

Vapourware

An Exercise
in
Virtual Fanac

Vapourware

beta version
Number One

Vapourware (beta version) Number One, edited and published by Greg Hills (address at right), has been sent to you for reader testing and evaluation.

Greg Hills
PO Box 428
Richmond 3121
Australia

Haeri mai

Vapourware' is computer jargon for software which is much talked about and may even be circulated in test ('beta') form but which never seems to appear in a finished version. In light of my recent publishing track record, I find it an appropriate title for a fanzine.

There is one problem with the title. The problem is that once 'vapourware' actually appears it is no longer vapourware but ordinary software. By extension, the very act of *publishing* an issue of *Vapourware* would make the title a misnomer. Paradox!

The solution I have applied is as follows: no edition of *Vapourware* will ever appear in 'finished' form — all you will ever see are 'beta' versions. ☐

What's in it?

In the latest issue of *The Metaphysical Review* (number 18) Yvonne Rousseau includes me in her list of conspicuous absentees from the recent Garden Party held by Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane. She noted after my name '*(of whom it was whispered behind his back that he had umpteen fanzines on disc — each of them in turn scuttled by the discovery of superior software with which to begin a newer, better fanzine)*'. Hrrmphh! This is that fanzine.

Actually, as might be expected with gossip whispered behind my back — I wasn't there, so

how could they know in which direction my back was pointing? — the rumour is not quite right. True, I have umpteen fanzines on disk, but what has scuttled each is simple fiscal impotence. No money for photocopying, no money for postage, means no publication. Only one project has been held up by the stated phenomenon, and that project is *Gutenberg's Bible*, the manual about producing fanzines. I think it's wonderfully ironic that the solution is suffering from the problem, don't you? Naturally it's an irony I would cheerfully live without.

Most of the material here has been culled from the corpses of *Vapourware's* stillborn siblings, particularly *Te Waenga Korokoro Whakaroa*, which replaced *Digitus* when I tired of talking about computer games and thought I'd explore the possibilities in the detour taken by *Digitus Secundus*. The material is rather promiscuous, but that reflects the way my interest has wandered around since giving up *Thyme* released me from the tight fannish focus that doing a regular newszine forced on me.

The (untitled) Anzus rave which kicks off the zine is a byproduct of time spent browsing in the local library and fossicking in the State Library. The Anzus brouha of 1985/86 is something I feel quite strongly about. It has always seemed anomalous to me that one of the keystones of a nation's sovereignty is control of its borders, which implies responsibility for substances entering and leaving its ports, yet the US military insists (1) that it will neither confirm nor deny whether any given ship carries nuclear weapons; (2) that its 'allies' must provide these maybe-nuclear-armed US ships port access regardless of the policies or desires of the ally.

Happy reading—

Greg
Hick

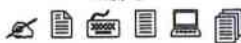


Spot the mistake

A beta version, as opposed to a finished version, should be imperfect. This issue's deliberate imperfection is on page 7. **Hint:** compare the *whitespace* with similar space on page 6. **Challenge:** eliminate the imperfection without disturbing pages 6 or 8. My solution will be published next issue.

Any other imperfections in this issue's layout are inadvertent. ☒

' "Cross "my heart' Gutenberg's Bible is coming ...



Six years in the making!

After six years in preparation, *Gutenberg's Bible* is nearing completion. Later this year I hope to distribute a limited-printrun 'Preliminary Edition', to show by example the areas that I still want help with.

For example, I need a rundown on ditto technique — preferably from someone with recent experience in using a spirit duplicator. I am not satisfied with my section on offset printing, so I also need someone with current skills to talk about that. I want a series of short articles on essay writing, review techniques, etc, preferably by someone with English-teaching experience. Does your employer have a house style manual? Can you write a brief review and get a screen shot of your favourite fanzine publishing software program?

The list goes on and on. If a picture is worth a thousand words, is a prototype worth a thousand begging letters?



Watch your letterbox!

— The Anzus Treaty —

TREATY BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS OF NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA CONCERNING SECURITY

San Francisco, 1 September 1951

Ratification deposited at Canberra, 29 April 1952
(in force 29 April 1952)

The Parties to this Treaty,

Reaffirming their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all Governments, and desiring to strengthen the fabric of peace in the Pacific Area,

Noting that the United States already has arrangements pursuant to which its armed forces are stationed in the Philippines, and has armed forces and administrative responsibilities in the Tyukus, and upon the coming into force of the Japanese Peace Treaty may also station armed forces in and about Japan to assist in the preservation of peace and security in the Japan Area,

Recognising that Australia and New Zealand as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations have military obligations outside as well as within the Pacific Area,

Desiring to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that any of them stand alone in the Pacific Area, and

Desiring further to coordinate their efforts for collective defence for the preservation of peace and security pending the development of a more comprehensive system of regional security in the Pacific Area,

Therefore declare and agree as follows:

Article I

The parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

Article II

In order more effectively to achieve the objective of this Treaty the parties separately and jointly by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

Article III

The parties will consult together whenever in the opinion of any of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened in the Pacific.

Article IV

Each party recognises that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations. Such measures shall be terminated when the security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security

Article V

For the purpose of Article IV, an armed attack on any of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of any of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific.

Article VI

This Treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations of the Parties under the Charter of the United Nations or the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Article VII

The Parties hereby establish a Council, consisting of their Foreign Ministers or their Deputies, to consider matters concerning the implementation of this Treaty. The Council should be so organised as to be able to meet at any time.

Article VIII

Pending the development of a more comprehensive system of regional security in the Pacific Area and the development by the United Nations of more effective means to maintain international peace and security, the Council, established by Article VII, is authorized to maintain a consultative relationship with State, regional Organizations, Associations of States or other authorities in the Pacific Area in a position to further the purposes of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of that Area.

Article IX

This Treaty shall be ratified by the Parties in accordance with their respective constitutional processes. The instruments of ratification shall be deposited as soon as possible with the Government of Australia, which will notify each of the other signatories of such deposit. The Treaty shall enter into force as soon as the ratifications of the signatories have been deposited.

Article X

This Treaty shall remain in force indefinitely. Any Party may cease to be a member of the Council established by Article VII one year after notice has been given to the Government of Australia, which will inform the Governments of the other Parties of the deposit of such notice.

Article XI

This Treaty in the English language shall be deposited in the Archives of the Government of Australia. Duly certified copies thereof will be transmitted by that Government to the Governments of each of the other signatories.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned Plenipotentiaries have signed this Treaty.

DONE at the city of San Francisco this first day of September, 1951

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| For Australia: | PERCY C. SPENDER |
| For New Zealand: | C.A. BERENDSEN |
| For the United States of America: | JOHN FOSTER DULLES |
| DEAN ACHESON | ALEXANDER WILEY |
| | JOHN J. SPARKMAN |



One consequence of unemployment is that I have had plenty of time to spend nosing after the answers to questions that have been bothering me for years. The Anzus hoopla in 1985/86, for example.

In February 1985, in line with its antinuclear policy, the New Zealand Government denied port privileges to the nuclear-capable destroyer USS *Buchanan* on the basis that (in line with US

policy) the US Government would not deny that it was carrying nuclear weapons. Over a period of time the argument escalated until in August 1986 the US 'suspended its security obligations to NZ under the treaty'.

