

RATAPLAN

Nº 19.

HAVE YOUR MEDI BANK
CARDS READY.

BY ORDER W. TUCKER

BY APPOINTMENT
**WILSON
TUCKER**
C.A.
NATURAL
INSEMINATIONS



CHURCHILL

Hi fans! Welcome to another issue of RATAPLAN!

I was going to open this issue with some wisecracks about people putting out issues of their fanzines late, the best means of defense being offense, but I've decided to take another line of attack. (We are in a military frame of mind today, aren't we.) It occurred to me that a better way of protecting Valma and I from the barbs of people who have nothing better to do than complain is to tell you what a fantastic and marvellous issue this is. Although this is always naturally the case we highlight it this time, we hope that you will appreciate that the better things in life should not be rushed and therefore we have taken our time in rushing this issue directly to you.

However, incase some of you are not convinced by mere rhetoric, we are going to move our contents listing from the back page where it normally belongs, and place it directly below so that you may instantly read it and ooooh and aaaahhhh in all the right places. But first, the ~~station~~ identification and colophon:

RATAPLAN NINETEEN / TWENTY

Edited and Produced by Leigh Edmonds & Valma Brown, PO Box 103, Brunswick, Victoria 3056, AUSTRALIA. American Agent: Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W. Main, Madison, WI 53703. Copies of this fanzine are more or less available at the whim of the editors but a fairly good way of making sure that you get a copy (if you want a copy) is by sending along some sort of a contribution to the next issue. Contributions can be in the form of the written word or the drawn artistic masterpiece. There may be other forms of contribution which we've forgotten at the moment, if we remember we will let you know. Another fairly certain method of getting a copy of this is to send us a copy of your fanzine. However this does not always work because we tend to forget all the fanzines that were sent to us two years ago. The least satisfactory way of ensuring that you receive a copy of this fanzine is to send money. Once you used to be able to get an issue for 40¢, but since the first issue of this fanzine appeared they invented inflation and now the cost of an issue is astronomical (atleast three times what it used to be). In theory this fanzine is quarterly, but we've been slipping a bit recently. We will try to be better in the future. A U-Boat Publication.

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Art in this issue has been provided by Chris Johnson and Valma Brown. The work by Valma appears on pages 38, 51 & 52 and the work by Chris on the cover,

pages 18, 31, 44 and 57. Any other artwork that appears in this issue was not in it at the time of going to press and should therefore not appear. If such pictures do appear in your copy we would be pleased if you would not look at them in direct sunlight and if you would report their appearance to the branch of the Marc Ortlieb Fan Club nearest your home. He is always in need of a couple of good illos.

People who have read a few issues of this fanzine will no doubt recall that I tend to use this opening remarks space to give a "State of the Nation" address. In them I usually get to comment on the lousy state of fandom in Sydney or something equally important. However, even though the issue prior to this appeared well before AUSSIECON I feel that the basic state of the nation hasn't changed that much and I'm going to pass up the chance to point out the already obvious as I usually do.

Instead, this time I would like to point out something which will only be obvious to people who read colophons. The obvious is that I, Leigh Edmonds, now share the editorial chair with Valma Brown. This is a most pleasing activity. I must add that almost any activity undertaken with Valma Brown is, to me atleast, a pleasurable one - just to put things into perspective. This sharing of editorial duties came about because it seemed to be about time that we shared the glory (if that is the word I'm groping for) since we share the production. Since I am the person who is more used to banging out pages of first draft stuff for fanzines at short notice and filling them with matter of no consequence I'm still the

FLIGHT INTERNATIONAL, 28th March 1974, "Straight & Level"

"What a narrow escape for all of us that Mr Michael Foot wasn't made the Defence Minister, thus sparing me the headline "Foot Heads Arms Body."

body who does the visible production. We call this part "typing the stencils". I also have this job because I'm the only one capable of sorting out the mess that Paul Stevens leaves on pieces of paper when he is supposed to be writing you an article.

Valma will be contributing a couple of comments later on in the issue, leaving me to fill out this beginning by myself. You may look upon me as at the moment performing the function of the "warm up" comic before the show really gets on the road. There is really no way that a person can leap right into a John Alderson article without preparation. Bill Wright read a John Alderson article straight out of the envelope without getting himself mentally prepared for it, and when was the last time you saw a Bill Wright fanzine.

The other thing I intended to do in this introduction was to tell you all about the people who were not able to contribute to this issue. Take Bruce Gillespie for example... Now if I were Paul Stevens or Christopher Priest I might make some joke about taking Bruce somewhere and dumping him there. But I do not need to rely upon such crude humor to get a laugh - I just don't get laughs. Anyhow, taking Bruce for example; here is a fellow who livens up any fanzine with his contributions. Naturally, this fine fanzine can live without that kind of "livening" but Bruce is going to do some of the proof reading for this issue, he is going to read this section before it is printed. Thank you Bruce.

The other person who has done proof reading for this issue is Paul Stokes, a truly fine person. Paul read the original first three pages of this fanzine and not only proofed the spelling but also the grammar. That is the reason why I'm retyping this editorial.

"You can't begin a sentence with the word 'but'," he announced to me. "But 'but' is a perfectly usable word," I retorted. "Besides," I continued, "'but' is such an easy word to spell, and 'and' is such a good word to start sentences with so why not 'but'." But Paul was not to be beaten, as a teacher he had obviously confronted this problem before.

"Yes, but Ghod invented the word 'however' so that we wouldn't have to begin our sentences with 'but'." Well, you can't argue with logic like that. Paul proof read most of the text in this issue and made some interesting comments, most of which I shan't pass on. Bruce will be reading the beginning and the end of the issue and he can keep his comments to himself. I'm glad that two such erudite gentlemen have done the proof reading, it means that I am absolved for all responsibility for typos and spelling mistakes in this fanzine.

However, I was not going to say too much about proofreading, I was going to say a few words about the people who have not contributed to this issue. As anybody can plainly see, there are a lot of them. Unless you are a very uncommon person you are among them. The difference between some people who have not contributed and others who are in the same state is that there are some who were asked to contribute. You can tell the difference between those I asked to contribute and who responded and those who didn't respond fairly easily. I bet that some of the people who didn't contribute are kicking themselves now, seeing the fine fannish company they are in. If I were them I'd be fairly annoyed at me for demanding that they drop everything to write a contribution back in March for a fanzine which is only now appearing. I bet there are also some people in this issue who are annoyed that they dropped everything back last March for me and have waited this long while I've read books, looked at the tv and listened to music and that sort of thing. I shall not present any excuses on the passage of time between my

DESK CALENDAR, Friday, June 17

"I am happiest when I am idle. I could live for months without performing any kind of labour, and at the expiration of that time I should feel fresh and vigorous enough to go right on in the same way for numerous more months."

Ward

proposed deadline and the actual one save to say that such things have been known to happen before.

Regarding the already noted unfortunate passage of time, Lee Harding would like me to mention that his life story is currently enjoying the happy ending he anticipates at the end of his report. See the top lines of page 37 for the clarification of this cryptic statement. I can say no more at this stage, nobody gives away the vital points in the plot on only the fifth page.

Future fannish historians might like to know that the setting for the opening of Paul Stevens story is now dated, Nobody of any fannish worth has lived in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, for many many months. At the time Paul wrote his story the house at 33 Brunswick Street was a hotbed of all sorts of activities, some of them even fannish. There were lots and lots of parties there and we got to go to some of them. One time I remember everybody got taught how to do square dancing - almost everybody - the sane members of the party stepped out onto the balcony and discussed the current state of play in whichever Test Match was going on at the time. It seemed to be the only safe place to be, the lounge room being full of half sober fans careering about the room, crashing into and bouncing off each other. Those inside the room might have felt that they were enjoying themselves, those of us on the outside looking in were glad to be where we were. It looked more like a blood sport than a dance.

Fans, when they become involved in physical activities, generally prove that they should have been born footballers. Which leads us to a potentiallally perfect rover.

PIERCED BY PERIL

John J. Alderson

When Leigh asked me to write a con-report I agreed, little knowing that out of the blue I would be attending a convention in the immediate future the like of which I doubt will be happening again. For my part, I hope that it will not

I refer to B'con 50, or the 50th Science Fiction Convention at Bambill. I shall never forget it for several reasons. Firstly I was Guest-of-Honour, which I cannot ever see happening again; secondly, I was chased by a unicorn and survived only through the efforts of Bruce Gillespie; thirdly, Bambill will never be the same again; and finally, there will be no more B'cons... at least for a long time.

It was out of the blue. I had gone in to collect the mail and amongst the bills, and some bulky fanzines which I rammed into my back pocket, was a letter from the Bambill Science Fiction Club telling me that I was their Guest-of-Honour. To my horror, I discovered that B'con 50 was due to start the following evening. As one in my position is always prepared (always carrying a packed suitcase and a sleeping bag in the car) in a few minutes I was speeding northward, through such famous places as Natte Yallock, Kinnabulla, Watchcupga, Woomelang, Ouyen, Kiamal, Nowingi and Yatpool, then turning westward out to where men are men, Culluleraine and Werrimull. It was as I topped a sandhill near Culluleraine that a rollypolly wobbled across the road, and a shockingly evil thought struck me that it looked like Shayne McCormack, but it didn't really. Shayne has beautiful golden hair. As I turned off the Adelaide road I reflected, more fittingly, I hope, as to whether Paul Anderson would make it this time. So I rolled into Bambill.

There were cars everywhere but I managed to park out near the cemetery and walked to the silo... out there in the wheat country everything of any size is held in the silo except football and horse races. However at Dunolly we have a silo big enough for that, but, no, no, I must not brag about my adopted district. As soon as I walked in Teddy Aitken says;

"Well look what's come! I knew I should've shut the gate meself."

"You leave John alone Ted," says Jenny Douglas, putting her arm around me protectingly. I looked up and smiled and would have kissed her if I could have reached. The Millewa grows fine big women and hulking tall brutes of men. Then they all flocked around me, slapping me on the back and shaking my hand.

"Why," I asked, "did you want me as Guest-of-Honour?"... I had forgotten that I had only received the information at a very late date.

"Because of your autobiography," said Val Hards. "It was super."

"Oh she just thinks that because you were born in Werrimull," said Gwen Scherger, "not of course that it wasn't very good," she added hastily, and just as hastily asked, "What are you speaking on? Roy Fletcher of the "Millewa News" is putting out a special B'con edition."

"Oh," I said, "am I expected to make a speech... never occurred to me."

"Of course John," said Gwen, "haven't you come prepared... oh this is terrible."

"He's only having you on Gwen," said Jenny Douglas.

"Actually I thought to speak on the "Importance of Sheep in Science Fiction, particularly as regarding the Crodwainer Smith 'Norstrillon' series".

That seemed to please them.

"Next year," said Teddy Aitken, "we're hoping to get Frank Herbert as guest of honour. He knows absolutely nothing about sand. We'll teach him and he can go home and rewrite DUNE."

"And after that," added Greg Hart, "we'll get Clarke; he knows nothing about dust and he ought to rewrite A FALL OF MOONDUST."

"And I would like Robert Heinlien," said Gwen...

"...That's because he knows nothing about women," said Jenny Douglas, "and she wants to teach him."

Gwen blushed furiously beneath her freckles. "I don't want to do anything of

the kind. Come and look at our library John and leave these evil-minded beasts."

She lead the way and we all followed. The Bambill library was quite large. "It's bigger than Melbourne, " I said looking at the walls of books.

"Oh, they've got their club going at last have they," said Gwen.

"Gee," I said, "don't you read RATAPLAN?"

"Of course I do, it's my favourite fanzine after CHAO."

"What about the BAMBILL BUNYIP?" demanded Teddy Aitken, "look at it there, fifty years labour, six hundred issues." There was a great line of volumes bound in kangaroo leather, numbered 1 to 59.

"They look pretty good," I said.

"And here's CHAO, bound in sheepskin," said JENNY proudly, "I bound it myself, would you like to autograph it."

I did, even though personally I thought it may detract from its value.

"This is our volume of RATAPLAN," said Teddy, handing me a volume bound in an old bag.

"That's a bit rough on poor old Leigh?" I said indignantly.

"We thought," said Gwen, "that to bind in a piece of wheat bag was a great compliment to someone born in Dimboola... wheat country, you know."

"What about Eric Lindsay's GEGENSCHEN?"

They looked at one another rather embarrassed I think. Gwen said, "I'm afraid I've never heard of it, he's certainly never sent any copies to Bambill whilst I've been secretary of the Club."

"Oh that reminds me," I said, suddenly remembering, "the Bangsund's don't think that they'll get here but John would like you to leave an hour or so free just in case they do."

"Good old John" said Teddy, "stout fellow."

* * *

Naturally I can't repeat all the things that happened that night. After the silo was shut the boys lit a fire outside and we stood talking and drinking until the sky began to pale and Jenny left us because she had promised her mother "to be home early". I went for a short nap in my room at the pub, and after breakfast I went for a stroll through the streets of Bambill to meditate on my coming speech. As I had a fair idea it would be the only guest of honour speech I'd ever make I wanted it to be memorable. I knew my subject was right.

It was about this moment when I heard a sort of heigh which rose to a thrill scream like that of a battle-frenzied stallion, and looking behind me I saw a white unicorn charging towards me, the wicked looking horn in the centre of his forehead directed at my midriff. The reason for this unexpected and unprovoked attack was something to ponder. As an avid reader of Burns and a lover of good Scotch and an enthusiastic eater of haggis I could not understand why this worthy symbol of Scotland should wish to poke a hole in me, an operation in my humble opinion not only needless but not conducive to my health and good looks. I certainly have never pretended to being brave, and accordingly when I could see the whites of his eyes, (quite bloodshot as a matter of fact, which did not improve my state of mind), I stepped aside and the unicorn thundered past, his hooves churning up the sand as he applied the brakes. I noticed in passing that his horn was nearly four feet long, well say a metre anyrate, unicorns may have gone metric, and had a long tapering three-start thread to it.

Actually it was a mistake for the unicorn to break so suddenly, he found himself too close for charging, nor did it occur to me at the time that a unicorn may rear and use pawing forehooves. But he didn't, and backed slowly away, neighing shrilly and eyeing me with surprising malice. I swiftly reviewed my family history but it seems that if any one of us have been previously attacked by a unicorn, the matter has gone unrecorded. Accordingly I had to ponder what other knowledge I possessed of unicorns, and then I had it, I began to look around.

"Can you help me?" I asked two young women passing by.

"I don't think that I could," said one, "I'm married with three kids."

"And I had better not try," added the other, "especially after Thursday night." She didn't elaborate on this and I didn't have time to ask. I had to suddenly step aside again.

But I knew this couldn't continue. Anyone who has stood around a fire during the small hours of the morning with Millewa people is apt to be unsteady on his feet next morning. Must be the smoke or something. As the beast thundered past, I slipped over the fence of the High School, under the tankstand that blocked off two classrooms, and into the next street.

"Help," I yelled to four young teenagers, "there's a unicorn after me."

"We can't," they said in a chorus, "we go to a co-ed school."

Then I saw a little girl coming along the street licking a lollypop.

"Help me please," I said, "there's a unicorn after me."

"Hoh!" she said scornfully, "I am eight you know."

Well, I don't know how I was supposed to know she was eight, and worse still, I couldn't see what that had to do with it. But I was obviously on my own. I felt around in my pockets and felt a thick wad of paper, and pulling it out I discovered that this was the mail I had got out of the box the day before and had not opened. Just at that moment the unicorn came around the corner and seeing what I had in my hand neighed more thrilly and angrily than ever and charged again. I just had a moment to see that I was holding a copy of SF COMMENTARY. How does one explain to a unicorn charging at fifty miles an hour that one cannot be held responsible for the things that get put in his post office box? And that just because one has a copy of SF COMMENTARY does not mean that he has read it. I stepped aside and ran like hell for the main street. I made it, and panting like fury, stood before a massive black belah that grew there, holding the offending article in front of me, and waved it enticingly as the unicorn galloped around the corner. With a scream of fury he charged. At the vital moment (obviously, or somebody would be writing my obituary instead of me writing this), I stepped aside. His horn tore straight through the fanzine, despite the impenetrable nature of its contents, and then on through the trunk of the belah. More swiftly than through I whipped off my laughing side and with the heel tapped the 'zine tight against the trunk as a lock nut.

The impact dazed the unicorn a little, but when he came too, there he was stuck fast, and right before his eyes was the hateful fanzine. His neigh became a roar and he heaved and tugged, and needles and seedpods fell to the ground. Then he began to take a deep breath and he swelled and swelled. Roused by the noise the folk of Bambill took in what had happened and in cars, on horseback, on foot, they lit out for the hills. I jumped in my car and sped away, passing a dozen or so grey kangaroos, and being passed myself by a huge old man red who must have been breaking the state's speed limit. After the explosion there was a shocked silence until finally a magpie defiantly warbled and a peewee called, and some of us trudged back to the top of the hill. In the words of Shelley....

"Nothing....remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Shocked and bewildered the survivors crept into the Werrimull pub except for those who went west, who revived in the Meringur Pub.

That was the end of the con of course. The Bambill Science Fiction Club has been broken, their magnificent library scattered to the winds, and B'con 50 ended as so few cons end, with a bang.

Frank Herbert can rest in peace knowing he will not have to rewrite DUNE, and Arthur Clarke will not have to rewrite A FALL OF MOONDUST, and Robert Heinlein can heave a sigh of relief.

However if anyone is interested in an excellent but undelivered Guest of Honour Speech, "The Importance of Sheep in Science Fiction" they should yell out.

Thank you John for that excellent tale.

Perhaps I should point out, in passing, that John's piece is getting on for a couple of years old, which about the length of time that it took to get from the previous issue of RATAPLAN to this one. At Degra's one evening I asked John what he would have in the next issue of RATAPLAN and so he asked me what I wanted. With AUSSIECON being less than six months off I suggested that a convention report would be a good thing, anticipating that I had scooped the world and would get the original and one user only John Alderson AUSSIECON Report.

Ah, but John is a devious fellow and got invited to a convention which I had forgotten about (how dare I) and consequently was diddled out of John's AUSSIECON one. I guess that if you were at AUSSIECON the punch line sort of explains itself.

Just so that you know, this issue is not a collection of old stuff held over from the issue which should have appeared a good couple of years back. Apart from the contribution from John everything is up to date and brand spanking new. The material which was supposed to be in the original version of RATAPLAN 19 is being held over until the next issue. The reason that there are no letters of comment in this issue is not that we didn't get any but rather they are a little out of date by now. There are some comments on music which would have been highly interesting but I guess that my thinking on that subject has moved on substantially since those days and at the moment. I would find it difficult to see eye-to-eye with anybody on that subject. Which is not to say that I cannot be dragged into a discussion on the matter later; but right now I'm a tiny bit tired from working in the garden this afternoon so we shall move right along to our second contribution.

THE CLOVEN WORM And Other Curiosities of Nature

John Bangsund

I heard the youngest of the Miss Oppatts from next door, the one in her mid-seventies, talking to Sally tonight, and I heard Sal say 'Oh, my husband will have a fit!' and I thought to myself, yes, whatever is it, if she says that, I will. So I went out the back and found my wife with an armful of kittens. I'm going to have a fit, I thought: I can feel it coming on right now. 'No,' I said, without being asked, 'we can't keep them. Aren't they lovely!' The youngest Miss Oppatt had found them in her wood-pile and thought Sally would know what to do with them. Miss Oppatt loves cats, especially our Dylan and Donovan (her little boys, she calls them), but the older Miss Oppatts (one is deaf and one is almost blind, and no, I don't know how they manage, by themselves in that old and comfortless house), while putting up with our cats, are not prepared to start looking after pocket-size kittens. Neither am I,

not for longer than a weekend anyway. Off to the Animal Welfare League with them first thing Monday. One of them thinks I'm its mother. Cute little things, really. No! - two's enough!

We decided to put them in the laundry. Unfortunately the laundry has a broken window-slat, and although we had no fears about the kittens getting out, we were rather apprehensive about other cats getting in (not ours: Donovan was quite polite to the youngsters, while Dylan sulked in a corner and pretended they weren't there), so we looked about for something we could use to plug the gap in the window. Sal picked up a likely-looking piece of board from the laundry floor, and there was a spider on it and I said *Drop it!* and she did, and I killed it, quickly, with a broom handle. After all I have told her about the things, this was the first red-back she has ever seen. 'It's pretty!' she said, and 'I didn't think red-backs were as big as that.' I assured her that it was of quite the normal size for a female red-back, and agreed that it was pretty - a beautiful specimen, the band along its abdomen a brilliant scarlet. Before I was sure it was dead, Donovan came nosing around, and he was quite shocked when I flung him a few yards away from it.

Many people are irrationally afraid of spiders. I am rationally afraid of them. If they look nasty, and I don't know what they are, I kill them. The red-back, *Latrodectus hasseltii*, does not look nasty and is not the least bit aggressive. When you act aggressively towards it, it curls up and plays dead, poor little thing. Then you hit it or stomp on it and make sure it is dead, because the red-back is one of Australia's two definitely lethal spiders. In America it is called the black widow spider, in New Zealand the Katipo. If you happen to be bitten by one, and you are in perfect physical condition, you may survive; if you are anything like me, you'll die. So I stomp first and apologise later. It's a shame that such a beautiful little animal should be so deadly, but that's how it is.

