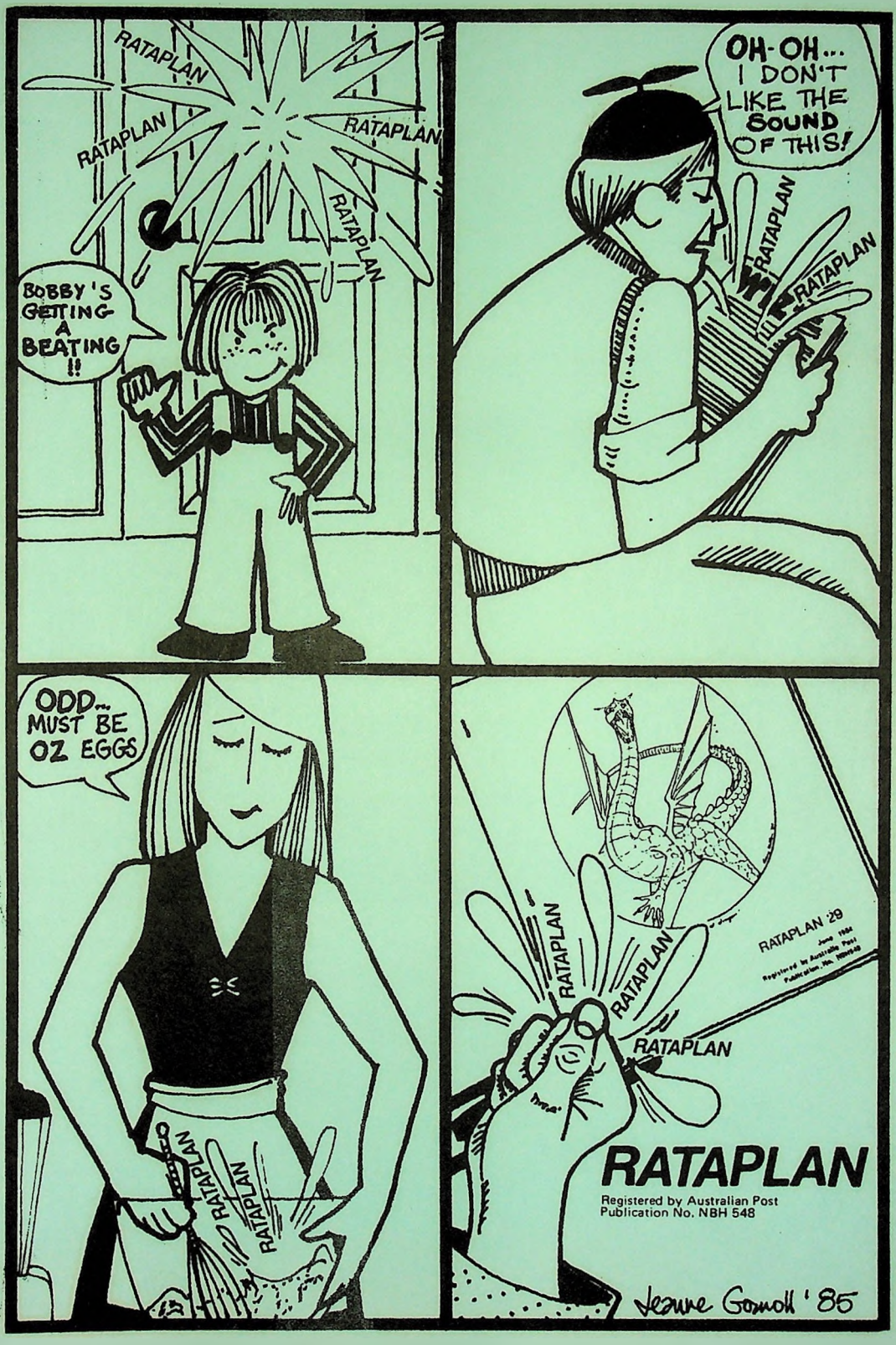
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
BOBBY'S GETTING A BEATING !!
OH-OH... I DON'T LIKE THE SOUND OF THIS!
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
ODD... MUST BE OZ EGGS
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN
RATAPLAN '29
RATAPLAN
Registered by Australian Post
Publication No. NBH 548
Jeanne Gomoll '85

Do you know what I hate?
I really hate it when F R Leavis reviews a fanzine like

RATAPLAN THIRTY-ONE

October 1984 - August 1985

Registered by Australia Post, Publication No NBH5483

A critically unacclaimed but apparently popular little fanzine from Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608, AUSTRALIA. Designed to be read by people who understand words, and because of this, the fanzine was to be had for trade, for contribution or letter of comment. On the other hand, there were those who did not feel like putting understandable words into this fanzine, and for them there was a special subscription which they could obtain on the basis of a mere $2 for three issues, unless, of course, they wished to purchase the de luxe subscription at a rate of $49.99 for three issues. The whole point of publishing this fanzine was that the words and far reaching concepts which it contained might be about science fiction and science fiction fans. A U-Boat Publication. MM.628

* * *

OPENING SHOTS

Right off it might be best to admit that this issue is quite a few months late and that most of it was put onto floppy disk back in March and April, but that the muse wasn't with me to write my bits and that OTHER THINGS have happened to keep on putting this issue off. This situation has become so acute (as opposed to grave) that I have had to look reality squarely in its ugly face and admit that the possibility of my getting out bimonthly issue of this fanzine are so minute as to be nonexistent. So it's best to quit consciously rather than just slide off into the great fannish abyss where all time-expired fanzines go. This is therefore the final issue of this fanzine for the foreseeable future.

Back during last October I was still battling with the English Civil War and here I am now most of the way through the much more nebulous problem of "Imperialism". Once I used to look forward to getting back into the academic harness at the beginning of the university year, but this year I only wondered to myself where I'm going to find the stamina and the enthusiasm to do the job properly. I suppose that's because by now the business of getting a higher education has lost any novelty value which it may have had for me.

I was over at the uni at the beginning of the year getting a little bit of orientation during O-Week (but, as usual, ended up more disoriented than before) and went for a quiet sit in the union refectory while I read the student newspaper. Although it looks as though it was edited by Keith Walker, or somebody who went to the same publishing school, it is usually interesting to see what the young and bright minds of the community are thinking about - it seems they are thinking about all sorts of useful things as nuclear discrimination and sexual destruction (Ahhh, forgive the interesting subconscious transposition, I wonder what my mind was up to - and no, I don't need any Freudians to respond) as well as gay rights, homelessness, problems in Africa, Aboriginal land rights and the like. It seems that the only matters which engage the young minds of today are the serious ones, not a jot of humor in sight except for the announcements of the Young Democrats... which we will lightly pass over for fear of offending any Democrat supporters among the readership. (I refer, of course to the Australian Democrats, the US variety are so much funnier and people gave up laughing about them many decades ago and now just shake their heads.)

So there I am in the union trying to get some of the spirit of the joy of life out of the paper, and thinking that perhaps I should have bought a Kafka novel, when I realize that all around me I am experiencing the chatter of young and enthusiastic voices. After a little while I dawned on me that the reason that they were all so

young and onthusiastic was because they were fresh from the secondary school system and very pleased with themselves because they had managed to get into the tertiary educational system. What's more, they were in the fortunate stage where they had been admitted, but they hadn't yet been confronted with the dull monotony of the lecture theatre, the desperate grind of the essay, the terror of the exam and the indescribable sensation of having nothing to say when all eyes are turned on you in a tutorial. No wonder all those eager young minds were chattering with excited expectation and I was trying to find some solace in reading about the chilly embrace of a nuclear winter. They say of LASFS that "Only death will release you". At least death is a fairly passive thing; but it seems that the only way out of tertiary education for any self respecting pseudo-intellectual is to keep on going until they (the university authorities that is) shove a piece of appropriately decorated paper into your hand and tell you not to come back. Unfortunately for me, that happy release is still a year and a bit down the track.

There are, or course, many varyied, interesting and enjoyable things in life. The fact that some of them are related to the summer season may be linked in some fairly obvious way to the fact that university isn't running then. One of the more enjoyable events is the local Canberra Convention which seems to have as much to do with sf as any book on upholstering, but is still fairly enjoyable to sink into - since we all no doubt enjoy spending a weekend just sitting around and chattering to friends.

Unfortunately I can't give you much of an idea of what the convention was like because, well, we didn't attend much of it... and I wouldn't be surprised if most other people would tell you the same thing. It was a bit like the crunchy conventions we used to have many years ago, before we discovered that the application of immense amounts of money could get us into motels or hotels where you could spend the entire weekend inside and away from the elements. However the Southside Motor Park isn't one big building but lots of little ones spread out across the landscape. Since the weather was nice and warm one bought a large glass of something stimulating from the bar and then went to sit out on the verandah where there was conversation about computers, politics or house renovations.

One of the other major differences between the you-beaut old-time conventions and this one was the way in which the people who organised Circulation looked at programming. We did see the program item on AussieCon II (at which some members of the committee tried to impress the assembled with their organization and the importance of some of the people who had said they would be attending, and I read my book) but apart from that there was none of the other important items which I tend to associate with the kinds of inexpensive and informal surroundings which we used to enjoy back in the late sixties - "Whither Australian Science Fiction", "The Media and Sex in Science Fiction", "Critical Standards in Science Fiction", "The Fan Panel" and "The Business Session". These days people don't need such weighty topics of conversation as an excuse to gather for the weekend and, if I may pass a gratuitous comment here, this may be one of the reasons why such events seem so much more dispersed than they used to be. The convention is wholly social and convention members can have an equally good time off with their mates than they can have sitting and attempting to make sense of some potentially difficult thoughts.

At conventions like Circulation III I begin to feel a bit like an old-timer and also a bit of an outsider. Conventions these days are based on different premises than they once were, and such matters as written science fiction and fanzine fandom seem to have little to do with them. I suppose that I can't complain since I don't have anything to do with convention organising these days and it serves me right if things don't go as I think they maybe should. Since Circulation was mainly a gathering of people whose major form of fan activity seems to be attending conventions and other social events, people like me have very little in common with most of them. There were only a couple of people who would be able to indulge in a meaningful conversation about the sad state of fanzine fandom. The provinciality of a bunch of fans whose fanac consists of socializing with each other also means that you can't really get any meaningful conversation going about the wider scope of fandom which is transmitted in fanzines; such as the conflicts going on in New York

fandom these days, the TAFF Wars or the current state of US/UK fannish relations. At times it seems almost a proud and lonely thing to be a fanzine fan.

So, if you can't beat them you join them. Helen Swift and Les Moulinger arrived and so a bunch of us went off and sat around in their flat for a while and then went to a Chinese restaurant. After that we went and looked at the election results on the tv.

The next day was even less like a convention since there was a barbecue, a visit to a hands-on science display and a dead-dog party. All fairly entertaining but seemingly it had little to do with science fiction and fandom; but perhaps not so if you care to define fandom as anything that a bunch of fans do together. (If that's the case, I wonder what that makes what I do in company with merely my typewriter. And no, I don't want to hear a Freudian interpretation of that either.) I suppose that is the reason why you won't find me writing any kind of commentary on the convention - I really wasn't there.

There were other excitements in the summer. Bushfires, a visit by Valma's mother, and the lush growth of weeds in the back yard which had to be combatted. All of these matters are passed over quietly.

A TOUCH OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

More recently the elections held back in December gave us the commencement of the new Parliament in the autumn. It meant that my indulgence in cricket on the radio was leavened by also listening to the parliamentary debates - and during the late stage of the cricket season, with so much of the one-day rubbish being played, listening to the talentless barbs of the likes of Wilson Tuckey made a welcome relief.

A hot topic of debate seems to be the ANZUS business, with our little cobbers in New Zealand saying that they want nothing to do with US Navy ships that may be nuclear armed or powered. The only people who seem to think that this is a really good thing is the famed Australian Democrats and their most entertaining speaker, Don Chipp. In two days he gave a couple of speeches which were almost identical and included lurid descriptions of how powerful the nuclear arsenals of the world are, how we are inviting people to lob some of their weapons in our direction by letting the US have twenty-six bases here, and then sounding very grave when describing the ultimate outcome of nuclear warfare in the "nuclear winter". As a politician our Don Chipp makes a wonderful entertainer.

The ANZUS business is mainly interesting because it shows how delicate international relations can get at times. If the New Zealanders were willing to toe the line and let the odd US Navy ship into their ports their Prime Minister would no doubt be welcome at the White House and he too could have his picture taken with the aged thespian who lives there. Then the next thing you hear is rumors that the US Government is going to set about destabilizing the New Zealand economy so that the people there will vote the conservatives back in next time, and the US can use their ports again. Now the US government can't win either way; if the Labor Party gets reelected the ports will remain closed, but if they loose there will be a lot of people who feel very justified in claiming that the US interfered in local politics to get the use of port facilities they want. (There are a lot of people who still believe that the US government was responsible for the overthrow of the Whitlam Labor government here back in 1975, but their belief has always lacked the kind of factual support that there is going to be in New Zealand if and when their economy does fall in a hold.)

This probably isn't too interesting to many people, except in the context of "cultural imperialism" which was a fairly popular topic of correspondence in a couple of US fanzines recently. Whether or not there is such a thing as cultural imperialism probably depends on where you happen to live; people who live in countries which have to support their habits of Coca Cola and Walt Disney comics through foreign exchange might just see it differently from people who get that

money. But in this case there is nothing being exchanged but diplomatic ill-will, and New Zealanders are getting stroppy because they can't understand why the US wants to force its rotten ships onto them, and Americans wonder why their "allies" are no longer willing to help them out in their international peace-keeping role. Unfortunately there is no ultimate objective value alongside which to put the two different attitudes, to see which one is really right. Perhaps this means that there is no right attitude.

ON RECOGNIZING ONE'S BASIC CHARACTER FLAWS

It's been so long now since I joined the ranks of the people I told myself I shouldn't trust that it doesn't worry me that much any more. I still don't trust anybody over thirty, and even though that includes me I'm past worrying about that too. (I've known that I was untrustworthy since I was about five, it just took everybody else a further twenty-five years to figure it out.)

But that's not the character flaw I was going to write about, especially since so many people suffer from it that it's like saying that having a nose is a fault.

The fault I am going to write about is still fairly common, but seems to have reached plague proportions here in fandom. But when I first heard about it I could hardly believe my eyes.

Many years ago I remember reading somebody commenting about the boxes of old SAPS mailings that they had out in the shed. I couldn't believe it because I couldn't imagine having that many fanzines and apa mailings that you had to put the excess in boxes and stack them up somewhere! At that stage I probably had enough fanzines and apa mailings to fill about a metre of shelf space, and I could only look upon any growth as an increase in my treasure. As something came in the mail it was carefully fondled and put in a place of honour. Each was a little gem and I added it to my collection as though it was of great worth and could only increase the worth of my treasure.

But if you come around to our house these days you will find the entrance hall has a lot of boxes stacked up in it, the ones that blue duplicating paper comes in. They are also full of other things apart from fanzines, like duplicates of Isaac Asimov paperbacks, all my old letters, and old SAPS mailings. (The only reason that they aren't out in the shed is because that's already full of old garden implements and broken plastic model aeroplanes - and besides, I recall that the earlier boxes of SAPS mailings that I read about in that shed had got wet... and I haven't slipped that far, yet.)

The progression from treasuring the mailings as they came in, to stuffing that treasure into old boxes and stacking them up out of the way has been a fairly long one of fifteen years or so. I don't suppose that there's much need to document it because you're either in the same position, or you are still in the earlier phase and I wouldn't want to disillusion you. Perhaps there are some who have moved to a higher level of existence where they no longer even collect stuff. I don't want to know about that.

Since deep philosophical concerns are not all the go just at the moment (so far as my brain is concerned anyhow), I'm not going to try to explain why it is that science fiction fans like to collect stuff. For myself, I keep on collecting it because it's a bit of a habit which is even harder to break than smoking. (Smoking is just the consumption of cigarettes which - unless you keep all the packets they come in - gives you little to remember all the previous cigarettes you've consumed.) When you haven't thrown out the first fanzine you've read, it is likely that you will also not throw out the next one, or the one after, or the hundredth, the thousandth, or the millionth if you last that long. And then you will be in the same position as me, with boxes of old fanzines that you will probably never read again, but which you have no intention of throwing out.

So, if this is the first fanzine you receive, the moral is plain. Read it and then throw it out. Do the same if this is your second or third fanzine; it's not too late to save yourself! Even if you have not thrown out those hundred or so fanzines you've received so far, you can still save yourself. All you have to do is send me all those fanzines you've kept - we may still be able to save you, and what's a hundred or so fanzines one way or the other to a lost soul like me.

The same goes for all those old letters you've saved, throw them out or send them to me (and don't to highlight the juicy DNQ bits to make them easier for me to read). And also all those old BRE Astoundings (the US ones might be even nicer) and the Eagle magazines with the colour Dan Dare strips; I'm willing to help almost anyone who is trying to get rid of the collecting bug.

I suppose that somewhere out there in the world there is a self-help group, like Alcoholics Anonymous, which tries to help people give away collecting. If there is, keep the news to yourself. If you really want to help me you'll send a cash donation which will help towards the only real solution to the problem. What we collectors really need is not to be cured; we need space to house the fruits of our addiction.

"Ah-ha!" exclaims somebody with an indecently long memory, "what about the extension you had put on your house a couple of years ago?" And they are right, we did get an extension put on, a fairly decent one in which I'm sitting at this very moment. Unfortunately all that did was allow me to spread out my junk a bit, and after a couple of years I'm having to compress it again. (You don't think that I collect only fanzines and old Asimov paperbacks do you - I have a fine but, alas, not complete set of most of the magazines published about plastic aeroplane modelling; but you might not want to know about that.)

The more dramatic way of making additional space would be to buy a bigger house in which to set up the collections properly. Valma and I came that close to buying a bigger house at the end of last year... the main advantage of the place was that it was over twice the size of our present place and had a few little living advantages like upstairs and downstairs (so that Ted White and Marty Cantor could both have visited at the same time and not met each other). There was also all that space which could be filled up with rows and rows of shelves so that everything we own could have been beautifully set up for at least the next five years - after which we would probably have had to start putting things back into boxes. (There were also a few other little civil advantages such as a posh neighbourhood, leafy trees all around, enclosed backyard with lilly pond and barbecue, patio, etc., etc.)

The reason we only came that close to moving was mainly because of the cost. It's not that we couldn't afford to buy the place - we had the bank loan all approved - but that if we had gone ahead we would have been eating stale bread and drinking nothing but water for atleast the next five years. And, what would have been worse, we wouldn't have been able to afford the shelves to put our treasure on or - the deciding factor - we wouldn't have been able to go on collecting things.

As it is, we can still afford little luxuries like a small computing device to produce this fanzine on, and boxes of blue paper which can be emptied of their contents to give me something to keep my old SAPS mailings in.

The solution to my whole problem would be, of course, just to get a big truck to come along and to toss everything into it. I can tell you that, at times, I have thought about it fairly seriously. Even so, I'm sure that old fanzines must be worth something to somebody, but I imagine that nobody could afford my price. I've figured out what that price is too - it's enough to pay for all the computer hardware and software to digitize them all properly before handing them over. That's because we really dedicated anal-retentives never get rid of anything if we can keep it - we just keep on trying to compress what we've got into less and less space. I really could live without all those glorious reams of twilltone paper, but I would find it very difficult to go without all the megawords of deathless prose - some of which are even worth reading.

Why keep it all then? Basically I suppose it's because I like keeping stuff, but I can think up a decent justification, as a historian anyhow. You see, what I've got out in the hallway isn't old SAPS mailings or unreadable Asimov novels, it's primary source evidence which I am storing up for the great explosion in writing the history of sf and fandom which I expect to take place any century now. I take as my model the bookseller Thomas who, back in the 1600s, had the foresight to collect every pamphlet, paper or book he could lay his hands on which was published from the beginning of sittings of the English Parliament in 1640. I suppose he thought that his collection would cover a few months of publications but, as it turned, out there was a civil war, a King beheaded, a republic, a military dictatorship, a series of illegal parliaments and a restoration of the old parliament and then the monarchy before the parliament was finally and properly dissolved and he could give up collecting in 1660. He had a lot of trouble keeping his collection together and moving it around to keep it out of the hands of soldiers who weren't too happy with some of the things that he was collecting. Fortunately this great anal-retentive's collection has survived and last year I spent seemingly endless hours reading microfilms of the collection. I don't know how many volumes the whole lot goes for but there's a couple of hundred rolls of microfilm to hold it so it must have been fairly big. No wonder poor old Thomas died a pauper, in those days they didn't have cheap cardboard boxes to put things in and so he had to bind everything properly by hand and then stick them in trunks. Such is the fate of the dedicated completist. (I wonder if Bruce Pelz is aware of this cautionary little tale.)

