

Transcendental Basenji Sermons & Enlightenment

**A submission for ANZAPA 215
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**September 30, 2003, Garry P Dalrymple
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INDEX

Page 1 – Index

Pages 1 to 5 – Mailing comments on
Anzapa issue # 214 Aug. 2003

Page 5 – Garry's recent reading

Pages 6 to 8 – Notes from the Sydney Futurian
Meeting of June 20, 'When Games get Real'

Pages 9 to 12 – Garry's report on the 2003 Sydney
SF Weekend of June 21 and 22, 2003

Pages 12 to 15 – The Sydney Futurian Meetings of
July 18, 2003, 'Super Women in SF'

Pages 16 to 22 – Garry's report on the Australian
Skeptics Convention for 2003, Aug. 22 to 24,
CSIRO Discovery Centre, Canberra

Pages 22 to 25 – My Review of the Magic
Casements Festival of Speculative Fiction, NSW
Writers Centre September 13, 2003

Editorial

Gosh this ish turned out to be a lot longer when I finished it than when I started it. I hope there is enough stuff of interest to make it comment worthy and worth you reading to the end. For those of you who might be in a hurry I have put the Mailing Comments to the front so you can see what I said about what you said about what I said etc.

Wishing you well in all things.

Garry P Dalrymple

Mailing comments on ANZAPA issue # 214 of August 2003

Necessity 52 Kryptonite – Jack Herman

Jack you might want to look into some of the distance education maritime / Seamanship courses that OTEN is currently or about to offer. There are about twenty of them and I have just finished copyright item listing them all. They include stuff of use to both vocational and recreational Seamanship. // My purpose in considering standing against Linda Burney was actually to try to help ensure her election by i.e. by drawing off the conservative first preferences from Liberal and One Nation candidates by providing another 'Non-Ethnic' candidate on the ballot ticket. I had been told that several Labor party branches were refusing to back her, in protest at her imposition on the area by ALP factions currently controlling Head Office. Never mind the colour of her skin, for some ALP branches she was the wrong faction. // Given the local weakness of the Liberals (aiming to come third?) and the local left ish 'Green alternative/Anti Stacks' strength I did not want to be a resident of a seat that gave One Nation a high vote and Linda the boot. In the end she was comfortably elected after distribution of preferences.

Panopticon 19 – Dan McCarthy

Yes to live forever is not always a blessing, as Jonathan Swift observed in Gulliver's Travels, and closer to home, Gladys (the 98 year old Theosophist) seems likely to achieve her goal of dying at home, which has for her the promise of rebirth among those she has already lost in this current incarnation. Graham Stone gives 'Out of the Silence' more space in his 'Notes on Australian Science Fiction' than for any other Aust SF story. I expect that a study of its predecessors and consequences could be a life's work or at least a Phd. // I think that the eternal life Sydney Futurian meeting was one of the better ones that I have attended and that my notes reflect this. Sometime soon I might try to put all of my Futurian and other meeting notes up on a 'Basenjis SF' website. // Re your chocolate comments, on ABC TV seen in Sydney has been a series about a Thatcherite

regime that outlawed Chocolate! On Sydney shelves I have noticed Cadbury 'Old Gold' (45%

cocoa) which seems to be the same as the old 'Guinea Gold'. I have not seen 'Energy Chocolate' return though. For our US readers I would like to point out that much US 'candybar' chocolate is unacceptable as it is sourced from South American cocoa beans which are smoke dried rather than sun dried (Africa and elsewhere).

Kingdom of the Bland – Eric Lindsay

Such adventures I can probably well live without. The stickers are from office stock and usually decorate files and folders, as they were at hand in some quantity I thought I would include them to add a subversive and quixotic touch. I hope you enjoy the accounts of meetings and conventions attended in this issue as well.

Taste not the Pierian Spring

– Erica Maria Lacey Barrantes

Thank you for the comment on the Immortality notes, I hope you find the Futurian notes for this issue equally stimulating. If the immortality stuff ever gets up on a website I will try to remember to include the Julian May reference and the others that other ANZAPAns have suggested. // Thank you for your view from within SES // For me I find the Homer Simpson rule of modern music applies, I.e. nothing much worthwhile has been recorded since 1979 of some similar date, even recent Kraftwerk and Hawkwind fails to enthuse // As for your interest in boy bands, it begs the question of how long a song has to survive to become a 'Classic' I can still enjoy anything by the Banana Splits just for the sheer energy of it's delivery. // I am very much a 25 hour clock person, on holidays and long weekends I can easily fall into a bedtime pattern that shifts back an hour each day. My hope is that this somehow qualifies me for life on Mars. // Talk of socially unacceptable loudness on public transport reminds me of my Macquarie University Astronomy night experience. Without fail I end up on a bus at 11 PM on a Friday night with several American exchange students and their voice level is deafening, particularly as they lean forward when their conversation becomes animated, effectively 'whispering' in the ear of the unfortunate sitting in front of them. // Your comments on the

government's Migration Vs Population Policies is an illustration of the general conservative power trip, i.e. a collision between the desire to 'enforce rules' and the Liberal values of letting people make their own decisions. Another example is the Government trying to encourage people to have children, but putting barriers in the way of 'non-traditional couples' accessing assisted conception. // On Vet bills, my (1992 model) Basenjis Mystique is in good health and from a breed without health problems. I pay about \$200 to \$300 per year for her annual vet visits, immunisations, worming, teeth cleaning and Dental inspection etc. // A thing that I have enjoyed about owning a 'hound' type of dog is that they hear and react to things you do not notice. Of late, when I walk Mysti at nights she has been stopping to spot a lot of bats in trees. // On the IQ score, on a tired Thursday afternoon at work I tried out a junk mail website's 'Find your Perfect Match' IQ test. I scored 129 and apart from concerns that some of the questions were US Centric, I was disgusted, That is only one George Bush above KoKo (IQ of 80) the F*****g Gorilla! // On the evils of Spell checkers, I have just read through three of Harry Turtledove's 'World War: In the Balance' books over a few weeks, every reading session I would encounter typos that had been spell checked into words that did not fit the sentence.