Our other deadly spider is the funnel-web, *Atrax robustus*, and it really is a nasty piece of work. Unlike the pretty little red-back, it is large and hairy and aggressive. I am told (and I have no knowledge to dispute it) that the funnel-web will attack you if you go near it. I am told that the last thing you should attempt to do if a funnel-web jumps on you is brush it off: it must rear before it can strike, and if you try to brush it off you are helping it into that rearing position. Instead, you try to shake it off, or knock it sideways. If it ever happens to me I'll let you know how I make out. I have never seen a funnel-web spider, and I'm not exactly in a tearing hurry to see one. They are found mostly in Sydney's sandstone country, particularly on the harbour's north shore, but they have close relatives in other parts of Australia.

There are about a dozen other spiders here that are thought to be possibly lethal; certainly they are dangerous. They include a recent discovery, a spider that may or may not be the American fiddle-back. If it is, no-one can say how this most undesirable alien got here. We thought we killed one in the house at Bridgewater, but it could have been anything. Whatever it was, it is now lost to Science; and if we ever find another one, it will be, too.

One of the more frightening-looking spiders in Australia is the one we used to call tarantula when I was young (some people still do). This is the huntsman spider, genus *Olios*. It is found everywhere in Australia. The huntsman (or Huntsperson, if you want to be funny about it: it's usually a female you see) can be a pinkish-coloured little thing with a leg-span of an inch or so, an enormous black hairy thing eight inches across, or anything between. Some members of the family are among those dozen or so spiders considered possibly lethal, but the vast majority of the family are quite harmless, except to insects. They love flies. Huntsmen can bite, obviously, and they have been known to bite humans, but they prefer not to. If you have the bad luck to be bitten by one it'll hurt, but you would have to have to do something awfully silly to be bitten. If you go poking at one or (much worse)

spraying stuff at it, it might jump at you, but more likely it will tear off in panic. It is even less aggressive than the red-back. If you spray enough insect-killer at it, it will go berserk. You won't kill it, unless it is a very small one: you'll just drive it mad. Please don't do that, no matter how scary it looks. The huntsman is a pacifist, and a friend. If you can't stand it, kill it; don't torment it. A few weeks ago Gary Mason and I were talking about them, and I said I would much rather have a huntsman in the bedroom than a mosquito. A few moments later we went outside and there was a medium-size huntsman on the wall inside the porch. Gary said something like 'I believe you, John, I really do!' and tore off into the night. I don't really blame him. Gary was born and bred on Sydney's North Shore, and he just doesn't trust spiders.

But about this eagle...

Cathy and Robert, our friends from Canberra, stayed here for a while during January. When they arrived, Cathy said 'Um, Robert has this eagle we picked up off the road. Where should we put it?' In the laundry - where else? So that's how we came to have an eagle in the laundry, and I hope that satisfies those people who dropped in at the time and thought we were acting a little strangely.

Present company excluded, is there a nobler creature on this earth than the eagle? I tend to think not. American readers dare not. But this was not an *e pluribus unum* kind of eagle. In fact, Robert and Cathy weren't quite sure what kind of eagle it was at all, and they're the kind of people I normally rely on to tell me that kind of eagle it is that we have in the laundry. We had a locust plague in these parts during summer, and all kinds of birds were feasting on them, wherever they happened to be, even in the middle of the highway, and that's what this particular bird had been doing when a car ran into it, crippling it somewhat and gouging out one of its eyes. That's how Rob and Cathy found it, and they picked it up, and that's how it finished up in our laundry. As soon as they got the chance they took the eagle off to a vet, and the vet said he didn't go in for that sort of thing. So they took it to another vet, and he said he would do what he could. We're pretty lucky in Adelaide, really, having even one vet who is interested in crippled, one-eyed eagles. The last we heard, he had mended it as best he could and put it in an enormous aviary, where it would not feel completely homeless and where it would not starve (as it certainly would in the wild).

Nature, red in tooth and things. It certainly is a fascinating study, if you have the stomach for it.

Sometimes - not very often, I admit, but sometimes - I wonder why it is that you and I have such strong feelings about the nastiness of spiders, the sad plight of a mangled eagle or a couple of homeless kittens, or the health of three elderly spinsters next door, and at the same time have no feeling whatever for the sixty thousand people who starve to death, one by one, every day on this planet of ours. Forty individual human beings, people with much the same feelings and faculties as you and I have, die of starvation every minute. Every minute of every day. Just think about that for a minute. Forty people died while you were thinking. Do you feel anything?

The human mind seems capable of comprehending, at best, only one death at a time (and the certainty of its own eventual death, not at all). When you read about two or three people being killed in a car accident, if you think about it at all, your attention tends to wander from one to another. If the people killed were your relatives or friends, the same thing happens, except that for a while you can think of little else. When eighty-odd people are killed in a railway accident, as happened a few weeks ago in Sydney, you just can't grapple with this vast, appalling number of individual deaths. You probably don't know eighty living people well enough to comprehend them, to know and appreciate and understand their characters, their ambitions and failings, their talents and potentialities. When it's sixty thousand people

dying, every day, and you've never even seen one of them, don't know any of their names, know nothing about them whatsoever (except, in principle, that they are your fellow men), the mind goes numb. To cope, you turn them into statistics.

Statistics is one way of shielding ourselves from unimaginable reality. Religion is another way, and so is poetry, and science fiction, and fandom, and opening another bottle. Perhaps the cleverest shield of all is 'keeping up with the news' - knowing the statistics, reading the papers, watching the telly, being aware. Aware of what? Aware of feeling aware, perhaps.

I mentioned poetry. Alfred Tennyson wrote a very long poem about one individual death that he could not comprehend, that of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam. Hallam was only 22 when he died, a man of promise and potential, a tragic loss. We know that because Tennyson has told us so. (We know nothing about the twenty-odd million people who starved to death last year. They had no Tennyson to write about them. Or perhaps their poets died with them.)

And I mentioned religion. *In Memoriam* begins and ends in religion, in faith:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen they face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;
Thine are these orbs of light and shade...

... the man, that with me trod
This planet, was a noble type
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of mine who lives in God.

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

In the three thousand or so lines that lie between the ones I have quoted, and in the seventeen years it took Tennyson to write them, he found room for doubt, and such doubt has rarely been so well expressed. He sees the obvious conflict between what we are pleased to call Nature's law and God's, and despairs of understanding. Shall Man (he asks), Nature's

...last work, who seem'd so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built his fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law -
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed -

Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. ...

No, he can't believe that dream, that monstrous nightmare (even though he has just put a pretty good case for it). So where do we look for an answer to this impossible problem? 'Behind the veil,' he says, 'behind the veil.' So that's it, the secret of the universe, the answer to man's anxious little doubts and fears: a pie in the sky, by and by, when you die.

As you probably know, I was a preacher once, when I was young and grave, but

I never really believed that that was the answer. My friend the charismatic priest has told me where I went wrong. Father Peter is one of my favourite people, even though we disagree about practically everything. He votes Reactionary (Liberal, sorry), drives an air-conditioned Japanese limousine, collects antiques, keeps an excellent cellar (for visitors: he doesn't drink), and on the whole seems to be having his pie now - but maybe that's a staff bonus. He has me tabbed: I am a puritan, an atheist and a socialist (and when he says socialist he means communist). 'The trouble with you Church of Christ blokes' he says, 'Is that you gave up the Sacraments...' 'Only five of them,' I remind him, 'We kept two.' 'Okay, so you had to put something in their place, and what you put in their place was *good works*. That's why all you nonconformist fellers finish up as socialists.' 'Oh, poppycock!' I say, lost for words, and Father Peter leans back and laughs. He has a fabulous laugh, a jovial, a rubicund, a High-Anglican super-chortle, and I can't help laughing with him. 'Let me fill your glass,' he says, when we've finished laughing at each other's absolute lack of logic. Peter is one of those wonderful people who seem to live life fully, every moment of it. He doesn't seem to understand why I believe that everyone should have the opportunity to live just as he does - not to live in detail as he does (how boring that would be), but broadly as he does. At the very least, no man should live under circumstances that pose a continual threat to his mere existence - and I believe that, not because any man is entitled to any such thing, but because we have the means to organise things to this end, and we've never really tried to, and we should.

If I am a socialist, I am probably one of those woolly-minded 'utopians' that Marx detested; furthermore, like Orwell, I am unworldly enough to think of socialism as 'love in action'. If I am a puritan, I'm a rather unconventional one, but I won't deny the tendency. But an atheist? No. I haven't enough faith to be an atheist.

Here is another of Tennyson's "dreams". It comes a page or so before the last one I quoted. With a few exceptions (such as the ultimate destiny of moths), these are pretty much my sentiments.

Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made his pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last - far off - at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

My feeling is, after having copied John's article out, that if one can't get nominated for a fanzine Hugo for printing stuff like it, then one may as well give it up. True, this may be sci-fi fandom we're in, but even Robert

Heinlein shows a stunning lack of originality alongside some of the stuff you will find in high class fanzines.

Although some of you may have not noticed it yet, the arrangement of contributions in this issue is strictly in alphabetic order. It seems the only decent way of placing people so that everybody had equal billing and its probably the reason that a lot of plays and films have casts listed "in order of appearance". The arrangement has also given (I hope) a nice balance to the material, which just goes some way towards vindicating the "aleatoric" system of organising things to be as good as any other. To prove this point I am, at the moment, attempting to write a string quartet using a pack of playing cards (let you know how it turns out). Also by chance the next contribution arrived only very recently quite unsolicited. The lucky thing about it is that I had reached the stage of preparation of this issue where it just slipped in neatly, another day or too and we would have been onto the Mike Glicksohn contribution and then it would have been too late. Of course it is also very handy that R as in Barbour comes a couple of letters after N as in Bangsund. Chance really is an interesting thing.

LIVE ! PERFORMANCE !

Douglas Barbour

Leigh Edmonds says that he liked my piece on The Rolling Stones' concert and thus lowers his guard sufficiently that i can sneak a punch through, and youre reading it now. I mean, wouldnt you take such praise as an invitation to muss up some pages of his zine? Sure you would.

I am listening to the only record extant by the Good Brothers as i type. I hope there will be more, and i fervently hope theyll someday make a live recording because this record, though good, just doesnt do them justice. Theyre a true live band, and theyre great! The Good Brothers are Larry, on banjo, Brian, on guitar, and Bruce, on autoharp and dobro, with John Allen on fiddle, and a drummer and bassist whose name I missed at the concert. Theyre a bluegrass group of sorts, as you can see from their instrumental lineup. Theyre also electric, and I do mean electric! when they play (but i also mean electrified), and they call their music "Goodgrass", a marvelous Canadian blend of many traditions and full of rock, as well as bluegrass, intensity and joy.

Well, what happened was, we were at the Jesse Winchester concert in Edmonton, and thoroughly enjoying it. He had a fine band, and they were just so obviously ready to hit the states, now that Jesse could go back, and they gave us a great show. So we were feeling very mellow and up when the promoter told the audience that The Good Brothers would be here soon and he would give us tickets two dollars off since we were there for Jesse Winchester. Now we didnt know The Good Brothers, but we thought, yeah, it should be fun and we like bluegrass, so why not? So we were there for the concert, and after a nice little duo opened, on came the Brothers' band, and proceeded to tear the place apart, raising the roof a few permanent inches at least.

I cant remember all they played now, but they have so much fun up there you cant help but have a good time too. Bluegrass, and Goodgrass, too, is an incredibly happy music. No matter how sad the lyrics, the instruments and that extraordinarily complex contrapuntal thing that they do, and the energy that the music promotes, well it all just makes a person smile, grin and kick up your heels. They played a few breakdowns and had the place in an uproar. The audiences for this music are different from the audience from say, Murray McLaughlin (another Canadian, a street-wise folk-rocker, moving more into rock, and good), or Jesse Winchester, or the McGarrigles (i had to mention them, cos, they're another example of Canadians who are able to use their folk roots and tie that traditional sense of people music into a sure knowledge of rock sensibility, and produce great music with lyrics of perhaps the highest wit in pop music today). But, as i was saying, the audiences for such people enjoy themselves, yeah, but theyre essentially polite and quiet, listening. The audience for The Good Brothers listened, too, but it wasnt as distant. These people felt the band was their friends and they talked to the Brothers as friends, asking

for their favourites, often interrupting the patter with their own. The other side of that relaxed lack of distance was a fierce loyalty and devotion and a sense that this band was theirs. The Good Brothers have just won a Canadian music award and on the basis of this may be able to crack the US market, but for years now they have annually, or even more often, trekked across Canada, playing small halls to this loyal audience, and putting out superb music without making a big splash. I think it's obvious they want to become a bigger attraction, but it's also obvious they'd keep playing anyway, because they love the music they play and the loyal if small audiences they know so well. A lovely song they did that night, the one i'm listening to as i type right now, is called "Missing You". It's a road song, but a nice reversal of the usual get out of my bed in the morning little girl song for it's a phone call to a loved one from the road from a loyal lover. It's by Brian Good and i really like it. Lot's of local Canadian references.

Anyway, the band played. And played. And played. And played. And we were tapping our feet, grinning from ear to ear, clapping as loud as we could, and generally getting as high as good music can take you in concert. And that's very high, for me. They do a lot of Bluegrass classics - a ten minute, at least, version of 'Orange Blossom Special' towards the end, with John Allen literally creating a whole train before our wondering ears - but they also do a lot of originals, their own or other Canadian writers. These are good songs, some rock, some pop, some indefinable but with a Bluegrass feeling, so i guess they're true Goodgrass songs. They have a great sense of humor, which usually comes through in the songs in a wonderfully ironic manner. One great little song, not on the album, is a nine year-old boy's lovesong to Kitty Starr. Bruce Good sings it with absolute sincerity; it is funny, but it's also real, and it's therefore delightful as he tells us he'd even given up baseball for you Kitty Starr. So they can move from outright comedy through light humor, to social commentary, to lovesongs, laments and other such stuff. And whatever they do they do well. I was so thoroughly entertained on this my first encounter with them that i vowed if they ever got to play within striking distance of me, i'd be there, and ready to enjoy, enjoy and applaud as loud as i could. And they give. I guess it has something to do with that audience (of which we felt we were an utterly organic part after the second number). After a great hour or so, going through the numbers they'd planned and listed, including numbers from the album ('album, album, what album?' i asked myself, and made a note to check the next day; i wanted it (though, alas, it took time; The Good Brothers is RCA Stereo record XPL1 - 0168, but i suspect it's a Canada only record, and even then, not too well distributed - none of the stores in town had any in stock and i had to wait a month or more before i snagged one)), Brian Good tore up the songlist and they proceeded to start playing requests, of which there were many, for another hour or so, including encores, and thus left a happy and exhausted crowd when they finally deserted the stage.

Well, of course they're not The Rolling Stones. Not many are (five at last count, and there just aint another band like them, but that's another story and i've already told my version of it, although i do wish i'd been in Toronto recently when they played their first bardate in over ten years. yeah!) No, The Good Brothers are simply a very fine family-centered group of music-makers who know how to really entertain by playing the music they love, pure and simple. When i say family-centered, i refer to the fact that the three brothers learned to play at home, from their mother mostly, and so have been playing together for a long time. Their playing has that solidarity to it. They're together, man! Like the McGarrigle sisters in Montreal, the Good boys in Toronto, or nearby, got traditional music at the family hearth and heard what was also happening on a transistor radio, more than likely. Both family groups have created their own synthesis, each unique, of the various sounds they have heard on the airwaves and in the air, and the results are highly individualistic songs you must go to the originators to hear. That both the McGarrigles and The Good Brothers are Canadian is something i appreciate, and

i believe their sound is Canadian, even if it also universal. Far North music perhaps? Sure, why not. And believe me, it's great to hear it in concert. You know, it's been a couple of months since i saw The Good Brothers, and so some of the immediacy of the experience is gone. But though i can't recall all the songs, nor the order in which they played them, i do remember clearly how much joy they gave us all that evening, and they did so mostly because they played so joyfully. I guess i love the music more than the presentation. It may not be as exciting a 'show', when a band just stands there and plays, and in fact the Brothers had some fine patter and made a cheerful mess out of parodying 'Duelling Banjos', but mainly they just get into their music as far as they can and go. Their obvious love of what they're doing is infectious. It's not just a job, it's their life and they love it. And we love it too, because they not only do it with love and joy, they do it well. I mean, it was a concert to remember, and I do, with pleasure.

About one of the most delightful things which has happened to me in the past few weeks is opening up the issue of LOCUS, glancing at the names of the Nebula winners and then coming, after wading through all the usual dull fiction Hugo nominations and then coming upon the name of Mike Glicksohn in the Best Fanwriter category. At last I get the feeling that fans are beginning to take some note of the good writers we have in fandom. There are few other names I could think of that belong in that category (of course Susan Wood is such a fine fan writer that she has virtually put down roots in the nominations, and a good thing too) and seeing that Mike had finally made it there made me happy that I had managed to coax a contribution of some short length out of him for this issue.

And I guess that the above paragraph could be counted as some sort of introduction to the following article, however I think that I might have a little bit more yet to say before we get on with it. I have, you see, this theory of fanzine production which I stole from David Grigg some years back. It's been so long since the previous issue of RATAPLAN that I've more or less forgotten what it was but I do recall that the basic idea was to save the hassels of trying to get articles to end on the last lines of pages and that sort of thing. I know that a lot of faneds like to think that they can imitate the styles of production that they see in slick magazines (or even ALGOL) but unless you've got type setting machines and all the other magical magazine production machinery which makes PLAYBOY possible it is nothing but a lot of hard, and to my mind anyhow, pointless effort to set out articles on their own pages with headings and little fillos to make everything neat. It is maybe even pretentious, but then I have for some years now had the vague feeling that a reasonable number of fanzines have more pretensions than they have actual quality. Bowers and Glicksohn may think bad thoughts about me but I, like Bruce Gillespie, have the feeling that fanzines are made to be read.

When you have completed reading this little triad you will find that there is an article of slightly over one thousand words from Mike Glicksohn. If things continue as they have been for the past dozen or so pages this article will begin in the middle of a page with no fanfare of trumpets and it will also, more likely than not, end in the middle of a page to be followed almost instantly by more writing. In most fanzines the only real difference would be that the articles would be seperated by either blank space or fairly pretty pictures. I prefer not to waste the space or my time thinking about how to arrange it all.

Once I might have claimed that I did things like print pages and pages of nothing but solid type because I had not the artistic sensibilities to percive a decent picture when I saw one. Unfortunately, as I pass into that period of life which follows after youthful folly I have to admit that I have a very slightly developed artistic sensibility and can, two or three times out of ten, percive a picture when I see one.. What this means, I now realise,

is that my main reason for printing page after page of solid type is because I am perverse enough to find such an arrangement attractive. And, of course, there is the visual health side of the matter too, the bracing effect of pages and pages of reading is nothing to be sneered at. People do not climb tall mountains only for the view. And so I hope that you have not flicked through this fanzine merely to see what pictures I have published.

Instead, read this issue from one end to the other in a single sitting, it will make good exercise for the eyes. Why, I expect that if you were to read this fanzine daily for a month your eyes would be strong enough for an attempt on such a work as WAR & PEACE (unless you've got the kiddie version you won't find any pretty little pictures to help you along there, will you?).

ABOUT A THOUSAND FANNISH WORDS *Mike Glicksohn*

If you have the stamina and the liver to last through five or more years of active participation in fandom it is easy to establish a reputation as a Fan with a capital F. Which means that sooner or later eager young neofans desperate to become "names" within the fannish microcosm will inundate you with requests for articles for their soon-to-be-published incredible fanzines. (longevity has typically been the premier route to fannish notoriety, easily shunting talent, ability and desire into the back seat.) Thus it was that I recently received a saline-drenched airletter from Leigh Edmonds asking "How would 1000 words by the end of the month sound?"

In a word: "impossible"! I do not write a thousand words of fannish material in a month. (Discounting letters, which go for 95¢ a dozen, but for you, ninety cents.) In fact, I seriously doubt that I know a thousand fannish words, regardless of what month it might be! Once I get past "blog", "Chivas" and "freedoublesforFanGuests" I still have a rather barren nine hundred and ninety-seven words to go.

