

as if the universe contains
everything there is that can be learned

[the white notebooks #7]



Threads of Memory

Nothing goes unrecorded. Every word of leaf and snowflake and particle of dew...
as well as earthquake and avalanche, is written down in Nature's book.

John Muir, *John of the Mountains*, 1938

THIS WOODLAND IS STILL as enchanting as it was two decades before: trees younger than yourself overhang darkened, winding footpaths, with the gentle shades of autumn colours shimmering around the wooden arcade. We all know places like this, at least in our imaginations, and you are here to eavesdrop on a meeting.

You don't walk here as often as you should. Taking steps back into the mysteries of a childhood place always seems a very charged affair, so you keep to the solitary paths. The deeper you walk the more you feel the wood asserting itself upon your consciousness; in a short time it holds your senses and you are able to picture your own presence there. Selfishly, as if you alone feel this strange sense of non-location, the wood becomes 'yours', though it dawns on you that it is really the reverse that has happened.



In a wood there is no niche that you can occupy; you have no 'place' here. You have no romantic allusion to a makeshift timber shack, burning deadwood for heat at night, picking fruit, snaring rabbits or stealing eggs. There is nothing that could be returned to the lifecycle of the wood; its slow, almost ponderous pace would soon outlast you. It is wholly better that you give it something different and more worthwhile: your attention, and keep your thefts to a minimum.

Through the centre of this wood runs a stream. Occasionally clear, occasionally murky, it trickles slowly

west to east, beneath two small, old wooden bridges that were built to last. A gate is fixed to one side of each, but both have rusted through disuse as there are no posts and wires attached to their sides; people, horses and dogs walk safely around them. You are nearing the upstream bridge of the two, by way of a path that runs alongside the water. Your approach causes you to look along the channel cut by the stream over a thousand, unhindered years. Stopping on the bridge you can hear the water, though you are really listening out for other sounds around you, and above you can hear the first stirrings of the gathering you came to witness: the growing crescendo of a flock of birds that has been arriving in the woodland canopy for their late Autumn migration south. You casts your eyes to the heights of the oak's finer branches and can see them alighting there one by one but disappearing behind the gentle movement of the remaining leaves, as if refusing to reveal their presence to human eyes. You like to think that this annual gathering, held in this wood for longer than you can remember, is a red-letter day more important and private to these birds than the Autumn equinox is to us.

You wonder about the importance this particular wood obviously has to other individuals of the animal kingdom; namely, those who would call it 'home'. Well-rehearsed dramas of nature have been played out here for centuries on end - foxes teaching their cubs how to hunt, starlings being pushed from the nest for the first time, the constant warfare of nations of ants, spring caterpillars transforming themselves into the butterflies of Summer.

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And how many families of badgers are asleep below ground, ignorant of the daytime activity going on above their sets and at the tops of their towering trees? Then there are the occasional visitors – cats out for adventure at night, humans out to be close for a while with nature or each other, dogs running off the leash to breathe in the rich air of the countryside. All these particular sights, sounds, smells and interactions are made here and here alone in this one wood, not to be reproduced anywhere else on this Earth. Are these just the details of a greater, wider, unrehearsed and unrecorded drama that is unfolding daily, and in the presence of mere blind trees that act as nothing more than scenery?

When you first wondered about the greater function of a place such as a wood or forest, you would find it hard to stop thinking, and would find it difficult to just get lost in the visual and aural splendour that was continuing all around... because from amongst the many tales that nature tells there seemed to be emerging a greater theme. It struck you then: what we see as the diverse activities of nature exist merely as items of information to the greater whole.

Over the years as you have watched the endless cycles of this wood, you have begun to wonder are you not seeing at work just one vital link between earth and sky in the chain that holds together every element of life on this planet?

Simply being in this wood today is enough, so you continue walking. In a small clearing where the path heads up a short steep mound, overhead there is the crooning approach of geese. Through the highest leaves you can see a pair of them as they advance and pass over at treetop level, disturbing the tree-bound flock that bristles in agitation. To the geese, if they see you, you must look much smaller than you actually feel, with your head upturned atop your rustic shirt, pivoting on your heels, following the wake of their flight.

Here on the soil, the path up the mound looks too slippery for your feet; instead you take a grassier path to the right. A bank of hedgerow lines this path a few yards to your left, marking the man-made boundary to the wood and providing a wall from which trees arch upwards and over. You begin to feel like Jonah inside the whale – you have this impression of walking inside something alive and much larger than yourself, where each part – each bird, insect, mammal, plant and tree – is here for its ability to help keep the whole alive.

Here again you witness the success of centuries of co-existence between species, but this time sensing a purpose other than the urgency of individual survival. Has this wood always kept going not for the moment, but for the day or the season? Is there no continuous memory of its own existence, and wouldn't such a memory assist in the survival of the woodland itself?

Could it recall this Autumn day of departure of a flock of migratory birds, or could it recall each flush of sunshine, each relentless flood of wind, each strike of lightning that brought chaos or each coming of Spring that stirred the forces of renewal? If each community of trees does have a library of experience it must reside, you have long thought, in that shared network of roots that

extends to much of the planet, filled daily with local information that goes towards ensuring the survival of all life on Earth, while in the layers of activity that flourish above, the animal life, the elements and the seasons all live out their own inner nature.

Now at home with encyclopaedia open, you are confronted with more information concerning trees on pages that are themselves made from trees. You wonder what secrets those trees held beneath their bark in a time before that bark was stripped and humans imprinted their own variety of knowledge upon the fibre within. A colour illustration only shows two-thirds of a tree: where are its roots? Do we have to imagine them? If so, then perhaps we can go one better by animating our imagination... we can picture the movement of fluids beneath its rigid skin, and we see what filters into these parts and out of those. We read why starch is converted back to sugar at nightfall, and at last we know roughly how many offspring this tree will sire in its long lifetime. Then we visualise the leaves, photosensitive, passing on information to the roots about amounts of sunlight, whilst at the same time absorbing and monitoring the endless stream of carbon dioxide flowing in, combining with water to make sugar for the tree's survival, then a similar stream of oxygen – needed by the animal world – flowing out. Perhaps we sense that this tree is more than just trunk, branch, leaf and root; this genetically close relative and ourselves live in opposite halves of the seemingly intelligent gestalt that is the living world. We are like Pythagoras's 'amicable numbers': the factors of each add up to the total of the other.

