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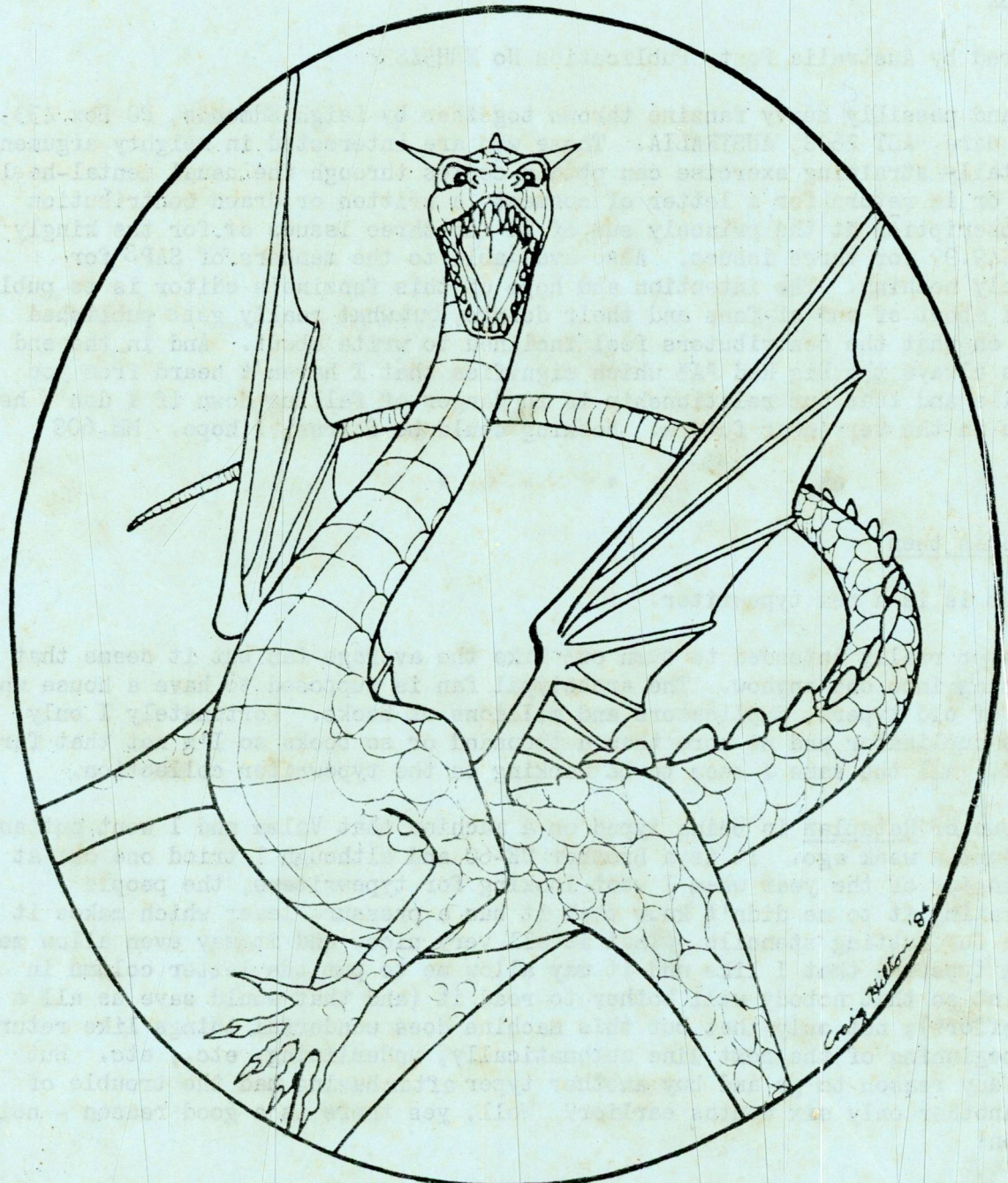

"Startled dragon."

RATAPLAN 29

June 1984
Registered by Australia Post
Publication No. NBH548

Isaac Newton was sitting under a tree when something fell on him. It was blue. From this he discovered gravity and

RATAPLAN TWENTY-NINE

June 1984

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH5483

A blue and possibly heavy fanzine thrown together by Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, AUSTRALIA. Those who are interested in weighty arguments and mentally straining exercise can obtain copies through the usual mental-health studios or in return for a letter of comment, a written or drawn contribution or a subscription at the princely sum of $2 for three issues or for the kingly sum of $49.99 for three issues. Also available to the members of SAPS for absolutely nothing. The intention and hope of this fanzine's editor is to publish material about sf and sf fans and their doings, but what really gets published depends on what the contributors feel inclined to write about. And in the end there is always the Big Red *A* which signifies that I haven't heard from you in a while and that our relationship is in danger of falling down if I don't hear from you in the very near future. Nothing could be fairer, I hope. MM.608

* * *

What's this then

What this is is a new typewriter.

I had never really intended to turn out like the average fan but it seems that I'm turning into one anyhow. The archetypal fan is supposed to have a house which is full of old typers, duplicators and millions of books. Fortunately I only have one duplicator and no more than a thousand or so books so I'm not that far gone yet. All the same I seem to be working on the typewriter collection.

This issue of Rataplan is being typed on a machine that Valma and I went out and bought just a week ago. It is a Brother CE-60 and although I tried one out at the beginning of the year when I went looking for typewriters, the people demonstrating it to me didn't know that it has a pressure lever which makes it suitable for cutting stencils. That is all very nice, and it may even allow me to use a typeface that I like and it may allow me to put the letter column in tiny print so that nobody will bother to read it (and that would save us all a lot of effort); not only that but this machine does wonderful things like returning to the beginning of the next line automatically, underlining, etc., etc. But is that any reason to go and buy another typer after having had the trouble of buying another only six months earlier? Well, yes there is a good reason - noise pollution!

One of the disadvantages of typers like the Adler which we went out and bought a few months back is that when you use it you get a good idea of what it must have been like to march in a Roman legion; a lot of banging, rattling and clattering all the time. And then, when it felt like it, the whole machine would begin to vibrate to itself and set up some kind of harmonic relationship between its various internal parts so that while it might have been a delight to a composer of new music, it was rather distressing to somebody trying to collect their thoughts to put the next word onto paper - and even more distressing to the person in the next room trying to do something else. So in the end we reached a unanimous decision - it had to go.

Now we have four typewriters in the house. I suppose that it's not too many but they are starting to take up the space that we could be using for useful things like more books, magazines, records, and so on. But I suppose that if I were to resolve upon becoming a collector of typewriters as well, I might be able to

justify having these four around as being a good basic collection; one office manual, one portable electric/mechanical, one golfball and finally one electronic. Now all I need is the dedicated word-processor to bring the collection right up to date. But I doubt that I will be able to afford that right away unless vast hoards of people start paying to see the existing members of the collection.

What's so great about fiction anyhow?

Reading is a fairly enjoyable occupation, if it wasn't I doubt that you'd be taking the trouble to read your way through this fanzine. All the same there's a lot of different kinds of things that a person can read, some of them are fictional and some are not. The question which exercises my mind just at the moment is why we in sf fandom should give such a special place to the reading and writing of fiction. (I know that 'fan' is just a contraction for 'science fiction fan', but even so, I hope that most of us read more than just that stuff.)

What set me on this line of thought was a letter I recently received which berated me, in a fairly gentle way, for being so dogmatic about not publishing fiction in this fanzine - and also criticising most publishers of fanzines similar to this one for being so critical of fan fiction. This is, of course, a fairly average sort of thing to have to put up with, and there is a by now standard response to it. If a piece of fiction is good enough to see the light of day then there is no reason why it should not be good enough to get published in a prefessional magazine. I still stick to that little bit of dogma, but on reflection I've decided to add another piece to it, and then hopefully my position will be completely secure and nobody will ever bother me with this problem again.

What is so great about fiction that I should expend energy and time and money in publishing it. There are other forms of writing which should be just as valid and important, things like essays, critical reviews, short articles on recent events, letters of comment, cheery little bits to liven up the day, and a whole host of other things that could be put into the pages of this or any other fanzine to good effect. Why include fiction as well?

For one thing, if you want to write fiction there are magazines which pay you for your work and go out of their way to solicit the kinds of things that fiction writers like to produce. So far as I know there are not magazines which are available to people who want to write intelligent but non-scholarly articles, notes on what they did on their holidays and comments on the most recent round of conventions. That being the case, would it not be more reasonable for fiction writers to be asked to peddle their wares somewhere where they won't be pushing out other kinds of writing which cannot find a home somewhere else?

I suppose that the preference which fiction has in this particular hobby group comes from the amount of time that we spend in reading the stuff. From that we are likely to get the impression that fiction is the most important stuff that a person can write. It is only natural when we go and spend so much time and money on collecting books full of it and even reading some of them. But I'm not sure that this impression is all that close to a correct understanding of what is going out there in the publishing world. I suspect, on the other hand, that in publishing it is fiction which is only a minority force - at least intentionally. There are all those journalists, science writers, sex therapists and historians out there, and what they write can only be considered fiction as a result of personal failings or a wish to make a fast quid.

Perhaps fanzines really should reflect a better idea of the wide world rather than just acting as a mirror to the ideas of what the world is about which we are likely to get from what we read for relaxation.

I suppose that it might even be legitimate to say that fanzines can serve as a good training ground for writers. But since there are more openings in the world for people who can write reports and memos, or books about how to tune up your car or the backs or cereal packets, perhaps fanzines should prove themselves

useful by offering those writers somewhere to get experience too. (I'm not about to run articles on how to get the best out of a V-8 engine but I don't mind if people try their hand at some of the other kinds of writing). And then again, is there any reason at all for people to have to work on skills that aren't going to earn them anything but will only serve them as an interesting hobby? Perhaps there is - just in giving people the practise that they would like so that they can get better at what they like to do for a hobby.

All this is not to say that I don't have a great deal of sympathy and understanding for those people who, for some unexplained reason, want to be writers of fiction. To write fiction well is an art which few can do very well. On the other hand, writing bad fiction is very easy indeed and has the advantage of needing little or no thought other than a consideration of the amount of money that might be gained if the work sells. A lot of the fiction that does get to see the light of day shows fairly clearly that while the author has an interesting imagination he or she lacks any of the usual ideas of self-control which give shape and power to stories. Learning these kinds of skills and abilities which are necessary to write fiction well are not going to be accomplished in the fan press which is largely uncritical and more interested in filling up bits of blank paper and feedin feeding the starved egos of the editors of such magazines.

While there might just be something to be said for getting practise in stringing words together in fan fiction so that you get used to the idea, I doubt that the attitude of most fans to that fiction is useful enough to serve much of a feedback purpose. The letter columns of fanzines which print large amounts of fiction never seem to be full of critical comment on the stories of the previous issues, and although they might contain comments about the reader's enjoyment or otherwise of the stories, that doesn't seem to me to be enough to justify their publication.

Perhaps a bit of the argument hinges on what purpose a fanzine has anyhow. Now if it were true to say that fanzines exist to encourage people to write fiction, then I would be completely in the wrong and I would probably not publish another issue of this or any other fanzine. The fact that some people have that aim in mind is quite fine for them. And it may even be the case that the earliest fanzines did set themselves that ideal as well, but then this is 1984 and not 1934, things have moved on a bit in the past few years and even evolution has its effects on fandom.

Keeping busy

The other day I was talking to Valma about the weekend activities of one of the people in at the office. She was going to drive down to a house in the middle of the bush and lie around there for a day and a half until it was time to return to Canberra. "Fancy," I said, "having the spare time to do nothing in particular for a whole weekend." Valma reminded me that the only thing stopping us from enjoying similar non-activities are the diverse interests that we have and the desire to follow them too. She also reminded me that I get bored very quickly and a day and a half of doing nothing would be a day too many. Perhaps so, but I hope I'm allowed one or two harmless fantasies - even if they are of total inactivity.

As you might have already worked out, this is turning into some kind of excuse for being late once more with this fanzine of mine. (Not that I need to apologise since being late with a fanzine is in the best traditions of the business.)

The simple fact is that I really do have too many things that interest me and the idea of dropping any of them is not very attractive. I often feel very envious of people who have nothing better to do on the weekends than read a pile of books or to get out into the garden and rip up a few weeds, but how dull life would be if there weren't any fanzines to be produced, model aeroplanes to be made and essays to be prepared for university? Perhaps I should just admit that I am a workaholic at my hobbies and be sent away for a rest cure.

Be that as it may, part of the reason that the June issue of this fanzine is appearing late in September is because I've found it just a bit difficult to work up the enthusiasm to go through the motions of producing this issue. Faced with the prospect of typing, rereading, duplicating, etc., etc. a thirty or forty page fanzine the spirit failed just a bit. This may be - because from the past few issues I've been getting the feeling that I'm mostly talking to myself because my letterbox has remained remarkably void of the good stuff that keeps fanzine editors at it.

There was, of course, the business of typing up the stencils and although it is a lot of hard work no matter which way you look at it, the machine on which you choose to do the job will make it easier or harder - and the old one just made the task seem like manual labour. There will still be just as much time involved in cutting stencils on this new machine, but so far I find that it doesn't seem to take as much physical endurance to get a page done. And when you're an old and tired fan like me those kinds of considerations start to become important.

Now I'm not going to be silly enough to say that the August issue will be out in September too and that the October issue will be out in October, I know far too much about my own habits to write that. I would say that I will catch up over the long university break from November until next March, but that is, of course, the cricket season when a lot more time is taken up in looking at the television and listening to the radio. But I suppose that I'd best make the effort because keeping up with my publishing schedule is going to be totally academic when the Australian team goes to England next year and I have to stay up half the night (or more) to make sure of seeing every last ball of each of the test matches.

About this issue

Following right on from the previous thoughts I suppose that I should make a passing comment about the austerity of this issue. For the previous three issues I've been playing with headings and interior artwork, which is all very good in a way but it takes up extra time in preparing an issue. Since I'm going to try to get this issue onto stencil and into the mails before the end of another week or so I have no time for such niceties. What you are going to get in this issue will be the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text, so help me Ghu!

I wouldn't say that pictures are out for future issues, just that they are waiting around for me to see if I have the time to use them properly. There are, after all, plenty of fanzines which fill themselves up with all kinds of things to make them look good (and most of them fail), but mainly look that way because of the time and unbounded enthusiasm which the editor has. Lacking a goodly part of those bounties I find that I have to do the best I can with what I have available. And I happen to find that there is nothing wrong with page upon page of honestly presented words - and that they are preferable to badly laid-out pages which show off pieces of art which only cause brain-ache, they are so poorly done.

Another factor will simply be how well this machine cuts stencils. I must admit that I was not really happy putting work that artists had sent me in pages of text which were not reproduced as well as they should have been. If pages of mere text start to look good again then I might feel encouraged to put some good art in them too.

But for this issue it's a matter of no frills. So I'm afraid that those of you who can't live without interior pictures are going to have to help themselves out with self-drawn work in the margins and in the space between the articles. I seem to have invented an interactive fanzine in passing.

About tool boxes

Let me draw a few threads together here (or on the next page at any rate).

Van Ikin has sent me the two latest issues of his always interesting Science Fiction. For me the most interesting article in the issues was George Turner's "What Australian SF Critics Should be Talking About" in issue 14. The reason that I found this item noteworthy was because it is another of George's attempts to get people interested in sf to do the right thing - or what he would call the right thing. Generally I agree with him, but that's not the point of this little piece.

The second thread is a lot of what follows in this issue - most of it having been written out for the past couple of months but only now getting onto stencil. It seems to me that although this fanzine was not really intended to discuss much about sf I have been publishing a fair bit about it. It also seems to me fairly obvious that we have two camps forming up and a few interested observers. One camp remains firmly attached to the old values of sf and the other camp seems to be looking for something that is like sf only with some mystery compound added (or subtracted) to make it better to read. The observers are generally wondering what the two camps are on about.

The third thread has to do with tool boxes - in the mental sense. When we are confronted with a problem around the house, something that needs fixing, we grab a couple of tools and do the job. A hammer, screwdriver and pair of pliers are generally what you'd need. But with an intellectual problem there are different tools, perhaps the basic ones are a grasp of logic and an ability to see a problem in the first place. (Perhaps the trouble with one of the camps parking in this fanzine is that they can't see any problem in sf. If that is the case, if they are satisfied with it in its present state, then there is little reason for them to do more than just keep on reading the stuff and ignoring the other camp.)

