



RATAPLAN 21

February 1983

Registered by Australia Post

Publication No. NBH5483



WATAPAW 21

February 1900
Registered by the U.S. Post
Office at New York, N.Y.
No. 1000

Juliet: Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?

Nurse: He'll be along later, he's reading

RATAPLAN TWENTY-ONE

(incorporating the airworthy bits of ORNITHOPTER TWENTY)

RATAPLAN is edited and produced by Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608 AUSTRALIA. It is available in return for letters of comment, other fanzines, written contributions and money (\$1 per issue or \$2 for three issues) and also goes to SAPS. The fanzine is published bi-monthly (as opposed to fortnightly). The cover of this issue is by Marilyn Pride. All sorts of valuable assistance has been rendered by Valma Brown. MM.579

WHAT'S GOING ON UP DOWN AROUND HERE - AN EXPLANATION

The big oak door opened to admit me to the Boss's office. I could see, from the unhappy scowl on his usually jovial features, that this wasn't going to be a very pleasant interview. He watched me all the way up to his desk and gestured that I should take a seat. From the frown and the way he regarded me I got the distinct impression that I was not popular, not popular at all.

After a minute or so he pointed to something that lay against the far wall of the room where it had obviously been thrown, a crumpled pile of blue papers that had hit the wall with some force and then slid to the floor in disgrace. "What's that thing?" he demanded?

In a flash of inspiration I knew what was going on, why the Boss was unhappy, what the papers on the floor were, and what was going to happen. That knowledge put me at ease and made the following conversation a lot easier because the best defence is offense. I replied, in hurt tone of voice, "Was there something that you didn't like about ORNITHOPTER 11?"

That took him right back. He knows how very protective I am of my fanzines and he had expected me to become defensive about it. So, when I seemed to admit that there might be something wrong and that I was interested in his advice, that put a different complexion on the matter. It also meant that he had to explain his objections to me rather than being able to unfold a tale of my various failings. Pretty clever, huh?

He thought for a moment. Then he tried to suppress a bit of a smile as he leaned back into his chair and relaxed. "Well, no, I suppose that there wasn't anything really wrong with the issue." He stopped again and thought some more while I resisted the temptation to leap in and tell him that there was nothing to worry about then. "The problem is," he said at last, "that what's on the inside doesn't seem to go with what's on the outside. If you take my meaning."

I had to admit that I didn't know what he was getting at. He regarded me as though he was disappointed that I hadn't instantly figured out what he meant, and so relieved him of the burden of having to explain it in simple and friendly terms.

He leaned forward and clasped his hands in front of him on the cluttered desk. "Well, you remember that when we started Orrite Ornithopter Production Systems, we decided that we needed a journal to publicise the company. Right? You took the job of doing that and it was all pretty good. But what were the objectives that we set ourselves?"

I closed my eyes and thought for a moment. "The idea was to publicise the activities here at OOPS so that the people out there," I waved my hands around vaguely, "would begin to understand what ornithopters were good for and to encourage the adoption of the ornithopter as a viable mode of transport."

"Yes. And the other thing we agreed was that it had to be light and breezy, so to speak. That there wasn't much room for serious material in the journal because it would increase consumer resistance, since nobody wants to

confuse ornithopters with serious thought." Suddenly a flicker of annoyance crossed his face, he pointed to the disgraced fanzine and said, "I thought there were probably quite a few serious thoughts in that journal ! And what's more, I thought that we'd agreed not to mention the business about the television advertisement."

Well, I won't bore you with a great part of the following conversation. You should have already gained the impression that a parting of the ways had been reached between OOPS and this fanzine. The Boss took great pains to assure me that he had nothing personal against what I seem to be publishing these days, it just doesn't fit with the ornithopter image. Or, as he put it, the way things are going now with this fanzine it is just as likely to end up publishing something about Patrick White (or even Ted White "whoever he is") rather than Wilbur and Orville Wright.

To tell the truth, I've got a sneaking suspicion that he's right. For the past couple of issues things seem to have been getting out of hand and the pleasant humor of the trouble at OOPS has been starting to fail just a little bit. So, what's happened is that instead of changing the form that the fanzine seems to have grown into there is going to be a simple title change. Not much else will be altered because, although there are many ways of producing fanzines, this way is the one that suits me the best.

The previous issue of this title was RATAPLAN 19/20. It was published in 1977 and I thought that it was pretty good. It had contributions from the likes of Lee Harding, Chris Priest, Bob Tucker, Mike Glicksohn and a whole host of other people, and perhaps one of the reasons that I never got around to doing another issue was because I didn't see how I could improve on it. We shall see how I go now.

Anyhow, although these thoughts flashed through my mind as the Boss worked his way towards telling me that it was time for a change, I didn't let on about what my plans might be just in case he got the impression that I'd deliberately set him up for this. The other thing that was in my mind, the thing that I did ask him about, was who was going to write up the exploits at OOPS.

"I suppose that nobody will," he replied, with what might have been relief. "At any rate it might not be such a bad thing, our commercial secrets won't be broadcast around the world the way that you've been doing. Take that Da Vinci business... now we've got people writing in and asking what it's all about. Of course we don't say anything, but you never know if there are industrial spies around and what they may be finding out."

"But what's there to know?" I asked in my innocence. "All it is is an ornithopter that anybody can make and use."

"You always were a bit simple on commercial matters, it's not as simple as that, really," he replied. "There's more than just the reputation of OOPS tied up in this business, others will market and distribute it for us. All we've done is to design and test fly the thing, that's keeping our side of the bargain but what would happen if somebody else lept into the market before us and saturated the skies with home made, light weight cardboard cut-out ornithopters?"

"I suppose that Mr Kellog wouldn't be very happy," I answered.

"That's right," said the Boss. "But if we can manage to keep snoop eyes away from our plans the first thing that the world will know of the Ornithopter Revolution that's about to sweep the globe is when they start seeing Corn Flakes packets with parts on the back and ads on the front saying "Collect and cut out the complete set of 420 packets and build your own Ornithopter. Boyohboy! Will people be surprised!"

I suppose that they might be too, but I'm not sure that the world is ready for it yet. I'm not. I'm going to be going back to having toast for breakfast as well as changing the name of this fanzine.

A CHANGE OF PAGE. For some reason Bruce Gillespie and I started writing to each other a few months. I can't recall what set off the flurry of paper but fairly early on I began pestering him for an article on his dreams and Jung. It seems that he's been involving himself in the work of the man and I thought that we'd, most of us anyhow, find that sort of thing interesting... better than articles about why some fanzines are better than others, anyhow. But so far Bruce hasn't got around to writing that article just yet and offers the following as something to go on with.

WHY I NO LONGER READ SCIENCE FICTION (WELL, HARDLY EVER)

Bruce Gillespie

The following piece sticks fairly closely to what I was going to say at the November Nova Mob on the subject of "Why I No Longer Read Science Fiction (Well, Hardly Ever)". I rambled and lost the thread of what I actually did say, which might be the reason why some people said later that the meeting was 'boring'. Oh well. Explaining myself in speech was never something that I was good at. As Elaine said later, it is very peculiar for a group which talks about science fiction to meet to hear two talks: named "Why I No Longer Write Science Fiction" (Lee Harding) and "Why I No Longer Read Science Fiction". But, as I discovered when I was writing the talk, reading science fiction is hardly the point; being addicted to science fiction is quite another matter:

"I'm not going to explain very clearly why I've nearly given up reading science fiction. That wasn't the problem in preparing this talk. What I wanted to find out was why I read so much of it for so long.

I became hooked on science fiction in my early teens, as happens to many people. I tried writing sf stories at various times, as many people have done. Not many people, however, have elevated their addiction to the level of sacred activity, then to publish magazines about it. Now that addiction has receded - spontaneous remission - I have been left without a drug strong enough for my tired old veins. Later I will describe the withdrawal symptoms.

In 1969 I made some statements about science fiction, and I have now had the foolishness to reprint them in SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969 (first and only advertisement for the night). Gary Woodman, long since disappeared from fandom, wrote in SFC 4:

"Many people bitch about What's Wrong With SF? Who cares? If it's bad, we can entertain ourselves bitching about its quality. If it's good, we're too busy reading it to be bitching... There is little doubt that sf is bad, and worse than it used to be. Why - who knows? What are we going to do about it - who knows?"

I replied: "Well, Gary, I have this old fashioned liberal fancy called 'education', which says that, if a situation is felt to be intolerable, then the best thing to do is a bit of analysis and find out what's wrong, and then find out who can fix it up. And maybe 'they' will listen and thank us for our trouble and fix up the situation."

I think I was mocking myself when I wrote that, or else my attitudes really have changed a lot since 1969. I wasn't saying that an addiction to science fiction was a good thing, and I wasn't saying that the product was worthwhile. I did seem to believe that, when most of the drug was of inferior quality, all I had to do was protest to the manufacturers and they would turn out the goodies that once again would send me into True Bliss.

Now I can see that a set of strange delusions have guided much of my writing in SF Commentary throughout the years. Firstly, I believed that the best of science fiction was the same kind of thing as Real Literature. For some years, I had been writing about Real Literature for my course at university. I read a lot of science fiction as well. Also I discovered Australian Science Fiction Review, from which I learned many new delusions.

I came to believe that, if I wrote about science fiction as if it were literature, lol! a miracle would happen and it would be so. All the true artists in the field would be discovered and sanctified, and all science fiction would be more and more wonderful. The result? A purer, and much more powerful drug!

(A sub-delusion of that delusion is that Real Literature is itself somehow sanctified, and is not already just a purer drug.)

Delusion 2? That the science-fictional powers-that-be would read what I and other SFC contributors had to say, and would refine their product accordingly. For a few years, this delusion seemed to have true value. The letter column of SFC featured the top people in the sf field, many of whom agreed with my line. The small number of people who received the magazine seemed to have great regard for its approach, and gave it several Hugo nominations. The quality of the best sf books actually did improve for a while in the early 1970s. All heady stuff, especially as I felt aligned with such other magazines as Franz Rottensteiner's Quarber Merkur, Peter Nicholls' Foundation, and Jeff Smith's Khatru. When Stanislaw Lem's bracing articles began to appear, I felt sure that people would pay heed and improve sf beyond recognition. Ha!

The 1970s proved to be the era of lost delusions. The big names of sf lost interest when the semi-professional fanzines and the critical-university journals began to appear. The function of these magazines proved to be most uncritical. Their prolix writers patted science fiction writers on the head and told them how wonderful and intellectual they were. Money flooded into parts of the sf market, further persuading many writers that junk is good because it's popular. The sf business has become like the recording business in its dying days; the people who are already popular get all the money, and the first-time failures are not allowed to try again.

You will notice, however, that I remained an sf addict during the 1970s. I knew most of what I was consuming was worthless. I didn't like ninety-five per cent of the stuff, and I said so. But I kept reading. Why?

The best comparison I can offer is with pop music, to which I became addicted at about the time I discovered science fiction. Collecting and annotating hit-parade charts was one of my hobbies before I began to publish fanzines. During the early 1960s I listened to every new release. At no time did I like more than a few of the records on the hit parade. Usually the ones I liked sneaked in at No. Forty for two weeks, then dropped out - if they sold at all. During the mid-1970s, I stopped listening to pop music radio almost completely, but still heard the occasional interesting album. All this waiting seemed to pay off this year, as I've found some albums which give me the same kind of enjoyment from pop music as I had twenty years ago. I wait for the pot of gold, and occasionally dig it up.

For a long while, I thought the same about science fiction, especially in the field of short fiction. For a long time, I attempted to read every piece of short fiction in the field. It was an impossible task, of course - there was always the one anthology for the year which did not reach Australia; a new magazine would not be distributed; an issue of a magazine would not appear. Some years, the effort paid off. I recognised Michael Bishop before anybody else discovered him. And Harvey Jacobs, but he did not stay within the field. Neither did Neil Shapiro. Bruce McAllister did, occasionally. Robert Thurston appears occasionally. His early stories were very impressive. Kim Stanley Robinson wrote one of the best sf stories of the 1970s, which has disappeared without trace. Only Gene Wolfe has stuck around, and become quite famous.

My point is that there were not many of those nuggets to be found in the mullock heap. The nuggets got fewer, and even though the original fiction anthologies were disappearing, the percentage of bad stories seemed to be going up. The fiction in the magazines became extraordinarily bad during the 1970s, with only F&SF trying to keep up any standard. By 1978, I still had the short fiction of 1975 to read. There were all those magazines lined up

on the shelf. All I had to do was read them. Halfway through, I gave up. I would take out a magazine, look at it, notice something else on another shelf, and put back the magazine. I gave up buying the magazines at the start of 1981. I still buy F&SF, but I haven't read an issue for more than a year. My addiction has nearly cured itself.

I realise that this is an over-melodramatic way of expressing an experience which most people have gone through. Many people in this room will never have become addicted to sf in the way I did. Some people will read so much that the sf assumes its rightful place as just another form of fiction in the general reading pattern. But for me, this cold turkey was serious. After all, I publish a magazine about the stuff. Yet now, when I pick up an average well-reviewed science fiction book, I look at the dreary, uninspiring prose on the first page, and put down the book. On the one hand, I ask myself: Why bother? Why did I once bother? On the other hand, I think: how can I keep up with the field and report it faithfully to my readers if I don't keep up with the major books?

