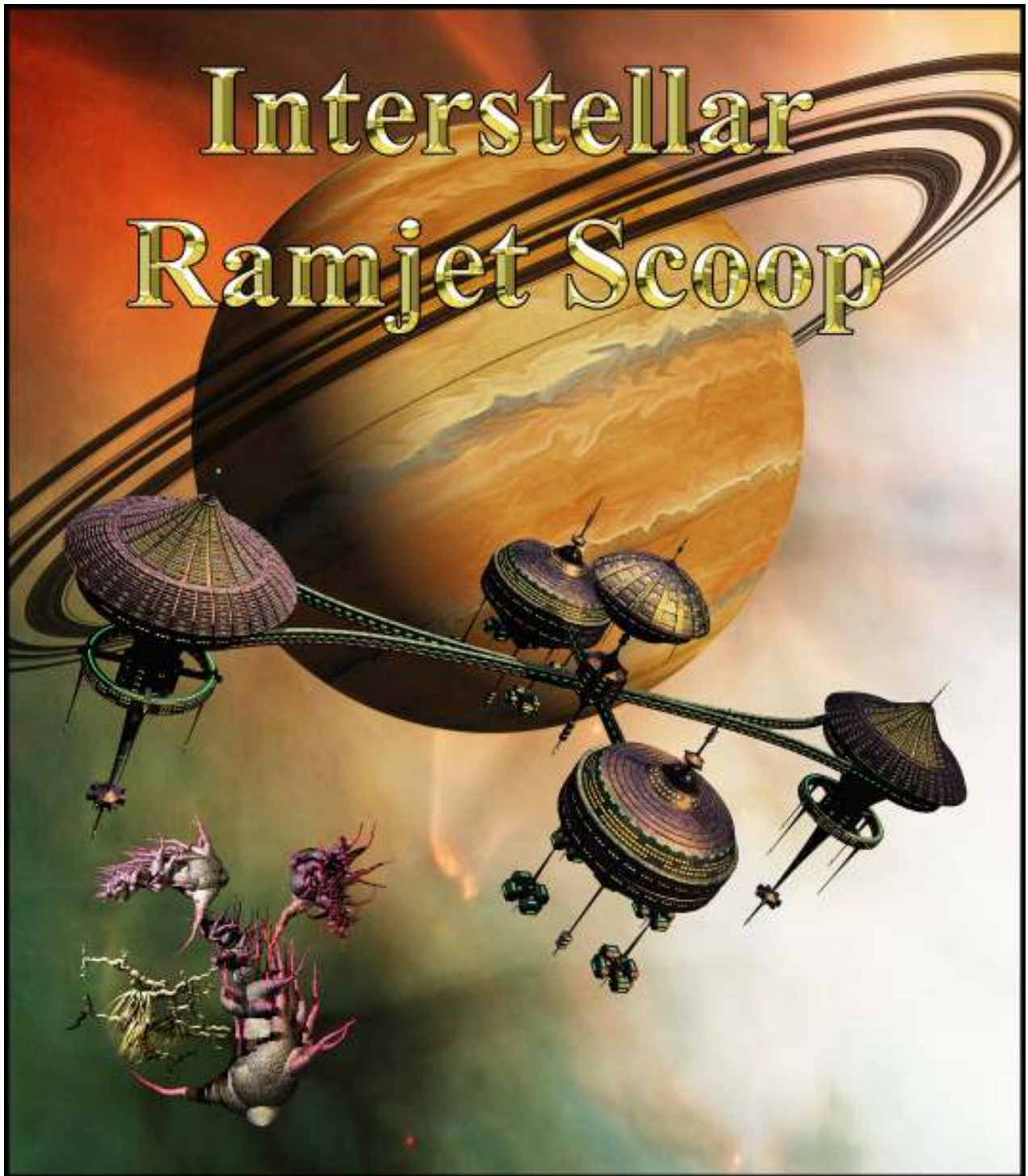


Interstellar Ramjet Scoop



ANZAPA MAILING # 247 FEBRUARY 2009
PUBLISHED ORIGINALLY FOR ANZAPA
BY BILL WRIGHT

UNIT 4, 1 PARK STREET, ST. KILDA WEST, 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 #247 - February 2009

"There are three basic rules for writing a novel Unfortunately nobody knows what they are."

W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)

Contents

This Issue's Cover.....	3
Forever City.....	4
Australia's 2009 convention season.....	4
Introducing Tim Train.....	5
Letter from Lloyd Penney.....	6
Clerihew corner.....	7
Taral Wayne.....	8
Worldcons on the horizon.....	8
Stamps of Approval.....	9
The 2009 DUFF race is on.....	11
Stefan Zone.....	12
Creation revisited.....	15
Browsing Barack Obama on You Tube.....	16
Upskirting, downblowing and the giggle palace.....	17
Explaining Gillian Polack.....	17
Bloody Microsoft!.....	17
Robots with soul.....	18
Vale the Post Office.....	18
In fealty to A E van Vogt.....	19
Pope John XX.....	20
Corflu Zed.....	20

Art, etc. credits...

Cover **Graphic by Ditmar**

Page 2	Masthead - photos of Bill Wright and Dick Jenssen	Page 12	Sex on high in Melbourne's big Ferris Wheel
Page 4	Book covers from Surinam Turtle Press	Page 13	Interesting views from elsewhere on the Ferris Wheel
Page 5	Young Tim Train in aspect	Page 16	Photos from Barack Obama's presidential campaign
Page 6	President Barack Obama in aspect Illustration by David Russell	Page 17	Photograph of Gillian Polack City in Flight from <i>The Triumph of Time</i> by James Blish
Page 8	Photograph of Taral Wayne	Page 18	IRS cover April 2004
Pages 8-10	Items from Taral Wayne's stamp collection	Page 19	Covers of A E van Vogt's <i>Weapon Shops</i> classics
Page 11	Illustration from Guy Lillian III's fanzine <i>Challenger 18</i>		Back cover illustration by David Russell

This Issue's Cover

Flora in Space

Is there a word which means ‘the melody lingers on’? I find that sometimes ideas, images, thoughts reverberate around what passes for my mind in an ineradicable manner – just as tunes which we may wake up humming or recalling seem to be immune from an active consignment to oblivion and so stay with us until suddenly, magically, they vanish. “Meme” is the closest word I can think of – but is there another, more appropriate? Anyway, such constant evocations also impinge on my graphics.

I have referred a couple of times in *IRS* to Stanley Weinbaum’s short story *The Lotus Eaters* – which I had not read until about a year ago (see the December 2007 *IRS*), but which impressed me greatly, so much so that it was one of those stories which kept on surfacing, meme-like, in my memory. It involved a race of fantastically intelligent creatures who were floral in nature. Now this story appeared in the April 1935 issue of *Astounding Stories*, and there have been yarns and films since then with such aliens, ranging from the marvellous of Weinbaum to the awfulness of the 1951 SciFi flick “The Thing”. (And I am definitely using ‘SciFi’ in its most derogatory sense. How, what is described in the film as ‘an intellectual carrot’ could evolve into a being with two legs, two arms with hands –and associated five fingers! – a head, eyes, ears...well, so much like a tall dressed-up human being – is bad, bad SciFi. The flick’s attitude to scientists – no humour, total lack of responsibility, inability to see potential danger..., and to the military – great sense of humour, responsibility (manifested by reaching for anything which could serve as a weapon and then using it), awareness of danger and reacting to it (again by destroying it) – is childish¹. But it’s also part of the hysteria and paranoia infecting the US, and major portions of the world, at that time.)

Weinbaum’s floral sentients, however, are eminently believable: they are possessed of an urge to explore, physically, scientifically and philosophically. And, although they are gentle and empathic, they are also without fear of death, and perhaps because of that, not as compassionate as humans. The cover graphic has a small group of these ‘lotus eaters’ exploring deep space. The station orbiting a gas giant is a triumph of human ingenuity – which pales beside the aliens’ ability to exist in the void of space without, but only seemingly without, any life-support – and our race is exploring that extra-solar planet.

Well, that’s my interpretation, but I have had someone look at the image and ask: “In the lower left - is that meant to be garbage expelled from the station?” You takes your pick...

Notes

Now that appraisal may strike some as excessive and warrant my being called an identified anonymuncule¹, but let me take the ‘*in good company*’ route and invoke a homodoxian². In fact, none other Isaac Asimov who in his anthology *Before the Golden Age* noted that: “John Campbell’s story ‘*Who Goes There*’, was eventually made into the financially successful but science fictionally contemptible motion picture ‘*The Thing*’ ”. If you disagree, take it up with Asimov. Or, if you prefer, add the epithet sequacious³ to your description of me...

