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Last chance to vote

GUFFaw 5

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This year's GUFF race is coming to an end – and if you haven't already voted, it's time to do so now

To help you make up your mind, I'm delighted to introduce all four of the candidates in this special issue of *GUFFaw*. Each of them has produced an original article which should at least introduce them to those of you who may not have had the great good fortune of meeting any of the candidates.

Since I know all four, I can say with complete impartiality that either pair of candidates would make a wonderful GUFF delegate, and British fandom is certainly set for a treat whoever wins.

However, only one pair of candidates can win – and who that will be is up to you. So make sure you use your vote now.

This issue of *GUFFaw* contains a ballot paper, please use it wisely.

In the next issue, along with one article I already have on hand, and the next chapter of my own trip report, I'll feature a complete breakdown of the results.

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GUFF News

Last chance to vote...

The GUFF race ends soon.

We'll soon know the result of the race to bring a GUFF delegate from Australasia to Paragon, the 2001 Eastercon. Voting ends at midnight on Monday 13th November, 2000, which means I'll be able to collect votes at Novacon. But this is your last chance — so vote now!

This issue of *GUFFaw* features articles by each of the four candidates, to help you make up your mind how to vote. You'll find a ballot paper included with this issue, and as a reminder, here are their platforms:

Eric Lindsay & Jean Weber

Secret masters of getting someone else to run a WorldCon after we've successfully bid for it, Eric (Party Animal) and Jean (Project Manager) want to visit UK and other European fans in their native habitats. Jean has never been to the UK, and Eric hasn't visited since 1972. Now retired from the paid workforce, we have lots of time to travel, party, and produce fanzines and websites, but little income to support our habits. You probably know our fanzines *Gegenschein* and *WeberWoman's Wrevenge*. Our sf websites are at <http://www.wrevenge.com.au/wrevenge/> and <http://www.wrevenge.com.au/psiphi/> and our Australian travel website is at <http://www.avalook.com.au>

Nominators: *Eve & John Harvey, Irwin Hirsh, Dave Langford, Perry Middlemiss and Lyn McConchie*

Damien Warman and Juliette Woods

We've been fans all our adult lives — even if that is only the last ten years. We've edited *fmz*, organized relaxacons, run Adelaide's discussion group 'Critical Mass' and have now started the OzMemoryHole. We are eager to expand our fanning interstate and inter-State, strengthening ties within Australia and to Europe. We know that GUFF isn't all real beer and skiffy. We're dead keen to admin — this is our real chance to make connections. Barring acts of gods, we'll be fun and frolicsome at Paragon and travel hard in search of fans in the UK and on the Continent.

Nominators: *Claire Brialey, John Foyster and Yvonne Rousseau, Roman Orszanski, Marc Ortlieb and Gregory Pickersgill*

This issue of *GUFFaw* is dedicated to Eileen Costello, a vital part of my own trip to Australia.

Jean Webber

The Last Time I Saw Europe ...

Was in 1967. I'm told it's changed a bit since then, or some parts have. But let's briefly go back to 1959, the *first* time I saw Europe. I was 16, just going into my final year of high school, and was dragged off (not quite kicking and screaming, but certainly without enthusiasm) to Italy for a year. My career-Army officer father and my mother were greatly looking forward to this tour of duty. My 11-year-old sister was probably no more thrilled about the prospect than I was.

We lived in Verona, Italy. Yes, *that* Verona – Romeo and Juliet's town. What I remember best was the Roman arena, a bit smaller than the Coliseum in Rome, but in much better condition and still in use as an opera stage in summer.

I have always disliked opera (can't bear the singing), but I loved the performances in that arena. They started about dusk with a simple ceremony that impressed me greatly. Everyone was given a small candle, which we lighted, one from the next, so that as the last daylight faded, the audience was in darkness punctuated by thousands of tiny lights. What a great way to dim the house lights for a performance!

The shows were great too. The huge stage (built on a large wedge of seats) allowed large choruses and live horses, even elephants on stage for *Aida*! It was worth putting up with the singing.

We always sat in the cheap seats, a few rows down from the very top of the arena. (Bring your own cushion!) We had a great view, if we remembered the binoculars. At the intervals, we could walk a few steps up so our heads were above the top of the arena's wall. Suddenly the sounds of a modern city and its traffic would assault us – quite a dramatic contrast to the interior of the arena. Sit down again and a thousand years or more disappear.

I don't think much has changed there, except I recall reading that the elephants had been banned from the stage.

My other main memory of living in Verona is the trips we would take on the train to Venice, and wandering about the town, looking at all the historic stuff and eating yummy food in odd little trattoria off St Mark's Square. I've heard that St Mark's (like much of Venice) is underwater a lot these days.

