

# Outbreak of Heresy 84

Feb 2021

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[**deadline** for subsequent issues: back to the first of each calendar month for the time being]

**NK:** Couldn't get out a late January supplement after all. But (partly thanks to being back on part-furlough) I've managed an early enough February main mag for the above deadline to be feasible. As a result this issue may either be a mega-issue games-heavy towards the back or, as intimated before, split over two parts. (Besides the ongoing Not-so-Intimate games I'm updating the Diplomacy "Clarifications & Corrections", and for those interested may also update *OoH* playtests that have been going on – or, thanks to the Covid situation, not going on – behind the scenes.) *[[But no doubt see email covering note for what I actually did]]*

However, as it'll lead into the (currently threatening to be 15-page) lettercolumn anyway, let's start with that anyone-can-join-in-anytime "**NARROW WAY**" *Who/What/Where* thing mentioned towards the end of last issue (this as a stop-gap replacement for the "Keep Talking" book game, at least until I can come up with something more Kinzettian). As of typing a couple of you have taken up the hint, starting with:

***W Marcus Arnold:*** *Who/What/Where, is it the Dark Side of Keith? There is no dark side of Keith, OH YES THERE IS, depends where you are watching from. I saw the whole of the Moon / age daydreams picturing myself on a boat on a river...*

**NK:** Believe it or not, the above (characteristic) slice of surrealism from Marcus does have some relevance to the current challenge. (So he kicks off his score with an initial Victory Point.) But all will become much clearer with this exchange of texts/emails between Karen and myself:

***Karen Day [text]:*** *Who/What/Where is it... Don't we even get to ask Animal/Vegetable/Mineral?*

**NK [text reply]:** No. Or rather, you can, you just have to frame the question(s) such that I can answer Yes or No (or Depends...). One Question gone.

***Karen [text 2]:*** *Ah wicked Nick Nick. OK, is it Animal?*

**NK [text reply 2]:** Depends. And that's the answer for YOUR *Who/What/Where*, though as a matter of fact the same answer goes to each individual who decides to join in! For the JOINT effort though, No.

**NK [text follow up]:** Two Questions gone but 1 Victory Point, by the way.

***Karen [text 3]:*** *WICKED Nick Nick. If this is 20 Questions I'm not asking another for the moment!*

**NK [text reply 3]:** Very wise, see forthcoming issue of *OoH* but look out for an email first ☺ ...

**NK [email follow up]:** Hi Karen! Can't reveal if it's *20 Questions* without someone asking that question. But so far you've established (A) everyone who joins in gets their own individual target (to which the answer to the question *Is it Animal?* is **Depends**) and (B) there's also a joint target for the *OoH* readership at large (to which the answer to that question is **No**). 1 Victory Point for getting us that far, may I print our texts for the others *[[Karen shortly replied Yes]]*. NB Marcus has sent his usual style of response and gets 1 VP too!

**The Kinzett Shameless Pink Floyd Reminiscence Files (14):** **NARROW WAY (The):** 3-part extravaganza by Dave Gilmour as his contribution to the studio half of *Ummagumma* (1969), to me the best bit thereof (though I like it all, despite the band's later tendency to disparage this experiment, which was Prog with a capital P...). Starts as a gentle acoustic instrumental (albeit backed by electric slide weirdness), bursts into a dramatic Progrock centrepiece, finishes as a thoughtful song. Great stuff, works, can't understand why Gilmour dismissed it in later days and, apparently, still does.

**Colin Evans:** *Next Competition.* Didn't OoH originate as a games zine? So how about 'Guess the games on my shelf'? Guess which ones I have modified (kinzettized / colinised)? And how? (Note the deliberate spelling of 'colinised'.)

**NK:** Noted, in respect of both prefix and suffix. Re the latter, I'll always allow you lot your *-ise* endings but ever since the late Richard Sharp explained to me that *-ize* was the more correct English (where the root isn't *-vise* or *-prise* or *somesuch*) I've always insisted on that for my own bits. So be assured it's not one of your dreaded Americanisms, just something the Americans tend to get more right than most Brits – notable exceptions including dear old Prof Tolkien who in this field (his own) knew what he was talking about. *Touché* // Yes, *Outbreak of Heresy* did indeed originate as a games(forum) zine, still is one really, so your Guess-Nick's-Games and which have been 'heresized' would have been a fine idea. Unfortunately I, ah, *gave away* most of the answers back in *OoH* 75...

**Colin E:** *Gifted? If something is not given freely then it is not a gift surely? Marcus stated that 'Hence money given to pay a bill is not "gifted" but money given to a charity is a gift and so is.'* Not sure of his meaning here. If someone gives you money so you can **pay** a bill then it has been given to you. One does not, strictly speaking I feel, 'give' to settle a bill, one **pays** a bill, it is not a gift.

**NK:** As per above hint, one can still give even when it's not a gift, which I think was Marcus' point.

**Colin E:** *Granted, 'gifted' may be found occasionally, and incorrectly, in song lyrics etc but I stand by that the correct, and usual, word is a version of 'give' not 'gift'. Oh no, you've inflicted an ear-worm on me! (Island in the Sun...)*

**NK:** You are most Welcome (Welcome, Welcome, you are Welcome)...

**Colin E:** *The year 2525 (if man is still alive): Thanks for another ear-worm. At least it got rid of the last one. Couldn't remember the words (worms?) of the next songs so no ear-worms there.*

**NK:** Most of them were instrumentals anyway {grins}

**W Marcus Arnold:** *Instrumentals, well John Peel said Have Twangy Guitar, Will Travel. I say what did the 60s give us instrumentally apart from Duane Eddy Rebel Rouser, The Ventures Walk Don't Run, Hawaii 5-0, The Safaris Wipe Out, The Tornadoes TELSTAR, Johnny & the Hurricanes Beatnik Fly, Jet Harris Diamonds, The Markets Bat Man Theme...*

**NK:** In this vein the list winds all over the letter via things like the *Peter Gunn* theme (actually 1959) etc, not forgetting the sinister *Dr Who* original nor dramatic opening for *The Prisoner*, both composed R.Grainer (though the *DrWho* one in particular owed much to others). But further down the page Marcus lost me a bit:

**Marcus:** *...when Whammy Bars ruled the world alongside the Meek (Joe) and Bridget Bardot's fur bikini, Barbarella meeting Mat Moss and DuranDuran da do ron ron ron. Much mainstream late Rock'n'Roll was the progressive reply to dead beat doo wop. Forget genres, it's the actual instruments that drive change: electric organ, mellotron, theramin, analogue synth, digital synth, stylophone, saxophone, plastic drumskins, electric pickups – oops, deviating again – fuss pedals, wem copycats, valve amps, non valve amps...*

**NK:** Definitely. Strictly speaking, what can be done with such equipment. Even a straightforward thing like the shift from the cumbersome double bass to electric bass guitar. Then shift from early models of that to something far more insistent or dominating – think of those who could play bass as if it were a lead guitar, Chris Squire being perhaps the most obvious example, e.g the largely instrumental "The Fish" on *Fragile*. And speaking of sometime Yes personnel...

**Karen Day:** *You didn't even mention Rick Wakeman...*

**NK:** Good grief, yes! "Judas Iscariot" from *Criminal Record*, the entirety of *Six Wives*, add 'em to the list.

**Colin Day:** *Far from finalising your Top 20 Prog singles (light- or heavy-hearted), it now sounds as if you want to do a Top 20 Instrumentals for your supposed Nuclear Bunker Exile.*

**NK:** I'd need a double-CD just for the shorter ones, probably a 10-disc set for the longer. Good call.

**Shaun Derrick:** *I am certainly behind the curve when it comes to modern music. As I have mentioned before (I think) I have an eclectic taste from Classical to Heavy Rock but I care little for who was a member of this or that band or who wrote what. Perhaps I'm becoming a staid, grumpy old man before my time?*

**NK:** If it's any consolation, these days I struggle to call most of my music 'modern', just witness what's been mentioned so far this issue (including the Shameless Reminiscence). You may be relieved that the preceding is virtually the only music bit this time (apart from perhaps another Shameless Reminiscence and an equally shameless digression later on). But I fear I can't promise as much on your other *bête noire*:

**Shaun:** *Hope you are keeping well and keep up the good work, even if I don't appreciate it sometimes! OoH 83 was the least read issue for me. Too much Sci-Fi (I know real SF lovers hate that acronym) and fiction (fantasy – all fiction is fantasy, really). ((A valid point! see later)) But I do read some of the other comments from various contributors, particularly the un-hinged Marcus, whose proverbial door does sometimes swing wildly out of control. And, of course, the more sensible(?) amongst us...*

**NK:** Fair enough. Mind, aside from my own ravings and gaming heresies I can only print what I'm sent. So do appreciate your contribution below. Referencing which, I did also consider an alternative follow-up to “Keep Talking” covering my non-fiction collection (likewise sorted out during the first lockdown) which, naturally, includes a prominent history section. But then decided it was a little bit too particular to me.

