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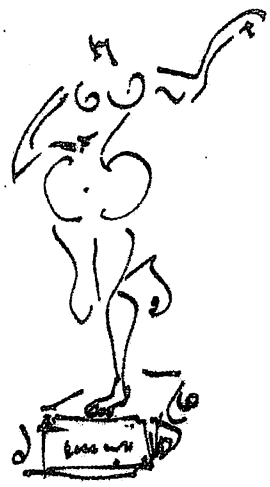
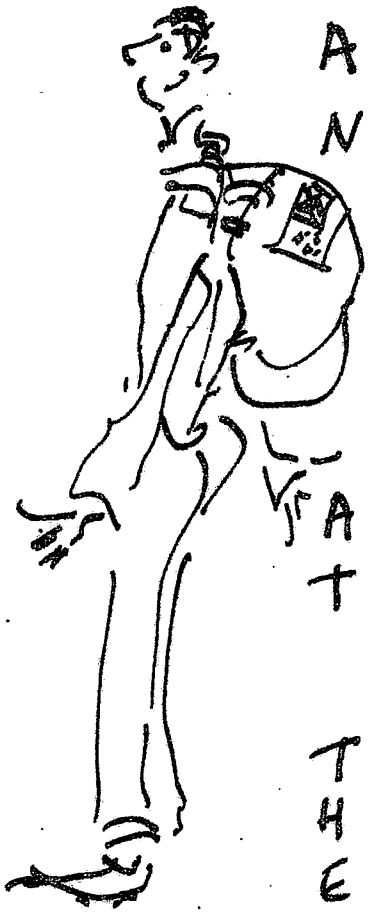


RATAPLAN AT THE LOUVRE



RATAPLAN 22

April 1983

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"This is illogical, Captain."
"Certainly, Mr Spock, but it is

RATAPLAN TWENTY-TWO

Even though there may be some who would have trouble with the logic of this publication one would hope that it is the work of Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608, AUSTRALIA. It is apparently published bi-monthly and the general idea seems to be that it is available to those who contribute a letter of comment or something else useful, who trade their fanzines for this or who pay the required tribute of $2 for three issues. If SAPS is still going it will get copies and there might even be a few lucky souls who get this issue without doing anything at all to earn it. If you find that there is a Big Red *A* on the final page of this issue it means that your time has come... The cover has been provided by Elizabeth Darling and Valma Brown has given all sorts of useful assistance. MM.582

* * *

When the notion came to me that I might stir myself and publish this fanzine on a regular (and fairly frequent) basis I also reached a semi-decision that there would be three topics that I wouldn't publish material about. The three taboo topics were to be sex (as opposed to gender), religion (as opposed to theology) and politics (as separate from social issues). Apart from the usual reasons of these taboos - that they are supposed to be matters which people find either offensive or distressing - there were more personal (and logical) reasons for my decision. Sex is a fairly uninteresting thing to write about, no matter what it might be like in real life, religion is a subject with an intrinsic excitement equalled only by something like blindfold stamp collecting; but politics is so interesting that I could run off at the fingers about it and nobody and nothing else would get a look in. And since this is supposed to be a fanzine of general (but circumscribed) interest, that would not be desirable.

However, over the past few weeks things have been just too exciting here in Australia's national capital, and I can no longer control myself. (And this is after only a couple of regular issues, so it doesn't say much for my self-restraint). I hasten to add that this doesn't mean that articles on the other two topics will appear in this and subsequent issues of this fanzine, not right away anyhow.

As some of you may have noticed, the membership of the Australian Commonwealth Government recently changed. If you didn't I suspect that you have either been reading too much sf and are way out of touch with the real world, or you may be one of the overseas readers who has probably been spending time worrying about the way in which the world is working towards blowing itself up. With weighty business like that on hand I suppose that you could be forgiven for not getting a little bit excited at the prospect of the Australian Labor Party winning a fairly convincing victory in the recent Federal Elections. Which is a pity because it is pleasant to have some nice things happen in life. (I suppose that some of you don't find the prospect of a Labor Government very pleasant, but since I didn't really find the previous seven years of Liberal/Country Party rule much fun I hope that you won't mind if we swap for a while.)

Theoretically the coalition parties rule should have been dull because they liked to run the place by letting things go on in just about whatever way they had been meandering. What is the news value in that? How can those of us whose favourite radio listening is the parliamentary broadcasts, and whose idea of light reading is the replies to Parliamentary Questions, get any pleasure from a mob who don't really feel comfortable with great national schemes, proposals

to possibly improve society or ways of stemming the flow of cash from the poor to the rich sectors of the community.

And, as for the people running the show, they were almost all very earnest men who were inclined to be serious about matters of great national importance and how much money they weren't really earning on the side from business ventures that we shouldn't have found out about. This earnestness was almost enough to send one right off to sleep every time it had to be endured and I can tell you that even though I thought it was kind of the Prime Minister to occasionally broadcast his overseas trip reports on the national television, they were not one tenth as exciting as Peter Toluzzi's visual DUFF report (but then Malcolm may have left out the interesting bits like the bubble bath in the White House and Discipline Sessions with Maggie). The conservatives were also very concerned about money - as are most of us - but there was no need to give the job of talking about it to John Howard, a man who is probably quite pleasant in person but who has the charisma of an undertaker.

Fortunately for us, theory and the real world very rarely meet in Canberra. This resulted in a series of delightful little crises for the Government which kept them on their toes and gave us a little light relief. Since I hesitate to call inflation and disemployment (previously known as "unemployment" or "being on the dole") "light relief" I'll just remind you of "Honest" Ian Sinclair - about the only man in Parliament to have his honesty proved in a court of law (well not actually proved - they just didn't have conclusive evidence that he did it), the kangaroo meat hamburgers, the imfamous "colour tv set" scandal, and who could forget the greatest continuing excitement of late 1982, the "Bottom of the Harbour Tax Evasion Show". (Overseas readers, who didn't live through the thrilling day by day revelations, may wonder if it's something to do with dumping filing cabinets full of incriminating documents into Sydney Harbour in the dead of night. Well, not quite, but it's pretty close.)

There used to be nothing more enjoyable than looking at "Nationwide" on the television every evening and watching some government spokesman staggering from answer to answer as the feared Richard Carlton had them sweating over the latest embarrassment and garbling their lines as they tried to worm their way out of this or that obvious contradiction. (In Canberra we are fortunate to have the Deadly Serious Party which fields candidates in most elections. This time one of their candidates complained that they hadn't been interviewed on the television because they had been practising for it by shouting at Richard Carlton cutouts.)

Ah me..., all that's passed. Now that we have a new government with vaguely reformist tendancies, which is reputed to have intentions of actually doing something to change society (but nothing precipitous you understand), the whole environment for the politician watcher has changed. Instead of the party in power having to defend its lack of actions and explain how come it got caught doing something a little irregualr, the new mob is also actually going to have to explain what it wants to do, why it wants to change things and how everybody's going to do better out of the deal. There will also be assurances all around that nobody is really going to suffer as a result - unless they are filthy rich capitalists who could afford it anyhow.

I reckon that there's going to be some pretty fancy political footwork on the television and in the newspapers in the coming few years, but I can assure you that it will be a while yet before I get desperate enough for contributions to this fanzine that I'm going to start reporting that sort of thing . Anyhow, if politics is a spectator sport there is no point in writing about the warm-up session, which is all the new government has been through so far - even though some of their early work has been fairly flash. I am, anyhow, what you would term a "one eyed" supporter who would only write about the good things that the ALP did and somehow forget to mention their failings (not that I seriously

entertain the thought that such a great party could have them), and that could lead to people saying that I only publish material that I agree with. So it may well be that I'm going to have to give political reporting a miss in this fanzine for the next couple of years after all.

So much for sex and religion creeping in as well.

* * *

Over the new year holidays Valma and I had the pleasure of a visit from the highly entertaining Paul Stokes, a character renowned throughout Australian fandom as having one of the vividest turns of phrase when it comes to expounding on the failings of others. One of the more interesting things about Paul is that, as well as this well known characteristic (people either stay well out of his way lest they be noted and commented upon, or they stay close to him so they are the first to hear what his ingenious imagination has to say about them), he is a very keen student and collector of art. This led to the following contribution to this issue

CULTURE CORNER - THE LOUVRE

Paul Stokes

My time in the Louvre lay across two days. A Sunday afternoon for five hours, during which time I did some extensive scouting around, and a later occasion for some eight hours when most of these observations took place. As is usual I am predominantely concerned with those objects and areas I like, though that is a somewhat poor word to cover the variety and depth of my reaction on many occasions. First though, some historical perspective.

The Louvre was originally a medieval fortress, built under Phillippe August in 1200 at the point where the defences of Paris were weakest. This site was known as "Lapara" which became "Louvre" in French. This corresponds with the present site of the south-west quarter of the Square Courtyard. Charles V (1364 - 1380) had it enlarged and adapted for use as a royal residence. The Hundred Years War, however, diverted the attentions of the soverigns from their capital for well over one and a half centuries. When they returned to Paris the old fortified castle was abolished. Francoise I had its imposing keep demolished in 1527, and then in 1546 he decided to replace the rest of the building in the Renaissence style.

Catherine deMedeici ordered the construction of two galleries, about five hundred metres to the west, on the spot known as the Tuileries, in order to connect the partly transformed Louvre with the palace built in the same period. These are the Small and Great Galleries. During the 17th century, under Louis XIII and later Louis XIV, the remaining buildings surrounding the present Square Courtyard were raised. In the early 19th century, under Napoleon I, construction of the North wing, symmetrical to the Great Gallery, began. At the same time the quadrilateral buildings and their decorations were completed. Half a century later, Napoleon III ordered the construction of the buildings bordering the Napoleon Courtyard on the north and south, so as to complete the enclosure of the space between the old Louvre and the Tuileries, which had been destroyed by fire in 1871.

Though the Louvre Museum was only born at the end of the 18th century, during the French Revolution, the idea had been launched forty years earlier by Lafont deSaint-Yenne, who suggested that the secret royal collections should be exhibited to the public in the Great Gallery of the palace. The "Central Museum of Arts" was instituted by decree on 27 July, 1793 and inaugurated on 10 August of that year. This opening, however, was partial and temporary. The Great Gallery, where the paintings were exhibited, and the Small Gallery,

given over to antiques, were fitted up progressively through the entire revolutionary and imperial periods. It was constantly enriched by objects brought back from the wars, and baptised the Napoleon Museum in 1803. It contained what was probably the most splendid collection of masterpieces of all time.

This collection was dispersed in 1815 as part of the restitution imposed upon France after the fall of Napoleon. However, the Louvre collections were soon rapidly increased during the Restoration and the July Monarchy. This was most notably achieved through the transfer, to the Louvre, of sculptures from the Museum of French Monuments, closed in 1817, and through the continuance of the Departments of Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Oriential antiquities. Thus the museum gradually spread into the four wings of the Square Courtyard.

The Second Empire saw the construction of further buildings, which provided new rooms and a visiting circuit better adapted to the number and diversity of the works exhibited. Constant alterations and realterations of the installations were carried out as the science of museology developed, together with the history of art and archeology. Others were necessitated by the constant increase in the collections. The contemporary period saw an important extention when the Flore wing and pavilion were opened to the public in 1968. Thus the Louvre Museum now spreads over three-fifths of the palace whose name it bears. Its collections are divided among six departments: Oriental Antiquities, Egyptian Antiquities, Greek and Roman Antiquities, Paintings, Sculptures and Art Objects - to which must be added the Small Gallery of Drawings.

Before I begin to talk at some length about those aspects of the Louvre which pleased me and those exhibits I found fascinating, there are some things I want to say by way of a more specific introduction. One word I would apply to the Louvre collection is "disappointing". One learns very quickly that there is one thing that the French are very good at, "blowing their own trumpet". I went to the Louvre expecting it to be a crowning piece to the Museums and Art Galleries that I had already seen during the trip. It was not. Firstly, not all exhibits were open and others were damn difficult to find. The Assyrian exhibition, for example, was closed so all I could do was lean over the railing and stare at one or two of the huge winged bulls.

