The Wright Stuff

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Graphic by Ditmar
DUFF laureate William (Bill) Wright’s contribution to the World Organisation of Fanazine editors (WOOF) at LoneStarCon 3, 71st Worldcon in San Antonio, Texas, August 29 to September 2, 2013)

Introduction

Born in Sydney, Australia, in 1937, I survived strafing from midget Japanese submarines in Sydney Harbour during WWII (where I didn’t suffer a hit) and the rigors of a Catholic boarding school education (where I was hit often) to join the Melbourne Science Fiction Club (MSFC) in 1958. Notable fannish achievements since then are to have become a life member of the MSFC, a founder member of the Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association (Anzapa) and secretary of Ausiecon, the 33rd Worldcon in Melbourne in 1975. I organised the 8th Aussie Natcon in 1969, and in 2004 the Australian side of the Bring Bruce Bayside Fan Fund to send the Doyen of Aussie faneds Bruce Gillespie to Corflu (the fanzine editors’ worldcon) in San Francisco in 2005. My fanzine Interstellar Ramjet Scoop is now an e-zine on eFanzines.

Now 76 years young, I work for the Australian Science Fiction Foundation as its awards administrator, and run Meteor Incorporated: www.meteor.org.au/new, an organisation with the long term aim to raise funds to set up a bricks and mortar science fiction institution and research library in Australia.

As the 2013 DUFF* delegate, I represent the Australian and New Zealand science fiction communities at LoneStarCon 3, the 71st Worldcon in San Antonio, Texas, on Aug 29 – Sep 2, 2013. TAFF* delegate Jim Mowatt represents flourishing European science fiction communities. Jim and I seek to coordinate our separate itineraries so as appear together at as many fan centres as possible. My visits are to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, New Orleans, Seattle, Minneapolis/St Paul and Boston.

About DUFF and Fan Funds

Fan Funds – the principal ones are the Trans Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) and the Down Under Fan Fund (DUFF) – are worthy fan charities. The majority of fans in the Southern Hemisphere never get to see their Northern counterparts, and vice versa, so it’s good to have a system in operation whereby, on a two-year rotation, they are visited by an individual who represents the very best its fan community has to offer.

My Aus/NZ nominators are: Mervyn Binns, Dick ‘Ditmar’ Jenssen and Bruce Gillespie
My North American nominators are: Murray Moore (Canada) and John Purcell (U.S.)
My opponent in the 2013 DUFF race was Melbourne (Australia) fan Clare McDonald-Sims.
Fan activity

Until the emergence of the Internet in the 1980s, whatever it was that science fiction fans did wasn’t regarded as fan activity – ‘fanac’ for short – until it was written down and published in a fanzine. Since then, a new generation of Internet savvy and media fed fans seems to have become estranged from its fanzine publishing elders. Are fanazines, then, a thing of the past? Or maybe the Internet is the start of the rest of the world catching up with fandom. To understand what is happening we have to know when and how science fiction fandom came to be and have an idea of how it has developed since. It’s time to revisit the origins of fandom…

Overview of fan history from when it all started in 1926

Science fiction fandom began when Hugo Gernsback published the first science fiction magazines in the 1920s. Readers wrote letters of comment to the editor, sparking lively debates in the letter pages. That soon broadened to publication of their own fan magazines, or fanzines for short. Driven by a need to share their enthusiasm for works of speculative fiction with one another, they and their correspondents weren’t content with merely penning a note to a science fiction magazine and hoping for publication. They wanted interactivity and a guarantee that their comments would be published.

They filled fanazines with letters, poems, stories and critiques, as well as personal updates and random observations. To them, fandom was something that came in the mail. Occasionally they felt a need to meet in person, resulting in science fiction conventions. Those were, and are, not-for-profit ventures run by fans to create a forum in which authors and readers can meet.

Structures like SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America) were established to give writers and readers their own space and to create an environment conducive to both author and reader education. Awards were given to recognise notable achievements by authors and fans.


