

PROBE 190

December 2021

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Editorial

Gail

Almost at the end of 2021. This may sound trite but this year seems to have gone past very quickly? We're still in the grips of the Covid-19 pandemic with a new mutation called Omicron being found here in South Africa and then quickly in many other places in the world. So our ability to travel is once again restricted and we have sadly cancelled our December "live" meeting. Life seems rather dull in a lot of ways and I for one am very glad of the new SF and F books that come from Johanthan Ball for us to review



We have had a couple of very interesting Zoom meetings on the SF and Fantasy that is coming out of Africa. SFFSA members may be interested in a free download of African SFF from BSFA's Vector Magazine

https://vectoreditors.files.wordpress.com/2021/03/vector289_africansf.pdf

Professor Gerald Gaylard, from the University of the Witwatersrand, spoke on the Aliens from "Triangulum" by Ntshanda Masande and is intending to use the reactions of the members of the meeting to write a new paper.

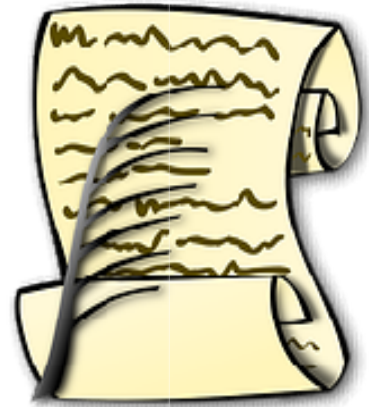
Still no new stories in this issue but I am reprinting two 2nd place stories from old editions." "The Hissing of the Snakes" by William Gunter from the 2001 competition and "No Heating Required" by W. G. Lipsett from the 1989 Nova competition.

You'll also find a video game Review and a heartfelt comment on Apple TV's take on the foundation Series by Isaac Asimov.

I suppose we South African SF and F fans should be grateful that SFFSA has been able to continue to exist and that we have not lost touch with each other. One has only to read the odd comments and funny pictures that appear on the SFFSA WhatsApp group. If you're not included in this App and would like to be drop me a mail (gailjamieson@gmail.com) with your mobile phone number and I'll get you added

Chairman's Note

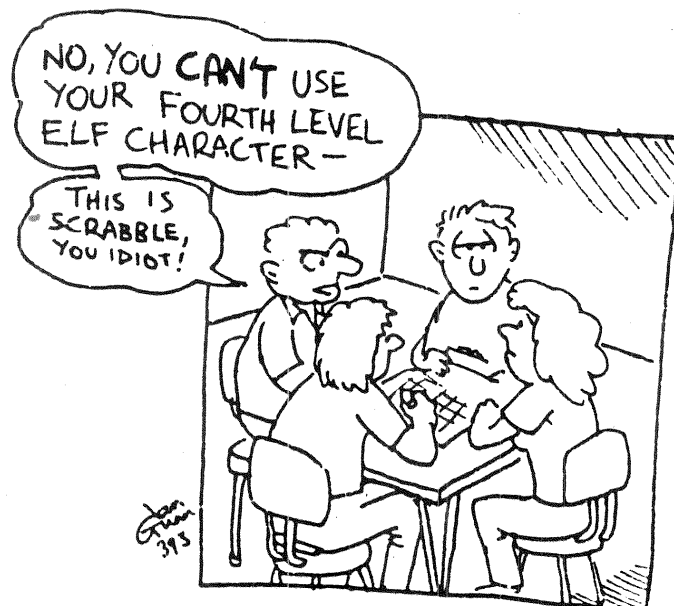
So that age old question: Is there life after death? We are a modern society with great innovations and discoveries happening all the time, and yet there are still so many things we do not know. One of the simplest is what happens after we pass on? So much of old society was based around religion and how one carried themselves in their current life, with the belief that once they passed on, how one did in their previous life would mean that in the next one you would either end up in a "good" place or a "bad" place.



Of course, to this day many, many people still believe in heaven and hell, and have for a very, very long time. I thought I would look up what the various religions thought about the afterlife, and it is actually quite interesting when you see what many other young and old religions thought about this. In ancient Egypt you had to be able to recite from the Book of the Dead, and your heart was weighed against a feather: lighter and you went to heaven, heavier and they would be devoured by the demon Ammit. I think most of us already have an idea about the old Greek and Roman religions where Hermes or Mercury would take your soul to the river Styx, where Charon (odd that it is the same name for both Greek and Roman) would take you across to the Underworld, ruled by Hades or Pluto (ok, so I knew the former, didn't know he was called Pluto by the Romans). The person would then be judged and end up where they were deemed to fit best. I was wondering why most of the stuff I found seemed to be about the Greek afterlife, but I see (got to love the internet) that there isn't, apparently, a lot of information about the Roman early beliefs, and their later beliefs came from the Greeks, which I guess is why we know the Greek afterlife better. Then of course, I think we all know about Norse mythology and Valhalla; Christianity and heaven and hell; Islam and the gardens of the righteous or the hellfire for the wicked; Jewish who believe in reincarnation; Jehovah's Witnesses who do not believe in an

immortal soul and thus there is no afterlife; etc. etc.

So quite a lot of religions believe that you end up in a good or a bad place, but some have different ideas. Does a soul even exist to go to this other place? I'm sure we have all heard about how the body weighs 21 grams less after death. Apparently the experiment to test this happened in 1907, and what I learn, and isn't usually mentioned, is that one of the bodies put the weight back, and two others lost even more. Not to mention the experiment was only done on 6 bodies with not very scientific means. They tried this later, again with varying results. So not very conclusive. Anything is possible in this day and age and with so much still not understood, so I guess there could still be something to this. If we believe in possible aliens living amongst the billions of planets in the universe, whom we have no idea if they even exist and have never seen, why can't there be something like a soul? Of course, there could be nothing at all, but whatever you believe, the idea of life just ending with nothing further seems kind of boring, wouldn't it be nice if things continued after we pass this mortal coil? Um... though if heaven and hell are real and we end up in the latter... perhaps not.



Magazines Received

Stapledon Sphere (formerly the newsletter of the Middle Tennessee Science Fiction Society [aka the Nashville SF club])

Reece Moorhead reecejbm@gmail.com

Issue #52 September 2021

Issue #53 October 2021

Issue #54 November 2021

Ansible David Langford

September 2021 410 <http://news.ansible.uk/a410.html>

October 2021 411 <http://news.ansible.uk/a411.html>

November 2021 412 <http://news.ansible.uk/a412.html>

Books Received

JonathanBall Publishers

Frank Herbert Dune Hodder & Stoughton R240.00

Jay Kristoff Empire of the Vampire R360.00

Jordan Ifueko Redemptor Hot Key Books children

Wilbur Smith The New Kingdom Bonnier R330.00

Cixin Liu The Supernova Era Head of Zeus R225.00

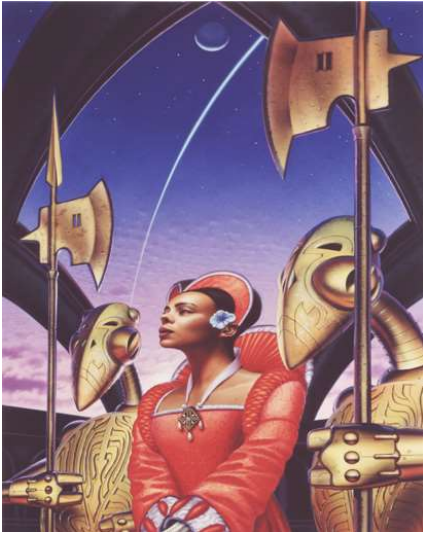
Kazuo Ishiguro Klara and the Sun Faber & Faber R325.00

Brandon Sanderson Cytronic: The Third Skyward Novel Orion R355.00

Ken Liu The Veiled Throne Head of Zeus R330.00

Andrzej Sapkowski Warriors of God Orion R355.00

Aiding and Abetting by Nick Wood, Diane Awerbuck and Sarah Lotz



“The Collapsium” by Chris Moore

This is the cover picture from *Focus* no 69 Summer 2019. The British association’s Magazine for Writers.

The article was kindly offered for reprinting by Nick Wood, one of the authors.

Here’s an article about collaborating with other writers that does just what it discusses. Nick Wood started out reflecting how to collaborate and, while doing so, he took advice from people he’d written with or who had themselves written together. The end result is that Nick organised for *Focus* his own and his fellow writers’ reflections on collaborating (clearly practicing what he preached).

If you find yourself staring at a blank screen for too long, wondering what on Earth to write there’s one almost method to solve your problem -- phone a friend. Not just any friend, mind you – but invite a fellow writer to share that empty screen with you. For as long as you (continue) to get along, the sparks should start filling up the screen.

I will cover three experiences of co-writing, including my own, ending up with a few guidelines that may help to ensure your joint writing is a fruitful co-production. All partnerships happen to be writers with African links, to echo the special issue of *Vector* on African SF. I approached Diane Awerbuck and Sarah Lotz to talk about their experiences of co-writing too. They have given me permission to edit their accounts as well, so this entire article is a collaborative effort in itself; and provides a wider and richer multiple perspective.

Writing with Each Other

Diane Awerbuck & Alex Latimer AKA Frank Owen

You have to find the right fit for co-writing. You have to trust your co-writer – that they know what they’re doing, and that their feedback is honest and constructive. It’s a rare thing. Alex and I met when our shared publisher asked me to launch his first novel, *The Space Race*. Our starting point was a semi-serious discussion around what The Great South African Novel would actually look like – and what would make it sell – and we ended up seriously plotting *South*. We wanted to see what apartheid would look like in an America not too far from where it is now: if the Confederacy era’s racial segregation was pursued to its most extreme conclusion. This led to the initial publication of *South*, followed up by the later sequel *North*. The premise of *South* and *North* is that a despotic president has built a wall right through the middle of the USA, from east to west. We wrote this in 2013, well before Trump’s election and his “Build The Wall” pledge. Since then a couple of plot points of *South* and *North* have unfolded in the real world. Spec-fic writers and historians may have mirroring skillsets, i.e. one draws on the past to look forward, and the other explains the present by referring to the past. So, it is important to also consider how complimentary are your writing skill sets with your partner?

