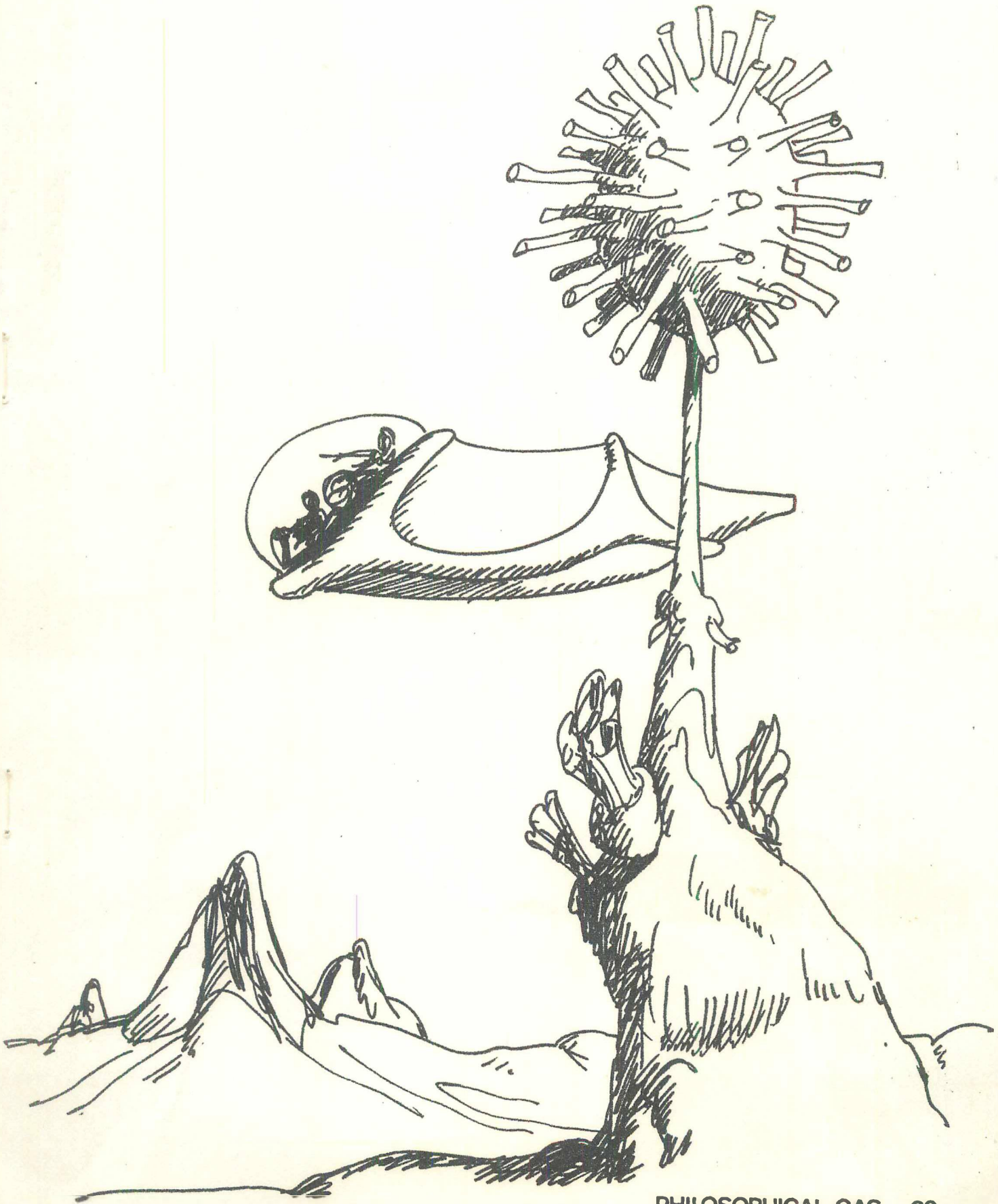
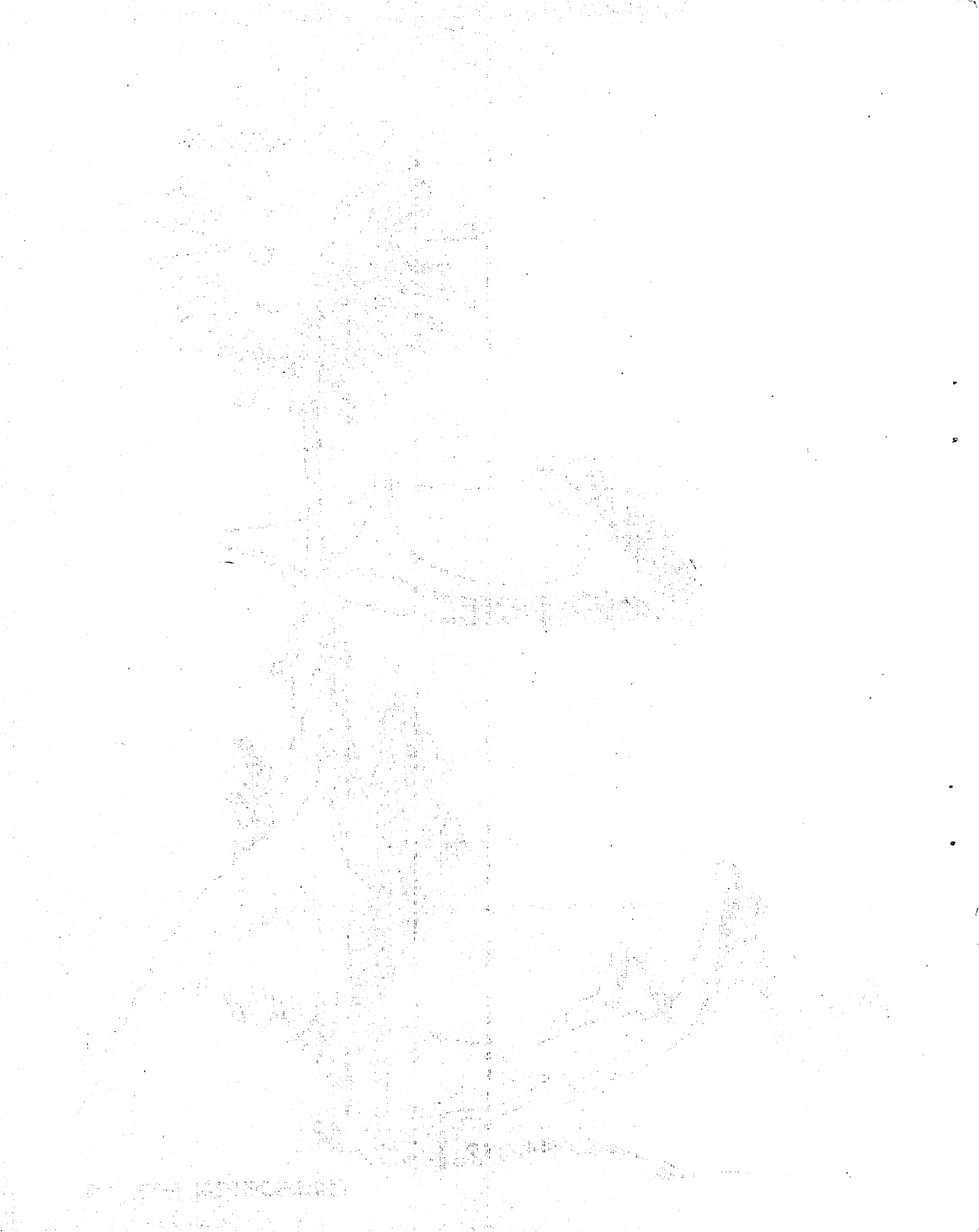




Philosophical Gas

'Not a felicitous title' -Judge Speer

'You are a philosopher,' said the lady, 'and a lover of liberty. You are the author of a treatise, called "Philosophical Gas: or, a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind".'
'I am,' said Scythrop...
— Thomas Love Peacock: Nightmare Abbey, ch. X

NUMBER TWENTY-NINE FEBRUARY 1975

ARTWORK: Bill Rotsler - covers
Jack Gaughan - 4,15
Alexis Gilliland - 21
John Bangsund - 10,12,25,27

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS
is published monthly or thereabouts by John Bangsund: Parergon Books, PO Box 357, Kingston, ACT 2604, Australia.
Subscriptions: A$4.00 / US$6.00 / £2.00 for 10 issues. Articles, artwork, letters of comment and fiction are very welcome. Trades also are very welcome, unless I tactfully advise you otherwise. If a note on your envelope says that this is your last issue, it is - unless you live outside Australia, in which case it's your third-last issue. All complaints should be directed to the Australian Attorney-General. Ta.

EDITORIAL

THE MARCH OF MIND

5 February: Just ~~five days ago I posted out~~ the first 150-odd copies of my new, all-singing, all-dancing fanzine 'First Draft'. Ken Ford and Sally did most of the work on collating and stapling that issue. I licked the stamps, yes, by crikey. Anyway, a day or so after the thing was in the mail, Sally and Ken and I sat around talking about fanzines in general and First Draft in particular, and we sort of talked me into not going on with it. Or rather, I would go on with what I was trying to do in that issue, but call it - Philosophical Gas. And that's what I'm doing. Apologies for any inconvenience, deeply gratified forthright comments, do better next time, &c.

I am delighted at the reaction of fandom to my new venture. Ken Ford and Leigh Edmonds opined in desultory conversation that it was a passable sort of effort. (They'll have to do better than that.) Today, John Ryan rang from Brisbane to say that the heat was killing him.

John also talked a bit about politics. He said that he regarded Joh Bjelke-Petersen (the Premier of Queensland, whom I had not said nice things about in FD) as a politician with his feet firmly planted in mid-air. 'On a clear day' John said 'he can almost see the end of the 19th Century.' I hope John will write for us now and then, as well as ringing me: he's a good guy, a great name in Australian fandom, and a pleasure to have polite converse with, withal.

Shortly after talking with John I received letters from Lee Harding and John Foyster. Suddenly I felt that here was a meeting of minds if ever there was one! Without further ado (as all good politicians pretending to be chairmen say) here are Lee and John:

LEE HARDING 4.2
2/29 GURNER STREET
ST KILDA VIC. 3182

First Draft arrived this morning and I have read it with pleasure from cover to cover. What are you trying to do, set some sort of precedent? (For me, yes.)

I read through your splendid piece on The Bulletin with growing alarm. Now I know why I never read newspapers (except for Age Lit. Supp. and TLS) and can't rouse any enthusiasm for weeklies (except for New Society, New Scientist, New Statesman, New Onanist &c). And I agree that Oz journalism is just about the worst there is, hence my lack of interest.

There was a strong and urgent continuity running through FD which I find heartening. Thanks for sending me something to brighten up my new year. As you will probably know, Space Age and I are connected only by a most tenuous link as of last week. This year it's poverty or success, diamonds or paste, everything depending. What's one year out of your life, eh? (365 rotten days?) Irene is going back to college. Carla is going back to school to matriculate...and I'm a hopeful freelance. When I was in Sydney a week or so ago, Tony Morphett endeavoured to impress upon me the joys of insecurity and the glory of freelancing - no time for holidays, but you don't miss them and etc.

