

# MUMBLINGS FROM MUNCKINLAND

AUGUST  
2008

25

*Featuring*



Mumblings from Munchkinland – the only West Australian fanzine published in the Australian Capital Territory!

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

*As Dorothy famously said -- but what happens when you don't know where home is?*

At my workplace last year we had a communal morning tea to allow people from across the organisation to get to know one another. As an icebreaker, everyone was invited to stick a small dot on a map of either Australia or the world, to indicate where they called "home". It is a diverse workplace, so the end result was pretty impressive, but some of us had trouble deciding where our dots should go. Place of birth? Where we were raised? Where we lived now? These questions had particular resonance for me since we had just had to decide where we would return *to* when we returned to Australia after living overseas.

One option for us was to go back to Launceston and settle down again in our familiar home -- but we knew well before we left Fiji that this would be unlikely. Employment opportunities in Tassie were just too scarce. This was a pity. We had spent a great deal of time and money renovating our lovely WWI-era weatherboard house on Henty Street, finishing up with a fresh coat of paint (and lovely new colour scheme) on the exterior. Inside, we had worn down the carpet in the hallway carrying each of the girls, as babies, back and forth to put them to sleep on many occasions, so sentimental attachments lingered. I probably felt this more strongly than Megan. I had taken great pleasure in simple building projects like adding a deck to the back of the house and building a playground for the girls amid the plum trees. I was able to cycle to work. And, when all of the renovations were done, I was finally able to get all of my sf books and magazines up on shelves in the study. Within a matter of weeks, they all had to go back into boxes when USP finally offered me the job in Samoa.

We didn't have to worry about a home there -- the University provided a house within easy walking distance of the campus. Things were a bit more complicated in Fiji; we lived in three different places in Suva before the time came to pack again and return "home". With Tassie out of the running, relatives in various places around Oz beckoned, including one of Megan's brothers and his family in Canberra. In the end it was this combined with the likelihood of finding work in the nation's capital that led us to here in January of 2007.

A little more research might have been in order. Many of you had warned us about rising house prices when we mentioned that we would be returning to Australia, but we didn't realise ahead of time that Canberra was also suffering from a drastic housing shortage. Upon arriving in the city we were greeted by cheerful headlines like the one at right. Having enjoyed a brief holiday in New Zealand before catching up with family in Perth and Melbourne and friends in Launceston, this was an abrupt and unsettling reality check. We began a depressing search for jobs and houses for rent. With shipments of house-hold goods on their way from both Suva and Launceston and no income, we didn't have a lot of time to waste.

Rental  
situation  
at crisis  
point

Our nervous tension was not relieved by the stiff competition and rigorous vetting practices used by most of the estate agents. They all had forms to fill in: names, ages, occupations, current employers, wages, bank account balances, previous landlords' contact details, and on and on. The viciousness of this rental market was not something we had encountered before (even in Suva, which we had thought was bad). One of the agents barely resisted snorting

