



**Top picture: Stony Point, Port Phillip Bay, December 1953. From left: me (aged 6), Jeanette (aged 2), and Robin (aged 5), held by my mother. My father, Frank Gillespie, took the photo.
Bottom picture: Mooloolaba Beach, Queensland, August 2002, my sister's Robin's wedding. From left: my mother; me; and Jeanette. Robin's not here because she took the photo.**

Scratch Pad 51

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I'm dreaming of a hot Christmas

Ian Nicols seems to be the only other Australian on the Fictionmags email list. Ian and I shocked Ian Covell deeply; he couldn't handle the ideas of 'hot' and 'Christmas' in the same sentence. Ian Nicols wrote about his childhood summers around Sydney Harbour, fishing for oysters. I wrote about one quintessential memory of childhood Christmas holidays: not wearing shoes for the whole six weeks (except on Sundays).

In Australia, Christmas means the start of the *summer holidays!* The school year ends on the nearest Friday to Christmas Day. Many businesses begin summer holidays on that day or Christmas Eve, and most Australian workers still receive three weeks' holiday.

When I was a child in the 1950s, we received at least six weeks' holiday, right through those hot, hot Januaries, returning to school on the first Wednesday in February. Some years, a quirk of the calendar gave us seven weeks' holiday. We had much to look forward to in the few days before Christmas: escaping school, shunting parents around the shops while dropping heavy hints about presents we wanted, then straight into Christmas Eve, waiting for Santa.

My sister Jeanette remembers on childhood Christmas Eves going with our parents to Carols by Candlelight at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, in the Alexandra Gardens near the city. It was a long night, consisting of much carol singing by the crowd and the Salvation Army band and chorus, plus various celebrities murdering a variety of Christmas songs. We arrived home at midnight, and had to be put to bed before Santa and Mrs Santa could put the presents under the Christmas tree. I can't remember believing in Santa after the age of six, but he was still expected to turn up.

I would wake up at 5.30 on Christmas morning. We weren't supposed to get up until Mum did. I remember tiptoeing from my room, through the kitchen, peeping in at the living room just to make sure the presents were there.

Mum enjoyed Christmas as much as we did. Disturbed by whisperings around the house, she got up at 6 a.m. That

meant we could too. We weren't allowed to open the presents, but we could raid the Christmas stockings. In the early fifties, they were raggedy old stockings that had been stuffed with nuts, sweets, and other bits-and-piecy presents that Mum had collected over previous months. Later, Mum bought plastic 'Christmas stockings' at Coles; they were also stuffed with a huge range of nuts, lollies, chocolates, and plastic trinkets.

Either Mum or Dad went off to the 7 a.m. Christmas Day service at the Oakleigh Church of Christ. Only when either of them returned from church were we allowed to open the presents for which we had waited all year. We kept munching those nuts, lollies and chocolates, so Mum rarely bothered to prepare breakfast on Christmas Day.

Dad and Mum had little spare cash, so I'm amazed to remember the cost and elaborateness of the presents we actually did receive at Christmas. Were we good Christian children or an extortion gang? The three of us had advanced ambit claims months earlier; often we got just what we asked for. After I became interested in my father's old Hornby model train set in 1956, I asked for new rails and carriages to extend the system, and I did receive some valuable items (not only from Santa, but also from aunts and uncles). Addiction to Enid Blyton books was fuelled by presents of the latest Blyton titles. No paperbacks in the 1950s; Enid Blyton books came only in hardbacks.

I remember how churchy we all were, but I also remember the paganness of Christmas at our place. Robin, Jeanette and I were not obliged to attend the early-morning church service; we were intent on the eating and celebrating aspects of the festival. Despite a morning sated with sugar, we were hungry again by the time Mum produced Christmas dinner at about 2 p.m. Few families in the 1950s in Australia could afford to serve roast turkey or chicken at Christmas; my memories are of roast lamb or beef and roast vegetables. My mother was quick to ditch tradition if the Weather Bureau predicted a day of 100°F (38°C) — she would produce a gigantic cold salad instead of a gigantic

roast dinner. But no matter how hot the weather, she always produced a huge plum pudding and custard.

Christmas dinner barely had time to be absorbed before we were wedged into our 'good clothes' in order to visit relatives, but not the relatives on my mother's side of the family. Reason tells me that we must have had occasional Christmas dinners or teas with Auntie Daisy (my mother's sister) and Uncle Jim, but memory says otherwise. When we were very small, we traipsed up to 14 Connell Road, Oakleigh, home of my father's mother and father. My grandfather died in 1954, so I remember almost nothing of him. My grandmother then lived with her two daughters, my Aunts Dorrie and Marjorie, who packed my mother and father (and three of us), my Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred (no children), Auntie Betty and Uncle Ian (no children), and sometimes my Auntie Jean and Uncle Alan (with four children), into the parlour of their tiny Edwardian house and fed us all again. Everybody felt obliged to give everybody else presents, so we nephews and nieces cleaned up. I remember returning from one visit to Connell Road with enough presents to extend the range of the model train set by many yards of rail and several gleaming carriages. Within a few years, my grandmother, suffering from Alzheimer's disease, found the whole shebang distressing (she died in 1958). Aunts Dorrie and Marj continued the Christmas tea tradition into the early sixties, until Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred moved the lot of us to their place every year. Photos show fourteen of us seated around a gigantic table on Christmas night. Very reluctantly, Auntie Linda had to give up the tradition during the late 1980s. Today only a few of those then gathered are still living.

