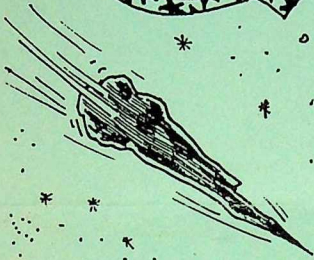
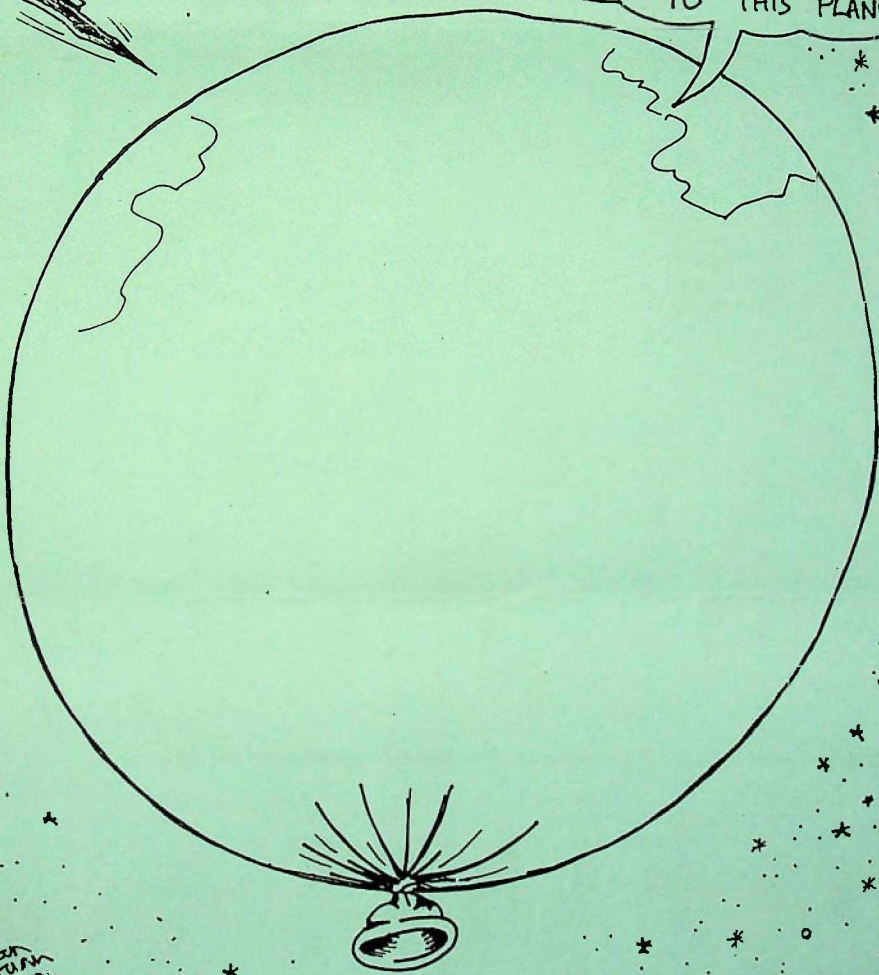


Q36K



OH, COME ON! HOW MUCH DAMAGE COULD ONE LITTLE METEOR DO TO THIS PLANET?



LOU QUAM '91



# Q36K (Marc II)

May 1991 (Probably)

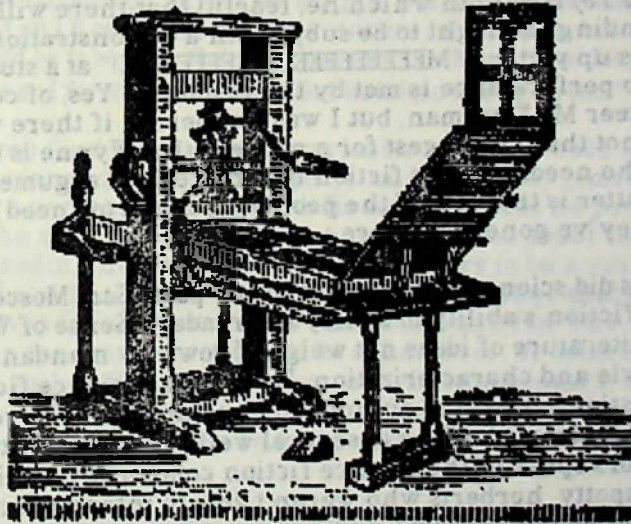
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## So who needs science fiction? Marc Ortlieb

When I suggested this topic at a Nova Mob meeting earlier this year, Wynne Whiteford's immediate response was "I do!" It reminded me of a story that Richard Feynman tells in his collection of autobiographical essays *Surely You're Joking Mr Feynman!* in which he, fearful that there will be dozens of volunteers demanding the right to be subjects in a demonstration of hypnotism, jumps up yelling "MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!" at a student assembly. His solo performance is met by the response "Yes, of course I knew you would volunteer Mr Feynman, but I was wondering if there would be anyone *else*" – not that I'd suggest for a moment that Wynne is the only person around who needs science fiction but the central argument of tonight's little natter is that few of the people who used to "need" science fiction still do; they've gone elsewhere.

What needs did science fiction meet in the past? Sam Moskowitz made much of science fiction's ability to satisfy the reader's Sense of Wonder. Sf was, above all, a literature of ideas not weighed down by mundane literature's obsession with style and characterization. People read science fiction for the ideas and the question asked of sf authors ad nauseam was "Where do you get all those wonderful ideas?" leading to several well rehearsed witty answers. Other commentators speak of the science fiction community's ability to cater for bespectacled spotty herberts who weren't able to interact socially with ordinary people, especially as some ordinary people were of the female gender, and so were forced to gather with other bespectacled spotty herberts in ghettos called science fiction clubs and conventions. Apologists for science fiction such as Alvin Toffler spoke of sf's ability to insulate against Future Shock – pink batts for the brain. Science fiction certainly did cater for these needs in the past. The trouble is that, for some folk, it wasn't enough to write about the stuff – people should be living it and so some of the readers got a little carried away and tried creating some of the future they'd read about

Backyard rockets, competing to get people into orbit; people frozen so that they can be awoken in the 24<sup>1/2</sup> Century; molecular machines that maintain the health of every cell in the body; colonies in orbit making the most of incalculable resources; people uploading their minds into computers and making backups so that one person can visit the entire universe – when Hugo Gernsback was a pup these ideas seemed custom-made for science fiction. Now they are stock-in-trade for such books as Ed Regis' *Great Mambo Chicken & the Transhuman Condition: Science Slightly Over the Edge*. In this book, Regis explores the subcultures inhabited by people who do not consider these ideas to be science fictional in the least. Indeed, for these folk, science fiction has failed – a failure never so clearly illustrated as in a description from Regis' book of the reaction to Heinlein's death, news of which arrived while members of Alcor (a cryonics corporation) were operating on a recently deanimated client.

"Then, about halfway through the suspension, Kent walked into the room with an announcement.

"I just heard over the radio that Robert Heinlein died," he said.

It was a rather spooky moment. Heinlein was one of the true visionaries. He'd foreseen space colonies, cryonics, even a variety of tiny robots ("Waldos," as he called them in a story) that Eric Drexler would reinvent some forty years later. Almost every person in the room could be counted as a great fan of Robert Heinlein's – Keith had actually named one of his daughters Virginia Heinlein Henson, in honour of the author's wife – but the strange fact was that it wasn't Robert *Heinlein* there on the operating table; it was some *other* Robert.

