

Talk about desperate! There we were stuck in a bloody great wooden horse parked outside the gates of Troy, and the only thing we had to read was

RATAPLAN TWENTY-SIX

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A classic fanzine edited by Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, AUSTRALIA. Copies of this deceptively simple little publication may be had in return for a letter of comment, published contribution (in either words or pictures), trade, by way of being so overwhelmingly interesting that I cannot ignore you, or by subscription at the rate of \$2 for three issues. Members of the august body of SAPs receive copies in the mailing, which is just what they deserve. The objective of this so-called bi-monthly fanzine, if it could be said to have one, is to be interesting. "Interesting to who?" you ask. Ah ha, a very interesting question that. A U-Boat Publication. MM.594

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A Technical Note

You might have noticed that this issue is later than I had hoped it would be and that it isn't typed on the same typewriter. Strange as it may seem, there is a link between the two.

For the past two or three years I've been noticing that my faithful old IBM golf-ball typer has not been cutting stencils the way that it used to. There have been ways of overcoming this - using the best and most expensive stencils, leaving out the typing film when cutting stencils, running the duplicator with the pressure roller on, and a few other little tricks. Even so things have been getting out of hand and it all came to a head when I was no longer able to get the really good stencils to type on. The first ten pages of this fanzine which I have already cut on the IBM are, to put it politely, unreadable.

As a result your humble editor has spent the past two weeks looking at most of the typers available for sale in Canberra. In the end it seemed to come down to a \$1 250 electronic daisy-wheel machine which cut a passable stencil, the best that I was able to find. But neither Valma nor I really wanted to pay that much money for a thumping great office machine which was only just adequate for the main job it had to do. It may have had a 500 character memory, automatic underlining, wrap-around and the like, with whistles and bells to let you know what it was up to, but it didn't cut a very good stencil, even under the best of conditions.

So, getting more than a little desperate, I looked up the classified ads in the paper on Saturday and found that there were only four typers advertised which had an electric keyboard and the good old-fashioned mechanical action. After ringing around it came down to only one which was 12 pitch. As things have turned out, it isn't exactly what I wanted either, but it was the only machine in Canberra that actually does what I want, and so you are now looking at its efforts. I expect that you will have to keep on reading its work for a few years too. The only thing that really disappoints me is that the typeface seems to be without serifs, something that I usually like. Still, I suppose that it could be said to make Rataplan look a bit like the good old traditional Gillespie fanzines. Not, mind you, that I'm sure that is a totally good thing, if you take my meaning.

Despite my usual grumbles about such things, I really am looking forward to the convention which will be held in Melbourne next Easter. You bet! The reason is a mixture of nostalgia and an enjoyment of the finer things of life.

Due to what appears to have been a very fortunate stuff-up with the Melbourne Town House (an establishment of dubious repute, especially among the fans of Melbourne), EurekaCon has recently picked up its camp and moved down to the Victoria Hotel, an establishment in the centre of the city. Rarely has the bad luck of a difficult hotel been resolved so happily.

I seem to recall that the fans of Melbourne first took themselves to the Victoria in 1973. (It could have been earlier, in 1972, but perhaps that was the year that we used the Savoy--Plaza down at the seedy end of town -- the place that later became, by the way, a police training academy; which should prove something or other fairly profound.) That was in the days when we fans were fairly young and unaffluent and not at all in the habit of frequenting such expensive places as hotel lobbies and restaurants -- guide halls and fish and chip shops were more our line. As a result, the Vic was just the place for us to start, gaining experience of the heady world of hotel conventions by working up from the down-market end of the spectrum.

That was the whole point, of course; because by 1973 we'd more or less decided that we were going to win the AussieCon bid and needed to get experience in holding real conventions in posh hotels -- the consensus in Australian fandom at the time was that the Epping Girl Guides Hall was not really big enough to hold five or six hundred convention members.

The Victoria used to be, in its heyday, the hotel at which all the better farmers stayed when they went down to the city during the ten days of the Royal Melbourne Agricultural Society Show. The lobby and the mezzanine have a certain elegance which once would have been the latest style. It must really have been an exciting place in those earlier days with cockies and their lavishly dressed wives sweeping out in the evenings to go to the city entertainments, while others took their ease up on the balcony, gazing down at the elegantly dressed but bush mannered people. But over the years bigger and better hotels have gone up, farmers have become richer or poorer (depending on who you discuss the subject with), and anyhow less of them bother to do down for what has become, after all, a big city event for city people. This meant the decline of the Vic; but on its way down it met us on the way up.

While the facade of the Vic is fairly presentable, the convention facilities were a little less so. Well, I suppose that they're not so bad really, but what can you say about a huge great cavern in the bottom of the hotel which you can only get to via the freight elevator (if you've got access to the secret corridor that links it with the room) or the stairway which is not exactly easy to find -- but is down past the public telephones on the left, if you get lost. (At least that's where it was the last time I looked.)

Still, in 1973 it was all new and exciting to us. On the other hand the convention itself was much like any other we'd run up until then, though the things we had to learn to deal with were room parties, breakfasts in restaurants, organising groups to go out to lunch and dinner, and things like that. In other words, the real business of attending conventions. We must have enjoyed ourselves a bit that time because we went back again in 1974.

I have some fond memories of the place. For example there was the fan opera that we put on, a masquerade at which I was Sir Rodney in a "Wizard of Id" group (it was apparently not my nature but my nose which got me the role), sleeping through George Turner's Guest of Honour speech, inventing fanzine poker, the generosity of the hotel management when it closed down a rowdy room

party and opened up one of its function rooms for us instead, the Adelaide party at which the only thing to drink out of was a tea pot, and a great number of other little incidents. All the same, there was no denying that, as a place to hold a convention, the Vic was not the best.

The main function room is separated from the other function rooms by a number of floors and a problem in spatial geometry which even a PhD would have trouble in navigating. The corridors and rooms of the hotel have been added on over the years so that you can only find your room by dumb luck or because you were smart enough to take a large ball of string. And the lifts... are interesting in the best traditions of hotels which host sf conventions.

Worst of all, however, is the problem of the large convention room. It is a fine place when you are a willing member of the audience at a panel or a speech, but since there is no area immediately outside which convention members can hang around in if they don't want to absorb the program, the place can be deadly dull for the hardened convention attendee. This was also made worse because the Vic was a "dry" hotel, and you know what that means. (Booze may be one of the three deadly sins of conventions, but without it the Banality and Boredom can seem even more extreme.)

After 1974 we moved on to better things, the glorious Southern Cross, the Melbourne Town House, the amazing New Crest in Sydney, and the lavish Oberoi in Adelaide. The convention facilities are larger and more lavish, the rooms are even more stylishly furnished and have the most modern of conveniences, and they are easier to find. The lifts, also, are generally okay.

Having moved on to bigger and better things I earned a lot of ill will from the committee which decided to use the Victoria as the site of its convention in Easter 1980. I said that it was a terrible place to hold a convention, for all the reasons that I've just mentioned. I forecast that the event would be a disaster and I turned up expecting the worst.

I was wrong. The convention turned out to be one of the most enjoyable I've been to in years. The Victoria is no longer "dry".

It really isn't that I spent the entire convention in an alcoholic haze, enjoying myself at riotous room parties, nobbing it with the BWFs, and all that sort of thing. It was because, right at the top of the stairs which lead up from the lobby to the mezzanine, in a spot where you simply cannot miss it no matter how you might try, is located a large and spacious bar.

The really nice thing about this addition is that as well as being a watering hole it is an ideal place to lounge around while talking with friends. It is definitely one of the finer things of life, complete with comfy chairs, plenty of space, and a lavishly stocked bar of liquid refreshments. If the doors were open all the time it would be quite possible to spend the entire convention there - I almost did last time and, apart from my unfortunate lapse in consenting to appear on a panel about fanzines sometime over this coming Easter, I could probably stay there all the time for this convention as well.

One of the excuses that the committee of EurekaCon are using for holding this convention is that it is a trial run for AussieCon II. You'd think that the people holding next year's WorldCon would have more to do than organise a big convention this year, but there is it. Perhaps they're trying to stop themselves going mad next year by bringing it on this year instead. At any rate, since my "usually reliable source" tells me that the Vic will be used as an overflow for the Southern Cross next year, I suppose that it's not such a bad thing that we get the management there used to fans again.

It also seems somehow appropriate that, after all these years, George Turner should find himself once again making a Guest of Honour speech in the crypt at the Victoria Hotel. It is probably an appropriate place to speak on a genre which, so Bruce Gillespie tells us, is well and truly dead. (And George, I promise to stay awake this time.)

* * *

As foreshadowed (lovely bureaucratic word that) in the previous issue of this fanzine, a lot of this issue is going to be taken up with letters of comment from you lot. I'm not sure that this is such a good thing, but since you've driven me to it you will have to suffer the consequences. However I'll break it up into blocks which, I hope, will be more digestible.

LETTERS OF COMMENT - PART 1

Lucy Zinkiewicz, 2 Tillbush Close, Hoppers Crossing, Vict 3030.

To further disagree with Elton Elliott (though I don't totally agree with Bruce Gillespie, either - but more on that later), I can't call fantasy "a cancer attacking the sf field, drinking away its precious bodily fluids". A cancer is something foul, unwholesome, a mutation, attacking the integrity of a body. But what is that body, that once was whole and now is diseased? Science fiction? It can't be, for fantasy spawned sf, not vice-versa - sf is merely a genre of fantasy. Harsher critics might even say sf is a cancer preying on fantasy. But I don't. I just feel that if you backtrack to the so-called roots of sf you'll find more fantasy than sf; certainly Verne and Wells' works are more fiction than science, even for those supposedly unenlightened days.

And here we get to what I see as the main divergence between Elliott's opinion and mine: he states that pure sf has been contaminated, while I ask what is "pure" sf?

Labelling something "sf" is just as meaningless as labelling Beethoven or the Beatles as "music". What is "music"? What is "sf"? I think calling a work sf (or fantasy) is imposing upon it a structure; walls, doors, locks, that aren't naturally there. The label "science fiction" should not tie us down to only literature with ray-guns and space ships. I mean, how much of these feature in fanzines? And, as Bruce Gillespie says, so many of even the "classics" are full of so-called "fantasy" premises and devices.

In a way it would be far better to call sf "alternative fiction", for that's really a much better summation of what sf is - anything different from the mainstream of literature, speculating and theorising, creating, questioning... Work stuffed with cliches and the same old hackneyed stuff is rubbish by whatever label you call it.

It'd be great if we all devoted ourselves to advancing the cause of sf as comes naturally, rather than tramping the morass, ever-deepening the ruts we seem to be stuck in, questioning the natures of sf and sf-fandom and sf-fanzines.

So now I've embarrassed myself arguing against Elton Elliott, I'll go and make an even greater fool of myself by questioning Bruce Gillespie's argument too.

Contrary to what he says, I don't believe sf (and fantasy) is dead. And if it is, I can't say any other literature is in the most healthy of states, either. This is a debatable point, but in my opinion there are few mainstream works written since, say, the early 1970s that can be called "classic". Educationalists seem to agree with me - it's reflected in the books they choose

to be studied, few of which, in the secondary school curriculum at least, are "modern". (But this could prove that I'm just as much a fool as they...) Anyway, I can't believe that sf is a "toothless, moribund" hound, ready to be mercifully "put down". No! There's still some life left in sf! Here I am, about as new a fan of sf as you can get, and I'm being stirred enough to put out a defensive torrent - not an easy thing to prompt, considering my rep so in apathy. Sf can still leave me with hope for a future of mankind, as well as make me bitter about all this era has missed out on. Anything that has the power to fire my barely combustible spirit must still create a lot of sparks. No, I don't think sf has died a heat-death: the cause of sf is still burning brightly.

((Perhaps it does, but obviously not so brightly for the people who have been reading it for a long time and who care about the way that it is going (or not going) at the moment. I think that what your experience shows is that this genre has the ability to spark the imaginations of a certain kind of person, and that when they are fired up they will go to great lengths for it. No doubt Bruce and Elton felt the same way that you now do, the only difference is that they are no longer fired by what they read, and like any other addict, they need greater and more stimulating doses of the same stuff to keep on getting the same excited reaction from what they read. But I hope that this doesn't sound terribly disillusioning - it is great that somebody who reads this fanzine will leap up and say that sf is still terrific stuff. Let's hope that this state of affairs remains.))

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

I read Bruce Gillespie's article on Elton Elliott's science fiction versus fantasy with great interest, as it's a subject close to my heart, very close these days. I also read Bruce's article on why he no longer reads science fiction, but for some reason that failed to reach my heart, so I've forgotten just what he said then, and I really don't feel like digging through my junk hunting for that issue. But, unlike Bruce, I did follow Elliott's "Raising Hackles" in Science Fiction Review with great interest and, of course, I read the reader's reactions in the letter column.