Boxing Day dawned. How would we spend the rest of the school holidays? Anything was better than attending school, but some holiday activities were less interesting than others.

My father, who worked for the State Savings Bank (also now deceased), did not receive his holidays in January. He usually received them in October or early November, so we were allowed to take two weeks from school for a beach holiday. But that meant Dad had to go off to work every weekday in January, and Mum had to put up with the three of us. We were told to 'do something — anything'. The activity that would have interested me most — curling up on the bed reading books — was forbidden unless it was raining. On fair-weather days, or even on very hot days, Mum told us constantly to 'go outside and play'. I was very bad at all sports, and had little interest in toys. If I knew one of my friends was also home during January, I could visit him, but it was easy to wear out one's welcome. The January sun in Melbourne burns too brightly to allow continual reading on a garden seat. When she had time, Mum put the three of us into the car and drove us to our favourite beach, Carrum, on Port Phillip Bay. Swimming, paddling, sunburn, whoopee! If we were really lucky, we would return home so late in the day that Mum would buy us fish and chips instead of preparing the usual night meal.

Family trips to the country in the old Morris Oxford were often exasperating to both parents and kids. The car usually broke down, or boiled, on some distant hilly bend. I felt carsick while sitting in the back seat. The three of us had little interest in 'glorious nature', which could keep Mum and Dad enthused for hours. We were usually more interested in hitting each other, or having the car stop at a roadside shop in order to buy sweets.

Summers only became interesting to me when Dad revealed that, yes, he did still have the model train set that had been his when a boy, and now I was old enough to be

trusted to play with it. At first we spread the rails around corridors and along floors in the house, but that stopped Mum from doing anything in the house. In the summer of 1956, on one hot day when no dew was left on the grass, we moved the set to the back lawn. During that year I had become obsessed by the United States of America, or rather, by the double-page map of the USA in my *New Elizabethan World Atlas*. Parents and relatives, pleased that I was finally interested in something other than books, gave me many of the bits and pieces that I added to the layout. By the end of summer 1957, I could lay out the rails from New York on one side of the lawn, across the dip in the middle (the Mississippi) and almost to San Francisco on the other side. Dad even made a wooden bridge, with rails stuck to it, so that a train could cross the Mississippi. He made the approach angles a bit too steep, so the Limited always took a header into the river, but it was fun trying to get it across the bridge. News of the railway layout spread to neighbouring houses, so unusually our yard was often filled with other people's kids.

Barefoot childhood summers ended on my twelfth birthday, 17 February 1959. On that day we moved from Oakleigh to Syndal. The move followed the best summer of all. For years, the schools and social groups of Oakleigh had been raising money to build a community swimming pool. The pool opened at the end of 1958, so the summer of 1958–59 was the only one we spent almost every day frolicking in the water. The railway layout stayed in its trunk for most of that January. Dad was painting the interior of the house; my sense of smell was a lot more sensitive than it was now, so I didn't stick around. The house in Oakleigh sold in January 1959, and very quickly we moved to Syndal, a new suburb five miles away. That February I would be starting high school. I decided I was no longer a child. I gave away all my comics, and forgot about the train set until several years later, when a friend asked to see them and they were laid out one last time. At Syndal there was no convenient swimming pool, although Mum still drove us to the Nunawading Pool or the beach occasionally. Presents stopped being quite so important in our lives — passing examinations was now more urgent — but it was Auntie Linda and Uncle Fred who gave me my first LP recording at the end of 1962. It was, of course, Roy Orbison's first LP, *Lonely and Blue*. I still own it. Within a few months of moving to Syndal, Dad bought the family a new radiogram and parked the old console radio in my room. I discovered pop music during 1959 and stopped listening to the *ABC Children's Hour*, and stopped reading Enid Blyton and Biggles and started reading real science fiction books. In one year I more or less turned into the person I am now.

My memories of childhood Christmas holidays could hardly be called nostalgic. I don't remember the 1950s as a golden age. I was intensely bored much of the time. The period between one Christmas and another seemed eternal. I wish I had realised how much cleverer I was then than I am now. As Eric Lindsay once said: 'When I was a child I wanted to know *everything*'. Exactly. But childhood was so regimented, so disenabled (to use a cliché of 1970s educationists, also probably remembering their childhoods), that I never quite found out what I might have been and done. I vowed when I was ten or eleven to remember what it was like being a child, so that I would never misunderstand children when I grew up. Instead, Elaine and I simply decided not to have children.

Even the heat of summer during childhood faded into vague memory. From 1974 until 1981, summers were much

cooler than they had been during my childhood. This trend continued until recently. Only in the last few years have summers been as hot as the ones I remember from childhood. These days I can allow myself to sit and read when I want to, or watch films, and I never go outside to play, although I go walking on cool days. All I do most summers is work on the computer. Christmases retain almost none of the excitement I remember from childhood; most years Elaine and I don't even give each other presents.

Only one thing is constant: the connection between Christmas and family. Usually my sister Jeanette gives a ride

to me or both of us down to Rosebud to have Christmas Day with my mother. (My father died in 1989.) This year, Elaine was there, as well as my other sister Robin, with her new husband Grant, Grant's son Paul, and Susan, a friend of Jeanette. Not quite as big a party as the feasts at Auntie Linda's in the seventies and eighties, but with the three of us, Robin, Jeanette and me, there in the same room as Mum on Christmas Day, it felt once again, for just a few moments, like a childhood Christmas.