1 ‘anonymuncule’: defined in the complete Oxford English Dictionary as: *a petty anonymous writer*.

2 ‘homodoxian’: defined in the OED as: *a person of the same opinion*.

3 ‘sequacious’: definition 1b in the OED as: *‘given to slavish or unreasoning following of others, (esp. in matters of thought or opinion)*.

Yes, I like to demonstrate new words. These, and **many others**, come from ‘*Reading the OED*’ by Ammon Shea. The author has read the **entire** 20 volumes (22,000 pages), and written of his experiences and discoveries in so doing. The CD version includes three volumes of additions (1993 – 1997). The latest version is 3.1.1, and is available from www.elearnaid.com for US\$198 at the time this is written. If you love words, and can afford it you must have it. (The 20-volume hard copy edition sells for US\$877 at Amazon, so the CD is a **bargain**.)

Technical details

The software firm of *E-on* has just released a slew of new products in their *Vue 7* range – including a **free** version: *Vue 7 Pioneer*. At the time of writing (early January) this is the Beta version. It is, of course, a cut-down piece of software, but at *no cost* is well worth downloading, especially if you simply want to explore 3D worlds. Let’s hope that it’s still free when you read this.

I upgraded to *Vue 7 Complete*, rather than to *Vue 7 Infinite*, simply because I didn’t need the extras, and – besides – the upgrade to *Complete* cost a quarter of the *Infinite* upgrade.

As always, final tweaks and logos, etc, were added in Adobe’s *PhotoShop CS3*. There is also an upgrade for this, but I could see **nothing** in the upgrade which I’d use, and the cost is, for an old-age pensioner like me, and given the plunge in the Aussie dollar, quite prohibitive.

Dick Jenssen

Editorial comment

Even inquisitive readers of *IRS* are finding it hard to keep up with the seemingly exponential expansion of human knowledge. The British weekly *New Scientist* gives one a general understanding of developments; but for in-depth comprehension you need the words. Hence...

Ditmar's optimised peduncles⁴
Distinguish him from anonymuncules
Who are to him as sequacious homodoxians
Of less account than mycotoxins⁵.

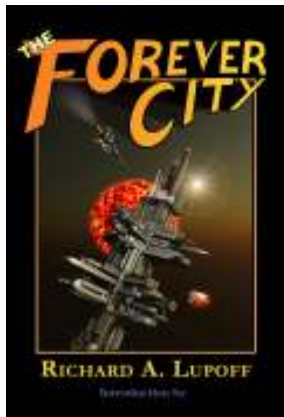
4 'peduncle': defined as a bundle of myelinated⁶ neurons joining different parts of the brain

5 'mycotoxin': defined as the toxic effluvium of a fungus.

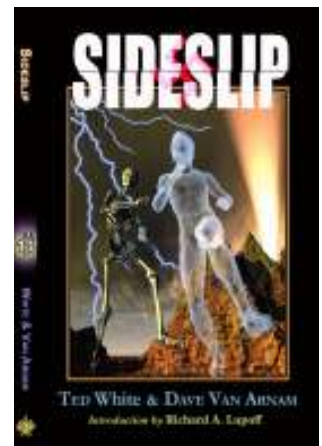
6 'myelinated': refers to myelin, a white substance that forms around nerve tissue.

Ed.

Forever City



American fan Earl Kemp has a rather fine 'zine, 'eI' on the site www.efanzines.com (where you will find *IRS* as well). Some years ago Bruce Gillespie, whose fanzines are also on that site, put me in touch with Earl who was looking for some graphics. Then some six months or so ago, Earl introduced me to Richard Lupoff. Dick is an SF author, film script-writer, actor...and also editorial director of a small publishing house called *Surinam Turtle Press*. More precisely, *Surinam Turtle Press* is an imprint of *Ramble House*, itself a pretty small company. Dick had seen some of my images and wanted to use them as possible covers for *Surinam's* paperbacks. It's not exactly a move towards being a professional, as far as I'm concerned, because as Dick points out: he is on a "tiny budget -- well, I'll be blunt about it, I'm on no budget at all! -- so I cannot offer any payment except for one copy of the book, gratis". But who cares? It's incredibly flattering to even be *thought of* as a cover artist. Anyway, above is a **draft** version of a forthcoming book. (Oh, by the way, if you go to <http://www.lulu.com/ramblehouse> you'll find a catalogue of books there – including *Slideslip* with another Ditmar cover. The 'mother site' is <http://www.ramblehouse.com/>).



Ditmar Jensen

Australia's 2009 convention season

The second Australian *Discworld Convention* will be held at Storey Hall, RMIT University in *Melbourne*, Australia, on Feb 9th-11th, 2009.

Swancon 2009 (34th annual Western Australian science fiction convention) will be held at All Seasons Hotel, 15 Robinson Avenue, Northbridge 6003 Western Australia on April 9-13, 2009. Guests of Honour: Richard Morgan, Trudi Canavan, Theresa Anns, Rob Masters and Alicia Smith. Memberships – Full A\$160, Concession A\$140. E-mail: swancon@swancon.com

Conjecture 2009 (48th Australian national SF convention) will be held at the Holiday Inn, Hindley Street, Adelaide, South Australia on June 5-8, 2009. Memberships: Full attending: A\$120; Student attending: A\$80; Supporting A\$60; Child (under 15) A\$40. Website: <http://www.conjecture2009.org/>

Continuum 5 (condensing from the aether) will be held at a wonderful central-CBD space called *Ether* located at Lower Level, 285 Little Bourke Street, Melbourne on August 14-16, 2009. :

Membership rates until April 30, 2009, are: Adult A\$145; Student/Concession A\$100; First Time Continuum Member: A\$100; Junior Member A\$35; Supporting Member A\$35.

Thereafter, membership rates until August 7, 2009, are: Adult A\$180; Student/Concession A\$125; First Time Continuum Member: A\$125; Junior Member A\$35; Supporting Member A\$35.

Website: <http://www.continuum.org.au/>

Introducing Tim Train

Tim Train is a poet, raconteur, bon-vivant, and demon blogger via <http://willtypeforfood.blogspot.com>. The website includes a large number of intriguing links for the delight and edification of connoisseurs.

According to his friends, he reads too much; according to his mother, he eats too much; and according to himself, he doesn't do nearly enough of these things. He resides in Thornbury, Melbourne, which is the poor man's Northcote. He's a tall, rangy youngster, a friend of Bruce Gillespie who, accompanied on occasions by his girl friend Alexis, attends meetings of the Nova Mob (Melbourne's SF literary discussion group) and 'Third Wednesdays' at the Standard pub; the latter being a tradition established by Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane when they lived in Collingwood and continued after their move to Greensborough in 2004.



He wrote to me on December 16th, 2009, saying...

Bill, thanks very much for the copy of IRS at the Nova Mob dinner on Sunday night. I am enjoying it very much. I notice there was a cleriheW in there about John Milton, but seemingly no mention of the fact that 2008 is his 400th birthday year! There have been a number of articles in the newspaper and events and readings of Paradise Lost to commemorate his birthday, including this by my Alma Mater, Sydney University: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=2832>. My tribute to Milton follows...

**John Milton
Never ate Stilton
But was quite a fond fella
Of a yella Mozarella.**

The article includes the following delicious snippet that Alexis and I both enjoyed, about Professor Barry Spurr, who is a (rather pedantic) lecturer in Enlightenment and Renaissance Poetry at the university English Department...

An opportunity to hear Paradise Lost 'come alive' at a free public reading in honour of the 400th anniversary of Milton's birth is not to be missed, he [Professor Spurr] insists.

At the reading, Professor Spurr will play the role of God. "I feel I was called to this part," he says, "Born to play it - I knew my day would come!"

I guess becoming God is the next step up after you have become a professor!

Tim sent me the following cleriheW at the time of the Pope's visit to Sydney for World Youth Day (July 2008)

**Cardinal Ratzinger
Was a jolly good scat-singer.
Now he is Pope.
Abandon all hope!**

It's in keeping with Ratzinger's character. He's actually a trained classical musician in the tradition of composers and musicians working for the Vatican on masses, etc. I wrote this poem for my blog during World Youth Day...