And I see you will be running some Harding letters next issue, by golly. I expect they will sound awfully old hat to us both when they appear. ....

JOHN FOYSTER 3.2
6 CLOWES STREET
SOUTH YARRA VIC. 3141

You have always seemed to me a scholar, in the best sense of the word, and, on occasion, a gentleman. But a part of First Draft (to hand this day) leads me to believe that my past impression may have been false: on the last page you imply, ever so gently, that I am a Labor voter. This is a dastardly lie, and not true to boot.

It is quite basic to almost all anarchistic philosophies that voting is not a fit activity for human beings, and I have followed that principle quite rigorously since I reached voting age (which was, of course, in those dim dark times, 21): I do not vote in Federal, State or Municipal elections (I also decline to complete census forms and kick small

children and dogs). This is not a terribly significant matter, but I am slightly touchy about it.

On the other hand, I may prefer to see one party or the other in power (or neither, now that you mention it), and so 1972 found me very mildly supporting the Labor Party: I attach one of my works of art from that period. (The attachment reads:

SOCIALIST FORUM
Should we fight for a Labor victory?
Led by Bill Hartley
Wednesday May 10
authorized by annette rubinstein)

Socialist Forum was a bunch of lefties at Monash (I don't think we extended as far right as the ALP). As I recall, Bill Hartley felt that 'we' ought to fight for a Labor victory - so did Alan Roberts and a few others. But there was some opposition. At any rate, I thought Labor marginally preferable to, though hardly distinguishable from, the Liberal Party. We sf fans can really see into the future, eh?

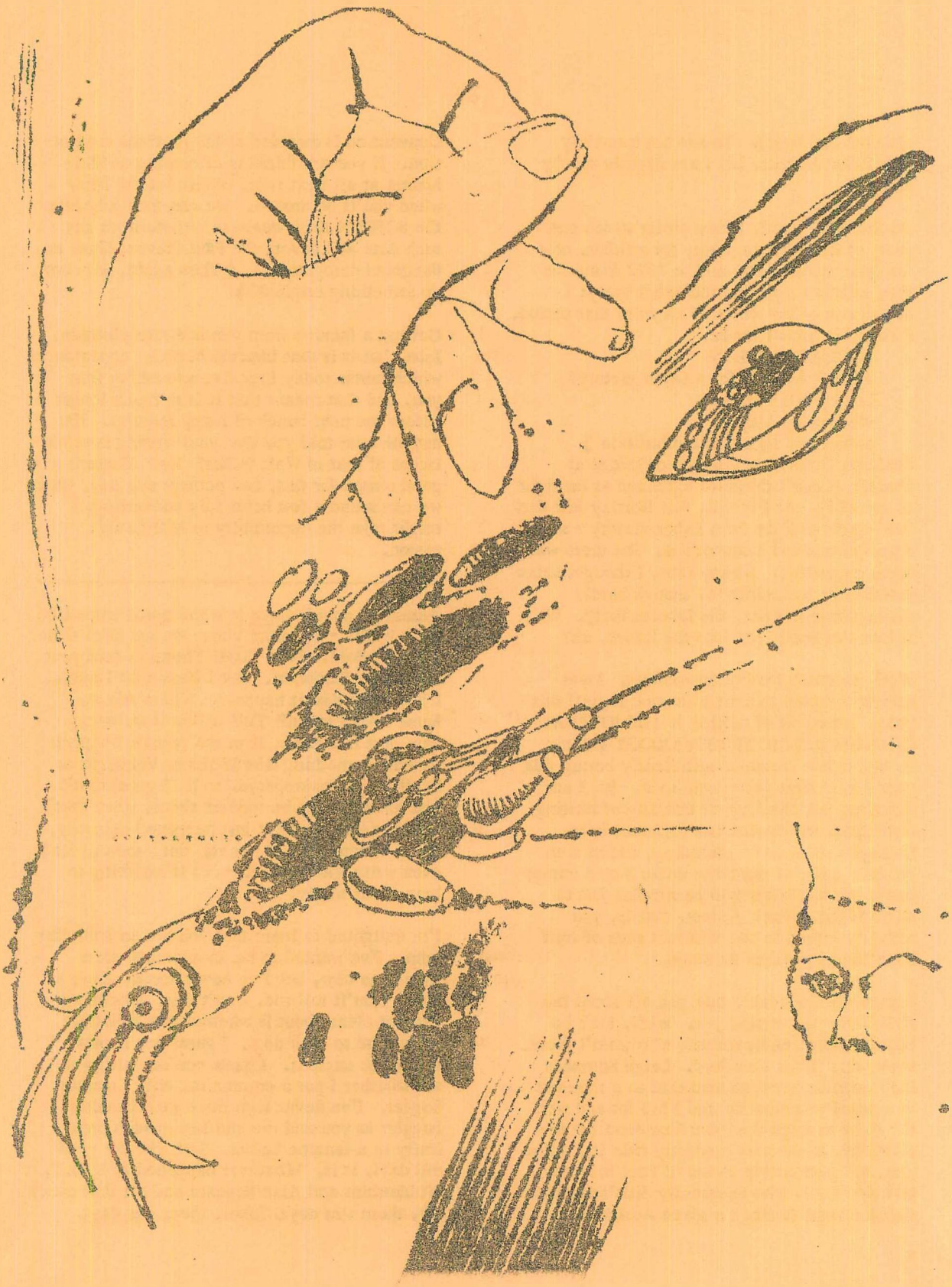
Well, so much for lighter matters. I was almost tempted to start a fanzine myself this year. I thought of calling it THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY volume 3, and if life becomes sufficiently boring this year I may well get around to it. But I am thinking, er, thinking of thinking of starting a fanzine, which is rather different from what you seem to be intending, which is to produce more of the same under a new name: don't you think it would be simpler just to stick to one name? Unless, that is, you actually intend to use different sorts of stuff in differently-titled fanzines.

I guess the folks have told you all about the SYNCON - we missed you. Well, let's be honest, we missed everyone who wasn't there, even you. Even Ken Ford. Leigh Edmonds may even have mentioned that in a moment of mental weakness he and I bid for and won the right to stage the next Aussiecon (or the BOFCON, as we may modestly title it). Mind you, we were a step ahead of Paul Stevens and Ken Ford, who apparently didn't realise that the right to stage a given Australian Convention is awarded at the previous convention. If you are thinking of coming to Melbourne at all next year, please let me know when you'll be around. We can then schedule the BOFCON for a weekend remote from any such date and devote the Paul Stevens Show to Bangsund derogations. (Then again, why not do something original?)

Getting a fanzine from you is a rare pleasure, John, but it is that interval between appearances which hurts: today I receive something from you, and that means that it is so much longer before the next bunch of funny remarks. Has anyone ever told you that your writing is reminiscent of that of Walt Willis? No? There is a good reason for this, and perhaps one day, when we can spend a few hours idly conversing, I might take the opportunity to outline this reason.

Actually, people have told me that I write like Walt Willis - and Kurt Vonnegut and Dick Geis and Ken Ford. Even Virgil Thomson (eat your heart out, Edmonds). But I know that I just... I just write like it happens. Where it's at, know what I mean? Tell it like it is, bang, zap, just like that. If in the process I happen to write something like Willis or Vonnegut or Bradbury or Shakespeare, well, I guess that's just something to be modest about, since that's where it was at and it just happened that way, like. O tempora, O mores! See, sometimes I even write like Cicero! - but it's nothing to brag about really.

I'm delighted to learn that you are an anarchist, John. I've wanted to be an anarchist for a long time now, but I've never known where to join. You'll tell me, won't you. One thing I'm not clear about is whether you kick dogs or decline to kick dogs. I guess you meant that to be unclear. I guess you're waiting to see whether I put a comma in, eh? Cunning bugger. I've never seen three such cunning buggers as you and me and Lee in such proximity in a fanzine before. Just like the good old days, it is. Whatever happened to K.U.F. Widdershins and Alan Reynard and all that crew? Ah, them was days, Joxer, them was days.



Meredith Thring

THE CREATIVE SOCIETY

Dr Thring is Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Queen Mary College, University of London. The following address was broadcast in the ABC's Guest Of Honour program on 2 June 1974 and is published here by kind permission of Dr Thring and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

MANY PEOPLE have pointed out that the affluent society is heading for disaster. Pollution, failure to help the underdeveloped countries, arms escalation, exhaustion of oil and metal ores, loss of interest in work, and the economic problems of inflation and unemployment are all out of control.

I am going to try to show that the apocalypse can be avoided and humanity can find the way to a society in the twenty-first century in which everyone has the possibility of a life of complete self-fulfilment.

Obviously this will not happen automatically. Indeed the automatic path certainly leads to disaster. The necessary change of direction can only come about as a result of the intentional efforts of millions of people all over the world who have thought the problems out for themselves and are prepared to dedicate themselves to changing the whole basis of society.

Everyone who has thought out the problems of humanity right back to basic principles has arrived at the same conclusion. A society entirely based on a motive of self-interest must inevitably degenerate into violence and destruction. This will happen both nationally and internationally. Fortunately there is an equally fundamental human motive of idealism - a desire to help to make a better world by one's creative efforts. If we can educate this motive so that it develops into a warm love of humanity, then it can be channelled into a stream powerful enough to float humanity away from the abyss into a safe harbour.

What we need is a secular morality based on caring for other people and developing the conscience which lies in every normal person, so that all their lives this caring grows stronger until it encompasses all people of the world, past, present and future.

We need an educational system in which the young are constantly encouraged to think about the questions 'What is life for?' and 'What use can I make of the talents I have so that I find self-fulfilment?' They need to be shown the hardships of people in hospitals, old people, the blind and crippled, people living alone, and people in famine or disaster areas, and given opportunities to do personal work to help to alleviate these hardships. They need to be shown by personal example how much more satisfaction and self-fulfilment may be obtained by doing one's own work as well as possible, for its own sake, and by doing voluntary work for other people that one can see is helping them, than by a life entirely filled with personal ambition for wealth, power and possessions.

The Victorian ideal of self-help is excellent to the point where one earns for oneself and one's children everything necessary for a full life. But it becomes disastrous when people cease to care for others in their mad scramble for status symbols. The fundamental cause of inflation is that people expect more status symbols than the world's resources can provide.

In my two books, 'Man, Machines and Tomorrow' and 'Machines: Masters or Slaves of Man?', I have tried to develop the idea of an alternative society for the twenty-first century. I call it The Creative Society, because it is based on the idea that every individual has plenty of opportunities to find self-fulfilment through the exercise and development of his creative talents.

Seven thousand million people will certainly be living on this earth in the twenty-first century - if we avoid World War 3 and pestilence and famine that kills thousands of millions of people. I believe that it is quite possible for all these people to lead full lives that satisfy their real needs and aspirations in every way, within the limited resources of this earth. The necessary conditions of such a creative society are worked out.

First, the individual's desire to find creative self-fulfilment through activities that give satisfaction to other people must become the main driving force of society, in place of the profit motive.

Second, it is the responsibility of government to offer an interesting and satisfying job to everyone, a job which occupies only a part - less than half - of his adult life's energies and which enables him to earn not only all the necessities of life but also what is needed for unpaid creative arts and crafts, travel, social life, sport and recreation.