Odd News and Nonsense Three – Roger Sims

I suspect Harry Mudd is one of the most popular minor Star Trek figures, I think you can find echoes of his character in the Next Gen and Voyager figures of Q, Qark the Ferengi, Neelix etc. // Oi what is this Anti Scot stuff, getting in ahead of the crowd for the Glasgow Worldcon?

Karenzappa VIII – Karen Johnson

Something like this turned up in a talk I attended at the Macquarie University open (Astronomy) night by Paul Davies. He stated that one implication of current thinking is that it could be possible to form a pocket Universe to hide as a refuge from the 'End of Everything' in our Universe. Thank you for the comment on the Immortality notes, I hope you find the Futurian notes for this issue equally stimulating. If the immortality stuff ever gets up on a website I will try to remember to include your suggestion about Mercedes Lackey, it has

stimulated me to remember a book by Octavia Butler about an eternal guy whose mind can leap into the body of any of his descendents, leaving his

previous host dead. Not a very sympathetic figure but very interested in keeping his family on the increase! // Those cat fonts look interesting, does anyone know of similar dog ones?

From the Lair of the Lynx #21 – LynC

I know of no local media coverage of the find of clothing, I expect there would have been something if there had been a real missing person case. As for the voting bit, I have noticed that as a 'younger son' most of my suggestions for change to fandom, politics etc. have a common theme of 'appeals to fairness', a point of view that frequently gets no where when opposed by a 'First born' point of view, that is appeals to authority, of the kind that 'it's too complex/hard' or 'it's always been done this way'. This is a consoling point of view to me for my many crusades/jihads, but you might want to think about it's application to the real world, in a world with increasingly smaller families we may be in for some increasingly inflexible thinking. I think it was Fred Pohl who wrote a book about a community of people that was designed (No Unco s) to build and run Asteroid filling Space stations. They factored birth order related personality into things. // If the absent person had been skinny dipping they would have to have rock climbing abilities to get up a five meter sheer rock face / overhang (bit scratchy on the dangly bits) as well as an high affinity for e. coli from suburban runoff (Poodle puddles, Labrador loads etc.).

Ping! – John Newman

You might be interested that at the site of John Howard's childhood home there is a shrine of sorts, the William Street Earlwood KFC (200 metres from Earlwood's 'Pizza Elvis'). The thing that has allowed John Howard to defy gravity is his firm grip on the same thing that kept Bob Menzies (National leader for 18 unbroken years) in power, a realization that most Australians wanted to avoid the uncertainty of change after WW2 and after the 'changes' of the Whitlam and Keating governments. The crime of Howard and his cronies is that they have taken this as endorsement of a rabidly Thatcherite ideology to impose Free

Choice/Market thinking dogma (whether you like it or not), irrespective of the consequences for the average Australian.

Siyayilandra 4 – Nick Shears

Your music choices remind me of the Homer Simpson rule (see earlier mailing comment).

Megatheriums for Breakfast 35 – David Grigg and – 80 days Around the World 21 - Sue and David Grigg

Your trip report on Greenwich is my sort of tourism. Somewhere I have a photo taken at the Greenwich meridian line looking the other way. The Transit instrument then in situ peers like a cowed monk over the shoulder of the subject. I must draw up a things to see list for the UK & Ireland if I manage to go to the Glasgow Worldcon.

Goat Sneeze 12/13 – Christine & Derrick Ashby

Mysti (born June 2, 1992) gets Supercoat 'Light and Mature', a reduced fat dry (soya based!) dog food. 'Extras' mean that she weighs in at 13Kg rather than 9-10 Kg in her show ring days. She is cage trained (born in a cage, fed in a cage, travels in a cage and had pups in a cage etc), which would make it much easier at feeding time and gate opening time. // Dick Smith Foods gave us a box of packets of Temptin biscuits (much better than Tim Tams!) for the Sydney SF Weekend. // I agree with your marching comments, taking part in a street march can be very exhilarating, I marched with the 'Olly Vollies' and in PSA protest marches and the effect is much the same.

Ultracrepidarian Bounder! #2 – Kim Huett

Night walking in Sydney is also an experience beyond the usual. A dog or two ago I used to walk the dog into the small hours of the morning and on occasion I did pre-dawn letterboxing when I was standing for Parliament (as an Australian Democrat) // I'll vote for your voting channel on TV, I also find it fascinating to watch the vote come in, I even tape the Eurovision Song contest to have a good laugh over the atrocious songs and way the 'democratic' vote comes in. // You have missed the obvious market for talking chips, elastic in ladies apparel ('no your ass looks fine') and condoms ('It'll be a stretch but we can make it').