This seemed bizarre to me, for not only did the Treaty say nothing about nuclear weapons, port visits, information, etc, but the escape clause in the Treaty did not support selective suspension — all that any signatory could do was cancel *their own* membership one year after so notifying the Government of Australia. So, my reasoning went, this must mean that on or around 12th August 1985, the US Government must have advised the Australian Government of its intention to cease membership of the Anzus Council. Therefore an instrument of withdrawal must have been deposited with the Australian Government, and since the matter was of intense public interest such an instrument must be accessible to the public under the Freedom of Information Act.

While I could hardly expect to see the original, copies must exist, or at the very least



someone must have quoted it somewhere in all the voluminous correspondence and media hype that we were bombarded with at the time.

At the time I had other things to worry about and so I let the matter drop. When I was sorting some papers recently I came across a photocopy of the Treaty that I had made in 1985. This reawakened my curiosity. I set out to look into the matter. I read through a dozen detailed

accounts of the affair, and you know what? Not one of them quoted any such instrument. The general accounts all said things such as:

The United States . . . suspended its security commitment to NZ under the tripartite treaty. Labour declared its opposition to a policy that would have permitted *reactivation of NZ's Anzus status*. [Italics mine — Greg.]

Or how about:

New Zealand Rejects U.S. Ship Visit

Nuclear Weapons at Issue. The U.S. State Department Feb. 4 announced that New Zealand had "definitively turned down" a request that a U.S. Navy destroyer be permitted to pay a port call to New Zealand. New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange had announced the rejection on the grounds that "the vessel requested was unable to meet the criteria of New Zealand policy."

The U.S. said it considered the refusal "a matter of grave concern which goes to the core of our mutual obligation as allies."

The U.S. and New Zealand were part of a 1951 mutual defense pact known as Anzus that also included Australia. The U.S. Pentagon Jan. 21 had announced that in December 1984 it had formally requested permission for the port call as part of Anzus exercises known as Sea Eagle scheduled to take place in the South Pacific in March. The request was considered a test case of the antinuclear platform on which Lange's Labour Party had campaigned and swept to power in July 1984. [See 1984, p. 533F2]

Prime Minister Lange had first given an indication of New Zealand's likely response to the request Feb. 1. Lange had said, "if the ship is nuclear-capable, it won't come unless we can be assured it does not carry nuclear arms." U.S. officials had viewed the response with concern because of the strict U.S. policy of not revealing whether or not its ships carried nuclear arms.

In announcing the firm rejection Feb. 4, Lange said he would welcome a visiting ship, "if the Americans would suggest a vessel that I know is not nuclear-armed."

After Lange's Feb. 4 definitive refusal to allow a visit by the U.S. destroyer Buchanan, the U.S. announced that the scheduled Anzus maneuvers had been canceled. The U.S. also said it was considering the "overall implications" of the rejection for future relations with New Zealand.

A State Department official, Bernard Kalb, said the U.S. was considering a broad range of further actions, including some that were not strictly military. He said, "Some Western countries have antinuclear and other movements which seek to diminish defense cooperation among the allied states. We would hope that our response to New Zealand would signal that the course these movements advocate would not be cost-free in terms of security relationships with the United States."

Analysts pointed out that the U.S. reaction seemed to be particularly strong given the lack of a real security threat in the South Pacific region. However, according to some observers, the U.S. was concerned that other powers, like Japan or Western European nations, might be emboldened to take similar actions concerning U.S. nuclear arms, if New Zealand suffered no reprisals for its action.

Japan had a ban on nuclear weapons, but allowed U.S. ships to visit without seeking to clarify whether or not they carried nuclear arms. Western Europe was depended upon to deploy North Atlantic Treaty Organization nuclear weapons, but there were strong antinuclear popular movements in some Western European nations, as there was in New Zealand. [See p. 19A1; 1984, pp. 781C2, 456F3; 1983, p. 999A1]

— Facts on File 1985

On Aug. 12, 1986, the US formally suspended all its security obligations to NZ under the Anzus Pact until NZ would restore port and air access to US warships and military aircraft.

This is in line with the newspaper reports, but (see the text of the Treaty) not in accord with the Treaty. It's not even accord with reality, since apart from the single instance of the *Buchanan*, *US warships and military aircraft were never denied access to NZ* — indeed, the NZ Government repeatedly invited the US Government to

send non-nuclear (ie presumably nuclear-incapable) vessels, or nuclear vessels declared to be not carrying nuclear weapons. At one point NZ's PM even offered a 'we won't peek and we'll assume the ship carries no nukes' compromise, which was a major step back from the Government's original position (as well as being quite unpopular in NZ). The US 'suspension of NZ from Anzus was something it could get away with only because of its preponderance of politico-military power — it had no 'right' to do it, it just could do it and did it.

Denmark Sets Elections After Atomic Arms Vote

NATO Role Threatened. Danish Premier Poul Schluter April 19 called a snap general election for May 10. The action was prompted by an April 14 vote of the Folketing (parliament) approving a resolution to tighten the nation's policy against port visits by ships with nuclear weapons. The resolution had been a defeat for Schluter's center-right minority coalition government and posed problems for Denmark's membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The one-sentence resolution said, "Insofar as the Folketing considers that for the past 30 years it has been Danish policy not to accept nuclear weapons on Danish territory, including Danish ports, the government is urged to notify visiting naval vessels thereof." Since 1957, when Denmark had instituted the ban, it had been the government's policy to assume that visiting NATO ships respected Danish policy.

The new resolution, however, threatened Denmark's membership in NATO, because NATO allies Britain and the U.S. had a policy of refusing to disclose whether their naval vessels carried atomic weapons. Denmark's position at the head of the Baltic Sea made it a key link in NATO's defense strategy. The ban also threatened the strategy of British reinforcement of Denmark with its 14,000-member strong mobile force, because the troops would have to be deployed across the North Sea by the British navy. That reinforcement policy

was a primary reason for Denmark's membership in the alliance. [See 1987, p. 929D3]

...
On the nuclear resolution, the Radicals joined the Social Democrats (Denmark's largest party) and the leftist Socialist people's Party and Common Cause grouping to defeat the government by a vote of 75-58.

...
U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz April 15 said that the resolution would have "extremely serious" consequences for Danish-American relations. He said that the resolution "goes to the very heart of the meaning and interlocking nature of our mutual commitments with the NATO alliance."

(A similar ban on port calls by New Zealand in 1986 had led the U.S. to dissolve the Australian, New Zealand, U.S. Treaty Organization [ANZUS] mutual defense pact with that South Pacific nation. [See 1986, p.998D3])

In announcing the May general election, Schluter April 19 told parliament, "we consider that the resolution endangers Denmark's membership of NATO and we fear that its consequence will be to isolate us from our allies. Therefore we feel that it is necessary to ask the electorate for their views on Denmark's continued full membership of the Western alliance."

According to a 1987 Gallup poll reported April 20 by the Times of London, 59% of Danes favored NATO membership, with 20% opposed.

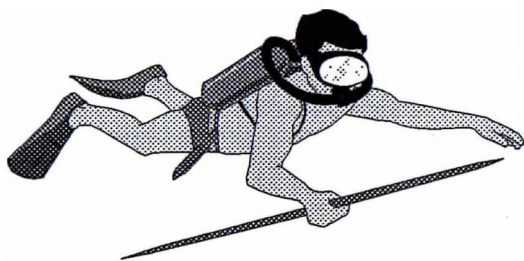
— *Facts on File 1988*

[Schluter's party lost seats but formed a new coalition government with other parties.]

