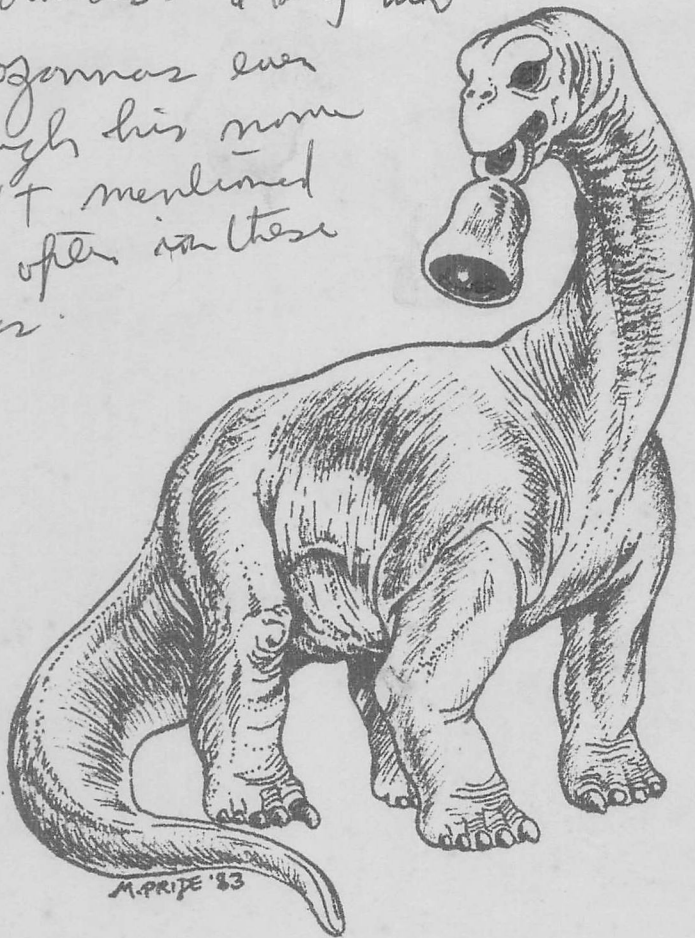


Re JH. Longford Int'n #1 I didn't think he was going to ²³
 make it + had this extravagantly beautifully
 written piece by J. Berglund, which got bumped
 by the Hanna letter. I was going to drop into
 his spot. As things turn
 out JB got bumped by JH.
 (a fate worse than death)

HE MADE IT! :

Glands - I say his
 hozennas even
 though his name
 isn't mentioned
 very often in these
 pages.



as for whose
 name is
 rarely mentioned
 in these pages
 but who, in my
 heart, is
 cherished as one
 of our
 best

after all
 there are
 so few
 comment books
 in this
 issue.

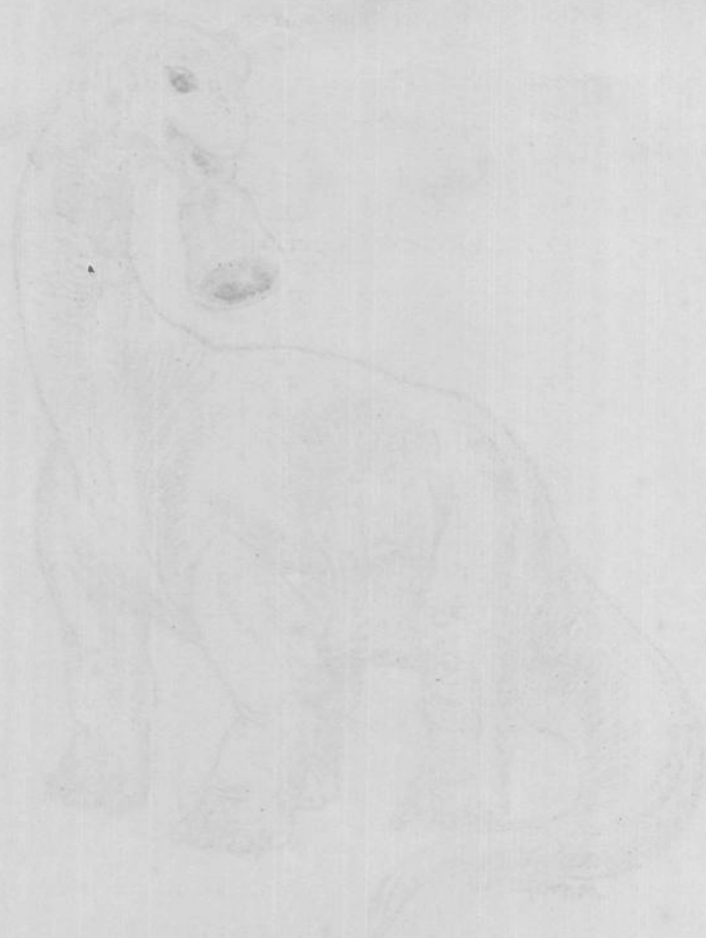
Robert A. W. Gordon

A Fued
 (re Galen)

RATAPLAN 23

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WATKINS

WATKINS
WATKINS
WATKINS

Vladimir: While we're waiting for Godot let's read

RATAPLAN TWENTY-THREE

This fanzine is published, to keep existential terrors at bay, by Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, AUSTRALIA. So that he doesn't feel completely immersed in solipisttry the editor likes to receive proof of the existence of others by receiving "the usual" - in layman's terms that means letters of comment or fanzines as trades. Since the editor understands the angst which is experienced when one feels unable to express ones deepest feelings through the cathartic process of "the usual" there is also the let-off of a simple subscription system in which sending \$2 gets you three issues of this fanzine. SAPS members get this little dose of reassurance for nothing. To do nothing brings you into the danger of the Big Red *A*, a fate too terrible to contemplate, in which one receives no more of these reassuring fanzines and is cast into a maelstrom of... well the term has already been used once in this colophon and it is so distasteful that it will not be repeated. The cover has been provided by Marilyn Pride (it is a MAUSSAURUS, or mouse dinosaur, life-size, from Patagonia. It was one of a number of youngsters and eggs found in a nest, but the adult form is undiscovered). Valma Brown has helped out with all sorts of production details. Where would one be without her? Contents copyright 1983 - returned to contributors MM.583.

* * *

I suppose that you will find me at this convention that's going to occur in Sydney in a week of so. I seem to have paid a membership, booked a room and seats on the aeroplane, and paid for the banquet (I think) so I guess that there's no way out of it.

What on earth possesses me to get myself into the position where there is nothing for it but to pack a weekend's supply of clothes and front up to one of these things. I know, from many years of experience, that I really don't enjoy them that much - I mean, at some time during the ordeal I may well be seen to be laughing and smiling, I may even be happy at that particular moment, but what is that when compared with the overall trauma of a convention. Especially a big one that goes for three or four days.

There can't be many of you reading this who have not, at one time or another, found yourselves in the middle of a convention and wondered what on earth you were doing there. Looking at the surroundings, the people going in all directions but never seeming to get anywhere, the gaudy decore and the noisy and often smelly environment, the chaos, and all the other things which go with a convention, nobody could help but wonder why they subject themselves to such degradation. If one had more brains one would be at home reading a good book, looking at the telly or feeding the goldfish.

Before any of you begin to think that I'm not a trufan (after all everybody knows that conventions are good things and so not liking them can only be a sign of creeping gafia), I must ask you to seriously think back over the conventions you've been to and ask yourself if they were all worth the trouble that you had to go to to get to them. Who really needs sitting around in a strange building with a bunch of people who are mostly weirdos and strangers, listening to somebody who hardly knows what they are talking about on a subject that really doesn't interest you anyhow. Or if you don't like the program item you can just have the alien surroundings and the crowd which is mostly strangers and weird; and leave out the mildly diverting bit.

I reckon that there are many things wrong with conventions; I've decided to write about only three of them because they fall handily into a group which might be called the "Three Bs".

The most common is Banality (this is similar to, but not exactly the same as, the "Seen it all before" Syndrome). Anybody who has sat through more than about an hour and a half of convention programming will know something of this, but those who have been to a dozen or so conventions will be so versed in it that they'd think it too obvious to mention. The simple truth of the matter is that there wouldn't be more than about fifty or sixty people in Australia who know enough about sf and related fields to make it worth putting them up in front of an audience to talk. That means that after a few years everybody who had anything to say has said it, and whether you call the panel "SF and modern literature" or "the role of sf in metaphysical geography", if the people on it are the same they are going to say the same kinds of things. They may dress it up in different jargon but if they reckon that sf is a literature of ideas or hold the view that it's only a form of entertainment, that is what informs all their attitudes and defines what they have to say. Anyhow, when was the last time that you met somebody who knew enough to be able to talk intelligently about literature, geography and metaphysics. The simple truth is that in most cases people with a general knowledge in many areas are called upon to be specialists, and lacking a specific knowledge they tend to talk in generalities.

Of course there are some people who might really know enough to be able to talk intelligently on a wide range of topics in an entertaining fashion. Because of this they are popular with convention organisers who put them up on panels on a wide range of subjects. Attending a program item which includes one of these worthies leads to a game in which you attempt to guess what the speaker's attitude will be on that particular subject. But once you've gone past that there isn't much joy in the exercise.

If you decide that banality isn't your favourite form of entertainment you can leave the program, go outside and mix with all the others who are also fed up with what the organisers have provided. If you are lucky you will find a friend of two and you can talk about sex, politics or religion. If there's only a bunch of strangers you can probably engage one or two in light banter about Star Trek or wander off and take in the art show or the book stall once more. And what could be more banal than that. If you are lucky enough to be staying at the convention hotel you can probably go up to your room and look at "General Hospital", "Live Action Sport" or the like on the television.

I could summarise this by saying that if you want your brain cells to be stimulated by new and interesting ideas, conventions are not the place to be.

And since we've just mentioned little grey brain cells, it seems appropriate that second on the B list is the "demon drink" which does them no good at all. Since Booze is consumed in great quantities by a large proportion of hard-core convention attendees there is little wonder that it plays such a large part in their ritual behaviour. For example, have you ever noticed how boisterous people are from about midnight to three in the morning, and then how quiet they are at breakfast (if they make it up that early).

This phenomenon hardly needs amplification so let me give you my personal opinion. I reckon the trouble with booze is that, although it is a social lubricant in moderation, it is difficult to maintain moderation over a period of hours in the middle of a crowded room party. For some reason which no scientist has yet explained satisfactorily, a plastic cup of almost poisonous white plonk is at least five times more satisfactory than a similar cup of soft-drink. This means that you will either go through the evening having drunk vast quantities of orange-juice or fizzy drink - or consumed a not quite so vast quantity of booze. If you do the former you'll end up feeling crook with either the vast number of bubbles making you feel like a blimp or from vitamin C poisoning. If you drink excess booze you'll simply get the standard retributory hangover.

There has to be a better way of starting the morning than feeling that every move and sound that reaches you will be your last. There can't be many more ways invented to make yourself feel thoroughly miserable - and who goes to conventions with the intention of making themselves unhappy.

Add to that the prospect of a business session or a convention site selection meeting: they always seem to happen in the morning but I suppose that it could explain why so many people seem to be grumpy and deliberately difficult to get along with during those program items.

Despite these debilitating problems booze seems to be entrenched at conventions. In moderation it is a reasonable thing, but then one of the things about most modern conventions seems to be that they are not times of moderation.

And finally (for the sake of brevity anyhow) there is the business of Boredom. Unless you are one of those people who are blessed with an effervescent personality and who is able to surround themselves with a hoard of interesting friends, this is something that you are going to have to learn to live with at conventions.

What do you do when the program item is too awful to bear, all your friends seem to have gone off to lunch without you, any other likely people are looking at "UFO" repeats and the television set in your room is on the blink. As I've already suggested, you could try striking up a conversation with some unlikely type, but if you've done it before you'll probably be disillusioned enough with the results not to want to try it again - you probably haven't even read the three most recent issues of Isaac Asimov's SF Mag anyhow and even if you had, the mere thought of having to talk about them would be unbearable.

Of course, if you're a shy and retiring sort like me, the mere fact that you are at a convention is not enough to get you marching up to complete strangers and engaging them in conversation about nothing very important. People like us can sit in the middle of a host of people and not talk to any of them - what were fanzines invented for anyhow if it wasn't to overcome this social problem. There we sit watching the more extrovert quipping at each other and apparently having a great time, and there we are feeling more and more like Marvin the Paranoid Android - totally out of it and wishing that we were home in our nice cosy room, with a stencil in the typer and a nice hot cup of milo to lubricate the brain cells. (What more could you want out of life?)