The train from Verona to Venice passed through Vicenza, a town with a large US military base and a school for American children, where I did my final year of high school. We rode the train each day to and from school. Some days a few of my classmates would fail to get off the train at the right stop, ride through to Venice, have a fine day off, and take the correct train home. Eventually the school would inform their parents that they hadn't been there during the day, but that was a problem for later. Alas, I never actually did this; I was far too dedicated a student.

Whenever they got the chance, my family travelled around other parts of Italy as well as France, Switzerland, Austria, and southern Germany. Like many young people, I'm sure, I tired early of yet another cathedral or art gallery, though I loved the outdoor stuff, especially the Alps. Now I think I'd be far more appreciative of the historical stuff.

After graduating from high school in Vicenza, I went off to Munich, Germany for the 1960-61 academic year, attending the University of Maryland campus (for American dependants and service personnel) there. Living in a residence hall far from my parents (who were still in Italy) was certainly different, even if girls were under a tight curfew in those days.

I did Oktoberfest, loved the Deutschesmuseum (science, not art), went on skiing trips in the Alps (though I never did learn to ski worth a damn), and took a 10-day tour of Yugoslavia. When those beautiful old historic towns like Dubrovnik got bombed in the recent wars, I was outraged. How dare they damage these places I had visited and enjoyed?! (I guess if I were older, I would have thought the same of, say, London or Berlin.)

Speaking of Berlin, I was still in Europe (back with the family in Italy) in August 1961 when the Berlin Wall went up. I wanted to see Berlin! But not that year.

Fast forward now to 1966, a mere 5 years later. By then I had finished my bachelor's degree, got my first real job (after a few summer jobs), and got married. He (who shall remain nameless, to be referred to as R) was in the Army, a draftee, and was fortunate to be sent to Germany rather than Vietnam. Although his rank was too low to allow for dependants' travel expenses to be paid, he could live off the Army base with me in the German town near the base (near Stuttgart, in a small town named Kornwestheim).

I got a job on the base (as a typist, for which I was magnificently overqualified), and we travelled about Germany a bit when we had the chance. One of our trips was to Berlin (yes, I did get there). Here are some notes from my diary, written at the time:

'23-1-67. Left car at Rhein-Main Air Force Base, caught Army shuttle to Hauptbahnhof Frankfurt. Train to Berlin left at 2115. Two-person compartment, very comfortable. Saw East-West Germany border 4 am. Several hundred yards of cleared land, then a wall about 6-10 feet high. Couldn't tell material, but solid, 1-2 ft thick. Then a dirt roadway with powerful lights, then more cleared land for 1/4 mile or so. At East Germany - West Berlin border, another 100 yds of open space with high-power lights and guard towers.

'Took German tour of West Berlin on 24-1-67, approx. 2-1/2 hours. All along wall here and there are little stands on west side where people can look over. All buildings on east side are being cleared away for 100 ft from wall. Guide says each workman is guarded by 2 guards, all Germans, not Russians, from other parts of Germany; East Berliners couldn't be trusted to shoot.

'In several places the wall was built by bricking up the first 3 floors of buildings. Now all but the first floor fronts are being cleared out. Gives eerie feeling as one can still read signs painted on shop fronts. At end of Bernauer Str is only place one can look over and see people. A tower is erected there (west side), so east and west can wave to each other. When the wall is built higher, the tower is built higher. Feeling is of looking into a zoo cage full of people. Should guess they feel pretty caged too. In other places can only see workmen tearing down the buildings; rubble; and guards.'

Looking back, I can't remember whether the whole thing seemed real to me, but I suspect not. At that point I hadn't seen or experienced enough to really have a frame of reference. So my memories are of superficial things: how it looked, rather than how it felt.

And now? The Wall's come down - more than 10 years ago. Something I never expected to see happen. I'm looking forward to seeing the remnants of the Wall, and seeing East Berlin.

In March 1967 R's two years in the Army were up and he took an overseas discharge. This entitled him to go home at the Army's expense any time up to a year later, so we decided to travel until our money ran out. (I, of course, would have to pay my own way home.)

We'd bought a VW Kombi van and built a camper into it. Because it was just the beginning of spring, we headed south, rather than north, planning to drive through southern France, tour Spain and Portugal, then cross into Algeria and drive across northern Africa, finishing in Israel and taking a boat from there to Greece or Italy. These plans had to be abandoned in Algeria when the Seven Days War started, but that's another story.

This story is about Europe. I remember several general things from those days. One was border crossings, with passport inspections and sometimes searches of one's vehicle. We were lucky not to be caught smuggling, since we were, in fact, often smuggling – petrol and cigarettes, both of which we could buy very cheaply at US military stores. We had no intention of selling either of these commodities – the cigarettes were for gifts (or bribes, depending on one's interpretation of some situations); the petrol was for use in the van.

