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Based on *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life No. 35*, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the November 2002 mailing of *Acnestis*. Front cover: Brian Lewis's cover illustrating the novella version of J. G. Ballard's 'The Drowned World', *Science Fiction Adventures*, 1962.

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I don't know a lot about death.

I scored the jackpot by being born in the luckiest country ever to exist on earth (Australia since World War II) at the most fortunate time in its history (1947, so that I was in the first, and last, generation to be guaranteed a good job when I left school). Apart from the fact that nobody has ever given me a vast wad of money in order to produce fanzines full time, everything's pretty much gone my way.

Yet in the next moment a plane might drop from the sky, or a stroke could finish me off, or that lurking asteroid could plop into Port Phillip Bay. Or I could visit the doctor, and come back with a death sentence. Or, like Frank Lloyd Wright (a endlessly entertaining man, as I discovered when reading Brendan Gill's biography), my career might actually recommence, or even commence, when I hit 70. As John Updike writes: 'The reason people don't make too much of their minds is that they see how totally at the mercy of the material world the mind is — a brick drops on your head, your mind is extinguished no matter how indeterminate are the motions of the individual atoms composing the clay in the brick. Life, thought — these are no match for the planets, the tides, the physical laws. Every minute of every day, all the prayers and ardent wishing in the world can't budge a little blob of cancer, or the AIDS virus, or the bars of a prison, or the latch of a refrigerator a child accidentally locked himself into . . . there is no way around matter. It's implacable. It doesn't give a damn about us one way or another' (*Roger's Version*, pp. 169–70).

Whatever; it doesn't matter when I'm dead. Nothing will matter then. Not only do I go, but as Gore Vidal once said, the whole universe winks out when I go. What scares me about it all is not so much dying, but of *not being*, effectively *having never been*. So does nothing we do have value? I would think so, were it not for what I feel about some recently lost friends:

Dave Piper, 1939–2002

DAVE PIPER

7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6BZ, UK

Sorry to be the bearer of crap news this morning . . . they

say that things come in threes, but *this* is ridiculous!

After a very brief diagnostic period (a few weeks) on 24 May we were advised that I have lung cancer, secondary bone cancer and a large aneurysm in my aorta. (All I need is a case of dandruff and I've got the full 'ouse.)

For reasons too boring to relate, no surgery is possible and they are terminal and thus the prognosis is not good.

I suggested to my specialist that perhaps my life-long intention to read the complete works of Piers Anthony was now a dream turned to dust, to which she replied, with a slightly puzzled expression ('What's this loony on about?') . . . 'Possibly'.

I hope you will all forgive the nature of this round-robin-type-note but I just don't have the heart to do separate letters, and there is, really, very little else to say.

It's been great 'knowing' you all these years and I'm sorry, again, that this is not the usual DCP letter to grace your breakfast tables . . .

Very best wishes for the future, look after yourselves and keep healthy.

(5 July 2002)

On 3 August 2002, David C. Piper — our Dave Piper — died. In the few weeks between the letter above and his death, I wrote to him suggesting that if he wanted a good home for his fanzines, he might try **Mark Plummer** and **Claire Brialey** (who live a lot nearer to the Pipers than does Greg Pickersgill, Britain's most famous fanzine collector). Dave and his wife Cath rang Mark, but before Dave could send back a letter to me, he returned to hospital for the last time.

Mark had mentioned my name to **Erik Arthur**. I had never heard of Erik, Dave Piper's favourite bookseller, who arranged a wreath on behalf of Dave's Australian friends. Erik emailed me:

ERIK ARTHUR

Fantasy Centre, 157 Holloway Road,
London N7 8LX, UK

I duly went along to the cremation, which was so well attended that there was standing room only in the Parlour, or whatever it is called. I would say chapel, but . . . I was delighted, but not surprised, to learn that Dave was a



Dave Piper (thanks to Irwin and Wendy Hirsh for this photo, taken at the 1987 World Convention, Britain).

committed atheist, and thus had a nice humanist lady doing the celebration of his life bit . . . in which she mentioned much about his extended family, consisting of two good and lifelong mates and their families (which probably accounts for the aforementioned full house).

Although he was said to be well and widely read, there was (surprise?) no mention of SF — are we condemned to the ghetto even unto death? — but a fair bit about jazz, his other abiding passion beyond his family, which would account for the coolest music I have ever heard in such surroundings: Nat King Cole singing 'Unforgettable', an instrumental of 'April in Paris' . . .

There was hardly a dry eye in the house at the end . . . a truly moving tribute to a great guy . . . and all I knew him for was acerbic comments about those SF authors he didn't like. Great discussions, we had here in the shop.

I said a brief word to Cathy afterward, but, given the large numbers of personal and work friends, most of whom seemed to be really well known to Cathy, I passed on the tea and buns, knowing I would be going over in due time to collect the fanzines and so on.

It did not rain for the duration, but as I was driving back the skies opened again (Bruce, we are getting almost Darwinian rain here these summer days) so there is some justice after all.

The wreath was as I arranged, that is, in Australian yellow and green, and quite tasteful, if your reporter may make so bold.

In due course I shall pick up Dave's fanzines and, in conjunction with Mark Plummer, arrange whatever in terms of disposal. I will, however, make sure that I read some of the Oz ones, for Dave's early texts.

Dave was only 63, and died of lung cancer, with other related complications. He first knew back in the springtime, so had little time to prepare himself as the news got worse. I don't think Cath was ready for it, such that when he went into hospital for what turned out to be the last time, she seemed sure he would be out again after a few more 'checks'. He died on Saturday, 3 August.

Dave was famous for his informality at work. Apparently he had some twenty people working for him at the New Zealand Department of Defence (or something like that) in an open plan office. It was common for him, having travelled to work in jeans and shirt, to be saying good morning to his staff as they arrived while he was in his underpants, putting on what was widely presumed to be his only suit.

(11 August 2002)

It's right that Dave should receive a send-off from his Australian friends (and, no doubt, from his American and Canadian friends), because he seemed to have little contact with British fandom. It's one of those contradictions in Dave's attitudes that I could never work out. His original link with Australia was with **John Bangsund's** *Australian Science Fiction Review*. In early 1969, John gave me a copy of his mailing list as the basis for posting the copies of *SF Commentary* 1. Dave, one of John Bangsund's greatest admirers, was one of the very first people to respond to *SFC* 1.

He wrote in Dave Piperish: a combination of north London accent, self-deprecating jokes, news of doings of the Piper family, and explosions of wrath about the silly opinions of other *SFC* correspondents. Here is his first letter of comment to *SFC*:

DAVID C. PIPER

Thanks very much for *SFC* Number 1. I'm not at all sure why you sent *me* a copy . . . of one thing I've never been accused and that's of being a literate member of the SF reading fraternity, and I can't see myself ever being much of an asset to a fan-ed's sub. list.

