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Marx: I say, I've just discovered class consciousness  
Engels: Not now Karl, can't you see I'm reading

## RATAPLAN TWENTY-FOUR

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A fanzine put together by Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, AUSTRALIA with the hope of edifying the masses and entertaining those who are not part of that large group. The masses may obtain this fanzine by subscription at the very reasonable rate of \$2 for three issues while the vanguard of the masses (most of the people who get this fanzine) can get it for the usual - contribution, letter of comment, trade or being just so nice that I can't resist sending it to you. Members of SAPS are, naturally, in the vanguard of the vanguard of the masses and receive it as part of their due in the bundle. Reactionaries suffer from the Big Red \*A\* (see back page for details). MM.587

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## INTRODUCTION

When I heard that Melbourne had won it's bid to hold the 1985 World SF Convention I rang up a usually reliable source of information who, is on the committee, to get a first hand reaction to the news. "Delerious verging on demented" was the word for word reply.

And I wouldn't blame anybody for feeling that way; it seems to me that the best way to be involved in running a WorldCon is to be a long way away from the scene of the coming event.

I pity any science fiction reader in Melbourne who sticks their heads up long enough to be noticed by the organising committee. As the same usually reliable source also said, "Organising the convention is nothing, it's organising the people that's the hard part". Up here in Canberra the whole business is going to be simplicity itself. Valma and I will just put ourselves on an aeroplane one Thursday evening, fly down to Melbourne, enjoy the convention, get on another aeroplane and then fly back to Canberra. The only real difference between us and the hoards of overseas visitors that the organisers expect is that we don't have funny foreign accents or passports and the cost of our air fares will only be about half that of the people coming from overseas (special joke for Robin Johnson).

The really pleasant thing about having been associated for a long time with the fans who are organising this event is that I get to hear all the gossip without actually having to go to the trouble of being on the committee. Many years ago I discovered that if you really wanted to know what was going on you had to join the organisations which were doing things, but since about the only organising bodies that existed in fandom were convention committees that meant that I had to get involved in the business of helping to organise such events. At about the same time, or perhaps a month or so later, I also discovered that I'm really not very good at the organising business and should stay away from committees... which wouldn't be such a hard thing to do if it weren't for the desire to know what's going on. There is also, of course, the business of guilt at not having done one's bit for the cause. Now I am spared all that and simply ignore my informant's occasional off-the-cuff queries which go something like; "I wonder what we can get you to do?" The simple answer is that I hope to do nothing in particular. I produce a fanzine, isn't that enough? The committee will just have to see this fanzine as my ongoing contribution to that event, but if that isn't enough they will have to put up with me writing the cricket commentary column for the convention newsletter. (I hope that the committee has had the good sense to organise with the Australian and English cricket authorities so that there will be a test series in England that year - it wouldn't be a WorldCon in Melbourne without one).

And talking about timing, the word of Melbourne's achievement, and the fact that Gene Wolf and Ted White are to be the Guests of Honour, came through at about the same time as Irwin Hirsh published the most recent issue of Sikander which contains the Ted White hatchet job on Australian fanzines. If there is any one person that Australian fanzine fans are not interested in meeting at the moment, it is probably Ted. (Well, I think he's probably alright, but that's something different).

I suppose that Ted will now have to spend the next year or so thinking of extremely good things that he can say about Australians and then publish them in another extremely long fanzine article. That way he will be back to square one - if he can convince anybody to read the article. then it will be just a matter of laying a lot of money on the bar at the Southern Cross when he is here and I'm sure that everybody will think that he is a fine fellow indeed.



Moving on a bit, I was recently reminded of the time, quite a few years ago now back in either 1967 or 1968, when the then Lee Harding took me in his little VW Beetle up to Richmond where he guided me through the banks of electronic equipment at Encei Hi-Fi (I wonder what Shayne would say if we referred to her bookshop as "Galaxy Sci-Fi"?). The time had come, you see, to initiate me into that elite which listens to good music being reproduced well. In the process of converting me from a pimply youth with a transistor radio pressed up against his ear Lee also assisted me by offloading a pair of headphones and quite a few interesting records. At about that time both Lee Harding and John Bangsund were thinning out their record collections but since Lee had the more esoteric taste, and was therefore getting rid of a higher class of junk (that's where I got my Tchaikovsky symphonies and, for some reasons which I find completely unexplainable, the late Beethoven string quartets), I seem to have ended up with more of his records than John's.

Time passes and by about the beginning of last year that first generation of Edmonds record playing machinery had almost run its course. The turntable still functioned, after a fashion, and you could still get it to run at a constant speed if you were willing to put up with the wheezing sounds that it sometimes made. The amplifier developed an increasingly annoying hum which gradually came to mask more and more of the music, but then gradually that inconvenience decreased to about half its previous intensity when one of the channels completely stopped working. By about the beginning of this year it became plain that something would have to be done - listening to only half a string quartet or only hearing the left half of the piano does not give you a feeling for the full scope of the music you are playing - though I was starting to get a feeling for how Dave Langford might hear music.

A couple of months ago I started poking my nose into shops that sell record playing machinery. In 1967/8 I had paid about \$300 and that figure seemed to be about right for this current day and age - especially since my speakers still worked perfectly well (as far as I could tell). The trouble I really had was finding machinery that wasn't overpowered; since the speakers run at only about eight watts that was the sort of amplifier I wanted too. But all that the hi-fi shops sell is this marvelous looking chrome, brushed metal and black enamelled stuff which looks as though it wouldn't be out of place in the Space Shuttle and runs at over fifty watts a channel. When I said that I wanted an amplifier that ran at no more than ten watts they looked at me very oddly and probably later asked each other where sub-normals like me come from.

The lowest that anybody could get for me was twenty-two watts, only about three times more than I wanted. So in the end I went to an electronics shop where they were quite willing to sell me a four watts amplifier, even if they did think that I was just a little odd. They also had a pleasant turntable for a mere \$169 which seemed quite cheap to me.

After a few weeks of thinking on the matter (no snap decisions here), Valma and I wandered back to the shop to buy the devices and discovered that when I had been there previously they had been in the middle of a sale and their prices had been reduced. No wonder the turntable had been so well priced. But the first time I'd been in the shop I'd been in the middle of an assignment on Marxism and so I was probably thinking more about the capitalist mode of production (or some similar phrase which I don't understand either) and not too aware of any posters or banners that they might have happened to have up. Anyhow, I suppose that the man realised, from the way that Valma looked sad at him and I picked up my bag and headed for the door, that I wasn't interested in his post sale prices, and he managed to find it within himself to sell me the goods at the sale price.



The upshot of all this is, of course, that I can now listen to records properly again. Turning the duplicator handle can be properly paced by putting some charming little Chopin Mazurkas on the turntable and collating can be carried out to the strains of Wagner - the "Ride of the Valkyries" is good for more than leading a helicopter gunship attack out of the sun.

And since I'm writing about fanzine production, I suppose that I must confess to what some of you have already noticed; that this issue is late. Well, that's the trouble with expecting a full time member of the toiling masses and a part time member of the intellectual elite (a uni student to you) to produce your class fanzines for you.

\* \* \*

I don't know about Bruce Gillespie. You will probably remember that, a long time ago, I asked him to write an article about Jung for this fanzine, the idea being to raise the level of discussion into the realms of "so intelligent that I can't understand it so it must be good". So far Bruce has evaded the issue and instead spends his time writing about the heat-death of science fiction and similarly depressing things. Well, I suppose that is only to be expected, given his world famous nature, but all the same he seems to spend more energy on this sort of exercise than any other living person. Perhaps he has, as he claims, stopped being an sf junkie, but he still seems hooked on the criticism business. That's the really hard junk, just reading paperbacks is something that anybody can give up if they really set their minds to it.

#### ELTON ELLIOTT'S SCIENCE FICTION VERSUS FANTASY: NO CONTEST

Bruce Gillespie

Elton Elliott wrote two articles for Science Fiction Review (No. 44, Fall 1982, and No. 45, Winter 1982) in his column "Raising Hackles". The articles appeared under the general title of "Fantasy as Cancer". I did not notice them when they first appeared, but turned back to find them only when I saw how strenuously SFR readers (including our own esteemed Jean Weber) agreed or disagreed with Elliott.

The title caught my eye: "Fantasy as Cancer". Ah hah! I said to myself (I say Ah Hah! to myself quite often when nobody's listening). Ah Hah! Somebody else is sick of what's happening to science fiction. It's not just me. I didn't stop reading science fiction - well, nearly stopped - just because of a midlife crisis, or getting married, or terminal alcoholic poisoning. It's the fault of science fiction as well. Maybe the rot's not just between my ears; maybe it's between the book covers as well.

So I lept to the bookshelf, to the pile of partly read fanzines. The pile collapsed on me. I picked myself up, dusted myself off, and found Elton Elliott's articles in SFR. I read them. I decided that yes, he is pretty right, but I don't agree with him.

It is always difficult to summarise somebody else's argument. A few quotes from "Fantasy as Cancer", both parts, gives the drift of Elliott's argument better than any summary of mine:

\* "Fantasy is a cancer attacking the sf field, drinking away its precious bodily fluids.

"You ever notice when you go to buy sf, how much of what is marketed as science fiction is really fantasy? I have. When I



started reading sf there was a good chance that when you picked up a book labelled sf it was science fiction. It had something to do with knowledge, the empirical method - and oftentimes \*shock\* even science."

- \* "Today the sf field is quite different. The bookstore shelves abound with fantasy and sword-n-sorcery... - the science fiction book is a rarity."
- \* "Norman Spinrad has commented that the takeover of the entertainment media by corporate conglomerates has had a lowest-common-denominator effect on movies/tv and sf... Fantasy is certainly the lowest common denominator of sf."
- \* "The current popularity of fantasy... is a reaction against technology. Most of the editors new to sf, and a lot that aren't, are subconsciously frightened by technology (as are most readers and others). Most have a Liberal Arts background..."
- \* "Countless times I've been in stores or at clubs when sf was brought up, and many people said that they used to read sf but the current stuff just wasn't as good. When pressed, most admitted that it was the fantasy which they detested and there is so much of it today that they can't be sure of buying science fiction when they see sf or science fiction on the spine of a book, so rather than hassle, most just stop reading sf; others only read a few authors they can trust."
- \* "One of the crucial factors underlying all of literature is how the characters deal with reality... In fantasy when the character gets into trouble he mutters some vital incantation and viola (sic) a magic genie appears and solves all his problems, or he mutters the correct magical spell and his troubles vanish. In science fiction the character enters a new situation and has to extricate himself by dint of reason - the accumulated knowledge stored up through a lifetime of learning and experience... This division goes far deeper than mere dragons versus alien trappings; it is at base a completely opposite way of viewing reality itself."
- \* "Science fiction at its best looks forward to the future, based on present knowledge and extrapolation, always keeping in mind the lessons, examples and experience garnered from the past. Science fiction tainted by fantasy seems to ignore the future, avoid the present, and view the past through nostalgic rose-coloured glasses. In essence, science fiction bastardized by fantasy is extremely limited in scope and suffers what I call Nostalgia for Yesterday's Tomorrow at best, Nostalgia for Yesterday's Yesterday at worst... (Bastard sf is also a lot easier to write than straight science fiction.)"
- \* "In summation, science fiction poisoned by fantasy values is left weakened and emasculated, unable to deal with the harsh realities of our technological age, not to mention the problems posed by a rapidly shrinking base of literature consumers."

Smack that pulpit, Elton T Elliott, bang fist against fist, raise the hand to heaven, and hope to God that God's on your side; call the faithful away from sin, and back to the True Way.



There are sections of Elliott's article where I feel I'm being treated to the fine old sermons which Pastor Peter Retchford bellowed at us in a gospel tent in the mid-1950s. Good sermons are stirring, and there are times when you catch yourself going rah, rah, with the preacher.

Yes, the trouble with Elliott's argument is that, in a perverse secret corner of my heart (the corner in which I sometimes still sit reading science fiction) I find myself wanting to agree with him. Wouldn't it be nice if...? But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The basis of Elliott's argument is that many fantasy books are mislabelled as science fiction. It doesn't take much checking of the shelves of Space Age Books to confirm that this fact is correct. Dragons, castles, wizards, knights-in-armour - all these elements from the most hackneyed fantasy literature have littered the covers of "science fiction" books during the last decade.

