

CAPRICE.....  
.....  
.....irwin hirsh

"Well, Mr Hirsh, there's been a problem and we've had to cancel the operation."

This is not how I would've had it, but that was the second line in my first conversation with a certain Dr David Wallace, neurosurgeon to my wife. Five minutes earlier I had arrived at work, to be given a message. "Dr Wallace, Epworth Hospital, rang at 9.10. Please ring back," it said. "What the hell is he doing ringing me," I thought, "he should be operating on Wendy." And with that I raced up to my work area and straight onto the phone.

"Wendy's alright now but she had a violent allergic reaction to the anaesthetic," the doctor continued. "The moment we gave her the injection we lost a pulse, she had trouble breathing and her body came up in a massive red rash. We were able to resuscitate her and she is fine now."

It was the worst phone call I've ever had to take/make. When I was eleven I was in the room when my father took the phone call that informed him that his father had just had a heart attack and died. And ever since I've mentally rehearsed such a phone call. To that degree I could cope with a call telling me that a loved one had died, but I'd never given much thought to one that told me that a loved one had nearly died. It was a great way to round up what had been a particularly harrowing eleven days.



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SIKANDER FOURTEEN

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August 1987

Sikander, better than a poke in the eye with a flower stem, is edited and published by Irwin Hirsh, 2/416 Dandenong Rd, Caulfield North, Victoria 3161, AUSTRALIA. It is available for written and drawn contributions, a letter of comment, your fanzine in trade, Ye Olde Fanzines, or \$2. Money gained from the sale of this fanzine will be donated to GUFF. This fanzine supports the following Worldcon bids, and encourages you to do the same: The Netherlands in 1990, and Perth in 1994.

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Sheep dog dials.

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For some time Wendy hadn't been feeling the best, occasionally having these strange turns. Ten years ago she had had an operation to remove a tumour from her brain, and her neurologist wondered if there could be something there. The day before Good Friday Wendy had a C.A.T. scan and the results were the worst. Wendy's doctor contacted her surgeon from ten years before and together they made the arrangements for her operation to be the Friday after Easter.

When I woke up that morning I felt good. At that very moment Wendy was being wheeled into the operating theatre and the way I figured it when I next see her the worst will be over. Wendy would then have ten weeks in which to get over any post-operative effects, at which time we'd be going on my three month GURF trip. If ever a pre-arranged trip was as badly needed I'd like to hear about it.

Dr Wallace continued to tell me precisely what happened and what was still to happen, answered my only question, and when the call concluded I quietly went to my room, shut the door and tried to do some work. The Dr told me that it would be a few hours before I'd be able to see Wendy and I figured that I'd be better off trying to do some work than sitting in some hospital waiting room for up to three hours. After about an hour and a half in which I did work which would normally take me twenty minutes I gave up. That Wendy had come close to dying wasn't my concern, she was alright now and there was nothing to worry about. And I wasn't too concerned that she was allergic to an anaesthetic - as her surgeon said it is better to find out in this way, rather than in an emergency where the operation has to proceed. To have to go through the mental build up all over again was a depressing thought. I could only wonder how Wendy would react to the news. I sat at my work-bench pondering Life, the Universe and Everything, and eventually decided I wanted to be at the hospital.

I was there an hour before I could see Wendy. As a precaution she had been taken down to the Intensive Care Unit ward. When I walked in there were a mass of tubes sticking out of her arms, mouth and nose, some of which the nurses were in the process of removing. I soon figured out that Wendy's condition wasn't critical; there were four other patients in the ward, and each were getting more attention than my wife. Another good sign was that the doctor on duty spent more time explaining to me Wendy's situation, than she spent observing Wendy's condition.

Despite all that Wendy didn't actually look the best. Her face had no colour and she had trouble staying awake longer than a few seconds. At the time I thought it was an after-effect of her allergic reaction, but all it was was the usual reaction to an anaesthetic. Wendy was still the same when I came to see her in the early evening, except for being a bit more aware of what was going on around her. I left the hospital mentally drained, but was cheered up by a phone call later that night from Wendy. The anaesthetic had finally gone through her system, she'd been up and about, gone to the toilet and would've had a shower except that ICUs aren't equipped with such devices. We mentioned this phone call to some doctor friends of ours, and all they could do was exclaim



"We've never heard of anyone in ICU getting out of bed! You must've been alright!"

The next day Dr Wallace outlined for us the two options towards Wendy going ahead with the operation. In the normal course of events the operation couldn't proceed until Wendy had been tested to find out what anaesthetic(s) she is allergic to. The tests couldn't be conducted for six weeks as it was only then that we could be sure that Wendy's body had settled down from her allergic reaction. Waiting more than six weeks thrilled none of us. However, it was likely the operation could go ahead much sooner. A different set of drugs unrelated to those administered the day before, would do the trick. This option was confirmed when they looked up what drugs had been administered to Wendy ten years earlier, and discovered that two of the drugs had been the same as this time around.

So Wendy finally had her operation on the 15th of May and we now know what drug caused her anaphylactic reaction (neat name huh?) With the two stays in hospital and related doctor visits we've totaled up medical bills in excess of ten thousand dollars, of which eight and a half thousand were paid for by medical insurance. More than two months of hair growth hasn't covered over the scar, and apart from that you wouldn't know Wendy has had to undergo a major piece of surgery. But the ongoing effects are still unknown. Inside Wendy's head was a benign tumour, and surrounding it was a sack of fluid the size of a golfball. In order to remove it all the surgeon had to cut into the blood vessel that leads to the part of the brain that sends messages to the right eye, and since the operation Wendy has not had the full visual range out of that eye. Unless her vision improves we'll be letting one driver's licence lapse.

And we've got an upcoming overseas trip to look forward to. At one stage there were three things I was looking forward to on this GUFF trip: the chance to meet new people, go to new places and spend four months with Wendy without the day to day pressures of work. Being able to rest up from the events of the last few months is an unfortunate added thing to look forward to. We were originally going to be travelling from late June to early October, but those plans flew out the window the moment Wendy reacted to those drugs. Now we are travelling from late August to mid-December, spending seven weeks in ~~England~~ the UK and two months on Continental Europe. I'm particularly looking forward to Conspiracy 87 as I spent two years working as a committee member of Aussiecon Two, the only Worldcon I've attended, and I was extremely tired by the time the convention came around. I'm all prepared for this con, with a list of people who have promised me a drink. I've also got a list of all the people who tell me I owe them a drink, but fortunately this list isn't as long as the first list. For the travels after the con I've begun to get on top of the job of organising places to stay. With the help of Pascal Thomas and Roulouf Goudriaan and Lynne Ann Morse I've been gaining many contacts throughout the Continent. It should be a fun and interesting time. Here's to the trip.

- Irwin Hirsh



AT LEAST YOU CAN SAY YOU HAVE READ IT.....  
 .....  
 .....the letter column

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The artwork is the best part of #13, especially the Harry Bell aliens. All seem to have a rather perfect expression of pathos in their stance, facial expression and action. The illo on page 31 was absolutely tops.

Rather, it also reminded me of a classic line from The Bedsitting Room, where Mate intones "God save me... and I'll give up being an athiest... Goddy." Bloody brilliant. The cover illo has the same feeling of inevitability and abject patheticness. "Wish upon a star" was the old saying, I believe.

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If one were to assume that Sikander's cover has some relevance to the fanzine, then I find the analogy of Sikander picking up "fallen stars" and then being crushed by a very large "falling star" disturbing. Who or what could this great falling star be?