Be that as it may, some extremely random comments:

(a) Repro is lousy . . . at least on my copy. I'm getting on a bit now and my eyesight ain't as good as it once was. Seems to be a lack of ink . . . the repro I mean, not my eyes . . . or badly cut stencils. No doubt it'll improve.

(b) Don't use illos inside the thing but I suggest you have a simple and uncluttered plate made for the cover. This cover is awful.

(c) Talking of first issues . . . I got this copy on Saturday and assume you sent it sometime in January. Ridiculous! You've probably published another couple already so I'd better keep mentioning the number. Numero One . . .

(e) I'm sick of reading about *2001*. I loved it. Wonderful film. Just not interested in reading any more about it, is all.

(f) I enjoyed your exhaustive Part I on Dick very much. Until I reached your 'Apology' on page 51, though, I was a leetle surprised at your conclusions on *High Castle*. It's one of the lamentably few cases where I reckon I got the point of a book without being told. I enjoy all Dick's books. Probably a masochistic streak . . . I enjoy being slightly baffled and intrigued and made to work hard at a book. Sometimes. My three favourites are *High Castle*, *Palmer Eldritch*, and *Martian Time-Slip*. That last one is, I think, a tremendous work. Brilliant . . .

(h) *New Worlds* . . . I sometimes buy it. I don't usually read it all. I enjoyed *Camp Concentration*. Only item I can remember enjoying recently is Delany's fragment a couple of months ago. I don't have strong feelings about the magazine now. It's there. Probably better to be there than not. It's very uneven. Good presentation. Too pretentious by half. Some of Ballard's bits of late have been in such bad taste that I find their publication incredible. Apart from Disch I don't reckon *any* of its New Writers are gonna amount to anything. Your comment, page 6, about Moorcock's 'New Writers' . . . surely Colvin is Moorcock, isn't he?

(i) Foyster's piece is crap. Quantity ain't Quality. Page 28: he loads his argument by mentioning MacApp and Saberhagen. Jeez . . . there's probably a million such from his supposed 'Golden Age'. It was always better years ago, wasn't it! Toffee apples just ain't the same as they were, are they?! Rubbish! Against his list I'd stack Delany, Zelazny, and Disch. It gets better all the time . . .

(k) Enough . . . enough. I enjoyed the thing very much. In the absence of Aussie cash herewith 10/- . . . hope that'll cover me for a couple. Assuming, of course, you'll accept feathery money!

(21 April 1969)

The essence of Piper (and the state of science fiction in 1969), all in one letter! 10 shillings equalled one Australian dollar, which bought Dave three and a half issues of *SFC*. That's nostalgia for you.

My favourite Dave Piper letter, about ten years ago, was written late on a Saturday afternoon after a long drinking session. It was incoherent, very funny, a clever meditation on being drunk, and unprintable without using a scanner.

Here is his last letter of comment:

DAVE PIPER

7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip HA4 6BZ, UK

Great to see one of those dogvomitella envelopes alight on the mat and even better to see your (excellent) printing of the front.

As usual, letters and editorial most interesting . . . reviews somewhat less so, at least, for this clapped-out old SF reader! I've just had a (very) rough count, and during the past year my book-buying/reading count seems to run at circa 10 to 1, non-fiction to fiction, and the fiction side of the equation includes many non-SF titles anyway. The last SF item I can recall, immediately, getting was an old Chad Oliver novel (*Unearthly Neighbours*) that I had forgotten about.

Be honest, I dunno where this year's gone . . . I note it's been just about that long since *SFC* turned up and yet I recall numero 76 arriving as if it were only yesterday!

Cath and I went to Bruges early on in the year . . . for a short stay and loved it. It's a very picturesque medieval town with lots of bridges and canals, and is very easy and quick to get around. There are remains of the old walls, and the really crap industrial parts are outside the main part of the town, leaving the interior relatively unspoilt and attractive. It was the first time we've travelled on Eurostar (the passenger train through the Tunnel), and for comfort (even taking into account the pathetic speed this side of the Channel) it beats bloody flying any day of the week. I've come to really hate flying these past few years . . . even given my not particularly massive height (5 ft 8 in . . . stretched!), the leg room and space in commercial flights is bleedin' disgraceful, I reckon. In future, if we can manage it, we're going to travel by train.

The son of a friend of ours got married in mid year in Ireland, to an Irish colleen of fair visage (!), and we went over for the wedding. We had a great time, and I stayed on in Ireland for a couple of weeks travelling around all the southern areas with the father of the bridegroom. Great time. The local people seem so nice and friendly and laid back, which surprised us a little, given the history we read in the couple of rough guides we had. You probably won't believe this (?), but neither of us, when at school, was taught *anything* relating to the 'troubles' and relations between England and Ireland. Disgraceful, really. Frinstance, I didn't even know that Oliver Cromwell had gone over and beat the shit out of the locals . . . and, worse still, I had no idea that during the famine the English were still taking produce from the local people and sending it to England.

Sara's at home again. She was living with a coupla gay mates but it all went sour . . . so we've lost the guest room again (!) Ceramics are still going well, and in fact I'm

getting a bit good at it (he said modestly), Clare moved into a bigger house with her bloke and seems to be getting on OK and happy, Cath's looking forward to early 2003 and retirement, and I'm not at all sure that the fight against 'international terrorism' is winnable.

But, then, I'm not sure of anything these days . . .

(17 November 2001)

Dave rang me several times from Ruislip (his late-night Friday, my early-morning Saturday), and I spent a wonderful day with him and the family near the end of my trip to England in early 1974. (Chris Priest, with whom I was staying, had never heard of Dave Piper, and neither had the other British fans I met at that time. Dave was my British secret correspondent.) Irwin and Wendy Hirsh met him at the 1985 British world convention, and Dave and Cath travelled to America during the early nineties.

As I wrote to Dave in the letter I hoped would reach him in time, his letters always cheered me up greatly during the seventies, when I was usually down rather than up. His opinions about most things were often more sensible than mine. He was really enjoying his retirement, but was struck down.

Both **Cathy Piper** and their daughter **Clare** have sent me wonderful notes, and Cathy also sent me a copy of the funeral eulogy for Dave. As long as any of us is alive, Dave remains alive. If these pages outlast us all, he's still alive.

Linda Gillespie, 1909–2002

My Auntie Linda might have been born in 1909, but I always had the feeling that she would outlast me. She was already in her forties when I was small, so she seemed to stay the same age throughout most of my life. Her own mother had lived to a great age, and she and my Uncle Fred had taken care of her Aunt Lizzie until the age of 99. Finally, a few months ago, my aunt's body just gave out from under her.

My Auntie Linda was one of my favourite aunts, and something like a second mother to me and all her nephews and nieces. My sisters and I began visiting her Murrumbena house at weekends when we were still a primary school — Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred had a television set, and we didn't. They were far more indulgent with us than our parents ever could afford to be. We watched lots of TV, ate too much, and got to know the local kids, who were friends of my aunt's. One weekend, the Hardhams (who lived next door) invited us next door while they set up a home puppet theatre. For months after, we made papier mâché puppets in the way the Hardhams had shown us. During my early secondary school years, I stayed at Murrumbena regularly. Each year, Auntie Linda put on a huge Christmas tea for the Gillespie side of her family. She was very fond of both my parents, and still talked to my mother by phone once a week until a couple of months ago.