I don't think I want to kick the habit of reading sf. I like finding wonderful stories in sources which nobody else but Terry Carr and Justin Ackroyd have ever read. I like finding unknown authors and brilliant, unexpected novels. I like writing essays which demolish rotten old books. But I don't have the stomach for all that anymore, the stomach to read everything in the first place.

All this has left me wondering what to do - this cold turkey could lead to some serious changes in my life. What, for instance, do I do with SF Commentary? I doubt if I will write much more about science fiction or fantasy for the magazine. I want to write about "borderland" books - those which escape all the categories. But I don't want to publish a magazine for the 'little magazine' audience. The audience in fandom is much more receptive and more willing to keep up a dialogue with the authors. Also, the best articles I receive are about science fiction. My current plan is to continue SF Commentary as a magazine which publishes mainly articles about sf and fantasy. Another magazine, which does not have a name or definite shape yet, will never talk about sf per se. At the moment I cannot afford to publish either of them.

Should I keep attending the Nova Mob? I asked myself this during 1982, and indeed, missed quite a few of the meetings. At a recent meeting, however, we made up a list of topics for 1983, and quite a few of the suggestions had little to do with science fiction. So perhaps this problem has solved itself.

I find that I must disagree with George Turner more and more, even if only under my breath. George really seems to thing it important to define science fiction, and to denounce poor exponents of the craft. That's all right if you still believe that the craft is improvable. I don't think that anymore. There will be exceptions, of course, but they will be good books only, and they will not fit anybody's definition of anything.

I have discovered other genres, particularly that of the mystery story. The best writers of the mystery story, such as Josephine Tey and Eric Ambler, show that one can write a good novel while still staying within the bounds of the genre. Science fiction writers have lost my support because of their resolute unwillingness to include any of the basic qualities of good fiction in their writing.

All this comes down to grumbling about an addiction which I could have avoided anyway. But addictions - obsessions, if you like - don't work that way. They colour your life. The obsession goes, and one's life is less colourful. But it's not all a process of me changing; this has something to do with the cynical and incompetent people who purport to give people dreams and good stories - the pure drug - and give them lolly-water instead. If I heard that the new sf books were really great this year, and if a few of them were, I'd probably be back on my science-fictional high."

EDITORIAL IMPOSITION

Last week was one of those periods when so much of nothing happens that you begin to wonder if the rest of the world just hasn't gone into some sort of statis. That indicator of activity in the outside world, the letter box, remains steadfastly void. Despite visits in the afternoon and the morning it could be encouraged to offer up nothing that would sustain a fully developed fannish ego.

True, there was a letter from Marc Ortlieb first thing on Monday but I had to re-read it again on the following three days just to remind myself of what a letter looks like even though the contents had grown a little bit stale in that time. Then, the next day Adrian Bedford wrote - but a single page of double spaced type doesn't go very far I can tell you.

And that's how the situation stood on Friday afternoon when I hauled myself around to the letter box for the last attempt of the week. When I opened box I was greeted by the joyful sight of a couple of thick enveloped items which could only be fanzines. They turned out to be Q36J and TAPPEN 5. I suppose that if these two items had arrived at the end of a busy week they would have been greeted with interest, but in my weakened condition they were perhaps too rich. After all, a person who has been lost in the desert for a week or so should be started off on some plain and simple food, not offered a couple of rich plum puddings to go on with.

The interesting and odd thing about both these fanzines is that they devote a fair amount of time to the subject of what fanzines and fandom are all about. All very interesting, but I'm not going to burden you with my thoughts on the matter just now... perhaps when I've got over the case of fannish indigestion that I'm suffering at the moment.

Instead I thought that I might mention, in passing, that Valma and I recently spent a couple of weeks away from Canberra; in the process of travelling up to Brisbane to visit Valma's mother, doing just that and then driving back again. For the most part the experience was an interesting one, but there was one major snag to the whole operation - a lack of suitable reading material.

I really don't read very much but that's because I seem to have surrounded myself with lots and lots of things that interest me and which seem to occupy my time instead of just sitting around and reading. But when I go on holidays the situation is changed and although there are renew interesting sights and experiences there are also those grey periods in-between which need to be filled in. Having remembered this I prepared myself by taking Half a dozen books to keep me occupied, four were not too difficult sf books and the other two were books of historical interest about Brisbane (which is a place about which I knew absolutely nothing despite having been there several times before).

I suppose that I should have known that six books wouldn't last two weeks. This wasn't helped when the car broke down in a very small country town and took a day to fix. After you've spent a couple of hours wandering up and down the main street there's not a lot else that you can think of to do. I might have bought the sf book in the newsagents if it hadn't been written by Jerry Pournelle and so I arrived in Brisbane with only a couple of books left to read. The big thick book on Brisbane in the 1890s promised some entertainment but turned out to be an expanded PhD thesis on urban expansion and migration of social classes - just the sort of lively reading that is guaranteed to lighten the tone of any holiday - and so I only read the first twenty or so pages before the heavy book slipped from my bored and drowsy fingers.

It turned out that Valma's mother is not a reader and her house is devoid of books (after I realised this it occurred to me that for people like us Hell would be a place where there was absolutely nothing to read). In the end, when I started twitching and making a nuisance of myself for lack of anything else to do, some books were found

hiding away in a cupboard. Mostly they were things that Valma had brought up on a previous visit but there were a couple of interesting other things that had been left lying around at work. I've already read the Foundation stories enough times not to be interested again, and the stories in the Pacific Book of Australian SF are, generally speaking, fairly old and tired by now, so that only left me a couple of James Bond stories, a horrible little looking thing called TrainWreck and that monstrous work, Atlas Shrugged (I can understand somebody leaving it lying around in a public place because it's the sort of thing that most people would feel too intimidated by to be able to toss into the rubbish bin, and yet it's not something that you'd actually want to leave lying around your house for fear of causing infection or something like that).

So, the latter half of my summer reading was made up of a couple of Ian Fleming's thrillers and this Trainwreck thing. This latter book is something which I would have no hesitation in recommending for the rubbish bin, but when there's only that or the corn flakes packet (and you've already examined that for small print) it's a matter of "any port in a storm".

I don't know who Jeremiah Jack is, but I reckon that it couldn't be a real person, because a real person with a reputation to keep wouldn't want to be linked too closely with this thing. If I were a more demonstrative person like, say, Bruce Gillespie, I would probably have hurled it against the far wall in the space of a page when the hero tells a passing pro that he's "Got something important to do," and that turns out to be barging in on the boss of the railway company that he works for and informing him in forceful terms about the deadly dangerous state of the tracks of the line. From then on it's all down hill.

This Jeremiah Jack must have liked that spate of disaster movies that were all the go before Hollywood discovered sf. He follows the formula faithfully because in the next couple of chapters we gradually get to meet the cardboard characters whose only redeeming features are that they will survive the initial disaster so that they can get together and interact a bit. There is the elderly couple who spend most of the time holding hands and reminding each other how happy they've been for the past fifty-years; the young character who has a money-belt with one hundred-thousand dollars which he has removed from a casino - money which he intends to use to pay his way through medical school; the hardened merchant sailor who has just returned from a journey to rediscover his roots (or something like that); a young woman who is travelling to the big city to be a nurse in a big hospital; a rock singer who is having some trouble with reality, who gets carried away in the dining car and removes all her clothes to the amazement of those surrounding and a cast of other interchangeable names and problems, not to forget the little mousy type who leads community singing in one of the cars of the train.

While I was in the process of working my way through this book I would try to tell Valma about how marvellous it all was but she would put her hands over her ears and threaten me with interesting forms of violence to make me shut up. Fortunately for you I seem to have forgotten most of what happened in the book - the same way that you forget how terrible you felt after the last all night session in the stair-well of the convention hotel with a bottle or two of fire water and so you do it again - and so you are spared the story and I'm spared the reprisals.

The best part was... and I remember it, so you'll have to bear with me for a few lines... when the train was rushing through the fatal tunnel and within seconds of hurtling itself into the rockfall which was blocking the exit. The poor character with the money belt had discovered that somebody on the train, a hard looking character, was looking for him with the intention of reclaiming the money and thwarting his plans for a long life in health. Having realised this our money grabber had somehow got out of the carriages and was climbing up to the roof of the train when he sees that this sinister character has cornered him and is looking at him through cruel eyes over the business end

of a nasty looking gun. The finger tightens on the trigger and the intended victim gibbers, the finger tightens even more and then , Crash!, the trains runs smack into the rock fall and there follows the lurid description of the crushing and mangling of lots of innocent cardboard characters and nonentities that the reader can't possibly have any feeling for.

I don't expect that anybody reading this fanzine will have ever seen this book or would be tempted to read it if they did. So I suppose that the reason I've mentioned it is because I can't see how this sort of thing gets written and published, I can't believe that I read a book that was so bad.

In comparison the two James Bond books were just the sort of thing pass away those dull hours during a holiday. They were well put together with just the smattering of detail to give them a sense of reality (the same sort of reality that Lucas got in "Star Wars" by smearing grime over his space ships). I suppose that I wouldn't last long if I were to say that these books are great literature. All the same it might not be a bad idea if a lot of science fiction writers were forced to read them, they might learn a few things about pacing and a sense of uniform style through a story. They might also learn how to avoid one of the most deadly of all the writers sins, boring people. Ian Fleming may have had many faults as a writer and some of the assumptions he displays may seem distasteful in the more enlightened 1980s. but you couldn't blame him of not knowing how to create believable and involving characters and how to put them through an interesting set of exercises before their book comes to an end.

Oh hell! I seem to have gone on at great length about books that I wouldn't have read otherwise and not gone into great and interesting detail about the fascinating sorts of things that there are to be seen between here and Brisbane, about what there is to be seen in Brisbane and about the drought going to and the flooding on the way back. I suppose that this should indicate to me that I lack some of the basic plotting skills. I suppose that I've also failed to create interesting characters (or to even mention any for that matter) and so I suppose that I'm just going to have to join up with one of those correspondence writing schools to get the knack of the business. On the other hand, as the famous D. West points out in TAPPEN 5, fan writing is different from other sorts of writing because it is tied into a matrix of other fan writing and the current events with other people and fanzines in the immediate fannish vicinity. Which is why letter boxes are so important and why it is so pleasant to get back from holidays.

There's none of this business of going and finding that nothing has been happening for the past week by slow installments, you wander into the office and they give you a great pile of things that people have sent, and then there is the fun of looking through the lot trying to find the bits that are actually worth reading. Just as there are junky books there is junky mail, and some of it from the most reputable of sources... but I suppose that I might save that sort of thing until I get around to writing about fanzines.

That's something that I'll get on with in a few pages, after you've all read the following article. This is something that I've been meaning to publish for a couple of years but have not had the time. It's not particularly good for the spirits but if you weren't a member of ANZAPA back at the beginning of 1980 (and that covers ninety-five per cent of you) then it might tell you something that you don't know. More to the point, Helen Swift is a "neat" writer and fanzine editors always need that sort of thing to give their pages some class.

A TRIP TO YALATA

Helen Swift

Through an extraordinary piece of luck, I landed a half-time job working on a trans-cultural psychiatry project, working with the Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at Flinders (Rod) and an anthropologist (Maggie).

Collectively, we were the nucleus of what is known on all the funding application forms as the "Western Desert Project". To quote at random one such application:

"The Western Desert Project was formed during 1978, with the aim of providing a multidisciplinary research-based advisory service for Aboriginal people and communities of the Western Desert region of Australia. It was formed with an awareness of the inappropriate nature, and indeed exploitative nature, of much previous research in Aboriginal communities, but in the belief that such communities should not be denied well-planned problem oriented research. The Project only provides an advisory service at the explicit request of communities, and in providing the service, works with and for the requesting Aboriginal community."

The Project received funding from the Australian Institute of Criminology to look at the problems of the high adolescent offence rate - "high" in this context being indicated by the fact that eighty per cent of the sixteen to eighteen year old males at Yalata were in court at least once (and in some cases, up to half a dozen times during the financial year 1978-9).

Rob and Maggie started doing this work in about August '78, which meant that they were spending about one week in five at Yalata, which is a reserve of about 400 people (plus white staff) some hundreds of kilometres along the Eyre Highway west of Ceduna. On one of their trips (in April, or thereabouts, 1979) the Aboriginal Council approached them about a slightly different, albeit probably related, problem which had developed in the community - petrol sniffing. It transpired that since about February of 1979 there had been a positive epidemic of kids sniffing petrol. The Council did not know what the medical effects of this practice were likely to be, nor where they were sure about how to deal with the problem. This is where I came into the picture. By some means, Rob managed to get extra funding to pay me half-time for six months, under a set of job specifications which were, essentially, "find out everything there is to know about petrol sniffing".

So I began the first of many hunts through the literature on the subject - only to discover that there is virtually no literature available. For the first four months, I buried myself in explanations of the production of petrol; discussions of the toxicology of its various constituents; harassed anybody I could think of to find out about how much lead there was in petrol; spent hours poring through 1928 articles on lead absorption and distribution in the human biochemistry; reading sociological reports on similar epidemics in Indian communities in Manitoba; reading medical textbooks on cerebellar dysfunction, and psychiatric texts on patterns of drug abuse among adolescents. For a while, it looked as though I was going to end up knowing a hell of a lot about glue-sniffing in New Jersey, but bugger all about petrol sniffing at Yalata. But eventually it all came together. To summarise what I think about petrol sniffing:

Drug abuse among teenagers is so common as to need to be viewed as "normal experimentation", and thus not to be worried about too much. This is fine in cities where the drugs which kids use are alcohol, tobacco and marijuana primarily; but at Yalata (and other similarly impoverished communities worldwide) the only drug which the kids have any access to is petrol. Wherever there's any sort of "civilisation", there's a vehicle, and therefore petrol. Locking petrol caps and careful storage in petrol drums doesn't stop the kids getting petrol: it just adds an extra level of complexity to the problem, since the base of sniffing it compounded by charges of breaking and entering, and thus court appearances. People don't like having their fuel lines cut. (Indeed, there's at least one Indian community where those who own cars routinely leave a saucer of petrol on the cars' bonnets, to prevent sabotage of fuel lines!)