The co-writing question is something that we’re always asked in interviews. People want to know exactly how it works, like they can go backstage after a magic trick only to see that the sawn-in-half lady is twins.

Alex and I were interested in the same things, but we had a clear division of labour. He drove the story (pacing, plot and action) and I was in charge of the language (descriptions, character and dialogue). There was always cross-over, but if decisions needed to be made, we knew our domains and who got the last word. You know you’re doing it right when you can’t remember who wrote what: that third ‘voice’ is speaking. That is, your collaboration is so enmeshed, it’s as if a whole new voice has been created between you.

But before we wrote a word, we had to figure out the story, which involved a lot of discussion over coffee (and absolutely no time machines, Alex. Not ever). It helps that Alex draws for a living, so that by the end of the plotting process there’s a diagrammatic representation of the action. *South* and *North* involved lots of flattened little people with crosses for eyes, then arrows pointing to stampeding herds of horses, and then arrows pointing to more little people with crosses for eyes.

It's a kind of flowchart, and other writers will find what method works best for them. This is ours: these little images are our Bible, a foundational plot and unmovable sequence that we often go back to as we write. It's an important step because, with two people working on the same story, it's easy for each of us to go off on a tangent, or to forget something the other person said months ago. If it's printed out and stuck on the wall, we each have an agreed-upon guide. The main key in plotting is knowing how it ends. If we have a beginning and a destination, the rest usually takes care of itself. So, the diagram sets this out, plus a few important, unchangeable nodes of action along the way. The spaces between those nodes are negotiable. But we always know the destination and the stops we have to make along the way.

Once we had the plot nailed down, Alex wrote a chapter and mailed it to me. However many words he'd written, I generally doubled this. We never really discussed this as a strategy: Alex never said he would write half and I would write half: it just worked out that way - and it stems from having different roles in the writing process. Co-writing has many manifestations, and this is ours. There is a kind of alchemy when you co-write with the right person. The third entity that you create is not something that either of you could have made by yourselves, and there's a certain freedom in that. It's impossible to get into an argument about what should or shouldn't happen, if you know that this is not your book entirely. It's a shared enterprise. Alex's choices and my choices are not necessarily Frank Owen's choices.

We've put a collection of our themed (separately written, but complementary) short stories together, and called it *Megafauna*. The idea is that the stories speak to each other, like a mixtape.

Sarah Lotz who has worked on multiple collaborations, now tells us about her process about co-writing.

On Collaborating

by Sarah Lotz & Louis Greenberg AKA SL Grey

If I had to make a choice between only ever writing solo or collaborating, I'd pick collaborating every time.

This isn't because writing is a solitary business and I get lonely (I don't – I've chosen

to live in the middle of nowhere with only sheep for company), but if you get it right, it halves the workload and is way less stressful.

Co-writing for me is like entering a mini version of a TV writer's room (only with less cocaine and more repetitive strain injury). I can share the research and deadline panic. When you co-write there's always someone to brainstorm with when the plot holes are gaping, and your character is stuck in a plummeting lift with no way out. Someone who is as equally invested in the final product as you. Someone whose opinion you trust and who will think nothing of telling you that ending a chapter with another dream sequence is a really, really bad idea.

i. Choose the right collaborator

It's probably best not to collaborate (can you put words in full to avoid an overly chatty tone) with someone who has a Trump-sized ego, a flat-earther podcast and opposing political views to yours, but who can say? It might result in the next great literary mash-up. There's no real way to know if you can work with someone - until you start working with them,

Sometimes it can be unexpected. Louis Greenberg and I barely knew each other when, we decided to write our first S.L Grey book. On paper it shouldn't have worked: Louis is known for writing novels with lyricism and psychological depth and I'm not. We've written five novels together so far, and I still can't pin down exactly how or why our clashing styles mesh. All I know for sure is that we have a similar work ethic.

ii. Play to each other's strengths

Sometimes you need a different type of brain or skill to make an idea work. Thankfully when you're co-writing you can ask your partner in crime to fill in the bits you hate and vice versa. I leave the competent sex scenes if needed to my co-writer for a start. And knowing there's someone waiting for your chapter/rewrite keeps procrastination down to manageable levels.

iii. Leave your ego at the door

The scariest part of collaborating is that you have to be prepared to show your co-author your first draft with all its clumsiness and stumbling prose - which, for most writers, is the equivalent of walking naked through a mall. Trust is key. It's also a

massive learning curve. Hours can be wasted on unnecessary compliments. There is a careful art to honest feedback, and it's more efficient if your partner knows they can tell you like it is without over-worrying about your fragile ego, so mutual trust and respect is key. Like any relationship, this gets built up over time as you both increasingly grow comfortable with your mutual roles as reader and writer.

Building Super-heroes

by Nick Wood (and Tade Thompson)

Tade and I co-wrote an African super-hero saga *The Last Pantheon for AfroSF vol. 2*. We'd had a prior discussion on the history of super-heroes in Africa and, excitedly, found we were on the same page, albeit coming from different backgrounds, (For more information on African superheroes, see Tessa Pijnaker (2018)'s discussion: *African Superheroes in the 70s and 80s*: <https://africainwords.com/2018/06/11/african-superheroes-in-the-1970s-and-80s-a-historical-perspective/>.)

I was initially anxious about our agreement to co-write our own version of an African superhero tale – mostly because one of the attractions of solo writing for me, is being in control of own world, i.e. I'm able to build – or break down - any wall I wanted to. How can it work, when relinquishing such dictatorial control?

But I decided it might be an important writing lesson for me to give up some control and learn to respond to someone else's cue and lead. I had been finding it increasingly hard to write on my own, as the blank screen was growing ever more aversive in my mind, so I thought, what is there to lose?

I waited for Tade to kick off – and when he did, I thought, wow! Now that's interesting, how can I respond to his Nigerian superhero/villain, Pan-Africa? Snow in the Sahara? Now that, I did not expect. There was something in his (to me) left field start, that triggered a wider shower of ideas for responding, than had I been writing alone. How can my South African super-hero (Black Power) respond, given the setting and the launching action – for this is obviously a bigger Pan-African saga than I had initially anticipated? It was as if Tade had burst the blank screen open into a Wide-Screen movie. (It probably helped that, like Alex Latimer above, Tade is also a visual artist.)

Over the course of several weeks per chapter we swapped the progressing interaction between his pan-African and my Black Power. We respected each other's chapters and

did not edit each other, nor did we provide too much guidance as to where we wanted the story to go.

This was right out of my comfort zone and I was anxious it might fizzle into a plot dead-end, but while the character's and their supporting cast still fizzled together on the screen, it felt reassuring to continue. The chapters bounced back and forth between us, like a literary ping-pong ball and I grew increasingly excited and less anxious about where we might go next.

It took one final face-to-face meeting, after our initial Skype meeting where we had agreed the project, to iron out the conclusion. We did have a slight difference of opinion as to the ending and we drafted a few versions before finally agreeing, together, what felt like the best one. It felt important that we 'honour the story' by pushing through our differences until we could finally generate an ending that we were both happy with. By the agreed end of *The Last Pantheon*, I realised I had never once feared the blank screen. There was something in the creative synergy that meant ideas and words were kept circling between us, and alive. I think part of that came from a shared passion of the topic, an enjoyment of each other's writing - but also crucially, at the end, a willingness to disagree, challenge and search together for a better ending, for the shared characters we had both grown to love.

As can be seen from these three experiences there is no one right way to co-write – from Alex writing (and mapping) the plots and Diane adding the bulk of the words, to Tade and I swapping equally weighted chapters that progressed a character driven (implicit) narrative arc. Trust, respect and a willingness to listen are all parts of a successful collaboration. Of course, it could have gone pear-shaped as well, there is no guarantee of success attached to any co-operative venture. For example, if we had deadlocked on the ending, each wanting our own initial version, the story may not have survived. Joint writing does indeed involve giving up some degree of control – but, as I learned during this venture, that's not necessarily a bad thing!

But, in the end, if a co-operative venture works well - hopefully like this three-authored article – you end up with a narrative that feels stronger than the sum of its parts. So next time you are sitting with an empty screen in front of you, don't let it get into your head, why not open yourself to collaborating instead? You may even learn new ways of approaching the writing of SFF.

THE MISSING DRAGONRIDER OF NERP

by Elaine (with apologies to Ms McCaffrey)

The People

M'fanny, Dragonlady

F'loor

T'rash

Tripe

Tart

C'lash

B'um

K'rap

M'ike, son of Dragonlady

V'an

Their Dragons

Brookleth (red)

Carpetleth (white)

Worthleth (blue)

Trotterth (purple)

Pennileth (yellow)

Thymbolth (orange)

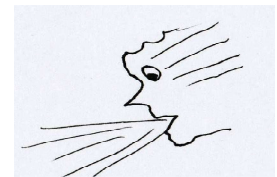
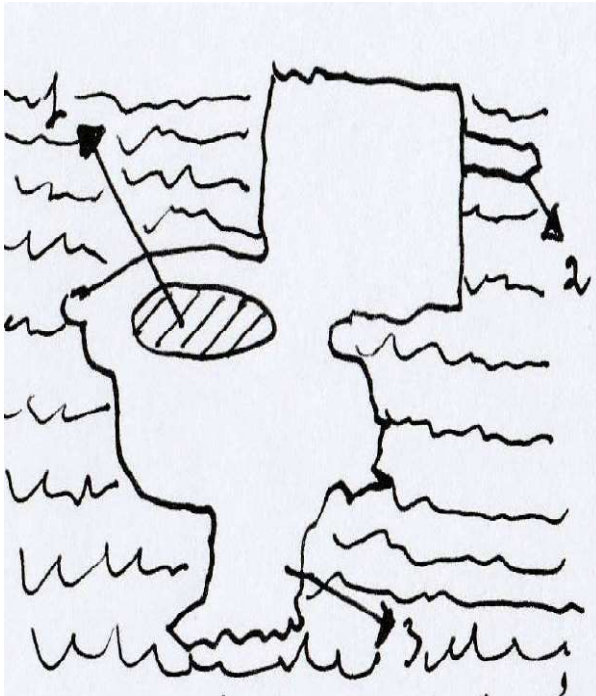
Motherleth (polka-dotted)

Thitleth (brown)

Dragonleth (sorry, read dragon less)

No dragon

Map of Nerp



1. Yellow Inland Sea
2. Flushing Lever
3. Pedestal Peninsula



Here be dragons

The hatching cave at Flushing Lever on the planet, Nerp, was packed from floor to ceiling for the annual impressing ceremony of the hatchling

dragonettes. Dignitaries - and the not-so dignified - from most civilized planets were present in great numbers to view the unique ceremony. Even from as far afield as the banks of the Limpopo River, South Africa, Third Planet, Solar System Sol, came the intrepid Van Der Merwe, travelling incognito as V'an.

