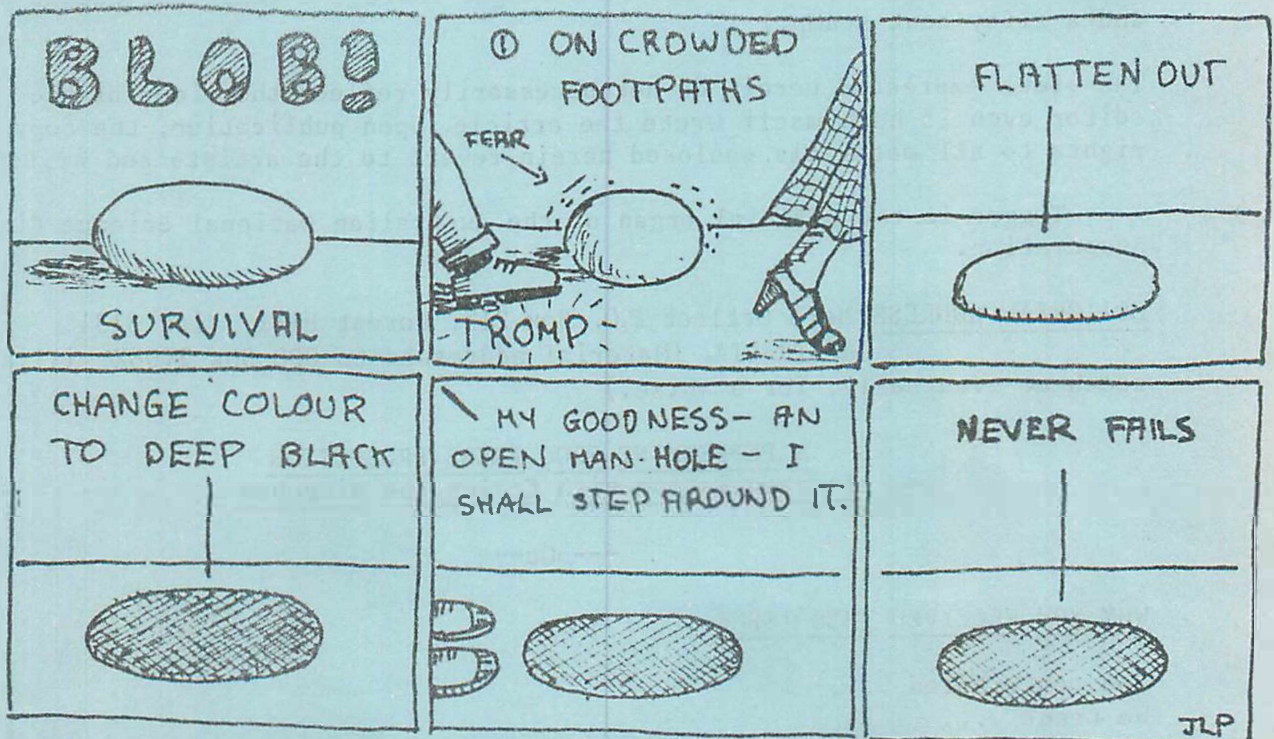


# TIGGER



NUMBER SEVENTEEN

DECEMBER 1985

Registered by Australia Post - Publication No VBH6727

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AVAILABLE for trade, contribution, LoC, editorial whim, or, if you insist on sending money, on an issue by issue basis for a \$2-00 money order made out to DUFF, GUFF, or FFANZ plus a fifty cent Australian Stamp. I'll post the money order on to the fan fund of your choice. (If you want to send your donation to TAFF then send it straight there and send your cheque butt and a fifty cent stamp.)

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor even if he himself wrote the article. Upon publication, the copy-rights to all materials enclosed herein revert to the artists and writers.

Tigger is the official organ of the Australian National Science Fiction Association.

EDITORIAL ADDRESS Marc Ortlieb P.O. Box 215, Forest Hill, Vict 3131 AUSTRALIA. (Material addressed to GPO Box 2708X will still reach me eventually, for a while.)

A PEPPERMINT FROG PRESS PRODUCTION  
In association with Eccles the Microbee

---oOo---

# WHY YOU RECEIVED THIS ISSUE

You contributed ....  
We trade ....  
I'd like to trade ....  
You LoCced ....  
Editorial whim ....  
Death will not release you ....  
Your last/only issue (Sorry, but you're a victim of budget cuts.) ....  
I'd love to have a contribution from you ....  
It was either this or write a letter ....



## ART CREDITS

Richard Faulder	page 3,5,6	Bill Rotsler	page 17
John Packer	cover, page 13,14,16	ATom	page 7
Terry Frost	page 1	Brad Foster	page 8,18



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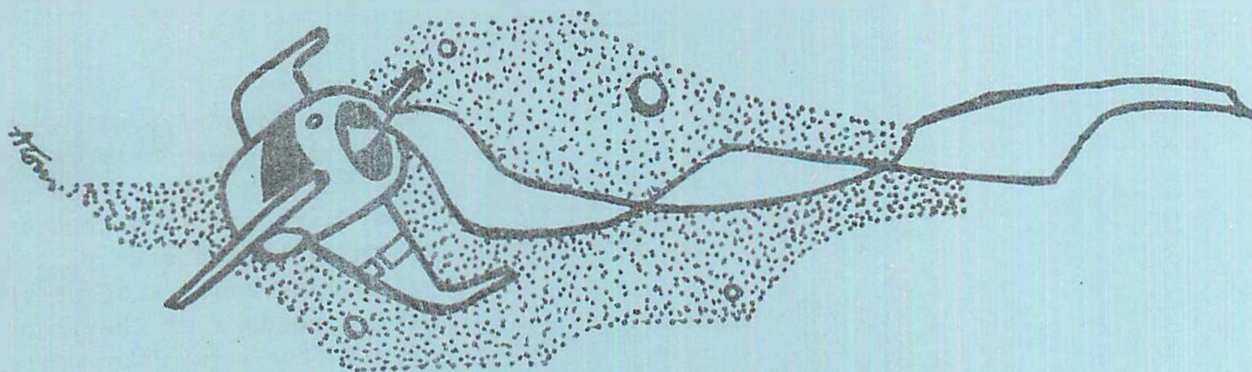
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Anyway, before you start to read, have dinner, swill down a couple of bottles of good plonk, and relax. Welcome to TIGGER 17, the fanzine that's so laid back it's a wonder its staples haven't fallen out.

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Last issue's electrostencils courtesy Richard Faulder and Allan Bray.



