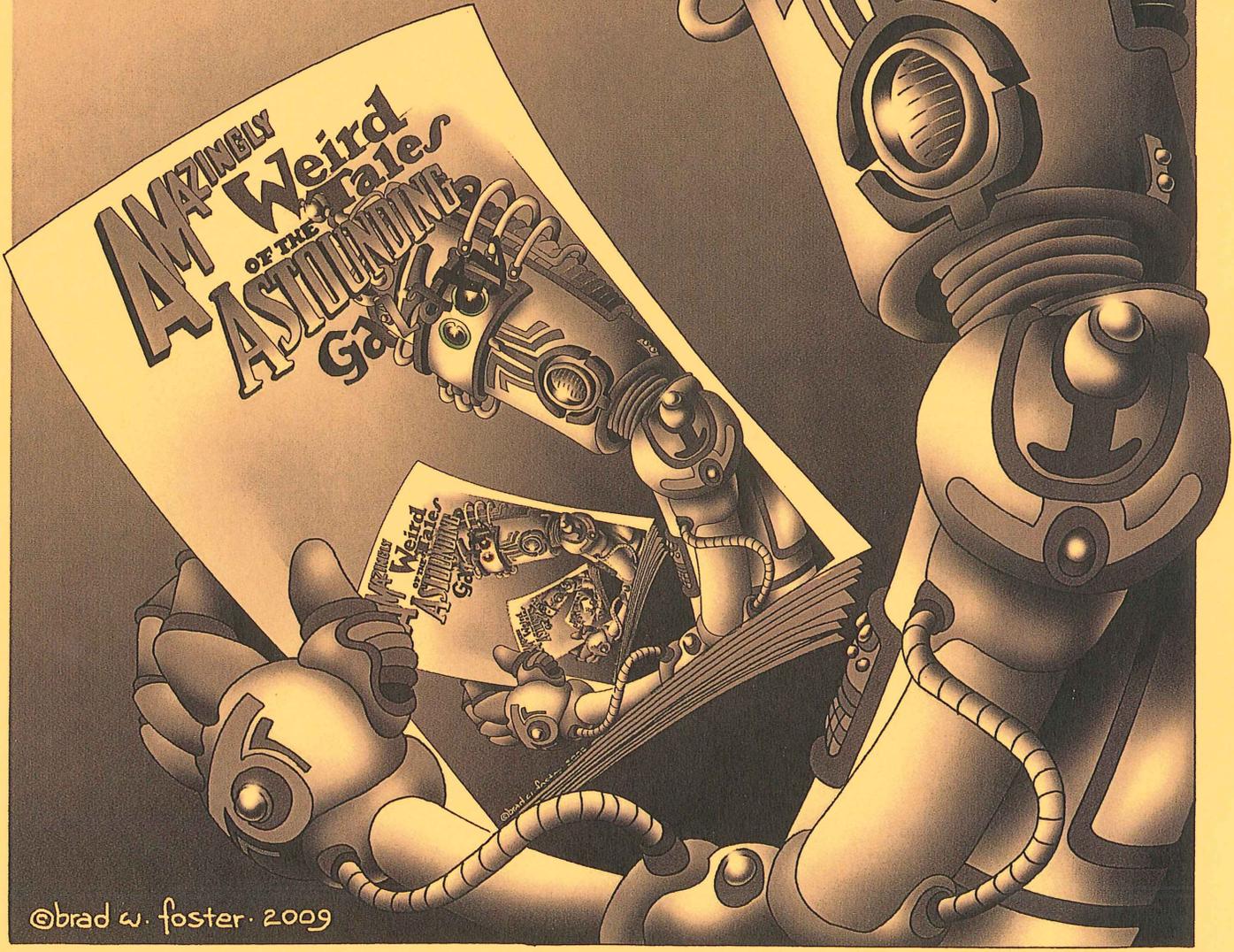


April
2009

Mumblings from Munchkinland 27



@brad w. foster. 2009

Mumblings from Munchkinland – the only West Australian fanzine published in Canberra – seeks your DUFF vote!

WHO IS SCIENCE FICTION'S SHERLOCK HOLMES?



In the February 1949 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, Sam Merwin's editorial concerned science fiction's growing popularity. He noted that both sf and the mystery/detective genre had origins in the Gothic romances of the 19th century, but that sf writers from Verne and Wells onwards had never created a character as memorable as Sherlock Holmes – a figure that could fully capture the public imagination. His editorial concluded:

“Consequently, science fiction is on the march. But today, as never before, it needs a Sherlock Holmes and his Watson. We do not mean a pseudo-scientific detective, of course. We do mean that a character of eye-catching traits equivalent to those of the master of Baker Street is needed to lift stf out of the specialized into the generally popular reading fields.”

Much has changed since Merwin wrote his editorial. Sf has become both much broader in scope and more accepted by the general public. Looking back over 60 years, can we discern any genre characters that have played a major role in this transformation?

Several, in fact, should have been evident in 1949, so the response his editorial provoked from contemporary readers is a good place to start. Although *TWS* was bimonthly, its publication schedule meant that the first letters to comment on the February issue did not appear until that of June. Merwin must have been rather disappointed. From a total of 36 letters published in that issue, only 4 commented on his editorial in any way.

Two readers misunderstood his argument. Ed Cox (of Lubec, Maine) doubted that sf would ever replace the detective story. Merwin had never suggested that it would and said so in his reply. Elizabeth Curtis (Canton, NY) thought that he was looking for a science-fictional detective and suggested that one had already appeared in the form of Dr Garth Derringer from H.H. Holmes' *Rocket to the Morgue*. (This was Anthony Boucher's pseudonymous roman-a-clef, famously modelled upon members of the Mañana Literary Society and other real-life sf writers and editors, including Robert Heinlein, John W. Campbell and Edmond Hamilton.) Merwin patiently reiterated: *“We weren't really thinking of stf with a crime slant when we propounded the Holmes-Watson theory”*.

Edwin Moran (Canonsberg, Penn.) disagreed with Merwin, since *“basically the whole field [of detective fiction] was alike – i.e. the same format, the crime, the investigation and the solution, with more or less the same cast of characters, victim, murders, suspects, detective. Infinite variations... all on the same theme (by Poe). But no one character will dramatise stf with its infinite basic themes before the general reading public.”* Although oversimplifying the mystery genre, Moran's core point here has largely been validated over the years. In the same sense, though, Sherlock was never the *only* popular detective, just the best-known. Merwin merely pointed out that Conan Doyle's creation coincided with an increase in public interest in crime due to the appearance of a new medium, the “sensational newspapers”.