If you could have named just twenty species of tree, plant, animal or bird in this wood, you would have returned home a happier person. Such is the depth of your naivety for the details of nature; you are more comfortable standing back to try to see the wider picture.

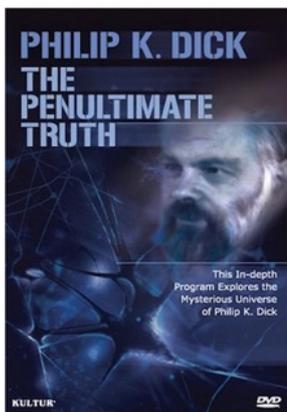
Soon enough, what to you was the joyous and majestic departure of the flock of thousands of birds became, to the wood, just another regular detail of its long life. After the great rush and noise had died down and you had paused for reflection, you were conscious of your ignorance for such details. As you left the wood and detached yourself from its slow and deliberate pace of life, conscious of this innocence you tried to witness simple events that would increase your appreciation of the natural world. You saw the graceful movement of a crow as it descended on a worm, a caterpillar eating its path across a leaf, an anonymous rodent scurrying for cover, shadow and sunlight on an ancient oak, low-flying sparrows criss-crossing the spaces between the trees, your own tracks across the grass. But these were more than just brief and unremarkable memories that make up the small details to a bigger picture. Today you caught a glimpse of something you had never seen before, something similar to a multitude of birds somehow hidden from the eye within a tree canopy: you saw the finest, clearest, most invisible and continuous threads of silk trailing behind each and every living being in this wood: today's web of life being spun into the ancient memory of a sensitive Earth.

Biopics



Philip K. Dick: The Penultimate Truth

2007, Emiliano Larre



I PREFER THIS FILM to the 55-minute BBC 'Arena' programme 'A Day in the Afterlife' that was broadcast in 1994, which is fine in it's own way but which also, in a slightly uncomfortable fashion when compared to *The Penultimate Truth* [1], unintentionally regards PKD as a rather sad figure of fun. Emiliano Larre's biopic not only treats its subject with a sober reverence, it also digs under the skin of various wounds to a sometimes uncomfortable degree, and reminds the viewer that this film is actually examining a fragile human being, and not so much the iconic inquisitor of the nature of reality.

Dick's mental breakdown is being investigated by two imaginary, archetypal agents from the McCarthy era, secretly piecing his life together for possibly dark, totalitarian purposes. The material they use is mostly recordings and posthumous interviews, so we end up with a diagrammatic picture of a man who never escaped the influence of his twin sister who died in her first month, who never escaped his need to rescue vulnerable women, and who increasingly needed to be rescued himself. Tim Powers and Ray Nelson offer continually supportive viewpoints, while K.W. Jeter's recollections are sometimes less sympathetic and Dick's ex-wives and girlfriends all provide a variety of perspectives that are genuine and sometimes critical. One is left with an image of man who, despite his failings and his vanity, nevertheless knew how to charm people and occasionally play them.

[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUo10InOH-A>

Tracks



'The Moon of Parthesius' Tribal Tech, *Thick*, 1999

THIS IS SUCH A MINOR TRACK in the manifesto of Scott Henderson [1] and Tribal Tech that it doesn't even get a mention on *Thick's* track listing – it's just tagged onto the end of what is a typically sardonic offering from one of the few true American jazz-rock outfits that were around at the end of the 20th Century.

You have to get the joke in the title: 'The Moon of Parthesius' is nothing more than the kind of skiffy-inspired instrumental rock that Yes did with a thousand times more sophistication than what's on offer here, because these guys are imagining being teenagers in their first rock band and playing with a suitable lack of finesse:

inept guitar tunes, a clunking, heavy-handed drum intro and wild screaming keyboards. This is science fiction music at its deliberate worst.

I saw Tribal Tech in Sydney's The Basement jazz club in 1999, around the time this had been recorded (the Australian drummer Virgil Donato was behind the kit instead of the regular Kirk Covington). A shame they didn't do this live, it would have brought the house down, or maybe had everyone who didn't get the joke run screaming for the exit. You can hear 'The Moon of Parthesius' as the unidentified last two minutes of the track 'What Has He Had?' at Spotify [2].

[1] <http://www.scotthenderson.net>

[2] <https://open.spotify.com/track/59kPDT6JxuRAbYnFsKuS1m>

above: James Gill, cognitivebiasparade.com [cc by-nc-sa 4.0]

Markers

lightly edited



WAHF...

John Bray, Eric Brown, Chuck Connor, Dave Hardy, Les Hurst, Jim Linwood, Taral Wayne and Liz Williams.

GRAHAM CHARNOCK, London, England; 3 Sept. 2016
First congratulation on your new-born. Secondly sympathies on your trials with your aged father, but pleased to hear he is somewhat recovered and is looking forward to a more structured life.

~ Unfortunately, his journey is now at an end – see the following eulogy. His 83rd birthday was a high, however in mid-October he caught yet another chest infection and the combination of painkillers and antibiotics means he started hallucinating, often that he was in Discworld as a character in one of Pterry's books. He had been through so much since May that I was considering getting a sign put on the end of his bed that said "I ATEN'T DEAD YET." He would certainly have liked that. ~

Andy Sawyer mentions 'extraneous books' which is a concept I am not familiar with. Having spent almost fifty years in the book trade on one level or another I have found it incredibly easy to acquire a massive amount of books. Why, I even bought some of them. I consider none of them extraneous, not even the ones I have not read and have no inclination to read. Almost all of them have a specific memory of how I acquired them and why, so wandering through my bookshelves is both an ongoing aide-memoire and a living diary. I have some quite valuable books, some Edward Ruscha first editions, for instance, and a few Ballard proof copies, a first edition of a Richard Adams novel which was withdrawn before publication, etc., but it would never occur to me to monetise them, any more than I would sell my guitar collection.

My children have long since grown up but I still have hoards of their juvenile collections about the house which are *really* worthless, but which I cannot bring myself to dump. I have multiple copies of some books which I acquired as a wholesaler and rescued from the company's skip when it went bankrupt, but these I think would probably be as much of a burden for a charity shop as they are to me. And even they have their memories. I worked for a distributor whose contracts with their clients allowed them to dump a percentage of returns and overstocks and I *rescued* some of these, not with any thought of profiting from them, but merely because some of them struck me as attractive productions in their own right and deserved better than being used for landfill or motorway foundations.

