

volume 2, number 9

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CONREPORTSVILLE (OCTOBER SERVING)

'How come' said James Styles in his backward and shy way 'there was no report on ANZAPACON in the last Chunder! ? Even a quickie report?'

Well, I don't know about the frequency of quickies at ANZAPACON (or ANZAPACON 1 as we call it for long), but here's a fumbling conreport.

October 1978 marked the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association and various long-toothed gents (mainly John Bangsund) felt that some celebration was in order - in particular that a small convention should be staged to mark the event.

Former members, as well as present members and waiting-listers, were invited to attend the convention and/or contribute to the mailing, and for this time only the copycount was 60.

The program was to be 'relaxed' and indeed, although a few formal items were planned ('How to draw on stencil' and a panel of former official editors, for example), the only definible events seem to have been a chess tournament (eventually won by Leigh Edmonds, so I am told, having been organised by James Styles) and a couple of auctions which raised money for various fan funds as follows: DUFF - \$129.30, GUFF - \$74.05, and TAFF - \$60.36. The curious amounts result from the various percentages allocated by the donors. Top price was \$61, paid by Gary Mason for the most hallowed item in Australian fandom - the ex-AFPA duplicator (damn! I've just realised that I forgot to pass on to Gary the secret handshake at the same time.). Oh yes, and then there was 'putting out the mailing', an event which seemed to occupy most of the weekend(October 14-15).

I suppose that the production of the 13-page ANZAPACON one-shot ought also to be mentioned. STAR TREK (on Peter Darling's TRS-80) was probably the favourite occupation, although ping-pong and darts also made a showing, and the vile practise of smoking cigarettes was also indulged in by a few. Mostly there was a lot of talking.

ANZAPAns came from such far-off and uncivilised places as Mackay and Sydney, and maybe there'll be another ANZAPACON in '79.

ANZAPACON OVERFLOW

Some of us took a few photos at ANZAPACON, and Helen Swift has suggested that duplicates could be sold with the profits to go to the various fan funds. (She has an ulterior motive, of course, since she wants at least one of my negatives) This could be a bit expensive, but how many people would be interested in (i) slides, (ii) color prints, or (iii) black and white prints?

Someone left behind a hardcover book purchased at the auction: name the book and it will be forwarded to you.

Leigh Edmonds is selling copies of Mailing 64 (413 pages) for \$5, and on top of that you pay postage. (LE: PO Box 103, Brunswick, Victoria 3056)

Guess I ought to mention that about 50 people showed up for ANZAPACON at one time or another. Oh yeah, and if you haven't got a copy of Merv Binns' contribution, drop me a line and I'll include it with your next Chunder!

REVOLT OF THE FANEDS! - replies to reviews in the most recent Chunder!

VAN IKIN: I feel I owe it to you to say how much I appreciate the fact that you'd obviously read the copy of SCIENCE FICTION 2 which you reviewed in the last Chunder! To give them credit, most faneds appear to have read at least the parts of the 'zine they have commented upon, but we've also had a number of reviews (chiefly in students papers, etc) where the reviewer seems only to have flipped through the pages. At least I know your remarks were based on what we'd printed, not on a cursory glance at it.

You managed to tread on a number of my most sensitive corns: the doubts about where to draw the line between 'encouraging' writers and fostering the second-rate; my fears that, whilst I think I may be able to write sufficiently perceptive criticism, I know my critical style is 'heavy going'; and other worries such as the justification of the use of colour in ENIGMA. (Colour is our 'image' - whatever that is - and we tend to worry about surviving a change to our image.)

Anyway, my thanks for giving me a response to think about; and - since all reviews tend to set me thinking - my thanks for giving me comments worth thinking about. There's a long piece on Jack Vance in the next SF, and I'm hoping you might find it more enjoyable than my piece on Harding. Time will tell....

(JF: Aw shucks. I didn't find the Harding piece unenjoyable - just strange. And provided there's a long section on TO LIVE FOREVER in the Vance piece I know I'll find it interesting...)

