

RATAPLAN 28

April 1984

Registered by Australia Post
Publication No. NBH5483

Oh no officer, we don't have any drugs around here. No acid or grass or speed, and not even any barbiturates or opiates either... er, but we do have a copy of

RATAPLAN TWENTY-EIGHT

April 1984

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A little fanzine sure to send your senses reeling and to put your higher mental faculties to sleep, from Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, AUSTRALIA. Available from some of the best contacts, and just for you at a special rate because you're good people, this fanzine comes in return for a letter of comment, trade of similar good stuff, published contribution (in either words or pictures) and at a subscription rate of \$2.00 for three hits of the usual high grade stuff or \$49.99 for three hits of the super-delux stuff. Would I put you wrong, you can trust me. And of course this fanzine is devoted to publishing material about sf, sf fans and their interests - a very wide spectrum indeed. If, by some mischance, I should fail to hear from you for a while you will get the Big Red *A*. It isn't fatal but it's a bad trip because it means I cut off your supply and you suffer withdrawal which is very uncool. But by using one of the above avenues you can get supplies of further issues and everybody's happy. Dig it! MM.602.

* * *

Opening Shots

Rattling around in the Victoria

As we were walking down one of the hallways to my room Jeff Harris said that he had come to suspect that the layout of the rooms at the hotel was a highly sophisticated psychological maze - not unlike the kinds of mazes that humans put rats through. This was at about the time when I thought I'd figured out the way to get to the room where Valma and I had camped for the duration - right out of the lifts, take any of the next three corridors to the left and then any of the following three or four corridors to the right and then one of several choices to the left -- and when I said this to Jeff he simply raised a meaningful eyebrow and said, "Very sophisticated indeed, how do you know they aren't changing the partitions all the time?"

The whole of the convention was a bit like that. First of all there was the shock of finding that they've rearranged the Victoria again so that you can now get straight from the ballroom to your room via the lifts without having to troop u to the ground floor, the discovery that the Jackaranda room is actually very easy to find if you draw a floor plan of the hotel, and that as well as having a decent bar the hotel now has a coffee shop across the mezzanine floor which is so located that you can keep an eye on the bar entrance and see who goes in and who staggers out. The other delightful discovery was that Melbourne fans haven't forgotten how to put on the kind of crunchy convention that we used to have before the war (or before AUssieCoh).

With no more than one hundred and fifty members the convention was very small in comparison with more recent modern national conventions, and for that reason it seemed to lack some of the sparkle of those events. But that lack of excitement was really only relative to the monster events where you'd have to fight your

way through mighty hosts of people to get anywhere or find anything. This time, whenever you felt inclined to talk with Jack Herman or Irwin Hirsh they were standing right over there or perhaps in the next room along where they were easy to find and to talk to. There really should be more conventions like it.

All the same there was a problem in this kind of luxury because it seems that after all these years of big conventions (you know, the three to six hundred people mark - and North Americans aren't to laugh or even get envious because that's just the way we do things in Australia, have big conventions with only five hundred members), many fans seem to have forgotten how to get the maximum amount of pleasure out of a small convention. Especially if the event they are attending is a national convention and they expect some lavish production - after all even the biggest national convention once boasted a membership of one hundred people, and not too long ago either. But the thing about big conventions is that they generate a kind of internal excitement which picks people up and carries them along, sometimes almost literally. People get swept away in waves of mass enthusiasm almost like some kind of herd instinct (which you get as the crowd surges forward to get the best seats at the masquerade or to get one of the good tables at the banquet... EurekaCon solved that problem by not having a banquet). Or trying to become one of the people in the film room watching the latest epic sci-fi release from Hollywood while the rest of the hoard gets very sore necks from trying to peer up and over heads from the back, whereas the one time I got to see the film room at EurekaCon they were rerunning old Star Trek serials (at least that's what it looked like to me) and there was only one person in the room. And at SynCon last year the Huckster's room was crowded as though it were the centre of a shopping mall in the final three hours shopping before Christmas whereas, at EurekaCon you could have swung any number of cats by very long tails, and only at inconvenience to the cats.

I guess that what people expect out of conventions shapes their enjoyment of the event. But most conventions are like the floor plan of the Victoria Hotel, rather complex affairs which seem to be constantly changing and are sent to try us. Going to conventions is something along the line of a pleasure olympics in which a few standard skills will see you through almost anything. Perhaps the most important is to be able to sleep in almost any environment; be it the middle of the Guest of Honour's speech, the business session, in the middle of a room party or (even more important) in the room next to one. This means that at all times you aren't asleep you will be in fine form, ready and energetic to take on almost anything. The second thing you need to be able to do is to withstand boredom, preferably by going to sleep, but if that isn't possible you should always carry around with you a few books and magazines (since it's at a science fiction convention you should never be seen reading anything to do with sf - one year I made quite a mark carrying around a copy of Armies and Weapons which had a large picture of an exercising French tank on the front and a very tasteful ad for landmines on the back cover). As well you should be armed with some small cards and a pen so that you can write little commentaries on the program item and spread them through the audience - following their passage by the ripple of suppressed laughter they create or, you could always try chatting to the person next to you - except that it usually turns out that they are the only person in the whole room who is really interested in the topic under discussion.

That is always assuming that you're at the program item. You can always make your way to whichever location it is that fans seem to want to congregate at the convention, it changes every time so you have to do a few scouting expeditions first to find the right location or otherwise you could have made the mistake of picking the spot where those people who don't know anybody seem to congregate in the hope of getting to meet the right people, or you could find yourself in the midst of the crowd who are actually all subscribers to Armies and Weapons, and then you are in trouble.

But I find myself straying from the point, which in this case really shouldn't be about the basic "survival at Conventions" course. The fact is, though, that this past EurekaCon was not the sort of huge event that anybody could write about in generalities, it was a puzzle that every member had to work out personally. Unlike the kind of convention where you could be sure that at least a couple of hundred people enjoyed the same things together, the number was much less here and who's to say how many actually "enjoyed" anything. I suppose that I've been to enough conventions now not to expect anything from them except to come out at the other end a bit poorer and possibly a bit more exhausted. EurekaCon did that to me, but in a number of events which weren't part of the convention itself - food expeditions where we finally lobbied into a Lebanese restaurant which layed on an improvised banquet at \$13 per head. (the groans when after we'd all stuffed ourselves full of food the waitress said that that was the last of the entrees and the main dishes would soon be coming, and we had to be back by eight to see the Ditmars given out though as it turned out I had to collect two of the things and they might have waited an hour or so for me to totter back). And there we were in the "fan" room SHOFFing away like mad when Valma announced that she was hungry and we discovered that one of the Pancake Parlours was open until 12.30, leading to a quick dash and a confused waitress who managed to deal with a dozen or so semi-deranged fans in swift order (even fans appreciate efficiency). And many more too complex to mention.

I suppose that what I'm coming to is the bit in essays which are headed "Conclusions". It is going to have to be that as a national convention EurekaCon was not a great event, and if I enjoyed myself a great deal it was because I knew my way around and had a good time talking to lots of people who I only get to see once in a year. Perhaps expectations had something to do with it because the people putting the event together had linked it to their running of AussieCon II next year. I suppose that a lot of people who went had expected some kind of dress rehearsal and instead all they got to see was a modest little convention run strictly along traditional lines. There was, of course, the Roger Weddall generated side-show of dissent among the ranks of the AussieCon organisers (as if all convention committees didn't have the same kinds of problems) and the sometimes interesting spectacle of John Foyster (the Chairman of AussieCon II) deep in discussion with this or that group of people about the allocation of space at the convention and pointing meaningfully at a floorplan of the Southern Cross which he had with him at all times. And then there was the typical enthusiastic and enquiring face of Christine Ashby peering over the top of the registration table wanting to be involved in everything and wanting to remain in charge of events. But unfortunately, if there was a dress-rehearsal aspect it was in the organisation behind the scenes and not in the up-front organisation. So many might rate EurekaCon as a failure even though it might have achieved its secondary objectives.

However, conventions are what you make them, and what others involved too make them. One of the programatic highlights of the convention was put on by a whole bunch of fans who read some of the more humorous bits from Damien Broderick's now novel, Transmitters. And I can feel a new heading coming on.

Book review - Virus in the Head

Transmitters, by Damien Broderick, Ebony Books, \$7.95, 320pp.

After I'd sat up until the small hours of the morning to complete reading this book I went and reread D West's article, "Performance". I wonder if Damien has?

But before I write more about Transmitters I suppose I must confess a certain partiality to Broderick's writing which other's might not share. The books of his which I've read (except the first one) share in common an interest in playing with concepts which are generally in the philosophical, sociological and

psychological areas and use much of the jargon which comes from those special fields. In one part of Transmitters you'll find words like hegemony and hermeneutics as well as many of their theoretical brothers and sisters all joined into what seems like a tossed salad of concepts. There was more to it that I could grasp at one in the morning (and probably at one in the afternoon too) and while whole passages could be bypassed without losing the narrative thread it certainly explains what the author thinks in going on in the novel. This is fairly far removed from the "sugar coated pill" idea of science fiction because Broderick serves this kind of thing up in thick and gooey doses, but if you happen to like this approach and can take the pace, you might find yourself attracted to this kind of writing too. It is worth trying to see if you like this kind of thing because it is absorbing to read the work of an author whose brain appears to be wired up slightly differently to the brains of most of his colleagues - see the recent interview in SCIENCE FICTION for further details. And now back to the main theme of this little piece.

In the concluding paragraphs of West's "Performance" he writes:

"Fandom is a performance. That is to say that it is the acting out not so much of a reality as of an invention. There is a difference between invention which is fiction and invention which is not. Fiction entertains and informs - lies simply deceive. The performance which goes on in fandom and fanzines is essentially fiction, but when it is taken as non-fiction is it becomes lies.

"This is not a matter of whether some incident described in a fanzine is true in the sense that it "really happened". As Chris Priest pointed out in DEADLOSS, literal reportage can be less true to the reality of events than an account which includes invented additions or substitutions. Any novel could be called a pack of lies, in the sense that it purports to describe events which never happened - but there is also a sense in which its inventions may be entirely true. There is a literal truth which is assessed by the degree of its conformity with the observed reality, and there is also a symbolic truth which expresses itself in metaphorical form. There is a form of lying which is misrepresentation or concealment of reality, but there is also a form of creative lying which is a new presentation or revelation of reality. Fiction is creative lying, and so is the whole fannish performance."

Transmitters is about some people who are fans. It is set in Melbourne and runs from the early sixties to the present day and since its main characters are invented you could say that this is a work of fiction which represents, in an altered form, the relationships between some Melbourne fans in that period. (If you were being stfnal you could say that this is an "alternate-reality" story - but since I'm not in that frame of mind I won't). Most of the main characters contain within themselves various personality traits belonging to, most recognisably, John Bangsund, Lee Harding, John Foyster and (perhaps) Bruce Gillespie so that it is often quite entertaining to work out which bits come from which people. Also, there are events which seem to be lifted out of the lives of those real fans and given to the created ones - the most notable one that I picked up is when Joseph Williams passes on his job working on a hi-fi magazine to Brian Wagner, just as Damien Broderick did to John Bangsund, more or less, back at the beginning of the seventies, and also when we read of Mike Murphy having Bruce Gillespie's "crushing blows". But there is more to it than just that, there is something of the feeling of fandom in Melbourne in the sixties and early seventies, and of the way in which the social climate of that era effected the ways in which people (and fans) thought and acted then.

However the differences between the "real" fandom and the one which Damien Broderick has created seem to me more powerful than the points of crossover.

Others may feel differently and this would be because the general nature of fandom is perceived differently by each participant who creates her or his own performance in the on-going business and at the same time judges others by the standards of their performances. Does this mean that Transmitters really isn't a book about fans but just about people described by the author as fans? Well, I really don't know. Transmitters is certainly not a fannish book because it does not depend on fandom for its existence, it could probably be set in any group of mildly radical university students or a small country town although some of the points which the author is interested in making and some of the typographical and format effects he uses would not work in another social context. Most of the concerns of the major characters are not fannish either but more directed by the social concerns of the period - music, the Vietnam moratoriums, drugs and the philosophy/psychology of R D Laing - but then this seems only reasonable since the book has to be sold and communicate something to a general readership and anything that the author has to write which is fully fannish can end up in a fanzine which is where it is in context.

However a book doesn't have to be fannish to be about fandom and to deal with some of the things that go into a fannish personality. This is the reason that I lifted a couple of paragraphs out of "Performance". Most of the really great writing in fandom has included extensions and developments of the truth of what happened and what was said, just as it mercifully leaves out the dull, the boring and the superfluous. It might well be that Transmitters goes one step further and tries to leave out the performance aspect altogether and get straight to the people behind the fannish masks. In this he has probably succeeded because we are all average and "mundane" people in the final analysis. This is what Transmitters brings out and is, of course, in its extension of that kind of reality also a performance.

There are a couple of problems with the presentation of the characters if we take this point of view. The main one is that the fanzine extracts which Broderick has invented for this book are all too well written and often far too erudite to be from real fanzines. When was the last time you read a paragraph like the one I'm going to lift from Ray Findlay's LEFT OF CENTAUR, August 1978?

"Holonistic analysis is dynamic (or what Popper calls 'non-stationary'), representing events as a self-generating teleonomy, open-ended towards the future. Complex structures are even capable of 'paedomorphosis': retracing their developmental paths and starting from scratch. Because Marxist critique depends on the 'dialectic', which finally is a mechanistic instrument, it is restricted to static (or 'stationary') extrapolation along rigid pre-ordained lines: a teleology."

But what is probably more off-putting for a person who has read probably thousands of fanzines is that the extracts presented here are all rather more in the line of personal revelation which helps to move the narrative along rather than what one normally gets to read; aimed at the establishment and maintaining of a Westian "performance". The only character who does actually perform, in that sense of the word, is Brian Wagner whose fanzine extracts read fairly much like the contents of any average intelligent, articulate but fairly self-centred fan. (He doesn't come across too sympathetically and that may be some kind of author's comment on the general run of fanzine fans. It turns out that Brian Wagner publishes fanzines because he's lonely - which is a pretty good reason but not, I imagine, enough to keep people at it once they get fairly socially involved with lots of fellow fans - this is perhaps something which could be explored fully in a fannish novel but isn't taken up in Transmitters.)