**Shaun:** *I have never really liked fiction in book form; even films or TV versions of fantasy/SF books can be tiresome, though I did thoroughly enjoy the LotR trilogy. I have read some fiction, of course, but that was a long time ago. These days I generally read factual history. I find the most recent historical writers really engaging. In the last 15 years or so there have been some amazing history books. I cover as many subjects as I can though I have read more on the 15<sup>th</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup> century having been inspired by the games Here I Stand and Virgin Queen.*

**NK:** We'll get to your examples in a moment. But first (as it happens) ColinE has sent an equally interesting (and indeed games-relevant) list:

**Colin Evans:** *Suggested History Books From Board Game Geek. Associated with particular games.*

*1491 New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus. Charles C. Mann.*

*1493 How Europe's Discovery of the Americas Revolutionized Trade, Ecology and Life on Earth. Charles C. Mann.*

*Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World. Jack Weatherford.*

*Lost to the West: The Forgotten Byzantine Empire That Rescued Western Civilization. Lars Brownworth.*

*Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth. Reza Aslan.*

*The Silk Roads by Peter Frankopan. ((Also referenced by Shaun overpage))*

*The New Silk Roads by Peter Frankopan.*

*When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting that Changed History. Matthew Restall.*

*Crowns In The Gutter: A Strategic Analysis of World War I. Ted S. Raicer*

*Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History. S.C.Gwynne.*

*A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and The Creation of the Modern Middle East by David Fromkin.*

*The Last Battle, when US and German soldiers joined forces... Stephen Harding. **Purchased and read.***

**Worth reading.**

*A Short History of Nearly Everything by Bill Bryson.*

*The Collapse of British Power. Corelli Barnett.*

**NK:** Most of those being self-explanatory. As a great fan of Mr Bryson I already have the penultimate entry. Now for Shaun's list:

**Shaun:** *Some of the best I have read recently are:*

1. *Over the Edge of the World by Laurence Bergreen – a really in depth analysis and storytelling of Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe. Maybe a little bit of embellishment to maintain the flow of the story, but utterly readable.*
2. *The Confident Hope of a Miracle by Neil Hanson – gripping account of the build up, drama and failure of the Spanish Armada.*
3. *City of Fortune by Roger Crowley – clear and engaging commentary about the City of Venice, its rise and fall from mere marshy island to great trading empire and back again.*
4. *Conquerors: How Portugal Forged the First Global Empire also by Roger Crowley – detailed narrative of the ruthlessness of the Portuguese explorers and attempts to carve out their own little empires in the Indian Ocean.*
5. *The Silk Roads by Peter Frankopan – insightful analysis and focus on the central Asian area throughout history and its effects on the rest of the world. Particularly good narrative on the US attempts to control oil production and global terrorism towards the end of the book.*

**NK:** All of which sound as if they'd appeal, not least those intersecting my field – but then of course I think human history is largely economic history anyway. Science history and exploration definitely included, must get hold of no.1... Which presumably contains at least an addendum on a notable piece of evidence for the rotundity of the Earth (the loss of reckoning re apparent days elapsed, *ie* the number of sunrises experienced over the course of the circumnavigation). Not that such evidence would have been needed by Magellan (assuming he'd survived to notice it) or even his predecessors – as I've cheerfully remarked before, flat-earthism was not really part of the Renaissance / pre-Renaissance or even medieval mindset. Instead it's a much more modern revival of some Ancient mis-thinking, but along the following (and only slightly exaggerated) lines:

**W Marcus Arnold:** *FLAT EARTH FOR IDIOTS. Like this flat earth like it's a plate innit sorta deep in the middle or is it the other side with the middle sticking out narghh the water would all spill out (see below) so this plate faces the sun which goes round it, seasons well the plate kinda tilts once a year about the equator you know that line running through Africa, anyhow North is top South bottom an like North gets nearer the sun in summer an in winter not so near, plain sense...*

*The edge of the plate must have sum kinda force field thing so planes get teleported from one to the other when they hit the rim, it teleports light too so you see the opposite edge, same for ships. This force field also keeps all the air and water in (see above). Gravity, well the other side of the plate is a magnet kinda sorta thingy only not the same. Aliens must have built it or Atlanteans and like got lost but they may come back homing in on the pyramids which the Greek Wall of China points to. Hey we should be ready and Armed cos when they get back what with pollution they won't be happy bunnies.*

**NK:** Goes on in this vein for some time but I think we get the point. Coincidentally (it's been some time since we last featured this topic) Steve J has a variation on the theme, as we'll see after his opening burst:

**Steve Jones:** *We recently got a new TV with a bigger screen because my eyesight is getting worse (old age creeping on). As a result, I am able to view U-tube videos from my U-tube library on the new TV – this is better than on my laptop because of (a) the bigger screen, and (b) the sound levels are much much better.*

*Anyway, yesterday I was watching several videos, both astronomy based. The first one was asking why are there flat earthers still among us, despite all the evidence in favour of the fact that the Earth is round (actually an irregularly shaped ellipsoid)? There were a few interesting points made. First, most flat earthers also tend to be conspiracy theorists. Also, they usually have very low levels of trust, and will not believe experts, etc. For people who study the phenomenon of conspiracy theorists, there is a term which describes the syndrome they suffer from; it is, and I kid you not, "bullshit receptivity". I googled this, and it is true! The term does exist.*

**NK:** Quite right too. Note the very need to so characterize and associate this syndrome is (if anything) another indication that flat-earthism and suchlike are really modern or relatively modern obsessions, rather than holdovers from medievalism. Modern flat-earthism actually arose from a premise not so unreasonable, but is these days impossible to sustain (except as deliberate joke or a flat refusal to be convinced by experts) unless the obstinate flat-earthier also subscribes to conspiracy theories – themselves very much a phenomenon of times more recent.

Bringing us to a very different kettle of Babel Fish:

**Steve J:** *The second video I watched was on the origin of life. They said that there are two possibilities: (Earth-based) abiogenesis and panspermia. They mentioned the evidence that stromatolites have been found in rocks that are 3.5 billion years old, and zircons containing biogenic carbon (i.e. high in Carbon-12 levels) have been found that are 4.1 billion years old. If life started on Earth, then it happened incredibly quickly, in something like 300 million years ((and, on this zircon evidence, while the main accretion period was still in progress...)). Of course, this doesn't rule out panspermia because asteroids containing bacterial spores could spread across the galaxy on similar, if not larger, timescales. Nevertheless, since the revolution period of the sun around the centre of the galaxy is 200 million years, the fact that life got started on Earth so quickly after it formed suggests that, if panspermia is correct, then space must be filled with bacteria-containing asteroids to a "high" concentration which, in turn, suggests that bacterial life is relatively common in the galaxy (if not the whole Universe). This, in turn, suggests that the creation of bacterial life by abiogenesis is relatively easy. In a sense, this is a point against panspermia because it implies that the Earth-based abiogenesis hypothesis is more likely simply because it can come about so quickly, given the right conditions. I, of course, recognise that the argument could just as easily be made in the other direction!*

**NK:** Well, precisely. The key Hoyle/Wickramasinghe point (for their Cosmichemia refinement of so-called Panspermia) was exactly that: biology must at least have been widespread on a galactic scale *though not necessarily uniformly* for the molecular clouds to show such signs of being massive repositories or graveyards of organic material. So that videocast certainly wasn't a point against the H/W refinement. Rather the opposite, as it now raises evidence for even earlier biological activity on the Earth (actually a point against abiogenesis if it really did occur during accretion) than that already held significant by H/W. (NB in *Life on Mars?* they predicted just such evidence.) However, I'd agree absolutely that all this really does narrow down the field to either Cosmichemia or Relatively Easy Abiogenesis! (That is, the alternative and essentially neo-Darwinian scheme remains hopelessly naïve.) And as you've pointed out before, in a sense the two models may not be irreconcilable, as the processes of solar system formation must involve at least the chemical wherewithal for biology in significant quantity.

**Steve J:** *I thought you might be interested in this article:*

[https://getpocket.com/explore/item/galaxy-simulations-offer-a-new-solution-to-the-fermi-paradox?utm\\_source=pocket-newtab-global-en-GB](https://getpocket.com/explore/item/galaxy-simulations-offer-a-new-solution-to-the-fermi-paradox?utm_source=pocket-newtab-global-en-GB)

**NK:** My thanks. Meanwhile, I'm very much resisting being drawn on the H/W implications for our current crisis, though bearing them in mind. [In their scheme I'm guessing that Covid19 would be characterized as an agent of at least moderately high 'horizontal' spread as compared to its hypothetical 'vertical' incidence – which in this context does not mean congenital. Thus isolation-type measures will still prove much more effective than non-isolation measures, though no guarantee against local recurrence after local elimination.]

