

PROBE 141

Published by:

Science Fiction and FantasySouth Africa (SFSA)

P.O. Box 781401 Sandton 2146 South Africa

www.sfsa.org.za

Probe is supplied to all SFSA members and is for sale or exchange. Contributions of all types are very welcome.

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Probe is typed by Gail Jamieson and other contributors.

Probe cover is by Gary Kuyper. This cover was specially designed for the 40th Anniversary issue.

Cartoons by Roberto Schima, Kai Bosse, Mark Parasi, Kyle Brunette

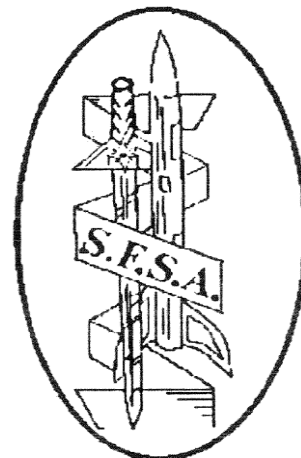
Drawings by Ian Gunn, Joe Mayhew and Bill O'Connor

Dragons by Ahmed Wadee.

Layout is by Gail Jamieson, assisted by Kyle Brunette

Created in MS Word

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PROBE 141

June 2009

40th Anniversary Issue

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Well... who would have thought on that dark and stormy night in 1969 that forty years later SFSA would still be going and publishing its 141st issue of PROBE on its 40th anniversary. I wasn't there at the very beginning but joined up in 1973 after seeing the Short Story Competition being advertised in The Sunday Times. I wrote a story (which reached the top twenty) and joined the club and soon got involved in the



running of things. Except for a year or so when my daughter was born I have been on the committee since 1976 in one position or another. This is my second time at editing Probe. I decided that the 40th Anniversary Issue should be a little different from the usual issues. There will still be fiction but I decided to include our Nova Competition winning story from Dave Freer, who is undoubtedly the most successful South African SF author to date. This story is a "real" South African one. I've also used an editor's prerogative and included a story of my own.

I've used some copy from the very first SFSA newsletter, which evolved into PROBE. And also from the PROBE from December 1970, Vol. 2 No. 1. – an A3 sized epistle of 14 pages with a blue cover.

Nina Gabriels from PanMacmillan offered us the option of an e-mail interview with Neal Asher. We asked club members what they would like to know and the results are in this issue.

You will have enjoyed many interviews with SF authors conducted by Michael Lohr, so I decided that it would be a good idea to conduct an interview with the interviewer.

You'll see cartoons by Kai Bosse. He came up with a character named PROBOT and he graced the pages of PROBE for a couple of years until Kai went back to Germany. Louis Lampbrecht made a real "PROBOT" and he attended a couple of Conventions.

I've been looking through my set of PROBE's and have seen some interesting things. In 1978 SFSA's annual subscription was R3.00, and by 1989 it went up to R15.00. 21 years later we're having to charge R185.00 just to cover printing and postage of PROBE.

Interestingly enough, I edited issue 41 which was published in August 1979. I mentioned in passing that the club was ten years old. Issues 87 and 88 on either side of the twentieth anniversary make no mention of it and issue 108 in June 1999 also passes that anniversary by without comment.

However Cedric Abrahams made a very special issue for PROBE 100. He used input from all of the previous editors and it was a bumper sized issue.

To celebrate the life and works of Philip K. Dick the May 1982 issue was Dedicated to him and Tony Davis produced a special version.

The first time we conducted our Short Story Competition was in 1972. It was one of the reasons that the club was formed and I am proud to say that it has been held every single year since then. As the reading and writing of Science Fiction does not have a big following in this country the club feels satisfied that it continues to support local talent. We have had many Final Judges, including Dr Arthur Blecksley in the very early days. Barry Ronge officiated for us in 1980. Dr James Sey, Dr. Gerald Gaylard, Professor Deirdre Byrne, Alan Swerdlow, Stan Peskin and Dave Freer have all judged the General Section of the competition for us. Arthur Goldstuck has sponsored and judged the South African section for many years.

We have had many illustrators. From our own Professor Ahmed Wadee to Roberto Schima from Brazil, whose work gave us many covers and the cartoon reproduced in this issue. Looking through past PROBES I came across Bill O'Connor, Grant Kruger, Neil Van Niekerk, Jerry van Zyl, Bertus McDonald, Dianna Minaar and Joan de Wet. I even found artwork by overseas artists such as Ian Gunn and Joe Mayhew, whom we met at Bucconeer in Baltimore. And of course the multi-talented Gary Kuyper. There are cartoons by Mark Parasi. We exchange fanzines with clubs around the world.

We have members in many countries. The U.S.A. Canada, England, Scotland, Australia, Germany to name just a few

I asked the previous Editors of PROBE if they would like to contribute.

You'll see their input as well as their pictures. It is interesting to see their vision of the club and of the world they now find themselves in. Through the years at Minicon's we had lots of fun writing (approximately) 99-word Wormholes. I've included two of those that (in my opinion) are the most entertaining. Interesting also to see that two ex-editors are among the authors.

I've really enjoyed reading old issues and putting together this retrospective issue of PROBE, and I think I may include other items from past issues in future issues.

I tip my (figurative) hat to all those fans, past and present (and hopefully future – this is SF after all) who have had a hand in taking Science Fiction South Africa to its 40th year.



Magazines Received

Opuntia. Dale Spiers P.O.Box 6830 Calgary, Alberta Canada, TP2 3ET
67.1B February 2009
67.1C St Urho's Day 2009
67.1D April 2009

Vanamonde. John Hertz. 235 Corondo St No. 409, Los Angeles. CA 90027 USA
763 - 772 - January 08 2008 – March 12 2008
778 – 782 - April 23 May 21st 2008

The South Australian Dr Who Fan Club Inc

SFSA Magazine #23 Science Fiction Southern Australia Ed. Tammy Vogel – October 2008

The Wall of Lies 109, 110, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117. Dec 2007 – April 2009

Ed. Tammy Vogel ed@sfsa.org.au

Jethrik 7 ed. Neal V. Wylde nvwylde@gmail.com

Fosfax 215 February 09 2009 Ed. Timothy Lane . P.O Box Louisville, Kentucky, 40233-7821



Editors PROBE Has Known

Probe No. 1 was published sometime after the establishment of the club in June 1969. I have been unable to find it. I do have Volume 2 No. 1 which was published in December 1970. Tex Cooper was the first *E*D*I*T*O*R* of PROBE. He went by the title of “The Great White Dictator” and produced editions up to 37 which came out in August 1978, after which he decided to dictate no longer.

Gail Brunette (aka Jamieson), young and foolish at the time thought it would be fun to try her hand at it. Looking at the Roneo system, which Tex had used, she almost despaired but took to a typewriter and the cut and paste system. I cringe a little when I see some of the earlier covers where the numbers are so obviously pasted a little out of line. The magazine was printed by Wallis Litho Systems who served us well for a long time. Gail produced PROBE 38, November 1978 to PROBE 67, January 1987, just before her son was born.



Tony Davis, a Canadian living in South Africa, was persuaded to take over the Editorship and he did so in his own inimitable way, taking on the Publications Control Board which looked at all publications with an eagle eye at that time. He put out PROBE 68, May 1987 to PROBE 72, May 1988, when he and his family returned to Canada. He has remained an Honorary Member and still contributes occasionally.

From PROBE 73, August 1988 to PROBE 93, October 1993, Neil Van Niekerk was the main editor. He does say that for about half of the time he was assisted by Derek Hohls. Neil's issues started to look much more professional and were thick jam-packed magazines.

PROBE 94, July 1994 was edited by Neil and Derek together, and then from PROBE 95, October 1994 to PROBE 96, February 1995 Derek Hohls was the sole editor, until he too moved on to greener pastures.

Cedric Abrahams then took over with PROBE 97, July 1995. He continued on until PROBE 104, February 1998. He was ably assisted by Deirdre Byrne and produced probably the largest PROBE, number 100, which for the club was a real milestone. There are not too many club or fanzines which have managed to get to the 100th issue.

Deirdre Byrne, who claims that her pregnancy had nothing to do with her decision, started with PROBE 105, May 1996 and carried on until PROBE 111 in November 2000. We then have a slight aberration as we have two PROBE 113's. The actual number 112 was edited by Deirdre and Cedric and was called 113 on the cover but 112 on the contents page.



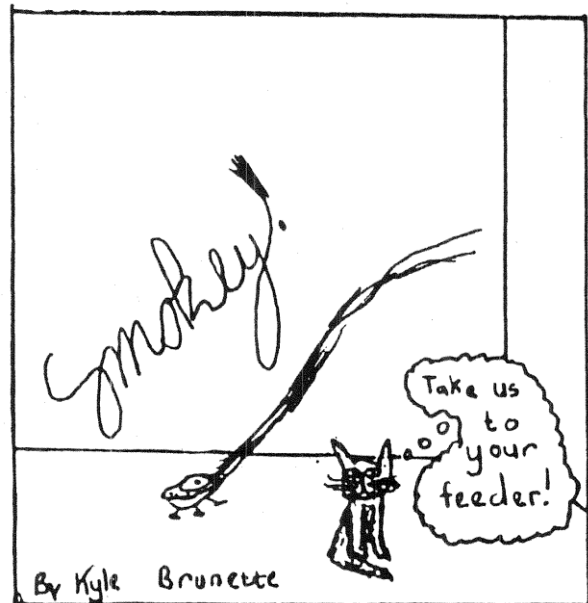
Liz Simmonds was not coerced to be the editor and sometime around now PROBE began to be produced fully electronically. The real PROBE 113, 2nd Quarter, 2001 was Liz's first issue. She enjoyed the feeling of power it gave her and with Roberto Schima's covers PROBE now became a glossy magazine which we took with us to WorldCon's with a sense of pride. Liz continued until PROBE 130, 1st Quarter 2006 before she felt she needed a break.

Finally, from PROBE 131, August 2006, I was persuaded to take PROBE over again.

The difference between the way I had produced it almost 20 years previously and how it is produced now is a miracle of science. I no longer have to agonise over retyping a sentence and trying to stick it over the one I wanted to change. I still get driven mad by WORD but PROBE has finally stopped being a Quarterly magazine that comes out three times a year.

We now have specially designed covers, thanks to Gary Kuyper and even colour covers when the budget, or donations, stretch to it.

Quo Vadis PROBE? Who knows what the future will bring but hopefully there are other, as yet undeclared Editors, waiting in the wings for their opportunity to produce their own versions of our flagship magazine which takes SFSA to Science Fiction fans around the world.



Neal Asher

Line War – R124

Shadow of the Scorpion – R189.00

Unlike my good wife, who is also more of a Fantasy fan, I don't particularly enjoy serials, but much prefer stand alone novels, even if part of a series. Both these novels are part of the "Agent Cormac of the Polity", both came out at the same time, and both are quite different books.

In "Line War" the entity Erebus, once an A.I. known as Trafalgar, is employing Jain technology to conquer and destroy the whole of the Polity. (It is insane.) Cormac is sent to investigate. Also involved, in no particular order, are Mr. Crane (the Brass Killing Machine), Dragon, once a product of the Makers, Mika, a scientist, Orlandine, a hugely augmented human being and of course, the A.I. of the Polity themselves. The novel is enjoyable but at 566 pages, and with all its complexity, I found it just a tad too long.

"Shadow of the Scorpion" is much shorter and has a far less complex storyline. In essence it is the story of Ian Cormac, his journey to manhood and beyond, and his link with his scorpion shaped war drone known as Armistad.

An excellent read.

D.B. Shan

Hell's Horizon

I have in my long, and not so illustrious life, owned two shops, one of them in what was, and still is one of the worst crime ridden areas in the country. We were broken into, robbed and held up at gun point. Never, at any time were we asked to pay any kind of protection money. The crime is still there but is it as organized as we are supposed to believe?

Al Jeery is a thug, a member of the elite guards of the crime lord named the Cardinal.

These are called the Troops. He is asked to investigate the brutal murder of his recently acquired girlfriend. Out for revenge he initially finds lies within lies, deceits within deceits. When Paucar Wami, a near mythical assassin, enters the picture and dispenses his own brand of torture and death, Jeery finds his own world turned upside down, for Wami is his long missing father.

The first three quarters of the book make interesting, intelligent and spell binding reading. Unfortunately Sham seems to lose the plot and the final chapters do not make too much sense, and in the last pages we discover the story is probably not over and there will be a follow-up book.

Very readable....BUT!

Arthur C. Clarke and Frederick Pohl

The Last Theorem

Synergy : combined action whose total effect is greater than the sum of the individual actions

Ranjit Subramanian is a young astronomy student who moves into mathematics because of his obsessions with solving mathematical problems, particularly Fermat's Last Theorem. The world around him is forever at war, with only the three great nations of USA, China and Russia holding a very tenuous peace. (What happened to India?) The story of Ranjit's life is told in excruciating detail, and only the project called Secret Thunder, a weapon of the United Nations brings a little life to the story.

Oh, and the Grand Galactics, having seen the use of nuclear weapons on our planet, have decreed that we on Earth are a menace to the Galaxy and have ordered an Invasion Fleet to come in and wipe us out totally, to annihilate every living thing on Earth. (Although the whole thing fizzles out.)

I have not finished a book as badly written as this for a long time. It is apparently aimed at the juvenile market (Although it does not say so.) It is full of inconsistencies and the ending, well the less said the better.

BORING, BORING, BORING.

A complete waste of two magnificent authors talents.

101 Horror Movies You must See Before You Die.

101 Sci-Fi Movies You Must See Before You Die.

General Editor Steven Jay Schneider

From a very young age most people tend to react badly to a statement like "you *must* do this." I tend to feel the same way when I see a book title like these two, especially as I am a science fiction (not horror) fan of some forty odd years (very odd in some cases.) These are physically small books and the white writing on a black background is difficult to read in artificial light. (For the introduction and Index, that is.) The formula for each movie does not vary – four pages in total, one for an original advert, one for a still photo from the film, and two for a brief précis and short discussion. Someone must have thought it a good idea to splash a brief comment in large letters bisecting the second page of writing. I found it annoying in the extreme.