You Really Know You're Home When You Find a Wombat in Your Bed 88

– Cath Ortlieb

Land of 10,000 Loons – Jeanne Mealy

The TAB (Tee Aiy Bee) is an Australian institution, originally set up as a government monopoly as a pooled betting system that was intended to drive out of the market the illegal (and non-tax paying) non-racecourse bookmakers. I.e. if \$100,000 is bet on the outcome of a race and the winning horse has \$20,000 bet on it then the payout for your \$1 ticket is \$5 (less expenses and taxes etc.) The really neat thing about it was that it was all made possible by an Australian invention, the 'Totaliser' a Babbage like mechanical calculator that could calculate odds and winnings in real time i.e. offices all over the state would be able to make payouts within minutes of the finish of a race from phoned in/telegraphed betting input. It might have been 'Socialist' ideas like this and confining Poker Machines (Slot Machines) to Community and Service Clubs that might have served to keep organised crime at lowish levels until the prohibition of Heroin and the Vietnam war.

I had to lift the dog completely off the ground (think Statue of Liberty with a big dog instead of a torch) and it was collected before nightfall.

Since #213 Gladys has been in and out of hospital again. No falls this time, just persistent fluid on the lungs. I expect that having a pacemaker that is 'set' at 79 beats per minute is part of the problem, a variable speed ticker under medical supervision might make it easier to get the fluid off her lungs. As of today (16 Sept.) Gladys has been at home overnight. The anticipation that my mother will one day soon have to enter the Gladys' house and find her dead is weighing heavily on my mother's mind at present, although Gladys currently gets daily (paid) visitors and her (sort of) adopted son, John Freeman, is likely to be living with her soon. Incidentally John is the brother of an English Cardinal (small world eh wot!). See elsewhere for reports of my health and the progress of the

Sydney SF weekend are included elsewhere in this issue. // I do not know what US blood donor standards are like, but I know from my own blood donor experiences that blood Iron levels can be deceptive. I have recorded 14s and 15s, well

above the 11/12 needed to donate and still passed out. The Iron level being variable due to hydration, i.e. these high scores were actually a result of not having drunk enough.

Ramblings 22 – Gerald Smith & Womble

I think you can get in touch with or even visit Bob Jones at the Linden observatory although they may be 'Mars Rushed' at the moment, or Radio National online Archives might have the rest of the talk still available. // The flip answer as to why I still stand all day in the sun for the Australian Democrats is a version of the Spartan's laconic reply to the Persian emissary's claim that Persian Arrows will darken the sky, 'we are not afraid to fight in the shade'. The practical answer is that the Greens are at best a political tendency, any and every party can turn on their degree of 'Greenness' as it becomes an electoral asset. In practice there are many opportunists who have climbed aboard the Green bandwagon as the wheels fall off One Nation (consider the 'Horny Goatweed' candidate for Leichhardt). The Australian Democrats remains a real 'third force' political party with a level of membership governance and policy generation exceeding that of the Lib/Lab twins. If there is not a third party option for the injection of new ideas to be appropriated by the major parties then you leave open the way to the politics of disengagement of the majority (like in the US). // See other my other mailing comments for news about Gladys, who as I write is back at home. // OTEN is currently under threat of restructure, extermination or integration into the NSW Department of Education (in the grip of the DET-Daleks). After the usual festival of appalling waste, service shedding and loss of organisational experience who can tell what my name / email might look like this time next year?

Practical Desperation – David Cumber

Butterfly Turkeys? Is this the collective name for the group that gave the US George Shrub via the Floridianese ballot paper? In Sydney Charcoal chicken shops I have seen 'Flat Chickens', split down the rib cage, spread out flat and held over the roasting pit in a bread toasting cage. // Alice down the drainpipe? Might this be a corruption of Alice in Wonderland disappearing down a rabbit hole? // The ultimate Ergonomic (and sensible) keyboard

option is the DVORAK keyboard, all the keys you use most on a centre line, available in Left or Right single hand formats or double handed formats.

All recent world typing speed records have been set using these keyboards and I have found it to be faster and less RSI than from hovering over a standard keyboard. It took all of 2 hours to re-write the wetware and get used to it. Practically an OH&S issue that it is not more widely available given the incidence of (arthritis?) hand disabilities. The 'Foreign' look of the keyboard configuration is also an 'anti snatch' security feature.

Everyday Practical Desperation – David Cummer

I can make no informed comment on the need/necessity of a Melbourne Gay SF group, in Sydney (where there is no SF at all) I know that the Sydney Dr Who Club was re-activated by a group of twelve which included eight gay men and two gay women. I have no idea if there is a SF interest group within Sydney's Gay scene, but I believe that there are gay people active within other Sydney Sci-Fi groups.

Reality Module 35 – Michael F. Green

// Please clarify, are you participating in these TAFE courses as a student or as a content provider. I have had similar stuff passing through my hands at work for copyright/third party checking. // This brave new virtual reality resort sounds a lot like a suit's version of the Web as depicted in 'Snowcrash'. // Your difficulty with understanding the Chaucer program may have to do with the differences in English dialects. Written English descended from the Mercian, while Chaucer's spoken English would be London or a South East dialect. It is much easier to hear read out than to read. // **Erica** – The savings from not having a car have been the basis of my financial success, thousands of dollars saved each year and compounding every year of employment. // Pre-Selling the first copy for a huge subscribed amount, I think this was what Stephen King tried (and failed) to achieve with a web offering. // Re the Filking, I will add to my Sydney Worldcon plan the objective of having the Muzak in con hotel and con venue lifts replaced with – Filking tracks! // Dunno about the breadth of the Stress to Suicide link, some sorts of stress probably do but others do

not i.e. during the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland I believe that Suicide rates fell.