PERRY MIDDLEMISS: I was rather amazed to see the response my letter in Chunder! 7 received. To be honest, after you published it I thought most of the responses would have been of a negative nature, but it's disappointing in a way to realise that a lot of Australian faneds are in the same boat.

If any young aspiring faned was to ask me today what s/he should do about publishing, I suppose I would suggest they start a personalzine (or whatever it is they're interested in) and initially circulate it through an apa. However, they should also circulate it outside the apa as well. I go into this a little more in APPLESAUCE. Helen and I will be doing so with SYZYGY but I would like to see a lot more Australian fans doing the same.

I haven't seen CE3K, and from all the reports I've read I don't intend to. I gather the last fifteen minutes are the best but I can't see myself paying around four bucks for fifteen minutes worth.

Thanks for pointing out the errors in the Susan Wood interview in SPECTRE 1. Paul Anderson also noted the 'Jack Gaughan' blooper. At least, as he pointed out, we now know how to pronounce his name.

Publication date for SPECTRE 2 has been put back until the start of February due to a printing snarl. It was either then or the start of December. I would have preferred the earlier date but that would have necessitated a rushed job, and I didn't want to sacrifice quality for quantity. Besides that I have an important exam on November 16 and I have a decided lack of material on hand. So February it is.

TIM DAWSON: Thank you for the unexpected copy of Chunder! - receiving it was a pleasant sensation, even if reading it was less so. I was somewhat piqued by your cavalier dismissal of ETHERLINE Four, since I edited it. It was not carelessness that omitted details of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club but an oversight that earlier editions did not suffer from. As to the fiction, for the others I cannot answer but I freely admit that I was not destined to be an author. And the production? I will say that not all of us have your experience. It was only the second I have produced and it was a vast improvement



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on the preceding ones. Almost all the current members of the MSFC are new to fandom. We still haunt the second floor of SPACE AGE on Friday evenings from 7.30.

Your readers may be interested to know that I am organising a picket and protest petition for the opening night of Bakshi's LORD OF THE RINGS (somewhat belated, unfortunately). It looks like being a lonely vigil at present but perhaps there are others who feel as I do.

(JF: Outraged Tolkien fans can contact Tim at 11 Murphy St, Kew V 3101)

JOHN ROWLEY: "... is just beginning to emerge from the fiction-publishing stage." indeed.

ARGO NAVIS has never contained any fiction, and I consider it odd that one who writes a review seems not to know what he's writing about. 'Odd' to say the least, which is all I will say on the matter for the time being.

And as for the influence of Richard Veis, well I must admit that I have read one of his fanzines, but I didn't like it. If influence on me he has had, it must be indirect influence, which means that Veis's influence must permeate fandom more than I realised if he has affected my zine to the extent you imply.

Without having read Lloyd Biggle Jnr's article, I heartily condemn his attack on pseudo-scholarly journals about science fiction, but then as the editor of one (or do I presume too much) maybe I am ... er, biased?

Pseudo-scholasticism can be FUN! But then, I wonder how many people have noticed the underlying humour in all my writing.

(JF: I didn't mean to imply that ARGO NAVIS had ever published fiction - though I admit that is a possible reading - but rather that ARGO NAVIS was at a particular stage of sophistication with respect to the selection of material. I was suggesting that Veis's influence was now quite vast, but I am worried that I might be exaggerating. The pseudo-scholasticism Lloyd Biggle was writing about isn't fun.)

LEE HARDING: About this here 'special' issue of Van Ikin's SCIENCE FICTION, I did not think it necessary to make a point in my 'interview' that you have, over the years, read (some?) of my writing "carefully and perceptively", and on several occasions muttered words which, while you may not have considered them in the form of advice, have very much influenced my development as a writer, for better or worse. Some things are personal. But the inference as printed was, unfortunately, that you had written reviews of my stuff, which is not quite correct. I do recall a very funny piece in an early ASFR when you reviewed NEW WRITINGS IN SF No. 11 and tore my story and Jack Wodhams' to shreds - but you did 'phone me and ask permission first. Sorry if I gave the wrong impression in the interview.