My second complaint refers to the actual exhibits themselves. A large proportion of the paintings I saw were French. One would expect that, but so much of it was boring, staid, unexciting work which did nothing for me. There was some excellent work; some, but that was only a very small proportion of the total. The most exciting work in the Louvre was, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, not French. The more corridors I wandered down, and the more galleries I examined, the more annoyed I became. I felt somehow cheated.

Among the most exciting paintings were the Flemish school. The skill in rendering, the beautiful and distinctive colouring and the subject matter were all so distinctive and impressive. In terms of paintings, they rate for me as among the most important I saw outside Italy. Some examples;

Jakob E Thomann Von Hagelstein
"Vac d'un port de Mer"

Paul Brit
"L'attaque a main armee dans un bois"

Denis van Alsoot
"Paysage au soleil couchant"

Pieter Breugel the Elder

"The Beggars"

I wander far too much already. I will make any further criticisms of the relevant areas as I discuss them in due course. I invite you, the reader, to join me in my ramblings through some of my favourite areas of the Louvre. Some of the disappointment and excitement will, I hope, become apparent as we move on.

The Louvre does possess some of the "better known" masterpieces in Greek annd Roman antiquities, though they tend to flaunt everything in what I came to think of as the "typical French manner". Among the Greek collection are such works as the Dorian "Lady of Auxerre" and the Ionian "Hera of Samos" (which is a very good name for a headless statue). The first is an interesting example of Egyptian influence in the heavy and stylised wig, and the strong Cretan influence in the sober severity evident in the rest of the piece. It contrasts clearly with the "Hera of Samos" which shows the influence of Mesopotamia, in the delicate modelling of barely indicated forms, the mysterious life that seems to animate them and the lightness and delicateness of the draperies.

However we soon learn that a reasonable amount of their fifth-century "classical" works were "removed" from the Pathenon, though by no means all. Still, there are large numbers of heads and fragments of friezes. One can view such famous pieces as the "Venus of Milo" and the "Victory of Samothrace", and I'm, afraid I found the latter of much greater interest, artistically and archeologically. The Louvre had many pieces (in some cases this was literally true) which are attributed to "Phidias" or "Praxiletes". Although I am sympathetic to the difficulties of a precise statement, this practise strikes me as being a little off, especially as the name is in large letters and the "attributed to" is considerably smaller.

Lastly, on Greek antiquities, their collection of ceramics was not only small, but also in a shocking state. Having already seen those in the Antikensammlugen, this was painfully clear. Much was made of the fact that they were masterpieces by such masters as "Exekais" or "Euphronios", who were brilliant, but it is very difficult, in most cases, to make out the patterns, or see very much of the development. I can see the point of having this work, but then I can appreciate much about the pieces that the majority of those seeing them don't. So, what do the majority of people get out of seeing them? Who knows? I did enjoy seeing some of the tablets on which the lists for the Delian League were kept.

There are some Hellenic works present and much of your usual Roman Antiquities; for example, busts of Marcus Asurelius. All in all, the Roman collection was decidedly second-rate. There were a few nice pieces; some mosaics, a frieze of two, even some armour and weapons. It was not inspiring. So it goes.

The Egyptian Antiquities there are in a number of divisions; Predynastic Egypt, Dynastic Egypt, and the Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine. The Egyptian section is not bad at all. While by no means the largest collection, it was certainly well put together containing excellent representative pieces from most areas of life. Weapons, tools, furniture, clothes, toilet articles, clothes, jewels, games, accessories used by the scribes and musical instruments. From the Predynastic period there were many funerary urns, vases and statues, as well as an interesting selection of bronzes.

Apart from a large selection of Steles, one of the first pieces to catch my eye was a glass case containing large sections of what had been a tomb fresco. I immediately thought back to a series that appeared on the ABC called "The Plundered Past". As the name might suggest it dealt with the trade in antiquities (largely illegal) the types of objects found, how they were

removed, and now and then embarrassing questions to the large and "respectable" museums about some of the objects in their collections. It appears that frescoes are chipped out from the wall as sections in a jigsaw, and then sold piece by piece. It appeared as though the Louvre had not obtained all the pieces. There were many other more complete pieces but none of them had an immediate effect upon me.

Other items of particular interest were the head of King Didoufri (c. 2600 B.C.), executed in pink quartzite, and a painted limestone statuette discovered at Sakka, in the chapel of a fifth dynasty tomb. It is best known as the "squatting scribe". There was a most impressive bronze statue, four to five feet high, of Isis. An extensive array of friezes led into a room which appeared at first to be soley dedicated to statues of Sekhmet. There were twenty large (six to eight feet high) statues of her. Very impressive. Other sculptures included the head and feet from the Colossus of Amenopii III, Amon protecting Tutankhamen, and several baboons adoring the sun.

One particularly exciting piece was a base-relief of painted limestone taken from the tomb of Sethi I (1318 - 1298 B.C.) in the Valley of the Kings. It shows the godess Hathor holding her amulet out to Sethi. The state of completeness and preservation is impressive in itself, but what made it so outstanding was the richness and beauty of the colours and the detail; the richness o the greens, the dark olive of her hair, the brightness of the gold ornamentation and the brown of the skin. The lavish detail in the gown of Hathor is quite outstanding.

The displays then progressed into the Coptic period. This "period" had its beginnings in the Hellenistic period around the third century B.C. and then, Roman influenced, it reached its zenith during the Christian era (fourth century). After the Arab conques (641 A.D.) it was perpetuated up to the twelth century A.D. Certainly the most outstanding piece of work here was a beautiful tapestry illustrating the rites of Dionysus, in particular resurrection scenes. It was very interesting, not only artistically, but also for its religious implications. There are the famous wooden sarcofagii that appear in the history books. The painted portraits on the lids were in an excellent state of preservation. There was a small quantity of pottery and some excellent bronze, but the majority of the display centered on tapestries and cloth.

From these halls I progressed further from areas which merely added to or illuminated areas with which I have a fair familiarity. The Department of Oriental Antiquities presents an almost complete panorama of the ancient civilizations of Asia Minor. This department was created in 1881 and its history is closely linked with the development of archeological research in Mesopotamia, Iran, the countries of the Levant and Cyprus, as well as in Punic North Africa. In particular, the section dedicated to Mesopotamia, Sumer and Akkad is very rich. These civilizations of the Middle East have always had a special fascination for me, as far back as my "innocent youth", but the opportunities for further study were non-existent.

Mesopotamia: Summeria

The Sumerians are still a people relatively unknown. It is not known who they were, but it is known that they were neither Aryans (that is, Indo-Europeans) nor Semites, two of the major populations of the ancient Middle East. Their origin is also unknown: it is likely that they came from the East, but any further statements in this regard, given present knowledge, would only be rash. They came to Mesopotamia during the fourth millenium, but the exact date is still an unsolved problem. A similar problem exists with trying to find the origins of the Etruscans.

Despite loose, contested and shifting structures of power, common to any system of independent city-states, there developed, remarkably, the flowering of a civilization that was homogeneous from north to south. It was a civilization with numerous cultural centres; the cities of Nippur, Urak, Ur, Lagash and Mari have furnished copious documentation of every kind. Tagash is the city best known at present, thanks to texts discovered there which permit a reconstruction of the organisation of a city at the dawn of the third millennium.

Perhaps, because of their involvement in much of the work, the Louvre seems to have put a great deal of work and effort into this area. I was very impressed by the attempt to give, as far as possible, a total impression. There were skillfully executed maps, large numbers of photographs - from both the air and the ground - as well as some superb reconstructions of temples, palaces and even sections of cities. This was done exceptionally well with the majority of the major cities represented. The quantity and quality of objects on display was breathtaking. Magnificent statues, statuettes, and columns in alabaster, red limestone, sandstone, diorite, calcite and basalt and superb pottery clearly showing changes in style and influence. Bronze, weaponry, cooking utensils and vast numbers of small cylindrical seals of various sizes, which when rolled into wax or clay produce a particular pattern.

There is a corresponding wealth of material from the reign of Gudea in Lagash during the 22nd century B.C. In particular, there are a number of representations of Gudea which bear witness to a Sumerian renaissance at the end of the third millenniu. One in diorite stands three feet 5.3 inches. The king priest of Lagash is depicted erect, hands folded, bare footed in the attitude of a man in the presence of gods. His long tunic leaves his right shoulder bare. He wears a turban on his head. Another, in calcite, shows him holding a vase, attribute of his divinity, from which gush life-giving waters full of fishes. The city of Lagash enjoyed a particularly splendid period under the reign of Gudea, though it is the city of Ur with which the majority of people will be familiar.

There are some magnificent displays for the cities of Mati and Larsa (2800 - 1750), twin neo-Sumerian cities on the Euprates. Again there are excellent displays of cylindrical seals, inscribed tablets, ornaments, armaments, vases, frescoes and sculptures. There is one magnificent piece which is still as vivid for me now as it was when I first saw it. This is an alabaster statuette some 20.4 inches tall of the superintendent Ebih-il. This was found in the temple of Istar at Mari, and illustrates magnificently Mesopotamian sculpture of the city state period. The Mari school is characterized by sure realism and a smile that gives life to many of its statues. The figure is seated in a wickerwork stool, and is wearing what appears to be a sheepskin skirt. The incrusted eyes lend an intense life to the face, and this is accentuated by the half-smile which tends to float on the lips. A superb piece.

From here one proceeds into the great Mesopotamian Empires; Babylon, the Cassites, Elamites and Mitanni, the Hittites, the Assyrian and the Achaemenian. Much of these empires blend into each other. Civilization was assimilated and perpetuated. Babylon was represented generally, and specificaly by one of those important items so often recorded iin our junior history books, the code of King Hammurabi (1792 - 1750 B.C.). The "code" is carved in basalt and stands seven feet four inches. It is postulated that it stood in the sanctuary of Shamash at Sippar. Above the 282 laws there is a relief showing Hammurabi standing before the god of the sun and justice, Shamash. He is holding the circle and staff, signs of his power, and his feet are placed on a mountain indicated by overlapping scales. The scene is reminiscent of the episode of Moses receiving the tablets of law on Mount Sinai. (Hammurabi's code was not a legal code in the modern sense of the word since it was not a collection of all the existing rules. It merely indicates

those laws which are being changed or confirmed. It also furnishes important information about social structures of that time, but that's another story.)

Babylon fell to the Cassites, who ruled from c. 1600 - 1240 B.C. and about whom we know very little. As said before, they assilated and perpetuated the civilization of their predecessors. Babylon returned to its position of dominance. From this time we see the eventual rise and dominance of the Assyrian Empire. This area is moderately well represented, but lacked the clarity which characterized some of the earlier exhibits. Still, there was very little to really complain about unless you were somewhat more expert and somewhat more greedy.

The next major section of the Louvre deals with the Achaemenian Empire. Under the Achaemanian (or Persian) Empire, the long dominance of the Mesopotamian powers ended and there was a shift of leadership to Iran. This collection was certainly one of the most extensive, breathtaking and exciting. The display began with five enameled tile relief walls depicting winged bulls and gryphons. They made it necessary for me to sit down for several minutes just to take them all in. The size and precision were most impressive, but I feel one of the most exciting aspects was the colours; greens, orange, bone and turquoise. In addition there were displays of terracotta - pots, jugs and bowls - jewellery was made of gold and silver, but considerable attention was given to enamelling and the use of coral, mother of pearl, jades and other semi-precious stones.