There are, of course, one or two little advantages in going to conventions. One is catching up with the friends you haven't seen for months; the other is... It seems to have slipped my mind at the moment.

* * *

One of the nicest things about fanzines (and conventions) is that they give you a social network in which you can meet people who you'd otherwise never even imagine meeting. Not, mind you, that I've actually met some of the people who contribute to this fanzine, but swapping letters is more interaction than a lot of people have with others they see every day. Here in Canberra, one class of people I'm never likely to meet are those who are in the Royal Australian Air Force down at Laverton - I've actually been there (to watch the Mirages and Phantoms go over at air displays) but never paid any attention to anything else about the place. Joseph Hanna-Rivero probably knows the place like the back of his hand but I doubt that he was there when the RAAF was still flying Phantoms, and so it's most unlikely that I'd have bumped into him there. I imagine that one of these days we'll actually happen to be in the same place at the same time. Even though I've never met him, when Joseph

mentioned, in a letter of comment, some problems with film censorship in Australia, it seemed like an interesting topic and so I asked him if he'd like to write more about it. As you can see, he did!

FILM CENSORSHIP IN AUSTRALIA

Joseph Hanna-Rivero

Australia is not a free country. By definition a free country should give its adult people the freedom to see, hear and read any material at their own discretion. Film censorship is preventing Australia from being that free country. In recent years literature in Australia (including hard-core pornography magazines) has been completely liberated. However when it comes to film it is a different matter altogether, as it is the dreaded censor who decides what we see or don't see in a film.

Just what is a censor? Well, according to the Oxford Concise Dictionary, a censor is defined as "a person expressing opinions on other's morals and conduct". There are two things that arise from this definition: First, that this censor is expressing an opinion, and because it is an opinion it is biased so the censor is not making an impartial decision about the contents of a film. Secondly, by what right does one person make decisions on another's conduct in a supposedly free country?

In this article I shall discuss how Australian censorship works, what's wrong with it and the present ratings system and what could be done to improve it in Australia. But before we take a look at the actual working of the censorship system it is necessary to briefly discuss why we have had censorship in Australia.

Australia has always been recognised for its puritancial laws with regard to pornography, especially up to the 1960s when censorship was much stricter than it is now. Traditionally, the subjects in films that have received the strictest censorship are sex and violence/horror. Fifteen or even ten years ago almost all the current crop of splatter horror films, such as "Friday the 13th", "The Burning" and "Maniac", as well as many other exploitation and porn films, would certainly have been banned. Even films such as "Freaks" and "Frankenstein" remained banned when most of us were still in nappies or still to be born.

It was only after the Government relaxed its censorship codes towards the end of the 60s and in the early 70s that films which are mild by today's standards, but which were previously banned, began to resurface.

The excuse or rationale that censors have been using over the years for banning or cutting films is that they are protecting the public from being influenced by sex and horror. What they fail to see is that we are human beings who have a right to make up our own minds on what we want to see or not see. And whilst the situation with censorship has improved considerably over the years, it is still bad enough to threaten that which is most valuable to us all - the freedom of choice.

CENSORSHIP IN THE CINEMA

The System of Censorship

Before you or I can see a film at the cinema, that film must first pass through the Australian Film Censorship Board to be registered and, if found acceptable, be classified in one of the now familiar ratings - G, NRC, M or R. Three things may happen to the film: it may be left intact; it may be cut or reconstructed; or it may be banned.

Most films that we see in our cinemas remain intact but a great number of films (particularly those that are rated R) arrive on the screen different to the original version. Some don't make it at all. It seems utterly ridiculous that a film must be cut to earn an R rating, yet this is what has happened to films like "Caligula", "Insatiable", "Death Wish 2" and countless porn films.

If a film is rated R it is for people over eighteen only to see. Why then must it be cut? The answer becomes clear if you realise that when an R rated film is cut, what the censor is really saying is "the scenes cut from this adults only film are not suitable even for adults". How do these censors decide what is suitable or not suitable for an adult to see.?

Let me illustrate the hypocrisy of film censorship by quoting a statement from the Film Censorship 1980 Annual Report which appeared in Vol.1 No.1 of Video Age magazine:

"... the board aims at reflecting the plurality of community standards... tries to implement a censorship policy based on the philosophy (shared by the major political parties) that adults have the right to make their own decisions regarding the material they read, hear or see: but that people generally should be protected from exposure to material that may be offensive or in the case of children, harmful to them."

The censor talks about "protecting" the general public, but let me say it again; the fact that an R rated film is RESTRICTED is, in itself, limiting its audience to people over eighteen and thus is protecting the general audience (which includes children) from being harmed by the film's content. And as for the film offending adults, let the adult decide if a film offends them or not. Let adults be their own censors.

Snip, snip goes the scissors...

What kind of films get cut or banned? Ninety per cent of the time they have sexual or violent content since those are the taboo subjects. For instance, if you are a fan of hardcore pornographic films, forget about going to your local cinema (or even a sex cinema) to see them, because you won't. All scenes which portray graphic sexual acts gratuitously are banned because they are classed as obscene by the censor. Now I don't like such films as "Deep Throat", "Johnny Wadd" or even "Debby Does Dallas", but I see no reason why people who do want to see such films shouldn't. It should come down to each adult's own morals. Something I consider to be obscene or disgusting might be to somebody else's taste.

As well as banning hard porn films the Australian censor may release a film, which originally had hardcore scenes in it, in a softer version. In other words, a film which started out being seventy minutes long will be reduced to a fifty-six minute strip of celluloid once the censor has clipped the "offensive" scenes from it. This does much harm to such a film; making what was once a porn film with a vague plot into a porn film with no plot. Scenes skip and jump through the film like a handful of Mexican beans.

Another thing which can happen to a porn film is being presented to the censor in an already cut version. This means that the distributor has cut some of the film in the hope of avoiding trouble with the censor. In many cases the pre-censor cut film may be banned anyway because the distributor's cuts have not been enough.

While it is true that Australian censors tend to be more lenient on horror/violence oriented films than on porn films, the situation is still bad enough that many horror film fans cannot see certain controversial cult films.

One classic example is a film called "Texas Chainsaw Massacre", which was made in 1974 but remains banned in Australia today, nearly ten years later.

Despite its gruesome title, which suggests a horrible orgy of blood and carnage through the use of a McCulloch or the like, TCM is quite tame compared to more recent splatter films. As for the use of the chainsaw, only one scene shows any significant amount of blood and that is when the killer gets his own leg cut up! Compare this with 1980's "Motel Hell" which has chainsaw atrocities perpetrated much more graphically than in TCM, but which was passed by the censor for release in Australia. What is more, TCM is based on a true story whereas "Motel Hell" is a pure exploitation film. TCM relies on credible acting and mounting tension to scare its audience - instead of simple blood and guts as demonstrated by films like "Turkey Shoot" and "Savage Weekend" which rate high on the richter scale of gratuitous violence.

But perhaps what is most embarrassing about the banning of TCM is that it was only rated R in America, which means children there could see it with their parents or older brother or sister, but here even adults cannot see it!

Another subject that Australian censors don't take too kindly in films is what is known as sexual violence - this includes rape, sexual torture and the like. Though there are not many films that dwell entirely on this kind of thing (except perhaps "Snuff" movies in which people are actually tortured and murdered, and as such are totally criminal) it only takes a protracted rape scene in a film, such as in the uncut "Death Wish 2", for the film to be cut or banned. The present censor doesn't seem to like seeing teenagers under eighteen in mild sex scenes (as opposed to child pornography which is illegal) and terms such scenes "exploitation of a minor" - the result is a cut, or if the scenes are a little raunchier, a ban. The film "The Blue Lagoon", rated NRC, could have been banned if it was registered with the present censor, Mrs Janet Strickland.

Another thing about Australian censorship which is so annoying in its sheer inconsistency in classifying films. The recent science fantasy film "Quest for Fire", a marvellous story about the life of prehistoric man, was rated R by the Australian Censor because several scenes depicted the brutal life of early man, including several mild but certainly not offensive sex scenes. The violence and sex in this film is justified because it is an integral part of the story. Compare this with last year's blood and guts film "Turkey Shoot" which was rated M by the censor. It contained numerous four letter words, nudity and sexual harassment as well as some of the most graphic violence I have seen in any M or R rated film; lopped off hands, bodies cut in half, toes bitten off and even an exploding head. I'm not complaining about the violence in the film, but because the censor has decided that children may view this film but not the much milder "Quest for Fire". Where is the sense in that!

This is not the only case of inconsistencies. Other examples are "Driller Killer" and "Slumber Party Massacre". Both these films' plots revolve around people being killed using drills, but the first was banned and the latter released.

Further complications

Censorship in Australia is an issue that is more complex than it appears. For instance, each state has the power to ban or release any film, even if it has been passed by the Chief Censor. The most blatant example of this occurs in Queensland which has its own separate board of censors and can stop any film it finds offensive from being shown there. Films that have been prevented from being released in Queensland, but which were accepted in other states, include the Canadian thriller "Happy Birthday to Me" and the second part of the infamous "Friday the 13th" trilogy. South Australia also censors films, though

not so much as Queensland. The most recent case I can remember was James Glickenhaus' ultraviolent "The Exterminator", banned after US President Regan was fired upon in 1981, because apparently the film showed the use of bullets similar to those which were fired at Regan!

If a film is banned an appeal may be made to the Board. Sometimes the ban may be lifted, as was the case with "The Exterminator", which was first banned by the Chief Censor for being excessively violent, but later allowed to be released after an appeal by the film's distributor - Warner Brothers. (The film still remains banned in South Australia though.)

Another point of interest was the furore over the Brazillian film "Pixote" at the 1981 Melbourne Film Festival. The Chief Censor banned the film because it contained a scene in which a couple made love in the presence of a minor. The Chairman of the Festival went up in arms over this and demanded that the ban be lifted, and the film was released intact.

CENSORSHIP AT HOME

As if banning and cutting films for cimenatic release wasn't enough, film censorship also applies to videotapes used at home. You cannot even watch certain films on videotape, that were originally banned at the cinema, in the privacy of your own home.

I have been looking around for a videotape of the uncut version of George Romero's "Dawn of the Dead", but to no avail because it has been banned. The same applies to the "Texas Chainsaw Massacre", though I have heard that illegal imported copies are available at a few video retailers in Sydney. It seems I've got no choice but to order the tapes from a mail order firm in the US or UK where they are available.

To make matters even more confusing, even home video censorship is inconsistent. Whilst the banning of the abovementioned tapes is enforced, you can freely walk into a Venus Bookshop or any of those hard porn video dealers in New South Wales or Victoria and buy or hire XXX rated videos like "Deep Throat" and "The Devil in Miss Jones".

In a recent issue of Video Age, a correspondent pointed out that the whole idea of home video is making censorship look ridiculous. God knows how many kids have seen R rated films like "Mad Max" and "Scanners" on their video machines at home with the full approval of their parents!

THE RATING SYSTEM

What is wrong with our present system

For the last seven or eight years Australia has had the following code for classifying films:

- G - For General Exhibition, all ages admitted.
- NRC - Not Recommended for Children, all ages admitted.
- M - For Mature Audiences, all ages admitted.
- R - Restricted Exhibition, persons less than 18 not admitted.

Any film passed by the censor will be slotted into one of these categories. They are meant to guide people as to the content of a film but, as we shall see, they are very inadequate.

The problem with the present ratings code is that it does not give the potential cinema goer any information about the content of a film, particularly so with NRC and M ratings as G and R are a little more self

explanatory. However all these ratings, except the G, need some sort of explanation as to why the film got that particular rating. Let's illustrate the usefulness of the present ratings using a hypothetical situation.

Picture a parent with a ten year old daughter looking at a poster for "An American Werewolf in London". All the parent knows from the ads on television is that it is a comedy about a man in a wolf suit. All the parent can see on the poster, apart from the credits, is a small letter M enclosed in a circle by the title. "Aha!" says the parent, "My little Annie is a mature girl, she can see this film."

All hell breaks loose when, half way through the film, the parent storms out of the theatre dragging the daughter behind. They have just experienced foul language, explicit violence and some raunchy sex, unsuitable for a ten year old in almost anyone's mind. But the parent didn't know this because the M doesn't say anything about the content of the film.