**Colin Evans:** *Steve Jones suggested that the virus is the planet's way of dealing with the human plague afflicting planet Earth. It needs to inflict a much more deadly disease to rid itself of (or sufficiently reduce) the human plague. An air propagated version of rabies for example, a disease which makes its victims behave much like zombies! Beware the zombie apocalypse! (The word apocalypse has apparently been misheard and rendered as 'a pack of lips'...) // Only a small percentage of the population apparently needs to die for our society to collapse (10% is suggested). However the short term effect on the Earth could also be devastating as we attempt to survive (and then rebuild?) regardless of the cost. A disease needs to kill off a lot more (and quickly if that is possible) to reduce the human plague to a tolerable level.*

**NK:** Sadly I have to concur with much of this, having maintained since I was about twelve years of age (when we were around ‘only’ 4 billions not 7) that HomSap was an overpopulated species – although then the main concern was pending scarcity of resources more than what ever-voracious consumption of such was doing to the planet (that said, pollution was still a big concern). Being a liberal sort of lad even at twelve years of age, I had rather ambivalent ideas as to how we might tackle this, given that voluntary population control seemed unlikely. My later realization that with rising affluence comes a tendency to do just that (this is my brother’s field remember) is tempered by the suspicion that this happens when the overall population is still unfeasibly high. As SF-buff I’ve long been aware that some first-class disease (though please not deliberately self-inflicted) might do for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves; but as Colin observes it would have to be devastating indeed to make serious inroads into the population, and way before that our over-complicated society would fracture. (Society doesn’t even have to be over-complicated: a telling analysis of past analogous cases can be found in Jared Diamond’s aptly-titled *Collapse*.) Faced with such intractables, no wonder that so many of us have been reduced to just Fighting The Long Defeat...

***again, Steve Jones:*** *Greetings again Nick. Glad to hear that you are well and surviving in the pandemic.*

**NK:** Subject to the above burst of General Global Cheer, I am. As mentioned on the first page, I'm back on part-furlough/part-work, this if anything being advantageous, at least for the zine. And no doubt giving more time to reflect on said General Global Cheer. But speaking of things thought at tender ages:

***Steve J:*** *On the subject of times tables in primary school, I suffered a curious affliction when learning mine (I must have been about 8 then): I had the higher times tables down pat (5,6,7,8,9) but I had tremendous difficulty with the times two and times three tables – go figure!*

***Paul Regan:*** *My trouble with times tables in primary school was great reluctance to recite them in front of the rest of the class. On my own I was fine...*

***Colin Evans:*** *Times tables, yes I quickly worked out ways to calculate the product rather than rely on my shaky memory. Helped by daily mental arithmetic in my last year of primary school. Or was that standard back then (the sixties)? (8 x 7 is twice 4 x 7 which I do remember is 28, so we get 56, for example.)*

**NK:** Believe me, I empathize with all the above and more. Particularly Paul’s, hard though it may now be to picture the notoriously extrovert NickK as shrinking violet.

***Steve Borndale:*** *I liked your description of yourself as idiot savant. We idiot savants should stick together.*

**NK:** Er, okay. Seen in retrospect, I think in my case it was an alarming inability to see myself as others might. Still have this to a degree but nothing like as bad. Honest. What your excuse is I’ve no idea.

***Steve B:*** *Since the New Year (New Civil Year, like that touch) nothing much has changed around here for obvious reasons. Been watching the news more than usual, things have been a lot more, erm, exciting in the States. Did you catch Private Eye’s great cartoon of Baby Trump Out, Old Man Biden In? ((certainly did))*

***Bob Gingell:*** *Hi Nick, Zine received with thanks. I am sure I wished you a happy new year, but if I missed doing that then I do so now. As far as I am concerned there is no such thing as an uncivil new year (unless perhaps we have fallen down a rabbit hole into Trumperland) so I am not going to debate how civil you or I or your many subbers might be.*

**NK:** I’ve reserved my main explosion against the fool Trump for elsewhere (*The Cunning Plan* again). Suffice to say here that it’s not just that he’s been dangerously ignorant, corrupt and a thundering hypocrite to boot (in effect trying to do exactly what he accused his opponents of doing), but also that he’d persuaded millions to adopt something close to his own destructive philosophy – that is, ‘winning’ thought everything and no consideration to ‘losers’. Which is divisive stupidity even in a GAMES context never mind that of the (sur)Real World. I’m not usually a vindictive type, but if the Americans can do it without plunging their country into civil war, I hope they throw Bell, Book and Candle at him.

***W Marcus Arnold:*** *Spring will soon be here, I await with glee this year's palindromic date of 12/11/21 and cooking dinner, which I postponed to peruse the (mid)Jan 2021 Outbreak of Heresy freshly delivered by privatised Royal Mail...*

**NK:** Hang abouts, give us all a chance to get into this Civil Year, your palindromic date is *months* away. Better bet is a few days hence as I type, 12/02/2021. But still on such matters, on the appropriate evening of last month Lorraine rang up asking me to raise a glass to the time 21:21:21 of day 21 in year 21 of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, or summat just as numerological. (But at least recognizing that this was 21<sup>st</sup> not the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of the century in the Gregorian reckoning, no I shan't let that one go.) Giving about 21 seconds notice, mind, no time to locate never mind open a bottle, so I had to gently decline. (In irregular verb terms, I drink responsibly, you knock it back, he's just a piss-head.)

Incidentally, Marcus, you're about the only one still getting *OoH* via Royal Mail. Though I can nurse my once so-reliable printer through your (essential) copy, for the readers who had paper backup for their e-copy – something I've cheerfully done for those who greatly prefer it in that form – this is getting problematical. (The machine is flashing up warnings that it needs a replacement part I just can't obtain during lockdown.) And in addition to THAT I've recently lost access to my real address record (bloody encryption methods!) and face having to reconstruct it longhand for those who'd care to remind me...

Happily I can remember Marcus' own address in full. He, meanwhile, is doing his English best to respond to Karen's call for more Rambling/Roaming:

***W Marcus Arnold:*** *Rather sweet! Verging on saccharine perhaps...*

*Paul Evans and canals (also Mr Derrick)... one aqueduct you won't have boated over is on the branch of the Wyrely and Essington Canal that connected Lichfield and Brownhills. Possibly Britain's newest aqueduct, it graciously spans the M6 Toll Road. Viewed from the A5 the startling detail that strikes you is that there is no embankment leading to or from it. Apparently it was built in case the disused canal is ever renovated/reinstated. I came across it while walking along such stretches of the canal – mostly dry and which can, if not afeared of brambles or nettles, still be traversed.*

**NK:** Another candidate in the endless battle to preserve and extend Public Rights of Way? On which:

***Marcus:*** *I don't know if you know, as I didn't until late last year, but the wooded edges west and east of the old Kenilworth Road south of the A45 (up to Gibbet Hill) have had a track made in them. Earlier today as I write (Jan 15<sup>th</sup>) I walked up one side and back down the other: rather pleasant if a little muddy. One thought at the back of my mind is petty gloating at how it must have annoyed the owners of the big houses there who seem to have treated these strips as part of their gardens, with fancy gateways for the drives.*

**NK:** Yes, I've always assumed that these strips must in fact be Common Land (corresponding to the north side of the A45 and the likewise largely wooded Stivitchall Common). The tracks you mention I'm barely aware of, they're not marked on the A-Z and I haven't had occasion to walk the southern course of the Kenilworth Road for decades (last time was a rather late return from a winter gig at the University when I stuck to the open paved way anyway, quite eerie enough in the nighttime snow). The eastern track must link to the spinney path that cuts back to Kenpas Estate, and further on with Wainbody Wood. So worthwhile pursuing one fine non-lockdowned day if ever I get one (possible round trip via King's Hill/Green Lane).