L'es Chattes Parties 66 – Sally Yeoland

The accumulation of recreation leave is a persistent symptom of the atmosphere of 'Life Long Restructuring' in the NSW public Service and Education in particular. As Education is one of the NSW State government's largest departments there seems to be an Education 'Reform' about every second year, so I have fallen out of the habit of taking an annual holiday. Instead I seem to take 'leave burning' breaks of a week or ten days when work seems to be slack but it seems likely that I will have a job to come back to.

Garry's Recent Reading, June to Sept. 2003.

To June 09, **Lieut Gulliver Jones: His vacation** by Roger Lancelyn Green First Pub. 1905, 206 pages; 09 to 13 June **They Fly at Cirion** by Sam Delany © 1966, 288 pages;

14 to 20 June, **Seven to Infinity** (An anthology of 7 stories from some mid 1950s SF&F magazines) Edited by Groff Conklin 288 pages © 1966;

05 to 17 July **Corpse** by Mick Farren 304 pages © 1986 ;

19 July to 03 August, **Darwin's Radio** by Greg Bear 538 pp. © 1999 ;

04 to 10 Aug., **World War – In the Balance** by Harry Turtledove 656 pages © 1994 ;

12 to 18 August (discontinued), **Eternal Light** by Paul J McAuley 463 pages © 1991;

21 to 27 August, **Worlds of Honor** by David Webber and three other writers working as 'Share croppers' on his 'Honor Harrington universe 407 pages © 1999. ;

27 Aug. to 04 Sept., **World War - Tilting the Balance** by H. Turtledove 482 p.© 1995 ; 04 to 13 Sept., **World War – Upsetting the Balance** by Harry Turtledove 468 pages © 1996 (**that's 1600 pages of Turtledove!**) ;

14 to 18 Sept., **The Silver Pigs** by Lindsey Davis 258 pages © 1989 ;

19 to 24 Sept. **Science goes to War** by Ernest Volkman 278 pages © 2002

Also Read ; Ansible – Dave Langford; Emerald City – Cheryl Morgan ; Fortean Times – Various ; The Irish SF Times – Pdraig O'Mealoid ; The Australian Skeptic ; The Sydney Morning Herald

Notes from the Sydney Futurian meeting of Friday June 20, 2003

Topic – ‘When games get real in SF&F Stories’

Present were;

Garry Dalrymple, John Fox, Ross Mitchell and Alex Paige & apologies received and noted from Ian Woolf and Emma Duncan Woolf.

General meeting introduction and Pre-Topic discussion;

Not that much happening in Sydney at this time of year. The 2003 SSFW takes place tomorrow, the ‘Selwa Anthony’s Festival of Popular Fiction takes place on July 5 to 7 at the NSW Writers Centre, Rozelle, and Continuum takes place in Melbourne. Traditionally some Sydney Futurian members tend to hide on the night before a Sydney Freecon / SSFW. As they are non-residential SF&F events, three trips into town in three days is a bit much for some people.

- The South American email was passed around and discussed. It states that it is a common practice for extracts of local native plants (containing the active ingredient in the ‘truth serum’ drug Scopolamine) to be used to commit crimes, i.e. victims become ‘Zombie like’ and highly suggestible and are prepared to hand over their valuables on request or becoming a non-resisting ‘love slave’. The extract is slipped into a drink or even applied to the skin/body parts, which the victim is invited to lick. This news item caused some present to reconsider their plans for the weekend!

- The phenomena of the release of the next Harry Potter book was discussed together with the other books of previous years that were going to make it

fashionable for children and young people to start reading books again (Adrian Mole, The Borribles, Goose Bumps, The Lord of the Rings etc.)

- Ted Scribner discussed progress towards the September 13 and 14 ‘Magic Casements’ event, especially his hope to introduce more fannish aspects to the mix of events planned.

- John Fox proposed that an occasion be made of the Boxing Day release of the final LOTR film, specifically a trip to the Blue Mountains where we could see the movie at the Katoomba cinema (wide screen and a chance to ungafiate some Blue Mountains old SF fans?). The June 04 event at Collins on Broadway had been well attended by most of those present.

Leigh Blackmore had organised for the bookshop to host an evening that consisted of several book launchings / signings, a panel discussion on publishing SF&F in Australia and Free Booze, wine and finger food.

The Sydney Dr Who Social group’s meeting place (meetings first Friday night each month) has changed, moving down the road to 163 Bay Street. The Seattle SF Experience was highly recommended, due to open to the public in 2004 but there is already a website to look at. SF Writer Greg Bear is associated with the project and it is mentioned in Emerald City 95.

On Topic – When Games Get Serious in Science Fiction Stories

I was unable to properly prepare for this topic, as I was distracted by the need to organise the 2003 SF Weekend, which was to take place on the days after the June Sydney Futurians meeting. To effectively discuss the topic we had to rule out of play Espionage and Trickster stories. Stories discussed could then be settled into broad categories

Garry’s categories;

- A. Central part of the story involves a competition or game that is well understood to be dangerous or risky
- B. A game played under false pretences that turns out to have hidden risks, B1 where the initiators are deluded about the nature

of the game and B2 where the bystanders who are brought into the game are deluded about the nature of the game.

- C. Relatively safe games that are corrupted by accident or by an external agent with an agenda.

Some examples we discussed are:

-Barsoom and Dream Park by Barnes and Niven, a role playing theme park is involved in murder, providing a 'virtual reality' alibi for a crime in the first book and a venue for Terrorist attack disguised as a virtual reality simulation.

