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About Dark Matter

For your free subscription to Dark Matter, e-mail darkmatterfanzine@gmail.com with the word ‘subscribe’ in the subject field. Email addresses will be considered confidential and will not be used for any purpose other than distributing Dark Matter.

Dark Matter is an independent fanzine exploring science fiction, fantasy, art, life, the universe and everything.

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The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the editor. This is a fanzine, and as such is a forum for personal opinions and debate. However, the editor reserves the right to refuse to publish material that may be offensive or incorrect.

Dark Matter likes to give credit for contributions and sources for each issue. If errors or omissions have been made, please e-mail the editor.

Uncredited text is probably the editor.

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Editor’s note:

This is a new zine and I am still learning how to use Adobe InDesign, my desktop publisher. Therefore Dark Matter is a project under development. I welcome constructive criticism, especially tips to help me develop my IT skills and content.

I hope to include a letters column in future editions, but correspondence may be censored.

I do not receive any income from this zine, this is a personal interest intended as a means of participating in the broader community. The total staff of this zine is 1, plus some support. While I hope to respond to emails, this is not guaranteed.

Flamers and senders of dubious or explicit content will be put on a blocked senders list and removed from the distribution list.
**Terra Nova TV Series**

Spielberg’s Terra Nova is going to be a 13 part TV series focusing on a group of human colonists escaping a dying Earth in 2149 by travelling back in time to settle in the prehistoric era to rebuild. The series has been co-written by Craig Silverstein and Kelly Marcel, starring Jason O’Mara (Life on Mars) as the father, Alison Miller (17 Again, Kings) as a colonist and Stephen Lang (Avatar) as the villain.

Producers include Stephen Spielberg and Brannon Braga, but David Fury has left the production and will not be replaced. Production will be centered on locations around southeastern Queensland and at the Warner Roadshow Studios on the Gold Coast.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said that her government provided considerable incentives to entice the production crew to Queensland. Around 80% of the cast and crew will be Queenslanders, with an expected $54 million boost to the economy.

Jim Sharp, executive vice president of production said, “We wanted this ambitious series to look like no other on television and Queensland provided the best of all possible worlds… Queensland had the right look, climate and terrain, a vibrant production commu-
nity and attractive economic incentives. We are very excited to be shooting our first production there.”

The Terra Nova Comic-Con panel was cancelled due to lack of footage, and the show has been delayed until Fall (Spring) 2011.

Sources:
Lillian ‘zenbitch’ Standefer and Jason Moore

V TV series reboot

V’s 2nd season has been delayed somewhat. Oded Fehr joins the current team of rebels: Erica (Elizabeth Mitchell), Jack (Joel Gretsch), and Ryan (Morris Chestnut), and Hobbes (Charles Mesure). Michael Trucco (BSG, Castle, below) might return to V although even he was under the impression his guest appearance was a one off. Source: www.scifimafia.com
Iron Sky

The Nazis weren’t defeated in 1945, they went to the moon to regroup and rebuild; now they are returning in 2018. This is a black comedy filming in Germany in October and Australia in November. Iron Sky stars Christopher Kirby (The Matrix Reloaded & Revolutions, Quantum Leap), Julia Dietze (1½ Ritter), Götz Otto (Schindler’s List, The Downfall), Tilo Prückner (The Neverending Story, Die Fälscher) and Udo Kier (Dogville, Dancer in the Dark).

Iron Sky is being made by the creators of Star Wreck although this movie is mostly in English, with soundtrack by Laibach and Ben Watkins. It’s directed by Timo Vuorensola and produced by Tero Kaukomaa (Blind Spot Pictures), Samuli Torssonen (Energia Productions) and Oliver Damian (27 Films Production), with a screenplay written by the acclaimed sci-fi writer Johanna Sinisalo (Nebula Award nominee 2009, Finlandia 2000) and Michael Kalesniko (Private Parts).

This production is unique in that fans are invited to collaborate and invest in the movie online, with benefits for investors. See the Iron Sky website for details. Iron Sky is due for release in 2011.

Sources:
www.ironsky.net
www.youtube.com/energiaproductions
Renovation World Con

Tuesday, September 7, 2010 Press Release

Reno, Nevada, USA – Renovation, the 69th World Science Fiction Convention, has taken over from Aussiecon 4, the 68th World Science Fiction Convention, as the current Worldcon.

The official transition occurred at the Aussiecon closing ceremony held in Melbourne, Australia on Monday, September 6, 2010. Patty Wells, Renovation chair, invited professionals and fans to come together in Reno in August 2011 to celebrate science fiction in all its forms as well as catch up with old friends and make new ones.

Worldcon is one of the largest global events run purely by volunteers. Renovation expects to welcome around 4,000 attendees for the five days of the convention including writers, artists, editors, publishers, filmmakers, musicians and fans. Particular recognition will be given to the Guests of Honor - author Tim Powers, editor Ellen Asher, artist Boris Vallejo and publisher and fan Charles N. Brown. The event will also make a significant contribution to the local economy with a positive economic impact estimated to be over $6 million dollars.

Over 150 volunteer staff are already working to make the event a success with many more to be recruited over the coming months. This volunteer effort to coordinate and put on Worldcon is the biggest example of science fiction’s unique economy of goodwill.

Renovation’s program continues to take shape and will include over 400 hours of panels, talks, readings, workshops and autograph sessions. Each evening of the convention will feature a highlighted major event including themed Music and Art Nights as well as the traditional Masquerade and Hugo Award Ceremonies. Alongside these events, Renovation will also host a substantial Art Show and a Dealers’ Room where members can buy books, prints, jewelry, models, craft work and more.
To quote Patty Wells, “with four of the last six Worldcons held outside the US, it’s great to bring Worldcon to Reno for the first time. We intend to put on a unique event with a program and exhibits that reflect our theme of New Frontiers. We have wonderful hotels and facilities and we’re an easy drive from the Bay Area. Reno is also a very affordable location to visit. We hope to welcome back many fans who may have missed the last couple of conventions as well as reach out to new fans who have never been to Worldcon. We hope to see you in Reno.”

Renovation World Con
Friday, October 1, 2010

Reno, Nevada, USA - Renovation, the 69th World Science Fiction Convention, announced today that it was extending the terms of its membership installment plan.

The existing membership installment plan was created to enable fans to spread the cost of an attending membership over a number of easy installment payments. This plan, which closed to new applications on September 30, 2010, has proved very attractive with many members opting for this convenient payment approach.

Under the new extended plan, Renovation will continue to accept installment applications until December 31, 2010. Applicants will need to purchase a Supporting Membership for $50 to join the plan, and will then pay a further $60 on or before February 28, 2011, with a final $70 payment due on or before May 31, 2011.

Renovation continues to be committed to delivering an affordable Worldcon. Renovation’s installment plan offer is complemented by a $100 full attending rate for Young Adults (17-21 years old at the time of the Convention) and a $75 full attending rate for Children (16 or under at the time of the Convention). A Family rate of $460 is also available, representing a $50 discount on the normal cost for 2 Adult and 2 Child memberships.
Reno, Nevada, USA - Renovation is delighted to announce an open competition for the design of the 2011 Hugo Award base. The Convention is soliciting artists and designers from around the world to come up with a base that is worthy of the Hugo Award and which reflects the convention’s theme of the New Frontiers and/or the region of Reno, Nevada and the North-Western United States.

The winning designer will have the opportunity to introduce their base design as part of the Hugo Ceremony itself and the base will also enter the archive of Hugo base designs, including the Hugo History exhibit which travels to each Worldcon. In addition, the winner will receive a full 5-day attending membership of Renovation along with $250 towards the cost of attending the convention.

Entrants are asked to submit initial drawings/renderings of their design by January 1, 2011. Entrants also need to be able to arrange for up to 30 bases to be manufactured if their design is successful, with a target price of no more than $150 per individual base. The winning design will be selected no later than February 28, 2011.

Full terms and conditions for the competition can be found on Renovation’s web site at www.renovationsf.org/hugo-base.php.

Ninja surviving in Outer Space

If you’ve listened to Joss Whedon’s Commentary the Musical, you might be wondering how ninjas survive in Outer Space.

