

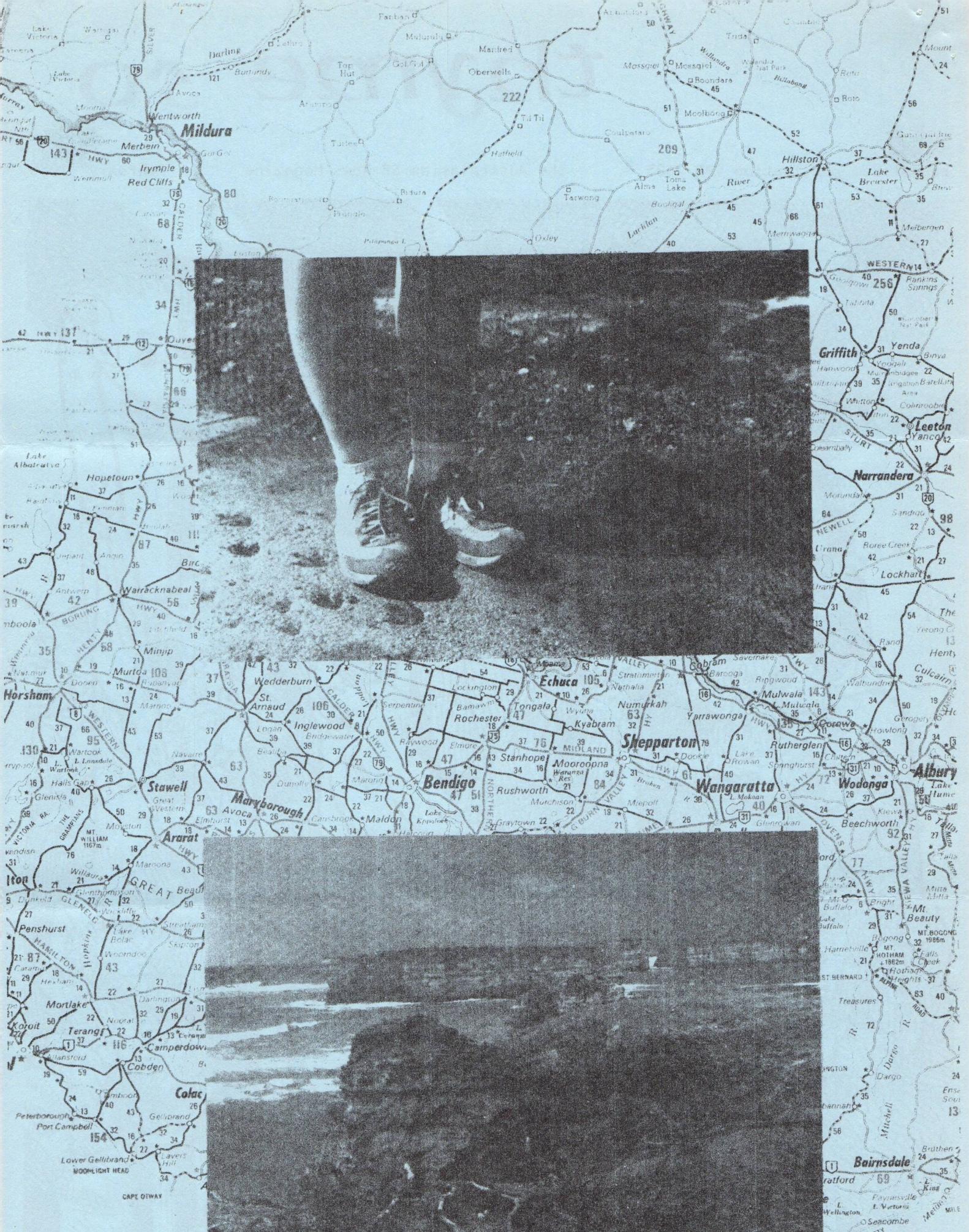
# thyme 50

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STRAIT



Thyme (#50) - the unpretentious newszine that wouldn't dream of telling you where to go for your holidays - is brought to you, once more, by that dynamic editorial duo of Peter Burns and Roger Weddall, who can be reached at the drop of a thirty three cent stamp at P.O.Box 273, Fitzroy 3065, Australia, or on the phone at (03) 347 5583.

Thyme appears monthly, except when it appears fortnightly, and is available for consumption (or reading, even) in return for news, review material, artwork, gossip, advice on where to go for one's holidays, interesting letters or \$\$\$MONEY\$\$\$, at the following rates:

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And remember: you have nothing to fear in this life unless you see, next to your name on your mailing label, a big, silver cross, which will be there to warn you that the sky is going to fall on your head (and it's probably your last issue) unless you... DO SOMETHING!

First up, for your edification, a report on something as close to a mini-convention as one as likely to find these days: sf fandom at its best. Take it away, Kim.

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (ALMOST)

A Report On The Wedding Of Kim Lambert And Mark Danbow

by Kim Huett

In my experience weddings are like Melbourne weather, inevitable but unexpected. When visiting Melbourne I know the weather will almost inevitably put on a display as impossible to ignore as it is difficult to predict. When attending a wedding it is with the expectation of experiencing anything from a mild cloudburst of emotions to a no holds barred hurricane.

Despite the uncertainty factor I watched the date for Kim & Mark's wedding approach with some degree of trepidation. Considering the people involved, and the advance plans mentioned it seemed likely this particular splicing of the knot would be of the gale force variety. It was suggested that there might be as many as 500 at the wedding ceremony itself, and 300 at the reception.

Finally the day of the great event dawned, warm sunny, and peaceful. The latter I had guaranteed by the clever device of moving out of the couple to be's house earlier that week and into another a full suburb away. I don't care how smoothly the wedding itself goes, the last minute preparations of the wedding party are not for the eyes and ears of the young and innocent.

After a little unhurried preparation, and much talking, the inhabitants and guests of Greenhaven, including such luminaries as Carey Handfield, Darrol Aesche, and Linda Smith, piled into two cars and drove over to Yarralumla Woolshed. There we joined a crowd of surprisingly well dressed attendees. Well such attire may be normal for the couple to be's relatives and business acquaintances. However, I for one have never seen so many elegantly dressed SCA and SF people in one place before, (and wonder if I ever will again?).

A cheerful atmosphere reigned as the attendees, many of whom had not seen each other for up to a year, exchanged news and views. Ha! The calm before the storm for sure I thought before making the most of my opportunity to show people how trendily I could dress if the mood so took me. However, by the time people stopped arriving there was no more than 100 or so people milling in front of the woolshed, a far cry from the original predictions.

Eventually we were directed to a tree lined glade to the rear of the woolshed, where the groom, and Jeff Jagoe, his best man stood waiting. As the crowd finished arranging itself around the edges of this clearing a car carrying the bride and her bridesmaid, Barbara DeLaHunty, arrived. Kim's father then escorted her to a spot beside Mark, in front of the Celebrant.

The Celebrant then conducted the ceremony, the guests watched, flies swarmed, and the sun beat down. All played their parts to the hilt apart from certain guests at the back of the crowd with short attention spans who swapped lines from "The Rocky Horror Picture Show". Suddenly everybody was clapping and it was all over. The crowd then straggled back to the front of the woolshed to the disappointment of some of the guests, including myself, who had been half expecting Kim and Mark to ascend into the heavens on a pillar of flame or something equally spectacular.