Third, everyone can receive an education which develops to the fullest possible extent his conscience or natural idealism and his ability to think all important matters out for himself right back to fundamental principles and right forward to ultimate consequences, an education

which also develops his creative talents and possibilities and provides the techniques and skills necessary to realize these creative talents. This means that he can use his leisure, given to him by machines, to find self-fulfilment.

Fourth, it is the responsibility of the applied scientists and engineers to find ways and develop machines so that all the needs of humanity can be satisfied within the limited resources of the world, without pollution or any other harmful consequences to people, present or future, anywhere in the world, and without people having to use up all their life's energy in boring, repetitive, uncomfortable or dangerous work.

Fifth, we have to develop an equilibrium economic system in place of the will-o'-the-wisp of perpetual economic growth. This means ultimately relying entirely on solar energy, complete recycling of all metals, and the use of agricultural products as the sole source of chemical raw materials. However, if we can replace our present gross waste by a proper economical use of coal, oil and metal ores fairly soon, we can spin out the exhaustion of these resources for a hundred years and more.

For example, the world's oil resources could suffice for convenient public transport for all humanity, including at least one comfortable and safe intercontinental journey in everyone's lifetime, for at least a hundred years. This would mean carrying all goods by rail and replacing the private car with a publicly-owned system which would give all the advantages except the status symbol without the disadvantages of air pollution, traffic jams, accidents and derelict cars. I have described the machines which the engineer would have to develop for this purpose in my books.

We can develop a machine which will find coal or any other mineral as it bores its way underground, steered and controlled by a man on the surface, and bring it to the surface, leaving the shale or dross behind. In this way we can make complete use of all the world's coal resources and thus provide a primary energy source which can last at least two hundred years and provide mankind with all the energy needed to provide the requirements for a completely self-fulfilled life.

At the same time we shall no longer be dependent on humans working in dangerous and inaccessible holes in the ground, because anything a human can do down a mine he can do much better sitting in a control cabin on the surface. He can control hands on the job which copy every movement of his own hands and return to him every sensation of sight, touch and measurement - for example, to discriminate between coal or gold and sand. I have designed on paper all the machines necessary to carry out coal-mining at any depth and in thin seams and only bring clean coal to the surface. We could develop them

in less than ten years for a small fraction of the money that has been spent on the space race or the development of nuclear fission.

A necessary condition for the existence of the creative society in the twenty-first century is that the world's population levels off at a figure which is not much greater than the seven thousand million which it will inevitably reach soon after the year 2000. Even if the world's resources are used equally by people of all nations, and all engineering brains are concentrated on providing a good life for everyone with a minimum use of these resources, it will still not be possible to achieve this goal if the world's population doubles again to fourteen thousand million.

Hence it is absolutely essential that during the remaining years of the twentieth century we enable all the world's population to earn a sufficient standard of living and receive a sufficiently good education that they decide voluntarily to limit their family size.

People often object to me that a world in which no-one starves and no-one enjoys a standard of living very much higher than the basically essential standard would be very dull and without incentive. I believe, on the contrary, that deep down most people realize that life is made exciting and worth while by the achievement of creative self-fulfilment rather than piling up status symbols. It is essential to draw a clear distinction between quality of life and standard of living.

Quality of life may be best defined as the individual's deep feeling of how worthwhile his life is. If one regards these two measures as axes at right angles, then as the standard of living rises steadily the quality of life rises to a maximum and then falls off again as people begin to regard possessions as more important than self-fulfilment. Evidence of this is provided by the rise of stress illnesses, people opting out, drugs and violence in the affluent societies. If, as I believe, it is also true that the optimum standard of living can be provided by good engineering developments at about a resource consumption rate equal to the present world average per head, then it is possible for everyone in the twenty-first century to have this optimum standard of living.

One example of the contribution the engineer can make immediately if he gets his priorities right is the possibility, already demonstrated by the biochemists, of giving everyone in the world enough protein by extracting it from green leaves by a kind of mechanical cow. I am trying to develop the engineering side of this process at present.

I am often asked what a young scientist or engineer who has a conscience should do. I always reply 'Take any job in the Establishment, except one concerned with improving methods of destruction, and keep your conscience bright and active. Then when you rise to higher positions you can form a Fifth Column and help to change the

basic morality from inside.' If the number of people who really see that our present morality leads to disaster, and are prepared to struggle to replace it, doubles every six months for the next ten years, we can achieve the creative society.

I have published Professor Thring's speech for two main reasons. One is that most readers of this fanzine are interested in science fiction, and therefore interested in possible futures. Is Professor Thring's possible-future really possible, or is the man being hopelessly idealistic? (When asking his permission to publish the speech, I suggested to him that you might feel this way. He replied: 'I agree with you that people will say I am a hopeless idealist. My only reply is that the practical people have got us into this mess and idealism is the only hope of getting us out of it.' So there's something else for you to think about.) The second reason is that most readers, I believe, are in one way or another already part of The Creative Society. Which raises the question: To what extent, if any, is it our responsibility to help other people get into this Society which we enjoy and use?

Constant readers who are used to a considerable element of levity in this publication should not take alarm at my apparent lapse into questions of morality. The guiding principles of my life, which I forget as often as the next man forgets his, are two: the first is St Paul's advice to 'try all things, hold fast to that which is good'; the second, Nietzsche's advice to be serious about everything and grave about nothing; the third, Thomas Love Peacock's injunction that 'no matter what happens, never let it spoil your dinner'. Three for the price of two, folks!

And here's another possible future, imaged forth by that brilliant Australian man-for-all-reasons, the middle-income-earner's Peter Ustinov - Phillip Adams. This little fable first appeared on the back page of 'The Australian' on 8 May 1971, and is reprinted here by courtesy of author and publisher.

Phillip Adams

COMING RACE

SIMPSON 366-A stepped off the tram into the gloom and crossed to the guide rail. His breathing roared in his ears, amplified by his respirator.

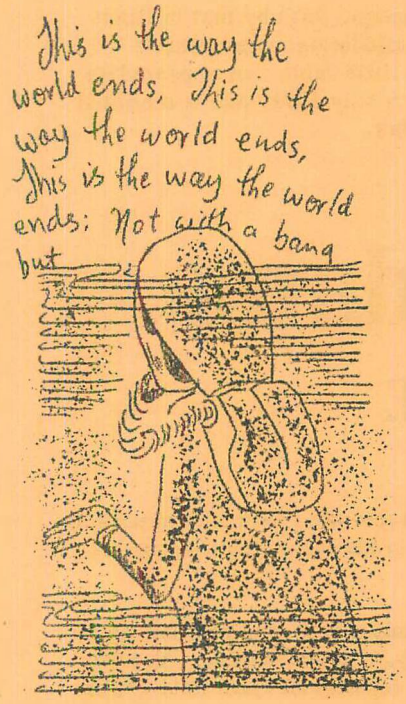
Even after wearing it on and off (mainly on) for the past four years it still made him feel slightly panicky. Claustrophobic. Yet God knows he was lucky to have it. As a department chief he'd got his

ahead of lots of others. And lots of others had subsequently died of various respiratory troubles. Mainly emphysema. Ten in his department alone. That was the way the world ended: not with a bang but a bronchial wheeze.

He looked at the luminous dial on his watch. Although it was just 7.30 in mid-summer, he couldn't see ten feet in front of him. The smog had come down about lunchtime and the giant dispersal fans had been unable to shift it. All they'd done was stir it, move it around a little. And although they were positioned miles away in the Dandenongs, by the TV transmitters, he could hear their reverberating hum in every city building. Over and above the different hum of the labouring air purifiers.

So Simpson 366-A felt his way home, his fingers trailing over the various fences he knew so well. Smooth bricks first. Then the pickets that made his fingers tap-dance. Then what had been a pittosporum hedge. Then palings. Then more pickets. The sequence of textures as familiar as... as the mask on his face.

Near his house he stood on a dead bird and felt a shock of revulsion as its dry body splintered beneath his shoe. He was also surprised that a bird had survived so long. It was a sparrow, one of the hearty little devils that had been the last to die. They'd outlived the pigeons and the starlings, which had outlived everything else. But in the end they'd fallen from the dead trees like so many autumn leaves. Thousands of them within a few days. Perhaps someone had been feeding this one on a window ledge. The last of the Mohicans. Come to think of it, Simpson 366-A could tell by the paling fence that it was outside Monahan 326-F's house. And hadn't she been a propagandist for conservation for years?



Simpson 366-A remembered when the issue had been in all the papers some fifteen years ago. It had been a fad, like the hula hoop and the Beatles. People had got bored with it so quickly. Or perhaps their response had been more complicated than that. He remembered an old-time comedian's monologue on the fears of flying. He'd spoken of a man who saw sparks coming from an engine and wanted to tell the hostess before it burst into flames and they crashed, but he couldn't bring himself to speak to her in case it was perfectly normal and she laughed at him. So he just sat there, more afraid of social embarrassment than death.

He went in the back door and flicked on the kitchen lights. Instantly they began to hum in a way he hadn't heard before, in exactly the same key as the dispersal fans. It was most unpleasant. He flicked the switch a few times but it made no difference. The tubes must be going.

The trouble with people was that they'd placed their faith in science. Science had caused it, so science could fix it. Science would find a way of cleaning the water, of purifying the air, of replacing the oxygen. But that sort of faith had proved as blind as faith in God. Things had got steadily worse.

Simpson 366-A remembered the way people had started to die in the cities, and marvelled once more at the way this had been accepted by everyone. Very few had moved out. Instead they

had sat there in their suffocating suburbs believing that the scientists and the leaders would sort it out. They stayed there with the same mixture of stoicism and stupidity that kept peasants living on the side of a volcano - that kept the doomed millions living in San Francisco and Los Angeles, despite the inevitability of the great quake.

Simpson 366-A switched on the radio and flinched at the sound of that same low-frequency hum. It made the cloth stretched over the speaker tremble. So he turned it off and tried the television set. There was the news, but he couldn't hear a word. Just that dreadful hum. Something was wrong somewhere. He pulled out the directory to videophone an electrician. Inexplicably, the same godawful noise came out of the hand-set.

He had to admit it. It was now pretty obvious that the human race had blown its opportunity. The bigwigs and their families would probably survive another decade in their controlled environments, but he didn't believe all that bullshit about controlling the environments of principal cities. That was just election talk. The domes over Tokyo and New York kept collapsing as fast as they put them up, so why should it be any different in Melbourne or Sydney? Probably a few humans would hang on. Tibetans up in the Himalayas and the odd thousands here and there in forgotten swamps or deltas. But the rest of us would be gone fairly soon. From what he heard the suicide figures were astronomical, and the birth-rate had stopped dead.

So much for evolution's experiment with the human brain. Back to the drawing-board. The dinosaur had died out because its brain was too small. About the size of a pigeon's egg. That tiny consciousness trying to control a body the size of a steam train. Then along comes man, who's just the opposite to the dinosaur, with a brain the size of a football controlling a small, subtle body. But this hadn't worked either. In fact you'd have to concede we'd been a bigger flop than the dinosaur.

The other day at the office they'd been making bets on what species would next dominate this earth. Temple 84-G had put his money on the dolphin, some of which he insisted would survive in the depths of that stinking ocean, but most of the others had picked an insect. Simpson 366-A had gone for the cockroach. He liked its form. After all, it had already outlived the dinosaur.