In 1962, my family moved to Melton, then a small country town 50 km west of Melbourne, where my father was to manage the first bank branch in the town. (Melton is now a commuter suburb of 40,000 people.) I wanted to finish Form 4 (Year 10) at Oakleigh High School, so Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred offered to put me up for Term 3 of that year. During my second year of university (1966), my American History lectures were at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, finishing too late to catch the last train to Bacchus Marsh (the town near by to which we had moved). Auntie Linda offered to put me up on those nights each week, and during the university vacations. For that reason, I was able to watch nearly all the episodes of the first Emma Peel series

of *The Avengers*, plus most of the second series. No wonder it remains one of my few favourite TV programs. (My aunt and uncle always said that Honor Blackman was much better than Diana Rigg, but I've still never seen any Honor Blackman episodes of *The Avengers*.)

Another clear memory of those days: walking into McGill's, buying my first copy of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, and reading it, astonished, intoxicated with intellectual hooch, on the suburban train out to my aunt's place.

In early 1978, my Uncle Fred died, just a few weeks before Elaine and I got together, and my aunt's living space gradually became more constrained. When Elaine and I became a couple, Elaine became as fond of my aunt as I was. Since both were keen gardeners, Elaine could hold up her side of a conversation with Auntie Linda better than I could. Auntie Linda sold the house at Murrumbidgee, including its large garden of roses tended by my uncle for many years, and moved into a unit just a few doors from the old house that had been her parents', nearly opposite the Churches of Christ's old people's home where she was to spend the last six years of her life. She tried to keep up the annual Christmas gatherings, but eventually she had to give up being a good host, as her back was beginning to cause her serious trouble. She maintained basic good health, despite a long period of recuperation in hospital after a bad fall in the 1980s and another hospital stay in the mid 1990s. She was always cheery, except if someone questioned her memory of an event during her life or yours. (It was best not to actually catch her out.)

In the end, I must have been a bit of a disappointment to her, as I did not keep up a connection with the Churches of Christ. My Auntie Linda devoted much energy (and probably a fair bit of money) to the Oakleigh Church of Christ, although its numbers dwindled after the 1960s. Ever cheerful and benevolent, she was as much an advertisement for her beliefs as any person I've met.

My Auntie Linda died on 30 September. Her funeral service was at Oakleigh, where I met some of the people I knew from Oakleigh Church during the fifties and sixties, my aunt's niece (and her husband and son) on her side of the family, my mother (the last person left from her generation of the Gillespie side of the family), my sister Jeanette, and my cousins, who were also my aunt's nephews and nieces. Not a large crowd, as my aunt had outlived many of her closest friends. But, like most Church of Christ funerals, it was a celebratory occasion rather than a miserable one.

It's difficult to think of her not being alive, because she had always kept every fact of our lives in her head!

Wynne N. Whiteford, 1915–2002

Wynne Whiteford had already lived a full life before I heard of him. In 1960, in Ted Carnell's *New Worlds*, one of the first SF magazines I bought, I read an author bio about this Australian author whose works I had never heard of (see box). So Australia had its own SF writers! Sure it did. The novella version of J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (*Science Fiction Adventures*, No. 24, 1962) was accompanied by a novella by Wynne Whiteford ('Bliss') and a short story by Lee Harding ('Pressure'). Wynne, who had published his first story in 1934, at the age of nineteen, was being published regularly by Carnell in Britain during the late fifties and early sixties, but fell silent after Carnell sold *New Worlds* to Mike Moorcock and co.

When I saw Wynne on a panel at my first convention, the Melbourne SF Conference, Easter 1968, I realised I was



Wynne Whiteford, 1979. (Photo: George Turner.)

gazing at a legend. Wynne stood out in the crowd: not only because of his youthful way of carrying himself, although he was entering middle age, but because of the careful way he chose his words, his refusal to enter into the smart-arse banter that was then (and still is) the dialect of writers and fans on panels at conventions. Modest and good-humoured: that's how Wynne seemed, then and now.

I must have spoken to Wynne occasionally during the early seventies, but the first time I became aware of him as a friend was during the first day of Monoclave, the convention held at Monash University when Chris Priest and Vonda McIntyre were in town for the 1977 Writers Workshop. Wynne drew me aside and told me, almost apologising for having to tell me sad news, that his wife Laurel had just died. He was obviously in distress, and I did not know what to say. I had never met Laurel.

Wynne began attending Nova Mob regularly when John Foyster started it again in the late seventies. At what I remember as the first of the new series of Nova Mob meetings, a gala party in South Yarra, Wynne introduced us to his new friend, Gwayne. We did not know what to make of her, and she did not know what to make of us. We found out only later that Wynne had met her at the Eastern Writers Group, an enthusiastic group of writers in the outer north-eastern suburbs. Gwayne herself was an enthusiastic writer, and gradually Elaine and I became her friend as well as Wynne's.

Wynne also became close friends with Paul Collins and Rowena Cory, who ran Cory & Collins, the small press that was seen as the rival of Norstrilia Press. Encouraged by Paul and Rowena, Wynne returned to writing, and produced his first novel, *Breathing Space Only*, at the age of sixty-five. I typeset it, and Elaine pasted it up on the kitchen table. It appeared in 1980, and was followed by several more novels for Cory & Collins. Cherry Weiner, an Australian who had

NEW WORLDS

— PROFILES —

Wynne
N.
Whiteford
Melbourne,
Australia



Born in Melbourne, Australia, Wynne Whiteford became interested in writing while in his teens, and had a few short stories and articles published. He then began to take writing seriously, produced some "literary" stories which failed to sell, then set the idea of a writing career aside to concentrate on engineering. For a few years he operated a display business.

He did not begin writing consistently until after his marriage in 1950, producing some suspense stories and short s-f which appeared in Australian magazines. At this time he was studying Commerce at the University of Melbourne, but he shelved it to concentrate more fully on writing. It's still on the shelf.

Through the mid nineteen-fifties he was Technical Editor of an Australian motoring magazine, specialising in road-testing of cars and covering motor-racing events.

He began writing novelette-length science fiction while living in Washington, D.C., in 1957. He arrived in New York the day Sputnik I was placed in orbit (pure coincidence!) and lived in Manhattan until the middle of the following year, writing sports-car articles and SF of various lengths which appeared in *Amazing*, *Fantastic Universe*, *If*, *Super Science Fiction*, and other magazines.

Since 1958 he has lived in London, using it as a base for exploring in various directions, but by the time this appears in print will be back in Australia again. He feels equally at home in Australia, America, and England, in Paris or in Honolulu.