Part two of the proceedings began with the offering of liquid refreshments, alcoholic and otherwise, in front of the woolshed. This began disappearing at a rate which would have surprised me if I had not known most of the participants as well as I do.

Eventually we were allowed inside the building itself for what became a very pleasant evening of eating drinking, talking, and general frivolity. My memories from this point onwards are somewhat hazy and out of order but the most important ones, the cutting of the cake with a Samurai sword, Terry Stroud reading out the congratulatory telegrams, my presenting the couple with the card for the group wedding present, etc remain.

On sober reflection the next day I concluded that the wedding had turned out to be a most satisfactory social occasion for all involved. Far from being a gale force event it had proved to be a summer thunderstorm, impressive but not overwhelming. It's a good thing I never had the urge to go into the weather forecasting business!

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#### CONVENTION UPDATES

##### GALACTIC TOURS CONVENTION

Dates: 7-10 March 1986  
Venue: Melbourne Town House, Swanston St., Carlton, VIC  
Rates: Attending - \$40; Supporting - \$15; Family (2 Adults + unlimited kids) \$100.  
Day rate: Adult - \$5; Child/Student/Pensioner - \$2.50; Family - \$10.  
Rooms: \$56/night/room, regardless of the number of persons in it.(!)  
GoHs: David Prowse, Kate Manning.  
Address: Galactic Tours, P.O.Box 264, Ascot Vale 3032

As mentioned in Thyme #47, this convention looks like being quite large, quite unusual, and quite fun.

Quite large: with a couple of months to go before the convention, the host hotel - the Melbourne Town House - is already fully booked. However, in

an arrangement that smacks of heaps of good will, the parent company that owns the hotel has agreed to provide, as an overflow hotel, a much classier place in the city, but still to charge for rooms at the convention-contracted price. The Melbourne Town House accommodates something over 300 people....

Quite unusual: the proof of the pudding is in the eating, but one way in which this convention is unusual, bearing recent Melbourne conventions in mind, is that it would seem to be well run. The convention is holding a press conference on the Wednesday before the convention, and negotiations are underway with the regular press (television, radio, papers) for live and advance coverage of the event.

In an attempt to draw members of the public along, the ground floor of the Town House - with its various scientific and science fictional displays - will be open for inspection at a small cost. The arrangement sounds similar to trade fairs and exhibitions organised by non-sf concerns the year round; to what extent this approach will capture the public imagination is unknown, but with an impressive list of exhibitors ranging from NASA & the RAAF, to Toltoys, and the presence of the Guests of Honour David Prowse (Darth Vader) and Kate Manning (Dr Who assistant "Tegan"), it should be standing room only.

Upstairs at the con proper is where the 'Quite fun' comes into play. Programming will run each day from 9am till midnight-plus... one of the nights there will be a banquet followed by a futuristic fashion parade (with Susan Johnson Agency people doing the modelling), and on another there will be a masquerade followed by a masked ball.

Regular features of cons such as continuous video & film programmes, space for hucksters, and panels & speeches will all be there, with a definite media bias, with some media clubs presenting some of the items - although much of the programming will be science fact rather than fiction-related.

Other items worth mentioning here are... part of the complicated deal with Columbia/Fox, for the pre-release screening at the con of an sf film that, just released in the States, has already been a big box office success. The rotters aren't telling anyone what the film is until the opening day of the con, to keep people guessing... and then there are the raffles being run, with prizes ranging from tickets for two for a meal with one of the guests of honour, to having your accommodation during the con paid for, but giving you the hotel's executive suite to stay in.

The bare bones of the convention aside, what impresses us most is the enthusiasm and inventiveness of those concerned with the running of the event, and yet they also seem to have their feet planted firmly on the ground. All bodes well for what promises to be the most lively and entertaining convention of its kind for yonks. Now if they'd been running Aussiecon II....

#### SWANCON XI - the 1986 AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL SF CONVENTION

Dates: 28-31 March 1986

Venue: Miss Maud's Hotel & Function Centre, 97 Murray St. Perth, W.A.

Rates: Attending - \$40 until 27 March; \$45 thereafter; Supporting - \$20.

Rooms: The con hotel is now fully booked, and nearly all rooms are taken; there are a few singles (\$37.50/night) and Twins (\$49.50/night) left at the time of printing - rooms in the overflow hotel will cost one dollar more/night.

The Accommodation Address is: Swancon XI Accommodation,

% Bridgetown Police Station, Bridgetown 6255. Got it?

GoH: C.J.Cherryh

Fan GoH: Jack Herman

Mail: P.O.Box 318, Nedlands 6009.

Talking about large - and probably quite fun - conventions, if you are a member of SWANCON XI, hopefully you already will have received their Progress

Report #3. It's a rather disorganised document but contains many suggestions as to who to write to - and when by - if you are interested in...

The Masquerade: 8pm Saturday 29 March. Theme: 'Meetpoint Station'. Enter before 15 March. Mail: the general address, attn: Karyl Nairn.

The Short Story Competition: word limit: 10,000 words. Entry deadline 7 March. Mail: the general address, attn: Grant Stone.

The Banquet: 8pm Sunday 30 March. \$20. Book before 14 March. Mail: gen. addr.

The Cocktail party: Friday evening 28 March. For reasons that are sufficiently obscure that even the people writing PR#3 appear to be confused by it: although there will be a cocktail party, and you should tell the committee in advance if you plan to attend it (otherwise you might not be able to) you won't have to pay money in advance, in fact you will just be ordering drinks (presumably cocktails?) across the hotel bar. Um... yes. This is confusing. Not as confusing as the matter of what works of fiction are eligible for the Ditmars this year, but confusing nonetheless.

In fact, the whole PR is a bit of a mess, but this probably has nothing to do with how the convention itself will turn out. Swancons have an unbroken reputation for being relaxed, enjoyable affairs, and this one looks like being no exception. PR #3 also has a tentative programme listed, including such gems as 'The Religious Iconography of SF Book Covers', 'Penetration of the Fan Mafia' [who blabbed?] and 'Fannish mixed marriages - can they work?' Intriguing. The PR also contains an ad for 'Kimcon', plans for a specially chartered bus, going from the ACT/Sydney area to Perth and back.

If the idea of travelling to Perth in the company of a bus load of fellow fans, all for less than the cost of the standard discount airfare, appeals to you, write to: 'Kim Books', Freepost 24, 82 Alexander St., Crows Nest 2065.

#### HALLEYCON - the 7th NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL SF CONVENTION

Dates: 30 May - 2 June 1986 - NZ Queen's Birthday Weekend  
 Venue: Southern Cross Hotel, 118 High St., Dunedin, NEW ZEALAND.  
 Rates: Attending - \$30 till 1 April, then \$35. Supporting - \$10.  
 Rooms: Single: \$80 (New Zealand dollars, of course); Double: \$90. There may be a discount if sufficient rooms are booked.  
 Mail: Halleycon, P.O.Box 5516, Dunedin.

