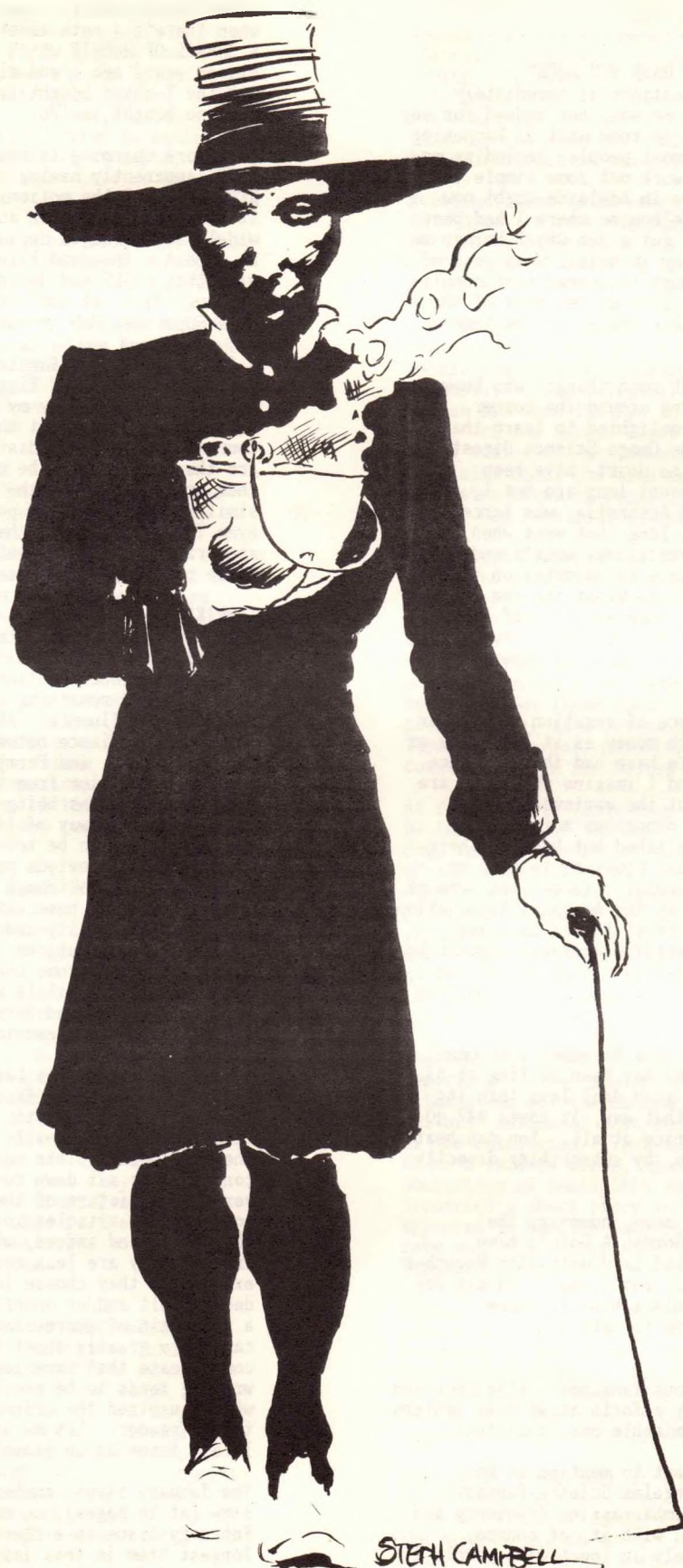


C
H
U
N
D
E
R



R
E
T
U
R
N
S

STEVE CAMPBELL

Chunder!, of which this is the first of a new series and is dated March 1987, is published by John Foyster, P.O. Box 483, Norwood, South Australia, Australia 5067 whenever he gets around to it. Round tuits are pretty rare in this neck of the woods, but I'll trap as many of 'em as I can. Artistic contributions for title and heading (of appropriate dimensions) are always welcome.

.....