Did I enjoy this book? I must have because I read it in two sittings (it might have been one but I had this essay deadline which wouldn't go away) and stayed

up until the small hours of the morning to finish it. As I said at the beginning, this may just be because I find myself attracted to the writing which results from the wiring of Broderick's brain (he'd no doubt describe it in terms of neurons, synapses and transmitters but my first experience of the practical marvels of science came from putting together crystal sets and it has stuck with me), but it may be because the various elements shuffled together in this novel go to make up a very good story with some personal bite to it. I'd recommend it it, and especially to fans.

If you're interested in getting a copy of this book but haven't seen it around you could try writing to Ebony Books, Box 1294L, Melbourne, Vict 3001, AUSTRALIA.

Some thoughts about the politics of uranium

Far be it from me to dob in a mate, but you may have noticed that we haven't seen Joseph Nicholas's DUFF report yet. I know that he's got some excuses for not having produced it yet but perhaps no excuse is good enough. Even so, just at the moment he and Judith Hanna are fairly heavily involved in the CND and, apart from anything else, they produce the newsletter for the Pimlico Branch of the CND. I'd have to admit that the CND is a fairly important business, but important enough to stop the publication of a DUFF report? (It has not slipped my attention that John Foyster published only a little bit of his report too - and I have to say that I'm not at all convinced that being the Chairman of a WorldCon is any good excuse. In fact it looks pretty much like a put up job to me, trying to get out of publishing the interesting bits of the report.)

At any rate, Joseph, being a natural fanzine editor at heart, went off looking for material for his new little fanzine. In a letter to me he wrote, amongst other things (or inter alia, as they say at the better schools), about "the Hawke government's reneging on its manifesto commitment to halt uranium mining (don't they realise that by continuing it they're providing an input to the front end of the fuel cycle that results in the production of the nuclear weapons they so detest?)"

This got me a bit annoyed because it took a fairly lopsided view of the politics of the uranium business and has the unmentioned assumption that the only thing of any relevance to the mining and use of uranium is the end result - this leaves out any of the middle business about deciding whether and how the stuff should be dug up. But I was not perhaps as annoyed as I might have been because it seems only reasonable to me that a member of a group which is doing its utmost to fight the deployment and development of nuclear weapons is allowed to be a little bit one-sided. In fact, after having thought about it for a while I realised that one of the things which had annoyed me about the so-called debate about nuclear power conducted in WAHF-FULL over the past year or so was that it was mostly carried out in terms of the physics and "morality" of the business and with little (if any) mention of the politics of the matter.

The other aspect of Joseph's letter which annoyed me was that it presumed to tell my government what to do when he was having more than enough trouble with his own. I suppose that most people overseas might see uranium in a different light to most Australians who see it just as another metal which multi-national corporations dig out of the ground and take overseas, returning some money in its place. As for nuclear war which could be fought partly using stuff dug up here, it seems to be generally expected that bombs will be lobbed onto a few key US Bases a long way from where most of us live, and we'll see the rest of the war on tv, if people in the northern hemisphere are still sending pictures. (Of course this may not be the way in which it will happen, but it seems to be the general impression that people have.) As a result the problem of uranium, if it is a problem, takes on a far less immediate and a much more political nature than just the business of survival which the CND might have.

Of course the ALP realises what uranium is used for and the sorts of risks that it takes in allowing the stuff to be sent overseas. That is why the Party Platform opposes its mining and export. Unfortunately the "platform" has never been considered binding by the Parliamentary Labor Party - those people who have been elected to parliament as ALP members and therefore see things less in terms of what is good or bad for the country and the party but in terms of what is going to keep or win votes at the next election.

The problem of Roxby Downs, which all the fuss seems to be about at the moment, goes back at least to the period 1972-75 when, so many people would say, a Labor government dragged this country screaming into the Twentieth Century after twenty-three years of conservative rule. The reasons for the dirty business of 11 November 1975 are complex - but one of them which seems to have stayed with the party is the accusation that they tried to "do too much too quickly". It seemed that their philosophy in that period was to push through as many of their reformist policies as they could which had been stored up for two decades as quickly as they could, before the forces of reaction took back their government. Many members of the public and the ALP held the popular belief that it was "natural" for the conservatives to rule, the electorate only turned to Labor when there was a crisis - so if you get a chance at government you grab it with both hands and work as hard as you can, while you can.

When the ALP returned to power in March 1983, under the leadership of Bob Hawke, it emphasised not only the Hawke personality but also notions of national reconciliation, redevelopment and job creation. After seven years of what many had seen as increasingly oppressived, devisive and paternalistic government the ALP promise was the promise of light in the distance, and very attractive.

The new Labor government, having achieved power, has two distinct differences from the earlier one. Firstly, this government is more moderate in its short term policies and, secondly, it is intending to stay in power for more than one three year term. The problem they have is in how to achieve this second goal - and that is partly the reason for the first difference. The other reason might be just that Hawke is a more conservative man than Whitlam.

Changing geographical focus for a moment, South Australia is perhaps the least blessed of all the Australian states. On the map it looks large enough but in fact the areas which are usable to western civilisation are restricted to the south-eastern corner - what the locals call the "settled area". Until the 1970s this state too was dominated by conservative governments relying on malapportionment of electorates for its parliamentary majorities. When this was broken the state enjoyed almost a decade of some of the most socially exciting government seen in Australia since the 1890s. But in 1979 the conservatives were returned in an electoral result which seemed to surprise even them.

Possibly the only good thing that the conservatives had done for South Australia in their long rule was to encourage industrial development - iron ore mining, smelting and ship building at the coastal ports of Whyalla and Port Pirie and a large manufacturing industry in Adelaide turning out white goods, cars and the like. For South Australians, who had felt some inferiority at being simply a rural state previously, this was no doubt a good thing. For the large numbers of migrants brought out during the fifties and sixties to man these industries, it was the only way they had ever known the state. So, when the bottom started to fall out of secondary industry during the seventies most people were worried (and this may have had something to do with the conservative victory at the 1979 elections). And at the same time as the state seemed to be going down a hole the people living there began to hear about the new economic miracles in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory due to the exploitation of mineral deposits.

Enter Roxby Downs.

This proposed development first came to the attention of the general public in about 1981 when the South Australian government announced it as the great hope for the economic survival and development of the state. Whether this is correct or not is beside the point in comparison to the public feelings which were generated about it. In the second half of 1982, with the state election looming, the conservatives said that if the ALP were returned to power it would stop the Roxby Downs development, and that would mean the end of the state. The leader of the state ALP argued against the development but said that since approval of the development had already been given he would not be able to repudiate that agreement.

The party was lucky to be able to use this because, even though it was supposed to oppose uranium development, if the party wanted to make sure it won the election it could not appear to oppose the one area of development in the state about which such public expectations had been created.

And the end result of the course of state and Commonwealth politics is that we have state and Commonwealth Labor Parties in power, and we have party policy which is opposed to uranium development, and yet we have seen those parties providing police protection to the mining work against the protesters who only want the parties to live up to their policies and who otherwise probably agree with the things that the parties do.

The reason for this odd and unfortunate juxtaposition seems to be electoral. The electorate at large doesn't care much or understand why the party has an anti-uranium policy, but it does understand that the party said it was going to support and encourage development and the media (which is largely conservative owned) reinforces this idea and uses almost any opportunity it can to attack the ALP. If the party stops development at Roxby Downs it could well bring on electoral defeat - certainly at the state level and potentially at the Commonwealth level. And since the party has decided that there is no advantage in sitting on the opposition benches it is not inclined to tempt fate. I agree with them at least on that point.

And so the question is - what is the right thing to do? The Labor government may be dominated by the right wing but it has introduced some socially important legislation and generally encouraged a greater sense of national pride and activity. Australia is a better, more positive, place to live now than it was a year or so ago. If the ALP is able to stay in power and consolidate itself it may be able to do a lot more which is useful and important - in the long run it may even be able to see itself in a position to stop uranium mining.

Put against that the possibility of a conservative government which, apart from anything else, would certainly encourage uranium mining - rather than just tolerate it - and what option have you got?

What is the right thing to do? If you are opposed to uranium mining you seem to have one of two options - working from within the party or public education.

However the ALP has always been a fairly fragile organisation. Three times since 1916 it has split and many of its members defected to the conservative parties, bringing about long periods of conservative rule. Faction struggles within the party seem to be growing at the moment and uranium is one cause - one member of the left-wing of the party has already resigned from the Cabinet because of it. The issue could well cause another party split if pressed too hard, and where would we be then.

Public education may work slowly, but against the expectations in the community

which have been built up since the 1940s about the value and necessity of development, and which are fostered by the conservative forces, it is all up hill.

If there is a solution to the problem of uranium mining I can't see it. Perhaps there is no problem in the first place and there is absolutely nothing wrong with allowing stuff which is to be found buried within Australia to be carried off and turned into stuff which is not only harmful (nuclear waste) but potentially fatal (nuclear weapons), but I can't see that either. It seems to me that in the final analysis the real question doesn't have to do with uranium at all, but the cost of a relatively good government.

Of course we may not need to take the blame for any of this at all. After all it is not Australians who want uranium and it is not us who are using it in power plants and possibly in bombs. It is overseas people and governments who are doing that kind of thing. So what are the excuses of the people who live over there?

A questioning

Somebody is going to have to explain to me why it is that this issue so far has become so serious -- and mentioned politics too. It isn't that I had wanted it to turn out this way. Perhaps it has something to do with being on holidays at the moment and what with not having to think about work or university my brain naturally seeks to fill up the vacant space. But since my brain is usually vacant anyhow the whole thing is beyond me.

But if this sort of thing goes on I can see that I'm in danger of producing the kind of fanzine that Damien Broderick seems to think is produced all the time. The next thing I know it will be letters of comment from Ray Findlay and Joseph Williams -- the fact that I've already received a note addressed from Brian Wagner fills me with no confidence at all for the future. I could be slipping through some kind of space warp.

Valma and I are spending these holidays at home, attempting to make some sense of the chaos which has grown to surround us over the past year or so. We bought a filing cabinet and by using that we've organised a fair bit of junk and found some more shelf space. The only thing to do with vacant bookshelves is to go out and buy some more books, which is what we did, by visiting a place called Academic Reminders and then another bookshop yesterday. My haul was a copy of the games from the Karpov-Korchnoi World Championship Chess Match in 1978, also copies of The Bicycle and the Bush, The Australian Workforce 1910-11 to 1960-61, A Constitutional History of Australia, and three copies of On Top Down Under which is about Australian cricket captains; three copies because they are being remaindered at such a cheap price that you never know when a spare will come in handy. (We were going to send one to Chris Priest after having read of his sad plight in the most recent DEADLOSS, to cheer him up, but then we read in ANSIBLE that the advance on The Glamour was so huge that he had to go out and buy a car to spend some of it...)

After I'd loaded up with the history we went around to the other place and spent an hour or so looking at books about food and how to cook it. We came away with only nine books there, but since eight of them only cost 30p each and even a couple of them are duplicates for "that special occasion" I thought we got off fairly lightly.

And just as we were about to leave the second bookshop I was glancing through a rack of odds and ends and came across a book telling how to play and win all sorts of computer games, not very exciting except that it was written by Arnie Katz and Bill Kunkle. Goshwow! So there's two more boy-wonder gafiates

gone off to make their fortunes in the wider world of publishing. But just because I was out on a book buying spree doesn't mean that I bought a copy.

* * *

Leanne Frahm, apart from being one of the very best fan writers in Australia and having a pleasant personality (and all sorts of other nice things that you would normally find written up in a blurb) made the mistake of writing to me a couple of issues ago, complaining that my standards had fallen. I was not publishing the high quality material that I should have been publishing. Little did she realise that it was a trap which I had set especially for her, and a letter went in her direction as soon as the trap was sprung. The following is the result, but Leanne needn't think that she will get off so lightly, especially if she finds that she unfortunately has spare time on her hands.

Progress in Work

Leanne Frahm

There's a classic line in Fritz Lieber's "Gonna Roll the Bones" that occurs to me every now and then, when I say to myself, lightly paraphrased, "Frahmie, you've crapped out."

The last time I used it was early this year, the last week in January to be precise. It may have been a Monday - it feels like a Monday-type of phrase - but that's not important. What was important was that at that time, in the gloomiest depths of irreparable despair, I knew I'd crapped out as a writer.

The talent was finished, mined out as cleanly as a seam of coal that stops dead at a wall of bassalt, the tunnels sealed off, the entrance boarded over, the pit ponies put out to pasture.

I had been writing fairly regularly, but there had been no sales for a long time. The letters of rejection quivered with admiration, but they were still rejections. I was finding that dismal and disheartening. Where was the flair, the spark, that other writers possessed that turned admiration into acceptance?

One beacon shon faintly on the horizon. I was hopeful of at least one story that I'd sent to Terry Dowling for the proposed Dowling/Ellison anthology. I had liked that story, small though it was, very much.

Terry's reply, when it came, was deflating. "...My preference would be to wait and see what else I am sent that 'Land's End' can stand in contrast to... I would prefer to hold on to your story and see how it fits in with whatever else would go with it." I was abashed. My story was reduced to this, to comparative testing like Drive versus Omo, or Holden versus Falcon, neither good enough to be accepted, or bad enough to be rejected, in a state of limbo where only stain-removal-power and engine performance counted.

Terry did send the story to Harlan for consideration, though, and eventually I received an encouraging letter, four pages of suggestions and corrections, aimed at producing a better story. I admitted that Terry was right; my story was a shadow without substance. Harlan suggested the solidity to make it real, and I set to rewrite it along those lines. Doggedly.

