

Outbreak of Heresy 83

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NK: Reiterating a recent email: Happy New *Civil* Year – having, natch, marked the new *Astronomical* Year on the day after the Solstice. Old obsessions die hard! But get the usual varied and gratifying responses:

Janey Cage: *I'll go along with the Astronomical Year. Sadly the Solstice itself was dampened by clouds but the days are getting longer and after the past year I'll forgive any weather.*

Karen Day: *Happy Happy HAPPY New Year (of whatever kind!)*

Dave Berry: *Happy New (Civil) Year to you too. I hope it is indeed both civil and happy.*

Andrew Fisher: *I do hope you have a pleasant 2021, and it is both astronomical and civil for you.*

Alex Zbyslaw: *Happy New Year (either kind, what the heck, push proverbial boat out, why not both kinds!)*

Alex Richardson: *Are we talking the Gregorian or the Julian calendar here?*

NK: Oh, Gregorian – even I am not that out of date.

Steve Jones: *Welcome to 2021! May it be a healthy one, although the way things are going with the new variant of the coronavirus, this does not look likely. On a controversial note, has anyone considered that, with all the nasty things going on in the world (climate change, the sixth major extinction, pollution, etc), the virus is the planet's way of dealing with the human plague afflicting planet Earth?*

NK: Must resume my science fantasy tale (on hold since the stroke) in which a recent and maybe worldwide pestilence *could be so interpreted* (non-spoiler alert: *you'll never be certain*). We'll get on to SF proper later. But as alternative histories go, this yarn of mine (so I flatter myself) is more alternative than most.

Paul Evans: *Colin Evans is quite right about the a-historical regiment titles in En Garde! (don't forget the exclamation mark or you're playing Reiner's clever fencing game). They appear to owe more to 19thC Europe (Princess Louisa, Grand Duke Max, Archduke Leopold) than the world of The Three Musketeers. But then it was devised by a bunch of Americans. :-)* // *Also with Colin on the use of 'gift' as a verb. And 'donate' is available if you want an alternative to 'give'...*

NK: now I had half-conceded the point; yet lo! what should appear but an unlikely champion in the form of:

W Marcus Arnold: 🎵 *Doh a dire a faymale drier* 🎵 (no sense intended but I like the sound).

NK: Season's Greetings, Marcus.

Marcus: *WELL ANOTHER BUMPER EDITION OF OOH HAS ARRIVED, but first while my ire is irey and well roused I shall take up the gauntlet cast by ColinE and enter into the lists as your champion in the joust about "gifted"... // ...for in my alter ego as prudent pedant I must take arms against the dismissal of said "gifted" as a verb. It is a given (by the OED) that to give has more than one meaning/usage. A gift is that which is freely given, that which is not freely given is not a gift. Hence money given to pay a bill is not "gifted" but money given to a charity is a gift and so is. We can therefore accept the term **gifted** in an adjectival sense that means **given freely**...*

...the conjugation of gifted in this sense includes: I gift (it is a gift), it was gifted (it is a gift), we will gift (it is a gift). [Repetition to make a point.] An example of gifted and hence gifts is in the lyrics of Mr Belafonte's Island in the Sun: "O island in the Sun gifted to me by my father's hand..."

NK: Don't mean to cavil (especially when you're on my side) but isn't it *willed to me*? Exactly the same sense, though. I suppose it might be argued that Mr Belafonte was born/raised in the US and so prone to its putatively corrupt usages anyway, but methinks that would be (at a minimum) to display a somewhat philistine approach to the lyric/sentiment. (And please don't start on the usage of the term "philistine".)

...We're showing our age here, Marcus...

Shaun Derrick: *Just how many recipients of OoH are 63 years of age – You, me, Gary...?*

Kath Collman: *I was mildly amused by the discussion of age. Must remember to check my birth certificate, there must be some mistake.... I was talking to my friend on the phone the other day and grumbling about all these old people dithering about, to which she replied "Well, WE'RE old now". To which I replied, "Well, YOU may be!". Back in 2019 we took a short break in Ludlow, and were returning to the car when she managed to trip over a kerbstone and fell flat on her face, hurting herself quite badly. A couple of kind ladies stopped to see whether they could help, and offered to keep an eye on her while I went to get the car. Apparently while I was away, one of these ladies said to her "Don't worry dear, your daughter's gone to get the car!" She was NOT amused. I thought it was hilarious!! Fortunately she hadn't broken anything so we were able to carry on with our plans.*

NK: I'd have been tickled too – there have been occasions when I've been taken as a generation younger than certain near-contemporaries, names withheld to protect the guilty (i.e me from their ire), though it's getting increasingly hard to pull off (as I say, must shave off the beard). Ludlow: great castle, nice town to walk around and about. No canals? But there's the Teme and the Corve, and wooded *hills* to SouthWest.

Paul Evans: *I'm another canal person – though I'm a boater rather than a walker. The thing I always remember about the aqueduct mentioned on the Stratford-on-Avon canal is that the footpath running alongside is on the base of the trough. So if you're walking alongside a boat, you're looking at its hull just above the waterline, which is not the usual view of a boat. (By contrast, the footpath on the Pontcysyllte aqueduct is on the rim of the trough, so you're looking right down on the boats.)*

Shaun Derrick: *Bob mentioned the abrupt ending of the Ashby Canal. Well, I visited the furthest point a month or so ago and it has been extended a little further along its original course; not by very far but the Ashby Canal Society want to rebuild the canal up to Moira where the West Leicestershire coalfields were the main reason for the building of the canal in the first place.*

In fact the final mile and a half up to the basin in Moira was reconstructed in 2000 but is, of course, just a section. I went there two weeks ago to take a look. The area is the Moira Furnace park. (The furnace was used for iron production but wasn't profitable so soon changed use and was turned into cottages – it is now the museum which was unfortunately closed when I went.)

In order to raise money for the reconstruction the society are offering to inscribe your name on a brick that will rebuild the Gilwiskaw Aqueduct for a minimum of £100! I think they have their work cut out as the original route of the canal is now in various private hands of whom some are reluctant to see the canal reconstructed on their land.

Karen Day: *I've enjoyed everyone's ramblings (ohh, pun!) on canal and old railway walks – more please! Something to look forward to doing and exploring at length when You Know What is over. Even your Marcus gets all frightfully sensible and English on this (mostly I think he's a bit mad but rather sweet).*

NK: W-H-A-A-T ??? On t'other hand, when on home territory...

Marcus: *Steve Jones' review: I did not realise that experiments with Drosophila (fruit flies) started so close to the rediscovery of Mendel's work, rather serendipitous as they have very large chromosomes. Experimenting with Drosophila must have tempted many scientists/technicians to fudge results, as I know from Biology practicals at University...*

Marcus, contd: ...1. The beggars are very small. 2. To count them and separate those with different characteristics, they are stunned with chloroform. Too much and it's fruit fly heaven, too little and they wake up and seek the nearest apple. 3. Chloroform also makes for happy scientists and makes separating stoned *Drosophila* (with a very fine paint brush) rather problematical. 4. Splitting which *Drosophila* have red eyes and which white or other differences, which even with magnifying glass (this gets in the way of the paint brush or vice versa), ain't very easy. 5. Finally, imagine counting and rebottling the separated flies while grinning from ear to ear.