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

Neither of these cosmic questions is immediately answerable for the average person, nor indeed for any person or thing. Managing to know what is happening today is quite enough for most people, including me. I suppose I can manage to work out some simple things - like how I got to be here in Adelaide right now rather than remaining in Melbourne where I had been living for twenty years; I got a job which brings me over here. I don't yet know in detail what sort of a job it is, but plainly enough it seemed sufficiently attractive to tear me away from my own part of the world, and it seemed sensible enough at the time.

SENSIBILITY AND SENSE

But you can never tell with such things: who knows what oddities may be lurking around the corner. Today, for example, I was delighted to learn that the ghastly Australian magazine *Omega Science Digest* has bitten the dust. Others, no doubt, have been appraised of this joyous event long ago but I, remote in the wastelands of South Australia, was forced to wait until the end of this long, hot week when, making my by-now almost traditional week's end visit into the centre of Adelaide - ten minutes on the 'bus or twenty minutes on foot - to visit the one extensive magazine store I know about (Jeff Harris told me) and discover, but not buy, the January 1987 *Omega* whose editorial told me that the super maggie was to cease with that issue.

Omega has been a mild source of vexation to me over the years, spending as much money as it has to be as bad as it was. Some people have had their science fiction published there and I imagine that they are rather glad about this, but the variously-naïve "fact" articles have been obnoxious not so much because they have been published but because their publication brings financial pressure to bear on decent magazines in the popular science area, one of which (*Science*, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science) folded last year, while others, such as *Scientific American*, appear to be suffering these pressures to a significant but lesser degree. I supposed I am inclined to believe that bad drives out good here, as elsewhere.

One magazine I did buy was the November 1986 *Omni*; for several months now *Omni* has been selling at \$3.95 in Australian dollars - a good deal less than its price elsewhere. Bought that way, it costs \$47.40 a year, which isn't a bad price at all. You can beat that price, if you want to, by subscribing directly for US\$28 or around \$A42.

For those who want to pay more, however, the Australian distributors (Gordon & Gotch) have provided a specially printed card with this November edition which allows you to get a year's supply for just \$A60. There's probably a hint in there somewhere, but I'm too slow to take it.

IN THIS ISSUE

Mostly, I think, stuff about fanzines. I've received quite a few lately, and my efforts at writing letters of comment are neither admirable nor consistent.

The first little item I want to mention is *De Profundis* which the Los Angeles Science-Fantasy Society mails to me with embarrassing frequency and regularity. I'm delighted with it, of course, because it keeps me remotely in touch with people I met years ago, or corresponded with for even longer, and in some ways with some I haven't met at all but

- 2 -

have come to know through the pages of *De Prof.* The minutes of the meetings of LASFS are sparkingly kept - usually these days by Mike Glyer - and form the centrepiece of each issue, at least for me: the news about forthcoming events is usually a little difficult to act on. Even so, there's a spacebinding effect occasionally - and a timebinding one, too - as when there's a note about an upcoming anniversary of A CHANGE OF HOBBIT which reminds me of my visit there eleven years ago - and might even remind me to get out the T-shirt bought last year to replace the tired red one bought in '76.

Even more charming is the reference to the Nova Mob: LASFS apparently having received, er, a shaft from NESFA, one of the motions for disposal was to forward it to The Nova Mob (on account of the Mob's widely-acknowledged seriousness). Located as I now am almost a thousand kilometres from Melbourne I do wish that LASFS had decided to pass along the NESFA trophy. Alas, it isn't to be. Perhaps I should set up a Supernova Mob in Adelaide....

A few other recent fanzines arrived from Melbourne: *Larrikin*, *Thyme*, and *Tigger*. Each of them would be insulted, I think, by my suggestion that there's a certain sameness about them, but it is true. Of course, they do have distinguishing features, which are the ones I shall be writing about here. Two of them are produced on the same duplicator, so the similarities there are perhaps not surprising. But even *The Space Vastrel* has a Melbourne-like appearance. However, let me not dilly-dally over these probably-exaggerated similarities.