The idea of other media occurred to Wilkie Connor (Gastonia, N.C.), too. He enthusiastically agreed with Merwin: *“You have really hit the proverbial nail smack on the cranium. Stf would definitely benefit if some author came along with a new and different character.”* He predicted that one would appear unexpectedly in the pulps and come to popular attention only when an agent promoted said character *“to the slicks and/or movies”*.

There were no significant further comments in the letter columns, until about a year later. In the January 1950 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*' stablemate, *Startling Stories*, an old space hero had been re-introduced to readers with "The Return of Captain Future".



Curt Newton, alias Captain Future, had featured in his own magazine between 1940 and 1944, along with his crew of Grag (a giant robot), Simon Wright (the living brain) and Otho (an android). Another three novels were published in *Startling Stories* in 1945 and 1946. All of the stories, most written by Edmond Hamilton, were aimed squarely at adolescent readers so it's a little surprising that Merwin was prepared to resurrect the character. It was he who had banished the truly awful Sergeant Saturn from the Standard Magazines, after all, and set the stable on a more mature course. At this time they were second only to *Astounding* in quality. (The issue of *TWS* which ran Merwin's editorial, for example, also ran stories by van Vogt, Blish and Knight, Leinster, Bradbury and Sturgeon.) Reviving Captain Future thus seems at odds with Merwin's drive towards greater sophistication. Was it his bid for the character he thought sf needed? What was the reaction of readers of the day?

When comments on the January *Startling Stories* appeared, in the May issue, the majority was in favour of Captain Future's return, by a ratio of around 5:1. But even readers welcoming him back (including a trio of writers-to-be: Robert Silverberg, Lin Carter and Marion Zimmer Bradley) acknowledged the stories were space opera. Of the few dissenting voices, one seems to have made a connection between Merwin's editorial of a year before and the Captain's return. This was none other than Rick Sneary (famed for his tongue-in-cheek cry in the letter columns, "South Gate in '58", which eventually proved to be good marketing, as the 1958 Worldcon was indeed held in his home town). Sneary wrote:

"It is amusing to note the editorial in the January (1949) issue and then see you return to C.F. The prize example of all things laughable about past space opera."

(The editorial in the January 1949 *Startling Stories* is actually on an unrelated theme, but the February issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* would have been out in January, so its editorial is likely to be the one Sneary had in mind when writing his loc, more than a year later.)

Merwin did not make a direct reply to this point in Sneary's letter, merely commenting that he would "*try to keep picking up the editorials and story content as best we can*". To his credit, it would have been easy for Merwin to plug Captain Future as the character he was arguing sf needed in his editorial. That he didn't suggests that he didn't believe this himself. Certainly the Captain was not a new and different personality and it would be hard to imagine Merwin arguing for a space opera hero given the direction in which he was taking the magazines. He never ran Captain Future novels, only novelettes, although (it should be noted) his successor Samuel Mines dropped the series completely.

What is much more surprising is that nobody challenged Merwin's editorial with what, today, seems like an obvious counter-argument, even for readers of 1949 to have made. Namely, that several iconic sf characters already existed in the public imagination, and had for many years. Indeed, sf was so closely associated with one of these characters in the public mind that the genre was commonly referred to by his name, as "that Buck Rogers stuff".

Philip Nowlan had created Buck Rogers in a story published in the August 1928 *Amazing Stories*. (Many people still mistake the figure Frank R. Paul painted for the cover of that issue as Buck when it is actually E.E. Smith's Richard Seaton.) The name might soon have been forgotten had it not become the basis for a newspaper comic strip just months later. In this medium, Buck and his friends in the 25th century quickly proved popular, leading in 1932 to a radio programme as well. He soon spawned clones like Flash Gordon and Brick Bradford and it wasn't long before Saturday morning cinema goers were marvelling at the exploits of both Flash and Buck on screen, too. (Demonstrating their interchangeable nature, Olympian Buster Crabbe portrayed both heroes in these movie serials.) Buck Rogers appeared on television as well in the 1950s and was enough of an icon by this time to be a subject for parody, most famously by Daffy Duck in *Duck Dodgers in the 24th and 1/2 Century*. The comic strip itself outlasted all of these other modes, ending just two years before the first landing on the Moon. A decade later, in the sf boom created by *Star Wars*, Buck still had sufficient name-recognition to be revived in a (mediocre) television series.



Why did neither Merwin nor any of his readers think to mention Buck as a candidate for “sf’s Sherlock Holmes”? One possibility is that he came from the wrong side of the tracks – the aim was to identify a character of significant literary standing that could “lift” science fiction to the attention of a broader audience and Buck Rogers was still best known from his cartoon strip. Another reason could be that Buck didn’t really fit the bill Merwin outlined, since he didn’t have any “eye-catching traits”. He was just an ordinary Joe caught up in extraordinary events. (As were other earlier popular heroes of the genre not mentioned by Merwin or the fans, such as Edgar Rice Burroughs’ John Carter. While a great swash-buckler, Carter’s only true extraordinary trait was his ability to wish himself to Mars. Hardly the best premise for an exemplar of sf to have!)

Another candidate who was well established by 1949 shares the first of these deficits but not the second. Superman had his origins in a comic strip, though his fan creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, drew inspiration from a range of sf sources including a novel by Philip Wylie and the pulp adventurer Doc Savage. Like Buck Rogers, Superman was a swift success and the model for many like characters, founding the entirely new genre of superhero comics. Even more so than Buck, he made the transition to other media, moving into radio, animated cartoons, live action movie serials, television, motion pictures and even a stage musical. The



emblem Superman wears on his chest is said to be one of the most recognised icons in the world and there’s no doubt that the franchise is one of the most successful ever created.

Unlike Buck, Superman was of unearthly origin and does have extraordinary powers. Over the years, though, he has spent most of his time in juvenile, repetitive battles with costumed supervillains, preserving his secret identity, or saving Lois Lane. It is clear that romantic fantasy has become a larger part of his appeal in television and film incarnations, sometimes at the expense of plausibility even to lay audiences. (One recalls in particular his reversing the direction of the Earth’s rotation in order to “turn back time” and revive Lois in the 1978 film.)