They know me from Rome to the Vatican City
I'm the original homey from the original city
I'm the rock from the land of the Colosseum.
You don't know me, homey,
Cos you don't got to know me
I've got the keys to heaven
I'm the P-O-P-E!

I got the news for protestants, and atheists, too-
You ain't lookin' for God, but God is lookin' fo you!
Look at you watchez, bitchez, cos yo time is up.
An you don't know me, homey,
Cos you don't got to know me
I've got the keys to heaven
I'm the P-O-P-E!

He's the P, O, P, E,
P-O-P-E!

He's the P, O, P, E,
P-O-P-E!

Fornication in this nation, it has got to stop
For the devil is the Devil, an' he just don't hip-hop
An instead of fame and glory, he's in purgatory.
Yeah, you don't know me, homey,
Cos you don't got to know me
I've got the keys to heaven
I'm the P-O-P-E!

Yo, listen up, yo homies at the WYD
I'm the top o' the pops o' the Diocese
I'm bigga than the jiggaz in the White House, too.
You don't know me, homey,
Cos you don't got to know me
I've got the keys to heaven
I'm the P-O-P-E!

He's the P, O, P, E,
P-O-P-E!

He's the P, O, P, E,
P-O-P-E!

Thanks again for the enjoyable read. Have a happy Christmas!
Cheers.

Tim Train

Letter from Lloyd Penney

1706-24 Eva Rd.
Etobicoke, ON
CANADA M9C 2B2

December 21, 2008

Dear Bill

I'm trying to get caught up in lots of writing just before Christmas and the end of the year, so I will happily tackle the December 2008 Interstellar Ramjet Scoop.

I always like Ditmar's art, even with the flying Robby (or not Robby) in it. Oh, well, the colors are always wonderful. And I shouldn't complain about Robby being there...he's put starships in his artwork before, and I never said a word.

There could be as many as 10^{500} universes, hm? Let us pray that there might intelligent life in some of them. As you might tell, I'm not too confident about there being any in this universe.

Mention of Stephen Hawking reminds me that he will be coming to southern Ontario in the New Year. He has signed a contract to spend some time in Kitchener, Ontario (home of the RIM Blackberries) to work at the Perimeter Institute, a scientific think tank. He will be getting paid more than sufficiently, so I am hoping there will be a chance to see Hawking some time this summer.

The local...nope, I can't go to the 2010 Worldcon in Melbourne. Sure would like to go, though. On a couple of the sports channels available to me, I can watch Aussie Rules Fitba just about any time on the weekend. Chris Garcia would sure liven up the place...can't wait to see what he does in Montréal. And if he calls me an American again, I'll make him limp again. Or worse.

There's still a fuss over Obama's descent...get over it, people! After eight years of stupidity and the worst in people coming to the fore in government, it looks like Obama is inviting some very intelligent and enlightened people into his cabinet. It will be a refreshing change for other countries to be able to work on a friendly and enlightened basis with the American government. It's been a while.

Yvonne is in a very snowy downtown at a performance of The Messiah with her mother and a cousin in from even snowier and colder Wabush, Labrador. Her birthday was a couple of days ago, and a birthday dinner is at her mother's home, so I'd better get ready for pick-up. Many thanks, take care, see you nextish.



Lloyd Penney

Good to hear from you again, Lloyd. You're not the only one to have picked up on Ditmar's learned musings on the energy state of the universe. Anzapa member and former Apple Sauce core, John Newman, has managed to pace it intellectually with him, sparking a discourse in simple language at almost the limit of human understanding. It takes people who know their onions to achieve that, which is why I have no hesitation in recording their exchange in this issue of IRS. The serendipitous thing from your point of view is that you can match those insights with what Professor Stephen Hawking had to say to you on his visit to Southern Ontario in the New Year.

Your mention of Yvonne 'in a very snowy downtown' is a sore point as Melbourne is in the grip of temperatures in excess of 43 degrees Celsius (that's 107 degrees Fahrenheit) lasting for days on end. Most households here don't have air conditioning. The fact that the atmospheric temperature is way in excess of body temperature (about 38 degrees Celsius = 99 degrees Fahrenheit) makes sleep impossible.

Ed.



Clerihew corner

*As the Emperor Tiberius
Was quite often delirious,
They just let him rave night and day.
(Actually, he made more sense that way). - Paul Horgan*

Tiberius Claudius Nero (42 BC - AD 37)

For an exhaustive analysis of the Roman emperor Tiberius, see <http://www.roman-emperors.org/tiberius.htm>. As only the second Roman emperor (after Augustus, his step-father), Tiberius inherited a principate that was still in a state of flux, and there are some signs that he was reluctant to take on the position at all. Towards the end of his life (he lived to the age of 78), the increasingly unstable Tiberius withdrew to his estate on the isle of Capri.

Letters kept him in touch with Rome, but it was the machinery of the Augustan administration that kept the empire running smoothly. Tiberius, if we believe our sources, spent much of his time indulging his perversities on Capri. He also became all but paranoid in his dealings with others and spent long hours brooding over the death of his son, Drusus, which had now been revealed to him as the work of his "friend" Sejanus. All who were implicated he had executed in barbaric fashion. As a result, no measures were taken for the succession, beyond vague indications of favour to his nephew Gaius (Caligula) and his grandson Tiberius Gemellus.

Tiberius died quietly in a villa at Misenum on 16 March A.D. 37. There are some hints in the sources of the hand of Caligula in the deed, but such innuendo can be expected at the death of an emperor, especially when his successor proved so depraved. The level of unpopularity Tiberius had achieved by the time of his death with both the upper and lower classes is revealed by these facts: the Senate refused to vote him divine honours, and mobs filled the streets yelling "*To the Tiber with Tiberius!*" (in reference to a method of disposal reserved for the corpses of criminals).

There was a young man in Rome that was very like Augustus Caesar; Augustus took knowledge of it and sent for the man, and asked him "Was your mother never at Rome?" He answered "No Sir; but my father was."
Francis Bacon (1561-1626), *Apothegms*, no. 87.

A brave young man; I don't know what became of him.

History abounds in wonderful words that have since lost their currency. **Phlogiston** is no exception – a nonexistent chemical that, prior to the discovery of oxygen, was thought to be released during combustion.

I had originally learned something about the phlogiston theory in secondary school. The concept was first mentioned in 1667 by Johann Joachim Becher, the idea being that all flammable materials had this phlogiston stuff inside them that was released when the materials were burned, leaving behind a de-phlogisticated calx.

*Joseph Priestley
Considered it beastly
When Lavoisier pissed on
His theory of phlogiston.*

Joseph Priestley was one of the strongest defenders of the phlogiston theory in the 18th century, and is sometimes credited with the discovery of oxygen (which he called 'dephlogisticated air'). Problems with the phlogiston theory include the fact that phlogiston has no colour, odour, taste or mass, and one should always question theories that can't be backed up. The Frenchman **Antoine Lavoisier** pointed out another problem: you could show that some materials actually **gained** weight when burned, which implied that phlogiston, if it existed, had to have negative mass.

In Paris in 1774, Priestley demonstrated the existence of 'dephlogisticated air' to an audience that included Lavoisier, but Lavoisier interpreted Priestley's results in a way that was entirely contrary to Priestley's. Of course, our modern chemistry is based largely on the work of Lavoisier and his contemporaries, and Priestley's ideas are now one with the dodo.

Dennis Callegari

Taral Wayne

Taral Wayne is Fan Guest of Honour at Anticipation (67th worldcon in Montreal, Canada, on 6-10 August 2009) and has been nominated for the 2008 Hugo for Best Fan Artist. You can read his fannish CV on the Anticipation website at <http://www.anticipationsf.ca/>



A BNF in his native Canada, he's been drawing furry characters before there was such a fandom and might have been the first to use a computer to cut mimeograph stencils to publish an SF fanzine.

His output includes magazine and book illustrations, a short and obscure career in black & white comics, private commissions, dealer at SF conventions and copious fanac as both fan artist and fan writer.

The Internet has affected the ability of artists to make a living, in that it has multiplied the number of artists a hundredfold, but the audience is accustomed to 99% of the art being free so it's problematical if there is a net gain. At the same time travel has gotten more expensive.

Like many artists, Taral can no longer afford to go to conventions.