It would be impossible for everyone to agree on the movies, but personally I cannot imagine why anyone would put in Dune and Starship Troopers, and leave out Village of the Damned and The Rocky horror Picture Show.

Enough of the complaints.

The books are extremely well written and in the short space allowed they do an excellent job of dissecting the directors' intent for the movie itself, or his thoughts behind it, as well as a brief description of the plot, etc.

I will not comment on the horror movies picked as I simply don't know enough about them. Suffice it to say that as a non-horror fan, this book was far more interesting.

These books are not aimed at the true Science Fiction and Horror fans, but they will certainly make interesting and enjoyable reading for most other people.

Raymond E. Feist

Rides a Dread Legion

If you really know where to look you can usually find out if a novel is a stand alone or part of a series. I forgot to look. I don't like fantasy series. This is book one of the Demonwar Saga, but you only find this out on the inside back cover. I should have let my wife read it first. Oh, well!

Amirantha is a warlock, an outcast because he can summon Demons. Sandreena is a knight, a member of the Order of the Shield of the Weak. The Taredhel, arrogant and selfish, are elves who have discovered a portal that can bring them from their own world to Midkemia. Pug is a master magician who is destined to see all whom he loves die in front of him.

And the Demons. There are apparently billions of them, and someone wants to bring them to Midkemia for his own foul ends, and a full Battle Demon is far superior to any one man in magic, strength, skill and cunning.

Pug and his friends must find that portal and close it before the Demon hordes are brought through.

The story continues in Book 2. Feist is normally one of the better Fantasy authors, but this is really not one of his better books; overlong in its introductions and with nothing new to say. It is just readable.

Tony Ballantyne

Twisted Metal

An email doing the local rounds starts off with "Craig" introducing himself as the new "Tech support Guy" for a company called "Cyberdyne", and as usual everything goes downhill from there. It ends up with him purportedly sending a hand written note to John Connor about his efforts in fighting the Ongoing Robot War.

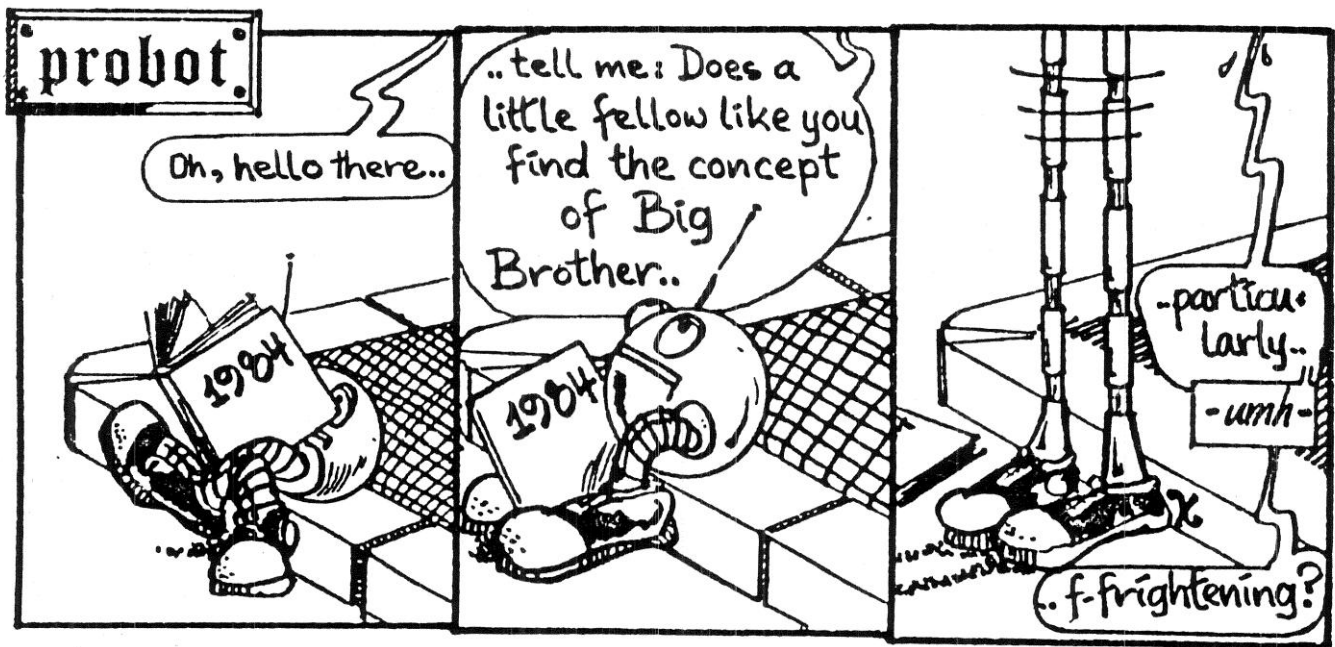
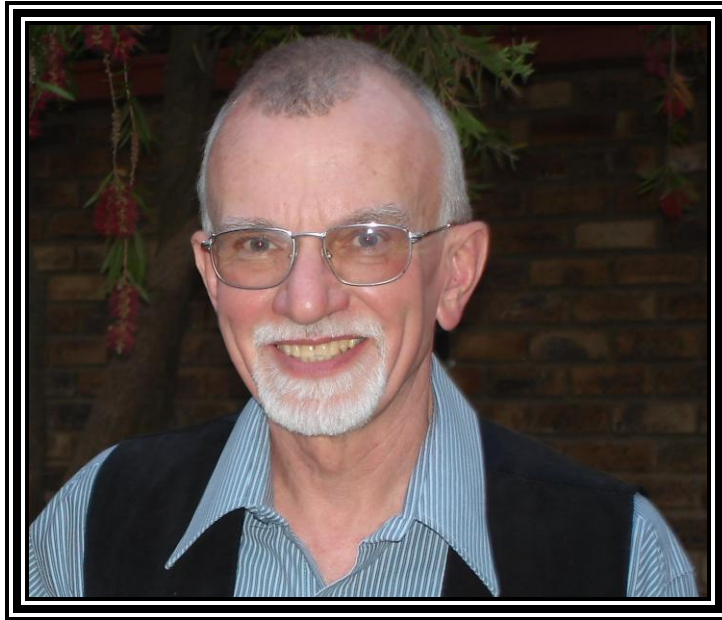
Southern Shull, a small part of the planet Penrose, is divided into eight states, all of them populated only by intelligent, feeling Robots.

The Robots of Artemis, one of the larger states, believe only in Artemis and are systematically taking over the other states. When they accomplish this they will then head north over the mountains to conquer the Robots there.

While the book is enjoyable enough I have two problems with it.

The first is that, as in any society there are various levels of citizenship, and this in spite of the fact that all the Robot brains are designed and manufactured by their own mothers. Why would any mother design a brain for a low class citizen?

The second is that the book sells for 16.99 pounds in the United Kingdom, and yet sells for R298.00 here, which I find excessive.



The Happy Face of Editor Tony Davis



The Cover of the November 1931 issue of Strange Tales



Local Writer Makes Good

By Tony Davis

Perhaps the title should be “Local Writer *Made* Good”, because the short stories of South African writer Ferdinand Berthoud appeared from the mid-1920s to the early 1940s in the pulp magazines. His first accredited story appearing in 1925 and the last in 1941, all stories with a South African locale. While many of Berthoud’s stories appeared in the adventure genre pulps (such as ***Thrilling Adventures***, ***Blue Book*** and ***Short Stories***), he made the cover story on the second issue of the short-lived (seven issues) weird fiction pulp ***Strange Tales*** in the November 1931 issue, brought out by Clayton Publications. Berthoud’s cover story is “Webbed Hands” which features an illustration by noted pulp artist H.W. Wesso who produced all the ***Strange Tales*** covers (as well as a good number of early covers for ***Astounding Stories***). This isn’t the best of Wesso’s covers for the series – it depicts a pair of webbed hands menacing a prone female victim. The short story, subtitled “Murder in South Africa”, relates the strange murders of a number of young women in several Cape Town locales. They all appear to have been terrified to death and bear the purple bruise markings of webbed hands. Coincidentally, the victims are all linked to a conniving individual, named Blaikie, who has loaned the individuals some money and taken out insurance on them, which he now collects because of their deaths. But police can’t directly pin the murders on him and there’s still the matter of those strange webbed hands as more people die. The story goes on to take on a moral tone about vengeance and wrong-doing. “Webbed Hands” is a typical period weird menace story. Many of the pulp fiction magazines had overseas writers who offered American readers exotic locales and local myths, Berthoud being a prime, though little- known example.

Claude Nunes – SFSA Success Story

By Tony Davis

Claude Nunes is definitely a case of local boy does well. If you look at Claude from a certain angle you could swear that you were looking at a close relative of H.P. Lovecraft. Claude and I coincidentally were both employed at the Chamber of Mines in downtown Johannesburg back in the late 1970s.

He and his late wife Rhoda have been long-term members of Science Fiction South Africa, though being Mondeor residents meant they didn’t get out to too many SFSA gatherings.

When I introduced myself to Claude and produced a copy of his 1980 book, **The Sky Trapeze**, one day at work he was somewhat amused on seeing the book and inscribed

the following message to me on a contents page: *There's always a first time: I didn't know anyone had read it. Claude Nunes.* However, his work colleagues were all very impressed at having a published writer in their midst.

The Sky Trapeze is Claude's third published novel, from Robert Hale books in London. The first is **Inherit the Earth** which was published in 1966 as an Ace Double (G-580) with cover art by Ted Hanke. His second book, **Recoil**, was co-written with Rhoda and also appeared as an Ace Double (#71082) in 1971 with a nice cover illustration by noted sf artist Kelly Freas.

I was fortunate recently to obtain Claude's original typed manuscript for **Inherit the Earth** which was auctioned off back in 1966 at the Worldcon held in Cleveland, Ohio (USA). The document is complete with red pen Ace Books edited corrections. It is quite interesting to note that at the end of the manuscript the Epilogue to the story has been completely "x'ed" out by red pen and that subsequently other editorial markings were added in pencil stating "stet" – i.e. don't omit the epilogue, with an additional note to run it on the next page. However, a quick look at the Ace paperback reveals that the epilogue did not appear in print. (Even though there was suitable space on the last page to do so.)

Here, then, for the first time (ever) in the pages of **Probe** we can reveal the conclusion to Claude's first published book – the Epilogue as he wrote it.

Epilogue

"Mab!" thought Oberon softly, probing at the barrier that seemed to become more and more intangible as time marched relentlessly onward.

Dimly somewhere, he sensed her existence. Somewhere on the other side of things, she yearned out towards him as she strained to bridge the gap.

The time was coming closer he felt when it might be possible for the dolls to leap over the final dividing line when they would realize, once and for all, what their own ephemeral lives held in prospect.

"Mab?"

Perhaps she heard. Perhaps her voice was answering. He began to feel it might be and he held his breath, listening.

The darkness seemed to be dissolving. As he grew weaker, the veil between them thinned. One day soon it would thin out into nothingness and he would feel her touch again.

The old man slept.

(Thanks to fellow collector Don Ramlow for unearthing the manuscript and bringing it to my attention.)

ace
double

G-580 / 50¢

After humanity, the Day of the Dolls?

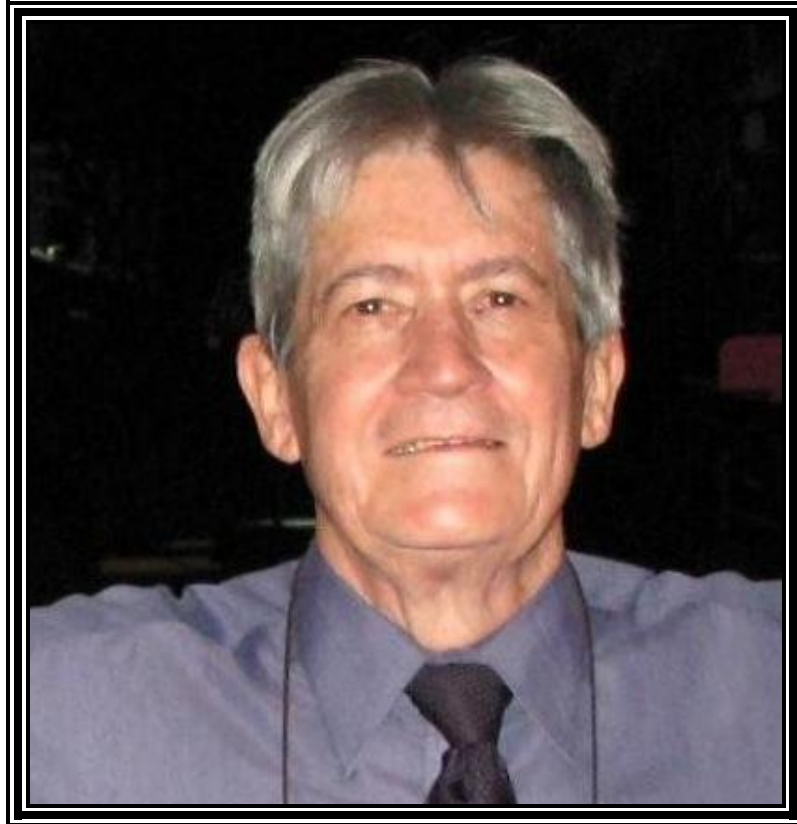
INHERIT THE EARTH

CLAUDE NUNES



Midlife Crisis at Age 40

Tex Cooper



It was a dark and stormy night. Really it was a dark and stormy night. If you don't believe me ask Simon Scott, he was there. *(By the way Simon I have an apology for you. If you remember at one of the Conventions there was a quiz. One of the questions was Who was the first Chairman of SFSA ? You answered correctly that it was Tex. I ruled your answer as wrong. In fact you were correct and I apologise. Obviously your memory was clearer than mine.)* Meanwhile, outside the storm raged, accompanied by hail and lightning and thunder. Amazing what people will believe if you use someone else's name.

