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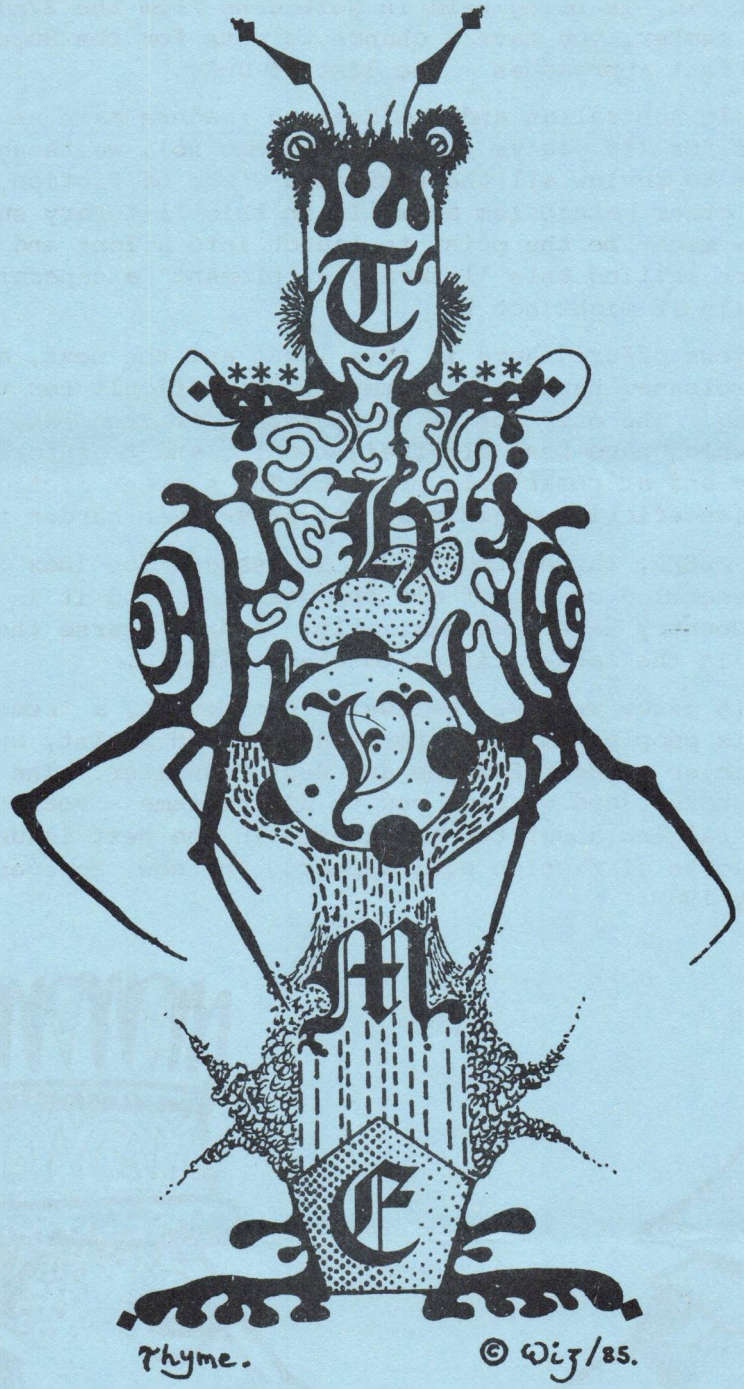


literary supplement

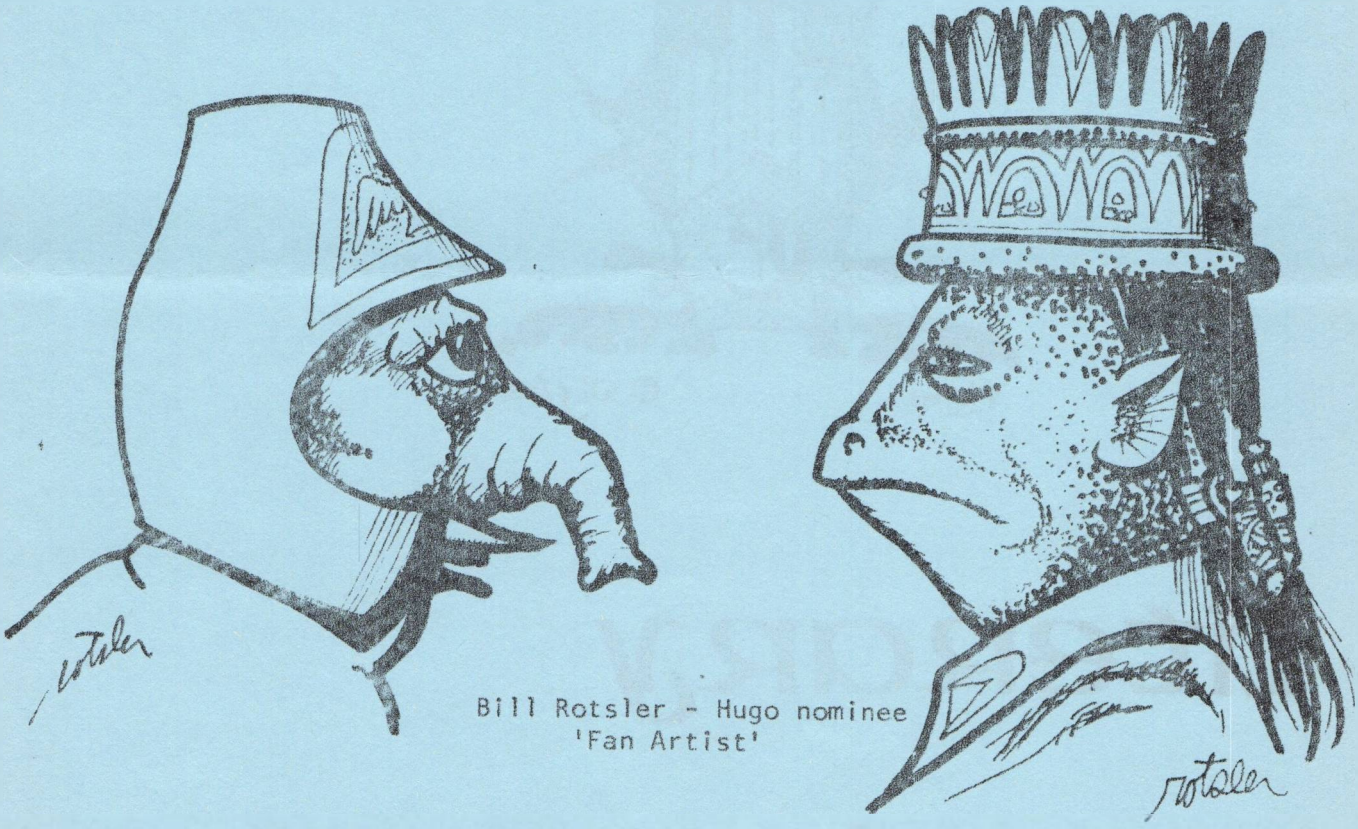
As most readers of *Thyme* will be only too well aware, this year's World SF Convention, Aussiecon Two, is being held in Melbourne from the 22nd to the 26th of August. If you're a member, you have a chance to vote for the Hugo awards; but the deadline for voting fast approaches - the 31st of July.