While three basic tools might be alright for fixing a broken hinge they would not be enough to strip down a turbo-charged V-8 engine. The case is probably also the same with the criticism of sf - a bit of logic and a recognition of a problem are only enough to work out that something fairly complex is going on, but not enough to be able to work out what. In order to do that it is necessary to collect together additional tools which make the job of stripping down an engine or a story possible. (Fortunately a piece of fiction remains in one piece even in this state while the motor mechanic needs even more tools to put an engine back into working order again.)

So where can a person get these tools?

I suppose that the easiest way is to go along to a place which sells intellectual tools to see what you can pick up. These places are usually called universities and I understand that people like Van Ikin and Bruce Gillespie have been to them. It may have been the case that they had some rudimentary tools that they'd picked up in high school but the ones you get at university are generally classier, and some properly packaged complete with a comprehensive users guide. And more to the point, there are simply more to choose from at university.

The second way is to be a bit of a bush mechanic and make all your own tools - odd bits of mental apparatus which one shaped to a purpose because experience has taught the user what works best or which the user has read of somewhere and modified to suit themselves. Unfortunately most bush mechanics can perform quite adequately on your average Ford sedan or Niven story, but they lack the training to deal with the really knotty and worthwhile problems. If they have any sense they will avoid problems like the latest Renault Formual One car or Ballard, but sometimes... But as an exception to this class there are those bush mechanics, generally also the same people who have built some fairly classy bits of machinery, who turn their hands to literary criticism - and usually do a first class job of it. To name one, George Turner.

Once upon a time the most important people writing about sf were also writers - the Knights and Blishes. But these days things have changed and it is the

youngsters who have been specially trained in criticism who have the running. I'm not sure why this is, but it might have something to do with the amount of money that a professional writer can make by just writing fiction and not wasting time on writing about fiction. It might also be because most self-respecting sf authors really wouldn't want to stop and think about what they are writing.

And then there is the vast body of fan reviewers who really don't need or use any of the intellectual tools. What they often have is a finely tuned set of personal preferences - which is quite reasonable in a fanzine so long as they write well enough to make their opinions entertaining to read.

All this brings me pulling the threads together.

My favourits book of this year and last year (having read it over the new year) was Rob Pascoe's The Manufacture of Australian History. It is a detailed work of Australian historiography and the way in which I devoured it so avidly perhaps points up the rather enquiring mind that I've picked up for these things over the past few years. I suppose that this is also a result of spending some time at a university getting fitted out with a kit of mental tools.

The relationship between what is going on is sf, what critics are writing about and what is going on in this fanzine are all held together by this line of thought. The trouble is that I think the tools in my tool box aren't the same ones that everybody else is using and so I'm not really equipped to deal with some of the problems that come up. It's as though people keep on pushing cars into my workshop to be worked on; all the nuts and bolts are Whitworth and my spanners and sockets are all in BSA.

Well now, it's even a bit weirder than that. The tools that you pick up in the English Department and the ones that the History Department give out look fairly similar but often they do different jobs. If you were to put Bruce Gillespie's tool box next to mine you'd probably also find that he too has a class of empericist tools (very popular in most fields so it seems), some tools which I would put under the label of "whig (history", some sociological tools and some psychological tools, and even some marxist tools. And if Bruce is very fortunate he will also have one of these amazing chrome plated, all dancing, all singing, all-purpose, multi-use structuralist tools with the special hermeneutic phasing device. If only I could figure out how to make it work. (Which reminds me of the recent laugh I got at a history students/faculty meeting when the speaker tried to wrap his mouth around the phrase "hermetically sealed" and got confused. Up I popped with an alternate version - "hermeneutically sealed". As you can see, that word has become one of my favourites in the past year of so - and it would be even better if I knew what it really means.)

The trouble I'm having is that the tools in my box may look similar to Bruce's, but they do different jobs. This one here rips out "unexamined assumptions in the text" and this one here does a job on "causal chains". Life would be a whole lot easier for me in this fanzine if I knew what the tools that people pick up in English Departments actually do. I can see the results but I often get confused about how it all happened. And on the other hand, I'm not really equipped to deal with problems that are starting to get wheeled in here, other than by having a go at them with some likely looking tools out of my collection and seeing what happens, or, by using the basic "grasp of logic" approach. For example, some of the stuff in Russell Blackford's letter in this issue concerns me a bit, but I've just had to let it slip by because I can't quite figure out why the argument that he puts up is running a bit rough. If only I could get this bloody chrome-plated, multi-widgetted structuralist thing to work... it's supposed to be able to deal with any problem.

So I hope that you'll bear with me from time to time while I rattle around in my mental toolbox, trying to find something which will work tolerably well.

On with the show

One of the simplest ways of making sure that this fanzine gets posted out soon would be to cut the editorial comment at the front of the issue. I can assure you that the simple fact that we have reached page eight already and I am about to type up some words from Bruce Gillespie is evidence of an incredible editorial self control,

We've had, you see, some interesting visitors of late.

Generally speaking Valma and I live a very hermit like existence with us going to see nobody and nobody coming to see us. How else do you think that we manage to find the time that we'd like to spend on all our interests - there's nothing like a continual stream of visitors to keep one away from the typewriter or the ironing (whatever that might be). But then Caroline Strong and John Newman happened to be in town one time and we spent a very pleasant afternoon sitting around talking, wandering around among the Norman Lindsay etchings in the National Library (he's not bad you know, I wouldn't mind having some of his stuff in this fanzine) and then going out to a remainder bookshop where Valma and I spent yet more money on interesting books which we might never read while John and Caroline seemed to be setting us a fine example of self restraint through their small piles of books, as opposed to our huge one.

Then there was the evening when I came home early from work to do some damage to the pile of wood in the back yard so that we could burn some of it to keep us warm, and there was a knock on the door and who should it be but Lee Harding. Unfortunately I forgot to note down any of what he said, which might be just as well for some of us... A few days later he was back again and this time with Irene Pagram who had been with him in Sydney. It was one of those evenings when there is so much catching up on each other to do that the mere fact that one couple had to be up real early to get on the road and the other had to get up to go to work got lost in the continuing chatter. For all you know, we probably talked about you too.

We went to our favourite vegetarian restaurant with Lee and Irene and a week or so later did the same with Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber. Apart from the ability to serve up yummy vegies, the restaurant in no-smaking so that those who suffer from the result of others pleasure can dine in comfort. We spent the greater part of the evening telling each other about the latest troubles we've been having at work, not that I've been having any but the other three certainly had enough to talk about. As Eric, Jean, Valma and I were leaving a desperate looking character burst into the restaurant and wanted to know if they sold any cigarettes. We had the discourtesy to fall all over the place laughing, enough to embarrass almost any person, including that one.

But while it's nice to have visitors from time to time they are not a good thing for a work schedule. Which brings us to the ever-green Bruce Gillespie, who hasn't been by to visit of late. That may be why he has time to write contributions to this fanzine... (Now all I've got to do is remember how to make the machine centre automatically ... probably that key there and this one here... right...)

* * *

IT'S AN OCCASIONALLY WONDERFUL LIFE

Bruce Gillespie

It's a Wonderful Life is the best film I've seen for a long time; very nearly my favourite film.

I never would have seen it without the wonder of the Midday Movie on television. The director was Frank Capra; Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed are the stars; and

I've forgotten the names of the three script writers listed on the credits. (Whoever was actually responsible for the script was great.) It's a Wonderful Life comes from that period of movie-making which I've been discovering during the last two or three years - those great years of Hollywood and English film making just before and after the Second World War. (This rule is hardly watertight; recently I saw the great The Harder They Fall, which in style is much closer to 1947 than to 1957, when it was actually made.) It's a Wonderful Life comes from 1947, right in the middle of the best period. You'll remember that the film begins with one of those ghastly twee conceits which only a pre-1950s Hollywood film-maker could have dared to present: God sends an angle (desperate for promotion, yet) to rescue a good man who has fallen by the wayside. It's a Wonderful Life sets out to show the life of a genuinely good man. What a foolish enterprise! Didn't Capra know that he was doomed to failure? Apparently not. Jimmy Stewart is completely convincing as the bloke who always wanted to get away from his home town, but keeps on staying to rescue his family's loan company, mainly out of the goodness of his heart. The film succeeds because the man's goodness brings him nothing but misery. He spends the whole of his life defending the poor mortgagees of his company against the richest banker in town. Finally, he feels himself such a failure that he staggers off to commit suicide. This is where the angel, disguised as a down-at-heel old reprobate, rescues him. In the course of the conversation, the Jimmy Stewart character says, "I wish I had never been born." The angel shows him what would have happened to the town and all of the people if he had never been born. This is one of the greatest fantasy sequences in all cinema, and is quite sombre and horrifying. Of course there's a happy ending - which only underlines the real point of the film: that the good guys in real life always get it in the neck. And, astoundingly for a Hollywood film, it's the force of big business which wipes out the small investor and home-owner. So the fantasy device hides the real message of the film, and also brings it out more strongly.

The secret of It's a Wonderful Life is not just the intricate script (really intricate, since every small detail is important throughout the film, and is not just a cameo). There is a sense of bravado, of true belief in what is happening, which seems to have disappeared from films. The conviction of the film shows in the magnificent black and white photography, and whip-snap editing (at least as effective as in Citizen Kane), and the great performances by every member of the cast.

But It's a Wonderful Life was not just an aesthetic experience for me. It brought me up short. Had my life turned into a morass of failure? What if I had not existed - would the world have been any different? Since I am here, how can I make my mark, or at least do something which really satisfies me?

My search for some answers has led me along some strange byways. If, for instance, one mentions the I Ching among many readers of this fanzine, they are likely to go rigid with shock and scorn. There are always people who have never had a hexagram read for them. And they are often people who make claims for their own 'rationality' when their own views on life don't sound too rational at all. I first met the I Ching through Phil Dick's The Man in the High Castle, but thought little of it then. In fact, the book gives little idea of how one can actually derive a reading. Nearly ten years later, I sat in a circle of people while David Grigg did a hexagram for me. That was just after I had returned from overseas. I was completely sceptical about the value or otherwise of the I Ching, but it didn't hurt to find out what happened when somebody else cast a reading. I laughed aside the reading which David cast for my general future. It was '32. Duration', which is the basic hexagram for marriage. The main image is lasting through wind and storm. I was pleased at that image; it did seem the way my life went, just scraping past potential disasters. But marriage? Hah! When I returned from America and England, it seemed that I had no prospects for marriage at all. The lady I loved had been left in America; I had no hope of going back there, and she had no hope of joining me in Australia. 1974 was a dismal year, 1975 was interesting, and 1976 was a disaster. So was 1977, come to think of it.

But at the beginning of 1978 Elaine and I got together, and we were married nearly a year later. This progression of events gave me some respect for the I Ching as a fortune-telling device. I did not realise then that it was not meant primarily for such a purpose, but I did begin to consult it every now and again. Usually the readings puzzled me immensely. It was not until I bought the Wilhelm/Baynes translation that a few of the readings became clearer. (What are you supposed to think when you are told to 'practise your chariot driving', for instance?) Not that casting hexagrams from the I Ching brought great solutions to great problems. It's just a way of surprising yourself. You get back answers which make you look at things in a different way. Eventually you realise that the I Ching is re-educating you. As I said, it is not primarily a fortune telling device, but more a source of moral guidance; not 'this or that will happen', but 'this would be the best line of action.' The I Ching, for instance, is not interested in power or money, but is interested in achievement, that is, people coming together to achieve a particular and which would benefit the world as a whole. The emphasis is on fitting into the world as a whole.

The world as a whole, eh? What if there won't be any world, or not any human world, in a year's time. The I Ching is based on the idea of continual change, by which all things unfortunate are turned into all things fortunate; no ideal condition can persist for long before sliding into some other condition. Earth abides, and all that. A mixture of thoughts comes over me - why bother to achieve things if all achievement will be swept away soon? I won't tell you the exact reading the I Ching gave me on the matter, since that might be regarded as a breach of confidence, but there did seem to be some promise that human existence would continue. However, there was also a strong hint that I might have to pitch in and do something in order to make sure of that. Me? Unpolitical, I am, unfond of crowds and power, a majority of one. I haven't yet discovered what I am supposed to do. Perhaps I should have joined the anti-nuke marches. I don't think so. Perhaps I should do something far more dangerous; I don't know yet.

Not that I am any less pessimistic about the next few years. There are just too many weapons which all sorts of people are itching to use. There are, as a recent issue of Rolling Stone pointed out, almost no politicians of the 1980s who have seen an atomic explosion. And there are just the usual people who want to dispose of my future without asking me about it. A marvellously unlikely answer is given in a book called Aralan, by N J Engh. Although it is one of the very few good books of the last decade, almost nobody knows about it. (Ursula LeGuin does, and so does Justin Ackroyd, who lent it to me.) I want to write more about that book one of these days.

When I begin to worry overmuch about Things In General, even stranger things happen. The number of unread books on our shelves worried me, so I designed a crazy way of choosing the next book to read with an alphabetic scheme chosen by I Ching hexagrams. Twice I got 'JU', once for paperbacks and once for hardbacks. Only one 'JU' was on the shelves - you guessed it, good old C G Jung. People had been telling me to read Jung for years, and I had bought a few of the readily available books: Man and His Symbols and Memories, Dreams and Reflections. Nothing I have read about Jung - not even in Ursula LeGuin's Language of the Night could have prepared me for the power of Jung's writing and thought. Reading him for the first time is like the first time one reads Hesse, or the first time you catch up with an honestly sexy book. Much of what I had heard about Jung had led me to believe that he had some system which categorised human mental phenomena, and that he could pin down every element in a dream to some symbol. Jung never claimed to do such things, and is very cautious about pinning labels on phenomena.

The essence of his thought is that all people experience much which they have been trained to ignore. This often takes the form of dreams, fantasies, 'daydreams', but is also shown in art or any other mental activity which stretches out beyond the mundane. All dream events, to Jung, are real events. They are real ways in which we perceive reality. If we take notice of our dreams, then the whole of our lives can come into focus, can be re-integrated. Jung does not

trace all dream experiences to early sexual traumas, as Freud was inclined to suggest. Jung seems to have had a much larger view of the world than Freud did. Nobody can have dreams 'interpreted' by having nice little explanations for symbols. Everybody must find his or her own symbol pattern. This can take a lifetime's work. Jung claimed to have 10 000 of his own dreams written down, and that some of the most important took him twenty or thirty years to be clarified. What I found exciting about Jung was the way he accepted the importance of the accidental, the intuitive, and the deeply-felt. In Memories, Dreams and Reflection, he does not make it clear why he went in a direction so contrary to that taken by his rationalist contemporaries; to embrace the intuitive in early twentieth-century mid-Europe must have taken quite a jump of the imagination. Of course, becoming a psychiatrist helped him a lot, as he saw the difficulty people had in 'accounting for' their lives.

After reading Jung, I could hardly fail to act upon what I was reading. But what could I do? Some friends of mine in the psychiatric business did not know of one reputable Jungian psychiatrist or psychologist in Melbourne. (And I could hardly pay the $50 - $100 an hour such a person would want.) I began to write down my dreams, but I had no way to help me make sense of myself. (Elaine is not sceptical, but she is not willing to enter dangerous territory of which she has little expert knowledge.) I suspect the role of the analyist is extremely important to Jungian psychology, which makes analysis an Haut bougeois luxuary. Ah well; I trudge on regardless, and write down all those dreams I can remember in my Little Black Book. One result of all this is that I started notes for an autobiography. This arose from my feeling that the events of my early life, though vivid at the time, remain in the mind like events in some continuous dream. Perhaps if I treated those images in the same way as I write about dreams, I might start to make sense of my childhood, much of which hurts me to remember. I don't know if I've made much progress, except that what I write shows how much of a problem I was to my parents, at least in the early years.

Everything started to happen at once. I was scribbling for the first time in some years. I began to get ideas for stories, again for the first time in some years. Two short stories were actually written. One was in the anthology edited by David King and the other faces problems. I'm not claiming much for the quality of the stories, but it was quite wonderful to get over the hurdle of actually snatching them from my head and committing them to paper. A novel is still sitting in my head, and not making much progress onto paper. I wrote 4 000 words which began well, and then they have been stuck. But it will get written, even if it must wait for another bout of spring fever.