*23 Henty Street, still looking immaculate in 2007.*



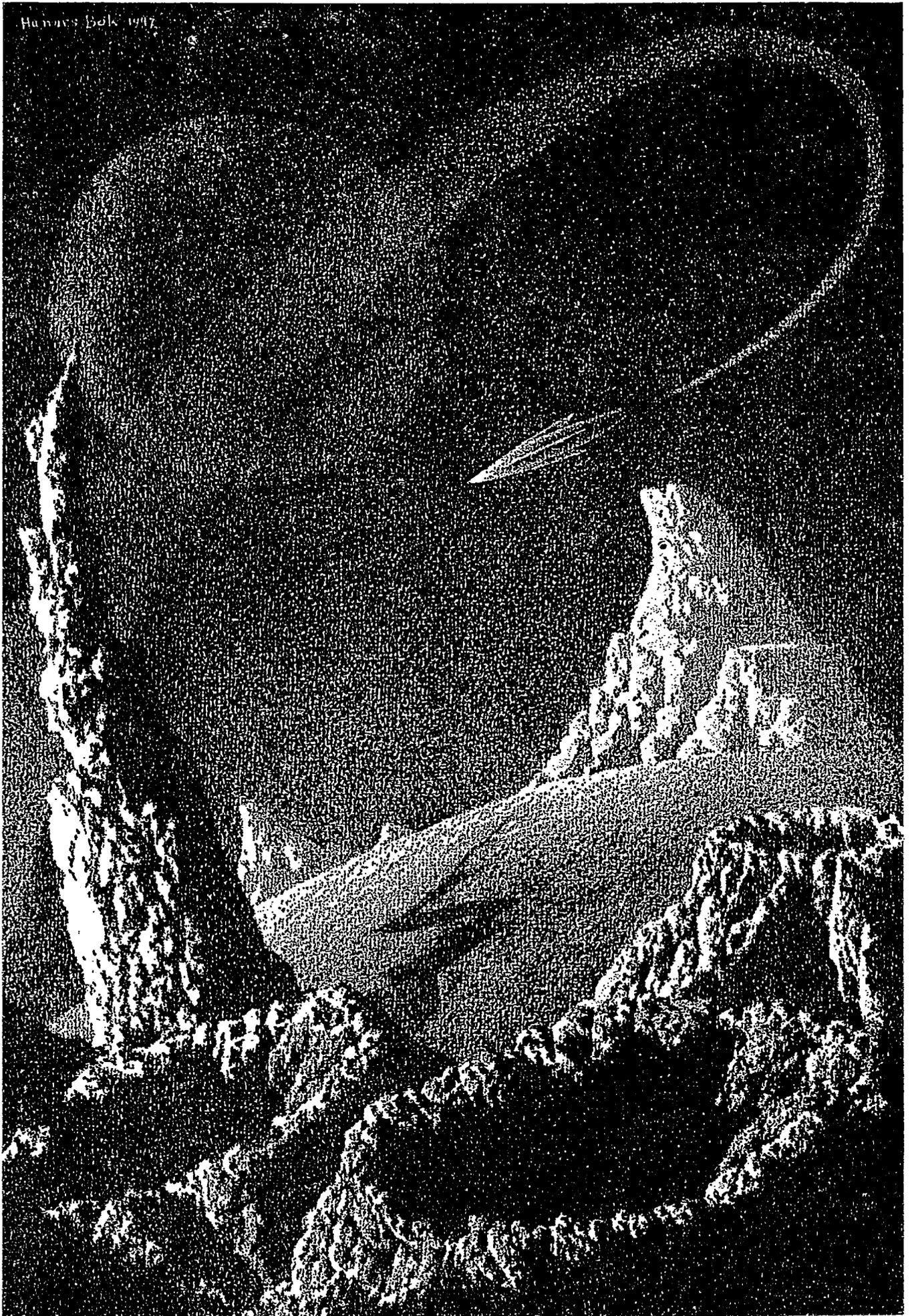
when we explained that we had three children, were recently returned from working overseas, still had most of our money in Fiji, had no local referees and were still looking for work. What was their problem? Happily, after several weeks of this and with spirits flagging, we chanced upon a sympathetic agent and were able to sign a lease. When the bank transfer from Fiji arrived, we were even able to pay the rent. Things were looking up.

Next item on the agenda was to find work. Megan scored first, landing a temp job at the local high school. She found she was filling in for a techno-wizard on paternity leave – not exactly her scene. The biggest problem, however, was the school's inability -- or unwillingness – to discipline several unruly students intent upon disrupting every class they were in. After the culturally more compliant behaviour of students in the Pacific, this was hard to take. Megan soon discovered that many of her fellow teachers were also frustrated at ACT Education rules by which teachers could be transferred to any school. She had other options. After three weeks, she resigned to take up part-time work teaching English and academic skills to overseas students at the ANU and University of Canberra.

My return to work was rather bizarre, but to understand why I need to back up again to before our departure from Fiji. When we knew we would be leaving at the end of 2006, we started looking at online job ads, hoping to find positions in advance of our return. One that popped up seemed ideal for me: Library Manager at Geoscience Australia (still better known by its previous name, the Australian Geological Survey Organisation). Geology had been my major at university and librarians with science-based backgrounds are relatively rare, so I figured my chances were pretty good. Sure enough, I gained an interview; unfortunately, it was via telephone and while it went reasonably well, I felt at a disadvantage not being able to see how the panel was responding to my answers. For whatever reason, I didn't get the job. Then the build-up to the coup began and we became preoccupied with just getting out of Fiji.

[continued on p.14]

Hanus's Bok 1997



# Invaders from Ceres

Donald H. Tuck

The space ship crashlanded on Perthum just as the sun disappeared over the horizon. Britledum telepathed his engineer for an account of the damage, but he received no immediate answer as the impact of landing had knocked Castledee senseless. On regaining his senses, however, the latter soon informed his commander of the extent of the damage and this was very serious. The main driving wheel had disintegrated into many pieces, having only just held together until a moment before impact; it was this part of the main drive that had made it necessary for the ship to land on this out of the way world.

Little could be done to repair the ship, thought Britledum, so he ordered all his crew except the lookout to rest until daybreak. The period of darkness passed quietly although they were all apprehensive and wondered whether they would be disturbed. Next morning they awoke to view this new world on which they had landed. Dackydo, the lookout, informed them that the area in which they had settled their craft was occupied by beings that perpetually moved in and out of large structures; these inhabitants were huge bipeds many times the size of their space ship.

This vessel was dirt-brown in colour and only a foot long (by this world's measurement), which accounted for it escaping the bipeds' notice, especially as of all places to pick Britledum had selected the weather-beaten head of a statue exemplifying the bipeds' spirit of adventure, located in the middle of these large structures. Anyway, who of the inhabitants of this city was to realise the adventures that

were to befall this little band of voyagers so far from their native home, before they returned? No, none of these bipeds would, for life, barring a few inexplicable incidents, still continued in the same tenor for each one of them.