In the centre of the next room is the "Capital of the Apadana", decorated with half-length bulls, which surmounted one of the columns of the palace of Darius at Susa. It stands some thirty feet high, and is six to seven feet wide at the base, and twelve to fourteen at the top. It is certainly awe inspiring and necessitated a brief sitting to examine it all fully. Then comes the most staggering collection of enamelled brick panels. There is one huge relief showing the archers of the royal guard. The panel would have been ten to twelve feet high, and in the thirty to forty foot range. To use one of those cliches, which seems somehow appropriate here, "you really have to see it to believe it". Just standing before it, gazing up in rapt fascination, one senses a presence or an aura coming from the figures standing there. It becomes quite overwhelming, and it is difficult to tear yourself away. This sort of reaction is very personal, and unfortunately many other visitors did not feel it.

Other items include, intricate ceramic seals, a vast number of bronze and large ceramic tiles. There are Parthian terracottas (200 B.C. - 300 A.D.), inspired by Hellenic art, and sumptuous pieces from the Sassanide period (224 - 651), in particular an ornament in the form of a royal bust, from the end of the sixth century, reflecting the revival of Irananism on the eve of the Arab conquest.

In addition to this magnificent collection - some seven rooms of it - are numerous objects from Palestine, the essentially Biblical land, dating back to the fourth millennium. There are several monuments from the Syro-Phonecian region: certain of them date from the Roman period, such as the Mithreum of Sidon or the fine ensemble of Palmyrian sculptures. Others are contemporary with the Persian domination, like the sarcophagus from Sidon (5th to 4th centuries B.C.) which bears the unmistakable mark of the double influence of Egypt and Ionia. There were other exceptional pieces, especially those discovered at Bybols, and above all at Ras Shamra - the ancient Ugarit, the point where the Syrian, Egyptian and Mycenian civilizations met during the second millennium. The no-less complicated history of Cyprus, from the early Bronze Age (2300 - 2000 B.C.) to the 3rd century B.C., is illustrated by an abundant series of vases, terracotta figurenes, jewels and sculptures. Punic and Libico-Punic monuments brought back from Tunisia and Algeria illustrate

the extent of Phonecian civilization. There is a section of Islamic art, but at that time little of it was on display, unfortunately.

Having reread tthe preceeding pages I feel I may really have said too little about the paintings and graphic arts of which the Louvre has a reasonable collection. Paintings in the Louvre end around 1800 and there is no impressionist art whatsoever. It does not have an extensive photography collection. Artists who are of particular interest have their own museums (Rodin, Gustave Moreau) or are better represented elsewhere, such as Turner.

So, all in all, had it not been for the antiquities section, in particular the Oriential Antiquities, and several other outstanding pieces, the Louvre could well have turned out to be a major disappointment. That the Oriential Antiquities, especially those from Suma, were the outstanding highlight for me is all to apparent. Such judgement is, of course, a purely personal response to what I saw, and to a lesser degree, my knowledge of the area. Isn't is always.

* * *

DIPPING INTO THE EDITOR'S PRIVATE LIVES

One of the great delights of being affluent is that you can afford to spend money. One of the great problems of that blessed state is that you have to work so that people pay you the money that is so nice to spend (unless you are born in possession of one of more silver spoons).

Recently Valma and I have become a good sight more affluent than we have been in the past years but, as Valma will gladly tell you, this new found wealth had been bought at some inconvenience - she can't sleep-in in the mornings and there is that rotten correcting and other work to be done later in the day. The long and short of the thing is that Valma has landed a job as a drama/english/living skills teacher at one of the high schools here in Canberra and we now seem to have a lot more money coming into the house than we used to enjoy in the "good old days".

With Valma working full time the schedule of the house has changed a little and, as many couples who both have jobs will know, that means that our weekends have become the time when all those ghastly chores around the house have to be done. Neither of us are really very good at this housekeeping business (neither, so I am told, are most fans - which just goes to show that there must be something genetic in it afterall) and so recently, when there was a long weekend looming, we looked forward to it as a good opportunity to catch up on all those little jobs that should have been done but had managed to remain undone because of important things like looking at "Blakes 7" on the television or keeping my membership in ANZAPA in a healthy state. I suppose that the true measure of middle-class, mortgage owning people all over the world is that their free time is invariably spent doing odd-jobs around the house and not enjoying life to the full (whatever that means).

So we had it all planned out, and we'd even left some time to pop along to the National Word Festival which was also taking place over that long weekend, to catch several items which looked interesting and to see Lee Harding who had been invited up to the Festival to appear on a couple of items. We rolled up to the Festival in the mid afternoon of the first day to catch an item or two, say hello to Lee and then get back to work. What happened was that we arrived in the mid-afternoon and dragged ourselves away from the event a couple of days later when it was winding down and we were collapsing from exhaustion. It was like having been at a convention without intending to.

The nice thing about the festival, and the thing that kept us there much

longer than we had intended was the opportunity it gave us to listen to a lot of interesing people talking informatively... sort of like attending the program of a sf convention and actually finding that the panelists and other speakers really had new and interesting things to say instead of coming out with the same old stuff dressed up in new turns of phrase.

The Festival was held in one of the Halls of Residence of the Australian National University - quite like most similar places but with the odd quirks of architecture that make them enjoyable to wander around in. One of the smaller meeting rooms looked out onto a delightful patio with a decorous piece of sculpture (or fountain) so that when the panel we attended there proved to be totally uninteresting (the only one of that description, and that was probably only because it told us stuff we already knew) we could gaze out at the tranquil scenery. The main room was a very pleasant place in which to sit and absorb the atmosphere of the Festival, mainly because it was arranged so that if you got tof looking at the speaker or the panel you could gaze past them through the full length windows into the courtyard beyond with its fountain and pool, trees and lawn. There was also the bistro which was along a little path and then down a few steps through a door surrounded by shrubs. You could take your food and wander out into another lawned and shrubby area to eat at the tables there. As you would expect, there were also hucksters. There were also some people demonstrating their computers which were supposed to be good as word processors... We left some money with the hucksters but were not affluent enough to be persuaded by the computer people.

One of the themes of the first day was oral history. Being a part historian I though that this could be interesting because I might learn something of the techniques of the business of getting people to talk about their memories into a taperecorder. Instead, the panel on that particuar topic turned into a series of small talks on the sorts of things that people have been doing or the sorts of things that they are doing now. There were six or seven people involved and the end result was that the audience got a little talk from each of the people when I, for one, would have appreciated a greater depth of information from fewer people. We listened to a man talking about how he had put together a radio program on the white rule of Papua/New Guinea, another man who was doing oral history in northern Queensland, a woman who had put together a history of female wards of the state in South Australia around the turn of the century and then another man who worked for the National Library doing oral history (at least he had the advantage, for me, of talking for a little while about the theory of the business). And finally there was a man who probably talked about oral history in the Northern Territory - I wouldn't know for sure because I went to sleep, and since I was sitting right in the front row I hope I didn't put him off too much.

Nodding off probably reflected the amount of information that had been poured into me in the preceeding two panels, not the intrinsic boredom of the subject that was being discussed. I suppose that even a finely tuned fannish mind (which is used to listening to Guests of Honour and other people drone on at great length) has its limits - or perhaps it's just that I am not used to these semi-academic gabfests where people do a lot of talking, trying to communicate to others the pleasure of what they are doing in the pathetically limited time that the organisers had allowed to them.

The thing that I found disappointing about the format of the panels was that while each of the people involved had something interesting to say on their own, there was no cross-communication between them; there was no dailogue between panel members and no time for questions and discussion from the floor.

After almost three hours of that sort of bombardment Valma and I staggerestaggered out of the main meeting room, not because we weren't interested in what was to come next, but because we couldn't take any more. We wandered down to the

bistro and then went and sat with Lee Harding in the pleasant shade of an academic cloister. We mainly caught up on the latest happenings; what we had been doing, where we had been, who we had seen, what we thought about it and all the usual stuff. Of course Lee did most of the talking, that may well be because his lifestyle means that more interesting things happen to him or it may have something to do with the basically humdrum nature of public-service life. Being naturally voluable and enthusiastic may also have something to do with it.

On our way out and on the way home we exercised our privilege to spend money by chatting to a couple of the organisers and booking tickets to the barbeque planned for the following evening (you all know about the inevitable dreadfulness of this sort of food, bu D Dictionary which we picked up (autographed by the editor no less) and paid for with plastic money.

The events of the following two days are a bit hazy - as they have a tendancy to get at these events. The second day was taken up with an event called a "Writer's Marathon" in which a number of writers were given half an hour each to do whatever they liked. We missed a lot of that because we were off in another room watching a slide show by a man from B.U.G.A. U.P. - they go around doing interesting things to billboards advertising cigarettes.

When we got to the the Marathon in the main room there were people drooped over chairs in all sorts of poses suggesting exhaustion and information overload. It may not be too difficult for the authors to go on for half an hour - but an audience listening to a non-stop stream of people is another thing again. I had idly pondered on what a writer would do with the time alloted to her/him, and it didn't take me The simple and short word to describe this activity is almost always "tedious". The trouble is that people don't read out loud as fast as they read to themselves and there is a lot of blank space left in the mind while it is waiting for more input (that's my theory anyhow). I suppose that there could be something to be said for hearing authors read from their works, but unless they have a dramatic flair I can't imagine what it is.

As most readers of this fanzine will be aware, one person who does have dramatic flair is Lee Harding. But then he put that ability to an even better use and conducted an interesting half hour session in which he first gave a little talk and then fielded questions from the audience. Since the audience had not been given much opportunity to do anything for hours on end (except yawn and try to get comfortable) they found Lee's session difficult to get used to but Colin Steele kicked the performance along and it ended far too quickly.

The interesting point that Lee made (well actually there were more but it's the one which interested me the most since it is something that we have been nibbling at in the last couple of issues of this fanzine) is that he has stopped writing sf because, for him, we have arrived in the future and he now needs different metaphores to describe the things that interest him because the old ones no longer work. The sf readers and writers of twenty years ago could look forward to a world at the turn of the century which would be lousy with pollution, unemployment, and all those other ecxiting things that we're now living with... and with a future like that having crept up on us who'd want to play with the themes that it has to offer. So, instead, for Lee, it is time to search around for other themes and variations on which to work - it may not look like or be called sf, because it doesn't work within the guidelines that have been built up in the ghetto, but it won for those who are interested in looking for those themes.

During the day it started to rain - an event of some note and delight with the drought so severe that even people in cities are getting concerned about it.

As a result the barby was held in the bistro and Valma and I ended up sitting with some of the Festival organisers and we spent a jolly time talking about the various ways in which a convention or a similar event might be organised.

There were two highlights on the final day in addition to another session which Lee ran. One of them was the performace of the artist who invented Alexander Bunyip. He had a hoard of kids sitting on the floor in front of him and he drew various characters from Alexander's tv show to the delight of that audience, though the most delightful aspect of what he did was the way that he talked with and got reactions out of that audience. The other highlight was the session by Alan Garner - a British author arnearner - a British author of some note. He talked about himself and how he came to be a writer, answered questions from the floor and then, by public demand, concluded by reading the final passage from his "Stone Book" series of books. Even after a longweekend of being read at and otherwise bombarded by writers the exhauseted audience reacted enthusiastically to his maginificent performance.

And at the end of it all Valma and I dragged ourselves away from the Festival and wondered where on earth we'd ever get the energy to get back to the humdrum reality of the days to follow. Valma wanted to know why she couldn't just sleep in, but such is the price of affluence.

* * *

A VIEW FROM THE EDGE

Rob Gerrand

Bladerunner is enthralling, and as I watched it, with great excitement, I thought this is the first real sf film since 2001.

The sets are convincing: 2019 suddenly wasn't just a mythical year in the 21st century, but a mere thirty-seven years off. I might well be alive; my daughter would be thirty-nine. The film seemed to be providing a credible future.

The pollution, the noise, the vibrant street scenes (eating chinese or japanese fast food), the sense of Philip Dickian decay -- all seemed resonant with a possible future.

These were some of my thoughts as the hundreds of metres of celluliod coloured the light projected onto the screen.

The film's complexity contributes to its sense of authenticity; it is necessary, I think, to see it at least twice to catch what is going on continuously in the backgrounds. ("Backgrounds" include spaces in front and at the ar of the main focus of attention.) The audience cheered at the sight of a Hare Krishna group cymbaling its way almost off camera.