There is nothing like a bout of Melbourne summer weather to shrivel the ambitions of a Melbourne spring. Melbourne's February and March were very hot indeed. No more stories were written, although another book by Jung (Answer to Job) was read. Sometimes the I Ching directs me very forcibly, and often it is merely oracular. Still, this is the first time in my life I have felt I should move onto something else without that direction being already clear and fizzing in my head. Watch this space.

* * *

Editorial aside

After having copied out Bruce's contribution I thought that I might be bold enough to ask the I Ching a simple question about the future of this fanzine. The translation which I have is the same that Bruce uses and I suspect the copy I have is the same one that David Grigg used to do that original reading for Bruce since I bought my copy from David a year or so after AussieCon - and then he had to go out and buy another one, so he said.

In any event, the reading came up with hexagram 53, Chien/Development (Gradual Progress), with a nine in the final place. A delightful reading in all respects,

even to the trigram images of wood on a mountain - even physically apt since this fanzine is produced from wood grown in the mountains of Tasmania. If you've got a copy of the I Ching you might enjoy looking the hexagram up.

* * *

And now an entertaining little contribution from a person whom I've never met but who must have a delightfully perverted fannish view of the world. You get to meet all sorts of entertaining people through fanzines, even these days when the sooth-sayers amongst us are predicting the immanent death of fanzine fandom.

BIOLOGY CLASS

Lucy Zinkiewicz

A few years back the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education decided that sex was too difficult for HSC students.

Right, now that your ears are - ahem - pricked up, let me explain.

It seems that the breakdowns of Biology examination results showed that most students didn't know the Facts of Life - at least, not their theoretical aspects - and were doing uncharacteristically badly in related questions. A conscientious placing of various magazines on the reading list (such as Harlot, Holier Than Thou, Rude Bitches and Weber Woman's Wrevenge) raised no marks though it did raise some other things, so VISE became desperate. To the torment of already curriculumly-insecure teachers, this desperation manifested itself in the delegation of sex education to Form 5 Biology; which isn't a prerequisite for the HSC subject anyhow. I'd call it all a bit of a cock-up, but that's much too apt.

It was a steamy day last summer that our Year 11 class began the topic, sitting in a darkness that seemed as embarrassed as we were. Tepid gusts from outside slapped the drawn blinds and stuck the skin of my thighs to the vinyl seat. At the front of the room a projector screen tipped with heat-stroke, and the weight of forty stealthily-interested eyes. Even for a supposedly liberated sf fan, going over the four phases of sex in public in a classroom is consciousness-raising - self-consciouness-raising.

As we covered the Excitement Phase (I think it deserves capitals, don't you?) I had a sudden craving for a mirror. I needed to peer into it to reassure myself I wasn't blushing, or growing pale. The thought of noting eyes has me abstaining from moistening my lips or incriminatingly swallowing. Catch-22! There's always that nagging wondering if your habitual twitches are being misconstrued.

My eyes studiously inspected my non-existent nails as the Plateau Phase succumbed to the Orgasmic Phase in the student teacher's dissertation. You have to admire these folks, and this particular one had a much harder task than most, hammering in (ouch!) the clinical details of 'sexual intercourse, copulating or making love'. I feel a bit guilty that none of us could mutter any questions or responses, but to do so meant revealing ignorance and embarrassment. And would the stranger really have been interested in hearing how I thought 'Applied Humanities' was the best way to describe this topic? I wonder?

At last the end of the lesson came, the musical bell's version of 'Greensleeves' for once forgiven. We scurried away, leaving the student teacher to clack-clack-clack the blinds up and cool the room down. I went home to secret myself in my bedroom and devour the data sheets that had been handed out. I still have them, tucked away in a finger-grottied box...

Er, yes - I suppose I'd better finish what I started and reveal that the final phase of sex is the Resolution one - you know, when you ponder morosely the

failings of the past, and draw up a list of things you aim to do and learn the next time...

* * *

ABOUT AUSTRALIAN FANZINES

I have to admit that I have seen the error of my ways. After having tried for an issue and a half to keep up with all the Australian fanzines that come to me and trying to think of honest and helpful things to say about them all, I have been beated by my own inertia and also by my growing disenchantment at the quality of what I am receiving. As I've said on many occasions before, Australian fanzines are, generally speaking, not too good. I can see that some of them could be improved if their editors really had a mind to go in that direction, but the overall impression seems to me to be that the editors that we have here are quite content to sit by their typewriters and put together fanzines which contain the first things or thoughts that come to them; giving little or no thought to providing the kind of finished product which will make the fanzine reading audience feel that it is really getting something which marks a high-water mark in the history of fanzines.

While it is always true that ony a few can produce the best fanzines, it is also true that the rest of us can aspire to do that. What disappoints me is that nobody seems to be aspiring these days. Perhaps that is why the only Australian fanzine to arrive in the past three months which has really excited me has been David Grigg's new effort (and my fear is that now he has taken over the job of AussieCon Chairman, he won't have time to produce any more issues). Two other fanzines which I enjoyed immensly and which gave me the impression that they are produced by people who do care to some extent are from Stewart Jackson and Gary Barber - but I've already written about them in this vein before.

Next issue, if I write about fanzines at all, it will be a more general thing about the way in which various people who produce fanzines make their efforts look good or otherwise. In the meantime, this issue will contain those reviews of Australian fanzines which I had drafted up before I ran out of enthusiasm for the task.

Centero 11, May 1984, 42pp.
Nikki White, PO Box 1082, Woden, ACT 2606.

Another issue of a fanzine which always seems to be the same in format and ideal, the only thing that changes are that the reviews are of the latest crop of 'Blake's 7' and other media fanzines and the letters continue on the multistranded discussions of the tv show. (A lot of the letters are set out in such a way that I feel I've come across the discussions that go on in apas - and this makes me wonder if media fans have apas because that would seem to me to be the ideal format in which these sorts of discussions could happen).

The disappointing thing (to me at least) is that whereas the first few issues of this fanzine were highlighted by a series of articles about the tv show, they have now been almost completely replaced by some short fiction based on the show. Perhaps this has happened because after a while the contributors have run out of comments and find it more frutiful to produce fiction. But as it turns out, the main feature of the fiction is not the quality of the writing but the fact that it contains some of the well known characters from the show. There is a lot of cross-series stuff where, for example, Doctor Who turns up at the end of 'Blake' (the last show in the whole series) or another character gets killed and is reincarnated in 'The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy'. Mostly light weight stuff, which is probably just as well since most of it is written by authors who are not so gifted.

(Try this bit: "Around her, the maimed and injured lay screaming and helpless

as the hospital ship tore through the war-pitted region of space, wounded and doomed, towards the craggy surface of an unbidding outer Rim World. And she was on it..." What was she on, the ship or the planet?)

Perhaps I'm being pedantic and the point of the story is more important than the way it's put together. Or, more to the point, these stories exist to extend the universe in which the characters of the tv show were created. Perhaps I should simply live up to my own resolution and not read fan fiction.

But apart from that, Centero is an interesting and enjoyable fanzine as always.

Foolsgold 1, 4pp.
David Grigg, 1556 Main Road, Research, Victoria 3095.

There's not much that I can really thing of to write about this fanzine - there are just so many elaborations and expansions that you can use upon the word 'excellent'. Despite being only four pages of reduced (and headache inducing) tiny type, which means that there is plenty to read, all of this is written by David Grigg. While this is an undoubted advantage in comparison to most fanzines it is also a handicap because it can lead to some other fan writers getting a bit envious. If it was actually possible to trade an arm and a leg for the ability to produce fannish prose of this quality I would be tempted to be in the queue - but I probably wouldn't go through with it because only having one hand would mean that it would take twice as long to cut a stencil - and I have to draw the line somewhere.

Apart from the introduction there are four main parts to this issue, two litle personal stories about EurekaCon which are very well crafted and about the best examples of personal writing I've seen for a few years; a well informed and interesting discussion on what word processing is and will do to the art of writing and a short column of 'recent reading'. In most cases a reader wishing to avoid boredom above and beyond the call of duty does the right thing in skipping this sort of thing, but David not only writes well about the books he's been reading, he also has the sense to read interesting books including a biography of Isaac Newton and the Penguin Portable Gibbon.

In my humble opinion Foolsgold is the best, most interesting fanzine to be published in the worldwide fannish community for a few years. Of course I'm biased in many ways because this fanzine reflects the fannish atmosphere which existed in Australia before AussieCon and while some might rightly claim that such things are revivals of past glories, it is also true that while the style is old and established, the concerns and the content are current.

David only produces about sixty copies for general distribution, and they will only go to fans who respond fairly regularly. I reckon that you should try to be among those sixty fortunate people.

The Hard Ones, 10, Winter 1984, 16pp.
Gary Barber, 409 Wanneroo Road, Balcatta, WA 6021.

If Foolsgold is in a way the reestablishment of what I consider a golden age, The Hard Ones akes me glad that there is a generation of newer fans who are producing fanzines out of their own resources, aspirations and interestes. There are a few faults in this fanzine but of much more interest are the positive features, the immediacy and enthusiasm in the writing and Des Waterman's art. Des. is at his best in the semi-surreal items such as the cover and the 'Jones the Cat' strip. The cover of this issue is one of the most interesting and imaginative pieces of art published in Australia in a long time - and even if the rest of the issue had been terrible it would have been worth getting for the cover.

There are but three letters of comment on previous issues and the rest of the issues is written by the editor. His review of the film Wolfen is a fairly detailed one and, in many ways, a sophisticated one which does something unusual in making

me want to see the film to find out what are the implications of Gary's [illegible] comments. On another page he makes interesting comments on the potential of the artshow at AussieCon II, hoping that there will be a bit more quality than normal and also wishing that fans had a bit more aesthetic training in looking at [illegible] paintings and sculptures. There is nothing wrong with expecting things to get better but I'm afraid that, at least in this segment of fandom, fans are more interested in what they read and think than in the visual arts. If there is boring art at conventions that is because people generally only get what they deserve - like governments.

The main thing that The Hard Ones lacks is a bit of variety, since it really has only one or two major contributors. Fanzine editors like Gary need the assistance of outside contributors because that added stimulus not only broadens the scope and interest of the fanzine, it also helps the editor to retain his enthusiasm and ability to be motivated by outside influences and ideas.

The Mentor 49, April 1984, 47pp.
Ron L Clarke 6 Bellevue Road, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776.

Having reached the forty-ninth issue Ron has discovered exactly how best he can publish a fanzine. It seems to have become a mechanical process in which Ron adds similar portions of short book reviews, letters of comment, an article or two and a half page of editorial comment, and what you end up with is exactly like previous issues and, no doubt, just like the issues to come too. While I don't think that change is necessary just for the sake of having it, I do think that a little variety in form is useful from time to time, just to stop the editor and the readers from going to sleep. Psychologists seem to have determined that the human nervous system reacts to change and variety, not to sameness.

The cover of the issue is alright though, since it shows a dragon playing football (just the right sort of thing for an issue published at the beginning of the footy season) and the best of the written content is (as it always was) from Bert Chandler - who will be much missed here and elsewhere. There is an interview with Damien Broderick which was interesting but a little dated - I am not sure that this interview was not intended for some other source because the style of presentation has the jaunty journalistic style rather than anything you might expect to find in this fanzine. (This thought is confirmed in issue 50 where Damien takes Ron to task for having published this piece which he (Damien) gave the interviewer a long while ago and for an audience which he believed was going to be newspaper readers.)

Thyme 36, 17pp, and 37, 10pp.
Roger Weddall, PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Vict 3065.

One of the main things I wish Roger would do is to put dates on his fanzines - when you get to look at them a month or so later there is just no indication of when they arrived or whether some bits of news don't appear in the fanzine because Roger never heard about them or decided not to mention them, or whether he went to press before the event happened. What use would a copy of The Canberra Times from the month before last be without a date on it? (What use would such a paper be anyhow? But that's not the kind of relevant question to ask here.)

It doesn't seem that Roger has moved into a faster publishing schedule, it also doesn't seem that there is too much going on which can be reported as news, the news content of Thyme being rather limited. Instead, this fanzine seems to have taken up a position of reporting in some little detail on some of the more reportable events in fandom. This means that there are usually some reports on conventions as they seem to be the kinds of things that almost everybody can knock together a few words on. Since these reports are not very well put together it is generally not possible to get from them a good idea of what actually happened or, often more interesting, have the pleasure of reading some good writing on the subject. Still, if nobody else in Australia is going to publish convention

reports I suppose Thyme has to be the place for them.:

I must confess that I come away from most issues of Thyme with a feeling of disappointment. I am always hopeful that by reading it I will find out the latest news on Australian fandom, but I never feel as though I have when the last page is read. This may be as a result of Roger's limited resources, or because he doesn't know the people who could give him the news that I'd like to read, or because he is disorganised enough that the news that he does publish is not clearly identified. There is, of course, also the option that what I would call 'news' and what Roger would call 'news' are not the same thing.

For example, in issue 37 the hard news is: FFANZ fund underway; DUFF update; various awards; and the bits and pieces hidden on the back page. There are also convention and fanzine listings and various comments, editorial and otherwise. I'm getting to find out a fair bit about what Roger and his friends are thinking and doing, but not too much else.

Tigger 1, 2pp.
Published on behalf of the AussieCon 2 Committee by Marc Ortlieb,
GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.

The AussieCon 2 committee has listened to the criticism that they have been getting over supposed failures to tell fans what is going on with convention planning and has thus embarked on a public relations exercise to counter that complaint. Tigger will be the more obvious stream of communication - the other is supposed to be a series of monthly news releases which may be coming out - the only one that I've seen is dated May 1984, and it's now September, he says in passing.

The first issue of Tigger is mostly introduction to the idea and doesn't give much useful news about the fast approaching convention. All the same, Marc makes it very clear that comments and suggestions about the convention are actively invited so that, if nothing else, people won't be able to complain that they didn't know what was going on, didn't get the right sort of information, and so on. Tigger is the informal channel of access to the committee and the convention members should make as much use of it as they can - doing so will only advance both the members and the committee, and in the end that will lead to a better convention.

As an aside; it seems to me that the convention committee has now opened itself up to the kinds of pressures that can be applied to any organisation which establishes a 'public access and information campaign'. That's the problem with this sort of exercise but it remains to be seen whether anybody is bloody minded or cranky enough to push Tigger further than its creators are willing to let it go.

The WASFA News 7, April 30 1984, 2pp.
Kevin McCaw, 20 Dodd Street, Hamilton Hill, WA 6163.

A very slight issue of this little newszine which tells a little about what's going on in Perth and also about what Kevin has been doing and what has befallen him. Like quite a few others, Kevin finds himself in a penniless state which he must endure while studying, and his lowered level of activity seems to match the transformation of the once overenergetic WA SF Association into a monthly dinner meeting. (Such is the fate of a fan centre upon which middle-age creeps.) This means, I hope, that both WASFA and Kevin's future fanzines will be less formal and more entertaining. But, from the way Kevin writes it, he may have to wait until next year when he has an income before we will see something more from him. That will be unfortunate, but I suppose we'll just have to be patient.

* * *

This brings us to the part of the issue where those dedicated sf buffs in the readership can pay attention. Not only does the Irrepressible George Turner have

something to say about new sf, he has something to say about the old stuff as well.

A FEW TEARS FOR THE GOLDEN AGE

George Turner

It seems to me that there are three basic reasons for writing sf:

1. To make money. (If you're luck holds, that is.) This is a perfectly moral reason - up to a point. The point is the one where you discover that junk earns the greenbacks and art limps in last with the corns aching. Sensibly, you discard morality and reach for the folding stuff, you dream up an adolescent fantasy (or nick it secondhand from legend or nursery rhyme) add a dollop of sex and some stuff about telepathy, blasters and FTL flight - and lo, instant sf! Or you invent a 'big planet' modelled on medieval Europe with some 'science' glancingly referred to, and there you have the Lord Valentine saga, dripping dollars. (The geology of the 'big planet' is hilarious, but just carry on as it you hadn't noticed.) There is a market for this sort of thing and anybody is justified in seeking to fill it - one only wishes the so-and-sos wouldn't insist on being regarded as literary artists. Make out your own list of felons, not forgetting many who are victims of their own fans rather than their own pretentions. But, as you will see, there are traps for even the honest hack.