In order to help Australian and New Zealand readers make an informed decision on what to vote for (if you've not already done so), we thought it would be a good idea for *Thyme* to review all the nominated works of fiction, and the nominated works in some other categories as well, in this 'literary supplement' issue and the next. Now might be the point to launch into a long and embarrassed explanation of why we are calling this 'literary supplement' a separate issue from *Thyme* #45. But then again it might not be.

Apart from the reviews offered here in this issue and the next, as some of the nominees have not been released here yet, it may prove difficult for the reader to obtain copies for reading. The only copies of *Emergence* or *The Peace War* to be seen, for instance, are some which have been air-freighted in, and therefore available only in limited quantity and at remarkable prices. The shorter fiction, unless you subscribe to all the sciencefiction magazines, may prove even harder to come by.

In Melbourne, MUSFA, the Melbourne Uni SF Association (Box 106, Melbourne University 3052), has assembled copies of all the nominees, and it is possible that other clubs across the country have done similarly. And of course there are the specialty sf bookstores in the larger cities to check with....

In any case, in this issue we have reviews of the Novels, a 'reminder' example of the artwork of all six people nominated for the Best Fan Artist, and a brief discussion of the categories of Best Fanzine and Best Fanwriter. The Best Semi Pro-Zine category will be ignored (and we urge you to do the same - vote 'No Award) for reasons explained while talking about the fanzines. In the next issue, comparative reviews of the shorter works of fiction will appear. For now, however, onto the novels. (PB/RW, July 1985)



Bill Rotsler - Hugo nominee
'Fan Artist'

Love Over Faith

JOB: A Comedy of Justice by Robert A.Heinlein
(NEL, 1984, A$19.95, 368pp) reviewed by Russell Blackford

In the Old Testament Book of Job, the eponymous hero of the story is rapidly stripped of his wealth, children and reason for living as the result of a cruel bet between a complacent Yahweh and a jealous Satan. Job's wife offers him the advice "...curse God and die" (Job 2:9), while his neighbours revile him and blame him for his troubles. His wife later refuses to speak to him when he addresses her - "My breath is strange to my wife..." (Job 19:17) - and he has no source of comfort but his faith. Still he refuses to blame God for his woes or renounce his apparently useless faith.

Robert A.Heinlein's character, one Alexander Hergensheimer, is a latter-day Job, picked out by Yahweh for a further experiment in destructive testing. Satan, not the father of lies in this book but a comforting Jubal Harshaw/Robert Heinlein figure, explains it all to Heinlein:

> "You want to know what happened to you... and to Margrethe. Yahweh came to me and offered the same wager We had made over Job, asserting that He had a follower who was even more stubborn than Job."

Satan goes on to add that he turned Yahweh down on this particular occasion; but Heinlein's is a polytheistic universe in Job, and Yahweh has employed a bit of help on the side from the Norse God and mischief-maker Loki. Hergensheimer is then subjected to a series of experiences more confusing than Job's, if less uniformly painful, and although Hergensheimer's faith triumphs over adversity at first, as did Job's, Heinlein would have it that for *his* saints love proves mightier than faith.

Like Job, Hergensheimer is a righteous man. Living in a society where his morally conservative values are essentially unthreatened, he takes the tenets of his conservative outlook more for granted than our own Festival of Light/Fred Nile afficionados would, but he is nevertheless a deeply conservative man, steeped in ideas of decency. Most obviously, he equates sex with sin, and in his home world is a fund-raiser for an organisation called 'Churches United for Decency', a bulwark against such alleged evils as recreational sex. Refering to marital relations as "family duties", Hergensheimer's own phrase bespeaks the sexual squeamishness that loves euphemism.

As for Job, so for Hergensheimer: his wife provides no comfort in the ruins. While Job's wife counsels him to "curse God and die", Abigail Hergensheimer eventually meets up with her husband in heaven, where she proceeds to berate him, intimating, "Years have I waited to be rid of that clod - be rid of him without sinning." Eventually ((in a scene about as well-handled as the Watergate burglary)) she has to be thrown out of Saint Peter's office by a judo-trained nun.

Unlike Job, however, Hergensheimer has love offered from elsewhere: he finds himself involved in amorous liaison with a comely Dane, Margrethe Svensdatter Gunderson, who initiates him into the pleasures of sex, practical survival in strange cultures, and the meaning of having someone to live for. Eventually, Margrethe comes to mean more to Hergensheimer than does Heaven (or, as it is put, where Margrethe is *is* Heaven; Heaven isn't itself without her), and he even dives down between the caldera walls of Hell to find her. His last thoughts before being scooped from impact with molten fires are: "Satan receive my soul; Jesus is a fink-". Unlike Job, Hergensheimer *does* curse God, but without dying.

The particular set of afflictions Hergensheimer suffers - along with Margrethe after the first time - is that of being rocketed from one alternate world to another, encountering a bewildering range of contrary histories and cultures. When he is initially shunted into Margrethe's world, he is stunned by the openness with which sexuality is expressed, or simply left unhidden and unhighlighted: clothing is scanty, language bawdy, swimming practised nude - crimes which would have led to imprisonment in the stocks, in his world - or worse.

Forced to dissemble his culture shock rather than draw attention to himself, Hergensheimer puts up with such, to him, unsettling norms. Consider his initial, bemused reaction to a topless alternative Polynesia:

> 'Any unbiased judge would have to admit that I am reasonably sophisticated. I am aware that some places do not have America's high moral standards and are careless about indecent exposure. I know that Polynesian women used to run around naked from the waist up until civilisation came along - shucks, I read the *National Geographic*.'