I have not yett seen Jedi and do not feel compelled to do so. This is possible partially due to my mental pigeon-holing of Star Wars and its ilk as "kids" films. My first contact with Star Wars was when I was ushering at a children's matinee screening of the film. Screeching, lolly-throwing children have since become inseparably forged in my memory of the film.

Unlike Perry Middlemiss, I have no recollection of approaching family "behaviour modification" in such an analytical fashion. Undoubtedly my parents attempted to steer me in my life and arguments did evolve from such but wars and campaigns were never fought quite so consciously in our family. If anything, I now discover that much of what I have inherited from my parents was unconsciously acquired in my childhood imitation of their speech, mannerisms and habits. Not all of my inheritance is good, but it all goes into making me an identifiable Warner.

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Unlike Perry's mother mine was never given to nudging me in the direction of meeting young ladies at dancing classes. At the time she was involved with, and raising little sister and I in, a fundamental "Christian" sect, and

dancing was one of the things that consigned one to the deepest pits of Hell. By contrast, my father had little direct influence in our upbringing, but one thing that he did insist on was silence at mealtimes (and he was too busy most of the rest of the time earning a living to have much to do with us.) Thus, one of the most important opportunities



for families to communicate with, and get to know, each other, was closed off to us.

In a sense, I'm not entirely surprised at Mark Loney's problems, which seem to me an inevitable consequence of the artistic temperament manifest in the production of entertainments. What I do wonder about is the reaction of the more ideologically-correct among your readers about the fact that sometimes people have to adopt the role of the heavy-handed disciplinarian in order to get a job done. Presumably one should feel that regarding a job as something serious enough to actually complete it properly is somehow bourgeois and stultifying of the human spirit.

Richard Brandt  
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Much in this issue is about "professionals" in the film trade. Mark's piece did recall some of my days in the screen trade - television screen, that is. News, in particular. One camera operator refused to speak to me again

after I dared observe how she had shot an entire interview out of focus. I hear business is as usual back at my old place of employment. I ran into one of the engineers the other night, who described (still in a state of explosive rage) how the prima donna sportscaster had requested the station's satellite dish be turned to pick up a sports event. As usual, the signal was patched into the sports department's editing deck. Then, Mr Sportscaster sauntered in at a quarter of six (fifteen minutes to airtime - having one of his patented "late lunches" before coming in, I see,) and was outraged because the engineers pointed the dish, fed the signal into his office, but then didn't leave the control room and go to his office to punch the "tape" button when the event started. Seeing as how he wasn't where he should have been, as they were...

Perry on Mothers. Ah yes. I did eventually knuckle under to my mother's assertion that USC or UCLA were not fit choices for me to attend Film School, because they were too faraway from "home" - eg Mom. My kid sister did eventually get to grad school in defiance of Mom's edict that Harvard was "too cold in the winter." It occurs to me now that a lot of the advice I had as a young man on how to plan my life and career may have been seriously flawed...

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I have always dealt with my mother by the "Yes, Mother" method: I say "Yes, Mother" to anything she suggests of the vaguely worthwhile nature and then proceed to do exactly what I was doing in the hope that whatever scheme it is will come to nothing. Usually, she will give up before I.

Michelle Hallett  
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The stuff about editing and film-making was interesting, considering the fact that I have more than a passing interest in the trade. When I first started my degree at the NSW Institute of Technology I had planned to major



in film production. Having been stunned by the cinematography in Apocalypse Now and We of the Never-Never I thought I might like to do some of the same. Hah! Full of confidence I walked into my first film production class. They showed me a film of how Eisenstein produced his effects in the St. Petersburg steps scene of Battleship Potemkin, then they showed me that bit where they cut a human eye with a razor, from Bunuel's Le Chien Andalou. Nope, I'll never be able to do that, thought I. Then they sent me out with nine minutes of film and a Super 8 camera. "Shoot," said they. I thought to ask where do I insert the bullets but restrained myself at the last instant. By the time filming was over I was rather glad there were no bullets. Then I had to edit my euphemistically named "film." At this point I decided to throw away everything I cut out, so I couldn't regret it later. I saved the last two minutes largely because I had to present something. Then I had to add sound. This was an unmitigated disaster, especially when I accidentally added the sound of a winding and cuckooing clock to the image of my pregnant sister and couldn't get it off. She keeps asking me to let her see the film. I also wiped half the dialogue by mistake but we found a sound effects record with a jackhammer on it and my favourite friends tell me they think it improved the flavour. I didn't attend the final screening but they tell me everyone who did laughed hysterically. "At me or the film?" I asked but my friends were too busy laughing to answer. I transferred to a writing major instead and as you can see from the intriguing and exciting story above, I'm much better at that. So you can see why I admire all you people who get into film and actually stick at it, even with chinagraph pencils rolling on the floor one time in a million and all.

Finally we come to Taral's story about haunted playgrounds. I didn't know you could precipitate an earthquake by having a leak on a micro-fault. I'll be careful next time. I'm also wondering if Taral's friend Paul would come by and help me with a rather knotty problem. I've just started doing some work for a club and they've told me the auditorium is haunted by a little old man in a three piece suit named Herbie. This is the absolute and utter truth, there is no tongue in cheek about it. At least they tell me it's the truth - my problem is that Herbie doesn't seem to like me. He's supposed to rush up and greet you as you enter the auditorium but he doesn't seem to want to do that with me. I really feel bad about it as I'm eager to meet my first ghost. I thought that as Paul, unlike Taral, has been a favourite with ghosts perhaps Herbie will talk to him. You know it's the ultimate in putdowns being ignored by a ghost.

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The item in Sikander which grabbed me most was Taral's article on Bad Places. Just as there are some places which are absolutely and unshakeably Good Places for me, so there are Bad Places too, and also a third category of Odd Places. The old trilogy of Heaven, Hell

and Fair Elfland is a neat way of distinguishing the three. My own Bad Places very often have peculiar acoustics. Thus a well-known occult bookshop in London makes me feel sick and shaky every time I visit. I



don't think this is anything to do with bad (psychic) vibrations as the proprietors have a very good reputation - but the shop is ravenous, and every time a bus rumbles along the street outside, the whole place physically vibrates (and, I think, produces nasty disturbing subsonics.) But I can't explain just what is so nasty about (say) Glencoe (curiously enough, it's not the official site of the Glencoe massacre that affects me,) or Hexham Abbey. Equally well, I can't explain why the small neo-Romanesque Catholic church in Dolgellau, where I used to live, was undoubtedly a Good Place. But the ones that really get to me are the Odd Places, particularly those far from human habitation.

It's easy enough to rationalise this sort of psychic topography as subconscious sensitivity to physical details of acoustics, proportion, temperature, smell, etc. Or in Jungian terms as the projection of archetypal force from within the individual onto the environment; probably the Shadow for Bad Places (but what for the other two?) I wonder how this links up with the well-known Pathetic Fallacy (that emotion and Nature reflect and augment each other?)

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Your comments about what a mish-mash Lucas made of Da Force and comparing it with The Karate Kid, a job done right, reminds me of a remark I made years ago in the NFFFSW Round Robin. I remarked that the Force in the SW

universe felt like what would have happened if Lucas had gone to Japan, got interested in Zine and the various martial arts, rushed home to tell all us Yanks all about it, but not before filtering the entire experience through a "Bible thumper's" mindset - dividing up the Force into Dark vs. Light, Good and Bad, instead of treating this energy like the impartial instrument that it is.

