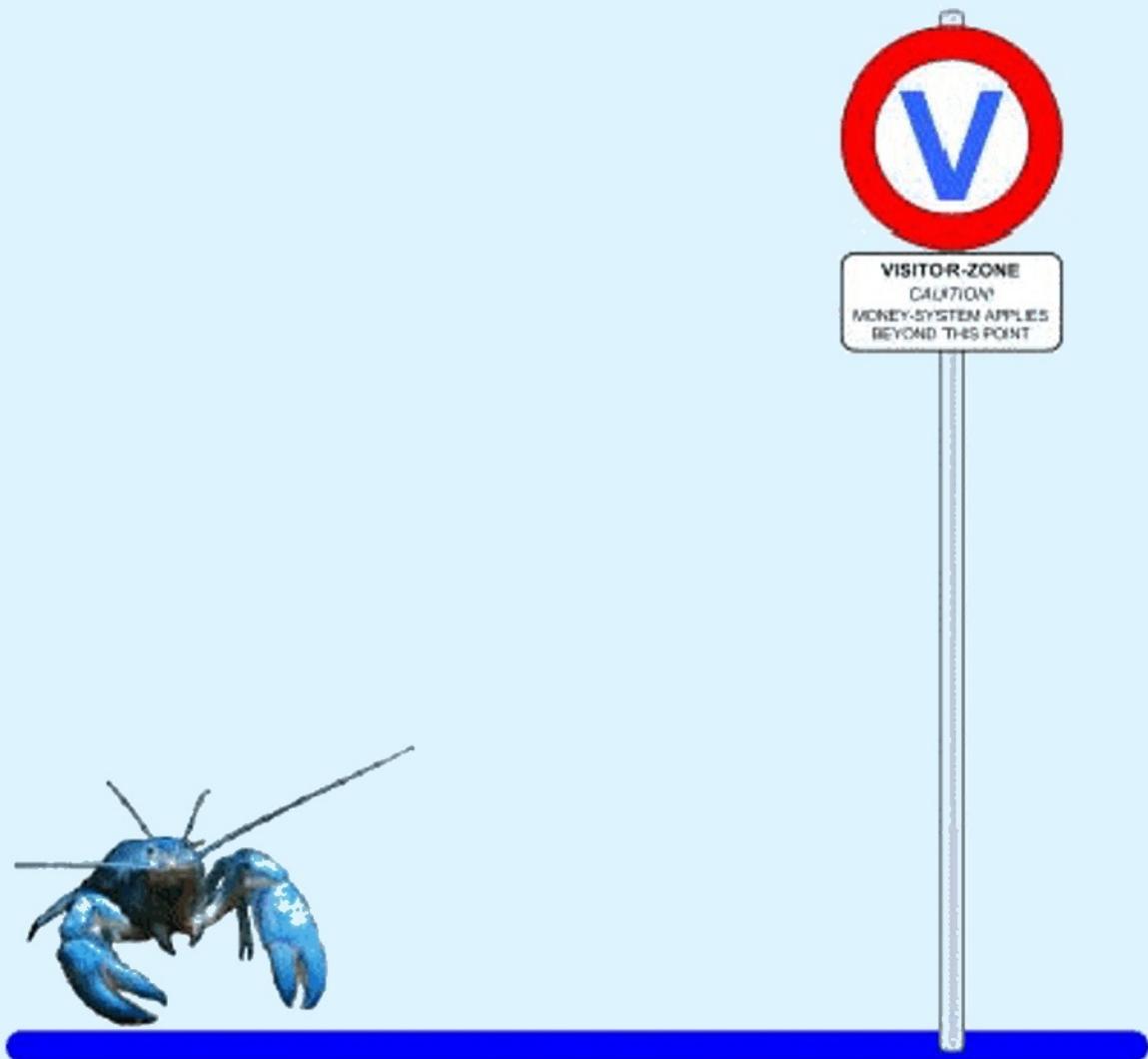


Yabbies

Fragments: possession,
passion and purpose



Tom Graves



Yabbies

Fragments: possession, passion and purpose

Tom Graves

This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/tg-yabbies>

This version was published on 2022-05-09



This is a [Leanpub](#) book. Leanpub empowers authors and publishers with the Lean Publishing process. [Lean Publishing](#) is the act of publishing an in-progress ebook using lightweight tools and many iterations to get reader feedback, pivot until you have the right book and build traction once you do.

© 2022 Tom Graves

Contents

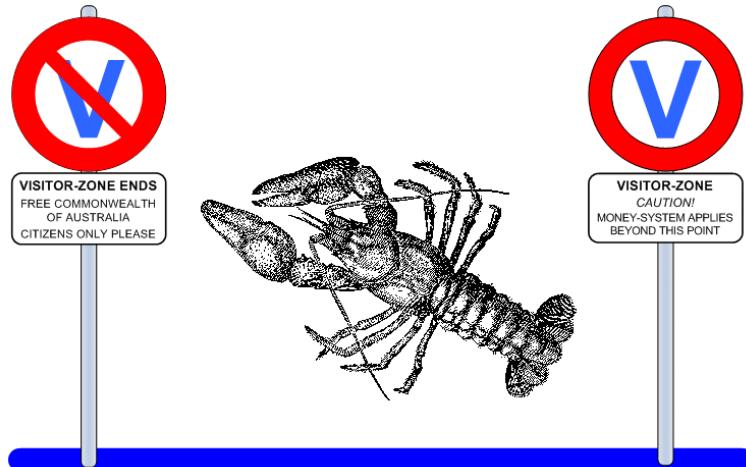
About Yabbies – a novel	2
.	4
Don's thesis	5
Steve arrives	6
Don alone	8
Steve's diary	11
Scattered fragments	14
Mercer's law	16
Women and guns	17
Steve's diary	20
Developing the skills	22
Language	25
Prelude to disaster	27
(<i>End of sample</i>)	28
NOTES	29

CONTENTS

Background	30
<i>Why ‘Yabbies’?</i>	30
Why Australia?	32
Sustainable law	33
Property and money	36
A problem of power	37
Transition	39
A little bit of magic	41
Yes, it’s real	44

Yabbies – a novel

Fragments: possession, passion and purpose

*Tom Graves**SAMPLE VERSION**(This sample includes 11 of the 87 chapters in the complete book)*

About Yabbies - a novel

“Yabbies. Funny little things, all in their own world at the bottom of the dam. A bit like us, ain’t they? Can’t see a thing for all the mud in the water; bits and pieces drift down, in any old order, all out of sequence, an’ we have to make sense of them as best we can.”

This unusual novel explores ideas about sustainability from a different angle: that we can’t achieve a sustainable world without a system of law that fully supports it. To make that happen, we would need truly revolutionary change in the way we see our world: a refocus of passion from possession to purpose. In some ways, as one of the characters here explains, we may not have much choice:

“The whole system is so fragile that there’s a real risk it could collapse at any time, in a really big way. Those problems are inherent in the system, so to speak, so that the whole thing is held together by little more than wishful thinking.”

But what would happen if only some countries made that change - and others didn’t? What would happen to trade, to international relations, to everyday living? How would they deal with each other’s business-visitors, or tourists? Yabbies explores these themes through story-fragments, each piece as if drifting down to us through the waters of time, different characters describing their own worlds and experiences each in their own unique voice. And perhaps a little magic, too.

Yabbies first appeared more than a decade ago as YABI - Yet Another Book Idea. Although it has taken many forms over the years,

as an interactive website, screenplay, annotated text and more, this is its first time available as a conventional novel. This new edition includes a background section on the ideas and principles behind the story, and also a suggested timeline to link the fragments together.