He soliloquises, "*Maybe I should just get a real job, like I had when I was 25. On the other hand, if I hold out another decade, I can 'retire' on welfare, and enjoy the first real prosperity I've ever known, and finally draw what I want!*"

Taral has extensive portfolios at:

DeviantArt - <http://taralwayne.deviantart.com/> and FurAffinity - <http://www.furaffinity.net/user/saara/> or you can go to www.efanzines.com and download issues of Chris Garcia's *The Drink Tank*. (It comes out three times a month). He has material in issues 153 & 154 (where Taral was interviewed by Frank Wu with lavish displays of his art), 161, 162, 163, 173, 179, 185, 186, 188 (Rotsler Award folio), 189, & 190. He finds other zines for more substantial material, such as F770, Banana Wings, Chunga or Askance. "*I've been writing a lot lately,*" he says, "*probably because I've been getting tired of drawing and making so little money from it.*"

"*I don't read a large amount of SF anymore,*" Taral explains, "*I suppose I might if I could buy used paperbacks for a quarter, like I used to, but with even used books costing \$4 or \$5, and there being no great amount of used SF in my neighbourhood, I've gotten out of the habit. I read mainly non-fiction and historical-mysteries I guess. One writer I keep up with is Robert Charles Wilson, but then he was a local fan, and I've known him as a friend since the 70's. His next novel, "Julian Comstock: A Story of 22nd. Century (America)" is a doozy. I think it's his best, and he's proud of it himself.*"

Worldcons on the horizon

Anticipation (the 67th worldcon) will be held in Montréal, Quebec, at the **Palais des congrès de Montréal** from August 6-10, 2009. Guest of Honour: **Neil Gaiman**; Invitée d'honneur: **Élisabeth Vonarburg**; Artist Guest of Honour: **Ralph Bakshi**; Fan Guest of Honour: **Taral Wayne**; Publisher Guest of Honour: **Tom Doherty**; Editor Guest of Honour: **David Hartwell**; Master of Ceremonies: **Julie Czerneda**.

Membership rates are obtainable from the Anticipation website: <http://www.anticipationsf.ca/>
 Australians should join through Anticipation's Australian agent Craig Macbride. For information on registering and making your payments in Australian dollars, simply e-mail him at montreal@f8d.com or write to PO Box 274, World Trade Centre, Vic, 8005.

Aussiecon 4 (the 68th worldcon) will be held in Melbourne, Australia, on September 2-6, 2010.

Email: info@aussiecon4.org.au

Web site: <http://www.aussiecon4.org.au>

Mailing Address: GPO Box 1212, Melbourne 3001 AUSTRALIA

For membership rates, please visit the website <http://www.aussiecon4.org.au>. If you have any questions, including contact details of the nearest Aussiecon 4 agent outside Australasia, email info@aussiecon4.org.au.

Stamps of Approval

by Taral Wayne



Hey! I know those Comic Strip Classics stamps that appeared in IRS Dec 08. I have a sheet or two of them myself. I tried collecting stamps for only a brief time in my life, and even then was interested only in those having some odd or fantastic appeal – like the Austrian issues with Adolph Hitler’s face, or a series commemorating the American Civil War, and (one of my favourites) a Canadian 5 cent stamp with the Avro Arrow. I had warships, Soviet spacecraft, famous film monsters and all sorts of gonzo stuff. After a while it became a hassle. I was chasing a particular series of Canadian hockey player and, before I could get one sheet the local station was sold out. I went to the main PO for my district and they told me there were none to be had – I’d have to go downtown to the BIG post office. I made the nuisance trip, and guess what? They were sold out. I felt sold out. I told myself the hell with it, I wasn’t collecting stamps any more.

I didn’t sell all of them, mind. I still have the dinosaurs and Pioneer and all my best stamps still, but anything I thought I could part with, I did. I used the money for a down payment on a US \$5 gold piece, but that’s another story. The comic strip sheet was one of the ones I kept.



Many countries have done commemoratives of cartoon characters, comic book heroes, and various talking animals. The UK did a very handsome issue for Wind in the Willows, and another for Winnie the Pooh. Milking a slender connection for all it was worth, Canada also did a sheet of four stamps commemorating the immortal Pooh, complete with a booklet explaining how the real bear that inspired the author was one from a Winnipeg zoo.

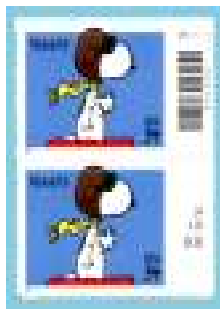


I think Canada was on firmer ground when we released our own sheet of comic characters. Unlike the US series, ours featured specifically comic book superheroes. They were mainly from way back when. Again, we stretched a point by claiming Superman as ours. It is true that Joe Shuster, one of the creators, was from Canada. But when he and Jerry Siegel created the world’s first real superhero they were both living in Cleveland. In fact, Shuster spend the rest of his life in the United States. But he had lived the first 15 or 16 years in Toronto, so we claim him as our own.

One of the two contemporary comics featured was the positively unknown Fleur de Lys. But to be politically correct, at least one of the five had to be French Canadian, so that was that.

They might have picked *my* satirical superhero comic, but noooo-ooh! I don’t have that sort of luck. I should probably have moved to Montreal and changed my name to Jean Luc Taral.

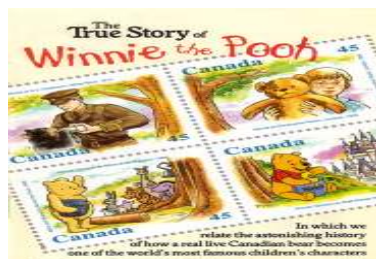
The real pride of the remainder of my stamp collection is the USPD's tribute to the Warner Bros. There were four sets – Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Road Runner & Wile E. Coyote, and Tweety & Sylvester. (Lord knows why that annoying little yellow shi... canary. Porky Pig was way more historically important.) The significance to me of the first three is that I knew the artist who painted them. His name was Robert Guthrie and he is normally pretty shy. But when I braced him he graciously signed a sheet of each of three he did, followed by the initials WBCP, which make it the real deal. WBCP stands for Warner Brothers Consumer Product Division, the actual studio that did the work.



Well, anyway, there's not much to be said about the Snoopy & the Red Baron stamp. And B'r'er Rabbit on the five cent issue from the Turks & Caicos is self-explanatory as is the Jungle Book number from Bhutan, wherever that is. Danger Mouse is obscure to me, but I gather one of those universal kid experiences in the United Kingdom. Doubtless there are hundreds of similar stamps if anyone wants to look for them. But these are what I have.



Many countries do single commemoratives, such as the UK's Winnie the Pooh, and Wind in the Willows. But Canada had a block of four, along with a handsome booklet. We also have a block of four Canadian comic book characters.



The real prize I have are the three Warner Brothers blocks at top of this page with Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Sylvester & Tweety. I know the artist who actually did the art, and he has signed each sheet in gold ink. (He didn't do the fourth sheet, Wile E. Coyote & the Roadrunner.)

The 2009 DUFF race is on

Since 1972 the Down Under Fan Fund, a fan-supported fellowship, has encouraged closer ties between science-fiction fans in Australasia and North America through an alternating annual exchange of representatives. DUFF is supported by voluntary contributions from fans all over the world. DUFF delegates attend the Worldcon or a national convention in the host country and visit fans they might otherwise never meet in person. Delegates are responsible for raising funds and administering DUFF until a new delegate from their continent is elected and are expected to publish trip reports which can be sold to aid the fund.

That system has resulted in many fine DUFF delegates representing with distinction their home fandoms at major foreign events. Their trip reports reward contributors and are a valuable resource for fan historians.

The cartoon at right commemorates 2003 DUFF laureates Guy and Rose Marie Lillian's adventures *Down Under* when, on an expedition to the Hanging Rock, a spectacular volcanic uprising on the plains below Mount Macedon [in Victoria, Australia], Guy risked life and limb to rescue the editor's backpack.

One does not like to advertise one's clumsiness, but I had slipped on a sloping patch of wet grass and my backpack went flying to the edge of an abyss, tipped over and skidded to a halt inches from another chasm. Guy earned his Superhero stripes that day. He climbed down and reached the pack easily enough, then tossed the pack up to Rose Marie and me. Then, grabbing the roots of a white sapling, he dragged himself up to safety.

He said afterwards that having several of the roots come loose on the way up made it one of the scariest experiences of his life and I believe him

Guy and Rose Marie enjoyed lots more tripping around as part of their DUFF experience. It's not just being lionised as laureates at conventions. Their expedition to Rottnest Island (home of the marsupial Quokkas) in Western Australia accompanied by Robin Johnson and myself was another highlight of their trip.

Some recent DUFF winners include...