2. Because you are a nut (probably quite a nice, genial, inoffensive nut) with a barrow to push. Your name is probably Watson or Ballard or Dick, or even Tu.ner. You'don't make much money but you have a lot of fun, your friends are uniformly polite through gritted teeth and the critics make handsom meals of you - gnaw you to the bone in fact. Still, you are geing honest in your peculiar fashion and can die in the belief that virtue is its own reward. Its only reward.

3. Because you dislike the way other people write it. This accounts for Aldiss, Priest, Wolfe, Moorcock, Harlan Ellison, Bruce Gillespie and Barrington Bailey. (All respectable bar one, and I don't mean Gillespie.) People like these sf alive and moving, even if you as reader don't always like their work. They supply the originality which others (see Group 1) copy, debase and turn into money in endless series sagas, alike as clones. Sometimes a Group 3 writer makes a little money (Chris Priest has recently struck gold after a too-long period of being more or less ignored), not from dyed in the wool fans but from the silent majority who know good work when they see it and wouldn't recognise fandom if they fell over it. (They are missing something; they might enjoy falling over fandom and being suitably astonished.)

Like all straightjackets, the three-sleeved one turns out to be too restricting when I consider individual works, but these useless reflections have been occasioned by a recent attempt to recover the Golden Age and see what we were like then - and where we are now - by reading some new works by Golden Age authors who are still with us and re-reading others by some of the giants of that time.

Stardeath by E C Tubb, Ballantine, 182pp; $4.95.
Why does Edwin Charles Tubb, now in his sixty-fourth year, write sf? A glance at his career may suggest some answers. He began, in NEW WORLDS in 1951, and was prolific from the start, operating mostly under pseudonyms. Remember Charles Grey and Volstead Gridban? With the firming of his talent he began to publish under his own name; Alien Dust, 1955, and The Space-Born, 1956, were two of the better novels of their decade. Then he dropped from sight for about ten years, reputedly having a lean time of it, writing little, to surface again in America with the first 'Dumarest' novel, The Winds of Gath, in 1967. Now 'Dumarest No. 30' is on its way and the damned man hasn't yet reached the Earth he has hunted throught something like two million words. I remember once commending this series as one of the best of its kind, but fell exhausted round about No. 8

or 9. As well as these he has produced twenty or so 'Cap Kennedy' novels (as 'Gregory Kern') since 1973 and half a dozen others under his own name; I know nothing of their quality. His sheer stamina is amazing.

Alas, the strain is telling; the once dependable, competent though never top flight story teller has fallen at last to process work on the assembly line. Consider the jacket blurb for Stardeath: 'The lucky ones on the lost ship are dead. The others have been turned insides out in gruesome parody of human beings and they are still alive' (My emphasis.) This nonsense is, unlike most blurb writing, an accurate account of what is going on inside. So is: 'The enemy is unknown and the only way Varl can solve the mystery is to use himself as bait!'

The story is actually much worse than that. The enemy, whose motives remain a mystery to me, come from another contimuum and most of the action takes place in space between continua. Make sense of that if you can. More interesting is the question of why Tubb is turning out tenth rate novels. The probable answer is that he knows how bad the stuff is but has little choice. The American paperback system offers contracts - a certain number of books to be delivered in a certain time - and the successful writer of 'Dumarest', who knows what it means to endure years of poverty and is suddenly at the height of his productive power, pledges his talent. Under this system Tubb churned out forty-five novels in a ten year period, 1967-77, and has not slackened noticeably since. A murderous grind.

I would be prepared to make a rough bet that he now finds himself caught in the small print of these contracts that seemed to promise endless money with some sort of freedom in the future. Most literary contracts contain an 'options' clause, and the only honest way to defeat it (if you haven't had it carefully vetted before signing) is to stop writing altogether. If you can afford to. The dishonest way for a disgusted author (often disgusted with himself as well as with his predicament) is to toss off a few junk items as quickly as possible, simply to fulfil his obligations and break free.

Tough on the readers. Yes. Tough on the writer, too. Deliberately writing assembly line material is not easy; many cannot do it at all. For a man in his sixties, with thirty years of intensive sf production behind him, the grind could be soul destroying. If you like Tubb, don't read Stardeath. Pretend it hasn't happened.

Chessboard Planet, by Henry Kuttner, Hamlyn; 187pp; $5.50.
There's life in this Golden Age yet. Originally The Fairy Chessmen, in ASTOUNDING, 1946, this is one of 'classic' (using the word loosely) which stands up steadily after nearly forty years. It is the story of a psychological war in which the rules keep changing (hence the original title). If you have never read it, rush out and buy the book, for this is one of the few which are really essential to your sf education. When Kuttner died in 1958 his passing was regretted by every sf reader; he was one of the few who appealed to all, from lowbrow to hard core intellectual. He had the secret of the ideal mix.

The book is fleshed out with short stories. 'Camouflage' is one of the earliest cyborg stories and little more has been said on the subject since, just as 'Android' is an early sample of its breed and says what little is worth saying about androids. The final eight-pager, 'Or Else', is about an alien trying to resolve a Mexican standoff it is an amusingly snide comment on interstellar as well as homegrown stupidity.

Out of the past, a gem.

The Best of Jack Williamson, Ballantine; 386pp, $5.95.
Gernsback's AMAZING published Williamson's first story 'The Metal Man', in 1928. Young Jack was twenty; at seventy-five he is still pouring them out. I met him at SeaCon, a tall, gently spoken man without pretences, whom you would

not suspect of being one of the all-time top practitioners of technirama space-opera.

That first story is published here and if forgiveable for 1928. It is followed by Dead Star Station', from ASTOUNDING, 1933, which is not at all forgiveable. It's aweful. But I recall that in 1933 we praised it for its 'warm humanity' and reckoned it was one of the best of its year. In fact it is a load of sentimental slop about a sweet little girl and her drivelling Granddaddy who can't get his inventions accepted. Then pitiless pirates strike, and Granddaddy's invention saves the day at the cost of his life. Stiff-upper-lip-cum-tearful ending.

Williamson was always partial to such plots and characters and, since his writing has not improved greatly in fifty-five years, evewn his latest works seem quaintly old fashioned. His forte was always dreaming-up fresh concepts which imitators have lapt upon, developed and usually degraded. He is credited as the originator of the 'alternate time-tracks' concept in a frighteningly inept novel called The Legion of Time (ASTOUNDING, 1938), and he commonly displayed great ingenuity in introducing original ideas.

The best tale in this book seems to me to be 'The Peddler's Nose', a comedy about the alien who came to Earth and caught a cold. (We Earthmen introduced influenza to the South Seas and decimated the populations everywhere. Likewise with the Esquimanx.) This is the sort of collection that reminds one of just how unmemorable the Golden Age could be in its unguided spots, and also of what a huge imaginitive base is provided for today's writers. Those who most influenced the strengths and directions of sf were rarely its best writers.

I would rather remember Jack himself, a nice, comfortable bloke to talk to.

Frederik Pohl contributes a Foreword which steers round the awkward spots with professional aplomb.

Ringing Changes, by R A Lafferty, Ace; 275pp; $5.95.
Lafferty has been for years one of my favourite yarn spinners. One can't call him a writer of sf because his stories relate only philosophically to science - and then at a distance - or for that matter to observable reality. His imagination has the quickness that charmed in Lewis Carroll and has something of the same effect of convincing the reader that a relevant truth lies behind it all, if only he could put his finger on it. I have rarely enjoyed his novels (except Where Have You Been, Sandaliotis?), which gave me the feeling of a joke extended beyond its appeal, but have watched for the short stories like a man starved.

Suddenly I am sated. I know that the twenty tales in this volume are vintage Lafferty, but I stopped reading at number seven. The quirky humor is undimmed, the nose-thumbing at reality is as subtly preposterous as ever, but I have had enough. What used to be the unique Lafferty method has familiarised itself into a set of mannerisims which have not changed over the years.

It would be foolish to decry Lafferty, he is sui generis and irreplaceable. The fault lies in myself, I have read too eagerly and too often. I shall put this collection aside and return to it in a year or two. In the meantime, the Lafferty lover who retains his taste for nonsense just over the thither side of comprehension will find here the same joy as ever - the same quality, the same trickery, the same antic dancing on pinpoints of the imagination.

The Narrow Land, by Jack Vance, Coronet; 176pp; $5.95.
Vance is another whose short stories have pleased me more than his novels, but this collection of old tales does him no justice. The earliest is vintage 1945, the latest 1967, and I am told (how truly I don't know) that he objected in vain to this lot being republished - in vain because agents tend to operate over one's head and there is little to be gained by arguing against one's own agent's bread and butter when the contract is brandished and the small print evoked .

Little can damage a reputation so solidly planted as Vance's, but one can understand the sophisticated writer of today writhing at the failures and niaveties of minor tales of the '50s provenance, and wishing they did not have to be served up for the sake of a few dollars he can scarcely need all that badly. He knows, as every writer knows in his heart, that you can't revisit a past you have outgrown.

The next book is His Master's Voice, by Stanislav Lem, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 199pp; $5.95) and it is the most important of those so far noted. But first, digression on the nature of the novel as a form of fiction.

Reviewers are prone to a number of stereotyped complaints. 'This novel', they cry, 'displays no sense of place', or 'one cannot visualise the characters'; or ' the characters remain static, do not develop'; or, 'the ambiguous ending is unsatisfactory'. These are the complaints of reviewers with hard and fast ideas of what a novel should be and who therefore cannot cope with one that does not fit their conception. All these 'faults', and many more, are often deliberate on the part of the writer who wishes to concentrate the reader's attention on what he considers the main matter, and is prepared to jettison inessentials in order to keep the mental eye fixed where he wants it.

Take, for instance, the 'sense of place', which usually means description and the placing of characters against prominently featured backgrounds. Now, physical background serves only one of three main purposes; (a) spectacle, as in Merritt or Herbert or Tolkien, in which case it is essential to the writer's intention, or (b) to influence the atmosphere or the plot, and is again essential, or (c) to hold the characters in place somewhere or other, and you'd better describe the place or the big bad reviewer will have you for breakfast. The fact is that in case (c) it may not matter a damn how little background indication you give and reducing it to a mere stage direction is a legitimate technique when what matters is what the characters are doing, not where they are doing it. (A good play, for example, can be quite successful on a bare stage.) Similar conditions apply to the other 'faults': visualisation of the character is often best left to the reader (unless it is structually necessary for the hero to have a clubbed foot or the heroine a naevus on her cheek); characters need not develop in a static study and the ambiguous ending may be a deliberate effect the reader is expected to exercise his brain on. Many writers pay their readers the compliment of assuming them capable of thought, which is why so many of the better ones get poorer reviews than they deserve.

The great exemplar of including only what is necessary was the late Ivy Compton-Burnett (mainstream), of whose novels no less than eight have in the last four months been reprinted by three different publishers. In an Ivy C-B novel you will be told little more than 'a country house large enough for a family of five and two servants', 'a tall woman in her forties, carefully dressed', 'a man whose eyes tend to evade'; often you are told less than that. The novels are conducted in whiplash dialogue, rather subtly self-explanatory, with no 'angrily', 'sweetly' or 'she cried in mounting hysteria'. The reader does all the work or fails to understand a word.

Ivy G-B is considered one of the major novelists of the Twentieth Century. A course in her novels could be a revelation to reviewers who can't believe that there are more than two ways - theirs and the wrong way - of presenting fiction.

Which brings me to the peculiar His Master's Voice. It has no real characters, only a number of named persons respresnting types of scientist and philosopher; it has a setting which Lem wastes little time on because a few of its details matter, it hasn't much in the way of story becuase story is not the core of his offering; the characters do not develop because they are not people but points of view, and as for ambiguity of ending ... well, it peters out when there is no further argument to dwell on, which is precisely what Lem intended.

It concerns a message from space and the attempts of a research team to decipher it. They succeed only partially and conclude (this is typical Lem) that the undecoded section may be forever beyond them because they don't know enough about

the universe to understand what it might mean - or even if it is in fact a message at all. You might say that the book is not so much a novel as a series of arguments presented in fictional form. But it has shape and development and purpose. It is a novel.

Chapter by chapter Lem discusses the issues raised by the mere idea of extra-terrestrial communication, the empiricism involved in making physical tests of the unknown and the possibility of systems of thought so alien that they can, by definition, make no contact with our own. The book is a discussion of scientific thought and experimental philosophy, rendered in fiction to make it accessible in layterms, and will be appreciated only by the reader prepared to surrender himself to ideas and not demand unwarranted intrusions of plot, characterisation and whipped-up drama.

It belongs already to the sf past (1968) but the method is timeless. Recommended to those who will give as much to the book as they expect to take from it.

This foray into the past has been in the main disappointing, for the usual reason that the past is unchanging but we are not. Most of the sf past (with, as always, significant exceptions) is for literary archeologists. In half a century of so sf has grown from a debased genre headed by Hugo Gernsback and Edgar Rice Burroughs to a fount of non-genre works related to sf but not of it, led by such as Christopher Priest, Tom Disch, Gene Wolfe, Ursula Le Guin, Michael Moorcock, et al. And somebody called John Calvin Batchelor.

Batchelor's novel, The Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica, has little currency in Australia; Bruce Gillespie is its enthusiastic publiciser and the only person I know to have actually read it. I await its paperback appearance with anticipation because his second novel, The Further Adventures of Halley's Comet, Granada; 424pp; $8.95, is already available and is a shot in the arm for the jaded reader or reviewer.

It's a thoroughly smooth and delightful wine trifle of a novel (you know, sweetly sour) by a man who dislikes the world we have made for ourselves but would rather laugh and poke fun than mope over it. Halley's Comet may or may not have been the Star of Bethlehem - 12 BC may be a backdating of the birth of Christ further than research finds acceptable - but who cares about that when the comet is inhabited by the three magi, who call in on Earth at each seventy-six year passage? They ask questions like, "What is the true nature of revolution?' and are immoderatley pleased with answers like. 'Replacing one gang of fools with another.'

It is not always so superficial. You might give some thought to this exchange:

'Socialism is ... a utopian state of human affairs wherein everyone in a community shares not only the bounty of the community but also in the making of the bounty.'

'Utopian?' said the dwarf ... 'And what is the true nature of nihilism?'

'Nhilism is also a utopian state of human affairs based upon the premise that it is possible to reject all legal, moral and spiritual authority.'

'Utopian again?' said the dwarf.

Don't think too hard about it if you don't want all your political morality to crash round your ears.

Such exchanges are, however, only incidental to the novel whose centre is the classic struggle between the romantic virtues of honest goodness and the popular myths of wealth and power. Batchelor appears to play no favourites; both sides are equally stupid, one romantically silly and the other pragmatically idiotic, and the nonsense is perfectly expressed when the forces of good, armed with bows and arrows, attack the castle protected by guns and electronic safeguards. They win. Well, after

a fashion, they win. You must read it to find out.

The flavour of the book lies in its marvellous bravura passages, like interpolated vaudeville acts of high quality. My favourite is that in which a young lady tells a gathering of army officers how to win the Vietnam War (the time scale is very elastic); her plan is tactically logical and might well have succeeded in practice - but it involves the slaughter of the entire attacking force as well as the enemy. The reactions of the officers, with both eyes fixed on personal advancement and political repercussions, tell a great deal about the philosophy of the power play, the real considerations of tactics and the limits of pragmatism.

It is not a book I can yet discuss in detail. Another reading will be necessary just to be sure I have understood its intentions, but I can commend it now for wit, ingenuity, belly laughs and lashings of the unexpected.

Please, please read it. The Golden Age is right now!

* * *

LETTERS OF COMMENT

Terry Carr
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I have to question your remark in Rataplan 26 that Dick Geis's writing in SFR 'marks some of the best writing in the field', because I think that Geis, despite his fannish history, is only a fair writer, not an outstanding one. In fact, it was the Hugo he won as Best Fanwriter that turned so many against him. The Hugos that SFR won were questionable, but the ranking of Geis's own writing as Best Fanwriter were clearly the result of uninformed voting by people who'd seem his writing but not that of Langford, the Nielsen-Haydens, etc. Sure, Geis is a good fanwriter - but does he rank with fans whose writing matches those of the very best! The fact that in 1979 no one present at the Hugo ceremonies seemed willing to accept his Hugo for Best Fanzine was a result of Geis's overachievement; we were all embarrassed. Finally Fred Pohl got up to accept the award, and he said "I've always admired Dick Geis's work ... but not very much". Can you ask for a more honest appraisal!