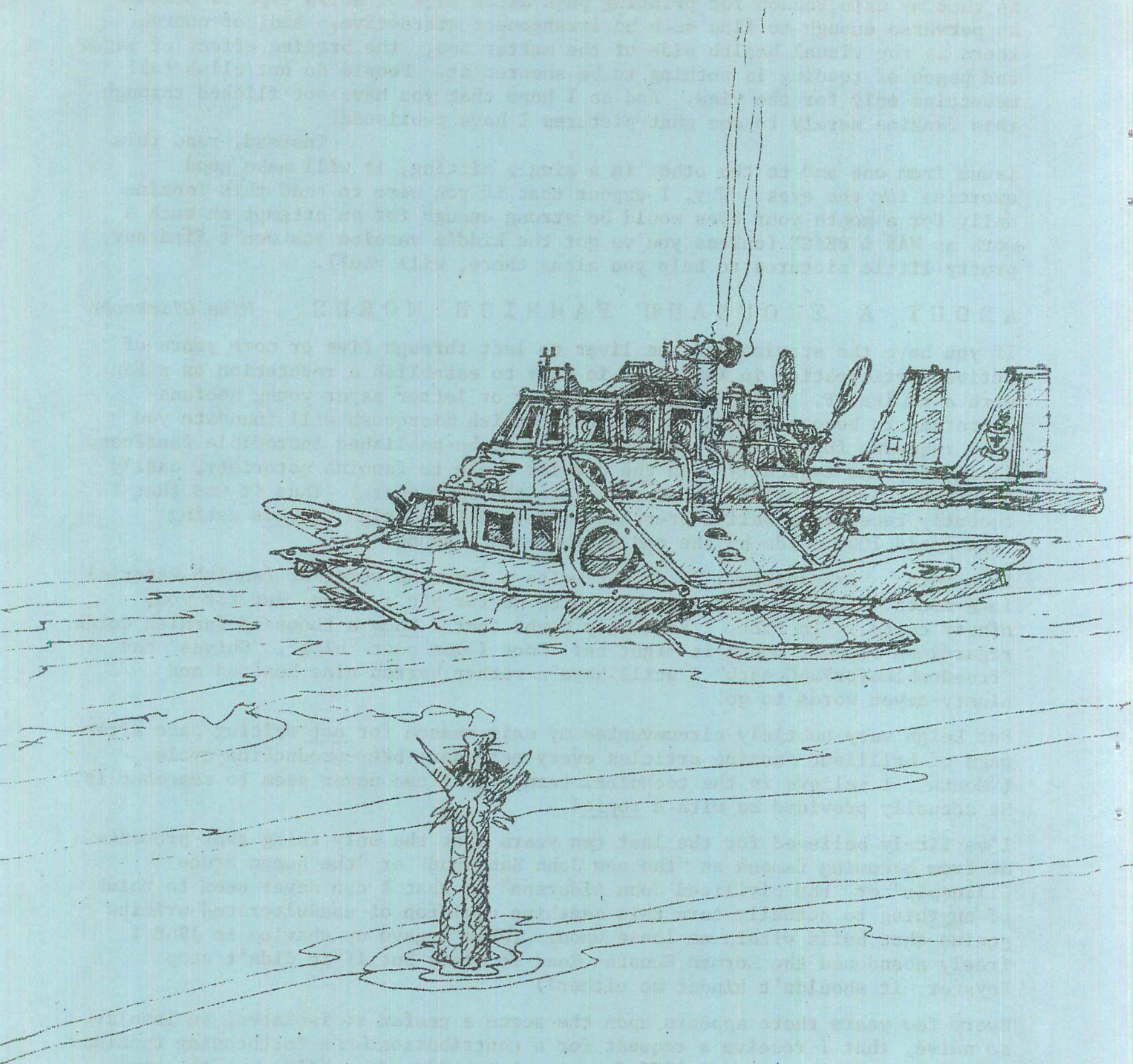
But Leigh very subtly circumvented my main reason for not writing page after page of brilliant fanzine articles every mercenary-beer-production-cycle. ("Month", I believe is the technical term, but I can never seem to remember it.) He actually provided me with a topic!

I've firmly believed for the last ten years that the only thing that prevents me from becoming famous as "the new John Bangsund" or "the human Bruce Gillespie" or "the civilized John Alderson" is that I can never seem to think of anything to actually turn this seething cauldron of unadulterated writing genius that boils within me loose upon. (When I gave up shaving in 1968 I freely abandoned the Norman Gunston Road To Glory but if it didn't stop Foyster, it shouldn't hinder me either!)

Every few years there appears upon the scene a neofan so isolated, so insular, so naive, that I receive a request for a contribution for a forthcoming fanzine. So it was in the spring of 1977 from one Leigh Edmonds. "I've got the urge to produce an issue of a fine fannish fanzine..." he wrote to me. (Take up drinking instead, I should have told him! Give up those pie-and-sauce and pineapple milkshake lunches: that way lies serconism, obesity, and a knitted cap permanently grafted onto your skull! Better to molest wombats the way Shayne does...) "So how about an article about how the skills of being a school teacher are carried over into fandom..." this walking advertisement for the desirability of retroactive birth-control went on to say. And thereby provided me with a topic the mere introduction of which has been good for four hundred and sixty-six words already! (Feel free to count them: there will be a quiz at the end of the decade.)

My topic, of course, is that no-one remembers what we do for fanzines as well as we do ourselves or as well as we think they ought to! And that includes me, of course.

I'm sure every faned has at least once been fighting his or her way towards



the free drinks, casually and callously over-running less-experienced conventioners, only to encounter some monolithic throwback to the Neanderthal era who interrupts life's important flow to say something like, "Er...Hi!... I'm Abner Neverheardofme..." as he picks you tenderly up by the scruff of the neck and dangles you a foot off the ground and a yard away from the Glenlivet.

When you respond with a falsely fannish greeting of enthusiasm that obviously carries with it not one whit of recognition (expediency being the guiding rule for most fen at most conventions, of course) he'll add, in an injured tone, "Don't you remember? I locced issue three of HAVEN'T PUBBED IN FOUR YEARS. I told you all about how my asparagus was going and you mentioned me in the

WAHFs..." which allows you to extricate yourself by saying, "Oh... that Abner Whatsyourname..." and a mere ten minutes of fancy verbal footwork might allow you to escape with an esophagus still capable of transmitting ethanol, at which point you'll most definitely need some!

It works the other way too, of course. You sweat for four months, hundreds of hours, and several hundred dollars to publish the definitive report on the fannish group flight to Australia and Aussiecon only to later encounter someone like Eric Lindsay or John Foyster who'll stare at you in dim-witted confusion and say, "Oh, were you at Aussiecon then?" When it comes to fanac, the good and the bad men do is oft interred with the stencils they throw away once the fanzine is completed!

It therefore doesn't really surprise me that Leigh Edmonds, his brain turned to mush by worrying overly much about how many millions of people in the world will never know the delights of a Chikko Roll, should be unfamiliar with my fanzine contributions. Just because every well-turned phrase, every clever piece of wordplay (both of them), each carefully wrought and ironed out sentence is engraved indelibly on my memory, that's no reason for Leigh Edmonds - whose sole raison d'etre seems to be to provide people with a reason for feeling sorry for Valma Brown - to be in any way familiar with my limited output, is it? I mean, just because I remember all that stuff he wrote about synthesizers and emus in America and moving because of noisy children and getting his creations performed in public and painting his flat etc, etc, etc, that he doesn't mean he should remember anything I've written, does it? What the hell, I often write as many as three articles a year, you know! What ordinary fan could remember an output like that?

I mean... after all... when all is said and done... just because it appeared in MAYA... a fanzine that provokes instant nods of recognition in backwaters and cul-de-sacs of fandom all the way from the Amazon Basin to Zanzibar by way of Havelock... just because it was one of the few ideas I've ever conceived, executed and had published without any suggestions from helpful faneds... those aren't reasons for Leigh to recall that I did a brilliant column for Rob Jackson on precisely the theme of how teaching has never offered me a single idea for a fanzine article of any consequence whatsoever!

You want an article on how the skills of being a school teacher are carried over into fandom, Leigh? I'll give you the only appropriate article!

"an"

You'll notice it's indefinite. Which is precisely what the connection is!

Nobody remembers what you do for fanzines. Not the way you do, that is. But I'll make it easy for all of you, because someone has to. I'll tell you what I did for this fanzine! I did one thousand one hundred and sixty-nine words.

The only thing is, I can't remember who I did them for...

Blush!

TO Q-CON 3 AND BACK AGAIN
... AND WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS
(The First NAFF* Report)

Lee Harding

Before we begin: trip reports are usually written immediately after the experience, filled with the white-hot fervor of the occasion, or a great deal of time afterwards, when distance and hindsight helps to produce a work that makes up for in depth what it lacks in spontaniety. I hope this report will prove rewarding to the reader because it falls into the latter category. Also

(* The National Australian Fan Fund. Just a suggestion. A precedent has been set. One day there will be conventions in New Zealand and elsewhere. So...why not?)

there is the added benefit of being able to include some extra material that would never have appeared if I had rushed straight to the typewriter upon my return from Brisbane: I am thinking of my experience at Monoclave; the good times I had with Chris Priest and Vonda McIntyre... and much more. So please read on. But before you do, I would like to thank everyone who helped make my trip possible. In particular I am indebted to David Grigg, whose wildly inspired idea it was; to Del and Dennis Stocks for being such gracious hosts; and John Foyster. God bless you all.

* * * * *

The first I knew about the 'Lee Harding Fund' was when I read the flyer that accompanied an issue of Leigh's FANEW SLETTER. There, set out in embarrassing detail, was a list of my achievements etc. together with a rallying cry to the effect that "Q-Con Needs Lee Harding!"

Rumor has it that the idea was sparked off one Wednesday evening when Melbourne fandom was engaged in an extended restaurant crawl trying to find a congenial venue that would at least recapture some of the legendary spirit of the late lamented DeGraves' Tavern.

David Grigg started the ball rolling. Peter Darling quickly put his hand in his wallet and donated the first five dollars to get me to Brisbane. Just as promptly (so I am told) Irene Pagram dipped into her meagre purse and donated the first dollar to bring me back. From then on the idea just snowballed.

Of course the success of the 'fund' would have been impossible without David's determined effort, the generosity of those people who contributed valuable items to the postal auction, and the way in which Australian fans pitched in and helped in whatever way they could.

I must confess that I was surprised at the result of all this endeavour. Granting that the project had been in some way inspired by the 'Tucker Fund' which had enabled Bob Tucker to attend Aussiecon in 1975, I was initially apprehensive as to whether our small fan community could raise enough money to pay for my fare to Brisbane and back, plus my motel bill, and also provide me with some eating/spending money.

Naturally I was broke at the time. I still am. And I hadn't had a holiday in ten years. My doctor kept telling me that if I didn't take one soon then I might very well run out of time to take one. Sobering advice. So, when I saw the donations beginning to roll in I decided I would do everything I could to ensure that the people bankrolling me got 'value for money'; I determined to do as much as possible for Q-Con when I arrived, and wrote to Dennis Stocks - the organiser - saying he could put me down for as many panels (and room parties) he wanted. (And of course this report is for all of you who helped out but didn't have an opportunity to attend that marvelous convention. In a moment I will try and convey to you something of what you missed, but before that I must fill how the 'fund' progressed.)

As the time for my departure grew close, I decided to autograph some copies of my own books and put them into the postal auction; Irene said she would do a special illustration on the flyleaf of each copy, making them genuine collectors items. Then, about a week before I was due to take-off by train, I threw open our apartment for a trash-and-treasure sale. Out of the cupboards and cardboard boxes came all the old books I felt I could do without. I piled them up on the dining room table and sometime around 7.30 pm the hordes of fans descended.

I wasn't out to make a fortune. I kept the prices loooow and didn't mind haggling. I think the record price paid for a single item was \$20 for a complete set of the Allen & Unwin pb. edition of Proust's REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST (a duplicate set)(thanks, Randall), and that animated and consistently enthusiastic young man, David Evans, spent about \$40. The books were mostly pb. sf of the vintage variety, and they averaged 20¢ to 40¢, depending on my mood. It was a merry evening. The wine flowed freely. Irene and I hadn't

intended to, but we weakened earlier, and decided to lay out a simple supper - when the table was sufficiently clear.

And did they clear it! Irene held the cookie jar in her lap and kept stuffing the coins and notes into it. When the last guests had gone - the duo called Mark 1 and Mark 2 - we found that we had close to a hundred dollars.

I felt much better. This amount, added to what David expected was due from the postal auction, clinched the possibility: I would be going to Q-Con. It wasn't just a dream any longer: it was going to happen. I had never been any further north than Sydney, and I was looking forward to my first taste of the Queensland climate... and 'getting away from it all' (I once asked my doctor: how do you manage to get away from your work when you are your work? He just smiled.).

I had booked my passage on the train a week earlier. One way. I wanted to leave my trip as open-ended as possible. Why a train, you ask? Well, for one thing I don't like aeroplanes. They move too damn fast. I have had little opportunity to travel, and when I do I like to have the feeling of moving from one place to another in a leisurely fashion. I know a lot of people who are widely-travelled, but they just don't seem to have been anywhere. But I digress...

I had talked Stephen Solomon into sharing a 'twinette' compartment. These are more comfortable than the single units and have a built-in shower and a more spacious feeling. Stephen had never travelled in this fashion before. Oh, he had been on trains all right, but always in an overnight, sitting-up position. I extolled to him the virtues of blissful sleep in comfortable beds and the convenience of your own toilet and shower. He decided to come along with me. Also, by taking the train overnight we would have a free day in Sydney before we moved on - again overnight - to Brisbane.

The eve of our departure was a Wednesday, and the fans gathered at Peter Poynton's pub in Carlton - the then current DeGraves' substitute (and a miserably poor one, too: thank heavens we have since found our haven at the Oxford in Swanston Street...). I recall something like a record attendance for those days. I saw a lot of familiar faces I hadn't seen for a long time. I even saw Peter House. "They told me they were sending you away," he said. "That's right," I replied. "But they've also raised enough money to bring me back." He looked crestfallen. A pained expression briefly passed across his face, suggesting that someone might have goofed up somewhere along the line.

We had a riotous send-off. Merrily flowed the wine, while lo! some of the food was wisely left unmolested. With a good half hour to spare we were poured into David's car, and accompanied by Irene and Sue Pagram, driven to Spencer Street Station.

I dislike extended farewells as much as I enjoy celebratory home comings. Anyway, the train was soon pulling out of the station. We made faces out of the window at our friends then settled down in a pleasantly befuddled state of mind to explore our 'twinette'.

"This is really nice," Stephen said. I was pleased that he was pleased. I was tired. The days and nights leading up to this final farewell had been particularly anxious, and I was relieved to be on our way. Brisbane, I thought, here we come! And I was looking forward to a long sleep, lulled by the gentle rocking rhythm of the speeding train.

But it turned out to be dreadful. Our train was supposed to be an express, yet somehow the driver contrived to slam on the brakes every half hour or so with such violence that we had little hope of going to sleep. On several occasions the stops were so abrupt that we were almost hurtled out of our beds.

Stephen was not impressed. But after a sleepless night it was nice to have tea and coffee and biscuits delivered to our door at 7.30. We declined to

take breakfast in the dining car, knowing from experience that the prices were exorbitant. Instead we decided to wait and have a cheap breakfast in Sydney. Our train arrived at its destination shortly after nine. We immediately checked in our luggage and went in search of food.

We found a cafe after a brisk walk. I was hungry and ordered ham and eggs. Stephen settled for something simpler: coffee and a toasted sandwich. (I wondered briefly: had his stomach been irreparably damaged by the severity of our overnight journey?).

After breakfast we went our separate ways for the rest of the day. I had an important appointment with my publisher, David Field of Cassell/Collier Macmillan, at the R.A.C.V. club at 1 pm. Until then I was prepared to fill in my time getting reacquainted with what used to be one of my favourite cities.

But times have changed. And so have I. I found the frantic bustle of people crowding the narrow streets rather oppressive. Pedestrians in Melbourne crouch; Sydney pedestrians scuttle, like crabs; and people in Brisbane... we'll get to them further on.

There had been a time when Sydney had contained, for this young Melbournite, some of the qualities of the Grail: a somewhat mystical city beyond the Known Lands. My first visit was in 1962, in the company of my young bride, Carla, had been a momentous occasion. My first glimpse of the harbour bridge was overwhelming; no matter how many photographs I had ever seen, they could not match the real splendour of what still is a magnificent harbour. During that unforgettable first-time there was combined the mysterious magic of meeting John Baxter, Bob Smith, Kevin Dillon, Ron and Cindy Smith and a host of other marvelous people. We returned again in 1968, and enjoyed the city much the same as before, although the friends were fewer. I visited Sydney twice in 1970: once while Robin Johnson was away overseas and I was privileged to have the use of his North Shore flat overlooking the harbour, with daily walks across the bridge to the city centre. (It was there, Robin, during a rather grim two weeks, that the first painful, tentative pages of THE WEEPING SKY were somehow put down...); and also to attend Syncon 1 - another marvelous time, meeting legendary figures such as Stanley Pitt and Shayne McCormack...

Syncon 2, in 1972, was pretty much a major disaster for me. Carla came with me, and I always think of that otherwise entertaining convention as the beginnings of the Bad Times; shortly afterwards we separated, were then divorced, and it took three very long years before we were able to establish a new and mutually satisfying relationship, for which I will always be thankful. It could have been much worse...

1975 I remember as the Cherry Wilder Sydney-times. Having established a rich and rewarding correspondence during the time I was putting together BEYOND TOMORROW, I was able to visit Cherry and her husband Horst and their two fine daughters, on two occasions. Firstly during Syncon 3 and later just prior to Aussiecon. But I carry in my memory an image associated with those two visits impossible to forget: standing near the bus stop in Hornsby Heights and seeing, in an otherwise cloudless sky, a deep coppery smog hiding the city from view. It shrives me even now to think about it. I guess Sydney was never the same after that.

It certainly wasn't on this particular day. Gone was the joy, the feeling of being part of a bustling, European city. Instead I felt out of step, out of time with everything around me. The pressure, the pace, were unbearable. Perhaps spending some time in Adelaide and absorbing its tranquil way of life had changed me - that and being an involuntary prisoner in an inner suburb of Melbourne after spending the previous ten years in semi-rural surroundings. Whatever it was, the need to get away from the city-centre soon became pressing.

I found temporary solace in Martin Place, one of the very few spacious areas in the city. I lounged around on one of the benches for an hour or so. In all that time I didn't see one pretty girl. That really made me feel homesick...

I never managed to keep my appointment with David Field. Either the natives gave me the wrong directions, or they gave me the right ones and I somehow misunderstood him, but everything conspired in such a way that I reached the R.A.C.V. building five minutes after David had left, having waited - rather impatiently, I imagine - a good half hour. I was depressed. It was a hot, humid day - the sort of humid day that only Sydney can manage, and I knew that David had made a special trip into the city to see me, leaving his family at home (this was holiday time, remember). I found a 'phone booth and rang through to his office and apologised. His secretary said that Mr Field wasn't in, but that she understood and would pass on my apologies. I thanked her and stumbled out of the booth, my shirt clinging to my back from the humidity.

By way of consoling myself I decided it was about time to fulfill a long-standing desire to see the Opera House at close range. I found it to be every bit as enthralling as I had imagined: a superlative, defiant work of art. Not so appealing, though, were the restaurant prices. I settled for a pie with gravy and peas and mashed potatoes, and a small carafe of white wine. I sat down at one of the many tables that dotted the area outside the Benalong Point Cafe and spent a pleasant half hour or so scoffing this rather primitive fare, fighting off the blowflies and the seagulls and feeling gulled by the inflated prices I had been forced to pay for such fodder. But the harbour view was magnificent, the sunshine soothing, and now that my frantic pursuit of my publisher was behind me, even the temperature seemed mild. A feeling of satisfaction overcame me, and I realised this was a result of being removed from the frantic centre of the city. Out here there was at least a semblance of tranquility... and the timeless surge of the ocean. Afterwards, feeling much refreshed and perhaps a little more tolerant, I wandered back into the city and spent a few hours browsing through the local bookstores. With the exception of Jim Thorburn's Pocket Bookshop, I found them dismally disappointing and no match for the Melbourne variety.

I met up with Stephen back at the station. We had an hour and a half to kill before our train pulled out, so we had a simple dinner in the railway cafeteria and then boarded the train. As we did we encountered the first signs of fannish life: some members of the Sydney contingent who would be attending Q-Con. I recognised Kevin Dillon and Blair Ramage, and James Styles from Ararat in Victoria. And as soon as we were aboard we discovered that purely by chance Elizabeth Foyster and her daughter, Jillian, occupied the twinette adjoining ours. Peter Darling, and several others, were situated further off down the car.

After a long day which I could now review with mixed feelings, I began to relax. The feeling of the impending convention was reinforced by the company of so many familiar faces. I knew that David Grigg and Paul Stevens would be flying up from Melbourne, along with several others. Yes, there really was going to be a convention, by golly!

Our train was about forty minutes late in leaving Sydney. Fortunately I had brought along a number of Puffin paperbacks for some light reading, but they came in handier for young Jillian and her mother. For a while, when we waited, I felt rather like a lending library, the way those slim little volumes shuttled back and forth.

The overnight journey was - as Tucker would have said - surprisingly smoooooth. It more than made up for the disturbances of the previous night. Stephen and I slept soundly, but long before that we witnessed one of the most hauntingly beautiful sights along the way. Dusk was falling. Our train was travelling slowly around a long arm of lakes that formed part of the estuary of the Hunter River. The panorama reminded me of photographs and films I had seen of Scottish lochs. Smoothly rounded hills surrounded the lakes, some large, some small, with deep clusters of healthy mangroves separating one from the other. We watched wordlessly for the most part, and when the darkness closed in we switched off the lights in our twinette so that we could extract

the last trace of detail from this memorable landscape. Later, on my solitary homeward journey, I was to see it in a different and almost Satanic light...

The forty-minute delay, plus several more incurred along the way while we slept comfortably, meant that breakfast would have to be taken on board the train; we were not expected to reach Sough Brisbane station until 10.30am or thereabouts. Stephen and I enjoyed a pleasant bacon-and-eggs-and-coffee-type meal while the train toiled steadily uphill at a reasonably sedate pace; we were not jostled around as is so often the case when trying to eat comfortably in a speeding train. Afterwards we retired to our twinette and sat back and enjoyed the scenery as it unwound before us.