This disarming passage, which professes sophistication and reasonableness is, of course, laden with signs of naïvety and dogma: Hergensheimer's culturally-located all-American gesture of false modesty, "shucks", is one nice touch. The expression 'run around naked' indicates a kind of patronising indulgence. Hergensheimer's reference to *National Geographic* is neatly satirical: he knows about other cultures by reading a classic example of his own; even the 'National' of its title firmly locates what is a worthy enough journal in a specific culture, looking out at the rest of the world - it's a pity *Reader's Digest* would not have done here!

With palpable naïvety, Hergensheimer refers to the arrival of 'civilisation', as if this is easily equatable with Western Culture and ascetic mores, and he claims that other cultures are 'careless' (a cetegory implying disregard of something known) about 'indecent exposure' (a high-order concept developed in a particular cultural and legal tradition). Hergensheimer's language is steeped in cultural assumptions which he has never examined, despite his pretention to sophistication.

At the same time, Hergensheimer's language can be clear, modest, sometimes witty. The voice if not the concepts and ideas - is very much Heinlein's, as we have heard it in previous novels, and the story is easy-going and enjoyable as a result. By subjecting the unfortunate Hergensheimer to a series of pleasurable and painful assaults on his sexual morality, Heinlein creates a lot of romping innocent fun ((... ed.)). At the same time as he teaches Hergensheimer a few lessons, he exposes Yahweh as an arbitrary and unjust God, setting demands and making rules which are without consistency, equity or logic. In a way both defiant and whimsical, *Job* is a good read.

The problem with the novel arises from what seems to be Heinlein's own artistic inconsistency. *Job* depends a great deal on the loving relationship between Hergensheimer and Margrethe, but both characters are somewhat blurred. Margrethe is a sexually liberated female from the Scandinavia of a world freer than ours. But she is scarcely believeable: beautiful, serious-minded but fun-loving, patient, devoted, an indefatigable worker when necessary, her only flaw a lack of a verbal sense of humour. She is Hergensheimer's Beatrice throughout the alternative worlds which constitute his purgatory, but her teachings don't really add up. In particular, she is inconsistent about how seriously to treat sexuality. At the beginning of the novel she is unwilling to kiss Hergensheimer erotically if he is unwilling to make love to her:

> She shook her head sadly. "There are kisses and kisses, Alec. I would not kiss the way we have kissed unless I was happily willing to go on from there and make love. To me that would be a happy and innocent thing..."

This speech strikes me as psychologically convincing: Margrethe is not interested in erotic play outside the context of full erotic possibility. Her attitude is understandable, though it runs counter to a view often expressed in Heinlein's novels that any eroticism is good clean fun to be indulged of itself, out of context of full sexual activity or in that context. Later on in this particular book, Margrethe kisses a truck driver with lingering eroticism, and defends herself thus:

> "And now you get hoity-toity and holier-than-thou because I kissed him hard enough to show that I appreciated what he had done for me *and* my husband. I won't stand for it, do you hear?"

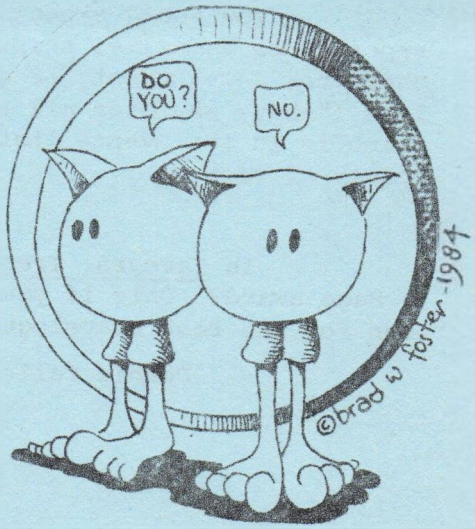
The truckie has given them a ride and a square meal, a big favour given their state.

Now, real people are not consistent, but Margrethe often seems a mere mouthpiece for ideas about erotic openness, regardless of whether these give her any psychological consistency. Though the general drift of her attitudes is clear, her specific emotional reactions seem to be more what is required to keep the story going than the spontaneity of a wise and integrated personality. Margrethe is likeable, but two-dimensional at best - which won't do for a book that needs to justify the punchline: "Heaven is where Margrethe is."

Hergensheimer himself is a downright shadowy figure, one who seems to remember or forget his moralism and fundamentalism as is convenient to move the story along, rather than in accordance with what is happening to him. When we first see him, he is a somewhat retiring tourist among touristic loudmouths, one who improbably bets a large sum of money that he can take part successfully in a fire-walking ritual. In the middle of this, he wonders whether he can remember what is described in wry terms as "the formula by which one made a deathbed confession and then slid into Heaven on a technicality" adding "Maybe there wasn't any such fromula." This passage is being written for the eyes of Satan, but it can't possibly represent the thoughts of an ordained priest who know very well what his own church believes about salvation and grace. The idea fits in with later discussions of the justice of such Christian doctrines, but the language does not ring true for a sincere and thoroughly indoctrinated Believer - who would presumably be *serious* about the state of his soul if he thought that death were approaching.

In fact, it is only 130 pages into *Job* that the breadth and depth of Hergensheimer's comittment not merely to Christianity but to a concerted campaign in defence of fundamentalist values and morals is realised. He finally reveals some of the things he thinks most about: "A federal law making abortion a capital offence"; "...the Jewish problem - was a humane solution possible?"; "Homosexuals - what's the answer? Punishment? Surgery? Other?" Nothing about the consciousness shown up to this point fits in with the depth of committment to and saturation in extremely conservative morals shown here.

I'm not going to deny enjoying Heinlein generally or *Job* specifically. Nor am I about to savage a book which I did enjoy. But there is a difference between enjoying a book (especially when it matches up with your own prejudices on dynamite topics like religion and sex) and considering it wholly successful. *Job* does not succeed, even in its own terms. The plot is thin, slapdash, often unmotivated, the characters insufficiently realised to sustain the serious message. This is a pity, because Heinlein keeps producing readable, whimsical, endearing books without recently getting the formula right for artistic success.



Brad Foster - Hugo nominee
'Fan Artist'

However, popular-financial success is another thing: the charm is still there, that and the heavy pandering to readers' fantasies of superiority. I suppose *Job* will not only give enttertainment to old Heinlein addicts, myself included, but also win fundamentally unwarranted adulation from the less sceptical of the master's followers. *Job* will thus give the Hugo voting a good shake; meanwhile, if you can forgive derivative writing, have a read of David R.Palmer's *Emergence*; it's a better Heinlein novel than this one.