NK: See what you mean (mean mean...). Especially if you have arithmetic issues anyway.

Marcus: I sympathise with Andrew Fisher's problems with subtraction, it always discouraged me from playing darts in pubs knowing I could not "chalk up" the running scores at any speed, or with at best dubious accuracy. Triple $17 + 5 + 8$ subtracted from 301? ((which incidentally indicates the thrower was all over the shop, sounds like me)) – not my cup of meat (Manfred Mann's mishearing of Dylan). My brain ain't too hot on rote learning so I couldn't learn by heart the Times Tables either and still use expedients, like $7 \times 9 = (10 \times 9) - (3 \times 9)$, umm $90 - 9 - 9 - 9$ umm 81, 72, **63** umm someone hand me a pocket calculator...

NK: Well come to that I myself thought the Primary Ed rote chanting of Times Tables was a little bit daft. But, as you may recall, I was also one of those idiot savants who could flash through number series anyway ("why not this way, miss? 13,26,39,52,65,78,91,104,117..." "Be quiet, Nicholas.") or visualise them in quite another way, akin to comprehending a pictographic language (that I automatically 'see' the product of 8 and 7, to take a simple example, has remarkably little to do with knowing any other product of 8 or 7). Recently in *Dane's Games* one of Dane's contributors set what at first looked a fiendish mathematical conundrum which half-a-dozen of us correctly solved using minor variations on the same theme (factorization of largish number followed by brute force summations of various sets of those factors). What was interesting was the minor variation, e.g some starting with the purer approach of lowest common factors whereas I simply generated them in my mind *bang bang bang* up to practical limits (I missed one out in typing up my explanation but happily not when executing the actual solution). Some of us tabulated our sets (again I missed one in the explanation but not in practice), the rest settled for a list. No right or wrong methods as such here, just what each was most comfortable with in dealing with abstract numbers.

Marcus: RIGHT, now back to *Introductory Wisdom* which I gift to thee...

WELCOME DORMAT is being prepared. It seems to be evolving out of my control though at least the edition to come is sort of conceptually game-ified. I shall now edit my pressed flowers (sorry, news cuttings) and (barring "Olive Geddes") have, I hope, avoided polemic.

NK: These cuttings being neatly tucked into a pocket within the greater letter. Firstly obituaries: (1) starting with aforementioned Olive Geddes, long-time ardent correspondent to and of Bette Davis (for it was mutual) [Marcus adds "*ordinary lives matter, not just the rich, famous, martial, media and establishment lives*"]. (2) Tony Hooper, folkly founding if variable member of The Strawbs (he had issues with them getting rocky) [Marcus: "*slowly but surely the old guard of 'Rock' give up their sentry duty but 81 not out ain't bad...*"]. (3) Joanna Harcourt-Smith, summarized with slight understatement as the socialite who went on the run with LSD guru Timothy Leary, who himself was summarized with rather more overstatement by one R.Nixon as "the most dangerous man in America" (then a description felt more applicable to one R.Nixon though he was a pussycat compared to the fool Trump, see nextish maybe). [Marcus: "*this story obit has a strange resonance with Julian Assange over Government persecution: unsavoury lies, self-serving exaggeration and sheer malice are in the recipe*".] // We may return to the non-obit cuttings in due course and where appropriate. Meanwhile here's ColinE with a decided *issue* about news media in general:

Colin Evans: News item on MSN (14 Dec) with the headline:

There's a total solar eclipse today – here's how to watch it from the UK.

*Reading the actual article quickly reveals that is impossible to see **any** of the eclipse from the UK, not even a sliver of a partial eclipse...*

still Colin E: *No wonder the news media has such a bad reputation (or should have). Probably far too many journalists under great pressure to write something (anything) to a tight deadline. Far too much opinion causing a slant in what is written (though I am not sure that can be totally avoided). A current example is from a journalist who so dislikes Boris Johnson that **any** deal with the EU or a no-deal will be bad in their opinion.*

NK: Written, as Colin himself noted, before the present last-minute deal was reached (Col put it more graphically but this threatens to subvert *OoH's* general policy of being No Go Area for Brexit discussion...). Although no apologist for the present government and its (shall we say) eccentric leader, I agree that this sort of pre-determined journalism is a waste of time and ink, no actual analysis at all. In this particular case it was in pursuit of a cause that had long become politically unrealistic anyway. (And that's quite enough here: as it is I'll probably be sounding off about it in a more appropriate forum, i.e. *The Cunning Plan.*)

Colin E: *Another headline, and a video, is of a woman throwing a dog off a (first floor) balcony after 'attacking a maid'. It is not clear if the woman attacked the maid or the dog did (it may be justifiable to throw a dangerous dog off a balcony), or possibly the woman in question was the maid attacked. This is not clarified in the video which shows only the throwing and the woman's subsequent arrest by police present. The subsequent condition of the dog or the maid is not described at all. Aaagghh!! The media far too often do not finish a story. We are enticed in but then left frustrated, we need completion. I would prefer not to be enticed. I tend to ignore headlines, rather than be so disappointed.*

NK: It's certainly true that headline-writers, in their attempt to seize attention, can end up as wholly misleading (too often intentionally). You can see why Marcus deliberately parodies exactly this sort of thing in **WELCOME**. And as I type these words, in yet another interesting coincidence/synchronicity, Hawkwind are finishing a rendition of "Welcome (to the Future)" on my deck [*Space Ritual 2014* version]. Bringing us back to Marcus himself and our next topic (or rather topics, as we'll see):

Marcus: *Surely the best science fiction novel of ALL TIME will be 42 by Deep Thought, due to be published sometime before the year 2525 (if Man is still alive).*

NK: Agghh, Zager & Evans! KEV, were you not circling around a (rather surprisingly arresting) collection by the latter? (In case Colin/Paul worry here, we refer to the one-time Deep Thought Purple vocalist Rod.)

Marcus: *"Green Tambourine" is quite tripping, it was of its day. A lot of the early Move was quite similar-ish. But not every future rock hero could beat Traffic's "Paper Sun", or indeed Simon Dupree and the Big Sounds ("Kites" is transcendent) and they ended up as Gentle Giant.*

NK: Ah yes: *Hear the crying of the dying, SOMEONE HELP ME... Terror fills my soul.* This is another of KevM's 'rediscovered' pieces of rock history which I may have to follow up. In respect of Simon Dupree anyway: I was only ever enamoured of a few Gentle Giant tracks, largely collected on a retrospective double CD. Mostly they were and are a good example of what I mean(t) by being too prog...