As for Van 'appreciation' - this came as a surprise, and I have already written to Van remarking that I thought it was a little, er, premature. I also share your puzzlement with his review of THE WEEPING SKY: he didn't seem to have read the book I had written. Like so many fans he seemed to grow enamoured of the window-dressing: the idea (read metaphor) meaning all. Not so. My novel was not about the weeping sky, nor about the conflict between science and religion. What was it about? Search me. I can only beg off with the words of John Rowe Townsend: "The author doesn't necessarily understand better than the reader what his book is about". Pity about your review of THE WEEPING SKY - that I would very much have liked to see in print. The local reviews - in the professional press, like - have been excellent. I would not have objected to the letting of a little blood from the touch of your scalpel...



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(JF: Chunder!, of course, always seeks to serve its readers' wishes, so after a quick mugging in a back alley of Melbourne, my review of THE WEEPING SKY was liberated from the clutches of the depraved Bangsund, and follows hereunder.)

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Dear John (Bangsund),

You ask me to review Lee Harding's THE WEEPING SKY. I'm sure it will not have escaped your notice that I've not previously reviewed any of Lee's stories or novels, and I have always felt that I had the best of reasons for not writing about Lee or his fiction: I am too close to him, personally.

But I think I shall try, partly because you ask so elegantly, and partly because last night I went to the movies and saw an Ibsen double-bill. Ibsen, I think, cheated by writing so much about people he didn't like or, more generally, people for whom he had no sympathy. That, it seems to me, makes writing too easy. But perhaps if I have that sort of belief I ought to think again about not writing on the fiction of someone as close to me as Lee is.

First I should dispose of one troubling problem - or at least bring it to your attention. THE WEEPING SKY, as found in a volume of the same name published by Cassell Australia (\$5.95 RRP), isn't exactly the novel Lee wrote. Now Lee and I had a fair discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of copy-editing, with particular reference to THE WEEPING SKY, and it was our conclusion that copy-editing was a good thing, but that screwing up a book wasn't. THE WEEPING SKY seems to have been subjected to a good deal of the latter and precious little of the former. And it gets worse. Let us hypothesize a jacket-copy author looking for a quick summary of the plot in the first few pages. A h, here we are - 'The Wall was a mystery they had come here to unravel' (page 2). Give 'em an inch and they'll take an ell, I always say - what do you always say?

The other side of what was done to Lee's manuscript has to be described in more general terms. Cassell decided to metricate the novel, so they did - in places. They decided that one character's accent was too broad, so it was translated into standard English - in places. Names were changed (of course), and bits and pieces added and subtracted throughout. All in all, I guess Lee has discovered the meaning of involuntary collaboration. (Parenthetically (he remarked tautologically) I might note that Lee finds this sort of treatment very different from that he is currently receiving from another publisher.)

Well, having tried to make some distinction between the book written by Lee John Harding and that published by Cassell Australia, I now find myself dealing somewhat hesitantly with a chunk of paper of uncertain parentage; but I shall not further make that distinction, and will pretend that LJH is the onlie begetter.

I have complained, over the years, and privately to Lee, that there is a certain sameness in all his fiction, so far as I am concerned. I do not think it is just his world-view, which is rather different from mine, but rather that his machinery for dealing with outside impressions is so different from mine.

I think that I take the world as basically knowable, that there are a few rough edges and dark corners near which one must tread carefully, but in general, though we may not like how the world works, we do know that it works and something about how it works. Lee, it seems to me, takes a different view - that if the world is knowable we do not know very much about it, and that such knowledge as we have should be guarded carefully and treasured as something rare and beautiful and (though this is a somewhat hackneyed description which I find embarrassing to use) there are some things we are not meant to know.



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At least, that's how we seem to differ whenever I finish reading one of Lee's stories, whether it's a short story or a short novel like this one. Perhaps I can begin to explain why I feel this way.

Far too much science fiction, as many observers have noted, is based upon the notion that human beings are extremely simple-minded (and, extending that, that none, or very few, are devious). Newspapers and television and pulp fiction all rely upon this self-perception amongst their various audiences. In science fiction, this approach works itself out largely through idiot plots, since the persons in science fiction are almost non-existent. Serious fiction tries, I like to think, to work with more realistic, more human, humans.

