

thyme 55

the AUSTRALASIAN SF NEWS MAGAZINE

JULY 1986

A black and white line drawing of a stylized, bald man with a stern expression, wearing a large, ornate collar with a central circular pendant. The drawing is signed 'cy' in the bottom left corner.

4

"You believe these guys?"

AGENTS: EUROPE: Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh St.,
Pimlico, London, SW1V 2ER, U.K.
NEW ZEALAND: Nigel Rowe, P.O.Box 1814, Auckland
NORTH AMERICA: Mike Glycer, 5828 Woodman Ave. #2,
Van Nuys, CA 91401, U.S.A.

And remember: a large, silver X on your mailing label, next to your name, means that you could be about to get the chop unless you... DO SOMETHING.

In this issue we have three conventions on which to report, remarkable for the fact that all three were held over the Queen's Birthday weekend. [The fact that New Zealand has its QBW a week before the Australian one is, perhaps, cheating, but it still sounds all very good & busy.] Here then are our three reports : from the sound of it, three good reasons to go to *more* science fiction conventions....

[illegible]

by Roger Weddall

Whenever an Australian NatCon is held in Perth, the adventure of travelling all the way across the Nullarbor to be there is a real part of the excitement of the con, and it's the same for Kiwis when the New Zealand NatCon is held in Dunedin in the far south of the mainland. Stepping off the train at the end of the journey from Wellington, after nearly two days of travelling, I was launched into a sea of cheering, laughing faces, people hugging each other with cries of "Pauline!", "Big boy..." and the like - the sound of fans greeting fans, anywhere in the world.

After checking in at the Southern Cross Hotel (they're everywhere), it was up to the ConCommittee suite to watch those in charge pretend that everything was going as planned ("Us - Nervous??!"). Besides, I'd heard that one of the ConCom wanted to throw a brick at Nigel Rowe, and that was a spectacle I wanted to see.

Tough luck - no brick - but then neither was there much for the committee to worry about, as the con ran quite smoothly, if at a relaxed pace. New Zealand author Guest of Honour Craig Harrison cut the ceremonial ribbon as he declared Halleycon officially open, following which Frank Macskasy Jr did a wonderful impersonation of a Fan GoH during the special convention edition of 'This Is Your Life'. Frank's been a fan for long enough for most of his past to come well out into the open, and compere Tim Jones, resplendent in tuxedo and bare feet, had more than enough material to choose from in his good-humoured roasting of Frank. The audience loved it, in-jokes and all. But it was the Friday night when the convention came into its own - if New Zealand fans know nothing else, they know how to party.

KINKON 2 (Melbourne...7-9 June.)

by Peter Burns

Swancon and Kinkon were not very similar conventions except in one respect - their attendances were both swelled by large numbers of 17 and 18 year olds, a kind of new generation in fandom.

One of the untold stories of Swancon was the evening a group of these younger fans got together and started planning a kind of palace revolution because they thought the BNPs were snubbing them and making them feel like second-rate fans. A few LNPs (and maybe even a NNP or two) explained to them the concept of paranoia and told them they had misinterpreted the situation entirely. The palace revolution idea was dropped, they went off & got into the swing of the convention and had a good time instead. In Perth, snobbery isn't allowed to get in the way of good conventions. These same new-generation fans will, after all, be running next year's Swancon XII.

In Melbourne, of course, we do things differently. Not that there was any snobbery present at Kinkon, but the role of the new-generation fandom was a little different. The first ones you tended to notice were the ones wielding spotlights and video cameras (practical media fans, there) [What are they going to do with all those hours of convention videos, I wonder.], as they attempted to record the whole thing for posterity. There were others who didn't have video cameras and who spent their time socialising and having a good time instead. And then there were the ones who spent their time shut up in the security of the video room, keeping their intake of vitamin D to a minimum - poor sods.

Kinkon was a convention run with the needs and wants of a younger generation of fandom in mind.... In a lot of instances, it was even run by that younger generation. I feel uncomfortable labelling these people as media fans, because most of them probably weren't - this is just a generation who not only (like me) don't remember a world without television but don't remember a world without Dr Who, Star Trek and (god forbid) the Thunderbirds [Hey - what's wrong with the Thunderbirds? Thunderbirds are glow!] and who naturally include these things in their sf interests.

The programming (that which I saw) has improved quite a lot since the last Kinkon. Whereas before I saw a showing of an episode of Star Trek followed by a detailed analysis thereof, I was pleasantly surprised this time around to find a really informative and interesting talk on Val Lewton's movie making, followed by a showing (in the video room) of The Cat People. This was particularly topical as the ABC has recently shown a large number of Lewton classics in the Saturday, 7:30pm, timeslot.

The video programme featured large doses of television nostalgia - early episodes of Dr Who; pre-Thunderbirds puppet shows like Fireball XL-5, and Captain Scarlet; as well as the odd worst sf movie ever made (surely the competition for this dubious honour is intensifying every year with every year's new releases.)

Marilyn Pride and Lewis Morley were excellent Guests of Honour, getting into the spirit of the con as though they were just ordinary fan. We also got a preview of the DUFF presentation to Confederation (the WorldCon in Atlanta, in August). FX seemed a particularly apt film to preview at Kinkon (courtesy of Village), given the profession of our guests, although Lewis was able to tear into the accuracy of some of the more technical aspects of the special effects, as presented by the film, with embarrassing ease.

I suspect that the main thing Kinkons lack nowadays is the acceptance of many fans as its being the fannish place to be on a Queen's Birthday weekend. They aren't "establishment" conventions, and have quite a different feel from, say, Swancons (in spite of membership numbers being not that dissimilar). Whatever Melbourne fans may think of Kinkon's approach to things, I think they do represent the future way of conventions in this city, as evidenced by the fact that Kinkon III will be bidding for the 1989 Australian NatCon.