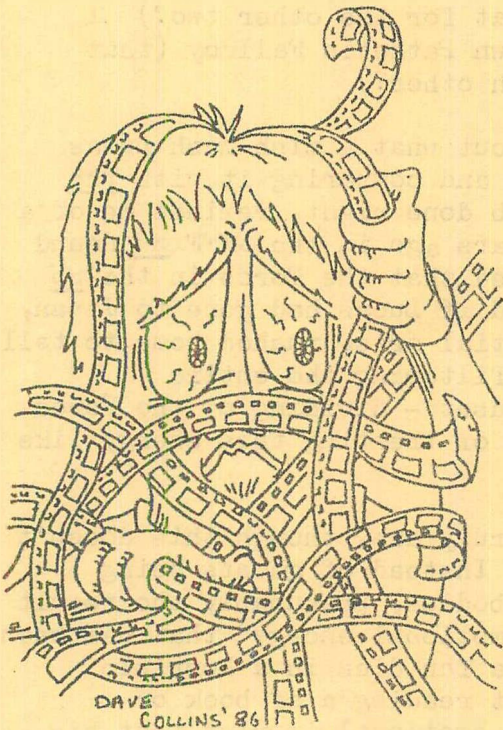
I have my own feelings about what ghosts truly are, though this doesn't stop me from writing Ghostbusters fanfic. Instead of ghosts being spirits who have been divorced from their bodies, presumably the result of death, ghosts are actually a form of "emotional energy" that has been left behind. To give an example, suppose a fan dies in a horrible manner, forced to go an entire week without reading a sf book or fanzine. First off, there is the negative emotional imprint that his spirit left behind after dying in so messy a manner. Secondly, rumors spread that X place where fan Y died is a bad, scary place. Each time strangers dare themselves to visit such a place, in the proper mood of trepidation, those persons leave a deposit of fear/negative emotion behind. I suppose this sounds crazy, but on a similar note let me point this out: Think of all the various shrines in the world. It's been said that if you study the histories of these "religious locations" what makes such a place special in the one religion, say Islam, was also special to the Christians who dwelt there before, and the Jews before that, and so on. The "spiritual uniqueness" of a geographical place remains the same, even as the stories as to why it is Important evolve down through the ages. So what does this have to do with ghosts? The emotional atmosphere of Awe and Mystery is the constant, just like the fear and uneasiness of a place that is reputed to be haunted.



I ALSO HEARD FROM: Walt Willis; Brian Earl Brown; John Alderson; Jeanne Mealy "Great lines like 'a deep and firm commitment to the ideals of indolence' deserve to be remembered."; Ian Covell; Pam Boal "Now, now, Perry, surely you know that 'Mother Knows Best'"; Diane Fox; Geo Bonder; Mike Glicksohn; and Dave Collins who also liked Harry Bell's cover and thought "Those beautiful big cow eyes make you feel sorry for the poor bugger. I'm sure Perry Como would enjoy that cover."

"Cy Chauvin... promises to write a trip report if he goes to Australia. He promises to invent one if he doesn't."

- from Cy Chauvin's DUFF platform, 1979.



MY LIFE AS A MOVIE-GOER.....

.....perry middlemiss

While I don't read very many of them, I quite like film biographies. I like the inside dope they provide about films I've loved for years. And I like the anecdotes that the best biographical and autobiographical writers can tell so well. On the other hand, I don't particularly like inane gossip very much; unless it's done in truly tacky style such as that employed in the Hollywood Babylon books. But the one thing about these biographies that really gives me the gripes are the authors who start their memoirs with a line like "I have been fascinated with the cinema since my father/mother took me to a screening of *Gone With the Wind*

when I was only four." How bloody pretentious can you get? What I want to know is, how the hell can the author remember back that far? I sure can't, and I'm looking back quite a few years less than the generally geriatric authors of such pronouncements.

The first film I have any distinctly separate memories of seeing was Cool Hand Luke, which I saw with the rest of my family in a Port Pirie Drive-In in 1967 when I was about eleven. The circumstances behind this viewing did not augur well for the future: we had actually gone to the Drive-In (some 28 miles from where we were living at the time) in order to see the latest James Bond film, but became somewhat bamboozled by the twin screens - a major innovation in those days. In any event the auguries didn't turn out as expected and while I don't remember being



"fascinated" by the film, nor understanding it, I do remember enjoying it as much as was possible at eleven and still consider it one of my favourites.

Over the next five years Drive-Ins took up a quite respectable proportion of my movie-going theatre locations. That is quite understandable when you consider that my family was living in the country while I was going to high school in the city, boarding with a friend of a friend of the family. After spending three or four weeks in a large city, visiting a small country town with about 300 residents can be something of a let-down, entertainment-wise. So it was that Saturday nights at the Drive-In at Gladstone became a rather regular event for my brother and me. First with the rest of the family and later on our own or with friends when we were old enough to drive. It got to the stage, in the early to mid-seventies, that it made absolutely no difference what films were showing - Disney kids' films, boringly soppy love stories - it didn't matter. You always got your money's worth with a double bill. At about 6:30 in the evening we would have showered, changed, eaten and been on our way with a half-dozen or so bottles of beer.

Huge volumes could be written about the goings-on in Drive-Ins. A person can learn a helluva lot about life there. And I don't mean anything to do with first sexual encounters either. I for one picked up quite a lot within the confines of that high chicken-wire fence with the undulating ground and dodgy sound system. For example, I learnt how to push start a car (you sit in it and let all the others push,) how to drink in a relatively steady manner so as to maximise the amount of beer available to the length of the film. And believe it or not you could also learn about politics, both social and governmental - I was told about Gough Whitlam's historic Federal election win in 1972 while watching some long forgotten film, and the politics of dancing around the urinals at the interval were a complete world unto themselves. I guess it would be safe to say that where city kids had shopping malls and pinball parlours, country kids had the Drive-Ins; there just wasn't anything else. The trouble was, outside of Friday and Saturday nights, the Drive-In was just a waste of space. Bare, desolate and fit for nothing.

So I was rather lucky with my accommodation in Adelaide; just down the street from one of the great old suburban cinemas which used to cater for all the kids in the area by showing really cheap double bills on Saturday afternoons. Forty cents in the late sixties was enough to get you two films, a large bottle of disgustingly sweet soft drink and the chance to win a chocolate bar or two. A thirteen-year-old and his pimples could do nothing but be in seventh heaven.

I hardly remember any of the films I went to see at the Vogue Cinema during those years. I suppose pictures like You Only Live Twice and Mary Poppins came along and were duly visited but none of them strikes a chord from that time. All I remember was that I really enjoyed sitting in the dark with a hundred or so kids, making a lot of noise and not



being told off for it, and, most of all, being fascinated by all the action up on the "ginormous" screen.

In the first years of the seventies I was entering my last couple of years at high school when the Federal Minister for Immigration Don Chipp, in his infinite wisdom, decided that the "naughty" films that had previously only been shown at film festivals should be made available to the general public (ie me) and so introduced the 'R' or restricted category for people over 18, for films of a violent or sexual nature. This opened up a whole new world for me and my friends. At about the same time the general drinking age was lowered to 18, so it was quite possible to get a skinful down the pub and then wander off to the flicks for a risqué or blood-curdling feature. Double the risk, double the fun. In spite of all the protestations from police and theatre-owners drinking in pubs or seeing R-rated movies was quite easy. You only had to look bored, buy everything with a ten-dollar note and nobody bothered you. I was only ever asked my age once and that was after I turned 18 - a great disappointment.