We'd built a small hidden compartment into the van, and hid the cigarettes in there, having saved up several months' worth of R's tobacco ration (since neither of us smoked tobacco, we had previously used his ration as gifts to German friends). On our travels we'd give a pack to anyone who helped us, often instead of the usual cash tip. I can't imagine doing that these days! (Well, maybe in Russia, or other places where heavy tobacco smoking is still common.)

We'd been warned that the Spanish police were on the lookout for smuggled petrol, though probably in more commercial quantities than we could carry. Nonetheless, we had 3 or 4 jerrycans of petrol in the back of the van (more than the legal amount), plus one jerrycan of water. We were stopped and questioned, an interesting experience when one has no language in common with the police. 'What's in the cans?' was an easy question to understand. 'Water,' I said, with what I hoped was a tone of complete innocence. 'Agua.' I pulled out the water can and opened the lid, let him sniff the contents. He looked at the other cans, looked at us, shrugged, and waved us away.

I often wonder what would have happened had he decided to check another can. But in those days we felt immune from the rules of governments; dire things could not happen to us (and we would live forever) – despite seeing Berlin. Ah, the innocence of youth! Only a year later were the events of 1968, campus riots, the shooting of university students, and other atrocities. But in Europe, in 1967, we were immortal.

Another smuggling episode occurred a few weeks later, visiting Gibraltar. We needed film, so we bought 15 rolls (considerably more than we could legally bring back to Spain), took them out of their wrappings, and put them in the bottom of my cavernous handbag. On top went all the usual rubbish that a woman carries around, including a thick layer of used tissues. I marched up to the 'Nothing to Declare' station and opened my bag for inspection. The customs agent looked in, recoiled in disgust, and waved me through.

My parents were in Europe recently and marvelled at the absence of border inspections. 'The border stations are still there, but abandoned.' And all of what we used to think of as 'Eastern' Europe (actually central Europe) is now open for me to visit. I still find it hard to believe, or picture.

My notes from the 1967 trip remark at several places about staying in youth hostels, which had two large dormitory areas, segregated for males and females. In the early part of the trip, I was the only female visitor, but the 'guardians' of the hostels would not let R stay in the females' dorm with me. (We would often cheat.) I'm sure that practice has since been modified – all the hostels I've seen in Australia provide double rooms (at extra cost) or allow

mixed groups to stay in a dorm room.

More snapshots click into my mind as I'm typing this: camping in fields (or parking on a suburban street) overnight when we couldn't find a campground or hostel (I'll bet you can't get away with *that* anymore); meeting backpackers and car-campers from all over the world, including an Australian couple that I later visited in Adelaide after I moved to Australia; viewing wonderful scenery and fascinating old buildings; shopping in markets and seeking out all the cheap 'fixed-price' lunches and dinners we could find; watching a bullfight in Spain; getting up early to see various dawn processions for Easter and other cultural and religious events; visiting Esperantists in several countries, despite an extremely rudimentary command of the language (makes note to self: must start learning Esperanto again - I did find the little book I'd used for my studies in the '60s).

My travels have never taken me to the British Isles, Scandinavia, or the Netherlands. I didn't get a chance in '59-'61, and by the summer of '67, R and I were short of money and I had been ill, so I flew back to the USA, having never reached northern Europe.

My last memory of Europe is in Luxembourg, where I boarded an Icelandic Airlines flight to New York. In those days, Icelandic was the first choice of backpackers and others travelling on the cheap. They flew propjets and stopped in Iceland on the trip across the Atlantic, because their planes didn't have the range to get all the way. The trip took about 13 hours - good training for travelling between the USA and Australia, though I didn't realise that at the time.

Though I've mentioned several things that I'd like to see again, I suspect that on my next trip to Europe I won't see any of them, because I'll be too busy visiting places I've never seen before - and I won't have time to see more than a few of those. Even a month is far too short! Perhaps I can stretch that into a bit longer...

Juliette Woods

The Reluctant Fan

I met my first fan when I was seventeen. In the twelve months which followed I edited my first fanzine, attended my first convention, met writers and critics, wrote dozens of reviews, started collecting a few fanzines and joined the Adelaide University Science Fiction Association. And yet it was not until eight and a half years later, during Aussiecon III, that I finally admitted to myself that I might actually be a fan. What was it about the nature of fandom, and about me, that led to almost a decade in which I would tell people, 'Well, I do fannish things, of course, but that doesn't *make* me a fan'?