Elton Elliott does not consider that publishers put them there because pictures of wizards and whatnots sold more books than spaceships and aliens; that indeed, many readers had long since got sick of boring old science fiction, and wanted something with a bit more life.

Elton Elliott's argument is lopsided. The sins he ascribes to fantasy-masquerading-as-sf can be verified by picking up any one of those strange hybrid books and reading it. But where was all that great sf which was replaced by fantasy?

"The current popularity of fantasy," says Elliott, "is a reaction against technology." But science fiction has been in revolt against technology, or science, for a long time. Either it has been because sf writers were, quite properly, warning against trends in their own society, or because sf writers were quite willing to produce technological gimmicks which produced results as fake as the magical spells of fantasy.

Science fiction has "a completely opposite way of viewing reality itself", opposite from that of fantasy. But has it? I find it hard to produce counter-examples to destroy Elliott's argument, because he does not provide his own examples. Most sf books, especially most of the famous ones from the Golden Age of the 1940s and early 1950s, rely on some fantasy premise to tidy up the plot. Most of sf's gimmicks - time travel, telepathy, telekinesis, anti-gravity - are fantasy gimmicks. They are not dressed-up-fairy-princess magic, but they are magic all the same. I find it very difficult to think of a famous sf book where "the ((main)) character enters a new situation and has to extricate himself by dint of reason". Usually he - usually a he in science fiction - gets out of a situation by firing a gun or socking someone on the jaw. (Elliott does not deal with the incidence of crude violence in both sf and fantasy.) Or someone rescues him. It's all magic: different magic wand, that's all.

Elliott's strongest argument is his delineation of the way in which fantasy looks backwards, often to a past which has been ludicrously idealized. Indeed, it is this aspect of fantasy which has most seriously undermined science fiction. Even those sf books which still claim to be sf often point "forward" to a simplified, primitive future. Aldiss does this with his fabulously best-selling *Helliconia*; Gene Wolfe does it with his even more fabulously best-selling world of the *New Sun*.

But does science fiction talk about the future? Did it ever talk about the future? An argument on this point could fill an encyclopedia as long as Peter Nicholls' and Arthur Mee's put together. I think there was a time during the



Golden Age when sf writers imagined themselves to be imagining the future, and that science and technology decided the shape of that future. I don't think sf writers have imagined themselves to be doing any such thing for quite some time. Elton Elliott does not ask himself why people have been turning backwards. Is it because they, and their writers, don't believe there is a future ahead of us? This would be a reasonable assumption, after all. If you don't really believe in a future, then you want an idealized past to wash away the dangerous elements of today. People who are choosing fantasy over sf are not fools, but they may be jaded. Cynicism, on the other hand, is a quality which one might attribute to some writers, who prtened to be writing about some technologically based future which of course will never come true.

If you find all this very generalised, I'm sorry. Elton Elliott does not provide many examples to prove his case, and I don't have much space either. I do want to suggest that Elliott has smelled out a serious problem, but that his sense of smell has not led him to the cause of the pong.

The pong, needless to say, is not fantasy. I remember how fantasy crept into the well-guarded halls of science fiction. Elton Elliott does not. Fantasy came in because there was precious little in science fiction worth reading. The one preceeded the other. There were two movements during the late 1960s: New Wave and Adult Fantasy. New Wave was literate science fiction, by and large, and the readers liked it for only a few years. Most of its practitioners have been forced onto the dole or into the executive offices of insurance companies. Ballantine's Adult Fantasy books, on the other hand, were very popular. Ballantine revived a host of books which had been out of print for many years. Many of them were literate, in an ornate, succulent way quite foreign to the literacy of the New Wave books. New writers appeared, often from children's literature, who could write better than the "classic" writers. Alan Garner, Ursula Le Guin, Susan Cooper, and William Mayne are names that spring to mind. It was an exciting time, and I liked many of these books better than any of the sf books of the time.

However, as Elton Elliott should have said, fantasy itself changed very rapidly during the 1970s. The good writers were still appearing occasionally, but they were almost forced out by a vast array of hacks who wrote one formula fantasy story after another. And many of their books were labelled as science fiction, as Elliott says.

But what Elliott cannot establish is that science fiction, as a genre, is lurking there in the wings, waiting a chance to return in all its holiness and gloriousness. It's dead, Mr Elliott, because it died before the revival of fantasy in the late 1960s. Even if you are quite correct, and sf has some connections with sweet reason and the difficult problems of our age, and resourceful heroes (and even some female heroes), you cannot prove that anybody can still write it. Not people who call themselves sf writers, that is.

Which is where I come back to where I meant to start. This article is, of course, a footnote to a piece I wrote last year, "Why I No Longer Read Science Fiction (Or Hardly Ever)". That was a psychological piece which told how I kicked an addiction withour meaning to. I left other people to work out whether sf itself should not be read. That's not a judgement I can make for any person other than myself. But I can assert that science fiction, of the sort Elton T Elliott and I might like to read, hardly exists under that label. Neither does fantasy, although the fantasy genre began so promisingly in the late 1960s. Both have melted together into the slag heap of escapist cliché. They have become merely genres, merely throwaway items which cost a lot and give little pleasure.



But you can still read good science fiction. And good fantasy. Just don't loook for them under the labels "science fiction" and "fantasy". Elton Elliott wants us to believe they are like two dogs at each other's throats, fighting it out. Not so. They are both toothless, moribund.

No contest.

\* \* \*

### SYNCON '83

My lasting impression of Syncon '83 will not be the Guest of Honour, the program items I attended, the people I got to talk to, or any of the usual convention stuff; it will be of hotel geography.

From the look of the place, the Shore Motel, where the 1983 Australian national sf convention was held (and which seemed to be a long way from any shore), must have had its hayday in the '30s and '40s. I can imagine it as a place where flash people would have gone to be seen, not outright exculsive but not the sort of place that a mere "anybody" could afford to go to. But unlike many similar establishments, the management of the Shore have managed to stop the place from slipping completely out of touch with contemporary life and the place is still reasonably attractive.

Part of the process of getting from the '30s to the '80s has involved additions and extensions which must have doubled or tripled the accommodation capacity of the place. But because of the original layout and the slope of the land that the hotel is on, the extensions go off at various angles and are stuck on in sometimes unexpected places. So, leaving aside the novelty of trying to find some of the rooms that parties were supposed to be in, there was the matter of finding your way around the actual convention area.

The broad details were plain enough, the main convention room was at the end of a long corrridor going off from the reception area, and just about all the other convention facilities were off at the end of another long corridor going off from the reception area at right angles to the other corridor. This meant that if you were in the hucksters room and wanted to get to the main room, you had to walk up one corridor and then along the other. And onto all that there was the extra exercise of a stroll along a third corridor, leading off from the one going to the hucksters room, if you wanted to get to the small meeting room.

I suppose that any of you who have been involved in organising conventions will have learned a little about the dynamics of large groups of people - so it would come as no surprise to you that when a major program item finished the hoard contained in the main room surged out and headed off down the corridor. This wouldn't be so bad if you were with them but is more than a little interesting if you're a person like me who is likely to want to attend the program item after the really popular one and is trying to get to, rather than from, the main room.

So, the result of all this going back and forth is that my most lingering memory of the convention area is of corridors, generally full of people going the other way.

(Towards the end of the convention I got wise to this and picked out a spot in one of the corridors where I could stand and observe people going this way or that. As one should always remember at events such as conventions, it is better to let people find you rather than going in search of them. Harlan Ellison knows this and set up his typewriter in a little alcove at the



junction of the two corridors where everybody would be able to see him at work.)

The other lasting impression of the convention is of having done an awful lot of nothing in particular over the three days. The number of interesting program items I attended could be counted on the fingers of one hand. There were, in fact, four of them; the first of Ellison's performances, Van Ikin's Guest of Honour Speech, the panel item on criticism and Jeff Harris's talk (I'm leaving out the items on fanzines, fandom around the world and the business sessions which were more in the nature of a family reunion... There was, of course, the excitement when, due to a rather large loophole on the constitution which governs the running of the Australian national sf convention, a bid from Seattle (WA, USA) won the right to hold the 1885 convention. Some people seemed to think that it was a silly idea and that we'd never get our convention back again whereas those in the know seemed to think that it was just the opportunity we needed to offload a dumb constitution and other things that we really didn't want onto people who didn't know what they were really getting.).

There was an art show which had the advantage over previous ones in being the biggest I've seen in a few years (bloated out by a lot of media-based sf representations) and the hucksters room which seemse almost always packed with people in search of something to sepnd money on and plenty of people with the goods to oblige them. There was also non-stop television in another area. In fact there was almost no excuse to be bored at the convention although if one was after a little more demanding mental stimulation, it was often a little difficult to find.

I'm not going to complain about the high profile which media sf had at the convention. I've no objection to the stuff and anyhow, since five hundred people is about four hundred and fifty more than I can relate to, the interest of the vast bluk of the convention membership really didn't effect me very much. Anyhow, those people were just the same as me, reacting to what the convention organisers had decided to put on for us, not really in a position to initiate any real change in the course of the convention once it had got rolling. The only thing about this is that I got the impression that, for the first time, I'd experienced a phenomenon which has apparently become quite common overseas; two or three conventions which co-exist in the same space and time and occasionally get together for some of the major program items. For example, the masquerade thing was apparently quite enjoyed by many media fans and there were supposed to be many costumes from various sf television shows and films. I have to confes that I didn't notice the costumes, I was simply overwhelmed by about five hundred people milling around in one place and so I disappeared up to my room to catch a few overs of cricket on the television (Sri Lanka versus England in the World Cup contest). On the other hand, I wondered what most of the people thought of the awards presentations about which they would have understood very little.

The most exciting few minutes of the whole convention took place during the panel discussion on criticism. From the line up it was fairly clear that the criticism being talked about was writing on literary sf. There were, however, fairly divergent views on the subject from those who were leading the discussion. Van Ikin seemed to be talking about the traditional literary criticism sort of thing, Carey Handfield was interested in any notice that a book might get in the press which would sell the thing, and Terry Dowling seemed to be more interested in what I'd normally call reviewing rather than criticism. This means that these three didn't seem to be interested in talking about the same thing at all and it was a wonder that anything happened in the discussion. But perhaps the audience had been saving itself for a couple of days, waiting for an opportunity to get stuck into one of the oldest areas for



debate in sf. Some participants got rather excited and while nobody actually lost their temper it was refreshing to be among a group of people who wanted to have their say and seemed to have a passionate interest in the subject.

Terry Dowling's attitude was the most interesting and sticks fairly close to an attitude which I've been coming to - that he is not interested in writing negative reviews of people's work. The difference in our attitudes seems to be that I'm not interested because it can get fairly boring, he's not interested because it can be painful for the people it is directed at. This is particularly the case when it comes to writing about locally produced sf because the critic will usually personally know the person whose work they are writing about - and perhaps this means that it is easier to feel for the person that you are cutting up.

I couldn't disagree with Terry that criticism hurts. Anybody who has received it has vivid memories of the experience (if they've actually been able to bring themselves to read the offending reviews). However, it seems to me that there is probably a great deal of difference between a three or four hundred word dismissal in an influential capital city daily newspaper and a more thoughtfully written criticism in a place like Science Fiction. The basic idea behind the review is to say that this or that book is available while a thousand or so words in SF has the objective of telling both the author and the potential reader why a book is a good or bad work of literature and perhaps even spreads a bit of light on the whole issue of literature itself (the latter being an optional extra). Surely this is the difference between reviewing and criticism... but I don't think that the discussion went into that.

The other place that I came across Terry Dowling was in a party one night where he, and then Dave Luckett, played some of their compositions to the rest of us. Now, if there is one thing I hate it is multi-talented people. And there is nothing that makes me think that a person has this overwhelming flaw to their character more than when they play and sing their own songs; and when I enjoy them immensely too. That's just rubbing my nose in it.

Jack Herman seems to be another of these too talented people. During the day you'd see him wandering around the hotel, apparently without a worry on his mind. Then some harried looking committee member would come up and talk to him for a little while. Jack would stop, think for a moment, and then, having offered a few words of advice to the other person, would go about his business completely unperturbed. If I were Prime Minister there would be a law against people who can do that sort of thing.

All the same, I can't really say that Jack and his committee get my unrestrained applause for having organised a great convention. I didn't see enough of what they organised to be able to go that far. On the other hand, I can say that the committee did provide a good environment for people to enjoy themselves for a weekend if they had a mind to do so.

