

there ain't half been some
clever bastards

[the white notebooks #8]

Travels



The Day I Built a Pyramid

And I look at the granite markers / those tributes to finality, to eternity
And then I look at myself here / Chicken scratching for my immortality
Joni Mitchell, 'Hejira', 1976

It was the time when we were getting sent to Cairo a little too often. Twice a month for some people was not unusual; we used to joke that we went there so frequently we probably qualified for council housing in the oldest city in the world.

The Pyramids of Giza can be fun, once or twice for most people, but we seemed to make good use of a more frequent schedule. After around five trips to Cairo, colleagues who'd never been would draft you or I to be tour guides to the Pyramids. I may have done this a little too often over the years, cheating the local guides out of their Egyptian pounds and piastres, saving our charges from the pestering of the touts for camel rides and shouts of "Tally-ho!" when their enquiries had established where we were from, and the constant requests for *baksheesh* even when all we'd done was simply ask for directions. We both knew a visit to the Pyramids could also be distracting and exhausting, when all you wanted to do was meet face to face with time and history.

We knew the alternative to actually interacting with the people there was to arrive on a tour bus and disembark for ten minutes, umbilical cord still attached, and complain once more about the heat before being pulled back in and driven somewhere else to see the same Pyramids from yet another direction. Our way of doing it was harder on the body but easier on the self-respect. It was the timeless eternity of the place that was the draw, and we'd be lying if we said we didn't still enjoy the sense of aeons that descends daily, especially on a cloudless day,

available to all who want to find it.

I'd go there on my own too, a 45-minute journey from our hotel in Heliopolis, trekking the surrounding desert like a solitary traveller in a post-apocalyptic future. Few in ancient Egypt ever imagined that one day, all this would fall. Except, of course, that some parts of it didn't, and would endure for the wonder of those far-future people with a hyper-complex, unimaginably global civilisation of their own.

On one such trek around the desert I sat down to drink from a bottle of water. Not far away, a scattering of large and small stones drew my attention. What similarly timeless structure could I make with them? And, especially, that large one over there looks like the right shape to make a pretty good capstone...

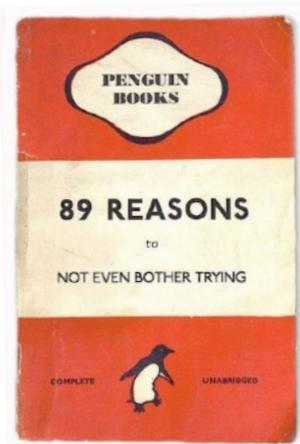
Over the next hour in the mid-afternoon of 6 July 1990 I shaped a small pyramid of my own, and before returning to Heliopolis I took a few pictures. Conversation in the bar that evening was a little unusual: "So what did you get up to today?" "Oh, you know, built a pyramid..."

I knew I was coming back the following month and decided to return to see if my pyramid still stood. I hoped to see a column of midges swarming in silence a metre or so above it, as Giza again descended into dusk.

So I did return in August, and found my pyramid had simply been dismantled, and rearranged into words in Arabic on the desert sands, meaning unknown.

If there was anything to be discerned from this, it was that some lessons can only be learned with hubris.

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Eponymous laws attributed to science fiction and/or science fiction authors and fans

COMPILED FROM AUGUST 2012 to the present, this list is a first draft and is, therefore, probably incomplete. Of course I welcome notification of any that don't currently appear on this list, as well as corrections and corollaries.

As written-out annotations and the links for further information would take up a whole page of a paper fanzine (if indeed you are reading it in a paper format) to view the annotations you may wish to head over to this issue's PDF edition (available at efanzines.com), which contains embedded links for all entries.

ADAMS'S THREE RULES THAT DESCRIBE OUR REACTIONS TO TECHNOLOGIES

(attributed to **Douglas Adams**, from *The Salmon of Doubt*, 2002)

- 1: "Anything that is in the world when you're born is normal and ordinary and is just a natural part of the way the world works."
- 2: "Anything that's invented between when you're fifteen and thirty-five is new and exciting and revolutionary and you can probably get a career in it."
- 3: "Anything invented after you're thirty-five is against the natural order of things."

ARKEN'S LAW

(attributed to **Arken** at www.iidb.com)

"A discussion is over when present society is compared to George Orwell's 'Oceania' in the book *Nineteen Eighty-Four*."

[[Rational Wiki](#) | [Urban Dictionary](#)]

ASIMOV'S THREE LAWS OF ROBOTICS

(attributed to **Isaac Asimov**, from 'Runaround', 1942)

The First Law states: "A robot may not, through its actions or inactions, allow a human to come to harm."

The Second Law states: "A robot must obey any order given to it, unless in contradiction of the First Law."

The Third Law states: "A robot must protect its own existence, unless in contradiction of the First or Second Law."

[[Rational Wiki](#)]

BENFORD'S LAW OF CONTROVERSY

(attributed to **Gregory Benford**, from *Timescape*, 1980)

"Passion is inversely proportional to the amount of real information available."

[[Wikipedia](#)]

THE BLINOVICH LIMITATION EFFECT

(attributed to **Terrance Dicks** and **Barry Letts**)

Usually understood as having two aspects: firstly, that "a time traveller cannot 'redo' an act that he has previously committed", and secondly, that "a dangerous energy discharge will result if two temporal versions of the same person come into contact."

Two of Aaron Blinovich's Laws are also invoked in the 2000 time travel film *Happy Accidents*:

Blinovitch's Second Law of Temporal Inertia states: "It is impossible to time travel in your own lifetime. One can only time travel to the distant past, and only small changes in history are possible, which will "dampen out" by the time they reach the relative present."

Blinovitch's Fifth Law of Causal Determination resolves (in an unspecified manner) all paradoxes involved with time travel.

[[Tardis Wikia](#) | [Wikipedia](#)]

BURNSIDE'S ADVICE

(attributed to **Ken Burnside**)

"Friends don't let friends use reactionless drives in their universes."

[[Project Rho](#)]

CELINE'S LAWS

(attributed to **Robert Anton Wilson**, from the *Illuminatus!* trilogy, 1975)

The First Law states: "National Security is the chief cause of national insecurity."

The Second Law states: "Accurate communication is possible only in a non-punishing situation."

The Third Law states: "An honest politician is a national calamity."