I notice your LoC column has contributors who I would dearly like to respond to my own fanzine but I suspect a generational thing is going on here. I'm sure I am regarded as an old-fogey has-been in some areas of fandom, a sort of Phil Rogers of my time, whom you younger fans don't really want to relate to. It's either a sort of back-door ageism or I am just being paranoid.

~ Yeah, I think it's partly a generational thing, but heck, I'm not that far behind you (56 now, always a late starter in just about everything, and also feeling in full possession of 'old fogey' credentials). There are plenty of people, younger and older and not naming names, who I send this fanzine to and that I would *love* to get a response from, but perhaps they feel they are too far outside the dialogue, or that they have little in common with the diverse group of fandom that appears in these here Letters pages. ~

But I got together recently with my old mate Steve Gilmore, who I played with in Mike Moorcock's Deep Fix. He runs open mike sessions at a Camden guitar shop and I asked him why, with all the talent he seemed surrounded by on these sessions, why he didn't form another group. He made the same comment, "It's an age thing, they don't want to associate with ageing rock stars." It's true, people have their own friends and social circles and want to hang out with their contemporaries. The trouble with old fans like me is that the older we get the more our contemporaries are dying off and we no longer have any chance to hang out with them. Oh well.

STEVE JEFFERY, Kidlington, England; 10 Sept. 2016
Firstly, congratulations, and welcome to the world, Sky. It's a shame you missed Sky's arrival after flying back all that way and then being given the run-around at the hospital.

I'm not going to get into Brexit politics (I think it was a mistake we're going to have a hard time living with), but the voting patterns across the country showed a complete disconnect between a bunch of Oxford and Eton educated posh boys in Parliament and a disenfranchised and resentful North that should have been evident had anyone cared to look beyond the concerns of London and the south. When you're angry you don't always think about the consequences when Cameron effectively posted a 'kick me' sign on his back for a lot of people.

I should actually say a big thank you for the work you put in on the ISFDB. I don't use it that much, but it's nice to know it's there and people care about it. Having lost more evenings and weekends than I care to count in the '90s as a *Vector* editor, reviewer and Clarke Award judge I appreciate that people are still prepared to do

things like this for free because they care about it.

My attitude to fandom waxes and wanes over time. At the moment it's waned to just keeping up with a handful of select fanzines, a bi-monthly apa (administered by Vikki, and currently down to four people so I can't hand in my notice) and a directorship of the BSFA which seems to get automatically renewed like my TV licence. Work currently precludes anything more time-consuming or arduous. Maybe if I retire, but Brexit and 0% interest rates seems to have put paid to that as a concept and I don't actually see any future beyond dying on the job.

Moving onto the letters, I belatedly note a couple of typos in my letter after hitting the send key. ("It would also be interesting to know" the literal translations of some those words for planet Earth in different languages rather than "It was also interesting to know" as I actually wrote (or more likely, wrote, changed, and omitted to prufe rede my edit before sending). Thanks for the comments on further Satriani tracks, which I shall have to chase up on YouTube. I can understand the idea of one guitarist riffing on another if they have the technical proficiency and fluidity to move between different styles but I'm mildly croggled that one of those you report Satriani as choosing is Steve Hillage. Don't get me wrong, I like Hillage, and have done since the early Gong albums such as *Angel's Egg* and *You* and still have a couple of his solo albums on vinyl (*L*, *Green* and *Motivation Radio*), and he has a quite unique modal style, but he doesn't often feature in lists of top 10 most popular guitarists, and the only other guitarist I know who consciously emulates his style is Steffi Sharpstrings of punk-hippy outfit Here & Now. As I say, I shall definitely have to listen to this.

(While I'm admitting my embarrassing hippy past here, I was saddened to learn of the recent death of Gilli Smyth, so shortly after the loss of Gong founder Daevid Allen, and rather pleased and astonished that it rated an obituary in the *Grauniad*.)

I liked Cover Stories in this issue. I have that edition of Swainston's *The Year of Our War*, and the two sequels and a prequel (*Above the Snowline*), all of which, as you note, abandon an actual cover painting in favour of typography and simple graphics. I shall have to follow your links to some of his others. (I've just done so; there are covers for a lot of books I have, but not in those editions. I did like the one for *Viriconium*, but realistically how many editions of this do I need I have three already.)

Win Lyovarin's *Rart Eikkaheit's Three Worlds* sounds intriguing, but I'm slightly suffering after Toh Enjoe's *Self-Reference Engine*, which I bought on the same grounds that the reviewer described it as weird and baffling, and I hadn't learned to leave well alone after Danielewski's *House of Leaves* or Hal Duncan's *Vellum* and *Ink*. One day I will learn.

Wimon Sainimnuan's *Immortal* looks at a familiar sf trope of cloning as a potential source of replacement parts. Everyone makes the inevitable comparison with Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* but forgets Michael Marshall Smith's earlier *Spare* or that the TV series *Orphan Black* also trod this path before. I'm sure there was also a short story about a mother and her daughter in a spaceship

where the daughter learns she is actually a younger clone of the mother (Tiptree? Can anyone point to this as I've forgotten where I've read it.)

JERRY KAUFMAN, Seattle, WA; 12 September 2016

Congrats again on your new child to you and Benji.

I've varied in how much I get out of fandom, depending certainly how much I put into it. The friendships, at least, have been life-long in most cases. Ones that have disappeared through my own lack of effort have often come back strong after re-connecting.

Your musical tastes and interests are rather different from my own. So I have not been jumping around in Spotify or Silver Platters (local CD and Vinyl store) to track down albums. I tend more to pop/rock than current jazz although I love jazz from the 1920s through the early 1960s (Thelonius Monk, for example).

I noticed another difference between the two versions of the Edward Miller cover for *The Year of Our War*: in the original version the wings are more sharply defined. In that version they look like bat wings, while in the published one, they look more like bird wings, with feathers (I looked at the PDF to be sure). I presume the Gollancz art director thought that a bat-winged figure would not be as attractive as a feathery one.

DAVE LALLY, London, England; 18 September 2016

Having taken on the mantle of the BSFA's Membership Officer since Loncon 3 in August 2014, and having now retired after forty years in the City/Financial Services (the (yawn) boring pensions industry) much of my time is now taken up by that role: indeed since that Worldcon, the BSFA's membership has grown with very few lapses.

My own two special areas of SF interest continue: the promotion of conventions and of course TV and film, mainly but not only due to my previous hat as Chair of the European SF Society (home of the annual Eurocons. It is nice to get GoH invites to various cons, the latest (in very hot weather but with beer at only £2 a litre) was at Polcon in Wroclaw, Poland. Amongst my fellow overseas GoHs were old mates Alastair Reynolds and Ian Watson.