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#### A VIEW FROM THE EDGE

Rob Gerrand

Every so often a book crops up with a reputation for brilliance, one which I find tedious or wrongheaded or just plain badly written.

I have just, by dint of will power, finished reading such a one, a monumental bummer by Norman Spinrad: Songs From the Stars. It appeared in the US in 1979



published by Simon and Schuster; I read the UK edition of Sidgwick and Jackson, published in 1981.

It concerns a post-Smash society, Aquaria, an outcome of the '60s and '70s hippie and head society where everyone is Karma Conscious and "uncoolness" is the major crime. All the old cliches are trotted out: there is Black Science and White Science. Black Science is practised, naturally enough, by "sorcerers" and involves any engineering which is pollutant related. White Science is "clean". A solar cell, a radio, pedal-powered dynamos are all clean, and white. Nuclear energy and petroleum engines are dirty and black.

No one asks how the white goods are made, whether black technology is involved; it is accepted as is, no questions asked. No questions, that is, until the time of this novel, for this black-white dichotomy, in fact, is simply a moral straw man, set up to get the action running. It is very helpful to writers that such appalling internal contradictions don't worry people until the time of a novel which has been devised to resolve them.

Aquaria, we find, has been nurtured by the black power sorcerers, for reasons that are unclear, and the sorcerers now need the Aquarians as they venture into space again, for reasons that are also not made clear.

Briefly, the Black Scientists are running Operation Enterprise in order to visit a long neglected space station so as to encounter the interstellar brotherhood of sentient beings.

The Black Scientists, or sorcerers, are represented by Arnold Hacker who is the cliché scientist: cold, held in, yet whose passions run deep.

The Aquarians are represented by Sue Sunrise, the token woman in this incredibly sexist book - leader of the Sunrise Tribe, who runs the "Word of Mouth" inter-village communication system. She, of course, is sexy, intelligent, compassionate, ambitious - so Spinrad tells us. Can she help it if in any moment of stress she reverts to irrational behaviour, either tearful or angry, and that all she really wants is Clean Blue Lou to herself? Clean Blue Lou, the third cardboard cutout in this bizarre menage-a-trois is the Justice-giver for the Aquarians. He has come to meet justice on the Sunshiners, who have been accused of using nuclear powered radios. Clean Blue Lou's mushy and jejune thoughts as he wrestles with himself on crucial moral issues (should he bed Little Sue Sunshine, or would that compromise him?) take up a goodly chunk of this waffly, overwritten book.

For some reason Hacker needs Lou and Sue to go with him to the space station. He says he wants Lou to voice justice to the Black Scientists, after he has seen the full facts behind what they are up to. The full picture will show that they've been using nuclear energy and petroleum in order to reach the interstellar knowledge located in the space station, which will bring untold prosperity to what's left of the Earth, including the ability to leave it. Sue is needed so as to get Lou, and she is offered the chance to extend her inter-village radios to a proper satellite network.

Well, wouldn't you know it? You just can't trust them nogood Black Scientists! No sooner do they get to the space station and plug themselves into the computer full of extra terrestrial knowledge than Hacker goes into a funk, and is afraid of all the knowledge.

You see, folks, this master scientist was a coward all the time! (Spinrad makes sure we know he is a coward by arranging to have him be space sick on the way up!). The goal to which he has dedicated all his life - extra knowledge - suddenly has lost its appeal.



Lou and Sue, grooving on tacky 2001 dream discards, getting into cosmic awareness, finally notice Harker's state. Sue, of course, gets very angry with him. Lou, of course, is understanding.

Finally Harker kills himself, because he only just discovered that the world is going to end in a few million billion years time, or some such; this revelation blowing poor old Harker's mind. His whole life must be pointless, mustn't it, kids, if the universe is going to die some time. Sue nearly falls for the line herself. Gee, is she lucky to have a Clear Blue thinker like Lou to calm her down. See, poor Harker didn't know that "Knowledge is not Wisdom", as Lou puts it.

A pity Spinrad himself didn't learn that lesson. Consider this passage, earlier in the book. Lou and Sue, having just "gotten it on with each other", have "found each other sweet". Sue is trying to convince the master law giver, Lou, to abandon his principles against Black Science. By what subtle arguing will she change his mind? First, here's Lou, worrying:

But what would be the cost?

How much evil had to be done before her electronic village could be built? Would not the bad karma of the means poison the results? Was this not how black science had once before seduced a world to its doom?

"I want to believe you, really I do", he said.

"But this ship they're building must burn millions of gallons of petroleum to get into space. And what about the energy units to build it? I don't see how you can send a spaceship into outer space without black science, and lots of it."

How does she answer this?

No problem there for Sue!

Sue looked downward at her breasts. "I didn't say they weren't sorcerers," she said softly.

"And you didn't say you wouldn't be willing to overlook sorcery to get your world radio network either," Lou said, wincing as the force of truth pulled the words from his lips.

Sue hesitated, then looked up at him, her eyes suddenly burning with defiance. "No I didn't!" she said. "Maybe we would have to taint our souls with a little sorcery to lift what's left of the human race out of the dust! Fuck it! So be it! Tell me, Lou, what's really more important, the pristine purity of your own soul or the destiny of the world? Neither of us are karmic virgins! If sorcery is what it takes to get a world radio network, then you can paint me black - and proud to the guts it takes to admit it, oh perfect master!"

A surge of lust poured up Lou's spine as she shamed him with her bravery.

As simple as that. Serves all those moral philosophers right, wanking away in their wilderness!

Roger Zelazny found it "a fine book, brilliantly written", while Larry Niven thought it "dense and meaty, multi levelled." And Gregory Benford, author of a



truly impressive and deeply thoughtful Timescope, thought it "perhaps Spinrad's finest novel - deft, powerful, with ideas that ricochet through the story".

There's no accounting for taste!

\* \* \*

#### NOT MORE ABOUT AUSTRALIAN FANZINES

There hasn't been much in the way of local fanzine publication over the past couple of months, no doubt the usual publishers are still getting over the trauma of SynCon... or something like that. The fanzines which have been published really aren't so remarkable that you (or I) would want to spend much time contemplating them anyhow. Jean Weber has given us more of the same with Weber Woman's Wrevenge, Marc Ortlieb has only found time to publish a numerical issue of Q36 (a collection of mini fanzine reviews which are okay if all you want is primary reaction reviewing, but it's very idiosyncratic) and Gerald Smith has presented yet another issue of Pariah, which is a vast improvement on previous issues.

Gerald now seems to have some idea of what sort of fanzine he is aiming to publish and has decided, among other things, to go for a higher quality of writing and for a bit more of the personal touch. This results in two features of this fanzine which are a good sign. Firstly, Gerald is trying his hand at longer fanzine reviews - I welcome this because I am not too keen to work up a reputation as a bloody minded fellow who can see no good in other people's works and now Gerald can dilute that stigma with his presence. The other thing that Gerald has done is to write a fairly lengthy article about the town where he lives, Frankston. The writing style which Gerald has attempted is a fairly light and informal approach and it works in large part, but unfortunately the style itself lacks a feeling of spontaneity and often totters on the verge of being ponderous. Still, it is good to see that Gerald is trying to improve upon his fanzine and his writing style. If he can continue in this fashion he will no doubt prove to be an asset to Australian fanzine fandom.

Apart from the fanzines which I've already mentioned, there are those other ones which seem to drift in now and then but which have not gained, in my mind at least, a feeling of permanence or substance. You could compare them to a sort of background noise against which the more regular fanzines, those which have gained themselves a reputation, are able to stand out.

For a while now it has occurred to me that I really should spend some time and space writing here about some of the more interesting fanzines which are published overseas. If local fanzine publishers are looking for some models upon which they can form their own ideas it might not be a bad idea to look to what goes on overseas. The trouble is that, just at the moment, there doesn't seem to be that much happening over the waves either. Certainly most Australians will recall that Jerry Kaufman recently toured the country handing out copies of the fanzine which he produces with Suzel Tompkins, Mainstream, and there have been a couple of issues of Holier Than Thou arrive, but apart from that... No Tappens or Warhoons, not even a Gambit or a Telos. Everything seems very quiet just at the moment...

The thing about fanzines like Mainstream or Holier Than Thou is that they appear to be from a sort of North American middle-of-the-road ideal of what fanzines should be like. Of course Mainstream is to the left of that centre and Holier Than Thou is to the right, but if you were to show them to somebody who was not too aware of the various ideologies which float around in the fanzine field, they would comment more on their similarities than their



differences. In particular, the look of a "fair average quality" North American genzine is something which both of them have in good measure, with liberal lashings of interior art, some fancy layout and the feeling that the appearance of the fanzine is something that the editors really worry about, even though some seem to do a bit better at it than others. There is also a great similarity in contents for while there may be differences in editorial preference, the tone of much of the writing seems to be very similar: the laid back personal commentary on this or that facet of life, some of it even dealing with other fanzines or even, gasp!, sf.

I am not sure that it would be a good thing for Australian fanzine editors to aspire to this sort of style. For one thing, the sort of fanzine that you end up with does not really seem to have that vital spark of fannish genius. It is almost as though there is a formula to producing these sorts of things and that once you have got into it the most important thing is to keep the stencils churning out of the typer. The trouble with a formula is that it leads to a kind of mental laziness in which the victim gets the vague impression that everything is right with the world and that creativity and communication no longer require the consideration and energy to carry through that they once did. On the other hand, the good thing about having a formula to work to is that it allows you to think about other things, such as improving the quality of writing, regularity, or any of those other little things which seem to take up so much editorial time. Perhaps the ideal is a delicate balance between the two, if you can manage it.

This seems to be the appropriate place to publish a section of a letter which I recently received from Diane Fox. It deals specifically with what I've been trying to do over the past year when writing about Australian fanzines, and it also explains away some of the puzzlement I've felt at the lack of response:

"Sue Tagkalidis' letter gave me a feeling of unfairness - after all, there she is, saying how no-one comments on your criticism of Australian fanzines. I may send her a letter explaining why I don't comment.

"1) They are extremely unlikely to get printed anyway. You don't print all the letters you receive, obviously enough. In any case you don't print my letters, even when they contain something conceivably of interest.

"2) People who comment on your criticisms generally end up feeling that somehow they have done something 'not done', 'unfannish' or whatever? This is merely a speculation, or course. And obviously one that will never reach the light of day, as it were."

There you are Diane, you never know what will be printed, do you?

There is a point or three that I want to draw from that comment, most relating to fanzine criticism and reactions to it. The first thing is that the criticism that I have been writing seems to have been going down a hole in the ground and provoking no reaction at all. Some people say that I say the right things and others say that out of my brain and leave it at that... not taking up the challenge to publish something better or to prove me wrong. And there was one person who wrote saying that they hadn't liked what I'd written but it was probably right anyhow.

See, one of the habits that I've started to pick up at university is that of putting up the strongest argument that I can on a point and then waiting to see who will try to knock it down, how they will go about doing it and if they succeed. I suppose you could say that so far my fanzine criticism has been one



side of a dialectic process (a term not used in an Edmonds fanzine before) and the other side of the argument has not appeared as yet. My trouble, therefore, is that I am waiting for an opposition which has not turned up. If contributors or correspondents were to send well thought out and written counter arguments to mine, I would be delighted to print them. But since this hasn't happened there is nothing that I can do about it.

As for the idea that my pronouncements are some kind of holy writ which people argue with at their peril... well, it would be nice if that were really the case. I'd love to be as infallible as the Pope. But if you were to care to express an opinion about what I have to say (and there is no reason why that thought has to be expressed in this fanzine) the only criteria of which might be the better argument will be based upon who puts the better case, not what our names happen to be. So let's have a look at your views. If you reckon you have differing opinions there is no point in sitting on them, let everybody have a look at them and decide for themselves.