Author Tom Graves is best known as a writer on a broad range of non-fiction topics - from the structure of organisations to the structure of magic, and much more besides. He applies the same perceptive eye and acerbic humour to this story, using fiction to explore some of the deep-questions and 'undiscussable' themes of the present day.

Published by

Tetradian Books

<http://www.tetradianbooks.com>

First published June 2011

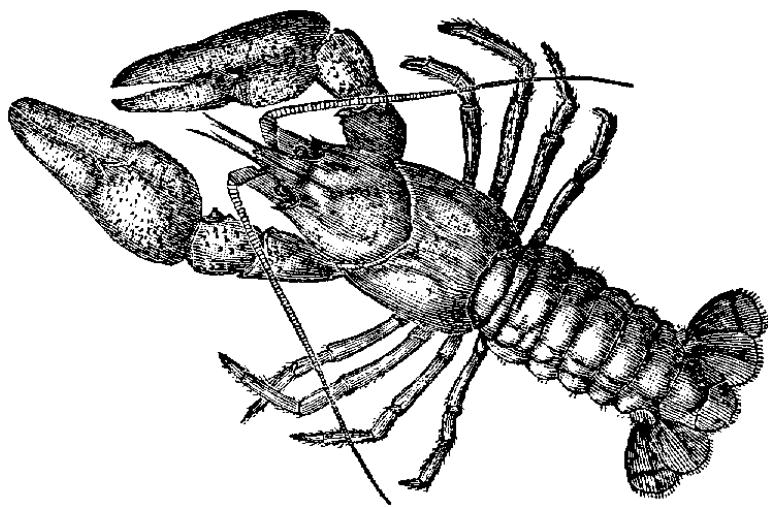
Updated edition published May 2022

© Tom Graves 2011 / 2022

The right of Tom Graves to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Note

This is a work of fiction. Unless otherwise stated, all names and characterisations are fictional, and are not intended to represent any actual person, alive or dead.



Don's thesis

“Towards a System of Sustainable Law”

James Donald Mercer

Doctoral Submission 14012/84

Derwent University

Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Current Australian law is based on the Westminster system, which is of relatively recent origin by comparison with the legal systems pertaining prior to European immigration. A problematic characteristic of Westminster statute-law is its volatility, requiring constant maintenance by the legislature to keep pace with changes in society. By contrast many tribal or ‘traditional’ systems of law have remained stable for long periods, in some case for millennia. A variety of traditional legal systems from around the world, and from different periods in history, are assessed in order to identify principles and characteristics that would assist stability and sustainability. A hypothetical system of law is presented that integrates these principles into a framework for use under current societal conditions.

Steve arrives

Too tired to think straight. But glad it's almost over.

The engines' howl slows to a whine, then a whisper, and finally stops. Silence at last – outside at least.

Inside, it's the usual chaos at the end of a long flight across the ocean. "Please remain seated until the captain has switched off the seat-belt sign", says the chief steward's voice over the speakers, but her grating Michigan tones are ignored as perhaps half the passengers climb out of their seats, heave open the lockers, dropping other people's bags to the ground in their frenzy to grab their property and get out of the claustrophobia and the canned air. Crammed in the centre of the row, Steve unclips his belt, rises, signs as if to move out, join the crowd. But his seat-partner waves him down.

"Don't worry the self, mate", comes the laconic drawl. "We ain't goin' nowhere till they get the bloody doors open. And we ain't gettin' out the port till they get the bags out." A wry smile. "If the Yanks wanna be stupid, they can go ahead, but it ain't gonna make any bloody difference. Just slows everyone down."

Steve grins. "Yeah, you're right. They been stuck on too many US flights, I guess."

He sits back, and watches. His companion's right: it's only the foreigners who are crammed into the aisleway, bags in hand, the stench of irritation and frustration wafting off them in waves. The ones who seem to be locals hardly seem to have noticed they've arrived: still sitting, or quietly stretching, chatting over seat-backs.

Not bothered: no need to make things other than they are, I guess.

Minutes pass, then the line starts moving. Two decks, two aisleways each, eight hundred passengers: it always takes time. The usual

pleasantries, the mechanically friendly goodbye from the cabin crew; a waft of warm air at the edge of the jetway gives a first hint that this is a different continent, a different world. Pack held over one shoulder, Steve is swept along, still crowded, cramped, squeezed together on the way out through the narrow tube, and through the double doors into the main passage, merging with people from other flights in a surging human flow.

It takes several moments to notice: something's missing. Steve turns to his companion from the flight; a whisper.

"Where are all the guards? The uniforms? The guns?"

A sardonic laugh. "Where you come from? – you been in the States too long. This is *Australia*, mate!" He shakes his head in dry amusement. "You blokes are crazy – we don't do that kinda crap here."

"What – no dogs, even?"

As if in answer, Steve feels a nudge in the back of his leg. He looks down, into the mournful eyes of a green-jacketed beagle.

"Don't mind us", says the handler. "Just looking for quarantine. Dog thinks you got fruit on you. From the flight, yeah?"

Steve nods, pulls out an apple.

"Dump it in the bin over there, will you? Thanks."

Steve does, and returns to his companion, as the crowd arrives at the baggage hall.

Don alone

Don stands in the doorway and waves as the last well-wisher leaves.

A long sigh. He takes a last look at the sky – overcast, unusually, but so appropriate for this day – and turns inside, closing the door.

Alone at last.

Alone with his grief.

Flowers everywhere, some of them drooping already in the dull heat of the day. He'd asked for none, but people had brought them anyway, for Mary. It's right, in a way: she'd loved colour, in every form. Past tense already, he thinks: 'loved', not 'loves'. And yet I love. I know I will always love. Present, past, future: they're all the same to us.

And still the tears will not come. Still too early and too public for that, even now.

He glances at a piece of paper one of the visitors has left: an ugly print-out from one of the new-fangled 'web-sites', it seems, from the Tapestry Guild. Other people's memories of Mary; but none of his own.

His hands drift over the table, seemingly of their own volition, touching, stroking, caressing fabrics and other small gifts. A different kind of memory: more real in its way.

In his study, a clutter of papers and student assignments: they tug, demanding attention. But they can wait: this is a different day, a different world. Another newspaper cutting, on the desk: stark, cold, factual, it mentions the car and little else. A statistic. Nothing human; no sense of the *person*, the woman, partner, lover, friend,

behind the name. Or the family left behind. Even if most of it is just a family of one, now.

Not quite a family of one. A small wry grin crosses his face as a clatter at the back door announces the kitten's return, now that the strangers are gone. A plaintive call for the woman who's no longer here, no longer able to provide the food-bowl and the warm lap in which to curl up for the evening. A plaintive call that brings it all back: the dark night, the knock on the door, two sombre figures, the uniforms, caps respectfully under arm, the low voice explaining. And yet he'd known, somehow, even before the squad car had arrived: a feeling in the air, something very wrong; a broken thread. The tapestry of the Three Sisters, Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos: one spins, one weaves, one cuts...

He scoops up the kitten, holds it gently under his arm, stroking, as his eyes fill at last. The kitten clammers up his arm and perches on his shoulder, rumbling contentedly in his ear, as he walks the narrow passageway to Mary's studio, empty now, and silent. He sees her in her chair, turning, laughing in the bright sunlight, as she so often did; but there's no-one there. Yet even in this grey light the room is a blaze of colour; swatches of thread and fabric samples lie everywhere in glorious profusion, glorious confusion.