Yet the story, set in this marvellously well realised context, ultimately disappoints in that it doesn't do justice to Dick's Do Androids Dream Electric Sheep, the novel on which it is based. (The film is also dedicated to the memory of Dick.) Androids, or replicants, do most of the dirty work in the section of the 21st century with which Bladerunner concerns itself. Much of mankind had colonised various planets with the aid of replicant labour. This is fine for humanity, but grossly unjust for the replicants -- who take to returning to earth from time to time to attempt to extend their four year life span (their very limited life span is another injustice).

The narrator of the film, Deckard, is a police bounty hunter, or bladerunner: his job is to "retire" such cheeky replicants. The film centres around

Deckard's attempts to retire four replicants on the loose.

Laid on top of the 2019 setting, Deckard professionally performs his work in a style that goes straight back to the old B grade police movies of the 40's. This is a very ingenious touch, which works surprisingly well in with the 21st century setting, but it perhaps contains some of the seeds of the dissatisfaction which later grew in me. For the B grade atmosphere means that the film in the end becomes a mere chase movie between Deckard and the one remaining replicant. A very thrilling, edge of the seat chase, certainly -- complete with melodramatic scalings, with broken fingers, of impossible overhanging ledges on high old deserted apartment buildings -- but a chase nonetheless, and the promise of the film's impressive first half is not fulfilled by a chase sequence.

Dick's novel (which is worth reading if any of you haven't already done so; and re-reading if you have) is a far richer and more complex work of art, which brings attention to the question "what is it to be human?" in a far more sophisticated fashion than does the film. The film certainly makes the replicants sympathetic; in fact this is one of Bladerunner's strengths. But Dick in his novel manages to insinuate the question "is Deckard a replicant?" in a way that the reader can extend and ask of any of the other characters,

I'm not going to disinter all the old arguments about whether a film can ever do justice to a book on which is is based (or vice versa!). That argument, comparable with the one about whether a poem can be adequately translated into another language, admits to two answers: "Yes" and "No". (Three answers -- or is it only one -- if you count "Maybe".) Yes: if the film (or poem) conveyed a feeling of subtlety and shades of meaning appropriate to the original. No: if a literal translation is attempted; for a film is structured differently to a book, just as (with poetry) one language is structured differently to another.

In applying this to Bladerunner, suffice it to say that the serious concerns of Philip Dick's novel, while they are initially considered in the film (thus raising expectations), are not pursued.

Rick Deckard's wife does not appear in the film; nor does Buster Friendly, that ultimate emetic tv anchorman; nor does Wilbur Mercer nor the Mercerism with its Sisyphus-like climbing; nor the alternative police force; nor a host of other details.

All these things, if they had been included, would of course have wrecked the film, fatally overloaded it. The failing, such as it is, of the film is, rather, that all its early resonances (and those of the novel) are eventually discarded for the sake of a cliff-hanging ending.

As an aside. I understand the version of the film that we in Australia are seeing is different to that released in the UK, where apparanly there is no voice-over narrator. I don't know to what extent the film had been released in the US. The New Yorker has yet to review it, which seems to indicate that it has not been released in New York yet. Perhaps the producers or distributors are waiting to see how the UK and Australian versions do.

Putting all these remarks into perspective, Bladerunner is, nonetheless, an interesting, grim and engrossing film, very well made, with some of the best effects yet seen, and for me the most satisfying and convincing sf film since 2001.

* * *

MORE AUSTRALIAN FANZINES

The Mentor is the oldest fanzine still being published in Australia - it was around when I came along in 1966, faded away in the early 70s and revived again in recent years. This means that Ron Clarke is probably one of the most experienced fanzine editors and publishers in Australia and that his fanzine should be among the best being published in this country. This may actually be the case but, of course, I'm not terribly impressed by current Australian fanzines so being "among the best" is no great praise.

The most recent issue of The Mentor (number 42) is a fairly typical example of the style which this fanzine has had. There is a short editorial in which Ron mentions, this time, the fanzines published in Australia in the past year; Michael Hailstone writes about possible problems with the "green house effect"; John Alderson writes about society and history and Bert Chandler produces yet another interesting column. There is also some fiction and poetry (neither piece being terribly impressive) and the centre of the issue is the letter column which occupies about half its pages; and then there are a good many short notices of recent books. The reason I'm not going into more detail is because one issue of this fanzine is more or less the same as the next - the subject of the contents may change but the earnest tone of the discussion remains the same.

The formula that Ron uses is that of the tried and true genzine, with a concentration on sf and an interest in some things going on in the real world. The letter column reflects this general inclination by printing comments, in a fairly undigested form, on the previous issue and raising the occasional new issue. This is the sort of thing that Ron has been doing, year in and year out, for as long as I can remember; he is probably the only person in a continually changing sea of participants which has, at some time or another, contained just about everybody who has passed through Australian fandom. People have drifted in and out but the atmosphere remains one of detatched editorial presence reflecting, rather than directing, the readers interests.

There is, of course, nothing really wrong with this kind of fanzine. Perhaps it is even a necessary part of any fannish region, being a place in which people can experiment with their abilities and their expanding awareness of fandom and the realities of the larger outside world. All the same, the result of this kind of environment is a sort of ennui; with most of the participants settled down to exchange views on matters which seem to be more of academic than real life interest. At least, very little of the discussion seems to be informed by any great committment to a cause or an evangelical desire to change people's basic attitudes to things which the writers consider important.

It seems to me that the reasons for this state of affairs is the inclination of the fanzine's editor. Like Marc Ortlieb (mentioned in the previous issue), I suspect that Ron has found it more comfortable to publish his fanzine in a pattern which suits him rather than press to the boundaries of his abilities. The difference between the two editors seems to be (to me) that Ron has occupied a certain position in fandom for a long time, and has fulfiled a useful role for most of that time, whereas Marc has shown promise that he could publish one of the Great fanzines, and has become waylaid.

In a recent comment Jack Herman said that The Mentor was underrated. I cannot agree. The fanzine probably receives the sort of response that Ron wants for it at the level he is aiming. If Ron's fanzine is not destined to become one of the classics, along with ASFR, SFC and Touchstone, that is because he prefers to hold back on that final expenditure of energy and ability which would lift him to that level, but also cause him to burn out. I can understand that point of view and I can agree with it. I too would like to still be publishing a competent fanzine which people find interesting in a few years time. On the other hand I also have the desire to be a "high flyer" for a

little while and to set the world on its ear.

The Mentor, Ron L Clarke, 6 Bellevue Road, Faulconbridge, N.S.W. 2776, published every second month, available for the usual of $1 per issue.

Another fanzine that's been around for a fair time is Forerunner, the newsletter (or what you will) of the Sydney SF Foundation (SSFF). One of the differences between it and The Mentor is that Forerunner has passed through a number of editorial hands on its way to the present. It therefore lacks the continuity that Ron has provided for his fanzine and some of its ups and downs coincide with different editors. It is now edited and produced by Shayne McCormack, one of the SSFF stalwarts who seems to leap in and do things for the club when nobody else is interested.

The result is a fanzine which simply doesn't have any kind of impact on the reader, it gets filed away in the "also rans". This is a pity because there is no doubt that Shayne tries to produce an interesting and informative fanzine, but if the SSFF is in the doldrums at the moment this is reflected in both the fanzine's tone and contents. Very little of the current issue (Vol. 5, No. 7/8) inspires great enthusiasm in the reader because there is an almost overwhelming lack of direction and purpose in it. Reviews and comments which could strike a responsive chord are somehow diminished by their drab surroundings such as letters from Glen Crawford and Joseph Nicholas which could be classed as fairly depressive. In fact the only thing that really made the issue worthwhile was a marvellous article from Bert Chandler about how he went to Orange for the Famous Authors week and almost nothing happened - four and a little pages of some of the most interesting personal writing I've seen in a long time.

The problem which Shayne faces is an age old one for any fanzine editor who finds themselves lumbered with the job of getting out the local club newsletter. Club members are not necessarily the kinds people who will contribute anything worthwhile (or anything at all) to their fanzine or enjoy what is published in it if it isn't directly related to the club. There is often a vague sort of feeling that the fanzine should be some kind of magical activity and that it should contain everything that the reader needs to know to be the complete sf fan. Anybody who has produced a club fanzine knows about this sort of pressure and so I'm a little amazed that a person like Shayne, who has been around for a fair while, could end up in this predicament.

In the editorial of the current issue Shayne announces that she is going to attempt to work her way out of the problem by treating Forerunner as though it were her personal fanzine. I wish her well in this because, judging from her long track record, she should be able to put together an interesting and friendly (if idiosyncratic) fanzine which will be well appreciated. That will be if she can overcome the intern tensions of club fanzines I've briefly mentioned. It is one thing to declare that henceforth things will be done in this or that way, it is another to make them stick, particularly in the face of mass apathy.

It seems to me that the only way out of this sort of dilemma is just not to bother with the problem and to let it go away. Of course there are personal ideas which keep people at this sort of thing, and if Shayne has a commitment to the SSFF which is going to keep her publishing something which isn't going properly, she would probably do well to re-examine her motivations and give it away.

Forerunner, edited by Shayne McCormack (P.O. Box A491, Sydney South, N.S.W. 2000) for the Sydney SF Foundation, available to SSFF members or also available for the usual or $4 for twelve issues.

I've been delighted to see that the flow of fanzines from the West has not completely ceased, though it has slowed to a pathetic dribble. Some fans over there are still capable of producing the odd fanzine, The Hard Ones keeps up that reputation.

My comments of this fanzine are going to be short and confused because, of all the fanzines I've received over the past year, this is the one which does the most to make me think about what a fanzine should be and what it should look like. What I mean is that it is probably a fanzine with a lot of potential (and already probably quite good), but it just doesn't push my buttons in the way that I usually recognise as being related to fanzines.

The contents of this fanzine are fairly limited - some film reviews, a couple of letters of comment and some editorial comment. The art comprises the usual fillos and a couple of strips which are quite well executed.

The art in The Hard Ones is generally better and more interesting than that in other Australian fanzines that I see. This is as a result of work done by Des Waterman, who i new to me. Some of the cartoon work is very imaginative with a good sense of interesting line and composition (although I thought that the thinner lined work was better because it allowed the artist better control over the images he created). Both the strips were also enlivened by a sense of humor and irony not very often found, but very appreciated. I hope that Des continues to draw for this (and other) fanzines so that his continued experience will knock off some of the rough edges which he has and that his imagination and control will continue to develop.

The written parts of the fanzine are good, as far as they go, which often isn't that far. The film reviews have what you might call a thematic continuity since the writer is concerned about horror films and compares them, but there is little analysis of the things in a film which make them good; the sorts of images and connections which are made up in the mind of the viewer .

The letter column is a little weak, not the fault of the editor since if only a couple of people respond there isn't much that the editor can do about it.

I think that one of the things which put me off this fanzine is the disjointedness of the thing. (This isn't helped since the fanzine is printed only on one side of the paper, but) there seems to be no internal consistency between much of what happens in the fanzine, as though the editor had collected together various different items, run them off and then just collated the results together. This kind of statement assumes that fanzines should, in fact, have an internal cohesion; others might want to debate the point and then we'd end up with a dialogue on what are the various attributes of a good fanzine and also features which they don't need to have. But until that sort of thing is resolved this is going to be a fanzine which can be labled "interesting", at least.

The Hard Ones, Gary Barber, 4109 Wannerco Road, Balcatta, W.A. 6021, available for the usual, published three times a year.

Some worldcon bidding committees will do almost anything to spread the word around. South on Peachtree is published by the "Atlanta in '86" people and is a reasonable general distribution fanzine. The format, art, printing and writing styles are all typically North American Average - nothing really spectacular but also not junk. There's not much more to say except that a worldcon in the South seems like a good idea and you might write to these people for a copy so that you can get a better idea of what they're about.