These voyagers were Terwickians, inhabitants of the asteroid Ceres; if you can imagine an alien form about the size of a matchstick, composed of vegetable matter bearing a rough semblance to a human form but moving on feet that were actually roots, you would have a good idea of a Terwickian. This party had been exploring other asteroids when their main driving gear wheel had developed a side-wobble, causing the ship to veer from its course and to be attracted into the Earth's (they later sensed the name of this planet from the bipeds) gravitational field.

After surveying the damage, Britledum knew their only hope of return was to obtain a substitute for the drive wheel. With this in view, Dackydo was sent to explore the city of the bipeds and ascertain what type of machinery they used.

## II

Our adventurer flew his ship, an auxiliary life-boat of the space ship, towards the busy structures and thought he would land somewhere and determine the chances of procuring a gear wheel which would render the mother ship serviceable. This he eventually did by landing on a covering which projected over the moving bipeds.

There was no fear of detection on his part as his craft looked just like the front half of

a silver propelling pencil and then, of course, it was capable of quite a good turn of speed.

His first intention was to sense telepathically the thoughts of these bipeds and so in this way to obtain some idea of their civilization. His contacts were not too direct, however, for besides sensing that he was over something called a shop and that the people were a mixture of man and woman he received the following garbled series of biped thoughts: *"Oh my poor head! Why did I drink so much last night?"* - "I wonder whether I locked that blinking cat out of the kitchen. Oh dash it, I don't believe I did and there's that steak and kidney for dinner on the table." - *"Hope Sue is at work today, I must pluck up courage and ask her for a date."*

And so it went on, making Dackydo more bewildered than ever at this strange civilization. None of these bipeds seemed to harbour any thoughts of a technical nature, yet there must be some type of such knowledge in these beings because of the buildings and the continuous mechanical noise that was in the air. He therefore decided to investigate further and enter one of these structures that seemed to lie everywhere.

He elected to investigate the noisy building across on the other side and proceeded to drive his ship in that direction across what the bipeds called a road. Halfway across, however, and taking his time, he suddenly saw a juggernaut bearing down on him at terrific speed, as if set to annihilate him. There was a big swoosh as this monster passed over him, one section which ran along the ground by revolving rapidly just missed him and the blast of wind nearly dashed his frail projectile to the ground. He didn't realise until later that the vehicle that had nearly run him down was merely an omnibus, one of the biped modes of travel, and the only reason he did not smash into its side was that he had been flying just above the ground.

The other side of the road was soon reached, however, and espying what seemed to him an ideal landing ground, he put his craft down on an area just the length of his vessel. To his consternation, however, he felt this field moving and he immediately launched his ship into the air again. He then found himself hovering over a bald region while the being on whom he had unwittingly landed was inspecting his hat to account for its unexpected weight. As soon as this cover was replaced, he relanded and the biped gave up worrying about the heaviness of his hat thinking he was imagining things after a night out.

The human walked through an opening over which Dackydo noticed the symbols B A N K and, as this did not convey any meaning to him, he set about exploring it. He soon noticed that the only items of machinery present produced a clackety-clackety type of noise and appeared to be a mass of flying arms with no wheels in their mechanism. Flying around to investigate these instruments, he zoomed past the head of one of these bipeds who was busily engaged in poking its tentacles on a section of one of these strange machines. Its concentration ruined this biped decided to rid the building of this noisy insect and started to stalk it with a fly-spray.

Dackydo first became aware of his pursuit when a pungent spray began to settle on his machine making it heavier to handle. He had decided anyway that there was not anything to interest him in the bank and so, because his presence seemed to be unwanted, he soon accelerated and sped back to the street through an open window.

Earth's little visitor then returned to his ship feeling very despondent about obtaining any form of help from this biped civilization. Nevertheless, his report to Britledum caused the latter to feel pleased. The huge bipeds must use wheels in many forms as evidenced by their use in the juggernaut that had run Dackydo down, and so Dackydo was commissioned to keep searching.

### III

At dawn next day the adventurer set forth again and he made sure that he crossed where the biped juggernaut had nearly run him over at a safe height. He then traced a continuous noise which was originating from lower down the biped street than the bank he had visited the previous day. It was coming from a huge structure outside which some small bipeds were yelling something that sounded like this-

"Payper! Payper! Latest Payper! Reed awl about it! Joe Louis announces another komebak! Reed awl about it! -

Anyway quite oblivious to this Dackydo entered through an open window and found himself in a maze of tremendously noisy machinery in which he noticed many different sizes of wheels. Using his telepathic powers on a nearby biped, he found that these were the high-speed presses of a newspaper, one of the facilities for bringing news to the public.

