

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

— the accurate fanzine — is published when least expected by John Bangsund, PO Box 434, Norwood, SA 5067, Australia, or by his readers for that matter, and is a natural consequence of the decision to move away from a fixed exchange to a more flexible policy of managed flotation, the Minister for Economic Chassis announced. The new subscription rate for this journal is two Hyphens, three Horizons, 4.73 SF Reviews or 289 pa'angas for seven issues, 6.72 Rataplans, four SF Commentaries or 14 006 new pistoles for nine issues, but don't rush those pa'angas in, folks, because these rates are subject to change without notice or forethought, depending on the economic climate and whether generally.

NUMBER 36

13 December 1976 No, no, I won't say a word about politics! You probably don't care anyway that today is the anniversary of Malcolm Fraser's official assumption of power as Prime Minister of Australia, swept into that office by the 57% of Australians who wanted Whitlam out at any price. It's a pity that we of the 43% have to pay that price at all, let alone most of it, but life wasn't meant to be easy and after all it's a free country isn't it yes. Fifteen days ago the Australian dollar was devalued by 17.5%, six days ago revalued by about 2%, and today revalued by about 1%, making an effective devaluation of something like 14.66% as of 9.30 am today. Big Mal now has the business community and the newspapers against him (and the unions, but they don't count), and I can't help wondering whether he's sick of the job and is trying for the hat-trick: all he needs now is the Governor-General against him. There's been a lot of talk lately about a 'mixed basket' of currencies, and whatever that is, we've apparently dropped it. When I first heard that we'd dropped the mixed basket I thought the Governor-General had sacked another Prime Minister. But I said I wouldn't say a word about politics, and I won't. It's entirely out of place in a radical left-wing science fiction fanzine and all-round scholarly urbane and accurate journal like this.

SEX! I'm not sure why Sally asked me to type that, but she did, so I did. I worry about her. I think the State Of The Nation is getting to her. We've just been watching our nation's leaders on the television, and one of them (Mal's mate, the Member for Vegemite and Minister for Maximum Confusion) said he would need to 'study the distribution of where this money might come from'. He also mentioned that it was all the unions' fault and that he had heard it all before. We reached a similar conclusion and cut him off in mid-platitude. I'm still wondering whether he was talking about anything.

Pot Black is a television show I never used to watch, since I thought it had something to do with Racial Misunderstanding in the United States and we have problems of our own, but a few months ago my brother-in-law Barry confessed rather shyly that he was quite addicted to it and that it was actually games of billiards, and I have accidentally watched a few of these games lately. Now I have to admit that I know even less about the game and play of billiards than the Minister for Unemployment and Commercial Frustration knows about the English language, and watching the game on a black-and-white portable tv set has done nothing much to increase my knowledge. 'Ah,' says the commentator 'he's snookered the pink, but there's the green right behind it, and he'll probably go for the brown.' A very snobbish game, billiards. For a start, you need a colour set to know what's going on. (Barry doesn't have a colour tv. I think he learnt the rules of the game during his misspent youth, probably when he was a policeman.)

Anyway, the first surprise you get when you tune in to this show is that it all takes place in a kind of small ballroom, except that there's an odd-looking table where the people normally dance and the people who should be dancing are seated neatly in tiers around the table, but at a respectable distance. Everything about this show is respectable. The genial compere announces the evening's excitements, and introduces the players and umpire. All of these respectable-looking men are dressed most respectably in evening suits - white shirts, weskits, bow ties and those odd trousers with velvet bands down the sides. All rather Masonic, actually. The players are allowed to remove their jackets. They bow to each other, quite charmingly, when the umpire introduces them (he looks like a retired wrestler: I almost expect him to say things like 'In the red corner at 240 pounds, Killer Charlton!' and 'Clean breaks, you bastards, and come out fighting!' - but he never does, unless it's under his breath or has been edited out) and they smile at each other in an incredibly sincere manner when they do awfully brilliant or awfully stupid or awfully lucky things on that table. You can just about hear them saying 'Jolly good shot by jove old chap!' The commentator (I think he is also the compere, but I'm not sure) describes each shot in almost-but-not-quite-breathless tones, each word and syllable quite distinct, well chosen, apt, gentlemanly, respectable.

Last week the commentator let me down utterly. There was a bit of a tension-packed pause while the gentlemen-players adjusted their dress before snooking or something, and nothing much seemed to be happening at all. The commentator said something complimentary about Fred Davis's smile, then seemed a bit stuck for words. 'Fred Davis' he repeated. Pause. Then in his inimitable, gentlemanly manner, he continued: 'Younger brother of the great Joe...'