It was only a pity that there were two conventions on over the Queen's Birthday weekend, so that many Sydney and Canberra fans who might otherwise have attended went to the alternative Syncon instead; Kinkon suffered by this, I think - but in summary it was a good convention; it was fun, the security arrangements were exceptional, the Committee was wonderful, the trivia quiz was disgusting.

Peter Burns

SYNCON - A REPORTby Carey Handfield

The good Syncons of old were held in Kings Cross - a good location for an sf convention. This year's Syncon moved upmarket to Sydney's North Shore! It was held in the Metropole Hotel Cremorne (a North Shore suburb similar to Melbourne's South Yarra). The committee seemed to have found both a good location and venue - there were over 20 eating places within easy walking distance of the hotel offering a wide range of food at reasonable prices, including a coffee shop across the road which was open to 3am every night. All this plus a discount liquor store at the back of the hotel which held a Beam tasting on the Saturday night of the con - what more could a con ask for?

The Metropole itself was a reasonably priced hotel where half the rooms had excellent views of the harbour. A number of fans who had booked double or twin rooms found themselves with two-room suites sleeping up to five people, with a sitting room-cum-kitchen, including a stove, all for \$50 a night!

Syncon '86 was a successful convention and from what I have heard it was similar in many ways to Kinkon - held in Melbourne over the same weekend.

Both had a successful mixture of media and sf programming with fans from both interest groups involved in running and attending the con. Membership reached 144 fans mainly from Sydney, with one fan from the Great Southern City, one from Joh's republic plus a few from Canberra with news of that almost mythical con Capcon which is rumoured to be on next year. And while Kinkon had a fan from Perth, Syncon managed a surprise guest - an sf fan from Poland!

In terms of programming the highlight of the con was 'An Evening's Entertainment' organised by Cath McDonnell and Ron Serduik. Take the following: Mr Ed; the Addams Family; the Flintstones; Rawhide; Robin Hood; Super Chicken; George of the Jungle; Denis More; Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport; Felix the Cat; George Lucas; 'I've Been Everywhere'; Gilligan's Island; the Mickey Mouse Club; Edna Everage; and Popeye the Sailor Man, plus three slide projectors and crew and sound, and a very trivial Jack Herman, and finally 50 fans singing off-key, and you have an evening's entertainment! It was a combination of a trivia quiz, a singalong and an audiovisual presentation, and it worked very very well. Other items included 'Nick's Show And Tell', a slide show/talk by the amazing Nick Stathopoulos on the joys and despairs of an artist working on tv ads, model making, book covers etc..

There was a history of sf films - from the earliest days to the present - which was run as a mixture of slides, film clips & talk and which ran for the three days of the con. Another three-day item was 'Ballandry', a case study on how (or not) to create a world. Also, Polish fan and publisher Zbigniew Jonszta gave a talk on science fiction in Poland.

There was 'Fit for Fandom', another item by the terrible duo. It owed a lot to the Swancon (Perth) idea of Fan Olympics. To quote from the programme book - 'So you think you're a trufan... but have you really got what it takes to be a BNF? Or do you fancy yourself as a convenor, committee member, or even as a gopher? Here's where we separate the merely aspirant from the real thing. Through various extremely serious competitive events, we'll see if you make the grade... if you're Fit for Fandom.' Three keen teams of aspiring fans had to go through a number of tests which included:

Ego boo Sydney style - One member from each team had to put on a large pair of pyjamas, provided by the con, and the rest of the team had 2 minutes to stuff balloons (=ego) into the pyjamas. There were five points given for each balloon that could be fitted in; Ron took great delight in deflating the egos with a pin, as he counted the points.

Room Stuffing - Each team had a lilo and a sleeping bag. You are illegally sleeping on someone's hotel room floor at the con when you are told that hotel security is checking rooms. You have two minutes to deflate the lilo, roll up the sleeping bag and stuff both into a plastic bag just big enough to take them.

Ditmar Bob - The fine art of Ditmar bobbing was probably the worst/best event in 'Fit for Fandom', and something all trufen should do. Take one member from each team and at the other end of the room place three bowls of jelly (preferably lime). The Ditmars are kitkats and each member has to get as many Ditmars as possible in the 2 minutes, by bobbing. I will leave it to people's imaginations... the photographs should be quite colourful!

While Syncon was a good con, there was plenty of room for improvement. Individually, programming had some great ideas, but as a whole it was fairly uneven. During the day there was dual programming in the two main rooms which, I felt, was for a con of that size a mistake, particularly when they had less than 10 people in the audience for some items. A single strand for most of the time with maybe an occasional item would have worked a lot better.

Of the three nights' programming, only the Sunday night ('An Evening's Entertainment') really worked. Friday night just had the opening plus a couple of panels; you really need something stronger to start a con.... The masquerade on Saturday night was not a great success, with only 10 entrants in the competition and hardly anyone else in the parade. Afterwards there was some dancing but it was fairly disorganised with only a few people staying on. The committee should realise that for a successful masquerade you need a fair amount of work and publicity. Syncon's theme of 'Buckaroo Banzai' did not work. Basically the more people in costume (officially entered or not) the better the event. In 1978 at Unicon IV Don Ashby came up with the idea of 'instant costume materials' for fans at the con who wanted to be in the masquerade but had not had time to prepare a costume. It worked well then and I feel it should be done more often.

Another idea which several cons have done including past Syncons is to make the masquerade part of the whole evening and not just something that stops with the announcing of prizes. Swancon has their disco with a dj, a couple of past Syncons at the Crest Hotel turned the masquerade into a party with taped music plus bar serving blog. The event this year would have been a lot better with some work in this area.

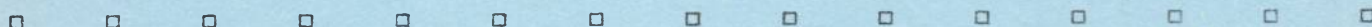
Art Shows seem to be the poor relation at Australian sf conventions. At both this year's Syncon and Swancon the art show was something relegated to a corner of the huckster room. More time and space should be given to artists at regional cons.