Arrival in Brisbane was... not quite like I had expected. We stepped out of the air-conditioned comfort of the train into a mild, sunny day with a temperature of only 28°C. I had been expecting blistering heat, I suppose. I learned later that I had left that behind me: Melbourne recorded 39°C on the same day.

Dennis and Del were waiting on the platform. It was good to renew old friendships: I hadn't seen them both since the Adelaide convention in 1974, when our train had stopped at Dimboola because of a derailment further up the line, and we had waited in the cold for hours until a bus took us on to Adelaide. And also, I had agreed to be the Guest of Honour at the previous Q-Con and circumstances had not permitted me to attend. (Very kindly, I thought, Jack Wodhams stood in for me on that occasion - but more about Jack further on...) I was glad to see them again.

With Del driving the Carrola we were soon at the motel convention site. We checked in, and, leaving the others for the time being, I went up to see my room.

It was certainly spacious; the biggest single-person motel room I had ever seen - certainly the biggest at that convention. Lots of room, a bed big enough for two people, PLUS a divan. Who were they expecting - Don Juan? Air-conditioning; television; wall length mirror etc. I opened my travelling bag, spread out the few things I needed, then sat down to ponder.

It was Friday, December 31st, 1976. The convention wasn't officially due to begin until the following morning, but Dennis had promised a pre-con evening with movies, supper and whatever booze we could smuggle in. Already a large number of fans had booked in - I met Shayne McCormack in the lobby (in fact that was one of the few times I did see her: for most of the con she seemed busy playing 'Dungeons and Dragons' or giving room parties...) - and some other people from interstate.

I decided to do what I always do when I arrive in a new city: take a stroll and look around. Which I did. I was at once struck by the architectural oddities of Brisbane. Take equal parts of Melbourne and Sydney and set them down on undulating hills and you have an approximation of how this city looked to the newcomer: a mixture of tall, modern buildings and older style shops and offices; everything built upon a grid-pattern (like Melbourne), but the pattern cunningly concealed by the many small hills. The air was clear; I noticed that immediately. Humid, yes - but not the smog-heavy humidity of Sydney or Melbourne. I was impressed by the enormous underground car-park situated beneath the city square; a clever bit of town-planning. And by the people...

Ah, the people of Brisbane. I wonder if they always walk so upright and so casually as they did while I was there? So different to the scuttling, crab-like pedestrians I had seen in Sydney and the hunched, unsmiling faces of my fellow Melbournians. Whatever the nature of the political climate, I could sense a feeling of spaciousness, of time spreading out, as I wandered through the streets of Brisbane. My main purpose was the primary one: to check out possible eating places. Quite a few looked promising. I could hardly be expected to know that, unlike Melbourne, New Year holidays meant 'closing-down'

for just about everybody, something I was to learn, much to my discomfort, later on.

I arrived back at the motel and wandered up to the convention room. Dennis was busy setting up a maze of audio equipment. Leigh and Valma had arrived and I talked with them for a while. A few fans were wandering in and out; everything was nicely informal.

I went back downstairs and found a take-away shop just a few doors down the street. I bought a bucket of potato chips and a hamburger and brought them back to my room for lunch. The food was awful, but a lot cheaper than eating in the expensive motel restaurant. I was determined to conserve my finances as much as possible.

That evening Stephen and I decided to try out one of the local Chinese restaurants. David Grigg and Paul Stevens joined us. I must admit we were a mite apprehensive. Melbourne has the best Chinese restaurants in Australia (as Bob Silverberg says), and we had all become used to, er, a certain minimum quality when it came to our preferred cuisine. After walking several blocks - and not wishing to miss out on the first of the movies - we finally settled on the first place we passed. I've forgotten the name. It was downstairs, had a full licence, and the Chinese waiters wore dinner suits.

The food was... adequate, but not offensive. I just missed some of the standard ingredients. But then, one of the reasons why Melbourne has so many good Chinese restaurants to choose from is that most of - if not all - of the Chinese market-gardening is done there (our waiter, for all his good intentions, did not know what we meant when we asked about snow peas...). However, having enjoyed our four courses - shared, as was customary, between us - we grew emboldened enough to ask for a fifth serving. "Pray tell," I asked our waiter, "what special dish do you recommend?" I suppose he could see by now that we were veteran Chinese gourmets, judging by the mess around our plates and the way we handled our chopsticks. "May I suggest beef and onions?" he replied. We considered his offer. It didn't sound particularly exciting. On the contrary, he assured us it was. We took a vote and decided to risk it. I'm glad we did. The beef and onions were served on a wooden tray into which was set a sizzling hot metal plate in the shape of a bull. "Please don't touch the plate," our waiter cautioned us. But it wasn't necessary, for as soon as he removed the stainless steel cover such a cloud of steam issued forth that we would not have touched the hot metal underneath for anything. We gazed upon this concoction with awe. If the flavour was anything like the presentation...

We were not disappointed. The beef was delicious, and the sauce sweet and pungent. It soon disappeared and we sat back, satiated and enobled by this fine example of the Chinese culinary art. Also, we had consumed some quantity of wine. I asked if they had any Chinese liquors, Dew of Roses being one of my favourite after-dinner drinks. The waiter explained that they had no Dew of Roses, but he would see what he could find. The beverage he brought, in very small glasses, was so fiery that even Paul Stevens, one of the greatest wine-sloshers of Aussiefandom, almost gagged. Well, it certainly didn't taste anything like I expected, but it was fiery as all hell (Chinese people do not share the western habit of 'table' wines, preferring their own marvelous variety of teas when eating - but they do, I assure you, have the most potent liquors in the world), and it sent a great glow down from the back of my tongue down to my belly - the front portion of the tongue, of course, being anaesthetised by the first sip, as in the very best Mexican cooking...

Light-headed, well-filled and lead-footed, we toiled up the hill back to the motel. Fortunately for us the movies had started a trifle later than expected. We arrived just in time to enjoy a marvelous Czech sf effort, THE MAN FROM THE FIRST CENTURY, which I strongly recommend to all future conventions. It was very funny - perhaps the more so because the leading male character seemed to have studied the techniques of Peter Sellers in his most inspired Inspector

Clouzot moments. Afterwards I stayed to see - yet again - COLOSSUS : THE FORBIN PROJECT. This fifth viewing reinforced my opinion that this is one of the most under-rated sf films of all time, and that it really needs to be seen in its original wide-screen format rather than on tv. There was some initial problems with the projection, and it was some looong minutes before the projectionist was convinced - by a vociferous audience - that they were being showed a wide-screen film without the benefit of anamorphic projection. Happy to report the film was stopped, the correct lens substituted, and off we went.

I dimly recall that more films were shown later, after teh marvelously well-prepared supper provided by the convention comittee. No, damn it: wait a minute. Let's face it: the convention committee was Dennis and Del Stocks. Let's leave it at that - and thank you, whoever helped in the organization of this simple but by no means unpleasant late-night snack. I wandered off to bed soon after, feeling tired and nicely boozed and not wanting to miss the opening of the convention proper the next morning. No doubt some people stayed on to see more films, and room parties partied on, but thish lil' black duck took a shower and then climbed on to - not in to - bed and was gently wafted off to sleep by the loud purring of the air-conditioner. It had been a long day.

I woke bright and early, with the Queensland sun streaming in through the curtains. I got up and peered out. I remember thinking: I can see the houses on the horizon. I can even see their windows. The air was so clear. I guess you need to have a recalcitrant sinus like mine before you begin to appreciate what it is like to experience air that is clean.

I didn't worry too much about breakfast. Time was against me. There was a People's Palace - or its equivialant - just down the road. None of the other cafes were open. I quickly scoffed some scrambled eggs - not at all bad - and hurried back to the motel.

At this point I think I should take time out to comment on the Q-Con 3 programme booklet. It really was the most well-presented and thoughtfully assembled publication of its kind I have ever seen for such a relatively small convention - sixty-four fully paid-up members, five supporting, average attendance at programme items: forty to fifty. Dennis even produced a supplement devoted exclusively to the works of the St.Lucia wunderkind, David Lake, who was to play an important role in the convention - and indeed, my life. As you will discover...

Dennis declared Q-Con 3 officially 'open' at a few minutes past 10 am. He read a congratulatory telegram, reproduced as follows:

GALACTIC GOOD WISHES GREETINGS TO GUESTS CHANDLER
EDMONDS KEEP HARDING OFF THE GROG

It was signed:

HUGO GERNSBACK & COMMODORE GRIMES

But the fact that it was an international cable lodged in West Germany was a giveaway - if the style wasn't. We miss you Cherry Wilder, and would that you had been there...

"You know, Lee, this is the first real writers'
convention we've ever had."

PAUL STEVENS

I'll drink to that. For indeed it was. A lot of this was the result of having intimate surroundings - a room just the right size; the participation of the Three Fine Gentlemen From St.Lucia (please read on); and the general air of informality that surrounded us. Yes, Paul, it was a writers' convention, but it couldn't have happened without the fans...

Firstly, then, the first Fine Gentleman From St.Lucia (University of Queensland): step up Bob Mathews. Thankyou. Let me check my programme.

Ah. Trust Dennis to get down to the essentials. Under the heading of Special People (among which - surprisingly - I also find myself) I discover that this warm, enthusiastic speaker is Senior Lecturer in Japanese at the university. And there is much more, but time and space does not permit me to write in depth about this remarkable man's experience. Instead I will speak of him as I knew him there.

His topic was: 'Japanese Science Fiction'. Perhaps a rather forbidding item with which to open a convention, to judge by the number of weary-eyed latecomers - but I challenge any one of them to deny that Bob's talk was the most popular item on the two-day programme. The fact that he was asked back to speak again on the following morning - out of programming - was not so much to satisfy these latecomers as it was to further delight those of us who were fortunate enough to be in on Bob's talk from the very beginning.

For nearly two hours - and way over time - Bob held us spellbound with a subject very dear to his heart. Beginning with the Japanese Reformation (about the middle of the Nineteenth Century, if my memory serves me correctly), he traced what was, to most of us, the astonishing flowering and development of a unique kind of sf. He explained, initially, how he had intended to write a thesis on Japanese sf, but that his researches had shown that the field was so vast that he had reluctantly abandoned the project. Dialogue with members of the audience led us into such fascinating topics as translation; the many forms of Japanese writing and, consequently, the limitations imposed by Japanese typewriters and type-setting machines, which of necessity must utilise the most rudimentary of all the forms available, and which lack the subtle nuances of the multifarious Japanese language.

Bob obviously relished in both his topic and the enthusiasm of his audience. He is one of that select group of people who never lecture, but discuss with their audience the subject of their enthusiasm, and in the process set off a chain-reaction among the participants. John Foyster is also capable of holding a fannish audience - perhaps any audience - in a similar fashion, and I remember wishing that he had been there. Japanese literature is a field in which John and I share a common interest, although I would be the first to confess that John's knowledge and appreciation far surpasses my own meagre experience. But just the same, I missed his presence.

It is perhaps not surprising that Q-Con 3's Guest of Honour, the redoubtable Bert Chandler, was listening very attentively in the front row of chairs (as was I), and that when the discussion between Bob and his audience grew more relaxed (but no less interesting) the subject of Bert's Japanese translations were brought to the fore. A leading Japanese publisher is engaged in publishing all of the Bert's 'Commodore Grimes' novels in series form - and other works as well - and the conversation that flowed back and forth between these two gentlemen was very interesting indeed. Finally, as a sort of coup de grace, Bert produced from - seemingly nowhere - a beautiful Japanese scroll made from genuine parchment, which was taken to be that nation's equivalent of the Nebula or Hugo or somesuch. However, when urged upon to provide some reasonable sort of translation, Bob Matthews came up with something more to the point: it was not an award for any book as such, but rather a retrospective award for the achievements of Bert Chandler as a science fiction writer, and for the life of me I cannot think why a similar award has not been introduced in Western countries. (You will notice how I do not say deliberately English-speaking countries. And sure an' all we have the 'Grand Master' Award, given by the Science Fiction Writers of America... and the - so help me! - 'Gandalf' award for outstanding achievement in fantasy writing. But they are all so incestuous and in-groupish...)

When Bob's talk was reluctantly brought to a close - with the promise that it would be taken up again the following morning - I adjourned. The prospect of a panel on 'Future Histories', discussing writers such as Niven, Heinlein, Asimov etc. was not sufficiently enticing after the very heady wine of the

mind I had just been steeped in.

I wandered into the adjoining room across the hall which had been thoughtfully set aside for those who required a brief respite, or a quiet smoke and a chat. And who should I meet, looking brazenly healthy and youthful but my old friend Jack Wodhams. The last time I had seen him had been at Syncon 2, when he had been living in Sydney and flying high as one of John W Campbell's All-Stars. But over the last few years there has been an absence of Wodhams stories in the magazines, and although some have been appearing in VOID recently, Jack seems to have adopted his own 'Farewell, Sweet SF' song a la Silverberg. When I spoke to him at Q-Con he had a steady job and was better financially than he had ever been in his life, working with the postal department or some such. I did not press him on the matter. Indeed, our last exchange of letters in late 1974 had ended on a rather sour note, with Jack's stern refusal to let me use any of his stories in BEYOND TOMORROW. Oh, well, time wounds all heels. "I don't know whether to sock you or to say hello to you," he said, with a wry and ambiguous grin that made me just a little uneasy. But after that it was plain sailing. I was bothered by the fact that he was often seen carrying a long, knobby stick around with him, and I was never sure whether he was going to use it to help himself up the stairs or to clout me with it. Fortunately for everyone concerned, when the opportunity came he chose instead to berate the convention attendees and myself with words, when he made an impromptu appearance during one of the panels later on...

Trying to find a place to eat out on New Year's day was not easy. After walking for many, many blocks - and not wishing to miss out on Bert's Guest of Honour speech, I settled for a quick snack at the People's Palace - again, the only place I could find open.

Back at the motel I had the privilege of introducing Bert to the audience. Paul had made some excellent slides showing a retrospective of the covers on Bert's books, beginning with the famous ASTOUNDING cover for 'Giant Killer' in the Forties - surely his most famous story - through the Ace Double period, and on to the more recent novels such as THE BITTER PILL. This was a colourful lead-in to our Guest, which I am sure he appreciated. At the conclusion of the slide show, Bert delivered his speech - a gentle and often whimsical reply to Ursula Le Guin's GoH speech at Aussiecon entitled "In Praise of the Ghetto". His delivery was precise and informal and liberally sprinkled with the by-now famous Chandler anecdotes. Afterwards he produced a tape of an interview made by an American radio newsman and we sat back to listen to it. I must say that the unknown interviewer was by far the most informed I have ever heard. Not only did he appear to know just about every novel and short story Bert had ever written, he also seemed to have read them! His intimate knowledge of the Commodore Grimes character made for an uncommonly interesting interview. Would that some other people I could think of could conduct an interview with an sf writer on such a fine level.

Bert's speech and tape were followed by a talk by Howard Brown on the cosmology of Michael Moorcock's novels. From a remark Dennis made at the conclusion of the talk, I got the impression that he was expecting some disagreement from the audience - apparently Howard has a reputation for being some sort of infante terrible in Brisbane fandom - but this was not to be the case. Howard's talk had been so lucid that there was really nothing left to add, except that a rather inordinate amount of time had been devoted to delineating the obvious, and that while Moorcock is a smooth practitioner of his art, the body of work he has produced lacked the quality and consistency and richness of invention of, say, Jack Vance. This opinion I voiced at the first opportunity - and found that I had unwittingly unearthed a minor hot-bed of Vance enthusiasts in the audience - John Cummings and Dennis Stocks among them. A vigorous debate ensued, with Howard fielding some thorny questions remarkably well. All in all, a stimulating hour.

After a short break it was my turn. "Lee Harding", said Dennis Stocks, with

just the right amount of light-heartedness, "this is YOUR life." And proceeded to interview me in that fashion, asking me about my writing, my life and love affair with sf in general, and lots of peripheral things. It was a pleasant, easy-going interview. I only hope that the audience enjoyed it. I certainly felt relaxed.

When my gig was over the competitors in the 'White Dwarf Award' presented their outrageous inventions to the audience. Dennis Stocks used the blackboard to chalk up an entry from Jeff Harris, from Adelaide, who unfortunately was unable to attend the Con. As I recall it was some kind of gigantic motorised boot that lifted itself - that's right - by its own bootstraps/power etc. Leigh Edmonds ambled up to the blackboard, turned his back upon it, and proceeded to present his verbal entry: an infinitely variable television series. David Grigg chalked up a diagram for a system which he declared would solve the population problem: freeze portions of people for a certain amount of time. This initial idea then took-off and gave birth to all kinds of possibilities - I can't remember them all - and David was rewarded with a good round of applause. The prize however, went to John Cummings and his remarkable CHAD drive (for Cummings, Hieronymous and Dean), an idea that used as a springboard the old concept of utilising a submarine for space travel, but John's outrageous delivery and the many wild and original ideas he incorporated soon had members of the audience roaring with laughter. His contribution was a clear winner. (If this segment of the Con was taped, I do with that someone will some day publish John's 'speech'. While the success of his delivery depended a great deal on style and spontaneity, I'm sure that the ideas themselves would make amusing reading.)

That evening several of us walked the streets again - in vain - for somewhere to eat. I was due to assist Paul in his opening 'show' at 8 pm: "The Pulp: a Hotbed of Depravity", which he would conduct under the guise of Prof. Hiram Q. Aardvark III. In desperation I hurried back to the motel and tried room service.

My dinner arrived ten minutes before I was due to 'go on'. I scoffed down the whiting and chips, gulped some coffee, and hurried down to the Convention room. I found only a few people wandering around. Dazed, I looked around and realised that I could have taken my time. "Paul's just having his dinner", someone told me. Apparently he, also, had had difficulty getting something to eat, only this time it was the inefficiency of the room service that worked against him.

Well, the great Prof. finally made his entrance, escorted - nay, helped - up to his rostrum by some sturdy members of the audience. Dressed in an impressive costume (a leftover from his vampire-act days), Prof. Aardvark - with the aid of a projector and selected reading from pertinent journals by myself - this learned creature proceeded to enlighten us upon Nineteen Thirties Porn. He certainly enlightened me. The sf pulps were soon passed up for juicier morsels: the so-called 'spicy' adventure pulps of the period. I must say that, when my opportunity came, I read aloud the relevant sections with relish, and the audience responded well. A good time was had by all.

This item was followed by the first performance - some insisted that it was the first rehearsal - of "SynthIA" with a script by David Grigg set to electronic music compositions 3M7 and 3M10 by Leigh Edmonds, the spoken parts being read by Valma, David and Stephen. This was an extraordinary experience, despite the obvious technical difficulties that obscured much of the performance (I have an image of Leigh stalking back and forth, fiddling with the amplifier and then something else, rolling his eyes heavenward and tearing his hair from time to time). The script had something to do with a spaceship approaching the region of a black hole. Valma reading the part of the ship's 'library' extremely well. David and Stephen's roles were difficult to assess, considering that their microphones were not working. I assumed them to be taking the part of Captain and Astrogator, respectively.

The music was strange and indeed other-worldly. The climax built up well and finished with the room suddenly plunged into total darkness as the spaceship entered the 'black hole'. A most original presentation of a great idea, and it was a pity that the many technical hitches got in the way of our enjoyment. But worthwhile for all that.

Afterwards there was a room party hosted by the Melbourne fans, for which purpose I handed over my room, it being the biggest available. A lot of people crowded in and much booze flowed. I remember young John Clark - well represented in THE ALTERED I and a promising new talent - collapsing and curling up on my bed, and the struggle I had to convince him that the divan would be more comfortable. I eventually had to lift him, despite his mumbled protests, and deposit him there. The rest of the evening becomes a blur. David Grigg assures me that I engaged myself in strenuous debate with Howard Brown, and that the results were hilarious to all concerned. You'll have to take his word for it...