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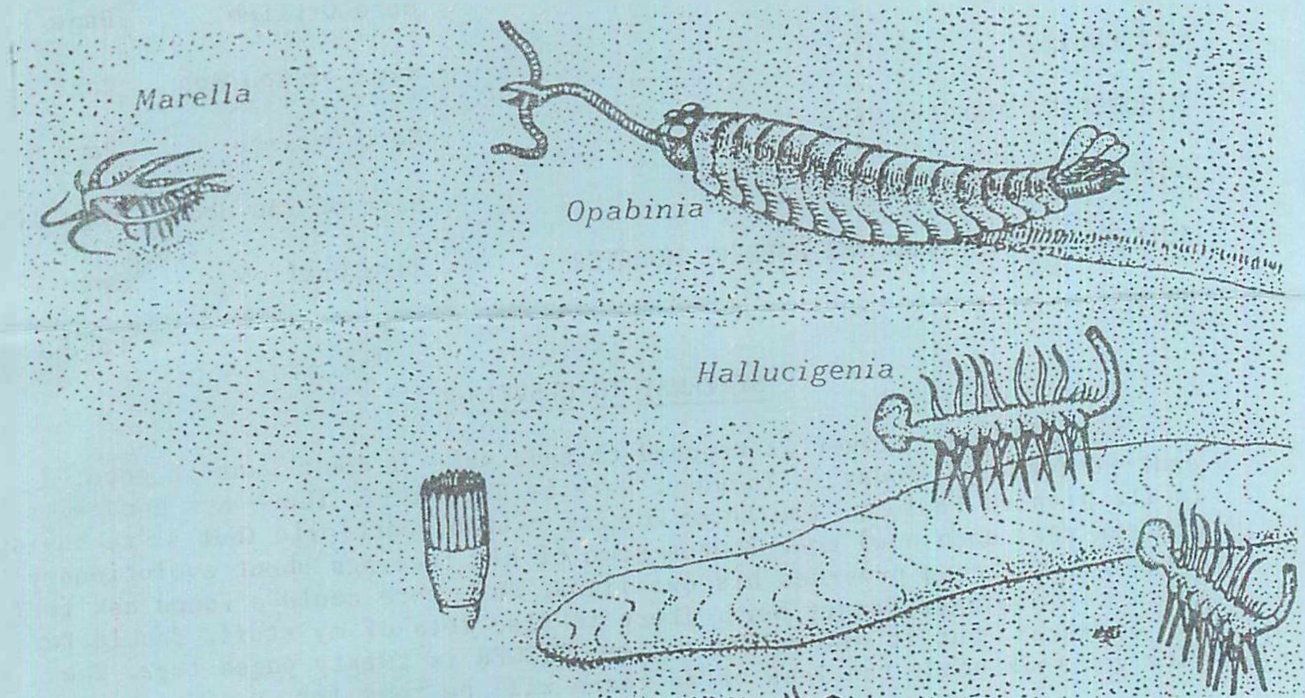
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## TO BE OR NOT TO BE - AN EVOLUTIONARY QUESTION

Richard Faulder



In the century and a quarter that has passed since Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace announced their theory of evolution by natural selection to the world, the only attempt to refute the theory has come from fundamentalist Creationists. (No doubt, considering the antagonism that the announcement aroused at the time, Wallace was probably glad that the world largely ignored his contribution, but he would probably like scientific historians to have paid a bit more attention to him than they have.) The incorporation of the discoveries of geneticists into the model, and more recent refinements, such as the idea of punctuated equilibrium (still not completely accepted), are just steps in making the model better explain the events of evolution. There has been no serious argument with the fundamental tenet of the theory - that a group of organisms with a common gene pool survive and multiply because they are better fitted to that environment than another group of organisms.

Evolution is as much a matter of chance as anything else. Any organism that we see exists because the particular combination of genes of which it is the expression just happened to be assembled in an environment in which it was better fitted to survive than some of the other combinations of genes that were around at the time. In spite of Billie Snedden's apparent belief that it was possible not to lose a two horse race, but merely to come second, the reward for those who don't win in the natural world is, eventually, extinction. The fossil record tells a continuing story of those that failed to cope, and became extinct. (This was, of course, before the advent of Californian pop-psychology which enables one to rationalise transferring the responsibility for coping from the self to others.)



People tend to think of evolution as something that works from lower to higher, producing at its peak Homo sapiens sapiens (if you judge success by the ability to foul one's own nest) or the insects (if you judge by the ability to produce great numbers and great diversity). However, we have to ask if these two groups are ideas whose time has arrived, or simply the result of a series of fortunate coincidences. (All of this leaves aside the question of Divine Direction, in which case the whole question becomes irrelevant.)

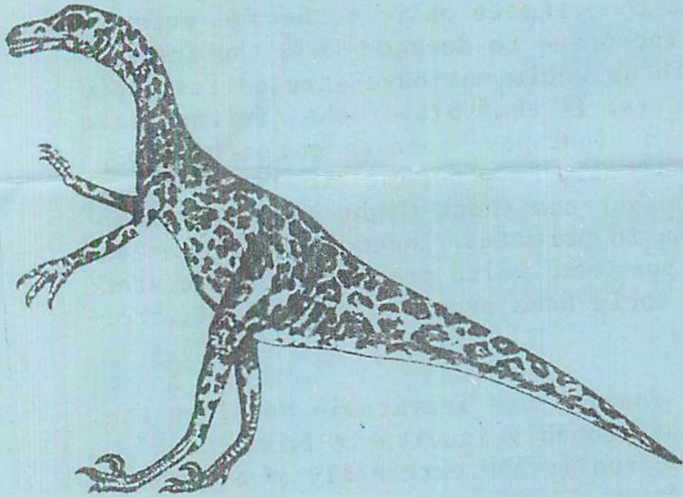
Suppose that, in its wanderings across the globe, the African Tectonic Plate had not traced a path that caused the climate on it to become drier. The pre-apes would never have had the incentive to descend from the trees, and the line that eventually resulted in us would not have started its rapid evolution over the last four million years. If that bit of the African Plate had eventually dried out, the pre-hominid might have been so committed to jungle life that it could not change and would have become slowly extinct, as the gorillas are currently doing. Another continent might have provided the conditions for intelligence to arise in primates. Indeed, given time and suitable environmental conditions, the possums, which provided a basic stock for many of the Australian marsupials, could have provided an upright, tool-using species.

By contrast, the appearance of the insects was inevitable and less the result of a happy accident. Indeed it was probably inevitable from the moment the segmented worms - made up internally and externally of a number of repeating units, which could become specialised for eating, sensing, digesting, excreting, propelling, or whatever - first appeared. (Indeed, some people think that the arthropods were so much an idea whose time had arrived that they hold that arthropods evolved independantly about three times, and that the spider is no more closely related to a butterfly than it is to an earthworm.)