When I was finished, I found myself staring at a manuscript of a story I didn't really like. It was solid, now, had a story-line, was double its previous length, but to me it looked like a patchwork quilt with gaps showing and

stitches missing, unconvincing. I was completely bewildered, and sick. What kind of fake was I - unable to fulfill a perfectly reasonable request from a perfectly reasonable Harlan Ellison?

"Frahmie, you've crapped out."

I sent off the manuscript dispiritedly, but that night I announced my retirement from the field of literature. No sales, an attempted novel that seemed destined to die aborning, and this latest calamity. There was no point, I declared sadly but nobly, in wasting my time or anyone else's with this pretense, this frippery. I possessed no flair, no spark. The family had suffered enough, I had suffered enough - yes, it must have been a Monday night.

The next morning, while idly appreciating the pink of my rubber gloves against the grey of the dishwater, I became aware of the voices on the local ABC programme on the radio. The announcer was interviewing a man who intended to run a Creative Writing Course at the TAFE college. "How nice," I subvocalised miserably. He had organised one last year, and it had been 'a great success'. I curled my lip. This year he would also be running an advanced class for past pupils and anyone else interested...

The curl became a quiver, and I stood transfixed and dripping. Was this, then, a Divine Answer to my problem?

My writing was, after all, still operating on instinct alone. I had attended the Turner/Carr workshop in 1979, but the emphasis there was on producing stories, the theory being that I'd had some sort of basic knowledge to want to attend. However, events seemed to be indicating that I didn't have that skill - I knew nothing of the craft of writing, if there was such a thing. Would the flair, the spark, be generated by an apprenticeship? At that stage I was desperate enough to believe anything. I enrolled.

So how's it going?

Pretty damn all right, actually.

The gentleman on the radio, Mike, and his wife, Ruth, are the instructors. It's hard for me to make a judgement, being an obvious novice, but they seem to be doing a good job. Mike and Ruth are from Texas, and have done free-lance radio and television scripting, article - and story - writing, fiction and non-fiction books, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Ruth has taught also, and Mike has been a radio announcer. They talk engagingly about their subject from wide experience.

And their subject is writing - all kinds and every kind. They denigrate nothing, not even Mills and Boon, and least of all, science fiction. They've bullied and coaxed us into trying new forms - scriptwriting for radio, stage and television, pieces on technical processes, non-fiction articles - things I'd never thought to try before, but things I now find interesting, and even fun. Maybe I'll never write the definitive book on 'Building Your Own Computer', but at least (move over Eric Lindsay) I've found I could try.

And after all this experience, I'm going to say something so ingenuous that most of you will either screech with laughter, or throw up: I have found that there is a craft. That there are rules for writing, that the rules make sense, and that an enormous amount of work should be done on a basic idea to make it into a real story. There. Naive, wasn't I?

Take the syllogism, for instance. I bet you all know the syllogism. I didn't. And isn't it the prettiest, neatest device possible? Or take the scene. All I

ever knew about scenes was that they were clumped together to make an act in a play. Now I know it's something else, and sort of important. Bridges between scenes, point-of-view - not just that there shouldn't be more than one to a scene, but why - the basic structure of writing, all these entrancing things I'm discovering that you probably knew about all along. In fact I'm slowly becoming convinced that it was a miracle I'd managed to sell anything before this.

All this in just six weeks so far. (At the end of the full sixteen weeks I'll be offering incredibly abstruse book reviews.) But all is not sweetness and enlightenment. Being in a creative writing class means coping with the other students.

The other students are both the most interesting and the most annoying part of the project. There seems to be something about a writing class that draws people who expect to be admired and who can't handle it when they're not. They rarely expect to have to work, apparently, only to exhibit (modestly) their talent. There was a touch of that at the workshop, and now, strangely, in this class where Turner-style criticism (which can be devastating) isn't used at all.

I've seen a very nice woman turn aggressively intransigent when it was delicately suggested that her characters lacked convincing motivation. I've watched a male student leave after two lessons when Ruth made it politely clear that the class could not spend all its time on his novel. I've heard the phrase "But what I meant was..." used time after time without the obvious realisation that "meant" is not good enough for the readers. I've watched Mike take three hours to explain the syllogism, and the defeated sag of his shoulders at the end when he realised they still didn't understand it.

Most of the class are graduates from the preparatory class held last year. I was astonished to find that none of them - not one - had written anything since that course. The obvious questions are "why?", and what are they doing back again? (But being inherently polite, I haven't asked them.) They all seem to be becoming less enthusiastic as the weeks go by. As one girl said to me, it's so hard trying to think of something new each week. Something new each week? What would she have made of the daily grind of the workshop? I get the feeling that if it was a class on macrame or origami they'd have felt equally fulfilled and happily under less mental strain.

Now I have a very real fear that the rest of the class will dissolve around me, and it will be cancelled, before I've learnt everything...

It would be a nice ending to say that in the creative writing class I have found the flair, that the spark has miraculously descended to halo my head, that I face the future with confidence, etc. Nice, but a trifle optimistic. At best, I'm better equipped than I was, and have a more realistic idea of the sheer work that must go into writing.

I may still crap out, but I'm delaying the announcement of my retirement - for a little while, anyway.

* * *

Australian Fanzines

After a year and a bit I begin to find that I have said all the deep and meaningful things that I want to say about the business of producing fanzines.

I'm now in danger of starting to repeat myself, and while this might not be a bad thing for people who haven't seen too many issues of this fanzine it would certainly be a bit tedious for the fanzine editors to have to read all about their sins for a second or third time.

At about the same time I was having these thoughts for the first time it occurred to me that there is nobody here in Australia who is giving decent coverage to the local fanzines which are being produced. It is something which is probably worth doing, I think, because while "in depth" fanzine reviews are useful in trying to get to some kind of philosophy of fanzine production, they don't actually deal with the day-to-day business of getting fanzines produced and into the mail.

The qualification I'd best make right away is that I do not receive all the fanzines being produced in Australia - in fact I suspect I don't see half of them. The half that I don't see are media sf fanzines. The only advantage I can think of in not getting those fanzines is that my bookshelf isn't infinitely large, the disadvantage is that I have no idea of what is happening in media sf fandom these days.

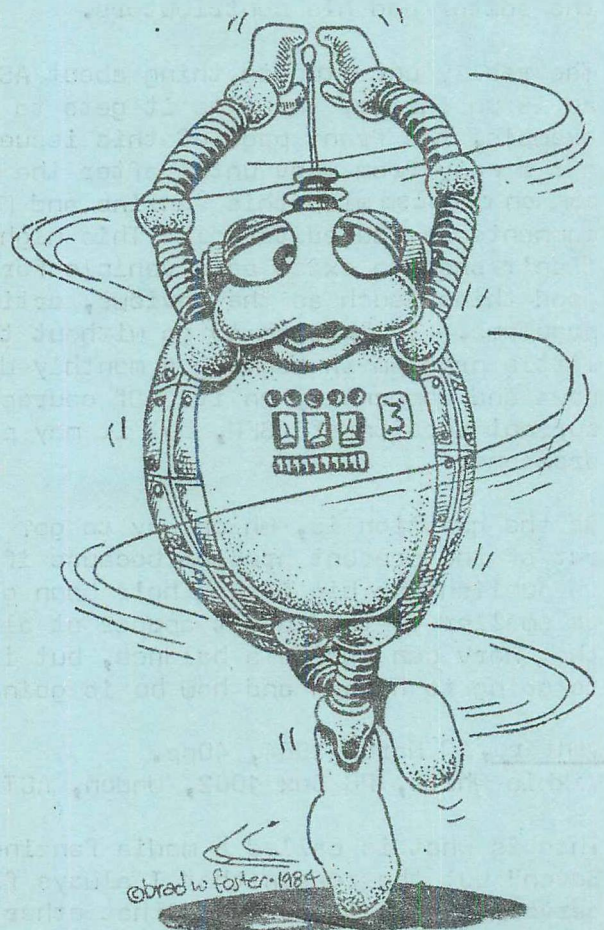
Anyhow...*

Agro 4, 34pp.

Peter Lempert, PO Box 310, Smithfield, NSW 2164.

Agro seems to be published mainly as a vehicle for fiction. This issue contains two stories, a piece of poetry, a report of Conquest 83 (a media convention held in Brisbane) and a letter column. It should be no news to anybody that I generally don't hold with the notion of publishing fiction in fanzines - Peter would probably reply that Agro isn't really a fanzine then, which makes my mentioning it possibly pointless. All the same, I have dipped into both the stories and found them rather hard going, but as I see that this is the final issue of Agro this is something up with which some of us will no longer have to put. Whether Peter intends to publish something more general in the future is not revealed here.

Of more general interest is the convention report and a page or so at the end of the issue with letters of comment on previous issues. The convention report itself is useful because it gives some idea of what a large scale media sf convention is like but all the same it suffers from many of the faults of a "then we went there and did this with these people" report because although we get a fair idea of what the event was like for Peter we don't get a very clear impression of what the convention as a whole was like. (Of course D West remarks that if there were five-hundred people at a convention there



are five hundred points of view, but out of that number of points of view there should be available a more general overall idea of a convention, especially if one spends a fair bit of time at the programme items.) The conclusion was interesting - in addition to the fact that the report actually had a little bit at the end called a conclusion. It says: "Media fans are like any other, they're out to have a good fun time, only their Ghods are different. Sure, some of them are strictly media fans, but there are others whose interests are as varied as my own." Which seems to be stating the obvious because just about every fan has interests apart from fandom - the interesting point is the attitude a fan has to fandom, not the attitude to the rest of life.

The letters of comment are a bit depressing since they mainly contain negative comments on the previous issues. I don't think that these letters should have been published but it is always difficult to find much that is worth writing about fiction which isn't very good.

Australian SF News, 37, 20pp.

Nervyn Bunns, 305 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Vict 3000.

ASFN is close to being the best fanzine, and yet at the same time the worst fanzine being published in Australia. It is perhaps the best because in an issue you can find interesting and well written articles and reviews from the likes of George Turner, John Foyster and Jeff Harris, as well as letters from such well known people as Terry Carr, Chris Priest, Dave Langford and Terry Dowling. These contributions tend to give ASFN a serious, informed but not overly weighty content, and this in addition to many and varied little snippets of news and information (which are admittedly not always well organised in odd little nooks). Nervyn has managed to cobble together a stew of a fanzine which usually turns out to be fairly attractive, the sort of thing that can be gobbled up in one sitting because it is varied, and as a result of the editor and his contributors.

The really unfortunate thing about ASFN is that Nerv takes so long to generate an issue that by the time it gets to its readers the news is stale. For example, the front page of this issue gives the Ditmar nominations but I didn't get a copy from Nerv until after the winners had been announced. This is a common problem with this fanzine and Nerv is well aware of it, to judge from his comments in the editorial. This might not be such a bad thing if the fanzine didn't seem to exist as a vehicle for spreading news. In fact in many ways the good things such as the reviews, articles and letters are what create Nerv's problems. If he were to do without them there would then probably be very little problem in meeting a monthly deadline with eight or twelve pages of news and commentary on it. Of course this wouldn't be as interesting as the current version of ASFN, but it may present Nerv and his readers with less problems.

So the question is, which way to go? I suppose that the solution might come out of the present problem because if Nerv can't get together the time and money to publish the big issues he's been getting out, the issues will simply have to be smaller or they won't appear at all. And if it isn't to come to that I hope that Nerv can strike a balance, but it will need a deliberate decision on what is going to happen and how he is going to make it happen that way.

Centero, 10 March 1984, 40pp.

Nikkie White, PO Box 1082, Woden, ACT 2606.

This is what is called a media fanzine. It is centred upon the tv show "Blake's Seven" but the reason that I always find this fanzine so interesting is that it serves me as a window onto that other kind of fandom. It seems a bit like an alternative universe over there, with many things being so similar in some ways

and yet so different in others. It is those differences which separate the two versions of the same kinds of people and they are probably deep enough that they will continue to separate the groups. I read here the names of the winners of the Fan Awards which were given at Medtrek, and the people who won are simply unknown to me - I wonder if that situation is reversed with the Ditmars?

As always Centero is well if plainly presented, with the various sections presented in a fairly logical sequence so that you can find your way around. The fanzine reviews and notes on clubs are the most valuable parts for me because they are presented to tell me about what a club offers its members and the contents of a fanzine. I suppose that this way of doing things results from the more commercial nature of media sf fandom where most fanzines and other desirable items are to be had for cash, meaning that there is a need for a buyers guide. But, since I'm not buying, the reviews are a useful guide to what is around and what is happening.

There is some fiction in this issue which, as usual, I skipped. That's just a personal preference. As usual the letters were generally focused on the tv series around which the fanzine is centered and while most of them are well enough written and have interesting or unusual perspectives on the show, I sometimes wish that I could find out more about the people behind the letters and other contributions - there are the rare occasions when the mask is lifted but that is only enough to make me want more. But perhaps that's as unrealistic as a fan who might want a fanzine like Rataplan to be full of book reviews since editors publish the kinds of fanzines they want rather than to some kind of theoretical ideal.

At any rate, the difference between Centero and most other fanzines I read is something which I enjoy.

Forbidden Worlds 9, March 1984, 14pp.
RJ Mapson, PO Box 7087, Cloisters Square, WA 6000.

I have been reminded by the editor of this fanzine that it is published in Western Australia and therefore should have got a mention in the previous issue as one of the surviving WA fanzines. Too right, except on two counts. Firstly, this is the first publication that I'd say has come from Robert Mapson in the past year or so that looks anything like a fanzine; and secondly because if I had mentioned it, the vast gulf between this style of fanzine and the others would have been too much to encompass all in one short column. So, apologies all round and a quick ponder on whether Forbidden Worlds is a fanzine anyhow.

The main thing that this publication seems to lack is any connection with the rest of the fanzines being published in Australia. It has some interesting thoughts and fiction in it but not in a usual format and somehow all run together so that a little piece of fiction will join very neatly with some form of editorial comment. The construction as a whole is fairly interesting and the use of montage and other artistic devices makes Forbidden Worlds a much more completed and self contained unit than most fanzines which are a collection of different bits and pieces in different tones.