I didn't hear any more for a few minutes. I was rolling around the floor in wet pants and a choking fit. You would have to see Fred Davis to understand. He must be sixty, at least, this younger brother of the great Joe.

30 December Actually it's closer to 31 December, but let's not quibble. The temperature in Adelaide got up to 40°C today — not a record for this time of year, but pretty hot — and I'm sure it hasn't dropped below 35 even as I write (11.30 pm). Since I can't sleep, and don't feel like doing anything else, here I am, back at the old PG. (Faint cheers off.)

ONE NIGHT a few weeks ago we let Dylan watch an elderly television program called 'Daktari'. You've probably seen it. This particular episode concerned a man-eating leopard called The Phantom. It was okay. The man-eating leopard didn't actually kill anyone during the program, but it was okay. About an hour after it ended, Dylan leapt from the sideboard on to my lap, more or less. The thing was that, sitting sort of sideways, as I was, with my naked legs clad in nothing but their native skin and hair (it's the heat, you understand), I didn't have much lap to speak of, and Dylan skidded down my left leg, leaving claw marks most of the way. This was a little painful, yes, but I managed to hobble to the typewriter next day (thank you for asking). A few nights later Dylan attacked Sally's legs, from a similar position. It may be entirely coincidence, I know, but lately I've been keeping a wary eye on that black cat, because I'm almost convinced that he really believes he's a man-eating leopard. If you think I'm exaggerating, ask anyone who has met him. He's an odd cat. If he were human, I'm sure he'd be organizing a World SF Convention. He's mad enough for anything.

The psychology of cats, as Marc Ortlieb will tell you (along with any other self-respecting cat-lover in our midst — and who can be truly human who has never been a cat-lover?), is, to say the least, of some passing interest. If you haven't had children, you could almost say that they're like children. I haven't had children, so I can say that. Take Donovan, for example. He's the ginger one, yes. Now Donovan is very different from Dylan. Dylan pretends to be affectionate; and he pretends to be a killer. Fair enough: he's both, up to a point. But Donovan doesn't pretend. Donovan is the one that hates visitors. He hides. This is because of his early upbringing, before we met him. He just hates people. Before we met him, someone had cut his whiskers — a terrible thing to do to a cat — and this meant that he was scared of people, generally, and that he had no sense of balance. He kept on falling off things. But we noticed fairly early that Donovan was the one that went racing up trees after birds twice his size, and caught them. These days, of course, he's twice the size of the Canberra currawong, and we don't get birds like that at Mile End, but he's still a killer. Donovan is the one that goes after anything that moves here, not Dylan. And he's affectionate. If you can manage to tickle Donovan, he'll fall off whatever he was on, in sheer ecstasy. I wouldn't like to admit that Dylan is entirely Sally's cat, but if he is, then Donovan is mine.

Deep down, I sometimes think, Donovan and I have the same basic attitude to life. That's probably why we get on, up to a point. That I cut my own whiskers is probably irrelevant.

CHRISTMAS (did I hear you say? Of course we have Christmas in Adelaide! Do you think we're a pack of pagans! Well, yes, we are, but no more than you are, with respect.):

Xmas started on Platform 12 at the Adelaide Railway Station, last Wednesday, when my mother arrived on The Overland, not quite two hours late, from Melbourne. The Adelaide Railway Station deserves, but shall not have here, considerable comment of a basically humorous nature. It was built about the time Captain Cook was thinking seriously about outboard motors, and it hasn't been thought about since. Cool, though: you have to give it that: it's cool. You can knock the Hanoverians all you like, but they really knew how to build a cool railway station. The House of Hanover had gone its illustrious way some years before this station was built (you knew that, didn't you! - go on, admit it!), but its influence sort of lingered on here and there, and especially here.

A Wombat in a Gum Tree: Among other things, my true love gave to me one (1) copy of Grant's VOYAGE OF THE LADY NELSON and (1) one copy of Christopher Brennan's Poems, both of which, I hesitate to say, I had bought and asked her to sign. I shall treasure them. But she neglected to give me a wombat in a gum tree - and so did everyone else. Things are a bit crook this year, obviously. Things have been a bit crook for quite a few years, actually: I've been dropping hints about wanting a wombat in a gum tree for at least ten years. Never mind: a book on the shelf is worth two marsupials up any old tree - or so I'm told.

