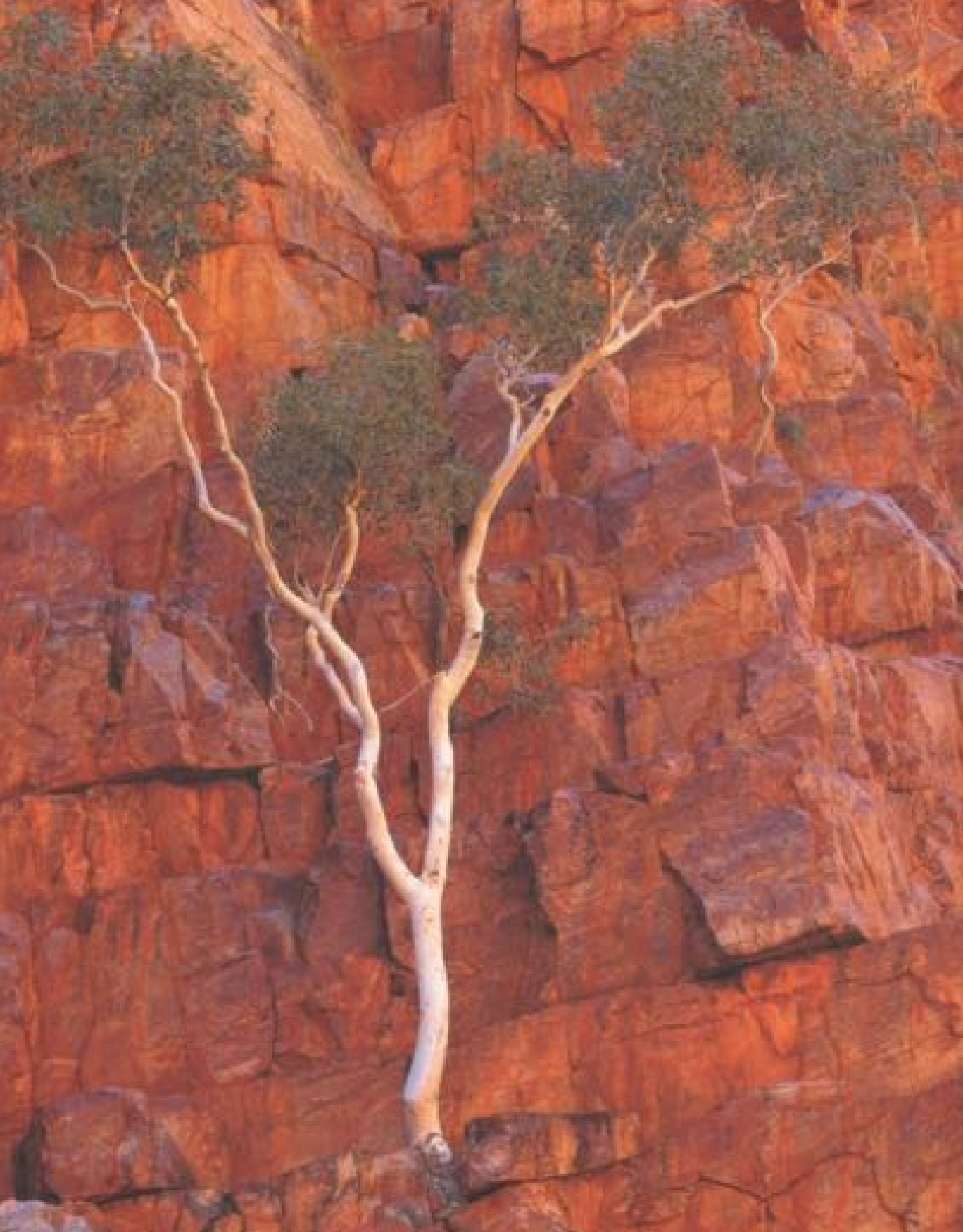


Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs #74

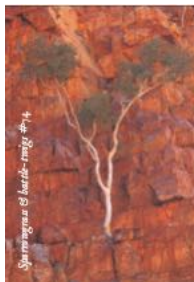


Culture Consumed

I have enjoyed P Djèlí Clark's stories set in an alternative Cairo, where al-Jahiz opened a passage into an alternative, mystical universe and we were treated to an influx of Djinn and Angels. We've had the novellas *A Dead Djinn in Cairo*, then *The Haunting of Tram 015*. And a powerful short story, *The Angel of Khan el Khalili*.