It may be well presented and it may contain some well expressed sentiments, but is it a fanzine as we understand the term? I'm not convinced.

Sikander 9 and 9.5, February 1984, 32pp and 28pp.
Irwin Hirsh, 279 Domain Road, South Yarra, Vict 3141.

Apart from my own egocentric biases and the feeling that Mervyn Bunns is capable of turning out something a good deal better if he decides what he really wants to do with ASFN, Sikander is the best fanzine being published in Australia at

the moment. In a mere couple of issues Irwin has developed a good sense of the sorts of things that he wants to publish. I cannot say that I fully go along with that sense because, as is often the case with a general circulation fanzine, the articles which find their way into print reflect more the state of mind and interests of the editor than any sort of consensus of what fans like to read.

The first half of this issue of Sikander has little if nothing to do with sf or sf fandom, and although some of the articles may have been well written it is really not so interesting to read nine pages of "what I'm doing at college" or five pages of "a day in the life of Marc Ortlieb". The only thing that both of these contributions showed me was that being Leigh Edmonds is really no less interesting than being Irwin Hirsh or Marc Ortlieb - only the things that interest these two people are often boring to me (and I expect that if I wrote seven pages about an evening spent trying to get unwilling pieces of plastic to look like an Avro CF-105 Arrow other people would have a similar reaction - and I wouldn't blame them, which is the reason why I try not to write such things). The one item in this section that I did enjoy was John Alderson writing about surviving through the drought - but that's because I happen to find most thing written about life in the country interesting.

After the solid and well presented, but generally unexciting first half, it was a relief to turn to the letter supplement which is issue 9.5. Mainly it is composed of various comments on the Ted White opus from the previous issue. This makes for lively reading but I also get the impression that a problem a lot of the correspondents had was that they article that they are responding to was just too big and too definitive to be able to take it all in in one go. The interesting thing to see will be whether discussion of the whole matter continues into further issues and spreads to other fanzines.

But, all up and despite being the best that Australia has to offer, Sikander is still fairly uninteresting in the material that it presents and the fairly solid "North American Genzine" idiom that its editor uses. It seems to me that over the past couple of years the best fanzines that I've seen coming from overseas have become much more fluid and unlike the set-piece productions typified by, for example, Mainstream. The fashion has drifted towards editorial informality and flexible formats, but Sikander does not follow that line. Perhaps it is because Irwin isn't interested in that kind of publication and would prefer to stick to the older ways. Fair enough, but perhaps part of the business of producing a fanzine which is right for the time is to follow (or even to attempt to set) the fashion.

Thyme 32, 26pp., 33, 4pp., 34, 8pp., and 35, 6pp.
Roger Weddall, PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065.

Here we have another newszine, like ASFN, which is in need of a definite and workable editorial policy. I simply cannot understand how it could take twenty-six pages to convey the news of what it happening, most of it in the small circle of Australian fandom. However I suppose that it all happens to depend on what you think news really is. Perhaps long pages of convention reports may be interesting to some people but I doubt that they contain the essence of topicality. (And it's not as though much of this sort of material was actually very well written, because it isn't - the idea seems to be to simply give a few examples of things that happened at the event and hope that the reader gets the overall picture somehow.)

Even most of the news is poorly presented because it is hidden amongst the other bits and pieces, meaning that you have to wade through the lot in order to dig out the bits which will be interesting to you. It's not as though the "Headline" which lets the reader know very quickly what the following item is

about and whether they will find it interesting, is a new idea. One prime example is the Changes of Address which are usually buried in one long paragraph of news snippets and are thus almost impossible to spot on a quick scan. (So if anybody is expecting me to pick up their changes from Thyme, it won't happen.)

Roger Weddall is already aware of some of the problems he has and is pruning Thyme down to size. I hope that it makes issues easier to produce and that they will therefore appear more frequently. I've the feeling that the most recent three issues have come out fairly recently but since I can't find a dateline on them I'm not sure (perhaps that would be useful for those unfortunate historians who are going to have to try to work out a chronology of events from fanzines like Thyme). The little luxury that Roger may find he has to dispense with is the generous helpings of editorial comment that he likes to mix with the news. He is simply going to have to decide whether it is more worthwhile to him to publish a fanzine which tells people what is going on, and to do that well, or whether he would prefer to publish a newszine which also attempts to tell people what to think about events. It is not that it can't be done, it's rather a matter of time and priorities. (And writing as a person who has churned out over one hundred issues of newszines I can sympathise with the tendency towards editorialising, because that's where the power and influence in publishing most obviously lies). Otherwise publishing that sort of fanzine really is a thankless task, so the editor may as well try to derive some pleasure from it.)

As with most of his contributors, Roger has a fairly utilitarian writing style. This means that I don't get the same pleasure of simply reading that I do from an issue of Ansible. Since Roger lacks the Dave Langford perspective on life, and hence the ability to give even the dulllest bit of information a gloss of excitement and entertainment, he should perhaps try his hand at a few issues of straight reportage, just to see how he goes and so that the rest of us can find out just how much factual news there is in an issue of Thyme. After a period of austerity Roger might have a better idea of the direction in which he'd like to develop Thyme.

Weber Woman's Wrevenge, Vol 3 No 6, May 1984, 19pp.
Jean Weber, PO Box 42, Lyneham, ACT 2602.

Oh no! Not only would some people say that the content of an issue of Jean's fanzine is unreadable, more of us are now likely to say that the print is unreadable too - now that she has gone over to using a dot-matrix printer which has the capability of producing compressed type. The capability is one thing, but using it on poor unsuspecting fans who have poor eyesight anyhow is another thing. All the same, I did read this issue right through and can report, for those who are not willing to risk their eyesight, that this is a fairly typical issue of this fanzine which contains more of just what you've come to expect from Weber Woman's Wrevenge. What this means is that the main slant of the issue is towards the discussion of the personal perspective on life with the letter column containing varied comments from Jean's correspondents about social and psychological matters. Some of these actually recount personal "problems" but, as I've commented earlier, the emphasis is on the external rather than the internal manifestations, which is okay if you're interested in reading about the often difficult circumstances that people have found themselves in, without actually being able to identify with them as people.

About the most interesting and worthwhile section of this issue was the book reviews which were written by Deborah Kean and (I presume) Jean. Many of the books are "feminist" in nature and I might not get to read about them anywhere else if Jean did not bother with them.

But really the best thing about Weber Woman's Wrevenge is the fact that it keeps

on appearing regularly and that it's readers and contributors can establish and maintain a feeling of continuity between the issues. This is a very important feeling which very few fanzines are able to establish and keep, and it must rest on the ability and the energy of the editor to keep up the work.

Coda

I suppose that the fanzines mentioned here are the product of Australian fandom for the past two or so months. There's not really much, is there, even though my so-called short reviews have proved to be a bit longer than I would have hoped and so there are plenty of words about them.

Notable by their absence are any fanzines from Ron Clark and Marc Ortlieb. The Mentor seemed to be appearing as regular-as-clockwork over the past year or so but February 1984 is the most recent I've seen. However I see that Ron and Sue's media fanzine, Chronicle (which by the way, was voted the best fanzine at Medtrek, for which congratulations), had a special eighty-six page issue published for that convention, so the break in the publishing schedule of The Mentor is understandable. As for Marc Ortlieb, he's just gone and got married - something which will divert his reproductive energies for a week or two I reckon.

* * *

Have you all got your copies of that ripper book Valencies there? If not you should go and get them, and then we will proceed with...

Covering Correspondence

Damian Broderick

Here's your chance to snigger as you pry into the secret correspondence between Author and Author on the occasion of that great work, Valencies, first smacking us severally between the eyes.

In about July 1983, I felt moved to write approximately the following words to Rory Barnes, my esteemed collaborator on Valencies:

* * * *

By now you must have seen the cover of Galactic Racing Tout. It took me a good quarter hour to force my optical cortex into giving up its socialist realist or do I mean stick-in-the-mud reactionary insistence on seeing the central lower pink splotches as a frontal view of an exploded nude dragon or lobster; then I understood in a blinding flash that this hairless man of the future was putting his glass to his ear the better to see metaphorically with, and all was well.

No doubt all this is to be preferred to a brass-titted space kitten or a Weeties-box rocketcraft but I do think they could have got the image-size-multiplying mechanism a bit more up to date. It gives every evidence of being war surplus from the stouch in which my Boer granny did so handsomely against the white men.

Decoding the semiotics of this work of art as best I can, it seems to me to be telling the news-stand browser something along these lines:

Once, when HG Wells was just out of grocery school and penning those charming "scientific romances" which did so much to divert us (and educationally!) before

the invention of most of the inventions with which his "scientific romances" diverted us, it was quite kosher to read stories set in the future.

True, there were penny dreadfuls (for all I know, with garish covers), but grown men and women would not necessarily be obliged to hide their heads under the horseblanket if they were observed casting a speculative eye across the pages of The Time Machine or The Shape of Things to Come.

Now, thanks to the miracle of University of Queensland Press's dodgeful arser, we of the year A.D. 1983 can relive that innocent pleasure with a form of literary conceit at once brilliantly innovatory and decorously antique - the rediscovery or Edwardian prophetic fancy, the opera glass held to the Victorian eyeball, the binocular which finds writ large in the heavens the shape of things all around us, or at least all around us up until about A.D. 1969.

At any rate, that was my instant first reaction.

By the way, allow me to advise you on a new business opportunity: the importation from the USA of that new wonder substance, dextro-rotatory sugar (or levo-, whichever it isn't usually), which sweetens without sticking to the craw and presumably without fattening the tooth-devouring micro-org either. A fortune to be made there, sir. Only the other day knowledge of this miracle of science was fetched to me, at a dinner table booked by Mervyn Benns, by my close friend and confidant Harlan Ellison (no, hang on, that should read Terry Dowling's very close friend and confidant), author of "I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream", though this is not I gather the result of his ingesting the substance under discussion.

* * * * *

In response, Rory made these remarks a little later:

* * * * *

Indeed, the aforementioned cover was hung by four stout gobs of bluetack upon our kitchen wall these few weeks past, an object of curious conjecture on the part of those who seek tea and toast at our humble board.

Myself, my first reaction as it slid from UQP's plain brown wrapper was "Good god, a map! Some island of dreams awash in the cosmic soup! Or, perchance, a peninsula appendaged to some mighty continent the precise confines of which are lost forever beneath the cruel polar latitude of the most southern edge of the handbill itself!" But I confess to only about three or four seconds of such conjecture before the information, scant though it is, generated its shadowy nape and tonsure.

Not so my father. After a good half hour's peering from this angle and that he pronounced it a dog.

(In the interests of evaluating the significance of this item of perceptual duncedom, I might perhaps record that Rortles' old dad is in possession not merely of most of his faculties but also of the one concerned with Sociology held in trust by Cambridge University or Oxford or somesuch.)

In vain did we point and expound, draw to his attention the eye, the snout, the lug, the manly shoulder. A dog, a curious dog, was all that he would allow.

On the morrow, with time on my hands, I prepared a flimsy transparency, tracing that which is given and extrapolating to that which is hidden. To the rude, naked chap I added hat, necktie, pipe etc. See this? I asked, placing the

sketch before him. Is this not, I said, a man? No dog or hound? Indeed, forsooth, cried my progenitor, a fellow or rather torso of fellow is what we have here. Like a conjecture I flipped the transparency to the poster. Ha! I said, as the two fitted one to the other, what now! And with a slow dawning he observed that perhaps the artist had made a few rough dabs at the human form.

God knows, however, what the honest loon looking for a good read in the book marts of our nation will think.

* * * * *

Since then, it has been my universal source of merriment to watch the scrambled brains of random onlookers and sci-fi fans do their best to untangle the artwork of this luckless volume. I hope that your many devoted readers, all of whom I trust have belted out to the local to pick up their copies of Valencies, will now inform us that they just knew the cover represented a pair of rutting rhinos, or the armature of a Hieronymus machine, or the number 42.

* * *

Letters of Comment

Darrell Schweitzer
113 Deepdale Road, Strafford, PA 19087, USA.

I tend to agree with Ted White on the matter of popular taste being reflected in popular fiction, rather than being created by it. I am not impressed that a Marxist theoritician could gobble Ted up for breakfast. (But only if the Revealed Truth of the State Scriptures say cannibalism is part of the class struggle, and therefore okay.) Totalitarian idealogues tend to accept certain tenets on faith, and reject all evidence to the contrary. I'd be more inclined to believe a medieval churchman (who might claim that good literature is a working of the Holy Spirit, and bad an instrument of the Devil) because at least he might be sincere. The vast discrepancy between what Marxism preaches and practises suggests that its belivers fall into two categories, cynical liars and people wearing blinkers.

If we stop to look at the evidence, it would take a fantastic conspiracy theory to justify the claim that the Powers That Be use popular fiction (and television) to instill correct attitudes in the populace. In a Marxist country, there can be no doubt. Such is the official policy of the Writers' Union of the USSR. The purpose of literature there is to further the interests of the ruling class by shaping the attitudes and perceptions of the masses. Distortions in history and cultural details are not the random products of ignorance, as they are elsewhere. They are deliberately planned.

But in the United States, for instance, it would take a conspiracy worthy of Robert Anton Wilson. Popular fiction contains so many contradictory attitudes. If both Suzy McKee Charnas and John Norman are published, we must assume that either the Secret Masters have no opinion on sexual relations, or they're throwing up a deliberate smokescreen to hide their existence. If a writer as pessimistic as David Lake is published right alongside Jerry Pournelle, what is the "correct" attitude towards technological progress and the future of the human race that is being instilled in the populace?

No, bestsellers are usually books which reaffirm something which the majority of the populace wants to believe in. Consider Stephen King's Firestarter. This is about an evil CIA-like agency which 1/ performs nasty chemical experiements on

unsuspecting young couples and 2/ tries to get it's clutching hands on the resultant mutant children who have super-esp powers. We are to assume that the ruling class of the US finds it is its one interest to tell the populace not to trust the government, and that each and every one of us has the potential super powers. Right? Very subtle, those ruling class types.

