

# Journey Planet 8





Journey Planet 8 - February 2011  
Editors - James Bacon, Claire Brialey, Christopher J Garcia

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# Editorial by Chris

So, I like lists. I really like lists. My favorite books as a kid were the Almanac and the *Guinness Book of World Records*; basically large catalogs of lists. I love them. The *SF Book of Lists*, by two guys whose names escape me but did an awesome job, is a favorite that I look to quite a bit. I sometimes get a little heat for the amount of space I give to lists like the National Film Registry or the Hugo Nominations. I spend a lot of time looking at and dealing with lists. It's one of the things I love the most about working as a curator; you're constantly looking at lists and ranking things and determining what they mean.

Lists are awesome.

One of the things I enjoy about awards is that they naturally inform lists. You always have a list of winners as time goes by and you often get a list of nominations and that's great too. You can have a lot of fun with those kinds of lists. You can trace all sorts of things: what's big with what segment of what. You see novels that are all available for free on the internet, and you can figure that net-availability helps you get on the ballot. You look at the same winner of a category year after year, and you can draw the conclusion that they're the most highly visible folks. You see five Spanish-language fanzines on the ballot and... well, when it happens, I'll let you know what it means. I love awards, and that's a thing that's fun.

And one of the things I really enjoy about lists are the asterisks. You know them, you see them all the time. In the Most Home Runs in a Season list, the asterisk goes next to either Roger Maris (for taking so many more games to hit 60 home runs than Babe Ruth) or Barry Bonds (for taking so many more steroids than Babe Ruth). On the list of Academy Award or Nobel Prize winners, it's the one that undoubtedly leads to the bottom of the page where they note that they were refused by the recipient. In the list of highest-grossing films of all-time, it's the notation that *Midnight Cowboy* was X-rated. Those notes are what I live for.

And one of those notes I now am!

You see, you might have heard that *Journey Planet* won the Nova Award for Best Fanzine. James Bacon, bless him, called me at 6 am in the morning my time, left a message saying that we'd won the award. I was knocked back hard!

I mean, when did I ever win an award<sup>1</sup>? It was weird, but more importantly, I became an asterisk. The Novas are only open to UK and Irish folk, of which I am neither, but there's a loophole that if your zine is co-edited by an American, it's still eligible! And so there was the chance for an American to win one of them, and that's what we did. I was the first American to ever win one! It was also the year that Atom won Best Fan Artist, making him the first posthumous winner ever. I love those sort of things.

And I also have to say thanks to everybody, especially Claire and James and everybody who contributed to making *Journey Planet* what it is. It's a zine that I love, that I read

regularly. Yes, I go back and read the issues all the time and I never get tired of them. Our contributors are great, they run the gamut from folks who are regular in zines all over the place to folks who may never have even seen a zine before. I love you folks and I'm so glad so many of you work with us and I love the stuff that y'all have sent us over the last couple of years. You're all awesome and I can't say thanks enough.

Also, we're in that part of the year where we talk about the TAFF race. This year, we've got four great candidates: Graham Charnock, Liam Proven, Paul Treadaway and JOHN THE ROCK COXON. That's right,

ALL CAPS! He's awesome and, as one of his nominators, I can say that JOHN THE ROCK COXON is, and always will be, the greatest human who ever lived. His winning TAFF would lead to peace in the Mid-West, to all those fans who gamble at Reno winning giant jackpots, to a reunion tour of the Beatles and, most importantly, to John joining us in Reno. You should consider voting for him since not voting for him is basically letting the terrorists win. Even if you wanna vote for someone else, you should go to [taff.org.uk](http://taff.org.uk) and make your vote for the man, the myth, THE ROCK... or whichever of the other exceptional candidates that you like.

So, enjoy this issue that digs around in our head meats and lets folks know what it is we feel about our fanning.

— Christopher J Garcia

(Endnote)

<sup>1</sup> FAAn Award for Best New Fan, 2006.



# Letters, lightly edited by Claire

*Let's do this the optimistic way. Next issue I hope we will have a bumper response and an extensive letter column, picking up on #7 (that splendid Pete Young guest-edited issue on space) as well as this one. In the meantime – with thanks to those who responded recently, some of whom were extensive in themselves and so it's good to be in a position to feature a lot of their comments – I confess we have been less efficient than I would like. And I do mean all of us, very definitely including me.*

*JP #7 was published in August last year, with the first printed copies being distributed in Australia before and during the Worldcon. We were slower to organise printed copies in the UK, and the majority of those were handed out by James at Novacon; the remainder only hit the post this year. It was posted to efanazines before that; but since we'd got into the habit of providing at least some printed copies where we could – on this side of the Atlantic I think we're technically paper-first – some of you might well have been waiting for that before reading and even possibly responding.*

*Driven by our seasonal instincts, though, having an issue ready for Corflu seemed an unmissable timetable. And so we leap into print again, this time also in North America, while anticipating that many of you won't have had anything like long enough since you received the last issue to get round to responding yet. And you should. You've got all the material from two issues to choose from – and how often do you get a Pete Young fanzine these days?*

*Meanwhile, on with this issue, with a short response to #7 that demonstrates the advantages of multiple formats if not semi-random timing:*

## **Jerry Kaufman**

I realized that the darkness of much of the art meant that there were probably fabulous colors in the PDF version, so I took a look at it on efanazines. The color is really fabulous, especially for 'Transparent Blue' by Sue Jones.

My favorite piece in the issue was Ang Rosin's memoir of visiting Cape Canaveral and watching that shuttle launch, in 'Mission: Atlantis'.

I'll keep a look-out for future issues as they get posted on efanazines.

Seattle, WA, USA – 18 December 2010

*And we are equally pleased to welcome new correspondents from this side of the Atlantic:*

## **David A Hardy**

I'm delighted that my art graces the cover of this issue, with an illo inside too; and honoured by Pete Young's very kind comments on the effect the cover art apparently had upon him as a boy. One of my prints in the art show at Novacon 40 was 'Portals to Infinity', which was originally a very large painting recently commissioned by someone

who had my 1981 book with Bob Shaw, *Galactic Tours*, as a boy and now wanted an original based upon the 'Gateway' illo which always fascinated him, but with five gates! This is now also being used for a writing competition by Illustrious, so I must be doing something right...

I think this is the first issue of *Journey Planet* that I've seen, and I hope it doesn't sound patronising if I say that I'm most impressed. This may be classed as a fanzine, but its contents are superior to most others that I've come across, and indeed of a professional standard. The illustrations, and especially the chapter headings, are not the obvious ones that might find elsewhere, being sometimes almost abstract or minimalist, yet they do the job so well.

But the writing! Every article is highly readable and informative, and I suppose it helps that I found myself agreeing with much of what I read. Why haven't I met some of these people – do they go to cons? It may seem invidious to single any out, but Jean Martin and James Shields certainly hit the spot (but James: I'm a bit surprised to see you referring to 'Mr Moore': even before he became Sir Patrick, he was Dr. Moore!). Nicholas Hill's article gives an in-depth overview of the British Space Programme, whose decline I have of course watched over the years with great regret and anger; we had all the brains and expertise, and successive governments allowed it all to drain away... And Alastair Reynolds – who of course I do know, and have met several times, as well as doing the cover for his Novacon Special a few years ago, which he kindly mentions in *Zima Blue!* – certainly provides much food for thought on the nature and need for Hard SF; something about which I've been doing quite a lot of soul-searching myself lately, and which I hope to write up for the Science Fiction Crowsnest website.

But on the whole, the standard of writing I've found here makes me think that perhaps I should stick to painting!

Birmingham, UK – 18 November 2010

*Now for a less new correspondent, with a letter of comment so long that, slightly reordered for which I hope Lloyd will forgive me, it's almost an article in itself:*

## **Lloyd Penney**

I have always had a passive interest in space, for it is where much of science fiction started off. Also, interest in space advocacy is there, too. I followed the Apollo and shuttle missions with great interest, plus the adventures of the Remote Manipulator Arm, or Canadarm, and Canadian astronauts on various missions, on a shuttle or on the International Space Station. The current ISS commander is Canadian, for example. Yvonne was quite active when she was quite interested in the space programmes. She was

a member of the Canadian Space Society for many years, and tried to make it survive and thrive. She belonged to The Planetary Society and the Mars Society. She's met some of the biggest names in space development, like Richard Branson, Elon Musk and the best-known of Canadian astronauts, Marc Garneau, and we've both met Buzz Aldrin and Rusty Schweikart. She chaired one of the first Canadian Space Summits, which has migrated from the CSS to universities, to keep the love of space going in various university aerospace faculties. She attended several International Space Development Conferences, and an International Aeronautical Conference. (We both attended an ISDC in Dallas, Texas.) We've been given tours of the Canadian Space Agency's facilities outside of Ottawa.

I can even say that Yvonne was published in an anthology with Arthur C Clarke... She was invited by the European Space Agency to write an essay on space advocacy, and it was accepted for publication. The book is called *The Impact of Space Activities upon Society*, and also features essays by Kofi Annan, Sir Patrick Moore, Robert McCall, and many more. The book can actually be downloaded from the ESA website, I believe. Yvonne was going after her pilot's licence; she was a member of the 99s, the association of female pilots.

And now? Yvonne isn't nearly as interested as she was, disillusioned by the old boys' network that truly runs the space industry. Disillusioned, but not surprised. She was part of two bids to bring the ISDC to Toronto, and both were failures, the second because the winning bid had more golf courses near the proposed conference hotel. We were curiosities because, in spite of the 'International' name, the ISDC is almost exclusively attended by American space advocates. Some didn't even like us being there. I guess being Canadian, and therefore not American, meant we may have posed a security risk. She also knows some of the dirt on some of the biggest names in the industry, and how they suck money away from their own projects to make themselves comfortable millionaires. Very much a private network, and the rest of us can stay outside to look in. There is still some interest on our parts, but not like it was before.

By the way, many thanks for the running of space-oriented postage stamps in the left-hand column. Stamp collecting was one of my hobbies before getting into this SF fandom stuff.

Over the years we've enjoyed SF set in space, and that has influenced what SF I read today. I don't like military SF, but spaceships out to the Galactic Rim still offer adventure I like. Later on, we were all told that our SF had to be scientifically accurate, which meant that many of those early adventures were lacking. Myself, I don't mind some fictional science in my science fiction, but it has to make sense with any particular change to the laws of physics. Perhaps I like the social part of such SF myself, to see how

we've overcome the problems we have on this planet, and see if we've done any better (or much worse) on another. After all, the focus of SF is not space or strange planets or strange alien beings, but how human beings react to all of those.

I think the adventure I found in space-oriented SF got me some interest in space, plus the Apollo launches gave me what looked like SF becoming fact. Arthur C Clarke is Yvonne's favourite author, and *Childhood's End* was the first novel she recalls reading. Our shelf of Clarke books also includes science books in paperback, which shows that science and SF can co-exist, especially if they are written by the same author. If there are any problems, it's that the interests one accumulates could take up all of your free time and more, and you still wouldn't feel like you know enough, or have devoted enough time to them. SF, space, astronomy, more... too much fun and not enough time.

We've always wanted to take in a shuttle launch, but one wasn't happening when we were in Florida for the 1992 Worldcon in Orlando, and we haven't been back since. Disneyland really doesn't interest us. Now that the shuttle programme is nearly done, we might never see Florida again.

James Shields's essay shows that space exploration has lost its appeal and much of its funding. The post-9/11 era shows that we pour much of our funding into the military and into anti-terrorist technology, and wars; too much money goes into this, and not enough to NASA and the aerospace private sector. It's now up to other countries to explore; the Canadian Space Agency is funding two Canadian aerospace companies to design and create a functional lunar lander. Should the US decide it can go to the moon, and such firm decision isn't expected for some time, Canada can go beyond the technology of the remote manipulator arm, and provide more tech that will facilitate that return.

The article on the British space programme and Anne Gray's article about female astronauts reminds me of a book Yvonne has (she's kept her extensive book collection on space and aviation) called *Promised The Moon: The Untold Story of the First Women in the Space Race*. The book was written by Stephanie Nolen, a reporter for the *Globe and Mail* (where I work evenings), and it is a fascinating read, and may explain why going into space was seen as a man's work, and is still very much the domain of the old boys of the industry. I recommend the book. It may be the first written on the subject; it's dated 2002.

Yvonne and I had some connections with one of the entrants of the original X-Prize. Brian Feeney had his shops on the old Canadian Forces Base Downsview in the north part of Toronto, and he had regular displays of his progress on his X-Prize entry called the daVinci Project. He never did get off the ground, but gave most of the people of Toronto a look directly into the X-Prize. (Seeing

he was sponsored by the Golden Palace casino website, there was the hint of hucksterism about the whole thing.) Yvonne had some connections with the X-Prize Foundation at its very beginnings, and wrote their original Silver Book on how to stage special events. We're not sure how much of that expertise and research went into the telecast that showed SpaceShipOne and Burt Rutan win the big multi-million-dollar prize.

I've always liked hard SF, and I expect I'll read it for as long as I'm around. It's changed over time, and our ideas of what science and space are about have changed radically as we expand our knowledge base. I asked a question a long time ago, if science fiction is supposed to be about the future, what will the future's science fiction look like? Dunno... Do we know all of science? Can we not imagine that there is intelligent life out there? Have we simply run out of imagination to make hard SF hard and relevant in this modern day? Robert J Sawyer said that SF is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century phenomenon... sure hope he's wrong. I hope our imagination improves so we can visualize the future's future, and imbue it with wonder.

I graduated from university with Robert Sawyer. Rob does his research, and he does have some background in astronomy. We were both past members of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and I am sure we've both spent some cold hours gazing through a telescope. Claire, as you wrote about 9/11, seeing those two towers come down, I remember thinking that this is the beginning of a new era – of what, I didn't know. It's the era of security at the price of freedom. When I look back now, and think of what you wrote, could 9/11 have signalled the end of the space race? Trillions of dollars are now spent on security and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and billions more will be spent on post-war support and rebuilding. The shuttle programme is closing, and those in charge of the International Space Station and the Martian rovers must be wondering when their projects will be mothballed. Any time there is something about space or technology on television, it is presented for children, as if they are the only ones who might be interested, or as if the interest itself is rather childish. Have we outgrown the desire to explore the galaxy, or have we decided that it's not worth the effort, and have gone back to our old habit of killing one another to satisfy the megalomania of politicians and religious figures? Add to all of this how we have ruined our planet, and I see little hope for our species. Exploring the cosmos, even from the safety of a telescope, at least added some optimism in a pessimistic time. Science fiction did too, and it still does, for me, anyway.

Part of the appeal of science fiction is the hope that one could travel into the galaxy and find other cities, other civilizations where one could fit into, especially for those of us who grew up as a bit of a misfit. Where will I fit in? Perhaps on the planet orbiting that little star? Childish?

No; in our childhoods, our deepest, most basic wishes are the easiest to put in words. The trick is to keep those ideas intact as we become adults, and to act upon them. The old and true phrase is it's never too late to have a happy childhood.

It's good to see Mike Perschon here and there in fanzines. He's a college professor in Edmonton, Alberta, and can be found at his website, Steampunk Scholar. On another remark, about the societal consensus that everyone should have freedom without responsibility, I find that we are children in adult bodies. We don't hafta, we don't wanna, when if we were truly adult, we would have to and want to, and deal with the results. I had read about such a feeling of this attitude in society, infantilism, and we continually fail to accept the responsibilities for our actions. Inappropriate Behaviour Officers might enforce these ideals, but in our childish ways, we would rebel against this form of authority. People must want to do the right thing; they can't be forced, but must be shown the way with positive reinforcement.