Television and film often “dumb down” concepts from literary sources, but they reach a wider audience, so is this trade-off the cost of success for any popular character?

Not necessarily. Holmes himself fared badly in the later films starring Basil Rathbone, but other screen personifications of the Great Detective, notably the BBC series with Jeremy Brett in the role, have been true to Conan Doyle's original. What about in sf? A decade after the pulps died, with Curt Newton largely forgotten, another spaceship captain and crew boldly provided an opportunity to test this conjecture, as well as Merwin's thesis.

Star Trek, in its early seasons at least, combined strong scripts adapted from stories by competent genre authors with continuity for its lay viewers in the form of Captain James Kirk and his crew. The show was not an overnight success, though. It took syndication and the actions of a relatively small group of fans to build the following *Star Trek* and its subsequent spin-off series on tv and film have enjoyed. And it was not Captain Kirk who attracted the most attention of viewers. He was the leader, certainly, but ultimately he was another Buck Rogers figure – a normal man having amazing exploits. It was Mr Spock, the figure who was clearly different – had, quite literally, “eye-catching traits” – who generated the most interest. Paradoxically, part of his appeal was the sexual charisma of his stoic, rational character. Changing attitudes to sex and love also contributed to the popularity of a more literary sf character in the '60s, Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. Spock's success, however, has outlasted Valentine Smith's.



The biggest boosts to sf's popularity in the 1970s came from a film and a radio serial. *Star Wars* was an immediate success; word of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* spread more slowly. *Star Wars* was unabashed space opera straight out of the pages of *Planet Stories* (and, appropriately, pulp queen Leigh Brackett, Ed Hamilton's wife, contributed to the screenplay of the sequel). The film's success owed more to its advanced special effects and fast pacing than characterisations. The radio *HHGTTG* was a comic masterpiece that also featured some intriguing sf concepts (such as the Babel fish). Both had normal men in leading roles (always useful for audience identification) but were really ensemble performances.

THHGTTG creator, Douglas Adams, had also worked on a BBC television series regarding a rather unique traveller of time and space. Although originally conceived as a children's show, the audience for *Dr Who* has expanded over the decades. Like Superman, he is an alien of human appearance who has lost most of his race in a terrible disaster. Like Mr Spock, he



prefers to resolve problems in a rational way. Like both of them, he has eye-catching traits. Not least of these is his ability to regenerate, a brilliant concept which has allowed a number of actors to portray the character over the years, providing both continuity and a rationale for the differences each performer has brought to the Doctor's personality. In his most recent incarnation, as depicted by David Tennant, the Doctor has also acquired sex appeal, best displayed in his relationship with companion Rose Tyler.

On the whole, the Doctor is also a snappier dresser than any of his rivals for the title of sf's Sherlock Holmes.

[continued on p.15]

TIM'S TRAVELS 5: IN SEARCH OF PENELOPE CRUZ

Madrid, 10 October 2008

Spain...a few facts:

POPULATION - mostly Spanish.

LANGUAGE - Mexican.

HISTORY - nothing much happened until about 50BC, when Asterix and Obelix visited from Gaul and helped the locals beat up some Roman legionnaires.

MEN - lean, swarthy Latin American types.

WOMAN - Penelope Cruz. Sigh.

Speaking of which, when I wandered off the plane this morning at Madrid Airport and scanned the welcomers I was somewhat surprised to see that Penelope was not among them. I guess she didn't hear I was coming to town. But not to worry, I'm here for two weeks.



After checking in at my digs (The Astoria), I spent most of my day wandering about the city, taking in the sights and generally trying to figure out if my money is going to last two weeks. As I approached the Museo del Prado (world famous art gallery) I mused at how, wouldn't it be nice if today were FREE day at the del Prado? Then, as I strolled up to see how many Euros it would cost me (and let's see, one Euro is about 50,000 Australian dollars), I was suddenly beset upon by the local guard who was saying something that included the word *gratis*. So guess what? Today was FREE day at the del Prado!

I ran about looking at the all the masterpieces (happily, they gave me a brochure that told which ones were the masterpieces, otherwise I might have had some trouble), including Gaya's "The 7th of May" (or was that the 8th?), some neat stuff by Bosch and "The Cardinal" by what's his name, it'll come to me. That last was cool, 'cause as you walked around the room his eyes seemed to follow you...

Madrid to Seville, 11 October

My day started with a 6.30am wake-up call. Not ideal, of course, but necessary to catch my 8.30am train to Sevilla. The only thing of note on this short trip was that they have a separate departure lounge for inter-city trains: no ticket, no entry and your luggage gets X-rayed. Presumably a result of the Madrid bombings a few years back, which may also account for the enormous police presence in Madrid -- they seemed to be everywhere (them and blokes selling lottery tickets).

I spent most of the journey sleeping and arrived at Sevilla just as a torrential downpour swept in. A somewhat surly young lass at the Tourist Info counter gave me a list of hostales and directed me to a booking service 50m away, where a more pleasant girl phoned one for me.

Macarena is not the most up-market of neighbourhoods, but has a lot of atmosphere -- narrow, twisting streets, crumbling Med-style houses (like the ones they fake in West Perth, except not fake).



I headed off to El Centro and the main sights of the city, including Seville Cathedral, a sprawling monstrosity of a church, third largest in the world (after St Pete's in Rome and St Paul's in London) and *the* largest Gothic structure anywhere (in the entire universe). Its interior included:

- the Retalbo Mayor, a massive golden wall wrought with figures of saints and disciples
- Columbus' tomb
- Sacristy Mayor (the treasury room)
- Le Giralda bell tower, partially a minaret that formed part of the original mosque, demolished to make way for the cathedral. I love a good spiral staircase, but this one had a twist (pun intended) in store -- a spiral ramp system, leading upwards to views over the city (originally built to allow a disabled muezzin to ride to the top of the minaret to call the faithful to prayer)
- Orange Tree Courtyard - part of the original mosque.

I should regress to recount my encounter with a mysterious gypsy woman before entering the cathedral. She appeared as if from nowhere and proffered a sacred offering... a twig. She then proceeded to read my palms (good news, Mum, you're going to have two more grand-kids, both "grande"!), told me she loved me (I sensed this was in an entirely spiritual sense) and then had me stamp my foot three times. Then, she stuck *her* hand out and looked at me expectantly. I didn't need to read her palms to see what she wanted. In fact, she was kind enough to tell me -- 5 Euros. What she got was a hearty chuckle and her twig back. Of course, I realise that now I'm probably cursed...