The truth of the matter is that popular fiction, as Ted says, reflects the unexamined prejudices of its audience. It has been strongly suggested that Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan books were so popular because Tarzan was a "Great White Hope". About the time the first story appeared, many whites were enraged by the victory of a black boxing champion over a white one. Further, many people felt that industrialization and urbanization were getting out of hand. Therefore, a story about a white man who not only lives a more interesting and exciting life than the rest of us, but is clearly superior to the blacks in his jungle (and is wont to play sadistic tricks on them) had broad appeal. Yet there's no indication that Burroughs was a racist in the modern sense. He knew nothing about Africa or Africans. He simply held commonplace opinions which he had never bothered to examine. (Any more than his readers had. This is why "serious" literature which challenged our pet assumptions will never sell as well as "popular" literature which merely reaffirms them.) He showed no active malice, quite unlike his contemporary, Thomas Dixon, the author of The Clansman (from which DW Griffith's "Birth of a Nation" was made). Haggard and Kipling were a lot smarter and sophisticated than Burroughs, but their work also shows very similar unexamined assumptions. This is clear with the hindsight of a hundred years. A century from now, readers will be able to see the unexamined popular attitudes reflected in our popular fiction.

All this is very different from the deliberately engineered false class consciousness of the totalitarian ideologies. The readers of the old pulp magazines could, if they chose, look up the facts. There was no one enforcing a theory of history the way Marxists do, by censoring everything that didn't fit.

That is not to say that Marxists are the only ones who do this. All Quiet On the Western Front was banned in Nazi Germany because it was "defeatist" and did not instill the right attitudes in the reader. There was, or course, only one viewpoint which was allowed. But if you combine capitalism with relative freedom of the press, you will get the situation Ted describes. Mass taste will dictate what sells best, but a wide spectrum of differing tastes and attitudes will co-exist.

((I disagree with most of the points made so far but I don't want to linger over a reply, partly because this is something which took up a fair amount of space in the previous issue.

The first thing is that I don't believe, and I don't think that I wrote, that there is a deliberate conspiracy of the "ruling class" to force its ideas onto the rest of the population. It is most likely that people who could be judged as members of a ruling class would not even recognise that they were, simply because they too do not think that one exists. That is part of the belief-system which they live within and have helped create. But just because there is no pre-planned course set for a society, such as the communist countries might seem to have, that does not mean that things just happen in a random fashion. Marx was one of the people who set out to describe how it does happen... that I think he is mostly wrong doesn't take away a lot of the beauty of his system and really there has yet to come along something better which will replace it. Saying that the workings of societies cannot be described by theories is like saying that the workings of nature are similarly mysterious.

((A lot of the arguments you put forward seem to be along the lines of "ignorance is bliss". But just because Burroughs did not think of himself as a racist doesn't mean that he wasn't. Just because Charnas and Norman seem to have different ideas on sexual relations doesn't mean that they don't share one overriding conception of the matter which, as you say, might be discernable to readers in a hundred years.

((Your comments on Burroughs were quite revealing, in fact. You go halfway towards generating some kind of theoretical description of society which might have room for a ruling class, and then draw back from it. There were, so you suggest, reasons for the popularity of the Tarzan books, but then you go on to say that he had "commonplace opinions which he had never bothered to examine." Perhaps you might care to examine why you think that because they were commonplace to him they are not worthy of examination by you. The business about race and the changing society suggests something about imperialism and capitalism which leads to exploited and exploiting classes, I would have thought. What you have to say in fact suggests to me that if you want to look a little under the surface you will find that there are rather stronger and unifying forces at work in popular literature which might be to the advantage of people out to make something from the system. They might also be part of the forces of hegemony which tend to hold capitalist systems of society together -- or so I understand the meaning of that word which I've been trying to use properly for a while.))

Speaking of unwholesomely defeatist, David Lake hasn't written science fiction off. He has merely written himself off. I know of an American writer who theorised at vast length that science fiction is dead. Sure enough, he doesn't write anymore. This has not slowed down his colleagues. If David Lake believes that there is no basis for sf anymore, well, he will simply be replaced by writers who do.

I also think his attitude towards fantasy is the wrong one. If you say, "Well, I can't do anything else now, so I guess I'll have to write fantasy," consider becoming a shoe salesman. That's a sure recipe for bad fantasy, which we already have in great abundance. If you don't see fantasy as something special, a method of examining important aspects of existence in a dream manner, providing insights which are impossible in realism, spare us.

David is right though, that the great sf works are all fantasies or myths of a sort. Pure speculation is not storytelling. Verne was a great speculator and a lousy storyteller, so a hundred years later, we acknowledge how clever he was, then don't read him. But there is no reason a myth can't be transcendently optimistic and forward-looking. People will probably be reading Arthur Clarke and Robert Heinlein for centuries long after their actual speculations have become obsolete.

David Lake
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David Grigg, in his attack on my views on literature, has made a serious mistake of principle. He rejects my notion that "literature is what a mature person can bear to read three times", and substitutes the idea that "literature ... is seriously concerned with some important idea". And on this basis, he goes on to claim Clarke's Childhood's End as "Literature" -- because the book deals with a very important idea about the human race.

I disagree most strongly. This is what you might call the Heresy of Content. You can disprove it at any time by checking over any number of schlock sf stories which deal with big ideas (say, Evolution, the End of the World, etc.). They are schlock in spite of their great ideas, because they are badly written.

There is no substitute for my criterion of re-reading (or something like it): I can not read Childhood's End over and over again, because Clarke's style is inferior, to, say, that of LeGuin. And The Left Hand of Darkness is a great book which I re-read every year NOT because it deals with great issues, BUT because it deals with various ideas and human emotions very well.

Literature is usually about important ideas, but not always; it is always written with excellent style. A really pungent limerick is unforgettable, i.e. literature.

Incidentally, I have read Camus and respect him very much. The reason why I do not write "The Myth of Sisyphus" or "The Plague" is that Camus has already written them. This frees me to do the lighter fantasy writing which now attracts me. Maybe I'm fiddling while civilisation burns; but since I am perfectly clear in my own mind that nothing I write will stop civilisation burning, isn't it possible that fiddling, i.e. fantasy writing, is a rational activity?

As for the sulphur volcanoes of Io, yes, I admire them, but I don't think they're going to become part of my life. They are no substitute for the lost Mars or Venus we looked forward to in my youth. As for life in the galaxy, well, Grigg may believe Sagan's excuse, but I don't. If there were another Earth out there, we'd know it all right.

Anyhow, what I really should say is that Outer Space is for me an emptiness and a bore, and what really interests me is inner space - the psyche, religion, human life and death. These topics can be handled in sf, but also and perhaps more directly in fantasy - which is why I write fantasy. And it's probably why many other people are writing fantasy these days rather than sf. Inner space is simply more interesting.

Russell Parker
26 Dowse Street, Paddington, Qld 4064.

I unfortunately missed reading David Lake's letter but, judging by the comment it evoked, it must have taken a polemic stand. One disparaging feature I've seen in the majority of fanzines I've come across is that the letter column almost invariably carried argument/definition of what science fiction is. Most educated people seem to derive some maniac pleasure from defining at length their personal interpretations of what sf is, where it's going and how it's getting there. Defining sf is an endless and pointless argument. I know what I read, which I consider quite diverse and highly literate and I can only loosely tie it into sf, but that's none the less the umbrella I use. As I progress in my reading and I discover many writers not under the banner of sf worthy of attention - such as Peter Carey, David Ireland, DM Thomas, Kafka, Fielding etc. Sf is just a part of literature (and popular culture) as a whole and the delineations are by no means precise, so why debate endlessly a matter of semantics. Generalisations stink and should be dispensed with as much as possible.

((Two things. If you use the umbrella term "sf" to describe whatever you read then you and I have no idea if we are actually talking about the same thing when we use that term. Definitions exist so that people can be sure that they are talking about the same things. If we didn't have them then the whole business of communication between people would be fruitless and break down. Secondly: there are those who just like to read and there are those who like to talk and write about what they read. A person who reads doesn't need a definition to describe what they read and why they like it, but people who try to communicate their thoughts and feelings about reading have to be able to use words with agreed meanings or else they won't be communicating.))

The current disheartening lack of politicisation at universities disturbs me as I have witnessed it also during my stay in the hallowed halls. I started my Degree in '78 when the protest movement and student activism of the early seventies had all but died. For the next four years I witnessed the deteriorating situation get gradually worse. The students, or at least the vast majority, seem totally concerned with getting the best possible marks to get that all-too-rare job. They also appear to be politically and socially naive and in many cases actively avoid involvement with political or social movements, perhaps on the fear that such an association will damage their "record" when looking for jobs or, as may be the easy way out, they're "too busy studying". Conservatism reaches new heights (or depths) and those in power are delighted with the prospect of a new generation too politically and socially ignorant to act against the excesses of their power plays.

((There is, of course, also the factor that the numbers of kids from the lower levels of society who can get to university is lowered so that the ones that now do get there are outnumbered by people who have traditionally been more conservative anyhow. All the same, you haven't explained why it is that student activism and the protest movement were good things. You and I might agree on this but it is perhaps an unexamined assumption. For all we know student politics might be something that the very bright kids at university play so that the institution of university isn't too boring for them.))

The censorship debate seems to have been fueled in fanzines in recent times, and that is not a bad thing. In Queensland the excesses of hard core pornography are kept at bay by our dual censorship system and the puritanism of the Premier and his National Party Junta, which is not totally a bad thing. Certainly pornography is available (with a degree of difficulty) for those who require it. What concerns me more are two things.

First, the Premier and his National Party sheep refuse to have any adequate sex education classes in schools while his state continues to have the highest percentage of teenage pregnancies, the highest percentage of teenage marriages and the highest percentage of teenage abortions are performed on Queensland women (though mainly in the south as abortions are strictly illegal here). He refuses to accept the arguments for sex education, continuing to think that if the kids know about sex they'll go out and do it. Well, they are doing it and they don't really know what it is. That's why so many lives are being ruined when a degree of simple knowledge would have made such a difference. But Joh is not one to be entertained by any logical argument.

Second, sexism in the media seems to be more prevalent than at any time before (or perhaps I am more aware of it now). But also I would like to think that awareness of that sexism will lead to its being outlawed and removed. Nothing makes my teeth grate more than the images portrayed of women as simpering dolts whose craving passion is to learn how to get little Adam's footy jersey sparkling white or as brazen harlots providing sexual availability for the man who doesn't have dandruff on his collar - it doesn't matter if he is a neanderthal man with manners to match, as long as his collars are free of the dreaded flaky scalp so he is good to roll around with.

((Are you sure that there is any growing wave to get rid of the kind of advertising you've just mentioned? I would have thought that the trouble with that kind of stuff is that it actually does sell the products better than any other way of advertising them, and people aren't liable to go without access to the kinds of profits they are currently raking in. And so what if that kind of sexism offends you - it obviously doesn't offend most people or else they would let their tv stations know about it by turning to the ABC to look at what they have to offer without the ads - which is what Valma and I have done. Why look at commercial tv in the first place, it encourages them.

Teresa Morris
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Almost any sf idea one thinks up is bound to have been used before, so it seems only sensible to find new ways of expressing them. Putting the magic into science is a great idea, and makes for more satisfactory reading than putting science into magic ("they woke up and it was all just a dream", or the black box gimmick that explains everything). The opening words in the film "The Right Stuff" are an excellent example of putting wonder and magic into science, and of mythologising the human experience. The words are about the problems of breaking through the sound-barrier. "They said there was a demon in the air." Maybe I'm getting off the track, but I just wanted to explain what I meant about putting magic into science.

On the other hand, there does seem to be an awful lot of fantasy around, which I haven't been reading because I don't like swords and chunder. It's too easy, that is it's not very stimulating, no ideas, and there are too many fight scenes. There are also books examining soft sciences in exotic settings which would make the science in them hard to find, especially to someone who equates science necessarily with technology.

However, the bit that really set me pondering was Michael Hailstone's letter in Rataplan 26. He says, "I can no longer be bothered writing the stuff." What is going on when writers can't follow the time honoured tradition of writing the sort of stuff they like to read? I remember reading somewhere that C S Lewis did. Perhaps the writer's tastes are too different, although reading is such a widely catered for hobby you'd think there'd be a market for just about anything anything. Anyway, the implications are that the forces of the publishing industry (stress the "industry") are at work, and it is because I know nothing about those forces that I feel unable to make any real comment about why we are getting the sort of stuff we are. Maybe it is, as has been suggested, a fear of the future and also of the science that goes with it. Maybe its the need on the part of the general reader for escapism which is controlling the market and so keeping sf in a holding pattern. Anyway, it's interesting that relatively few fans seem excited enough by what they read to be bothered voting in the Ditmars.

((Apart from the various reasons which seem to make for the publication of a different sf these days, which have been mentioned in this fanzine, there seems to me to also be a purely financial reason for declining interest in sf by many people. Books just cost so much these days that it is difficult to justify buying a book on mere speculation. Last night we were in a bookshop just generally looking around and I discovered a shelf of sf. On it was a Lloyd Biggle Jnr book and since I had not seen it before and find him an entertaining author I was interested. But at a cost of something like \$5.95 I quickly became disinterested. Now I am well aware that my salary has gone up a fair bit since paperbacks cost 60¢ to 80¢ each, but the only reason that it has gone up by anything near the same extent is that I've had a couple of outrageous promotions in that time. Even so, the cost of an sf book is a proportionately higher slice of the money that I have to spend and since there are so many more of them than there used to be there is also a greater chance of buying a dud and having wasted that money. Perhaps there's also a bit of being older and harder to please hidden in the reason too.))