#### KINKON 2

Dates: 7-9 June 1986 - Aus. Queen's Birthday Weekend (except for W.A.)  
 Rates: Attending - \$25 until the day before, then \$30. Day rate: \$15/day.  
 Venue: Victoria Hotel, Little Collins St., Melbourne, VIC.  
 GoH: not Val Lewton - he's been dead since 1951.  
 Fan GoH: ... nothing confirmed, apparently.  
 Rooms: Single: \$29; Double: \$36; Triple: \$43 - all without facilities.  
With facilities (fridge, bathroom, toilet): S\$37; D\$47; T\$56.  
 Mail: 11 Hopkins St., Dandenong 3175.

Kinkon 2, run by the same people who did #1 in the series, promises to be a smallish but pleasant convention, on same time as Syncon '86 (sydney). You might like to write them for their 'Flyer Number 2' which talks briefly about the possible programme, mentions that there will be a contest for the best short sf film (okay, Irwin, put 'em up!), and talking of films there will be various items concerning Val Lewton - panel/discussion, perhaps a film or two of his. The theme of the masquerade is the same as the theme of the con itself: comics; prizes for best costume - "Golden Gorillas" will be awarded. What else is there to say? It should be an enjoyable, smallish con....

Australian SF from the Mainstream

by Lucy Sussex

Early last year I received in the post a list of twenty-one books with the request that I would read them and, having mentally digested them, give a talk on Australian sf novels written by mainstream authors. The compiler of the list was Jeff Harris, who was then seeking programme items for Advention '85. Like an idiot, I accepted, although I had read few of the listed works. There followed several weeks of frantic reading, in which I discovered the list was quite idiosyncratic. It was as idiosyncratic as my modified version of the list would be.

List One:

- Games of the Strong, Glenda Adams (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1982)  
Committal Chamber, Russell Braddon (London: Heineman, 1966)  
The Year of the Angry Rabbit, Russell Braddon (London: Heineman, 1964)  
A Flight of Chariots, John Cleary (London: Collins, 1964)  
Play Little Victims, Kenneth Cook (Rushcutters Bay: Pergamon, 1978)  
Tomorrow And Tomorrow And Tomorrow, M. Barnard Eldershaw (London: Virago, 1983)  
Going, Sumner Locke Elliot (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1975)  
A Change of Mind, G.M. Glaskin (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1959)  
The Hand That Feeds Us: A Satiric Nightmare, Nicholas Hasluck (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Press, 1982)  
The Bush Soldiers, John Hooker (London: Collins, 1984)  
Breakthrough, John Iggylden (London: Chapman & Hall, 1966)  
City of Women, David Ireland (Melbourne: Allen Lane, 1981)  
A Woman of the Future, David Ireland (Ringwood: Penguin, 1980)  
The Plains, Gerald Murnane (Melbourne: Norstrilia, 1982)  
Three Persons Make A Tiger, Dal Stivens (Sydney: Cheshire, 1968)  
The Girl Green As Elderflower, Randolph Stow (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979)  
The Suburbs of Hell, Randolph Stow (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984)  
Visitants, Randolph Stow (London: Secker & Warburg, 1979)  
Beloved Son, George Turner (London: Faber, 1978)  
Vaneglogy, George Turner (London: Sphere, 1981)  
Yesterday's Men, George Turner (London: Faber, 1983)

The trouble was largely that one person's sf is another's mainstream. Furthermore, since category-bending has become fashionable in literature - like a punky haircut - it has been increasingly difficult to make distinctions. The reader is referred to the term 'magic realism' (a contradiction in terms?) to indicate the kind of confusion now current.

Before I figuratively start throwing books in all directions it should be noted that List One already had some 'exclusion factors'. It consisted of novels, while a comprehensive study of Australian sf from the mainstream should include short fiction, notably some works by Messrs Moorhouse, Carey, Foster and Bail. Also excluded were works like The Germ Growers, which is justifiable since prior to 1926 the term 'scientifiction' did not exist. It would not be justifiable, however, to omit children's books from an omnium gatherum study (which this article does not pretend to be). That category of literature, incidentally, has been bending like a willow in recent years.

The reader is asked to duck at this point: out go Three Persons Make A Tiger by Dal Stivens (a fantasy) and The Girl As Green As Elderflower by Randolph Stow (magic realism). Stow's The Suburbs of Hell received a Ditmar nomination in '85, which is odd for a mystery in which Death, and not the Butler, did it. A closer encounter with sf is Stow's Visitants (an excellent novel) which was based on a UFO sighting. However, as Stow interprets the UFO as a sputnik, the one science fictional aspect of the work becomes mainstream and so it departs from the list. A Flight of Chariots (Jon Cleary) and Committal Chamber (Russell Braddon) are social realism by comparison and out they go too.

A borderline case is Glenda Adams' Games of the Strong, which figured recently in Science Fiction's Best Oz SF Poll. For that magazine I reviewed the book unkindly - 'style as flat as day-old omelette' I said, and worse. However, Adams was not excluded for poor writing (if that criterion had been applied rigourously, the resultant List Two would have been very short) but because Games of the Strong bears the same relationship to sf as Le Guin's Malafrena: they are set in countries so close to reality one wonders why the author bothered.

The book throwing metaphor will be abandoned now, rather than seem disrespectful to George Turner, who was also de-listed. [Why single him out? eds.] As three Adventioneers were discussing his work, he appeared to be adequately covered at the convention. Moreover, with three sf novels, some short stories and a quantity of criticism, Turner can be said to have fairly embraced the genre, whereas this study is primarily concerned with the writers who flirted with it.

To fill out the somewhat depleted list, some additions were made. At this point an apology should be made to the shade of Neville Shute Norway: On The Beach and In The Wet should have made an appearance but there was not time or the opportunity to read them.

List Two:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <u>The Year of the Angry Rabbit</u> ,                | Russell Braddon                         |
| <u>When The Enemy Is Tired</u> ,                     | Russell Braddon                         |
| <u>Razorback</u> ,                                   | Peter Brennan (New York: Jove, 1981)    |
| <u>Play Little Victims</u> ,                         | Kenneth Cook                            |
| <u>Pig</u> ,   | Kenneth Cook (Melbourne: Schwarz, 1980) |
| <u>Tomorrow &amp; Tomorrow &amp; Tomorrow</u> ,      | M. Barnard Eldershaw                    |
| <u>Going</u> ,                                       | Sumner Locke Elliot                     |
| <u>A Change of Mind</u> ,                            | G.M.Glaskin                             |
| <u>The Hand That Feeds Us: A Satiric Nightmare</u> , | Nicholas Hasluck                        |
| <u>The Bush Soldiers</u> ,                           | John Hooker                             |
| <u>Breakthrough</u> ,                                | John Iggleston                          |
| <u>A Woman of the Future</u> ,                       | David Ireland                           |
| <u>City of Women</u> ,                               | David Ireland                           |
| <u>The Plains</u> ,                                  | Gerald Murnane                          |

To begin the discussion proper, here is Helen Garner, who allegedly complained on a postcard to Laurie Clancy: 'I am fed up with realism but do not know what to do about it.' ('Struggling to Write For Your Life', Age, 2.3.'85, p.2)

A quarter of a century ago, G.M.Glaskin knew what to do but, aware that he was taking the literary equivalent of a walk though the red-light district, he covered himself with an apologetic preface:

'This is not really a novel, but a fantasy, an imaginary adventure of the human mind. Infeasible it may be, but, I trust, plausible; for nit is not as incredible as the man-made satellites now encircling... the Earth.' (A Change of Mind, p.7)

More will be said about this book anon, so we will put it aside for the moment, noting only that Glaskin was in a minority of one in his need to apologise. Onto the convenient grouping of books involving the subject of alternate worlds....