Seville and Cadiz, 13-14 October

Yesterday was Spanish National Day. Hurrah! Not sure what that means, in practical terms. Everything was open and I didn't see any fireworks. By the time I arrived at the Alcazar, Seville's obligatory palace, I was a bit concerned that it might be closed. Where were the queues? Happily, there wasn't one -- I waltzed right in.

Seville's Alcazar was originally built in the 7th century by the Moors, but after they were booted out the new owners undertook a variety of extensions and renovations, mostly in the 15th C. The result is an interesting mix of Moorish/Muslim and Christian architecture. You enter through the Puerta del Leon (Lion's Gate) into Patio del Leon and then the Patio de Montera beyond that. This large square forms part of the original Moorish complex that also includes the Patio de las Doncellas (Patio of the Maids), where visitors would await an audience with the sultan, the Salon de Embajadores (Ambassadors Hall), where the sultan met his visitors and the Patio de las Munecas (Patio of the Dolls), so named because one of the room's carved pillars includes several miniature, doll-like faces. There's more out the back.

Penelope update: I've seen her! Strolling down the Avenida de la Constitucion in Seville and there she was, in all her goddess-like ethereality. Pity it was only a poster. Mind you, as I kept strolling along I did notice that *her eyes seemed to follow me wherever I went...* so, I'm taking that as a positive sign.



I went to Cadiz, believed to be the oldest inhabited city in Europe, dating back to 1100 BC. It also has the last great cathedral to be built by colonial riches, a great big white thing, with a gold dome on top. I skipped a tour of the inside (after all, I've already seen inside the third biggest cathedral in the world), but couldn't resist a climb up to the top of one of the towers, via another spiral ramp system! This offered great views of the town.

Cadiz is less colourful than Seville, the oranges and reds and blues largely eschewed in favour of Mediterranean white, which is a little funny when you consider that Cadiz sits on the Atlantic Ocean rather than the Med. It's surrounded by water on three sides and is a maze of narrow little streets. I set off to explore the fortifications of the Castle of San Sebastian, built on a tiny island that is now joined to the mainland by a roughly kilometre long walkway.

I reached the front gates only to discover that it was closed; today was a public holiday (for *yesterday's* National Day). Considered storming the place, but thought that might not go down too well with the local constabulary, so went back to the train station instead.

Back in Seville I headed straight to the Plaza de Espana, a magnificent semi-circular plaza. Oddly, my guidebook doesn't even mention this place, which is bizarre, given how striking it is. The semi-circle is formed by a palatial building, twin spired towers at either end, two matching towers halfway along and then a larger tower in the centre from which proudly waves the Spanish flag. Along the length of the building, at its base, are tiled murals representing the different regions of Spain. A moat (empty, for water is scarce in Spain) divides the building from the centre of the plaza, from which rises a fountain of water (not that scarce), with four small bridges connecting the two sides.

Granada, 16-18 October

Arrived about 12.45. Was told by an old woman that I couldn't stay at her Pension because I didn't have a girlfriend (*that's* never happened before), so checked in at the Hostal Britz instead.

After lunch I hiked up the hill to the entrance of the Alhambra, only to discover that it was sold out for the day. Didn't really mind, as it was a very pleasant hike and I continued on to get a view of the city from the surrounding hills. Then it was back into the city to try to book an Alhambra ticket for tomorrow. *Then*, I hiked up into and around the Albaican, the old Moorish part of the city, a labyrinth of (surprise) *narrow* and *twisting* streets, all up hill! Was eventually rewarded with stunning views of the Alhambra from across a gorge, before trudging back downhill. With the aid of my trusty map, did not get lost even once in the Albaican. Then promptly got completely lost in the downtown area of the city.



I've noticed a lot of familiar names here: Sierra Nevada, San Francisco, San Fernando and Obispo. Even an Avenue de Americas. And that's just a sample. Wasn't it nice of the Spanish to name lots of their towns, parks and streets after places in the United States?

Wandered into the Museo de las Bellas and was asked where I was from. "From Australia!" I declared, my chest swelling with pride. As a result, I was charged 1.50 Euros to get in, whereas for EU citizens it's free. So next time, kids, remember: "Deutschland Über Alles!"



Penelope update: Haven't seen beautiful nor lustrous hair of her here in Granada. Then it came to me – that new movie she's made, directed by Woody Allen, called *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. Barcelona! There it was right from the start, staring me in the face. Fate has sent it's subtle message and I've finally received it. I'm off to Barcelona!

En route to Barcelona, 20 October

Boarded Trenhotel at 9.45pm. Did *not* fall asleep immediately. Discovered, in fact, that I had a seat facing another seat, a good thing only if no one sat opposite me. Began hoping that all that time spent in cathedrals recently would do me some good. Train began to fill up. Girl sat next to me. Not Penelope Cruz, but she didn't smell bad, so I wasn't complaining. Large, red-faced man with bulging eyes and equally bulging belly appeared. *Please* let him walk past. He walked past. Relief. Moments passed. Large, red-faced man with bulging eyes and belly reappeared. Noooooo!!! But not no. Yes. Bugger, bugger, bugger. Me and red-faced man exchanged "what ya gonna do?" shrugs.

Was also coming to terms with the fact that the girl next to me was very likely going to spend most of the trip talking loudly into her mobile phone. Large, red-faced man has hacking cough and appears to have a cold or flu. Possibly the plague. Air-con doesn't seem to work too well, either. Awfully hot and stuffy and somewhat stifling. Maybe I'll get lucky, pass out and not revive until Barcelona...

Large red-faced man coughs again. Face gets redder and eyes bulge even more. I hope the girl next to me knows CPR, because if this guy has a stroke I'm NOT doing it!

Large red-faced man eventually disappears for a while, but at the first stop he is replaced by a stern looking Spanish woman who could shatter a mirror at twenty paces. Make that ten. I get up and go to front of coach. Try sleeping while standing up. Half successful -- standing up I have down pat; sleeping, not so good. Eventually return to seat and actually sleep for a while. Train arrives twenty minutes early! Oddly, Penelope is not there to greet me.