— Bruce Gillespie, 7 January 2003

Zest

Reviewed:

SUPERTOYS LAST ALL SUMMER LONG AND OTHER STORIES OF FUTURE TIME

by Brian Aldiss

(St Martin's Griffin 0-312-28061-0; 2001; 232 pp.;
\$US13.95/\$A33.95 tpb)

[First appeared in *New York Review of Science Fiction*, August 2002.]

I've had great trouble reviewing this collection. I find myself writing about the book it isn't, not the book it is.

Supertoys Last All Summer Long is not the book of the Steven Spielberg film *Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)*. 'I was wheeled out of the picture,' writes Aldiss in his Foreword, after telling the story of two years' work with Stanley Kubrick, several years before Kubrick died and Spielberg took over the project. 'He [Kubrick] never said goodbye or uttered a word of unmeant thanks.' But Aldiss's most recent short-story collection does begin with 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long', which, in the words of the cover blurb, is 'the story that inspired . . . *A.I.*' If the film had been an enormous commercial success, this book would have been a bestseller.

The essence of the story 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long' is reiterated in the first half-hour of *A.I.* Several scenes from 'Supertoys When Winter Comes' and 'Supertoys in Other Seasons' also appear in the film. Much of the mood of the three stories remains in the script, which was eventually written by Ian Watson (although Bob Shaw was involved as well). I hope Brian Aldiss was paid adequately for his efforts. No wonder I find myself wanting review *A.I.*, completed by Steven Spielberg after Stanley Kubrick's death, a film that almost everybody else in SF circles except me seems to have disliked.

'Supertoys Last All Summer Long' is a delicate little story about a boy who isn't a boy. He's a product of Synthank, a near-future organisation run by Henry Swinton, who seems to be his father. His 'mother', Monica Swinton, childless, is pleased to have him in her own home. She loves David, the boy android, but only to a point. David, who does not know he is an android, is programmed to love his 'mother' unconditionally. The story is basically the same as that of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, whose monster cries out in abject loneliness at being forever shut out of the affections of people.

From the initial premise, Spielberg, using the Kubrick/Watson script, builds a film of genuine romanticism, that is, a search for the unattainable. Aldiss's 'Supertoys' stories are more ambiguous in tone, although they also take David on a journey through a wasteland of spent androids. In the stories, the magnificent house of the film's first half-hour proves to be a synthesised illusion. Like David, Henry Swinton undergoes an odyssey, and the three stories become the story of his saga as well as David's.

Take away the 'Supertoys' stories, and we are left with a short story collection that proves a worthy, if hardly an equal successor to *The Secret of this Book (Common Clay* in its American edition). Like the previous collection, *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* is a report card on the findings of a major writer entering old age. It is a report card scored with several large ticks and some minor crosses, full of contradictions, deep meditations and triumphant self-assertions. Aldiss's style becomes more ebullient — 'younger' — with age, his themes more universal.

Heaven and hell, utopia and dystopia, are the themes of these stories. Aldiss discusses utopia in several shorter pieces, which are more like sermonettes or baby parables than short stories. At the conclusion of 'Cognitive Ability and the Light Bulb', the narrator talks of the switching on of the human brain. Some time in the near future we will acquire the 'thousand watt brain', although the narrator looks back to poor twentieth-century humans, crawling along, equipped with only a one-hundred-watt brain. In 'Galaxy Zee', an entire galaxy achieves utopia, but 'Nothing was left to chance. Everything was programmed.' Deprogramming the galaxy involves Stapledonian fireworks, which some readers might not find convincing.

The oddest meditation on utopia is the collection's last item, 'A Whiter Mars', a companion piece to *White Mars*, Aldiss' most recent novel. Written as 'A Socratic Dialogue of Times to Come' between 'He' and 'She', it seems to be only a sermon that summarises *White Mars*'s pro-conservation, anti-terraforming attitude to future human colonisation of Mars. The goodies (conservationists) seem to win, until we discover that humanity has changed, and Mars, like the rest of the solar system, has been terraformed anyway.

If *Supertoys*' sermonising parables dwell rather unsatisfactorily on the possibilities for utopia — material heavens — the book's major short stories take us to visionary hells.

In 'Dark Society', Corporal Cleat, court martialled from an army involved in what seems like a twenty-first-century English civil war, finds himself unwelcome in his old haunt,

Septuagint College, Oxford. Even the portrait of his father, a benefactor of the college, has been moved from Fellows Hall. Cleat, sitting alone in his cupboard-like room on a grey autumn day, receives cryptic faxes from his dead wife. He descends the stairs, only to find himself contuing to descend. He finds a cityscape of delicately subtle horror, slight hope, and (perhaps) the meaning of life and death. Aldiss's thickets of fine detail and beautifully modulated ironies make this into a remarkably unsettling fantasy.

'Steppenpferd' is also evidence that Aldiss has lost none of his ability to confront the reader with the multiple possibilities of life and death. Religious faith, lightly dismissed in 'A Whiter Mars', is the main obsession of Father Erik Predjin. Left alone as a member of the last monastery on the last island on Earth after a vast alien invasion, Predjin clings to some sort of faith. Even his novice, Julius Sankal, challenges his beliefs. Is this still Earth at all? Is this still a Norwegian island, although Predjin can still touch its trees and feel its soil? Without offering any easy answers, Aldiss confronts us with that precise moment when we might find out what our lives have been all about.

Life is both heaven and hell — often both at the same time, and often changing from one to other from moment to moment. This perception illuminates the major stories in the *Supertoys* volume.