High school ended and university started. A natural progression I suppose because it was generally expected of me, and because I actually couldn't think of anything else to do. Just about everything in my life was being turned upside down and roughly shaken at that time. I went from being spoon-fed at a high school that was more interested in results than education, to being thrown in at the deep-end at university; from a cloistered existence boarding with a kindly but narrow-minded landlady 55 years my senior, to university college style accommodation with a lot of people my own age; basically from being looked after and ordered around almost every hour of the day to a life of what seemed like unrealised freedom. As with a lot of people around me, old friends were lost and new friends found, and I came to experience the highs and lows of sex and drugs and rock'n'roll. I wouldn't go so far as to say that my film appreciation faculties diminished at this time, they just stagnated. I was still going to films (very rarely to the Drive-In now, more general university and larger cinema screenings) but merely to pass the time pleasantly rather than for any inherent interest in the medium.

Oddly enough, about the time my interest in film started to gain some sort of momentum I encountered fandom. Looking back on these two events from 1975, I have some difficulty separating the two. Whether one would have happened without the other I have no way of knowing but I suspect they fed on each other and made both more enjoyable.

Maybe as a result of my involvement with the members of the Adelaide University Science Fiction Association or maybe just as a result of a natural progression, my film-viewing began to go through some rather single-minded and diverse phases in the middle seventies. The first of these concerned the Vampire cinema; everything from the original Bela Lugosi films to the Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee Hammer cycle. In retrospect there probably wasn't much of lasting value in these films beyond a basic voyeuristic entertainment interest but in the wider



scheme of things they had their place. In quick succession after that came obsessions with the films of certain directors: Robert Altman, Stanley Kubrick, Akira Kurasawa, Lina Wertmuller and Alfred Hitchcock; in no particular order. Along the way a continuing interest in science fiction and private-eye genre films kept at bay any cinematic blank periods during the latter part of the seventies.

So why film and not something else? Well, I don't want to give you the impression that all I ever did was go to the cinema for my entertainment, I just want to let you know that films filled up a great part of my leisure time during this period. I am essentially a visual person - getting most of my information via visual input than by auditory or kinesthetic means. Film gave me everything I wanted; intellectually rivetting visuals on a big screen which - if you tried hard enough - seemed to swallow the whole world, an all-encompassing sound system and, if you were lucky enough, good plots, characterisations and themes to go along with it. It was a package unrivalled by any other form of entertainment which demanded my attention, and got it.

The major difficulty with all these films was that they had a tendency to make me want to read about them and, consequently, to see more. There was a problem with this, however. During my last few years in Adelaide I was, for long periods, out of regular contact with a television set. In addition, most of the old suburban cinemas were being sold and put to other uses - my beloved Vogue became a Christian Revivalist Centre, and many others were turned into mini-supermarkets by Tom-the-Cheap chain of stores. This markedly reduced the number of picture theatres and hence the number of films I wanted to see. The drop in cinema attendances caused by the introduction of colour television didn't help either - the theatre owners felt they had to compete with the new medium and kept to the tried and true course of showing new colour release features rather than risk the attendances at an old black-and-white, whatever the quality. It looked like being a long hard road as a film fan in Adelaide.

It began to look even worse when I moved to Canberra at the end of 1981. I rapidly came to the conclusion that the place was a cultural desert. Without the presence of the Australian National University Film Group and Electric Shadows (a repertory cinema) I would have been in right trouble. The one commercial television station in the city was just that, commercial; more interested in showing the absolute worst of Australian soap-operas than in appealing to their generally well-educated audience.

During the next couple of years the number of times I visited a cinema per month dropped drastically. There didn't seem to ever be anything on I wanted to see. A friend of mine in Canberra with a similar addition used to satisfy his cravings by spending two weeks each year in Sydney attending their Film Festival. I always thought that to be a rather radical approach to the problem given that one would have to go cold turkey for 50 weeks a year and then explode in an orgy of film for two



weeks almost non-stop. A bit much.

At last, in 1983, the video revolution finally took off. I read somewhere that Canberra had the highest percentages of homes with video recorders of any cities in Australia - and Australia one of the highest of any country in the world - which was hardly surprising. The film prospects seemed pretty good at that time. I should have guessed it wouldn't last. Whichever video store I went to the films on offer were all the same: teenage sexual wish-fulfilment fantasies, psychotic fascist blood-baths, excerable down-home philosophical platitudes or beautifully filmed plotless melodramas. Within about twelve months I'd seen all the videos I wanted to. Overall it wasn't a great experience. Most of the films made specifically to utilise the size of the big screen just couldn't be translated effectively to video. It was like the old saying about Chinese food; it fills the gap but you're hungry again an hour later.

In 1985 I moved from Canberra to Melbourne for work-related reasons, though more out of a sense of relief than anything else. The culture shock was, to say the least, overwhelming. Putting aside the extra radio and television stations, the multitude of live bands in pubs and the actual existence of an active and varied live-theatre scene, there appeared to be cinemas everywhere. It was obvious from driving around the suburban streets that some of the old ones had been converted to other uses, although not to the extent experienced in Adelaide, which was a mixed blessing. Added to that there was, almost unbelievably, a two-hour radio program on 3RRR each Saturday devoted entirely to film. It has taken a little while to become adjusted to this surfeit of riches: the Australian Film Institute with its cinema discounts and award screenings, the Valhalla, the Liberty, Film Buff's Forecast and the Astor, to name just a few. The conclusion is obvious, I should have moved here years ago.

My fascination with the film medium has carried on for about twenty years now - close to two-thirds of my life. I am quite willing to concede that a number of films I have seen can be considered as nothing more than chewing-gum for the mind. I couldn't care less.

There is a story I remember, from some long gone film, of a character telling of her friend Beryl's death while watching The Sound of Music. It wasn't that the film was bad, she explained, it was just that the theatre was running continuous sessions and poor Beryl's bladder burst. I think that just about says it all.

- Perry Middlemiss

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Sikander Music Review Column: Boy, what did musicians do in the days when there weren't any songs of which to do cover versions?

- Wendy Hirsh

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THE MUSE, RUDE MECHANICALS AND I.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....mark loney

How do you review a radio play. I wondered?

"Remember," said Irwin, "It's unlikely that many people would have heard the ABC Radio production of John Baxter's Little Wing, you'll have to tell them a bit about it."

So I listened to Little Wing a few times. The first time around I thought of the dominance of sight in our culture. I was sitting comfortably in the lounge room but I couldn't keep my attention on Little Wing. If it had been a book or a tv programme there wouldn't have been a problem, the eyes would have been occupied. But they were idle, so I fidgeted and missed pieces of dialogue because I kept thinking of other things.

Despite this I heard enough to realise that I had a low opinion of whoever engineered the sound. It was, well, skiffy. Lots of echo, reverb and layover to convince the credulous that, yes, this was the future and, wait for it, one of the two main characters is an Artificial Intelligence. A talking one, of course. This AI is a heuristic something or other and probably an escapee from an Arthur C. Clarke novel. It certainly isn't from the film; Stanley Kubrick would never have let anything sounding like that be installed on Discovery.

The second time I listened to Little Wing I realised that I had a low opinion of the whole show. It reeks of the strong glue necessary to hold a pastiche together and is a production that doffs its hat in so many different directions that it never actually wears it. The setting, for example, is Tokyo - the cyberpunk electronic world of the future so conveniently sketched out for us by William Gibson. The protagonists are Tanzin MacKay, otherwise known as Genevieve Jackson, and the AI, which we may as well call HAL. HAL is the best sound facility in the cyberpunk world and an autonomous business entity to boot. This begs the question of why he sounds so much like an escapee from a bad 1980s ABC Radio play, but no matter. Tanzin MacKay is a nurse. Later on we find out that she is really Genevieve Jackson and that Genevieve was born in Montreal, educated at McGill and, most importantly, is a frustrated jazz musician.