South of Peachtree, Worldcon Atlanta Inc., P.O. Box 10094, Atlanta, G.A. 30319, U.S.A.

* * *

LETTERS OF COMMEMT

John D Berry, 525 19th Avenue East, Seattle, W.A. 98112, U.S.A.

I've resisted the urge to send forty dollars to Bruce Gillespie, for the simple reason that I've still got all the old SFCs ; the only advantage to me of buying the reprint edition would be better typography and a chance to read Bruce's historical introduction. (I would like to read that introduction but forty dollars for one fan article seems pretty steep.) I wish I could put my hands on those early issues immediately, because I've been wanting to do some rereading to see whether it's SFC that's changed or my taste in fanzines. The last couple of issues (which means, of course, the last couple of years' output) have struck me as almost self-parody - not by Bruce, but by the whole set of contributors. If not parody, then laziness and self-indulgence. I never used to expect from George Turner, say, the kind of cheap shots that he took at Delany's Triton: what Eileen aptly calls the "sniper-on-the-rooftop school of criticism". It's a kind of dismissive criticism that looks superficially like the application of very high standards but really amounts to wallowing in the citics' crustiness. But what I remember from earlier SFCs (apart from the interminable articles from Franz Rottensteiner) was good, if harsh, criticism. (Apart, too, from the obvious fannishness of Bruce's personal writing and the letters it engendered.)

In passing, you mention "the hospitality of fandom as it then was in Sydney". I've always gotten a lot of fanzines from Melbourne, and have a pretty good sense of the contintity in Melbourne fandom, but for all the fanzines I've gotten over the years from Sydney, I haven't been able to get a clear sense of the changing nature of Sydney fandom. That is, I have some images of Sydney fandom these days, and I have some from Aussiecon and before, but I'm not clear on all the middle parts. Perhaps you, or someone closer to Sydney, could write a bit about how "fandom as it then was in Sydney" became fandom as it now is in Sydney.

((Don't ask me to write that article John, I seem to be in about the same boat as you when it comes to understanding what happened in Sydney between about 1974 and 1978. I suppose that while I was off helping with Aussiecon, and then geting over the whole thing, events in Sydney went on their merry way and the people who had been active up until when I lost track were replaced (in large part) by people who drifted in after that worldcon. The odd thing is that for all that blank period I was producing Fanew Sletter and so you'd think that I should have had my finger on the pulse, but apparently that's not the case. Which just goes to show that there are disadvantages in publishing a newszine or that, if you want to look at it another way, the press might not always know what's going on or have a view of the big picture.))

There's nothing inherently futile about a fanzine lettercolumn that's full of comments on how well or badly the previous issue was done. It has to be edited with a sure hand, though. First of all, you toss out all the ego-boosting bits that tell you what a wonderful editor you are; the only ones that stay should be ones that you can't cut out because they make some other worthwhile point. Then go most of the deflating bits about how crappy it all is; they, too, have to stand on the strength of their inherent interest. This may eliminate virtually every critical comment; if so, I'm sure you'll be happy. But it may leave one of more letters that have something to say about the issue that's more than "I liked this/I didn't like that" or "it's good/it's bad": the sort of real critical comment that shows how the thing works, or fails to work, and that's not only of interest to the editor and contributors, for whom it can be assumed to hit close to home, but to all the other editors and writers who

read the fanzine, too. After all, you're doing the same thing in your fanzine reviews; some people do that in their letters, and do it well.

((I almost couldn't have put it better. However thinking and writing critically don't seem to be in vogue just at the moment. I suppose that's the result of the "letter of comment" syndrome which leads people to fill a page of two with general comments to the editor to make sure that they get the next issue and to dish out the appropriate egoboo. That sort of response is, of course, a lot better than none and I, as a fanzine editor, would be the last person to knock it. All the same, deliberate criticism in the form of articles is a much surer source of thoughtful writing and perhaps we should encourage more of it.))

Jean Weber, c/ CSIRO, Box 333, Wentworth Building, University of Sydney, N.S.W. 2006

Michael Hailstone appears to be one of those who thinks criticism (and lack of interest in purchasing his product) is a terrible thing, but I thought your reply to him covered the reasons very well. He seems, from his letters elsewhere, to think that because he's sacrificing himself to offer an opportunity for writers to publish, that fandom owes him support. Which, as you tactfully point out, is crap. I hope his association with Neville Angove's publications, which are attractively presented, will help both of them. Though I'm not wildly impressed with the quality of writing in Angove's magazine, I do support him because he's giving it a professional effort (and he admits he is not much of a fiction editor; I find that sort of honesty refreshing). On reflection, I suppose it's easy for me to say I "support" Angove, but in fact I don't spend money on his magazine; I trade. But then, like you, I don't have a paid subscription to any fanzine; I've been fortunate enough to get some of the others (who usually charge) in trade too.

On the other hand, I do spend money on Cory & Collins books, even those I don't think I'll like. (I can always give those away.) Their last couple of years' offering have been quite a mixed bag for me: Keith Taylor's book I enjoyed (Lances of Negesdul), Wynne Whiteford's Sapphire Road disappointed me while having elements that I would like to have seen further developed (some good stuff in there, but the best bits for me were the least developed), I couldn't read Looking for Blucher, but I enjoyed Breathing Space Only largely because I was plotting a story of my own at the same time, in the same setting, and was a bit miffed when someone scooped me (and did it well). I've got several other novels from C&C on my "to be read" shelf. In contrast to Marc Ortlieb, I enjoyed Dreaming Dragons and Beloved Son (and Vaneglory) and thought that they were well written; I agree that Moon in the Ground was tedious, especially in the small size type. I'm not quite sure what kept me going to actually finish it.

((That's an interesting catalogue of likes and dislikes Jean, amd starts to make me wonder if there is any sort of pattern to the reading preferences of you, other local sf fans and readers. The trouble seems to me to be that currently people are not really explaining their likes and dislikes beyond the fact that they found this of that book interesting or entrtaining to read. This may well be one of the reasons for the lack of strength in current fannish critical writing or, of course, it may simply be that there are more interesting or exciting things to do than cogitate on the nature of books or their readers. However I, for one, would have been interested in knowing what some of the undeveloped elements of Wynn Whiteford's book were so that others could have compared their reactions to yours.))

Reading Bruce Gillespie's contribution makes me realise I'm glad that I'm less fussy about the books I read; if the contents interest me, I'm happy to make a lot of allowances for the style of the writing; though of course a book that is both well written and has interesting subject matter is the best! But I

find that much mainstream fiction that I see (even, or especially, that which has won critical acclaim) strikes me as a lot of well-chosen words saying little of nothing.

((It looks as though you're another person that I wouldn't want to lock in a room with Bruce Gillespie, although you and Marc might see eye to eye on the matter of literature. I'm beginning to get the impression that there are some of us who read basically for entertianment and information, and that there are others who read for the sheer pleasure of it. Some people might say that the main point of writing is to string together well chosen words, but it seems not to be the dominant idea with people who contribute to this column.))

Ali Kayn, 16/349 Beaconsfield Pde., St. Kilda W., Vict. 3182

Regarding the question of publication outlets for novices, etc., Carol Cranwell appears to keep track of professional and non-professional outlets. She's involved with writer's workshops, competitions and so on so I expect that she attempts to keep her finger on the pulse. Her address is PO Box 79, Warringah Hall, Brookvale, N.S.W. 2100.

I find the whole question of what is a fanzine and what is a good fanzine a wonderful outlet. Such discussions are sure to save doing the actual work. For myself, I would rather discuss what I like and dislike rather than attempt to publish my own fanzine and risk the embarrassment of a dismal flop. I know how much I detest receiving dreadful magazines - I cringe at the thought of the postlady seeing them and I would cringe even more if I were to create one myself.

((That's a poor excuse Ali! I know that in the previous issue I said something about not really having to be a practising exponent of a particular skill to be able to comment, and of course, not being a professional politician, I can't change my mind overnight. All the same, one of the reasons that I chatter so much about the business of publishing fanzines is so that others might get one of two ideas - that they will do better if they already publish a fanzine, or that they will give it a go if they don't.))

Leanne Frahm, 272 Slade Point Road, Slade Point, Qld. 4741.

It's a great pity that Jenny Bryce doesn't write more often, and I don't necessarily mean for fanzines. She's very gifted in this respect, as well as musically. She seems to latch on to the small things that make different events and people more real to me, and recount them in such an economical and entertaining way that I can see them happpening.

Your advertisement for Bruce's opus, also in Ornithopter 11, (you'll never get ahead in PR: too wordy by half) certainly whetter my appetite for the history of earlier Australian fandom. I find what I've read of it intriguing, and would love to read more. But I have to say I baulk at $40, even though I cringe guiltily while saying it. I saw a limited edition of Australian birds in watercolours once, and I love Australian birds, and I love watercolours. The price was slashed to around $75. Much as it hurt, I had to say no. There's a limit to self-indulgence in a family situation, and right now I feel the same way about the special edition of SFC. Do you think he'll bring it out in paperback?

((Golly, I thought that it already was in paperback. I wonder what the price is for the hard back edition? Anyhow, I wouldn't worry about not being able to get a copy right away, the way that Bruce talks about it I get the impression that there will still be copies left by the time we're all on the pension.))

I probably shouldn't enter into the discussion you continued with Marc on Australian sf and the overseas market as I still have a lot to learn, but

since when has ignorance not been a prerequisite in fanzines? I've been slanting my writing more to what is loosely called "horror" lately, because I've found in this genre that I can write about the places I know here in Australia, and the people I know. It makes writing so much easier. And I've been encouraged in that such stories are getting a more positive result in the U.S., (not always selling, but I know they're better and the editors are telling me they're better.)

I was hesitant about using Australian backgrounds for the U.S. market for a while, but Jane Butler (my *agent*) said in a letter, "And by all means I think you should stay comfortably in the Australian countryside ... it is just that (comfortable, I mean) and suits you better ... To say nothing of the popularity Aussie films and literature are currently enjoying here."

One problem that I think some Australian writers have is that they too self-consciously decide to write "an Australian story", instead of a story that happens to be in Australia. The result can also be self-conscious and agressive, with a style that submerges the actual story-telling. It makes more sense to relax and just let the Austrailaness happen naturally.

I had to giggle at Paul Kennedy's letter. It's a brave man who tells Leigh Edmonds he doesn't know what he's talking about. What was that I said about ignorance before?

Terry Frost, 4/15 Samuels Street, Dubbo, N.S.W. 2830.

A word or two on Helen Swift's fascinating article; the kooris aren't getting the padded end of the stick here in Dubbo, either. "Boong" jokes are the perennial favourite (as they are among a few Sydney fringe-fans, I'm afraid). Having a very very diluted amount of aboriginal blood in my ancestory is enough to piss me off mightily at those attempts at humor (though the genetic link is by no means necessary to the offendedness). Aboriginal employment is unreasonably below white percentages and you won't see a black or even a brown face across any counter except, perhaps, the Aboriginal Legal Aid office in town. There are, however, a number of aboriginal truck drivers with their own rigs, and technical college classes are attracting increasing numbers of aboriginal women even with the TAFE cutbacks. Things are improving (this close to the city, at least) but damn slowly.

I like the fanzine reviews, but aren't sure that you always know what the editor is trying to do. This surely must influence the veracity of your criticism. From your piece on Q36 I get the idea that you have firm ideas that a fannish fanzine should do things by the rules that worked in the past. Like it or not, fandom is changing and the only way to keep up with that in a fanzine is to experiment and dare to be different. Even the grottiest of the West Australian crudzines is at least trying for originality and a unique style. (Granted that they're ninety-nine percent failures, but the principle is an honourable one).