The hum from the fluorescent tubes was growing intolerable. It sounded like rheumatism felt. So he switched them off and went to bed. Lying in the darkness, he realized that the hum was everywhere. In the room. In the air outside. Perhaps they'd left the dispersal fans on. God knows the air was bad enough.

Resigned to another sleepless night, Simpson 366-A started remembering. Remembering Christian names - silly, sentimental things. Hard to computerize. Yet not without their charm. His had been William. Hers had been Margaret. Then he remembered their funny little car which they'd had to give up at the time of the second carbon monoxide crisis. How incredible.

Simpson 366-A must have dozed, and when he awoke there was

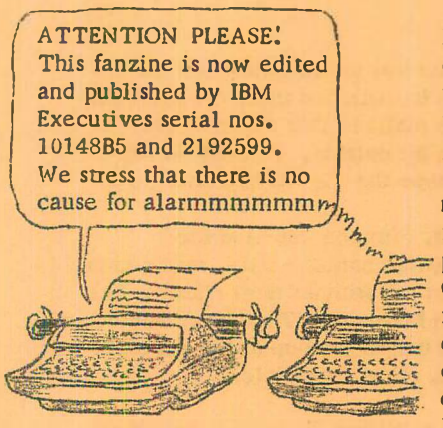
sunlight coming in the window. About the strength of a 40-watt globe. And that meant it was a pretty good day. The humming was still in the air, the humming of the dispersal fans. Unless it was just in his head. He realized that he had a terrible headache.

Stumbling to the bathroom, Simpson 366-A stepped under the shower, where the water was alternately icy and scalding. But at least it cleared his head. Then he switched on his electric razor and flinched as it gave off the same maddening, dreadful bloody noise. Then it kicked in his hand and seemed to lunge at his face, the muzzled metal teeth managing to cut him badly. Yelling in pain, he tossed the razor into the far corner of the bathroom as blood streamed down his cheek. Even then the damn thing kept humming. Even though it wasn't plugged in. It kept humming and it moved towards him, dragging the flex behind it. The bloody razor came towards him for all the world like an electric rat. He kicked at it in terror and fled into the kitchen.

The entire house was humming, humming. The radiator was humming. The lights were humming. The radio was humming. The television set was humming, and flashing, too. Flashing stroboscopically like the lights they used to have in discotheques. Even the damn stove was humming - and red hot into the bargain - although he knew he'd turned it off. The humming got steadily louder, setting off an agonizing resonance in his aching teeth and his pounding head.

Simpson 366-A rushed out into the street, past the fences he knew by touch, and in the gloom he could see his tram-stop. And at the tram-stop there seemed to have been an accident. Some sort of pile-up. One tram had mounted another, and both trams were humming, intolerably humming. As he drew closer he saw that the tram on top was moving, rocking to and fro. He saw the conductors trying to pull the poles away from the overhead wires.

Then it became clear. The world wasn't going to be taken over by dolphins or insects. Man had already made his decision, had chosen his successors. Hence the humming. Hence the electric rat in his bathroom. Hence the trams. Because there hadn't been an accident. The great green brutes were copulating.



In one of his novels Thomas Love Peacock says (through one of his characters) 'I almost believe it is the ultimate destiny of science to destroy the human race.' I have the feeling he wasn't the first to feel that, nor will he be the last. An entire literary genre has grown up around the subject: science (if you'll pardon the expression) fiction. According to the best-opinionated critics of the genre, namely me and me mate Herbie down at the Hotel Kingston, science fiction started either with Lucian's 'True History' or with the publication in 1926 of Hugo Gernsback's magazine Amazing Stories. Other critics, less well known around the Kingston pub, have put forward other views - most recently and notably Brian Aldiss in his excellent book 'Billion Year Spree'. So far I have asked two eminent authors to review this book for PG, and each has copped out in his own inimitably eminent manner. Ladies and gentlefen, I crave indulgence for - George and Bert! (Loud huzzahs off.)

George Turner

PLUMBERS OF THE COSMOS

Frankenstein and Whatsisname

IF MARY SHELLEY had guessed what she was starting, she might well have joined the rest of the Villa Diodati push in not bothering to finish her horror story.

Wouldn't you roll in your grave if, 155 years after you had frightened the living daylights out of your generation with a neat piece of popular Gothic called 'Frankenstein', Brian Aldiss branded you publicly as the 'onlie begetter' of science fiction? You might run your eye down a list containing such gems as 'The Lemurian Chronicles', 'Ralph 124C 41+', 'Captain Future and the Space Emperor' and 'Hicks' Inventions With a Kick', and at once apply for a licence to haunt Aldiss to the edge of remorseful terror.

You would discover a Universal Pictures film of the hair-raising 1930s (also the era of Dracula, The Mummy, King Kong and all the screaming standards) and be tempted to approve the Karloff performance, though not what had happened to your story. Then you would see all the sequels, remakes, revisions and rip-offs and weep for your beautiful idea.

You would come to Aldiss again with 'Frankenstein Unbound' and discover yourself taking part in a splash of unexpected sex whose provenance would leave you as much dazed as delighted.

Finally you would meet a television film (Universal again) called 'Frankenstein' and subtitled (heaven preserve them from your vengeance) 'The true story'. Even if you didn't like Byron's physician Polidori in real life, you might mutter an unladylike oath over what has been done to him

here. But you just might like the late twentieth-century version of your monster.

All the above adds up to this: The basic Frankenstein legend (it has become a modern legend, though I don't know whether or not Mrs Shelley was aware of the somewhat parallel Jewish folk tale of the golem) remains unchanged, but the treatment of it has altered almost out of recognition. The alteration has not been entirely due to the box-office-value 'improvements' of money-hungry adaptors, but in the main to changes in social attitudes which make the original work impossible of modern digestion.

Part of Mary's initial statement remains: a man creates a monster and it destroys him. Call the monster 'nuclear fusion' or 'resource exhaustion' or 'bugging device' and the legend is alive and well - and don't we know it!

But this is the new legend, not Mary Shelley's statement; it is only what we have retained of it. She subtitled her novel 'The Modern Prometheus', which betrays an altogether different thought. Prometheus brought fire from heaven as a gift to man and was savagely punished by Zeus for his presumption - chained eternally to a rock while an eagle tore at his liver. So Mary's theme was not that the evil creation destroys its creator but that God's vengeance descends on the man who usurps the divine privilege of creation. Destruction of creator by creation is poetic retribution, but only incidental to the theme.

Herein we see the attitude of the period which forced 'Frankenstein' to be the story it is rather than the story modern adaptors have made of it. The Shelleys and Byron, who, with the unfortunate Polidori, lived at Villa Diodati while the novel was written, played with atheism as an intellectual idea, but their work shows that God was never far from their cosmology. So Mary made the vengeance of God her theme, and the reading public would have been profoundly shocked had she done otherwise with such a plot.

This public morality (which is what the poor dears thought it was) dictated several other matters in the book. I am not inferring that Mary pandered to the taste of the day, but that she was a woman of her time and despite her notable progressiveness (very women's-libbish) her general ideas were those of her time. She could not have written her book other than as she did.

A resume of her original story may not go amiss, because more talk of 'Frankenstein' than have ever read the novel.

It is a pretty dreary compendium not quite saved by a few marvellous purple patches. Young Dr Frankenstein discovers 'the secret of life' and constructs a male body. The business about building the body from

corpses is not in Mary's book - though perhaps the inference from rather cloudy prose is not unreasonable - nor is the electricity which always adorns the animation scenes. She was very vague about the whole business, and the construction of the body is contained in a single phrase: 'I assembled my materials.' She was writing a Gothic horror novel, not a seminal work of science fiction. That she achieved the latter also is just one of those things.

Having animated the body, Frankenstein goes into a fit of terrified conscience searching, which he thoughtfully indulges in the next room (and here we smell the origin of that deathless line, 'There are things, Ermyntrude, not given man to know!') so that the monster is able to escape before he goes back.

The monster is as ugly as sin (a) because he had to be horrible, and (b) because the more sophisticated conception of a handsome monster was just not on in 1816. (In that day of lady novelists, 'handsome monsters' were the lecherous nobility who preyed on helpless flower girls or rioted with actresses.) Ugliness is its downfall, because all who meet it loathe it on sight and reject its simple overtures of friendship. It becomes disillusioned and vicious, murders Frankenstein's young brother and fastens the crime on a servant girl, who is duly executed.

Frankenstein is fully aware of these circumstances and does nothing! He finds some marvellous reasons for doing a great deal of nothing about the monster, but his real reason, no matter how Mary tries to write round it and hope you won't notice, is that he is scared stiff of being held responsible.

This is where Mary and the modern reader part company, for her Frankenstein is a dithering jelly without the moral guts of an honest coward, and her monster is a pitiable, deprived beast at all times deserving of our sympathy. And there is plenty of internal evidence that Mary also had great sympathy for her monster; but the wrath of God needs must override generous emotion.

So the terrified Frankenstein creates a female at the monster's demand and then, in a fit of revulsion, destroys it. From then on these two are pursuer and pursued until the monster destroys its maker in the Arctic ice and itself disappears on an icefloe. Note that the creator is destroyed, not the monstrous creation.

Any attempt to read the story as a parable of man's treatment of his own lower orders (the modern racialist novel) founders on that last consideration and the Prometheus reference in the sub-title.

So the mores of the time dictated the plot, but it is hard to believe that the morally squirming Frankenstein ever attracted much favour as a hero.

What the Germans did with their 1912 film version I do not know, but I am sure all of us know what Universal did in the 1930s. If they did nothing else they gave us Karloff's tremendous monster, even with those unlikely rivets in his neck, and one of my most treasured film memories is of the awakened monster bemusedly grasping at a beam of sunlight.

The weakness of the film lay in its approach to the problems of making Frankenstein a sympathetic character and the monster a true monster rather than a pitiable brute. (They didn't quite escape that last.) The makers solved their problem by inventing the assembly-of-corpses structure of the monster's body and including the brain of a murderer. As long as the audience included nobody who resented an insult to the intelligence, this covered all eventualities. In fact we all left our intelligences at home and felt not the slightest need of them all night, but sat there with our silly mouths open, drooling.

So, with a tweak of the typewriter, out went the wrath of God and in came the modern theme of 'monster on the loose', with creator-versus-creation retiring to a shaky philosophic background.

Endless sequels, including the divine Elsa Lanchester's fabulous

five-minute appearance as Mrs Monster, served only to debase the theme further, which by then you wouldn't have thought possible. Yet, strangely, the monster myth did not dissolve in raucous contempt as Abbott and Costello met Frankenstein or other similar indignities were heaped upon it. What Mary started had survival value. But in her wildest apprehensions of change and decay she could never have anticipated 'Billion Year Spree'.

The major thesis of Brian Aldiss's book (subtitled 'The History of Science Fiction' in the British edition, 'The True History...' in the American - but you know what those Yanks are) is that modern sf stems from 'Frankenstein'.