Seriously, June 6, 1969 was a stormy night outside. Inside a blazing fire was in the fireplace warming the hearts and souls of those inside. All the guests appreciated this. And so the Science Fiction Club of South Africa was born. I'm not going to describe how

the Club was formed and all the trifling problems we had in trying to get it going. Suffice to say we succeeded as evidenced by this special edition of Probe.

After a period of getting to know each other we finally got down to some serious business. The establishment of a science fiction fan club. Everyone was in favour and the club was inaugurated. The most important decision was that way back in those days we had five aims for the Club.

1. To produce a monthly club magazine.
2. To hold monthly meetings where like- minded SF buffs could meet other SF buffs.
3. To establish a South African Science Fiction writing competition.
4. To hold an annual convention and eventually host a WorldCon.
5. To establish a lending library available on loan for members.

How well have we achieved these aims ?

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

It was originally a newsletter but soon grew into a more formal type zine. Originally the zine was printed on a second-hand Gestetner duplicator purchased by the Club. Producing a zine was a monumental task. Remember, way back in 1969, there were no such things as PCs or laptops. It was rather messy and time consuming as each article/story/loc had to be typed onto wax sheets and then printed on the duplicator. Drawings had to be traced onto the wax sheets. Naturally the quality of the drawings left a lot to be desired. (The comments of the artists have been expunged.) Because of the time element and the difficulty to get contributions the monthly issue was two monthly or every three months. Since then the quality of the printing and the contents improved dramatically. A full colour cover, wow. Anyone remember Kevin MacDonnell and his heroic drawings ? To the publishers/Editors/Typists and anyone involved in producing Probe I extend large congratulations and thanks.

Aim Number 1 : Probe : 8 out of ten.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

One of the more successful aspects in getting to know each other in the early days were the monthly meetings. Usually held at Member's home they took the format of a meal, discussion and a movie. Remember this was before TV in SA. We borrowed on a permanent basis, a 16 mm movie projector. Some of the movies were hilarious/scary/out of this world. Most of the time we hired B grade movies. Except for Dark Star, which became a staple of the conventions. The Club also used Wits University to show movies, attracting the students. Subsequently, meetings were held in Total House in Braamfontein. In addition to a discussion and movie, quizzes were held, the library was

available, but the main thrust was the meeting with like- minded people. Somehow the meetings have still attracted members.

Aim Number 2 : Monthly meetings : 7 out of 10.

WRITING COMPETITION.

Originally the idea was to get authors to enter their stories into N3F's writing competition on a personal basis. However, the competition was held in USA which made it difficult for locals to enter. Instead, a local competition was held which attracted a large number of stories. If I remember correctly the winning entry received the enormous amount of R3.00. Since then the short story competition has become a highlight of SFSA. Congratulations to the organisers and judges. The quality of the stories themselves has increased fantastically. For further details check the latest Probe for winning stories.

Aim Number 3 : Short Story Competition : 10 out of 10.

ANNUAL CONVENTION.

Unfortunately the local convention has met with mixed success. A couple of "Mini-Cons" were organised, more of the style of a larger meeting than an actual convention. Then for a while proper Conventions were held at Wits University over a Friday night and Saturday. The programme consisted of talks, displays, panel discussions, quizzes, and general getting together to have a yak with others. Apparently there don't seem to have been any conventions lately. Pity. It would have been great to have a WorldCon in 2019. Any offers to organise.

Aim 4 : Conventions : 5 out of 10.

LENDING LIBRARY.

This was established early on with books being donated by members. Unfortunately because of the number of books, it was not possible to bring the library to the meetings. I notice, however, that the Club is receiving copies for review from the publishers. No rating.

While it is interesting to note the growth of SFSA, I have a question in conclusion. What aims has SFSA got for the next 10 years ? To paraphrase a well known book. A Club without a vision soon dies.

What is your vision ?



Book Review

Andrew Jamieson

Author: Robert V.S. Redick
Title: The Chathrand Voyage 1 : The Red Wolf Conspiracy
Publisher: Jonathan Ball Publishers (SA) / Gollancz (UK)
Price: £12.99

Imagine a ship, a ship so vast that it dwarfs any nearby ship or schooner, so huge that it appears as if a small city is afloat... that is the good ship Chathrand. A marvel of engineering, and, sadly, the last of its kind, the Chathrand is capable of transporting hundreds of soldiers across any sea, or carry three times as much cargo as any other ship for its owners. It is upon this vessel that the fates of two nations will be decided.

Pazel Pathkendle is a simple tarboy who has grown up moving from one ship to the next performing menial shipboard tasks. Cursed by a spell which allows him to understand and talk to any creature or learn any language, he will be one of several major players who will take part in the Chathrand drama. Along with the infamous and brutal captain Nilus Rose, the most famous, long serving and... previously fired captain of the Chathrand; spymaster Sandor Ott, loyal servant of the Emperor, but who's designs are very much his own; Thasha Isiq, daughter of the ambassador for the Emperor to Mzithrin, a pawn in a very deadly game, who has skills and knowledge beyond the norm for a young lady of the empire; and the Ixchel, a race of beings barely a hand high, who detest and are detested in turn by the giants, yet have their own code of honour and merely wish to return home, and on the way, to find out why the Chathrand is not following protocol; all will ride the great ship Chathrand on a voyage that will take all of them into conflict, into possible love, into adventure and above all, into a story that will involve the lives of thousands of innocents for the benefit of the few.

On starting to read the book, I was immediately struck about how completely lost I was. The author jumps between people and places, bringing all the major characters into the story, but at the expense of a coherent plot. There are simply too many people and things happening at the beginning of the book, with too little explanation of who they are so you get easily confused, unsure what is going on or who the players really are. Conspiracy is a good title for the book as from the beginning it is very obvious there is something going on, but you are totally lost as to who is involved or how, there are just so many things happening! Unfortunately this means that after reading yet another short chapter about

someone you barely read about earlier, you start losing interest in the story as you don't know what is going on or who anyone really is. Also, not enough things of interest happen in the beginning to keep you interested in continuing reading, it is more about meeting the people. If there had been more action in the beginning it would at least have kept one entertained.

Still, from the beginning it is obvious that the author knows how to write, but the style just lacks... decent enough prose to keep your interest. Being riveted by the story and the authors words seems too far away for this author. However, there are times - specifically when there finally is some decent action going on - when the reader is gripped and enjoying the story, if only there were more of those at the beginning. However, as you progress you do realise that there are many characters being introduced in an epic story, and as I expected, once passed the multitude of people, places and happenings - when all major parties have gathered on the great ship - that the story picks up and it is much easier to get into it, without the constant jumping to and fro. It is still a pity that with so many things happening before, it is too easy to forget who is who and why they are important in the story.

By the time the reader is half way through the book and they no longer have to deal with a multitude of differing storylines and instead only deal with the main plot, the author has settled down very well. Gone are the long winded descriptions of everything (which I would give up reading after the third or fourth description), instead the author has brought the disparate parts of the story and the various people together very nicely. We now know part of the mystery, yet there is still much to be learned, and we all know that keeping the readers interest in the story is of utmost importance. Also, we need to start caring for the main characters in the story, and again the author is upping the stakes. I must admit the author has done exceedingly well at describing the different characters in the novel, both from a physical as well as personal level. As the story progresses we learn more about the characters, their feelings and what they are capable of, and we start feeling for them as well. This is a very admirable trait that the author is able to evoke incredibly well.

Throughout the book the author makes use of letters or diary notes as written by members of the story, only I never got the impression the author wrote them from the perspective of the writer, i.e. sailor or captain, etc. but rather as another part of the bigger story. Unfortunately this distracted me as instead of a page written by, say, a rough sailor, I get pretty prose not in keeping with the person writing it. The author should have kept these pieces short and to the point and, of course, as if written by the sailor or whatever, and not as just another, and in my view, useless, extension to the story which broke my concentration when reading the book instead of adding to it.

The further into the book you progress, the better the author seems to get and the more relaxed and interesting the author's style seems to become. Gone are the boring pacing, the confusing tales. The reader is now fully aware of who everyone is and what is (mostly)

going on and so the author is swiftly moving the story along. Each segment of the story seems to flow extremely well into the next and you really do get caught up in the whole adventure, fearing for the main characters, cheering when things go well, and even laughing at times for the really fun parts.

There are also plenty of alternate scenes or scenarios throughout the story. I think the reader would have begun to get bored with constant reading about life on board a giant ship, but the author manages to throw several unusual and varied scenes which definitely break the boredom of ship life, and in such a wonderful way too. There really are some strange places the author comes up with, as well as the creatures that inhabit them. By now the reader and author are well entrenched into the story and so the reader is caught up with the scenes, the places, the people and creatures.

On the front cover of the book is a quote by the science fiction author Paul Park, about the book, stating its “un-put-downableness”, and, whilst I do not quite agree with the comment, I will admit that each time I put the book down, I was more than a little bit excited to pick it up again and continue the story.

Too often of late I have read stories where the author has “fleshed” out the story a bit too much, just adding waffle which does not really add to the story but merely extends it, thus creating a fat book (perhaps to appease the person purchasing the expensive book?), but this is not the case with this novel. The author has done wonderfully well at keeping a steady pacing, of keeping the excitement flowing and, most importantly, keeping the readers interest page after page (after the beginning at least anyway). As such, the book is over 400 pages which, once you reach the meat of the story, does not add any extraneous waffle, thankfully.

As I started to reach the end of the book, I began to wonder if the story would finish just before the giant ship reached the harbour it was aiming for, and I wondered how the author was going to manage something that seemed would be too sudden an ending. I should have guessed sooner, as is much the case nowadays, this is only the first part in a trilogy of books, such a pity not to have the great story end, but then again, this also means the story will continue in another two novels, and I will admit, I shall be keeping my eyes open for them considering how much I ultimately enjoyed this novel.

As such, I don't think I've enjoyed a fun, adventure story quite like this in a long time. It is just a pity about the beginning of the story, but get past that, let the story unfold before your eyes and just thrill in the adventure, the characters and the wonderful places you will visit.

Books Received

PanMacmillan

Tony Ballantyne – **Twisted Metal** – R298.00

J.R.R. Tolkein - **The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun** – R319.95

J.R.R. Tolkein - **Tales from the Perilous Realm** – R149.95

Jonathan Ball

Alastair Reynolds - **House of Suns** - Orion - R124.95

Arthur C. Clarke and Frederick Pohl – **The Last Theorem** - HarperCollins – R139.95

Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson – **Paul of Dune** - Hodder and Stoughton – R139.95

Raymond E. Feist – **Rides A Dread Legion** - HarperCollins – R269.95

D.B. Shan – **Hell's Horizon** – HarperCollins – R224.95

C.C. Humphreys – **Vlad : The Last Confession** – Orion - R214.95

Stephen Deas – **The Adamantine Palace** – Orion – R339.95

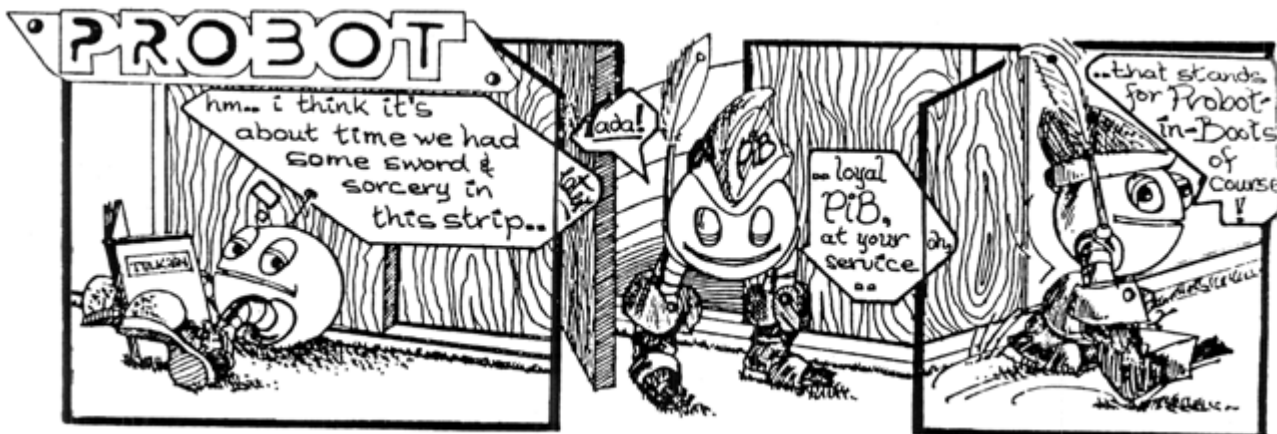
Penguin

General editor Steven Jay Schneider

101 Horror Movies You Must See Before You Die

101 Sci-Fi Movies You Must See Before You Die.

R180.00 each



On Being An Editor

Liz Simmonds



The Facts:

I had been a club editor since 1992, and had craved the job of editing Probe since around about issue 100, so leapt at the chance. I did 18 issues, 113 to 130, over the next five years.

It was great fun, but I had – don't we all – less and less time as the years passed and handed over the reins to Gail, for her Second Time Around. Thanks, Gail.

The Job:

What is it like? Like a circus really – and you are the show!

You have your finger on the pulse of the club; your ear to the ground for breaking news. You are sniffing out leads for contributions and conjuring articles out of thin air. Contortions, prestidigitation and bullying are all part of the job.

You need a keen nose for articles, a long arm to wrestle contributors into commitments and a swift pair of feet to get out of trouble.

The risks:

The job gets you into a lot of places, including Trouble. You might mortally offend people by editing their Purple Prose or resequencing their jumbled journalism. The Rules of Logic and Grammar are oft ignored and Editors take risks in correcting contributions.

One such contribution was a trifle; a melange of different ideas and threads of thought. I had recourse to an Editor's best Friend – not the famous Blue Pencil, but a Rainbow of Highlighters. That particular article had a different thread for every day of the week. I cut and pasted sentences by colour and ended up with a rather interesting article. The contributor was livid!!! Ah well.