[[Wikipedia](#)]

THE CHRONOLOGY PROTECTION CONJECTURE

(attributed to **Stephen Hawking**)

“It seems that there is a Chronology Protection Agency which prevents the appearance of closed timelike curves and so makes the universe safe for historians.”

[[Arcana Wiki](#) | [Wikipedia](#)]

CLARKE’S LAW OF REVOLUTIONARY NEW IDEAS

(attributed to **Sir Arthur C. Clarke**, from ‘Next The Planets!’, *Report on Planet Three*, 1972)

“Like all revolutionary new ideas, the subject has had to pass through three stages, which may be summed up by these reactions: (1) ‘It’s crazy – don’t waste my time.’ (2) ‘It’s possible, but it’s not worth doing.’ (3) ‘I always said it was a good idea.’”

CLARKE’S THREE LAWS

(attributed to **Sir Arthur C. Clarke**)

The First Law states: “When a distinguished, but elderly, scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.”

‘Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination’, *Profiles of the Future*, 1962 (restated in ‘Technology and the Future’, *Report on Planet Three*, 1972)

Corollary to the First Law:

Isaac Asimov: “When, however, the lay public rallies round an idea that is denounced by distinguished but elderly scientists and supports that idea with great fervor and emotion – the distinguished but elderly scientists are then, after all, probably right.” (*The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, February 1977)

The Second Law states: “The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.”

‘Technology and the Future’, *Report on Planet Three*, 1972

The Third Law states: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

‘Technology and the Future’, *Report on Planet Three*, 1972

Corollaries to the Third Law:

Grey’s Law: “Any sufficiently advanced incompetence is indistinguishable from malice.” (see also **Hanlon’s Razor**)

Shermer’s Last Law: “Any sufficiently advanced ETI is indistinguishable from God.”

Gehm’s Corollary: “Any technology distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced.” (Dr. Barry Gehm, *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*, 1991; once known as ‘Benford’s Corollary’ and attributed to Gregory Benford from his use of it in *Foundation’s Fear*, 1997, later attributed to Gehm as the originator.)

Arlan Andrews, Sr.: “Any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology.” (‘Indian Summa’, *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*, January 1989)

I-CON SF: “Any sufficiently advanced iPhone is indistinguishable from magic.”

Rich Kulaweic: “Any sufficiently advanced bug is

indistinguishable from a feature.”

Karl Schroeder: “Any sufficiently advanced civilization is indistinguishable from nature.”

Charles Sheffield: “Any sufficiently antique technology is indistinguishable from magic.” (*Transcendence*, 1992)

Unknown: “Any sufficiently advanced science fiction is indistinguishable from fantasy.”

Unknown: “Any sufficiently well-understood magic is indistinguishable from technology.”

Unknown: “If you cannot distinguish my technology from magic, you are not sufficiently advanced.”

[[Rational Wiki](#)]

THE FERENGI RULES OF ACQUISITION

(attributed to **Ira Steven Behr** and **Robert Hewitt Wolfe**)

All 287 rules are too extensive to quote here, but can be accessed directly at [www.ferengirules.com](#).

[[Feringi Rules](#) | [Memory Alpha](#) | [Wikipedia](#)]

FINAGLE’S LAW OF DYNAMIC NEGATIVES (also known as FINAGLE’S COROLLARY TO MURPHY’S LAW)

(attributed to **John W. Campbell**)

“Anything that can go wrong, will – at the worst possible moment.”

Corollary to Finagle’s Law:

O’Toole’s Corollary of Finagle’s Law: “The perversity of the Universe tends towards a maximum”, popularised by Larry Niven.

Ads for bookplates run by *Galaxy Magazine* in the late 1960s stated “The umpteenth corollary of Finagle’s Law of Dynamic Negatives states ‘No books are ever lost by loaning except ones you particularly want to keep.’”

[[Wikipedia](#)]

GODWIN’S LAW OF TIME TRAVEL

(attributed to **colonel_green** at scans-daily)

“The first rule of time travel is that any and all modifications made to the timeline result in Hitler winning World War II. Run over a hippy in 1968? Hitler wins.”

[[Arcana Wiki](#) | [TV Tropes](#)]

HALDANE’S LAW

(attributed to **J.B.S. Haldane**, from *Possible Worlds*, 1927)

“I have no doubt that in reality the future will be vastly more surprising than anything I can imagine. Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose.”

HANLON’S RAZOR

(attributed to **Robert Heinlein**)

“Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.”

[[Rational Wiki](#)]

See also: **Grey’s Law under Clarke’s Three Laws**.

HITLER'S TIME TRAVEL EXEMPTION ACT

(attribution unknown)

"If you time-travel into the past and then try to kill Hitler, it won't work as intended. It may even backfire."

[[Arcana Wiki](#) | [TV Tropes](#)]

See also [Godwin's Law of Time Travel](#).

JON'S FIRST LAW

(attributed to [Jon Souza](#))

"Any interesting space drive is a weapon of mass destruction. It only matters how long you want to wait for maximum damage." *It goes on to say*: "Interesting is equal to 'whatever keeps the readers from getting bored'".

[[Project Rho](#) | [Jon Souza](#)]

See also [Larry Niven's Kzinti Lesson](#).

KEN HITE'S RULE

(attributed to [Ken Hite](#))

"Alternative universes tend to have more Zeppelins."

[[University of York, Dept of Computer Science](#)]

THE KZINTI LESSON

(attributed to [Larry Niven](#))

"A reaction drive's efficiency as a weapon is in direct proportion to its efficiency as a drive."

[[Larry Niven](#)]

See also [Jon's First Law](#) and [Niven's Laws](#).

THE LITANY OF THE LAW

(attributed to [H.G. Wells](#), from *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1896)

"Not to go on all-fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to suck up Drink; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to eat Fish or Flesh; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to claw the Bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not Men?"

MOFF'S LAW

(attributed to [Josh Wimmer](#) at [io9.com](#))

"Of all the varieties of irritating comment out there, the absolute most annoying has to be "Why can't you just watch the movie for what it is???" Why can't you just enjoy it? Why do you have to analyze it???" If you have posted such a comment, or if you are about to post such a comment, here or anywhere else, let me just advise you: Shut up. Shut the fuck up. Shut your goddamn fucking mouth. SHUT. UP."

Codified as:

1) As a discussion of a creative work grows longer, the probability of some ass whining about "overanalyzing" approaches 1.