Also on the con front, there is a nice linking with the (so far) only known bid for Worldcon in mid-August 2019, to be voted on at Worldcon 2017 in Helsinki, and that is my home town of Dublin. That link is now the one-week-later Eurocon 2019 bid for Titancon in Belfast (the bid will be at Eurocon 2017 in Dortmund) and just up the road or rail from Dublin on the same island.

Titancon, when it began, was solely a *Game of Thrones* convention (a lot of it is filmed in Northern Ireland), but in more recent years it has expanded with encouragement from me and others into general SF also: recent GoHs have included Joe Abercrombie, Pat Cadigan and of course (he is local after all) Ian McDonald.

Most non-Irish are unaware, but since Aug 1947, long before Gene Roddenberry/William Shatner/Patrick Stewart *et al*, the two cities of Belfast and Dublin are linked eight times a day each way by the express train "The Enterprise", and of course in 2019 we will be hoping to have an "NCC 1701" Worldcon/Eurocon connection, subject to CBS/Paramount agreeing.

In the world of film and TV many of us await with excitement the arrival of Mike Carey's dystopian *The Girl with All the Gifts* with Gemma Atherton and Glenn Close, mostly filmed in Birmingham plus a little in Chernobyl. Based on his own book Mike also did the screenplay; the UK launch is late September this year. I'll hear more from him regarding this at the forthcoming UK Fantasycon in Scarborough.

Also there is some special excitement for me in 2017 (and one would expect this, my being an acknowledged fanatic for the show): the 50th anniversary of the first broadcast of the unique, cult TV series *The Prisoner* in 1967. The show is still banned in some places, eg. Russia, China and most of the Middle East, and was also banned in the mid-1970s in Northern Ireland! Events are being planned in Portmeirion (where else) in north-west Wales in late September; and also one week later in London.

I am also pleased that much of the necessary provisions at Worldcon 2016 designed to reduce the blatant slate voting have gone through, although it was sadly necessary. Whether this will be sufficient remains to be seen: I've a horrible feeling that more will have to be done at Helsinki in 2017 and (god forbid) even more at subsequent Worldcons, San Jose in 2018 and Dublin in 2019. One well known SF person (no names, no pack drill) opined to me in confidence that this has reduced the Hugo's standing, being an open SF fan vote, and that perhaps the Nebulas, voted on by one's SF peers, now has more standing. I'm sure that debate will continue.

LLOYD PENNEY, Etobicoke, ON; 14 October 2016

First of all, congratulations on the birth of Sky, and condolences on the death of the king. King of Thailand for seventy years... now, that's job security.

Brexit... a foolish decision, IMHO. We're in a part of our history where we are stronger together, and I do not take that idea from Hillary Clinton's campaign. There are many separatist factions around the world, and as much as there are people who might want to try it alone, money usually says no. Being a Canadian who's been through two Quebec referenda, I believe I know. The people who ran the Brexit campaign got what they wanted, and scarpered like mice.

We do try to get out of fandom what we put in... with mixed results. I met Yvonne through fandom, so I have definitely gotten more out of fandom than I put in. I have a few trophies and certificates, and some other achievements to make me feel good. In my early days of fandom, I was a journalism grad, so I wanted to write, and get my byline here and there. I was never able to do that in professional publications, but got to do it in the locals of many fanzines. (I just checked my own ISFDB listing... it is long, but I do write about 250 locs a year; so it really should be a lot longer than that.)

~ I think I probably entered into the ISFDB the greater majority of all those letters, and 'Lloyd Penney' is now an auto-fill for just about every 'author' data-field when I add a new fanzine! ~

I do want to lighten our load, and we are lucky that there is an SF library in Toronto, the Merril

Collection, but whether they might want what we have to offer is another thing. They have a finite amount of space, with little storage space, and whatever I might give them/ whatever they might want to accept may see out the rest of its days in a dark storage room. I really don't want to recycle this stuff, but if there isn't any demand for it... I am *still* looking for work, but I have a good interview on Tuesday and a good feeling about it. The second half of August saw us in London and Lincoln; we had ourselves a great time in both locations, and we want to return.

I admit that when you write about your job flying BA, I would think, "Boy, would I ever like *your* Air Miles!" By the way, when we flew to London in August, we flew WestJet to Gatwick, and took the Express up to Victoria station. Let me know when next you might be flying into Pearson, and if time allows, I'll come up to visit, and the first round is on me.

Time rarely allows for much else these days... the odd loc is written in between frantic job hunting. Why can't I just win the lottery? It would be so much easier, and local businesses would never again see me at their doors. I want to become accustomed to the lifestyle I aspire to. Anyway, thanks again, and again, happy family. See you at Pearson some time, I hope.

DAVID REDD, Haverfordwest, Wales; 14 October 2016

My sympathies with your personal roller-coaster (your term), and I hope all has got better in your life, in particular the high spots with your children continuing.

Interesting discussion on what-happens-to-our-books from Joseph Nicholas etc. Charity shops here swiftly circulate unsold items to other branches or even nominally-rival charities, some finally being dumped, recycled or at best given to a market trader. Same for vinyl LPs. I've been in Haverfordwest's excellent Terminal Records (advert) and seen proprietor and customer sighing over carrier bags full of Mantovani and Jim Reeves (Artist names given as shorthand for genre only, no reflection on these well-loved, etc.)

Do hope Steve Jeffrey can find some sensible archiving home for his ephemera. A very few academic researchers are at last just waking up to the sociological treasure trove in there, but it's more generally a light-hidden-under-bushel situation as yet. I don't like to repeat this, but at "our" time of life fans need to write very detailed wills and make sure potential executors understand fully. Personally, I regret even the fairly responsible downsizing I had to undertake last decade, when I let go some issues of *Banana Wings* (ouch), *Busswarble* (lost some good Mae Strelkov letters), *Forgotten Fantasy*, *New Worlds* and through some mischance *Substance #2* among others. But I'm sure everyone has such stories. The point is that some uninformed executor or helpful downsizer would make even worse decisions than I did. There should be some academic safe-deposit possibility if Steve's ephemera can be trumpeted as a mother-lode of new Ph.D material.

Another useful warning from Andy Sawyer: buy it now. That bargain won't come back. The next time it's advertised one joker will think it's worth £35 and all other new advertisers will assume he's right. I've seen it happen

and so have you.