In 'Nothing In Life Is Ever Enough', Aldiss hurtles us from uneasy realism to lyrical romanticism and back again, often from paragraph to paragraph. The main character finds himself condemned to reiterate the fortunes of Shakespeare's Caliban, and knows that this is happening, but thinks he can avoid Caliban's fate by rewriting the story. Instead, he seems caught up in a story much larger than himself or his love for Miranda.

In 'A Matter of Mathematics', the reader is projected from Earth, where Joyce Bogreist makes a mathematical discovery that propels her to the Moon, to the colony on the Moon that is the result of her discovery. There we meet some rather obsessive people: Terry W. Manson, who falls in love with his 'mentatropist' Roslyn Staunton, and General Willetts, who has a provocative affair with Molly Leviticus. Terry's life is taken over by a strange dream. Violent events on the Moon help him to find the meaning of the dream. Aldiss doesn't bother with arduous explanations or those bridging paragraphs that make most SF stories tedious — we go along for the ride, or stop at the first paragraph. What zest! What brilliance!

Despite its odd little sermonettes and the first three stories, *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* reminds us how lucky SF readers are to receive a new volume from such a youthful spirit and fine artist as Brian Aldiss.

The first part of this section was written for *Vision*, a newish Web fanzine from Brisbane, edited by Stephen Thompson. The second part was written for the revived *SF Bullsheat*, now being edited by Edwin Scribner and Edwina Harvey in Sydney.

Why I publish fanzines

'Fan magazines are the great vehicles of thought in our republic of letters,' says the 1959 edition of the *Fancy-lopedia*, 'and our most characteristic product.'

Fanzines are magazines in which you can say what you like to the people you want to speak to. Most of those people live in the republic of science fiction fandom. SF fans are the people who invented fanzines. But the idea of publishing fanzines has now escaped from the SF world, and thousands of them can now be found on Web sites littered throughout cyberspace.

I tried to publish a fanzine several years before I heard the term. In Grade 6, a friend and I typed three copies of a magazine, using carbon paper and my father's gigantic old Underwood typewriter. There's not much you can do with three copies of a magazine, so we kept one each and gave one to a friend. My copy disappeared many years ago. I don't even remember its name.

At the end of Form 2 (Year 8), I did the most useful thing I'd ever undertaken on my own account without prompting from a parent or teacher. I taught myself to touchtype, using a book given me by my aunt. A month or two later, I was confident enough of my typing ability to suggest the idea of publishing a magazine to a high school friend. His father owned a spirit duplicator, a little machine that would print

up to 100 copies from one stencil. In fact, we printed only about 20 copies of each issue, but sold them all around the school ground at Oakleigh High School in Melbourne. The first issue came out in February 1961, we published 26 issues during 1961, and made 10 shillings profit for the year. That's the first and last time I've made a profit on a fanzine.

I was already reading science fiction, so I published in each issue of the magazine an episode of the science fiction serial I was writing. My main hobby at the time, however, was collecting hit parades and scribbling in my diary the details of every new pop single I heard. So I published a fair bit about pop music. My friend Ron was fond of puzzles and jokes, so he supplied a couple of pages of them each issue.

Cashbox and Chatter, as I named it (the 'Cashbox' was in honour of a major American music news magazine, whose pop charts were the bible of Stan Rofe, our favourite disc jockey at the time), included stuff we were interested in, but also stuff that interested the audience. That's the paradox of fanzines (and *C&C* was a fanzine, even if I still did not know the term). If you publish only material about what interests you, you run the risk of restricting your audience to yourself. If you write only for the audience, you might make a bit of money, but producing the magazine becomes a chore.

I first read about fanzines in the fan column published by Lin Carter in *If* magazine during the middle 1960s. Science fiction fans throughout the world, it seemed, exchanged magazines produced on ink duplicators (what Americans call 'mimeo machines'), and some of these magazines had very high standards of production and writing. You could obtain them only by writing to their editors. Lacking addresses, I did not write away for any.

One day in July 1966, on the counter of McGill's Newsagency in Melbourne, there rested copies of a new magazine called *Australian Science Fiction Review*. It was not a regular magazine. Its cover was not glossy; it was a plain black-and-white photo. The interior pages were typed on a typewriter. It was 40 cents a copy, so I did not buy No. 1 (in those days, the cheapest SF pro magazines were 35 cents each). When *Australian Science Fiction Review* No. 2 appeared a month later, it was irresistible. As I read it in the train, I realised that I had arrived at my true destination. This was my spiritual home. These were the only people in the world who were on my wavelength. The critics wrote like real critics, analysing and tearing apart the new releases. The magazine featured major essays on important writers. There was the editor, John Bangsund, whose editorials and answers to correspondents were witty, urbane, reassuring. When John Bangsund was feeling relaxed and writing about some subject in which he was delighted, he was the best writer in the world.

John Bangsund's partners in crime were also no slouches at writing. John Foyster could be funny, but also ferocious and dismissive about poor writing. Most importantly, he did not whinge and make excuses for science fiction, as the writers in the American pro magazines did. He assumed that nobody should be called a good writer unless he or she actually wrote well. Lee Harding, whose stories I knew from the English *New Worlds* magazine, was also a highly entertaining and perceptive reviewer. When he wrote about his personal experience, such as his account of appearing on a TV show as the token SF writer, he was very amusing. There were other writers, such as K. U. F. Widdershins and Alan Reynard, who proved to be Foyster and Harding in disguise.

