

folks these days just don't do nothin'
simply for the love of it



[the white notebooks #6]

Due to sudden constraints of both time and money, this issue is having to come out initially as a PDF only. My apologies, and I will endeavour to mail print copies with issue #7 in December.



And the World Changes Yet Again

THE LAST FEW MONTHS have been something of an emotional rollercoaster. In the second half of May, my 82 year-old father was admitted to hospital with either an undetermined inflammation of the lower digestive tract, or something similar to typhoid. Even the Tropical Medicine Institute in Paddington got involved, and they never could pin down exactly what he'd been chronically suffering from. After the bug departed with a cocktail of antibiotics in hot pursuit, he was left totally exhausted by the experience and barely hanging on to life, and for too long simple physiotherapy was too strenuous to restore much strength. At the worst point, his weight went down to 47kg, and he has been bouncing between two hospitals ever since. I returned to the UK at the end of May and on my days off was making regular visits to either Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, or the Wokingham Community Hospital (which, I was pleasantly surprised to discover, has received some financial support from our old friend Uri Geller).

So I was torn between returning to Thailand for the imminent arrival of our second son, which of course had to take priority, or being around for my ailing father; however I have four siblings who are also able to fulfil that role. None of us are around in such a capacity that we could look after him full-time at home yet such a return home for him still remains a goal for us all.

So, I returned to Thailand in time for the predicted event: Sky was born on 23rd June 2016, a healthy 3.53kg. Apart from my joy at Sky finally arriving, the day itself was marred by otherwise being totally shit: I took Benji to the

government hospital at 4.30am. I was asked to call again at 8am, which I did but couldn't get through to the Maternity Ward. After taking Miles to school I visited the hospital again at around 9am, and was told there was no news yet but they would call soon, probably before midday. By 3pm I had still heard nothing, so after picking up Miles from school in the middle of one of Thailand's massive monsoon downpours (and being bitten by a huge caterpillar that had wrapped itself around my ankle) I returned again to the hospital only to be informed that the baby had been born, but also that he had respiratory problems which they were monitoring, and Benji was in another room on the 8th floor of a different block. So Miles and I went there, only to discover that she wasn't there at all, she was on the 9th floor of the Maternity Ward, back in the block we'd started from. So after the trek back we discovered Benji and Sky together

he'd had no respiratory problems at all, and had been born at 06.41am, nearly three hours *before* my visit at 9am, yet the hospital had neglected to inform me even though I'd gone there in person. Mother and child had waited *eleven hours* for me to finally join them.

This was also the day that will go down in European history as a day that the UK stunned the world: the gullible 'Pride and Prejudice' half of the country voted for Brexit and put the sober 'Sense and Sensibility' half in a minority. Because of ever-worsening exchange rates my take-home pay has already dropped by 5%. But Sky did his bit for the family: lottery ticket numbers based on his birth-weight won us forty quid so screw you, Boris Johnson.

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image bar (above): wheatfields ripening, Christian Guthier, 2008 (cc-by-2.0)

quickly found areas in which I could contribute significantly: projects such as entering up-to-date runs of issues of highly notable fanzines such as *Ansible*, *SF Commentary* and *Broken Toys* to name just three. I'm currently working on the complete run (so far) of *Banana Wings*, and next-up is *Chunga*, then *Head!* plus others.

Most moderating editors at the ISFDB have their own pet projects. I focus on British, American and Australian fanzines, and Asian spec fic. Many people still don't realise that genre fanzines are perfectly admissible to the ISFDB, and their limited presence at the moment is something I'm working on.

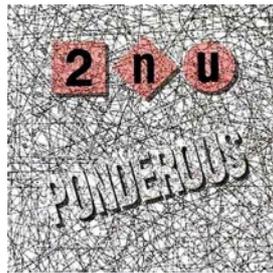
In June 2012 the moderating editors asked if I'd like to become a mod myself, and I accepted. This means I get to approve (or otherwise) other editors' edits based on my knowledge of how the database is organised and run. Believe it or not, this occasionally means running into new editors who have specifically signed up in order to vandalise the ISFDB, usually assholes who have a self-righteous grudge against a particular author. I've personally had to slap down two instances of this behaviour so far.

But it's not only the newbies who can cause problems. A few months ago one of the ISFDB's most senior editors, whose knowledge and experience were pretty invaluable to the database, threw his toys out of the pram over an edit conflict, then directed insults at other editors before storming off. He hasn't been seen since, and it's a shame he left under a cloud. Of course it wasn't the first time an editor had threatened to leave over a minor point of policy, and he once said he didn't enjoy the job of 'bad cop', but on a daily basis he did nothing to ameliorate his reputation as an abrasive stickler for detail. He really should have stayed, but it's somehow a little less tense now, and we're getting on with the job just fine.

I'd say, quite accurately, that I'm fortunate that these days I get out of fandom exactly what I put into it. I don't concern myself with online discussion any more because that aspect of fandom has drastically lost it's appeal for me. In fanzines, though... this is where discussion lives the best, and in a small but important way the ISFDB can help to preserve it. It's where discussion of our genre history began... all because of our shared love for it.



Tracks



'Frank's Chair' 2NU, *Ponderous*, 1991

If ever there was a guy who loves the sound of his own voice, it's Jock Blaney. 2NU [1] are not so much a band, more a musical project from Seattle that employs Blaney's voice-over narrating an assortment of surreal, dream-like stories that wouldn't be out of place in a *Twilight Zone*-like 1950s weird fiction anthology. It's not just the cool stories that attract, though; the music and the surreal sense of humour is pretty hip, too. If you were ever into the more surreal excursions of Was (Not Was), these guys are a natural next step in the same direction.

When they started getting airplay on Seattle radio in 1990 they were still an anonymous group with one DJ saying they were "too new" to have a name, and that stuck. I first heard 2NU in 1991 while listening to 'Whispering' Bob Harris on the UK's Radio 1 on a Saturday afternoon. The track he played was 'Spaz Attack' from *Ponderous*, and the weird humour and super-fine slap bass immediately told me this was an album I had to find.

A firm favourite from the beginning was the

longer tale 'Frank's Chair' [2] which ended side 1. It starts and ends with dusk as experienced at a cabin in the mountains, with five notes on an acoustic guitar that quite simply say "dusk in the mountains", and that kind of clear, visual counterpart to sound is what defines the whole *Ponderous* album. The story then involves a long, involuntary journey among Arab raiders, two-headed lizards and a rickety old riverboat drifting through a wet, jungle landscape. How you get from dusk in the mountains to that riverboat and back again involves the creativity of guys who know how to use voice plus narrative plus a huge range of sound effects, all against a series of relatively unsophisticated musical backdrops.

'Frank's Chair' doesn't go for humour like the rest of the album nor is it the most bizarrely imaginative song compared to other dreams on offer, but it's easily the most atmospheric and illustrates well how it's not all just shallow fun for Mr. Blaney and friends. It's just a shame that their output has been so minimal in twenty-five years.

[1] <http://www.2nu2.com>

[2] <https://open.spotify.com/track/4ZljbYfnfuLQVO1i1GKQzs>

Markers

lightly edited



WAHF...