Not that I could really claim that fanzines and apa mailings will be quite so useful. All the same, it makes a good excuse.

* * *

Possibly more interesting than instruction on how to get out of collecting things are articles on what people do on their holidays. Well, perhaps not. It really depends on where you go and what you do. I can tell you that my holidays aren't as useful or as relaxed as the one related next.

ON THE BEACH, WITH TURTLES

Russell Parker

As sf fans, we have all entertained the notion at some time of other, that we may be ostensibly "different" from other ordinary folk. There's an enthusiasm in fandom that's found in few other pursuits. As a scientist, I'd like to think that I approach my job with the same kind of enthusiasm, the kind you need if you intend to do sea turtle research; which is how I spend my holidays.

Fellow biologist, fan and friend, Peter Kerans and I have, over the last five years, been involved in conducting sea turtle research on Peak Island, a national park in the Capricorn Bunker group of the Central Queensland coast. The island is a few kilometres to the south off that satyrian paradise, Great Keppel Island.

A continental island of about twenty-eight hectares, with a solitary peak (hence the name) rising 111 metres, it's fairly rocky and sparsely vegitated. On the eastern side, wind blown crags drop steeply down to the sea, while the western side is mainly low grassed dune and beach. From the largest beach (about 500 metres) where we camp, the horizon is filled by the mainland. At night the glow of Gladstone's lights can be seen to the south, Rockhampton's to the west and Yeppoon's to the north.

Aside from a solitary pair of sea eagles that ride the thermals above the peak and the occasional oyster catchers feeding around the few offshore rocks, the island seems totally deserted and devoid of life. That is until the breeding season (mid November to January) when the beach is alive with turtles. It is this flurry of breeding activity that makes Peak Island the largest rookery on the east coast of Australia for the endemic Flatback Turtle (Chelonia depressa), supporting a breeding population of about 500 females.

For a couple of weeks to a month each breeding season we escape civilisation to camp on the island and collect data on the nesting turtles. As Peter has just completed a Master's Qualifying in Biotechnology at the University of NSW and I'm working on an overseas aid project to Malaysia and the Philippines on control of insects in stored grain, the work provides us with the opportunity to use our talents in a different area. And besides, watching sea turtles lay is rather more appealing than maintaining Aspergilus or Lesser Grain Borer cultures. Somehow, it's not quite the same.

The research is conducted as part of the on-going project of the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service on the sea turtles of Queensland waters. Those of you who have been fortunate enough to visit the Loggerhead (Caretta caretta) rookery at Mon Repos, near Bundaberg, during the breeding season, will be well acquainted with the volunteer researchers who patrol the beach answering the public's questions. I did a few seasons of that before brnching out to Peak Island.

As an aside, it's amazing some of the questions that people ask you while you're measuring and recording a turtle. More than once a parent has informed a sibling that the turtle was "crying" because I was hurting it as it was being tagged. So I try to explain that the turtle has salt glands near the eyes for excretion of excess salt, with the added bonus of helping remove any sand from the eyes; the tagging does not hurt them much at all. I've also had adults ask, in all seriousness, as the turtle was dropping its eggs, "what sex is it?" Thankfully, the majority of tourists are co-operative and appreciate the work being done. Certainly without the public's awareness and support, the recent land development threat to Mon Repos would not have been successfully thwarted and the rookery protected.

Mon Repos has been the centre of sea turtle research for around sixteen years. As the only major mainland rookery in Australia, Mon Repos is important both for conservation of sea turtle resources and for public education, something the Queensland government is only just realizing by belatedly declaring the area an Environmental Park,

Although Mon Repos maintains a breeding population of several hundred, some of the island rookeries support populations in the thousands. Raine Island, off the tip of Cape York, was recently in the news for recording an unusually large season - during one hour on one night researchers counted 11 500 nesting Green Turtles (Chelonia mydas) and estimates put the population in the surrounding waters at over 150 000. That's high density nesting for an island that's only about 800 metres long and 500 metres wide.

Peak Island, while not having the same numbers as Raine, is still a significant rookery and as such has warranted our attention over the last five years, with the annual surveys by two to five member research teams.

The team is taken out to Peak courtesy of the National Parks launch; this year a rough trip due to a twenty-five knot south-easter. The route skirts Great Keppel Island which, I am reliably informed, once also supported nesting turtles. Perhaps they could no longer stand the cacophony from the resort disco.

Peak has no fresh water, so all supplies have to be carried up the beach to our one Pandamus tree camp - no mean feat in the thirty degree temperatures of a Queensland summer. Regular supply trips help to mix in some fresh food with our usual spartan tinned fare.

The days are spent lolling about on hammocks strung up in the shade of the Pandamus tree reading or trying to sleep. The island atmosphere tends to make you attempt the more demanding of books purchased that year. Peter brought along Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow and Brunner's Crucible of Time, if that's any sort of guide. Frequent swims help to make sure we don't offend each other too much as fresh water is rationed, leaving no extra for washing.

The occasional spot of fishing also helps to fill the relaxed daylight hours, after the first season, when a couple of good-sized flathead were caught, we've been trying (unsuccessfully) to emulate the feat. We've discovered that the oysters found on the island do not stay on the hook and are much more productive if eaten straight from the shell. Even the disgusting tinned frankfurts can't catch anything!

Talking of food, for those curious, turtle flesh is rather palatable but turtle eggs are to be avoided at all costs, although I would never think of touching either while doing research.

The island also has a good assortment of venomous animals. The odd snake and scorpion appear, usually at unfortunate times, like the scorpion that crawled across one researchers foot while he was visiting the latrine. I'm glad it was not me. A couple of sea snaes inhabit the rocks near the beach and small sharks are common as they come in to feed on the occasional daylight-emerging hatchlings and the larger fish that feed on them. There would doubtless be larger sharks out in the deeper waters, but we haven't been keen to meet them.

The real work of the researcher is from dusk to dawn. The beach is patrolled and all turtles are tagged, measured and recorded. Most nesting occurs around the high tide, from ten until midnight. The turtle will slowly drag itself up the beach to the grass slope above the high water mark. After digging a body pit a nesting chamber, around fifty centimetres deep, is scooped out with the hind flippers. During this time the turtle is very sensitive to light, movement or noise and any disturbance will send it back to the water as fast as it can go.

Once laying commences, the turtle is remarkably placid and it is then, if possible, that we tag and measure. The turtle is first tagged with titanium cattle tags for identification, so that individual turtles can be followed throughout their breeding lives; usually three to four nestings at fortnightly intervals during the season on alternate years for about six years. Each nesting is of about fifty billiard-ball sized eggs, making the entire breeding production of a flatback turtle about 450 to 500 eggs, most of which will hatch, but few will survive to maturity.

Although the tagging does not damage the turtle (indeed it would be pointless if it did), they do react at times, especially when returning to the water. With a jaw capable of crushing molluscs, a few fingers present no problem, but I've never come across any damage inflicted in that way. Flippers can also present difficulties (I lost a toe-nail from a flipper sweep a few seasons ago) and on a couple of occasions, people have been sent sprawling by their persistent strokes.

The turtles carapace (usually around ninety-three centimetres) is measured for rookery averages and growth rates. Some turtles are also weighed for data on averages between different rookeries. Any damage is recorded, usually parts of flippers missing from shark attacks; their only predator as adults, other than man.

This season Peter came across a turtle that had been hooked up on a bait line of the type set by commercial fishermen, with a couple of large hooks cutting deeply in the flesh of its neck and one flipper. The animal would have almost certainly died and, with no facilities to attempt to repair the damage, it was very distressing and disheartening for us to watch it go back to the water.

Some clutches are counted and weights and diameters measured on the leathery soft-shelled eggs. Sand temperatures during incubation influences the sex of the hatchlings. At one temperature females will predominate while, at a degree or so different, mainly males will result. Because the season covers summer and the incubation period is about seven weeks, a temperature range of enough variation occurs to ensure an even mix between the sexes.

Flatback hatchlings are the most attractive sea turtle young found in Queensland waters, being clean and strong with flippers that never stop moving, like a wind-up toy. Contrary to popular belief, birds don't take a lot of hatchlings, except for

the occasional daylight emergence, which also frequently suffers shark predation. The largest predation is from Ghost crabs (Ocypode sp.) while the eggs are incubating.

After hatchlings emerge, we dig up the nest and record the number that have successfully left the nest (from the remaining shells), those alive and dead in the nest and the undeveloped and unhatched embryos. It is a rather unpleasant, smelly job opening rotten eggs to check for the development of an embryo.

The research on Peak Island is important to understanding the enormous fluctuations that can occur in breeding turtle numbers and hence in providing for adequate conservation management to cater for this. It is doubly vital as many of the sea turtle species found in Australian waters migrate to neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia and Vanuatu where they are being slaughtered in increasing numbers with little thought to effective management or conservation. Many overseas rookeries have been exploited to extinction and now Australian rookeries present the best chance of saving some of the these species.

The relevance and need for the work on sea turtles is one reason why, season after season, Peter and I go back and do it. Also the chance to live out on a deserted island and escape the pressures of inner city life. The atmosphere on the island is ideal for stimulating thought so we always return full of ideas for the coming year. It is also handy for getting through the backlog of books bought that year. But there is a deeper, more meaningful, almost mystical reason for us to do the work.

A remnant of the age of the dinosaur, turtles may well have been nesting on Peak for thousands of years. It's difficult to describe the sensation of sitting on a totally deserted beach beside a laying turtle as dawn approaches. The tide slowly wipes away the tracks on the beach and the only sound is the turtle's laboured breathing and the occasional cry of an oyster-catcher. The sky overhead is full of stars and the horizon is clear, but for the occasional flash of a distant lighthouse. The turtle keeps laying as if you were not there at all. You feel as though you're a privileged observer; a time traveller gone back before man had evolved.

To be touched by such a scene is to realize just how insignificant man really is and what an enormous tragedy it would be if we were, in the space of less than a hundred years, to wipe out some sea turtle species forever. It's a perilous situation and one that we must do whatever we can to avoid.

* * *

CONVERSATION ABOUT CRITICISM

Introduction: You're going to have to exercise a bit of imagination here, but since we're all sci-fi fans together that shouldn't be too hard, should it. At least let's hope not.

What you have to do is imagine that you are in the middle of a partly comprising about twenty-five people who are all busy talking to each other about various things. It's very much like the kind of party that you would find at any fan gathering, some people on the verandah talking WorldCon politics, some others in the kitchen talking about sex, some lounging around the washing machine in the laundry talking about cricket, and a small group in the hall discussing sf. We'd go into the living room and see who's there but no doubt the video machine is chugging out old copies of "Blake's Seven".

The difference, and this is the reason why you have to use your imagination, is that this particular party is taking place in the pages of ANZAPA from mailings 97 to 102. Instead of people standing around with drinks in their hands and fog on their brains we have a lot of people sitting at typewriters, sending out lots of words to each other. Over in the imaginary equivalent of the kitchen there is a conversation about house renovations and in the back yard they are arguing about

politics. Elsewhere there are people gossiping about this and that and discussing WorldCon politics while over there you will find Jack Herman muttering to himself the vital statistics of all the fanzines he's published so far (a habit we all have from time to time).

Now, if you would like to come with me along here to the small gathering in the back room, between the duplicator and the pile of old ERE Astoundings, we will find an interesting turn in the conversation. With the kind of 20/20 hindsight which we historians learn to cultivate, we will find ourselves eavesdropping on an interesting little conversation which is going to develop on the subject of literary criticism.

Let's see, before we start, how about some introductions. You no doubt know Marc Ortlieb, Joseph Nicholas and Bruce Gillespie. There's Gerald Smith, Eric Lindsay, Judith Hanna, Jean Weber and David Grigg. And there's me standing over by the fridge.

As you'd expect with any party conversation, there's no real beginning or end. So let's be arbitrary and start with Bruce who has been looking thoughtful for a short while.

Bruce Gillespie: Jeff, you really know how to pick a fight with your remarks on serious literature. I have an ambiguous attitude to the whole question. There is a certain kind of academic English attitude that holds that serious literature is, of course, a quite different and vastly superior activit than popular literature. Then there are writers who simply write their best and let the critics tell them whether it's good enough or not. Then there is the strange attitude that serious literature is not/cannot be entertaining. Why is it entertaining not to think, for instance. This implies that reading is not an activity into which you want to put any effort or commitment; that is, it's not worth much. But in fact, you are one of those people who enjoy reading and get a lot from the books you read. What's worthwhile is what you put your heart into. "Serious literature", to me, is simply that kind of reading matter which gives me back as much as I put into it. With most of today's sf, I have to work hard to read it, and it gives me nothing back.

When talking (listening) to Christine Ashby, I get the idea that she believes that reading shouldn't give you any intellectual exercise at all. But the books I remember and enjoy are those which take a certain amount of effort. Some books, like Finnegans Wake, are beyond me, and some, like the bit of Under the Volcano I have read, are both difficult to read and very badly written. (That's how I would describe much of Damien's early work.) There are peculiar books, like Garner's The Guizer, which are magnificently written and impossible to read. I'd say the same about the Irishy books which John Bangsund likes so much.

(Both Jeff Harris and Christine Ashby are off somewhere else and don't respond.)

Marc Ortlieb: I don't think it's a matter of serious literature being not entertaining, though I would, to an extent support that sort of view. What it is is that certain critics have made it clear that literature isn't for the masses, it is for those favoured few who can bring their full sensibilities to bear in their examinations of the Great Works of Literature. For me, entertainment is something which stretches my mind without warping it. Anything that requires excessive thought isn't worth t as entertainment, though I might look towards it the next time I have to write an essay full of deep and moaningful comments. Since each person sets his/her own ideas on what constitutes stretching the mind too far, each of us will have a different idea on how entertaining certain works of "literature" can be. I personally turn off if I have to use the dictionary more than once per two pages. It's not that I don't want what I read to make me think; it's more a matter of priorities, and, to me, the enjoying of the book is more important than the thinking. If I can do both, then that's fine. (Boy, there's the basis of a full essay there, as I feel the need to qualify everything I say. Another facet of course is that one will read a book that makes one think hard on

the proviso that one wants to think hard about the particular issue the book deals with. Most "literary" books that I've read don't get me thinking about the things I'm interested in thinking about.)

(At this point Marc reaches into his pocket and pulls out a bundle of dog-eared papers which, it will turn out, is an essay he had to write for college. Since his wife isn't there to give him a gentle "Not now dear, put it away," - she's in the living room showing slides of her recent overseas trip - we will have to endure:)

MY LIFE IN CRITICISM

or

How I Became an adult Philistine
without developing a Guilt Complex.

My appreciation for criticism, to paraphrase William Blake, went through an innocence of criticism, during which I disliked criticism because I didn't know enough about it or about the material with which it dealt; to an experience of criticism, during which I thought I knew a little bit about criticism and rather enjoyed it; to that innocence born of my experience of criticism - my current stage - where I feel that literary criticism has its place in the scheme of things, but that it shoud be handled carefully, and that one really should wash one's hands after handling it.

My first experience with literary criticism did not encourage me to develop the acquaintance further. The first time I paid any attention to literary criticism was when I was in Year Eleven at High School - Leaving, as it was optimistically known. My Leaving English teacher appeared to us to be the stereotyped prim and proper spinster lady. She gave no indication that she was interested in anything more recent than the Boer War, and refused to discuss anything remotely connected with sex. (One of our more loutish students, who was repeating Leaving English, would take every opportunity to embarrass her by asking if the crags and crevasses in .... (insert any novel from the set text list) could be interpreted as sexual metaphors,)

At the time I was the Wonder Boy Scientist who was going to revolutionize the chemical industry, and English was one of those boring interruptions to exotic experiments in the chemistry and physics labs. Nothing that our English teacher could do quite compared to the excitement of watching our physics teacher wringing mercury out of his socks after dropping the barometer that he'd been demonstrating to us. I couldn't work out why anyone would want to read works of mouldering old novelists and poets - my particular bane being Gerard Manly Hopkins. (I was most impressed when one of my friends - also in the maths/science stream - produced a two page essay analyzing the title of Hopkins' poem "God's Grandeur" - pointing out that the initials, G G, were a reference to another of Hopkins' famous works - "Pied Beauty".) In poetry lessons I managed to ignore most of what was being said, but, in order to make sure that I passed the subject, I memorized a poem, Rudyard Kipling's "The Secret of the Machines". That was as close to my major literary obsession - science fiction - as our set anthology The Progress of Poetry came. I then planned strategies whereby I could twist any poetry essay topic into such a form that I could answer it using that poem. I must admit that I was having trouble working out how I could use the poem to discuss romance in poetry, but otherwise I was fairly well set. (It must have worked too, I got a credit in English at the end of year exam.)

I did have a sneaking regard for Shakespeare, and particularly enjoyed those lessons in which we were permitted to read his plays out loud, but otherwise I have few positive memories of high school English criticism. 1969 was the first year that English was not a compulsory Matriculation subject, and so I dropped it, opting instead for Classical Studies as my compulsory humanities subject.

My most fruitful encounter with literary criticism came in my second year of tertiary studies, I'd spent my first year at Adelaide University discovering that my

mathematical ineptitude precluded me from a successful scientific career, and, for financial reasons, rather than repeat first year university, I transferred to Adelaide Teachers' College, where I was permitted to do second year biology and Education Studies on the basis of my results at University. I did though need an extra subject, and I chose English as the lesser of the offered evils.

My experiences with literary criticism at Adelaide Teachers' College were all positive, once I'd been cured of my tendency to write run-on sentences. I suddenly found out that I did enjoy unravelling obscure poetry, and that my enjoyment of Shakespearian literature had blossomed into a fascination with his work - reinforced by my discovery of books such as G Wilson Night's The Crown of Life.

The main reason for my freshly sparked interest in literary criticism was the bunch of lecturers at Adelaide Teachers' College - notably Marion Howes, a London MA who was doing Education Sudies at Adelaide Teachers' College while lecturing in English. Her personal interest in literature and her basic insanity impressed me. She would sit in tutorials chain smoking while discussing Freudian interpretations of literature and of the cigarettes that she was smoking. She became very much a part of our student group, involving herself in such student activities as the annual musical. (This caused me a little consternation, as I was in charge of the lighting for The Boyfriend. and one night I notices that Marion had her own personal follow-spot. This was not in the lighting script. On blasting the responsible follow operator, I discovered that Marion had offered her a Credit in English if she gave Marion the personal spot.) Marion received a standing ovation when she went up to receive her Graduate Diploma in Teaching - she wore her London robes, red and yellow striped football socks and a red woolly hat. I decided that if people like Marion were interested in literit then it couldn't be all bad.

In my three years of English at ATC, I was forced into the position of reading quite a lot of literary criticism, though I found that I preferred to use my own interpretations as much as possible. (My science background gave me a different slant on literature too. One essay that I did came back with the comment "This is the first time I've seen the jargon of New Maths used in a literary essay." I'd made some statement to the effect that, although some of Donne's work was a sub-set of meta-physical literature, there was other work that did not fit into that set. I cannot recall whether or not I included a Venn Diagram to illustrate my point.)

I found that I preferred poetry and drama to novels, and to this day I shy clear of literary analysis of novels, largely because I find most "literary" novels pretentious and over written. (Not that I am consistent in this. The two "literary" novelists whose writing did appeal to me were Patrick White and Janet Frame. I particularly enjoyed researching an essay on White's Riders in the Chariot.) I found that my favourite form of criticism was that that dug into obscure metaphor, symbolism and allegory. I also developed a taste for dark, evil and mystical writing, preferably the works of poets such as Blake, Milton and Plath to those such as Wordsworth. Somewhere along the line I even discovered that I was capable of enjoying Hopkins.

The role that criticism played was in opening up those writers to me. Part of my problem with literature in high school was that I hadn't understood it. I hadn't been able to see the complexities in the works I'd been reading. Criticism enabled me to see the depth of the works. Suddenly literature had become an intellectual challenge - a crypic crossword to be solved - a chance to show how clever I was.