Marcus: *I think The Moody Blues are still big in the United States, but I now find their lyrics rather twee. To Mr Fisher(King), I do have the Elfish Gene – the S variant anyway* – and in my lore of heraldry and Walter Scott's Ivanhoe know that over armour went a surcoat which might have been samite or silk or, as in the case of the Knight of the Burning Pestle, London Rubber...*

(well I certainly have patched jeans and smoked lots of elfish parsley with leather-clad troglodytical ones in my youth.)*

As for Status Quo, Gerundula was excellent but they capitalised on being "Rockers" when pop psychedelia was no longer a la mode.

NK: May have mentioned before that "Gerundula" & "Someone's Learning" (both from *Dog of Two Head*, definitely a Prog-style title if ever there was one) qualify as Progrock in my book, as does at least "A Year" from *Piledriver* (arguably not a Prog-style title).

Dave Berry: *On a completely different note, I forgot to mention that Marcus's comment about the song "Woodstock", and your agreement that the best version is the one by Matthews Southern Comfort, prompted me to compare three versions – Mitchell's own, the Ian Matthews cover, and the one by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. All three are different and have their virtues. The CSN&Y performance has quite a strong Country music influence. The MSC version captures the hippie-ness of the lyrics. Meanwhile, Mitchell's solo version has more of a jazz influence. I can see the attraction of the MSC version but for me this is still a Joni Mitchell song, and I prefer her version.*

NK: Just as a matter of interest, which version did you first hear? Part of my preference for MSC is undoubtedly that, though a cover (competing with other covers), it was the version I encountered first. And in my impressionable childhood, yet – Nick as proto near-hippy before he got variously carried away with phenomena like James Branch Cabell in literature and Many Things Electronic in music...

Alex Zbyslaw ((referring to a "Keep Talking" clue)): *Recognised JBC as soon as I read it – an obscurity of yours I didn't get on with. Unlike Klaus Schulze (definitely praised by you) who I didn't take to at the time, but has been in my top 5 listened-to music in the last decade. I think 90% of what I choose to listen to these days is 'instrumental', whether electronic (Schulze, Tangerine Dream, Ozrics), minimalist (Reich, Glass), classical (Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky) or jazz (Surman, Zorn). I still like a good sing-a-long if a classic comes on somewhere, but very few wordy artists get a look in. Occasionally classic Bowie, Blyth Power, Momus, Lou Reed and (very weirdly) Tim Blake's New Jerusalem, which is mystery-mongering, crystal hugging, new age claptrap, but very, very cheering nonetheless.*

NK: Oh, Tim's fun. There's a good live version of "New Jerusalem" on *Complete '79*, an expansion of Hawkwind's *Live '79* (Blake's first stint with the Hawks where he's still billed as Crystal Machine). As for the instrumentalists, although not quite as fervent as yourself a good half of ALL my preferred music must be instrumental. I even take the view that the best lyrics are those in which the *vocal delivery* becomes a kind of instrument in its own right, far more significant for me than whatever the song is ostensibly about, an attitude that I know is anathema to some. Examples: Floyd "Echoes" (mellow mode), Swervedriver "Deep Seat" (groan mode), Lush "Ocean" (so ethereal I never made out what the girls were singing at all, but their twin wall-of-sound guitars are so wonderful it's more soaring mountains than mountainous seas). Or Fields of the Nephilim (Lovecraft mode, "Psychonaut") or Muse (er, apocalyptic, "Apocalypse Please").

Of the instrumentalists you mention, Schulze and T.Dream are of course a given for old NK and if I remember aright it was actually you (returning the favour as t'were) who introduced me to Ozric Tentacles – I'm still a massive fan of much of their early stuff, the very titles of which (e.g "Puffpuff on a Chuffchuff" and the unbeatable "Code for Chickendon") are redolent of their essentially happy approach. Of your minimalists I like Philip Glass (particularly *Koyaanisqatsi*) though not really S.Reich; and I enjoy fast/dramatic or evocative classical – Mendelsohn's *Hebrides Overture* yes but not so much Tchaikovsky, love above all *Night on Bare Mountain* by Mussorgsky and similar, plus all of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* (notably the swift Summer finale), things of that sort. Not familiar with the jazz artists you mention but have you yet tackled The Comet is Coming? Particularly for "Summon the Fire" and "Blood of the Past" (the latter actually a for-them rare part-vocal), examples that raise my hopes for others in that style.

Mention of which brings me to other all- or mainly-instrumental combos like Sky ("Toccata" etc, yes I overlooked Bach above) and Mogwai whose sinister soundscapes (as praised before) start at "The Precipice" but evolve into "Ratts of the Capital" via "Remurdered", "Mogwai Fear Satan" and other cheerful themes. A lot of otherwise vocal bands in my ambit have marvellous instrumentals: Hawkwind's "Snake Dance", "Spiral Galaxy" and too many others to mention; Hawklords' "Flight Path" (especially live); King Crimson under "The Sheltering Sky" etc; Floyd with "One of These Days" and "Careful With That Axe Eugene" (discounting single-line pseudo-lyrics in both), I could go on. And will, from (as also noted in earlier *OoHs*) The Afro-Celt Sound System ("Lovers of Light") to FZappa himself ("Apostrophe"), via artists as varied as The Charlatans ("Feel Flow"), ELP ("The Barbarian" on), Goat ("Diarabi" etc), Man ("Keep on Crintin"), Metallica ("Orion"), Osibisa ("Dawn", "Music for Gong Gong"), Rush ("Yyz") and Ultravox ("Astradyne"). Finally, notable how many of Nick's marginals have one-off instrumentals that qualify as That Band's Best in my mind, e.g Ride's "Grasshopper" (again wall-of-sound) or Verve's "Brainstorm Interlude" (just sound).

still NK: oops, got a bit carried away there, possibly to the dismay of the music non-fans amongst you. And I didn't even get to include classic entirely-instrumental albums like J.M.Jarre's *Oxygene* and *Equinoxe* or (Viv Stanshall's outro-intro bit apart) Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*. Or classic singles ("Sabre Dance", "Apache", "Classical Gas" etc). What all these very varied instrumentals have in common (for me) is their evocation of SOUNDscape, translating in what passes for my mind as LANDscapes, SEAScapes, ICEScapes, SPACEscapes, honest-to-goodness alien WORLDscapes. (You'll gather that I've never needed drugs...) But speaking of being translated into an other-world, must get around to Marcus' old (well, 2003) film/DVD mini-review that I didn't have time for last issue:

W Marcus Arnold:

SPIRITED AWAY review: 1. bl—dy amazing animation. 2. surprisingly free from the slightly fetishist Japanese eroticism in too much Anime (animation to you and me). 3. imaginative plenty weird monsters. 4. disappointing closed happy ending. 5. borrows "fairy tales" and twists 'em Japan style. 6. worth watching just for the visual. 7. amusing misuse of **an** in subtitles. 8. do not watch with American English dub track, it loses the magic English subtitles, keep the strangeness. 9. Cyclogenically sealed/approved.