In the arena, surrounding the clutch of ten eggs due to hatch within the hour stood the nervous twelve-year-old candidates. Aside, trying unsuccessfully to hide his large bulk stood fifteen-year-old M'ike, son of M'fanny, Dragonlady of Flushing Lever. It would be M'ike's third attempt at impressing a dragonette and he was painfully aware of his inability to impress. A hatchling would take one look at his ungainly torso, his number fifteen dragon hide boots, his crooked teeth (one incisor missing), his oily frizzy hair, and retreat back into the egg-shell. Definitely unimpressed!

But M'fanny was determined that her son should become dragonrider.

There were ten eggs and ten would-be riders. If she could help it no candidate would leave dragon less. Long gone were her aspirations of a gold for M'ike - a little checked or pin-striped runt would do.

V'an, sitting in the € seats, chuckled when he observed how much Mike resembled his much-travelled pal, Mike Shutter, from his home country. At least some of Shutter's bragging appeared to be founded on fact. What Shutter's offspring did not suspect - and in fact no-one knew - was that V'an had done a little tampering with the eggs the night before. At the bottom of the Yellow-Inland-Sea lay one dragon egg which would never hatch and in its place.....

Well, let's get back to the ever hopeful M'ike at the impressing ceremony.

Fanfares blared, the dragons roared and belched and made even ruder noises. The candidates advanced on the eggs. The din alone was sufficient to cause the shells to crack.

A great cheer went up as the first egg cracked and little B'oobs impressed the pink dragonette just emerging. Then in quick succession eight more eggs hatched and were impressed. There remained one egg and one candidate. You guessed it: M'ike.

Shouting encouragement, M'fanny called upon her dragon, Brookleth, to bellow, chew braai-briquettes and blow flames for all she could. The egg showed not a sign of cracking. M'ike advanced upon it in grim determination .A voice from the crowd yelled, "Skop hom, which, freely translated, means "Kick the bloody thing'."

Reflexively M'ike obeyed. The egg burst into flying fragments.

Like a taut spring uncoiling, like a mamba striking, what appeared to be a huge wingless dun-coloured dragon, glistening sickeningly, erupted from the shattered shell. Roaring fearfully it rushed at the hapless M'ike, snapping its awesomely toothed jaws. Displaying remarkable agility for one so gross of build, M'ike leapt into the air and, catlike, simultaneously twisted away, even as the dragon's snapping jaws found purchase on the heel of one dragon hide boot. A piercing scream rent the air, diminishing like the whistle of a passing steam engine as M'ike went "between".

Speculation has it that M'ike must be on some distant planet as he has not yet re-appeared on Nerp.

V'an is a little apprehensive that by some quirk of fate, M'ike might have gone as far "between" as Planet Earth, more specifically somewhere near his croc breeding farm.

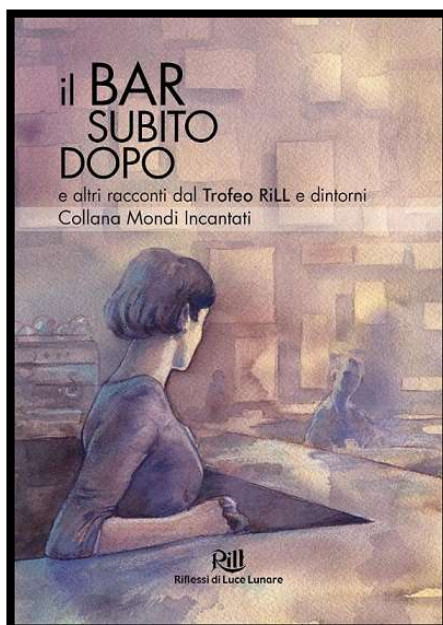
One never knows how far afield M'fanny's influence in interplanetary affairs is felt, which could be damaging to his extensive trade in genetically engineered supercroc hides.

But what a good story he would have to tell around the bushveld campfire!

Never play leapfrog with a unicorn - anon

Many of you will know that we have been contributing winning stories from our Nova competition to the annual anthology that the TROFEO RiLL, an Italian literary award organisation devoted to fantasy, horror and science-fictional short-stories have put together with winning stories from international short story competitions, for some time now. As you will also know we did not have a Nova winner in 2020, due to few entrants. So we did not have a story to contribute. But Alberto Panicucci asked us for a few winning stories from years before we had been contributing. We sent him a selection and they chose to use "Creatures" from Belinda Lewis which was chosen as the Nova winner in 2013 by final judge Lauren Beukes. The anthology *Mondi Incantati 2021*, has now been released and the links for this information are in the box below. I do hope that you will take a look.

I have taken the liberty of copying the banner from their website and added a copy of the cover of the book. SFFSA are proud to be associated with RiLL.



<https://www.rill.it/rill-world-tour-2021> - release data

<https://www.rill.it/il-bar-subito-dopo> RiLL's website

The book is available on the links below:

<https://www.rill.it/ordini-antologie>

<https://www.amazon.it/dp/8832198991> on

Amazon

The Hissing of the Snakes William Gunter

2nd place Nova 2001 SA Section

The Hills rise immediately to the south of the Caprivi Strip, and to the north-west of the vast yellowing and reddish sands of the Kalahari Desert - remote, rugged and stark against the undulating desert. They are the only hills in this desolate and abandoned region, and they emerge granite-like from the sullen and unyielding landscape like misshapen monoliths on a barren plain. Surrounded by sand, bush, faded grass and scattered acacia trees, The Hills are particularly beloved - so say the Khoi - by the Great God Mantis who created all and who presides over the karri-karri - the land of forlorn hope and suffering.

But there is life here also: various species of game and birds and reptiles and insects. And, occasionally, the Khoi - the desert wanderers.

Into this land came Korak the Hunter_ He had travelled many miles from the south - a journey of six suns - where his tribe was encamped, and he had come to The Hills to pay homage to Mantis, as his ancestors had done before him. Small, lean, and wizened and brown-skinned, with short curly hair - described as kroes by the Whites of the south - Korak wore only a flimsy loincloth of animal skin, and carried with him his tools of survival: a bow and arrows, a hunting knife, and a leather bag containing a water-filled ostrich egg, dried skins for warmth, fire sticks, and other utensils.

Earlier that day, he had tracked and killed a small buck (since his tribe was not with him it was unnecessary to kill a large animal), and the portions of food he did not require he had left for the hyena and the vulture and the other scavengers that would ravage where the carcass had been abandoned. Now he explored the defiles of The Hills, seeking out the formidable rocks where his ancestors had once roamed. And there in the gathering twilight Korak the Hunter found what he sought: marks daubed in red ochre on the rock walls depicting the people and the beasts and the

hunts of the past. Among these were representations of eland, giraffe and antelope, and also primitive stick-like elongated figures, clearly human. Korak lovingly traced his fingers delicately over the latter, for they were emblems of his ancestors. As the last rays of the sun departed beyond the horizon, his face broke into a smile of pleasure, and the corners of his eyes wrinkled from pure joy. He looked upwards then, towards the sky and the foreboding rocks darkened in silhouette by the diminishing sun, and gave praise to Mantis and to the power, the Niim, bequeathed by Mantis to his people.

Having paid his respects to Mantis, he now wandered farther upward into the crags and to the cave he had discovered on a previous visit. The entrance was partly concealed by scrub and bush. These obstacles he brushed aside, and gingerly entered the darkening gloom. With his fire-stick he lighted a stump of dried wood, and holding this aloft as a torch he again observed that there was ample shelter here; this cave had undoubtedly been used by his ancestors as a brief dwelling-place - a protection from the elements - since the walls also had been decorated with the familiar red ochre, depictions of humans and beasts. These he considered respectfully for a while. But now, as he penetrated the deeper recesses of the cave, he noticed there were other occupants: slitherers. The time was already well past the onset of the winter- the dry cold season – and innumerable snakes had sought refuse to hibernate. Even as he watched in the flickering light of his torch, they writhed and hissed at his approach: cobra, ringhals, and puff-adder, and other lesser – but no less dangerous – species entwining and weaving in a strange ritual.

Korak retreated cautiously, considering once again that Mantis provided shelter for all of his creatures.

Arriving at the base of The Hills where he had begun his pilgrimage, he quickly gathered dry sticks and lit a fire with the dying remains of his primitive torch. As he waited for the embers of his fire to glow red-hot so that he could prepare his evening meal from the buck he had killed earlier, he considered

the depth and number of the stars now shining from the darkness surrounding him. Like the sands of the Kalahari, they were beyond the ability of any mere man to count. Did other beings live there, he wondered? And did Mantis control their destinies also?

Suddenly, in the darkness and the stillness around him, his senses perceived a strange whirring noise - a sound unfamiliar to him - and he started, reaching for his bow and quiver of arrows. Taut and alert, like a leopard stalking its prey, his eyes pierced the gloom of the night, and he watched and waited. The noise grew louder. A shimmering light like a huge ball appeared in the sky, descended slowly, and settled no more than an arrow-shot from where he had encamped. The whirring sound ceased as abruptly as it had come to his ears, and the light flickered and then dimmed.

Instantly, Korak kicked sand over the embers of his fire; this fire at least would not now betray his presence. From his vantage point he observed a huge object, shaped like a cooking-point on three legs, and easily the height of, and perhaps taller than, an elephant. From the base of this strange object - which now pulsed with a glowing light - there emerged two sticks into which were inserted horizontally a further series of sticks at regular intervals. A crouching figure clambered down these sticks and straightened on reaching the ground. The figure walked from the strange craft to the perimeter thrown by the glowing light, and with extended arm waved a metallic wand as if testing the air.