The third comment I want to make relates to what fanzine editors should publish in their letter columns; and this is related to the sorts of letters that they receive. One of the most unusable kinds of letter of comment to a fanzine is that which starts off at page one of the issue and works its way through the pages in order commenting on various things as it goes. The trouble with this particular kind of letter is that while it mentions everything in passing it deals with no particular aspect in enough detail to warrant printing. Unfortunately, Diane, your letters fall into that category. And it is for that reason that I've not printed any. In this particular fanzine I have been attempting to encourage people to think a little more than is normal for your average fanzine - I suppose this has something to do with my recently having discovered this novel activity at university and wanting to share it around (as is the habit with fanzine editors who discover wonderful new facets of life). However, if people are simply going to send me letters which do no more than seem to react in a fairly superficial way, I'm not going to print them. An idea expressed in a letter doesn't have to be just interesting to get published, it has to be well expressed, show a reasonable amount of original thought and also deal with a subject which I happen to find interesting.

All I have to do is write that kind of material all the time too.

\* \* \*

#### LETTERS OF COMMENT.

Judith Hanna, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London, SW1V 2ER, UK

Before I left Sydney I was working on an Equal Employment Opportunity program in the NSW Corrective Services Department. It didn't actually involve much contact with aboriginals - partly because only one was employed by the Department. This is, of course, part of the problem. In terms of the departmental structure, no internal discrimination against Aborigines could possibly show up in our study. In terms of the ethnic composition of the state population, the discrepancy wasn't so serious, either - after all, Aborigines are only about 0.08% of the population, which is less than the three per cent classified as mentally handicapped. But when you consider that Aborigines make up five to six per cent of the prison population then there's clearly a case for some special consideration to be given to the special needs of Aborigines in the prison environment. Further, sixty to seventy per cent of Aborigines spend some time in prison (i.e. have a prison record), as against five to six per cent of the rest of the population. It's been well demonstrated that part of the reason for this is that Aborigines get sent to



prison for crimes which bring down only a fine for whites - drunkenness, assault, petty larceny. Of course, fewer Aboriginies can pay hefty fines - partly because of the number of organisations that don't employ Aboriginies. All very Catch-22. As is the poor education and qualifications which restrict most Aboriginies to competing for unskilled jobs. A further problem is that it's the unskilled with whom Aboriginies are in competition for the bottom edge of the job market who are least sympathetic to "positive discrimination" or "affirmative action" and who are likely to bastardise any poor bugger that management foists onto them, causing poor job performance and leading to "justifiable" dismissal... As Helen says, our treatment of the Aboriginies make us ashamed to be white.

But what I really set out to comment on was Jack's and Richard's responses to my comments on how Australian fanzines look from over here. Since my special knowledge of British fans was the whole point (or at least a major point) of those comments, Jack's reply strikes me as rather off beam. From the British point of view, after all, especially, I have a special knowledge of Australian fanzines - I expect that my knowledge of the personalities behind them, and a touch of nostalgia for that more informal, less sedate, often wackier, milieu, has a lot to do with why I feel my heart leap, adrenalin surge, and generally definitely enjoy receiving and reading Australian fanzines (even when they come from Glen Crawford whom I haven't met). My first contact with Britfandom, apart from meeting the GUFF winner so many other Australians met, was paper contact - Napalm in the Morning, Joseph and Ian Maule's By British fanthology (which, as a "best of" collection, wasn't a wholly unbiased introduction - it was made up of pieces chosen for their vividness), and Dave Langford's Ansible (like all Langford publications brimming with gossip and personal innuendo). I can see why Jack finds Nabu, Tappen, Wallbanger and Epsilon all quite similar - they do all share the same low-key, mild mannered conversational tone, and reflect that fairly homogenously sedate tone of British fandom. Others, like Phil Palmer (by no means the "fawning new boy" Jack called him, and quite miffed at that description), Alan Ferguson, Jimmy Robertson, Abi Frost, and Ro Kavney, do not. Equally, I can see why Australian fanzines don't project this conversational informality - the chatty links between articles and in letter columns - that the British want to find in any fanzine that they read, and which are where the Brits look for editorial personality above and beyond that implied by the selection of articles.

Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London, SW1V 2ER, UK

As a supplement to Judith's comments I'd say that the way Jack Herman goes about projecting his personality in the pages of Wahf-Full is of a different order and in some ways inferior to the way British fans go about projecting their personalities in the pages of their fanzines. Sure, what you chose to print is, to a certain extent, a reflection of your interests and hence of your personality (and on this basis it can therefore be claimed that all fanzines are personalzines); but it's nevertheless an extremely indirect and indeed somewhat cumbersome method of getting that personality down on paper, not least because of the lack of significant clues thus provided and the length of time it takes for the individual's character to emerge. In a British fanzine, by contrast, one can tell immediately who is who and what they're like as people -- and whether or not they come across as somewhat stereotyped individuals, Jack should perhaps reflect on the fact that their characters have been and continue to be communicated to the reader, something that the majority of Australian fanzines manifestly do not manage. (Yet what are fanzines for, and what is fanwriting, if not the communication of personality? Nuclear power and rape and whatnot are all very well as topics for discussion, but in Australian fanzines appear to be approached in a very impersonal manner, as though the authors were more concerned to lecture their readers on the theoretical pros and cons rather than put forward individual experiences.



I can't see the point of such an approach, myself, since if I want to find out about such subjects I can obtain books and journals written by people who have studied them at first hand and have something original to contribute instead of reading the earnest, derivative and ultimately superficial maunderings of someone in some fanzine or other. When I read fanzines, I'm looking for stuff about people, not things.)

((Fine... fine... and so are most of us. But the question, or one of the questions anyhow, is, do fanzines exist just to fit into the Nicholas ideal. I readily admit that I seem to read fanzines for the same sorts of things that you do, but it also seems to me that people do not only produce them for that reason. There are a lot of people who seem to look upon the medium as a sort of substitute for professional magazines, whether they be Analog, New Scientist or New Society. I suppose that what you, and some others are saying, is that fanzines have found a niche for themselves in the form of a vehicle for the personal essay, so let's stay in that general area and develop it. After all, this is the age of specialisation.))

"When Joseph Nicholas criticises Weber Woman's Wrevenge it seems to be because it doesn't meet his objective ideals on the whole field of fanzines." Yes and no - this is quite correct, taken on its own, but in context it seems to suggest that I'm objecting to the fanzine's contents, to the type of material Jean actually publishes. Not so; and for the benefit of those who won't have read what I've said on the subject in ANZAPA, I'd like to stress that my primary objection to Weber Woman's Wrevenge (as it currently stands) is that it's not particularly well-written, and the defect seems to be wholly a consequence of Jean's straightforward lack of interest in the business of writing - as she admitted in a recent editorial, she simply can't be bothered to try harder than she already is, to work at improving it. In which case, as I've said to her, she's effectively insulting her readers by knowingly offering them substandard goods, and negating the impact of the writing into the bargain. What you have to say influences the way you say it, ideas cannot be separated from the words that contain them, clarity of expression is a consequence of clarity of thought, and so on and so forth; and no matter how interesting and important all Jean's raw data about rape and whatnot may be, it has none whatever when it's written up in so lackadaisical a manner. It's worth pointing out, too, that the carelessness of the writing is partly responsible for the fanzine's seeming impersonality of tone, since the degree of thought necessary to encapsulate the writer's personal feelings in the correct (and most appropriate) words - so that said feelings are most effectively communicated to the readers - is obviously lacking. In which case, why bother? As D West and others have remarked several times before, the personal element of fanwriting is its raison d'etre, the unique quality by which it stands or falls, and without that element it has nothing to commend it either way.

Sue Tagkalidis seems to have got hold of entirely the wrong end of the stick as far as fanwriting is concerned. "The method of writing employed in the fanzines is reactive," she says, as though this were a condemnation; to her, it may be, but not as far as you and I and everyone else is concerned. Fanzine fandom is by its very nature self-referential, taking up issues of the moment and running them through a number of different fanzines with a number of different viewpoints being brought to bear; what else would one reasonably expect of an inwardly-focused "clique" that holds certain things in common? "Anything written should be whole by itself and should have a centre of its own," she says, yet something as closed as that would produce little to no response at all; and it is response to what is published, the continuation of discussion by others, that sustains fanzine fandom. People write for fanzines because they have something they wish to contribute to fanzines as a whole, not because they wish to revel in the experience of writing - "their primary



concern is not writing per se, but in communication with other people," she says, as though she were constructing some great divide between the two; but surely writing is a form of communication, and in writing well you're in consequence communicating more precisely than you would if you wrote badly? Sue's problem, however, may stem from a certain misperception of the nature of fanwriting itself: she seems to have mistaken it for a form of fiction, when it is instead a form of journalism, and to criticise it on the basis of the former than the latter is to commit all manner of tawdry solecisms.

George Turner, in his letter in Ornithopter 10, referred to the recent demise of one of the two sf magazines published in this country. He may be interested to learn that Extro (for such it was) folded, not because of its poor sales record -- after three issues it was on the verge of being accepted for national distribution by W H Smith and John Menzies, the two biggest news and book wholesalers in the UK (who between them control three-quarters of the market) -- but because its editor suffered a change of bank manager, whose first act was to cancel the overdraft granted to his publishing company (despite the fact that it was secured against the editor's house) and thus force it to suspend its operations in the middle of arranging for the printing of the fourth issue. (Significantly, the bank in question was Barclays, which over the past couple of years has gained a terrible reputation for the support, or lack thereof, it gives to small business. Interzone, on the other hand, has now been secured against loss to a maximum of Two Thousand Pounds guaranteed by the literature panel of the Arts Council, and receives some support from the Arts Fund of the Greater London Council, so it is at present in no danger of going under... although it will be interesting to see how many of its initial subscriptions are renewed now that its first year is up. Some four hundred of the BSFA's eight hundred-odd members signed up at a discount as charter subscribers in early 1982, but I can't help wondering how many of them will decide that they have not received the sort of spaceships-and-alien fiction for which they might have been hoping and decline to renew at the full rate. I myself have renewed my subscription - I may have some reservations about the magazine, but it's still developing and think it's worth supporting -- but the average Heinlein-loving BSFA member... hmmm.

I liked Ali Kayn's article a lot, not least because it comes close to saying something I've been saying about sf art for some years: that it's absolute drivel, not remotely even worth the paper it's printed on and a waste of everyone's time. Not, however, that she attempts to discuss the reasons why, simply concentrates on berating the fans for not being critical enough about it; but this is a mistake, because the dominant themes in the field are established by the publishers, not the readers, and fanartists - who will to a certain extent be influenced by what they see on the covers of books and magazines - are no more likely to listen to them than are the publishers. But since critical discussion of sf art is what Ali is after, I propose not to respond directly to the points she raises (the fanartists themselves will be rushing to do that) but to advance my own theory of why the stuff is so bad. It's a bit complicated, but it goes like this:

Brian Aldiss's conception of the pulp magazine, from the days of Frank Reade, Jr to the Second World War, is that they were intended to assist in the assimilation into the social fabric of the USA of the vast number of immigrants who flooded into the country in those years by providing them with a simplified guide to the mores and tenets of the culture they were attempting to adopt - the western pulps to teach them something of its history, the crime and war pulps to teach them something of contemporary society, the science fiction pulps to teach them something of its aspirations for the future. Taken together with the advent of mass literacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the consequent demand for a more assimilable and



understandable "proletarian" literature, this accounts for the simplicity of the vocabulary used and the concepts discussed in the said magazines. By extension - and this, incidentally, is where I begin to discuss my own rather than his ideas - the art used in those magazines was intended to fulfill the same ends: an adjunct to the writing rather than existing in its own right, it concretised the verbal images inherent in the words and thereby assisted in the formation of the "correct" mental images in the minds of the readers, particularly those readers still struggling to comprehend the nuances of the new (to them) language. The result has been to tie the images and themes of science fiction art down to the images and themes of science fiction literature, so that instead of developing the freedom to create and explore its own concepts it has remained something of a "quasi-realistic" medium, attempting to make "real" the visions of the writers rather than the artists. Nor has it been helped by the ideologies propounded by such influential editors as Gernsback, Campbell and Gold, who, whatever else they said and did, cleaved more or less true to the line that sf is primarily a literature about the future, and this acted to circumscribe what little vision the artists had left. And as it was in 1940 so it still is today: tedious representations of future cities, space habitats, colony starships, alien flora and fauna - this is vision, imagination, artistic innovation? Not bloody likely; all the main currents that have run through twentieth century art-as-a-whole (cubism, surrealism, pop, op, abstract and whathaveyou) have passed it completely by, and it's now so set in its ways that it's not likely to change now.

I don't pretend, of course, that this is a finished, polished, all-embracing theory - I have little evidence with which to support it - but I advance it for what it's worth as a contribution to the discussion, and wait to see what people say in response.