Dackydo thought this rather a cumbersome way of spreading news, not realising that the bipeds were so low on the evolutionary scale that they were unable to telepath each other, or listen in on an open telepath like his race could.

Dackydo then proceeded to explore the huge room, flying over tool boxes, benches and even through open parts of the machine to find a wheel of the size that would suit the space ship. It was all to no avail, however, and he felt terribly depressed. These bipeds did not appear to use any small machinery in their civilization but only huge monsters that could swallow his mother ship many times over.

So he flew despondently on, not caring much where he was going. Suddenly a whirr behind him aroused him from his apathy and he turned his head to find a winged creature diving in to attack him. It was coloured black and white and had

apparently lost its way in the noise and bustle of the biped city. Dackydo sensed that it was very hungry and that it thought his ship was some sort of flying worm. So for the second time on his scouting trips Dackydo had to accelerate to elude an attacker, and being hard pressed he made use of a door that had conveniently been swung open by a biped in front of his ship. This door slammed back causing the bird to smash against it; after regaining its senses a very disgruntled magpie flew slowly away feeling somewhat thwarted, not to mention very dazed.

Dackydo investigated his new domain and to his surprise soon found plenty to interest him. His speed had carried him through the first section of what he noticed was a biped selling place and he found himself in a room where some bipeds were busily working.

There was a feast of small machinery lying on the benches around the walls and he saw that, with the help of some of his shipmates, he would have no trouble in procuring a wheel of the right size which would make the mother ship spaceworthy again. He sensed from one of the bipeds that he was in a jeweller's work room and that the fly-wheel of a wristlet watch was exactly what he required.

### IV

He immediately telepathed this great news to his comrades at the space ship, and by the time he had arrived back preparations for an expedition to bring back the desired article were well under way. Five auxiliary life-boats were to be used, each driven by one Terwickian but capable of carrying two if necessary. As soon as it became dark the force set out with Dackydo in the forefront. He had had the foresight to place a small wireless-signal transmitter in an opening at the outside top of the biped shop so that they would be able to find their desired objective easily.

On their arrival, however, they could find no direct method of entry and they telepathed each other on how to overcome this problem. They were just about going to decide on having one of the ships crashdive through the front glass window and so create an entry for the others when Dackydo, who had been investigating the frontage, informed them that a small section of the door was not rigid but gave inwards slightly. He soon found that he could manoeuvre his ship slowly through and then the others followed in single file while behind them the flap of the letter-box clanged, these five sharp knocks causing an amorous couple of bipeds in the shop porch to move to quieter regions.

This did not worry the party, however, as they soon arrived at the work room and began searching the loose material on the benches for their required item. At last they found it; the back was off a wristlet watch lying on one of the benches and their future new drive wheel was part of its mechanism. They were prepared for the eventuality of having to loosen it before they could take it with them, and small charges of explosive were soon laid at each end of the frame holding the flywheel in position. There were two phuts and the wheel came free. As quickly as they could, they trundled it into Dackydo's machine because they had sensed some creature in the shadows sneaking up to attack them. They had just shut the doors of their respective machines when the rat sneaked up behind one of them.

Each then blasted off and there was quite a squeal of pain when the rat had its nose singed by the exhaust of the ship it was behind. They now had to escape from the shop itself and thought it would be easy by the way they entered. However, the first small ship diving for the letter-box flap crashed into it and plummeted to the floor below. They had not realised that the flap only swung one way and this mishap rather sobered their jubilant spirits. Fortunately the pilot was uninjured but his ship was

completely wrecked, and his telepathed S.O.S. soon brought another ship down to double-bank him for the rest of the journey to the mother ship.

An open telepathed conference then took place and it was decided to use the original plan for entering the shop as a method of exit. Accordingly one of the other ships proceeded to batter at a set spot on the window until a break appeared, but this rendered this ship incapable of any further long trip and made it necessary to abandon this one also. The pilot's transfer was soon accomplished and the depleted squadron of three then passed through the fissure on their final stage back to the mother ship. The group flashed over an inquisitive biped, who had been drawn to the scene by the knocking on the glass, causing him to duck his head rather hurriedly.

Next day a puzzled jeweller scratched his head wondering how a watch fly-wheel had vanished from his work room and how a small hole had appeared in the top of his front glass window. The two space auxiliaries which could possibly have told him something, providing he possessed an imagination, were no more. One had been trodden on, and the other had been crushed when the shop door was first opened.

The space ship cleared for Ceres at mid-day.



## TIM'S TRAVELS 4: A NIGHT IN CASABLANCA

*In which we welcome back my peripatetic brother's accounts of his world travels after too long an absence from these pages. But things are not as the title suggests! After last issue's rather grim look at Fiji, here is a more light-hearted view...*

[July 2006] I arrived safely in sunny Suva, Fiji, where a kindly native couple with three charming daughters took me in for a few days. Here, I have done... STUFF!