Well, an Editor has to Set Standards. Logic and Grammar are needed. Common Sense is useful. How much one should censor is a major problem. Freedom of the press vies with good taste. I am a non-swearer and I think it did Probe no harm when I dropped certain short words from some articles. The sense didn't change with the delicate substitutions I found and the readability increased. Mind you, there was one story which placed second in the Competition on year and lost a lot of volume when pruned. I sent it to the author for permission to use as lopped and received no reply, so the story failed to reach a Reader. Ah well.

Being an Editor is the key to many doors, not a few of them slammed in your face. A lot of experience comes your way. And a lot of new friends. As an Editor, I could approach a well-known columnist, to borrow an article. We became good friends and met a few times.

That is the up-side.

The cons:

The down side? It is a job bearing much scorn and little praise. You are on your own out there.

Back to the circus. You are the ringmaster, the clowns and the roustabouts who 'move the show at dawn'. You do Everything.

Having caught the fish [the article], you now have to gut it, prepare it, cook it, check it for flavour and texture , and then present it upon a silver platter to your readers.

Back to that in a moment, but said readers can be a difficult bunch. One of the clubs for whom I did a magazine used to ban the handing out of the circular till after the meeting, because the audience would be busy rustling pages and not paying attention to the speaker. I found it flattering at first, but not for long. As soon as the speaker was done the audience would come rushing to me to point out typos!

An Editor is an Engineer. He has an idea of the finished product. He has been to market, as it were, and brought home bits and pieces and the odd off-cuts and has to assemble them into the Whole he envisages. He has to edit, type, re-edit, collate, re-edit and paginate the Beast into a publication. I didn't then have Lotus, and had to juggle pages to get articles to fit, whole and complete, into the pages.

You learn to Do the Job. I still have a fax sent by my ex-husband, a journalist, on How To. [I still keep it, just for fun...] No fiestas of Font, choose One, or two for interviews. One column for everything, as it is most efficient in both use of space and readability. The occasion **bold** or very occasional *italics* or underlines.

Editing takes a lot of time, say 12 hours of your time for the 64 pages. Getting out four issues a year is hectic.

Tips:

A few tips, should you ever venture into Editing.

Get some professional advice. Thereafter, you are on your own. Never ask for advice. Never ask the previous Editor what he or she thinks of your efforts. Find a publication you admire the style of and emulate it as closely as possible given the limits of printing costs, sizes, black & white etc. I liked New Scientist, and the previous style of Derek Hohls.

My very first effort – in another club - changed a last-in-last-added roneo effort into a neat, ordered newsletter. How the previous incumbent sneered. 'all right for some,' she said.

Ignore any further advice forced upon you. File it away and check it out later, perhaps.

Make your pages neat and professional; set and maintain standards. Grow the hide of an elephant. Let your version of the magazine have its own 'look and feel'. I shan't name my favourite editor, but that was the style I copied.

Summary:

Ignore the comments of the unenlightened, keep your nose to the grindstone and your shoulder to the wheel. Don't do something because someone said so. Do it because it fits your image of your publication.

Pros:

You learn useful skills. You become a grammarian, an incurable complaint. You read each item in four different ways, seeking suitability, typos, grammar & hairline cracks in item logic. [you never lose this, see footnote]. You pick up a lot of typos on the first three readings. I picked up a hairline crack in story a week before SFSA III went to press.

You wear a Cloak of Power. You can print stories whose merit you believe in. Derek Hohls did that for "The Treasure Seekers", which was passed over in the SF competition, but which he liked. It was included by committee command in SFSA III. [on sale now.]

I made a point of printing Hidden Gems, and was justified when one of them came second in an overseas competition.

At the end of the day, all praise and blame is yours alone.

In Conclusion:

Being an editor is fun. It is life on the high wire, challenging and rewarding. You balance quality, quantity and deadlines. You are bold and daring to get contributions and then thick-skinned to complaints.

It is creative and demanding and extremely frustrating.

It is a roller-coaster ride, thrills all the way! As much work in producing as a pregnancy almost. [SFSA III – now on sale – took 5 years].

But would I settle for a C-section or adoption? Not on your Nellie.

Just like a baby, you have a high-class product to show to your friends and family and something fine for your CV!

Editors dress differently; they wear many hats. They are tyrants, charmers, workers, bosses and slaves.

They are their own circuses!

FOOTNOTE:

Your reading is snarled as your subconscious picks up items that pass the computerised spell-checkers of the day:

‘Three seems to be a problem here...’. [not a ménage a trois!]

'Bare with us,' ... a sub title in the Band's Visit. Not a nude scene either...

'His engine suffered dual engine failure' ... not a WWI fighter pilot, but the hero Sullenberger, who landed on the Hudson River.

@ @

Excerpt from the very first SFSA Newsletter (the predecessor of PROBE)

NEWSLETTER NO. 1 (THIRD QUARTER 1969)

HOW THE SOUTH AFRICAN S.F. CLUB WAS LAUNCHED

On April 13 Tex Cooper placed an advert in the “Sunday Times” inviting interested persons to contact him with a view to forming a Science Fiction Fan Club.

The people who replied and were in Pretoria or immediate surroundings met at Tex's house on the evening of 6 June, and Tex explained the advantages of forming a Club, which could be affiliated with the National Fan Federation (N3F) of America.

It was decided that evening to elect a temporary committee until the time of the Annual General Meeting to be held on October 3.

The committee met on the evening of 27 June at the home of Jeff Kalwerisky, in Johannesburg, and again on the afternoon of August 3, at the home of Robbie Wolter, in Pretoria.

A further meeting is scheduled for September 5 at the home of Simon Scott, in Johannesburg. At the above meetings the various details were provisionally agreed on regarding finances, publicizing the Club, and what the Club could offer members in return for their hard earned cash.

The Michael Lohr Interview

We've been publishing Michael Lohr's interviews with various SF and Horror authors in Probe for the past 4 or 5 years.

As this is the 40th Anniversary edition of Probe I decided that it would be a good idea to do something different this time and interview the interviewer himself.

Probe: First of all we see from the comment at the end of all your interviews that you are a professional journalist, outdoorsman, treasure hunter and adventurer. Your web page gives us an idea of what you have done professionally, but not about you. Can you give us a bit of background as to who Michael Lohr actually is?

ML: I'm a devout Father and a sports enthusiast. American college football, rugby and auto racing (World Rally and F1) are my favourites. I love playing odd sports like curling, vintage baseball, horseshoe pitching, bocce, fencing, Jeu de Paume, kabaddi and skeet shooting. I'm also a backpack enthusiast. There's nothing more cleansing than venturing into the deep wilderness miles from civilization. In addition to those things you mentioned above, I'm also a university researcher and folklorist. I have undergraduate degrees in journalism and folklorics and graduate degrees in research methodology and statistical analytics. My day job, so-to-speak, is a senior researcher for a major university here in America.

I've been a professional music journalist since 1984. I started writing for the local newspapers and various rock magazines when I was still in high school. I've written music reviews for everything from Creem and NME to Rolling Stone and Esquire. I am also a story advisor on ancient mysteries, paranormal research and scientific anomalies topics for the History Channel and Sci Fi Channel. Currently, myself and the renowned geophysicist Dr. Robert Schoch, along with cymanetics/harmonics expert Jonathan Goldman, are developing a couple television shows, which will explore such anomalies around the world.

Probe: Please tell us some more about treasure hunting? Does this relate to your interest in archaeology? Are you a real life Indiana Jones?

ML: I've been treasure hunting for most of my life. At first as a kid, I panned for gold, metal detected and hunted for meteors. As an adult, I became involved with world-wide treasure hunting and artifact recovery focusing on things like lost burial cairns, lost cities, lost Viking treasure, etc. I've assisted archaeologists at excavation sites from Wales and England to Spain, Germany and Romania, looking for ancient Celtic, Roman, Germanic and Dacian relics. My usage of a metal detector is in direct correlation with my volunteer archaeologist activities. At most excavation sites I assist the archaeological team by using a metal detector to discover and map the location of "in situ" artifacts. I've been searching for the tomb of Celtic Iceni warrior Queen Boudica for over a decade now. I will be in France and Portugal for the most of June searching for lost Knights Templar treasure.

As for Indiana Jones, I guess you could say that I am a reflection of the myth. I even have a scar on my chin from a motorcycle racing accident when I was a teenager.

Probe: We can see from the interviews that your knowledge of SF is extensive. You also seem to be able to ask questions about other interests the authors have. Are you one of those lucky people who absorb and retain many interesting facts or do you read up about each author before you interview them?

ML: I do an extensive amount of research on each subject that I interview. I even gather together as many of their past interviews as possible so not only can I study an individual's previous answers, but that way I can also make sure I don't ask the same questions. Occasionally, I know the interviewee. So those interviews come easy. I am also an information sponge, so that helps greatly. I will usually read an author's one seminal work just to get a feel for their writing.

Probe: I started reading SF as a child, following my father's taste. How long have you been reading SF for? How did you get interested in the genre?

ML: I remember as a kid picking up copies of Fahrenheit 451 and R Is For Rocket, as well as Erich von Däniken's Chariots of the Gods and being mesmerized. I must have been six or seven at the time. I also loved comic books like the Mighty Avengers, Thor, Spider Man and X-Men as well as magazines that dealt with UFOs, the Bermuda Triangle, etc. I've always been interested in all things space alien and paranormal. If I remember correctly, there is a character in either Fahrenheit 451 or R Is For Rocket that is named Lohr. I can't remember which novel it was, but that was a natural hook for me.

The first Star Wars movie and the original Star Trek series also got me hooked on science fiction. These days I'm a certified Sci Fi Channel junkie and enjoy the Stargate television

series in its many incarnations; SG-1, Atlantis and Universe as well as Amanda Tapping's Sanctuary. I also love the TV series, Heroes.

The new Star Trek movie is spectacular, I absolutely loved it. You know, what the Star Trek franchise should have done, TV show-wise, after Deep Space Nine went off the air? They should have had a Klingon-based show and not Voyager or especially not Enterprise. That would have been fascinating to have a weekly show in Klingon space and on the Klingon home world. Ok, now you've gone and done it! You've officially dragged my geek out from under the rock it's been safely sequestered under. ☺

Probe: Again from the interviews you seem to enjoy the work of each author that you interview. Do you only seek interviews from authors that you like to read? How do you choose?

ML: For the most part, a majority of interviews are assigned, and as such, many of them I know nothing about. But I do enjoy interviewing people whose talent I appreciate. Sometimes, if I read a book by an author that I really like, but haven't seen much exposure out there for them, I'll suggest the interview to the editor. I did this with suspense writer Scott Nicholson. In my opinion, he tells the best Southern Gothic ghost stories you'll find anywhere.

I do the same thing with musicians. About 75% of what I write is actually focused on the world of music. From a music journalism perspective, I cover everything from HammerFall, Nightwish, Iron Crow Medicine Show and the Tennessee Mafia Jug Band to George Strait, Miranda Lambert, Gjallarhorn and Sevara Nazarkhan. I have very eclectic tastes. If I hear a song or a record of a new artist that I really enjoy, I'll put a buzz in the editor's ear about at least reviewing the CD, if not actually interviewing the artist in question. I would much rather spend the time giving a deserving new artist press time than I would wasting my time on "big name" acts that don't need nor in some cases, warrant further exposure.

Probe: This is really a follow on from the last question. How do you go about the actual interviews? I have to assume that they are not all done face-to-face. Still, I suppose that video conferencing is not even considered as SF any more.

ML: Because I am so busy, I mostly ask to do interviews via email. I will occasionally do a telephone interview, but I hate to transcribe it from notes and tape recorder into something that makes sense. I would rather let the individual write their own answers and capture their true thoughts than attempt to interpret them. I've had to say "no thanks" to certain individuals because they wouldn't do an interview via email.

I will, upon occasion, after completing an email interview, do a telephone follow-up to go over the interview with the party in question. It's always best, if possible, to allow your interview subject to review the "finished" product. This is a good way to catch erroneous items and I find it a good quality control procedure.

Probe: Looking at the list of interviews that we've published I see that the authors are mainly SF and Horror. Have you interviewed any Fantasy authors? I'm not talking about MacMaster Bujold's "Regency" Fantasy or Terry Pratchett satires. I'm thinking more of the "Elf and Demon" type of work by Terry Brooks or Cecilia Dart-Thornton?

ML: Actually, no. Surprisingly, over the years, no one has really ever assigned me fantasy authors. I did an extensive interview with British author Storm Constantine, who in my opinion, is one of the top three fantasy writers in the world today. But other than her, I honestly can't remember interviewing any other writer that could be considered fantasy. I interviewed Neil Gaiman, but I'm not sure what genre camp he sits in these days.

Probe: Has anyone ever refused to give you an interview? You don't have to give us names.

ML: Yes, Keith Urban. Or at least his worthless PR people did. There is nothing more irritating than famous folk's idiotic PR people. Writer-wise, most are delighted to do an interview. Though I've had a couple well-known horror writers cause problems. One demanded the cover story and when I, being just the freelance journalist, couldn't provide this on a silver platter, whined and bolted like a little child. I actually had this happen with a very well known Star Trek actor as well. I turned that interview over to a colleague rather than proceed with the inanity and he did eventually get his cover story. As for the other "spooky" writer, she had originally agreed to do the interview, then inexplicably declined. This was during her transitional "going from Vampire Queen to Jesus Freak" phase.

Probe: Who are your personal favourite SF and Horror authors? I see that you contribute to the Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum Journal. Do you read Westerns? What fiction besides SF do you read?

ML: I love reading Douglas Clegg, but otherwise, I rather dislike horror fiction. And that may be a shock to some who read this, due to all the horror writers that I interview. At one time or another, I've written for every major professional horror and dark, speculative fiction magazine out there. The pay is ok, but I like a challenge. It's that rebel on the edge kind of thing you get with a lot of horror writers.

