

si era como las nubes tragando
estuvieran la ciudad

[the white notebooks #3]



90th Birthday Card for Brian Aldiss



I RAN OUT OF SPACE in TWN #2 to include David A. Hardy's 90th birthday card for Brian Aldiss, commissioned by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, and I'm pleased to have room to reproduced it here, with permission. The main in-joke in the picture is the reference to Brian Aldiss's memoir Bury My Heart at W.H. Smith's. I asked Dave for some background:

For the cover of the Novacon 41 Guest of Honour 'Special' chapbook (in November 2011, obviously) I illustrated a story by GoH John Meaney, 'Study in Shadow'. (This is relevant, as you'll see...) The story is based in Birmingham, appropriately since Novacon originated with the Brum Group, and I depicted in sepia tones an old shop called 'Peyton's Emporium' - an in-joke since of course one of our most prominent members is one Rog Peyton, once owner of the famous Andromeda Bookshop. In the background behind and above this was the possibly even more famous tower of Birmingham University, with its illuminated clock, against a scene of cosmic violence and colliding galaxies.

So when the matter of a 90th birthday card from the Brum Group was broached, it was suggested that I might be able to adapt this. Which I duly did, with the result you see here. I converted it into full colour, filled the windows of what is now 'W.H. Smythe' with nearly twenty of Brian's books, and the sky with the red and blue suns of Helliconia. And so on, including the number '90' on the door.

it was as if the clouds had swallowed the city [the white notebooks #3]

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Genuine Thai Fakes: The Strange Case of Nathan Oman and *The Prince of Red Shoe*

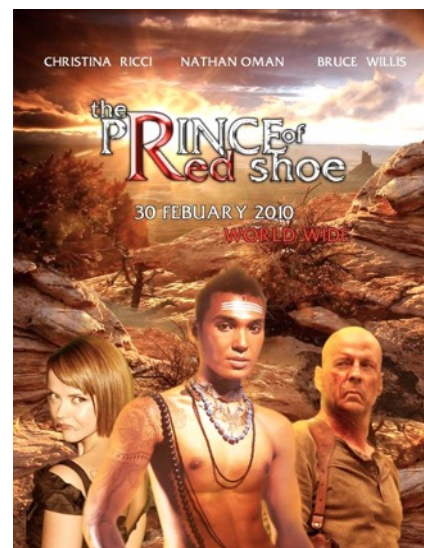
FOR THIS ISSUE'S BRUSH with Thai infamy I thought I'd do a redux and update on the story of the once-crooked Thai pop star and fantasist **Nathan Oman**, who I first discussed in a couple of Live Journal posts in late 2009.*

Here's a recap, based on those two posts. There are plenty of bad movies made every year in Thailand, many of which have even worse trailers, and a curious trailer surfaced on YouTube in mid-2009 that at first sight looked like something cobbled together for an extremely bad Thai fantasy movie called *The Prince of Red Shoe*. But there was a far deeper story behind it. The trailer was actually a cleverly mocked up piss-take of the movie's Thai supporting actor, one Nathan Oman, who in June that year went public with his account of being paid 100,000,000 baht (£1.8m / \$2.2m) to star alongside Bruce Willis and Christina Ricci in a fantasy movie based on his own life, filmed in the Arabian desert and directed by Wolfgang Petersen for 20th Century Fox.

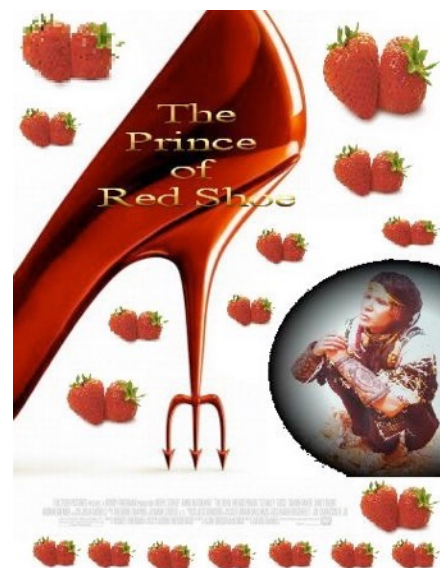
He talked extensively about the film, his interactions with his co-stars and director, and the stresses of making the film in an interview at Manager Online in 2009 [1].

Except that this film only existed as another chapter in the bizarrely fraudulent career of the deluded Nathan Oman, a once-popular Thai singer-turned-wannabe-actor who has clearly never heard of either IMDb or Walter Mitty. He claimed to be multilingual, half-Thai and half-Nepalese (even to Thais, a rather exotic mix) and in his twenties, yet it emerged that his ID card states his name as Thanyawat Yuntrakul, his parents are all-Thai and in fact he was in his thirties. He claimed to be a survivor, since disproven, of Thailand's 26th December 2004 tsunami. He intermittently released two albums of Thai pop songs, neither of which sold particularly well. Over the space of eighteen months he gradually accumulated a long list of fraud allegations against him, including borrowing a large amount of cash given as charitable donations to a severely disabled and nationally-known woman who later died, and not returning the money. He was never in Hollywood or the Arabian desert, though on his Hi5.com profile (since deleted) he posted photos from the Burning Man festival, claiming they were from the film shoot. In fact, he was working in disguise as a waiter in a backstreet Bangkok café all the time.

As for *The Prince of Red Shoe*, no such film ever existed on IMDb, even in pre-production, and 20th Century Fox claimed never to have heard of him or the film, and yet he was interviewed several times on national TV about the project. But here's the film poster anyway:



Actually, that's obviously a fake, given that the film's date is "30 February 2010" [sic]. Okay, here's another:



* Most links to news articles from my LJ posts are now dead links, which accounts for few reference URLs appearing here.

...except that's obviously a fake too, based on real publicity for *The Devil Wears Prada*. The strawberries are not there for decoration but to send the message that the poster's creator thinks Nathan is lying: 'strawberry' in Thai, when borrowing the English word, means 'to lie'. There were several other imaginative posters doing the rounds, all pointing out Nathan Oman's ever-dwindling integrity.

All this soon developed into an ongoing national story that resurfaced occasionally with new instalments and revelations about Nathan Oman's dealings. Well, it turned out everyone was wrong about precisely half of his story of making the film in the Middle East: near the end of November 2009 it emerged that he did in fact take a photographer to Oman (where else but?) for a week in July with Nathan's own partner-in-crime foster mother, to shoot some publicity photos of him sitting on a camel, or decked out in traditional Arab gear, or posing moodily alongside some ancient stuccoed buildings. After a couple of days of this the photographer got a bit fed up and began to wonder something along the lines of, "Er, Nathan, where's that nice Mr. Willis and his film crew?" "Oh, they'll be here next month." And right there, any actual work on this non-existent fantasy movie ended and the photographer wisely quit for home.

Nathan Oman was clearly a man of many facets. He also fancied himself as a kind of dodgy tour operator and job finder, arranging for assorted people trips to Nepal that never materialised (he'd pocketed the money, of course). It also emerged that he'd been knocking up a variety of fake rubber stamps to add a necessary layer of conviction to his lies. Someone else who foolishly lent money to him came forward with a collection of them, with logos for the Tourism Authority of Thailand, its equivalent in Nepal, a Bangkok hotel, and even the Hollywood studio 20th Century Fox. This is the kind of thing you can get very easily at any forgery shop along Bangkok's Khao San Road. Meanwhile, more fraud claims emerged from distant relatives in Sydney; also, after previously backing him his manager inevitably gave him the push after some "It's me or him" pressure from another star he managed, someone else who was also duped by Oman and had even offered to clear his debts before the dreaded truth dawned on him.