To consider this, I have to think way back to my seventeen-year-old self. Back then I was an acned, geeky girl, but one with a perhaps unusual amount of self-possession. My hobbies were such that I often thought of myself as an honorary boy: I wrote computer code, studied astrophysics, played Dungeons and Dragons and read a great deal of sf. I had just survived a particularly stressful year, having been hospitalised for severe peritonitis only a month after my family had moved to Australia. When I finally got back to school, I had to do two years' worth of work in one, as the Australian syllabus was quite different from the Scottish one. I was also becoming aware that my acne was not quite as bad as it once had been, and that I might not be able to be an honorary boy for much longer.

The first fan I ever met was Jeff Harris. Of course, I didn't know then that he was a fan, or what a fan was. I met him at the Kensington and Norwood Writers' Group. He seemed alright and he read out a short story about dragons. He and his sf-writing companions had a sense of humour and talked about interesting things, but I never went back. This was partly because I didn't know how to cope with the young blond man wearing steel-rimmed spectacles who tried to chat me up during the teabreak. And it was also because I would soon be distracted by university.

Somehow I knew from the start that university was more than its lectures, that I was there for Great Life Experiences as well as for coursenotes. I threw myself into university life and was startled to find that few other First Years did the same. I joined three clubs during Orientation Week, expecting to join others later. I joined the Film Society, the Literary Society and then, with much swithering, the Science Fiction Association, AUSFA.

I surely can't be the only sf reader who once had peculiar ideas about what other sf readers are like. I worried that the people at AUSFA would be too nerdy for words: greasy-skinned physics students with no social graces. I only joined because the person behind the club table, Cathy Jenkins, seemed OK.

Even then I might never have discovered fandom if it weren't for an economics student last heard of digging latrines in Angola. He told me the wrong time for the Literary Society meeting, so I missed my chance to edit their *Timely Literary Suppository* for that year. I still at-

tended all their meetings, learnt to drink cappuccinos, and enjoyed the sensation of feeling cultured and literary with wannabe-poets, but I couldn't devote myself to it as I would have liked. So instead I slunk back to AUSFA to help the editor of their magazine. His name was Damien Warman.

Damien tells me that his first experiences of fandom were much better than mine. He arrived at uni a year before I did, when the AUSFArians were a little more varied and lively. Carol Woolmer and ACB Tyson were running things then, organising snark hunts and writing proper fanzines like *Suds on Toast*. I never met Carol and I met ACB only once. When I joined AUSFA many of the active members appeared to be either drunks or dweebs: people like Cathy and Damien seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. And yet their clubzine, *Nemesis*, soon came to dominate my life.

I wonder now why I never questioned why there was a Literary Society, a Film Society and an SF Association. Was sf not literature too? There was a feeling of relegation and of segregation: the LitSoc hung out in popular cafes while AUSFA spent its days in the Clubs Common Room, an ugly brick place nicknamed the Rubble with graffiti on its walls and forks dangling from the ceiling. Sometimes you found people passed out on the floor.

But I loved *Nemesis*. I wanted it to be the best little magazine. I wrote more than half of the first issue I helped with, under three different pseudonyms to encourage other people to submit. I bullied my brother into providing illustrations, forced erstwhile friends to give me their fiction, and browbeat others into reviewing *V* novels and worse (eventually people began submitting stories about evil alien editors and their velcro chair of pain). Then, for the sake of a few more column inches, I attended my first sf convention. I thought I would write an anthropological piece on the weird people who attend them.

ConFictionary was run in the September of 1991 at the Hotel Adelaide. The Yoyodyne fans (Martin and Helen Reilly, Julie and Martin Edge, and others) had put it together. I enjoyed myself, but I now think I wasted much of my time when I opted to play D&D rather than meet more of the attendees. The sf fans weren't quite as peculiar as an anthropological article might require, although my English I tutor was there. I hadn't known that Dr Michael Tolley cared about sf. He spoke at a book launch on behalf of the deceptively demure Yvonne Rousseau. If I had known anything about Australian sf or Australian sf criticism, I would have been too petrified to meet her (Roman Orzsanski introduced us), let alone join her for lunch with the guest of honour, George Turner.

So this should have been an auspicious start. My English tutor was a world expert on PKD, I'd been befriended by the GUFF-winning Roman Orzsanski and the terrifyingly erudite Yvonne Rousseau, and I'd exchanged a few words with a man sometimes described as Australia's best sf author. And yet fandom still wasn't where I wanted to live.