I remember my neo days at conventions... Yvonne and I were dating at the time, so I never really went to conventions by myself. I can understand how lonely young boys/men would go to conventions, see socializing, alcohol and a few scantily clad young women, and want desperately to join in the fray to get the companionship, friendship and sexual contact they've always wanted. Patience comes as you age, and patience is what these young boys/men need to prevent what they might do to young girls/women at conventions. I do not defend them or what they do, but I can at least understand why they do what they do. (Some conventions have massage workshops... I wonder if this, shall we say, hands-on approach is part of the problem? I suppose we could clamp down on the scantily-clad young ladies, with the idea that if you dress to be seen, you shouldn't complain if someone looks, but the problems at the conventions goes beyond mere looking. Clamp down? No. Education and peer pressure? Yes.)

Pamela Boal's letter reminds me of some young women who emerged into local fandom, spent a few years here, and then quietly slipped away. I wonder if they had any misadventures that hastened their departure? I can think of a couple of males who left local fandom because they weren't getting enough attention. I guess we find ways to get more out of fandom, and leave when our expectations aren't fulfilled, or when we get too much.

To David Redd: off-hand, I cannot remember the name of the dealer who sold me the CDs of radio shows, but his website is [www.gdoradio.com](http://www.gdoradio.com). We purchased a CD of 24 Mercury Theatre performances (*War of the Worlds* was but one of them), and a CD of 95 episodes of *Vanishing Point*, a *Twilight Zone*-ish radio programme on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the '70s and '80s, I believe. Radio drama is quite enjoyable, and I remember listening to episodes of the CBS *Radio Mystery Theatre*, hosted by E

G Marshall.

The sign of a good fanzine is one that entertains, and makes you think, and perhaps introduces some new ideas. A good fanzine also allows you to write a substantial letter of comment, and so *Journey Planet #7* has been good, maybe great. Thanks to all the editors and contributors for all of this; it's been a challenge and a pleasure to respond to it. You've all got your work cut out for you to top it with issue 8.

Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada – 3 December 2010

*And now for a letter from the same neck of the woods, headed 'Thank You for Journey Planet #7', but which finds itself compelled to digress:*

### Taral Wayne

I don't have it among the zines put away, just a copy of issue 5, and it wasn't among the unsorted zines either. Normally I would e-mail a receipt of issue if I had gotten it.

The last issue was superb looking, I forgot to mention. Too bad it was about *ugh* science fiction.

I make a schtick of the *ugh* not because I hate SF or even writing about SF, but because I don't see how anyone can be interested in *everything* written about SF. I could browse through a hundred books on Mack Reynolds and probably not find one word I'd think worth rereading. But I might well stop and read something about Phyllis Gotlieb, because we had been friends for many years. Or about Bob Wilson, who I'm still friends with. I might possibly read something about Tim Burton or Tim Powers because they're a little out of the common mold, and I don't know too much about them.

But I read quite a bit about the history of the genre and about typical writers back in the '70s. This doesn't make me an expert by any means. I couldn't tell you what Heinlein liked for breakfast or whether Philip K. Dick ever attended university. But I feel I 'understand' the genre and the writers in it sufficiently well that I needn't educate myself in the personal habits or career of Greg Bear – it would add nothing fundamentally new. Writers are people, after all, and generally neither more or less interesting than other people. In fact, as SF has matured, the people in it actually seem to be getting more like anyone else. No steamboat captains who were pensioned off after being stung in the dick by a scorpion while hunting for Greek ruins in Baluchistan, no ex-bookies who were once Lucky Luciano's son-in-law, no professors of linguistics who used to translate the Wall Street Journal for the Communist Party of China, etc. Today's SF writer is probably just a guy from a middle-class background with a degree in journalism who's first job was teaching and quit when he sold his first novel to Tor. Oh hum.

Is anything worse than a jaded fan?

Toronto, Ontario, Canada – 16 November 2010

*We close with a letter from another new correspondent, who fortunately doesn't sound at all jaded – and who has had the talent to implicitly manage to address himself to some of the questions we've also chosen to consider more directly in this issue.*

### Warren Buff

I've always felt the appeal of space. I remember playing with the space LEGO sets (mostly the fictional ones, though also one of the actual space shuttle), and very early on thinking of my top career choices as astronaut and paleontologist (kind of a far cry from office work, alas). This may be a difference in the years between Chris and I – I think that he was just a little too old to still get the childish excitement of the early Hubble images, and I was born too late for the very coolest of the deep sea images he recalls. (And the stamps in the margins of the letter column are quite the nice touch.) I remember an early fascination with charts showing our position as you scaled out into space, as well as yearly commemorations of the Challenger explosion. Space was pretty well ingrained in my childhood.

I recall meaning to respond to the last issue (I'm a rather infrequent LoC writer, alas), especially the back pages, and was glad they got a strong, honest response. I've spent my share of time worrying about harassment and safe spaces as a con runner, and unfortunately had to deal with an issue from a position of responsibility once. I can only hope that the results helped to make the con a safer space, and that the young man I won't be seeing again grew up as a result. I was at least gratified to know that the young ladies involved returned the following year. I also hope that what I learned will help guide me to better results in future cons I work on – to my knowledge, there were no issues at ReConStruction. One of the methods I used there was to instruct the operations staff that their role would not include security, per se, but that they were there to help – to help inebriated fans back to their rooms, to help upset fans to calm down, etc. We didn't actually have anyone called 'security', and I think that using helpful and friendly rovers or operations staff is better for handling these types of situations than an authoritative security staff. In the future, I may even advocate changing the designation of these staff to a ribbon reading "Here to help". The direct, self-explanatory, and ideally brightly-colored ribbons would, ideally, become something easily recognizable.

I liked the Acme Instant Fanzine article, and wouldn't mind seeing this as a regular feature of the zine. The one bit I'd disagree with is the degree of primacy James seems to be giving to SF books. They're important to us, and always should be, but I think that, especially as my generation comes of age, more and more fans will have grown up not just reading SF, but watching it from a very young age. The first film I can remember is *The Empire Strikes Back*. I know I must have watched other movies earlier, but that one



stuck. It's there in the formative memories file along with things like watching the Berlin Wall come down on the evening news – it just felt that important. Maybe that's my dad's influence. He was never really a fan (at least, I'm not aware of him having discussed science fiction with anyone outside of our household), but he had a way of talking about things that made you certain they were significant and right (even when he had his facts wrong – for years I thought Meat Loaf wrote 'Killing Me Softly'). Dad talked that way about Luke and Vader, and he talked that way about the Challenger explosion. And as Chris points out, space (and SF) plays a huge role in video games, which have been a constant companion to folks my age since we were in grade school (earlier for some). My folks also introduced me to things like *The White Mountains* and Asimov's Norby series, and gave me Tolkien and Lewis right around the time I could read (although I think my only actual experience of *The Hobbit* was through the wonderful cartoon movie, and I wouldn't complete *The Lord of the Rings* until well into my teens). So which source should I see as primary? Would I have really been a fan without both? And I've gotta take exception to Caroline Mullan's disparaging remark about the imaginative value of film. My playmates and I were putting our imaginations into service well before we could read, fed on a steady diet of movies and television. When we pretended to be Jedi or elves or wizards, were we somehow not using that imagination?

I definitely enjoyed the articles on the past and future of the space program, and learned quite a few interesting things. That's the sort of thing I look forward to in *Journey Planet*. Best of all, I think, was the quote from Werner von Braun. It's one of those wonderfully inspiring science quotes I love. I was a bit disappointed that Liam Proven's article didn't go into the details of the firm he says only space nuts would have heard of – was he referring to SpaceX?

Then we get to the meatiest of the articles, Alastair Reynolds's discussion of hard SF and its problems. I've always wondered if the phrase 'hard science fiction' was meant to be parsed as [hard science] [fiction] or [hard] [science fiction] – there seems to be a conflation of the two readings, at the very least. I think the methods of hard SF still have quite a bit of merit, and the sorts of stories Reynolds cites as believably futuristic follow from good principles I see in the better hard SF (though lacking in much of it). While a lot of mediocre hard SF has only paid attention to the hard sciences, it is the application of other fields of study (sociology, psychology, history) which gives us the fully believable futures – including the sorts of advances in our understanding of the universe that we would expect the future to hold. This is something I see as core to the difference between the two parsings: [hs][f] involves a rigorous application of the hard sciences to conceive a story, while [h][sf] uses that same rigor to

conceive changes in culture, politics, and the history of ideas. Not everything needs to be explained, because the characters often don't understand the mechanisms of the world around them (for a good example of this, check out the film *Children of Men*, which I thought involved a really thorough look at how society would change in the face of an unexplained calamity, yet didn't let this get in the way of the story, but rather buttressed it). And even this method isn't the only one for telling a good science fiction story – Reynolds picks two great examples of distinctive otherness that clearly break the rules of hard SF in Cordwainer Smith and *Dune*. The lesson here is significant: the rigor of the science is less important to science fiction than the believability and immersion of the story. Rigor can be used to buttress believability, but it can also descend into a tedium that kills a story's immersion. It's good to see this kind of top-notch criticism coming from a prominent writer.

So of course, right on its heels, we get a short piece from Ditmar about how a lot of things that sure do look like science fiction aren't. That's the sort of stodgy criticism that I don't think does much good for the field. Folks are reasonably good at looking at a story and saying, "Yeah, that's science fiction." Worse, he uses the old saw about conforming to established theory. Wouldn't a story whose premise included a slight deviation from established theory, *for the purpose of exploring its ramifications*, be just as rigorously science fiction as one which supposed our current theories are correct (and potentially more entertaining, too)? How about stories like *A Case of Conscience*, where the events could well occur by established theory, but part of the point is calling into question whether that material worldview is correct? Are those not science fiction, or do they get a pass for letting the materialist have his out? How about stories with faster-than-light travel and psionics? Those seem pretty far-fetched, right out at the edge of believability, but plenty of science fiction stories manage to work with them – and folks can readily recognize them as science fiction. A ban on all hand-waving would surely leave the field without a great many of its more notable works and iconic pieces – telepaths, *Stranger in a Strange Land*, positronic brains, and *Ringworld* would all be relegated as 'not hardcore enough for my little genre island'. Sorry, but I'll keep my loose and fluid genre, even if it means the riff-raff can astrally project to Mars.

Raleigh, NC, USA – 17 November 2010

*So then, you'all, here's the deal. If we get better at distribution – on the big assumption that whatever we do with content is at least enough to make you want to tell us something in response – will more of you do more of this?*

– Claire Brialey

# Why do you ask? by Claire

I asked quite a lot of people a question – not a trick question, but one that could be interpreted several ways. I was interested in any answers we might get but also in how people read, or chose to read, the question itself. But I suspect that too many people read it too quickly and had the sort of reaction that Taral Wayne both describes and demonstrates in his piece here; as he notes, many variants of this question have been asked before, and it's therefore quite easy to breeze past it muttering, 'What, *that* again?'

But I thought for a while – probably too long, because I do – about how to phrase the composite question I wanted to ask, partly to see which part of it people answered. And so I asked 44 people in 8 countries, 'What makes you a science fiction fan?'

What, that again?

I was ready to be interested enough in the straightforward answers to the interpretation 'What attracted you to science fiction?' or 'How did you get into SF fandom?'. I asked quite a few people whose responses even to those questions I hadn't seen before – as well as a few I thought I probably had, not least to help with the range of national and generational diversity I thought it would be good to cover.

But I'd been seeing some interesting exchanges on fannish e-lists about whether long-time fans still considered themselves to be fans/readers/viewers of science fiction and/or members of fandom – whether, without denying or decrying that part of their life, they felt that they'd drifted away or that the modern incarnations of the genre or the community were passing them by. So I wondered about why people continued to be, and to consider themselves, SF fans – and why they might stop even while they were connected enough to consider writing within an SF community about it.

And I wondered, inevitably, about whether anyone would take the opportunity to write about circling the wagons – about whether they thought other people counted them as SF fans, and what it took to achieve that, or indeed about their personal definitions that might exclude others or attempt to include those who didn't welcome it.

I was curious about whether anyone would choose to write about what had replaced SF as the main focus for their enthusiasm and engagement, even if they still saw themselves as SF fans (and, in those circumstances, why they did). What would bring them back, or drive them away?

We got some answers I was interested to read and keen to publish, but mostly we got no reply. Maybe our invitations languished in spam traps. Maybe it was a bad time for some people. Maybe we simply didn't provide enough time for many potential contributors to respond. And maybe too many people read the question – despite my

perception of careful crafting and elaboration – too literally and too quickly and thus as being too familiar. So don't read anything specific into silence, or into the demographic of the responses we did get.

If someone had asked me that question, I'd have suspected careful drafting and in any case leapt on the open nature of the question – assuming I had enough time, which is the only reason I hadn't responded to Arnie Katz's quite recent variant of this question in 2009 (as Taral points out, a lot of people answered the more focused question 'Why are you a fan?' which Arnie posed – alongside commissioning some other specific viewpoints – for the first anniversary of the Vegrants' fanzine *Idle Minds*).

And I might then have responded that the answers could include my father, and Ray Bradbury, and my schoolfriend Corinne and Douglas Adams, and London pub meetings and fanzines and conventions, but that these are really all the introductions rather than the transformation, as I tend to think of it, from this being about what I *do* to about who I *am*. And there's a whole nature vs nurture debate about why I have the sort of mind that makes me appreciate science fiction and want to have conversations with other people who think the same way.

I might have said that I came to SF fandom for the science fiction but I stayed for the people, but although that might be a good line it doesn't actually bear much examination. I was already doing pretty well in finding and enjoying science fiction by myself, I thought, without feeling much more need for engaged discussion of what I was reading than I got at school or at home. What attracted me to the idea of fandom, back in my adolescence in the mid-80s, was the people all along; maybe I could talk to them about SF, but surely the point would be that as SF readers they were my sort of people, with ways of thinking and approaching the world in common? And the ones I'd heard about sounded like a good laugh, too.

As for what makes me an SF fan – well, when I first met fandom I did think it was that I liked SF. Then, as others have said, I realised that it was being someone who liked SF who was active in fandom. And then that there seemed to be a long-running difference of opinion about whether still liking SF was a necessary factor. And finally that I could just make up my own mind about that, especially as there was a lot of really good new SF being written and published in my own country on top of all the older stuff I still hadn't entirely caught up with and now accept I never will.

And for the people... Of course, there's the big happy family of fandom myth. Or is it in fact a myth, now, that anyone feels we're still a big happy family? Some people have their own definition of what sort of SF, and what sorts of fannish activity, counts as real; I've got a pretty hard-line

view for myself of what SF is, but the arguments about that in any particular case can be stimulating too. For fan activity, I don't feel I have much in common with SF fans who don't have any interest in primary sources in written form – whether that's books or magazines or comics, on paper or electrons – and I find it difficult to empathise with people who limit their interest and engagement with the field to one author or series, but I don't really meet many people who genuinely fall into either category. Which might mean I need to get out more, but if it would just reinforce my prejudices and other people's then I don't see that it would be all that productive.

But even here amongst my people, maybe we are like a family, but it feels more like a small village. We don't have to like everyone we happen to be related to or live nearby, and just because we've got some interests in common doesn't mean we will share a sense of humour, principles, politics, social preferences or other interests. Nor does it necessarily mean we will always share our way of looking at the world – and our common frame of reference is increasingly shared with other people now too.

