursu'd with speed,
 The rebels flee th'Imperi'l Starfleet vast.
 A group with Luke Skywalker in the lead
 Hath to the ice world known as Hoth flown fast."

As soon as I saw this book of 'The Empire Strikes Back' rewritten Shakespeare-style, I smiled and picked it up straight away. The last time I read Shakespeare was in high school, but I found this a gripping read. As the author points out, 'Empire' and Shakespeare go well together because of the themes of the tragic hero, love, betrayal, hubris etc. Plus spaceships.

What's good about this book also is that it expands some of the characters – R2D2 gets to have his own opinions (as well as going, 'beep, boop') while Lando Calrissian agonizes over having to hand his old friend Han Solo over to the Empire.

There's even room for two Imperial workers to wonder aloud why lots of places in the Empire have these dangerous areas where people can easily fall down a shaft to their deaths (hmm). Worth a read.

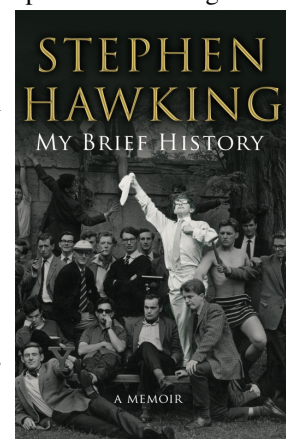


My Brief History: A Memoir

by Stephen Hawking
 Published by Bantam Press
 Supplied by Random House New Zealand
 Reviewed by Steve

It is hard to believe that Stephen Hawking is 72 years old. But he is, and has written this memoir to prove it. By comparison with the Richard Dawkins memoir/autobiography I reviewed earlier, Hawking's memoir is remarkably short at 126 pages. And that includes photos and truncations due to chapters. Not that it isn't worth the read. But I got the distinct impression Hawking is decidedly uncomfortable writing about himself. The style is generally light and Hawking doesn't entertain any fantasies about his own importance.

Stephen Hawking is still inspirational to many and *My Brief History* provides some insights as to why. Don't expect revelations into physics but do expect appreciations of humanity.



Bones Never Lie

by Kathy Reichs

Published by Heinemann

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

Now, I enjoy the “Bones” TV series, so it stands to reason that I’d like the latest book in Kathy Reichs’ series of books featuring the forensic

anthropologist, Tempe Brennan, and I did, but not for the reasons you might think. For one thing, it became quite obvious early on that the TV series and the book series have evolved in very different directions. These are not the novelisations of the TV programme, and the TV series is so loosely based on the books that Tempe Brennan can watch Bones on TV and be amused. There are major aspects of the book series that aren’t even touched on TV, like the Canadian connection. And of course the characters are different.

“Bones never Lie” is the story of a cold case, of a serial killer of young girls, and of how Tempe Brennan tracks down that murderer. Now, I must admit that I did accurately guess whodunit about half way through the novel, and I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or not... Is it a sign that the author has dropped one too many breadcrumbs for the reader? Or is it deliberate? But that does not take away from the intense sense of verisimilitude one gets reading this novel. You see, Kathy Reichs is herself a forensic anthropologist, and is insistent on getting the science right. Which is something I appreciate. This is not science fiction, but it is fiction about science, and that works for me.

Lockwood & Co.

The Whispering Skull

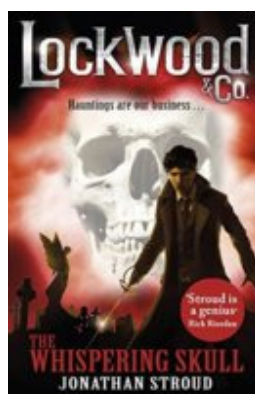
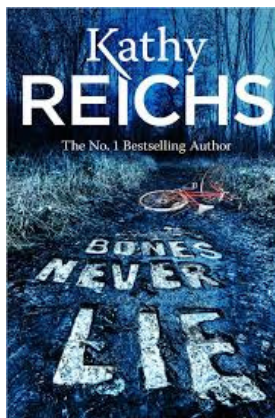
by Jonathan Stroud