2) In any discussion of creative work, anyone who says "OMG, why can't you just enjoy it??" automatically loses.

[[Racialicious](#)]

MUPHRY'S LAW

(attributed to [John Bangsund](#))

(a) if you write anything criticizing editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written;

(b) if an author thanks you in a book for your editing or proofreading, there will be mistakes in the book;

(c) the stronger the sentiment expressed in (a) and (b), the greater the fault;

(d) any book devoted to editing or style will be internally inconsistent.

[[Wikipedia](#) | [John Bangsund](#)]

MURPHAN'S LAWS

(attributed to [Arthur Thomson](#))

1. Any stapler handed to you by a fan has only one staple left in it.

2. When your prissy old aunt, who you're trying to keep in with because she has money, picks up a fanzine it will fall open at the worst obscenity in it.

3. Con hotel waiters won't.

4. Con hotel lifts don't.

5. Con hotel managers can't.

6. If you send a letter savagely attacking a fan it will cross in the post with one from him in which he is exceptionally nice to you.

7. At a convention banquet, all the people you like are together at a different table having the time of their lives.

Corollary 1: The one seat you might have had at the table has been snaffled by your worst enemy.

Corollary 2: If you have successfully avoided somebody throughout a con he will be seated beside you at the banquet.

8. The breaking strength of a fanzine staple is three fingernails.

9. 75% of the lifts at any con are permanently occupied by the same eight year-old child.

10. Nothing interesting ever happens at a con after 2 a.m.

11. At a con you always waken up one minute after they have stopped serving breakfast.

Corollary 1: The only time you waken earlier is when you are too hung-over to eat.

12. There is never time to loc a fanzine when you are actually reading it.

Corollary 1: When you get time to do the loc you can't remember any of your comments.

13. The amount of money you spend in a session at the con bar is inversely proportional to how much of the session you can remember the next day.

14. When you need reminding of a fan's name at a con he is: (a) not wearing his badge, (b) wearing it about the level of his fly, (c) wearing a badge on which the lettering is illegible or microscopic.

15. If the sign opposite the lift on your floor of a sprawling convention hotel says, algebraically speaking, "Rooms N₁ to N₂", then your room number will be:

$$\frac{N_1 + N_2}{2}$$

16. All postmen believe that all fans are eccentric or feeble-minded, or both.

NIVEN'S LAW

(attributed to **Larry Niven**)

"If the universe of discourse permits the possibility of time travel and of changing the past, then no time machine will be invented in that universe."

[[Wikipedia](#)]

NIVEN'S LAWS

(attributed to **Larry Niven**, from the collection *Known Space*)

1. a. Never throw shit at an armed man.
b. Never stand next to someone who is throwing shit at an armed man.
 2. Never fire a laser at a mirror.
 3. Mother Nature doesn't care if you're having fun.
 4. $F \times S = k$. The product of Freedom and Security is a constant. To gain more freedom of thought and/or action, you must give up some security, and vice versa.
 5. Psi and/or magical powers, if real, are nearly useless.
 6. It is easier to destroy than create.
 7. Any damn fool can predict the past.
 8. History never repeats itself.
 9. Ethics change with technology.
 10. Anarchy is the least stable of social structures. It falls apart at a touch.
 11. There is a time and place for tact. And there are times when tact is entirely misplaced.
 12. The ways of being human are bounded but infinite.
 13. The world's dullest subjects, in order:
 - a. Somebody else's diet.
 - b. How to make money for a worthy cause.
 - c. Special Interest Liberation.
 14. The only universal message in science fiction: There exist minds that think as well as you do, but differently.
Niven's corollary: The gene-tampered turkey you're talking to isn't necessarily one of them.
 15. Fuzzy Pink Niven's Law: Never waste calories.
 16. There is no cause so right that one cannot find a fool following it. (In variant form in *Fallen Angels* as 'Niven's Law: No cause is so noble that it won't attract fuggheads.')
 17. No technique works if it isn't used.
 18. Not responsible for advice not taken.
 19. Old age is not for sissies.
 20. "Do some basic physics before writing *Ringworld*."
- [[Wikipedia](#)]
*See also Larry Niven's **Kzinti Lesson**.*
-

THE NOVIKOV SELF CONSISTENCY PRINCIPLE

(attributed to **Igor Dmitriyevich Novikov**)

Concerning time paradoxes, "If an event exists that would give rise to a paradox, or to any "change" to the past whatsoever, then the probability of that event is zero."

[[Arcana Wiki](#) | [Wikipedia](#)]

PELLEGRINO, POWELL AND ASIMOV'S THREE LAWS OF ALIEN BEHAVIOUR

(attributed to **Charles Pellegrino**, **James Powell** and **Isaac Asimov**, from the front endpapers of Charles Pellegrino's *Flying to Valhalla*, 1993)

The First Law states: "Their survival will be more important than our survival. *If an alien species has to choose between them and us, they won't choose us. It is difficult to imagine a contrary case; species don't survive by being self-sacrificing.*"

The Second Law states: "Wimps don't become top dogs. *No species makes it to the top by being passive. The species in charge of any given planet will be highly intelligent, alert, aggressive, and ruthless when necessary.*"

The Third Law states: "They will assume that the first two laws apply to us."

RACKHAM'S LAW

(attributed by Frederik Pohl to **John T. Phillifent**, who wrote as John Rackham)

According to Pohl, Phillifent's opinion of "the diagnostic cut ... between science fiction and all other forms of writing" was that science fiction "was unique in that it was invariably written by 'the science-fiction method' analogous to the 'scientific method' which ... underpins all science."

[[Wikipedia](#)]

ROBINSON'S FIRST LAW OF SPACE COMBAT

(attributed to **Rick Robinson**)

"An object impacting at 3 km/sec delivers kinetic energy equal to its mass in TNT."

[[Project Rho](#) | [Rick Robinson](#)]

RULE 34

"If it exists, there is porn related to it."

Adapted by **Charles Stross** as **RULE 34.1:**

"Anything on the internet can be construed as filth, by a mind that's sufficiently warped."

[[Antipope](#) | [Know Your Meme](#) | [Rule 34](#) | [Telegraph](#) | [Urban Dictionary](#)]

RULES FOR WRITING LOVE-LETTERS

(attributed to **John Sladek**, from "The Communicants", 1969)

1. Be neat.
 2. Get the name right – that's important!
 3. If you must criticize, praise first.
 4. Make words work for you: Use analogies, use short words.
 5. Remember the 'We/you/I' formula.
 6. Put in plenty of 'curiosity value'.
 7. Keep it short.
-

SCALZI'S LAW

(attributed to **John Scalzi**)

"The failure mode of clever is asshole."