Russell Blackford

The Integral Trees by Larry Niven

(Del Rey; ?$6.95) reviewed by Dennis Callegari

The Integral Trees, Larry Niven's latest Hugo-nominated novel, is better than his award winning *Ringworld* - or so my copy of *The Integral Trees* tells me.

....Well, yes and no.

To the lover of 'hard' sf, this may be true. Niven's latest attempt at world-building doesn't depend, as *Ringworld* did, on fantasy devices such as FTL travel, unbreakable metals and strange psychic gifts. The Smoke Ring of *The Integral Trees* is a toroidal envelope of breathable atmosphere that orbits around Larry Niven's favourite neutron star - it is basically the Ringworld redone without the element of fantasy, and it is to Niven's credit that he has managed the change without losing many of the original idea's attractions.

But a novel should be more than an idea, and in this *The Integral Trees* is less successful. Niven has used a simple enough method to show off his invention - he has taken a group of people with little knowledge of the world about them and has forced them to explore that world. And our heroes cover a good deal of air in their exploration, from the integral trees of the title to the cotton-candy jungles and the vacuum of space, where the cyborg watchdog Kendy lurks aboard the well-named starship *Discipline*.

The novel is a good adventure yarn, but disappointing in that the setting deserved a better plot than the one it was given. (In fact, the same criticism could be levelled at *Ringworld*.)

The Integral Trees is least satisfying in its inability to develop any part of the Smoke Ring's environment beyond the purely material. All of Niven's invention has gone into the scenery, and none into the characters who inhabit it.

You would expact the people who live in a place as strange as the Smoke Ring to be considerably different in attitudes and tradit ons from us, their Earthbound cousins of the twentieth century. And they are not.

You would expect that the main characters, after undergoing such traumatic experiences as exile, shipwreck (- treewreck?), slavery and war, might show some character development, or at least make a token protest against the unfairness of life ("-hey, why does all this have to happen to *me*?"), but they don't. Their value is in the events that take place around them; they are treated only as points of view.

Is *Integral Trees* worth a Hugo award? Only if you give one for the best travelogue.

Dennis Callegari.

Alexis Gilliland - Hugo nominee 'Fan Artist'

(*Science Fiction Review*)

EMERGENCE by David R.Palmer
(Bantam, Nov1984, US$2.95, A$6.95, 291pp) reviewed by Damien Broderick

It's crucial for a reviewer to keep a proper sense of balance and judicious proportion, so let's start with the important facts about this 1985 Hugo-nominated book. The most amazing is given immediately above, and I have no explanation for it. Grabbing at random, I find that *Blooded On Arachne*, by Michael Bishop, (Timescape, US$3.50), was bought in mid 1983 for A$4.95. The Oz buck has been punctured since then, and is now equal to some two-thirds of an Amber or primary universe dollar. So let's suppose that two years ago it cost Space Age Books a dollar apiece to get Bishop's spiders here. It follows, very crudely, that a US$2.95 pb + US$1 freight = current A$5.90. This is quite close to the price I paid Merv for Poul Anderson's *Past Lives* (Tor, Nov1984, US$2.95). Why, then, does *Emergence* have an 18% loading? Little wonder we need consolations of books like this as the purchasing power of our money gurgles away down the drain.

The book, man, the book:

I skimmed a cruelly detailed summary of the plot of *Emergence* in Geis's *SFR* and with each paragraph laughed the louder at Palmer's unmitigated gall. The joke was on me, of course. At the end, despite the evidence just given, I was told that I'd love this book, this action-packed bundle of fun and love and joy.

What Mr Palmer has done, you see, as it had taken me about three lines of that review to know beyond any doubt, is to colonise the Robert A. Heinlein Ecological Niche, recently abandoned by Spider Robinson. He has the colouring, the voice (though some of the mating calls are muted--he's not quite as big on everyone calling everyone "dear" and "Boss"), the cropping habits; not so much a case of adaptive mimicry as of cloning, you'd think.

I am the proud owner of a Joe Haldeman calling card which bears the slogan "Heinlein re-treads a specialty". In truth, though, Joe took from Heinlein only the most general tricks and usages of what Budrys calls "modern science fiction", the John W.Campbell stable staples; Palmer pinches the details, the feathers and eye glances and webbing on the water-churning feet, the odour and the grooming behaviour, pretty well everything that makes a duck a duck.

The word for this isn't "tanstaafl". It isn't exactly plagiarism, either, for no piece of explicit plotting, no complete character, no sequence of words is flogged from Heinlein - just everything that a simple-minded fan of his early story telling would recognise instantly as his imprint, his knack of doing things, his obsessions, his political tastes....

This is pretty funny, you must admit. A man spends his life preaching that the competent individual makes his own path, goes his own way, respecting others in their god-given ornery singularity and demanding his own prerogatives at the point of a nuclear weapon, and the moment his brain starts to go the buzzards are nipping in there, strutting and tearing at his carcase for his tattered old hide so they can march about inside it doing impressions, hammering his old marching song: "Ain't No Free Lunch, Babe."

It's the way to make a lot of money, admittedly. The bed's been warmed for you. Grease up and go for it.

But how horrible of me to say these things. It's patently untrue, or at least unlikely. Yes, David R.Palmer, aged 44, very first novel under review, jack of numerous trades including many of those attributed graphically

and compellingly to his 11-year-old superkid heroine and her 13-year-old chum (car racing, flying, bird fancying, farming, perhaps karate and emergency medical treatment), is surely no mere cunning hack. One feels that he's less *studied* Heinlein's stock in trade than *lived* it, breathed it, absorbed it as might a worshipper the incense of his deity.

In 1968, Alexei Panshin published a pretty cluey rundown on what made a Heinlein story or novel tick. He was not uncritical, but the component of his study which burned through was Panshin's clear wish to learn how to emulate Heinlein's mastery of a certain kind of very effective sf. Effective, that is, in grabbing and holding adolescent readers, knocking them sideways with wonder and a sense of honour and decency and courage that they didn't find in their loathsome 1950s American world but which Heinlein told them would be the spine of the future, when tough-minded, practical dreamers would run the world right, if they had to kill every last Bug in the Universe. Panshin learned his own lesson: the result was *Rite of Passage*, a slightly left-wing variety of the standard formula which instantly ran off with the Nebula Award. Yes, it pays to study the masters.