The people at Alcor couldn't fathom it, especially Keith Henson, who had tried to convince Heinlein, when the writer was still on the L5 Society's board of directors, to sign up for a cryonic suspension. In fact, so had Eric Drexler. Henson and Drexler had met with Heinlein at an L5 conference in San Francisco, and tried to tell him what a terrible loss it would be to science fiction, to science, to the world at large, if he simply *let himself die*, once and for all and forever. But Heinlein hadn't agreed."<sup>1</sup>

The ideas you find people taking seriously in Regis' book are seductive to any reader of science fiction, but Regis is, unfortunately, one of those chroniclers with a personal axe to grind. He sees the ideas he portrays as an example of what he calls *fin-de-siècle* hubris. He writes about those people who consider uploading human minds into computers to be a real possibility rather than an sf plot in the sort of condescending manner that the media customarily reserves for science fiction fans. Thus any fan who longs for the days when being a fan was something to be ashamed of, or something that was proud and lonely, rather than, as it is now, a socially acceptable reading pursuit that even gets write-ups in The Australian literary section, can now join a group such as the L5 Society or Alcor and revel in rejuvenated pariahship.

Regis' book concentrates on cryonics, backyard rocketry, L5 colonies and Dyson Spheres and on the linking of human minds and computers. He introduces us to a series of characters whose incestuous cross-linkings make them very much like fans – indeed several are. We have pictures of Carolyn & Keith Henson, L5 founders who used to go out exploding things just for the hell of it. They acted as the centre of a circle that included Hans Moravec, whose ideas about melding human minds and computerized bodies gets more attention later in the book; Eric Drexler, whose thoughts on nanotechnology also merit a

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<sup>1</sup> *Great Mambo Chicken and the Transhuman Condition* Ed Regis (Addison-Wesley 1990) 106

chapter and whose ideas become central to the hopes of Robert Ettinger and Saul Kent who were involved in cryonics. Familiar names crop up at regular intervals. Richard Feynman, Timothy Leary and Freeman Dyson, from the world of real science rub shoulders with science fiction writers such as Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl and Jerry Pournelle, with Robert Forward having a foot in both camps. It is notable that the skiffy writers who do rate a mention are the hard science types rather than anyone with literary aspirations. I suspect that the characters with whom Regis deals would have little time for the "softer" writers. Surprisingly enough, considering the book's interest in computerized people, Gibson and the cyberpunks are not mentioned, nor is Phillip K. Dick. This mob are definitely only into the nuts and bolts. The closest one gets to a literary writer is when Simak gets a guernsey for *Why Call them Back From Heaven?*

The ideas recall some of science fiction's more nightmarish moments. Has Moravec imagines our uploaded minds inhabiting what he calls a "bush robot" – certainly not the comfortingly humanoid robots of Asimov et al, but a branched creation with each branch ending in manipulators, with the manipulators getting smaller and smaller in much the same fashion as fractal diagrams. Regis presents Moravec in such a way that one can clearly see that Moravec occupies the social stratum reserved for zap zap raygun fiends by earlier journalists.

"In fact this was even *better* than becoming Superman! You can kill Superman with Kryptonite, but with bit-by-bit transfer you can make *copies* of yourself! That seemed much better to me than anything I was reading about in science fiction."<sup>2</sup>

*Great Mambo Chicken and the Transhuman Condition* is definitely a book about where some of the people who found science fiction too limiting have gone. I accidentally discovered where a few of the males who were uncomfortable around the female of the species had disappeared. It used to be that science fiction clubs were a good place to get away from one's fear of females but, with the increasing involvement of women in fannish activities, those men have been forced to find something else. A couple of years ago, before I converted from Microbee to Macintosh, I attended a couple of meetings of MBUG – the Melbourne Microbee Users' group. There was one woman at the meeting and the club president made a point of welcoming her. The Microbee was, at the time, a CP/M machine, used mainly by electronic tinkerers. Meetings of the Melbourne Apple Users' Group – AUSOM – are far more like science fiction conventions in their gender balance.

Another major problem with science fiction is that its ideas are being snaffled up by serious science. I'm not thinking of the trite question "Now that people have landed on the moon is science fiction dead?" That was simply a physical event. What is a concern is that the interesting speculations that skiffy used to make are being made by honest and for true scientists now-a-days. Take, for instance, the following quotation from *New Scientist*:-

"If a singularity were able to interact with the outside world, physics as we know it would break down. Information could emerge from such a naked singularity in a completely arbitrary way. It could, literally, eject oven-ready TV dinners, replicas of Big Ben, or the complete works of William Shakespeare bound in vellum."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid* p 169

<sup>3</sup> "'Naked singularities' pose problems for Einstein's theory" John Gribbin *New Scientist* 16 March 1991 p 18.

Admittedly Gribbin isn't exactly free from the taint of science fiction – several of his books are rather good sf, even if the book he *intended* to be sf isn't – but this was published as a serious piece of news in a moderately serious science publication. Add to this books such as Paul Davies' *God and the New Physics* in which Davies examines the implications of such areas as quantum mechanics for physics and even those metaphysical speculations that appear in sf vignettes such as Eric Frank Russell's "Sole Solution" and Frederic Brown's "Answer" seem tame by comparison. Davies is here discussing the problems caused by the idea that there are several potential quantum states existing simultaneously

"One bold idea addresses this unnerving issue face on: the parallel universe theory. Invented by physicist Hugh Everett in 1957, and subsequently championed by Bryce DeWitt, now at the University of Texas at Austin, the theory proposes that all the possible alternative quantum worlds are equally real, and exist in parallel with one another. Whenever a measurement is performed to determine, for example, whether the cat [Schrödinger's] is alive or dead, the universe divides into two, one containing a live cat, the other a dead one. Both worlds are equally real and both contain human observers. Each set of inhabitants, however, perceives only their own branch of the universe."<sup>4</sup>

Okay. Granted that the thought of Everett "inventing" the parallel universe theory in 1957, when science fiction writers had been using it since the thirties is amusing, the point is that science feels free to play with these ideas and with their implications. Who then needs science fiction?

Even scientists working in relatively conservative fields, such as paleontology are not immune from the speculative fever. Take, as an example, Stephen Jay Gould's recent and brilliant book *Wonderful Life*. Here Gould examines the process by which a series of fossils was re-interpreted, throwing a great deal of light onto the nature of evolutionary change and incidentally looking at the way that people's interpretations of fossil evidence are very much conditioned by the prevailing paradigms and their own personal interests and situations. A thread running through the book is provided by a thought experiment as follows:-

"You press the rewind button and, making sure you thoroughly erase everything that actually happened, go back to any place and time in the past—say, to the seas of the Burgess Shale. Then let the tape run again and see if the repetition looks at all like the original. If each replay strongly resembles life's actual pathway, then we must conclude that what really happened pretty much had to occur. But suppose that the experimental versions all yield sensible results strikingly different from the actual history of life? What could we then say about the predictability of self-conscious intelligence? or of mammals? or of vertebrates? or of life on land? or simply of multicellular persistence for 600 million difficult years?"<sup>5</sup>

Without making clear reference to it, Gould is applying Chaos Theory to evolution. A Chaotic System is one to which a very small change can result in very disparate results. He's also dealing with a theme that science fiction writers have, in such stories as *A Sound of Thunder*, by Ray Bradbury and *Lest Darkness Fall* by L. Sprague de Camp, except that, according to Gould, you don't need to posit a lightning-struck classical scholar or a shit-scared dinosaur hunter with a butterfly on his boots. The system, according to Gould, will do the work for you. He figures that luck plays a large part in determining which

<sup>4</sup> *God and the New Physics* Paul Davies (Penguin 1983) p 116

<sup>5</sup> *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* Stephen Jay Gould (Hutchinson Radius 1990) p 50

creatures squeeze through evolution's needle's eye. Gould acknowledges that fiction writers have taken up his ideas, noting Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos* and Stephen King's *The Tommyknockers* as examples of recent writing that mesh with his view of evolution. Having read the former, on Gould's recommendation, I must agree that Vonnegut's idea of the way the human race survives a debilitating virus has much in common with Gould's picture of capricious evolution but it has even more to do with Vonnegut's pessimism and sense of nihilism as seen in books such as *The Sirens of Titan*, written over a decade before Gould and Eldredge's paper on punctuated equilibrium.

