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BY BILL WRIGHT

4/1 PARK STREET ST. KILDA VICTORIA 3182

THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS



GRAPHICS BY DITMAR

INTERSTELLAR RAMJET SCOOP (THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS)
PUBLISHED BY BILL WRIGHT, 4/1 PARK STREET, ST. KILDA, VICTORIA 3182

for ANZAPA #242 - April 2008

"Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day.
Give a fish a man, and he'll eat for weeks!"

Takayuki Ikkaku, Arisa Hosaka and Toshihiro Kawabata

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Boat lovers, when you visit Melbourne for Ausiecon 2010 (assuming Melbourne wins the bid at Denvention 3 in August 2008) you must let me take you to Friday lunch at the Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club with its own jetty, boat house & clubrooms Hobson's Bay. There is an automatically powered launching gantry and racks for dozens of 13-ft fishing boats built in the 1930s but with sails and oars replaced by inboard motors.

The club house has balconies affording panoramic views of Port Phillip Bay and the Melbourne central business district skyline. If you have time, we can show you snapper runs where the fish fairly leap into the boat. *Ed.*



This Issue's Cover



Meteor Incorporated

ABN 51 672 398 723

President: Paul Bray
Vice-President: Mark Loney
Treasurer: Carey Handfield
Secretary: Bill Wright
Committeeman: Rob Gerrard
Committeeman: Russell Blackford



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The culmination of years of planning will come to fruition on 25 April 2008 with the launch of a website for Meteor Incorporated, an incorporated association under the Victorian Associations Incorporation Act 1981 that was formed in August 2008 to accumulate cash donations & bequests until enough funds are available to

- preserve and manage a collection of science fiction and fantasy memorabilia (books, magazines, fanzines, and electronic media) through acquiring premises and hiring qualified librarians/custodians; and
- provide a resource for research into science fiction and fantasy literature and culture.

This is not a new idea. It was eighteen years ago that Mark Loney, recognising the long term benefit to Melbourne fandom from having a permanent home that could be used for a library/archive as well as a meeting place, proposed that twenty Australian fans should each contribute \$1,000 to make a down-payment on an inner suburban property. That deposit would have had to be augmented by the Australian Science Fiction Foundation (ASFF) to secure a mortgage loan on the premises that could have been paid out over time by institutions like the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, literary discussion groups and SF conventions.

Aussiefen listened respectfully but had other things to do with their hard earned at the time. But the idea took hold of me. By the turn of the millennium many of the Jiants of Fandom who ran the first Aussiecon in 1975 had accumulated vast collections of memorabilia that, through death or incapacity, they could no longer look after properly. Universities said they could help but their collections tend to dissipate when the interested academic moves on. At the turn of the millennium I decided to Do Something, all by my cotton-pickin' self.

For five years, I spent thousands of dollars pursuing the chimera of a charitable trust, but the entire edifice came crashing down when, in 2006, the truly horrendous capital gains tax implications became apparent.

By August 2007 I had spent as much money again on different advice, only to find that I should have settled on an Incorporated Association like the ASFF in the first place. I contacted seventeen like-minded fans to form Meteor Inc, rustled up a Board of Directors and endowed it with 50,000 shares in a speculative biotech research company valued at \$15,000 today but having a potential worth of millions of dollars in five years time if its pipeline of anti-cancer drugs now under Phase II human trials succeeds. Mark Loney is Vice President and I have taken on the role of administrative secretary.

My contemporaries tell me that, whilst I've done the right thing setting up Meteor Inc, they doubt if younger SF fans, being financially strapped, will take to the idea any more enthusiastically than their illustrious forebears. I counter by pointing out that the mere existence of Meteor Inc is a plus. Fandom may not embrace it now but the fund will still be around in years to come to be re-launched by a later generation of fans.

Meanwhile, as Larry Niven puts it in *'The Mote in God's Eye'*, the horse might sing. Every effort will be made to balance the investment profile of the Meteor fund from *'all risk'* to *'a balance of risk and conservative'* investments by means of donations and bequests from supporters; but... who knows? ...the speculative investment might come good and pick up Meteor Inc's small share of US\$48 billion per annum market estimate for the biotech's leading drug candidate. If that happens, fandom will have a secure repository for the ongoing management of SF collections that might otherwise disappear without trace.

To view in glorious Technicolor the full page ad for Meteor Inc that appeared in the Swancon 2008 Programme Book, please google <http://efanzines.com/IRS/index.htm>

Bill Wright

Bruce Gillespie wins 2008 Peter McNamara Award



At this year's Australian national science fiction convention, Swancon 2008 (20-24 Mar 08), Bruce Gillespie was awarded the Peter McNamara Achievement Award* for his lifetime contribution to science fiction.

* The Peter McNamara Achievement Award is an annual award given to a professional in the Australian SF field in remembrance of the life and contribution of Peter Trevor McNamara. It is presented each year at the Australian National SF Convention.

Justin Ackroyd was in Perth for the occasion and accepted the award on Bruce Gillespie's behalf from Aurealis, which sponsors the Award.

What endears Bruce to Anzapans (and makes us proud to have him as our official editor) is his sense of occasion and genius for administrative nous, as witness the note he sent with Justin to be read at the ceremony...