But no-one now to bring a subtle, joyful order to this chaos. A stab of anger, frustration: he wants to sweep it all aside, bury it, destroy it, burn away the pain and loss. Abandon himself in abandonment at having been abandoned in this way, is how it feels. Another sad smile flickers across his face. The anger is real; yet so is Mary's presence here. And he knows which he'd prefer to keep.

“This isn't right, is it, dearest? We can't leave this unfinished. But I don't have your touch: you'll have to show me what to do.”

His hand settles on one pile of fabric scraps. Picking up a needle and bobbin from beside them, he leaves the room, with a brighter glance at the woman who nods approval at his choice. Mary's chair; Mary's room; her space, not his; that much remains the same.

Possessive in her own way; yet she'd always understood. Another bright, sad smile.

Returning, fabric in hand, he clears a space on the kitchen table and spreads out the patches. He sits, reaches out, finds two pieces that seem to make sense together. The kitten climbs down and settles into his lap, purring, whilst the tears form and fall. Making anew to re-pair; new stitches to hold together a new patchwork quilt, in the old frayed fabric of the world.

Steve's diary

2 November, for what it's worth

I want her. I'll start with that. I bloody want her. I've always wanted her. I'd say I *need* her, but she'd probably say that ain't the same thing. But what bloody difference does it make? – I still want her, but don't have her.

And I can't. Can't have her. Simple as that.

And it bloody hurts.

She says write it all down, get it out of my system – that's what all this is about it, ain't it, though I doubt it'll help. So here goes, dear effing diary. Start from the top. Or somewhere.

Okay. I'm Steve. I can manage that bit. Steve Hallam, for what it's worth. Twenty-eight years old, and still living with me bloody parents, here in bloody Bolton. Guess they'd say I'm the failure of the family: me sister's followed me mum into teaching, and me brother's gone one better than dad and got his full engineer's ticket from uni, and me, all I've got is a fitter-and-welder cert from the tech and a dead-end job at Hobart's like the half the other scrags in this dead-end town. Least I'm better than production-line, cos that really would drive me mad.

Dead-end town. Dead-end job. Dead-end life. Certainly feels that bloody way.

And – no, can't even write her name in here, even that hurts too bloody much right now – Anyway, she and I grew up together. Always liked her. Then a lot more than just liked her. And she always liked me too, I know that. She still does – I know that now too. That's what bloody hurts. We never did get it together – having

mum in the same school was bad enough, but she was our class teacher every bloody year through that school, so that screwed any chance I might have had with any of the birds there. Let alone with her. And the only other birds I've known are into it just for what they can get for themselves and nothing more, take a guy to the bloody cleaners and never give nothing back, and I seen too many of my mates get ripped to shreds that way. So I got into drinking with the lads as the only bloody thing I could do, and walking the hills when I wasn't drinking, and she got into studying and drawing and singing and all that stuff, and then she was gone.

Till last month, when I saw her back in town. With a kid on one arm, and a guy on the other. A Traveller, by the look of him, and she looked it too. Travellers, making a few quid here and there, singing at pubs and that, and then always moving on afore someone gets pissed off with them and trashes all their gear. She sees me, recognises me, comes running over, gives me a great big kiss – and yeah, that brings it all back. Even writing that brings it all back.

The baby's still a squeaker, but she introduces her guy, name of Rouge or something like that, decent enough lad which makes it a bit better, I suppose, but of course I hate him just because he's where I've always wanted to be. With her. Jealous ain't easy. And we talk a bit, the usual crap about the time of day and such, and then she waves, and he waves, and even the squeaker waves, and they're gone.

And we meet up again a week later at my usual, the Monmouth, where they've got a gig. I've been playing a bit of keyboards there too – feels like it's the only bloody thing I can do now other than drinking – bluesy stuff, a bit of cassio and such, nothing much but at least it keeps me sane and off the booze a bit when I'm there. So we get a chance to talk a bit while her guy's up on stage with the rest of their crew. Doesn't make it any better – just reminds me what I ain't got – but I agree to meet up with her again at some kind of gathering they've got at one of the old places down south.

Which we did, a couple of nights back. Can't remember the name of the place, a tiddly little village with just the one pub, in the middle of a bloody great circular ditch and some huge old stones like up the back end of the Peaks. We talk some more, but that's it, really. I want her, and she wants me, but I dunno that's good to know that at last, because it ain't going to change. They ain't got much, those Travellers, but they not far off own each other, those two, and the kid owns her, there's no doubt about that at all. I don't figure in that equation.

And she's a Traveller, for god's sake, she's got the life she wants. Best I could offer her is a two-up-two-down box in the scrag end of Bolton with the cops' sirens howling all the bloody time and the kids having to scram out the way afore they get flattened by the heavies and the drug-heads. She'd be gone in a week, or be a strait-jacket job in two.

So I want what I can't have. Story of my bloody life, really.

I'm going to have to get out of here. Have to get out of here. I can't face seeing her in the street again. And even if I do push off out of Bolton, chance is that I'll bump into her on the streets of Edinburgh, or Solihull, or bloody Milton Keynes or wherever.

Feel like I'm bloody possessed by this.

But what the hell can I do? Where the bloody hell *can* I go?

Scattered fragments

In the background, in the unseen distance away to the right, beyond the end of the corridor, the screams settle down from terror to simple fright and fear of the unknown. Jeni sits on the floor, silent, slumped, leaning against the wall of the corridor. Exhausted. Exhilarated, perhaps. Released. Overloaded, certainly.

She's perhaps thirteen. Perhaps tall for her age, short hair, scarily thin, but with an energy that exudes far beyond her small frame. Scattered all round her are plates and fragments of plates, some still spinning and settling to the floor. Shattered plates and shattered glass all round the swing doors from the school's kitchen area. Whoever threw those plates – or whatever threw them, perhaps – there was no small amount of force behind it. Yet the half-open door, still swinging on its hinge from the impact, shows there's no-one in the kitchen. Hasn't been for some time. The place is empty.

A crash as the doors are flung open at the far end of the corridor. To the simpering chorus of wails continuing from behind her, a heavier-built girl, perhaps a year older, runs in, skids to a stop in front of the slight girl on the floor, kneels down. An arm around the shoulder; words whispered in an ear. Jeni allows herself to be helped upright. Stops for a moment; looks in wonder at the chaos around her.

“Don’ worry about that, darls, we’ll fix it...”

“I did it, Kimmie – I *did* it!” Exhilaration; wonder.

“Yeah. You did. An’ those slags won’t bother you about nothin’ no more. Not for now, anyway.” She holds Jeni’s hand, gives her a gentle tug. “C’mon, girl – gotta get you outta here afore any of the teachers come.”

Jeni allows herself to be lead down the corridor, away from the

sound of angry questioning that begins to be heard beyond the far doors.

Mercer's law

From *The Age*, Letters page, 19th Sept

Mercer's law

I must say, I do like Prof Mercer's description of a world without money ("Sustainable Law", *The Age*, Wednesday). But if I follow his ideas, does that make me a mercenary? And if I don't, would he call me mercerless towards the needs of others?

Tod Ryland, Mt Dandenong

Women and guns

From *The Courier-Mail*, Wednesday

“A woman’s best friend”

By our US correspondent, Maggie Combin

Only in the USA, perhaps. I’m looking at a full-page advert in the only nationwide newspaper, which begins with the caption “A woman’s best friend is the pistol in her purse”.

Since the end of the Cold War, reduced orders from the military have left gun-makers here struggling to meet their profit targets. To make up for the lost sales, they’ve turned to a previously untapped domestic market: women.