Madrid, 23 October

Went to the Reina something or other gallery today (hey, it's late). Was looking forward to seeing Dali's works. Guess which part of the gallery was closed? Saw Picasso's masterwork "Guernica" and boy, what a gyp! It was in black and white! Couldn't the guy have bought some colour paint?

Penelope update...no, make that...Penelope lowdown: The following arrived from a friend:

"I have been reading of your trip with much interest. You may not be aware of my close relationship with Pen. Anyway I knew you were keen to meet her and as you are my mate I made a couple of calls to her. I told her what a good bloke you were, big fan, etc. Pen only had one question. Would you treat her the same if she dressed as an old gypsy woman. She therefore hatched a cunning plan..."

That explains a lot. Also shows what they can do with make up and special effects in movies these days. I always thought Penelope Cruz was a goddess -- turns out she's a frumpy old gypsy woman.



THE READER SQUEAKS

Arthur Haddon, Coffs Harbour, NSW

18 December 2008

Enjoyed your expose on the femme fan scene. Have heard on the grapevine that...

[Thanks, Arthur. I may publish more on this once I hear from a few other fans of the day.]

Bert Castellari, Curtin, ACT

19 December 2008

I was quite absorbed by your account of the imbroglio within the Futurian Society of Sydney in the early fifties. History in a microcosm but quite fascinating even so. All this happened long after I was a member of the FSS. By 1952 I was mostly preoccupied with two things – a young family and my job as a journo which brought in the money to support us. I also had political interests, one of which was in the Australian Journalists' Association, a trade union...

It didn't occur to us that the FSS was a boys' club or anything other than a science fiction club with a few lofty ideas about the world we wanted for the future. We knew there were women fans in the US. Somebody once mentioned that they had heard of a girl who was a science fiction reader and they would try to find out more. But nothing ever came of it. It surprised me that Vol Molesworth and some other members opposed the admission of women to the FSS and saw them in a women's auxiliary role. Even the AJA from the moment of its formation in 1911 won equal pay for women plus 20 pounds a year dress allowance for them. But there was a contradiction because most women for many years were restricted to "social" reporting and similarly limiting jobs and were seen as not capable of the day to day rough and tumble.

I note that one of the people in that excellent convention picture is identified as Padraic McGuinness. I cannot remember having heard previously that Paddy, famous at the time of his death as a right wing conservative, had been a member of the FSS. Is there anything about him in the history? He would have been about 16 then. The McGuinness who supported the progressive attitude was Mike, but I think Paddy would have been a supporter.

Graham Stone recalls my sister, Roma, having been at one or two meetings. It was one I think. Roma came along because she had drawn the cover illustration for an issue of *Zeus*. She had no interest in science fiction but had potential as an artist which was never developed.

I could continue to ramble on as things come to mind but I'll call a halt, noting that today's papers reported Forrest Ackerman's death at 92. We knew him as 4SJ, his way of abbreviating his full name. He was probably right at home with text messaging.

[Paddy isn't mentioned much in Vol's history, but perhaps Graham will be able to recall more.]

Brad Foster, Irving, Tx.

19 December 2008

That was quite a time-warp view on male/female relations with "Rosemary Simmons and the Femme Fan Group". I can't recall the last time I saw the phrase "women's auxiliary" anywhere. Something for the little ladies to do while us men get on with the real business. Times have changed for the better, thankfully. Still lots of ground to cover, but more people are judged on what they think and do than how they look, and that can only be a good thing.

Thanks too for the piece by Finlay. Haven't actually looked at his work in a while, and was good to remind myself of the incredible skill and detail he put into all his work, large and small. I mean, just look at all those tiny white dots, so perfectly placed, to add tone to the sky. Phenomenal talent.

Rex Meyer, Pennant Hills, NSW

29 December 2008

What a surprise – a fascinating glimpse of the past...especially the wonderful photograph of the Business Session of the 2nd Australian SF Convention of 1953. During the war years and the years immediately after the war it was difficult to get SF magazines and books, to discuss trends and issues and review the latest stories. You will notice I am sitting next to David Cohen who was the proprietor of a small book outlet, Blue Centaur Books. He would bring the latest titles to meetings to sell to fans. While I personally found this to be very useful it was resented by some as it was considered exploitation of informal non-commercial meetings.

I am afraid I cannot help with the story of the “Femme Fan Group” of the Futurian Society. All that was so long ago that memories are vague. But I can say that nothing was as straightforward as may first appear. The issue was not simply the admission of women into the Society. There were multiple hidden agendas and it is these which distort the various accounts of that period. That is all I can say.

David Redd, Haversfordwest, Pembs.

31 December 2008

Yes, I think I get the overall picture: a galaxy is a sort of space storm, just a giant cyclone spinning very, very slowly. And you have another storm about the Futurian attitude to women. Very neat, and I'm sure the brief gap since issue 25 conceals a long gestation period for bringing it all together.

Reading about the Futurian Society of Sydney is a bit like reading a Peter Weston *Prolapse* from some parallel time stream; a few names familiar but most people and events different. It's interesting for the same reason that the *Prolapse* articles are interesting: discovering what people we thought were just like us actually got up to.

Oh, and the Norma Hemming sf plays. The picture isn't clear. According to Roger Dard's conrep her 1955 play at Sydney “Miss Denton's Dilemma” wasn't subtitled “Sex with Hex”, it was “tagged” thus by the “tabloid newspapers”. What year was Olympicon in Melbourne where her “Balance of Power” was performed? McMullen and Blackford in *Fantasy Annual 2* refer to her last known play as “The Matriarchy of Renok” at the 1958 Melbourne convention. So I'm confused. And did you have to hand-trim every copy of your fold-out photo? That's dedication. But the size was worthwhile.

[‘Balance of Power’ was presented in 1956 (Olympicon referred to Melbourne hosting the Olympic Games that year). I missed her 1958 play -- Molesworth doesn't mention it at all and I haven't seen the McMullen and Blackford paper on Hemming. Yes, I hand-trim A3 pages for fold-outs.]

Merv Binns, Bentleigh East, Vic.

25 January, 2009

That photo of the second convention in Sydney is great. They all look as though they are attending a funeral though, rather than an SF convention. I knew a few of the people there and I did attend the third con, I think it was, though my memories of it have vanished. Bluey Glick, in the middle there, came down and lived in Melbourne some years after that photo was taken, and told us that he could not stand living in Sydney because of the feud that had developed between people in Sydney fandom.