SF wise, I enjoy the classics like Arthur C. Clarke, Vernor Vinge, Douglas Adams and Jack Macdivitt. I also enjoy Greg Bear and Nalo Hopkinson. Like Storm Constantine, her novels transport you to wondrous places you wouldn't normally go to. Her novel, *The Salt Roads* was simply mesmerizing. And yes, I love Western novels; Elmore Leonard, Louis L'Amour, Elmer Kelton and Larry McMurtry, etc. In fact, I love all things Western and Cowboy.

I am an avid and passionate reader of Cormac McCarthy, Paulo Coelho and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I really enjoy Clive Cussler, and the historical fiction of Steven Pressfield and Bernard Cornwell. I also enjoy Dan Brown's novels. And to clarify, I began reading him when he first published *Deception Point*, well before *The Da Vinci Code*.

As American Founding Father Thomas Jefferson once said, "I cannot live without books."

Probe: We know that you are a professional journalist but have you ever tried your hand at writing any sort of fiction?

ML: I have written a few short stories over the years, mostly for anthologies. A couple of these stories have actually won awards. But it's a factor of money. Most of the mainstream nonfiction magazines I write for pay at least a \$1 per word. That's much better than a few cents per word like most fiction magazines offer. But I am working on a thriller/suspense novel that I hope to complete later this year.

Probe: Have you ever been to Africa? If not, would you like to visit our very beautiful but some time dark and troubled continent?

ML: I have been to Africa a multitude of times. I've journeyed to Egypt several times on archaeological-related trips. I've also been on treasure hunting expeditions in Morocco. I traveled to Kampala, Uganda twice for writing purposes and for recreational adventure I took a Kibo safari in Tanzania.

I currently serve as an Associate Board Member for the African Conservation Foundation (ACF). The African Conservation Foundation won the 2006 Stockholm Challenge Award for its African Conservation Network program for cultural and environmental preservation projects in Tanzania.

I have also performed research in Africa for the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). These projects were in Egypt, Ghana and Kenya. I went to Cape Town once, when I attended a conference at the University of Cape Town.

Once, back in 2005, I was on an expedition with a group of archaeologists from the University of Asmara, located in Eritrea. We were on the Eritrean/Ethiopian borderland searching for an ancient, lost holy city that we have reason to believe resides there. I was digging a test hole when I heard something whiz by my head, then another and another. I

quickly realized that the Ethiopian Army was shooting us at. They must have thought we were planting landmines or something. Needless to say, we got the hell out of there. The irony of this post 9-11 situation was that, here I was, an American, from a Christian background, working with a group of Muslims, from an Islamic country, standing on Islamic soil, and we are being shot at by the armed forces of a rival, Christian nation.

I also have done volunteer work for many African-focused NGOs, including The Water Project, The One Campaign, the African Women's Development Fund, African Wildlife Foundation, the African Well Fund, etc. I went to Rwanda in 2000 on a Humanitarian mission with a team from the Bread for the World Institute. I am intimately familiar with your beautiful, but troubled continent.

It was my passion for Africa that was the primary reason why I reached out several years ago to the SFSA. Getting involved with Probe and the SFSA just made logical sense. You're the largest, if not the only science fiction organization on the continent. What better than to combine my love for the Dark Continent with my interest in sci-fi than to get involved with Science Fiction South Africa. Every time I see that issue of Probe arrive in the mail, it makes me smile and think of my many adventures on far distant shores.



Excerpt from the Contents page of PROBE Volume 2, Number 1, December 1970

S.F.S.A.'s Committee

Chairman: Tex Cooper
Vice Chairman: Simon Scott
Sec/Treas: Mavis Cooper
Members: Niels Christensen
Trevor Watkins
Kevin MacDonnell
Bernie Ackerman

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Yon artwork is to be submitted to ye ART EDITOR, by name Kevin MacDonnell. Ye scribbling to be sent to ye EDITOR and censor, Tex Cooper. The contents of this magazine are copyright. Submissions gratefully accepted. PROBE is published every six weeks and can be obtained from the Editor at 30c a copy, or by joining S.F.S.A. Overseas fen may exchange magazines.

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Artwork in this issue by Kevin MacDonnell and William Rotsler.

We have a recording of Professor Sellschops' address at the 2nd A.G.M. Copies of this may be obtained by submitting a tape and twenty –five cents to cover the cost of recording it. Please enquire from Tex Cooper.

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MEMORIES OF



PROBE

Cedric Abrahams

When I first started editing PROBE, the technologies involved allowed for a lot to be done on computer, but there was still a lot of physical cut and paste. Pritt glue is still a firm favourite. ☺ Although a lot of the text and layout was done using WordPerfect, we were supplied art in the physical form and scanning to PC was still not available to home users. Roberto Schima's magnificent cover art was always a pleasure to work with. Having been given a folder full of it, I enjoyed choosing art which I believed suited the tone of that issue.

As an editor, my forte was content and layout. As anyone who knows me will attest, I am not the most patient of people and so proofreading was my avowed weakness. To assist me in overcoming this limitation I was ably assisted by Dierdre Byrne. She put in many hard hours correcting my many oversights and omissions. As an editorial duo we were a formidable team.

When I managed to get hold of a scanner at work I was able to put the art in electronically, flip it, reverse it and manipulate the images as I saw fit. I was very disappointed when WordPerfect was superseded commercially by Microsoft Word, as it was an inferior product with better marketing. It took Microsoft years to include many of the features I used in WordPerfect. Oh well, technology and market forces go marching on.

One of the highlights of my tenure as editor was putting together issue 100. Unlike the regular coloured cover this was white. It made Roberto's art particularly striking. Unfortunately as my career grew and changed, I had less time to devote to PROBE and handed on to Liz Simmonds, who put her own look to it. It was the ability to personalize it

that I remember fondly; fighting with drop caps, artistic titles and column layout were in equal parts frustrating, and exhilarating when completed successfully. As this is the 14th palindromic issue of PROBE (if you exclude 1) and 40th anniversary edition, I am pleased to have been able to contribute. In a world where the literary seems to be overwhelmed by the visual, it is nice to know that PROBE PROBE still finds new frontiers to explore.

....and **“The Star Trek ‘Get Wesley’ Wormhole”**

Surf’s Up

Favienne Walther, Liz Simmonds, Iain Sinclair, Cedric Abrahams

Ensign Cody was furious. “Omo., I mean oh no. There is no Skip! What will Maq say? He pulled on his away strip: yellow, and discarded the soiled red shirt he had planned to wear dirtside. Ensign Crusher was steaming. He would have to wear the traditional red shirt. They beamed down into a swamp of triple concentrated enzymes, which made all colour Vanish from any fabric. Suddenly a current began to rotate them. They realized they were stuck in a spin cycle. Crusher was sucked into the Vortex! “At least”, mused Kirk, “it was a clean death”

.....and

“Tomorrow is too Late”

Frans Tomasek, Liz Simmonds, Andrew Jamieson

Chronos was expecting ten to the party. The days of the week were fairly prompt – although Friday seemed a long time in coming. Monday as usual wore blue whilst graceful Tuesday was consoling woeful Thursday.

Yesterday was boring people with stale news as today was making unfair bets with him.

Monday Monday and Ruby Tuesday were playing on the gramophone.

Chronos was pleased with the turnout as he handed out minute sandwiches – which of course led everyone to clamour for seconds.

Promptly at midnight everyone left, and, as usual, Tomorrow was too late to join in the fun.

Flight 514 From Cape Town

Gail Jamieson

She dropped her suitcase with a sigh and looked at her watch. "Thirty-five minutes until take off. Just enough time! No need to panic but also no need to sit and wait." The couple in front of her were loading a baby chair and a pram onto the conveyor belt. The baby was whining querulously over its father's shoulder. It seemed to be about nine months old and irritable. She hoped it wouldn't be anywhere near her on the 'plane. It wasn't that she disliked children but she had had a busy, stressful few days and just wanted to be back home again. To sleep in her own bed with Ian's arms around her and not in a strange bed alone. She loved her job but it did have the disadvantage of having to be away from home from time to time. She checked in her suitcase, collected her newspaper and went through the security checkpoint. It was a longish walk to the correct gate and she was sorry she hadn't checked in her briefcase as well. It was a Friday afternoon and she wasn't going to do any work on the flight home. There were a lot of un-accompanied children waiting to board the flight. It was school holidays and many of them were flying up to family in advance of their parents driving up. Some looked rather lost, with their tickets on string around their necks – rather like refugees waiting for a flight out of a war zone.

Her flight was called as she sat down. Warily she stood up again, handed in her boarding pass, had it torn in half and returned to her. She walked out into the wind. Truly, Cape Town was a beautiful city but she didn't think she could live with the wind, always plucking at her skirts and mussing her hair.

It was only a short walk across the runway to the 'plane. She climbed the stairs and found her seat – on the aisle as she had requested. She had discovered that she was much more comfortable on a 'plane if she couldn't see directly out of a window. It was foolish, she knew, but flying always made her nervous. Intellectually she knew she was much safer ten kilometers above the ground than driving home on the highway once she had landed. She always had the silly notion that it took her about an hour to run ten kilometers but that it would probably take less than two minutes to fall from that height. Not that she would, of course.

The 'plane filled up slowly, but not completely. The two seats next to her remained vacant. It was seldom that she had a single empty seat next to her and had never before had two. She wasn't antisocial but quite liked the idea of an uncrowded flight home.

Then she slowly became aware, above the noise of the people settling down, of someone kicking the seat behind her.

They had been in front of her in the check-in line. She should have thought to ask for a seat far away from them. But it was too late now. The child shouted angrily as its father tried to make it sit on his lap for the take off.

The 'plane taxied down the runway and turned around to start its take off. The engines revved and as usual she felt the niggling fear in the pit of her stomach. As they rushed down the runway, she closed her eyes and offered up a silent prayer. Seemingly slowly the 'plane tilted up and left the ground. Her stomach slowly reoriented itself. As usual taking off out of Cape Town was bumpy. But before long the seat belt signs pinged off and the cabin crew began to move about.

She put on her glasses, opened her book and settled down to read. She had hardly read half a page before she became aware of a minor commotion behind her. This time it sounded as if it was the father who was making the fuss. She had decided not to pay any attention when she suddenly saw, out of the corner of her eye, a movement on the floor against the side of the 'plane.

The child had crawled under her row of seat and was now sitting looking at her. She sighed inwardly and looked back at the father who was trying, in vain to reach the child over the back of the seat.

She leaned down to pick him up, but he shied away from her. She undid her seat belt and picked him up. He yelped but she paid no attention and handed him back to his father who rather shamefacedly offered apologetic thanks. She settled down to read again. The child quieted down and she read on. Deep within her book she became aware that someone was trying to attract her

attention. From the seat behind the child's father was asking if she minded if the child, now fast asleep, could be laid across the two empty seats. "Oh well" she thought. At least asleep she wouldn't have to be concerned about what he would be up to next. She nodded her agreement and helped the father to lay the now motionless child across her two free seats.

Before she could go back to her book, the cabin crew had reached her seat in the middle of the 'plane. She gratefully accepted a glass of orange juice and a couple of open sandwiches. She was hungry as she hadn't had a chance to have more than a cup of tea during her busy morning. It wasn't the most appetizing meal but at least it would keep her going until she reached home.

She ate. Then she leaned back and closed her eyes for a few moments. A sudden draught made her aware of the silence. She opened her eyes and quickly closed them again. Slowly she re-opened them.

She was sitting on a grassy bank with her back up against a tree. Everything was quiet. She looked around, not quite sure of what to expect. There on the grass beside her was the child! He rolled over, sat up and looked at her sleepily.

"Hello" he said in a surprisingly adult voice, "Where are we?"

"We are... We were on an aeroplane somewhere between Cape Town and Johannesburg." She answered.

She reached down and felt the grass. She pulled up a piece and smelled it. It was green and it looked and smelled like grass. If this was a dream, it was a far better production than those she was used to. She could remember

occasionally dreaming in colour but certainly not being able to feel or smell her surroundings. She had always been nervous of flying – perhaps she was dead. Somehow she didn't feel disturbed by the thought. If this was the afterlife, it looked pleasant enough, if not very exciting. She was just wondering if she should get up and take a look around when the child spoke again.

"I suppose we should go and have a look" he said.

She looked at him more closely. Yes, it was definitely the child who had been asleep on the seats next to her in the 'plane. She hadn't heard him speak then but she was sure that he wasn't anywhere near old enough to enunciate the words she had heard him use now. She shook her head to try and wake herself up, if she was indeed asleep. Nothing changed. Perhaps she was hallucinating? Maybe she had watched too many bad SF movies lately?

He broke into her train of thought. "Well... are you just going to sit there?"

She got to her feet. She had no idea of what was going on but she seemed to be trapped in the illusion so she might as well go along with it.

Without looking to see if she was following, he set off. As she looked more closely at her surroundings, she became aware of what seemed to be of a cluster of houses in the middle distance. She also noticed as she glanced down that they were on a path of sorts, not very well defined but a lightly worn pattern in the grass.

The child seemed to know where he was heading.

Feeling rather foolish she asked him where they were going.

"To the village", he replied. "You had better let me do the talking. I didn't mean for you to be here and they won't be expecting you. It may be rather difficult."

"You didn't *mean* for me to be here?"

"What *did* you mean and where *are* we?"

"I meant to come alone and this is my private playground so you has better just stay quietly behind me and maybe it will be all right." His voice had taken on a rather threatening tone.

"Well, in that case, perhaps I'd better just stay her." She said.

"No!" he snapped.

She tried to sit down again but found that she could not. Her feet would not stay still. She was being dragged along behind him. She had no control of her legs at all. Despite the fear she suddenly felt her body followed at a relaxed pace.

"That'll do", she heard him say softly.

Reluctantly she went with him towards the dwellings. As they got closer, she could see that they could not really be dignified with the title of houses. They were shabby lean-to structures which seemed to be made out of rough wooden planks and caulked with a dirty grey clayish material. They seemed to be deserted. In fact, they looked as if they had been uninhabited for a very long time, although she actually had no idea of how long such makeshift structures would stand up to the elements. She still felt nervous. An air of uneasiness pervaded the whole area. From close up she could see that there in fact only a dozen or so structures still standing. The rest were in various stages of collapse.