"Robin Johnson accepted the Big Heart Award in Japan last year, he said that he was 'gobsmacked' to win, and nobody understood the word. If I say I'm gobsmacked at receiving the Peter McNamara Award this year, you'll know what I mean. And even that's an understatement. Not only am I honoured to receive an award in the name of Mac, the most congenial, hardworking bloke in Australian SF in the last 25 years, but I'm very much honoured by the distinguished company I'm now keeping. Thanks very much to this year's judging panel, and everybody in the Australian SF community.

"I've rarely made any money out of my interest in SF and publishing, but I can claim to have been around a long time. I published my first magazine at school at the age of 14, before I had heard of fandom. When in 1963 I heard about these little magazines called fanzines, in which I could publish whatever I wanted, I knew that was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. My thanks to all the people who have helped me since January 1969, when SF Commentary first appeared.

"Thanks to John Bangsund, Lee Harding, John Foyster and George Turner, my original mentors, the many people who have contributed reviews, articles and letters since then, and in recent years, the amazing people, such as Thomas Bull, Bill Wright and David Lake, who have kept alive my magazines through their financial contributions, and Dick Jenssen, whose cover artwork has been such a large factor in their success.

"Thanks also to my international co-editors of Steam Engine Time, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller for the first few issues, and Jan Stinson recently. Thanks also to Carey Handfield and Rob Gerrand, my partners in Norstrilia Press, which blazed the trail from 1975 to 1985 for Aphelion Books and the many small-scale publishers that came after. And thanks most of all to Elaine, my wife, who has put up with all this publishing for the last thirty years."

Arthur C Clarke (1917-2008)

Sir Arthur C Clarke, pioneering science fiction author and technological visionary best known for the novel and film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, died on 19th March 2008 at his home in Sri Lanka, aged 90.



His SF spanned seven decades and, though his dreams of intergalactic space travel and planetary colonisation were never realised in his lifetime, Clarke's predictions of technological breakthroughs were uncannily accurate. His final novel, *The Last Theorem* co-written with Frederik Pohl, will be published later this year.

Bill Wright

Clerihew corner

Sir Arthur C Clarke, the well known SF author (whose many novels include *2001, Childhood's End, The City and the Stars*, and *Rendezvous with Rama*) is also credited with being the first to suggest that satellites parked in a geostationary orbit could be used for global communication. He died on 19th March 2008, aged 90

His WW2 experiences in the development of radar were fictionalized in his novel *Glide Path*. Clarke was a keen SCUBA diver, and made Sri Lanka his permanent home in 1956.

*When Sir Arthur C. Clarke
Left his orbital park
The workings of karma
Ensured that he made a rendezvous with Rama.*

"I'm sure the universe is full of intelligent life. It's just been too intelligent to come here."
-- Arthur C. Clarke

Following is the editor's take on Turkish Technology...

Constructed in 1770 by Wolfgang von Kempelen to impress the Austrian-Hungarian Empress Maria Theresa, *The Turk* was supposedly a mechanism for playing chess against a human opponent; but it was in fact a mechanical illusion that allowed a chess master to hide inside and operate the machine.

*A bit of a felon
Was Wolfgang von Kempelen.
His chess-playing automaton
Is fraudulent and best forgotten. .*



History is full of such examples of unprincipled brilliance that inspire emulation. For example, the founder of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, coined the term **artificial artificial intelligence** (AAI) to denote the outsourcing to humans of those parts of a system that computer programs can't do. AAI is the underlying principle behind the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a division of Amazon Web Services.

Amazon Web Services is a crowdsourcing marketplace where **Requesters** (nerds who write these programs) pose Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) such as identifying performers on music CDs. **Providers** browse the library of outstanding HITs and complete any that strike their fancy for a monetary payment set by the Requester, who is typically an employee of a corporation paying Amazon 10% commission on finished tasks. This particular example of exploitative casualisation of creative effort is restricted to American Providers. Foreigners can participate but, under Amazon Web Services rules, they must have US addresses. That ensures that any benefits stay within the US economy under Amazon's control. This is nineteenth century-style buccaneer capitalism at its best - or worst - depending on the extent to which productivity gains are shared with Providers.

*Amazon's Jeff Bezos
Is a smart one because.
He has quarantined the genius
Of his nation's best thinkers.*



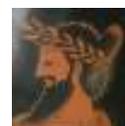
Dennis Callegari wonders if, where there is Jeff Bezos, can Microsoft's Bill Gates be far behind...

*The third William Gates
Remembers those that he hates
But he's mostly agin those
Who throw stones at his Windows.*



Francis Payne countered with the obligatory behavioural implication...

*Jeffrey Bezos
Is richer than Croesus
But still chairs every meeting of Amazon
With nothing but pyjamas on.*



Frank couldn't resist doing something about King Croesus of Lydia, who had a long and interesting history with the Oracle at Delphi. Early in his reign Croesus decided to test which of the Oracles was the best, so he sent a messenger to them all to ask "*What is the King doing now?*" What he was doing was sitting on the beach cooking a lamb and a tortoise in one pot. Delphi got it right, arguably by bribing the messenger:

"I count the grains of sand on the beach and measure the sea; I understand the speech of the dumb and hear the voiceless. The smell has come to my sense of a hard shelled tortoise boiling and bubbling with a lamb's flesh in a bronze pot: the cauldron underneath it is of bronze, and bronze is the lid."