Perhaps I should start off with where I disagree with Elliott. I don't think sf is all about technology and the future, I think that's far too narrow a definition. I'm not at all keen on where Elliott is at, and this probably puts me rather in the anti-science fiction camp, along with CS Lewis. Some of Elliott's stench comes across in his choice of words, for example, his "rapidly shrinking base of literature consumers". "Literature consumers" indeed; why the hell couldn't he have just said "readers"? Please forgive me if I diverge briefly to one of my pet hates. I feel, quite frankly, that a lot of writers who shove the word "consumers" in wherever they can are on some kind of wank; they think they're proving to themselves and their readers that they're hard-headed, down to earth, pragmatic, getting down to the nitty-gritty "realistic" and all that crap. I think that word is one of the main abominations of our age, though on the other hand I must allow that it is an accurate description of the kind of society we live in nowadays.

Anyway, getting back to the point, I could say more, but I'd mainly be just agreeing with Bruce, which you probably wouldn't find very interesting. Bruce seems to miss, perhaps, the main thrust of Elliott's argument, although it's contained in the same paragraph as his "literature consumers", and I quote: "... science fiction poisoned by fantasy values is left weakened and emasculated..." (my emphasis). In short, the problem lies not so much in there being a lot of fantasy written and read and marketed under the label of sf, but rather that the field as a whole has been attacked by - not fantasy - but fantasy values. To put it around more explicitly, fantasy values have been imposed on the whole field.

Let me tell you of my own experience. When I began seriously writing sf in the late sixties, there still was, or seemed to be, a market for the type of sf I wanted to write. I was always interested in sf as a literature of ideas, and, being called science fiction, it seemed to deal with scientific ideas. These, of course, don't have to be about technology or even the future; they can be about the distant past or the present, but I liked science fiction because one could have a lot of fun with it, putting ordinary people into a situation made extraordinary by some strange yet scientifically rational phenomenon. My own definition of sf used to be an extrapolation of the known into the unknown. I know, of course, back then we already had the New Wave; I sent my first story, a traditional scientific-wonder tale (see The Mentor 44) to New Worlds, who sent it back with the scribbled note: "Suggest you read a few issues". Okay, but New Worlds was but one market; there were plenty of others.

I think what craps me off more than anything else is the way the rules have been changed over the last fifteen years. Writers and readers alike no longer seem interested in ideas, let alone (shudder) science. I know there are still a couple of markets for traditional sf, such as Analog, but these seem to be crumbling bastions beset by the all-conquering fantasy hoards. One glaring example is Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, which was really good during the early days, when it was coming out quarterly under the editorship of George Scithers. The truly remarkable thing about it then was that I liked almost every story in every issue I read, indeed a rare thing for me with magazine fiction. But from the issues I've seen recently, as a Davis Publications monthly, I never buy it any more.

My own personal golden age of science fiction, as a reader, was probably the late sixties, and even then I had the impression that the best sf had been written back in the fifties. But on the other hand the stuff I began to write differed then from anything I'd so far seen in print, which had been written by an older generation. That's why I was so delighted when I discovered Thomas Disch's almost unknown but excellent novel Echo Round His Bones, which was run as a serial in New Worlds in 1969, before being released by Panther in 1970. Here was a writer of my own generation, here was a story with my generation's values, especially with its ironic criticism of such contemporary issues as Vietnam and the nuclear madness, and so beautifully and sympathetically told. It's a great shame that Disch failed to follow that up with later works in the same tone, instead of sinking into the depths of nihilism and despair. But maybe that's a sign of the times. I wrote my own novel, inspired by both Lewis and Disch, but failed to bring it off.

Anyway, to get back to the present, gone are the days when I could browse through the sf section of a bookshop and pick up something I couldn't resist buying. The books I see reviewed in such 'zines as The Mentor and Australian SF News leave me cold; what few ones do grab my interest I usually can't find anywhere. And I can no longer be bothered with writing the stuff; sure, there are still a few markets, but, I feel, considering the dismal lack of interest in ideas, and especially in science, it's not worth the effort. Mind you, I can understand why there is such a loss of interest in science these days, I too share the fear of the future, but I've always been afraid of the future, for about as long as I can remember. But that fear has nevertheless failed to still my interest in science and ideas. It's not even as if science fiction had been replaced by some worthwhile brand of fantasy or mythology; the stuff being flogged nowadays is pathetic. As Bruce says, there is no content. It's rather that would-be sf writers nowadays are fettered by fantasy values, from which come the two main commandments of our times:

1. Thou shalt have no science in thy story.

2. Thou shalt not explain anything.

((Yet another dose of disillusionment. I reckon that you and Bruce Gillespie should get together some time, you'd obviously make excellent drinking partners, even if the brands of sf that you used to like were different there is still a common link in not having any of it around anymore.))

Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1 2ER, UK.

I find I rather agree with Bruce Gillespie's response to Elton T Elliott in Geis's SFR. What struck me most about Elliott's tub-thumping tirades was their sheer old-fashionedness - like something straight out of the John W Campbell era of supreme rationality and still trying to pretend, forty years too late, that there is a basic Grand Equation that will explain the entire universe in the simplest possible form. This sort of perspective, parochial, narrow-minded and admitting to no uncertainties, is one that quantum theory shot down decades ago, and that people are still espousing it as the only "correct" one for sf to have is laughable. But then Elliott's essential ignorance and narrow-mindedness is best revealed in his attacks on fantasy rather than his comments on science fiction - because all he can think of when he uses the term "fantasy" is the juvenile drivel published by (as the best possible example) Del Rey Books. The Epic of Gilgamesh or The Tempest or Frankenstein or Easy Travel to Other Planets or - or the fact that all fiction is implicitly fantasy because by its very nature it deals with events that have not happened - gosh, they must be "different" because they don't bear the genre label, what?

What a fool Elton T Elliott is.

Not, mind you, that I agree with absolutely everything Bruce says; for example, his comments that certain sf novels (and here he names recent bestsellers from Aldiss and Wolfe) point "forward" to a "simplified, primitive future" and in this respect demonstrate the corrupting influence of fantasy is wrong in its conclusion for the simple reason that their worlds are not simplified, but actually worked out in far more detail than the background of the average genre fantasy novel (which for the most part seems to have been lifted at fifth or sixth hand from a simplified mediaeval ethos of William Morris). But then such a comment leaves aside the whole business of whether such detailed backgrounds are actually necessary to the fiction or just a latter-day manifestation of Campbell's "Sf as future realism" approach.

((I'd always been under the impression that the reason that people thought up elaborate worlds on which to set their stories is because they liked playing with ideas the way that kids like playing with toys. Larry Niven's "Ringworld" is perhaps the biggest toy ever invented, and more people have had fun with it than just about any other toy you could name except Barbie Dolls. For the writer there must be a great deal of interest in creating a backdrop in which what the reader would find unusual becomes the usual, and so they get to create all sorts of interesting juxtapositions.

((And as for Elton T Elliott being a fool, I reckon that he can line up with the very large number of people who agree with him. A call for a return to the tried and true values of the past, a purity of ideas and the like, is anyhow nothing more than you would expect as part of the growing conservatism which the US, and other unnamed countries, are experiencing. I'm not sure that there is anything that can be done except to grin and bear it.))

Diane Fox, PO Box 129 Lakemba, NSW 2195.

I enjoyed Bruce Gillespie's comments on Elton T Elliott's denunciation of fantasy. Actually I agreed with one of Elliott's points to a degree - when he

said: "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".

By this definition, of course, Samuel Delany's Tales of Neveyor and Neveyora are among the most sfnal works ever written. They are fearsofly intellectual -- all the characters use their brains, invent things, discuss ideas with great intellectuality and eloquence. But the characters are slaves, barbarians, decadent nobles, etc. -- and the covers have dragons and nude maidens and warriors clutching swords, among other things, on them; just the sort of thing that would make a fantasy hater automatically shove the book away. Some people don't just dislike fantasy, they react to it just as if they had been conditioned.

What I hate is the old technique of writing a fantasy and then explaining it all away with black box science. The demon was really a highly sophisticated computer formed out of energy, for example. I can tolerate this when it is done with skill but at times it reaches the banal depths of Von Danikenism. This is beastly puritanism at work -- they are ashamed to be seen enjoying fantasy so they have to dress it up as sf. It is reminiscent of the common practice of having a foreword to a work written by someone with a string of academic letters after his name.

((And what is wrong with a person with a string of academic letters after their name? It could be that some of them are pompous old people far too proud of their own thought processes for those who are not similarly trained -- but surely there is something to be said for a person who has spent the time, effort and energy needed to get those letters. Or are you objecting to the idea of forewords as a general rule?))

If the genres of sf and fantasy are both toothless and moribund, it is time for them to be revitalised.

Since the 1980s, again and again it has been said that culture was dead, the novel was dying out, and so on. What this means, of course, is that the person saying it has recently read a number of novels and short stories only just new, which they did not find appealing.

((I don't think that it's quite as easy as that, although you would be quite right if you expressed it so that it covered people like Bruce and Michael. I don't think that either of them said that culture or the novel was dying or dead, just that they didn't like the way that things are turning out. That is all together a different thing, much more a matter of personal taste than an all embracing description of society.

((I don't suppose that anybody reading this would disagree with you that sf and fantasy could do with "revitalisation". The troubles are, however, manifold. To pick just a couple or three; how do you go about doing it, to whose tastes do you do it, and, to what level do you aim your revitalisation? Any answers out there?

Franz Rottensteiner, Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060, Wien, AUSTRIA.

There is something to Bruce Gillespie's remarks on that anti-fantasy article in SFR; still, it is possible to dislike both the pretensions of the old sf, and the current state of sf, and on the whole I am inclined to agree with that writer in SFR, for I think that real sf doesn't exist any more. All this fantasy stuff is a great curse, but perhaps inevitably the result of the

literary aspirations of so many sf authors that are not accompanied by any noticeable increase in literary talent. The "soft" sciences tend all too quickly to turn into magic, and the greater concern is with "human values" and the "psychology of individuals" into sentimental tripe. What remains unchanged is the unabashed love of sf writers for primitivism; the more primitive a society, the better the authors and the public love it. It also seems to me that the authors want to have it both ways: they want to be recognised as literary figures, and yet they cannot miss the acclaim of the fans and all the sf awards, and the more the better. Ideally, the authors will be satisfied only if there are enough awards yearly that no one must go without an award; the stitch is, of course, that no matter how many awards, they all go to the same few (and naturally the wrong) books. The sf fans also seem to have a great need for Great Unrecognised Literary Figures, those sf writers of the highest calibre deserving of the highest honours that by some quirk of fate, i.e. the ill will of the world at large, are completely unknown there. Theodore Sturgeon used to be that writer; Samuel R Delany might be another, ever since Algis Budrys declared that "as of this novel, Delany is the best sf writer in the world" (he meant that cops-and-robbers rubbish Nova, if somebody has forgotten); Gene Wolfe must be another. Unlike George Turner, I never thought Wolfe a particularly good writer, merely another example of American baroque with a love for a fairly ridiculous prolix psychology. I wonder what Mr Turner thinks now of Wolfe after The Book of the New Sun? I must confess that I stopped reading after the first novel, and shall say only that an attempt to write "intelligent" swords and sorcery strikes me as a not very intelligent task, and defensible only in commercial terms, and that the greatest value of Wolfe's books lies in making it plain which writers were corrupt enough to endorse it... Holliconia is hardly better.

Sometimes I think fondly of the days of Science Fiction Commentary, and you may be pleased to learn that Bruce Gillespie and SFC have finally made The New Yorker: there is an autobiographical Lem piece, "Reflections" coming up there (tentatively on January 30, 1984) that mentions his writing there.

I sometimes miss the old feuds, and when I read, for instance, the exchange between Harry Harrison and John Brunner in ASFN, I see that the sf writers still are the little children that they were. A great book could be produced by copying the most ludicrous statements that sf writers have made in the fanzines (or prozines, for that matter). They are still at their old game of alternatively complaining how they are being screwed by their publishers and editors or not sufficiently loved by the readers, and bragging how successful they are, how big their advances, and how well liked - and therefore how good.

And yes, I find that Christopher Priest and I must be more similar after all than I had thought: his remark about the symptoms and the cure is one that I had intended (with a different thrust, of course) to make for some time, and may indeed have made in an as yet unpublished letter to Bruce Gillespie. The only difference is our decidedly varying notion of who is part of the symptom and who part of the cure.