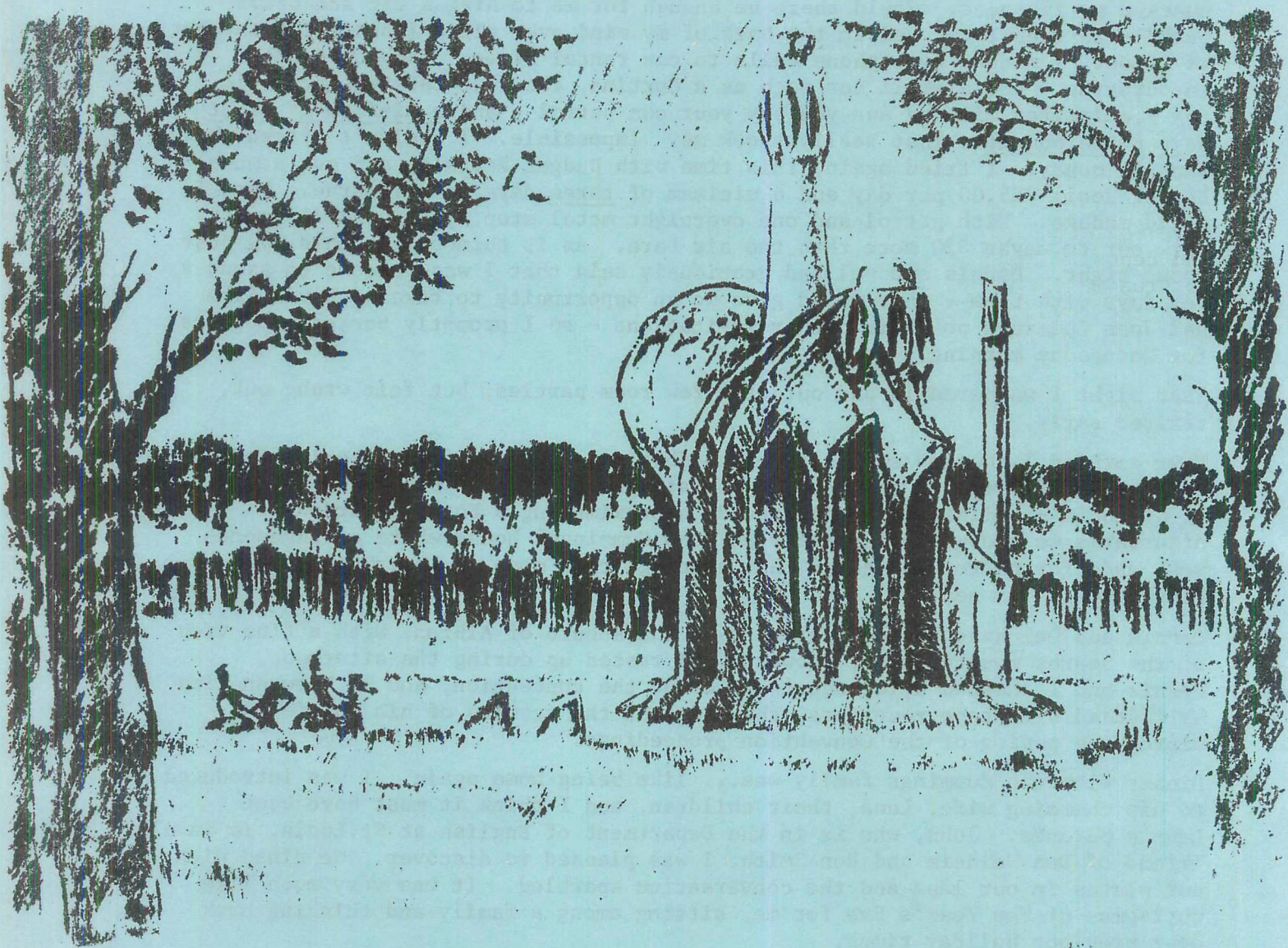
Sunday morning. The city was still slumbering. After a brisk walk I discovered what must have been the ultimate Greasy Joe's: a hole in the wall for eating there and taking away. There was counter space of about eighteen inches, so I guess that if you wanted to eat there you stood there. There were a few people ahead of me, so I carefully watched what they were ordering. I think I must have paled slightly when I saw that their concept of a hamburger was a cold rissole, sliced in half, heated in a greasy frying pan and then dumped between two slices of toast. When my turn came around I asked for an 'eggburger'. With this and a paper cup filled with lukewarm coffee, I made off, and found a place where I could sit down in the sun and enjoy my frugal breakfast.

One thing that impressed me: the number of litter-bins in Brisbane. I counted a minimum of eight of these bright-yellow units for every block in the city - more than I had ever seen elsewhere. And people used them.

I arrived back at the motel in time to catch the last half of Bob Matthews' second talk on Japanese sf, this time concentrating on the works of a prolific contemporary author, Hoshi Shin'ichi. Speaking to Bob afterwards I discovered that he had already translated more than forty of this writer's stories and was trying to get publishers interested. I made some suggestions, such as submitting a few of them to Damon Knight, or a collection to Seabury Press etc. Dennis promised to follow this up for me.

X The following panel had been rather misadvertised - intentionally - as THE OCKER ELEMENT IN AUSTRALIAN SF - and I was supposed to examine this in detail with a number of younger Australian writers. Well, at the last minute I changed my mind. I know how boring panels can be, and I thought it was about time we tried something different. So I ranged David Grigg and David Lake on either side of me and encouraged them, as part of the 'new wave', to put forward their views on the state of the art. To my horror they agreed on just about everything. In desperation I summoned Frank Bryning to join us. "Frank," I said, "you're writing again after many years. You qualify as a new writer. Come on up..."

"Damn you," said Frank, when he had sat down. "Damn you, Lee Harding!". It was only then that I realised that Frank had taken the title of my panel seriously and actually researched considerably into just what amount - if any - ockerism was present in the writing of Australian sf! Now the shape of the panel took a dramatic change for the better. Someone suggested that this special quality could be found in the works of Jack Wodhams. Encouraged by the audience, Jack lept up to the panel, commandeered a mike, and proceeded to harrange us all for a very long time on his personal view of what the future would be like, and the Great Things That Were Going to Happen. The panel finally dissolved into uproar - of the best kind - and I decided it was time for us all to make a dignified exit before we collapsed with laughter.



I lunched - yet again - at the People's Palace: ham and eggs, not too bad. Way ahead of Greasy Joe's (it must be the worst place, ever). I missed Leigh Edmonds' talk on fanzines. I had my second shower for the day and rested up a bit, then went down to sit in on the final item of the programme, which turned out to be one of those interminably serious UFO discussions. I must confess that I can scarce keep my eyes open during such talks, primarily because so-called observers insist on taking a literal, hardware approach to the phenomena. Anyway, there were enough people in the audience to ensure a heated discussion, so I just sat back and listened to the tail end. I think I asked a few questions myself, but by that time I was beginning to run down. And so was the Con. At the conclusion of Roy Russell's talk, Dennis declared Q-Con officially closed, and that was that. But with people not meaning to check out until the next morning there were plenty of room parties later in the night.

We dined that evening - Stephen, David and I - in the worst 'Chinese' restaurant I have ever experienced. It wasn't that the food was bad - it wasn't; it was passable - but because it was a huge cafe serving Australian meals as well, staffed by hostile waitresses ("You try working here!") and watched over by a matronly Australian lady at the cash-register by the door. In all my life this was the first time I remember looking down at a Chinese meal garnished with beetroot...

Afterwards, I spent some time fiddling with maps and deciding the best route back to Melbourne. In the afternoon I had tried to make a train booking back to Melbourne, without success. And I didn't fancy travelling by 'plane. I had checked my finances. Would there be enough for me to hire a car and drive back? - an idea I had had in the back of my mind ever since I had first thought of Q-Con. I made a few 'phone calls to car rental firms. They were not encouraging. For a small car such as a Cortina, the flat rate was \$28.50 a day - unlimited mileage and you buy your own petrol - and a minimum of eight days to Melbourne. That really shook me. Impossible. I couldn't afford that kind of money. I tried again, this time with Budget Rentals, and got a much better deal: \$25.00 per day and a minimum of three days to Melbourne. That I could manage. With petrol and one overnight motel stop, I figured it would work out to maybe \$20 more than the air fare. As it turned out, this was just about right. Dennis and Del had graciously said that I was welcome to spend a few days with them - this would give me an opportunity to take up David Lake and John Cummings on their dinner invitations - so I promptly booked a Cortina for Wednesday morning.

That night I wandered in and out of a few room parties, but felt wrung out, retired early.

Next morning I checked out, said my goodbye's to the few fans I could find, and drove off with Del and Dennis. We stopped off at the beautiful University of St. Lucia - buildings set in grounds approximating a botanic garden. Afterwards we stopped off briefly at John Cummings' house where arrangements were made for us to dine there that evening, then move on later to David's house, which was nearby.

Dennis and Del have a nice apartment in the suburb of Albion, with a fine view of the nearby mountains. I showered and rested up during the afternoon. Dennis and I chatted a lot about sf, about the convention, and in between times he fiddled with tape recorders, checking out the results of his multi-microphone taping of the Convention proceedings.

Dinner with the Cummings family was... like being home again. I was introduced to his charming wife, Lana, their children, and I think it must have been Lana's parents. John, who is in the Department of English at St. Lucia, is an old friend of Don Wolheim and Ron Smith, I was pleased to discover. We dined with our plates in our laps and the conversation sparkled. It was very much like Christmas or New Year's Eve for me, sitting among a family and thinking back over previous holiday times.

Later in the evening, we walked the short distance to the Lake's house, where we were expecting coffee and to have a look at David's 'star map'. This map is underneath the house - the building is on a steep slope and there is enough room underneath the house for a fair-sized flat. The walls are decorated with frescoes by David and his wife Margarita. The 'star map' is an enclosed space - with black walls - with rods coming down from the ceiling and reaching up from the floor - also painted black - and on the tip of each rod is a coloured globe. Each globe represents a star, and the distance between each globe has been accurately measured so that the whole 'cluster' is a three dimensional representation of the main stars within ten light years of Earth - the area within which David Lake's first five novels have been set. The 'map' is built on such a scale that he can walk around it and indicate such stars as he wishes, and describe in what particular novel he used that system. There is also special lighting to highlight the construct. I was most impressed. As a fellow writer I constantly surround myself with visual references to whatever I am working on, but I had never before seen anything as elaborate or as inspiring as this 'map'. "I tried suspending the coloured balls on strings at first," David explained. "But they moved around too much." Hence the wooden rods.

We took our time over coffee, discussing various topics. And afterwards, walking back to the car which we had left outside the Cummings' house, the

combination of mild evening, euphoric company and the new friendships filled me with content. I wished that I could have stayed on for several weeks, but of course that was impossible. But I resolved to return, and thanked my hosts for their hospitality.

I slept soundly on the convertible divan in the Stocks' lounge room. In the morning Dennis showed me around the city: the local sf clubrooms; a place where I could get road maps; then left me to my own resources for the rest of the day while he went back to the university. Two things stand out in my memory when I recall that day: my little river journey on the ferry... and eating lunch beneath a poinciana tree on the river bank. In fact the sight of those colourful, vibrant trees will be forever associated in my mind with the city of Brisbane. They were everywhere: great splashes of red-orange among the houses, along the streets. I had never before seen anything like them. I snapped off one of the blossoms and pressed it into a book I was carrying. I have it still, carrying with it all my memories of that remarkable trip.

That night Dennis and Del took me to a very nice Malaysian restaurant somewhere in the suburbs, and afterwards I joined Del in watching that droll English comedy series, "Man About The House", while Dennis finished making a cassette for me of our 'interview'. Then it was time for bed, for thoughts of impending goodbyes... and of the work that waited me back home.

We said our goodbyes in the morning and, feeling rather sad to have to leave such fine people, I made my way to the station and in to the city to collect my car for the journey home.

"Sorry," said the manager at Budget Rent-a-Car, "we haven't got a Cortina in the place at the moment..."

My face fell. But I had ordered one...!

"... let you have an automatic Kingswood for the same rate," he continued. I brightened considerably. I don't particularly like big cars, not Holdens especially, and it would use more petrol. But it sure as hell would make for easier driving.

"That's okay," I said. "I'll take it." I signed the necessary papers and took off. Gradually at first, getting used to the great lumbering beast that was to carry me home. I drove out of the city and headed for the New England Highway. I was not attracted by the coast road, but preferred to see the inland country. And besides, I wanted to make good time back to Melbourne. There would be other occasions...

The city was soon far behind. I was on my way home. Once I had grown accustomed to its size, the Kingswood cruised along comfortably, guzzling fuel. My thoughts were occupied with the immediate past - the fun I had had, the people I had met, and the people who had made it possible. I must have thanked everyone concerned again and again as I drove down the New England Highway.

I stopped overnight at Armidale. This was the only town which appealed to me along the route: surrounded by hills; lots of tree-lined streets and gardens etc. I found a small but pleasant room in a Zebra motel, dumped my bags (it was around 6 pm), and went in search of food. I bought two large ham and salad rolls at a milk bar and took them back to my room. I made do with one of these and a cup of coffee for 'dinner' (the motel supplied an electric jug and two serves of tea, coffee and sugar), and placed the other one in the tiny 'fridge for breakfast. I was learning to hang on to my pennies; the Kingswood was a hungry carriage...

I resumed my journey early the next morning, thinking now of the work that waited for me when I got home. And wasn't there another writer's workshop coming up, and something called Monoclave? Christ, how was I going to fit everything in?

I passed through Newcastle in the mid-afternoon and saw some of its less attractive aspects. I was reminded of Blake's "dark, Satanic mills". I by-passed Sydney and drove cross-country to stay overnight with some old friends living at Emu Plains, who were expecting me. We spent a pleasant evening together, reminiscing about Olde Times. I slept soundly.

In the morning I again left early and set out on the last, long stretch of my return journey: straight down the Hume Highway - a road I knew so well that the car might well have driven itself - until I reached Melbourne. I thought it rather strange that I had to be heading towards Victoria before I experienced really hot weather: thought my stay in Brisbane the weather had been warm but mild, with even an occasional light thunderstorm for variety. But now the sky was bare and the sun beat in mercilessly through the windows of the Kingswood. I got sunburned on my arms and face. It wasn't fair, I kept thinking, to have to come home to get sunburned! But that's the way it worked...

I stopped off at Goulburn. The Kingswood was guzzling fuel at an alarming rate. I did a careful calculation and decided that my funds would permit a reasonable lunch. I walked around for a while, discovered a delightful Italian bistro, where I had the crispest, freshest ham salad I have ever had in any restaurant - and a glass of claret. After the bread rolls for dinner and breakfast, this was a luxury.

I pressed on, taking advantage of the improved stretches of the highway, surprised by the new freeway I had never experienced before that made driving the last sixty miles the easiest of all.

I arrived home about 8 pm on Saturday, January 8th, exhausted but triumphant. I had so had a holiday. I recall mumbling a few words to Irene, dumping my bags, showering, having a light supper then crawling into bed. Q-Con was over, finished with - but for me the trip had only just begun. I had stored up enough charge in my batteries to keep me going for some time...

I spent the next four days taking things easy and preparing for my stay in the hills. My good friends, Apollo and Richenda, have a beautiful home in Tecoma, next door to Sherbrooke Forest; they had told me in advance that they would be away for two weeks and that I was welcome (as always) to make use of the house in order to get some writing done - just so long as I cared for the dog and the garden, which I was always pleased to do.

You see I had a book to finish. It had been hanging around my neck like an albatros for seven years, and this time I was determined to finish it.

On the afternoon of January 14th I loaded my gear into the Beetle and headed for the hills. I spent a relaxing evening with my friends and they departed the following morning.

I set up my typewriter, notes, reference books and typing paper on the dining table. And for the next fourteen days I worked. In the mornings I woke to the sound of bell birds, and in the summer evenings I watered the vegetable garden and harvested zucchinis. In the evenings I read or watched some television. By day I wrote - easily, confidently. I moved ahead slowly with my fifth revision of a novel called THE WEEPING SKY, often recalling a question I had asked Bob Tucker on an Aussiecon panel: "Bob, however did you manage to write three versions of YEAR OF THE QUIET SUN?" His answer? "Because I loved that book, damn it!" And I had kept working at my book, on and off, for the same reason. I couldn't give it up, and this time everything seemed to be going right.

There was ample opportunity for long bushwalks through the nearby forest, and the general atmosphere one of complete, secluded tranquility, with trees and mountains towering around me, obscuring most of the houses: my natural habitat. Can you understand why I regard my enforced stay in the city as a kind of imprisonment? I respond to nature, and to people. Not to the roar of

traffic and the dearth of seasonal variety that you find in the city. But to each of us who writes, his own way...

By working steadily and keeping to a strict routine, I had almost finished the rough draft of the second half of the novel by January 29th (the first half was already in finished form). Apollo and Richenda and their two children arrived home... and I returned to the city with general reluctance, but with the feeling that I had accomplished some good writing, but with much yet to be done.

I made the mistake of visiting Monoclave on Sunday night. I was feeling kind of flat and empty and it seemed like a good idea at the time: Irene was taking part in the masquerade, as part of an Arthurian group, and I thought it might help me to 'come down'. Unfortunately I came down too far, too fast.

We got a lift with David... and I arrived at Monoclave with the uneasy feeling that I had gate-crashed a private party - which, in a way I had. Christine McGowan - as treasurer or somesuch for the convention - managed to extract my last three dollars from me, simply for the privilege of attending the masquerade. Discount for students, of course, but none for poverty-stricken writers. Well, I didn't complain, after all the fans had done for me recently. But I do think it was a bit... dare I say, thoughtless?

I met - very briefly - Chris and Vonda. Partook of a passable dinner in the cafe. Afterwards, I wandered around most of the time, feeling restless. Someone shouted me a drink. Then another. But nothing seemed to help. I knew, intellectually, that so much going on around me came as a cultural shock after my long isolation in the hills. But there were other things as well. By the time the masquerade was in full swing I was beginning to sense the signs of impending paranoia and claustrophobia. But I stayed on.

Outstanding among the contestants were two 'faceless' monks who defied recognition. The perfectly flat sheets of one-way glass inside their cowls made for an eerie effect. Rob Gerrand scored top marks for his presentation of a Scottish lad looking for his Nessie, and Marks 1 and 2 deserved an E for Effort for their hilarious portrayal of a unicorn (with a very limp horn...)

The venerable Paul Stevens Show, having been allowed to lapse for several years, returned with all the insanity of its former glory, thanks chiefly to the efforts of Ken Ford and Chris Priest.

There were movies afterwards, but I left early. I knew that the workshop would begin immediately after Monoclave - three weeks of intensive study for the participants and this reminded me of my own work still unfinished. ★

Back home, I put everything else out of my mind and continued working steadily on with the last half of SKY. This was completed on 6th of February. On Tuesday the 8th there was to be a special Nova Mob meeting at Elizabeth's, to discuss the works of Chris Priest, who had bravely agreed to be the sacrificial lamb. Irene thought of doing a critique of THE SPACE MACHINE t-shirt which Chris was handing out. We worked out a few ideas together, hoping that Chris would take the joke in good form and that our effort would hopefully lighten what could turn out to be a very heavy meeting. Happy to report that Irene's 'critique' was well received, and that in fact quite a pleasant evening was had by all.

I began the final revision of the second half of SKY the next morning. Chris Priest 'phoned me on the 14th during his stint at the workshop, and asked me to come over and drag him away for a drink some evening. We settled for the following Thursday. This turned out to be propitious: I put the finishing touches to the novel that same afternoon.

I picked Chris up from Monash and we drove to a pub in Oakleigh. There we sat for a few hours, spilling beer all over an unsteady table (surely it was the table?) and gossiping and talking shop. This was one of the highlights of my trip - remember, it had not yet finished - and I look forward to seeing Chris

again, if and when I get to England. Say... in '79? And meet Tucker again? Ah, but the mind reels at the possibilities of another Worldcon...

I delivered the ms. of THE WEEPING SKY to my editor, Jim Ellis, the following afternoon. Then I settled down to await his verdict. Seven years of work, on and off; five revisions. If it didn't work this time...

The next day marked my 40th birthday. I dined quietly with Irene at Leo's, our favourite restaurant in St.Kilda. It was a rather solemn occasion, not so much because of the years behind me, but because of the uncertainty of the future, and of the book I had just finished.

But I had built up such a head of steam working on SKY that I knew I would be a fool to sit back and let it dissipate. I began another novel the next day, laying down the first chapters while Irene corrected the carbons of SKY.

There was a party that afternoon at Elizabeth's - ostensibly to celebrate the birthdays of Bruce Gillespie and Valma Brown, a function which seemed to have been regular for some time. Apparently no one had realised that my birthday also fell within the shadow of theirs, so this added an extra air of festivity to the proceedings. Carla was there, and my children: Erik (almost as tall as me, now), Belinda and Stephen. So was Chris. But there were so many people it was difficult to find time to talk with them all. A rousing success, I do declare.

There was another party the following evening, this time a farewell to Chris, held at 33 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, the (then) abode of people such as Keith Taylor, Carey Handfield, Don Ashby, Maz etc. The usual riotous time was had by all. I said goodbye to Chris with a sinking feeling in my gut; one doesn't like to say farewell to someone you've only just begun to know, and will sadly miss...

Jim Ellis 'phoned me on Tuesday morning. He liked the novel and was sending it on to David Field - and when would Michael Payne be free to do the cover and interiors?

I couldn't really believe it. What if something went wrong and Sydney didn't like it? "Don't worry," Jim said. "They will."

And they did. They made all the appropriate noises - which I do not intend to detail here: why should I explode the myth of the writer's ego? So I let go of the anxiety which had gripped me for so long... and thought again of the new work ahead.

Now my memory begins to blur. I recall an evening when we had Bruce Gillespie and Vonda over for dinner, and how pleased I was when I discovered that A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM was one of Vonda's favourite musicals. I remember that Irene cooked her delicious honey-lamb... but after that everything gets swallowed up in a fog. The blank pages in my diary testify that this was a time of intense writing (I only make entries in my diary when I am not writing, or when something marvelous has happened).

The workshop finished; the captains and kings departed. A wave of apathy descended upon Melbourne fandom. Weeks later, I received an air-mail copy of the pb edition of Chris' THE SPACE MACHINE, which he had kindly autographed for my son, Erik, just as I had asked him to. But of course I read it before passing it on.

So the trip finally ran down, lost momentum, and now I am once again established in the familiar routine of my little grey corner of the world (for that is the colour of the city, to me). The work continues, the hopes high but slightly tattered. Dejection comes and goes, thrust upon me every now and again when I surface from my work and am reminded that it is now six months without any form of part-time income to help support my 'habit'. But there are always friends who, when it is least expected, lend a hand in the best possible way: an invitation to dinner; a visit from my family; the

occasional party. The cycle is set and can only be broken by producing good work that will, in time, enable me to leave my prison and dwell once again among trees and mountains, and wake to the sound of wind soughing through the branches, and the song of bell birds.