Croesus concluded he was on a winner with Delphi. But her predictions were shrewdly phrased, which caused many supplicants to misinterpret the advice. The most famous instance comes down to us through a Delphic prediction given to Croesus in 550 BC when, preparing to invade the Persian Empire, he consulted the Oracle about his chances of victory. After sacrificing 300 head of cattle to Apollo, he had gold and silver melted down into 117 bricks, which were sent to Delphi, along with jewels, statues, and a gold bowl weighing a quarter of a ton. With these gifts, Croesus sent his question of whether he should attack Persia.

The Pythia answered, "*If the King leads his army across the Halys he will destroy a great realm*". The Halys was a river that marked the border with Persian territory. Buoyed by the response Croesus invaded Persia, only to suffer a decisive defeat. The Persians swept into Lydia and captured Croesus who bitterly denounced the Oracle, sending his iron chains to Delphi with the question, "*Why did you lie to me?*" The Pythia answered correctly that her prophecy had been fulfilled. Croesus had destroyed a great empire -- his own.

Hence, Frank's versical* observation...

*versical: a neologism denoting farcical verse.

*The Sybil at Delphi had said it
But Croesus the King didn't geddit
"If you cross the Halys
You'll shut down a Palace"
A warning he just couldn't credit!*

--

Steve Jobs was co-founder, with Steve Wozniak, of Apple Inc which, via its famous Apple Macintosh brand name, helped popularise the personal computer from the late 1970s. Ousted from Apple in a board room putsch Steve Jobs created NeXT, a computer platform development company specialising in higher education and business markets. NeXT's 1997 buyout by Apple saw Jobs return as Chief Executive Officer to the company he co-founded. In 2007 he was recognised by Fortune Magazine as the world's most powerful businessmen out of a shortlist of twenty-five contenders for the title. Hence this more-doggerel-than-clerihew

*Steve Jobs was Apple,
Then he was NeXT.
If you opposed him
You were sure to be vexed..*



Jordan Allen-Dutton, Erik Weiner and composer Hal Goldberg have produced a stage musical on Broadway about Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, titled '*Nerds://A Musical Software Satire*'. The following is from a theatre review by Mathew Murray...

"If a few jokes, particularly involving a muse named Oracle who descends to cast some heavenly light on the second act, are aimed at their more hardcore tech fan base, such moments are generally few and far between

For the most part, following the story is little challenge: Bill Gates and co-investor Paul Allen's domination of the computer industry is presented parallel with the story of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, the more forward-thinking competition who appropriate Apple's graphical interface from Xerox but rest on their laurels and miss out on their own chance for technological domination. Two women, Myrtle and Sally provide a measuring stick for Gates and Jobs to track what they gain and lose along the way."

Doesn't sound like the kind of gig that would wow Australian audiences. Priscilla* it aint!

* *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* is an iconic Australian stage production and film reviewed (sort of) on page 8.

Bill Wright, Dennis Callegari and Francis Payne

Shaun Tan to be Guest of Honour at MSFC Minicon

The 2008 Melbourne Science Fiction Club mini-convention will be a one-day affair to be held on Saturday 17 May 08. The idea is to encourage representatives of all SF and Fantasy groups in Melbourne to come together to acclaim one of their own who has achieved Great Things!



Guest of Honour **Shaun Tan** is the illustrator and author of award winning children's books such as *The Red Tree* and *The Lost Thing*. Tan was born in Fremantle, Western Australia in 1974 and after freelancing for some years moved to Melbourne in 2007.

In addition to books and cover art, Tan contributes political cartoons to the *Western Review* and is the art editor and a contributor for *Eidolon Magazine*. In 2006 his wordless graphic novel *The Arrival* won the "Book of the Year" prize as part of the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards.

In 2007 *The Arrival* went on to win the Childrens Book Council of Australia's "Picture Book of the Year" award, the 55th APA Book Design award, the Hardie Grant Egmont Best Designed Book Cover award and, as the crowning achievement in an obviously stellar year, the World Fantasy Award in the Art category.

At left, an elated Shaun Tan displays his Award at the 1977 World Fantasy Convention at Saratoga Springs, New York (Nov 1-4, 2007).

For further details of Minicon on 17th May 2008, google MSFC and click on Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Mark the date in your diary now.

In December 2007, Warrnambool fan and MSFC stalwart David Russell wrote to IRS to advise that, eleven days after the Minicon, the acclaimed **Spare Parts Puppet Theatre** will stage a non text based adaptation of *The Arrival* at the Warrnambool Performing Arts Centre on Wednesday 28th May 2008 at 6:30 PM.



This adaptation of Shaun Tan's award winning book 'The Arrival' is a truly warm and magical experience. Winner of the WA Equity Guild Award for Best Production in 2006, it is a mix of digital projection from Shaun Tan's exquisite images combined with the excellence in puppetry that audiences have come to expect from Spare Parts Puppet Theatre.