Petrol is, medically speaking, probably the worst drug of abuse that there is. There are several reasons for this: firstly, the hydrocarbons in petrol (such as benzene, toluene, etc.) can cause rather ghastly effects, such as anemia and, in high enough concentrations, probably leukaemia. These effects are rare in sniffers, because the concentrations of these hydrocarbons which the kids experience are very low. But the one thing of which they get only too much is lead. This is where the whole issue gets cloudy. The lead in petrol is in an organic form, not the inorganic form which produces classical lead poisoning as seen in cases of kids eating leaded paints, or industrial accidents. Therefore, the type of lead poisoning which petrol sniffers get is different - it affects mainly the central and peripheral nervous systems, and psychologically produces dependence and a type of hyperactivity. This causes the kids to perform very poorly scholastically (even assuming that, when they actually do go to school, they're not so hungover or so sleepy as to pay no attention whatsoever). The kids therefore tend to get put down (especially by white staff) even more than previously, and thus their tendency to escape from it all by sniffing increases accordingly.

What's more, whereas in classical (inorganic) lead poisoning, there are some types of medical treatment available, there is absolutely nothing that the medical profession can do to treat lead poisoning in petrol sniffers. The reason for this is as follows. Classical lead poisoning is treated by the use of chelating agents, which bind with lead in the blood and (being water-soluble) carry the lead out when they are excreted. But the alkyl leads in petrol, being biochemically different, don't hang around in the blood for as long as does inorganic lead; therefore the chelating agents don't have enough time to bind to them. And once the petrol leads cross into the brain/nerves/whatever, there's nothing that can get them out again. Therefore, the psychological and physical effects of lead accumulation are irreparable. But because they're chronic effects, it's very difficult to convince the kids that they're killing themselves by sniffing.

The above is a summary of the manuscript for a research monograph on petrol sniffing which Rod, Maggie and I wrote in the last couple of months of my job. Fortunately, the Institute of Aboriginal Studies has recently decided to get more into publishing "scientific" papers in their field; so when Rod approached them about publishing our manuscript, they were more than keen.

Since I was writing the bulk of the medical stuff for the monograph Rod decided it would be useful if I went to Yalata on their last field trip for 1979, so that I could get some idea of the kinds of people to whom the text would theoretically be directed. (Essentially, we hope it can function as a kind of handbook for health care workers and other white staff on reserves - most of the Aboriginal reserves in Australia have problems with petrol sniffing.) Furthermore, the final 1979 trip was designed as a feedback trip, to explain to the Aboriginal community and to the whites exactly what we'd been able to find out about sniffing, and to report in a preliminary fashion on the offence data.

In order that the information could get through to the Aboriginal community effectively, a fourth person came with us, to act as translator, Rod and Maggie speaking only very limited Pitjantjatjara. This person, John, is one of the most incredible (and I mean that literally) people I've ever met. In his early thirties, he's a lecturer in Aboriginal Studies at one of the teachers colleges in Adelaide. Superficially, one might expect him to be an ordinary academic: he's married with two kids and lives in the city during the week but goes up to his country home over the weekends to be with his family. He majored in history and politics for a B.A., then taught at a private school before training as a social worker. This is where his tendency to look suburban stops: for the next six years, he lived on a series of Aboriginal reserves in the Northern Territory and during that time, was initiated as a full member of the Pitjantjatjara tribe. Hence his facility as a translator. John is

consequently in possession of the most schizoid head I've ever come across: by blood he's pure white; by psychology, pure black. To say he feels stuck in the middle is a gross understatement.

For me, it was marvellous that he came with us, because that enabled me to get a more balanced view of what was going on at Yalata: a combination of the academic stance, first hand impressions, and a wealth of information from one of the few people around who probably understands both sides of the whole thing.

A Little Trip Report

We left Adelaide disgustingly early one Friday morning, and took it in turns to drive - our ability to stick religiously to the hundred kilometres each stretch was remarkable. Hence, I progressively got the hang of the truck - though for the first three or four times I tried to put it into reverse, I simply could not.

The equipment for the trip astounded me. Not only was the cabin of the truck air-conditioned, but the selection of classical music tapes to be played seemed never-ending, and made the travelling really delightful, as did the selection of munchies in the glove-box. Mind you, it seemed that the air-conditioning did not reach the glove-box, as the chocolate freckles were in a sad state by the time we hit Whyalla - it was about 38°C although it was only mid-November. The other particular delight about the truck was the way in which the tray was packed. All the solid items were stacked carefully on one side, such that a mattress could be laid down over their tops, and the non-drivers could fight over whose turn it was to kip in the back.

I'd never been west of Port Lincoln before, and I hadn't been north for years. Since I really love that sort of country (the drier the better), I found the driving and travelling in general to be great.

We took nearly two days to get to Yalata, for several reasons. Firstly, the fuel consumption of the truck doubles if you go over 100kph, so we drove obediently at 99.5 the whole way. Secondly, there is an enormous culture shock between here and Yalata, and so taking the trip in a leisurely fashion helps you to adjust. The nicer aspects of the trip were largely due to Rod and Maggie's having done it so regularly. They know all the good camping spots to stay out at overnight, and are familiar with the short cuts to Cactus and other good beaches en route.

I had felt incredibly stupid packing all my gear for the trip into a suitcase - it really did not seem consistent with my notions of "going bush". But I was in for a surprise.

Maggie had explained to me briefly, before we left, that they believed in taking a few creature comforts with them, in order that they did not end up absolutely hating each trip. This, I had innocently assumed, accounted for the Beethoven tapes in the truck. But there was more in store. The first night out, we camped at a place called Pt Labatt (not very far from Streaky Bay). This was Rod and Maggie's favourite spot, and for good reason. It's totally deserted, and there is a marvellous wind break of paperbark trees, which protects one from the wind coming in off the sea, about 200 yards away. It's so solitary that we had to chase two roos out of the spot so we could pitch our tents. I had anticipated the army surplus approach to tents - but it turned out that we each were provided with a two-person tent, complete with floor, and zipped flyscreens... the full bit. Into these we put our foam mattresses and super-down sleeping bags (!). John, of course, found our antics in tent-assembling highly amusing. Not deigning to partake of these little homes away from home, he'd brought his well worn swag. By the time we'd got ourselves together (especially me, since I'd never assembled such a tent before), he had tossed down his swag (two seconds), and had a magnificent fire going. Whereupon Rod pulled the deck chairs (!) out of the truck, opened a

bottle of sherry (we'd passed through the Clare valley en route and had felt ourselves obliged to stop at Stanleys), and a tin of smoked oysters, putting the steaks on the fire. God, I don't eat that well at home. Maggie explained it all: apparently, the funding allocations for field trips are paid at a rate equivalent to that paid to academic staff going to interstate conferences - that is, thirty-odd dollars a day. Therefore, what would ordinarily be spent on hotel bills, we spend on petrol, food and other niceties like videotapes, etc. It certainly helps to make one feel positive about field trips, I can tell you! Some hours of discussion about Land Rights, anecdotes from John, and evil tales about the Department of Aboriginal Affairs later, we went to bed, leaving John to organise his night log.

I'm still mulling over some of the things I was told that night. Rob (who worked for a couple of years on the outstations out from Alice Springs) was talking about the medical practices he'd seen. For example, the traditional healers he'd worked with. Apparently, the system adopted tends to be one in which any community member who was ill would see the healer first, and have the sources (in terms of spirit possession, etc.) or his/her illness elucidated; and then would seek Rod, his western medicines being viewed mainly as an aid to symptomatic relief. Rod showed some healers how to use stethoscopes etc., and in this area, some remarkable things occurred. Although there would appear to be no common ground between tribal and western medical practices, although the tribal theories of disease are such that they would be scorned by the vast majority of westerners, Rod found that, upon showing a healer how to use a stethoscope, within a matter of minutes, the healer would be hearing things that it would take most medical students years to be able to identify correctly. And John's stories of how he'd witnessed elders travelling hundreds of kilometers in unbelievably short times, without any apparent means to do so, were simply incredible. For example, on one occasion, John took the only vehicle in an isolated community to drive to another some 150 km. away. Before he left he was speaking with one man, who said (rather inexplicably at the time) that he would see John in a while. John left the man, and the community; drove at breakneck speed to his destination, only to find the man waiting for him. What can you say?

Anyway, we finally got to Yalata (having stopped to look at the Streaky Bay seal colony, and to have a swim at Cactus and watch the surfers, en route).

Yalata is absolutely extraordinary.

It is beautiful and loathsome simultaneously. John's reception was really fascinating to watch. He'd never been to Yalata before, but within about five hours of his arriving and identifying himself by his relation to some northern relatives of Yalata residents, he was immediately accepted. For the next five days, he kept racing back to the visitors' quarters where we stayed, to look at the family trees which Maggie had previously made, trying to work out some of the more obscure of his relationships, through the families in the north which had taken him as their son.

The white staff at Yalata are -- unspeakable, really that's the only way to describe the situation.

The history of Yalata, in a nutshell, is this. Early this century, those whites imbued with a missionary zeal (such as Daisy Bates) rounded up a whole lot of families and moved them south (from around the Tomkinson Range and the Northern Territory/South Australia border) to Ooldea homestead, where the people were kept until about 1952. At this stage, Ooldea began to be evacuated, due to its proximity to the Maralinga atomic bomb testing site. The South Australian Government purchased Yalata homestead and property (god knows how many thousands of acres) and the Yalata Lutheran Mission was established there in about 1955. (My knowledge of the dates is pretty inaccurate, but you get the idea.) The reserve remained a mission settlement until comparatively recently, since which time it has been run by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The white

superintendent has been there for several decades and appears (here comes the libellous part) to be a bureaucratic racist extraordinaire. As one telling example of his attitude, none of the people on the settlement gets unemployment benefits. The superintendent refuses to allow it (though obviously legally he cannot do so), on the grounds that they are not really unemployed, since, if they really wanted to work, they could make artifacts to sell in the nearby roadhouse. Said roadhouse, incidentally, is owned by Yalata Community Inc., but there are no black staff in it.

Most of the staff there are genuinely well-intended. Their positions are mainly as teachers... although these are standard Education Department appointments, the vast majority (I'd say, about eighty-five per cent) of the teachers can only be described as being rampant Christians - probably they get the positions because no-one else has sufficient missionary or equivalent zeal, to make them apply to go to Yalata.

There are a few good staff, but some of these never get the chance to put their ideas into practice, simply because the superintendent (referred to by us as "God") forbids them to do so. The only person who really wants to stand up to God and is in a position to do so, is the school headmaster, who is excellent. For example, he has introduced a new series of primers for the little kids to learn to read with. Instead of the typical Dick and Dora approach, the Head has encouraged his teachers and Aboriginal teacher aids to make their own primers. I saw one lesson in which the kids were learning prepositions, using a primer consisting of magnificent photos taken around the reserve. So the examples they were learning from were things such as:

Kugena is by the watertruck.

Girllie is in the wiltja.

And so forth. Superb stuff.

In terms of our feedback to the white staff, the main message which we wanted to get across was this. Any group of people who have been put into a situation of total powerlessness (not to mention gross poverty) are obviously going to drink/sniff when they have nothing else to do. The whites cannot help except by standing back; it simply is not going to work if you employ a YMCA officer to organise footy matches for the kids - the sniffers won't come. What the whites need to do is to admit that they've fucked things up incredibly badly (they or their predecessors), and all they can do to help is to try to aid the Aboriginal community itself to try schemes to fix the situation. For example, if the people at Yalata want to try to get their kids to stop sniffing petrol by taking kids out to a camp away from the main settlement where the kids can be taught about traditional tribal practices and culture, the whites could help by organising regular water drops to them, or whatever. This did not go down too well with most of the whites, whose attitudes seemed to be, "Look, things are so messed up now that we can't afford to let the blacks muck around trying to work out solutions: we need to import more white experts who really know what they're doing". Another of our findings which was not popularly received was about the comparison between sniffers and offenders, in terms of the psychological profiles that had been run on them. These tests suggested that the two groups were significantly different; that is to say, one could not predict that the kids who, at twelve, were the heaviest sniffers were the kids who, at sixteen, would be in court most often. This conflicted too much with the apparent attitude of "once a bad one, always a bad one" to be popularly accepted.

The problems at Yalata are, in one respect, different from those at the Aboriginal reserves to the north, simply because the Yalata people have historically been increasingly kept separate from the rest of the Pitjantjantjara people. The secret hope of the Project members is that the Project might be able to be of assistance in re-establishing "the northern connection". The Yalata people are not involved currently in the land rights struggle, or in fighting the decisions of their superintendent, largely because

they don't have access to the resources of the northern Pitjantjantjara Council... they don't have sympathetic solicitors at hand, they don't have the pull to get appointments to see the Premier, etc., etc. And until they're in a situation to learn how to play the whites' games, they'll be unable to do much to work towards establishing any control over their own lives.