Convention Reports - AussieCon4

An overview of AussieCon4 &
The Orbit Hugo Party

by Helen Lowe

Those of you who read my pre-Worldcon post on Marianne de Pierre’s blog, will know that even getting there was a big deal for me. Although a long time avid reader of scifi-fantasy (SFF) and lover of shows such as Babylon 5, Buffy and Firefly, I am still something of a moss gatherer by nature and not unhappy with the quiet life of study and garden, manuscripts and books . . . But the opportunity to attend the 68th Worldcon, or Aussiecon4, in Melbourne seemed just too good to miss—and I am so glad that I did go!

Firstly, it was fabulous to get together with so many other people who love SFF as much as I do. My very first panel was “Eowyn and Sam, Under-appreciated Heroes in The Lord of the Rings” and of course, the hall was full (I mean: LoTR!), with both audience and panelists all enthusiasts for the topic. I know I had a great time, because I was pretty much in Fantasy heartland territory, but I got the feeling everyone else was enjoying themselves as much as I was. And when all’s said and done, it’s a pretty easy topic to roll with.

In terms of highlights, there were so many that it’s hard to enumerate. Seeing The Heir of Night in print for the very first time was definitely right up there. So was meeting so many other writers and seeing even more across the crowded concourse. Writers were just—everywhere! Meeting folk from both my US and UK
publishers for the very first time was a blast, as was being approached by people who had either read my first novel, Thornspell, or loved what I had to say on a panel. Even more of a blast was when I was approached by fellow Con goers clutching both my books because they had liked what I’d had to say on a panel. Heady stuff for a moss gatherer from the bottom of the world!

Overall though, my highlight of highlights was the Hugo Awards ceremony. I mean, go figure: I am both an avid reader and a writer, plus I had read and voted on all the fiction finalists, so “being there” for the actual award ceremony was a really big deal. Even better—because Orbit sponsored the pre-Hugo party—I was able to meet and chat with many of the nominees in person. They were being very cool, but you could feel the excitement building, and that was all part of the atmosphere. The ceremony itself was very polished and there were many great moments—Seanan Maguire’s (aka Mira Grant’s) sheer delight at winning the John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer; Peter Watts telling us that winning the Hugo for Best Novelette (for The Island) had transformed the worst year of his life into the “best summer ever”; and Charles Stross, who was so certain that he was not going to win the novella category (for Palimpsest), that he had omitted to prepare an acceptance speech. And perhaps the most surprising, but also exciting, moment of all—realising that the Hugo for Best Novel was being awarded jointly for only the fourth time: to Paolo Bacigalupi for The Windup Girl and China Miéville for The City & The City. (Both great reads, by the way, in my humble opinion.)

It wasn’t until I got on the plane to return to NZ that I realised that there was one other really great aspect of attending Worldcon that was very personal for me, one that tied into but was not restricted to some of the other highlights above. I have been writing away
in a small study in New Zealand for quite a few years now, while most of my writing career has been happening on the far side of the world: finding an agent, selling my manuscripts, the whole process of publishing my first—and now my second—novel. Intellectually, I knew it was real. But until I went to Melbourne and met publishers and booksellers, writers and most importantly readers and fans from all over the world, it didn’t feel real. Now it does.

Helen Lowe is an award-winning novelist, poet and interviewer. Her first novel, Thornspell, (Knopf, 2008) won the 2009 Sir Julius Vogel Award for “Best Novel, Young Adult”, and Helen was awarded the Sir Julius Vogel for “Best New Talent” in the same year. Her second novel, The Heir of Night, the first of the adult WALL OF NIGHT quartet, is being published on 1 October in the USA, Australia/New Zealand, with UK publication scheduled for March 2011. Helen also blogs on the first of every month on the Supernatural Underground and every day on her own Helen Lowe on Anything, Really blog.

An overview of AussieCon4 by Daniel Haynes

The 68th World Science Fiction Convention or ‘Worldcon’ was held this year in Melbourne (2nd - 6th September), with Guests of Honor author Kim Stanley Robinson, award-winning Melbourne artist Shaun Tan, and dedicated fan Robin Johnson. I attended the last three days of the convention, and by-and-large had a fantastic time. There is something magical about walking around a small compound and running into your favourite authors, who are more than happy to have a chat with you in their downtime or on the way to events.

The convention was organised for panels and activities to run in hour-long segments. There were generally between 10 and 14 panels running every hour, so there was almost always something of personal interest to attend. Aussiecon was very relaxed in the management of panels, with everyone from authors, artists, enthusiasts, fans and gamers able to run their own. But as the old saying goes, quantity does not equal quality. Although I only walked
out of one panel (after a hopeless display of knowledge of the subject matter), many others would have been greatly improved with some form of preparation.

There were some extremely good, challenging and thought-provoking panels and discussions. I attended each panel with Kim Stanley Robinson on it. He was a fantastic speaker, and had some very interesting and entertaining discussions about Mars (terraform, colonisation, habitation), sustainability on earth and suburbia, poverty, world issues and evolving technology. Other panels, such as one on writing a first novel (with some successful Australian authors of all ages) were very informative and often inspiring.

Of course, some panels such as George R.R. Martin’s reading from his upcoming (and very late) A Dance With Dragons were so popular the room was filled far beyond capacity. After these overcrowded events, Aussiecon management began to change some panels’ rooms to attempt to fit everyone interested better. The problem was that often times they didn’t tell anyone (including some panelists), so there was a lot of scrambling around every hour getting to newly designated rooms.

The convention boasted a modest “dealer’s room” for businesses to sell their wares, space for scheduled hour-long round-table talks with authors, book signings and more. While the management of space left much to be desired, the services provided worked well to enhance the convention’s experience.

The closing ceremony was very underwhelming compared to other ceremonies (Kim Stanley Robinson’s Guest of Honor acceptance speech was much, much better). It was quite disappointing to see the convention go out on a ‘fizzle’ rather than a ‘bang’, but these are minor gripes indeed.

The fourth Aussiecon is an experience I will never forget. I thoroughly enjoyed most of the panels and talks I attended, with the good far outweighing the bad. I will certainly be attending the next one. Make sure to buy your tickets as soon as the convention is announced, because the prices rise very quickly to arguably obscene levels.
The Hugo Awards are the premier award in the science fiction genre, honoring science fiction literature and media as well as the genre's fans. The first Hugos were awarded at the 1953 World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia (Philcon II), and have honored science fiction and fantasy notables such as Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Robert Silverberg, Ursula K. Le Guin, J.K. Rowling, Neil Gaiman and many others.

**BEST NOVEL**
[Tie for first place]
The City & The City by China Miéville (Del Rey; Macmillan UK)
The Windup Girl by Paolo Bacigalupi (Night Shade)

**BEST NOVELLA**
“Palimpsest” by Charles Stross (Wireless; Ace; Orbit)

**BEST NOVELETTE**
“The Island” by Peter Watts (The New Space Opera 2; Eos)

**BEST SHORT STORY**
“Bridesicle” by Will McIntosh (Asimov’s 1/09)

**BEST RELATED WORK**
This is Me, Jack Vance! (Or, More Properly, This is “I”) by Jack Vance (Subterranean)

**BEST GRAPHIC STORY**
Girl Genius, Volume 9: Agatha Heterodyne and the Heirs of the Storm Written by Kaja and Phil Foglio; Art by Phil Foglio; Colours by Cheyenne Wright (Airship Entertainment)

**BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION - LONG FORM**
Moon Screenplay by Nathan Parker; Story by Duncan Jones; Directed by Duncan Jones (Liberty Films)

**BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION - SHORT FORM**
Doctor Who: “The Waters of Mars” Written by Russell T Davies & Phil Ford; Directed by Graeme Harper (BBC Wales)

**BEST EDITOR, LONG FORM**
Patrick Nielsen Hayden
BEST EDITOR, SHORT FORM
Ellen Datlow

BEST PROFESSIONAL ARTIST
Shaun Tan

BEST SEMIPROZINE
Clarkesworld edited by Neil Clarke, Sean Wallace, & Cheryl Morgan

BEST FAN WRITER
Frederik Pohl

BEST FANZINE
StarShipSofa edited by Tony C. Smith

BEST FAN ARTIST
Brad W. Foster

THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD FOR BEST NEW WRITER
Seanan McGuire

STAR WALKING Inc.