At the beginning of December 2009, Nathan Oman disappeared. Not as an official missing person, he just dropped out of sight. Then a short time later, it was a bust. Police with an arrest warrant found him hiding out in a tamarind plantation in the province of Loei in Thailand's north east, even though he had claimed to the complainant for the warrant, his former housekeeper, that he was staying in the deep south. All the police had

to do was check some phone records. He tried to run, he asked the police not to handcuff him, they did anyway. Then his crooked foster mother (who very likely created the fake 20th Century Fox contract that Nathan had waved in front of the TV cameras) turned up yet again, this time with a land title deed for use as surety on a 100,000 baht bail. No doubt the police checked its authenticity, and they eventually agreed bail but considered him a 'flight risk' before he would inevitably get his day in court.

Also, after hearing about Nathan's arrest, a nun from a temple in Surat Thani called the police to congratulate them. She said Nathan had called her offering to make merit at her temple but could he borrow 80,000 baht first?

Now for the update.

He was convicted, ultimately, of swindling more than 700,000 baht from a dessert-seller in Loei's Chiang Khan district, someone who continued to struggle to pay off debts incurred on Nathan Oman's behalf. He served eight months in Loei Prison.

One of the first bits of news to appear after he was released was his emotional reunion with his ex-manager [2]. Oman lip-synched (badly) the Lady Gaga song 'Telephone' at his ex-manager's birthday party in Bangkok, wearing a glittering outfit reminiscent of Michael Jackson. Oman had used the lyrics of 'Telephone' for inspiration before, having created a few hundred t-shirts that told the wearers they should go to hell. They did not sell well.

His next career move was as an author of two projected books: his first advised readers on how to spot a liar "based on the devices I once employed", and his second was to be an autobiography – he assured his publisher it was to be an honest one. He has also since worked as a prison lecturer, touring some of the nation's jails to talk about his experiences. His ex-manager also saw mileage in the idea of a film about Oman's life as a conman, one in which Oman would not star as himself. "I can help him choose actors who can portray me most convincingly as a rogue," Oman joked. There's still no sign of that film being made, either.

And there the scandal dries up and the shenanigans appear to end. He's been actively avoiding controversy: after release from prison he said he wanted to be liked again, although he now has a Thai Wikipedia page [3] that is comprehensive about many of the allegations against him. He seems to have been active on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook between 2010 and June 2013, and his Facebook fan page [4] identifies him as "Writer". As of December 2015, 434 people still like him enough to have 'Liked' him there.

[1] English transcript at <https://dirtlaundry.wordpress.com/2009/07/17/nathan-oman-my-life-as-a-nobody-in-hollywood>

[2] <http://www.bangkokpost.com/lite/news/281572/favicon.ico>

[3] http://th.wikipedia.org/wiki/นาธาน_โอ้ร์มาน

[4] <https://www.facebook.com/nathantwitter>

Markers

lightly edited



If you are reading this in the PDF edition and would prefer to receive the paper edition, drop me a line at peteyoung.uk@gmail.com and I will add you to the mailing list.

WAHF...

John Bray, Chuck Connor, Arnie Katz, Dave Langford, Guy Lillian III (thanks for the review in *The Zine Dump* #35), **Joseph Nicholas, Dale Speirs** and **Taral Wayne**.

JERRY KAUFMAN, Seattle, WA; 11 July 2015

[Jerry sent this as a reply to issue #1, however; after it didn't appear in #2 he later discovered it had been addressed incorrectly, and re-sent it along with his LoC for #2, further down these pages.]

Thanks for mailing us your new small fanzine with its even smaller companion hitching a ride. (I recall that there's a bit of doggerel about big fleas having smaller fleas to bite 'em.) We appreciate being among the limited number to get this honor.

I like that you will have different titles each issue, although still having an overall underlying title. I remember that others have done something similar. Fred Haskell used to change the title of his apazines for each issue (I think it was for Minneapa), but then in parentheses stating "Formerly..." and listing every previous title he'd used. If memory serves, they were listed in reverse order of appearance. Eventually, of course, this took up the entire first page of each issue.

Sometimes I don't vote in the FAAN Awards because I don't read much of what appears in eFanzines and not my own mailbox. I also feel like I don't really remember much of what I have read during the previous year. Then there's my feeling that I can't rank what I did remember and like, knowing how the positions in ranking are weighted. The differences in my preferences are so slim that I feel I'm being unfair to the third place selection compared to the first place.

Your search for genre and Tony Bitch was mildly interesting but doesn't move me to want to find his books. Good thing, if they're so hard to find. But "A Word on a Map" intrigued me more. Were I ever in New Zealand, I would want to find the Hermitage. Too bad for me that it's very unlikely I'll ever be there. However, if you have not sent a copy of this to Andy Hooper and Carrie Root, I'll be sure to lend them our copy. Carrie's brother lives and works there, and she has traveled there to visit. I think she's likely to do so again.

Jim Godbolt sounds like a writer I'd enjoy, and I have some interest in jazz, so I might find his work enlightening as well as randomly entertaining. I consider Calvin Trillin as a sort of fanwriter — he is a fan of food, as well as a long-time writer for the *New Yorker*. His food writing was collected in three books collectively known as the Tummy Trilogy — *Alice, Let's Eat* is one of them.

He's also written political doggerel, satirical novels, true crime, and memoirs.

I liked your summation of the Acronym Wars. But I don't feel like adding my two cents' worth. (I wonder just when this phrase came to be, and what it would be worth in 2015 pennies.)

Then there's *TLS*, the rider. I found your summaries of these books interesting enough that I might have to carry the zine with me when I next visit a used bookstore. I liked the cover of *Sightseeing* the best, and short stories sound like a good way to meet the people of Bangkok or the beach. Furthermore, it's from a publisher that is based in the US (I think — I see the cover price is in pounds) so I'm more likely to run across a copy.

~ There is a US edition which came out first, but the cover is a rather generic shot of a tourist reading a map in front of a Thai temple. The cute pig on the UK cover does feature in a story. ~

I'm one of the Seattle fans working on the Sasquan Lost World Fanzine Lounge, and I'm assembling a display of current fanzines for browsing. I'll be sure to include *The White Notebooks* as well as *Journey Planet* and *Big Sky*.

CHUCK CONNOR, Stevenage, England; 6 August 2015

Found *White Notebooks* #1 up on Bill's eFanzines, and read it with some amusement. If I were truly Faaaaaanish then I'd've* read it with several pints of Henry McNasty's Old Rivet Banger (the Trufan's go-to pre-loader prior to any activity. (*Is this a word? Can I claim it as one? Does that make me like Bill Gates and Windows? And when did heroin cease to be a trademark of Friedrich Bayer & Co.? China White or China Miéville?)

As you said you like to receive paper fanzines, here's some of mine and one of Rodney's. As you'll read in *EAYOR* #1, I'm one of the old Gestetner zinesters (thank you *Broken Pencil Magazine*) — which is probably why *EAYOR* has little or none of the admirable production quality of your *Big Sky* — which brought back memories of older Small Press and semi-Pro projects of old.

In regard to paper copies in return? Probably best to send me stuff via email — that way I can print things out and mail them to Rodney — who's living the Canadian Dream, that of a Grizzly Adams lifestyle.

Electronic copies of my productions will eventually appear on Bill's eFanzines — however, having had a better response by direct emailing and postal mailing, I'm now of the opinion that Bill's website would

best be used as an archive rather than a point of distribution (mainly due to the passive nature of the grazers who frequent it, and have little or no intention of responding.)

~Thanks for the paper copies, Chuck. I discovered your LoC and fanzines had arrived during one of my month-long absences from home, and also after I had finalised the LoC column for #2. Have dispatched paper copies to your good self and Rodney, which I trust you have received by now. In Rodney's case I know how it feels to be separated by great distances from like minds, so I'm more than happy to mail him paper copies directly. I can often do this when I periodically visit the UK and North America, so the cost is not nearly as prohibitive as mailing everything from home.