I also disagree with your remark, 'And in any case, fanzines aren't art, they are a continuing process of communication between writer and reader which is mediated by the editor and the fashion in which he wants to present the work'. I don't see that the latter obviates the former, and in any case, all art is communication (if it's any good at all). Mainly, though, I see your statement as the latest in a decades-long dichotomy among fanzine fans: are we here to write quality prose, or are fanzines just a means of communication, another way for fans to keep in touch, etc? I think it's a false dichotomy, and one that's led far too many fans to argue about 'standards', the advisability of reprinting past fanwriting (how can something written in 1956 contribute to the ongoing communication of 1984?), and such etc. Genzine fans put down apas for their trivial, first-draft mailing comments, apa fans sneer at the pretentions of those who write in more formal modes.

I think it's all silly. Many people have written mailing comments, first or fourth draft, that can stand outside the context of original publication; and many fans have written formal essays or fanfiction stories that were no damn good the first time around. The mind-set that sees fanzines as communication misses the fact that a good piece written in whatever form can have applications and resonances that will remain appropriate and useful for centuries. If this wasn't true, there's no point in publishing The Letters of Jane Austen, to name only one example. Good writing is good writing usually in any era, and while those who write strictly for the moment (or the month, quarter, the year) may be contributing pieces that are primarily valuable to their own times, if what they have to say strikes to the heart of an important subject, their products will continue to be valuable long after

justify having these four around as being a good basic collection; one office manual, one portable electric/mechanical, one golfball and finally one electronic. Now all I need is the dedicated word-processor to bring the collection right up to date. But I doubt that I will be able to afford that right away unless vast hoards of people start paying to see the existing members of the collection.

What's so great about fiction anyhow?

Reading is a fairly enjoyable occupation, if it wasn't I doubt that you'd be taking the trouble to read your way through this fanzine. All the same there's a lot of different kinds of things that a person can read, some of them are fictional and some are not. The question which exercises my mind just at the moment is why we in sf fandom should give such a special place to the reading and writing of fiction. (I know that 'fan' is just a contraction for 'science fiction fan', but even so, I hope that most of us read more than just that stuff.)

What set me on this line of thought was a letter I recently received which berated me, in a fairly gentle way, for being so dogmatic about not publishing fiction in this fanzine - and also criticising most publishers of fanzines similar to this one for being so critical of fan fiction. This is, of course, a fairly average sort of thing to have to put up with, and there is a by now standard response to it. If a piece of fiction is good enough to see the light of day then there is no reason why it should not be good enough to get published in a prefessional magazine. I still stick to that little bit of dogma, but on reflection I've decided to add another piece to it, and then hopefully my position will be completely secure and nobody will ever bother me with this problem again.

What is so great about fiction that I should expend energy and time and money in publishing it. There are other forms of writing which should be just as valid and important, things like essays, critical reviews, short articles on recent events, letters of comment, cheery little bits to liven up the day, and a whole host of other things that could be put into the pages of this or any other fanzine to good effect. Why include fiction as well?

For one thing, if you want to write fiction there are magazines which pay you for your work and go out of their way to solicit the kinds of things that fiction writers like to produce. So far as I know there are not magazines which are available to people who want to write intelligent but non-scholarly articles, notes on what they did on their holidays and comments on the most recent round of conventions. That being the case, would it not be more reasonable for fiction writers to be asked to peddle their wares somewhere where they won't be pushing out other kinds of writing which cannot find a home somewhere else?

I suppose that the preference which fiction has in this particular hobby group comes from the amount of time that we spend in reading the stuff. From that we are likely to get the impression that fiction is the most important stuff that a person can write. It is only natural when we go and spend so much time and money on collecting books full of it and even reading some of them. But I'm not sure that this impression is all that close to a correct understanding of what is going out there in the publishing world. I suspect, on the other hand, that in publishing it is fiction which is only a minority force - at least intentionally. There are all those journalists, science writers, sex therapists and historians out there, and what they write can only be considered fiction as a result of personal failings or a wish to make a fast quid.

Perhaps fanzines really should reflect a better idea of the wide world rather than just acting as a mirror to the ideas of what the world is about which we are likely to get from what we read for relaxation.

I suppose that it might even be legitimate to say that fanzines can serve as a good training ground for writers. But since there are more openings in the world for people who can write reports and memos, or books about how to tune up your car or the backs or cereal packets, perhaps fanzines should prove themselves

useful by offering those writers somewhere to get experience too. (I'm not about to run articles on how to get the best out of a V-8 engine but I don't mind if people try their hand at some of the other kinds of writing). And then again, is there any reason at all for people to have to work on skills that aren't going to earn them anything but will only serve them as an interesting hobby? Perhaps there is - just in giving people the practise that they would like so that they can get better at what they like to do for a hobby.

All this is not to say that I don't have a great deal of sympathy and understanding for those people who, for some unexplained reason, want to be writers of fiction. To write fiction well is an art which few can do very well. On the other hand, writing bad fiction is very easy indeed and has the advantage of needing little or no thought other than a consideration of the amount of money that might be gained if the work sells. A lot of the fiction that does get to see the light of day shows fairly clearly that while the author has an interesting imagination he or she lacks any of the usual ideas of self-control which give shape and power to stories. Learning these kinds of skills and abilities which are necessary to write fiction well are not going to be accomplished in the fan press which is largely uncritical and more interested in filling up bits of blank paper and feedin feeding the starved egos of the editors of such magazines.

While there might just be something to be said for getting practise in stringing words together in fan fiction so that you get used to the idea, I doubt that the attitude of most fans to that fiction is useful enough to serve much of a feedback purpose. The letter columns of fanzines which print large amounts of fiction never seem to be full of critical comment on the stories of the previous issues, and although they might contain comments about the reader's enjoyment or otherwise of the stories, that doesn't seem to me to be enough to justify their publication.

Perhaps a bit of the argument hinges on what purpose a fanzine has anyhow. Now if it were true to say that fanzines exist to encourage people to write fiction, then I would be completely in the wrong and I would probably not publish another issue of this or any other fanzine. The fact that some people have that aim in mind is quite fine for them. And it may even be the case that the earliest fanzines did set themselves that ideal as well, but then this is 1984 and not 1934, things have moved on a bit in the past few years and even evolution has its effects on fandom.

Keeping busy

The other day I was talking to Valma about the weekend activities of one of the people in at the office. She was going to drive down to a house in the middle of the bush and lie around there for a day and a half until it was time to return to Canberra. "Fancy," I said, "having the spare time to do nothing in particular for a whole weekend." Valma reminded me that the only thing stopping us from enjoying similar non-activities are the diverse interests that we have and the desire to follow them too. She also reminded me that I get bored very quickly and a day and a half of doing nothing would be a day too many. Perhaps so, but I hope I'm allowed one or two harmless fantasies - even if they are of total inactivity.

As you might have already worked out, this is turning into some kind of excuse for being late once more with this fanzine of mine. (Not that I need to apologise since being late with a fanzine is in the best traditions of the business.)

The simple fact is that I really do have too many things that interest me and the idea of dropping any of them is not very attractive. I often feel very envious of people who have nothing better to do on the weekends than read a pile of books or to get out into the garden and rip up a few weeds, but how dull life would be if there weren't any fanzines to be produced, model aeroplanes to be made and essays to be prepared for university? Perhaps I should just admit that I am a workaholic at my hobbies and be sent away for a rest cure.

Be that as it may, part of the reason that the June issue of this fanzine is appearing late in September is because I've found it just a bit difficult to work up the enthusiasm to go through the motions of producing this issue. Faced with the prospect of typing, rereading, duplicating, etc., etc. a thirty or forty page fanzine the spirit failed just a bit. This may be because from the past few issues I've been getting the feeling that I'm mostly talking to myself because my letterbox has remained remarkably void of the good stuff that keeps fanzine editors at it.

There was, of course, the business of typing up the stencils and although it is a lot of hard work no matter which way you look at it, the machine on which you choose to do the job will make it easier or harder - and the old one just made the task seem like manual labour. There will still be just as much time involved in cutting stencils on this new machine, but so far I find that it doesn't seem to take as much physical endurance to get a page done. And when you're an old and tired fan like me those kinds of considerations start to become important.

Now I'm not going to be silly enough to say that the August issue will be out in September too and that the October issue will be out in October, I know far too much about my own habits to write that. I would say that I will catch up over the long university break from November until next March, but that is, of course, the cricket season when a lot more time is taken up in looking at the television and listening to the radio. But I suppose that I'd best make the effort because keeping up with my publishing schedule is going to be totally academic when the Australian team goes to England next year and I have to stay up half the night (or more) to make sure of seeing every last ball of each of the test matches.

About this issue

Following right on from the previous thoughts I suppose that I should make a passing comment about the austerity of this issue. For the previous three issues I've been playing with headings and interior artwork, which is all very good in a way but it takes up extra time in preparing an issue. Since I'm going to try to get this issue onto stencil and into the mails before the end of another week or so I have no time for such niceties. What you are going to get in this issue will be the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text, so help me Ghu!

I wouldn't say that pictures are out for future issues, just that they are waiting around for me to see if I have the time to use them properly. There are, after all, plenty of fanzines which fill themselves up with all kinds of things to make them look good (and most of them fail), but mainly look that way because of the time and unbounded enthusiasm which the editor has. Lacking a goodly part of those bounties I find that I have to do the best I can with what I have available. And I happen to find that there is nothing wrong with page upon page of honestly presented words - and that they are preferable to badly laid-out pages which show off pieces of art which only cause brain-ache, they are so poorly done.

Another factor will simply be how well this machine cuts stencils. I must admit that I was not really happy putting work that artists had sent me in pages of text which were not reproduced as well as they should have been. If pages of mere text start to look good again then I might feel encouraged to put some good art in them too.

But for this issue it's a matter of no frills. So I'm afraid that those of you who can't live without interior pictures are going to have to help themselves out with self-drawn work in the margins and in the space between the articles. I seem to have invented an interactive fanzine in passing.

About tool boxes

Let me draw a few threads together here (or on the next page at any rate).

Van Ikin has sent me the two latest issues of his always interesting Science Fiction. For me the most interesting article in the issues was George Turner's "What Australian SF Critics Should be Talking About" in issue 14. The reason that I found this item noteworthy was because it is another of George's attempts to get people interested in sf to do the right thing - or what he would call the right thing. Generally I agree with him, but that's not the point of this little piece.

The second thread is a lot of what follows in this issue - most of it having been written out for the past couple of months but only now getting onto stencil. It seems to me that although this fanzine was not really intended to discuss much about sf I have been publishing a fair bit about it. It also seems to me fairly obvious that we have two camps forming up and a few interested observers. One camp remains firmly attached to the old values of sf and the other camp seems to be looking for something that is like sf only with some mystery compound added (or subtracted) to make it better to read. The observers are generally wondering what the two camps are on about.

The third thread has to do with tool boxes - in the mental sense. When we are confronted with a problem around the house, something that needs fixing, we grab a couple of tools and do the job. A hammer, screwdriver and pair of pliers are generally what you'd need. But with an intellectual problem there are different tools, perhaps the basic ones are a grasp of logic and an ability to see a problem in the first place. (Perhaps the trouble with one of the camps parking in this fanzine is that they can't see any problem in sf. If that is the case, if they are satisfied with it in its present state, then there is little reason for them to do more than just keep on reading the stuff and ignoring the other camp.)

While three basic tools might be alright for fixing a broken hinge they would not be enough to strip down a turbo-charged V-8 engine. The case is probably also the same with the criticism of sf - a bit of logic and a recognition of a problem are only enough to work out that something fairly complex is going on, but not enough to be able to work out what. In order to do that it is necessary to collect together additional tools which make the job of stripping down an engine or a story possible. (Fortunately a piece of fiction remains in one piece even in this state while the motor mechanic needs even more tools to put an engine back into working order again.)

So where can a person get these tools?

I suppose that the easiest way is to go along to a place which sells intellectual tools to see what you can pick up. These places are usually called universities and I understand that people like Van Ikin and Bruce Gillespie have been to them. It may have been the case that they had some rudimentary tools that they'd picked up in high school but the ones you get at university are generally classier, and some properly packaged complete with a comprehensive users guide. And more to the point, there are simply more to choose from at university.

The second way is to be a bit of a bush mechanic and make all your own tools - odd bits of mental apparatus which one shaped to a purpose because experience has taught the user what works best or which the user has read of somewhere and modified to suit themselves. Unfortunately most bush mechanics can perform quite adequately on your average Ford sedan or Niven story, but they lack the training to deal with the really knotty and worthwhile problems. If they have any sense they will avoid problems like the latest Renault Formual One car or Ballard, but sometimes... But as an exception to this class there are those bush mechanics, generally also the same people who have built some fairly classy bits of machinery, who turn their hands to literary criticism - and usually do a first class job of it. To name one, George Turner.

Once upon a time the most important people writing about sf were also writers - the Knights and Blishes. But these days things have changed and it is the

youngsters who have been specially trained in criticism who have the running. I'm not sure why this is, but it might have something to do with the amount of money that a professional writer can make by just writing fiction and not wasting time on writing about fiction. It might also be because most self-respecting sf authors really wouldn't want to stop and think about what they are writing.

And then there is the vast body of fan reviewers who really don't need or use any of the intellectual tools. What they often have is a finely tuned set of personal preferences - which is quite reasonable in a fanzine so long as they write well enough to make their opinions entertaining to read.

All this brings me pulling the threads together.

My favourits book of this year and last year (having read it over the new year) was Rob Pascoe's The Manufacture of Australian History. It is a detailed work of Australian historiography and the way in which I devoured it so avidly perhaps points up the rather enquiring mind that I've picked up for these things over the past few years. I suppose that this is also a result of spending some time at a university getting fitted out with a kit of mental tools.

The relationship between what is going on is sf, what critics are writing about and what is going on in this fanzine are all held together by this line of thought. The trouble is that I think the tools in my tool box aren't the same ones that everybody else is using and so I'm not really equipped to deal with some of the problems that come up. It's as though people keep on pushing cars into my workshop to be worked on; all the nuts and bolts are Whitworth and my spanners and sockets are all in BSA.

Well now, it's even a bit weirder than that. The tools that you pick up in the English Department and the ones that the History Department give out look fairly similar but often they do different jobs. If you were to put Bruce Gillespie's tool box next to mine you'd probably also find that he too has a class of empericist tools (very popular in most fields so it seems), some tools which I would put under the label of "whig (history", some sociological tools and some psychological tools, and even some marxist tools. And if Bruce is very fortunate he will also have one of these amazing chrome plated, all dancing, all singing, all-purpose, multi-use structuralist tools with the special hermeneutic phasing device. If only I could figure out how to make it work. (Which reminds me of the recent laugh I got at a history students/faculty meeting when the speaker tried to wrap his mouth around the phrase "hermetically sealed" and got confused. Up I popped with an alternate version - "hermeneutically sealed". As you can see, that word has become one of my favourites in the past year of so - and it would be even better if I knew what it really means.)

The trouble I'm having is that the tools in my box may look similar to Bruce's, but they do different jobs. This one here rips out "unexamined assumptions in the text" and this one here does a job on "causal chains". Life would be a whole lot easier for me in this fanzine if I knew what the tools that people pick up in English Departments actually do. I can see the results but I often get confused about how it all happened. And on the other hand, I'm not really equipped to deal with problems that are starting to get wheeled in here, other than by having a go at them with some likely looking tools out of my collection and seeing what happens, or, by using the basic "grasp of logic" approach. For example, some of the stuff in Russell Blackford's letter in this issue concerns me a bit, but I've just had to let it slip by because I can't quite figure out why the argument that he puts up is running a bit rough. If only I could get this bloody chrome-plated, multi-widgetted structuralist thing to work... it's supposed to be able to deal with any problem.

So I hope that you'll bear with me from time to time while I rattle around in my mental toolbox, trying to find something which will work tolerably well.