So what really happened? The evidence says that NZ, acting within the limits of both Anzus and its own sovereignty, denied the US something that the US had neither God- nor Treaty- given right but which it had long taken for granted. In retribution the US punished NZ by withholding all the cooperation guaranteed to NZ under the Treaty, imposed economic penalties, and slandered and libelled NZ shamelessly. This by the policeman of world justice.

It is worth noting that in September 1986 NZ refused Soviet overtures for air landing rights, port facilities, and military cooperation — *privileges* never denied to the US since its entry into WW II. The anti-nuclear policy was *not* pro-Soviet in intent, but was a response to massive public support for such a policy. It was so popular that even in 1990 (see the clipping 'NZ seeks renewal of US ties') the incoming National Party Government dared not meddle with the policy even though they opposed it and had a massive Parliamentary majority. (Bolger's announcement is more a test of local reaction than US reaction. He faces an election this year and in NZ electoral support is traditionally shaky after a new Government's first term in power, particularly over unpopular policies.)

I think there is some reason to assert that Labour's nuclear policy won them the 1987 election, or at least helped them retain their majority in the face of the country's economic woes. By 1990 there was too much internal power-broking for too little performance, so they lost. The world has changed too much and I have been out of NZ too long for me to presume to make predictions for 1993.



NZ seeks renewal of US ties

By DAVID BARBER,
Wellington, Tuesday

The New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr Bolger, revealed today that he had written to the US President, Mr Clinton, urging a quick settlement of the dispute between the two countries over nuclear policy.

But New Zealand fears that Australia may stand in the way.

The US formally declared New Zealand "a former ally" in 1987 and effectively suspended its membership of the ANZUS defence alliance with Australia after the then Labor Government passed a law banning visits by nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed vessels.

Although the relationship has improved since Mr Bolger's National Party came to power in 1990, the US still deprives New Zealand of political and defence intelligence it shares with other allies.

"We want to, as quickly as possible, get back to a totally normal relationship," Mr Bolger said. "The Cold War has ended. It's a different world environment and I believe it's in the interests of New Zealand and, dare I say it, the United States, to put bygones behind us."

Bolger's call for a renewed Anzus seems to me to be an anachronism, since the fall of the Soviet Union means that Pacific disputes now reflect local rather than global politics. Protected by distance, NZ needs no other alliances, though I think it should keep close military ties with Australia in line with its economic ties such as Closer Economic Relations.

The worst NZ faces is casual terrorism, not necessarily directed against NZ *per se*, of the type practised by France in the *Rainbow Warrior* affair — and France was a 'friendly' power! (US sources later claimed that they knew about the planned French attack in advance but *withheld* the informa-

He said President Clinton's inauguration offered "a potential window of opportunity that I would hope is used by the US administration".

With nuclear weapons now removed from US surface vessels, there was no reason for the US not to resume visits by conventionally-powered ships, Mr Bolger said.

Former President George Bush's administration had declined to do so while the anti-nuclear law, which continues to ban visits by nuclear-powered vessels, remained in force.

Mr Bolger made it clear that he thought the first move should come from the Americans in the form of a ship visit. The Bush administration consistently said it was up to New Zealand to repeal the anti-nuclear law and demonstrate its commitment to the alliance.

Mr Bolger welcomed last week's comment by the Senate Democratic leader, Senator George Mitchell, that the incoming administration should hold an early review of the relationship "with such good friends and allies as New Zealand".

The fear in some Government quarters in Wellington is that Australia will, for domestic political reasons in an election year, maintain pressure on the new

administration to make no concessions to New Zealand.

Mr Bolger repeated today that he was in no hurry to change the anti-nuclear law before his election, due late this year, despite a scientific report published last month that said nuclear powered vessels were safe.

No New Zealand Prime Minister has been invited to Washington since Mr David Lange came to power in 1984 with his anti-nuclear policy. Mr Bolger said he would be happy to go there to discuss the issue, but commentators believe Washington hard-liners will insist there is no invitation while the anti-nuclear law stays in place.

MARK METHERELL reports from Canberra that Australian sources said that while the matter was essentially a dispute between NZ and the US, the Australian Government's view was that membership of ANZUS imposed certain obligations.

If NZ wanted the advantages of joint exercises and sharing of intelligence with the US, it should be prepared to accept nuclear ship visits. "They are after the benefits without paying the dues," a source said.

But officials said Australia was likely to maintain its low-key approach to the dispute.

— The Age 27jan93

tion from NZ as part of its punishment. Starting from scratch after the explosion, without US help, NZ managed to catch two and just missed other French agents — not a bad effort.)

Getting back to Pacific defense, although Anzus never was a nuclear treaty, it has become identified with nuclear weapons and is unlikely to live down this stigma. Far better to abolish it entirely and try something new — something that does not involve playing Russian roulette with neither-confirm-nor-deny policies.

NZ always recognised that its nuclear policy would imply some scaling-down of US military aid — the Australian 'source' who said NZ 'wanted the benefits without paying the dues' was playing with words. What is at issue is how

far that scaling-down should go. That depends on the nature of any new agreement.

Why should the preferences of the US military forever override the sovereignty of the citizens of other countries? Would the US accept a 'neither confirm nor deny' policy from any country that wanted to ship dangerous — or potentially dangerous — materials in and out of US ports, against the wishes of the majority of the US population? I doubt it.

After 40 years of this sort of arrogant policy, the paradox is that US Americans still wonder why the US is unpopular even with its nominal 'friends'. ☐

— Greg Hills

[I started aggressively, so I might as well go on the same way. This article was sent to Leah Zeldes Smith for Stet. To describe it as 'aggressive' is, perhaps, a trifle mild. Leah did her best to tone it down and even, er, helped by adding bits here and there — including one strategically-placed paragraph which plugged a gap that I had deliberately left as sucker bait for medium-smart readers. The version printed here is what I sent Leah; interested readers can find the edited version in Stet 6.]



by Greg Hills

'Fanzines are dying' — The greying of fandom' — do you recognise these phrases?

The odds are you've heard them, even uttered or written them. You probably even have a pet theory as to why they should be true. Well, I'll bet that your theory is wrong.

The first obvious point is that fewer fanzines are being published now. Seems to be true, though if you take a few away from a lot you still have a lot left. There are still more zines being published than any one person can read, if only because there are a lot more fans than the typical printrun.

The next obvious point is that fanzine fandom is smaller than of yore. Seems not so true, unless you take a strictly limited definition of a fanzine fan. I look in the lettercolumns of zines like *Stet* and *Gegenschein* and see the same old names. Then I look in the lettercolumns of zines not cut from the Sixth Fandom mould — *Ethel the Aardvark*, *Fosfax*, etc — and see new names among the old. I take over *Thyme* and start adding some of these names to the mailing list,

and behold! They turn out to be fans indeed, but fans who never heard of Walt Willis or — or Lee Hoffman or *Quandry*. They have odd ideas and traditions all of their own, and they fit the Sixth Fandom mindset like square pegs in small round holes.

Which brings me to the crux, being that the new fans are out there, craving their fanzine fix but not finding it in our zines. The paradigm has changed, and if we are really interested in getting these people into 'our' fandom we must be prepared to change our mindset a little to meet them. Else we will become a fringe group of old fogies, derided and disregarded while 'fandom' continues apace beyond the walls of our little self-imposed ghetto.