LARRIKIN

Larrikin has quickly established itself as a high-class fannish fanzine. I'm not sure it has ever mentioned science fiction - but each issue has certainly had something about food. This may be the Middlemiss influence. At any rate, the somewhat unexpected alliance between Irwin, a long time publishing fan, and Perry, who although involved in fanzine production from time to time in the past had never struck me as being really committed to publishing as a way of life, has proved at least in the short term to be totally successful. It is hard to recall any previous partnership which has been so productive, and although Irwin's extensive overseas contacts plainly have enhanced both the spot illustration quality and the letter column, Perry's editorial contributions are of about the same magnitude. With some overlap in interests, but substantial variability beyond those common interests, Irwin and Perry seem to have all the desirable and complementary skills one would want.

What is it that makes *Larrikin* so worthwhile as a fanzine? For me the first and possibly most important characteristic is that the contributors, like the editors, really appear to care about what they are doing. This means that firstly, when the contributors sit down to write (or draw), they have a very clear picture of the experience they want to communicate; articles in *Larrikin* are short and to the point (and indeed, when they wander from this precept they are less satisfactory). Secondly, the experience they choose to communicate about is deeply-felt and/or understood, which means they have a rich vein of impressions to mine. Thirdly, they care very greatly about how accurately they communicate that experience; as a consequence the writing tends to be precise, and that clear picture which inspired the writer/artist in conveyed neatly to the reader. Let me explore this case using the latest issue as an example.

The January issue, number 8, is double the normal size (at 16 pages), so may well be the January-February issue in a clever plastic disguise. The longest item in this issue is Perry Middlemiss's review of Australian Fandom in 1986 (although Perry acknowledges assistance from Justin Ackroyd).

This is vaguely fictionalized, and is reminiscent of the style of one of the most famous fanzines of 1986, *The Motional*. Since Middlemiss has always been high on most people's list of suspected perpetrators of this anonymously-published parody of the Brown-Edmonds *Motional* suspicions will be, ah, heightened. But this is a piece of work in which every word has been worked and reworked to achieve a glossy but superb article which is both light-hearted and barbed. This is probably the best piece Larrikin has published to date, and it would be delightful if it could inspire others to attempt to emulate its trenchant wit. Perry knew exactly what he wanted to write about, knew and cared about it in depth, and then wrote with great skill to make sure we knew exactly what he felt.

By contrast, Alan Sandercock's piece about his return to Australia lacked conviction. While the events about which Alan writes obviously made a great impact on him, it doesn't work for me. The bulk of the article is taken up with anecdotes from the flight home and these anecdotes in combination frankly don't add up to much. Each time we come to believe that something significant is going to emerge as a punch line Alan rolls on to the next event in his sequence. I don't think he's able to make us care enough about what happens, and so the whole article fails.

Irwin Hirsh has a couple of short pieces about how Larrikin is put together and, not surprisingly, a substantial fanzine review column. Irwin, after all, was responsible for the most thoughtful article ever published about Australian fanzines, Ted White's long piece in *Sikander*, so it seems inevitable that he should try to work in this area himself. It half works this time. Marc Ortlieb's *Tigger* is a most difficult fanzine to deal with - maddeningly variable as it is - and Irwin fastens upon what he regards as its major weakness (Marc's failure to control the fanzine intellectually or editorially). I think I believed this already, but in any case Irwin is persuasive. But after that the column falls away: Irwin talks about three other fanzines, but you don't learn much about them from him. I think he owed those fanzine editors, and his own reputation, better attention than this.

The other two pieces - one by Wendy Hirsh about her hard times as a kindergarten teacher and the other a John McPharlin food extravaganza of the kind Larrikin readers have come to expect - are good average fare.

The letter column is heavily-edited and seems to match all I know about Irwin's approach to such things; for all I know Perry has exactly the same view. Certainly, as one goes from issue to issue as the editors take turns there's little variation in the way the letter column is conducted.