The only problem with the Metropole hotel was when the Mosman and Harbord Rooms were combined to make one big room for the major items, making a long, narrow room with lots of problems with pillars & line of sight being blocked. It was okay this year, but I can see there being real problems if you had more people there.

Quickly, other items: a great programme book; an auction of \$600+ which raised around \$200 for the fan funds, and some great folk singing by Terry Dowling, Ann Poore and Robbie Matthews.

Deckchairs Ray Gleeson and Sharon O'Brien, along with a cast of thousands, are to be congratulated on running a good con. Syncon '87 will be held over the Queen's Birthday weekend next year. I will be there; will you???

Carey Handfield



CONVENTION UPDATES

EASTERCON

Dates: 17 - 20 April 1987 (Easter)
 Venue: The Diplomat Motor Inn, St Kilda 3182, VIC.
 Rates: Attending - \$20 until 31 March '87; more at the door
 Supporting - \$10
 Rooms: \$20/night per person for all shared rooms (Cheap!)
 Mail: P.O.Box 215, Forest Hill 3131 // 'Phone: (03) 233 9480.

A small, relaxing science fiction convention/party to get you in the right mood for the National Convention, and to allow you time to talk to a few fans before the hurly burly of Capcon. The emphasis will be on science fiction, pleasant company and fandom.

It won't be held quite so far out into the bush as suggested last issue, but the ConCom have promised genuine trees anyway. Apparently St Kilda was quite popular as a seaside resort earlier this century.

Programming features are "fannish" films (films made by fans for screening at conventions) [urk], an art show featuring art produced for fanzines, and also a convention one-shot [a one-off fanzine, that is] to be produced at the convention.

CAPCON (26th Australian National Science Fiction Convention)

Dates: 24 - 27 April 1987 (Anzac Day Weekend)
 Venue: Canberra Parkroyal Hotel, 102 Northbourne Avenue, Canberra ACT.
 Rates: Attending - \$25 till 14.10.86; \$30 till 31.12.86; \$35 till 31.3.87; (etc etc...) Supporting - \$15 till 14.10.86; \$20 till 31.12.86; \$25 till 23.4.87 dot dot dot Day Membership - \$20.
 Rooms: an incredibly expensive \$98 per night per room, regardless of the number of people per room [Typist's choice words on subject censored]. Deposit of one night's room cost required.
 GoH(s): Robert Lynn Asprin, and Lynn Abbey
 Fan GoH: John Newman
 Mail: P.O.Box 312, Fyshwick 2609.

This is a new scale of membership rates brought about by ~~various~~ various economic factors. It would probably be a good idea to get in early before the economy worsens even further. There has also been a change of venue [again], bringing the con back in closer to the city centre. The New Airport International Hotel was apparently having problems with the builders not being finished. PR#2 mentions that there will be a writers' workshop held on the two days prior to the convention, costs and location to be determined. The Ditmars will be administered by Jack Herman in Sydney, so the Ditmars mailing address will be different from that of the rest of the convention's business: Box 272, Wentworth Building, University of Sydney 2006. Nomination forms will be circulated in the near future for these. Banquet cost will be \$25-\$30, with a \$10 deposit needed. It'll be a big con, folks, maybe a great one too.

WINDYCON (9th New Zealand National Science Fiction Convention)

Dates: 6-8 June 1987 (NZ Queen's Birthday Weekend)
 Venue: Whups! They've apparently just had their hotel booking cancelled on them owing to a takeover or something of that nature - watch this space for info!
 Rates: \$30 Attending
 Rooms: um, see 'Venue' above.
 GoH: Joe Haldeman
 Mail: Windycon, P.O.Box 11-708, Wellington
 Beating the competing Antarcticon [yes, that's right - Scott Base] at the recent NZ Natcon Business Meeting on the Chairman's casting vote (see report elsewhere this issue), Windycon has promised to provide a well-thought-out convention, although to lose one's hotel at such a late stage must be a bit of a blow to the whole effort, and it is to be hoped they're able to organise a suitable venue at such short notice.... Tsk

NORCON 3

Dates: 24-26 October 1986
Venue: Farthings Hotel, Auckland, NZ.
Rates: Attending - \$15.25. Supporting - \$8.73.
Mail: P.O.Box 1814, Auckland, NZ.

New Zealand's own answer to Corflu (our words, not theirs), this should prove to be a pleasant little relaxacon, with a programme oriented towardsthe fannish and with a dash of science fiction thrown in, even, maybe. Sounds like fun.

HOLLAND IN 1990 - the mouse that roared.

This is a WorldCon bid race which Australian fans can participate in with relative ease. The choice, as things currently stand, is between Los Angeles and Holland (or more precisely, Den Haag, the capital city), and site selection vote will take place at Conspiracy, the 1987 World SF Convention (Brighton, 27 August - 1 September, 1987).

If you were at Aussiecon (or even just a supporting member) and you participated in the site selection bid in which the Britain in '87 bid was successful (and turned into Conspiracy), you are also a supporting member of Conspiracy, and you are thus eligible to vote for (or against) the Holland in '90 bid just by paying (there had to be a catch, didn't there) a voting fee (usually around \$20). For your trouble, you will automatically become a supporting member of the WorldCon in 1990 (even if Holland loses). The small matter of additional money for the airfare to Europe is then all that standw in the way of your attending what will surely be a most memorable WorldCon. If you enjoyed Aussiecon, and would like to support other non-American bids, you could do worse than lend your weight to the Holland in 1990 campaign.

So much for the sales pitch. Pre-supporting membership of Holland in 1990 is a mere couple of dollars (which you can later claim back off your membership costs), so why not write away now to join, or even just for free info on the bid, to...

AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND: Justin Ackroyd, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne 3001, AUSTRALIA.
U.S.A.: Charlotte Proctor, 8325 7th Avenue, South Birmingham, AL 35206, U.S.A.
General Address: Stichting Worldcon 1990, Postbus 95370, Den Haag, 2509 CJ, Netherlands.

PERTH IN '94

Perth fandom, inspired by Aussiecon II, have taken it into their hearts (and gone out of their minds) to make a bid for the 1994 WorldCon.

Thanks to the migration of the America's Cup and the tourist boom thus inspired, Perth currently boasts of four venues capable of holding the WorldCon.

Due to American enthusiasm for yet another WorldCon in Australia, there are a multitude of U.S. agents, but they are still looking for U.K. and European agents.

Current Pre-supporting membership rates: A\$5/NZ\$5/US\$3/fstg.2.

Bid address: 5 Kinbrace Way, Lynwood 6155, AUSTRALIA

EDEN IN '96

"The day of creation was Sunday, 23 October, 4004 B.C.." - Archbishop James Ushhur of Armagh (c.1650).

According to the flyer: a bid for the 54th (and last) World SF Convention to celebrate the 6,000th birthday of everything. The six days of WorldCon will feature creationist programming.

Pre-Supporting membership: \$10 (US/A/...)

Address: Creation Association, 103 Wright Street, Hurstville 2220, AUSTRALIA.

Eden is a fishing settlement and holiday resort on the south coast of N.S.W. which features ~~creationist programming~~ some very intelligent killer whales and a harbour to rival Sydney's - and also a Flag Inn.]

The 1986 HUGO-NOMINATED NOVELS - A REVIEW

As part of our policy at Thyme to keep you informed as to the state of sf and (we admit it) as a matter of general interest, we present here a review of the novels nominated for this year's Hugo Awards (see last issue for a complete list of the nominations in all categories). Note: if you're a member of this year's World SF Convention, being held in August in Atlanta, USA, you have little time left to vote - so get a move on. Okay, Alan Stewart, take it away....

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Blood Music..... Greg Bear.....(Ace, pb, 247 pp.)

Cuckoo's Egg..... C. J. Cherryh.....(DAW, pb, 319 pp.)

Ender's Game..... Orson Scott Card.....(Tor, pb, 357 pp.)

Footfall..... Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle..(Del Rey (Ballantine), pb, 581 pp.)

The Postman..... David Brin.....(Bantam, hc, 295 pp.)

In Blood Music, Greg Bear has expanded upon his Hugo-winning novelette of the same idea, and it shows; it starts off as an exciting thriller based on a novel idea.... Research scientist Vergil Ullam develops cells that can think while doing unauthorised work. Fired, discovered, he injects himself with some of the altered white blood cells in order to smuggle them out. After infecting numerous people, he changes into what becomes the start of 'the noocyte creature'. North America becomes one vast colony of intelligent cells, so numerous they are able to affect the space-time universe by their perception of it ((so when does the fiction begin? - ed.)), becoming in the end 'the noosphere' which eventually vanishes up its own arse, or something like that.

Following Vergil as he attempts to smuggle out the cells keeps the reader entertained, and realistic descriptions of laboratories concerned with genetic engineering helps make a plausible scenario. However, the latter part of the novel moves from such person involvement and suffers. America changes into a huge blob, ho hum. 'Floaters' and 'fringes' do things, over there somewhere - the reader doesn't care anymore. The remaining characters aren't really interesting and much of the 'noosphere' remains unexplained, which would be fair enough if it couldn't be explained, but the likely explanation here would seem to be authorial fudging. In the end, the novel fails to satisfy.

Cuckoo's Egg seems to be typical Cherryh: a well-crafted alien society with a sympathetic human character centre stage. Thorn's training and upbringing conveys some of the hatani caste mystique; there are tantalizing glimpses of things such as the pebble custom, where an undiscovered pebble symbolises death overlooked. Such details enhance the novek, but much of the world's caste and technological systems remain vague.

The revelation of Thorn's origin and purpose agree with the novel's framework, but don't gel with the image of an adopted, stranded human baby, strongly suggested by the cover.

Overall, Cuckoo's Egg is descriptive and interesting, but without the spark of inventiveness or thriller pace to make it truly memorable.

Ender's Game is an engrossing novel. Orson Scott Card writes well and directly. From an early age, protagonist Ender Wiggin is taken by the military of Earth and trained in games - against humanity's enemies/with his fellow trainees/with the military adults/with his brother/against even himself, in an enigmatic computer game. All of these different games are narrative threads which keep the reader entertained. We are drawn into Ender's world by characterization. Card writes primarily about people about whom we come to care. We sympathise with Ender, but the military necessity for the solution which is Ender is so guiltily attractive.

As an example of 'end justifying means' philosophy and the military exploitation of children to produce an amoral commander capable of genocide, Ender's Game has depth behind its hard sf action facade. Reading like a technological thriller it offers entertainment with a moral flavour.

A plot summary of Footfall could go much as follows: a powered ship is observed approaching from the Centauri system, via Saturn. The alien Fithp attack, capturing prisoners from the Soviet space station and bombarding dams & railways with meteorites. A base is established in Kansas, but is nuclear-bombed by a US/USSR alliance. The Fithp drop an asteroid in the Indian Ocean and take South Africa. A nuclear-bomb-powered craft is launched to attack the Fithp mother-ship. The Fithp surrender.

On the acknowledgements page: 'And Niven said "I hope you break it gently to him that [the idea has] been done", - and that about sums up Footfall. [For a full-length review of the novel, see Thyme #48.] It has been done! Not all at once, or so sketchily, trying for everything like this novel does, but done nevertheless. For asteroid strikes, see books such as Shiva Descending; for alien invasion, perhaps H.G.Wells; believable, humanistic aliens - Pride of Chanur et al., and there's nothing more here than these plot bits and pieces tacked end to end - the book adds up to nothing. An sf-writer think tank was a slightly amusing idea, but is overworked. There is no emotional involvement; with over a hundred dramatis personae you can't really feel for any of them. Academic interest in how - not if - the human beings win is all that carries one through to the end. Overly ambitious, Footfall comes across across as the stale skeleton of a solid sf adventure.

