

Interstellar Ramjet Scoop



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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

December 2008

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"Some folk are wise, and some are otherwise." -- Tobias Smollett

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Art, etc. credits...

Cover	Graphic by Ditmar
Page 2	Masthead - photographs of Bill Wright and Dick Jensen
Page 3	Cover illustration from the commemorative issue of <i>The Skylark of Space</i>
Page 3	Woodcut from <i>Astounding</i>
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This Issue's Cover:

(No) Strings Attached

According to some String physicists, the mathematics of that theory could be interpreted as indicating that alternative universes exist – an enormous number, in fact, of the order of 10^{500} – a belief expounded in one of the *Christmas Books* in last December's *IRS* (*The Cosmic Landscape* by Leonard Susskind).

Even if only a minuscule fraction of those universes could be favourable to life, they would still constitute a huge range of possibilities (one in a trillion trillion trillion of 10^{500} is still 10^{446} , even if a 'trillion' is taken to be a million million million), and so – as the December '07 cover disclosed – there are universes in which fictional SF characters are alive and well. It was seen that in one such cosmos Richard Seaton is exploring alien worlds in his spaceship *Skylark 6* (pictured at right in a titanic battle with a vessel of the detestable Chlorians who had militarised an entire galaxy – see *Skylark DuQuesne*).



His explorations continue, and on yet another planet, of bizarre geological formations and extraordinary flora and fauna, he has encountered evidence of life, albeit mechanical life, and is preparing to land. This approach to the planet's surface is depicted in the cover graphic, together with a member of the indigenous intelligence.

Curiously enough, here is another world in which what seems to be a science fictional icon of our universe is quite definitely fact, not fiction. And yet, it is **not** Robby the Robot languorously floating in the sky (in fact, it cannot be) for many reasons, the most valid of which is that **our** Robby is incapable of flight or even hover. Besides, a careful inspection of the cover creature would disclose that the materials of which he is constructed (if 'he' is appropriate) are not those we attribute to Robby.

The problem with these alternate universes is that we – at least at present – cannot visit them, nor even communicate with them. But speculation is, of course, the foundation of Science Fiction.

Technical Notes

The robot was a freebie from an Internet site, where absolutely **no** materials or textures were supplied – these attributes were supplied using *Vue 6 Infinite* – another reason why it is not Robby. Everything else was part of *Eon's Vue*. Text and logo, etc., were added with *PhotoShop's CS3*.

Dick Janssen

Editorial comment

It is generally agreed that *The Skylark of Space* (1929), first of a series of four novels by E E Smith Ph D ending with *Skylark DuQuesne* (1965), was the first book even to suggest the concept of interstellar travel. Smith's universes are many and varied, the principal ones being battles between rival scientists in the Skylark stores and his history of the galaxy-spanning Civilisation of the Lens. Others may be found in *Masters of Space*, *Galaxy Primes* and *The Vortex Blaster*, although the latter has points of intersection with the universe of the Lens.



Smith's stylistic and literary faults may be apparent and his sexist morality and dated descriptions of science may grate in comparison with today's more refined standards, but those of us – like the editor - who have read Smith in their youth find themselves returning to him in old age. His visions of epic space battles between the greatest of heroes against the vilest of villains constitute primitive fare, but this is the mother lode that has inspired later generations of writers of Space Opera typified by current best selling British author Peter Hamilton. E E Smith's epics are worth reading and re-reading for that reason alone.

Ignore characterisation and realism. For sheer escapist exhilaration you can't go past the *Skylark* stories. **Ed.**

A Christmas book list

for that sense of wonder



Hope Springs Eternal or Eyes Bigger Than His Stomach
(from *The Smaller Majority*)

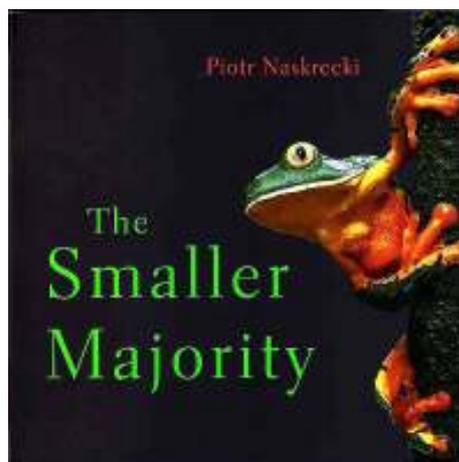
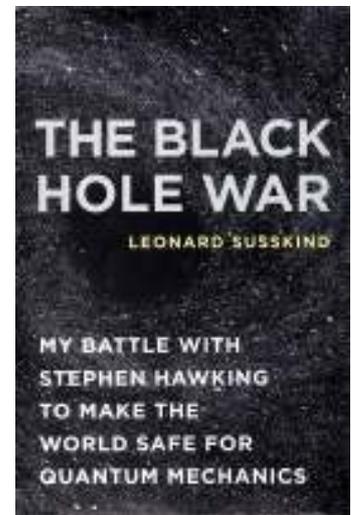


Beastie – Capusa cuculoides
(Photo by Elaine Cochrane)

Well, last year Leonard Susskind appeared in this list of recommendations with his book *The Cosmic Landscape*, and this year it is his new book *The Black Hole War* which is a perfect gift for the SF fan who is as interested in science as in fiction. The book details an argument he had with Stephen Hawking regarding the way in which black holes ‘swallowed’ objects (that is, information). Hawking – and many other theoreticians – believed that this information was lost, forever, to the universe. Susskind argued that such destruction meant that entropy was lost, and that that in turn was incompatible with basic concepts of physics. Although black holes evaporate (Hawking showed this), the information may still be expunged. Susskind bet Hawking that he (Stephen) was wrong. The book takes the reader through to the resolution of this disagreement. And, since the book exists, clearly Hawking lost the bet.

The first few chapters will be very familiar to anyone who reads *New Scientist* or *Scientific American*, and the read is akin to sliding downhill – not much effort is required – so the segue to more and more esoteric ideas and concepts is rather like a conjuring trick. Before one is fully aware of it, one has been gracefully led to the realisation, carefully justified, that every four *Planck areas* of the event horizon of a black hole contains one bit of information. A Planck area is $2.611 \times 10^{-70} \text{ m}^2$ – which is very, very small considering the radius of even an ‘small’ black hole.

The journey ends with the rather SF conceptualisation that since *all* the information inside a black hole is ‘on’ its event horizon, we, and perhaps the entire Universe, may simply be holograms, determined by a cosmic event horizon. This is heady, joyous stuff, and the book is highly recommended.