The long journey we call life is broken up into stages along the way. These stages, in turn, we come to see as journeys of another kind. Such a one was mine which begun when I stepped aboard the Southern Aurora, bound for Queensland, and ended... where?

Hard to say. The edges blur. The stages merge together; there is no sharp boundary.

Perhaps... here?

At this place? At this time? With this line? Or the next?

I have written this report, which I hope you have enjoyed, and I would like to thank again every one of you who made it possible. And I would like to think that the precedent which has been established will be used again, sometime in the future, to help others who live out their lives on the edge of poverty so that they may do the work they like best.

I would like to nominate Keith Taylor for NAFF.

And with that line, end.

LEIGH: It occurred to me in the last half dozen pages that apart from making the assumption that the editor of this fanzine is also the person who writes these bits there is no way of your knowing who is doing the unmarked writing. Henceforth this situation is changed by the name that starts the passage. This procedure will also stop people from becoming confused about which half of the editor is doing the writing. Henceforth I can just pull the trick of typing VALMA, yelling out that it's her turn to write something and pottering off to the loungeroom to view whatever is on the box. However, at the moment there is nothing exciting on, but I guess I can think of something to keep me occupried for a while.

VALMA: Did I decide to write for RATAPLAN in order to be recorded for posterity alongside such greats as Christopher Priest and Wilson (Bob) Tucker. Yes, yes..... of course I did. Well, actually many months, that is about a year ago, I promised Leigh that I would help etc., etc., You know how you get carried away with gushes of enthusiasm. I'm actually still enthusiastic but time wise I only have BLEAK HOUSE and four plays to be read in the next few days. I have just come home from seeing a play called "Requim" which was a compulsory 'go-to' for my Drama and Theatre Core. It was based on T.S. Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" and though I have never seen Eliot's play performed, I am familiar with it and rank it among the greats — The poetry, the chorus, the priests etc., and of course Thomas. Well, Thomas rated a mention and Mary Magdalene managed to get in. A couple of people masturbated and the gooie stuff was smeared over someone in a very religious manner. Intense feelings were portrayed all over the place. The problem was that they forgot the dialogue for poor souls such as myself who need to be told what's going on. To me it was much intensity about something.

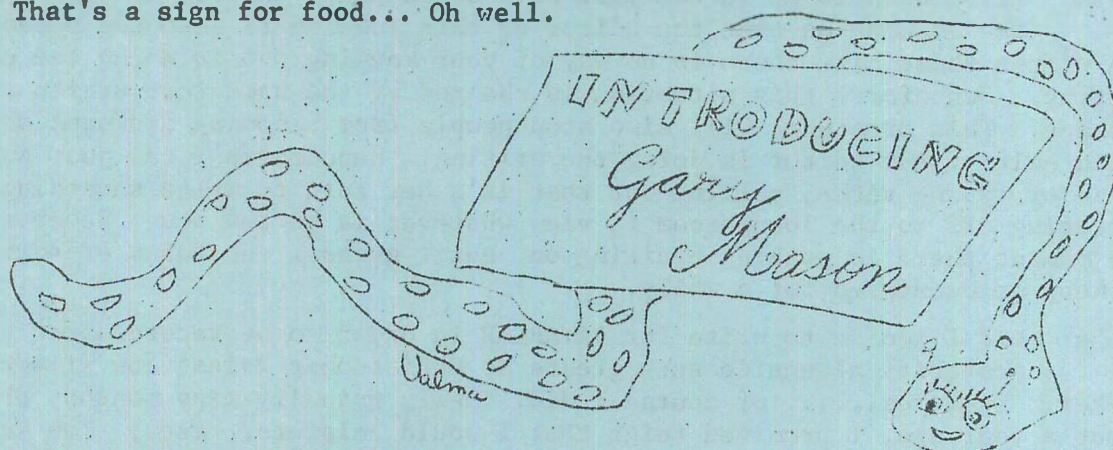
Apart from going to plays etc., we have been leading a very quiet existence. College takes up a lot of my time and when we do get some free time, there is so much to be done around the house. We figure we will just get everything organised and it will be time to move to Ballarat. Everytime we look around there seems to be more kipple attempting to devour us. And waiting to devour the kipple are the dreaded silverfish monsters. I have this terrible fear that when I finally get around to sorting the stuff in the grey cabinets in the loungeroom, I am going to open up the sleeping bags and find a six foot silverfish in there. Aaaah.....Perhaps it's best if I don't look.



I have been having a most enjoyable time at college. At the beginning of this term I spent two weeks at a primary school which I really loved. The kids were tremendous. I was at a school which is only twenty minutes walk away. It was really incredible. By the time I reached the school, I would have this array of little people surrounding me. It was so tempting to change over to Primary study instead of Secondary. I was assigned to a Grade Three class which means that the average age was eight years. It was really strange being called "Miss". One would hear little whispers saying, "That's Miss Brown, She's in with our class." I would have loved to have

stayed at the school teaching instead of going back to college. Most of the other students found it boring and were really looking forward to getting back to College Life and the Caff, etc. I just must be subject to kiddie egoboo because when little people said things like, "Gee, Miss, you're real nice. I wish you could stay and be our teacher," I must admit to being thoroughly delighted.

I wonder how cats give egoboo. Is it when they come and purr and look adoringly into your eyes or is it when they come and rub against you. No!... That's a sign for food... Oh well.



A SLIGHT CASE OF AMNESIA:
I REMEMBER SYNCON '70 (or am I
confusing it with BoroniaCon?)

Gary Mason

I was surprised, flattered and pleased to be asked to write a piece for RATAPLAN (The Magazine of the Arts), even if on a subject that is neither artistic nor, I fear, any longer clear in my memory. Only once before can I recall having been asked to write something for someone else's fanzine, and that was only an apazine, and it must be something like twelve years ago now, well before I first came into contact with Australian fandom. Strangely, within a couple of days of Leigh's making his request, I got another one (from Paul Stevens), but since I can't remember now the title of the fanzine or what I was meant to write about, and since the deadline has probably since passed, I guess I won't be doing that.

This is not intended to encourage a flood of requests - putting out my own fanzine just about exhausts the time I have available for fandom. I figure that if I avoid excessive involvement in my second flirtation with fandom, that flirtation is likely to last longer. Finding that one's fannish commitments have become oppressive is a sure recipe for gafia, not that I ever did that completely. But I have been quiet for the past five years.

What I've been asked to write about is the first Syocon, of which I was treasurer back in 1970. The full title was "Syncon '70 - Sydney Science Fiction Convention", and we billed it as the world's first science fiction convention of the 1970's. Some members of the organising committee wanted to bill it as the first convention of the new decade, but pedants among us pointed out that the decade in fact didn't start until 1971. As a compromise, we agreed that 1970 could be described as part of the 1970s. I'm not even sure if that's right. But we said so anyhow.

We were quite sure that it was the first convention of 1970, in any case. Even if someone in Europe or America was holding a convention on 1st January (which was the first day of our three-day con), we would beat them to it because of time differences. Just in case, I seem to recall, we kicked it off with a New Year's eve party so that the convention was already going at midnight. Only if they were having a convention in New Zealand, or Fiji, or Tonga or somewhere like that that night, could anyone have beaten us to the first convention of the year. And we were fairly sure that they weren't.

I recall that Syncon was Sydney's first sf convention since 1955. The 1956 (OlympiCon) and each one since, had been held in Melbourne. Late in 1969, when Syncon was being planned the AUSSIECON bid was starting to be talked about seriously (in the pages of NEW FORERUNNER - then in its first incarnation, for example). At that stage it was by no means a foregone conclusion (so we thought) that AUSSIECON would be held in Melbourne, and Syncon was planned partly with an eye to the need to prove that Sydney fandom was indeed again capable of mounting a major convention. Of course, in those days the name "Aussiecon" had not been decided upon; it was just just referred to generally as 'the Australia in '75 Convention'. After the EasterCon of 1970, at which time it was decided to make the bid a reality, the name "StrineCon" was in vogue for a while. I'm not sure when the Australia in '75 Committee hit upon "AussieCon" as a name - about the time the bid was won in 1973, I think. Not having been at AUSSIECON, I still find the whole thing a bit unreal and can hardly believe that we actually got it together to have a WorldCon in Australia.

I didn't see a lot of Syncon '70 either. One of my grandfathers died at the outset of it which involved me in a funeral and upset me more than a little: it was the first death close to me that I had ever encountered, and I was at an impressionable age.

Come to think of it, I've had bad luck all round with conventions I've helped organise, particularly Syncons. Syncon '72, of which I was also treasurer, I missed completely. I'm supposed to go to Syncon '77 about the time this issue of RATAPLAN is due to go to press; I wonder what will happen there? I'm not involved in organising that one though (I live in Adelaide now).

Like any other convention, Syncon '70 is chiefly memorable for its people. Like Ron Graham, then newly famous "Vision of Tomorrow" publisher, who I recall was immortalised in a movie (shot by Ron Clarke) coming out of the 'loo zipping his trousers up. If any of us had had a vision of tomorrow we'd have seen what a disaster the "Vision" project was going to be. But it all seemed like a good idea at the time.

Peter Darling and John Ryan were there, before they grew their beards (I think John has lost his again now, but I haven't seen him in recent years.) Robin Johnson in those days wore a toupee.

I remember that I persuaded my family to have Bruce Gillespie and Stephen Campbell stay with us. That was the first time most of fandom had met Stephen, about whose membership a furure was raging in ANZAPA at the time. Seems some members thought that ANZAPA was not suitable for general exhibition - the term 'ageism' hadn't been coined then. I don't recall whether the argument was defused any when the protagonists were actually confronted by this inoffensive 14-year old, but I doubt it. Nowadays, of course, he's an

inoffensive 21-year old hanging around the legendary Blessington Street, St. Kilda, former home of this very fanzine. In 1970, his greatest ambition in life was drawing comics - at Monaclave, when I last met him, he played me some excellent clarinet. We've all changed a lot since 1970.

One of my strongest non-memories of Syncon '70 is being locked in a storeroom with John Brosnan. We were both getting different things for different reasons, I think, when the door somehow accidentally locked behind us. The storeroom door on the Epping Girl Guides' Hall (where Syncon '70 was held in those pre-hotel convention days) could not be opened from either side, for some reason, without the key, and whoever had the key was nowhere to be found.

Or did we have the key with us, and find it was only able to be used from the other side? I don't remember that exactly either, but I do know that both John (who at that stage had yet to make his first professional sale and who also had yet to coin his description of John Brunner as "the rich man's Gary Mason") and I panicked. Each of us, I suspect, was a little suspicious about the other's sexual orientation - I still have a photo I took during that interlude of John frantically beating at the door, and I think I took turns. The window was barred, and it was about an hour (or maybe it only seemed like it) before we were freed.

Hmmm; come to think of it, I've heard a lot about convention organisers who ought to have been or wanted to be locked up, but John and I are the only two I've heard of who actually were.

LEIGH: The storeroom was only at the back of the meeting room too so that there was nobody at the convention who was not aware of what all the bannig was about and wasn't hopeful that something interesting would happen to one or other of the two. Meanwhile the convention programme continued on as though nothing was happening up the back and since it is something that everybody saw it is fairly widely remembered among people who were there. On the other hand, at BOFCON, Stephen Bates was trapped in the lift on his own for an hour or two and nobody much paid any attention. I remember peering into the lift with a couple of other people and hearing somebody comment that he had a couple of copies of AMAZING with him so that there was no need to worry on his behalf. Only a few people knew that somebody was trapped in the lift or knew who it was so that it did not become as important in fannish history (if such things can be said to be important).

Other people have had luck with Syncons too. Sue Clarke did all the hard work on getting the convention on and then she was with child and missed every last minute of the con.

Melbourne fans who have memories and/or histories that go back far enough will almost always tell you that Syncon '70 was one of the best conventions they've been too. The reason for this is simple enough, being because it was the first time that Melbourne fans had been to a con that they had not had to help organise and which they did not have to worry about. There was also the bus iness of having the first chance to meet Sydney fans whom we'd hardly had a chance to talk to before because when they had been down in Melbourne we'd generally been busy trying to organise conventions. The mere fact that they were busy organising a convention that time didn't stop us from talking to them. And of course, if they didn't answer because they were busy trying to juggle a couple of display boards at the time we could always stand around and talk to other Melbourne fans secure in the knowledge that we could chatter on as much as we liked and the convention would still happen.

Come to think of it, there have been, so far as I remember, only four conventions in Sydney over the last seven years, and the only one I missed was the one last Easter which happened around about the time that this issue was first promised to exist. I've heard reasonable reports of it and my experience of the earlier three (in '70, '72 and '75) were all enjoyable. In a lot of

ways the best was SYNCON '72 which was held, so a few of us discussed at the Oxford recently, in the best surroundings an Australian convention has suffered so far. For some reason I can't remember the name of the motel that it was held in, but as Australian fandoms introduction to hotel live-in conventions it has still to be bettered as far as the room went. The tv sets weren't up to much but on the other hand most of the rooms were huge and you could have held most of the programme items in any of the bedrooms.

Then there was the heated swimming pool up on the roof where John Bangsund and I sat sipping our drinks while Valma took a dip and later on Kevin Dillon joined in, using his plastic blow-up woman as a float.

The other notable thing was that at that convention they tried, for the second (and up until now, final) attempt at multi-programming. The layout of the place was that a hall ran up alongside the large convention room and there were partitions which would divide the room up into five - I think it was five - smaller rooms. Each smaller room had its own door off the hall and for some reason five was the number of programme items that the committee ran at the one time. I seem to recall that I found the whole thing most confusing and ended up missing or sleeping through just about all of those items. That was in the days when it was still fashionable to attend programme items.

The other notable thing... (have I said that before, well, if I have, this is more notable than the other one) about SYNCON '72 was that it was the first time that any Australian fans had run a convention at which we had had an official American guest, and one whose fare had been paid for from the fannish purse. Lesleigh Luttrell, (hi, Lesleigh) was the first DUFF winner and I guess that most people found it a bit unreal that here was living proof that fandom could get itself together enough to drag up the kind of money to support such expensive activities. Since then local fandom has gone ahead a bit and organised all sorts of expensive things and the next contribution springs from that.

Gosh, and at SYNCON '72 we also showed the AUSSIEFAN film for the first time, which was when, I suppose, a lot of people began to realise that we were really serious about the WorldCon business. When you think about it, Syncon '72 was a fantastic convention in more ways than we imagined at the time.

Although Syncon '75 was a nice quite and relaxed convention, Valma and I enjoyed it immensely after our recent (a few months anyhow) successes at BUBONICON and DISCON II. Even so the thing which I remember most plainly was the look of horror and panic which spread over the Gillespie face when, on the first night, Bruce discovered that there was no coffee in the college (it was a college convention and a good college it was too) and no prospect of having any for some time.

In moments of great stress Bruce tends to make fish imitations with his face and to wave his arms around a lot.

Which brings us naturally (or unnatrually some folks might say) to our next contribution.

W O M B A T W O R L D

Christopher Priest

introduction

"Wombatworld" is the product of a promise... or rather, of two promises. While I was in Australia, I faithfully promised Leigh that I'd write a report of my Melbourne trip for a Fanew Sletter supplement. As soon as I returned to England I was reminded of an earlier, and equally faithful, promise... that I'd write a report for the English fanzine Wrinkled Shrew. After much thought and worry - I couldn't do it twice - it seemed more sensible to stick to my earlier promise, because if I write about Australian fans for Australian fans I would only tell you a story you've already heard... on the other hand, if I describe you (if I may address you in the plural) to English fans, and let you

see what I say, it will not only satisfy a great deal of genuine curiosity about Melbourne and Melbourne fans (I've been plagued with questions ever since my return), but also let you know what I think of you. So this is what I wrote, in all its gory reminiscence. As far as possible I've tried to tell it honestly and objectively, but there are sure to be errors of omission and commission. My memory of that heady month is like a speeded-up dream: all colours and sounds and fleeting images. A blanket apology in advance, for any such errors... and also for any wounded egos that may result.

But this introduction is also partly to rectify one known omission. My sincerest thanks to Peter Darling and Elizabeth Foyster; Peter, who went to endless trouble to organise everything smoothly, and Elizabeth who put me up (and put up with me) for so long. And to everyone I met. Your constant friendliness and welcome was one of the warmest experiences of my life. It made it for me (and I'm sure for Vonda too) a memorable and happy trip, the recollection of which causes me nothing but pleasure.

Here's "Wombatworld":

The iron hand of fear flexed its fingers around my heart as I shuffled towards the security check at Heathrow Airport. Fear of flying is a common complaint... but for me a phobia it isn't. My fears are entirely rational, because I believe that large metal objects full of people, baggage and fuel cannot actually fly, but instead survive crashes. There are varying degrees of crashedness: the very gentle crashes are the most common, the less gentle ones effectively kill people. However, at the security check I encountered a minor problem that took my mind off the bloody plane for a few moments. I was carrying a copy of BREATHWORLD... the only copy, in fact, for there is only the original print in existence.. The Australian fans had asked to see this world-famous classic of cinematic art, and Harry Nadler and the others had daringly loaned it to me (daringly, because at the time he sent it to me I reckoned my chances of coming back were about 0.00001%). The point is that BREATHWORLD has a magnetic soundtrack, and passenger's hand-baggage is searched by X-Ray machine. Does this wipe magnetic stripes? I don't know, and still don't... but wasn't prepared to risk someone else's movie. So Heathrow was the first occasion of many (similar searches are conducted at every transit point in the flight) when I had to surrender it to manual search. There's something about film that arouses suspicions, and I got fairly browned off with explaining before the trip was over.

I had never been on a Boeing 747 before, and although I'd seen pictures of the cabin, and had been told that they were big, I was nevertheless taken by surprise. They are truly immense... it's rather like being inside a ship's lounge. I was shown to my seat (which was relatively cramped), and it was by a window looking out at a wing and one of the engines. (28½ hours later I was getting pretty sick of looking at this wing and engine.)

While waiting for take-off I started reading Maya 12/13, which (Rob Jackson be forever praised) had arrived that very morning, and which I'd been saving up all day to use it to keep my mind off air-crashes. Glancing through Pete Weston's garrulous memoirs, I saw names from the past: Charles Platt (whatever happened to old Twisher Platt? I mused... selling T-shirts isn't he?), and Dicky Howett (drawing dirty cartoons now), and Peter White (old buddy of Platt's; whatever happened to him?). There was a sort of electronic bonging noise, and a voice, breaking rudely into my musing, said: "This is your Captain speaking..." Suddenly, paranoia exploded around me. With horrid certainty I remembered what had happened to Peter White. He had become A PILOT WITH BRITISH AIRWAYS! I held my seat in terror: the stewardesses looked grim-faced, the other passengers were clutching paper bags to their mouths, the motion of the aircraft became unsteady... and we were still only taxiing. I forced myself to listen to what the Captain was saying... and at last he mentioned the names of the crew. White wasn't there; momentary relief. But the paranoia never really left me, knowing as I did that the crew would be

changed several times during the journey. Do the crew see the passenger-list? Would White remember me? If he did, would he drive the plane into the nearest air-pocket, or deliberately burst the tyres on landing, just to spite me for the Great Chimera Films Disaster of '64?

Well, we finally got off uneventfully. From the consumer's point of view, the first take-off you do in a 747 is memorable; the power of those fucking engines is incredible, and the first burst of noise is simultaneously exhilarating and terrifying. I was near the back of the plane, and as the nose goes up an Archimedean principle gives you a quite distinct sensation of sinking, and you expect to hear a loud scraping noise as the tail bashes against the runway.

A few impressions from the outward flight:

Teheran, where the plane was surrounded by troops (theirs, not ours), and we weren't allowed out. Bombay, where it was 10.00 am local time, and it felt like 11.00 pm; jet-lag creeping up. The perfumed, shitty smell of India, coming in over the kerosene; glimpses of the shanty-towns around the airport, and tents on the perimeter; the transit-lounge where you could buy cholera-infested Coca-Cola and cotton shirts (I bought one of each); a huge sign saying BOMBAY, GATEWAY TO INDIA...WELCOME TO THE PEACE-LOVING DEMOCRACY OF INDIA, and a huge photograph of Indira Gandhi... a sure sign of something less than peace and democracy. Etc etc. Then a long flight across India and the Indian Ocean. Kula Lumpur just after sunset (by my watch it was now 10.00 am), four great thunderclouds flicker-lit by lightning. A hair raising landing, a steep turn between hills, a sudden drop, another turn, another fast dive and crunch, you're down. Amazing tropical heat as we left the aircraft: I naively thought I was walking in the exhaust of the engines. In the transit lounge I bought some postcards (\$1 each): shots of incredibly fat and ugly naked women, grinning toothlessly at the camera; the caption on the back said "Sea Dayak Beauties, Sarawak". Wonderful view from the transit-lounge balcony: the airport tarmac, littered with dozens of propellor-driven planes, and in the centre the great, beautiful British Airways 747, floodlit and busy... looking like a sort of airborne gunboat, flying the flag. Then onwards... hours later, my first glimpse of Australia from ten miles up, looking down through the clouds at the dark land... a curling worm of bush-fire. Sydney, where the plane of Brits was sprayed with insecticide and germicide to stop their horrid British colds infecting a nation. Then Melbourne. It really exists.