The central idea of The Postman, on the other hand, is so charming that it carries the novel. In a post-nuclear Western America, Gordon Krantz poses as a mailman and 'Inspector' from the 'Restored United States' in the East, and he is greeted with warmth and hope, bringing cheer as he wanders through the grim, post-holocaust world. He establishes Post Offices, and is legitimised by the hope he inspires. Gradually becoming involved with a community surrounding Cyclops, a super-computer from before the war, Gordon becomes a General, de facto, and leads the people in battle against Survivalist bands from the South.

Gordon's character is well portrayed, coming across as a sensitive but strong hero, not above a bit of forgery to further his aims, although other characters remain sketchy, merely background or personalising particular ideological viewpoints - Powhatan as a baronial leader; the General in charge of the Survivalists.

Fast pace and clear writing make The Postman an enjoyable read. Hard to put down, especially during the fight sequences where you want to see who survives. Despite appearing too short or condensed in parts, The Postman is a worthy Hugo finalist and probably the most hopeful and enjoyable because of its mailman mythos.

FIELD FORM

Five well-known authors, all having won at least one sf award in the past. Greg Bear should probably be considered an outsider for this race. Although previously having won both the Hugo and the Nebula he is probably the least well known.

David Brin has gained an impressive reputation with his Hugo and Nebula winning Startide Rising, but doesn't have megastar status yet, although the fast-paced action of his work will challenge that of...

C.J. Cherryh who, although prolific, works more through language and detail. [Er, 'quality not quantity'?] Cuckoo's Egg will certainly winn her devotees but is really just good Cherryh, not a major novel. Still, popularity through prolificity never hurts when it comes to Hugo voting, as the 'big names' of...

Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle will find. The authors of numerous awards between them, the very familiarity of their names will help.

Orson Scott Card may have a counter to this: with Ender's Game having won this year's Nebula, increased sales should affect the Hugo vote, and Card's work is reasonably well known, having been featured in Omni and F&SF.

On a popular vote it should be Footfall fighting it out with the more deserving Ender's Game, possibly with a challenge from The Postman.

Alan Stewart.

And now for something completely relevant - if you want to write science fiction and have it professionally published, that is.

The 'Nova Mob' is an informal group of people who meet on the first Wednesday of every month, in Melbourne, to talk about... anything that takes their fancy. Yes, but what really goes on there, you ask, and how can I find out about it? The simple answer is to turn up (198 Nott Street, Port Melbourne, from 8 o'clock on) and see. In the meantime, you might do worse than read the following transcript of a talk that Sean McMullen gave at the April Nova Mob meeting - not about science fiction, a more usual topic, but about science fiction writing....

DON'T QUIT YOUR JOB

Sean McMullen

Why do a study of professionally published science fiction in Australia over the past ten years? Certainly we need to check the validity of old truisms, such as that A.Bertram Chandler was the most prolific Australian science fiction author, and that a boom in Australian science fiction writing followed Aussiecon I (1975). There are other questions of some importance to ask, however, such as how prolific is the average science fiction author, and by how much did local sf publishing expand after 1975? What place do women have in Australian science fiction writing? How well are Australian science fiction authors selling overseas, and how widely are overseas writers being published in Australia's magazines and anthologies?

By Australian professionally published science fiction I mean original science fiction literature published either in Australia or works by Australians published overseas. In my original talk on this subject (to the Nova Mob, 9 April 86) I devoted much more time to defining exactly what I describe as being professionally published, science fiction, and Australian, but for now I shall skip over most of that and promise to provide the information on request.

What defines an Australian author?

This is one definition that cannot be ignored, Australia being a country fairly heavily composed of migrants as well as having a small population. We have a tendency to grab newcomers as our own as soon as they arrive, as well as claiming expatriates long after they have left. Defining who is Australian is more of an art than a science, as a few examples will show.

Chandler, born British, was first published in the U.S. in 1944 at age 32. Ten years later he migrated to Australia and made the country his home, and by the late 1950s British magazines were calling him an Australian author. Neville Shute, author of that famous Aussie science fiction novel On The Beach, was a similar case. I say that a writer becomes Australian after five years' residence and the intention to stay, and that all works published after his or her arrival can be claimed as Australian.

F.G.Macintyre was born in Australia but moved to the U.K. while a child and then started writing. He does not qualify as an Australian. The case of David Rome is harder; He was born in the U.K., was educated in Australia, then moved back to Britain and began having science fiction published in 1961. After staying in Britain long enough to start to look British, he moved back to Australia. In 1973 he was thought still to be Australian enough to receive a Ditmar nomination, so I include him.

There are many other writers who can be classified as Australian who migrated here and then began their careers. Jack Wodhams, David Lake and Cherry Wilder are the three best known. Wilder lived here for 15 years then moved to Germany, so just how long people will claim her works are Australian is anyone's guess. The same applies to Judith Hanna, an Interzone editor in Britain who had a couple of short stories published here before she left Australia.

Cordwainer Smith misses out. He did live here for awhile, but although (like Chandler) he began writing overseas then wrote here as well - even using local settings - he did not make the place his home. An Australian setting does not make an Australian work. Alan Dean Foster set part of Orphan Star in a Brisbane that was

capital of the Earth, and even painted an engaging picture of some insect-like aliens surfing in the waves off the Gold Coast, but this is still an American work. The same is true of the stories of Arthur C. Clarke wrote with the Great Barrier Reef as a setting.

The problem of defining literary nationality will not go away, and can become horrid in the extreme. Arthur C. Clarke is a British writer, even though he lives in Sri Lanka, but what would happen if the fighting there became too much for him and he moved to some island on the Great Barrier Reef? Could he become a local writer after a five-year residency and with an intention to stay, even adding in a couple of novels with a local setting?