His interests are travel, people, fast cars, chess, science fiction (!). He has been accused of reading anything from *War and Peace* to the labels on jam jars.

long since settled in New Jersey, made a flying trip to Australia in the late seventies. She signed up Wynne, George Turner, Keith Taylor, and quite a few other Australian writers. She sold Wynne's first few novels to Ace, who published them, plus two more. Altogether, Wynne published six novels during the eighties, but no publisher has yet collected his short fiction.

Wynne couldn't help being compared with George Turner, as both were the senior Australian writers of the late twentieth century. Frank Bryning, who died recently in his nineties, seemed a full writing generation older than both of them. Wynne was quiet and modest, and George at his worst could be a prima donna. Both were fond of the company and good talk provided by the Nova Mob. Both won the A. Bertram Chandler Award for lifetime contributions to Australian SF. George suddenly became old in the early nineties, and moved to Ballarat. When he died in 1997, we suddenly realised that not only was Wynne a year older than George, but at the age of eighty he could still seem startlingly young. Terry Frost tells of Wynne knocking around with fans a quarter his age at both the 1994 and 1995 national SF conventions. When Wynne was eighty, I saw him enter the room at the Nova Mob, notice that the only empty chair was a small stool, and sit straight down on it without any complaint. It was only in very recent years, after a series of falls, that he started to feel his age and look frail. Gwayne had to refit their house in Eltham so that Wynne could move around safely. Nevertheless, he and Gwayne attended a series of social events late last year, including the Nova Mob end-of-year gathering at Eastern Inn, a joint birthday party with **Helena Binns**, and the New Year's Eve party held at the home of **Paul Collins** and **Meredith Costain** in Clifton Hill.

The wake/celebration/garden party in Wynne's memory was also held at the home of Paul and Meredith on 12 October. Many of the members of the Eastern Writers' Group were there, and one of them read out the last chapter of Wynne's *Breathing Space Only*. It was fascinating to listen to Wynne's prose so many years after typesetting it. People who didn't like Wynne's writing said it was 'oldfashioned'. Maybe. He provided a few too many explanations, but he never used a cliché or wasted a word. His descriptions of the interactions between people are quite subtle, and he knew how to throw in a joke when appropriate, such as in the superb last line of the novel. **Russell Blackford**, one of two people to write at length about Wynne's work, summed up his achievements for us. The sun shone; it was a perfect Melbourne spring day. We were glad to be alive. We felt glad that Wynne had been alive — and we felt again the need to remember him properly. Nobody can explain the necessity for death except a biologist. It's up to writers to keep alive the well-spent life.

2002 wasn't all gloomy . . .

. . . but we did lose my other favourite cat (**Oscar**, 18, from kidney failure), after losing **Theodore**, 16 (from cancer) since *Donut 32* was published, leaving the three prima donnas, Polly, Sophie and Violet (and Polly and Violet still don't like each other). Oscar was found by **Sally Yeoland** under the Brunswick house she and **John Bangsund** lived in during the early eighties. When Sally phoned saying that she had found a tiny kitten, all fleasy and hungry, and they couldn't possibly keep him, we bowed to the inevitable. We even had a name for him. The week before, I had dreamt about a grey fluffy cat, a music critic named Oscar Leitmotiv. So Oscar had a name immediately. He had obviously

been separated from his mother too early, so for the rest of his life showed some feline psychological peculiarities, the worst of which was extreme timidity. All we had to do was hold an implement or plate in the hand when walking out the door, and Oscar would scurry off in fright. He lost this timidity only late in life, when he became deaf. Oscar was very affectionate to the other cats, always welcomed new cats, especially kittens. When Theodore arrived two years later, Oscar fell in love with him immediately. He jumped towards Theodore, trying to put his paws around him. Theodore jumped back six feet. They were soon lifelong friends. When Theodore died, Oscar, who already had kidney problems, gave up the battle for life. He soon became distressed, stayed mainly in the kitchen, and stopped eating regularly. On the day when he could no longer drink water, we took him for his last trip to the vet's.

There have been periods when every week or so brought the name of another dead SF writer or fan, not always of the Ancient and Revered Generation (**Damon Knight**, **Poul Anderson**, and many others). **George Alec Effinger** was my age. **Peter MacNamara**, who has been diagnosed with a brain tumour, is one year younger than I am. I could wake at 5 a.m. worrying about imminent mortality, but instead I get up in the morning, read the death notices in *The Age*, and give a sigh of relief that I'm not there yet.

The year has been satisfactory, and often satisfying. You can tell that from my ConVergence Report (posted with most copies of this *SFC*), which is the Cheery Segment of 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. Two Ditmar Awards, lots of good company, and lots of people met through the Internet (see box). The **Nova Mob** continues successful — perhaps too successful, with 30 people trying to crowd into the **Sussex-Warner** living room on 2 November. The ultimate accolade was being invited (by Ian Mond, who cannot be refused) to a few recent fan events at which Elaine and I have been by far the oldest people.

Thanks to the ever-enthusiastic **Dick Jensen**, I've had a very good year of watching DVDs. Dick buys far more DVDs than I do, and is willing to lend them. I've bought a few of my own DVDs. I've seen a few films at the cinema (*Gosford Park* and *Last Orders* at the local Westgarth, and *Enigma* at the Astor), but most films are now appearing on DVD shortly after they've been shown locally. (And often before; *Pollock* has just opened in cinemas here, but Dick showed it to me on DVD last summer.) When Dick bought himself a (gasp!) vast plasma screen, he let me have his (gasp!) 42 cm TV screen, which does almost everything with an image except throw it up in the air and twirl it around. Distribution of DVDs in Australia is still peculiar; some of the great musicals are still unavailable, but I was able to buy *The Pajama Game*, completely unavailable on TV, cinema screen, or on VCR or laser disk for more than 30 years. Carol Haney's performance is a revelation, as is the brilliance of Bob Fosse's choreography, even in 1957. Many of the great British and European films are still unreleased (especially films by Visconti), but Dick managed to buy John Frankenheimer's *The Gypsy Moths*, one of the greatest American films of all time. It's never been on VCR or laser disk, and has not been shown on TV for more than twenty years. Not many Australian films have been released on DVD, but Nadia Tass's *Malcolm* has finally appeared. That's my favourite Australian film.

Books? I've read a few, but am way behind in writing about them. I'm in one of those periods when most writers of fiction seem boring, but poets (I picked a volume of Stephen Dunn's from the shelf, enjoyed it greatly, then

discovered that he has just won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry) and essayists (I finally read Gore Vidal's gigantic *United States* collection) still have sparkle.

Music? I've bought too many CDs, as usual, and am very far behind in listening to them.