Because I still thought of fandom as the land of the propellor-beanie, of social misfits who wanted to join the crew of the *Enterprise* when they grew up. I didn't know how people like Rousseau and Orzsanski fitted into all this, I didn't understand that *they* were fandom. I read too few fanzines to know this, and I didn't find out at the local sf discussion group either. Critical Mass was often worthwhile but was going through a bit of a bad patch. One regular (since gone) would spend the meetings running up and down the wooden stairs at the back of the room, shouting about *Brazil*.

Really, it's remarkable that I persevered.

But persevere I did. By then I was going out with my former fellow-editor and we'd attend conventions together when we could. This wasn't very often, as few conventions are held in Adelaide and Melbourne is eight hours and many dollars away when you're an impoverished student. But I have fond memories of Constantinople (held in Melbourne in

1994). Damien and I were still pretty timid young twenty-somethings, so it was only through acts of fannish kindness that we got to know as many Melbourne fans as we did. But then we'd get back to quiet, insular Adelaide and the impetus would fade.

In retrospect, I should have paid more attention to fanzines. I would have found people there with whom I wanted to talk. But I saw few, and those I did were written by people I'd never met or didn't accept contributions. It is daunting to write to someone who's never heard of you who lives thousands of miles away. So, after *Nemesis*, I wrote for the ill-fated but not-dead-yet *Adelaide Fan Review* and then concentrated on my fiction. All the fannish things I wished to discuss — life, sf and everything — I put to one side, or emailed to uni friends. Oh, and we AUSFarians organised a coup of Literary Society, and the *Timely Literary Suppository* fell into our fannish hands at last.

All of this time, Damien thought of himself as a fan. I still didn't, even if I kept on doing fannish things.

But then came Aussiecon III.

In the MUP Encyclopedia, Aussiecon I is described by Bruce Gillespie as 'a vast recruiting drive for all aspects of Australian fandom'. Aussiecon III will presumably prove to be the same. I've been hanging out with fandom for almost a decade now, but it was Aussiecon III which has proved to be the turning-point.

At Aussiecon III, I finally knew enough cool people to keep being introduced to other cool people. The Melbourne fans knew who we were by now, and we'd had British and American visitors in Adelaide before the con. We were given interesting fanzines, had interesting conversations, and then read in later interesting fanzines about those very same interesting conversations. Fandom no longer seemed to consist of overweight men in skintight Romulan costumes plus a few BNFs. At Aussiecon III there were People Like Us — from Melbourne, Croydon and LA. And I finally, thoroughly and deeply felt that this was where I belonged. The would-be anthropologist had gone native.

(There was still at least one person whom I was too scared to talk to. Lucy Sussex seems to have said something about me to Damien Broderick. Damien strode up to me outside You Yangs 3 and said, 'Hello.' 'Hi,' I said. End of conversation.)

I'm trying to finish my PhD this year, so my fannish time has been a little curtailed, but Damien and I are filled with enthusiasm now. There are many conversations we've only just joined, many friends we've only just met and many more people we're now anxious to meet. We've spent a decade in fandom almost accidentally (well, I have) but now it looks like we're in it for the long haul.

So, on reflection, there are two reasons why it took me so long to admit to my fannishness. One is the small size of Adelaide's fannish contingent and its relative isolation. The links were there, but I didn't know what they were linking to. The second reason is the old one in which science fiction and its readers are denigrated by the mainstream (if such a thing exists). When sf is considered to be unlitrary junkfood for nerds, it can be difficult to admit that you prefer it, let alone that it forms a major part of your life. As long as *The Australian* can still publish sf reviews beginning 'I don't read much sci-fi but...' this will continue to be a problem. Perhaps we need to be more forceful in expressing our opinions — in pointing out sf's different but peculiar merits — to a literary establishment which still mostly ignores sf (excepting Gibson and a few other other 'acceptable' authors). Or would this lead to a kind of professionalisation which would kill fandom?

These are larger questions which I don't want to discuss here. But perhaps in my next fannish article, after I've fished around in a few old fnz to see what other people have said first. Now, where's my copy of *Steam Engine Time* gone this time?

Eric Lindsay

A Modest Proposal

Back when I was at my first school, we had an assembly each week, or perhaps each day. It included a short speech by the Headmaster, and various consciousness raising exercises designed to help socialise all us youngsters. There was a school song, the words of which were quickly parodied by the assembled body. There was generally belief in a Christian God, and total neglect of the possibility any other deity. It was an age where there was almost a belief in the Divine Right of Kings.

One really big event was going off to see the Queen. As I recall, the Royal car zoomed past the assembled crowd, but you did get to see the Royal wave.

In those days there were a number of women's magazines selling an extraordinary number of copies. Each appeared to devote each and every cover to yet another photograph of the Queen, or some other member of the Royal Family (it was always Capitalised).