Rob Gerrand is wrong about the UK release print of Bladerunner, anyway - it does have the awful sub-sub-sub-Spillane voiceover, and in that respect is no different from the Australian print. Or perhaps not, depending on whether the Australian print is the same one released in the US, since that released in the UK had five minutes' worth of the chunks edited out in the US (due entirely to the negative reactions of the morons who constituted the preview audiences) added back in the interests of clearing up some of the resulting inconsistencies. But not too successfully, either; did anyone else notice the faulty arithmetic of the police chief who handed Deckard his assignment? Twice in almost as many minutes he told Deckard that six replicants had escaped and returned to Earth and that one had been found dead in the shuttle, leaving five; Deckard then goes out and shoots one of them but is told by the chief that since the Tyrell Corporation girl has been added to the total of replicants to be hunted down he still has four targets left. Strange, but I'd always thought that five less one plus one equalled... five. As for the rest of the film: it was garbage.

The only authentic Dickian moment came in one of the opening sequences when we first sight Deckard as he crosses the street in the rain to order a meal at an open-air lunch counter only to be told that he can't have the particular dish that he wants; of such petty frustrations is the Dickian universe composed. The rest of the story never rises above the witless and while the backgrounds might look impressive at first glance they do not stand up to detailed scrutiny for a moment. Why, for example, have the interior decorators of 2019 forgotten the basic principles of lighting a room, and instead of suspending the light source from the centre of the ceiling hide it away in corners or chair arms? Atmospheric, yes; sensible, no, not by a long shot. Nor is the film even consistent from shot to shot within the same scene; whenever we look across the central well of the genetic engineer's apartment building, for example, we see white spotlight beams roving around it, yet whenever we look up through the roof of the well we see largely red and orange lights on the



giant tv screens of the passing drone - red and orange lights so bright that they'd be the ones illuminating the well of the building, not the white spotlights (whose source is in any case impossible to locate anywhere in the mess that fills the screen). These mistakes stand out to so great an extent that, apart from preventing one from believing in the "reality" of what's on the screen, I'm frankly amazed that more people haven't noticed them. I suppose nobody would have noticed them if they'd been on the screen for less time than they were, which betrays Ridley Scott's origins as a director of tv commercials: any image will do as long as it has impact. Balls. He should be sent away to learn how to direct films, using for the purpose a very small budget that forces him to concentrate on basics like scripts and acting rather than flashy backgrounds and cheap spectacle, and until he can manage that his films will be a waste of celluloid.

Incidentally, I find the dedication of the film to the memory of Philip K Dick quite insulting - particularly since, as I understand it, Scott used the occasion of his death to repudiate the script he'd personally approved and both rewrite and reshoot certain portions of it. Such treatment is too shabby, too vile for words.

Mike Glicksohn, 508 Windemere Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M6S 3L6, CANADA

I didn't see Bladerunner until it appeared on pay TV (hence uncut and uninterrupted) but even on the small screen the most impressive part of the film was the realism of the background and the society in which the action took place. Since I haven't read Dick's original novel (I was never a Phil Dick fan, finding much of his stuff too cerebral for my simplistic taste) I considered it merely as a movie, not as a movie version of a book, and I agree with Rob Gerrand that as a film it fails to live up to the promise of its setting. The story line is too simplistic and, in spots, inconsistent and I'm surprised he fails to mention the totally-unacceptable "happy ending" which is tacked on with total disregard for any sort of internal logic. Still, I'm keeping a copy in my video tape library if only to enjoy the amazingly solid way in which the world of 2019 is presented.

Nothing to say about your fanzine reviews except that they are thoughtful, intelligent and better than just about anything else that's been done in that area in recent months. You shall now edit out this paragraph or John Berry will frown at you!

((Aww!))

Frank Denton, 14654 - 8th Avenue SW, Seattle, WA 98116, USA

Rob Gerrand's review of Bladerunner was a very perceptive review. His ability to correlate the film with the book denotes either a very recent reading of the book or an excellent memory. At WesterCon Paul Williams was passing out flyers concerning a Philip K Dick newsletter which he is publishing. \$5 a year from The PKD Society, c/ Paul Williams, Box 661, Glen Ellen, CA 95442. There will be four newsletters a year to include original, unpublished PKD material, news, correspondence, bibliographic notes, etc.

((It looks as though fandom is getting fan clubs, in the film sense of the word. Who is going to be the one to start up the Isaac Asimov Appreciation Society, International, Inc.??))

Robert Coulson, 7682N-100W, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA

Basically, the problem that Bruce Gillespie wrote about in Rataplan 21 seems to be that he liked science fiction, not for what it was but for what he



wanted it to be. He mentioned mysteries as an improvement, but mysteries also aren't what he wants them to be and he'll be off them in another couple of years (if he hasn't given up on them before this letter is printed).

He's right that the sf short story field went to pot in the 1970s. Partly this is because the sf novel market boomed, and novels pay better (not per word, but per amount of total effort. There are, say, more than ten times as many words in a novel as in a short story, but it's not really ten times as hard to write, and you get paid ten times as much) so the better authors went into novels exclusively. Partly this is because the vacuum in the short story field, that this change produced, was filled by the graduates of English Departments who wanted to write the sort of stories Bruce likes, but didn't know how. One of the advantages of action-adventure fiction is that it can, sometimes, survive bad writing and still be entertaining. Failed attempts at "literary" efforts are always drivel. (Sometimes even the successful attempts are drivel...)

((Welcome aboard one conservative! Despite that you make a good point which has me wondering, in turn, if Bruce would be convinced that the better authors have gone into novels exclusively. There are, so I am informed, some fairly shocking novels being published these days... perhaps just as many bad novels as bad short stories. Perhaps this has something to do with the nature of the market which is more interested in large complete packages than in collections of little concepts. What with people producing open ended series of novels these days, perhaps even the novel is too short for the likes of those people who still read.))

George Turner, 4/296 Inkerman Street, East St Kilda, Vic 3183

I realise that every so often I should write something incisively relevant for fandom to deride and fulminate against, according to taste, but have been fully occupied with the brute of a book I have taken on for the Literature Board, who supplied the money, and Norstrilia Press, who threaten to publish it. It contains considerable autobiographical elements, and if you think that telling the truth is simple, pause to consider: (a) the uncertainty of memory (ask any policeman), (b) the people who may be unnecessarily hurt by what you write, (c) the tendency to 'remember' what suits rather than what happened, (d) the basic dishonesty in any 'point of view' account and (e) as I have noted somewhere in the text, the human willingness to admit wickedness rather than reveal stupidity. After eighteen months of limping over these hurdles I begin to agree with critics who suggest that autobiography only provides a pecking ground for others to grub out the truth.

Bruce Gillespie, who has read most of the manuscript, knows why I think that definition of sf is, if not essential, at least critically useful (Rataplan 21) and in the final chapter will discover that I do indeed think that the "craft is improvable". I take snide glee in the thought of Bruce type-setting, proof-reading, publishing and (presumably) launching a book full of things he must disagree with, particularly as he is disillusioned with sf whereas I, after nearly sixty years of treating it as harmless entertainment, now see its literary and social possibilities. To find out what that means you will have to read the book. (Hype, hype!)

Nice to see Chris Priest reappear in Rataplan 23, in his usual alter ego. Chris Jekyll is the bouncy, joking bloke you meet in the flesh; Christopher Hyde is the one who writes to fanzines, disapproving of everything. Despite him I welcomed the SFC reprint with some joy. Far from "reliving past glories", it preserves them; without a remembered past there is no future and only a groping present.



My reaction to re-reading my own early critical work was, aside from the usual squirms of "I shouldn't have said that", surprise at the ebullience of it all. Oh dear, but I have grown stodgy by comparison with the brash icon-smasher of 1969. Now that I know so much more about books and reviews and critical responsibilities in general, conservatism has set in; I can only hope it won't prove fatal, but I no longer feel the urge to rip and tear at what offends my standards. While Neville Angove and Damien Broderick still breathe I will never be short of a joust if the fit takes me, but I tend now to let detractors run on while I give a tired sigh and think, "What the hell does it matter?" The joy of battle for its own sake has lapsed. It must be catching; even Rataplan isn't stirring any feuds.

((And just as well, this fanzine isn't the place for the bloody butchery we've seen in past decades. They tell me that the '80s is a much gentler decade (I'm not sure who 'they' are and what I see on the tv doesn't sit with that), and so we at the Rataplan editorial offices are more interested in genteel dismemberment than the blood and gore of past battles...))

Avedon Carol, 4409 Woodfield Road, Kensington, MD 20895, USA

I think you slipped in your response to Chris Priest's letter when you said "the people out there have lowered their standards and joined us here in the ghetto." Sounds neat for a minute, until you realise that the people were reading junk all along and have merely expanded their list of junk categories. Sf really did raise its standards, you know, and at a faster rate than most other areas of fiction. And while it was happening, the reading public was buying up diet books and junk religions and sophomoric "informational" books about sex (I've sometimes toyed with "Everything Dr Rubin Doesn't Know About Sex" as a title for my book; but realize that this would make the book at least three times as long as what I had in mind).

What I see happening in publishing, and especially in regard to sf, is what I had, with my colleagues, bemoaned for years in the music business. The information exists - the demographics, the market studies, even the personal interviews - but the people who read those figures stare blankly at them and don't know what they mean. When BATTLESTAR GALACTICA failed to appeal to the television sponsor's prime target audience (women from twenty-five to forty) the producers thought the antidote was to bring on the dancing boys. They incorporated a sporting event which gave Dirk Benedict the opportunity to run around without a shirt for a minute. It doesn't take a genius to explain why the show nevertheless failed to attract the target audience. Recording producers have made similar mistakes, basing their market strategies on demographic studies which were made fifteen years ago and failing to note that the population has moved to other demographic categories in the past fifteen years. People figured out that certain age-groups were buying records, but never figured out why, and now can't understand why the "same" groups aren't buying those records. In the same way, intelligent editors have used silly arguments to explain silly publishing/marketing strategies. How you market an item does have an impact on sales, and producers and publishers have never been willing to admit that the methods they have used to market items have often been responsible for the failures of those books, records, tv shows, and movies, notwithstanding the actual commercial validity of the product. The market strategies which do sell products are used for items which the producers already perceive as commercially viable - creating a self-fulfilling prophesy syndrome: we believe it is viable, therefore we will take the trouble to market it properly, therefore it will sell, therefore it is viable. There is a basic, snobbish assumption that the public is so stupid that it will refuse to buy a good product - if it is good, it can't be commercially viable - and record companies, publishers, network chairs and producers are literally afraid to try to market good products. Thus, we have the ironic conversation



in which consumers tell producers that we don't like the current product and want something else, the producers tell us that we really don't want what we say we want and that we buy what we say we don't want, we say that we buy only because there's nothing else and we'd spend more if they'd give us more, they say we don't know what we're talking about (even when we cite demographic studies) and that there are "market realities" involved which explain why they produce what people don't want to buy. They then turn around and wonder why people aren't buying records or books or whatever like they used to and have to go invent new reasons for the trend.

I could go on about this forever, citing examples such as - after a few years in music you develop a huge repertoire of complaints like this, you learn to read demographic studies yourself, you argue with executives - it never seems to bear fruit.

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

Let's get the story straight before the story is told half wrong. I will typeset for Science Fiction, and Van Ikin will take over my subscription list. No SFC subscribers will miss out. I've typeset SF 13 already, have done half of 14, and will do 15 or 16 as "The Last SFC". I do want to publish again, but anything I attempt will have to be small-circulation, small size. The rotten postage rates make even this modest aim seem almost impossible at the moment.

So I have no answer to Chris Priest, except that I did publish the Reprint, that was well worth doing, but that few people have bought it, and so I am vastly in debt. There will not be a Reprint of 1970; probably 1971, SFC's best year, would be a better year to do, anyway.

Irwin Hirsh has some worthwhile ideas about how people should publish fanzines - but money always raises its monstrous head. How can anyone turn out a "small, frequent, regular" genzine these days without going broke? If you have a Category B permit, okay, and distribute all your copies in Australia, you might do it. But where's the fun in that? Nearly all the people I want to reach, and who will write great letters of comment, live overseas. And even with Category B, the cost of sending copies overseas is enormous.