((To take up a thought earlier in your letter - that the soft sciences tend to turn all too easily into magic. This is something which, on the face of it, is only logical. However it has seemed to me that it is the results of physics and chemistry that can become the magic very easily, not the so-called soft sciences. It is in fact very hard to change sociology or political science into fantasy. It is fairly easy to substitute a laser beam for a bolt of magic force (or something along those lines) but social and political theories of behaviour don't transmute quite so easily. The real problem is probably that writers don't use any decent work from either of these fields in sf or fantasy, if they did we might have less to complain about. But I imagine

that the emphasis is on the material which we have had for the past few decades and that has made it more acceptable to extrapolate the physical rather than the social, who would expect many people to class Skinner's Waldon Five as sf, which it probably is; only in the psychological sciences.))

Robert Coulson, 2677-500N, Hartford City, IN 47348, USA.

Bruce Gillespie agrees that sf is dead, largely because the New Wave is dead, or at least that's what I get from his article. If you're willing to define one type of science fiction as containing everything good, I suppose he's right, but I'm not willing to do that. Also, I do have an advantage; I've never had to buy thirty or forty books by writers I never heard of before in order to decide which ones are readable - or at least I haven't had to do so for the last fifteen years or so. Turning to professional reviewing has added to the influx of reading material, but I was getting more books than I could read while I was still a fanzine reviewer. Some of the new authors are quite good; I suspect that even Bruce would admit that. The problem comes in picking them out from the drek; that problem always existed, but Bruce knew the older generation of authors, and presumably the procedure of going through all the garbage again to find the gems has discouraged him. (Well, it might discourage me, if I wasn't getting paid for it... though I don't think it would.)

Rob Gerrard objects that the "appalling internal contradictions" of the society in Songs From the Stars helped spoil it for him. I thought they made the book more realistic. Is Rob going to try to tell me that modern Australian society doesn't have any appalling internal contradictions? If he is, I won't believe him, even though I'm more aware of the contradictions in US society. Of course, he also misses the point that it's a parody of certain elements of US (and Californian!) society; Clear Blue Lou and Sue Sunshine are icky because a lot of their present counterparts are icky. On the other hand, the book was overwritten; overwriting is what made Spinrad's reputation and he's not about to quit doing it now.

I don't think Nicholas quite understands personality. "... the carelessness of the writing is partly responsible for the fanzine's seeming personality..." Assuming that the writing is careless, then that carelessness is part of the personality; whether it's a personality that Nicholas cares for or not is something else again. What Nicholas seems to want is for fans to think carefully about what they write in order to project a specific personality as strongly as possible - but this sort of writing has very little to do with an individual's real personality. I could project a personality overflowing with warmth and charm if I wanted to; so could most fans and pros. But most fans prefer to express their real personality by writing what they think in much the same way that they would in a conversation; without all the extra work required for formal writing.

I object to Aldiss or anyone saying that pulp magazines were intended for this or that social purpose. They were intended to make money for the publishers and for no other reason. They may well have achieved other results, including the one Aldiss mentions -- after all, many of their readers were those immigrants, and the way to make money is to provide people with what they want. Or at least it was in that era; the massive attempts by advertisers to direct public taste wasn't as massive, and wasn't used at all in trying to sell pulp magazines. Aldiss has the cart before the horse. (Unless he was misquoted, of course; I haven't read the original.)

((I had to go back to check the words used in discussing the possible uses of pulp magazines and you are right, the word used was "intended". I would have to agree with you that making money was the intention, the points I raised with

Ted White in the previous issue being more directed at unintended social consequences. And that is, as you say, a different thing again.))

James Styles, 342 Barkly Street, Ararat, Vic 3377.

Bruce Gillespie seems to have a depressing view of literature. Many people view it as a form of escapism and that is something that "nuts and bolts" Bruce terms as "sweet reason and difficult problems of our age" sf - sci-fi will never offer. If there was a place for such soul searching garbage, then doubtless it would still exist. A good storyteller could make milking a cow and nookies with the milkmaid seem worthwhile and so create further classic literature. Pretentious writing that isn't flippant is just so much waffle to the well educated and sensation seeking denizens of the present age (despite what George Turner and other such ancient critics might claim). I welcome further mind expanding epics.

Joseph Nicholas cans "Bladerunner" in a rather superficial way. Then he mentions inconsistencies in the plot. He is like a little mundane child who needs every detail explained to him in a logical and reasonable manner. The fanzine views and comments that he makes are probably an indication of his one track mind and inability to grasp concepts of significant import. Six replicants escape! One is found dead in the shuttle and that leaves 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 also one equalled... five. As for the rest of the film it was garbage." The arithmetic can be corrected by true sf import. If Deckard was the other replicant, he couldn't himself be a target. Obviously this is a somewhat sinister and hard point to grasp and probably would have gone over the heads of American and Australian audiences. One would hope that the Brits were subtle enough to enjoy it and the film.

((Perhaps, but only if the film was subtle - which it wasn't.))

Dickian is so much claptrap. Who wants to be reminded of dismal British society and history in a film that is forward looking and investigates various moral ambiguities? I found the film portrayed various facets of problems that are more a part of the present than the future. It was an excellent film for anyone who would allow themselves emotional involvement and an open mind. I find many of the critics who panned "Bladerunner" to be just as stuffy in their own intellectual processes and lives.

The roof top scene where the android saves Deckard and then dies himself was very vivid and reminded me of past experience where death had been so close and the very realities of Life, The Universe and Everything have seen Death assured its proper place.

It seems to me that today's society isolates people from the true feelings of life and death and they don't really understand what everything is really about. As long as nothing can be something, peace will not be possible.

I found Joseph's views on the dedication somewhat shabby. Many viewers will now read the book, appreciating Philip Dick for what he really was. I think Joseph should be more careful with the import of his words, even though the wordplay of his sentences might read a little less impressively.

((And the same to you too. I'm not quite sure of what you are trying to get at in some of the above paragraphs. Am I right in suggesting that what you wanted to say is that feelings are more important than rationality, that there are some great mysteries in life which are not reducible to mere logical thought,

and waffly stuff like that, Horatio? This just goes to show that you use the other side of your brain from the one that Joseph and I use. We expect the universe to be logical, that all the bits will fit into place and everything has a reason for being the way that it is. This has to extend to films and novels too because they usually set out to reflect life in general where things have rational causes as well. Still, if you want to live in the fifteenth century that's okay be me. I'm into plurality this year.

All the same, and despite your comments about "Bladerunner" being "an excellent film for people who would allow themselves emotional involvement and an open mind", I will stick with my earlier comments that it is, in fact, nothing more than a silly film - and oversensationalised too. Even the name of the film is silly, and only bears a passing connection with the story in hand.))

Doug Barbour, Department of English, The University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E5, CANADA.

Although I can't remember seeing a Big Red *A* (in fact there isn't one on the back page of Rataplan 24, which is the one I'm responding to, but there might have been one on the long-gone wrapper), I'm sure I owe you some lettercol filler, or at least something to put on a file. And I have my reasons. Both for not having responded much lately, and for writing now. First, I have been busy, too busy, doing something akin to what you've been doing. That is, I too am busy at a university, but teaching, and this fall I was teaching too many classes, and reading too much for them, and generally not finding any time for anything else, except on Sundays when, I confess, I watched football (I know of only one fan I can be sure will understand this obsession, and that is Arthur Hlavaty). So I have not kept up on my fannish reading, though I have tried to keep up on my sf reading to the extent that my bookreviewing duties demand it.

Second, I will be in Australia sometime in late May or early June, but whether I get to Canberra is not clear. I'm going to New Zealand, you see, to take part in a conference on Canadian Studies and then travel around to universities and read my poetry and talk about CanLit. My flight includes Australia and if I (or we, if a fellow poet comes along) arrange some readings in Australia then I shall have some time to see your fine country. I shall certainly try to say hello to some sf types too. Of course. But I suspect the connections are as slight as they are here (where I'm one of the few academics or poets to know much about sf or participate in any of its festivities). Like, how many sf fans realised that a marvelous and outrageously inventive writer from Canada who visited Australia last summer (last winter?) in 1983 on the Australia-Canada Author Exchange would be right up their alley (or should be - and I bet Bruce would love his stuff) because his fictions are crazily unattached to realism. His latest novel, which sold very well here considering how outre it was, was titled Shakespear's Dog, and is in fact narrated by the pooch, Mr Mr Hooker by name. Leon Rooke was the writer (is the writer, he's still alive, he just isn't there any longer), and he is also a magnificent performer of his own work. I guess you could call a lot of his stuff "fantasy" if you think of people like Borges as fantasists, and I think they are sometimes.

What I'm getting at, I guess, is how I agree and disagree with Bruce, and how being trapped (which some sf readers are) in a genre-fix can blind you to the entertainment possibilities elsewhere in the reading world. And a lot of the sf I've read lately isn't any too overwhelming. It's fun, but it doesn't push me. I mean, I've just read the two latest Asimovs and while they're good fun, and it is interesting to watch him turning the stories inside out to gather all his previous fictions into some kind of coherent whole, they are not designed to open one's mind (in, say, the manner that Delany has always been for me (and I know Bruce would not agree about that) and remains in Neveryona

(or the deeply affecting manner that Dick moved into in spiritual inquiry in his last novel, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer -- a book I think will be remembered as one of his very finest).

* * *

IS THE BEST?

I imagine that over the past year or so most readers will have come across the argument about what is a fanzine and what is a bit better than it isn't one. The general thrust of the argument seems to hinge on the tangibles of fanzine circulation, payment of contributors and presentation and such inponderables as editors intentions and readers reactions. The supposed final result of all this analysis is to decide which publications are "true fanzines" and which ones are "semi-professional magazines". I have to admit that it is an interesting little theoretical question, but I cannot help but wonder what the practical application of it might be. After all, it doesn't make much difference what the actions and intentions of the other editor are when you are going about the business of producing your own fanzine. Although I may be missing something fairly subtle, I cannot see why it is that the editors of "true fanzines" spend so much time on this problem -- except of course for the obvious answer that it gives them something to worry about.

Although I have read much of the debate with the sort of interest that one would normally give to most human interest stories in the newspapers I have not really felt the need to stick my oar in too. However, at some stage or another that question of "why all the fuss" came to my mind and it is something which has helped pass the occasional minute while waiting for the bus. For the past fifteen years I've been under the impression that the main thing that I and most of my colleagues in the fanzine editing business were in it mainly for was fun and entertainment -- if it occasionally crossed my mind that there might be a way of making money out of my hobby I put it aside in the "too hard" tray. I am not sure that fans should dismiss the efforts of others who have tried to put that thought into effect, just because they are succeeding to some extent. Since I am not competing with them for the money of those people who are willing to pay there should be no conflict between us. So then, why is there conflict?

Silly me, it seems that I've been looking the wrong way all the time or, to put it another way, I've been looking at the cause without even seeing it. Dick Geis triggered my thought processes in Science Fiction Review 49, in a reply in the letter column to Ted White's thoughts on the matter, with a comment about the FAAn awards having failed because the fans were after the big awards, not the small stuff.

So, what I've been missing is that fanzine fans are complaining about the difference between a real fanzine and a semi-professional one simply because the two sorts are in competition for something -- the recognition of awards.

Now I know with some certainty why the subject doesn't raise much interest within me. Although it is nice to have everybody reckon that you are a fine fellow and that your fanzine is the best, there are better ways of being made to feel like a fine fellow. I get my reward and my pleasure out of this fanzine every time I open the letter box and find a note from someone which includes a few words saying that they enjoyed the previous issue of Rataplan. This is more personal than somebody just putting numbers in boxes on a form and then sending them off to be added up -- sure it's nice, but if I really wanted to go in for egoboo in a big way I'd go in for politics where the voting is on a much larger scale and you actually get more than just a trophy

if you are lucky enough to win - you get an all-expenses paid three year holiday in your State Capital or (if you go in for the really big game) here in Canberra.

Having got all that preliminary stuff out of the way I can now get to the main business of this continuing column about fanzines by making some comments on Science Fiction Review.

Two main questions come to mind; is it a fanzine and is it among the best if it is a fanzine?

Personally I can dispose of the first question very easily. SFR is a fanzine because its editor is an old hand at the fannish business and his prose, no matter what subject he chooses to comment on, is enlivened by a sense of lightness and informativeness which marks some of the best writing in the field. Many of his contributors also write in the same fashion although I have to admit that there are also some who are unimaginative and stuffy. Still you get that in any fanzine. Secondly, I regard SFR as a fanzine because Dick Geis trades with me (on a one-to-one basis it seems), and since I have not paid good money for a new fanzine for years and years I can't imagine that it is anything else. If he was aiming to be really professional, Dick would be trying to get money out of me as well as everyone else - and you can't make much money by giving your wares away

On, then, to the major question - is SFR a good, or even great, fanzine?

