

# thyme 57

the AUSTRALASIAN SF NEWS MAGAZINE    October 1986





### MERV BINNS SELLS BOOKS

With less than a year passed since Mervyn Binns folded Space Age Books, he's back in business (of sorts), this time with a mail order service and a complementary publication to tell people all about it, called simply Merv Binns Books. Merv writes:

'As the owner of Space Age Books and as a science fiction and cinema fan of long standing, I have been producing lists and fan magazines, mainly of a news or simply booklist variety, for about 35 years. Doing booklists is something of an obsession with me. Quite simply it has been with the hope that people will buy (the books) from me, but I feel it fulfills a desire just "to publish". A feeling that all fanzine editors will understand.

'So as well as being a list of books that I can supply or obtain for you, Books will be a list that will assist buyers of all types of books... an ambitious project perhaps, but I will give it a shot.

'To begin with I will be sending Books to a lot of people free! Those who buy books from me will continue to receive it, but other readers will be able to continue to receive it by subscribing.'

For the moment, if you'd like to see copies of Books, write to Mervyn Binns, 1 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea 3185. The first ('October') issue deals mainly with sf & fantasy titles, with a mixed bag of other stuff - humour; second hand; sf slides etc. Concerning future plans, Merv writes:

'In some ways I would like to start a shop again, if not in the city of Melbourne, in the suburbs, but I feel also that I could not put up with all the problems involved with it. Perhaps I could set up somewhere on a temporary basis, in the city, once a month. I will attend as many conventions as I can. However, I intend to develop and improve the mail order business and continue to work from home. I will be home most of the time, including the weekends, so if you wish to call in and look over what I have to sell and pick up orders, I will be very pleased to see you, but please give me a ring first[(03) 531 5879]. As the weather improves in the next few months, I am likely to take off for a day or two and go fishing.'

It's a constant minor source of interest to see how different people who've been receiving Thyme will respond to an appearance on their mailing labels of the dreaded Silver Ex. Some readers despair; others complain (sometimes with justification - sorry!); and from some placid souls we hear nary a peep. But you know what Lee Harding does...

### LEE HARDING WRITES!

'Dear Peter and Roger:

'Thanks for sending me Thyme #56. Also the previous issues. I enjoyed every one. Please accept my apologies for not writing and thanking you sooner, but my correspondence gets further behind with the years.

'It's no great secret that for some time now my interest in sf and fandom has been at aphelion. Hopefully, this won't last for long, because I've enjoyed so many good fannish times in the past and the early years of Space Age Books remain a source of wonder to me.

'Thyme is certainly a juicy newszine, probably the best Australian fandom has produced. [Cough! Okay, Lee, we'll keep on sending you copies; you can get up off the floor now.] But I must confess to a hankering for the yellow press style of yore - exemplified in John Foyster's Chunder! - when a three-line item tucked away on the back page of Thyme 56 would more likely have been headlined "BRODERICK GOES BACK TO SCHOOL!!!!". Ah, sweet nostalgia.

'Thanks again for thinking of me.'

Lee Harding.



Thyme #57, the newszine that does when the others don't, and doesn't when the others do, is brought to you by Peter Burns and Roger Weddall, care of P.O.Box 273, Fitzroy 3065, AUSTRALIA. Telephone? Please do: (03) 347 5583.

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"Do it!"



'Kicking up one's heels'

So much for all the complicated stuff; there's nothing left to do now except read the issue. Unless, of course, your mailing label is graced by a large, silver X, in which case  
+++++

TED WHITE GOES TO GAOL

From the Nielsen Haydens in America, via Bruce Gillespie in Collingwood, comes the news that Aussiecon II Fan Guest of Honour Ted White has been sentenced on charges relating to drugs - he's been "busted".

The circumstances of his arrest could be described as unfortunate: a long-time neighbour, convinced that the succession of "weird people" traipsing in and out of Ted's place (fans; musos; members of Ted's Writers Group) must have meant that Ted was dealing in drugs, contacted the police who fronted shortly with a search warrant, and who proceeded to find small quantities of grass, psilocybin and LSD on the premises. Ted is now in gaol. We cross to a broadsheet circulated by the Nielsen Haydens....

'Ted phoned us collect this evening and talked for over an hour, so I thought I'd pass on his change of address plus the current bits and pieces of news. He said he mailed us a letter on Monday (8 September), two sheets four sides of notepaper size, covered with pencil scrawls, but we haven't received it yet. The arrangement we discussed with Ted at the Worldcon involves him sending us his general-distribution letters from prison, which we'll try to place with whomever is going to be publishing soon and is willing to run the material. Probably his first batch will go out as an insert in the next \_\_\_\_\_, God willing and the creek don't rise but we sent the material to be electrostencilled out to Terry Hughes today. Rah.

'First, for anyone who didn't get the news last Friday, Ted's sentence is a lot lighter than any of us had thought it might be. The background info is that he pleaded guilty to three counts of possession-with-intent-to-distribute, and his sentence is going to sound pretty grim for the first few seconds, but hang in there; it gets better as you go.

'The initial sentence was ten years on each count, yielding a total of thirty years. However, the judge then ordered that all three terms run concurrently, which reduces it to ten years. Then he suspended nine out of each of the ten-year chunks, reducing the actual time served to three one-year concurrent sentences, i.e. one year. (I'm going to be spelling all this out as clearly as possible, for those not familiar with the American Criminal Justice System, so please be patient with the technicalities.)



'The news came as a terrific relief, of course; we'd been expecting Ted to have to serve several years before he came up for parole, and then at the convention Ted told us he'd heard from his lawyer that the total time served might be as little as ten months. In fact it's likely to be four months, six months at the absolute outside, once that vastly reduced sentence is subjected to further shrinkage via parole (see below). So let there be general rejoicing, relatively speaking. On the other hand, spending time in the Fairfax county gaol only looks good compared to spending a lot of time there. Onward.'

And so to Theodore White's first 'LETTER FROM PRISON' - 6/9/1986

"This man has a sixties mentality," the female prosecutor said. And, unstated, "Ought to be punished for it."