Now I was never a fan of ‘creepy crawlies’, mainly because as a pre-teenager I used to have very frightening nightmares where I was threatened, horribly, by huge beetles, wasps, spiders and precursors of BEMs. But my mind-set has been modified, rather greatly, by several experiences. First there was Elaine Cochrane’s enthusiasm for these creatures (see the photo at the top of this page), then came the superb French documentary *Microcosmos*, and David Attenborough’s TV series *Life in the Undergrowth* together with his book on the subject, and a few other books, of which Piotr Nasrecki’s *The Smaller Majority* is one. This a small coffee table, or largeish

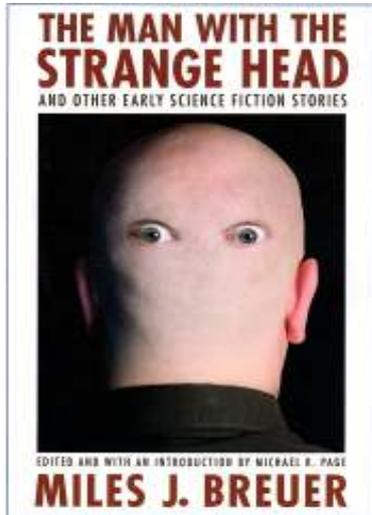
trade paperback, of text and photographs of the tiny (and some not so minuscule) denizens of the rain forests. The photos are wondrous, beautifully printed, at least one to each of the more than 250 pages, and with a text which is equally fascinating and enthralling. (For those who seek bargains, let me point out that this paperback is **exactly** the same as the hardcover, yet sells [at Amazon] for a bit over US\$16).

Why is this listed here – in the pages of a ‘zine for SF fans? Well, partly because *IRS* is for ‘inquisitive readers’, but mainly because of what A. Merritt said about the world about us:

In this great crucible of life we call the world...the mysteries lie close-packed, unaccountable as grains of sand on an ocean's shore. ... They walk beside us, unseen and unheard, calling out to us, asking why we are deaf to their crying, blind to their wonder.

The Metal Monster.

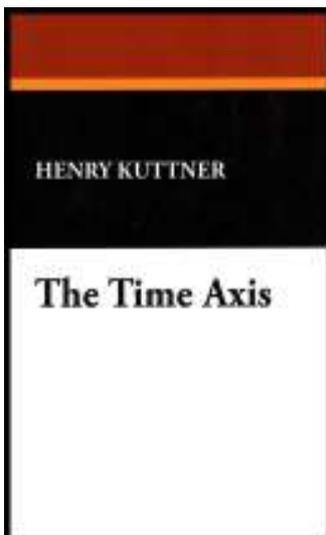
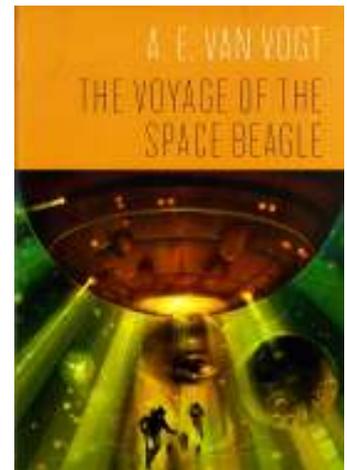
Well, here in Nasrecki's book we can see the unseen, respond to their wonder, and envisage creatures so beautiful yet so inimical that they could have stepped out of an SF novel of fantastic explorations.



Science fiction of the 1920s and '30s was in a nascent stage, barely able to find its feet, and many, if not most, stories were about ideas, inventions, strange concepts – usually one such per story. And the emphasis was seldom on character. And yet, for all that, some writings persist in their charm. Miles J. Breuer was one such author who, even limiting himself to the single-concept yarn, still has a nostalgic allure. Some of his stories have just been published in the collection *The Man With the Strange Head*. Medical procedures through the fourth dimension, the eponymous strange head of the collection, the psychological power of irrational thought (which sound highly contemporary), and spaceships to Mars. In the latter story, it's pointed out that such a trip is carefully balanced on a razor-blade of weight of cargo on the one hand, and life-sustaining resources on the other. The margin for error is so critical that the captain of the vessel can, at his discretion, eject any stowaway who is discovered out into space. Death is the cruel penalty for what may seem a minor infraction. Such a stowaway is found, and is so expelled. This is but a minor plot element of the story, but many years later Tom Godwin would make it the lynch-pin of his yarn *The Cold Equations*.

The Breuer book is for those who wish to follow up the history of SF.

Just ten years after Breuer's stories, 'The Golden Age' of SF is sometimes dated to July 1939 when A. E. vanVogt's first published story appeared in *Astounding Science Fiction* – *Black Destroyer*. (See the editorial comments on this story in Drake, Flint & Baen's anthology *The World Turned Upside Down*). The story would fit rather nicely into the *Star Trek* universe, where the *Beagle* is a relative of the *Enterprise*. The crew of the *Beagle* is intent on exploration of our Galaxy, and in this first story encounter a cat-like creature, Coeurl, of great power, and which almost brings the voyage to a premature halt. vanVogt wrote other stories about the *Beagle*, and these, together with additional material, were gathered together in the novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*. I read *Black Destroyer* about 1952 (it was in Healy & McComas' anthology *Adventures in Time and Space*), and the novel as well at about the same time. Both made an indelible impression. In rereading the new paperback edition (see the image) a few months ago, I was just as enthusiastic. If one compares Breuer with vanVogt, the enormous advance in the sophistication of SF story-telling is immediately apparent, and attests to the great, and rapid, strides made in the techniques of filling in the background universe to the reader.



Henry Kuttner – by whom I mean the conflation of Kuttner and Moore, since even they were sometimes unsure of who wrote what in their collaborations – is a favorite of mine. He (remember I mean they) wrote the best short SF story I have ever read – *Vintage Season* – and the best, and my favorite, SF novel – *Fury*. So when I discover something of his I knew nothing about, it's an infrared-letter day. The hitherto unknown novel is *The Time Axis*.

It's one of those 'Super-Science' novels in which a disparate band of adventurers, only four in this case, are brought together by some power in order to avert some inexplicable catastrophe. Not something, in this case, as simple as the destruction of the Earth, or the solar system, or even the Galaxy, but rather the entire Universe. Of course the *time axis* will play a fundamental role – whatever the nature of the *time axis* may be (no spoilers here) – but also a *real* mathematical procedure will be of critical importance. This is the Banach-Tarski dissection. These two mathematicians proved (let me stress that – *proved*) in 1927 that it is possible to dissect a solid sphere into a finite number of pieces and to reassemble those pieces to yield *two* spheres *identical* to the original. In 1947 another mathematician, R. M. Robinson, *proved* that the minimum number of pieces was a mere five. Cut up a solid sphere into five pieces, put them together again, and you have two spheres of the same size and density as the original.

The Time Axis was published a year after Robinson's result, and clearly Kuttner (he or she or both) were well on the cutting edge of mathematics. The dissection is used to split the Universe into five pieces, from which *two* universes are created. How this is done, and how it might possibly avert disaster is again something which will be discovered only by reading the novel.

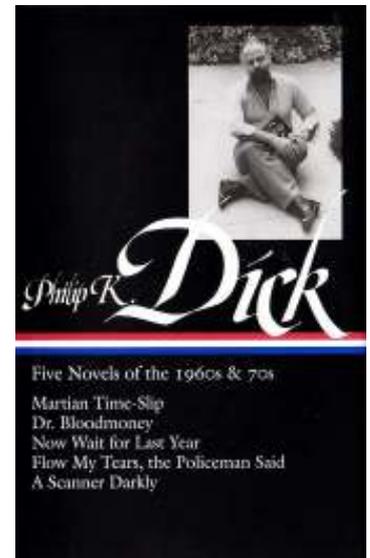
Let me be clear. This is **not** a novel which is likely to appear on anyone's list of best 50 SF novels (perhaps not even the best 100), but it **is** a wonderful romp, a breathless journey, and a thoroughly entertaining read. It is also unlikely that once read it will ever be forgot. How many novels can one say that about?