Nor do six legs seem to have been a matter of chance, any more than four legs were for vertebrates. The leg-at-each-corner principle seems to have been the minimum and maximum requirement for something that uses a fish-like wriggling motion, while still trying to reduce drag by lifting itself off of the ground. In a similar way, if you start out with a rigid box with legs sticking out of the bottom, then the minimum requirement (and you go for the minimum because it reduces the amount of your nervous system committed to just walking) seems to be six legs. Preying mantids, grasshoppers, and other insects in which one pair of legs has become specialised still normally use all three pairs for just walking along, and several groups of arachnids have come to walk on only six of their eight legs, developing the unused legs for touch sensing. This does not mean that a skiffy writer can go out and equip scorpions or spiders with wings - the arachnids' fusion of the segments which carry its sense organs and legs into a rigid box means that the flexing of the last two leg-bearing segments, which insects used to flap the platelike outgrowths that eventually became the wings, is not possible.

Some of the most interesting organisms evolution has produced are not the successes but the failures - those species which have become extinct. We might yet fall into that category, in which case the insects will come to rule over the Earth just that little bit more quickly than we expect. Even if the johnny-come-lately groups like the wasps, beetles, moths and flies are wiped out, it is a safe bet that cockroaches will survive. Being very much generalists, they have the potential to generate all the other sorts of insect all over again, just as they did once before.

Everyone would be familiar with the dinosaurs which, at the time of their disappearance, were very much working on substituting brain for brawn. While there is no evidence which justifies Damien Broderick's writing of "The Dreaming Dragons", given a few million years of uninterrupted evolution of creatures like Saurornithoides we might have had intelligent reptiles. Unfortunately the dinosaurs seem to have been sidetracked into producing the birds, where the demands of flight - small size, light bones and the loss of limbs which could become specialised for manipulation - meant that that avenue for their development was closed off.



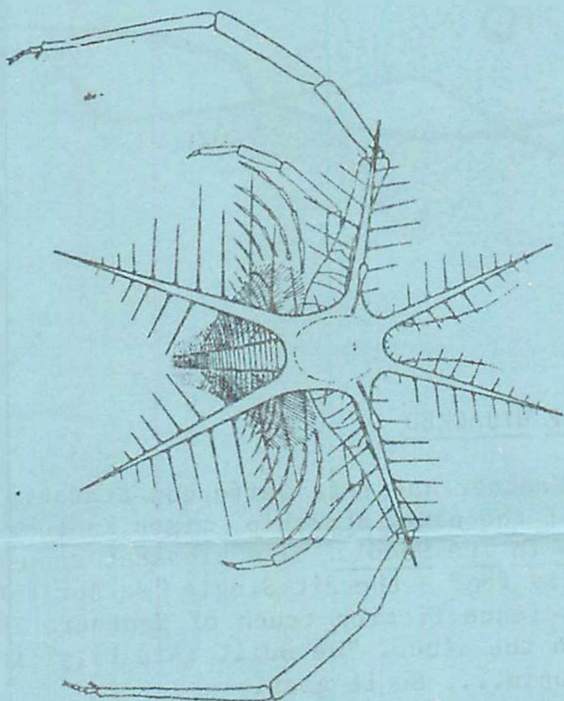
All of this pretty much closes off the possibilities for terrestrial intelligence, although I don't think we can completely rule out the possibility of bear-like intelligences, given enough time and no competition. Looking at undersea prospects, octopi and squid are rather attractive creatures and certainly the most intelligent of the invertebrates. It is tempting to see them setting up an underwater civilization, but squid are committed to fast pursuit of fish in the open sea, while octopi evolved in response to the appearance of crabs, and all that development is aimed towards better crab-catching. As potential intelligences then I'm afraid they are failures. The problem is that the nautilus, from which they evolved, is a creature of the open sea. Now if the

mollusc which first separated its foot into a number of tentacles had been an omnivore living on the bottom of shallow seas, then the stage might have been set for an underwater civilization with which we would have had to share the planet.

Aside from the dinosaurs, there are other interesting evolutionary failures which are even older, dating back to when nature was playing around with all the possibilities. This was during the Cambrian Period, about five hundred and seventy million years ago. About eighty million years before that there had been little more than a few worms and some creatures related to the jellyfish, but in the intervening period there was an explosion of new forms, including the first arthropods.

Some of my favourites from this period are the ones that didn't make it through to the present. Perhaps it's the decline of classical scholarship, but one rather suspects a poor knowledge of Latin and Greek when giving a name to something like Hallucigenia. This animal, which belonged to no known phylum, walked along the sea floor on seven pairs of pointed stilt-like spines. Seven tentacles stick up from its back, and it has been suggested that these may be feeding tentacles, directly connected with the digestive tract. (You also have to wonder about a name like Yohoia, an arthropod living at the same time.) Nobody has noticed the descendants of Hallucigenia perambulating over the sea floor. Its line seems to have ended rather quickly. Obviously it lacked sufficient genetic flexibility to adapt to a changing environment, but it is interesting to paint a picture of one of its gigantic descendants wandering around near a beach, its tentacles snaking up to gulp down unwary swimmers. Just when you thought it was safe to go into the water again...





Mimetaster

Another favourite of mine is Opabinia, apparently related to, but not actually an arthropod, with its segmented body with flattened side plates, five eyes and a stalked grasping appendage at the front; again, for some unknowable reason, a non-succeeder. I wish Robert Silverberg had included reference to them in "Hawksbill Station". Nothing there but references to trilobites, another group, like the dinosaurs, which endured for millions of years and then vanished. Advocates of the meteor theory of extinction sometimes cite the trilobites in support of their idea, but the trilobites were in decline before they finally disappeared. Trilobites are pretty boring animals anyway, although some of their relatives, such as Marella and Mimetaster, are more interesting.

Interesting or boring, they are all one with the snows of yesteryear, along with Meganeura, the dragonfly with the eighty centimetre wingspan and Megarachne, the thirty four centimetre long spider, and the reasons for their departure will remain largely a mystery until someone invents a time machine. That they evolved in the first place should not be seen to mean that there was any great incentive for them to do so. If the environment is undemanding then random genetic drift may produce organisms that can survive for a while. Eventually though the environment changes, and those that cannot adapt perish.

There's a lesson for us there. Our environment is changing, largely as a result of human activity, and, as it does, we are finding that, like the trilobites and dinosaurs before us, our options are being closed off. Modes of behaviour that the world could accommodate when there were fewer of us now make life increasingly precarious. To quote Niven and Pournelle, from "Oath of Fealty":

"Think of it as evolution in action."