Science fiction, however, is a quite rich field for exploration and variation. Lee Harding, so far as I can make out, has for almost twenty years mined one little patch: a protagonist, almost always alone, seeks to understand an artefact which is clearly the product of Someone Else. (I do not suggest that Lee hasn't written other kinds of science fiction, but he does seem to have taken a lot of gold out of those particular hills.)

I do not see this as a serious problem: understanding other people may be difficult (but that's not likely to arise in science fiction), but dealing with the products of a civilisation, however loosely defined, doesn't seem to me to warrant serious consideration - I'm sorry that Lee wastes his time on it.

In THE WEEPING SKY the protagonist is a sixteen-year-old: the artefact is a weeping lens (rather than a weeping sky). The age of the protagonist is determined by the market for which Lee is writing, of course, but it nevertheless is restricting in terms of the perceptions which may be relayed to the reader. But because such a protagonist is so much easier for the writer to handle, such a choice is common enough in science fiction - particularly, say, with Heinlein.

The other way to make one's authorial life easy is to create a very simple society, probably highly regulated, and not too different from the popular impressions of past human societies. THE WEEPING SKY is set in a sort of kitsch-medieval alternate world which, because there really isn't room for development, lack the charm of, say, LUD-IN-THE-MIST.

The final handicap with which Lee saddles himself is, as one might almost predict from the context, that ponderousness of language which some mistake for poetry. Here's some sample dialogue.

Donella: "But how can you know this? ... How can you say that such a thing will be true?"

Conrad: "I cannot say for sure, Donella: I can only surmise there is a high probability that this will occur."

Conrad then goes into an explanation which presumably is so nauseating that even Lee cannot bring himself to report it. And then:

"Donella gazed at him in fascination. It was hard for her to visualize what he was saying; her mind had not been trained to understand such things. Conrad seemed to realize this, for he lowered his voice and said gently, 'Donella, I know how difficult this must be for you: but try to understand. It is my task - my sworn duty - to observe everything strange, to record what I have seen; and, where possible, to make conjecture upon what I have seen. This much I have done.'"

Of such stuff are reporters for TRUTH made! (But we should be grateful that the last sentence of this extract from pages 116-117 was not "This much have I done.")

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Given that starting point, it seems unlikely that a 'good' novel will result. In some ways the result is disappointing, but it is also true that THE WEEPING SKY is surprisingly readable. Lee does have a story (or almost a story) to tell, and while the story is jogging along it is almost possible to forget its surroundings. Perhaps, like some other science fiction writers, Lee isn't actually telling a story, and by craft manages to give the impression that he is. Since the characters don't influence events, one might assume that the novel is to some extent about character development, yet in fact there's little evidence that the characters do change, aside from the author's earnest assurances that this is the case. Nor does the novel tell us very much about our world (except for giving Lee's views on the fallout shelter problem - see pages 166-168). So what the subject of the novel might be I can't tell you.

But THE WEEPING SKY is readable, as I have said. "Because he has done it so often before, Lee is able to interest the reader in his puzzle that isn't a puzzle. One does want to know something about the bloody lens (er, you don't really find out, by the way) and, if you are like me, you will keep reading in the hope that something of interest will develop in one of the characters (for me, nothing did - they seem to have been pushed around in response to plot requirements). In my case, of course, I was interested in seeing what Lee would do next, and that perhaps won't be so much fun for other readers. On the other hand, other readers may find the plot more palatable. This is one of the major problems, I guess: that because I've seen it done before I'm hardly able to be enthusiastic about this umpteenth repetition.

I don't know whether you would enjoy THE WEEPING SKY - it doesn't seem to fit into your pattern of reading material - but it will tell you something about what Lee is up to nowadays.

Regards

John (Foyster)

(I was going to review ROOMS OF PARADISE and OTHER WORLDS in this issue, but even though readers might not have had enough of book reviews, I have. So it's back to the)

#### LETTER COLUMN

JAMES STYLES: While I agree with your move to limit letters to one page, I wondered why you restricted the fanzine reviews to 2 pages after going to the trouble (and expense sadly) of acquiring the originals.