The inspirational illustrations of Shaun Tan come to life in a world of animals and people living harmoniously in a fantastical metropolis. This strange new place of floating ships, mysterious lights and symbols is the place our hero Aki makes his home.

The Arrival is a universal tale of the challenge and adventure of arriving in a new country. The absence of words not only makes the story perfect for puppetry but, with gentle humour, brings into sharp focus the isolation of culture shock.

Shaun Tan's work has an ability to transcend social, cultural and age barriers. This performance will appeal to all and be remembered forever.

Performers: Giri Mazzella Sanjiva G Margio Karen Hethey Director: Philip Mitchell

Adapting Writer: Michael Barlow

Artistic Development: Sally Richardson

Designer: Jiri Zmitko **Composer:** Lee Buddle

Costume Maker: Cherie Hewson

Animation Design: Michael Barlow

Lighting Design: Graham Walne

Production Manager & Technical Operator: Sharon Custers

Assistant Stage Manager: Damon Lockwood

Puppet Makers: Jiri Zmitko Kipling Smith Adam Ismail

Warrnambool is 400 kilometres west of Melbourne, but it's worth the trip to see this show.

David Russell and Bill Wright

Priscilla vs Kevin07, King of the Desert



'The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert' (1994) is an Oscar-winning Australian film about two drag queens and a transsexual woman driving across the Outback from Sydney to Alice Springs in a large lavender-coloured bus they have named Priscilla. The film stars Hugo Weaving, Guy Pearce and Terence Stamp. It was written and directed by Stephan Elliott.

Such is the show's popularity that it opened as a major musical in Star City Casino, Sydney in October 2006. The company is now 'on tour' to state capital cities. In February 2008 it played to packed houses at Melbourne's Regent Theatre.

The film is full of humorous moments, enhanced by Director Elliott deliberately casting his leading players against type. *"What we have here,"* he said, *"is an aging gay man/transsexual. So let's pick the best-known older heterosexual icon I can think of. That's where Terence Stamp came in."* Stamp was a British star from the 1960s. In the 1980s, he was voted most beautiful man in the movies no less than six times. His role as Bernadette seems outrageously out of character, yet he pulled it off brilliantly.

Heartthrob Guy Peace plays Adam/Felicia, a catty, trash-talking bitch, and Hugo Weaving, plays the sensible Tick/Mitzi. In their journey through the desert, the three meet a variety of interesting characters and become entangled in hilarious situations.

A typical exchange occurs when Adam, Bernadette, and Tick are discussing their motives for going to Alice Springs. Adam declares, *"Ever since I was a lad, I've had this dream... to travel to the center of Australia, climb Kings Canyon - as a Queen, in a full length gordiaey sequin, heels, and a tiara"* to which Bernadette replies, *"That's just what this country needs - a cock, in a frock, on a rock."*



Overseas Priscilla was adopted by the GLTG lobby as an icon for the gay rights cause, but Australians tend to see it mainly as an above average musical road show; in other words, good theatre. That might be the reason why Australian politicians, with respect to aboriginal reconciliation, are jumping on the Priscilla bandwagon otherwise known as the Bipartisan Bus.



This cartoon was lifted from the editorial page of 'The Weekend Australian' for February 16-17th, 2008. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, having been swept into power in the November 2007 Federal Election, has in the eyes of many political commentators pulled off a remarkable feat in forging a consensus with his defeated opponents in the matter of saying "Sorry" to the Stolen Generations – referring to over a hundred years in our

history in which aboriginal children were separated from their parents *for their own good*. At least a third of the white population are still in denial of the facts, but the lie is given to their protestations by the fact that, in many jurisdictions, aboriginal children were defined as ‘deformed’ for adoption purposes and, even today, aboriginal children are ripped from their parents and bussed far away to urban dormitories close to schools

Late in its term of office and with highly suspicious motives, the former Liberal Party government sought to alleviate problems facing dysfunctional aboriginal communities in the Outback. Now, at Kevin Rudd’s initiative, inflammatory claims of genocide have been put aside and he and Opposition leader Brendan Nelson have found common cause in the centre ground. Some colourful and/or ultra-conservative luminaries of the former government are named in the cartoon’s text bubbles. Parallels of the cartoon’s Bipartisan Bus with Priscilla are striking, but parliamentary dialogue is unlikely to be as witty as in the show.

Aboriginal elders from as many remote communities and urban ghettos that could be reached were bussed to Canberra for the Kevin Rudd’s ‘Sorry’ statement on Tuesday, February 12th, 2008. An Internet campaign even raised enough money to fly, rather than bus, some elders home after the ceremony.

Many aboriginals regret that Prime Minister Rudd saying ‘Sorry’ doesn’t confer any rights to personal compensation. Despite that, their elders are meeting the Invader’s - that’s what they call us - initiative half way. Non-indigenous Australians are being encouraged to attend two-day ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremonies designed on the premise that all people living in Australia need to comprehend aboriginal culture. In doing so they will ultimately learn more of themselves and understand better the deep history of the land in which we live. There’s still a long way to go, but Australians of all ethnic stripes made a good start on Sorry Day.