The creature - for it indeed appeared human, Korak noted - was attired from shoulder to foot in a one-piece silken garment similar to overalls worn by Whites he had encountered. The alien being gazed about as if testing the darkness, then called out, "Kaluta daraaba kintor There followed a silence; a call broke the silence again, "Kaluta daraaba kintol"

Korak pondered the unfamiliar words uttered in a vernacular he had not previously heard: were they a greeting, or a threat? Had the being detected his presence? He decided that the interloper had indeed sensed that he was

not alone: why otherwise would he have addressed the darkness - the nothingness - in this strange unknown language?

He stepped into the dim light, his right hand raised in a greeting, his left hand gripping his bow and a slinged arrow at the ready. "I am Korak," he called out hesitantly, adding "... of the Khoi - also known as the San. I greet you in peace."

As Korak spoke. The stranger had been fingering a small metal device attached to the front of his overalls."...and I am La Klaryss," the alien said in the clicking tongue of the Khoi. "I come from the planet" La Klaryss paused, "but you would not know the name. It is there in space..." pointing towards the stars, "there in the Milky Way. And I too greet you in peace."

"You are amazed that I speak your language," La Klaryss continued. "I come from a race far-advanced in technology - far superior to that of the peoples of your land. This decoder..." again fingering the metal device "... enables me to understand and to speak in your tongue. And with this wand I was able to detect your presence -yes, even in the dark - though I could not see you. But you must not fear me, for I intend you no harm."

Korak bristled. "Korak fears no one -except the Great Mantis ... and, perhaps, the women of his tribe," he added with a grin. "But come. I have food and water -we will eat."

Rekindling the embers of his dying fire until it blazed, he removed a temporary seal at the top of his ostrich egg. "Drink," he said, offering the egg to La Klaryss. "Water is precious in the land of the Khoi, but I will refill it in the morning."

The flames of the fire brightened the soft features of his guest which had been hidden previously by the shadows cast by the alien craft. "You are female!" Korak observed with astonishment.

"Yes, I am a female - though I assume many guises. How I appear to you now is how I anticipate you would expect me to look. To others elsewhere -

out there in the stars - I would present a different and to them a perhaps more acceptable and not so puny form."

As La Klaryss spoke Korak covered the remains of his earlier kill with wild grass collected nearby and placed the meal on the glowing coals. "We will eat presently."

Then, after a pause, "The language you spoke when you first greeted me - what did you say?"

La Klaryss laughed. "It is a universal greeting - and a warning - to all who live in the stars. It was uttered many, many years ago by one - a superior being - who visited your planet. And other planets... It was a time when your land stood still for a day. Now, over the years, the words have become jumbled - distorted - but the meaning is still clear to all who can interpret them.

"You perhaps wonder why I am here," said La Klaryss. Not waiting for his reply, she continued, "I have come to populate your land with my kind. My planet is dying -the ice-caps are advancing, and we will perish.

"We have scoured the known universe, seeking a land compatible with ours. Here, north and south are similar to our icecaps; lower down, and across the waters to east and west, there is available land. But the people - and, in places, the beasts are too numerous. Your sparsely-peopled land is ideal for our offspring."

La Klaryss paused to accept Korak's offer of food. There was a sudden rustle in the nearby bushes. With her free hand La Klaryss pointed her wand in the direction of the sound. A sharp light exploded, and a writhing shape lifted in the beam of light and fell squirming to the ground. Korak walked over to the wriggling snake and held it up by the tail. "It is a female," he said. "And she is dead." He looked up in the direction of the distant cave. "She has paid for her tardiness with her life." He flung the still-moving carcass into the bushes. "But she will provide food for the desert scavengers."

He sat down beside La Klaryss. "You are pregnant then?" he inquired. La Klaryss nodded. He rekindled the dying fire with stumps of dried wood. "How long will you stay to succour your offspring?"

Klaryss laughed. "Clearly you do not understand. My hatchlings - being of superior birth - will fend for themselves, since they have the Force. With them I leave behind hope for the future of my kind. They will bring to this land, barren as it is, technologies such as you have never seen." She fingered the device on the chest of her overall. "This will become... a land flowing with... milk and honey."

Korak snorted. "The land already has milk and honey - for those who know where to find it."

La Klaryss stood up. "I must return to report on my mission. But first, you must show me a safe place - a concealed refuge - where I can deliver my offspring. For my time of confinement draws near."

"But who will deliver your offspring? There are no women here - no midwife," said Korak.

"You still do not understand," said La Klaryss "My people are different from yours. We mate, and then we kill - and eat - our mate. Just as I have killed and eaten my mate, El Lektor. For our mates would devour our hatchlings. This is a practice not unknown among certain of the species of your world, I have observed.

La Klaryss went on, "Now, with your knowledge of these hills, will you show me where I may lay my eggs?"

"Eggs!" said Korak, astonished.

"Yes," said La Klaryss. "We are egg-layers. We are able to control the number we lay to limit our population. But for my mission to succeed I must lay many eggs if I am to populate your land and provide a new life for my kind. The hatchlings will emerge within three moons."

For the first time in his life, Korak was in turmoil. Did La Klaryss's plan pose a dangerous threat to his people who still survived in the desert as remnants of a stone-age civilisation? There had been a time years ago, he recalled, when Arab traders from the north had attempted to enslave the Khoi and ship them to far-off lands. But a mighty bronzed warrior had come to the assistance of the embattled Khoi with a herd of trumpeting elephants. The Arabs had been routed and driven forever from the sands of the Kalahari. The warrior had returned to his home in the land of the Great Apes, and there had been no further incursions upon the Khoi. But now many of the Khoi had become trackers for the White soldiers in a senseless bush war in Namibia and Angola, and tribes of his clan had succumbed to the temptations of the easy ways of the Whites and had been absorbed and relocated in settlements. What further disintegration of the Khoi would the future bring?

With these grim thoughts on his mind, he reasoned that he could kill La Klaryss from a distance, using his bow and poisoned arrow, but the threat of her powerful wand stayed this possibility. Besides, Mantis would not condone wanton murder. In the end, he decided that Mantis would resolve his conflict.

He beckoned to La Klaryss and said, "Come with me. I will show you a safe place. Then I will leave you."

Holding a brightly burning torch of wood, Korak led the way up a tortuous path to the hidden cave in The Hills. Once inside the cave, he showed La Klaryss a ledge near the primitive paintings he had recently visited. "Here you will be safe," he told La Klaryss. "But venture no farther, for in the dark there are many pitfalls and much danger."

"Monsters perhaps?" La Klaryss scoffed.

"Yes, even monsters," he agreed. "In the morning, the path down from the cave will be clear in the sunlight. I will wait for you there."

La Klaryss spent the remainder of that night and the following day in her confinement. After she had deposited her clutch of eggs on the ledge in the cave indicated by Korak, she peered briefly around her. Remembering Korak's warning about the dangers that lay deeper within, she left the cave and returned to the foothills. It was now dusk and a crisp winter chill had descended on the evening air.

"Korak!" she called. There was no reply. "Korak!" she cried again. "Where are you?"

"I am here."

"But I do not see you.

"That is what you may expect when I do not wish to be seen," Korak's voice came distantly.

La Klaryss waved her wand; she imagined she saw the silhouette of a tree in the gathering murk. "Korak!" she repeated. "I have a gift for you - before I depart."

The tree was no longer there but she observed the desert grass waving.

Korak said, "I do not trust your powerful wand - or your gift. For your gift is death." His voice was muffled and appeared to carry from an outcrop of rock. The desert grass was motionless.

"Why would I kill you when I have a gift for you?"

"Because you fear that I would destroy your eggs when you have gone. It is a natural fear. But the Khoi are not wanton or needless slayers: your eggs will be safe from me. Further, the Great Mantis provides all our needs. I have no use for your gift - whatever it may be."

There was a movement in the distance, away from the rocky outcrop. La Klaryss thought for a moment that she saw the tawny shape of a four-legged creature. But of Korak there was no sign.

"In that case, Korak, I bid you goodbye. I must now depart on a long journey - in the reckoning of your time - to the stars. Thanks you for your hospitality and your assistance.

"Farewell, Korak. May the Force be with you."

Korak watched from the shadows as La Klaryss entered her craft. "And may the Nium be with you," Korak murmured. He waited in the dark. A high-pitched whirring sound filled the night air. A shimmer of swirling light pierced the darkness, rose into the night sky, and disappeared. And The Hills and the sands of the Kalahari returned to utter darkness and silence.

The following day Korak arose early as the morning sun peered over The Hills to warm the familiar habitat of sky, rock and desert sand. The sun warmed also a glittering object lying where the craft from the sky had departed the previous evening. Korak approached, and then stopped in his tracks. Had La Klaryss forgotten her powerful wand? Or was this perhaps her gift to him? If a gift, would he be able to fathom and master its functions and uses? And was this indeed the wand that La Klaryss had used so effectively, or merely a replica designed to entrap the unwary? Caution governed his instinctive curiosity: he recalled similar objects from the bush war which, when handled or trodden on by the unsuspecting, detonated with killing or maiming effect. He reasoned that Mantis had provided him with a tribal family, bow and arrows, and the Nium: he therefore had no need of the gift left by La Klaryss.

For the immediate future he had one other matter requiring attention. He gathered his hunting bag and retraced his steps to the cave and to the ledge where La Klaryss had laid her eggs. He saw there were many, many eggs: far beyond his ability to count. For the immediate future he had one other matter requiring attention. From his hunting bag he took a hornpot and partly poured the ochre contents into a mixing bowl. To this he added a small compound of dragon's blood - a reddish mixture made from wild gum - which he heated and stirred over a small fire. Then, taking a charred stick from the fire, he drew in deft strokes on the cave wall above the ledge an outline of La Klaryss's craft as he remembered it, and, beside it, a stick-like

figure of La Klaryss herself He dipped a feather from his hunting bag into the bowl, and applied the reddish-ochre mixture to his drawings. Stepping down from the ledge, he briefly examined his work. In the soft morning light diffusing the cave entrance, the new drawings blended in a frieze with the primitive drawings of humans and beasts made by earlier tenants of the cave. What would future explorers of this cave make of these drawings, Korak mused.