And it looks like this new clientele is taking the hook. Handguns are flying off the shelves as never before, whilst the magazine *Women and Guns* is now the hottest seller in most of the Southern states.

The industry has a multi-pronged campaign for new converts to their cause – and new sales to satisfy their shareholders.

There’s the feminist position, of course. Gun-control, we hear, is nothing more than a patriarchal plot to keep women in chains. So even if you have no idea how to use a gun, just owning one will demonstrate your self-empowerment. Proof indeed of your right to count yourself amongst the leaders of the sisterhood.

And then there’s the fashion angle. No smart woman could consider herself properly dressed without her Smith & Wesson ‘Ladysmith’, complete with its diamante trim and interchangeable hand-grips to match any style and outfit.

It’s illegal to carry a concealed weapon in more than two-thirds of the US states. But that hasn’t deterred fashion-houses from joining

the gun-makers' charge. No ugly holster for women, please. No, the new vogue is for plush inserts for handbags, or a padded clip to go inside that subtle fur stole.

No surprise, though, that the main thrust of the sales-campaign is fear. Paid 'advertisorials' crop up in every newspaper, warning every woman that she and her family at high risk of assault by strangers. Think-tanks and politicians alike have received hefty contributions from shadowy lobbyist groups for promoting the same fear-laden line.

But the facts don't support the sales-pitch. Far from it. New figures released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation show that just 45 women in the entire country used a handgun in 'justifiable homicide' last year. But for each woman whose life was saved by that "pistol in her purse", more than two hundred women died, most often killed by her own gun.

Despite the gun-lobby's myths, most of the more than 25000 gun deaths here last year were from suicide, not homicide. And like homicides, most suicides are committed with whatever weapon comes to hand. Until recently, women most often attempted to take their own life by poisons such as amphetamine overdose. But this tactic has fallen by the wayside with the increased availability of handguns.

Last year, 45 percent of women who killed themselves did so with firearms. And unlike Britain, where young males kill themselves almost three times as often as do females, here young women are killing themselves at almost the same rate as the men.

Some have called the steep rise in female suicides an 'epidemic'. But if it is, it's a man-made epidemic, and the blame lies squarely with the gun-makers and their sales-tactics.

The NRA's grand slogan "guns don't kill people" has always sounded hollow, cynical, self-serving. Yet as the stones rattle on the coffin of my friend's 16-year-old daughter, who killed herself last week with the pistol she found in her mother's handbag, that

hollow sound will no doubt echo in her family's ears for many years to come.

Steve's diary

Nov 13

I must be going mental or something.

Had a dream last night, like I was sitting on one of those big grey laid-down stones at that village-place, like we did last time I saw her, and it kind of shook itself, kind of woke itself up a bit. Like the real one did when we was there, and I still don't know what the bloody heck happened there. And next thing, in the dream this is, I'm on me tod, sitting on the stone still, but the grass ain't there any more, it's not green, everything's gone kind of orangey-red, including the stone itself, and it's bloody hot instead of bloody cold, and all that. And I'm shrinking and I'm shrinking, or the stone's growing or something, till all I can see is the surface of this bloody enormous stone I'm on, and other rocks or mountains or whatever in the distance. And there's a pathway down, so I take it, till I'm down at ground, in amongst a whole load of trees, and though they look a bit odd they're all normal height, so it's the stone that's changed, not me. And it's quiet, real quiet, kind of calming quiet, but way out in the distance there's a kind of clacking sound, like someone banging two sticks together, in a kind of funny rhythm, a kind of funny edge to it, sort of ta-ka-ta-ta-ke-ta, like it's leading somewhere. And I move over a bit and the sound's coming from a different direction, with a different rhythm, and so on. Does this about a dozen different times, a dozen different ways, without hardly moving at all. Then I hear voices coming, talking in some funny kind of clickery language that don't make sense, so I try to hide, and then I wake up.

Yeah. Bloody mental. But it was so bloody real it wasn't funny.

What's even more bloody daft is it sounds like that bloody great rock thing they've got in the middle of Australia. Can't get bloody

Australia out of my mind at the moment, but at least it means I'm not stuck thinking about her so much.

But I ain't that crazy. Not yet, anyway. I am not going there, and that's flat.

Developing the skills

Have we seen this girl before?

She's perhaps fourteen, and at first we see her only from the back, sitting in a chair in this cluttered place – an electronics lab, by the look of it. But there's a sense of familiarity about that slim body, the scruffy jeans and loose sweater-top, the birdlike stance: we *know* this girl.

Perhaps we shouldn't.

There's an air of uncertainty here, of tension, of strangeness beyond comprehensibility. A faint hum pervades the quiet focus in the room, but that in itself seems no cause for unease. There are two other people here – a middle-aged woman beside the girl, also birdlike, tall, thin, all emphasised by the circular wire-rimmed glasses; and a younger man, off to one side, intently watching the dials on a simple fascia perched amongst a tangled nest of wire. A twisted rope of ribbon-cable leads away from the rack to the helmet the girl wears: once an ordinary industrial hard-hat, it seems, but now adorned with extraneous electronics, including a standard sensor-mike and a bare see-through projection-holograph display-panel seemingly pulled out of a discarded laptop and tacked into place with hot-melt resin. Another cable threads its way to a well-worn joystick crudely clamped to the chair-arm below the girl's left hand. A typical lab-prototype lash-up, in other words: a little odd, perhaps, but nothing that much out of the usual there. Still no explanation as to why this all feels, well, just plain *weird*...

And then, as our hidden eye moves round, to the side, toward the front, we see it. A small wooden ball, no more than four or five centimetres across, each quadrant painted in different bright colours, red, blue, white, black, yellow, green. And floating in mid-air, with no visible support, gently quivering, directly in front of the

girl, and perhaps half a metre from her face. Something that clearly should not be possible; and yet, here, now, in this place, clearly is. Madness.

Certainty falls away, as the ball stays firmly in place. Is *held* in place.

In a calm, certain voice, the woman murmurs quiet instructions to the girl.

“Good... that’s good... now rotate left... good... and right...”

At each command, the girl’s knuckles whiten, as she adjusts the joystick in her hand. A moment later, the ball twists slightly, as if on some puppet-master’s hidden wire. Except there’s no wire there: *we know* this now.

“Now up... rotate up and away from you... very good... now stop the rotation... now ten centimetres to the left... twenty... thirty... and back to the centre again... *very* good...”

Seemingly following the words alone, the painted ball performs its matching pirouette in the empty air...

An urgent beeping comes from another instrument-rack off to one side. The young technician quickly reaches out to silence it, but too late. Distracted, the girl spins round – and the ball instantly drops to the ground.

“Blast! Sorry, Jeni, my fault, you were doing really well there.”

“Can you get it going again, Marko?” asks the older woman.

“Yeah, give me a minute, just need to reboot the VR server.”

The girl lifts up the visor on the helmet, pushes a wayward strand of dark hair out of the way.

“I can do it without the bender, Cory – look, I’ll show you...?”

Without moving from the seat, she reaches down toward the floor. A moment’s pause, then the ball leaps up, seemingly of its own

volition – but bounces off her outstretched fingers, hitting the window-pane with a crack. Cory moves to retrieve the wayward object before it rolls underneath another cluttered desk.

“We know how much mass you can move, dear. And you’re getting better every day. But you also need practice with *precision*, and that’s where the bender will help right now.” She smiles. “If Marko can get it going again, that is.”

“Just a mo’... nearly there... yep, we got greens on all channels. When you’re ready, Jeni?”