[[Whatever](#)]

STURGEON'S LAW

(attributed to **Theodore Sturgeon**)

"Nothing is always absolutely so."

[[Wikipedia](#)]

STURGEON'S REVELATION, now more commonly known as STURGEON'S LAW

(attributed to **Theodore Sturgeon**)

"Ninety percent of *everything* is crud." *Now more likely to be seen as* "Ninety percent of everything is crap."

World Science Fiction Convention, Philadelphia, 1953

As related in the anecdote: "When people talk about the mystery novel," Ted said, as I remember, "they mention *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*. When they talk about the western, they say there's *The Way West* and *Shane*. But when they talk about science fiction, they call it 'that *Buck Rogers* stuff', and they say "ninety percent of science fiction is crud." Well, they're right. Ninety percent of science fiction is crud. But then ninety percent of *everything* is crud, and it's the ten percent that isn't crud that is important. And the ten percent of science fiction that isn't crud is as good as or better than anything being written anywhere."

James Gunn, *The New York Review of Science Fiction* #85, September 1995

Corollaries to Sturgeon's Law:

Sturgeon's last comments in the above quote are sometimes codified as:

Sturgeon's First Corollary: The existence of immense quantities of trash in science fiction is admitted and it is regrettable; but it is no more unnatural than the existence of trash anywhere.

Sturgeon's Second Corollary: The best science fiction is as good as the best fiction in any field.

Also Rucker's Corollary to Sturgeon's Law: "The Golden Age looks so good because we've forgotten the 90% that's crap."

(attributed to **Lee Ann Rucker** on rec.arts.sf.written, January 2001)

[[Rational Wiki](#) | [Wikipedia](#)]

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR READING THE MAGAZINES

(attributed to **Stanislaw Lem**, translated by Franz Rottensteiner)

You shall stop reading a work of SF:

1. in which gods, angels, demons, devils and other mythical beings appear, the work nevertheless being called "SF".
2. in which members of "other civilisations" appear, not as seen through the eyes of human observers, but described "quite directly" from the godlike position of a master strategist.
3. in which the names of the characters (if only some of them) are constructed by a distortion of the paradigm of proper names in the alien language concerned (for instance, "Alexi Andrei" is supposed to serve as the name of a Pole, or "Kohlenschlag" as the name of a German; such are the signs with which an author betrays his ignorance which masquerades as arrogance) any serious author takes the names of his heroes from models of the country where the alien tongue is spoken, and he does so by selecting genuine sources: there are *no* exceptions to this rule.
4. which is armed with a foreword by the author in which

he declares that he writes in such-and-such a way, whereas Swift, Voltaire or Flaubert, Joyce, etc., wrote in such-and-such a way: in general, the length of the foreword is in inverse proportion to the quality of the text.

5. in which it is impossible to determine, after having read the first pages, the time, place the objects of the plot.

6. in which the names of all the characters are monosyllables.

7. in which there is an "escalation of the fantastic" i.e. the hero is a telepath, but he is not one of the usual telepaths: he is a telepath who can set fire to objects just by willing it: and it's not only that he can light his cigarettes in such a way he can also turn the sun into a supernova: but not only can he turn the sun into a supernova, normal telepaths cannot read his thoughts: and not only is it impossible to read his thoughts, but etc.

8. in which the plot moves, in a very short space, from one point of the Earth, or the solar system, or the galaxy, to other points.

9. in which the main characteristics of extraterrestrial humanoids are a peculiar number of fingers (4 or 6, say), or a peculiar chemical composition of their bodies.

10. in which the characters admire qualities among themselves (for instance, incisiveness of intellect or humour which, when presented to the reader, do not so impress him.

THE THREE LAWS OF INFERNAL DYNAMICS

(attributed to **David Gerrold's** alter-ego Solomon Short, from *Yesterday's Children / Starhunt*, 1980 edition)

The First Law states: An object in motion will always be headed in the wrong direction.

The Second Law states: An object at rest will always be in the wrong place.

The Third Law states: The energy required to change either of these states will always be more than you wish to expend, but never so much as to make the task prospectively impossible.

YOG'S LAW

(attributed to **James D. MacDonald**, named after a nickname of MacDonald, 'Yog Sysop')

"Money should flow towards the author."

[[Wikipedia](#)]

Self-Publishing Corollary to Yog's Law:

John Scalzi: "While in the process of self-publishing, money and rights are controlled by the writer."

[[Whatever](#)]

2017'S ONLY RULE

(attributed to **John Scalzi**)

"There is only one rule for 2017:

STOP EXPECTING FASCISTS TO PLAY BY THE RULES.

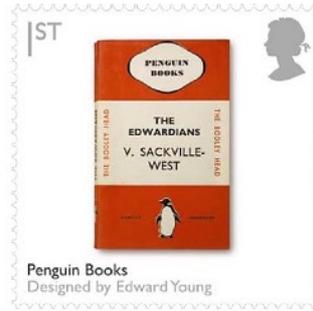
When in doubt, see 2017's Only Rule. Act Accordingly."

[[Twitter](#)]

See also: [Evil Overlord List](#)

Markers

lightly edited



WAHF...

Tony Cullen, Bruce Gillespie, Steve Green, Fred Kiesche, and Andy Sawyer.

AMY HARLIB, New York, NY; 2 January 2017

'Threads of Memory' was pure prose poetry for this armchair nature lover. I love Annie Dillard and Howard Morowitz too. You should try Stephen Jay Gould and Gary Nabhan and Bernd Heinrich and Farley Mowat for more great nature writing.

Beautiful moving obit for your father. I got a lot of my love of SF&F from my Dad (d. 1994 of cancer at age 68) who left me his collection of pulps: *Astounding* and all thirty-nine issues of *Unknown Worlds* and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels* from the 1940s. They were not kept in mint condition and are probably not worth much in \$\$ but are beyond price emotionally.

Also liked reading the letters from other fans and the book reviews although I do not like mundane thrillers and mysteries. I keep my fiction reading strictly SF&F not enough time to read nearly all I want to. I have thousands of genre books waiting for me to read them, I love knowing they are there. My flat has books everywhere

I love living in a library, hyperlexic bibliophile that I am.