March 11th saw the arrival of the new novel, *A Master of Djinn*. When someone murders a secret brotherhood dedicated to one of the most famous men in history, al-Jahiz, Agent Fatma is called onto the case. Not only does Agent Fatma have to deal with the case, but she also has to deal with her *unexpected* new partner! And we find out a lot more about the Ministry and how it operates. We also see a lot more of Cairo and its various areas, and find out more about the various religions and cults in the area.

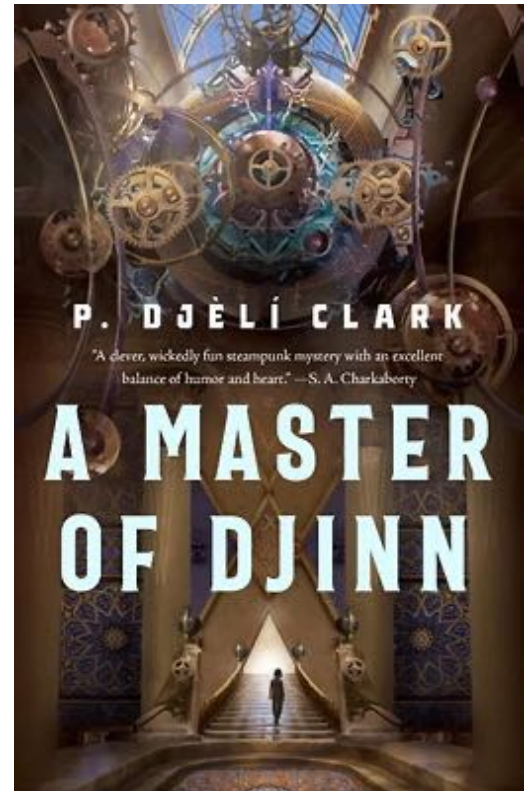
On the eve of European peace negotiations, a fellow claiming to be the original al-Jahiz appears, causing unrest and protests in the city. An interesting and absorbing murder mystery set in a fascinating alternative Cairo, 1912.



Cover: *A Ghost Gum in the West*
McDonnell Ranges National Park

Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs is a small fanzine produced by Roman Orszanski primarily for the assorted members of ANZAPA.

This is intended for the June 2021 mailing. I can be reached at PO Box 3231 Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5001, or electronically via email at websmith@internode.on.net



As expected, Agent Fatma, of the Egyptian Ministry of Alchemy, Enchantments and Supernatural Entities, rises to the occasion. We also find out a bit more about her personal life, from duels to family connections, favourite foods to potential lovers and partners.

She's also good with cats:

"Slipping on a gallabiyah she walked to where Ramses lay on her high-backed Moroccan chair – a ball of silver fur atop cream-colored cushions. She thought to sit, but remembered her mother's claim that the Prophet – peace be upon him – had once cut his own cloak rather than move a sleeping cat. Instead, she stepped past fluttering curtains to her balcony, and looked out at the city below."

A fine mystery and an intriguing story, with wry humour and interesting ideas. Hopefully Clark will be able to write more stories set in this alternate reality.

I'd love to read more about Agent Fatma and her cases. 🐾

The Ruby's Curse



A new River Song adventure, written and performed by Alex Kingston. This new BBC radio production, released May 20th, runs 8 hours 20 minutes.

1939, New York. Private-eye **Melody Malone** is hired to find a stolen ruby, the Eye of Horus. The ruby might hold the secret to the location of Cleopatra's tomb - but everyone who comes into contact with it dies.

Can Melody escape the ruby's curse?

1939, New York. **River Song**, author of the Melody Malone mysteries, is forced to find a reality-altering weapon, the Eye of Horus - but everyone who comes into contact with it dies. River doesn't believe in curses - but is she wrong?

I'm only an hour into it, but enjoying the story so far. But given I'm a big fan of both Alex Kingston, and the character River Song, that's not too surprising. 🍷

Webinars

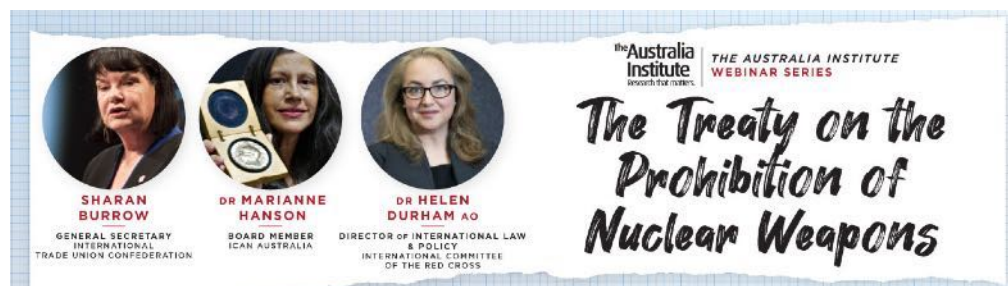
On Wednesday, May 26th, I had the pleasure of listening to one of the Australia Institute's webinars; this one dealt with the Treaty on the Prohibition

of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force on Jan 22nd this year.