-The 'Spruce Goose' a giant flying boat built by Howard Hughes features in a 'Games' SF story (whose details I failed to note GD)

-The God Game, by Greely, some one is killing the humans and aliens who are being worshipped as Gods?

-Starwars I, the Pod racing part, the audience is not initially aware that the event will result in the death of most of the participants.

-A story by Robert Heinlein, The Ultimate Authors Convention?, people attend as their favourite Author and then the real Authors start turning up (dead?)

-Rimworld stories, stories about racing Spaceships around an at times hazardous course

-Westworld and Futureworld, are adventures with berserk robots that add authentic death and mayhem to the make believe attractions of a theme park.

-Rollerball, a hazardous and at times deadly game becomes a battle to the death as a result of a political decision by Oligarchs that the Plebs must be shown the futility of individual valour.

-Startrek, just about all the 'Q' episodes, Q uses these to 'instruct' Picard et al. By letting them have an episode where things are seldom what they first appear to be.

-Star Trek Holodeck episodes (all series), many explorations of how the virtual reality offered by the Holodeck suites can interact with the 'real' world of Star Trek episodes. Too many to list all of them but the episodes about Professor Moriarty's (Holmesian) attempt to escape and Captain Picard's 'Sam Spade' detective adventures stand out.

-Dr Who, starting with 'Celestial Toymaker' where characters from children's stories are made real,

lots of games have to be played with the fate of the universe at stake. The recurring antagonist, 'The Master' is frequently acting as a Trickster.

-One original Star Trek episode stands out, the Kirk Vs the Dinosaur bloke, the battle between the two will affect the fate of both worlds

-The ghastly Shark Jumping Voyager episode, when Voyager met the stars of WWF in a series of 'Beat the Borg Chick' (go on, punch her in the ring!) wrestling matches.

-Blakes 7, the Gambit Episode, deadly combat where the audience can feel what the combatants feel. As you would expect, the game is corrupted by outside forces.

-Last Star Fighter and Enders Game by Orson Scott Card, similar premise for each, kids trained/selected by playing games machines that turn out to have real world applications.

-Starquest, a Double Double take situation, where a group of (squid like in real life) Aliens abduct a cast of Sci-Fi TV stars under the initial delusion that their TV adventures are real, the Sci-Fi TV stars are under the delusion that they have been booked by a group of hyper realistic fans. After the delusion shatters, Sci-Fi stars save the day, besting the evil planet conquering aliens and even get a return series.

-Blair Witch project? sorry no notes on this, GD.

-The Captain Cook Gambit, is frequently found in SF stories, where arriving strangers are presumed to be Gods. This game is best played once, as coming back for a second visit can have fatal consequences if the mask slips.

Essentially, any discussion of this topic should be cross-linked to Trickster appearances in SF.

Local Con/SF&F Event Noise

Not that much happening locally at this time of year. The 2003 SSFW is tomorrow, the 'Selwa Anthony's Festival of Popular Fiction takes place July 5 to 7 at the NSW Writers Centre, Rozelle, Continuum takes place at Melbourne July 11 to 13.

Garry's report on the 2003 Sydney SF Weekend of June 21 and 22, 2003

Gosh, the feeling relief in having got away with it again this year. This year in addition to the usual trauma of trying to run the con and coordinate the four writers panels almost single-handedly, a late complication very nearly de-railed the whole event. I was called for a period of jury service to start in the week before the 2003 Sydney SF Weekend, so I nearly missed being able to attend my own con. I sent off a letter to the NSW Sheriff's office to explain and due to the con I was let off, with a letter implying that I should not hold SF conventions as a means of avoiding future jury service.

While still organising the 2003 SSFW mostly as a committee of one, I had a lot more this year than in some previous years. My back did not give out

this year and I even missed out on the usual post-con stress cold which occurred after each of the earlier Museum Freecons, progress of a sort I guess?

Notably helpful were;

Garfield Barnard – Saturday and Sunday SF Trivia competitions and compiler of a lunchtime Video program (will be seen at Sydney Futurian meetings?)

Dick Smith Foods – Who sent us a box of Dick Smith's Tem p Tin chocolate biscuits. I originally proposed proper comparison taste test at the 2003 SSFW of Tem p tins Vs the American owned product. Not having enough staff to help out, they just sent me a box of the biscuits!

Ross Mitchell – Turned up early and helped with setting up on Saturday

NSW Sheriff's Department let me off Jury duty that was due to start June 16, week of the con!

Gillian Polack – participation beyond the usual writer

Susan Smith – contributed ideas towards the 'Undead' Vampire panel.

Georgie Vestey – Very kind treatment in her 'Sydney Talks' newsletter, a listing of Sydney's public lectures, club meetings and other non-sport /

non-music / non-theatre events which are usually ignored by Sydney's daily papers. All of our 'Four Minutes of Fame' participants, for bringing a broader context of what SF&F Fandom can involve

Notably unhelpful/crossed wires

Getting to the Museum's security desk at about 8.45 on Saturday morning to find 'Booking, what booking'? Sorted out by 9.00, but had to single-handed unstack chairs and tables to set the room up, until Ross Mitchell turned up to help.

2003 SSFW Convenor's point of view

You might think that it should be fairly easy to report on a small single program stream SF convention, especially if I organised it and have access to all the documents put out about it. Not so. Your con is what you see and what you see of a SF con can be very different depending on where you happen to be sitting. Usually the audience ends up seeing a very different con from what the committee had planned, and what the panellists and panel chair being can see from the front looking over the audience is very different again. Unless panel chair beings are very aware of what is happening, most panellists will talk among themselves rather than talking to the audience as an equal participant in the panel. Most writers will read and explain their work to an imaginary self and usually the audience will let this happen.