Finally, there is another omnibus collection of P. K. Dick's novels. Even if you already have the books, the collection is recommended. If not, it's probably a must-have. I know that this is irrational and quite illogical of me, but I find that the production values of a book effect my reading experience. Silly – what's important are the words, not the packaging, but my prejudices are too strong.

The volume is published by *The Library of America*, and it is joy to hold and read. The paper has a sensuous feel and is acid-free, the font is clear and readable (Linotron Galliard), the book is sewn-bound, there is a page-marker ribbon incorporated in the binding, and even the dust jacket has a voluptuous feel.

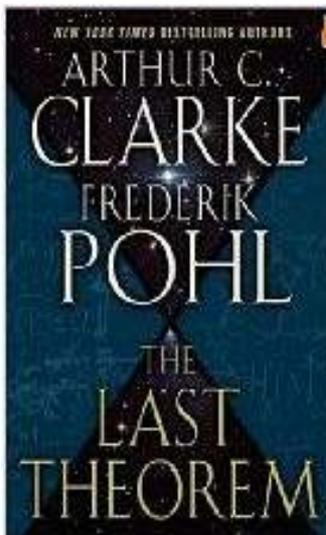
Five novels, over 1100 pages, all for only US\$40.

Oh, the stories are by P. K. Dick, which may be an added incentive to purchasing.



Dick Jensen

Arthur C Clarke's last theorem



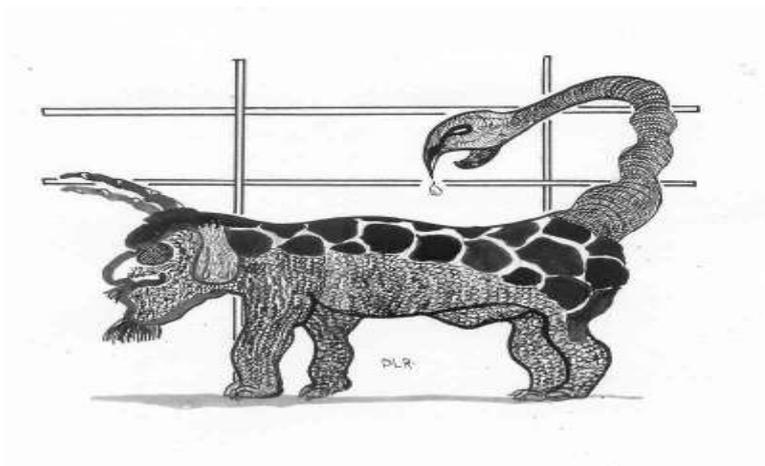
This collaboration between the late Sir Arthur C Clarke and Frederik Pohl was Clarke's last book. He died a few days after receiving the final manuscript.

A Sri Lankan teenage mathematical prodigy manages to reconstruct Fermat's Last Theorem and achieves fame and fortune. Meanwhile the alien and all-powerful Grand Galactics see the flash from Earth's nuclear tests and decide that humanity needs to be wiped out. They assign a subordinate race to do the deed, but humanity's growing social maturity gives them pause for thought. Throw in a stereotypical comic book villain that, for me, does little more than demonise the American military-industrial complex and you have the ingredients for an adventurous plot line.

The novel is disappointing in a number of ways. It has all the ingredients of good science fiction – sharply drawn characters, hard science and an adventurous story line. But the characterisation is odd, the themes and ideas stale and the pace uneven. There are irritating slabs of mathematics that are more or less effective the first time around but they suffer from repetition.

This is not a book to remember the authors by. Both did better in their prime.

Bill Wright



Conflux 5 Report

Canberra SF Convention, Friday 3rd to Monday 6th October 2008

In spite of ill health (including an ‘episode’ during the Great Debate on Friday evening that I’d rather not have had) I had a great time at Conflux 5 and afterwards exploring Canberra. A highlight was the day spent prowling around the main campus at ANU where, amidst a forest of security fencing, I stumbled across a lecture on the Milky Way Galaxy by the Head of Science at CSIRO. Since then I’ve been through an extended period of illness where I lost not only my concentration but also all my notes but I’ve managed to recall some details.

Thursday, 2nd October

I travelled from Melbourne to Canberra on the same plane as Fan Guest of Honour Bruce Gillespie who was met at Canberra airport by Conflux 5 committee member Phil Berrie. Phil kindly invited me to accompany Bruce in driving both of us to The Marque Hotel on Northbourne Avenue (a highway that bisects the city) that proved to be a comfortable convention-friendly crash pad and watering hole.

Phil gave us a guided tour of Canberra - a vast area of parkland with magnificent views of iconic buildings and monuments, including the Carillon on Lake Burley Griffin, the National Library, the National Museum, the National War Memorial, Questacon (the national science and technology centre), the Old and New Parliament Houses and the embassies of foreign powers having diplomatic relations with Australia. Of the latter, the Chinese Embassy is as big as small city. Unlike most other cities Canberra’s roads are not laid out in a grid pattern but go in circles. I had thought that landmarks would give me a sense of direction but I was wrong.

I think I was in the hotel swimming pool when the committee swept up invited guests and took them out to dinner at a local restaurant. So I missed by best chance to talk to most of them. I did manage to chat with the major luminaries before the end of the convention, including Liz Gorinksi from Tor Books in New York, best selling fantasy author Trudi Canavan (of *Black Magician* trilogy fame) and her husband Paul Ewins from Melbourne and Rob Hood and Cat Sparks from Sydney.

Also in that dinner party was local publisher Donna Maree Hanson who had generously put copies of her magnum opus ‘*Australian Speculative Fiction: a Genre Overview*’ into convention show bags.

This is a lavishly illustrated 230-page compendium of Australian authors, anthologies and small press outfits containing one-page biographies and descriptions with photos and links to relevant websites. Appendices include cross-references to stories in anthologies and individual issues of small press magazines, as well as a comprehensive index. An unexpected windfall and very much appreciated. Naturally, I paid Donna the complement of attended the launch of this masterpiece at the convention.



Friday, 3 October 2008

After sussing out the hotel breakfast, I noted that Friday was mainly devoted to pre-arranged workshops. These have been a feature of Australian SF conventions since the first Aussiecon (the 33rd worldcon) in 1975 when Guest of Honour Ursula Le Guin ran the first workshop for budding Australian SF authors that resulted in the acclaimed anthology *The Altered I*.

Most interstate visitors didn’t arrive until late in the day, so I ventured forth to find Civic, Canberra’s commercial and shopping precinct, to purchase supplies for a party on Saturday night to promote Melbourne’s Continuum 5 convention on 14-16 August 2009. Being ignorant of the lie of the land, I didn’t catch the bus outside the hotel. It was a long walk for a bloke with diabetic pains and a bum left leg and I wasn’t much good for the rest of the day. I was OK for the opening ceremony at 7:00 PM where the highlight was a corroboree performed by an indigenous family in which legends of The Dreamtime were told in dance. That was supposed to set the theme for the convention, *Dreaming*, so I was disappointed that most convenors of panel discussions failed to even mention it.