There are many things that can be done to attract these readers, but the thing I want to address here is perhaps the most paradoxical, in that 'common sense' tells us it is sure to be counter-productive. Yet experiment argues that it is empirically correct.

We must devalue the egobuck.

There is, of course, no such currency. It's a figment created by juxtapositioning egoboo with issue credits. What I want can be more clearly described as reducing the value of 'the usual'. Lower the issue credit on contributions, demand more parity in trades, assess 'the usual' by its value to you rather than 'one fan, one loc' or 'all locs are created equal'.

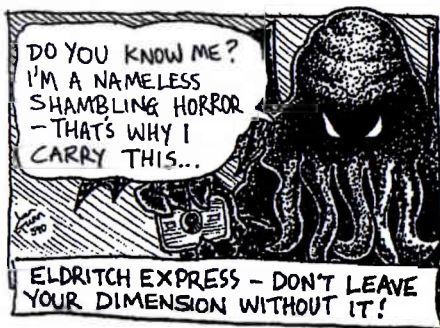
I can hear the screams already. You want fair play! You spend a couple of hours of time and a little money for postage and paper and you expect a fair return on your effort. Like several issues of a magazine that is costing the editor hundreds of dollars and weeks of time to produce. Sure.

Then you wonder why so many people give up publishing. Then you wonder why the quality of the locs is dropping. Then you wonder why people drift away from your zine and from fandom while you send them all those freebies. Why only the hard core is left, those who loc and contribute far beyond the call of duty.

The problem is that standards are too low. Too many people expect — and get — issue credits for scribbled notes that wouldn't even make good apa mailing comments. A worthwhile loc needs creative input, not mere knee-jerking to the last issue. But when a scribble gets you as many issues as a carefully-considered letter, why bother? And if the quality of contributions in the zine to which you send the scribble declines, well, you can always stop responding and take your interest elsewhere, calm in the awareness that it's not *your* fault — after all, didn't you loc them?

The only zines that seem able to sustain the quality are those that drive themselves by the contributions of their editors and their close friends, but — they grow long WAHFs, which still seem to get freebies because even though those locs had nothing interesting to say, they *responded* and so *deserve* a copy.

Then there's trading policy. Fannish economics seems to argue that trading a seven-per-



year zine with a one-per-year zine is 'fair' and that trading issue for issue isn't. Well, this may be true if the seven issues are small and the one is a giant, but face it, this situation is rare. All it means is that the more frequent publisher is pouring money down a hole, which is fine if they really want to do that but is not (in my opinion) something that should be *expected* of them. The frequent publisher is discouraged, and soon discovers that publishing two issues a year nets them as many trades as seven a year ever did. So they cut back.

Many fanzines don't publish contributors addresses but do publish addresses with locs. An article may require several times the creative input of a loc, but the loc nets more freebies from other faneds who add to their mailing lists by parsing the lettercolumns of the zines they see. So articles and the like are discouraged in favour of mindless and (relatively) mass-produced locs.

Then we hear the cries that fanzines are dying and that we're not getting any new blood. Of course not — what's being published is often of interest to few but the long established and indoctrinated fans.

The too-high value of 'the usual' is not the sole cause of all this, but I submit that it is a major contributing factor. Devalue it, I say! Devalue the egobuck! ☐

— Greg Hills, 1feb92

[Being unemployed is more than just not having to get up in the mornings, or cutting down on book-buying, conventions, and fanzines. It's not a case of running short of cash before payday. It's weighing every single expenditure against anticipated future needs, where the loss of a week's 'income' is not a momentary embarrassment until next payday, but a major disaster that will take months to recover from.]



Swanston Street, as many readers will know, is Melbourne's main drag. The traveller debouching — or debauching? — through the main entrance of Flinders Street Station will be confronted with the stony lump that houses Young & Jackson's Hotel — Number One, Swanston Street — home of the nubile nude 'Chloe' and first pit stop for generations of sailors fresh into port. Facing Y&J across Swanston is St Paul's Cathedral — 'Vice before and virtue behind', as the Chinese once said of a procession comprising their Emperor, his mistress, and K'ung Fu-Tzu. I could ramble at length about the wonders to be seen as the traveller paces up Swanston Street, but the wonder that inspired this article calls me on.

A feature of Swanston Street that has always fascinated me is the couple of hole-in-the-wall establishments which, from time to time, hock cheap Asian goods such as radios, tape decks, binoculars, and dolls — for a pittance. A miniature TV set, no matter how shoddy and even though the image is



only black & white, is a definite bargain when knocked down for \$1.00. What attracted me however, was not the TV set.

In a financial crisis earlier this year (1992) I sold off my stereo and some other chattels to pay the rent. This represented a significant decline in the comforts of home and was made tolerable only because I still possessed my little Sony Walkman (worth \$200 in the days when \$200 was a piffling sum to me; not worth enough to sell now that even a fraction of that sum is rather more than piffling) and a set of ghetto blaster-sized amplifying speakers. The catch to this system is that the several AC adaptors I have acquired over the years offer voltages from 3 Volts up but my Walkman takes only 1.5 Volts. Although it gets up to 8 hours of tape play from the single alkaline battery that the 1.5 Volts represents, batteries



form an overly expensive way to get music into my life.

My interest was caught when the man behind the counter waved a stereo tape deck around. A deck that size would surely take juice from one or another of my AC adaptors; it would allow me to get my musical joy from *house current*, not batteries! Music all the time, not just whenever the craving for an auditory fix got the better of my financial better judgement.

I drifted in with the crowd, waving my hand eagerly in the breeze whenever the man offered a tape deck as part of the goodies.

My first booty was a free deck of playing cards. The man was passing out freebies and super-bargains like he wanted to get quit of the day's load and go home. The cards were nice but they weren't a tape deck, so I hung around and played it cool in case by being greedy for lesser things I might lose out on the cherished goodie.

The man behind the counter was an artist — just how much of an artist he was I did not appreciate until much later. He started by asking twenty cents for this, a dollar for that, then acting ashamed at his own greed and giving the thing away free or for fractions of the agreed price. He invited the crowd closer. His patter was slick and witty, punctuated by outbursts of spontaneous generosity. He started showing the crowd the goodies that he would be giving away to them later on. The day's temperature, some 29° on the street, lagged behind the fever that was spreading through the crowd. I smiled, enjoying the show, admiring the salesman's performance. This was cheap entertainment.

He picked up a plain brown box. A mystery box. Any gamblers in the crowd? Five dollars for whatever it contained. You, sir? Five dollars is too much for an empty box; you can have it for one. Can I open it for you? Look at that — a bottle of 'Poison' perfume, retails for \$40 in the shops, you get it for twenty cents. Thank you. More boxes, more bargains.

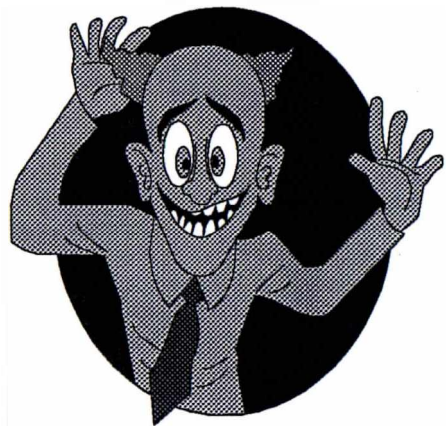
The prices began to rise, slowly and with frequent showers of freebies. Now he would demand \$5 for this, \$10 for that, then rebate all but a dollar or two of the asking price after the deal was struck.