Published by Random House

Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

There’s a lot to be said for reading children’s literature, especially when it’s this good! I enjoyed *The Screaming Staircase* immensely, and I found *The Whispering Skull* to be if anything, even better than its predecessor. There’s less need to explain what’s going on in the second novel of a series and so there’s more space for story. And it’s an engrossing and exciting story, a real page-turner. It begins when something is stolen from a coffin - a very dangerous artefact; that has a nasty habit of killing anyone who looks into it. Lockwood and his friends are assigned the job of finding this missing object, which means finding who stole it, and what they’ve done with it. This brings them into contact with some interesting characters at both ends of the social spectrum of Stroud’s alternative London, not all them alive in any sense of the word... Our ensemble of lead characters grow quite a lot in this novel, especially the nerdy George. In some ways this novel belongs to George more than it does to either Lockwood or Lucy (or the eponymous Skull, for that matter). He gets a lot of good lines. Mind you, the book



is full of great lines; Stroud’s humour and skill with words is a wonderful thing. Some may question the validity of a world where circumstances place young people at the forefront of a war against menacing undead spirits, but there’s a long tradition of those meddling kids defeating adult treachery throughout children’s literature. Children love to read about other kids in heroic roles... it’s an empowerment thing, and that can’t be at all bad for them.

The Long Mars

by Terry Pratchett & Stephen Baxter

Published by Doubleday

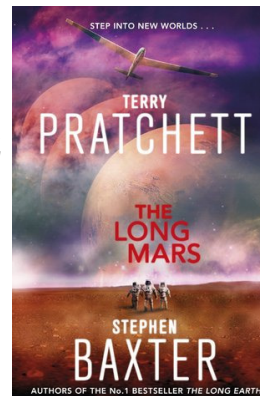
Supplied by Random House NZ

Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

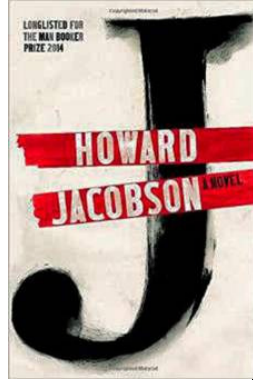
The “alternate earths” concept is not new in science fiction, there are even multiple role-playing games and campaign settings based around the idea, but I have to admit that Pratchett and Baxter have gone somewhere original with it. Apparently, it is all based on an unpublished short story, *The High Meggas*, which Pratchett wrote while *The Colour of Magic* was being published. Discussing the idea with Stephen Baxter in the early 2000s led to this collaboration. Unusually, they haven’t gone for alternate history – there are no Britannias or Reichs here – but alternate biology, geology, even astronomy. And it is the latter that is the key to “The Long Mars”, because among an infinite number of Earths, there is the Gap, where Earth has been smashed to fragments by a catastrophic cosmic collision. Which makes it a whole lot easier to get to the Mars of the Gap. It’s a Long Mars, of course, which means that there must be sentient Martians out there somewhere among the infinite alternates of the Red Planet.

While Sally, Willis and Frank explore the Long Mars in stepper-equipped modified gliders, Captain Maggie Kauffmann leads an airship expedition further west into the Long Earth itself than anyone has been before, to versions of the Earth that become increasingly alien. Closer to home is Joshua Valianté, and the problem of the Next; young people who despite their human appearances have somehow evolved beyond human. And let’s not forget the Datum itself, still devastated by the eruption of the Yellowstone supervolcano some twenty years after Step Day.

If that’s sounds confusing, it was... mainly because I came to *The Long Mars* without reading either of its predecessors, *The Long Earth* and *The Long War*. I loved the ideas here, but there was a bit too much going on, maybe even too many narrative threads. And at the back of my mind was a niggling doubt – not about the Long Earth itself – but about infrastructure and logistics, the practical issues of a series of new, wild Earths. Step sideways into an uninhabited Earth-like world... how long can you survive? How long does it take to build a civilisation from the ground up? Never mind having a sizable chunk of the Earth you came from being blown up and the rest thrown into the deep freezer of a volcanic fimbulwinter! Maybe it’ll make more sense with the two books in the series yet to come.



J
by Howard Jacobsen
Published by Jonathan Cape
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith



I should have known when I saw the “Long-listed for Man Booker Prize 2014” tag on the cover, that I wouldn’t get far with this novel. And I didn’t. A combination of ennui and distaste for the lacklustre characters, together with a sense of “this is going nowhere in particular” caused me to give up by page fifty. It reminded me unpleasantly of the sort of book they made you read in English class, back in the 1970’s. And not *1984* or *Brave New World* either (to which *J* is inaccurately compared on the back cover). Those works had setting and plot. They went somewhere. Here you have an intriguing futuristic setting: “What happened, if it happened” lies somewhere in a past hidden behind a wall of unofficial censorship. But there’s no real development of that idea I can see, flicking through unread pages. There’s much better dystopian fiction out there, but because it’s genre fiction and popular, it isn’t literature and it won’t win the prizes or the accolades. Which just shows how much those prizes are worth – a label to tell me and many others which books *not* to read.