~ I always enjoyed dropping by your flat for a few hours chat when in New York, with your walls, kitchen and hall completely lined with books. I certainly don't get to New York as much these days, but visiting you always made a welcome change from dropping into Barnes & Noble yet again, and instead being able to sit around talking about genre while surrounded by thousands of books owned by someone who'd actually read them. ~

MARK PLUMMER, Croydon, England; 2 January 2017

TWN#7 seems like a positive harbinger for 2017, as I deflate the Christmas triceratops and mentally prepare myself for the return to work tomorrow. The Christmas/NY break always starts with a great deal of potential for Getting Things Done, as it's probably the longest period in the year when I have nothing in particular to do and nowhere in particular to go, and yet somehow it always seems to evaporate in a cloud of inaction. I have nothing in particular to do and so I do nothing in particular.

Did I congratulate you on the Corflu 50? If I did, I guess it stands saying again; and if I didn't, well, congratulations. Sadly, we won't be seeing you there as one of the things we have accomplished during the last few days and it feels a bit feeble to claim this as an accomplishment, with too many echoes of work where we've encouraged to advance just about anything for the

'success register' is a final decision that we won't be going to LA. It'd be hyperbole to claim Brexit as the defining factor, as the impacts for us (so far) are nothing like what you're seeing with the plummeting relationship between the pound and the baht, but it was certainly a consideration.

A more substantive accomplishment of the last few days is that I've re-shelved the books in the living room. My great insight of December was that replacing a couple of low tables in the hall with low bookcases would create a new home for the graphic novels while their relocation out of the living room would give us a few extra feet of shelf space for hardback fiction. Inevitably, though, the space thus created was at the beginning of the alphabet necessitating a shift-and-shuffle of everything to the left, with the interpolation of recent acquisitions as I went along in the hope that everything would still fit by the time I got to the end. Which it did, and even with a little space to spare although to minimise inconvenience we may have to constrain our future purchases to the works of Zoran Živković and former local boy Émile Zola.

I admit that I do rather enjoy this process, even if the sheer amount of dust that books attract who knew? can be alarming. The overall pattern created by the outward facing spines becomes familiar; the way that certain books or series really stand out because of strong or unusual colours or sheer enormity, and the reshuffle creates new patterns, bringing new books to the fore. And as Graham says in his letter, it really is 'an ongoing aide-memoire and a living diary' with so many volumes surrounded by an aura of associations where they came from, perhaps what provoked their specific purchase, the when and where of their reading far more powerful than any memories of the actual texts themselves. I've recently resumed an old practice of using various 'found' documents train tickets, business cards, menus, leaflets, flyers as bookmarks and then leaving them in the book as more tangible time-and-place-holders. They may not mean anything to me in the future, let alone anybody else, but you never know.

~ This practice of adding stuff to one's memory of books was enthusiastically pursued by my father right up to the end. He would cut out reviews and slip them between the covers, or similarly save opinions in the *TLS* about books or writers that contradicted opinions he had already cut out and kept, and keep those as well, filed concisely alongside particular chapters in particular books. Two weeks before he passed away in a nursing home he was asking me to cut out some commentary from the Catholic journal *The Tablet* and file it alongside a chapter of a book

that I would find on a particular shelf in his study. And yet given his condition, he probably knew he would never see that book, or his library, ever again. I managed to ensure most of his books have been kept together (at least the books on theology and art history), and are now in a library at a castle residence near Chepstow in South Wales, complete with all these thousands of accumulated annotations. Yet I don't feel inclined to catalogue everything myself – that job can be done the new owners, if they ever feel such an inclination to do so. ~

JOHN PURCELL, College Station, TX; 2 January 2017

I have to say your opening section on walking through a woods is very thoughtful and beautifully described. It reminds me very much of Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Less Traveled', but yours is more philosophical and reads more like a prose poem. Both texts carry similar messages: how one perceives the world, connectivity with it, what meanings a person derives from encountering nature. Frost is more concerned with life's decisions and how those affect one's self in the future, but I can see your musings leading in the same direction. How we as individuals relate and understand nature now will affect our lives, and the environment of the woods, in many ways. People are a part of this world, its ecosystem, and much like Frost implies, raising our self-awareness of where we are, where we go, and how we get there, all affect each other. It is a symbiotic relationship, and on a larger scale, mankind must develop a better awareness of its contributions, good and ill, to this ecosystem. A quite haunting beginning to this issue, but when I read your closing section – the eulogy to your father – then I understood your first few pages in a different light.

I have not read a whole lot of Philip K. Dick, a situation easily remedied: there are six of his books in my collection, and I have only read two of them, although over the years I have read many other books and short stories of his. Dick is definitely an important author for any sf fan to become aware of, and *The Penultimate Truth* sounds like a very interesting movie to watch. I must check into this.

Graham Charnock's letter reminds me that we also have a lot of our kids' books lying about; now that we're grandparents – with another to arrive in a couple of months – I'm glad we still have them to pass along to the grandkids. Old toys, too. I bet my stash of old Hardy Boys books from the 1940s to the 1960s might be worth something to a collector; but I have no interest in selling them. Sharing the books I loved as a lad with my own son and eventually my grandson has way more value than all the money in the world.

My deepest condolences on the passing of your father. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us. He sounds like he was a wonderful, loving father, and I am glad you and he shared a passion for reading. My dad and I had that, too, although his was mysteries and I was into science fiction. I am glad you have some wonderful memories of your time with your father. What a blessing.

I think I had better stop here. It is a new year, a new beginning. Congratulations on the birth of your child, and with luck and some extra income lying about, maybe I

will see you at Corflu later this year. Otherwise, I am campaigning hard and heavy to win the TAFF race to Helsinki this year. As the old saying goes, "we shall see."

EARL KEMP, Tecate, CA; 2 January 2017

About Cary Grant. Way back when I was working as the VIP greeter for the Pullman Company, I would ride a train outside of Chicago and then get on the inbound train and greet the special people.

One day they happened to be Cary Grant and his wife Betsy Drake. When I arrived at their compartment and greeted them, they were involved in a rather heated argument, so much so that they almost totally ignored me as they continued their rants. Nevertheless I was still there to help them. We gathered up all their stuff and carried it off the train, through the huge RR station and out to the taxis where they and their luggage were gathered up and they hastily left for their hotel reservation. At no time did they halt their argument as they totally ignored everyone they got close to. Much noise about nothing.