((You sound as if you expect fanzines to actually make enough money that they can pay for themselves. (Perhaps that is the case in Star Trek fandom or the like but) I was always under the impression that in this particular branch of fandom the editors published fanzines because it was something that they liked doing. Like any other hobby it is something which a person supports by the sweat of their labours from other fields of human endeavour. So, my good fellow, the solution is to go out and get a well paying job which will then pay for your habit. The mere fact that you may not like what you have to do is not the point, is it?))

Andrew Brown, c/ 21 Shakespeare Grove, St Kilda, Vic 3182

I've found the fanzine reviews you've written for the last two issues of Rataplan the most interesting of the material you've published recently. In particular, your comments about the fanzines that are published by the alumni of APPLESAUCE. You comment on the apa's "earnestness and concern for real world problems..."; what comes to my mind is that the grounding in editorial techniques imbued by APPLESAUCE is far removed from that which, through the medium of genzines (or the better publications in ANZAPA), we employ when we seek to publish a general circulation fanzine. The emphasis in apas tends to be more towards content than style. There may be an inverse relationship between frequency of mailings and the quality of presentation: in a monthly apa with a large membership such as APPLESAUCE, the hidden agenda would be



that of communicating to as many members as possible while still maintaining a level of material sufficiently engaging to elicit comment. Thus, there might (I say, having been a member of APPLESAUCE for a mere three months in late 1979) be a tendency to head for the "real world" hard hitting material which gains quick response.

In ANZAPA, however, where the mailing comment "conversations" are drawn out over a more protracted period, there is more time for the laidback, fannish approach. When people have more time to consider their approach, their readers have a greater length of time to consider their material: thus the emphasis tends more towards the anecdotal or essay type of approach.

Given some scrap of truth in the comments above, it might not be too far from the truth to say that APPLESAUCE was one of the greatest catastrophies in the course of Australian fannish publishing. I seem to recall, though, that it was set up to give people practice in publishing fanzines to spread word for the A in '83 bid. Best laid plans, hmmm?

Kevin McCaw, 20 Dodd Street, Hamilton Hill, W.A. 6163.

It seems, from the reading of things, that fandom has got bogged down in its own mire. All I seem to read is "No one is producing good fanzines", "No one is producing new fanzines". Is fandom stuck in this sort of nostalgia? In this situation "new" fanzines are stifled by the weight of all that has gone before. The fans have now got so comfortable with the high quality fanzines that a new fanzine that is just starting up doesn't get encouragement. No wonder they dwindle and die off.

I do find it a little annoying that there is nothing I do that someone doesn't criticise. This may be one of the reasons that burgeoning new fanzines tend to collapse after a few issues. They get so buried under the weight of complaints that, when their editors come to ask, "Why am I doing this?" (which they inevitably do) the only answer they have received is complaints. So why should they do it? This is not at all fair. How can new fanzines arise if they are criticised to death before they have a chance to really get going? And why is it assumed that just because the Eastern States fanzines are on a decline, that the whole of Australia is. We're still alive out here in the West you know!

Fandom seems to have fallen into the old trap, people set their standards too high for new fans with ideas of producing a fanzine to reach, hence new fanzines die off due to the intolerance of the "Truefans" (dirty word that). Then this gives the "Truefans" plenty to bemoan in their own long standing fanzines, while continuing to kick the new fanzines in the teeth. "No one does anything", "so everyone complains about it", "so no one does anything", and so on. What a vicious circle.

The trouble is that fans seem to have forgotten how hard it is for a new fan to start a new fanzine! What qualifies me to say that? Well, I am one of these new fans. And The WASFFAN is one of those new fanzines. I got past the silly "three issues and die" syndrome by starting at issue twenty-nine (issues one to twenty-eight had already been published by Roy Ferguson). If it hadn't been for the fact that I have to produce The WASFFAN it would have folded after my second issue due to the massive amount of complaints received: people out there in fandom seem to like really sinking their teeth into a new fanzine and tearing chunks out of its editor. Don't they realise how depressing it is to a person starting from scratch, with no previous experience, to be told twenty times "It's not good enough!" and you're only up to the second issue.



*It didn't buy sex from  
Spaceways secure of it yet. 4*

Those who complain about the lack of fanzines should go out and publish some! And it's up to us editors to help them over the teething troubles. New fans need help with all the little things like "Where do I get paper from?", "How can I print it?", "What's a Gestetner?" and so on. Don't just berate people for their inexperience, help them.

((Earlier in this column George Turner writes that we need the past because, without it, there is no future and only a groping present. And here you are, saying, among other things, that the past loads us down so that those who just start on something have too much to aim for if they want to achieve excellence. I suppose that the difference might be one of age and also achievement. George has done a lot and achieved high standards in those things that he has done that I know about. On the other hand, for people like you and me, there is the trouble of starting. It seems to me that the trick is not to look upon the achievements of the past as a weighty burden but, instead, as something to be regarded as a goal - you can either decide that you like it and that you are going to try to do as well, or you can decide that it is all self-indulgent garbage and you can set new goals which will show off that earlier stuff for the worthless nonachievement that it is. Either way, you can't berate the past for being there, it was made by people who had just the same troubles that you have been having.

((As for the problems of criticism of the new and inexperienced... the first thing that you should do is name names. Who are the people who have been critical? If you were to think on it for a while you might find that the criticism is less than you think and from people who are not qualified by their own learning, experience or achievements. I, personally, think that it is reasonable to treat those new to the business with different standards than those who have been around for a while - there is a learning period. But after that it's all-in-wrestling time. Of course, the proper thing to do with critics is to say out loud, and often, "What do they know anyhow, when was they last time they produced a great fanzine/wrote a great story/produced a great play/painted a great painting, etc (delete the inappropriate ones).))

Harry Warner Jr, 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, MA 21740, USA.

Just forty-five years ago, I prepared to publish the first issue of my first fanzine title and I announced for it a policy remarkably similar to the one you outlined on the first page of Rataplan 22. You decided not to publish material about sex, religion and politics. I kept out of Spaceways anything dealing with religion and politics. Memory fails me, but I suspect I didn't include sex in the ban because I hadn't heard of it yet. I think my purpose was to try to keep out of Spaceways the topics which were filling other fanzines of the time with such bitterness and incomprehensible arguments, with perhaps the added impetus of my ignorance of political and religious matters. Today, I still think it was a good idea but for a reason which didn't occur to me in the late 1930s: there are so many things fanzines can publish material about which are rarely or never written up in professional publications, but the religious and political material which appears in fanzines is rarely much different from what's available in larger circulation sources.

I can understand your reaction to The Mentor. But you and I and a handful of other readers must try to keep one fact in mind: we're in the minority as longplaying fans. I think it's important to have fanzines like The Mentor in steady production over the years, even if they don't change much, because most of their readers will be fans who are subject to the few years of activity which is the common fate of most of fankind. The Mentor won't seem changeless to most of them because they won't be around long enough to get that impression and meanwhile lots of other fans will be arriving to whom The Mentor is brand new, fresh and different after all these years because they



haven't seen it before. It's a good fanzine and good fanzines aren't plentiful nowadays. Remember how complaints were heard over Campbell's unchanging policies with Analog from those who had read it through decades? I'm sure those who complained would be glad to have him resurrected and back at work on the magazine, now that they've experienced those years of its publication under successors.

((As a person who only started buying Analog after Campbell died, I wouldn't know about that.

((I don't disagree with you about The Mentor, and I think that Ron's hide is thick enough that any comments that I or anybody else (even Ted White) might have to make on what he does will have no effect on it. Ron is one of those people who has found a formula that works for him and he is going to stick to it. The point I thought I was making in commenting on The Mentor was that what Ron is doing is not something that interests me... on the other hand I wouldn't be surprised if Ron's fanzine is still going the way it is now long after this incarnation of this fanzine has reached its zenith, burned out and disappeared. Such is life.))

Richard Faulder, PO Box 136, Yanco, NSW 2703

Not having seen a Ted White fanzine review, I don't know what standards he is using to judge fanzines. However, so far as I can see, you do not use some sort of mythical golden age ideal fanzine as a standard against which you judge all other fanzines. Certainly you may have been influenced in your ideas as to what a fanzine should be and do by past examples, but this isn't the same thing as using past standards as a basis for judgement.

It begins to occur to me that one of the weaknesses in your fanzine critiques is that a continuing criticism that you make of Australian fanzines is that they are not pushing towards the pinnacles of their possibilities, but you do not indicate what you would consider would be the pinnacle, nor how each faned might go about getting there. To be fair, you make it quite clear that the pinnacle for a fanzine produced by Ron Clarke or Marc Ortlieb is a different one for each of these people, and different from the one for your own fanzine. Nevertheless, my criticism stands. It is not enough for any critic to merely point out faults - having done this it becomes their responsibility to suggest remedies for these faults, or to at least suggest what the work would be like once the faults have been corrected.

((Well, I dunno about that. Perhaps it would be something nice if there was a unified field theory of fanzines in which almost everybody agreed on what a good fanzine would be like. Unfortunately things are not so simple and, what is worse, people who publish fanzines are individual enough that they get upset if people try to stick them into categorical or metaphorical boxes. If they get upset because I have the nerve to say that their fanzines aren't perfect, I'd hate to imagine what the reaction would be if I had the gall to say which way they should be aiming their efforts. Anyhow, the nice thing about fanzines is that when their editors get motivated they go off in directions which nobody would expect. So, to some extent, my reviews are a bit of a nudge to get people motivated to see what they can do. Pointing out where they should be going would spoil a lot of the fun.))

The interesting thing about your perception of APPLESAUCE being "noted for its earnestness and concerns for real world problems" is that it certainly didn't start out that way, and if the responsibility can be sheeted home to any one person, that person would be Jack Herman, who felt that fandom wasn't concentrating itself sufficiently with the real world, and set out to see that it did. The problem with gaining egoboo by attracting comment on what one



publishes is that it is necessary to be selective about what one takes regard of, let alone prints. After all, there's not much egoboo in printing comments that say that your publication is tedious, or trite, or comments in like vein. Indeed, I have recently seen accusations that one local fan edited a letter of comment so as to make it appear less uncomplimentary.

((Of course, if it was uncomplimentary it shouldn't have been published at all. Life already has enough knockers and we don't need to encourage more.))

Strangely enough I was, in theory, actively involved in Sydney fandom through the period 1974-8, being Secretary and/or Treasurer of the Sydney SF Foundation through most of that time. Somehow, though, I have the feeling that the changes that occurred in Sydney fandom took place outside the Foundation, so that in many ways I was at most an observer. Those, of course, were the years when Dungeons and Dragons was ascendant, so that much of Sydney fandom's activity was taking place away from Foundation meetings, and it is there that the society of the new, post-Aussiecon fans evolved. At that time a number of older Sydney fans dropped out of the general fannish scene, either through force of non-fannish commitments, or because they became disenchanted with what fandom was evolving into. Some have since evolved into the new fannish type, and to some extent returned to the fold.

You seem to have summed up my feeling about conventions well. As I've undoubtedly said many times before, though, conventions ain't what they used to be. I tend to make before and after AussieCon comparisons. Before that occasion, sf conventions were places where you could relax, even if you didn't know all the people there was at least a feeling that they would be interested in talking about things that interested you in a fairly rational, subdued way. Since that time, sf conventions seem to be increasingly populated by people with the attitude "I came here to enjoy myself, and by ghod I'm going to do so even if it kills me". Hence the increasing need for booze to break down people's inhibitions enough to carry this out. There's a connection between your second and third "B"s, too. Since I find being drunk personally unpleasant my alcoholic intake was moderate at most, and hence it doesn't take long for me to find out how boring the intoxicated are when listened to with sobre ears. Ask yourself - how are modern sf conventions different from parties anywhere these days, and you soon come to the realisation that you could obtain the same effect by going to a local party, without the stress and/or expense of travelling and the need to prolong the agony over three days.

((Ah yes, but if we all stayed at home then we would not experience some of the choicer moments of conventions which you can't find elsewhere; like going to sleep during panel items on space colonisation, peering at the latest cricket scores on the tv through the bodies at a crowded room party, afternoons spent in trying to arrange which group of people is going to go where for dinner, and happening upon a showing of slides from "Blake's 7" and only realising afterwards that the auction like conversation that is taking place is indeed people bidding for the slides as they were being shown. You can't convince me that these kinds of experiences can be had by just staying at home with a few friends.))