Nevertheless, *Wonderful Life* does fulfil many of those scientific needs. Here we encounter *Hallucigenia* which may or may not be a whole creature. If it is a complete creature, it would fit neatly into any science fiction novel, with its seven pairs of struts, its bulbous head and its siphonlike tail. There is *Opabina*, the weirdest of segmented beasties, with a toothed snout and five eyes spotted on its head. And Gould leaves us with an epilogue, on *Pikaia* an inconspicuous little worm-like creature which, Gould suggests, would seem the least likely candidate for success, based on its place in the fossil record but which seems to be the first recorded fossil record of a chordate—that group to which we humans belong. With that, Gould closes the book with a paragraph that would not seem out of place in any science fiction novel

"And so, if you wish to ask the question of the ages—why do humans exist?—a major part of the answer, touching those aspects of the issue that science can treat at all, must be: because *Pikaia* survived the Burgess decimation. This response does not cite a single law of nature; it embodies no statement about predictable evolutionary pathways, no calculation of probabilities based on general rules of anatomy or ecology. The survival of *Pikaia* was a contingency of "just history". I do not think that any "higher" answer can be given, and I cannot imagine that any resolution could be more fascinating. We are the offspring of history, and must establish our own paths in this most diverse and interesting of conceivable universes—one indifferent to our own suffering, and therefore offering us maximal freedom to thrive, or to fail in our own chosen way."<sup>6</sup>

So who needs science fiction? Is fandom any justification for continuing one's involvement with the field? I was tempted to refer to the wonderful writing produced by such writers as Bob Shaw, giving keen and humorous insights into his contemporaries, but then I read the following passage in *What Mad Pursuit: A personal view of scientific discovery* by Francis Crick in which the following appears:—

"Sir Lawrence Bragg was one of those scientists with a boyish enthusiasm for research, which he never lost. He was also a keen gardener. When he moved in 1954 from his large house and garden in West Road Cambridge, to London, to head the Royal Institute in Albemarle Street, he lived in an official apartment at the top of the building. Missing his garden, he arranged that for one afternoon a week he would hire himself out as a gardener to an unknown lady living in The Boltons, a select inner-London suburb. He respectfully tipped his hat to her and told her his name was Willie. For several months all went well till one day a visitor, glancing out of the window, said to her hostess, "My dear, what is Sir Lawrence Bragg doing in your garden?"<sup>7</sup>

That in itself is nothing, compared to the series of biographical essays *Surely You're Joking Mr Feynman! Adventures of a Curious Character* (Why is

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* p 323

<sup>7</sup> *What Mad Pursuit: A personal view of scientific discovery* Francis Crick (Penguin 1990) p 53



it that scientists are too indecisive to ever give a book a simple one part name?) by Richard P. Feynman, as told to Ralph Leighton. In this book, Feynman manages to detail anecdotes of work, love and play in a manner that would grace even the very best of fanzines. I felt awe, sadness, and happiness in the course of reading this book, coming away from it with the feeling that science lost a great writer when Feynman died. The sequel *What Do You Care What Other People Think? Further Adventures of a Curious Character* is every bit as good, despite getting a little bogged down in the section dealing with the investigation into the *Challenger* disaster.

With books like this around, who needs science fiction? Why do I waste my time reading fanzines and F&SF when I could be re-reading *Surely You're Joking Mr Feynman!* or going through the latest *New Scientist*? I guess it's become a habit and I do still get a lot from some of our more literate writers—considering their work strictly as literature, rather than as a source of goshwow! Now I tend to get my goshwows from the real stuff—science. It's an amazing world out there and who better to remind me of it than Feynman

“I have a friend who's an artist, and he sometimes takes a view which I don't agree with. He'll hold up a flower and say, 'Look how beautiful it is,' and I'll agree. But then he'll say, 'I, as an artist, can see how beautiful a flower is. But you, as a scientist, take it all apart and it becomes dull.' I think he's kind of nutty.

“First of all, the beauty that he sees is available to other people—and to me too, I believe. Although I might not be quite as refined aesthetically as he is, I can appreciate the beauty of the flower. But at the same time, I see much more in the flower than he sees. I can imagine the cells inside, which also have a beauty. There's beauty not just at the dimension of one centimetre; there's also beauty at a smaller dimension.

“There are the complicated actions of the cells, and other processes. The fact that the colors in the flower have evolved in order to attract insects to pollinate it is interesting; that means insects can see colors. That adds a question: does this aesthetic sense we have also exist in lower forms of life? There are all kinds of interesting questions that come from a knowledge of science, which only adds to the excitement and mystery and awe of a flower. It only adds. I don't understand how it subtracts.”<sup>8</sup>

So who needs science fiction?

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The talk above was given at the April 1991 Nova Mob Meeting. The Nova Mob is a Melbourne science fiction discussion group which meets at 8pm on the first Wednesday of each month, except December and January. Current venue is Alan Stewart's place 31 Brighton St Richmond. Though having a reputation for serious scholarly discussions, it's basically a natter group, enlivened by such luminaries as George Turner, Lucy Sussex, Sean McMullen, Bruce Gillespie and Wynne Whiteford. Other regular attendees include Alan Stewart and Greg Hills, who have trouble avoiding the meetings as they live there—not that that stopped Alan missing my talk. His excuse was that he was in Port Pirie.

The South Australian equivalent is Critical Mass. It meets at the South Australian Writers' Centre, 155 Pirie St, Adelaide, from 8pm again on the first Wednesday of the month.

<sup>8</sup> *What Do You Care What Other People Think? Further Adventures of a Curious Character* Richard P. Feynman, as told to Ralph Leighton (Unwin, 1990) p 11



\*

## A LETTER FROM GEORGE

George Turner

With reference to Graham Stone's letter and your article, 'A Native Tongue' (Q36J):

The troubles with Australian science fiction are rooted, as much as anywhere, in the attitudes of Australian fandom. Professional editors are not unenlightened as to the virtues of science fiction and the maligned 'establishment' has always been prepared to accept a science fiction which connects with the real world rather than with its own incestuous concerns. (Have you noticed that 90% of 'popular' science fiction is set in a future where all obstructive problems have been resolved in some unexplained fashion—i.e. ignored—or on far worlds where imagination fancies no limits need be implied and logic is for rockheads? It bores because it is neither honest fantasy nor honest science fiction—or, for that matter, honest adventure genre.)

From memory, science fiction by Peter Carey, Lucy Sussex and Rosalen Love has been published by *Coast To Coast*, *Westerly*, *Overland*, *Writing Women*, *Storyteller*, *Meanjin* and *Sun News Pictorial*. The catch is that these stories had 'literary' qualities, were not the usual in-group incestuous stuff. Literary? What that means, in simplest terms, is that the stories were not only written with some grasp of the art of literature, but were about real people in real situations rather than about 'science fictional' ideas; they were about the impact of ideas upon people instead of being written round stock characters manipulated to display a (usually) unworkable idea.