The girl pulls down the visor again. Cory gently throws the ball toward her; it stops in mid-air. And does not drop.

As this strange, impossible practice-session continues, we make our silent, invisible way back out of the room. The image fades, as if in a dream.

Was it just imaginary? Or real?

And if it was indeed real – and it certainly seems that way – just who *are* these people? How is it possible they can bend our everyday reality so easily in this casual-seeming way?

And where do they come from? Or when, perhaps?

Language

From *The New Australia Travel Guide*

Language

More than 160 languages are spoken in Australia, and in some states up to thirty may be used in public documents. The main language, though, is **standard English**. Australia being Australia, of course, there are a few local quirks and variations that can cause visitors some confusion or concern.

Spelling can be erratic, even on public documents. Officially, it is supposed to be an amalgam of British and American spellings, though usually closer to the British form. Expect ‘-ise’ endings rather than ‘-ize’, for example, and ‘-our’ rather than ‘-or’. But you’ll find ‘labour’ also spelt as ‘labor’ – the latter being a last remnant of the long-defunct Labor Party.

Structure can sometimes seem more like French than English, because of a common preference to avoid possessives such as ‘my’ or ‘your’ – hence ‘the child of them’, for example, rather than ‘their child’. Many older people, particularly those who went to school before the Troubles, will still use the older possessive forms, but the usage is deprecated. With younger people, possessives are often used almost as an obscenity or an insult, so this can be one place where you do need to watch your language!

On the other hand, mild *swearing* is almost a standard feature of Australian English, so don’t be surprised to hear ‘bloody’ this-that-and-the-other in almost any sentence, and from almost anyone. Even the word ‘bugger’ was officially sanctioned as acceptable language more than half a century ago, well before the Troubles, when a car-manufacturer used it in an advertising slogan. The general recommendation, though, is “don’t compete with the locals”

– listen to the local usage, tone it down a couple of notches, and you should be fine.

The other feature of Australian language which confuses almost every foreigner is a common tendency to pepper the dialogue with a breadth of *idioms* and similes that vary from the colourful to the flat-out incomprehensible. The range of graphic alternatives for ‘vomit’, for example, is truly legendary – perhaps from too much practice! Idioms for distance include the sequence:

- *out bush* – regional, some distance from a city
- *back o’Bourke* – rural, ‘remote’, by European standards
- *beyond the black stump* – remote even by Australian standards

See the *Dictionary* for other common examples; otherwise ask for a translation. We suspect, though, that many idioms are made up on the spot just to confuse tourists – you have been warned!

Prelude to disaster

From *The Independent*, London

Wholesale corruption – literally

The Australian election was thrown into turmoil yesterday with shock revelations that both major parties have been funding their political campaigns by large-scale drug-trafficking.

Senior police from several states have been identified as key players in a corruption scandal that has rocked the nation to the core.

A number of officers have also been implicated in the murder of Alexandre Topolski, the telecomms technician who accidentally recorded the incriminating teleconference between police and politicians on Wednesday.

Topolski was killed in a drive-by shooting shortly after delivering a copy of the recording to Canberra police. Highways Authority specialists identified the assailants' vehicle from motorway-camera footage as an unmarked police-car attached to the Parliamentary Protection Unit.

The Canberra copy of the tape is missing, presumed destroyed. But with the agreement of the Supreme Court, the original has now been lodged with representatives of *Four Corners*, ABC TV's current-affairs programme. The ABC have promised to publish a formally validated transcript within the next few hours. In the meantime, unauthorised versions have already started to appear on activist websites.

The government's justice minister, Attorney-General Andrew Pat-tinson, and opposition Shadow Attorney-General Alberto Morenzi have both been remanded without bail. Other arrests are expected as the urgent investigation continues.

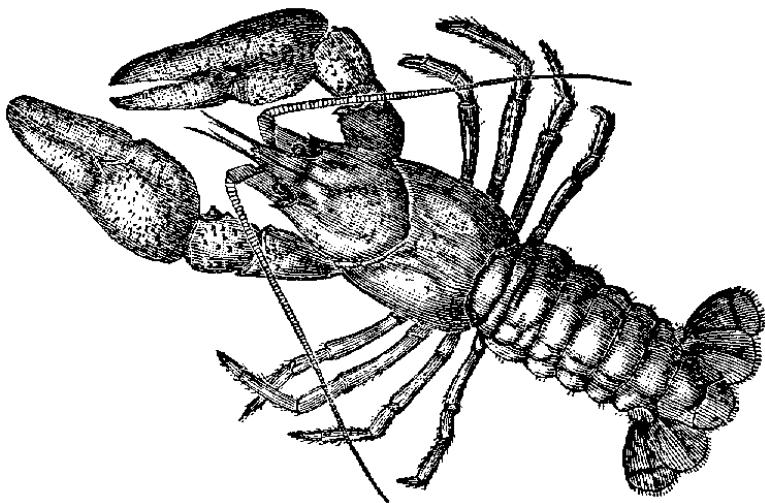
Senior police already named in the affair include Commissioner Morag Campbell and the head of Queensland Police, Bob Murrell. Campbell was arrested at Laverton International Airport near Melbourne by military security officers yesterday evening whilst attempting to board a flight to Singapore. It is understood she was carrying a false passport and more than AUD\$550,000 (€365,000) in foreign currency.

Early evidence from former officers indicates a “systematic culture of corruption and intimidation” at every level of police forces in all Australian states.

Two unnamed witnesses from Topolski’s work-team have been offered protective custody by the Australian Army.

(End of sample)

NOTES



Background

It's perhaps unusual to add a commentary to a novel, yet it does seem valid here to provide some kind of background explanation.

The *Yabbies* project was born way back in late 1998 or thereabouts, and has come out in a number of different forms since then: first as an interactive website, then as a screenplay, a standalone draft novel with explanatory notes between each text-item, and finally here as a fairly conventional novel. In each case, its core structure has always been much the same, as 'story-fragments' that come together in seemingly-random form:

Bits and pieces drift down, in any old order, all out of sequence. An' we have to make sense of them as best we can.

So although, by its nature, a book forces the fragments into a fixed order, you should be able to dip in at random, change the thread, to perhaps give a different sense or flavour to the overall story. My own view of what 'really happened' in the context of the story is in the Timeline that follows this chapter – though in reality any other timeline could be just as valid. Note, too, that at times this sequence of fragments is deliberately *not* in chronological order – just to reinforce that sense of uncertainty about the way in which time and stories interweave through each other and themselves.

Why 'Yabbies'?

In the real world, a *yabby* is a crayfish, a crustacean of the species *cherax destructor*, a bit like a small freshwater lobster. Common

throughout much of rural Australia, they're often to be found burrowing into the walls of farm dams – hence the 'destructive' part of the species-name. They've also been an important food-source for the indigenous population since time immemorial.

I'll have to admit, though, that the link between this story and the yabby itself is fairly tenuous, because the real starting-point was the acronym YABI – 'Yet Another Book Idea'. This arose from two separate themes. One theme came in re-reading Ursula le Guin's masterful sci-fi classic *The Dispossessed*; which explores ideas and implications of a society based on true anarchist principles, and compares it with a thinly-disguised analogue of the then-current (1970s) US society and economics. The other theme was that, whilst reading about permaculture, I had a sudden realisation that we cannot achieve sustainability without a system of law that supports it – which doesn't exist at present. Yet how could we get from here to there? What could we use as a roadmap? Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* seemed a very good place to start.