Before trying to answer that one properly I have to admit that of all the various lumps of fannish mail that lob into my letter box, SFR is always the first opened and looked through - not because of Geis at all but because of the cartoons contained within. But after that the fanzine is also among the first read because the views which it expresses are generally interesting even if they are sometimes wrong or stupid. The prose might never be great but, on the other hand it is always easy to get through - which is a lot more than can be said for the majority of fanzines.

But what makes a good fanzine? Is it the editorial style, the presentation, the standard of written and visual contributions, the atmosphere which it builds up or also related simply to the regularity with which it comes out? I reckon that it is all of those things and more. The difference between a great and a merely good fanzine is that it combines all of them and throws in something else, perhaps just the luck of having been published for the right audience by the right person at the right time.

I think that SFR has a good editorial style. Like a lot of other fanzines which are commonly agreed to be good, Geis does not hesitate to make his presence felt at any time and in fact he adds greatly to the fanzine with his short, witty and hardheaded comments on books, films, magazines and the like, as well as the state of the world in general. You don't have to agree with anything a person says to be able to admire the way in which he or she goes about doing it (and I sometimes wonder whether his detractors are confusing Geis's style with his political and artistic stance - if we were passing judgement on the "most politically sound liberal or socialist fanzine" there might be grounds for complaint but that doesn't come into it here).

It seems only natural that the strong editorial presence leads to the creation of a general feeling within the fanzine, as though those who appear in it form a kind of community with the fanzine itself being a kind of group expression. Some fanzines lack this because their editors are not strong enough to attract it, and others because the matters raised in the fanzine are simply too uninteresting to attract any continuing involvement from one group

of contributors and correspondents. If you have a flow of people discovering and then leaving a fanzine it cannot establish itself firmly and establish that interesting and attractive atmosphere.

The matter of standards for written and visual contributions as perhaps the one matter which could keep a discussion going for ever, in fact I seem to have noticed that in our own modest way we have one going on the pages of the letter column right here. Suffice it to say that nothing in SFR is incompetent and in fact most of it is a good deal better than you will find in all but a handful of other fanzines. In addition Dick Geis seems to have attracted some interesting sfnal pros as contributors, and I'm not that far gone yet that I'm not interested in reading the views of the people who write the literature which I still enjoy. Besides, somebody who writes for a living generally has a better turn of phrase than somebody who dabbles on the weekends or in the evenings.

And so we come to the matter of regularity -- something at which SFR appears to have no better. There is no real point in having produced the best ever single issue of a fanzine and not following it up; fanzines not only exist in the dimensions which allow them to be held in my hand, they have a being in time too and if they are to have life they must continue to express themselves, to grow and to effect and have an effect upon the environment in which they live. SFR does this just so much better than most of the so-called "great" fanzines of this current era and so even if I were to admit that it is less in stature than them in some other areas I would have to say that it makes up much ground simply from the way that it's editor keeps them coming out.

The final thing to be important is the matter of word-count. Far be it from me to say that some short stories are not better works of art (or even entertainment) than some novels -- I'm not that silly -- but I will claim that something which has the size sufficient to provide its readers with a couple of hours occupation is more memorable than something that only keeps their minds off their problems for twenty minutes or so. And in any case, fanzines aren't art, they are a continuing process of communication between writer and reader which is mediated by an editor and the fashion in which he wants to present the work.

Getting back to the business of awards, perhaps we should all be really honest about it and simply ban Geis from winning any more Hugos. He has been fortunate enough to be the right fan in the right place with the right abilities. He produces something which nobody straight out of "sixth fandom" (via the time machine) would have denied as being a fanzine -- and yet he has the knack of being able to reach a much larger audience than most other people who have chosen to produce fanzines. He has reached the stage where he is even able to make some money out of it and if that means he is able to keep up his current pace I'm not going to complain -- especially if he keeps on trading for much less ornate fanzines such as Rataplan. If it wasn't for the fact that I enjoy the job I already have I would be quite envious of him.

And since I never vote for the Hugos anyhow, the whole concept of a "Best Fanzine" is something that I don't have to grapple with.

Just incase you have never heard of Dick Geis or Science Fiction Review, you may be interested in the following boring information: PO Box 11408, Portland, OR 97211, USA. You can subscribe by sending the equivalent of US\$7.50 for one year or US\$15.00 to Space Age Books. You get four issues per year and I suppose that it also helps to keep Mervyn afloat as well.

Next issue I'll have a quick look at fanzines from the West.

LETTERS OF COMMENT - PART 2

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

I still think you need to pay more attention to the order in which you print the letters. On the last page of your fanzine reviews in Rataplan 24, for example, you complain about the lack of feedback you receive on same - so wouldn't it have made sense to follow the column with letters that do comment on them, even though they don't quite fulfil the terms of the dialogue you desire? In respect of which, I of course agree with you all the way in your reply to Diane Fox: criticism is indisputably a dialectic process, in which variant theories and interpretations are both proposed and opposed, the better to enhance and refine our understanding of the subject under discussion, to map out new paths of exploration and methods of discourse, to establish and maintain intellectual standards. Or at least, as you point out, in which variant theories and interpretations should be both proposed and opposed, etc, but it seems that most people can't be bothered to make the mental effort necessary to enter into such a dialogue. (At least in Australia, if I read you correctly; the situation in Britain and the USA may be different. Look at the incredible amount of response D West's "Performance" generated, for example - an example which, special though it may be, bears out my comment to Sue Tagkalidis about the self-referential nature of fanzine fandom.)

Perhaps (just to be really controversial) this is because people are actually unable to make such mental effort: they're not just too lazy, but too dim. When you look at what passes for thought in the pages of some fanzines... but some fans, it seems, to me (and in this, just to defuse possible criticism in advance, I do not necessarily exclude myself), do not think at all, not in the sense of thinking as a cogent, linear, analytic, structured activity; they merely react, substituting unexamined prejudice and inchoate, unfocussed opinions for reason and logic. And this, from a social subgroup that seems to pride itself on being different, and "therefore" (note the dreadful non-sequitur) better, and "therefore"... balls. But perhaps I'd better stop, before I provide Ted White with another excuse for stomping me up and down, what?

((I'm not too proud to admit that "thinking" is not really something that I enjoy in large doses. The occasional thought before lunch I can handle, and perhaps a fifteen minute break in the afternoon would be enough to round off the day. As an activity for recreation it is probably overrated although it must be admitted that it does have it's useful points. Really, a little hard thought goes a long way -- just like the man said about inspiration and sweat. Perhaps it is really something that you can train for, just like any other activity; you wouldn't expect somebody to win a gold medal for swimming if they only did two laps of the pool at the weekends. And I suppose that since thinking is a relatively hard thing to do and most of us avoid it when we can, it is no wonder that we aren't able to do it very well when we need to.))

Sticking with the idea of thought in fanzines, though, brings me on to what I myself said about Wahf-Full and Weber Woman's Revenge - and I wonder how many people, Jack Herman and Jean Weber no doubt foremost among them, have gleefully rushed forward to draw your attention to the apparent contradiction between the two sets of comments? Dear oh dear, they really should pay closer attention to what they read (Jean in particular, as her comments to me in the latest Al'ZAPA reveal her to be extremely careless in this regard). After all, I'm not objecting to the inclusion of "real world" material per se in fanzines (some of the stuff I've published, when I used to publish, was just that), but

to the impersonal manner of presentation they both adopt. I recall a letter from Harry Warner (although I can't remember where I read it) in which he stated that he was bored rigid by articles which went on and on about the historical oppression of women by men but was fascinated by articles about someone's personal experience of sexist practices and what they'd done to reverse them - and I'm arguing out of pretty much the same perspective. If we're going to discuss "real world" matters, then let's do so from a distinctive personal viewpoint and set some recognisable individuality into it rather than thrashing around in a sea of stodgy statistics and forced objectivity. The people who, in your own words, "look upon the medium (of fanzines) as a sort of substitute for professional magazines, whether they be Analog, New Scientist or New Society" have got hold of entirely the wrong end of the stick. As D West pointed out, a fanzine is not an inferior copy of a professional magazine, small because it can't be big, but a type of magazine in its own right, small because that's part of the medium's general (and particular) appeal. Not (see above) that I'm suggesting fanzines should concentrate exclusively on fans and fandom and other fanzines (as Ted White and others seem to claim), but the personal element is quite definitely a consequence of this smallness and should always be present if any particular fanzine is to have an impact on its readers. Yours has the personal element scattered all through it; Wahf-Full and Weber Woman's Wrevenge do not; hence yours succeeds where theirs fall flat.

((Ta. I expect the reason for that it because Jean and Jack have more self control than I have when it comes to keeping quiet.))

By the way, when leading a helicopter gunship attack to the sound of Wagner's "The Ride of the Valkyries" you have to come in not "out of the sun" but out out of the rising sun. Otherwise the anti-aircraft batteries will take out half your squadron before you can get your troops onto the LZ...

Roger Weddall, 79 Bell Street, Fitzroy, Vict 3065.

I would have thought that the lack of lengthy replies to your fanzine criticisms quite obvious; it's "no contest". Not because of the amazing brilliance of what you write (you write well, but not with "amazing brilliance") but because no-one really cares about what you say much. I don't think the fault lies with you so much as with the idea of reviewing fanzines. There are two separate ways of looking at this: 1) If you genuinely have something to say about a fanzine to the editor, you'll write it to that person. Publishing your thoughts is a matter of posturing, or setting yourself up as some sort of Judge. People will not respond at length because they don't attach enough significance to your opinion, or because they don't wish to be seen attacking any significance to your opinion.

2) Regardless of whether 1) is true or not, people a) feel confident enough about their own views to generally ignore or not care about what you've said except perhaps to add "Bravo!" or "Bullshit!", or b) don't care enough about the subject to do the work necessary to explain their ideas at the length required. I suppose there is a category c) which includes my two reasons of not having enough time in general, and specifically realising that by the time it takes to write a decent critique was found and the critique written, we'd be nine months down the road and onto another subject altogether. For example, my current letter to Ted White is so far fifteen pages of foolscap (mostly about Gambit 55) and so far ten months old.

Basically - as I've written to a few other people on the subject of fanzine reviews - I think that you're doing an okay job, as did Ted White in Sikander. On the subject of Rataplan, well it's coming along quite nicely. I'd have to agree, at least in part, with Ted White; Rataplan is and has

clearly been the best fanzine around Australia for over a year now.
((Ta. However, as I've mentioned once or twice, being the best fanzine in Australia is no great achievement for this or any other fanzine.))

While I do consider awards unimportant, your comments re "Best Fanzine except possibly Marc Ortlieb's" are spot on. If I'm ever in charge of the nominations and voting for any of these awards, there will be none of this shit about authors' or editors withdrawing their own works from contention. Once something is written/produced/in the public domain, it is open to any and all awards for which it might be eligible. The producer's wishes have nothing to do with it. If people whose work has won an award refuse to accept it, they are totally within their rights to do so, but that's it.

((Fair enough too, I agree with your comments on awards. The trouble for the poor person not wanting to accept an award is that they are placed in the situation of insulting a lot of people who have apparently thought highly enough about them to give them the trophy in the first place. Perhaps the only way out of the whole business is simply not to do the sorts of things that make one eligible for awards in the first place.))

Kim Huett, GPO Box 429, Sydney, NSW 2001.

After reading your own writing on why you don't like conventions, in Rataplan 23, I was reminded strongly of something that Ted White had said in Sikander 8 about Marc Ortlieb, to the effect that his talent is more suited to "the comfortable expression of opinion and narration of events" rather than "cleverness and wordplay". This, in a nutshell is my own reaction to your comments. The basic underlying idea is not bad at all, i.e., why I don't like conventions anymore, but you seem to use it merely as a vehicle for clever comments. The trouble is that to pull that off successfully the writing needs a quality best described as gonzo. That means it has to have a lot of warped humor and very fast pacing so as to stop the reader examining what is being said too closely. Unfortunately you approached the subject in a leisurely manner which allowed me to see all the holes in your arguments as I read it, consequently the whole thing fell flat. There were some amusing, even very accurate comments made but my suspension of disbelief had gone and nothing could restore it.

((Kim, I hate to have to tell you this, but your trouble is that you live in Sydney and you expect that everybody in the rest of the Commonwealth will see things in the same way as you with that stuff which, in Sydney, passes for humor. Everybody knows that Sydney has been infected by the North American virus which confers upon its victims a lack of subtlety second to none. It is well known that people thus afflicted have to be beaten over the nut with something which may have been funny once before they realise that it is supposed to be funny. Not, mind you, that anything I happen to write is supposed to make people laugh. I know my limitations and one of those is that the "absurd" node in my brain has not developed into the gigantic proportions of say a Langford or a Hughes, and so I have to suffer seeing the world very much as everybody else sees it. So if I get the occasional chuckle that's a good thing. I assume from your comments that you think I should have written something serious about the problem of conventions - an unsavory thought if ever there was one. And anyhow, if there is something worse than flat humor it is deadly earnest comments on a matter which is as dull as the root cause in the first place.))