"You may think the drugs you sold were not harmful," Judge Jennings said, "but they inevitably lead to worse ones." What era mentality is that?

The judge pronounced the sentence: "Ten years of incarceration" -- I stood very still -- "with nine suspended."

One year. Or less. How much less I do not yet know. Estimates I've heard range from 45 days to six months.

I was taken directly from the courtroom to a cell outside that room. I was told by a deputy that I would serve my sentence there (here) at the Fairfax Adult Detention Center, a jail in Fairfax City. Then he left me in the bare concrete cell for an hour while my paperwork was processed.

From there I was taken downstairs via private passages to G(eneral) H(olding) 2 -- the same cell I'd shared with around twenty drunks the night of my arrest in March. I sat on a concrete bench for about three hours with 18 others -- some of whom would be processed with me in the days to come.

Later that afternoon I was taken to a receiving cell -- R44 -- where I spent Friday night, Saturday, and part of Sunday. It was hellish.

Imagine a concrete cell ten feet high, seven feet wide, and eight feet deep. A bench-shelf ran across the back wall, and -- thank god -- had a thin mattress on it. In the corner to the right of the door was a stainless steel commode/toilet. A fluorescent light overhead was lit 24 hours. The door had a barred window and a slot which opened to admit trays of "food." (Pig swill is a better description.) With rare exceptions, when I was taken out for "classification," etc., I spent my time in that windowless cell doing nothing, allowed nothing to read. I dozed much of that time, escaping reality in vague dreams, punctuated by noises from the corridor outside and cells down the way. It was air-conditioned, and uncomfortably cold. There was no blanket, no pillow. Eventually my body ached in every position.

Around 3:00 AM, Sunday morning, I was taken to a room where I surrendered all my clothes -- my watch and everything in my pockets had already been taken -- showered, and was issued my prison clothes, rather old and threadbare.

From there I was taken to DT-2, a cell-block where I was given a cell-room off the dayroom. It was larger and nicer than R44 -- in addition to a separate commode and toilet, it had a table and lights that dimmed at night, and I was issued two sheets (very thin) and a blanket (ratty and too short).

This began a less unpleasant existence. I didn't sleep much the rest of that night -- I was slept out -- but the surroundings were better.

Around 5:00 AM the lights came on, my cell door unlocked with a loud bang, and I rose to join eight others in the dayroom for breakfast. I gave my stainless-steel tray of swill to the others and returned to my bed. At 9:00 AM I had to leave my cell for the dayroom -- my cell door was locked and my cell inaccessible until evening.

The others in the dayroom were four whites and four blacks. I recognized several from GH-2 -- two had gone in with me that morning.

I found it easy to make friends with all of them, and soon began playing cards with them. (I played Spades with "spades.") Jesse was a tall black with a motor-mouth -- a line of five and clever with cards. He christened me Theo. (I am officially Theodore White here, and mail should be addressed to me under that name.) Rick Washington was a soft-spoken black with whom I became friends. The whites stayed more by themselves that day. I found my accent thickening as I spent most of my time with the blacks.

The day (Sunday) passed quietly and enjoyably. We played cards, the food got better, and I found myself smiling to myself in bed that night. "This isn't that bad," I thought to myself.

Half of us were transferred to permanent cells in the general population that evening -- the rest of us to follow 24 hours later. During the "night" three new ones were added.

Monday morning I rose for breakfast feeling pretty good. The day passed with card games -- something I always enjoy -- and conversation. I used the phone (collect outgoing calls only) to talk to my mother and my daughter. A minister came by and gave us pencils and paper.

Around 9:00 PM five of us were transferred "upstairs." I was separated from my newfound friends and put in Cellblock A-5.

This is a smaller cellblock than DT-2. The dayroom is smaller, and there are only four separate cells off of it. (DT-2 had six.) There are seven of us here, and as the newest I sleep on the floor of the dayroom with two others. No privacy at all. This does not strike me as an improvement. But we have a TV set (13" B&W), cards, etc. Four blacks and three whites, all "older men" like me.

"YER UNDER  
ARREST!"





When I came in, everyone was watching Monday Night Football, so I haven't really "met" most of them yet. (Instead, I've written this.) I've yet to settle into the routine here, but I hope I'll move up to a cell eventually. I'll keep you posted.

I can receive unlimited letters here, but not fanzines -- send them to my home address. Letters should be addressed to --

Theodore White, A5  
Fairfax County Adult Detention Center  
10520 Judicial Drive  
Fairfax VA 22030

Getting back to the  
Nielsen Hayden letter:

'Oh, and Ted says that if you can send books, don't worry about whether it's something he's already read. If he doesn't read them, the other guys at the FCADC very likely will.

Ted says they're a decent

lot -- all six or seven of them total, and one is a very intelligent ex-psychologist with whom Ted's been having a lot of interesting conversations. The daily routine there seems to involve a lot of television and card games, particularly "dirty hearts", which is like regular hearts ["Blackies"? - eds.] except that the loser has to do fifteen push ups and the next-to-loser has to do ten, and both have to drop out so that two more inmates can rotate in. Ted said he'd doubted he could do that many, but he's found that he can manage it and has done some fifty push ups today alone. Entertainment is where you find it.

'(We) hadn't realised that Fairfax county gaol would be so small. Oh, and I forgot to mention earlier -- Ted will be there for his entire stay, rather than being moved to one of Virginia's crowded state prisons. Anyway, the FCADC seems to consist of the Detox area downstairs, plus three or four cells and a day room upstairs.