On Xmas Day we had the pleasure of the company of Jeff Harris, Ruth and Reg and Little Reg (I keep forgetting their surnames), John McPharlin, Marc Ortlieb, Paul Stokes and Roman Orszanski. Some of us played table tennis, I seem to recall, and went on to play poker until all hours. Early on Boxing Day our guests left, with all the matches in the house, and about half an hour later, Gary Mason dropped in. I recall, dimly, talking politely to Gary. Whatever I said must have been okay, because he's been back since.

Ah, we had friends in Canberra - but we never had so many and so good friends as we have here! God bless them all, I say!

Paul Anderson rang today, and yesterday (early, therefore I was sober), John McPharlin came round to play cgeess. I beat him. Today, about 1.40, our friend Paul Stokes took pff for America. He lert a pile of his eecords with us. We're enjoying them.

Good luck in America, Paul! And if the worst comes to the worst, we never heard of you - okay?

Xmas was also a wonderful gift from Ursula Le Guin, and dinner with two of our best friends, Peter and Barbara - or, if you want to be fussy, our local Anglican priest and his wife.

It was a good Xmas - one of the best I can remember.

Mind you, it would have been better if you'd been here. But we were thinking of you.

4 January There are, I understand, still a few people here and there who believe that I never type a stencil before drafting what will appear on it. I have never pretended that this is so, and to prove it I have included in this final issue of Philosophical Gas a raw, uncorrected stencil — which, with luck, will produce the page before this. I blush at the typing errors on that page, but a man must do what a man must do, if only to convince his fellows that he, too, is mortal, and not such a crash-hot typist as his fellows give him credit for.

That I am a perfectionist, I will not deny. That I achieve perfection at times, I admit. That I invariably achieve perfection, I most strenuously deny. I appreciate the comments of those that think otherwise, of course, and I love them all madly, but perfection, by my definition, is simply that which I aim for and have never yet achieved. If I had achieved it, it would not be perfection.

But enough of this philosophical gas! For this final issue, the least I can do is outline the history of PHILOSOPHICAL GAS.

During 1970 it was decided by John Foyster and others that the pernicious influence and general lack of activity of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club should be countered by a new group, which eventually came to be known as the Nova Mob. I'm not sure whether the first meeting of this group was held at Tony and Myf Thomas's flat at South Yarra — it may have been the second meeting — but I attended that one. We spent a lot of time discussing the name of our new group: I remember that. As part of the new group's activities we decided to launch a new apa, APA-M, or APA-NOVA, and for the meeting at my place in September I produced the first issue of Philosophical Gas. It included a letter from Brian Richards and a review of Claud Dumont's LE FANAL FANIQUE. Knowing me, as I do, up to a point, that issue probably also appeared in ANZAPA, but I'm not sure of that just now.

I have a tape of the meeting at 1/8 Bundalohn Court in September 1970. Bruce Gillespie was the guest speaker, on the subject of (you guessed it!) Philip K. Dick and his works. The meeting turned into a party, and it wasn't the last to do so. I had the microphones from my Tandberg tape recorder placed strategically in the lounge room and the dining-room, and the tape I made must be heard to be believed. Peter Darling was there, from Sydney, and a friend of mine from the Engineers' Association, and a whole lot of other interesting people. It's a pretty boring tape, actually, but part of our history, so I preserve it.

Philosophical Gas 2, dated October 1970, included letters from Ursula Le Guin and John Brosnan. PG3, December 1970, I wrote entirely. By this time PG was definitely going through ANZAPA, and from this issue on became more general in tone and outlook.

At this point I reckon I should retrace my steps a little, and do a list of PG's issues from the beginning, with notes on contributors and so on.

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS: SEPTEMBER 1970 -- DECEMBER 1976