In describing fanzines, I've begun by describing the perfect example of the medium. *ASFR*, as it was known, was obviously the product of great dedication and love, but its writers also believed in entertaining their readers. Better still, the magazine came out regularly nearly every month for two years, before its schedule began to falter. Famous writers from all over the world (including Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Ursula Le Guin and Samuel Delany) sent contributions.

In No. 10, July 1967, the First Anniversary Issue, the magazine introduced the most startling critic of all, George Turner. In his first essay, 'The Double Standard', he lambasted Alfred Bester, one of SF's most-revered writers, and set up what seemed like ludicrously elevated criteria for criticising science fiction. Turner, it seemed, had been reading SF for nearly fifty years before being introduced to John Bangsund in 1966. That friendship led to the fabled writing career of George Turner.

The lively letter column of *ASFR* made it plain that something else was going on. Because it was appearing regularly and finding its way all over Australia, the magazine was re-creating a phenomenon I knew nothing about — Australian fandom. After the 1958 SF convention held in Melbourne, there were no more Australian conventions until 1966. At that convention, held at Easter in Melbourne,

the idea of publishing *ASFR* had been born. Soon people we'd never heard of were writing from Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Sydney. There was even a lively group in Wodonga. These recruits soon formed active new groups, such as the Sydney Science Fiction Foundation and the Adelaide University Science Fiction Association. In January 1970, Sydney staged Syncon 1, the first convention there since 1955. Adelaide held its first convention at the beginning of 1972; Brisbane in 1973.

Fanzines, it seems, do not merely represent the views of their editors and featured writers. They also form the main communication device of our 'republic of letters' — science fiction fandom. This phenomenon began in the 1930s when a small group of blokes, scattered throughout America and Britain, wrote to the addresses that appeared in the letter columns of the prozines. A gallant band of them met for the first world convention in New York in 1939 (although any British fan would point out that the first convention in the world was held in Leeds, Britain, in 1936). Many of these fans — people who wrote for the love of it — quickly graduated to becoming the professional writers of SF's Golden Age (1940–1954). Isaac Asimov, Donald Wollheim, Frederik Pohl, Damon Knight, James Blish, Judy Merrill and many others published their own fanzines and wrote for everybody else's. Even after they began selling stories, they often still remained fans. The story of those years can be found in Damon Knight's hilarious memoir *The Futurians*.

Russ Chauvenet coined the word 'fanzine' in 1939. 'Fan-mag' was the most common term before then.

From the beginning, it was clear that almost any kind of cheaply produced magazine warranted the term if it was distributed among SF fans. Many were only a few pages long, published on ink duplicators, without illustrations. Some fans learned specialised manual arts in order to make their fanzines look slick, including the placing of plastic sheets over stencils so that the force of the typewriter key would not punch out the centres of the 'o's; and tracing illustrations onto stencil using a scratch board. It was the mechanical difficulty of publishing fanzines that gave them their romance; but they were cheap to produce. Publishing fanzines was still an affordable hobby then.

The fanzine community quickly divided into groups who had very different views about what a good fanzine was. Serious-minded fans tended to publish fanzines that were full of news and reviews only. Bob Tucker, Bob Bloch and their friends decided that fanzines had become pretty damn boring by the early 1940s. Tucker, writing as 'Hoy Ping Pong', took the mickey out of everybody else in the field, fan and pro. Many of the more serious-minded fans (called 'sercon' fans) were offended. Some of those slights were never forgotten. Australia's longest-lived, most faithful fan, Graham Stone from Sydney, was definitely 'sercon'. He published fanzines from 1940 onwards, but fell out with Melbourne's fans (far more 'fannish') during the 1950s.

'Fannish' fandom is almost impossible to define. Beginning as the light-hearted group within fandom, it eventually became a self-contained group within the larger republic of fandom. Yet its pundits, such as Ted White (and Greg Benford, Terry Carr, Ron Ellik and many others before him), preach of an ideal type of fanzine that never takes itself too seriously, yet takes humour itself very seriously. The subject of a 'fannish' fanzine (of which almost none now are published) is the fan him/herself, a person who speaks a special language, attends conventions, has difficulties with the real world, yet always 'pubs the next ish'

(publishes the next issue of his or her fanzine). The greatest examples of fannish fanzines tend to be found in collectors' garages, and are treated as if they are holy relics. In a sense they are, as the great fannish writers, such as Irishmen Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, James White and George Charters, are now all dead, and the few we've ever had in Australia (John Bangsund, Perry Middlemiss and Irwin Hirsh) no longer publish fanzines.

Today's version of the 'sercon' fanzine is faring slightly better. I was treated as an ultra-serious beast when I began publishing *SF Commentary* at the beginning of 1969, but my magazine evolved into a 'perzine' (= 'personal zine', i.e. a magazine revolving around the personal interests of the editor) during the 1970s, then evolved into two magazines, *SF Commentary* (reviews of SF and fantasy books) and *The Metaphysical Review* (personal essays, rarely about metaphysics) in the 1980s. Many of the pro writers and critics who supported me during the early 1970s fled to the academic magazines when they began appearing in the mid 1970s, but that left me free to develop a style of criticism that owed little to the pretensions of academia. During the 1980s, however, the cheap technology of the duplicator and stencil disappeared, to be replaced by the much more expensive technology of offset printing and computer composition. But that promises to evolve into the very inexpensive technology of publishing directly to Adobe Acrobat files or HTML. The *idea* of the fanzine, as SF's 'great vehicle of thought', continues.