The Australian fan, it seems, is not interested in such work. Bruce Gillespie, of Norstrilia Press, told me long ago that Australian fans just will not buy Australian science fiction, and in *Eidolon* for Autumn, 1990, a reviewer of science fiction opened his article with "...I deliberately do not read Australian science fiction ..." The history of attempts to publish Australian science fiction is one of struggle against precisely such a state of mind. I doubt that Norstrilia

Press made a profit from any of its genre work save Gerald Murnane's *THE PLAINS*, which had its major appeal outside fandom. Paul Collins' anthologies barely broke even. Peter McNamara's *Aphelion* went down the drain of local apathy. Just now, two new magazines, *Aurealis* and *Eidolon*, are on the market and I fear for both of them. The professional authors (Love, Broderick, Whiteford, Dowling, Egan, Collins, McMullen—all successful overseas) have done the generous thing in support of their own, supplying stories for a far smaller payment than they can command in more prestigious venues, but the responsive noises from fandom are minuscule. There is nothing second rate about these publications beyond the teething problems suffered by any project, nothing that support and encouragement will not cure quickly, but I doubt that fandom will produce any backbone of well-wishing buyers.

Fandom seems to want *Astounding*, *F&SF* and *Asimov's* (which are no great peaks of achievement) and will not look at work that speaks for its writer's ideas instead of kowtowing to the self-replicating values it has become used to. I imagine that only fanzine publishers and their correspondents (and even among them the same small list of names cycles in the printed columns) have any real knowledge of Australian science fiction—and there are not enough of them to support a viable print run. So the writers publish abroad because their own people don't want them.

There may be a few writers who orient their work deliberately to the money-driven American market but most do not. Those I have read in the last couple of extremely productive years write in their own personal idiom and are accepted because even in America they are understood as having distinct and original voices. (It must be admitted that the essentially simplistic nature of the science fiction short story keeps idiom and vocabulary within the bounds of the American *WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY* dictum.)

Trouble starts for writers who, like myself, concentrate on characterisation, when we begin fitting dialogue to our creations and use half a dozen different varieties of idiom, from outback to ocker to professorial, to bring them and their talk to life. It is possible to steer cravenly round the more awkward idioms but my practice is to write them in and then fight the editorial objections, word by word, to save everything I can.

With *BRAIN CHILD* (to be issued next June) I suffered one defeat when nobody in the Morrow office knew what "cooee" meant but everything else was retained in a story that uses at least five varieties of class, workplace and gutter speech in wholly Australian context and vocabulary. America will accept such work; in Australia a publisher would be forced to remainder half his run.

The point is this—that some writers produce what they think will sell in a popularised market, tailor their stories to be acceptable and take no chances. That's fair enough while they make no literary pretences about it but it results in a static, lifeless genre. (When they run off endless series from the same template they become process workers.) The creative writers produce what they want to write, what expresses their desire to present their ideas in a manner personal to no one but themselves; they know in advance that they risk non-publication but they write what is in them and has to come out. They are the ones who produce new forms and new directions and are remembered when the process workers are long forgotten. The process workers get the money; the writers get another kind of satisfaction which I cannot describe because it is different for each one. They—and I—could not do process work, whatever the prizes, because the effort would bore us to tears.

It is the real writers who do their bit for each brave new publisher of a doomed local magazine. They get no support and almost no reward; for them the work is its own reason for existence.

Graham Stone asks: "If a distinctive Australian kind of science fiction were created, who would want to read it?"

Not Graham Stone, obviously. He doesn't even realise that a distinctively Australian science fiction has been with us for some years—but it has had to go overseas to find markets and to be recognised as distinctively Australian.

He also writes: "...the English speaking world in particular is almost completely homogenised to a bland cultural mush."

That is the statement of a man who reads only the homogenised mush produced for the mass market. Despite American insularity on the pop culture level, in the real world—you know, the big one out there where people think and explore and ask questions—the national differences of speech, thought and approach to literature form a considerable part of the pleasure of reading.

Could *LORD OF THE RINGS* have been written by an American, *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* by an Australian or *MY LADY TONGUE* by a Glasgow Scot?

Fandom was once an integral part of science fiction; now it seems to be a self-regarding chatter group which long ago severed itself from its roots and knows precious little of what really goes on in the big bookworld outside or even in its own backyard.

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ANNIE'S TELLING ME</b> <b>Marc Ortlieb</b></p>
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(With thanks to Anne Revell, who provided the original stories.)

Then there was the bloke who took a country road corner too fast, spun out and found his car sinking in a farm dam. At the last minute, a three-legged pig came racing across the paddock and, fastening his teeth onto the bumper bar, dragged driver and car free of the water.

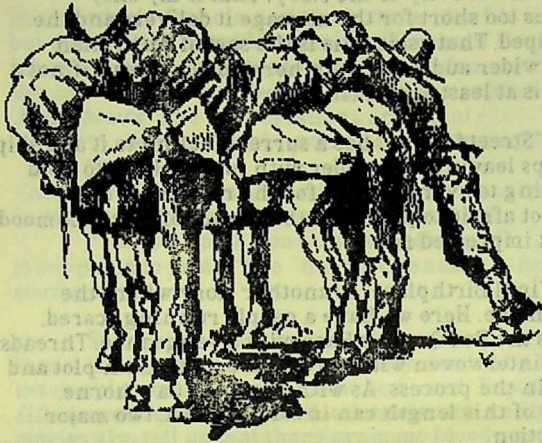
The pig was followed by his owner and, the fortunate driver thanked the farmer profusely for the pig's bravery and strength.

"Tain't nothing," replied the farmer. "Last November a school bus did exactly the same thing as you just did. The pig saved every single kid and all their homework and then dragged the bus free"

"Was that when he lost the leg?"

"Naw. That happened at Christmas time. He's such a good pig that we couldn't bear to eat him all at once."

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## Panning For Gold

Marc Ortlieb

I guess only a twisted cryptic crossword freak would look at the magazine title *Aurealis* and translate it as **gold exists**. I vaguely recall that the official explanation of the title is that it is a portmanteau of Aurora Australis. Still, I'll go to any extreme to give me a handle on this review of *Aurealis* 3. Please note that any detected sour-grapes bouquet here has a lot to do with the kind but firm rejection slip I received a couple of weeks ago. That aside, there are certainly traces of colour in this issue.

*Aurealis* is the brightest attempt at an Australian prozine since the late and lamented *Aphelion*. Its format, though reminiscent of *Far Out* in size, is much more appealing and its editors seem to have made a stronger effort to engage the enthusiasm of local fandom, not that that, as George points out above, is much in real financial terms. The cover for this issue, by Shaun Tan, is an attractive piece featuring astronauts trudging towards the desiccated ruins of the Sydney Opera House, establishing the magazine clearly as Australian and Science Fiction.

In my opinion, the nuggets that pan out of this issue are Greg Egan's "The Moat", Andrea Gawthorne's "Streetchildren" and Dirk Strasser's "The Final Birthplace". E. R. van Helden's "The Tourist", Maria McKernan's "The Day of the Sun", Simon Brown's "The Final Machine" and John T. Stolarczyk's "A Shadow Guard's Passing" are worth putting to one side for further processing and Marilynne Cromarty's "Is There A Fate Worse Than Death", Andrew McBurnie's "Dawn", and Scott Mendham's "Pieces of Paul" can be washed downstream. In this brief look at the magazine, I'll concentrate my attention at the top and the bottom. There are things to be said about the middle ground—Simon Brown's piece, for instance, takes a look at nanotechnology and one can almost forgive him the holes in his plot for the sake of the closing image—but it is at the edges that we see the strengths and the weaknesses of *Aurealis*.