I like VOID and on the idea of 'a little touch of quality can do no harm' I can only offer that 'the end justifies the means'! Other than that I quite agree with your concise reviews....

(JF: The idea of limiting letters to one page has plainly gone down the drain. And I do agree that limiting the fanzine reviews to 2 pages wasn't very sensible, under the circumstances. However, I plan to limit them to 2 pages this time. This means carrying over to next issue not just the two book reviews, but also the glances at ANZAPA, APES and APPLESAUCE - and by then there should be another FAPA mailing to write about.)

NOOZ

GILLINGS FUND - The idea of this special sprocket is to raise funds to take/bring Walter Gillings to NOREASCON 2 in 1980, which just happens to mark 50 years of fanactivity for WG. Contributions gratefully received by John Millard, 18-86 Broadway Ave, Toronto, Ontario, CANADA M4P 1T4.



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CONVENTIONS - NOREASCON TWO I got another pile of stuff which essentially repeated the information already printed in Chunder! 7. Robin Johnson, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne Victoria 3001 is Australian agent, and the current rates are \$7 Australian supporting, and \$13.50 Australian attending.

CONVENTIONS - UNICON 5 Tony Howe sent a copy of the extremely detailed recent progress report - I hope to carry copies as a flyer with the next Chunder! // The theme for the convention is 'Science Fiction as Modern Folklore', which is what Guest of Honour Patricia Wrightson will be talking about. Other topics - alien cultures, planetary propulsion systems, SF as modern metaphysics, cosmology, etc. The Sydney TV series WHAT IS SCIENCE FICTION? will be observable through the wonders of videotape, there'll be movies, wargames, and auction, and all the usual stuff. The theme for the costume evening is 'Alien Beings' // Membership rates: \$10 to December 1, \$12 thereafter. The dates - January 27-29, and the address for mail is Antony Howe, PO Box 191, Gordon, NSW 2072. Cheques should be made payable to 'S.U. Science Fiction Association'.

CONVENTIONS - SYNCON '79 The most important news is the insert to a recent PR. The PR cites room rates of \$45 single rising to \$52 triple. This proved altogether too much for the concommittee, who announce in the flyer a new hotel (THE NEW CREST HOTEL, 111 Darlinghurst Road, KINGS BLOODY CROSS) and somewhat lower room rates - single \$24 or \$25 and double \$27 or \$28.

The program is announced in some detail in the PR. The bulk of the program will be traditional (and double-strand), and amongst the items announced are 'The Classic Future Histories', 'The Bright and New Futures', 'The Same Old Setting - Laziness or Depth?', 'The Opus', 'Childe: The Thematic-consciousness novel in SF' etc etc. Blair Ramage (13 Attunga Ave, Earlwood, NSW 2206) is in charge of the awards, and readers are invited to send their thoughts on the Ditmars to Blair. (Don't hesitate - you can't possibly produce anything more outlandish than what has already been suggested!) // Convention membership costs \$10 until March 1, \$15 thereafter, and supporting membership is \$4 all the time. Cheques should be made payable to THE SYDNEY SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION, and the address is SYNCON '79, PO Box 146, Burwood, NSW 2134.

CONVENTIONS - CUPDAYCON By the time you read this CUPDAYCON will be over. I'll try to persuade Paul Stevens to write a conreport. Hope I don't have to wait for that as long as I've been waiting for Keith Curtis's report on SYNCON '78 (SUBTLE HINT!)

UNCONVENTIONAL NEWS - The Sydney fans turned out en masse for the first anniversary of STAR WARS; Melbourne Fandom was far too lethargic for anything like that. // Vague rumours that some of this year's Ditmars still have reached the winners. // and there was going to be a para of ARARAT fandom news, but let's get on with the fanzine reviews and hear about the life and hard times of Styles next time around.