How the ratings system can be improved

What I think should be done is firstly to replace the present code with something more along the lines of the US system. Keep the G rating for general films for all audiences, replace the NRC with PG (Parental Guidance) and replace the M with R. The reason for this is that the M is very vague - what constitutes a mature audience anyway? The M rating allows material which, in some cases, should be R rated, to be seen by pre-teenagers, as in the case of "Turkey Shoot". The new R, which is the American R, would not be as strict as the present Australian R, but allow people under seventeen to see these films if accompanied by an adult guardian. Finally, an X rating should be introduced to cover films which are too strong for the R rating. These would include pornography and other strictly adult themes. Nothing should be banned.

The whole new code would appear as:

- G - For General Exhibition - recommended for all audiences.
- PG - Parental Guidance - not recommended for children under 12.
- R - Restricted - under 17 not admitted without adult guardian.
- X - Prohibited by law to anyone under 18.

To solve the problem of indicating why a film got a particular rating, each rating except G should carry an accompanying letter, or combination of letters:

- L - Language
- V - Violence
- S - Sex

In addition to this each poster advertising a movie should carry a short warning statement about the intensity of the contents of the film. So, for our earlier case of "An American Werewolf in London", the poster would read:

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON: R L, V, S

This motion picture contains numerous scenes of explicit violence, foul language and mild sex.

Admittedly this system is far more complicated than the present one, but at least it gives a fair indication of what to expect to see in a film and helps a particular person decide if a film is suitable for them.

A COMPARISON OF AUSTRALIAN CENSORSHIP WITH THAT OF THE U.K. AND U.S.

Strangely enough, and contrary to what I have lead you to believe so far, Australia rates its films more leniently than either the US or UK censors. In the US a film which contains the stronger four letter words is automatically rated R. By the same token it would be rated X in the UK in most cases. Here, an M rating will allow these words to be heard by a young child without the company of an adult. Similarly, general helpings of sex and violence can be accommodated by the M rating here as demonstrated by "AWIL", "Turkey Shoot", "Conan" and countless others.

Here is a side by side comparison of the present rating codes in these three countries:

Australia	G , NRC , M , R
United Kingdom	U , A , AA , X
United States	G , PG , R , X

Although the UK and US X ratings match up they are by no means equivalent in "strictness". The UK X is given to all films of an adult content, even those that might only get an M rating here, and R or even PG in America! The American X is reserved for pornographic films and perhaps films in which violence is so excessive that it cannot be given an R.

The following table shows how several horror and fantasy films are rated in each country:

	<u>Australia</u>	<u>UK</u>	<u>US</u>
Poltergeist	M	X	PG
AWIL	M	X	R
TCM	Banned	X	R
Conan	M	AA	R
Dawn of the Dead	Banned	X	No MPAA Rating
The Thing	M	X	R
Halloween	R	X	R

Some interesting things can be derived from the table. It is obvious that the UK censor is by far the strictest when it comes to classifying films but the UK doesn't ban as many films as does the Australian censor (in fact I can only think of one film that so far this year was released here intact but banned outright there, and that was "Class of '84"). The US censor is by far the freest since nothing can be banned by the censor there. The censor rarely cuts films unless it is to prevent them from getting an X rating, which limits the audience considerably to people over twenty-one only.

The film "Dawn of the Dead" was released without an MPAA rating. MPAA stands for the "Motion Picture Association of America" which is the only censorship board in the world not controlled by a government. The reason that "Dawn of the Dead" was released without a rating was because it would have been given an X rating due to the extreme graphic violence. Since the producer didn't want the film cut to get an R, the only solution was to release it without the MPAA rating but having its own self-imposed Adults Only rating. The film couldn't have been released with an X because audiences would have confused it with pornography and, as mentioned earlier, the potential audience would have been greatly limited.

So although Australia rates its films more leniently, it bans more films than the US or UK. This is the basis of my attack on the Australian censorship system.

CONCLUSION

Censorship in Australia is not doing the film going public justice. It is making decisions about what we do or don't want to see for us, with the excuse that it is protecting us from certain films. It is thus treating us as if we are incapable of deciding what we want to see and hear. It threatens our very nature as human beings, and our freedom of choice.

ADDENDUM

For those of you who want to keep up to date with censorship in Australia I recommend the professional and learned publication, The Cinema Papers, which is produced in Australia and published bi-monthly. As well as carrying interviews with popular film personalities and reviews of contemporary Australian and foreign films, it often features articles on censorship and carries a column in each issue in which every film released in Australia over a bi-monthly period is listed with its rating and reasons for cutting, banning, etc.

Another good article on censorship in Australia is to be found in the Australian Motion Picture Yearbook 1983 (available from Cinema Papers publications and good bookshops) which argues against censorship in Australia, listing numerous films (and stills) that have fallen foul of the censor.

Publication details on The Cinema Papers are: a year's subscription (six issues), \$18 (U.S. A\$25.20 surface or A\$48.90 air, U.K. A\$25.20 surface or A\$53.10 air). Payable by cheque or money order to: Cinema Papers Pty. Ltd., 644 Victoria Street, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051, Australia.

* * *

Consistency is, as they say, the hobgoblin of small minds. If I was to be consistent those of you who've read a few issues of this fanzine would almost instinctively expect that I publish some comments about that Valma and I have been doing recently. I seem to have slipped into the habit of doing things in that format and since some people say that habit creates lazy minds (probably the same people who talk about consistency) I have taken a big step to upset those two supposed vices - I've decided not to write about recent exciting personal events. My resolve was also helped by it only being a few weeks since the previous issue of this fanzine was published, and that has meant that Valma and I really haven't done anything which is novel enough to be worth reporting (there's only so much that you can say about gardening, chopping wood, washing dishes, studying for university and going to work). Fortunately for me, Marc Ortlieb seems to lead a much more interesting life, and he makes things even better by writing about it. Of course some people might also say that writing about events in the far distant political past (a week being a long time in politics) is not exactly the sort of thing that they expect - just be thankful that I decided not to write about what I was doing during the 1969 elections.

ELECTION? WHAT ELECTION?

Marc Ortlieb

It was election day. After the blessed relief from matters political provided by the Australian law that bans the electronic media from mentioning anything even remotely connected to the election for forty-eight hours prior to the opening of the polling booths, I received my own personal political message via the electronic media. My mother phoned to remind me to vote. Mum knows that I am shockingly apathetic when it comes to voting. Evidence for this can be found in the two ten dollar fines I've received for not voting on previous

occasions. Thus she has made it her job to prod my conscience every election day. Besides, she knew I was living in an electorate that the Australian Labor Party was hoping to wrest from the Liberals, and, though mother is not partisan, she really doesn't like the Liberals.

At least this time I'd taken the elementary precaution of locating the polling booths. One of my fines resulted from the occasion when, being unsure of where to vote, I'd decided to stay at home all day and cut stencils for Minador. I filled this in on the form that arrived asking me to justify my failure to vote, but whoever deals with such forms obviously has no appreciation of the importance of fanzines to Australia's burgeoning philatelic industry. I was fined.

Having exhausted all my excuses for not voting, such as doing the laundry, and washing the week's dishes, I set out for the polling booth, carrying a letter to Catherine Circosta. I figured that, since I was going to have to leave the house to vote, I might as well at least do something useful. Indeed, such was my fannish frame of mind that I almost managed to justify the act of voting in terms of my vote being a letter of comment to the government. Fortunatley I remembered to put the letter to Catherine into the red letter box and not the grey ballot box. Though my letters do tend to be informal, I'd rather not see them listed as such on the official tally of votes.

My faith in the personal nature of the voting system was almost vindicated when I went to get my name crossed off the electoral roll. The bloke doing this looked up, and, as I began to recite my name and address, he said "Don't worry Marc," and proceeded to cross it out. It was Greg Elliot, a bloke I'd known at teachers' college. We had a brief natter about our current teaching positions. Then he reverted to officialese, asking me if I'd voted anywhere else that day, and explaining how I had to put a number in every square in order for my vote to be valid. That, I felt, was the end of the conversation, and so I made my way into the cubicle, and exercised my democratic option.

The resemblance between that cubicle and the type that one finds as an outback dunny was enhanced by the voting slip for the Senate which, though unmarred by perforations, was otherwise of the length and texture associated with the sort of paper that one tends to find in outback dunnies. Being of the opinion that politicians are basically not very nice people, I could not help but be struck by the aptness of the image that had formed in my mind. Rather than think about the huge roll of paper, I filled in the squares like a good little Laborite.

It is ironic that the one time that my political awareness has been raised from its usual apathy, I was in no legal position to do anything about it. It all came down to a vested interest in saving my own arse, and, to be quite honest, my mind is really not clear on the details. All I remember was that I was over twenty, but under twenty-one (the legal voting age at the time), at teachers' college; and that the Department of Defence had invited me on an all-expenses paid visit to Vietnam the moment I finished my diploma of teaching.

Naturally the idea didn't really appeal to me, and I'd spent much of the time since learning of the government's plans for me in trying to work out how to avoid them. Heading for the border didn't really help. New Zealand has an extradition treaty with Australia, and the thought of spending the rest of my life in Indonesia wasn't that appealing, even had I been able to work out how to get there. Those U.S. citizens with the unguarded border with Canada just to the north of them had it easy.

I did, though, engage in a couple of minor pieces of sabotage, in order to get even with the system. One of the more politically aware of our group raided

the local post office for multiple copies of the forms on which one registered for National Service. We then expressed our dis-satisfaction with the educational lackeys of the imperialist system by skipping a few lectures in order to fill out those forms with spurious names and addresses. We almost got ourselves into deep trouble too. We felt that the press reaction to a draft notice served on someone obviously unsuited to serve in the army would be an excellent way to mobilise public feeling against the idiocy of the system which wanted us to face the Red Peril, and so we filled out a form in the name of a female friend of ours, smudging the name so that it looked as though it could be a male name. Naturally we didn't mention this to her. What we failed to consider was the fact that, being the sort of girl she was, she would have four draft dodgers living in her house. Evidently the arrival of the call-up forms caused a minor panic. Fortunately for us, she never did discover who sent that form in.

My second act of sabotage backfired on me too. I figured that no army in its right mind would consider inducting a specimen who was clearly over-weight, and who had flat feet. (I will grant that I was a little naive when it came to evaluating the sanity of your average army.) Since I had been told by a school doctor that my feet could well develop the tendency to be flat, I felt that I should help them along. I regularly spent my lunch money on over-sized Cherry Ripe bars and strawberry milkshakes with double milk. When it came down to self-preservation, I figured that big would be beautiful. Indeed, I still subconsciously consider Cherry Ripe to be lifesavers, and have contributed more than my fair share towards the maintenance of the Australian confectionary industry. (I wonder if the same rationale can explain the large number of overweight people I saw while I was in the U.S. If so, the consequences of the Vietnam War are clearly not limited to the effects of Agent Orange.)

Then came the election that would solve the problem. The Labor Party had made it quite clear that, if elected, they would stop Australian involvement in Vietnam. The only problem was that we were not old enough to vote. It was a most frustrating experience. However, in order to participate in some fashion, a party was organised for election night at the house of one of the Elizabeth High School Old Scholars. The exact details of what happened that night have faded into an alcoholic haze. I was in my customary state, i.e. between girlfriends, and so made up for my feelings of inadequacy by getting very drunk. I vaguely remember watching three blokes who were even drunker than I trying to break into an MG, since they'd locked the keys inside. They weren't having much luck, which, on sober consideration, was probably a good thing. I also remember the feeling of relief that swept over us when it became obvious that Whitlam's Labor Party had some chance of winning. It was a very large, a very noisy party, as befitted the sort of party that was going to say hello to an era of Labor politics.

The second time is never quite the same. The week before the Federal election I went to the wedding party of two friends of mine, one of whom was an Elizabeth High School Old Scholar, and who had been, if memory serves me, at the election party mentioned above. There I re-established contact with a few old school friends, including Rob and Eileen, who I hadn't seen since the birth of their first child. Considering that their second was already a year old, I felt it long past time that I saw them again. They'd become members of the suburban bourgeoisie, and so were able to invite a group of us around to their place to use the swimming pool, and to watch the election telecast in colour. There was agreement that this was a Good Idea.

Thus it was that, having done my bit for the democratic process, I grabbed a couple of bottles of wine, and headed for Rob and Eileen's place. I was the first person to arrive, but that was nothing out of the ordinary. As the hours ticked by though, it became obvious that I was the only arrival.

