# PROBE 162

## December 2014

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## Editorial

2014 is almost at an end and time seems to flash past at a close to relativistic rate. Talking of "time" we went to see "Interstellar" recently. Interesting. Earth is finally about to become uninhabitable and a very few of her scientists are trying to find a new home for Mankind. Entertaining but rather too long. As Cedric said this is what can happen when the Director, Producer and Editor are the same people. Also somewhat convoluted and heavy on the emotions.



In this issue you will see that Gavin and I have both been looking into the earliest archives of SFSA and the beginnings of the club. Funny how little things have really changed in 45 years.

I happened to find an anthology of the best SF stories from 1949 and was again reminded of how little the basics concepts of SF have changed in 65 years. There was no mention of cell phones, personal computers or the World Wide Web, but many of the ideas still seem as fresh and new today as they must have been all those years ago.

I need to make an apology to Simon and Mary Scott. When I edited the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue of "PROBE" I thought I had contacted all the previous editors of "PROBE" and asked them to contribute. I now see that Simon was, in fact the very first editor of the magazine and that Mary took over for the next seven issues before handing over to Tex Cooper. Unfortunately we can't go back in time to correct my error but they are still members so if either of them would like to tell us about the early days I would be happy to share their reminiscences with you.

Earlier in the year Jean Pieters, from the publisher JonathanBall, asked us if we would be interested in hosting Raymond E. Feist who would be visiting South Africa. We jumped at the opportunity and on September the 24<sup>th</sup> we hosted Raymond E. Feist and Jean Pieters at a supper. We were easily able to fill the room at the restaurant and had unfortunately to disappoint a large number of people who would have liked to be there as well. Mr. Feist is a most entertaining speaker and a really down to earth person. See James Dryja's report for more details.

At our MiniCon in August we did our usual "Wormhole" For those who do not know; this consists of writing a 99 word story in around 45 minutes. You will find the results filling space in this issue of PROBE. The phrase to be used was "under the purple fog of a winter dawn." Read and enjoy.

# Nova 2013 Finalist General Section Silver by Morné Steenkamp

The night was colder the usual. There was a light breeze tugging at the rim of her coat. The breeze promised rain. The breeze lied. It would not rain, not so close to the corpse-fields. Not so close to the tower. An alarm sounded in the distance. Her eyes opened slowly. It was feeding time. She started gently forward as not to make too much noise. One never knew what was just over the next hill, or around the next corner. The alarm sounded again. It was closer, but still far off. Her mouth was salivating more than usual. She released a shuddering breath. It was so close that she could taste it. Just over this hill. She crawled slowly, taking care not to disturb the dead. Pale lifeless eyes stared up at her. Their skin was cold to the touch. Colder than the breeze that was still tugging at her hooded cloak. In the past she had made the mistake of moving too quickly. It had almost cost her, her life. Another shudder escaped her mouth as she reached the top. It was there as she knew it would be. She could see it, the glow of life. There were several bodies that still held that faint glow. She scanned her surroundings patiently. There was nothing. Only her and her meal. The time for stealth had ended and she rushed down the hill, carelessly stepping over the dead. At first she had felt "wrong" about it. As if she was disgracing their memory. Such thoughts flew out the window a long time ago. She had to hurry. Her body demanded sustenance and feeding time was only so long, before the harvesters returned.

The first body was in reach. She wrung her hands around its head and brought it closer. Dead eyes made contact with hers. It was still a little unsettling, even after so many months. It was not the corpse's eyes that frightened her. They were still human, in a sense. It was the reflection of her, own eyes. They were inhuman. Silver orbs glowing brightly, almost burning. They looked sinister. They looked evil. The thought made her laugh sadly. She was evil. She was an abomination. All it took was to look at the dead man's head in her hands to tell her that. She realised that she had been holding her breath and exhaled roughly. Such thoughts always triggered upon seeing her reflection staring back at her. They would trigger again and again. She closed her eyes and brought the man's head closer. She kissed him. The first

kiss was always the worst. The kiss of death. It made her feel dirty. It made her feel like the scavenger that she was. His lips still held some warmth. She could feel his energy flowing into her. Despite her disgust, it felt good. The craving grew stronger as the body grew colder. Their lips parted and she opened her eyes. The night looked brighter. The smell of rain was more intense. There were three more meals lying around. She could see them and taste them so clearly now. It always made her feel more alive. Crawling over the dead she moved to the next one. Her reflection was starting to bother her less. The second body belonged to a woman. She had been in her mid-thirties to forties. Around my age. The kiss of death did not discriminate against genders, races or age. She held up the woman's head and pressed her lips against hers. Her lips felt cold. She parted her lips and inhaled. The energy flowed into her. A sense of ecstasy rushed over her body. The lifeless head dropped onto the pile. She could hear the soft buzzing in the distance. She knew it was the tower; the resting place of the harvesters. She sat up and looked around. The darkness of night had left her. She could see clearly as if it was midday. She looked up, beyond the crater of corpses, at the city that stood beyond. Only a few skyscrapers peeked out. She could see the sky-trains zooming on their suspended tracks. She sighed sadly. That world was no longer hers. A second sigh escaped her lungs and she went back to feeding.

Her eyes opened the next morning and she squeezed them shut again. It was too bright for her. She crawled into the shade. After the third corpse she had lost her sense of being. She tried to open her eyes again. It was still bright, but did not burn. She looked around to see where her instincts had brought her. Her surroundings made her sigh. The tower stood far in the distance. Behind her was an old ruined building. Once it might have been a block of flats. It was nothing now, nothing but a brick skeleton. A large slab of cement spread out around her. Several patches of grass were growing through cracks. She spotted a small murder of crows lounging in the shade next to her. The birds did not dare enter the corpse fields. It had to do with the constant buzzing of the tower. The frequency could not be heard by normal human ears but it seemed to keep animals away, as if they could sense the "wrongness" of it. She looked around again. She had been here before. It was on the outskirts of the corpse fields. It was about four kilometres from where she had fed.

The border between the fields and the slums. It was a relatively safe area. If you stayed on the outside. Most people, like the animals, avoided the corpse fields. She would have avoided them, had circumstances been different. Yet, life was strange like that. They had become her sanctuary. They had become her feeding grounds. The birds were starting to realise her presence. One or two squawked aggressively at her. She laughed softly at them. The brown hooded cloak smelled of death. It was the reason they did not fly away immediately. They thought she might become food soon. She stood up and stretched. The crows shied away from her, waking others in the process. More angry squawks were aimed at her. She stomped her foot loudly against the cement and they jumped, landing a feet meters further away from her. "Stupid birds," she said under her breath. She frowned and her head shot around. Someone was coming. She had not heard the footsteps over the noisy crows. They heard it too and struggled to fly away. She cursed softly and looked around quickly. There was nowhere to hide and she could not run. It was too late. She sat on her haunches with her head down. From the outside she still looked human. The footsteps were growing closer. She could hear pieces of gravel grinding against each other clearly. It was as if she were holding some in her hand and squeezing them close to her ears. She squeezed her hands into fists. Her eyes were closed and she was biting down on her teeth. Goosebumps covered her body as the footsteps came to an abrupt stop.

She could smell the sour sweat clearly. She did not have to look to know that it was a man, and he had seen her. To him, she would look nothing more than a homeless vagrant. His soft footsteps told her that he was either short or young. A boy perhaps? His voice confirmed it. "Sorry to disturb. I di'n know I'd find some'n 'ere." A slum boy it seemed. She released her breath slowly. It was a relief of sorts. A slum boy was better than a slum thug. "Leave me be kid. You would not want to get my stench on you." He took a few steps closer. "Stay away!" she screeched. He stopped, reluctantly, but he did stop. "I'm sorry. You have a pretty voice." There was a brief moment of silence before he spoke again. "What you doin' out 'ere, all alone?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;I could ask you the same thing."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Me? I'm treasha huntin'!"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Treasure hunting?"

"Aye!"

"Stealing from the dead?"

"They ain't usin' it. A man's go'a ma'e a livin', an' besides, any hell tha' 'waits me is probably be'er than this hell anyways!" At first she had thought that the boy was a little lacking in intelligence, but that comment almost made her laugh. Almost. It made her feel a tiny bit better about herself. She was forced to steal from the dead. Her shirt, her jeans and her brown hooded cloak and even her sustenance, they all came from the corpse-fields. They were all stolen from the dead. "Found this here pocket watch just the othe' day!" He paused. She knew he was holding it up for her to look at. When she failed to move there was a shuffling sound as he returned the watch to his pocket. "Used to hunt in the abandoned buildings and such. But all 'em treashas are gone. Got mi name from it though. Roach they call me. 'Cause I'm small and can go where the bigger men can't. Aint got no other name. Dad left, mi mom died. It ain't so bad. Most folks are decent in the slums. An' those that aren't, stay away mostly to avoid any trouble." He paused again to take a breath or two. It felt strange to hear words spoken by someone else. The name Roach amused her a little. She was surprised to find a small smile on her face. It turned into a frown when she heard him ask for her name. She had not used her name for such a long time. She could hardly remember it. "Anna," she heard herself say. It sounded right. "A pretty name for a pretty voice. Pleased to meet you, Anna." She hardly heard him. The name held many memories. Memories she thought she had lost. Memories she wished she had lost.

She had had a husband once. His face was a blur and his name was forgotten. He might have had light brown hair with a touch of grey in it. A goatee, mostly grey and he wore glasses. He must have worn glasses. Together they had lived in the upper reaches. High above the filth and stench that was the slums. He would take the sky-train to work. She would stay home with the child. Child? No, there was no child. Not yet. The thought stuck in her mind. It made her feel sad for some reason. She remembered cleaning and wiping away dust from their dark marble kitchen top. She could see her face in the reflection. She was pretty, border lining on beautiful. She had aged well. Her hair was dyed blonde and her eyes were a dark and deep brown. She was smiling in the memory. Was I happy? Perhaps she was, but she had come

to realise that any state of mind was an empty illusion. People were never truly happy. They always wanted more. She wanted more. As her memory turned she saw herself in the mirror. She was dressed in a lovely white silk gown with a pearl necklace to match. Her diamond earrings sparkled in the lamplight. They were going to a function of sorts. All the top people were going to be there. Her husband was nominated for an award. She could not remember what the award was for. She could not remember what he did. She turned as he opened the door. "Anna, are you ready?"