#### FANZINE REVIEWS

SF COMMENTARY (the independent magazine about science fiction) 53, April 1978 (\$1 a time from Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3001). John Birks Gillespie was nicknamed 'Dizzy' because of his eccentric behaviour. Our own and lovable Gillespie might very well be known as 'Dizzy' because of his inexhaustible ability to see the dismal side of every situation. Bruce has an unerring eye for the grey lining in every silver cloud, and in Paradise he will be complaining about the lack of central heating or of coffee-supplying facilities. For years we have been treated to series of crushing blows - a seemingly unending sequence of personal tragedies from which he is saved only by the need to continue with SFC. Now, at last in this issue he reports favourably on his personal life. But



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his manic passion for gloom and doom, you will be relieved to learn, is as intense as ever. The theme, admittedly an echo of earlier pieces in the Gillespie oeuvre, is the lack of recognition of SFC- both practically (in the form of greatly increased numbers of subscribers) and honorifically ( see page 34).

This sort of nonsense gets in the reader's way just a bit, but it is worth pushing past all that to the contents - and here I refer mainly to BRG and his letter writers. Sneja Gunew's review of Peter Nicholls' SCIENCE FICTION AT LARGE didn't tell me much at all, and the fact that I haven't yet read THE MALACIA TAPESTRY makes it hard for me to manage John McPharlin's review. Bruce has found a new and unimaginably bad format - three unjustified columns - for many of the pages, and in addition he jumps the contents all the way through the magazine. But it is worth pursuing Bruce's writing through this maze, and the letter-writers are good (when they are not still worrying Silverberg) - I think Michael Shoemaker underestimates the difference of opinion between Lee and Longstreet at Gettysburg, and it's always nice to pick up a typo in SFC (It's Sickles (as in Daniel of the same name) rather than Sicles.) If Bruce could just concentrate on putting out Australia's best fanzine and worry less about being told he was a good chap we would all benefit.

Jack Herman sent down the three latest issues of FORERUNNER. I don't know just how available it is to non-members of the Sydney Science Fiction Foundation, but I think it is sufficiently good a fanzine that people ought to pester Jack to make it generally available. The August '78 FORERUNNER (8 pages) has two pages of reviews by Jack, the first in a series on series (Gordon R Dickson) and a cryptic crossword, as well as a page of news. The September issue is down to 7 pages with much the same sort of contents as the August issue, but with a small lettercolumn. October is up to 11 pages with about two pages of news (SYNCON '78 lost \$86.38, unfortunately (coffee and printing seem fairly expensive items) - and a system for raising funds is announced which I do not understand at all - no, a mere ten minutes of solid reading (and noticing a previously-overlooked phrase) now makes it all clear to me.... Three pages of reviews and a couple more pages on series (Heinlein this time) are cut from the usual cloth, and the two pages from Shayne McCormack on running the GALAXY Bookshop are the best I've seen in these three issues of FORERUNNER. It is interesting to learn that the Dr Who books outsell Asimov, Clarke and other big names. I assume that that is for the series overall, and not each title.

FORERUNNER could be - and should be - a great image-maker for Sydney fandom. I hope it gets used that way.

PRETENTIOUS SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY is published by Michael Ward and costs \$5 for a four issue sub (Michael Ward, PO Box 1496, Cupertino, CA 95014, USA), and I have in my hands number Two of the same because Lee Harding loaned it to me. It is 28 pages, quarto, offset, saddle-stitched - in other words, looks just like the offset SFCOMMENTARY. The contents, however, are not in the SFC class, being rather bitty and boring sf-related squibs. The only saving graces are the letters and the editor's sense-of-humour: well, he did edit a newszine for a couple of years....

AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS I haven't gotten around to commenting on yet. The fifth issue doesn't have a letter column edited by me, so I guess I can say a few casual things. I think ASFN takes up more production time than is justified by its circulation (considerably less than SFC, I believe). The effort of producing 8 pages a month, almost alone, will surely tell on Merv Binns before too long. But while Merv keeps going people interested in what is happening in the professional world of science fiction are well served by ASFN (\$5 for 10 from Mervyn R Binns, 305 Swanston St, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3000).