DAVE LALLY, London, England; 6 January 2017

Since my submission (a rare event BTW) to your fanzine, my condolences on your loss (I'm commemorating ten years this coming Spring since my own Dad – at 87 passed away) and at the same time congrats on your new family arrival.

Although this is not meant to make matters trivial or trite (and I trust that it does not), I've come round to the idea that life itself is a cycle ("life's but a brief shadow that struts and frets it hour upon the stage and then is heard no more..." (The Bard: that Scottish play!).

I vividly remember – in the same week ten years ago as my own Dad left us – in another part of my family (after she had lost her 1st child in childbirth), one of my nieces successfully delivered of her 2nd child and joy throughout our extended family – had to be tempered with the loss to us all (either as a Dad or Grandad) of John Lally.

Anyway, let us see how 2017 pans out. I expect it will be a curate's egg – some good, some bad.

JERRY KAUFMAN, Seattle, WA; 7 January 2017

I'm in the middle of reading *Little, Big* again, some thirty or so years after the first time, and your 'Threads of Memory' seemed to echo Crowley's passages about nature.

~ Gosh. A comparison I am entirely unworthy of. ~

I read *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* even longer ago, and don't remember anything about it, not even its flavor, except that I enjoyed it at the time, and felt moved by it to a greater interest in the wild.

In my case, I was not very close to my father, who died when I was a teenager, about a year before my first sf convention. We were not much alike in many ways, and it was my mother instead who helped introduce me to science fiction. This was not deliberate on her part – she read some of the Ace paperbacks and left them around the apartment, so I read John Brunner among others, at the same time I was reading Groff Conklin and August Derleth anthologies, André Norton tales of time and space

travel, and J.R.R. Tolkien from our neighborhood library.

But in some ways your father reminds me of our old friend Sandra Miesel. At one time Sandra was very active in fandom, writing both scholarly and humorous articles for fanzines, wearing fancy dress for costume competitions at Worldcons, and hanging with various midwestern authors like Gordon Dickson. She even had several novels published and wrote introductions to story collections by Gordy, Poul Anderson, etc.

In more recent years she's been publishing quite a lot of non-fiction in Catholic journals like *Crisis*. These articles have ranged from studies of Catholic practice in the Middle Ages (she's a medievalist), to discussions of popular television shows like *Person of Interest* through the lens of Catholic morality, to science fiction or fantasy that deals with Christian themes, to an entire book (written with a co-author) that debunks *The DaVinci Code*.

DAVID REDD, Haverfordwest, Wales; 31 January 2017

Thank you for *TWN* #7; again, my sympathies about the loss of your father — you have recalled his life and your relationship very touchingly.

I have a habit of reading things backwards (no doubt due to dipping into old sf pulps at the departments first) and so begin at the *Thai Literary Supplement*. Always fascinating despite the unlikelihood of my finding the books themselves or having any opportunity to read them. Your 'I Ask the Questions' is tasteful eye-candy in words.

'Threads of Memory' — yes, this is why I go walking in the natural landscape. Rather than waffle about how evocative it is (which it is) I'll recommend two books I found wonderful for similar reasons: Ian Niall's countryside memories in *Fresh Woods* (1951), and Tom Wakeford's factual *Liasons of Life* (2001) about symbiosis which takes in Beatrix Potter the scientist, the "Wood Wide Web" of mycorrhizal fungi and much else. You may have found them already? Facts date rapidly with scientific advances, but the sense of wonder doesn't.

Thanks for your note about fair use of ISFDB data re. Ballard's iconic 'The Voices of Time'. Unlikely I'll ever complete anything satisfactory on present form, but a possible history of the story has nagged at me inexplicably for some time. Really the story deserves a whole celebratory volume with text, reviews and bibliography, but that's just me having fanboy thoughts when I'm too old for such nonsense. However I appreciate your taking the trouble to answer. I'll attempt the explanatory chronology this year and — rather eventually no doubt show you what I come up with.

LLOYD PENNEY, Etobicoke, ON; 2 February 2017

There's lots of fogeys of all ages in fanzine fandom, but I think there's only a few that are younger than 50 or so. I am 57 now, and Yvonne retires at the end of this year. Some people won't respond to online-only fanzines, but I try to respond to them all. Yes, there are friends we are losing all the time... we very much miss Mike Glicksohn. But, we realize this, and are determined not to be living life with few or no friends, so with our interests in steampunk and local groups, we have many friends from that interest, and in many cases, feel like the oldest in the

room. My own feeling towards fandom changes with time, and I remember an old Rotsler cartoon... "Fandom, so neat, so nifty... too bad it's full of fans."

Belated condolences on the death of your father. I suppose we are at the age where death becomes an everyday part of it, whether it is a loved one, a friend or someone whose artistic works you loved. 2016 was certainly bad for that, and now, 2017 seems set to repeat that. My parents taught me to read extremely early, but as far as my own interest in science and space, that's my own development. Mum brought home the anthologies from the library, though. I admit that I have not read any SF for several years now, no doubt going through my own hiatus. Perhaps when I am working again, I might get back in to SF. As I read your comments on your father, Yvonne is going through the same kind of thing with her mother. Gabrielle lives in a French-Canadian retirement home near the shore of Lake Ontario, she is in her mid-90s, and she is slowly losing her grasp on the moment. Yvonne is visiting with her as I write.

Add to Brexit the horrors of the Donald Trump presidency. We have plans to go to Michigan in July of this year, but given the erratic behavior of Trump, we might not be able to go now. Time will tell.

I write as I wait for Yvonne to come back from her mother's place... the place she lives reminds us both of a hospital, for when you stay there long enough, it feels like many of the people there are simply waiting to die. A horrible thing to say, but that is our impression.

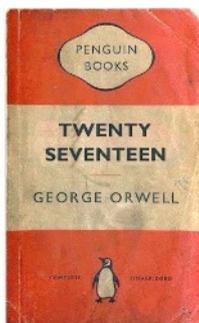
JAMES BACON, Iver, England; 26 February 2017

I was sorry to read of your father's demise, and I think your piece about him was really very nice. It is always lovely to read about a person who intrinsically good and so important and good to a friend, and fathers can be ropery, I consider myself lucky to have had one who I considered a friend as well as dad. Not everyone has that luxury I find, and so it is nice to read.