That frustration is the motivation upon which the whole plot creaks. Genevieve didn't want to do post graduate work in cybernetics, she wanted to blow that horn and hear the crowd roar. So she wandered around posing as a nurse and collecting the 'birkenhairs' (sic) of the Dave Daniels Trio. 'Birkenhairs' are recordings of personality, scrapings of the mind, and, unfortunately for the Dave Daniels Trio, taken at the time of death; Tanzin has this lethal bedside manner. The plan is to implant these 'birkenhairs' in her mind and through them achieve her musical dreams.



In the best of fictional traditions things go wrong and the result of the implants is not quite what Tanzin seemed to be expecting (though you'd think that all that post graduate work would have given her a clue.) Unfortunately for the best of fictional traditions, Little Wing trips over its own premises and ends up as feathers all over the floor.

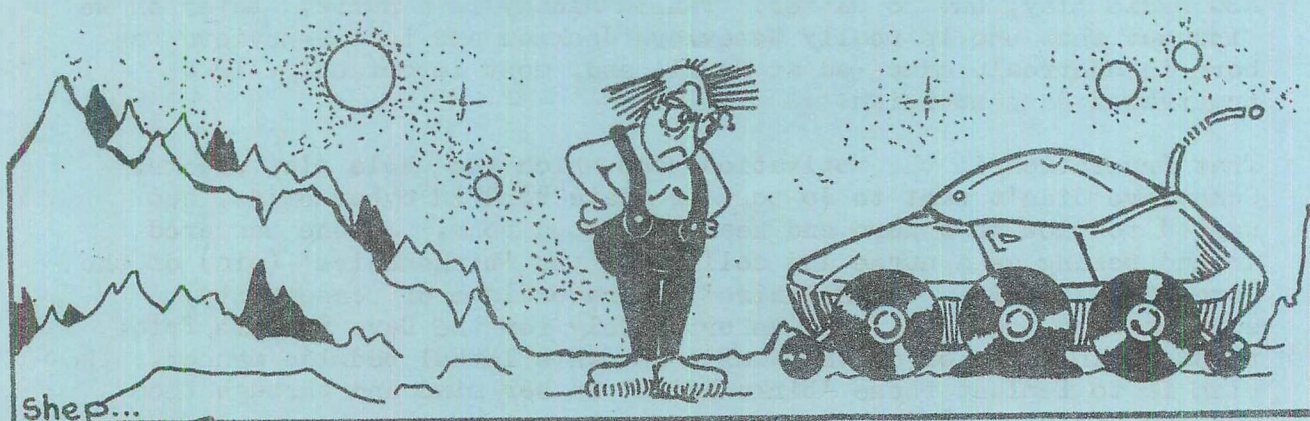
"Not out of the head," Dave Daniels rasps to Tanzin in his last moments, "Out of the groin."

Tanzin's problem is obviously too much ratiocination and not enough natural rhythm. But this doesn't bear any close scrutiny in the text. Dave Daniels makes some fairly direct links between musical and sexual ability. Tanzin certainly has the latter; she gains the attention of a terminal Dave Daniels with a head job that that jaded doyen of the rock world thought was pretty good. Max Rayne's last moments were also enlivened by her sexual antics. So where does that leave us? Tanzin had just practised at sex a lot but deep down wasn't any better at it than music? That you had to have the right kind of sexual ability? Or maybe that you just have to be a man? (Tanzin is the only female voice in this version of the 21st century.)

But delving into the sources of creative ability is fairly dubious stuff, so perhaps its best to conclude with a few more specific criticisms. Little Wing has the problem of a lot of fiction about fiction - what it offers as the work of its putative genius is, of course, just the work of a far more ordinary mortal. The tracks proffered to us as the product of the youngest and the brightest bring words like "boring old fart" to mind instead. We could also query the portrayal of those youngest and brightest as single minded alcoholics - but we've already noted that Little Wing doesn't break any new ground in its portrayals. Cliches are much easier.

So what should you do if Little Wing turns up on your radio station? I'd suggest turning on the television, or if that's too much trouble - go for a walk.

- Mark Loney





.....THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM MELBOURNE.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....a duff report by cy chauvin.....

As I stepped off the plane I was greeted by a hail of fanzine confetti, old issues of The Mentor, ASFR and The New Forerunner cut up and dropped out of plastic garbage bags. These Australians are so nice! I thought then, before, of course, understanding the true nature and extent of their depravity.

Melbourne was such an attractive city in 1973, with its trams and trees and whitewashed buildings, and after the cold grey skies of winter in Detroit, the clear warm air seemed miraculous. I was met by the infamous Leigh Edmonds, who was kind enough to put me up in his house before the convention. Leigh was very nice, even if he kept me up all night playing operas and acting them out in a pair of old tap-shoes. I asked for a typical American meal of turkey, corn on the cob and pumpkin pie, and instead ate what you Australians call a "meat pie," and what we Detroiters eat when we go to Hudson's restaurant at Northland Shopping Center (a Diane Drutowski favorite.) It's also available for 25¢ in the frozen food department at most supermarkets.

In the morning we went to Merv Binn's Space Age Books, where Lee Harding signed an issue of Vision of Tomorrow for me (it contained his disaster novelette set in Australia, one of my favorites.) Many famous Australian fans were there: the urbane John Bangsund, the crusty old George Turner, the witty David Grigg, the red-bearded Eric Lindsay, the chauvinistic John Alderson, the brilliant critic John Foyster. But no Bruce Gillespie. I had wanted to meet Bruce Gillespie since I subscribed to SF Commentary and wrote him a few letters, and he even wrote a few back, greatly increasing the size of my Australian stamp collection. I asked George Turner, one of SFC's contributors, where Bruce might be. He mumbled back, as if by rote, "Well, he's indisposed at the moment...he doesn't really care to come to conventions."

I thought this was odd (as this was a bookstore,) but then I was known for my invisibility as well, so I could sympathize with what I thought were Bruce's feelings of shyness. Little did I know that he was Australia's answer to Lucy Huntzinger.

The next day I went grocery shopping with Eric Lindsay, and when we were in the pet food section watched him load up on Tender Chicken and Tuna Kidney Delight. This wouldn't be unusual except that Eric (in a moment of rare personal revelation) confessed that he had no cats. "Eric, what's all this cat food for?" I asked.

"Oh, the tins are for Bruce," he said absent-mindedly. This is terrible, I thought, Bruce is so poor that he has to eat canned cat food, the way some elderly were reported to do by newspapers in order to supplement their meager meat budgets.



"Gosh," I said to Eric, "I suppose I ought to renew my subscription to SFC. He really needs the money." I felt guilty.

"Oh, no," said Eric, "This is for Bruce's cats." He laughed when I told him my reasoning about Bruce's poverty, and pulled his beard. "You know he twisted his arm climbing up after a cat that was on his neighbor's roof at midnight, that's why he can't buy the food himself. That's why the latest issue of SFC is delayed."

"What a foolish thing to do," I said; what a great excuse for not publishing on time, I thought. Everyone in fandom will forgive you because everyone in fandom loves cats. THE WORLDCON HAS BEEN DELAYED THIS YEAR, the headline in Locus read, BECAUSE THE CHAIRMAN STRAINED HIS DECISION-MAKING ABILITY HELPING HIS CAT DECIDE WHETHER SHE WANTED TO GO OUTSIDE THE HOUSE OR STAY IN. "\*Sigh\*," fandom was quoted as saying, "We understand. We love kitties." Now I understood why Bruce gave all those favorite reviews to Cordwainer Smith's books. What a cat-lover. What a wimp. (If anyone ever found out about the cat stuffed and mounted in my basement like a trophy, I'd be through.)