- 1: September 1970: 7pp: letter from Brian Richards
- 2: October 1970: 4pp: letters from Ursula Le Guin, John Brosnan
- 3: December 1970: 2pp: letter from Ursula Le Guin
- 4: April 1971: 4pp
- 5: (No file copy. One of these issues
- 6: included my article 'John W. Campbell
and the Meat Market'.)
- 7: September 1971: 4pp
- 8: October 1971: 3pp: cover by Daryl Lindquist
- 9: (no file copy)
- 10: (no file copy)
- 11: (3pp: all drawings, a non-issue)
- 12: June 1972: 7pp: cover by Lindsay Cox: notes on National Alf
- 13: June 1972: 18pp: cover by Lindsay Cox: illustrations by Cox
and Rotsler: letters from Gillespie, Cox and Le Guin
- 14: December 1972: 4pp: cover by Rotsler: 'The Ballad of the
Readers'
- 15: (no file copy of these three issues. One included
- 16: a reprint of an article in The Australian Author,
- 17: another photos from Australian conventions &c)
- 18: February 1973: 8pp: cover by Gerald Carr: report on the first
Australian Bring-Your-Own Convention
- 19: April 1973: 6pp
- 20: April 1973: 14pp: cover by JB
- 21: (suppressed: about 4 copies released)
- 22: May 1973: 13pp: cover JB: review 'John G. Bangsund: An
Australian Tribute'
- 24: August 1973: 5pp: 'In Memoriam Brian Richards': includes
address to the 1968 Melbourne SF Conference by Brian Richards
- 23: (No file copy)
- 25: Spring 1973: 28 pp: cover by Rotsler: other art by Jim Ellis,
Kurt Vonnegut Jr and Anon: articles by Bill Wright, John
Litchen, Ursula Le Guin and Kurt Vonnegut Jr: letters from
Valdis Augstkalns, Mike Glicksohn, Peter Roberts, Joan Dick,
Keith Curtis, George Turner, Ken Ozanne, John Brosnan, Bill
Wright

Note: About this stage, Philosophical Gas had obviously superseded my earlier gazette, Scythrop. But what's in a name? I just went on publishing whatever I felt like publishing.

- 26: Summer 1974: 27pp: cover portrait of Brian O'Nolan: other art by Rotsler, JB and Anon: articles by Walt Willis and Leigh Edmonds: LeGuin acceptance speech for National Book Award: letters from Barry Gillam, Bill Danner, Paul Stevens, John Alderson, Bill Wright, Ken Ozanne, Anne Kilcullen, George Turner, Ned Brooks, Mike Horvat, Eric Lindsay, Seth McEvoy, Doug Leingang, Bruce Townley
- 27: Autumn 1974: 36pp: cover by Michael Leunig: other art by Rotsler, JB and Anon: articles by George Turner and A. Bertram Chandler: letters from John Hepworth, Noel Kerr, John Berry, Norm Metcalf, Helen Hyde, John Alderson, Archie Mercer, David Piper, Cy Chauvin, Kevin Dillon, Eric Lindsay, Rose Hogue, Werner Fuchs, Barry Gillam
- 28: Winter 1974: 21pp: cover JB: other art by Lindsay Cox and Anon: article by Bert Chandler: letters from Mike Glicksohn, John Clark, Sydney J. Bounds, Leigh Edmonds, Philip Jose Farmer, Richard Mason, Bruce D. Arthurs, George Turner, David Grigg, Ben Indick
- 29: February 1975: 34pp: covers Rotsler: other art Jack Gaughan, Alexis Gilliland, JB: articles by Meredith Thring, George Turner, Bert Chandler: story by Phillip Adams: letters from Lee Harding, John Foyster: supplement, The New Millennial Harbinger 14, with article by John Alderson
- 30: March 1975: 24pp: cover by Rotsler: other art by Alexis Gilliland, JB: articles by Ken Ford, John Litchen, John Berry: letters from David Piper, Lee Harding, Bert Chandler, John Foyster, Leigh Edmonds, Bill Wright, Grant Stone, Walter Murdoch, Valdis Augstkalns, Jerry Kaufman, John Brosnan, Shayne McCormack
- 31: July 1975: 16pp: cover by Alexis Gilliland: letters from Patricia Rappolt, Phillip Adams, George Turner, Robert Bloch, Bert Chandler, Van Ikin: other messages from Henry Thoreau, Omar Khayyam and Charles Lamb
- 32: August 1975: 7pp: special issue for 33rd World SF Convention, Melbourne: cover by Max Ernst (?) and another: other art JB
- 33: April 1976: 14pp: cover JB: letters Wm F. Temple, Rob Gerrand
- 34: May 1976: 9pp: cover JB
- 35: November 1976: 14pp: What happened in Canberra on 11 November 1975: Foyster on the origins of ASFR &c
- 36: December 1976: well, you'll have to count the pages and name the artists, because I'm not sure I'm finished yet. The first attempt at printing this page blew a fuse in the Roneo 870, so this version varies slightly from the page in ANZAPA. The ANZAPA version of PG36/Lodbrog/Stunned Mullet/Scythrop/&c included 6 pages by Gary Mason, a left-over cover from Lodbrog (c.1968), an unused cover from Scythrop (1971), and the Leunig cartoon previously used as a cover for PG 27 and an issue of The New Millennial Harbinger. A pretty scrappy finish to PG, on the whole. Roll on, 1977.