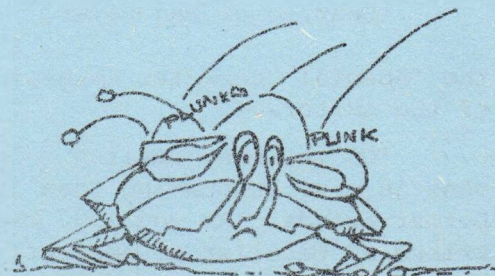
'There aren't enough cells for the resident population, and Ted as least senior inmate has to sleep on a mattress on the day room floor; he says it's no great hardship. Much more serious is the unavailability of Pepsi or RC Cola (or anything else decently carbonated): Ted's suffering [er, cough]. (This is a man who was in the habit of going through a six-pack of 16 oz. bottles of cola per day.) He says it's not the caffeine he misses, just the habit, but he has a nasty cola-deprived taste in his mouth all the time, and it doesn't help that the beverage served at meals is "some kind of horrible fruit juice, kind of like watered down Kool Aid." There Is Nothing That Any Of Us Can Do About This. Oh, and he says the food is nothing to write home about, though there's nothing horrible about it that he felt moved to mention.

'Actually, Ted said that compared to the rest of the inmates he hasn't really seen much trouble. He says there's a "decent fellowship" within the group, and added that "most of these guys have had much heavier shit to deal with."

'I'm practically a dilettante," he concluded.'

*Teresa Nielsen Hayden*

And so begins the letter writing, and the waiting. As things currently stand, word has reached us that the 5th of January (1987) is the mandatory date for Ted's release. After his release, he will be on parole for one year, then be on probation for the next nine. Ted's plans to be at Conspiracy, the '87 Worldcon being held in Britain, will not be affected by his sentence.





'THE NOTIONAL' TO FOLD

Information has come to hand that the next issue of The Notional is to be its last. The issue, #16, is expected late November, when the last of co-editor Leigh Edmonds' University course work is out of the way.

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THE DITMAR DEBATE

In the last issue of *Thyme* we reported on a number of tentative reforms to the Ditmar awards. Since that issue, we've found that a number of people are under the impression that the mooted changes have been made necessary by the changes to the Australian SF Society's Constitution. To clear the air a little, written out in full is the section of the Constitution dealing with the subject of awards (of any sort).

'The Convention Committee for each Australian SF Convention will, by a vote of the Convention's members, after a nominating process involving Australian fandom generally, award up to five Australian Science Fiction Awards (of which at least one must be for fannish endeavours) and the William Atheling Jr Award for Criticism or Review.'

[Putting aside for the moment the observation that it was commonly agreed at Swancon XI that the Constitution was to act more as a guideline than an inflexible set of rules, we see that it's specified that there be five awards (plus the Atheling), and that at least one of them be 'for fannish endeavours'.

[Looking at the proposed new categories of award, we can see that two of them are for fannish endeavours - No.3, the award for Best Fanwriter, and No.4, the award for Outstanding Achievement in Australian Fannish Endeavours.

[If the award categories were changed scrapping Nos. 4 and 5 (Professional Audio/Visual SF) in favour of Best Fanzine and Best Fan Artist, respectively, then we would have three awards being given for fannish endeavours. Now wouldn't that be nice?

[Anyway, here's Bruce Gillespie with his own thoughts on the matter.]

'Dear Roger and Peter,

I'm sending you this letter in the hope that the 'Special Character Assassination Issue' has not led to the assassination of the editors.

'Of the many amazing suggestions and fantastic statements in the issue, none is more astounding than Jack Herman's propositions for changing the Ditmar Awards. As you say, the new awards, Nos. 4 and 5, can only be described as peculiar mishmashes, with only No. 5 having any sort of justification. (Although why anyone should actively want to encourage illiteracy is beyond me.)



'In the light of that statement, one might be disappointed at the standard of Australian fanzines until quite recently. Not so in 1986. Offhand, I can think of ten fanzines that should be on the nomination list for 1986's Best Fanzine (not including my own, which I would withdraw from nomination if the Best Fanzine Ditmar is restored). There are, no doubt, plenty I've never seen that are also worthy of nomination. The best year in Australian fanzines for fifteen years, and Jack Herman wants to drop the Best Fanzine category! Is there no end to madness?

'Way back in 1976, when I introduced the William Atheling Jr Award (in, I admit, an even more cavalier way than Jack has changed the Ditmars here -- I thought of the award and stuck it on the ballot, and nobody complained, and quite a few people voted for it) -- as I say, way back then, the award was for any piece of critical or review writing anywhere in the world. The idea was that Australia had become so well known for sercon writing, and we felt so in touch with what was going on Out There, that we could set the standard in the field. Nowadays, of course, this is impossible, as vast amounts of material are being published overseas in academic journals that never reach Australia. At least Jack has restored the Atheling Jr Award to the intention of its second incarnation. However, there is no place other than the Athelings where Australia's sf fans can vote for achievements in serious fanzine publishing. Since this is the great strength of Australian fandom, as seen overseas, the current line up of the Ditmars seems all the more ridiculous.

Bruce Gillespie

'Dear Peter and Roger,

'The proposed categories for the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards need comment. I am concerned that the awards for Best Fanzine and Fan Artist have vanished. These are the only categories in which I have consistently voted. They are also the categories which have usually received the most votes; therefore I feel that other fans may feel disenfranchised by this change.



'I would be interested to see further comment about the new categories. Is it too late for them to change, before Capcon, if many feel them to be inappropriate?'

Mandy Herriot

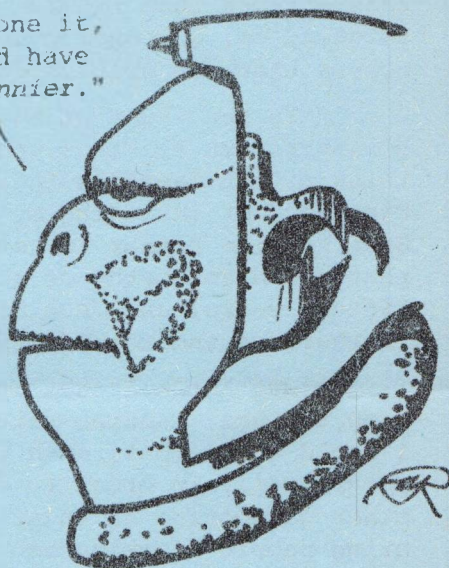
[No, Mandy, it is not too late for the categories of award to be changed.

"If I'd done it, it would have been funnier."

[Speaking with Capcon Chair Mark Denbow on the subject, he said that when Jack Herman had presented his list of Ditmar categories to the committee...]