The year has been dominated by Paying Work and social events. After being effectively unemployed for nearly three months at the end of last year, I've been taking every bit of work offered to me. There's a lull at the moment, which is why I have time to publish this issue of *SFC*. As relief from staring at a computer screen, Elaine and I take any opportunity to meet with congenial people. **Andrew Macrae** and **Ian Mond** invited us to their Tuesday night get-together in Fitzroy. Elaine and I have discovered two more restaurants in the area (**Suko Thai** in Johnston Street, Fitzroy, and **Beelzebub** in Smith Street, Fitzroy, both highly recommended). 'Dinner at Ciao' has become a Friday night institution for the fans who meet at the Australia Food Hall basement each Friday night. (**Ciao** is in Hardware Lane, Melbourne, and is open at night only on Friday.) And **Dick Janssen** has organised some wonderful occasions throughout the year, including a few dinners with 'Carnegie fandom', the group of well-known Melbourne fans who suddenly find themselves living close to each other in the eastern suburb of Carnegie. **Race and Iola Mathews'** monthly Film Night has been enjoyable, a way of keeping up with people we might not see otherwise. **Eva Windisch's** *Tira Lirra* magazine launch events are always stimulating.

In August I shocked even my least shockable friends by travelling outside the state of Victoria. I had not left the state since 1981. Elaine and I were invited to my sister Robin's second marriage in Maroochydore, Queensland, about 60 km north of Brisbane, but Elaine decided to stay home and take care of the cats. (Just as well. No cat ever bothers about my presence, but my Absence Was Noticed.) My other sister Jeanette and my mother had taken a flat for the

week before the wedding, and I joined them on the Friday. Jeanette hired a car, so we looked at a fair bit of the local area. Jeanette drove us to a sheltered beach, where I swam in sea water for the first time in ten years! Jeanette said that the locals do not swim until the water temperature reached 30C. At the beginning of July in Queensland, the water temperature was about the same as it reaches at Port Phillip Bay beaches at the end of summer: just right for a frolic. Later, Jeanette drove us to the Mooloolaba port, where we went up a sight-seeing tower. We could see the entire port, where the river meets the sea. Below were the moored yachts. On one of the yachts we saw a carefree, prancing cat parading along the spar: a cat who owned a boat. Jeanette also drove us to Point Cartwright, from where we could look back over the Queensland coast. As the huge red sun set, a streamer of smoke from burning sugar fields bisected the red globe. The breeze blew. The temperature was in the mid twenties. I decided that southern Queensland in 'winter' provides a lifestyle I could get used to.

And the wedding? It went, as John Bangsund used to say, without a hitch. A group of about fifty of us gathered on the beach at midday, the celebrant united the happy couple, and we climbed into the limo that Robin and Grant had hired for the day. We went to a restaurant, where we ate and drank all afternoon instead of enjoying more of that fabulous Queensland sunshine. We spent most of the next day coming home, but not before I actually got to sit down and talk to my sister Robin properly for the first time in many years. I didn't get a chance to talk at length to Grant, her new husband, but I did have a good yarn with John, to whom she was married for nearly thirty years, and who was at both the wedding and the reception. Also present were my Queensland cousin, Ian, and his wife Bev, who I hadn't seen for twenty years. It was an eye-opener to see my mother in action at a large social event. Whoever imagines one's own mother as the life of the party? Just shows where Robin and Jeanette got their pizzazz.

ConVergence redux

These are some matters that were not cleared up when I published the ConVergence Report (**brg* 33/Great Cosmic Donut of Life 34*).

I was wrong, as usual

Dick Janssen handed me a list of corrections to the Report. The item on p. 9 was one I picked up eventually.

- Page 3, line 3: 'she recovering' should be 'she was recovering'.
- Page 3, line 3: 'asn't' should be 'wasn't'.
- Page 6, line 5: 'Helen' should be 'Helena'.
- Page 8, line 8: 'Dimitrii' should be 'Dimitri'? (Maybe; I always spelt his name with four 'i's.)
- Page 9, line 36: 'Alan Dean Brown' should be 'Alan Dean Foster'.
- Page 15, line 13: 'Ditmar, and she gave' should be 'Ditmar, she gave'.
- 'Page 18' should be 'Page 16'. (**Jack Herman**, writing in ANZAPA, picked up that one.)
- The photos on the back page were made into a montage by **Dick Janssen**, the photos themselves were taken by **Helena Binns**.

MSFC at Somerset Place: that elusive date

John Straede put his hand up during the ConVergence Panel on 'The Melbourne SF Club: The Lost Years', and reported on the dates in his life that pinned down the exact date when the Melbourne SF Club moved to its most famous quarters, 2 Somerset Place, Melbourne. I reported this conversation to **John Foyster**, whose place I took on the panel. A vigorous Internet exchange followed. John F. got in touch with John S., who wrote that I had reported him wrongly. Eventually John F. and John S. decided that they agreed on the date. Here's John Foyster's summary: 'John S. definitely remembers joining the club in 1960, rather than an earlier date, and I think my estimate for Somerset Place (previously given as 1961-62 — meaning late in '61/early '62) stands up (25 July 2002)'. Is that the last word, or does somebody out there own a copy of a publication that gives the exact date of moving from McKillop Street to Somerset Place?



Above: **Justin Ackroyd** prepares to shave off the **Marc Ortlieb** beard for the sake of the DUFF, GUFF and FFANZ Funds. 'How much am I bid?' Only fifty dollars!

Right: Fifty dollars and a few minutes later: Marc Ortlieb as we've never seen him before (or since; he's already grown back the beard).

(Photos: **Cath Ortlieb.**)



I didn't have any photos of Janice, Mark or Claire from when they attended ConVergence. Fortunately, they called in on **John Foyster** and **Yvonne Rousseau** in Adelaide. Yvonne took the photos:

Left: **Janice Gelb** and **John Foyster.**

Below: **Mark Plummer, John Foyster,** and **Claire Brialey.**



We spent most of the next day travelling home, but I decided that I must find a way of persuading Elaine to take a holiday with me in Maroochydore. It's warmer than I like, but a constant breeze blows off the sea, so I didn't need to

worry about the weather. This seems odd to a Melbournite, who can spend hours each day trying to calculate the next turn in the weather.

The revival of the science fiction novella

A talk for the Nova Mob, 2 October 2002

by Bruce Gillespie

[The Nova Mob is the monthly SF discussion group in Melbourne, Australia. Begun in 1970 by John Foyster, it has continued, with only a few interruptions, since then. Usually held at the home of Lucy Sussex (writer and critic) and Julian Warner (most recent DUFF winner), but during 2002 it has shifted several times to the home of Sarah Marland and Andrew Macrae (Acnestis top waitlister).

I sent a copy of this article to David Pringle because he's mentioned in it. He promptly bought it for a future issue of *Interzone*, so please don't tell him that it's appeared here first.]