These factors were important to me. I like to be able to interact with my reading material. I do this in two different ways. In the books I read for pleasure I like to interact by becoming a part of the novel. I relate to the characters to the point that I feel myself a participant, or at least an involved observer, in the novel. In "literit" I tend to participate in a more critical manner, I look at the book, poem or play and draw meanings and interpretations from it. I can dismantle it; look at how the different parts interact; and see what it going on. I can speculate on the writer's reasons for choosing particular words, or particular characters and settings. I can read the writer's biography and speculate on the

influences that his/her life has had on the work. It is a rare book that I can approach from both directions; the only two novels that come to mind being Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and George Orwell's 1984. (If I extend that to poetry and drama, I can include Faith, Blake, Milton, Shakespeare and Ionesco.)

At college I found that two things influenced my opinion of a particular work - the attitude of the lecturer to that work, and whether or not I had to do a major assignment on the work. The A T C lecturers were very fond of Donne, and took great joy in revealing the implicit and explicit sexual references in his works to their innocent students. With that sort of introduction it's no wonder that I'm still rather fond of Donne's early poetry. The effect that doing a major assignment had on my opinion of a work has, I feel, more to say about what a student will justify spending several hours of his life on than it has to say about the intrinsic joys of writing essays.

My contact with the world of literary criticism was broken when my course finished and I received my first teaching position, at Naracoorte High School, two hundred and fifty miles from civilization. I soon discovered that critical analysis had very little to do with teaching English to a low-stream Year Ten English class. I had to learn to look at literary texts from a different point of view. This was brought home to me very early in Term Two, when I had a class reading out loud from Hemmingway's The Old Man and the Sea. There is one section in the novel where the old man is speculating on the sex of the fish - which, in itself, should have warned me. His final decision is that it "pulls like a male". That line was given a whole new significance by the emphasis placed on the word "pulls" by the boy who was reading. (I can't remember his real name, merely that he was known to his friends as "Boof".) I trust that I didn't go as red as had my Leaving English teacher on similar occasions. Thus "reading critically" came to mean reading a text very carefully before setting parts of it to be read aloud in class.

Although Naracoorte was more or less a literary desert - as I discovered when I tried to introduce the local drama club to absurdist theatre - I managed to regain some contact with literit through becoming involved in the sub-culture that surrounds science fiction. I had been reading sf since early childhood, and had become aware that there was some sort of organization of science fiction readers, or "fans". In 1975, through attending the World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne, I came into contact with this organization, though I now realize that organization is not really a good word to describe the loose association that the members of the sub-culture have with each other and with science fiction.

One aspect of the sub-culture is the multitude of small magazines, some of which are devoted to critical writing about sf. When I first encountered these magazines, the premier serious critical publication was Bruce Gillespie's Science Fiction Commentary. In its pages the critics, writers and fans conducted lively discussions on the nature of science fiction. The articles varied in quality and interest, but invariably led to much discussion in the letter column of the each issue.

One topic that dominates serious discussion of sf is whether or not the critical criteria for "mainstream" fiction should be applied to science fiction. (Those involved in the argument tend to argue as though there is one particular set of critical criteria used in evaluating "mainstream" fiction). Some will argue that the difference between sf and mainstream are so large that standard critical techniques are not adequate to deal with the unique nature of sf. The major difference, it is argued, is that sf is literature of ideas rather than a literature of characterisation. The "content" versus "style" argument has led to assorted schisms in the science fiction community.

The proponents of the stance that science fiction should be judged on the same criteria as "mainstream" literature have a tendency to be pretentious and elitist. The description of Leavisites, as given by John Cocker in his article "How I Became a Teenage Leavisite and lived to Tell the Tale" seems to fit this group to a "t". George Turner, a prominent member of the external standards group, stated in a recent talk to the members of the Melbourne science fiction community, that the only

worthwhile science fiction is that written by authors outside the genre. He cited Orwell and Huxley as examples. In the same talk, he wrote off the majority of science fiction writers as competent story tellers, but little more. (In the case of science fiction critics, The Great Tradition seems to have been enlarged to include certain favoured European writers, but there is still a strong bias against anything from the United States.)

Here is the main reason for my dislike of the way that literary criticism is applied to science fiction. It seems to be telling me that I shouldn't like books that I know I do like. It tells me that I should disregard those books that I read for pleasure, and instead indulge in the analytical part of my reading - the bit where I take works to pieces to see how they achieve their effects. Now I'm not averse to that as one means of reacting to literature. I do though object when told that I should only read "good" literature and should abandon the sort of stuff that I can enjoy reading without having to engage my critical facilities. I'm quite willing to ignore stylistic and characterizational faults if a writer provides me with an interesting story.

As a teacher, I have come to realize that litcrit is, at times, useful in looking at books, but those students who have enough background and experience to respond positively to litcrit are few and far between, and are certainly seldom found at any level below Year Eleven. For the majority of students, literature should be looked at on a gut-level rather than in an intellectual manner, though all students should be given the opportunity to develop an understanding of some of the litcrit jargon, on the off chance that they do, at some time, go on to study literature in more depth.

As a citizen, I will occasionally exercise my skills in literary criticism, if only to write the occasional piece for fanzines, sending up the entire litcrit process - I'm quite proud of the feminist/Marxist analysis that I did of John Wyndham's The Midwich Cuckoos, which I thought sent-up the style well, but which elicited all sorts of serious letters of comment, agreeing with my statements implying that Wyndham was a sexist, fascist shit. I'm also interested in the various critical analyses of Lewis Carroll's works, and have attempted some serious critical analysis of his works. Above all though I read whatever I want to read, and have no intention of allowing any critic to dictate my taste. Criticism is, at best, a tool which can aid in the understanding of a piece of literature. At worst, it is a pathetic attempt by those who cannot themselves write to influence the fortunes of those who can.

(We all snap back to consciousness, and I ponder on Marc's ability to get away with writing fanzine articles for college - how come I can't do it.)

Leigh Edmonds: Literary critics are starting to sound more and more like historians all the time. Although the critic may be spared the search for primary evidence he seems to take it upon himself/herself to invest the activity of the profession with a kind of god like necessity. But then I'm particularly biased, I'm well aware that what the world needs is more historians and less literary critics.

Eric Lindsay: I liked the image of washing ones hands after criticism. I'd prefer it if critics didn't exist. Against that, it is obvious that there are a number of interesting characters involved in writing criticism, and it would be a shame to miss all that hey say. After all, Dorothy Parker has done it.

Jean Weber: Your experiences with, and feelings about, litcrit sound very similar to mine, and your final two sentences sum up the whole topic beautifully. I'd add that to me an essential difference between litcrit as constructive analysis (that is, an aid to understanding) and a kill-the-fuckers negative approach, which often implies - or even blatantly states - that one shouldn't be wasting one's time with works that don't pass that particular critic's test of values.

One thing I like about George Turner's approach is that he doesn't demand all of to be "literary", just that he deplores that so little of it attains those heights. At least that's what I got out of his recent book, In The Heart or In The Head. I would certainly agree that few of writers appear to try for the heights (or maybe they do, but can't sell the results), and that's a pity. But I certainly don't think - nor do I believe George thinks - that if one doesn't aim for the heights, one is wasteing one's time, and the reader's time.

Joseph Nicholas: In view of my earlier correspondence with you, Marc, on the subject of literary criticism, you will doubtless not be at all surprised to hear me say that I consider your comments on the subject philistine garbage from beginning to end. Since you already know why I think this, I won't repeat myself here - except to pick you up on one point, where you say that one topic which "dominates serious discussion of sf is whether or not the critical criteria for 'mainstream,' fiction should be applied to science fiction", and then go on to condemn those who say the criteria should be so applied as "pretentious and elitist".

Bollocks.

This is the usual whine of the die-hard sci-fi fan: that sci-fi is the literature of "ideas" and that since "mainstream" fictionis all about "character" the criteria can't be transferred. Except that "ideas" are the province of all "types" of fiction, and "mainstream" criticism is concerned with far more than just "character". Marxist criticism, for example, seeks to interpret fiction in terms of class struggle and social hegemony; structuralist criticism seeks to interpret it in terms of its modelling of various aspects of the social and physical world; sociological criticism seeks to interpret in terms of why it reflects underlying social tensions and preoccupations; Jungian criticism... etc. etc. etc.. How and why are these critical strategies "inappropriate" for the interpretation and analysis of science fiction? To write them off as "pretentious and elitist" is too close off vast swathes of potentially enriching endeavour, deliberately restricting your mental horizons to the safe, the known, and the undemanding, impairing and impoverishing your intellect in the process. Or it is because you know that if these critical strategies were applied to science fiction something like ninety-nine per cent of it would be instantly condemned for its paucity of ideas and poverty of imagination.

You say that the main reason for your dislike of "the way that literary criticism is applied to science fiction" (despite your failing to elucidate the "way" in question) is that it tells you that "I shouldn't like books that I know I do like". Another of the typical whines of the die-hard sci-fi fan - how dare these mere critics expose these great writers like Jack Chalker and Spider Robinson for the talentless hacks they are, what?

Attitudes like this are not so much painful as contemptible. I find myself wondering why you've bothered to undertake this course of study.

David Grigg: I much enjoyed your discussion of literit, Marc, and if gave me food for thought. As a sometime writer, I certainly agree thatliterary criticism of the kind I was subjected to at school has very little to do with how a writer writes. And I can't think of a worse way of trying to learn to write than by trying to please the literary critics. But on the other hand, I look at Leavis' book on Dickens, for example, as an interesting opportunity to see what someone else things about books I myself have read. I might well disagree, but often I pick up aspects of a book I hadn't thought about before.

I couldn't agree more that your reading taste should never be dictated by the critics. Like you, I read for pleasure. But where litcrit can be useful is in helping you discover new kinds of pleasure. The opinions of others can be invaluable in helping you step out into areas of reading you might nor previously have considered.

It seems to me that reading tastes are exactly like eating tastes. (I know I've attempted this comparison before at conventions, and it's usually fallen flat, but that's because I'm not a good public speaker. Bear with me.)

One eats partly to avoid starvation, but largely for pleasure. Now you may thoroughly enjoy eating sausages and chips, despite what all the food critics and health bods tell you about how rotten such food is for you. And indeed, no one has the right to dictate to you what you should eat for pleasure. But if someone takes you along to a Chinese restaurant and explains the menu to you, you may find that you discover such wonderful taste delights as lemon chicken or prawns with black bean sauce. And you may then vow to eat Chinese food often. Almost certainly, however, you won't eat Chinese food for every meal. Quite often you'll go back to the rougher delights of sausage and chips, despite the fact that you know there are better things. But you'll have learnt a new taste pleasure that won't ever leave you.

So it is with books. A good reviewer is like a good friend who introduces you to a new restaurant. A literary critic of the type you despise, on the other hand, is rather more like one of the health fanatics who raves about how bad sausages and chips are for you and how you should be eating whole-meal rice with bean shoots.

So endeth Grigg's Gospel on Reading Tastes. (Marc, why don't you try this tasty bit of Charles Dickens: well-stewed and seasoned, stuffed full of plums, perhaps a little on the filling side, but you can always skip your lunch of Heinlein sausages before you tackle it...)

Marc Ortlieb: Can it be merely coincidence that Bruce Gillespie introduced me to the joys of red wine? (True, I don't indulge in red wine often, but then I don't read books by Lem often either.) I will grant that I was a little polemical in my look at criticism. I still, though, maintain that it is my right to enjoy whatever I want without having to worry about others sneering at my lowbrow tastes. You certainly don't do this - sneer I mean. Joseph certainly does. This might be one of the reasons I'm more willing to accept your statements than I am to accept Joseph's. I'm still not sure that I'll accept your offer of Christmas pudding... er, Carol, but I was put off Victorian novelists at an early age.

Eric Lindsay: I very much liked your food analogy David. Tends very much to make me look more sympathetically at the carryings on of critics, while confirming Poul Anderson's idea that sf is competing for your beer money.

Jean Weber: I certainly don't agree with Eric's earlier statement that "I'd prefer it if criticism didn't exist". I can certainly do without the "kill-the-fuckers" style of criticism, but I often find fascinating new perspectives on a work by reading someone else's views; or discover new authors to read. Ditto for films, fanzines, etc. The key is not to take the critic's word as any more valid than your own. It's an opinion, that's all. (Even "kill-the-fuckers" criticism can be good reading, if it's done wittily enough. Mencken is a good example of this, or your choice, Dorothy Parker.)

Oh, and who is F R Leavis, and who are the Leavisites?

Bruce Gillespie: F R Leavis taught at Cambridge University for umpteen years. He had his greatest influence during the 1930s, when he and his students/disciples published Scrutiny, a critical magazine. He disagreed so basically and constantly with his colleagues that he was never made a professor, a knight, or anything. He disagreed strongly with C P Snow about the "two cultures", but I can't remember which line either bloke took. He died during the late 1970s. And that's about all I know about him. When his ideas reached America, they were called "the New Criticism", but I couldn't summarise those ideas. They did not seem too diferent from those of Henry James and T S Eliot, both of whom are more interesting to read.

The great "kill-the-fuckers" critics are Gore Vidal, Edmund Wilson, and (in sf) Franz Rottensteiner and John Foyster (in olden times). I always wanted to be one, but nobody was offended by my opinions.

Joseph Nicholas: Snow invented the term "two cultures", pointing out that in an increasingly technology-dominated age those on the arts side could no longer understand what those on the science side were doing, and that those on the science side could not adequately explain their activities to those on the arts side; Leavis's angry response was that since art was the literal expression of the human soul it was far more important than science, which was soul-less and therefore irrelevant. Time has proved Snow's warning right and Leavis a fool.

Gerald Smith: Funny, but I had the distinct impression, from what Marc said earlier, that what he was upset about was those critics who presumed to tell him what he should and shouldn't read. I have no objection to a critic telling me that Spider Robinson and Jack Chalker are talentless hacks just so long as they let me read them and have my own opinion on whether they are talentless hacks. You see, like Marc, I happen to think that for a writer to be good he doesn't necessarily have to be top notch when the mainstream objective criteria of criticism are applied, so long as he writes stories that keep me entertained and which I enjoy reading. Mind you, for a story to be enjoyable certain basic rules of English and style must be adhered to, on that I will not disagree, but the writer does not have to be a literary genius to be enjoyed.

Marc Ortlieb: You got out of bed on the wrong side didn't you Joseph. I assure you that I am aware of the varying forms of criticism, certainly not fluentin them, but aware of them, and they have little to do with my enjoyment of science fiction. I can, and do enjoy using critical techniques on novels, plays and poetry, which is one of the reasons that I'm doing the course. I enjoy arguing within critical paradigms. I choose not to do so in the case of reading science fiction because I enjoy reading that simply for escapist reasons. If you feel that that is a poor reason to read something then that is your right, just as it is my right to feel that your dismissal of Chalker and Robinson as talentless hacks is a reflection of the narrow attitude that you have to writing. The point about the multitudinous assortment of critical paradigms is that they are all human inventions, and all of them embody the biases of their creators. There is no reason for me to respect them or to take them seriously, except insofar as they are useful to me as a reader.

As for me closing off areas of criticism, and thus closing off vast swathes of potentially enriching endeavour, I thought that my piece made it clear that I haven't closed off criticism as one possible means of looking at literature. I merely don't feel like applying it to science fiction. There are types of literature that lend themselves to critical analysis far more easily than does science fiction, and there are works that lend themselves to particular critical approaches. Patrick White, for instance, is fun to look at through jungian criticism. Structuralists, I have been told, tend to like James Joyce.

Criticism is a game - an intellectual game, but a game none the less. You obviously enjoy that game more than I do. I'll play every now and then, and I'm an adequate player, at least according to my English tutors. However to consider that it has any importance in the scheme of things is a little too Leavisite a statement. You may find my attitude towards criticism contemptible. Fine, that is your rigt. Just don't expect me to take your attitudes particularly seriously. I respect the ability that you have to express your attitude, and I find your attitudes interesting, but I see no reason to consider your attitudes to be any more valid than mine.

(By the way, is there any reason for not considering your attitude towards Chalker and Robinson to be elitist?)

Actually, Jean, I'd really have to add a third thing that literit can be. It can be an interesting construction in its own right, with varying degrees of reference to

the text which it purports to examine. (I'm currently twisting my mind into all sorts of new shapes attempting to come to grips with some of Stanley Fish's theories on the nature of reading. His basic position seems to have been that there is no such thing as a text, merely the individual's reaction to it. That's all very well, until you start looking at a piece of criticism, which is an interaction between the critic's reaction to the text, and the reader's reaction to the critic's reaction to the text, all further complicated by the fact that there is no such thing as a text anyway. And Joseph wonders why I'm doing a course in literit. I love paradoxes and absurdities, and literit is full of that.)

F R Leavis is interesting. He is the bloke who is responsible, more or less, for the position that writers such as Austin, Donne, Conrad, and James had in English courses. Leavisites were people who followed his particular literary philosophy. He championed the concept of a sensibility towards literature. He was forever putting works and authors into hierarchies, from best to worst, and he felt that only literary critics could really be trusted with Britain's cultural heritage. He was a strong opponent of mass culture, and didn't like science or scientists much. He had a protracted and fairly famous argument with C P Snow. From reading an assortment of his letters, an a few of his critical writings, I'd figure him for the prototype of the elitist boring old fart, though, in his favour, he did champion argument as a method of reaching conclusions.

Leigh Edmonds: I also have some concern with the proposition that it is simply enough to pull out one of the forms of criticism and apply it to sf. The fact is that sf is in general written by a different group of people and in a different fashion to most of the written works which are subject to criticism. Many works of literature are now in fact written with an eye to the critics (whereas earlier books that were written before the critics came along are used as the models for the craft) whereas most sci-fi is written with an eye to the reviewers. Criticism is inappropriate because when it is "criticized" you find out how awful the work was, in literary terms, but the stuff wasn't written to meet those criteria and to give those who read carefully and deeply a thrill, it was composed to keep the person stuck on the train for two hours a day happy. Perhaps one of the tools that a critic should use in addition to all the rest is that of context; if it is a book to be read on the train and it achieves that objective very well, then it should be rated as a good book in that category. The fact that some of us don't like that sort of thing means that we should steer clear of it, there are enough halfway decent books around these days that time can be profitably spent on educating the writers who create them in how they might make even better books and in directing readers who want more than a train book towards what you have found.

However, right at the moment I wouldn't mind reading a Larry Niven book. For the past couple of months all my serious reading has been history on the English Commonwealth and Protectorate. There are actually some good writers among that period and reading, for example, Clarendon's books on the period was a bit enjoyable but not too fruitful. But after all that hard reading I really feel the need to take my reading muscles on a holiday and just do something light. My trouble is that I really can't bring myself to pay money for a Niven book and hence I'm spared.

Bruce Gillespie: Marc, from the title of your essay about literit I took the inference that we were going to disagree on the subject. Instead, I agree with most of what you say. Reading should be done for pleasure, and so should literary criticism. It all depends on what you call literary criticism. One possible definition: an organised, self-conscious way of reading well, and writing opinions about what one has read.

Little that we did at high school could be called "literary criticism". We were given no tools for reading. In fourth form I wrote a long book report about A Town Like Alice, in which I wasted thousands of words tying to explain why it is a second-rate book. I did not have the words to describe my experience of the book; particularly I did not have the word "pro-emptory", which would have summed up A Town Like Alice in one word and saved me the trouble of writing the report. "Superficial" and "desultory" are two other words I could have used. In fifth and

sixth form Eng Lit, teachers looked at the individual words and phrases of poems or books, but only to show how this or that word, phrase, or sentence meant something else. I needed a way of showing what was intrinsically pleasurable in the works, not ways of passing the literary buck. I still had no word tools. From reading sf and other pop lit, I knew what a good story was like, but I still could not see the link between an overall good story and the words used to tell that story.

In First Year English at Melbourne University, when I walked into my first tutorial, I received a piece of paper on which were typed stanzas from two different poems. No author's names were given. I had never read the poems. We had to write an essay on the differences and similarities between the poems. I had no idea what to do. I had been brought up to think that you could understand poems only if somebody had already explained to you the "real meanings" of the words. How could I talk about the poems "cold"? I had still not finished my essay on the day when I was supposed to hand it in. Shamefaced, I went to the tutorial. The tutor, Mrs Scoborio, did not "explain" the poems, but she gave just enough hints on ways to do it for ones self that I was able to finish my essay next day, hand it in, and get a decent mark. I had been so badly mislead by high school teachers, you see. Poems were made of words that had meaning in themselves, not just in terms of somebody's interpretation. Also, the words gained much of their meaning from their sounds and their positions in the lines. I learned to find out about poems from saying them in my head. When I looked at both poems, I found that one was definitely "better" than the other: the images were more interesting, the rhythms more tense, the sounds more sparkling. Moreover, I found that I did not need a special language to describe how the poems worked; I needed only to describe how the words worked on me.