Spider Robinson, as noted, did the same trick a little later, with similar success. He too extended the original range a little, introduced profanity to balance the sticky sentimentality, was more streetwise than techie, but the essence was "Heinlein re-tread". Now Palmer has done it better than either, and it's embarrassing. I don't think he'll get the 1985 Hugo (though his Heinlein is better than poor old R.A.H's effort in the flaccid *Job*, also a contender); William Gibson's post-Bester-early-Delany *Neuromancer* is too good. Still, he's going to *sell*, as the word gets around that this new guy's down on the corner, offering that fine old stuff, hey!

I oversimplify in crediting Heinlein as onlie begetter. Palmer's story (increasingly *ad hoc* and full of holes as it is) goes like this: Candidia Smith [a perfect Heinlein name, natch] is orphaned, adopted by nice Dr and Mrs Foster [!] in Smallville. She's very very clever; Mommy helps her read by age two, calculus shortly thereafter. Daddy treats her like a child, which is a comfort (she's no freak, right?). Mommy dies next, but soon a nice old Asiatic-American arrives in town to teach her karate and give access to lots of books behind Daddy's back. At 8, as I recall, she's a Fifth Degree Black Belt, and by 11 has self-induced hypnotic access to hysterical strength (deployed strikingly in a number of astonishingly violent scenes). This old gentleman proves (as is typical in such books) to have three doctorates as well as Eighth Degree mastery; Candy's country-practice foster father turns out to be something similar, as well as owning a nuclear bomb-proof Bat-cave 200 feet down under the white clapboard home, which saves Candy when the filthy Russkies wipe us out with radiation-induced viral megadeath.

As oldtime sf readers will see, Candidia is not just a classic Heinlein over-achiever, she's also that marvel of *Astounding*, the mutant superhuman. Mark Clifton's *Star, Bright* is the epitome of the tradition (that, or Wilma Shiras's *Children of the Atom*), and oh how they made my tiny 12-year-old heart pound when I read them, read them again and again. Zenna Henderson's People are another variety. The point is, as I trust you see, is that *you*, lucky reader, might well be one of these fortunate souls. *Homo post hominem*, in the Palmer avatar. In the frame of the story, true, this is unlikely, for one evidence of membership is lifelong immunity from illness. Many fanatic sf readers, by contrast, got that way due to being (1) rather smarter (and hence lonelier, often bitterly lonelier) than their peers, and (2) sick, fat, scrawny, half-blind or deformed (and hence suckers for the consolations of fantasy and not quite so distracted from reading by the pleasures of rough-and-tumble sport). Still, though you are almost certainly *not Homo superior*, you're a better bet than those klutzes who kick sand in your face, and when you grow up and master science you will (and who can deny it?) Run The World! Until then, here's the story just for you.

David Palmer has put a *lot* of work into *Emergence*. He's thought up cunning tricks which permit the world to be depopulated of all but superfolk (don't *you* wish the buggers would just *go away*?), he's found ways to make a cute little 11-year-old indispensible in Saving The World (don't you just know you too could drive a spaceship if they gave you the chance?) but he hasn't just fudged it up, the man's gone and studied the Shuttle Operator's Manual, I tell you, and consulted doctors, and specialists in Russian, and *it pays off*, this book is heavy with authenticity by comparison with the slick numbers churned out by Chalker and Anthony and their like if god-forbid they have any like.

But the sub-text is pretty crook, when it isn't simply laughable. See, the world left to the superfolk is under threat by a buncha bastards in Russia who are the last surviving *Homo sapiens sapiens*. But as you can see, they're also Commie scum, while the nice handsome, healthy, brave, honourable, heartbreakingly American *hominems* are all Republicans. So the equation reads back into our world: superman is to man as American is to Commie scum; but American is man, not superman; ergo, Commie scum is *sub*-human, and deserves to be nuked by Reagan as soon as possible. You think this is far-fetched? Look, I'm not saying Palmer put it there deliberately.

Candy's friend "Adam" is hot for her underdeveloped bod. So is virtually every other male she meets. This is a bit odd, surely; critics have found it before, admittedly, in Heinlein. Men in their forties, their thirties, they're all eager to slip her a little something. One of them, while putting this idea to her in a paradigm of Heinlein reasoning [a gem of self-ridicule, done with full awareness I'm sure] is very messily and satisfylingly murdered/executed. Joanna Russ will wet herself. Candy is appropriately remorseful (she is usua-ly more sensitive to the value of the lives of those she dislikes than Heinlein could ever be), but by then we've had our suges of adrenalin. Anyway, her older friend Kim Melon convinces her it was okay. Kim is 'slim, willowy, long-legged. Waist-length natural Swedish-blond mane. Pretty face - correction, beautiful face - double correction, movie-star face. Plus last name describes salient physical characteristics with unintended hilarious accuracy.' Such boyish 'unintended' gags typical Heinlein. Shame, Palmer. Sexist, silly.

Can we believe Candy is superhuman (always the problem)? Well, she writes most of the book in Pitman shorthand - Palmer is a court reporter, by the way, when he's not being a racing driver - and as a mark of her smarts leaves out all the unnecessary words: verbs, pronouns, articles definite and indefinite, and so on. This makes her sound (a nice side benefit) rather like Manny the narrator of *The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress*, but clots some of the text so foully that I started skimming *real* fast. Palmer fails to understand that natural languages do not employ redundancy out of stupidity, but as an important syntactical component. It might save Candy time to write it that way; it slows us up to no good end in decoding the bloody stuff.

Yet I read the damned thing through with more satisfaction than I got from, say, the first two of Ian Watson's laboured trilogy. Somewhere in my leathery pump there's a strong trace of the retarded adolescent who, at 22, found all the Heinlein juveniles I'd missed as a child (*Tunnel In The Sky*, *The Star Beast*, *Have Spacesuit Will Travel*, and so on) and gorged till I choked. If you harbour such a traveller (or are still yourself an adolescent, retarded or not), give the poor wee beastie its due. But try to talk them down to $5.95, the swine.

Tanstaafl!

Damien Broderick

Awards, Winners, and Values

Neuromancer by William Gibson
(Gollancz, 1984, 251pp £8.95) reviewed by George Turner

I don't try to stay abreast of the latest science fiction, preferring to watch for the signs which say I had better read this or that in order to keep up with party conversation and Nova Mob references. William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, having taken the Ditmar in Adelaide and being nominated for the Hugo, is loaded with signs. (Besides, Merv Binns gave me a copy.)