I had left London Airport at 7.30 pm on a Monday; by my watch it was now midnight of the Tuesday. According to the locals it was 11.00 am on the Wednesday. I had had precisely two hours sleep. That's jet-lag, folks.

Vast queues at Immigration. The Australian passengers walked regally through their own channel; the second-class citizens of the world (Wops, Wogs and Brits) clustered noisily in their own reservation. I joined what was then the shortest queue (about 100 yards long), and for an hour or more watched the backs of people's heads, peering anxiously forward as one would-be illegal immigrant after another was carried off in chains. Most of the owners of these heads were elderly Greeks and Italians, clutching suspicious-looking, bright-coloured passports. In the end I got through (I was carrying neither firearms, dangerous drugs nor hoof and mouth disease), collected my baggage, which was miraculously waiting for me, and walked expectantly through a door which was actually marked EXIT, but which I felt should more appropriately have been marked TO AUSTRALIA.

Waiting on the other side of the door was one of the biggest crowds I've ever seen in my life. Where was Robin Johnson? He was the only person in Melbourne fandom I was likely to recognise (apart from Bruce Gillespie, but I knew he'd be too busy washing his underpants to be there). I could hardly remember what Robin looked like... I was confused, you see, by the Aussiecon



bidding film, in which bald Robin had worn a wig. No sign of a fannish presence, except a huge banner poking up from the back of the crowd:

WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA...Luigi. I dumped my bags, went in search. After about a quarter of an hour (there must have been several thousand people crammed into the arrivals lounge, mostly Greeks and Italians waiting for elderly relatives), I found Robin and two other people, staring amiably in the wrong direction, apparently not waiting for me. An unhysterical reception, I thought.

We walked into the open air. It was clean. The sky was blue. It was hot. It was January. Suddenly, I wanted to go home.

(The other two people waiting with Robin Johnson. One was the incredibly famous John Foyster. John is of singular appearance: he has a black, rabbinical beard and wild black hair; palish face, spectacles. He often wears a paint-streaked tracksuit. The other was Peter Darling, who, for the six months before the journey had been writing me disconcertingly familiar letters. It seemed that he used to live in England, that we were old friends. Indeed, it later transpired that he had once even been to a party at my place. However, my memory for faces is reliably worse than my memory for names... and this particular ole buddy of mine turned out to be a perfect stranger. Peter is tallish, stoutish, and full of information. He is a born organiser.)

My memory of the rest of that day - and indeed of the two or three days following - is made rather vague by the effects of jet-lag. I remember we went for lunch in a restaurant in the centre of Melbourne, and I had my first two glasses of Fosters. (Australians drink their beer in small, poofy, schooner-sized glasses; the first surprise of many.) Then we went to where I was going to be staying: a flat in the basement of Elizabeth Foyster's house. The four of us sat around and talked, and sometime in the late afternoon we drove over to see Vonda McIntyre, who was staying at the house of Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown in Brunswick. On the way we passed Bruce Gillespie's flat (Bruce wasn't there). Actually, my main memory of this car-journey is that I suddenly developed double vision, and couldn't keep my head up straight. My eyes felt red, my body was hot and sticky, and Peter Darling was informing me about Australia but I couldn't hear what he was saying. In the throes of chronic jet-lag, I met Vonda, and Val, and Leigh... and a crowd of other fans, none of whom I can now remember. I don't even know what we talked about or why. The next thing I knew was that we were back at Elizabeth Foyster's house, it was 7.00 pm (actually, by my uncorrected watch, 8.00 am, probably on Wednesday... and I'd still only had two hours sleep since Sunday night), and there was a bed. I crawled in, and the confusing, upside-down, heatwave-January world of Australia went decently away.

I woke up at 3.00 in the morning (their time), ravenously hungry. I sulked for a bit, then went back to sleep and woke up again at 9.30 am. I found myself in an empty house in a strange country... and upstairs there was a telephone with a list of numbers Peter Darling had scrawled beside it. I tried one; spoke to Peter. I tried another; spoke to Bruce Gillespie. I went for a walk (the heat was killing), and had breakfast in a sandwich-bar in a part of Melbourne called Toorak (if you can imagine a place something like the posher part of East Finchley plonked down where Bayswater is, you might get some idea of what it's like), and after more walking and a ride on a tram, I met Bruce Gillespie and Rob Gerrand for lunch. X

By this time, impressions were coming in helter-skelter, and I was beginning to feel as I had done the day before. Bruce was an old friend of course, and I was pleased to discover that he hadn't changed a bit. He still drinks something like fourteen gallons of coffee a day, and still has a disastrous private life, eternal hope dashed by crushing blow, which he carries on in public. Rob Gerrand was someone whom I knew only by his occasional writing in SF Commentary, but he was one of the most likeable people I met in Melbourne. He is amazingly handsome and debonair (someone else told me he'd recently

been featured as Bachelor of the Month in a magazine), works as some kind of Public Relations Officer for the Post Office Telephones, and had been a member of Ursula LeGuin's workshop in Melbourne in 1975.

After the meal we walked over to Space Age Bookshop in Swanston Street, where I met Merv Binns and Paul Stevens. The bookshop is much larger than I'd imagined; it's roughly the same size as the world-famous Baker Street Bookshop. Although it carries a huge specialist selection of sf books and related stuff, it is a general bookshop too. In the room upstairs there is the largest collection of second-hand books, back-issues of magazines and pulps I've ever seen on public sale. The price of the second-hand stuff is comparable with British and American prices... and I'm ashamed to report that later in my stay I bought rather a large pile of it. I liked both Merv and Paul; Merv has that faintly worried air borne by all professional booksellers (and tells the usual horror-stories about the invidious ways of the publishing world)... Paul is a cat-loving lunatic who, in spite of what I suspect is massive shyness, has partly fulfilled ambitions to be a stand-up comic. (More on this later.)

In the evening I met Elizabeth Foyster for the first time (my jet-lag crash-out had made me miss her on the first evening), and we went to a place called the Lyceum Club with Vonda, Peter Darling, and Leigh and Val. The Lyceum fulfils a long-felt want: a ladies' club where men can only go as visitors, where the ladies do all the ordering, and where they pick up the tab. Although the effects of jet-lag were homing in on me again, my memories of that evening are somewhat more cogent. Even so, I'm not really sure what we talked about. Another early night, followed by an awakening at 3.00 am, and wondering if there were crumpets still for tea. (Real time: 4.00 in the afternoon.)

The following day was the one when the convention started. This was called Monaclave (the "Mona-" coming from Monash University, on whose campus it took place; memories of Mancon, my only other campus-con, were thrust behind me). I spent a large part of the day with Damien Broderick, from Sydney, whom I bumped into at Space Age at lunchtime. (Damien: thin, long-haired, red-eyed... a compulsive writer, and callused by years behind a typewriter into a cynicism I both enjoyed and recognised.) In the evening, before setting off to Monash, Vonda McIntyre and I and an Adelaide fan called Gary Mason went to Peter Darling's house in a remote suburb called Blackburn. Here it was that I met my first true-born Australians, genuine natives to that island continent. They appeared in eight-legged, furry splendour, fully twelve feet in diameter. While Gary and I went for a suddenly agreed upon walk, Vonda and Peter did their bit for arachnicide. Soon after this we went to the con.

This was one of the most pleasant parts of the whole trip. I've now been to cons in Britain, France, Germany and Australia... and they're much the same anywhere. The British fans have the most fun, the French fans have the most money, the German fans have the most rules... and the Australian fans have the most booze. They also have what might be called sporadic programming, with hour-long pauses between items. Monaclave had the usual mix of fannish and sercon; I didn't see all the programme, because the conversations in the bar were more convivial. There was, though, one programme-item that I particularly enjoyed: a formal debate on whether or not science fiction was sexist. Proposing the motion were John and Elizabeth Foyster; opposing it were Christine McGowan (last year's DUFF winner) and Bill Wright. John Foyster revealed himself as a thoroughgoing troublemaker by delivering an elegant speech to the effect that not only was science fiction sexist (to which many would agree) but that it was a good thing too (to which many wouldn't). Christine McGowan gave an equally amusing and interesting speech, the basis of which was that even to allow sf as sexist literature was to dignify it with qualities it didn't possess. I thought all this was great stuff, because both main speakers were good at making out academic arguments for the hell of it, but it annoyed the shit out of Vonda, who thereafter could hardly bear to speak to John Foyster.

(Vonda: Perhaps it's unfair to introduce Vonda immediately after reporting her reaction to this debate, but it was after this programme-item that I began to get to know her. I don't think we got on too well for the first few days... I was terrified of her at first. Nebula-winner, influential American writer, and all that. She is deeply serious about sexist matters, but not strident... and I think that what probably annoyed her about John Foyster's speech was that he was joking about something important to her. Towards the end of the trip, when we were both less guarded, Vonda and I got on pretty well, and I for one was regretting that we'd spent the first week or so in armed truce. I still feel I hardly got to know her.)

Other events at the con worthy of note: The showing of BREATHWORLD three times, for instance. For many people at the con it was the first time they had seen most of the people in the movie, and the jokes about the pro-writers, especially, fell flat on their collective noses the first time the film was shown. On the second showing, I explained who some of the "actors" were... but to be frank even I was hard put to recognise the youthful Jim White, the dark-haired Ted Tubb, and the slim Harry Harrison. Chuck Partington, incidentally, now has an orgasmic following amongst the sub-teen Australian femmefans. Another film shown was SHIRLEY THOMPSON AND THE ALIENS... an Australian commercial movie made in about 1970, and definitely worth seeing if it ever comes across here. On the Sunday night (or it might have been Saturday) Lee Harding put in an appearance at the con.

(Lee Harding: Fair-haired, bearded and be-denimed, Lee is something of a controversial figure in Melbourne fandom. With controversy goes talk... everybody talks about him... It took some time, but I grew to know and like him. Lee's lady, the stunning Irene Pagram, has an extraordinary sense of humor, from which I've only just started to recover. Apparently, she once went to a fancy-dress party in "period" costume: one of those sheep-shearer's hats with corks dangling from the brim, except in this case Irene substituted tampons for the corks. "Period". Get it? I never felt entirely safe while Irene was around. I wish Lee and Irene would visit England.)

Back to the con. For me, the best thing about it was that it gave me a chance to meet and get to know a lot of the people in Melbourne fandom. Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown, for instance - whom I've mentioned in passing up to now - spent a lot of time with me, and I soon recognised them as fellow spirits. Leigh is tall and stocky, has hair down to his waist, always wears a wolly hat, and glints somewhat myopically from behind his spectacles. Valma is red-haired and slim, and always seems to be laughing. They feel about AC/DC (a local heavy rock band) the way I feel about Status Quo, and that's okay, and they think Auntie Jack is as funny as I think Fawlty Towers is funny, and that's okay too. They are royalists and cat-lovers, Leigh composes electronic music and Valma is doing a degree in drama-teaching. X

Also memorable from the con: Ken Ford (if you can imagine someone who is a cross between Brian Parker, Roy Kettle and Harry Harrison, you're almost halfway to Ken Ford), Carey Handfield (one of those people who is quietly and deeply involved in fannish matters, without making too great a meal of it), Kitty Vigo (who looks and talks uncannily like June Hall of Sphere Books, but is altogether a different kind of lady; during the workshop, which she organised, she reluctantly became a motherly soul), Don Ashby (member of the Magic Puddin' Club - I can't explain what that is - and would be Viking), David Grigg (who has published two juvenile novels in Australia, and is currently finishing his first sf novel), and Paul Stevens, of Paul Stevens Show fame. Paul played Anti-Fan in the Aussiecon bidding film, and one of the traditions of Australian cons is that hour when Paul puts on his show. Part of the tradition is that the jokes are awful, the sketches are ghastly, and that both are worse than the time before. I've only seen one Show, but by all appearances the tradition is being maintained; it was terrific. I hope that if (a) Britain wins the Worldcon bid for '79, and (b) the Aussies do as they say they will and come over to Seacon in force, a

slot is found in the programme for this hour of nonsense. It's fannish, it's funny, and we've got nothing like it.

After the con, I had a fortnight more or less to myself, during which (now thankfully free of the last effects of jet-lag) I explored as much of Melbourne as it was possible to, and met many more people.

To an English visitor, Melbourne has a pleasantly familiar aspect. The downtown area is very much like the Oxford Street part of the West End of London, with only the trams being noticeably different. The nice thing about the Melbourne trams is partly that they are a picturesque and old-fashioned form of travel, and are used (as opposed to being a tourist attraction; no tourists, incidentally), and partly the effect they have on the rest of the traffic. Wherever the trams run, cars and lorries have a bad time of it... and as a consequence the streets of central Melbourne are remarkably free of traffic and pollution. Natives of Melbourne will find this hard to believe, but the heaviest traffic I saw in peak-hour times was just about equivalent to the lightest conditions we are used to in London. I was with drivers who visibly paled at the sight of lines of cars fifty yards long: if they only knew what we have to put up with.

The inner suburbs are also pleasant. A lot of the houses date back to the beginning of the century or before. A typical house of this sort would be a terraced, two-storeyed building, with a balcony on the first floor. This balcony would be embellished with ornate cast-iron work, and the gables would be shaped and decorated. The roof would sometimes be tiled... or, more frequently, made of corrugated iron, often red-coloured.

The outer suburbs are abominable. Melbourne, like Los Angeles, lies in a broad, flat basin surrounded by mountains, and the suburbs are crawling outwards to the mountains. One can drive for mile after mile down broad, straight roads, on either side of which are filling-stations, drive-in cinemas, supermarkets, bottle-shops, etc. In the side-roads are what seem like millions of tiny middle-class bungalows, each with its patch of green, each identical to all its neighbours. I found this depressing...

...As I did the two beaches I visited, which were fly-blown, dirty, and smelling of sewage (I believe that the beaches are better further away from the city). It was the beaches that brought home to me the thing I found oddest about Melbourne. What it boils down to is this: there is a conflict between a Westernized, urbanized way of life and a physical environment and climate exactly similar to the Mediterranean.

Like London, Melbourne closes down at about 11.30 pm. Like London, Melbourne has no pavement cafes, no after-hours street-life. The Mediterranean way of life is a product of the climate: nothing is so important that it can't be done tomorrow, and the afternoons are too hot to do anything except sleep. The two great pleasures in life are sitting around doing nothing and walking around doing nothing.

In Melbourne, people rush home from the office to their suburban boxes. They watch TV, and drink ice-cold beer from the local drive-in bottle shop, or invite their friends round for a barbecue on the patio, and they keep the doors and windows closed against the flies and mosquitoes, and shiver in the blast of the air-conditioner. All this isn't a complaint about another city, just an observation of an incongruity. Next door to where Leigh and Val live there is a family of migrant Greeks (people kept telling me that Melbourne is the third largest Greek city in the world; I kept telling them that Athens is the third largest Australian city), and they would sit out in their garden, drinking and playing cards, until midnight. I'm sure people like these Greeks would feel the strangeness more keenly than I did. The beaches were a symptom of this: just bits of fucked-up shoreline, and I felt that with a bit of effort the local authorities could have easily made them comparable to those I've seen in Europe.

The determination to stay a part of the western world was best manifested for me by a small thing: lawn-sprinklers. Having seen Britain suffer its famous drought last summer, I was slightly shocked by the apparent profligate waste of water on grass; sprinklers were spraying everywhere. I was told that there was no water-shortage in Melbourne, but that's not the point. Grass doesn't grow (and indeed starts dying) when the air temperature goes above about 80°, and to water a lawn in that sort of heat is literally pouring it away. And yet the need for bright-green grass is a sort of symbolic link with the cooler lands from which most Australians originate... and so the sprinklers sputtered and spat all day and every day, on to grass turning brown under the wilting heat of the sun. I think I would have actually preferred it if the gardens, public parks, etc., had been allowed to grow with shrubs better suited to the climate.

While in this generalizing frame of mind, I think perhaps the most pleasant surprise of all about the trip was the nature of the people I met. (When reading this, bear in mind that I was mixing in mostly fannish company, and stayed in the Melbourne area the whole time; these might be specialist conditions to bear on an otherwise valid generalization.) I don't quite know what I had expected. The sort of Australian you meet in Earls Court Road - or you don't meet, if you've any sense - is what the Australians themselves call an okker, and is the sort of pear-shaped, singlet-wearing, Zapata-moustached, short-trousered Pommy basher that the Auntie Jack mob send up so ruthlessly. The real Australians - or at least, those I met - are nothing like that. Apart from the different names and different faces, I felt at home with everybody almost at once. I even became deaf to the Australian accent after about three days (it's not an accent at all - at least, not in Melbourne - but more a different intonation from the rather flat, downbeat way of speaking that the English have.) It's worth remarking, though, that the middle-class housewives from the outer suburbs who phone-in to the radio-stations during the day really do talk like Edna Everage.

During the next fortnight... I met Gerald Murnane one evening; Gerald is a novelist (not sf) who wrote a generous review of one of my books a few months back. I went over to see him with Bruce Gillespie and Rob Gerrand... for the first five minutes Gerald thought Rob was me, and vice-versa. Why am I telling you this? I went to Hanging Rock, where the film about the Picnic had been made. That same day, I went to the farm in Kyneton owned by John and Elizabeth Foyster, where we were eaten by flies and midges, hopped on by grasshoppers, and slithered at by a venomous black snake. One evening I went to the Magic Pudding Club - I still can't explain - and had dinner. "Don't eat the food!" said everyone else, clutching their throats in horror. I did, and we had something that looked like stuffed chestnut leaves and they were very good; that was one of the best evenings I had. On another day I went with Val and Vonda to the Old Melbourne Jail, and saw Ned Kelly's death-mask; also the beam of the gibbet where he was hanged... except it wasn't the original, but the new one they'd installed to hang Mick Jagger instead. One night there was a Nova Mob meeting, perhaps best remembered for John Foyster (roused to ire by my subjective value-judgements about sf) claiming that no American sf writer could write as well as Mark Twain; another sentiment that went down like a bomb with Vonda McIntyre. I went to the movies twice with Leigh and Val: THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND was one film, CADDIE the other. Both home-grown product, both excellent. On two or three occasions John Foyster ("I'm going to take you away from all these fans") took me to meet his own friends outside fandom; they were mostly people who were teachers, or who worked in education administration, and much as I felt more at home in fannish company, it did make a refreshing change. One glorious day I went with Val and Vonda to the wildlife sanctuary ("zoo" is a dirty word) in Healseville. Here I saw kangaroos, echidnas, emus, a platypus, wallabies, koalas... and best of all, some WOMBATS! The best animal in the world is the Hairy-Nosed Wombat; its way of passing a hot day is to lie on its back in the

shade, and, every now and then, scratch its belly with an indolent paw. For a few minutes I saw the future of the world, as I would like it to be.

Events closed in on me after this, because of the workshop - which was, after all, the only reason I was in Australia at all - was about to start. That occupied me for a week... and after a couple of days respite, which seemed to be one long party, I headed for Tullamarine Airport in the company of Val, John, Robin, Vonda, and some baggage that was now considerably heavier. We ate an airport lunch; Robin started talking about Great Air-Crashes I Have Known.

By this time, the vivid memories of my fear about Peter White's Revenge had emerged, and I'd changed my flight to a Qantas jet. If you've ever seen a British Airways 747 next to a Qantas 747 you might doubt the wisdom of this move (because BA keep their aircraft well-painted and repaired-looking, whereas Qantas jets have a homely tattiness to them that doesn't inspire confidence), but Qantas actually have the best international safety record in the world, and that wasn't the least consideration. Be that as it may, my simple, unprejudiced consumer report is that British Airways made me feel safe, comfortable and welcome, whereas Qantas did not. A lot to do with it was the way they landed (or gently crashed) their machine, the sensation being roughly similar to that of being thrown off a twelve-foot wall strapped to a seat, a lot to do with the way something that looked suspiciously like a fuel-pipe burst as we crunched and bumped our way into Perth, and a lot to do with the way they didn't either warn us about the imminence of heavy turbulence or apologize for it afterwards (British Airways did). However, in spite of their best efforts to kill me, they did manage somehow to deliver me safely to Heathrow... and I walked off with a second dose of terminal jet-lag (and a heavy cold I'd caught in Australia) into a wet and blustery dawn. I saw puddles, with the wind rippling the surface. I saw grass, ridiculously, soakily green. I saw trees, black and gaunt and wintry. You can have no notion of how beautiful it seemed.

Conclusions? In no particular order of importance:

(1) Surprise: At almost everything, but especially at the fannishness of the fandom, and the continual pleasantness of the people. (No anti-Pom attitudes anywhere.)

(2). Amazement: At the physical environment of the place. The unspeakable immensity of the outback as we flew over it, the blue hazy light over the hills, the eucalyptus trees with their smell of cough-drops and their stringy, drooping bark, the redness of the soil, the yellowness of the grass, the spaciousness of the city, the upside-down Moon and constellations.

(3) The weather: It seemed to go in four- or five-day cycles, growing steadily hotter until you expected your head to explode... and then becoming sharply much cooler. The temperature was over 100° at least three or four times. The worst day was when the wind blew from the north, and there was no escape anywhere from the heat.

(4) I saw no black faces anywhere.