"We asked around, and nobody seemed to have any objections to the way things had been set out...."

[Now I believe that since that time I have spoken to many people in Australia involved in the production of fanzines, and a fair slice of the ones involved in the production of Fan Art, and I have yet to encounter anyone that Mark or another representative of the committee had spoken to on this subject, and yet Mark Denbow is a reasonable fellow, as is Jack, and I'm sure (which means, I hope) that when they see the groundswell of opinion wanting both categories of Best Fanzine and Best Fan Artist to be retained, they will do their best to help keep these popular awards.]



Who did The Motional?

[Of course, there are popular sentiments and popular sentiments: Elaine Cochrane writes:]

'Thyme,

the new Ditmar categories distress me. Do they mean I can't nominate The Motional for Best Fanzine?'

Elaine Cochrane.

[What a wonderful idea. And then if it won we could wait and see who'd stand up to collect the award - but let's get back to some debate about what those suddenly-contentious Ditmar categories should be. Perry...?]

### A Larrikin With A View

-- Perry Middlemiss

'Dear Roger and Peter,

by crikey there's a lot of good stuff going on in fandom at the moment. We've had the rewriting of the Australian SF Society's Constitution (and a good job too, I reckon), and then we had the publication of The Motional and Fuck The Tories, and also this Bergeron/White blue. Makes a young lad's blood run it does.

'In this vein, the most interesting item in #56 is the information regarding the new, improved Ditmar award categories from Jack Herman. So a few comments may be in order.

'I concur with you that the dropping of the International Fiction Award category is long overdue. It has always been a waste of time as far as I'm concerned: too hard to manage, open to debate at every turn and just another one of the proliferating fiction awards in the sf field. The Australian Novel and Short Fiction awards cover the necessary areas and require no comment. The Audio and/or Visual SF Award strikes me as somewhat hairy [you too?]. But I know next to nothing about the various possibilities within the category - I can't draw a straight line and have given up singing in the shower due to the restriction of my credit at the local mirror shop. The fannish awards, on the other hand, are bound to attract a lot of discussion and argument (I have already heard mutterings of discontent from various quarters) so I thought I might get in my tuppence worth.



'Leaving aside the restriction of a maximum of five Ditmars for the moment, the first question that springs to mind is: why not have one award for Best Fanzine and Best Fanwriter?

'Before getting on to my opinions on the matter maybe a little history is in order. When I came around to the idea of writing this letter, I felt that I would need a comprehensive list of previous Ditmar awards upon which to base my arguments. I have included with this letter an extraction from the complete list of awards - the fannish awards from 1979 to 1986; 1979 was the first year that a Best Fanwriter Ditmar was presented.

| DITMARS AWARDED FOR FANNISH ACTIVITY (1979 - 1986) |   |                |
|--|---|----------------|
| YEAR   | BEST FANZINE  | BEST FANWRITER |
| 1979 ...   | <u>Chunder!</u> .....<br>(ed. John Foyster)                 | Marc Ortlieb   |
| 1980 ...   | <u>SF Commentary</u> .....<br>(ed. Bruce Gillespie)         | Leanne Frahm   |
| 1981 ...   | <u>Q36</u> .....<br>(ed. Marc Ortlieb)                      | Marc Ortlieb   |
| 1982 ...   | <u>Q36</u> .....<br>(ed. Marc Ortlieb)                      | Marc Ortlieb   |
| 1983 ...   | <u>Q36</u> .....<br>(ed. Marc Ortlieb)                      | Marc Ortlieb   |
| 1984 ...   | <u>Rataplan/Ornithopter</u> .....<br>(ed. Leigh Edmonds)    | Leigh Edmonds  |
| 1985 ...   | <u>Australian SF News</u> .....<br>(ed. Mervyn Binnis)      | Leigh Edmonds  |
| 1986 ...   | <u>The Metaphysical Review</u> ...<br>(ed. Bruce Gillespie) | Leigh Edmonds  |

'As you will see from the list, in the eight years under consideration, the Best Fanzine and Best Fanwriter awards have been won by the same person on no less than four occasions - Marc Ortlieb three times and Leigh Edmonds once. This leads me to two possible conclusions: (i) that Ditmar voters have often linked the two awards (and voted accordingly) or have been unable to tell the difference; and (ii) that Australian fanzines have a tendency to be dominated by the writings of their editors.

'I don't have the time nor the reference material to respond to the second of these points - try someone with a statistical bent coupled with a comprehensive Australian fanzine

collection, say John Foyster. I think you would find from this research that if the fanzine editors don't write the bulk of the material in their publications then they have a very strong editorial presence which colours the rest of the contributions in their magazines. And this leads us back to the first of the conclusions above; many, if not most, of the Ditmar voters having voted for their favourite fanzine in its category, make a direct connection between the fanzine and the fanwriter and vote accordingly, i.e. for the same person for both awards.

'Hardly seems worthwhile does it? There's no point in having two fannish awards if you're going to hand them out to the same people a lot of the time. It just means that a few individuals will have to get bigger mantle pieces, while a number of other worthy nominees miss out year after year.

'So, one possible solution to the problem is to dump one of the award categories. Jack Herman has taken this route but has covered himself by widening one of the other Ditmar awards to encompass the deposed activity. This is quite a good way of going about it and, at this time, I cannot think of a better procedure. My only dispute with Jack is that I feel he has dropped the wrong category, i.e. Best Fanzine.

'There is more to being a fanzine editor than just having the ability to put articles and artwork in the best possible order for publication. The same can be said of the captain of a cricket team; there is more to captaining a team than setting the batting order and knowing which bowler to bring on next. A team of champions does not necessarily make a champion team. The captain must get the combination right and therefore take the knocks or the kudos where appropriate. It must be noted that the captain is also a player, but is, more importantly, a leader and a motivator. The best individual player in the team may not have the captaincy because more than just individual performance is required.