Then followed the Great Debate on the subject ‘Is this a Dream or is it Reality?’ led by philosopher and critic Russell Blackford. (He’s the real McCoy, holding Ph Ds in the supposed return to myth in contemporary literature and, in philosophy, relating to the social and legal response to human enhancement. His extended bio from the

standpoint of his contribution to science fiction may be accessed on the website www.meteor.org.au. Go to the bottom of the 'Who's Who' page and click on the link to the 'extended bio of dr blackford' page).

Despite suffering a painful health 'episode' near the end of the Great Debate, I stayed around for one of the highlight's of the convention – the launch by editor Jack Dann of Part 2 of the *Dreaming Down Under* anthologies titled '*Dreaming Again*', with publisher Stephanie Smith and many of the authors.

Ten years ago, *Dreaming Down Under* edited by Jack Dann captured the wild side of Australian fiction and won a coveted World Fantasy Award. It was time to start *Dreaming Again*. In this new anthology are stories from acclaimed international best sellers and new writers. What distinguishes them all is excellence. Jack is an exacting task master and to be published under his name you have to be good. Jack proceeded to tell us how good and spared the blushes of none of the authors in the telling. The audience was encouraged to join the celebrations by buying and reading the book and we responded as only avid science fiction fans can.

My favourite tale from *Dreaming Again* is 'Undead Camels Ate their Flesh' by fledgling author Jason Fisher. It begins: "*With its usual efficiency, the sun blazed down on bugger-all.*" When a new writer does that in his first published sentence, it says to me that here is a crisp writer with something to say; and so it proved to be.

Saturday, 4 October 2008

I mentioned earlier that I lost my notes, so I can't tell you about the panels I attended. I can tell you from memory that the formal program was of very high quality. Thought-provoking themes on Saturday morning included, "*Without the Universal Translator, what might learning real alien languages be like?*", "*Making a living as a writer, but not necessarily as a novelist*" and "*Into the mouths of characters; food as the basis for world building.*"

Saturday afternoon was devoted largely to a panel I was on with Bruce Gillespie titled *What is Fandom?*. It was moderated by local fan Rachel McGrath-Kerr. The fourth panellist was a young lady whose badge said 'K J Taylor' and whose experience of fan activity is confined to blogging. Bruce got excited about that because he is desperate for clues about how to navigate that mysterious realm in cyberspace, but she volunteered no information at all. Attendance was meagre and for most of the time we talked to ourselves. I came well prepared to expound on the evolution of fanzine production from ditto to stencil through offset printing to e-zines and had examples from each to illustrate my presentation. It fell on stony ground. Most attendees had come to celebrate authors and Bruce and I, as traditional fanzine and apa hacks, were stranded high and dry. We might have had more people there who are interested in the multi-faceted nature of fandom and its history if there hadn't been so much competition from four program streams catering to interests that had little relevance to fan activity as we know it.

I missed the CSFS Party. Indeed, I didn't even pick up on the significance of the Canberra Science Fiction Society itself. Bruce says he knows all about it. I must remember to ask him about it before the next Conflux.



At left is a group photo of some of the authors at the mass book signing on Saturday afternoon before we broke up to prepare for the Gillian Polack's Prohibition dinner.

All were contributors to Jack Dann's anthology *Dreaming Again* and all signed my copy near the title of their story.

I had had 24 hours since purchasing my copy to sit in the hotel's roomy foyer and read a few of the stories. It did me good to be able to put a face to the name of the author of some of them. Others, of course, were well known to me from past conventions or from fan activity in Melbourne.

I can't put names to them all, so I won't name them here.

After the mass book signing I retired to set up my hotel ensuite for the Continuum 5 room party and to preen myself for attendance at for Gillian Polack's 'Prohibition New York Dinner' at 7:00 PM.



Gillian Polack has a Ph D in history from the University of Sydney and an MA in medieval studies from the University of Toronto. She admits to being joyously addicted to food, history and writing – in that order. So, when it was decided to have a Prohibition dinner in a New York speakeasy, Gillian was given the task of ensuring that the eight cocktail varieties and food courses served on the night were authentic to the 1920s.

Her efforts did justice to that theme, as did most of the ladies who donned Flapper gear for the occasion. Men were less adventurous. Some made no effort to dress up. I gave them ‘cardsharp’ silk ties. I went as the Boy Wonder wearing a mask and a Batman and Robin badge and matching tie.



Pictured above are a local fan sporting a ‘cardsharp’ tie, Jean Weber dressed as a Flapper and the Boy Wonder. At left is a solo photo of Jean Weber with one of Gillian Polack’s authentic Prohibition cocktails.



The Continuum Party on Saturday night was a roaring success, as well it might be since it was the *only* room party. I must say that the hotel was very decent about it. Attendees seemed to come in waves. Having eaten their full Prohibition Dinner, they didn’t make significant inroads on my party supplies, with the result that there were lots of left overs for Sunday night’s room parties.

I had to remind fellow Continuum 5 committee member Rachel Holkner stop partying and sting the company for memberships at appropriate times. The pickings were good.

The theme is ‘Galaxies by Gaslight’ and the venue is Ether in the Melbourne CBD on 14-16 August 2009.

Sunday, 5 October 2008

Apart from listening to 20-minute Authors’ readings, attending Cat Sparks’s, Bruce Gillespie’s, Gillian Polack’s and Liz Gorinski’s Guest of Honour speeches and doing a bit of volunteer work for the committee,, I spent much of Sunday conversing in corridors, relaxing with friends at the bar and practicing buyer resistance in the dealers’ room. That left me with energy to spare for partying on Sunday night. There were, if fact, three room parties but they eventually merged into the one in the room of Juliette Woods and Damien Warman, who were promoting next year’s national SF convention in Adelaide called *Conjecture* to be held over the South Australian Queens Birthday weekend on 6-8 June 2009.

My party supplies were still going strong when I went to bed but only a few crumbs, a block of cheese and a couple of bottles of soft drink were left over from the Woods-Warman party as contributions to the dead dog party after the convention.

Monday, 6 October 2008

My main focus on Monday morning was the Meteor Incorporated presentation I was due to make at 11:00 AM.

Meteor Inc was formed in August 2007 to raise funds to set up a permanent science fiction institution and research collection in Australia. (For details please visit its website at www.meteor.org.au and follow the links).



It is a grand vision that deserved better than an audience of five including Bruce Gillespie and a couple of fans who sharing the surname Doig who were not related. But what the gathering lacked in quantity it more than made up in quality, for the other two present were the venerable Founder of Anzapa Leigh Edmonds and his wife Valma Brown (pictured at left).

We’ve set up an organisation that could, right now, build a collection and archive it **if we had the money!** I was trying to put over the double message, ie. the need for such an organisation and the need for donations.

The closing ceremony was a bit of a blur for me and I remember none of it.

For me, the most enjoyable part of Monday was the dead dog party afterwards at the hotel bar. There were still a few workshops in progress but the committee's task was done and its members were unwinding in the company of those members of the convention who hadn't checked out of the hotel.