"Anna, are you listenin' to me?" A shudder ran through her. She could smell the boy had wandered closer. "What was that?" she asked harshly. It sounded rude to her. She took a deep breath. She was feeling irritable. "Sorry. I was lost in thought." The boy shrugged. She could see his shadow on the ground in front of her. The sun was rising quickly. "I said, I'm gonna go a huntin' now." There was a faint feeling beneath the surface of her mind. Could that be disappointment? She inhaled slowly. "May your search be fruitful." Roach did not say anything. She could see him still standing near her. Anna exhaled just as slowly. "May you find lots and lots of treasure!" He gave her a cocky laugh. "Thank ya kindly mam! Maybe see you later?" She did not reply and after a few moments the shadow moved away. Anna waited for the footsteps to recede before she looked up. He did not go far, but far enough as to not be able to see her clearly. Roach's back was turned to her. He was indeed short. His coat was much too big for him. Anna caught herself smiling at him. She looked at her surroundings. It was not a very good hiding spot. The smile turned into another sigh. There were places within the corpse-fields that were over shadowed by the high-rise buildings far above it. She would go there and wait. The crows were slowly returning. One by one they landed near her. Anna was gone by the time the final few crows reached the ground.

She watched the harvesters from her small sanctuary. Anna had used this place before. It was an old abandoned apartment building. Only the ground and first floor had survived. All the valuables had been stolen long before she knew of its existence. She could see the harvesting-fields clearly. The hulking behemoths moved slowly over the landscape of bodies. It was dark, but she could make out their silhouettes. The size of the harvesters had fooled most people in to thinking they

were slow and cumbersome creatures. It had certainly fooled her. It had nearly cost her, her life. They were predators, like her. They were unnaturally agile for their size and tenacious once they began the hunt. The memory still left her with chills. From observing them she had come to realise that there were two types of harvesters. Both looked identical, yet the second type did not seem to feed as much. Their only job was to move new corpses around. At first she had thought they were collecting them for something else, perhaps for the making of new harvesters. After following the culprit however she had noticed that it had simply moved a few bodies where the pile had started getting too high, to another location with smaller piles. After her eyes had been opened she could clearly see other "mover" harvesters trudging through the fields. The "movers" did not hunt. She had dared venturing close to a few of them. Each one had seen her and sniffed at her from a few meters away, yet after that they ignored her completely. It fascinated her how such creatures could live below the utopia that was above. A utopia built on the dead. As a denizen from that world, she had also been oblivious to what truly happened down below. Everyone knew the city ran on the energy of the dead. A single body could power an entire city block for over a year. At least so the adverts and posters had said. Of course they did not say where the bodies came from. Most people believed that they came from the slums. Anna had learned since that it could not be so. Most of the dead were finely dressed. They had to have fallen from above. The system had been active for over a century of course. That alone was enough time to gather such a vast collection. In the months that she had been down there, only a few new bodies had joined the collection. New bodies were easy to see. They looked like shooting stars falling all the way to the ground. She had not had a chance to feed on fresh bodies herself. The harvesters were all over them in minutes. They were just like flies. She sighed. Anna would have to wait another week she knew. Feeding time came only once a week. When the harvesters were called in to hand over all the energy they had gathered. The tower would relay this energy to the city, and their false utopia would live on. She closed her eyes and went to sleep.

Despite her reluctance to be seen, Anna found herself waiting on the outskirts the next morning. She felt like a fool. Yet a part of her yearned for human contact. Yearned for someone to talk to, or perhaps simply for a chance to listen and hear

real words spoken by other people. The chances were that the boy would not return, or if he did, it would only be after he ran out of valuables to trade. The crows were there again to keep her company. Their noisy squawks could hardly be called talking though. After waiting half the day she finally decided to give up. The sun was far beyond its zenith and darkness was not far off. He would not come. Part of her wished that she had not met him. Anna had come to realise that shattered hope was a lot more painful than no hope at all. She could feel that her mind wanted to cry, but her body would not let her. It made her laugh softly.

The boy did not return the next day or the day after. The urge to cry was gradually growing stronger and the laughter was growing weaker. Anna gave herself two more days of foolishness before abandoning all hope. On the fourth day as the sun was going down and Anna stood up she caught a noise coming from a nearby alleyway. It came again. Someone was making an awful lot of ruckus. She could hear old trashcans getting knocked over. Curiosity took over and she stalked closer to the ruined buildings. There was laughter echoing against the broken walls. She could also hear grunting and swearing, followed by more laughter. They were all men. At least she could not hear any women. There were three maybe four. Anna peered slowly around the corner. She had been right. There were three men standing in a semicircle. They looked young. The oldest must have been in his late twenties. They were standing much further down the alleyway. More than twenty meters away. Their backs were partially turned to her. She could not see why they were laughing. The middle one kicked at something and she heard a grunt. They are beating someone up! She took a step forward and stopped herself. It had nothing to do with her. The thought made her tighten her fists. Fingernails were digging into her palms. She was no longer human. Human problems should not concern her. She inhaled slowly and started to turn. It is not my concern. No matter how many times she repeated it, the words seemed false and half-hearted. She heard the impact and another grunt of pain. Anna closed her eyes tightly with her back turned to the thugs and exhaled slowly. Before she knew it she was marching down the alley way towards them. "Hey!" The laughter stopped as they turned towards the newcomer. Her hood was hanging over her eyes. To them she looked like just another woman. One of the thugs burst out laughing. "A woman!?" the others joined in with laughter. The victim was pushing himself up to get a look. "Run Anna, I'll be fine!" The shaky voice made her angry. Three grown thugs against a boy! There were times like those where she felt glad to no longer be human. The harvesters might be monsters in their own rights, but they would never attack their own. Humans were the true monsters, harming others simply for the sake of a few laughs. She could feel her fingernails digging deep into her palms. Her knuckles were starting to hurt. "Anna? So you know this woman, punk?" The thug snorted. "I'll make you a deal, Anna! You have a nice voice and you seem to have a pretty face. How about we trade the kid, let's say, for you instead?" She was finding it hard not to rush in and kill them all. Her body was certainly stronger than theirs. Anna forced herself to smile. They could see her nose and mouth. She was beautiful despite the lack of hair, and she looked young. Feeding had that effect she had come to realise. Her face had become youthful, as if she was no older than eighteen or twenty. "Very well. Let the boy go and I am all yours." Roach was arguing or trying to, at least, but the deal had been made. The thugs were chuckling to themselves. She could hear the lust in their nervous laughter. All men were the same. They talked big in front of their friends, but when their boasts became reality the nervousness kicked in. Anna walked towards them. The coat hid much of her femininity, but she tried to sway a little more than usual. She stopped about a meter away from the nearest thug. Her eyes were still hidden. "Run along kid, you are free to go." She could hear him crying and snorting. "No, I ain't gonna leave you to these three!" The thug standing to her right laughed loudly. "The little perv wants to watch!" Anna inhaled softly. She walked closer to the middle one. He seemed to be the leader of the gang. He was only a little taller than her, but she had always been a tall woman. The thug was still laughing nervously. Anna grabbed the back of his head and kissed him. The warmth of his lips felt good as it pressed against hers. It made her hungry. The man did not struggle as her tongue gently parted his lips, and then it was too late. She could hear the other two howling their approval. She opened her eyes and stared into the fearful eyes of the thug. He tried to pull away but she was stronger. Her grip was fastened around his head and held him still. His friends were still laughing, not knowing that their leader was dying right in front of their eyes. Memories flooded into her as she fed.

It was a cold night. They were walking down the street. Her husband had given her his jacket. It was warm. At first she had refused to take it, but he insisted and after the fifth insist, Anna finally gave in. He looked so handsome in his buttoned up shirt and tie. He was carrying the trophy; "Best New Innovative Mind". Several of his ideas had greatly improved the output of the harvesters. Anna hardly understood her husband's work, and he hardly spoke about it. Most of it was official government business, which meant he could be tried and imprisoned for leaking any of it. It was not far to walk. The sky-train stopped only two blocks away. The streets were mostly abandoned so late at night. She looked at him and his trophy. He looked so proud, it made her smile. Then they were there. She did not know where they had come from. They wanted her necklace. It had been in her family for generations. Her mother had given her that necklace. She refused. The man tried to grab it. She stepped back and he missed. Her husband's trophy hit one of them against the head. He grunted in pain but did not go down. Another one back handed her husband. He fell to the floor. There was knife suddenly in the first one's hand. She felt the pain before she saw the wound. She touched it. It felt warm. It felt wet. She looked at her hands. They shone red in the streetlamp lights. They were gone and the necklace with them. Her body collapsed next to that of her husband's.

When she awoke she was at home. Her husband was lying next to her. His face was pale. She leaned over him and touched his cheek. He was cold. He was dead. She fell backwards. Her hands were shaking. She felt at the wound. It was gone. She was naked. Her bloodied clothes lay in a bundle in the corner. From her surroundings, she knew that she was in their basement. She had hardly ever gone down there. It was where her husband worked. It was where he used to work. The thought made her cry as she looked at his lifeless body. The tears would not come. She only managed a few sad sniffs. They basement had drastically changed since her last visit. There were rough drawings and formulae pinned all around. She had never been the scientist, but it was clear what her husband had been working on. "Eternal life." Anna found herself staring in a mirror. Her eyes glowed a bright silver colour. She looked young. Half her years had slipped away, and she felt strong. Stronger than she had ever felt. She could see things more clearly. She could hear more clearly, and her nose was filled with hundreds of unknown scents. It was

unreal. It was madness. Had she killed her husband? Or he had killed himself to save her? Without thinking she ran. She ran all night. She had to get away.