Greg Egan's "The Moat" is a science fiction story of the first water. It deals with an interesting scientific concept while at the same time looking into the problems of an Australia of the near future—divided by poverty and racial hatred. As with all Greg's stories, "The Moat" works on several layers, with each contributing to the basic theme of isolationism. The characters are

as real as they can be, given the brevity of the story. That is my only complaint with the story—it is too short for the message it delivers and the ending seems somewhat clipped. That aside, this is the sort of Australian Science Fiction that needs a wider audience, both here and overseas, if not a *Welcome Stranger*, this one is at least a good find.

Andrea Gawthorne's "Streetdreams" has a surreal feeling to it and skips from image to image, perhaps leaving the reader with just too little to hold onto in the process. I'm willing to overlook that for the rhythm of the language. Here is a writer not afraid to play with the sounds of words. A mood piece certainly, but one that impressed me.

Dirk Strasser's "The Final Birthplace" is another story where the metaphor meshes with the theme. Here we have a people running scared, running from the light, it is the Red Queen's Race with a vengeance. Threads from the exposition become interwoven with threads from the main plot and the characters become real in the process. As with Egan and Gawthorne, Strasser realizes that a story of this length can involve, at best, two major characters and their interaction.

Putting aside the doubtfuls, I want to spend a little time on the clunkers. Marilynne Cromarty's "Is There A Fate Worse Than Death" is an example of someone with a superficial familiarity with the genre attempting that most difficult of tasks, the humorous science fiction story. It starts as a bar story with all the worst bar story clichés. Terms like *mega-popular*, *top brass* and *scuttlebutt* grate against the sensibilities. The sexism at the core of the punchline is straight out of the fifties. It ignores all the basics of science fiction writing. In the *1991 Writer's Yearbook* published by *Writer's Digest*, they have an article on writing science fiction by Orson Scott Card, extracted from his book *HOW TO WRITE SCIENCEFICTION AND FANTASY*. It includes the following warning:-

"Also, beware of analogies that remove the reader from the milieu of the story and remind him of the present time. 'The aliens had facial structures like eyebrows, only arched in an exaggerated way, so they walked around looking like a McDonald's advertisement.'"

What do I find in Cromarty's story but:-

"Fortunately, one of the first things I saw when we hit the city was that big, beautiful golden ~~A?~~"

Cromarty also drops names like *Trantor* and *traal* revealing that she's read some sf. Not a good story, given that it gets as much space as Egan's.

Andrew McBurnie's "Dawn" was, if I may return to my earlier metaphor, a piece of pyrites. It started out, for all intents and purposes, as the sort of ecodrama about meddling humans attempting to terraform a very alien planet. Such stories have been written well in the past, though I note that it has also been done very badly lately—in Bruce Holland Foster's "Big Far Now" (F&SF March 1991). What got to me about this story was that it didn't even follow through with that promise. It was suddenly transformed into a psychodrama about colonists from L5-style colonies who couldn't face the thought of living on a real planet with real weather. There is no hint of the dénouement until the last half-page. Indeed, all the signs in the story up until then point to it revealing the mystery of the planet Dawn. Add to this stilted similes, like:-

"Your obscene drills—stuck into this planet like giant proboscises:"

and you can see the trouble I had with the story.

When I read Cordwainer Smith's "A Planet Named Shayol", I had no trouble accepting the idea of people growing extra parts. Smith builds up to it

in an orderly fashion and the bizarre idea fits into Smith's strange universe but a story like Scott Mendham's "Pieces of Paul", in which he attempts to introduce the concept into a more mundane setting needs far more effort. It's the sort of story that feels as though it would be more at home as an episode of *Neighbours*. The conversations are banal:-

"...Hey, just think, you may even be immortal."

"Really?"

Careless editing has allowed the words *regeneration* and *rejuvenation* to become confused and I'm still not sure what

"The new finger then expanded radially,..."

is supposed to mean. The "horrific" ending is just silly, especially the last sentence.

So what do these stories tell us about *Aurealis*? For a start, they tell us that it is a market that is desperately needed by local authors for only in the marketplace can writing talent be honed. Hopefully readers will find that it fills a need for them as well, otherwise the venture is doomed to fail. The stories also tell us that there are some bloody good writers here. Of the three stories that impressed me positively, only one was by a writer whose work I'd already encountered and enjoyed—Greg. I'll keep an eye out for other material by Andrea and Dirk. The stories also tell us that the editors are willing to take chances; one expects some of these chances will not pay off, but that's the nature of magazine fiction and I'm sure that there will be people who enjoy those stories which were, to me, the real clunkers.

If you do care about Australian science fiction, there are worse things you could do than subscribe to *Aurealis*. Their address is P.O. Box 538 Mt Waverley, Vic 3149, AUSTRALIA and current Australian subscription rates are \$24 for four issues.

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### Q36K Contributors' Addresses

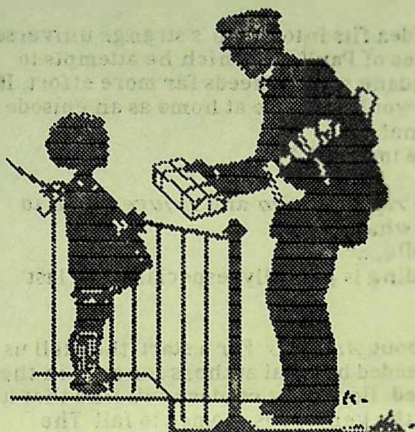
Ian Gunn P.O. Box 567, Blackburn, Vic 3130 AUSTRALIA  
George Turner 4/296 Inkerman St, E. St Kilda, Vic 3183 AUSTRALIA

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### THE PRINTER'S LAMENT Marc Ortlieb

In the midst of the proofs and the revisions,  
He found the Lord's final decisions.  
And it gave him the hump  
That they'd sound the Last Trump  
While he printed *Last Dangerous Visions*.

\*\*\*\*\*



## LETTERATURE You Mob

**Ian Gunn**  
P.O. Box 567  
Blackburn  
Vic 3130  
29/12/90

I was very disappointed that Q36J wasn't up to the same High Standard of Quality you exhibited so long ago in the days when you produced Q36I. I mean, the guy who does your covers has lost it as far as I'm concerned

The shit in S.F. article was amusing. In *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Douglas Adams notes that Millways has a corridor with "over fifty doors in it, offering lavatory facilities for all of fifty major lifeforms" which must play havoc with the plumbing contractors. Restrooms at the End of the Universe?

The Star Wars trilogy had a few insights into waste disposal on large space craft—our heroes caught in the garbage compactor in the first film and attempting to escape in a cloud of jettisoned waste in the second.

Please let Sheryl Birkhead know that, no, I don't NUMBER my work—the '590' beneath my signature is my own reference to let me know I drew this in May 1990. If I numbered my work, I'd probably be approaching six figures by now! Thanks for the praise though, much appreciated.

**James Allen**  
P.O. Box 41  
West Brunswick  
Vic 3055

27/12/90 do what you do well—others work in the same vein. There is a group direction, a flow of ideas. For example, I liked the article "Science Fiction Authors Don't Know Shit"—it was clever, funny and thoughtful. A nice piece of writing. I just don't see Phil [Wlodarczyk] or I doing it. (You should see Phil's "Celtic Shit Cross" illo.) perhaps Brian doesn't fit in at all. There must be more than two groups of fans—I think the old lit/media grouping has had the dick, just like Holden vs Ford or US vs USSR. This isn't a war—all of us rail against Australia Post and their price increases for one thing.

Edit this scrappy letter as you want...I try to understand people who take fandom so seriously that they wish not a syllable of their prose to be lost. They



worry me a little; it is just a goldfish bowl and anyhow "nobody gets out of here alive"—Jim Morrison.