---oOo---

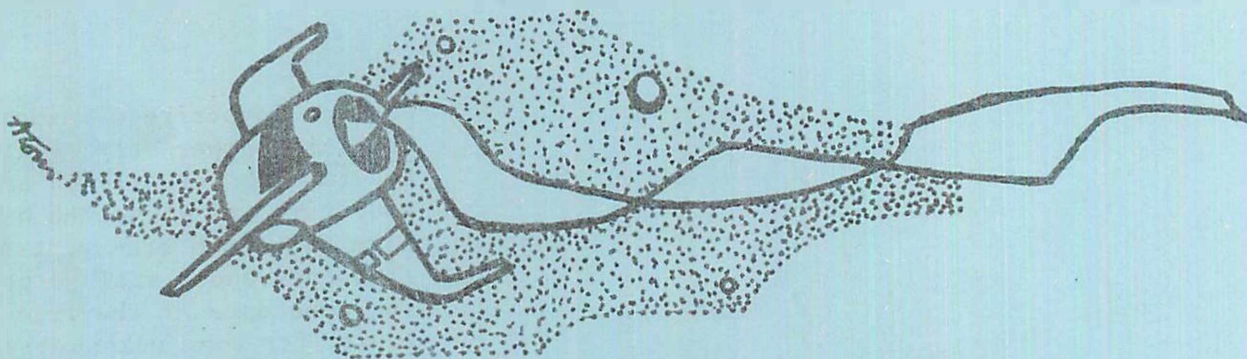
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Extinction is Nature's way of telling us to piss off.

=====

TIGGER COMPETITION. Which famous author made the following comment, and under what circumstances?

"It was, quite frankly, one of the most embarrassing moments of my life." The real answer will not be accepted. I will publish the most interesting, and least libelous, entries in TIGGER 18.



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## LETTERATURE

LUCY SUSSEX  
42 Wolseley Parade  
Kensington  
Vict 3775

28/10/85.

meaning of the word "many" I have not previously encountered.

I am also surprized by the use of the word "cojones". The redoubtable Ms Rousseau tells me that it is Spanish, from the wonderful people who brought us the word "machismo", and derives from the brutally pointless activity of bullfighting. Papa Hemingway, an aficianado of the sport, introduced "cojones" to Western literary circles some time ago. The expression is now somewhat dated.

Baldly, cojones means balls. This is puzzling, given the well-known meaning of "balls" - rubbish. (Balls!; Balls-up; "Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols".) In this context, Mr Harding appears to be expressing a wish for more rubbishy science fiction. I thought there was quite enough of that in existence already.

The alternative is, of course, that Mr Harding is using "cojones" in its crudest sexual sense, equating the male reproductive organs with literary excellence, or at least verve. As a writer without cojones but with a pair of seed-producing organs, similar to those of the male but called ovaries, I must protest - this use of language is an implied put-down. If said to, say, Joanna Russ - a writer with undoubted verve and feminist sympathies - the response would be a swift kick in the, er, cojones.

On the whole, I think bad science fiction is a lesser evil than sexism, however unconscious.

[I will take that as a thorough and effective telling-off, and deservedly so. Lee's imagery leaves something to be desired. I still though feel that a lot of Australian sf is missing something. If I called it "gutz" would I be making equally sexist implications about sf?]

JENNY BLACKFORD  
GPO BOX 1294L  
Melbourne  
Vict 3001

24/10/85

I feel that I must take issue if not umbrage with the quotation from Mr Harding. He states that many of the stories in these anthologies (Urban Fantasies and Strange Attractors) are written by academics. A careful examination of the biographies in both anthologies reveals, of the twenty two writers featured, only five teach in tertiary institutions. Clearly this is a

I may be being paranoid, but may I cry "Foul!"? I really don't like the juxtaposition of the much-appreciated free ad for Contrary Modes with Lee Harding's anti-academic pronouncements. After all, it is the proceedings of the Academic Track - it is supposed to be academic. If it was supposed to be Eamibi Meets the Thing From Planet X well, yes, you could carp at it being academic.

"A SOFT ANSWER  
MAY TURNETH  
AWAY WRATH, BUT  
GRIEVOUS WORDS  
MAKE FOR A  
BETTER LETTERS  
COLUMN."

-SOLOMAN, JR.



[Guilty as charged M'Lud. I couldn't resist the juxtaposition though. It seemed such a lovely quotation with which to follow the ad. Besides, I hadn't discriminated sufficiently between my bits of TIGGER and your ad, and so felt obliged to add the disclaimer.]

[Jenny continues to ask what I thought of Contrary Modes. I thought she'd never ask.]

#### PROCEEDING ALONG NICELY

Contrary Modes is a collection of papers presented in the Academic Stream of the programming at AUSSIECON TWO. The collection divides itself more or less into three suits - papers looking at Gene Wolfe's works; papers on Australian Sf; papers on feminist sf - with two jokers - Janeen Web's piece on "The Monster as Hero" and Russell Blackford's piece on Heinlein's Stranger In A Strange Land.

I'll leave the papers on Gene Wolfe. The furthest I even got into a Gene Wolfe novel was a little way into The Fifth Head of Cerberus. The rest of the collection is uneven. Russell Blackford's piece is an interesting examination of Stranger, and centres on Heinlein's concept of an Elect, who do what is right because they know it is right. I find Russell's piece interesting, though a trifle picky. As part of a token look at the sexism in Stranger he quibbles over the use of the word "tart" in a little verse that is used in the book, but he does not really examine that to my satisfaction.

The pieces on Australian sf by George Turner and Van Ikin are worth the cost of the book - despite the fact that the last couple of paragraphs of George's piece got lost somewhere between talk and publication. George tries to establish how the Australian fictional accent differs from that of other countries. Van takes a look at some of the older examples of Australian sf. As a counterpoint to this, John Baxter looks at the Mad Max films, from the point of view of imagery, and in a historical perspective. He notes alterations in the drafts of the script, and looks at archetypes in the films. It was far more interesting than I'd expected the article to be, and even though I've only seen the first of the Mad Max films and bits of the second, I found the piece quite interesting.

The pieces on feminism are far more uneven. Judith Hanna's paper is a disappointment. It sheds little new light on anything, and is the vague look at feminism in sf that might have been appropriate ten years ago, but which is pretty old hat now. It's all ideologically sound, but not very interesting. Diane Cook's piece is far stronger. She looks at the issue from a novel point of view. She examines authors' use of utopian societies as a means of examining feminist ideals. In doing so, she provides a more coherent paper, and one that I enjoyed reading. Bruce Wells' piece is a catalog rather than a paper, looking at female protagonists in an assortment of books. Fine if you like that sort of thing. I found it rather limited. You cannot do justice to this sort of topic with a paragraph per book.

As you might note from the above, I don't find the whole collection to be worth reading, but there is easily enough here to justify its cost. If you are interested in the academic approach to science fiction then this is a useful introduction to the field. Send your \$6-50, which includes packaging and posting, to Russell and Jenny at the address on Jenny's letter.

[Now that that's got that out of my system, what about a word from another part of the Ebony Books directorship.]

RUSSELL BLACKFORD I'm writing about Lee Harding's alleged cojones or, in  
Address as for plain English, balls. I can't see that it does anyone in  
Jenny Blackford science fiction in this country, least of all Lee  
himself, for Lee to go into print in Locus raving about



how contemporary Oz sf lacks balls (sorry, cojones).... I would argue that the recent anthologies Lee is apparently attacking contain stories which are variously exuberant, radical, challenging, tough in ways which Lee doesn't seem to appreciate...