James Bacon (twice on postcards – two sent in reply), **Jason Burnett** (“you certainly added a lot to my to-read list (and in the case of ‘Borg Sex’ my to-listen list – I haven’t listened to a Satriani album since *Surfing with the Alien*”), **Chris Hinchley** (“I really enjoy getting the paper version – it’s just like old times and I can read it in the bath!”), **Jim Linwood**, **Sue Mason**, **Taral Wayne** (“In Kjojala Siroihin (the native language of Saara Mar), Earth is Telurla”) and **Mark Young**.

STEVE SNEYD, Huddersfield, England; 8 May 2016

Just casting back to the various coffee shop discussions in *TWN* #3 and #4. I don’t know if you caught an item on Radio 4’s sociology programme *Thinking Aloud*: Laurie Taylor, who presents, was discussing with someone who’d published a paper analysing the ways/whys of people choosing where to get a coffee. The gist was – to summarise ruthlessly but hopefully accurately – there were class elements, but different classes converged on the non-taxpaying chains from Starbucks to McDonalds, and from questioning it emerged that the main reason was they knew how to behave / what to order there, whereas in the specialist coffee shops they feared being shown up, not knowing what to order, etc. (There’s an analogy with specialist real ale pubs – faced with *n* niche brews they’d never heard of, they would worry about seeming/feeling ignorant, whereas in less adventurous pubs there would be bog-standard brands they’d know or know of and not have the indecision of the ‘excess choice phenomenon’ to cope with.) Intriguing, I thought.

Probably not of interest, but I will mention it just in case: Andrew Darlington has put an impressionistic article about me on his website of articles – the URL (takes deep breath) is:

www.andrewdarlington.blogspot.co.uk/2015/12/steve-sneyd-interview-from-mars-to-marsden

DAVID REDD, Haverfordwest, Wales; 4 June 2016

Still acquiring books myself with increasingly little prospect of ever reading them. Thanks for the glimpse of *your* take on the perennial problem! With first editions/signed copies, why not store them in clingfilm, labelled and priced? I only did it once, then baulked at the pricing and the intimation of mortality. An internet bookshop? Works for some. From Thailand? Ron Bennett used to sell sf and comics to worldwide customers from Singapore (see *Trap Door* #26, etc.) so you’re in with a chance, if Thai postage costs permit.

An aside: book/magazine covers on a large

glowing screen can look more impressive than in real life, (picture postcards even more so) which can encourage buyers. But that may not help if your customers are only flicking little mobiles in bus queues or wherever.

Should have started with your “Listopia” project. Fascinating if puzzling – for a concept as basic as Earth (or perhaps “world” or “land” or “this place here”) how did so many different words develop? Wasn’t earth/soil a basic necessity to the early cultures developing language? Maybe not if they weren’t farmers. Is there a similar spread for water, say? I know you were translating [Planet] Earth rather than just “earth” but the list does rather invite 70+ etymologies followed by a history of human migrations and language developments... You could have a best-selling book here, as long as the cover shows a Klingon.

JERRY KAUFMAN, Seattle, WA; 11 June 2016

Thanks once again for mailing us a paper copy *TWN* #5. What do I do with it, file with our dictionary? Will you look at a different work or phrase next issue? How about “science fiction”?

We’re a wee bit older than you, and disposing of books is becoming more of a concern. (Not to mention the numerous books of fanzines.) I usually send discards to the Friends of the Library for their book sales. There may be a few that have gone in value from book collectors, so we’ll have to have someone come here to appraise them. (Fortunately, we have a local, knowledgeable collector who has already volunteered.)

But I do enjoy people browsing the shelves and giving me a bit of indirect egoboo.

Have you read any of the Sun Ra poetry yet? I have heard a little of his music, but not read anything he wrote. I hope you find something interesting to say about it. I’m all ears.

JOHN BRAY, Orpington, England; 17 June 2016

In 2003 when I decided to sell my house and go round the world, I gave away 800 books, half my collection, mainly tatty SF paperbacks, and vowed to not buy another book until I’d read, or at least browsed the rest. thirteen years on, I’m down to forty unread books, and buy perhaps ten a year. I don’t regret losing the paperbacks, apart from occasionally when one pops up on a Jomsthing reading list. I also only read about twenty-five books a year, mostly for Jomsthings, and wish I had the concentration for more. All are on open shelves now. But I was never a collector, and I really don’t worry about condition, or borrowing from libraries. I suspect your love of physical

books is much deeper than mine.

I suspect your key problem with efficient disposal is being in the wrong country to the stock. I can't see how you can run the business from Thailand, with the costs of shipping the stock over and dealing with Thai postal system will put you at such a distance from your readership.

The obvious solution is to ask Brian [Ameringen] to sell them on your behalf, but he wants to retire, and if he can't find a buyer for such a well-run business as Porcupine, I don't see there is a way to compete with the warehouse online outlets, so you will be making a poor return on the stock. Perhaps you should just view this all as sunk cost.

At this point I should have a good idea to end, but I can't think of one :-)

JOSEPH NICHOLAS, Tottenham, England; 17 June 2016

Reading your piece about the struggle to give up buying books, I sympathised. I too have a Large Backlog of unread volumes: about five year's worth, I calculate – if I do nothing else but read, of course. (I promised myself that one of the things I'd do in retirement is catch up on that backlog, but it's taken me two years to start getting properly stuck in.) This is why, as we say, we have given up buying books – indeed, we officially gave up buying books several years ago, but have found that they, er, keep following us home. Why, only a week or so ago we were at the British Museum to see its current exhibition on Sicily, and on exiting through the gift shop acquired not just the exhibition catalogue but a history of Sicily by John Julius Norwich and a general history of the Mediterranean by David Abulafia. All three to be added to the Sunken Cities exhibition catalogue acquired a few weeks previously on our visit to the BM to see the statuary and other artefacts brought up from the seabed off Alexandria by Franck Goddio; and the book about Greek trireme battles acquired from the BM a month or two before that...

Over time, we have of course culled our holdings. Once upon a time, I had a lot of paperback SF (when I was much younger, my dream was to have at least one thousand SF books!); a chunk of that holding was disposed of, via various sources, when we moved to a flat in North London in 1989 and found that we had less storage space than at our previous home. Moving to our current address in 1993 gave us more shelf space, so it wasn't until a few years ago that I felt the need to dispose of some more books, this time most of the politics collection (perhaps less a collection – a term which suggests a dedicated and structured assemblage – than a smorgasbord of stuff which interested me at the time, including lots on nuclear weapons-related material from our 1980s campaigning days) which was donated to Oxfam. Oxfam has been the favoured recipient of the dribs and drabs we've disposed of since, although I'm not sure the local shop(s) would be able to cope with a proper cull of the SF paperbacks, if indeed one ever takes place. (I don't think – indeed, I know – that I don't have the patience or the aptitude to try to sell stuff through the internet. Individually, they're not valuable enough (I don't think I have any first editions), and the proceeds which

might be made from them would probably not repay the costs of advertising and postage.) Ultimately, of course, someone will have to take responsibility for our books, although I've written into my will a specific instruction to my executors that the SF should be sold to a specialist dealer who can maximise its value to my heirs and assigns. Perhaps I should also add a clause suggesting that the history and archaeology volumes go to a specialist in that field – after all, I do have rather a lot of them!

STEVE JEFFERY, Kidlington, England; 19 June 2016

Thanks for sending me a copy of *The White Notebooks* #5. If you want to send these as pdf in future to save postage and gain the gratitude of your family then please do. Response might be a bit more sporadic (although I'm conscious that I've already taken far too long before responding to this issue) as I don't usually fire up the PC at home during the week after spending weekdays staring a screen all day.