Great Edward Miller cover in either version [of Steph Swanston's *The Year of Our War*], although a hanging-rifle shape in the Gollancz scan puzzles me. Would have been nice to see the Gollancz without text. For me the other version is less pleasing but more effective, at least in textless form, because the false-horizon illusion leads me to interpret the winged figure as a shadowed underside.

Thai Literary Supplement: not likely to read the actual books now, sorry, but as always it's good to glimpse a parallel culture trying out different directions.

Oh, one query on the ISFDB which may not be for your precise editorial position. One day, time and eyesight and et ceteras permitting, I'd like to draft a publishing history of J.G. Ballard's 'The Voices of Time' culled from ISFDB listings and given cover scans.

Because it's there. Would ISFDB mainpersons be willing to allow this, you think? Don't like to copy the lists wholesale without permission in case the idea takes flight and I start showing it/offering it to others. (I admit after a first draft nothing is likely to happen for years.) Of course, if somebody else has already tried this, warn me off!

~ No permission required: at the bottom of just about every ISFDB page is a brief Creative Commons statement (CC-BY-2.0) for all information the ISFDB provides. The cover scans, too, appear under a 'fair-use' rationale that you'd also be entitled to use in order to reproduce them. I know of no other specific project like this, so I do look forward to seeing what you come up with! ~

Can't comment on air miles as haven't flown since 1969.



Sharing Space: A Brief Eulogy of My Father

Ashley Young, 1 October 1933 – 3 December 2016

I PROBABLY WOULD NEVER have been a science fiction fan if it was not for dad.

He had a background in books, having worked at Foyles in London, and his love of books was something he carried throughout his life and clearly passed on to me more than my four siblings. From an early age, and with no specific beginning that I can remember, I experienced a speculative 'drip feed' that gradually accumulated into curiosity about the nature of the universe. For instance, at age seven he once took me – straight out of school and still in my school uniform – to catch the early evening showing at Reading's Odeon Cinema of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I confess I almost fell asleep and dad was just as puzzled by the movie as I was, but no doubt by his mid-thirties he could discern more of its depths than I could.

My ambivalent response to *2001* clearly didn't deter him. At age eight he would take me on Saturdays to London's Natural History Museum to see the dinosaurs and the Science Museum to 'learn science'. These trips were for me alone, not my brother and sisters. He sometimes had a secret password, probably gained from a perk with his employer Gillette, that even got us into the special exhibits, after which we'd sometimes head over to the London Planetarium to gaze at planets. In 1972, after seeing how much I also loved gazing at my maps of the night sky on my bedroom wall, he bought for my birthday David A. Hardy and Patrick Moore's *Challenge of the Stars*, which in later years was influential in my ambition to

become a science fiction artist.

I think dad was looking for someone with whom he could talk to about this kind of imaginative (or at least scientific) stuff, perhaps not finding it there with the rest of his children or his mates at work, and he looked to his eldest son for that kind of fatherly gratification and indulgence. I was all for it, as much as any slightly confused pre-teen kid could be, although I had no idea of dad's actual pedigree in reading science fiction. That was to become a little more apparent a couple of years later in 1974, when he subscribed to the NEL illustrated magazine *Science Fiction Monthly* and bought himself a copy of Brian Ash's *The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, which I remember poring over endlessly, such that dad hardly ever saw it. He encouraged my experimentation with SF, although he'd certainly have preferred that I worked harder at school than I did. He bought for me Arthur C. Clarke's *Islands in the Sky*, after which I spent my pocket money on Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, André Norton's *The Beast Master* and Kate Wilhelm's *The Killing Thing* – and you could say that by this time I was 'on track'. It was also around this time that he mentioned to me that while stationed in Malta with the RAF in his early twenties (as an aircraft mechanic working on a squadron of Hurricanes) he'd read Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the first edition, nicked furtively from the squadron's library.

Post-war, dad's pre-occupations were more faith-based. Born C of E, he converted to Catholicism around

the time he met my mother. His Catholic faith was to remain *the* central focus throughout his life to the end, never wavering, yet it caused a rift between us when I was in my late teens. Barely a day went by when we didn't argue, and it was usually centred around his saddening observation that his eldest son was losing his religion, which he saw as something that needed to be prevented, if he possibly could. He tried many things to get me back on that particular track including, for my nineteenth birthday in 1979, buying me the first edition hardcover of Ian Watson's *God's World*. As a confused and over-sensitive teenager, just the title of the novel was to me like a red rag to a bull and smacked of a kind of desperation on his part, trying to draw me back into the Christian faith. No, he'd never read it, and he had clearly just bought it for the title as a kind of hoped-for bridge between us. I regret my shallow reaction now, and to this day I have never read it despite owning it for thirty-seven years. Now that I know more about the book and Watson's own irreligious point of view, I do intend to rectify that.

More happily the following year, dad bought for my birthday Carl Sagan's book of *Cosmos*, after he could see how much I was in awe of the TV series. It was really the first pop-science book I'd ever read. With dad's backing, it helped me form my own view of the universe that didn't rely on invisible friends. I could see he respected my position, and was grateful that at least I was still thinking about Big Questions. A couple of years later I was in the long process of escaping the nest, and our relationship became much more cordial and accepting of each other's positions. He no longer tried to force his religion upon me, and books, and science fiction in particular, became one of the two most discussed subjects between us, the other being politics. But with him as a lifelong Tory and me an embittered 'child of Thatcher', we both knew where to draw the line and keep our relationship on an even keel, because neither of us wanted to go back to fighting.

Dad was a well-travelled man. From the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, as an Export Marketing Director for Gillette he inherited a huge sales territory from Senegal to Thailand. By chance he was always away for my birthday, but I never held it against him. His experience abroad added something to our family dimensions, then at age 55 he took early retirement on a good pension and gained the opportunity to get stuck into books once more. He'd always had an admirable library, and his collection of theology, art and history books probably served him well when he took an Open University degree in European Humanities in 1990, gaining a distinction. For a decade he also served as Secretary for the Eckhart Society, devoted to promoting the works of the German mystic Meister Eckhart. It appealed to his *sensawunda* about the universe, which he always saw through a typically catholic lens.