Reading your reprints of the reports and letters confirmed the impression that I (and I believe other members of the Melbourne SF Group) had in the very early days, that the organisation of Sydney fandom was a little too formal for us. Consequently we had a very loose set-up. Bob McCubbin reported the events at the meetings and Ian Crozier printed them in the club/group magazine *Etherline*. When Bob and, soon after, Ian pulled out, I was left holding the baby. Not having any experience at organising anything I never bothered reporting meetings or such, but I did produce club newsletters and concentrated on working on the library. Paul Stevens helped me a lot when he came along in the 1960s and we got into holding movie shows in the clubrooms.

Meanwhile "another" fandom was growing in Melbourne and I believe we have to thank John Foyster for that. He, John Bangsund and others were producing zines such as *Australian SF Review*, and the Nova Mob came into existence. Eventually they decided we should have a convention, which was held in the clubroom in 1966. Melbourne fandom blossomed after that and it all led to the first Aussiecon Worldcon. I have recorded all my memories up to 1975 and I am working on later times.

Norma Hemming wrote a play which was performed at the first Melbourne convention in 1956, Olympicon. Some Melbourne fans including Bill Wright want to produce the play during the 2010 World Con, as a tribute. Luckily I have a copy of the script which Kim Huett somehow got hold of and sent to me a year or two back; it turned out to be my own "sound effects" copy. I have photos of the cast and all, which will be seen again in due course.

[It's great to hear more about what was happening in Melbourne at the time and it's good to know you are recording your memories. So few of the early fans have done so that there are details we are never likely to know about Australian fandom's origins. Norma Hemming wrote plays for most of the early conventions; it will be good to see one performed again in 2010.]

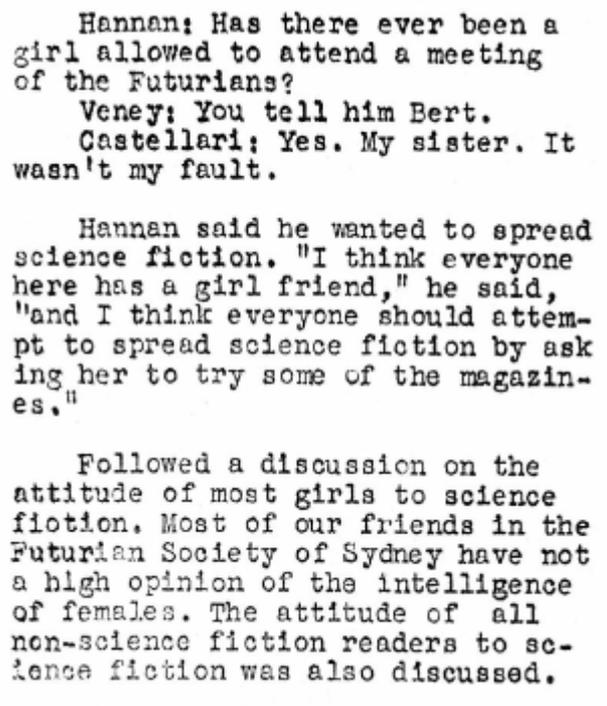
Kim Huett, Woden, ACT 26 January 2009

The young, male, science fiction fans of the late thirties/early forties give me the impression from their writings that they disapproved of romance and close contact with women other than family members. Attached is a small scan from an issue of *Futurian Observer* 353 (January 1942) which I think sums up the attitudes of the time. Given such determinedly 'Boy's Own' attitudes it does not surprise me that the same group (different members perhaps but largely the same) still hadn't entirely shed such attitudes a decade later.

The centrepiece of this issue is most impressive. I've also attached a PDF of the attendance list published in the official report on the 1953 convention. It lists 76 attendees so Graham is right on the money in regards to how many of the attendees are included in the photo.

I hope you will find my fanzine list of some help in fine tuning your Australian fanzine timeline.

[Thanks, Kim. We must see if Bert is willing to let us reprint more from issues of Futurian Observer. And I do hope to get back to the Aussie fanzine timeline soon, so thanks for your list.]



Hannan: Has there ever been a girl allowed to attend a meeting of the Futurians?
Venev: You tell him Bert.
Castellari: Yes. My sister. It wasn't my fault.

Hannan said he wanted to spread science fiction. "I think everyone here has a girl friend," he said, "and I think everyone should attempt to spread science fiction by asking her to try some of the magazines."

Followed a discussion on the attitude of most girls to science fiction. Most of our friends in the Futurian Society of Sydney have not a high opinion of the intelligence of females. The attitude of all non-science fiction readers to science fiction was also discussed.

Eric Lindsay, Airlie Beach, Qld. *[now Condon, Qld.]*

29 January 2009

Cyclone watching is interesting. So far we have been lucky in that all the mainland crossing ones have been distant from us. Like you, we start the cyclone season by making sure we have appropriate stocks of supplies in place. Not sure what good it would do. Any decent cyclone could rip the metal roof off our apartment.

Interesting points about Vol Molesworth's comments about women members of the Futurian society. I do not recall Graham Stone saying much about that to me. I should make sure I have a voice recorder with me any time Graham talks about fan history. *[Good idea!]*

Robert Lichtman, Oakland, Calif.

2 April 2009

I read with great interest your account of Cyclone Heta. I've never been in a hurricane myself, but when I lived on the Farm commune in southern middle Tennessee we occasionally got the high winds and heavy rains that accompanied one of them as it made its way inland. I remember one particular night when we were living in a 16x32-foot army surplus tent pitched on a wooden platform with some minimal reinforcing framing. The winds were so fierce that night that half a dozen of us had to stand for hours pushing back on that framing so that the wind wouldn't blow it over and leave us all drenched as the roof flew away. At times it tried to get the upper hand, but in the end we (and the tent house) survived.

It was revealing to read in "Rosemary Simmons and the Femme Fan Group" of the sexism that surfaced in the Futurian Society of Sydney when Ms. Simmons applied for an ordinary membership. I was pleased to see that it was Graham Stone who made the successful motion to insert a non-discrimination clause into the group's constitution. Also interesting in this article was Graham's letter to you of July 2008 in which he wrote that Vol Molesworth "tried to get into [Jean Roberts's] pants as with any female he met." That's rather appalling, and must have made for unpleasantness for the various women in the club's membership.

[It's hard to say how much of a problem this behaviour was within the club. More's the pity that we haven't heard from any of the femme fen of the time, for only they could really tell us.]