He offered something for \$20 but got no takers. Without a pause he showered us with more freebies — I received a blank cassette — then offered several goodies to the first person to offer — (every hand went up) — *five hundred dollars!* Was that a genuine offer, sir? It was? Do you think it's fair? Well, I don't and you can have the lot for one dollar. Thank you. *Fifty dollars* for this doll and — a walkman. Was that a genuine offer? It was? Well, you can have it for five dollars.

He started stacking things on the counter. A clock radio, a walkman, a TV, this & that, a *ghetto blaster*. He explained that he would sell the lot to the first hand raised after he stated the price, which was \$5 —

Every hand was in the air.

Well, he was sorry but he couldn't give it to everyone and he hadn't seen who was first — had blinked or something; I missed hearing the reason. Instead he said he would knock it down to the first hand raised after he rapped his auctioneer's mallet three times. Knock, knock —

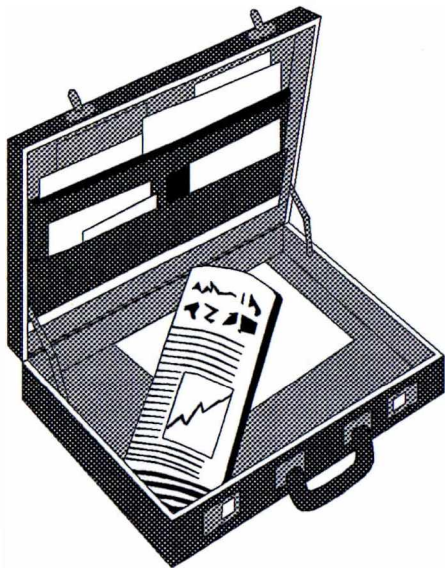


Every hand was in the air.

Hadn't he told us to wait for the hammer? He was going to do it again, and this time he told his partner to watch the crowd and tell him who got their hand up first. Knock, knock, knock —

Every hand was in the air.

His partner said he hadn't been able to see who got in first, so the salesman asked everyone who wanted the stack of goodies to put their hand up, and counted the resulting forest. Fifteen hands, he reported. Here was what he was going to do. He had some nice opal key rings. He would give one to every genuine customer — a genuine customer being anyone who would pay \$2 for their ring. Thank you, ten dollars here, five dollars from this lovely lady, thank you, and here was \$8 change and here was \$3 change, thank you. I crowded up and handed him my \$2. He counted the result. Seventeen people had paid, he reported. A second partner handed him seventeen key rings and he handed several each to several people, asking them to give one to everyone who had paid.



The key rings were distributed — and my hands were empty. Hey, I asked, who's got a key ring they haven't paid for? The salesman was distraught — his clever plan for fair distribution of the goodies was imperilled. Hastily he asked who had paid for but had not received a key ring. Four hands — well, he wanted to be fair to the genuine customers, and he recognised that all four of us had paid our money — here were four more key rings, making 21 even though only 17 people had paid. There were four crooks in the crowd and he asked them to put their hands up.

Not a hand was in the air.

Well, the salesman explained, he wasn't about to risk giving these goodies to a crook instead of one of the honest genuine customers. He would put the pile aside for now and think up some other way to give it to the right person. In the meantime, our keyrings were our proof that we were genuine customers and we should keep them in our hands and show them whenever we bid for something.

Instead of the big stack he offered jewellery and briefcases. He would *give* each genuine customer the item of their choice, he explained. You, sir, what did you want most? And you? And you? (I chose a briefcase — there were no tape decks in this offer.) As each choice was made he stacked it on the counter. Eventually everyone had been given a choice — he asked if anyone had been missed out, and nobody spoke up. He had fifteen things on the counter and seventeen genuine customers and four crooks. Unfortunately his partner had vanished. He called the man back on deck and asked him where he had been. Having a smoke. Why was he having a smoke when it was his job to be out in front keeping track of who asked for what? Had to smoke sometime. Well, get back to work and give each genuine customer their free goodie. Give who what? He hadn't been there to see the division.

Well, there was no way to sort out who should get what in most cases, and rather than



be unfair to some the salesman declared that he would not give out any of these. But when we saw what was coming next —

This plain box, ten cents. What the hell, I was getting bored waiting for the tape decks to come back on sale. Ten cents? Why not. I scored a shoddy plaster figurine and a set of wooden stirrers.

Back to the big stack. Was anyone willing to offer fifty dollars for it? Two hands. You, sir, you had your hand up first. Was that a genuine offer? Do you think it's fair? Done; give me the money. Thank you.

He brought out a ring. Genuine solid gold, genuine Australian opal. Fifty dollars for the right to bid on this. One hundred for that. Were these genuine offers? Thank you, thank you. (This money was collected. It did not come back.) The counter was strewn with jewellery, a silver tea-set, silver-plated cutlery set, watches.

He would give their choice of any one of these to anyone willing to offer *two hundred dollars*. Thank you, thank you. Two hundred dollars, was that a genuine offer?

The hammer was aimed straight between my eyes. I checked my wallet and hesitated. Any method of payment — credit card, cash —

Hey, what the hell, he kept giving the money back, didn't he? I got leave to dash to the nearest bank. My account wasn't rich, but I was between rent payments and had the residuum left over from my last dole payment that was earmarked as this fortnight's share of the next rent. I could spare two hundred dollars for a few minutes —

Got two hundred? Genuine offer? Fair enough? What's your name, friend — Greg. Which item do you want, my friend Greg? — here, have the ring. Stay right there. And for you, madam, the tea service. You, this watch. And you. Not much left now.

Freebies showered. I scored the silver-plated cutlery set, a ring and earrings, a necklace ('are you married? No? You soon will be with this —'). The partner came round and handed out garbage bags to those conspicuously laden with plunder. I hung on; my two hundred dollars was still in play and I wanted it.

The end. No more to give away. The crowd began to disperse —

I still didn't have my two hundred dollars, and in the cooling breeze that the absence of bodies now allowed into the shop I realised that the money was gone. Spent, freely offered by me and accepted by them.

Conned, by damn, and me so smug and aloof amidst the greedy crowd an hour earlier! The hour's entertainment had cost me two hundred and two dollars and ten cents, for which I had received goods with a 'shop' value of about that — mostly in the opal-set 9ct gold ring and the silver-plated cutlery set, with a little help from the gold-plated necklace and the gold-plated paste ring and earrings. Conned? But I *did* have goods which were nominally 'worth' what I had

paid; I had no beef coming. I had offered the money freely, had declared I thought it a fair bargain —

But I had expected to get the money back. I had been 'had' . . . hadn't I? Without that money I was going to have an awful lot of trouble paying the next rent; it wasn't really a *disposable* asset since it had all been earmarked for rent. All that about genuine offers and fair value had just been persiflage; they knew it and I knew it. I would go and talk to them, demand . . .

I grinned to myself and said nothing after all; just gathered my booty and departed. I'd been 'had' all right — I *had* handed over \$200, fully expecting it to come back. It *hadn't* come back, but after all that was the bargain I *had* struck: \$200 for my pick of the counter. The salesman *had* made quite certain afterwards that I got my 'money's worth', even though the goods I received didn't look much like tape decks and certainly weren't things I would have chosen in

preference to paying the rent. I *hadn't* a single leg to stand on, and the final irony — handing out garbage bags to the lucky customers to carry their purchases home in — was not lost on me.