Later that day, on our way to a party, we drove by an ancient brick flat, all covered with soot and ivy, and Eric took the bag of cat food and shoved it down what looked to me like the coal shoot. "Does Bruce live in the basement? Maybe that's why his zines are always so gloomy. Why don't we go in?" I asked.

"Oh, no, we couldn't," Eric wheedled, sounding rather like I imagine Frodo would when telling someone not to use the ring, "He'd be busy feeding the cats and we'd be late for the party. Everyone's there to see you." Well, egoboo wins every time.

The party that night was marvelous. I couldn't understand how everyone could get along so well. There were no feuds, not even loud arguments. No big Melbourne/Sydney rivalry. George Turner would write long elaborate essays and John Foyster would write the exact opposite, but everyone was a good fellow about it. No one thought the Perth fans were weird with their kangaroo caps and hand-held propellers. No one was even mildly irritated with Leigh and his tap-shoes, tap-tap-tapping away, or even with Paul J. Stevens, who tended to wait in the dark corners of the room, his dark cape softly rustling, his eyes glowing. Even I didn't mind it. Was it the alcohol? Does all your blood really rush to your head in Australia, because the world is upside-down? I was no longer sure.

But what had really happened to Bruce Gillespie, the fan Ted White had called "the bon-vivante" of Australian fandom, the one able to publish 1500 pages in a year while wrapped in a cast, the man everyone said wrote his best while depressed and reviewed all those depressed novels (in both senses of the term,) and whose critics said he hated sf? I decided to track down this Mystery Man of Australian Fandom.

The first problem was to get out of the hotel room I had checked into for



the big con that weekend before someone noticed. (Thinking back, I realized that I had never been left alone - other than to sleep, \*sigh\* - the whole time I had been in Australia. Indeed, these Aussies were very sly, beneath their bush hats.) I decided I needed a disguise. So I lured the maid in with the classic Diane Drutowski line, "Hi. Want to come in and see my, \*ahem\*, tacky postcard collection?" After she fainted - she was a Portugese Catholic, and I showed her the Ultimate Tacky Postcard, a 3-D "Winking Jesus," discovered by Teresa Nielsen Hayden - I took off her clothes, changed into them, and locked her in the bathroom. Outside, I hailed a cab and took it to the main post office.

While Eric had driven me past the dirty old flat Gillespie lived in, I couldn't remember the address or how to get there. So I decided to go to GPO Box 5195AA and wait for its owner to come and claim his daily mail. If David Gerrold could use the same ploy to track down James Tiptree Jr, so could I. (This thought gave me a shiver. Tiptree was really Alice Sheldon. Perhaps it wasn't Bruce Gillespie but Bernie Gillespie or Judith Hanna or...?)

I hid in the janitor's closet, the door to which was just next to GPO Box 5195AA. I heard two people approach the box. "Yes, that Chauvin character has been asking a lot of questions. We should never have agreed to DUFF! The strain is too great!"

"But we need the prestige and fan contact," said the other. "What's the point of Gillespie otherwise? He could just as well be dead."

Realizing that things were getting rough, I burst through the door and pulled out my light saber! "Tell me what you've done with Gillespie!" Since the pair hadn't seen Star Wars yet (it hadn't been released in Australia) they just laughed at me in my maid's outfit. "Great for the Masquerade and Fancy Dress, Cy. The woman in the James White Hospital Ship stories, eh?"

It was hopeless so I got really drunk at the convention instead. After several bouts with red Australian wine and learning that fine Australian art of chundering, I found myself outside the hotel talking to a cat. It was wet and dreary. "Pretty kitty, fandom needs you," I said, in the tone of voice one only uses when talking to babies and cats. Then it occurred to me that 90% of the cats in central Melbourne must have been owned by BRG at one time or another. Sure enough, SFC was stamped on the cat's collar. This cat had already been converted, and was already as much a fan as a cat could ever hope to be, ie a fan bought her food.

So I tracked the fannish feline to the old coal shoot that Eric dumped cat food cans down, and watched as she climbed in. Was there really no other way in? Still drunk, it seemed as though this might be the easiest way, even if it seemed as though I might grease the slide down in my own vomit. No, sliding down head first had not been wise.

I pulled myself to my feet, nearly slipping on a couple of empty cans of



cat food. The dark and musty room was illuminated by a single naked bulb hanging over a typewriter and a desk. Cats were circling the room, looking desperately for a lap to sit in, even mine. In the corner was a swirling mass of cats, rather like our universe was supposed to be in the beginning, only cats rather than mere matter, and meowing quite loudly. Something stirred on its bottom (big bang, not steady-state?) A propellor prop thrust through the squirming cats, then the striped beanie to which it was attached, then a head strapped to this head-gear - child-like. I suddenly felt humiliated and embarrassed by fandom, for the first time, and as yet I had no inkling of what had happened here.

Bruce looked somewhat like his photographs, but all the intelligence seemed drained from his face. He lurched and fought his way free from the cats, and then sat hunched over at his typewriter. He sat there obviously suffering, working up the depression in order to start doing a fanzine or editorial. He picked up a really awful looking sf novel, and recited the back cover quote: "'This book deserves to be as famous as the Bible.' - Harlan Ellison." The wood particles in the pulp paper the novel was printed on were large enough to give one splinters, and Bruce's palms were already bleeding profusely. Well, maybe it was better than the Bible. Would Bruce's beanie have thorns or velcro on the inside?

"Hello," I said from a dark corner, "Aren't you Bruce Gillespie, editor of that excellent fanzine SF Commentary?" One would think I was making an inquiry at a fannish cocktail party.

"Who are you?" asked Bruce suspiciously, "Another agent of my distress? What further agonies must I undergo to relieve the angst of Australian fandom?" And he swept his hand toward the far wall, on which hung strange and sinister devices, whether instruments of torture or ancient mimeograph attachments I could not tell, although surely items of this nature were no longer used in American fandom except by Ted White. A pinkish ichor slowly dripped from a dark metal tube at the end.

"I'm no agent of distress, I'm an American," I said, then suddenly realized that this confession might have been a mistake. "I'm the DUFF winner this year," I added, hoping to mollify it.

"I'm not sure I believe you," he replied. "This might be a test of my devotion by Foyster and the others. And then if I fail," he shuddered visibly, "it's the shading plate for me!"

Still dense, I said, "I don't understand how I could be some sort of test for Foyster or anyone else, or why you should think me an agent of despair. I know you write and publish some of your best when you say you are depressed, but perhaps then I am an Agent of Inspiration." For an instant I felt like Jophan, preaching to those who fell by the wayside on the quest for the enchanted duplicator.

"I'm a martyr, a miserable martyr meant to keep the peace in Australian fandom. A balancing of yin and yang." It all became as clear as ditto



fluid now. I could understand its appeal, since the whole history of American fandom could properly be written as a series of feuds, TAFF wars, boondoggles, schisms and the like. Not 'numbered' fandoms; numbered feuds! It was sad to reflect and realize what topics had so often dominated the pages of American fanzines, and here Aussie fandom had found a solution (although beastly.) Yes, a tip of the hat, and a twirl of the propellor to them.

Bruce appeared to be still aggravated, so I asked him how it had all been arranged.

"Well, it wouldn't have been possible at all without the magic cap," said Bruce, touching the beanie of many hues on his head.

"The cap?" I asked, puzzled.