Bill Wright

What word is *that*?

Following the remarkable essay ‘Architecture in word and form’ that appeared in IRS June 2007, Dick Jenssen, in collaboration with Thomas Bull, progresses his exploration of words with the following...



Thomas Bull is a quiet fellow who prefers to listen rather than take the lead in conversation, so I was surprised when, out of the blue, he asked me, “Have you tried using *electroextraction*?”

As one does, I responded with a flippant observation to the effect that it sounded painful; but he explained that he was talking about long words with s, x or z as the middle character. Thomas continued, “I’ve found *trinitrobenzenelessness* (23 letters) but I think you can do better than that.”

Not being one to refuse a challenge, I sought frantically for inspiration. “According to my *Oxford English Dictionary*” I temporised, “*electro-extraction* has a hyphen, but if that’s allowed then so is *thought-experiment*, both at 17 letters. For 19 letters, maybe *uranium-hexafluoride* is acceptable – but to your 23 letter word *trinitrobenzenelessness* I tips my hat.”

I then went on to say that the subject matter merited a wider audience and suggested an airing in IRS.

Thomas was agreeable and also unstoppable. “If you tell Bill” he exclaimed, “he might reply with something like *undercapitalisationlessness*. I don’t mind hyphens, but you might like to know that *Chambers English Dictionary* has *electroextraction* without hyphens.”

That might have been the end of it except that, a few days later, I received an email from Thomas saying, “Hi, Ditmar. If you allow hyphens, you might accept terms such as *administratrix-strangulating* and *paroemiography-extra-illustrating*.”



Dick Jenssen

IRS readers might care to join this conversation. Email your s, x or z word to bilw@iprimus.com.au

Ed.

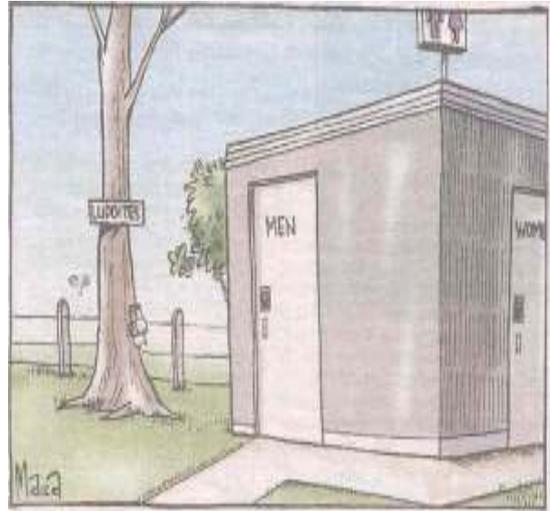
SMS for emergencies

The New South Wales Ambulance Service has introduced an ‘ICE’ (In Case of Emergency) service that reserves a four-character SMS code for up to nine quick emergency call numbers – ICE1, ICE2, ICE3, etc. up to ICE9 being SMS codes for different kinds of emergencies, eg. ambulance, police, fire, PC death, etc.

The idea is excellent and has implications beyond the scope of its original application. For example, SMS code ‘WCE’ (Water Closet Emergency) could unlock park or railway station toilets that are closed outside business hours to circumvent undesirable conduct.

The idea is not new. In London one can find the nearest public convenience by texting a message to a system called SatLav (conjuring the image of a spy in the sky as you pee).

And in Finland the roads administration, fed up with wanton vandalism of expensive roadside toilets between Helsinki and Turku, have created a system whereby the only way to ‘spend a penny’ is to SMS the word ‘OPEN’ to a number that is printed on the toilet door. Then (this is cunning) if the toilet is vandalised the authorities have the mobile phone number of the last person to use it.



A Piece of Grandpa’s Belt

Currently, the senior members of the Wright clan are myself, Bill (71), John (69), Rosemary (68) and my kid brother George (66).

Before she died in 1991 we siblings promised our mother we would meet four times a year to celebrate our respective birthdays. The last such occasion, also attended by the spouses of those of us who married, was dinner at the Oriental Bistro in Exhibition Street, Melbourne, on Thursday evening, Feb 7th, 2008. George produced a tall bottle of amber liqueur, informed us that it contains the distilled essence of Grandpa’s belt, recited its history from the label and commanded us to partake thereof. That we duly accomplished with unfeigned diffidence and unavoidable facial grimaces. The gist of what he said follows...



William Wright Senior was born In Lanark, Scotland around 1880. He subsequently married Elizabeth and in 1925 the couple, accompanied by their children, Elizabeth, Joan and George, emigrated to Australia. Wul, as Lizzie called him, laboured on the construction of the original Tom Ugly’s Bridge in Sans Souci, Sydney, prior to joining the gang of Kogarah Council, eventually rising to foreman status.

On Wul’s death in 1950, George Senior (our dad) inherited the belt that had been retrieved from his father’s trousers. When young George left home to work as a forester in 1960, aged 18, Dad gave him grandpa’s well-worn belt. Unimpressed by its venerable history, George wore the belt regularly on his work pants for the rest of the twentieth century and into the next.