This was in the days before the Royal Family were making a right Charlie of themselves. These days, the women's magazines are more likely to have a pop star on the cover, their sales are down, and they don't even have accurate covers. The Woman's Day, for example, is a weekly. The Woman's Weekly is however a monthly, and it probably wasn't hard for them to decide not to change the title.

The celebration of the 100th birthday of the Queen Mother made the news here, but I hear one British TV station didn't show them live because they would have displaced showing Neighbours. How the mighty have fallen.

Of course, Australia just recently held a vote on whether to become a Republic, and the vote was overwhelmingly against. Despite this, few doubt that it will happen eventually.

I'd have preferred a chance to cast a meaningful vote regarding the republic (which is why I want a 'none of the above' option), rather than having a sneaky, manipulative politician set the question such that all results were unacceptable. I eventually grudgingly voted for the fouled up republic (but not for that idiotic preamble) because the alternative was marginally worse, but I bitterly resent not having a reasonable choice presented. Australian just didn't want a politician to select a President.

I'd prefer to see the President selected by a properly Australian method.

Get the Lotto people involved, on prime time TV, with a big transparent barrel containing books of all the electoral lists for the country. A randomly selected member of the audience comes on stage, is blindfolded, and draws an electoral list out of the barrel.

The district is announced. Members of the audience from that electorate are asked to stand and cheer. No-one does, because no-one has any idea which electoral district they are in. The teleprompter puts up a list of suburbs in that electorate. People finally leap up and cheer. The compare takes the microphone down into the audience. We have three different

people from the electorate interviewed for 20 seconds, and asked how they would deal with whatever international crisis is happening at the moment.

Meanwhile back on stage, the spine is ceremonially guillotined off the electoral list, and the pages scattered into another transparent barrel. Another randomly selected blindfolded member of the audience draws out a page. Another member of the audience calls odds or evens on the toss of a coin, and the page is affixed to a dart board. Finally, another randomly selected blindfolded member of the audience gets to play 'pin the tail on the donkey' with the page as the target.

As the name is announced, the phone number of the winner is dialled, and it is announced they are to be President. They are invited to the studio the next evening for a really solid 60 second interview.

The name that is pierced gets to be Governor General in waiting for one month, for training in protocol, gets to be Governor General for one month, and gets a final one month all expenses paid overseas trip as a senior statesman to catch up with heads of state he or she has met, and possibly apologise for whatever was said. Next month you do it all again. It would raise a lot more interest in the position of President of the Republic.

It is fair, it is equitable, it gives us all an equal chance, it is democratic ... well, OK, it isn't democratic, but neither is it democratic to have the Prime Minister pick the name of one of his mates.

If we can conscript soldiers during a war, we can conscript ourselves a President.

Damien Warman

**An Accidental
Polemic**

In 1990, chaos was all the rage. And fractals.



'Your narrative style,' said Parker, 'though racy, is a little elliptical. Could you not begin at the beginning and go on until you come to the end, and then, if you are able to, stop?'

'I'll try,' said his lordship, 'but I always find the stopping part of the business so difficult.'

DL Sayers, *Murder Must Advertise*
(Victor Gollancz 1933, my copy Coronet Crime 1993)



I've recently read David Quammen's *The Song of the Dodo*; it's rather good, and I recommend it to you as one of the more lucid accounts of the field of island biogeography. That is, it talks about evolution and extinction, and why it is that we see rather more of the latter these days than the former. (One of the background characters to Quammen's story is Jared Diamond: I similarly commend to you everything he has written, but in particular *Guns, Germs And Steel*.)



I matriculated from Christies Beach High School in 1988: I studied maths (two lots), physics, chemistry and French. My best friend, Mark, was a year ahead of me... during that year he deferred his enrolment in engineering at Adelaide Uni to work and hang about. After I was done with school I decided to do the same (with encouragement from mother and grandmother, who thought I was a little young at 17 to start uni).

Mark and I were sort-of proto-Hitchhiker fans. We didn't know about any organised clubs; I don't believe we would have joined any besides. With a few other friends we roleplayed (mostly actual *Dungeons and Dragons*, some *Paranoia*), hung about, etc. We liked *Blake's 7* and old *Doctor Who*, *The Goodies* and *The Young Ones*. On Saturdays we listened (at our respective houses) to *The Science Show* on Radio National, followed by *The Goon Show*. Ah, Australia; where old British programming goes to die.

The year before I started my undergraduate 'work', I spent a lot of time waiting for but not receiving Social Security payments, and making hamburgers. Unemployment in my suburb, for people in my age group, ran, I believe, at around 40%. If you were under 18, you

had to wait 13 weeks between becoming unemployed (say, by leaving school) and receiving a payment. Eventually you give up any hope of doing something cool. You'll settle for anything.