***Marcus:*** *Back to canals, a good example of a reconstructed one is the Droitwich connecting the Worcester Canal to the River Severn: about two miles was rebuilt to render it navigable. Droitwich is a pleasant place for a lazy sunny day with its main street of houses at odd angles due to subsidence from salt extraction. Easily, in better days, reached by train. My god how I miss walking one week over Cannock Chase, perhaps the next week the Malverns or Edgehill. The trouble with rambling without public transport is the lack of not knowing what is to come next.*

**NK:** Must admit to having been spoiled in that respect for a few years now.

**NK:** and now... SHAUN ALERT. Fiction (or, as he put it, fantasy) section starts here.

**Karen Day:** *I think I agree with you more than ColinE about Sci-Fi being more Fantasy than the other way round (my Colin's going to scold me now for saying Sci-Fi...) ((chalk one for Shaun's first observation)) Pity in a way that you you didn't just invite everyone to name their favourite fantasy of any sort. There might have been a runaway winner but the also-rans would have been more interesting for more of us!*

**NK:** That's one reason I left it to respondents to decide what did or did not constitute science fiction. Though as we'll see later, there's a good case for *TLotR* (at least) being allied to the form. The same could be said for most of the fiction of one Umberto Eco, to whom we now turn:

**Dave Berry:** *..You mentioned that your Italian isn't up to reading Umberto Eco in his native language. When reading the translation of *The Island of the Day Before*, I found my English was barely up to reading Eco! I kept a dictionary beside me to look up all the unfamiliar words he (or his translator) used. I hate to think what the original Italian must have been like for a non-native speaker.*

**NK:** This sent me scurrying for my copy of *The Island of the Day Before* as I couldn't recall this snag but having done so I see what Dave meant. Guessing it was mostly Eco trying to represent the period narrative (and so state of knowledge/comprehension) of his 17<sup>th</sup> Century protagonist, which in translation probably comes over as even odder to the modern ear (or eye). On t'other hand *The Name of the Rose*, set in a still earlier period, doesn't have anything like this difficulty. All part of making it sound plausible, I suppose! Methinks this does not expose Eco to Marcus' implied criticism of last issue:

**Colin Evans:** *Marcus stated that 'It is surprising that Literature as opposed to penny dreadfuls espouse the conscious and unconscious values of the society they are written in.' Yes, those who espouse 'Literature' claim to be above such things, but they are clearly very much not. Let's face it, it is all just fiction. As in the usual disclaimer, the views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the author/producers etc.*

**NK:** Although agreeing that many do so claim (by implication anyway) and that you're right, they're not, I'm going to play Devil's Advocate for a moment and observe how closely your "all just fiction" contention echoes Shaun's "it's all fantasy", implying "all just fantasy". We may have cause to question the "just".

**Colin E:** *Marcus again: 'Gor Blimey Guvnor of Gor, Mr Norman reveals Robert E Howard as the Tolstoy of Fantasy.' Isn't Tolstoy long winded, obscure and confusing? (I've not read War and Peace.) That's probably what makes for 'Literature'. Generally I think I prefer concise, simple and obvious (which the Conan books are).*

**NK:** True enough as individual stories, but as concluded last time there can still be a lot of qualitative difference between Howard's simple & obvious and those of too many imitators (your own observation, backed by mine even for those parts of the Conan Saga not actually written by Howard).

**Colin E:** *Isn't there one 'Literature' novel which is just one very long sentence? That would seem to make it unreadable without getting a pen out and attempting to add necessary full stops as one attempts to understand it. Actually I think the author's idea is just stupid and pretentious (a triumph of style over substance). I have plenty to read without wasting my time attempting such drivel.*

**NK:** I think I know the suspect, so agreed again and indeed Marcus himself isn't too far away on this one:

**Marcus:** *Keep Talking, I shall and with the advantage of no hassles over social distancing. It is obvious that none of the contributors are in danger of becoming Booker Prize judges – all their Best SF seems to be unpretentious, readable and (even worse) entertaining...*

**NK:** On behalf of Booker Prize judges, Ouch! Marcus goes off here to excoriate the Booker Prize winning *The Satanic Verses*, not of course on grounds of its putative blasphemy but rather for being pretentious, unreadable and (even worse) not entertaining. And regretting the 30p that he, out of curiosity, paid for it.



**Paul Evans:** *Sorry for not contributing to the last “Keep Talking” ((no worries)). I intended to work through everything over Christmas, but never found time. :( Lord of Light is my favourite Zelazny and would have been my suggestion. However, knowing nothing of Hawkwind I was unaware of that connection. // Reading OoH 83 was a major nostalgia kick for all the brilliant SF stories mentioned. The number of books I've now decided I must re-read will keep me going for years...*

**Colin Day:** *You realise that I'm now going to spend the rest of the Lockdown re-reading everything that everyone has reminded me of.*

**Steve Borndale:** *Can't get out and about to seek out all these things I've missed! Even re-reading the Dune series for the upteenth time (just done that) or LOTR (and that, and watched the movies – again – extended versions of course, appendices included) isn't going to keep me sane forever.*

**NK:** At this point someone's going to suggest investing in one of these new-fangled Kindle thingies but it's culturally and psychologically too late for Steve (and me). There may be other sources though...

**Gary Lyon:** *Just to say you cost me £20 – went onto eBay and bought a job lot (15) Dumarest books. Easy reads though.*

**NK:** eek, must take care even when I don't directly comment! £20 for 15 sounds a bargain, however, given ColinE's quotes below. I'm not actually familiar with *Dumarest*, E.C Tubb wasn't it? Nick consults his copy of Clute/Nicholls: correct. One of those nightmare authors who wrote under loads of pseudonyms.

**Colin Evans:** *Someone mentioned the Dumarest saga. This consists of 33 books by E.C.Tubb. The first is *The Winds of Gath* 1967, Kindle £3, Paperback £58 (!). (From [www.fantasticfiction.com](http://www.fantasticfiction.com)). I haven't read any of them, are they worth reading?*

**NK:** see Gary. But speaking of those who wrote under pseudonyms:

**Steve Jones:** *I back up what you said about Cordwainer Smith. The interesting thing about Tenn and Smith is that they are (or were?) pseudonyms: Philip Klass for Tenn and Paul Linebarger for Smith. Both wrote science fiction that is almost unclassifiable. Both wrote stories that could be described as strange, but with the quality that they drew you in. I have several collections of Smith's short stories, plus his one novel Norstrilia, and a two-volume collection of all of Tenn's works (or so the editor claims).*

**NK:** ohh that's one I must seek out – only remember a few classic tales from library loan anthologies, “Custodian”, “Down Among the Dead Men” and the like, enough to mark Tenn out (of ten...). I gather that he and Smith wrote their very individual Science Fiction under pseudonyms partly to distance it from their serious Real World work, although I think both would have made a case that said Real World work had a bearing on their Science Fiction.

**Dave Berry:** *I enjoyed reading people's SF/fantasy favourites, but I did notice that a lot of us chose quite old works. I wonder whether there would be interest in sharing favourites from the 21st Century? My pick for a novel would be Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*, for the fascinating main character and for the deadly society that she lives in. For short stories, although my main choice from last issue was rather old, I did happen to mention a couple of more recent ones so I'll stick with those – Matthew Johnson's *Irregular Verbs* and Ken Liu's *The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species*.*

**NK:** The old book/story thing is partly because a lot of us are of a Certain Age anyway, but also no doubt partly because the ‘classic’ era of notable or lasting SF (especially in its shorter form) lies in the 1950s-60s and even 70s when we were busy being born and/or embarking on growing up. Often with excellent local libraries which stocked these things: that's where I found my anthologies, my Arthur C Clarke (both short and long), genuine excursions like Geston's *Lords of the Starship* or older classics like *Last and First Men*. This isn't to claim that later SF hasn't been a patch on that of this perceived (and arbitrary) Golden Age, but I for one would be struggling to nominate much, lots have passed me by! Others may have kept up more:

**Tony Ross:** *Once again an interesting read, thank you. I always intend to write in response to the latest OoH, now finally! Just thought I'd write as a sort of "keep up the good work" attaboy type encouragement from somebody who could have contributed (& to Keep Talking) but never got around to it (& likely won't had scored very highly anyway based on my lack of crossover with your books).*

*Lots of Sci-Fi & authors, most of which I've heard of (& of course lots I haven't) & some of which I've read, which now seems to create a huge list of 'To Read'. Once I was most of the way through everybody else's lists of faves I had the realisation that one name was missing & yes he's definitely my fave – Iain M. Banks! Not even a mention by anybody??? No mention in this issue of Douglas Adams (I've not long since read the 6th HitchHikers & been a bit disappointed). Also there's mention of some fantasy, but none of my fave Steven Erikson. (Also no mention of Neil Gaiman?)*

*As a one off (I think) I enjoyed 'The Company of the Dead' by David Kowalski which is time travel & alt reality in that the time travel has changed 'our' reality & a group of people are trying to change it back. I enjoyed it, but it uses an interpretation of history which I fundamentally disagree with, which is that US involvement in 1st WW is what won it for the Allies...*

*I read a lot of what some would probably call main stream, is this too wide a topic for discussion in OoH? (Or maybe you'll do SciFi movies?) Fave author is probably John Le Carré, although Antony Horovitz would run him a close 2nd (also Fredrick Forsyth & Iain Banks). I also read a fair amount of non-fiction.*

**NK:** In reverse order: see earlier for non-fiction. I have... mixed... feelings on SF movies, but see later; and given my own enthusiasm for Le Carré and others (Golding/Angus Wilson, albeit when 'allied' to SF anyway) I wouldn't find "mainstream" too wide a topic for *OoH*. ColinE may have mentioned Kowalski, definitely sounds up his street. Gaiman would certainly be in there if, as Karen mentioned, we'd more explicitly extended Favourite SF to Favourite Fantasy in general (including in the graphic novel field, natch, in which *Sandman* is still something of a masterpiece). Not (yet) read Erikson. *Hitchhikers*, as Dave hinted a couple of issues back, has alas become a case of diminishing returns – certainly the later radio series (reconstructed from Adams' notes and novels) lack the punch and sheer loony joy of the earlier stuff, and even were he still alive it'd be hard to see him NOT revising or rationalizing the whole canon to death. Banks: tried him in both his SF mode (as Iain M) and in non-SF mode (as just Iain), he's a tad *savage*, no? (I'm reading *Matter* at the moment.) // In general: you are most welcome and thank you for the attaboys!