The Australia Institute had an excellent panel: **Sharan Burrow**, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation; **Dr Marianne Hanson**, a board member of ICAN Australia, who lobbied for the creation and adoption of the treaty; and **Dr Helen Durham**, Director of International law and Policy for the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent.

The discussion explained the treaty, and its future development, considered how the treaty might be further developed and noted that the ALP had decided to support the Treaty, as it recognised that it was compatible with the ANZUS treaty and that the whole world would be safer when we stopped pretending that it was feasible to actually use nuclear weapons. New Zealand, after all, is already a signatory.

I contacted Ebony Bennett from TAI, who hosted the zoom webinar, and received permission to replay the audio on the Environment Show on 3d radio, the weekly programme on peace, environment and social justice issues I do on the public radio station¹. The archive video of the webinar is available on the Australia Institute youtube channel, and is well worth a viewing². 🍷



¹ 7:30 Tuesday nights on 93.7 fm

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1VrGZupc_A&t=277s

In the Real World...

GERALD, KAREN, HER MUM JANICE & I were at Naaz, a new Persian restaurant in Pulteney Street, as part of our search for a replacement for the late, lamented Jerusalem (cheap, tasty lebanese food).

Naaz is an upmarket eatery, but their appetiser platter is excellent value, containing various dips and salads (including variants on babbganoush and tzatziki). They offer vegetarian and vegan options, as well as mains with beer, lamb and chicken, all very tasty.

There were three desserts, featuring combinations of ice cream, poached pear, and cotton candy. The candy was yellow, very light, not as sweet as fairy floss, definitely melt in the mouth.

I opted for cardamon tea, while Gerald went for cinnamon. They were each presented in a pot, decorated with photos of a sultan, sitting atop a bowl containing a candle to keep the pot warm. We poured the teas into our respective tulip glasses (ah, memories of Istanbul!) before savouring the taste.

March 26th was an overcast Wednesday night — the one of the supermoon and the eclipse — but we didn't rush home because it was clear — or should I say *unclear* — there wouldn't be much moon gazing that night. 🌕



THURSDAY, MARCH 27TH: GOOD NEWS about two climate related court cases.

The first, which made international headlines, was the decision in the case brought against Shell by Milieu Defensie (Friends of the Earth, Netherlands):

The Hague, 26 May 2021 - For the first time in history, a judge has held a corporation liable for causing dangerous climate change. Today, as a result of legal action brought by Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie) together with 17,000 co-plaintiffs and six other organisations¹ the court in The Hague ruled that Shell must reduce its CO2 emissions by 45% within 10 years. This historic verdict has enormous consequences for Shell and other big polluters globally.

Donald Pols, director of Friends of the Earth Netherlands:

“This is a monumental victory for our planet, for our children and is a step towards a liveable future for everyone. The judge has left no room for doubt: Shell is causing dangerous climate change and must stop its destructive behaviour now.”

Roger Cox, lawyer for Friends of the Earth Netherlands, is also delighted:

“This is a turning point in history. This case is unique because it is the first time a judge has ordered a large polluting company to comply with the Paris Climate Agreement. This ruling may also have major consequences for other big polluters.”

Main points from the verdict:

1. Royal Dutch Shell must reduce its emissions by 45% net by the end of 2030.
2. Shell is also responsible for emissions from customers (scope 3) and suppliers.
3. There is a threat of human rights violations to the ‘right to life’ and ‘undisturbed family life’.
4. Shell must comply with the judgment immediately, because Shell's current climate policy is not concrete enough.

Note point 2 holds the producers of fossil fuels accountable for the emissions of their customers.

The second decision was the court case against the Environment Minister brought by eight teenagers and a nun.

Michael Mazengarb from RenewEconomy reports⁵:

The Federal Court has delivered an historic and landmark ruling that the federal environment minister has a duty of care to avoid harm to young people as a result of climate change, a judgement that could have flow-on consequences for projects seeking to increase Australia's production of coal.

The legal action had been commenced on behalf of eight Australian high school students and a catholic nun who acted as their litigation representative. They argued that federal environment minister Sussan Ley had a duty of care not to allow harm to be caused to young people as a result of climate change.