In 2000, after I had returned to reading SF from a fifteen-year hiatus, I dropped by his place one day and to my utter surprise he slammed Alastair Reynolds's *Revelation Space* on the table in front of me. "You have to read this," he said, and I really needed no further recommendation. He was 67, and he knew I'd returned to reading SF after I'd rhapsodised to him about Mary Doria

Russell's *The Sparrow* which, given its religious context and my recommendation, he loved. Our remaining sixteen years were populated by discussion of the books of Al Reynolds, Iain M. Banks, Terry Pratchett, Peter Hamilton and Stephen Donaldson. He developed a love for galaxy-spanning space operas, and in his later years he was probably better read in this sub-genre than myself.

We differed on one crucial point, however: Stephen Donaldson's often over-ornate language, which, like many, I find irritating. But dad didn't mind it at all: "He's just using the language," he'd patiently remind me. For him, Donaldson's 'Gap' series was the most exciting science fiction he'd ever read, and his 'Thomas Covenant' series the most enthralling fantasy series that he loved getting lost in. He was clearly a huge Donaldson fan, so I did my duty by also introducing him to Donaldson's pseudonymous Reed Stephens series of crime fiction, which, as if by predetermination, he also enjoyed.

He loved hearing of my time in fandom since 2001, of meeting or knowing "inside stuff" about all these writers he so admired, and he prized his collection of 'Culture' novels that Iain Banks had inscribed and signed for him. I feel lucky to have had a father who completely understood his son's enthusiasm for science fiction. I imagine there are any number of fans whose parents wished their children had outgrown the 'crazy Buck Rogers stuff' and for their whole lives have never seen the appeal in fantastic literature that their kids have done. Dad was never a 'science fiction fan' as we see it, more a 'fan of science fiction', but I wouldn't be where I am today as a trufan without his initial influence, his humour and his gentle, patient love.

Despite having very good health for most of his life, he was suddenly taken ill in March 2016 a month after a trip to Thailand for a grandson's wedding, and he was never to see his home again. It initially looked like typhoid, but there were missing indicators in his blood composition such that it was never determined exactly what had hit him. He spent the next four months shuttling between two hospitals with related ailments, then his final two months in a good nursing home. We may never have found out what set off his sudden downward spiral, but it later emerged that he had very likely developed an aggressive form of pancreatic cancer. Treatment with antibiotics and painkillers advanced a mental decline that was thankfully short of dementia, but they did give him many surreal and dreamlike hallucinations, either seeing himself as a character in Discworld or inhabiting something like a John Le Carré novel, being caught up in long-running spy missions against the Russians in the Baltic. His final months were often entertaining in this way and peppered with bizarre insights, but witnessing this decline was also for me this time inevitably a saddening observation. There really was no bringing him back. There were clearly some battles to save aspects of each other that we would both lose in our lives.

This brief recollection covers only one aspect of his varied life, but it was an important one that connected us through good times and bad. If I can't write about my own father's love of science fiction here in my own fanzine, where else can I write about it? I will always miss you, dad.



What's the full story behind that barely-remembered anecdote about Cary Grant and his breakfast?

I searched for this online about ten years ago and came up with nothing. The story's now up at IMDb in its Trivia section for **Cary Grant** [1]:

Grant once phoned hotel mogul Conrad Hilton in Istanbul, Turkey, to find out why his breakfast order at New York's Plaza Hotel, which called for English muffins, came with only one and a half muffins instead of two. When Grant insisted that the explanation he'd been given – a hotel efficiency report finding that most people ate only three of the four halves brought to them – still resulted in being cheated out of a half, the Plaza Hotel changed its policy and began serving two complete muffins with breakfast. From then on, Grant often spoke of forming an English Muffin-Lovers Society, members of which would be required to report any hotel or restaurant that listed muffins on the menu and then served fewer than two.

This is an abbreviated form of the story compared to the more detailed version I read in a New York newspaper in the late 1990s, in which Cary Grant had to go all the way up the line asking the same question, from waiting staff to hotel manager and then on to Conrad Hilton who was on holiday in Turkey, before he got satisfaction. I see there has also been a Cary Grant-inspired English Muffin-Lovers Society [2] in existence online since 2004.

Who was the CNN journalist that I witnessed faking news footage of the Gulf War?

Sometime in February 1991, while kicking the Iraqis out of Kuwait was in full swing, I saw a non-credible CNN journalist claim a chemical weapons attack was under way at his base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. In a fit of panic with siren warnings going off all around him, with maximum drama he donned his gas mask in front of the camera, after which the head of another man, presumably the sound guy, could be seen popping up in the lower left corner of the screen, continuing to wear nothing more than his headphones. Turns out this egomaniacal journalist was none other than **Charles Jaco**, who doesn't appear on Wikipedia's list of CNN reporters (past and present) but he

does have an entry all to himself [3]. The sirens Jaco was reacting to did not sound authentic, either: they sounded like a rather muffled recording, and I was certain I was watching a journalist *creating* fake news – he was clearly decades ahead of his time. Unfortunately the clip is not on YouTube and remains clear in my memory only, but other similar clips of Jaco's Gulf War antics are online alongside more conspiracy-laden accusations that he was not even in Saudi Arabia [4], for which he threatened legal action.

Who was Tank Man?

The best reckoning, or at least the most widely circulated [5], is that his name was, or is, **Wang Weilin**. He looked for all the world like he was on his way home with a couple of bags of shopping when he just decided to say "No." The name first surfaced a few weeks later in the British *Sunday Express* and that claim to his identity was also furthered by Chinese student protest leader Li Lu [6] in his 1990 autobiography *Moving the Mountain*, which I've read. Some reports say he was executed two weeks later; another that he was executed by firing squad two months later; other unverified claims are that he's still alive and hiding out in mainland China, also that he escaped to Taiwan where he's been working either as an archaeologist or in a museum. In 1998 *Time* magazine included Tank Man on its list of the 100 most important people of the twentieth century [7].



In my lifetime, I would like to be able to visit the memorial to him at the spot where the above photo was taken near the Avenue of Eternal Peace, but until that far-off and unlikely day the best tribute to him is the 2006 PBS documentary, at YouTube in 8 parts [8], and most relevant to the present is part 7.