“The Star Wars Appreciation Society of Australia”

Skyforce Meetings Location:
Whitley College
‘The Mervyn Himbury Theological Studies Centre’
50 The Avenue, Parkville
(just north of Leonard Street)
(Mel Ref: Map 43 F1)

Skyforce Meetings Dates:
June 12th
August 21st
October 9th (Includes AGM)
December 11th

Skyforce Meeting Times: 1 pm to 5 pm

Cost:
Members: $5.00
NonMembers: $8.00
Children Under 12: Free – must be accompanied by an Adult.

Note: There is wheelchair and pram access.
www.starwalking.net
Check out our Facebook page too.
Edward McArdle’s Photographic Review of AussieCon4
Various scenes from the Worldcon. Mostly focusing on Aussies, but we let a few furriners slip in.

Scenes include Danny embracing Cthulu, Duncan hard at work, and various Guests of Honour.
 Changing the Climate  
**Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe**

It appears that many were not aware of this science fiction conference, scheduled for the 3 days prior to AussieCon4, held at Monash University in Melbourne with Kim Stanley Robinson (KSR) as Guest of Honour. This conference was a real treat, held in the Monash Conference Centre with 3 rooms for 3 different streams and a smorgasbord of academic presentations to choose from. Each session usually had 2 or 3 presenters, so it was difficult to choose. The only complaints I heard over the three days were about being forced to choose, and people hoping all the presentations would be made available over the web soon. Below I’ve mentioned a few short points from a few of the lectures I attended. In later issues I hope to render decipherings of my notes or possibly even publish the work of other speakers.

Kate Rigby opened the conference with obvious passion for her topic. Rigby concluded by commenting that utopia is a means not an end unto itself and that we must learn to dance with disaster by being responsive and improvising. Ecological epicureanism is important in that we must develop new models of the good life to create alternative hedonism. Humanity must escape its identity as separate from the world, in order to embrace a new identity as ‘Earthlings’. Greed must be balanced with fear of consequences.

Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor discussed Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the many issues this novel raised. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a dystopian feminist novel with many themes including women’s access to employment and how this affects fertility, perceptual inattention to risk as a hazard in itself, isolation caused
by hardening oneself against others, building walls and the ease of surrendering freedoms. In this novel science is masculinised while art is feminised and both are pitted against one another. Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor and Peter Marcs were the panel for this session and were united in saying that science is deficient because it lacks ethics, empathy, visualisation, a source of hope and faith in imagination.

Tom Moylan warned of the dangers of artificial negativity, which is a form of reformist behaviour too readily contained and exploited. As Moylan pointed out, privatisation of a green lifestyle is already occurring. Moylan referred to numerous works of SF in his talk, to assert that these novels exist as an informing tense of positive utopian myth. In KSR’s Mars trilogy, the struggle of the colonists to combine impossible opposites results in will transformation, eco-ontology and eco-politics. Moylan managed an impressive discussion of a number of KSR’s books in his allocated time.

It should be noted that, while Kim Stanley Robinson was the guest of honour, his books were also the subject of a number of lectures. I had not read any of Robinson’s books so it was fascinating to hear a variety of interpretations of his work. I should also point out that, with 3 streams, I could have chosen not to hear many talks about Robinson’s books. My favourite memory from the conference was of Stan Robinson sitting in lectures on his own books taking notes.

Robinson on Robinson was also fascinating. Apparently Robinson came to utopia ‘by accident’. He was reading utopian non-fiction hippy style books seeking to live the dream and find alternative technology. Realisation dawned that there was something wrong with utopia as a narrative, and Terry told him ‘there’s a gun under the table.’ Even after writing so many utopian novels, Robinson thinks utopia is a terrible idea but it has been worth experimenting with this strange subject.

Imagine utopia is possible as it is possible to imagine change. Rather it is the bridge from here to utopia we cannot imagine, visualising a positive history upon which utopia depends. Like
an ocean liner that cannot be turned around in under 10 kilometres we cannot change our society overnight without catastrophe. Robinson asked are we in a Wile E. Coyote moment where gravity hasn’t caught us yet? Are we in a fantasy moment? Can we change things? Robinson suggests that SF writers need to write the new future to help people visualise and realise it. It used to be the perfect society was considered utopian, but now survival of the human race is the new utopia.

Urging writers and artists to network with scientists to assist in communicating the dire situation the Earth is in, Robinson said, ‘Apart from the slings and arrows and the feeling you might get assaulted, it’s really quite fun.’ This comment, I think, encapsulates Robinson’s intelligence, creativity and sense of humour.

John Clute, SF critic with 50 years’ experience, closed the conference. Clute feels oppressed by entering a world tragedy as we don’t have the skills to deal with the impending disaster. SF failed to acclimatise us to the future except to expect change.

Heinlein was an engineer who believed the world had problems that needed to be solved. As an activist, Heinlein wrote utopian visions that fatally fail to generate a sense of consequence. Clute told an engaging story about London buses to illustrate his point. The old buses had platforms on the back where people could jump on and off, air circulated through the bus and communities were different. These buses were replaced, bus stops were instituted and regulated, traffic jams developed behind buses blocking traffic flow. And the people became little islands separated from one another.

Clute raised awareness of the need for a sense of consequence while also warning that we cannot predict outcomes of change. Kim Stanley Robinson urged artists to join forces with scientists to communicate the issues of climate change to the broader community. Kate Rigby inspired us to learn to dance with disaster, not to be overly reliant on authorities but to be flexible, and to develop an alternative hedonism in order to aspire to a good life that does not detrimentally impact upon the world.
The Changing the Climate: Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe conference was well catered for, with coffee and tea constantly provided as well as nibbles for breakfast, morning and afternoon tea, a light lunch and, on the final day, wine and nibbles to close. This helped create a relaxed atmosphere, where people could mingle during the breaks rather than dashing out for a coffee or food.

The academic stream at AussieCon4 was organised by the same people who organised the Utopias conference. Every academic session I attended at AussieCon was at the same standard as the Utopias conference. The downside of AussieCon was the academic stream was too popular for the room size it was allocated, and the air conditioning could not cope with that many people crammed into such a small room. I was very disappointed because I went home ill on the Friday of AussieCon so I missed out on the rest of the conference and all the academic sessions I’d planned to attend.
The closing talk on Monday afternoon was Marshall Bell conducting an artist’s talk with Deborah Rose as interviewer. This was almost a Clayton’s exhibition as no original paintings were present for viewing, but paintings were viewed via a power point presentation.

Bell explained that he used to be a traditional artist, painting artifacts for sale in the tourist industry. Determined to bridge the divide, Bell strove to exhibit paintings in galleries, and was the first Native Australian artist to achieve this level of recognition.

Having researched the political and cultural history of the various Aboriginal tribes, Bell weaves the threads of this history into his paintings. In the above painting, Coastal RUtopia, Bell’s trade mark ‘stitching’ is shown to reflect the cultural heritage of stitching skins together. This gridding represents a form of art that died out over a century ago, belonging to Bell’s tribe. This stitching separates art from other areas because this particular tribe needed clothes.

Bell’s thesis Why you paint like that examines imagery from South East Australian tribes, determining the inter-connectedness between different tribes’ art, the use of dots, circles, cross-hatching and supports or media. Support or media vary from tree-carvings, to ground carvings to clothing. Predictive modelling determines where and what style of art and the medium used for the various tribes.
Margaret Preston was, in Bell’s opinion, one of the top 3 or 4 white people who has lived in Australia. Preston took Aboriginal imagery and educated white people into acceptance. Preston was also heavily involved in setting up an anthropology course in Sydney. Bell also recognises Albert Nanageera as an influence.

The artist’s talk consisted of a power point presentation of Bell’s paintings as Bell spoke to each of them, explaining his imagery and goals. Remarkable creativity and humour were revealed during this talk.

Bell explained that he has acquired Christian mythology and reinterpreted it for his culture. In *The Miracle* (left), Bell shows the Aboriginal culture and people who were crucified when White Australia sent the army to invade the Aborigines in the last decade. The yellow kangaroos are white people. The kangaroo urinating represents John Howard, who is urinating on kangaroo shaped flowers, also representative of the Aboriginal people and culture. This is poignant and yet the use of colour brightens the dark humour, serving to leaven the political message.