Fascinating list of different names for the planet in umpteen languages (where would we be without Google?) It was also be interesting to know what the literal translations of some of those words was in the same language and how many of them, like Earth, *tero*, *Terra*, *Erde*, also mean the ground we stand on.

When I first encountered fandom I was greatly taken with the slogan on one of Caroline Mullan's t-shirts which proclaimed "whoever dies with the most books wins". Unfortunately, as with many fans, we now have the same book overflow problem too, to the point where it's starting to become a matter of inconvenience rather than pleasure in owning or keeping so many. I think the next move will have to be to relocate a lot of the older paperbacks into the loft, either boxed or shelved, so I can gain back some space in the (currently aptly-named) boxroom-cum-office which I had plans to use as a music space before it was taken over. Consequently, I've cut right back on acquiring new books (though Vikki hasn't, since I spend yesterday wrapping up 10 or 11 new fantasy tomes in readiness for her birthday in a couple of weeks time). We've already donated several boxes of books that we know we won't read again to the book sale we help out with at the local church hall, but they don't appear to shift very fast and usually end up being passed on in turn to the local charity shops. It also doesn't seem to have made any significant impact of our own lack of space.

On top of the books, there's also the accumulation of 20-odd years in fandom in the form of boxes and piles of fanzines, magazines and apas (in the days when they were still on paper). Now we have stopped going to conventions, I don't know what to do with a lot of that that I know I won't ever unpack and look at again. It seems a shame to bin it or shred it, but at the same time why keep it when so much older stuff is now being digitized and made available on line as pdfs in places likes *efanzines.com*? How much of this sort of stuff is worth keeping or any use to anyone else?

Interesting piece on Satriani's 'Borg Sex'. I don't know this one (I only have two or three of his CDs including *Surfing with the Alien* and *The Extremist*. I shall try and look out for it on YouTube. I do know what you

mean about the thudding drums though, which almost wreck some of his slower songs. It's almost like he has a tin ear for percussion when it comes to mixing.

I've not noticed that thing you mention about his song endings. I shall have to keep that in mind the next time I listen to those CDs (or, more likely, select them on my mp3 player, although currently I'm using this to listen to downloaded podcasts rather than music during the journey to and from work. It's a good way of catching up on stuff you missed during the day.)

~Two further Satriani things:

1) Another song ending to listen out for is 'Attack', also on *Engines of Creation*. It's like the gloomy music you'd get at the end of a video arcade game when you've just lost your last life, and it explains everything you've just heard (if you hadn't figured it out already).

2) I'm personally convinced that on most of his middle-period albums, at least up until *Strange Beautiful Music*, one song on each album was used as a vehicle to pay tribute to another musician. *Crystal Planet* has 'Love Thing' in which he's clearly, *definitely*, riffing on Steve Hillage's guitar solos. *Engines of Creation* has 'Until We Say Goodbye', in which the drums are as close to John Bonham as I've ever heard (and also fit your criticism of Satriani's standard percussion arrangements, but I do like this song). *Strange Beautiful Music* has 'Sleep Walk', a direct tribute to Santo & Johnny Farina (you can also hear the original in the Stephen King movie *Sleepwalkers*). I'm sure there must be others I'm not aware of. ~

There's a Sun Ra fanzine? Of course there is. Sometimes the world is a surprising and wonderful place.

LLOYD PENNEY, Etobicoke, ON; 24 June 2016

First of all, congratulations, Dad! [~ Thank you, sir! ~] I just saw the picture of your newborn Fa in my Facebook feed this morning. I hope the whole family is happy and healthy. As you say in your FB message you're a little overwhelmed, and I can understand. Well, *The White Notebooks* #5 was the next zine up in my IN box, so here's combination congratulations and comments.

We have so many names for the planet, with the connection of home and sustaining mother-type, but yet, we treat home like garbage pile. We are indeed the only animals on the Earth that will happily foul their own nests.

For us, retirement is beckoning, so we feel we must lighten our load. That means weeding our book collections, our collections of fannish materials (fanzines, programme books, magazines, etc.) if we need to be mobile, which will probably happen. There is much comfort for us with books on the shelves. To me, it looks like there will not be any place or anyone interested in taking on my books and other papers, so even though they are of value, it may only be so for me, and the recycle bins will be bulging. I think that will have to happen over the next year or so.

My loc... not much has changed, I am still not working, but it's not for lack of trying. I think my age is working against me, as are my qualifications. Employers then make assumptions as to how much I'd want for

salary, and gloss over my resume. Computer problems continue, and I put the blame squarely with Windows 10. Yvonne and I are both on a low-carb diet, and the weight is melting off.

I mark my entry into fandom to December 1977. Our family had moved from Ontario to British Columbia that summer, and I did see the original *Star Wars* in the theatre in Victoria. In December of that year, I saw advertising for a local *Star Trek* club... I joined, and the rest is my own history. Fandom will have had to endure me for 39 years this coming December.

The rest, I will say in apa-ish fashion RAE,BNC. Many thanks for this issue, and happy family.

ANDY SAWYER, Chester, England; 12 July 2016

Re. collecting the mantra "You don't have to buy it now" has never worked for me. I used it when I saw the single-volume annotated edition of E.R. Eddison's "Zimiamvia trilogy" for sale in Forbidden Planet and decided that as much as I actively *needed* the book, £10 was very expensive for a paperback (it was a *long* time ago!).

Eventually, when the need became pressing there were no copies to be found. And so things stayed until the advent of the internet... and I found a copy. At £25.00.

Oh well. Reader, I bought it.

Getting rid of extraneous books is always difficult. To some extent, I have a library (the Science Fiction Foundation Library) to donate useful books but I've long since passed the stage when what I have is what the SFF actually *needs*. I'm not a collector as such, though: more of an omnivorous reader, and I have very few books that are worth more than a couple of quid in terms of any profit that I'm likely to make selling them. My solution is simply when I reach the point where I'm realistically not going to want to read books any more, I'm going to give them away if possible. If then I need to read something I've disposed of, it will almost certainly be available for a couple of pennies on the Internet. The books I'm keeping are books of sentimental value - childhood birthday presents and inscribed copies from people I value. Good luck with any solution you're likely to come up with! Your project of collecting Asian speculative fiction is one well worth devoting time to - your writing about such books is what in many ways is most interesting about your fanzine

I know it's not technically "Asian" but it was intrigued about finding collections of Sun Ra's poetry, and the Singapore fanzine scene. Thanks for including the links - I think I might check those out!

CHUCK CONNOR, Stevenage, England, 17 July 2016

I am now in receipt of *TWN* #5, for which I can but offer my most sincerest of thanks. Codling, our valet de chambre, recently presented it to me while I was in the library. He's a dear old soul, though a touch forgetful, and after I'd discretely advised him to put it away and zip himself back up, he informed me I was in receipt of your latest. I also knew Cook had been busy earlier, creating one of her rightly famous coffee and walnut sponges. She uses a technique to shell the walnuts that involves a stone floor, an adjacent wall, and a leather catchers' mitt. It's something she'd perfected during her time in the

Philippines, apparently substituting the *Juglans regia* in place of the original ping-pong balls.

Regardless, I now have a slice of the aforesaid, and a steaming cup of a pleasingly counterfeit Da-Hong Pao before me, and thus am well prepared to start typing this to your good self.