The big test of this insight was an attempt to compare two passages of prose. To me, the words in a novel or short story were designed merely to keep the story going. Descriptive bits were usually dull, and even at their best, unnecessary. Mrs Scoborio showed me how wrong I was. Each of the passages was the first paragraph of a novel, (one of them, I think, was from Greene's The Power and the Glory.) She took us through the passages, word by word, phrase by phrase, showing how rhythm, metre, and other literary devices work in prose as well as in poetry. She showed us how the first paragraph will often give away much about the story of the whole book, even if the main characters have not yet appeared. From this I worked out the theory that a good piece of literature is one in which every word is valuable in itself and also connects with every other word of the poem, story, or novel. I can see now the difficulties with this theory. It presumes that an author puts in each word for some worked-out purpose. Trying to write fiction cured me of that delusion. And there are the writers who do write slipshod passages, but can still construct prose or verse which is powerful and interesting.

My theory, which is merely a crystalization of what I learned at university, is often useful in working out which books are better than others. Sf books do not stand up well when you look at them with any care. It's all too easy to see the slipshod phrases, dull sentences, cliches, and all the other devices of pop fiction, so much so that I can't rea most of the stuff. It's written by authors who do not respect the English language or, when they do, don't trust their own view of things. Instead they rely on rattling bags of old tricks that should have been thrown away. I agree with George Turner, in other words. An sf novel is good if it's a good novel, and I won't put up with novels or short stories that are bad by any standards.

Having said that, I still agree with David Grigg's wonderful comparison between a critic and a food-taster. When I write criticism, I try to be like "a good friend who introduces you to a new restaurant". If sf isn't much good, it's because it provides little nourishment and even less taste; often it's bad food, badly cooked. So I keep trying to find the new taste thrills, and telling people about them.

Marc, the terrifying name of Leavis keeps rising in this litcrit discussion. Damion Broderick keeps trying to pin the label "leavisite" on me, but I don't like wearing labels. I'm a "Bruce Gillespie-ite" in all things. I was influenced by people like Veni Scoborio and Peter Steels, who might have called themselves Leavisites, but

didn't in my hearing. I've read almost no Leavis. lecturers and tutors at university were always asking us to make up our own minds about books, plays, and poems. We were supposed to construct our own Great Traditions.

I know little about F R and Q D Leavis, since no biography has appeared yet. In The Best of Scrutiny, they attacked what they called the "British-Council-supported" authors, who turned out to be the Bloomsbury Group, especially Virginia Woolf. Also they didn't like the nineteenth-century British writers, and of British poets, Leavis seemed to like only Donne, Marvell, Hopkins, and Eliot. Leavis praised D H Lawrence, which is more than I can do. My own Great Tradition includes Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Flaubert, then hopping the Channel to George Eliot, Henry James, James Joyce, (surely) Virginia Woolf, then really not much until Patrick White. But that ignores (as Leavis did) the much stronger literature of USA during the twentieth century. It's all a big game, surely, and Leavis played harder than most. Literature and literit should be exciting and inclusive, not dry and exclusive. And most of it is more exciting than the ticky little tiddlers you find in the sf pond. Of course the critics ignore sf; they need their microscopes to see evidence of life. What can they make of maudlin emotions, slipshod writing, narrow minded opinions, and stale, constantly re-used "ideas"? Why don't the sf writers shape up, instead of blaming everybody else but themselves? And why don't sf readers learn to read better, instead of blaming the critics?

Eric Lindsay: I found myself agreeing with much you said on literit, and that rather surprises me, given the considerable difference in our taste in books. Particularly the comments on schools not providing appropriate critical tools.

I guess I was overstating my objection to literary criticism, I have a reasonable number of books on the topic, and have even read the majority of them. I guess that what I object to is the attitude of some critics that what they are doing is more important and meaningful than the work they criticise.

Marc Ortlieb: Your uni course was certainly Leavisite in nature. The handing to a person of two unseen poems is a Leavisite sort of a thing to do. It implies that one of the other is intrinsically better, and that poetry can be examined in isolation from everything else. Words do not, of course, have any meaning in themselves. Their meanings are determined by the language, by the experience of the reader, and by their relationship to other words in the piece of writing. In most cases it is impossible to assign a meaning to any word.

However, I don't think that your criticism of the method you used for prose is valid. Whether or not the author intended each word to do something, the words will fulfill a function in the piece, the function being affected by the author, the reader, the structure of the language and the structure of the piece in question. Your criticism of sf is a subjective thing - you only see slipshod phrases, dull sentences and cliches if you are looking for them... if you have particular expectations of a work. Cliches, for instance, are not objective in nature. At some point in time, a cliche must have been an original idea. It becomes a cliche through overuse. Does that now mean that the original use is a cliche because subsequent uses have been? Does it mean that an author who unwittingly uses a cliche is writing badly because he/she didn't check to make sure that he/she wasn't using cliches? Is a cliche still a cliche if the reader hasn't seen an example of it before?

In following a school that says that you should make up your own mind about books, plays, and poems, you are revealing your Leavisite roots. One of the central assumptions of the Leavisite school was that the informed reader was going to make the correct decision about books. Certainly you are a Bruce Gillespie-ite, but your literary awareness has been shaped by the Leavisite school of criticism, much as has mine. However, the effect that the Leavisite approach had on me was a negative one. I reject the idea that literature could be arranged hierarchically from good to bad. I only accept that there is literature that I enjoy and literature that I don't enjoy. I can explain this, but not in terms of absolutes.

Judith Hanna: I'm going to pick up your comments on literary criticism Leigh, with nods towards Marc and Gerald and Bruce and ummm... Where did the idea that criticism involves "pulling out one of the frms of criticism and applying it to sf" come from? As if criticism was some sort of complicated apparatus that an unhappy piece of writing had to be squeezed about to fit. Isn't it rather tho case that "criticism" is simply taking the trouble to think about what you read, and articulating the impressions it leaves on you - which includes what the author seems to be trying to do, how well she achieves that aim, what the book is about, and everything else relevant and interesting that you might want to drag in. The interest of academic type criticism is in seeing what others who are interested in reading have looked for and found in the books they admire. To say that one doesn't want to "apply" criticism to what one reads (which is not something that you say) is surely to say that those books don't bear thinking about. I perfectly understand the urge to rot one's brain once in a while. Some use alcohol, others dope. Some use sf, others mystery stories. I can't understand how some people can rot their brains with nasty chemicals. Joseph's just as puritan about word-use. He does take things he thinks important seriously, and quality of writing is one of these - if he didn't take is seriously, he wouldn't have produced Paperback Inferno for five (or is it six?) years.

I was interested in your description of what you learned studying Englit at Uni, Bruce. I never did formally study English Literature, either at school or at Uni, or at least not until I drifted into various classes on the Language side of Sydney Uni's English Department, first studying Old Irish and Middle Welsh, then adapting the structuralism I'd learned in Anthropology and Linguistics to the study of literary texts. When it comes to reviewing/criticism, the "mental tool kit" (that useful phrase of Leigh's) I use draws first on commonsense, backed up by social science, psychology and linguistics. It is no doubt egocentric conceit that makes me sspect that training in these disciplines provides more useful insights into literature than does mainstream Lit Crit. After all, a text is of interest not just for its patterns of words (on which linguistics focuses more rigorously than litcrit anyway) but because of the light that the text sheds on human life and the world as we experience it, and that is what the social and psychological sciences examine. Conversely too, good social science needs the clarity and elegance of good literature in order to communicate what amounts to very much the same sorts of insights - the difference is that the one is presented as factual description and analysis, the other as a story. (This is of course a generalization - exceptions don't disprove it but are generated to test our assumptions about these conventional forms, eg R D Laing's antipsychiatric stories.)

Gerald Smith: Like Marc (I believe) I have nothing against Litcrit per se. I am grateful that I was taught (or otherwise learned) the basic elements of critical thinking. And, sometimes I do apply those elements in my reading, albeit unconsciously, so that I appreciate a really well written piece so much more. There are times, however, when I like to suspend those faculties and merely escape into a piece of pure adventure and excitement that isn't a deathless piece of prose. My objection isn't to litcrit but rather to some of its practitioners and their holier than thou attitude that says, "This book is poorly written and therefore you must not read it". These are the people who prefer style to enjoyment; technical excellence to entertainment. When I read for pleasure, I read for pleasure. So damn me.

Marc Ortlieb: Judith, what you describe as criticism, ie, "simply taking the trouble to think about what you read, and articulating the impression it leaves on you" is one critical strategy, but only one, and to thinkthat it is simply an interaction between the reader and the text is naive. Your reading has been conditioned by expectations, which have been developed through experiences. What the critic who recognizes the different critical approaches is doing is recognizing that there are a number of different ways to look at books. I think it is more honest to recognize that you are working within a paradigm than to state that there is any such thing as "word-abuse" for instance. It's all subjective.

Leigh Edmonds: Well Judith, I suppose that there are some people who might even be brave enough to admit that they do read books that don't bear thinking about, and that in fact they read just the same way that a lot more people look at anything that is being shown on the television. But, in fandom at least, thinking is a reasonably prized and looked-up-to activity and so nobody will come out and admit that there are times when they don't want to think. (I might, but I don't see why I should take the blame for the avalanche of admissions which would be bound to follow.

Wrap-up: At this stage we suddenly discover that the fridge is empty and that there is a fairly lively discussion developing in the other room about the current state of Australian cricket. I'm sure that you don't want to read about that here.

* * *

Having now indulged our wild critical passions it's time to let Jack Herman regale us with a tale of one of the "golden ages" of Australian fandom. From it you will surely discover why it is that Melbourne fans (and their allies) have parties at which they stand around discussing the deep and relevant points of literature or potter about organising WorldCons, while to the north, in a climate where less circumspect activities are all the go, fans tend to lie about in pulsating groups and leave little record of their coming or going. Not that I, a good and puritan Melbourne fan well versed in the finer points of the Protestant Work Ethic, would wish to express any prejudice for such people - if I could contain myself that is.

101ST (AIRBORNE) FANDOM

Jack R Herman

Thursday night was the centre of the Golden Age of Sydney Fandom. In many ways, its origins of Thursday nighting incorporates the diverse sources of the people involved and their major concerns. It was like this: William was interested in Peter who was interested in Debbie who thought she could "convert" William. This unlikely trio was wont to meet each Thursday night at Galaxy Bookshop (Sydney's first and, at that stage, only sf specialist bookshop) on Sydney's night for late night shopping and go out to dinner together. William was a product of the Tolkien Society; Peter had come in through the D&D group; Deb was, originally, a media fan. Soon after the evenings started, Blair Ramage (an old guard SSFF member) joined in. Future historians will be fond of noting that I was member number five. This was in 1977.

It was at an early Thursday night in 1978, when about fifteen of us were dining together at a pseudo-Deli-style restaurant built in the shell of a large cinema, that the group was adequately names. In my mind, it refers not just to those involved in the eating-out, since that activity has had ups and downs since and still survived in a vestigial form - although it started Balkanizing in 1979, it refers to those involved in Sydney Fandom in the Golden Era - Easter 1977 to June 1983. We knew that there were numbered fandoms in the States, we had no idea whether anyone was till counting but we didn't want to step on any toes and we wanted it to have a military ring - being wargamers all - so that the 101st (Airborne) Fandom was born.

Of course, less kindly souls referred to us as "The Herman-McCormack Elitists".

And that too has some relevance to the group and the era. Shayne McCormack came into fandom in the late 1960s as one of the original Trekkers, graduated into "real" fandom (she has, apparently, reverted of late), got involved in the Sydney SF Foundation (SSFF)and helped hold it together over the dead period of 1972 to 1977. She was President when the revival occurred. This was spurred by three events: the Sydney University Tolkien Society, putting on annual dramatic Tolkfests from 1975, attracted an enthusiastic membership, who eventually flowed into fandom; Jon Noble was the major link between Tolkien and fandom. In late 1975, a Sydney Dungeons and Dragons group emerged, originally an amalgam of Tolkien and SSFF types, it attracted

a number of wargamers who were again linked therefrom to fandom. Thirdly, the holding of the Worldcon in Melbourne in 1975 brought a number of fans into the SSFF orbit and many of these stayed around long enough to help fuel the revival. Of the three proximate causes, Aussiecon was, probably, the least.

But all that misses the heart of the 101st because it tends to suggest that the central agency for its activities was the SSFF. This club met but once a month, infrequently attracted more than twenty people, passed the evening away in anarchic cacophony and relied on a small number of its members to organise anything- usually only the annual Con and the monthly clubzine.

Because most of the 101st were in their late teens and early twenties at the time of the revival, because most were students or recent drop-outs, the essential character of the 101st was its social interaction.

###

Sydney has never really been the centre of written fanac in Australian fandom - not in recent times anyway. Even at the height of the Golden Age, the best evidence for a prospering fandom was not to be found in fanzines - although it must be admitted that for a brief moment APPLESAUCE, the Sydney-based apa started in 1978, had a full roster of fifty and a waitinglist and was producing mailings of 300 pages monthly.

For those not in APPLESAUCE, there was very little evidence that there was, in fact, a Golden Age at all. In the period under discussion, the only Sydney originated fanzines were: the last ouple of Enigmas - the fanzine of the Sydney University Group; the first couple of Nev Angove's Epsilon Eridani Express (before he moved to Canberra); one issue of Shayne's Something Else; two issues of Tolsoc's The Eye; a DUFF issue of Opal, for Keith Curtis' campaign; the Foxe's Rhubarb, an apazine growed large; two issues of Peter Toluzzi's Peter Principle, again motivated by a DUFF campaigning; several Forerunners, the SSFF clubzine, only regular when I was editor; and Wahf-Full, my genzine, the only Sydney zine to produce more than a couple of issues in the era.

Not much to suggest a high point of fanac, considering we're talking about a seven year period. And, in terms of quality, the picture of written 101st fanac was even more bleak.

Future historians will have to ponder why thirty or more Sydney fans dipped their feet in the fanac river, via APPLESAUCE, and never tried to dive into fanzine production as a result. They will, probably, make some comment about the incredible output of a very small fan community one hundred kilometres away at Faulconbridge, where, in the same era, there were three functioning genzines, several large apazines and a number of mediazines in constant production.

####

The growth of conventions in Sydney, over the era, was amazing. I don't believe there would be much opposition to the assertion that the Sydney cons of the late seventies and early eighties were the most innovative and best run cons in Australia of that time. There was certainly a lot of imitation of Sydney ideas in cons in other states.

My first con was Syncon 77, and it was a fairly small one - about fifty members - held over an Easter weekend, in opposition to the Unicon in Adelaide. The previous Sydney con of any magnitude had been in 1972. (There had been a small "National" con in 1975 but as that was the year of Aussiecon, the yncon had been tiny.) Syncon 77 had been run by Shayne, with a little help from Warren Nicholls and Blair Ramage.

Before Syncon 78, several moves had occurred which altered Sydney fandom, and changed the "power structure". Ken Ozanne, returning from the US, had asserted that 1988 was too long to wait for a Sydney bid for the Worldcon and that 1983 was

winnable. His actions generated several ripples in local fandom: an Australia in 83 bid committee was formed; a decision was made to bid for the 1979 National Con; an apa was started; local conventions were to be annual to legitimize local fandom. Secondly, we had held a FanWar - a War-gaming con, run mainly by Shayne and me, which had proved both popular and profitable. Thirdly, a slanshack was established at Moira Crescent. Amongst its residents were Peter Toluzzi, Rob McGough, Linda Smith and I. It was to be a centre of Sydney fandom for the life of its existence and to set in train the social mores that motivated that fandom for the next five years. Finally, in May 1978, I was elected President of the SSFF and told that as a concommitant of that job I was also Editor of Forerunner, the club zine, which up to that point had been very irregular.

These changes didn't really have that great an effect on Syncon 78, although, by that stage, we had won the 1979 bid. There were about 100 members of the con in 1978, which was nominally chaired by Keith Curtis, but actually run by Shayne, Warren and me. There were more interstate members and a smaller wargaming component.

1979 saw two major cons in Sydney, as well as a Writer's Workshop. This latter was held in conjunction with Unicon V, organised by the Sydney University SF Association. The workshop seems to have produced a couple of writers, especially Leanne Frahm, and Unicon V boasted the first professional GoH from overseas in Sydney, Terry Carr. There were about 150 at the Unicon which was held in late January.

There were 250 members in all at Syncon 79, a startling increase, leaving us with an embarrassing profit. Gordon Dickson was the GoH. Originally Robert Heinlein was slated for this position and this had been advertised prior to the bid. In fact, Peter Toluzzi was made Chair of the ConCom because he (and the rest of the Uni of NSW SF Society) was responsible for the invitation to Heinlein. After we had won the bid, it turned out that Heinlein's commitment wasn't as strong as we had thought. It was fortunate that we could get as good a Guest as Gordy to replace him. With DUFF winners, Ken Fletcher and Linda Lounsbury, and Japanese fan, Kouichi Yamamoto, along as well, Syncon 79 turned out to be a very good and innovative con.

Syncon 80 had no overseas Guest and still attracted about 150 members. Again, it was a success.

While Peter Toluzzi and Robin Johnson had been the Chairs of Syncon 79, Shayne and I (as Treasurer and Programme Manager, respectively) had done most of the work. At Syncon 80, I was actually called the Chair, and by that time we had a fairly established group working: Shayne McCormack looked after the Hotel, Warren headed Registration, Peter Toluzzi was fan co-ordinator and publicist, Andrew Taubman and Gregor Whiley provided ideas, and several others filling in various other functions.

The genesis of Syncon 81 is even more strange: it started as a joke and then got serious. For a long time many of us in the Tolsoc had wanted to put on a Tolkien con - with programming aimed at JRRT's work and associated works. But we couldn't get motivated. At Unicon VI in Melbourne, we all knew that Geoff Langridge was to make a bid for Unicon VII on behalf of the UNSWSFS, to be held in Sydney with "a major overseas GoH". We asked him repeatedly if we could be of any held and offered any advice he wanted. He rejected our offers, ery rudely. It was, in fact, Judith Hanna who suggested a counter-bid, and Shayne and I went along with the idea. The resultant bid was still only half serious: I proposed a generic con: there would be no overseas GoH, no banquet, no expensive fripperies, no films; instead, there would be an emphasis on academic papers, on performance and on original ideas. The theme would be Fantasy, with special reference to Tolkien. The first vote was a tie between our bid and Geoff's. Eventually Adelaide came off the fence and we got the con.

Judith Hanna and I ran Syncon 81 (aka Unicon VII, aka Tolkon) I managed the Programme, Shayne looked after Hotel Liaison and Marjorie Lenehan looked after most of the artistic side. It was John Snowden who asserted that the con had been taken

over by the "Herman-McCormack Elitists", who wouldn't let anyone else have a con in Sydney. Langridge and Co went ahead with their con, anyway. In 1981, there was a Cinecon in Melbourne at Easter, with Bob Bloch as GoH; Langridge's Nucon in Sydney in May with Larry Niven; Advention in Adelaide in June with Frank Herbert; and Syncon 81 in Sydney with no overseas GoH. We still attracted over 225 members, and charged less than a third of the at-the-door price of any of the other cons - and still made a surplus.

In 1981, we lost a bid for the 1982 National Con but won the right for the 1983 Convention, provided we lost the 1983 WorldCon bid. Fortunately, we lost this bid too. I thought we put up a damned good bid, garnering more votes than an overseas bid has ever received before but not enough to beat the strong Baltimore bid. So we ended up with the 1983 NatCon.

Peter Toluzzi ran Syncon 82 as an interesting sidelight to Sydney cons of the era: it was a workshop oriented con with about 150 members. It was sufficiently different to entertain most of the members.

The climax of the series of conventions came in 183, with Syncon 83, starring Harlan Ellison. It had over 500 members, more than double any previous Sydney con, and it was one of the most successful and best run cons in Australian fan history. By the time it came around, however, the SSFF existed in bank account only: the D&D group had broken up; the Tolkien Society had done nothing since Syncon 81; and the Sydney fan group was splintering all over the place. It was as if the group stayed together just long enough to put on this con, and as if the group existed for no other reason than to run this con. It must be admitted that, in terms of programme, it was less innovative than earlier Sydney cons but the sheer numbers and enthusiasm of the members overcame this and lifted Syncon 83 to a different level. In many ways, the convention exhibited the best aspects of 101st activities: the parties were exceptionally lively - it became traditional for the ConCom to provide grog for the first night party and for there to be little or no botel problems. At a time when cons interstate were experiencing severe difficulty with hotels over party noise, Sydney cons went very smoothly, a compliment to Shayne's ability to liaise.