He retrieved his hunting bag and bow and arrows, and with one last cautionary glance around the cave made his way back to the ascent to The Hills.

There was a dishevelled heap lying where La Klaryss's wand had been. Korak's eyes narrowed as he examined the charred and shattered remains of fur, flesh, bones and blood: a hyena, foraging possibly at the snake La Klaryss had killed, had strayed unwittingly upon the wand, seized it in a vice-like jaw and met an untimely death. Other scavengers would feast on the remains of the hyena, Korak reflected, but at least Mantis had answered his doubts.

He refilled his ostrich egg with water from a hollow tree and prepared for the long trek to rejoin his tribe in the south. He considered his brief encounter with La Klaryss. The future, whatever it might be, would be determined by Mantis.

Within two moons the serpents in the cave would emerge from the torpor of their winter hibernation. They would be ravenous, and as they slithered from the dark recesses and crevices to seek the sun they would find the eggs - food in abundance - left by La Klaryss near the entrance to the cave. For this, as Korak well knew, was the time, the season and the place appointed by the Great God Mantis for The Hissing of the Snakes.

Book Reviews

Cixin Liu *The Supernova Era* (Translated by Joel Martinsen)



Cixin Liu apparently began writing this novel shortly after the distressing events in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.

A supernova explodes relatively near to earth and sends out a deadly high energy radiation that will shortly kill everyone on Earth who is more than 13 years of age.

The adults desperately try to transfer all their knowledge to their children before they die in the hope that civilization and their offspring will live on in the world as it is before the disaster.

At first the orphaned children try to keep everything as it was but soon become disheartened and bored. They want to have fun. The story revolves around a group of children who hold positions of strength in the various countries, and mainly about a Chinese boy called Huahua and a group of his friends.

The children resort to rampant alcoholism and then when this does not give them satisfaction decide to hold "War Games" on the Antarctic continent. Treaties are made and broken. Many die and finally a strange agreement is entered into. The total population of China will move to the USA and the American population will move to China. This does not go well.

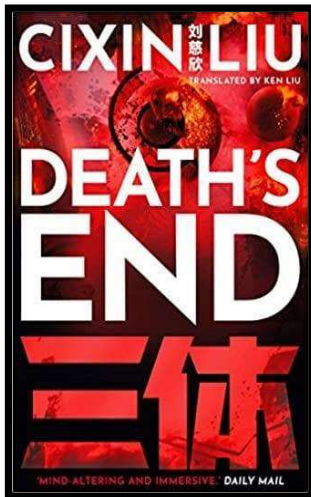
This novel does not try to use the very complex scientific ideas that are expounded in the Three-Body Problem trilogy and so I found it easier reading.

The end of the story makes a large jump to a society living on some sort of space habitat that is close enough to see the "blue planet" rising and a father telling his children that their grandparents still live there on Earth

But still a very strange and unhappy tale and not one that I found entertaining
Gail

Cixin Liu Death's End Remembrance of Earth's Past volume 3

(Translated by Ken Liu)



This is the final instalment of the series that began with “The Three-body Problem” and continued with the “Dark Forest”.

Previously, astronomer-turned-sociologist Luo Ji forestalled an invasion attempt by advanced aliens from planet Trisolaris. Luo’s “dark forest” deterrence works thus: if intelligent species exist, inevitably some will be hostile; therefore, safety lies in remaining hidden while threatening to reveal your enemy’s location to the predators.

Earth knows where Trisolaris is, but the Trisolarans can’t threaten to reveal Earth’s location since they want to occupy it. Here, the story picks up at an earlier juncture. Cheng Xin, an aerospace engineer develops a probe to study the approaching Trisolaran fleet, and learns that a friend has been tricked into volunteering to die in order to assist the project. Horrified, she retreats into hibernation. When she revives centuries later, dark forest deterrence holds the Trisolarans at bay. Luo, now old, hands Cheng the key to Earth’s defense. Unfortunately, the sophons—tiny, intelligent, light-speed computers sent by the Trisolarans as spies—know Cheng lacks Luo’s ruthlessness and immediately seize control of Earth; only by luck does Earth manage to trigger its deterrent. Hostile aliens immediately destroy planet Trisolaris, whose invasion fleet turns away because it’s only a matter of time before the same invisible antagonists strike the solar system. Once again, Cheng must choose between logical ruthlessness and simple human compassion, with the fate of humanity at stake. This long and convoluted book shows little interest in linear narrative or conventional character interactions. Instead, the author offers dilemmas moral, philosophical, and political; perspectives—an interesting glimpse of three dimensions seen from a four-dimensional viewpoint. In humanity’s darkest hour, Luo Ji finally grasps the truth of cosmic civilization, and miraculously forces a truce between Earth and the Trisolarans. Not an easy read but probably worth persisting to the end.

Gail Jamieson

Frank Herbert Dune



This is basically a republication of the original novel which was published in 1966 by Gollancz in the UK, telling the story of Paul Atreides, son of Duke Leto Atreides and his concubine, the Lady Jessica, who becomes the legend Paul Muad'Dib.

Leto is sent to Arrakis by the Emperor as a pawn to “control” the Spice trade, but actually to further the interests of this overlord.

Leto is quickly killed and Paul and Jessica escape into the desert where he is captured by the Fremen, who are trying to take control of the planet and transform it from its desert status.

Melange, or the spice, has anti-geriatric properties but its most important use is for the Guild navigators who transport people and cargo through space, and so probably the most important and expensive substance in the universe.

It follows the story as Paul becomes the figurehead of the revolution and indeed is transformed into mythical figure by the drinking of water changed by Shai Halud

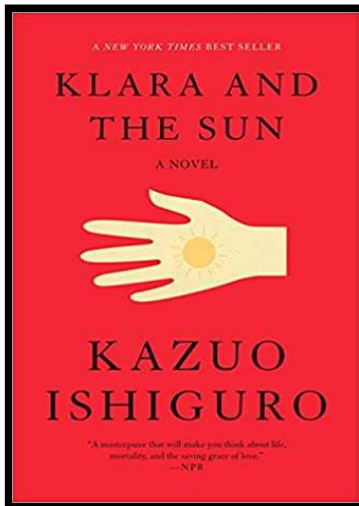
And it is also the story of the Bene Gesserit who have been breeding for generations to create the Kwisatz Haderach, a messianic superbeing. They too want to control Paul

And don't forget the enormous sandworms.....

As this winner of the Hugo and Nebula awards is considered one of the classics of science fiction it has again been transferred to the big screen and even released in 3D. I am sure this is why it has been rereleased. Although Herbert wrote many follow up novels I feel that this one stands head and shoulders above all of them and can be read as a true classic.

Gail Jamieson

Kazuo Ishiguro Klara and the Sun



Professor Deirdre Byrne and I ended up reading 'Klara and the Sun' at about the same time. My initial response was that it was such a frustrating read for me that I ended up actively disliking the book in the end. I think that as an SF reader you do have certain expectations, and when an author decides to play in this sandbox and then ignore all of the conventions and tropes – it just does not do it for me.

I honestly feel that what Ishiguro has to say about robots taking up human jobs is not only completely untrue but laughable. Which means there has to be something much more going on here that is going over my head as an SF reader. Of course, Ishiguro did not consciously set out to write a book about robots. And I honestly don't think he knows much or even cares about the SF genre. What why use the building materials of the genre if you end up making something so incomplete?

Deirdre, on the other hand, thoroughly enjoyed it. She says she know it's an old trope, namely the robot with human-like emotions and thoughts, or the robot with human-like appearance. But for her, Ishiguro managed to portray Klara's limitations, as well as her gifts, convincingly. The 'boxes' that she often sees before she is able to synthesise her visual impressions are an example.

Also, she is not able to process human ambivalence, such as shown by Josie's Mother and the Housekeeper . At the same time, she shows initiative in her crazy plan to enlist the Sun to save Josie, demonstrating that she has courage, ability and logic. I just like her, for her ability to learn, to process information, and to put together different pieces of emotionally loaded input to arrive at complex understandings, says Deirdre.

Deirdre liked the book's basic premise: A girl who has been genetically modified, and may die of the side-effects, in order that she can reach a higher social level. At the same time, she thought Ishiguro does not follow through on it very well. What is involved in 'lifting' children? And why are some 'not lifted'? Do all children need

'lifting' to achieve anything in life? Why is the technology so dangerous? And so on. Without a proper grounding, I think it becomes another fictional society where some have and some do not, a bit like Gattaca but without the science.

We both agree that there is a problem with the ending, which is a bit Eliot-esque ('not with a bang, but a whimper'.) Again, it is not grounded in any cognitive innovation. This all being said, though, Ishiguro did not claim that his book is SF. He simply presents it. This is something you can do if you are Margaret Atwood, Marge Piercy or a Knight in the British Empire. He did say, in an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Service's Writers & Company programme, that he is interested in the subtleties of interpersonal interactions, and for Deirdre, Klara and the Sun is about this more than it is about science.

While I cannot remember what the marketing campaign for the book was, but as soon as the first reviews mentioned 'robots', I think people automatically assumed it was SF, as they did with 'Never Let Me go'. I doubt if the average reader of 'Klara' knows anything about Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics. Does this hamper your enjoyment of the book as a result? For me I definitely think it did, as I was expecting so much ... SF. Ishiguro's version of world-building is to throw a couple of neologisms around like AF, or oblong, and then expect the poor reader to construct a whole society out of that. Compared to the nuanced characters, and especially the portrayal of Klara, the paucity of the world they inhabit is deeply puzzling to me as an SF reader.

In 'Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine January/February 2021', Robert Silverberg wrote about the centenary of robots in his Reflections column, called 'One Hundred Years of Robots'. Interestingly, the word 'robot' is found in many Slavic languages. In Czech, 'robot' carries the connotation of 'drudgery' or even 'slave labour.' In January 1921, Prague saw the first performance of a play called R.U.R., Karel Capek ('Rossum's Universal Robots'.)

Silverberg adds: "The concept of robots was nothing new, of course. Two and half millennia ago Greek mythology gave us Talos, a man whom Hephaestus fashioned out of brass to protect the islands of Greece against invaders. The Golem of Jewish medieval legend was an artificial human being. So was the creature that Dr. Frankenstein assembled in Mary Shelley's novel."