That didn't really bother me though. In fact the whole election became of secondary importance to re-establishing my friendship with Rob and Eileen. I met their youngest with monotonous regularity, as he was worried by the stranger in the house, and kept expressing his displeasure that his parents were talking to someone without inviting him to join the gathering. We played Black Maria, with the occasional pause while either Rob or Eileen went to quiet one or other of the kids. Eileen blamed her poor playing on the fact that, since adopting her housewifely role, she'd only played cards with the mothers in the play group, and that she wasn't used to the cut-throat style that Rob and I retained from playing Bridge at our respective work-places. Every now and then we'd turn up the sound on the television, and note the latest figures, but there was no sense of immediacy or urgency.

Even the fact that our electorate returned its sitting Liberal member, Ian Wilson, wasn't really a source of concern. The election itself was of marginal interest. Sure, we expected Hawke to get in. Despite early doubts, the results were pretty much a foregone conclusion. It was far more interesting to talk and to see how much our respective life styles had diverged. There were Rob and Eileen with their lovely house, two cars, two kids, and swimming pool, talking about how far behind they were with their record collection, and I was talking about the new albums by assorted artists, and describing the difficulties I was having fitting my bookshelves into the cruddy little flat I was living in.

We played a little guitar, and I got to fiddle around with the Casio that they had bought, partly with the kids in mind. It was a quiet and layed back evening, mellowed out by some reasonable wine and a pleasant port. Fandom didn't get mentioned at all. Bob and Eileen knew of that particular perversion of mine, but it was pretty much irrelevant in the context of our relationship. We discussed how we'd drifted apart, largely due to the fact that the last time I'd seen them, I had been fairly heavily into smoking certain substances. And then, having watched ex-Prime Minister Fraser almost show some emotion in admitting defeat, I decided that I'd kept them up long past their bedtime, so I ordered myself a taxi.

I haven't seen them since, though this should be rectified once we get the poker game organised. Strange though that I should have Malcolm Fraser and politics to thank for renewing a friendship that means a lot to me. I guess it just shows that some good can come out of politics.

* * *

STILL MORE ABOUT AUSTRALIAN FANZINES

One of the more commonly held ideas about fandom is that when people come into it they tend to imitate the role models that they find already established. In earlier days most fans in Australia either published or contributed to fanzines and somebody coming into the field saw this and assumed that doing the same sorts of things defined one as a fan and they followed that example. This meant that by the early 1970s fandom in Australia was producing some fairly nifty fanzines because of the local talent which had been developed and because local faneds were also closely in touch with what was going on in the rest of the fannish cosmos.

After that there was AUSSIECON and later on fandom had grown and become a much more social community, so that fans could define themselves by the people that they hung around with rather than whether or not they published fanzines. In this environment new comers did not naturally see fanzines as a necessary part of fandom and Australian fan publishing fell on hard times. Locally developed talent was either burnt out after the convention or became more absorbed in the numerous social activities which had become available.

Sometime around 1978 Sydney fans began a monthly apa which they called APPLESauce. It introduced many people to the idea of fanzines, but in a way which was largely isolated from the fanzine fandom which was left in the country. This meant that the people had to begin by re-inventing the wheel and evolving their own standards and expectations of what you should put in and expect out of fanzines. As a result of this the people who learned about publishing fanzines from the apa learned to do it in a different fashion from the old (and possibly time honoured) methods.

Although the thoughts I've expressed so far had been rattling around in the back of my brain for a while they were brought into focus by a comment which Ted White made about Australian fanzines in Skel's The Zine That Has No Name. In part Ted said, "The discussion of Real World topics - from nuclear power to politics to rock music - has an earnestness that I associate with apa-discussions and indeed a number of these zines strike me as transplanted apazines." The fanzines he was referring to include Q36, Peter Principle, Wahf-Full and Weber Woman's Wrevenge.

I'm not surprised that Ted got that impression from those fanzines because three of the four titles mentioned are (or were) published by fans who gained their initial publishing experience in APPLESauce. Over the years that apa has been noted for its earnestness and concern for real world problems and so the editors of those fanzines have learned from experience that those are the sorts of things that go into fanzines. They have also learned that the valuable commodity called egoboo is gained by attracting comment on what they publish and they have learned various strategies for attracting it.

One of the most interesting developments in Australian fanzines over the past couple of years has been the deliberate encouragement of comment on specific subjects which the editors hope will interest the readers. (In fact it seems that topics such as nuclear power and gender role modelling are popular because they are matters upon which it is possible to discourse without any specialised knowledge and so everybody - or almost everybody - feels free to comment.) Attracting this sort of response can be done in a couple of ways; by taking diverse comments out of an already existing source (such as Jean Weber has done on lifting comments out of APPLESauce) and forming them into an article on a subject, or by inviting comments on a set subject from the readers for future issues. The advantage of the latter system is that it actually fills up the mail box with letters of comment which may be nice, but is also synthetic.

As well as learning techniques and strategies from the contemporary fannish milieu, people also find rationales for publishing fanzines - to publish amateur fiction, to criticise current sf, to give people a place to discuss their personal preoccupations or to make people laugh, for example. As well there is personal inclination which effects the style and content of a fanzine and also, of course, feeds back into the whole process which forms fandom, when somebody has a powerful personality.

In the most recent issue of Weber Woman's Wrevenge Jean Weber says "... I emphasise the personal, and feelings over statistical things..." in reply to Joseph Nicholas's comments that she is not producing a very good or interesting fanzine. Jean's priorities lean towards encouraging personal "feelings" and, judging from her letter column, there is no doubt that others like this kind of thing. These days fandom is big enough that all sorts of fanzines, publishing all sorts of material, are going to collect audiences - and since the "in" philosophy is "pluralism" I suppose that this could be considered a good thing. In fact, I'm convinced that this is so because there are people who come to fanzines and fandom as a result of personality problems and a fanzine like Jean's will be a good place for them to partially work out those problems.

But being a useful fanzine and being a good fanzine are not necessarily the same sorts of things. When Joseph criticizes Weber Woman's Wrevenge it seems to be because it doesn't meet his objective ideals on the whole field of fanzines (and as a good pluralist I can go along with that too). On the other hand, my disappointment with the fanzine is because most of the time it seems fairly impersonal, and most of its contributors deal in generalities rather than specifics (with "statistical" rather than "private" thoughts).

Joy Window's "Once Around the World", for example, covers twenty-seven days of travelling in six pages. The end result is very little more than an "I went here and then we saw that" catalogue of events which gives the reader no idea at all of what it is really like to visit the US and do the things that Joy did. (The only reason that the first two pages made any sense to me is because Valma and I visited New York in 1974 on my DUFF trip, so I can still remember the excitement of the subway and relate to the vastness of the Doubleday book shop.) Joy covers just so much, and tries to fit in so much information, that there is no time at all for reasonable personal interpretation of events and reactions to places. The end result is very impersonal.

The letter column is disappointing because what it gives us is personal opinion, not writing which could be considered in any way as expression of a personality. There is a world of difference in Greg Hills spending a lot of space in writing about various bits of the body being chopped off (and concluding that he wouldn't want to lose his penis because that would be a loss of pleasure), and actually trying to make the reader understand what Greg means when he says that kind of thing. It is as though stating a bald "fact" is enough to disarm in and make it universally obvious, requiring no further elaboration. But, on the contrary, it seems to me that this "naming" is in itself an escape from the reality of the personal feeling being hinted at, and if Jean's contributors were willing to write really "personal" material her fanzine would be one of the most absorbing being published because it would contain the expressions of people seeking self knowledge rather than those simply trying to work out the values and problems of contemporary society. But if the contributors are only going to toy with personal expression and list, rather than describe, their motivations, Weber Woman's Wrevenge will be in danger of remaining a fanzine for those who are only starting to realise and articulate their personalities.

In a slightly different way Jack Herman is producing the same sort of fanzine, but instead of encouraging "personal" writing he is trying to get his readers to contribute material about subjects which are less likely to cause some people trouble. (Nuclear disaster is probably easier to write about than penis envy or loss in this society.) All the same the results are the same, we get fanzines which encourage only a minimum of personal involvement from those who read and contribute to them. Which is really quite okay if you're that much into pluralism...

* * *

One of those old fashioned sayings that seems to have gone out of favour these past few decades is "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all". No doubt the reason for its decline in popularity has to do with the boredom that we'd all have to face if we acted on its precepts. However there is a sense in which it is a good idea, and one of those senses is that finding not-nice things to say about people, things and fanzines can get just as boring as saying nice things. So... I've made a resolution that in the next issue I'm only going to say nice things about the fanzines I review - either that or I won't do any reviews at all. Perhaps somebody out there had best produce something that will inspire me on to niceness.

In the meantime there is always the business of art in fandom. For some reason

this seems to be the area in which I've copped the most flack. The result is that when confronted with the problem I tend to go off and think about something else. For this reason I was delighted when Ali Kayn brought the subject up in one of her letters and even responded with an expansion of her thoughts when I asked if she was interested.

IS THERE ART CRITICISM IN SCIENCE FICTION?

Ali Kayn

One of my great criticisms of sf (and fandom) is the lack of Criticism; structured criticism, not outrageous slinging or praises. Sf fandom appears to be a study in indulgence and self-indulgence.

Indulgence - or "I don't know Art, but I know what I like."

"I don't know Art, but I know what I like" is the last retreat of the unsightful and/or uneducated.

Professional sf "artists" are largely illustrators. The Bob McCalls, Boris and Frazettas, and the whole Ballantine stable of painters. Strictly speaking, from an Art Historian Critic's point of view, Illustration is not Art. It falls in the same disreputable category as graphics (e.g. posters) and sometimes photography.

This disdain, on the part of the art establishment is a complicated pattern of prejudice, as well as educated discernment. First of all, the appreciation of Art is a structured approach to the study. One considers the Artist's life and times, past and current influences including social, political and religious; as well as artistic precursors. One notes the medium (for example, marble, oil on canvas, watercolours or bits of paper stuck together) and the use of that medium (brushstrokes, unevenness due to poorly mixed and applied paint and so on). Then there is the use of light and shadow, colour, accuracy of drawing, modelling or deliberate (for Art's sake) mis-drawing/modelling. There is scale, composition, subject matter, and aims and objectives (political, propaganda, or experimentation).

As well as the "gut" feeling of liking or disliking. It is not merely enough to criticise a work by "liking" it or recognising the subject (especially by vague resemblance) or "he tries hard".

The Art establishment does not hold sf art in good repute.

1. Because it doesn't see it, and if it does it's usually dreadful Middle Earth paintings in a book on a bookshop shelf.
2. Because sf art is not presented professionally. As an Art student I attempted an essay on the Art in Science Fiction Art, but was unable to submit it because any work mentioned must be properly referenced - e.g. size, artist, medium, current location - and this is not done in any of the "reference" books on sf that I could find. Articles in sf magazines on "The Art of _____" do not use these references, nor is this information available from them. I tried. These magazines say they want to further the claim to serious stature of sf literature and art but if they don't treat them seriously why the hell should anyone else?
3. Because many members of the establishment maintain that Art is above/beyond Life and therefore above/beyond the great unwashed mass who live it. This is a great disadvantage for sf since it is an art for "the masses". It is illustrative, self-explanatory, understandable, born in the popular media. Pop, not classic.

If the sf fan who viewed sf art was more educated, more critical, more demanding of quality, less likely to display dreadful amateurism (especially dreadful talentless amateurism) publicly then perhaps the acceptance of sf art as Art might be more forthcoming.

Hopefully sf Art might be more forthcoming from the artists themselves if more is demanded from them.

Self Indulgence - or "They buy it."

I was shocked at my first convention to hear an "artist" tell me that he saw no reason to experiment or otherwise WORK towards improving because "that's what they buy, so why should I?"

The general standard of artwork that I have seen has varied from competently handled to "bloody awful", and the sad thing is that there is very little objection to the mercurial standards of sf art. We are offered books of amateurish and unexciting efforts and surrounded by peculiar abstractions meant to be representational portraits. And the fanzines!

It is not always the fault of the "artists". For one thing, I suppose there are those who scribble unashamedly, but then there are those who think they have talent (and are praised out of ignorance if not out of pity) and then there are those who have talent and don't try harder. As well as the very few who have talent and try.

There seems to be little understanding of the differences between the above mentioned types. I guess there is nothing wrong with a little (or a lot of) familial praise of talentless friends and co-fans, but there must be a point at which talent, or its absence, must be acknowledged. If sf is ever to have an art movement, it must have WORKING Artists. It is the people whose work could be Great (and only the Great are Artists) who should be ferreted out and encouraged.