In 1980 and 1981 there were three relaxacons in the nearby Blue Mountains, just up past Faulconbridge, which complemented the Sydney cons in providing the parties without the need for programming. Liaison with Canberra led to similar sorts of conventions there; and close relations between Perth and some aspects of Perth fandom, plus a similar age and social outlook, led to Perth cons being much close to the Sydney model than the Melbourne or Adelaide ones.

####

Another aspect of the rise and influence of the 101st can be seen in the winners of the Down Under Fan Fund. In the first three years in which Australians were selected (1974, 1976, 1978) the winners were from Melbourne. But the three subsequent winners have all come frm Sydney, and each has been the Chair of a Sydney Convention.

####

The majority of the 101st and its associates were, as earlier stated, late teens and early twenties, by and large male, and reasonably horny. Most were not overly gifted with the social arts and their conversation tended to wane a bit after they had exhausted the latest book read or the intricate details of the operation of the more obscure weapons of the past and present. In spite of their unlikely success, most were fairly active questers of social recognition.

There were two main groups involved here. The first I will call the Moira group and the second the Tolkien group. There was a fair overlap in these two groups in personal and social interaction. On the fringes of these groups were a fair number of fans who remained aloof from the playing around and whose interest in the sf scene had some other motivation than (mainly) social.

The catalyst of the Moira group was Peter Toluzzi. By both self-admission and general acclaim, he was noted as the instigator of the Moira slanshack, which acted as the central meeting place of those who wanted to be involved in touchie-feelie fandom, who wanted to get stoned or hoped to get laid. It was an unusual weekend at Moira when there weren't three or four crashers in the lounge room, some sort of party or quasi-party, or some meeting to go elsewhere to party. Within the group was a fair amount of promiscuous behaviour and much jollity. It was, in essence, a group of kids finding out the fun of a communal existence. After Moira, there were a number of slanshacks which tried, to a greater or lesser extent, to emulate it as a hub of Sydney gropedom: Livingstone Road (aka Hawkhurst in the SCA) was set up in conscious imitation, mainly by people who had spent lots of time on the Moira living room floor; Peter tried again, several times, the most notable of which were his plaes at Tamera, and later at Georgina Street; several people tried to fit Fletcher Street (where I lived, first with Jane Taubman and Gregor Whiley, and later with Cath McDonnell, William Good and Shayne) into the Moira mold but we wouldn't let them.

The Moira group split over a period of time as the members started to pair-bond - the fate of these sort of adolescent goings-on. Peter's influence began to wane, particularly after he moved to the USA, and the Transfinite people tried to maintain the tradition via their place in Smithfield. With their departure for Canberra, that aspect of Sydney fandom seems to have faded.

The Tolkien group wasn't much older than the Moira group but was more stable far earlier. They were mostly pair-bonded from the start, although there was some fluidity amongst the pairs over a period of time: but most of the re-arrangements seemed to take place within the group. In some ways, the Tolkien group became the elite (by self award) and started the Balkanization of Sydney's 101st by organising separate Thursday night venues, and by having parties far less openly (and open) than the Moira group was wont to prefer.

Marriage started breaking up these groups from about 1978, and reached a sort of crescendo in the early Eighties. Where bondings now occur, it usually involves the import of one of the partners from outside the original group.

####

It is difficult to pinpoint reasons for the demise of the 101st. The SCA seems to have taken some members from active involvement but I tend to see that as a symptom, not a cause. Similarly, there has been some movement in and out of Sydney fandom: Toluzzi, the Smithfielders, the Lenehans, Linda Smith, Jon Noble, Richard Faulder, Judith Hanna, Stephen Hart, and Kim Huett have all left Sydney. Each loss took away some of the possibilities of maintaining the structure of the 101st. Again, the fact that we got a couple of NatCons and won three DUFF races took away some of the edge of the "Sydney Paranoids", a group within Sydney fandom that saw Melbourne SMOFs running Australian fandom to the detriment of Sydney.

However, I think I would subscribe to the Camelot theory: that here for one brief shining moment we had a group that jelled. Although it never produced a major fanzine or made a startling insight into human nature, it provided a social recourse and recreation for a large number of people, and, for a while, was the hub of Australian fandom. It was incredibly important to a lot of people whose growth and maturity were encouraged through the 101st. Its memorials are to be found in three brief periods within the era: Syncon 79, Tolkon and Syncon 83, and, for me, that magnificent, pointless and exhausting year at Moira and, in the long run,
Cath McDonnell.

* * *

Interestingly enough, Bruce Gillespie has published an issue of The Metaphysical Review in which Don Ashby spilled the beans about the Magic Puddin Club, one of the higher points of Melbourne fandom in the mid seventies. It tells all about characters such as Ken Ford and John Ham, what they did and why. If you read it you

will probably find out that Melbourne and Sydney fans are not so different afterall - perhaps except in that the Magic Pud was but a part of what happened in Melbourne and the 101st was the heart of Sydney fandom. Which just goes to show what happens to a group of fans when they don't have elderly and experienced mentors to guide them in the ways of fandom.

And that leads us, more or less naturally, to a contribution from a young Melbourne lad who has needed a lot of help and guidance to bring him up to scratch... but none of our careful efforts seem to have taken...

GUFF REPORT - CHAPTER ONE

Justin Ackroyd

After six and a half years I was finally free. It was 7.00pm, Friday, March 30 1984. I stepped out of Space Age Books for the last time as a shop assistant and became an unemployed traveller at large. My sister, Ruth, picked me up and drove me back to the house on Mt Alexander Road which I had been sharing with Marc Ortlieb for the past two and a half months. We arrived there at 7.30pm, which gave me about half an hour to myself before the guests began to arrive. You see, it was my last night in Australia before I departed on my Pan Am flight to Minneapolis via Auckland, Los Angeles and a night in New York, and it was time for the "throw Justin out of the country" Party. I had moved most of my furniture to various households around Melbourne, and my books down to my parents place in Geelong over the previous weekend, so there was a distinct lack of seating for the party, not that it really mattered.

The guests arrived randomly from 8.10 on. There were a variety of fans, hockey players and general friends in attendance, making sure that I really was going to leave the country - I'm sure some of them were hoping that it would be permanent.

I have little memory of events of the evening as I was already very tired. I remember seeing Cath Circosta (now Cath Ortlieb) and Christine Ashby arriving by taxi. Both were on crutches; Christine as usual and Cath as a result of an accident while goalkeeping at hockey which resulted in torn knee ligaments. This injury was greatly admired by some of my hockey team mates. I opened a bottle of Wolf Blas cabernet sauvignon which I had been saving for the day that I left Space Age Books. It went down very well and was probably an omen of the months to come. The crowds said their farewells and dispersed at around midnight so that I could get my beauty sleep. Before going to bed, Marc struck me a fatal blow to my sentimental side - he presented me with the first invitation for his and Cath's wedding which was being held while I was away. They really wanted me to be there but could not blame for refusing as the GUFF trip was more important to all three of us. Mind you, I was a little misty eyed at the thought of missing the wedding.

I had finally said goodbye to everyone. I still felt a little unreal as I went to bed that night. The continual adrenaline surges and the mild apprehension I was feeling towards the trip kept me awake for most of the night, but I managed to get up fairly bright eyed and bushy-tailed the next morning. My father and sister took me out to Tullamarine and saw me off. The first, brief stopover was in Auckland. This airport was surrounded by the greenest countryside I had come across and decided on the spot that I had to return and look around at some later date. I arrived in Los Angeles earlier than scheduled after what was a pretty uneventful flight. I had watched Gorky Park for the third time - great film, although the book is even better, and Trading Places for the second time (both were edited for family viewing), and read Symbiote's Crown by Scott Baker which was disappointing after a strong beginning. I hung around Los Angeles for two and a half hours while waiting for my connecting flight to New York and actually managed to get half an hours sleep.

I got into JFK just short of 10.00pm and got to my overnight hotel at midnight. I had to walk about ten blocks from where the airport bus dropped me and made my first

mistake as a reverse pedestrian - I crossed the road looking the wrong way and was nearly collected on the front bumper of a New York Yellow Cab. Luckily I avoided the onrushing cab.

I managed to catch a little sleep before arising the next morning and having a light breakfast at the hotel. I had some time to kill before my flight to Minneapolis, so I contacted Moshe Feder and Lise Eisenberg and organised some of my future crash space. They also gave me the address of some nearby bookshops that I could browse through for the couple of remaining hours that I had. I went forth on 5th to Broadway and arrived at Forbidden Planet (New York style) and the Strand Bookshop. With unusual restraint I managed to walk out of both without buying anything.

I checked out of the hotel and caught the bus to JFK. There were only short delays before the plane took off and arrived at Minneapolis only an hour late. I was met at the airport by Joyce Scrivener who promptly took me on a short tour of Minneapolis/St Paul before we stopped for a meal at an Italian restaurant. We caught up on gossip and discussed life in general.

Linda Lounsbury had crashed by the time we got back to their place (Joyce and Linda's) so Joyce and I sat around sipping Irish Mist for a little while before retiring for some much needed sleep.

Joyce had decided to take a couple of days off work so that we could go for a drive through the north of Minnesota. We passed through some barren countryside - the spring thaw was just beginning - on our way to Duluth, an industrial city on the south west edge of Lake Superior. We proceeded up the western edge of frozen Lake Superior, which was quite spectacular though a little chilly with the wind coming directly across the ice, to Split Rock Lighthouse, and on through Superior State Forest, Castle Danger, Beaver Bay, Silver Bay, Illger City, Little Marais, Finland, Finland State Forest, Murphy City, Isabella and finally to Ely where we checked into the West Gate Motel, which was situated on a very quiet Main Street. We wandered down to a restaurant (diner) where we had dinner. We watched some television - I forced Joyce to sit through an atrocious courtroom drama - before sleeping.

The next day dawned bright and sunny, and we headed off quite early. We passed through Robinson, Tower, where we stopped for breakfast, Wahlsten, Aurora, Biwabik, Gilbert and arrived at the destination I had picked out for the morning, Eveleth, home of the United States Hockey Hall of Fame. Even though it was a shrine to ice hockey, I felt compelled to look through it as the sport is a derivative of the game of field of hockey, which I have been playing for the past fifteen years. It was quite interesting, even though there was a bias towards players who were born in Minnesota. Back in the car and it was onwards through Central Lakes, Cotton Canyon, Independence, Four Corners, Duluth again, across the bridge and into Superior, Wisconsin. Joyce got picked up for a very dubious speeding ticket in the early afternoon as we headed back to Minneapolis. We went via Mickersea, Duquette, Kerrick, Bruno, Askov, Sandstone, North Branch, Almelund, Palmdale, Taylor's Falls; into Wisconsin again and St Croix Falls, Copas, Stillwater, where we stopped for a Mexican diner and a margharita, and finally Minneapolis, where I meet Linda just before she went to bed. We had been on the road for two days and covered over five hundred miles of Minnesota in that time. Joyce was tired after this as she was the only driver. I sat in the passenger seat the whole time acting as navigator. Thanks to Joyce I saw parts of the US I would never expect to see.

The next day was rather quiet and the pace settled down. In the morning I posted all the packages and letters I had been entrusted with and read my first US newspaper. It was not very good. I tried ringing Denny Lien but there was no answer, so I started the walk to Uncle Hugos and Uncle Edgars to do some heavy browsing. Half way there I saw a gentleman in front of me that I thought I recognized. I sped up and to my surprise I had found Denny. I told him where I was heading and he joined me. I must admit that Denny was very patient while I browsed and finally purchased my first bundle of books for the trip. Denny and I went back to his place for lunch and there I met Terry Garey. We spent the afternoon talking and reading, and Denny gave me a tour of his library, which was rather impressive.

I also played with their new cat. I spent a pleasant evening chatting with Joyce, Linda, Denny, Terry and Mark Richards.

I spent Thursday doing some washing, reading, and wrote a few postcards. In the late afternoon, Linda took me on her famous ten cent tour of Minneapolis. She took me through the city to warehouses renovated, by yuppies, into vast shopping complexes. She introduced me to the Minnesota souvenir shop, and a marvellous fudge shop where I tried macadamia chocolate fudge. It was delicious. We ate a light dinner from one of the gourmet delicatessens.

We had not kept track of the time very well. We had been due back at 7.00pm to pick up Joyce and go to a birthday party for one of the local fans. Joyce was not in a party mood when we arrived, so Linda and I headed off to the party by ourselves. I was introduced to numerous people whose names I promptly forgot, but I chatted away merrily with anyone who came my way, listened to some filking, and watched, briefly, a game of Trivial Pursuit. As I was getting a fairly early plane to New York the next day I joined Linda as she left at about 11.00.

Joyce dropped me at the airport the next day, and after we were loaded onto the plane we were kept there for a few minutes until a runway was clear for takeoff. We stopped in Detroit for what was meant to be just a refuelling stop. We were delayed for another twenty minutes as JFK had a traffic problem. We got to New York and had to go into a holding pattern for another twenty minutes. We finally landed but we had to wait for yet another twenty minutes while they found an empty gate for us. I got to the baggage claim area where I waited for another thirty minutes until my baggage arrived. I caught the airport bus to Central Station and walked to Washington Square, thirty blocks, to where I was to be staying. Lise Eisenberg had left a key with the doorman, so I finally put down my baggage seven hours after leaving Minneapolis.

I went in search of food in Greenwich Village and finally settled for some cheap Vietnamese. On returning to the apartment I received a phone call from Lise informing me of a party at the home of Larry Carmody and Maryanne Mueller. I was given instructions on how to get there and promptly took the wrong train so I had to walk an extra mile to the party. More introductions and more forgotten names. I tried some Budweiser and gave it a rating of one - drinkable if there is nothing else going. I chatted briefly with Phil Foglio before he headed off to hog the video game, and then at length with Larry Carmody, who I discovered was a man after my own heart - a sports writer - so we sat around and talked about sport for quite a while. Later I noticed Phil sitting in a corner scribbling away and ten minutes later he presented me with a caricature of myself. Mind you it was not a very flattering portrait - he had drawn me so that I was the spitting image of Bob Hope. Maryanne dropped me at the subway station at about 2.00am, and I got back to Washington Square at about three.

I slept for about five hours before getting up and going for another bookshop browse through the Strand, Forbidden Planet and the Science Fiction Shop. I returned to Washington Square at noon and Lise Eisenberg soon arrived. We headed off to the Public Theatre where they were showing the Academy Award nominees for animation. Moshe joined us soon after, but he was too late to pick up a ticket for the animation. Lise was planning on seeing Cinders, a Polish black comedy, after the films, and on the spur of the moment I decided to join her. Meanwhile Moshe headed off to see Patrick and Teresa Nielsen-Hayden and arranged for a group of us to meet at the World Trade Centre later on. It was an excellent, though very depressing play, and it took me a few minutes to get my bearings back afterwards. The walk to the Trade Centre helped.

We met up with Stu Shiffman, Patrick and Teresa, Moshe, and Andy Porter. We did not go up to the observation deck as it was too windy, so Moshe gave us a walking tour of Lower Manhattan. We finished up in Chinatown where we had dinner and I was introduced to hot and sour soup. Moshe was horrified when I did not order a beer with my meal. He thought that all Australians drank copious amounts of the stuff. From Chinatown we trekked off to Andy's place and proceeded to become very bored,

with Andy insisting that everyone should pitch in on a one-shot. We left reasonably early.

After a good night's sleep, I spent the day wandering the streets of New York. I wandered down 5th to Broadway and on to 7th until 50th Street. I stopped and looked around a great variety of shops and tourist traps whenever the mood took me. Finally my feet took me back to Times Square where I had a junk food lunch - Roy Rogers, if you must know - and went to see Greystoke. In the evening I strolled around Greenwich Village, watching the buskers and street theatre that was taking place on Washington Square. I settled for Chinese again and went back to the apartment to write some letters.

I was up early the next day as I was going to Staten Island to see F&SF Book Company. I took the Staten Island Ferry across the bay, passing the green and scaffolding enshrouded Statue of Liberty on the way. I walked the three plus miles to the warehouse as it was a mild, sunny day. I picked out a bundle of books which I put on my account, and walked back to the ferry. Back on the ferry I realised that I had got sunburnt on my arms and face, and it was only in the high fifties.

Back to Manhattan I packed my bags and then went in search of some food. I settled upon what turned out to be a very good Mexican restaurant. Afterwards I picked up my bags from the apartment, gave the key to the doorman, and took the subway to JFK. I checked in and sat around until the plane left. It took off only fifty-five minutes late. It was a sparsely populated flight so, as soon as the seat belt sign went off, I walked to the back of the plane, found a row of four vacant seats, and promptly slept until half an hour before the plane was due to land at Heathrow.

It was now Tuesday 10 April. I had arrived at my true destination.

* * *

Bringing you up to date with the latest in fannish weddings, our special reporter gives the inside story on how to help organize and how to enjoy a McDonnell/Herman wedding. To read this report it sounds as though everybody involved had an indecently good time. What a pity Jack and Cathy don't decide to get married every year.

GOD HELP THE BRIDE

by Marc Ortlieb, with editorial assistance from
Cath Ortlieb and Justin Ackroyd. Title courtesy
Kate Bush - "The Wedding List"

At the end of Syncon 83 Jack Herman promised that he'd never run another convention.

Addictions such as Jack's aren't that easy to shake. His forceful presence at the LACon II Business Session - at which he proposed to split the world in two, and to turn it upside down in the interests of Australian supremacy - is evidence that Jack is suffering from cold turkey. He wants to get back into organising conventions. Fortunately Cath McDonnell understands Jack all too well, and she cunningly organised a way for Jack to host a convention without actually hosting a convention.

The story goes that, on 29 February 1984, Jack walked into the staff room in the school at which he teaches to find a bouquet of flowers and a note saying "Will you marry me? Love Cath". Scurrilous rumor has it that Jack then phoned five glove wholesalers before finally answering in the affirmative. The date was set for 29 December 1984, which not only avoided the school term, but which gave an excuse for an extra party between Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, and enabled Jack and Cath to have a suitably Orwellian wedding date.

Why, though, should this alleviate Jack's convention organising addiction? Well, as far as weddings go, it was a wonderful one-day convention, in a way also the second best wedding I've ever attended. It was even the most enjoyable wedding I've ever

attended, but otherwise has to take second place to the other wedding I attended in 1984. After all, I enjoy conventions more the less I'm involved in working on them, and weddings are no different. Not that I didn't get to work at Jack's wedding, but it wasn't quite the same as working on my own.

The wedding was short on interstate attendees. It was small in order to fit into the facilities that Jack and Cath had cleverly purchased from the bank several months earlier, just on the off-chance that they might want to throw an informal convention.

As with any good convention, it started with an interstate trip. Catherine and I drove to Canberra with her parents on the previous day to view our new nephew, courtesy of Catherine's side of the family. We then flew from Canberra to Sydney and joined up with the other third of the interstate contingent, Justin Ackroyd, who, for reasons of convenience, we had decided to adopt. (He's over twenty-one; is almost house trained; and promises to run away from home immediately.) We were collected from the airport by the hotel courtesy car - Jack and Cath's red panel van. Justin and I shared the bean bags in the back and I only had to beat him off twice, explaining that that sort of approach has to be considered incest on his part, and bestiality on mine. (At least I think beastiality is the term you use for doing it with teddy bears.)

We settled in to Jack and Cath's place, nattering to Jack and with William Good, who was rehearsing his "best man" schtick. Then we headed into the Big Smoke, coincidentally just as Cath's mother and sister arrived to arrange tidying up the house. It wasn't that we were scared of work, merely that we were prepared to treat it with the respect that it deserves, and give it a wide berth.

We spent the afternoon hitting too many book shops, and with me having my hair and beard cut off in their prime. In a far more respectable incarnation I joined Catherine and Justin at Galaxy Bookshop and nattered to Shayne McCormack and Ron Serduik before heading out to dinner with Helen Swift, her husband Les Neulinger, and ex-Canberra (now Sydney person) John McPharlin. They took us to a superb little crepe place that Les knew, and we had a lengthy natter over good food and wine. It'slong been my contention that the main purpose of weddings is to get to see people, and this one was no exception, even if we weren't actually seeing Helen, Les and John at the wedding. We arrived back at Jack and Cath's place well after all the work had finished.