I had already come to the same conclusions as you about Australian fanzines. However I think the fact that there has been insufficient worthwhile role models produced locally since AussieCon I is at least as important to the problem. After all, if John Bangsund, John Foyster, David Grigg, yourself and

others had been editing and writing outside the apas in any significant quantities post-AussieCon, would this problem have arisen? I think not, at least not to any significant degree.

Basically the whole problem is a shortage of good editors. From what I have seen of the local product, past and present, this country should be able to support three to four good if not excellent fanzines. It was done in the early '70s and we now have a much larger group of potential contributors. Trouble is, you Leigh, seem to be the only Australian faned making use of locals, though Marc has done a bit in this direction too (I only wish he was a firmer editor).

((Perhaps Marc should exercise more? I don't think that it is fair to expect the remnants of the old-guard to provide the role models for fanzine editors ten years or so after they did their best work. Something like fanzine publishing is a craft handed down from fannish generation to fannish generation, and one of the things that I am aware of is that in the current fanzine publishing scene I am something of a dinosaur - which explains the occasional cover I suppose. The way that I do things should have gone out of fashion a long time ago since, for example, the first issue of this fanzine was typed on the lounge room table of the Bangsund/Stevens/Edmonds slant-shack in the winter of 1968 and the fanzine has been published in more or less the same format since about 1973. I am not above copying a good idea when I see one - in fact this format was copied from David Grigg - so that makes me think that perhaps I haven't seen anything worthy of flattery by imitation in a decade.

((I agree with you that this country is capable of sustaining four or so good quality fanzines. It seems to me that they are already being published but that, for one reason or another, they have not reached their full potential. I'd reckon that this fanzine, Wahf-Full, Q36 and WUM are all capable of being good quality fanzines if the circumstances of their editorship were to improve only a little. The material, the editorial ability and the energy seem to be there... On the other hand, I am hard pressed to call to mind four good Australian fanzines from the early '70s; SFC and The Fanarchist/Touchstone were two. What were the others?))

Art Rapp, 282 Grovania Drive (RD2), Bloomsburg, PA 17815, USA.

After reading a couple of issues of Rataplan, Nancy and I were discussing SAPS this afternoon, and suddenly it struck me that apparently Australian fandom resembles US fandom in one respect: the fanzines are being published by old fans: there are none - or at least very few - of the younger fans leaping to their typers and launching glorious new publications to revolutionise the hobby, if not the world. (Or am I drawing an incorrect inference with regard to fans in your part of the world?) This led us to look at the current SAPS membership list, and as far as we can judge there isn't a single SAPS member under the age of thirty. The few youngfans who have joined SAPS in recent years have quickly become bored with it and dropped out. In trying to recruit new members I've been forced to concentrate mainly on bringing in old acquaintances, simply because I'm so out of touch with mainstream fandom that those are the only ones whose current addresses I have. But quite a few of those I wrote to have post-adolescent-age children, and so I usually suggest that if the fan himself wasn't interested in joining, perhaps his kids might be. I got no response showing even the slightest interest in such an idea.

The conclusion seems plain: we fanzine fans are the aging remnants of an obsolete species. We may be revelling in our second fannish childhoods, but there are no young fans to revel with us and carry on the traditions into the future. When I was a young fan, at least half of the actives either secretly or openly regarded fandom as a sort of training ground for future

sftwriters -- and of course, a considerable number of them eventually attained at least momentary success in their efforts to sell to the prozines. If we didn't have any young fans with that ambition today, if no young people at all any longer dream of being some kind of writer when they grow up, I'm sure that in a few more decades there will no longer be conflict between fanzine fandom, or even sft-in-print fandom and media fandom, for the first two types will have ceased to exist.

Roy Tackett had an astute comment on this situation in Dynatron 79, in speaking of something called the Fourth International Conference on the Fantastic: "There were all these dreadfully serious people giving scholarly papers on fantasy and science fiction and what it all means. It is, I tell you, a marvellous thing to think of all those scholars devoting their time to studying the old stories and writing serious papers on the philosophy of Brett Sterling or the psychological motives behind the works of Ivor Jorgensen and all that sort of thing. It does give one pause. It also tends to give one an upset stomach. I wonder, doesn't anyone read just for fun anymore?"

((Of course not, reading is a serious business. If you want some fun you turn on the tv or go out and see a film. This, of course, is why the sf fandom that once was all the go is in decline these days. It is not true to say that there aren't a lot of fanzines being published by a lot of young and enthusiastic youngsters, because there are. The thing is that just about all of them are being published by fans of media sf, by people who are still interested in writing fiction, discussing the stories and taking some serious delight in the form of entertainment which they like so much.

((It often seems to me that if this kind of fandom is to survive at all, it will do so by bleeding off some of the people who get into media fandom. There is probably nothing wrong with that because after all fandom has always been a kind of filtering process in which the vast majority of the people who pass through only stay a couple of years. It's people like you and I (I started cutting stencils in 1967 and you probably knew more about stencils than most of us would ever want to know before I was even born) who somehow find something attractive in this field and stay around. And anyhow, if (as seems likely) the optimum size of fanzine fandom is only around three or four hundred at any given time, it is only natural that youngsters can't get in if us old fogies keep on hanging around.

((And, more generally; any of you who are interested in joining a decent apa you might consider writing to Art about SAPS. I've been in it for over ten years now and it has been by far the most enjoyable one I've contributed to. I will also add, to Art's embarrassment no doubt, that Spacewarp, which Art published for SAPS, is one of the most entertaining fanzines being published anywhere that I have the opportunity to read these days.))

Harry J N Andruschak, PO Box 606, La Canada-Flintridge, CA 91011, USA.

I guess that the main thing is the on-going discussion about fanzines. This does, in fact, seem to be a popular subject. I myself am still very much a neo... three issues of my genzine Intermediate Vector Bosons does not make me a reviewer or critic. As a neo, I must simply say that I do not understand much of what Ted White is talking about. Nor, in some cases, you. Nor most of those who talk about standards and traditions.

My fault mostly. Working at Jet Propulsion Laboratories I get used to the fact of new standards and new rules for every mission. The idea of using concepts from twenty years in the past is ludicrous. We work on the concept of mission, not tradition. We aim to be at the cutting edge of technology. Fanzine fandom seems not to accept this idea. I do not comprehend.

((Since fanzines are not about technology there is no reason at all that they should be at the cutting-edge of the stuff. Fanzines are more about the social business that goes on behind and around the use of technology and science, and while it might be possible and necessary to rewrite the rulebook for each new space mission, that has nothing to do with the day to day business of human survival and entertainment. Perhaps you have been deceived by the amount of time that fans spend chattering about technology and the relatively lesser amounts of time that they spend chattering about social stuff. But the fact is that chattering about and using technology is a social business.

I don't think that the advocacy of continual change, which is what you are talking about is either a good or a necessary thing. And besides, you are getting a very biased view from working at JPL because it is in a new field in which the basic procedures have yet to be established - the people there are still trying to figure out what works best in which situation. When they find that out they too will start to use traditions and previous experience. If you doubt that you only have to look back at the older brother of the space business, aviation. Even up until the 1950s aviation was a field in which the rules were being made and amended all the time in a search for those which worked the best and were easily applied. Now the field is largely run by a handful of rule books which only get altered after lengthy and very careful consideration at international meetings, conferences and the like. It may be a while coming to the space business, but it is on the way.

((And being historically technical about your premise that nobody should use ideas which are more than twenty years old, how would JPL get on without the ground-work done by such notables as Newton and Einstein (who died well over twenty years ago) as well as those who established the fields of astronomy and mathematics. What has changed is the day to day operating techniques, not the basic rules.))

Marc Ortlieb, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Vict 3001.

Personally, I'm quite looking forward to meeting Ted White. It's just that I'm not sure that he will be interested in meeting me once I get Q36L done... (perhaps I'm overestimating my power to annoy people, but I'm having fun with some Ted White material at present. John Packer's working on a little something too. Sigh. Perhaps that was all that Q36 needed to lift it out of the doldrums - a decent target to fire at. Trekkies aren't much fun at all so a good moving target like Ted could be fun.) According to Peter Toluzzi, Ted's nice in person, and I'm not at all offended by Ted's piece in Sikander. I enjoyed it, and was flattered by the attention I got... any publicity... I think that a few of his comments were pretty much off beam, especially with reference to word usage, but hell, if I'm not hurt by Speer's comments on that, how could Ted hit home? But hopefully you'll see more of that in the next Sikander, if Irwin ever recovers from the typing that must have gone into number 8.

I guess you and I have rather different expectations of fanzines. I like Holier Than Thou, and, other than it's rather nebulous editorial presence at times, consider it to be one of that fanzines that I'd happily put out. Mind you, for me, the ultimate would be to put out a fanzine that would compare with Simulacrum, though it would have an Ortlieb flavour rather than a Vayne flavour. (I'd also like to be able to produce SFD, but I know my limits. Skel is probably my current favourite fanwriter - though Langford gives him a run for his money.)

I agree with your policy on letters, though I know that there are those who see it as a liberty taken with letters. Some of the media fan I've been corresponding with are most annoyed with your letter editing.

((Really? Does that mean that media fans aren't used to the idea of treating letters just like any other contribution to fanzines, something that probably has to be edited to bring it up to it's best. That must mean that either media fans write very precise letters of comment or that letter columns in media fanzines are full of lots of waffly stuff which adds nothing and takes up some of the editor's precious space.))

Joseph seems to have gotten a real bee in his bonnet about standards and people "insulting (her) readers by knowingly offering them substandard goods." What he says here is very similar to his letter which appeared in Q36 No 5. Whether you agree with Joseph or disagree depends on whether or not you agree with the framework of standards that he has set up. Personally, my feeling about fanwriting is that it, like all forms of writing, has only one raison d'etre and that is that the person writing wants to write. Joseph doesn't like Jean's fanzine, and her writing. That's fine. However, there are a lot of people who don't agree with him. To those people, his arguments are irrelevant. Jean bothers because she wants to. Her readers respond if they want to. The last thing she needs is someone suggesting that she pack up and go home because her standards don't match his. Joseph has the right to suggest this, but I rather hope that Jean pays only as much attention to his proclamations as she feels she wants to. There are several aspects of fanwriting that make it worthwhile, and while I will agree that the "personal element" is important, I don't see it as the be-all and end-all of fanwriting. Fanwriting's strength comes from its diversity, forcing everyone to write according to a particular set of standards is silly.

Which brings me to your remarks about my terrible altruism in refusing further nominations for Ditmars. I feel that you have the situation arse about. First, though the ASFAAs have the word "Best" on them, they are nothing to do with quality. They are to do with popularity. Now, I know that I am a popular person. I don't know why, I guess other people don't know me as well as I do, but, be that as it may, for some reason I've become popular in certain circles, and those people have been voting me Ditmars. However, even my ego only requires a certain amount of reassurance that I am popular - especially when I hear comments like "Well, the awards are nothing but popularity contests anyhow." Q36 was not the best fanzine for three years running. Some people liked it, that's all. Similarly, I'm not the best fanwriter in Australia. Some people like me, and they voted for me - not that many, as Paul Kennedy has pointed out.

Thus, in order to save myself further embarrassment, I decided to withdraw from future awards. Sure, it is a lot presumptuous of me to even think that I'd be likely to win another of the fucking things in '84, but I used the same logic in '83, and despite the fact that I knew I didn't deserve the things for '83, I got them. It may be selfish, but I'm not going to go up and pick up another Ditmar for fanzines or fanwriting. The three in a row made me a laughing-stock. I won't have that happen to me again.

Point reiteration. The "best" has not been withdrawn. The award isn't about best. If it were a legitimate measure of best fanzine, I wouldn't have withdrawn, for exactly the reasons you suggest. However, popular awards are terribly susceptible to weird results, such as my three double barrells. (Or Battlefield Earth almost making the Hugo Ballots.) Having seen what has happened to the fan Hugos - "Is there anyone here from Oregon!" - I'm not going to put myself, and the Ditmars in that position.

Anyway, probably not as neatly stated as I should have, and, despite my first statement, my reasons aren't altruistic. I'm embarrassed by winning three years running, and I'm not willing to risk it again. Besides, there's a chance of losing too, and, as the Goons proved, the best time to quit is while you

are ahead. From the response to my two at SynCon, I left that one year too late. But I always was a greedy bastard.

((Fine, fine. But now that our shield is gone, that means that the rest of us are going to be exposed to the ridicule and other nasty things too. I mean, the thought of being forced to go up in front of a lot of people to collect an award for doing something that they know nothing about doesn't sound like much fun to me. Are you sure you won't reconsider?))