Now, one can only approve of his cutting away all that dead wood that other sf genealogists have loaded on to the poor groaning beast. Only bored incredulity can do justice to the people who insist on Lucian's 'True History' and Dante's 'Inferno' as progenitors; and even 'The Odyssey', 'The Epic of Gilgamesh' and 'Genesis' have been brandished like spitted trophies by those with more enthusiasm than restraint. So all honour to Aldiss for bringing the birth date of a peculiarly modern literary mode down to a comparatively modern time. But... 'Frankenstein'?

Here is Aldiss's definition of sf, which contains the core of the matter:

> 'Science fiction is the search for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould.'

The key is in the last ten words. Delete these and the definition is, whether you fully agree with it or not, a good working tool for the critic.

Having observed the group of novels (if that's the word for them) cited at the beginning of this essay, can Gothicism be held accountable for such anarchic productions as Ron Goulart's comedy-thrillers? After all, the tradition of humour by exaggeration is at least as old as Aristophanes, and the fact that he used it for purposes of satire has not prevented an uninterrupted line of writers siezing upon the mechanics rather than the intention.

Nor can Gothicism be held responsible for space opera, which is most probably a descendant of those 'informative' novels which, from 'Robinson Crusoe' onward, have always been staple adventure fare. Remember G.A. Henty, R.M. Ballantyne and finally Jules Verne? (Verne did write one - just one - novel in the Gothic tradition: 'The Carpathian Castle'.) Early space opera was similarly loaded with

information about stellar geography and distances, gravitational effects, speculations about the Martian canali and so on, and such horrors as appeared were perfunctory intrusions on the general sense of wonder - not to be confused with the Gothic fixation on horror and the super-natural.

There is a small Gothic tradition round the edges of sf, but it has claimed only a handful of writers. It descends obviously through Poe and his imitators to the more recent Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith (if you regard their work as sf) and finally to Harlan Ellison, who has made popular - but in my view, unsuccessful - weldings of sf to the horror apparatus. In a different sense one might also include Lafferty, but I feel his vision is personal and his method allied to the intentions if not the manner of such divergent people as William Burroughs and James Joyce.

I feel that Verne and Wells would have operated as they did if 'Frank-enstein' had never been written, and that they deserve the credit for conceiving and bearing the two great twins of sf, the hard-science-and-adventure story and the extrapolative-philosophical story.

If all this sounds like a denigration of 'Billion Year Spree', be at once undeceived. It is one book you cannot do without if you are a student or lover of the genre. You don't have to agree with everything in it, but you do have to read and consider the opinions of one of the sharpest intelligences in the sf field. And it is a book which wears erudition lightly and delightfully; you can read it for the sheer exuberance of an sf-lover talking about his love.

But he has been, I think, a little unfair to Mary Shelley. Let us pass on.

And passing on, we find Aldiss still with us, presenting his novel on the 'Frankenstein' theme, 'Frankenstein Unbound'. (Consider the references and possible meanings in that title!)

It is, in the main, a piece of extended literary pranksterism, siezing on possibilities as they present themselves, snapping up ideas and paradoxes and weaving them ingeniously into entertaining variations on a theme. But at the end there is a suggestion of deeper purpose.

The novel begins in the future, in a world wrapped in nuclear warfare to the point where released energies are causing celestial perturbations which in turn cause 'time-slips', one of which dumps the hero into the Switzerland of 1816. This outrageous pseudo-scientific gimmickry, not even pretending plausibility, warns us at once that the novel is only 'by courtesy' sf. When the Villa Diodati menage is introduced as a group of characters and we discover that Mary is writing her novel about events which, unknown to her, are actually occurring, it is evident that in 70 000 words or so we are to be cheerfully hit with

everything, probably including the kitchen sink. Aldiss follows Mary's plot - so far as the purely fictional characters are concerned - to the point where the female monster is created. Frankenstein, however, does not destroy her but is himself killed, allowing the 21st century intruder (who has whiled some of his time having trans-temporal sex with Mary) to take over the traditional role of pursuer of the monsters. Also at this point we are given the highlight of the novel, the sexual dance and mating of the monsters, one of the more memorable scenes in a genre which presents few such.

So far we have been treated to ingenious plotting, deft story telling and a couple of effective set pieces (though the presentations of Byron and Polidori do not really come off), but for climax Aldiss strikes a fresh note. His monster has so far been very much as Mary wrote him, even to some pastiche presentation of the brute's speech in the style she gave it, but we are always aware - as Aldiss is aware - of the shameful treatment dealt him in the original. And this is surely in some part responsible for the newly devised ending.

The pursuit follows, as previously, into the Arctic ice, the pursuer being armed with a 21st century machine rifle. As he comes within range of his prey another time-slip occurs (there have been several at strategic points in the narrative) and a mysterious shining city from the future appears on the ice. The monsters nearly reach the city and, by implication, safety, but the hunter shoots them both. And the lights of the beckoning city go out. He is left alone on the ice with his empty triumph and unimaginable loss.

The construction of 'Frankenstein Unbound' is too puckish, too full of antic distraction, to add much to our conception of the monster, but at least Aldiss has gone a little way towards repairing the psychological brutality of previous versions. What you, the reader, make of the climax is your affair. I find it poignant and meaningful, but allegory in modern dress is treacherous stuff and your interpretation may not match mine.

It is, all in all, a delightful book which no Frankensteinian should be without.

We turn to 'Frankenstein: The True Story', the TV script published by Avon Books,with a sense of deja vu, for Mary Shelley leads off the dialogue, with Byron, husband and Polidori picking up smartly.

Before we start sorting this one out, let us note that one of the co-authors is Christopher Isherwood. It is a fair guess that he did his stint with a hangover and one hand behind his back. The dialogue is pure Universal Pictures Glug, save perhaps for one line: 'Byron's merely a journalist with a knack for rhyming.' Aside from the

stratum of truth in the remark, it has the genuine sound of one poet speaking his mind of another when opportunity offers.

The reason for introducing the Diodati push soon becomes plain. Isherwood and Bachardy are fully aware of the dramatic shortcomings of Victor Frankenstein and so have fingered another poor innocent to carry the load. They have created a new leering, sneering villain from the unfortunate Polidori, whose only qualification seems to have been that he was a physician and so could be counted on to do some plain and fancy stitching on any corpses he just happened to have about him. Poor Polidori was Byron's personal physician in life, and Byron's behaviour (which was usually that of an intellectual lout) seems to have driven him close to suicide; he was at worst an inoffensive young man with a brand new degree from Edinburgh and no great intelligence. From this unpromising material has been created a villain for James Mason to decorate with the best sneer on the screen, although he is some thirty-five years older than the real Polidori, who died young.

So it happens that Polidori discovers those secrets which should remain hidden from man, but chickens out when it comes to harnessing lightning for the animation sequences. Reason: he's afraid of lightning. Young, handsome, honourable Doctor Frankenstein has to take over and complete his evil master's research.

For a while the plot winds round and round (with some stuff that should be very effective visually) with recognizable bits of the original surfacing now and then as the writers come up to see where they have got to, but in general the thing becomes a contest between Polidori-vice and Frankenstein-virtue. Eventually they manage to pack everybody on to a ship in the Arctic, where the monster picks them off until only the confrontation between himself and Frankenstein remains. Victor uses his gun to start an avalanche which engulfs them both. (But the final frames leave room for a sequel. Never let a good thing get away from you.)

The interesting thing about this mess of nonsense is that the script takes a penultimate step in the humanization of the monster. He is played by Michael Sarrazin, who is a very good-looking young hunk of Hollybeef, and only becomes monsterish when a flaw in the process causes evolutionary reversion. (Let us pass over the scientific aspects of this opus in an appalled silence.) All his misdeeds are traceable to the baneful machinations of Polidori (this must have been a real camp holiday for Mason) and in fact he reveres his creator, Frankenstein. Their showdown scene under the overhang of the avalanche narrowly misses being a love scene, and - prepare yourself for it - as the avalanche thunders down the bestial face reverts to the handsome innocence of its first creation. Well, I'm all in favour of them

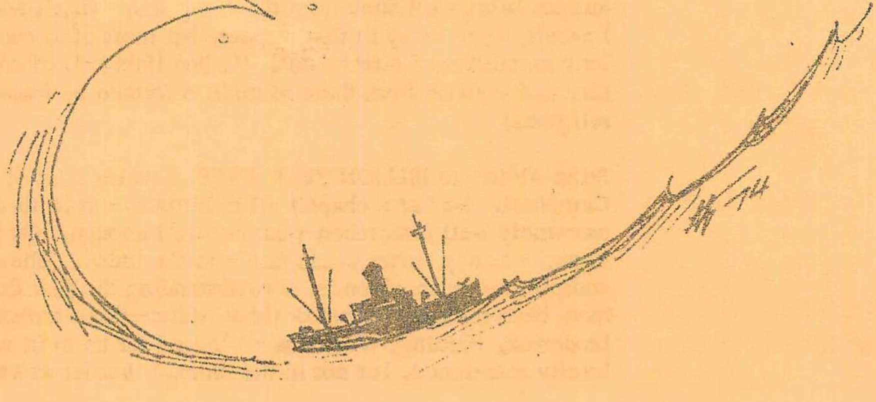
humanizing the monster, but I don't much care for 'Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde' crossed on 'Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm'.

And there you have it. The basic story is still with us, but the emphasis has changed. And where can the monster's writers go from here? The next move, obviously, is to present him either as a new messiah or as the first superman of a more glorious world. By then poor Mary will be rotating like a centrifuge while the monster will have made the classical myth-transmogrification from demon to godlet.

A thought remains. Why, with all these facelifts, does the monster remain a monster? Why has the underlying terror of the legend not collapsed under the weight of nonsense?
The answer, I think, is surprisingly simple.
Not one of all the writers who have handled and rehandled Mary's tale has given the monster a name. Nor did she.
We are permitted to think of him only as 'monster'.

I think I should mention that George's article was written about June last year, and Bert's not long after. I showed George page 13 of this issue, along with the covers and pages 5-12, at the 13th Australian Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne last August. When I next saw George, just three weeks ago though it seems an age, in mid-January, I had typed no further. I told him that I had found a sentence in a letter from Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett which seemed to sum up everything he had said in his article. He said 'You publish it and I'll never write for you again!' Well, I've looked at that sentence again, and it supplements rather than summarizes what George has written, so I shall risk all and quote it: 'Fashions in monsters do change, but the truth of humanity goes on forever, unchangeable and inexhaustible in the variety of its disclosures.'

And now: Bert.
Um.
Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?
Just resting, uh huh. Yer on, skipper.



A. Bertram Chandler

STARBOARD WATCH

JOHN W. CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE - published by Ronald E. Graham & John Bangsund - distributed by Space Age Books, GPO Box 1267L, Melbourne 3001 (A$2.00)
BILLION YEAR SPREE: THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE FICTION - by Brian W. Aldiss (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £3.75, A$10.10)
THE BEST OF STANLEY G. WEINBAUM (Ballantine Books)
THE LEGEND OF MIAREE - by Zach Hughes (Ballantine Books)

WE HAVE waited a long, long time for the Tribute to John W. Campbell. It was worth waiting for. Oddly enough I feel impelled to take to task only one of the contributors, John Foyster. Oh, I did disagree with quite a few of them, but on matters of opinion only. Redd Boggs, for example, although he was both entertaining and thought-provoking. (I have suggested before that he should be asked to contribute a column to Philosophical Gas called 'Port Watch' as an antidote to this column.) Redd has a Campbellian way with words and ideas. But as I said, it's the Foyster piece that has evoked the whinge.