The debate about what makes a good fanzine continues - it continued all over EurekaCon. I seem to disagree with everyone. Actually I thought general fanzines were exactly what they meant to be, and one either accepted them as such or didn't bother with them. (That's what comes from having missed the golden age that people talk about.) Then there's the media fanzine versus general fanzine debate, which I kind of tired of at the moment. Maybe that

debate continues more to give people something to argue about and look down on than anything else.

((No, no. The reason I get cranky about the state of genzines and tend to argue about them is because I really would like to understand why it is that whole slabs of a fanzine like Wahf-Full can be so unutterably dull. That is another matter again from simply trying to define a general fanzine, which is an exercise even more fraught with dangers than trying to define sf.

((And of course a debate about the worth of media and general fanzines is fairly tedious and also tends to create the sorts of barriers which neither group needs.))

Mike Glicksohn
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I disagree with your comments in Rataplan 25 on Ted White's piece in Sikander. I think it's obvious that Ted was not just trying to write a review of contemporary Australian fanzines. Had he been, he could have done the job in far less space and with considerably less effort at justification of his charges. To me it seemed from the beginning that Ted was trying to create a definitive personal statement on fanzines and he just happened to be using Australian fanzines as a framework around which to build his essay. Taken in that light I rated this as one of the finest pieces of fan writing of the year, going far far deeper than any mere review column could hope to and gives an excellent insight into the nature and potential of fanzines in general. Of course, it helps that I think Ted has both the background and the ability to make his views on such matters worth reading about so I relished all the explanations and diversions as well as his contemporary comments, and I was delighted that none of them were edited out since to me they were just as much what the piece was about as were the specific mentions of Australian fans and fanzines.

((It seems that I can't have made myself very clear on what I wrote about Ted White's mammoth article in Sikander 8, that could partly be because I didn't express myself clearly and partly because the article was still fresh but not fully digested at the time. There are, as you point out, two aspects of that article, it is a collection of reviews of Australian fanzines and it is also a broad and sweeping statement attempting to explain the Ted White perspective on fanzines. I thought that I'd mentioned this in my comments when I wrote something to the effect that Australian fanzine editors should feel flattered that they had been chosen to be written about in that article (but perhaps I didn't put it so well the first time). I know that I felt quite flattered to be rated, at the end of the whole article, as the editor of a good fanzine, something which would not have been so egoboosting if it had just appeared as a singular review. (And I have to admit that I still sneak a look at that review when I get particularly disheartened with this fanzine, just to cheer myself up a bit.)

((With a bit of hindsight I'm inclined to say that Ted's "Lost in Oz" is as important to us, or perhaps more important, than D West's "Performance. That is, the sorts of things Ted writes about describe ways in which people who write for and publish fanzines can digest to help improve their performances whereas the West article is much more philosophical and really only seems to have one major point to make. However, most of the real meat of what Ted has to say is hidden behind opinionated outbursts and some side issues which may be interesting in themselves but are distractions from the main issue. The other problem, of course, is that the article is going to be fairly useless to people who come to read it at some time in the future because while at least "Performance" sets its own context -- is mostly context in fact -- "Lost in Oz"

will lack its context when those who read it have no personal experience of the fanzines Ted reviewed. I pity the poor person who ever decides to reprint the article because to do it properly they are going to have to produce facsimile copies of the fanzines he has used as the basis for his long and deep comments. It will be a large package but perhaps future technology will be able to handle it.))

Gary Barber

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I tend to agree with Joseph Nicholas that the problem of sf art's development is due to unimaginative copying of ideas from author's books. However book covers are commercial art first and sf art second. One must remember this fact, book covers are there to sell books and are not art - art is totally secondary. If this factor of selling could be removed then the art form may start to go its own way. Sf art does not really exist at all, it's just an extension of commercialism. Some of it may be very well produced technically but, as Joseph said, this does not make it good art.

In fact I'd like a definition of sf art before I can really comment at all, otherwise I don't know the point of view of the argument.

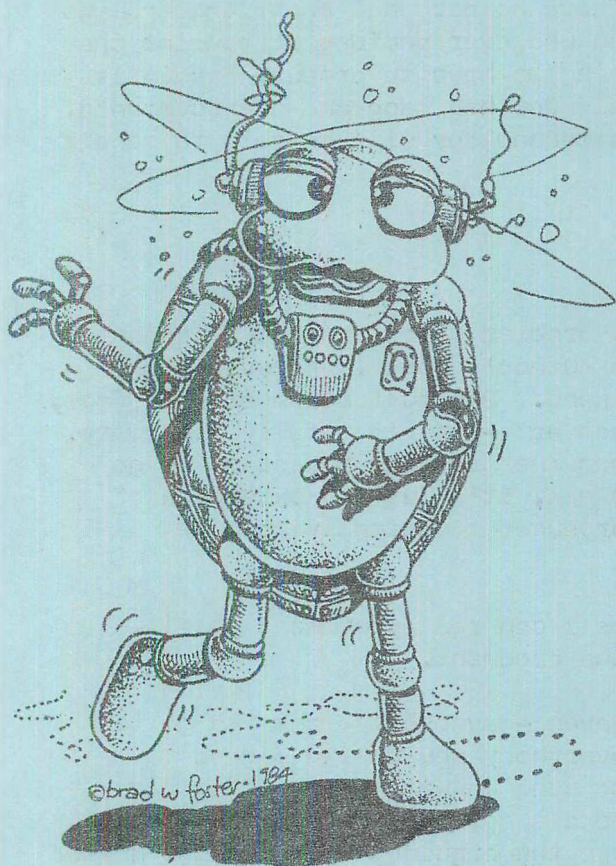
((It seems that definitions are a bit like heaven - everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die. Just about everybody would like a good definition but nobody seems willing or able to come up with one. If we did have something like a definition then we could all agree on what we are actually arguing about, though I doubt that it would stop the arguing; it's still a matter of values as well. So, since they're so useful you'll probably want to know what my definition is - but I'm not interested in the dying bit either. Is anybody else?))

Derrick Ashby

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I am particularly drawn to make a few remarks on Don's description of the art of convention organising in Rataplan 25. His view perhaps indicates why the conventions he organised, when he organised conventions, always went broke.

There is a fundamental flaw in his argument as to why fans have conventions. He says that the idea is for a small coterie of fans to organise a convention in order that they may meet their friends from interstate and overseas, and have others pay for it. Now, there is no doubt that the basic reasons for having conventions are social, and that the non-fans who come to conventions are going to be short changed unless the organisers make a serious effort to put on a good programme. That's why I think that programmes at any convention are an important part of the organisational effort though many convention organisers don't. Let's look at a few concrete facts. Hiring the Victoria for EurekaCon will cost a bit under \$2 000 and hiring the Southern Cross and the Victoria for AussieCon II will cost around \$60 000. The total budgets for each of these conventions will probably come in at about \$3 000 and \$120 000 respectively. At the \$10 000 per head that Don quotes for a membership fee of a convention we would only need three and twelve fans respectively to cover the cost of them. The problem with that is that the hotels would be rather empty as a result. On the other hand it would cost next to nothing to have a house party for between three and a dozen fans, and what's more we would be able to draw up our own guest list. We already have over three hundred attending memberships from the US for Aussiecon II, but of course they wouldn't come if it weren't for the WorldCon. After all it is going to cost them something between half and a million dollars combined to get here and back, which makes the total WorldCon budget look like peanuts. There are, no doubt, many reasons why people get



involved in running WorldCons - idiocy is one of them, another has to do with what Ursula LeGuin had to say in her Guest of Honour speech in 1975. The WorldCon is a celebration of science fiction. Today's science fiction may not be worth celebrating, but it's a vision of sf that is being celebrated. It's also a celebration of fandom.

I agree with everything you say about the Victoria, and everything you say about the Townhouse. We went to the Townhouse to start with because we were expecting over three hundred people at EurekaCon, and there just isn't anywhere else in Melbourne that will take that sort of attendance without costing an arm and a leg. We are not now expecting over three hundred people (if they turn up I don't know where we'll put them! The bar may be big, but not that large...). "Getting the hotel used to fans again again..." Banns put HarryCon on in the Jackaranda room there early this year and after our little effort tiny Daryll Mannell is running a convention there over the Queens

Birthday weekend. After Kinkon we'll probably have to run another convention at the Victoria over Easter next year to reassure the management that we are in fact suitable people to be allowed in the place next year. (No, we aren't really going to do it...)

((And if you did Jeff Harris would have various parts of your anatomy for taking up the slot he has for next year's national convention in Adelaide.

((I often think that convention organisers are much greater masochists than fans who produce fanzines could ever be. All I have to do to produce this is sit at a typewriter and cut stencils, do a bit of hack production work and keep on annoying people for contributions. But perhaps there isn't the same thrill in that as there is for the convention organiser, nothing to get the adrenaline flowing and to keep the mind and body agitated worrying about suitable venues, likely attendance numbers, break-even budgets, the sanity and trustworthiness of all the other committee members, and just so much more that it boggles the imagination. Surely there must be something that you get out of it that makes the whole process worthwhile, but even my boundless imagination fails to reveal what it might be.

((Surely there is some doubt the basic reason for having conventions is social. It may well be that, for some people, that it the reason for attending such events, but surely another reason for having conventions it to actually discuss sf. Perhaps we should look upon the programme as the reason for holding a convention rather than as something to fill in the time of people who have nothing better to do when they attend a convention?))

I liked the juxtaposition of Joseph Nicholas and Roger Weddall in Part 2 of the letter column of Rataplan 26. Needless to say, I agree with Joseph's remarks in the first part of his letter but I just wish he'd leave the subject of Jean's

fanzine alone. I mean, we all know what he thinks of Weber Woman's Wrevenge by now, and we know what Jean thinks of that attitude. They're like two trains running towards each other on separate railway tracks. Pass each other they might, but they're unlikely ever to link up (or even collide).

I agree with Don on the subject of sf art. (Yes, I know it must be a shock to the nervous system, but we have been known to agree before). I am reminded of a remark that Bjo Trimble made in reference to "non-representational art" during her recent visit to Melbourne. I paraphrase: "I could step into a couple of cans of paint and jump up and down all over a bedsheet and call it 'Lloyd Biggle's mumblemumble', (I can't think of the book title in question), and who can deny that it is a piece of sf art? At least if you've got a picture of a unicorn you're on safe ground. It may not be art, but at least it can safely be put in a convention art show."

((But if what you're putting into a convention art show isn't actually art, what does that make the show - a non-art show?

((The tins of paint and bedsheet routine remind me of the article I read, probably in Aviation Week and Space Technology, about the man who used to lease jet aircraft so that he could put up large canvasses behind the engines and then toss the contents of tins of paint into the jet blast to make himself reasonably wealthy. Apparently he was doing rather well at it too.))

Glen Crawford
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Perhaps it is the fact that my father died when I was eleven, and as the oldest of four children I watched our family struggle to survive on the pitifully small widow's pension, the little extras we considered luxuries at the time like butter and meat being provided by Mum's earnings as (of all things!) a Tupperware dealer, but I took offense to this totally untruthful, narrow minded and unresearched bit of feminist bitching. There are, as Christine mentions, several other forms of the 'party', two of the most popular, and of course the most profitable, are the lingerie party and (would you believe?) the sex aids party. The first of these is managed wholly and solely by three enterprising western suburbs women, and the second by one of Australia's leading feminists whose name escapes me at the moment. Why no attack on these Christine? Perhaps feminists ripping off women is okay by you, it's only if it's a man that you think you can attack and get sympathy.

For a little FACTUAL history about Tupperware in Australia, it may enlighten you to read the following: Mum was one of the first group of dealers, or rather demonstrators in this country, and the National Manager (a woman of all things!), purchased the franchise from America and opened a warehouse in Sydney. At the same time Mum joined, the total workforce was something like thirty-people, only two of whom happened to be male, the truckdriver and the storeman. Now of course that could be considered sexist, after all, women can drive trucks too, but at that time there were certain laws pertaining to the weights women were permitted to lift and carry, and even boxes of plastic can be bloody heavy, besides, these poor, unenlightened females in a pre-feminist world actually appreciated having someone to do the gut-busting.

We watched Tupperware grow in Australia from a tiny warehouse to a national company, and in all that time, the number of women in the team always outnumbered the males by a hundred or so to one, and surprise, surprise, it was the males who always got lumbered with the menial tasks! I remember quite clearly the opening of the first interstate office, our home was crawling with bloody Yanks for a week... The parent company had sent over several senior executives to assist in the final planning and opening of the new state office,

and guess what... they were all (with one exception) bloody females! The one exception happened to be the male half of a husband and wife team who had apparently created the biggest State franchise in America, and would you believe that the husband was an employee of his wife.

As far as the selling techniques being written by some (male) PhD, wrong again, I'm afraid. When the original party idea was brought from the USA it proved to be only partly successful in Australia, so the demonstrators (females) got together at weekly meetings and threw together ideas that had worked and suggestions from customers as to what should go into a good party. The best ideas were adopted, the thinker-upper being suitably rewarded for her efforts, and the techniques evolved over the past twenty years or so are the polished displays you see today.

The real pity about the whole thing, Christine, is that you were so busy looking for something to whinge about, you forgot to relax and enjoy yourself in the midst of a group of your peers.

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

I was surprised by Christine Ashby's revelatory article - it seems unbelievable that the blessings (?) of marriage can outweigh the less fascinating things it entails, such as Christine's Tupperware Parties. Even as a child I remember thinking that the ladies selling Tupperware, Avon cosmetics, fruit-preserving jars or whatever were pretty uninteresting, though their samples were great fun to semi-destroy (under the table, out of reach of Mum's admonishing eyes, though not her - ouch! - feet). But at that age I still retained a modicum of liking for the female sex in general.

Yipes! I've an uneasy feeling that I'm on the point of losing what few female fannish friends I have - let me explain.

My childhood was fairly unexceptional, I guess, with various (female) "best friends" who were, for some reason that's no doubt psychological, either older or younger than me. But about Form 1 I realised that my dislike of skipping, elastics, jewellery and such was merely symptomatic of my alienation from the girls' school I attended (and still do; HSC) and the majority of people within it. But, coward as I was, I didn't overtly rebel until I became actively involved in fandom and had a peer group to replace the one I'd thrown aside.