I also like that your LoC was printed on the back of a Stevenage Borough Council car park notice I had to read it through as well, just in case there was obscure fannish humour contained therein... ~

DAVID A. HARDY, Birmingham, England; 14 Sept. 2015
Thanks for the copy of your 'zine that arrived today (again with a UK stamp ;-)) It really is multinational, or multicultural, or multi something, isn't it?!

Re. your question about shower curtains: I can't speak from personal experience because we have a glass screen, but, at the risk of being simplistic (or maybe just simple), I'd think that the flow of water would create a downflow of air, maybe even a partial vacuum, so that air tries to get in from outside, making the curtain drift inwards ?

~ That's the premise of all the scientific enquiries and theorising, the consistent problem has been to prove it! ~

DAVID REDD, Haverfordwest, Wales; 15 Sept. 2015
[via postcard from Aberystwyth:] Many thanks for *TWN* #2. Fascinated by your "Genuine Thai" Prof. article, perhaps more so than with the real writers. But how sad that Acres of Books (and others) are no longer in a time or place I can visit. The price of progress?

STEVE JEFFERY, Kidlington, England; 16 Sept. 2015
Highly amused at the list of claimed, pretended and honorary degrees and appointments held by GTF author and self-styled "Prince of Sci-Fi" Prof. Dr. Verawat Kanoknukroh. Where, in between receiving all awards, does he get the time to write?

Way back in time, during a weekend in Philadelphia, I chanced on an article in a free paper that listed the best coffee shops in the city and decided to try and visit as many as I could. I wish now I had kept a list or jotted a quick review of each (if I did at the time, it's now lost). I don't think I managed them all, or probably even half of them, before caffeine overload kicked in, but I do remember one in particular which served the biggest muffins I had ever seen and which must have been around four inches in diameter, and that one went straight up to the top of the list. As expected, the smaller, independent shops fared much better than the big chains. It was also, I think, the first time I discovered that

coffee could come in other flavours than just coffee, and there was a creamy hazelnut flavoured one I became very partial to. (You could also buy your own blend at at least one of the shops.)

But the place where I really thought I'd gone to heaven and died was a little two or three storey café in Dublin which was crammed with secondhand books. I decided I wanted to live there, at least until I'd read all the books.

Murray, in his Operacon report, lists Milwaukee's delights as including:

"cheese, fish fry, cheese, bratwurst, cheese, summer sausage, cheese, beer, cheese, German fare, cheese, brandy old fashioned, cheese, frozen custard, cheese, cheese curds and more cheese. What's not to like?"

Cheese? To be honest, I have mixed feeling about American cheese. I'm sure some of it is really good, but I find it hard to trust the judgement of a nation that reckons squeezable cheese in a tube is a good idea.

Like Lloyd Penney I used to keep occasional private notebooks, a couple of which I rediscovered recently in a clear out. These were red A4 notepads, rather than white. Reading them was a bit like being a guest on Rufus Hound's *My Teenage Diaries*. I also started a LJ account but mainly to keep track of what other fans were writing. I've started to explore the blog thing a bit more (I'm always a very late adopter) but finding myself completely confused, and indeed irritated, by the way in which Google+ tries to connect everything to everything else when I want to retain control over where I post and who can see it. I'm beginning to think I should have gone for Wordpress.

Steve Sneyd mentions K.V. Bailey. I'll have to look on ISFDB, and look in my files. As well as several publications from Steve's own Hilltop Press, KVB was also a member of the *Acnestis* apa and contributed various articles to our *Inception* fanzine.

Talking of apas, you comment at the end of Joseph's letter that you think *The Women's Periodical* is the only current apa that British fans have any connection with. Not so. The *Prophecy* apa is still going on an alternate monthly schedule and is currently up to mailing 157 (or will be by the time you read this). This was modelled on the late *Acnestis* apa which died in around 2005 (as reported by Dave Langford in *Cloud Chamber #156*) as a paper-based apa primarily for people interested in fantasy literature, but as with sf fanzines tends to honour that by-line more in the breach than the observance. It's currently looking for members and also has a fledgling on-line (invitation only) incarnation at www.prophecyapa.blogspot.com.

I'd always thought the shower curtain effect was due to differential air pressure between hot and cold on either side of the curtain, but obviously it sounds more complicated than that. Perhaps the easier answer is to replace the curtain with something stiffer, like a frosted glass panel. Doesn't answer the question, but does get round having a cold plastic curtain trying to wrap itself around you while you're showering.

STEVE SNEYD, Huddersfield, England; 17 Sept. 2015
LoC a là WAHFish (& recycling an envelope with one of my many surname variants, the euphonic 'Snedyd').

Extremely rare I go into a café these days, and certainly not one of the tax-avoiding overpriced chains. There used to be pleasantly low-key buffets on rail stations, but they're just about all expensive branded outlets now, too. In Huddersfield the open air café at the open market's gone, though the indoor market still has one, and a great survivor is the last of the Merry England ones here, brown and cosy. Your piece, though, did set off a lot of memories of back when jurassics still roamed the Earth, and pubs opened only briefly, with a gap of being shut in the afternoon, and a retreat to a café to make one or two coffees stretch 'til the licensed premises' doors reopened was the strategy of choice. So back came names of long-vanished Huddersfield ones like the Alassio and the Santa Maria – oddly, proprietors who seemed mostly Cypriots went in for Italian names for 'em. So my thanks for indirectly opening a window on long-gone days.

Rick Deckard – your unicorn mini-tale is yet more evidence of how PKD, like HPL, has become a universal cultural referent for outside SF.

Like you say, secondhand bookstores moving to selling on the Net is the preferred route for their proprietors to survive. Clearly the odd famous bookstores still thrive, though, mainly on media hype/history, like City Lights in San Francisco and Shakespeare and Co. in Paris, from what I've read.

I managed to find a remaining spare copy of K.V. Bailey's *The Sky Giants*, sent to you as a complimentary copy, hope you enjoy. Bibliographic information re. his poetry collections appears on the 4th page of my Foreword, and I hope this gives sufficient information for the ISFDB.

Sad news that Ray Bradbury's home was destroyed. Of course, the USA isn't unique in past-vandalising, eg. I heard on Radio Humberside today, Hull Council are thinking of reburying the foundations of Beverley Gate of the old brick City Wall, where the English Civil War began with refusing King Charles I's troops admission. The foundations are currently visible at the bottom of a large well-like opening, but the idea is that filling that in will ease the traffic flow! All this before Hull becomes the UK City of Culture, to add to the vandalistic element. "So it goes."

Will add 'paralipomena' to a list of words I shall be looking up.

PS. Would George Wald's quote on "matter reaching the point of beginning to know itself" be a useful epigraph for a book on AI?

ANDY SAWYER, Chester, England; 19 Sept. 2015
Thanks for *fraught, with occasional peril...* just a quick acknowledgement and not, I'm afraid, as it's coming towards the end of an afternoon at the keyboard (I'm not actually in work today despite this coming from my work email – I have, though, been playing around with the specifications for a short course I'm hopefully running). But it was a little melancholy to see the letter from Ned

Brooks kicking off your lettercol – so sad to see him go. He was a mainstay of the Fictionmags e-list, which is where I knew him best.

I have, I think, been in Acres of Books in Long Beach. At least, I've been to Long Beach and I remember someone taking me to a bookshop which was full of good things, but I was in that kind of awkward situation where I could buy books and I could eat, but not both, so I bought *some* books and pretended I was on a diet... NOT Clute's *The Disinheriting Party*, though, which I did find some years later at Hay-on-Wye, though foolishly I only bought one of the six copies that they had... I didn't know at the time how rare it was. Could have paid for the holiday (eventually) if I'd bought them all.