The editors, I have suggested, are their own best writers. This isn't surprising; not only do they know exactly what they want, but what they want happens to be just what they are themselves good at. This combination seems a reasonable recipe for success. It will probably be necessary to invent a Hirsh-Middlemiss feud to stop them.

THYME

Thyme was originated by Irwin Hirsh (and Andrew Brown), so Irwin's influence on Australian fandom is now rather widely felt. The current *Thyme* announces that GUFF for 1987 has been won by Irwin Hirsh, so there doesn't seem to be much chance at all to get away from the semi-employed film editor. Nowadays, of course, *Thyme* is very much the creature of Roger Weddall and Peter Burns, although the usual anonymity of editorial work means that who does what cannot always be identified. The partnership seems to work well, and perhaps there's generally no need in a newszine to identify the writer.

However, when something controversial is written the editors are usually careful to identify the author (as happens this time when Peter Burns writes a two-page reply to Jack Herman).

The reproduction of *Thyme* is slightly inferior to that of Larrikin. *Thyme* used to be produced by typing onto regular paper and then preparing electro-stencils: nowadays it is hard to tell, for while the typing is a lot clearer to read than it was with the old, almost ghostly issues of *Thyme* of three or four years ago, it still lacks the crispness of a directly-cut stencil. Appearance, however, is not the main thrust of the efforts of Roger and Peter.

Newszines tend to be reactive rather than proactive but *Thyme* - a news magazine rather than a newsletter, with #61 of this monthly running to 30 pages - hovers at the edge of creating news rather than merely reporting it. Of the thirty pages, for example, eight are devoted to a long-running controversy about the Ditmars. Previous issues have printed tables of statistics arguing to and fro on the matter, and the result now is more probably exhausting than exhaustive. The essential question is whether Jack Herman has Gone Too Far in managing the Ditmars this year, and the debate began when Jack sent a letter to *Thyme* outlining his intentions. In this issue he complains about the treatment given to his letter, and Peter Burns in reply implies that the original letter had been sent in confidence (of a sort).

But Joseph Nicholas, in this same issue, also complains about the treatment given to an earlier letter of his - and the editors admit a fault. There does seem to be a problem here: newszines do, after all, have to rely upon their sources, and annoying folks by quoting them out of context does seem to be a fairly reliable way of cutting down on your sources. But *Thyme* doesn't seem to have a real problem here: as a review column reports implicitly, *Thyme* is a larger, more regular newszine than its counterparts in the United States and the UK.

As for content, *Thyme* does report on what it sees to be the issues of the day. The three reports on fan fund results are restricted to factual descriptions of the number of votes, except in the case of FFANZ, where the editorial remarks interpret liberally the reactions of one of the contestants. Then again, in reporting the results of the GUFF voting the editors seem rather too heated in their excitement over the number of votes received, suggesting that this was the biggest turnout ever - a somewhat exaggerated claim.

The tendency towards overkill emerges again in the reporting of the opening of nominations for the Ditmars: we get the categories, the rules, and the editors' notion of what items are eligible in several of the categories. That their lists are faulty seems to me a serious error, since it encourages the nomination of ineligible items (for example, Damien Broderick's short story in *Transgressions* had first appeared in *Amazing Science Fiction*, so far as I can make out; the editors might be excused, since *Transgressions* listed previous printings of its contents (so long as the authors admitted them) but Damien continued his long-standing practice of not admitting reprints to be just that, so how was Don Anderson, or the editors of *Thyme*, to know?) and the ignoring of eligible, but overlooked by Burns & Weddall, items. The practice followed by the Awards Sub-Committee of deliberately not issuing a suggested eligibility list seems to me to be wise.

What makes *Thyme* work is that the editors really become involved in a story, and if they sometimes milk it to death - well, we can always look back to the high points of which, in a given year, there always seem to be more than a few. *Thyme* manages to provide exceptional and committed service to a smallish fan group: it's very well done.

TIGGER

Tigger, produced by someone who in some ways has been around longer than the editors of **Larrikin** and **Thyme**, now seems the weakest of the regular Australian fanzines. It is worth investigating why this seems to be the case.