'To continue the cricket analogy further, a very good player may be a member of an unsuccessful team (Alan Border is one example that springs to mind, Ian



Botham is another) but it is the team's performances that are counted at the end of the day. A batsman or bowler is only as good as their team, and by implication the captain, allows them to be. So too with fanwriting. The best piece of fan writing in the world will die an untimely death unless it is nurtured in a suitable environment. And that means a fanzine whose editor has the skill, enthusiasm and feel for the piece to allow it to perform at its best. The bottom line is that without fanzines fan writing would cease to exist outside apazines. And what are they really except one or two person fanzines anyway?

'In conclusion then, it is my belief that a Ditmar should be awarded for Best Fanzine, thereby allowing the art of fan writing to be covered by the Outstanding Achievement in Australian Fannish Endeavours Award. If only to give credit where credit's due.'

Perry Middlemiss

[The giving of credit where credit is due certainly sounds like a good idea, and while Perry has put a good case for the category of Best Fanzine being more important or relevant to fandom than that of Best Fan Writer, surely one is left wondering why either category must be dropped, if by far the majority of the voters do not want this to happen.

[On whose behalf, one wonders, and for whose benefit, are these awards being run? Who, in fandom, is clamouring for the embarrassment of an award for Best Professional Audio/Visual SF, at the expense of the Best Fan Artist category? These are strange days indeed. But on the subject of audio/visual sf, and other revisionist pasttimes, here's John Foyster with his two cents' worth.]

### Science Fiction: A Trivial Pursuit - With Exceptions

by John Foyster

The September issue of Thyme, an Australasian news magazine about sf, brings the joyous news that the embarrassment associated with the Australian SF Awards is to be got rid of. This embarrassment is a complex thing, worthy of some investigation.

In the first instance, the embarrassment relates to the category - now the former category - of 'Best International Fiction'. This category seems to embody two kinds of embarrassment. Firstly there's the embarrassment we have all felt in the past when writers like Brian Aldiss and Chris Priest and Joe Haldeman have had emblazoned on the covers of their works that they are 'Ditmar Winners'. It is true that past winners may go on exploiting their victories but, by removing the category, there'll be no more barbarians able to claim association with our wonderful and parochial selves. Secondly there's the problem, increasingly revealed in recent years, that attendees at the Australian Science Fiction Convention don't appear to read science fiction from overseas: after all, when you've got Far Out and Aphelion, Pamela Klacar and Terry Dowling, who needs Shepard and Robinson and Wolfe and so on? Besides reading, as we shall see a little later, is pretty old-hat anyway.

(There may be a further slight embarrassment, but I'm not sure how deeply felt it is. Jack Herman, only begetter of the newstyle awards, has long waged a campaign to remove the 'International Fiction' category and has been rolled, year after year. Having failed at the ballot-box, he's now able to attain his goal by fiat. Whether or not the newstyle awards will be retitled the Hermans remains to be seen, but I guess we may be reasonably certain that Jack will not emulate the founder of the Ditmars, who donated money for their production until a rude and careless committee (from Sydney, I believe) ignored his generosity and his existence simultaneously.)

The embarrassment is also to be reduced, I see, by upgrading the outmoded international SF category to something more fitting - 'Australian Fannish Endeavours'. The abbreviation 'etc.' appears to be a particularly important component of this category, although by including filking and costuming one would have thought the category



This trivialisation of science fiction - the reduction of science fictional merit to performance on the level of 'It's A Knockout' - is something I'm not alone in noticing. In the November 1986 Amazing Stories - a magazine with a circulation in Australia somewhat lower than Thyone - Robert Silverberg has a 'Reflection' on the state of science fiction from the writer's viewpoint. Silverberg is concerned about the influence that science fiction conventions have on the thinking of the world about science fiction. Since few readers of this piece will have seen Silverberg's original, the best way to communicate his concern is by quotation of two key paragraphs. As befits an Old Fogey, Silverberg starts by talking about the Good Old Days. But he continues:

'In short, the conventions were invaded by hordes and hordes of nice, dumb youngsters who find reading a pretty difficult task, but who are turned on by the Hollywood sci-fi product and enjoy dressing up in goofy costumes. It's a harmless amusement and at least keeps them off the streets.'

The 'but' has several facets. Firstly, Silverberg goes to conventions but he doesn't dress up in costume. But suppose at a convention he has to explain why he is there? Is it not embarrassing, perhaps, to have to admit that he writes for the 'kids in costume'? Maybe, maybe not.

But what's the problem? Firstly, there's a problem Silverberg identifies. Writers attending a science fiction convention might come to believe that the kids in costume constitute the *whole* of the readership, and react either by restricting themselves to writing for that market, or by turning away from science fiction. Each of these reactions could turn away skilled writers. Secondly there's a problem Silverberg doesn't refer to. Publishers and editors might come to believe that the kids in costume constitute the *whole* of the science fiction readership, and orient their productions accordingly. Were that to happen, writers who wanted to write for other than the kids incostume might find themselves without a market.

I believe there's some evidence of this happening. Earlier this year, when I was preparing a (now-aborted) edition of a revival of my fanzine Chunder! (to be retitled Chunderous Visions) the first piece I wrote, called Triumph of the Swill, dealt



with the ways advertisers tried to sell their product to the readers of Locus and Science Fiction Chronicle. I didn't then see it as a matter of being targeted at the adolescent but I guess that is one way to look at that kind of advertising. [*Triumph of the Swill* will be appearing in *Thyme* #58.]

The case that is being argued is that science fiction is susceptible of being seduced by its image: Norman Spinrad, in the September *Asimov's*, makes a somewhat similar point. In brief, if science fiction is continuously and unrelentingly promoted as being reading for teenagers and for no-one else then that is what it is likely to become, and writers of science fiction for adults will have to find some other way to keep warm and fed.

So when Hack Herman decides to ditch the award for International SF, and replace it with one for the best costume (or some other fringe activity) one can't help but wonder whether he is responding to historical necessity or actively promoting the acceleration of a trend. Whichever it is, such a change is a sign that the belief that science fiction can be for adults is becoming outmoded.