[Russell makes further comments regarding Lee's own writing which would not fit comfortably into a small letter column like this one. Perhaps Russell will write a more detailed critique for a later TIGGER.]

CRAIG MACBRIDE      [Craig asks whether or not the twenty page maximum I've  
2/23 Glen Iris Rd    put on TIGGER is a deliberate decision to cut down from  
Camberwell            the larger size that Q36 got to. Yes. Twenty pages  
Vict 3124              squeezes TIGGER into the lowest surface mail rate for the  
28/10/85               overseas mail. Since the bank unreasonably demands that  
                        Cath and I pay back the money they gave us for the house,  
we do have to count the pennies. Craig also congratulates John Packer on his  
BLOB cartoon. I'll second that. It is vintage Packer. I must see if I can con  
him out of more such.]

GIULIA DE CESARE    Your post mortem of the masquerade was enlightening as it  
P.O. Box 57           is all too easy to criticize without having any idea of  
Sandy Bay            the problems that are involved in setting something like  
Tas 7005              that up. The idea of using a theatre with a proper stage  
                        certainly sounds the best way to view a masquerade, but  
the added hassle of getting from one venue to another might discourage  
ordinary folk from wearing hall costumes to the event.

[I don't know about that. There was certainly no shortage of strangely  
costumed folk traipsing between the Victoria and the Southern Cross.]

When leaving the Southern Cross on the Sunday of AUSSIECON TWO and re-  
turning to the Victoria to check out I saw two athletic-looking young chaps in  
the lobby wearing matching, in fact virtually identical bright red tracksuits.  
Nothing unusual in this, but I had just spent three days in the company of  
some fifteen hundred fans from all over the world and I swear I never saw a  
single tracksuit among them. Considering the normal distribution of tracksuits  
in mundane society, you'd have expected a few among them, but no; mundanes  
wear tracksuits, but scifans do not. Tennis shoes, adidas yes: tracksuits no.  
The occasional stray top, worn as a cardigan, and well-camouflaged by badges  
you might find, but the pants - never!

Now consider the development, the evolution if you will, of human  
clothing. We have gone from bearskins through to business suits, via togas,  
kilts, starched ruffs, stays, crinolines and bustles and all manner of uncom-  
fortable items, but what is the endpoint of the evolution of the garment? What  
does sf, literature of the future, tell us? Silvery little jumpsuits all too  
often, whose overridingly important characteristic is comfort. Now consider  
the tracksuit; it looks one-piece, like a jumpsuit and it is very comfort-  
able. True it needs washing, and wears out, unlike the sf ideal, but it's a  
lot closer to that ideal than blue jeans and t-shirts. So why haven't fans  
taken to them in droves?

[You are, of course, making the mistake of seeing evolution as a  
directional process, leading to some imaginary platonic ideal, rather than a  
process of adapting to environment. The evolution of human clothing is  
affected by several factors, including climate, the role of clothing as  
sexual plumage, and the fact that few fans exercise much and so most look  
atrocious in tracksuits.]

P.S. By the way, who is Carey Handfield?

MIKE BOURKE I'm opposed to generalization - I cannot tolerate people saying  
 42 Bogan St "I don't like that artists's work, or that writer's style." or  
 Nyngan whatever. I feel that the way people react to a particular  
 NSW 2825 piece of work depends on what they are looking for when they  
 read/view/hear it. I change "preferred writers" at the drop of  
 a hat; whether or not I like something is an expression of the interaction of  
 the mood I'm in and the tone of the story. For light entertainment, humour and  
 novelty, I read Heinlein, Piers Anthony's "Xanth" series and Robert Asprin's  
 "Myth" books. For something rich in personality there's Anne McCaffrey, for  
 space opera there's Doc Smith. Tolkien, Fiest, Asimov, Harrison, Niven and  
 many others adorn my bookshelves. There are times when I read a new book and  
 loathe it - because I wasn't in a receptive mood at the time. And then I'll  
 re-read it, often because I don't have anything new, in a different frame of  
 mind and will hang on every word. People get out of books what they put into  
 them. If you categorize your collection you will be the richer for it -  
 because you'll know exactly what to read to scratch that particular itch, when  
 the time comes.

[Mike explains that this letter was originally sent to Larry Dunning's  
 TAU CETI PHOENIX. While I can see Mike's point of view, I think that he is  
 over-generalizing. I know that, when I say "I don't like Brian Aldiss's  
 writing." there is the assumption that the reader knows that I mean on the  
 basis of what I've read I don't like his style. There may come a day when  
 that will change, but, at the moment that the statement is made then it is  
 as true as any human utterance can be. I don't quite follow what Mike means  
 by categorizing one's collection. I know which authors I'll go to if I'm  
 feeling in a particular mood but there are certain authors I won't even try  
 to read unless I'm feeling masochistic....Ballard for a start.]

[Mike doesn't like "The Dark Awakening" feeling that I could have  
 developed the idea. I'm afraid that it was only ever intended to support the  
 throw away line. Besides the idea of a culture discovering fandom after some  
 sort of apocalypse has been done by Robert Bloch in "A Way of Life" and  
 there's no way I'd even contemplate trying to match that story. It impressed  
 me well before I understood it. I'd not even discovered fandom at the time,  
 and didn't know what FAPA was.]

LUCY ZINKIEWICZ Is Cath going to put forward the moderate, liberal  
 2 Tilbush Close Christian viewpoint [on evolution]? At the Catholic  
 Hoppers Crossing secondary school I was at last year, nothing was ever said  
 Vict 3030 against evolution, and it was the only theory we studied  
 that claimed scientific validity. Though we did study  
 1/12/85. Genesis, it was only ever in Religion, and the nuns and  
 lay teachers were at pains to point out the contradictions  
 in the two variations of the tale given - before we all did. They never  
 claimed it was anything but a myth, the ancient Israelites' attempt to  
 explain things of importance to them - why there is Evil in a world God  
 created; how God gave us free will; and what our roles and the roles of  
 creatures are in this life. As a literary work, edited a number of times by  
 different sub-groups of the faith, with each version revealing their  
 individual differences, the Bible is quite fascinating. The interest of the  
 little we studied in high school, along with the odd bits I've picked up  
 this year - living in a residential college which also houses Theology  
 Students - has me wondering about doing a bit of proper study of the Old  
 Testaments. How theological commentators explain away some of the atrocities  
 and inconsistencies is really fun.



[I'm sorry Lucy, but I just can't help it. Your mention of theological commentators put me in mind of Richie Benaud saying "Yes, an unfortunate captaincy decision that. God sacrificed Job quite unnecessarily there. I really cannot understand His decision. The Archangel Michael was listed next to go in to bat for the Good Eleven. There was no point in elevating Job that far up the batting order."]