‘How do you know Adam and Eve were white? They ate the apple not the snake!’ exclaimed Bell. In *Original Sin* (right), the Fall from Christian mythology is reinterpreted. The black angel/kangaroo is rooting on sin.

RUtopia combines culture, history, political comment and skill to present an alternative history and alternative future. While Bell’s message may be confronting, the humour and vivid colour leaven the experience. RUtopia is a vibrant, appealing body of work.

For more information about Bell’s work go to [www.wag.com.au](http://www.wag.com.au), the site of the Woollongabba Art Gallery, or e-mail the Gallery on email@wag.com.au.
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Dark Matter

Anime

Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind

Director: Hayao Miyazaki
Distributor: Madman
Release date: 3 November for Blu Ray
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Nausicaa is a princess who lives in a rural community located in the Valley of the Wind. Nausicaa has an unusual gift of empathy for creatures; one could say she is a ‘whisperer’. Lord Yupa is a wandering sword-master who accidentally enrages an ohmu (enormous insect) who lives in the toxic jungle. Nausicaa rescues Yupa by stunning and then charming the ohmu to return to the jungle. Back in the valley it becomes clear both Yupa and Nausicaa are well loved in the community, where they work with people to care for one another and survive the spread of the toxic jungle.

Their lives are changed when an air ship from a neighbouring kingdom, Tolmekia, crashes in the valley bringing with it toxic spores that infect the valley, a dying princess from the kingdom of Pejite wearing shackles, a huge ohmu and the heart of a legendary giant who was one of several responsible for destroying the world 1,000 years previously. A Tolmekia warlord princess invades the valley, taking Nausicaa captive before the Tolmekian ship is shot down, crashing into the toxic jungle. Nausicaa rescues the Tolmekian princess then the Pejite pilot, Asbel, who shot them down, only to fall to the bottom of the toxic jungle where she makes a monumental discovery.

This is an engaging family friendly movie for all except the youngest viewers, rated PG, with environmentalist themes contrasting with the petty human warmongering that almost results in the destruction of three remaining human kingdoms. Originally released in 1984, Nausicaa was well ahead of its time. Nausicaa the princess is likeable and although her emotional state...
seems a bit changeable for Westerners, she is not unstable like other anime characters, for example, Pokemon characters who can be pleasant then screaming in the next sentence. The voices are well done and, for a cast of stars, not overpowering to the story. Voice actors include Alison Lohman, Patrick Stewart, Uma Thurman, Edward James Olmos, Shia LaBeouf and Mark Hamill to name a few.

In this era of computer generated graphics, it’s refreshing to watch Nausicaa, made in 1984 with hand painted images. The landscapes are gorgeous, especially the images of the toxic jungle that seem to be based on a blend of existing weeds like dandelions and sea creatures. One scene has Nausicaa and Asbel standing beside the wall of an airship with bullet holes. The wall and the holes are beautifully detailed and artistically painted. The characters, animals and objects that move, such as the sails of the windmills, aren’t painted in the same style. Instead they are the more traditional cartoon style, but this does not detract from the story or the imagery. I would love to have some of the landscapes framed for display on the walls of my home.

Extras include promotional advertising from the original release, a storyboard version of the movie, and The Birth of Studio Ghibli. The Birth of Studio Ghibli is quirky and interesting, but it’s subtitled and sometimes the English subtitles are superimposed over Japanese subtitles making it difficult reading.

This is a family movie well worth watching, highly recommended.
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Meetings and calendar of club events

The weekly events calendar may be found on the web site www.msfc.sf.org.au

Melbourne Science Fiction Club (MSFC) meetings are held every Friday except Good Friday and between Christmas and mid-January. Premises open at 8:00 pm (20:00), Events commence at 9:00 pm and everyone out of the pool at 11:00 pm. Location: St David’s Uniting Church Hall, 74 Melville Road, West Brunswick, Vic 3055. Melways ref: 29 C5 (or catch a #55 Tram from William Street (in the city) to tram stop 36).

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The MSFC is a place where people who enjoy science fiction and fantasy meet to discuss their love of books, TV, films and coffee.
Terminal World
Author: Alastair Reynolds
Publisher: Gollancz
Year: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Terminal World is the story of Quillon, a fallen angel living among humans on Spearpoint, an artificial construction around which the largest city on the planet has evolved. Early on Quillon meets another angel who has come to warn Quillon of a threat to his safety and send him on a journey whose goal is self-preservation. Quillon flees with Meroka, a human who has good reason to hate angels. Meroka is not aware of Quillon’s race, which has been hidden through surgery and gene therapy, but Quillon is reverting without the ongoing therapies.

The pair set out on an epic journey, meeting various peoples, making friends and enemies along the way. These peoples illustrate the different strata of society and technology that exist on the planet. Zones somewhat like weather zones shifting around the planet threatening destruction by affecting machinery, plants, animals and humans.

Quillon and Meroka befriend two feral humans Kalis and her daughter Nimcha, and then all four are taken prisoner by The Swarm, a fleet of dirigibles that used to be the navy for Spearpoint. The Swarm defected when the captains felt betrayed by Spearpoint centuries earlier, but now the Swarm puts its animosity behind it and goes to the aid of Spearpoint.

Reynolds’ characters are believable, fighting to the death for a chance to live, feeling conflicted over killing when Quillon’s calling is medicine, men whose focus is power ruthlessly destroying people in their way, and mindless mobs sacrificing the better good.
for a slim chance at personal gain. The altruism of the Swarm after generations of hatred was a bit thin, but the motivation was explained as a combination of internal politics and a desire to prove the Swarm is better than Spearpoint. My favourite point in the story was when a central character discovers that he is not the central character but instead a side character to someone else’s meta-story. His reaction was wholly convincing, as well as humorous.

Terminal World ends in the middle of the story as it were. I don’t think this is meant to be a trilogy, which increases the appeal for me. The story is left in such a way as there has been a conclusion to the primary story of this narrative, threads moving forward to the future, some definite outcomes, some indeterminate outcomes. I found this uncertain ending surprisingly satisfying because I could fill in some of the blanks myself as well as envisage these characters moving into an uncertain future where the only real certainty is hard work and an ongoing story. This is so much like real life, where there are no happy endings, only more stories.

Read this if you enjoyed Asimov’s Prelude to Foundation, which is one of my all time favourite books.

Some foul bachelor frog cartoons are actually funny. This one was pointed out to me by my son. After much searching I haven’t found it on the internet or I would provide the url.
And Another Thing...

Author: Eoin Colfer
Publisher: Penguin
Year: 2009
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

This is part 6 of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy. Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect, Trillian and Zaphod Beeblebrox continue their adventures crossing time and space, delving into religious existentialism and social comment. Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl* series revealed Colfer as the perfect author to pick up Douglas Adams’ mantle to re-ignite or lay to rest the *Guide* series. As a long time fan of the *Guide* and *Artemis Fowl* I was not disappointed.

In high school I was one of the nerds who knew whole pages of the *Guide* and its sequels off by heart. I was disappointed with the 4th and 5th portions of the *Guide* trilogy, feeling that Adams rushed these out the door without doing the story justice. I suspect that Adams wrote *Mostly Harmless* in order to pre-empt more requests for sequels. Colfer’s book provides a much more satisfactory conclusion or middle to the series, with a journey that brought together threads of previous stories, a continuation and a possibility for a future rather than concluding with abrupt destruction.

Just as *Life the Universe and Everything* exposed cricket as evidence of remarkably bad taste, *And Another Thing* examines religion from the perspective of the gods and society. Cthulu attends a job interview after being coached in likely questions, Gaia almost won the job (of deity) but she sabotaged herself by mentioning a desire for a retinue, and the new society of survivors from Earth have a religious war over worshipping Cheese. The humour ranges from subtle to slapstick, definitely recapturing the best ambience of early Adams as well as bringing *The Guide* successfully into the 21st century.

A recommended read for fans of the original *Hitchhiker's Guide* series, *Red Dwarf* and UK comedies in a similar vein.
The Bird King and other sketches
Author/artist: Shaun Tan
Publisher: Windy Hollow Books
Year: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

The Bird King is a collection of sketches or less developed works by Shaun Tan. Tan has retained artistic control of the publication in order to achieve a more casual, authentic, even understated publication. This collection of works includes images such as Summoning, which would be familiar to Tan’s fans. However, the focus of the book is as a visual art diary of sorts, showing undeveloped or developing works and even sketches done of landscapes on holiday.