John Foyster

[Er, thanks John - and thanks to everyone else who wrote in on the topic; if you have a particular view on the sorts of things that Ditmars should or shouldn't be awarded to, the best thing to do would be to write off now to: Jack Herman, Box 272, Wentworth Building, University of Sydney 2006. Failing that, we'll be more than happy to print your letters and pass them on to Jack, and the Capcon committee.

[But speaking of Jack Herman...]

'Dear Roger and Peter,

I'll leave aside for the moment the question of the Ditmar categories in dealing with both ur private comments and your & Peter's published ones. I am waiting for more feedback before committing myself. [You hear that, everybody?] But on the single question of why no Fanzine category - well, I had to drop something and it seemed to me people had a better understanding of the standard of fanzine writing (and what was required) than they did about fanzine editing. As evidence I adduce the list presented for Hugo voting at Confederation. It seems that fanzine pubbing is not a very admired activity at the moment, at least not more so than club or con organising or costuming or filking: which is why I have lumped them all together.'

[Not to put too fine a point to it, Jack, your explanation of your actions is ingenuous and unconvincing. It was nice of you to decide on the behalf of Australian fandom that the 'standard of fanzine editing' was too complex a matter for people to grasp; and the attempt to link the membership of an American Worldcon with the Ditmar electorate is, quite frankly, laughable. It is decent of you to keep your mind open on the topic of the final categories of award; the question that everybody I've spoken to would like the answer to, however, is: "what was Jack thinking of, when he made up these new categories?" Some people have gone so far as to venture that this is just your idea of a practical joke.

[On the subject of hoaxes, and a letter we printed from a 'Daniel Wallace' in the last issue of *Thyme*, Jack continues:]

'I am now unsure as to who is pulling whose leg. Where are the hoaxes and who is being hoaxed. For example, someone is definitely pulling your leg in respect of Zbigniew Jonszta. He really was a Polish fan or it was the greatest hoax of all time. I get the feeling the real hoax is Daniel's letter.'

[Sigh... sucked in again. It wasn't until entering 'Daniel's' address into the *Thyme* computer mailing list that I happened to notice that the entry following it was decidedly similar, except for the name... William Good. Nice one, William - we'll pay that. (William Good, as Sydney readers will probably know, shares a house with Jack Herman and Cath McDonnell.)



of *Fraud*:]

between Koenig and Gibson.)'

Gault

'P.S.: Valma is my chief suspect in the Motional question.'

Limma. Sorry about using your name - and Shayne's - where we shouldn't have. It had honestly never occurred to us that someone would have the gall to knowingly advertise as guests people they knew were not interested in appearing.

[We don't know what you could do to prevent this happening in the future, but we're sure that this sort of thing must be illegal. And extremely unfannish. Talking about fans, and conventions....]

'Found on the floor at the Nova Mob'

## CONVENTION UPDATES

NORCON 3

Dates: 24-26 October 1986

Rates: Attending - \$15.25; Supporting \$8.73

Venue: Farthing's Hotel, Auckland, NZ.

Mail: P.O.Box 1814, Auckland, NZ.

"Relaxing. Fun. Be there!"

DODECACON

Dates: 13-15 February 1987

Rates: Attending - \$10

Venue: Leura Gardens Motor Inn, Leura, NSW.

Mail: % Gordon Lingard, P.O.Box A359, Sydney South 2000 (COA)

GOHs: anybody who happens to be having a birthday withing about a month of the dates.

Seriously, this is really more a Big Birthday Party to celebrate Eric Lindsay turning 40, Gordon Lingard turning 30, and a few other people a few other ages, round abouts then. As good an excuse for a Blue Mountains relaxacon as there is, and by all reports with a hotel (or rather Motor Inn) to match. Rooms should cost in the order of \$45-50 per night for a Double or Twin, and the large function areas and the sections of the inn which will be booked out by fans are apparently well away from the area where the rest of the inn guests will be staying, making it fine for all-night carousing and carrying on - sounds like it should be lots of fun. Plans for the proceedings are not yet finalised; there will probably not be much in the way of a programme. Jean Weber warns that the rock-bottom, no-frills membership of \$10 may rise closer to the date.

SYDNEY GAMES CONVENTION

Dates: 14th & 15th of March 1987

Rates: er... stay tuned for details.

Venue: The International Grammar School, 508 Riley Street, Surry Hills NSW.

Mail: S.G.C., GPO Box 2302, Sydney 2001.



SYDNEY GAMES CONVENTION cont.

Sounds like a straightforward gaming/tournament affair, with AD&D, Traveller, Call of Cthulu, Runequest, Star Fleet Battles etc. being offered for playing, as well as some display games. Cost probably depends on the number of games played.

KINKON 3

'In the dim, dark days of 1984, we held KINKON 1. Thickhead Murphy enjoyed it so much - and so did a lot of other people, by all accounts - that we decided to do it again.

'KINKON 2 was brought forth upon a suspecting world, and it was a success, too.

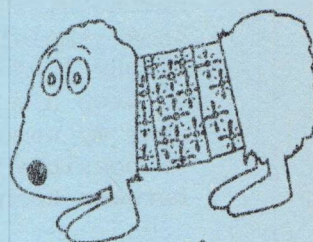
'So much so that we have nominated KINKON 3 for the 1989 National Convention. Vote for us..

'We have an overseas Guest of Honour (we know Phillip Island doesn't count) in the wings, and we are currently negotiating the serial rights to a Fan Guest of Honour. We even have a Committee: [list of names...].

'Now for the clincher - as usual, we're CHEAP. (Yes, I know everyone knows it, but.....) A pre-supporting membership of KINKON 3 will cost you a lousy \$2.00.'

Write to: KINKON 3, 11 Hopkins Street, Dandenong 3175. 'Phone: (03) 819 3844 (AH).

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □



The latest from Paris.....  
Designer Gaffa!!

WHERE TO, PETER McNAMARA?

A review of Aphelion #3; Winter '86

by George Turner

The magazine seems to be running on the spot so far as my personal enjoyment goes. Peter McNamara is trying this and trying that, making small changes and seeking a definitive editorial line; some things look promising and others begin to show weaknesses. However, there are changes coming up and Aphelion is definitely not slipping backwards. It still deserves our support not so much for what it already is as for what it can become -- of which, more below.