"Yes, it was given to me by the Australian equivalent of St. Pantony, when I still thought fandom was only about science fiction. No one told me anything about magic mimeographs, mushrooms or Herbangilism! So I accepted what I thought was an honor; only now the neos know its doom, and the cap has to be freely taken for me to be freed from the charm of Post-Fanzine Depression."

All the blood does really rush to your head down here in Australia, I thought. At first the idea seems to have some socio-psychological sense, but a magic cap? St Pantony? Charms? Let's get scientific, like building a space elevator from old bheer cans! Still, I held my tongue and said instead, "But you don't need to give it to someone in Australia, you can mail it to a neofan in the United States. They'll gafiate, and then we'll be rid of it forever." And then I gave Bruce the address of a neofan who had just mailed me a copy of his first fanzine before I left home. Of course, the idea of a magic cap ... conferring fannish martyrdom on its wearer was pure bosh (Sorry, Bob,) but for Bruce's psychological health, it was important for him to get rid of it in a way consistent with his beliefs. (I've studied anthropology, y'know?) Any plausible remedy could have worked. I might have suggested boiling it in corflu, but we would have died from the fumes.

We packed the magic beanie up (which was very well made; hand embroidered, not glued) and sent it off via airmail, at Bruce's insistence. A load seemed to lift from his shoulders as the package slid into the mail chute, and he smiled for the first time. Bruce Gillespie has dimples!

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Far away in America, a neofan was opening his mailbox on a farm in Indiana. "Gosh, an airmail package from Australia. I wonder what it can be?" He tore it open, and found the wonderful magic propellor beanie inside. "Hey, Mom, look what I got in the mail," and then thought, no mothers never understand important stuff like this. I guess



ushed his beard and hair  
time in a long time, and  
ve some desperate fun.

- Cy Chauvin

stance," sings Paul  
ht that life could be  
ur brains."

ts, but I didn't know  
n - the one with the  
g to the centre of  
at chuffed smoke and  
was over the road from  
hey batted goods wagons

nes belching smoke and  
roaring at me to stay in  
workhouses of the  
region called  
it a long line of goods  
to pass our house.

I grew up. Trains were  
neys. They played  
ad and beyond a slight  
front of our house I  
I might even have my own

gical or terrifying or  
or not you lived it;  
dream. For years I had  
that my father opened the  
almost never opened to  
pose an entire model  
a circle on the carpet.  
e beside it. My father  
let the little green  
the rails and clattered  
to the engine. This  
ff demurely around the



This went on for some time. It seemed that the set had two engines, a little green one and a black one, both driven by clockwork, and lots of carriages. We tried out all the possibilities. Various combinations of carriages circled the track. I wound up the engines until the clockwork broke on one of them.

That was that. I wasn't old enough for the train set yet. I was bundled off to bed, and in the morning there was no sign of the miraculous layout. Nor did it show itself again for about four years, which is so long a time in a child's life that I really thought I had dreamed the whole episode.

It's still not clear to me how parents decide that a child is "old enough" for something. In their endless attempt to get me to do something in life beside reading books, Mum and Dad revealed one day during the particularly long and hot school holidays at the end of 1956 that the model train set really existed. It had been my father's when he was a boy. Dad showed me the Hornby catalogue for the year, sometime in the late 1920s, when he had started the collection. The catalogue was more exciting than the set of model trains. All the engines and carriages shown were based on famous English trains of the early twentieth century, and each of them bore mysterious initials, such as LNER, LMS and GW. My father explained that these letters showed which English railway company each belonged to. The idea of private ownership of railway lines was new to me, and somehow indecent. No matter. English railway engines and carriages, as shown in the catalogue, looked much prettier than the humble black chuffers and red rattlers that passed our house every day.

I have always been bored by games of any sort. Once you know the rules of any game, there is no more interest in it; you give up such a useless activity and go back to reading books. So what do you do with a model railway layout? It was very exciting to get everything out of the tin trunk in which the set had been stored for thirty years. It was rather nice putting together the first circular track, and running trains around it. But watching things go around in circles was boring after the first half hour.

To beat the boredom, I stretched out the rails in straight lines. The circular rails could be used to go round corners. Off we went, and soon had a track that stretched from the kitchen, through the living room, and into the front passage. This was fun for a while. We could invent place names for destinations, and use blocks and toys as part of the layout. There was one snag: my mother wanted to use the house as well. After she had tripped over unsuspected rails and carriages a few times, she decided that maybe I could go back to reading books.

Not so, for I had glimpsed a new idea: that of 'destination.' Where could we take the railway lines so that they stretched out into the distance, like a real railway line? How could I make their destinations mysterious and variable?

One night I had a dream, one that excites me still. Somehow the



Oakleigh railway line curved over Houghton Road, came up the side of our house, made itself small, climbed up through some passage in the floor, went through the living room, out the other side, and eventually rejoined the main railway-line. (Years later I discovered that someone had written a song along similar lines: "The Railroad Goes Through the Middle of the House.") It was during the hot days of the January annual school holidays, in that long-gone era when summer began in December and ended in February. The lawn was dry, and there was no danger of sudden showers. Why not set up the whole layout on the back lawn?

The back lawn was a large oblong, with a grassed gutter down the middle. A chunk at one end of the oblong had been turned back into garden. It looked to me like a map of United States of America, with the gutter as the Mississippi River, and the chunk as the Gulf of Mexico. My obsession the previous year had been the films, comic books and stories about Davy Crockett, so by the end of Grade Four I knew everything there was to know about American history and geography. In 1954, during the visit to Australia of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, my parents had bought an atlas. It was, naturally enough, called The New Elizabethan World Atlas. One double-page spread in it showed the USA. I spread out the atlas in front of me. The double-page map was filled with possible destinations, including many that I had never heard mentioned in films or comic books or on the radio. "Natchez" - what a wonderful name. There was no name in Australia with that kind of sound. Yaco, Texas. You could journey towards a place with a name like that. Tampa, Florida: let's head for there.

There was one difficulty: the line could go to Florida, or over to St Louis. Seattle or Los Angeles were quite out of the question unless you started from there. Nope. New York was always the starting place. We needed new railway lines so that the layout, with the help of points and a bridge across the Mississippi, could cover the continent. From then on my parents and relatives were faced with expensive requests at each birthday and Christmas time: more railway lines! extra carriages! Even at the age of nine I was afflicted with the collecting disease, which merely got worse with age.

The model railway idyll lasted only three summers. The weather was too damp during the May and September holidays for us to set up the railway layout, and we didn't get many ideal days even during the summer holidays. By the beginning of the summer of 1958-9 the crunch had already come. My parents decided to move from Houghton Road, ironically because they were increasingly irritated by the noise from the Melbourne-to-Gippsland railway line across the road. We moved to Syndal on 17 February 1959, and I took the lines and engines and carriages out of their tin trunk only once again in my life. Yet, somehow, by summer 1958 - that last, regretful period of six weeks at Oakleigh - I had collected enough lines to cross the American continent, via Saint Louis, and send a branch line to Florida as well. We had extra accessories and lots of extra carriages, but never a bridge that crossed the Mississippi safely. (The carriages always fell off in the gutter, and had to be put back on the lines on the other side.) The clockwork mechanism had failed in both engines. The rails had already begun to rust.



The whole layout is still with my parents. In its tin trunk it was dragged up to Bacchus Marsh and back to East Preston, up to South Belgrave and down to Rosebud, but it's never been played with again. Maybe it's valuable - probably very valuable - to someone. Whatever happens to those model railways, they already have given their special pleasure, not because of what they are, but because of the way they attached themselves to my imagination.

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Why did I choose America as the basis of that model railway layout? Why didn't I choose Australia, which has roughly the same shape and size as the USA?