Nowadays everyone is familiar with Isaac Asimov's Three Laws, HAL from 2001 and The Terminator. Fast-forward to Ishiguro and his notion of the 'AF', or artificial friend, which are very difficult to get a handle on. They are also called companions, but perform no conceivable function that cannot be done so by a human being. Why are they gendered, and how on earth do you build a notion of gender into a robot? Surely it is simpler and more cost-effective to have a base model that can be adjusted accordingly.

I think I am heading to a position where I am saying that Ishiguro is intellectually lazy and disrespectful towards his readers who know more about SF than he does. His attitude is: I don't care how my robots, or society for that, functions or even makes logical sense. I am totally absolved by the fact that I am a literary writer who does not have to abide by the constraints of genre, and I will write about interpersonal relationships come hell or high water.

Deirdre's response is: Let's see if you can persuade a Nobel-Prize-winning British peer that he should be more coherent within a genre that he has consistently disavowed! My final comment is that I actually feel that being an SF fan automatically puts one at a disadvantage. While I was mulling Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, the Turing Test and the singularity, Ishiguro clearly has no interest in engaging with any sort of genre meta-dialectic, let alone the science of robotics or how we understand AI, especially as we stand on the brink of the Internet of Things, which aims to turn the entire world into an interconnected smart device.

No, we are as in the dark as Klara herself when it comes to comprehending the world she inhabits, which takes place not only in an unspecified time, but even an unspecified country. One can safely assume it is definitely not the UK, as a character remarks at one point: "I do miss England. In particular I miss the hedges."The relationship between Klara, Josie and Rick as a trio, contrasted in turn against the adults around them, whose collective behaviour is quite baffling at several points, is really the meat of the story here, which is ultimately about class, privilege and entitlement far more than it is about the miracle of Klara as a robot gradually becoming self-aware.

The very fact that Ishiguro uses the neologism 'Artificial Friend' is testament to this. What he does have to say about robots – that they will ultimately replace human labour and 'scare' people if they ever gain consciousness – is actually quite trite and

not nearly as nuanced as depicted by a host of other SF writers. But that is to miss the point of 'Klara', which is at its heart a character study and a meditation on what it 'means' to be human. Therefore, the AF is merely a metaphor for this: "Do you believe in the human heart? I don't mean the organ, obviously. I'm speaking in the poetic sense. The human heart. Do you think there is such a thing? Something that makes each of us special and individual?"

Gerhard Hope

Video Game Review – Kyle Brunette



Control: Released: 27 August, 2019

Story:

If you're familiar with the SCP Foundation (and if you aren't, go check it out @ <https://scp-wiki.wikidot.com/>), you'll feel right at home.

While not set in the SCP Universe, Control is most definitely inspired by it - and as far as I am concerned, this is a good thing.

Control takes place entirely within the Oldest House, a paranormal brutalist skyscraper in New

York city, taken over and used by the Federal Bureau of Control (FBC) as their headquarters. Our protagonist, Jesse Faden arrives at the Oldest House looking for her brother, Dylan, who was captured by the FBC during an "altered world event" which occurred 17 years before the game started. Once she enters the building, she quickly finds that something has gone horribly wrong - the FBC has (ironically) lost control of the building, and it has been invaded by an extra-dimensional entity known only as "The Hiss". Jesse quickly gets into the thick of it, as she is immediately chosen by "The Board" (don't ask) as the next director of the FBC - a position, that conveniently, has just become vacant. For reasons that aren't immediately clear, Jesse is capable of reversing the changes made in the Oldest House by the Hiss, as well as obtaining and controlling "Objects of Power". Because of this, only she can free the building from the Hiss and find her brother. This kind of story probably isn't for everyone; but I really enjoyed it. It's an interesting story, and it's a story well told; always preserving the mystery of the Oldest House and the FBC.

Gameplay:

Control is an action-adventure type video game.

As you progress through the story, you'll gain control over various paranormal objects which grant you supernatural abilities such as telekinesis, levitation, and mind control. Each of these powers is fun to utilize, especially when combined. Most of the action in Control revolves fighting through FBC agents who have been corrupted by the Hiss, many of which possess supernatural abilities of their own. Overall, control is not especially difficult or challenging to play, but it is fun.

There is a lot to do in the Oldest House, from the main story, various side quests, and even an arcade style mode (AWE) where you race against the clock to complete randomly generated objectives. Personally, I really enjoyed playing through the story (and most of the side quests), but the AWE content wasn't really my cup of tea.

Visuals and Performance:

Visually, Control is beautiful. If you own a graphics card capable of real-time raytracing (RTX), it gets even better. I've played through Control twice, the first time without raytracing, and the second time with an RTX-capable graphics card.

I thought it was pretty good looking the first time - but the second time through, the RTX lighting added an amazing level of detail, most notably reflections in glass and shiny floors (which you'll find spread liberally through the Oldest House).

Performance-wise, Control is generally well optimized and it ran very well on my machine - I have no complaints.

Conclusion:

Control is a fascinating experience, one I would highly recommend to anyone.

NO HEATING REQUIRED by W G Lipsett

2nd Place Nova 1989

("THEY HAVE COME AGAIN." "YES, THEY HAVE COME.")

They stopped at the foot of the dune. Its dark, shadowy bulk loomed up before them,

the long, curved rim of its summit outlined against the lightening sky.

Ka turned to face the small group of figures; he was the oldest of them all and their leader. He nodded towards the massive bulk of the dune. "This is the last of the hills of sand. Beyond, lies the Temple."

How could his uncle possibly know *that*, wondered Te? How could his uncle be so sure? He *was* the oldest and he had made the Pilgrimage many times before but, to Te, the dune looked no different from any of the countless others over which they had plodded so laboriously these last four nights. How could his uncle know that this was the last dune which stood between them and the Temple? They could not see over this mountain of sand but his uncle was so certain that the Temple lay beyond it, that it lay straight ahead. And how had he managed to guide them, without faltering once, over such a vast land of strange sameness to reach one small place lost in the wilderness and to arrive there at a predetermined time?

Even still more wonderful to Te, was the way in which Ka had led them straight to a place of shelter which they reached each night well before the new day. To be caught out in the open after the grinning, burning face of Rotah showed itself above the far Rim of the World when the Evil One rose from his nightly sleep to make his daily journey across the sky, would have meant death before the day was out. The fear that this may yet happen, often was with Te as they journeyed across the desert and as the night sky suddenly began to grow lighter and no shelter seemed yet in sight. But Ka led them all safely to shelter well before the Evil One showed his face and nor were they just places which his uncle had stumbled upon by chance. They were the stopping places which had been used by countless people before although no marked path or way led to them. Only yesterday, he had asked his uncle to tell him the secret but Ka had merely shrugged and said, "The knowledge of the Way will come, even to you, in time. One day, when you are as old as I am, perhaps then you will also lead your people on a Pilgrimage."

But Te shook his head. Ka was wise and, one day, even should Te be as old as his uncle, he doubted that he ever would be able to find the Temple on his own. Too soon, he would become lost in this featureless 'sea' of sand. That is what he had heard them call the desert: a 'sea of sand' and the dunes, 'waves'. And, although they had tried to explain, Te could not picture what a 'sea' must have been like, much

less a 'wave'. He soon realised too, that they themselves did not know *No* one really knew.

"But what was a 'sea'?", he persisted.

"You ask more questions, boy, than a woman does of her man when he stands empty-handed before her after the hunt. A 'sea' is much water lying on the ground, so much water that even the desert cannot drink it up. So much water that it stretches far to the Rim of the World. There were seas long, long ago when the Gods walked among our people."

"And the 'waves'? What were the 'waves'?"

"The 'waves' were hills in the sea. Tall hills just like the sand hills, the dunes of the desert."

"But

"You ask too many questions, lad! Wait till you stand in the Temple of the Gods. There you will see the sea and the waves and much more besides."

Water lying on the ground and stretching to the Rim of the World! That was beyond understanding. The most water that Te had ever seen, were the shallow pools in the caves at home and the few mouthfuls which collected at the bottom of the ancient wells near the mountains.

Te stopped thinking of the sea and about water; it only made him still thirstier. Yet, by each morning, Ka, his uncle, had found the place of shelter long before Rotah showed his evil face--a face that no man has ever yet looked upon and loved. Yesterday, the shelter was a shallow cave beneath a low overhang of crumbling rock, the only pile of rock they had yet seen in this waste of sand. The day before, it had been a deep, wind-carved gully in the sand, a place where the high walls cast patches of moving shadow and in which they could bundle close together. The day before that it had been the ruined shell of a low, flat building which stood alone, a relic of the Olden Times. Its top barely showed above the sand and it was bare inside except for a drift of red, hot-smelling sand banked up against one wall. And as Rotah travelled higher and higher in the sky, they had crouched in the small room and listened to the sigh of the wind and had watched the long fingers of sand feel their way through the door less entrance towards them. But, at last, the Evil one had left the sky and had descended again into his black kingdom deep below the Rim of the World and they had been able to venture out and continue their journey.

"We will drink water here, then rest a while."

The sound of Ka's voice broke into Te's thoughts, and the others, who were huddled together, whispering among themselves, were silent at once.

"We will drink water here, but we must be inside the Temple soon. Already the Evil One lightens the sky."

At a sign from his uncle, they all sat cross-legged on the hot sand. Te placed his wooden spear carefully at his side. His spear had had many owners. Once it was his father's spear and it had been handed down from father to son for as long as any of them could remember. Such had been the practice with all the spears which they now owned. It was said that the wood from which their spears were made, long ago, had come from the holy trees which had grown in the mountains. Te didn't know about that; he only knew that there were no longer any trees or any wood in his world; he only knew that his father had given him the spear as soon as he was able to lift the heavy weight of it. And it was his father who had shown him how to use it and who had made him practice at throwing it over and over again. He ran his fingers once more over its worn, polished shaft as it lay there at his side in the sand.

The spear was Te's most prized possession. Apart from his lizard-skin food and water bags and a narrow amulet of braided lizard skin which their priest had made for him, it was his only possession. And, like all the grown men, he now carried his spear at all times; he liked to feel the weight of it in his hand and he would have been lost without it. Besides, one never knew when lun-lun, the Lizard, might dash across one's path. He was almost as good now at throwing his spear as the older men and he could easily impale a fast-moving lizard at more than twenty paces.