NK: To follow which we move (at last) onto books and so a mini-review of my own. This one is thanks to Paul Roman's very kind seasonal donation (we were both amongst the skeleton staff at our Work HQ up to virtually, or in my case actually, Xmas Eve):

SEMIOSIS (by Sue Burke): On one hand an account of an idealistic slice of pioneering interstellar colonialism (gone slightly wrong, though with the implication that the Earth they've fled is far worse) and on the other a tale of First Contact – first with the native species (a sort of giant sentient tree), later with the degenerate descendants of alien fellow-colonists. Effectively told generation-by-generation via a series of varied narrators, with often painful results, and the more plausible for it. Apparently there's a sequel?

NK: And with that we can return to the aftermath of last turn's "Keep Talking" and ancillary lettercol:

Gary Lyon: *Some quick thoughts on books whilst listening to the wonderful R4 I'm Sorry ... (showing my age again here) & missing Tim.*

Had a good English teacher (early 70s Grammar School) who encouraged us to read different authors – so an early love of Tom Sharpe. The first books were about South Africa in Apartheid days (think he was chucked out of country for them?): Riotous Assembly and Indecent Exposure. Always liked them more than commercial Wilt series. // Also nudged towards Catch 22 and Thurber – being taught to think for yourself.

PS And have read some of the Gor series: I liked the fifty bits. Anyone ever read any of the Dumarest saga? Was never able to find many of them – SF Space Opera. Must see if I can find some online.

Colin Evans: *I don't read much fantasy (but see Suggested Reading below), far too much is (or sounds like) a pale imitation of LOTR or perhaps Conan / Robert E. Howard (incidentally an anagram of my name is Conan Lives, or Conan's Evil). Which I read many of a long time ago, not that I am claiming it is great literature, it is just a fantasy series I have read. Are the Conan books similar to the Gor books?*

NK: From memory I'd say Not Really (Gary's fifty bits in the earlier volumes possibly apart), especially in respect of Howard's original stories (see on). Marcus puts it even more strongly:

Marcus: *Gor Blimey Guvnor of Gor; Mr Norman reveals Robert E Howard as the Tolstoy of Fantasy.*

NK: Yes, well... I gather the trouble with the Conan 'saga' is that Howard's original stories (which again from memory did have a certain and very muscular power) weren't written as a saga. Only later efforts (notably but rather misguidedly those of Lin Carter) tried to systematize and turn them into a continuity – sometimes by writing linking pastiches (often inferior, as Colin suggests of Howard imitators in general). Or, almost as bad, by taking Howard's other stories and substituting Conan for the protagonist – despite their generally interchangeable mighty-thewed character, you can still see the join. Result, bit of a mish-mash. For all that and the scenario's ruthless *mores* (which some see as lending a quasi-historical plausibility), there's still an attractiveness, even gorgeousness, of the whole (akin maybe to *The Arabian Nights*). Not excluding within the sullen not-quite-superman character of Conan himself. But from my limited acquaintance with it, these rugged virtues are (for me anyhow) quite impossible to see in Norman's *Gor*.

As he hinted, Colin's latest suggested reading does start with an outright fantasy (we'll get on to his individual view of SF/Variants vs All Other Fiction in due course).

Colin E: *Suggested Reading.*

Lawrence Watt-Evans: Ethshar series, fantasy. Not an imitation of LOTR or Conan.

Dennis Taylor: We Are Legion (We Are Bob). And sequels.

Tim Pratt: The Wrong Stars. And sequels.

John Scalzi: The Collapsing Empire. And sequels.

My main source for SF book details is www.fantasticfiction.co.uk though it does not include some more obscure or recent authors. Yes, I did get many answers for "Keep Talking" there. ((And why not.))

Alex Zbyslaw: *Not entering the book quiz this time as I didn't really understand most of the instructions! Can't be sure you recommended The Female Man to me, but that thought popped into my head so fast, I didn't think to doubt it.*

NK: Almost certainly did so while praising Russ in general, the irony being it's the one I haven't collected, though her most famous. Yet again, read as library copy, years and years ago. But still further back, and about as different to Russ as it's possible to get:

Paul Evans: *OMG! (as young people say.) I remember We Joined the Navy. That was a LONG time ago.*

"...deliberate non-use of Wiki gets you bonus points" – I'd like some of those, please. I assumed the whole idea was to rely on one's own resources (hello, shelves) rather than the Interweb – though my destination would be the SF Encyclopaedia, not Wikipedia.

NK: Ah, but it'd be a bit too hard if it was only own resources or memory, and impossible to police. I had meant to type *kudos* points anyway! Clute/Nicholls' *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (and Clute's corresponding Fantasy one with John Grant) would be my main source too. But of course neither Wiki nor Encyclopedias will help much when Kinzettian idiosyncrasies are missed or ambiguities not nailed.

Dave Berry: *A few random comments came to mind as I read the report of the latest round. I'd completely forgotten about A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. I've never read it, but it does have "Nick K likes this" written all over the premise!*

I vaguely remember enjoying a James White novel or two, and I think you may have mentioned them in conversation, but obviously they didn't make a big enough impression to come to mind for this game.

And I didn't know 2312 was set in the future of the Mars trilogy. My re-reading of the latter has nearly reached the end of Green Mars, so still some way to go before I finish the whole trilogy. So far, I'm absolutely loving it (again). Alex Z opined recently that Blue Mars is basically a utopia; I'll be interested to see whether I agree.

NK: We're getting to the Favourites Thing, but a few more "KT" (or SteveJ)-extrapolated comments first:

Andrew Fisher: *The one thing that struck me deeply was your mention ((hint)) of the necessity of reading Jules Verne in translation. (As well as your mention of the only two books of his I've read and which are such fun. What I especially like is the subtle thread of romance wound through them...) I haven't read 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea mainly because of an introduction by an over-zealous translator who spent seemingly the whole review castigating previous translations and particularly previous translators. It almost put me off what I'd read and did put me off reading 20,000 Leagues, which the irritatingly pedantic translator insisted on being titled as 20,000 Leagues Under the Seas. Just because he may have been right, it doesn't mean any of it was necessary. For crying out loud, did James Mason die in vain?*

NK: Quite. I had mentioned in an earlier round that my French wouldn't be up to Dumas' original text (ditto therefore with Beckford, Bernanos, DeMaupassant, Verne, Voltaire), my Italian even less up to Eco, just imagine my difficulties with Polish (Stanislaw Lem) not to mention Russian (the Brothers Strugatsky). So I remain grateful for what seem to be excellent translations – i.e, English versions that read smoothly despite possible presence of concepts or phrases without precise English equivalent. Michael Kandel's renditions of Lem are especially praiseworthy, *most* especially when Lem is in mischievous mood.