It might even mean that what we most palpably have in common are our less endearing qualities – the ones that might make you think someone's acting like a fan and not in a good way. So if I were feeling grumpy I could say that what makes me an SF fan is my tendency to nit-pick or to go on a bit or indeed to be grumpy, to be over-fascinated by technology although I'm far from being on the cutting edge there, or to think that we have more intelligence (or even, in the face of much evidence, insight) than 'normal' people. I will not use the term 'mundane', which to me demonstrates much that's wrong with us rather than with anyone else.

But all that would be unfair to myself and to most of us. I'd prefer to think that what makes me an SF fan – what makes me enjoy reading and watching SF even though I also enjoy detective fiction and other novels and history and biography and comedy, and what makes me want to participate in SF fandom and spend time with other SF fans, and perhaps above all to continue to have these conversations in fanzines as well as at conventions and in emails and down the pub – is the sensawunda that makes me look at the moon and marvel that human beings have walked on it, even while looking beyond it to the expanse of space and enjoying the knowledge that I'm standing on another globe that's moving through it.

It's the desire to speculate about what this planet, and the people and societies on it, could be like and will be able to achieve – or are at risk of becoming – in 20 or 50 or 1,000 years' time; the view that it's natural and necessary to think about the impact the people have on the world and one another and to wonder how it could be, and could have been, different – to ask 'what if' as well as 'why' and 'how'. To be interested in the ways people have already thought

about this and imagined their future, which may not now be ours. And to argue passionately that almost everyone else has got it wrong – but at least to understand what we each mean when we say that, and to care about the answer as well as the argument.

The other articles we've included in this issue after those which directly answered some variant of my question are ones that I think answer it implicitly – although it's arguable that pretty much any good fanzine is constantly doing exactly that.

It's no longer such a lonely thing to be an SF fan, although sometimes it can demonstrate how to be lonely in the middle of a crowd. But despite all the things we might mock about each other and ourselves – all the things that we're damned if we'll let other people mock – I don't see why it shouldn't still be something we can each be proud to be.

– Claire Briailey



## An instant reply, hardly a contribution

Bruce Gillespie

A fan is above all somebody who likes to Do Something about his or her hobby.

I was a devoted SF reader for some years before I joined fandom. I knew about the Melbourne SF Club, but could not stay in town on Wednesday nights to attend meetings. What made me a fan as soon as I read about them was Lin Carter's article about fanzines in *If* magazine sometime in the early 1960s. I did not attend the 1966 Easter convention in Melbourne, the convention that re-started Australian fandom, because of my extreme shyness (at the age of nineteen) about attending crowd events; but the idea of publishing a magazine about what I wanted to publish for people who would appreciate it – I just knew I would find a way to publish one, some day.

I bought a copy of *Australian SF Review* in late 1966, and slowly but surely moved towards being a fan. I was not a fan, though, until I wrote to John Bangsund, editor of *ASFR*, and offered contributions, and at the end of 1967 met quite a few of the people who produced *ASFR*. From then on, it was just a matter of becoming an employed person, who could afford to publish a real fanzine.

I had already attended one convention, but attending conventions was never at the heart of fandom. The heart of fandom is sitting down and writing to other fans, or for fanzines, or whatever.



## Why am I a science fiction fan?

Chris

I've spent the last thirty minutes thinking about what I would write about with all the extra space after I've said, "I'm a science fiction fan because it's fun." That's all there is to it. It's fun. "Why am I a Film Festival fan? Because it's fun." "Why am I a fan of pro wrestling? Because it's fun." I love science fiction; I always have. I've been around fans all my life, and there's no other way I could ever think of existing. Science fiction fandom is, at its best, as fun a place as I've ever found.

And this is weird at times when there are things that aren't thought of as fun that I do a lot. Running a Fanzine Lounge at a con can be a freakin' hassle, but I love it. When we ran the Back Section in *Journey Planet* issue 6, that was heavy, brutal material; and yet I had a blast figuring out what to do with pieces that wouldn't work against it, that would allow the work to present itself and yet give the material some visual cues to lighten things up. It was a lot of fun. Folks ask me how I find the time to do all the issues I put out and the writing that I do, and all I can really think to say in response is: "if you were having this much fun, you'd be doing it all the time too!"

And now that I've said that, what do I do?

Well, I could talk about how hard it is when I don't get a chance to Fan. The run-up to the Revolution exhibit at the museum was crazy and at times, sometimes for full days, I wouldn't be able to write or lay-out or anything. It was madness trying to fix the errors, to deal with the bits of research, the checking and rechecking and then noticing that you missed so much on the recheck that you've got to recheck the recheck and end up rechecking that. It hurt, at times physically, to have to pay such close attention to the material and not be able to get my head up, to pull down some of that sweet fannish air that comes with zining for me. Usually, I can deal with the requests, do my research, work on the various things and still manage to do my zines, but with the exhibit work, I couldn't get that space.

Of course, that's the problem. This job would be great if I didn't have to do the actual work.

There are times when having some folks around the museum helps remind me why I'm a fan. Steve Wozniak pops by every few weeks and we chat. I talk about the various books I've read. I had a lovely chat with Grady Booch, an IBM Superstar, about the various SF authors we read. It's fun, and it reminds me that even folks who aren't fans are still fans... after a fashion.

So, it's fun. Nothing transcendental or deep, just fun, and really, that's all I'm looking for.

– Christopher J Garcia

# What makes you a science fiction fan

## by Lloyd Penney

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When I first saw the question, I thought of two possible meanings, as I expect most people did...

First of all, a science fiction fan could mean a fan of science fiction itself. I have always enjoyed science fiction because it is a literature of fresh ideas, the more astounding (amazing, fantastic, etc.) the better. The big question, "What if?" is answered in a multitude of ways. Any number of futures can be explored, as can any number of improbabilities, if not impossibilities and surrealities. What do we get out of it? A fully exercised mind and imagination, and the desire to explore more ideas. In an era where it's never been cooler to be smart or imaginative or even wise, we happily buck the trend.

Second, a science fiction fan could mean a member of science fiction fandom. Some of my personal likes: Fandom is social in its activities, like club meetings, conventions and other assemblies. Fannish activities run the gamut, and I often use a smorgasbord model to describe what you can do in fandom... sample from any of a myriad of things to do, or settle down with one. It is creative in all that it does. It is interactive because fans communicate with each other, and with the authors, artists, agents, publishers, editors and

other creators that eventually produce what we like to see and read, with the hopeful result of a better product. That communication with each other manifests itself in fanzines, personal correspondence and, in this computerized era, email lists and various social media. Fandom also ranges in scope and size from local to international, so you can find what level you are most comfortable with.

I could go a little further as to what I don't like about fandom, but it's not my fanzine, and you don't have that much space. But I stay; because, honestly, my likes vastly outnumber my dislikes, and the people I like and love vastly outnumber the people I don't like. And I cannot think of any other activity I could take part in that could get me the friends and acquaintances I have today. I see so many fans in their 60s, 70s, 80s and even 90s (hello, Art Widner!), and there has to be something that has kept them around so many decades. So many fans who gaffiated once have returned, and they have found once again whatever it was that got them into fandom in the first place. I plan to stick around long enough to find out for myself, so you've been warned: you won't get rid of me any time soon.



# What makes me a science fiction fan

## by John Coxon

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This contribution to this brilliant fanzine arises because I've been asked, as a candidate for TAFF<sup>1</sup>, to pen something on the subject of what makes me a science fiction fan. It's a tough question, and I've decided to answer it by explaining how my first interactions with other fans and my entry into fandom really marked a number of distinct changes in my life, for which I am extremely grateful. This is also something that I talked about, briefly, in the first issue of my own fanzine, *Procrastinations* – alongside an article on T-shirts as a fannish equivalent of tribal tattooing...

The first change was attending two AGMs of ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha. They are a totally awesome club and if you are fond of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, you could do much worse to give them a look, even though my three or four years of active service have now come to an end. This really opened my eyes to the sorts of people that existed in fandom. Through the events I met people like DougS, Flick, James Bacon and many more people, as well as interacting with my very first Beeblebear.

The second change (a slightly misleading description, since it actually happened between my two ZZ9 AGMs) was attending the Peterborough SF club for the first time. I am eternally indebted to Max for inviting me along to my first meeting alongside the other denizens of the society. It was at that club that I met Tobes Valois, too, and for a long time I went religiously, like clockwork. It provided me with a place to go and discuss something that was very dear to me with people who had the same sorts of interests. My friends at school were good to me, and I enjoyed their company, but I was definitely the geek of the group – it was nice to know that other people existed who shared my interests, and that those people were, undoubtedly, the sort of people I wanted to meet more of.

The third change (which occurred before the second change) was being introduced, by DougS, to LiveJournal and the role it plays in wider fandom. Not everybody is on LiveJournal, but when I was 14 years old and couldn't just get the train down to London being able to read about what other fans are doing and see what's going on in the wider world of fandom really was a lifeline for me. I threw myself into the online world with gusto, and indeed, there was a time when I posted on LiveJournal almost every day (although now I am back to the levels I used to achieve when I first started on the site, and the days when I had to go back over a hundred entries from other people to catch up in the morning are long gone).

The fourth change (which did actually come after the first three changes and came around mostly as a result of the second and third), was my first event in more general

fandom. This took the form of <plokta.con> π: the Dangercon, which was my first one-day convention, held in London. This was a change for me in two important ways: firstly, it marked the pubbing of my first ish, *Procrastinations*; secondly, it marked my first real entry into wider fandom. I appeared on a panel or two, and failed spectacularly to win the balloon debate I appeared in.

I remember vividly arriving at London Bridge Station and looking around to see how to get to the pub at which the event was to be held. Having not often visited the city, never mind that station, it was slightly disorientating! However, as good fortune would have it, I saw two people who I decided to ask for directions on the basis that they looked like fans. Those people were Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, and they were able to direct me superbly! I promptly gave them a copy of my fanzine, which turned out to be a fine investment as it has led to me reading several brilliant fanzines in return.

It was that event – the atmosphere, the discussion on the panel items, the conversations in the bar, the lovely, lovely people – that made me decide that I needed to attend a convention. My first Eastercon (indeed, my first convention at all) was Contemplation, in Chester in 2007, and represents the fifth, and arguably the biggest, change of them all. Some people would say that it was a bad choice, since it was a smaller convention with no GoH, but actually, I think if it had been a larger convention, I would have enjoyed it less as my entry into the con-going world. From there, I sailed gaily onto Year of the Teledu (in Leicester) and Recombination (in Cambridge), both of which were also brilliant.

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**Why an SF fan? To be horribly flippant (and Dave Pringle used to send me rejection slips accusing me of this), I just like the stuff and the antics around it. – David Redd**

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Some might assume that the answer to the question, "What makes you a science fiction fan?" is, "I like science fiction." Whilst it's true that the impetus for getting involved in science fiction was Douglas Adams, I think the thing that really makes me a science fiction fan is the people, not the subject matter. Having said that, being a

science fiction fan is definitely increasing the amount of science fiction I consume (I make a point of trying to read something by every GoH at every convention I attend, something which has introduced me to some very fine literature!), and I do avidly enjoy it. I love appearing on panels (a particular highlight was a panel on *The Hitchhiker's Guide* in front of hundreds of people, with Neil Gaiman and three other brilliant *Guide* fans!) and I love being able to talk intelligently about things I've read or watched with other people who really get it.

Fandom vies with university as being the best thing that ever happened to me so far. It's a huge part of my life, and I hope it will get even bigger as I continue into the future.

**(Endnote)**

<sup>1</sup> There are three other fantastic candidates and you should definitely vote for one of us – I think you should vote for me, but I am, after all, biased.



# What makes you a science fiction fan, puny human?

## by Rich Coad

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“What makes you a science fiction fan?” asked the sinister triumvirate junta of the Journey planet, a group who had easily wrested the Nova of power from Lord D’or Naughb. It wasn’t a question I expected. I’d been prepared for torture – the kiss of Denebian giant leeches or the penetration of a Canopian telepathic candiru or even, most thrillingly, the exquisite torments of a Gorean slave girl. But not this.

“By Callisto’s methane geysers! I’ll tell you, you bastards!” I ejaculated. The editorial three kindly offered a Kleenex.

“You have to think back to a much more primitive time, a time when the closest equivalent to the net provided only three choices, all in black and white, and turned into a test pattern by midnight. They were dark days then and even in the backwater of the West Midlands it was hard for a child to be unaware of the stench of evil emanating from nearby paper mills and smelters. The one beacon of light in this bleak world was the public library which, among other things, held copies of books by Patrick Moore and Fred Hoyle.

“Yes, I admit it. ‘Twas space that made me a science fiction fan. Well, not space, exactly for that’s a fairly empty and dull place until one gets down to a quantum level far beyond the knowledge of a nine year old schoolboy. No, it was the lumpy bits in space: the places where gravitation had coalesced gasses into a fusion burning, plasma spewing, bright spot in the dark; the accretions of rock and metal thrown out by supernova explosions of earlier stars that orbited around our own; the massive super structures of galaxies and even more massive galactic clusters; the most amazing things in the universe could be seen by simply looking up on a dark and clear night.

“In rapid succession I learned of bifurcated Mercury, one side ablaze in perpetual sunlight, the other a frozen waste of constant darkness; of Venus caught in an atmosphere so thick that fog was never necessary; of Mars which certainly had no canals but likely showed striations of vegetation in dark patches over its rust colored surface and snow-capped poles; of the rocky remains of a smashed

planet endlessly orbiting between Mars and vast Jupiter, the giant planet with an eternal storm far larger than the Earth all by itself; ringed Saturn, unique in all the universe; awry Uranus with its pole tipped to almost 90 degrees; green Neptune and, sometimes beyond sometimes not, small Pluto. And, tantalizingly possible, a mysterious trans-Plutonian planet X conjectured to account for observed orbital perturbations in these pre-Oort cloud days.

“Beyond and beyond we could go. Stopping first at our nearest neighbor Proxima Centauri, dull but worthy, a mere 4 trillion miles from home. Cooler still was Alpha Centauri, not merely a star but a binary system of stars orbiting each other. Potential stars harboring planets like Earth: Wolf’s, Barnard’s and 61 Cygni C. Amazing giants like Betelgeuse whose very girth would encompass the orbits of Earth and Mars.

“Nebulae and clusters; magellanic clouds following our own spiral galaxy of which we were in an outer arm – a distant exurb of the galactic core. Andromeda, no longer chained to a rock but floating free in space and due to collide with us in a few billion years. Mysterious quasars that shone as bright as a galaxy but were as small as a star.

“Having read of these wonders and seen them many nights, how was it possible to not become a science fiction fan once I learned about books imagining people in these exotic locations?”

I concluded my explanation and looked up again at the sinister three. I knew they intended to terminate this interview. I touched the button on my belt and the force field instantly surrounded me. I entered a key on my wrist-pad and the ship which had patiently been awaiting its command rushed to my side. As I stepped aboard I could see the female of the junta typing furiously on her tablet. No doubt a damning report was to be filed that would go in the permanent record. The tall one shouted something in a mellifluous but unintelligible accent which sounded a bit like “fookn ainglsch bstid”. And the hairy short one stood mouth agape, with two thumbs up showing before him.

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## Fandom is about fandom, it’s a great big social club.

Greg Egan



# Don't tell, don't ask by Taral Wayne

I began this 'answer' first with a petulant outburst – “Oh Gawd! Not that question again! It's been asked and the answers published a hundred times since 1939!”

To which Claire correctly replied, “And that answer can, of course, be taken as another response to the question!”

Smart aleck!