Having organised most of what happened at the 2003 SSFW, by acting as a four person committee of one (Organisation, Writers, Publicity and Programming) I sat in on most panels as chair being. Occasionally I saw panels start well then seemed to veer about 90 degrees off the agreed topic, but as long as the audience was on the same trip, you learn to just let them keep going.

I think everyone enjoyed the 'Martian Academy of Archaeology' panels, as in these most people are effectively on the panel in that they are trying to second guess what the people on the panel table will have to say about the objects as they are uncovered. (For non-attendees the panel consists of several 'experts' impersonating Alien

Archaeologists who have to try to interpret cryptic 'found objects' from a recent expedition to the deceased planet Earth.)

A surprising success was the presentation put on by the **Richard Saunders** and **Aylinda Browne** of the **Australian Skeptics**, who managed to stretch their 'four minutes of fame' into close to forty minutes by the clever stratagem of starting to bend spoons! In the process of about forty minutes many spoons were to curled up and died, but as no fan was injured or bored during the Australian Skeptic's demonstration and explanation, so I let them keep on talking.

Brian Walls, speaking for the **Sydney Passengers**, the local Sherlock Holmes group and **Infinitas bookshop SF discussion group** deserves a special mention for sheer energy and persistence and for having the foresight to bring along gifts for the audience.

Dudley Robb from the **NSW UFO Research** group did rather less well, speaking from the middle of the audience his message was delivered without eye contact and his message about Sydney meetings and National conventions suffered when he started to waffle on, giving 'testimony' about UFO 'Experiencer' conspiracy theories and such like, completely blowing his chance to impart to 2003 SSFW attendees any useful details like when and where the monthly NSW UFO Research group or the Brisbane UFO Conference took place..

The Four minutes of Fame,

A 'Fractal programming' initiative, with only a single program stream how do you try to present Fandom's full bandwidth? Answer – you give groups with something to say that you think would be of interest to SF fans ('near SF' groups) an opportunity for brief pop-up talks between listed program items to tell con members about their group and it's activities, i.e. the 2003 SSFW's 'four minutes of fame' presentations.

Some of the individuals and groups that made presentations include;

Beris B. – WEA Film group

Nathan Burrage – Infinitas & Thorby St. Writers

Zara Baxter – local Thylacon Swancon Rep.

Jefferey Candiloro – Aust. NSSA space group

Garry P. Dalrymple – **Sydney Futurians** and urging people to go to Melbourne for Continuum

Dudley Robb – **NSW UFO Research group**

Alynda Brown and **Richard Saunders** – **Australian Skeptics** and Spoon Benders

John & Diane Fox – **ANZAPA**, the Aust/NZ/US Amateur Press Association and the **Society for Creative Anachronism** (SCA) a group of medieval lifestyle re-enactors.

Gillian Polack – the AAA, the **Australian Arthurian Association**.

Ted Scribner – **Southern SF & Fantasy meetings**, **Australian SF Bull Sheet**, the **Magic Casements** Festival of Speculative Fiction and the recently appointed local (Sydney/Aust?) representative for the **2005 Glasgow Worldcon**

Cat Sparks – **AGOG Press**, the Wollongong based publisher of new Aust. Speculative Fiction

Brian Walls – **The Sydney Passengers**, the Sydney group for fans of Sherlock Holmes etc. and the **Infinitas SF discussion group**

Michael West – the **Australian Mars Society**

Richard Womack – **Conflux Theatrical program** and support of community radio stations

Other loose threads and achievements

- Questions from the audience were encouraged and rewarded by panel throwing Minties to people who asked questions
- The miracle of the Salad and pasta, on Sunday a table of nearly a dozen Sydney fans sits down to a lunch of pasta and salad, when they rise to leave there is over twenty dollars more than the bill. The money is added to the donations jar.
- The convention was still running after 5.00 pm on both days.
- Fans were still talking to each other after the between panel breaks, which I see to be a 'great strength' rather than a sign of timetable weakness.
- With no full weekend SF&F event planned for 2004 (go to Conflux instead!) there was a vote on how to distribute the money left over from the 2003 SSFW and earlier

Sydney Freecons between four 'fan popular' charities.

- The rest of the weekend came and went in a con shaped Blur as panels arrived and left like trains at a suburban platform, early, late or cancelled. At times some panels started well then seemed to veer about 90 degrees off the agreed topic, but as long as people

The Writers of the 2003 Sydney SF Weekend who attended and read from their work

Leigh Blackmore
 Jon Blum
 Nathan Burrage
 Richard Harland (Wollongong)
 Rob Hood (Wollongong)
 Claire McKenna (Victorian)
 Gillian Polack (ACT) (read both days)
 Cat Sparks (Wollongong)
 Richard Womack

Also

Kevin Whately gave a brief reading of his poetry (Kate Forsyth sent her apologies, as she was very unwell with a cold that weekend)

Conclusions

1. I originally went into the 'business' of trying to run Sydney Freecons and the SF Weekend with the view that there just had to be lots of latent 'SF con demand' out there just waiting for a spark to ignite it and that my Freecon format would be the spark that would lead to Syncon sized conventions in Sydney 'real soon'. Four years on I believe I have demonstrated that it needs a much bigger event to get that sort of reaction. This year publicity was better organised but it seems that events of the level of a Freecon / Sydney SF Weekend can only expect about 40 people each day. I am more relaxed about this now.