A couple of months ago, puzzled by how I felt about **Tigger**, I wrote to Marc Ortlieb a letter which tried to express my frustration about his fanzine, and he replies in this December issue. "My idea of fun" he says "is sitting around a coffee table, dinner table or public lounge engaged in conversations that flit from topic to topic, sometimes weighty matters, sometimes absurd, sometimes slanderous but usually interesting." He continues somewhat later: "**TIGGERS**, though, aim to be accessible. I don't see the point in shutting out people. If people read **TIGGER** and then decide that it's too low-brow or superficial for them then that's their choice."

I don't think this describes **Tigger** completely, though it is a start. It doesn't explain why, for example, bits and pieces of letter column appear all over this edition. They're scarcely separated because each chunk deals with a different topic but, as Irwin Hirsh puts it in dealing with an earlier issue (and a different aspect), it seems to rely to much on luck and not enough on the editor's wits. Indeed, since we know that Ortlieb is a clever chap, we are forced to wonder why he doesn't put that intellect to work to organize what is, after all, a formal presentation. Marc might like to pretend that a fanzine is like a coffee table discussion but in fact it isn't, and **Tigger** shows exactly what happens when you confuse the two.

In the terms I set out at the start of this column, Marc doesn't care what the topic is, because that topic arises spontaneously (aleatorically, as Damien Broderick would write were he seeking to stay on Marc's mailing list). Sometimes he may light upon a topic about which he does care, and the result is some deeply-felt and often flash writing which strikes the reader substantially because of its contrast with the surrounding gossip for then Marc writes at his best and his past Ditmars testify to the esteem in which that is held. **Tigger** is a good example of what is produced by an out-of-form fan. It remains everyone's hope, I suppose, that Marc can drag himself out of the slough.

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

Science Fiction Review, now appearing in its final edition (Winter 1986), deserves far more praise than I can give it here. Through **Science Fiction Review**

Richard Geis has given far greater service to the science fiction community than his handful of Hugos suggests. Although in some ways the final edition is a grab-bag of what's left over, it still manages to convey much of what Geis intended over an immensely long period (in fan terms).

Richard Geis believes that science fiction writers have something to say about their trade, and that a free flow of ideas between readers and writers is a good thing to encourage. Some of his sf readers have dopey ideas (and so do some of his writers), but the volume of material he has produced ensures that anyone wanting to understand what science fiction was about in the 1960s and 1970s (as opposed to what books were published) will need to read a file of **Science Fiction Review**.

Orson Scott Card's article in this issue is a good example. Over the years Card has, I think, written some of the silliest stuff about science fiction imaginable. But his column this time is a passionate piece in reaction to Michael Swanwick's August **Asimov's** piece on, er, cyberpunks and humanists. It's the sort of stuff which will be missed (though Card will be starting his own fanzine, **Short Form**). All one can really write now is "Well done, Dick Geis - no one has ever done better!"

(**Larrikin**, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Vic 3001, Australia.

Thyme, PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Vic 3065, Australia.

Tigger, PO Box 215, Forest Hill, Vic 3131, Australia.

Science Fiction Review, PO Box 11408, Portland, OR 97211, USA.)

PAGE THREE GIRL

The Page Three Girl in **The Weekend Australian** for February 14-15 1987 was that highly-esteemed member of the Science Fiction Collective and copyeditor for **Australian Science Fiction Review** Yvonne Rousseau. This was all in connexion with her long-way-back book **The Murders at Hanging Rock** (hmm, which reminds me that John Baxter still has my copy) and the impending release of the "final" chapter of Joan Lindsay's **Picnic at Hanging Rock** (scheduled for 14 February). Yvonne has also been doing TV interviews and the like, and to tell the truth has been using this forthcoming event for months and months as an excuse for not working on **ASFR**. I suppose one would have to say it is all a great relief now that it is over and Yvonne can concentrate on more important things - like **ASFR**.

PRINTED MATTER ONLY

If undeliverable
please return to:

PO Box 483
Norwood
SA 5067
Australia