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After the convention, I spent a couple of days visiting the major national monuments that Canberra boasts, including the War Memorial, Old Parliament House, New Parliament House, the National Library and Questacon, the national science & technology centre. Very early on Thursday morning I hired a ferry boat and had the Captain show me Canberra from the waters of Lake Burley Griffin. To borrow a phrase from my youth, that was Extra Grouse! The Captain put me ashore at the back entrance to Floriade where I spent the rest of the morning admiring entries to a graded garden gnome competition, looking at artwork & flower displays and sitting quietly on a bench in the company of two elderly Chinese patriarchs listening to an aboriginal corroboree being conducted in a nearby shelter.

When I made my way to the front entrance to get the bus back to Civic, the first bus that came along was going to a remote campus of the Australian National University and I decided to go along for the ride. The campus was a rather forbidding huddle of low huts separated by security fencing. That looked promising, so I got out and started to look for someone to follow who looked as if he knew where he was going. Most people on the strut seemed to be headed for the same place, so I followed them in.

It turned out that I had stumbled across a two-hour lecture on *'The Milky Way'* by the Head of Science at the prestigious Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) who is based at a radio physics laboratory at Marsfield NSW. She gave a potted history of optical and radio astronomy and expounded on applications of the latter used to map the Milky Way entrancing her listeners with vivid descriptions and projected displays of its evolution, composition and functionality.



**Starry Night nebula in the Milky Way galaxy
(named after a Van Gogh painting)**

I button-holed her afterwards and noticed a glazed expression cross her face when I remarked that the timing of her talk was apposite in that it might serve as a prelude to Continuum 5, a science fiction convention with the theme *'Galaxies by Gaslight'* to be held in Melbourne over August 14-16, 2009. She accepted a copy of the October 2008 edition of my fanzine and listened politely when I opined that an abridged version of her talk at the con would not go unappreciated...

... at which point the scientist interrupted my flow of eloquence to explain that she was about to embark on maternity leave and that her attendance at the convention might be inconvenient as it would coincide with her planned resumption of full-time work. I responded by pointing out that maternity does not switch off one's brain and asked for her email address so that we could correspond. To her "Pourquoi?" I explained that I might use pages from her audio-visual presentation to put together an abridged version of her talk for delivery at Continuum 5, subject to her approval. She blinked and handed over her card. I left while I was still ahead.

I returned to Melbourne on Friday and, at a meeting of the Continuum Foundation on the following Sunday, I was roundly criticised for exceeding my brief in that it is the Foundation acting collectively that determines convention programs and not individual members acting precipitously. I invoked fanarchy as my defence and was exonerated.

Bill Wright

Letter from Chris Garcia

Following is a LoC from American fan and ex-Anzapan Chris Garcia...

The October 2008 issue of *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* has so much stuff that I want to comment about and here I am reading the zine and not sure which of the awesome pieces to jump on to first!

Let's start with another amazing Ditmar cover. He's always doing great things and he very kindly sent me a DVD full of his work that has been most useful. This one is particularly interesting because of the subject. Giant Domes have been a thing for me for years. The idea of sending a giant terrarium into space, putting it on a planet of nearly the right climate-type seems so much more realistic than the idea of terraforming. The amount of energy needed to terraform a planet, or even a significant part of a planet, is rickdiculous! On the other hand, establish a pod of livable environment, use that to try and establish small portions outside of the dome on an experimental basis and you've got the start of a New World. I must admit though, I've always had something of a place in my heart for van Vogt.

I'm very happy that Melbourne's getting the Worldcon in 2010. Sadly, the odds of me being able to attend are pretty much slim to none. I'd love to go, but there are two things stopping me: the first is the cost of the flight across and a hotel while I'm there and the second is that since it's right at the end of the AFL season, there's no way I'd go to the con itself and instead spend the entire weekend watching Aussie Rules live! Of course, I'll have more to say about that particular sport in a minute.

Whoops, Lloyd's a Canadian. I called him an American once. I still limp because of it. [*He forgave me.* Ed.]

I've been watching the Meteor thing recently, since I've started working with Earl Kemp to help the Eaton Collection here in California. I might have some things that'll help y'all out in the advice category. I'm always willing to help folks out who need anything in the way of advice from someone who's been around museums.

The entire China thing of late has been killing me. I mean, the Chinese can take giant steps forward, and then there's something like the Milk Scare, the Protests, the weirdnesses in general, that all sort of put things back where they were. The Olympics were a grand slam for China. They can brag about the number of medals they won, the amount of success they had and how they put on the most impressive selections of buildings in Olympic history. On the other hand, the folks who managed to get news of the protests and such out and the arrests of journalists all make it hard to believe they'll gain international standing due to hosting them. On the other hand, the Milk Scare just got big and it's been going on for years, though the government has often issued pronouncements that no one can speak of them or they will not provide health care for the sickened children. That's the awful stuff. There's more of this to come. One of the reasons that the Chinese can provide so much so cheap is the general lack of over-sight. If they put as much into inspections and testing as the rest of the world, they'd face the same problems.

I've had a lot of discussions with various figures like former London Museum of Science curator Doron Swade and Computer Historian Mike Williams about the Antikythera mechanism. There's a lot of debate about the differential gear (Mike was dead-set against it being an actual differential gear) and there are folks who think it might have been a more general computing device (which Doron was dead-set against. I'm not sure. I've seen the diagrams and thing there's obviously something to the idea that it was a date-fixer, much like the ones that were built for the Vatican to compute the dates for the Moveable Feasts. The Viennanese reconstruction took a few liberties that a lot of people weren't happy about. Then again, so did the Babbage reconstruction we got sitting around in our lobby for the next six months, so it's hard to say what's right!

The Guadalupe River in San Jose is nowhere near as large or as impressive as the Yarra, but the city fathers, led by a Mayor who was trying to completely reinvent the city and pert-near managed to, came up with a design tat both attended to the needs of recreationalists and the environmental needs of the river. Of course, it was nowhere near as grand a plan as there seems to be for the Yarra, but it worked pretty darn well.

All this talk of new teams in the AFL reminds me of my two latest pains: the loss of the Premiership by the Cats and the fact that Gary Ablett didn't win the Brownlow. These are both bad things if you're a Cats fan. Ablett was hurt by the fact that he was hurt. He'd probably have made up the difference if he'd played in two or three more games. The loss to Hawthorn is a slightly larger deal, almost exactly like the Patriots losing the Super Bowl after winning every other game that season. Still, Geelong had a wonderful season, Ablett won the MVP and there's sure to be some great stuff coming in the future for them.

You gotta love eggheads, but a friend of mine pointed something out. If Larry Niven had written the entire LHC scenario, and it could produce a Black Hole that would swallow up the Earth, it would be constantly breaking

down because the universe would never allow an artificial means for discovering the fundamental secrets of the Start of All Things. And then the LHC went and broke down like a Chevy on a roadtrip. Made me think!

I really do love Ernst, but his stuff really served as the prelude to the Abstract Expressionists. Ernst and Gorky were too wild guys. They really rule.

Great issue! Can't wait for the next

Chris

More on the Chinese milk contamination scandal

In IRS October 2008, I drew attention to the Chinese milk contamination scandal that came to light weeks before the Olympic Games when the New Zealand dairy Fonterra (which has a joint venture with China's Sanlu) began pushing for a recall of contaminated mild products in China. The order to delay any action until after the Olympics came from the highest level of government in Beijing. By then, of course, it was too late and 40,000 babies were hospitalised with life threatening illnesses. Some Chinese press reports have said the contamination scam had been going on for years

At the time, I didn't know that Sanlu was a major sponsor of the Games, which amplifies the scandal a thousand fold. Now we learn that the milk scare appears to be spreading beyond China's borders. This issue completely overshadows China's magnificent accomplishment is sending its first Astronauts into Space and returning them safely to Earth. What glory is there in China becoming a space power if its leaders wink at poisoning its young and the young of its trading partners?