John Hooker's The Bush Soldiers covers the period of time from World Wars One to Two, the latter of which the axis powers win. There is no other resemblance to Dick's The Man In The High Castle - what follows is peculiarly Australian. As the Japanese invade this country, members of the Volunteer Defence Force go bush in a scorched earth campaign. Hearing that the Japanese are operating the Broken Hill mine with slave labour, htey blow it up and escape into the desert, eventually to do a Burke & Wills at Cooper's Creek.

From that potted plot one would assume *The Bush Soldiers* is an adventure novel with a pathetic finale, but Hooker is more ambitious. His main character, Sawtell, is intended to be of psychological interest, for his life is told in alternate, flashback chapters. However, while Marjorie Barnard has the knack of making ordinary people fascinating, Hooker has not. Sawtell and his mates are a little dull.

*The Bush Soldiers* is not a bad book, and one cannot attack the author for being ideologically unsound, in the Tim and Debbie sense. Hooker makes Sawtell's wife a feminist, improbably so for the nineteen-twenties, and when the Bush Soldiers are unkind to Aborigines they get a nasty come-uppance. Presumably the point of the novel is that the Australian landscape wins out. Competent, but without distinction.

The next book to be mauled is David Ireland's *City of Women*, in which Sydney is off-limits to men. It is not possible to relate the plot, because there isn't one, much - Ireland creates his works by a collage-like process in which there is little narrative progression. Instead there are anecdotes, snapshots and vignettes, held together by the narrator's voice. This is fine provided the reader's attention is held, but Ireland is repetitious. The narrator does little but reminisce, visit the girls and get drunk, until *City* resembles one long, drunken afternoon, where one o'clock is much like five, or chapter one like twenty-one. Until the end, the reader is encouraged to think the *City of Women* is a future Sydney, until the unmanned metropolis is revealed to be a feminist fantasy. Thus the book enters the alternate world, and also the cop-out class.

It is curious that the all-female societies in sf are usually the dreams of lonely women - consider Wyndham's *Consider Her Ways*, for instance. Ireland's women are not convincing; he has said 'that if you expell men, there are still certain functions in society that have to be filled... like that of a bully, or a criminal, or a publican, or a whinger, or a murderer' (*Science Fiction* 9, Sep. '81, p.111). However, the inhabitants of the city go to doe's parties, molest underage youths and rape - the book reads very much as if Ireland merely transcribed the conversations at his local pub, and changed the sex of the speakers.

In this study, though, there is not space to discuss Ireland's strange obsession with female characters - on to the next book!

Gerald Murnane's *The Plains* is Australia inside out, with the centre not only the geographical middle of the country but also the HQ of its high culture. Murnane achieves this reversal by equating squalocracy with intelligensia, an imaginative feat with distinct possibilities for farce. If a name was affixed to the elegant mansion full of servants, womenfolk and arty hangers-on (a name like 'Nareen'), and if the narrator's metaphysical patron were very tall and an ex-Prime Minister, *The Plains* could be hilarious. However, it is serious:

'... a new group of plainsmen came in... to resume their life-long task of shaping from the uneventful days in a flat landscape the substance of myth'. (*The Plains*, pp.18-19)

The plainsmen are unusual gentry, not only in their mental activity but by seeming not to expect value for money. The narrator lives on the estates for years with the promise of making the definitive film about the heartland, and wins praise for never actually making it. By inaction, he has proved the incomprehensible nature of the plains.

One suspects that in reality the society of *The Plains* would be stultifying; and for all the plainsmen's love of their country, they shut themselves away from it - in leafy verandahs and the tightly shuttered interiors of pubs. Strangest of all, when the plainsmen picnic with the whole clan, a large, opaque marquee is erected, within which everyone gets drunk. Possibly the foregoing is unfair to the book, but a far more satisfying exploration of Australis Metaphysicalis is Murnane's short story 'Land Deal', in *Dreamworks*.

An interesting feature of the list is that half the books are dystopias, or have dystopic elements: Breakthrough; The Year of the Angry Rabbit; Play Little Victims; Tomorrow; When The Enemy Is Tired (arguably); and The Hand that Feeds Us. If one imagines the unifying factor of gloom in these books to be the liquorice, then they are a packet of liquorice all sorts, in which the thriller, political satire, allegory, unreliable memoir and other literary genres are represented. For vaguely alphabetical reasons, the first all sort to be munched is Breakthrough, by John Iggyulden.

This curious novel contains many elements (much like The Dreaming Dragons, which in this case is not bonded together by stylistic flair). There is a human bomb, a dictatorship that glorifies apathy, 'tkf' alias telekinetic force, an Australian anti-nuclear peace force and a hero who smacks of James Bond. Briefly, said hero - a member of said police force, has a bomb implanted in him by the dictator, has it removed by tkf, then destroys the apathetic state. To the cynical, eighties reader, the notion of Australians as rugged individualists combatting apathy seems a little naive. It is certainly an idea with which Marjorie Barnard, writing twenty years before Breakthrough, would have disagreed.

The Hand That Feeds Us is, in contrast, a cynical book which is also avant-garde. This lolly is a right-wing satire of a future Australia misruled by the trade unions. It is intended as wit, but unfavourable comparisons come to mind, notably with Swift, who was funnier and more savage. Also, Kurt Vonnegut's 'Harrison Bergeron' attacked over-egalitarianism so effectively in short story form that a novel-length diatribe against the same evil seems prolix. The Hand That Feeds Us does drag on, particularly in the three reviews itself (faked by Hasluck) which end the book - not an original trick. Still the novel has its moments: The Middle Central Party and its enemy The Central Middle Party, and the acronym S.C.A.B. (Suspected of Criticizing Approved Beliefs).

The next dystopia to be discussed is David Ireland's A Woman of the Future, which is a coming-of-age novel, its eponymous narrator a teenage girl. It is the setting of this book which edges it into the sf category - in this future automation has made the working class redundant:

The social classes have been reduced to two: Serving Class and Free.... At the end of school years the grading system diverts a small stream of young people towards the class of professionals, those named the Servants of Society. The rest are Free Citizens, proletariat.... The Serving Classes, describe them; produce, provide and proscribe for them; analyse, diagnose, manage the machines that have replaced them as labour units; allowing them the dignity of life, costing that as an expense against the State; granting them the luxury of reproduction.... The trivial occupations of freedom are their whole life.

(Melange of quotations from A Woman of the Future, pp.12-13; not in auctorial order.)

It is doubtful Ireland has read C.M.Kornbluth's 'The Marching Morons', but something of the same spirit informs the book. Ireland is more sympathetic towards his morons, but he invests (infests?) them with the weirdest diseases. It is apparently symbolic that failures should sprout coffins and excess vulvas from their bodies, but there is never any explanation for this high mutation rate. Here the novel hops a category into fantasy. One explanation for the omission (apart from Ireland being uninterested in or unable to fabricate the spurious science necessary) is that the novelist had set his heart on the heroine becoming a leopard and so created precedents so that the leopardization does not seem utterly improbable.