- 2004 Norman Cates (New Zealand) attended Noreascon 4 (the 62nd worldcon) at Boston.
- 2005 Joe Siclari (USA) attended Thylacon IV (the 44th Australian natcon) in Hobart.
- 2008 Steve and Sue Francis (USA) attended Swancon 2008 (the 47th Australian natcon) in Perth.

In 2009, the DUFF trip will be from Australasia to Anticipation (67th worldcon in Montreal, Canada, on 6-10 Aug 2009). To go on the ballot form, a candidate must be nominated by three Australasian fans and two North American fans. Each candidate will have a written platform and promises (barring Acts of God) to travel to the 2009 Worldcon, and to serve as administrator of the fund until the next Australasian delegate is elected.

Each nomination must be sent by the nominee and be accompanied by a donation of at least \$10.00 (New Zealand or Australian currency) to DUFF.

Visit <http://sfanz.sf.nz/duff/> for details. Nominations close on 15th March 2009.

o-o-o-o-o



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.

Stefan Zone

THE CIRCUS IS IN TOWN

With all the recent public transport announcements (tunnels to the centre of the earth, slower trips being "Better for you", etc), one proposed change slipped the media's attention. Even I missed it until colleagues mentioned it at lunch today.

Connex has plans to change the name of North Melbourne station to 'Ferris Wheel station'[†] due its proximity to the latest of Melbourne's 'bling' attractions. The station itself will receive a gaudy makeover in order to attract more people. Hey, everyone. Roll up, Roll up, the circus is in town!

In keeping with the circus theme, the Connex Customer Service staff will dress up as clowns. Passengers with queries can go up to any of the staff and press their hooter noses. Once you've asked your query, you'll be squirted in the face with water from a fake flower on their jacket. Well, it is refreshing in the summer months, but they may need to soon replace the water with lemon juice due to the water restrictions!

The more aggressive passengers out there will be approached by a bloke in top hat and tails holding a chair in one hand and a whip in the other. After growling and carrying on for a bit, the aggressive passengers eventually calm down and wander off.

Passengers with no tickets will be approached by some gorillas. If the passengers don't have any bananas, they'll be in real trouble.

Even the trains will have a makeover to keep with the theme. They'll be painted to look like clown cars. Instead of a clown mini pulling up and 15 clowns clambering out of it, a 56-seat clown carriage will pull up and 300 people will clamber out of it.



For boarding purposes, the Customer Service Staff have been specially trained to push more people in with their oversized clown shoes. These will squeak each time they're used for this purpose, which will enable management to determine bonuses later on.

If there's still a chance of fitting another person on the carriage, a Connex Trapeze artist will swing down, pick up one of the passengers waiting on the platform and deposit them into the carriage onto someone's shoulders.

Blokes and sheilas on horseback will be employed to keep people moving down the platform. This is to stop people congregating at the bottom of the ramps. In amongst the crack of the whips, the theme song to 'The Man from Snowy River' will be played to remind people what a real blockbuster film about Australia is all about. (None of this "Australia" rubbish, which seems to be a cross between 'The Constantly Crying Game' and 'The Terminally Ill English Patient'.)

There'll also be sideshows on offer. See the Fat Ladies - everywhere. Look out for the strong men. Well, actually, you'll be able to smell them before you see them - their BO is pretty powerful! Spot the bearded lady but don't say anything - it's due to a hormone imbalance. Hear the foul-mouthed teens. Listen to the deaf guy's music from the other end of the carriage.

The Connex circus brings you all this and much more. Why passengers (sorry, "customers") don't want to pay a measly 5 % extra from January to experience this sort of show each day is beyond me.

[†] Regarding 'Ferris Wheel station', the editor knows whereof Stefan speaks. North Melbourne station is in the line of sight of Melbourne's new Southern Star Wheel; which, after January 10th, 2009, has enjoyed a sudden surge in popularity as a result of the following incident...

Newspaper photographer Ken Irwin and, no doubt, passengers in other modules with the same or higher elevation were treated to what has to be billed as the ultimate peep show. After a cursory glance at Melbourne's expanding skyline, a young couple embraced passionately before moving their 120-metre high public display of affection to the carriage's wooden bench, where they gave the bench – and themselves – a full workout.

continued on next page\...



The incident is not without precedent. When Britain's giant wheel, the London Eye, opened in 2000 a pair of 17-year-olds was caught in the act, sparking tabloid headlines such as 'Mile Eye Club'.

The 'G' referred to in the illustration at left is not what you think. It is, of course, Melbourne's iconic sports ground, the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) pictured at right. **Ed.**



News flash! Dateline: Monday, February 2nd, 2008

The Big Wheel at Melbourne's Docklands isn't operating. Whereas it was working for a time, heat stress during Melbourne's four days of temperatures over 43 degrees Celsius caused the contraption to crack and buckle. It has been shut down indefinitely. **Ed.**

TAXI PROTEST IN MELBOURNE

Dateline: Friday December 19th, 2008

Just a quick note regarding the taxi protest in the city yesterday. As with all protests, I had to wander past, if only to provide some stirring to inflame the issues.

The drivers apparently started the protest from Tullamarine Airport and crawled their way into the city at 5 kmh. They still managed to make it to the

city much faster than they would have if they had gone their usual 'quick' route via the ring road.

At the protest, many of the taxis had their bonnets up, a sad indication that many drivers spend more money on their beaded seat covers than they do on vehicle maintenance.

STEFAN TV'S LATEST ATTRACTION – BONDI GARBO

From the producers of the mega series '*Bondi Housewife*', the blockbuster series '*Bondi Rat Catcher*' and the ratings-breaking series '*Bondi Hairdresser*' comes the next mega blockbusting ratings-breaker series '*Bondi Garbo*'.

('Bondi Garbo' is really only being made to fill in the 100 hours per week of quality reality television that was freed up by the demise of '*Oh Brother*' last year. As with all reality TV shows, we just rent some cheapo third-hand cameras to give to the public so they can do the work. Cost to us = \$50 per week. ad revenue charged = \$1.5 million per week. Increases to our bonuses? Priceless!)

* It's 4am and most people are still fast asleep in this leafy Bondi street, but not for long if Jimbo and his team have anything to do with it. They're attempting to break their current record of 511 squashed wheelie bins in a day, but they'll have to start early. Can they do it?

* Tensions flare as Macca, the shop steward, and the Boss go head to head over Macca's attempts to introduce union-approved coloured bin liners for the office rubbish bins. Do the bins really need to be emptied by cleaners with union tickets? Does the blue bin liner have to only be used on Tuesday

or can it be swapped with the purple liners on Thursdays? What will the Union Colour Regulations book have to say?

* Kyle's team get ready to celebrate 24 hours without a workplace accident, but tragedy strikes when Brett trips over his shoelaces and winds up in hospital. Does it count as an accident if he was pushed?

* Davo's day grinds to a halt after something fouls the crusher. Is it just more concrete waste, or yet another mafia victim with concrete boots dumped in the garbage?

* Back at the office, Anne and the girls sift through the trash of Bondi celebrities in the hope of finding something not covered by the trash magazines. What will they find?

* Just as they're about to knock off, Tom's crew get a call from a distressed resident down the road who forgot to put their bin out. Can they be bothered going out again?

Find out after the 2-hour lunch break. That's coming up on the all-new '*Bondi Garbo*'.

Stefan

PM MIA

The Australian Federal Police have issued another world-wide alert for PM KRuddy after he went Missing in Action yet again. Not that the AFP particularly care where he is or what he's up to, they just don't want another 'Harold Holt' disappearance on their hands.

Just before disappearing again, KRuddy chalked up another two milestones - his first 100 days as Prime Minister (after 13 months in office) and his first giga-ton of carbon emissions from his worldly travels. He adds these to his already impressive list of achievements, including:

- * Longest serving part-time Australian prime minister
- * Quickest 1 million miles in overseas travel
- * Most political-babble words in a complete sentence

HASN'T IT BEEN COLD LATELY?

I don't know about you, but I think I survived the heatwave last week, unlike the garden. Actually, it was wasn't a heat wave, more like a heat tsunami. It started off the week with a small 30-odd degrees before swamping us with a few 43's and 45's. (45.7 in Werribee on Thursday and 45.9 on Friday)

There was little hope writing this article during the week because all the keys on the keyboard meltedintoneanoagfasjdgil. It was so hot that Megabytes became bytes before becoming little nibbles as people found it too hot to eat. People imitated camels drinking before crossing the Sahara, by skolling as much drink as inhumanly possible. At least camels didn't have to worry about lining up outside the toilets every hour.