Your piece on 'Verawat Kanoknukroh' was interesting and amusing (and I don't think harsh): but I never fail to be amused at what turns up on the internet. I wonder if anyone actually believes in him? Good for him, in a way – he seems harmless.

I loved the street signs – there are actual street signs/billboards near the airport in Lima, Peru which basically exhort people not to mug tourists because so much of the country's income comes from tourism, and I thought of that when I saw the picture of the 'The Rich' direction. I'm not sure whether the signs are meant to *reassure* the tourists (if I remember they were in Spanish, so possibly meant locally, though Peru does get a lot of tourists from elsewhere in Latin America). Certainly I suppose it would put you off...

~ I've seen two other signs of interest outside airports: Buenos Aires's International Airport still has a sign declaring the Malvinas belong to Argentina, and Larnaca Airport in Cyprus has/had a sign urging visitors to "Never forget the Turkish invasion!" No idea if it's still there. ~

... but still, though I know there are big crime problems in Peru (another indication was the way buses would be driven into the bus station and gates locked behind them), and what was impressive was that the authorities were clearly thinking about dealing with them. (We found everything was pretty efficient and people looked out for you.)

~ My experiences of Peru were somewhat different. Quite apart from the personal circumstances which took me to Peru a few times in the late 1990s, my abiding memories of the place are dominated by the sheer hair-raising danger of driving in Lima. Rarely have I felt so unsafe behind the wheel of a perfectly good car. ~

Interesting *Thai Literary Supplement* too! I know nothing about Thai fiction apart from Somtow Sucharitkul and *She Who Will Not Be Named*, and it was fascinating to get a sense of the literature through those brief reviews. I assume these would be local small-presses aiming at an international/English-speaking expat market?

~ Publishers here come and go, and prominent among them has been Asia Books, mostly as a successful chain of bookstores although I believe their publishing wing wound up a few years ago. The quality of books produced

in Thailand is actually very good, mostly well designed and generally cheaper than the UK and US. ~

JASON BURNETT, Minneapolis, MN, 19 Sept. 2015

My perfect cafe was Kaldi's in New Orleans (www.grahamscambler.com/kaldis-and-new-orleans). Sadly, it's no longer there. One of my favorite things about Kaldi's was to sit at one of the bars around the outside edge of the room, from where you could talk to people passing by on the street through the open windows. Cafes are very much tied in to walking culture in my mind, which is why we have so few of them in America – outside of New York City, there are very few places where we don't live in our cars.

Also enjoyed the article on Acres of Books. From what I've seen, secondhand bookstores are surviving, but in the process they're being literally transformed beyond all recognition. The present-day analogue of the used bookstores of yore is the Amazon reseller. No need to maintain an (expensive) attractive storefront. You just rent some warehouse space, list your books on Amazon, and maximize the efficiency of your operation so that you can sell books for a penny a piece and turn a profit based on the difference between the Amazon shipping allowance and your actual shipping costs. It lacks the romance of a used bookstore, but it optimizes the process of getting used books into the hands of readers.

If I could entice you to engage in speculation for a moment: why do you think Prof. Dr. Kanoknukroh has carried out this elaborate campaign? ~ **He's a delusional individual. Planet Verawat.** ~ What is he gaining here? ~ **Evidently, nothing!** ~ Is it all about the egoboo? Or is there some other endgame I'm failing to see? ~ **If there's any endgame at all, it's that he visualised/dreamed/fantasised the end result before writing any stories. Ambitious foresight, hopeless execution.** ~

Re. your comment to Joseph Nicholas re. British APAs: I know of at least one other: *APA-247*, a comics APA centered primarily in Legion of Super-Heroes fandom. (Legion of Super-Heroes has a fandom devoted enough to support three paper APAs, and DC cancelled the title anyway.)

JIM LINWOOD, Isleworth, England; 22 Sept. 2015

The disappearance of second-hand bookshops is a local phenomenon here too. Over the last decade two bookshops have vanished from Twickenham including this one which local gossip claimed was owned by a former deputy prime minister:



Over the river in Richmond, two more have gone including one in which the owner entered into a discussion over the book(s) the customer was buying. Most used books now seem to end up in charity shops like the Oxfam Bookshop in Kingston which usually has a large number of SF books. In Chiswick there is a remained bookshop which is well stocked with Gollancz SF books – possibly because Malcolm Edwards lives nearby? However, the wonderful bouquinistes on the south bank, like those on the Paris left bank, still survive.

~ **Hua Hin in Thailand has several used bookstores, none especially outstanding and mostly rather disorganised. Meanwhile back in Reading, England, the Oxfam Bookshop is kept well-stocked with SF with seemingly regular donations from Messrs. Langford and Stableford – they've even had a few Brian Stableford special events which featured large amounts of books he had offloaded from his vast library, and donated to raise money for Oxfam. Good on yer, Brian.** ~

FRED LERNER, White River Junction, VT; 1 Oct. 2015

[#2:] A most interesting issue! It brought back memories of some of my favorite cafés. On a raw and rainy day about forty years ago a friend and I were driving through the Hudson Valley. We stopped in the historic city of Kingston in search of a warm place to get in out of the weather and have a snack. Upstairs from a combined grocery and butcher shop we discovered a dimly-lit room with wooden tables and an extensive menu of coffee and pastries. I asked about the lively music playing in the background, and was informed that I was listening to Mozart divertimenti – an artform then new to me, but which has over the decades become one of my favorite forms of classical music. When I mentioned my experience to Jack Gaughan, who was then living in or near Kingston, he recognised the place immediately from my description, and gave me its name. A quick Google search suggests that Schneller's is still in business, and should my travels take me near Kingston again – and I'm long overdue for another wander through the Hudson Valley – I shall be sure to stop in for more coffee, cake, and Mozart.

About an hour's drive to the northwest, if memory serves me right after all these years, is a place called Big Indian, now the site of an ashram called Rudi's Big Indian Center. I don't see any evidence online that Rudi's Big Indian Country Kitchen still exists – a pity, for it is there that I had the only ninety-mile cheesecake I've ever encountered. I rate cheesecake by how far I'd be willing to drive for a piece. It's a good ninety miles from Teaneck, NJ (where I lived forty years ago) to the Catskill foothills – a very good ninety miles, if there was a slice of Rudi's Russian icebox cheesecake at the end of it.

When I moved to Montpelier, Vermont, in the mid-1970s my friends wondered how I would adjust to the place. "How many people are there up there?" one of them asked me. "About 450,000", I replied. "Don't you think that's too small a town for you?" she responded. "No", I said, "That's the entire state." Vermont is America's second-smallest state in terms of population, and Montpelier with its 8,000 or so people is the smallest

state capital. But it was big enough to support the Horn of the Moon Café, a vegetarian restaurant that in mid-afternoon was a splendid place to have a cup of good coffee, leaf through magazines like *The Christian Century* and *The Nation*, and watch the passing scene on Langdon Street through its plate-glass windows.

Now that I live in White River Junction I can visit the cafés of Hanover, but I seldom do so, for we've got a perfectly good one right here. I can walk to the Tuckerbox in ten or fifteen minutes and enjoy a cup of coffee and a piece of baklava — and if I stick around until evening the place becomes a Turkish restaurant serving food that holds up well against my memories of meals in Istanbul and Ankara. If the Tuckerbox is too crowded with aspiring graphic novelists — the Center for Cartoon Studies is just down the street — the Boho Café a few doors down will serve quite nicely.