Grandpa was a stern disciplinarian and when he warned his four grandchildren to behave themselves he would grab at the buckle of the belt and threaten to give the scallywags ‘a piece of me belt’. Nobody ever got the strap.

On 4 Oct. 2007 the belt broke for no apparent reason (a manufacturing defect, no doubt). George cut it into one millimetre strips and extracted a century and a half of toil in alcohol, the essence being of sweat, tears, blood and laughter. The extract celebrates the challenges of life, not the achievements: the living, not the accolades. As George explained, “The resultant liqueur is for descendants of Wul and Lizzie to also take a belt, a toast for family members to also get ‘a piece of grandpa’s belt’.”

Bill Wright

Ways Our Computers Have Failed Us

by Brianna Flynt and Frank Wu

reprinted with permission from the authors.

1. Our Computers don't have sex with us.

Source: *Austin Powers*, *Firefly*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

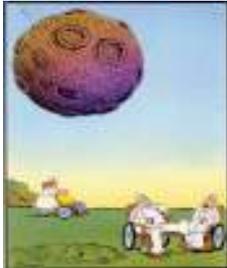
[Brianna] Last week on Valentine's Day, I made out with Frank and he was *so* not a robot.

Also, my Palm Pilot alarm will vibrate, but it won't vibrate in the ways I want it to. Where are the androids like Data that are programmed in multiple techniques?



2. My laptop has never once calculated my odds for survival.

Source: *Barbarella*, *Star Wars*, *Space:1999*



The odds of successfully navigating an asteroid field may be 3,720 to 1, but my computer has never provided the odds of surviving a Nicolas Cage movie. This should be Microsoft's top priority for the next Vista service pack. Knowledge is power, and that knowledge could potentially save me from seeing the next crappy 'Ghost Rider' or 'National Treasure' sequel.

[The image at left is of two waifs of misfortune who, coincidentally, had each been struck by lightning twice. Their immediate prospects are obviously not bright, reinforcing the absolute uncertainty of attempting to calculate one's odds of survival in any given situation. **Ed.]**

3. Where are the medical droids?

Source: *Star Wars*, *Star Trek: Voyager*

I have an X-Acto knife scar from 1982 and despite my begging, my Dell Dimension has never made it all better. It's not like this was an attack from a killer wampa. Where's 2-1B with his Bacta tank when you need him?

4. Our Computers don't fight wars for us.

Source: *Resident Evil*, *Terminator 'The Sarah Connor Chronicles'*, *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women*

My Apple G5 has never once given me pointers on fighting zombies, and it's certainly never murked a T-888 for me. How bogus is that?

I want a computer that will protect me, the future leader of mankind, and even sacrifice itself if necessary in a pit of lava. I also want it to do it with a non-Microsoft operating system.

5. My iPod has never once shed its exoskeleton and strolled around with its electronic innards hanging out.

Source: *The Terminator*, *Alien*.

That one time I was hit with an exploding gas tanker, my iPod proved to be highly disappointing. It didn't resurrect itself as an indestructible killing machine. The screen just blinked with that lame Apple logo. I want an iPod so tough it would have to be crushed in a drill press to give up the ghost.



6. Our Computers have never once sent us back in time.

Source: *Terminator "The Sarah Connor Chronicles," TimeCop*

I rented 'Gigli' in 2003, and my Palm Tungsten C wasn't able to send me back in time to rectify this terrible, terrible mistake. If Palm ever gets around to releasing a new operating system, a time-travel application is a must.

7. Our Computers don't instigate wacky adventures.

Source: *Star Wars, Alien*

C-3PO had his memory wiped by Captain Antilles after 'Revenge of the Sith', but I don't find that necessary. Everything my TiVo shows me is eminently forgettable. I want a TiVo that will crash me onto the surface of Tatooine with the stolen Death Star plans.

8. Our Computers don't make critical fashion choices for us.

Source: *The Jetsons*

When I got dressed this morning, I *so* was not run through a conveyor belt that dressed me and styled my hair. Instead, I was cruelly forced to pick from random shiny shirts scattered on my floor. I want a computer that will tell me if plaids and stripes match.

9. My Honda's inboard computer has not once gotten the car airborne.

Source: *Back to the Future II, Blade Runner*

The government conspiracy to keep flying car technology from the public continues. When will this shadowy cabal of lies crumble? I want a Honda Accord that will let me fly just like the De Lorean DMC-12 with the Mr Fusion hover car upgrade. No more excuses, because two-dimensional driving ranks as mega-boring.

10. My cell phone refuses to call down the dropship from the 'Sulaco'.

Source: *Aliens*

My co-workers Ferro and Spunkmyer were violently massacred by Aliens while trying to rendezvous with my APC last week. Of course it was tragic. But the real tragedy was I had to wait 20 minutes for the bus afterwards. I want a cell phone that will come through in the clinch and bring down the other drop ship from the "Sulaco". If possible, I don't want to have to crawl through miles of tunnel to get a signal.

11. My work desktop has totally failed to predict the stock market.

Source: *Heinlein's The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*

Don't tell my boss this, but I spend my work days surfing BoingBoing.net, Perezhilton.com and efanines.com. Imagine how much more time I'd have to surf if I were a billionaire!