Marcus: *A chance to argue, don't I love it. I did not say that Wells' The Time Machine was in a socialist future ((ah, but I hadn't said you'd said so – sorry, go on)) but that it promoted socialist ideals. Actually it may have been a bit of a joke. The brute Morlocks, descendants of Brutish Workers, eat the effete descendants of an effete aristocracy. Morlocks still work machines and Eloi still do bugger all.*

NK: Oh granted, though cannibalism as metaphor is a little bit two-edged (cf remarks on Tolkien's Orcs), so methinks the joke would have been largely missed. (But also see “From Gustible's Planet” later.)

Marcus: *Mr Campbell may have been racist but there are too many dead racists to bother about. If we want to get down to it cyclogenically, all Space Empires are colonialist, most sword & sorcery ((sic)) glorifies war, many of the futures are all white and WASPish. Perhaps contemporary SFers are more aware and diverse but it is surprising that Literature as opposed to penny dreadfuls espouse the conscious and unconscious values of the society they are written in.*

NK: Might ask, why surprising? There's obviously some justice in your characterization, especially where much SF and Fantasy (even in “Literature” mode) are concerned. But writers (even the SF storytelling kind) naturally write about, or extrapolate from, what they know or what they think they know.

Marcus: *I just hope Heinlein's Farnham's Freehold was satire. But if Heinlein was a racist / militarist / Yankee-doodle flag-waving imperialist / white Anglo Saxon-derived caucasian male privileged badger, would that spoil the fun of reading his healthy all-American Apple Pie fiction? Of course not.*

NK: Me, I always found Uncle Bob a selectively libertarian type if you know what I mean, and good on ideas or short stories but wearying at greater length – which, alas, a lot of his stuff amounted to. As can be seen from “Keep Talking”, I've collected nothing by him. I can certainly see why others (be they philosophically sympathetic or otherwise) have found him, ah, fun. But (and this is in marked contrast to the other acknowledged SF ‘giants’) no one's yet owing to his longer stuff, e.g *Stranger in a Strange Land*, as being amongst their favourites...

Paul Regan: *I tend to prefer the old British science fiction works: Arthur C Clarke's Childhood's End, John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids (and The Kraken Wakes). But as you've mentioned Asimov and The Gods Themselves I may as well say that this is still my single favourite science fiction novel. I quite like a lot of his other books, especially the earlier ones (the Foundation trilogy would be my favourite series). But TGT was different.*

Paul Evans: *Can I join in the chorus of The Gods Themselves being Asimov's masterpiece. Such brilliantly realised aliens makes me sorry for the lack of them in all his previous work. And the principle that there's no sensible number between one and infinity (I paraphrase) is the first thing that springs to mind whenever I read anything that brings in parallel worlds/multiverse.*

Colin Day: *Favourite all-time SF novel, got to go along with SteveJ's vote for The Mote in God's Eye. Naturally Dune runs it close but we'll reserve that for favourite series. Novella, maybe The Martian Way by Asimov (great idea in, for once, our own Solar System). This is all sounding a bit Big Name / traditional, isn't it? So something a little bit outfield or forgotten for short story, "Sunken Universe" by James Blish.*

NK: As we'll see, SteveJ slips in *Surface Tension* for his novellas, and I'm not sure now whether this was a sort of expansion on "Sunken Universe" or an alternative title for it. Exactly the same theme as I recall, though (and a fabulous notion). Meanwhile, speaking of *Dune*, here's SteveB:

Steve Borndale: *Fave SF novel: Dune. Fave SF series: Dune, what else? And so fave SF novella: Dune Messiah if it counts as short enough, otherwise first bit of Dune. Could go on like this (and if you can do Stanislaw Lem, I can do Frank Herbert).*

NK: We get the picture. And I kind of suspect that John R, at least, might concur. Which will probably give Mr Herbert a clear lead given that I'd also list *Dune* as one my honourable mentions/also rans.

Dane Maslen: *I'd probably go for The Sheep Look Up by John Brunner as my favourite novel. I preferred it to the also very good Stand on Zanzibar. I see that these plus two other dystopian novels comprise the Club of Rome Quartet. Perhaps I should make an effort to obtain copies of the other two. Very different in nature is Who Goes Here? by Bob Shaw, which I'd almost certainly nominate as the funniest SF novel I've read. Finally The Deep Range by Arthur C Clarke is the SF novel that has had the most profound effect on my life. In my teens it planted the seed that was to lead to me becoming a vegetarian in my early 20s.*

NK: I'm sure I've read *The Deep Range* but, unlike most Clarke novels, regret to report that I can't remember what it was about at all! Whereas I hadn't got around to *The Sheep Look Up* (famous for its Mankind-Despoils-the-Earth theme which today seems more relevant than ever), but by coincidence this is another donated me by PaulRm, so I'm tackling it bit by bit (it's quite chunky) in my Work lunchbreaks.

Steve Jones: *Moving on to your suggestion of widening the list of best science fiction, I have a number of also-rans in all three categories... // On the novel front, my closest also-ran would be Vernor Vinge's "A Deepness in the Sky" which is an unusual first contact story in that there are two first contacts involved (read it to see what I am on about). I would have also added his connected novel "A Fire Upon the Deep" but it does suffer from an annoying flaw (viz. why are those bloody kids behaving so stupidly?) Even so, who wouldn't like a galaxy filled with weird alien civilizations and entities that blow your mind?*

NK: Once more PaulRm swung in here to recommend exactly these two titles, for much the same reason though t'other way around (*Fire* is the earlier work?), so again between him and you and Paule this sounds like one (or rather two) I must pursue.

Steve J: *Other favourites include John Wyndham's "The Chrysalids" (surprised that one of your other readers did not like it – why???), Poul Anderson's "The Corridors of Time", Clifford D. Simak's "Way Station", Hal Clement's "Mission of Gravity", Arthur C. Clarke's "A Fall of Moondust" (why this hasn't been made into a film is beyond me), Alfred Bester's "The Stars My Destination" (also known as "Tiger, Tiger"), Frank Herbert's "Dune", John Brunner's "The Squares of the City" and Robert L. Forward's "Dragon's Egg" (the last containing intelligent life on the surface of a neutron star!)*

NK: Can definitely endorse Bester (Gully Foyle is one of SF's great anti-heroes) and despite last issue's momentary discomfort can half-endorse the Wyndham selection. Agree absolutely on *A Fall of Moondust* (see the upcoming "Keep Talking" report, yes perfect for a film). And while we're still on good ol' Arthur...

Steve J: *On the short story front, I can only think of a couple of also-rans: Arthur C. Clarke's "The Star", Eric Frank Russell's "Allamagoosa" and Fredric Brown's "Placet is a Crazy Place".*

NK: ...I'm reminded that I could list dozens of ACC's short stories (see again "Keep Talking"), beginning with the superbly-titled "Nine Billion Names of God", he was an absolute master of the form.