I was curious in regard to what I initially believed to be an omission in your list headed *Planet Earth Has No Single Name*. Namely that of the Inuit.

However, imagine my surprise on opening my copy of the *Inupait Eskimo Dictionary* (Webster, Zibell & Webster, published by the Institute of Linguistics, Fairbanks, Alaska) only to discover that, in fact, they do not. Mind you, in my perusing of said, I have also discovered it is a traditionally held belief that the goddess, Sedna, gave birth to Canadians, Americans, and Native Americans, after various liaisons with dogs — which is pretty understandable, all things considered.

Sadly, of course, that Dictionary is one I would really love to physically own (rather than a long-ago downloaded pdf file) because, as you so rightly state in the following piece (“Not Just Downsizing”) it isn’t so much about the book itself — it’s about ‘discovering’ its existence, then trying to find it, and lastly bringing it out occasionally, in order to show to others that you had the foresight to get two copies while it was still an undiscovered first edition. That way you have one to read, and the other priced up as Mint-Unread — while all those ‘Janet-&-Johnny-Come-Lately’s will have to make do with second-hand ex-Public Library copies — usually with poorly defined and badly drawn biro representations of penises on the back flyleaf.

I was also quite bemused to read that first edition Lensmen were actually making more than ‘mere pennies’

because many years ago at a convention (Connote-8, or somesuch) I ended up with a dealer’s suitcase full of old pulp magazines — the whole lot for £2.50, including the battered case. My original interest was that one of the pulps had a piece of fiction by Harry Warner Jr. — but it had down at the bottom a complete 6-issue run of *Galactic Patrol* in *Astounding Stories*. I’d read the ‘Lensman’ series in the old Panther editions back in the 1970s — but after doing a quick scuttle around the likes of eBay and Amazon, I managed to find no end of ‘dubious’ editions available for sale from assorted ‘minor’ presses such as Ripping plus something purporting to be a facsimile of the 1950 edition. Maybe it’s all dropped out of copyright?

Sadly, like a lot of things, those six *Astoundings* were destroyed at the hands of my sister — while my original book collection got ripped off by a dealer. Basic rule — get the bastard to pay up front, and also pay for transportation as well.

Moving on to the letters section, and reading Rodney Leighton’s letter reminded me that I have been meaning to write to you for some time now in order to correct your assumption that only The Women’s Periodical has British Fan involvement. Witness my own *EAYOR* — which consists, as you know from being on the mailing list since early in its wobbly life, of parts of my *eAPA* contribution — *Boopledoggin’*. Apart from that, I also remain the longest running compiler and central mailer

that *eAPA* has had in its 12-year monthly existence (next mailing being #148 — August 2016).

There again, maybe I’m not considered Faaaaaaaaannish any more? Or British, come to that, with a name such as Connor (Royal house of Ireland, as befits.)

However, onwards and upwards, Andy Sawyer brings up the comment that most covers are basically the same thing, but with a slightly differing PoV. I can tell you now, sir, that after reading such I stopped masticating for a good thirty seconds. If you were to trace a ‘well-published’ work, through various reissues, you would see that the actual *style* of the cover has changed — sometimes quite radically. And by that, I mean during one period it could well be considered ‘fashionable’ to use an abstract style cover, or a small simplistic design surrounded by an overly large amount of white. Other times it has been almost photo-realism in style and incredibly fine detail, or an almost impressionist-like ‘sketch’.

But, the one question that remains unanswered is this: Given that a cover influences choice to some degree, would you go out of your way/be prepared to read Carlton Mellick’s *Cannibals of Candyland* (“For Candy People it’s normal to eat humans — it’s what they do...”) or one of Jeff O’Brien’s *Bigboobenstein* novels if they had something of a less than Bizarro fiction style cover?

Or do you feel that the cover has no influence at all, and that it’s the title and the back cover blurb that hook you in, regardless of how tacky/poor the cover is/looks? I certainly remember Charlie Stross saying that it was a marketing decision to have the breasts on a cover of one of his novels [~ *That can only have been Saturn’s Children* ~] significantly larger on the American edition than the European one, because that was supposed to guarantee more worldwide sales.

But to move on — mainly as I can tell from the sound of a shotgun discharging, that Cook is preparing fish for our evening meal. She keeps them in a barrel in the kitchen pantry, and says that it’s much more humane than trying to catch them with a hook.

But to move on — onto the comments about fanzines, which I found curious. Especially as it was a step into old and familiar territory for me — the non-SFy-fanzine/Small Press/non-commercial publications — or what now seems to be called The Papernet.

One rallying zine these days would have to be *Xerography Debt* (Davida Gypsy Breier/Leeking Inc) — which still retains a paper only presence, despite using the Interweb for advertising its wares. \$4.00 a pop, and twice a year (all going well.)

Yes, there is a hard-nosed, cash-up-front, commercial aspect to these productions — you don’t often get a one-for-one trade for free, no matter how much you wheedle for one (so there’s direct similarities to Core Fandom there, I suppose) — and sadly the old tradition of ‘tear sheets’ also no longer applies (where you got a torn out page that contained your review/review of your zine — which meant minimal copy loss, usually from the junked mis-printed/mis-stapled/mis-guillotined copies, if you’re as ‘up market’ as *XD* is compared to some of the products it reviews.)

There again, Rick Peabody isn’t likely to be

tossing out copies of his *Gargoyle Magazine* for free especially when they're over 500+ pages, perfect bound into a softback styled publication. Or sometimes as a proper CD. I've known him since the early 1980s when he was still making it big in the Washington DC Literary Circles. Now he's a well-respected Professor at a University, runs his own indie book store, does reading tours and the like and still finds time to 'pub his ish' even if it is one of the most professional I know.

So when 'SF Fans' say that zines/Small Press/Non-Commercial publications are the refuge of the Unsuccessful, I usually tend to treat them with a modicum of the same contempt they've shown non-Faaaaaaaaa-aaaaaaaaan zines. SF fanzines are fading away due to the insular attitude of more than just a few mainly because both the Internet and the Papernet offer more variety and space to be different. And as any True Fan knows, it isn't a *real* fanzine unless it's Twiltone Gold, duplicated, and distributed to just a select few in time for the next Corflu.

However, enough of all that. One final comment would be regarding your review of *The Windup Girl*. What cultural differences have been taken into account in regard to European/Western reviewers, when it comes to the perception of women, pornography, and art in an Asiatic culture? I can remember several very good lectures back in the late 1990s regarding the Japanese perception of what is/is not considered 'pornographic' within that culture both from an historical perspective, and a then-modern PoV. There was also some observation regarding Western obsessions being imposed on what it perceived as 'alien' cultures but whether that still remains true today (some 20+ years on) remains to be seen.

As for "dangerously fucked-up Christians believing they're angels" [~ my review of S.P. Somtow's *The Pavilion of Frozen Women* ~] I would humbly suggest (if you haven't already) finding a copy of John Connolly's first Charlie Parker novel, *Every Dead Thing* and if you're not hooked then I'd be surprised. I'll admit it now, I'm a Connolly/Parker fan, have been for quite some time now (even though there are a couple of duds in the span of the series).

And on that point I shall put down my empty cup and push aside my empty plate thus bringing this to an appropriate end.

There's little left to add, except that I hope Sky makes an uneventful yet joyously welcome entrance into this world of ours, and to wish both his parents many years of happiness. [~Thank you, sir! ~]
Yrs, et & cetera, C. Connor Esq. (VD & Scar) Retd.