Terry Dowling is with us once again. He seems to be popular with readers (and God knows we need a few 'name' writers to establish a core) and the fact that I find him unsatisfactory is neither here nor there while others like his work. He leads the issue with 'Time of the Star', another Tom Rynosseros tale. Its main gimmick is a battle of charvolants (land-yachts) between Ab'O clans, wherein the principal tactical manoeuvre is to confuse the opposition by using life-size holograms of yachts to swell the apparent size of the fleets. Given the conditions stated by the author this is technically doubtful, I think impossible, and the battle itself, which is the action climax of the tale, is flat and uninteresting, probably because Dowling does not know enough of warfare and tactical possibilities to bring it to life. Also, the plot meanders to a sentimental close without much meaning.

This whole Rynosseros series, neither sf nor fantasy, hovering between realism and extravagance, leaves me cold -- but others like it, so the editorial choice may be a correct one. Of that also, more below.

Of the three short stories there is not much to be said. Two are mere fillers of poor standard, but Chris Simmons's 'The Murdering Mirror' shows an improvement in technical dexterity that makes him worth encouraging.

In the non-fiction items we are on more solid ground. Margaret Winch concludes her survey of the 'Dune' series and what she writes seems to be the product of thoughtful study. I admit to refusing to read another word of them after the tiresome Children of Dune, but who am I to buck the hallelujahs of five million readers? Interestingly Winch, after doing her duty as an unbiased critic, gives as an appendix her personal reactions to the novels and they are, happily, not wholly adulatory.



Michael Tolley surveys the novels of David Brin and is nicer to his earlier books than I have been, but his judicial summing up is hard to disagree with. The 'Letters' column on page 2 is enlivened by a typical Michael Hailstone tirade, infuriated to the point of hysteria by Tolley's earlier review of Aldiss's Helliconia sequence. The issue is almost worth the price for the spectacle of a midget battering the enemy round the ankles. Let us have more Hailstone!

Colin Robertson's short article, 'An Answer to Fermi', has little to say and nothing fresh but it could provoke a couple of new stories on the subject of extra-terrestrial intelligence -- if some writers actually think about it instead of snatching at the obvious.

'Film Briefs', by Giulia De Cesare, offers some interesting information on scenes cut from the released print of *Bladerunner* and makes me wish that a complete, unedited version was available. And scenes actually removed from the script would seem to make sense of much that had to be guesswork on the part of the viewer and to bring the story closer to Dick's intention. Studio moguls, run by their accountants, are a terrified lot.

Merv Binns's column gives news of forthcoming publications and conventions but he doesn't seem to have fully hit his stride yet.

The final 42 pages of the 96 are taken up by Part 3 of Patrick Urth's Oasis. I remain in two minds about this novel. It is a courageous attempt at a big adventure of the kind Australian sf needs in order to appeal to a wide readership; it is well-plotted, has a wide variety of characters, plenty of action, a nicely exotic setting -- and for me just doesn't work. I suspect that Urth is a young man (always an unsafe speculation in literature) because he makes a young writer's errors and lacks knowledge of matters you would expect an older man to be well informed about. As a writer he carries on long, descriptive passages that serve little purpose in an action story and should be cut drastically (e.g. pages 91-92) and reduces his characters to yelling hams when tight drama is needed. Yet he can write very well when he is not consciously striving for effect. 'Effect' is an inbuilt ingredient created by the situations, not something pasted on with over-writing.

On the matter of being better informed, there are twists and incidents that seem to be modelled on the reading of bad sf with no thought for realities. There is, for instance, a para-military group from a high technology world which practices the 'democratic' method of electing its group leader. Emerging communist nations have tried this with disastrous results; what they get is a rapidly rotating leadership with eventually a popular but untrained and inept figurehead in charge of matters of which he knows nothing. [Met any American presidents recently? eds.] The Red Army gave the idea away very early in its career (about 1919). A fixed hierarchy has its uses.

Also, the behaviour of Urth's senior politicians is wholly untenable; the constraints of office simply do not allow the freewheeling, emotional exchanges he postulates. Protocol is not purposeless; it restrains damaging emotion, encourages second thought and prevents exaggeration leading to unnecessary damage. Again, the secret gutting and internal rebuilding of a huge public structure is simply impossible, even in a police state, when hundreds of workers and planners are involved and very sophisticated spy-and-communication systems are commonplace. Nor, unless she is an idiot, could Carocci have remained unaware of Hienz's perfidy. Urth seems aware of this and skids over it obliquely.

Still, Oasis was worth the writing, if only to conquer the first-novel hurdles and learn, the hard way, how it is done.

I have complained enough. It is plain that I am not satisfied with Aphelion and also, I hope, plain that I am on Peter McNamara's side and want to see the magazine succeed. So what is to be done?

First, some minor matters:

The cover: I like Steve Altmann's airbrush work but will soon balk at seeing it on every issue; his ideas are limited and his symbols are obsessively recurrent. The good news is that new cover artists are to be tried out. Excellent.



Proof reading: This is a problem that McNamara is aware of. What he will do about it I don't know; professional proof-reading is prohibitively expensive for a magazine still trying to find its financial feet. There are problems, too, raised by the authors' failures of syntax and grammar. The variations worked on 'phenomenon' and 'phenomena' in No. 3 are horrendous with, apparently, nobody sure which is singular and which plural. (Radio newsreaders seem to share this uncertainty, which is unforgivable in professionals.) [But did you hear the ABC television commentator refer to something that was "real good", the other day... eds.] Let's hope for the best. Surely the two assistant editors can be of use here.

We are to have another Dowling story in No. 4, making four in a row. Even if the name were Heinlein or Asimov that would be too many too often and bad editorial practice. To my complaint Peter answered: 'Yes, I like Terry's style a great deal (the cause of many arguments with Jeff Harris) as do both Margaret and Dianne (Asst. editors -- G.T.) so you'll be seeing a lot more of him. No apologies should be offered on that score.'