2. This year the number of new faces was larger than previous events, both on Saturday and Sunday, covered the absence of 'old fans' and confirms my view that Sydney Freecons etc are at last beginning to form a 'new Sydney Fandom' of some sort.

To people used to Natcons and Worldcon numbers, these figures may seem pretty feeble, but to me they reinforce the idea that there are significant numbers of SF&F readers / viewers out there who can be 'turned' into con going SF fans.

3. Not a bad effort for the 'Harry Potter day' weekend. In future though it might be better to try the week before / after Winter Solstice, as various old fans / writers / SCA connections have longstanding commitments at this time of year.

4. For the next two-day Sydney SF con provide Five packets of tem p tins, three Madeira cakes, three packets of Mint slice and two packets of Ginger nut biscuits (more) and less of the plain biscuits (half packets?).

Next year and next Freecon?

The positive feedback I was getting all weekend from newcomers and old fans almost makes me want to say 'Hey lets do it again next year'. However the more fanac I do, the more I notice there other SF&F related activities taking place in Sydney, i.e. the appearances of local and overseas SF and Fantasy writers at sessions of the NSW Writers festivals (March, July and October), Sydney Festival (Feb), Sydney Writers Festival (May) as well as the occasional feature at Supa Nova, Parramatta SF Market days.

Brian Walls – The Sydney Passengers, the local Sherlock Holmes group and **Infinitas bookshop SF discussion group** These may not be 'Fan run' SF Life as we know it' but from a con organiser's point of view, trying to get event publicity or commitment from writers around these times is just not a viable option.

As Maximum leader, my decision then is to try for one or more single-day SF events during the two windows of November 2003 to February 2004 and June to August 2004.

Irish APA Famine Appeal!

While refraining from making any comments about 'Potato Powered Fandom', the following comes

unaltered from the September issue of Padraic O’Mealoid’s **Irish SF Times**, email contact details - irishsfnews@yahoo.co.uk

AND NOW A WORD FROM BOBBY ...

Bobby MacLaughlan is an old friend, and she has long been involved with various APAs (Amateur Press Alliance), so when she asked for a little publicity for this one, I was more than happy to oblige. **PAPA wants YOU!!!**

PAPA is a zine for people that want to write --- preferably SF. It is published by photocopying (Thanks to Read’s) every two months. We are up to issue no 118 but we’ve hit a snag. We need more writers --- alien/human/male /female /normal /weird (preferred).

Part of the deal is to comment on the writings in the previous issue. The flipside is that you get comments back up to 25, as the APA works best when there is a waiting list. Interested?? Contact

Bobby MacLaughlin – bobby@catalase.com

Garry’s ‘Official’ report on the 2003 Sydney SF Weekend, June 21 &22

Discovery Centre Meeting Room Level 2 Australian Museum Sydney

2003 is the fourth year that I have organised a Free Entry two-day SF&F convention largely without the help of a formal committee structure.

This year I had the help of several new people, several very helpful writers and some others who contributed single program items. After last year’s effort, four Sydney Freecons (and a three month cold!) I was feeling considerably ‘burnt out’ and considered dropping the whole project.

An anxiety highlight for the year was that while I was off work for a month with Bronchitis I received a jury service summons requiring that I attend from June 16, that is to say the week

immediately before the 2003 SSFW. This could have seen me in a jury box during office hours in the last week before the con and possibly being part of a locked up jury during the weekend of the con.

I had to keep organising the con under this cloud as there was a possibility that even if called, I need not necessarily be empanelled to sit on a jury. I discussed having an alternate ‘con-head’.

When I was back at work I sent off a letter to the NSW Sheriff’s office explaining the situation and successfully received a deferment, citing the consequences to others of my having to cancel the convention.

All thanks to the visionary staff of the NSW Sheriff’s department for this peculiar recognition of the validity of SF Fandom as a community experience. The con was able to proceed without having to get my Starfleet uniform dry-cleaned.

SOME NUMBERS

I was able to identify Forty Four people attending all or part of the 2003 SSFW, one or two others may have left without filling in registration forms.

Attendance

2003 ssfw	Saturday	Sunday	Both days
Attending	34	25	15
One day	19	10	29
New fans	06	06	12

Financials

Source of Funds	\$	\$	date
Left over from 2000-2002	132.00		
Tea &Coffee etc	201.95		

From Books	34.00		
Sunday Lunch	21.25		
Total Funds		389.20	
Expenses			
Pre-march, post	12.00		
June Postal	18.50		
Copy Paper	27.90		
Tea & Coffee etc	52.80		
Room Hire	88.00		
Post con Postal	10.00	209.20	
Surplus/balance		180.00	
Donated to			
Diabetes Aust.	\$78.75	43.7%	Jun. 30
Conflux Natcon	\$52.50	29.2%	Jun. 30
Aust Red Cross	\$33.75	18.7%	Jun. 30
GUFF	\$15.00	8.33%	Jun. 30
Total	\$180.0	100.00	
Carried Forward	NIL		July 01

The Sydney Futurians meeting July 18, 2003

Present were Garry P Dalrymple, John and Diane Fox, Ted Scribner, Brian Walls and Ian Woolf (who has been absent for several months due to ill health)

Topic: Superwomen in SF

Introduction

This account of the July 18 meeting is based on my recollections and the notes that I prepared in advance of the meeting. What you will read hear is biased towards my own impressions of the topic, but I have tried to be as inclusive as possible. I hope this record of our deliberations will prove to be a useful resource.