The child hesitated. A look of discomfiture crossed his babyish face.

"This is all wrong. It's all your fault," he

complained peevishly. "I don't know why you had to come along."

She just looked at the child. She really could not argue with someone who stood less than a meter tall, especially as she was not sure the whole episode was not taking place inside her own mind.

Suddenly she felt as if there were eyes watching her. She turned quickly. Out of the corner of her eye she thought she saw a blur.

"Don't do that!" It was a command. If you don't see them, they can still pretend they haven't seen you. It might be much safer."

An increasing feeling of uneasiness seemed to settle upon her. "Can't you do something?" she asked. "If this is your secret place you must be able to do something."

"It's not the same with you here.

Everything has changed. It used to be... good." He seemed to be at a loss for words to explain how he felt. The people seem to be gone and I'm sure that was a wizard you almost saw. I want to go home." His voice took on a much less adult tone than it had before. "My friends are all gone."

Once again something flickered just beyond her visual perception. She couldn't help herself. She turned and looked. "Don't!" she heard him wail. He began to cry in earnest but she would not even turn back to look at him.

There before her was a presence. It seemed to be very tall and very dark. Waves of icy dread seemed to emanate from it as if it had absorbed all of the warmth from the afternoon. All she wanted to do was to run but she also felt compelled to look into the dark shape in front of her.

A shape was all it was but it was echoing hollow and a chillingly stark contrast to the bright sunshine. An arm seemed to form from out of the darkness. It beckoned. "Come." The thought insinuated itself into her mind.

"This dream has turned into a nightmare." With that thought firmly in mind she forced her eyes away, managed to turn, and ran. All she wanted was to get away from the frightening presence. She had only run a few steps when she pulled up short. The child! Physically he was only a baby. He could never outrun that dark strength that had threatened them. She turned back and ran to him. The expression on his face was certainly not that of a child.

"Run" he shouted.

She hesitated and then scooped him up into her arms. She was surprised by his lightness. Her own children were so much older and she hadn't lifted one of them in this way for years. She fled away from the ramshackle dwellings and back towards the trees. She had no idea if they were being followed but she didn't take the time to look back.

As she reached the trees she stumbled and fell. She could not use her hands to stop her fall and as her head struck a tree root the world was dropped into darkness and she felt no more.

She started! And looked around her at the people across the aisle. Nobody seemed to have noticed anything out of the ordinary. The 'plane jolted again. The young girls across from her looked scared. The seat belt light pinged on. The Captain announced that there was a lot of cloud around and that seat belts should be worn until they landed in about ten minutes time.

Ten minutes! She looked at her watch. It was indeed three o'clock. She felt disorientated. One moment she had been.... somewhere else and now she was back on the 'plane. The child! She looked down and there he was, still fast asleep. She must have been dreaming. She hadn't realized she was so tired. It had been so clear, so vivid!

The 'plane continued its descent into the clouds. They were thick and grey and she could not see the ground at all, even though she leaned over to look through the window two seats away. It gave a strange, almost surrealistic feeling – like floating through dirty, grey cottonwool. But surely cottonwool would be soft and give a padded effect and a feeling of safety.

But she didn't feel at all safe. The turbulence seemed to be increasing and the 'plane was buffeted from side to side. They seemed to be descending at a very steep angle. She felt rather as if she was in that strange state when your alarm has clicked but not yet begun to ring. Asleep but yet awake on a different plane of existence. She felt vaguely nauseous. Which was reality? The place she had visited or this frightening descent back to earth.

"Cabin Crew, take your seats for landing." The Captain's voice was barely audible above the noise of the engines.

Suddenly through the window she saw that they had fallen through the bottom of the cloud layer. They were still much higher up in the air than she would have expected. She noticed, without being able to do anything about it, that her hands were tightly clenched around the arms of her seat.

The wheels of the 'plane hit the ground with a shudder. She was thrown forward in her seat as the pilot reversed the engines. The passengers clapped with relief. She was home.

Suddenly she was sure it *had* all been a strange dream, although she had never slept before on a short flight. A very vivid, realistic dream. It would make an amusing story to tell Ian. He knew how much she disliked flying. As the 'plane taxied to a stop she was already phrasing in her mind the story she would tell. She collected her briefcase and left the 'plane. Ian was waiting and she went gratefully into his arms.

As they walked to the exit she caught sight of the child again. He was sitting sleepily in his father's arms with his head on his father's shoulder. The sleepy blue eyes made contact with hers and she suddenly felt cold.

Solemnly and deliberately he winked at her.



The Neal Asher Interview

An e-mail Interview with Neal Asher (with thanks to Nina Gabriels at PanMacmillan)

SFSA: We see you have an engineering background. Does this help or hinder your description of space ships and Brass Men?

Neal: It helps in a big way. The engineering background, plus about fifteen years being self-employed, has given me an understanding of how machines work and what certain materials can be used for. During my engineering days I went from basic workshop stuff to actually programming robotic machine tools, and during my time being self-employed I took apart and reassembled all sorts of engines – even making parts to repair them. Aiming at the specific instances of your question: it's the engineering background that gave me the brass man's powder-compressed and case-hardened ceramal outer armour, because I know exactly what all these are, and it's that same background that helps me describe the machinery in the massive factory stations of the Polity that build spaceships. This background also helps me understand new stuff I read about and often include in the books, like bubblemetal and why it would be made in zero gravity (even dispersal of inert gas bubbles throughout the molten metal) and what its properties would be.

SFSA: Do you prefer to write short stories or novels? Which come easier?

Neal: There's two different disciplines here. Short stories have to be tight and concise, and fitting in the beginning, the middle and the end can be hard work. However, if I have problems with that the thing expands into a long story then a novella until I feel I've got it right. The same rules apply

for a novel but there's just a lot more work involved so, really, short stories come easier. As to my preference? Short stories are something I have more freedom to enjoy, but novels, though there's more slog there, are much more satisfying and give a greater sense of achievement. The nearest I can get to an answer here is that I prefer writing a short story to writing a novel, but I prefer having written a novel to having written a short story.

SFSA: You've been described as "The Master of SF Horror" We agree that the "Prador" are a pretty unpleasant bunch but I'm not sure they really belong in "Horror". Why do you think you have been given this appellation?

Neal: I think that one turned up with the third book I ever had published, a collection of short stories called *The Engineer* (now published as *The Engineer ReConditioned*), and before I'd done very much with the Prador. I suspect it comes from the graphic violence, flesh-eating monsters, torture and hideous pain-inducing technologies. That's just a guess, mind.

SFSA: We see that you have your own large SF library? A man after our own heart. How many books do you have? How do you choose which to keep? Who is your own personal favourite SF author? Do you only collect SF?

Neal: I'm damned if I know how many books I have, maybe one or two thousand. I know that when I was in my twenties I read an average of ten SFF books a month over a number of years. These were obtained new, or secondhand, or from the library. Those I'd paid for, enjoyed and thought I might want to read again were kept, the rest went back to the secondhand bookshop, and the collection is mostly science fiction and fantasy. My favourite authors are all in there, but I don't particularly have a singular favourite. In the acknowledgements of *The Skinner* I thanked 'all those excellent people whose names stretch through the alphabet from Aldiss to Zelazny,' so that about covers it.

SFSA: On a similar note. What type of non-SF authors do you like to read?

Neal: I like thrillers, police procedurals, travel, humour, science, historical and even aga-sagas sometimes. My reading is a lot wider nowadays and, really, I like a book if I like a book. Names that immediately spring to mind

are: Minette Walters, Bill Bryson, Richard Dawkins, Jeremy Clarkson, Wilbur Smith, Karin Slaughter ... but we're straying into alphabet territory here again.

SFSA: Do you still read E.C. Tubb?

Neal: I haven't read any in many years but, if I see something I haven't seen before I might pick it up and give it a go. I gave up on Tubb's Dumarest saga at about book twenty-two when the formula was no longer working for me and I was starting to get fed up with the hero never actually finding Earth. Maybe that same saga is why I don't like ever-extended TV franchise SF, preferring to see a complete story arc like the one in Babylon 5

SFSA: Have you ever collaborated with another author? Is there one you would like to collaborate with and why?

Neal: The closest I've come to a collaboration is writing a story based on someone else's characters and setting. This was (possibly) for a film and I didn't really enjoy the process. The guy I was writing it for didn't like what I did with it and I couldn't fully commit to it, nor give my imagination free rein. It wasn't mine, you see. Writing is a very introvert and, really, a very selfish pursuit. So no, I don't want to collaborate with another author.

SFSA: We've been to a small number of WorldCons but have not seen your name appear on any of the programming lists? Have you ever attended a WorldCon and if not, do you have a specific reason for not going?

Neal: I've never attended a WorldCon and don't really want to. As an author I'm sure someone would want me to go on a panel or stand up and give a reading or talk, and I just don't want to do that. Referring to that 'introvert pursuit' I mentioned earlier, well I retreated into my bedroom to write stories and learnt to enjoy that process. If I'd wanted to be a performer I'd have joined an amateur dramatics group or something. As for the rest of what goes on at cons ... getting drunk with strangers or looking for recognition and adulation just don't appeal.

SFSA: Have you ever had an offer to turn one of your novels or stories into a film?

Neal: There's been a few queries: one from a company called Blue Train Entertainment for Gridlinked and one from 20th Century Fox for Hilldiggers, but they came to nothing. However, I have worked on developing a number of my short stories for the proposed new Heavy Metal film – this involving David Fincher (Fightclub etc), Kevin Eastman (Ninja Turtles) and Tim Miller (boss of Blur Studios). This was for Paramount but they rejected it at the last hurdle, and it is presently doing the rounds of various other film companies. It was gratifying to learn that even Tom Cruise took a look at the material and thought that one of my stories by itself could be turned into a film, but again this went no further.

SFSA: The Gabble Duck. We're intrigued by his "dialogue". Are we going to see more of him? I rather hope he is actually intelligent?

Neal: The stories in The Gabble collection go some way towards explaining what the gabbleducks are all about, but my fascination with them and that of my readers has led me to propose a book completely focused on them. This will be the third book of my present three-book contract with Macmillan. Currently I'm finishing book two, which tells the story of the early years of a character called the Owner – a ten-thousand-year-old owner of worlds who controls some seriously powerful and massive technology. He has appeared in short stories in The Engineer ReConditioned.

SFSA: Have you ever considered writing Fantasy?

Neal: This was where I came in. The very first thing I started writing, doing it longhand, on a manual typewriter, electric typewriter, green-screen pc running Wordstar and finally an IBM clone. I wrote a fantasy trilogy, the overall title being The Road to the Yellow tower, and individual titles being The Staff of Sorrows, Assassin out of Twilight and The Yellow Tower, and tried to get them published. At one point I even had an agent hawking them around various publishers, meanwhile writing the first book of the next trilogy whose overall title is The Infinite Willows, the first book being The Creatures of the Staff. No luck, and enough rejection letters to paper my bedroom. I did a contemporary novel too, about Essex farmers growing GM cannabis, and didn't have any luck with that either. During this time I discovered the SFF small presses and started writing short stories for them – mostly science fiction – then longer stories and novellas, which appeared

in numerous magazines or were published by small press book publishers like Tanjen or Club 199. I then went on to produce larger stuff like Gridlinked and The Skinner, which is about where Macmillan came in. To sum up: I have four short fantasy novels and one contemporary novel that still sit in my files. One day I may return to them and rewrite them, but not yet.

SFSA: What do you like to do when you're not writing?

Neal: I like to read, watch films and TV series, eat out, lie in the sun, swim, drink too much. I like gardening, doing sudokus and crosswords, and shouting at the TV news. In recent years I've been enjoying blogging and sticking my tuppence-worth up on messageboards. Just the usual stuff really.

SFSA: How do you feel about "stand alone" novels in comparison with "series"? (We mean one book that follows another, not that takes place in the same universe.)

Neal: I enjoy reading both, but have too often seen the danger in a science fiction series of it becoming an extended franchise like the Tubb books, or finishing with anticlimax or deus ex machina and often both. That being said there's some superb sequences out there produced by the likes of Alastair Reynolds, John Varley, Julian May, Larry Niven and many others besides. On writing either, my opinions vary. In a stand-alone novel I can just take the shackles off my imagination and go for it – usually doing the job quicker – and this can lead to some of my personal favourites amidst my own books, like The Skinner, Hilldiggers and Cowl. Writing a series is something that gets progressively harder, since each subsequent book must be written with reference to the books that went before, and I get increasingly tied down by previous now unalterable events. There's also the problem of trying to avoid the aforementioned anticlimax or deus ex machina, however, if these can be avoided the pay-off is greater – the satisfaction at the end. I tried very hard to avoid these with the five-book Cormac series, and hope my readers think I did so.

Cheers!



A Real Cyberpunk - Neil van Niekerk

Here we are in 2009, a world that most Science Fiction writers from 50 years ago didn't quite envision. A world that is physically not as different compared to the worlds they had imagined. We still drive cars and live in houses on the same planet. No inter-planetary space travel and no inter-galactic wars between us and the alien races.

Yet we are living in the Science Fiction future - long past 1977, the year when Star Wars was released and Sci-Fi truly **became** the mainstream. And if you're in doubt, just look at the movie listings right now, and at least half the movies on show will be Sci-Fi or fantasy or have strong elements of either.

So here we are, neither living in a utopian future, nor a dystopian one. Just our regular daily lives on this planet.

But if we're not living in a Utopian future, we're perhaps a little closer to the future more recently imagined by the Cyberpunk writers. Since they write about a post-industrial world where hackers are the heroes battling against mega-corporations, it is much closer to our current reality. The cyberpunk writers have it easy in imagining a more realistic future-fiction ... they live in it, and it is easier to extrapolate from a more current electronic-driven technology than it would've been to interpolate to a realistically envisioned current future from a mechanical technology.