**Bob Gingell:** *I missed getting involved in setting out my favourite reads for your letter col. I am a voracious reader and used to buy a lot of sf from second-hand bookshops (which have pretty much disappeared now), but when I moved house 5 years ago I donated almost all my paperbacks to those few charity shops in Cov that still were prepared to take them: at least a dozen large boxes. I gathered that many of the early sf paperbacks had a collectible value although (as with second-hand games) I bought them to use rather than as treasure so frequently they were in 'acceptable' rather than good condition. Does anyone remember the paperbacks which had two books combined? ((I do, just.)) You turned it over and then read from the other end; however this was from before the era of doorstep novels.*

*I had a room with floor to ceiling shelves of books and games. My memories of the titles are better than memories of the content. My large Terry Pratchett collection was received with rapture (although I suspect that the volunteer at the shop was going to keep them all) and my biggest regret is that I kept back all my David Gemmell books and then had no space for them and had to dump them (with a few other items that I wish I still had) at the tip on the day before the move. I had a lot of books by some authors – I liked the early Necroscope books by Brian Lumley and I kept a couple of large boxes of Dr Who books intending to sell them (thinking there would be a fan market) but I never sorted that out so anyone interested is welcome to contact me. That shows a fairly broad history!*

**NK:** Ah Bob, I wish we (the CovMob) had paid more attention the day you moved: although no fan of Gemmell myself I'm sure we'd have found someone to give him at least temporary houseroom. A couple of other *OoH*ers have mentioned *Necroscope* with approval so there's another I may investigate.

**Bob, contd:** *I shifted in later years to library borrowings, which meant that I did not have the reminder of seeing the titles on my shelves so tend to forget what I have read until I see the name of the author or title mentioned in OoH. My taste also shifted over time away from sf towards fantasy, although I did enjoy Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game series which I had expected to dislike due to his religion. I have just finished NK Jemisin's Inheritance trilogy (The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms etc) and, prompted by your zine, since I do not remember the Mars trilogy by Kim Stanley Robinson I fancy finding those next.*

**Dane Maslen:** *...Interesting to see so many people enthusing about Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars series... I read the series many years ago (evidently reading Red Mars twice) and also disposed of it many years ago (at one ManorCon when I sold various SF I had no intention of ever reading again, proceeds going to charity). From my records I deduce that I was moderately impressed with Red Mars on first reading, but was unenthusiastic about it on the second reading, found Green Mars the most readable, and struggled to finish Blue Mars.*

*So, why the big difference between me and you (and your other readers)? I suspect it comes down to two sides of the same coin:*

*If the storyline is good, I'll accept characters being cardboard cut-outs, even though it would be better if they weren't. If establishing characters causes lengthy distractions from the storyline, I become frustrated. There was one entire chapter (one of the characters goes off running around the landscape on his own?) in Blue Mars that was like this. Well, I assume the entire chapter was. If I recall correctly, I read the first few pages of it and then skipped to the next one before the urge to slit my wrists became too great.*

*So for me the storyline is the essential ingredient, with characterisation merely a desirable extra, provided it is done without interrupting the story. ...Writing this has reminded me of Hello Summer, Goodbye by Michael Coney, which has both. Had it occurred to me previously, I'd have mentioned it as a runner-up to The Sheep Look Up. Sadly the only other novel I've ever read by Michael Coney, namely The Celestial Steam Locomotive, was poor; so he's not someone I can recommend as an author.*

**NK:** Ah well, Dane, so far as KSR's *Mars* is concerned (and if it's any consolation) it was only me and Dave and by Dave's implication AlexZ, though now Bob at least may also be interested. As a matter of fact, and this despite the presence of some varied and notable primary characters (chiefly scientist *par excellence* Sax Russell, whose role grows from Supporting Cast to Main Man over the course of the trilogy), I reckon the saga is far more about the changing Mars anyway and what this does to the societies that have come to exist there. And like Dave says, if a reader gets bored by this theme, indeed best not bother reading on.

Me, I loved it. For its sheer scope on a plausible near-future I've never come across anything quite like it, not excluding from my personal favourite Mr Lem. (Whose major work is slenderer if even more detailed: in *Fiasco* and *His Master's Voice* the reader is treated to ever-growing cascades of mostly-plausible science wielded by knowledgeable experts – who are still all-but-stymied by the situations they're investigating.) Possibly one reason for my positive reaction is that, after half-a-lifetime of admittedly entertaining but ultimately fantastical interstellar SF, or alternatively equally entertaining but now irredeemably dated interplanetary SF, we actually had a plausible (sorry to keep using that adjective) space yarn on epic scale.

There is of course an alternative view on the whole notion of terraforming Mars (though that's part of the trilogy as well): I can't quite lay my hands on his exact quote at the moment, but I'm sure that somewhere amid his recent correspondence our Marcus was hissing *HUBRIS* or something of the sort. So before we get back to him and ColinE on the latter's "take" on Science Fiction/Fantasy in general, here's Colin himself with the final fallout from the preceding theme:

**Colin Evans:** *I like the word 'fondleslab' suggested for an Ipad or similar. We should use it for any such hand held device: what sort of fondleslab do you have? Another nice new word I read in SF is 'fittle', to travel faster than light (from FTL). (Hmm, perhaps that is not too clear in this font, try 'fittle' or 'FITTLE' or 'Fittle'.) Many ways to fittle are described or merely mentioned in SF. Such as the hilarious 'bloater drive' from Bill, the Galactic Hero by Harry Harrison.. ((like I say, entertaining but ultimately fantastical))*

**again, Colin Evans:** *More on SF and My Categories (Sub-Genres) ((this addressed to all as I've evidently over-edited Colin again!)) Modern(day) Fantasy: Nick added the (day), which suggests the present day – I did add 'present or near-present'...*

**NK:** Ah, sorry about that Col, consequence of cut'n'pasting your original vertical list on the erratic laptop (rather than on the reliable WP) and later editing it into paragraph form: I accidentally deleted part of that category and too-hurriedly reconstructed it from the sense of what you seemed to be saying. As we'll shortly see, I now realize that by “magic etc in present and near-present” (which I did remember to include) you meant something rather broader than I'd assumed. But, as we'll also see, it's still not enough!