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

Well, apropos your supposition on page 1, paragraph 1, of Rataplan 23, I did find you at that convention that was going to occur in Sydney in a week or so. And, apropos paragraph 2, you did seem to be laughing and smiling - were you really in the grip of an overall trauma?



Perhaps you started too young, Leigh, and have attended too many. A surfeit, perhaps; too much, too soon, and then too many. But conventions are still new to me. New, because I can only go to one a year, so any aching doubts about the worth of a con, a sort of post-coitus malaise which does occur in the week succeeding a convention, are soon submerged as I begin anticipating the eleven months of exquisite torture before the next one.

I'm the same with the local Show - what the capital cities call The Exhibition and - what do the Americans call it? "State Fair" was the movie, wasn't it? The once-a-year carnival, with Sideshow Alley, and incredibly stomach-churning rides, the junkiest junk foods, horse events, local exhibits of needlework and jam-making, wood-chopping, the fireworks display, and show bags for \$3 whose individual items total 3/6 - sorry, I regress as Show time.

You might even be describing the Show in paragraph 3. "...the people going in all directions but never seeming to get anywhere, the gaudy decore (sic) and the noisy and often smelly environment, the chaos, and all the other things which go with (it), nobody could help but wonder why they subject themselves to such degradation." But then you go on in the next sentence to point out exactly why I could subject myself to the degradation of Shows, or conventions, when I could be at home "reading a good book, looking at telly, or feeding the fish." Leigh, night after night, I read good, bad, and indifferent books. Night after night I look at bad, indifferent and indescribable telly. Night after night I feed chickens, a budgerigar, a cat, a dog, a husband, two children, and fish (worrying constantly why the cardinal-fish seems to reject most food and whether the goby is developing enteritis), and you offer me, as an alternative, in fact as a superior alternative, MORE OF THE SAME?

Never!

Give me once a year when I can wander star-crossed beneath the coloured fairy lights of the Ferris Wheel, clutching a furry toy I won by shooting four ducks in a row, with my Nestle's bag complete with Phantom comic under one arm, listening to the sprukers cajoling the last florin from the waffle-grimed fingers of hapless children, the shrieks of teenagers caught in the rapacious arms of the Octopus drowned out by John Naish describing, in mellifluous tones over the loudspeaker the continuing saga of the Olympic Jump.

Give me also once a year when I can wander, still star-struck, down the endless corridors of hotels to which I could not otherwise afford to go, with "a bunch of people who are mostly weirdos and strangers, listening to somebody who hardly knows what they (sic) are talking about on a subject that really doesn't interest you anyhow", and loving them, and loving being with them, and loving being me with them.

So - did I enjoy Syncon '83? You bet I did.

((You make conventions sound so good I'll have to go to another one. And that's the last time that I let you quote from my fanzine, you put too many of those "(sic)" things in.))

Jean Weber, 13 Myall Street, O'Connor, ACT 2601

Having just returned from Syncon, reading your pre-convention musings on conventions was most timely. I did get a taste of the dual problem of programming though - I was talking to some women (who'd not attended a convention before) about women writers and other matters. Two of them had been referred to me as the available oracle on feminism, apparently. They asked why there was no panel item on the subject this time, having heard that some



conventions in the past had had them. I suggested it might be because those of us who were interested in the subject had done it all before, several times, and hadn't felt like repeating ourselves.

"Yes, but we haven't heard the discussion before," they said. And that got me thinking about the necessity to repeat some topics year after year (though, one would hope, with the occasional new idea thrown in). We old fans and tired may skip the programming because we've heard it all before, but there are always newcomers, especially at a National convention, who haven't heard it all. This train of thought will eventually lead me to write to the Melbourne in '85 mob with the suggestion that certain provisions for women, and especially feminists, be made - whether on the program, or in the form of a "Room of Our Own" (a la Susan Wood), or whatever. Old-time convention goers, especially those from overseas, may yawn, but the WorldCon will attract many first-timers and should provide for them too.

((Perhaps the problem is that panel items at conventions have taken on a role as a form of mass entertainment rather than as a forum for the discussion (either among the panelists or with the audience) of the topic. When we say that we have done an idea before we are suggesting that we have said all that we have to say on it, and this suggests that our views do not change with time. Surely the new books that we read and the thoughts that we've had on a matter (if we care to think) over the period since the previous discussion, should enliven a further discussion. The sort of attitude that most of us have had is that we would say the same sorts of things over again if we had to talk about the same thing again - that we would be putting on a set piece for the audience and those who had seen it before could just go away somewhere else while the obligatory bit for the first convention-goers happened.

((The panel discussion on Criticism that Van Ikin tried to organise at SynCon was intended to be a continuation of the discussions which had taken place at the Seminar held here in Canberra a year or so ago. If it had worked it would have served two purposes; giving the newcomers an opportunity to get acquainted with one of the longest running problems in sf and giving the people who had been interested and involved in the matter for a long time a forum in which they could express their latest thoughts. Perhaps it is an exercise which is worth trying again.))

Michael Hailstone, PO Box 193, Woden, ACT 2606.

I'm rather puzzled as to Joseph Hanna-Rivero's stand on censorship. Clearly he feels that Australian censors are not doing their job fairly and that British and American censors are doing better, but he also seems to be disapproving of censorship altogether. Besides that, while I resent as much as he does some big brother telling me what's good for me, I tend to see a sign of decadence in a society that wants to see some of the films made nowadays. While I don't mind a bit of explicit sex or "naughty" words, I do shrink from extreme horror and violence. I once read (I think) a sort of interview with one of our film censors, who told of some of the films she had to sit through as part of her job; of the most horrifying scenes, which modern technology makes possible now, such as someone's scalp being peeled off. I fail to understand how anyone could want to see something like that. But then maybe it's not modern decadence but rather good old human bloodlust. After all, public hangings used to be very popular not so long ago, not to mention the blood sports in the Roman Coliseum and elsewhere.

((Bread and circuses, eh? I suppose that the differences are that these days the audience gets a better spectacle than it used to get in the old days (not everybody could be in the front row or see the individual spurts of blood from



severed arteries) and in reality nobody gets hurt too much in the production of such scenes for films.

((I'm pleased that somebody thought to comment on this aspect of Joseph's article. I am in a similar position to you in that I can't understand how anybody would want to see many of the things that are being shown - and unlike Joseph I think that it is probably a fair thing to show sex on the silver screen since, I assume, most people take part in that sort of activity from time to time. However scenes of people having limbs ripped off, holes drilled in them and the like are extraordinary and not part of everyday life. If films serve a partial purpose in teaching people how things are done in society, setting standards and so on, then this sort of education seems like a good thing. While I find no attraction in violence and horror, perhaps that extraordinariness is part of what makes them popular.))

Joan Dick, 88/27 King Street, Prahran, Vict 3181

Marc Ortlieb's "Election? What Election?" was a light hearted look at an activity that seems to be getting more frequent these days in Victoria. The right to vote is such a precious thing, yet such a lot of people think of it as an intrusion on their Saturday liberty. I am always amazed at the casual attitude of most women towards voting. I wonder if they realise how that right was obtained for them.

Although votes for women were discussed in the Victorian Parliament as early as 1868, and Australian women got the vote and the right to stand for the Commonwealth Parliament in 1902 (the first women in the world to do so), it was not until 1909 that the act to give women the vote for the Victorian Parliament was proclaimed. Victoria was the last state in the Commonwealth to proclaim such an act.

Royal Assent was given to the "Act to Enable Women to Become Candidates at Parliamentary Elections in Victoria" on 12 May 1924. In 1925 Mrs Jones was a candidate for the seat of Frankston but withdrew in deference to the opinions of the church women and the vestry of the parish. The first woman Member of the Victorian Parliament was Lady Peacock from 1933 to 1935; then Mrs Weber from 1937 to 1943, and Mrs Brownhill from 1938 to 1948. Then there was a twenty year gap until another woman was elected in 1967. Now, after fifty-nine years we have twelve women in the Victorian Parliament.

((That's a fairly unrepresentative proportion of the whole population, but at least it's a start. One of these days there might even be a woman Premier or Prime Minister - but as Susan Ryan is the only woman in the new Commonwealth Labor Ministry that sort of thing seems to be a long way off.

((Here in Canberra we are over-represented by women in Parliament. Of the four representatives which we are allowed - two members of the House of Representatives and two Senators - three are women. And Susan Ryan is one of them so that seems even better.))

Terry Hughes, 6205 Wilson Blvd, #102, Falls Church, VA 22044, USA

It doesn't happen often but Marc Ortlieb disappointed me in Rataplan 23. His account of his activities during election time seems so... so ordinary. Now I fancy myself something of an expert about the way Australians behave whenever Labor wins an election -- I have after all, seen Don's Party. No more need be said. From the way I read Marc's account all he did was chat and strum a guitar and drink a little wine. Where's the parts about taking off his pants and throwing up on the carpet and being arrested by the local police? Where is the highly embarrassing account of how he disgraced himself and his country by



behaviour on the night in question? It's enough to make me wonder if he's truly Australian. I mean even when they live here in the States, Australians know how to maintain their national image. One Aussie was telling me the other day how he and some of his mates threw a bachelor party for one of their number who was about to tie the knot. The climax of many hours of partying was when the groom-to-be was tied to a tree outside his apartment building. He was only wearing his underpants and spent most of his time throwing up copious amounts of vile alcoholic beverage mixture. That and moaning in agony and screaming for some bloody fucker to come and untie him. He was still there in the morning. He did get married but he and his fellow partiers were all evicted from the apartment building. Now, that is your Australian national heritage in action. Guys like Marc Ortlieb make me suspect that possibly some Australians are actually namby-panby bleeding intellectuals. Columns like his could undo years of hard work creating your national image. Tell the boy to shape up.

((Okay Ortlieb, you read the man, what are you going to do about it?

((Of course Terry, you've got it slightly wrong, the wildest parties don't take place when Labor gets into power, they take place when Labor loses. The play, Don's Party takes place during the 1969 election when Labor lost and one of the drunkest parties that Valma and I ever held was when they lost again in 1975. In 1972, when Gough Whitlam led them to power, Valma actually went out to see a play, leaving David Grigg and I to bounce up and down with excitement. This year Valma and I were too busy worrying that Labor might not actually win so that we waited until Big Mal actually admitted defeat before we knocked the top off the bottle of bubbly.

((And as for Bucks Parties, the tale you recount is mere child's play... One case which has been related to me was when the intending bride-groom was tied, naked, to the boom gates at a railway crossing. It is hard to know which was worse for the poor fellow, when the gates were up and he was stuck way up in the air (and possibly very uncomfortable), or when a train went by and he had to dangle helpless in front of a line of waiting cars. I understand that in the end somebody took pity on his plight and wrapped a blanket around his shoulders.))

Others who wrote were: Harry Andruschak, Neville Angove, Bryan Barrett, Marty Cantor, Paul Collins, Glen Crawford, Diane Fox, Joseph Hanna-Rivero, Jerry Kaufman, Dave Langford, Peter Lampret, Denny Lien, Pete Presford, Jonantan Scott, Caroline Strong, James Styles, Julie Vaux and Ted White.

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#### AGAIN BLOODY BOOK REVIEW

The Deceivers, Alfred Bester, PanSF, 255pp, \$4.95

"Golly!" I thought to myself, "a review copy of my very own. Only trouble now is when do I find time to read it?" Somehow or other the people at Pan got my name and address and sent me a book. Why I am honoured thus I really don't know, but having received the artifact I felt obliged to read the thing and publish a few words about it. (Not, mark you, the kind of short notes and pictures of covers that Ron Clarke publishes, one person doing that sort of thing is one too many.) But, as I've probably said somewhere else in this issue, work and university being what they are, there didn't seem to be too much chance of me actually finding the time to read this book, or any other of a similar nature.



By a coincidence the main character in this book is a person who can make sense out of complex or seemingly random patterns, so it seems appropriate that this book arrived on the day when I was unable to make the slightest sense of the history theory text I was supposed to be reading, and so I decided to try something lighter instead. Not that this particular book is really light reading - it seems to me that Bester must be someone with unusually aligned synapses because he spends a lot of space in the book tossing around ideas which are only marginally related to the story that he is telling. This means that the constant kaleidoscope of ideas gets in the way of what could be a good story.