The effects of the heat could be seen everywhere. Mum's garden looked like someone had torched it with a flame thrower and the watering we did Wednesday morning disappeared pretty much the same time it hit the ground.

Even the latest attraction, the Wheely Big Wheel in Docklands, was affected. It had to be closed indefinitely due to the heat buckling parts of the structure, which apparently hadn't been built to withstand the Australian sun. It now seems to be in danger of breaking free and churning up the Yarra like some crazy mobile dredging machine. We could always incorporate it into some giant paddle steamer so the wheel doesn't stick out like another arty sore thumb.

Maybe we should have had the wheel painted with Aussie paint. The paint companies are always going on about how their paint can withstand the extreme heat. We could have tested these claims.

I'm unsure why he put up his hand for the job in the first place.

Lady-in-waiting, Julia Nosey, has also set a record for being our longest-serving Acting Prime Minister. Last year she denied sending fake telegrams from various overseas heads of state inviting KRuddy to visit.

"Look, I don't know where he's gone this time or when he's due back. Do you think his office would look better in a pale yellow that would highlight my red hair?" she quipped.

If you do see KRuddy wandering around your electorate and speaking disjointed sentences, or if you spot him overseas when you're on holidays, please contact the AFP directly.

There are calls for the Big Wheel to be painted either yellow, to represent another Yellow Peril, or white, to signify another big white elephant.

It wasn't just big wheels that couldn't stand the heat. Connex came to the party by cancelling about half their regular services, blaming the fact most of the train air conditioners aren't designed to work in the 30+ degree Australian heat. I don't think driver absenteeism was mentioned once, but suspect some of them suffer from the same design fault.

Connex did try to make the most of the situation by obtaining a Government health grant to cover the launch of their latest Connex campaign. Titled 'The Connex Biggest Loser'. The idea is for people to lose weight on the way home. Connex helps by cancelling services and making subsequent services so crowded that people have to fight their way on board, thereby burning up calories.

Once aboard the packed trains, people burn more calories as they sweat all the way home. The top 10 biggest losers in each carriage will go into the semi finals where they are forced to run between platforms for a train that will never arrive. (Next Werribee is on platforms 4/5...No, it's platforms 8/9.. now try Platform 12 ... oh, back to 4/5)

When will commuters realise they are ALL big losers for being Conned into catching public 'transport' in the first place???

If any international visitor asks you if it's always this hot, just tell them that this is pretty tame compared to the heat we had back a few years ago, where it was 52 in the shade for over a month, and the roads all melted and ...



Creation revisited

Inquisitive IRS readers will recall that Ditmar, in IRS August 2008, demonstrated that the total energy of the universe is zero by first explaining the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and then proving via the formula $\Delta E \Delta t < h / (2\pi)$ where h is the Planck constant (when divided by 2π this is the reduced Planck constant) and ΔE and Δt are respectively the uncertainties in energy and time, that when considering the very smallest scales of time – that is, at the quantum level, where the smallest time interval is the Planck time (5×10^{-44} sec) – the uncertainty in the energy over that time can be very large indeed, even though the reduced Planck constant is only 1.0546×10^{-34} Joule.sec.

Ditmar explained that Stephen Hawking had used this uncertainty to explain how Black Holes can radiate; so that, at any point in space energy/time uncertainty can lead to the production of virtual particles. Normally, these immediately annihilate each other, so that over a longer time interval, the energy of that small region of space remains zero. However, if the pair production occurs at the event horizon of a black hole one particle may enter the horizon (and be lost to normal space) while the other escapes as *Hawking radiation*.

Ditmar then took us to the birth of our universe when the *Big Bang* occurred: a singularity in space-time which was accompanied by a period of *inflation*. The theory is that the inflation took some 10^{-37} seconds during which time the universe (the singularity) expanded by about 10^{50} . The initial inflation was from the *quantum foam* of some point in space (where time is of the order of Planck time, and space of the order of the Planck length (1.6163×10^{-35} metre)). Because of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle there was the associated production of matter/antimatter particles. During the inflationary period this initial, small amount was *hugely* increased, but **leaving the total energy at zero**.

Anzapa member John Newman, no slouch in the IQ department, commented that he is pleased that Ditmar had at last solved the problem of creation. Clearly, he says, there is no need for a supreme being to pop up and create our universe, because it's not here! Or, more correctly, creating nothing from nothing is no big deal, so no problem! He concludes that we are left with a bit of a chicken and egg situation regarding which came first, the mass or the negative energy, but this will surely turn out to be the quantum froth and bubble.

Ditmar took cognisance of the fact that Newman had pinged him on the problem of creation and determined to ping him back - "*one ping only, please, Vassily*" as Ramius said in one of his favourite movies, *The Search for Red October* - because he thought that John's thanks were slightly misdirected and undeserved.

As Ditmar pointed out in his article on The Energy of the Universe, "*the idea of our universe having zero energy is one shared by the Lucasian Professor of Cambridge (Newton's old Chair), Stephen Hawking; and he is much more of an authority than Ditmar, since he has appeared in 'Star Trek, The Next Generation'*".

Ditmar continues... "*And even if the Universe has a total energy of zero, that doesn't really obviate the existence of a Creator. It may be, as Laplace said, that there is no need of that hypothesis, but, for some people, arranging a zero energy state can be taken as evidence for the validation of 'that hypothesis'. (As a lecturer I observed such a phenomenon regularly by watching students slipping into that mode). Martin Rees, England's Astronomer Royal, also believes in the zero energy concept. See his book 'Before the Beginning'.*

"Finally, I understand that solipsists exist - even though they believe that nothing else (including me) does, and that 'all' is in their mind - but I've never come across a solipsist whose 'nothing' extends to themselves! Mr Newman is to be congratulated for adding to the extensive, very extensive, bulk of philosophical thought."

I think that John Newman can justifiably take a bow, and perhaps another, because Ditmar has more to say...

"I guess most SF fans know of the inflationary Universe, but they may not know what the originator of the concept and the theory, Alan Guth, has to say about it. The first chapter of his book 'The Inflationary Universe' is titled 'The Ultimate Free Lunch', and in it Guth says, "If the universe was created from nothing, then the total energy must be zero." As to how this could be - well it's because, as Hawking, Rees, et al, et al, point out, gravitational energy is negative. Guth explains in some detail in an appendix (no mathematics) how and why. In the final chapter, 'A Universe Ex Nihilo', Guth tells us that 'the first serious suggestion that the creation of the universe from nothing could be described in scientific terms was the 1973 paper by Edward Tryon, 'Is the Universe a Vacuum Fluctuation?'. And so John Newman's summing up of the 'chicken-and-egg' nature of creation as 'quantum froth and bubble' is wonderfully correct! Again!"

Marc Ortlieb, who teaches science, adds, "*I'm in awe of the universe but somewhat perplexed by people's insistence on trying to define and confine their deities. I spend part of my time as a Heinleinesque solipsist, part of my time as an orthodox Dawkins atheist and the rest wondering what the hell is going on.*"

Bill Wright

Browsing Barack Obama on You Tube

Browsing You Tube can be rewarding. For example, google ‘*No one as Irish as Barack Obama*’ and pick the BBC’s You Tube outlet – the one with the kid playing the bagpipes. Go to full screen and turn up the sound, because you’ll want to. Then settle back and watch the Irish band ‘Hardy Drew and the Nancy Boys’ belting out their version of the Barack O’Bama anthem, with flashbacks to scenes from Irish pubs, parades and the election campaign itself. Second time through, you can sing along with the band. Here are the lyrics...

No one as Irish as Barack O’Bama

- 2 -



O’Leary, O’Reilly, O’Hare and O’Hara
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama
 You don’t believe me, I hear you say
 But Barack’s as Irish as was JFK
 His granddaddy’s daddy came from Moneygall
 A small Irish village, well known to you all

Toor a loo, toor a loo, toor a loo, toor a lama
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama
 He’s as Irish as bacon and cabbage and stew
 He’s Hawaiian he’s Kenyan American too
 He’s in the white house, He took his chance
 Now let’s see Barack do Riverdance

Toor a loo, toor a loo, toor a loo, toor a lama
 There’s no one as Irish As Barack O’Bama
 From Kerry and cork to old Donegal
 Let’s hear it for Barack from old Moneygall
 From the lakes if Killarney to old Connemara
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama

O’Leary, O’Reilly, O’Hare and O’Hara
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama
 From the old blarney stone to the great hill of Tara
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama

Initially I felt outraged that an upstart junior senator had upstaged and usurped Hilary Clinton’s US Presidential Election campaign. Then I listened to one of his campaign speeches on You Tube and was instantly converted. It’s a pity his sainted maternal grandmother died in Hawaii just days before the election. When young Barack Obama was only ten years old she whisked him away from primary school in Jakarta and raised him as her own, making sure he got the best-rounded education that any Presidential candidate has had since Adlai Stevenson ran against Dwight D Eisenhower in 1952. It is no bad thing that a man acquainted with grief whose character is unblemished with the insecurity and vengefulness of his predecessor will be US President during the darkest period in world history since World War II.