FOURSIGHT

edited by Peter Crowther (Gollancz 0- 57506-870-1; 2000; 216 pp.; £16.99/\$A51.00)

FUTURES

edited by Peter Crowther (Gollancz 0-575-07023-4; 2001; 320 pp.; £12.99/\$A39.00)

INFINITIES

edited by Peter Crowther (Gollancz 0-575-07355-1; 2002; 358 pp.; £12.99/\$A39.00)

In 1999, American critic Gary Westfahl wrote an article for *Foundation* about the strengths of the science fiction novella. At the end of his article he wrote that 'there is no real financial incentive for science fiction writers to produce novellas'. His article appeared just as, it seems, he was about to be proved wrong. The first successful venture in novella publishing for some years was about to be launched. This is a series of books, first published in 2000, edited by Peter Crowther for Gollancz in the UK, each about 90,000 words in length and containing four novellas. That three of these have appeared, and a fourth rumoured to be in the works, suggests that the novella form is not dead in science fiction. Indeed, after reading the three anthologies, *Foursight*, *Futures* and *Infinites*, I can say that it is still as robust a form as it was in the early 1960s, when I first discovered many of my favourite SF novellas.

What is an SF novella? Is it, for example, the same as the literary novella, a form that, according to David Pringle, in his introduction to an anthology called *Leviathan 2*, pre-dates the novel itself? Pringle found that the novella began in Italy with Boccaccio's *The Decameron* in the fourteenth century. The word meant 'small new thing', and the Boccaccio's novellas were really short stories. However, in

English the word was shortened to 'novel' in the eighteenth century, and grew somewhat. The novella, as a modern term, arose in Britain in the 1880s, to fit those works of fiction that much longer than short stories, but which were very much shorter than those gigantic Victorian novels that littered the bookshelves. The best-known examples of turn-of-the-century novellas included Henry James's *Daisy Miller*, *The Aspern Papers* and *The Turn of the Screw*, and, a few years later, James Joyce's finest work, *The Dead*. Pringle quotes Henry James as saying that the '*nouvelle*' (the French equivalent) offered 'the best of both worlds'. As Pringle adds, 'If the short story creates a character and a moment, and if the novel creates a community of characters and a "world", then the novella is approximately mid-way between the two: it creates a few characters, moving through a limited number of moments in an imaginatively circumscribed world. It shares in both the intensity of the short story and the expansiveness of the novel. At its best, it can have many of the finest qualities of both while retaining few of their faults (i.e. the oft-criticized "slightness" of the short story and the "bagginess" of the novel).'

A highly successful novella of the period was H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), which made Wells famous, provided what I regard as the true beginning of science fiction, and established the literary form that would flourish best in science fiction throughout the twentieth century, that is, the novella. As David Pringle points out: 'When we look to the origins of the science-fiction genre we find that many of the crucial works were novellas. Sir George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871)' and 'Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* . . . were all of novella length, and it is hard to imagine them at any other length'. A great strength of *The Time Machine* is that its main narrative is told by a single, anonymous Time Traveller, who interacts only with a few people in his own era and some people in the far future. We are given the freedom to see a

whole timescape through his eyes, without being too distracted by his personal characteristics.

The SF novella was not put into its own category, however, until the early 1950s, as I discovered thanks to a number of Internet correspondents. George Flynn can trace the use of the name back no further than February 1951, when, in a very early issue of *Galaxy*, H. L. Gold used the term for Ray Bradbury's 'The Fireman', which later became the novel *Fahrenheit 451*. Flynn writes: 'There's no abbreviation for "novella" in the Day Index, implying that no magazine had used the designation up to 1950.' Mark Owings notes that *Startling Stories* used the term 'complete novel' in the 1940s, with the term standing for what we now call 'novella'. John Boston writes that *Astounding* started to use the term 'novel' for stories that were complete in one issue; again, we would use the term novella these days for the same length of story.

What happened to the novella when it arrived in the SF magazines? It took until the mid 1960s to be given a Nebula, followed by a Hugo category in 1968. The length of each category of fiction is now specified: a short story is anything up to 7500 words, a novelette ranges from 7500 to 17,500 words, and a novella is between 17,500 and 40,000 words. I agree with David Pringle when he says: 'These categories may fit the market realities of the science-fiction magazines, but they seem to be both too precise . . . and to err too much on the side of brevity . . . I prefer to be less of a hairsplitter and to classify the short story as a piece of fiction of less than 10,000 words; the novelette as anything between 10,000 and, say, 20,000 words; and the novella as a work ranging from 20,000 to 50,000 words — approximately'.

Why have divisions of short fiction at all? I can only guess that the SF magazine editors, forever trying to do more with less money, hit on the categories as a way of encouraging casual readers to buy the magazines. Open an SF magazine, in the days when you could find SF magazines at your local newsstand. The table of contents says to the reader: the magazine you are holding in your hand does not contain merely an episode of a serial and six short stories; it actually contains an episode of a serial, a novella, three novelettes and three short stories. This practice reached absurd lengths in *If* magazine in the early 1960s, when it was winning the Hugo for Best Magazine every year. Sometimes it would give the title of 'short novel' or 'novella' to a story as short as 35 pages, with 'novelette' being pinned to anything over 19 pages.

These days I don't call any story a novella unless it runs over 55 pages, which by coincidence happens to be the length of the original version of J. G. Ballard's 'The Drowned World' (*Science Fiction Adventures*, No. 24, 1962, with a wonderful cover by Brian Lewis). I remember crawling through that story, sentence by sentence, drowned in Ballard's hot, overflowing world, while sitting under an umbrella, watering the lawn at home with a hose because of extreme water restrictions, while Melbourne's mid-summer sun beat down on the umbrella. 'Soon it would be too hot' is the story's first sentence. Its last sentence reads: 'So he left the lagoon and entered the jungle again, within a few days was completely lost, following the lagoons southward through the increasing heat, attacked by alligators and giant bats, a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn Sun.' So intense was that experience of reading the novella version that I have never read the novel-length version of *The Drowned World*.

Science Fiction Adventures, edited by E. J. ('Ted') Carnell, was one of two sister magazines of *New Worlds*, which was the

main British SF magazine. Michael Moorcock became its editor in 1965. The other sidekick magazine was *Science Fantasy*, which became *SF Impulse* after Carnell relinquished editorship. *Science Fiction Adventures* lasted only until 1964. It was unique, in that it published only novellas and short stories. I bought it first in late 1959 because, at 2/6 (25 cents), it was the only SF magazine I could afford with the pocket money I then received. *Science Fiction Adventures* had been a short-lived American magazine (edited, I'm told, by Larry Shaw). Carnell published the British Reprint Edition of the magazine in 1958, then kept it going until he retired. It boasted many fine stories, including the three highly enjoyable 'Society of Time' novellas, by John Brunner, published later by Ace as *Times Without Number*; and the publication of many stories by Australian writers. In No. 24, for instance, 'The Drowned World' was accompanied by 'Bliss', a novella by Australia's David Rome (David Boutland), and 'Pressure', a short story by Lee Harding. Wynne Whiteford, who died on 30 September 2002, often appeared in *Science Fiction Adventures*.