Going to Yalata caused me to feel sick to my stomach that I am white. I just wish I could describe better how criminally wrong the treatment of Aboriginies by our bureaucracies is.

LEARNING BY OTHERS' EXAMPLE

One of the things about reading other people's fanzines is that you profit by their mistakes and learn from their successes. You also find out about things that would otherwise remain a bit of a mystery.

CENTRO looks like my kind of fanzine, no messing about with pictures or any other rococo decoration, just line after line of words and words for pages and pages. True, there are a few unfortunate hand drawn headings in the second issue, but they don't detract much from the overall effect. The really nice thing is the crispness and attractiveness of the reproduction, something which a lot of faneds should envy and attempt to emulate.

The other good thing about CENTRO is that it is an interesting and intelligently written fanzine. I read the sixteen pages of the first issue and thirty-four pages of the second straight through and could probably have read more. The only real trouble I had with this fanzine is that the whole thing is dedicated to the discussion of "Blake's 7".

I have to admit that this fanzine did a lot to annoy me and so I suppose it would be best if I paraded my biases and dislikes about it before going any further. Despite many years of living with reasonable sf on the television and on film I still tend to think of the genre in literary terms. (This may well be because I prefer my own imagination to that of the producers and would rather imagine a ten mile long space ship or a multi-tentacled being from another planet than see what they can make up for the camera as a representation.) Because of this attitude I don't get very enthusiastic about the visual product and feel even less inclined to write or read about it than the stuff that appears on the shelves of Space Age or Galaxy. On the other hand I can imagine that some people can get worked up about visually presented sf and do want to read and write about it. Fair enough, we've most of us got funny habits, but what I do find difficult to come to terms with is the sort of monomania which compartmentalises various sf shows and characters into their own little fan groups - why not a fanzine which deals with all visual sf, not just one tv show that has run for three or four seasons? This sort of thing seems very restrictive to me and I can only, personally, explain it as being a phenomena which is different from the fandom that is represented by this sort of fanzine because this fandom has become basically people and idea oriented whereas visual sf fandom concentrates purely upon the initial interest of its members.

(A

sociologist or psychologist might care to explain this as resulting from the lack of socialisation of fannish fans - who therefore set up an alternate society in fannish fandom - while visual sf fans are already socialised and don't need to invent an new, all-embracing, society for themselves. Not, you understand, that I would support such a proposition.)

I get the impression that there are fanzines of this sort which restrict themselves to a single character, such as Avon/Paul Darrow, and this seems to me to be more a traditional fan club like an Elvis Presley Fan Club. This suggests, to me at least, that perhaps visual sf fans hold a middle ground between fandom, as most readers of this fanzine understand it, and the more traditional hero-worshiping fan club.

The other thing that I have difficulty in coming to grips with is the way that money changes hands so readily. People involved in this field pay to join clubs and subscribe to fanzines; instead of trading the common practice seems to be to collect subscriptions which, I assume, would be used to pay for subscriptions to other people's fanzines. I imagine that most people in this area of fandom do not participate as much in the activity since spending money substitutes for involvement. I don't really know why these fans are so commercially involved in their fanac, but it is one of the reasons why my contact with them is liable to be limited - the last time I subscribed to a fanzine was in about 1968.

I have a few other reservations which this fanzine brings out, but enough of generalised griping. My comments about commercialism don't refer to CENTRO anyhow since the editor, Nikki White, does not generally make it available for money but, instead, for the good old-fashioned fannish "usual". By doing this Nikki is encouraging her readers to involve themselves in the sort of dialogue which is apparently not common in this sort of fanzine. Also, by concentrating on discussion (rather than publishing fiction and news) Nikki provides a forum for those who are interested in exchanging views about "Blake's 7" which may get more interesting as contributors get more used to writing to each other through a letter column. This is one of the parts of this fanzine which I look forward to with interest. There is, however, one problem with the fanzine so far, the earnest tone of the discussion which results (so it seems to me) from the earnest intent of the editor and the limited experience of the correspondents.

In the first issue Nikki sets the discussion going by picking up on the many plotting faults in "Star One", the final episode of the second series (I think). Alison Bloomfield also discusses problems with the origin of the Liberator and these, together with comments on the general awefulness of the fourth series, are the matters which occupy most space of the twelve page letter column in the second issue. CENTRO also contains a great deal of information about other "Blake's 7" fanzines, clubs and conventions. There are pages and pages of it and then Nikki gives depth to the listings with a number of detailed and entertaining reviews of fanzines. I appreciated these because they told me about what's being published without forcing me to have to read the fanzines for myself - I'm not sure that I have the stomach for so much fiction on a tv show which is really nothing great. Because of this feature, and a lot of discussion, CENTRO is a very useful window on to "Blake's 7" fandom for those of us who are not used to the customs of the natives. It is produced in a way which fanzine fans will appreciate and I would recommend it, both for its intrinsic worth and as an eye opener.

One final comment on this fanzine is about fan fiction. I'm usually allergic to the stuff but in the second issue Nikki has a little encounter between Avon and Han Solo which really doesn't say or do anything but it a delightful little exercise in manipulating two already established characters in a little light banter - as one might imagine the difference between the two characters was played up but a deeper stream of commonality was also revealed. I suppose that you'd have to call it an exercise rather than a real story, but then there are some interesting and diverting exercises littered around most areas of art.

I'm beginning to have some second thoughts about Q36. Although it's probably still the best fanzine being published in Australia that doesn't mean that it's as good as it should be. For a while Marc seemed to have his hands on something that was really coming alive, but if he isn't careful or lucky (or both) the poor thing is going to die on him.

The reasons for this sad state of affairs could be many and varied but I'm going to pick on only a couple here. The first is that Marc probably isn't getting the sort of material that he needs to keep his fanzine going on its exciting way; and the second is that Marc seems to be having the same sorts of problems that a lot of other people are

having in working out what a fannish fanzine is all about in this day and age. If you don't have a clear idea of what such a fanzine is supposed to be like, and what it's supposed to do for its editor and readers then you're going to be like a blind person trying to find their way in a swamp. There are many traps for players of all ages and very few guidelines.

With the Jth issue of Q36 Marc gives a very good imitation of splashing around with no real idea of where he is or where he's going. The first few issues of Q36 were almost exploratory while its editor worked out his format, took the bearings on the fannish landscape and planned where he might go. Now that he's had time to settle in he doesn't seem to know what to do next. Q36 is marking time, waiting for something exciting to happen - and for the past couple of issues nothing has. What's Marc going to do? I don't know, but it will be interesting to hang around for a few more issues to see what happens.

Three of Marc's symptoms are; the time between issues, the wandering letter column and - the most telling of all - long discussions on what fanzines are about anyhow. I can understand that a fifty-four page fanzine is going to take some time to stencil but when the editor confesses, on the last page, that he can't remember when he typed the first page, it's a fairly good indication that somewhere along the line he's lost the enthusiasm which he might once have had for the issue and what he wanted to do with it. (Come to think of it, I really can't recall when Q36I arrived which means that they can't be making the impact on my overburdened fannish consciousness as they once did.)

The letter column is generally well edited, it flows from beginning to end with no terrible demands on the reader but, on the other hand, its gentle and controlled pace could rock the unsuspecting reader off to a sort of mindless drowsiness in no time flat. There are occasional ripples on the surface, but they are very quickly subdued. If Marc were to focus his letter column onto a few issues and draw out a few points in more detail he would achieve a lot more and save himself some space too.

As for spending pages on idle speculation about the role and nature of fanzines (although I note that a few foreign fans are producing fanzines which get great mileage out of this sort of thing) it seems to me to be a better idea to be doing, rather than talking about it. Still, Marc is a teacher by trade, and you know what they say about them...

The common cry of fannish faneds is that they publish the material that interests them. I do the same sort of thing myself so I really can't point the finger of accusation at others and then duck away, not by the usual rules of unarmed combat anyhow. All the same, an editor should have some idea of the kind of people who are going to read what they publish and aim to please and interest them too. I don't know Marc's attitude but it comes across that even if he is concerned about his readers he really isn't too sure about what he is personally interested in. At any rate, the passion of some of those earlier issues has gone right down the drain and all we are left with is feeling rather comfortable and pleased with ourselves after having been absorbed by the current issue. But I'll say one thing for Marc: even though he may not know what's going on or what kind of material he wants to publish, the current state of affairs while everybody waits for the next step is quite comfortable. If I could publish a dull fanzine as good as this one I'd reckon that I'd won some kind of lottery.

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The great disappointment of this issue is the first twelve or so pages in which Marc indulges in a personal update of "The Enchanted Duplicator." The main thing that you'd learn from this is that an editor should not publish his own faan fiction. If Marc had sent this particular piece to me I'd have returned it, saying that it was too long, that it lacked any real interest or excitement and that the allusions were too vague for even me. I imagine that Marc became too absorbed in the details of the world he was creating and didn't know which

bits to leave out and, conversely, which bits to expand. Better luck next time, sport.

This leads me to the problem of just how a faned like Marc, who probably has fairly definite ideas about the kinds of things that he is going to publish, can get enough of the really good material to fill up each issue. I suspect that the answer is - he can't! Despite some limited input from overseas fans Australian fandom is pretty much a side issue in world events. This means that it gets the appropriate support from overseas and the foreign appearances in local fanzines is very small indeed. So, what has happened is that Australian faneds have had to depend on local resources and, over the past few years, they have become very thin on the ground. This is also exaggerated when a good proportion of people who could write well are also producing their own fanzines and just don't have the time or energy to support others. There may be a solution to the problem but it isn't evident to me just at the moment. Pretty depressing, eh?

A couple of shorter mentions to close this off. Q36J arrived in the same mail delivery as TAPPEN 5 (... you already knew that but I recall it to add that the following week - yes, time does fly when you're typing stencils - and under more or less the same circumstances WARHOON 30 and HOLIER THAN THOU 14 arrived together. Now I'm not naturally suspicious, but I think that the great plot writer in the sky is having a few problems at the moment). After being taken into the arms of Morpheus by Q36 I thought that TAPPEN might be a little more lively, and for part of the issue it was. There are snappy little editorial comments by Malcolm Edwards and good short articles by Chris Atkinson and Chris Evans. They were the kind of writing that has given British fandom (and TAPPEN) such a good reputation. But then, on page seventeen, where the heading is partially hidden from view by the fold caused by the staple, you slip unaware into a piece of epic fan writing by the legendary (so some would say) D. West.

This item wanders on until page fifty-two and contains just about all the mannerisms that have been evident in British fan writing for ages and ages. A little bit of Langford here, a touch of Nicholas there and a burst of Pickersgill over in the corner. Something for everyone, there is probably a great deal of truth and beauty hidden away in here somewhere but the sheer size is too daunting - there may have been some nice decorative touches on the Titanic but the whole thing was too large to let such things stand out. Something like this should be taken away and dismembered for serialisation in some glossy magazine as a case study in some kind of mental disorder which has the victim uncontrollably pounding a typewriter until he runs out of paper or some of the keys break. Of course I have to admit that I haven't been keeping an eye on the latest literary trends coming out of the British Isles and may be missing some vital clues to a new multifaceted form of gargantuan fan writing. All the same, it's better than at least ninety per cent of the writing that you're likely to find in fanzines.

Moving from the sublime to the ridiculous we have the multihued wonder of CRUX 5 from James Styles. I get the impression that not many people are really impressed by James' fanzines but I'm not sure that many read them. The reason for this lack of reader interest is because James insists on publishing a ditto fanzine in this day when, as I am reliably informed, people who use mimeo duplication are dinosaurs. I don't know what this makes James but I wish that his reproduction wasn't so spotty so that we could read it a lot more easily. Aside from that major obstacle CRUX is one of the more entertaining personal fanzines being published in Australia. I may think that its editor has some funny ideas and gets up to some odd things, but I enjoy the way in which he writes about these things.

CENTRO 1 & 2, Nikki White, PO Box 1082, Woden, A.C.T. 2608, available for contribution, letter of comment or trade.

Q36J, Marc Ortlieb, PO Box 46, Marden, S.A. 5070, available for the usual.

TAPPEN 5, Malcolm Edwards, 28 Duckett Road, London N4 1BN, U.K.

CRUX 5, James Styles, 342 Barkly Street, Ararat, Vic. 3377, for the usual.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001

Thanks very much for all the discussion about SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969 (hereunder known as "the Reprint"), both from you and from Rob in the eleventh issue. You leave me little to add.

About all I can say is that I make no claims to an objective history of fandom in the Introduction to the Reprint. I wrote down what happened to me and the people I knew, as clearly and accurately as I could remember things. I would be grateful if people pick up strictly factual inaccuracies. Also, one of the reasons for publishing an Introduction was to elicit alternative interpretations. I must admit, however, that I had forgotten how important that first Syncon was for the Australia in '75 bid. I remember most clearly the actual declaration of an intention to bid, and the formation of a bidding committee, at the 1970 Easter Convention in Melbourne. Even more clearly, I remember the vast flood of Australian fanzines through late 1969, all of 1970, and into 1971, which did more than anything else to win us the bid. The trouble is that for the Melbourne in '85 bid we can't win with fanzines - most of the people voting will be convention fans, not fanzine fans, and will never have seen an Australian fanzine.