After all, I'd had an hour's 'free' entertainment and a candid glimpse of the rapacious greed that dwells within 'honest' citizens (unfortunately including myself). If we'd really been honest, would we have been there like jackals around carrion? The truly honest citizen would never have been involved in that frenzied attempt to take advantage of a naive salesman.

I got a marvellous education in folly. I got the germ of an article. I would pay the rent somehow — late, maybe, but somehow. And after all, I did get a free garbage bag along with the rest of the garbage. What could be more practical? ☐

— Greg Hills, 17nov92

On a clear disk you can seek forever . . .

Credits and Production Notes

Most of the artwork in this issue was either filched direct or modified from the clipart collections packaged with Word perfect, CorelDraw! and Harvard Draw. Ian Gunn drew the illos on pages 11, 18 (bottom), 21 (bottom) and 24. Everything else (the dregs) is my work.

43rd Law of Computing:

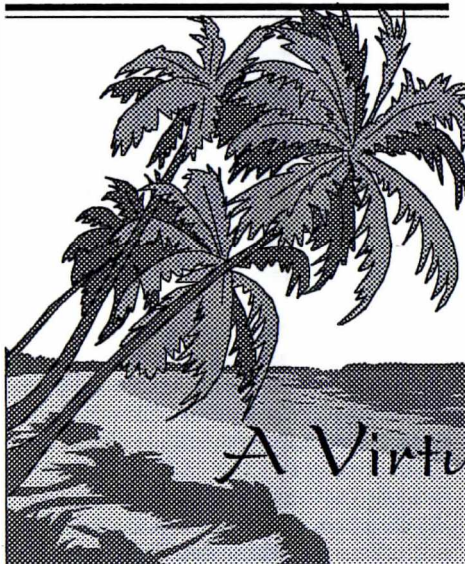
Anything that can go wr^@#%

Internal stack overflow
System halted

'Devaluing the Egobuck' was first published in *Stet* 6 (Leah Zeldes Smith — 17 Kerry Lane, Wheeling, IL 60090-6415, USA, moving soon). 'A Virtual Paradise' was presented as a talk to the Nova Mob at the June 1992. The other words in this issue are seeing the world for the first time.

Final layout and design used Pagemaker 4.0. Body text set in Garamond 9 on 10.5 at 90% of normal width; supplementary material in 8 pt Garamond or Times Roman. Headings in Present Script. Logo used Arnold Boeklin.

Printing and annoying 'BEEP! Out of memory' messages by Sharp JX-9500E laser printer. 512 K of printer memory is no longer a lot. There is nothing more frustrating than to see a page ejected — complete but for the last couple of millimetres of the graphic rules. Fiddle with the graphics, re-print, curse, fiddle again . . . ☐



[Here in Melbourne there is a group known as the Nova mob, which meets at a member's house on the first Wednesday of each month to talk about sf and related topics. Regular attendees include George Turner, Wynne Whiteford, Bruce Gillespie, Marc Ortlieb, Alan Stewart, and so on. There is no membership fee but you are expected to present a discussion every so often. I attend infrequently, but last year I thought it was about time to pay my dues. I even had a topic lined up . . .]

A Virtual Paradise

by Greg Hills

The subject of this talk is 'how science fiction has not kept up with society'. In accordance with the traditions of such talks, my examples will not keep up with science fiction and science as such will not be permitted to intrude.

Science fiction proclaims itself to be the literature of ideas, of the future, of the possible, and so on. It has at various times claimed predictive powers .

The problem is, of course, that most sf is not predictive at all. Putting aside the myriad half-baked space drives and super-weapons, the overstructure of plasteel, glasstick, hand-held bevawatt lasers and other frannistans, we usually emerge with a society that is a subset of the writer's current decade complete with shibboliths.

From the viewpoint of the storyteller this is not bad, since most sf is written for money. If the reader cannot identify with the characters then the market for the story or novel will be small. Who wants to read about incomprehensible entities doing bizarre things for inscrutable

reasons? So there is a pressure on the writer to make their characters and society accessible to the casual reader of the time.

Unfortunately — and here we resume previous programming — most writers simply accept the restriction and if pressed will become quite indignant over being called to task. The 'restriction' conceals their lack of inspiration, their sheer laziness or even *inability* to bring the alien viewpoint to life for the reader.

If I put a story aside for a few decades and return to reread it after the period in which it was written has become nicely hazy in my memory, I often find that the characters in it are behaving in a convincingly alien manner — a manner at odds with the mores of today's society — without loss of readability or accessibility. Of course, this is not quite the same as creating a society that never existed. In the case of sf written after 1958, I lived through the period in which those assumptions held sway and so it can be argued that this familiarity with the background makes the difference. Even in the case of sf written



before I was born, the society it is (actually) set against did exist and subsequently became the one that exists today, and so is again familiar.

Such an argument, however, simply delivers itself back to my argument that it is laziness or incompetence that is behind the endless string of modern-society-plus-hi-tech-add-ons stories. In a story set in the near future, then the society of that future has evolved from the society of today in exactly the same fashion as today's society has evolved from the society of yesterday. The writer's challenge is to take the new elements of his or her future and extrapolate the effect of each item on that future. If mobile phones have become ubiquitous then the future the writer creates must allow for the effect of this on the way the characters will act. If automatic teller machines are freely accessible then the writer needs to explain why the character is queuing at the bank counter.

The difference (for the writer) between creating a strange but accessible future society by combining today's society with the new elements introduced by the writer, and a strange but accessible future society by waiting a couple of decades for the mores to change from those standing at the time of writing, is that the former requires imagination and creativity while the latter merely requires a dusty bookshelf. For the reader, on the other hand, the former means that the sf he or she picks up in the bookshop today

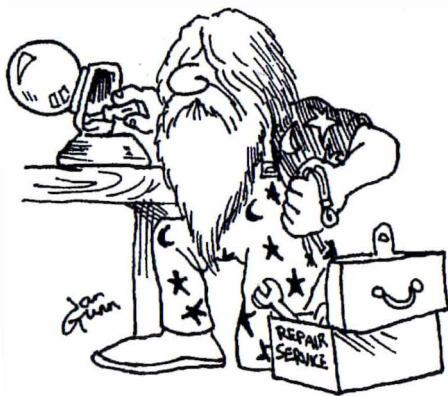
will be genuinely predictive, genuinely new, and therefore genuinely inspiring.

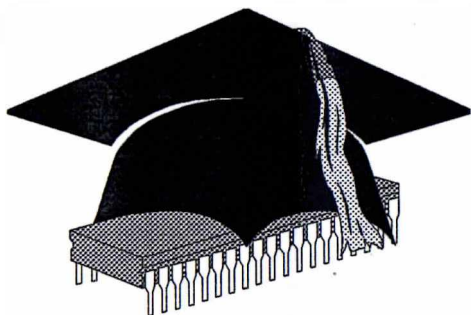
Let's take an example. The one that started the chain of thought that eventually led to this talk is one dear to my heart, namely computers. The microchip is the key innovation of the eighties, has transformed the world, and yet when I go into the shops for sf, what do I find? Supercomputers, intelligent houses, mere terminals. I search in vain for the descendants of the desktop personal computer. Hand-held calculators and silicon memo pads abound, but these already exist. There is a gap between these and the built-in models that run houses and offices and may be intelligent. This I find odd. Here I find clear evidence of the failure of sf to keep ahead of society.

More than that, the stories still usually require the characters to leave home and commute to their offices . . . where their computers allow them to link instantly to anywhere or anyone in the world without stirring from their chairs.