Regarding, pursuing and socializing within society I can see there are multiple reflections of those mundane schoolgirls. There are also fascinating individuals - it's just much easier to pretend there aren't and so save oneself from that bothersome search for them that's spurred by conscience and curiosity. I "relate" much better to men than women, anyway (and even non-fannish males seem challenged, hypnotised or at least amused by the fannish femme fatale. Not that I'm one, of course...)

Perhaps it's my awareness of feminine failings - anyhow, whatever it is, my personal illogic, reinforced by the kinds of society I frequent, seems likely to keep me treading the same path I do now: despising the feminine "arcanum", as Christine calls it, while occasionally enjoying selections from it. I went to a non-fannish party with a gaggle of girls yesterday - that I enjoyed. But not Tupperware Parties.

((I suppose that a psychologist in the audience could explain why it is that you find it much easier to "relate" to men and yet while I was at about your stage I found it much easier to relate to women. Well, actually I tell a lie. When I was still at school I had decided that I really didn't enjoy

talking to anybody all that much but I really did enjoy reading the epic works of the likes of EE Smith, Isaac Asimov and Eric Frank Russell - no sf on the tv except "Fireball XL-5" which was a bit simple minded even for me which also explains something about me. But if I continue on in this vein people will begin to think that they've fallen upon a copy of Jean Weber's fanzine... and both Jean and I have to maintain what we are pleased to call our "standards".))

Other people who wrote were

Neville Angove, Doug Barbour, Brian Earl Brown, Joan Dick, Richard Faulder, Diane Fox (who has a new address at PO Box 1194, North Sydney, NSW 2060 and who sent a gigantic thirty-two page letter which I might lift bits from for next issue), Brad Foster, Ali Kayn, Robert Mapson, Ed Mycure, Chris Priest, Colin Steele, Juile Vaux and Brian Wagner.

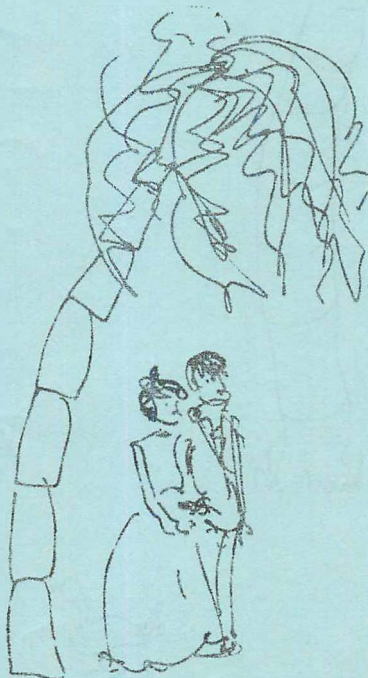
* * *

There seems to be some kind of virus going around Australian fandom at the moment which brings on uncontrollable fevers and urges in couples of people and leads to them making the most unbelievable promises to each other at ceremonies, and in front of a whole lot of witnesses too so that they will find it all rather hard to deny later on. Well, whatever give them pleasure... There have been a few of these ceremonies going on recently, and there are a few more coming up. I had hoped to report on a few of them in the social pages of the fanzine but my correspondents seem to be forgetting their serious responsibilities or the couples concerned are holding their ceremonies well away from fandom to try to hide the evidence. Still, there are some that just cannot pass without being reported upon, and so we have - allowing for the ones that we've missed so far:

Wedding of the Year - 2

written by Christine Ashby and illustrated by Elizabeth Darling

I've never been to the Melbourne Cup, but now I know exactly what it must be like. Conventional wisdom has it that there are two approaches to dressing for a formal outdoor event. On the one hand you can wear a silk dress under a fur coat; it might surprise some people to learn that I do possess both such garments, but unfortunately I have been too mean to have the coat (a present from an elderly relative) altered to fit. On the other hand, you can have two complete outfits ready, dress at the last possible minute and hope that the weather doesn't change for a few hours. I settled perforce for the latter course, and spent the morning of the 12th of May wandering around the house in my underwear pondering the resulting conundrum; if it rained should I wear the lighter



outfit on the grounds that the wedding would take place indoors, rather than wearing the warmer outfit which would be more appropriate if it didn't rain and the ceremony proceeded outdoors?

In the end I wore the light gear because I liked it better, not because I could make up my mind about the weather. As we drove past the conservatory which was to be the indoor venue I slowed to a crawl, but failed to spot any other wedding guests. At the entrance to Hedgeley Dene Gardens, however, we saw Carey Handfield pulling up together with Mandy Herriot, Phil Ware and John Packer. As the first guests to arrive we amused ourselves watching the ducks and the goose which live on the little ornamental lake. The goose had the most extraordinary habit of wagging its tail like a feathered dog, especially when people offered it food. Eventually other guests began to arrive - lots of relatives of the happy couple, the other fannish people including Jan McDonnell, Terry Stroud, Jack Herman and Cathy McDonnell. We still weren't quite sure just exactly where the ceremony would take place; cries of "Follow that table!" greeted Cath's brother, who seemed at first a little unsure himself just where he should set up. Eventually there appeared the groom and best man (Marc's brother, Chris), both nattily attired in three-piece blue suits, each with a white carnation in his buttonhole. You could tell which one was the groom by the way his complexion matched his carnation.

The weather was getting colder, and the clouds were getting darker. Several people had brought umbrellas - this was the first wedding I had been to at which the guests were nervous. The minister arrived and organised us into a semi-circle, with instructions to move in closer once the ceremony commenced. Marc and Chris took their places under a giant palm tree. On the other side of the lake the goose was competing with a black labrador for slices of bread.



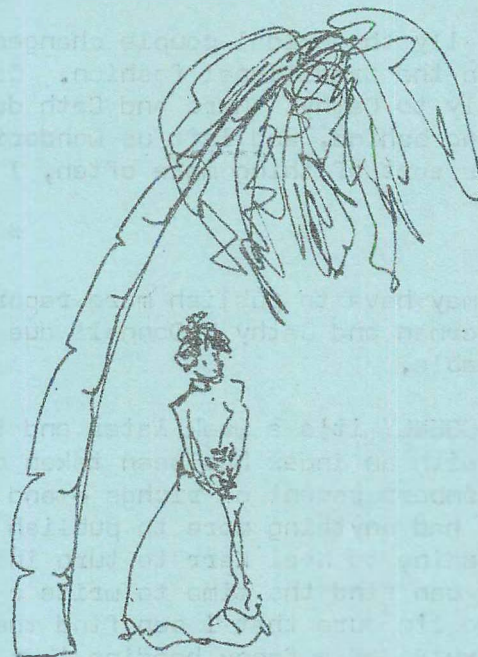
At last - only a little bit late in the best tradition - the bride arrived. For those who are interested in such things, Cath was wearing full-length white moire silk (superbly made by her mother), with a fitted bodice and a mandarin collar, leg-of-mutton sleeves and self-covered buttons at the cuffs and throat. She had a spray of baby's-breath in her hair, and a bouquet of carnations and baby's breath. The whole effect was very elegant and I'm afraid I have to say it - she looked radiant.



The ceremony was simple, dignified and affecting. It was also slightly suspenseful - right at the critical moment it started to spit rain, and up went the umbrellas. Fortunately the rain ceased almost immediately; Marc Ortlieb and Cath Circosta probably didn't even notice, but I confess that I was

distracted for a moment from wallowing in sentiment. I really do enjoy weddings, and this one was the best I've been to in years.

After the ceremony Mandy and John Packer rushed forward with their bubble-blowing equipment; much nicer than confetti, which was forbidden in any case. Across the lake another wedding party arrived. The men, so help me, were wearing tail-coats and the bride was done up in what can only be described as "the full bit", her veil and train being rather inadequately handled by two bridesmaids in shocking pink suits and cocktail hats. According to Jack the poor girl was attacked by the goose shortly after we left.



The reception took place at the Palm Lake Motel, scene of BofCon in 1979. Pure coincidence, you understand. What with the state of the weather a number of guests (including the fans) arrived somewhat before the advertised starting time, and got in the road as the management laid out the red carpet. Eventually they let us in to mingle over drinks and canapes. The reception was extremely well catered; antipasta, cannelloni, roast beef or chicken, cassata or chocolate mousse, cheese and fruit and Italian cakes. I don't know how the people who were dancing managed to rise from the table, much less cavort to what we occasionally identified as Lennon/McCartney numbers. Actually I have heard worse bands, and Jack and I can talk over the top of anything. Between courses Marc and Cath circulated, giving the chance to palm Carey's place-card and replace it with one which read "Carey Handfiend", a genuine typo so he said (I believe him).

Cath and Marc excused themselves from the bridal waltz on the grounds that Cath was still not fully recovered from her knee injury. The Master of Ceremonies very nearly excused them from cutting the cake, so keen was he to get on with the dancing, and we thought for a moment that we were going to miss out on a speech from Marc. We didn't, and he spoke without a microphone what's more.



No amount of barracking by the more disruptive elements in the audience could induce Cath to make a speech however.

Eventually the bridal couple changed and we all formed a circle and farewelled them in the traditional fashion. Cath didn't throw herbouquet - she handed it directly to Cathy! Marc and Cath drove off without any boots or tin cans trailing behind, and left us wondering who else we could marry off. We have to do this sort of thing more often, I tell you!

* * *

And I may have to publish more reports of this kind of event too. What with Jack Herman and Cathy McDonnell due to go off later this year it seems almost inevitable.

And SUDDENLY it's a week later and the space which I thought I'd fill up just below with an index has been taken over by other things. I'm tempted to call it an embarrassment of riches - and also embarrassing because I didn't realise that I had anything more to publish when I sent off a couple of sheets of art and heading to Noel Kerr to turn into electro-stencils for me. But if George Turner can find the time to write a long book review for publication in this fanzine I'm sure that I can find the space to publish it and simply go without the luxury of a fancy heading this time around. So if your eyes aren't set to scan for anything but large headings you are likely to miss the following, for which I apologise - but it's your own fault anyhow...

SCIENCE FICTION UP THE WRONG TREE?

George Turner

The Man In The Tree, by Damon Knight; Berkley Books; 246 pp; \$4.95.

Be warned: Knight's novel is just an excuse for writing a longish introductory section on something else . . . and then pondering on the business of reviewing.

From a science fiction dominated by endless look-alike series and dedicated to panic flight from any sense of a real world, a science fiction wherein more or less reputable authors like Sprague deCamp and Poul Anderson (both of whom like to be thought of as serious practitioners) can turn a dishonest penny by writing 'Conan' novels, it doesn't pay to expect too much. It becomes increasingly clear why Bruce Gillespie can't be bothered reading the stuff and why Norstrillia Press publications are moving further and further from the science fiction mainstream.

(Yes, Virginia, there is a science fiction mainstream, running roughly from A Princess of Mars to Heretics of Dune; swimming in it will, like the other pleasant habit, send you mentally blind. The two habits are psychologically related.)

It becomes clear, also, why sensible people like Christopher Priest find the constraints of mainstream science fiction (which its practitioners cry, pathetically, allows them creative freedom - poor, deluded dears) too tight to be borne and demonstrate the justice of their complaint by writing lovely novels like The Affirmation. You didn't like it? Okay; turn to some other article; you'll hate this one.

But The Affirmation wasn't really science fiction, was it? I mean to say, no planetary disasters, no power-mad dictators, no oceans of blood or malignant espers. Dreary stuff. Well, there was something that might or might not have

been an alternate world - depending on your need for such aids to understanding - or might or might not have been a schizophrenic delusion, or might or might not have been simply an authorial device without reference to perceived reality or accepted fantasy, designed to allow rumination on aspects of the psyche. All a bit troublesome for Riverworlders and Conan freaks who like to be told what to think.

If The Affirmation is not really science fiction, how did it get into this diatribe? It got in because Chris Priest has discarded most of his science fiction past to produce an offbeat novel which he might never have written if his science fiction years had never existed. He has used science fiction to produce something else.

There is indeed a whole area of science-fiction-related novels and stories which do not belong to sci-fi (which is what the bulk of the genre has become) but which might not have been written in their present form, or not written at all, if the excesses of sci-fi had not formed a literary compost to feed original thinking. Consider Lanark, Riddley Walker, A Woman of the Future, The Plains and some of the short stories of Frank Morehouse and Peter Carey; they show their lineage here and there, but they are the products of fresh approaches by unregimented talents. They are neither science fiction nor realistic fiction, nor are they the meta-fiction of Delany or the J G Ballard of the "condensed novels". I think of them as "para-fiction" - "beside-fiction" - not divorced from the classic novel of the real world as science fiction now is, but commenting on and complementing it from those points of view which the intellect can assume though the physical body can not.

This move towards greater freedom of statement has not gone unnoticed among the older hands - Ursula Le Guin has always been aware of the possibilities and has used them in her own fashion; so have Ballard in his "Terminal Beach" days and Michael Moorcock in his chaotic output - but has produced confusion among them, particularly among the American professionals who know there isn't much room for experiment in a business run by publishers' accountants who know what sells and what doesn't and advises accordingly.

Here is a cautionary tale for publishers' accountants: Round about 1770 Doctor Johnson pronounced (and writers trembled when old Sam pronounced), "Nothing odd will do long; Tristram Shandy did not last." A couple of Centuries later it is easy to sneer at the old boy for being wrong - Tristram Shandy not only lasted but introduced new concepts of the form of the novel - but he was only being conservative in a supremely conservative age, while Laurence Sterne was dancing on the broken rules and setting up new ones.

Still, what does a bedevilled novelist do when his publisher doesn't dare risk anything that somebody else hasn't made a success of first, while his writing individualism cries out for a break from the endless process-worker job of turning out Dumarest No 103 or The Punk Sandworms of Dune?

He does what a careful coward always does. (Don't despise cowardice; it's a survival trait.) He tries to have the best of both worlds, leaving his burrow open for a quick retreat if it doesn't work but ready to see himself as part of a literary vanguard if it does. If his name is Damon Knight he writes The Man In The Tree, and sits back to see what will happen.