The eyes of the thug leader had turned dull and lifeless. The other two thugs were still hooting and laughing. Anna released the corpse. The limp body fell to the ground. They were still make noises of approval. She inhaled loudly as their minds realised what had happened and their laughter grew soft. It grew nervous. She could smell their fear. She could hear their hearts racing. The kiss of death had taken no longer than a few seconds. Roach was still there. She could see him clearly. He could see her clearly. There was fear in his eyes. Her lips curled at the edges and she smiled at him. The thug on the right was swearing noisily now. She could hardly hear him over their loud heartbeats. She heard him pull a knife. She felt the air rippling as he stabbed at her. Her body moved instinctively. Her hand grabbed his wrist and twisted. The thug bared his teeth as she twisted even harder. He was in pain. A wide smile appeared on her face. She twisted and twisted. Anna could hear his bones creaking under the heavy strain. She did not stop. A loud snap echoed of the ruined walls. The man screamed. She looked at him. She knew him. "I know you." The thug was breathing heavily. After seeing what was happening to his friend, the last thug had given up on any sort of attack and had bolted. Anna did not mind. She would deal with him soon enough. The thug still in her clutches was looking at her. His eyes were wild. He gave her a good long look and then shook his head. "Look lady! I don't know you!" No, but I know you. She dropped his wrist which fell loosely to his side and grabbed him by the throat. Anna slammed his head into the exposed brick wall behind him. He gritted his teeth again. She pushed her face close to his eyes. "Look very closely." His lips were quivering violently, but he looked. He shook his head. She could see tears forming in his eyes. "I don't know you!" He started crying. Anna frowned. She released him and sighed. She did know him, but he was not the one who had stabbed her that night. He had simply been with the other two. A younger brother perhaps. She sighed again. Her murderer had escaped. Instinct took over as she ran down the alleyway. The last thug could not have gotten far. He had run towards the corpse-fields. It did not take very long for her to spot him. He was shining like a beacon among the dead. Anna walked over to where he was lying. She almost laughed. The fool had tried to pretend to be a

corpse. She grabbed him by the leg and pulled him out screaming. She dragged him to where the crows were still waiting. Some flew away but landed on top of the broken walls. Anna jumped onto him and pushed him down. The thug was struggling, but it was all for naught. He felt weak in her hands. "Look at me." He kept struggling with his eyes closed. "Look at me!" She shook his head violently and his eyes opened. "About a year ago, you killed me. Do you remember?" He tried to speak, but when words failed to come out he shook his head. Anna could smell the stench of urine. She could not believe that such a pathetic creature had killed her. "Where is my pearl necklace?" There was a hint of recognition in his eyes. He did know her. "Where is my pearl necklace!?" She shook him and shook him again and again until he began to cough. The sight of him disgusted her. Anna let go of him and got off of him. His coughing fit stopped after a while. He stood up. His pants were still wet. His eyes lifted and found her starting. "I sold it." He paused to swallow. She could see him struggle. It took some time before he managed to swallow. "You won't find it. Probably been broken down, sold as separate pearl rings or pendants, maybe earrings." His eyes left her gaze for a moment as the thug looked at his feet. He seemed to notice only then that he had peed himself. He looked up again. "What now? You are going to kill me too?" Up to that point she would have. Yet the rush of feeding was leaving her. Her predatory nature was leaving with it. Her humanity was scratching at the surface, trying to return. She did not reply. She just left him there to rot in his own piss. She felt sad. The boy had seen her. He would stay away. The realisation made her sadder. Her heart was aching. She wanted to die. Yet she could not. She knew she could not. She had tried many times before. Each time she would awaken, far away from where she had been. Her body would not let her die. She was alone. She was immortal. She was cursed.

Anna found herself returning each day despite her logic. Each day was the same. The crows were there and the boy did not come. The stench of urine still marked the ground where she had pinned the thug. Slowly it began to fade as feeding days came and went. A month passed, then two. Still she returned and still she waited. Until a day came when nearly a year had passed. She could smell him before she heard his approach. She knew his smell. It was the same as the day she had first met him. Anna slowly rose and walked around the corner. He was there, standing in

the open. He had grown much taller since that day. She was wearing her hood but her face was uncovered. Her silver eyes found his. Roach held out his hand. In it was a necklace of pearls. She recognised them. They were her pearls. The clasp was different, but the pearls were the same size and arranged in the same way. The pearls started small on both sides, growing larger towards the middle. "It took time to track 'em down, but I believe they belong to you?" Anna felt like crying. She hesitated before moving closer. The young man did not seem frightened. He was smiling. They were her pearls. She hardly cared. She took one step closer and then found herself embracing him. Her curse had ended. She had found a replacement. He hesitated for a second but then returned the hug. Anna could feel wetness on her cheeks. She squeezed a bit harder and burst out into tears of joy. "Thank you," she managed before the tears flowed anew.

#### Wormhole 1

### **Bob's Morning**

The alarm goes off at 5 a.m. It's time to get up. He lets the dogs out, brushes his teeth and drinks his coffee. Rushes out to catch the bus, failing to notice that he is under the purple fog of a winter dawn.

The bus driver looks at him strangely. "Excessive party?" Surprised he nods and sits. Looking out of the window he notices the purple haze and then sees his purple reflection. What's happened. "Am I dreaming?"

The creature wondered why his friendly tactile effort at communication had failed.

"Time to bring out the big guns – Purple rain.

Andrew, Eileen and Gail Jamieson. Natchar Pimdee. Steve Tatham

## Rosetta mission lander detects organic molecules on surface of comet

Philae spacecraft worked for more than 60 hours on the comet, which is more than 500m miles from Earth, before hibernating

The Philae lander has found organic molecules – which are essential for life – on the surface of the comet where it touched down last week.

The spacecraft managed to beam back evidence of the carbon and hydrogen—containing chemicals shortly before it entered hibernation mode to conserve falling power supplies. Although scientists are still to reveal what kinds of molecules have been found on comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, the discovery could provide new clues about how the early chemical ingredients that led to life on Earth arrived on the planet.

Many scientists believe they may have been carried here on an asteroid or comet that collided with the Earth during its early history. The DLR German Aerospace Centre, which built the Cosac instrument, confirmed it had found organic molecules. It said in a statement: "Cosac was able to 'sniff' the atmosphere and detect the first organic molecules after landing. The compounds were picked up by the instrument, which is designed to "sniff" the comet's thin atmosphere. It is believed that attempts to analyse soil drilled from the comet's surface with Cosac were not successful. Philae was able to work for more than 60 hours on the comet, which is more than 500m miles from Earth, before entering hibernation. Goesmann said his team were still trying to interpret the results, which will hopefully reveal whether the molecules contain other chemical elements deemed important for life.

Professor John Zarnecki, a space scientist at the Open University who was the deputy principal investigator on another of Philae's instruments, described the discovery as "fascinating"." There has long been indirect evidence of organic molecules on comets as carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atoms have been found in comet dust," he said. "It has not been possible to see if these are forming complex compounds before and if this is what has been found then it is a tremendous discovery."

Philae landed on comet 67P/Churyumov—Gerasimenko after a 10-year journey through space aboard the Rosetta space probe. Philae's initial attempt to touch down on the comet's surface were unsuccessful when it failed to anchor itself properly, causing it to bounce back into space twice before finally coming to rest.

It meant the lander's final resting place was about half a mile from the initial landing site and left Philae lying at an angle and its solar panels partially obscured. In a desperate attempt to get as much science from the lander as possible before its meagre battery reserves ran out, scientists deployed a drill to bore down into the comet surface.

It is thought, however, that the drilling was unsuccessful and it failed to make contact with the comet. But other findings from instruments on the lander, which were beamed back shortly before it powered down into a hibernation mode, suggest that the comet is largely composed of water ice that is covered in a thin layer of dust.

"It's within a very broad spectrum of ice models. It was harder than expected at that location, but it's still within bounds," said Professor Mark McCaughrean, senior science adviser to Esa. "You can't rule out rock, but if you look at the global story, we know the overall density of the comet is 0.4g/cubic cm. There's no way the thing's made of rock."

At Philae's final landing spot, the Mupus probe recorded a temperature of -153°C before it was deployed and then once it was deployed the sensors cooled further by 10°C within half an hour.

"If we compare the data with laboratory measurements, we think that the probe encountered a hard surface with strength comparable to that of solid ice," said Tilman Spohn, principal investigator for Mupus. Scientists hope that as comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko moves closer to the sun in the next few months, some light will start to reach Philae's solar panels again, giving it enough power to come out of hibernation.

This could allow further analysis to take place on the surface.

"Until then we are going to have to make do with the data we have got," said Zarnecki

### **History of SFFSA**

### **Gavin Kreuiter**

This information is extracted from the documentation that is in the library.

Club Name

Two options for the name of the club were proposed at the inaugural meeting held at the home of Tex Cooper on 6 June 1969:

- 1. SFSA (Rick Johnson)
- 2. Sci-Fi SA (Simon Scott)

The first newsletter (minutes of the inaugural meeting) was titled "South African SF Fan Club".

At the second meeting, voting was inconclusive (11 votes each).

At the first AGM (3 October 1969), held at the home of Simon Scott, the name S.F.S.A. was adopted by 18 votes to 11.

Mark Floyd wrote (2nd Newsletter):

"Regarding the suggested names, I feel than neither of the two titles are fully representative as today's trend is most certainly veering towards the 'light fantastical'. SFSA is concise, but maybe too concise. It is likely that I am among the youngest of the Club, but as time passes there will be more emphasis on the fantastic aspect of SF.

The words 'Science Fiction' and their abbreviation 'Sci-Fi' are reminiscent of little green men and H.G. Wells' school of thought. Besides, man has reached the Moon, so space travel no longer holds the mystery of 10 years ago. We are in a progressive age – so why not be progressive?

It is my contention that the word 'Fantasy' should be incorporated in the title of the club formed along modern lines. Furthermore, the trend in reading habits favours not only the hypothetical, but the unknown."

Nicholas Shears responded in the 2nd newsletter:

"I must disagree with Mark Floyd about the name of the club. I do not see why the word 'Fantasy' should be used. Fantasy is now hopelessly combined with S.F. The latter is used more than the former in the majority of works and should be the focal point of the title. To use both would cause a very clumsy and unwieldy title. As for saying that 'Fantasy' is being progressive, science, and not fantasy, will be the

foundation of future generations, and to say that S.F. writers do not contribute to this or predict future world events would be to defy proven facts."

Newsletter 4 (Bernie Ackerman):

"I would also like to drop the Fan from the name and rather than use 'Club' would like to see 'Society'. To me Fantasy is even more reminiscent of little green men and BEM. What about S.A.S.F.S/A. South African Speculative Fiction Society or Association?"