On with the show

One of the simplest ways of making sure that this fanzine gets posted out soon would be to cut the editorial comment at the front of the issue. I can assure you that the simple fact that we have reached page eight already and I am about to type up some words from Bruce Gillespie is evidence of an incredible editorial self control,

We've had, you see, some interesting visitors of late.

Generally speaking Valma and I live a very hermit like existence with us going to see nobody and nobody coming to see us. Now else do you think that we manage to find the time that we'd like to spend on all our interests - there's nothing like a continual stream of visitors to keep one away from the typewriter or the ironing (whatever that might be). But then Caroline Strong and John Newman happened to be in town one time and we spent a very pleasant afternoon sitting around talking, wandering around among the Norman Lindsay etchings in the National Library (he's not bad you know, I wouldn't mind having some of his stuff in this fanzine) and then going out to a remainder bookshop where Valma and I spent yet more money on interesting books which we might never read while John and Caroline seemed to be setting us a fine example of self restraint through their small piles of books, as opposed to our huge one.

Then there was the evening when I came home early from work to do some damage to the pile of wood in the back yard so that we could burn some of it to keep us warm, and there was a knock on the door and who should it be but Lee Harding. Unfortunately I forgot to note down any of what he said, which might be just as well for some of us... A few days later he was back again and this time with Irene Pagram who had been with him in Sydney. It was one of those evenings when there is so much catching up on each other to do that the mere fact that one couple had to be up real early to get on the road and the other had to get up to go to work got lost in the continuing chatter. For all you know, we probably talked about you too.

We went to our favourite vegetarian restaurant with Lee and Irene and a week or so later did the same with Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber. Apart from the ability to serve up yummy vegies, the restaurant in no-smaking so that those who suffer from the result of others pleasure can dine in comfort. We spent the greater part of the evening telling each other about the latest troubles we've been having at work, not that I've been having any but the other three certainly had enough to talk about. As Eric, Jean, Valma and I were leaving a desperate looking character burst into the restaurant and wanted to know if they sold any cigarettes. We had the discourtesy to fall all over the place laughing, enough to embarrass almost any person, including that one.

But while it's nice to have visitors from time to time they are not a good thing for a work schedule. Which brings us to the ever-green Bruce Gillespie, who hasn't been by to visit of late. That may be why he has time to write contributions to this fanzine... (Now all I've got to do is remember how to make the machine centre automatically ... probably that key there and this one here... right...)

* * *

IT'S AN OCCASIONALLY WONDERFUL LIFE

Bruce Gillespie

It's a Wonderful Life is the best film I've seen for a long time; very nearly my favourite film.

I never would have seen it without the wonder of the Midday Movie on television. The director was Frank Capra; Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed are the stars; and

I've forgotten the names of the three script writers listed on the credits. (Whoever was actually responsible for the script was great.) It's a Wonderful Life comes from that period of movie-making which I've been discovering during the last two or three years - those great years of Hollywood and English film making just before and after the Second World War. (This rule is hardly watertight; recently I saw the great The Harder They Fall, which in style is much closer to 1947 than to 1957, when it was actually made.) It's a Wonderful Life comes from 1947, right in the middle of the best period. You'll remember that the film begins with one of those ghastly twee conceits which only a pre-1950s Hollywood film-maker could have dared to present: God sends an angle (desperate for promotion, yet) to rescue a good man who has fallen by the wayside. It's a Wonderful Life sets out to show the life of a genuinely good man. What a foolish enterprise! Didn't Capra know that he was doomed to failure? Apparently not. Jimmy Stewart is completely convincing as the bloke who always wanted to get away from his home town, but keeps on staying to rescue his family's loan company, mainly out of the goodness of his heart. The film succeeds because the man's goodness brings him nothing but misery. He spends the whole of his life defending the poor mortgagees of his company against the richest banker in town. Finally, he feels himself such a failure that he staggers off to commit suicide. This is where the angel, disguised as a down-at-heel old reprobate, rescues him. In the course of the conversation, the Jimmy Stewart character says, "I wish I had never been born." The angel shows him what would have happened to the town and all of the people if he had never been born. This is one of the greatest fantasy sequences in all cinema, and is quite sombre and horrifying. Of course there's a happy ending - which only underlines the real point of the film: that the good guys in real life always get it in the neck. And, astoundingly for a Hollywood film, it's the force of big business which wipes out the small investor and home-owner. So the fantasy device hides the real message of the film, and also brings it out more strongly.

The secret of It's a Wonderful Life is not just the intricate script (really intricate, since every small detail is important throughout the film, and is not just a cameo). There is a sense of bravado, of true belief in what is happening, which seems to have disappeared from films. The conviction of the film shows in the magnificent black and white photography, and whip-snap editing (at least as effective as in Citizen Kane), and the great performances by every member of the cast.

But It's a Wonderful Life was not just an aesthetic experience for me. It brought me up short. Had my life turned into a morass of failure? What if I had not existed - would the world have been any different? Since I am here, how can I make my mark, or at least do something which really satisfies me?

My search for some answers has led me along some strange byways. If, for instance, one mentions the I Ching among many readers of this fanzine, they are likely to go rigid with shock and scorn. There are always people who have never had a hexagram read for them. And they are often people who make claims for their own 'rationality' when their own views on life don't sound too rational at all. I first met the I Ching through Phil Dick's The Man in the High Castle, but thought little of it then. In fact, the book gives little idea of how one can actually derive a reading. Nearly ten years later, I sat in a circle of people while David Grigg did a hexagram for me. That was just after I had returned from overseas. I was completely sceptical about the value or otherwise of the I Ching, but it didn't hurt to find out what happened when somebody else cast a reading. I laughed aside the reading which David cast for my general future. It was '32. Duration', which is the basic hexagram for marriage. The main image is lasting through wind and storm. I was pleased at that image; it did seem the way my life went, just scraping past potential disasters. But marriage? Hah! When I returned from America and England, it seemed that I had no prospects for marriage at all. The lady I loved had been left in America; I had no hope of going back there, and she had no hope of joining me in Australia. 1974 was a dismal year, 1975 was interesting, and 1976 was a disaster. So was 1977, come to think of it.

But at the beginning of 1978 Elaine and I got together, and we were married nearly a year later. This progression of events gave me some respect for the I Ching as a fortune-telling device. I did not realise then that it was not meant primarily for such a purpose, but I did begin to consult it every now and again. Usually the readings puzzled me immensely. It was not until I bought the Wilhelm/Baynes translation that a few of the readings became clearer. (What are you supposed to think when you are told to 'practise your chariot driving', for instance?) Not that casting hexagrams from the I Ching brought great solutions to great problems. It's just a way of surprising yourself. You get back answers which make you look at things in a different way. Eventually you realise that the I Ching is re-educating you. As I said, it is not primarily a fortune telling device, but more a source of moral guidance; not 'this or that will happen', but 'this would be the best line of action.' The I Ching, for instance, is not interested in power or money, but is interested in achievement, that is, people coming together to achieve a particular and which would benefit the world as a whole. The emphasis is on fitting into the world as a whole.

The world as a whole, eh? What if there won't be any world, or not any human world, in a year's time. The I Ching is based on the idea of continual change, by which all things unfortunate are turned into all things fortunate; no ideal condition can persist for long before sliding into some other condition. Earth abides, and all that. A mixture of thoughts comes over me - why bother to achieve things if all achievement will be swept away soon? I won't tell you the exact reading the I Ching gave me on the matter, since that might be regarded as a breach of confidence, but there did seem to be some promise that human existence would continue. However, there was also a strong hint that I might have to pitch in and do something in order to make sure of that. Me? Unpolitical, I am, unfond of crowds and power, a majority of one. I haven't yet discovered what I am supposed to do. Perhaps I should have joined the anti-nuke marches. I don't think so. Perhaps I should do something far more dangerous; I don't know yet.

Not that I am any less pessimistic about the next few years. There are just too many weapons which all sorts of people are itching to use. There are, as a recent issue of Rolling Stone pointed out, almost no politicians of the 1980s who have seen an atomic explosion. And there are just the usual people who want to dispose of my future without asking me about it. A marvellously unlikely answer is given in a book called Aralan, by N J Engh. Although it is one of the very few good books of the last decade, almost nobody knows about it. (Ursula LeGuin does, and so does Justin Ackroyd, who lent it to me.) I want to write more about that book one of these days.

When I begin to worry overmuch about Things In General, even stranger things happen. The number of unread books on our shelves worried me, so I designed a crazy way of choosing the next book to read with an alphabetic scheme chosen by I Ching hexagrams. Twice I got 'JU', once for paperbacks and once for hardbacks. Only one 'JU' was on the shelves - you guessed it, good old C G Jung. People had been telling me to read Jung for years, and I had bought a few of the readily available books: Man and His Symbols and Memories, Dreams and Reflections. Nothing I have read about Jung - not even in Ursula LeGuin's Language of the Night could have prepared me for the power of Jung's writing and thought. Reading him for the first time is like the first time one reads Hesse, or the first time you catch up with an honestly sexy book. Much of what I had heard about Jung had led me to believe that he had some system which categorised human mental phenomena, and that he could pin down every element in a dream to some symbol. Jung never claimed to do such things, and is very cautious about pinning labels on phenomena.

The essence of his thought is that all people experience much which they have been trained to ignore. This often takes the form of dreams, fantasies, 'daydreams', but is also shown in art or any other mental activity which stretches out beyond the mundane. All dream events, to Jung, are real events. They are real ways in which we perceive reality. If we take notice of our dreams, then the whole of our lives can come into focus, can be re-integrated. Jung does not

trace all dream experiences to early sexual traumas, as Freud was inclined to suggest. Jung seems to have had a much larger view of the world than Freud did. Nobody can have dreams 'interpreted' by having nice little explanations for symbols. Everybody must find his or her own symbol pattern. This can take a lifetime's work. Jung claimed to have 10 000 of his own dreams written down, and that some of the most important took him twenty or thirty years to be clarified. What I found exciting about Jung was the way he accepted the importance of the accidental, the intuitive, and the deeply-felt. In Memories, Dreams and Reflection, he does not make it clear why he went in a direction so contrary to that taken by his rationalist contemporaries; to embrace the intuitive in early twentieth-century mid-Europe must have taken quite a jump of the imagination. Of course, becoming a psychiatrist helped him a lot, as he saw the difficulty people had in 'accounting for' their lives.

After reading Jung, I could hardly fail to act upon what I was reading. But what could I do? Some friends of mine in the psychiatric business did not know of one reputable Jungian psychiatrist or psychologist in Melbourne. (And I could hardly pay the $50 - $100 an hour such a person would want.) I began to write down my dreams, but I had no way to help me make sense of myself. (Elaine is not sceptical, but she is not willing to enter dangerous territory of which she has little expert knowledge.) I suspect the role of the analyist is extremely important to Jungian psychology, which makes analysis an Haut bougeois luxuary. Ah well; I trudge on regardless, and write down all those dreams I can remember in my Little Black Book. One result of all this is that I started notes for an autobiography. This arose from my feeling that the events of my early life, though vivid at the time, remain in the mind like events in some continuous dream. Perhaps if I treated those images in the same way as I write about dreams, I might start to make sense of my childhood, much of which hurts me to remember. I don't know if I've made much progress, except that what I write shows how much of a problem I was to my parents, at least in the early years.

Everything started to happen at once. I was scribbling for the first time in some years. I began to get ideas for stories, again for the first time in some years. Two short stories were actually written. One was in the anthology edited by David King and the other faces problems. I'm not claiming much for the quality of the stories, but it was quite wonderful to get over the hurdle of actually snatching them from my head and committing them to paper. A novel is still sitting in my head, and not making much progress onto paper. I wrote 4 000 words which began well, and then they have been stuck. But it will get written, even if it must wait for another bout of spring fever.

There is nothing like a bout of Melbourne summer weather to shrivel the ambitions of a Melbourne spring. Melbourne's February and March were very hot indeed. No more stories were written, although another book by Jung (Answer to Job) was read. Sometimes the I Ching directs me very forcibly, and often it is merely oracular. Still, this is the first time in my life I have felt I should move onto something else without that direction being already clear and fizzing in my head. Watch this space.

* * *

Editorial aside

After having copied out Bruce's contribution I thought that I might be bold enough to ask the I Ching a simple question about the future of this fanzine. The translation which I have is the same that Bruce uses and I suspect the copy I have is the same one that David Grigg used to do that original reading for Bruce since I bought my copy from David a year or so after AussieCon - and then he had to go out and buy another one, so he said.

In any event, the reading came up with hexagram 53, Chien/Development (Gradual Progress), with a nine in the final place. A delightful reading in all respects,

even to the trigram images of wood on a mountain - even physically apt since this fanzine is produced from wood grown in the mountains of Tasmania. If you've got a copy of the I Ching you might enjoy looking the hexagram up.

* * *

And now an entertaining little contribution from a person whom I've never met but who must have a delightfully perverted fannish view of the world. You get to meet all sorts of entertaining people through fanzines, even these days when the sooth-sayers amongst us are predicting the immanent death of fanzine fandom.

BIOLOGY CLASS

Lucy Zinkiewicz

A few years back the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education decided that sex was too difficult for HSC students.

Right, now that your ears are - ahem - pricked up, let me explain.

It seems that the breakdowns of Biology examination results showed that most students didn't know the Facts of Life - at least, not their theoretical aspects - and were doing uncharacteristically badly in related questions. A conscientious placing of various magazines on the reading list (such as Harlot, Holier Than Thou, Rude Bitches and Weber Woman's Wrevenge) raised no marks though it did raise some other things, so VISE became desperate. To the torment of already curriculumly-insecure teachers, this desperation manifested itself in the delegation of sex education to Form 5 Biology; which isn't a prerequisite for the HSC subject anyhow. I'd call it all a bit of a cock-up, but that's much too apt.

It was a steamy day last summer that our Year 11 class began the topic, sitting in a darkness that seemed as embarrassed as we were. Tepid gusts from outside slapped the drawn blinds and stuck the skin of my thighs to the vinyl seat. At the front of the room a projector screen tipped with heat-stroke, and the weight of forty stealthily-interested eyes. Even for a supposedly liberated sf fan, going over the four phases of sex in public in a classroom is consciousness-raising - self-consciouness-raising.

As we covered the Excitement Phase (I think it deserves capitals, don't you?) I had a sudden craving for a mirror. I needed to peer into it to reassure myself I wasn't blushing, or growing pale. The thought of noting eyes has me abstaining from moistening my lips or incriminatingly swallowing. Catch-22! There's always that nagging wondering if your habitual twitches are being misconstrued.

My eyes studiously inspected my non-existent nails as the Plateau Phase succumbed to the Orgasmic Phase in the student teacher's dissertation. You have to admire these folks, and this particular one had a much harder task than most, hammering in (ouch!) the clinical details of 'sexual intercourse, copulating or making love'. I feel a bit guilty that none of us could mutter any questions or responses, but to do so meant revealing ignorance and embarrassment. And would the stranger really have been interested in hearing how I thought 'Applied Humanities' was the best way to describe this topic? I wonder?

At last the end of the lesson came, the musical bell's version of 'Greensleeves' for once forgiven. We scurried away, leaving the student teacher to clack-clack-clack the blinds up and cool the room down. I went home to secret myself in my bedroom and devour the data sheets that had been handed out. I still have them, tucked away in a finger-grottied box...

Er, yes - I suppose I'd better finish what I started and reveal that the final phase of sex is the Resolution one - you know, when you ponder morosely the

failings of the past, and draw up a list of things you aim to do and learn the next time...

* * *

ABOUT AUSTRALIAN FANZINES

I have to admit that I have seen the error of my ways. After having tried for an issue and a half to keep up with all the Australian fanzines that come to me and trying to think of honest and helpful things to say about them all, I have been beated by my own inertia and also by my growing disenchantment at the quality of what I am receiving. As I've said on many occasions before, Australian fanzines are, generally speaking, not too good. I can see that some of them could be improved if their editors really had a mind to go in that direction, but the overall impression seems to me to be that the editors that we have here are quite content to sit by their typewriters and put together fanzines which contain the first things or thoughts that come to them; giving little or no thought to providing the kind of finished product which will make the fanzine reading audience feel that it is really getting something which marks a high-water mark in the history of fanzines.