**Colin E:** *...by near-present I meant back to Renaissance times (probably), the more extensive use of gunpowder (or simply science?) bringing in a new era (seems very significant to me anyway) and possibly abolishing (some?) magic. This is near-present as it covers only about 500 years of our history out of about 5000 (a mere 10%). Thus Jonathan Strange is my Modern Fantasy (but not your 'modern day fantasy').*

**NK:** Aha, light dawns: you're implying a presumed state-of-knowledge as a marker between “standard” and “modern” fantasy, yes? If so, then (A) you'd still need a further category of Fantasy for the examples given below and (B) your specific inclusion of my *Jonathan Strange* example isn't as clear-cut as you believe it to be. I reckon you're here thinking more of the TV series which, excellent fist as it made of S. Clarke's ‘alternative’ Napoleonic Wars England, couldn't adequately reproduce the novel's marvellous footnotes, which frequently hark back to pre-Renaissance settings and are often mini-tales in themselves. Going on from that, Clarke's later *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* collection wouldn't sit comfortably in your Modern Fantasy either (even with tales more or less contemporaneous with *Jonathan Strange*), nor would Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin* (could be any time in the ‘real’ world), Moorcock's *The Golden Barge* (very ambiguous in every respect) or his alternative Elizabethan Age *Gloriana*, and nor Edison's *Zimiamvia* (its other-world distinctively Renaissance-like even though lacking gunpowder etc) or Cabell's *Poictesme* in its full scope (ranging from medieval to 20thC). Or Harrison's *Viriconium* (Dying Earth). And so on until:

**Colin E:** *Not sure about Gormenghast, I can't remember the technology or magic (if any) used (I only saw the TV series quite some time ago). Yes the technology does make a difference, it is all science fiction after all. By 'modern day fantasy' I think you mean 'present-day fantasy', but how far back in history would you go with your term? Your own life time perhaps? Probably not as far back as World War Two though. ((But now add Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* to the above examples.)) Ultimately though it's your reading, you can use whatever categories you like.*

**NK:** I was thinking more along the lines of “contemporary setting”, ie scenario more or less contemporary to the time a particular fantasy was written – which would still imply a separate category for *J.Strange*, never mind my other examples. But I've nailed the difficulty now: your magic/technology dichotomy is only valid if we've already conceded Fantasy to be a sub-set of SF (which is the matter under debate) and indeed if this dichotomy somehow defined Fantasy, which I definitely think it doesn't! There is no magic or even “magic” in *Gormenghast*, nor is its (very very ambiguous) state of technology at all relevant: it's the setting that makes it Fantasy. This last (and often enough a lack of “magic” etc) is true of all the examples I gave above and more. In fact, contrary to what you seem to be imagining, a great deal of Fantasy does not involve anything supernatural as such, and the level of technology is very often irrelevant (partly why it's Fantasy and not Science Fiction).

**Colin E:** *I can see your point re the name 'science fiction' but your suggested alternative 'Fantastic Fiction' sounds too much like it's only Fantasy to me, ie magic, dragons etc. Another possible name suggested is 'Speculative Fiction' but that suggests looking into (speculating) only the future (and not into the past or sideways).*

**NK:** Agree with this last, which is why I've never rated “speculative” fiction as a viable alternative to science fiction or science fantasy. But from the above it seems clear that what's bothering you is the association of fantastic fiction with your ‘only’ Fantasy (magic etc) perception, maybe the sub-Tolkienien or sub-Howard works you cited last issue. And, as demonstrated, there's a lot more to Fantasy than that.

**NK:** By way of further demonstration, here's a different (if roundabout) take on the genre:

**Marcus:** *Swedish method. Goes to show that the Fat Lady hadn't sung. Yes, in retrospect Mr Belafonte did sing "willed" not "gifted" in Island in the Sun, well Excuse Me while I kiss this guy (J.Hendrix)...*

[ **NK:** This is the brief music digression I mentioned to Shaun and I'll give him & others fair warning now that it does bring us back to SF&F ]

**Marcus:** *...and Welcome to my Nightmare. Alice Cooper, like Blondie the band, is not the singer, or not the singer alone. O Furry One of Self Satire, you anticipated Goth. Forget "School's Out" – consider instead "The Black Widow" with Vincent Price voiceover, still sounds superb. He had a most unusual influence on American Stadium Rock though the unsung hero here is Bob Ezrin.*

**NK:** Also of Pink Floyd fame etc. Agree on *Welcome To My Nightmare*, easily Alice Cooper's outstanding work – and definitely a slice of Fantasy! Like you I just love "The Black Widow" piece, strictly speaking the segued track "Devil's Food / Black Widow" – even if the album rendition, correctly stressing the dominance in the female of the species during the superb V.Price museum monologue (or rant as it became), then got it wrong in the actual song. (But you can mentally translate: *She sits upon her throne*, etc.)

I have a soft spot for Vincent Price, who featured in many dodgy SF&F screenplays rendered so much better by his general mock-cultured delivery – best example for me *Masque of the Red Death*, which makes quite an expansion on the Poe tale (in part via other Poe tales). And indeed by his own talent for self-satire – best example for me the wonderful tongue-in-cheek spoof on the Shakespearean muse *Theatre of Blood*, in which revenge is taken in unlikely (and grisly) Shakespearean ways upon overly-censurous theatre critics. And so:

**Marcus:** *Sword & Saucery ((once again, sic)) is a horse of a different colour to Fantasy or Science Fantasy (I may expound later). The classic work of Sword & Sorcery, albeit drama, is of course Macbeth – Witches, Ghosts, untimely ripping from wombs, Dynastic Usurpation, blasted heaths, Birnam Wood on the move...*

**NK:** You know, I never really thought of it in quite that way before (and this despite *Macbeth* being my favourite Shakespeare play) but you definitely have a point. As Fantasy (Gothic Fantasy at that) anyway. And for all your careful distinction between Sword & Sorcery and much other Fantasy – including many Shakespearean elements and even whole plays (*The Tempest*, *Midsummer's Night Dream*) that we nowadays wouldn't hesitate to label as Fantasy. Ironically enough, that doyen of the genre Tolkien had an immense indignation of Shakespeare, mainly for what he saw as misapplication if not misappropriation of just these fantastic elements. E.g he thought Birnam Wood being on the move (especially given its role as misleading prophecy) a letdown in its mundane explication, and as a rebuttal conceived his Ent assault on Isengard. Goes to show that even indignation has its creative side. And so, ever closer to your own indignant analysis:

**Marcus:** *By contrast The Odyssey was a classic in the classical sense of a classic (Graeco-Roman) but it is generically Epic literature, a bard-sung saga. Curses, that does not exclude the Arthurian romances...*

**NK:** But more importantly:

**still Marcus:** *Anyhow, here goes in Prudent Pedant, no frills back-to-basics mode... Originally, or at least long ago if not far away, there were considered in prose fiction to be two modes, Novels and Romances. Novels were plausible and believable, while Romance (more to do with Rome and things Roman than romance as we know it) required suspension of disbelief and were fantastic in the old usage of fantastic (not synonymous with great). This distinction was ably exploited in Cervantes' Don Quixote (KEY HO TAY), where Don Quixote's brain addled by reading romances believes in them and goes questing and acting very weirdly. // What were once categorised as Romances were described as fantasy and were often set in mythical or imaginary lands (James Branch Cabell's Poictesme is a satire on this) ((in part, yes)). As in Philip Sidney's (prithiee resta while) Arcadia. Modern fantasists use alternate worlds instead of fairy lands or elf kingdoms or Tolkienesque pseudo-folklore.*

**NK:** Which is arguably where many of them, and parts of your thesis, fall down. Key thing about Tolkien (whose very calling and scholarship lent plausibility to his conception) and plenty of his predecessors is that their fantasies gave the sense of *being of this world*, however remote in time (alternative or forgotten 'history' as in *TLotR*) or space (over them there hills and far away) or perception ('real' world in some wise coexisting with Elfland or Zimiamvia or whatever). Tolkien himself had a theory about this sense, one of "secondary belief" as distinct from "suspension of disbelief". This world perceived differently is an exercise in "secondary belief"; whereas a genuinely alternative world is harder to pull off with any conviction, being more dependent on the weaker "suspension of disbelief".

**Marcus:** *As for "science fantasy", science fiction if not believable is Fantasy. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings is Pure Fantasy, but if Sauron were an alien green lizard and the Elves sailed away in spaceships it would be Science Fantasy...*

**NK:** ...but no longer *The Lord of the Rings*! Not least because, although in one sense omnipresent, the titular and key character [i.e Sauron] appears only in glimpses and is certainly nothing like as *unthreatening* as a mere SF-style alien. I think you've picked on the wrong example here. But other fantasies might similarly evade your analogy, the clue being in your equation, "not believable = Fantasy". As above, Fantasy can be believable, that is "secondary believable" – in this sense *TLotR* and maybe others are more believable than many a hard SF romp, indeed more than much supposedly mainstream fiction. This may partly explain wide and enduring appeal of certain works (which in the case of *TLotR* is way across the spectrum). Needless to add – says he, adding it anyway – such secondary belief reduces very few of us to the state of that poor old sod Don Quixote. // I'm perhaps being a bit unfair here, better let Marcus get on with his non-Tolkien examples and I'll try not to interrupt (except to back up an occasional point).