So in my experience the perfect café can take many forms — but the most important aspect of the perfect café is its location. The two within walking distance might not offer Mozart or magazines (though if I imitate the rest of their patrons and bring my iPad along I'll have both at my fingertips) but they do offer that combination of coffee and ambiance that make seeking refreshment away from home a pleasure rather than a nuisance.

On another topic: in your response to Joseph Nicholas you wrote that “The Women’s Periodical is the only current apa that British fans (that we know of) have any connection with”. There are three British members (Sandra Bond, Steve Green, and Keith Walker) of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, the oldest of the SF-related apas, which is still distributing its quarterly mailings as it has been since 1937. Anyone interested in learning more about the FAPA can write to Robert Lichtman at robertlichtman@yahoo.com.

ALAN WHITE, Las Vegas, NV; 3 October 2015

Very nice reading the bit about Acres of Books.

Born in Long Beach, I frequented the place regularly in the '60s and indeed it was huge. Not from the front, but in depth like entering a great cavern and the further you went, the more interesting and claustrophobic it became.

The air was thick with Sensawonder. Way, way in the back the only light came from a skylight and was inhabited by a flock of pigeons that flitted about the store. This is where I bought my first hardcovers — a lot of original Burroughs; \$3.50 each, if I remember. A truly marvellous place.

Then, things shifted a bit when Richard Kyle opened Wonderworld, nearby.

JERRY KAUFMAN, Seattle, WA; 4 October 2015

Seattle's the home of Starbucks, but I used to prefer a different chain, Tully's, that seemed cozier. They're gone now, and I don't have a favorite currently. But if you ever make it here, I'll take you to the Allegro in the U-District (University of Washington). The entrance is in an alley, around the corner from Seattle's best used book store, the Magus. The shop is in a string of rooms running

along the alley, and is much beloved of writers, artists, poets, composers, and technical writers from Boeing (well, at least one I know of).

As for bookstores, well, we still have a few used books at the Magus, as I mentioned above, and a block away there's the University Bookstore — of course, it has textbooks and supplies for students and school memorabilia, but it's also a massive general book store. (Nothing in Seattle outdoes Powell's in Portland, Oregon, which takes up a city block.) But only fifteen years ago or a little more, I was able to write a bookstore guide for a convention in the U-District that included at least fifteen shops (symmetry) plus half-a-dozen music stores.

I printed out *Big Sky* #4 to bring to Sasquan for the Fanzine Library. I didn't have a stapler that could handle it, so I used a big bulldog clip. It was admired but I'm not sure if anyone read it — except me, of course, after returning home. I was most impressed by Abigail Nussbaum on *Arslan*, a book I put down after a couple of chapters. I think she helped me see why I didn't like it.

I will have to read #3 at some point, but I won't be printing it out!

TOM BECKER, Mountain View, CA; 18 October 2015

Describe your perfect café.

That would have to be the Brick Hut. It started in a small brick building on the south-east corner of Ashby Ave. and Adeline St. in Berkeley. There was counter seating and a few small tables. On weekends if the weather was good crowds would sit at picnic tables in the back yard. It was run by a collective of lesbians. They took great joy in running their own business, welcoming the community, and serving the best diner food ever. Their home fries were small potatoes cooked with the skins on, then chopped up and grilled with peppers and onions until they were all charred and caramelized. Simple and perfect. What Chez Panisse did with French cuisine, they did with eggs and bacon and home fries.

One time in 1980 or 1981, after a long night working in San Francisco, I came back to Berkeley early in the morning and got to the Brick Hut when it opened. After a breakfast and a few cups of their strong coffee, I stepped out onto the sidewalk. The sun was up, and in the morning light the world looked fresh and new. I felt a powerful sense of well-being. All was right with the world.

The Brick Hut restaurant moved to a storefront a few blocks south on Adeline. It gave them more room. (Anything would have more room than the original brick hut.) They were there for many years. I moved around the Bay Area but came back to Berkeley often and always ate at the Brick Hut. It was not far from Debbie Notkin's hospitable home and Doug Faunt's house, so it was very common that I would run into fans from far away who happened to be in the area.

The third and final incarnation of the Brick Hut was in a beautiful refurbished space on San Pablo Ave., with a high ceiling and brick walls. Unfortunately, it took them much longer than expected to get the permits and get the new place ready so they could move in. It put them into a financial hole that they were never able to

get out of. They closed after (I think) about a year and a half on San Pablo.

There are some wonderful cafés in the Bay Area, but since the Brick Hut closed there's nothing to equal it. *Which cafés have come close to your ideal?*

The original Caffè Trieste in North Beach is a sacred shrine to the Beats and it has very good espresso. The Italian pastries are pretty good too. It's not a very comfortable place: It is hard to get a table and I find it hard to relax there. But it's worth a visit just to experience the vibe.

For a while there was a Caffè Trieste in downtown San José. I would drop in whenever I happened to be downtown, which usually meant I was there for a science fiction convention. It was a very interesting place. Once I went there on Halloween and there was a huge crowd of people there in costumes doing a poetry slam. Another time around the fourth of July there were some cute young people standing just inside the big plate-glass window, less than fully dressed, applying body paint to each other. It's now Cafe Frascati. The menu is still the same and the coffee is still good, but I haven't been there enough recently to say it still is as lively, culturally.

My favorite place in North Beach is nearby. Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store Cafe is in an old and acutely triangular building on the corner of Columbus and Union, across the street from Washington Square Park. The space is mostly taken up by the bar, with a few tables squeezed in by the windows. They serve a lot of coffee, and the espresso is excellent. It's also a good place to get a glass of wine, or a hot sandwich if you are hungry. It's the sort of place where you can go with a group of people and there is something for everyone. And although it's tiny, it's comfortable, a good place to hang out and relax.

I've been to the original Peet's in Walnut Square. It's hallowed grounds in its own way, and it's a nice place with lots of outdoor seating. But I don't feel a strong bond to it. When I was living in Berkeley I was on the south side, and it was a rather long trek to get to the north side, and I would have to pass many other good coffee places on the way. Nowadays they've expanded a lot, and there are several Peet's stores in my area. They are not as omnipresent as Starbucks, but that's okay. The main thing is I like their coffee. Most of their roasts are very dark and rich as they should be. Also, they have limited special coffees that are sometimes amazing. If you ever see their "Ethiopian Supernatural" beans, don't stop to think, just buy them.

The single best cup of coffee that I've ever had was at an Indonesian restaurant in Melbourne, in 1999. We were having lunch and I noticed that Indonesian coffee was on the menu. The owner asked me if I was really sure I wanted to get it. Maybe he had some customers who were expecting a flat white. Anyway, I said "yes, Indonesian coffee" and my cup came after the meal. It was very strong, rich, and full of flavor. I think it was brewed, not made on an espresso machine like most Australian coffee, but I'm just guessing. I don't think the place is there anymore, at least I didn't see it when I

came back in 2010. But I think there must always be a place like it somewhere.

JAMES BACON, Iver, England; 27 October 2015

Many thanks indeed — two fanzines, and so beautifully crafted, they were a joy to read. Your articles are perfect lengths, easy on the eye and captivating for the mind.

I know the blue notebooks you had. I have a couple, although they may be red, in a box, in a container, in a wood, in Staffordshire. Lists of comic wants, something I've done since I first walked into my fandom gateway, a comic bookshop, and learned that back issues were a thing. My list still exists, though unrecognisable in form and of comics that I would not have known nor cared for twenty-five years ago.

I loved your trek to the Hermitage. Reminded me of my own trek to the fictitious Twin Peaks, or rather Snoqualmie and North Bend, near Seattle. I do like to occasionally head off to do something on my own, and usually it involves trains or books, or military history.