[I don't know about getting Cath to do a piece on the liberal Christian view of evolution. She's a humanities teacher rather than a biologist.]

ALAN STEWART                      As current secretary of the Melbourne Science Fiction  
18/329 Dandenong Rd      Club, I will take this opportunity to pass on the  
Pahran                      information that the club's current address is  
Vict 3181                      P.O. Box 212  
                                    World Trade Centre  
3/12/85                      Melbourne  
                                    Vict 3005.

We meet each Friday night (from December 13th onwards) at about 7pm, in the St David's Uniting Church Hall at 72 Melville Rd, West Brunswick. (Stop 33 on the Number 55 tram that leaves William St in the city.)

[The club also has a newsletter - ETHEL THE AARDVARK. Co-editor Phil Pribaz gave me a copy of #6 in Space Age Books the other night. There's another reason I'm going to miss Space Age. It's the sort of place one could encounter people for casual natters. I'd not met Phil, but she was attracted by Cath's BILL THE CAT t-shirt. We got nattering, established identities, and I traded a TIGGER for an ETHEL. ETHEL is available to members, but I can't find mention of the dues here. Perhaps try writing to the above address. It's a clubzine, and one that seems quite fresh and active. This one features natter on Comet Halley, and a couple of book reviews. It also solicits articles.]

IAHF Jane Tisell, 6/64 Studley Park Rd, Kew, Vict 3101, asking if my data base is now satisfied. Yes. (Jane used to do fanzine reviews for Herv Binns. Feel free to add her to your mailing list.)

Helen Swift, who announces that her major activities are of the non-fannish sort - cherishing a vegie patch, getting puppies through obedience classes, and being pregnant.

Nikki White who announces the demise of CENTERO as a generally available fanzine.

Eric Lindsay who doesn't believe in Official Carey Handfield Fan Clubs, and who suggests a running Bob Shaw Fan Fund that brings him to Australia every time the Fund accumulates enough money to do so.

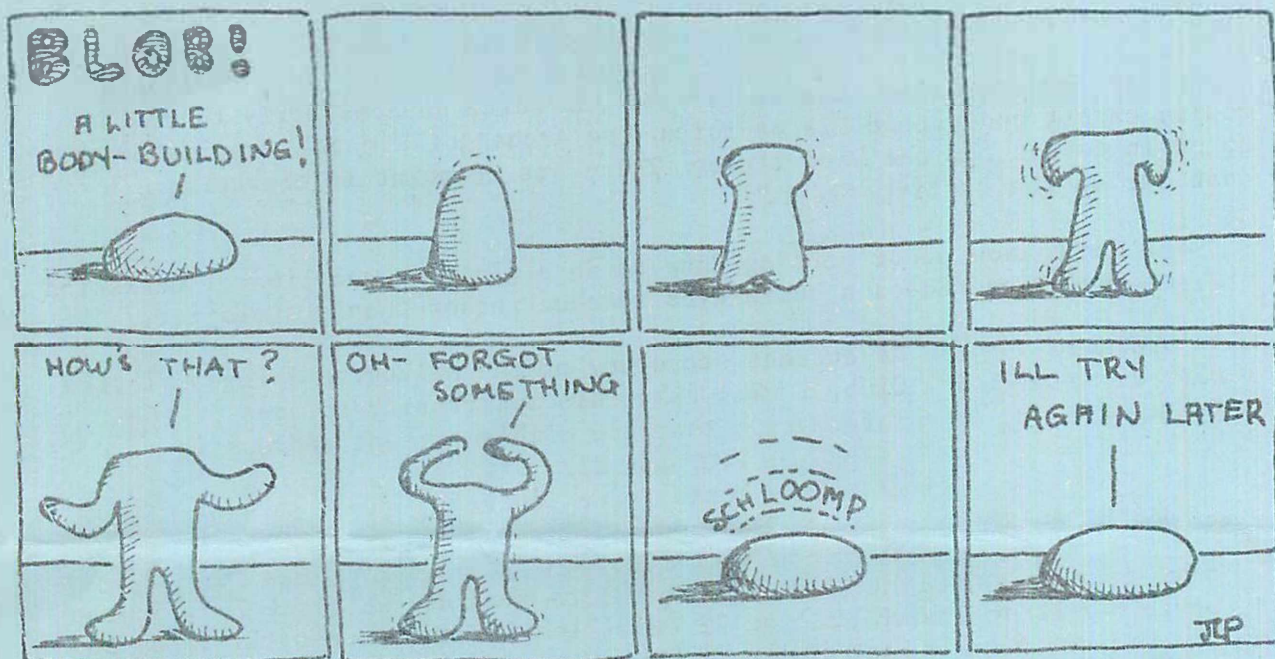
Jonathan Scott who natters Microbes, and who mentions a CoA for Andrew Taubman - 21 Ealtic St, Newtown, NSW 2042.

Adina Hamilton who states that the masquerade article put her off the thought of masquerade organising. Good to see it's having its desired effect.

Kevin Dillon who sends a review of Kurt Vonnegut's "Galapagos", and who adds some natter in an interesting style of handwriting. (I wish people would type LoCs.)

John Tipper who natters typical fanzine stuff - typing, deadlines etc, and who mentions his, METALUNA, an SF media zine with original fiction and art, available from him at P.O. Box 487, Strathfield, NSW 2135. Subscription rates are \$8-00/4. He has back issues, and an assortment of other stuff, including a calendar with Forbidden Planet stuff for \$4-00.

Richard Brandt who replies to my article on masquerades with a few comments on the NASFIC masquerade in Austin. It sounds as though the perfect masquerade might just be one of those impossible dreams.



### SCIENCE FICTION AND THE HOPEFUL MONSTER

Marc Ortlieb

I seem to have evolved into a more reactionary science fiction reader. Perhaps my mental arteries have evolved a less flexible tegument. A particular symptom of my degenerative thought processes is that when I see the word "science" in the term science fiction I tend to take it literally, and I expect the science in the science fiction I read to be at least consistent with current knowledge. Seldom am I more disappointed in this than when reading stories dealing with mutation and the evolution of the human species.

I'm not talking about such blatant abuses of the term mutation as can be found in the pages of Marvel comics. There one can merely accept the fact that the pseudo-scientific explanations for the X-Men's super powers are window dressing. If one likes reading comics - as I do - then one reads them as pure fantasy and expects no real logic, other than the internal logic of the comic - and sometimes precious little of that. Where the blatant abuse of scientific principles bothers me is in "real" science fiction - the stuff that is written in paragraphs.

In my efforts to support the local science fiction industry I have been buying local anthologies and magazines, two recent purchases being Far Out #2 and URBAN FANTASIES. Both feature stories about pregnancies and the birth of mutants. The stories are Margaret Giordano's "Big Freeze" and Damien Broderick's "A Tooth for Every Child".