((If I were to spend my time worrying about whether or not I really had a handle on the thoughts of the people editing the fanzines that I comment on, I'd probably never have the time to do anything about the business of trying to review their works. I have this half thought through theory that people who publish fanzines (or engage in almost any form of creative endeavour for that matter) have very similar objectives in mind as they work. If this is the case then it should be a fair thing to look at all works from a similar footing. If I'm wrong, then at least I've had a go at it, and I also think that that is an important thing in itself since nobody else in Australia is curently trying to review fanzines in depth. What the readers of my comments should try to do is figure out the sorts of things that I like (the basis of my comments) and go on from there to draw their own conclusions. @

The other point that you make is perhaps one of the "articles of faith" that we could argue over if we were so inclined. I don't think that experimenting and daring to be different are the keys to succes, although I would have to give way if we are going to talk about the very pinacle of artistics expression. But since we're not, I'd claim that what is important is that the editor of a fanzine aims to do the best that they can and that they continue to think about what they are doing, the ways they are doing it and the results that they are achieving so that they can improve their work. Despite all this, I think that in this particular case - my comments on Marc Ortlieb's recent efforts - we actually agree. The main problem with Q36 is that it has begun to stagnate, it needs to try new things and explore new directions in order to keep up the level of excitement that it had established in its earlier issues.))

Harry Warner Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, U.S.A.

I won't go into details on my hypothesis that the entity whom you write about and publish an article from in Ornithopter 10 is not the Joseph Nicholas whom we all came to love as a fanzine reviewer, but rather something indescribable which slipped into this space-time continuum as a result of the storms which those fanzine reviews stirred up in fandom. I wouldn't want to spoil the illusion, as long as the entity makes you so happy on its visits and creates such intensely interesting articles as this account of the suspenseful flight. I haven't flown for a dozen years, since attending the first Noreascon. I know the statistics show it's safer than other forms of transportation. But I think the comparison wouldn't be in favor of air travel over motor vehicles, if consideration were given to the fact that you can improve your chances of safe travel on the highway. You can drive a vehicle which has received proper care and is sturdy enough to increase your chances of surviving a crash, you can refrain from driving while under the influence of medicine or drugs, you can stay off the highways during the most dangerous hours (from perhaps 11 p.m. to 3 a.m.) and you can go a few miles out of the way if necessary to avoid the most risky stretches of road. If you travel by air, you must give up all hope of beating the odds because there's no real difference between the safety accomplishments of the major airlines or any other way of improving your chance of getting where you're going in a breathing condition.

It's curious, my reaction to the reprints: I had the sensation that I'd read this article not too many years ago. Maybe someone else reprinted it or maybe another article covering much the same grounds reached me. I doubt if I received that issue of Etherline. It should be possible for you to dig out some of the prominent Australian urfans who figure in this narrative. Most of them were very young in the late 1930s. One of the Russell brothers was only thirteen when he entered fandom, I think, and I seem to remember that Veney and Castellari were about fifteen when I first contacted them. (If you think John Gregor might be still using that penname, my memory and the Fanzine Index tell me that he spelled the name Devern, not Deverne.) As for collections of Australian fanzines from this first outburst, I should have many of them in the attic somewhere. But I don't want to be dogmatic on the matter, because a spacewarp up there had been giving me trouble: the four fat volumes of Brahms' collected lieder vanished for almost a year and then reappeared just the other day where they were immediately visible, and my large set of collected works of Rudyard Kipling has been somewhere in hyperspace for an even longer period of time. Veney seems to have had access to a good collection of those fanzines when he wrote the article and I think he has been in occasional contact with some Australian fans in recent years. Another possibility: Vol Molesworth must have used old fanzines to compile his history of the early years of Australian fandom, and Laura might have inherited them or may know where they went after his death.

((In about 1972 Ron Graham published a pamphlet which had similar information to that which is in the Veney article. Since I get the feeling

that 1972 was only a little while ago you may, from your perspective, feel that it is even more recent. Ron may have taken his information from the Veney article or he may have written it from the fanzines which he had in his collection - it may well have been a combination of both. But if Ron did have his own set of fanzines then they might have ended up in the library where a good part of the rest of his collection went (I can see the point in the family trying to make money from selling off old and rare books, but would there be much money in fanzines or would it be easier just to let the library have them). Somebody in Sydney might be able to let us know about this possibility.))

Teresa Moriss, 12 Brighton Road, Glenelg, S.A. 5045.

Reading "Why I no longer read science fiction" by Bruce Gillespie makes me think. Why do I read science fiction? Or, at least, why do I think I do? I came to the conclusion that I select books from the sf and fantasy genres because that is where I expect to find the gold. That is where I expect to find the free ranging of ideas and imagination, twists in plot, experiments with style and technique. I am not always satisfied with what I read, but generally I feel more entertained by the writings of sf than of other genres. Thrillers don't seem to thrill me, they have a lot of people going about with a lot of intrigue over nothing in particular. A lot of books seem like Train Wreck, which I haven't read but which sounds fairly typical of the sort of book where the cardboard characters are given the obligatory major problems such as big bills or impending divorce, but little actual characterisation. Sf is famous for its cardboard characters who exist only to impart certain information to readers, but this is something Asimov et. al. get away with because of the novelty of their story's premise. In a way, I must be lucky because, being new to sf, I can still turn to all the old masters when I'm disgusted enough with contemporary offerings. I've hardly started on writers like Dick, Silverberg and Sturgeon. There's still plenty of old gold for me to uncover before I become disillusioned, and so sense of wonder is still before me. Sometimes, although not nearly as often as I would like, there is also perception and enlightenment in sf and just plain good writing. There seems to be a lot of trash on the way to uncovering the gold, but I wouldn't want to miss the lyrical beauty of Country of the Blind or Roger Zelazny's short stories or Samuel Delany's Nova. I wouldn't want to have missed The Lord of the Rings, Flowers for Algernon, or The Greatest Terran of Them All.

I wouldn't want to be stuck with reading domestic novels, historical romances (which, with a few notable exceptions, are Mills and Boon dressed up) or whodunnits by authors so stuck on certain patterns, or formula, that it becomes easy to solve the mystery from the first few pages. All the genres have their trash and it's just a matter of personal taste as to which one you will like to sift through.

I agree with Nikki White that media and general fans should not seperate into hostile camps to regard each other jealously across the off-set printer. Media fans are often hungry for more fiction about their heroes and are willing to pay for it. By paying for it the printing of further fic-fanzines becomes possible and the hungry readers can be kept satisfied. The writers put some work into the fanzines and are, in fact, following the age-old custom of writing the stories they want to read. Besides, funds raised from the sales of these fanzines also help the media clubs survive.

General fanzines are labours of love, or masochism, done by individuals for no particular reason - or do you have one? Anyway, I'm all for free fanzines, and it's good to hear that Nikki has done one for media fans. I hope they get the idea and keep it going. Occasionally I have considered the possibility of doing a media fanzine myself, but the idea of having to explain it to everyone I hand it out to is daunting, and I don't think I'd get much response to it

anyway. As Nikki says, media fans are used to just sitting back and reading their newsletters. (This has something to do with the passive nature of television entertainment?) On the other hand media clubs are often socially active.

L.W. Symes, c/ National Australia Bank, Personnel Department, Brisbane, Qld. 4000.

Ever since I received my first copy of Ornithopter I have considered why you sent it to me. Now I know - I'm being held to ransom for a letter!

And what a way to find out. I was just settling down with Rataplan 21 after a delicious home-made spaghetti bolognaise, ready to tuck into my coffee and cigar, when, during my perusal of the magazine, I was startled to discover a big red *A*. So, I have stirred myself into action.

((I'm glad to see it. Unlike most other forms of magazine, the fanzine depends upon its readers to keep it going, not only because the expressed appreciation of the reader is the only real payment that the editor gets, but also because it is the readers who provide a valuable contribution to the fanzine in the letter column and by also giving the editor a better idea of the the sorts of things they think are worth publishing.))

I hope that Bruce Gillespie does continue to publish SF Commentary, and also to read and criticise current sf. I do not always agree with what he says, but often, after I have read a novel, and then read his review of it, I can see where he is right.

As far as a New Wave is concerned, publishers, even in sf, are out to make a profit, and will publish mostly only material that will sell well. And writing that sells well need not be, and often is not, of a good literary standard. Any new style of literature will only sell in small amounts, because the people who can recognise that it is an advance in quality are few in number, and any such new work would not be published in large numbers because the commercial publishers wouldn't risk money on it, and the Literature Board, etc., do not have enough money. I think this problem will always be with us.

We need Bruce, and others like him, to let us know when new styles have emerged, and to publicise them.

((Enclosed with the letter was a cutting which relates to Helen Swift's article in the previous issue. It dealt with a recent case in the Northern Territory in which a couple of aboriginal girls had eaten the soap powder "Rinso" in order to get a high. They apparently didn't like the idea of sniffing petrol to get high and so looked around for some other substance that is easy to get at which might give a similar effect. Rinso apparently does bring on a sense of euphoria after you've eaten a few handfuls of the stuff, but it also causes acute and severe abdominal pains. The reported reason that they liked Rinso was that it was tastier than other brands.))

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

The Yalata horror story was interesting. I presume, from Helen's description of the teachers as eighty-five per cent rampant christians, that some/many of the staff there were right-wing/fundamentalist/etc. I, being a little biased here, suspect that if the reserve had been an ex-Anglican mission, it would have been less of a mess, as, to my, knowledge the Anglican missions in the Northern Territory at least actually train the local staff in work skills. There are some christian missions that try to help and succeed at least a little. I have heard of one which is training in printing skills.

((But what

use is being able to operate a printing press in the middle of the Northern Territory?))

There is an aboriginal woman at work who is one of the Fraser Island/Maryborough people. She moved down to Sydney to give her children a better education, mainly because of a certain politicans. She goes back for holidays, but refuses to live there while the likes of Hinze and Jo are in charge in Queensland. If her kids stay in Sydney they'll probably have less problems than many other young part aboriginies in Queensland.

My own opinion on why magazines fail in this country is that it is the same reason why we have such a terrible market for fantasy art; the difficulty of persuading people to part with their money. This creates a Catch-22 situation where the creator has to work full or part time to pay the bills, hence reducing the amount of time available for creative activities, hence reducing the quantity and quality produced, which means that the creator has to have a job to live.

In reply to your comments on my previous letter; what I meant is that some one who has an inside view of the media being reviewed could give a more accurate and knowledgable review. I never said you have to have a degree in the subject, just be knowledgable. Besides which, most fans don't even know the difference between gouache, water colour and acrylic. Would you respect a review of, say, a George Turner novel, by someone who doesn't even know the difference between Niven and Bradbury, or why sci-fi is a term we resent?

((That all depends on the standard of the review. There are good and bad reviews in almost any field, and some of those are the result of sheer ignorance while others come from an inability to look at something and write intelligently about it. It is, of course, quite possible to know nothing about sf and yet be able to write critically about a work in the field using literary standards.))

Ted White, 1014 Tuckahoe Street, Falls Church, V.A. 22046, USA.

What is this bullshit linking my name so intimately with Joseph Nicholas? Marc Ortlieb refers to me as an "American Joseph Nicholas knocker", and assumes that out of Nicholas's piece on flying in Ornithopter 10 I would "only notice the bit where he pokes fun at SF in Dimension," a fine bit of prescience indeed. Actually, Marc, I read the whole piece, and thought to myself at the time, "If Joseph could only curb his tendencies to sneer at people he can't hold a candle to, he'd be a decent writer."

I find it amusing that I have been singled out by Ortlieb (and Joe himself) as Joseph's current American nemesis, since I can think of lots of Americans (Mike Glyer probably tops the list, going on published writings) who holds Joseph in greater contempt than I do, and no doubt there are Brits (like D. West) who rank equally high on that list.

((That's probably all quite true. All the same, the problem that both you and Joseph now have is that you've been providing one of the greatest entertainments to be seen in many years in various fanzines with the fueding that you two have been engaging in. I'm sure that, for most of us observers, the whole initial point of the disagreement has long been forgotten; what is important is that the tussle between two titans continues and it gives us something to look forward to in future fanzines. Life has never quite been the same since they took professional wreastling off the tv - this is the closest substitute that we've seen in years.