Loved the Flann O'Brien stamp, great choice. Did you know that the stamp was not issued on his birthday as was meant to be the case but the day after. There is no explanation. O'Brien had no love lost with Post and telegraph as it was when he was a columnist for the Irish Times, and so one wonders if there was a little bit of revenge laughter going on with that stamp issue, served very very cold. In many respects, if there was I find it pleasing, a further enigma to a man who was enigmatic.

The man in front of the tank is an amazing image. I also agree that he seemed to be off shopping when it happened. An amazing moment. It often makes me think of the times armour has been used inappropriately against civilians, which is an area of interest to me, although mostly centered around use of tanks in Ireland, in the 1910s and 1970s. It always looks bad one finds.

I was a bit taken by your comment about your dad reading *JP*, I am not surprised, the 'Blade Runner' issue is still one of my favourites, and we have done some thirty-two now, although I do love them all. I would have liked my dad to read the 'World War 1' issue we just did, I hope he would have approved, and Mick to read the Irish Comic Fanzine issue, but that is the way.



We used to play pretend, give each other different names
 We would build a rocket ship and then we'd fly it far away
 Used to dream of outer space but now they're laughing at our face
 Saying, "Wake up, you need to make money".
Twenty One Pilots, 'Stressed Out', 2015

This fanzine was pieced together between 2 January and 28 February 2560 / 2017. The title 'There Ain't Half Been Some Clever Bastards' is nicked from the B-side to Ian Dury & The Blockheads' timeless 'Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick' in 1978 (and the colour bar below the title is snatched from the single cover, designed by Barney Bubbles). If only that B-side had been half as memorable as the A-side, but anyway, I always liked the title. Actually, these days I think a lot of the music we hear in the charts would have been B-side material thirty or forty years ago, if we still had such things as 7-inch singles. I first had this revelation when hearing Beyoncé's 'Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)' in 2008, after which I simply thought "That is surely *not* a single." forty years ago, if, say, someone comparable like Chaka Khan had written it it would have been considered too odd even for an album track, and instead would have been used correctly as filler for a B-side and there remain mostly forgotten for decades. Until some weird science fiction fan unearthed it and used it as an inappropriate title for a fanzine – much like this one, mate. I rest my case.

The Day I Built a Pyramid

Dedicated to my memory of Michael Rickman. Written in January 2017, I used the first person plural for most of this essay because I'm remembering Mick who, like me, also used to freely take colleagues on trips to the Pyramids of Giza – not that I was much of a tour guide, I'm sure. Finding people like Mick in my line of work is pretty hard, as most just want to sit around by the hotel pool if it's hot outside; instead Mick was known for taking risks, once embarking a trip to the middle of nowhere in Iran, and speaking no Farsi, just to witness a total eclipse. He was the kind of guy we all like to share adventures with and it was always a pleasure to run into him somewhere around the world. I don't think I ever got to tell him this story. We lost touch more than a decade ago and he may have retired by now, so I've no idea if he's still alive or where in the world he may be living. Not in Blighty, that's for sure.

Eponymous Laws...

As with my previous lists, I welcome any corrections or additions.

GENRE FANZINES RECEIVED / READ IN 2017

Ansible #354–356 DAVE LANGFORD
Askance #39 JOHN PURCELL
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 #352–368 DALE SPEIRS
Spartacus #16 GUY LILLIAN III
Vibrator #2.0.31–2.0.36 GRAHAM CHARNOCK
The Zine Dump #39 GUY LILLIAN III

AT THE END OF NEXT MONTH (April 2017) I will be going to Los Angeles for Corflu 34 as a guest of the Corflu Fifty fan fund. I'm honoured to have been asked, and I'm sure I will spend much of my time learning more about the histories of fanzine fandom that aren't covered in Rob Hansen's *Then* and comparative publications concerning the US and Canada. I went to Corflu when it was in San Francisco in 2005, but did not have a chance to get to either of the recent UK Corflus in Winchester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, so I am particularly looking forward to hooking up again with many acquaintances made in 2005 and other

fen whom I have not encountered yet. The one part of the trip I am not looking forward to, however, is the bit that involves actually entering the United States, since Trump and his crew of White Power nazis occupied the White House. I come to the US regularly as part of my job, but my entry under those circumstances is comparatively easy. This time I will be queueing up in the long immigration line like a well-behaved Brit amongst people from a few dozen nervous nationalities, worried if they're gonna get pulled aside for secondary checks because of the colour of their skin or the sound of their name. My concern will be that they might ask for access to all data on my mobile phone (as has happened recently to other passengers undeserving of such attention): if I were to refuse, I would end up on their 'no fly' list and I would therefore be unable to do my job. Such are the joys of 21st century international aviation.

TLS

THAILAND, IN ENGLISH



THE THAI LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, #8

MARCH 2560 / 2017

Edited by Peter Young

peteyoung.uk@gmail.com

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

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I discovered that Thailand was one of those countries, like Sri Lanka and India, where memory of past lives used to be commonplace. Go back a few generations, and you find people talking about earlier lives with total certainty.

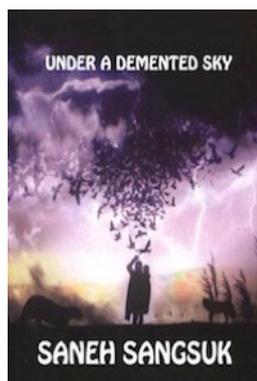
John Burdett

Saneh Sangsuk

Under a Demented Sky

2012 | ThaiFiction, ISBN 978-2-36382-014-3, 150 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



Set in north India at the time of Gautama Buddha, the unnamed narrator used to be a minor wife of a much-despised local land-owner, someone who is in desperate need of a son having already sired too many daughters. And eventually a son is born, but not a lucky one. At a young age he is bitten by a cobra, and thus begins the narrator's frantic search far and wide for an antidote. Only, "frantic" might indeed be some-

thing of an understatement here: Saneh Sangsuk pushes his protagonist to extremes of desperation and endurance that not so much reflect actual life as the trials inflicted on mere humans by vindictive gods and malevolent spirits that one finds either in cheap comic books or mythical literature, all designed to teach a few harsh lessons about never giving up. Terrible terrain, terrible weather and terrible people continually intervene to thwart her path and try to force her to face the impossibility of her quest. And it all takes place, supposedly, in a compressed 24-hour period, pushing this tale more certainly into the region of twisted fantasy than realistic fiction. One thing Sangsuk cleverly keeps ambiguous is the possibility that despite receiving a lethal dose of venom the boy may still be alive throughout the search for his cure; this is done via the wife's refusal to acknowledge that the boy may in fact have been dead all along as this would invalidate her journey. This faith in one impossible thing is what drives the story on a level beneath what one is actually reading: the readers wants to see how much more demented her situation can possibly get – all of which makes this a deliberately uncomfortable and challenging story.