Having mentioned animals, it seems appropriate to discuss next a group of works best termed bestiaries - animals figure prominently in them, specifically mice, rabbits and pigs. Kenneth Cook's short Play Little Victims begins

with God exterminating all life on Earth. He forgets, however (otherwise there would be no novel) one little valley and two wee mice. To quote Cook: 'The cosmic convulsion had completely disrupted the theory of evolution' (Play Little Victims, p.4) and thus the mice have IQ. Cook ever so subtly has the mice call themselves Adamus and Evenus - they are fruitful and multiply.

Play Little Victims is an overpopulation dystopia, with a satirical bent. The mice soon have excess numbers and turn to a conveniently surviving public library for the answer. They learn about wars, cars, drugs, abortion etc., all of which they interpret as population control measures and adopt. The right-handed mice fight the left-handed mice, for example. When none of these means work they turn to cannibalism, subtly called 'the final solution' in the novel.

My reading of Play Little Victims happened to coincide with a mouse plague, which somewhat soured the reception of the book. Also souring was Cook's mistakes, particularly in mouse physiology. While correctly stating the mouse gestation period, he greatly overestimates the mouse reproductive capability - young mice take three months to mature sexually, not three weeks, which means his calculations of the rate of increase are in error. Another odd feature is the elasticity of the mouse valley: from 'a few square kilometres' (p.4) it increases to 'sixty square kilometres' (p.16), without explanation. These factual errors pale beside the essential implausibility, however, of mice using a library without the deciphering skills of a muse Michael Ventris.

If Cook has a cavalier attitude towards scientific fact, then Russell Braddon ignores it altogether in The Year of the Angry Rabbit, a novel not intended to be taken seriously. The premise is that the search for a bigger, better myxomatosis leads to Supermyx, which has no effect on rabbits (except to make them fierce) but kills human beings instantly. Realising the possibilities for germ warfare, the Australian government takes over the world. But the rabbits are not beaten, even when nuked to prevent the spread of Supermyx. They mutate into carnivorous giants, whose unstoppable advance causes Australia to be evacuated. Only the tribal aborigines remain, and they summon the rainbow serpent to drown the bunnies - it rains for forty days and forty nights.

From the plot outline it could be assumed that the novel is hilarious, but it is not. The Year of the Angry Rabbit is frantic but insufficiently farcical, due to the lumpen nature of the humour - for instance the nuclear attack system concealed in the Prime Ministerial dunny. Still, the reader may be amused by notions like conscription for tennis, swimming and athletics.

The last two bestiaries represent a digression from the dystopia, although not from nastiness: both concern feral swine. Pig, by the previously mousy Kenneth Cook, and Peter Brennan's Razorback appeared, coincidentally, within a year of each other. There is no question of plagiarism since Razorback, which was published later, is definitely no quickie. In contrast, Pig is brief, hurried, and thankfully forgettable. Both books have the theme of a giant, canny and savage boar (Tusks!) but Brennan seasons the mix with a tale of international crime involving the pet food industry. If one can compare these books to pork sausages, then there is more meat in Razorback. However, given the fashionable gore in both novels, and their loving description of pig parasites, the reader may prefer to eat vegetarian.

Curiously, the bug for rabid animals ravaging the outback also bit G.M.Glaskin, who produced a short fiction called 'The Inheritors', in which sheep go nasty. These unpleasant carnivores are, however, a far baa from Glaskin's other sally into sf, A Change of Mind. This novel describes two men who exchange minds via hypnotism, one a middle-aged accountant, the other a handsome young steelworker. The first copes with life in a new body, the second cannot, and suicides. Thus the accountant inherits an extra twenty years of life, good looks, a new zest for living, and his secretary. Compared with other mindswap tales, particularly Robert Sheckley's novel of that name, Glaskin seems unimaginative.

A Change of Mind also suffers in comparison with Sumner Locke Eliot's Going - and these two novels are bracketed together as examples of small stage sf. There are few characters, no elaborate sets, and the action is focused on the family, in Eliot's case as the microcosm of the larger dystopia outside.

Strictly speaking, Going is not Australian, for Eliot is now an American citizen, and in at least one library the novel is classified in the 810s - Dewey Decimal Code for Yankee literature. However, being finicky about nationality would have meant the omission of one very good book from the list. Going resembles Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, in being a melange of dystopic ideas that are not in themselves original, but are adroitly told. Eliot's dystopia has ration cards, paper dresses, no pollution but few butterflies, dissenters mentally lobotomised into happy citizens and, like Bradbury, an absence of books: '... with all the reading these people did, they had pollution, crime in the streets, venereal disease, political corruption and anarchy' (Going, pp.2-3).

The society of Going is middle America triumphant, being a very clean-living and right-wing tyranny, of the sort Ron Reagan would gladly preside over. However, the change has been ushered in (and here Eliot shows his Australian roots) by one Senator Bjelke-Petersen, of Minnesota. 'Thinking is pollution' is the motto of this - in a strictly limited sense of the word - culture.

The story of Going is very simple: the last day in the life of a woman who has turned sixty-five and is due for euthanasia. Amazingly this tale is told without mawkishness, and is not even as depressing as the plot summary would suggest. Mrs Bracken dies with a figurative clenched fist.

A large part of Going is reminiscence, as is another of the list's dystopias, Russell Braddon's When The Enemy Is Tired. So much of this novel is memoir, in fact, that the dystopic element is merely a frame story. South-East Asia has been overrun by Communists (this novel was published in 1968), and an Australian POW is being encouraged to write the story of his life as a means of breaking him. The two strands of the novel are integrated somewhat clumsily when the POW is led to believe that tortures derived from his memoir are being inflicted on fellow prisoners. Today the frame story reads like anti-communism of the crudest variety, and the rest of the novel, while competent, is not half as much fun as the (somewhat similar) Unreliable Memoirs.

Last but not least in this discussion is the chronological first: M.Barnard Eldershaw's Tomorrow, first published in 1948. This novel is long, compromising two separate narratives, one a complete novel of life in the depression and beyond, the second the story of its author, a man of the future. Unlike When The Enemy Is Tired, the politics are sophisticated: Tomorrow is a critique of Wells' political ideal, the technocracy. In the novel, the ruling 'Scientific and Technical Congress' is shown to be stultifyingly corrupt.