Turn to page 57. Read the second paragraph. I quote: 'It is worth pointing out that in 1941 Campbell had reached the ripe old age of 30, and while his authors went off to fight the fierce Japanese attackers in such remote places as Los Angeles and Los Alamos, he stayed bravely at home, fighting the good fight at Street & Smith.'

All right, all right, John Campbell himself never came under fire in the literal sense of the words, but the work that he was doing was vitally important to the war effort. Good officers were six a penny. Good writers of manuals on sophisticated weaponry were as scarce as hens' teeth. And as for Campbell's authors being well back from the firing line - that's a load of hogwash. A few, I admit, were lucky in that respect, but most of us contrived to live through a long succession of near misses. (L. Ron Hubbard, of course, collected a direct hit, and went on from there to make a fortune by founding his own freak religion.)

Brian Aldiss, in BILLION YEAR SPREE, devotes a lot of space and time to Campbell. He has a chapter all to himself - as is his due. The book is extremely well researched - but not well enough. On receiving my copy I turned - as any writer would turn - to the index. The name of Chandler was conspicuous by its absence, notwithstanding the fact that stories by myself have been included in two or three Aldiss-edited anthologies. Bryning, Broderick, Harding, Wodhams - I looked for them in vain. (Actually Lee is briefly mentioned, but not in the index.) Insofar as I myself am concerned,

I did find one brief mention. According to Mr Aldiss, 'ASTOUNDING, after the war, was a very black magazine. Its writers and readers - to say nothing of its editor! - were digesting the implications behind the nuclear bomb, its unlimited powers for greatness or destruction... Titles of late 'forties and early 'fifties stories in ASTOUNDING reinforce the point: TOMORROW AND TOMORROW (Kuttner), THE END IS NOT YET (Hubbard), THERE IS NO DEFENSE (Sturgeon), DAWN OF NOTHING (Chandler)...'

Oddly enough I can recall this title but not the story. In those days I'd open my copy of old Omar's masterwork (or FitzGerald's masterwork?) at random, find a title and then build a story around it. The two that do stick in my memory are TOWER OF DARKNESS and DISTANT DRUM, although the latter was retitled, by some editor who Knew Best, FIREBRAND. DISTANT DRUM - mentioned in a recent book on the Venus of the science-fictioneers, FAREWELL, FANTASTIC VENUS - was all about a revolution on that allegedly watery world. For some reason I had in those long past days a thing about four-inch guns. Why, Ghod knows, as artillery of that particular calibre I'd never had the opportunity to play with during World War II. Six-inch, 4.7-inch, twelve-pounders, heavy and light machine guns from 20mm down to .30, a wide assortment of rocket weapons - I knew, well, and loved them all. But if I had to use any cannon in my fiction they were always four-inchers. In DISTANT DRUM everybody was shooting at everybody else with four-inch guns...

Talking of naval artillery, a very surprising omission from BILLION YEAR SPREE was Max Pemberton's THE IRON PIRATE. It is also surprising how many people I know have read that book, although some of them are very junior to myself agewise. I read it in my early teens. From the engineering viewpoint, at least, it was good science fiction. The central character was an ex-tramp skipper who, early in his career, had become imbued with a great dislike for the human race in general and shipowners in particular. Somehow he had come into possession of a very large sum of money. I could be wrong, but as I remember it, he won a lottery in some South American city, bought his own small tramp steamer, armed her with a couple or three secondhand machine guns and indulged in small time piracy. In pre-radio days this would have been far from impossible. Then, his ill-gotten gains having accrued sufficiently, he had a super warship built to his own specifications in an Italian yard. This vessel had a hull not of steel but of phosphor bronze - which meant, of course, that she would not have to be dry-docked at regular intervals to have the accretion of marine growths scraped off her bottom. She was driven by gas turbines - and the fuel for these was hydrogen! She was the fastest thing afloat. She had a shore base, of sorts, in Greenland, where a coal mine supplied the raw material for her fuel. She pounced upon hapless trans-Atlantic liners carrying large shipments of bullion, diamonds and the like. Needless to say, the world's navies were out to get her. Somehow the location of her rendezvous with a chartered tanker - from which she was to renew her supplies of lubricating oil - was discovered, and before the hoses could be run, squadrons of battleships and cruisers closed in on her. She ran for it, and would have escaped if the gas turbines, with their by then bone-dry bearings, hadn't seized up...
It was a bloody good story, and the use of hydrogen-fueled gas turbines at the date when it was written certainly made it science fiction.

Another omission was a book called A MARVELLOUS CONQUEST: A STORY OF THE BAYOUDA. The author was French, I think, a contemporary of Jules Verne. I know of only two other people who have read it: one was the late Willy Ley, the other William F. Temple. I read it years and years ago, in my very early teens, when staying at the home of my paternal grandparents. In the attic were boxes and boxes of books that had belonged to my father, who was one of the early British casualties in World War I. There was practically all of Rider Haggard in paperback. There were stacks and stacks of back numbers of THE BOY'S OWN PAPER, which used to specialize in science fiction serials. A MARVELLOUS CONQUEST was one of these serials.

Even as a kid I could see the utter absurdity of the plot - and even now I feel the utmost admiration for the audacity of the concept. There were the usual slightly mad scientists - three of them, as I recall. They wanted to get to the Moon, but had decided that all the conventional methods wouldn't work. (A slighting reference was made to M. Verne's moon cannon.) So what did they do? They went out to the Sudan where, very conveniently, there was a sizeable mountain of almost pure soft iron. They set up parabolic mirrors for

the harnessing of solar energy and melted the sand around the mountain so that the magma percolated through horizontal fissures, insulating the mass of iron from the rest of the Earth. This simple feat accomplished, they then wound miles and miles of copper wire around the mountain. Solar power was used again for the generation of electricity through steam-driven dynamos and the current fed into the enormous solenoid. And the Moon, slowly but surely, was dragged by magnetic attraction down to the surface of the Earth.

And nobody noticed!

Very conveniently, there was overcast weather over the entire world - except, of course, for a few square miles around the iron mountain; the supply of solar power had to be maintained, and nobody, apart from the scientists, saw our satellite looming larger and ever larger in the sky. There were, the author admits, a few abnormally high tides, but even they weren't sufficiently abnormal to cause any large-scale loss of life or property.

The Moon hit, and the impact stopped the generators, cutting off power to the solenoid. It then bounced back into its original orbit, and like the comet in Verne's HECTOR SERVADAC, scooped up a hunk of Terran real estate - in this case the iron mountain - and all the equipment, some human beings, and enough atmosphere to sustain them.

The scientists did some exploring around their mountain, discovering the relics of a long-dead, giant, but otherwise human, race. Then, finding it rather hard to breathe and to keep warm during the Lunar night, they thought it was time they were getting back. They repaired their generators and constructed a Montgolfier balloon. When the Moon had dragged itself down to the outer limits of the Earth's atmosphere the balloon was aloft, tethered to the mountain by a mooring line of copper wire that was an integral part of the solenoid circuit. At the exact moment, this line was cut with an axe, breaking the circuit. The Moon again bounced back into its orbit and the explorers floated down to Earth. And once again, there had been overcast weather all over the world, so that nobody noticed anything untoward happening in the heavens. The worst of all this was that nobody believed the heroes of the story when they told their tale...

I'd like to get a chance to read that yarn again - but in all probability, if I did, I'd find it quite unreadable. I still remember the business of QUEEN SHEBA'S RING, by Rider Haggard. (Did the author realize what he had done when he put his name under that title?) That's a story that sticks in the memory.

The usual Haggard white adventurers are in Darkest Africa, looking for a city allegedly founded by a descendant of King Solomon's girlfriend, Balkis. They find it and are well received by the Queen - a sort of Ayesha but without that lady's supernatural powers. She welcomes the strangers, hoping that they, with their relatively sophisticated weaponry, will prop up her rather unstable throne. As I recall it - I could be wrong - the wicked High Priest was aiming to depose the Reigning Monarch so that he could impose his own brand of dictatorship.

The city was called Mur. Outside the city walls was a huge stone sphinx, called Harmak. And there was an old, old prophecy to the effect that when Harmak came to Mur all sorts of horrible things would happen, including the downfall of Sheba's dynasty. The explorers decided to help the Queen by making nonsense of the prophecy. If Harmak were destroyed, they reasoned, then Harmak could never come to Mur.

(They were real twits, weren't they, Bert!
(Yes, John.
(Never read Macbeth in their lives, eh?
(No, John.
(You aren't making all this up, are you, Bert?
(No, I'm not! Get out of my article!)

Like most characters in adventure stories of that period (and like most of the rather unpleasant little animals in today's animated cartoons), they had with them ample dynamite. After all, you never knew when a stick or two might come in handy. The body of Harmak was already honeycombed with tunnels and passages. They made their way inside, planted a hefty demolition charge, lit the fuse and retired to a safe distance.

However...

When the dynamite went off, one of the main tunnels inside Harmak's body functioned as the bore of an enormous cannon, and the head of the sphinx as the projectile. And inside the city there was a low, oblong hill, shaped rather like a sphinx's body. Harmak's head, flying through the air with the greatest of ease,

landed neatly on its new neck... So Harmak came to Mur, and the dynasty was overthrown, and the white explorers and their royal popsy managed to escape and make their way back to civilization with enough gold and precious stones to enable them to live happily ever afterwards.

Well, I'd been giving the everloving a lecture on Rider Haggard, telling her what a good writer he was and how he never dates, &c &c, and she, never having read anything by him, took my word for it. Then in our local library I found a copy of QUEEN SHEBA'S RING. I seized it, bore it home and thrust it into her hands. She got as far as page 6 and said 'I can't read this.' 'But it's good!' I told her. 'Can you read it?' she countered. Frankly, I couldn't.

The foregoing story of my inability to re-read a book that I thoroughly enjoyed as a kid brings me (at last) to Ballantine's THE BEST OF STANLEY G. WEINBAUM. (I'd have thought he'd be mentioned in BILLION YEAR SPREE, but he wasn't.) I have tried to read it - with about as much success as I had trying to re-read Haggard. Some of the stories I dimly recall having read years ago, but only one, A MARTIAN ODYSSEY, had stuck, in a very half-hearted manner, to the memory.

I'm sorry, but I have to say that it dates, dreadfully. Furthermore, all the stories are what I class as stories by, for and about boy scouts. (The same can be said about Doc Smith's sagas, but he painted on such a wide canvas in such strong colours that he got away with it.)

The other Ballantine book - THE LEGEND OF MIAREE - is an altogether different kettle of fish. It most emphatically does not come into the boy-scout category. The author not only makes it plain that he has heard there is such a thing as s*x, but employs s*x as an essential ingredient of his plot. The writing is consistently good. Best of all, from the sf reader's viewpoint, the Sense of Wonder is maintained all the way through, from beginning to end.