I fell in love with Tan’s The Arrival when it was placed in my hands for an all too short perusal then locked back in a cupboard for safekeeping. It is Tan’s storytelling ability coupled with his artistic skill that makes his work such a pleasure. Never before had I seen images without words that conveyed a story so effectively. The pencil sketches are detailed with a beautiful, soft tonal quality.

The Bird King presents bits of story and characters in development or that have been left incomplete. Some of the works are more spontaneous, rougher than Tan’s usual published style, which is something he wanted to reveal in this publication. The works vary from pencil to pastel, pen and even paint. At the book launch, Tan said he wanted the book to be in the same moleskin style and size of his normal sketch book. In addition to this Tan appears to sketch on various available surfaces as is indicated by the scanned images of slightly rumpled pages that add texture and authenticity to this exhibition.

Water Buffalo perfectly captures the essence of The Bird King, by exhibiting an incredible imagination and artistic skill whilst revealing a delightful sense of humour. A child asks for directions and the monstrous water buffalo is pointing the way.

The Bird King is a collector’s item for any SF/Fantasy or artistic person. The only downside - some images go across the gutter.
I Shall Wear Midnight is the fourth in the Tiffany Aching series, Discworld stories for younger readers (aimed at teens I think) about an intelligent girl who, when she was 9, chose to become a witch. This book opens with Tiffany aged 15, attending a fair alone because she has lost her beau Roland who is about to marry Letitia. The Nac Mac Feegles, the 6 inch high blue men with red hair, a love of drinking, thieving and fighting, are still following Tiffany around in theory to protect her but also making life difficult.

As the story unfolds we learn the Cunning Man is hunting Tiffany down. The Cunning Man is the ghost of a religious priest whose witch hunting and burning career ended with his love for a witch enabling that witch to trap him in the fire with her, killing them both. In the thousand years since then, the Cunning Man has kept returning to wander the earth destroying the innocent and guilty alike until a powerful witch sends him back. This time he was awoken by Tiffany when she kissed the winter in the previous book, Wintersmith, and in the two years since The Cunning Man has been hunting Tiffany to destroy her.

Pratchett respects his audience, striking a nice balance between earthy humour and delicately avoiding specific details, such as with his description of the giant carved into the ground as ‘in need of trousers’. There is no talking down to his audience, instead he talks about the facts of life such as birthing, suffering and death quite openly while alluding to the other facts of life witnessed by country children watching the cycle of life and death in the animals all around them.

In many if not all the Tiffany books Pratchett discusses the nature of difference, how it sets some people apart and how sometimes this sense of difference is the basis for witch hunts that result in
the death of innocent people. In the other books this is more of a background, but in *I Shall Wear Midnight* this difference and the resulting witch hunts are a major theme. ‘Poison is as poison’s welcome’, as Tiffany says, meaning that the poison of hatred only gets in the hearts of people who already have the seeds of hatred.

Tiffany’s adventure includes a flying visit to Ank-Morpork where she meets Mrs Proust, who is another witch, as well as old favourites including Captain Carrot, Captain Angua and Commander Vimes. There are also appearances from Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg as no good witch story would be complete without them. There are a number of references to other Discworld novels for adults as well, with cameos and references to still more characters.

Although it was widely acclaimed, including becoming a Printz Honour book and being shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal in 2010, *Nation* was the Pratchett novel I liked least. Since I read *Nation* I have had the pleasure of reading *Unseen Academicals* and now *I Shall Wear Midnight*. I assure you that, while Pratchett may have to use creative means to work around his illness, his ability to craft a good story is undiminished. While *I Shall Wear Midnight* is not a personal favourite in the Discworld series, it is enjoyable for all ages and a recommended read.

It is not necessary to read all the Tiffany Aching books in sequence, they can be read as stand alone books. I personally enjoy experiencing the growth of characters and the building of the world in which they exist, so I would recommend reading all in sequence if you want to experience this series to the fullest extent. The books are *Wee Free Men*, *A Hat Full of Sky* and *Wintersmith*. 
The Way of Kings
Author: Brandon Sanderson
Publisher: Gollancz
Year: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

The Way of Kings is written with the initial focus on 3 main characters, Szeth, Kaladin and Shallan. Each of these characters is like a pebble thrown into a lake, sending out ripples into the world. As the ripples extend beyond the initial impact of these characters, the story grows, weaving in new characters and expanding the focus of the story.

Szeth is the assassin in white who murders King Gavilar, starting a war with the Parshendi. The ripples from this action encompass the extended family of the king and his court, as we follow Dalinar, Gavilar’s brother, Adolin, Dalinar’s eldest son, Elhokar, Gavilar’s son and the new king. Dalinar struggles with court intrigue whilst feeling increasingly bound by the Codes, a code of honour that is seen as out of date or irrelevant for a ‘modern’ era. Adolin is the charming rake whose dalliances are cause for gossip, who cares for his father but convinces his father that Dalinar is going mad. Elhokar is paranoid that he, too, will be assassinated, which makes him a weak and vulnerable king.

Kaladin is the individual most closely followed through the book. Kaladin began as assistant surgeon to his father, intending to follow in his father’s footsteps until spite causes the city leader to force Kaladin’s younger brother Tein into the army. Kaladin follows his brother into the army in an attempt to protect him, but fails. Kaladin tries and fails to protect others whilst struggling against apathy. Eventually Kaladin intends to commit suicide, but is challenged by a spren, a spirit, to try one more time. This final attempt to protect others has far reaching consequences, leading into a dramatic climax and life changing aftermath.

Shallan is a young woman who has led a very sheltered life up until the death of her father. Shallan then sets out on an audacious
mission, to become ward to a princess so she can steal a valuable artefact that can convert matter, thus restoring Shallan’s family’s fortune. Shallan is tested time and again during her mission until her success is close. An assassination attempt changes everything for Shallan, and reveals shocking new truths.

Sanderson has developed a huge, complex world with a number of cultures, religion and even an ecology that shows great creative talent. Cultural dress is described for particular people groups that also varies for rank. Religious beliefs vary across people groups but there is a dominant religion that requires women of high rank to conceal their left ‘safe’ hands inside their sleeves, whilst women of lower rank or in cross cultural situations wear gloves on their ‘safehands’. In contrast, courtesans expose their safehands, which is considered to be provocative. Plants usually retract to protect themselves from being walked on or from storms. Symbiotic life forms are described in intriguing detail. Creatures reminiscent of giant hermit crabs inside their shells are used as beasts of burden.

Sanderson uses Dalinar’s struggles with his sanity and Shallan’s training to become a scholar to delve into matters of philosophy not as lecture but as character development. Their struggles are real, their engagement with issues are very real, making their conclusions feel like victories or ongoing dilemmas. As a reader we are not being converted or lectured, we are participating in their journey.

This book is a must read. When the lists are written, this book will be up there with Lord of the Rings. However, this book is not for the faint hearted reader, as it has 1001 pages. There are a number of illustrations of various styles, meant to be works of various persons mentioned in the story. This book should be published as a hardcover with full colour plates; if so, it would be a real collector’s treasure. As it is, with the illustrations and the beautiful paper upon which it was printed, it was a delight to begin reading, revealing a compelling story that was difficult to put down.
Mogworld

Author: Yahtzee Croshaw
Publisher: Dark Horse Books
Year: 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

Mogworld begins with Jim, in second year college learning combat magic. A neighbouring college attacks in the hope of acquiring a non-existent artifact. During the ensuing slaughter, Jim is killed, experiences heavenly bliss until he is rudely resurrected by a necromancer, Lord Dreadgrave.

Between unsuccessful attempts at suicide, Jim finds contentment working in the rat pit for Dreadgrave who is a thoughtful employer. That is, until Lord Dreadgrave is deleted by programmers racing to meet a deadline to release their massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). (Yahtzee says a lot of those letters are extraneous, hence his reduction to MOG world.)

Jim has made friends of a sort, Meryl and Thaddeus. Together they narrowly escape the deleters and set out on a quest to die, find alternative employment and convert sinners respectively. They learn that 50 years previously people stopped aging, became sterile and when killed they resurrected in new bodies in churches. This resulted in an extremely high suicide rate as well as some casual pillaging to ease the boredom and maintain the economy. Two ‘gods’ (programmers) also vie for dominance, with reality (including emails) infringing on this MMORPG.