Emblem

Competition with 5 possibilities announced in Newsletter No 5. Winning Emblem printed on cover of Newsletter Vol. 1. No. 6 was designed by Kevin MacDonnell.

Probe

"Name the Newsletter Competition" announced on Newsletter Vol. 1 No 6 (April 1970).

28 alternatives announced in Vol 1.No 7.

First time Probe appeared on the cover of Vol. 1 No. 8. (June/July 1970), when the results were announced (19 votes for Probe, 17 for Nucleus, 12 for War of the Words). It's unclear but probable that the name was suggested by Niels, because he was awarded a year's membership as a prize. Tex's sense of humour confuses the issue because he mentioned, almost certainly tongue-in-cheek, that Niels had proposed "Nucleus" – probably Tex's personal choice.

**Short Story Competition** 

Proposed at the 1st AGM.

In the 1969 Short Story competition sponsored by N3F, Tex Cooper was one of ten finalists (out of 47 entries) with "For Your Penance...". This was also the first story published by SFSA, appearing in Newsletter No. 5 (Jan/Feb 1970).

Probe Vol. 1 No 8 mentions the rules for N3F's short story competition.

Library

Initiated at 1st AGM. First (acting) Librarian: Tex Cooper. 20 books and "a few fanzines".

Year Date Description

1969 1969-06-06 Inaugural Meeting

1969 1969-06-06 Rick Johnson proposed name of Club: "SFSA"

1969 1969-10-03 Inaugural AGM

1969 1969-10-03 S.F.S.A. adopted as name of Club

1969 1969-10-03 Library created (20 books and a few fanzines) hosted by Tex Cooper.

1969 1969-10-03 Savings Account opened at Sunnyside branch of SA Permanent

Building Society. Subs: R63.75, Expenses R22.70, Balance R41.05

1970 1970-01-01 Joined N3F

## RAYMOND E FEIST – OUR GUEST AT DINNER James Dryja



What is it about SF writers? There's none of the jaded arrogance, the overexaggerated sense of self-importance, and conceit so often associated with celebrities!

At a packed dinner hosted by SFFSA on the 24th of September – appropriately, on Heritage Day which celebrates culture, and we know which cultural genre ours is! – renowned, popular and successful Fantasy writer Raymond E Feist told us of the warmth he experienced from everyone he encountered during his visit to South Africa. Well, the feeling, as they say, is mutual: Mr Feist was himself warm and genial, in a friendly chat about himself, his work, and writing in general, in his post-dinner talk at Cesco's in Kelvin, Johannesburg.

He confirmed what we all suspected: that SFF writers encounter negative publishers, and experience an anti-SF bias through the media. But soldier on they must: he confided that he had been a writer of humorous short stories, but after losing his full-time job, was challenged to do a serious novel. The challenge was by a publisher, who, on condition that Feist worked on it for 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, would cover his rent and food! And publish! (Nice arrangement if you can get it!)

Of course the end result was the seminal "Magician", and now 32 years later he still gets detailed questions from youngsters, and has to keep his memory brushed-up on the finer details! And yes! He has considered making it into a movie but, he would need full control on the script to prevent Hollywood-style commercialization. Feist gave us interesting insight into movie casting: each actor has different interpretations of the role, therefore, as all parts must work together, different actors' emotions must be taken into account to determine who is best to act with whom, so as to find the right mix.

And then "Daughter of the Empire" became a 3 book trilogy – "Servant of the Empire" and "Mistress of the Empire" following on, with the helpful collaboration of assistant Jenny Wurts collaborating with some of "Empire's" background. A true writer, the words – and books – just followed where a single book was intended. (Even with "Magician" he had not known where it was going – the story wrote itself,

and he had written the epilogue of "Magician's End" – recently published - before he had written any other fantasies!)

Feist also let us have a glimpse of a future story: elder gods return to Earth, result: 90% mankind dead, the rest tied into slavery and forced worship. He shared with us his feelings on ten thousand years of religious worship on Earth – clearly unimpressed, as many are, with the results!

Answering many questions, he also told us "how to write": "Put butt onto chair, fingers onto keyboard, and keep writing until it's good enough to go to market!" But then he added this rider: "I tell all writers not to write, but they never listen!" Well, what can we say? Except thank goodness he didn't listen when he was told to "get a decent job"!

A selection of his books was available to purchase, there was a never-ending booksigning queue, and there were selfies galore. And he ended on this note:

WE SHOULD BRING MORE SCIENCE-FICTION FANTASY WRITERS TO VISIT US!



# Nova 2013 Finalist General Section The Last War by Julia Louw

'No, I don't have The Times, we're sold out. By God, they give me the creeps,' said my father.

The second sentence was aimed at me and said beneath his breath. The first sentence was addressed to the angel who had just left our shop, and who had almost certainly heard the second sentence, for he looked back over his shoulder as he opened the door, and met my eyes impassively. It, the door, had been locked. That was the part that gave my father the creeps.

I was ashamed of myself: I recognised the angel, and he recognised me. We had never spoken, but I had seen him in the company of my angel once. He had smiled at me. I wished I could go after him and apologise. But that would have upset my father, not to mention all the questions that would follow - and not necessarily just from him. One had to be careful these days. So I kept my eyes lowered and went on cashing up.

It was hard for me to know where to stand, or even how; there were no role models for budding ideologues in this unassuming part of the world. We lived in the most secular province of a country that had a long history of minding its own business. When I was old enough to wonder, I had asked my angel once or twice why he had chosen this as his landing when he forded the unknowable strait between his realm and ours. He changed the subject. At that stage, it was the closest he could come to a lie.

They had been here for two years now, in force and publicly; much longer than that in secret, and as visitors, singly or in groups, since forever. No one knew anymore

how many there were. In the beginning, in the dust of the first influx, it seemed important to keep records. There had been registration drives in several jurisdictions. But the task was near impossible: the angels had no fingerprints, let alone fixed abodes, and many of the first arrivals had not even decided on names by the time the second wave arrived. Finally, the effort was abandoned. It was easy to identify them anyway, if not to count them: they were very beautiful, and they glowed in the dark.

It was me who named my angel. He had become agitated when I first suggested he take a name for himself, although he acknowledged the practicality of it.

'I like yours, can't I just use that?' he said.

'No,' I said. 'Mine is a girl's name. You need a boy's name, a man's. Don't you?' 'I suppose so,' he said.

After the first influx, their population was initially concentrated in the Middle East, where many had crossed into our world. The choice to enter into our realm in Israel or Jordan or Palestine was in no way indicative of any religious bias, the angels assured humankind; they merely aimed for the places they thought the locals would be most likely to take it in their stride. This logic had backfired spectacularly: several political factions in the region simultaneously suggested that the newcomers were a holy army sent to deliver their people from the neighbouring ones.

'An army?' the angels' spokesperson spluttered into Al Jazeera's microphones. 'Quite the opposite. We are refugees.'

'Why don't you have wings?' demanded a celebrated blogger who had managed to get inside the chevron tape at the Wailing Wall.

'I am a civilian,' said the angel, blinking delicately, before he was hushed by a rabbi.

During the second influx, ten months hence, a large number of angels chose to arrive in our world at the Vatican, where their advent was greeted with a baffled admixture of bureaucracy and awe. The explanation they offered for their presence was the same: they sought asylum.

'Where is this conflict?' asked CNN's vulpine senior war correspondent, who had flown into Italy by Learjet.

'It has not yet started,' came the answer.

No one knew exactly when it would begin, it emerged – nor indeed if it would ever end, but that it was imminent, was, by all accounts, beyond question.

Who would start the war? Who would fight it? Were they still letting souls into Heaven? Did our fate hang in the balance? How could a perfect and omnipotent being create an imperfect world? The media thrust forward their boom micks. The angels had no comment.

Eventually, the news frenzy died down, and with it, the pressure on the authorities to be seen to be taking control of the situation. The truth, practically speaking, was that the angels did not take much accommodating. They were naturally nomadic, and soon began to disperse of their own accord. Wherever they did settle for a time, they were no burden – quite the contrary. They did not need housing. They disliked being indoors, were never cold, and no matter how many of them there were, they did not seem to take up much space. They did not require nourishment, although they loved our food, and could put away vast amounts of it when offered. They loved sweet things particularly. The first thing I ever brought my angel from our shop was an angel-food cake, and though I had been sure he would laugh at me, or perhaps be offended, he delighted me by wolfing it down.

They sought no power, no privilege, no rights; and though they were charming to their hosts on daytime talk shows, very few of them troubled the world stage in an individual capacity for any length of time. Anonymity was a deeply ingrained habit; second nature.

And so we all acclimatised, and there was little to complain of. How could anyone resent a people so self-effacing, so lovely to behold, so noble in reason, so infinite in faculty, in form and moving so express and admirable? They were excellent at mathematics, they played exquisite music, and every one of them spoke every single

human language fluently, including the dead languages. Although they were very hazy on metaphysics, they were able to clear up many points of scholarship that had long vexed human consciousness. They shared all of their skills and learning readily, making little of their contribution, much as a good house guest might insist on washing the dishes. Many of them eventually took up informal work, and never requested compensation.

That was where the trouble began.

'It's because they think you're doing people out of jobs,' I told my angel when the first protest march made the six o' clock news in my country.

'That's not the real reason,' he said softly.

I had invited him into the house, knowing my father would not be back for a couple of hours yet. The angel had declined my invitation to sit, but now he sank to his haunches as if exhausted, and folded his hands over his mouth. I walked over to him and came to a halt before his bowed head, unsure of my own intentions. How does one comfort a celestial being?

'Don't worry,' I said at last. 'They'll forgive you as soon as they figure out you can't make anything new.'

He looked up at me and smiled. It was a sad smile.

My angel had only ever created one new thing (that I knew about, at least): a limerick. Of the poem itself he had seemed very proud, of having tried to compose one in the first place, furtively ashamed. I have it still, but I shan't repeat it here out of respect for his wishes.

I encouraged him; taught him the basic construction, and did my best to explain to him how to make it funny in human terms. Even so, it took him most of a week, and it was only possible for him to do it at all because he had already been among humans for several years by then. By the time the others began to arrive in force, my angel had already started losing his glow.

I knew this – that angels become more like humans the longer they spend among us – long before most people. I knew this and many other things about them, because my angel and I had become close friends long before the world at large even knew they existed.