Steve J: *On the novella front, the one's that immediately come to mind include Daniel Keyes "Flowers for Algernon" (the most brilliantly written tragedy in all of science fiction), Isaac Asimov's "Nightfall" (yes, I know: anthologised to death), Murray Leinster's "First Contact" (has any other novella had the impact that this story had on science fiction?), James Blish's "Surface Tension" (an amazing tale of the struggle for existence in a puddle of water!), Alfred Bester's "The Push of a Finger", Tom Goldwin's "The Cold Equations", William Tenn's "The Servant Problem" and Cordwainer Smith's "A Planet named Shayol". (I had to get Tenn and Smith in there somewhere.)*

NK: See above for Blish (and amazing indeed), quite right for Tenn and CSmith. Particularly Smith, whose marvellous future history (The Instrumentality of Mankind) had marvellous matching titles: "Drunkboat", "The Dead Lady of Clown Town", "Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons", "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" and the incomparable "The Colonel Came Back from Nothing-at-All". But *Shayol* is indeed his masterpiece. (Ohhh, once started on Smith titles I've GOT to go on: "The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal", "Golden the Ship Was – Oh! Oh! Oh!", "The Burning of the Brain" and "From Gustible's Planet" – this last concerning foreign relations with intelligent aliens who, alas, turn out delicious to the human palate.)

Steve J: *If we are including SF series, I cannot say that I have a definite favourite. Ones to be mentioned include Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" series (whether the original trilogy or the whole canon), E.E. 'Doc' Smith's "Lensman" and "Skylark" series, and Philip Jose Farmer's "Riverworld" series. Although they are not novels, I would include H. Beam Piper's "Paratime" series.*

NK: For a similar reason (*Norstrilia* being the only novel proper in the canon) I might again go for Cordwainer Smith's *Instrumentality*! Or, once again, to James White's *Sector General* tales (see last issue). But if sticking to series-of-novels I'd have the original *Foundation* and Brian Aldiss' *Helliconia* as honourable also-rans to my definite favourite: Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars*. Bringing us back to:

Dave Berry: *Once again, your reminder has prompted me to finish writing a response to OoH, in this case your request for favourite novels. Like you, I think it is difficult to choose a single novel (or short story, or whatever), because I like different ones for different reasons. That said, let's give it a go. Though I find it hard to keep it short, there's so much I want to say about each choice. So, here's the bullet point version:*

- *Novella:* *Story of Your Life* by *Ted Chiang*. *Honourable mentions:* *The Unconquered Country* by *Geoff Ryman*; *Great Work of Time* by *John Crowley*.
- *Short Story:* *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* by *Jorge Luis Borges*. *Honourable mentions:* *The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species* by *Ken Liu*; *Irregular Verbs* by *Matthew Johnson*.
- *Series...* *Red Mars, Green Mars, Blue Mars* by *Kim Stanley Robinson*. *Honourable mentions:* *the Chanur series* by *C.J.Cherryh*; *the Vlad Taltos series* by *Steven Brust*.
- *Novel:* *Little, Big* by *John Crowley*. *Honourable mentions:* *The Dispossessed* by *Ursula K LeGuin*; *Red Shift* by *Alan Garner*; *Dahlgren* by *Samuel R Delany*.

NK: With a lot of these, author names apart, I'm unfamiliar. I have (and love) *Mars* and *The Dispossessed* as per "Keep Talking" reports, also once read *Red Shift* (for which see below). And so:

Dave: *I tend to read novels rather than short stories or novellas, so I don't have a wide range of the shorter forms to draw on. For novellas, my choice is easy: Story of Your Life by Ted Chiang. This was the basis for the film "Arrival", although the film concentrated more on the aliens while the book is more about the effect on the narrator. In fact, the novella is really about the emotions involved in committing to a life-long relationship; Chiang just uses SF features to bring these issues into sharper focus. It's absolutely superb.*

If it weren't for Story of Your Life, I'd have picked Geoff Ryman's classic, The Unconquered Country. Like Wells's War of the Worlds, this is a superb presentation of what it is like for your country to be invaded by a superior technology. An honourable mention goes to John Crowley's Great Work of Time, which is my favourite time travel story. Like Story of Your Life, the work is less about the mechanics of time travel; it's more about nostalgia for empire.

Dave continues: ...For short stories, I really like the contrivances of Jorge Luis Borges' Fictions, with Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote as one highlight. In the SF world, Ken Liu has written a couple of stories in a similar vein: The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species; An Advanced Readers' Picture Book of Comparative Cognition, both of which are in his collection The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories. And I'd like to mention Irregular Verbs by Matthew Johnson, which combines these literary games with more emotional depth: it describes a society in which each family creates their own private language and one person's attempt to remember a dead partner by keeping their language alive after there is no-one left to share it with.

Switching from short forms to long forms, for a series I will pick KSR's Mars trilogy. I've been re-reading this for the past couple of months and I'm absolutely loving it. KSR's joy in building his world and his characters shines from every page. In a way, it's a meta-creation, because his characters are building the world they inhabit, both physically by terraforming Mars (or areoforming, as they call the process), and socially as they contest for the sort of society that will inhabit the planet. It's a future history and a utopia, and people shouldn't read it if they will be bored by loving descriptions of the changing Martian landscapes. I could write an essay about what makes this trilogy so good, and about its flaws as well.

NK: I'm on record elsewhere in noting a few fractional faults: KSR had some difficulty in consistently handling his very large cast of secondary characters, while primary ones can only continue far into the story thanks to the plot contrivance of a longevity treatment. But for all that it's a magnificent creation, at least equal with *Dune* in my mind and arguably the more science fictional, dealing with plausible near-future tech (as distinct from the putative disciplines in *Dune*) and recent expansion of our knowledge of a real planet.

Dave: As an aside, I was intrigued to see that KSR foresaw the widespread use of iPad-style tables, although he calls them "lecterns", which is arguably a better name. (That said, I still like *The Register's* irreverent term, "fondleslab".) More surprising, especially given KSR's later writing, is that the trilogy largely misses the impact of global warming on the Earth.

For comfort reading, I like old fashioned space opera series, in which trading vessels use jump-points to leap between stars in the style of the Traveller RPG. There are many such, including the Vorkosigan saga by Luis McMaster Bujold – which has a very heretic-like main character who you might like* – and the Vatta's War series by Elizabeth Moon. But if I had to pick a favourite, I'd choose the Chanur series by C.J.Cherryh, in part for its range of aliens. On the fantasy side of things, I have to mention Steven Brust's Vald Taltos series, which is both a lot of fun and also, as the series progresses, deals with the impact of the main character's actions on his friends, family and his own self awareness.

*Come to think of it, my description of Bujold's character Miles Vorkosigan as being "heretic-like" is a bit wide of the mark; a better fit would be the comic you wrote many years ago – he's the SmartArse. In a good way... for I am belatedly reminded, on re-reading OoH, that the SmartArse in question is your alter-ego, one Tezniek! ((ssh, not too loud or Dane will have a fit)) My memory was a bit slow catching up.