Fans must make a decision as to whether or not they are interested in supporting and developing the potential Artists in their midst (and therefore being discerning in recognising them) or whether they wish to stroke their own and their friends egos (and not be discerning). If they choose the latter they must, at least, be honest about it and forget the bull and call a spade a spade and illustration, or shut up.

Lastly, a word to and about the "artists"; I once heard an sf "artist" say derisively (without having a drink) that he had seen someone's attempt at abstract sf art. Science fiction is an abstraction, a satire, an out-of-world experience and if the so-called artists can't see and appreciate the infinite possibilities of sf inspired art, then we might as well give it away and shut up shop. In painting and drawing, as much as in writing, if sf fans are undemanding they will get exactly the quality they deserve - none.

* * *

LETTERS OF COMMENT

Sue Tagkalidis, 40 Harding Street, Coburg, Victoria 3058.

After reading three issues of your fanzine and three of Gerry Smith's Pariah I am still very restricted in experience and these comments I make are generalized from my narrow first hand knowledge. Therefore, I cannot gauge how appropriate or valid my comments are with respect to fanzines. That is left up to you.

In Ornithopter (and now Rataplan) I sensed your obsession and frustration with the lack of quality in fanzines. It is the one theme in your writing which runs through the three issues and it is an extremely strong and fundamental one. I was surprised at the virtual non-response to your criticisms. Nearly everyone who replied to your column ignored the substance of what you were saying either because they failed to see what irked you, or they dismissed it as unimportant. This angered me.

What prevented me from writing to express a view earlier was the desire to state once in a complete way, my views on this fundamental question of why people write because I see that as the real underlying issue. You want to know why so few fanzines are any good. The key to that is how and why the people are writing for them, since fanzines are based on the written word.

Writing for me (as distinct from talking) is the most deliberate and conscious activity of my life. This deliberation is for most people so out of the ordinary that a special occasion must arise to prompt the need for the recording of their thoughts. The special occasion must distinguish writing from other more banal and less novel forms of communication. A different set of screening processes, far more stringent than for conversation, are set into operation, and a higher standard of lucidity and expression is called for.

In other words, writing for me is still something rare and different from the rest of my daily activities.

I do not write often but I prepare myself constantly. I rehearse expressions mentally and this constant practice formalizes my world, forces me to clarify my perceptions, to reach an essence in my thinking, to tidy up my mind and clear it, to solve and resolve unfinished thoughts.

By writing I record a finished thought process. Sometimes I anticipate and record the process when it is still unfinished, but that is premature writing and is never satisfactory. Writing crystallises my position and allows me to have a clear policy and direction on what is important to me. Writing is the end process of my personal thought, and all my serious thought is always intensely personal. Writing is the hard copy, the result of a great deal of hidden work that takes years to develop.

I write rarely on what I think are important matters because of the slow gathering of experience and thought. It takes so long to think on your own and know something - I have so few of these genuine possessions that I am loathe to dispense them to the world at large.

I used to constantly search for these pieces of gold in the writing of other people but then gradually gave up because there was so much rubble to sift through before I found a small speck of valuable material.

Sometimes upon opening a book the first paragraph on a page will say something to me so clearly that I will buy the book and own it for that sentence. Sometimes in the middle or near the end of the book a phrase, sentence, paragraph or page will speak and stand above the rest because it is the central crystal, the heart of the piece around which everything else has developed. All good writing has this core and I sense a feeling of arrival and presence when I come to the pivotal point, the fulcrum of a work.

The very best writing has either one core that is so insightful and large that it opens doors automatically and creates movement inside your head, or it has (an even rarer event) the actual gathering in one place of three or four distilled essences of thought. This is a feast of intensity so dense that you cannot read the work without stopping to come up for breath. I sense a human being's existence.

Tossap in for comment - (after all, there are
so far, books in
this issue):

Whenever I write the first sensation I feel is that of existence. I am conscious of being very alive at the moment of commencement. I gather energy and begin to command myself and control awareness. This feeling of control may disappear the very next moment when I am launched and entangled in trying to describe in the narrow linear way of this medium what cannot be squashed and should not be mutilated by limitation.

Henry Miller

But that first second, the excitement, the mystery of yet again defining my existence, of telling the secret that binds me, that is always there. I know I am alive when I write. But how to translate that life onto paper and into further life? How to describe the now, now, now of every second of that life? I mostly fail. That is why I keep more and more silent, practicing.

I want to feel my life, but I do not write about my life. Somehow that is not important in the world of writing. At least not the mere motions.

Can I now return to the more concrete criticisms I have about your contributors. They write in self-absorbed detail about the actions of their lives as though they were nineteenth-century spinsters closetted in their vicarages unable to take part in the overwhelming issues which surround and confront them. This may be severe, but I find that I am irritated by pieces of trivia and pedantry and I'm afraid that most of the on-going literary battles they engage in are of this type.

But when you have nothing important to say, yet want to participate in a group discussion what else is there but to write, saying little, yet appearing to have something to say. The fact that a fanzine comes out so often forces people to write with incomplete thoughts, with stream-of-consciousness stuff which passes for polished writing. I don't think it is meant to be held onto.

This sort of writing is controversial. There is little deliberation and your contributors know that they will be able to modify and redefine themselves through personal encounters at conventions. Their primary concern is not writing per se, but in communication with other people. Writing is thus merely one way of communicating. So much space is used to report on past conventions, or current "Hello, how are you? What are you up to these days?" topics.

Tossed in for comment

What I bemoan is that some of you are writing so much that you have made it humdrum and ordinary and taken it out of the realm of the symbolic and the ceremonious. Writing is a magic ritual, a telling to the world at large, a gesture of open sharing of something of value. That gesture is hollow when the gift that is offered is so ordinary and commonplace that its value had been debased.

The second major point to be made is that the method of writing employed in ~~the~~ fanzines is reactive. Each of your contributors tends to react to what happened in previous issues and conferences. It is always writing that is looking backwards, essentially critical and not often original, the pieces do not stand alone as independent pieces of work but as appendages and postscripts to what has gone before. I lean towards the view that anything written should be whole by itself and should have a centre of its own. In reactive writing the centre of the work is frequently to be found in another earlier primary work and so the reactive cannot stand by itself but must be supported by the earlier writing. There is no inner balance.

15/5/55
checked
envelope

I think that a lot of your contributors are striving to achieve an easy, familiar style of writing traditionally called the "essay". It is something that is very difficult to do well because one treads a delicate balance between writing the trivia of one's daily life with warmth, colour and details, and then using that as a springboard from which you comment on a personal but common experience. The piece becomes a vignette, a cameo which

captures you, your life and all life exquisitely. It is the second stage which is not being achieved successfully. People write about their daily life and they are forgetting about the second generalising part altogether. I just wish they would put more thought and effort into what they write.

((So do I, on a lot of occasions. There are some people who write letters of comment with very interesting thoughts, but fail to put them into a form which makes them worth printing because they simply aren't developed enough to be worth the trouble. That indicates to me that some people don't want to, or can't, extend themselves into thinking about something for more than about two lines. You are also right that a lot of thinking is merely reactive... and the reason that you give for it (that people want to be part of the conversation which is taking place) seems to be a good estimation of what is happening. If people persist in writing that sort of thing, that is their problem - it is only my problem when that is all that I get to print in this column.

((I have to comment on what you say about the nature of writing. As a person who more or less makes my living from writing (and there are quite a few other people who get this fanzine who are in the same boat), I find that there is little which is "symbolic" or "ceremonious" in the business. Although there is something to be said for some sort of mystical quality in writing it seems to me that very few humans ever have the ability to write to that very high standard. The best that the rest of us can aspire to is to use words well to say the sorts of things that we want to say - to communicate as effectively as possible. While I find your idea of practising in your mind is a novel thought, it isn't something that I would be able to do... I'm amazed that anybody can. As with most other forms of human endeavour, writing requires constant practise, day in and day out you have to learn how to put words together and how to know when they are doing the things that you want from them. This means becoming as familiar with them as a person is with the rest of their everyday lives. True, this diminishes the "magic power" of words to the person using them but, on the other hand, it enhances that effect for the reader when they come across a phrase or a passage which looks as though it has been put together from divine inspiration but is actually the result of practise and hard work.))

Peter Toluzzi, PO Box 177, Wilmont, WI 53192, USA.

I'd like to suggest another contender for the the "Ditmar" Award category of Contribution to Aussie fandom. Very few people seem to be aware of who is really responsible for the fact that there is a viable Australian Worldcon bid at the moment: Ken Ozanne. Ken returned from a sabbatical in the US early in 1978, charged with eagerness and enthusiasm. And he is directly responsible for: the re-energising of the Syncon '79 bid (and hence, indirectly, the re-establishment of an annual Syncon); the official announcement of the '83 bid; and the formation of APPLESAUCE (with a view towards revitalising the Sydney fanwriting scene). And while the '83 bid went the way of all good things (and Ken departed from its helm much earlier), it remains the foundation upon which the soon-to-be-successful '85 bid has been built. All this would probably not have happened if it were not for Ken's efforts and enthusiasm... so, while he may not be the most popular or eloquent fan in Australia, I believe he should at least be considered for the honour in question.

Michael Hailstone, P.O. Box 193, Woden, A.C.T. 2606.

I don't want false praise for a book or anything, but neither do I want unfair harsh criticism. As for you having been under the impression that you'd been giving Crux a chance by staying out of my way and not commenting on it, well, words fail me. At the very least that strikes me as a pretty contemptuous and arrogant attitude. I feel that a bit of criticism, even adverse criticism, is

better than being contemptuously ignored. This is the main point of my original beef. I am glad that you have printed comments on local sf magazines which has led to some communication between us. When I said "Magazines don't succeed in this country largely because people like you won't give them a chance", I meant that you wouldn't touch them with the proverbial forty-foot pole, not that you won't give them full support.

You may be right in saying that I expect you and others to support Crux, and I can see how this could seem a most unreasonable attitude. But there is a difference between a serious fiction magazine like Crux and a fanzine like Ornithopter, Rataplan and the Matalan Rave. The latter can survive without widespread support; the former can't, and I felt that all Australians deeply into sf should support local ventures. Especially embittering is the poor support Crux got; while Boggle had 270 subscribers for its three issues, Crux (although a better magazine, though not as well printed) got less than a fourth of that, probably mainly owing to the failure of Boggle and others.

I'm not loading all the blame onto you and your friends for the failure of Crux. You're quite right in saying that "the larger economic forces in Australia acted against its success," and that my success is measured by sales to the general public. But do you regard yourself and the "mere handful of people" as something apart from the general public?

I also don't think it's quite fair to describe me as committed to "publishing Australian sf, no matter what the cost or standard". My commitment is rather to providing an outlet for Australian sf. George Turner makes a good point about the American hack tradition (though to my knowledge he's seen only one issue of Crux - number 3). With Crux I've been trying to encourage writers to break away from that.

Joseph Hanna-Rivero's suggestion, that the few sf publishers in Australia should pool their resources to publish a magazine, is very good, and I'd be happy to be part of that if such a thing could work. However I have misgivings as to how readily we small editors and publishers would give up the individuality of our own creations to such a merger. I must own quite frankly, that I don't get the same satisfaction from being fiction editor of the Cygnus Chronicler that I got from being editor and publisher of Crux.

I can give you a slight update on what has happened to Crux. I heard from my printer the other day, assuring me that Crux 5 will get printed, and soon, he hopes. I would like to put out issue 6 after that, but I've decided to make that the last issue. I've become pretty disillusioned with sf over the last couple of years and would now rather move away from it.

Irwin Hirsh, 279 Domain Road, South Yarra, Victoria 3141.

Australian fandom needs a body of fanzine criticism to give its editors and readers something to think about, something to help us get out of the sad state are Aussie fanzines currently in. And we certainly need to get rid of the short paragraph-per-fanzine type review. That type of fanzine review has long struck me as being neither here nor there. As a means of telling people what is available I am sure the same could be accomplished in far less space. (And Marc Ortlieb tells us that one reason he does such reviews is to help him keep his trading list in order; something that strikes me as an incredibly time consuming and expensive way of keeping one's books in order.) As a means of providing some critical comments on the fanzines, I don't think the space given allows for objective criticism. This point is obvious by just looking at the inconsistencies throughout a set of such fanzine reviews. (The one that I, for obvious reasons, notice is where Sikander would be criticised for not starting articles at the top of the page, and then seeing the reviewer

overlooking the same feature in other fanzines that do the same - for example, Malcolm Edwards' Tappen, John D Berry's Wing Window and your own Ornithopter.)