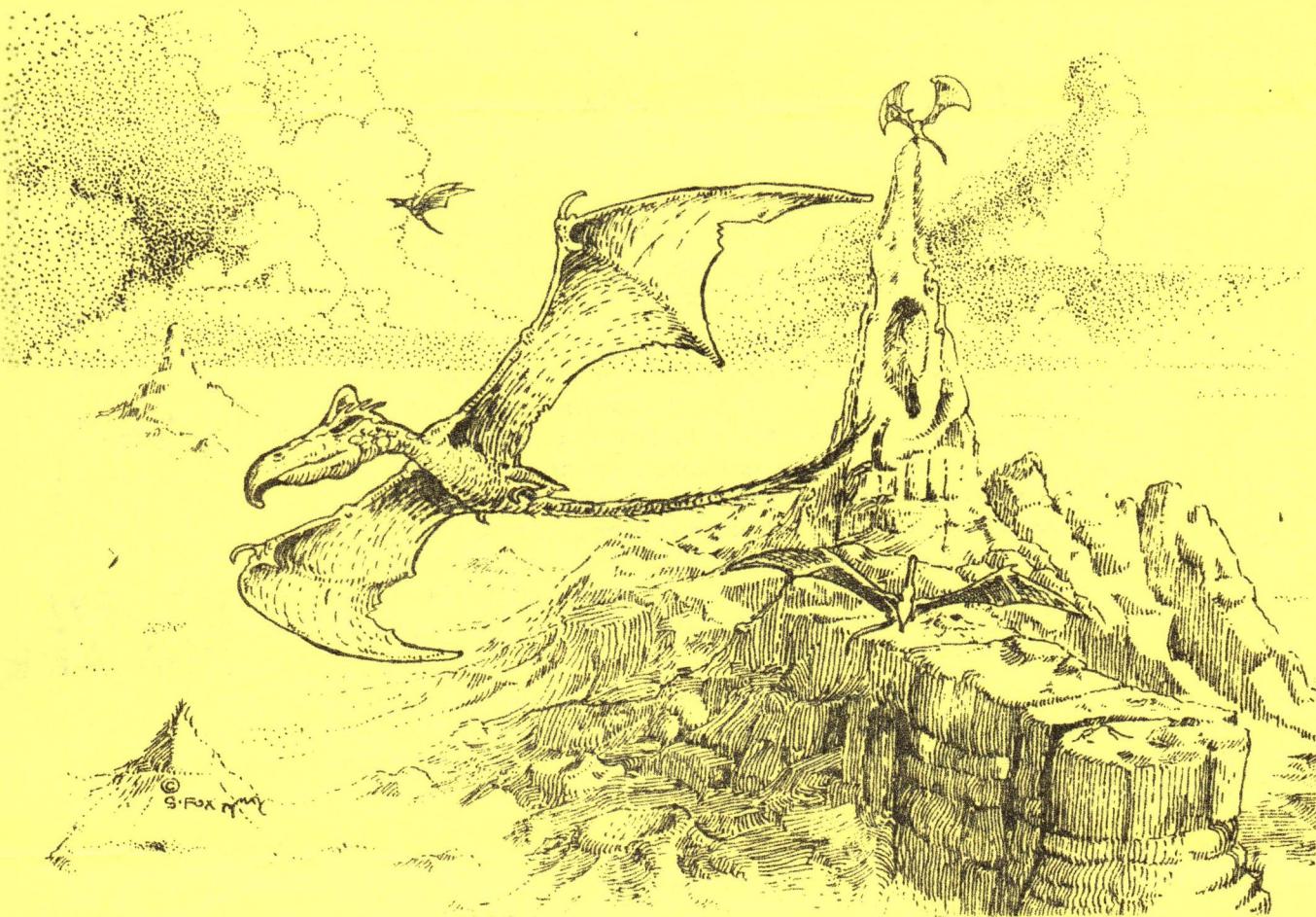
The parts of Tomorrow set in this future tell of an attempt to create an Auxiliary (read alternative) Congress. The author's commune - this is a socialist dystopia - is polled on its attitudes to the Auxiliary via a telepathic votometer. This device is the one Campbell-esque element in a fiction which otherwise derives its science solidly from Wells. The motion is defeated by what Marjorie Barnard obviously perceives as the great Australian disease - 62% of the commune are indifferent to the idea of political change. The originators of the proposal, specifically the novelist's son, are blacklisted by the regime.

Also unlike When The Enemy Is Tired, frame story and picture story integrate smoothly, being thematically linked: the search for freedom in the future is echoed in the historical novel that forms the bulk of Tomorrow. This book within a book is realistic (compare its gritty description of depression Sydney with Hooker's The Bush Soldiers, and see the novelistic advantages of living through a period rather than relying on historical sources) until the end. Barnard has the second World War conclude with the Australian Peace Movement

seceding this country from the conflict. A right-wing international police force invade, and the pacifists burn Sydney in defiance:

'The destruction of the city was only a symbol, an act of repudiation of all the city had come to mean, a gesture single in all its complexity, and a solution only in so far as by destroying the accepted mould it forced men to create another.' (*Tomorrow*, p.415)

Another mould is not created. The population of Sydney is evacuated with 'food and clothing to a certain weight but no "capital goods"' (p.379); they flee to the interior and slowly die out. Thus the socialist future is not, as it initially seems, the legacy of the pacifists-anarchists. Yet the spirit of resistance lingers on, in the attempt to create the Auxiliary Council.



There is now the problem of summing up fourteen books representing eleven authors' dabblings in sf over a period of forty years. A point to be made is how disparate they are - it was to group them together for discussion, not to mention identifying elements to serve as bridges from book to book. Play Little

Victims is a long way from Tomorrow, as is The Bush Soldiers from The Plains. All these works have in common is that they are Australian, and can be shoe-horned into the category of sf, although their authors originally made their reputations in the mainstream. It should also be noted that, with the exceptions of Messrs Braddon, Cook, and Ireland, the list comprises largely single lapses into science fiction.

Furthermore, it seems pointless to compare the list with works by authors whose reputations are founded on sf - is Hooker better than Harding, or Braddon better than Broderick? It can be argued that the best sf is written by outsiders, who can seize on the ideas of the genre and ignore its generally

pox writing style. 'And I think the reason that such mainstream sf and fantasy is largely superior to the genre variety is precisely because these mainstream writers are not encumbered with the trappings of genre sf' (Andrew Weiner, letter to The Metaphysical Review #3, p.8). However, in the case of the Australian strangers, it does not seem that they scooped the glittering prizes. Of those on the list there appear, on a purely subjective level, to be only three very good books: Tomorrow Going and possibly The Plains. The rest are all rather forgettable. Still, remembering the late Theodore Sturgeon's dictum that 90% of sf is waste matter, three out of fourteen is not a bad hit rate.

Lucy Sussex.

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### WE WERE SLEEPY WRONG

'Dear Thyme,

On page 18 of Thyme #49, someone has so drastically edited the comment following my review of Peace that I am printed as saying almost the opposite of what I actually wrote. This was:

'The above review was broadcast on the ABC's 'Books & Writing' programme on 21 August. Before writing it, I told Damien Broderick of my 'discovery' that Peace's narrator was dead. Damien then embarked on an inspired rereading, and it was he who pointed out to me the 'Weer-Wolfe' connection. At Aussiecon Two, Gene Wolfe agreed that the narrator was dead, and a werewolf - and added that the elm's death was taking place about two hundred years after Weer's death.'

Thus, I did not claim (as the edited version suggests) that I told Damien about the narrator's being a werewolf, or even that I knew the life span of an American native elm.

Yours sincerely, Yvonne Rousseau

Yvonne Rousseau.



**STUPID  
RAMARK**

Now that we've printed what Yvonne has had to say, we might as well start in on the...

### WRITE OF REPLY - THE LETTERS OF COMMENT

In response to the closure of Space Age Books, many people have written to express their disbelief and/or condolences. Cary Lenehan's response was typical of many:

"Anastasia", Cemetery Rd, Numeralla 2630.