MURRAY MOORE, Mississauga, ON; 7 August 2016

I am reading, unusually for me, a doorstopper book.

Young man grows up, nobody but him knows he is special; he goes to the bigger neighbouring country, fights in a war, is wounded and receives a medal; people begin to notice that he is special and they become his followers; his first attempt at revolution fails and while in prison he writes a book; more people believe in him, he becomes the leader of his country, he unites his people and roots out the enemies among them; until all of his external enemies gang up on him and defeat him.

Yes, I am reading *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (1959) by William L. Shirer. Re-reading, actually. Older son Russell read the paperback that I bought and that I read, decades ago. That copy came apart during his reading so he bought me the trade paperback version.

I took the trade paperback from a shelf and began re-reading it this month (August) after, in reverse order; this year; watching a documentary about the team of eight Americans who won gold in rowing during the Nazi Olympics; watching some of the Democratic National Convention and some of Hillary Clinton's acceptance speech (I fell asleep); watching some of the Republican National Convention and all of Donald Trump's acceptance speech (I stayed awake); reading the first of the Bernie Gunther, private eye, novels set in Nazi Germany.

As the month is now August, are you still delusionary? Do you persist in believing that you are not an addict?, that you will stop buying books, that you will, haha, part with some of your books?

The best that can be said of bibliomania is that its victims are harmless, unthreatening creatures who, at worst, deprive only themselves of material comforts by buying and storing books, as squirrels store nuts. The same can be said of course about other types, e.g. pet owners.

Your cover for *TWN* #5 is particularly appropriate as I read *TWN* #5 during the second day of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games.

KATE ORMAN, Northmead, NSW; 9 August 2016

Just back from the gym, where I perused your excellent publication. (I highly recommend Pet Shop Boys' *Relentless*, a bonus disc of dance tracks released with 1993's *Very*, for the treadmill. My colour-music synaesthesia makes it seem as though I'm strolling through a neon cyberpunk landscape, rather than plodding along a slightly grotty piece of exercise equipment, going nowhere.)

Since we're living in the grim alternative universe in which common sense didn't prevail and Britain left the EU, you must send me *TWN* as a PDF from now on. It'll certainly be easier to print out than just the SF reviews from *Locus*, which requires patience and a degree in topology.

Books! I've got fed up with books. No more am I drawn like a moth to a black hole to second hand bookshops and book fairs, to be spat out again, poorer and with yet more stuff there's no realistic chance of my ever reading. This partly reflects changes in my mental state the hypomanic swing of Bipolar II Disorder is deadly to the bibliophile and partly the continual annoyance of what to do with the things. I'm not at all a serious collector, so what I have amassed, on shelves, in boxes, and in tubs, is like the "glassel" from *The Meaning of Liff* the beach pebble which was once shiny and interesting and is now a rock. All these door-stop SF novels I've been reading are going straight to the local shop as I finish them (when I say 'straight', I mean 'when I remember to get around to it'. Right now they're still cluttering up the lounge.) Given your review, I may send *The Windup Girl*

after them; if I really want to read about the abuse of sex workers, I'll open the newspaper. (Although maybe I ought to take a look just because I want to write about robots....?)

I also seem to have lost my interest in the Hugos since my last letter. In fact, I can remember the exact moment it happened, during a discussion in the comments in file770.com, about what to do if E Pluribus Hugo wasn't enough to defeat the Puppies. Phil Sandifer, over at the TARDIS Eruditorium, had put forward the argument that TPTB should simply discount ballots that were so nearly identical as to be obvious slate votes. (I like this idea because, while it wouldn't force the Puppies to stop, it would force them to dilute their votes, hopefully to the point where slate voting was useless. I add here my own belief that Vox Day and anything he publishes should be ineligible.) Anyway, I mentioned Phil's idea, and someone responded that there was no point, since folks like Vox will just keep coming up with more ways to game the awards. And a switch in my head just snapped to "off". Not quite "well fine then, let's give up and let him win", so much as "this is not my problem any more". Just "click". Quite a strange feeling. I suppose that's why I've been reading random stuff (Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* is helpful in making sense of the current US election) instead of searching out possible nominations as I ought to. Mind you, I'm also behind on reading (and writing) because my psychiatrist and I foolishly tampered with my medications and I slept for a month and then lay on the sofa for another month, watching bad SF movies on YouTube. Or trying to. I thought *Atomic War Bride* would have giant insects, but it turned out to be a minor Yugoslav masterpiece. *X The Unknown* was also disappointingly excellent.

I loved school; it was the other children I couldn't stand. After high school, university was a revelation – I was harassed just once in three years, and that was a fizzer, since I simply walked away. Because I could! I have a BSc from the University of Sydney, and on top of it, bizarrely, the mighty Graduate Certificate in English Literature (two years part-time), which is one-eighth of a Masters, or something. I'd love to be getting the rest of that MA, but I've promised myself not to until after I finish the bloody novel. In the meantime I continue to study Korean and to inflict my terrible tourist Hangukeo on victims in cafés and restaurants around Sydney. A waiter was saying rude words in Korean at lunch yesterday so I made sure to say thanks and goodbye to him. (I didn't have a clue what he was swearing *about*, but *he* didn't know that. Ke ke ke.)

I adored Steve Stiles' tales of school, and also Murray Moore's correction re one alumnus, many alumni. (What Latin I know I picked up from studying biology.) I finally got my library card from Sydney Uni, something I've been meaning to do forever. I told the nice lady I was an "alumnus", then corrected it to "alumna", then she corrected me: "alumni". Which is what the cards are called: I have an "alumni membership". Feeling clever about the Latin, I took my new card, borrowed an academic tome, and promptly put a wet umbrella on top of it in my bag. Oy. I like learning useless things, mostly about ancient civilisations, although I promise myself to

use them in stories one day.

Steve Jeffery's mention of post-prandial naps during Powerpoint presentations also reminded me of my disastrous university honours year. The real scientists whose work I was disrupting were experts at grabbing sleep whenever possible, including in seminars once the lights went down. They had many time-management skills: for example, they'd set up an experiment in the morning, imbibe copiously at lunch, and have slept it off by the time their enzymes were cooked. It was one of these wizards who taught me to breathe in cool air over my tongue when I ate a hot curry. Definitely the most useful thing I learned in the five months before I chucked it in to everyone's relief, mostly mine.

The "Man's Inhumanity to Man" reading project continues, with Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and John Hershey's *Hiroshima* now crossed off the list. (Should I list George Orwell's *Animal Farm* under the same heading? I think I shall.) It's very typical of me, I think, that these books move me not to pity but to anger. It's not out of compassion for the Earth that I pick up recyclables in the street; it's out of indignation that my neighbours have dropped them there.

I wonder what dolphins call the Earth.