Some people don't agree with me, but I reckon that you and Joseph keep up a very private correspondence in which you map out future campaigns to ensure that they have the maximum inpact and entertainment appeal. Those people tell me that you two really are at each others throats, but I can't

believe that such an epic could just spring fully formed out of thin air.))

I enjoyed both your look at the SF Commentary reprint and your fanzine reviews. Both embody, it seems to me, emminently sensible criteria and thinking. You are not afraid to explore aspects of Australia's fanhistory, and you're not afraid to write critically. Why aren't you on Joesph's shit list? In any case, I think of the Bangsund/Gillespie/ASFR/SFC period as an Australian "golden age" as well. I recall being quite impressed with the general level of the criticism in both zines (and also in Weston's Zenith/Speculation, a British contemporary), but of course there was another factor, and that was all the ferment in sf then, which reflected itself also in Habakkuk's final incarnation and Geis's Psychotic/SFR. A lot of writers were getting active in letter column discussions, and it was a time when fandom served (young) prodom well. Yeasty. I liked the way Bangsund and Gillespie put out these fanzines which had sercon topics but a fannish zest and atmosphere. It was in the tradition of Boggs's Skyhook, where "Atheling's" criticism first appeared: a serious side to fannishness, and a reminder that we could be fannish and still talk about sf occasionally.

What has happened to Australian fandom since those halcyon days? Why is Ornithopter and the occasional Gillespie apazine all that seems to be left of that era and the standards of that era?

When you criticise contemporary Australian fanzines you are unconsciously (or, for all I know, consciously) holding them up to those standards set in the "golden age" of the late sixties; you are judging them by the best fanzines of your experience. In the process of your reviews you are verbalising these standards, perhaps for the first time.

Well, I am here to tell you that you are doing exactly the right thing (kiss of death!). You are doing exactly what I have done to earn Joseph's wrath. You are applying the standards of a different place and period. But they are the standards which prevailed when you discovered fandom and you stand ready to be accused of living in your past. But of course anyone who lived through that period can reassure you: it was a damned good period. It certainly changed my picture of Australian fandom for the better.

In simple fact, American fandom was already slipping into eclipse during the Australian "golden age" of the late sixties; we'd enjoyed ours earlier, and I was just lucky enough to have discovered fandom during it. (I suspect the sudden growth of convention fandom has had a deleterious effect upon the "golden age" of the fandoms of various geographical areas. It was our misfortune to be first, but I see many of our problems now cropping up in British fandom and Australian fandom as well, especially the problems of the different attitides and expectations of media fans like the one whose letter you ran.) It's a shame that some people cannot accept this as a simple fact, and want to make of it either rampant nostalgia or a reactionary clinging to the past, and evidence of an attempt to Impose History upon Now. I'd like nothing better than to see a new golden age, one in which every fanzine that arrived sparkled with fresh writing and lively wit, with the excitement of an ongoing event. Well, there are some fanzines which fit that description now, and I include Ornithopter on that list...

((Readers may refer to John Berry's comments earlier in the letter column for my justification for publishing this kind of ego boosting comment. You are right Ted, at least to the extent that one of the reasons that I now find myself embarked upon the business of publishing a bi-monthly fanzine is because there is nobody else in Australia who is publishing the kind of fanzine that I think needs to be published at the regularity which is necessary. It's good to know that some people seem to agree with one of the driving ideas behind this effort. Of course, a monthly publishing schedule would be even better, but one has to eat

and sleep too.))

I share your estimation of Rob Gerrand, whose column this time is far too brief. I like his tone of voice. The implicit topic is one which could provoke extensive discourse, however. Is it time for a retrospective of Brunner's "significant" works like Stand on Zanzibar? Does it hold up, or was it, like most of Spinrad, too relevant to its contemporary period and dated by now? Then there's the subsiduary questions like, has Brunner's Colonel Blimpish reputation and the general antipathy with which he is regarded by many led to an underestimation of the quality of his corpus, has his prolificacy trivilaized a reputation which might be higher had only his "significant" works been published, or is Brunner worth a serious critical examination.

Personally, I think if John Russell Fearn deserves a critical bibliography, then John Brunner deserves no less.

((One of the most significant things that I thought Brunner did, starting with perhaps The Stone That Never Came Down (was that serialised in Amazing?) was to state the problems that faced society and then to lighten them with a possible solution, or at least to show that there were people who could make a go of life despite the overwhelming nature of the things that were against them. Of his later works my favourite remains Shock Wave Rider, mainly because it takes the reader on a tour of a possible future and then shows a way in which it might be improved. He also dealt with something which I think has been left far too much alone by sf writers; the effect which computers will have on normal everyday lives, and the way in which those machines will really be a liberating force for people - especially those who are willing to spend some time learning about them and how they work.))

Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU, U.K.

Over here things are much the same as usual. The perpetual public spectacle in fanzines is Joe Nicholas locked antler-to-antler with Ted White. Naturally we're all backing our boy -- since if nothing else he's less boring when it comes to Serious Fannish Debate -- but we do deplore Ted's use of unfair weapons like short sentences, hard facts, and even attempted logical reasoning -- all things which detract from a good fannish argument when used to their full potential, or even used by Ted White.

Glen Crawford, 6/57 Henry Parry Drive, Gosford, N.S.W. 2250.

The article on your trip to Brisbane and being caught bookless brought back some memories for me too. I travelled by train to Adelaide to visit my brother a few years back, and took two books to keep me amused, thinking that the scenery would occupy most of my time. Have you ever seen the gibber desert that seems to make up ninety-nine per cent of South Australia? It goes forever? The total trip lasted twenty-seven boring hours, I almost froze during the night, and my meagre supply of reading material lasted all of five and a quarter hours. Your idea of Hell, however, doesn't quite agree with mine... My torment would be outfitted with shelves and shelves of Mills & Boon, and just for variety, a complete mint issue set of Readers Digest condensed novels.

It surprised me that you wonder how crap like Train Wreck gets into print... Garbage writing is not the exclusive property of the sf genre, you should see some of the trash that appears under the guise of 'Horror', 'Thrillers' and 'Romance'. The last category especially is the target of literally tons of mindless pap, churned out for the valiun set, and far more escapist then the wildest sf ever written. I know only too well, part of my new area of control at work is the book department, which had been neglected for the last two years. My first act on taking over was to rip all the garbage off the shelves

and ship it back to the publishers. One company alone got over $5 000 back in one hit! My major interest was, naturally enough, the sf section. You should have seen it, all it had was Perry Rhodan, John Carter of Mars, and every kooky bit of crap ever written about the supernatural, ("Where'll I put this?" "Oh, looks weird, shove it in the sci-fi section."). What I filled the shelves with may prove interesting too, particularly in the light of Richard Faulder's comments on Heinlein juveniles. Apart from a few new releases, I bought just that... Heinlein, Aldiss, Clarke, McCaffery, Herbert, nothing but the earlier works of the most easily named "greats" of sf. I also bought all the Bert Chandler titles I could find, if I can't promote an Australian sf writer, who can? I stayed right away from Moorcock, Doc Smith, C.S. Lewis, Wyndham, etc., and the "fringe" and "classic" side of sf, as I felt that since I wanted to create new business, I'd do better aiming for the middle of the field, rather than the fantasy or collector side of it. It should be interesting to see how things work out.

((Your surprise at my surprise at the likes of Train Wreck just goes to show that you don't know much about my lack of reading in the wide world of non-sf paperback literature. I may have put away a few "highbrow" books in my time but they were always in hardcovers, and since I've never developed the habit of just hunting up stuff in the general area of bookshops I was very surprised to find that there is real junk being published out in the real world as well as here in sf ghettoland.))

While on the subject of publishing sf, you may be interested to know that I've found a couple of books which can really only be called sf, printed under the general fiction titles of the publishers. The first one is a new release from Patrick Tilley (Sphere) titled Mission. The back jacket rap-up reads...

> "Easter Saturday. The naked body of a thirty five year old man is rushed to Manhattan General Hospital... (etc) The impossible had happened: Jesus Christ has appeared 7000 miles and 20 centuries away from the Crucifiction - Dead On Arrival. What can the witnesses do? What would you do?"

Now if that isn't sf...

The second book is the one that really intrigued (and irritated) me. I bought it off a used book table because of the author's name, Kurt Vonnegut Jnr., becuase I like his writing, and despite the fact that it was clearly not sf. (Slapstick, or Lonesome No More, Granada Fiction, 1978.) The inside sleave states...

> "His earlier books were mainly sf, although he has since declared to have abandoned the sf genre."

I get to the first page, and find the tale being narrated by a 101 year old, 2.2 metre tall, neanderthaloid, former President of the United States, as he squats beside his open campfire in the foyer of the Empire State Building. Now that is most definitely sf!

What's happening? My guess is that some publishers are using their sf titles as a dumping ground for all the cheap crap they can pick up under that heading, while shifting "name" authors into the general title area. This way they get two bites at the cherry, the regular sf reader with taste picks up books by known names, and the general reader sees new titles amongst his selection. This would work particularly well with fringe books (like Mission) while the cheap crap keeps the pulp reader satisfied. Maybe we should spend more time browsing the "Best Seller" section of our bookstores instead of throwing our hands up in horror at what's appearing on the sf shelves.

Other people who also wrote were: Joyce Scrivner, Lee Harding, Harry

Andruschak, Marc Ortlieb, Terry Hughes, John Alderson, Irwin Hirsh, Colin Steele, Doug Bargbour, Tom Cardy, Gary Mason ("Barrister and Solicitor", his posh letter headed paper is something to see), Lucy Huntzinger, Terry Hughes, Kevin Dillon, Diane Fox ("Kellog's ornithopters? Now there's food for flight!"),R. Silverton, Faren Miller, Linda Cox Chan, Sue Tagkalidis, Richard Faulder, Joe Hanna-Rivero, and Michael Hailstone.

* * *

BLOODY BOOK REVIEW

Sapphire Road, Wynne N Whiteford, published by Cory & Collins, paperback, 267 pp., $4.95.

After reading Jean Weber's comments about Wynne's book I thought that it might be interesting to find out what she was actually writing about. As a result of this innocent curiosity I have to report that I came away more confused by the whole thing than after just about any other book that I can remember reading. But as with most things in life, this novel has some bad parts - piles and piles of bad parts - and one or two good parts.

The ideas are almost the only redeeming feature of this book. They fall into roughly two parts - a quick look at an Australia some time in the medium term future and then a similarly quick look at life in a colony on Alpha Centauri. The author manages this with a plot which takes us through a high level of future Australian society and then puts us on a star ship to Alpha Centauri where the main character gets to mix with the locals. As a sort of coda we then returns to Australia a few decades later and catch a glimpse of society going down a hole.

The Australian future seems to include the flooding of Lake Eyre by a canal from Port Augusta and the creation of a few other inland lakes. The only other thing of any significant interest is a thing called the National Stability Council which appears to be the form of government which the country enjoys - the story doesn't explain anything more than that and I thought that it was a rather interesting failing in the view of society.

The business of government is also something which is not explained about life on Alpha Centauri. This is possibly forgivable because the thrust of the story's interest is mostly involved with genetic and biological engineering; partly to suit people to differing environments but also for personal convenience. If people live on a high gravity planet it could make sense to restructure their bodies to be shorter and stronger, and it might also be rather useful to have metal legs which you can lengthen, shorten or take off depending on whim. These sorts of physical changes could also lead to different sorts of social mechanisms to cope with ideas of how people are defined by their body-space and how they cope with a physical environment which must suit different sorts of people. These latter points are only dealt with very briefly.

As with a lot of sf, the feeling that I got from this story was that there was a barrier keeping me from any real involvement with the characters and their experiences. It was as though the story is in a glass case, and while I could observe what was going on, I could not empathise with the characters moving around within the reality of the novel. This was simply because there were so many obstacles put in the way of accepting the internal reality that every time my sense of disbelief was about to drift off to sleep it was bonked into wakefulness again. I hope that this doesn't mean that Wynne Whiteford lacks the ability to write continuous convincing prose, I hope that it is as a result of the problems with style and plotting.