You will appreciate that I've been up close and personal with the Hugos this year, so sure that *Journey Planet* would be No Awarded, so disappointed that *The Drink Tank*, *Big Sky*, *Banana Wings* and others had missed the cut. My emotions on the matter were all over the place. You'll understand I love the Hugo Awards, so being a nominee again this year was emotional; indeed, those emotions exploded somewhat on-stage for me, and off-stage they surfaced hard, as friends congratulated me and those standing in the wings — Vince Docherty watching on, his dinner suit and formal stance hiding the work he and others had done to ensure the night went well. He was next to the stairs on the way up to ensure we made our footing, or a last stop line backer to prevent any stage infractions. The stress, workload and pressures were apparent as bits of fandom and individuals suffered collateral emotional damage.

Some disingenuously dismiss the Hugos, but you and I, Pete, we care, like the thousands, millions of words written about them — is that irrelevancy? 1,918: that's a lot of fans to vote for a halfway house, mostly-PDF-sometimes-paper fanzine.

It was unreal. Even now, my feelings distort my writing like a doctor's prescription. Anyhow, lets hope the extremists fuck off and the fans come together and just *vote*, nominate and discuss the works they love.

I recommend the coffee shop in Powell's in Portland. It is very lovely, as is Powell's, although the Brewery bar with a doorway into a comic shop the size of a small Tesco's in Spokane was so exciting I think I leaked. After LACon in 2006 I stopped briefly at Acres of Books in Long Beach. Found me some James White, but you know, everywhere struggles to be as good as the old Fantasy Centre in Holloway Road. I miss that place.

Right, off to drive trains, do Worldcon stuff and, as ever, fanzines. I hope your *White Notebooks* continue.

LLOYD PENNEY, Etobicoke ON; 30 October 2015

One of the best local cafés in my area is The Yellow Cup Café in the East Mall and Dundas St. W. area of Etobicoke. There are a myriad of yellow coffee cups,

coffee pots, teacups, etc., everywhere, the place is usually jam-packed with people. The food is very good and plentiful, and the coffee is fantastic. I went looking for The Plantation on King George St., and the only King George St. I could find is north of Eglinton Ave. I can't find any café named The Plantation, although I did find The Plantation Tea and Coffee Co., a distribution business in Scarborough.

~ It looks like I've sent you on a wild goose chase, Lloyd ... Did I really say King George Street? **goes to check** Yes, I did, and my apologies: I meant King Street E.! ~

Toronto is very lucky in that its SF bookstore, Bakka-Phoenix, is still a going and growing concern. Yet, books seem like an awkward addition to homes now. Some even say that a paper book is a huge waste of resources, and books can now be put online ... I used to know all the used bookstores in Toronto, but their numbers are literally decimated. Perhaps my years are showing, but I still find a comfort in a wall of books or a small library. I know we must weed our collection, but it's not easy to even contemplate.

Creating music is one thing, but to be known for that is another. I knew the name Jay Chattaway because of the incidental music created for shows like *ST:TVG*. Another fine composer was James Horner, and you know you like someone's music when their passing causes you and many others great sadness. The exposure through movies and television seems to be what's needed by composers and musicians these days, seeing that there's few places to visually pick out music to buy.

The passing of Ned Brooks shocked me, as I know it shocked others. My question still is what happens to that amazing collection he put together? Could a university take it on as a whole, or would it be broken up into more manageable pieces?

My LiveJournal account is still updated every time I write a loc, and over the years, a few editors, when they lost my loc, would go to that LJ to find a copy for themselves. Still, I've had to endure multiple shitstorms from some people who feel I am doing every editor wrong by publishing them on my LJ before they can publish them in their zines. It's great to still be getting such a good list of zines, but I have noticed through my own slowly slumping productivity of letters that the numbers of zines is also slowly slumping. It could also be that I am no longer chasing every zine out there, which eases up on the pressure to produce, and allows me a little more time for newer interests.

BRAD W. FOSTER, Irving TX; 2 November 2015

Picked up your print copy about two weeks ago at the postal offices, but extra busy here, including fighting the latest rounds of rain water trying to get into our house, so have been a bit distracted.

Responding to the question in your second piece about used book stores dying off: I'm lucky here in Dallas that we have a number of small such stores, plus a monster chain called Half Price Books that still has that wonderful vibe of an independent used store, even though there are now dozens of them. We're working to

thin out the book collection here (part of the problem with rain coming in is that we have crushed our house foundation down in areas from the sheer weight of bookshelves and such, no lie!), so once every month or so I take in a box of books to them, they give me some store credit, which I immediately spend on more books – but, and this is the point, it is a few less than what I walked in with, so I *am* slowly getting the weights cut down.

Loved the article on Prof. Dr. Verawat Kanoknukroh. It's like a "real life" version of so many of the troll and poe accounts I run into in various discussion groups on Facebook, but he's really working on spreading it as far as he can. Sounds like the kind of personality I would love to have a conversation with, find out just what they think happens when they put this kind of stuff out there. Since already here on the net, I just typed his name into Google, and it popped back with 434 results. Wow, he *must* be legit, right? The "Prince of Scifi" tag is particularly, wonderfully weird – maybe he's just trying to pick up some girls?

A sad twinge on seeing the loc from Ned. On the other hand, we'll probably be seeing those from him for the next year or so, as he continues to live on beyond mere life in pages like these. And that's a good thing.

MURRAY MOORE, Mississauga, ON; 25 November 2015
Your favoured Toronto cafe, The Plantation – full name Plantation Coffee and Tea – is closed. It was at 18 King St. E., not King George Street, although the king when the street was named might have been George. Being a seller of "moderately priced" drink (per web search) in an expensive per-square-foot area of a city is not a smart business plan. Your vision of the perfect cafe in which a customer lingers for half an hour with a coffee requires either many simultaneous customers and/or low expense overheads, so your Barefoot Café strikes me as more likely a success as an ongoing business, i.e. a combination of low expense + low income.

I have seen photos of Ray Bradbury's house. It was to me so ordinary a structure that I can't be excited about its destruction. I do not see how a visitor would learn insights: Bradbury is found in his stories.

My city, Mississauga, population 700,000-plus, has no used book stores. The last two closed two years ago. On the other hand, in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood, is BMV Books, four large floors of remaindered and second-hand books.

How common are the names Verawat and Kanoknukroh? Would a native Thai draw a conclusion about the bearer of the name Verawat Kanoknukroh? From your description, Verawat Kanoknukroh is a real world fantasy role.

~ A Thai surname is unique to that family, but I have seen the first name 'Verawat' elsewhere. ~

My current reading is a book in the 'Tanner' series by Lawrence Block, *Tanner's Twelve Swingers*. I compare it to a Keith Laumer 'Retief' novel of fond memory, in terms of seriousness not genre.

~ Lawrence Block's 'Tanner' novel set in Thailand, *The Scoreless Thai*, is now on my TBR pile. Thanks, Murray! ~



The Western Influence on Thai Nicknaming

LAST MONTH WE TOOK MILES to play with his Dusit Thani Football Academy against a team from Bangkok, Bang Bua Thong. It was a great tournament, apart from it being realised too late that both teams were wearing yellow shirts, which caused hassle when finding differently coloured vests that fit the younger kids of our team who were vastly outnumbered anyway, so it didn't feel like a particularly 'level playing field' even though our kids acquitted themselves well, all things considered.

But when Miles wasn't playing I became distracted by the huge variety of nicknames that Thai kids are currently being given: on the team shirts these are emblazoned on their backs above the team numbers (see above and below), much as professional footballers do with their surnames.

As I pointed out when Miles was born in 2009, the naming of Thai children is a complex business [1] as most Thais are irrecoverably superstitious. You must take into consideration the day of the week the child is born and the date, and on particular days you shouldn't give a child a name beginning with certain letters. Each letter of the potential name also has a numeric value, and adding these up the total number will then forecast the child's characteristics. Then you do the same for the English spelling. If after all that everything still looks good, then go ahead. There is simply no getting around this.