The catch, for me, was that le Guin takes a few rather important short-cuts. In particular, she places the two societies on related yet separate worlds; and the core driver for her story is that, for the first time since the societies separated, one of the people from the anarchist culture chooses to return to the homeworld, as a visiting scientist. These short-cuts do help to make her story stronger, to emphasise the contrasts, the clashes in worldview. Yet they also tend to distance the story from our own experience, in which everything and everyone must coexist somehow on the same crowded planet. So instead of le Guin's separate worlds, what if there were no boundaries? How would an anarchistic, sustainable society protect itself from predatory possessionist cultures? How could it deal with visitors – with tourists, even? That was probably where this story really started.

Why Australia?

For a number of practical reasons, I chose to place the main part of the story in Australia. I was living there at the time, and it is of course a lot easier to build a story around a place that's known. But there were other reasons too, that helped that choice to make more sense:

- Australia is a single nation on an 'island continent': it shares no land-border with any other country – which makes it easier to create and maintain a radically different social structure from other countries.
- Australia has a strong tradition of a 'fair go' – fair treatment of everyone, regardless of class, religion or (at least post-Second World War) ethnic background or race.
- Australia has a strong tendency to radical or egalitarian movements, particularly since the gold-rush period and the Eureka Stockade (1854).
- Australia is a strange amalgam of cultures, where West meets East and – in the cities especially – where almost every ethnic group is represented.
- Modern (i.e. European) Australia was based on the theft of an entire country – the dishonest claim that the land was 'owned by no-one' – and "began as a dumping-ground for criminals", as the historian Robert Hughes put it: "we had nowhere to go but up, and we've been going up ever since!"

However, it's a historical reality that the governments of the self-styled 'Lucky Country' have repeated almost every mistake made elsewhere, but usually ten or so years later – hence much of the 'luck' was simply that other people had had to work out how to recover from those mistakes, so that Australia could recover more quickly. We might also note Karl Marx's purported statement that the two countries he thought least likely to embrace communism

were Russia and India – two countries that in fact *most* embraced his theories. So I make no real assumptions there: if the *Yabbies* scenario were ever to eventuate in real life, it could indeed happen in Australia – but it could just as well happen somewhere else.

Sustainable law

‘Sustainable law’ would be a system of law that actively supports a sustainable economy. The story’s fictional character Dr Don Mercer, fairly early on in his 3QJ radio-interview, describes the background as follows:

The original idea for the sustainable law project came from permaculture. [It] aims to interweave the needs of people with the needs of the environment, so that all needs are met in a sustainable way – hence permaculture, permanent agriculture. But it can’t really be sustainable, at the level of the whole society, unless there’s a system of law that fully supports it – which is where the idea of sustainable law comes in.

Present statute law is not sustainable. It is primarily designed to attempt to control the inherent chaos created by the possession property-model – and for the most part succeeds only in making the chaos worse for (almost) everyone. It suffers from all the problems of the money-based economic model: in particular, it fails to recognise the futility of trying to define absolute controls for inherent uncertainties. And it evades many fundamental problems – such as many international environmental issues – either by ignoring them, or abandoning them into the ‘too-hard’ basket. And it is far, far too complex: the formal statement that ‘ignorance is no defence within the law’ no longer makes any practical sense, given that in Australia, for example, tax law alone, *each year*,

runs to many new volumes of impenetrable ‘legalese’. Even full-time professionals can’t keep up with the flood of new laws and regulations, let alone we ordinary mortals...

By contrast, the common-law mostly *is* sustainable – particularly that which deals with interpersonal issues rather than property-based ones. And there seems to be a significant difference in the wisdom available from judges and magistrates – who implement the meaning of law – rather than that from the random contortions of lawyers and the legislature – who, all too often, seem more concerned with arbitrary advantage than anything else...

The core of sustainability – as is also illustrated well in most common-law – is a clear awareness of mutual responsibilities that interweave in complex yet often unpredictable ways. Hence the key change described here is a shift in emphasis from rights to responsibilities – for example, from supposed *rights* of exclusive-possession to the *responsibilities* of stewardship.

Sustainable law places its emphasis not on individual ‘rights’ – as at present – but on *mutual* responsibilities. The core of the law would not be a Bill of Rights, but a Charter of Responsibilities. This does *not* mean that individuals would have no rights as such. Instead, as in current British traffic law, individual rights arise implicitly, yet directly, from defined mutual responsibilities. Any ‘declaration of rights’ *over* others is seen as arbitrary, and (as an *a priori* assertion) is usually indefensible in legal terms. By contrast, a reasoned case *must* be provided for any assertion of asymmetry in responsibilities – especially where a responsibility is assigned only to others – and is thus, once accepted, far easier to sustain and maintain. This also ensures that *no-one* gains arbitrary ‘rights’ which provides them with automatic priority over all others – an endemic problem arising from much current law.

Another key reason for this emphasis is that whilst individual rights do arise directly from mutual responsibilities, personal responsibilities are often absent from most definitions of personal rights. If

mentioned at all, the responsibilities needed to achieve those rights are assigned implicitly to others, but *not* to self – hence the all-too-common notion that “*I* have rights, *you* have responsibilities”. In practice, a declared ‘Bill of Rights’ tends to reinforce a toddler-age self-centredness – crippling the entire culture in childish fights about personal priority and privilege.

By instead shifting the emphasis from ‘rights’ to responsibilities, sustainable law shifts the basis of property away from arbitrary ‘rights’ of possession, and towards the explicit responsibilities of stewardship. This includes not just property-holding, but also full responsibility for property-disposal – the ‘anti-property’ of waste, pollution, environmental damage, exploitation and injustice for which no-one, under present law, either wants or needs to accept responsibility. This does not mean that individuals become personally responsible for carrying out all property-disposal as such, but that they *are* responsible that it is done appropriately – and also to minimise the need for property-disposal, by reducing waste and (unlike the ‘consumer society’) unneeded acquisitions.

Arbitrary and wasteful exploitation of any kind becomes illegal *because* it is irresponsible: yet it is *everyone*’s responsibility – not that of some arbitrarily blamed ‘Other’ – to reduce and minimise waste. Because the responsibilities are placed on everyone, in all circumstances and contexts, the effective rights do remain very similar to those of the present – without promoting the dangerous self-centredness implied in the current concept of ‘rights’

A side-effect is that most sustainable law can be reduced to a clear set of legal principles and guidelines that can be far less complex than present statute law. This is paralleled by an awareness that so-called ‘morals’ are little more than a lazy-person’s avoidance of ethics. Instead of hiding behind the smokeshield of ‘rights’, the onus is placed on everyone to show how the respective actions (and inactions) support those principles of mutual responsibility – and what to do when they don’t.

Property and money

A core theme of the story here explores and contrasts the implied outcomes of two different property-models:

- *possession* – the explicit right to exploit a resource without reference to others either in the present or elsewhere, and to exclude others from access to that resource;
- *stewardship* – acceptance of the responsibility to appropriately manage a resource in the context of others in the present and elsewhere, and thus the implicit right to exploit that resource as an expression of that responsibility to self and others.

At present, the possession-based model is the norm in ‘western’ macro-economies: it is the key concept that underlies all ‘western’ property-law, including finance and ‘economics’.

At present, the stewardship model is the *internal* norm in many if not most micro-economies in ‘western’ economies – such as with family, charity, support-group, immediate friends and colleagues, and also *within* most businesses – and on a larger scale in many if not most ‘traditional’ economies (though a possession-based model is often used *between* unrelated groups).