I had met him when I was a girl of seven, one night when I had fled my house in tears. My father is not a bad man, but he was my only parent all my life, and I his only child, and it wasn't always easy between us. We had had a row, and I had resolved to run down the road to our shop and hide in the store-room until my father was worried about me and suitably regretful of his harsh words.

As I passed the big camphor tree in our garden, the angel stepped quite naturally out of its shadow, and I ran straight into him. Once I got over the shock, I did not fear him at all. It was true that he was tall, strong, unusually shiny, and unignorably naked, but he seemed almost as bemused by these things as I was. He was similarly thrown by the tree, the grass, the pleasant spring night, and most of all myself – at least initially, when I collided with him at full tilt in my headlong moonlit sprint from the kitchen door. Once he recovered from this surprise and looked me full in the face, his expression immediately changed to one of uncomplicated trust. I asked him who he was.

'I am an angel,' he answered.

I nodded. That made sense. Had I not said my bedtime prayers assiduously since I was four? And, somewhere in the litany of more urgent petitions (for the power of flight, for my school to be engulfed in flames, for my father to buy me a Bengal tiger, et cetera) had I not always put in for the protection of a guardian angel? None of the other requests had been granted; it seemed only fair that this one should be. My reaction was something akin to the modest joy of receiving the Christmas present one really needs rather than the one one wants.

'Come on, then,' I said. 'We're going to hide from my father in the store-room.' We did. I had forgotten to steal his keys, but this proved not to be a problem.

The angel did not stay in our city for long, that time, but he would come and visit me often over the months and years that followed, and tell me about his travels. Sometimes he would be around for a few weeks; sometimes he could stay no more than the length of a walk along the river. Although he never specifically asked me to keep these meetings a secret, I did so of my own accord. I knew that if I spoke of him I would either be made fun of for believing in nonsense, or made to answer questions until I was obliged to lie.

As I grew, however, I naturally began to ask more questions of my own.

'Why is it that other people don't notice you?' I asked him once. We were out by the river, and a well-to-do lady had passed us, sparing me a smile and him hardly a glance. This had happened before. It made no sense to me: though he now wore clothes, he was still clearly not a human being.

'They do notice,' he said. 'But then they forget again very quickly. Even you would forget if I didn't come and visit you often.'

'Why do you come and visit me?' I returned. It was another question I'd been wanting to ask for a while. 'And I wouldn't forget you,' I added as an indignant afterthought.

He didn't answer. I was accustomed to this habit and didn't press him, for fear I would annoy him.

At some point in our acquaintance, I dared to ask him if there were other human beings who knew angels. Not as dreams or visions, but as people, the way I knew him. I half-expected another silence, but this time, he seemed to feel the moment was right to open my eyes a little further.

'There have always been messengers,' he said. 'But there are only a few of us here in this form, for now.'

'For now?'

'Soon there will be more.'

Indeed, as the years passed, he talked more and more often of other angels in his acquaintance who had come to dwell in the world. It seemed I was now ready, in his estimation, to be privy to this kind of news, and I learned more and more about his kind from his stories. On one occasion, I even met some of his companions. They

were very friendly to me, though when they spoke together their faces were grave. I didn't understand their words.

'What were you talking about?' I asked my angel when the others had left us.

'We were speaking of the war,' said the angel.

He looked uncomfortable; I had an instinct that he was unsure what to share with me. I pressed my advantage 'Which war?'

'The one that is coming.'

Shortly after this, with no notice or explanation, he left again, and I didn't see him for an entire year thereafter. And though I had never imagined it was possible, he was right: I did begin to forget him. It was not that I no longer believed in him; I simply forgot him, much as I had forgotten the names and faces of some of the children who had been in my kindergarten class with me.

He returned at last on my twelfth birthday, giving no more warning than he had left me with. It was, in fact, in the middle of my birthday party. I had gone up to the top room of our house – the one that had been my mother's sewing room, and was now used for bric-a-brac – to look for the pool lilo, and I found him standing there on the balcony beyond the sash window. I had to look at him two or three times before I actually saw him. Then the truth of him arrived me in a rush of gladness and guilt, and I went out to greet him.

'You look very grown up,' he said, smiling down at me in my yellow party dress and dangly earrings.

The smile was strange, the words reserved.

'How have you been?' I said. My face felt hot beneath the blusher I had insisted on wearing. I wished I had dressed myself as he had always known me.

'I have been busy,' the angel answered.

'Can you stay for a while?' I asked. 'I'm having a party, but I can meet you somewhere after.'

'I can't,' he said. 'I'm sorry.' His smile faded and the strange look returned.

He had brought me a birthday present: a ring of turquoise glass which he said had been given to him in Tunisia. It fit on my middle finger, just about. I felt sad as I thanked him and twisted it into place, somehow sure that this would be the last

diversion that lay between me and whatever blow his gift was aimed at softening. I was right.

'Listen,' he said. 'This may be the last time we see each other.'

'What do you mean?' I said, unsurprised but angry nonetheless. 'Are you going back to where you came from?'

'None of us who come here can ever go back,' he answered. 'But it would be better if I stopped visiting you.'

'No, it wouldn't,' I said. 'It wouldn't be better. Better for who? Better than what? What are you talking about?'

'I'm afraid I may put you in danger.'

'Don't be daft. You're my guardian angel.'

I no longer really thought of him in such simplistic terms, but he had become my friend.

I tried to argue with him a while longer, but very quickly he simply stopped answering me. I knew this silence. I remembered it now. I began sniffling.

'I will be nearby, if that's any consolation,' he said.

'I don't want to...' I started. My words were sticking in my throat. 'I hardly noticed you just now,' I finished. It felt like a confession.

He put his hands on my shoulders. 'Soon, everyone will notice us,' he said.

"Soon" in my angel's time was a long while in mine. It was another two years before I heard or saw any sign of an angel again. Long enough to make me wonder if he had really meant it when he said goodbye. Long enough, even, to make me start forgetting again. I was almost a young woman now; my world had narrowed and sharpened. But then there was the turquoise ring, which I still wore from time to time, though it had since become a better fit for my ring finger.

I remember turning it endlessly as I sat with my father and our neighbours, watching the news unfold on satellite, one wet Saturday in November. Marvelling. Praying to a neglected god. And in my case, remembering. Soon, everyone will notice us. We spent all day in front of the TV, confounded, as the image package looped again and again: a long line of luminous figures spooling down from the Temple Mount, blazing

against the stark hillside; beautiful, fearsome, undeniable. What my angel had spoken of was at last coming to pass.

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In the summer of my fifteenth year, a third wave of angels arrived. Public sentiment began to transmogrify from bewildered awe to suspicion and resentment. The questions became insistent. How many more would come? When would they leave? Why wasn't there more information? It was easy to see a change was on the wind: among this latest group were several hundred warriors. They were larger than the others, with opaline skin, and these did indeed have wings: two, three or four pairs, depending on their rank. Their eyes were so bright and piercing that few could meet them steadily. Even the senior war correspondent was obliged to drop his gaze when he interviewed a general who deigned to give him a soundbite.

They were there, the general explained, to safeguard the passage of the refugees. 'Will you be returning to Heaven to fight?' asked the war correspondent.

'No,' boomed the angel. 'None who come here can return until it is over.'

Anger grew in the weeks and months that followed this revelation. The angels had already outstayed their welcome. Those who arrived with the first influx had already begun to look like us, act like us, think like us. Soon surely, they would want money. Soon they would be able to make things. Soon they would be just like people, only better. If they came in numbers and never left, the dissidents probed, who would have the upper hand?

Election year arrived in my country, and to no one's great surprise, the Conservatives came to power. They had allied themselves closely with the growing New Humanist Movement in the run-up period.

Their first act as the new government was to forbid any more angels to enter our borders. At first I scoffed at this notion, knowing the angels were not constrained by doors or walls. But it turned out they knew something I didn't. Angels in their earthly form could not pass through an electrified fence. Our government seized gleefully upon this weakness - discovered quite recently and by accident on a cattle ranch in

Mexico – when it came to enforcing their border control plan. Still, the New Humanists were not satisfied.

'The angels are hiding something from us,' they insisted. 'If they have found a way to come to our realm, what's to stop their enemies from following them? We are harbouring their soldiers now. No one asked if we were willing. No one gave us an opportunity to choose sides. If we don't get rid of them, this fight will be brought to our door.'

In one place, and then another, mobs attacked lone angels. One was injured, the next killed. The third incident, and the worst, occurred in my country, to my shame and horror. Two angels were beaten to death in the central business district of our capital city, in the small hours of New Year's morning. They, the angels, had been fixing a burst water mains. Some men who arrived on the scene had felt it was not their job to do so.

It was around this time that my own personal moment of reckoning arrived – that day in the shop, I mean, when my father shunned the angel who had come in asking for a newspaper.

In the end I did go after him. Too late for it to mean anything – I waited until my father was out of eyeshot – but I did go.

It was not the principle that decided me, I admit. I simply had to ask him if he knew anything of my angel's whereabouts. There were so few of them now to be found, at least publicly. I couldn't miss the opportunity. My angel had said he would be nearby. Assuming that was still true, and that he had meant it in earthly terms, I had to try and convince him to leave. This place, this passionless, apathetic, middle-of-theroad country, had suddenly become one of the most volatile hotbeds of xenophobic sentiment in the world.

I jogged down the street behind the broad-shouldered figure, calling until he stopped and turned. We stood a few feet apart, he waiting expressionlessly, me catching my breath.

'I'm sorry,' I said at last. For good measure, I said it again. There was a lot to apologise for, after all. My father's behaviour. My failure to stand up to him. The new laws in our country that made this very conversation dangerous to us both. The

murder of his kinsmen a few nights earlier, at the hands of my race. He nodded, silent.

'Please,' I said. 'I'm trying to find someone. One of you.' I had no other way of identifying my angel, so I mentioned the name I had bestowed on him. That drew a smile. It turned out to be quite unnecessary.

'I know who you mean,' said the angel. 'I can see him with you.'

'Right now?' I stammered. Some self-important, eternally seven-year-old part of me did not hesitate to retable the possibility that he had indeed been an invisible, doting companion to me through all these years.

'No,' said the other angel. 'I can see him with you in other times.'

'Oh,' I said.