**Marcus:** *Now Edgar Rice Burroughs kind of ran out of weird settings in Africa for Tarzan, and so he created a fantasy Mars and a Tarzanesque John Carter. No science was involved in Carter's transfer to Mars and the Martian 'science' was not scientific (as we know it). But use is made in the series of scientific knowledge of the planet – its moons, its gravity – and for such slim cause it is Science Fantasy.*

*Terry Pratchett's imaginary Discworld is pure fantasy ((notwithstanding efforts to systematize its 'science')) while Conan was Sword and Sorcery, a sub-genre of Fantasy – give Conan a Ray Gun and he becomes science fantasy. And hey Mr Asimov, great detective murder mystery – a whodunnit becomes science fiction just because it's set in the future ((and with humanoid robots, and an underground city...))*

*So, all science fantasy is primarily Fantasy. As is a lot of science fiction – think Philip Jose Farmer's Riverworld and Gates of Creation series. Which spring not from the wells of Wells but rather the wells at the end of the world, Worm Ouroboros school. As for Mr Verne he just wrote adventure stories with strange settings. Rant over.*

**NK:** Phew. Can't quite tell where (or even if) you're being disapproving! There's obviously some justice in what you say, and I happen to agree that all science fantasy is primarily Fantasy – for which reason I'd incorporate not only ERB (including Tarzan, incidentally) and the Farmer examples you cite but also all space opera, past and present, now much more science fantasy than science fiction. We could say the same for any SF where the 'science' has since become obsolete (including even Wells, never mind Verne).

All considered, I think there's more evidence for my concept of SF being sub-genre of Fantasy (or rather fantastic fiction) than for Colin's the other way about. But I think both of us more insightful than those who'd rather definitively separate out what they consider "realistic" or "believable" science fiction from all the rest. Because we both recognize the relationship. *TLotR* / Middle-earth aren't really *science* fiction except to the extent that things like philology or feigned history or rewritten myth can be considered an exercise in science; but just those (and there's arguably much more) reveal the link. I've long liked the way Brian Aldiss put this in *Trillion Year Spree*:

*Beyond, or above, or outside science fiction – but watching over it as the Castle watched all that went on in the village in Kafka's novel – stands J.R.R Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings...*

**NK:** Anyhow, back to Colin and his categories of SF:

**Colin Evans:** *You say I missed out Space Travel but I would consider this either Technology, if concentrating on the means of space travel, or Adventure (my rather vague default) if concentrating more on characters, events etc (probably). ((Fair enough.))*

*Sociology and Psychology as additional categories. Not having been educated in either of these areas I consider them rather 'fuzzy'. Dr Sheldon Cooper (Nobel prize winner) of course considers them 'not proper sciences'... (I'll attempt to remain open minded on that.) I think meeting (proper) aliens could be classed as psychology (and sociology?). Perhaps First Contact could be a category in itself.*

**NK:** I was thinking more impact-on-society of numerous SF tropes, which a lot of SF (particularly in its short story form) strikes me as being principally about.

**Colin E:** *A new category: Powers. Read four novels recently of that ilk, two poor, two good. Strangely all four are from the same series, the Wild Cards series edited by George R.R. Martin. They are all actually linked collections (can't remember the term used at present. Mosaic?) The two poor ones were numbers 3 and 4 of the series (**Jokers Wild** and **Aces Abroad**) (1 and 2 read some time ago), the two good ones are numbers 26 (**Knives Over Queens**) and its immediate sequel 30 (**Three Kings**), probably largely because they are set in the UK not the USA (and possibly different authors). Numbers 5 to 25 I have not read and I don't think you need to read any others to enjoy those two. These could also be classified as Alternative History, the series starting in the 1940s I think.*

**NK:** Not come across these at all, I assume it's a "shared scenario" enterprise? Shared by different authors, that is, under an overarching theme/scheme presumably moderated by Martin. Now, Colin, are the "Powers" you mention a sort of SF equivalent of what, in some Fantasy, might be considered "Magic", or am I mischievously misreading you here?

**Colin E:** *Another possible new category: Combat. About fighting but only a few people not a full war. Yet another new category: Collection (of short stories), since a single volume is likely to contain stories of several other categories. Thus all the categories one needs. Probably.*

**NK:** Indeed. But a final expansion on your Aliens category:

**Colin E:** *...to Steve Jones: Yes I would like a galaxy filled with weird alien civilizations and entities that blow your mind!*

*Other Great Aliens: James White's Sector General series. Not sure now the aliens are so great (read over 40 years ago!) but there are a lot of different ones in a wide range of forms.*

*Wheelers and Heaven by Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart.*

*The Prador in 'Prador Moon' and other books by Neal Asher.*

*Poor aliens: It is understandable that Star Trek etc have poor aliens appearance-wise, some poor actors have to portray them. However it is unforgivable that they do stupid things with them especially interbreeding with humans. One is more likely to get offspring from a dog and a daisy, and they're from the same planet!*

**NK:** Ah yes, the "They've Come For Your WOMEN" syndrome, highly unviable (even assuming Hoyle) given the diversity since just on the Earth. (As you say, Dog'n'Daisy. Good name for a pub, that.)

**Colin E:** *That's enough rambling for now, the probable deadline is looming (34 minutes). You can look forward to more rambles next month.*

**NK:** As it turned out, absolutely correct on the deadline. Colin, thank you, indeed thanks also to Marcus and all who've contributed to another mega-lettercol (and I trust no one's minded my verbal sparring).

## COME FLY WITH ME... (shortish polemic on movies by NickK)

TonyR earlier raised the issue of science fiction movies. A bit later in the lettercol I briefly alluded to dodgy but Vincent Price-redeemed old SF&F screenplays – anything from the original *The Fly* in which he had only a support role through *Dr Phibes* where he's main villain to the fantastical *Masque of the Red Death* where he just shines amid fairly wooden performances from most of the rest of the cast. It's probable that Tony and others will have something rather broader in mind, but for the moment I'm going to sidestep the obvious blockbusters (though see postscript) and...

...use some of this page to sound off on one of my pet peeves. Given the potential GOLDMINE represented by the "Golden Age" likewise mentioned in the lettercol, I cannot understand why so much of it has been ignored (or, alternatively, carelessly abused) by the movie-makers. Updating the putative science would be easy (especially given what passes for sexy science nowadays, no I was not impressed by *Interstellar*). SteveJ mentioned Clarke's *A Fall of Moondust* last issue, it would make an almost oven-ready crisis movie. (Lunar tourist vehicle is sunk without apparent trace beneath a lake of 'dust', the fact that nowadays we're almost sure that no such dust-lakes exist on the Moon is neither here nor there.) There are many such readies (novelettes just off the top of my head: Walter Miller's *The Lineman*, Asimov's *C-Chute* or perhaps *The Martian Way*, Wyndham's *Survival* or *Consider Her Ways*). And as I've previously hinted we get dubious gung-ho fare like *Armageddon* (disaster averted, no apologies for no Spoiler Alert) instead of something along the lines of *Lucifer's Hammer* (disaster endured and aftermath), and the ludicrous *Independence Day* instead of a take on *Footfall*, what do Niven & Pournelle have to do? Conversely, some SF tales that do reach the big screen (as distinct from the small) are rendered into travesties of the source material (e.g *The Day of the Triffids*, the 1953 *The War of the Worlds*, sad to add the 1984 *Dune* and this despite a damn good try, just out of its depth).

There are SF movies that I like, even those not-so-faithfully based on written SF. *2001* (greatly informed by Arthur Clarke's input) remains for me a slow-moving classic, *Solaris* (both versions, and notwithstanding that Lem himself didn't approve) more so (watch Tarkovsky version with subtitles not dubbed soundtrack). *Dark Star* is hilarious, *Brazil* brilliant, *Alien* genuinely scary and the Director's Cut of *Bladerunner* (cutting out silly gumshoe overdub & happy ending) actually a good fist in evoking your typical Phil Dick scenario even if missing lots from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (mixing it with another Dick tale to boot). I'm sure there must be others (e.g *The Martian* with Matt Damon is actually quite plausible) but they're not springing to mind at present...

[But by all means remind me.]

Postscript: now FANTASY movies (very broadly interpreted) may be something else again in the Kinzettian mind. Of course a lot of that field now stands in awe of the magnificent edifice that Peter Jackson & co made of *The Lord of the Rings*, which as I insist is up there with mainstream monuments like *The Godfather* (original and *Part II*, and as a matter of fact I don't think *Part III's* bad either). Such has been the achievement of the Jackson trilogy that it's informed and enhanced the field both before and since, whilst rendering some efforts wholly redundant (amongst them the Bakshi *TLotR* animation that only covered half the story anyway, another damn good try out of its depth). Not least, to this viewer anyway, in the film trilogy's *sheer attention to detail*. Amongst many other things this had the effect not only of making it seem history rather than fantasy – Tolkien would have approved – but also a faithful interpretation even when perforce modifying the story. (The 'history' feel is also what brings it in line with *The Godfather* etc.)