If you want to begin a collection of fanzines, look around at any convention. Old fanzines are often lie around on tables in the fan room, available for ludicrously low prices. Don't be put off by the dowdy production values; it was that dowdiness that enabled us to keep publishing all those years. Look out for the great Australian fanzine publishers, such as John Foyster (who went on to found the second series of *ASFR* in the 1980s, and has also published many other fanzines, such as *Chunder*, *Norstrilian News* and, from the pre-1966 era, such fanzines as *Wild Colonial Boy*), John Bangsund (whose fanzines from the 1970s and 1980s are worth arm-wrestling for), Leigh Edmonds (*Rataplan*, which nearly won a Hugo Award in 1985, *Fanew Sletter*, and many other titles), Perry Middlemiss and Irwin Hirsh (*Larrikin*),

Eric Lindsay (who has published *Gegenschein* since 1971), Jean Weber (*Weber Woman's Wrevenge*), David Grigg (*Grilled Pterodactyl*) and umpteen goodies on his Web site of the same name), Jack Herman (*Wah-Ffull*) and Marc Ortlieb (*Q36* and *Far G'nel*). Today, Van Ikin still publishes *Science Fiction* in Western Australia (it's really a fanzine although it looks like an academic magazine), Ron Clarke occasionally publishes Australia's longest-lived fanzine *The Mentor* (which he began when still at school in the early 1960s), and in the last three years John Foyster has published nineteen issues of *eFnac* on the Internet. A way to ease your way into the world of fanzine publishing is to join ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) — write to David Grigg, 11 Ellendale Street, North Balwyn, VIC 3104 for details.

What is not a true fanzine? Any magazine that, although it is an amateur magazine, pretends to be a pro magazine (such freaks became so prevalent during the 1970s that they acquired the tag of 'semi-professional magazines'); any magazine that primarily publishes fiction (let budding fiction writers bud elsewhere, say I); and magazines that purport to be edited, but after the first four issues, give no evidence that their editors are living, breathing human beings.

Today I heard famous English actor Sir Donald Sinden say that his only true home is on the stage. My only true home is behind the keys of a typewriter, thumping away typing stencils, which I then use to print pages with a duplicator. Because of the need for a bit of physical energy when pounding the keys of a manual typewriter, I could build a super rhythm that would carry me from beginning to end of a fanzine with hardly a pause. Since such primitive technology no longer exists, I'm just beginning to feel at home behind a computer keyboard (I can never build a typing rhythm on a cramped computer keyboard), and I like being able to choose my type faces instead of being confined to those of a typewriter. A real fanzine is still published on paper, but it's becoming more and more expensive to print and post such artefacts. Who knows what path the fanzine will take? It's the path I will have to take.

— Bruce Gillespie, May 2002

Bullsheets fanzine reviews, July 2002

This column in the *SF Bullsheets* began because I thought it odd that my fanzine *SF Commentary* was awarded this year's Ditmar Award for Best Fanzine while several other contenders either lost or did not even make the nominations list.

Conspicuously absent from this year's Ditmar Award nominations list were the two best Australian fanzines of the last few years: John Foyster's *eFNAC* and Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchkinland*.

**eFNAC, edited by John Foyster
foyster@senet.com.au**

Did *eFNAC* fail to reach the nominations list because it is available only in electronic form? To download it, you need

to email this year's Chandler Award winner John Foyster at foyster@senet.com.au, ask John for *eFNAC*'s Web site and the code you need to download this Adobe Acrobat (.PDF) fanzine once you reach the Web site. Once you download the latest issue, you can read it on your screen without needing to print it. (I refuse to read any fanzine on screen, so I print out each issue.) Once you have gone to such trouble, you feel that you have earned your issue, and by god you're going to enjoy it. Most issues are enjoyable, although recently John has begun writing about the contents of rather elderly SF magazines. This might try the patience of some younger readers. More enjoyable are the innumerable fan photos, most of them from the collection of Allan Bray, and John's commentary on the photos. Even

more enjoyable, in a hair-raising way, have been John's thoughts on being part of the medical system since September 2001, when he suffered what seemed like a stroke. After much medical examination, it was found that he was suffering from a small brain tumour, for which he requires continuing treatment. Since September, John has continued to produce issues of *eFNAC* whenever possible, without reduction of quality. *eFNAC* is the one fanzine you must download.

MUMBLINGS FROM MUNCHKINLAND No. 19
May 2002. 20 pp. A5, offset.
Chris Nelson, PO Box 1571, Apia, Samoa
nelson_c@samo.usp.ac.fj

Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchinland* is now the only Western Australian fanzine being published in Samoa (PO Box 1571, Apia, Samoa). Until recently, it was the only Western Australian fanzine being published in Tasmania. *Mumblings* is short, terse, attractive to the eye, and published regularly. The great strength of issues during recent years has been Chris Nelson's documentation of Australian fan history. He has interviewed Bill Veney, Bert Castellari and Graham Stone, Sydney fans who joined before World War II, and has kept in touch, astonishingly, with Don Tuck. (Tuck, one of Australia's few Hugo winners, seemed to vanish from fannish sight in 1975.) I wish Chris could have taken part in the Timebinders stream of ConVergence, the recent Australian national convention, as his comments would have complemented Merv Binns's photo gallery. Since Chris is now living in Samoa, he's holding conventions (admittedly with very small numbers of attendees, all with the surname of 'Nelson') and commenting on life in his own entertaining manner. Write to Chris for a copy.

I've tried to stick to fanzines received during June and July, but that's difficult. Some people have sent me their fanzines when they heard I was writing this column, so I had better not ignore them.