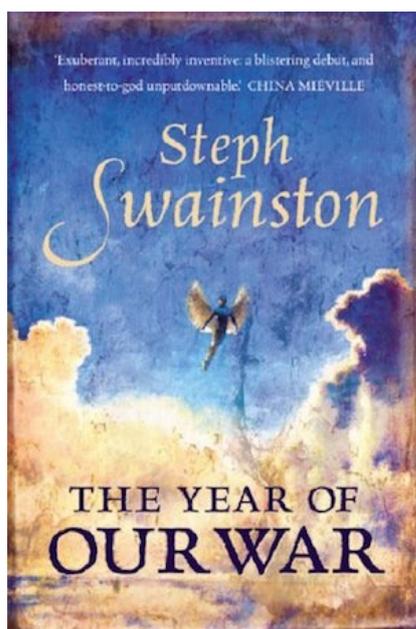
CHRISTINA LAKE, Falmouth, England; 22 August 2016

The only place I come across mainstream zines is in alternative book shops, most recently on visits to Bristol and Liverpool. But these zines tend to be either quite arty or political, and feel like the tip of a very big iceberg. I'm in a group for Zine Librarians at work that testifies to the liveliness of this sector, but none of them seem to collect SF fanzines. Indeed SF didn't even feature as a category in the proposed index that one of the librarians sent round. That's how far we've fallen off the radar. I had a sudden sense of doubt over the worth of my kind of fanzine when I was looking at the British Library website and saw a big article on an '80s punk fanzine from Cardiff. The fanzine looked very similar to the parody of a punkzine that Lilian and I once put out (under the supposedly shocking name of *The Foetus*), but in this case it was credited with inspiring the music scene in Cardiff. What did my '80s fanzines ever do apart from amuse me? At the time I would have said they also contributed to a lively fanzine scene, and I still believe that the creativity that goes into fanzine writing and production is worthwhile in its own right, but with the advent of the internet and social media, perhaps the empowerment that came from that message that anyone can put out their own fanzine is no longer, in retrospect, as easy to convey.

I suspect that there was more I was going to say about *TWN* #5 when I started this loc sometime back, but I can't remember what now, other than that I continue to enjoy your discussion of Thai-related science fiction, and I'm surprised at how much there is. Loved the different names for planet Earth too. I wonder if they are all equivalent to the word for the land or soil beneath your feet or have a very different etymology? Anyway, I'll look forward to the next issue when you have time between your new family commitments!



Edward Miller's cover for Steph Swainston's *The Year of Our War*, Gollancz, 2004



Steph Swainston's debut fantasy novel *The Year of Our War* was published in April 2004, and cover artist Edward Miller properly known as **Les Edwards** provided an image that can't fail to attract attention, using his recurring motif of a small figure set within a much larger composition. (To see other examples of this check out his SF Masterworks covers for Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* [1] and *Star Maker* [2], and George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* [3]; plus for PS Publishing, Paul Di Filippo's *A Year in the Linear City* [4] and Paul Park's *No Traveller Returns* [5], and, while we're at it, his famous cover for China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* [6]).

The finished cover art for *The Year of Our War* is not a straightforward scan of artwork, and the cover's original painting of the book's protagonist, Jant, is actually very different from the finished result. The original

painting's sky is a deeper, darker and more solid blue, and the flying figure looks particularly solitary, suspended alone above the clouds almost as if he is the last of his kind. The original painting, with ill-defined edges on a larger canvas, might look like an early sketch or perhaps even a work in progress, but for the Czech edition it was given a more robust reworking that emphasises the blue sky and a repositioning of the man's wings (below).

The artistic licence taken by a publisher in manipulating an artist's idea often results in some bad feeling on the artist's part, but it was not the case here: Edwards acknowledges that Gollancz's digital manipulation, which involved scarring and altering the whole image itself has actually improved upon his idea, and the finished result is rather satisfying. The image has been given a historical feel that echoes winged men of mythology; the typography is correct, the clouds have been given some gold filigree, and the book's cover seduces by telling you precisely what you will get inside: a brave, strongly imaginative and almost classical fantasy tale. Swainston herself was delighted with the result and it is a shame that the covers for the sequels *No Present Like Time* and *The Modern World* were given a purely typographic treatment to match this book's paperback edition; Gollancz might have been aiming for understated simplicity but it left me wishing for something more like the cover for the novels' Czech editions [7] [8], which continued the line of using atmospheric fantasy illustration from a master of his medium.



- [1] <http://www.lesedwards.com/galleries/science-fiction/last-and-first-men/1115>
- [2] <http://www.lesedwards.com/galleries/science-fiction/star-maker/1677>
- [3] <http://www.lesedwards.com/galleries/science-fiction/earth-abides/1521>
- [4] <http://www.lesedwards.com/Edward-Miller/fantasy/a-year-in-the-linear-city/1323>
- [5] <http://www.lesedwards.com/Edward-Miller/fantasy/no-traveller-returns/1332>
- [6] <http://www.lesedwards.com/Edward-Miller/fantasy/perdido-street-station/1318>
- [7] <http://www.lesedwards.com/Edward-Miller/fantasy/no-present-like-time/1416>
- [8] <http://www.lesedwards.com/Edward-Miller/fantasy/the-modern-world/1604>

above: © 2004 Les Edwards, used by permission,

I Ask the Questions



What's my air mileage?

Pilots don't have to keep log books (at least in the UK; I don't know about other countries), and there's no legal requirement for cabin crew to do so either. However, at various times over the years I've kept detailed logs, either as written entries in a log book designed for pilots or as entries in a FileMaker database. Given the level of detail I chose to record, both of these methods were pretty labour-intensive and relatively short-lived: the log book lasted six years before it fizzled out, the database 2 1/2 years. But I have still kept all my old work diaries since I started flying professionally thirty years ago in June 1986, and these record basic dates and a few other details for every flight I've ever done since then, including any non-working flights. So despite being labour-intensive, it was straightforward to calculate how much flying I've done and a thirty-year anniversary was a good time to do it.

Instead of another Filemaker database, this time I chose to create a Pages document that consisted entirely of tables in which I entered the sector, the date, the flight number, the aircraft type and registration if known, followed by the distance covered in statute miles, nautical miles and kilometres. These distances were generally the most unreliable of all the information I entered, given that it feels like I have spent approximately six months of my life circling over London before landing at Heathrow, plus other daily route variations that mean aircraft never fly in straight lines between cities: there are always turns to be made as various ATCs route planes around massively bad weather, secret military bases, or wars in the Ukraine, Iraq and elsewhere. I don't think I have ever done a straight-up, straight-down flight in my life. Therefore the distances between cities that I entered, gleaned from airmiles-calculator.com, are very conservative estimates, and pretty much always an understatement of the actual mileage done, for the reasons above.

The 'log book' thus created has run to 106 pages in 10pt. type. When working full-time, I averaged around 125 intercontinental flights a year, and now that I've been working part-time since 2008 that average has gone down to 65. I've flown on 29 aircraft and helicopter types and variants, including four as crew: Lockheed TriStars, Boeing 747s and 777s, and Airbus A380s. Of these, I loved working on the TriStar and of the remaining types, all of which I still work on, I only ever feel completely relaxed working on the 747-400, which is a perfect aircraft and which I describe as my 'office'. I still look forward to (almost) every flight I do on it.

I have flown into or out of 112 cities around the world and dropped into 27 more airports without entering

their respective countries. Of the cities I have flown into, excepting Bangkok and London which I commute between, by far the most visited are New York and Toronto (Toronto was also a short-lived commute, once): New York 117 times, Toronto 79 times. I still average four to five intercontinental flights every week in a working month.

I don't know of anyone else, pilot or cabin crew, who has calculated their total air mileage over a period of decades. Given that I have also commuted long-distance to work, even when working full-time, my mileage might actually be higher than the average even for most air crew. Doubtless there *are* other people who have calculated their own mileage, and I meet passengers who fly almost as much as crew do, though almost certainly not for such a prolonged period.