Here are a few free-wheeling predictions for the future of the microcomputer. How many of them turn up in the sf *you* read?

1. The computer gets smaller and more compact — the laptop shows the way — until you can stuff a full-featured PC into your wallet or purse. (Do they still use purses? Some items





of technology never go out of fashion.) Ubiquitous wall sockets allow you to plug into the global network any where, any time.

2. The walletcom eventually gets superseded by the earcom, which is worn after the fashion of modern hearing aids. It may be voice-oriented (talk to it by sub-vocalising; it talks back the way a hearing aid does) if powerful enough, or may use a credit-card-sized screen and keyboard. Infra-red light replaces wires, as per modern-day remote controls. Uses rechargeable batteries. You take it off at night and plug it into its recharger.

3. The earcom gets replaced by the skullcom, which is either grown into the bone of the child by nanotech devices or else implanted by advanced surgical techniques. Interfaces directly with the parts of the brain that handle the five senses. Needs no keyboard (just think at it), no screen (heterodynes the image over your normal vision), no speaker (induces current directly into the auditory centre). Needs no recharging — runs off the body's natural electricity, or maybe uses a physical dynamo operated by the normal activity of the muscles in your small intestine. A small transmitter communicates with the global net, or maybe you push your forefinger (whose bone contains a communications extension of the skullcom) against a conductive surface.

Of these three suggestions, only the first has appeared in more than one or two places in modern sf literature. Robert Reed's *Down the Bright Way* introduced the concept of 'hard

memory' which looks like a variation of suggestion two which is physically implanted into the head and communicates direct with the brain (except that the 'hard memory' he suggests is rather more passive than my earcom would be). If other sf has gone further (my reading is a little short in the cyberpunk area) I haven't seen it.

Note that the three suggestions are extrapolations of trends in the evolution of the personal microcomputer; the walletcom, earcom, and skullcom mentioned here are not mere terminals for the world computer net but individual computers which can be stand-alone or networked at least as easily as today's desktop or laptop.

Now consider some of the consequences. *Instantaneous mathematics.* It will be taken for granted that everyone above the level of the moron can do mental arithmetic, even though arithmetic may become a special subject taught only to those who think it may be useful for projects they plan to undertake. *Quick and perfect recall.* No more memorising long lists of facts and figures, except as a lesson in mental discipline for the student. While the capacity of the PC may be limited, most of the facts that may be required during everyday life can be stored in it, and more can be stored in the network, which is as close as the nearest wall. The skullcom, indeed, may be able to access the brain's own memory storage and both organise it for your own use and use it itself. *Reminders and notes.* It can jog your memory when you need to do something, acting as an automatic personal secretary. *Phone calls and communications.* No need to keep a telephone directory handy — the PC can keep track of people you may want to ring and you'll never need to worry about lost phone numbers again. And so on — the list is endless. The effect would be to make every individual fitted with a skullcom a genius by every characteristic measured by today's IQ tests.

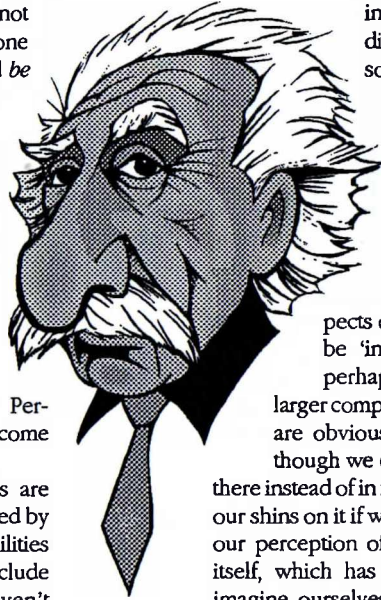
Note that I have not presumed that any of the three PCs will be intelligent. They are just tools. Extensions of your mind, just like the modern

PC. Note also that I have not actually claimed that someone fitted with a skullcom would *be* a genius, just that today's IQ tests could not distinguish between a naturally bright person and an enhanced person. On the other hand, who is to say what characteristics of creativity may be brought out when someone no longer needs to struggle with a defective memory or inability to make quick mental calculations? Perhaps they really would become geniuses.

I believe that these PCs are coming. They won't be called by the names I've used, their abilities may differ (will certainly include enhancements that I haven't thought of), but they seem obvious steps along the chain that started at the tail-end of the seventies when cheap microcomputers such as the TRS-80 first became available. Nor do I believe that they are far in our future. The first versions of the walletcom are already available in the shops. They're not full-featured and mostly have only 64 K of memory, but the direction is clear. I believe that the earcom will be available this decade. Marc Ortlieb's grandchildren will grow up wearing skullcoms, though he personally may never want to touch one.

This is just one example of sf's failure of imagination. Most writers use a PC every day, but very rarely does the PC as such (let alone an extrapolation of it) turn up in their stories.

Let's follow up. Another failure, even when a piece of technology has been used in a story, is the failure to think through the consequences of that technology and its effects on people. In the example above, the writer would be remiss indeed if they did not realise the potential



inherent in a machine with a direct interface with our sensory system. I'm talking Virtual Reality here. You don't like the colour of the walls? Don't get out the paintbrush; simply instruct your skullcom that the wall is green, not brown. Floral sheets? Scent? Food need salt? I see no reason why these aspects

of our environment could not be 'interpreted' by the skullcom, perhaps with a little help from the larger computer that runs the home. There are obviously limitations on this — although we could *imagine* the settee over

there instead of in front of us, we would still bark our shins on it if we walked into it since it's only our perception of the location, not the settee itself, which has moved; or while we could imagine ourselves warm rather than freezing, this might not be the wisest thing to do.

So by small increments my suggestion for the future course of personal computer evolution has brought us back to ideas at the forefront of modern sf — and demonstrated how they can realistically work without converting a human being into a computer program. I've never felt easy about the story which demands that you either become a computer program or else sit in a chair and enter the virtual reality only mentally. While it may well be possible to do it that way, it seems so *limited*. As someone who rents rather than owns their own home, I am confronted daily with decors that I don't much like but can do little to change. If I could just alter my perception of the colour scheme . . .

Look at the consequences. Why bother with a fancy 3-D holophone when the skullcom can pick up the incoming message and construct the image in your head instead? Why travel (except to *be* there), when the global network can instantly bring anyone to you or send you

anyplace? Why spend money on paint and fancy things when the computer can make the plainest object seem rich? Why pay for cosmetic surgery when your skullcom can tell others how you want to look?

There would still be a place for personal visits in such a world, but it would make obsolete a massive number of the resource-wasting fripperies we need today only for 'front'. You could still collect beautiful objects, create art and fiction, and so on; what would go would be the thousand different designs for objects intended for one purpose. This has far-reaching effects on industry and commerce, which effects are unfortunately beyond the scope of this discussion. (Translation: I can't be bothered thinking that far ahead right now and I've left writing this till the last moment so there's no opportunity to get bothered.)

At the end of all this you wind up with a human being that has quite different standards to our own, yet who should still be perfectly accessible to today's reader if the writer can only clearly demonstrate how they got *there* from *here*, because all the changes are rooted in that old unchanging human nature.

I make a present of this vision to anyone who cares to file off the serial numbers. There are enough undefined variables in it to let you make it your own.