'We don't use the same lens for time that you do,' the angel added helpfully.

'Oh,' I repeated, nodding. 'Do... do you know if he's all right?'

'No,' said the angel.

'Please,' I said. 'Do you know where I can find him?'

His eyes flickered. 'I can tell you where you will be the next time you see him,' he said. 'If that's any use.'

My heart filled with unease when he told me. It was in the capital.

I decided to go there by train as soon as I could get away with it, which would be on Friday. My father had started letting me run the shop alone on Friday afternoons. If I cashed up by one, I could get the two o' clock train and I wouldn't be missed until after dark. No one would question the shop being closed early; a march through the city centre had been organised in protest of the angel murders, and there had been rumours that the New Humanists were going to turn out too. It was possible that it would get ugly. Several of the smaller businesses hadn't even opened their doors.

I wasn't sure how I was going to find my angel once I got to the capital. But I was sure I would find someone who could point me towards an angel, and I was convinced that would be enough. This, then, was my plan.

But instead, when I stepped out onto the walk that day, I found my angel right there, waiting for me beyond the electric fence that now surrounded our property.

I hesitated before greeting him – and not just because of the laws. He looked so different, especially in comparison to the glowing newcomers that had been splashed ceaselessly across the TV and the Internet over the last few months. I wondered if it was my memory that had enriched him, or he that had faded.

'I thought I was supposed to see you next in the capital,' was the first thing I said.

'You were,' he answered. 'But I changed it.'

I exhaled, struggling to recalibrate, trying to make sense of the heavy way he had spoken those words. 'Come in,' I said at last. 'Before someone sees you.'

He followed me back into the shop.

'Why have you come here?' I asked when we were safely inside.

'I came to stop you from looking for me,' he said. He sounded angry. He really had become almost human.

'I would have been fine,' I said. 'But you should have lain low until this tension has blown over.'

'It's not going to blow over,' he said. 'And you wouldn't have been fine. This was my only chance.'

'What do you mean?' I said.

'The war is starting. Tonight. Right now.'

It was true. Our army was mobilising to quell the unrest in the capital.

We hid together in the store-room, the angel and I, just as we had hidden from my father all those years ago, listening to the worsening news on my digital audio player. They played a sound bite from the city's central square: it was the New Humanist Youth Movement leader, who had instigated the counter-march that became a riot that was becoming a skirmish that would become a war. 'What is really going on up there?' he thundered. 'Have the angels given us any reason to believe we should protect them? Why won't they tell us anything about the war in Heaven?'

'Why don't they answer?' I asked the angel. 'There's something you're not telling me. All of you, there's something you're not telling us, isn't there?'

He looked at me, wordless.

'Go on,' I insisted. 'No more of your silences. Answer me this. Why have we not heard of a single angel fighting, or even fighting back?'

He took my hand, but I tore it from his grasp.

'No,' I said. I had just seen the answer, and in the same moment I apprehended it, I rejected it. I could not let this be his fate. 'We are leaving,' I said to him. 'You and I. I'll bring you some of my father's clothes. You barely look angelic anymore; we can make it out to the countryside, at least, without being stopped. Can you drive a car?' 'Yes,' he said, capitulating.

'Good.' I would have to borrow that from my father as well.

The angel sat down on a pile of soda crates and passed a hand over his face.

'Whatever happens, I hope you won't think badly of me,' he said. 'It wasn't my decision.'

He seemed to be acknowledging the truth of my suspicions. I wasn't ready for that to be the case. I opened the door to leave, but then closed it again and turned to face him, taking my courage in both hands. 'What did you mean, earlier?' I said. 'When you said I wouldn't have been fine if I came to look for you?'

He waited a long moment before answering. 'You always had a part to play in this,' he said. 'It was why I was sent to you, when you were a child.'

I nodded, coming to terms with his words. 'And my part, what was it?' I said. 'To die tonight, or later? No – rather don't tell me. I don't want to know.'

'I couldn't let it happen,' he said. 'Coming here tonight... that decision was mine alone.'

I did something I had never done before. I put my hand on his cheek and kissed him on the mouth. When I stood up straight again I knew that now I was no longer a child. 'There's food if you want any, I said, indicating the shelves. Then I left at a run for the house.

Things quickly got worse. The angels never fought back, but there were many who fought for them, and before the next year was out, the war had spread to involve several other nations, and many other issues. I did all I could to stop it – not just the killing of the angels, but the killing of the people, all of it – because I had realised what it was that they had been keeping from us all this time. I had realised that the battleground was not Heaven; that it was never going to be Heaven. This war may have started in another realm, but it would be played out between human beings.

This fight was always going to be our fight. Angels are no more capable of destruction than they are of creation. They were martyrs to the grand design, every single one of them. That was their purpose here. They were sent to die.

And die they did. My angel too. Not that night, although it was that night that sealed his fate, and I would never forgive myself for it, nor would I ever forgive my father. My father, who caught us trying to make off with his van at three in the morning and alerted the militarised police. The angel was arrested for auto-theft and kidnapping. My father eventually dropped the charges, but by then the angel had already been transferred to one of the new camps that had been established, the government said, for their own safety. They could open any door, but they could not pass across an electric fence, and when I heard these barriers had been erected around the camps, I gave up hope. My angel perished there some ten months on. One of many thousands. I only found out much later.

I think back occasionally to that moment of reckoning, when my father shunned that other angel, the one I barely knew, and I chose my father's pride over the angel's dignity. Perhaps even I was on the wrong side of the divide, at the last account. In my bleaker moments, that small choice seems to me prophetic of what was to come, of the choice we all made. To be loyal to our humanity rather than to the ideas we had long assumed to comprise it. Liberty, equality, fraternity. Beauty. Truth. Faith, hope, love. And all that.

I suppose we shouldn't have been surprised when the first of the Horsemen showed up, but we were.

### THE DRY CORNER James Dryja

SCIENCE FICTION. Now say it again. (But not too loud, people might wonder if you are talking to yourself.) SCIENCE FICTION. There, now notice anything weird? (Not about the genre: we know it's weird; nor about its fans, they're supposed to be weird.) No, look at the linking of those two words. Surely, fiction cannot be science, nor science be.....well, fiction. What is it called, 'a contradiction in terms'? What is that superb example? MILITARY INTELLIGENCE! And the formal name: Ah, OXYMORON!

Let's propose instead: SPECULATIVE FICTION! And SF initially swings both ways, covering SCIENCE FANTASY too. Like SPACE FICTION. Boy, did that die out, as the genre spread beyond cowboys-n-crooks in space and into odysseys. Then George Lucas went to war in the galaxy not-so-long-ago.\

Wither our genre then? Every time we think we've got some good flippin' Fiction going, then some scientist or other comes along and invents it into reality, and before you can say ROBOT (no, not the traffic light), it's science fact and not science fiction anymore. (There are now giant robots which will kindly go to war for you, not to mention drones which will do your war-time flying, cars that will drive themselves (and make both AA's obsolete....!)

From the M2, downtown Joburg's advert-bearing skyscrapers resemble more and more a setting from Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner" - and no doubt the cosmopolitan population resembling the cast, though alien with a different meaning. (Alien is how Phillip K Dick felt about Scott's interpretation of his work.)

Remember the good of days when we knew little about Mars except strange lines criss-crossing the planet and consequently we had these amazing speculative stories of a great civilization which built Canal Waterways! Why can't we go down that canal, er, road, again? What did Mark Twain say about not letting the truth get in the way of a good story?

Never mind, our genre will survive further scientific discoveries.

Talking about that, The US Patent office shut shop at the turn of the century – no, the other century. Seems that, just before the Wright brothers took off, the office decided in its wisdom that all that could be invented, was, well, invented!

Looking at Probe 160's Blast from the Past: and on another nostalgic note – aside from the other nostalgia - this scribbler's arrival in Jozie in the early 80's coincided with SFFSA's Convention at Wits' Senate House: and what a grand intro! SFF heaven! Met Gail, and Ian Jamieson, and still around they are. A Very Vibey Fest it was, which included Ralph Bakshi's animated and lovable "Lord of the Rings" (Gollum sneaking here and there!).

Well, we are still around, not sneaking around, leaner, but not meaner, and now at the Wits Medical School's Marie Curie Theater .SEE YOU THERE!

#### Wormhole 2

The scavenger scuttled along, the eight legs of his survival suit creaking in the chilly night.

His scanner searched for forming frost for the hydroponic plant back at the warren.

The subterranean, autonomic machinery hummed smoothly, while spewing iodized gasses and water vapour.

This unforgiving world was the only one his kind had ever known.

Then came the aliens.

The output of the aliens' mysterious factory was not seen as pollution but as a lifesaving resource.

As he harvested the ice, under the purple fog of a winter dawn, he muttered:

Life has really changed for the better!

Ron Cowley, Nick Heyns, Gavin Kreuiter

# Nova 2013 Finalist General Section Mozie 950604030 by Sal Garbier

I knew everything was going to be different. I knew that it was the last time I would see my wife. I knew it was the last time I would call my rat-hole apartment home. If everything went according to plan, it would be my last day on Earth.

The Athan – Muslim call to prayer - was transmitted directly into my implant just like every other morning and like every other morning, it was silenced with a simple thought. I'm not sure why, but I never listen to it to the end. I had almost no sleep, yet I was immediately awake and anxious. I looked at my Musalah – prayer mat – and I tried to motivate myself to perform my morning prayers. You may not believe this, but I don't always perform my morning prayers. Everyone thinks that people like me always pray five times a day. I can't speak for everyone else, but I go through cycles. On this morning, I just wasn't feeling it. It surprised me too; I wanted God on my side today.

I didn't wake my wife. I had mixed feelings about that. I have feelings for her I guess, but the truth is I don't trust her. I never have. It's very strange to be so intimate with someone and then never tell them what's going on in your mind. No one really knows what you're thinking unless you let them in and I've never let her in. That's the only privacy I have. Even the implants in our brains can't really monitor what we're thinking.

I quietly opened the door to my wife's room and crept beside her. Although I didn't wake her, I did look at her for the last time. I walked out of the room and tried to analyze my feelings for her. I can only say that I felt empty. Not sad, simply empty. I wasn't sure if I was going to miss her. Even right now, I'm not missing her. When the government chooses your wife, you just can never really trust her.