Ecce Winnie ille Pu

Pu optimus ursus mundi est



Clerihew corner

From Thomas Jefferson to Barack Obama

Though the text of the clerihew below has nothing to do with the current US presidential election, it came about because of a reflection on that event.

*Enjoy the gentle zephyrs on
The estate of Thomas Jefferson;
You can't be anything but mellow
On the slopes of Monticello.*

Commentators say that Barack Obama is the first time an African-American is President of the USA. But is he? After the American civil war (1861-1865) and especially in the early years of the 20th century, the measure of “blackness” in the US was the ‘one-drop rule’, which essentially meant that if any ONE of your ancestors was black, so were you. Hence, Barack Obama is black because one of his parents was black.

Before the civil war, however, the definition of blackness was more flexible. Often, the southern estates of *antebellum* America had slaves who were *quadroons* (a single grandparent was black) or *octoroons* (a single great-grandparent was black). Taking this to its logical extreme, at some point you would have a slave who, to all intents and purposes, could not be distinguished from the free “white” children of the master. And often, in fact, a slave would be the half-sibling of the master’s children.

In many of these cases, the slave child would be encouraged (and even given financial support) to run away. Once they left, they would presumably be able to choose to call themselves what they wanted: black, white, Indian, Portuguese, or whatever. This is what happened at Monticello, the estate of Thomas Jefferson, third president of the USA.

Sally Hemmings was a quadroon, and a slave in the household where Jefferson’s wife (Martha Wayles) grew up. Sally’s mother was the daughter of an African slave and a white sea captain; it is widely accepted that Sally herself was Martha Wayles’ half-sister.



When Martha Wayles married Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemmings became part of the household, and remained there for life. Sally Hemmings never married, but DID have several children; recent DNA evidence has proved that either Thomas Jefferson OR one of his close relatives was the father of at least one of her children. She was never freed, but several of her close relatives were, and at least two of her children were encouraged to ‘run away’ to live as free and white. The simplest conclusion to make (though not with 100% certainty) is that Jefferson was indeed the father of Sally Hemmings’ children, and that many of their descendants today, not knowing their ancestry, consider themselves white. What if one of them has already been president?

But the point is moot, since the racial issue has since been overtaken over by events. During the 2008 presidential election campaign, the American electorate came to the appalled realisation that Dick Cheney had succeeded in privatising the U.S. Treasury and Barack Obama was perforce elected as the 44th President of the United States.

Born 1961 in Honolulu, Hawaii, Barack Hussein Obama is the son of Barack Hussein Obama Sr from Siaya District, Kenya, and Ann Dunham from Kansas, USA. His parents divorced and Ann married Indonesian oil manager Lolo Soetoro. In 1967 Soetoro's student visa was revoked because of political unrest in Indonesia. Dunham and six year old Barack accompanied him to Jakarta where Obama's half-sister, Maya Soetoro was born. Four years later, aged ten, he was sent back to the United States to live with his maternal grandmother.

Barack Obama is the fifth African American senator in U.S. history and one of the few politicians since Adlai Stevenson with the intellectual clout to match his aspirations. Like Adlai Stevenson, he believes that the average man and woman are a great deal better than average. Such is the cultural range and sense of history revealed by his rhetorical skills that every nation in the world seems to want to claim him, including the Irish...

*Your don't believe me I hear you say
But Barack's as Irish as was JFK.
From the old Blarney Stone to the great Hill of Tara
There's no one as Irish as Barack Obama.*

From Paradise Lost to Stream of Consciousness Regained

John Milton was a 17th century English poet, prose polemicist and civil servant in Cromwell's Commonwealth of England. He is best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and for his treatise *Areopagitica* condemning censorship.

Milton was writing at a time of religious and political flux in England. His poetry and prose reflect deep convictions often reacting to contemporary circumstances, but it is not always easy to locate the writer in any obvious religious category. His views may be described as broadly Protestant, and he was an accomplished man of letters and an official in the government of Oliver Cromwell.

According to me,

*The reputation of John Milton
As a radical is built on
Tracts with titles long and sinuous
Like An Apology against a Pamphlet Called a Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the
Remonstrant against Smectymnuus.*

Or perhaps...

*Paris Hilton
Is not John Milton
She'd rather be Forrest Whittaker *
Than think of writing Areopagitica.*

* Forrest Whittaker is worthy actor (appearing in *The Crying Game* and *The Last King of Scotland*) who in no way resembles Ms Hilton.

It is in relation to *Areopagitica*, that I first heard the term "anacoluthon". The only other use of the word that I know of was by Captain Haddock in a Tintin adventure.

The editor's dictionary says that *anacoluthon* (from the Greek: 'lacking sequence'), plural *anacolutha*, is a grammatical interruption or lack of implied sequence within a sentence - not to be confused with *anacoloutha*, the opposite of *acoloutha* which is the substitution of reciprocal words; that is, replacing one word with another whose meaning is close enough to the former that the former could, in its turn, be a substitute for the latter.

*A wonderful word is anacoluthon, plural anacolutha,
A decided perquisite in constructing verse drama
Not to be confused with anacoloutha
Whose meaning is the obverse of its opposite acoloutha.*

If you're wondering why I have inflicted this esoteric epistemology on you, then wonder no more. Having persevered so far you are now equipped to comprehend stream-of-consciousness prose such as that in James Joyce's *Ulysses* – a rare gift whose worth will become apparent when you essay the effort.

While browsing at the local second-hand bookshop at lunchtime, I managed to score a copy of John Sladek's review of occult beliefs, *The New Apocrypha*. Alas, Sladek is no longer with us, but now I have a copy of his book. Similarly no longer with us is William Bligh, naval captain, and the victim of three mutinies and a rebellion. But there WAS a book about Bligh on the shelf immediately above *New Apocrypha*.

The clerihew that this prompted came unbidden, and has nothing to do with John Sladek or the occult.

*William Bligh
Was only so high
Which was why, said Captain Cook,
He was easy to overlook.*

Now when this thought arrived, I had only a limited knowledge of the interaction between Cook and Bligh. (I had known that Bligh served as an officer on Cook's third and fatal voyage of discovery, but that's about it). Imagine my surprise on reading this excerpt from the Dictionary of Australian Biography:

"Cook was a good-looking man of over six feet in height...."

And this: *"Bligh was below average height, somewhat heavily built, with black hair, blue eyes, and a pale complexion."*

Dennis Callegari (with editorial embellishment)

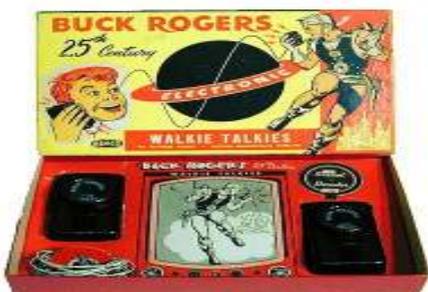
Celebrating the comic strip

The United States Post Office sometimes issues commemorative stamps that impinge on our interests. Michael Waite of Ypsilanti, Michigan, has sent me the following that was issued in 2006.