I want a computer that will cheat the stock market and give me the wherewithal to join the plutocracy.

12. My iPhone has never opened up portals to other dimensions.

Source: *Sailor Moon S*

Sailor Mercury has a three dollar calculator from Claire's that can open up portals to secret dimensions. And that was back in the 80s before the Series of Tubes existed! Can't my iPhone transport me to a dimension where the 'Star Wars' prequels didn't highly suck?

13. In times of distress, my laptop fails to toss off witty catchphrases.

Source: *Terminator, Terminator 2, Terminator 3*

When I crashed into the police station, my laptop didn't dispense a half-witty catchphrase that strode through the ages. I want a laptop that recites 404 error codes in an Austrian accent and with none of the maddening timeline errors of the Jonathan Mostow Terminator 3.



O great and powerful Computer, when wilt thou cease to fail me?

Stefan Zone

THE SSSSHHHH AWARDS

Welcome one and all to the ...

"Sssshhhh"

Sorry, Welcome one and all to the 17th Annual 'Sssshhhh' Awards where we pay tribute to the best librarians in Victoria.

"Be quiet! Can't you read the *No Talking* sign?"

I'll have to talk in a whisper. They're very strict here. First up is the Bookend Award for the fastest stacking of 100 various books. This award goes to Miss Janet Fliub of Goonawangee, who took only 1 min 57 seconds. She attributed the win to her library having only 100 books.

"Sssshhhh"

Next is the Plastic Bookmark Award for the librarian who never forgets a book. This award goes to Miss Amy Willow who correctly named 37 out of 40 children's books after being given a quote from them.

"Sssshhhh"

Next is the Late Stamp Award for the librarian who has tracked down the largest number of late books this year. This award was to go to Miss Beatrice Holly, until it was realised that all the

books she had tracked down were ones she'd been taking home without permission.

"Sssshhhh"

The Fastest Returned Book Stamper Award goes to Mrs Sarah Edwards who stamped an amazing World Record 117 books in a minute. This victory will wipe out last year's catastrophe when she was disqualified after it was found that one date went slightly over the line.

"Sssshhhh. Be quiet please!"

The Ignoring People at the Counter Award has been won jointly by Miss Karen Andrews and Miss Donna Rogers who managed to ignore customers at the counter while they talked for 4 hours straight and drank three cups of tea.

"Sssshhhh, Please!"

Last but not least is the Big SSSSHHHH Award, given to the librarian with the largest "Sssshhhh". The award goes to Mrs Lily Davies, who's "Sssshhhh" recorded 110 decibels.

"SSSSHHHH. I've warned you before about talking! Please leave."

"Sssshhhh"

TOURING THE SUBURBS OF MELBOURNE - STEFAN STYLE: PART 1 BROADMEADOWS

Another new series. This one sees me giving travelling hints to the general public regarding some of the suburbs of Melbourne. All the places you've never thought of visiting are brought to startling reality by this new series as I let my imagination do the walking.

BROADMEADOWS

Touring Broadmeadows is easy, as long as you travel in a Popemobile with a police escort. If travelling by train, please note the position of the panic buttons, conveniently located at each seat. (Response times to pressing the button may vary, depending on the number of incidents already being attended to).

If travelling from Melbourne, head North. The more burnt out cars you see on the side of the road, the closer you are to Broady. Broady has had the highest ratio of burnt-out-cars to residents for the past 6 years.

The main street of Broadmeadows highlights their open living arrangements, partly helped by all the broken windows and holes in the walls. Behind this barbed wire can be seen the local primary

school, which has produced 119 of Australia's Top 10 Most Wanted this past decade, including 3 of the current top 10.

Broady is home to much goings on, most of which are illegal. On any given day, the main street is a hive of activity as people run to and fro - criminals escaping from recently committed jobs and victims escaping from attackers.

The Broady Sunday Market is well frequented as it is used as a local 'fence' for stolen goods. Not everything on sale is stolen - you can pick up a genuine Broadmeadows-made Broady flick knife for the cost of a slab.

Broadians claim to be at the forefront of fashion. Who can claim otherwise, especially when Broadians can be seen getting around in combinations of clothing not seen in any other part

of Australia. It just seems that no other suburb wants to follow their lead in fashion.

At any given cafe in Broadmeadows, you can sit down to a hearty breakfast of eggs and bacon in beer, beer toast and beer-battered sausage, all washed down with a refreshing cold beer.

Lunch is same as breakfast but double the size.

Meet Jim. At 51, he's one of the eldest residents in the area. He's lived here so long, he can name the people involved in a domestic dispute simply by hearing the shouting and screaming from two blocks away.

PHONE A FRIEND

I'm back on project work at the moment, which means longer hours but a shorter temper. With a lot of work to get through and a fast approaching deadline, I declined the management decree to attend a departmental 'compulsory' 3 hour work function that is to be held this Friday afternoon. The fact that the 'compulsory' work function was Lawn Bowls clearly influenced my decision to stay behind and work on my project.