I only got around to reading Bester's The Demolished Man a year or so ago and so the impression which that book made on me probably has something to do with the disappointment I'd have felt over this book if I'd been expecting much. In this book there is none of the tension or detailed working out of ideas that the earlier book has. This one just rolls along nice and easily, there is plenty of time for the reader to inspect the various bits and pieces that Bester tosses in to keep the interest level up, which is just as well because there simply isn't much action described in a way which brings the story alive. Bester may simply no longer be interested in writing good books to the older formula when he can write this kind of mushy and semi-intellectual stuff to give all the undergraduates a bit of a thrill.

The main thing that amazed me about this book was that I actually finished reading it. I have the theory that this was because I kept turning the pages in the hope of finding the vague promises fulfilled. Since the story featured people figuring out complex patterns I expected that the author was setting us up and would pull all the unrealted bits together later in the book when he revealed his overall Grand Scheme, and that it would all become worthwhile. But that simply never happened. (Around page 150 it seemed as though the whole lot would crystalise, but that hope only lasted a few pages.)

Still, I suppose that if some people have to read everything ever written by Bester they won't be too disappointed by this one. Similarly, those with a slow and meandering style of thought might find this interesting while it will give those who like to imagine what the future demography of the solar system might be like some material to conjur with. But, as for being a great book (at the one extreme) or a good fast paced read (on the other), there would have to be better things on the shelf of your local bookstore.

(As an aside, the blurb on this book is one of the most amazing fabrications I've yet read. The key words are there but the actions and motivations they are supposed to describe seem to be lacking from the copy of the book that I was sent.)

\* \* \*

When you come to Melbourne in 1985 (you are coming, aren't you?) you will doubtless notice Damien Broderick. I can assure you that travelling to Melbourne to sight this imposing edifice will be worthwhile, but in the meantime you'll have to get a taste for what I mean from the following little manuscript.

TATTSLOTTO AND PSI

Damien Broderick

Naturally you're all waiting to hear more about my investigations of Tattslotto, aren't you? Every day I have to turn crowds of you away from my groaning verandah, prying your importunate fingers off my doorbell.



Oh. You mean you didn't rush out and buy the May issue of Omega to learn all about the Amazing Psychic Truth of Lotto's Vanished Winners? Here I am wearing my computer to the bone...

Well, I'll tell you anyway. I'm made of sterner stuff. I've already done this stint in Perth before a crowd of glazed-eyed hapless victims at SwanCon earlier this year. I'd like to live in Perth. Nice people. Nice weather. They even have a parapsychology department at their university.

#### The John W Campbell jnr Memorial Crackpot Lecture

There is a traditional belief that people are capable of paranormal perceptions and actions (psychokinesis, telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition (verifiable foreknowledge)). If this belief has any factual basis, the phenomenon must certainly be transient, unreliable and infrequent, or we'd be using it instead of our eyes and ears and fairly questionable methods of extrapolating the future by rational inference.

Attempts by parapsychologists to get beyond broad statistical assays of the evidence for psi have not been notably productive. However, although controversial on a number of grounds, it is now not scientifically disgraceful to consider the question an open one, worthy of further investigation.

The major objection to previous studies have been theoretical and methodological.

Methodological criticism usually strikes, these days, either at the statistical robustness of published experiments, or at the precautions taken against deliberate or unconscious fraud in the conduct of those experiments. Such objections are impossible to answer conclusively for all classes of alleged psi phenomena except one: precognition.

Here, the predictions of the experiment are known in advance, and the methods chosen for generating targets can be made indefinitely elaborate. Data can be collected and processed by impartial agents.

Remarkably, all these requirements are met in any gambling situation where large numbers of people submit entries specifying their choices or guesses at n as-yet-undrawn winning numbers out of N possibilities. In Tattsлото,  $n=6$  in the First Division of prizes, while  $N=40$ .

In such a natural experiment, the population of entrants presumably can be expected to be in the appropriate state of mind to evoke a psychic perception. Although it is crucially necessary to adjust or weigh the raw guesses, to filter out the influence of common population preferences or biases, in principle the presence of a psi element will be evident if any statistically significant deviation is found from the numbers of correct guesses expected "by chance": which is to say, assuming no conventional cause is acting to bring about a positive or negative correlation between guesses and winning numbers.

Parapsychological studies suggest that psi rarely operates in more than one per cent of random choices (if at all). So it can be expected that a small proportion of entrants (perhaps of that order) will be influenced in their guesses.

The hypothesis calls for a "two-tailed" statistical evaluation. It is framed in terms of an unsigned significant deviation from the mean chance expectation. A negative deviation would be as impressive as a positive one, statistically speaking. That is, too few winners would be as evidential of some



inexplicable informational intrusion as too many. It is necessary to emphasise this fact, because systematic negative correlation is a tedious and rather baffling feature of a large part of parapsychological research.

Guessing by a population at a single set of target numbers is prey to a "stacking effect": the influence of recurrent patterns of preference for certain numbers, positions on the form, order effects generated by adjacency to numbers already elected, and so on, can create skews which look provocative but are purely artificial.

In the ideal experiment, the votes accrued in each draw by every candidate number (that is, numbers 1 through to 40) would be tallied. The psi hypothesis is that the proportions of votes obtained in various weeks by non-winning numbers will remain fairly unchanged. Perhaps the number 7 (a "magic" number in the estimation of many entrants) will receive more than 2.5% (one-fortieth) of the vote, but the enchantment will be consistent in all weeks where 7 is not among the six winning numbers.

By contrast, the hypothesis predicts a significant difference in the proportion of votes obtained when a given number falls among the "lucky six". It is irrelevant whether that difference is positive or negative (that is, whether the vote goes up or down): the variation from background preference is the key factor.

Such an effect makes it possible to predict the six winning numbers in advance of the draw, by running a computer search on the comparative frequencies of incoming guesses, matched against the known background average. Ultimately, a practical technology of forecasting could be devised on similar lines, in which alternative outcomes to a given problem would be coded into a value-blind matrix of possible winning numbers.

Interestingly, this proposed technique bears a striking resemblance to the analytic methods now routinely in use in studying transient waveforms in the human brain.

"Whereas the signal recorded by the EEG commonly reaches an amplitude of between fifty and one hundred microvolts, evoked potentials are often no larger than five microvolts and may be as small as .5 to one microvolt..." (David Reganm "Electrical Responses evoked in the Human Brain", Scientific American, December 1979.) "The EEG signal is unwanted and overwhelming background noise."

One method of enhancing the signal-to-noise ratio "is transient signal averaging... When a large number of individual transient evoked potentials have been summed and stored, the computer calculates the average amplitude of each point on the trace and displays the averaged curve... Since the EEG background activity is not correlated to the stimulus but varies randomly in relation to it, the summed background noise builds up much less rapidly..."

In the case of the proposed psi application methodology, it is the background which is expected to remain consistent, while the week-by-week frequencies of winning numbers vary from that background.

Given access to Tattsлото's entry files, it would be easy to learn if there exists a correlation between (1) small but significant variations from the background pattern of preferences and (2) the subsequent random generation of the winning numbers.

Confirmation could be secured easily by repeating the procedure prior to disclosure (indeed, prior to generation) of the winning random numbers.



I have conducted an indirect test of this hypothesis, not dependent on the co-operation of the Tattslotto organisation or the disclosure of privileged files, using records of numbers of winners in the first 437 Tattslotto draws (after which the conditions of entry altered markedly).

It is easy to calculate the numbers of prizewinners expected in each draw on a purely chance basis. (The relevant probabilities are given in the Omega article mentioned above, entitled "The LOTTO Effect".) When the actual number of winners in each Divisional category is taken as a proportion of this mean expected value, it is found that too few prizes have been won in each Division over that period of some nine years.

Since the frequencies of randomly generated winning numbers were not absolutely equal, it must be asked if this deficit of prizewinners was due to negative correlation between population preference and target frequency. A good estimate of the effect of bias and preference has been obtained by averaging the proportions of winners in all draws containing each of the candidate numbers from 1 to 40.

Thus, there were seventy draws in which 7 was one of the six winning numbers. than expected by chance. On the other hand, 38 was a winning number sixty-six times. On average, those weeks had nearly forty per cent less First Division prizes than expected by chance. It seems reasonable to attribute these variations from theoretical "mean chance expectations" as principally due to the common elements. This indicates that 7 is highly preferred, and that 38 is even more highly disliked.

After the effects of such target-preference are filtered out, and the results of all forty candidate numbers is averaged, we find some one and a half per cent too few winners in Divisions Three and Four. This is extremely significant in statistical terms, due to the very large number of cases involved. (The result in Division One is still more dramatic, with a deficiency of 6.95 per cent, although the small numbers of winners in each draw for this category make it far more volatile and untrustworthy as a source of evidence.)

For the non-parapsychologist, the most trying aspect of these results is that they suggest a kind of psychic colour-blindness, a wilful and self-defeating rejection of the correct answers. Why should such an unlikely faculty as paranormal perception of the future act to decrease the number of prizewinners in a lottery?

Surely such a faculty only makes sense, in evolutionary terms if no other, if it provides accurate information not available by other, more reliable means. Parapsychologists have advanced useful conjectures in this regard, notably the suggestion that psi calls forth powerful resistance in cultures like ours, just as sexual repression operated to a quite senseless and damaging degree through much of our recent history.

Whether such explanations hold water is irrelevant for the moment. The result of computer study of the available Tattslotto database is consistent with the hypothesis of paranormal cognition on the future, even though it is manifested in a curious way. At this point, the challenge to scientific curiosity calls for a thorough computerised study of the official Tattslotto database. On the face of it, however, there is the same chance of securing such a study as Lou Richards has of propelling a caboose of six painted trams up Bourke Street by farting into the wind.



## THE LAST WORD ON AWARDS (FOR THIS YEAR ANYHOW)

In the previous couple of issues I spent a bit of time writing about the business of the Ditmars (or Australian SF Achievement Awards as they are sometimes known). As a wrap up it seems more or less appropriate that I should conclude the comments for the current awards season with the names of the award winners themselves. You will be able to compare the winners with the people that you thought should have won and can draw, from that, your own ideas on the worth of awards or the wisdom/stupidity of the voting public.

Russell Hoban won the International Fiction Award; Terry Dowling won the Australian Fiction Award with a short story called "The Man Who Walked Away Behind The Eyes" and also the William Atheling Award for an article called "Kirth Gersen: The Other Demon Prince"; Marc Ortlieb also copped two awards again, for Best Australian Fanzine and Best Australian Fanwriter; Marilyn Pride also added to her set of awards with the trophy for Best Australian SF or Fantasy Artist; John Packer got the nod for Best Australian SF or Fantasy Cartoonist; and Van Ikin collected the award for Best Australian SF or Fantasy Editor. (Results taken from Thyme, thanks Roger.)

No great surprises there, really. The only three which were in doubt really were the two fiction categories and the "William Atheling" (where it was only really a question of which item would carry the day for Terry Dowling. One of the interesting things was that Roger printed the figures for the voting and it turned out that possibly the most popular category (Roger missed the Fan Writer category) was Best Australian SF or Fantasy Artist which received fifty-one votes. Best International SF or Fantasy and the William Atheling Award were both at the other end of the scale, each receiving forty-three votes. Forty-three or fifty-one might not sound like too many, but it's probably a reasonable proportion of the total convention membership at the time that the voting closed.

The coming year should present an interesting set of contenders, and I suppose that I'll get around to that in a couple of issues time.

I note, with some little concern, that Marc Ortlieb has announced that he is not going to allow himself to be nominated in his accustomed categories again. That seems fine by me if the awards themselves are going to go under the headings of "Best Australian Fanzine except possibly Q36" and "Best Australian Fanwriter except possibly Marc Ortlieb". The point of these sorts of things is to encourage people to do a bit better, and if the "best" has withdrawn from the contest then there seems to be little point in the whole exercise. Of course, there are some who think that there is little point in the whole exercise anyhow... But that's another thing again.

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## BACK PAGE - SPORTING COMMENT

Spring has finally arrived, and with it the Football Grand Final. It was an event which I managed to totally avoid. The only nice thing about the Grand Final is that it signifies the end of the football season. And if the football is over, can the cricket season be far away?

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The little space to the right is reserved for reactionaries who have not remained in touch with social reality and have not been in touch for some time. The Big Red \*A\* signifies your departure from the vanguard of the masses unless I hear from you real soon.