So while I may not have the invasive body modifications where I am integrated directly with the connected cyber-world - as I clutch my iPhone in my hand, I do feel like the 21st Century boy that I am. I can contact anyone anywhere in the world via phone; email; text messages. (I am extremely contact-able!) I can surf the web; I can take photos, video clips, voice recordings and send them to anyone. I have a built-in GPS. I can check train and flight schedules from this device. I can listen to music. I have a staggering number of ways I can interface with the world around me.

the cliché is that you can reinvent yourself ... and with the technology we have, we can actually redefine ourselves .. or does the technology define us ?

The dystopian sci-fi visions warned us of how technology would control us, as we are either enslaved to it, or have to fight apocalyptic battles against "the machines". And well may you laugh at that comment, thinking of how we are enslaved to our mobile devices, and as they dissociate some of us from the world. And yet, the technology we have at our fingertips enables us in a way that would've made the older Sci-Fi writers proud.

Our technologies are expanding at a faster rate than most people can keep pace with, even within any specific field. A younger generation is growing up immersed in technology, with a near instinctive understanding how technology is to be used, than people growing up in a more mechanical era. When I discussed this with my 15 yr old daughter, she described technology as being akin to a language you know in how you instinctively understand it.

Everyone knows the joke that if you want to have a digital device programmed, you need to give it to a 7 year old child. Actually the joke was based around programming your VCR, but VCRs are soon to be ancient history. That in itself shows how fast the technology is expanding .. when you have to update the jokes.

In a way the future we are living in now is perhaps less exciting perhaps than the Sci-Fi futures which were essentially futuristic Westerns as humans fight against aliens. But the dangers facing us are far more / very real. Our planet is slowly dying on us, as the rain and oceans become more acidic. The oceans are becoming depleted as they are systematically stripped. There is a crisis that is slowly unfolding right under us. It isn't quite the apocalyptic drama that a lot of Sci-Fi is based on. But it is there, underlying our daily existence.

However, I'm excited to be living in this current future. I love the toys. I love the technology. Even though I was born in the previous century, I truly am of the 21st century. I'm ready for more ... as I clutch my iPhone in my left hand.

CANDY-BLOSSOM

Dave Freer

I was going to run. As soon as he... it... the THING stopped looking at me. Staring a hole through my **stupid** head with its four eyes. I was going to run like the wind. I shouldn't have come here. Never. I swore to God ... if I ever got out of here...

The thing opened its mouth. The wrong way. Like a vertical slash. The inside was watermelon-pink, full of tombstone teeth... Orange tombstones. Glowing even in the moonlight. "Candy-blossom?" it said. Or that is what I thought it said, anyway. It sounded like one of those wind-chime *magodies* that that *langhaar* by the beach sells. What was the word he used again again? Oh, *Ja*. Mellifluous. Mellifluous with just a little bit of lost-child despair.

Nothing that looks like a cross between a nightmare and train-smash should speak like that. Not even to an old poacher. My bag of illegal spiny lobster twitched where it lay on the sand.

The creature jumped like a startled rabbit. He pointed the thing in his ...hand at the bag and backed off. I was happy he was pointing it at the bugs. I didn't know what a set of semi-see-through rods in these modern dayglo-fashion-design colours did. But something about the thing said 'gun'.

A spiny lobster stuck out a feeler and went '**eeerrrrrk**'. A bleddy scary noise in the quiet, if I say it myself. The thing crouched and aimed the gun-goody, waiting. Hey, the bugs could make a sudden move and find out if it was a cigarette vending-machine or not. Me, I was out of here.

I tensed myself to make that dash. Just a few seconds and I'd be gone behind that big grey granite boulder . And then I'd be away. I'd sneaked around these granite bricks and scrubby *fynbos* for thirty years. If the bleddy army couldn't catch me, then furry

feeler-face Candy-blossom hadn't a chance.

Suddenly my ears picked up a familiar sound. One I was used to listening for. Put-put... Patrol boat. Old Candy-blossom heard it too. His four eyes nearly bugged out. And then, from up the hill, we heard a radio-crackle. Shit. Not even to save my life from this alien thing was I going to be caught here! That bleddy *magistraat* at Vredenburg wouldn't give a damn how I'd been caught this time...

"Candy-blossom? Enku?"

Hey, I didn't have to be a mindreader to understand the Alien. It was just as shit-scared of being caught as I was. And I'd bet 'Enku' meant please.

"Oh, bugger it. *Ja*. Come." I picked up the bag.

It stood. Looked bleddy pathetic.

"Man! *Heretjie-tog*, follow me, dammit."

It still didn't move, just made a miserable little "eeep!ting" sound. The patrol-boat was getting closer.

"Ag! Candy-blossom."

"Candy-blossom?"

"*Ja*, all right then, bleddy Candy-blossom. Now come."

It did.

Down here on this patch of beach there was no cover, unless you counted the piles of half-dry washed-up kelp. I'd got myself

caught once before hiding in one of those piles. The bleddy patrol had stopped and sat down on the rock next to my pile for a smoke-break. The buggers were parking off maybe three feet from where I was lying under that stinking kelp. They didn't have a clue that I was lying there with a streepsak of perlemoen and those damned kelp-goggas crawling all over me. *Ai*. It still makes me *gril* just thinking about it. Eventually I just had to scratch, even if it meant getting caught. I wasn't doing that again.

Up the slope was mostly those big granite boulders and scrubby little *renosterbossies*. Not an easy place to hide but also damned near impossible to keep a skirmish-line patrol in contact with each other.

You could hear the dumb *troeps vloeking* their way through the bushes. Hell. There must be a couple of hundred of them up there. This wasn't just a patrol out looking for old Piet Geel poaching in the military reserve again. They must be out looking for Candy-blossom here. Looking for him seriously.

I'd been wondering if I'd done something really stupid. Maybe I should give this monster to them. I mean he was... an alien. Like from the X-files, on the teevee down at Minna's place. But they shouldn't have come

searching for him like that, not with half the bleddy Military Academy out after him. That got me mad. I'd had them looking for me before. Right now old Candy-blossom and me were up the same damned creek. I'd get him away, then, maybe...

There was a little *vlei* just up the hill in a bit of a flat-patch there. The water is the colour of *rooibos* tea that's been boiled for two hours, with this red-brown scum on it. At the deepest it is just over knee-deep. It's full of *platannas* and *waterblommetjies*. I pulled old Candy-blossom out into it. Made him lie down in between the lily-leaves. Pulled a couple of them over him. Put one on his face. Lay down next to him, with a leaf on my face too.

I heard them splash in the shallow water. Couldn't hear what they were saying, because my ears were underwater, but I know *troeps*. There hasn't been a *troep* born that is going to walk into the water deeper than half-way up his boots, if he gets that wet. Not on a winter's night, that's for sure. All I had to worry about was that there'd be some *snotkop* officer watching them. A torch shone across my face. I lay still. The torchlight stopped blinding me. Moved on. The splashing stopped. We waited.

I gave old Candy-blossom a nudge. We got up. The skirmish

line was downhill from us now. On the sea I could see not one patrol boat but all four. All around where we'd been. Not, TG, where we were going. I poured the water and a happy little *plattie* out of my boots and led old Candy-blossom over the ridge.

Now, you leave a boat on the beach, and anyone can see it. Put it in the open water and it's pretty obvious in the moonlight. Cover it with kelp and it gets full of those damned kelp-*goggas*. Me, I always leave the boat in a patch of three big grey rocks just off the beach. Who notices if there are three or four rocks? They're higher than my old boat. I put a bit of kelp on the back end just leave her there.

She stayed there three months last time I got arrested. They thought I'd come over the fence. *Lelik is niks, maar stupid...* Like, I'm going to climb a ten-foot razor wire fence when I can just row around? So the old boat just stayed there. Even in the daytime nobody noticed her. Okay, it means I get myself wet getting out to her, but what is a bit of wetness to old *smokkelaar* like me? I could see my rocks below us, and in two minutes we'd be away.

Except there was some *troepie* gyping on the point. OK. Maybe he was supposed to be on guard. Looked more like he was having a smoke and a daydream.

Funny, they reckoned these black *troeps* would be different from the white ones. But a *troep* is a *troep* is a *troep*, like they say.

We couldn't wait. I'd swear blind that was a dog I heard. You can't fool dogs as easily as you can people.

"Stay here," I whispered. It didn't work. Candy-blooming-blossom followed me anyway. There were no small rocks around, but I took a couple of nice undersize *perlemoen* from my bag. There's a good thick patch of bush in the gully just other side of the headland. Couple of bat-eared foxes have their hole there, and this close to morning they're pretty near to it. I know. They nearly made me shit myself the first time I came that way. I waited 'til the guard had taken a nice deep pull on that smoke, and chucked the bat-eared foxes a *perlemoen* for breakfast.

Hey, I didn't expect that *troepie* to shriek like that. "Hai!!! Haii!!!" and then to go in shooting. Shooting, *noga!* Shit. I felt sorry for the bat-eared foxes. They don't even eat *perlemoen*. Still, we were into my old boat faster than I can pull a *snoek*. I've been shot at once before and I didn't like it.

Quiet like mice I rowed us away between the bricks and kelp. I tied off the bag and hung it over the side, as usual. If a Sea-fisheries boat found us now, I'd

just cut the rope. I wished like hell I could do that with old Candy-blossom, too. 'Cause now that we were in the boat, I was thinking, "What am I going to do with this... thing?" I mean, I live alone. But my grandchildren are in and out of the place. Maybe I should just...

A helicopter whopped away out of the dark with a searchlight, off towards Saldahna. "Candy-blossom?"

Ag, so what the hell could I do? I just kept on rowing between the along the edge, keeping near the bricks. The moon was nearly down now, and we still had a couple of hours till sunrise. Hennie and some of his boys had been going to set some nets for *galjoen* when the moon went down. I wondered how they'd feel about that chopper? It made me laugh. I'll bet old Hennie thought the Sea-fisheries boys were getting pretty bleddy sneaky.

We slipped across, with a couple of ships shining lights around in the dark. They never shone them at us. My word, but there are a lot of little boats out there in the bay at night. All on perfectly legitimate business, I'm sure. They kept the Navy boys busy. The Academy Reserve looked like a Christmas tree with all those lights flashing around. Me, I know you see much better without a torch, but the army always knows better, *né?*

So we pulled the boat up. I'll say this for Candy-blossom. He gave me a hand. Actually, he gave me four hands, and man, was he strong. I took him up to the house. It is not much of a place, but it's my home. Just an old *strandhuisie*, but my father's, my grandfather's and my great-grandfather's before me too. I put the spiny lobster and the perlemoen down, lit the lamp and got out a bottle of brandy and a couple of glasses. After this lot I needed a shot. Hell, I thought we both needed a *dop* or two.

Old Candy-blossom took one look at the bottle and got excited. "Candy-blossom? Candy-blossom?!!" He picked up the bottle, and tried to open it by pulling the lid off. Looked like he'd never met a screw-cap and he needed a drink badly.

I grabbed it back. It was my brandy, after all.

"Hey. *Los uit*. I'll give you a drink, but you can't have it all!" I poured him a shot into the glass. A good double. And you know what he did?

He stuck that gun thing into it.

It turned blue. All of it. Bright glowing blue.

"CANDY-BLOSSOM!!!"

He pressed the button on the thing. I didn't end up dead, although, *Ja*, I did duck behind the table. Then he picked me up. I

mean right up, off the ground, like I weighed nothing. "Candy-blossom. Enku?" and he held the brandy bottle in one of the other hands.

Ja-nee, well, what could I say? "Okay. Candy-blossom. Enku Enku. Whatever you like!"

"Splidzat." He put me down, and, with my bottle of brandy in hand he walked outside. It wasn't quite dawn... just grey. And the road in front of my place was full of this big thing. Long, and that same kind of blue as the thing I thought was his gun. Something spiralled out of it. Old Candy-blossom turned back to me.

For a bleddy bad minute I thought he was going to take me with him. Instead he pointed this thing that I'd thought was his finger at my doorstep. It's just a piece of the rock, that *oupa-grootjie* shaped. Candy-blossom cut that shape in it. With red light. I reckon if he could cut rocks, he could have sliced soldiers. Then he climbed into that seat-*magodie* that had spiralled out and... 'whoop' he was up into the thing. With my bottle of dop. With not so much as a '*dankie oom*' or a wave goodbye.

Two seconds later he was gone. The only thing to show he'd ever been here was that twisty shape he cut in my step. *Ja*, I wonder what it means. Maybe, it is like the mark like the Israelites put

on the door. You know, when the liens come they won't kill me and the grandchildren.

Ja, well, maybe. But, Ag well, it is probably just alien-hobo for 'you can get a dop off this old balie.'

The candy-blossom wasn't very pure. Barely good enough for

the ship to run on. Two enku was a quite a price for such a little. Still, the enku glyphs should protect the aboriginal for some years. And with its lifestyle, it **needed** them.