**Amazing how each generation of fandom discovers its own metaphor. At the risk of seeming a boring old fart, I'll stick with that coined, I think, by Susan Wood: "I like fandom; it's better than owning an ant farm." Jocko is also interested in a cheap copy of *The Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam.**

**Lucy Sussex  
39 Chapman St  
North Melbourne  
Vic 3051  
28/12/91**

It was good to read an extended critique of *My Lady Tongue*. Most reviewers have only a limited amount of words to play with, so the individual stories at most got a sentence each. One notable exception was in what is referred to as the *Kernel Journal* (in reality the magazine of Flinders University's Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English.) Their reviewer spent some time discussing 'God and Her Black Sense of Humour', pointing out, among other things, that while you can refer to 'Upper New York City' and 'Upper New York State', 'Upper New York' (which I had in the story, is nonsensical. Somehow I think a word got lost somewhere between the proofs and the text.

It hadn't occurred to me that the link between art, technology and reality was a theme in the collection. I grew up with an artist in the house, so I suppose that was influential. I have just finished writing a story for an anthology of school stories, something that was difficult given that I had tried to forget as much of my school experience as possible. In the end, I wrote about a Life Class, so the theme crops up again.

You might be interested to know that I agree with you about 'Montage'. I think that some of it works as a mod piece, but the plot isn't quite right. In fact, I wanted to keep it out of the collection, but the publisher fixed me with her glittering eye and said: "I want everything!"

But then again, looking through the collection of reviews (Van Ikin asked for copies of them for his 'Winds of Criticism' column), I note that some people didn't seem to mind the story. Different strokes, I guess. George Turner didn't like 'God and Her Black Sense of Humour'. In a review he wrote for the final *ASFR*, but Bruce Gillespie did...

Incidentally, Mark Linneman read 'God' at my request to check the American idioms, and told me that exactly the same idea had been used in a C-Grade horror movie called—it would be—*Spermula*. I haven't tracked down this gem in the video shops yet, and, if any *Q36* readers have seen it, I'd be interested to know what it was like.

**Graham Stone  
GPO Box 4440  
Sydney  
NSW 2001  
15/1/91**

Your piece on excretion seems to miss one point: excretion is very little mentioned in literature generally. I think this is not all due to the general avoidance of the subject in polite speech, though certainly that's a major reason. There is simply no reason to mention it very often. It rarely has any relevance to plot or character. In mundane fiction, then, all we get usually are, er, passing references. But in science fiction there do arise points that should be discussed. As you say, authors have generally dodged the issue as far as possible, but SF still has more intelligent discussion than the whole corpus of mundane fiction.

Yes, there are a few examples from the classics. There is an episode in Aristophanes' *The Frogs* introducing a discussion of incontinence as a result

of fright, it is clear that it was already a cliché of Greek comedy. Closer to modern times I give you the lengthy discussion somewhere in Rabelais of the best material to wipe one's backside with (he suggests the neck of a swan) and there's at least one bit (I confess I haven't read the whole work) in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* where Sancho Panza has to keep still on guard duty but also has to relieve himself.

Conditions encountered in space vessels are the main occasion where SF authors have sometimes coped with the problems, but for a long time they either ignored them or dismissed them briefly. I used to wonder how they managed for months on end in cramped quarters, without even thinking about free fall. And how about the Iron Mole boring down a few thousand miles in Burroughs' *At the Earth's Core?* Same problem but at least with gravity. And I remember wondering about the girl reduced in size and carried around in a cage hung on a chain around the villain's neck in Cummings' *Beyond the Vanishing Point*.

I can add a few examples:

Niven & Pournelle *Lucifer's Hammer*—Inconclusive discussion on women urinating in free fall. The Russians have the answer but won't tell

Pohl *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*—Not much detail, but some discussion of the problem.

Heinlein *Farnham's Freehold*—Down to Earth, early in the book is a passage about devising a simple form of water closet from scratch. Garrett. 'Look Out! Duck!'—Short story about spaceshipping a lot of live ducks, introduces problems relating to duck shit, especially recycling it.

Roshwald. *Level Seven*—Missile controller is locked in a sealed underground bunker, waste doesn't get out, but is tanked.

Asimov. 'Strikebreaker'—Short. Untouchable caste handles colony's sewage.

Concerning the work necessary on Noah's Ark, there is a folk tale about this. Briefly, Noah went on a tour of inspection and said: "We'll have to get this all cleaned up! Shem and Ham, get shovels, Japhet, get a broom and go to it!" And go to it they did. They swept and they shovelled and they swept and they shovelled and they shovelled and they shovelled and they shovelled and, in 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered America.

**John Tipper**  
**P.O. Box 487**  
**Strathfield**  
**N.S.W. 2135**  
**AUSTRALIA**  
**26/1/91**

I opened your zine up with but one thought: *this zine is going to be full of shit.* and I was correct. Now I know why you've been around fandom for so long. Well, I had the answer when I read your zine, but your bloody painful blue paper killed my remaining brain cells.

**QUESTION:** What U.S. TV series was the first to reveal the existence of a toilet/john in the bathroom?

**ANSWER:** *I Love Lucy*

Just the type of useless crap you're looking for, I'm sure  
My favourite page was #20. It was yellow instead of blue. It was also softer on my bum.

**Dammit. I knew I should have printed Q36J in delicate pastel colours—only then Greenpeace wouldn't have been happy with me, despite the fact that the zine was largely recycled ideas.**

**Walter Willis**  
**32 Warren Rd**  
**Donaghadee**  
**N. Ireland**  
**BT21 OPD**  
**U.K.**  
**31/3/91**

Thank you for Q36I and Q36J. I thought they were peculiarly interesting. Perhaps I would have enjoyed them more had my knowledge of computer technology, Australian fandom and contemporary sf been more complete, but I doubt it. It has always seemed to me that the ideal fanzine should have something mysterious about it, in the same way as a garden pond has. Once a garden pond matures, you never know what is in it.

There might be anything

Schultz knows about this. In one of the *Peanuts* strips, Snoopy and his little feathered friend are looking at Snoopy's water bowl...

"What do you think is at the bottom of it?"  
"Would you believe the Lost Cities of Atlantis?"

To the rightminded reader, the obscure references in your fanzine are just a sercon equivalent of WHO SAWED COURTNEY'S BOAT, or its predecessor as fandom's No.1 interlineation YNGVI IS A LOUSE, and I wish you commensurate success with them.

Anyhow, your editorial policy as set out in "Now Where Was I" in Q36I is one I would agree with, except possibly as regards letters, which to my mind have the same importance for the life of a fanzine as the circulation of blood in the body.

In Q36J I was impressed by the originality of the main article, but would be inclined to question the assumption that shit is inherently funny. I think this is so for quite a small class of people, consisting mainly of small boys, the English upper classes and John W. Campbell, a group which has in common a fear of sex.

It's not that I question the right of these good people to laugh at anything they find funny; it's just that I feel that, if shit is a joke, it is not a very good one. I am more inclined to resent it as a sort of Three Stooges slapstick which mars the subtle wit of the sexual relationship.

**Mike Glicksohn**  
**508 Windermere Ave**  
**Toronto ONT**  
**M6S 3L6**  
**Canada**  
**28/3/91**

With Good Friday just a couple of hours away, it seems like an appropriate time to send a few words of thanks for the unexpected resurrection of Q36.

Your talk/article on excrement and its place or lack thereof in science fiction was extremely interesting. It strikes me that excreting just isn't something that's dealt with at much length or in much detail in any of the fiction I read so perhaps sf doesn't deserve to be taken too much to task for its failings in this area. Still, you manage to present an interesting view of the topic and its special relationship to science fiction (no other genre fiction could have attempted what Aldiss did, for example) and have probably sensitized me to the topic so I'll be thinking more about shit when I'm reading my next few sf books. Whether or not I'll thank you or curse you for this depends on what those books happen to be, I guess.