Terry Frost, 3/35 John Street, Potorsham, NSW 2039

I tend to agree with you, in Rataplan 24, where you say that the hotel tends to dominate one's impressions of SynCon '83. What I most remember is a hell of a lot of steps, each with different coloured carpet...

On the Seattle in '85 NatCon bid: having been a member of that bid (along with such worthies as Clifford Wind, Jerry Kaufman, Michelle Muysert, Derrick Ashby and, I think, Sally Beasley), I can shed some light on the reason it existed. Basically, it was one of those gonzo ideas. Jerry and Clifford came up with the idea, the committee en mass recruited a mass of people with convention-damaged brains to vote for it, and we won. It wasn't done to fob off the dumb constitution on the Americans. It was done to point out the dumbness of one particular part of the constitution, to perform some inspired gonziness and perhaps to tart up one or two convention reports with something unusual. Many others considered it a hooliganism abuse of the business meetings, some said that it was idiotic and others reckoned we were out to topple idols. The truth is that it was fun to get the NatCon for Seattle. Rationalisations came later.

Sydney fandom is dead. Applesauce is suffering from metastasised minac, and the SCA has the severed head of the former tucked by the hair into its belt. Just at the moment, any examination of either seems a bit like an autopsy to me.

Mae Strelkov, Familia Strelkov, Estafeta Postal, 4501 Palmsola, Jujuy, ARGENTINA.

Some while ago Vadim brought back from Cordoba your fanzine addressed to Mae and Tony. Sorry that Tony's not here -- he's still going his Military Service in Cordoba, in their posh sector for Military Police. (They have even curtains in their barracks windows and plastic tablecloths in the canteen! And they wear white gloves and other decorations when on parade or doing their vigils or what-not.) Himself, he warms a seat in the top-sector's offices all day and sometimes till midnight and later, when urgent invoices and reports must be typed. But they treat him as a treasure; he got voted by personnel and by junior officers as the most appreciated of the whole company (together with his best friend). They are always ready to do favors and help anyone out of trouble, that's why. Sorry for all their fellow conscripts and even for the poor fellows who choose the army as a way of life.

Till the elections at the end of this month, there's no hope Tony will be given his release. I fear they'll hold on to him as long as they can, for he has -- perhaps foolishly -- proved himself irreplaceable. (Never were those offices run so smoothly... "a place for everything and everything is its place".) And then again, the whole company is so proud to have a black-belt Karateka in their midst. Other companies have only lesser Karatekas -- no black-belts!

((It seems as though Tony has joined the ranks of those fans who have proved their worth in the services with their typing speeds and their ability to write and file things. Good luck to him though I'd hope that by now he will be getting near his release, even in far off Australia we heard about the

results of your election. And that was a few months ago now.))

As for our daughter Sylvia, and Vadim and myself, we are in the wilds of Jujuy on a piece of land (nearly 300 hectares of it), owned by sons Ed, Robert, Tony and Sylvia in equal shares. At the moment only Sylvia is here to sign documents, run the show with Vadim's help, and so on. And what a show! It turns out we own the most valuable stand of timber in the whole region, and since floods made the forests of the Argentine Litoral unreachable, the needs of Buenos Aires have to be supplied from these northern provinces, especially ours. So a firm hopefully started building a good logging trail up into our property without even asking our permission, and only later in a fit of panic got Sylvia to agree to let them be the ones to use the lovely new logging trail. (Other companies were trying to horn in, with offers of higher prices. But we liked the first lot best, anyway, and have stuck with them, as they eagerly continue cutting through incredibly steep jungle ever higher up to the top of the ridge where the real treasures of lumber are.)

Various attempts to steal our lumber (cut and load it broad daylight on the new trail) have already been made, and on one occasion Vadim had to call in the police. Forged documents were even used for such purposes by the thieves, but they have been exposed. The latest ploy is an attempt to muddle us into thinking the wood in question belongs to the folks next-door; and with all the soaring peaks and plunging precipices and twisting ravines, boundary lines are hard to figure out, though cement boundary stones do exist under all the foliage and must be found anew. We'll have to get an agronomist in to help!

We would like to keep the forests untouched, but seeing that till the huge trees are turned into lumber, attempts at stealing it will never cease, we are agreeing to have the oldest trees taken away so the young ones can have their turn to take over the place. It's that Buenos Aires pays any price for more lumber, any price! and temptations are tremendous in consequence. And it becomes a sort of game to local yokels to see who can get away most successfully with cutting and carrying off their neighbours' wood. We have yet another neighbour who just the other day announced to Vadim, "Next year I'll be in charge of all the lumber on that mountain-side and will do your work for you. I'll represent so-and-so" (our buyers' competitor) "who'll pay you much more." He spoke very sweepingly; already he's convinced our woodcutter tribe to stop cutting for us meanwhile. He means to edge us into the position where we'll betray the ones who made the road so the other crooks can horn in. It's a constant fight, as you can see, defending fair play.

We somehow enjoy it tremendously. Diplomacy and a spirit of sturdy resistance are required constantly. We are on our toes. Back at Las Barranoas where we spent the last twenty-two years we faced many challenges also, the last of which endured or the final five years we spent there. The new buyers turned out to be notorious crooks and worse. Their doings were only recently exposed in the tabloids, on tv, and everywhere in this country. Dangerous folk... people who crossed them vanished. (And we often felt icy shivers when we'd stick up for the rights of the peones against all their fury at us because we weren't going to help them cheat the poor little folk there.)

Ah, well, now it's a different situation. We are our own bosses in the matter of selling timber; all we have to do is to stay that way and not let - say - the neighbour just mentioned establish himself as the boss of the wood on all the mountainside, throwing pennies - or centavos rather - at us when we grumble a bit too much. We'll see...

I enjoyed dipping into your private lives and had a great chuckle regarding your comments on being affluent. We too are facing the burdens of that right ahead. If we can protect our lumber steadily (with the help of our buyers,

who have struggled terribly to build the logging trail and feel "tight", financially, by now), we will be quite affluent by next year, and able to do a lot for this property. (The bottom eighteen hectares is good farming land, where we hope to build a more comfortable house. Right now we inhabit a box, three metres by eight metres, very uncomfortable and unfinished.) Worse, it turns out we inherited from a dear and lonely old man years ago who went off to the end of nowhere and vanished, all his precious stamp collection of the British Empire. It was a heavy burden to have to drag about as we travelled (thirty years and more of moving here and there) but we kept it because he asked us to guard it carefully till he'd want it back. But he never did, and -- alas -- once one grows old the next door to enter is "the beyond". So now Tony happened to mention to a friend in the Army the existence of these very boring-to-us stamps, and the boy's father is a member of the Philatelic Club in Cordoba. They are now with their tongues out panting to see the collection and crying, "Such British Empire stamps today are terribly valuable. Even millions of dollars you could get for them. Where are they?" (Packed carelessly in a burlap sack with Sylvia's treasured veterinary books, and gathering dust with all our other junk in a friend's place -- a house they don't use -- in Jesus Maria, that's where.) So Tony asked Vadim or Sylvia to rush there to help him decide what to do, and Vadim wrote back, "I can't come yet or they'll steal all our wood on our mountain-top". Such a mad way of life we've entered now!

The lovely old man who made the stamp collection dating from his early boyhood until he grew old, never married, had no relatives, and had grown very attached to us when we were still kids ourselves with just a couple of babies. (In all we had seven -- the eldest now forty-five, the youngest, Tony, twenty-three.) The man sailed off to the Seyscheselles to get away, as he put it, "from all the crooks in Latin America". From this he duly wrote to us, "They're a lazy bunch of natives here. I'm looking for some better place to go next!" (Heaven? He merited it, I'm sure, he was so idealistic.)

Ah, life is so funny, funny. Looking back, I recognise just how much we enjoyed being short of cash always. It was a challenge, and God did pull us through tight spots invariably, so it gave us a special sort of confidence in Him as a good pal. Now, to be saddled with (gosh) millions in our old age, scares us to bits. Actually, "millions" here mean nothing. They've been adding zeros all the time as inflation soared, to every thing, salaries, basics for food and living, etc. The logging firm that built for us the six kilometer -- and more to build -- road up, wanted to rent from us this property for two years at close to one million new, new pesos. It scared us to bits. "No!" we gasped, "you'll just pay at once for every log you cut, no more and no less!" Sylvia and Vadim have to march up that six kilometer trail to the loading site regularly to put our stamp on the logs going out and prepare the bill of lading (or guia). It's a lot of work but it keeps everyone honest, with us looking on, at all they do. And honesty is a lovely thing to encourage in this land where vivi who best knows how to embromar is the one emulated and admired. (Vivo -- crook; embromar -- to injure one's fellows, cheat him, etc.)

* * *

SOCIAL NOTES

from Our Melbourne Correspondent

"Soire", the invitation said, "to meet noted Canberra fanned Jean Weber. Dress optional, but clothing preferred." Well-known Melbourne fan-about-town Derrick Ashby and his equally well-known wife Christine (nee McGowan) turned on

the hospitality at their semi-renovated residence in the lovely bayside Middle Park; your social reporter dusted off the glad rags (still rather crumpled after Bruce and Elaine's Friday the 13th party) and hastened to the scene, notebook at the ready.

Upon arrival mine host Derrick hustled guests into the front room to perform a certain act, of which more later. Then on to the jollifications. Christine was stunning in an optional dress; guest-of-honour Jean Weber, in a pale blue "Melbourne in '85" t-shirt, was deep in smoffish conversation with early arrival Carey Handfield until interrupted by the entry of John Foyster (attired in a most workmanlike pair of bib-and-brace overalls). In no time at all the joint really began to jump, as they say in the classics. Peter and Elizabeth Darling were accompanied by their charming daughter Jillian Miranda Foyster and young friend Emma, both so stylishly clothed that your reporter's vocabulary quite fails. Nobody paid any attention to Christine's suggestion that they inspect the delightful north-facing courtyard (actually she said "backyard") - too far from the food. Catherine Circosta took advantage of the occasion to introduce a cousin from interstate to fandom - no adverse reactions were observed.

Mandy Herriot and Phil Ware provided transport for Marc Ortlieb; none of them looked any the worse for having spent the day sanding the walls of Mandy and Phil's new residence, apparently even more semi-renovated than the Ashby abode. It is not true that Mandy and Phil only came to the party in order to recruit further labourers. Melbourne fans spend almost as much time these days discussing house as they do discussing computers. Later in the evening Christine and Marc Linneman were overheard attempting to liven things up with an exposition of the rule against perpetuities, but by that stage the situation was hopeless.

Your reporter eavesdropped on numerous conversations, having instructions from Mr Edmonds to pass on juicy gossip. An earnest debate about how long the absent David Grigg has been in fandom resolved itself rather inconclusively. Carey (who went to school with David) asserted that he dated from 1969, but was unable to counter Bruce Gillespie's assertion "I never heard of him until 1970." John Newman talked about computers, Terry Stroud talked about house renovations (his bath was found to be emptying not into the sewer but straight onto the ground), and Justin Ackroyd hugged people a lot, with special attention to Mandy. Watch out world for the Cuddly GUFFER!

Shortly after Jennifer Bryce arrived from another engagement the meaning of the furtive acts in the front room became clear. Champagne bottles were stealthily uncorked and Peter Darling proposed a toast to the happy couple, Marc and Catherine, presenting them with a card signed (in the front room) by all present. Jean is surely to be congratulated for her foresight in suggesting that a party be held on a date that turned out to be only days after the announcement of the forthcoming nuptials! Marc and Catherine both turned all sorts of shades of red, to the great satisfaction of everyone.

A supper of crepes with a variety of fillings presented Candy the Cavalier King Charles vacuum-cleaner with an opportunity to make herself useful as well as decorative when a fan who shall remain nameless attempted to fill a crepe with salmon mornay without first placing it on a plate. On the whole the evening was remarkably free of such incidents; no swinging from the chandelier (no chandelier), no drunken cavorting (not a great deal of alcohol consumed), not even any smoking. It is thought that there are indeed fans in Melbourne who indulge in such activities, but clearly they are not on Jean Weber's guest list.

Late in the evening Justin was closely questioned as to why he burst into tears when Marc and Catherine's forthcoming marriage was announced. He

confessed that he was merely upset at the thought of having to find someone else to share with upon his return from foreign parts, especially since everyone he has ever lived with has eventually left him to get married. All eyes turned to the eligible John Newman...

Your reporter, in need of beauty sleep, beat a retreat at about one in the morning, by which time the glittering throng had somewhat thinned, and the conversation had taken a distinctly smoffish turn. Darlings, believe me, the metaphysics of WorldCon-running are of no interest to the gutter-press, and the practicalities are too boring for words. Alas, a fair number of Melbourne fans are obsessed with the business, and not to be distracted by a good party.