DIVERSE UNIVERSE No. 12
June 2002. 20 pp. plus index to first 12 issues. A4, offset.
Geoff Allshorn and Miriam English, for Spaced Out Inc, PO Box 363, Preston VIC 3072.
Electronic version (plus all back issues) available from <http://www.spacedoutinc.org> or info@spacedoutinc

Diverse Universe and *Solar Spectrum*, both published by Spaced Out Inc, 'the gay/lesbian SF Club of Victoria', received more nominations than *SF Commentary* for the Ditmar Award ballot, but didn't win *this time*. I was a bit annoyed that I had never heard of them before, and had not heard about Spaced Out Inc. Thanks to ConVergence, I now have some idea who Geoff and Miriam are, and now they have sent me a copy of *Diverse Universe*. *Solar Spectrum*, which is advertised as a fiction anthology, is only available for \$10 a copy, and therefore (according to my definition) not a fanzine.

Diverse Universe is a natty little clubzine, with a layout rather similar to an earlier incarnation of the Melbourne SF Club's *Ethel the Aardvark*. News items (mainly about forthcoming television programs — phooey!) are mixed with editorial statements, a page of justified self-congratulation for their shared Ditmar Award for the club's Spaced

Out Web site, several very short stories, and a useful interview with Joe Haldeman, who was a Guest of Honour at ConVergence. (Did you know that *The Forever War* was rejected by eighteen publishers before being accepted by the nineteenth?) I don't think *Diverse Universe* is yet a great fanzine, because it tells us next to nothing about the individual editors and contributors. It doesn't even give details of Spaced Out meeting dates and times. Perhaps I missed seeing such detail on the Spaced Out Web site.

INTERSTELLAR RAMJET SCOOP:
THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS
June 2002. 44 pp. A4. colour covers.
Bill Wright, Flat 4, 1 Park Street, St Kilda, VIC 3182;
or through ANZAPA, c/o David Grigg, 11 Ellendale St,
North Balwyn VIC 3104

Bill Wright's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* is the fanzine that I thought would win the Ditmar Award at ConVergence. It looks a lot better than anything I can do, it appears much more regularly (six times a year), and it's more entertaining than a mere Gillespiezine. But Bill didn't distribute copies widely enough to snare the second preferences he needed to topple *SF Commentary*. The only guaranteed method of obtaining your copy is to be a member of ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association, see address above), which itself is the location of 25 of the best fanzines appearing in Australia at the moment. Bill does distribute copies of *IRS* outside ANZAPA, but in a random way.

If Bill Wright printed and distributed 350 copies of each issue of *IRS*, he would win the Ditmar every year. He puts together an aromatic mixture of brilliant computer graphics by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen), winner of this year's Ditmar for Best Fan Artist; photographs; and artwork purloined from all over the Web; and cooks them together with his own unique humorous style (I enjoyed the article about St Kilda); funny articles by writers such as Stefan who write only for *IRS*; and Bill Wright's mailing comments, which might or might not make sense to a non-ANZAPA member. *IRS* is one of Australia's essential fanzines; write to Bill for a copy, or (repeat that advertisement!) *join ANZAPA*.

VILE TEMPTRESS! No. 2
August 2001. 30 pp + cover. A4.
Zara Baxter, 108 6th Avenue, Berala NSW 2141.
editor@vile-temptress.org

I met Zara Baxter very briefly at Aussiecon III, then thought she had disappeared from sight, especially as I didn't see her at ConVergence this year. Then out of the blue came *Vile Temptress! 2*, which is that rarest of all creatures — a fannish fanzine from New South Wales. I was really impressed by Zara's article 'How to Tell If You're a Fan', which includes perceptions such as 'One does not attend cons because one wants to see the Guests of Honour' and 'Reading, watching and discussing science fiction do *not* — repeat, *not* — make one a fan.' Zara's conversion from neo-fan (at Aussiecon III) to fan makes quite moving reading; I trust that many of the wannabe writers who attended ConVergence will also feel the divine touch of fannish conversion. Zara includes lively convention reports from Swancon 26 and the first Freecon, four contributions to her 'My First Encounter with Fandom' section, a short story, and photos of lots of people I've never met or met only once. I trust that

Zara is just about to publish Issue 3.

VALLEITY No. 1

June 2002. 18 pp. A4

**Damien Warman, 400 W. 35th St., Apt 106,
Austin TX 78751, USA dmw@pobox.com**

How many years do prominent Adelaide fans Damien Warman and Juliette Woods need to stay in America before *Velleity* also migrates? For the time being, it's the only Australian fanzine being published in Texas. In 'Astroboy', Damien tells the story of how he became an astronomer. English fan (and recent visitor to ConVergence) Claire Brialey ('Careless Talk Costs Fanzine Articles') tells why fans are like British parliamentarians ('For the sake of argument, you might think of the House of Commons as con-runners and the House of Lords as fanzine fans'). Claire should know, as she works at the British House of Commons. Nick Falkner raises a glass to South Australian wineries and wine areas in his 'The Irregular Diary of a Winemaker'. British fan Max tells us about 'Corflu — Feel the Love'. This is a pleasantly personal view of the most recent Corflu, the convention for fanzine fans. *Velleity* is well written, well edited, and short enough to read over dinner.