Nonetheless it is a hard book to review. Great restraint must be exercised lest too many beans be spilled and those reading it thereby robbed of their pleasure. The exact nature of the Artonuee, with their complex life cycle, is revealed piece by integral piece as the story progresses. They are a people humanoid to outward appearance who have colonized all five worlds of their planetary system, using both rockets burning chemical fuels and sailing ships of Space. The Delanians, with whom they come into contact, seem to be human rather than merely humanoid, and are capable of interstellar flight. The two races join resources in an attempt to escape the doom that, inexorably, will incinerate every habitable world in their sector of the galaxy.

Zach Hughes, with his close attention to every detail, makes it all so convincing, and by implication, paints a saddening picture of a race, the beings from Delan, that could well be our own. Oh, the Artonuee have their faults, too, but although so very unlike us, they are far more likable than their guests and allies.

This is the first novel - and it is a novel - by Zach Hughes that I have read. I hope that it is not the last.

THE MARCH OF MIND

— continued from page 3

10 February: Today Lionel Murphy's resignation as Australian Attorney-General and Senator for the State of New South Wales, and his kick upstairs to the High Court, became general knowledge. Today also, with luck, I finished typing the stencils for this issue, which I started nearly seven months ago. You might well find these two statements a little, shall we say, irrelevant to each other.

I liked Senator Murphy, if no one else did. (His successor as A-G, Kep Enderby, for whom I voted as my local member last year, ghod save us all, I do not like. His heart's in the right place, but sometimes I wonder where his head is. Anyway, time will tell.) A lot of people liked Lionel actually - and his place in Australia's history is assured, if not yet defined. We'll be forgetting to thank him for a lot of things in years to come. Me, I owe my job to him. He's the bloke who kept on pushing the idea of Parliamentary Committees, and kept on pushing the parallel idea of the Senate as a house of review (as complementary to, if not distinct from, the States' house). To keep up with his committees Hansard was forced to employ full-time journalist-editors - a new breed of parliamentary reporters, who work with new-fangled tape recorders and such, instead of the traditional shorthand notebook - and I was one of the first appointed. I am still the only person on Hansard's reporting staff, as such, who doesn't do shorthand. I am the shape of things to come (he said modestly), and - getting back to the starting-place - if ever there was a man committed in every way to shaping the things to come, it was Murph the Lion. I salute him.

I don't only owe Lionel Murphy a job, come to think of it. One of his greatest contributions towards making Australia a 20th-century place is his Family Law Bill, which has yet to be passed, watered down though it is from his original conception. For a month or so during early 1973 'Murphy's Rules' applied to divorce cases. And during that time Diane and I - and Lee and Carla Harding - were divorced. We got in under the rope. We were lucky.

I'm rapidly running out of space here, and there are things I must say. Most important is that John Litchen's article about his brother-in-law, the Chilean sf writer Hugo Correa, will appear next issue - as will also John D. Berry's report on the 32nd World Science Fiction Convention, Ken Ford's fabulous short story, and a lot of other material I had hoped to include here. There are lots of letters: thank you, everyone who has written. And I told my mate Robin Brown at work that I would publish his pome about Inflation. Here it is:

Gather inflation while ye may
And fear ye not to borrow,
For dollars that you owe today
Will all be cents tomorrow.

DUFF -
the Down-Under Fan Fund - is a most worthy fannish enterprise. In 1972 we brought Lesleigh Luttrell from America to the national convention in Sydney; last year we sent Leigh Edmonds from Melbourne to Washington; and this year we are voting and contributing cash to bring John Berry, Jan Finder or Rusty Hevelin from America to the Worldcon in Melbourne. (For details contact one of the administrators: Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 74, Balaclava, Vic. 3182; Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W. Main, Madison, WI 53703 USA.) The entire staff of Philosophical Gas supports John Berry - but that's not what I set out to say. I had a letter a few days ago from Rosemary and Darroll Pardoe. I quote from Darroll's bit: 'We always imagined DUFF to be a strictly North America-Australia fund - are we under an illusion? It seems to be generally believed in Britain anyway that Britons are not eligible for DUFF.'

I don't know the answer to that. I invite my learned colleagues John Foyster (founder) and Leigh Edmonds (administrator for 1975/76) to comment.

SHAYNE McCORMACK, I was reliably informed, is back from her globe-trotting. Last week there was a note from her in the mail, so I believed it. 'Thanks for First Draft. I enjoyed your thoughts on the govt, even if I didn't completely agree.' That was fine, but Shayne enclosed a subscription (blush, young lady!). Now we all know that in fandom subs are the last resort. We do, don't we. Does this mean, Shayne, that we are unlikely to see your delectable fanzine Something Else for a while? That you've gafiated? entered a nunnery? what?

NOEL KERR threatens a letter real soon. He says, in an illegal note on his last batch of electrostencils, that anyone who prints a letter from him must be creating a good impression. Quite right, too: just look at those covers on this issue.

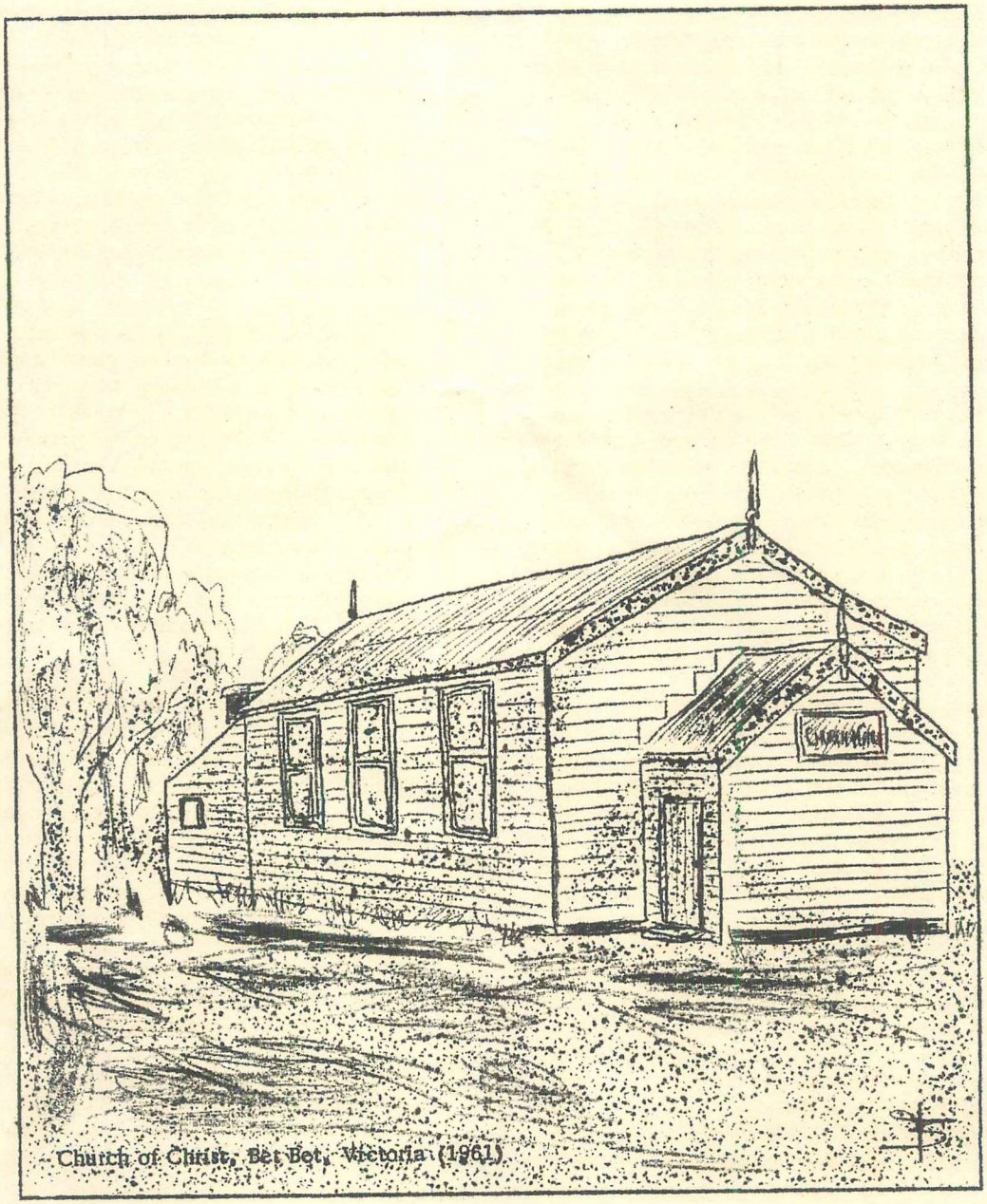
BILL WRIGHT sent a most perceptive letter about my latest (= fourth) short story, which one of us will publish some time, and about other things. He concludes (you'll read this again next issue): 'All things are beautiful so long as you've got them in the right order.'

Other correspondents (in next issue, with luck) include Perry Chapdelaine, Bruce Arthurs, Val Augstkalns, Warren Silvera, Joan Dick, Margot D'Aubbonnett, Dave Rowe, Don D'Ammassa.

The New MILLENNIAL HARBINGER

Number Fourteen

Christmas 1974



Church of Christ, Bet Bet, Victoria (1961)

The New Millennial Harbinger

THE NEW MILLENNIAL HARBINGER has been published and mostly written by John Bangsund since 1968. This issue, the last for the time being, is published jointly by John Bangsund (PO Box 357, Kingston, ACT 2604) and John Alderson (PO Box 72, Maryborough, Victoria 3465).

Supplement to Philosophical Gas 29

THE DEATH OF A VILLAGE

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn.

I HAVE JUST RETURNED from the meeting that closed the Bet Bet Church of Christ. That was the church where once Banger thundered from the pulpit (a metaphor of course: I doubt if John ever thunders). The church - more correctly, chapel - stood long years after John went from bad to Canberra, but today it has closed its doors. Its membership had fallen to fourteen, with half of that number aged over 80 and the youngest member a grandmother. A community without children, young people or middle-aged people.

(For those of you who wonder about such things, knowing the writer to be a mere 24 in a little while, I should explain that my membership is at Maryborough but that I worshipped at Bet Bet.)

Once - well, Bet Bet was never very big, a mere township on the edge of Havelock, say a couple of thousand in its prime. Enough for instance to run two pubs. Grant's hotel was the first to close. Within its walls the local Presbyterian Church began way back in 1863 (it still continues as the United Church), and the Church of Christ began there in 1886. Grant's closed I am not quite sure when, but my dad related that in 1914 he nearly kissed the daughter of the owner. (I can only stand aghast at the morality of the time!) It was on the other side of the Bet Bet Creek. Gormon's pub was on this side, diagonally across the bridge. It was a two-storeyed place, and there is a painting of it in the Goldfields Historical Museum, with a white horse tethered to the veranda post, and the owner, one James Salter, sitting on the veranda. James was my great-grandfather. He was the first and only elder the Bet Bet Presbyterian Church ever ordained, but he, misguided fellow (Presbyterian view), attended a Churches of Christ mission at Dwyer's Bridge, two miles away, and was converted. Our family is ever seeking new truth (writer's view). Regrettably, James Salter fell from grace. He drank heavily.