It was while I was making hamburgers for Jacques Qui A Faim, as our local variety of Burger King is known, that I met my first actual fans-who-knew-they-were-fans. Miriam Hill was a first year student at Adelaide Uni, where I was soon to start studying mathematics. Together with her younger sister Rebecca, she was in the local chapter of the SCA. Other workers at Jacques thought they were weird: friends in garb would occasionally turn up to get snacks after beating the crap out of each other on the Barr Smith Lawns (AU central). I thought they were cool.

When I started at uni in February of 1990, Miriam introduced me to the folks running the Adelaide Uni Science Fiction Association (AUSFA). I also joined the roleplaying group, the fencing club and the SCA (and the French club, and so on. I wasn't gonna waste no time, no sir.) The good folks at AUSFA (principally someone known as ACB, and Carol (Caz) Woolmer) showed me their fanzine *Suds on Toast* (lots of local gossipy SCA stuff, mostly) and the AUSFA clubzine *Nemesis*. I was immediately rather interested in all this stuff, but it took until well after the middle of the year before I convinced the actual editor of *Nemesis* that he was never going to publish that year without help, and so managed to take over.

By this time, I'd been introduced to an older guy named Roman Orszanski, who'd showed a few of us a bunch of fanzines and then promptly disappeared to Den Hague and other forn parts. This was my first contact with the notion of GUFF (and fan funds in general).



I can't fact check this, because my copy has gone wandering, but I'm pretty sure I got my copy of James Gleick's *Chaos* towards the beginning of 1990. I dimly recall promotional material at the uni bookstore, and still relatively flush with hamburger money I don't see how I could have resisted.

As I said earlier, chaos theory was all the rage then, as well as carefully programming one's Commodore computer to draw fractals. I think it took a good couple of weeks before I began my love affair with the Barr Smith Library, and took Benôit Mandelbrot's *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* to read on the train. Of course, we all know that the chief thing with fractals is that they're all curly, from which we deduce that the coastline of Britain (for some reason) is infinite.

One of the topics I recall from *Chaos* (apart from the cool stories of weird Californians who lived on 26 hour clocks — perhaps it was then that I abandoned my ambition to become a quantum mechanic in favour of becoming a mathematician proper) was that traditional mathematics courses neglected all of the interesting strange messy complicated stuff that can happen in favour of studying the stuff one could *do*. That is, that most mathematicians searched for their keys under the lamp post, on the grounds that at least then they had a chance of finding them.

So, from the beginning of my maths degree I was primed to look at the cool, unconventional stuff. Luckily this caught on: in late 1992 I was able to enrol in a short course on applications of mathematics to biology. This included a short section on 'island biogeography' and 'patch dynamics'; this bit was so much fun that not only did I go off to do a summer course on it offered by the botany department, but I convinced my friend and *Nemesis* co-editor Juliette Woods to do the same a year later. She went on to do honours in patch dy-

namics, before changing to the groundwater modelling that keeps us both fed today.

The deal with patch dynamics is this: the bigger an area of reserve, the more species it contains. This is because more species can immigrate (it's a big target to aim for) and fewer species become extinct (they have enough room to find what they need). By contrast, small patches of habitat are poor in number and variety of species: the smaller area supports fewer individuals, so the chance of some random event wiping them all out is greater. This is called the area-species relationship, and Quammen gives a good view of it, and the arguments for and against it. Perhaps the strongest of the counter-arguments says that small patches of environment aren't necessarily worse than big ones, just that big ones have a more diverse range of habitats and occupational niches than small ones.

Anyway, patch dynamics and evolutionary biology are rather cool, but the mathematics for the most part is pretty standard stuff. These days we like to think about how patches might have nice fractal edges, and how small reserves might help species so long as you can stitch them into larger ones by making 'corridors' between them. Juliette's honours supervisor, Hugh Possingham, has done a great deal of work involved with koala preservation, based around this idea that so long as the koalas can move along a safe corridor they can maintain a viable 'metapopulation', even though the populations in any given patch might become locally extinct.

The thing I find interesting about this, both Hugh's work and the theory that underlies it, is the way that it highlights the fact that conservationists don't typically think of trying to save any given endangered species, but that some species might serve as poster kids for a type of habitat, a whole shelf of niches; that the world is a complicatedly interacting place, and yet we can understand some of it. It's a satisfying framework.



I put it to you that we can model fandom as a metapopulation: that different fans might occupy different fannish niches; that sympatric and allopatric evolution of types of fandom has occurred and continues to occur; that some types of fandom are currently booming, while others are senescent or obsolete. That there is no one fandom, but many many different fandoms, all exploiting and exploring different ways of living in the world.