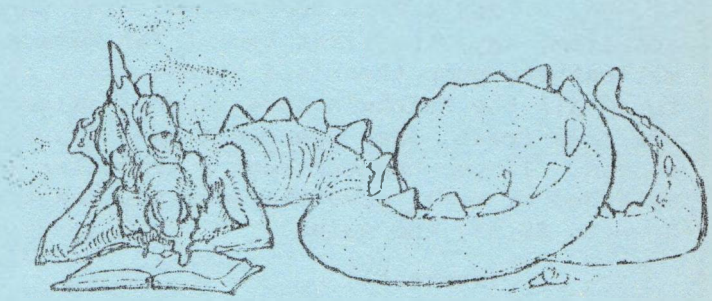
We know, of course, that sf awards are the result of popularity polls - and sometimes, it is whispered, of factional in-fighting - and have no literary significance, but does not simple popularity have its own significance? This book may be forgotten by next year but it means something this year to a large number of people (if only that it is the best of a dreary bunch, just ahead of 'No Award' - an outcome desirable once in a while); so it may pay to ask, What?

Having now read *Neuromancer*, I think I know why it took the Ditmar and would lay a small wager on it sweeping the Hugo vote, though I have read none of the other finalist novels. (On the strength of various reviews and accounts I don't see why I should; there are better things in life, which is short enough.) It will probably win because it has all the attributes of success, the elements which rivet, entertain and bamboozle - until you think back over them with cooler blood and unglazed eye.

The *raison d'être*, gimmick, McGuffin or whatever makes the story possible is the ability of some computer jockeys, in an unspecified but not too distant future, to actually see programs as shapes, colours and artefacts, via electrodes clamped to the head, enabling study of them as gestalts. This is illustrated excellently in the novel by the presence of a 'virus' - a program designed to penetrate and pirate another. A biological virus operates by locating a point on a cell wall where chemical affinities will allow it to lock on and then penetrate the cell, after which it takes over and directs the cell's operation. In Gibson's computers a virus program duplicates these moves, seeking recognition points in the program to be pirated, locking on and absorbing it. In several scenes this action is watched by protagonist Case, making a nice innovation in imagery and venue. (The watcher, seeing the shape of a program but not its content, can design a virus to explore and penetrate.)

So far so good; original and attention-catching.

Next comes the illegal program, the AI, the Artificial Intelligence. It is worth noting that in the present state of argument about the possibility of creating an AI, several computer scientists have pointed out that very strict controls should be incorporated in a structure which might well be capable of reorganising its capacities in unpredictable and possibly dangerous form - which is why AIs in Gibson's tomorrow world are illegal. One of them certainly has dangerous capacities, including the ability to manipulate not only computers but any mechanical artefact linked to a power source; it can also produce, as visible programs, simulacra of any person whose 'information' has been recorded, including the dead. The possibilities of real-world confusion are fully exploited in the plot.



Joan Hanke-Woods - Hugo nominee
'Fan Artist'

(Have these simulacra any reality? Though visible only on a screen or to a 'seeing' jockey, but complete in their simulation, how 'real' are they? The AI (God?) could have them reproduce if it wished. The question is hinted at but not developed.)

Given these conceptions, the novel could go, broadly, in two directions: it could present a thoughtful exposition of the possibilities and implications of artificial intelligence, or it could use AI as a gimmick for a thriller.

Gibson settled for the gimmick. *Neuromancer* would be a simple goodies and baddies thriller if there were any goodies, but there are only the rotten and the less rotten; even the hero, Case, is a drug-addicted killer. Gibson has assembled a cast of characters (for want of a suitable word) who operate on drugs and emotional triggers; there are no subtleties in this lot. So one's interest has to be focussed on the outcome of the computer probabilities, but there isn't any that matters. Gibson seems to have thought that his puppets were people and that one could care what happened to them. In most novels one would, but these name-tags are there only to shove the plot along.

What Gibson's future world is like is hard to tell because the reader never gets out of its murder-haunted, drug-ridden gutters - until the last section, set on a pleasure satellite, which amounts only to a filthy-rich, murder-haunted, drug-ridden gutter.

The plot hardly matters; it is the old faithful about piercing to the core of a mystery to find a more dangerous complication behind it, and then getting the right people out by the skins of their teeth. The climax is, in fact, a mite clumsy, but almost rescued by a neat little visual twist in the final paragraphs.

So what makes all this a popular success? The philosophical and extrapolative possibilities are ignored, and there are no characters to identify with or find memorable, the settings are dreary and listless and only the goings-on in the bowels of the computers seem fresh and stimulating. Even the assorted mysteries have the same soulless solutions that Van Vogt tought up back in the 'forties. More accurately, they have no solutions, only running revelations which stop at a convenient point - the ninety thousand word mark. They stop right where the real story should begin: Now that the AI has what it wanted, what now? Would the AI be a goodie or a baddie, and would the thing have any conception of such terms except as descriptive of non-logical moralities? This is where the theme really begins to tick.

Steven Fox - Hugo nominee 'Fan Artist'

So where lies the attraction? Certainly not in the prose, full of those loaded copouts that mean the writer can't be bothered visualising properly, like 'kaleidoscopic angles', 'the blue flash of orgasm', 'beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he moved', giving an impression of verbal drive but in fact having no meaning. Call them 'surreal' if you like, but I call them attempts to gloss over what the writer did not know how to handle.

Against all this are the surefire selling values of the pop literature of the moment, the three great teenage concerns of our sociological day - the computer scene, the hard drug scene and the sickening violence scene. All in one package, they can hardly miss a public. There is also plenty of sex, latent and consummated, with no hint of involvement or enjoyment - what you might call the hard sex scene. The women are killers, lesbian or harlot-sexy and cold-blooded,

even in sex; the males are, with one exception, not quite so sordid. This may say something about authorial chauvinism but is more likely to be a product of the fascination of the contemporary thriller with women as tough guy-sexpot-substitute male. In any case, all the characters are mere points, having position but no size.

These unattractive elements are the hallmarks of the late twentieth century thriller, bearable only because the writer's lack of artistry reduces them to strings of words without conviction; they fail to horrify, and in presenting violence the author in fact hides it behind a yawn of acknowledgement that it is all in play. This is dangerous; we should think seriously about it. Fascination with violence designed specifically to lull reaction is a virus with easy entry, one whose effect is to deaden the response to reality. A touch of the reality might cure many a thoughtless devotee.