Hillary Clinton refused to give up; not, I think, because she thought she could win, but because if she kept fighting she might not be seen as a quitter and might be able to get a good position in the new Obama administration. In the event she got the plum job of Secretary of State.

The problem is that when you get Hillary you also get Bill. How much influence is tied into foreign donations to Bill Clinton’s charity that might compromise on-the-spot decisions Hillary might have to make as the US foreign-minister-at-large? President Barack Obama will be almost totally focused on domestic issues for most of 2009. How will he cope with Bill Clinton always under foot? I hope the answer is that Hillary and Barack

Two thousand and eight the white house is green,
 They’re cheering in Mayo and in Skibereen.
 The Irish in Kenya, and in Yokahama,
 Are cheering for President Barack O’Bama

O’Leary, O’Reilly, O’Hare and O’Hara
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama
 The Hockey Moms gone, and so is McCain
 They are cheering in Texas and in Borrisokane,
 In Moneygall town, the greatest of drama,
 For our famous President Barack O’ Bama
 Toor a loo, toor a loo, toor a loo, toor a lama
 There’s no one as Irish As Barack O’Bama

The great Stephen Neill, a great man of God,
 He proved that Barack was from the Auld Sod
 They came by bus and they came by car,
 To celebrate Barack in Ollie Hayes’s Bar

O’Leary, O’Reilly, O’Hare and O’Hara
 There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama



as sung by The Corrigan Brothers
 (formerly known as Hardy Drew and the Nancy Boys)
 and recorded by Peter Creighton in Nov 2008

reach an understanding based on absolute mutual trust to the effect that, whilst she is informed by agreed policy, she calls the shots as she sees them – particularly when she is overseas – and that Barack *always* backs her up, unconditionally!. Any glitches can be argued out and resolved in private or in cabinet, retrospectively.

Barack Obama will have more tough choices to make than have been faced by any US president in recent memory. Most of them are on issues worth risking one's office for. His first term will test his mettle as a statesman. If he appeals to the maturity of the American electorate on an unpopular issue (such as raising taxes to pay for education and other much needed infrastructure works) and loses, his demeanour and rhetoric will be all-important. He isn't gutless and certainly isn't guileless and won't be fazed by being labelled as sly and treacherous by his political enemies. Hopefully, slyness will be exhibited as craftiness and confound his enemies; for, faced with looming disaster, craftiness morphs into statesmanship. Statesmen rise above reverses and Obama commands concentrations of major means of violence that, used adroitly, can be decisive. George W Bush commanded as much force but he was maladroit, just as Bill Clinton before him was inattentive.

Upskirting, downblowing and the giggle palace

Because of the two-month interval between mailings, conversations in Anzapa tend to be slow affairs affording opportunities for considered replies on topics such as the uses and abuses of cameras in mobile phones. One member became incensed enough to rant against upskirting, downblowing and x-ray cameras.

I fell into reverie, remembering visits to the Giggle Palace at St Kilda's Luna Park when I was very much younger. There was a wonky walkway on its upper level consisting of roped wooden cylinders in oscillating frames with smooth-finished timber guide rails and mirrors that reflected distorted images of people passing through and where a strong updraft lifted women's skirts.

That, and the River Caves where enterprising lads would jump out of the boat to explore behind the scenes in pursuit of equally adventurous young ladies, defined the ultimate in naughtiness in those days.

Sadly, the Giggle Palace and the River Caves are no more. The Ghost Train is still running, but security cameras ensure that liberties taken there are swiftly nipped in the bud.

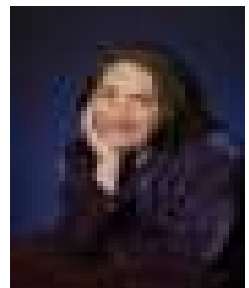
Bill Wright

Explaining Gillian Polack

It isn't easy to characterise and profile some science fiction fans. Intending visitors to Aussiecon 4 in August 2010 can look up any number of websites for CVs of active Aussiefen, for example the 'Who's Who' page on www.meteor.org.au. But some fans are reticent, preferring to hide their light under a bushel, so to speak...

For example **Gillian Polack** was a Guest of Honour at Conflux 5 (Canberra science fiction convention on Oct 2-6, 2008). In her GoH speech she began by saying she has no idea who she is, so she doesn't see that other people should know. Instead she explained how she became a writer. That process isn't nearly as fascinating as her background before she became a writer, much of which is shrouded in mystery.

We know that Gillian 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. She's bit evasive as to what she was doing in her day jobs before becoming a writer and teacher of medieval sex and cuisine (theory, not practice, in the former I hasten to add), but we get an a clue from the cryptic labels she has given them - *Duty*, *Security*, *Public affirmation* - from which, she asserts blandly, she has liberated herself. I think she means she now uses them as tools instead of props.



Bloody Microsoft!

Is anyone as irritated as I am at the way toolbars in later versions of the Microsoft Office suite (eg. those supported by Windows XP Professional) seem to change their positions and contents at random. Missing buttons can sometimes be retrieved by displaying a toolbar's contents on two rows instead of one, but even then there can be a number of hidden buttons that have to be found and retrieved one at a time as and when the need arises.



Robots with soul

Who can forget the pitter patter of tinny feet in ‘*Silent Running*’ or fail to see the pathos in HAL’s descent into psychosis in ‘*2001 - A Space Odyssey*’? Could it be that part of the malaise that weighs upon the human spirit lies in the guilt we feel at the slave status of automatons that do our will?

Maybe the problem doesn’t exist, not necessarily because our cyber servants are unaware, but due to a nigh unbridgeable chasm of perspective. This sensitive topic was explored in IRS April 2004...



Ditmar’s cover graphic for IRS April 2004 is set in the not-so-distant future. In a universe predominantly hostile to protoplasmic life, exploration and colonisation are done by proxy using intelligent robots. The highest robotic types are, of course, humaniform. Whatever primitive emotions they have are almost entirely concerned with their love and respect for humans, living and past. That respect has been engendered in the main by rare personal contacts with humanity, but also by their absorption during fabrication of the entire deposit of recorded human experience. Included are the sacred books of Earth’s major faiths, the universal declaration of human rights and inspirational texts by the four Shapers of robotic culture: **Eando Binder, Eric Frank Russell, Isaac Asimov** and, greatest of them all, **Hal Clement**.

For centuries robots have toiled to line up ore-bearing asteroids in orbit around Earth’s Moon, that being the most efficient way of ensuring that an endless supply of raw material is available for continued robotic service on the home planet. Like fireflies in the backdrop of infinity, refinery ships flit from rock to rock putting down and picking up

humaniform crew with their quantum of ore. So precious is even the shape of Man that beams of light from the ship shine on each crew member during extra-vehicular activity so as not to deprive the ship’s brain of even an umbra of the beatific vision.

During one such EVA, R1278 discovers a rusty marker for a lode of iron ore. Something about its shape suggests the type of primitive microphone that human entertainers used in the Dawn Age. Recalling - and mourning - all the human beings he has known who have lived and died and died and died since his fabrication in 2071, R1278 pours out his grief and rage to the Universe in modulated waves of electromagnetic lament that translate (in the words of a famous Ode by Percy Bysshe Shelley) as *profuse strains of unpremeditated art*. Thus he became known as The Skylark of Space”

Q. *How many fans does it take to change a light globe at a science fiction convention?*

A. *One, but only when he has told you his life story at three o’clock in the morning at a room party.*

Vale the Post Office

In 1840 Great Britain established the Royal Mail and issued the world’s first postage stamp, the famous penny black. Penny postage raised the volume of mail substantially and put private delivery services out of business. Over time, the original post-office-to-post-office delivery system was expanded to include door-to-door delivery (well, almost; householders had to walk to a pillar box at the end of the street to post a letter). Addition of parcel post in 1890 established a model that was the template for postal systems the world over.