(5) Wariness of "progressive" legislation: Seat-belts have to be worn in cars, and, as a consequence I'm sure, I have never seen so much lazy, selfish, and downright dangerous driving as there was in the uncluttered streets of Melbourne. Six bad collisions took place in my presence. A breakdown truck is parked permanently outside Elizabeth Foyster's home, to pick up the pieces from the daily crashes on a near-by junction. Smoking too has been legislated against, in vindictive ways, with a socially divisive effect.

(6) Envy: Of a technological breakthrough that some enterprising businessman in Britain or the States ought to copy at once: 3- and 4-litre cardboard casks of wine, which have a collapsible plastic bag inside, so that the last glass of wine is as fresh as the first. (Coolabah Riesling and I became old friends.)

(7) Amusement: At the sight of grown men going to the office in short trousers.

(8) Drama, sexism, education and music were the most frequent subjects of conversation. Science fiction rated a poor fifth.

(9) Relief: That not everyone in Australia is bronzed and muscly. My pasty, cold-climate complexion was not as out of place as I'd feared.

(10) The mini-skirt is alive and well, and blowing in the wind in Australia. Denim is comparatively rare (comparative to London, that is). Almost everyone looks healthy, prosperous and happy. Melbourne today looked to me like London used to look in the late 1960's.

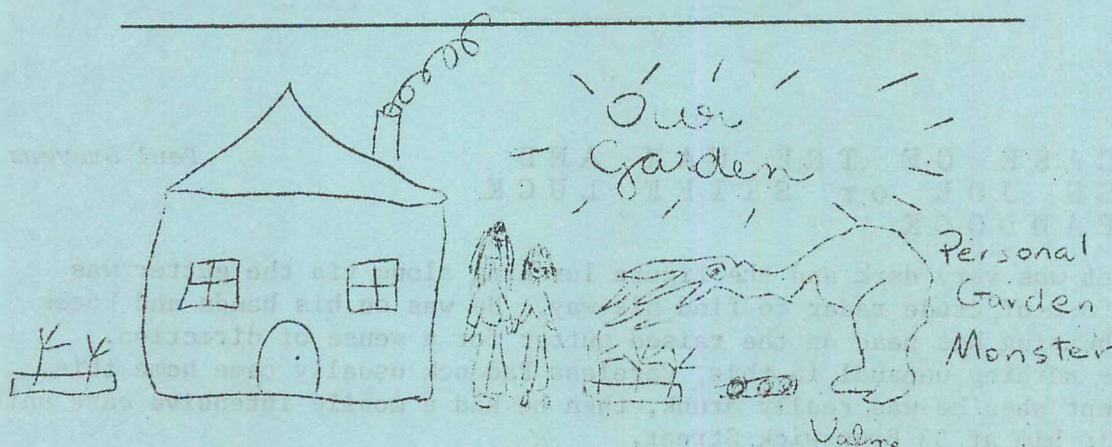
(11) By my calculation, best steak costs about 50p per pound. (The calculation is difficult because Australia has metricated, and uses incomprehensible currency.) In a restaurant, you are given approximately twice as much meat for approximately two-thirds of the cost over here.

(12) Conviction: That London should take its fleet of trams out of mothballs and get them rolling again. I hope that Melbourne never inflicts on itself a "progressive" city administration that phases out their own trams.

(13) New books are expensive. Paperbacks cost approximately three times what they cost here; hardbacks cost approximately double.

(14) I came away with a genuine desire to return one day, and see the rest of the country.

Apologies to any of my new friends in Australia who happen to see this if I haven't mentioned you. I love you all, you sods, and I'm missing you already.



VALMA. Since our lovely little house has a back yard, Leigh and I have decided to have a garden. Getting back to nature and all that stuff... GROW YOUR OWN... Get with the soil...

So far we have managed to weed the front garden, and trim the grape vine. I'm not allowed to mention how we managed to cut down the fig tree we are going to grow because Leigh will become embarrassed. We have a compost bin and a book called The Australian Gardener's Guide to Pests and Diseases. We also watch an English Television Show called "The Good Life" which discusses such erudite things as how music will affect your plants growth. We saw a delightful episode whereby an experiment was conducted to see whether a bean or a pea (I can't quite remember which) would react to love and warmth. The bean or pea was exposed to a minutes wrath from the male and a minutes love from the female (pretty sexist stuff this). Of course, there was a control pea or bean in the middle. Unfortunately although the pea or bean that was exposed to love and warmth came up first, the nasty lady from next door came over and ruined the experiment. Apart from giving handy hints to such would be gardeners as ourselves, it is a very funny show.

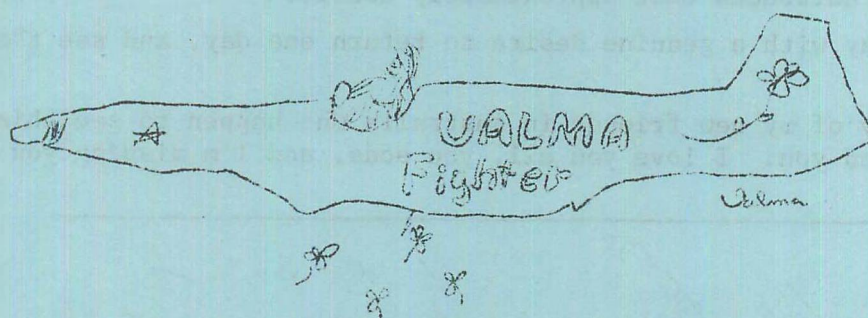
Much to our disgust we have discovered horrible little wormies killing off some of our lovely flowers. Erkie little white things they were. As Auntie Jack would say "Erkie Perkies". Not being at one with the soil and having that intimate relationship with one's flowers that tells you what to do, we

referred to our gardening guide on Pests and Diseases. An index would have been very handy but I guess people who write gardening books think that as well as finding a union with the soil, you will do so with the book and the disease you are looking for will open itself unto you. Well, we found, by means of page by page elimination, a ghastly nastie called an eel worm which seemed as though it might be the erkie perkie we had making a guts of itself on our flowers.

One remedy which amused me greatly was the planting and subsequent growing of brown winter marigolds. Apparently, the little erkies feast on the marigolds' roots and gorge themselves to such an extent that they commite mass suicide. Now since my marigolds had all the symptoms described as a result of the eel worm, this means that our garden, our lovely garden with its pretty flowers has been the scene of... mass suicide.

Oh dear, I don't think I can cope. This gardening is getting far too involved.

Relaxing hobby this gardening. Maybe I should take up jet fighting.



THE CASE OF THE WAX AND POLISH JOB or STIFF LUCK FOOTPADDOCK

Paul Stevens

The street was very dark and the figure lurching along via the gutter was using a form of crude radar to find his way. He was on his hands and knees and was bumping his head on the raised gutter for a sense of direction. There was nothing unusual in this, Careless Paddock usually came home this way, except when he was really drunk, then he had a mobile intensive care unit to deposit him at 33 Brunswick Street.

As Careless crawled homeward, his head filled with thoughts of black coffee and asprin he failed to note the dark cloaked figure lurking behind the nearby dustbin, a spaghetti filled sock in its gloved hand. Sounds drifted up the empty street... the bump of a head against the kurb, the rattle of a dustbin lid, a cat howling, the thud of a sockfull of wet spaghetti against a passing head, the collapse of a body into a gutter full of discarded Colonel Sanders Chicken in a Basket wrappers and Ronald MacDonald chip containers, and the sound of a body being dragged away.

* * * *

Pullon Steffaans, the famous, handsome, strong, magnetic and modest detective smiled at himself in the mirror and rippled his muscle. "What a handsome devil," he smirked to himself. His image shattered and his trousers fell down. "Everyone's a critic," he muttered, brushing broken glass out of his hair. Just then the phone rang. Steffaans answered it.

"Ah so, this is Hung Foo Chinese laundry. You want socks washed?"

"Steffaans? This is Don Ashcan...."

"Ah so, sorry to say but famous Steffaans has gone to Alaska for the Elephant shooting season, not be back for many months."

"Stop mucking about Steffaans, this is important."

"Steffaans say to tell you he not have any money left, need it all to buy Elephant guns and snowshoes, none left for DUFF contributions."

Steffaans hung up and then tore the cord out by the roots.

An hour or so later an upset Don Ashcan was hammering on Steffaans front door. "Open up you bastard," he screamed.

Steffaans shook his head sadly. "You asked for it. Open up I will." He pulled a lever and the doormat under Ashcan's feet swung down on silent hinges and Ashcan disappeared from sight. There was silence for a second and then a loud splash followed by screams and roaring sounds.

Steffaans smiled nastily over his brandy. "I think my pet alligators like Ashcan." He switched on the remote TV cameras just in time to see Ashcan execute a climb straight up a vertical wall whilst fourteen frustrated alligators snapped at his heels. A few desperate hand over hands along the rafters and Ashcan once again stood on Steffaans front doormat peering down through the open hole he had just climbed through at fourteen sets of alligator jaws. "I get the very distinct impression that Steffaans doesn't want to see me," he mused, pulling the shreds of his clothes into some sort of order. "I'll have to approach this problem another way."

Later the same day the postman delivered a large, six foot high packing case to Steffaans front door. "If that's collect then I'm not accepting delivery," Steffaans told the exhausted postman. "And watch out for that alligator pit behind you, I haven't got around to fixing the loose doo... nevermind. Saves on my meat bill I suppose."

Dragging the packing case inside Steffaans set about opening it with a crowbar. Finally the contents stood revealed, vitrified Careless Footpaddock. "Jeez," muttered Steffaans, "I knew Careless got paralytic drunk at times but this is ridiculous."

* * * *

Ashcan drew in a deep breath and raised the flagon to his lips. He proceeded to pour the contents down his gullet.

"Jeez!" mused Steffaans to himself as he watched the level of the flagon drop like the Australian economy under a liberal government, "he must have hollow legs."

Ashcan finished the flagon and threw it into the far corner with the accompaniment of a loud burp. "Bloody good drop that. What was that?"

"Claret DeCorosive 1977."

"Yeah! Good drop that... ahhh... any more?" Ashcan's eyes lit up like aircraft landing lights.

"Sure," Steffaans told him, "I've got several one hundred gallon vats of the stuff downstairs. I'm saving it to use in cleaning out my septic tank and killing a few weeds but you are more than welcome to...." But Ashcan was no longer there and from the cellar the sound of the door being bodily torn from its hinges and then, a few seconds later, a loud splash. Ashcan had gone swimming.

"Now I know why I don't invite him around here more often," mused Steffaans.

* * * *

"The problem as I see it," Steffaans told an extremely hung over Ashcan a few hours later, "is who would have a motive for wanting to give Careless a wax job."

Ashcan lifted his head from the ice bucket and looked at Steffaans with a pair of bloodshot beadies. "We could start with anyone who hated him."

"We could, but we can't arrest the entire state of Victoria. No, we can narrow it down a bit more than that."

"All Melbourne fandom?" Ashcan asked.

"No, even more... to one specific person and the clue is in tonight's paper, The OLD PACKPACER, The Adelaide edition."

Ashcan forced his bleary eyeballs to focus on the print.

ALL ADELAIDE SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM DISAPPEARS MASS KIDNAPPING SUSPECTED.
RANSOM NOTE EXPECTED. POLICE BAFFLED.

"There's only one man in all Australia who hates Adelaide fandom that much," Steffaans stated, his eyes glowing with the clean power of his deductive reasoning.

"You don't mean..." Ashcan said, suddenly realising.

"Yes," Steffaans declaimed, "Careless was only a dry run - so to speak. All Adelaide fandom has been kidnapped by the fiend with the intention of turning them all into wax statues. (In Juff Horliss' case that could be a distinct improvement.)"

"But, Pullon," Ashcan asked, "Aren't you going to ring the police and tell them who did this mass kidnapping. I mean, he might not yet have waxed the Adelaide fans."

"A good point, Ashcan, a good point. Yes, I shall make a phone call to Inspector Johaan Bangschutt in Adelaide... right after dinner, tomorrow night. More wine?"

* * * *

Well, that was the end of the case. Several nights later, right after Steffaans phone call to Bangschutt, the villain was apprehended with a set of waxed and polished Adelaide fans. He was later sentenced to solitary confinement for life with nothing to read but old Vargo Statten novels.

Once more Melbourne fandom reigned supreme in Australia and at every convention the waxed set of Adelaide fans were brought out and admired and then put away until next year. Careless Footpaddock was given to Don Ashcan's brother, Crane, as a wedding present when he married Crystaline McGallon. They used him as a coatrack and conversation piece in their new home.

And the villain? Well that was... yes... Lee Hardup, the struggling author. You see, he had been refused a Ditmar by the Adelaide fans who had said nasty things about his ability as an author, and he burned for revenge at the slight to his artistic soul.

The plashing sound... ohhh that's only Ashcan in the cellar, he's gone swimming again!

* * * *

And so ends another case from the files of Pullon Steffaans, Famous Fannish Defective and Sewers Cleaned While You Wait.

LEIGH: I was going to finish off my bit by saying how much I like collecting fanzines. I was also going to say that fanzines take up a lot of room, but I guess that anybody who collects fanzines knows all about that. And those fans who are just starting out should be made aware of the dangers of the habit.

But then I decided that talking about fanzine collecting is not the greatest way to end up my end of this fanzine. You should all be hoping for some fine fannish writing by this time, but after typing out fifty odd stencils I don't have the enthusiasm for being fine and fannish. People who have typed up fifty page fanzines will be aware of the feeling, and those fans

who haven't typed up such large fanzine yet in their careers should perhaps be spared such knowledge.

So what I decided to write about, finally, was the famous Paul Stevens. I'm sure that everybody want to know all about Paul.

Only the other day he announced to me that he was thinking of standing for DUFF again. Third time lucky I thought to myself and then Paul sort of casually asked me who I would be nominating. This is what is known in the trade as a "hint". Now this business about nominating people for DUFF is a sore point with me and a fine argument raiser between me and my memory. It was my memory, you see, that allowed me to promise two different people that I would nominate them for DUFF. I may have promised the same to one or two others in a moment of mad generosity, but I can't remember for sure.

My memory is the worst one I can remember meeting. Valma tells me that I should keep a diary to note down all the things that I have to do on any particular day, but that doesn't work very well. I carried it around for months and months with me in my bag and even forgot that I had it. I had to ask Valma what it was in my bag for when I finally discovered it again.

Of course I don't forget the really important things. The only trouble is that there aren't very many people who agree with me that they are important. I can spot a Boeing 747 four miles off from the shape of the forward fuselage and tell a Boeing 727 from a Douglas DC-9 from a glimpse of their wing platfroms as they fly over the backyard. Not very many people seem to hold such abilities as being important, which just goes to show that a lot of people don't know very much.

And a lot of people don't know very much about Paul Stevens which is why I was going to write something about him. However I have now decided that I'm not going to write anything at all about Paul. Some smart readers might guess that this is because I can't remember anything interesting to write about Paul. This is simply not true. The truth is that he is my oldest friend in fandom and infact my oldest friend. I don't mean that he is the most elderly person I know but I'd best be careful in what I say about Paul else I might find myself in an early geriatric hospital.

Or, to put it another way: People who know Paul aren't telling and those who don't know him have a world shattering experience coming to them when they do. If I tell you whether this earth mov'ng experience is a good or a bad one Paul will probably run over me in a dump truck.

So I'd best forget the whole thing.

BND: Big Name Dropper

Bob Tucker

I am a Big Name Dropper. It impresses the fans when I go to a convention, it causes neos to look up to me with awe and respect, it gains me invitations to closed door parties.

I like to wait for a lull in the conversation and then say casually: "Yeah, I know Bradbury. I've known him for about forty years, I suppose. When I was publishing a fanzine in the Thirties - 1938 or 1939, I don't remember the year - Ray liked to send me cartoons to brighten my pages. Once he sent me a cover; I think I printed it on a 1939 issue. I suppose my fanzine is the only fanzine ever to have a Bradbury cover. Collectors are bidding for it like mad but I won't sell, I value the sentiment over the dollar."

Heads nod, eyes gleam in sympathy, throats are cleared.

"Bradbury wasn't much of a cartoonist or cover artist, you know. Quite awkward, really. I urged him to try his hand at writing, I like to think that I convinced him he could write once he put his mind to it. And he did. He sent me dozens of poems, stories, articles. I printed a few of them, the best of them, and threw away the others."

The neos are visibly impressed. They exchange meaningful glances and paw the floor, or shift uncomfortably in their chairs. Nubile madiens draw closer to where I am sitting.

"Damon Knight was another beginner in my pages," I like to say. "I suppose one could say I discovered him. He was living in Hood River, Oregon, at the time - a mere stripling with ambitions - but I saw something in his work that showed promise, and encouraged him to do covers for my fanzine. He was a very clever cartoonist, as clever as he is today in writing and editing. He sent me two or three covers, I really don't remember how many, and I published them in 1939 and 1940. One of those covers had been rejected by Amazing Stories but after I published it, Ray Palmer was green with envy. He kicked himself for passing it by.

"Damon had a flair for writing; his fan stories were among the funniest and I continued to encourage him. It took me a while, but I finally persuaded him to go to New York and become a professional. He stayed over at my house one night, en route to the big city, and we stayed up until the late hours while I bolstered his confidence and reminded him of the glories to come if he would buckle down to work. You know the rest. Today he is a very successful writer and editor, but I suppose he'd still be in Hood River if it wasn't for me pushing him."

The circle of listeners will hang on every word. Someone who is the proper age will dash across the street to the liquor store to buy a bottle of Beam's Choice. He will make a gift of it later.

"Yes, I guess I knew them all when they were very young," I will say casually. "I published the leading fanzine of the day and they wanted to be seen in my pages. Don Wollheim, Cy Kornbluth, Fred Pohl, I had them all in print. We had a good time, we gossiped and built our dream castles. Wollheim liked to talk about the future, the pie-in-the-sky future when he would be an important book publisher. Kornbluth was content to write, and to give the hot-foot. He was forever putting matches in the soles or heels of people's shoes and lighting them - it was a typical American gag of that day, giving the hot foot. Well, I cured him of that, and I sent him on his way to a writing career. And Fred Pohl - Pohl wanted to write and edit, he wanted to try his hand with both books and magazines. They were all pretty discouraged in that long ago day, but I kept them going. They made it."

The neos will clutch the books they've bought in the huckster rooms, the books of Wollheim, Kornbluth, and Pohl. Those treasured volumes will instantly increase in value after hearing my remarks. Married matrons will give me the welcoming eye, the calculated glance.

Someone will bring up Robert Bloch's name.

"Oh, yes, Bloch," I respond. "I met him in Los Angeles in 1946. We were boat-riding on that little lake in MacArthur Park - quite literally, we bumped into each other. We fell into an easy conversation and he told me of a story he was working on, a novel about a woman who is stabbed in the shower. It wouldn't work out right for him, he said; he couldn't make the plot fall together rightly. I gave him a few ideas, and he returned home to finish it. The book was called "Psycho," I think, or some name like that. I'm told that it was later made into a picture. He moved to Hollywood and got a swimming pool. I have a warm memory of that boat-ride in the park."

The neos will make surreptitious notes on their program books. A divorcee will jot down her room number while I am looking over her shoulder. The numbers are bold and easily readable.

"I well remember the day when Arthur C. Clarke came to one of our little conventions at Bellefontaine, Ohio. It was about 1952 or 1953, and Arthur was already having some luck with his fiction. I inquired what he was doing, and he said he was trying his hand at non-fiction, at accurate prophecy in



an attempt to show the non-believers in the outside world what was to come in their lives. I told him that the Russians would launch an artificial satellite in a few years, I said that they were working in secret on a satellite they called "sputnik" and they would have the first one in space in less than five years. I suggested to Arthur that he write a paper on the public uses of space, the non-military uses, and gave him a few throw-away ideas. I remember telling him that someday in the future people, or companies, would launch communication satellites for phone and television relay purposes, and it would be nice if he'd do a paper on that. He could wake up the men who had their heads in the sand. He was quite pleased with my suggestion."

The neos are quite impressed. They hold me in awe, and later tell their friends who weren't there. Before the circle breaks up and I leave for dinner, the divorcee will press her room key into my hand.

ACTIVE APATHIST NEWSLETTER

Vol. Fred/No. Laura

Editor: Ken Ford

Nothing much happening on the A.A. front for some time due to a move by Kraft Australia Pty. Ltd. to take out the essential hallucanogenic component of Vegemite. The substance, known as V2-114, was removed without telling anyone and without anybody but the most hardened Vegemite addicts knowing. People trying to attain Vegvarna (an amazing spiritual state reached on a Vegemite overdose) have missed out completely by a few miles and hit Nirvana - a neighbouring state of mind reached by taking an overdose of Nivemite.

Trouble is, Nirvana is nowhere near as apathetic as Vegvarna and these poor misinformed souls have taken an unhealthy interest in life.

On the good side, V2-114 is being produced synthetically and should mean an upsurge in Active Apathy when it hits the market. At the time of this writing, the sole distributors of V2-114 (or Conceveg) will be Lygon Street Boot-Makers.

A well known addict sums up all the latest with these words. "Hey, I was really interested in life until A.A. put me onto Vegemite overdoses. The only thing that upset me was that I couldn't shoot it up too well. Now with the amazing Conceveg (R) I can be non-interested and non-interesting without having to eat all that bread."

Chow!