Our plans to avoid any other work went astray the next morning. Cath, her sister and Catherine drove out to round up the wedding cake. William, Jack, Justin and I spent the morning clearing the front garden of the more obvious weeds; loading an assortment of bottles into the bath, shower, and laundry trough, and in collecting ice to keep said beverages at a decent drinking temperature. Assorted ghods earned their keep by ensuring that, although we got rained on while weeding, and Catherine, Cath and Cath's sister got dampened while collecting the cake, the rain kept away from the wedding itself. (In moments of silliness, I imagined several clouds with their legs tightly crossed, saying "Hold on just another couple of hours, and then they'll go inside.")

My sympathies for the Titanic were confirmed during the icing of the punch. Jack and Cath had prepared a veritable Atlantic of sangria with the sort of proof rating that keeps maiden aunts giggling for hours, and I had to empty a little ice from one of the bags into one of the huge bowls. It slipped. Jack and Cath now have a wine dark table cloth. (Catherine took one look at me, and muttered "Clutz!". She clearly doesn't understand the inevitability of that sort of disaster.)

Eventually things were are ready as they were every going to be. We were all decked out in our costumes (wedding togs), and the guests had started to arrive. The wedding was backyard informal, but there was a smattering of suits. Cath wore a lovely blue dress, topped off by a white wide-brimmed hat that punched people in the nose if they got closer than nine inches. Jack's hat was a narrower brim. He was in a trendy looking outfit, sans tie. Indeed, there were very few ties to be seen,

most being replaced by cameras. I was wearing both. The tie was one that Catherine had bought for me. It featured the white rose of York over a white boar; symbolic of Richard III. Of the fan/friend guests, only Warren Taylor and I wore ties; the rest of these symbolic clothes were on relatives.

The actual wedding service was quick and painless. We gathered out in the garden, with the guests jostling for the best camera angles, while the celebrant, Jack, Cath, and William said the words and performed the appropriate actions. A squad of small children and Warren Nichols, armed with bubble-pipes, provided the confetti substitute which, due to the prevailing wind, went in the wrong direction, and ended up in the swimming pool. It was a refined and sensible service, as one would have expected of Jack and Cath.

With the official programming out of the way, the food appeared. Jack and Cath had hired a wonderful group of caterers who ran the gauntlet of guests with finger food at regular intervals. It was totally informal, with people finding places to sit in the garden or in the house, as suited them. The drinks were there for the grabbing, although Warren Taylor did do wine-waiter impersonations for a while. There was a gradual separation, as the relatives graduated towards the house, leaving the fans in possession of the garden. The food was excellent - I think the caterers got a bit of a shock when the sushi came out. They were mobbed by fans with clicking chopsticks. The closest thing I've ever seen to it is the descent of seagulls onto an unguarded picnic table.

The champagne, beer, white and red wine, and soft drink flowed freely, as did the friend/fan guests, who were pretty much a cross-section of Middle Sydney Fandom - that group that came before the current generation of Sydney fandom, but who came after the older pharts like Eric Lindsay, Keith Curtis and Gary Mason. There were a number of ex-Sydney University TolSoc people, like Meron Clarke, Greg Kable, Jonathan Scott, William Good, Warren Taylor and Jill Seaborne, and Warren and Margaret Nichols, with a scattering of slightly more recent recruits, such as Richard Lesze, Andrew Taubman, Tanya Forlani, Ron Seduik, and Jane Taubman. To show the way things had changed, I was the only current APPLESAUCE member present, and I was an import from Melbourne.

Lots of nattering was the order of the afternoon and evening. I spent time with Margaret and Warren, admiring their new daughter, Linda, and avoiding their not so new son Jamie. Warren and Jill provided an interesting contrast; Warren with his immaculate outfit, including a tie, which he refused to remove under any circumstances, though he had no objection to removing Meron's dress for her when she begged out of swimming on the grounds that she didn't have a swimming costume - her petticoat was fine in the circumstances; and Jill, with her newly punked hairstyle.

The swimming pool was filled with fannish bodies and the kiddies of the relatives. I thought it was unwise to mention the fact that Jamie had piddled in the pool. After all, if people were happy to be in the same swimming pool as Justin Ackroyd's feet then a little juvenile urine wasn't going to bother them. Justin himself was more restrained and didn't, so far as I noticed, compete with Richard and Meron in the belly-flopping contest. He was seen rather closer to Jane Taubman than propriety might dictate reasonable, but, when asked about this later, he replied - "Well, we were cold... at first."

The relatives gradually disappeared into the night, leaving the fans, for whom Jack, ever the considerate host, provided a barbecue supper. The rain started just after he had removed the last sausage. Even a cloud can hold on for only so long.

It was a great wedding. There was a chance to gossip - adding yet another name to my "All my friends are getting married" list - Dave Ramsbottom in this case. (Warren Taylor spent a lot of time trying to prove by argument that marriage was a waste of time, but had little luck, even after loosening his tie a little, as Jack, being a very recent convert, was quite willing to argue the contrary with Catherine, Caroline and I chipping in.) Catherine was a touch disappointed that she didn't manage to snaffle more of the ricotta-filled pancakes, but nothing is perfect. I

even felt guilty about my part in later suggesting to Paul Stevens that Cath receive a Gold-Plated Caterpillar for her proposal to Jack. After that wedding, she deserves a Hugo.

* * *

LETTERS OF COMMENT

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

Julie Vaux, in her "The Art of Illustration", again takes issue with certain comments of mine that first appeared in Rataplan 24 and were amplified (slightly) in Rataplan 27 - and again seems to miss the point of what I was saying. She's correct to claim, albeit by implication rather than by direct argument, that to illustrate something is to represent by graphical means a scene, action or idea that has elsewhere been described in words; and since this is the foundation of my argument I have no disagreement with her on this point. But her twelve-item list of what constitutes "illustration" is so broad in its conception, so sweeping in its terms of reference, and goes so far beyond the above basic definition as to be almost meaningless. Illuminated manuscripts, the Parthenon statues, portraits by Rembrandt, calligraphy - "is not a picture an illustration of a concept from the creator's mind?" she asks, to which I would reply by saying that if she's going to advance an argument like that then I could just as well advance an argument to the effect that these words on this page are an illustration of the thoughts inside my head, and be equally as justified in doing so. In this respect, in other words, her argument is quite nonsensical.

All along, my concern has lain solely with sf illustration, and specifically with the way in which sf illustrators have sought to provide visual concretizations of the verbal (abstract) images provided by the writers - and in particular of the way in which sf illustrators are so tied to this "provision of concretizations" as both an idea and an actuality that their art has failed to develop any original concepts or approaches of its own. Surrealism, cubism, pop, op, modernism: all the major currents that have run through the world of art during the twentieth century have passed it completely by, and it has remained instead a resolutely "realistic" medium, faithfully depicting whatever people, cities, planets, aliens and spaceships that the words elsewhere describe. None of the four paperback covers that Julie describes go any way towards disproving this; all are realistic, in both intent and execution, and merely depict things as they are. How well they depict them is another matter entirely, and not one with which I've ever been concerned; yet it's interesting to note, from her lavish descriptions of these covers, how close Julie comes to repeating a line of reasoning that first surfaced in Rataplan 26; that the skill with which the work is executed absolves it of all other criticism, and that the materials with which the artist works are of more importance than the skill with which they are used. This, again, is quite nonsensical. (And, to be specific about one of the covers she mentions, I don't think that the cover of the Bantam edition of Brin's Startide Rising is "a boautiful textural piece"; the dolphin looks as though it's made of moulded rubber, the two humans seem little better than posed Action Man dolls, and the sea is a casually splashed-on block of colour - and a block, moreover, on which the fore-ground figures appear to have been stuck with strategically-placed blobs of blu-tack: there is no sense that they are actually standing in the water.)

Most of her argument, then, is ignoratio elenchi, or pretty close to it: the argument that appears to refute the opponent while in fact disproving something that has never been asserted. Only at one point does it intersect with the ideas that I was putting up; the question of whether or not illustration is also art, and the subsequent consideration of whether, if it is, it is also god art.

The first point to make, of course, is that these days art can be - and is - defined so broadly that it can be applied to almost anything. Comic strips, post-cards, T-shirts with slogans across their chests, the covers of rock albums... never mind

what's commonly thought of as "the arts"; music, painting, sculpture, film, dance and drama. So I'm happy to include illustration in the long list of things that these days falls under the heading of "art" - with the proviso that, beneath that catch-all heading, we can then divide the subject up into two different groups: the art that is produced autonomously, in response to the artists' own inner drives and concerns; and the art that is produced in response to the wishes and desires of others. Illustration clearly falls into the second category: it is not produced for its own sake, but as a reaction to the proddings and directions of authors and editors; and the vision that animates the illustrator, being imposed from without, will hence be rather more impersonal, rather less cutting, than the vision derived from within, which animates the artist.

It should be obvious, of course, which of these two sub-categories of art is the more valuable, because it contains the more original works. One could therefore say that because illustration is ipso facto unoriginal it can never be good art, and leave it at that; but in fact the context in which we have to address the question of whether something is "good" or "bad" art (here employing the word "art" in its catch-all way) is rather different. In short, we have to consider what art is actually for - and without going into a great many details we can say, simply, that art is an attempt to interpret the world; specifically, to draw our attention to and provide insights into facets of life that we might otherwise overlook, enabling us to appreciate and understand ourselves and our world on a deeper, more intensive level. (This, by the way, is what I refer to as my "all-purpose definition" of art, because it retains its force, and its meaning, regardless of the theoretical or ideological position that the artist or the critic may wish to push - the Marxist can use it as well as the structuralist, for example.) The question of whether a particular piece of art is either good or bad, then, can be answered - or at least begin to be answered - by examining how and why it succeeds or fails in its stated intentions, whether or not it has taught us anything new about ourselves and our world, and how it compares with other examples of its kind (to name but three crucial questions).

So is sf illustration therefore bad art? The answer, of course, will depend more on opinion than theory, on emotion rather than intellect; but I have to say that no, sf illustration is not god art. It is limited in its form, style and content; it is unoriginal, in that it provides its consumer with nothing that it not already present in the texts it adjourns; and it provides no greater insights than the texts themselves already offer.

Julie will no doubt disagree with this, which will be all well and good; but would it be too much to ask that, next time, she concentrates on the subject at hand?

((Who knows, but as things have turned out fate has given you the final word. As far as I can see you have a fairly good argument here because anybody who wants to put the opposite case is going to have to prove that there is no distinction between copying out other people's ideas - almost a form of cross-media plagiarism - and the business of concocting and expressing one's own ideas. The only place that I can recall something like a surrealist cover was on the old Ace Specials, and the cover of the first edition of Ballard's The Drowned World was a long way different from what we expected to see on the cover of books. This leads one to contemplate the sorts of illustrations which appeared in the new-wave New Worlds. But perhaps the sf readers just want illustrations, not a new wave in either art or illustration. And since artists who like sf have to eat too, they become realist artists. Or maybe its the other way around and so realist artists are attracted to sf because of the kind of product that it wants.))

Steve Green
11 Fox Green Crescent, Acocks Green, Birmingham B27 75D, UK

As Cy Chauvin states in Rataplan 29, the future does indeed appear very grim, which undoubtedly explains much of the appeal of the utopian novel he describes. But it seems to me that works where the "simplified" society is introduced through nuclear catastrophe (a category which includes Engine Summer from the sound of it) merely

cop out on indicating realistic methods of achieving this nouveau-hippy paradise. Perhaps worse in a sense, such novels even ignore the true ramifications of the atomic deus ex machina, being employed and paint a rosy-coloured portrait of post-apocalypse potential which is patently absurd.

((And which encourages people to think about an atomic war as being merely a burp in human history rather than a full stop?))

The points you raise about the evolution on a "new stream" in speculative fiction are almost word-for-word identical to a statement made by Chris Priest at the Birmingham SF Group last year. Chris stressed his hope that even is tho main body of "sf" (the ones trapped in the arbitrary mindcage explored earlier in Joseph's letter) were reluctant to join in his exodus into the landscape charted in The Affirmation and, more overtly, The Glamour, there would remain a hardcore Priest readership prepared to take the risk, its ranks eventually swelled from the "mainstream" literati (those members who find that equally arbitrary label similarly oppressive). The success of The Glamour may be a nail in the coffin of Science Fiction The Classification, but it's a victory for Literature The Artform.

((Great minds, otc., etc. All the same, I can't see too many deserting the ranks of traditional sf to enter this new stream, possibly because the modern day sf reader is not the same kind of person who used to read it a few years ago. In the "good old days" a lot of readers were interested in sf for its mentally stimulating (for want of a better phrase) qualities, whereas these days it is read for almost the opposite reason. Somebody like George Turner would surely disagree on this point, but that may simply be a matter of deciding when the "good old days" actually existed.))

Richard Faulder
PO Box 136, Yanco, NSW 2703.

Rataplan 29 struck me as one of the most substantial fanzines that have passed through my hands in quite a while (with the possible exception of Van Ikin's production, and that is substantial in a different way, even if you accept that it is a true fanzine, which is also debatable). Substantial not only in terms of the sheer quantity of verbiage, but also in the substance of the issues raised.

In a way, from the beginning of this issue you seemed to be leading up to your discussion of mental tool boxes. Thinking about the issue over the last few days, it seems to me that there are two classes of tools - tools for making things with, and tools for looking at things with. Now, since we don't build or look at only one sort of thing, we need different sorts of tools for dealing with different sorts of things. Now, I think the argument about the value of fan fiction boils down to one about which tools people acquire in the process of writing it. People such as yourself say that writing fan fiction only gives you a set of model-maker's tools, satisfactory for making a bit of toy fiction, which has a rough resemblance to the real thing, but isn't as strong, big or intricately put together. On the other hand, the proponents of fan fiction say that tools is tools, and once you have the tools to make a kennel you can use those same tools to go out and make a palace. Now, I have this nagging feeling that you could be right, but there's still some doubt, some suspicion that perhaps the important thing is the person who uses the tools. Perhaps some people start off building kennels and never get beyond them, some graduate from kennels to palaces, and some start on palaces.

((The analogy is an entertaining one and perhaps fits the bill of trying to describe the value that some people see in publishing fiction in fanzines. But that wasn't the point that I was trying to make - and since you misunderstood me it just goes to show that the bits and pieces I use for stringing together arguments need sharpening or resetting or something. What I was trying to say, but a bit more elegantly, is that there is more to writing than just putting together fictionalized accounts of things for the edification and entertainment of the reader, there is non-fictional writing which sets out to do the same thing, but without the benefit of being able to play around with present day reality. Why, I wondered (and I'm still wondering)

do so people think that writing fiction is more difficult and also more important than writing prose which is not a made up version of reality?))

Then there's the other class of tools, the ones you were really talking about. These belong to the second class - tools for looking at things. Here, to my mind, the situation is much more clear-cut. The tools you need to examine any object are the ones which will best reveal its most significant features. I'll go to an analogy from my own area, and hope people can readily follow. In examining arthropods for the purpose of identification I have a number of tools at my disposal -stereoscopic microscopes, transmission microscopes, scanning electron microscopes, and so on. Now, suppose that I have this triffic new scanning electron microscope, and I want to try out my new toy by examining the surface features of some animal in minute detail. I do so, and find that all the animals, which should be different, all look alike. It turns out that tiny surface features weren't significant, and that the important thing was variation in the colour patterns; for which I needed the old standby, the stereoscopic microscope. Alternatively, I might decide that, on the basis of colour patterns, that I can divide a collection of animals up into several distinct species. Just to check, though, I decide to run an electrophoretic test on their proteins, and, lo and behold, they are all the same - the colour differences are just not significant.

So much for analogy. What is the importance of this to literary analysis? Well, it seems to me that the argument is again over the universal application of tools. People like Bruce Gillespie and, I guess, you, argue that the same set of tools are appropriate to the analysis of all types of fiction. Others, such as myself, would disagree, at least to the extent of saying that you need to recalibrate your measuring devices when working on a different type of fiction. Sure, there are some things which should be universally present - lucidity, coherent plotting, credible characterisation and others which I'd think of given a bit more time. It's no good, though, using a tool to look for poetry - introspection or sweeping imagination - if they're not meant to be there, especially if you then go on to say that because they're not there, then the item must be inferior, just because you think they should be, even though the author may not have intended them to be. After all, if an artist does a black-and-white etching, you don't criticise it because it doesn't have any colour.

The thing which brought me onto this train of thought was a reference by Bruce to the first time one reads Hesse, as though it were somehow a particularly significant experience. Bruce's contempt for science fiction (he'll say I'm exaggerating his position, or quoting him out of context, or some such, but I hold my assessment of his attitude) is very marked, and it struck me, in conjunction with your discussion about tools, that the reason is that Bruce uses literary tools appropriate to the works of authors like Hesse, and that when he doesn't find a certain amount of incoherence, poetic though it may be, or angst, or the other things you find in books of that type, in even good mainstream science fiction, he concludes that it must be inferior.

((I'll have to leave Bruce to argue his own case. From my own point of view, it is apparent that we all make or are given intellectual tools with which we judge what we read. Some people, like Bruce (as you will read elsewhere in this issue) went off to a university and were specially trained in the ways of literary criticism. After that training Bruce believes that he should apply the tools that he has been given to the business of analyzing books that he reads, and for him the explanations which he gets from his training seem to fit nicely with his actual reading tastes. On the other hand there is Marc Ortlieb who (as you will also read somewhere else in this issue) has also suffered some training in the use of the tools of literary criticism, but who does not find that the evaluations of those tools always match up with what he likes and dislikes. And, since Marc is not a person to mess around in such matters, he says "to hell with critical tools" and gets on with enjoying what he reads. As for me, well I'm perhaps fortunate in that I don't have time to read much sf - but when I do I often wonder why it is that I don't enjoy much of it. I wouldn't mind having a better handle on lit crit (or something like it) just so I would be able to match up what I like with reasons for liking it or not liking it.

((One of the troubles with using commonsense in trying to make judgements on things like this is that it's often like trying to undo 2mm bolts with a monkey wrench. For example, I recently read Greg Benford's Against Infinity which seemed to me to have a lot going for it but ultimately dropped its bundle and failed to deliver the goods. I'd love to know why. On the other hand, back in 1982 I read about half of Douglas Pike's Paradise of Dissent (500 or so pages about the formation of the colony in South Australia which will be 150 years old next year). At the time I thought that it was great history because it told me so much about what happened to who and why, but I got bogged down and had to give it away. In 1984 I came back to it when I was doing a course on historiography and theory, and very quickly I found all the faults in it which I had not been able to identify the first time around. I was only able to do that because I had acquired a nice new chrome plated set of historiographical critical tools. Bruce could probably tell me a lot about the prose style of Paradise of Dissent because his mental tools look for that sort of thing, but he would probably have a lot of trouble sorting out some of the problems with the historiography itself. So what I'm saying, more or less and to make it fairly plain even to myself, is that different disciplines within the general field of writing lead us to view and treat the art differently. I think that we might agree on that.))

Russell Blackford
GPO Box 1294 L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.

Unlike George Turner, I am still blessed with a published critical output small enough to allow me to take a quick survey of what I have said in print: in particular, I could not quickly locate a single instance of the words "good" and "bad" used in the context of a critical evaluation. This is not to say I have not used the words somewhere, and I have not checked any of the forthcoming material; how embarrassing to think that something being typeset even now might contain the proscribed words! However, the closest thing to an exception that I could actually find was a single instance of the term "excellent" in writing of Kurt Vonnegut's Jailbird. Generally, I seem to have kept my critical nose clean (what an image, methinks). I am revealing this not solely in self-congratulation, but more to express my relief that so far I have not been one of those critics prone to use words which are said to have "no critical meaning". I might add that I am fairly unrepentant - not totally - about the Jailbird review; I did elaborate at very considerable length, and attempted to concentrate upon the text itself, at least as seen through my own critico-philosophical glasses (more about this later I assure you, my smalls); and the word still seems a reasonable one to have used in context, establishing simply that my own response was very positive before going on to an elaboration of its relationship to sf and a further elaboration of its structure and texture. Perhaps I would do the whole thing differently now, but it seems that I would be going too far flatly to condemn my past self for the wording of this particular review.