And a good thing too, I don't think that I'd travel all that distance to meet most of the contributors to current Australian fanzines.

It is not good enough to say that now I can "get on with the more important business of publishing current issues of SF COMMENTARY". I still have a vast debt from publishing the Reprint (mainly because it has not exactly been selling well), and I can hardly publish again until the debt is cleared. Indeed, I had hoped if the 200 copies had sold quickly, that would provide enough money for SFC, since I don't have any spare money from other sources. Also, the Bruce Gillespie who did the first eight issues of SFC was vastly more enthusiastic and energetic than the 1983 version. Also, he was richer. Sure, I was only on \$4 000 as a beginner teacher in 1969 - but prices have gone up six times since then while my income has only tripled. If people really want SFC to keep going, they should send large donations. Also, in 1969 there was some decent new sf to talk about. I've been completely disgusted with the rubbishy old junk that's been published in the last few years. The only interesting books are those which nearly fall off the sf map altogether, borderline books like Norstrilia's The Plains (Gerald Murnane) and Chris Priest's The Affirmation. I'm hoping Lee Harding is right when he says that his next book is not science fiction.

That all sounds a bit grumpy, I know. What I'd like to do is spend all my time on SFC, or a magazine like it. Instead, I can't afford to spend any time on it. If everybody buys a copy of the Reprint, of course, new issues of SFC will come tumbling off the trusty old duplicator.

I wasn't quite sure what Rob was saying, but my comments on Brunner's statement on relevance is much the same as I would have said back in 1969: that an sf writer should not be required to include material on such subjects as "LSD and the Pill, H-bombs and the Rolling Stones", etc, but that he or she should not be required to leave them out. That was the trouble with what came to be known as Old Wave editors and writers - the sheer number of interesting things they didn't want to know about. The problem has become much worse now, with the vast sludge of mock-medieval-fantasy-disguised-as-sf covering any glimmerings of intelligent speculation about anything. A pity, since there are a lot of exciting things going on in the sciences, and the rest of the world does not seem any less interested, either. Even Brunner has been reduced to only one book every few years; Dick is dead; Priest can't get published; Aldiss has joined the triple-decker bandwagon with his latest Big Book; etc. A New Wave is needed.

It might be needed but I doubt that you are going to get one. I am

reminded of the comment by Nik Cohn, on the first page of Awopbopalooobopalopbam-boom published in 1969 (and talking about Rock and Roll) which goes:

"It's one of the cliched laws of showbiz that entertainment gets sloppy when times get tough and, with the depression, the war and its aftermath, times had gotten very tough indeed. Hemmed in by their lives, people needed to cling tight in the dark dancehalls, to be reassured, to feel safe again. Reality they could very well do without."

There is, I think, a lot to be said for the idea that sf and popular music serve the same sorts of functions in society and are therefore subject to the same sorts of pressures from society. We may not have a full scale depression just yet, and let's hope that the war holds off, but a lot more people are finding life tougher all the time. If Cohn's "cliched law" is correct then the sorts of people who flock to sf as an escape are going to be more and more interested in finding themselves transported to places and societies in which issues are simpler, answers are easier to come by and they don't have to worry about regular employment and paying bills. I can't say that I blame them.

But on the other hand your suggestion about the interesting stuff no longer being real sf suggests that those people who read it for the values which you, and a lot of others hold dear, are hiving themselves off to form a separate genre of, what you might call, classy sf. That way people like Chris Priest might get published, even if they don't get paid very much for their efforts.

Jack Herman, Box 272, Wentworth Building, Sydney University, N.S.W. 2006

Like you I have settled into the summer habit of slothful cricket observation, playing hell with my fanac - hence late LoCs for all concerned. Today is a lay-day in the one-day circus, although I must admit that unless something radical happens soon the only interest left in the game will be whether the Australian bowlers can actually accumulate fifty sundries in an innings, whether they will be forced to actually bowl out fifty overs in an Innings and how many new ways batsmen can find to get run-out. We went out to the first pyjama game at the Sydney Cricket Ground last week and thought that the cricket was very substandard. The Australians bowled out for 180 with only Dyson and Lawson doing anything, and then the Poms, well on their way to a victory managed to collapse all over the place, even letting Greg Chappell (who had been bowling awfully) clean bowl two of them. What was worse was that we were surrounded by hords of people who knew almost nothing about the game, obviously drawn by the "excitement", not by any appreciation of the game. Most of these were bemoaning the Aussies' performance at over thirty and were ready to leave. By the end they thought it was really "exciting". The funny thing was that the Poms were playing well in those first twenty-five to thirty overs and not being appreciated, but when they went for unnecessary windy woofs and got out the crowd came to life. I'm not sure what they wanted, but it wasn't cricket.

Since

I find this one-day cricket fairly terrible stuff I haven't watched more than a few overs of cricket since the final test at the beginning of the year. For that reason I've been able to get a lot of other things done while listening to the ABC radio broadcast; it wouldn't be summer without cricket to appreciate and yet I don't have to insult my intelligence by looking at the sorts of strokes that batsmen have to play when they are chasing a run rate of six per over. After this break from watching cricket on the tv I see that the ABC are starting to broadcast Sheffield Shield matches (for the uninitiated that's a series of four day matches between teams from each of the States). That is likely to take me out of action for a while because, if anything, Sheffield Shield games are much more relaxed than Test matches because there is not quite so much at stake. The crowds there may also be a lot less, but they know and appreciate good cricket and so, in many ways, even though the players might be less skilled the standard of play is a lot higher.

I can see where Joseph is at in his attack on Ted White and Sixth Fandom Fandom but I cannot help but think that Joseph overstates his case more than a little. Faneds have to evaluate their efforts primarily in terms of their own aims and achievements and the sort of feedback they get from the readers to whom they are appealing. What I find most ironic is that Joseph, who was one of the first to advocate a consistent line of fanzine reviewing towards the production of a pretty stereotyped sort of fanzine, is not outraged at Ted White for suggesting much the same sort of thing. Having read Joseph here and Ted in GAMBIT, I think they are both arguing more "ad hominem" than about any issue of substance in fan publishing.

Judith struck me a rather faint praised damn in her comments and I am tempted to respond on a personal level, because in many ways WAHF-FULL is a very accurate representation of my personality - it has myriad aspects, is very frequently quiet and contemplative and at other times, to use the "in" epithet about my personality, didactic. Like Ian Maule's NABU and several other zines I could name, many of which Joseph has either written for or approved of, WF, in aggregation, is a reflection of the editor's personality, not through an intrusive editorial presence, that's not my style, but through what I publish and solicit.

The overall impression I get from British fanzines (and here I'm talking about a small coterie of almost incestuous fanzines that constitute a self-labelled main wave, not fanzines like SFD, SING ME A SONG THAT I KNOW, CRYSTAL SHIP, ARENA, FANZINE FANTASTIQUE, ERG and FLAY, SWELTER AND GROAN) is that they are so self-obsessed and inward looking and "earnest" about being iconoclastic that they often remain merely ciphers with stereotyped fan personalities, like Deaf Dave Langford, brusque D West, fawning new boy Phil Palmer and so on. I often (to look at things in a Ted White manner) sometimes have difficulty telling a NABU from a TAPPEN from a WALLBANGER from an EPSILON. I think Judith is projecting from her knowledge of British fen something that we foreigners with no special knowledge do not see.

Possibly. But to go back a few lines, I see no great problem in having ciphers and stereotyped fan personalities - they are much easier to manipulate around in a piece of writing. One of the main problems with a lot of humorous writing is that the author has to take a lot of time to set up characters with traits which can then be worked on for humorous effect. British fandom has set out a table of established traits over a number of years and its best writers have been able to put them through all sorts of extraordinary exercises which would have been impossible otherwise. So what if these traits do not always reflect real personalities, at least they are far more real than the majority of North American fanzines which contain not the slightest trace of personality.

Marc Ortlieb, PO Box 46, Marden, S.A. 5070

The Greek fella with the rock you mentioned in ORNITHOPTER ELEVEN was Sisyphus, but don't take too much notice of him. It was, as are most Greek myths, an allegory. I have the feeling that the Greeks were in fact refering to the perils of washing dishes.

Jenny's piece is the sort of thing that can be rather frustrating to the would-be Letter hack, in that it made fascinating reading, but did not provide anything at all in the way of comment hooks. I mean, I could use it as a starting point for a brief account of my experiences playing electric guitar and bass with high school staff garage bands, but then I'd have to go on and talk about the debacle at a Morphett Vale Staff Dinner, and I'm not really drunk enough to want to do that at the moment. (Mind you, had I been less drunk on the occasion in question, it might not have been the debacle it was.)

Okay, you're right. I should have given you more examples of the sorts of things that I find don't work in Australian sf, but it's difficult, as I've found little of it worth the effort of finishing. MOON IN THE GROUND is one

that I hardly started. Turner's BELOVED SON is another. From the response that BELOVED SON got, I was expecting something really excellent, but I'm afraid I could not find anything that drew me further into the novel than the first few pages. It seems to me that too many Australian authors are trying to be stylistically clever at the expense of keeping the reader interested. I found the same problem with Damien Broderick's DREAMING DRAGONS. I do recall finishing that one. I was killing time while staying at the Denbow/Jagoe/Lamb Lambert household outside Smithfield, and had nothing else handy to read. However, I certainly can't remember coming out of it with any real feeling of enjoyment. Sure, it was stylish, but I couldn't find a story there.

Don't get me wrong. I don't insist on a step by step plot. I just finished reading Robert Wilson's THE HOMING PIGEONS, which is as disconnected a piece of writing as one is ever likely to find outside of James Joyce, but at least that has the virtue of being witty and amusing, and through its convolutions you suddenly find yourself staring at the back of your head, much in the same way as Heller twists you around in CATCH 22. So I'm afraid that, for me, Australian sf hasn't really produced anything worth my time yet.

I don't think that I'd like to lock you and Bruce Gillespie in the same room. You might not get along if you get around to talking about sf - not that I imagine that would actually happen. But have you tried reading some of the "downmarket" sf that is being written and published here, such as the Corey & Collins books? I'd be very interested in reactions to the recent novels of Whiteford, Wodhams and Lake.

But, while talking about heavy type things, in his column in this issue (which struck me as enjoyable, probably because he did stick to one thing rather than gloss over lots) Rob asks, "Where are the new Shakespeares writing their Tempests?" Now, far be it from me to mention names in a decent letter like this, but it seems to me that Robert Heinlein's TIME ENOUGH FOR LOVE is the closest thing to the Tempest that sf has so far produced. THE TEMPEST has all the marks of a last work, including the fact that the playwright himself is clearly represented within the play. In both works, the authors' previous works are recapitulated in capsule form. The difference though is, that at the end of THE TEMPEST, Shakespeare has Prospero say

"As you from crimes would pardon'd be
Let your indulgence set me free."

As magician and creator, he abandons his role - I think we can safely assume that HENRY VIII was a posthumous work completed by his associates, in much the same way as Conan and others have been. Heinlein, on the other hand, reaffirmed his immortality, and went on to write THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST. (Am I being too pedantic in suggesting that a new writer wouldn't produce a "Tempest"?)

Well, barring a miracle tomorrow, you bloody Aussies have got the Ashes sewn up, so what better time for me to finish this letter.

Too right! And a good thing too. Which reminds me that I probably owe Malcolm Edwards a big favour. In a letter of comment I sent him just before the England team left for Australia I asked him if he could do something about that man-menace Ian Botham. I don't know what he did but Botham did very little this season and that's probably why we got away with it.

George Turner, 4/296 Inkerman Street, E. St.Kilda, Victoria 3183

Your resurrection of the old "hack" controversy interests me because none of those involved seems to have bothered to discover what the word means. Recourse to the Concise Oxford would have shown that the commonly accepted meaning is "drudge", as in "hack writer", and that the word is a shortened form of "hackney", as in "hackney carriage", a nineteenth century usage meaning a coach for hire. So the hack writer's pen is one that can be hired. In the 1880s, "Grub Street hack" meant a writer who produced whatever was required so

long as someone paid him for it.

The shift to "newspaper hack" was an obvious one and applies, not necessarily derogatively, to most reporters because they are required to write on selected subjects, at a properly judged length (usually short) in the "house style" of the paper that pays them. This is more difficult than most people realise; have you noticed how few novelists who write a newspaper extract into their work ever make it read like a news quote? They usually write it with no sense of compression or urgency, both essential to news reporting.

When the use of "hack" is extended to the fiction writer, it is commonly used to mean one who writes "on demand" instead of in response to his creative impulse. (Blish's "Star Trek" tales, for example.) There are pb editors in the US, I am told, who lay down rules about the length of a sf novel, as well as what may and may not go into it. Writers who bow to these dicta are for the most part hacks who will do as they are told, for money. Some very talented people, like Ray Bradbury (Wodhams should not have included him with the hacks) were able to use the restricted forms to show the way to literary freedom, easing the path for such freakish successes as Cordwainer Smith and R.A. Lafferty. The hack gives in to the restrictions imposed on him, the creative writer manipulates them to his purpose. (No, Shakespeare was not a hack, nor do I imagine you believe he was.)