It is obvious that such reviews are first draft, and if the writer was to spend a bit more time going into a second draft he or she would notice the inconsistencies and get rid of them (and in the process add a lot more to the worth of their opinions). And if the reviewer was to give him/herself the space to argue out their opinions they would add even more to the worth of those opinions. I may not agree with some opinions, but if explanation was there I'd have something with which to see exactly where the reviewer is coming from and would be given something to think about, rather than toss away.

I've been thinking about the thing(s) that would help the Aussie fanzine scene get out of the doldrums. The best thing would be if half-a-dozen highly energetic and reasonably talented people were to get sick of the apa format and move towards the genzine scene. (I'm not trying to belittle apas or force people out of them: it is just that the apa format doesn't really encourage people to think in terms of well-rounded, "finished" articles or extensive, non-one-liner comments. I'm assuming that if someone was to get sick of apas it would be in recognition of these points.) Unfortunately that solution is unlikely to occur.

The other possibility is the appearance of a small, frequent, regular fanzine that has a deliberate policy of being witty, friendly, lifeful and snappy. I imagine that such a fanzine appearing every two or three weeks should be able to gather a large, self-generating response, that didn't come from just an inner circle of contributors. Andrew Brown and I tried such a thing with Thyme but it didn't really work, and mainly because we were a newszine and by the time we had published the hard news (convention listings, etc.) we didn't have much space for the rest. Also, being a newszine, people just took out subs and didn't ever consider getting copies by contributing to it. Such a fanzine that I would like to see wouldn't be a newszine - though it would carry reports of recent past events as they would provide the base for the success of the fanzine. And the unfortunate thing about me having this theory about the Fanzine that Australia Needs is that, after having put out Thyme, I'm still quite lethargic to take on a regular genzine. I'd love to do it - I could really get off on being the person who was mainly involved in bringing about a resurgence in Australian genzine fandom. Of course, I can't say that this idea is original as I more or less got it after observing the resurgence in US fanzine fandom, of which Pong was the catalyst. I only started getting Pong near the end of its run, by which time it was, I imagine, in its downhill slide as far as quality or influence goes, but I can't deny its effectiveness. And not only is US fanzine fandom on the up, but there has also been a large-scale link up with UK fandom. And in the wake of all this Australia has been left behind, widening the gap in both quality and friendship - all four Aussies who stood for last years DUFF race were largely unknown in the US fanzine scene, while all four US fans who stood for this years TAFF were known in the UK.

In a lot of ways a lot of Australian fanzine ills can be seen in Q36. It is the best fannish fanzine we have, but if you take away Marc's own writing and the letter column there isn't much left to the fanzine. The writing by others in Q36 often strikes me as being unfinished as pieces of writing and in dire need of another draft or a bit more editing. It is odd really, as for all the regard and esteem people hold for Q36 they aren't exactly tripping over each other to be published in it. And those who do get published aren't really submitting the quality they should be. I'm also not a great fan of most of the art that Marc publishes, but then, I'm one of those people who go along with Jay Kinney and his statement that any similarity between most fan-art and "real" art is purely coincidental.

I'm not so sure that this is a letter of comment so much as a statement of my opinions on various aspects of Australian fanzines. The next issue of Sikander will appear as soon as I get an article from Ted White about his feelings on Australian fanzines. He wrote to me some time ago that he had already written ten closely spaced pages and still had a lot to say. I'm very interested in seeing what he has to say.

((Wouldn't you say that it's a pity we have to wait to see what overseas fans think about our fanzines rather than already having a good idea for ourselves? While I've no objection to reading what Ted White (or any other overseas fans) have to say about locally produced fanzines, it would be much better if we were to take the trouble to critically examine what we are doing, why we are doing it, and whether we are meeting any objective criteria for what a good local fanzine might be. In the past few years nobody seems to have been at all interested in trying to explain or do much about the generally low standard of the local product. I am wondering when (or if) somebody else is also going to try their hand at longer reviews because while I happen to agree one hundred per cent with what I say, I wouldn't mind a second opinion. No flourishing art form or craft results from a single stream of thought - rather it is the result of agreement, disagreement, trying ideas and talking about theories within a general sense of community.

((What you are talking about, when you refer to the need for a small, regular and witty fanzine, is probably that what we need is something which will generate a sense of community in Australian fanzine fandom. You probably have the feeling that the total output of Australian fanzines does not form a coherent whole in which there is cross-fertilisation - everybody goes off in their own direction without much reference to the rest. If the ideal that you have in mind is one of community then there may be other ways of doing the job rather than following the US model because, after all, there was no such thing as Pong published in the UK. Different geographic and social situations may demand different actions to bring about the ends that you seem to have in mind. We could generalise and say that in North America the problem confronting a community of fanzine fans is the vastness of general fandom and geographic separation (though that is relative, dependant on transport costs and attitudes to long distance travel). In the UK they seem to have neither of these problems although their fandom is larger than ours and they are all jammed together in that little island (though they might not see it that way). In Australia we have a comparatively small fandom and geographic separation (and with the rapidly rising cost of air travel this separation is effectively growing). The conditions here could well mean that a fast and regular fanzine would not achieve the same thing that it apparently did in North America because the small size of local fanzine fandom could not fuel a regular and frequent fanzine - said to be the ideal cure for the problems of geographic separation.

((I'm not sure what the solution to the problem might be (assuming that we actually do have a problem and that we want a solution) but one suggestion which comes to mind is simply that of writing to and about other fanzines and fanzine fans in our publications. A sense of community could just as easily be generated in the existing framework by acknowledging each others activities and helping each other with praise, criticism or suggestions, as appropriate.

((I get the feeling that Australian apas are in a state of decline already. APPLESAUCE is looking poorly these days and seems to lack most of its former excitement. While ANZAPA is still doing well this is probably because it is now filling a FAPAish role and a lot of its members are now only active there - but in many ways that function is irrelevant to any development of a wider fanzine fandom in Australia.))

Jerry Kaufman, 4326 Winslow Place No., Seattle, W.A. 98103, USA.

Please look me up at SynCon. I'll probably be cowering in the bar. You do have bars in Australia, don't you? I might even be on a program item or two. Oh, dear, and they're all going to ask me what I think of Australian fanzines, aren't they? I'm just going to have to tell them that since I've never seen Science Fiction or read a Terry Dowling article, I can hardly have an opinion, can I?

((Everybody who arrives in this country is expected to have an instant impression (preferably favourable) about the place ready after they've been here no more than ten minutes. Just thought you'd like the warning - you can practise up on that first impressions on the flight over. As for people asking you what you think of Australian fanzines, I understand that you and I are going to be on a panel about fanzines at SynCon; guess what question I'm going to ask you then? And no smart answers thank you.))

Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2EH, U.K.

We've just had Eastercon, which Daroll Pardoe thought was triffic but which I thought wasn't so hot. This may have had something to do with the size of the hotel -- large and roomy, but essentially too large and roomy for the 800-900 people attending -- the committee -- which seemed invisible for most of the time -- and the program -- which had far too much about astronomy, spaceflight, gaming, and other fringe interests and not nearly enough science fiction (admittedly, I don't go to conventions for their sf content any more, but I do think that a major national event like the Eastercon should focus more of its attention on the stuff than this one did). (Looks like I've just named every major factor that would have effected the feel and running of the convention, eh? Okay then: its lack of triffness had something to do with all three.) I didn't go to either of the Guest-of-Honour speeches (James White is someone I sort of like as a person, but his tales of nice doctors and nurses in space send me straight to sleep; and Marion Dimmer Bradley I had the misfortune to (briefly) run into at Skycon in 1978, so there was no way I was going to be manoeuvred into that hall), and slunk away from the masquerade long before the judging was finished (the contestants, devoid of originality, had settled for the usual routine of displaying large areas of bare flesh and hitting each other with blunt swords; yawn, swoon, how glad I was that I was standing at the back and close to the bar). The only two programme items I attended in their entirety were a "Twenty Questions" quiz game on which Judith and I appeared and the "Book of the Year" panel which I chaired -- which was scheduled to run for ninety minutes but which, because of delays in getting the succeeding item together, actually ran for 110, all without boring any of the audience....in fact, it actually picked up audience as it went along (up to about a hundred people by the end, all very appreciative -- or so it seemed), perhaps because it was one of the few solidly science fictional items of the weekend. I shall have to wait and see what, if anything, forthcoming convention reports there be may have to say about it.... The most fun was probably to be had in the Fan Room, in which ran an intermittent fannish programme: Judith's fanzine review panel (about which I can say nothing, since it clashed with my "Books" panel) went down well, she says; Avoden Carol, TAFF-winner and hence Fan GoH, was interviewed by Kevin Smith, and when asked whether the British fans she'd met had lived up to her expectations of them confessed that I, in particular, had struck her as "kinda cute" (to, of course, general hilarity from the audience); a game called "Connections", stolen from the TV, on which I was supposed to be but which kept migrating from time-slot to time-slot until it lost me, at which (Judith says) Eve Harvey, its organiser, gave such a perfect imitation of a game show host that Judith left within the first five minutes. And there were the parties in the evenings, the best of which was probably that organised by the Birmingham Group: drinks from the bar, and mounds of sixties' music cassettes to dance

to, at which I let myself go and stomped about and drank several pints of larger and sweated it all back out again and boogied up and down and was so all-round energetic that when I woke up the next morning I found that my feet had swollen up. Luckily, it was Monday morning, and time to depart for London but a few hours later...

The bid for the right to hold next year's Eastercon was won by the Eastercon-combined-with-Eurocon bid co-chaired by John Brunner, from a bid for a "traditional" Eastercon (at which, they were at pains to stress, European fans and authors would be very welcome) chaired by Malcolm Edwards -- who, since Chris Atkinson is about to give birth in a few weeks' time and has run into some minor complications, was not actually in Glasgow to present his bid, and left it instead to Rob Holdstock. The result (Rob is a triffic person, but) was predictably shambolic -- but then, even if it hadn't been, it was obvious that their opponents' presentation was very slick, very showbiz, with every twitch and gesture rehearsed down to the last second. Its real hollowness was apparent in the question session that followed the presentations: while Malcolm's committee made an honest attempt to answer each and every question that was put to them, their opponents tended to deflect their questions -- they gave you something bland, something that didn't really tell you what you wanted to know, and followed up with a repetition of their slogan. But I went ahead and voted for them anyway -- as Janice Maule put it, "Just because you don't like Brunner is no reason to vote against the only chance for a British Eurocon", although I was inclined towards his bid anyway. God help me, but I was one of the people who first backed the idea, when Chris Priest first proposed it at a Surrey Limpwrist meeting way back in 1980 ("It's something that Britain can bid for that the Americans can't, and won't that make them jealous?"), and the only thing holding me back from giving my full support until the day was the desirability or otherwise of combining such an alien international event with our own national convention -- I supported the idea of a British Eurocon, but not at Easter (which was the basic objection of Malcolm's committee). It turned out, though, that we couldn't have it at any other time but Easter, since the Eurocon standing committee (composed, no doubt, of some really prominent Serbo-Croat or Lithuanian sf editors) had stated that it had to be combined with our national convention or go by default to this year's Beneluxcon in Eindhoven. When I found out who the main guest was, though, I wished that I could have my vote back -- I mean, Isaac fucking Asimov! Why import a boring old fart like that, and a boring old American fart to boot, for a European event? Mind you, his attending is supposedly dependent on his health, so with a bit of luck he'll drop dead later this year and force the committee to pick someone else. (Robert Heinlein, maybe. Fucky fuck fuck.) Or, more likely, decide that he simply can't spend a whole weekend away from his typewriter and send a robot double instead.

Christopher Priest, 1 Ortygia House, 6 Lower Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 ODA, U.K.

The problem of Bruce Gillespie is to determine whether he is part of the sickness or part of the symptoms. He sees his growing lack of interest as being the result of science fiction itself becoming less attractive. That sf is a decadent field at present is almost beyond argument, but what's interesting about it is why this should be so. Bruce correctly diagnoses the spread of money through the field as being the cause of this: the current display is of aged American sf writers entering the bestseller charts, with people like Silverberg and Benford seriously discussing, in advance, what bestsellerdom would mean to them. Looking at it objectively, it's a pretty pathetic sight. I'm fond of reminding people how only about ten years ago the word "bestseller" was synonymous in the sf world with "undesirable rubbish". Now the chaps are all out there trying to get in on it, and actually don't realise that they are doing it by writing undesirable rubbish.