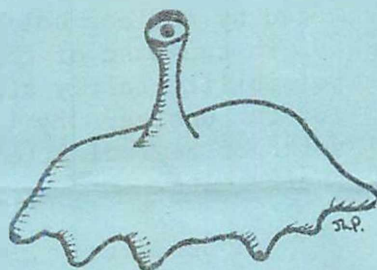
Giordano's story hinges on an evolutionary theory reminiscent of that of the Russian biologist T.D. Lysenko. The Earth is getting steadily colder. It is hinted that this is a very recent development, although the time scale is never really clearly established. The climate has clearly deteriorated within one person's life time. The protagonist meets and falls in love with a butcher who wears mittens even in bed to hide his deep dark secret. He has very hairy hands - the backs thereof rather than the palms.



She becomes pregnant to him and, at the end of the story, gives birth to a baby which is covered in short brown fur. Co-incidentally all of the other babies in her ward are covered in fur. The story finishes with the line:

"There is hope for us in the future after all."

It is hard to interpret this story through anything short of the discredited theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. The babies became furry because the climate was cold and so they needed to be hairy in order to survive. Some people have very hairy hands, and so their children take this one step further, and become hairy all over. We are told that the father has hairy hands; there is no suggestion that the father is exceptionally hirsute in any other way. Are we to believe that all the women in the ward had husbands with hairy hands, or that the narrators' husband impregnated the lot of them, or that only women whose husbands had hairy hands gave birth to children?



Had she resisted the impulse to make all the children hairy then the development would have fitted nicely into a Darwinian picture. The child is a mutant in whom the father's genes for hairy hands have been multiplied. In the cold times, the child survives, and mothers or fathers lots of children, who inherit the child's inbuilt fur coat. Eventually the race is, on the whole, hairier. (It has been suggested that changes in regulatory genes, such as those responsible for hair length, might be responsible for sudden changes in morphology. After all, humans have as many hair follicles as do chimpanzees. It's just that our follicles aren't so active.) The story though would have centred on the problems faced by the child and the social reaction to it rather than skipping to the point where all children are hairy and so there is no problem.



An additional quibble is that humans have adapted to their environments in terms of their use of tools and through their societal structure, rather than through morphological developments. Eskimos have lived in very cold environments for hundreds of generations and have not become notably hairy. They have though developed a society to suit the conditions, and have designed a technology that fits their conditions.

All in all then Giordano's story is a rather pointless one, and, insofar as it makes any attempt to deal with the feelings of the mother, falls very short of the story that stands as a benchmark for any such story - Judith Merrill's "That Only A Mother."

Damien Broderick's "A Tooth for Every Child" shows more detailed reading of current evolutionary work, at least in its more popularized form. Again the central character is a parent-to-be, in this case though there is a slight twist. The parent is male. The embryo has been taken from his wife, who was killed in a car crash for which he is responsible, and so, as part of his penance, he is carrying the child surgically implanted in his body. To complicate matters, there has been an outbreak of strange births. The children are not clearly described, but one gets the impression that they have claws and that they are ideally suited to surviving in a world devastated by nuclear holocaust. They might or might not feed on their mothers, or, in the case of the protagonist, on their fathers. Broderick makes that possibility fairly strong, and then demolishes it in the last two pages, leaving unclear why the protagonist, a computer expert with access to all sorts of medical files, was so dead certain that the creatures destroyed their hosts.

In Broderick's piece he attempts to establish his bona fides by having his characters discuss evolutionary theory in order to establish what is responsible for the sudden explosion of weird births. His pregnant protagonist - a computer scientist - makes the following comments in an attempt to explain what is going on

"Susan says nothing. I push her. 'That was Gould's idea wasn't it?' 'Who?'"

'Come off it, doctor. Stephen Jay Gould, father of neo-Darwinism. The great unpredictable leaps up the evolutionary tree.' Not the slow aeons-long accretion of adaptations envisaged by Darwin, but abrupt discontinuities.

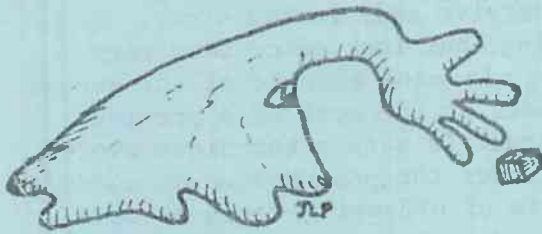
She frowns. 'Hasn't that been disproven? "Punctuated equilibrium"?'

'It's fallen out of fashion, but it certainly still has its current supporters....Long stretches of conservative rule punctuated by bursts of creative frenzy. "Saltations", he called them."

Here is my first quibble with Broderick. If he must quote scientific theories, he should at least get his facts right. Neo-Darwinism is the synthesis of Darwin's theory of Natural Selection with Mendelian Genetics. G.L. Stebbins, in the first chapter of "Evolution" Dobzhansky, Ayala, Stebbins and Valentine (San Francisco, Freeman & Co, 1977) attributes the birth of the synthetic theory to Dobzhansky in 1937. Since Gould didn't receive his PhD until 1967, I doubt that he can be considered responsible for neo-Darwinism.

What Gould is partly responsible for is the theory of punctuated equilibrium, mentioned in Richard Faulder's article earlier in this issue. In 1972, he and Niles Eldredge suggested that species did not evolve at uniform rates; that evolution was like war - long periods of little change punctuated by periods of intense activity. They suggested that speciation might occur very rapidly. What Eldredge and Gould see as rapid though is in geological terms - i.e. a few hundred or a few thousand years. In all other respects, the theory of punctuated equilibrium is orthodox in its treatment of Darwin and Mendel. It sees Natural Selection as the mechanism by which species that do not work are weeded out of a population. It certainly does not see evolution as being directed to any greater end. Gould sees variation within a species as a random thing, followed by the weeding out of those species that do not fit their particular environment.





Damien's monsters seem far closer to the ideas of Richard Goldschmidt, who coined the term "hopeful monster" to describe a creature that looks very little like its parents. Goldschmidt suggested that, via a very small change in a regulatory gene - say the gene that controls hair-length or the gene that controls the rate of a child's development - large differences in the offspring could be noted. There is, though, nothing to suggest that particular genes are more susceptible to such changes than others. That such a change could lead to a creature being ideally suited to a post holocaust Earth strains credibility. Goldschmidt's theory runs into a major problem too. Such changes

would be rare. The likelihood of the hopeful monster finding a mate is very low. How many of us would voluntarily breed with something that looks vaguely like a lobster? Damien solves the problem by having a large proportion of the new generation being such monsters, but his rationale for such a development is certainly not sound in terms of evolutionary theory. He comes back to Giordano's solution. The mutants are being born because they are needed. Rather than Giordano's cute little balls of fur we have an abomination that the narrator happily kills, but the idea that Mother Nature will save us from our own follies by fortuitous mutation is as strong in Damien's story as is the suggestion that Nature will equip us to deal with the environment She creates for us in Giordano's piece.