An unfortunate problem with many of the ideas is also the way in which the author shows them to us, they don't suit the style and don't settle into the plot.

The style of this novel is of a fair paced thriller, events keep piling up; there are mysterious men doing sneaky things, a secret organisation of sorts which seems to be running things, and the suspicion of dirty deeds. (The latter is fair enough since the main character gets dragged into the story when his father, uncle and cousin get blown up, off-stage but on the first page). This doesn't sit well with the other side of the coin - the sociological observation of the two societies - which would best be served by a much more gentle pace and a rather more contemplative style of narrative. This conflict causes confusion in many places; a good example is when the main character, in the middle of some secretive midnight business, falls to contemplating the fact that the fifty storey building he is living and working in is only half occupied. Given the positioning of this passage I assumed that the author was alerting us to all those empty floors and getting us ready for the mischief that, we would shortly find out, was taking place on one of them. But nothing came of this and, in retrospect, it became clear that the author was making a comment on the stagnation of the economy and society which was unable to fill all the floors of the prestigious office building. It seems to me that if an author is going to make these kinds of observations it should be done in some way which clearly separates (at least in the mind of the reader) the background information about the society from the information necessary to the progress of the story.

After only a few pages it became fairly obvious that the author had a fairly firm grip on his story (almost a strangle hold I'm tempted to say), and also that the grip included a clear visualisation of how things looked, where people stood in rooms and how they moved around. This is, more often than not, a good thing because it shows the author is in control of his work and can maintain direction and pace - if that's what that particular story needs. However, the trouble with a great deal of the narrative of this particular novel is that it is extraneous to the story. We are almost always told what colour an aircar or an aircraft is, but very little about what shape it is (perhaps because that's a bit more complex). People will move about during a conversation in a way that shows the author has not forgotten his characters are real people, but which also detracts from the message in the conversation with unnecessary information.

The first couple of pages are a startling example of this. The main character gets a telephone/visual call from which he learns of the death of his father and the others. In this passage the author carefully walks us through the way in which the scene unfolds and the way that the communications machine works, but forgets to tell us what the man thinks about the unfortunate event. It may well be that he doesn't feel anything, but even that is something important we might like to know about the man. (This relates back to my earlier point, it might be interesting to observe a society populated by people with diverse shapes, but unless the author also lets us into the mind of the person whose eyes we are using, the exercise is fairly sterile.)

This often distracting concentration upon unnecessary information carries through to the basic structure of the plot itself. The first two thirds of the novel contain a lot of toing and froing which provides some excitement but has little to do with the final third of the story. The explosion which sets up the whole story, and upon which much of the early suspense is based - "who blew up the relatives and why" - simply doesn't go anywhere and the plot saunters off in another direction. Later on a couple of women go off and listen to an illegal radio broadcast in suspicious circumstances, but that potentially interesting thread of political dissent isn't followed through either. Then there is the sinister Captain Kranzen who makes threatening

gestures but gets needlessly destroyed before anything worthwhile happens. When I got to this stage (the Australians send a space ship to Alpha Centauri which is loaded with bombs to threaten the colonists, and due to a bit of carelesness it gets blown up) I suddenly felt as though reading the first two thirds of the book had been a waste of my time. Since the rationale which drove the first section did not carry over, it need not have existed at all, not if one is supposed to consider a novel as a whole and integrated work anyhow.

The problems of plotting and style also muddies the water so much that the novel came over to me as lacking in conviction or, at least, rationale. I got the impression that the reason the characters in the novel got so excited about going to Alpha Centauri was because they'd heard the roads there were made of sapphire. The locals were supposed to be so advanced technologically that they could afford to make their roads out of the stuff but I never understood why, if they were so advanced, they needed roads at all. Be that as it may, the way in which this motivation was unfolded was not really highlighted (and was misdirected by a dead-end sub plot) that it simply passed me by.

The moral of all this may be that people who set out to write novels should try to limit the material they put into it to the stuff that the reader needs to know. It is probably important for the author to have a deeper understanding of motivations, social structures, economic organisation and colours of aircars, but shooting the lot at the reader in an unfiltered form is giving them an undigested lump which will be more confusing than rewarding to read.

After all that I must say that, despite the problems which this book has, I would not want to see it unpublished. There is a need for all levels of commercial sf publishing in Australia and Corey & Collins provide a valuable service because they give aspiring authors a place where they can hope to see their works published commercialy. That, in itself, is something we should be thankful for.

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AN EVENT FROM THE SOCIAL CALENDAR

Bruce Gilespie

It takes a bit of cheek to write about somebody else's wedding. Cheek is not one of my strongpoints; neither is tougue-in-cheek. So here is some nostalgia and sincerity instead.

Ten years ago, some time in late 1972, Lee Harding was striding down Bourke Street, arm in arm with Shayne McCormack. He and Shayne were carrying on with the sort of argy-bargy which sounds like a knockdown fight but was actually the chaff of affection. Behind them walked Irene Pagram and me. I had only just met Irene. It wasn't very long since Irene had first met Lee. Irene did not quite know what to make of Lee's habit of walking around arm in arm with somebody else. I did not quite know what to make of Irene, except that she looked beautiful, and she was so easy to talk to, and I thought that Lee was very lucky. (My One True Love had gone back to America, and I was subject to romantic doldrums of the heart during that spring of 1972.) I began to tell Irene about my romantic troubles, and she told me some interesting things about her past, and although I was very shy and it didn't seem quite right, soon Irene and I were also striding arm in arm down Bourke Street. Our foursome meal at an Indian restaurant that night was very enjoyable.

I don't know whether I've felt closer to Irene or Lee since then. Irene

discovered (I presume) what Lee was really all about. Lee became a Great Writer. I became a failed, but happily married, fanzine editor. Shayne went back to Sydney, opened a bookshop, and I've hardly seen her in years. And almost ten years since that walk down Bourke Street, I found myself with a group of people who had met to celebrate the wedding of Irene and Lee.

I had rather wondered how Elaine and I had been invited to this august occasion since I haven't been as close to either Lee or Irene in recent years as I might have been. But when, in splendid sunshine, we reached the new Pagram-Harding residence in Ferntree Gully, we guessed at one of the reasons why we were there. We had survived the ten years. So had the other people who were there. About the only way I can sum up the people who attended that party is that they all knew Irene and Lee in 1972 when they got together. It was a right old reunion rort.

I drank too much white wine, so my account is a bit unreliable. I spoke to Apollo and Rischenda for the first time in years. (Surely you remember Apollo and Rischenda? I know that Apollo even went to a convention once.) They were about to set off for Western Australia. I said hello to Don Symons, whom I met first in 1969, and whose path had crossed mine every few years since then. Lee's mother and stepfather were there - I had never met them before. Irene's father and stepmother were there - I had met them at Sue Pagram's and David Grigg's wedding a few years ago. but had not seen them since.

And Erik was the best man at the wedding itself, which had happened that morning. When I first met Erik, who is Lee's son, he was five years old. Now he is eighteen, had just been to Sydney, and was now planning to go back to Western Australia. I enjoyed meeting Erik again. As Apollo put it so succinctly, "He talks even more than his father."

David Grigg and Sue Pagram were there, and young Katherine. David is now Lee Harding's brother-in-law - maybe that's why he looked a bit worried about the occasion. Lee himself, on the other hand, was more mellow than I've seen him for some time. Maybe new marriage has honeyed his brains, or maybe he was still burbling from the pleasure of having just finished, and sold, his latest book. Irene was, or course, radiant (no, Radiant), although it was a bit hard to surge through the well-wishers to talk to her.

There was a strange group of people standing on the sidelines. Some of them had known Lee for nearly twenty years. With dark glasses and strange garb, they looked like the local Mafia branch come to take a look at the proceedings. One wore a beret and smoked a cigarette at a very French angle. He was called Jean for a while, until people realised it was John Bangsund. Another suspicious looking character wore a white t-shirt with strange writing all over it, a white bow tie, and a coat. And dark glasses of course. This character owned up to being John Foyster. Damien Broderick lurked on the sidelines.

Sally Yeoland, Jenny Bryce, and Diane Hawthorne were there as well, but they were much sunnier in appearance. Sally told me the long and complicated story of John Bangsund's job, which turned out to be connected with a job I had not got the week before. Jenny was pleased since she had at last quit her job and was going freelance. And Diane and I swapped stories about the tribulations of trying to find a free lane at the local swimming pool.

The highlight of the afternoon was when we were all led back into the house, and John Bangsund took a funny little case from his pocket and put it in the cassette recorder. The result was a burst of snatches and lays from Handle, Joe Cocker, and various things sung by the perpetrators (Sally, Jenny and Johns B and F). The references were all deep and meaningful and nostalgic and very funny to Lee and Irene, so it was a well appreciated wedding present.

The day finished oddly, long after some of us had left the Pagram-Harding residence and arrived at the Rice Bowl Restaurant in Ferntree Guly. White wine and sunshine (which gave me a bit of sunburn on my face) had done their work. Meals were ordered, more wine consumed. For some reason which I can't quite remember, soon everybody was digging into purses, wallets, or handbags. Sally found her marriage certificate. John Bangsund discovered his birth certificate entry. Jenny had a tiny fruit knife which went with a beautifully embossed old purse. Diane revealed her yearly ticket for the Brunswick Swimming Pool. And at the back of my wallet was a driving license which somehow I gained in 1968, and which I let lapse in 1971. John and Jenny drove us home.

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TROPHY TIME COMMENTS

After the previous issue I was dreading the sorts of things that might have happened to me after I'd suggested that readers might like to send me lists of the stories that they thought were a good thing for the "Ditmars" this year. Fortunately for me none of you took me up on this offer since it absolves me of the trouble of trying to make any sense of the suggestions.

As it is, the nominations on the recently released voting form are fairly civilised and so there wouldn't have been much call for the sort of exercise that I had in mind. (I hope that at some stage the people who organised the convention will release the figures for the number of people who involved themselves in the nominating and voting process - though I could fairly well understand it if they didn't because the numbers could be quite low, a state of affairs which might not do much good for the ego's of the people involved.)

All up, the nominations seem to have been fairly good, for one person at least. Terry Dowling gets the nod in three categories. I have to admit that I haven't read his story which appeared in Omega so I don't know what his fiction is like, but if it is as skillfully put together as his other writing then it should be a good thing. The other nominated work of Australian fiction that I haven't read is Keith Taylor's Lance of Nengesdul, and since life is already short enough that I have to spare myself the pleasure of reading fantasy, I will probably never read it. On the other hand I have had the pleasure of reading George Turner's Vaneglory which (Bruce Gillespie to the contrary) was one of the best things that I did get to read last year. If I were a betting fan I reckon that I wouldn't have much trouble in picking up some spare change on the outcome of that particular vote.

Terry Dowling rates a nomination in the "Best Australian Fan Writer" category, along with Marc Ortlieb, No Award and me. I was surprised that this category was so short (but then Jack Herman had disqualified himself from contention which might, or might not, have something to do with it) but perhaps people have been reading my recent comments about the poor state of the art in Australia these days. How you vote should, I think, depend upon what you think of as "fan writing". I have personally found Terry Dowling's writing to be of a very high standard, but not very fannish. Marc Ortlieb has been writing his usual stuff and you may recall what I said about that in my previous issue; and as for me, it is well known that I think my own writing is terrific. But the whole issue is one for you to decide.

The nomination of Van Ikin's Science Fiction in the "Best Fanzine" category perhaps has a lot to do with the support that Terry has been giving it. However that does not discount the fine work that Van has put into it and it is worth remembering that SF is virtually the only contemporary Australian fanzine which had been interested in seriously looking at sf. The only question which some people seem to have is whether SF is really a fanzine at