Michael says that a superhero series of stamps was due for release in 2007 and, indeed, I have a packet from him where he used all those stamps.

He would like to see - *I* would like to see - a stamp featuring Buck Rogers (or Anthony Rogers) and John Carter of Mars. How about a sheet of Edgar Rice Burroughs' heroes on stamps, or Robert E. Howard?



Imagination vs Logic in the accommodation of Inconsistency

Those of us who are old enough to remember the days when westerns, detective yarns and Saturday nights at the local cinema defined the cultural parameters of the general populace also recall the isolation one experienced as a science fiction fan. Indeed, most people thought science fiction aficionados were a little mad.

At the time, I found consolation in the writings of early 20th century essayist G K Chesterton, who said that imagination does not breed insanity. What does breed insanity, he wrote, is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative minds very seldom. Chesterton does not in any sense attack logic. He only says that danger lies in logic.

So I plunged lightheartedly into the novels of A E Van Vogt who, you will remember, was heavily into the logic of levels. In *The Weapon Makers* he had a perfectly rational explanation for a time traveller being in two places at once – at least it *seemed* logical until the end of the story, which is all that matters.

Imagination reveals possibilities, in comparison with which reality sometimes suffers. To avoid pessimism people turn to religion or escapism. They move away from religion in optimistic times and back to it again when the future looks bleak. But escapism is always with us and, nowadays, it takes the form of speculative fiction or media extravaganza. That is unquestionably a Good Thing, because the alternative is fanaticism.

There are severe limits on types of dissent that can be tolerated in a democracy, depending on the world views of the dissenters. A democracy that subscribes to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights finds it hard to tolerate, for example, fanatics whose wills have been forged into a conviction that the way to Paradise is suicide accompanied by the wholesale slaughter of infidels. If politics is the art of the possible, then it ought to be feasible to devise structures that reduce points of intersection between ultimately antagonistic cultures.

G K Chesterton's views on imagination versus logic are only part of a wider debate on the need to accommodate multi-valued solutions to vexed questions such as that. Chesterton himself goes on to say, "*The general fact is simple. Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. . . . The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head; and it is his head that splits.*"

"Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have mystery you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity. The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic. He has permitted the twilight. He has always had one foot in earth and the other in fairyland. He has always left himself free to doubt his gods but, unlike the agnostic, free also to believe in them. He has always cared more for truth than for consistency. If he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he would take the two truths and the contradiction along with them. His spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for that."

It is one thing for people to arrive through growth at an appreciation of multi-valued logic that can accommodate inconsistency; it is another for that position to be forced on them. It is a dilemma faced by people – and that includes most of us - who have had a set of beliefs imposed on them in early childhood. We spend a lifetime liberating ourselves from those and in resisting mostly well meaning attempts by others to bring us back into the fold.



Eighteenth century French philosopher François-Marie Arouet, better known by the pen name Voltaire, expressed libertarian views that aroused the ire of the Catholic Church, particularly in relation to freedom of belief. He was resolute to the end in his refusal to recant. On his death bed in 1778, as recalled by Morand, his valet-de-chambre, "...flames flared up from the nearby oil lamp. Responding with his quick wit, the famed author and dramatist exclaimed, 'What? The flames already?'" In that way Voltaire deftly acknowledged the possibility of damnation while at the same time offering himself the saving grace of humour

Such are the facts of Voltaire's decease. He made no recantation, he refused to utter or sign a confession of faith, but with the connivance of his nephew, the Abbé Mignot, he tricked the Church into granting him a decent burial, not choosing to be flung into a ditch or buried like a dog. My admiration for Voltaire's integrity does not imply disrespect to anyone who succumbs to such pressure. Fear of eternal damnation is a powerful incentive to *just in case* repentance. On the other hand there are heroic examples to the contrary and God, they say, is merciful.

Bill Wright



Stefan Zone

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Next is the Australian Climate Change policy that takes just one week to construct but another 234 weeks to get agreement. This is followed by other

aspects of Climate Change and Global Warming (only to be issued in the summer months).

Over the next 2,600 weeks, you and your family will painstakingly piece together the intricate response to the Environmental Report. What part will cow methane take? Will the rise in greenie jobs outweigh the loss of jobs in the mining, energy, manufacturing and primary industries? How about those good and bad enzymes?

Will you and your family have to perish to save the planet? Only time, and the next 2,600 weeks of DIY Federal Government Response to Ross Garnaut's Environmental Report will tell.

You'd better get a start – you're already 20 weeks behind as it is! Don't worry, we'll deduct the cost out of your wages.

WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS – A STEFAN LED RECOVERY

"Welcome back to SMS-Stefan Market Summary, and with me now is ... myself. How am I?"

"I'm fine, and how is myself?"

"Getting along like a house on fire - not that I lit it, by the way. Besides, they can't link it back to me - I wore gloves. And I made sure they were the wrong size.

Now, the news these past weeks has been chockers with market updates and analysis, with further economic information coming out of Canberra this week. This has caused widespread confusion amongst many people. Many people think there is a link between the markets always going into the Red and Communist China. Can you give us your insight into what is happening?

"Certainly. In recent weeks, world economies have suffered fall after fall, like an elderly person trying to negotiate the footpaths of Melbourne. As market eggheads scratch their heads and wonder how to stop the free falling markets, market analysts are trying to come up with plausible explanations each day as to why the market is yo-yoing about.

Basically, no-one has any idea how it happened or what is required to fix it, but they are leaning towards the bungee jump theory. At this stage, we're not even sure if a bungee cord was used or if it was secured at the top of the jump.

In Australia, Chairman KRudd has this week introduced the biggest giveaway since the Logies. He's taking \$10 billion of taxpayers money and giving it to the elderly, families with kids, first home buyers, basically anyone apart from me (and possibly yourself).

I'm all for a recovery, but can't someone else help pay for it? Can't there be a new special allowance for single white males so that I get GIVEN some money for a change?

Instead, I've had to cancel my annual leave for the rest of my working life, take up 6 new part-time jobs, work 64 hour days, do some computer hacking to give myself an unauthorised \$100,000 payrise and push off retirement until 2756 (assuming the market doesn't tank again in the meantime). \$10 billion takes a long time to repay.

The \$10 billion was meant to be kept for a rainy day, but since we don't have any of those any more, your PM decided to don the Santa hat early. Free Plasma TV's for all! That will go down well in the retirement village. Now it's over to me."

"Well, I'd like to thank myself for a wonderful insight. I still have no idea what is going on, but feel strangely reassured that someone else may be doing something. And that's the type of unreliable confidence that world markets are built on.

Coming up after the break - a sneak preview of High School Musical 5 - The Nursing Home."

TEENAGE JUDGE & JURY

To combat spiralling teenage crime, and to free up 'big people's court', Victoria is considering a children's court run by teenagers acting as Judge and Jury. Clearly, having sullen, out of control, know-it-all teenagers judging other sullen, out of control, know-it-all teenagers is a well thought out idea. "Yo, S'up ?" "Um, like, y'know, whatever !"