The students argued that Ley would be negligent if she decided to approve an application from the Vickery coal mine, operated by Whitehaven coal, to extract an additional 33 million tonnes of coal from the mine. The additional coal production is expected to result in 100 million tonnes of additional greenhouse gas emissions.

In response, Ley had argued that no such duty of care existed, as there were no 'reasonably foreseeable' climate change-related consequences resulting from the extraction of additional coal from the coal mine. Ley also argued that recognising the duty of care could 'open the floodgates' of litigation, allowing any person to commence legal proceedings to block a coal project.

In a landmark decision, federal court judge Mordecai Bromberg agreed that the federal environment minister owed a duty of care to young people to prevent harm as a result of climate change, dismissing many of the counterarguments made by the environment minister.

It's a fairly detailed decision, but I particularly enjoyed this comment by the judge (para 293 from the judgement) because it's the context in which [@sussanley](#) will need to make future fossil fuel decisions:

"It is difficult to characterise in a single phrase the devastation that the plausible evidence presented in this proceeding forecasts for the Children. As Australian adults know their country, Australia will be lost and the World as we know it gone as well.

The physical environment will be harsher, far more extreme and devastatingly brutal when angry. As for the human experience - quality of life, opportunities to partake in nature's treasures, the capacity to grow and prosper - all will be greatly diminished. Lives will be cut short.

Trauma will be far more common and good health harder to hold and maintain. None of this will be the fault of nature itself. It will largely be inflicted by the inaction of this generation of adults, in what might fairly be described as the greatest inter-generational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next."

Whether the federal government pays attention or tries to introduce legislation to rule this (judgement) illegal, it's becoming increasingly obvious that several of our major trading partners are serious about taking action on climate change; the UK, European Union, and USA are all

⁵ <https://reneweconomy.com.au/children-win-landmark-climate-change-court-case-against-australian-minister/>

moving to institute “Carbon Borders” where goods made with an excessive release of CO₂ will be taxed. This means a lot of Australian manufactured goods becoming uncompetitive in our traditional markets. [And yes, the taxes have been designed in accord with the major trade treaties.] 🐦

full circle

a search for
the world that
comes next

'Australia lost a senator, the world gained a luminous writer. Scott Ludlam's *Full Circle* is at once a comic chronicle of the climate apocalypse, a heartbreaking work of paleohistory and a fugitive tourist diary, strange, uncategorisable and magnificent!' — Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved* and *The Value of Nothing*

scott ludlam

The most common way that people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

— ALICE WALKER

An awesome read

The reviewer in *The Saturday Paper* raved about this book. As I've been a fan of Scott Ludlam as both activist and Greens Senator, I ordered a copy.

The opening chapter sold me. Titled “fireground” it's a first person account of the massive firestorm that hit Cobargo in New South Wales the other year.

Though the greens & progressives managed to pass legislation to encourage clean energy reforms, the laws only lasted 730 days before coal and gas investors had them repealed, 39 votes to 33.

Ludlam set out to discover how we got to this state, and seeking out old and new ways to make our systems regenerative and in tune with nature. He looks at what happens when ordinary people stand up to corporations and tyrants. This book suggests a new ecological politics.

I'm still working my way through it, and hope to discuss it with Scott Ludlam when he's in Adelaide next week.

I'll try and have a more detailed response next issue! 🐦

Nova Mob

The “fireside chat” with John Clute this week was very interesting. He spoke a bit about *Fantastika* as a term covering SF, Fantasy and Horror, and then discussed a possible new edition of the Encyclopaedia of SF.

It's grown a lot online, and he suggests a new print edition would be around 20 volumes.

Plans are afoot to move it to its own website, rather than one controlled by Gollancz. The most likely location is Dave Langford's server.

There was some discussion about how the enterprise might be funded, and I suggested that perhaps a modest annual subscription would raise funds. People might pay (say) \$20 a year for the right to access and download all the content that interested them.

I also ventured the opinion that, given the size of the Encyclopaedia, perhaps it might be more sensible to offer copies in electronic form (ie Epubs).

Thinking further on the matter, I think subscribers might appreciate a monthly email newsletter which indicated what essays had substantially changed (along with a brief summary paragraph), so that they could peruse those of particular interest. Such an email could be automatically generated from an RSS feed of posts/pages which contained an “updated” tag.

Anyway, it was an interesting discussion, and the 28 fans who attended would have enjoyed the discussion with John Clute. Murray certainly enjoyed it!



Last Page typed 6:03pm Friday June 4th.
Take care, and stay well. 🐦 Roman