Overall Statistics

Under the foregoing definitions, 200 Australian science fiction authors published 90 novels and 416 short stories in 9 local sf magazines, 14 anthologies and a few mainstream and overseas venues. Three quarters of the authors wrote short stories only, while only 18 wrote both novels and short stories.

While the overall figures seem impressive, when compared to the U.S. on a per-head basis a different picture emerges. Population for population, we published a third as many novels and anthologies and a fifth as many magazines. On the surface it would then seem as though the local market could triple its output, but this is not strictly true. Our local heads read a great deal of U.S. fiction, which cuts down on the locals' share. In addition it is harder to sell on the U.S. market than the other way round.

The Role of Aussiecon I

It stirred things up. Compared to the 1965-1975 period, the last decade saw four times as many novels and short stories, and seven times more anthologies. Doubtless there was some help from the introduction of Australia Council Literature Board funding, but enthusiasm generated during the WorldCon was doubtless the main factor behind the workshops, magazines and anthologies that followed. Also, we should not forget the International Women's Year, as the number of female authors jumped from one in 14 to one in 3.

On the other hand it is important to ask who was doing all this extra writing. Science fiction was being published in Australia and by Australians long before Aussiecon I. I have tracked down 30 writers active in 1975. Short stories were published in local and overseas anthologies, and in various mainstream venues. If it were hard to get started, those who survived were fairly dedicated. If we define a prolific author as having published 2 novels or 6 short stories or the equivalent, we find that half of the prolific authors in the last decade began writing before 1975, and there are only 26 in this category. 80% of the past decade's authors thus began writing after 1975, but of these three quarters stopped after three years or less. Nearly all those who began before 1975 and passed the criteria for being prolific could be considered active by 1985.

Per head, the prolific wrote 5 times more than the others. Their numbers doubled after 1975, and their average output rose somewhat too. Brace yourselves: the number of less prolific writers grew 15 times, seven times faster than the dedicated! Thus, making it easier to be published led to a staggering rise in those writers who did not persist long enough to develop any sort of technique or reputation, as well as encouraging dedicated writers. This suggests that time, money and effort should be carefully directed if the idea is to encourage good writing and writers.

Magazines and Anthologies

In the study period there were 9 magazines extant at one time or another either partly or exclusively dedicated to publishing original Australian science fiction. Before that there had been four magazines that fitted the criteria in the early-to-middle fifties, as well as *Vision of Tomorrow* in 1969-70. The latter was published in Britain, but about half of its fiction was by Australians (or so the theory went). Of the fourteen anthologies of 1975-85, 2 were dedicated to introducing new authors to the reading public, while the others averaged only two new writers each.

Of the 160 new writers in the decade, 104 first sold works to magazines, while 44 began with anthologies. Remembering that two of the anthologies were for newer writers only, it is clear that magazines are far and away the best place to get started. Only 12 began with a novel, usually their only work. Establishing low-budget magazines specifically to give new writers a chance does not seem to be a good idea at all. Without competition from established authors, the new ones seem not to improve to the point where they are bought more widely. A full 70% of short story writers either had only one work published, or were published by only one editor. The standard is reflected in the popularity of the magazines. Only two were still publishing as of August 1985, and of these Omega Science Digest was not reliant on its fiction component for sales. The other, Far Out, has folded since, to be replaced by the somewhat more impressive Aphelion.

Anthologies tend to be showcases for what the editors consider to be the best available in Australia, and the better and more prolific authors tend to dominate. The standard tends to be higher, and sales tend to be around 1,000 copies or a little higher.

Beginners

Beginners remind me of nobody more than Beatrix Potter's Jemima Puddleduck. "I met this nice Mr Fox today, and he's invited me on a picnic. I'm to bring a baking dish and some parsley - oh, and an onion, I must bring a nice onion." Not quite what she said, but it summarises the sentiment. Disturbingly similar sentiments of trust and enthusiasm are to be heard from many beginners. The last ten years have seen a huge number of them given the barest gleam of exposure in sympathetic magazines before being fed to the foxes and wolves of a much more predatory general market than they had been prepared for.

Faced with a quantum leap of difficulty in being published after their first successes, three quarters gave up in three years or less; my figures show that very few tend to take up writing again after the first disappointment. A stunning number of people seem to have sent a couple of stories to Analog. Why is it always Analog? Analog receives 2,000 unsolicited manuscripts a month, but Isaac Asimov's Magazine, with a similar distribution, admits to only 850. Stop and think: who were the last three Australians who sold stories to Analog, and when? Many declare that they have gone on to beginning a novel, which stretches out into the following years and grinds ever slower.

Joint authorships would seem to be a good way for beginners to get a start, borrowing on a better-known author's name, so to speak. Yet I have found only five jointly authored novels and seven short stories out of five hundred or more works.

Things are never nice for beginners, because they can never become published without first having a reputation, and a reputation is impossible to come by without having been published! Making it easier for them initially does not seem to help, however. Both Harry Harrison and Robert Silverberg were quite adamant about this while in Australia, and both said that a real writer will write through sheer passion, regardless of what the market does to him or her initially. Perhaps the best way to encourage Australian beginners is to provide a competitive, healthy market for them to develop in, and not literary, sheltered workshops that most local magazines have been.

Established Writers

The 15% of writers who began before 1975 and who continued to write published nearly half of the short stories and nearly all of the novels in the decade following. Of the remainder, 15% were still active in 1985, but had been published much less on average. If the market was supposed to be easier to crack over the last ten years then one could conclude that suffering and tight markets are good for a writer.