It seems, then, that *Neuromancer* gets by on a single bright idea dressed up in cliche. Enough for a Ditmar, probably enough for a Hugo.

Yet there is something more. Very early in the reading I was visited by a feeling of *déja vu*, not in the sense of plagiarism, but in recognition of the style and method - the relentless push, the rough and urgent dialogue, the swift change of scene, the spare description, the ambient harshness.

What I recognised was, of course, a pale shadow of the style and method of the Alfred Bester of *The Demolished Man* and *The Stars My Destination*. Gibson has one slight advantage over Bester: he is much more careful to preserve the internal consistency of his tale. But he hasn't Bester's unerring choice of the single word to do the work of a sentence or his ability to pile one monstrous shock on another. And his computer jockey, Case, is no stupendous Gully Foyle; he is not even a hapless, blundering Ben Reich

I wait, without actually holding my breath, for Hugo night.

George Turner (reprinted from a forthcoming issue of *Metaphysical Review*)

Stu Shiffman - Hugo nominee
'Fan Artist'

We All Should Move To Disneyland

The Peace War by Vernor Vinge
(Baen Books; A$7.95, US$3.50; 378pp.)
reviewed by Dave Marten

Picking the winner of the Hugo for Best Novel has always been a popular pasttime for those involved in sf circles; it's a bit like trying to guess what the weather is going to be a month in advance.

In years gone by the appearance of a Heinlein novel on the ballot would have had the forecasters rushing to their local bookies but the sheer awfulness of hia last couple of books has ably demonstrated that it takes more than *just* a big name to win these wards, and this year's Heinlein being no exception to that: it's 'orrible. Okay then, what about Niven? A hack of some stature (all things are relative) - is his book a winner? Well, *The Integral Trees* is not so much horrible as non-existent. As far as novels go, I've seen more complete skeletons in a butcher's shop.

By far, the three best books on the ballot are the ones by newer writers. Two of the books are first novels. *Emergence*, by David Palmer, is snappy, droll, written in the style of Heinlein before his clutch plates wore down. Winner of the Philip K.Dick Memorial Award, the Ditmar and most recently the Nebula, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* looms large as the favourite for the Hugo as well.

Last of all is Vernor Vinge's *The Peace War* which I found quite a surprising book. I hesitate to say that it is the best of the lot, because some people would surely take that to mean that some of them were, in fact, really any good.

It is a tale of irrepressible, free-thinking, fun-loving, technologically-minded anarchists fighting to restore truth, justice and scientific research to the world, in the face of opposition from the Bureaucrats, known to us this time around as the Peace Authority. This whole idea is nothing new to anyone who's heard Reagan or any other conservative politician talk of freeing us all from the clammy clutches of Big Government; it is a standard cliché.

New is the way in which lip service is obviously but carefully paid in the book to just about every minority group in, or popular concern of, contemporary America. The hero, apart from being every bit the super-genius that is Candy Smith-Foster in *Emergence* (without the complication of being of a new species), is black; the reluctant 2nd string baddie is female *and* Chinese; irrelevant references to people such as famous (red) Indian mathematicians are plunked in; and so on. Sexism is bad - although the society portrayed is extremely sexist. The peace loving bureaucrats are bad - although most of them probably mean well. And so on.

The Peace War is set in the near future and concerns a mechanism for for producing bubbles - 'bobbles' - of variable size which effectively stops all movement.

The Peace War is a novel which has as its major plot device a machine which is capable of projecting small bubbles - in the book 'bobbles' - of impenetrable force around objects or areas of pretty much any size. The Peace Authority controls this device, and rules the Earth in a 'benign' dictatorship.

Almost instantly recognisable as the type of book in which the author moralizes (rants is often a better word) about the evils of almost any form of social or governmental 'control', *The Peace War* is surprisingly restrained in its treatment of the baddies. It is stated repeatedly that the baddies, or anyway most of them, do believe that they are doing what is best for all. and the fact remains (and, more surprisingly, remains referred to) that the Peace Authority, well, shucks, did almost certainly save the world from an eventual, nuclear Apocalypse. This act, however, meant (low drumroll) the dismantling of the United States and, as one character puts it, 'To think that some lousy contractors could have brought down the greatest nation in history!' Tsk.

Succinctly, *The Peace War* is superior junk. The notion that scientific research is forbidden by the authorities, although they allow a *little* bit of research to go on - as long as it isn't *too* high-tech - doesn't really bear thinking about. Likewise, the notion that the 15 year old main character, who doesn't know how to read or write or even speak English properly, can a few months later be the foremost electronics and computer theorist in the world... well, never mind. He's a genius, okay? Must be... but enough. Vernor Vinge juggles his act quite well; you are not forced to dwell upon the novel's multitudinous faults, the way you are constantly being reminded of them, for instance, while reading *The Integral Trees*. And with a little bit of imagination (strictly on the reader's part) the setting of *The Peace War* is for the most part quite beautiful.

What a pity, however, that the concept of brain-computer linkage, so inventively handled in *Neuromancer*, and made such an important part of this book also, is done with so little flair, in such pedestrian manner. Description of the process is limited to the fact that... 'it made his physical self dopey and uncoordinated.'

If it seems that excessive mention is being made in this review of the other nominees, then that is because of the striking similarities between this book and most of the others. People interfacing with computers... super-genius youngsters saving a world ravaged by waves of deadly plague.... It obviously isn't a question of plagiarism, just a particularly trivial example of an idea, in this case a set of science fictional cliches, whose time has come. All of which doesn't say much for the stories at hand; but we are of course talking about the Hugos....

If I might be permitted to observe that this year there are five novels nominated, but that there is a sixth possible choice open to voters? No Award.

Dave Marten.

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Best Fanwriter is an award open to anyone whose writing has appeared in fanzines or so-called 'semi-prozines', and this year we have a fair range of talent from around the globe. Leigh Edmonds is an Australian fan who, while never brilliant, is capable of producing a steady stream of quite reasonable, readable prose. Richard Geis is the editor of *Science Fiction Review* and has won about a dozen awards for his fanzines or his writing. His crackpot economic theorizing and reactionary, sexist ramblings have won him an apparent army of devotees but whatever you make of what Geis has to say, there's no doubt that he is able to string words together to effect. Mike Glyer is another person who is in the position of being where he is (namely on the ballot) because of his large number of American readers (not as many as Geis's) and more importantly because of the fact that he edits a newszine (*i.e., e.g. SF Chronicle; Locus; Australian SF News; Thyme*) which many people would automatically find interesting because of the information it contains, and thus they unthinkingly reckon Glyer to be a good writer. It is absurd to suggest, for instance, that Glyer (or Geis) is even in the same class as Teresa Nielsen Hayden, 'Skel', or Dave Langford.