In those days Bet Bet fielded a fair sort of cricket team. The story goes that a Melbourne team, and one of the best, came up to play them and got the pants beaten off them. The opening bat for Bet Bet strode

out with a bran-new bat, took the first ball in the centre of it, and lofted it through the first-storey window of Gormon's pub across the road. The impact of that mighty hit left a dint in the bat an inch and a quarter in diameter and one-sixteenth of an inch deep. For the life of that bat the glorious scar spoke of the crack Melbourne team so terribly beaten that they never returned. The cricket team persisted for many years, until most of the players were outsiders, but it folded about twenty years ago.

Gormon's pub was destroyed in a huge flood in the 1930s. I remember dad reading the account of the piano floating out of a top-storey window. We were in the Mallee then, and had only heard of Bet Bet as the place where dad grew up.

Today the president mentioned his grandfather's marriage certificate, and later I looked at this document. His grandfather is described as a 'vigeron'. Now his name was Alderson, Tom Alderson, and he was my grandfather's brother. The two brothers, John and Tom, began the 'Bet Bet Winery', and 'Alderson's Sacramental Wine' went all over Australia and New Zealand. It was, of course, unfermented, but they used to make the other vile fermented stuff as well. So did almost everybody - and this in a Church where alcohol was regarded as the main agent of the devil! I am still pondering this.

The winery business ceased in the 1930s, and the last wine was made for the local church a decade later. Today the family secret was promised to me - and a secret it was, too, jealously guarded. Old Jack Stevens swore he would discover the secret, so he got his grapes and crushed them - 'then I boiled it and scummed it, and boiled it and scummed it, and boiled it and scummed it. Then I put it away and about six months later I tried it. It was the best whisky I'd ever tasted.' Must repeat that experiment...

The school was closed in the 1940s. It stands to this day, solid reinforced concrete. The locals were sold on 'area schools', so we don't have a teacher in the community and the buses go past an empty school to grossly overcrowded schools in Maryborough. Some of the kids catch the bus at 7.30 am, after riding a bicycle six miles to the bus stop. The world must progress, of course.

The telephone exchange went several years ago. It is now a wooden box in the corner of a paddock. The post office still survives, just, but the exchange no longer subsidizes the store and this closed its doors early this year.

The Sunday School went about ten years ago. The Church of Christ used to run this and the Presbyterian children used to come. Now they are all taken to Dunolly to a combined Sunday School. The psychological effect on the church was severe: the children sometimes stayed to church, and of course we gave them a Christmas tree and a

picnic and an Anniversary. Well, that all went and the old folk started feeling old, and when you start feeling old that's the end.

Today the church went, leaving (apart from those other heretics of course) the railway station - and I have a sad feeling that soon there will only be the Bet Bet railway crossing.

The old church was packed today, and there was an overflow meeting outside. You could hardly go to any of our churches in Victoria and not meet folk from Bet Bet, and many of them were here today. For many years Bet Bet was probably the smallest of our churches, yet they gave a higher proportion of their offerings to total Brotherhood work than any other church. They refused stubbornly to pay their Conference fee - and Conference just as stubbornly refused to remove them from the list of affiliated churches.

There was more than local fame. Stanton Wilson, now secretary of the Victorian and Tasmanian Conference, spent a number of years overseas, and was often asked what Australian churches were like. He had been a student minister at Bet Bet, so this was the church he told people about.

Now the chapel has been sold; the money from the sale has been invested and the interest goes to Brotherhood work, so the work of Bet Bet will go on. It will be a long time before the Bet Bet church is forgotten. Perhaps when Gabriel blows the trumpet and all men's works are weighed, Peter will come up and say 'Youse blokes from Bet Bet can go straight in.'

I have sat in many a hard pew, and only those of one church have been more uncomfortable than Bet Bet's. I won't say which church it was in case they sue me for defamation of seats and refurnish the place out of damages. All of Bet Bet's seats and furnishings have been given to the new church at Warburton, so those venerable tea-stained pews will go on preventing people from sleeping during sermons.

As I started out to say, I have been far and wide, and the Bet Bet church remains unique. It is not that there I first found a wider world (as I did); it is not that there I first spoke in public and preached my first sermon; it is not even the incredibly old aspidistra they had there (which piece of Victoriana I believe the organist now possesses). Once a missioner named Harold House came to the church, and while people sang hymns he made crayon sketches. One of his sketches, a landscape, or perhaps more correctly a seascape - well, half sea, half land -, featuring a palm tree and some surf, a terribly simple drawing, hung behind the communion table for decades. I have been in many churches, but I have yet to see a crayon sketch such as this hanging above, behind or anywhere near the communion table or altar (it's an altar if it's against the wall). And that drawing is to go to our Church Archives!

So the last benediction has been said. We all took our neighbour's hand, so that everybody was one for that last little prayer. And it was stiff for those poor coots who had to sniff and later wipe their eyes. Why are otherwise hard-headed farmers so damnably sentimental! Yes, the Bet Bet church members were all farmers. And the world is going to say, sooner than they think,

'Where have all the farmers gone?
Under the green sod every one?
Why did we never learn?
Why did we never learn?'

Today I feel as though a great slice has been cut from my heart. I know a great slice has been cut from my life.

— John Alderson
15 December 1974

(OXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXOXO)

WHATEVER BECAME OF JOHN BANGSUND?

I am still working on the answer to that one, and hope to continue doing so for some years yet, but since this publication is going to people with whom I have had no contact for ten or fifteen years, I will attempt a progress report.

I left the College of the Bible in 1958. My time there was well spent and I have never regretted the experience. My only regret is that after a good Christian upbringing, and a tremendous enthusiasm for the Church, I found myself unable to become a minister, and not long afterwards, unable to regard myself as a Christian. I am basically a good person, a talented person - and a shameless egotist. My friends will confirm that I am also an incorrigible evangelist and pedagogue. With these qualities I should have become a second Gordon Moyes (or perhaps he a second John Bangsund: we were in college together, but I think I am his senior by a few months). But I did not, because the more honestly and closely I looked at my faith the more sadly I realized that I had no faith - at least, not the kind of faith that is necessary for a Christian. I had, and have, endless faith in my fellow man; it has got me into more strife than I care to think about, but I still have it.

If the Churches of Christ in Australia are still as unhappily bigoted and lacking in basic humanity in some quarters as they were 18 years ago, then I can imagine some people taking what I have to say as further proof that the College of the Bible is a godless, anti-Christian, communistic &c institution. From my recent reading of 'The Australian Christian' I have no doubt that such people still exist. I can only say that I am proud to have studied under such men as Lyall Williams, Randall Pittman, Ken Clinton, Alf White, Keith Jones and Laurie Trezise - great men and great Christians. If I came out of college something other than a Christian, it was by no means their doing. If I came out of college knowing how to think for myself, it was almost entirely their doing. My understanding of the basic beliefs of the Churches of Christ (as outlined in the Declaration and Address of 1809), of protestantism, of Christianity itself from its very beginning, is that fundamentally religion is a man's direct relationship with God. If he accepts his faith unthinkingly from any human intermediary, then he has no faith. These days I go further, and say that any man who accepts without examination anything (of more than passing importance) said by anyone, is something less than a man. This - the observant reader will note - conflicts somewhat with what I said earlier about my endless faith in my fellow man. And it is a conflict. If I ever resolve it I'll let you know.

When I left the college, and not long after stopped going to church, the one thing I missed most was what we perhaps rather glibly called fellowship - the sense of community, of being accepted, of having a common purpose. I have

never quite regained that sense of fellowship, although I have gone close to it at times. I have experienced it occasionally at work; I felt it for a time when I joined a political party; I have felt it often over the past decade in science fiction fandom; but it has never been quite that sensation which comes from knowing that you and your friends are part of 'the body of Christ'.

Once, at a youth camp at Monbulk, I said during a discussion that 'the body of Christ' is a mystical concept. A young chap (very learned for his age) named Keith Bowes said I was entirely wrong. Today Keith is principal of the College of the Bible, and I still think it's a mystical concept. Things don't have to be untrue or unreal to be mystical concepts!

Anyway... I left college and went to work in a bookshop. Also I left home and went to live by myself, in a couple of rooms in St Kilda, overlooking a synagogue. I was desperately lonely. My best friend, a bloke at work, was a German migrant who got me talking and thinking about literature, art, sex and other matters of considerable import, and introduced me to the demon drink. How often we discussed religion over our portergaffs at the Hotel Australia! It seems humorous now, but it wasn't then.

I drifted in and out of jobs: clerk in the Victorian Department of Labour and Industry, motorcycle messenger for a printing firm, security guard at a factory, typist at AAP-Reuter, and so on. In 1961 I landed a job as assistant librarian at the Victorian Railways Institute, and the next year became Head Librarian. I stayed there for four years, and enjoyed myself no end. I organized a music club, which met every few weeks to listen to classical records. I travelled around the state inspecting our branch libraries. I was still lonely, but there were plenty of things to do. Among many other things, I wrote a column for the monthly Victorian Railways Newsletter - and I hated it when the editor rejected or changed my stuff. It was probably about this time that I resolved, somewhere deep down inside, to be an editor (one way or another) and a writer (if possible).

In 1963 I met a bloke named Lee Harding, an interesting, jolly kind of bloke, who liked classical music and had read at least three good books. He not only read science fiction but wrote the stuff - but after all, no one is perfect. Somehow I found myself reading this rubbish, and liking it. There was a kind of speculation in science fiction about things that really matter which I had not struck since I left college.

In 1965 my father died, on Good Friday. I have still not come to terms with this unspeakable sadness, and on Good Friday 1975, when Sally and I celebrate our first wedding anniversary, I shall have very mixed feelings.

Towards the end of 1965 I joined a publishing firm as a sales representative, and during the following two years saw a lot of Australia (and sold a few books here and there). My greatest achievement in the sales line was subscribing something in excess of 1200 copies of the Jerusalem Bible - a book which I still read with great satisfaction.

In 1966 I married Diane Kirsten, and not long afterwards her brother Barry married my sister Ruth. Ruth and Barry seem very happy on their meagre farm in the Western District, especially since 19 October this year, when they were joined by a daughter, Amanda. Diane and I were pretty happy, too, for a while, but by 1970 we knew that the marriage was quite impossible, and we were divorced after a separation of two years. We had no children, and we remain friends, at a distance.

In 1966 also I attended my first science fiction convention, and published my first magazine. Australian Science Fiction Review enjoyed considerable esteem, in Australia and overseas. Through it I gained many friends (some are still speaking to me to this day) and somehow got in, by the back door, to a career in journalism. From 1967, when I left the publishers, until 1972, when I moved to Canberra, my activity and friendships in science fiction fandom (while indescribably frustrating at times) more or less kept me sane. Diane and I moved house more times than I can recall offhand, and I changed jobs and spent long periods unemployed more often than I care to talk about.

One of my crazy ideas, not long after I started publishing ASFR, was that Australia should campaign for the honour of conducting a World Science Fiction Convention in this country. We campaigned, I lost a lot of money and not a few friends in the process, and in August 1975 the 33rd World SF Convention will be held in Melbourne. It should be a lot of fun, especially since I am no longer involved in organizing it.

Early in 1972 I got a job as a sub-editor with the Parliamentary Reporting Staff in Canberra. In March this year I married Sally Yeoland. And here we are, happy, and looking forward to the future with hope - and faith, and love.