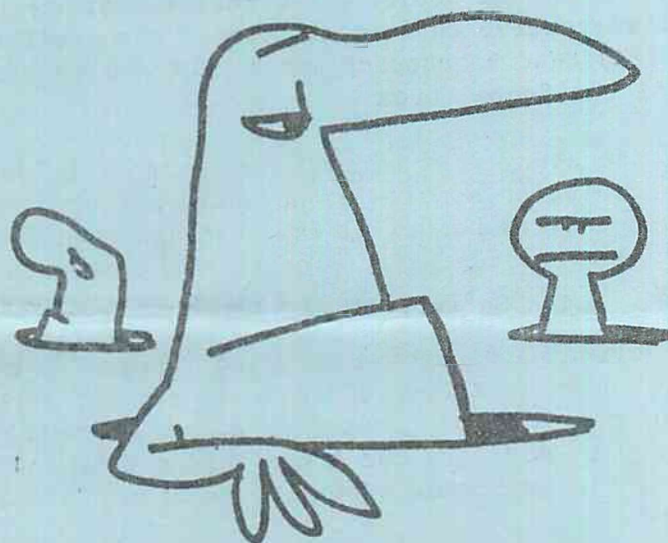
To complicate matters further, it appears that these hopeful monsters act as receptacles for lost souls. Broderick is writing a reincarnation story. The monsters receive their souls during the twelfth week following conception, and they tend to attract souls that are somehow suited to the genetic makeup of the foetal creature.

All in all, the story is a terrible mish-mash of ideas, and the sort of thing that gives evolution stories a bad name. Rather than having the scientist explaining to his beautiful daughter how the discombobulating reverse polarity defrangistan gerfurgles the warp structure of the zed dimensional space-time matrix, we have a computer programmer sprouting some pseudo-biological nonsense. It is comfortably trendy, in a Seventies sort of way, looking to pollution as another possible cause for the sudden mutations - suggesting that random mutation can cause a rash of births of creatures that look similar enough to be grouped together. We even get a little Freudian psychology to chew on. The bloke thinks that the babies eat their bearers because of his repressed hostility towards his mother.

Sigh. Perhaps Damien's story is telling us nothing, but instead poking fun at pretentious people who spout theories that they really don't understand. Thus the message becomes an integral part of the characters in the story. Damien might just be making a point about the sort of people who jump on trendy bandwagons and spout pop-biology, pop-psychology, and pop-religion. If that is what he is doing, then the more power to him. I just have the horrible feeling that people who read his story might get the idea that he is giving them the real information on current trends in biological science, and the biology teacher in me objects to that.

I guess I'm also disappointed by Damien. He had some interesting ideas here. Scientists divide evolutionary strategies into two types; in one, creatures produce lots of offspring, but pay little attention to any one of them, working on the idea that a few will survive and, in the other, creatures produce a small number of offspring, but look after them very carefully. Damien's story seems to offer the ultimate example of the second type of strategy, in that the offspring exists at the cost of a previous individual, be that cost physical or spiritual. Is such a technique evolutionarily viable? I would have said that, under the post-holocaust conditions, creatures that produced small numbers of offspring would be at a disadvantage when compared to something capable of producing huge numbers of offspring - cockroaches for instance.

So I'm old fashioned. I like my science fiction to be scientifically accurate, insofar as is possible, and neither Giordano nor Broderick have made what I see as a reasonable effort to fully think through their evolutionary backgrounds. Of the two stories, Damien's is the more evolutionary literate. Internal evidence suggests that Damien has at least made the effort to keep up with evolutionary science. I'd recommend though that anyone even considering writing a story dealing with evolution read Stephen Jay Gould's books. They are, for my money, better than Asimov's science articles, and Gould's ego isn't as pervasive as the Good Doctor's. Three worth considering - all available in Pelican paperback - are Ever Since Darwin, The Panda's Thumb and Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes. You'll never look at nature in quite the same way.



HELL IS NOT HAVING SOMETHING  
TO READ.

- LR





#### CONVENTIONAL SIGNS

KINKON 2 Queens Birthday weekend, June 7th - 9th 1986. Victoria Hotel, Melbourne Vict.

Membership:	Until 1/1/86	\$20-00
	2/1/86 - 6/6/86	\$25-00
	At the door	\$30-00
	After 10/6/85	\$35-00

Hucksters: Twice membership rate at time of booking a table.

Features: All night screening of five of the worst sf/fantasy/horror movies ever made; The mythology of Aussie Rules; Beyond Thunderfoam a look at film costuming makeup etc; plus the usual stuff, including a Masquerade.

Further details: Kinkon 2, 11 Hopkins St, Dandenong, Vict 3175 or  
Andrew Murphy, (03) 793-1706 (After Hours)  
Angus Caffrey, (03) 420-1328 (Business Hours)

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MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CONFERENCE Easter 1968 19 Somerset Place, Melbourne Vict.

Membership: Attending \$2-50; Supporting \$1-00.

"When we hold conventions in Melbourne we tend to think primarily of watching films and running an auction."

[From a flier found in a copy of the December 1967 ASFR I bought in Space Age the other day.]

---oOo---

SWANCON XI The Swancon Accommodation Enquiries address is now Greg Turkich, c/o Bridgetown Police Station, Bridgetown, W.A. 6255. (Reserve your cell now.)

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CLOSE BUT NO CIGAR

THE AUSTRALIAN, November 21st 1985, has an article describing the market for organs for transplants. Kidneys are evidently very much in demand, fetching up to \$20,000. Unfortunately, while Larry Niven extrapolated that pretty accurately, he missed out on the name. People dealing in human spare parts are called organ-brokers and not organleggers.

=====

RUMOUR OF THE MONTH

Tigger knows nothing whatsoever about any possible marriage between an American travel agent and anyone living in Perth.

---oOo---

TIGGER  
If undeliverable return to

Marc Ortlieb  
P.O. Box 215  
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Vict 3131  
AUSTRALIA



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CONTRIBUTORS ADDRESSES

Richard Faulder  
John Packer  
Terry Frost  
Brad Foster  
Bill Rotsler  
Arthur Thomson (ATom)

P.O. Box 136, Yanco, N.S.W. 2703, AUSTRALIA  
9/3 Eversley Ave, Enfield, S.A. 5085, AUSTRALIA  
P.O. Box A491, Sydney Souyh, N.S.W. 2000, AUSTRALIA  
4109 Pleasant Run, Irving, TX 75062, U.S.A.  
17909 Lull St, Reseda, CA 91335, U.S.A.  
17 Brockham House, Brockham Drive, London, SW2 3RU,  
U.K.

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