I don't know who first asked the question “Why are you a fan?” and expected an answer he could print. The first thought I had was that the guilty party was likely Earl Kemp. Earl published something called ‘Why is a Fan?’ as an issue of the second *Safari* annual in 1961. His first annual had been a survey called ‘Who Killed Science Fiction?’ – a provocative title for a controversy that wasn't one. According to Wikipedia, five identical questions were mailed to 108 correspondents in the SF world, and Earl got 71 responses that he published. He followed the same procedure for the second annual, ‘Why is a Fan?’ By sending his questionnaire to 94 fans he got 74 replies. There are more facts and statistics in the introduction, but you'd find them less than enlightening, so I'll leave them out.

Yes, I own a copy of ‘Why is a Fan?’ It's a well-mimeographed fanzine on white paper that enjoys an attractive Bergeron cover. But I've never read more than a smattering. Maybe it's just me, but I found it as boring as shit on toilet paper.

I think it highly significant that Earl himself says in the introduction, “Here we have many words, many opinions, many repetitions. Here we have *nothing!* There is no answer to the question.”

He also says, “The replies were so *similar*, that it was a task in itself just cutting out the repetitions for publication here. An earnest effort was made to retain every single new thought contributed to the study, and the thought best expressed was kept in the manuscript. Still, the sameness and repetition was rampant.” Earl finished saying, “It was a totally unsatisfactory survey, for me.” You have to admire the man's determination, who goes to such lengths to publish material he himself has so little enthusiasm for. But who will admire the reader?

Strangely, the question ‘Why is a Fan?’ simply won't die. It was asked as recently as August 2009 by Arnie Katz, in *Idle Minds* #4. It was a special issue, self-consciously patterned after Earl Kemp's pioneering effort. Indeed, Earl begins *Idle Minds* with a number of quotes by Francis Towner Laney, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Fritz Leiber, Howard DeVore, and Eric Frank Russell from the original ‘Why is a Fan?’

Asked again by *Idle Minds*, the question inspired some 45 correspondents to send in their answers. They were

similar, highly predictable statements that all boiled down to something like “I like SF and discovered fandom through a magazine letter column/book store signing/local convention/getting my photo taken with Santa at the shopping mall.” There are clearly only so many ways to hear about science fiction fandom. Yet it's a question every fan is eager to answer, I suspect... again and again... because the discovery of fandom is highly personal, even if it isn't unique.

I myself answered the question, “Why is a Fan?” in *Idle Minds*.

Now, instead of answering it again, I intend to cut 'n' paste the answer – *answers*, rather – that I gave to Arnie for that zine into this zine.<sup>1</sup>

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There is almost no meaningful answer to the question ‘Why am I a fan?’ Because, that's why. I am what I am. If it's good enough for Popeye, it's good enough for me.

One is also tempted to try to quote Howard the Duck as well, and blame it on being a stranger in a world I never made. There's something to that, actually. The grown-up world is a big scary place that I never really wanted to join, and have never proved to my satisfaction that I'm fit to compete in. Who would I be without fandom? A guy working in the sales office, pasting up quarterly catalogs of garden tools. Or maybe someone in a product design department, who decides where to put Yogi Bear on a kid's lunch pail. That's if I had been lucky, and didn't have to settle for being a cog in accounts receivable at Sears. No LOCs, no egoboo, no Hugo nominations, no GoH at the worldcon. In short, fandom makes me somebody.

It's just too big a world out there to make your mark on, and while most people are content to be husbands, wives, parents, and breadwinners, not all of us are as domestically inclined. We want to leave our footprints in the sands of time, or at least a scuff print on the linoleum of next week. Some turn to religion – God loves them. Others join political parties – the nation owes them. Other callings come to mind – the military, the arts, science, Esperantists, golfing associations, Burning Man, Skull & Bones, white supremacist groups, Amway, model railroading clubs, Dead Heads, Greenpeace, and, yes, even fandom... They all have this in common: they scale down to a human size a world grown far too big

Still, this doesn't explain why I'm not on a seat cheering a WWF championship match, or practicing Tai Chi four times a week. What was there about science fiction fandom that appealed to me more than canvassing for the Marxist-Leninist party of Canada, or breeding poodles like my Dear Old Mum?

The reasons are straightforward enough. I wasn't into physical activities like hockey or shaving heads (hot rod slang, not barbering). I liked to read. I liked to read about things that were surprising or unusual, whether it be gold-mad KGB paymasters in Jamaica, or experimental spacecraft testing the first faster-than-light drive. Another attraction was the possibility of using my skills at drawing and writing. Best of all, it was possible to pursue these interests in the company of like-minded people.

That some of those people became friends for life goes without saying. That my fanac has gained me desired notoriety is obvious. Both only restate that fandom gives me a purpose and a place in life that I doubt I'd have found stocking grocery shelves, or designing the labels of non-prescription cough syrups.

**How I Got Into Fandom** – In very specific terms, I am a fan because I was reading science fiction heavily at the time I discovered an ad for a local club in the back of a used issue of *Fantastic* magazine that I bought for fifteen cents. It told me when and where the next meeting was, so I screwed up my undeveloped sense of adventure and attended. The meeting itself was something of a bore. I thought talking about SF with other readers would be fun, but listening to older members of OSFiC talk at me from the front of the room was not. Fortunately, I met a couple of fellow-travelers who were also new to the club. We stayed up all night in some donut shop, and my fate was sealed.

So, you see, there was a strong random element to my becoming a fan, just as there was a certain poetic inevitability. I am a fan, because I became a fan. I am what I am.

**The First Fan Thing That Really Hooked Me** – I could say donuts, and be a smart-ass. It would be myth-making to say it was the sight of *Energumen* being passed around at the OSFiC meeting, but the truth is I only saw it at a distance. I was nobody, and those fabulous copies steered well clear of me as they circulated. It would be closer to the truth to say that the club quarterly, imaginatively named *OSFiC Quarterly*, were the first fanzines I ever got a good look at and that I grew excited over. Or I might broaden the question a few degrees, and claim Torcon II was the first fannish thing to make a big impression on me. But again, truth is a little less romantic. I attended a local comics convention called Cosmicon several months before that Labour Day. I even met Vaughn Bodé, who awarded me a minor prize for something in the art show. Perhaps what hooked me was the first time I laid my hand on a mimeograph handle, to crank out pages of the club's newszine a few months later. But no, I wasn't cranking out my own zine yet. Also, I had visited Mike Glicksohn in his lair and had already seen a mimeograph. Could it have been the first zine I got in trade when I was finally pubbing

my own ish? In hindsight, no. It was *Riverside Quarterly* that came in the mail, and what sort of an impression did that make on a neo? Getting into fandom was really not a single flash of insight, nor an unpremeditated leap into the unknown, but a series of steps that led me deeper and deeper into the mire. No one of them was critical... except making friends.

**My Happiest, Most Memorable Day in Fandom** – You're going to hate me for this. Many events and incidents have gladdened me before, and after, the day I'm going to describe. Not least among them were being asked to be Guest of Honour at Anticipation. There was the time I got my first Hugo nomination, for another instance. And, too, the time Bill Bowers asked me to be toastmaster at his Corflu. But my endorphins never flowed as freely as they did on the final day of the first furry convention I attended. I was not only the GoH, but a dealer. I'd had a great time at the con, and looked forward to spending another two weeks crashing with Marc Schirmeister. Our itinerary included touring the city, hiking the mountains and desert, and filling myself with more Mexican food in a short time than I had ever eaten at home in Toronto. The real high spot of the trip and the con, though, was when the dealers' room closed on Sunday. I held over \$2,500 in cold hard cash in my hand, virtually all of it profit. The money was in US greenbacks at a time when they were worth about a third more in Canadian loonies. I know how this must sound – pretty crass. And it is. But I had never had \$2,500 cash before. I'm not sure I have since. Just fanning those twenties, fifties, and hundreds caused my heart to race. Counting the money again and again, I felt like Uncle Scrooge in his money bin. Pure, unadulterated joy unlike anything I had ever experienced. Nothing in my life, baby, ever felt that good, and maybe nothing ever will again... except maybe \$3,000. Sorry if I dash your expectations.

**The Most Memorable Fan I Ever Met** – Um... I forget. Seriously, I tend to grow into friendships, and rarely gain instant impressions of a person that are any use later. There are exceptions. I can't say why, but I liked Moshe Feder the moment I met him at Torcon II. We hardly spoke, and he was preoccupied at the time with the recent death of a fellow New York fan, but an impression was made. Similarly, I fell into a conversation with an odd stranger, one time, at a party held by Bakka Books. He was into Dark Fantasy and looked the part, with his hair parted in the middle and Turkish mustache. I wasn't much into Dark Fantasy at all, but we seemed to find grounds for an accord anyway. Robert Hadji and I only met again some years later. We both recalled the earlier time and became good friends for a number of years.

There have been many others I've found unforgettable, of course. No, not Walt Willis or Terry Carr or Dave

Langford, the sort of people fans want to hear about. Mostly I never met those people, or made only a fleeting acquaintance. The fans I remember were Ken Fletcher, Bob Wilson, Victoria Vayne, and others with whom I forged lasting relationships.

But perhaps the most striking example of meeting someone who left a sudden, indelible impression on me was at Iggy. I had known Marc Schirmeister as a name in fanzines, who drew some of the goofiest, stylistically unmistakable fan art I had ever seen. But I had never met him, or even corresponded. We bumped into each other somehow at the '78 worldcon, and instantly became fast friends. Nor is Schirm memorable only as a matter of friendship. Anyone who has met Schirm is bound to have noticed that he's one of a kind. He talks different, he dresses different, he draws different, he is different in his interests, activities, and opinions. Who else would own a house and leave it to his sister and brother-in-law to live in, because he preferred the rustic charms of a flat over the garage that hadn't been redecorated since Teddy Roosevelt was president? Who else under the age of 50 collected 78 rpm recordings of '30s foxtrots and novelty songs? Who else hung authentic George Herriman and Wally Wood originals on his walls? Who else walked two Akitas the size of woolly mammoths around his neighborhood every day,

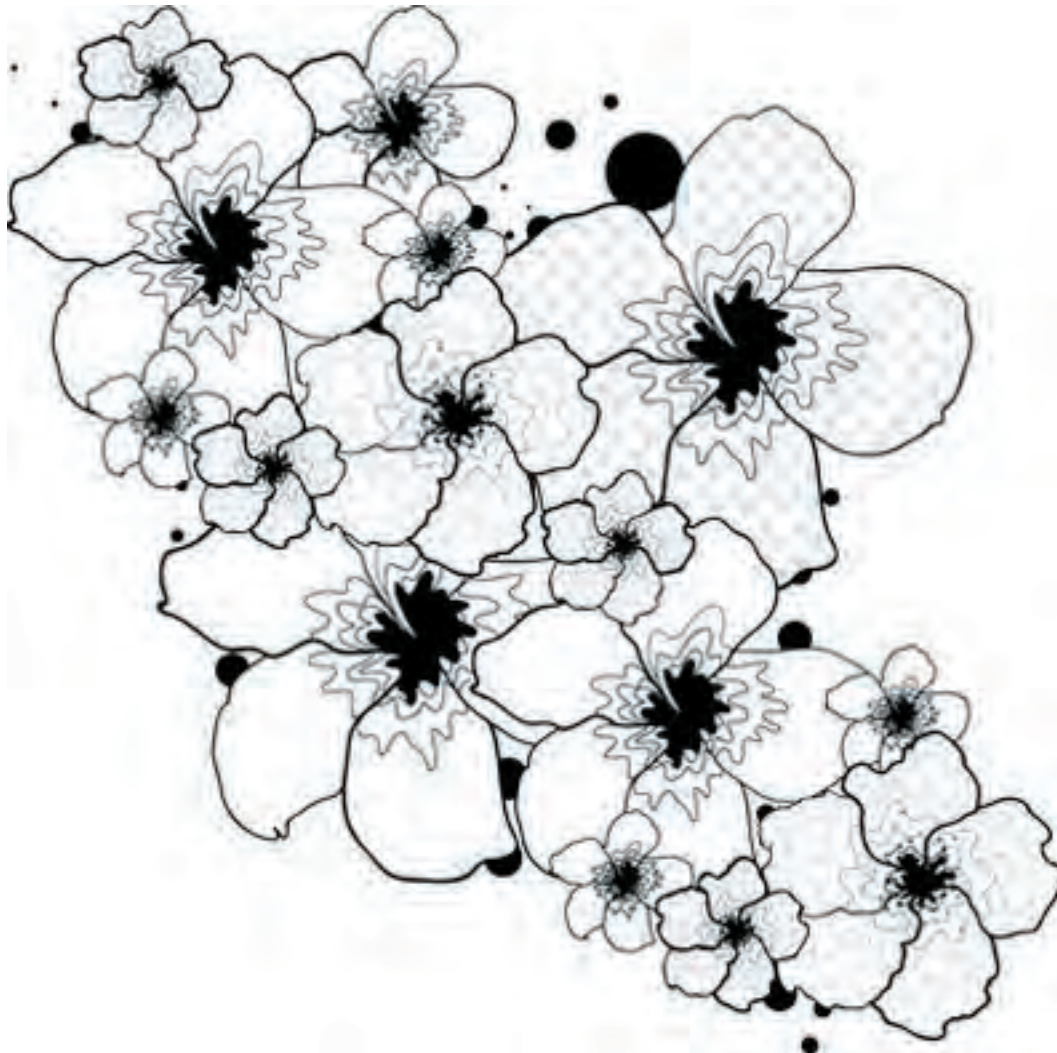
or poisoned ants with a syrup from an innocent looking tin he kept in the kitchen? I can't think of anyone else who can name the directors of every major cartoon studio before 1960, or who can sing more offbeat songs than most of us can bear listening to. If all that doesn't qualify for memorable, I don't know what does.

So there you have it. I yam what I yam, and that's all what I yam. If you don't like it, start your own damn fandom. The Trekkies did.

'I Yam What I Yam', first published in *Idle Minds* #4, ed. Arnie Katz (August 2009)

**(Endnote)**

<sup>1</sup> And we chose to let Taral do that, rather than just leaving the part of the response where he writes about the things in this that annoy him, for those who hadn't read the relevant issue of *Idle Minds* (which you can find at <http://www.efanzines.com/Idle/IdleMinds04.pdf>) or who wanted to compare these comments right now to anything else said in this issue. The only changes made, to my knowledge, are the light editorial sort that I continue to delude myself both contributors and readers would prefer.



# Defining our terms by James

Definitions within our hobby are such a difficult thing. I have to admit that, for us, language can be a real tool of confusion that other hobbies don't have to endure to the same degree. Even when we quote the mantra about what is science fiction, it sounds like a patronising smart-arsed retort that is of no help whatsoever.

Reading science fiction is a vastly popular pursuit; watching science fictional television and movies is mainstream. People don't like to admit that they like SF. Why not?

Maybe they like some Sci-Fi. That's another term for science fiction that some hate and some like. I ran the Dublin Sci-Fi club for a couple of years; it was a good night, you know, with a theme, a speaker or more if we could manage it, a discussion and even some footage related to the subject. Open at 8 PM, start at 9 PM, go till 11 and off for the bus at 11.30 (last bus time in Dublin); have a few pints, carry Martin up and down the stairs, talk bullshit and meet a little wish fulfilment with the subject matter.

In my workplace (I drive trains), people know I read books and comics. A good number of my colleagues also read comics, and there is a group who like thriller and murder books, some of which veer into SF, and there are the guys who read SF. Tim is studying physics and he is widely read in SF – knows about most authors. I have talked about SF books with a number of train drivers; it's always nice to do that. Yesterday I was speaking about a comic one of my team mates got for Christmas; actually his girlfriend, another driver, bought him *The Walking Dead* graphic novels, all six hardback editions. Lucky chap.