Which leaves us just with novels. There are so many to choose from and so much to say about them: I could literally write an extended essay about each of my favourites. My pick of them all is *Little, Big* by John Crowley; a long, rambling, beautifully written story about a strange family, their strange house, and their relationship with the enigmatic fairy folk (who in this novel are not the twee fairies of the urban fantasy genre but the wild and unknowable strangers in the forests and streams).

Ursula K LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* is a close runner-up; it has stood the test of time well in comparing different societies and their limitations. And I can't write about my favourite novels without also mentioning Alan Garner's *Red Shift* and Samuel R Delany's *Dahlgren*, both of which affected me hugely and both of which are immensely complex and allusive works. Garner's novel has the advantage of being considerably shorter. It also has a coda written in code that you have to decipher yourself (or cheat by looking it up on the internet).

NK: A great fan of Garner once lent me *Red Shift*: very odd/grim timeslip tale, written staccato style. Thanks for all that, Dave: definitely worthwhile in full as you explain why you've enjoyed particular titles.

Colin Evans: *I don't usually do favourites, why should I choose ((to take the Fantasy equivalents)) Tolkien over Pratchett when I can (and do) have both? How does one know what SF-readers-at-large actually like?*

NK: Fair comment, fair point. I can only say that, though well aware *OoHers* aren't necessarily representative of SF-dom as a whole, nevertheless what's been sent so far has curiously piqued my pique (so to speak). And I do have other motives: I'd appreciate some material new to me if/when I reach retirement (not that long to go now) and what better than things I've missed? Correspondingly: I thoroughly relish expressing, ah, *enthusiasm* for what I have already enjoyed (as you may just have noticed...); and if I can convey some of that enthusiasm to you, my friends, that's a bonus.

Colin E: *Books are often described as a 'New York Times Bestseller' or something of that sort, but what does that mean? Taking it literally, I don't see how well a book sells in New York (via The Times?) is relevant to anything, certainly not to me. That statement gives no indication whatsoever whether I will like that book or not. I want to know what a book (or film etc) is about, not whether some critic likes it or not (some reviews are simply that and thus of no use at all).*

NK: Again, broadly agreed, though it's surprising how the essence of what a story's about can be conveyed with just a few words (sometimes even one word) – just look at everyone's examples I've published here, including at least one of your own recommendations. Admittedly it does help to know the commentator's "take" on the material commented upon, but again see the examples. Which brings us to your own "take", reading which I now realize why you cited the Fantasy equivalents above. To your mind Fantasy is a sort of sub-category of SF, yes? Interestingly I'd put it more the other way around, but we'll get to that.

Colin E: *Back to your question: I divide all literature into two types: Main Stream and Science Fiction. Each has a number of genres / categories. All genres of Main Stream exist in Science Fiction, some genres of Science Fiction do not exist in Main Stream. // ...Perhaps 'Mundane' would be a better phrase than Main Stream... ((Or perhaps not, given the implication that it's all by comparison inevitably dull.))*

My Categories (Sub-Genres).

Adventure (a rather vague default); (Alternative) History; Parallel Worlds (more than one alternative history); Time Travel; War; Aliens (good proper aliens, not 'men in suits'); Technology; Comedy; Detection; Fantasy (standard Fantasy); Modern(day) Fantasy (magic etc in the present or near-present world – I prefer this name to 'Urban Fantasy': probably includes all 'Horror', 'Occult' etc).

Possible other categories / sub-categories? And some ((much)) fiction could be in more than one category, e.g Terry Pratchett's Discworld series is both Comedy and Fantasy.

NK: All of which demonstrate how varied "science fiction" can be, particularly I trust to non-adherents who vaguely mis-think of it as only an overblown form of Outer Space yarn. Incidentally you did miss out Space Travel! (unless that's a sub-sub-genre of 'Adventure'). Further categories might include Sociology and Psychology, again as you say often in combination with others.

Towards the end of your list there's the broad suggestion of the (broad) grey area where putative science shades into non-science. An example of this ambiguity might be the 'planetary romance' of ER Burroughs and his imitators, oft touted as science fiction but having at most only a quasi-scientific rationale before embarking on what's really outright fantasy in a fantasized landscape. Thus not in essence different to what I assume you mean by "standard" fantasy. (Note there's also a good deal of non-standard fantasy that wouldn't fit your modern-day category either, anything from *Gormenghast* to *Jonathan Strange*.) This essence being more significant than now knowing more what Mars/Venus are really like. But to once more recall how outdated (or always plain mistaken) the 'science' of SF can get (e.g how popularly conceived Time Travel or effectively Faster-Than-Light devices aren't how real Space-Time actually functions or can function), there's again a case for treating SF along with Fantasy (and Horror etc) under the catch-all banner of "Fantastic Fiction", using the adjective in its actual rather than superlative sense. // BUT NOW FOR:

W Marcus Arnold: *THE GAME IS AFOOT (that's almost a third of a metre, Watson)...*

I fear it was much harder this time, to the extent that a couple of you concluded it wasn't worth risking your skewed average just for a few more accumulative points and a couple of others giving up part way through! (having at least secured the round for the participation tiebreaker and hoping others wouldn't). **Answers:**

The Time of the Hawklords (ostensibly M.Moorcock/Turn6 but much more M.Butterworth who would have been Turn 2) is the Hawks-related collaboration missed from previous turns. (Unlike the track the book is not very good, incidentally: Cornelius pastiche about fantasized alter-egos of the then Hawkwind line-up.) **Roger Zelazny** (as many reasoned) was the missing XYZ but *Lord of Light* (as most alas didn't) was the Hawkwind track staring at you from the list (only other possibility there was *Damnation Alley*).

Part Three (Laputa etc) is my favourite part of *Gulliver's Travels*, being easily the most satiric and **SF-like** (with Gulliver himself mainly an interested observer rather than participant/victim as in the other three parts). Apart from Dave and at the last moment Bob, everyone understandably went for Part Four instead (Gulliver being there reduced to semi-bestial Yahoo in the land of the intelligent horse-like Houyhnhnms). **John Sladek's** *The New Apocrypha* is the wonderful overview of oddball beliefs (I treasure chapter titles like *Will U kindly FO*) and **Mary Shelley's** *Frankenstein* was the one blatantly missed, kick yourselves! (except Karen). Finally, as only Bob nailed, **Michael Shea** wrote *A Quest for Simbilis* as sequel to Vance's tale of Cugel the Clever *The Eyes of the Overworld*, Vance himself later doing *Cugel's Saga* (yet to get).