For now, we're back to square one. I took one key aspect of modern society and extrapolated and came up with a scenario that has not been used in any sf story that I am aware of. Nor have I used anything new and wonderful — all the ideas here have been

available, even obvious, for several years. Long enough for them to have turned up in the literature. But they haven't. Instead good old Man strides boldly through the world He has created, staunchly unchanged and unchanging, She still gets the boy, and the readers lap it up.

Blech.

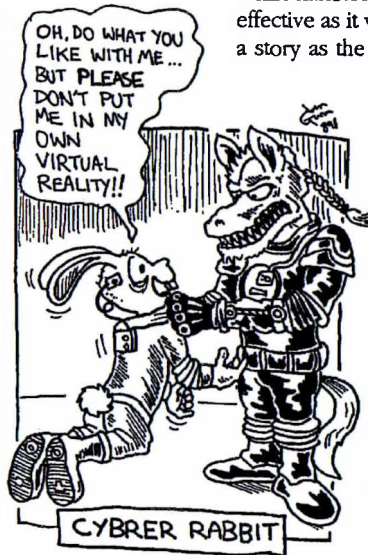
Here is a series of propositions about things I think we should be demanding from our sf.

One. I think good sf should challenge our assumptions about the way things work.

Two. I think good sf should show evidence that the writer has considered each new element they are throwing in and has allowed for its effect on the characters inhabiting the writer's story.

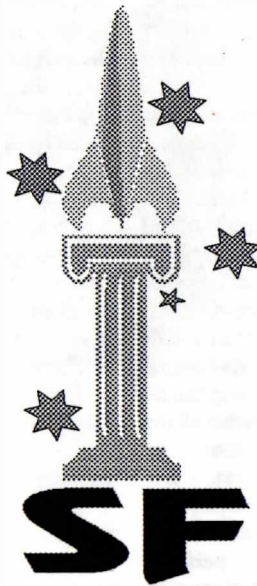
While nanotechnology need not be quite as effective as it was in *Blood Music*, its use in a story as the explanation why the central

characters can make swords glow and do marvellous things should be coupled with an explanation as to why these abilities cannot be extended to the mob. If an oppressed minority can build spaceships to escape medieval Dark Age European persecutors, we deserve an explanation as to how a society with that much spare industrial capacity (which it applies continuously over a period of nine hundred years from 450 AD to 1350 AD) can yet fail to overawe and dominate the



superstitious rabble around it. If the supercomputers of tomorrow build themselves into the interstices between places in the network of matter transmitters they run, we need an explanation as to why they neglected to design an unpullable plug.

Three. I think goodsf should attempt to construct characters who can realistically be accepted as deriving from the societies and technologies behind them. At the same time, proposition one above would suggest that throwing a few curve balls is a good idea. Okay, we have a world in which computers are used universally and so sex-based differences can be expected to diminish. Genetic engineering is commonplace. Now let's find a good reason why people should elect to stay as different as possible. Or, hmmm, why tall and short people should so choose. Fifteen billion people, hmmm, and the energy shortage because the idiots in the late 20th Century didn't build enough nuclear plants means that everyone still has to huddle together in cities to gain economy of scale, hmmm. Now a short person needs less headroom than a tall person, so let's design our housing for graduated heights. Shelly, our main character, is tall and agonising over his



feelings for Boney, his short lover. Should he have some bone removed from his legs to reduce his height so that they can live together? Who will bear the foetus if they decide to mix their X chromosomes at the local gene factory? Can he persuade Boney to divorce Scaley, Boney's other lover, or should he just accept the extended relationship implied by Scaley's own three other lovers? Okay, now drop a story on top of this scenario, tie up the loose ends, and post it off to the slushpile.

Fourth and finally, I think that goodsf should show those characters attempting a plausible solution to whatever problem has been dumped on them.

Sf that attempts all four of these propositions seems damned scarce today. Perhaps the market is to blame, for buying what it thinks will sell. If that is the case, then perhaps the fault lies not with the writers but with the readers, who fail to demand enough from their chosen form of entertainment. I don't know. In the end I have no pat and conclusive answer to the topic of this talk, just a series of if-onlys and I-wishes.

Any suggestions? ☐

—Greg Hills, 3jun92





Better Times

My Editorial, love it or leave it

We live in the greatest age of wonder and individual opportunity the world has ever seen. Anyone willing to grasp the tools now available can do quickly and at home tasks that once required an officeful of flunkies and a floor or a whole building filled with heavy machinery. The paradox is that recently the whole trend of 20th-Century life has been reversed. Instead of leisure and quality of life, the new icon is 'productivity' — lower wages, longer hours, fewer workers.

It has long been known that one way for a business to get out of difficulty is to prune its workforce and strike agreements with the remaining employees for either lower wages, or productivity-linked

preservation or increase of wages. This policy has saved many companies — SPC is one Australian example.

Unfortunately, what is good when practised by a few is not good when practised by many. One company shedding staff has little effect on the economy — sacked individuals quickly find new work and the leaner original company trades its way back into health. Once staff cuts become endemic, however, the job market quickly becomes saturated. Everyone is cutting down and nobody is hiring, so unemployment begins to rise. Unemployed people who have no prospects of a quick return to work are forced to cut their expenditures, and they also drain funds from Government coffers that should have been used to improve community services or the nation's infrastructure. As unemployment grows, therefore, consumer spending falls and deficits grow, putting more pressure on companies to reduce workforces. This cycle cannot be reversed simply by ceasing to sack, because the mass of unemployed people remains.

From *The Song of the Rear Guard*

*Our doorways that, in time of fear,
We opened overwide
Shall softly close from year to year
Till all be purified;
For though no fluttering fan be heard
Nor chaff be seen to flee —
The Lord shall winnow the Lord's Preferred —
And, Hey then up we go!*

*Our altars which the beaten brake
Shall rankly smoke anew,
And anise, mint and cummin take
Their dread and sovereign due,
Whereby the buttons of our trade
Shall soon restored be
With curious work in gilt and braid,
And, Hey then up we go!*

— Rudyard Kipling

I am no economist, but it seems obvious to me that the solution to this problem is *not* to cut more jobs, lower wages and conditions, raise hours, open shops on Sunday, sell off profitable public enterprises, raise taxes. These steps only make things worse.

Increasing the value of exports and reducing imports will help, but with every nation in the world attempting the same task Australia has small chance of succeeding with an 'export-led recovery', particularly when every glimmer of improvement in the national economy immediately leads to an anticipatory increase in imports without a corresponding increase in exports.

Reducing the budget deficit will help, but with between ten and eleven percent of the nominal workforce sucking on the open wound there are few places where the budget can be cut without reducing expenditure on long-term investments such as education and short-term investments such as infrastructure.

In the end, the problem cannot be solved without getting people off unemployment and

back on incomes which will allow them to buy consumer goods. This can take a long-term form — concentrate on jobs for the young and let old age take care of the rest — or a short-term form — spending money for job creation — or a mix of long- and short-term measures. Over time, advances in technology will help.

Moral I have none, nor a satisfactory conclusion to this Editorial. All I know is that for the last two years I have been forced to watch with envy the parade of glittering new goods coming on the market, and being unable to afford them. There is a shop, not ten minutes walk from my front door, which is selling an 800 dpi Postscript/PCL laser printer for \$A2650. That would be just a little more than a month's wages for me if I was employed as I wish to be. Instead I must anxiously watch the ominous greying of the output of my little 300 dpi laser, hoping that it is merely because the toner is running low and not because the printer is breaking down. □

— Greg Hills, 13may93