This is not quite true. Before 1975 it was easier to be published in overseas anthologies such as the New Writings in Science Fiction series, and various magazines. The situation reminds me of the geographer in Saint-Exupery's The Little Prince. The man does not travel anywhere, but he writes about distant places after checking the credentials of his informants very carefully. The editors and publishers of the real world are very similar in their liking for credentials, and none are better

than those of an overseas publication. Recently a famous author tried to sell a manuscript under a pseudonym.... It was rejected as having no promise by all and sundry, but when she revealed that it was she who had written it, offers began to appear as if by magic.

Let us consider the output of a few big names in Australian science fiction - except that here we are not confined to the study period.

From 1955 to 1975 Bertram Chandler wrote about as much as the rest of Australia's science fiction writers put together. So far I have tracked down over 200 published short stories and 30 novels by him, as well as innumerable reprints, from 1944 to 1985. Nobody comes within an order of magnitude of him for total words written. For most of his career Chandler published at 5 times the rate of other Australian sf writers....

Before going on I shall emphasize again that these figures are for what I have been able to find as an interested reader. A dedicated biographer could turn up much more. John Wodhams sold 54 short stories, mainly overseas, and 4 novels, and Lee Harding 31 short stories and 12 novels, and edited two anthologies. I have discovered 24 short stories and six novels by Damien Broderick, who has also edited two anthologies. Paul Collins has edited 6 anthologies and sold over 30 short stories.

Women writers tend to be less prolific on the whole, but then they started later, at a time when overseas markets were closing. With her first sale in 1974, Cherry Wilder has 4 novels and at least 9 short stories published, followed by Leanne Frahm with 11 short stories and Phillipa Maddern with 8 short stories. Frahm is an interesting case in that most of her sales have been to overseas anthologies, which is quite an achievement. The only woman who started out in the 1950s was Norma Hemming, with 10 short stories published in Australian magazines (remember, they existed), four more stories published in Britain. When she died aged only 32, in 1960, the loss to science fiction was more than just that of an obscure Australian author. Her style was very similar to that which became popular in the late 60s, and she might well have risen to the stature of Le Guin had she lived. It was twenty years before another Australian woman's published output in science fiction exceeded hers.

Us and Them

And who are they? Mainstream writers and science fiction writers from overseas, of course.

To begin with overseas writers, some 28 British and American writers had 39 short stories published in Australian magazines and anthologies between 1975 and 1985. Put in another way, a tenth of the locally published authors were foreigners. I do not have any accurate figures on the incidence of Australian authors appearing in British or American venues, but the figure is certainly miniscule. The absolute number of Australian short stories published overseas is about half the number in the decade before 75.

It is almost as if Australians grew aware of their own sf as the world forgot it. Before '75 more than half of Australian sf short stories were published overseas in such places as New Worlds Science Fiction, New Writings in SF, Science Fantasy and even Analog. The U.S. market has tightened after never being easy, and much of the British market has ceased to exist.

Mainstream authors are three times more numerous than before 1975, implying that the field is gaining a respectable image - which may or may not be a good thing. 24 tried their hand at sf, usually by way of novels, but most published only one or two works. Some authors, such as Peter Carey and George Turner, have managed to write sf while remaining friendly with mainstream circles.

Standards

The Ditmar fiction nominations have a strong tendency to be from the more prolific authors. Yes, I know that John Foyster won a Ditmar with his one and only sf story, but the fact remains that prolific and experienced authors tend to be nominated. This implies that their work is better, which is understandable.

The British magazine New Worlds of SF polled its readers on the stories it published through the 50s and the 60s, and on the whole Australian authors did about as well as an average British writer. The Americans tended to score better, on the whole. American polls showed the Australian few published in the U.S.A. doing well, if not brilliantly: Australians' best writing does seem to be considered as good as any. Stories by Chandler, Turner and Lake have found their way into various 'year's best sf' type anthologies, and Damien Broderick came very close to winning the Campbell Award for his Dreaming Dragons novel. Standards are not really in question, then.

Conclusion

Did the tightening of overseas markets in the early to middle 70s force Australians to develop their own sf industry? This is probably a simplistic view, as things were pretty bleak in the 30s and 40s, yet local sf only sprang up when overseas reading material became restricted. I would lay the credit at the doors of the Australia Council, Aussiecon I and the International Women's Year, although I cannot help think that the release of Star Wars in 1977 was influential in awakening wider public interest in the field.... Science fiction now has a wide base indeed in Australia, and is finding a place beside the mainstream, albeit uneasily.

The plethora of failed writers over the last ten years shows that it is not enough merely to give newcomers some token exposure to a limited audience; they need a healthy market and the possibility of publication to get the incentive to improve. Per head of population it is still harder to be published both in Australia and as an Australian overseas than would be the case for an American writer at home or abroad.

Looking at the publishing statistics in the brief few months since Aussiecon II, we find that sf is being published at a rate similar to that during the previous decade. One new magazine, Aphelion, has begun life, the publisher & editor inspired by Aussiecon II. Phillip Gore, editor of Omega, admits to a big surge of unsolicited manuscripts after the WorldCon (in addition to the normal 200 or so that turn up every month). It is worth noting that Omega sells more copies per annum than all the other paying Australian sf magazines together, and for their entire lifetimes. It may primarily be a science digest, but there is Australian science fiction in every issue, it is over five years old, and some of its stories have won Ditmars. Is there a lesson here for Australian science fiction, or is success not the Australian way?

In Wells' The Time Machine, it is said that we are kept keen on the grindstone of pain, and look what happened to the Eloi when that grindstone was broken. Most of our top writers started out before the boom that followed 1975, while the attrition rate among the rest is frightful and their output lower. If help is to be provided for publishing sf in Australia, I would like to see it providing publication venues that would attract our best writers, so that newcomers have to get to a certain standard before they see themselves in print. There is nothing wrong with fewer writers writing better science fiction.