[1] <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000026/bio>

[2] <http://www.harsh-light.com/cary/index.php>

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Jaco

[4] <https://www.metabunk.org/debunked-cnns-fake-news-broadcasts-charles-jaco-and-the-fake-live-gulf-war-reports.t1140>

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tank_Man

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Lu

[7] <http://www.time.com/time/time100/leaders/profile/rebel.html>

[8] Starting at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB70mWXrZEE>

It's Always Darkest Just Before It Goes Totally Black

I always try to keep a sense of humour when things head south. But I struggled to do so in the weeks following the vote for Brexit, when the British pound's battle to keep some kind of parity with the Thai baht saw the pound devalued from 53 to 48 baht in one 24-hour period. Ten years ago, the rate was 70. In 2008 when it hit 60, that was very bad news. These days, on a very good day we might hope to see 55, but are more used to 50. A month after Brexit it was at 46, it's lowest ever. Today, five months after Brexit, we are now down to 42.5. At 55,000 baht per term, Miles's school fees are now costing me £294 more than last term when the money is converted from sterling, the now

plummeting currency by which this family has to survive.

I no longer ask British friends here which way they voted. I'd rather not know, because a self-sabotaging vote for Brexit will, I admit, shamefully handicap my conversation with them. I noticed this with one friend Tim who, judging by his John Lennon glasses and charity-shop clothes, I always reckoned was a thoughtful family man and a diehard lefty. Wrong. "No, mate, I'm fully paid-up with UKIP. I put my country first." *But Tim*, I thought, *you're an immigrant here yourself...* I now refer to this as his blind 'Berlin 1933' moment, or as Bowie might have put it, *Visions of Nigel Farage in my head, plans for everyone...*

Oneirataxia



Listopia

Don't help me set the table / Cause now there's one less place / I won't lay mama's silver / For a man who won't say grace
If home's where the heart is / Then your home's on the street / Me, I'll read a good book / Turn out the lights and go to sleep

Barbara Mandrell, 'Standing Room Only', *This Is Barbara Mandrell*, 1976

(as appears in the closing sequence of the 2016 BBC documentary *Hyper:Normalisation*)

This fanzine was pieced together between 20 September and 31 December 2559 / 2016, mostly typed with one finger while simultaneously holding a sleeping baby in the other arm. The title as a phrase is not something that came from an obscure PKD screed; it came to me in late 2015 while doing the edX course 'Super Earths and Life', and for once (or twice) has not been nicked from elsewhere.

Threads of Memory

This piece has had a very long gestation period, dating back to the late 1980s when I titled it 'Pace of Life'. I've occasionally tinkered with it but it's essentially the same essay I wrote all those years ago. It was inspired by Annie Dillard's two books of nature writing *Teaching a Stone to Talk* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, as well as the essays of Harold J. Morowitz in his collection *The Wine of Life*. I once thought about sending this essay to Satish Kumar's magazine *Resurgence* but never did; I think it would have fitted nicely there.

Even today, nearly thirty years later, I still look at trees the same way, and just last month I discovered a pop-science book that covers similar ground to this essay: *The Hidden Life of Trees* by the Peter Wohlleben.

FURTHER GENRE FANZINES RECEIVED / READ IN 2016

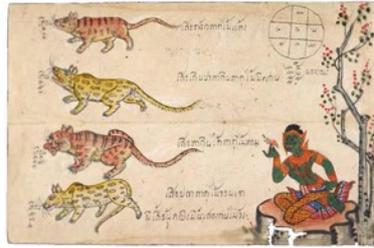
- Ansible* #350-353 DAVE LANGFORD
- Banana Wings* #64 CLAIRE BRIALEY & MARK PLUMMER
- Broken Toys* #50 TARAL WAYNE
- CounterClock* #26 WOLF VON WITTING
- Data Dump* #220-221 STEVE SNEYD
- Inca* #11-12 ROB JACKSON
- Lofgeornost* #125 FRED LERNER
- Opuntia* #352-355 DALE SPEIRS
- Spartacus* #16 GUY LILLIAN III
- Vibrator* #2.0.31-2.0.34 GRAHAM CHARNOCK
- The Zine Dump* #38 GUY LILLIAN III

MY FATHER WAS NEVER a fanzine fan per se, but he did take pride in and enjoyed the fanzines I edited, especially my issues of *Journey Planet* which on more than one occasion I found him dipping into. I don't doubt that he could have written some interesting stuff about SF that would have looked good in fanzines, but he was happier writing variously about Christianity and theology. That was clearly his first love in the playground of the mind.

above: Rich Johnston

TLS

THAILAND, IN ENGLISH



THE THAI LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, #7

DECEMBER 2559 / 2016

Edited by Peter Young
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“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

Lawrence Block

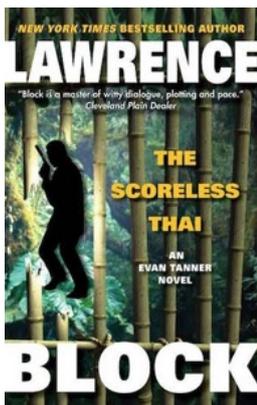
The Scoreless Thai

1968 | Harper, ISBN 978-0-06-125939-5, \$7.99

Collin Piprell

Kicking Dogs

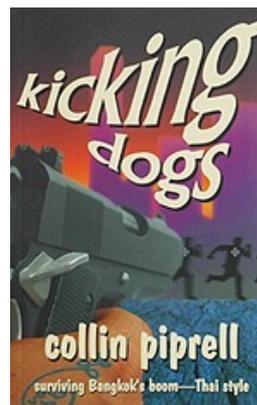
1991 | Asia Books, ISBN 974-8303-44-6, 425 baht



I came by this novel obliquely via Murray Moore. Block’s ‘Evan Tanner’ series of novels focusses on the adventures of an American spy – for want of a more accurate word – who had the sleep centre of his brain put out by a piece of shrapnel in the Korean War. Unable to sleep, he’s had an extra eight hours every day with which to improve himself, learn a dozen languages and get into assorted scrapes on behalf of the American govern-

ment, not dissimilar from those of a certain better-known British spy. Here, he hooks up with a Kenyan jazz singer in New York, who tours Southeast Asia with her band only to get caught up in a jewel heist in Bangkok then disappear. Tanner decides to investigate, and not entirely for selfless reasons because he’s also rather attracted to the shiny, sparkling stuff as well.

This is not what I’d call an ‘embedded’ novel. It’s a little too apparent that Block’s familiarity with Southeast Asia was at that time a little too casual – from Thailand the story progresses to Laos where the communists are screwing with the country and its neighbours, and over to the east there’s also a serious North/South altercation going on in Vietnam. Specifics are lacking and blurred generalisations tend to hold sway, such that it feels a little too readily like casual fiction knocked off on a typewriter on the other side of the world. But despite the easy nature of the plotting Block clearly knows how to entertain: his pacing is pretty good and his dialogue is better, but I didn’t quite get enough of the world-view of a sleepless man growing weary of his fellow human beings – I’d need to read a few more Tanner novels to get that bigger picture.