Anyway, the counter to this sort of stuff is what we've all been missing recently: informed debate on a high level that embraces all aspects of the field. During the early 1970s, before the "boom" that created the present confusion, much debate did exist, and Bruce Gillespie was a vital part of it. SFC was just one of several regularly appearing magazines that engaged the interest on a high level. During the past decade, people like Bruce have been less and less in evidence, letting in the barbarian hordes of populism of course, but also allowing "sf criticism" to become a concept that seems to mean boring essays by self-serving academics. I think the fact that Bruce has started reprinting early issues of SFC is an extremely bad idea, and have told him so.

((One of the ironies which your letter brings to mind is that one of the driving forces behind the "informed debate on a high level" was the assumption that if sf was going to get out of the ghetto it would only be by raising standards so that it would become acceptable to those outside. But what has happened is that instead of us improving ourselves to get out to the rest of the world, the people out there have lowered their standards and joined us here in the ghetto. (In 1975 Ursula LeGuin talked about knocking down the walls to get out but now we've seen people on the outside knocking the walls down so that they could get in). The end result is that the part of sf that has been trying to improve itself has found that it doesn't have anywhere to aim these days. The big money is down at the bottom end of the scale, and while critical acclaim is not such a bad thing, it doesn't seem to be as satisfactory as having the money to buy those little luxuries which can console one when the bad reviews come in.

((I'm not sure why you think that reprints of SFC are such a bad thing. My problem with reprints is that they don't do anything new and it is really just reliving past glories. Your reasons may be different but I don't think that either of us are going to be able to encourage Bruce to go back to his old ways. There just isn't the money or the enthusiasm anymore - in fact I seem to recall Bruce telling me that he has started writing to his subscribers telling them that SFC has folded, and the most exciting work that he is going to be doing in the sf area is typesetting Van Ikin's Science Fiction)).

While I'm writing, I'd like to put to rest the misconception that "Chris Priest can't get published", as reported by Bruce. True, I went through a sticky period in 1981/82, but my central problem has always been that I can't write enough. It's hell being a slow writer. What happened around the beginning of 1981 was that the publishing trade started getting slower and slower with reading, making decisions, making offers, signing contracts and paying cheques. Everything stretched out forwards, thinning the present. Summer of 1981 was when it was thinnest for me. It took ages getting a British pb deal on The Affirmation (but the one I eventually got turned out to be good, if not in financial terms); I didn't get pb deals in France or the USA, my two hitherto largest paperback markets; I never sold The Affirmation in Japan at all, my third largest market. But in general I have no work, stories or novels, unsold. I have difficulty in fulfilling requests from editors, and at present the thinned-out future has been caught up with. Times are generally hard, but not that hard.

John J Alderson, Havelock, Victoria 3465.

Your own comments on Sapphire Road were very interesting. The book consists of two vastly different themes and the first is forsaken for the other and neither gets a good treatment. It is not so much that it is a bad book or an ill-written one, its just that its below the very high standard set by Void, and Cory and Collins. With about four books per year Cory and Collins are not big publishers, but alas, through default they have become one of the largest publishers of original fiction in this country. In the previous year those

giants, Rigby and Nelson each published one original novel! Cory and Collins need a larger stable of writers but they are hampered by lack of finance. Still, what's a poor book now and then; they sometimes become classics.

Van Ikin, English Department, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, W.A. 6009.

I think you raised some good and interesting points about the current round of "Ditmar" nominations. I was really quite stunned to see the definition of "fannish" that implicitly underlies some of the nominations - in particular, the nomination of Terry Dowling for Best Fan Writer and the nomination of Science Fiction for the best fanzine. What is going on here? Are we seeing an "opening up" of the concept of what is a fanzine? Or are we merely seeing the result of a very low number of nominations coming in for this year's awards?

I think the concept of what is fannish, and of what fandom is and means, is fascinating - which is why it will be the main thread of what I'm going to talk about in my Syncon speech. Take Science Fiction: is it a fanzine? In one sense, obviously not, for it is operating on a bigger budget and a bigger print run than other fanzines. But in another sense this just makes it a fanzine "writ large", because I put it together in exactly the same way any other fanned does: I do the typing, the layout, the collating, stapling, binding, mailing... And I finance it out of my own pocket, and at a continual bleeding-sore-on-the-hip-pocket-nerve loss... In short: what is a fanzine? Do we define it by the end product only, or by process as well?

And - coming to the really tricky bit - if SF is a fanzine, then in a sense Terry's articles are in a way "by definition" fannish...

I'm not pumping for these conclusions at all. For example, I did not give Terry my first vote in the Fan Writer category because I don't think his writing is that of a "fan writer" (though I'd be delighted to see the vote show a mass consensus in the opposite direction). I do personally think of SF as a fanzine - inasmuch as I think of it as "my mag" in the same way that I thought of Enigma as "my mag" - but I would be the first to admit that in most attempts to promote or distribute the magazine I play down its fanzine nature and exploit its "semi-professional" aspects instead. So I don't really know what it is - but that hardly matters, because such things are for the reading audience to decide, not for the editor to dictate. What I would like to see is more open discussion of the issues involved.

((I wonder if the whole business of whether or not publications like Science Fiction and Australian SF News are fanzines or not is an imported problem and not something really relevant to Australia and its conditions. It seems to me that in North America this problem can be important because fandom there is large enough that the totally amateur fanzines and the semi-professional ones can exist in totally different spheres, whereas in Australia there are so few of us publishing anything at all that we should be glad of the company. As you point out, the method of production that you have to go through is one common to most fanzines and so, if there are going to be awards to people for being good at doing that sort of thing, it seems only fair to me that they should be allowed a chance to get some just recognition for that effort.

((People who have been following the discussions that have been coming from North America will realise the real trouble that they are having in trying to define what is a fanzine and what is not. Like science fiction itself, the definition that suits all tastes has yet to be found and, generally speaking, it would not matter so much if there wasn't the matter of public awards to resolve. Since, in Australia at the moment, it is quite possible for a fanzine with a print run of under a hundred to get the nod, there is nothing for us to

really worry about. And, of course, if you keep on publishing SF at such a slow rate there is nothing for the rest of us to worry about anyhow.))

Others who wrote were; Harry Warner Jr. (twice), Harry Andruschak, Joan Dick (whose new address is 88/27 King Street, Prahan, Victoria 3181), Glen Crawford, Jean Weber, Brian Earl Brown ("What Australians are missing in all this talk about whether there is a local market for homegrown sf is that in the last few years a market has developed, small but unexpected, for a country forced into importing printed books from England or America".), Lee Harding, Ann Poore, Joseph Hanna-Rivero, Terry Hughes and Ted White.

* * *

The main theme of this fanzine seems to be turning into one of conventions. I suppose that it serves me right for starting off the issue by writing about them. But, as people around Australia might have noted, Valma and I haven't been to very many in the past few years so if they are going to be mentioned here, I have to get others to do it for me. Christine Ashby is a person who seems to have a good time at such events, if for no other reason that it gives her an opportunity to indulge in her favourite activity, which is watching other fans do odd things. Christine has what you might call a sharp wit, it goes very well with her observations and the two attributes combined mean that she should write more convention reports than she has so far.

AN EVENT FROM THE SOCIAL CALENDAR: FUNCON

Christine Ashby

For me, Funcon was Foodcon. Now that I have had a chance to digest my memories they seem largely to feature food. My mouth begins to water even before I think of the actual convention. On the Thursday night I brought Derrick home from work in a car headily scented by fresh hot cross buns, to find Perry Middlemiss and Helen Swift trotting across from the licensed grocer with their arms full of party supplies. We settled down to an evening of pumpkin soup, Disaster Mince, chocolate cake and gossip.

On Good Friday, after a leisurely and mildly decadent breakfast of freshly ground coffee (trying out an unfamiliar variety, Maragogype, huge beans with a fairly low acidity), Perry and Helen set off, and by the time we arrived at Funcon later, things were in full swing. We set up the "Melbourne in 85" shop and such was our dedication that we went without lunch altogether (perhaps that should read "such was out disorganisation").

The great thing about being on a huckster table is that everybody comes to you. Some of them even buy things, though the perversity of the buying public is remarkable. The Mark-I t-shirts, with the Chris Johnston design, only came in white, and people constantly complained that they wanted colours. The Mark-II Steph Campbell design came in four colours, but Funcon attendees tended to look at them glumly and ask "Have you got any of the tram t-shirts?" Thank goodness the end is in sight for the bid, and we can stop trying to screw money out of people!

The afternoon was most convivial. Katy Grigg, who will no doubt be a fan of note by about 1999, sat on my knee playing with the contents of the cash-box. I am pleased to report that even at the tender age of fifteen months she shows a definite preference for \$20 notes.

At the end of the afternoon the convention began to split up, as conventions will, into select little groups setting off in pursuit of dinner. We joined a group at the Fairy Stork, one of Ackland Street's better Chinese restaurants (you can always rely on the Chinese to stay open during Easter and Passover

and just about anything else). In the middle of the meal we were joined by none other than Andrew Brown, resplendent in a pink scarf. It seems he had been directed to the restaurant by a third party who had spotted us in the street. Within minutes the then-gaffiated Andrew agreed to organise a Hon Moonquet for Sunday, the first stage, as it turned out, in his return to the bosom of fandom.

Picking up a hamburger for lunch, we returned to the fray on Saturday. I had a chat to Bruce Gillespie, who was lamenting the price of the hotel's beer and the slow sales of The Plains. Well, it wouldn't be Bruce if he wasn't being a little gloomy, would it? You could probably say the same thing about Merv Bunns, who was worrywarting away about the competition opening up down the road and the generally depressed state of business, life, the universe and everything. The effect was only to throw into high relief the irrepressible cheerfulness of the rest of the population.

John Foyster was very much in evidence, smocking away like mad. George Turner, God bless him, marched straight to our table and produced his wallet; he seemed rather disappointed that we weren't taking memberships for the worldcon. We wouldn't sell him a Eurekacon membership either, since he's the Guest of Honour. Alas, our photograph of Peter Darling writhing on a bed with twelve other people only shows the back of his head, though we have a view of Jeff Harris's naked thigh which fairly beggars description. (No, Elizabeth was not present, but she has been given a Full Report.)

On Saturday evening another select group set off for Taco Bill's. I really can take or leave Mexican food, but I suggested the place because it was close and they'd put a leaflet in the letterbox announcing that they were open over Easter. I think everyone enjoyed their meal, including Les "it's alright for you, you've got teeth" (whose surname I'm afraid I've forgotten). I enjoyed it at the time, but had indigestion later.

Saturday evening ended with an intermittently riotous party in Perry and Helen's room. I was reluctant to leave, knowing that mine would be the next character to be assassinated as soon as I was out of the door, but we packed it in by about 2am.

We returned to the hotel at lunchtime on Sunday bearing fish and chips. The first panel of the afternoon was called something like "Are Conventions Good For Your Health?". We had been telephoned some weeks before by Gerald Smith - whom we naturally assumed was moderating - and Derrick had nobly volunteered. Minutes before the panel was due to start Derrick, John Foyster and Melv Binns found that they, and they alone, constituted the panel. Where was Gerald? John Newman went in search of him, found him suffering from an excess of wine and women and denying all responsibility, and returned without him. When Gerald finally dragged himself into the world of light he was greeted with hearty applause, and at least had the decency to look embarrassed.

There was a mad scramble to assemble and costume the participants in the panel on the role of quiche in sf. If I say so myself, it was a brilliant idea, but perhaps too well-executed. Feminism has been done to death, and we are overdue for an examination of the image of men in sf; the basic intention of the panel was absolutely serious, but I think that the audience may have misunderstood our theatrical approach. Marc came as Gonad the Barbarian, complete with hockey stick, Cath Circosta dressed as befitted someone concerned with the representation of men as the objects of romantic passion, Helen Swift was clearly a sophisticated woman of the world who knew why the "Gor" books do not portray sophisticated men of the world, and Jack Herman was wearing his deerstalker and a lab coat. The audience seemed to enjoy the opening speeches, but absolutely refused to get involved in further discussion. Oh well...