Not all of my suspicions of the newer writers come from statistics. I read a hefty slice of the lower end of the decade's output while sick recently, and it was a worse experience than the actual operation on my spine. That is my only comment by way of review. While this study has not provided much literary criticism, I hope that it has made you aware of the extent of Australian science fiction. Which of you have read any of Norma Hemming's stories, or even Neville Shute's On The Beach? The dozens of stories published in the New Writings in Science Fiction anthologies are still available in public libraries, showing what Australians were writing from 1965 to 1975. As far as the works of the last few years are concerned, you have probably already read a lot of the better ones. Remember what Theo Sturgeon said about 95% of sf being crap before you consider reading the rest; for many works the statistics that they add to is all there is to them that is worth looking at. Speaking of statistics, my figures are based on my bibliographic researches up to April '86. Doubtless I shall add a few more works to the bibliography over the months ahead, but the statistical trends have been stable for some time.

Finally, who said "Don't quit your job"? Frederick Pohl said it to me on hearing that I had won the short story competition at Aussiecon II. Sound advice.

Of the 200 writers to sell works during the last decade, only one in eight published more than 2 novels or 6 short stories - and this averages at less than one work per year. I have sold four stories this year, which is statistically fairly good, but I am still not even slightly tempted to quit my job. Whatever motives people might have for writing science fiction in Australia, getting rich quickly cannot be one of them.

Sean McMullen

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LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Following Swancon and the giving out of the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards (Ditmars) for 1986, Craig Hilton offers his sentiments about why awards are a nifty idea and what they should represent.

The Definition of Best Fan Artist - A Muse from Craig Hilton

On what criteria are the votes cast for a fannish award such as best fan artist? Is it the most artistically accomplished, the most prolific, the most fannishly relevant or the most popular at parties? Now is a professional who submits some work to fanzines or displays at a convention compared with a true amateur? Evidently, the individual voters seem to know what they are voting about, but if this thing is something nonspecific, unspoken and generally assumed to be understood, surely our revered award then merely represents the same.

Talking about the Ditmar for Best Fan Artist, we have a situation where the fannish community has elected at one time John Packer, whose work can be described as rough and immediate, and at other times Marilyn Pride and Nick Stathopoulos, both professionals producing polished, technically sophisticated art. You couldn't find representatives of the spectrum any wider apart. So why are we choosing them? What, through our awards, are we proclaiming about them?

Further examples: The 1984 Hugo at Aussiecon II was taken out by Alexis Gilliland, a man known most for his small thumbnail 'fillos'. I think most people would agree that, if it came to the crunch, there are artists and cartoonists in world fandom who can produce work technically superior to Alexis', such as Brad Foster. Is volume more important? In volume, the quick cartoonist has the edge, and so does the professional, by and large (vis Mr Foster). Note, by the way, that the Hugos named this category the *Best Non Professional Artist*. Presumably the professionals got their work done in a non-professional capacity.

Western Australia's own Tin Ducks saw local watercolour, gouache, ink and pastel master, Peter Saxon, on the 1983 list of nominees. Again, none of the others could begin to approach Peter in the field of artistry. However, his eligibility as a fan artist that year was based on the fact that some people in fandom had seen exhibitions and/or bought his paintings. For the record, Peter polled very well but didn't win the Duck.

This, then, I recently put to Mr Stone. He replied thus: "The Best Fan Artist is the person whose artwork has contributed the most to SF Fandom in the year being voted upon."

Now, I don't know about you, but I think that is brilliant. It defines the common, comparable thread which links in the one category the Packers, Prides, Stathopoulos's, Fosters, Gillilands, Saxons and - ahem - Hiltons. It makes less relevant the distinction between the strictly pro or non-pro, fan or non-fan. It can also, I suggest, be extrapolated. When we vote for the Best International Fiction, do we really mean Best International Fiction, or rather the novel which has contributed the most to fandom?

For the awards to have any value, we should be able to define what they are about. The damn things have been voted for and handed out year after year, so someone or perhaps everyone must know what's going on. What I'd just like to see is it written down somewhere prominent, with the run up to the awards, for all to see and be confidently and justly proud to honour the fannish achievers in the way they do.

Craig Hilton

It would be nice if people really did have such noble thoughts in mind when they voted for awards [I do.], but I suspect that the truth is rather more complicated. In a real world, how do you tell fen what criteria they should use for deciding who to put a '1' against on their ballot? In a "popularity" award like the Ditmars, there's nothing to stop anyone from voting simply for the name they know best or the work they think looks nicest. I personally tend to be biased a bit towards Fan Artists who've helped improve the look of Thyme, for instance. Whether that represents a significant contribution to Australian fandom is no doubt contentious. Also, since you twist my arm, I should remark that Craig Hilton cartoons have made some of the most topical additions to these pages recently, thanks muchly.

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PLUS C'EST LA MEME CHOSE, PLUS C'EST LA CHANGE OF ADDRESS!

Melbourne: Roy Ferguson has moved up-market (and yet, paradoxically, closer to where Dennis and Justin live...) to 4/4 The Vaucluse, Richmond 3121, but his POSTAL ADDRESS is P.O.Box 427, Abbotsford 3067, as ever. John Newman has a new mailing address: P.O.Box 327, St Kilda 3182. And finally, Angus Caffrey is now living at 4/25 Illawarra Road, Hawthorn 3122, telephone 819 3844.



Sydney: The Better Late Than Never Dept. informs us that Christine & Murray Brownrigg were blessed with a child, one Daniel Mark, cesarian, last 18.3.86. Less happy news concerning hospitals: Dave Ramsbottom, on honeymoon in New Zealand, has been afflicted with a heart condition while over there and will not be able to fly back until sufficiently better. All the best, Dave....

Thanks for this issue go to: Carey, Alan, Sean, Craig, Angus, Nancy, Marc & Cath.
For RTWERK: Bill Rotsler (p.3); Betty De Gabrielle (p.7); Angus Caffrey (p.18).
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