Better (gotcha Leigh!) reviewers than I are far freer with simple evaluative words, and I wonder what we should make of Bruce Gillespie's use of the particular word "best" in his generally admirable article about rock and pop music in Rataplan 30: the word peppers his article, as do such expressions as "listenable" and "bloody awful". Now, I happen to agree with much of what Bruce is saying about the relationship between rock and pop, and I find a certain sensitivity and authority about Bruce's critical writing here and elsewhere, but these simple unqualified evaluative words and expressions make me wince. In my previous letter I essentially defended Bruce's (for example) right to use them; whereas they would be eliminated entirely on George Turner's logic, if I understand him correctly. Whatever the good qualities of Bruce's article, I think the Turnerian thesis looks quite strong here, since the article really is full of unhelpful words which convey an evaluative attitude but do little more. I might say that I'm more worried about the swiftness with which value judgements are passed than by the words themselves. Bruce is always authoritative, but the tone is sometimes almost authoritarian, as well as sounding critically unsophisticated, however sophisticated the critic may be musically. Certain colocations of words make my point, most notably the one which you picked on: "unutterably vulgar heavy metal". I find this kind of phrase more

confusing than anything I might say about "meta-values" and the like, because it could mean either "heavy metal (of the unutterably vulgar variety)" or "heavy metal (which is, as we know, ipso facto unutterably vulgar)". In the latter case, the tone is downright bullying, assuming that the reader will agree with a blanket value judgement that is not backed up in any way. Incidentally, I've been getting enjoyment lately from albums by Dio and Quiet Riot, who would count as heavy metal, so I picked an example which was suitably close to home. None of this is intended to denigrate Bruce's article in general: as I said, I largely agree with the main points.

Having said all that, I notice that reviews which I have had published include many words which are value-laden, if not downright emotive, and I certainly have not shied away from making value judgements. Introspecting, I tend to feel that the reason why I've avoided simple expressions of taste such as the words "good" and "bad" is pretty well what Turner suggests: such words are either confusing or redundant; either way they are uninformative. I have to add here, contrary to your response to my original letter, that this has little to do with the alleged fact that critics use the words "routinely": as George Turner's letter in Rataplan 30 shows, the words themselves are a problem. I think the other reason why I've shied away from these words is that their use tends to suggest that values are somehow uncontroversial: particularly when used by themselves, without argument as to what considerations led to their use, they imply that no one could have any different set of values. Of course, we have all seen passages of literary criticism, as well as moral discourse, which give the same impression even in the midst of lengthy argument; we can't avoid the authoritarian approach simply by avoiding certain words.

George Turner, at any rate, has now gone a long way to clarifying his reasons why we should avoid such words, and I thank him for that. I agree with your observation that his argument is actually the other side of the coin from one of my arguments: that such a range of usages for these apparently simple words comes, in practice, to much the same thing as no unequivocally understandable use at all.

It helped me greatly reading George's analysis of the communication problems inherent in using such words as "good" and "bad". But I found his discussion of the logical problems inherent in making value judgements at all totally confusing. In this context, it is of no help at all to go to the dictionary, which does provide many definitions - but the salient definitions themselves use value-laden words which are just as problematical from a philosophical point of view as "good" and "bad" themselves. I'm reminded of the debate between Protagoras and Socrates in the Protagoras of Plato. At one stage Protagoras launches into the following speech:

> "But I know plenty of things - food, drinks, drugs, and many others - which are harmful to men, and others which are beneficial; and others again which, so far as men are concerned, are neither, but are harmful or beneficial to horses, and others only to cattle or dogs. Some have no effect on animals, but only on trees, and some again are good for the roots of trees but injurious to the young growths. Manure, for instance, is good for all plants when applied to their roots, but utterly destructive if put on the shoots or young branches. Or take olive oil. It is very bad for plants, and most inimical to the hair of all animals except man, whereas men find it of service both to the hair and to the rest of the body. So diverse and multiform is goodness that even with us the same thing is good when applied externally but deadly when taken internally. Thus all doctors forbid the sick to use oil in preparing their food, except in the very smallest quantities, just enough to counteract the disagreeable smell which food and sauces may have for them."

In this speech Protagoras sees good as a "multiform" concept, whereas Socrates has been trying to track down the essential nature of the related concept of virtue. We don't need dictionaries to know the diversity of usages of the word "good"; Protagoras pointed out that "good" is a "diverse" concept in the 5th century BC. However, this does not seem to have stopped philosophers, critics and other thinking people from debating the nature of good and evil down the centuries. There is still

no consensus within our society, or among this world's societies, as to what forms of behaviour are to be counted (morally) good, or what phenomena (artificial or otherwise) are good aesthetically. Obviously, people can share very similar values, and discussions between such people can be quite meaningful even if evaluative words are not used naively and with little explanation. But none of this makes Socrates' philosophical quest irrelevant.

I simply can't follow what George has to say about these issues, and I suspect that the fault is my own, not in being too stupid to find some meaning in at least some of George's words, but in that I failed to make myself properly understood in the first place, so that we are now talking at cross purposes. Maybe the term "meta-values", as well as "relative consensus" caused some trouble; certainly you seem to have found the former term (my own coinage as faras I know) confusing. I thought it was clear from the context that I was talking about values of some universal and absolute kind against which the fundamental values of individuals (or, indeed, societies) could be judged. Values against which we could value values! I still think it's a reasonable term and will probably go on using it, now that I've explained myself. My view is simply that there are no such meta-values available to us to test each other's fundamental values. This position is controversial, to be sure, but it has plenty of adherents in ethical thought; and the arguments would appear to apply equally to aesthetics. In my previous letter I attributed my own views on this point to George Turner. I'm now not so sure. I went on to suggest that even if we recognize that fundamental values can differ, and that there is no absolute authority (such as the decrees of God, as an obvious example) to settle the difference, we can still go on making value judgements and conveying them to each other - whether or not we know what we're doing, I suppose, but certainly if we do know what's going on. This thesis, I argued, does not <u>in itself</u> stop us from using the words "good" and "bad", though it might encourage us to use them with plenty of qualifying material and to use more specific words if we can, since it might help us to find out more quickly how fundamentally we agree or disagree. None of this, of course, prevents us from being intelligent or otherwise, consistent or otherwise, informed or otherwise in having and defending sets of values.

I'd like to hear, particularly from George Turner, whether I'm now making myself clear or whether this is still obscure stuff. Thereafter, I'd be pleased if we could take the argument as it applies to criticism of sf quite a bit further before going on to grand new topics such as the purpose of sf and fantasy.

Hum. That leads to the penultimate point about my alleged "screen of academism" approach. These days I am not an academic, and I have not been relying on my supposed academic expertise in any of this. It's true that I'm blessed or cursed with one of those PhD's in English Literature which we've all heard about and learned to regard with suspicion; it's also true that I actually taught that subject at Monash University for four years; and it's true, if less well-known, that I've spent good stretches of time studying philosophy in three departments at two universities; <u>and</u> that I'm involved in the organization of the notorious academic track for AussieCon II. I know something about literary academics and the halls of academia, though my own general reading, perhaps along with my scattered formal studies in philosophy, has made a much bigger impression on the way I think and argue about general topics, such as those involved in the current debate, than any specialized training I may have had in academic criticism. Certainly, I have only a limited knowledge of such things as structuralism and literary deconstruction (Damien Broderick is much more learned in those fields than I, as far as I can tell) so you won't ever see me wheeling out any multi-widgetted structuralist machinery in my arguments. These days, I make my living as an industrial advocate, spouting homespun words before the Arbitration Commission, usually on some practical issues such as who should get how much money. My own approach to intellectual problems depends upon having enough knowledge of the relevant facts and principles to be able to take a broad perspective without treating the issues superficially, and then to apply what you call "the basic grasp of logic approach". Actually, while my "academic" background seems to be well-known, my own private emphasis is on the disillusionment that I feel towards much of what goes on in literary academia, with

its obscurantist prophets of false gods (whether God is seen as being Leavis or Derrida.)

There's another argument on my hands!

I haven't even addressed myself to David Lake's gracious, thoughtful, and unashamedly academic letter. Lake seems to be on the right track in his factual summary of how a canon or works comes to be given privileged status in our society and enshrined as Literature (with the capital L). Perhaps George Turner and I can turn to this point in the next stage of the discussion.

Come on, then George. Come on.

Diane Fox
PO Box 1194, North Sydney, NSW 2060

Your article on "What's So Great About Fiction, Anyway" in Rataplan 29 will certainly arouse a good deal of irritation. I think I know why. Fans speak of the sf ghetto, but actually all fiction is in a ghetto. Novels were written before the 18th Century, but they were a rarity and for practical purposes fiction is an invention of the last three hundred years. It is surprising how many novels are set out in a framework that either suggests they are based on fact, or are something that could happen. There must be this lip-service to fact. Even today, there are people who can't really understand that there is a difference between fact, fiction and lies. They think that all television programmes are documentaries. Harlan Ellison had some interesting comments to make on this.

Fiction is like sex - underneath all our liberated attitudes we are subconsciously convinced that it is immoral, undignified, childish, dirty, and even at least, not the highest possible attribute of the human spirit. We feel that we will be ridiculed by others for it.

So in our feelings towards fiction, especially fantasy which has less of the pretension-its-fact than realistic fiction, we are guilt ridden and extremely defensive. We are like a country at war : the slightest criticism may be a subtle enemy attempting to destroy us by destroying our self-respect. We know that there are people who would deprive us of all our pleasures, and we fear them. Fans are paranoid, as all minority groups are paranoid.

((What's this "we" you keep on using. You might be on the defensive and you might be paranoid because somebody wants to take away your pleasures... but that doesn't mean that we all are - especially if that pleasure is reading sf anyhow.))

Perhaps I'm overstating this but these are almost certainly the underlying assumptions in most cases subconscious). Why else should Ray Bradbury's tale of book burners be so popular? It hits this fear directly.

Why do people want to publish fiction? Everyone likes to gratify his or her ego by making something. Once the level of competence is reached, with most such things there is a certain degree of satisfaction. An average or less than average cake is still enough to satisfy hunger, a clumsily made article of clothing is still useful to keep you warm on a cold day. But as fiction is not a necessity (unlike non-fiction which gives out information and is valuable if it is good enough to get the ideas or facts across) it must be good to be anything. A short story needs a lot more self justification than the simplest What-I-Did-On-My-Holidays, and is a lot harder to defend.

Now it's in the nature of human beings to identify with what they have made - criticise a story and you are criticising the person who wrote it - who already feels a little on the defensive to begin with.

Why then take the risk of writing fiction at all? This again is about as easy to explain as it is to justify one's sexual tastes; almost utterly impossible if your

audience simply doesn't have similar tastes or finds them alien, incomprehensible, or, god forbid, disgusting or sinful.

((This goes some way to putting the problems of being a fiction writer into a kind of perspective, but I'm afraid that it doesn't say much about the business of why many people are of the opinion that writing fiction is more important than writing anything else. Of course it is true that one can derive something from writing fiction, but it is true that you can derive satisfaction from writing almost anything well?))

I expected that George Turner's article would be both interesting and highly readable, and it was. The three reasons for writing sf sound very accurate. I can think of a few authors who would fit in all three categories. There's one quite well known author who started by writing for money and succeeded, had a change of heart and tried writing quality art and, to a degree, succeeded but became embittered by the reader's lack of interest and returned to writing material which he thought the public would like. There's another author who had gotten into the habit of writing series of more than three or even four books - the first two books of each series are usually inventive and interesting, but he despises his audience and the next few of each set are usually less ad less well written, more and more formula. There's a third writer who complains bitterly about the poor taste of the sf reading public, and about the lack of success of his own books (still, he has had some critical acclaim and his books are usually in print!) who would love to be a best selling author. The trouble is, he can only write material with appeals to somewhat intellectual or perhaps pretentious taste, as his books are absolutely loaded with whinging and self-centred, articulate and extremely introverted characters, who are about as entertaining to read about as they are to encounter in real life - they speak well, but about their self-obsession only.

An interesting and important point that George made in the review of the Jack Williamson collection is about the difference between myth making and idea-spinning, and actual writing skill. It is not commonly remembered that sf is not so much the work of individuals but a kind of group-mind achievement, the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. Great art can be created outside the field by genre writers or by mainstream writers immersing themselves in the genre, but most stfnal classics are classics because they added a whole batch of ideas and images to the sf concept pool, <u>not</u> because they are well written. And it would be theoretically possible to write a magnificent sf novel, with superb prose, characterisation, etc, which added absolutely nothing to the ideas pool.

The points Turner makes about Staninslaw Lem are also well worth reading and remembering. I tend to have filmic rather than dramatic tastes - in a film the background is very much a "character", in a play very much less so. Basically the interesting background adds another dimension to the novel.

Sf and fantasy novels tend to have far more simplistic backgrounds than realistic novels. This is mainly because it is easier to evoke a background the reader is familiar with. The author need only use a few words skillfully to stimulate the reader's own memory. It works best with very familiar things - not only sights and sounds but taste, smell, textures, temperatures are remembered. However, just about any part of our planet can be fairly rapidly evoked: we've all seen pictures or films of places we have never visited in the flesh. In a fantasy or sf novel, the entire background is unfamiliar. The author has two choices, either describe all in detail, or have most of it familiar with just a few alien details to point out that this is another planet or the future.

One of the most irritating factors in sf is an overly malleable background. The author will create a culture or planet that it almost one dimensional in the emotional sense, so as to prove some philosophical or political point. Consider all those stories where the lone earthman takes over a whole planet because he is an earthman and therefore superior. The writer hedges his bets by <u>making</u> the aliens rather characterless and by making fate and the universe so co-operative with the hero. Real life seems much more complex and obdurate. This is an extreme and

obvious case, but many sf writers tend to do this. It would be far more difficult to write an historical novel to prove a political point because history sometimes doesn't co-operate.

((And if history doesn't co-operate properly very few authors or film makers get too upset about giving it a bit of a kick to bend it into the right direction, so that it will make a good story. You need only think about all those Hollywood films of the lives of the Great Composers. On the other hand perhaps such films don't really bear thinking about. Anyhow, not even historians - who generally stick to the documented facts - have much trouble in putting whatever interpretation they like on something that they are writing about. Or if they do, they go off and write about something else which suits their world-view. Sf and fantasy writers are not the only people who do that kind of thing and perhaps everybody who has put pen to paper is guilty of changing the facts or making up the story to suit themselves.))

I've gotten away from the subject here, but feel that one of the good points about Turner's comments is that they encourage readers to think about sf in general.

The Stanislaw Lem story he described certainly doesn't sound like a typical simplistic-background-to-prove-a-point story - in fact the opposite. The novel in dialogue, or the discussion novel, certainly isn't a new idea. Thomas Love Peacock and Aldous Huxley are the most well known examples - I greatly enjoyed their books. But they do have backgrounds - usually delightful country houses - in their novels. The backgrounds are not particularly obvious but do come across as extra "characters", even "silent voices" in those novels.

Terry Carr's comments about fan writing certainly deserve some thought. To speak bluntly, writing well is a rare talent, and most people will never be good enough to satisfy a demanding critic, no matter how they break their hearts trying. Must they then stop communicating at all by the written word? According to one school of thought, yes. They are inferior, they do not amuse, therefore they deserve to suffer in silence. If they are unable to ask for information and help and come to grief, what does it matter? Communication is supposed to be two way (or multiple way) but if these people bore us, why should we bother to see if they need help? Such, I unhappily feel, is the unspoken thought that may lurk behind such an attitude.

There's also the thought that writing for the next 100 years may encourage people to write on "important" subjects; to write about what the group thinks is important. Such writing <u>may</u> become a form of juggling for status, and people may write essays on set topics, treating them in a set way - the interest for the reader would <u>not</u> be in what was being said, but how well that particular writer did at it. Rather like reading a lot of essays handed in at exam time, with everyone striving to get the highest mark. Fans should be careful to avoid this attitude.

I think that, because women tend to write more personally than men, they would be at an intense disadvantage in such a situation. If they did try to write the set subject essays, they might well be treated with some hostility. When communication becomes competitive, even being allowed to enter the competition is a matter of status.

((I find the idea of writing essays to set topics as a source of egoboo a novel one, and one which I've not heard suggested before. Do you think that it is really a possible development in fandom? I can't see it. Just for a start, writing essays is fairly hard work, and most fans are smart enough to avoid work which is not productive. And do you really think that fans would conform to a series of set topics on which to write. If there was such competition for egoboo, I can tell you that I would have no intention of giving the likes of Bruce Gillespie or Terry Carr an advantage by agreeing to write in areas where they know more and could make better puns.))

Martin Bridgstock's comments about media fans being mostly female has given me a cynical thought - maybe this is another reason why serious fans may frown upon media

fandom - unacknowledged sexism. And it is certainly true that women tend to get lower status positions in any branch of society. Maybe women (and younger, less confident males) tend to gravitate towards media fandom because of its lesser status. An interesting example of two-way negative reinforcement.

((I thought that the reason more people became attached to media fandom these days is because film and television are much more popular than writing. It's not a matter of having a choice of which fandom they will go into, it's a matter of which bits of sf they are most attracted to when they become aware of something called fandom. It may also have something to do with the way in which different bits of fandom are organized. If you want to join a club (because that is the way most people think special interest groups work) you will find lots of media clubs. On the other hand there are probably no print-media fan clubs running in Australia today, so a newcomer will join the clubs that they can find rather than go hunting around for the informal organizations of ordinary fandom.))

Doug Barbour
10808 - 75th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T6E 1K2, CANADA.

The thing is, it's to bad that Bruce Gillespie didn't wait for 1984 to write about the state of rock. I like a lot of what he said about rock, and think he's basically right. The first thing I really howled at was his characterization of one of the greatest voices in rock n roll (which I still love, and which is a bit different from rock - I'd say The Rolling Stones are rock n roll while Cream was rock, by Bruce's definition), Van Morrison, as sounding "like gravel flung into a concrete mixer." One major reason I listen to Van Morrison - and I listen to Morrison's music a lot - is that wonderful voice. Another, and it ties into Bruce's bewilderment at Bob Dylan's too preachy (and too narrow) recent music, is that Morrison creates a music which is both mystic and utterly of the body (as all good rock n roll must be). A kind of kosmic blues then? Yeah, except it isn't the blues quite, anymore, because there's too much joy in it. It was Dylan who told us we had to choose, either/or; but it was Morrison who told us that "the healing has begun", and has continued to provide songs of that healing in every record since, including Inarticulate Speech of the Heart and his latest, wonderful album, A Sense of Wonder.

Then, of course, last year, Dire Straits released their double live album, which is full of those long guitar solos Bruce loves so much. An album I confess I've listened to a lot. But I like jazz that is not crossover, rock is rock and jazz is jazz, and all that, and so I've been listening to some great jazz, old and new and a lot more than to most pop music. The late great Zoot Sims was making records of almost transcendentally glorious jazz during the last few years - anyone of them is worth almost all the pop and rock albums released during the same period. I was surprised Bruce didn't mention Cold Chisel, alas now broken up, but certainly one of the finest rock n roll bands I've heard recently, and which I only heard in Australia, where I immediately picked up a couple of their albums, albums I enjoy a lot. Of course they didn't make it in America while whimps like The Little River Band did. There is no justice. As we know only too well. But John Fogerty's Centrefield can give us all hope, as can the singing of Tina Turner on Private Dancer. There is still room for the true passion of rock n roll, even if we do have to look in the stores rather than hear it on the AM radio, or even FM.

((Oddly enough Bruce and I share some tastes in rock n roll, but rapidly go poles apart on others. We share a liking for the Rolling Stones but I am not sure that Bruce yet appreciates the true worth of AC/DC, the best band ever to emerge from Australia and streets ahead of useless mobs such as The Little River Bland. I'm not sure that Bruce has come to terms with all this modern dance music either, but I have to admit to a liking for bands like INXS - not that I have bought any of their records. The other band which I enjoy immensely but which Bruce probably doesn't think much of is Talking Heads. The last time I was in Melbourne I made a point of getting along to see Stop Making Sense, which is one of the best concert films so far made.

((I don't share your liking for jazz, the records I've been buying most recently have been Chicago Blues. I suppose that's because my tastes in popular music firmed up at just the same time as rock rediscovered the blues. One of my most played records over the years has been Fathers and Sons, but it's only now that I've had the time and the money to follow up the interest.))

Eric Lindsay
PO Box 42, Lyneham, ACT 2601.