**The Iron Trial
(Magisterium #1)**

by Cassandra Clare & Holly Black
Published by Doubleday
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jacqui Smith

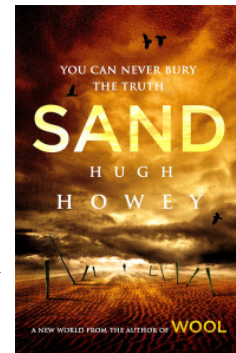


I began this novel with a distinct sense of déjà vu. It looks like a somewhat Americanised *Harry Potter* clone, and indeed it is, with a more coherent magic system, and a somewhat more plausible setting (just how *do* you hide a castle the size of Hogwarts?) The Magisterium is as you might expect, a wizard school, but it’s somewhere in the eastern US underground in a natural cave system (possibly based on the Luray Caverns in Virginia). Our lead characters are apprentice mages, in their first, or “iron” year. The protagonist is Call, who is one of those irritating young teens that seem to populate a certain type of juvenile literature. With better reason than most, as it turns out. He finds himself sitting the entrance test for the Magisterium, and tries desperately to fail, only in his failure he manages to prove his not inconsiderable talent for magic. He must be trained, is apprenticed, and spends considerable time learning concentration and control. And then another student runs away, precipitating a series of events that leads to a spectacular climax with a fine twist on the “I am your father” moment.

The problem is that it is all very like *Harry Potter* and has been royally criticised for just that similarity. On the other hand, I’ve seen people carping at “magical school” stories which were actually published considerably earlier claiming that they were ripping off *Potter*. In fact, it was *Harry Potter* that “copied” earlier work, notably T.H. White’s *The Sword in the Stone* (Rowling admits as

much). So, should we make comparisons, or let each new story stand or fall on its on merit? The *Iron Trial* has its merits, it’s an enjoyable read, and well enough written. In many ways, it makes more sense than the *Potter* books, so if that’s what you like, read and enjoy!

Sand
by Hugh Howey
Published by Century
Supplied by Random House NZ
Reviewed by Jan



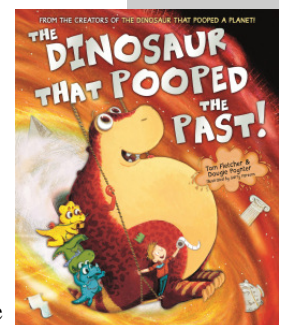
Palmer’s family has been falling apart since his father walked out on them one night. His youngest brother Rob wasn’t born, their middle brother Conner wants to be him, his older sister Vic is running from her past, their mother Rose is struggling to survive. Palmer is a sand diver, someone that dives beneath the sands to scavenge anything useful or a relic from the world before the sands buried it. He and his best friend sign on to join a secretive team looking for something and he comes across something that will change his life, and the future of his people, forever.

Told from the different perspectives of the family members, the plot weaves its way together by the first third of the book. I found it hard to get into the story at first but once I figured out the whole diving thing, it became clearer and the separate plots meshed seamlessly together. The story is not related to the *Wool* trilogy yet I saw similarities in the worlds that made me wonder.

I don’t like this genre – I find it depressing and boring, yet Hugh Howey compels me to read every word he’s written while enjoying the story. I can’t explain it, either he’s into the dark arts or is an extraordinarily gifted writer.

The Dinosaur That Pooped The Past!

by Tom Fletcher & Dougie Poynter
Published by Red Fox
Supplied by Random House New Zealand
Reviewed by Jan



Danny and his pooptastic dinosaur are back! They are celebrating the birthday of Danny’s gran and she serves up broccoli and Brussel sprouts, making him clean his plate before going to play. The dinosaur sneakily gobbles the lot before he and Danny rush off to use the swing – which has powers to go back in time. They travel back until the swing snaps and throws them into the middle of a forest where they meet some dinosaurs. Their play is interrupted by a volcano exploding and they repair the swing to leave before realising all of them make it too heavy to swing through time. Then the dinosaur comes up with a plan.....

The plot is in rhythmic rhymes that are short and catchy, with clever illustrations that tell the story well. They are bright and colourful, conveying the humour of the book. This is a brilliant book in the series and one any child will love!



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** Monday October 27th
at Chez Smith
- SPACE** Friday November 7th
(venue TBA)

Next Quarterly Meeting:

Wednesday 19th December 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 3-6th 2014

RECONNAISSANCE

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