A huge practical problem we face is that the possession-model gives ‘better’ results in the short-term, yet is invariably disastrous in the longer-term. It usually *seems* more efficient at a local scale, but the reality is that it is usually very ineffective at a global scale – “forests precede civilisations, and deserts follow them”, to quote the 18th-century French writer Chateaubriand. The key word here is ‘*seems*’: in essence, a possession-economy actually ‘works’ only by stealing from the future, and/or from others in the present or past. Its inherent logic of ‘winner-steals-all’ can only be run as a pyramid-game: when there’s no more that can be brought in at the bottom of the pyramid, the structure is forced to cannibalise on itself, eventually to oblivion. Many of the environmental and other

indicators imply that we're dangerously close to that tipping-point right now, at a truly global scale.

A return to barter is not a viable solution to the problems of the possession-economy; and the same applies to *every* would-be 'alternative currency' model that I've seen to date. The concept of barter depends on exclusion – withholding – and thus exists only under a possession-based model. Money, as a mutually-agreed standardised intermediate token for barter, likewise only exists in the special case of a possession-based property-model. It does not exist, and is not used, within a true stewardship model.

In the *Yabbies* context, the removal of money from the economy – the 'no-money' economy described in the story – is actually an inherent side-effect of the change to a stewardship property-model. For outsiders, living in a society with a possession-based property-model (i.e. the model which is 'normal' in our current society), it's all too easy to make the mistake of thinking that because there's no money, everything is 'free' – which is definitely *not* the case! For insiders, the real 'currency' is respect: the economy essentially operates on self-responsibility and mutual respect – neither of which appear to be deemed necessary (in the short-term, at least) in a possession-based economy.

A problem of power

The current politics, economics, social mores and concept of ownership in 'western' societies can best be described as based on the self-centred psychology of a toddler's possessive temper-tantrum. A key theme of the story is to explore the possibilities that would become available if we support a social psychology in which the society as a whole can grow beyond that childish state.

To make sense of those power-issues in social context, I've found it useful to build outward from a set of flat definitions, which you'll

see applied in practice throughout the story:

- *Power is the ability to do work, as an expression of personal choice* – where ‘work’ can take any form, at any level, and needs to be understood as a synonym of both ‘play’ and ‘learn’, and also ‘relate’ with others and with self.
- *Responsibility is ‘response-ability’, the ability to choose responses appropriate to the context.* It is essential to understand that responsibility is *not* a synonym for blame, which itself is actually an act of violence and/or abuse.
- *Violence is any attempt, in any form and at any level, to create the illusion of empowering the self by disempowering any other* – in other words, any attempt to prop oneself up by putting others down is an act of violence. Trashing the environment or kicking the cat is just as much an act of violence as physical assault.
- *Abuse is any attempt to offload responsibility onto another, or to take responsibility from any other, without their express involvement and consent.*

The *only* ultimate source of power is from within the self. Each person can, however, assist others in creating that power. Power is created by individual responsibility. Violence and abuse create the *illusion* of power, but in fact reduce the overall amount of power available. The key distinction between violence and abuse is that the aim of the former is to leave the Other without apparent power; the aim of the latter is to co-opt the Other’s power.

Violence and power are mutually exclusive; it is not possible to be both violent (or abusive) and powerful at the same time – and the delusion that it *is* possible is a key source (arguably *the* key source) of dysfunction in our society.

Transition

“The whole system is so fragile that, quite honestly, there is a real risk that it could collapse at any time, in a really big way. We already know that it tends to break down anyway, quite often – such as in the Depression years of the 1890s and 1920s, or the computer-driven stock-market crash of 1989 – but what we’re seeing is that those problems are inherent in the system, so to speak, and that the whole thing is held together by little more than wishful thinking.”

So says the character Don Mercer, in his interview with Radio 3QJ in an early part of the story’s timeline. It’s factually true that “there is a real risk that it could collapse at any time, in a really big way”. But it’s perhaps the last comment there that is the most disconcerting: “the whole thing is held together by little more than wishful thinking”.

It’s all the interlinks and cross-dependencies in the current overall system that make it so fragile: for example, a factory that depends on ‘just-in-time’ inventory-management will be unable to produce anything if there are any transport problems at all. The systematic removal of the backups and redundancies as part of so-called ‘economic rationalism’ has increased the fragility to the point where there are often no alternatives in case of failure. At present, the overall system can probably withstand a single failure in any single key sub-system; but with simultaneous multiple failures, catastrophic collapse becomes increasingly likely.

The 3QJ interview refers to a real incident of this type in Victoria, Australia, with disastrous impacts on the state’s energy-supplies, threatening the viability of the state as a whole. The Japanese earthquake of March 2011 is another example: a huge earthquake, which then triggered an almost unprecedented tsunami, which in

turn caused lethal damage to a poorly-managed and decidedly risk-prone nuclear power station. On a world scale, much the same applies: for the most part, the system is still robust enough to withstand one major failure at a time, but not multiple failures at the same time. And Murphy's Law is the only law in town...

For the purposes of the story, I chose three fairly arbitrary examples of global-scale failures, as described in the Cabinet-meeting transcript.

The first is a feedback-loop in algorithmic trading-bots, similar to the 1989 stock-market crash. Some people never learn from past mistakes – especially if it seems there's a quick profit to be made...

The second is a computer-virus that targets internet routers, conceptually similar to the Stuxnet worm that was used to target the Iranian nuclear programme. There's always some fool who fails to think about the risks of unintended consequences...

The third example, though – the impact of the 'flare' – might take a little more explanation. For this I imagined a new processor-technology called the 'Zell effect', which can pack far higher density onto each chip – obviously desirable in many ways. But the take-up of the new technology is so fast that it already dominates the market before a fatal flaw is identified: it's at risk from certain types of cosmic radiation associated with the peak of the sun's thirteen-year sunspot cycle. For commercial reasons – such as happened in the real-life case of the Ford Pinto car – the risk is first concealed, then conveniently forgotten. In the story, an unusually strong flare with a huge coronal mass ejection would destroy or damage most new technology dependent on the chip-design; the flare in turn pushes the Earth's magnetic field into an unstable state, flicking the magnetic poles rapidly between North and South, in effect acting as a bulk-eraser on any unshielded magnetic-based records. (The science is still out on whether that would actually happen – some scientists argue for a slower, more sedate reversal – but the core concept is scientifically sound.)

Even on its own, each of these impacts would be disastrous. If all three impacts were occur together, as in the story, it's clear that the results would indeed be catastrophic.

Given that events like these are real possibilities, it seems wise to at least *consider* some alternatives to the lethally fragile systems we have now... and explore how to reduce the overall risk, and how to recover from them if – or *when* – the risks eventuate.

A little bit of magic

For many people, one of the more difficult parts of the original *Yabbies* project was the inclusion of references to a variety of so-called ‘intuitive technologies’ – the application, *as technologies*, of various controversial phenomena such as dowsing, psychokinesis, telepathy and alchemy. It’s probably true that, to quote Arthur C Clarke, “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”. Yet somehow very few people seem to realise that the inverse is equally true: “any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology”. An interesting point...