Jerry Pournelle composed the near-future/near space essays collected in *A Step Farther Out*, which whatever your views on the man's political philosophy are scientifically literate and well-informed. As the generally liberal **Steve Howe** agreed when he named his similarly titled Dipzine – one Hobby connection, Pournelle's early participation in **postal games** being another (here I was hoping someone would cite *Crottled Greeps* beloved of John Piggott and Dip Press Sagas, imagine my thrill when these made an appearance in Niven/Pournelle's sequel to *Mote*). But it was **Michael Moorcock** who composed the essays on the Fantasy field collected in *Wizardry & Wild Romance*. Again generally well-informed but spoiled by Moorcock's animus towards Tolkien in particular – his dismissal of *The Lord of the Rings* as “epic Pooh” rather misses the point of *TLotR* as well as being... imperceptive. Uncharacteristically so, and long since overwhelmed by events anyway. Moorcock was better off pillorying John Norman, and I here have to reveal that the two *Gor* books I temporarily acquired in order to know whereof I criticized were *Captive of* and *Slave Girl of* (I thought the titles might be guessable from the lettercol clue that they're supposedly written from a female viewpoint, but no one bit).

Working backwards and all the authors guessable even when the titles weren't: **H.P Lovecraft** with his long essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, then **C.S. Lewis** with his SF analysis *Of Other Worlds* (this is the one I've mislaid), **Stanislaw Lem** with his SF essay collection *Microworlds*, finally **Stephen King** with his Horror overview *Danse Macabre*.

The latter has staunch words in favour of **James Herbert**, certainly fairly famous in his field, to the extent of being mis-guessed by some as the ‘other’ Herbert in Turn Four, but I'm afraid I really can't get on with his stuff at all. (There's Horror and there's Horror...) The theoretical pendant novelette of Turn Three could indeed have been **Stephen Donaldson's** *GildenFire* (well spotted Paul), which would have made a plausible fourth title in the original clue (being an afterthought for the first Thomas Covenant Chronicles).

Arthur C Clarke is of course Him (Susanna being Her) and my fave novel of his is that great Engineer's tract *A Fall of Moondust* (see SteveJ's bit in the lettercol), though several of you got a consolation point for *Childhood's End* (I'm afraid I don't actually have *Rendezvous With Rama* or *Against the Fall of Night*, though I've read them, natch). And my favourite short story collection of his is the Club-story-themed (or rather **Pub-story-themed**, and for that reason + arguably Dunsany reference) *Tales From the White Hart*. Irresistible though a collection with *The Nine Billion Names of God* might have been! (again see lettercol). His science essay collections on my shelves do include *Voices From the Sky* and *Profiles of the Future*. Finally I am a massive fan of **Robert Chambers' The King in Yellow** collection (Steve B got this, inevitably) while the short fantastical novel in the greater collection is **William Beckford's Vathek**.

“Keep Talking” concluded: That last (incidentally for some reason originally composed in French, hence Beckford's appearance a bit earlier in the list of those read in English translation) was actually suggested by a couple of you way back in Turn Two but overlooked this time! However I've been generous, as ever when it makes no difference to the primary results (for the same reason I've cheerfully added a kudos point [per turn played] to those voicing mild protest that they too didn't or couldn't use the internet). Otherwise for this turn score 1 per correct answer, 2 where I've given 1 for good guess, +1 if only entrant naming it and the (Valium)10 for participation in this the probable (and now certainly) Final Turn. *Certainly* because:

WINNER (of this turn and so game in terms of Turns Won) is **DAVE BERRY** with **32pts** from nearest rival Bob Gingell(29) then Karen Day(28), Alex Richardson(27), Steve Borndale(26), Neil Carson(24), WMarcus Arnold(17) and Colin Evans / Paul Regan both 15 – as Paul put it, he only had to get one right to improve his skewed average, while Colin only had to enter to at least keep up with Dave & Alex (in terms of the turns played tiebreaker) in case neither won or entered this round at all. (Good grief, *tactics*.)

So plaudits to Dave, not least as I now don't rack brain to contrive a Turn Nine in case he, Alex & Colin remained locked on Two Wins (with Paul Evans breathing down their collective necks as well). But also to **KAREN** whose cumulative **210** (from all 8 turns) again and at the last moment in their titanic battle overtakes SteveB (209/8t) with AlexR (208/6t) so close, then Marcus (205/7t), Dave (191/6t), Bob (164/5t), NeilC (150/7t), ColinE (134/6t), Lorraine (122/6t), Tony Hedges (113/6t), PaulE (105/3t), plus PaulRg (48/3t) gamely making ground (Paul again “*should have joined in earlier shouldn't I?*”). Thanks also – this for one-off entries or general interest/comment or both – to Alex Zbyslaw, Tony Wardlow, Andrew Fisher, Janey Cage, Kath Collman, Gail Baker, Gary Lyon and Colin Day, plus Dane Maslen/Steve Jones *et al* for further expanding on that comment. All told, about half the readership! Of whom...

...**ALEX R** takes the skewed average crown (despite going down a bit for once) with **29.71** from Bob 27.33, DaveB 27.28, PaulE 26.25, Marcus 25.62, Karen 23.33, SteveB 23.22, ColinE 19.14, NeilC 18.75, Lorraine 17.42, TonyH 16.14, PaulRg 12 (you were *definitely* making ground Paul) then the one-offs etc. In retrospect I should have had a “gradually expanding” Participation Bonus (and maybe a normalization) to make this measurement of performance more statistically valid but I don't think anyone's going to complain (least of all Alex).

However, the main rationale for pursuing the game turned out to be generating literary comment for the lettercol, methinks it's done precisely that. As well as exercising some ingenuity on my part, all to keep my semi-addled brain ticking. (And talking.) So, once again, my thanks to all, notably NeilC for giving me the seed of the idea in the first place. Great fun. Only problem: what to replace it with...

...so for the moment let's try a **Who/What/Where** (if you add *is it?* to any of those lead words and the fact I should only answer with a Yes/No/ Depends you'll get the picture, start guessing). We'll put this under the latest moniker “**NARROW WAY (The)**” [Shameless Pink Floyd Reminiscence next time], because...

... to the new **Still Less Intimate Dip** variant rules I'm just putting finishing touches, so putative new game becomes “**ONE SLIP**” [Shameless Floyd Rem. next time]. Along with all the other Dip-related material this will either go in a supplement that I'll put out later this month or as part of a super-quick *OoH84*...

...Including “**FEARLESS**” though the players will already have the adjudication. For anyone following the game: as per pre-NYr email, although adjudicated accurately I was so tired when typing up the Fall 1908 turn that I missed out the Italian order *A(Mun)sA(Mar)-Bur* (fairly obvious from the other orders but still...), also my sardonic editorial comment *it's a Fleet nice try Steve* to the final Russian (hold) order.

And that's it for now. Though I've all that and still more material, if I don't temporarily halt now I'll be here for the whole of another weekend. Besides everyone in games or lettercol **WE ALSO HEARD FROM** Tony Ross, Paul Ratcliff, Jeanette Hawley, Graham Staplehurst, Kevin Moore, Chris Johnson, John Riches, Paul Roman, Tony Dickinson, Andy&Sandra, also John Marsden/Neil Duncan (via their zines).