So, comics. A comic is a form of media; it's not a genre, but there is a close association somehow between science fiction books and comic books. True, the stereotypical genre for comics is super heroes and these in themselves can be science fictional in nature – although I see Supes as a genre of its own, as there are science fiction comics that are, well, more like we know science fiction. Say *Judge Dredd*, *Strontium Dog*, *Rogue Trooper* – all great science fiction, from 2000 AD. Comics are not SF per se. Yet I get to include things about war comics in SF fan publications. There is that definition thing again.

I am also contradictory in my own definitions. Science fiction makes up a large quantity of the books that I have read, enjoyed and loved. I cannot explain why. Not all science fiction books are to my taste, but some are. I like things that are not exactly science fiction, but somehow we get to talk about them in places like here, or at conventions. That's quite nice. Yet I sometimes wonder what books are SF and are not, and have a personal and private debate about *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

Well, it's when someone does more than just read the book or comic. They write to the author, talk or engage with others who like the author, go to signings and events, maybe even go to conventions. They may produce a fanzine – as they see it, though maybe not as we know it: a fan magazine that is specific to their subject. (I did one; it was called the *Brentford Mercury*. It was not like *JP*.) A fan may not do any of these things, but do something I haven't encountered or thought of, that sets them apart from other readers.

Fandom, then. I was at a Harry Potter convention, sitting among a hundred or so fans at a convention panel; there were 500 people there in total and I was taken aback when someone said, "I love fandom." They didn't mean the fandom that I think of; they meant 'their' fandom, Harry Potter fandom. It was a revelation, and a nice moment as I understood. Someone used a term that I understood to explain something I understood, but it was for them and their interest, not mine. Their home. Not my home, but I know what home means.

Of course, the confusion comes when we try to define things. What is a fanzine? Well, for me it's this that you are holding. But 'fanzine' is now very broad, and I have been surprised by what we (the royal we, used for we members of the Worldcon) categorise as a fanzine, within SF fandom as I know it. Yet *Vector*, the critical journal of the British Science Fiction Association, was under Niall Harrison's editorship in some respects like a fanzine to me – a semi-prozine even, in its amazing quality – but do the 600 members of the BSFA feel that? I wonder what they thought; will they lament Niall's departure? Will more than the 20 or so members who comment or write say anything at all?

Occasionally, *Vector* veered towards being a little bit too academic for my liking. If I want that, I would join Foundation; and when I grow up, I shall probably join Foundation, or else when they start reviewing science fiction comics. Either way generally *Vector* is a pretty cool selection of articles and interviews and reviews.

I read reviews for many reasons, but my main driver is normally to find out about the book that is being reviewed, and therefore I do not fall into the group who enjoy reviews just to read the reviews; but generally I have enjoyed the articles and essays a vast amount, under Niall's tenure. He has left now for *Strange Horizons*, a website; he has been there some time looking after reviews, but he has been promoted to Uber-editor. I think I may become more of a regular reader with him at the tiller.

*Vector* felt like part of the fan stuff that I enjoy; it arrived infrequently but eventually, a paper copy of a magazine that entertained me a lot and made me think, disappointed and

even annoyed, but always for the good. What is next is an unknown, a moment in time for me. We will see. I have now started checking Niall's blog on *Strange Horizons*, and I recommend it.

What makes me a fan? Well, the imitator of the BSFA, the Irish Science Fiction Association, was an important part of my transition from reader of comics to reader of books-and-comics-and-fan-activities. Although with a lower case F. We railed a bit against those who were too serious, took themselves too seriously and forgot about enjoyment, but loved the bureaucracy.

We had our monthly newsletter and a variety of quarterly zines. As a teenager I would write the occasional review, when reviews were just reviews – you know, a synopsis and thoughts on the work and a recommendation, not some analysis that is erudite, challenging and articulate but doesn't actually tell you whether the reviewer liked the work. Nope, it was base and bare stuff back then.

The letters were always good fun, with some anger or issue spilling out onto the pages, seeping across the paper like blood, on a frequent basis. Once an editor allowed someone to write anonymously, using the moniker 'steerpike', and all hell broke loose.

As a fandom we appreciated learned and intelligent people, but it was about the SF, the authors, the artists. Some guys who took it slightly more seriously went and set up *Albedo 1*, which eighteen years later is still running. The guys who just took it too seriously – well, they don't seem to be about at all. I think Irish fandom is very different; apart from Padraig O'Mealoid – who is writing a book about *Marvelman* – I don't think we even have any of those academics who veer into fandom or vice versa. The college societies did produce their share of fans, but Ireland has obviously less people and less variety. But more controversy, anger and passion.

I wrote about Octocon for *Banana Wings*, and I think that upon re-reading there is something to be said for keeping stuff simple and basic.

Of course, my path, which I have spoken of before, was through a comic shop, through comic and book readers, the ISFA and Octocon, and my friend Mick O'Connor who took the time to speak to me like an adult, like someone who should be encouraged. This is what fandom represents for me: friendly people, who generally are pretty good.

It is a shame when fans become arseholes, or just don't seem to possess common sense, so that they just allow personal stuff and petty moments of self-gratification or plain craziness to lead them. It's uncommon, but I think that we are sometimes our own worst enemies.

How much of a fan a person is – well, I don't have some grading; no one does. And there is no fan better or worse or bigger or smaller or more valid than another, really. There

are people who like conventions and running them, and that for them is the hobby. That's OK, but these folk need to remember that it's still about the SF books and stuff.

I think sometimes that bureaucracy is such an enemy of the hobby, and we need to remind ourselves that the purpose of conventions is to look at science fiction, and for people to socialise and have a nice time, not to be bureaucrats.

It's like political issues, that seem to float up and ignore common sense sometimes. I read science fiction to enjoy it: to escape, to be taken away and given an imagined vision – a picture, a world and someone else's story – that conjures incredible images in my mind's eye. When I want to pursue political issues, I do that: I protest, I write to my MP. I will try to effect change, but I sometimes tire at the bullying that people conduct – especially online – using fear and self-righteousness to hurt others, in the name of doing right. I am not so sure on that.

Luckily, I don't need to turn on the internet, and I can ignore people who I feel are more about themselves than about the issue, and probably nothing to do with science fiction. Or is it?

So what makes me a fan? Well, I enjoy doing stuff that stems from reading books and comics. It's just a hobby, something to pass time, and something I enjoy. I like talking and writing about these things.

Does science fiction act as a metaphor for what is going on in the world, or is that sometimes what I think? I wonder what books recently have reflected issues that our societies are faced with. I know Robert Rankin's most recent book shines a hard searchlight at the current war Britain is involved in, in Afghanistan, but has anyone else?

Of course, like Mick who was my conduit to this wonderful additional world, fandom is populated with very decent, intelligent, thoughtful and entertaining people. I like it a lot really, and many of them; you are friends and acquaintances who I like to be in the company of, who I like to read the thinking of, and like to hear on panels – and some good folks who are just great craic to hang out with at conventions.

I hope that occasionally I have done what Mick has done. It makes me smile when I see John Coxon running for TAFF; I remember recommending comics to John, and I was impressed when he was suddenly running the con newsletter at LX, the 2009 Eastercon. He was an excellent con newsletter editor, and I appreciated that he also partied late, and moved a sofa into the newsletter room in the early hours of the day. I have always been impressed with and enjoy his fanzines and other writing. I know he will be a superb TAFF candidate and hope he wins. I think he would definitely create ties between the US and Europe, his charm and intelligence helping him; in person he is a brilliant person, relaxed, great fun and thoughtful.

So much has happened since *JP* #7. Went to Australia, and had a ball. I loved Australia; it was an incredible experience, and I am grateful to Rod O'Hanlon for letting me sleep on the other half of his bed, James Shields for his floor, and Bev Hope and Trevor Clark and Sue Ann Barber for their hospitality before and after the convention. Aussiecon 4 was a lot of good fun, and I met good people, who I wish I could meet up with frequently and become friends with. Too much fun. Melbourne fandom were real nice, as were Perth fandom, and the Continuum gang were awesome – thanks, Emilly.

I had a real moment of strangeness when I walked out of the Hilton in Melbourne and looked across a bus stand and taxi rank with the rain falling, and thought how like Docklands it looked, here in London, and wished it were that close to home. But I wandered back in and found Helen and Julia and James and Kate and sat and enjoyed a beer. Claire and Mark were in Oz and that was a gift, and I got to know some new people and some other people better.

Raleigh was also great; I went to the NASFiC and I was

pleased to find that with some fans, I could set politics to one side, in the knowledge that we would have differing opinions, and talk about science fiction. I was also pleased with the wonderful Southern welcome, the great food and the lovely people that were there. Lynda and Kim were especially good to me.

It's been all go; the last six months have been hectic. I look at the great cons – Octocon, Novacon and Thought Bubble – and it's been amazing, although Christmas has been especially shite as I was working, and I find that I have really been working a lot in the last while. So it's busy on many fronts.

A moment from last year that I will savour and that will encourage me, was winning the Nova Award for *Journey Planet*, with Claire Brialey, Chris Garcia and of course guest editor Pete Young. It was something else; I was so, and still am, totally blown away. Thank you.

You see, last issue I was all wondering about people giving a damn, and there you go and show you do. But keep those articles and letters and thoughts coming our way.

– James Bacon



# The best science fiction novel you've never read by Claire

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I asked people what makes them science fiction fans. I assumed that for most of them part of the answer would include some science fiction. So obvious it might go without saying, of course, which is why I reckon it's worth remembering to say it sometimes.

I imagine we've all accepted now that no one has read all science fiction and few of us can even keep up with everything currently being published in the genre (or outside it that nonetheless still is), which is where recommendations come in handy. Chris mentions elsewhere how much he likes lists, which may not be the sort of thing that actually *makes* someone a science fiction fan but is undoubtedly one of the characteristics that many of us share. I'm another list fan – in some ways it's not so much a preference as a compulsion – and I find one of their uses is to offer not just recommendations but a sort of order to the chaos from which some of you may in fact prefer to serendipitously pluck your next book. There are all sorts of lists of both classic and contemporary SF that can point the way; short-lists for awards offer some perspective on the best works of any given year, and more personal recommendations, depending on how well specific reviewers' taste chime with yours, can prompt new discoveries or just propel a particular work up your own Great Unread Pile.

In this vein, Chris and James recently co-edited an issue of *The Drink Tank* (#265) which focused on the forthcoming Worldcon in Reno – which they're both involved in running – and included some thoughts on SFnal and fannish works from 2010 which various contributors thought worthy of recommendation in the context of the Hugo awards. Taking a longer perspective, about a year ago fannish listmeister Bruce Gillespie mentioned in ANZAPA that Jonathan Strahan had provoked some discussion on the best genre works published in the ten years from 2000; Bruce was prompted to offer several top twenties of his own around this theme and I couldn't then resist that siren call myself. Towards the end of last year, discussion on the Torque Control blog led Niall Harrison to call for nominations for a top ten SF novels published by women during those ten years. And I found all this quite fascinating, partly as a pointer towards books I hadn't yet read or hadn't particularly thought to read, and partly as the starting point for some conversations and arguments that inevitably follow from any list offering opinions about 'the best' of something.

So I was hardly an unwilling participant in a programme item at last year's Worldcon, also focused on the previous ten years, with the same title as this article. The premise

was for the panel to recommend what we thought were the best under-appreciated novels from the period, the books that, despite their quality, never found the proper audience. And in some ways it was a tough call: of the books I'd be inclined to recommend, what would other people not have read – or at least the subset of other people that might want to attend such a programme item at a Worldcon? And if the choices I then made were obvious to me, what were the chances of avoiding overlaps with the recommendations from the other participants?

As it turned out, the latter question wasn't a problem. Even though one of my fellow panellists was Mike Scott, another British fan who I know well and with whom I even talk about science fiction sometimes, we had no clashes. Indeed, among the three of us we hadn't read all of one another's choices and thus I got some recommendations from the item myself which is always a bonus – other than the massive backlog of unread books I have in the house already, but that's not important right now and indeed never seems to be when I'm in the process of acquiring more. I've included at the end of this a list (of course) of our combined recommendations, attributing the other choices where relevant to Mike and the third participant, author Gail Carriger whose own series of *Parasol Protectorate* novels I would also thoroughly recommend – although I hope that most people have in fact heard of them. In a purist sense I suppose they're not science fiction as such, being a combination of steampunk (airships!) and fantasy (werewolves and vampires and ghosts, oh my) and what I'd describe as romantic suspense in a way that I would wholeheartedly emphasise I consider to be a good thing. The first of the series is *Soulless*, although those like me who have little patience may want to be aware that only the first three of the mooted five have yet been published. As for my first concern, I needn't have worried about that either. I've also noted in the list how many of the good few people in the room – including, where relevant, other panellists – said they'd already read the books being recommended, which is partly what convinced me that it was worth repeating my own choices for a different audience; although that difference, and in particular our common interest as readers of fanzines, may mean that you're already more familiar with the sort of recent but lower profile science fiction I'd personally encourage people to seek out. That risk may be increased since, in addition to the seven novels I had time to recommend myself during the panel, I've also included here the five others I'd noted to mention if I had time – which I omitted then primarily because I suspected more people would have heard of those.

It seems odd to offer a list of great SF from the past ten years without including writers like Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Ian McDonald, Ken MacLeod, Paul McAuley, Alastair Reynolds, Tricia Sullivan, China Miéville and Justina Robson; so if you haven't read their work either then I'd recommend that just as much.

I am, of course, interested in recommendations by response, particularly if it seems as though we haven't been reading many of the same books but have tastes in common. I'm still trying to read more SF that I'd missed from the 1970s and '80s at the moment, but given how much has been published in the last ten years – and how much good stuff there's been in the UK to keep me occupied, which means I may particularly have missed books only published overseas – it would be useful to know what other people think is the best I may have missed.

### My recommendations



- *The Brief History of the Dead* – Kevin Brockmeier (2006)

In the beginning is the city. Although you might not call it the beginning, or the end, or either customary combination of the two. But there is a city, and it's where people go when they die – at least for a time. Literally, at least, it's an afterlife, but it is not a mythic existence; in the people, people are still people and they still think and feel and behave

and to all intents and purposes live as people do in cities everywhere. And just as this is a sort of living, so there can come another sort of death; at least, sometimes people disappear from the city, and it's a popular belief that this happens when even their memories have faded away from the original works. When no one alive can remember you, it's time to move on again – or, perhaps, to finally really just cease to exist. This, then, is the brief history of the dead. And now the city is becoming crowded, as an epidemic sweeps the world and more and more people are dying.

The city, and the changes facing it and the people in it, are given context and perspective through the story of an individual woman who is dying too, left alone on a scientific expedition in the Antarctic. As she reflects on the story of her life, this too will soon be the brief history of the dead; meanwhile, all of the people who feature in her memories live on, in the city. Their stories remain interwoven, in a novel that provokes engagement and reflection. Figuratively speaking, this is the legacy that the living give to the dead and that readers give to writers: to have their brief histories recognised, and given new life through each retelling.



- *Blue Silence* – Michelle Marquardt (2002)

Like many of my female Australian friends, I acquired this at the Natcon in the year it was published and started to read it immediately, so began to wonder whether it's somehow a bit of a girls' book, but – apart from it having a female protagonist and author – can't see any reason why it should be. It is, however, a thoroughly enjoyable book:

an excellent first novel by an Australian SF author (and consequent winner of the George Turner Prize). It's about the nature of humanity and about alien relationships. It's about the politics of community and the community of politics. It's about Earth and expansion, telepathy and technology, first contact and friendship and so many things that it's too easy to wring these trite alliterations from it. It's a book about people – human people, and alien people – and what they want from one another. And it's very, very good.