I have travelled on the roads of Fiji and determined that I want to be awarded the "speed bump" franchise for this country - every village has at least 3 speed bumps... and there are LOTS of villages. To those expecting villages with traditional huts - "bures" - be prepared for disappointment and lots of concrete and/or corrugated iron houses.

On the road, with brother Chris and niece Ruby (Ella could not join us as she was up to her eyeballs in school work...and Lauren was willing, but ill) I saw such highlights as:

Pacific Harbour - a tourist development (sorry, "Arts Village") with a variety of shops, cafes, restaurants, clothes stores and real estate agents (Gawd! They're everywhere!) and... the Fiji Experience. The latter was a series of "interactive" events that one could partake individually or as part of a day long experience. Not having a day, we chose the "Island Boat Tour". To quote from the brochure: "Step on board a canoe and come on a magical journey of discovery. Ancient Fiji comes to life on this wonderful tour. Warriors pole you (don't worry - it didn't hurt) around the island as you visit little bures, learning all about the crafts and customs of this rich culture." Namely, mat weaving, boat building, painting, pottery, net making and wood carving. In fact, it wasn't too bad.



The Casablanca Hotel - our first night's stop. Had dinner at the adjacent Sinbad Restaurant, where a jovial owner took the time to tell Ruby how cute she was. Like most 5 year olds who have complete strangers telling them how cute they are, she looked suitably pissed off. Said owner could probably have expended his energies better on ensuring that Ruby's chicken pizza wasn't "spicy", as requested. Ruby consoled herself by eating Chris' and my pizza instead, before being carried off to beddy-byes by her adoring uncle. (Awww...!).

The Tavuni Hill Fortification, the site of a 19th Century fort near Sigatoka, now comprised largely of rocks or wooden poles surrounding spots where something significant used to be! Views of the surrounding countryside were worth the hike up, however.

The Momi Gun Site - sort of. Unfortunately, this WWII restored gun fortification operated on "Fiji time", which means that it closed sometime before we arrived at 4.15, even though it was supposed to be open until 5.00pm.

The Kula EcoPark, Sigatoka, a collection of local birds and iguanas which was well organised and run. Also included the "longest suspension bridge" in Fiji -- suspended about two feet off the ground and billed as the "Wildest Bridge in Fiji" (*woo-hoo!*) -- and a forest walk. Our hostess told Ruby how cute she was, before terrorising her with an iguana that Ruby didn't particularly want to hold, thank you very much (she relented at visit's end).



The Garden of the Sleeping Giant - a garden covering several acres and originally established in 1977 by actor Raymond Burr (of Perry Mason and Ironside fame to anyone as old or older than me). It housed an impressive collection of orchids and gardens stretched out in a small valley. The gardens, I might add, were inhabited by a band of trolls who lived under rocks and in small caves. If you don't believe me, just ask Ruby.

The Bounty Restaurant, Nadi - a racy establishment, where Chris unfortunately lost all sense of decorum. Much to the horror of his innocent 5 year old daughter, he called upon one of the waitresses to procure for him a Fijian Lady. Then, after the "lady" had arrived, he really lost control. Limbs went flailing about and the next thing we knew the Fijian Lady was spread across the table! Diners at the other tables looked on in unconcealed disgust; Ruby was distraught and I was left to clean up the mess! Lordy, how embarrassing! I only hope Megan never learns of this! As for me, I ordered a Blue Hawaiian and managed not to knock it over...

Malamala Island - Chris had organised our visit to this tiny "100% uninhabited island" prior to my arrival. Yep, it was uninhabited, apart from our boatload of tourists.

The Hindu Temple in Nadi. This is where Chris and Ruby dropped me off before heading back to Suva. You're not meant to go in if you're wearing shorts, but some chap at the gate said it was okay, so I went in. Turns out he wasn't an official, just an unofficial tourist guide looking for business. Still, nobody kicked me out, even though I exacerbated my shorts-wearing faux pas by wandering into the one section of the temple that is most sacred and off-limits to non-Hindus. An "oops" moment.

And my final parting with Ruby was tainted, alas, by her sudden interest in a packet of Twisties. Outdone by a package of cheese flavoured processed junk food! Ah well, at least we'll always have the Casablanca...

## THE READER SQUEAKS

Arthur Haddon, Coffs Harbour, NSW

4 June 2007

The 4<sup>th</sup> Convention comments from Roger Dard brought back some humorous memories of the fancy dress night. *[Do tell!]*

It would appear from Graham's comment that he appears to consider climate warming to be a foregone conclusion. As for me, I am not totally convinced. Like so many controversial issues there is a myriad of statements for and against. I feel that we have undoubtedly gone through this particular issue a number of times in the far distant past. Certainly the uncertainty (how about that) of the issue was highlighted extensively in the references given in a novel by Michael Crichton; I recommend *State of Fear*.