Go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh4QKDkLu_c to see Yahtzee talk about Mogworld and the authors who influenced his writing style. Mogworld reflects the influence of Douglas Adams without being as surreal, as well as Terry Pratchett without being as strong social comment. Personally I think it also has shades of Peter David’s Apropos of Nothing, but is not quite as dark.

Mogworld will appeal to MMORPG gamers who disconnect for long enough to read (Tuesday nights, guys!), to anyone who makes a hobby of hating MMORPGs (a gift for the girlfriend?) and to anyone who loves authors such as Adams, Pratchett and David.
In *Hamlet’s Blackberry*, Powers looks at our lives in this digital age, from the perspective of someone who has grown up in an evolving society and, at times, has not successfully managed the technology and increased connectivity it brings. Part I looks at how this new era of technological connectivity (mobile phones, email, internet) is good and how it detrimentally impacts on us. Part II recounts the ideals, concerns and experiences of 7 historical figures who had experience of new technology in their eras or who developed ways to cope with similar issues in their times. Part III reviews Parts I and II, and goes further into looking at the author’s ‘internet Sabbath’ as a means of coping and ensuring a strong family network away from gadgets.

Ever read a book that says what you already kind of knew? Because the author is saying what you know, it clears the muddy waters and validates your feelings. Parts I and III were like this for me. I am less connected than a lot of people I know and yet I feel overwhelmed at times. At other times I have tried to find space away from the internet to enrich family relationships which has been really positive, but I’ve found it difficult to sustain those efforts. Powers putting all of this into words and expressing what I already felt validated my concerns, giving me extra energy and authority to take control of my own life rather than be controlled. I believe many people if not most could benefit from reading and reflecting upon Powers’ exploration in order to reduce stress levels and enjoy life more.

Part II explored the ideals and concerns of Plato, Seneca, Gutenberg, Hamlet (Shakespeare), Benjamin Franklin, Henry Thoreau and Malcolm McLuhan. Each of these men was faced with technological developments impacting upon his era or a need to alter his life in unconventional ways in order to live a productive life. As
my history has been largely an accumulation of random facts from books such as this, I found this new perspective to be interesting although perhaps a tad repetitive. Perhaps my overloaded mind just wanted the synopsis rather than the experience?

Put this on your reading list if you are feeling technologically overwhelmed, even if you only read Parts I and III.

This may not be a game but it is an epic science fiction thriller (gamer definition of epic, it is only 369 pages). Dagmar is the central character, a thirty something gamer who now runs Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) which are role playing games that bridge the computer/reality divide.

The story opens with Dagmar stranded in Jakarta during a military coup incited by a collapse of the country’s economy. Her story paints a vivid picture of every tourist’s nightmare, being trapped in a developing world during a revolt complete with lootings and shootings. Dagmar remains trapped as she watches other countries’ nationals being evacuated – everyone except Australians, who Indonesia will not allow in because of poor relations over Timor, and the Americans (including Dagmar) because all US assets are in the Persian Gulf. Dagmar’s personal experience in Indonesia paves the way for the following story, where real life and an alternate reality game are skilfully blended together by the puppetmasters, but who is the real puppetmaster? There are enough twists and turns to confuse the reader, with the suspects narrowing during the course of the plot.

The people who will appreciate this book the most will be gamers, however non-gamers can bridge the cultural divide helped by
the many movies and TV shows that have used this plot device previously. For the uninitiated, acronyms like ARG are explained, but I think MMORPG was not explained. An MMORPG is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, or an online game where you are a character in an unfolding storyline playing with other players (real people who are also online) and NPCs (Non-Player Characters, or characters that are part of the game and not played by real people). Examples of free to play MMORPGs are Allods, Dungeons and Dragons Online and Guild Wars. Lord of the Rings Online is currently pay to play but about to change to free to play, and other pay to play games include World of Warcraft and Warhammer Online. Playing any MMORPG is an experience in itself, which will add to the understanding and enjoyment of books such as This is not a Game and series such as The Guild. Anyone passingly familiar with the internet, email, forums and chat rooms should be fairly at home with most of the concepts in the book.

Other people who will get a kick out of this book are IT people, especially anyone who has worked on a help desk. If in any doubt, read the chapter This is not the Bat Cave then you will be hooked. This is where the reader meets BJ, an underemployed computer geek working on an IT help desk (“Try restarting your computer”) who is a gold-farming ninja (a ninja is not a Japanese warrior, a ninja takes loot not rightfully his) to supplement his near minimum wage. The characterisation in these four pages alone was worthwhile reading. Many years ago I had a description of car engine from a future perspective (an excerpt from Heinlein’s Time for the Stars I think) stuck on my toilet wall. I might reinstate that tradition just for this chapter!

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, reading it nearly in one sitting. It was a roller coaster ride with twists and turns, and although I quickly narrowed down the likely suspects for puppetmaster, I was never quite sure until the close of the book. A recommended read.
Knights of the Old Republic

Developed by Bioware,
Published by LucasArts, 2003
Gameplay: 8
Storyline: 10
Graphics: 7
Sound/Music/Score: 10
Overall (Not an average): 9.5
Reviewed: Daniel Haynes

Set 4000 years before the events of Star Wars episode I, KotOR takes place in a time where the Sith are terrorising the galaxy and extending their rule. Created by BioWare (developer of the ‘infinity’ engine, Mass Effect, Jade Empire and Dragon Age), KotOR puts you in control of a character who crash lands on a Sith Controlled planet - tasked with exploring vast worlds and following an immersive storyline.

The game, created in 2003 was hailed as being far ahead of its time, and provides a rich, compelling storyline and gameplay experience today. Filled with developing characters, a simple but fluid combat system, and an engrossing and cinematic storyline unfolding seamlessly, KotOR defies the common formula of releasing rebranded generic B-grade gaming experience under Star Wars names, and engrosses you in a daringly dark story, fresh from what we know about the movies and it makes you care. Through the intricate story and gameplay, KotOR makes the player care about the Sith, the Jedi, the citizens of Taris, and the “Star Forge”.

KotOR begins with a relatively linear gameplay experience but branches out into a fairly open RPG experience once the player reaches a certain stage in the game. The worlds you explore are full of optional side quests allowing the player to experience further gritty lore. There are multiple ways to complete many quests,
however the main storyline is fairly linear all the way through. The storyline is really the high point of the game. The combat and gameplay itself is used only as a medium for communicating Bioware’s story, a really welcome change from the average modern games which include storylines as an afterthought. The plot twists and turns at many points, with the main twist awarded 2nd place in Game Informer’s top ten video game plot twists of all time. While Bioware worked on the game and story itself, LucasArts developed the audio aspect. With over 15000 lines of spoken voice-over, KotOR boasts the most dialogue in any game from its’ time. LucasArts hired award winning composer Jeremy Soule to compose the games score. Flawless sound effects and music set the scene and add a layer of immersion to the worlds of the Old Republic.

If you haven’t already, you should definately play this game. One of the pinnacles of western RPG making, 2003’s game of the year, and one of the greatest games of all time.

Evolution
Distributor: V Republic
Release: 6 October 2010
Reviewed: Nalini Haynes

Evolution is an online game, available for login or demo. I looked at the demo version. The introduction was overly melodramatic while reminiscent of the Borg seeking to assimilate people. After being transformed into a some strange sea creature, you swim around looking to interact with the world around you. The objective is to reach the goal without running out of energy. To keep energy reserves up, you either find sources of energy in the game or, surprise, surprise, enter codes from cans of V.

This is a 2D platform style game with little appeal, especially when the screen load times are longer than the time taken in each screen. This game can be found at www.vrepublic.co.nz/evolution.
Media Watch

www.SaveTheMurlocs.org

by Nalini Haynes

Saving murlocs since 2009. A World of Warcraft reference but the video is absolutely hilarious black comedy. Save the Murlocs begins as a bleeding hearts style mockumentary where a druid is explaining about the devastation caused by hunting murlocs. The murloc hunt is apparently caught on the hunters’ own video camera, complete with sound track. Back in Ironforge, the druid pleads for help saving murlocs while a crowd gathers and performs for the camera. Someone holds up a sign saying “Chuck Norris 3:16” while a female draenai dances and a guild charter opens onscreen.