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LETTERS OF COMMENT - PART 3

Sally Beasley, 21 Gold Street, South Fremantle, WA 6162.

A couple of comments on Joseph Hanna-Rivero's article on censorship in Rataplan 23. Firstly, a minor point. Although we aren't a "free country", neither is any other country. All countries have laws to control the behaviour of their citizens, and to control the ways in which that behaviour impinges in other citizen's lives. It is my contention that film censorship - flawed as it is - is in actuality attempting to control the way in which citizen's behaviour impinges on others' lives. I don't think the censorship laws were conceived in that way - which may be why they're flawed - that that is their effect.

I am talking mostly about film censorship, because that is the area in which I would argue that censorship acts as a protection. It is, of course, also the area Joseph covered. Written material is quite different in several areas. If, for example, free adult citizens want to read about adult-child sex, that does not actually involve any child. If the same adult wants to see pictorial/film depictions of the same thing, that does involve a child or children's lives being affected (by posing for the picture/film).

Film, in addition, is a far more immediate medium than the written word. Sensory information is received directly and via two sensory channels (sight and hearing) as opposed to the written word, where information is via one channel only, and imagination must be used to translate and process the information presented in written form. If people are seeing/hearing/reading potentially sexually arousing material, then, it is more likely to be sexually arousing when presented in film form. However, if a stimulus is repeatedly paired with sexual arousal (for men anyway; it doesn't appear to be the same mechanism for women) there is a likelihood that that stimulus will become an integral and necessary part of sexual arousal. At least, that is the behavioural explanation of fetish formation, and it appears to be possible to induce fetishes in this way experimentally. I remember some of the lectures at Maudsley Hospital running that experiment when I was doing my clinical psychology training there in 1975/76.

If, then, sex and violence are repeatedly paired in films, there is a real possibility that adult males may develop the fetish for violence associated with sex. If then put into practice in real life (because someone with a fetish cannot have sex without the fetish being present) then obviously that impinges on people's lives. Specifically, women's lives. There have already - from my recollection of reading the newspapers - been violent sexual crimes against women whose perpetrators used the influence upon themselves of visual media as a defence.

While I am in favour of living in a free society, then I am also in favour of censorship of any film/tv/video which pairs sexual and violent content. If a movie (tv show, video, etc.) depicts solely sexual or solely violent content, or even depicts both separately and not in association, fine. I don't think those should be censored. Unfortunately the present censorship situation is one where a good deal of material with a violent sexual content is not censored, and much material that has only sex or only violence is. That is the situation I believe should be reformed.

((Now all you have to do is prove to somebody in the right place that there is a sound psychological basis for this kind of censorship, and that it is more important than the moral basis for the business which is current. You'd probably also have to convince a number of people that there is something particularly repugnant about the practice of sex with violence by men upon women. After all that you have actually to figure out a way of enforcing that censorship - the increasing access to video machinery that everybody has, and the "under the counter" access which most people can have to illegal material, means that almost anybody can look at almost anything at any time that they like... And if the Government has any brains they will give up trying to stop this sort of thing and at least try to monitor what is going on, If we can't stop this sort of thing we should be able at least to put ourselves in a position of being able to properly study the incidents of violence and sex in the community as it is linked to what people see.))

Joe Hanna-Rivero, A410871, No 1 Tech App Course, RAAF School of Radio,
RAAF Base Laverton, Vict 3027.

After reading Michael Hailstone's letter in Rataplan 24 I don't think that he understood what I said about my view on censorship. Although I am against censorship as a whole, I am only concerned with the censorship of adult films. I stressed fairly strongly throughout the article that adults have the right to make their own decisions as to the sort of film they want to see. However, my view is that while film censorship should be more liberal for adults it should also be stricter for children. Another aspect of censorship I am in favour of is a rating system (though not necessarily the one we have now) because it's the only way that a person has to help them decide if she or he wants to see a certain film. Hence I am not totally disapproving of censorship, only that which is aimed at adults only films. I'm sorry if I didn't make this point clearer in the article.

Michael hit the nail square on the head when he said the popularity of violent film is not due to the decadence in society but the natural aggressive instinct of man. However, one must realise that while today's violent films are nothing but light images on a celluloid film, the popular blood sports of the past were real and if anything we are less bloodthirsty today than we were in times gone by. I hold the opinion that violent films, especially horror films, are harmless. In fact, recent studies by psychologists have shown that violent films are actually a means of releasing tension and ill feeling towards others. Better to release the anger inside of us on the actors butchering on the screen than on some poor soul in the street. And, as anyone will tell you, watching the six o'clock news on tele is more shocking than any film, no matter how violent. The fact that people are actually killed on our roads and by senseless killers in infinitely more of a tragedy than the paper mache characters that are given the "chop" in most horror films. The first is reality and the other is fantasy. Just listen to Skyhooks' "Horror Movie" oldie; "... horror movie, it's the 6.30 news."

I respect the fact that some people like Michael and yourself simply don't like violent movies but I am simply saying that one should not go around blaming them for causing violence and unrest in society or teaching young

people how to kill. What's the difference between a G rated western on tele and an R rated horror show? The first shows killing without the plasma and the other is heavy with it. It has been argued that films like westerns, which show killing as quick and clean are bad for children since they relate to the hero or bad guy and tend to imitate them in play. This means that the child may grow up thinking that killing a person is not so bad since it is not messy or ugly. Yet the gruesome effects in most horror films portray death as ugly and horrible, and are bound to turn a child's head away in disgust. What do you think?

((I tend to agree.))

Also, Leigh, I don't know how you came to the conclusion that I felt sex shouldn't be seen on the big screen. If you re-read the article you will note that I only said that I personally dislike it, but my actual argument was that Australian censors are making their own decisions for other people by not showing explicit sex on our screens. When I say that I don't like sex films, this does not mean that I am offended by the actual sex scenes, only by the shoddy production values and poor dubbing plus non existent plot.

But I think you will agree with me that, like horror films, many sex films are simply extraordinary in what they show. To name a few subjects: bestiality, bondage and S/M, plus unthinkable things like golden showers and eating shit (Yuchh!).

To prove my point, I recently saw a film - if it could be called that (it was more like an excursion into torture) - that dealt with the relationship of a slave and his master. The slave was chained by the neck and forced to do things too despicable to be worthy of mention here, and in one instance the director had to intervene to prevent this person from being gravely injured from what was being done to him. Yet this sort of thing is not staged or done through the use of make-up effects like horror films - it was real and it was hard to sit through.

To date I've only seen one tasteful and well produced sex film, and that was Paul Raymond's "Erotica". See it if you get the chance.

One final comment about Michael's letter. He mentions having read an interview with a film censor about how she had to sit through a film in which someone was shown as being graphically scalped. I have only this to say. Why then was this film (called "Maniac") released in Australian cinemas yet porno films are continually cut and banned to the point of ridicule?

((Right on!))

Brian Earl Brown, 20101 W Chigago, No 201, Detroit, MI 48228, USA.

It feels a little strange to see the MPAA listed as a censorship board in Rataplan 22. I tend to associate censorship boards with movements to ban things and the MPAA doesn't ban anything. It was actually set up to prevent a real censorship board - a Government board - by presenting the appearance that the Hollywood system was policing itself. The MPAA succeeded in getting the Government prudes out of the movie business and while there are always people who are unhappy with the MPAA's standards I've not heard much serious talk about banning any film in the US. That Australia and Great Britain actually do ban films is startling. It sounds so... totalitarian. I thought these countries were part of the free world.

((And of course some people would say that one of the reasons that we are still part of the free world is because we maintain high moral standards

through censorship. It is a well known fact that the once great US of A is on the downhill slide, and it's failure to censor things is obviously the reason. At least, that's what some people think.))

The matter of cutting films doesn't sound that awful in view of the casual manner in which most commercial tv stations in the US chop away at films in order to squeeze in commercials and get everything to fit into a two hour period. For that matter there is already a long tradition of overseas versions, US versions and revised versions in the middle of distribution. Joseph Hanna-Rivero makes it sound as if "the film" were an inviolate indivisible entity such that editing a film to reduce offensive scenes is an unbearable offense. It seems to me that most times "the film" is such a fluid assembly that such editing is defensible. Of course there are always extreme cases but how much of the grue in say, "Motel Hell" is essential to the movie. How much of it is there just to gross out the audience? There are whole classes of film that I find disgusting, such as splatter films which to my mind have no redeeming qualities, or the sexploitation films like "Porky's" which are just depressing little teasers (the success of which is a depressing indication of taste in this country). But I can't think of any film that I would want to ban. What I would like to see, though, is some of these films give more specific ratings.

Joseph points out that there are four classifications in the US but that it not really true since no commercial film ever gets an X rating. The only films that accept an X rating are the porn films and I don't think they bother to submit their films to the MPAA for rating. As I understand the system, no movie has to be rated but no unrated film can claim to be G, PG or R rated. They can only claim to be X rated. I'm not sure why movies avoid the X rating. Either the theatre owners have made it clear that they won't show X rated films or the distributors have decided that X rated films can't make money (a valid argument since most movie goers are sixteen to twenty-four years old. A film rated X would be barred for the majority of film-goers). I really feel that films like "Motel Hell" (Joseph's example of a particularly awful splatter film) ought to have been X rated.

What we seem to need is a rating system that distinguishes between "soft R" and "hard R". Soft R would be films like "The Blues Brothers", which was R rated because of profanity, an automatic R rating. These are films that parents would want to take a closer look at before letting their kids go see them. (And probably should be open to children over twelve). Then there would be hard R films like "Porky's" and "Motel Hell" that should be restricted to children with guardians.

((What are Guardians supposed to do, shove paper bags over the kids' heads when the bits they aren't supposed to see appear on the screen?))

Joseph proposes a rating system that adds warning flags to alert parents to potentially offensive material. One of the Detroit papers does that already. In the Friday edition they run a column of capsule reviews of all first-run films showing and end each review with the film critic's rating (1 to 10 on quality) and lists things like nudity, violence, language, extreme violence, graphic violence, gratuitous violence or sexual situations. As a result parents can get some idea of what sort of film they're letting their children see. I think it's a good idea, though sometimes I wonder if it doesn't just encourage some kids to see the wrong films; "Hey, let's go see this one. It's got both gratuitous violence and full frontal nudity..."

Maybe there would be less talk about censorship if films weren't so devoted to grossing out audiences.

Art criticism. Ali Kayn seems to be trying to analyse why there is no good sf art, no public acceptance, no critical acceptance of sf art as art. But her article seems confused as to what she is saying. "I don't know art, but I know what I like," may be the refuge of the uneducated but it has nothing to do with why the Critical Establishment refuses to accept sf art as art. Most of the people who say "I don't know art, etc.," are really saying "I loath non-representational art". But of course non-representational art is where it's at in the art world. Thus illustrative art by the likes of Whelan, Maitz, or Kelly Freas is not "art" yet these men do produce great art, paintings that sharply delineate the future. I don't know art. I've never had a course of art appreciation in my life, but I know what I like, and I like little of what I see. I know that Maitz's work has a texture that explodes off the surface in a way I like, he has a brilliancy of colour that makes his paintings unforgettable. On the other hand the Borises and Rowenaes... well, as a friend observed, they look like they'd painted too many refigerators for ads before becoming sf artists.

Ali does have a point that it is difficult to write proper academic papers about sf art because much of the material can't be properly referenced. And it's understandable that the sf artbooks haven't helped since they were largely aimed at nostalgia-minded people who just wanted to look at old pulp covers once again. Most of the old drawings and paintings probably don't even exist anymore except as moulding covers on old pulp magazines. This stuff was never done as art. It was "product" produced to make a living, thrown away, given away when the assignment was completed. It would be nice to see this stuff documented but that's going to require the cooperation of numerous art collectors around the world. Most, I'm sure, would be glad to help if they only knew someone wanted this sort of information.

Her second point, that people buy the "worst" stuff is beside the point. Jay Kinney has remarked that most sf art is iconographic in nature. What interests fans has little resemblance to art because fans are interested in totems of fandom - propellor beanies, unicorns and so on. Most of what sells at sf conventions is the fannish version of velvet paintings of Elvis. (Here in Detroit one is apt to find the corner of an intersection taken over by a vendor of drawings painted on black velvet often selling for only \$20-\$30. These paintings are florid, lurid and usually pretty awful with Evlis or Jesus as common subjects.) So in a sense getting upset at what sells in an art show is pointless - like getting upset at being caught in a rainstorm. Trying to make a living from sf art in fandom is impossible unless all you produce are fannish icons. There isn't enough money in art shows to support anyone, not even on the American art show circuit. Sf art, if it is to develop, and if there is such a thing as sf art, is going to have to be developed by pure amateurs, people who paint without thought of getting paid for it - because nobody will pay.