Eric Mayer, northeastern Pennsylvania (via email)

4 April 2009

My loccing strategy tends to be from the Harry Warner that-reminds-me-of school and since I've never been through a hurricane or attended a meeting of an organized fan association your articles reminded me of nothing I've ever been through, thank goodness. Actually it sounds like that 1952 fan meeting was stormier than the Samoan cyclone. (Wasn't he a pro wrestler?)

Here, in the northeast part of the United States, far inland from the sea, we don't get hit by hurricanes full force. We might be brushed by the edge of one racing up the coast, or receive the dying winds of others that moved inland from the Gulf of Mexico to the south. I certainly wouldn't like the idea of being menaced by a cyclone while out in the ocean on an island. I'll have to go back and read the previous installments of this series. Fascinating and highly unusual fanzine fare.

My wife Mary and I have done a lot of research for our writing projects (particularly looking into 6th century Byzantium) and it's really opened my eyes about history and historians. It's amazing how much dispute there is amongst professional historians, not only as to the interpretation of known facts but even about the facts themselves. And equally remarkable how few facts often exist to support certain historical narratives. So it irks me to constantly see fans presenting their own memoirs as history. These tales can be entertaining, but are almost always self-serving and tend to place the writer at the center of everything. (To be fair we all tend to do that in personal writing, I think.) They are not history, though. They are one-sided and unreliable.

As you can imagine I was delighted by your examination of the truth about Vol Molesworth's account of the admission of women into the Futurian Society of Sydney. Trying to find and evaluate all the available evidence, being honest about what evidence was missing, stating clearly what were facts and what were only possible conclusions that might be drawn from the facts -- that's real history. If only there were more of it in fandom! I know absolutely nothing about Australian fan history but the event was fascinating in its own right, as an example of the changes going on in society in that era, and your detective story of trying to ferret out the truth was equally interesting. Brilliant piece.

[Harry Warner's strategy certainly produced some entertaining locs and I'm grateful for yours. You've articulated my reservations about Vol Molesworth's 'history' of Australian fandom perfectly and placed the issue of historical analysis in a more rigorous context than I'd be able to.]

Lloyd Penney, Etobicoke, Ont. 4 April 2009

[On *Mumblings* 25]

Was the Tuck story previously published? (Ah, I thought it was.) It sure reminds me of SF I might find in an old pulp. An enjoyable read.

So that's where Raymond Burr has set up a garden! I knew about it, but wasn't sure where.

I agree with Arthur Haddon, there are more humans on this earth than it can sustain, but as soon as this is established, the Pope comes around to remind us that condoms are evil, and we must be fruitful and multiply. I am not sure we can afford to be so fruitful any more.

I must see if I can get an old working computer like Robert Lichtman has, one with a 5.25" drive in it. I also have a ton of old floppies, and I'd like to see what I have on them, and see if there's anything valuable left. I have a few USB drives, but should get one of those large portable flash drives.

[No, the Tuck story was never published before here. He had tried to place it locally back in the 50s but there were only a few magazines publishing sf and when these knocked it back he did not pursue it overseas. Burr's garden is lovely. It's in quite a small valley not far from Nadi, where Fiji's main international airport is. There's a danger that with climate change it will dry up, so they've installed a sprinkler system for much of it now.]

[On *Mumblings* 26]

Toronto rarely gets hurricanes, but Hurricane Hazel is an event that ripped a good portion of western Toronto, including where I am now, way back in 1954. I couldn't tell you how many books were written about that rare central Canadian hurricane, and how much damage it did, and how many lives it took.

I suppose we can look back at the exclusion of women from the Futurian Society in 1952 and think the original decision to be stupid, but such was a different time. Today, we'd never consider not admitting anyone because of gender or colour or race. At least, I hope we wouldn't. It seems to be unfortunate human nature to find some way to discriminate. I recall that story from *The Mentor*...another

fanzine I wish was still in production. If the possibility of adultery were a question in the minds of male members, I'd wonder who was afraid of it, and who might have been anticipating it.

[Yes, I enjoyed Ron's zine, too. There are back issues of The Mentor up on efanazines now, I believe courtesy of Eric Lindsay.]

PRESS GANGED

Here are two newspaper articles I collected years ago and meant to run earlier. Top, a classic from *The Samoa Observer*; bottom, a gruesome piece from *The Fiji Times*.

LOST

**Brown God lost on
Vailima mountain.
Ph: 75885 Reward for
our dog Samson**

Woman claims foul play

A WAINIBUKA woman is claiming foul play concerning the death of her 49-year-old husband who was found floating near his village and his eyeballs, ears and nose missing and his moustache and forehead skin peeled last month.

Lavenia Tinai, 50, who was living with her husband Anare Sikoa Koroinamoce on his island in Yavu village, Batiki, for three years now, said she came to Suva with her two children and grandson to attend a wedding last month.

She said her husband stayed back in the village with their nine-year-old grandson and they were shocked to hear the news from family members on the island that he was dead.

She added that her husband went out fishing on September 23 and did not return so the villagers conducted a search party and found the body of Mr Koroinamoce floating near the mangroves.

Mrs Tinai said when the villagers found the body, his ears, eyeballs and nose were missing. She said the nurse at the health centre had stated that her husband suffered a heart attack.

[Continued from p.5]

The originality of *Dr Who* includes his TARDIS. By being larger inside than it appears on the outside, it is a startling demonstration of Clarke's Law: a technology so far advanced that we cannot distinguish it from magic. This gives the scriptwriters wide poetic licence. On a more pragmatic level, it allows the Doctor to travel in both space and time, allowing him to explore a range of sf concepts. It is also an example of the wry humour of the series, for the TARDIS looks like an old police telephone box only because the Doctor, technological wizard though he is, cannot fix its broken cloaking mechanism.

While *Dr Who* tends towards horror at times and melodrama all of the time, it's long run has introduced several generations to sf, so sentimentality enters into any evaluation of the Doctor as an exemplar of the field. But strong scripts involving character developments in the recent series are also factors in his favour. Yes, it's still space opera, but at its best, it's *good* space opera. On that basis, if pressed to answer the question "Who is sf's Sherlock Holmes?" today, we could reply simply "Yes" (with apologies to Abbott and Costello).