Murlocs are creatures in WoW whose role is to be killed for experience in the original version now referred to as ‘vanilla’. In Burning Crusade, murlocs are brought to Outland to restore the ecology. Allegedly. One could be forgiven for thinking the release of murlocs in an enemy’s village is done for less virtuous reasons. In Wrath of the Lich King, murlocs are split into factions. Players become friendly with one faction and even dress up in a murloc costume to sneak into the enemy faction’s camp. Many players love to hate murlocs, but may also have a murloc ringtone. The video can be seen at www.savethemurlocs.org or on YouTube.


Joffa the Movie

Distributed: Madman
Release date: August 2010 for cinema, December 2010 for DVD
Starring: Jeff ‘Joffa’ Corfe and Shane
Co-Starring: The Gold Jacket & The Volvo

Joffa and Shane are two ordinary blokes based in Melbourne supporting their footy teams and working together as J & S Labour Force mowing lawns. The movie is part documentary, part mockumentary, heavily influenced by Home Improvement and The Simpsons with a little Pimp My Ride for garnish. Within the movie Joffa and Shane are referred to as “Dumb and Dumber”, but from the little of that movie I have seen (the ads), I believe this movie has more universal appeal.

We learn a little about Joffa’s background, growing up in a boys’ home and being taken to see Collingwood play where he discovered a tribe of people who accepted him, shaping the rest of his life. Joffa’s passion for football has made him famous as a Magpies supporter, but he also works with Reclink and supports the Celtic Football Club.

The movie is ideas based and unscripted. It seemed to me that Father Bob felt very uncomfortable in his role in the beginning of the movie, but soldiered on, ad libbing his way through the pivotal scene where he sends Joffa and Shane to business school. Father Bob seemed to grow into his role through the course of the movie. Other ordinary people, not actors, also used their own words to play their parts. Sometimes they seemed a bit tense, but on the whole they played themselves well. My favourite cameo was the little old lady rubbing her hands together with glee, ordering Shane to give her a massage. I’m convinced she’s a character and a stirrer, and enjoyed her role immensely.
Unlike many documentaries this story has a plot and a climax, with a good finish. I would describe this movie as ‘Danny Deckchair for footy fans by footy fans’. And it works no matter what footy club you barrack for. Laugh at the antics of Joffa and Shane. Watch the adventures of The Gold Jacket, right up until it loses most of its sequins. Mourn for (or gloat over) Collingwood supporters who bask in the glories of triumphs earnt about 80 years ago, when they won 4 premierships in a row.

When I walked in to the cinema and saw Joffa standing there in his gold jacket, I thought ‘O no, I knew I should have Googled this movie before I came… I am SO in the wrong place.’ Then Joffa took off his jacket to reveal – a Magpies jumper. Help! Then someone asked me where I was from. When I explained that I was the editor for Ethel the Aardvark (my previous zine editing role) I got a strange look, so I explained I was from the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. The guy looked affronted, saying ‘Fiction? Joffa’s not fiction is he? He’s over there!’ By this time I wished the ground would open up and swallow me. But I stayed. I figured, I came, it’s a local film, dammit, even if it is about football, I’m sticking this out. And I am glad I did. It was a window into a different culture, the tribal culture of football, with lovable characters who can be ratbags.

After I left the movie I went to some art stores and bought some grounds (paper) so I could finish a work (AKA drawing) I was developing (the cover for this zine actually), then I had a soy latte. And I said that to say this – ok, the movie was made by footy fans for footy fans, but even I enjoyed it. Most of the people in the cinema laughed a lot more than me. I believe the appeal of this film is fairly universal as it works on a number of levels, just like Home Improvement and The Simpsons. So go, watch it, and support a local, low-budget Aussie film. And to my readers overseas – look out for it! Joffa the Movie has an international distributor looking at taking up the rights.
Shaun Tan’s The Lost Thing
Distributor: Madman
Release Date: 10 November 2010
Reviewed: Nalini Haynes

This is a move based on the book by the same name. A boy is on the beach collecting bottle caps, only to discover the lost thing, a creature distinctively of Tan’s creation. The boy tries to help the creature find it’s home, a place for it to belong, but no-one helps him. Eventually he takes it home, but his parents don’t want it around. The boy cares and wants the lost thing to be happy, not swept aside or forgotten in a busy world.

Beautifully illustrated and brought to life by animation, the art was consistent with Tan’s original work in the beautiful soft tones consistent with the gentle tone of narration. At times the animation reflected the original source of material by seeming almost comic strip in form. This was used as a means of telling of a journey with events separated by a little time, and was used effectively.

*The Lost Thing* is a gentle story aimed at viewers of all ages with a satiric undertone for older viewers. For Tan’s interpretation of his own book, go to [www.shauntan.net/books/lost-thing.html](http://www.shauntan.net/books/lost-thing.html). Very short, *The Lost Thing* left me wanting more, perhaps a collection of Tan’s work brought to life on the big screen.

The Melbourne International Film Festival Shorts Awards gave The Lost Thing the Grand Prix for Best Short Film.

The Hedgehog
Distributor: Madman
Release date: 10 November 2010
Reviewed: Nalini Haynes

Paloma is the central character of the movie, an 11 year old girl who has decided to commit suicide on her 12th birthday because, as she says, she does
not want to grow up in a fish bowl dashing herself against the glass like a fly trying to get out. Paloma is precocious, displaying a perfect blend of child-like curiosity and experimentation alongside extreme intelligence coupled with insensitive acerbic insight into those around her.

Paloma’s mother has spent 10 years in therapy, dependent on prescription medication and champagne, lavishing the love and attention on her plants that could have been better directed at the daughter she doesn’t understand. The older sister is determined not to be as neurotic as her mother, but is a self-involved university student who throws a tantrum when she is told to respect the labour laws. The father is a politician about to be reshuffled out of cabinet, meaning well but ineffective in his family life. Kakuro Ozu is the new tenant who moves in after the tragic death of the previous tenant. A Japanese gentleman, he builds friendships with Paloma and Renee.

The hedgehog of the movie name is Renee Michel, who works as a janitor in a building of luxury apartments. She describes herself as ugly and overweight, but always polite, believing that people want a discreet janitor and expect a surly one. At first she epitomises the ideal surly janitor, but developing relationships with the persistent Kakuro and Paloma transform her.

The use of art as Paloma’s tool of exploration in film making, her ‘advent to death’ calender and expression of discovery is beautiful, and used well to emphasise the development of the characters. Humorous moments sparkle as a counterpoint to the difficult times.

Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton both gave The Hedgehog 3.5 stars out of 5, see www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2931049.htm. Personally I enjoyed this film, but Margaret and David both found the idea of the 11 year old thinking of suicide to be disturbing, and may have detracted from the movie for them.
I am Love

Distributed: Madman
Release date: 10 November 2010
Reviewer: Nalini Haynes

I am Love is a story revolving around Emma Recchi (Tilda Swinton), a middle aged woman who ‘is love’. Emma loves her children, reaches out to others but remains isolated and unhappy. The movie opens with an elaborate family dinner, introducing all the family with parts both large and small. Emma’s husband Tancredi is named joint heir and successor to his father at this dinner, joint with one of his sons, Eduoardo (Edo). There are two sons including Edo, and one daughter, Betta. Edo has a friend, Antonio, who is introduced as the person who beat Edo in a race earlier that day. Antonio is also a chef, which common interest with Edo serves to inspire a friendship between the two.

Betta sends Edo a letter discussing her new lesbian relationship but Edo leaves this in his pocket for the dry cleaner to find and give to Emma. Emma is silent upon learning of her daughter’s sexual affiliation with no one to turn to. Emma’s unhappiness and isolation inspires her to attempt to develop more of a friendship with the housekeeper, but she is rebuffed. Alone, Emma continues embodying love for her children at every opportunity. Emma reaches out to others around her in kindness, opening the way for her relationship with Antonio to develop.

The story develops from the beginning where it almost looks like a cross between a ‘lifestyles of the rich’ program and a cooking show, to weave a story of love, loss and finding oneself. There is a focus on the cooking and presentation of food, which is used as a language unto itself. This, along with a cinematographic focus on trivial details while the servants prepare and serve the food, whilst skipping over the normal focus of things like the death of the patriarch and the wedding of the favourite son, creates an atmosphere unlike the usual Hollywood style movie.