I put it to you that the geographical boundaries are important barriers to intermixing disparate fannish populations, but that there are also subtle distinctions amongst the sort of fannish populations that might exist in a physically close area.

I claim that mixing fans together is the thing that drives fandom, that keeps it evolving as an overarching entity (one posited to exist for convenient theory, rather than any real existence, of course), that prevents it as a whole from becoming extinct, even if local populations change or die out.

Let us consider GUFF as one of the corridors that fans travel along. It doesn't just connect fans in Europe with fans in Australia, but also fans of one age with those of another, fans in one sort of niche with fans in others. It provokes fans to seek out sympatric fans: those who live in the same place but engage in other sorts of fandom, to see what they do, now that one has been alerted to the diversity that exists within fandom.

But GUFF these days is a rather narrow corridor, one little used. There were just four GUFF trips in the 90s: Orszanski, Hauser, Gunn & Pender-Gunn, Kincaid. I'm sure that all of these folks only saw a small fraction of what they wanted, spoke to fewer fans than they wanted to.

Trip reports are hard to come by, especially if you don't know they exist. They can have

the air about them that ads for the BSFA in the pack of Penguins had for me: 'it's a long way away, and rather old now, and not the sort of thing I should or can be involved in'.

I put it to you that GUFF should be strengthened; that this communication, between us all, should be encouraged and enjoyed. I think that GUFF should operate on a yearly basis: the current notional two years between trips is too long. It's too easy to lose momentum, as we've seen these last ten years. People are enthusiastic now: let's capitalise on this. Plan to come to Australia in 2002.

Trip reports should be free, or as nearly so as possible. Let's give them away, with a gentle suggestion to donate, maybe, or somehow become involved. After all, I imagine the greatest cost involved with trip reports is in the copying and even more in the distribution. With electronic versions, much of this cost can be sidestepped, or else displaced from the trip report 'producer' to the report 'consumer'. Let's use trip reports as another sort of corridor; coupled with up to date contact information for the fund administrators, they can and should be the most powerful forms of advertising we can deploy.



I've stopped thinking much about chaos, and fractals, and similarly modish mathematics. These days I'm keenest on classical mathematics, on the geometry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of course, the modern viewpoint is pervasive. The questions are the same, but the words in them mean different things now. Objects that were thought of as monstrous, or so rare as to be ignorable, are recognised as the usual, the expected. I'm more aware of mathematics research as being a highly politicised and acculturated endeavour than I once was. I'm quite happy under my lamp post: there's lots to look at.

I think that these communities, those of the academic research mathematician and the trufan, have much in common. We are at heart, I believe, gift economies. We work because we love the work we do, and the best thing we can do with our work is to give it away, and to try to communicate the wonder we find in it.

Let's keep doing that.

GUFF Publications

GUFF survives on your generosity, but we do like to give you something for your money. The following GUFF publications all provide good reading, and all monies raised will go to supporting GUFF.

GUFFaw

Back issues of the GUFF newsletter are available for a small contribution plus postage.

GUFFaw

A showcase for the three candidates in the last Europe to Australia race. Contains articles by Steve Davies, Julian Headlong and Paul Kincaid.

GUFFaw 2

Published for my GUFF trip and distributed at Aussiecon 3. Includes a cover by Ian Gunn and articles by Dave Langford, Chris Priest, Karen Pender-Gunn, Judith Hanna plus the final part of Eve Harvey's trip report.

GUFFaw 3

Published November 1999. Contains a chapter of Irwin Hirsh's on-going trip report, Bruce Gillespie's Fan GoH speech from Aussiecon, and the first chapter of my own trip report.

GUFFaw 4

Published May 2000. Contains Eva Hauser's trip report, and the second chapter of my own.

Suggested donation: £1/A\$2.50/US\$2 (including postage) for one issue, £3/A\$7.50/US\$6 (including postage) for all four.

Trip Reports

Two completed trip reports are currently available, I hope others will become available later.

A Brighton Belle Meets Skippy by Eve Harvey (1985 GUFF delegate)

£3 + 52p first class postage (40p second class)

A\$7.50 + A\$3 surface postage (A\$6 airmail)

US\$5 + US\$2 surface postage (US\$3.50 airmail)

Oh To Be In England, In The Summertime, With My Loves by Ian Gunn & Karen Pender-Gunn (1995 GUFF delegates)

£2.50 + 52p first class postage (40p second class)

A\$6 + A\$3 surface postage (A\$6 airmail)

US\$4.50 + US\$2 surface postage (US\$3.50 airmail)

Sterling and US\$ cheques should be made payable to **Paul Kincaid**. A\$ cheques should be made payable to **GUFF**. All donations are gratefully received.