As for nicknames [2] there are different rules to follow, usually meaning they must emphasise positive attributes and comprise of just one syllable, so the variety has always been rather limited: the last-born in a family is often nicknamed 'Lek' ("little one"), other prosaic nicknames are 'Nok' ("bird") and 'Gai' ("chicken").

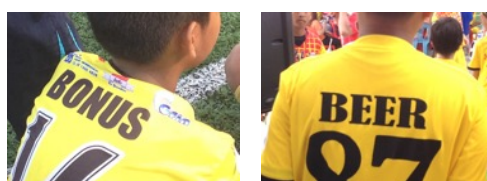
One thing that could not possibly be avoided, as Thailand has opened up to the outside world in the last fifty years, is the impact of English. Children of my wife's generation have either used English proper names or other words for their nicknames (as you probably already know, it's common across Asia for people to adopt an Anglicised name): my wife's nickname is 'Tung' ("rich"), her brothers are 'Best' and 'Bump' and these are the names they go by on a daily basis.

More recently, however, it seems just about

anything goes. Kids also now give each other secondary nicknames, and the widespread practice of Anglicisation is far from being restricted to multi-racial children; for example, Miles has an all-Thai cousin here in Thailand with the nickname 'Pope', because he was born on the day Pope Francis was appointed in 2013. His parents are both Buddhist.

Here's the list I drew up of just the English-language or Western-derived Thai nicknames of boys playing at that one tournament. Most boys were all-Thai.

- Auto
- Beagle
- Beer
- Bonus
- Carrot
- Chain
- Chap
- Copter
- Creed
- Earth
- Folk
- First
- Force
- Gain
- Guitar
- Horse
- Jedi
- Korn
- Melbourne (probably an Australian father)
- Nokia
- Oak
- Ong-Ree (derived from French footballer Thierry Henry)
- Pele (his father is English)
- Picnic
- Plankton (probably a Spongebob thing)
- Police
- Rock
- Santa
- Sprite
- Summer
- Sydney (see Melbourne)
- Zion



[1] <http://blog.jclark.com/2007/12/thai-personal-names.html>

[2] http://www.tor.com/2013/04/24/the-ink-readers-of-doi-saket/#_ftnref7



WHO SAYS: HARD TIMES? / I'M USED TO THEM / THE SPEEDING PLANET BURNS / I'M USED TO THAT
 MY LIFE'S SO COMMON IT DISAPPEARS / AND SOMETIMES EVEN MUSIC / CANNOT SUBSTITUTE FOR TEARS
Paul Simon, *The Cool, Cool River*, 1990

This fanzine was pieced together between 3 October and 28 November 2558 / 2015.

The Paul Simon lyrics above are from the album *The Rhythm of the Saints* (1990), a sublime musical document which forms one half of those *X* or *Y* questions: Beethoven or Mozart? Marmite or Vegemite? Gliese 163 c or Kepler-452 b? *The Dark Side of the Moon* or *Wish You Were Here*? Stones or Beatles? *Graceland* or *The Rhythm of the Saints*? The latter, in all those cases.

This fanzine's title appears in Spanish on one of the many murals in San Francisco's Mission district, this particular one created by Precita Eyes Murals (year unknown – and I've taken a small liberty with the translation of tenses at the bottom of page 1).

I apologise to some recipients of issue #2 who were confronted with a glaring typo on the front page: it should have read "Trident in Boston's Newbury Street". I mailed out probably twenty copies with its incomplete precursor, so I am now forbidden from ever again claiming I can spot a typo at 500 yards.

And so, to the late **D West**. The announcement on the 27th September of his passing on the 25th left me saddened. If there was one fan I had not yet met and who I would wish to meet more than any other, it was he, the great D West. He was simply the funniest (and probably the most astute) fan cartoonist ever. The first two issues of this fanzine were sent to him as paper copies, however with no response. I wish I had been on the receiving end of some words from Don, even if it was just a withering 'Must Try Harder'. I trust you're resting in peace, sir, or giving 'em hell, whatever your preference.

Genuine Thai Fakes: The Strange Case of Nathan Oman and *The Prince of Red Shoe*

I haven't put this essay in my series 'The Search for Genre in Thailand' because it's not about that subject, despite the 'movie' in question ostensibly being a fantasy movie. The public face shown by Nathan Oman describes a butterfly character who, it seems, has never found an environment where he has been able to prosper with integrity; as if he has always wanted to be something he isn't, and I'd suggest that includes being part of a stable family. But what do I know? To him I would be just another long-distance commentator with an opinion that really is of no consequence at all.

FURTHER FANZINES RECEIVED / READ IN 2015

The recent mixture of past and present:
The Art of Garthness #5 GARTH SPENCER
Broken Toys #42-44 TARAL WAYNE
Claims Department #18 CHRIS GARCIA
CounterClock #23 WOLF VON WITTING
Enter At Your Own Risk #1-4 CHUCK CONNOR
Opuntia #323-327 DALE SPEIRS
The Reluctant Famulus #107 THOMAS D. SADLER
Rodney's Fanac #6 RODNEY LEIGHTON
SF Commentary #90 BRUCE GILLESPIE
Vibrator #2.0.21 GRAHAM CHARNOCK
The Zine Dump #35-36 GUY LILLIAN III

FAVOURITE MAINSTREAM FICTION READ IN 2015

Pierre Boulle, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, 1952
Kishore Modak, *Lost in Pattaya*, 2014

FAVOURITE GENRE FICTION READ IN 2015

Ben Bova & Eric Choi, eds., *Carbide Tipped Pens*, 2014
Jonathan Strahan, ed., *Engineering Infinity*, 2011
Rhys Hughes, *The Crystal Cosmos*, 2007

FAVOURITE NON-FICTION READ IN 2015

Rob Hansen, *Then*, 2015

FAVOURITE FILMS SEEN IN 2015

***Danny Collins*, 2015**
***The Imitation Game*, 2014**
***The Theory of Everything*, 2014**

FAVOURITE GENRE FILMS SEEN IN 2015

***Ex_Machina*, 2015**
***The Lego Movie*, 2014**
***Penguins of Madagascar*, 2014**

FAVOURITE ALBUMS HEARD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2015

Nik Bärtsch's *Ronin*, *Live*, 2012
Stefano Bollani, *Joy in Spite of Everything*, 2014
Mo'zdzier Danielsson Fresco, *The Time*, 2005

TLS

THAILAND, IN ENGLISH



THE THAI LITERARY
SUPPLEMENT, #3

DECEMBER 2558 / 2015

Edited by Peter Young

peteyoung.uk@gmail.com

136/200 Emerald Hill Village,
Soi 6, Hua Hin,
Prachuap Khiri Khan 77110

THE NEWS OF ENGLISH, we tell the latest. Writ in perfectly style and most earliest. Do a murder git commit, we hear of it and tell it. Do a mighty chief die, we publish it, and in borders of sombre. Staff has each one been collaged, and write like the Kipling and the Dickens. We circle every town and extortionate not for advertisements. Buy it! Buy it! Tell each of you its greatness for good. Ready on Friday. Number first.

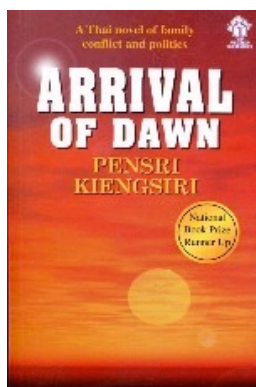
Handbill announcing first publication of the Bangkok Times, 1906

Pensri Kiengsiri

Arrival of Dawn

1999 | Praphansarn, ISBN 978-974-319673-7

Translated by Pensri Kiengsiri



Oraphan is the eldest of four siblings in a fractured Chinese-Thai family and yet, via her domineering widowed mother and the laziness and inability of her brother and sisters to look after themselves, she must keep the whole family going with an endless series of personal sacrifices, while all the while wishing for escape and the parental permission necessary to marry someone.