North Americans, in particular, were intensely proud of their postal services, such was their reputation for reliability & efficient service. Mailmen were iconic figures enjoying equal status with police and firemen. The rot started in the world’s postal services forty years ago when private delivery outfits were allowed to corner their most profitable elements. That left whole populations at the mercy of the franchised husks that can charge what they like whenever they like. That is why Bruce Gillespie, the beloved Official Bloody Editor of Anzapa, has so much trouble juggling postal rates for each mailing, and also why contractors who deliver the mailings late and in shocking condition are wont to disclaim responsibility. Mailmen of yore, imbued with the ethic that the mail must go through, would have cared enough to do something about it.

Bill Wright

In fealty to A E van Vogt

It is hard for some of us oldies to come to terms with the idea that there are science fiction fans *Out There* who have never read Alfred Elton van Vogt (1912-2000). His views on women and sexuality might offend modern tastes but he was a powerful storyteller who, I venture to say, is re-read in old age by older SF fans who avidly devoured his stories when they first appeared in print.

His first published SF story, *Black Destroyer* (Astounding Science Fiction, July 1939) was inspired by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*. The story, beginning with the famous line, "*On and on Coeurl prowled!*", is credited with having ushered in the Golden Age of science fiction. It depicts a fierce, carnivorous alien stalking the crew of an exploration spaceship. Van Vogt introduces the idea of an all-encompassing system of knowledge that he calls 'Nexialism' to analyse the alien's behaviour.

In his early years A E Van Vogt wrote mainly short stories. In the 1950s, many were cobbled into novels, or "*fixups*" as he called them, a term which entered the vocabulary of science fiction criticism. His first fixup was to combine *Black Destroyer* (1939) with *War of Nerves* (1950), *Discord in Scarlet* (1939) and *M33 in Andromeda* (1943) to form the novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (1950) which is ranked among the top ten science fiction stories of all time. Another successful fixup is *The War Against the Rull* (1959).

Not all of van Vogt's fixups fared as well. In *Quest for the Future* (1970), for example, he totally lost the plot.

One of van Vogt's best-known novels, *Slan* (1946), was originally serialised in *Astounding Science Fiction* (Sep-Dec 1940). Using what became one of van Vogt's recurring themes, it told the story of a nine-year-old superman living in a world in which his kind are hunted down and slain by Homo Sapiens.

It behooves me to list the best of his other stories of that ilk. They are...

	<i>Asylum</i>	lead story in <i>Astounding</i> (May 1942)
and its sequel	<i>The Proxy Intelligence</i>	(1968)
as well as	<i>Research Alpha</i>	(1965) written in collaboration with James H Schmitz

Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* stories are the most famous examples of a science fiction author's tribute to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Just as good, but very different, are A E van Vogt's

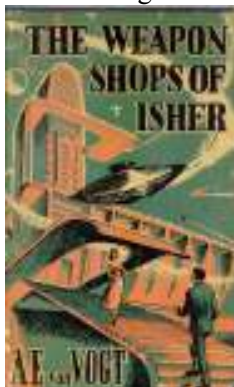
	<i>Empire of the Atom</i>	(1957)
and its sequel,	<i>The Wizard of Linn</i>	(1962). Both novels tell the story of the mutant superman, Clane Linn.

Nexialism, or "*applied wholeism*" as van Vogt described it in *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*, and revelations of the totalitarian police state that emerged after World War II were overarching themes that influenced his two most extraordinary novels, *The World of Null-A* (1945) and *The Players or Null-A* (1948).

Null-A, or non-Aristotelian logic, refers to using intuitive, inductive reasoning rather than reflexive, or conditioned, deductive logic. Van Vogt wrote an inferior sequel, *Null-A Three* (1984), that I advise you **not** to read. Lately, his estate has authorized author John C Wright to write a sequel to the first two Null-A novels and he succeeded brilliantly with *Null-A Continuum*. Here is a brief synopsis: '*Starting from the end of The Players of Null-A, we once again follow the exploits of Gilbert Gosseyn [pronounced Go Sane] as he discovers his true origin and his true purpose. Can Gilbert unravel the very mysteries of creation itself in time to save the past and future universe?*' Now that is truly van Vogtian in scope!

He said that many of his ideas came from dreams. I can believe that, as some of his stories are incoherent. At their best, however, as in *The Book of Ptath* (1947), his writing has all the vision and power a dream can impart.

Other van Vogt novels I can recommend are...



<i>The Weapon Makers</i>	(1947)	Note: There was a raging debate at Melbourne Uni in the 1960s about the viability of that model of society.
<i>The Weapon Shops of Isher</i>	(1951)	
<i>The House that Stood Still</i>	(1950)	co-authored with first wife, Edna Mayne Hull
<i>Planets for Sale</i>	(1954)	
<i>The Silkie</i>	(1969)	and its sequel,
<i>The Mixed Men</i>	(1952)	
<i>Lost: 50 Suns</i>	(1979)	



The Battle of Forever (1971)

Van Vogt systematized his writing method, using scenes of 800 words or so where a new complication was added or something was resolved. Several of his stories hinge on temporal conundrums, my favorites being *The Weapon Makers* and *The Weapon Shops of Isher*. Wikipedia reveals that he acquired many of his writing techniques from three books, ‘*Narrative Technique*’ by Thomas Uzzell and ‘*The Only Two Ways to Write a Story*’ plus ‘*Twenty Problems of the Short-Story Writer*’, both by John Gallishaw.

A E van Vogt provided the inspiration for Meteor Incorporated, the name of an association that aims to set up a permanent science fiction institution and research collection in Australia.

In *The Weapon Makers* (1947), the Meteor Corporation is the name of the firm holding title to premises controlled by the Weapon Shops, a permanent opposition to the Empire of Isher based on distribution of personalised weapons that can be used only for defence that was established by Earth’s one immortal man three thousand years before events described in the novel. The Meteor Corporation reference is near the end of chapter 3 where, in typically van Vogt fashion, the reader is subjected to an episode of total surprise when the immortal protagonist hurls himself at a blank wall and is teleported to one of his secret laboratories where he is attacked by a gigantic white rat.

Today, we describe such twists and turns of plot as Phildickian, but it wouldn’t surprise me if Philip K Dick himself got the idea from van Vogt; who, as explained above, had an 800-word plot change technique that exactly encompasses the attention span of the reader.

During the 1950s A E van Vogt had a brief flirtation with Lafayette Ronald Hubbard’s not so private fantasies that, unlike his own, were paraded as if they were real; during which time he operated a storefront for Dianetics, the secular precursor to Hubbard’s Church of Scientology. Having become disillusioned with Hubbard and his methods he resumed writing again in the 1960s, mainly at Frederik Pohl’s invitation, remaining in Hollywood with his second wife Lydia Bereginisky who cared for him in his declining years.

Pope John XX

In the early part of the twentieth century, conservative moralists tried to have H Branch Cabell’s masterwork *Jurgen - Comedy of Justice* banned for obscenity. Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land* was influenced by the book; Jack Vance’s protagonist, Cugel, in *Dying Earth* is based on Jurgen; and Neil Gaiman freely acknowledges that H Branch Cabell (1870-1958) has had a major influence on his own writing.

It is well known that the case was thrown out of court. A curious aspect of the affair is that the moralists were more upset by Cabell’s rubbishing the concept of Papal Infallibility than the alleged obscenities of Jurgen, whose plotted behaviour in every case had an innocent interpretation to counterbalance the salacious one.

Jurgen - Comedy of Justice is out of print and hard to find on library shelves. Since publishing the article on Cabell in *IRS* August 2008 I have been besieged by readers who, being exercised about supposed moral imperfections of the papacy, demand that I extract his joke on papal infallibility from *Jurgen - Comedy of Justice*. Here, then, is the relevant excerpt from the chapter on ‘The Ascension of Pope Jurgen’, where Jurgen is continuing his innocently nefarious affairs in Heaven...

“John the Twenty-first says he thinks they lost count somehow and that there never was any Pope John the Twentieth. He says you must be an impostor.

“Ah, professional jealousy,” sighed Jurgen, “dear me, this is very sad and gives one a poor opinion of human nature. Now, my boy, I put it to you fairly: how could there have been a twenty-first unless there had been a twentieth? And what becomes of the great principle of papal infallibility when a pope admits to a mistake in elementary arithmetic? Oh, but this is very dangerous heresy.”

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