No American magazines specialised in novellas, but the average issue of one of the chunkier magazines, such as *Galaxy* and *Analog*, usually included one novella, several long novelettes, a number of short stories, as well as the episode of the current serial. The novella was a form by which an up-and-coming SF writer could put himself or herself on the map. Walter Miller Jr was already well known when he published the original novella of 'A Canticle for Leibowitz', but when two more novellas appeared, the entire work became known as one of SF's most distinguished novels, although it is, strictly, a fix-up rather than a novel. James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* began as a novella, and many of us feel that the rest of the wordage in the novel version is merely padding. Gene Wolfe's three-part novel *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* began with the novella of that name, which still stands up quite well on its own. Keith Roberts' perennial classic *Pavane* emerged from several powerful novellas and short stories.

However, it has proved very hard over the years to sell a novella as a standalone book. Brunner usually had to expand his novellas into one half of an Ace Double before he could sell them in America. An exception is Fritz Leiber's Hugo-winning *The Big Time*, which is basically a play in the form of a novella, although it was published as a novel.

Many of my favourite authors first made an impact on me through novellas. I had read nothing I liked of Brian Aldiss's until I read *The Saliva Tree*, his tribute to H. G. Wells and H. P. Lovecraft, in *F&SF* in the mid 1960s. That was one of my most powerful reading experiences, with its truly horrifying last page. Cordwainer Smith's novelettes and novellas always seemed to be more substantial than his short fiction, and his novella 'The Dead Lady of Clown Town' is a sublime reading experience. Probably the best novella writer is still Michael Bishop, who seems to shine only in the novella and short story form. Many of the novelised versions of his short pieces seem to trip over their own feet, and retain little of the energy of the originals. Similarly, most of the best Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser 'novels' of Fritz Leiber began as long novelettes or novellas.

In attempting to revive the SF novella in the anthology *Foursight* (Gollancz, 2000), Peter Crowther was fully aware of the gravity of what he was trying to do. In the Introduction, he describes how his first encounter with the novella was with one of the best of them all, Clifford Simak's 'The Big Front Yard' in *Astounding*. He lists the first officially

categorised novella as being in a *Galaxy* as late as 1955 (Robert Sheckley's 'A Ticket to Tranai'). George Flynn's information appears to prove him wrong. And it's odd that, as a British writer, he doesn't mention the importance of *Science Fiction Adventures* to readers in Britain and the Commonwealth.

Crowther knows a good novella when he sees one, as his three anthologies show. *Foursight* includes four pieces of 'dark fantasy', by Graham Joyce, James Lovegrove, Kim Newman and Michael Marshall Smith. *Futures* (2001) has stories by Stephen Baxter, Peter F. Hamilton, Paul McAuley and Ian McDonald. *Infinites*, which appeared in May this year, has stories by Eric Brown, Ken MacLeod, Alastair Reynolds and Adam Roberts. All the hot shots of current British SF, but very oddly, Crowther includes no women writers. I would have thought Gwyneth Jones and Mary Gentle, among many others, would have been asked to take part in showpiece books such as these. The series has done so well that Gollancz has reissued the stories in other forms, including an equivalent of the Ace Doubles.

The first story in *Foursight*, the first of these volumes, is Graham Joyce's 'Leningrad Nights'. At only 42 pages, it isn't even the right length for a novella, but it feels like one. You will have to excuse me if I include a number of spoilers from now on. There's no way to talk about a story except to *really* talk about a story.

Novels have plots; novellas have trajectories. I decided this after rereading 'Leningrad Nights'. I noted that it includes a number of directional turning points, rather than plot developments. These in turn provide the surprises that make the story memorable. 'Leningrad Nights' begins with a scenario that we think we know well: that of the million and a half people who died in Leningrad during the 900 days of siege during World War II. Will this story be one of unrelieved suffering? Perhaps not. Leo Shaporal, the main character, is extremely good at surviving in this uniquely bleak cityscape. Faced with starvation, he discovers a deposit of opium-soaked tea. After drinking this, he finds that the whole city becomes to him something almost supernatural. The Germans shell the city regularly every day, except on the days when they vary the routine. Leo becomes convinced that he will only die when The Whistling Shell finds him. Until then, he resolves to spend his time looking for people to help. Fuelled by the opium-soaked tea, he finds his personality seeming to split into two people, the person who scurries around the streets of Leningrad, and a doppelganger who keeps offering him advice when it's least wanted. Leo's Uncle Yevgeny dies in his below-freezing flat, but oddly keeps offering him advice. Because of the fierce cold, his body does not decompose, and soon Leo, as well as other citizens of this city, find that there is more than one way to provide fresh meat.

The turning point of Leo's life is when he rescues Natasha, a prostitute who is about to give birth if she doesn't die first. Leo makes a soup for her based on his mysterious source of fresh meat mixed with the opium tea. Natasha revives, the baby is born, Leo takes responsibility for them both, then Natasha introduces him to a tiny cell of Christians who share the meagre resources they can put together. Leo becomes their only source of fresh meat, until the members of the Christian cell discover its source. Leo is nonplussed by their disgust at his actions; their own religion talks of turning water into wine and the wafer into the actual body of Jesus.

'Leningrad Nights' could be taken on a realistic plane, with the opium-flavoured tea as the source of all the 'magi-

cal' things that happen to Leo. But the style of the story is so lucid, and its unfolding logic so perfect, that one begins to see everything from Leo's viewpoint. He becomes more and more convinced of the extraordinariness of the world and human possibilities, even as his city is dying.

Another story that works with a similar rhythm of unfolding possibilities is 'Tendeléo's Story', by Ian McDonald (*Futures*). I haven't liked any of the other pieces of McDonald's fiction I've read, finding them arch and unnecessarily baffling. 'Tendeléo's Story', however, has a lucid style, a strong story, and an even stronger sense of committed passion.

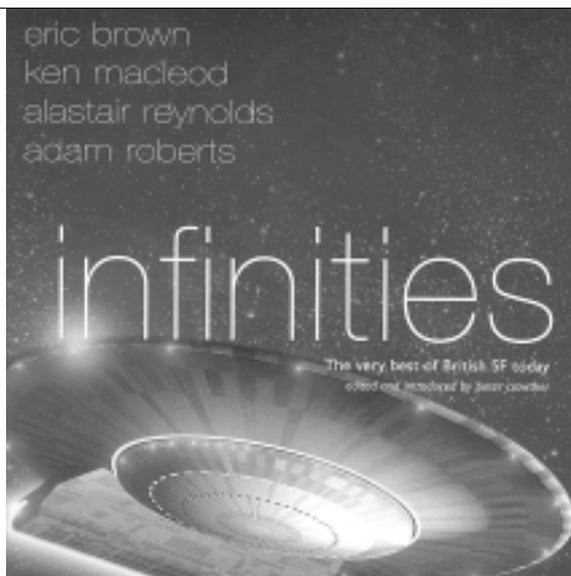
Nearly all the narrative is told in the first person by its main character, Tendeléo Bi, a girl growing up in Kenya. Most of the satisfactory stories in these volumes are written in the first person, an ideal way to write a novella. With the first-person narrator, the author can combine the intensity of using a narrow range of characters with the opportunity to concentrate on large stretches of historical or geographical background as needed. Like all good novellas, 'Tendeléo's Story' is unencumbered by many of the millstones that usually drag down the SF novel. The writer does not feel compelled to create an entire other world, but through sketches can provide a picture so complete that the reader can fill in the rest.