While it is always true that ony a few can produce the best fanzines, it is also true that the rest of us can aspire to do that. What disappoints me is that nobody seems to be aspiring these days. Perhaps that is why the only Australian fanzine to arrive in the past three months which has really excited me has been David Grigg's new effort (and my fear is that now he has taken over the job of AussieCon Chairman, he won't have time to produce any more issues). Two other fanzines which I enjoyed immensly and which gave me the impression that they are produced by people who do care to some extent are from Stewart Jackson and Gary Barber - but I've already written about them in this vein before.

Next issue, if I write about fanzines at all, it will be a more general thing about the way in which various people who produce fanzines make their efforts look good or otherwise. In the meantime, this issue will contain those reviews of Australian fanzines which I had drafted up before I ran out of enthusiasm for the task.

Centero 11, May 1984, 42pp.
Nikki White, PO Box 1082, Woden, ACT 2606.

Another issue of a fanzine which always seems to be the same in format and ideal, the only thing that changes are that the reviews are of the latest crop of 'Blake's 7' and other media fanzines and the letters continue on the multistranded discussions of the tv show. (A lot of the letters are set out in such a way that I feel I've come across the discussions that go on in apas - and this makes me wonder if media fans have apas because that would seem to me to be the ideal format in which these sorts of discussions could happen).

The disappointing thing (to me at least) is that whereas the first few issues of this fanzine were highlighted by a series of articles about the tv show, they have now been almost completely replaced by some short fiction based on the show. Perhaps this has happened because after a while the contributors have run out of comments and find it more frutiful to produce fiction. But as it turns out, the main feature of the fiction is not the quality of the writing but the fact that it contains some of the well known characters from the show. There is a lot of cross-series stuff where, for example, Doctor Who turns up at the end of 'Blake' (the last show in the whole series) or another character gets killed and is reincarnated in 'The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy'. Mostly light weight stuff, which is probably just as well since most of it is written by authors who are not so gifted.

(Try this bit: "Around her, the maimed and injured lay screaming and helpless

as the hospital ship tore through the war-pitted region of space, wounded and doomed, towards the craggy surface of an unbidding outer Rim World. And she was on it..." What was she on, the ship or the planet?)

Perhaps I'm being pedantic and the point of the story is more important than the way it's put together. Or, more to the point, these stories exist to extend the universe in which the characters of the tv show were created. Perhaps I should simply live up to my own resolution and not read fan fiction.

But apart from that, Centero is an interesting and enjoyable fanzine as always.

Foolsgold 1, 4pp.
David Grigg, 1556 Main Road, Research, Victoria 3095.

There's not much that I can really thing of to write about this fanzine - there are just so many elaborations and expansions that you can use upon the word 'excellent'. Despite being only four pages of reduced (and headache inducing) tiny type, which means that there is plenty to read, all of this is written by David Grigg. While this is an undoubted advantage in comparison to most fanzines it is also a handicap because it can lead to some other fan writers getting a bit envious. If it was actually possible to trade an arm and a leg for the ability to produce fannish prose of this quality I would be tempted to be in the queue - but I probably wouldn't go through with it because only having one hand would mean that it would take twice as long to cut a stencil - and I have to draw the line somewhere.

Apart from the introduction there are four main parts to this issue, two litle personal stories about EurekaCon which are very well crafted and about the best examples of personal writing I've seen for a few years; a well informed and interesting discussion on what word processing is and will do to the art of writing and a short column of 'recent reading'. In most cases a reader wishing to avoid boredom above and beyond the call of duty does the right thing in skipping this sort of thing, but David not only writes well about the books he's been reading, he also has the sense to read interesting books including a biography of Isaac Newton and the Penguin Portable Gibbon.

In my humble opinion Foolsgold is the best, most interesting fanzine to be published in the worldwide fannish community for a few years. Of course I'm biased in many ways because this fanzine reflects the fannish atmosphere which existed in Australia before AussieCon and while some might rightly claim that such things are revivals of past glories, it is also true that while the style is old and established, the concerns and the content are current.

David only produces about sixty copies for general distribution, and they will only go to fans who respond fairly regularly. I reckon that you should try to be among those sixty fortunate people.

The Hard Ones, 10, Winter 1984, 16pp.
Gary Barber, 409 Wanneroo Road, Balcatta, WA 6021.

If Foolsgold is in a way the reestablishment of what I consider a golden age, The Hard Ones akes me glad that there is a generation of newer fans who are producing fanzines out of their own resources, aspirations and interestes. There are a few faults in this fanzine but of much more interest are the positive features, the immediacy and enthusiasm in the writing and Des Waterman's art. Des. is at his best in the semi-surreal items such as the cover and the 'Jones the Cat' strip. The cover of this issue is one of the most interesting and imaginative pieces of art published in Australia in a long time - and even if the rest of the issue had been terrible it would have been worth getting for the cover.

There are but three letters of comment on previous issues and the rest of the issues is written by the editor. His review of the film Wolfen is a fairly detailed one and, in many ways, a sophisticated one which does something unusual in making

me want to see the film to find out what are the implications of Gary's [illegible] comments. On another page he makes interesting comments on the potential of the artshow at AussieCon II, hoping that there will be a bit more quality than normal and also wishing that fans had a bit more aesthetic training in looking at [illegible] paintings and sculptures. There is nothing wrong with expecting things to get better but I'm afraid that, at least in this segment of fandom, fans are more interested in what they read and think than in the visual arts. If there is boring art at conventions that is because people generally only get what they deserve - like governments.

The main thing that The Hard Ones lacks is a bit of variety, since it really has only one or two major contributors. Fanzine editors like Gary need the assistance of outside contributors because that added stimulus not only broadens the scope and interest of the fanzine, it also helps the editor to retain his enthusiasm and ability to be motivated by outside influences and ideas.

The Mentor 49, April 1984, 47pp.
Ron L Clarke 6 Bellevue Road, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776.

Having reached the forty-ninth issue Ron has discovered exactly how best he can publish a fanzine. It seems to have become a mechanical process in which Ron adds similar portions of short book reviews, letters of comment, an article or two and a half page of editorial comment, and what you end up with is exactly like previous issues and, no doubt, just like the issues to come too. While I don't think that change is necessary just for the sake of having it, I do think that a little variety in form is useful from time to time, just to stop the editor and the readers from going to sleep. Psychologists seem to have determined that the human nervous system reacts to change and variety, not to sameness.

The cover of the issue is alright though, since it shows a dragon playing football (just the right sort of thing for an issue published at the beginning of the footy season) and the best of the written content is (as it always was) from Bert Chandler - who will be much missed here and elsewhere. There is an interview with Damien Broderick which was interesting but a little dated - I am not sure that this interview was not intended for some other source because the style of presentation has the jaunty journalistic style rather than anything you might expect to find in this fanzine. (This thought is confirmed in issue 50 where Damien takes Ron to task for having published this piece which he (Damien) gave the interviewer a long while ago and for an audience which he believed was going to be newspaper readers.)

Thyme 36, 17pp, and 37, 10pp.
Roger Weddall, PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Vict 3065.

One of the main things I wish Roger would do is to put dates on his fanzines - when you get to look at them a month or so later there is just no indication of when they arrived or whether some bits of news don't appear in the fanzine because Roger never heard about them or decided not to mention them, or whether he went to press before the event happened. What use would a copy of The Canberra Times from the month before last be without a date on it? (What use would such a paper be anyhow? But that's not the kind of relevant question to ask here.)

It doesn't seem that Roger has moved into a faster publishing schedule, it also doesn't seem that there is too much going on which can be reported as news, the news content of Thyme being rather limited. Instead, this fanzine seems to have taken up a position of reporting in some little detail on some of the more reportable events in fandom. This means that there are usually some reports on conventions as they seem to be the kinds of things that almost everybody can knock together a few words on. Since these reports are not very well put together it is generally not possible to get from them a good idea of what actually happened or, often more interesting, have the pleasure of reading some good writing on the subject. Still, if nobody else in Australia is going to publish convention

reports I suppose Thyme has to be the place for them.:

I must confess that I come away from most issues of Thyme with a feeling of disappointment. I am always hopeful that by reading it I will find out the latest news on Australian fandom, but I never feel as though I have when the last page is read. This may be as a result of Roger's limited resources, or because he doesn't know the people who could give him the news that I'd like to read, or because he is disorganised enough that the news that he does publish is not clearly identified. There is, of course, also the option that what I would call 'news' and what Roger would call 'news' are not the same thing.

For example, in issue 37 the hard news is: FFANZ fund underway; DUFF update; various awards; and the bits and pieces hidden on the back page. There are also convention and fanzine listings and various comments, editorial and otherwise. I'm getting to find out a fair bit about what Roger and his friends are thinking and doing, but not too much else.

Tigger 1, 2pp.
Published on behalf of the AussieCon 2 Committee by Marc Ortlieb,
GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.

The AussieCon 2 committee has listened to the criticism that they have been getting over supposed failures to tell fans what is going on with convention planning and has thus embarked on a public relations exercise to counter that complaint. Tigger will be the more obvious stream of communication - the other is supposed to be a series of monthly news releases which may be coming out - the only one that I've seen is dated May 1984, and it's now September, he says in passing.

The first issue of Tigger is mostly introduction to the idea and doesn't give much useful news about the fast approaching convention. All the same, Marc makes it very clear that comments and suggestions about the convention are actively invited so that, if nothing else, people won't be able to complain that they didn't know what was going on, didn't get the right sort of information, and so on. Tigger is the informal channel of access to the committee and the convention members should make as much use of it as they can - doing so will only advance both the members and the committee, and in the end that will lead to a better convention.

As an aside; it seems to me that the convention committee has now opened itself up to the kinds of pressures that can be applied to any organisation which establishes a 'public access and information campaign'. That's the problem with this sort of exercise but it remains to be seen whether anybody is bloody minded or cranky enough to push Tigger further than its creators are willing to let it go.

The WASFA News 7, April 30 1984, 2pp.
Kevin McCaw, 20 Dodd Street, Hamilton Hill, WA 6163.

A very slight issue of this little newszine which tells a little about what's going on in Perth and also about what Kevin has been doing and what has befallen him. Like quite a few others, Kevin finds himself in a penniless state which he must endure while studying, and his lowered level of activity seems to match the transformation of the once overenergetic WA SF Association into a monthly dinner meeting. (Such is the fate of a fan centre upon which middle-age creeps.) This means, I hope, that both WASFA and Kevin's future fanzines will be less formal and more entertaining. But, from the way Kevin writes it, he may have to wait until next year when he has an income before we will see something more from him. That will be unfortunate, but I suppose we'll just have to be patient.

* * *

This brings us to the part of the issue where those dedicated sf buffs in the readership can pay attention. Not only does the Irrepressible George Turner have

something to say about new sf, he has something to say about the old stuff as well.

A FEW TEARS FOR THE GOLDEN AGE

George Turner

It seems to me that there are three basic reasons for writing sf:

1. To make money. (If you're luck holds, that is.) This is a perfectly moral reason - up to a point. The point is the one where you discover that junk earns the greenbacks and art limps in last with the corns aching. Sensibly, you discard morality and reach for the folding stuff, you dream up an adolescent fantasy (or nick it secondhand from legend or nursery rhyme) add a dollop of sex and some stuff about telepathy, blasters and FTL flight - and lo, instant sf! Or you invent a 'big planet' modelled on medieval Europe with some 'science' glancingly referred to, and there you have the Lord Valentine saga, dripping dollars. (The geology of the 'big planet' is hilarious, but just carry on as it you hadn't noticed.) There is a market for this sort of thing and anybody is justified in seeking to fill it - one only wishes the so-and-sos wouldn't insist on being regarded as literary artists. Make out your own list of felons, not forgetting many who are victims of their own fans rather than their own pretentions. But, as you will see, there are traps for even the honest hack.

2. Because you are a nut (probably quite a nice, genial, inoffensive nut) with a barrow to push. Your name is probably Watson or Ballard or Dick, or even Turner. You'don't make much money but you have a lot of fun, your friends are uniformly polite through gritted teeth and the critics make handsom meals of you - gnaw you to the bone in fact. Still, you are geing honest in your peculiar fashion and can die in the belief that virtue is its own reward. Its only reward.

3. Because you dislike the way other people write it. This accounts for Aldiss, Priest, Wolfe, Moorcock, Harlan Ellison, Bruce Gillespie and Barrington Bailey. (All respectable bar one, and I don't mean Gillespie.) People like these sf alive and moving, even if you as reader don't always like their work. They supply the originality which others (see Group 1) copy, debase and turn into money in endless series sagas, alike as clones. Sometimes a Group 3 writer makes a little money (Chris Priest has recently struck gold after a too-long period of being more or less ignored), not from dyed in the wool fans but from the silent majority who know good work when they see it and wouldn't recognise fandom if they fell over it. (They are missing something; they might enjoy falling over fandom and being suitably astonished.)

Like all straightjackets, the three-sleeved one turns out to be too restricting when I consider individual works, but these useless reflections have been occasioned by a recent attempt to recover the Golden Age and see what we were like then - and where we are now - by reading some new works by Golden Age authors who are still with us and re-reading others by some of the giants of that time.

Stardeath by E C Tubb, Ballantine, 182pp; $4.95.
Why does Edwin Charles Tubb, now in his sixty-fourth year, write sf? A glance at his career may suggest some answers. He began, in NEW WORLDS in 1951, and was prolific from the start, operating mostly under pseudonyms. Remember Charles Grey and Volstead Gridban? With the firming of his talent he began to publish under his own name; Alien Dust, 1955, and The Space-Born, 1956, were two of the better novels of their decade. Then he dropped from sight for about ten years, reputedly having a lean time of it, writing little, to surface again in America with the first 'Dumarest' novel, The Winds of Gath, in 1967. Now 'Dumarest No. 30' is on its way and the damned man hasn't yet reached the Earth he has hunted throught something like two million words. I remember once commending this series as one of the best of its kind, but fell exhausted round about No. 8

or 9. As well as these he has produced twenty or so 'Cap Kennedy' novels (as 'Gregory Kern') since 1973 and half a dozen others under his own name; I know nothing of their quality. His sheer stamina is amazing.

Alas, the strain is telling; the once dependable, competent though never top flight story teller has fallen at last to process work on the assembly line. Consider the jacket blurb for Stardeath: 'The lucky ones on the lost ship are dead. The others have been turned insides out in gruesome parody of human beings and they are still alive' (My emphasis.) This nonsense is, unlike most blurb writing, an accurate account of what is going on inside. So is: 'The enemy is unknown and the only way Varl can solve the mystery is to use himself as bait!'

The story is actually much worse than that. The enemy, whose motives remain a mystery to me, come from another contimuum and most of the action takes place in space between continua. Make sense of that if you can. More interesting is the question of why Tubb is turning out tenth rate novels. The probable answer is that he knows how bad the stuff is but has little choice. The American paperback system offers contracts - a certain number of books to be delivered in a certain time - and the successful writer of 'Dumarest', who knows what it means to endure years of poverty and is suddenly at the height of his productive power, pledges his talent. Under this system Tubb churned out forty-five novels in a ten year period, 1967-77, and has not slackened noticeably since. A murderous grind.

I would be prepared to make a rough bet that he now finds himself caught in the small print of these contracts that seemed to promise endless money with some sort of freedom in the future. Most literary contracts contain an 'options' clause, and the only honest way to defeat it (if you haven't had it carefully vetted before signing) is to stop writing altogether. If you can afford to. The dishonest way for a disgusted author (often disgusted with himself as well as with his predicament) is to toss off a few junk items as quickly as possible, simply to fulfil his obligations and break free.

Tough on the readers. Yes. Tough on the writer, too. Deliberately writing assembly line material is not easy; many cannot do it at all. For a man in his sixties, with thirty years of intensive sf production behind him, the grind could be soul destroying. If you like Tubb, don't read Stardeath. Pretend it hasn't happened.

Chessboard Planet, by Henry Kuttner, Hamlyn; 187pp; $5.50.
There's life in this Golden Age yet. Originally The Fairy Chessmen, in ASTOUNDING, 1946, this is one of 'classic' (using the word loosely) which stands up steadily after nearly forty years. It is the story of a psychological war in which the rules keep changing (hence the original title). If you have never read it, rush out and buy the book, for this is one of the few which are really essential to your sf education. When Kuttner died in 1958 his passing was regretted by every sf reader; he was one of the few who appealed to all, from lowbrow to hard core intellectual. He had the secret of the ideal mix.