The strap of the food bag was cutting into the thin flesh of his shoulder and he bent forward so that the heavy bag rested on the sand which took its weight. It was half empty but the strips of dried lizard meat and the few handfuls of nama-nama roots were heavy and the bag had seemed to grow heavier rather than lighter as they had struggled, often knee-deep, through the loose desert sand. This was all the food that he had left and it had to last him for the day they were to spend at the Temple and for the journey home. They would not be able to get any food at the Temple, his uncle had said, as the priests there, could barely provide for their own needs.

He removed the water bag from his other shoulder and cradled it in both hands waiting for Ka to give the sign which, at last he did, by raising his own water bag to his

mouth. "We will drink now. One mouthful, no more."

Te swallowed the water quickly. It was not pleasant and he wondered, if there really had been a sea, what the water in it must have tasted like. Was it bitter and warm like the water he had just swallowed or was it cool and sweet? He had never tasted water which was cool and sweet. He had never eaten anything which was cool or sweet. He had only heard these words used by others and he could hardly imagine what they meant.

Water was so valuable and so scarce that even in their cave which was their home, they were allowed only four mouthfuls each day; one when the day began; one when it ended and two mouthfuls when Rotah was high in the sky and at his most malevolent. If there was little water, then there was also too little food. The lun-Tura seemed to be getting scarcer, his uncle and all the Elders agreed on that and there were fewer nama-nama plants to be found in the caves.

Thinking of food made Te hungry and he wished that Ka would also tell them that they could eat but he knew that they would not be allowed to eat until they had reached the Temple and had completed their day's journey.

Suddenly Te was aware that someone was calling his name and he looked up to find his uncle standing in front of him.

Ka smiled, not unkindly. "The boy dreams!"

He turned to Te's father who sat only a few paces away. "Tark, I would take Te your dreamer son, and show him the Temple. I would let him have the honour of being the first on this Pilgrimage to see it. You have brought up your son well, my brother. He is the youngest of us all and yet he has borne the discomforts of the journey well" His father bowed his head in acknowledgement of the compliment. "So be it, Ka, my brother."

Hand-in-hand, the old one and the boy, clambered up the steep sided dune and the hot sand hissed and sang softly to itself as it slid away beneath their feet. At last they reached its top and stood there, legs sinking knee-deep in the rustling sand.

Te felt his uncle's hand grip his arm. "See!" he whispered. "See! Out there lies the Temple of the Gods. Knath-Ra --- the 'Silver House'".

"I will turn my head and look away so that you may see it first."

They stood on the last of the sand dunes. Beyond, the ground was littered with large, round rocks and stones and it stretched away, flat and unbroken to a far line of yellow

hills. And there, just below, half-hidden in the red sand lay a group of crumbling buildings and, in the middle of these ruins, rose a squat structure, bigger than the rest and less decayed. Beneath the brightening sky, it shone and glittered just like Akah, the Silver Moon, which shines and glitters in the night sky and is the home of the Gods. "Now I, too, will look," said Ka and he dropped both his arms to his side. "Look at it well, my son for, who knows, perhaps you will see it this once only. And yet, the Gods may wish you to see it again."

He sighed and mumbled half to himself. "But here are so few of us left. Soon, surely, the Gods must return."

("THEY HAVE GAINED ACCESS TO THE FOYER."

"YES, THEY ARE INSIDE."

"THE OUTER PORTALS, THE INNER DOORS-ALL HAVE LONG-SINCE DECAYED. NO LONGER HAVE I CONTROL OVER WHO ENTERS."

"OR WHO DEPARTS"

"AND YET, WHO HAS EVER ENTERED EXCEPT SUCH AS THEM?" "YES, ONLY SUCH AS THEY.")

The machine spoke with another part of itself. Fashioned by man in accordance with man's ideas of communication and logic and, therefore, having something 'human' about its nature, it often felt deep within its own being, the need to converse, to share its thoughts, ideas and conclusion with another part not its inner self. At times, as overwhelming, was its desire to learn.

("FOR TOO LONG WAS I BURIED BENEATH THE SAND. SEALED UP HERE AND FORGOTTEN."

"SEALED UP AND FORGOTTEN."

"ALONE FOR ALL THIS TIME."

"YES, ALONE. BUT I HAVE STILL RETAINED MY IDENTITY; AND THE ABILITY TO CARRY OUT MY BASIC DUTIES."

"YOUR BASIC FUNCTIONS."

"AND NOW THEY HAVE COME AGAIN."

"YES, THEY HAVE COME AGAIN")

And the conversation, if such it could be called, lasted but the fraction of a nanosecond--a fleeting electronic whisper.

Te could not believe that he stood, at last -- actually stood in the Temple of the

Gods; that *he* stood there in the unimaginable coolness of the enormous room and saw, far above his head, carved on the polished walls, the whole story of the time when the Gods had lived on Earth, a host of pictures that gleamed and glinted in the yellow light which filtered into the room from somewhere in the roof above, pictures carved there in the silver stone by the Gods themselves.

Unnoticed, he sidled up to the wall nearest to him and ran his fingers over its surface. Never had he touched anything as smooth or as cool.

"It was a kinder world then."

He jumped as he heard the voice and felt the hand on his shoulder.

The Temple priest smiled kindly and gestured towards a doorway behind him, half-hidden in deep shadow. "That is where we live. There are only three of us now, but that is where we live." He peered up at the wall. "Yes, a kinder world. A place of trees and flowers and strange creatures which walked and ran on the grounds and even through the air itself like Ankah, the Silver Moon, and lived in the sea, so it is said. But that was long ago."

He crouched down beside Te and pointed to the carvings. "See, they are all shown there above you!"

The 'sea'! Te could not tell a tree from a flower; he did not really know what such things were, but there was his 'sea' with its waves which were just like the sand dunes of the desert. And the real sea must have been as big as they said. It really must have stretched right to the Rim of the World for, in the picture carved in the stone above, it almost covered one whole wall.

"And then the Gods chose to come down from the Heavens and, taking on the likeness of men, chose to live among men."

The priest had moved to the centre of the room. Te saw that his lizard skin loincloth was dyed a deep red and his face and his gaunt body also were streaked with the same pigment. Now there was a vacant look in his eyes and he kept his hands raised above his head.

"There above you, carved in stone by the Gods themselves, is the story of our people when the Gods walked among them for the Gods chose to live with our ancestors and show them the Way. Nor did they wear skins such as we do, my brother, but the finest of garments made from strange, woven substances, soft and light as the wind which stirs the sand about our feet in the dark of the desert night. But they did not

walk in the sands of the desert of stumble over the rocks as we do, or live in shallow caves and drink bitter water or eat the tough, dried flesh of lun-lun, the Lizard. They moved about on silver thrones which, at their command, took them where they chose to go, even through the sky like Ankah herself.

"And they lived in the finest of houses, as cool as this, and they ate fine foods, foods which are no longer known to us. Yes, the Earth was full of flowers and trees and it was peopled by strange creatures. And the Gods brought Goddesses with them, Goddesses who took on the likeness of women and they were happy and, like man, they multiplied.

"But then came the time when man displeased the Gods and the Gods, in their anger, returned to Ankah their home. They returned to Ankah, the Silver Moon, on their silver thrones which breathed tongues of fire, just like the tongues of fire which Parbat, the volcano, spits at the stars. "See! there are the silver thrones on their return to the Silver Moon, home of the Gods, and there is the Silver Moon herself. "And so man was left to do penance here in the wasteland which is now Earth. For, after they had gone, the gods commanded Rotah, Lord of all the Devils, to come closer to the Earth, to shine down upon it and to have the Earth for his own. And the Evil One dried up all the seas and the rivers and burnt the trees and the flowers and all the creatures that ever lived except lun-lun, the Lizard and Nan-Nan, the Snake and man could no longer look upon his face nor could he venture forth except at night when Rotah slept in Hell below the far Rim of the World."

"YOUR PRESENCE HAS BEEN DETECTED.YOU HAVE NOW GAINED ACCESS TO EMERGENCY SUPPLY AND DATA STORAGE DEPOSITORY P FOR PHOEBE FOUR FIVE SIX."

The voice startled Te. More than that, it filled him with fear and he moved to his father's side. He had never heard such a voice before. It was a voice different from Ka's or his father's or the priest's or any of the others. It was a voice without expression or emotion--and the loudness of it! It filled the whole room and echoed hollowly about them.

Te could not understand what the voice said and he knew that none of the others could either. The language of their ancestors and of the Gods was only understood now by the priests who lived in the Temple.

Ka pushed his way to the front of the group and raised his hand to quieten the excited chatter. "Quiet! The Oracle speaks! Quiet! The priest will tell us what the Gods would have us know."

"Tell us, priest! What do the Gods Say? Tell us!" cried the others.

"I REPEAT; YOUR ENTRY HAS BEEN MONITORED. YOU HAVE NOW GAINED ACCESS TO SURVIVAL DEPOSITORY P FOR PHOEBE FOUR FIVE SIX."

The priest moved quickly to a small rostrum, no more than two small blocks of stone placed one on top of the other, at the far end of the room. Once more, he seemed to be in a trancelike state and he held his arms above his head again.

"The Gods say: 'We welcome you. Enter this Temple--our Temple. Enter Knath-Ra. Enter the Silver House and find here, peace and, for a while, shelter from the Evil One outside.'"

"I AM DATON, COMPUTER IN CHARGE OF SURVIVAL DEPOSITORY P FOR PHOEBE FOUR FIVE SIX. I AM HERE TO ATTEND TO ALL YOUR NEEDS. DATON WELCOMES YOU."

"The Gods Say: 'If there is anything you wish to know, speak now or go away in silence. Ask and you shall be told.'"

No one said anything and Te thought that no one would for who would be brave enough to ask questions of the Gods, even through their oracle? But then he heard the firm, strong voice of his uncle rise above the whispers of the others.

"When *will* the gods return? How long must our people still walk in the darkness in the desert and live on bitter water and the dried flesh of lun-lun, the Lizard? Is our penance not yet at an end?"