By 1972 the locals had had enough. Occasionally losing what is, in effect, their Natcon to an Overseas city was irksome. So American fans instituted the NaSFic (Occasional North American Science Fiction Convention) to serve as their Natcon whenever the Worldcon goes off-shore.

Before large-scale public access to the Internet began in the 1990s, fanazines remained the dominant form of discourse among science fiction fans. For almost a century that amateur publishing phenomenon had helped create and sustain a worldwide network of science fiction fans. Long before the Internet, they shaped science fiction by typing, copying and mailing their own periodicals.

Paper fanazines are still published, mainly in apas, amateur press associations in which fanedds send copies of their fanzine to an official editor who, at set intervals, bundles them and sends them out to members. Each contribution consists of a mixture of original articles and mailing comments on previous distributions. Nowadays, the generation of post-WWII faneds who are unable or unwilling to incur rising printing and mailing costs post their fanazines on the Internet in such forums as eFanzines: www.efanzines.com. For younger fans the Internet (via blogging, e-mail lists and social media) has replaced fanazines as the principal method of fannish dialogue. After 1996 the telephone became a terminal for these activities.

Online archives like eFanzines go some way to preserving the unique historical deposit represented by pre-Internet fanazines, but nothing on the Internet is permanent. Indeed, preservation of both printed and electronic fanazines is something university libraries and other community archives should support. Scanning even the most significant printed fanazines will take decades.
Fandom in Australia

Before the 1950s, Sydney was Australia’s fannish Mecca. It held conventions that were well attended by Melbourne fans, but the Sydney scene fell into disarray in 1950s as a result of feuding within the Sydney Futurian Society. In 1952, a group of Melbourne schoolboys founded the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. In 1956 the club held a successful ‘Olympicon’ to celebrate the Melbourne Olympic Games held that year. The only Sydneysider present was pioneer SF feminist author and playwright Norma Kathleen Hemming who had written a play to be performed at the convention. The annual Norma K Hemming Award for race, gender, sexuality, class and disability, presented at Aussie Natcons since 2010, is named in her honor.

In the late 1960s and early 70s, Melbourne became the hub of a worldwide campaign to hold the 33rd Worldcon in Australia in 1975. The bid was successful. That first Aussiecon, held in Melbourne, spurred three more successful Melbourne bids for Worldcons in 1985, 1999 and 2010.

Fanzine activity peaked in 1960s and 70s. In Australia, creative energies unleashed at Ausiecon sparked a renaissance in writing and publishing speculative fiction. A fiercely entrepreneurial small press evolved to develop the talents of emerging writers, giving them chances for paid writing they would never otherwise have had. Conventions became showcases for their best efforts where book publishing majors Allen & Unwin, HarperCollins, Penguin Books, Hachette Australia, Random House and Pan Macmillan gathered like bees around a honey pot to pick up potential bestselling authors and integrate them into their stable of writers whose submissions are routinely raised from the slush pile and at least considered for publication.

University departments of literature began to pay serious attention to popular culture as the Australian science fiction community demonstrated its ability engage with the wider community in both literature and media presentations. Great strides in reader and writer education were achieved by the introduction of an academic stream in Australian science fiction conventions. Nowadays, fans in every Australian State run regional conventions, most of them annually. The Continuum Foundation runs annual conventions in Victoria, the Western Australian Science Fiction Foundation runs annual Swancons in Perth. The Canberra Speculative Fiction Guild runs formidable literary conventions called Conflux annually in the National Capital, where book launches at every session break are the order of the day. Queensland ran its last regional convention Conjure in Brisbane in 2007, South Australia Conjecture in Adelaide in 2009, and Tasmania Thylacon in Hobart in 2005.

Each State seems to take its turn in volunteering to host the Aussie Natcon, maintaining a more or less cohesive Australian science fiction community that fizzes with talent and constantly renews itself via personal contact between professional writers, artists, media producers and their fans. There are inputs from book publishers, academics, small press magazine editors, and small press book publishers (whose collaborations between authors and artists of late have been of the highest standard), resulting in intellectual density. Yes, I know what you’re thinking. Either interpretations is apposite, depending on the range and quality of one’s reading.