So, to the numbers.

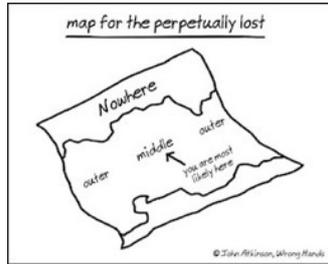
The average annual mileage covered 1986-2007 was around 450,000 statute miles, and from 2008-present it's been around 300,000 miles. My total air mileage to date (end of August 2016) is **11,585,954 statute miles**, or **10,144,303 nautical miles**, or **18,783,843 kilometres**.

The distance to the Moon is 238,855 statute miles, so that equates to **24.25 return trips to the Moon**. Mars is roughly 33,900,000 miles away at its closest point, so all this mileage will only have got me **one-third of the way to Mars**.

So what does all this tell me? That over a timespan of thirty years I've overdosed on high-altitude radiation and poor quality cabin air? Certainly. That I now live in a time zone all of my own? Probably. That I should long ago have settled down and got a proper job? Never.

That the mileage and the time has just shot by is a given. It's often also a rootless existence, and can lead perfectly good people into feeling disconnected and even lost within the structure of their own lives. Families can suffer from too much parental absence, so there has to be an extra degree of understanding and mutual support within such families to make life work. There was a time when the job took me *to* the places and people I wanted to be among, however these days, after getting married and starting a family relatively late at almost 50, it now takes me *away* from those I want to be with most. I'm actually looking forward to retiring in four years, but with two young kids to see through school and college I might end up flying even longer. When I eventually do retire, I know I will miss it enormously: I will look up at that 747 or A380 flying at high altitude, thinking to myself "I could be on that", and also wondering if I have friends on that plane.

That's the future, and what I'm inevitably looking towards, but it may be further in the future than I want.



SAID I REMEMBER WHEN WE USED TO SIT / IN THE GOVERNMENT YARD IN TRENCHTOWN
OBSERVING THE HYPOCRITES / AS THEY WOULD MINGLE WITH THE GOOD PEOPLE WE MEET
GOOD FRIENDS WE HAVE, GOOD FRIENDS WE'VE LOST / ALONG THE WAY
IN THIS GREAT FUTURE, YOU CAN'T FORGET YOUR PAST / SO DRY YOUR TEARS, I SAY
Bob Marley, *No Woman, No Cry*, 1974

This fanzine was put together between 26 May and 31 August 2559/2016. The subtitle, *folks these days just don't do nothin' simply for the love of it*, is a couple of lines from Don Henley's song 'A Month of Sundays' on the 1984 album *Building the Perfect Beast*. Well, Mr Henley (or, more accurately, the narrator of your song, a retired farmer), people do *fanzines* for the love of it, and probably plenty of other stuff besides, but I suspect you already knew that despite your double negative that's not really intended to negate your sentiment. </pedant> It's the best song on your album; yes, even better than 'The Boys of Summer' and 'Sunset Grill'. For what it's worth.

And the World Changes Yet Again

As of the end of August 2016, my father is no longer bouncing between the two hospitals – four stays in each at the last count – and is now actually looking forward to being cared for in a nursing home. We will need to sell his house ASAP to pay for the care. I'd particularly like to thank Dave and Hazel Langford for their unfailingly kind words and sympathies during this time – I'd usually drop into their place en route to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, just down the road – and the rest of fandom has been largely unknowing of this ongoing situation until now.

Sky is doing fine, now a little over two months old. Whereas Miles was generally a very cool and self-assured baby who took to this thing called life very quickly, Sky seems to be showing a more diverse range of behaviours he somehow seems more sensitive to everything around him. All of this is of course hard to discern with accuracy in a child so young, but at the moment Miles and Sky appear to have made very different beginnings with their temperament.

Cover Stories

An earlier version of this article first appeared on Live Journal in August 2005. Thanks to Les Edwards for the permissions.

I Ask the Questions

Compiling the complete log of my flying career so far, as well as working out the total mileage I've flown, took a few dozen hours spread over several months – all for, ultimately, just two lines in this article.

FURTHER GENRE FANZINES RECEIVED / READ IN 2016

Ansible #347–349 DAVE LANGFORD
Banana Wings #65 CLAIRE BRIALEY & MARK PLUMMER
Beam #10 NIC FAREY & JIM TRASH
Challenger #40 GUY LILLIAN III
Flag #17 ANDY HOOPER
huBBub #1 MURRAY MOORE
Broken Toys #49 TARAL WAYNE
File 770 #166 MIKE GLYER
Nice Distinctions #29 ARTHUR HLAVATY
Opuntia #341–351 DALE SPEIRS
SF Commentary #92 BRUCE GILLESPIE
Vibrator #2.0.29–2.0.30 GRAHAM CHARNOCK

I TRY TO AVOID *The White Notebooks* appearing as a meaningless patchwork of random stuff, but close to the end of August I had a nagging feeling that that was what this issue was amounting to. New family commitments meant I hadn't been able to give as much thought towards the fanzine as I would like, and it risked ending up as a bit of a last-minute, ragtag assemblage. (Heck, maybe you'll still think that anyway.)

So in a bid to head off disaster I went back and re-read several fanzine review articles, including Paul Kincaid's 'Slow Train to Nirvana' from *Waxen Wings & Banana Skins* #3, which I'd previously read in the great 2010 fanwriting anthology *Slow Train to Immortality*: Paul's summation of several fanzines from 1996 (many years before I joined fandom) helped me focus a little more on the actual point of what I was trying to get across this particular time without having to go through the process of spelling it out.

Time for a major edit, discarding some pieces and writing others anew. What I have ended up with are two articles featuring men who fly, one article features the dilemma of being caught between two simultaneous life-events on opposite sides of the world, one article features being dragged into an impossible journey against one's will, and another discussing why we do stuff for the love of it. There's enough in all of that to reflect aspects of life as it is for me, here and now, given my current preoccupations. Hope you find it all interesting.



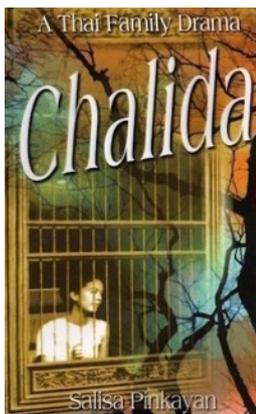
“The Siamese people, gentle and intelligent, will they protect themselves with a new courage against their native sluggishness? Or will these foreign germs be murderous for them, like those that ferment in the swamps of the Menam?”
former Brussels mayor **Charles Buls**, *Siamese Sketches*, 1901

FICTION

Salisa Pinkayan

Chalida

2002 | Asia Books, ISBN 974-8303-63-2, 230 baht



Back in 2002 when Asia Books still had a publishing wing, some interesting English-language Thai fiction came into print. *Chalida* is the first (and still only) published novel by Pinkayan, an American-educated Thai who prefers to write in English. The setting is recent though necessarily non-specific as to dates, as it involves the family of a fictional Prime Minister in the late 20th Century. The Rattakarn family have always been influential, and young Chalida comes

to learn that her beloved grandfather, who was once Prime Minister, may or may not have the blood of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators on his hands. As she learns, it all depends on whose side of the story you believe, and mixed in with this is the suicide of her haunted mother when Chalida was younger. With this troubled background to a promising young life, where is she likely to end up?