On Sunday evening we went to the Hon Moonquet, yet another select little affair organised by the infamous Mr Brown. It is now an established tradition that all Melbourne conventions include a visit to the Hon Moon; I have no doubt that every Easter the proprietors nod to each other sagely and wait for that tall fellow to come through the door. The food was up to the usual high standards. This year, instead of Jack Vance who wanted to eat off a flat plate, we had Katy Grigg who wanted to eat orange juice off a chop stick (and who appears to like Chinese food almost as much as she likes money). Katy was given a guided tour of the kitchens by the management, which is more than Andrew has ever had - mind you, it would be a bit difficult to carry him on your shoulder.

On Monday the question of lunch arose yet again. David Grigg (who has clearly been spending far too much time with the Ashbys) hit upon the idea of going out for pizzas and then selling them off at \$1 a slice, proceeds to the bid. Jack Herman, who explained that Passover wasn't officially finished, was observed lunching on matzos and a sticky-looking concoction of honey and dried fruits. This no doubt made up for all the Chinese food.

The unsquashably cheerful nature of the convention persisted right to the end. Derrick joined John Newman and David Grigg on a panel about computers. David had intended this to be a very serious affair but he was quite unable to control the other two, who were suffering from raging Funcon disease. Quips about "fiches and chips" flew thick and fast.

The last item (apart from the official closing) was the "Melbourne in 85" panel. Most of the bidding committee fronted up to answer questions and report on progress. I think that Roger Weddall was wearing his Walkman, but everyone else expressed real enthusiasm and a great interest in the whole business of putting on a worldcon. This is just as well, since it will take over a hundred people to run the convention, and the committee will need all the help it can get. (Let me just sneak in a plug for Eurekacon, to be held in Melbourne next Easter; preparation for the worldcon - assuming we win - will be the not-so-hidden agenda, and we will be looking for both volunteers and ideas.)

By the end of the afternoon the Ashbys were in no fit condition for dead dog parties. We staggered home to take a couple of shepherd's pies out of the freezer and count the proceeds. Funcon really was the most enjoyable convention I have been to for several years. There is no way that it's organisers can avoid helping to run the Big One!

* * *

A VIEW FROM THE EDGE

Rob Gerrand

Recently I attended a conference on marketing for leisure and recreation and it seems to me that the marketing of science fiction could usefully be looked at. So, here goes.

First, I suppose, it would be useful to agree on terminology. What is marketing? Nobody seems to know. Or, rather, everybody seems to know, but nobody agrees. That may sound contradictory, which it is, but it illustrates the difficulty of talking about the subject. Each marketer believes that what he or she is doing is marketing, but what somebody else is doing is not. And vice versa. They're doing selling, or advertising, or promotion. Therefore nobody seems to have a definition that everyone agrees with; which perhaps, it could be argued, indicates that nobody knows what it is.

Notice any similarity with science fiction? Those endless debates about what

is, and what isn't, si? What I read or write is science fiction. What he reads or writes is not - god no, it's swords and sorcery, it's fantasy, it's surrealism, it's westerns with lazer-guns, it's mainstream, it's Star Trek.

For our purposes here I'll use marketing to mean a process that earns income. It's a process, which means it is concerned with a transaction, an exchange of something for money.

There are four main areas of concern in this process. These four areas are known, cutely, as the four Ps: Product, Place, Pricing and Promotion. Let's look briefly at each of these jargon words.

Product is the way we turn a Mona Lisa into a can of beans. It is the catch-all word that sums up the thing or service or idea that is being marketed. If you feel uncomfortable trying to think of the book 2010 as a product rather than a novel, you are not alone. (Perhaps we should take 2001 instead, seeing that some reviewers reckon 2010 is a product!)

Okay, the product is that which is being marketed. Therefore if we apply the term to unusual things such as art or sport or ideas, we are only using the word as a classifying label. Don't forget that. (As an aside, there are all sorts of dangers when people, having applied the label, start believing the thing labelled is a product like, say, a can of beans.)

Place, the second jargon term, means the facility or the method of distribution. (This word Place has been chosen because it begins with P. It has also been called Scheduling.) With 2001, Place is the bookshop and how the shop gets to stock the book. With the film version of 2001, Place is the cinema and how the celluloid gets to the cinema. With the advent of video, Place can now also mean the shop that sells videos of 2001.

Pricing seems pretty straight forward. It is the price at which you sell the product. That's clear, isn't it?

Unfortunately, it's not clear. Conceptually - yes, quite straightforward. But actually to determine the price? That's difficult.

Take a fanzine, for example. Take Rataplan, what is its price? Come on Leigh, what's the price of Rataplan? Let's see:

"available to those who contribute a letter of comment or something else useful, who trade their fanzine for this or who pay the required tribute of \$2 for three issues".

It could be that the price is a third of \$2 - because that is income. But are the services in kind, which also earn copies of the magazine, the sorts of things that can be termed "income"? Under our strict definition the answer is no (unless we want to redefine "income" to include "payment by services"; let's not do that here).

The complexity of pricing lies in two areas - working out whether to subsidise or not; and determining whether a given price will increase or decrease sales.

Leigh clearly subsidises Rataplan. \$2 for three issues doesn't cover his labour and other production costs. He writes: "I won't bother you again with this fanzine unless you bother me first... it is designed to cut down on the hugeness of my mailing costs."

Bruce Gillespie probably reckons SF Commentary is too costly for him to produce (and subsidise) as often as he wants to. And his \$40 price on his very worthwhile Reprint Edition of SF Commentary's early issues only covers Bruce's costs, and is probably too expensive for the market to bear.

The fourth P is Promotion. This is just jargon for letting people know that the product is available, and persuading them to buy it. Various methods are used: advertising, public relations, sending out dodgers, and personal contact such as by shop assistants or salesmen.

The marketing process, then, involves these four areas of Product, Place, Pricing and Promotion, and if one of them is not right then the whole process is not right.

Turning to sf, and Australian sf at that, the product is a book like Dreamworks (just published by Norstrilia Press - that's an advertisement) or Van Ikin's collection of Australian sf (just published by University of Queensland Press - that's an advertisement?).

The first thing the marketer must do is make sure the product is right. He's got to check that the market (in this case that's us, yep, you and me, the potential readers) wants a book of short stories like either of these. If the product is wrong, no amount of Place, Pricing and Promotion will earn the income, and the book will bomb.

The quality of the product is paramount. Here the writer or editor must exercise all his or her talents.

The way the book looks might, at first thought, be considered to be part of the product; but I think that is quite wrong. The product in this case is the quality of the writing, not how the writing has been reproduced. The way that the book has been printed, the way the jacket or cover has been designed, and the way the blurb has been written are all parts of the Promotion.

Place is getting the book into the shops and on the shelves.

Pricing is setting its price.

Promotion is letting people know the book is available, and persuading them that it is worth reading.

With a book there are two approaches: Through reviews and features in the media, and by word of mouth, people can learn of the book's existence and want to read it; alternatively, people browsing in a bookshop see the book, and its jacket or cover persuades them to pick it up and look at it. Reading the blurb and some pages at random ensure the book is bought.

You can see why the cover and feel of the book is an important element in promotion. If the book is unattractive it won't be picked up. You can also see that if the product - the quality of the writing - is not good enough or inappropriate then the browser will quickly ensure that the book is returned to the shelf. You can also see that pricing is important. If it is the wrong price - too expensive or too cheap - again the book won't be bought.

The problems associated with publishing sf books in Australia crop up like this:

Product how do you get good writing; where do you find and cultivate good authors?

Place how do you get the books into the shops; who will distribute the book?

Promotion how do you get the book to people's attention; who reviews sf in the mass media, particularly if the book is published in paperback?

Pricing how much do you charge for it? This is a very interesting area.

The bookshops take forty per cent of the cover price. The distributor, assuming you've found one, takes an extra twenty per cent. The

author gets a royalty, another twelve and a half per cent. That leaves twenty seven and a half per cent for the publisher. For a retail price of \$10, that means the publisher gets \$2.75 out of which to pay for typesetting, the cover art, the layout, the printing, the warehouse storage costs, and the promotion - and to make money so another book can be published. A commercial publisher also has to pay the salaries of his staff out of that \$2.75, and also an advance to the author.

How many hardbacks retail at \$10? Very few. How many people are prepared to pay over \$10 for a hardback? Very few. The economics don't add up. And here we get to the dilemma facing small publishers such as Norstrilia Press.

The only way to earn enough money to pay for proper promotion is to print and sell a large number of books. Then the promotion and other one-off costs are spread over all of these books. Conversely, if you only printed and sold 100 books, all those costs would have to be met out of 100 lots of \$2.75, namely \$275.00 - which obviously doesn't work out.

To print and sell a large number requires a large amount of money to start with, which the small publishers don't have, and also a large audience willing to read the books. Therefore the small publishers can't afford large promotions, therefore people don't get to hear about their books, therefore booksellers are reluctant to stock their books (because other books are available which are being expensively promoted and which, therefore, people have heard of and are asking for).

A vicious circle.

Interesting, isn't it? It can work, as a labour of love, and even then on a knife-edge - a bit like a fanzine. It also shows how important the quality of writing is. For if you have quality of writing then, eventually, the demand for the book will grow.

* * *

After my experiences with the previous issue of this fanzine there is nobody who can convince me that there is no such thing as computer error. Just in case you hadn't noticed, there were some odd things in the layout of that issue and there were some things which happened in the text that no sane typist (and not even me) would do. The reason was that as an experiment I put the complete issue onto the word processor at work. Getting the words from the keyboard onto the stencil was not an easy business and along the way I ran into all sorts of problems that I never imagined existed - I suppose that it was just like all the problems that people have the first time that they come to cut a stencil for a fanzine, all those little tricks that you later take for granted but have to be learned through painful experience.

All the same, I don't care whether the experts would call the problems that I came across software errors or hardware malfunctions, they are computer errors so far as I'm concerned. Some of the problems were, of course, caused by my dreaming up nifty ways of moving the text around which were just a bit too much for my own logic or the simple mechanics of the program that I was using - but there's nothing quite like having a thirty-four page document stored on a disk and the computer telling you that you can't look at it because of a slight error in the marker that the program has used. I can accept the blame for lots of things, but that is because I am such a patient person, which is what you need to be when you can't get to thirty-four pages of typing that you've painfully done. (Fortunately I'd saved backup copies of what I'd typed... but having to reformat it all was not much fun. Isn't it amazing the things that we go through to get an issue of a fanzine into the mail?

Hopefully things will go a bit better this time. The man from the computer shop updated the program so that some of the gremlins have been removed. All the same, what happens will depend on whether disk drive 1 decides to do its stuff or not and whether the printer decides it enjoys shredding stencils as much as it has taken a liking to paper of late.

I'll tell you something though, there's nothing quite like cutting the stencils for a whole issue in less than a couple of hours (and that's while you're reading a book too). And as for corflu, that's something I just don't have to think about any more - for this fanzine anyhow. Anyhow, I'm just hoping that anything that's going to go wrong will wait until after this issue is safely on stencil, or that they won't be too inventive if they do happen. Unfortunately you'll find out all about that when you read this issue, I'm just going to have to wait and see...

* * *

INDEX

Film Censorship in Australia	
Joseph Hanna-Rivero writes on what we don't get to see, and why.	4
Election? What Election?	
Marc Ortlieb comments on the positive side of Fraserism	11
Still More About Australian Fanzines	
Not really fanzine reviews, more like a lecture on what APPLESAUCE has done to Australian fanzines	13
Is there Art Criticism in Science Fiction?	
Ali Kayn has something to say about this sad matter	16
Letters of Comment	
Sue Tagkalidis, Peter Toluzzi, Michael Hailstone, Irwin Hirsh, Jerry Kaufman, Joseph Nicholas, Christopher Priest, John Alderson and Van Ikin have a few words to say, some more than others. Some only just get their names mentioned at the end because this fanzine could get too big too easily	17
An Event from the Social Calendar: Funcon	
Christine Ashby fills us in on the comings and goings.	28
A View From the Edge	
Rob Gerrand continues his series - this time on marketing	30

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This leaves me with a bit of space to write about that extremely tedious matter of the Big Red *A*. If it appears in the space just over and down there to the right it means that I haven't heard from you in a while (if at all) and it is a test to see if you are still paying attention. If you are you can let me know and we'll say no more about it. If not, then I suppose that you won't have read this in the first place...

* * *

Vladimir: That passed the time.

Estragon: It would have passed in any case.

Vladimir: Yes, but not so rapidly.

(Pause)

Estragon: What do we do now?