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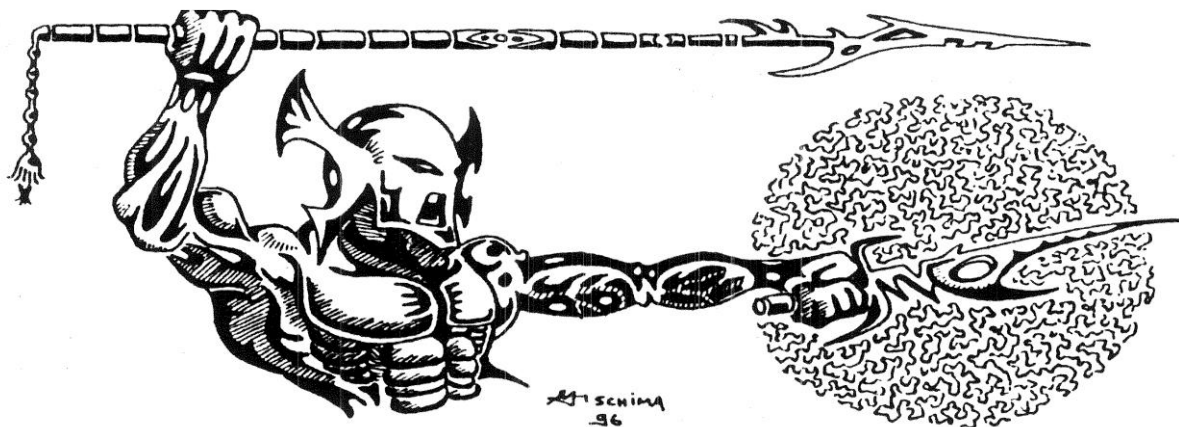
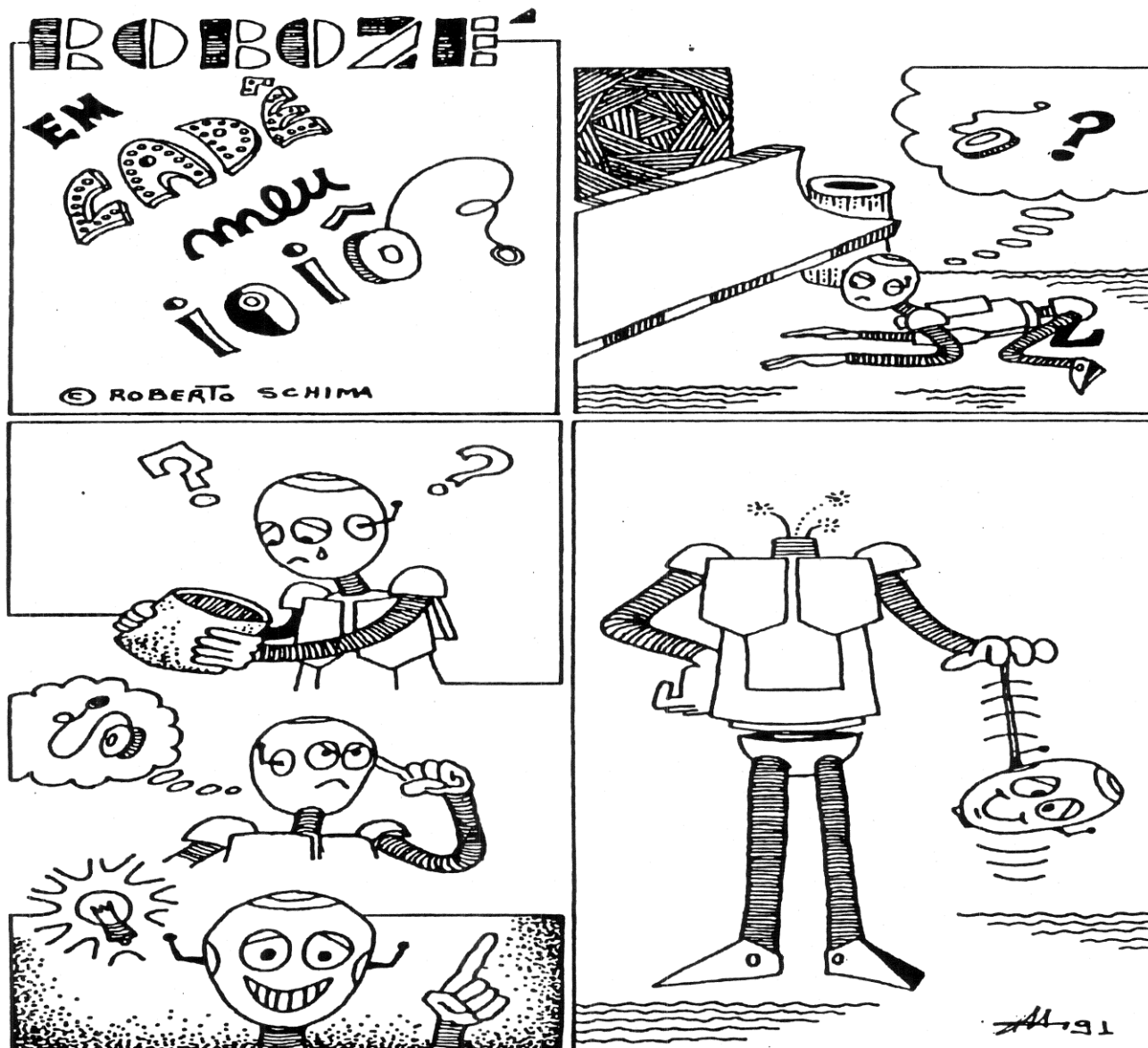
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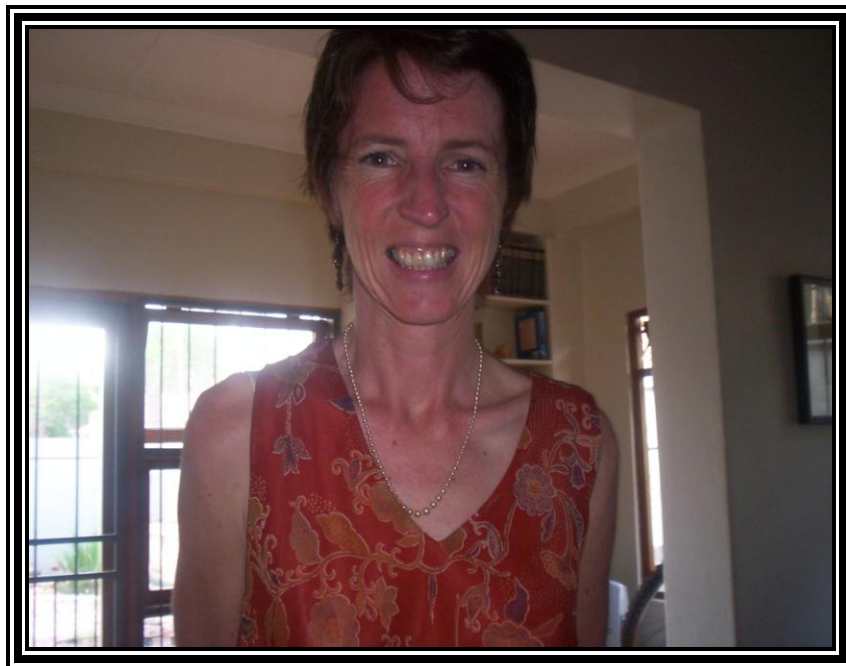


Roberto Schima, a Brazilian artist did a lot of our covers for us as well as sending various illustrations. I rather enjoyed this cartoon which appeared in Probe in 1991. And the picture below.



Reflections of an ex-*Probe* editor

Deirdre Byrne



It was a sunny Saturday afternoon (not a dark and stormy night) in 1997. Business As Usual. That is to say, it was the monthly SFSA Committee Meeting, with six-seven eccentrics having their say about how the club should be run. The Committee has several portfolios, including *Probe* editor. At the time, this portfolio was occupied by Cedric Abrahams, despite my ardent wish to take over the job (which had nothing to do with the fact that I was 5 months pregnant). To everyone's horror, Cedric announced that he was taking a 'sabbatical' for 10 months from *Probe* in order to regain his life. I saw my chance and pounced into the gap, volunteering to edit the zine.

I should explain here that I spent several months as Cedric's apprentice (aka sub-editor) before taking this drastic step up the corporate ladder of SFSA management. This involved spending Sundays at Cedric and Adele's Yeoville flat. Those were the days when people we knew actually lived in Yeoville. In fact, if you hadn't lived in Yeoville at some time during your tortured delayed adolescence, you weren't worth talking to. These Sundays were fascinating occasions, usually in the company of Cedric and Adele's energetic but seldom completed household (err, flat) renovations. The bathroom was grey

one week, pink the next month. In the time between visits, I learned to expect that anything could, and frequently would, change.

During my apprenticeship, I was both Typist and Editor. To me, 'editor' meant someone who edited. That is, someone who worried about commas, capital letters and the correct way to spell words. On receipt of the Short Story Competition winners, I would type them out, correcting spelling, grammar and occasionally style as I went. Sometimes I would leave the style as it was, not out of charity or even laziness, but because I thought that the authors of the short stories deserved it. I would then take all this material on a floppy disk to Cedric and Adele's flat of a bright Sunday morning; there would be tea, and we'd get to work.

That's when I discovered that 'editor' also means 'layout artist'. Cedric was a maestro with the Text Art keys. We agonized over whether to use striped or spotted titles; titles with shadows; with curves in unexpected places; and even basket-weave filling for the page numbers. By the time he'd finished, Roberto Schima's gothic and frequently gruesome cover art was looking positively mundane next to the baroque titles he'd conjured. But, of course, every achievement has its cost, and by then it would be time for More Tea.

After several of these encounters with text art, layout and the arrangement of cartoons on pages, I was ready to take over producing the zine on my own in Cedric's unfortunate absence. The first notable change was that it was much less fun doing it all on my own without a running commentary. I had to type the short stories as I had before; but then I also had to arrange them on pages. I am nothing if not obsessed with detail, and I'd spend hours worrying about the correct numbers of quotation marks, paragraph indents (to have them or not?) and — my personal favourite — rescuing the much-abused comma from yet another mistaken usage.

I found, to my surprise, that I grew quite fond of the short stories. All 10 of the finalists eventually make their way to the pages of *Probe*, and despite the committee's annual groans when they arrived for judging, there were some real gems to be found. Liz Simmonds's offerings were a continual delight, with Liz's trademark combination of irony and her talent for weird juxtaposition of mismatched concepts and objects. She also has a remarkable flair for understatement, which meant that some of her more cryptic endings and situations may have gone unnoticed and certainly unsung. But I enjoyed figuring out the unsaid in her stories (the others weren't half bad either).

There were a few regular columns that gave me headaches. The column on 'Zines received' always meant that I had to plough through a pile of clubzines from all over the world. Some of these offerings were highly esoteric (*Opuntia* comes to mind, and not only because of the wacky cactuses that grace its covers, but also because of its highly recondite content); others were just newsletters dressed up as zines, and had contained nothing at all to tickle the intellect; and still others told of clubs as unusual and endearing

as our own. It was a mammoth task just reading them, let alone commenting on all of them. My favourite was *Fosfax*, which contained stimulating comments on all things fannish, albeit in much more detail than any living human being could wish. Its gigantic range and endless discussions do challenge the reader's stamina; as Norman Pringle wrote in *Probe* 108: "I can only recommend that you get hold of a couple of copies and take some time off work!"

I finally edited a fair few issues of *Probe* – from 104 to 110. That's about a year and a half of work. During that time, I lost probably a few weeks of sleep trying to fit things in, decorate titles and page numbers, get the zine to the printers on time, amuse and inform our readership and keep in touch with the club's activities and thoughts. I developed a deep appreciation for Gerhard Hope, journalist extraordinaire and my ex-MA student, whose energy for producing printed text on anything to do with science fiction, fantasy or fan-related activities apparently knows no bounds. (Those who remember Gerhard may like to know that he's presently residing in Dubai on a temporary journalistic contract, and that his output is as prodigious as ever, although most of it has appeared on Facebook. Times – and publication media – have changed.) I also grew to realize that our club encompasses much more than monthly meetings. There are serious reflections on The Nature of Life, truly unusual things to do (such as comet-watching and overseas travel to Worldcons) and a phenomenal amount of reading. It is largely due to the efforts of SFSA and Arthur Goldstuck that South African science fiction has flourished to the extent that it has. As our political history (especially in recent years) has increasingly taken on the overtones of either an ideological comedy or *film noir* (and sometimes both), while always appearing slightly science-fictional itself, a number of genres have blossomed, but they have always fallen within the relentless ambit of historical accuracy and social realism. If it weren't for the Nova Short Story Competition's encouragement, it would be easy to dismiss speculative fiction in South Africa altogether; and our national imagination would be much poorer for failing to construct alternatives.

After my brief but demanding stint as *Probe* editor, Liz took over and trimmed down the zine's presentation and layout to an almost ascetic look, which I loved for its simplicity and clarity. The imaginative flourishes remained, though, and are still there in this vibrant little publication.

Long live *Probe*!



What is written on a Dalek's tombstone ?

(Rust in peace)

Editor Number 5

Derek Hohls



Its' finally happened. With the recent arrival of Probe 139 in my postbox, I now officially own more Probes than I am missing. The first Probe I ever laid eyes on was issue 69, nearly Tony's last effort, with a dark red cover showing a space-suited woman with a rather exaggerated figure (not untypical of his artwork!). I encountered this Probe shortly after I moved up to Jo'burg, in the first Exclusive Books store I visited. Attached to the cover was an invitation to attend a meeting of the "Science Fiction South Africa" club. I was rather surprised. In Durban we had rugby clubs and cricket clubs and possibly, at a stretch, photography clubs... but science fiction?! Needless to say, I took the red pill, er, magazine.

Yes, it turned out to be a rather strange and assorted group of people that I was to fall in with... as quirky and varied as our beloved genre... but undoubtedly informed, interesting and, once you'd penetrated the often defensive facade, really nice human beings (I'm assuming this of course, but you never know?!). Formal meetings - then taking place at Total House in central Jo'burg - alternated with informal meetings at members' houses. For me, it was a great escape from some of the harsher realities of my life (community service at Jo'burg Hospital) and access to the wonderful and extensive SFSA library was a major bonus.

Then, one day, I chanced to make some comments to Neil van Niekerk, then editor of Probe, and somehow found myself getting drawn into the technicalities of the fanzine publishing world. The great thing about working on Probe is that there are very few pre-defined "must dos". Each editor, or co-editor, can bring his or her own ideas and creativity to the mix. I'd like to think that something of what I did at that time remains in some small part even if the whole 'zine undergoes some radical changes (hint to the next editor-in-waiting!). In the murky and highly malleable world of websites, which is where most of my work is done, nothing is permanent. With Probe, I know that I've left some small part of me behind in an archive.

Finally, editors are like critics. They would Not actually exist if there were no creative people. To all those who have contributed To Probe, in one way or the other over the years, I'd like to say "thank you"! You're the reason it started and the reason it is still continuing. Keep it up!