Meanwhile, Arthur Hlavaty finds himself on the ballot again. Arthur's not an extraordinarily good writer, but he keeps people entertained - enough so they'll nominate him for a Hugo, anyway. And so we come to Dave Langford, a Brit. Well, like Mike Glyer he's the editor of a newszine (amongst other things), but even constricted by this format here is obviously a fanwriter of the first order, and although he may have gained his place on the ballot by editing *Ansible*, it is possible that he reached there on the sheer strength of his articles and delightful wit displayed in other fanzines.

Given the fact that many more people are eligible to vote than there are copies of the fanzines in which these people's work appears to go around, voting is often heavily influenced by how many voters have seen a person's work. This year, with a smaller number of voters, and many of them Australian, Leigh - an Australian - has a chance of winning. So does Dave.

The conditions governing the Best Fanzine category are much the same as for Fanwriter - the larger circulation, American zines are the ones that voters tend to see, so tend to vote for. *File 770* and *Ansible* are newszines, with reasonable circulations, although being American *File 770* would probably have the voting edge. Of course for Australian voters this works in reverse, for example in the case of *Mythologies* by Don D'Amassa. It's a small circulation American zine that hardly anyone in Australia has heard of, let alone seen.

Holier Than Thou is a large fanzine with a large circulation. Issues typically tally around the 100 page mark, and Marty & Robbie Cantor have done well to assemble a large and - more often than not - quality range of contributors of of articles and artwork. The covers are a treat. The letter column, 'The Loc Ness Monster', is always lively, if sometimes full of fuckwits, and if sometimes lacking a little in editorial direction, or control or discretion, *Holier Than Thou* is not bad.

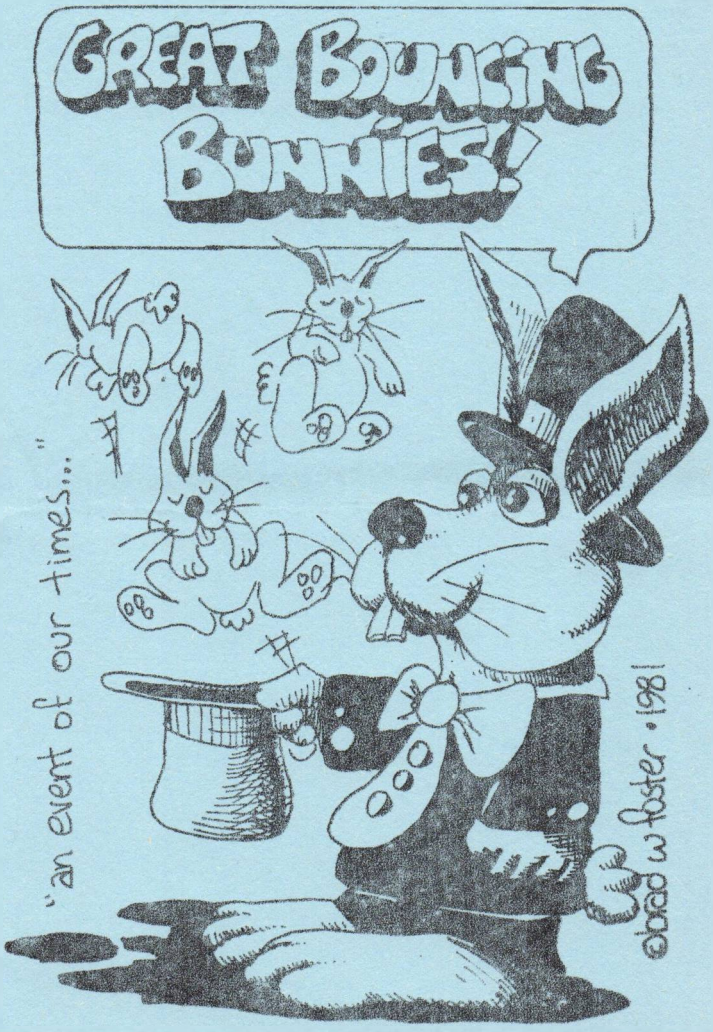
Rataplan, edited by Leigh Edmonds, is a fine little fanzine, which has carried in it both an interesting selection of articles, and discussions carried on from the articles and into the letter column. Leigh has a deft and sure editorial touch that should be the envy of many a faned, and which makes *Rataplan* the most successful of all the fanzines on this year's ballot. Australians should vote for this fanzine not because it is Australian but because it is a reminder of the reasons that fanzines exist - to engage the intellect and tickle the humour of friends around the world, and to get that back in return.

Then there is the Semi-Prozine category, the bastard creation of a well-intentioned but misguided few, designed to stop high-circulation fanzines taking away the Fanzine Hugo year after year. From the results last year, it's clear that they got it wrong: the category they should have created was Best Newszine. As a device to ensure that Charlie Brown doesn't keep on winning the Hugo for fanzine, the category of Semi-Prozine is an ill-conceived embarrassment, and deserves nothing more than a vote of No Award until they finally abolish it.

Those artists nominated in the category of Best Fan Artist are represented in the pages of this issue and #45 by small illustrations that in most cases do little justice to the skill and artistry of those concerned. A good example of the work of Steven Fox can be found on the cover to *Thyme* #38; Brad Foster hijacked the covers to issues Nos. 39 and 42, and the art of the inestimable Joan Hanke-Woods can be found adorning the cover of #45. (thanks *SoB*)

Beyond that, we're not willing to give recommendations. It's bad enough trying to deal sensibly with criticism of the printed word without buying into an argument on the relative virtues of artists.

Last message to Australasian members of Aussiecon Two: the deadline for voting is the 31st of July. If you haven't voted already, pull your finger out and do so. The postage isn't that much, and you've probably till about the 25th of July or so to mail your vote in, if you want to be sure that it will get there in time. Don't worry about the fact that you haven't read everything on the voting form; hardly anyone else does so why should you?



Hokai. Thanks for this issue must go to: Damien, Dennis, Bruce, George, Dave, Russell, Marc and - who else - VICTOR.

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