I was a bit hesitant about recommending this at an Australian Worldcon, but I enjoyed it so much that it seemed unfair to omit it – and either many people in the audience weren't Australian (what with it being a Worldcon an' all) or they were but had somehow missed one of their best recent home-grown novels. I'd say more if I didn't want to let you all have the same enjoyment I did of discovering it for yourself.

- *Ascent* – Jed Mercurio (2007)

This short novel follows the fortunes of Russian fighter pilot Yefgenii Yeregin through the cosmonaut programme and out towards the moon. Intertwining his secret history with the real stories of the US pilots and astronauts who followed a similar path, *Ascent* conveys the sense of yearning for a moon landing and the journey into space that spilled over from science fiction into mainstream culture in the middle of the twentieth century and just as suddenly receded. It also provides an insight into two alternate histories which at least some of the world must have been prepared to follow as the golden thread of the present in 1969: that the Soviet Union would land on the moon before the USA, and that the first men on the moon would be unable to return.





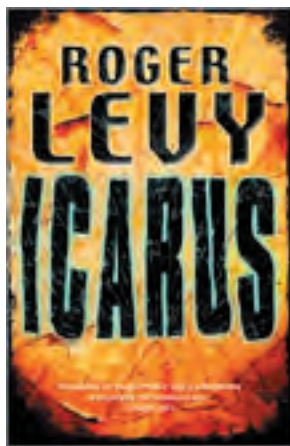
- Species Imperative trilogy (*Survival*, *Migration*, and *Regeneration*) – Julie E Czerneda (2004-2006)

This is another author who I had some hesitation about recommending since I found it difficult to make the case that most people wouldn't have heard of her work. Julie Czerneda is not only a successful Canadian writer who was master of



ceremonies at the 2009 Worldcon, but she'd been guest of honour at both the New Zealand and Australian natcons in the same year, which must surely mean that virtually everyone in the Antipodes had now read some of her novels? I say this because she's one of my exemplars for an excellent convention guest – not just interesting, friendly, and participative but an enthusiast for science fiction and science in a way that made it impossible for me to resist reading practically everything she'd written as soon as possible after I heard her talking about it.

And yet all this means that if for some reason you haven't yet read her work I'd be doing you a disservice by failing to recommend them after all. So far they're all science fiction, although I gather she's now working on some fantasy: the main science in question is biology, and her alien characters are not only splendidly written but, I gather, rigorously thought through as well. This particular trilogy stood out for me partly because of the relationships between the characters, including two strong women at the heart of the narrative.



- *Icarus* – Roger Levy (2006) (although I'd also recommend *Reckless Sleep* and *Dark Heavens* from 2000 and 2003 respectively)

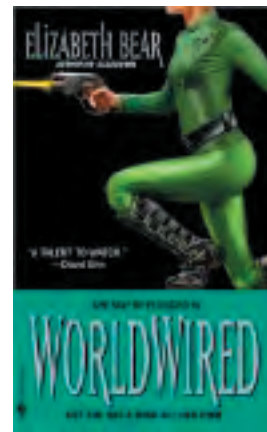
*Icarus* explores the themes of Roger Levy's first two novels – faith, belief, and the nature of reality – with a background of environmental collapse and planetary colonisation. Humanity has reached two habitable sister planets in deep space, and all connections with Earth and

memories of the homeworld have been excised from record. There's Haven, where a strictly-run underground society is based on a necessary and enforced belief in the doctrine of 'Fact' – at least until the discovery of certain information buried in the planet's bedrock calls into question the received truths behind the colony's origins, and history as they know it is in danger of being rewritten. There's Haze, a neighbouring jungle planet with spiritual leaders who see enemies within, where we follow a woman who has

already lost one child to the powerful Lords of Angwat and is about to lose another. And there's Earth in the twenty-first century, where an American Christian fundamentalist preacher is slowly accumulating a disastrous amount of political power and influence, and pushes an already fragile world closer to collapse. And he also has the solution: humanity must colonise the two recently discovered extra-solar worlds. What could possibly go wrong?

- Worldwired trilogy (*Hammered*, *Scardown* and *Worldwired*) – Elizabeth Bear (2004-2006)

Each part of this trilogy reaches a conclusion – if not a resolution – for at least some of the characters, and can be read as published as a story in itself; but taken together the books expand to tell a bigger story on a much bigger canvas than seems singalled by the tightly-paced action, complex characterisation



and relationships, and already full plot of the first volume. It's a story about taking a very worldly conflict – a conflict that has already raged across economic, cultural and quite literal battlegrounds – out into space. It's a story about first contact with aliens, about contacts between human cultures that initially seem at least as alien, and about reappraising relationships when the battlegrounds shift. It's a story about national and international politics, and that also means it's about relationships: both the relationships between politicians inside and across state boundaries and their relationships with business, science, military forces and with the people who they aspire to represent. But inevitably it's also about relationships between people on a much more personal level – drawing on a diverse cast of really good characters to explore families, friendships, romances, sex, and all the ties that this implies of honour, blood and guilt.

In some ways, even at the conclusion of the final volume, this story doesn't end (no matter what some critical theories will have you believe). Individual characters have lived and died. Continents and empires have risen and fallen, in some cases literally. Horizons have expanded. Relationships from the very personal to the cosmic have developed and changed and settled and moved on. The world has definitely changed, and every character we encounter has changed with it; for some characters there's been a permanent resolution, and others are still standing as the narrative closes. But the well-worn framing device for the story, the 'editor's note' that opens each volume, offers hope for the future not only of some of the characters, but above all for the world they live in and have helped to shape.



- *Transcension* – Damien Broderick (2002)

Another Australian author, albeit now an Australian living in Texas and one who doesn't have a UK publisher; yet this is the sort of SF novel that's too good – too imaginative, too stimulating, too engaging – for us to be missing. Damien Broderick's novels are always clever: not just intelligent, challenging, thought-provoking or whatever intellectual qualities

you may be looking for in fiction, but deliberately clever. This one is about beginnings: births and changes and new lives and opportunities. It reflects many of the same ideas as, and develops the possibilities set out in, the author's 1997 non-fiction book *The Spike*, which posited what he described as 'an exponential technological singularity' (following on from Vernor Vinge). The novel is constructed around vast questions, and imagines the answers both through the developments of societies and through the lives of individuals, and the changes that these represent from the time in which we're living – which is already the future. And it matters not that the book is now nearly a decade old.

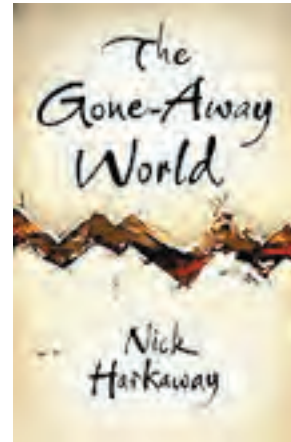
Yet this remains a character-driven story. The narrative focuses on three characters whose vision describes most of the plot, each poised on the brink of great change, both personal and public. And the novel is also the story of the birth, or generation, of the Aleph, who speaks rarely but whose consciousness spans the action from beginning to (nearly) the end. We're changing fast. We're speeding up. We have choices to make – and some of them will have to be influenced by the choices made long ago.

- *The Carhullan Army* – Sarah Hall (2007)

By way of contrast, this is a very British – indeed a very English – sort of book, with a powerful sense of place in its evocation of the north of England. I have some enduring reservations about this novel: I found it deft, powerful, and generally engaging, but there were a couple of things about its narrative structure that disconcerted me during reading, and I wonder whether it's the sort of novel that I find it easier to criticise the further I go from having read it. The other reason I'd thought it a risky recommendation since it had won the Tiptree award and was short-listed for the Clarke (and has since topped the Torque Control poll), but this may well underline the



premise of the panel rather than confirming any conspiracy theories that might be excited when I note that it read in some ways like a 1970s feminist SF novel – and I mean that as a compliment. Nonetheless, to me it's very much telling a twenty-first century story.



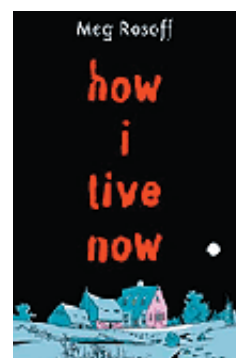
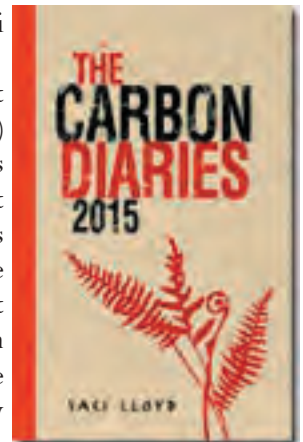
- *The Gone-Away World* – Nick Harkaway (2008)

Again, this is a novel that featured on awards short-lists so I thought people might already have heard of this too. I could have spent a lot of the time I was reading this novel wondering if it were really SF, or fantasy, or something slipstreamy, but I mostly enjoyed reading it too much to worry about that for once. The setting and the action

and even the characters certainly feel like SF as well as being weird in more ways than the obvious; and then it turns out that All Is Not As It Seems, also in more ways than you might think. The author has a famous father, but don't hold that against him.

- *The Carbon Diaries 2015* – Sachi Lloyd (2008)

A YA novel depicting what happens when the (British) Government actually imposes the restrictions on twenty-first century living that many of us suspect are necessary but hope won't happen to us really – not least because I wouldn't have been able to fly to Australia to have this sort of discussion if they had. The protagonist is a 17-year-old girl whose diary describes the impact on her family – inevitably dysfunctional, at least in her perception and depiction – when carbon rationing begins from the start of 2015. Although it's quite an amusing novel in its plotting and style, the concept and messages are effectively thought-provoking.



- *How I Live Now* – Meg Rosoff (2004)

Another YA novel which I enjoyed a great deal, and another which I suspect I wouldn't particularly have noticed as being YA-targeted if I'd read it when I was indeed a young adult (or teenager as we called it); I tend to think that I would have thought that a good thing then and that it's a probably a good

standard by which to judge YA fiction, but what would I know? It has a female protagonist aged about 15, and another very strong female character of about 9. My inner SF purist still wonders about how SFnal it really is, but it's at least a 'cosy catastrophe' in a way that's not cosy at all, set in the near future somewhere in England.



- *Lint* – Steve Aylett (2005)

Who was Jeff Lint? If you need to ask, this is the book for you. If Lint needs no introduction, this is the book for you too. You could always check out the fan site at <http://www.jefflint.com/> but it's no substitute for reading Steve Aylett's book. As this book explains, Jeff Lint was the author of some of the strangest and most inventive satirical SF of the late twentieth century. The

bibliography lists nearly two dozen titles by Lint himself – including *One Less Bastard*, *I Blame Ferns* and the avowed genre classic *Jelly Result* – but scanning the index and the list of illustrations provides a richer and more bewildering indication of the diversity of Lint's work. Occasional readers of Steve Aylett's novels (which are short, mind-blowing and synaesthetic) might have been surprised that he had embarked on a biographical project, even of so unconventional, baffling and infuriating a character as Jeff Lint. Regular readers of those novels, however, would have expected from the outset that Jeff Lint is a fictional creation of Steve Aylett's, who thus enables him to take a sideways look at all of the creative fields through which Aylett chooses to let Lint meander like a river in a china shop.

Aylett clearly revelled in the opportunity to invent not only Lint's life, friends, lovers, enemies and incoherent parties to lawsuits but also his various works (including book covers) and autobiographical notes. The novel contains many of the hallmarks of his earlier work: disconcerting syntax, disturbing mental images, thoroughly illogical protagonists, and an impression that your brain needs to be in a slightly different gear or possibly a slightly different dimension to entirely comprehend or believe what you've just read. And I don't mean that in a bad way. That said, this is a book best taken in small doses. A combination of too much Jeff Lint and too much Steve Aylett consumed at one sitting would diminish the impact of the later episodes; getting too much into the rhythm of reading either Aylett's prose or Lint's reported dialogue allows it to gather momentum without conveying meaning, and the satire begins to blue into a carnival of grotesques. A couple of chapters each night before bedtime would make for a weird and wonderful fortnight, some rather strange dreams, and a compelling desire to check in obscure book shops just in case

Steve Aylett hadn't made it up after all.

**Recommendations made during the panel** (some of which may be stretching the time limit, or indeed the genre!) along with the scores on the doors of how good we were at recommending books people really had never heard of, or at least had not yet read...

- *Feed* – M T Anderson (GC – 2 other readers in the room)
- *Lint* – Steve Aylett (CB – 2 others)
- *The Brief History of the Dead* – Kevin Brockmeier (CB – 2)
- *Freedom & Necessity* – Steven Brust & Emma Bull (MS – 4)
- *The Fortunate Fall* – Raphael Carter (MS – 2)
- 'Union Dues' (short story, available via Escape Pod) – Jeffrey DeRego (GC – 5)
- *Starpilot's Grave* (and other novels in the series, of which the first is *The Price of the Stars*) – Debra Doyle & James D Macdonald (GC)
- *The Eyre Affair* – Jasper Fforde (GC – lots!)
- *Sun, Moon, Ice and Snow* – Jessica Day George (GC – 1)
- *Soon I Will Be Invincible* – Austin Grossman (MS – 2)
- *The Magicians* – Lev Grossman (MS – 4)
- *The Carhullan Army* – Sarah Hall (CB – 2)
- *The Native Star* – M K Hobson (GC)
- *Ysabel* – Guy Gavriel Kay (MS – 2)
- *Icarus* – Roger Levy (CB)
- *The Carbon Diaries 2015* – Saci Lloyd (CB – 1)
- *Blue Silence* – Michelle Marquardt (CB – 3)
- *Ascent* – Jed Mercurio (CB – 1)
- *The Hounds of the Morrigan* – Pat O'Shea (recommended from the audience)
- *Aberystwyth Mon Amour* – Malcolm Pryce (another audience recommendation)
- *Sorcery and Cecelia* – Caroline Stevermer & Patricia C Wrede (GC – 10)
- *Knowledge of Angels* – Jill Paton Walsh (MS)
- *Blindsight* – Peter Watts (MS – 6)

Honour was satisfied to the extent that we each managed to recommend one title that no one else there claimed to have read...

– Claire Briailey

# Wernher von Braun by David A Hardy



Wernher Magnus Maximilian Freiherr (Baron) von Braun was born on 23 March 1912 in Wirsitz, Germany, the second of three sons in a minor aristocratic family. His mother gave him a telescope, which led to a life-long passion for astronomy. He was also a talented musician who could play music by Bach and Beethoven from memory. He made firework rockets and attached them to model cars (something which sounds quite familiar in my own life!), leading to his being arrested by the police until rescued by his father. Perhaps surprisingly, he did not do well at physics or mathematics at his boarding school at Ettersburg Castle near Weimar, but in 1928 he was given a copy of a book by the German rocket pioneer Hermann Oberth, *By Rocket into Interplanetary Space*, which led him to improve his education in physics and maths, so that he could develop his interest in rocketry.

Von Braun is infamous for creating the V-2 rocket which caused such devastation in London towards the end of World War II (arriving and exploding without any warning, because it was travelling at supersonic speed), and famous for being responsible for the Saturn V launch rocket which placed men on the Moon in 1969. There has always been controversy over his true motives, because he was indeed a member of the Nazi party and a commissioned SS officer. Personally I believe that his advancement here was always a means to an end, because he became the leading rocket engineer of his time. He went to the Technical University of Berlin, and while there joined the *Verein für Raumschiffahrt* (VfR – ‘the Spaceflight Society’) and assisted

Willy Ley in his early liquid-fueled rocket motor tests together with Hermann Oberth. So, although he worked on military rockets for a number of years, his prime aim was always to build vehicles that could take humans to the Moon, and then on to Mars and beyond.