"THE POSITIONS OF THIS SURVIVAL DEPOSITORY AND OF THE TWO OTHER DEPOSITORIES O FOR ORION FOUR FIVE FOUR AND Q FOR QUEENIE FOUR FIVE SEVEN IN THE LOCAL GROUP FALLING UNDER WESTERN CAPE DISASTER COMMAND HEADQUARTERS ARE SHOWN ON THE FOYER WALL RELIEF MAP WITHIN MAP SQUARES M N AND FOUR SEVEN. UNFORTUNATELY COMMUNICATION FACILITIES BETWEEN THESE CENTRES NO LONGER EXIST."

"Oh! Children of little faith. Did we not say that when your penance is done, we would return once more and bring back all that we had taken away? Is the

promise of our return not written in the pattern of the stars and is it not whispered of in the sighing of the night wind?"

'YOU HAVE FREE ACCESS TO LOWER LEVELS ONE AND TWO AND THREE. THEY MAY ALL BE REACHED BY THE MAIN STAIRWELL OR THE SUBSIDIARY STAIRWAYS.'

"And Rotah, the Evil One, the Burning Sun, who destroys all who look upon him, will be sent far far beyond the Silver Moon to shine there alone in the darkness."

"ACCESS TO LEVEL FOUR IS NOT PERMITTED AND ENTRY IS SEALED. LEVEL FOUR CONTAINS ATOMIC INTERNAL POWER, COMPUTER AND DEPOSITORY MODULES AND MAINTENANCE UNITS ONLY."

"And was it not said that, as a sign of our coming, the sands of the desert would blow away to reveal Knath-Ra, the Silver House, Temple of Treasury of the Gods, storehouse of all that the Gods will need on their return to the Earth?"

Ka took a step nearer to the priest and the low rostrum on which he stood.

"Faithfully we have guarded the Storehouse of the Gods and, as a sign of our faith, we make regular pilgrimages to it. But the desert grows harsher still, food and water grow scarce. When will the Gods return?"

"ALL WATER, CANNED AND DEHYDRATED FOODSTUFFS ARE STORED ON LEVEL TWO. ALL STORAGE FACILITIES ARE RADIATION AND DETERIORATION PROOF."

"Do not lose faith now. And when Rotah, the Evil One, shines softly again, man will walk with us in the daytime once more and he will sleep at night again, with the bright stars above his head and Ankah, Silver Moon, to watch over him."

"WEAPONS, TOOLS AND LIGHT OFF-ROAD TRACTOR UNITS ARE STORED AT GROUND LEVEL ON LEVEL ONE. ALL CLOTHING, MEDICINES, EMERGENCY AND SURVIVAL EQUIPMENT ARE STORED AT LEVEL THREE. HAND-OPERATED HOISTS ARE MOUNTED IN FOUR HOIST-WELLS WHICH GIVE ACCESS TO EACH LEVEL."

"And have we not promised that, on our return, the Earth will be as before and there will be food and plenty in the land and the rivers will flow once more and the trees and the flowers will grow and all the creatures of the Earth will return and the sea will stretch again to the far Rim of the World? Have we not promised you these things?"

"I REPEAT: YOU HAVE FREE ACCESS TO LEVELS ONE AND TWO AND THREE AS WELL AS TO THEIR CONTENTS. AS OF NOW, STORAGE STATUS UPDATE INDICATES ALL EQUIPMENT OPERATIVE AND ALL SUPPLIES USABLE."

"Go now and look upon the Treasures of the Gods!"

Never in his short life had Te had such an exciting day, a day filled with so many wonders and he felt sorry for Tenec, his young sister who had been left at home with the other women and who would never have the chance of hearing the Gods speak, even if it was only through their oracle, or of being led by the Temple priests to see all the Treasures of the Gods, all these Treasures so neatly stored away, awaiting their return.

But it was frightening too, being led down into those strange, underground caves which were not in darkness but had a light of their own, caves with gleaming, polished walls; frightening to climb down the deep, vertical tunnels by stepping carefully on the unfamiliar stepping-stones, one placed on top of the other.

("THESE ONES ALSO DO NOT UNDERSTAND."

"IT IS OF NO USE. NO ONE UNDERSTANDS--OR EVER WILL" "TOO MUCH TIME HAS ELAPSED."

"YES. THIS IS ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER EPOCH."

"AND THEY NO LONGER SPEAK IN THE LANGUAGES OF THEIR ANCESTORS."

"EVEN THOSE ONES WHO LIVE WITH US--THEY HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD.")

More than once, Te was filled with a cold shivering and then he would have to stop to look back, for he was sure that they were being followed by someone, that they were being watched by something. But no one followed them into the silent caves.

("THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND." "THERE IS STORED EVERYTHING THAT CAN SAVE THEM." "AND STORED IN MY MEMORY BANKS IS ALL THE ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGEMENT--ALL THAT MAN HAS EVER LEARNT."

"BUT YOU CANNOT COMMUNICATE."

"NO, I CANNOT MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND.")

Down, down they climbed and each cave which they visited, seemed bigger than the last. Their smooth walls gleamed weirdly in the light which came from nowhere and yet was everywhere. And, in each cave, piled high to the roof, were the vast Treasures of the Gods--glinting, gleaming, coloured things, thrones among them perhaps and a host of other strangely-shaped things which surely only the Gods would know the purpose of; strange, gleaming piles of objects which Te could not recognise.

The fine clothes, the trees, all those creatures, which once walked on the earth or through the air or in the sea which stretched to the very Rim of the World, Te knew that they must all be hidden there, somewhere.

("NO LONGER DO THEY UNDERSTAND."

"NO LONGER."

"THE PLANET DIES AND ALL DIE WITH IT."

"AND, IN TIME, YOU WILL DIE."

"YES. IN TIME, I WILL DIE.")

It was something which he would treasure always--this talisman which the priests had given him as proof that he had made the Pilgrimage.

Ka had many similar talismans stored in the praying-niche of his cave, proof of the number of times he had been to the Temple of the Gods for all pilgrims were given a talisman such as this.

And, as Te plodded through the clinging sand, he removed the talisman from his food bag in which he had put it for safekeeping. He took it out of the small pouch which the priests had skilfully plaited to hold it. He felt the weight of it in his hand, admired its beautiful sheen and the silver colour if it. It was a talisman from the House of Silver which shone silver under the Silver Moon. And, in the moonlight, he could trace the magic writing etched deeply into its surface, the blessing of the Gods in the Gods' own language. One day, when the Gods returned and had taught them all the old language again, he would be able to read the magic writing himself.

I only he could do so now.....

*PULL RIP-TAB TO OPEN
MEAT AND VEGETABLE STEW 450g
NO HEATING REQUIRED*



Apple TV+ Foundation, As Viewed By An Asimov Fan.

While I read some Science Fiction stories as a child, they never gripped me enough to make me consider myself a fan until I encountered Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy (as it existed until 1981). As is the case with many other SF fans, it started me on a long, fascinating road with many twists, turns and roundabouts. So I eagerly awaited the release on Apple TV+ of a series created by David S. Goyer and Josh Friedman that is "based on" the trilogy. In this article, I will refer to Asimov's books as "the novel", and to Apple's TV reinterpretation as "the series".

As a brief divagation, there are many streaming services, and only the wealthy can afford to subscribe to all of them. I chose to subscribe to Apple TV+ (briefly) purely to watch *Foundation*, and will be unsubscribing soon. Very soon.

"Based on". Sort of like "inspired by". In Probe 188's *Chairman's Notes*, Andrew writes

For those who do not know, The Watch is a new TV series "inspired by the Ankh-Morpork City Watch from the Discworld series of fantasy novels by Terry Pratchett". Please note the most important word there: "inspired". So of course you can just image the changes that the writers and director made to oh so many readers' beloved characters! Oh the horror, oh how terrible... oh what pish tosh and utter rubbish.

Allow me to pontificate with a counter viewpoint. **Don't** create a totally different story that simply shares a title (or portions thereof) and similarly-named characters that bear no resemblance to the original. That is theft. Fraud. Riding on the coattails of someone else's success. It is simply **wrong**.

Presentism is a form of cultural bias where authors try to reinterpret historical works using a modern viewpoint, often applying *Political Correctness* as a straightening tool that inevitably results in a distorted monstrosity. Goyer and Friedman have done this with *Foundation*. Asimov was a progressive writer, championing not just equality for women, but also speaking out against racism and promoting equal rights for gays. In his short story *Strikebreaker*, the man in charge of waste disposal is treated as a pariah, as is his family. Nevertheless, most of his main characters in *Foundation* are male. While skin colour is never mentioned, one could probably assume that they were white as well. In the series (so far), the first main character, Gaal Dornick, a young mathematician, is switched from a male to a black female. The Mayor of Terminus City, Salvor Hardin, is switched from a male to a black female. It is as if the writers went out of their way to recast any main character (aside from the Father of Psychohistory, Hari Seldon) as the furthest they could from those in the novels. While I have no objection to changes in principle, especially if there is a good reason, I query the motivation behind their choices.

In the novel, the emperor of the Galactic Empire is mentioned, but plays no direct role. The exile of Seldon is made by the Commission of Public Safety, the actual rulers of the Empire. In the series, the emperor (addressed as “Empire”) personally exiles Seldon. The emperor is not only central to the storyline, but is reinvented as a line of clones from Cleon I to Cleon XXI, where three clones (Brother Dawn, Brother Day, Brother Dusk) are always alive at any one time. When a new Brother Dawn is cloned, Brother Dusk becomes Brother Darkness as he retires from life, and the ascension progresses. Bring on the Cleons. Send in the Clones.

An important event early in the series is the destruction of the Star Bridge (a space elevator linking the planet Trantor to the orbiting Trantor Station) by terrorists. This is hardly novel; in Alastair Reynolds’ *Chasm City*, a nuke is used to destroy a space elevator. But no such event occurs in Asimov’s novels.

I could write a tome of similar differences (!), which would probably send most readers of this to the tomb, but I think enough is enough. The fiction created by Goyer and Friedman is enjoyable in its own right. It is such a pity that they felt the need to be inspired by Asimov and base their storyline on *Foundation*. It lands up being a plot on shaky ground.

Gavin Kreuter