I quietly walked outside and something occurred to me. I've lead a pointless existence. Although I was married for sixteen years, I had no son or daughter to say good-bye to. We had applied numerous times for a Muslim Birthing Permit, but we

were rejected each time. Our appeals were also rejected. Each rejection came with a different reason.

We have to carefully monitor the Muslim population. Your professional positions are too important to be side-tracked by raising a baby. The potential father's aptitude is not conducive to raising a child without significant personality design intervention. The mother's age is past her optimal fertility stage.

There was only one way we could have had a child, and that was to sign up for the Repopulation Program. But who wants to give up their first two children to the government? That's simply asking too much.

Get to the point, Mozie.

Mozie. Do you know why I asked you to call me Mozie? Why would anyone want to be referred to by a religious slur? It's because no one can properly pronounce my given name, Qizmat. So then they called me Moslem. And then eventually Mozie. Qizmat wasn't even what my parents wanted to call me. They wanted to call me Shaheed, which means martyr. Calling a child Shaheed is actually an act of treason. Can you believe that? So they called me Qizmat instead. They still called me Shaheed privately, but only when we were alone or around our most trusted friends. That decision cost them their lives.

I've read the reports. I'm sorry about your parents.

Are you really?

No, but I don't want to dwell. Just tell me how this happened and why you betrayed your country.

Please. This is not my country. But let me continue with my story. I left my home and walked towards the bus-stop. I knew all the implants in my body would be

transmitting my heart-rate, blood pressure, and brain activity so I took a pill that would calm me down. I felt much better than when I woke up.

I made it to the bus station and was quite inconspicuous. The other riders didn't make eye contact or even acknowledge my existence, which was perfect. Why would a citizen acknowledge a Moslem. That's one of the benefits of being a non-person. Even though we have to wear a Fez on our head, these garish uniforms, and our Muslim ID is branded onto our wrists, we can still hide in plain sight because no one acknowledges that we even exist.

I waited for the citizens to board before I made my way to the back of the bus. All the citizens were wearing business suits and had an air of arrogance about them, but I knew if they had any real power or importance, they wouldn't be taking the bus. They weren't better than me, they just thought they were.

Just as I was thinking that, I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. One of the citizens turned his head slightly and glanced at me through the corner of his eye. At least I thought he glanced at me. He turned his head away from the window and towards the interior of the bus to do it. Why would he do that unless he wanted to glance behind him?

Usually when your heart stops in terror, it starts to beat extremely fast right afterwards. The drugs wouldn't allow my heart to suddenly stop or compensate, so it just continued at a slow, even rate. It was quite an unsettling feeling. This was the first sign that something had gone wrong. But I decided to stick with the plan. I had nothing to lose. I memorized the back of his head and the shape of his shoulders and would keep a lookout for him. But I had to continue.

Entering the building was the first real test. All these government buildings have tight checkpoints and will investigate any anomaly from anyone's sensor implants. I walked through the checkpoint feeling surprisingly calm. There was no siren or even a skew look. The drugs had done their job. Until, that is, the dog starting barking. We had found ways to fool all of the sensors and implants, but we still couldn't fool the dogs. Muslims hate dogs, by the way. And this was just another reason for me.

One of the guards looked at me and was sizing me up. He looked like he couldn't decide whether to investigate or just continue drinking his coffee. Finally the aroma of the coffee won out and the guard ignored me once more. I was in.

Is that when you met your contact?

Yes. He gave me my new identity. We went into the bathroom and he changed the Muslim ID on my wrist. 950 604 030. I have seen and heard my Muslim ID number so many times. He grafted a piece of skin over the old ID with a piece of skin we took off my leg days ago with the new ID. We used my own skin because if he grafted skin from someone else, the sensor implants would definitely have detected it. He then used a machine to remotely reprogram all my implants. I had a new identity. I was no longer 950 604 030. I was now Yusuf Elliot (963 110 342), a United Nations of Arabia Ambassador's assistant who was in a US government building running some errands.

The machine that reprogrammed your implants - how did they get it in the building?

Piece by piece.

Who was your contact in the building?

I don't think I want to tell you that.

If you don't tell me, the Truth Engineers will get it out of you later. I'm simply here to give you an opportunity to avoid that experience.

Truth Engineers. Do you remember when they were called torturers? I guess renaming something changes its essence. A rose by any other name, right?

Shakespeare. I'm impressed. Please continue.

Yup. I've read all of Shakespeare's plays. Ben Jonson too. And Tennessee Williams. Also Keanu Reeves (his later work obviously). I always wanted to become a playwright. And act in them. Of course, that was an impossible dream. The Culture Police are pretty intolerant of subversive art and to them, anything made by a

Moslem is subversive. Unofficially, all art has to be created by a Citizen and have a 'righteous' theme. How boring.

You digress a lot.

Well, I'm not going anywhere. You'd think you'd indulge me. I strutted out of the building and through the checkpoint, but this time as Yusuf Elliot, official representative of the United Nations of Arabia. There was even a car waiting for me to take me to Metro Spaceport. Do you know what the craziest thing is? I didn't even need to wear a disguise. Even though I walked through that checkpoint almost every day for the last nineteen years, no one noticed anything wrong. Do you know why that is? It's because no one looks a Moslem in the face. As long as the sensor implants don't set off an alarm, no one cares to look at the person.

And then?

And then I got in the car and we headed off to the spaceport. I noticed the driver was driving very slowly and close to the ground, avoiding the upper lanes and keeping to the speed limits. I have no idea if he knew what was happening or if he was simply a taxi driver dropping off a customer.

He dropped me off at the spaceport and I walked right through the government checkpoint like I owned the place. The drugs were definitely having their effect. You know how the soldiers at the checkpoints often harass the Moslems just for being Moslem?

That's your opinion. They're just keeping us safe.

Whatever. Anyway, no one harassed me. Perhaps it's the drugs, or maybe the fact that I was posing as a government official, but I think it was my poise. I was finally leaving the US. Even if it was to the moon.

I thought I was home free. But as I was leaving the checkpoint, a damn dog started barking. Tell me, there are rumors amongst the Moslims that dogs have been trained

and bred to bark at Muslims. Is that true? I'm never going to leave this place so the answer will die with me.

Never mind that. What happened next?

This time I was searched. They didn't find anything of course. My sensor implants were perfectly reprogrammed. My skin graft was completely invisible to the naked eye, but the damn dog wouldn't stop barking. While they were trying to figure out what was going on, they sat me in a chair and one of those sadistic guards held the leash of the dog so close to me that the dog was barking and gnarling about five inches from my face. It was the young soldier that noticed that my sensor implants were not detecting an elevating heart-rate. The drugs really were doing their part. This was just too suspicious so they really started to dig into the situation. They started to gather as much information on Yusuf Elliot as they could. There was a record of him being born on the Moon and working for the United Nations of Arabia as an executive assistant for the Ambassador to the United States. The record showed that he indeed entered the United States, Earth about six weeks prior. Unfortunately for me, there were also news reports of Yusuf Elliot dying in a car crash two weeks ago. The game was up.

Are you part of the Underground Muslim Brotherhood.

If I answered that, I would be signing my own death warrant. And that of my friends and family as well. I think you know the answer anyway.

You're right. We all know the answer to that. I notice that you don't refer to the moon as New Arabia. Why is that?

The moon will never be Arabia or New Arabia or part of the United Nations of Arabia or whatever. If you force people to live on a barren wasteland in space after they lost a war, don't expect them to call it home.

Then why were you leaving earth for the moon? Your job has been designated as a vital strategic role by the government. Abandoning your post is treason.

So the slave-owner wonders why the slaves show no loyalty. I simply had to leave.

My superiors upstairs don't agree with me, but I don't think this is about the Brotherhood. In fact, I think this is about a woman. No answer? It would simply ease my conscience for you to confess. The Truth Engineers will get the answer out of you anyway.

Perhaps, but then it's not admissible in court.

There isn't going to be any court case. This is the last place you'll ever call home. But don't worry; you won't be here for very long.

Good, then I guess freedom for me is just around the corner.

## **Best of SFSA Volume III**

The Best stories from the Nova short story competitions in the 1990's.

If you don't yet have a copy contact the secretary and we will send you one.

secretary@sffsa.org.za

# Blast from the past

A couple of months ago I got a mail from one of the original members of SFSA, Neils Christiansen from Port Elizabeth to say that he was clearing out a lot of old documents and would the club like to have the first volume of the newsletter that became "PROBE". As we are trying to get a complete record of club publications and do not have all of this very early material I replied that we would indeed very much like to have it. He promised to post it to me the next day. As fate would have it the South African Post Office decided to go on strike and postal deliveries have become almost non-existent. I despaired of ever receiving these irreplaceable papers.

But, lo and behold, almost 2 months later there appeared in my post box a large envelope. It contains all of the very first minutes taken as the club was constituted and the eight issues of Volume 1 of the newsletter which was to become "PROBE". Anything we do not have will be scanned and placed in the SFFSA repository for posterity.

The first newsletter was dated Third quarter 1969 and as members are invited to send contributions to Simon Scott I have to assume that he probably edited it, but by newsletter number 3 I see that Mary Scott is the editor of the newsletter. It is printed on a Xerox machine. By Newsletter Number 5 a Gestetner Roneo machine had been donated by a member and all SFSA documentation was reproduced on this until I took over as Editor on November 1978.