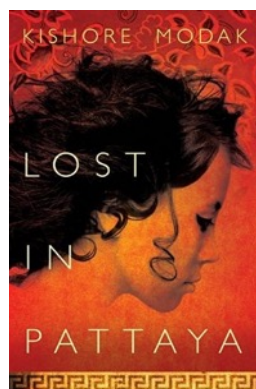
This is more a novel about understanding yourself and the role that life has given you than it is about the seemingly endless family arguments along the way that lead Oraphan to the peaceful conclusion and decision that she finally makes for herself. For example, her discomfort about the family pawnshop business needs to be put aside in order to take over the running of it, as does her wish to marry first one man and then much later a second, both of which come to nothing, simply because her immediate family is in greater need. She is a woman who takes on more than one person could reasonably be expected to bear. She finds an exit route eventually, but it's not the way out that Western readers may be used to reading about, or might expect for such a patient and self-sacrificing woman who has been denied the pleasures in life that her siblings take for granted.

Arrival of Dawn was a runner-up in Thailand's National Book Prize in 1999, and this 2009 edition is the author's own proficient translation. I enjoyed it in spite of the fact that I may not be the kind of reader it was initially intended for, but this translation does that job admirably as a noteworthy book on Thai family traditions.

Kishore Modak

Lost in Pattaya

2014 | Grapevine, ISBN 978-938-184122-8, 150 rupees



This novel has a deceptive exterior: a simple title that tells of an Indian father's loss of his daughter to a Pattaya child prostitution ring, and his efforts to get her back. But scratch beneath the surface, and after a few chapters it's apparent that there is far more going on here. The tone of regret and melancholy that drenches this novel, with complex explanations to come, is the biggest

pull for the reader quite apart from the screwed-up methods the father has of justifying his varying positions: why was this guy, with a fragile marriage and a serious cocaine problem, frustrated in his attempts to achieve what ought to have been a straightforward rescue? And why is his Chinese wife so damned unsupportive?

You could say that Modak's protagonist is a man on the run from himself, or responsibility, or complex emotions, or combinations of the above. At the very least he's a man discovering the hard way his most suitable role in life, which is perhaps not as a parent. He's already proven himself to be successful in business (if at times an unreliable narrator) and his love for his lost daughter is unquestionable. But while the overall destination of this novel is perhaps not a surprise, what is experienced is undoubtedly rooted in a reality that isn't generally experienced by Westerners, and in that sense the book is both eye-opening, as well as fundamentally elegiac.

This is Modak's second novel, and it could have done with one more pass in front of a copy-editor and proofreader, but I can overlook the few shortcomings this book has because Modak took me on a real journey I hope I never have to experience other than on the page.

Paul Murphy

Experience Preferred... But Not Required

2006 | Bangkok Books, ISBN 974-272-938-7



An easy collection of fictional first-person portraits with the common theme of uneasy Westerners teaching English to Thais in Bangkok — a world I once expected I'd enter, myself, in recent years, but never did. Having moved past the cartoonish cover art, the poor typesetting and the regrettable absence of the author's name on the cover of my edition, this actually turned out to be a good if rather unassuming collection,

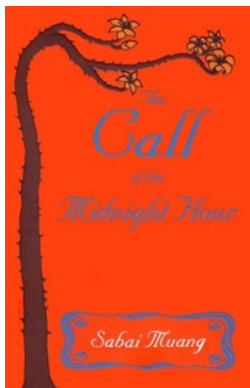
covering the extremes from the most boringly competent educators to the embarrassing have-a-go failures, such as the middle-aged divorcee Brit who mistakenly marries a Bangkok bar girl, a story which despite its completely predictable tramline of events is actually a realistic and sympathetic character study that brackets — and is superior to — all the other stories. This is perhaps an unchallenging book, but it's also consciously educational and one that I'd actually recommend.

Sabai Muang

The Call of the Midnight Hour

1993 | Silkroad, ISBN 978-974-8097-46-6, 295 baht

Translated by Sukanya Cholasueks



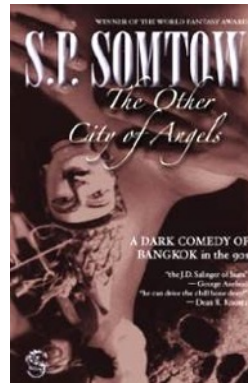
Sabai Muang is one of the many pseudonyms of the prolific Thai author Sukanya Cholasueks, and *The Call of the Midnight Hour* is one of five novels she wrote on each of the Five Precepts of Buddhism. The Third Precept here is that of abstaining from sexual misconduct and is the story of Phatta, who abducts another man's wife and suffers the consequences but also obtains a rather unusual

redemption. Set in India at the time of the birth of Buddhism, Muang's story has supernatural elements which muddy the waters of what is otherwise a very clear storyline, and towards the end it splits into two threads that separate what is going on with Phatta's soul in the spiritual world and what is happening with his body in the real world, but these are mixed in such a way that I was often unable to tell what was happening where, and with whom. If the other four short novels are also published in English I'll probably read them as well, as this was mostly well written even if I felt at times that it was either too straightforward in places, or a little too abstract.

S.P. Somtow

The Other City of Angels

2007 | Diplodocus Press, ISBN 0-9800149-0-7, 395 baht



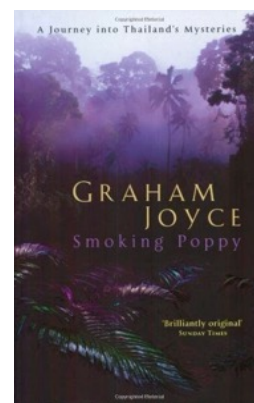
A dark comedy set in 1990s Bangkok that Somtow wrote as a cliff-hanging serial for Thailand's *The Nation* newspaper, directly based on the tale of Bluebeard. The several-times-divorced Jude Abramowitz is more-or-less kidnapped by marriage from her California lifestyle and thrown headlong into some over-the-top Bangkok high society decadence, with a murder mystery to solve along the way.

It features at least one real-life character, the food critic Bob Halliday (who appears in several more of Somtow's stories), but beyond that any connection to the real world is deliberately suspect. Probably written with a predominantly female audience in mind it skims between genres easily, from Californian chick lit to whodunnit to supernatural thriller, all ending in a bizarre fit of science fiction fury. For male readers it has its moments too but is best regarded as a kind of lighter antidote to John Burdett's *Bangkok Eight*, which doesn't contain nearly as much wisecracking in the face of death.

Graham Joyce

Smoking Poppy

2001 | Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07304-7, £6.99



When I first read *Smoking Poppy* in 2006 I stated in a review that I'd like to re-read it in a few years, and it has always been high on that very short list of books. Well, it took me ten, but here we are.

A lonely, divorced and bitter Englishman goes to Chiang Mai in search of his daughter who is jailed on drug-smuggling charges, but is led on a further journey into the mysterious, spirit-

haunted world of Thailand's interior. Graham Joyce, whose genre fiction often focusses on ghosts and spirits, here shows a contemporary, knowing, middle-aged English freshness; all the characters are sufficiently well-drawn to come alive vividly in the reader's mind, and the narrator never really loses his jaded cynicism throughout, though he finally succumbs to a rather belated coming-of-age as a proper parent to his two estranged twenty-something kids.

After the re-read? This is probably my favourite book about Thailand by a farang author. The quality is evident, and Joyce's passing in 2014 was a big loss.