Because there's nothing in the middle of Australia except desert. Only one line, the Transcontinental, crosses the continent. In the middle of Australia there is no Des Moines, Iowa, no Grand Rapids, Michigan, no Wichita, Kansas, where a tired railway passenger can alight for a good night's rest before going on with his journey. As the man says, "Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance... The thought that life could be better/Is woven indelibly/Into our hearts/And our brains." When I was nine or ten, Australia did not seem to hold out possibilities; it seemed empty in the middle. I felt the same about Melbourne and its suburbs. You rode through Murrumbeena or Caulfield or Toorak in real and very suburban carriages; they were built merely to carry people; they left nothing to the imagination. The suburbs, your own home turf, were home, parents, relatives, houses and gardens, everyday practicalities, boredom. Could anything ever be better, except over there somewhere in New York or the middle of America?

It was only much later that I found out that Victoria's railway system was not built wholly according to boring ironbound practicalities. The people in charge of Melbourne's most important growth period, from 1870 to 1890, used the suburban rail system as a way of letting their imaginations go. Also they wanted to line their pockets. They bought undeveloped land way off the edge of the suburban perimeter and then bribed somebody in parliament to run a railway line through it. This procedure often worked. The Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn, for instance, was built around its railway station.

Victoria's rail system radiates out from Melbourne. During the 1880s country towns, no matter how small, were able to persuade politicians that one railway station could buy lots of votes. Lines spread across wide plains and previously unheard-of rivers and climbed into desolate mountain forests. Most of these lines were never profitable.

Therefore during the 1880s Victoria's rail system became a model railway set that used real engines and carriages. Its imaginative purpose, as opposed to its practical purpose, was to give Victorians the feeling that they could travel safely from anywhere in the colony to anywhere else. And this remained true until the late 1960s, when suddenly the railway system began to make huge losses and politicians began planning ways of shutting it down.



Railway trains are symbols of power, especially when carried along by steam engines. All that prancing and chuffing and speed and prevailing against relentless gravity and distance! But railways are also a symbol of domesticity. If you get on a passenger train, it carries you to the place shown on the destination board. It doesn't crash, except in the most exceptional circumstances. A land filled with railways, like the USA of my atlas, is a settled land. People can move as they like. No wonder Paul Simon feels that the sound of a train in the distance reassures you that life could be better. All you have to do is travel far enough and you reach that better life.

Something like this thought must have occurred to the people who built Melbourne. Build railways and the suburbs follow them. More importantly, suburban houses fill up the spaces between railways. Why not, then, build a railway that did not stretch out directly from the city, but instead made a great loop that would link all radiating railways?

Such a plan was made in the 1880s. It was called the Outer Circle Line, and was the most gloriously silly episode in Melbourne's long history of absurdly disastrous public projects. It would go north from near Caulfield station (now on the Oakleigh line,) cross three other lines until it arched in from the north at Clifton Hill station (very near where we live now.) It would provide jobs and guarantee the growth of suburbia. And it would, although nobody said so at the time, symbolize Melbourne's maternal quality, its desire to give total security to its citizens, enclosed as they would be by railways.

The Outer Circle Line was actually built during the 1890s, but as the last sections were opened, the first sections were about to be closed down. Graeme Davison, in his The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne (Melbourne University Press, 1979,) writes that "The new line was built to the most generous engineering standards with wide double-track cuttings and embankments and closely spaced stations." However, "in its first nine months of operation (the Outer Circle Line) attracted only 5153 passengers (most of them joy-riders?)"

The Outer Circle Line was Melbourne's great model railway line. Hour after hour, trains would trundle across deserted paddocks and past deserted stations. I see on each of these stations a lonely station master standing forlornly while waiting for the passenger-of-the-week to turn up.

The Outer Circle Line might have succeeded if it had been opened ten years earlier, in 1881 instead of 1891. 1891 was the beginning of Australia's worst depression, an event that stopped Melbourne's growth for nearly 30 years and ensured Sydney's win in the battle between the cities. Davison records that entire new suburbs, built during the boom of the 1880s, lay empty, their home-owners forced to give up their houses because nobody had the money to take over their mortgages.

Many of the paddocks beside the Outer Circle Line were filled only during the late 1950s. By that time most of the line had been



demolished. It left only odd patterns of streets through the "garden suburbs" - patterns so irregular and striking that you can still use a street map to trace the old path of the line. I'm told that there are also plenty of remnants of the line - sleepers, lines and other bits and pieces - hidden behind suburban fences or in unexplained little parks.

There will never be another Outer Circle Line, not even among those grandiose schemes that governments announce every few years. At one stage there was going to be a line from Huntingdale Station to Monash University (demolishing how many millions of dollars' worth of factories and houses?) and even four years ago of the Cain Government still talked of a line from Frankston to Dandenong. This didn't happen. Instead the government built a freeway covering the same distance.

Cars have made railways very unprofitable in Victoria, and now politicians and bureaucrats seem to spend their nights tossing and turning, trying to think up acceptable ways to kill the railway system. Most people are still as emotionally attached to the suburban railway system as I am, so the government cannot destroy the system at one go. But only 7 per cent of Melbourne's people still travel on the system. Most Melbournites live in one outer suburb and travel to work in another outer suburb. The railways may still radiate from the centre of Melbourne, but Melbournites' lives do not.

If the railways go, the Melbourne I grew up in will have gone. Maybe it has already. When I was a boy, Oakleigh was on the edge of the suburbs. Now Oakleigh feels like an inner suburb, and the sprawl stretches another 40 kilometres to the east. Only a small proportion of Melbourne's people live within walking distance of a railway station. And if we can no longer hear the sound of a train in the distance, can we still hope that life will be better?

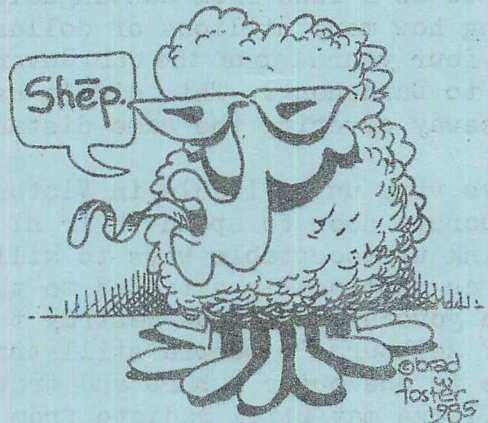
There is only one remedy. One day in the future, when Melbourne lies in ruins because it no longer has its suburban railway system, and when we've won Tattsлото and can afford to retire to a large, comfortable house set on wide lawns surrounded by hedges, I will take out a rusted tin trunk from where it has been hidden for many years. In it I will find all those railway lines, carriages, engines and accessories. They will be very rusted by then, perhaps unrecognizable. But if the wheels of the carriages and engines still turn, I will lay out the lines across the lawn.

I will not, however, return to the map of America in my old atlas. Instead I will turn to the map on page 156 of Graeme Davison's The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne. I will call the central station of my system Melbourne. Straight lines will stretch out to a station which I will name Caulfield. Circular lines will veer off to the north. With a combination of straight and circular lines I will bring the trains back to their destination at Clifton Hill, and finally into Melbourne. Hour after hour trains will travel through the long grass. No passenger will ever step on or off that train. But I will know where those carriages are and will keep them all moving.



At last I will recreate the Outer Circle Line. In this way I will create the real Melbourne - the marvellous Melbourne that never quite came into existence - on that lawn in the future.

- Bruce Gillespie



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SIKANDER FOURTEEN

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August 1987

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Carn the blues!

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