Fostering that sense of community among fans are the permanent Fan Funds DUFF, GUFF, FFANZ and NAFF which maintain personal links between national, regional and global science fiction communities. Without those face-to-face contacts fans communities would become isolated from one another. TAFF and DUFF are linked to Worldcons and perform that function for the World Science Fiction Society: http://www.wsfs.org/.

Scientist and graphic artist Dick ‘Ditmar’ Jenssen describes what it is to be a fan in the following words…

A science fiction fan is someone who lives slightly askew from those who inhabit the drab everyday world, someone who sees things from a modified perspective. Someone who can perceive the extraordinary in the ordinary, the ultra-mundane in the mundane, and the wonder which resides in the ubiquity of the quotidian.

But there’s even more to a fan. Abraham Merritt expressed the combination of beauty of emotion and logic masterfully in The Metal Monster:

“In this great crucible of life we call the world - in the vaster one we call the universe - the mysteries lie close packed, uncountable as grains of sand on ocean's shores. They thread, gigantic, the star-flung spaces; they creep, atomic, beneath the microscope's peering eye. They walk beside us, unseen and unheard, calling out to us, asking why we are deaf to their crying, blind to their wonder. Sometimes the veil drops from a man's eyes, and he sees - and speaks of his vision”.

And those who hear are the SF fans.

Ditmar
Australian Traveller

The following anecdote by Aussie fan icon John Bangsund is reproduced here to promote internationalism in fandom. It was first published in his fanzine Scythrop #22 (April 1971).

Travelling through Germany, at Göttingen, Keats and Chapman fell in with an Australian, and (having extricated themselves) discussed their plans with him.

"I reckon I'll just kick around here a bit, sink some beer, pick up a sheila or two . . ."

"You like to read poetry while you imbibe?" asked Chapman.

"Beg yours?" the Australian said politely.

"My friend refers to your interesting habit of reading Schiller over your beer," said Keats.

"Eh? No, you've got me wrong there, fellers! I said 'sheila' -- you know -- birds, broads, talent . . ."

"Ah," said Keats and Chapman.

"And what are youse blokes thinking of doing?"

"We thought", said Keats, "we might emulate Heine and go for a tour in the Harz."

"Well, strewth mate, you call it what you like, but why don't we all go together?"

The existential Keats and Chapman


Keats and Chapman were dining with the noted philosopher Descartes in connection with some research they were doing on word-play of an equine nature. "Shall you take a little wine?" Chapman asked. "Wine?" cried Descartes, who knew poteen when he saw it, "I think not!" and instantly disappeared.

The friends looked at each other (with a strange surmise). After a while Chapman said, "How did he do that?" "Do what?" asked Keats, oblivious.

John Bangsund
The Australian Science Fiction Foundation

The Australian Science Fiction Foundation: [http://home.vicnet.net.au/~asff/](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~asff/) was set up in 1976 to carry on the good work of Aussiecon (Australia’s first Worldcon in 1975). It’s a useful starting point for fans wishing to find out more about the Australian science fiction scene. It contains useful links to information and resources.

Fandom in New Zealand

Rather than me telling about the New Zealand fan scene from an Australian perspective, I’ll let the New Zealanders tell their own story.

From now on, most of the news about SF, Fantasy and Horror which is of interest to New Zealand fans (and supporters of global fandom) will be posted on their new News Blog: [http://www.sffanz.org.nz/](http://www.sffanz.org.nz/).

The News Blog will let you subscribe to the news service by joining an email list. You can also pick up an RSS feed; and you can even follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Or you can just bookmark the link and visit the News Blog whenever you wish to check for updates. Since it is a blog, you will also be able to post comments on the news items as well.

Much of New Zealand fan activity seems to be centred around its annual achievement awards known as the Sir Julius Vogel Awards. [I’ll leave it to readers to suss out from the website who Sir Julius Vogel was and why fans from the Shaky Isles have seen fit to name their annual achievement awards after him]. The awards are presented annually at the New Zealand Natcon.