I have said a number of times in past years that with fossil fuel having a finite life the use as petrol or diesel should be severely restricted as the use and need in the chemical industry is far more important. Another issue that should be regarded as critical, whether we have climate warming or not, is the world population. I do not believe that the planet can support the number of people alive now, let alone the population growth that exists. There are times when I think the Malthusian principle is alive and well in our subconscious.

*[And we just blunder along and Earth abides, calmly awaiting the rise of the next "dominant species".]*

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Don Tuck, Lilydale, Vic.

10 June 2007

I knew of Eric Russell's decease. Met him in Sydney in 1943 and he looked Audrey and I up in Lindisfarne in the 1950s. Bob Tucker wrote to me around 1940 and he produced annual listings of the contents of the sf magazines for the early war years – quite helpful I might add.

I know a bit about Canberra as our son was there in the 1980s and we used the Bass Strait ferry and car to visit him and his wife. When there I got in touch with a weird/fantasy collector and he nominated me for the Non-Professional World Fantasy Award which I got in 1974. It is quite an ugly head and shoulders statue of H.P. Lovecraft and was originally mounted on a china base. This was broken in transit – act of ordinary travel or deliberate because of the white powder in the base, which could have drugs, or?! I can't remember the collector's name. After seeing him he was to take a job in New Guinea with his wife and family and in the 1980s there was trouble there.

*[Wouldn't it be funny if the white stuff in the base of HPL's bust was powdered ice cream?]*

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Leigh Edmonds, Ballarat, Vic.

25 June 2007

I was glad to receive *MfM 24* bearing in mind all the stuff that had been in the news. And I'm glad that you went through that experience rather than me. From my own little experience with wrongdoers I know first hand how clear and fast thinking can be in situations like that but you seem to have come out of it very well.

*[More luck than clear thinking, in retrospect. For a while afterward I ran various alternative scenarios through my head (some vain, some tragic) as a kind of self-therapy, I guess.]*

I had sort of assumed that both of these fine men had died years ago and I had missed the news then, so it had come as a shock to learn that Tucker was still alive only last year, and now this...

Bill Wright, St. Kilda, Vic.

28 June 2007

I was secretary of the Blackburn, Melbourne, branch of the Australian Labor Party in 1987 when Sitiveni Rabuka, a third-ranked colonel in the Royal Fiji Military Forces, ousted the democratically elected multiracial government of the late Dr Timoci Bavadra. We had earlier sent Dr Bavadra a letter congratulating him and his party on his election win and wishing him well in his endeavour to ease then simmering Fijian racial tensions. From what has happened since it doesn't surprise me a bit that things have gotten so rough for expatriates that you have had to up stumps and leave. In the last 36 years, indigenous leaders and their militant nationalist allies have set in train race-based clientelistic development policies that have plundered indigenous resources, divided the community, engineered a cadre of indigenous elite, cemented inequality and poverty and, above all, resulted in unprecedented levels of corruption and financial mismanagement. The role of the Christian Churches in that process is far from benign. The church-inspired political ad you published in *Mumblings 24* conveys only a hint of their pervasive malevolence.

It seems that you are well out of the Fijian snake pit. One day, India might flex its muscles and sort out that poisonous nest of Christian racists. That their malevolence feeds on some measure of historical injustice is no excuse for their overall behaviour. Dunno whether I am in favour of turning over ethnic Fijians to the tender mercies of Kali and Shiva, but they seem intent on making their own bed of nails.

*[By odd coincidence, two of our neighbours in the first house we rented in Suva were Rabuka and his wife. She chatted to Megan once in a while but he rarely said anything at all to us. He was still active in Fijian affairs – or wanted to be; wrote to the papers often and publicly warned Bainimarama against following his lead in deposing an elected government.]*

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David Redd, Haverfordwest, Pembs.

2 July 2007

Thanks for *MfM 24* with its first-hand report from Fiji. Different to the problems I've heard about in Bougainville and other spots, but clearly the South Seas are no longer idyllic (if they ever were).

We're clearly getting nostalgic for the sf 50s even if we weren't active then – see Pete Weston's editorial in *Prolapse 7* (e-fanzines soon). Interesting Natcon '55 report. Mentioned the Norma Hemming play as "Miss Denton's Dilemma". In *Fantasy Annual 2* (1998), McMullen & Blackford say "The Carson Effect" by her was performed in Sydney in '55. Who's right?

*[According to the official con report, it was "Miss Denton's Dilemma", but I haven't seen the McMullen and Blackford article so I don't know what their source was for this.]*

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Brad Foster, Irving, Tx.

12 July 2007

You definitely had a much more calm approach to your encounter with the criminal elements. I remember years ago in my college days, living along in my very first apartment. Around three in the morning I'm burst awake at the sound of someone pounding away at my front door, shouting. I can't really make out the words, they're just loud and angry, and "pounding" does little justice to the relentless assault of blows that kept coming again and again to the door. I am not, or course, in any way going to freaking answer that. I'm not insane.