'We must be pretty isolated out here (OK we're miles from anywhere) - we heard no rumours of the demise of Space Age. I can only say that this event distresses me more than the death of most sf authors has as Space Age has long been synonymous with fandom and sf in Australia. Sure there are other, quite long standing, sf bookshops in Australia, and I don't knock them, but for this one to go under is sort of like the Bank of England petitioning for bankruptcy. A pillar of fandom has collapsed and part of my growing up in the genre has died with it.'

'Secondly [as Cary continues]: as a dabbler in things constitutional, I can only say that I am horrified by the reports in re Advention '85 and what is reported to have been done [to the constitution]. Constitutions and conventions (the legal variety) are fragile things and should not be rampaged through. They are very hard to repair.

'I cannot make any close criticism until I have read the amended item but might I suggest, as a means of stopping both rampant rule changing and cries of anguished outrage alike, that changes only be made on the same basis as at a WorldCon. Simply a proposal is voted on at one con and must be ratified by the next before any change is effected. This system has the advantage of setting up a sort of bicameral legislature with an automatic house of revue and a year to think things over. Any comment?'

Cary Lenehan

Well, in Thyme #48 we ran 'An Open Letter To Australian Fandom', an appeal by Jack Herman to the science fiction community at large for some commonsense to be exercised when dealing with the constitution that supposedly exists to regulate the running of National SF Conventions, and the awarding of the Ditmars - the Australian sf awards. Since then, there has been little in the way of reaction or response.

The alterations made to the constitution at the 1985 National Con, in Adelaide, have still not been published in any form, and this year's NatCon committee in Perth has had little choice but to make up its own rules for running things - in short, confusion reigns. The idea of a process of ratification would seem to have merit; Jack Herman writes again with another proposal, rather a more sweeping one....

'Dear Peter and/or Roger,

The call for responses on the current condition of the ASFS Constitution has not produced an amazing response. Even from Adelaide has there been little noise: no constitution seems to yet be emanating (nor have I yet received my Programme Book therefrom). So bad is the situation that I understand Perth is operating off the 1983 and/or 1984 Constitution since they have seen no copy of the 1985 [one]. This means confusion re the Ditmars and consideration of Bids for the 1988 NatCon. What the hell is occurring?

'In line with my earlier letter, I continue to believe that these matters should be public so I am now outlining the proposed new Constitution I will move [to have adopted] in Perth. I will be moving that the current Constitution (whatever it is) be rescinded, in toto. If that is carried, I will suggest the adoption of a new Constitution with but 3 (three) clauses, to wit:

1. 'At each National Con, the ConCom will, by a vote of convention members after a nominating process involving Australian fandom at large, award up to 5 Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards and one William Atheling Jr. Award for Criticism or Review.'
2. 'At each National Convention there will be a meeting whose sole purpose is the determination of the site of the National Con 2 years hence.'
3. 'Any surpluses accrued by a National Con will be applied to the benefit of fandom, generally, and shall not be used to reward individuals or groups connected with the Convention Committee.'

'That, I believe, covers everything needed in the Constitution and will eliminate the need to discuss it end lessly at Cons.'

See you,

*Jack R. Herman*

So: the movement for constitutional reform is alive and well, although what sort of reform it is that is wanted is another question & one open to much debate. And as someone was heard recently to observe, as long as there is a constitution of any sort there will be argument over its content, no matter how simple or comprehensive the document is.

Jack mentions the possibility of the abolition of the constitution but he is in fact rather a latecomer to the notion, which in 1983 failed by a single vote to be put into effect. If such a motion were to succeed this time around in Perth at the Business Session (the place where all such parliamentary matters are formally discussed and voted on) it might not be so easy to have anything put back in its place.

The argument for having no constitution at all centres around whether or not Australian fandom is still of a small enough size such that it can be presumed that there is a reasonable degree of communication between the people in it, and a reasonable degree of continuity of people in it as well. To date, people have managed, although sometimes only just. (The fact that the ASFS Constitution - of dubious legal worth - has been observed as closely as it has, over the years, is however a sign that people have managed satisfactorily... Hmmmn.) One thing is certain, then: that the Business Session of Swancon XI is likely to be more interesting than such things usually are. As always, we enthusiastically invite further comment.

Speaking of the constitution, and the Ditmars, Grant Stone of the Swancor XI Awards Sub-Committee informs us that the deadline for nominations for this year's awards has been extended by the Sub-Committee from the 24th of January until the 5th of February. Anyone who has been around in science fiction fandom for "a while" is eligible to participate in the process of nomination, and if you haven't already done so, we hope you'll use the nomination form attached to the cover of this copy of Thyme [if you're an Australian reader] to help decide the final voting ballot for this year's Ditmars.

And speaking of participation in events, Russell Parker writes:  
2/37 Elizabeth St, Toowong 4066.

'Here's the cash (cheque, really) to keep me in your good books. Frantically busy at the moment otherwise I would write a decent loc but, what the hell, you've got the money; why want more?

Regards, Russell

Well, Russell, thanks for the money - when it comes down to it, money is what enables us to keep publishing issues - but as to why we should want more... the purpose of Thyme - its *raison d'être* - is to keep people up to date with matters that concern or interest them but which they otherwise might not find out about or come across.



Further to that, it has been the express policy of Thyme, from at least issue #19, to actively seek out opinion as how to better do the job we're doing; because of what people have had to say, has improved - and we're still open to suggestions. So if you want to write and tell us you think we're doing all right, well, thanks, but if you have any criticisms to put forward, or opinions on other matters, this is what we want (to hear about), as much as the money.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ Thyme #50 ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ 17

WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, HOW & WHO - incorporating the Changes Of Address

Melbourne: It seems that everyone has decided to settle down for a bit; this time only Koren Mitchell has moved, to 11 Palmerston Place, Carlton 3053. The bookshop is dead; long live the miniatures specialty shop? It's called 'The Depot' and the address is 1933 Malvern Road, East Malvern, 'phone: 25 7002. Open Tuesday to Saturday, it stocks the expected amount of computer & board games, as well as its main line, which is an impressive range of miniatures for gaming or whatever. Worth a look. Speaking of Space Age, as we almost were, more on the Melbourne SF Club, which shows absolutely no signs of rolling over & playing dead. Their new postal address is M.S.F.Club, P.O.Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne 3005. Every Friday they meet from 7pm on at St.David's Uniting Church Hall, 72 Melville Rd.,West Brunswick 3055, and they've currently a new line of windcheaters & t shirts out for their members to spend money on. Write for a copy of their clubzine Ethel the Aardvark. Okay? ☐☐☐ Latest GUFF rumour update: three more possible candidates: Derrick, Derrick and David.

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The NOVA MOB - the programme for 1986

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The Nova Mob is back in business with its first meeting for 1986 coming up next week. For those of you not in the know, the Nova Mob is an sf discussion group that meets on the first Wednesday of every month to discuss whatever it is that takes the fancy of those present.