The 2013 New Zealand Natcon was

**Au Contraire!**

**34th New Zealand Natcon**

**Friday 12 to Sunday 14 July, 2013**

**at**

**Quality Hotel, Cuba Street**

**in the heart of Wellington**

News just to hand is that the grand old man of New Zealand fandom, Dunedin fan Dan McCarthy, has died. Born Oct 26, 1934, Dan passed away on Wed Aug 7, 2013, after a short illness. Dan was the major contributor to New Zealand’s apazine Aotearapa over its 25-year life, and contributed to The Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association (Anzapa) for more than a decade, where his last contribution will be published posthumously. He won short story prizes including a New Caledonia short story competition where, as part of the prize, his work was translated into French. He was also published in small-press anthologies.

Many of his oil paintings and prints are on the walls of New Zealand’s science fiction fans. As a cartoonist his sequential art serial *Augustus X* was in NZ’s premier F zine, Phlogiston. His eye was keen and ever alert for the beauty and weird in everyday things. His writing and his art skewered the pompous who believe their own hypocrisies and so deserve to have their balloons pricked, a task Dan relished, for he had a wicked mordant wit. For that, and much more, he will be missed.
From Ian Gunn (1958 – 1998) - Advice for Neos on how to be a fan

Clerihews of Light and Darkness

Invented by Edmund Clerihew Bentley in 1890 and preserved almost a century later by Oxford University Press in 'The Complete Clerihews of E Clerihew Bentley' (1981), the verse form now known as the clerihew is poised to take over from the limerick as the preferred medium for compulsive versifiers. Such is Melbourne fan Dennis Callegari, whose recent output includes...

Happy birthday, Erwin Schrödinger

Google’s logo for Aug 12, 2013, marks the 126th birthday of Erwin Schrödinger, the Austrian physicist who gave us the Schrödinger equation and zombie cats. As I read in Wikipedia: In 1933 ... Schrödinger ... became a Fellow of Magdalen College at the University of Oxford .... His position at Oxford did not work out; his unconventional domestic arrangements, sharing living quarters with two women and his cat, Milton, was not met with acceptance.

Which kind of adds a bit extra to the clerihew that I had composed just moments before.

Professor Erwin Schrödinger,
The notorious cat-swinger,
Hid his vices under keys and locks
Within the depths of a big black box.

British weekly New Scientist some time back had readers suggest what name Schrodinger would have given his cat. One of the best suggestions, with Shakespearean connotations, was 'Toby or Not Toby'.
Napoleon Bonaparte and Sir Walter Scott

The following will resonate with Southern fandom, for reasons that emerge in the telling...

Born on August 15th, only two years separate Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) and Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). My clerihew for August 15th, 2013, owes its existence only to the fact that they are next to each other in Wikipedia’s list of births on this day.

Napoleon was not
Sir Walter Scott.

One of them was barmy, and
The other one wrote ‘Marmion’.

Wikipedia is a bit ambivalent about Walter Scott and repeats Mark Twain’s assertion that Scott "had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the [American Civil] war", that he is "in great measure responsible for the war".

Mark Twain (whose real name was Samuel Clemens) goes on to coin the term "Sir Walter Scott disease", which he blames for the South's lack of advancement.

Art poster for Aussie Natcon Convergence, held in Melbourne in 2002

Graphic by Ditmar

Doc Rat – furry animal sequential art by Jenner

Jenner is the pseudonym adopted by an Australian physician who publishes his Doc Rat strips on his blog at: http://www.docrat.com.au/. The site is worth a visit, either to have a quick look at today’s cartoon or, at a more leisurely pace, to view his earlier work going back for years.

Here is his strip commenting on the Down Under reversal of the Seasons and how the Australian marsupial, the Bilby, has become a symbol of Easter rivalling the Northern Hemisphere’s Easter Bunny…
Diet tips for Worldcon from Ian Gunn - winner Hugo Award for Best Fan Artist at Aussiecon 3 in 1999

Hi. I am a creature from outer space. I have transformed myself into this piece of paper. Right now I am having sex with

Iconic Australian Images

The Drover’s Dog

The Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge
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