This is something in a different league from what might be considered its Science Fiction (though really Science Fantasy) equivalents, the blockbusters sidestepped above i.e *Star Wars* and the *Star Trek* franchise. (A case could also be made for the various comicbook superhero adaptations, likewise Science Fantasy.) I've no beef with *Star Wars* etc, and understand completely why many are in love with them. But though I've watched and even enjoyed the odd one here and there (the original *SW* film and at least two of the *ST* things) they have no lasting hold on me – i.e they're not in any way my 'sort' of science fiction/fantasy, they're not even what springs to my mind when thinking of the very term Science Fiction (or Fantasy).

[But, again, by all means remind me]



**STILL LESS INTIMATE DIPLOMACY:** This version of Dip is for anything from two to five players each playing one Great Power apiece (but by all means try it with six or even all seven where rules relevant).

One: Each Power has a not-so-secret 'Stash' or slush fund, measured in 'credits' (or dollars if preferred...), primarily for use in bribing non-player Powers for the temporary use of their units but also in the revival of eliminated Powers (player or non-player) or even building extra units. Where N is the number of non-player Powers, each player-Power begins the game with 4N credits, adding another N if they are a 'central' Power (Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary). Non-player Powers begin with zero credits.

Two: Each game-year of play is now divided into four turns, in order: **Winter**, Spring, **Summer** and Fall. Of which Spring and Fall are as per the standard game (including retreats without further negotiation and unit adjustments in Fall) except that during adjustments one may build (subject to usual restrictions) an extra unit for 15 credits, while at end of Fall there is also a gain in credits for each Power (player or non-player) equal to their current supply-centre count *plus 1*. Winter and Summer are non-move turns, thus:

Three: **Summer** has no negotiation phase, thus in remote play should be a conditional sub-turn tacked onto the end of Spring. During Summer each active player must either *transfer* at least 1 credit to another Power (player or non-player, max 1 or N whichever is greater) or *propose* (for 1 credit to the hypothetical bank) the revival of one eliminated non-player Power: this last may be made by an eliminated player-Power on his or her own behalf! (If an eliminated player does not or cannot do this, the Power becomes non-Player.) Failure to transfer or propose, *which is always assumed for non-player Powers*, results in that Power losing at Summer's end half of their current stash (odd half-credit also lost) to corruption (i.e to the 'bank').

Four: **Winter** has in theory a short (five minute in face-to-face play) negotiation phase, so in remote play should not be made a conditional phase tacked onto Fall (at the end of which, as Rule Two above, all Stashes are enhanced by s.c count +1). In this turn player-Powers may simultaneously bid in credits for temporary control of all 'active' non-player Powers (those still having units/centres or whose revival has been proposed in the immediately preceding Summer). *Each* bid may be up to a maximum of the player's current Stash. Each non-player Power will accept the highest *valid* bid offered (the credits are transferred to that Power's stash) and control of that Power's units (including retreats/adjustments) passes to the successful bidder for the remainder of the game-year (i.e until the end of the current game-year's Fall). Should there be no single highest valid bid, the Power hesitates, accepts nothing and remains in effective Civil Disorder for the remainder of the game-year. However, a player's bids become INVALID (and are ignored) should the total of what would have been his successful bids exceeds his current Stash (which is then for the moment reduced to zero). Note it is quite possible for a succession of players to default in this manner!

Five: If a currently-eliminated non-player Power is thus revived by the above bid, the successful bidder must immediately yield one of his or her currently owned supply centres to that revived Power, either converting the existing unit to one of same type belonging to the non-player Power or building such if the centre is unoccupied (note the latter does NOT force the original owner to disband yet). Defaults if no order given: army not fleet; centre will (with alphabetical tiebreaker) first be any candidate originally part of the non-player's homeland, then a neutral, then any except in current owner's homeland, then that homeland.

Six: An eliminated player-Power is considered active if self-proposed during the previous Summer and will revive if any active player-Power yields a centre to him as above, except that the revived player may choose to build a fleet if the centre is unoccupied/coastal. Should no one offer a centre, the player may build upon one of his/her unoccupied homeland non-scs at a cost of 10 credits (5 if entire homeland is empty).

Seven: As usual, the game ends in victory for a Power owning 18+ supply centres. But should any Power at any point simultaneously occupy and/or own a centre in each player-Power's homeland, that Power wins instead (taking precedence over a simultaneously achieved 18+). If the winning Power is non-player, the game is a limited defeat for its current controller (becomes a client state) and a catastrophic joint one for everyone else. Should more than one Power simultaneously achieve the occupation/owning victory condition, the game is a draw between all players (even if eliminated and not yet become non-player, see above). Players may also mutually agree to end the game early as a draw, again between all players as said.

((Report should have been in last issue but, again, all I had time for was note on the missing Italian order *A(Mun)sA(Mar)-Bur* [as could be derived from adjudication] + sarky note Russian unit in Edi is a Fleet.))

ENGLAND... A(Gas)-Par, F(MAO)-Naf, F(Bre)-MAO [stood off], F(ENC)sF(Bre)-MAO,  
(Neil Carson) F(IRI)-Lvp, A(Bel)-Bur, A(Ruh)-Kie, F(Kie)-Ber, A(Boh)-Vie.

ITALY... F(NAO)-NWG, F(Por)-MAO [stood off], F(Spa/sc)sF(Por)-MAO, F(Tun)-WMS,  
(Colin Day) F(Rom)-TYS, A(Nap)-Apu [fails], A(Ven)-Tyl [stand off with..] A(Mun)-Tyl,  
A(Mar)-Gas, A(Bur)-Ruh, A(Sil)-Ber [stood off by superior force],  
A(Bud)sA(Ser)-Rum [cut], A(Ser)-Rum [fails], F(Gre)-Bul/sc, F(Con)-Smy,  
F(Ank)-BLA, A(Stp)-Mos [stood off].

RUSSIA... F(Edi)-Cly, F(Nwy)-Stp [fails], F(BAL)sEngF(Kie)-Ber, A(War)-Mos [stood off],  
(Steve Borndale) A(Gal)-Bud [fails], A(Rum)sA(Gal)-Bud [cut], A(Smy)-Ank, F(Apu)-Ven [fails].

retreat phase: none occurred...

Colin – Steve: VERY nice try my old mate.

Neil – Steve: You really are incorrigible but I suppose I’d have done the same and yes, it has helped.

Nick – All: Still not straightforward. I’ll include some sort of deadline on the covering email...

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((Thanks to all for getting orders back so swiftly, which means I can also include...))

ENGLAND... F(Naf)-WMS, A(Vie)sRusA(Gal)-Bud, A(Bur)-Mun, A(Par)-Gas,  
(Neil Carson) F(Bre)sA(Par)-Gas, F(ENC)-Bel, F(Lvp)-IRI, A(Kie)-Hol,  
F(Ber)-Kie [stood off by superior force].

ITALY... A(Stp)-Nwy, F(NWG)sA(Stp)-Nwy, A(Ruh)sA(Mun)-Kie, A(Mun)-Kie,  
(Colin Day) A(Sil)-Ber [fails], A(Gas)-Bur, A(Por)-MAO, F(Spa/sc)-Mar, F(WMS)-Tun,  
F(TYS)-Nap, A(Nap)-Rom, A(Ven)holds, A(Bud)-Rum, A(Ser)sA(Bud)-Rum,  
F(BLA)-Sev [stood off], F(Bul/sc)holds reluctantly, F(Smy)holds likewise.

RUSSIA... F(Cly)-Edi, F(Nwy)-Stp [stood off by sup.force, dislodged\*], F(BAL)-Ber [fails],  
(Steve Borndale) A(War)-Sil [fails], F(Gal)-Bud, A(Rum)-Sev [stood off, dislodged\*],  
A(Ank)sItaF(Smy)-Con [not so ordered], F(Apu)-Ven [fails].

\*retreat phase: Russian F(Nwy) to Swe, Russian A(Rum) to Ukr.

Adjustments:

ENGLAND: Lvp Lon Bre Den Hol Bel Ber Par -Kie +**Vie,Mun** (10 but 9 units) builds F(Lon)  
RUSSIA: Mos Sev Swe Edi War -Smy,Nwy,Rum +**Ank,Bud** (7 but 8 units) disb F(BAL)  
ITALY: Ven Rom Nap Tri Tun Gre Bul Ser Spa Mar Por Con Stp  
-Bud,Mun,Vie,Ank +**Smy,Nwy,Rum,Kie** (17 & 17 units) no adjustments

Neil – Colin: If you’ve outguessed us this time, congratulations. Otherwise the fight goes on!

The Heretic Speaks: Not quite and in fact it’s getting quite messy. Not so long ago we were looking at Colin perhaps grinding out a careful 18-centre win against some grim defence, but chances have been taken on all sides and almost anything could happen (I like the way that the danger of the instant NSI win has now induced several orders that maybe wouldn’t have been otherwise made).