VISION, Nos. 9 (June 2002) and 10 (July 2002)

**Each is 12 pp. A4. Available for the usual,
or \$20 annual subscription**

**Stephen Thompson, 26 Mitchell Street,
Brisbane QLD 4101**

esstee@gil.com.au

or <http://welcome.to/vision-writers/>

Two issues in less than a month! This makes *Vision* just about the hottest fanzine in Australia at the moment, and surely a contender for next year's Ditmar Award for Best Fanzine. *Vision* started out as the magazine of a writers' group, but recently editor Stephen Thompson has extended its scope. He's trying to make it into a wide-ranging fanzine with general material, as well as advice and help for writers, and the occasional piece of fiction. The layout has improved greatly in these two issues.

I found No. 9 more interesting than No. 10, but that could be because Stephen says nice things about my fanzines and prints an article of mine ('Why I Publish Fanzines'). There's much else of interest, including writers' tips and advertisements, Grace Dugan's report on Convergence, Stephen's editorial, and articles by Robert Hoge and Kate Eltham.

I must dispute Kate's definition of 'fanfiction', which to me is 'fiction written by fans about other fans, including the whole ethos of fandom'. The new type of fanfiction ('fanfic'), Kate tells me, is fiction that 'embodies a fan's desire to be part of the world she loves so much, be it Buffy, Dr Who or the setting of any fantasy novel'. No wonder I've missed out on fanfic, since I have little interest in fantasy and none in SF on TV.

The main item in No. 10 is Cat Sparks' accurate and comprehensive survey of the current small press scene. She hits the mark when she writes: 'Imagine going to the ice-cream parlour only to discover that you can't get 21 flavours any more because it has been determined by a team of marketing experts that chocolate, vanilla and boysenberry are the best sellers. What about hokey-pokey?' This is exactly the message I received from HarperCollins when I

asked why that company had not released in Australia Paul McAuley's recent novel *The Secret of Life*. Because they didn't think it would sell well! It was on the Clarke Award shortlist, but Australians are not allowed to buy it! Extend this principle to Australian SF and you can see why the small press publishers are currently beavering away. Beware, however. We at Norstrilia Press did it all in the seventies and eighties, made no money, and had to give up in 1985.

Other contributors to No. 10 include Geoff Skellams, Theresa King, Dirk Flinthart and Lee Battersby 'having a rant', Karin Hannigan with another ConVergence report, plus book reviews and market information.

REVIEW ZINE No. 51

February 2001. html, approx. 19 pp.

**Susan Batho, 6 Bellevue Road,
Faulconbridge NSW 2776**

Review Zine appeared in my email, a year and a half after the official release date, but I had thought I was trading fanzines with Susan Batho. I'm not sure if No. 52 is available yet. Most of No. 51 comprises short book reviews, but Susan also reviews Slashcon 2000. The main interest of this fanzine is that Susan has the longest record for continuous fan activity in New South Wales apart from that of Ron Clarke, and Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber, who have now moved to northern Queensland. As we found out at ConVergence, Susan is one of the few people who can tell you what happened around Sydney since the early seventies, so I hope she writes much fan history in future issues.

A BRIGHT PARTICULAR STAR:

WORDS AND DEEDS OF LUCY HUNTZINGER

July 2002. 34 pp.

**Kim Huett, Flat 29, 63 Pearson Street,
Holder ACT 2611**

To receive *A Bright Particular Star*, send stamps to Kim Huett at the above address. If he has any spare copies, you will find yourself reading an anthology of some of the best fan writing of the last twenty years: that of Lucy Huntzinger. In a useful introduction, Kim tells us that Lucy entered fandom in 1981 in Seattle, and has since lived all around the United States, as well as taking extensive overseas trips (including her DUFF trip to Australia in 1987). Her most famous fanzine was *Rude Bitch*, co-edited with Avedon Carol in the eighties. The pieces in *A Bright Particular Star* concentrate on Lucy's travels, but don't reach back further than 1988. Since 1996, Lucy has published only through her Web zine *Aries Moon* (which I've never stumbled across). *A Bright Particular Star* is a beautiful piece of fanzine craft.

ETHEL THE AARDVARK No. 103

July 2002. 20 pp. A4

**Emilly McLeay, for the Melbourne Science Fiction Club,
PO Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne VIC 8005.**

**Magazine subscription: \$15. Club membership:
\$25 (singles), \$35 (household), \$35 (overseas).**

msfc_ethel@yahoo.com

I'm not sure whether any copies of *Ethel the Aardvark* are available for 'the usual'; however, I did trade fanzines with *Ethel* for several years before I joined the Club, and each issue has letters from all over the world. Emilly McLeay has taken over from Sean Paul Smith, and is gradually solving

the problem of Fitting Everything Into 20 Pages. In the previous issue, I could not tell who had written which article, but in the July issue the layout is accessible and good-looking. This issue of *Ethel* contains so much material that's impossible to list everything. Damien Christie reviews *Star Wars II* (for those who are interested), Steve Cooper writes an excellent comprehensive review of Turner Award winner Maxine McArthur's first and second novels, *Time Future* and *Time Past*; Danny Heap takes over the lash-the-fans role recently vacated by Terry Frost, telling us the agonising behind-the-scenes tales of putting together

ConVergence (it was a huge success, but *might have failed*); Ted McArdle reviews franchise books; and there is lots of news (including this year's DUFF results), plus a healthy letter column. I expect *Ethel* to return to the Ditmar nomination list next year.

— Bruce Gillespie, 23 July 2002

[Since this column was written, Acnestis member Damien Warman has been operated on, successfully, for rectal cancer in Austin. Best wishes from everybody in world fandom.]



Graphic by Elaine Cochrane, using DJFractals.