In truth, Merwin's editorial was a furphy. Contenders for a character able to raise sf's profile already existed at the time and new ones have emerged since. The real point, however, is that neither sf nor the mystery/detective genre need have a sole champion, for their continued popularity will, in part, always lie in diversity. For sf, that diversity has long included space opera and that's fine, as long as we recognise it for what it is. Ultimately, even space opera and its larger-than-life heroes will increase appreciation of the genre if they inspire enough of their audience to venture further and try the Real Stuff.

This issue of *Mumblings*, for the first time, features original artwork on the front cover. I am indebted to Brad Foster for breaking the long drought, with his lovely recursive robot reader. Another great artist whose work *has* appeared here before graces the back cover, as a tribute. Edd Cartier passed away on Christmas Day 2008. While he had not been active in the field for many decades, Cartier's legacy will continue to astound and amuse aficionados of the unknown for many years to come. "Pumpkin Heads" mixed sf, fantasy and whimsy perfectly to illustrate October in *The Gnome Press Fantasy Calendar for 1950*. Edd's portrait appeared with his obituary in *The Los Angeles Times* and other sources.

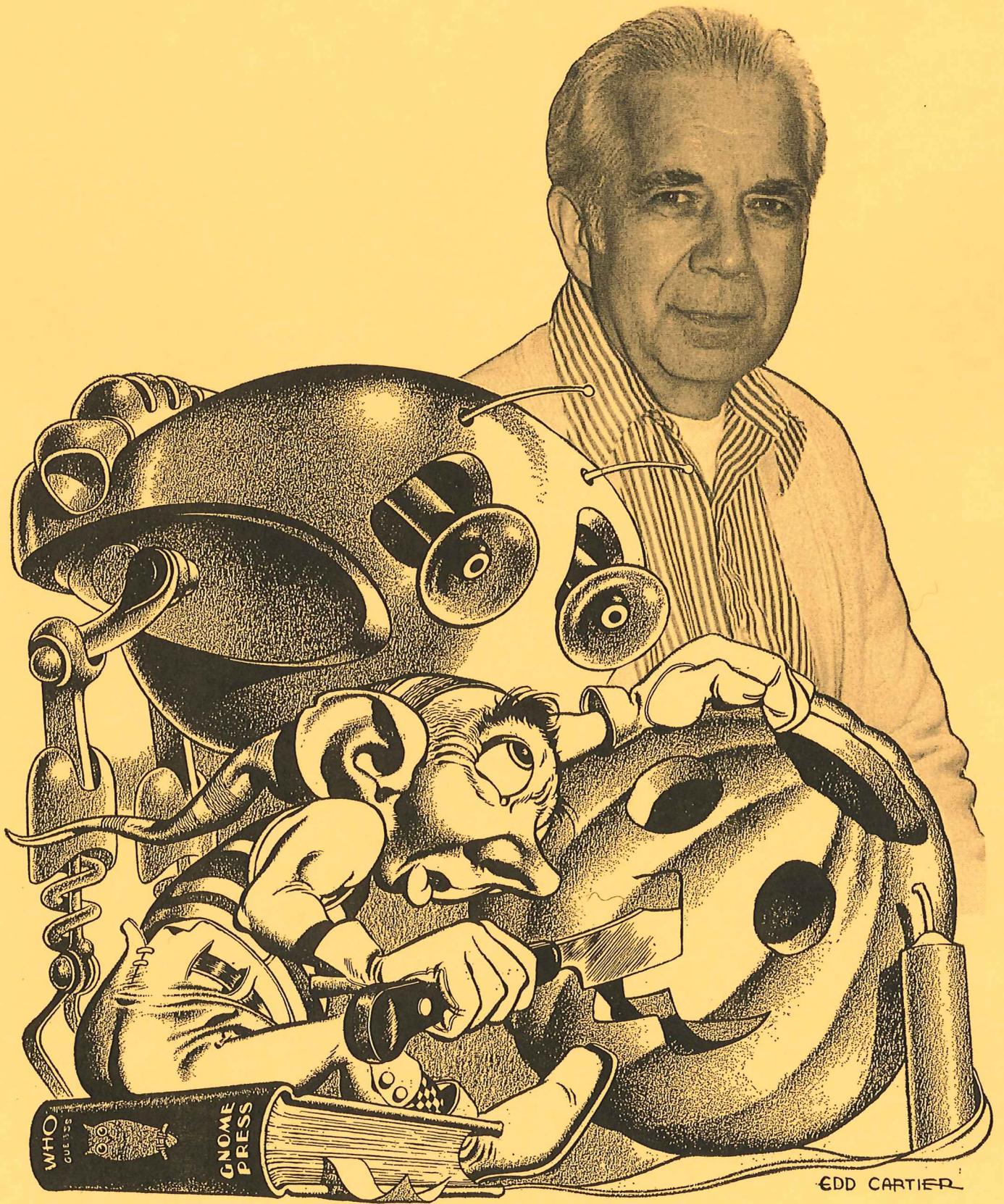
All of the other artwork in this issue was sampled from the Internet, most often from one or another of the "official websites" for each of the characters and/or real people depicted. The final image for Tim's latest travel piece is a famous test of perception (Do you see a young lady or an old hag?) -- which seemed appropriate. Penelope Cruz, if you ever read this, know that Tim is willing to apologise *in person*. As long as no twigs are involved.

If this is the first *Mumblings* you've seen, or you've missed some issues over the past twenty years and you're curious to see more of them, visit www.efanzines.com. Bill Burns has very kindly agreed to post *Mumblings* there so I am currently converting back issues to PDFs, as time permits. Letters of comment on this issue are most welcome, to:

Chris Nelson, 63 Ligertwood St., Evatt, ACT 2617 Australia

or

nelsonleoz@hotmail.com



Timeline of American SF & Fantasy Magazines

1985 – 2004

a supplement to

Mumblings from Munchkinland 27

April 2009

This section follows on from that which appeared in *Mumblings 25*, but so few professional magazines were published in this period that I've added a representative sampling of the semi-prozines. For those who don't have a copy of #25, the un-named titles carried over from that part of the timeline are:

- o = **Amazing Stories**
- o = **Analog (top line) and Isaac Asimov's SF (below)**
- o = **Omni**
- o = **Rod Serling's Twilight Zone (top) and Night Cry (below)**
- o = **The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction**

- o = single issue
- 8 = two single issues published in one month
- ø = double issue (two in one physical issue)