But the scariest part of that memory for me is that, having snapped my eyes open and awake at the first sound, I found that I was almost paralyzed in the bed. I couldn't move an arm or a leg, just lay there listening to some psycho outside my door trying to get in. I certainly hope it was simply the shock of coming awake to that moment that did that, and that I won't turn into a statue should I ever be in an even more bodily-threatening situation. So, kudos to you for handling it all so well and smoothly.

The question of who had keys to your place, when you discovered they had not forced the door to enter, also brought up a memory. The very last apartment I lived in was burglarized while I was gone one day. But I realized that to get in, I had to unlock both the regular door lock and the bolt lock. Now, you can set the regular lock just by twisting the knob on the inside before walking out, and it locks behind you. But to re-lock the bolt lock, you HAVE to have a key.

Considering how many maintenance men had been fired from that particular apartment complex over the years, easy bet one of them held onto an extra key, and just helped himself back in one day. This was reinforced when I was just about moved out to a nearby duplex (where only I and the one owner would have a key). I still had the apartment for that last month, so was slowly moving my stuff out. I came back toward the end of that month to double-check I hadn't forgotten anything small, and to do a last clean up before turning in my key there, to find a large bike sitting in the middle of the living room. Our key-happy friend was obviously now thinking this unit was empty, and was using it to store the stuff they were picking up in other apartments. I reported it all to the manager, turned in my own key, and said goodbye to all that.

The flyer from the Fiji Assembly of Christian Churches is one of the scariest things I've ever seen -- maybe even more than a homicidal idiot pounding on my door late at night!

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Robert Lichtman, Glen Ellen, Calif.

17 July 2007

It was chilling to read in *Mumblings* No. 24 of the home invasion you suffered—and then to get to the part where the invaders were overwhelmed with joy over getting to steal lots of liquor and left overjoyed at their good luck. Like you, though, I hope the large kitchen knife they also copped didn't help them in further adventures of this sort. And it certainly doesn't surprise me that given this and the political upheavals that followed you're now safely back in Australia. On reflection, though, it must have been a great pleasure and adventure living in Fiji for as long as you did. [*Yes.*]

I had been unaware until now that there were *two* Eric F. Russells in the science-fiction world. It was interesting to read of this less known (to me) one and to note that both had writing careers even though very divergent in *what* they wrote. “Your” Eric’s writing on Australian history makes him remind me of Leigh Edmonds, whose book *The Vital Link: A History of Main Roads, Western Australia 1926-1996* is a very interesting read and has gone through several printings in both hardcover and softcover. I read with interest in the excerpt from *Le Zombie* of his being editor of the fanzine *Ultra*. As it happens, Kim Huett is sending me an issue or two of that from his stock of duplicates, and now I look forward with somewhat keener interest to their arrival and getting to check them out.

Unlike Eric Lindsay, I still have a floppy drive *and* still back up a few important things on 3.5-inch diskettes. But all those files are also backed up in two other places: on a 160 gigabyte external hard drive I got in 2005 and (depending on what it is) also on either an 8 or 12 gigabyte “travel drive” that I keep in a cubbyhole in my car as an “off-site” back-up in case a fire or (more likely) a major earthquake destroys both computer and external drive (which sit next to each other). I’ve had my present computer since late 2000. It was custom-built to my specifications and there was never any question that I would have a floppy drive. My previous computer dated from 1987 and had only the now really ancient 5.25-inch floppy drive. When it came time to switch over, I was fortunate that at work I had a computer with both—and spent quite a few hours switching about 175 of those old disks over to around 60 of the newer ones. [*You’re better organized than I am!*]

I miss Bob Tucker, too. Last year, I launched into an ambitious reading (and in some cases rereading) of his SF and mystery/thriller novels (and the two collections of his short fiction). As I neared completion of this enjoyable task, my wife and I went on a 10-day vacation to Arizona and New Mexico. I took along the last of his books for reading at night in our motel room, planning to write an omnibus letter of egoboo upon our return. Sadly, we got back just as his death was being announced.

Fast forward to Canberra six weeks later. I've registered with one of the employment firms and now they've called me about a temporary cataloguing job at a government agency they think might suit me very well. Have I ever heard of Geoscience Australia? they ask. Some times you just have to laugh.

It was immediately apparent when I started at GA that the chap who had been successful in landing the job I'd applied for from Suva was not doing well. He was not connecting with the Library staff at all; in fact, they were surly in his presence and highly critical in his absence. Under the circumstances I felt awkward criticizing him myself, though he did seem ill-suited for the role. *C'est la vie*, I figured, and just got on with my work.