When I folded my first fanzine, lo these many years ago, I deliberately selected a new title when I started publishing again just so people would not bring their expectations of *ENERGUMEN* to *XENIUM*. The

other approach, of course, is to keep the same title and tell people loudly and often to get their brains into gear and realize that any faned publishes primarily for himself and anyone who expects otherwise has been watching too many episodes of BLAKE'S 7 and STAR TREK.

In recent years there's been a lot of talk about a distinctive Canadian sf so it doesn't surprise me that something similar should take place in Australia also. Despite having read some passionate statements on behalf of the developing Canadian sf subculture I'm unconvinced as to just what "Canadian sf" is/should be (obviously having a story set in Toronto or Sydney has nothing to do with making it Canadian or Australian) and your own article didn't convince me as to what "Australian sf" might be like. The tales you describe could just as easily have been written by Canadians or Americans talking about their own native peoples. Local vocabulary or local colour is just cosmetic as far as I'm concerned so I largely feel that sf stories are just that: science fiction stories, with no regional adjective needed to tie them to a specific culture.

**Ned Brooks**  
**713 Paul St**  
**Newport News**  
**VA 23605**  
**U.S.A.**  
**6/4/91**

Great cover by Ian Gunn on Q36I. Oddly enough, as I typed that line, booming noises arose to the south. Looking out the front door, I see that someone in downtown Newport News is celebrating something with fireworks. The Q36J cover and the other Tosche art is funny. I remember cherrybombs from my days at Georgia Tech, though we generally preferred a silvery cylindrical firework whose name I forget—it would stand on end with the fuse (which came out the side) stuck through a cigarette butt as a crude time-delay fuse. I once pout one inside a partially empty can of talcum powder and left it with such a fuse. Ah the folly of youth—now that I am old and grey and a Facility safety Head for NASA, I would inevitably stop and think of the hazard of flying bits of tin talcum-powder can. But I was lucky—no one was hit by shrapnel but the target room was spectacularly filled with white dust.

You should have stuck to the typeface in Q36I; it's much clearer than the one in Q36J. I am particularly sensitive to such things, as I'm very near-sighted—about 20/600—and often read with my glasses off, so I see every dot that the dot-matrix makes. the 'u' in Q36J is some sort of mutant version of that letter, and the footnote flag in that font is quite unreadable as the 'l' it was supposed to be. The flag for the second footnote does not seem to be there, but I assume it refers to Shatner. The only problem with the sharper font in Q36I was that, with my glasses on, the comma and period are indistinguishable.

I'm sure people will tell you that Q36J is full of shit... I enjoyed the article—odd that you missed mentioning Philip K. Dick's *CounterClock World*, with its transferral of the taboo on excretory function to eating.

I don't know that Australian idioms in a story would bother me, as long as the meaning is generally clear from the context. Such concerns should be ignored in sf publishing—nothing an Aussie writer could do in that line would be as bad as *Ridley Walker* or any worse than *A Clockwork Orange*, some editions of which were issued with a glossary. Turgid prose, dull characters, lack of rhythm, all are much worse impediments to the enjoyment of reading than the occasional unfamiliar idiom.

**Pamela Boal**  
**4 Westfield Way**  
**Charlton Heights**  
**Wantage**  
**Oxon OX12 7EW**  
**U.K.**  
**8/4/91**

As, for the last five years, there have never been fewer than four and often as many as six Australian soap operas currently running on British TV, I think we have more than enough exposure to Australian idioms. Actually, the example chosen indicates the editor has a poor opinion of readers' ability to translate the obvious "Come within cooee" is much more friendly than "come within shouting distance" and definitely more peaceful than to "come within a stone's throw." You simply do not have to overload your text with local dialect or idiom to give a very real image of a culture. I'm sure I'm not alone amongst readers who cringe when they come across 'stage' Welsh, Irish, Cockney etc; the turn of phrase that gives the ambience but does not perplex the reader is more than enough. Boney is very popular with readers of crime fiction, gives a wonderful image of Australian life (of course I have no way of knowing how accurate that is) and whilst I expect the author does use local idiom, I can't ever recall noticing it. Therefore I suggest it is used appropriately.

I see no reason whatsoever why Australians should pretend to be American or British in order to sell. I can see every reason for any author to write from their own cultural background; a good writer lets his or her imagination jump off from the solid base of what he or she knows. He or she also can select the words that convey images and understanding to the widest spectrum of readers.

#### **IAHF**

**Peter Booth P.O. Box 44, Woodridge, Qld 4114, AUSTRALIA** who sent a copy of *SYZIGY*, which appears to mark the emergence of another Angry Young Fen movement.

**Allan Bray 5 Green Ave, Seaton, S.A. 5023, AUSTRALIA** who details the reasons he's been too lazy busy to publish of late.

"I loved, in particular, your shitty article. Some more references, not exactly shitty but certainly pissy and nose dribbly, can be found in *Neverness* by David Zindell. It's housebrick size but I wouldn't say it's fantasy—definitely sf. Vaguely in the style and universe of Cordwainer Smith but not, I think, a copy; it's got too much original material."

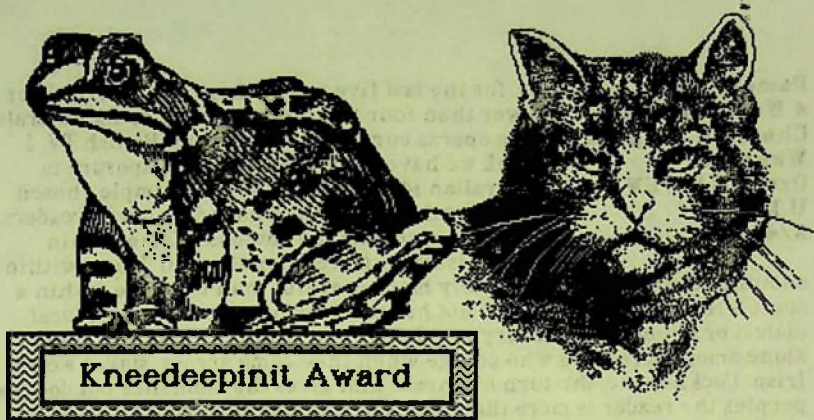
**Dr Craig Hilton, P.O. Box 430, Collie, W.A. 6225, AUSTRALIA** who mentions that, since acquiring a photocopier for his practice, he does indeed have copies of *The Rat Tale Songbook* and *The Galactic Bard* available for \$3-00 a shot.

**Cath Kerrigan P.O. Box 437, Camberwell, Vic 3124, AUSTRALIA** who notes "Sf fans claim to be very open-minded and adaptable—in my experience that's not so. They seem to dislike change as much as mundanes. (I hate that term—but it is appropriate.)"

**Mike McGann 483 Beauchamp Rd, Maroubra, N.S.W. 2035, AUSTRALIA** who asks me if I have the guts to run his artwork. The answer is that I'm not interested in that particular feud. I suspect that I will have more than enough of my own.

**Jan Weber 7 Nicholl Ave, Ryde, N.S.W. 2112, AUSTRALIA** "I particularly appreciated your comments on keeping Australia a WorldCon-free zone." Well, Sydney have seen sense too, fortunately.

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### Game Of Cat and Cane-toad Marc Ortlieb

(with apologies to Cordwainer Smith)

They do say as how the second book in a trilogy is the worst and the third is almost as good as the first—that was before Piers Anthony redefined the term *trilogy*. I'll leave the readership to decide whether or not that is the case for Q36 but with this, the third in the new series, I figure I can return the title **FANED** to my calling cards. True, three issues in a year isn't the greatest of publication schedules, but I figure that we older fans are entitled to take it easy while all the bright young things publish once a fortnight or so. At least Ian Gunn will be pleased to note that I've found a better cover artist.