There are several reasons why I’ve included these ‘intuitive-technologies’ in the story. One is that, to me, they’re part of my own everyday reality: I’ve been around those fields for several decades now, and have seen enough first-hand to know that there’s *something* going on that may not make sense in terms of the everyday, yet still *does* seem to exist. I’ve taught dowsers (water-diviners) for many years now: it’s long been my standard test-bed for research on how people learn the awareness and judgement aspects of *any* type of skill. I have a close friend in Australia who is a real alchemist, creating compounds with the same chemical formulae as in standard chemistry, but with radically different chemical properties. I’ve even seen a real example of intentional psychokinesis, by a young woman – one of my design-students, at the time – on whom I based the character

Jeni Silver. (Sadly, her real-life fate was similar to that of the character Andy to whom she briefly refers in the story-fragment ‘Lifter-crew’...) Sure, the whole subject-area is often drowning in a morass of wishful-thinking and self-delusion: yet unlike many self-styled ‘skeptics’, I do have enough experience to have some sense of what is real and what is not. (Most of the time, anyway...) And beyond all those newage inanities, there *is* something real, concrete, practical, the solid glimmerings of a tangible technology – even if, as I would freely admit, usually far from ‘everyday’ as yet.

Many people would no doubt prefer to dump all such things into the random grab-bag of ‘the supernatural’, as a source either for uncritical hype or equally-uncritical ‘skepticism’. Yet in either case, it kind of misses the point. In each of the examples I’d used in *Yabbies*, current physics does actually allow for their existence: for example, the previously ‘supernatural’ concept of action-at-a-distance has now long been proven, at least at a quantum level, and arguably beyond. Note too that most technologies consist of taking something that is highly improbable in the natural world – a gas-explosion, for example – and providing conditions under which it becomes highly probable – such as the gas-explosions inside a car-engine. Hence these somewhat-imagined ‘intuitive technologies’ are perhaps not quite so bizarre as they might seem. Somewhere between science-fantasy and science-fiction, perhaps: but a lot could happen in technology in the fifty-year span of this story, as we know well within our own real world of today.

Yet what I really wanted to explore here is the way in which science itself becomes a kind of ‘exclusive possession’ – the notion that there is only one truth, and that no other truth is possible. I’ll admit that I’m anarchist enough to want to shake people out of their comfort zone a bit, to get them into a stronger habit of challenging assumptions. And if the anarchistic philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend is right, that “the only approach which does not inhibit progress ... is ‘anything goes’”, then anything that purports to

be ‘the truth’ has to be considered suspect, a vain yet ultimately arbitrary ‘exclusive possession’. Or perhaps, to quote Feyerabend again, “‘anything goes’ is not a ‘principle’ I hold... but the terrified exclamation of a rationalist who takes a closer look at history”. Letting go of possession of ‘truth’ is perhaps just as important as letting go of the delusions of possession of ‘things’.

Whilst working on this edition, it became clear that I was actually dealing with at least two very different themes: the ‘big-picture’ focus on politics and economics, and large-scale social change over long periods of time; and the more intimate or personal side of those stories, around each person’s experience of those clashes of worldview, to which that clash between the ‘scientific’ and magical’ paradigms would add yet another useful counterpoint.

Yet each of these themes appeals to rather different audiences: as I’ve discovered to my cost, there aren’t that many people who would comfortably straddle both worlds. So at one point I did try to split the story into two separate parts, to focus on only one of those audiences at a time. But it actually didn’t work *as a story* in that form: one side become a disjointed set of fragments, and the other a simple narrative-story without any real depth. It was only when I brought the two parts together again that it started to make sense, with the political and conceptual ideas brought to life through the social context of the Troubles and of Steve’s more personal journey. To me, the ‘magical’ themes add another layer to all of that, weaving the story as a cross-current, a counterpoint that brings up deeper questions about reality and our role within it. But if such things do annoy you beyond what you’re willing to bear, it’s perhaps simplest just to ignore them: they’re not actually essential to the story as such. Add some other theme of your own instead, perhaps, and see where it will take you?

Yes, it's real

How much of this is real? After all, it's all fiction, isn't it? These are questions I see quite often in relation to *Yabbies*.

The short answer is, yes, the text is fiction, and the characters are fictional, too. But the issues the project addresses are not fiction at all: they're painfully real. All of the references are real as well: for example, that's the real content of the Emergency Management Act of one of the Australian states; the story-fragment on Weikart and 'Plan, Do, Review' describes what really happened; likewise the reference to the magazine 'Women & Guns'. The drink-driving poster and the 18th-century broadsheet are exactly as originally published. The references to aboriginal culture and relationship with landscape are based on formal research, whilst the terms that Steve interprets as sound-patterns are derived from an aboriginal dictionary. And all the references on 'intuitive technologies' are real, too: Kenneth Batcheldor, Julian Isaacs, Rupert Sheldrake and F David Peat are all real researchers who've published proven work in the respective contexts. Don's thesis doesn't exist, as far as I know, but otherwise just about everything that purports to be in the present or past is derived directly from real material.

Any references to the future are fictional, of course. Yet they're likewise based on a lot of careful study – the kind of assessments I do in my 'day job' as a futurist. I'll admit that, yes, they're somewhat caricatured, to emphasise the point: Tony Morrison's tendency to drop into the most appalling clichés – and somehow get away with it – is one of the more egregious examples. But there've been plenty of colleagues in Australia, for example, who regarded the depiction of the Topolski affair as too *mild* rather than too extreme.

Perhaps the most unfair portrait is that of the US under the control of 'Moral America': but the blunt reality is that it could indeed happen that way, because all the seeds for a literally 'unholy

alliance' between corporatism and religious fundamentalism can be seen all too clearly in present-day US politics. The fatally-flawed logic of the Bill of Rights does point directly to an *Animal Farm*-type society in which "all humans have equal rights, but some are more equal than others". And if not the US, then some other country: the 'winner-steals-all' logic of possession in a social context leads directly to a stratified society in which some people become treated as the possessed 'human resources' of others.

(In many ways the old slave-based economies from two or three centuries ago have continued on, almost unchanged: the only difference is that much of the work of the former slaves is now done by machines – which depend on prodigious amounts of energy, from energy sources that are fast running out. When those energy-sources do indeed become scarce, expect to see the return of a true slave-economics again, though probably in disguised form at first – as in the use of literally captive prison-labour.)

The responses of the various characters to the transition, and other contexts in which they find themselves, were all straightforward enough: I built up a picture of each person, put myself in their shoes, and wrote down whatever seemed to come up for them in the respective context. For those, it's not about analysis, but about *feeling*: and the feeling itself has its own logic that drives that person's decisions and experience. Very real, in its own way – even if 'only' fiction.

As for the 'Yabbies scenario' itself – the SusLaw framework – could that ever work? My short answer is, yes, I do think it would. Don Mercer's summary in his Radio 3QJ interview puts it well:

It would be hard, for a while, but after that I honestly believe that no-one would want to go back to what we have now. The present system is so ridiculously inefficient, in every way. It would be much more effective – and, I honestly believe, much more satisfying, for everyone – to belong to a literal 'commonwealth', in

which resources are owned simply in terms of use, and are used as needed. And yes, as far as law is concerned, it really is as simple as I've said: for example, we really could replace every single monetary transaction with the simple phrase "What do you need?"

Some people have said that "this goes against human nature" or some such: yet whilst myopically stupid self-centredness is indeed all too human, altruism and sharing are just as much part of 'human nature' too. And the reality is that we get the behaviour that we reward: so given that our current 'economics' actively rewards selfishness and actively punishes almost every form of responsibility, it's hardly surprising that we get what we currently get. If instead we were to provide conditions that could support responsibility, rather than punish it, does it not seem probable that we might see better results than at present?

There's far, far more that would need to be worked out, of course, and many of the true complexities and problems would only surface once it's up and running – there's no way to know beforehand. Yet as a colleague puts it, "the devil is in the details, but the angel is in the architecture" – and there *is* enough of an architecture here on which we could indeed get started.

At the very least, food for thought, I hope? Over to you...

-