On criticism, critical tools and history, I find myself wondering about the self perpetuating nature of many academic studies. Take history... please. I was reading a few books like Stephen Usher's The Historians of Greece and Rome and JB Bury's The Ancient Greek Historians, and kept coming across passages that reminded me inescapably of the evolution of science fiction criticism. Herodotus is praised for his skill as an artist, ensuring his place both by being one of the earliest historians whose work has reached us, and also by being readable. However in no way does his writing resolve the continuing struggle between the various aspects of history as seen in his time. Was history to be considered as epic, as dramatic work, as a scientific study, or in some distinct manner that we would consider historic? Herodotus, of course, tended to write what was told him, and did not feel particularly obliged to believe his own tales. We have slogans like "In war, truth is the first casualty", however it seems that lies were very much a part of history in early times. Indeed, wasn't Herodotus labelled "the father of lies"? However he did attempt to define what he was doing in his own introduction, where he says that he considers history the recording of human affairs, especially Greek affairs, and the glory of them, and their foes, and the cause of their conflicts.

Thucydides tried to define his genre, but many argue that his work was tragic drama in disguise, while others claim it was just as scientific as the tracts of his contemporary Hippocrates. His own reasons seem almost pragmatic. "The accurate knowledge of what has happened will be useful, because according to human probability, similar things will happen again." Thus historians provided "moral edification couched in persuasive language". Certainly accuracy was not generally considered within the reach of the Greek historians. The sceptical Hecataeus remarked "the stories of the Greeks are many and ridiculous, as it seems to me."

The demands of artistry often took precedence. Cicero said history was a branch of rhetoric, and subsequent historians who ignored this dictum risked oblivion. Polybius, for example, tried to distinguish it by its serious educational purpose, but was not above using rhetorical devices to add literary colour. Duris insisted that the "feelings of the readers should be moved and harrowed by highly wrought pathetic scenes, conjured up from the writer's imagination." Duris, tyrant of Samos, lambasted some historians, claiming they "failed to excite the pleasure which history, properly treated, is capable of affording."

In essence, history, in the modern sense, had to wait until there was an audience of historians, for it could not gain enough support from its reading public. This had the effect of ensuring that ancient historians are far more readable than are our contemporaries, albeit far less critical in their treatment.

In a like manner, recent academic treatment of sf is far less readable than the efforts of sf writers who write their histories for love, and the hope of a small commercial sale. It is more critical, I grant you, but less immediate, in that academic writers generally do not have personal knowledge of the writers, and often seem to feel constrained to restrict themselves to picking over the dead bones of seminal authors who are already "safe".

((The reason for that is, of course, that the academics writing this stuff about sf are not generally historians but people like English lecturers. While some of my best friends are doubtless English academics, they are not in the business of writing entertaining stories about what has happened in the past, they are in the business of writing learned bits and pieces about the literature itself - a recounting of what happened in the past is one thing and learned descriptions of

bits of writing is another thing again, and I know which I reckon is more entertaining. True, some english literary academics write in an entertaining style, but most people are more interested in what happened in the past then in reading descriptions of the driving forces in stfnal stories which could hardly be said to possess such a thing anyhow. Have any historians tried their hand at writing about the development of sf? I've not heard of it if they have.

((Your summary of the different views of what history is supposed to do puts nicely quite a few of the different theories. I suppose that in the end a work of history has to be a good read in order to reach an audience. Perhaps the most popular works in Australian history are the five books in Manning Clark's A History of Australia. But it's quite an education to open up some of these volumes which sit on the shelves of lecturers in the ANU History department and to read their marginal comments about the accuracy of much of what it in them. But since there are so many more Clark books around than things like a very accurate but not terribly exciting biography of Sir Henry Parkes, Clark's view will become, probably has already become, the received wisdom of Australia's past as far as most middle-class Australians are concerned.))

Irwin Hirsh
2/416 Dandenong Road, Caulfield North, Vict 3161.

It is strangely appropriate that the first block of time I have for writing this letter is on this weekend; the last weekend of a very long summer of first class/international cricket in Australia. If I were to switch on the radio I could tell you the current state of play in the Sheffield Shield final. Over the past few weeks much has been written about the disappointments of the summer, but for me the biggest disappointment has been over-looked. I don't think I'll ever be able to look towards the Melbourne Cricket Ground in quite the same way again. Over the Christmas/New Year period I had a holiday in Sydney, and on the 30th I watched the first day of play in the Fifth Cricket Test from high up on the Sydney Cricket Ground's Hill. I've never had a more comfortable day while watching a cricket match. Natural grass is far more agreeable to one's backside than the planks of wood that the Melbourne Cricket Club refer to as "seats". I imagine that for watching a full days play of cricket, grass is even more comfortable than the best seat of any cricket ground in the world. I can't imagine myself ever finding a seat in which I would happily spend seven hours in much the same, upright position. On the Hill I was able to watch the cricket in any position I felt like; lying on my back, on my side, sitting up, etc. It has certainly changed the way I'll be watching cricket from now on.

((It is also strangely appropriate that this is being stencilled on the first day of the Fifth Test, this time against England. Fortunately for me my eyesight is so poor that if I went to the MCG or the SCG I would be lucky to see the small figures of men in white clothes running around, let alone such nuances as which one is the bowler and what the batsman is up to. For this reason I spend long hours in front of the tv, also able to change position whenever I feel the need. This ability to move around, rather than being forced to sit in an uncomfortable seat for seven hours, might be another reason why people like to stay home to watch their cricket on the box.))

I liked your observation that you thought British fanzine fandom was an informal apa, as a healthy apa would have the same effect as a healthy fanzine scene; that of generating enthusiasm for contributing something back to the field, whether it be a direct response by adding to the discussions already present or by setting up new discussions through articles and new fanzines, and all with an obvious attempt to entertain. Unfortunately this isn't happening in Australia; I receive an Aussie fanzine and it generates no enthusiasm in me, while there are fanzines coming from the UK or North America that do get me enthused. I read the fanzines of Jean Weber and Ron Clarke and I come away with the thought that they are unwilling to go beyond seeing what is in their letterbox in order to get contributions to their fanzines. I read the fanzines from Western Australia, and I get the impression they are genzines - what with the articles starting at the top of the page, and filler

material and art - but then I look at the contents listing and I get the impression I've just read a personalzine. I continue to wonder why such people don't solicit specific contributions; I've found the extra effort made worthwhile by a better fanzine and a more satisfying response to one's efforts. I hope that Aussiecon 2 generates a lot of enthusiasm for fanzine fandom and returns a fanzine fandom frame of reference to most people's thinking. I know that my fanzine efforts has been greatly reduced by having been on the Aussiecon 2 committee.

((I look forward to seeing more issues of Sikander after the Great Event. The trouble with Australian fanzine fandom over the past few years has been exactly the business of nobody talking to anybody else and very few topics of conversation being carried across the discussions in various fanzines. Instead of everyone being in the same boat the impression has been that there are lots of people busy paddling off all over the place, and hardly a one of them getting anywhere.))

Avedon Carol
9A Greenleaf Road, East Ham, London E6 1DX, UK

I liked what you had to say about why we don't include fiction in fanzines. It really is my feeling that, as you say, there are a lot more places to publish fiction - and professionally at that - and fanzines provide a forum for something else, something not as easily found in commercial outlets. So I see no reason to give them our space.

I also tend to feel that fanzines stay lively when they visibly integrate with their social milieu, which is why I like to make a point of mentioning lots of people in my fanzines. Someone pointed out to me that the thing that made the Katz's Four Star Extra feel like a dead-end was the fact that there were no locs in it. Lucy and I did our whole Rude Bitch schtick with an ear to mentioning lots of people, even if the stuff we said about them was off-the-wall and had no particular meaning. It was meant to be inclusive of people, to let them know we know they were out there - and I think that most people (with two obvious exceptions) enjoy that sort of thing, appreciate that they are being told, "Hey, you are part of our fandom, you're as important to us as anyone else, even if you are weird and strange and say dumb things. That's okay, we're not afraid to be dumb either."

And I don't think you can have that feeling of integration and aliveness if you are publishing only about people who don't really exist in a world that doesn't exist or something. I think fiction takes you too far outside of that milieu and puts you someplace else - like the commercial world you can find in your local glossy bookstore. Hell, I can be isolated all by myself alone in my room with my books and tv, I don't need to be in fanzines for that. And I don't need to spend my own money doing what Doubleday gets bucks for doing, thank you very much. I also think that if people really think fiction fanzines ought to be published, they can publish them themselves - maybe then they'd understand why, when we are publishing for our own priorities, we prefer not to publish fiction.

And somehow related to that same topic, I find Terry Carr's letter, which I mostly agree with until he says things like, "... why should anyone want to write material that will certainly be irrelevant a year from now?" Because, while I agree that no one wants what they write to be dead next year, and I doubt anyone does so on purpose, the fact of the matter is that some of the liveliest and most powerful art is responsive so directly to the time that it does lose meaning very quickly. It takes a special skill to create art out of immediacy, to produce something which responds specifically to what is going on Right Now and has not happened with much frequency before and many never happen again. You have to be fast on your feet to write a song or an article about something that just happened yesterday and isn't just your common garden-variety Timeless Topic. And then you have to get it out into public view before it becomes dated. And if the timing of it is right, it may have a very powerful impact because it was precisely what was called for at the time. But six months from now it could be meaningless, or the context of the times could be so altered that a new singer singing the same piece is doing a completely

different song. When I look at the lyrics to "The Times They Are A-Changing" now, I hear it as sung by Young Republicans...

The fact that a piece of art may date itself very quickly doesn't mean it wasn't brilliant. Some of the most creative and generative music of the sixties was, of necessity and almost by definition, work which could not retain its meaning and power a generation up the line. Sometimes the very fact that it is highly creative and generative means that it will spark a new tentacle or field off of the old body that will advance until it leaves the original creative spark back in the dark ages of its own existence. Timeless Works are all very well but aliveness and growth and evolution are important parts of the creative process and they have a way sometimes of erasing a lot of what has gone before.

And because fanzines really do thrive on the immediacy of their own social milieu, it stands to reason that many of them will contain pieces which will have little meaning a year or three up the road. Our memories are short enough that two months later we can't remember why a particular joke was so killingly funny at the time. The guy we told those jokes about gafiates and the neos don't know who he is, or it all seemed like The Going Thing at that moment, or whatever. But that was yesterday... Today there's something else entirely going on, and we have to think up a new joke to go with it - which will itself be meaningless by next year. Okay, so these jokes date themselves, but we have to think them up pretty fast. The joke that lasts forever is one I had thirty-three years to try to think up. Hell, even if the Summer of Love lasted forever, there were only so many times you were going to be able to hear "The Times They Are A-Changin" before it goes stale and meaningless. The brilliant revolutionary cry which changes history (for which we all breathlessly wait) is gonna sound pretty stupid if it is repeated after a truly successful revolution, isn't it?

And anyway, if fanzines are art, and fanzines are communication, and, let's face it, art is communication and communication is an art, who the hell cares whether it's all timeless or whether it just communicates for the moment sometimes? If you didn't need communication for immediate purposes, no one would have invented language.

* * *

We also heard from; Brian Earl Brown, Joan Dick, Ian Gould, Michael Hailstone, Eve Harvey, Joy Hibbert, Lucy Huntzinger, Stewart McGowan, John D Owen, Skel, Gerald Smith, Julie Vaux and Lucy Zinkiewicz.

* * *

SOME INTERESTING STUFF ABOUT FANZINES

One person wrote: "I've always admired your fanzine reviews but find there may be a self defeating syndrome at work. You concentrate (constructively) on the Australian output but by the time you finish with a batch they come across as a sorry lot and not something that one gets all fired up about sending off one's own fanzine in trade for. Perhaps you should be calling local attention to superior examples from other lands (Timbre, say, or For Paranoids Only, or Stomach Pump) in hope that your local crew will learn from exposure to better examples. Constructive criticism doesn't seem to be having a great effect."

Too true!

Not that there aren't quite a few Australian fanzines being published at the moment - I've received twenty-nine in the past five months and contributed another five to that total - but very few of them come anywhere near the standard set by the best from overseas. As well as a lot of junk being published in Australia there is just as much of it being produced overseas, so maybe the sad state of Australian fanzines is only a small part of the general sad state of fanzines.

For example; the other day Mike Glyer's File 770 53 arrived. In it Mike lists the best fanzines of 1984, and they are a sad lot. (Two Australian products get the nod in the also ran section, Irwin Hirsh's Sikander and Roger's Thyme... but not this humble publication.) Mike's idea of the best if Mythologies, which is nice enough but, apart from Don D'Ammassa's thoughtful opening comments, it is stuffed full of often off-the-cuff letters of comment. Next is Holier Than Thou which is fairly much like an expanded and US version of The Mentor. Then we have such non-events as Lan's Lantern, Instant Message and Neology. While the fanzines listed here might bo the current "state-of-the-art" overseas, that doesn't mean that I consider them good enough that I should recommend them to Australians as models upon which to mold themselves. (Perhaps one of the reasons that I have stuck to reviewing Australian fanzines is that I don't mind upsetting people I can talk to later about what I've said, but I don't think that I am likely to be able to meet the likes of Marty Cantor or Jerry Kaufman often enough to feel comfortable with them or what I might say about their works. While this might be an unnecessary caution in most artistic areas it does seem to me that in the big family of fanzine fandom such considerations are a bit more important.)

There might wellbe some overseas fanzines which I could recommend as good examples, I hear of some of them but if their editors don't send me copies when I maintain a fairly high profile it seems doubtful that they would be sending copies to people they have never heard of - so there is no point in making such recommendations.

So where does that leave a person who wants to try to show people who are interested in fanzines the way that things might best be done. I've always thought that the best way to go about it is to try and set an example and Rataplan has been about the best fanzine that I could produce within certain mundane restrictions. With it I had hoped to set some kind of example and to provide a model for others. Sadly that doesn't seem to have worked and I can console myself by saying that it isn't that this has been a terrible fanzine, but just that I tried at the wrong time.

There is also another reason for sticking to Australian fanzines. I am something of a nationalist (a product of the ANU History Department) and think that somebody should spend some time in trying to encourage Australians in seeking some kind of excellence in the business of fanzine production. Even though Ted White wrote that long article on Australian fanzines a while back nobody else has shown the slightest indication that they are interested in writing about them. And what sort of encouragement is that? Of course there just don't seem to be very many fans around the world writing about fanzines these days, and that may be one of the reasons for the sad state of the whole field at the moment. As Irwin and Avedon were saying in the letter column, people need to talk to each other and encourage each other in the pages of fanzines, if they don't then the whole exercise becomes too dry and we end up with a lifeless collection of fanzines which do not combine to constitute a group; rather there are a lot of little magazines which really on't mean anything to each other and thus constitute no consolidated body.

Even I, who know nothing to speak of about sport, know that a team that doesn't talk amongst itself doesn't get anywhere. So let's start talking again.

Another thing I have heard about sport is that a champion team will beat a team of champions every time. If this is true, and if the analogy could be carried across into fanzine fandom, it would mean that fandom would be better off if it had a dozen regular but mediocre fanzines which all related to each other rather than having a dozen ripper fanzines which were all published in isolation. But I don't know if there has ever been a period in fandom which would prove or disprove this idea. But it does sound like an interesting little theory, doesn't it? It, and a bit of evidence from Australian fanzine fandom at the moment would lead to the following statement - "The best fanzines hunt in packs".

At the moment there are four good fanzines in Australia - Van Ikin's Science Fiction, Bruce Gillespie's The Metaphysical Review, Roger & Peter's Thyme and The Notional which Valma and I publish. In a lot of ways we are an unlikely coalition with quite different ways of looking at what we do and in the look of the results

that we get. But what we have in common is that we are all discussing the same general topic - science fiction. Of the four of us, Van is the one who most explicitly has set out to deal with that topic, Bruce seems to be forced to it because his contributors seem to like discussing the topic, Roger & Peter seem to have drifted from a fairly fannish point of view to a more stfnal one, and The Notional is being published in the form that it is because I happen to think that it is a format which will be successful and because I discovered, like Bruce, that a growing number of my contributors wanted to write about sf.

These four fanzines do not constitute the whole of Australian fanzines, and they do not overtly refer to and talk about each other, but it is becoming the case that you have to read all four of them to form a picture of what is happening in sf and fandom in Australia. Topics of conversation are starting to cross from one to another and the concerns that are being expressed in one place can be seen reflected in another.

More hopefully, although the current main thrust of Australian fanzines is towards sf, that doesn't mean that fanzines in the traditional fannish mold have no place. When Marc Ortlieb upgrades Tigger he will probably do so in the existing fannish climate, and that means that we will get articles which give us some of the more personal background of what is going on and contribute to the gossip which is being passed around in the fanzines. Others who come along later will find that there is an existing social environment into which they can fit - that kind of environment is something which has been missing for the past few years.

From the fanzines published in Australia in the past few months I reckon that there is an interesting future lying ahead. Either that or everything will fall in a hole for some as yet unforeseen reason. Let's hope for the best.

* * *

SOME INTERESTING STUFF ABOUT THE NOTIONAL

One of the reasons for the demise of this fanzines is because I've started producing a monthly newszine/fanzine called The Notional. The idea to do this has been with me for a while now, and the title has been in my mind since the beginning of this year when the ABC announced plans for their new omnibus news and comments programme. The actual spur to get involved in this fairly time consuming activity came from the "Word Festival" which was held over at the university back at the beginning of the year when Valma and I resolved that there must besomething better to life than having to work for other people for a living. From that came the decision that, when I have finished my degree at university next year, we will up and move ourselves to our house in Ballarat. When we get there we won't be looking for new jobs, we will be looking for ways to make some money from activities such as writing, art or model making, and living as cheaply as possible.

This means that publishing a fanzine on the scale of this one, and giving it away, would simply be impossible. When we get to Ballart we will be trading adequate money for adequate time, and while I might have a lot more time to produce a flash fanzine like this I would have no money to publish it. That means that any fanzine that I produce in the future is going to have to be self-financing, and so far as I know there is only one way to do that.

The Notional not only fits the bill as the kind of fanzine that I have had in mind, it is also the kind of thing that I can feel comfortable in charging people I don't know a reasonable sum for. One of the reasons that I haven't ever been keen on taking subscriptions for Rataplan (apart from the basic unfannishness of the action) is that this fanzine is so unpredictable that I could hardly promise any readers what they would be getting for their money. It does have the disadvantage of forcing some restrictions on what I publish, but in twenty pages a month there is plenty of space for the odd contribution that is not strictly within the stfnal framework, and anyhow I find these days that I'm just as interested in the quality of the writing as I am in what that writing is about and so I'm just as happy to

provide people with the best writing that I can find about what is going on in sf in Australia. And since more good writers seem to be interested in giving me material about sf these days, everything seems to fall into place nicely.

So, if you're interested in what's happening post-Rataplan, send me $10 (or $15 seamail or $23 airmail overseas) and I'll send you twelve issues of The Notional.

* * *

RATAPLAN THIRTY-ONE

The text, the whole text, and nothing but the text
(Leavis would have loved it!)

CONTENTS

OPENING SHOTS 1
The editor gives some background information

A TOUCH OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 3
A thought or two on ANZUS and cultural imperialism

ON RECOGNIZING ONE'S BASIC CHARACTER FLAWS 4
Some editorial comments on collecting things

ON THE BEACH, WITH TURTLES 6
Russell Parker tells us what he does on his holidays

CONVERSATION ABOUT CRITICISM 9
Marc Ortlieb, Bruce Gillespie, Joseph Nicholas, Gerald Smith, Eric Lindsay, Judith Hanna, Jean Weber, David Grigg and Leigh Edmonds hae a bit of a chat about literary criticism

101ST (AIRBORNE) FANDOM 22
Jack Herman briefly describes what happened in Sydney between 1978 and 1983

GUFF REPORT - CHAPTER ONE 27
Justin Ackroyd gives us the first part of the report of his 1984 GUFF trip

GOD HELP THE BRIDE 30
Marc Ortlieb reports on the McDonnell/Herman hitching

LETTERS OF COMMENT 33
We read the thoughts of Joseph Nicholas, Steve Green, Richard Faulder Russell Blackford, Diane Fox, Doug Barbour, Irwin Hirsh and Avedon Carol

SOME INTERESTING STUFF ABOUT FANZINES 47
Your editor passes some comments on the current state of the art

SOME INTERESTING STUFF ABOUT THE NOTIONAL 49
What your editor is up to now, and why

* * *

AT LAST, THE LAST BIT

So there you are, a nice fat issue to be give out to lots of people at Aussiecon. You don't think I would have let this issue get so big if I had to pay postage on all but a handful of copies, do you? I may only be a public servant, but I'm not that silly. Anyhow - so long, and thanks for all the rissoles.