When the Nazis came to power in Germany, von Braun was working towards his doctorate in physics; but an artillery captain, Walter Dornberger, arranged for von Braun to work with him at a solid-fuel rocket test site at Kummersdorf. He actually got his doctorate in 1934 from the University of Berlin, his thesis being entitled *About Combustion Tests*. By 1935, he and his group had sent up rockets to a height of several kilometres, von Braun being inspired at this time by the work on liquid-fuelled rockets by the US pioneer Robert H Goddard. Since no rocket societies were permitted in Germany after the VfR collapsed, only military research and development was allowed. Von Braun became the Technical Director of a large new facility, the Army Research Centre at Peenemünde on the Baltic coast. He became a member of the National Socialist Party in 1937, he later claimed, only because not to do so would have meant he could no longer take part in rocket research. (Some have, however, claimed that he entered more enthusiastically into brutal Nazi procedures than he admitted, even using ‘slave labour’; something that he always denied.)

In December 1942 Adolf Hitler gave the go-ahead for the production of his second ‘vengeance weapon’, the liquid-fuelled A-4, since Britain doggedly continued to hold out despite Hitler’s use of the V-1, known in the UK

as the 'Doodlebug' or 'Buzz-bomb', which was actually an unmanned pulse-jet aircraft. Less than two years later, on 7 September 1944, the first A-4, now renamed the V-2, was launched on London. Von Braun described this as 'his darkest day'. He was actually arrested by the Gestapo in March 1944 on suspicion of treason, accused of using his position to develop methods of reaching outer space, rather than weapons for warfare. After the war, and until he died, von Braun used this episode as proof that he had been a victim of the Nazis rather than subscribing to their beliefs.

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**“Don't tell me that man doesn't belong out there. Man belongs wherever he wants to go – and he'll do plenty well when he gets there.”**

## **Wernher von Braun**

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Early in 1945, with the Soviet army approaching Peenemünde, von Braun asked his planning staff to decide to whom they should surrender. Having heard of Soviet cruelty to prisoners-of-war, they decided to surrender to the Americans. On 2 May 1945 von Braun's brother Magnus, also a rocket engineer, saw a US soldier approaching on a bicycle, and said, in the best English he could muster, that they wanted to surrender. Afterwards, von Braun issued this statement to the press:

'We knew that we had created a new means of warfare, and the question as to what nation, to what victorious nation, we were willing to entrust this brainchild of ours, was a moral decision more than anything else. We wanted to see the world spared another conflict such as Germany had just been through, and we felt that only by surrendering such a weapon to people who are guided by the Bible could such an assurance to the world be best secured.'

(David Wolper, *Biography* (TV series, 1961-64), Wernher von Braun.)

The US high command was well aware of the importance of von Braun in the German war effort, so considered him a good catch. After being debriefed by both British and US intelligence, he was sent to America under a programme called Operation Paperclip. He and his colleagues were given false employment histories which expunged them from the Nazi Party, after which they were granted security clearance to work in the USA and transferred to Fort Bliss in Texas. Here they trained US military and other personnel in the design and construction of rockets, and also launched a number of captured V-2s from the White Sands Proving

Ground in New Mexico. This led to the development of the first two-stage step-rocket, when in 1949 a WAC Corporal missile with a camera in its nose-cone was fitted to the top of a V-2, reaching a height of 244 miles and sending back the first, grainy black-and-white images of Earth taken from this altitude. The Americans also developed their own vehicle, with its motors very similar to those of the V-2, known as Viking.

By 1955 they announced that they were ready to put an artificial satellite into orbit within two years: Project Vanguard, a three-step vehicle based closely upon Viking, which would launch a  $3\frac{1}{4}$ -pound, grapefruit-sized ball containing two radio transmitters. Von Braun's team had no direct involvement with this project (which turned out to be unfortunate), as from 1950 to 1956 they were developing the Redstone rocket missile, used for nuclear ballistic missile tests. This was then developed into the Jupiter-C launcher, which von Braun informed his employers was capable of launching the US's first satellite into orbit. Meanwhile, on 4 October 1957, the Soviets launched Sputnik 1, weighing an amazing 184 pounds and circling Earth every 90 minutes between 135 and 580 miles.

On 31 January 1958, after the spectacular and embarrassing failure of several Vanguard launches at the end of 1957, von Braun was at last allowed to launch Explorer 1, an 80-inch bullet-shaped satellite, into orbit. That was America's first artificial satellite. More satellites followed in rapid succession, with Russia always leading, some carrying animals – from dogs (USSR) to monkeys (USA) – and eventually men. In the case of the USA, first the Mercury one-man craft and then the Gemini two-man led to the three-man crewed Apollo, when President Kennedy announced the goal, before the decade was out, 'of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth'.

Meanwhile, apart from his involvement with the launch vehicles, von Braun had been busy in the publishing business and even on TV. He organised a symposium on spaceflight for *Colliers* magazine, and invited Chesley Bonestell to illustrate his concepts. In 1952 *Colliers* published a series of highly-illustrated articles under the title 'Man Will Conquer Space Soon!' They started with von Braun's plans for a manned, wheel-shaped space station (which later influenced the one in *2001: A Space Odyssey*) and 'ferry' (shuttle) rockets, and went on to outline his ambitious plans to send three large ships and 50 astronauts and equipment to the Moon, and even more ambitious plans to land on Mars and build a base there. The series was edited by Cornelius Ryan, written by von Braun (who of course designed all of the vehicles) and Willy Ley, and illustrated by Chesley Bonestell, Rolf Klep and Fred Freeman.

There is no doubt that this series was very largely responsible for a climate of public opinion which resulted

in America's space programme, the formation of NASA and President Kennedy's announcement of the Apollo programme. The series was expanded into three books: *Across the Space Frontier* (1952), *Conquest of the Moon* (known in the UK as *Man on the Moon* (1953), and *The Exploration of Mars* (1956). In 1952 von Braun also wrote the book *The Mars Project*, reprinted in 1962 and 1991. He even wrote a novel set in 1980, *Project Mars: A Technical Tale* – not published until many years later in 2006, having been rejected by no fewer than eighteen publishers! He also wrote, or co-wrote, many other books.

Walt Disney's TV series *Tomorrowland* went out between 1955 and 1959, covering a variety of futuristic subjects and including the episodes 'Man in Space' and 'Man on the Moon'. The series was made in colour, but of course went out in black-and-white. It didn't involve Chesley Bonestell and his team of artists, but it was narrated and its vehicles were designed by Wernher von Braun. Digitally remastered, the whole series is now available on DVD.

In 1960 the Marshall Space Flight Center was opened at Huntsville, Alabama. Von Braun became its first Director – but only after he had insisted that he would join NASA only if the Saturn rocket was allowed to be developed, together with his 'lunar orbit rendezvous' method of docking vehicles to land on the Moon, one remaining in orbit. This was of course the method finally used by the Apollo programme, enabling von Braun to see his early dreams of landing men on the Moon be realised at last.

It was around this time that I had some personal contact with Wernher von Braun. In July 1969, just around the time of the Apollo 11 landing, I really wanted to send him something to congratulate him on the enormous part he had played in landing men on the Moon. Obviously, a painting! But I had been working as a freelance artist for only a few years then and was living in a cottage in Norfolk, and could not afford to send a large framed painting to America. I had met a photographer called Alan White, who produced transparencies of my work to send to publishers, and he was much more publicity-minded than I was. Why not approach a shipping company and ask them if they'd fly the art to the USA, in return for the publicity they would get out of it (which Alan would arrange)? To my surprise, a company in Great Yarmouth agreed to do just that, and the painting was flown to the Marshall Space Flight Centre.

Shortly afterwards I received a friendly and personal letter from von Braun, thanking me for my painting "which is so remarkable both in conception and execution". The painting, 'Outpost', shows the descent stage of a late Apollo mission on a lunar plain near the pole, by earthlight, with the ascent stage already on its way back to Earth. A long, black shadow from the LM leads towards the low-hanging Earth. Several years later I was told in confidence by a NASA publicity man that it replaced a Bonestell painting

in von Braun's office at Huntsville, and was above his desk until his retirement. Sadly, all my attempts to discover where it is now have failed...

When a series of budget cuts resulted in the Apollo programme being curtailed and all of the missions after Apollo 17 being dropped, von Braun retired from NASA on 26 May 1972. It had become obvious that his plans for exploring space, building bases on the Moon and so on had become incompatible with those of NASA, and he was frustrated by the public's rapid loss of interest in manned spaceflight once the aim of reaching the Moon had been accomplished. Von Braun became Vice-President of Fairchild Industries in Germantown, Maryland, and helped to establish the National Space Institute, which mutated into today's National Space Society. Sadly, in 1973 he had been diagnosed with kidney cancer, and when the National Medal of Science was awarded to him in 1977 he was unable to attend the ceremony, being in hospital. He died – actually from pancreatic cancer – on 16 June 1977 at the age of 65, and was buried at Ivy Hill Cemetery, Alexandria, Virginia. A crater on the Moon has been named after him.

One quotation (out of many) by which he will be remembered is this, on the possibility of intelligent life on other worlds:

"You must accept one of two basic premises: Either we are alone in the universe, or we are not alone in the universe. And either way, the implications are staggering."

– David A Hardy



# A science fiction fan's guide to Revolution: The First 2000 Years of Computing by Chris

It shouldn't be surprising that there's a lot of stuff for SF fans to see in the Computer History Museum's new (25,000 sq. ft.) Exhibit. I had a major hand in putting it together so there had to be but, even beyond my involvement, there's plenty of stuff that beams SF to the mouth of the world.

I always love putting together themed tours of things and here's my SF Fan's Guide to the exhibit.

## Alcove 1: Calculators

While it would be cool to have a Mentat (who you will know by their red-stained lips), the calculator section doesn't have much SF content, even though I worked on it in the early stages. One of the things I included in an early draft was a *Guide to The Slide Rule* written by Isaac Asimov. It was probably the most popular of all the available guides in the late 1960s and we get about one offer of a copy a month. It's really good, too. It almost made me understand how to use one!

The only other connection is Charles Babbage, without whom there'd be no steampunk. He went further with the idea of a computer than anyone else except those who actually managed to build one.

## Alcove 2: Punched Cards

This was one of my sections, and I think it turned out the best of all of them. It's gorgeous (much of the exhibit is a feast for the eyes) and it tells the stories in as interesting a way as possible.

Still, there is nothing Science Fictionesque about it. That almost makes me sad, but it was a fantastic alcove and one of the most fun in the entire building!

## Alcove 3: Analog Computers

There's a working Differential Analyzer in here. And there are things that look like computers that you'd have seen in movies from the 1950s.

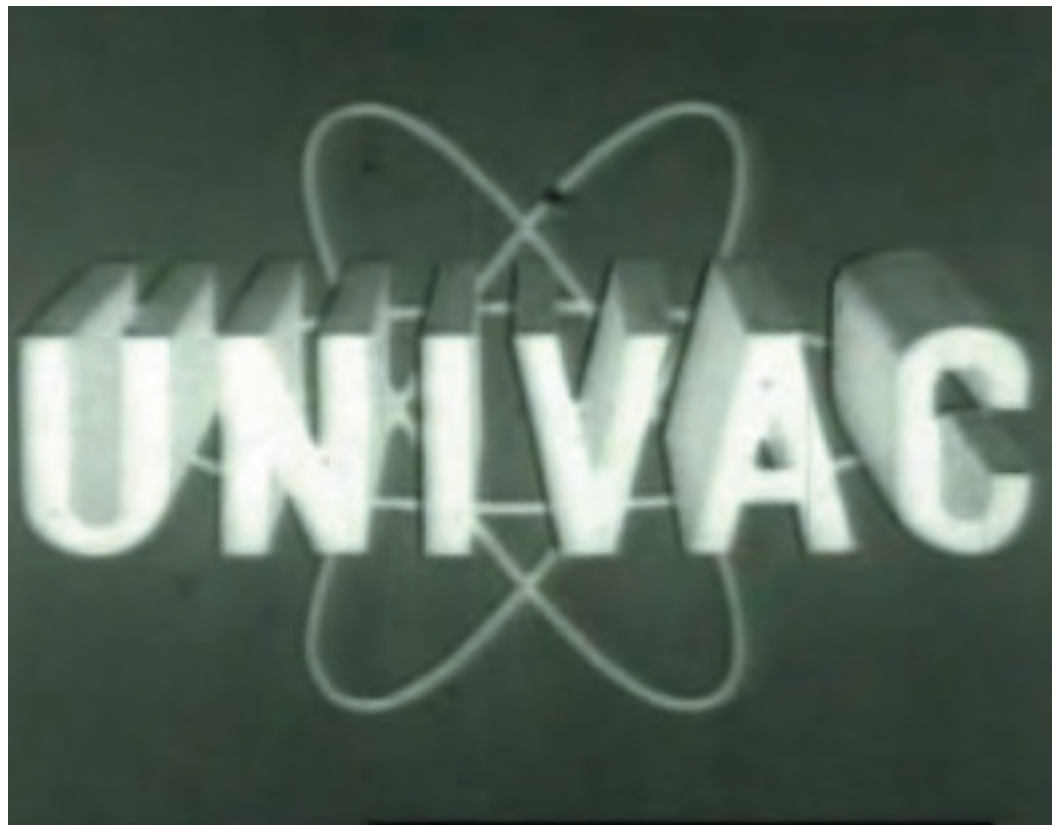
There's a focus on a machine that appeared in the film *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*.

The machine that was used in the film *Vannevar Bush's Differential Analyzer* was also used in the film *Destination Moon*. Those, and a short bit shot for Movietone news, is all the footage of that DA that exists.

Bush was very important to the development of computers, especially since he taught many of the first generation of computer pioneers and would later be influential on folks with his concept of the MEMEX, an early hyper-text-like machine. He was also a fan of the writings of H G Wells, and referenced him frequently.

## Alcove 4: The Birth of The Computer

This is where the early computers made by research groups and universities live. There's a large section of ENIAC and a really cool little diorama of it too! There's a little connection for the average SF fan as there's an Enigma machine and a piece of the code-breaking machine Colossus. The Enigma was the most widespread coding machine used by the Germans in World War II: The Deuce, and it was the basis for several SF stories. I think it plays a role in *Cryptonomicon* (and once I get around to finishing it, I'll let you know).



### **Alcove 5: Early Computer Companies**

The star here is the UNIVAC 1 mainframe. It was the most famous computer of the 1950s, so much so that the word UNIVAC pretty much meant computer. It was featured in newsreels, in films, on television. It accurately predicted the winner of the 1952 election far earlier than any other pundit or wag.

It was also featured on the cover of a Lois Lane comic. It's a great cover, and I'm so glad we included it in the exhibit. There's a lot of IBM stuff, but the UNIVAC is the master!

Sadly, we don't have the computer that has the strongest fandom ties from the 1950s, which would be in this alcove: the IBM 650. It was the first computer used by Ray Nelson and Jerry Pournelle, among others.

### **Alcove 6: Real-Time Computing**

This section has SAGE, the air defense Semi-Automatic Ground Environment, as its icon. You may recognize it from films like *Fantastic Voyage*, *Westworld* and *KISS Meets the Phantom of the Park*. It's an amazingly huge machine; the miniature model to the right of it shows in 1-to-200 scale just how huge it would have been.

There are also several bombsight computers, half a Mercedes and a pacemaker.