As with many of the other stories in these volumes, 'Tendeléo's Story' begins in a familiar world, which quickly becomes tantalisingly unfamiliar. Tendeléo is living in one of the most salubrious areas of Africa; there is plenty of food, and her home life is comfortable, being dominated by her father, pastor of the local church. She might have led a very safe and fulfilling life, if it were not for the arrival of the Chaga.

It is not clear whether or not McDonald expects the reader of this novella to have read his novel *Chaga*. All the necessary background is in the novella. Tendeléo discovers, along with the other villagers, how the Chaga will threaten her life. The Chaga are an interstellar life form. Pods of Chaga land across the southern hemisphere, and spread outwards, at 50 metres a day, in a precise circle. Inside the Chaga-contaminated circles, everything changes into areas of 'bright and silly colours'. All normal vegetation disappears, to be replaced by vast structures seemingly made of spores. These structures, it is discovered, are built of nanomachines as small as a molecules. The purpose of the Chaga is unknown.

The United Nations, believing that nothing could stay alive within the Chaga, prevents any humans from staying behind in the area being eaten up. This means that most of the people of the southern hemisphere become refugees. The story gives us an insight into how becoming a refugees destroys all the structures of a person's physical and psychological existence. This has an obvious echo in today's world, with its 20 million refugees, largely as a result of wars. Also, McDonald is no doubt trying to show us some idea of the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on Africa today. Science fiction fans will recognise a much more obvious parallel: the alternative universe in Greg Egan's latest novel, *Schild's Ladder*. As that universe spreads outward, at half the speed of light, it swallows solar system after solar system. As in 'Tendeléo's Story', people flee from the alien invader, believing that it merely destroys humanity.

McDonald takes away every one of the assumptions upon which Tendeléo has built her life. Fortunately, he makes her strong enough to ride the wave of calamities. She



and everybody from her town is forced to leave for the shanty towns of Nairobi. Before they leave, she goes to have a look at the Chaga:

I saw jumbles of reef-stuff the colour of wiring. I saw a wall of dark crimson trees rise straight for a tremendous height. The trunks were as straight and smooth as spears. The leaves joined together like umbrellas. Beyond them, I saw things like icebergs tilted at an angle, things like open hands, praying to the sky, things like oil refineries made out of fungus, things like brains and fans and domes and footballs. Things like other things. Nothing that seemed a thing in itself. And all this was reaching towards me. (*Futures*, p. 251)

She goes with her family to the shanty town outside Nairobi, but finds that the only job she can find is becoming a courier of illicit spores, smuggled out of the Chaga, which she delivers to the Americans on behalf of the local gang boss. As the Chaga edges into both sides of Nairobi, the United Nations pulls out. There is no law any more; the gangs kill each other off. A Chaga pod lands on the house of Tendeléo's family, so they are lost to her. She just manages to catch a plane out of Nairobi, ends up in England, and meets Sean, who tells part of the story.

All this seems to roll on at a ferocious pace, but that's only because McDonald leaves out everything but the essentials. His language is vibrant, and many of Tendeléo's observations of the world are sharp and funny. That's what can be done in a novella: write a very contracted, taut narrative, but still give plenty of scope for revealing the future world.

A story that works rather differently from the others in the Crowther volumes is James Lovegrove's 'How the Other Half Lives' (*Foursight*), which is more an extended parable than an SF or fantasy story. It is based on the same idea that Ursula Le Guin used in her short story 'The Ones That Walked Away from Omelas', that is, as a kind of compensation for great success or great goodness in human existence, there is an equation that demands that somewhere there must be someone locked away deep in a cellar, forever condemned to be tormented.

William Ian North has an unbelievably successful life, controlling half the world's money, and taking pleasure in every aspect of his personal existence. Once a day he goes

down into the depths of his magnificent house, enters a grubby cell, and nearly beats the life out of the totally wretched prisoner who lives there. We guess the relationship between them long before it is revealed; the interest of the story is that every second section of the story gives us the viewpoint of the prisoner. The prisoner, despite his continual suffering, never suffers from despair. His captor gives him one match a day, with which he can light one candle. In the light of the candle he sees a mouse. The prisoner offers the mouse a portion of his meagre ration of cheese. He uses the stump of the match to draw shapes on the wall. Although the prisoner cannot quite believe it, he sees that the mouse recognises the shapes he draws. A glimmer of hope occurs to the prisoner. As his plan unfolds and sees a plan of action, the life of William Ian North begins to disintegrate.

There is a lot more to the story than that, but it is all the more enjoyable for the fact that Lovegrove does not even pretend that it is a realistic story. It is a fantasy a bit less elaborate than Stephen King presents in 'Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption' or *The Green Mile*, but it would also make a good film. The story would not work as a continuous narrative told by either the captor or the prisoner, but the interweaving of the two viewpoints gives it suspense and effectiveness.

An SF short story relies upon its central idea, but except for real masterpieces, such as the original version of 'Flowers For Algernon', it cannot imply a great deal more than the central idea. An SF novel at its best is a real novel that happens to take place in the future, or perhaps an alternative present or past, filled with interesting characters, both plots and subplots, all that texture and superstructure that very few writers can manage. In a novella, the writer can keep the main theme in mind all the way through, but present a series of surprises that provide a satisfying sense of story. At its very best, a novella can, as in Alastair Reynolds' 'Diamond Dogs' (*Infinities*), bring the narrator and reader face to face with the truth that 'We can't assume anything'. Take away all certainties, and one has the ideal SF story.

A novella can go wrong, as a few do in Crowther's volumes. In Ken MacLeod's 'The Human Front' (*Infinities*), the result can be frustrating, because most of the story is excellent. MacLeod tells of an alternative world in which America began, and seemed to win, the Third World War with selective atomic bombing of targets across the world. MacLeod is the only current SF story who has enough political savvy to work out the pattern of politics that might follow from such a scenario. But then, right at the end, he waves the magic wand, draws aside the curtain — and it's only bloody aliens again! Clunk, clung, cliché science fictional element, and the intricate world-building of the first three-quarters of the story is wasted. Perhaps the novel version, if MacLeod publishes one, will be more satisfactory.

Science fiction and fantasy are now the only genres in which writers can hope to sell novellas, or even publish collections of them. Stephen King's success with the form in horror only proves the point; perhaps only Stephen King and one or two other authors outside the SF field could have a success with a collection such as *Different Seasons*. For this reason, we must all hope that the SF magazines and original fiction anthologies keep going, especially collections as refreshing and successful as Peter Crowther's.

© Bruce Gillespie, 2 October 2002