All this ties in with your concern for Australian sf magazines. Nearly all who have written for "Crux", "Futuristic Teles", etc. have been too firmly anchored in the US hack tradition, and placing a story in Cootamundra or wherever does not disguise its origins. There is no useful market for this stuff; whatever there may be is swamped by the work of US old-timers who have done it for years and developed a sort of awful expertise in galactic menace, sword swinging amazons and the rest of the junk product. There may be -- just may be -- sufficient sf talent in Australia to maintain a bi-monthly magazine of some polish, but the writers would have to work their guts out to keep the supply flowing. A glance at the two new British sf magazines (one already folded) will indicate how thinly the capacity is spread in a country drawing on three times our population.

Finance is, of course, a killer. A magazine must be prepared to run at a loss -- a big loss -- for a year or so. Any millionaires interested? The situation with books is, as you seem to suggest, a little better, but not much. Neither Norstrilia Press nor Corey and Collins would have survived without the Commonwealth Literary Fund, nor would some of the country's old-established publishers. The CLF quite literally supports the country's creative writers, as well as many of lesser quality.

Once we could look to England and America for lucrative reprint rights (and still not make a decent wage) but no longer. US publishers, hit by recession, will take only what is pre-sold by the writer's name. (Aldiss, Moorcock, and then not always) or what fits the computerised idea of what will sell. Chris Priest and Ian Watson have both suffered because they don't fit the mould or bow to hack demands, having some of their best work refused; my own "Vaneglory" has no US buyer though strangely it has been translated into Dutch for Prisma (het Spectrum).

I feel it would be a long, expensive haul for anyone trying to launch a sf magazine in Australia. Hack work, which is almost by definition imitative and unoriginal, does not interest most editors, but thousands of short stories are published in Australia each year (in spite of whines to the contrary) and there is room for intelligent sf which relates to human beings rather than to the fan's secondhand fantasies. There is none for galactic epics, sword 'n' sorcery lookalikes or gosh-wow spectacle. The great obstacle to the young writer remains what it always was -- editors demand competence, intelligence and talent. Enthusiasm is not enough.

I suppose that, for a person who has come to

writing through sf, the trouble, or at least one of the troubles, is that they tend to think about outlets for their creative abilities in terms of sf magazines. There may be thousands of short stories published in Australia every year, but a person who wants to be a sf writer will probably not know about the places where they are published and not particularly care either. Instead, they will see ASIMOV's Magazine and not only send their stories to it but emulate the sorts of things they read there - a notably futile activity. So, perhaps one of the things that people who are interested in sf in Australia should be doing is letting novice sf writers know about alternate outlets for their work. I am not aware of any club or publication which does this sort of thing and which would be well enough known to reach most people who are likely to use such a service.

Your mention of the Commonwealth Literary Fund may remind a lot of readers of the very real support which the Commonwealth Government has given to literature in general - and sf in particular - over the past decade or so. It is something which people either don't know about or take for granted and if it were something that the Government cut back on, as it is doing in a lot of areas, we'd probably notice very quickly. I think that the only place I've heard this mentioned in much depth was at the Speculative Fiction Conference which was held in Canberra in mid 1981. I understand from Van Ikin that he will be reproducing your lecture (and some of the others) in a future issue of SCIENCE FICTION.

A general feeling that I get from your letter (and you may not have intended it) as well as other sources, is the futility of trying to take up writing. You talk about the amazing ability of old hands to write "space opera" material and the state of play in the US where only work which is sure to be profitable gets published. In his article at the beginning of the issue Bruce Gillespie says more or less the same sorts of things. I'm beginning to wonder if anybody would say that writing is a viable way of making a living these days - it may have been a difficult one in the past but at least it seemed something you could get a little money from to keep you going but now even that seems to be impossible.

John J Alderson, Havelock, Victoria 3465

I collected my mail on Christmas Eve, hoping my publisher had sent me a cheque for \$5 000 as an advance against the novel of mine he is considering, but I collected, instead, PORT OF MELBOURNE Annual Report, 1981-82, AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS 31, and ORNITHOPTER ELEVEN.

The PORT OF MELBOURNE Report was even more pretentious than ever with full-colour photographs, coloured graphs, tinted pages and a minimum of information. It's always been trend setting as an annual report. One day I shall get out my file of them and write an article on the Port of Melbourne. Incidentally, I Haven't got quite a full set, so if anybody is cleaning out their attics and finds some, drop me a line before giving them to the National Library.

I thought the AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS most noteworthy for its report that Eve Whitley got kicked out of a restaurant for breast-feeding her baby. Of course it seems strange to me but then I'm used to babies being fed thus-wise where-ever they happen to be when the critical time arrives, be it tram, cafe, or garden party. In fact there's an interesting story of a baby being fed during the sermon one morning in the Dunolly Church. There was a to-do about it, and a hurried meeting of the Elders who advised the woman to cover herself up better; but my aunt, a dear old soul in her eighties when she told me, said the real reason was that the woman had squirted the Minister, she being in the front row. If, like Genny Geddes she disapproved of the Minister's theology, she was at least a more accurate shot.

Which brings me to ORNITHOPTER 11. What is it, when all said and done, but a very badly edited means of escapism? It is by no means the worst produced, though of the ones I've seen, the worst edited, and certainly the emptiest in terms of content, and there is certainly a deadly sameness about the editorial

mumblings and what articles you use. This latter possibly derives from your extreme prejudice inasmuch as you refuse to use anything not entirely in keeping with your own views, and those, whatever they are, I have no doubt are most admirable.

I didn't know that you were a mind reader, John. That's the only way that I can explain your statement that I only publish material which is entirely in keeping with my views.

I take it, from the order of your thoughts in the last paragraph, that you are suggesting my prejudiced thoughts are badly ordered (or edited) and empty, as well as having a deadly sameness. Well, that's your opinion and you're entitled to it. I just hope that others don't share it.

In passing, I have to say that I hope you really aren't proposing to write an article about the Port of Melbourne based solely on the reports of the Authority that runs the place (which is what you suggest you might do). You will get an extremely biased and unrepresentative idea of what has happened and why if the reports are going to be your only source. I would hope that even an article in a fanzine would be better researched than that - but perhaps my liking for balanced research in preparing articles is one of my prejudices that you don't appreciate.

I think I'll indulge myself in a letter with a view counter to yours.

Jonathan Scott, Box 292 Wentworth Building, University of Sydney, NSW 2006

Grief, people writing sodding long letters to you, judging from the ones in Ornithopter #11. I'd be lying if I said that this letter was purely sent to ensure I continue to receive your carefully formatted product, yet I find little that demands such a letter in your zine. Is this because it is perfect? I don't know, and today I don't care.

I will say that I like the fanzine reviews, not only because I agree on the whole where I have read the criticised article and hence trust the others, but also because you don't pussy-foot around. I liked Peter Wherrett more after I saw him slam the Mazda 323 (early model) because I knew he would slam what deserved it. (That car did, sorry Jack.)

Michael Hailstone, PO Box 193, Woden, A.C.T. 2606

I was interested to read your comments on CRUX. Funny thing is that you first saw it well over a year ago, not in Angus & Robertsons, but at Circulation 1. You so abhorred it that you wouldn't even deign to read the editorial to answer a personal question you asked me. I got the distinct impression that this had nothing to do with the production standard, but rather sprung from your typical fannish contempt for the local product. Magazines don't succeed in this country largely because people like you won't give them a chance. In fact the Australian sf scene is absolutely incredible for the jealousy, snobbery, back-biting and downright nastiness on the part of both fandom and the professional elite for the local effort. One blatant example of this is the consistently bad reviews Paul Collins gets for his books, yet I've just read a decidedly favourable review of RYN in ANALOG, in which the reviewer actually asks whether any bookshops in America stock Cory & Collins books.

A prophet is without honour and all that...

I seem to recall seeing some fair reviews of local books but, has it occurred to you that a book does not simply earn a good reputation because it was locally written and published. To falsely praise a book (which is what you seem to want) is doing its writer and publisher a disservice of the highest order.

I didn't say that the first time I saw your magazine was in A&R, my comment was that if it did not sell very well I would not be surprised if the look of it had a lot to do with the problem. As for the matter of giving your magazine a chance, I'd like to know what you

mean by that idea. You see, I had been under the impression that I had been doing just that by staying out of your way and not commenting on it. I've been around long enough to know that people such as you, who have a very high commitment to the idea of publishing Australian sf, no matter what the cost or standard, are very low on tolerance when it comes to criticism of your work. That's fair enough because I invest a fair amount of time and effort into this and probably feel a little about the result much the same as you do about yours. However, I think that a difference might be that I do not expect you to support what I do whereas it might be that when you say "give them a chance" you actually mean something like "give full support". You misunderstood my reaction to you at CIRCULATION, what you thought of as contempt was, in fact, lack of interest in reading something when I had gone to that event to mix with people. (As I recall it, and I don't recall it very well, I asked you something about why you had come to live in Canberra. You told me that you'd written about it in your editorial and said I could read it there. As a ploy to get me to look inside an issue it might have been useful, but as a way of helping to bridge the gap between us it was fairly inept.)

I am not keen on finding that I, and my friends, are supposed to take the blame for the failure of your efforts. That is what you mean when you say "Magazines don't succeed in this country largely because people like you don't give them a chance." In 1972 the whole matter of sf magazine publication was discussed at a convention. After looking at the economic and other problems which would confront a publisher the answer was that such a magazine would almost inevitably fail. If the conclusions had been different you would have found such magazines being published from that period instead of waiting for people such as yourself and Paul Collins (who left in without a full knowledge of the obstacles) to try their hand. If CRUX fails it will be because the larger economic forces in Australia acted against its success, not because a mere handful of people failed to support you.

This comes right back to what I was saying last issue. CRUX is not packaged so that it will attract attention to itself in a bookshop full of magazines and books with full colour glossy covers, attractive art-work, excellent binding and trimming and well known names splashed across the front. Your success is measured by sales to the general public, not by selling me a copy.

Richard Faulder, c/Department of Agriculture, Yanco, N.S.W. 2703

In regard to your discussion of Van Ikin's Science Fiction, I cannot help but wonder if one can validly call it a "fanzine" except by default. That fans receive it is in a sense irrelevant, since it is not aimed at a fannish market, or so I read Van's intention. I'd be interested to know what category Van himself slots his publication into - fanzine or literary small-press journal.

Actually, my reaction to Gobstopper 1 is that it is not as entertaining as some of Seth Lockwood's earlier publications, notably Ankh. Be that as it may, you probably appreciated the Robin Johnson piece more than I did, since I tended to compare it with his original speech at Swancon, which was far more effective as a piece of entertainment, since in that he allowed the audience to gradually come to realise the extent to which the world in which he was making his speech was at variance with our own, rather than simply breaking the news to them at the beginning of the article.

John Alderson tends, rather as von Daniken and his ilk do, to take advantage of the ignorance of his audience. While the areas of specialised knowledge that we have are different, I too tend to take someone's accuracy, not to say veracity, for granted - until they make an error in my specialised area, whereupon I tend to regard their statements in all areas with some scepticism. Perhaps you know, but I as unaware as to what area John Alderson has his specialised knowledge in, besides presumably sheep farming, since he's apparently making enough to get by on.

The problems you raise come down, in the end, to the problem of what constitutes "good" literature, whether the purpose of literature is to entertain or uplift, and other similar problems. These, I hardly need to add, are essentially subjective problems, in that there are no "right" answers (in spite of that the Melbourne literati might have us believe). For my part, I read to be entertained, on the principle that "I don't know much about art, but...", and if I am uplifted, then so much the better. There is also an element in this whole consideration that involves the development of the reader. As one matures mentally (assuming one does) then one becomes more aware of the subtelties in the world around one. This leads to an expectation of subteltly in the literature being read. This is why sf at the pulp level, or Heinlein juveniles, continue to sell well, as a new generation of readers discovers sf. I don't think we should begrudge them the availability of such material - after all, we don't have to read it, and it can always be sold at auctions at not too great a loss. In this regard, the problems of local sf fitting a mould displaced in space and/or time from our own is fairly irrelevant.

In making the main point of this paragraph (what I take to be the main point anyhow, correct me if I'm wrong) you seem to be saying that writing serves two purposes. It can be entertainment - in a pulp tradition - or it can be literature to be read for the edification of the intellect. This seems to me to be a fairly common distinction which is made (and I've done it myself on more than a few occasions). However you then suggest that if something that you are reading for entertainment also proves "uplifting" then that is a bonus and then a bit later you suggest that as people mature they become aware of the subtelties which surround them. What this makes me wonder about is the way in which the things that we consider entertaining gradually become more subtle so that whereas once reading was carried out indiscriminately and just about all was enjoyable, a heightened level of expectations leads to a more careful selection of reading matter simply because it is the only stuff that is actually enjoyable to read. So when does entertainment stop and literature begin?

Judith Hanna makes great play of the gossip, back-biting and general personality (which all sounds fairly unpleasant - and in any event isn't a strong feature of the British fanzines I recieve) which she says gives fanzines from the Auld Dart their flavour. This raises a question in my mind - how strong is the apa scene in Britain? It seems to me that personalities, if they are going to be aired in Australia, receive such an airing in the apas, which reduces the necessity for them to appear in the genzines, leaving the genzine editors to produce their publications for other reasons - basically intellectual, I guess - than simply expressing their personalities. (Faneds in Australia are , by and large, also apahacks, to a greater or lesser extent.) Perhaps apahacking is weak in Britain, leaving genzines to perform the function of allowing contact between personalities which is in Australia performed by apas.