Let me say now - as much to confuse the issue as for any better reason - that in the teeth of what may follow, I enjoyed this novel. That doesn't make it a good novel; it makes it one that held my interest in spite of... There are many things wrong with it, but they don't make it a bad novel; there are things wrong with War And Peace and Remembrance of Things Past, too. So, if you like a review to tell you whether or not you will like the poor thing

that is being kicked around - I think most readers will like it. As an entertainment it is worth it's \$4.95. And how much do you get these days for \$4.95? Genius comes a bit dearer; from Damon Knight it doesn't come at all. Or from anyone else in the science fiction business, for that matter.

What I am saying is that "good" and "bad" are not words for use in literary criticism. Nobody knows that a "good" novel should be, or what would make a novel "bad". A novel, like any other creative work, is either effective or ineffective, enjoyable for you or boring for your neighbour, competently handled or incompetently botched. It can have practically everything wrong with it from the reader's point of view and yet be, on its own terms, which are the only relevant terms, a success - consider Damien Broderick's Transmitters. It can have, on its own terms, everything right with it and be almost incomprehensible - as with Transmitters, if you don't happen to be familiar with the ethos and inner language of fandom. I liked it, but neither I nor anyone else can call it good or bad; the words have no critical meaning.

Which should tell you that I propose to consider The Man In The Tree rather than to judge it.

TMITT mixes traditional science fiction elements with familiar realistic elements and the mixture is homogeneous; the two work together. The same cannot be said of other strivings for literary respectability like Bishop's No Enemy But Time or Benford's Timescape, wherein the two elements were hard pressed to relate to each other. So Knight who, as a competent critic knows how things ought to work, has brought off the tricky business of mixing incompatibles. I know just how he has done it, too, but this is no place for a lengthy technical discussion.

Aside from this, he has not found a single aspect of freshness for the book. And yet it works. It works because Knight is a tradesman (every creator has to be a tradesman before he can succeed as an artist) who knows how to string the reader along from word to word. This means, of course, stringing him along to a climax which will justify the willing pursuit, and my only real complaint against this novel is that for me the end did not justify the pursuit. I won't tell you what the climax is because your reaction may be quite different from mine. (That's why value judgements like "good" and "bad" are unhelpful. What values?) Suffice it that I saw it coming at a point about two-thirds of the way through and was disappointed at being right. This may mean no more than that as a practising novelist I am too familiar with plot and themes and methods and know from experience just why this point or that has been planted at such and such a spot in the development and what it will lead to. But, as it is said, it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and Knight's travel package is a pleasant one. On the other hand, you may not see the plot twist coming, in which case good luck to you and two cheers for the old "sense of wonder", so long absent from the field.

This is what it is about:

Gene Anderson is a pituitary giant, eight and a half feet tall, but apparently without the physical weaknesses common to such unfortunates. This serves to symbolise his difficulty in relating to normal humanity. (My sneaky novelist's mind says it is really there to let Knight display his knowledge of carney freaks and mores in some fascinating scenes.) But Gene's real apartness from the mob lies in his special talent. Special talents in science fiction affect me like an emetic, but for once, thank God, the blighted one is neither a telepath nor a teleport; otherwise the book would have gone straight to the dustbin.

Gene is "aware" - a nice word which prevents Knight and the reader from worrying too much about inconsistencies and technical objections - of parallel

worlds. He can in fact reach into them and abstract needed items. For instance, when he breaks a tool he can reach into a parallel continuum where it is not broken and bring it back intact. It is useful, also, for amassing money. (Somewhere, someone is getting robbed blind, but there is no discussion of that. Black mark, Damon, for immorality!)

It is this parallel worlds stuff which allows the novel to be called, rather loosely, science fiction (Berkley Books labels it "Fantasy" - oh, well...) Parallel worlds were once the stuff of fantasy, but readers of New Scientist and other serious material will know that some reputable scientists - including mathematicians, the feared high priests of intellectual rigour - are suggesting that they are not only theoretically possible but may actually be necessary to a properly constructed holoverse. So, watch your step, Virginia: you never know where you'll end up, or who/what with.

The nature of the talent is never discussed in detail, so Gene (or Damon) can call on it wherever necessary to get some awkwardness out of the way, but on the whole it is used with discretion. That alone is a blessed relief in this sort of plotting. It is used without discretion just once when Gene as a terrified nine-year-old is involuntarily responsible for the death of the son of his country town's policeman. He runs away, allowing the plot to play picaresque variations on life with artists, carney folk and others. The vengeful policeman pursues him unsuccessfully for thirty or so years, allowing a parade of spectacularly foiled murder schemes. It's all good edge-of-your-chair stuff, nicely judged and executed.

Gene, grown up and a millionaire, goes the way of half the loners in fiction: he evolves a philosophy of peace to save the world. (The other half always want to blow it up. They have their supporters, too.) At this point there's a faint whiff of Heinlein and Stranger In a Strange Land, but it passes, and the true shape of the plot is revealed. Gene's campaign to win hearts and minds is brilliantly successful and the world may indeed become his philosophical tool, but counter-belief raises its ugly head - not in the person of the policeman, who is dealt with in suitable fashion - but from among the ranks of the faithful.

Yes, Gene has his private Judas and the end is in sight. But that is where the plot twist comes in and my rather cynical lips are sealed.

If all this sounds like variations on evangelism crossed on a pursuit thriller, that's exactly what it is, and within those limits the book is more successful than it has any right to be. That's professionalism for you. The characters are smartly, broadly drawn, the action is fast and on its own terms credible, the carney chapters are knowledgeable and fascinating and, all in all, the average reader will get his five bucks' worth.

Speaking of professionalism, there is a marvellous bit of technical showmanship where Knight reveals, in a throwaway dependent clause in the middle of a paragraph, that the world of his novel is not ours but a parallel world. You will find it on page 219; it is the sort of touch that does an old trickster's heart good.

Speaking again of professionalism, this time without approval, there is one of those obligatory sex scenes wherein Knight's enthusiasm runs away with his good sense. It is based on a carney joke about "the giant and the sword swallower". Do I need to be explicit? Now a sword swallower depends on being able to breathe around the blade, which does not fill the whole throat cavity. My bet is that on the specifications given, the lady swallower would have died ingloriously in the practice of her trade. Choked. (Bloody critics! Why do they have to spoil all the good bits?)

So Knight has tried to take a science fiction theme out of its straightjacket and wed it to realism - of a sort. He has not succeeded because he has written what is basically a thriller rather than a novel with a theme. He has added nothing to the parallel worlds idea, the pursuit story or the Jesus metaphor; what he has done is to weld them into an entertainment which demonstrates that even tired science fiction can be enlivened by good story telling and the injection of human interest beyond the boy-meets-girl formula.

With the best will in the world, Knight has been too timid to write the book that is screaming to get out of TMITT, the savage indictment of civilised values from the point of view of an outsider. Priest or Hoban or Ballard would not have tied themselves down so tightly to the storyboard dictated by frightened publishers - but Priest and Hoban and Ballard go their own ways without consulting the necessities of the book trade. They have the courage to say, like it or lump it, though they have as many bills to pay as Knight and probably earn much less for their writing.

The future of science fiction, or rather of the writing which will be the logical descendant of science fiction, does not lie with the Knights of the game but with the players of new gambits, writing what seems good to them without worrying too much about whether or not it will seem good to you.

But when you feel like relaxing with a yarn, Knight will give you better value than all the sex 'n sorcery starbusting on the shelves of the Space Age Bookshop.

If you have stayed with me so far, thank you for your attention. I have only been trying, by example, to show that reviewing, even of a fairly commonplace novel, is not the straightforward matter that so many make it. It is a matter in which final judgements have no place. There are no final judgements about anything - except death and taxes.

* * *

Parting Shots

In all seriousness

If you flick back to about page three of this fanzine you will find that there I was having a bit of a chatter about EurekaCon, the national convention which was held in Melbourne over Easter. In doing it I was quite pleased, up to a point, because I had managed to keep it from getting serious and heavy. And then something seemed to happen and the next thing I know, it's page 38, and what we have inbetween seems to be nothing but weighty consideration of this or that important (or unimportant, depending on your interests) issues. It's not what I had intended at all. What I had hoped for was a mere slip of a fanzine this time, 18 pages at the most. It just goes to show what a slackening of control on those subconscious passions can do to a person. But having gone this far I might as well go the whole way and flush out the last remaining serious matter that I have been pondering over of late.

About our native land

Right there in the middle of a letter from Terry Dowling to Mervyn Binns, published in ASFN 37, we find Harlan Ellison talking about the "mythic quality that drenches Australia." This is something that Ellison found in the outback and the Flinders Ranges. I'm not sure what it is that he is writing about but, perhaps that is because, being a native of some of the more closely settled

country areas, I simply take a more pragmatic view of the country called Australia. It is all very fine to fly into a country for a few weeks to see a few of the more notable tourist attractions - Hanging Rock, Ayres Rock and the Flinders Ranges - but that is to see only the parts of the country which have been preselected as being interesting. It is a different thing again to drive along a dirt track in the midst of a range of hills worn flat by millions of years of erosion and to realise that the old brick chimney's just off from the road are all that are left of the Kelly homestead and that the bodies of Dan and Steve Hart were buried behind what is left of a barn further back on the block. To see that is not to see anything of a mythic quality, but simply to see how a political system of land settlement called "free selection" put people onto blocks of land so poor in quality that they were forced into opposition to the law of the land.

White Australians have been in this country for less than two hundred years. In that time they may have done a lot to ruin the soil but they have not had the time necessary to effect or be effected by any supernatural qualities which the country might have. That is the preserve of the aboriginies who lived a mythic existence and explained their existence and the land in which they walked through myths and legends. White Australians who adopt that are guilty of nothing less than cross-cultural stealing. For the white settlers, the only myths and legends are those created by the almost unimaginable effort to make this old and exhausted continent respond to the attentions of people who are much more used to damp and fertile Europe. Those who are suitably inclined will tell you that this has led to the creation of a special kind of person who is basically unemotional and pragmatic - what else could you be if you've staked everything in a hundred acres of land which suffers three years of drought, a flood on the fourth and bushfires on the fifth. That sort of treatment doesn't make people open to myths and legends, it makes them cynical and hard.

Even in the cities this is the prevailing attitude. Most people live in the cities because they either don't have the imagination to want to live anywhere else or because they aren't so stupid as to want to live in the country. Why go to such trouble when life in Sydney or Melbourne can be so pleasant, comfortable and rewarding? The country and particularly the outback just have nothing to offer the vast majority of humanity. It might be nice to visit Ayres Rock, but can you imagine actually trying to live there?

For this reason I think that Terry Dowling and Harlan Ellison are barking up the wrong tree. It is worth getting to read Ellison's comments in Terry's letter in ASFN because it may actually have something to add to the literature about why there have not been very many great artists in Australian history - and the ones that do or did exist often had to go overseas. Australia is simply not the kind of land in which people have time to make up the myths and legends that these two seem to want, not if they are to make a living out of the land at the same time. What they will write about, those who have lived in the areas where such myths might grow, is hard work, disappointment and isolation. This might lead to a certain kind of native Australian literature, but I doubt that it is the kind that Ellison has in mind.

The main worry that I have about writing this is that somebody like Terry Dowling will think I'm guilty of the classic Australian habit of "knocking". In a way I am, but not because I think that he and Ellison are being pretentious dolts, but because I think they are trying to impose upon this country something which is either a carryover from the European tradition of mythic life or, perhaps worse, encouraging Australians who are not aboriginies to lift bits and pieces from their ancient culture - their "Dreaming" has nothing to do with white Australian hopes and aspirations. I am not drawn to put together these few comments because I don't care much about the Ellison

and Dowling project, but because the representation of the nature of Australia and its people is something which I care about a great deal. I am afraid that it is going to be misrepresented.

It might not be a difficult thing to put together a story about some nameless and ancient thing lurking on the banks of Lake Natimuk or arising with silent and awful inevitability out of the flat saltbush plains of the Mallee, but it would be a lot more difficult to create, in a few thousand words, the impact which the failure of selection or the Soldier Settler program after the First World War had on individuals and, in fact, the whole of Australian society. The latter might not make a very exciting story anyhow. (I've had the occasional thought that a very good story could be made out of rewriting Lawson's "The Drover's Wife" or "Water Then Geraniums", or even "The Loaded Dog" - the latter preferably set on a mining asteroid with people zipping around in low gravity and worried about their space-suits as well as their skins - though I've yet to figure out why you'd want to have a dog on an asteroid.)

If the Ellison/Dowling project comes to fruition I will look forward to reading what it throws up. It will be interesting but I doubt that it will have much to do with the existence of a western civilisation in this country. And I would suggest that that should be a primary concern.

* * *

Index

Opening Shots	1
I write about EurekaCon, <u>Transmitters</u> and uranium mining	
Progress in Work	10
Leanne Frahm writes about problems with writing	
Australian Fanzines	12
Quick reviews of the latest local fanzines	
Covering Correspondence	18
Damien Broderick and Rory Barnes about the cover of <u>Valencies</u>	
Letters of Comment	20
Darrell Schweitzer, David Lake, Russell Parker, Teresa Morris, Mike Glicksohn, Gary Barber, Derrick Ashby, Glen Crawford and Lucy Zinkiewicz all have something interesting to say.	
Wedding of the Year - 2	31
Christine Ashby and Elizabeth Darling on the Ortlieb/Circosta do.	
Science Fiction Up The Wrong Tree	34
George Turner reviews <u>The Man In The Tree</u> , among other things	
Parting Shots	38
Some comments about writing about Australia.	
Art - Elizabeth Darling, cover, pages 31-34, Brad Foster, pages 13 & 28.	

So once more we come to the final part of the issue where you find out whether you're going to get the next one. A blank to the left here means that you probably will. A Big Red *A* means that you probably won't - unless you do something useful - see page 1.