Well, there should be, if not apologies, some second thoughts. Dowling and Urth have between them occupied more than half of each issue so far, severely limiting the variety of content. Those of us who are less keen on both writers have reason to complain of the rest of the magazine being filled out with little more than snippets; we want something to get the teeth into and the Dowling-Urth combination is not that. That all three editors like Dowling's work is, in terms of policy, irrelevant. Their job is to satisfy readers, not their own predilections -- unless they really want to go broke. And magazine readers want variety. Even the safe old 'mixture as before' needs a change of seasoning.

There is, of course, always the bitter possibility that few worthwhile stories are being submitted and that there is no alternative to Dowling. (And what, then, happens after that bulky serial finishes in No. 4? Not another serial, one hopes, unless it is truly professional.) The crop so far has been poor. If McNamara is not getting good stories, why not?

When I talk to local writers of sf I hear always the bitter complaint that there are no outlets. Yet here is a local outlet paying 3c a word, and the people who could give Aphelion the lift it needs are ignoring it in droves. What's wrong with them? Where are the stories by David Grigg, Tony Peacey, Leanne Frahm, Wynne Whiteford, Russell Blackford, Lucy Sussex, John Baxter, Paul Collins, Cherry Wilder and Greg Egan? Each of them can provide fiction of a higher quality than McNamara is at present getting. Don't they know the magazine exists? Or do they really not want the outlet whose absence is so often lamented? (And if you ask: Where are the stories by George Turner? there will be a couple in forthcoming issues.)

The magazine can only fail if the people who have most to gain by its continued existence don't provide the stories.

George Turner.

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Dear 'Thyme' - Changes of Address.

New South Wales: Glen Crawford & family have moved to 98 The Round Drive, Avoca Beach 2260; Glen's postal address is P.O.Box 1, Avoca Beach 2260. Stewart & Valerie McGowan have moved, to 4 Lindsay Street, Hamilton 2303 - 'phone: (049) 62 1496. Greg Hills is back in Australia (you can run, but you can't hide) from his native New Zealand. Greg will be living and working in Sydney for the moment (stay tuned for



an exact address, as soon as he has one); his tentative plans include moving on to the U.S.A. in about seven months' time. A change of address of sorts: Lewis, Marilyn and Nick are back from their DUFF trip. Marilyn ventures that a trip report may be out in time for next year's NatCon (Good Luck!)END

Canberra: Until mid-December, Ken Moylan will be living at... CCAE Student Res-  
idences, P.O.Box 20, Belconnen 2616. Will Terry Frost and Karen Vaughan  
be moving soon from Sydney to Canberra? Who knows. Maybe. Maybe not.

Melbourne: Mark Loney & Michell Muljart are (last time we heard) due to be heading over to Melbourne to live in about two weeks. They're planning to take about a week driving over, and to start with will be living at 206 Houghton Road, ~~Waverley~~ Huntingdale 3067, home of - among other people - Peter Burns. 'Phone: 544 6071.

\*\*\*\*\* There's a Party (actually, a 'Bar Christening') at Angus Caffrey's place - 4/25 Illawarra Road, Hawthorn 3122. Should be a star turn - the advertising says 'Freeloaders must supply their own twisties - but all beer, wine and spirits supplied. Hard to believe but there you go. The date is the 18th of October, the time is 8pm. You're invited.\*\*\*\*\* Harder for Damien Broderick to believe must have been the fact that John Douglas, the American publishers who has been sitting on his novel Striped Holes (to be heard on the AEC as a radio play, on the 26th of October), have finally decided to buy the thing. Douglas, in their Avon incarnation, are publishers of Damien's recently released hit The Black Grail, and the suspicion is that Douglas were waiting to see how that novel went before they either returned the Striped Holes manuscript, or simply said they'd like to buy it. A cynical manoeuvre, indeed. Meanwhile, if he has yet to see a copy of his book The Black Grail (Avon neglected to send him a copy, at least Damien can console himself with the thought that, at Deakin University, he is famous. Introducing Damien Broderick apparently a companion volume to the Deakin School of Humanities publication Mattoid, is a handsome little booklet running to fifty pages and which features an interview with Damien, a selection of short pieces (including poetry) by the author, and an excerpt from a 'work-in-progress', Time Zones. All rather good stuff. \*\*\* 'Good stuff', too, is what we should expect of George Turner, now he has bought himself a word processor. A novel every six weeks, George - we know you can do it!\*\*\*

Perth: Lisa Summers & Jay Prester are now expecting a baby in March - congrats.

Back Page Drive Away News: We forgot to mention in the last issue: the winner of the vote to decide the 1988 World SF Convention was 'Nolascon II' - New Orleans. In one of the biggest votes ever, New Orleans recieved 312 votes in its favour; the Bermuda Triangle came a solid second, with around 425 votes; Sydney Cove in '88, a write-in, recieved 16 votes. The 1989 World SF Convention was awarded to Noreascon III (Boston). □□□ The finalists for the coveted Booker Prize this year are: An Artist of the Floating World, by Kazuo Ishiguro; An Insular Possession, by Timothy Mo; What's Bred in the Bone, by Robertson Davies; The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood; Cabriel's Lament, by Paul Bailey; and The Old Devils, by Kingsley Amis. And that is the end of the news.

That only leaves us with the pleasurable task of thanking all the nice people who helped make this issue possible. First, we'd like especially to thank Irwin & Wendy Hirsh for their help in actually running off the last issue. Friends in need, indeed. That does not mean we think any less highly of Cath and Marc Ortlieb, who let us invade their place regularly (when Marc's duplicator is working) to run the beastie off there. A special mention, too, to John Packer, who we failed to credit for last issue's great 'Special Character Assassination' cover artwork (best thing about the whole issue, if you ask me).

Art credits this issue: Joan Hanke-Woods . . . cover  
Betty De Gabrielle . . . pp.3,4,5,6.  
Bill Rotsler . . . . . p.8

Hokai: thanks to Bruce, Perry, Merv, Lee, Mandy, Patrick, Jack, Elaine, John, John, Yvonne, George, Jenny, Nancy and Jean. 193008101986. Seeyuz blin!





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