And speaking of bright young things, I received my first issue of **SYZYG** the other day—#2—and I note that we have therein the harbinger of a whole new crop of Angry Young Fen Who Say "Fuck" A Lot. Creator, Peter Booth seems sure that Australian fandom is moribund, incestuous, irrelevant and that it is up to him to reinvent fanzines. Good luck to him. I hope that **SYZYG** goes from strength to strength and that he can become a part of the fannish community rather than an angry interjection. If I seem less than enthusiastic, I guess it's because I'm an old fan and tired, who has seen it all before. There was Steve Palmer and **RATS** and there was the **SPACE WASTREL** collective and there is the **MSFC** who seem to have scarcely had time to make the transition from AYFWSFALs to establishment before Peter comes barking at their heels. Interesting to note that the Secretary of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation, an organization reviled in the **SYZYG** editorial was himself part of a similar movement when the first series of the **SPACE WASTREL** came out. Historical perspective is a wonderful thing.

And speaking of historical perspective, what would Australian fandom be without a Ditmar kerfuffle. For the benefit of overseas readers, the Ditmars are the pet name for the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards. They are handed out at each National Convention and any member of the NatCon has the right to vote. They are a watered-down version of the Hugos. They also generate vast quantities of angst and flak from time to time. This year there has been yet another uproar: first

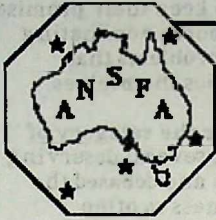
because the Awards sub-committee were rash enough to keep their promise to determine the Award categories by a ballot of those people nominating items—a thoroughly democratic procedure, with all the problems that entails; second because of the nature of the award trophies themselves.

In the first case, there were more nominations for the category of Best Fannish Cat and so that appeared on the ballot, with several deserving feline nominees. Some thought that this was in bad taste and debased the Award. Others felt that it gave the Award a touch of silliness so often missing from such pompous occasions. Anyway, the business meeting at SunCon, the convention at which the awards were announced, passed a motion that the Award for best fannish cat be retrospectively converted to a Committee Award, on the basis that the constitution of the Australian National Science Fiction Convention specifies that there should be only five categories. This ignores the fact that the category received the most votes and thus should have been retained with one of the lower categories being removed. It also ignores the fact that Swancon in 1989, also operating under that constitution, awarded six Ditmars. For consistency's sake, one of their Ditmars should be redesignated a Committee Award. It strikes me as a case of blatant discrimination against cats.

In the second case, the award trophies were stuffed cane toads, mounted on wooden plinths. The cane toad being the unofficial state animal of Queensland, it struck me as a most fitting award to be given at the first ever Queensland NatCon, but again there were some who considered the award to be in bad taste. Why? I will grant that *Bufo marinus* is not my favourite member of the amphibian class, but I have to admit that it is a survivor and can be considered representative of the race who introduced it to Australia in that it out-reproduces the locals, eats just about anything it can lay its thumbpads on, fucks anything that stands still for long enough to be mounted and pollutes the environment in the process. What better creature to represent the best the Australian science fiction community has to offer? It is certainly a more pleasant Ditmar Award than the one proposed at Adventon '81 which was to be black, biodegradable, radioactive, smeered with lard, the first such being administered to John Foyster as a suppository. That motion was only defeated on a countback.

I guess what I'm saying is lighten up. Fandom is just a goddamned hobby. It worries me when I hear rumours of a certain prominent Western Australian fan considering a lawsuit against a South Australian faneditor. It bothers me when I hear of people talking of fandom as though it is some sinister conspiracy designed to keep Joe Public away from science fiction. It pisses me off when I hear that some of me mates are getting stroppy towards other mates. Fandom isn't meant to be taken seriously. Certainly there are activities in fandom that require serious behaviour, such as making sure that fans don't shell out good money on poorly run conventions, but forget tiffs over what are, after all, merely gestures from the fannish community to people we think are great. Does the fact that fans give an award to a cat really detract from the fact that fans voted for a particular work of science fiction. The criteria for the two are, I trust, dissimilar. What's the fuss about?

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## THE ONSECK

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Notes from the Onseck of the A.N.S.F.A.

### The Science Fiction Achievement Awards (Faanies)

The Australian National Science Fiction Association has long been aware that there is a degree of dissatisfaction with the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards (Ditmars). In order to redress the serious deficiencies that allow there to be an award for the best fannish cat – the only qualifications for which, according to Terry Frost, are an ability to piss on furniture and to lick one's own groin – the ANSFA has decided to inaugurate an award that will recognise true ability in the field, rather than merely popular appeal.

The **SFA Awards (Faanies)** will, through the rigours of the nomination and voting process, ensure that only the very best of serious Australian science fiction will receive the awards. They were named after Ms Faanarella Adams, a prominent member of Antediluvian Antipodean Fandom in honour of the amount that this sweet lass contributed to fandom in general and to their production in particular.

#### Categories

In order to avoid the problems created by people taking the first three letters of the term "categories" too literally, there will be only three categories for the **Faanies**:-

- Best Serious Australian Science Fiction between 50 and 5,000 words
- Best Serious Australian Science Fiction between 5,000 and 50,000 words
- Best Australian Doorstop.

#### Nominating procedure

- 1) Anyone is eligible to nominate a work for the **Faanies**.
- 2) A nominated piece must be accompanied by a 1,500 word critique, written by the nominator, in which the literary, social and aesthetic qualities of the work are thoroughly elucidated. Said critiques must be accompanied by a letter of acceptance from *Meanjin*, *Science Fiction*, *SF Commentary* or *The Mentor*.
- 3) A work is only eligible for nomination if the committee can be convinced that it was indeed published in the calendar year preceding the year of the Awards Ceremony. Adequate evidence includes the destruction of all evidence to the contrary or large sums of money enclosed with the nomination form.



### **Voting procedure**

- 1) All current members of the Australian National Science Fiction Association, the Australian Science Fiction Foundation, the current Australian National Science Fiction Convention, Justin Ackroyd's mailing list, the Nova Mob, Critical Mass, ANZAPA, anyone wearing a Mike McGann t-shirt and the Great Unwashed are eligible to vote.
- 2) Each vote must be accompanied by a Statuary Declaration that the voter has indeed read each of the works for which he/she has voted.
- 3) Each vote must also be accompanied by a five page comparative analysis of the works in contention in which the voter clearly establishes which school of criticism has most influenced him/her in reaching a final decision on the merits of the works under consideration. (In the case of the voter deciding that literary works cannot be ranked on a single scale, considering the varying paradigms adopted by the different authors and the fact that the text does not exist in any other form than in its interaction between the arbitrary symbols on the page and the socially and biologically conditioned mind of the reader, then the votes in that section will be divided equally between each of the nominees.)
- 4) Each vote should be accompanied by a \$100 bill (or a convincing facsimile of the same, in those states in which the prevailing economic conditions render the facsimile more valuable than the original.)

### **Presentation of the Awards**

The **SFA Awards (Faanies)** will be presented at the Australian National Science Fiction Convention of the appropriate year or, in the event that this is cancelled, due to problems with First Class Airfares, at the ANSFA AGM of that year.

### **Design Competition**

ANSFA is running a design competition for the **SFA Awards (Faanies)**. Send us a photograph of your **Faany (SFA Award)** for consideration. (Stuffed cane toads need not apply.)



**All correspondence for ANSFA should be sent to:-**

The Onseck  
Marc Ortlieb  
P.O. Box 215  
Forest Hill  
Vic 3131  
Australia