Oh yeah, and the Space computers. The machines that guided the Apollo moon missions are on the wall, along with a Minuteman Guidance Computer. I used to bring these to cons in the BArea and they were always good conversation starters. There's a video station that talks with the designer of the Apollo computer and some neat imagery to go along with it!

### **Alcove 7: Mainframes**

You've seen mainframes in all sorts of SciFi films, they're in all sorts of novels, and they're instantly recognizable as computers. Most of what people older than 30 think of when they think of a computer is a mainframe.

My favorite part is Tillie the Teller. To get people to identify with the ATM and use it instead of a regular teller, the First National Bank of Atlanta created a character that people could connect with: Tillie the Teller. There's a photo of the actress who played her in commercials and at special events, starting with the Tillie the Teller that was shown on the ATM itself!

### **Alcove 8: Memory & Storage**

Not quite an Alcove because it tells the story of a series of technologies over the course of computing. There's a Quipu, a knotted counting system, and drums and all sorts of storage media, including a laserdisc of *Fantasia*. I consider this the least SF of all the Alcoves because they don't include any of the cool cubes that were seen as the future of storage in SF films in the 1970s and 80s.

### **Alcove 9: The Software Theatre**

This is a movie that's really good about programming and the art of Software. If there is one computer pioneer who would have made a great science fiction fan, it's Don Knuth, and he's featured prominently in the video. It's a fun time. I love fun!

### **Alcove 10: Supercomputers**

There is nothing more science fiction than a Supercomputer. In fact I am fairly certain that the term Supercomputer was coined in the pages of *Astounding*.

This is a gorgeous gallery of Supercomputers. There's the Cray-1, the Supercomputer that has probably been featured in more science fiction than any other. There's the Stretch, IBM's Supercomputer that was only half as fast as they promised, and thus they sold each at a serious loss. It was also the machine that most influenced Arthur C Clarke in dreaming up HAL. There's a Thinking Machines Connection Machine, featured in the novel *Jurassic Park*. They're all beautiful machines and it's a perfect setting.

### **Alcove 11: Minicomputers**

The minicomputer section isn't all that fannish. There are few machines that were small and had a significantly fannish dealing. I guess the Data General Nova was used by a bunch of early computer folks who were also in fandom. I used to bring a Nova with me to BayCon once in a while and folks would drool over it.

Arnie Spielberg, Steven Spielberg's father, is prominently featured, though...

### **Alcove 12: Digital Logic**

I'm not a fan of Digital Logic. I think putting it all in one section instead of threading it through the entire exhibit wasn't the best concept. Still, there's stuff in this section for fans. Bob Zeidman, a computer guy and a fan, donated a number of things including a bar napkin that had all the features needed to start a company. There are things like pieces from the bar that all the technical types hung out in during the boom years, and the Fairchild Channel F Video Game System. It's an OK alcove, but nothing special compared to the rest of the exhibit.

### **Alcove 13: AI & Robotics**

Oh yeah... Robots! There's a lovely video that features a few shots of computers and robots from movies, like HAL from *2001*, and a few SF covers which are all from my collection. It's a nice video. The big thing is that there's a long glass case of Robots. There's the Stanford Cart, Shakey, industrial robots, Squee the Robotic Squirrel, Officer Mac, a large police PR robot, and so many more. It's an impressive display and it's very very cool!

As a guy who wrote a lot of the labels for the AI section, I think it stands as one of the best alcoves in the museum.



#### Alcove 14: IO

Input-Output might be the part of computing that has the most sumptuous objects. There are so many bizarre contraptions that have been invented to put info into and get it out of computers that there are so many nutty pieces in there. This is one part Xerox PARC homage, and the second part is all about the objects themselves in a long case. The various mice, printers, monitors, scanners and the like. One of the scanners is the CueCat, which is a scanner in the shape of a cat, the most fannish of all animals.

#### Alcove 15: Computer Graphics, Music and Art

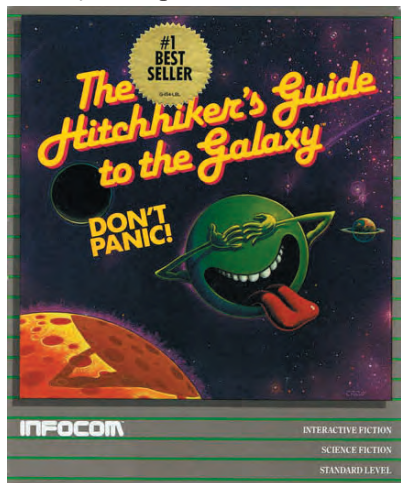
This was another of my sections and there's a lot here for us types. You start off walking into Music, where LA-area fan George Van Wagner gave us an Apple MIDI connector which is in the exhibit. There are music bits from Max Matthews, who was the guy who got an IBM mainframe to play the song 'Daisy Belle', better known as 'Bicycle Built for Two', which then was used by that Kubrick fellow in his film *2001*. We talked about Clarke and I mentioned the few emails we had exchanged over the years.

You walk around the corner and you end up in front of a number of Art pieces and a large flatbed painting system. The painting system is called AARON. An English dude named Harold Cohen put it together; AARON is his masterwork, a software system and painting bed that would create magnificent works of art.

There's also a bunch of Pixar stuff. You gotta love Pixar.

#### Alcove 16: Computer Games

Yes, I got to do Computer Games. The big thing is that there are tons of science fiction games (including a huge graphic of Space Invaders) and the video that tells the history of *SpaceWar!* mentions Doc Smith and the Toho films that influenced them.



And in here there's a great piece. Douglas Adams visited the Computer Museum History Center about two weeks before he died. When he came in, I met him and shook his hand and he pulled a software box out of his bag. It was the Infocom game *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, based on the book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* what he wrote and which was based around the actual Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. "Thought your museum might like this," he said, handing it to me.

And that's the one that we used in the exhibit, right next to *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*.

#### Alcove 17: Personal Computers

Steve Wozniak spends a lot of time at the museum. He's a good guy, and we spend a bunch of time hanging out in this alcove. Here you can see things like the Apple II, IBM PC, stuff from the Homebrew Computer Club, and a wide selection of stuff from Europe.

One of the things that should be considered is the video of Microsoft's history. Yes, it focuses on Bill Gates, but Paul Allen is in it too. He's one of the richest science fiction fans in the world, and that's allowed him to start the Science Fiction Hall of Fame & Museum in Seattle.

#### Alcove 18: Mobile Computers

This is all about the Palm Pilots, the Newtons, the Psions and the inevitable Osbornes. There's mention of things like Dick Tracy's watch, *Star Trek* communicators and the like, and some great advertising images, including one that seems to have been shot at the Playboy Club.

One thing about portable computing is that it was so thoroughly predicted by science fiction. Think of all the novels written in the 1960s that feature handheld-based communication devices. *Star Trek* was certainly the most famous example, but there are so many.

One thing that I love is the BEHEMOTH: the Big Electronic Human Energized Machine, Only Too Heavy. It's a bicycle that's got a trailer with a bunch of solar panels and the like. This is a machine built by a dude named Steve Roberts. He's a bicycle enthusiast and he created it and rode it all over the country, and he came up with a system that allowed him to write while he was biking, without taking his eyes off the road! This guy has the mind of a fan, without question.

#### Alcove 19: Networking and the Web

There's a wonderful video that talks about people who had envisioned things that seem 'Internet-like'. One of them is H G Wells. Another is Ted Nelson. There are a bunch of SF-ties and several fans mentioned. Sergei Brin, one of Google's founders, and I once had a nice long chat about Vernor Vinge.

There's a lot of great stuff here, but there's only one tiny mention about porn. I mean really, you *have* to talk about porn if you're gonna tell the story of the Internet!

So, there it is, an SF fans' tour of our exhibit. If you show up, I'll take you around and show it all to ya!

– Christopher J Garcia

# One more thing by Claire

This fanzine that you hold in your hands – or see on your screen – has been a sort of experiment, although not in the way you might think. It's also been a deliberate change of pace after #7; as Lloyd Penney mentioned in his letter of comment, we'd have a tough job to top that, and personally I see fan activity as fun rather than competition. When you consider the qualities that Chris, James and Pete Young individually bring to fanzine editing, you'd expect their combined efforts to be remarkable.

As Chris and James have both mentioned, at the end of 2010 *Journey Planet* won the Nova award for best fanzine; and I realised that I was very pleased for James and Chris, and also for Pete whose two guest editing stints have been among the stand-out issues produced so far, but I didn't feel that it particularly had anything to do with me. Now, this might just indicate that I'm far too blasé about the Novas by now – although I really don't need to claim a share in another one – or reflect my general disillusion at the apparent failure of attempts to reform them in the past couple of years; but it shouldn't take anything away from the pleasure that other people feel in winning one or indeed from the pleasure found in fanzines that encourage people to recognise what they like through awards. What it really doesn't mean is anything unnecessarily self-deprecating; I'm perfectly good at doing that, contrary as that statement may appear, but this isn't one of the times I feel provoked into such a reaction.

*Journey Planet* is clearly a fanzine that people enjoy and in its own terms must therefore be counted a definite success. It's included some excellent articles and artwork that I would have been happy, even proud, to have published anywhere myself, and a lot of people (inevitably, a lot more than actually write to us) have told us they've enjoyed reading it and indeed that they've found many of the pieces stimulating and thought-provoking. So the fact that I don't wholly get it, as a fanzine, is irrelevant to what *Journey Planet* is like and what it should continue to be like. And it may also be the case that other people don't feel that *Journey Planet* actually presents in the way that it impacts on me; when a commentator like Andy Hooper describes something as 'a sleek and sercon genzine' then you should really just say thank you and not quibble.

I'll try to explain, though, which probably means I am quibbling. But first let me emphasise that no one needs to get over-excited about what they think I'm saying or what they think that means; I am not damning the whole fanzine community either implicitly or deliberately, and neither (albeit possibly uncharacteristically) am I saying that I think I'm right and everyone should do it my way. Chris mentioned in his editorial that contributors to *JP* have 'run the gamut from folks who are regular in zines all over the place to folks who may never have even seen a zine before.' And I'm always pleased to publish people who haven't previously engaged with fanzines, provided that engaging with fanzines is what they want to do now. I want to publish people who want to be published in fanzines – because they read fanzines, and enjoy fanzines, and understand the urge to produce fanzines.

What I find myself feeling edgier about is publishing pieces whose creators aren't fussed about the publication being in a fanzine; for whom fanzines, or even the wider SF community, aren't especially meaningful in themselves; who won't be interested to seek out other issues of this fanzine, never mind any other, and who may not even be bothered about what response might be drawn to their own contribution. That isn't to say I'm not interested in those pieces and that I haven't enjoyed some of them; but I wouldn't have expected to publish them in a fanzine of mine. Yet I think perhaps part of what people like is that

they find in *JP* things that they wouldn't have expected to see in a fanzine. Still, if all that would make this the post-fanzine fanzine, I'm not quite ready to come forward into that future.

I also don't really get themed issues of fanzines; it is something lots of people do, and it's an approach that's clearly felt comfortable for James and Chris, but to me having a different topic every time feels like having set a subject for homework. I suspect I look for fanzines to build up a personality of their own, while staying fresh and interesting in the issues they address; and that takes a while. Reaching the eighth issue, after nearly three years, *JP* may have begun to achieve that despite this predilection for theming; and of course that's a relatively leisurely pace by the standards of the co-editors here, which I've acknowledged before may be the



most visible impact I've had on this fanzine and which may in itself demonstrate why my contribution isn't particularly constructive or necessary.

So, invited by James and Chris to pick a theme, I struggled a lot and then decided to be recursive: inviting variations on an old and familiar fannish theme while – I thought – offering the opportunity to actually think about it and approach it differently. But one of the important points to me in this was 'fannish'. I don't mean that in an intentionally excluding or alienating way; but to me this is a science fiction fanzine and it's produced by and for science fiction fans, and while all these terms are self-defining I expect the people who contribute to it to be people who'd also want to read it. It's pretty egalitarian in that respect: anyone can join in if they want to, and they'd want to because they get it. If it doesn't appeal to someone, they don't have to participate; in turn, wanting to participate is a pretty good indicator of being welcome to. But I'm afraid I didn't seek this time to probe the reflections and motivations of members of the broader SF community who don't usually get involved in fanzines, or otherwise invite contributions as an act of outreach; so I will emphasise now that if anyone's inspired to respond because they're interested in something they've seen here, then we'd all potentially be interested in your response. It's not that I won't make the first move, more that I'm offering a general invitation that you need to decide about for yourself instead of being flattered by specific attention.

I'm pleased to be able to publish all the writing included in this issue and I hope that you all enjoy it too, but I realise that it might not be what you'd come to expect from *Journey Planet*. And that's why I need to be clear about what my role here is. I'm just an old fart when it comes to fanzines – indeed, probably to many things – to the extent that it's clear I'm more of an old fart about this than many of the ~~old~~ **farts** fans with a much longer and more distinguished track record in fanzines than I have, lots of whom have embraced more modern ways of communicating and engaging with one another (even while some of them do still enjoy and appreciate fanzines) and to most of whom my reservations are evidently incomprehensible. So it would be entirely wrong to seek to impose my personal preferences on a publication that many people like just as it is, and indeed consider to be doing all that they'd want a fanzine to do in a way that's more to their taste than whatever the rest of us do in other fanzines. After all, I've got some of those other fanzines in which to try to do it my way.

It's also pretty clear that some of the other things I think are important in fanzines, and in fan writing – clarity, accuracy, coherence, spelling; call it what you like – aren't at all essential for people's enjoyment. Without me, the regular issues of *Journey Planet* would be rather like the issues of *The Drink Tank* that James and Chris co-edit;

and no one seems to mind that (except me, apparently, and since I write letters to Chris only every few years, he can cope with that). Indeed, no one even seems to notice; maybe, as Bill Burns commented recently, everyone's just used to it and instinctively corrects for it in reading – and maybe that's because it's not the presentation or mode of expression that's important to most other people. After all, James's writing and Chris's editing without me both still attract a lot of praise and award nominations. (And, of course, the issues of *Journey Planet* guest-edited by Pete Young are edited by Pete Young, and there's nothing I could add to that anyway.)

Maybe I'm over-sensitive to how things read and how they look, at least when I'm editing rather than writing myself (although even this, of course, is likely to invoke Muphry's Law and my own hubristic equivalent of *FANAC NEVER MAKES MISTAKES*). Maybe other people can just read around or find themselves completely unbothered by the sort of approaches that make me start frothing that *This could be so much better* and *It's such a waste*. Or maybe people really don't expect any more from fanzines so don't think they could or should be better. And that really will start me frothing, but I think I'm on my own again here.

I got involved with *Journey Planet* in mid-2008 because I thought the contributions in the first issue deserved to be presented to their best advantage, and indeed that fanzines should be the best that they can be while still remaining fun for all concerned. And while I've always been concerned that my approach diminishes the fun for both Chris and James, and in risking some diminution of their exuberance thus risking more extensively the fun and enjoyment that other people are obviously deriving from *JP*, I was also pretty clear that my 'editorial' contribution would be about copy-editing rather than vision or editorial direction – and that seeming to claim more credit for this endeavour than I think is due doesn't feature in my own definition of fun.

And that's why I want to make it quite clear, about the past as well as for the future, that *Journey Planet* is really edited, in that masthead sense, by James Bacon and Chris Garcia. And that's what the future ones will make explicit. While they want me to, I'll be delighted to continue to write for it, proof-read it, and help to get it distributed in whatever ways I can; but this is really their fanzine, or indeed whatever else they want it to be.

– Claire Briailey