I don't think I've been too clear or organised in these comments, anymore than Ali was in her article. Basically I hold great reservations about anyone who is out to "improve" things - be it fandom or sf art. Even when I agree that a lot of what appears in convention art shows is bad, that some of the people nominated for Hugos don't deserve them because they're bad artists and I honestly despise people who take the attitude of "Fuck fandom, I'm in it for the money", I'll still disagree with anyone who is out to improve fandom.

((Another Tory! Conservatives seem to be coming out all over.))

Don Ashby, 75 Neil Street, Carlton, Vict 3053.

I regard illustrating (which I do) as a craft, similar to puppet or mask making. All three occupations are interpretative. They take a pre-existing

body of work and embellish it or animate it. It has constraints on it that make it a totally different activity than the production of works of art. Illustration and art have the same relationship as a film score to a symphony. Illustrators can be artists in the sense that they can set out to produce art or set out to produce illustrations. There are, of course, exceptions - William Blake's illustrations and texts were conceived together and one without the other is to miss the point of the whole.

It is impossible to have sf art because art isn't about ghettos, it is about universals. A picture of the Holy Family by Michelangelo is more than a biblical illustration, it is a statement about the human condition. A picture by Donetti of the Holy Family is a biblical illustration because it is a graphic representation of what the three of them might have looked like at the time and contains no other material. I have been to many convention art shows and have seen fine illustrations from sf and fantasy but have yet to be faced with a work of art. I doubt that I ever will. People who go to convention art shows want pictures of a book they have read, or astronomical pictures of their favourite view of Pluto.

I draw things for money. Someone says to me, "Hey Don, here is an article I want illustrated, have a look." I am not crazy about Tibetan yak husbandry, but I go away, look up some photos and anatomical drawings of yaks, and whip up a few. I do the best I can, but it ain't art.

You can have a work of art where the artist chooses an sf motif (one doesn't come leaping into my mind you understand) but you can't have sf art any more than you can have Mills and Boon art. Art isn't derivative, it's primary.

I am not saying that you can't deplore the craftsmanship of sf illustration. Magazine illos are still horridly banal and stilted. This is probably a market thing: low budgets buy second rate illustrators like me. There is the jobs for the boys (or girls) thing too. The covers of Cory and Collins in the past have suffered from that mentality, though I haven't seen any recent titles.

By all means let's have a healthy criticism of the standards of illustration in sf, but let's not get it mixed up with art.

Jerry Kaufman, 4326 Winslow Place W, Seattle, WA 98103, USA.

All professional sf artists are illustrators. Even when he's borrowing from Tanguy, Chirico or Ernst, Powers is an illustrator. This is the only reason for taking one segment of art and identifying it with a publishing genre. (It's like "Western" art.) Some of it is very good illustration, and we have some of it around the house. But it all began, and mostly still is done, to illustrate stories or ideas on book jackets or in the pages of books or magazines, or to base movie and stage setting upon. It might also occasionally illustrate an advertisement or two, or just somebody's fantasy about the past or the future.

However, that doesn't mean that fine art is about or different to life. It's about life. I suppose there's plenty of disagreement about what art does; communicates ideas, expresses emotions, organises space and colour. What it generally doesn't do is to depict some scene from Blood Pirates of the Sex Asteroid in a manner which will convince a reader to buy the book.

Artists who are potentially Great (and not only the Great are Artists: there are bad Artists, too) should be ferreted out and encouraged... To leave sf altogether, or to pursue it only as a hobby. It was disappointing that David Vereschagin of Edmonton decided to leave off doing cartoons for fanzines and watercolour abstracts for convention art shows, but he did the right thing,

moving to galleries where people who could appreciate his work could see it, and through which he could see real art and meet real artists. (You can supply the quotes wherever you think I might be slightly ironic.) David did watercolour abstracts, as I said, some of them with stfnal titles, and maybe they were abstracts about science (the one I own is called "Red Shift"). That wouldn't be too surprising, since the Futurists did a lot of paintings and sculptures about the beauties and terrors of science. Of course, none of them did covers for Amazing.

((The business of representational art brings to mind, once again, the business of those neat covers that used to grace the "Ace Specials". Most were not representations or illustrations of the book in particular, but I thought they were remarkable enough to sell books - which was apparently not the case. There were also some fairly colourful and interesting covers on some of the late '60s and early '70s Amazings. Perhaps the most important work was done in the Moorcock issues of New Worlds where neither the writing or the illustrations were tied terribly much to the then "state-of-the-art" in sf. Still, most of that too was illustration.))

Julie Vaux, 14 Zara Road, Willoughby, NSW 2068.

I naturally object to Joseph Nicholas' remark that sf art is drivel. I have had to decide whether to say nothing at all (and watch the others fight it out) or whether to make the effort to say something sensible that will probably be misinterpreted or misunderstood anyway. Of course if I say nothing at all I can finish off my correspondence heap and go back to really important things like writing and painting.

"Tedious representations of future ... alien flora and fauna"! I believe that Joseph thinks nothing has changed in the course of forty years. Of course things have changed. That should be obvious to anyone who compares the style used in pulp illustrations to modern illustrators. If nothing else, there is a far greater diversity of expression and technique being used in modern illustrations.

Lastly, I think that Joseph is forgetting that since artist/writer combinations are rare, as he said himself, sf art consists mainly of illustrations to stories and that type of art tends to be very eclectic; because like any other international style, such as international courtly gothic or art nouveau, both movements which involved book illustrators, it shows influences of a diverse nature.

As for Damien Broderick's remark on using statistics to prove or disprove psionic abilities, I get the feeling from his article and other things I have read by him, that Damien is one of those people who subconsciously wishes they had it while consciously expressing slightly negative esp opinions - mainly because they have no esp experience but have read about them.

It seems to me that too many researchers are hung up on using statistics to prove it's existence mathematically, when esp/psi is an experiential thing.

Ultimately proving it hinges on finding psychics whose powers have a proven record and finding a training method to use on latents and people with erratic abilities that come and go. I remember reading a fan story which suggested that the reason many demonstrations fail when sceptics are in the room is that the sceptics themselves are either people with latent blocked psi powers or people who act as natural psi dampers.

((Perhaps. All the same I can see no reason why you should give emphasis to having one proven case of psionic powers and yet not care to look at very

carefully worked out statistical proof. Perhaps it is because it is easier to comprehend the evidence of one thing that you can see and hear than the sort of mathematical proof which Damien put up. It seemed to me that if Damien has done his sums right, he has established some proof for precognition, but it is not the sort of thing which stirs the imagination or has immediate applications whereas a personal ability to forecast Tattsloths numbers would mean a whole lot of very rich people. Perhaps that's the reason why they're hiding themselves!

((All the same, I reckon that if there had even been people with decent psionic powers, one of them would have been spotted and written up by now. But so far as I know this has not happened, indicating that such people have been very lucky or that they don't exist. After all, it may be as Damien suggested, that psionic powers, if they are possible in the first place, are not much by way of a survival trait and have been largely bred out of the species.))

Diane Fox, PO Box 129, Lakemba, NSW 2195.

Fascinating stuff on psi in Damien Broderick's article. I've been thinking the matter over. Psi might be an extremely rare talent, everyone might have some microscopic talent but few would have it in a measurable form, like the ability to write poetry, etc. How many people are artists, musicians or published authors? It might also require intensive training to bring out this rare ability. Genuine psionics might be as rare as, say, olympic champions. Or rarer!

Another point. Some people simply can't have experiences that come easily to others. For instance, many women simply don't or can't have orgasms - and this has a psychological cause. It would be even easier to condition people against developing paranormal powers. People get turned off sex by traumatic experiences or by fear instilled by their elders: similar traumatic or threat like experiences like "people will think you're crazy" or worse, will permanently suppress any chance most people with any talent might have of developing their abilities.

Imagine something as rare as genius-level artistic talent, and as surrounded by as many horror stories, ignorance, myths, puritanism and perversions as sex (in a somewhat warped society at that); add to it the fear that the paranormal might be "drafted" to be used as some kind of secret police dissident detector or spy, and you have an awesome barrier to paranormal development.

Brad W Foster, 4109 Pleasant Run, Irving, TX 75038, USA.

I've started Damien Broderick's article five times and not gotten past the second page! Ah well, some of us have no mind for number theory.

((So endeth the third and final reading of letters for this issue. Others who wrote were: Derrock Ashby, Terry Carr, Linda Cox Chan, Glen Crawford, Joan Dick, Lee Harding, Eve Harvey, Beverley Lane, Peter Lempert, Kevin McCaw, Russell Parker, LW Symes, Barbara Tennison and Harry Warner Jnr. That just about cleans me out of letters of comment on anything before Rataplan 25, but includes a thing on that issue. I have a few trifles in on that which will appear next issue. Your comments could be there too if you write soon.

Letters of comment have the advantage of filling up the pages of a fanzine with interesting and divergent comments but, for the fanzine editor they also have the added advantage of not having to be solicited, not requiring that you keep on good terms with your contributors and all that sort of thing. On the other hand they have the disadvantage of unpredictable, not coming in on time in the numbers and on the topics that one would like, or not coming at all.

TID TROPHY TIME TOPICS

Well, I seem to have missed the boat a bit this year due to a couple of oversights. I forgot to join EurekaCon and I didn't get an issue of this fanzine into the mail at the appropriate time anyhow. So the Ditmar nominations have been decided without me having had anything to say about them, not that it means much, I'd imagine.

The first thing I noticed when reading through the 1st of nominations was that there has been an awful lot published here in Australia and that I've read very little of it. Six items are listed in the "Best Australian Long SF or Fantasy" category, which must be something of a record as well as probably being a complete list of the eligible works. I've only read one, Valencies, and so my view is biased. From knowing something of George Turner's style I'd say that Yesterday's Men would be something worthwhile, and I'm looking forward to the chance to read Bert Chandler's Kelly Country. Of the other three, which have to be also-rans, their authors are all capable of turning in workman like performances.

In the shorter fiction category, all the nominated works come out of the David King edited book, Dreamworks. If you are like me and haven't read it, you are going to also be a bit in the dark.

I'm not sure about the "Best International SF or Fantasy" category as it contains three novels already listed in the Australian category. This looks like making sure that everybody gets an award as far as I'm concerned. Surely one go at an award for each work is enough. But anyhow, I suppose that it is all rather academic since "Or Who" got a nomination and it likely to romp it in by a large margin. I might even vote for it. It is interesting to see that the rules covering the categories allow the kind of flexibility to put a long running and very successful tv show up against a couple of overseas novels and three local novels. I may be a little biased but I refuse to believe that Thor's Hammer is among the best five or six sf books published in the world in the last year. I wonder if others feel the same way. Or is it just that the nominators have become a little bit sillier than in the past.

This leads on, naturally enough, to the Australian fanzine and fanwriter categories which contain all the usual names except for that of Marc Ortlieb, who seems to have been granted his wish to be free of the Ditmars. The only thing I would like to add is that despite what it says on the nomination form, I didn't publish any issues of Ornithopter in 1983, and so I don't think that you should vote for it. Following right on are the categories for best artist and then best cartoonist; mostly a lot of names that I can't put to pieces. I still reckon that if there are going to be two categories for people who draw or paint things then there should be an equal number of categories for the different sorts of writing that you find in fanzines. Or, to put it another way, the standard of art (or illustration) in Australia is low enough that there is just no need for two categories.

Finally there is the business of the Best SF or Fantasy Editor in which the four named; Paul Collins, Van Ikin, David King and Norstrillia Press have all done their bit this year for sf, but only Collins and King have done that much which is notable. Perhaps it might be an idea to convert this award into some sort of coverall in which the person who has done the most to foster sf or fantasy in the Commonwealth gets some kind of recognition. Either way the general idea seems to be to recognise the side of sf which is not in itself creative but part of the necessary work to get sf before the public. Why

couldn't a film maker, a musician or a bookshop owner be similarly worthy of the kind of recognition that this category makes possible?

Perhaps that would lead to more awards but, as everybody knows, the more of the things that you hand out, the less worthwhile they become. But then again, the more you hand out, the more fun people have at the ceremonies involved - so which way to go? But you can't put one past me; I noticed that we are short one award on what we usually have. Where has the William Atheling Award for Criticism gone? Perhaps there hasn't been any worthwhile criticism this past year, but can the category be dropped for that reason alone?

All in all, a very uninspiring bunch this year. They ask you to get your votes in by Friday 13th April, but if you didn't I wouldn't blame you in the least. It's hardly worth the effort.

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* * *

Finally there is the matter of the Big Red ***A***, a tedious matter to be sure but one which we must broach with each issue, just for those among you who have been letting your participation in this fanzine lapse. If you find the offending mark just to the right here it means that your struggles are almost at an end...