About a month later I was called into the office of his boss. She had been the chairperson of the panel for my telephone interview from Suva, so she was fully aware of my situation. She asked whether or not I was still interested in the position and, at my quizzical look, confided that it was about to become vacant again. I'd placed second in the interviews and she was now happy to recommend me for the job. She had sounded out some of the other staff about this already (which explained the mischievous smiles I had been getting from my colleagues for the previous few days) and their responses had been very positive.



So for most of the past 18 months I've managed GA's Doc Fisher Library. It's a fascinating agency, founded in 1946 as the Bureau of Mineral Resources. For the next three decades it was dedicated to mapping the geology of Australia and Papua New Guinea and has assisted in mineral exploration and development ever since. The Library features a rocky desert with palm trees and a pterodactyl (seen here swooping on unsuspecting penguins during Open Day, 2007). It also retains material dating from before the BMR was created, though most of our collection development now aims to expand the range of electronic resources available to the research staff. We are adding to the latter ourselves at present, by digitising the early geological survey reports so that people can access these online.

My daily routine now begins with a bus trip into Civic, the centre of Canberra, more often than not arriving just in time to see the second bus I need to catch disappear around a corner. GA lies on the opposite side of town from where we are renting, in a suburb not well serviced by public transport. Originally, this second bus followed the corridors of power, passing by the National Library, Treasury, Old Parliament House, the High Court and National Gallery. I could glimpse the National Museum and Australian War Memorial, as well. Of course, all of these sights quickly lost their novelty. More often than not, I now spend the travelling time engrossed in a book. Recent route changes have made my daily commute an hour and a half each way -- one of the biggest adjustments I've had to make since our return to Oz.

Ella also rides the buses now, having started high school this year. Our desire to give her a full year in primary here, to settle down before making the transition to high school, was one factor in our decision to leave Fiji when we did and this appears to have worked. As well as making a circle of new friends she is scoring straight As, even in Physical Education (never the forte of Megan or I). Last semester, she topped her Mathematics class.

Lauren and Ruby, too, have made new friends and are doing very well in school. The house we rented turned out to be conveniently close to an excellent school, Miles Franklin Primary. (After Robert Louis Stevenson School in Samoa, this makes two schools named after famous authors that Ella and Lauren have attended; we trust this will inspire them to great literary endeavours later in life.) The house is also near to public transport, the local shops and even the University of Canberra, so we consider ourselves lucky to have found it.

That said, it doesn't really feel like *home*. No rented place can, I guess, to the same extent as a house that one owns and can do with as one likes. We sold our Henty Street house last year, knowing that we would need the capital to buy a property here. We continue to watch and wait, hoping that prices will fall a little more while we build up our earnings and interest.

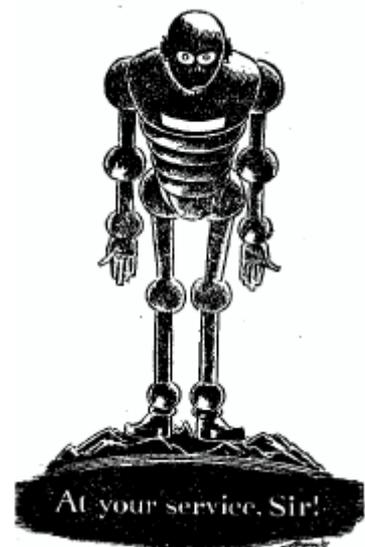
So where did I place my dot, you wonder? In line with the old maxim that home is where the heart is, I actually placed a number of dots on the map. There's one on Chicago, another over Perth and more marking Peshawar, Launceston, Apia and Suva, for all of these places have been home to me. I'll add a dot on Canberra, eventually, but I haven't yet.

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Special thanks this issue go to Don Tuck for offering me "Invaders from Ceres", his only sf story. Written in the late 1940s, Don was encouraged by compliments from his workmates and Roger Dard to offer it for sale in Australia, but it was never taken up. He concentrated on his bibliographic work instead and kept his story a secret for 60 years. Many thanks, Don.

On the cover we have not invaders from Ceres, but two of John R. Neill's nomes, from *Tik-Tok of Oz*, the eighth of the Oz books by L. Frank Baum. The rocket and asteroid vista facing Don's story originally illustrated "Boomerang" by his mate Bert Chandler (writing as George Whitley) in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, August 1947; the artist, of course, was Hannes Bok. On the back cover is a commissioned work by up and coming artist Lauren Nelson-Lee that demonstrates her quirky habit of drawing characters with very large, round eyes. (This one was inspired by a 1950s *Future* cover.)

Rogers' humanoid, at right, from the May 1948 *Astounding*, commemorates the passing of Jack Williamson. I regret to advise also of the death of Gloria Castellari, in February, and send condolences to Bert and their sons.



Be quick with locs on this issue, #26 is almost ready already.

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# Timeline of American SF & Fantasy Magazines

1965 - 1984

a supplement to

*Mumblings from Munchkinland 25*

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