Volume 1 Number 7, dated May 1970 called for members to vote on a name for the newsletter. They had until the 30th of June, 1970 to choose from the following:

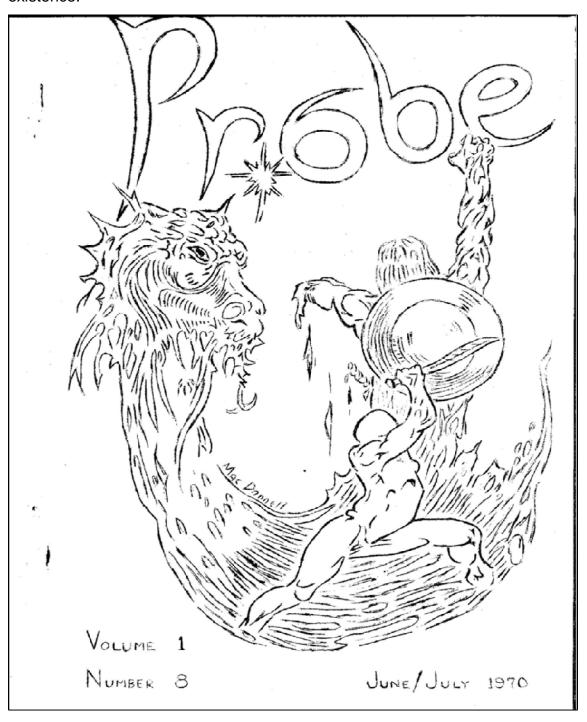
RADIATIONS ZENITH CONTRATERRENE NUCLEUS AVALON EXPANDING SCI-LENS ISOMERS MARYTEX MUTATIONS UTOPIA DIRAC BEEP THE WAITING ROOM XENON TELLSTAR ENTROPIAN S.F.S.A. LIFELINE WAR OF THE WORLDS CONGLOM PROBE STARGAZE SF NEWS AURORA PULSATIONS EX TERRA ANDROMEDA

I am very glad they did not choose S.F.S.A. LIFELINE, but some of the other options might have been interesting.

Anyway, Volume 1 Number 8, dated Jun/Jul 1970 was called "PROBE" and the cover illustration was done by Kevin MacDonnell from Cape Town.

You will also see in this issue that our librarian, Gavin Kreuiter has been perusing the early material we have that Tex Cooper passed on to us some years ago so there might be some overlap with the History of SFSA that he is compiling.

I have reproduced here the cover of the very first magazine of SFSA that was called "PROBE" and considering we are about to publish issue number 162 in December 2014, I think that "PROBE" has to be one of the longest running SF clubzines in existence.



L.O.C.

142 Jaimie Road, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada L4J 6A9

September 2014

Dear Gail:

It's a case of déjà vu all over again! There's Gail as Editor of Probe. How's that for resilience, fortitude and stamina, people! Well, some might call it masochism but it can sometimes be a case of no one else raising their hand to volunteer their services. (Nice job Carla for your past efforts!) Probe serves a very worthy goal – it maintains the link or bonds among club members. Though most reside in Southern Africa a few of us (like your loyal LOC writer Lloyd) reside overseas. Getting volunteers to join a committee can be tough because it requires time, commitment and effort. Any 'rewards' tend to come back to participants in terms of socializing, sharing like interests and - in ye olde days - sharing Felicity's homemade cakes. Reading Simon Scott's "Whither Goest Thou" reprint letter from 1980 in #160, brought back memories. And Gail is right, problems that existed then exist today. Are such issues solvable? Well, one can't make everybody happy all the time about what SFFSA has to offer. It is important for a club to reinvent itself. Member surveys often don't elicit enough responses, so the committee tries to be all things to all people. Social meetings, movie meetings, braais, outings, conventions, short story competitions, etc. Regardless people, SFFSA does ok. It is still alive and kicking when much fandom has withered and died. As long as there are successors to committee members the club will go on (nice to see Andrew J. as Chairman). In the Spring 2014 issue of Filmfax (a magazine which also looks at pop culture) there's a lengthy article by Mike Olszewski entitled "Attack of the Changing FanCon" in which he comments on how fandom conventions in the United States are struggling to survive. The writer looks at sf cons, comic cons, nostalgia cons, old time radio cons and even my favourite, the pulp cons. He comments that the Baby Boomers who started up these conventions and clubs are literally and figuratively dying out. So I

guess one has to appeal to new trends. Make ebooks available. Have a club website, continue to use Facebook as a venue to spread the word of SFFSA. Try to reinvent the club. What can an SFFSA meeting do that an interested person can't already look up on their tablet or review on their iphones. When I was first involved with SFSA back in the mid 1970s, the club meetings were structured around social gatherings before we moved to more public meetings (is Total House in Braamfontein still there?). Perhaps social meetings are the way to go. Bring everyone together with like interest for food and socializing. Have some fun – build a BEM, have a quiz, or go the way many sf cons are going now – have cozplay. Whatever you do, have fun!

Tony

#### 

#### Wormhole 3

Under the purple fog of a winter dawn the vile alien vegetation crept toward the clustered domes of the beleaguered settlement.

Abandoned by the government of Earth, the settlers cringe before the writhing vines that slithered onward.

Noxious exhalations of the squirming tentacles clouded the landscape with a miasma of purple poison.

"As you know, Bob" the settlements' biologist said to the community leader, "once this evil infestation forces its roots under the domes. It can infiltrate our critical plumbing facilities. It'll probably be wriggling up through our toilet bowls soon. Death from below! What we need is lavender Toilet Duck."

#### Norman Pringle, Nial Mollison, AL du Pisani

### Ian Jamieson

### **Book Review**

BLACK THURDAY. Four passenger planes crash at almost identical times in four different places around the planet. It was not a terrorist attack or, in spite of serious conjecture, pilot error. It was as if something critical on the planes failed at the same time. There are no survivors from one crash, but from each of the others a child escapes, somehow unscathed, plus one woman who survives just long enough to leave a message on her phone; a chilling warning.



The Press call them "The Three", and then they start to show strange behaviour patterns. It is as if the crashes happened to someone else, and they are such happy beings, with occasional quirks odd quirks and sayings. When the cult leader of a charismatic church insists that they are the harbingers of the apocalypse, and millions of people start to believe him, the children are forced to go into hiding. But as the children's behaviour becomes even more irrational their guardians begin to question their "miraculous" survival.

Exceptionally well written and entertaining, although a bit too long. It is written in an almost documentary style, as if the author were collecting all of the information in a factual way. Rather more horror than science fiction. The story is not new and long before the end it becomes apparent where it will end up.

3/5



Dark Matter Nalini Haynes

http://www.darkmatterzine.com/publications/#unmasked

David Langford <a href="mailto:news@ansible.co.uk">news@ansible.co.uk</a>

Ansible 326 September 2014

327 October 2014

328 November 2014

Exodus 152. The special edition for LONCON.

From the Science Fiction Club Deutsland

http://www.sfed.eu/ASFM152.pdf

<u>ಎಂಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎಎ</u>

I sent out PROBE 1612 in electronic format as the Post Office was/is on strike.

Received from Wayne Stepanik:

Thanks a stack. It was rather fun reading the Probe in PDF format – I wouldn't mind receiving every issue like this. Isaac Asimov's ideas of what the world might be like in 2014 were quite fascinating, albeit rather hopeful in terms of the robotics and human boredom. I think computers and robots have resulted in humans being put to work in many other areas. So no boredom for us just yet ©

Cheers

Wayne

1706-24 Eva Rd. Etobicoke, ON CANADA M9C 2B2 October 12, 2014 Dear SFFSAns:

Greetings from Canada!, and many thanks for Probe 160. As always there is much to read and enjoy here, so I will write up what I can in the form of a letter.

Also, greetings to Andrew Jamieson, the new chairman? Welcome to the job. I wish there were more people there for you to stage a kind of convention, but at least you have enough people to gather regularly and share the interest.

(I actually started this letter in late September, but I've had nothing but crazy time ever since. Also, I got Probe 161, not in the mail, but in the IN box. This will allow me some time to get caught up. Hope your post office ends their strike soon. In Canada, plans are underway to eliminate door-to-door delivery completely.)

The Jacket...I have never been a fan of post-holocaust or post-end of society fiction, because the way things are going, it will gradually become less fiction and more fact. I think this one is still in preparation, reads interesting, hope there will be more.

Terry Pratchett is now in the later stages of Alzheimer's Disease, and I am not even sure if he is able to write. He is seen from time to time in Great Britain, but he has enough of his wits about him to prepare for the worst of what will happen. I remember Terry as we picked him up at the airport as he attended our local convention in Toronto, to our knowledge, his first North American convention many years ago.

My letter...looks like we are back on our financial feet again. Both of us got new jobs in June, and then even newer jobs in September. As I write this on our Canadian Thanksgiving weekend, we truly have a lot to be thankful for, and relieved, too.

161...thanks for e-mailing this to me, it might have been a while until it had arrived.

Isaac Asimov was my first favourite author, and I can say with candour that I met Doctor A twice, once at a Star Trek convention in Manhattan, and again at a Worldcon in Philadelphia. He had the gift, and one of them was some pretty good predictions of what was to come. Some were way off, but... I wish he was here to comment on what he would see in this modern age; I think he would be both delighted and horrified.

I think I am done for the moment...many thanks for these two issues, and I eagerly await more of them. See you when they arrive.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

# The Black Hole at the Beginning of Time --"We may have Emerged from a Black Hole in a Higher-Dimension Daily Galaxy

What we perceive as the big bang, physicists at the Perimeter Institute argue, could be the three-dimensional "mirage" of a collapsing star in a universe profoundly different than our own. Conventional understanding holds that the big bang began with a singularity – an unfathomably hot and dense phenomenon of spacetime where the standard laws of physics break down. Singularities are bizarre, and our understanding of them is limited.

Our universe may have emerged from a black hole in a higher-dimensional universe, proposed a trio of Perimeter Institute researchers in the cover story of the latest Scientific American. "Cosmology's greatest challenge is understanding the big bang itself," write Perimeter Institute faculty member, Niayesh Afshordi.

The big bang poses a big question: if it was indeed the cataclysm that blasted our universe into existence 13.7 billion years ago, what sparked it?

Three Perimeter Institute researchers have a new idea about what might have come before the big bang. It's a bit perplexing, but it is grounded in sound mathematics, testable, and enticing enough to earn the cover story in Scientific American, called "The Black Hole at the Beginning of Time Tensional Universe"

"For all physicists know, dragons could have come flying out of the singularity," Afshordi says in an interview with Nature.

The problem, as the authors see it, is that the big bang hypothesis has our relatively comprehensible, uniform, and predictable universe arising from the physics-destroying insanity of a singularity. It seems unlikely. So perhaps something else happened. Perhaps our universe was never singular in the first place.

Their suggestion: our known universe could be the three-dimensional "wrapping" around a four-dimensional black hole's event horizon. In this scenario, our universe burst into being when a star in a four-dimensional universe collapsed into a black hole.

In our three-dimensional universe, black holes have two-dimensional event horizons – that is, they are surrounded by a two-dimensional boundary that marks the "point