So far as I know there are no apas in Britain, and perhaps the "character" of British fandom reflects this. But I would have thought that the difference between the sorts of personal interaction which appears in, say, the pages of APPLESAUCE, is a lot different from the action and interaction which takes place in British fanzines - especially since the British product is vastly better written.

Glen Crawford, 6 Warruga Crescent, Berowra Heights, N.S.W. 2082

Having been exposed to no other fanzines except WAHF-FULL, it was interesting, to say the least, to read another quality fanzine, doubly so issue ten as it contained your own opinion of WF. I have always found WF most readable, despite my lack of contact with general fandom, and I do not agree with you about Jack not aiming at a high enough "intellectual standard". It would seem logical to me that any editor who demanded such from his contributors would end up with either piles of verbose excreta as writers tried to out-wordwooze one

another, or nothing at all! Jack's supporters may tend to express themselves in plain english, but I personally would much rather discover from a dictionary that a spade is "a metal bladed implement used for tilling the soil" than have it described to me in those terms in a letter of comment!

An interesting observation, Glen, but I wonder if you're not confusing intelligence with pedantry. Anyhow, it is not necessary that the fruit of intellectual work be explained in long and obscure words and phrases just as it is not always the case that simple thoughts are simply expressed.

And, on cricket, let me tell you a tale - sad but true

When I was an impressionable wee laddie of some eight summers, my betters decided it was time I learnt about the important things in life. My father, it seemed, was neglecting me, teaching me unpatriotic drivel like swimming, fishing, pet-care, and worst of all, buying me BOOKS to read! (Including sf, God bless him.) Dad was a policeman, and worked most Saturdays, so I was surrendered to the tender mercies of the old man next door, who took me and my mate to the cricket. Not some local match mind you, the Real Thing... Australia versus England. We arrived at the Sydney Cricket Ground early, and got a good position on the hill, or whatever the open space is there. We STOOD all day, not allowed to go for a drink, or a wee, in the December sun (remember those summers)/ It finally burned through my skull that the reason we weren't allowed to move was because one of those matchsticks dressed in white over THERE might MOVE while we were away, and we might miss it! After I got over the sunburn and heat exhaustion, I went back to my books, rabbits and fishtanks, and people finally decided I was "funny" and stopped asking me about crock-it (as I am sometimes heard to call it) or feebleball. I will, however, admit that in a moment of weakness I watched the last Victorian Football League Grand Final.

Your experience of cricket was nicely put and if I had been dragged to the SCG to look at a match I'd have thought the same thing too. My eyesight is very poor and I just can't see what is happening on the field. But looking at cricket on the tv, that's a different thing entirely, and I can appreciate the skills of the game, the sheer poetry of good batting, the drama of a pace attack and the cunning and guile of an over of spin bowling. As for being dragged along to the SCG and being made to stand on the hill for a day, that's like being told to learn to like music by listening to Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde" through a bullhorn or to like sf by reading the complete works of Cordwainer Smith in the russian translation while wearing sunglasses.

Nikki White, PO Box 1082, Woden, A.C.T. 2608

I assumed you were curious about media fandom, which is why you sent me copies of the two most recent issues of Ornithopter, and I see this assumption confirmed in your reply to Paul Kennedy. My views on the media fan debate have been aired in Forerunner, so I won't repeat them. Basically, I think that they are horses of a different colour and each group should be tolerant of the other (at Adventon, in particular, I got very tired of the snide remarks made about media fans). No one should be forced to like the other, or the two groups be forced to amalgamate. Each should be aware of the other, and acknowledge that the form of fandom (and they do operate somewhat differently) has validity and if people from one group decide to join the other group's activities, be it zine or con, they should feel free to do so. In other words, I'm not recommending the establishment of ghettos.

Like a number of older media fans, I like to be aware of what's going on in fandom as a whole (in other words, I've heard of Q36 and others, am aware of people like Marc Ortlieb, even met him once or twice - I think - I've got a memory like a soup-strainer for faces!) So I subscribe to Australian SF News and Forerunner and get sent general sf zines such as Ornithopter, Wahf-Full, Pariah, etc. Some of which, I must admit, I find difficult to comment on or

even incomprehensible (if you want to turn me off with a thud, talk about war-games or computers) as these are, to use Paul's phrase, "outside my field of interest". My reading matter tends to be anything from Lovecraftian horror to Japanese classics of the 12th and 14th centuries, not sf per se. (I tend to read something because it is a good read, not because it falls into a particular genre, particularly where sf is concerned.) I also attend sf cons regularly and not just media ones, though that is where my preference lies. The first con I attended was 1974's OzCon in Melbourne.

You are right about differing fannish traditions. When I started Centro, I had in mind the kind of thing most sf zines are - distributed free of charge in return for contributions or LoC, article or similar zines. You'd be surprised (well maybe you wouldn't) at the astonishment this seems to have caused in the Blake's 7 (B7) fan community, used as they are to zines you pay for then just sit back and read. As one reader put it, "I'm not used to having to earn my zine" while others wonder at how I can afford it. I never thought it would need explaining, really.

I guess media fans tend to be more business-like in their approach to zines (editors, I mean) because it is such a specialised field, being dependent on one (occasionally two or three) TV programmes or films, that they feel their audience is very well defined and the zine is tailored towards that audience. I tend to send Centro only to those I know to be interested in B7 and to trade Multiverse only with those interested in media sf fan fiction.

I was vastly amused by Judith Hanna's comment on Australian sf zines in the UK - that they seem poorly reproduced compared with the local efforts. While that may be true in general sf, it certainly isn't of media sf zines produced there. It is commonly agreed that British B7 zines are the sloppiest, scrappiest, most poorly reproduced, etc., etc. on the market. There are a few exceptions to this. Their ST zines are better, though, but not better than ours look. Their DW zines, though, are much better looking and meatier, though Zerinja compares well or even surpasses many of theirs.

Julie Vaux, 14 Zara Road, Willoughby, N.S.W. 2068

I felt you were being unfair to Gerald Smith in your review of Pariah. You can not expect him to develop Jean Weber's editorial skills so quickly. Be generous and give him more time.

As far as the art work, I will not inquire which you thought was terrible but I will rather point out one or two facts:

A) I found the actual art quite adequate by fanzine standards and, as a fan who both paints and draws and has studied the history of several art mediums and forms... well to be quite frank I am one of the few fans who is qualified to give a true art critique (and not a personal opinion disguised as one).

B) Gerald is trying. He apologised for the creases in some stencils and the exclusion of captions. I sincerely hope, given time and patience, he will overcome technical problems with help from friends. Furthermore there were items of interest in the letter column despite your opinion.

You bring up a couple of interesting points which I'm only going to be able to deal with briefly.

Firstly we have the matter of who is qualified to be a critic of art. You seem to be suggesting that one has to actually have hands-on experience before you can say anything about the particular field - and that you have to be able to recite history as well. I take this to mean that a person who actually writes is the only one fit to judge other writers and that only a film director can be a film critic too. Surely matters of general aesthetics fall within the domain of anybody who cares to discuss them. You might be able to say that my views are worthless because of points a, b and c, but not because I'm not qualified by a degree in the matter of experience.

The second thing is that I don't think it is a good thing to say, as you do, "the actual art is quite adequate by fanzine standards". This suggests that there is one standard for fanzine art and another for other art. And going further is the suggestion that fanzine art is of less value than other art. So when you say that something is adequate for fanzines you are damming with faint praise. Why, I would be interested to know, should not the contents of a fanzine be of the same standard as any other work? It is my personal opinion that while fanzines call upon some skills that are different from other forms of expression, the expression of those skills should be no less directed towards the best that any person can do. So, saying that something is adequate is the worst of criticisms; it suggests a laxness in approach which can never result in excellence whereas something which is bad, but strives to get better, may one day be excellent.

There is also another thing which I should comment on, the suggestion that Gerald Smith (or anybody who comes in for criticism) should somehow be protected from adverse comment because they are trying to get better, and praise and patience will solve all problems. I happen to disagree, from my own experience I have learned that nothing teaches so well or so thoroughly as the rebuke. Even mild criticism (and that is the best that Australian fanzine editors have been offered over the past few years) does nothing but lull the receiver into a sense of security, and reading that somebody sees all sorts of failings in your performance, an honest appraisal, is worth many pages of muddy back-patting. But I didn't mention Gerald's fanzine just for Gerald, it was also for other people who publish or are thinking about publishing fanzines... there are lessons to be learnt from the works of others if you know where to look and I hope that other people are able to pick up something from my comments. I should add the qualifier that I would not have mentioned Gerald's fanzine if I had not thought that he has enough experience and self confidence to be able to take some adverse comments. I think that what I have to say about Marc Ortlieb this issues is perhaps even harsher, but then I reckon that Marc is even more experienced and self-confident (and he'll probably ignore what I have to say into the bargain).

Why is it that in your Circulation II report every huckster/sales person was mentioned except me??? I was trying to sell paintings you know - the ones pinned to the display board. My paintings have lower prices than Cindy's jewellery. I sell them unframed so people can afford them, and what do I get? I get people wanting to buy \$15 paintings for \$7 or \$5 when I should be charging \$20 or \$30.

I'm sorry I failed to mention you, it was probably because I didn't realise that there was so little huckstering and didn't think that you were the only one that I hadn't mentioned.

All the same, it is an odd fact that paintings just don't seem to sell at Australian conventions. I did a few paintings in the later '70s and sold a few of them at conventions, but the market has dried up and I don't bother any more (that may have something to do with the standard of my work, as some people will no doubt tell you). But Paul Stokes, who has been involved with a lot of art shows and has spent a lot of money on local art, tells me that it is a common phenomenon... the only solution for all of us who are interested in making and selling art is to move into the three-dimensional medium, I think.

To finish off, I also heard from: Diana L. Paxson; Joseph Hanna-Rivero who writes, among other things, *What few sf publishers there are in Australia should pool their resources and publish an sf magazine that is; a) Australian, with only Australian authors, b) attractive, with at least a colour cover and bright logo, c) regular, not a one-shot that makes you look forward to the next issue which you never get to see, and, d) well distributed, not just specialist book shops but at newsstands where people can see it, examine it and buy it (if it satisfies a, b and c); Harry Andrushack who makes some interesting points about higher technology making life safer; Marilyn Pride; Adrian Bedford;*

Catherine Circosta who tells me to watch it; Ann Poore who only wrote a short letter in the middle of the heat wave because she was going to go off and visit a friend who had air-conditioning; Joan Dick who nominates me as a Devils Advocate (blush); Mervyn Barrett; Bruce Gillespie; Kerrie Hanlon and Glen Crawford, who has the last word on ornithopters.

The Managing Director
Orrite Ornithopter Production Services

Dear Mr Edmonds

After reading your interesting resume, "What's Going Up Down Up Down At the Factory," it gives me much pleasure to offer you the services of SPLAT.

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For our pilots go SPLAT all of the time."

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Yours sincerely,

(Glen Crawford)

Managing Director
BLAST

ROUNDING OUT THE ISSUE

First the announcements.

Missing from this issue you will find a couple of items which should be regulars. Rob Gerrand has not had time to complete his column so that will appear in the next issue with any luck. There is no "What Happened Before Aussiecon" this time because I haven't had the opportunity to finish working on the installment which I had hoped to publish this time. As it is this issue seems to have outgrown its modest bounds quite enough already and I'm going to have to think of a way of controlling myself in the future.

There was another announcement, but

I've forgotten what it is.

IT'S AWARDS TIME AGAIN

I seem to be losing track of the days and the months of late. The last time I looked everybody was planning to get to the convention that Justin Ackroyd was running in Melbourne last year - the annual national convention. The next thing I knew, and it seems as though it was only yesterday, I was reading reports of the event by some people who claimed to have been there. And now, after only a few days, or so it seems, we are faced with the business of having to put in

nominations for the Australian SF Achievement Awards (or as some people might call them, the "Ditmars", while other uncharitable folks might call them "the annual trophy donations to Marc Ortlieb and Marilyn Pride").

Whatever you want to call them, it seems that by now these awards have been going long enough that they have their own aura and have lifted themselves out of the mere "tin trophy" stage to perhaps actually meaning something. If this is the case then it would be a good thing if we were all to give more than a passing thought to ensuring that not only do we nominate and vote for the things but that we give some thought to the items and people we are going to vote for.

For this reason I thought it might be appropriate if a little space here was given to making mention of some of the names which might be worthy of entry on the nomination form. We'll worry about the voting later on.

(The first thing to note is that when it comes to awards... I reckon I'm fantastic. I won't mention this fact again and pass on to mentioning other people.)

BEST INTERNATIONAL SF OR FANTASY:

One of the nice ironies of this award used to be that when it covered works published in a calander year it meant that some works published towards the end of the year would not have made it to Australia in time to be considered. The wording of the eligibility this time means that the works can be published in 1982 or they can be generally available here in 1982. I'd been hoping, you see, that with the old problem works like "Foundation's Edge", "Battlefield Earth" and "2010" would not make it into contention because they had been published later in the year. But as things stand now I get the impression that they could be considered for the award both this year and next year, since they were published in 1982 and will be generally available here this year.

Aside from all that my reading of new sf has been so limited that I really couldn't think of anything so outstanding that I'd say you have to vote for it. Two shorter stories that have stuck in my mind have been Marc Stiegler's "Petals of Rose" (Analog, November 9, 1981 - but not available in Australia until 1982 I'd imagine) and James White's "The Scourge" (Analog, January 4, 1982). Neither are outstanding though they are both fairly novel. Perhaps it would be safer to vote for "no award" but that will go on the final ballot forms anyhow.