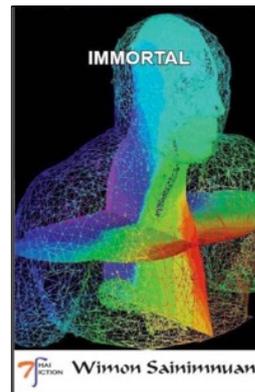
Chalida takes a while to get going, with sixty-odd pages of ‘poor little rich girl’ background to wade through. However when Chalida’s privileged family history is laid out before her at age ten, the novel gradually lifts off and becomes a useful examination of both sides to a story that is sadly familiar in struggling democracies around the world. This novel’s events of 1969 mirror Thailand’s actual experience of 1973, still considered by many to be the country’s ‘darkest days’ of the modern era, where students were shot in the Bangkok streets with little accountability from the military or the government. What this novel bravely tries to do, and largely succeeds, is to put human faces on the political villains: the anger felt at these people may not be misdirected, but it can also be dehumanising.

Wimon Sainimnuan

Immortal

2000 | ThaiFiction, 250 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



When I discovered this novel it felt like a small milestone had been achieved: I’d found an actual science fiction novel written in Thai, which also won a major award (the S.E.A. Write in 2000), and has been decently translated into English for a wider readership. Unfortunately, however, it’s still only available as a PDF, the dead-tree edition (cover left) still being put on hold.

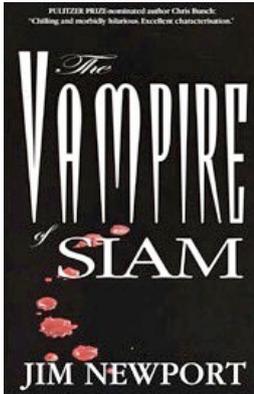
Immortal is, perhaps predictably enough, about cloning and the pro/anti ethics arguments it engenders, although the matter in question here is that of the actual place occupied by the mind, as Buddhism perceives it, within the body. A rich and powerful protagonist, Phrommin, a not particularly likeable middle-aged Thai billionaire, is determined to use his illegally-created ‘spare-parts’ clone to extend his life. But into this straightforward exchange comes a second clone with a different proposition: “why not use my whole body in which to simply transplant your brain?”

This novel inevitably contains a few extended philosophical debates on Buddhism and the mind, which may be necessary to the story but are in fact its weakest points. I found myself comparing it with Kazuo Ishiguro’s admirable *Never Let Me Go*: the questionable morality of raising human clones is similarly explored, but given that the viewpoint of the novel is Buddhist, you can reasonably expect a different outcome. I found both the characterisation and the ease with which scientific challenges have been overcome to be too simplistic, but this was a decent read despite its rather too casual approach to the science.

Jim Newport

The Vampire of Siam

2003 | Asia Books, ISBN 974-8303-80-2



Ramonne Delacroix is a French vampire who has watched Bangkok grow for 170 years, yet his lust for blood and beautiful women is as young and strong as ever. Enter Martin Larue, an aimless American film critic who finds himself put on Ramonne's hidden trail, first as a pursuer then as an accomplice... but can he stay the course without being seduced to the dark side? With a background in movie design, Jim

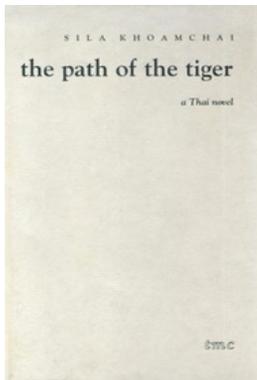
Newport clearly has a cinematic eye that he can use to good effect with the written word as well. There's a morbid vein of humour that runs through the excesses of sex and corruption in *The Vampire of Siam*, and Newport's slightly jaded style is what kept me reading this in one sitting. An engaging if easy read, and I look forward to the sequels.

Sila Khoamchai

The Path of the Tiger

1989 | TMC, ISBN 974-890388-5, 120 baht

Translated by Phongdeit Jiangphattanarkit



This 1994 first English language edition of the 1989 novella *Thang Suea* also marked the first publication in the Thai Modern Classics series of hardcovers. Marcel Barang's long introduction paints a picture of an author (whose real name is Winai Bunchuay) with an interesting background in political guerrilla activism who one day chose to walk away from it all in order to write.

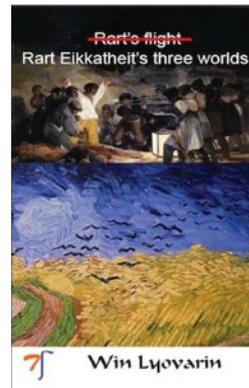
On the surface, this first novel is a colourful depiction of a lost, solitary hunter in the Thai jungle who encounters an equally solitary tiger; however, layered beneath the story are levels of metaphor that serve to cast the story in a different light if the reader can discern them. I can't claim complete success in this; while for me the most impressive aspect of the story was the dramatic illustration of the dark, wet jungle, the hunter's trials with the tiger had enough urgency to carry the story without needing to look deeper for inferred political or social subtexts. This story is sometimes compared with Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and while they are of comparable length and have obvious similarities in plot, I can find little else in common beyond man and beast facing it off in the wilderness. Hemingway makes the best of the drama, but Khoamchai wins for detail.

Win Lyovarin

Rart's Flight Rart Eikkatheit's Three Worlds

unknown original publication year | ThaiFiction, 150 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



The title of this rather stunning novella uses a typographic idiosyncrasy employed in the text, which has paragraphs struck through to show paths not taken. Rart Eikkatheit is either an artist who wants to be braver than he is, an under-employed soldier with a death fetish, or a pimp with a violent streak. Maybe he's all three, as these three characters, all with the same name, cross paths in events driven by Thai political

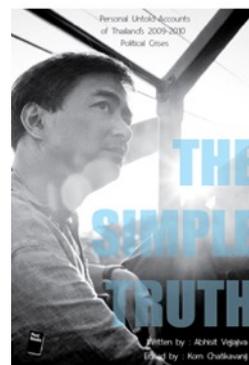
turmoil over the space of nineteen years and, somehow, they recognise each other for who they are: the same person. With each story told you get the point of view and all the things Rart wishes he had done. You get a mind-twisting conundrum told at a relentless pace that doesn't let up. You get questions about identity that necessarily go unanswered, because to answer them would be to have no story. I'm full of admiration for this baffling yet attractive piece of speculative fiction that does things I've never (quite) seen done before, and it certainly deserves a wider international readership. This is another publication deserving of a paper edition (the as-yet-unused cover is above) because for now, like Sainimnuan's *Immortal*, it's available as PDF only.

NON-FICTION

Abhisit Vejjajiva

The Simple Truth

2013 | Post Books, ISBN 978-974-228-127-4, 295 baht



Kuhn Abhisit began his political career in 1992, and as Thailand's Prime Minister from 2008-2011 heading a Democrat-led coalition, he had to steer the country through turbulent times including a clash of troops with anti-government protesters in 2010, in which twenty-three died and hundreds were injured. It's this event more than any other that drove him to put in writing his recollections of his period in

office, and to set straight the distorted charge sheet against him. I have respect for this cultured, educated Democrat who's still a full head and shoulders above the selfish and opportunist Red Shirts who followed him into office and have all since left in disgrace. Thai politics is always a mess, but there are occasional streaks of visible, personal dignity.