The book is fleshed out with short stories. 'Camouflage' is one of the earliest cyborg stories and little more has been said on the subject since, just as 'Android' is an early sample of its breed and says what little is worth saying about androids. The final eight-pager, 'Or Else', is about an alien trying to resolve a Mexican standoff: it is an amusingly snide comment on interstellar as well as homegrown stupidity.

Out of the past, a gem.

The Best of Jack Williamson, Ballantine; 386pp, $5.95.
Gernsback's AMAZING published Williamson's first story, 'The Metal Man', in 1928. Young Jack was twenty; at seventy-five he is still pouring them out. I met him at SeaCon, a tall, gently spoken man without pretences, whom you would

not suspect of being one of the all-time top practitioners of technirama space-opera.

That first story is published here and if forgiveable for 1928. It is followed by Dead Star Station', from ASTOUNDING, 1933, which is not at all forgiveable. It's aweful. But I recall that in 1933 we praised it for its 'warm humanity' and reckoned it was one of the best of its year. In fact it is a load of sentimental slop about a sweet little girl and her drivelling Granddaddy who can't get his inventions accepted. Then pitiless pirates strike, and Granddaddy's invention saves the day at the cost of his life. Stiff-upper-lip-cum-tearful ending.

Williamson was always partial to such plots and characters and, since his writing has not improved greatly in fifty-five years, evewn his latest works seem quaintly old fashioned. His forte was always dreaming-up fresh concepts which imitators have lept upon, developed and usually degraded. He is credited as the originator of the 'alternate time-tracks' concept in a frighteningly inept novel called The Legion of Time (ASTOUNDING, 1938), and he commonly displayed great ingenuity in introducing original ideas.

The best tale in this book seems to me to be 'The Peddler's Nose', a comedy about the alien who came to Earth and caught a cold. (We Earthmen introduced influenza to the South Seas and decimated the populations everywhere. Likewise with the Esquimanx.) This is the sort of collection that reminds one of just how unmemorable the Golden Age could be in its unguided spots, and also of what a huge imaginitive base is provided for today's writers. Those who most influenced the strengths and directions of sf were rarely its best writers.

I would rather remember Jack himself, a nice, comfortable bloke to talk to.

Frederik Pohl contributes a Foreword which steers round the awkward spots with professional aplomb.

Ringing Changes, by R A Lafferty, Ace; 275pp; $5.95.
Lafferty has been for years one of my favourite yarn spinners. One can't call him a writer of sf because his stories relate only philosophically to science - and then at a distance - or for that matter to observable reality. His imagination has the quickness that charmed in Lewis Carroll and has something of the same effect of convincing the reader that a relevant truth lies behind it all, if only he could put his finger on it. I have rarely enjoyed his novels (except Where Have You Been, Sandaliotis?), which gave me the feeling of a joke extended beyond its appeal, but have watched for the short stories like a man starved.

Suddenly I am sated. I know that the twenty tales in this volume are vintage Lafferty, but I stopped reading at number seven. The quirky humor is undimmed, the nose-thumbing at reality is as subtly preposterous as ever, but I have had enough. What used to be the unique Lafferty method has familiarised itself into a set of mannerisims which have not changed over the years.

It would be foolish to decry Lafferty, he is sui generis and irreplaceable. The fault lies in myself, I have read too eagerly and too often. I shall put this collection aside and return to it in a year or two. In the meantime, the Lafferty lover who retains his taste for nonsense just over the thither side of comprehension will find here the same joy as ever - the same quality, the same trickery, the same antic dancing on pinpoints of the imagination.

The Narrow Land, by Jack Vance, Coronet; 176pp; $5.95.
Vance is another whose short stories have pleased me more than his novels, but this collection of old tales does him no justice. The earliest is vintage 1945, the latest 1967, and I am told (how truly I don't know) that he objected in vain to this lot being republished - in vain because agents tend to operate over one's head and there is little to be gained by arguing against one's own agent's bread and butter when the contract is brandished and the small print evoked .

Little can damage a reputation so solidly planted as Vance's, but one can understand the sophisticated writer of today writhing at the failures and niaveties of minor tales of the '50s provenance, and wishing they did not have to be served up for the sake of a few dollars he can scarcely need all that badly. He knows, as every writer knows in his heart, that you can't revisit a past you have outgrown.

The next book is His Master's Voice, by Stanislav Lem, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 199pp; $5.95) and it is the most important of those so far noted. But first, digression on the nature of the novel as a form of fiction.

Reviewers are prone to a number of stereotyped complaints. 'This novel', they cry, 'displays no sense of place', or 'one cannot visualise the characters'; or ' the characters remain static, do not develop'; or, 'the ambiguous ending is unsatisfactory'. These are the complaints of reviewers with hard and fast ideas of what a novel should be and who therefore cannot cope with one that does not fit their conception. All these 'faults', and many more, are often deliberate on the part of the writer who wishes to concentrate the reader's attention on what he considers the main matter, and is prepared to jettison inessentials in order to keep the mental eye fixed where he wants it.

Take, for instance, the 'sense of place', which usually means description and the placing of characters against prominently featured backgrounds. Now, physical background serves only one of three main purposes; (a) spectacle, as in Merritt or Herbert or Tolkien, in which case it is essential to the writer's intention, or (b) to influence the atmosphere or the plot, and is again essential, or (c) to hold the characters in place somewhere or other, and you'd better describe the place or the big bad reviewer will have you for breakfast. The fact is that in case (c) it may not matter a damn how little background indication you give and reducing it to a mere stage direction is a legitimate technique when what matters is what the characters are doing, not where they are doing it. (A good play, for example, can be quite successful on a bare stage.) Similar conditions apply to the other 'faults': visualisation of the character is often best left to the reader (unless it is structually necessary for the hero to have a clubbed foot or the heroine a naevus on her cheek); characters need not develop in a static study and the ambiguous ending may be a deliberate effect the reader is expected to exercise his brain on. Many writers pay their readers the compliment of assuming them capable of thought, which is why so many of the better ones get poorer reviews than they deserve.

The great exemplar of including only what is necessary was the late Ivy Compton-Burnett (mainstream), of whose novels no less than eight have in the last four months been reprinted by three different publishers. In an Ivy C-B novel you will be told little more than 'a country house large enough for a family of five and two servants', 'a tall woman in her forties, carefully dressed', 'a man whose eyes tend to evade'; often you are told less than that. The novels are conducted in whiplash dialogue, rather subtly self-explanatory, with no 'angrily', 'sweetly' or 'she cried in mounting hysteria'. The reader does all the work or fails to understand a word.

Ivy G-B is considered one of the major novelists of the Twentieth Century. A course in her novels could be a revelation to reviewers who can't believe that there are more than two ways - theirs and the wrong way - of presenting fiction.

Which brings me to the peculiar His Master's Voice. It has no real characters, only a number of named persons respresnting types of scientist and philosopher; it has a setting which Lem wastes little time on because a few of its details matter, it hasn't much in the way of story becuase story is not the core of his offering; the characters do not develop because they are not people but points of view, and as for ambiguity of ending ... well, it peters out when there is no further argument to dwell on, which is precisely what Lem intended.

It concerns a message from space and the attempts of a research team to decipher it. They succeed only partially and conclude (this is typical Lem) that the undecoded section may be forever beyond them because they don't know enough about

the universe to understand what it might mean - or even if it is in fact a message at all. You might say that the book is not so much a novel as a series of arguments presented in fictional form. But it has shape and development and purpose. It is a novel.

Chapter by chapter Lem discusses the issues raised by the mere idea of extra-terrestrial communication, the empiricism involved in making physical tests of the unknown and the possibility of systems of thought so alien that they can, by definition, make no contact with our own. The book is a discussion of scientific thought and experimental philosophy, rendered in fiction to make it accessible in layterms, and will be appreciated only by the reader prepared to surrender himself to ideas and not demand unwarranted intrusions of plot, characterisation and whipped-up drama.

It belongs already to the sf past (1968) but the method is timeless. Recommended to those who will give as much to the book as they expect to take from it.

This foray into the past has been in the main disappointing, for the usual reason that the past is unchanging but we are not. Most of the sf past (with, as always, significant exceptions) is for literary archeologists. In half a century of so sf has grown from a debased genre headed by Hugo Gernsback and Edgar Rice Burroughs to a fount of non-genre works related to sf but not of it, led by such as Christopher Priest, Tom Disch, Gene Wolfe, Ursula Le Guin, Michael Moorcock, et al. And somebody called John Calvin Batchelor.

Batchelor's novel, The Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica, has little currency in Australia; Bruce Gillespie is its enthusiastic publiciser and the only person I know to have actually read it. I await its paperback appearance with anticipation because his second novel, The Further Adventures of Halley's Comet, Granada; 424pp; $8.95, is already available and is a shot in the arm for the jaded reader or reviewer.

It's a thoroughly smooth and delightful wine trifle of a novel (you know, sweetly sour) by a man who dislikes the world we have made for ourselves but would rather laugh and poke fun than mope over it. Halley's Comet may or may not have been the Star of Bethlehem - 12 BC may be a backdating of the birth of Christ further than research finds acceptable - but who cares about that when the comet is inhabited by the three magi, who call in on Earth at each seventy-six year passage? They ask questions like, "What is the true nature of revolution?' and are immoderatley pleased with answers like. 'Replacing one gang of fools with another.'

It is not always so superficial. You might give some thought to this exchange:

'Socialism is ... a utopian state of human affairs wherein everyone in a community shares not only the bounty of the community but also in the making of the bounty.'

'Utopian?' said the dwarf ... 'And what is the true nature of nihilism?'

'Nhilism is also a utopian state of human affairs based upon the premise that it is possible to reject all legal, moral and spiritual authority.'

'Utopian again?' said the dwarf.

Don't think too hard about it if you don't want all your political morality to crash round your ears.

Such exchanges are, however, only incidental to the novel whose centre is the classic struggle between the romantic virtues of honest goodness and the popular myths of wealth and power. Batchelor appears to play no favourites; both sides are equally stupid, one romantically silly and the other pragmatically idiotic, and the nonsense is perfectly expressed when the forces of good, armed with bows and arrows, attack the castle protected by guns and electronic safeguards. They win. Well, after

a fashion, they win. You must read it to find out.

The flavour of the book lies in its marvellous bravura passages, like interpolated vaudeville acts of high quality. My favourite is that in which a young lady tells a gathering of army officers how to win the Vietnam War (the time scale is very elastic); her plan is tactically logical and might well have succeeded in practice - but it involves the slaughter of the entire attacking force as well as the enemy. The reactions of the officers, with both eyes fixed on personal advancement and political repercussions, tell a great deal about the philosophy of the power play, the real considerations of tactics and the limits of pragmatism.

It is not a book I can yet discuss in detail. Another reading will be necessary just to be sure I have understood its intentions, but I can commend it now for wit, ingenuity, belly laughs and lashings of the unexpected.

Please, please read it. The Golden Age is right now!

* * *

LETTERS OF COMMENT

Terry Carr
11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611, USA.

I have to question your remark in Rataplan 26 that Dick Geis's writing in SFR 'marks some of the best writing in the field', because I think that Geis, despite his fannish history, is only a fair writer, not an outstanding one. In fact, it was the Hugo he won as Best Fanwriter that turned so many against him. The Hugos that SFR won were questionable, but the ranking of Geis's own writing as Best Fanwriter were clearly the result of uninformed voting by people who'd seem his writing but not that of Langford, the Nielsen-Haydens, etc. Sure, Geis is a good fanwriter - but does he rank with fans whose writing matches those of the very best! The fact that in 1979 no one present at the Hugo ceremonies seemed willing to accept his Hugo for Best Fanzine was a result of Geis's overachievement; we were all embarrassed. Finally Fred Pohl got up to accept the award, and he said "I've always admired Dick Geis's work ... but not very much". Can you ask for a more honest appraisal!

I also disagree with your remark, 'And in any case, fanzines aren't art, they are a continuing process of communication between writer and reader which is mediated by the editor and the fashion in which he wants to present the work'. I don't see that the latter obviates the former, and in any case, all art is communication (if it's any good at all). Mainly, though, I see your statement as the latest in a decades-long dichotomy among fanzine fans: are we here to write quality prose, or are fanzines just a means of communication, another way for fans to keep in touch, etc? I think it's a false dichotomy, and one that's led far too many fans to argue about 'standards', the advisability of reprinting past fanwriting (how can something written in 1956 contribute to the ongoing communication of 1984?), and such etc. Genzine fans put down apas for their trivial, first-draft mailing comments, apa fans sneer at the pretentions of those who write in more formal modes.

I think it's all silly. Many people have written mailing comments, first or fourth draft, that can stand outside the context of original publication; and many fans have written formal essays or fanfiction stories that were no damn good the first time around. The mind-set that sees fanzines as communication misses the fact that a good piece written in whatever form can have applications and resonances that will remain appropriate and useful for centuries. If this wasn't true, there's no point in publishing The Letters of Jane Austen, to name only one example. Good writing is good writing usually in any era, and while those who write strictly for the moment (or the month, quarter, the year) may be contributing pieces that are primarily valuable to their own times, if what they have to say strikes to the heart of an important subject, their products will continue to be valuable long after

AND FINALLY, A LATE (VERY LATE) MESSAGE!

If you read this sheet first all will be explained; if you read it last it will perhaps clear up a few mysteries. If you don't read this sheet at all then you will probably think that the fanzine is just a little later than usual. Of course you'll be right. That is the whole point of typing up this little piece at the last moment. The last moment being just so much later than anything else in the issue.

Now if my memory serves me right, I started work on typing this issue around the third or so week of August and completed the final page about three weeks later - yes, it does take me that long to type up forty pages. When I finised that final stencil I fondly hoped to have the issue into the mail by the end of September by the cunning activity of doing the production at the same time as I worked on the essay which I mentioned just a page or two ago in the future tense. But as it turned out that piece of writing gave me a great deal of trouble and demanded a couple of rewrites. Even so, by the time the thing was handed in I was far less happy with it than I had expected to be and so I reckoned that the mark I'd get for it would be less than I had really hoped for. That meant that I had to do a lot more preparation for the exams than I had expected to have to do, and the end result was that fanac had to go onto the back burner.

The exam was last Monday, 12 November, and since then I have been trying to pick up the mess that things have fallen into since the end of August. First priority has been to find out who has written to me since then or sent me a fanzine, the second priority has been to finish producing something to send them in return. Yes, I am all too well aware that the cover of this issue proclaims that it is the June 1984 issue, but things could be worse I suppose and it could be the June 1983 issue. It all means that if I want to stick to my bi-monthly schedule I'm going to have to indulge in some very fancy and fast work to get everything rounded off before next March rolls around and it's time to take up with the academic business again.

The trouble with spring and summer is that there are just so many other things to do as well as sit and type stencils. There is catching up on all my non-historic reading, pulling weeds out of the garden, planting the vegies, just lying around suffering from the heat and also there is lying around watching the cricket. In respect of the final matter you can thank the bad form of the Australian team in the first test that this issue isn't even a couple of days later. (The very annoying thing about university these past three seasons has been that an essay or an exam has been due on the monday or the tuesday of the first test, and that has meant that I've had to miss part of the play. Not that I'm sure anyone would want to remember the mess that the Australians made of their batting potential in front of some very good West Indian bowling. Studying the events of 1642 in England was probably a much better thing to have to do. But I was prepared to enjoy every moment of the cricket that was available and took my little radio along to the exam to be able to tune in as soon as the distressing event was over. But it turned out that the Australians didn't have the stamina to last three hours into the fourth day and so there was nothing to cheer me up after having wondered if I'd got it right in my discussion of the necessity/or otherwise for the topping of Charles I. Probably not.)

There are, of course, all sorts of interesting things going on just at the moment which will conspire to keep me away from the typer; more cricket to come and a General Election in a couple of weeks which should be interesting in the Senate, to see if the Nuclear Disarmament Party gets a seat. Probably not, but it might be a very close thing. The other thing that Valma and I were working on to fill in the time was the possibility of moving house - to a gigantic edifice in a more posh part of town, but in the end we figured out that if we did that there wouldn't be much money left over to pay postage, so we didn't. Anyhow, more about that in the next issue and as soon as I get these tomato plants into the ground.

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