Antonio romances Emma with food before the relationship be-
comes physical. Later the physical passion is presented beautifully, partially in analogy and partially cinematographically. (I’ll take this presentation over TrueBlood’s sex scenes any day!)

Tancredi’s on camera role is small, to the point where Tancredi is almost wallpaper, but in a few key scenes his superb acting conveys his character as antagonist to Emma’s protagonist. Tancredi complacently accepted being named heir to the company then, without a word, conveyed his displeasure at being named co-heir with his son. In one key scene with few words, Tancredi demonstrates ‘foreplay’ as he changed the TV channel away from a program his wife was watching. Needless to say, she rolls over to go to sleep.

Edo is an enigmatic character who I could never quite pin down. He wanted to open a restaurant but went into the family business as expected. Once in the business, he tried his best to live up to his grandfather’s expectations even while Tancredi was working to sell off the business to make more money. Edo brought home a girl who later became his wife, but I had the impression that he may well have been sexually attracted to Antonio. It certainly appeared that there was a triangle there, with the wife working against Edo increasing his involvement with Antonio.

*I am Love* began slowly. I had no idea what to expect, so I felt that I was struggling to put the images of this dinner party, the food, the servants and so forth, into context. Gradually the story built up to the climatic finish, increasing speed and developing the characters right up to the end. The climax was powerful, and full of meaning for those who look for depth in entertainment.

*I am Love* is primarily in Italian, with a little French, Russian and English, with English subtitles. I believe if you enjoyed *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* and *Le Divorce* you will enjoy this movie.
Terry Pratchett’s Going Postal

Distributed: 20th Century Fox
Year: 2010
Reviewed: Nalini Haynes

Going Postal begins with Albert Spangler AKA Moist von Lipwig desperately working to escape his cell before he is hanged. He is unsuccessful, and successfully hanged to within an inch of his life. The inch that remained was then presented to Lord Vetinari, the tyrant of Ankh Morpork, who offered Lipwig a choice between certain death and becoming the Postmaster General. Lipwig accepted the offer, then promptly fled Ankh Morpork only to be recovered by his golem parole officer, Mr Pump.

Lipwig begins his job as Postmaster General by meeting his staff, Junior Postman Groat and Stanley, then learning the history, culture and problems of the post office. The principle problem of the post office, apart from its failure to actually deliver mail and short life expectancy of the postmasters, is its rivalry with the Clacks, the Discworld’s telecommunications and internet company.

The consummate con artist, Lipwig gains the attention of the crowd, enlists the aid and support of a workforce of golems plus a veritable Dad’s Army of formerly retired postmen, as well as receiving a gift from the gods of $150,000 to restore the post office to its former glory. Along the way Lipwig meets Adorabelle Dearheart, a young woman bereaved of both her father and brother due to the family’s former connection with the Clacks company. Lipwig and Adora have undeniable chemistry, with their verbal harangues coupled with body language telling a whole different story.

Stanley’s body language and speech appears influenced by Michael Crawford in Some Mothers Do Have ‘Em. Reacher Gilt is effective as the villain supported by his less effective
I believe feeling overwhelmed by our new connectivity is a common problem in this day and age. Net Rage is the new Road Rage. Our experience of road rage ends when that 4WD or sports car finally overtakes us so we no longer have someone honking and screaming abuse at us for obeying the road rules and being courteous to other drivers. We arrive home, park the car and get out, check the letter-box, then walk inside to check the virtual letter-box and find that Net Rage is being poured all over us in our own living rooms, a place that should be safe.

A while ago I did some volunteer work. One Friday afternoon I emptied my volunteer work in-box, only to receive a critical e-mail on the Monday morning because I hadn’t emptied my in-box all weekend. I became rapidly and increasingly stressed about this, and started obsessively checking my in-boxes, hating what I was
doing the whole time. How many other people have done the same thing? Increased their participation in this rat race in order to meet someone else’s expectations? And begun to feel as though they are drowning?

Someone asked for assistance with using Facebook in a forum, to which I replied. My experience is that if I hadn’t replied in the forum, someone else would have gone to the extra effort of doing so at a later date, so I replied in the forum. Someone (not the moderator) used the forum to get my personal e-mail address and send me a critical e-mail (this was not the first he’d sent either). He had personally decided to take upon himself the role of moderator because he felt that the response was ‘off topic’. However, at no time did he criticise the person asking for assistance. So what’s going on here? I think we have people who do not know how to control the technology and are feeling overwhelmed, so they take it out on the ‘other drivers on the road’. That person and all the others who subsequently joined this conversation all appeared to have their e-mail settings set so that they received individual e-mails, not a daily digest, not important e-mail only and none of them used the ‘no e-mail’ option, where you only access the posts by entering the forum when you have the time and inclination to do so.

Powers suggests that we can control the technology rather than let it control us, and he is right. Since feeling overwhelmed by volunteer work that rapidly became a full time job, I put the brakes on. I check the letter box on the street once a day, 5 days a week, so why was I checking my in-boxes several times a day from the time I got up until the time I went to bed at night 7 days a week? Since then, I’ve put the forum e-mail on important updates only, so I can go onto that forum occasionally to check what is happening. I’ve also reduced the number of times a day I check my e-mails, and sometimes I don’t check them at all.

Facebook can be a cause for stress. I’ve talked to people who have literally thousands of e-mails in their in-boxes because they spend a lot of time on Facebook, then receive updates whenever anyone makes a comment in a thread they have entered. There
doesn’t seem to be a ‘leave conversation’ option available, so it snowballs over time. I think I’m a bit unusual in the way I use Facebook, because just about everyone who is my friend on Facebook is someone I know from places I used to live. Facebook reminds me to send friends a birthday wish, and if I log in once a day I can scan down my news feed to see if anyone has anything interesting or important happening. Sometimes it’s pleasant just to exchange small talk with a friend who is mourning the lack of sun in Launceston while I’m enjoying a beautiful sunny day in Melbourne. I also use Facebook to track whether The Guild has put up a new episode. Today Jinx sent out a notice that the sale ($7 off every tee) ends at midnight, so I bought hubby and son 3 tees each at a huge saving. I don’t feel overwhelmed, I’m content with this level of connectivity.

Mobile phones are a huge blessing and curse in one little hand-held. Before I moved away from my daughter, the entire family would meet at a restaurant for dinner for most family celebrations. No cooking, no cleaning, just focused family time EXCEPT for my daughter’s mobile phone. Her phone would ring and she’d be gone, there in body only and often not even at the table. I felt that dinner out was rather pointless because not only did we not get 5 minutes uninterrupted conversation, but on a few occasions she didn’t even eat her dinner. When I’m out I hate getting mobile phone calls unless it’s from hubby or son, checking in for some reason. If people want to talk to me, they can call me at home and I’ll call them back if I’m out. That way they get all my attention. If someone wants to be sure I get a message, e-mail me! I don’t SMS. Ever. It’s about making the phone work for me rather than becoming a slave to the phone.

While I applaud Powers’ ‘internet Sabbath’, a whole weekend wouldn’t work in my family. Hubby’s idea of relaxing is to hook in to the net. He recently told someone he doesn’t want a shed, give him a computer any day. And my son would run riot if we instituted a weekend moratorium on the internet. The internet provides him with contact with his friends without being on the phone constantly, as well as being the arena for his games, Eve and Starcraft II.
But I applaud Powers’ internet Sabbath principle, having visited it, backslidden, revisited, backslidden…

I believe it is vital that our social lives as family members and participants in communities are not neglected while we focus on our screens. Some time each week needs to be set aside for uninterrupted family time, even if it’s sitting down to dinner at the table with the TV off, or spending Sunday afternoon having a delicious lunch and playing a board game or watching a movie together. Preferably the board game or, even better, get out of the house away from the tempting distraction of the computers.

I agree with Powers one hundred per cent when he says we have to learn to control the technology and not let it control us. We need to disconnect from our gadgets to get the head-space we need on our own, so that we can then spend some genuine quality time with those who are important to us. To do that we need to be creative, and we need to install protective boundaries around ourselves just like we have fences around our homes and doors that shut and lock. Protective boundaries are different for different people, but important for sanity’s sake.