Unfortunately, my dream of three hours uninterrupted project work came to a crashing halt when they found they didn't have enough people from other departments to man the phones. Someone stupidly mentioned my name (to be precise, Someone mentioned my stupid name) as one of the ones that was not attending the aforementioned lawn bowls extravaganza and could therefore help out on the phones.

The next thing I know I'm attending a one and a half hour training session on how to work their call tracking system and being warned not to give advice to anyone. Tomorrow I'm to sit with someone for half an hour to see how they take calls then it will be two glorious hours solo on the phones.

Let's see how my math is:

Plan : 'Gain': 3 hours on project by not going to lawn bowls

Actual: Loss: (1.5 hours + 0.5 hours + 2 hours) = 4 hours.

So instead of 'gaining' 3 hours, I'll be losing 4 hours. This phone thingo had better be worth it!

At least it's not like a call centre where you're trying to ring up irate people and flog them everything

from flea dust to coats for elephants. Instead irate people ring YOU up expecting you to answer queries ranging from "Do I need to pay Tax?" to "Why did my Super account lose so much money?"

I'll try to make it fun. I've already got the "L" plate to strap on when I go around to the call centre. I just hope the callers can see it over the phone. They might take the hint when I put them on hold for the umpteenth time.

Maybe I can pretend to be taking a call but instead just talk to myself, like some people do with their mobile phone. If the phone then rings, I can say "I've just got another call coming in. Let me put you on hold for a minute."

There's always the range of voices I can use when on the telephone. I could be anyone from a stereotypical Indian call centre worker (very irate about the current state of their cricket team) to an opinionated American to an Oshtrayn. If it wasn't for the fact that the calls are being taped and can be traced back to a particular logon, I could have got away with it. "I rang on Friday afternoon and spoke to an aborigine and he told me..." – to which I answer, "I'm sorry, ma'am. There's no aborigine working here."

I could always put our telephone number on YouFool or whatever that socialising website is. That will ensure we get 100 calls a second and that each call will be relatively short. Hmm. Still too much talking involved.

Maybe I could use the time to phone a friend?

Aaah, silence is golden

Stefan

0-0-0

Signalling a change of pace in a narrative is something most authors find hard to do. None do it with more finesse than P G Wodehouse, as witness the point in 'Three Men and a Maid' (1921) where he says,

"As I read over the last few chapters of this narrative, I see that I have been giving the reader a rather too jumpy time. To almost a painful degree I have excited his pity and terror; and, though that is what Aristotle tells one ought to do, I feel that a little respite would not be out of order."

Exquisite!

Ed.

Queen Victoria rules the waves

On Thursday, February 21st, 2008, Queen Victoria arrived in Melbourne for a fourteen hour stopover, the first Australian port of call on her maiden around-the-world voyage.

The Cunard liner - sister ship to Queen Elizabeth 2 and Queen Mary 2 - docked on schedule at 7:00am at Melbourne's Station Pier to be greeted by a water cannon display and a traditional Aboriginal welcome. A spectacular fireworks display heralded her departure at 8:45pm.



The 90,000-tonne Queen Victoria is the youngest cruise liner ever to visit Australia and the 44th cruise ship to call at Melbourne in the summer of 2007-08, having been launched only last December by Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. Unfortunately the champagne bottle swung against the hull failed to break, which is a sign of bad luck in the seafaring world. Unkind commentators were quick to label the incident 'Camilla's Revenge'.

The 16-deck luxury liner boasts five star facilities including a three-storey grand lobby, a ballroom, a \$2.3 million art collection, an English-style pub and an 830-seat three deck theatre complete with viewing boxes and a royal box. There are 13 bars and clubs, seven restaurants including the two-storey Art Deco-style Britannia Restaurant, a cigar lounge, a casino, three pools, a 6000-book library with two librarians, and a \$2.3 million art collection that contains original etchings by its namesake Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert. The Royal Spa and Fitness Centre span almost 13,000 square feet.

"She's a first-class lady," a passenger enthused, *"with curves in the right places and she rumbles at night."*

He was coy about the cost, but Cunard said that guests on the 106-night around-the-world voyage had paid from £STG 11,000 for a modest state room up to £STG 210,000 for the grandest suites that include 24-hour butler service, and were looked after by no less than a thousand crew members. So far, they have consumed 351,900 bottles of wine & champagne, 5896 kilograms of lobster and a mind-boggling 954,681 teabags. In their fourteen-hour Melbourne stopover they generated over a million dollars for the Victorian economy.

Regrettably, there was no public access either to the ship or to Station Pier. Fellow sightseers clustered on a nearby jetty where, wonder of wonders, **a small boat took us out – sixty at a time – for 20-minute sightseeing circles around the liner for five dollars per person.** You can't beat that for value for money.

Opposite the jetty is an open-air dog restaurant where pets of all shapes and sizes occupy benches at eye-level with their owners. An adjacent kiosk sells all manner of dog accessories from party hats to woollen vests and gloves for heavy petting. Sustenance for man and beast can also be purchased there. Importantly, the kiosk also provides comfortable toilet facilities for humans. I neither know nor at the time cared where the dogs go.

I arrived home tired but deeply contented. I had been shewn wonders – at a distance, 'tis true – but wonders all the same.

Bill Wright