BEST AUSTRALIAN SF OR FANTASY:

If there was enough time to spare before the nominations closed I'd probably ask you readers to let me know what you thought of the works published last year and give me suggestions as to those which you thought were worthy of nomination. Tell you what, since the next issue will come out around the time that the voting forms are made available, why don't those of you who are inclined let me know which four works you think are worthy of inclusion on the final ballot. Then we'll compare what works appear on the ballot and what works didn't, but perhaps should have. If you feel inclined to give short reasons for your choices I'd be interested.

I see that this year the committee handing out the awards are hedging their bets and threaten to split the award into a "short" and "novel Length" set of categories if there are sufficient nominations. This seems to be a good idea because it has been my impression that Australian sf has not been seen in print much over the past year or so. As for the international sf, my reading has been fairly restricted recently and so there is nothing that comes to mind that I'd care to nominate.

One of the decent things about the nominating/voting process is that poor people in my position get given a list of works which other people think might be worthy of winning and so we can look them up and then make a choice. But if those who do the nominating haven't read as widely as they might or don't give proper consideration to the names that they are

putting forward, then the whole system breaks down.

BEST AUSTRALIAN FANZINE

In my humble opinion fanzines in Australia have been fairly dismal over the past year or so and we might do best to ignore the lot. On the other hand, the category title says "Best", not "Outstanding" or some such, and so I may as well try to recall what has been published in 1982. The names which come to mind are the old regulars, THE MENTOR, WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE, WAHF-FULL, Q36, THE FORERUNNER, AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS, CYGNUS CHRONICLER, PARIAN and SCIENCE FICTION (though some seem to think that it is not strictly speaking, a fanzine. There are also other fanzines which were not published so regularly and so do not come to mind so readily.

There is also a great pile of fanzines published by people who are involved in media fandom, and I know so little about that area that I'm not going to risk a comment. If one of them gets nominated I hope that its editor will make copies available to fans so that we can judge the sort of product that we are voting on.

A couple of the fanzines that I've named deserve some mention; such as Merv Binn's AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS which has all sorts of troubles with regularity, style and standard of writing, but is still the only real source of information on what is going on in sf in Australia. Merv deserves to make it onto the ballot simply in recognition of the service which he provides. Ron Clarke's THE MENTOR is the oldest surviving fanzine in Australia (the first ten or so issues had been published before I came along, and that seems like ages ago) and in its current form seems to attract a lively readership into its letter column. I might find it all a bit dull at times but the evidence is that others don't and so it probably deserves nomination for that continuing role. Nev Angove's CYGNUS CHRONICLER is without doubt the best looking fanzine published locally, as well as containing some reasonable fiction. At times I am somewhat disappointed by the level of review and criticism in the fanzine but it is in there trying and its different approach to content and appearance should attract a lot of people. Jean Weber's WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE and Jack Herman's WAHF-FULL are two of the solidist and most dependable fanzines which have been published in Australia for quite a few years. While I might not be convinced that being "solid and dependable" is any guarantee for an outstanding fanzine I think that this sort of fanzine is the backbone of any fan grouping, and they deserve to be recognised as such by nominations.

Despite what I've written earlier in this issue, Q36 has been and probably remains the best fanzine being published in Australia. In particular, the most impressive issue which was produced last year was Marc Ortlieb's report of his 1981 trip to North America which appeared as the whole of the 6th issue which was published in the first couple of weeks of 1982.

BEST AUSTRALIAN FAN WRITER:

This is even tougher than the previous category because of the general low level of writing ability displayed and, perhaps more importantly, the diversity of styles and interests. There is also the slight problem that some writers are only visible in ANZAPA and APPLESAUCE - for example David Grigg. But leaving that aside there are a few names that come to mind:

Both Jack Herman and Jean Weber have a solid and dependable style which is linked to a rather "no-nonsense" set of interests (sounds fairly much like their fanzines, don't you think?) and abilities. Mervyn Binns rarely (if ever) goes outside the realms of reporting and most people who appear in fanzines rarely go outside the role of writing letters of comment - if fanzine editors were not such savage people perhaps Richard Faulder might get a nod of recognition.

This field is wide open but the one person who stands a bit ahead of the rest is Marc Ortlieb - who must be sick of getting awards by now.

BEST AUSTRALIAN SF OR FANTASY ARTIST: and
BEST AUSTRALIAN SF OR FANTASY CARTOONIST:

Apart from wondering why the organisers thought it necessary to establish two separate categories when they could have waited to see if there were sufficient nominations to justify the categories... no names, no pack drill.

BEST AUSTRALIAN SF OR FANTASY EDITOR:

This is an odd little category and deciding who will get onto the list is going to be some trouble I'd reckon. The nomination form says "Any amateur or professional editor who has edited SF or related topics in 1982". I really don't know what that means because it includes most fanzine editors as well as the people who actually try to make a living out of sf itself. For example, Van Ikin might get the nod for his work with SCIENCE FICTION or he might equally get it for his forthcoming collection which, while it is going to appear in 1983 was edited in 1981 or 1982. This is something which I think is probably left well alone by most people who don't have an extensive knowledge of the field in Australia.

WILLIAM ATHELING AWARD FOR CRITICISM:

When this award was first given out the amount and the standard of criticism of sf in Australia seems to have been fairly high. Since then it has declined a bit. The only locally published works that I can think of which might be eligible are the Terry Dowling piece about Cordwainer Smith in SCIENCE FICTION or the series on sf films that Jack Herman had in his fanzine.

Fortunately the award is not exclusive to the local scene and so we can look at works published far and wide. The trouble then is that there is just so much published in so many obscure areas that nobody would have an overview of it and be able to nominate with any real authority. The other problem is that the criticism is not restricted to sf and fantasy, but can be about fandom or any related topic. This opens up the award to the recent spate of writing in British and North American fanzines about the nature of fandom. For example, D. West could well get the award for his long rambling piece on the nature of fandom in TAPPEN 5, or he and Ted White could carry the award between them for their writing on the subject in WARHOON 30. While this seems interesting I don't think that it should be the intention of the award to encourage this sort of writing, but rather to encourage the sort of criticism for which William Atheling himself was so well regarded. In fandom at the moment we could certainly do with more writing like it.

CONTRIBUTION TO AUSTRALIAN FANDOM:

This is the trickiest award of the lot. It is not an award in the form that the others take but something which will be given by the organising committee from amongst the nominations which it receives. I take this to mean that although they will be accepting our nominations they will not be calling for a vote on the winner. Which is not such a bad idea because it removes the thing from the realms of a popularity contest.

The problem with the award is that it does not set a time frame for us to think in. However, for my own purposes I believe that the award should cover any contribution which has led to Australian fandom being the sort of thing that it is today.

In looking for nominations we can therefore look to the people who are currently shaping fandom, the Webers, Hermans, Ortliebs, Wedells, Ackroyds and so on. But if you were to ask me I'd say that at the moment there are just so many people doing things that it is impossible to decide which contributions are more worthwhile than others. Perhaps in a few years time we'll have a better idea of individual worth.

Looking back further there are more striking individual performances which did so much to shape current fandom. Ones which come to mind are George Turner (who gave the

Australian fanzines and conventions of the 70s much of their bite and interest), Bruce Gillespie who kept Australian fanzines interesting for so long, Robin Johnson who more or less kept control over AUSSIECON, and people like Peter Darling or Carey Handfield who have done so much of the "behind the scenes" work which has supported fandom.

Going back even further into the mists of the past you find people like John Bangsund, who recreated Australian fandom in his own image, John Foyster who made sure that the image was a good one and has stayed around to ensure that the whole business of fandom remains the way he started it off, and Lee Harding who seems to have put in so much time and enthusiasm to making its interests diverse and worthwhile.

But I think that all these efforts don't compare with the foundation upon which everybody else has simply built. Fandom as we know it these days was carried over from the flourishing fandom of the 1950s by the dedication and tireless work of only one person, and that is Mervyn Binns. The rest of us might have shaped it in our various ways but Merv made it possible for us all to enjoy the sort of fandom that we have today. Added to that is the contribution that he is still making to sf and fandom in Australia through his bookshop and fanzine.

FINAL THOUGHT

I wonder if nine or ten awards aren't a few too many. We are, after all, a rather small community and you can carry this business of patting yourself on the back a bit far. I think we will reach the stage where we'll soon be able to finish the awards ceremony, as Dick Jenssen did one year, by asking "Does everybody have an award?"

ORNITHOPTER TWELVE

(incorporating the interesting bits of RATAPLAN TWENTY-ONE)

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ABOUT THE BIG RED *A*

Jack Herman told me that he thought the space in the previous issue similar to the one which appears below looked as though I'd forgotten to paste in an electronic stencil drawing. That was because he didn't get the dreaded mark and his space was clear. But if you find that the space has the evil blot in it that means that you won't receive the next issue unless you respond in one of the ways suggested on the first page. Last time about ten per cent of those who got the mark saved themselves. It will be interesting to see how many save themselves this time. As they say in the classics, it's no more Mister Nice Guy from me - "And it's no more Mister Nice Guy from him."

all, and that is something for you to think about as you vote. Of the rest, I think that (apart from self interest) the nominations may reflect the best fanzines that Australia has to offer but that only indicates that they aren't offering much. I've already said unkind things about Q36 and Weber Woman's Wrevenge and it is probably only a matter of time before I get around to Roger's publication too.

Lumping the two art categories together seems like a good idea to me right now - it disposes of the two odious areas together. Of the nine names listed in total there are only four that I would count as even worth nominating. At least the shortness of the "Fan Writer" category spares us the unfortunate prospect of having to think about the works of people which really only deserve to be forgotten. I can see that there might be some advantage in naming so many people, because it could encourage the development of art in Australian sf, but I don't see that so honouring the mediocre is doing those who actually deserve it any good. It is also giving the rest an inflated idea of what they are up to. Still, it will be interesting to see how things turn out...

The most interesting category is "Best Australian SF or Fantasy Editor". There is a wide range of people to choose from but perhaps some of the names on the list shouldn't be there. So far as I know Mervyn Binns has not edited any sf or fantasy; if he has been nominated because of his newsletter then I wonder that Marc Ortlieb and Jean Weber aren't in this category too. And while Ron Clarke has been known to publish some fiction in his fanzine, I doubt that that is the sort of thing that most of us would consider as being within the scope of this category. So, to my mind at least, that leaves us with Neville Angove, Paul Collins, Van Ikin and Norstrillia Press. Each, in their own way, has done some good work on publishing sf or fantasy. However I'd have thought that Neville Angove has counted himself out of the running through his own admission that he isn't a very good editor. (Although some people might want to flatter him there really isn't much point in trying to convince him of something counter to his own stated position.) There is little doubt that, through his great efforts with "Cory & Collins", Paul Collins deserves some kind of recognition for what he has done to get sf published locally. However I'm not sure that this award is the way to do it, there have apparently been some severe criticisms of his editorial ability and when I think back again on Sapphire Road I realise that at least some of the problems which the book suffered from could have been sorted out by tighter editorial control. So that leaves us with Van Ikin and Norstrillia, both of which have their claims to the award. I don't know which way I'll decide on this one; is the standard of Van's work (mainly in Science Fiction) that much higher than the sterling work of Norstrillia, which has introduced some of the most innovative work to be seen in Australia for a long time?

The final local category puts two works of Terry Dowling in opposition to the mammoth publishing effort of Bruce Gillespie who published the reprint of the first eight issues of SF Commentary. The decision here will depend on whether you count the sheer bulk of Bruce's achievement against the intellectual work that Terry puts into his writing. I think that Terry deserves the award because he has made an original contribution and Bruce has not. There is also personal preference here since I know that I could actually get together the willpower and the time to republish a collection of my early fanzines (not that I'm actually likely to do it, you'll be pleased to know), but I can't see myself ever having the patience and ability to write the sort of things that Terry has. Of course Terry stands the distinct possibility of losing because his vote will be split between his two works. My preference is for the long article on Cordwainer Smith.

The other category is "Best International SF or Fantasy". I have to admit that I haven't read any of the four nominated works but I understand that the

authors involved have fair reputations so I suppose that it is a better outcome than if our mates Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke had been nominated.

There are two things to remember when it comes to these awards. The first thing is to remember to vote - these things only make sense if people actually take the time to contribute to the voting. The second thing is to think about how you are going to vote because an uninformed vote might have the same weight as an informed one but it will reduce the stature of the awards themselves if even a few people just react without really knowing what they are doing. If you aren't familiar with the work in a category don't vote in it, or take the trouble to read up on the nominations. And also remember that in the more general categories, the work under consideration is that published in 1982 - that means thinking back to what happened over sixteen months ago and forgetting what has happened in the most recent four months.

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And here we are at the conclusion of yet another issue of this fanzine. All that is left is the formality of the dread Big Red *A*. If you find that one of them is lurking in the space just off to the right here it is the sign that I won't bother you again with this fanzine unless you bother me first. It all sounds terribly civilised and it is designed to cut down on the hugeness of my mailing costs, which might sound like a mercenary thing to say, but then you don't have to pay to post this monster out. As for the rest of you, those who are saved from the scourge, don't think that I've forgotten that you may be due for the vile mark with the next issue.