‘Kicking Dogs’ is a useful Thai euphemism for taking out your frustrations on somebody that doesn’t really deserve it – e.g. an innocent canine conveniently located within striking distance. Collin Piprell’s first novel is a comic thriller: the comedy is downbeat and cynical and the thrills not outrageously dangerous, despite being set in 1990s boom-time Bangkok where any number of small-time and big-time crooks are

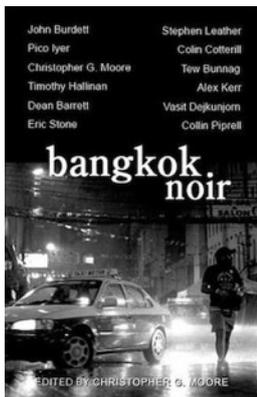
out for a piece of the action in pursuit of big money. Jack Shackaway, on the other hand, is an American journalist not actually making much money at all, and he finds himself set upon by a variety of said low-life who achieve various degrees of success in inconveniencing Jack. The thing is, he has no idea why all this is happening, and his problems are starting to affect everyone else too.

What Piprell does well is show the point of view of the Western *farang* who simply doesn’t understand Thai ways, as is constantly pointed out to Jack by his beleaguered girlfriend Mu. These two character types have since become ciphers in just about any modern novel featuring single men in Thailand, and I’m setting a bar for how well an author can illustrate this kind of relationship. Collin Piprell carried it off with style in his collection *Bangkok Knights* and again he does it well here, although for a first novel there was perhaps some mixed success with how clearly the plot was driving the characters or the characters were driving the plot. There are some exploitative scenes too featuring the Bangkok sex industry, but sadly that’s a given these days, showing that where we get our thrills really is a moveable feast.

Christopher G. Moore, ed.

Bangkok Noir

2011 | Heaven Lake Press, ISBN 978-616-7503-04-2



Moore has edited two noir anthologies set in South East Asia, this one and *Phnom Penh Noir* (2012), but it's this anthology's introduction that has the best summation of 'noir' I've yet come across: "Hard-boiled stories make for uncomfortable reading, but you know somehow there's the possibility of hope at the end (no puns are allowed in noir). Noir is black in the way certain death is black.

No redemption, no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel." The same description might not apply everywhere around the world that noir fiction is written, but perhaps it ought to, and there's a certain characteristic ruthlessness to the darker undercurrents of South East Asian life that Moore has brought to light with this selection.

Firstly, of the twelve stories I was pleased to see some speculative fiction among the more traditionally bleak offerings, my favourite among them being Colin Cotterill's energetic 'Halfhead', in which a fake Chiang Mai psychic is haunted by dreams of an old, dead woman with literally half a head, and he is forced by circumstance to bargain with her offer of crime-solving information from the spirit world. Needless to say it ends in the worst possible way for the clairvoyant, but then all along you knew it would.

There is also Christopher Moore's near-future 'Dolphins Inc.'; set mostly in Bangkok, the story begins with Thai misunderstandings of Japanese whaling and which bounces between locales and themes, requiring a little thought from the reader about water resources.

One story that is a little out of character with the rest is Eric Stone's 'The Lunch That Got Away'. It features an attractively nonviolent resolution to a criminal dispute between a poor Bangkok street fish vendor and a big restaurant, but it feels far from being 'noir' in the sense described above.

Of the two Thai writers in this collection, only one was familiar to me: Tew Bunnag, whose writing I admire greatly and have reviewed before, has a slowburn story about a mistress who tries to gain the upper hand over her lover, only to get outplayed herself. The other is Vasit Dejkunjorn, a retired police general who shows he knows a thing or two about Thai police corruption in his story 'The Sword'. The portrait he draws of a crooked superintendent is concise yet contains an unexpected resolution that will likely have readers cheering.

Capping the collection is Collin Piprell's 'Hot Enough to Kill'. It sweats atmosphere, describing the workings in the mind of a poor Bangkok hitman as he carries out a job. It's just work.

This anthology worked well for me.

S.P. Somtow

The Stone Buddha's Tears

2012 | Post Books, ISBN 978-974-228-097-0, 200 baht



Somtow is not really known for his y/a mainstream fiction, so in that respect this novella was both surprising and welcome. Two boys from distant strata of Thai society – a novice monk whose father is a rich politician, and a street beggar enslaved to the local mafia – meet by complete chance on a Bangkok street at a time when the slums are being hidden by a giant fence to protect the delicate

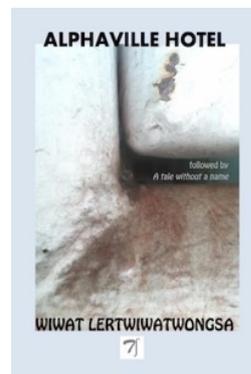
sensibilities of those attending an elite economic conference. Between them they devise a plan to bring down an infrastructure of corruption that bedevils both their worlds to the benefit of one but to the detriment of the other. Theirs is an unlikely friendship, but Somtow makes it believable in a way that gives hope; I also like the direct and uncomplicated structure of a story that is ambitious, enjoyable and thought-provoking. If only real life was so inspiring for Bangkok's street kids.

Wiwat Lertwiwatwongsa

Alphaville Hotel

2010 | ThaiFiction, ISBN 978-2-36382-011-2, 180 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



The title gives some clue as to the kind of story within because, while this story is very much in the orbit of the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, his movie *Alphaville* doesn't really inform the plot although there is certainly some resemblance to the kind of Godardian characters that populate the story. Here, the seedy Alphaville Hotel in Lop Buri is owned by a Thai-Frenchman by the name of Jean-Luc Godard (no relation), and it's a place where time stands still and ghosts of past residents haunt the rooms. A mysterious woman named Anna, or sometimes Mari, has multiple roles to play in the story particularly in connection to its narrator, a struggling writer who unexpectedly has been asked by Anna to come to the Alphaville Hotel to work on a screenplay with M. Godard. From here on in, heavy doses of *meta* come thick and fast.

This novella was a real pleasure. The multiple and innovative directions it takes means it never gets dull and there are surprises on just about every page. It would also be interesting to see it filmed, to see how much, or how little, it would need to resemble a Godard film itself in order to be a success in its own right.