For such a scheme to succeed, the court can only be open for business after 3pm, given that teenagers only get up at midday and will need at least 3 hours to meander their way into court. It will also have to close by 5pm to give the teenagers enough time for some pre-night club binge drinking sessions.

If I believe the stats provided by popular papers, over half the jury will be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, leading to either an outbreak of 'laughing-at-nothing' (druggie) laughter or a vicious drug/grog induced brawl because someone looked at someone else. Then the next jury will need to be called in to pass judgement on the previous jury.

Despite the fact that justice is meant to be blind, there will be quite a bit of judging by

appearance. "Who on earth still wears THOSE clothes ??? She must be uilty." "Whoooooooo, she's hot. NOT guilty." "A busy top AND busy pants ??? What WAS he thinking! Guilty." "Ugly. Guilty"

There will be some good to come out of this mess. Gone will be the gown and wigs that weight down the current justice system. In will be the trendy clothes of the day. There are also plans to have, amongst others, a goth court for goths, a nerd court for nerds and a Nemo court for Nemos.

Another thing on the way out will be the telephone-book sized volumes of court proceedings. Anything that can't be sent in a 120-character SMS will not be considered. Verdicts will be passed to the judges via SMS - "Giuty". The defendant will also find out their fate via SMS - " U R DED."

I'm just waiting to see the fights that break out after 5 minutes when everyone wants to be promoted to Judge.

There can only be one Judge Judy !

STEFAN - THE IMELDA MARCOS OF SOCKS & HANKIES

It's Spring time, and with it comes the chore of Spring Cleaning. Spring Cleaning is the process of moving everything from one side of a room to another and back again just so you can clean the mounds of dust that have built up since the last Spring Clean. Nothing seems to be thrown out at our place (even the dust) - just moved around.

Most of you with kids may find the concept of Spring Cleaning strange. Some may even vaguely remember it from your pre-kids days. The process is not too difficult to follow so even the kids can join in, as long as you pay them overtime, a host of penalty-rates and provide them with a range of RDO's. Unions are starting them young these days.

Gosh, schools can't seem to teach kids the basic 3 R's (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic), but they've certainly stuffed them chockers full of the Fourth R (Rights). It's a pity they don't teach the Fifth R (Responsibilities). That's why so many kids in the US plead ignorant of the Fifth in court.

Anyhow, enough of my soap box and time travel to the US. Let's get back to the mess that doubles as my bedroom. Spring Cleaning can uncover hidden

treasures and reveal certain facts that you may not notice on a daily basis.

Take, for instance, the fact that I found I have 70 pairs of socks. What Imelda Marcos was to shoes, Stefan is to socks. I know I've got a way to go to catch up with old Im's thousands of pairs, but you must admit that 70 is a good start. Don't ask me how they all appeared. Some seem to date back to secondary school days (almost 20 years ago). Others are still clipped together, as yet unused. I suppose I'd better be known as Sock Man from now on.

Where did they all come from? Is there a Sock fairy that hands out socks? Could I be sleepwalking down to the local laundromat and taking other people's socks? Does it indicate a justification of the rumour that I'm hard to buy presents for? Is the Black Hole really a Black Sock Hole that sucks socks from all over the world and deposits them into my drawer? The mind boggles. I should stop all this thinking - it's clearly not good.

Next I discovered I had over 70 hankies. Still only one nose, though.

STEFAN'S NEW PHONE (PART 1)

This was meant to be just the one article, but Telstra has dragged the incident out so long that I'll need two articles to it justice.

Last week I decided it was time for a new phone. Sure, I could have dragged the decision out for another few months, but it was best to put the phone out of its misery once and for all.

The warning signs had been there for over a year:

- * Showing full charge but then reducing to 'Low Battery' once a call was made.
- * Unable to get a replacement battery from any of the so-called "Phone Accessory" shops because the phone was too "old".
- * Lately I'd been forced to take the battery out and sit on it for a few minutes to warm it up just so I can turn the phone on.

Having been forced to make a decision, I trundled down to the Three Amigo's at the Big Ol' "T" ranch in the city. Well, the company used to be Australian owned, even though a fair few million is now funnelled off to overseas interests.

After a short while playing the part of the Invisible Man, someone eventually asked me what I was after. To complicate matters, apart from a new phone, I wanted to move from Post-paid to Pre-paid. Gosh, two things ? How would they cope ?

Choosing a Pre-Paid phone was relatively easy, considering I didn't want access to the internet or any video functionality. That left about 2 choices, or one, really, once I decided that I might want to make a call from the country if I go gallivanting around the state again.

Moving from Post- to Pre-paid was a bit more complicated. Apparently they take things slowly at the Big Ol' "T" ranch. I was told that they can only process one transaction of mine per day. Last Thursday (20/11) they were able to take me off the old system. Friday they gave me a call to say the system was down. Monday they ran to say the system was still down. On Tuesday, the system was still down. Wednesday they didn't bother ringing because they thought I wouldn't believe them.

Today they ring asking me to ring up another area so I can be re-connected. The number they give me has a message saying it is disconnected. After ringing back the first person, I'm then told I need to come back to the store to be re-connected.

Next episode:

Will Stefan be re-connected to the outside world?
How was he humiliated for the second time in seven years?



STEFAN'S NEW PHONE (PART 2)

It seems there may be a part 3 of this story in the making - Telstra still haven't got my phone working and have stopped calling me to tell me how they are going in fixing the problem.

But first, Part 2 - the Humiliation of Stefan.

It all started when I saw on the Telstra computer what Market Classification they'd used to pigeon hole me - "Work Hard, Play Hard", which I think was short for "Work Hard, Play Hard, Makes no Calls" or possibly "Stingy, Scott-no-Friends". Well, they've certainly got my number !

The next thing I know the saleswoman's grinning at me while asking "Can I have your old phone to swap your Contact number list over to the new phone ?" I mumbled something about there being no numbers left on the old phone.

While I was technically correct in saying there were no numbers on the old phone, the term "Left" suggested that I'd actually had numbers stored at some stage in the past on the old phone. This was not the case. Apart from never having sent a text message in the 10 years I've had mobiles (Who else can boast this ???), I've never bothered storing a number in the phone. How hard is it to remember Triple Zero ?

Surely there's a law against such harassment ??? It was the same about 6 years ago when I got my

second-ever mobile phone. They wanted me to provide the top 5 most frequent numbers I called so I could make calls to these people at a cheaper rate and could even make free calls at certain times of the day. I started thinking in my head: "There's Home, the Fire Brigade, Triple Zero, oh, hang on, that's already free... um ..."

Needless to say I didn't provide any numbers to them at the time of purchase. Not having finished making fun of me, they proceeded to call me up a few times in the ensuing months demanding I provide 5 numbers to take up the offer. In the end I didn't bother answering the phone if it was from a number I didn't know.

Are they trying to kick me out of Telstra so I have to join a rival network such as 'Losers', where if you make more than 2 calls in one day they assume your phone's been stolen and your coverage is cancelled.

If they keep up their current weak excuses of "The network is down" for much longer, I won't have to bother about owning a mobile ever again. I'll go back to the old smoke signals and cricket whistles.



Meteor Incorporated was formed in 2007 to raise funds to set up a permanent science fiction institution and research collection in Australia. Visit its website at <http://www.meteor.org.au> and follow the links.