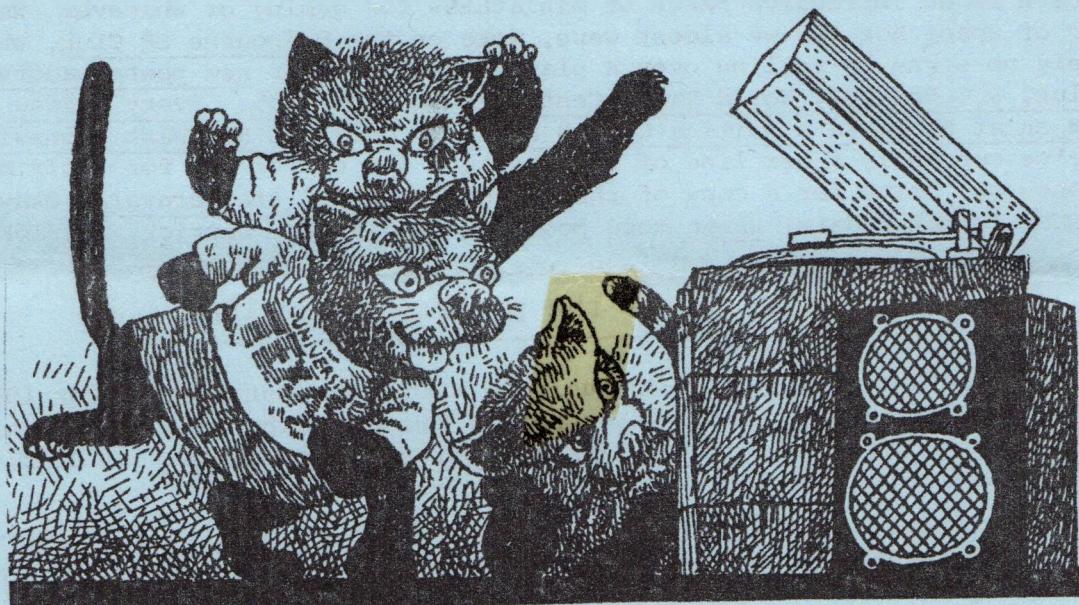
Without a "membership" as such, meetings are open to all comers.... The monthly gatherings usually start off with a short talk by someone on a particular topic that interests them, and from there the discussion spreads and develops however it may, often ending up in an intellectual (and sometimes not-so-) free-for-all that's all pretty good fun. Listed below is a tentative programme of topics for discussion for the year, but this should be taken as a guideline more than anything else.

What is sure is that you're welcome to drop in and have a listen, maybe even join in the fun. Before each meeting, which is regularly held at Russell & Jenny Blackford's place, 198 Nott St., Port Melbourne (starting at eight o' clock), people get together for a meal at the nearby Rose & Crown Bistro in Bay St., Port Melbourne - people congregate there from six o'clock onwards - but the two activities - pub meal and discussion meeting - are separate, and you can turn up to one or the other, or better still both. See you there!

- 5 February: 'Russell Blackford, on Lee Harding'
- 5 March: Cathy Kerrigan - 'Islands, Doctors, Death and Gene Wolfe'
- 9 April: Sean McMullen - 'Australian sf between conventions' (sorry, no prizes for guessing which ones)
- N.B.: this is the second Wednesday instead of the first of the month, as it was thought that most people would still be in Perth, after the National SF Con, on the first Wednesday.
- 7 May: topic/speaker not yet decided
- 4 June: Marc Ortlieb - topic not decided
- 2 July: topic/speaker not yet decided
- 6 August: " " " "
- 3 September: " " " "
- 1 October: " " " " (any volunteers to discuss Fred Hoyle?)
- 5 November: Malcolm Gordon - topic not yet decided.

New Zealand: A new address for our NZ agent Nigel Rowe: P.O.Box 1814, Auckland. Likewise, a new (to us?) postal address for ex-FFANZ winner Tom Cardy: P.O.Box 27274, Wellington.

**Canberra.** Jean Weber, Bruce Gillespie, Valma Brown and Gordon Lingard will be having another combined Birthday party (Bruce, as per usual these days, *in absentia*) on the 22nd of February, at Jean's place - 13 Myall Crescent, O'Connor, A.C.T. It will be starting at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and is byo everything. It's a general invite, although if you are thinking of attending, please let Jean know, by writing to P.O.Box 42 Lyneham 2602, A.C.T. And a good time should be had by all...



Hokai - enough is enough, as someone once said. The following credits for the artwork herein:

Matjaz Smidt .....	cover, p.18	Bill Rotsler .....	p.3
Steven Fox .....	p.13	Alexis Gilliland ...	p.14
Joan Hanke Woods .. p.16			

Apart from this, the usual, breathless thanks must go for help with this issue to: Cathy, Rex, Kim, Shane, Grant, Nancy, Lucy, Yvonne, Cary, Jack, Bill, Joan, Alexis, Steve and Matjaz. Whew! 1150.270186.

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AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

DETAILS OF NOMINATOR

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SWANCON 11 MEMBERSHIP NUMBER (If applicable)

(Note: You do not have to be a member of SWANCON 11 to nominate titles/candidates for awards. If not a member, however, please explain your involvement in Australian fandom in 1985)

REGULATIONS OF AWARDS OPERATION IN 1986

BEST INTERNATIONAL FICTION (SF OR FANTASY)

1.0 A work shall be deemed eligible for this category if the work has been published for the first time, in either hard or paperback, in English, and distributed to Australian readership by an Australian book publisher or distributor in the calendar year preceding the year in which the awards are to be presented.

1.1 If a work has previously reached the DITMAR ballot paper for its first appearance in either hard or paperback, then it shall no longer be eligible even though it subsequently makes an appearance in either form.

BEST AUSTRALIAN FICTION (SF OR FANTASY, LONG OR SHORT)

2.0 A work to be eligible for this category must meet the requirements stated at 1.0 and 1.1. Furthermore it must be the work of an Australian citizen or resident of longer than seven years.

2.1 If there are fewer than four works eligible for this category then the committee may decide to make no award.

BEST AUSTRALIAN FANZINE, FAN WRITER, FAN ARTIST

3.0 To be eligible for these awards the fan in question must have produced TWO fanzines available to any fan and generally distributed, written articles or substantial LoCs in TWO fanzines generally available, or contributed artwork to TWO fanzines generally available, which ever is appropriate to the award in question, in the calendar year preceding the year in which the awards are to be given.

WILLIAM ATHELING AWARD (CRITICISM)

4.0 To be deemed eligible for this award the critic must have produced either a substantial critical piece or body of shorter critical items in the calendar year preceding the year in which the award is to be given.

GENERAL

5.0 The awards committee for the year in which the awards are to be given will be the sole judge of eligibility or any value decisions that are required under the above regulations. No correspondence on either the ballot paper of the outcome of the voting will be entered into.

MAIL THIS FORM TO:

ATTN G.L. STONE, MURDOCH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, P.O. Box 14,  
WILLETTON, W.A. 6155, AUSTRALIA.

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DITMAR NOMINATION FORM  
1986

1. BEST INTERNATIONAL FICTION (NOVEL)

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2. BEST AUSTRALIAN FICTION (NOVEL)

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3. BEST AUSTRALIAN SHORT FICTION

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4. BEST AUSTRALIAN FANZINE

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5. BEST AUSTRALIAN FAN WRITER

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6. BEST AUSTRALIAN FAN ARTIST

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7. WILLIAM ATHELING AWARD (BEST AUSTRALIAN SF CRITICISM)

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NOMINATIONS RECEIVED UNTIL WEDNESDAY the 5th of FEBRUARY  
SEE OVER FOR FURTHER DETAILS, REGULATIONS AND MAILING ADDRESS.