Marcel Barang, ed.

9 Thai Short Stories

2009 | ThaiFiction, 150 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



Marcel Barang issued annual anthologies of translated Thai short fiction between 2009 and 2014, the first having nine stories and the last having fourteen. The stories however were not all contemporary so in this edition we have a very mixed bag, from Sila Komchai's likeable and rather Ballardian 1994 story 'A Traffic-wise Couple', about a middle-class couple who spend most of their

lives stuck in their car in Bangkok's traffic, to the rather incomprehensible 'The Muzzle' by Suchart Sawadisri ("The Pope of the Thai short story") in which a photographer documents in a rather abstract fashion the presence of army tanks on the streets during a military coup. Also from Komchai is 'Blood Buds', about a screenwriter wrestling with both his young son's predilection for violent behaviour and the violent screenplay he is contracted to write. My favourite is the witty and appealingly odd 'The Lookers-on' by Korn Siriwatthano, concerning a group of people try to figure out the purpose of a mysterious, vaguely-defined object that has appeared in the street. There are two autobiographical stories from Seksan Prasertkul looking back to his days of insurrection against the communists. Manop Thanomsri's 'The Night of the Falling Stars' is an unexpectedly upbeat story of an accidental meeting between a disillusioned tycoon and a naive street-dweller. However, easily the most appealing story is Reungsak Kamthorn's 'Ties That Bind', about an elderly man and woman who try to rekindle their youthful passion after their spouses have died, despite family objections. It wraps up a lively and enlightening group of stories.

Siriworn Kaewkan

A Scattered World

1999 | ThaiFiction, 150 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



What can a reader usually learn from exploring the hidden corners of translated speculative fiction from around the world? That you have to constantly expect the unexpected; that the success rate of discovering new fiction that you like far outweighs the disappointments and, anent to the point that I will make here, it's not only South Americans and Africans who make decent forays into magical realism. My

only previous read from Siriworn Kaewkan was the excellent paperback *The Murder Case of Tok Imam Storpa Karde*, a very different (and far more grounded) novel than the one under the microscope here.

And it's a story that does indeed need close inspection: it has hidden interiors that invite peering into, it can have the effect of a fleeting dream if the reader does not take time to establish in one's head the family relationships at play here and the twisted and rather unnatural turns they take. Set mostly in the earlier half of the twentieth century in a rural Thai community close to the Andaman Sea, the surrealism descends on the town right from the start, and it becomes apparent that one is following the immortal life of the reluctant Abdul Hamid, as his life transforms from one animal species to the next while somehow maintaining family relationships with others who seem similarly afflicted. Beautifully visual scenes take place in both the sky and the ocean, all as civilisation is making it's presence felt with the arrival of a new railway connecting this bizarre location and it's distinctive unreality to the outside world.

What Kaewkan does well is inject colour and vitality into his scenes. Readers have to trust where Kaewkan is taking them and that the journey will be worthwhile, and the surreality of some of the imagery is attractive and keeps up the necessary engagement with the reader's imagination. These aren't the half-baked ideas that usually inform our nightly dreams only to evaporate when they come into contact with the real world; the dreamlike imagery here somehow has a more solid form that has made its way clear onto the written page, and is expressed well. That it also takes the form of the natural world only serves to make it more enduring.

Perhaps what Kaewkan doesn't do so well is allow the reader to keep apace with the portentous changes and the implications that they just about delineate. This could be something that is lost in translation, though, and it might be a fruitless challenge for any bilingual reader of the Thai original to better the translation on offer here, which I'm sure took me as far on this particular journey as Kaewkan originally intended. One to remember.

Thomas Olde Heuvelt

The Ink Readers of Doi Saket

2013 | Tor.com, \$0.99



I really do warm to this story, which placed 4th among the Hugo Award short story shortlist in 2014, and Tor have done the right thing and presented it in its own ebook edition.

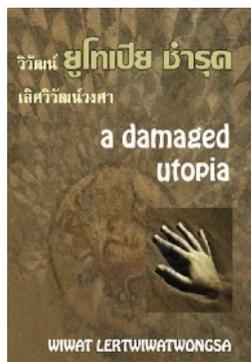
There is only one event in the story which casts the whole as speculative fiction, as everything else is believable from the standpoint of trying to understand the Thai obsession with superstition, myth and fable. As the story of Tangmoo, an untypical young man who does not appear to have any wishes or ambitions, and who instead stumbles upon a group of crooked monks who are making big money off people's willingness to follow their animistic urges, 'The Ink Readers' both entertains with humour that doesn't patronise and lifts the spirit while questioning the truth of such beautiful Thai rituals as Loi Krathong: if our lives are to be dictated by myths, we should at least make them beautiful ones.

Wiwat Lertwiwatwongsa

A Damaged Utopia

2011 | ThaiFiction, ISBN 978-2-36382 029-7, 150 baht

Translated by Marcel Barang



The last thing I read by Wiwat was the admirable *Alphaville Hotel* which riffed on Jean Luc Godard; this has a similar artistic muse to be found in Marguerite Duras, whose affair with a Chinese man formed the basis of her novella *The Lover*. However this story is far darker than that of Duras. A murder has been committed and body parts found in a bookshop and a cinema. The story lets the reader figure out

the whodunnit and at least part of the motive, which involves a Thai man's search for his lost mother in the movies, film posters and magazines of South East Asia. It involves a strange introverted couple who stay at his house while he goes on a trip to Ho Chi Minh City and hooks up with a young Vietnamese prostitute resembling his mother.

A Damaged Utopia is deliberately disorientating, but the prose is fine and the jigsaw nature of how it all fits together is handled well. One curiosity is Chapter 9, which is mostly at odds in style and content with the rest of the book, and warranted an Afterword by the author in this English edition, as a summary about what events in Thailand drove him to write it. Of all the Thai writers I've discovered recently, Wiwat is amongst my favourites.