General News and announcements

-The new American variation on the 'sport' of paintball is 'Bambi hunting'. Where rich men are armed with 55 m/s paint ball guns and the women are hunted and naked. (on bare skin a 320 km ph paintball would hurt!). 'Winners' get to pose with and videotape their 'trophies' (what is there about this that we should find so strange?).

-Previously thought to be a volcanic effect, patches of soil in Mali that are hundreds of degrees C have been discovered to be caused by soil bacteria initiating underground peat fires

- New preventative treatment for prostate cancer, apparently a self-help procedure that allows men to take health matters into their own hands.

- The Friends of SF at Lidcombe (Sundays) have hired an extra room to suit their gamer members.

-Ted Scribner is currently the local agent for the 2005 Glasgow Worldcon.

-Zara Baxter is now the local agent for Thylacon the 2005 Natcon and / or the 2004 Swancon.

-A Red Dwarf movie is to be made in Australia.

-HQ Magazine is running a cartoon competition with a \$1,000 prize for the best two-page cartoon. Entry details to be found some where in the magazine.

-The latest edition of ASIM is out, continuing a relative drought of NSW writer credits. Are most of the NSW SF&F short story writers being published in Cat Sparks' AGOG or is the NSW talent pool so shallow?

-Ian Woolf is back on his feet, having been unwell since November last year.

-The Terminator 3 movie had been seen and was praised by Ian Woolf and Brian Walls.

-David Bofinger a regular Sydney Futurian, is back in Australia from a year or so of work in England.

-Tom Clancy wishes some of the work released under his name did not sell so well. The works in question are a series of books published under Tom Clancy's name but are written by a commissioned writer, with royalties and other rights benefiting his ex-wife. They were part of a divorce settlement.

-Ian was very concerned at copyright action students are part of a program by US publishers to make Australian law conform to US forms.

-Ian is again broadcasting (radio and internet) as part of the Discovery science program on 2SERFM, 9 AM Mondays? (See websites for program details).

-Some months ago Ian Woolf (and Emma Duncan Woolf) attended a preview of the yet to be released movie 'Cypher' a Science Fiction/Spy thriller movie that owes more to Phillip K. Dick and Harlan Ellison than George Lucas. The preview started ominously as Ian and Emma tried to find the sixth floor venue in a building that the lobby directory only listed five floors. It got even spookier when they noticed that the movie (shot in Toronto, Emma's home town, but pretending to be New York), about a main character assigned to attend trade fairs and conduct industrial espionage. The movie was filmed in venues well known to Ian and Emma from Toronto Star Trek conventions and also featured what is the 2003 Worldcon venue. At one point the main character even used a hotel room that they had used. Ian said that it was a very good SF film as well as being a strong enough spy thriller to have mundane appeal and that Lucy Liu can actually act!

-Apparently Kim Il Sung the North Korean dictator learned English from watching pirate copies of Star Trek!

-I found the recent 'Young Hitler' mini-series to be very disorienting. Characters were required to use a range of US regional accents (but the

newspapers and signs were in German!) at a subliminal level I could note assimilate Americans taking part in his rise to power from 1919 to 1933 (and where were Unity Mitford and Tom Mosley while all this was happening?). I saw the 'making of' documentary a few days before which depicted the producers own 'Mein Kampf' as they tried to depict a credible account of Hitler's early life and rise to power while their New York financial backers vacillated, insisting that Hitler not be shown as too much of a madman lest this be seen to be an excuse for his criminality and be a source of sympathy for a man not completely responsible for his criminal actions.

- Zara Baxter is looking at venues for a 'daycon', SF& F event that is likely to be more 'fannish' event than recent Sydney Freecons.

The Topic (at last) - What's In?

As usual it took some effort to establish acceptable parameters for the topic. Ted Scribner offered a pair of dictionary definitions, apparently the

Webster dictionary definition of a 'Superman' involves words including the post Niechszian genesis of a superman, while the 'Superwoman' definition just required that a woman succeed at both family and career. My list of 'Ins' and 'Outs' was accepted as a convenient starting point for the discussion and that 'Superwomen' of Science Fiction were required to be women gifted with Physical powers well above the ordinary, which could be innate or acquired and that these powers could be Magical, Technological, Intellectual or involve leadership. Another point that emerged from conversation was that Superwomen had to make use these powers. Possession of powers without participation in the affairs of the world was not enough, there has to be a question of effect involved in the Superwoman's participation in the SF story, usually as an agent of correction of a bad situation. The character of Super Women may have a sexual component that is not attached to Super Men. No doubt there is a body of deep dark psychology written about this.

What's Out?

Not a mind in a machine

Not a completely mechanical Woman

Not the beneficiary of a temporary lucky streak

Not a 'talismans bearing' Fantasy hero

Not a genuine God

Questions raised

1. How did they get that way and
2. How did they live?

Our list of Superwomen in SF

Honor Harrington – David Webber

Milla Jovic's character in Fifth Element

Ayesha / She – H Rider Haggard

(a comment was offered that in the end she enters the magic life preserving shower and emerges asGermaine Greer)

Earani – Out of the Silence

The Bene Gesserit Sisterhood of the Dune series by Frank Herbert

Podkayne of Mars – Robert Heinlien

Buffy, Faith, & other slayers – Joss Whedon
Xena Warrior Princess – By Ghodnose ?
Seven of Nine – Star Trek Voyager
Super girl, Bat Girl and **‘Wonder Woman’**
The Bionic Woman – TV
Max from Dark Angel (it was suggested that James Cameron conception of Max was highly influenced by the six book ‘Venus Prime’ books by AC Clarke and Paul Preuss)
Athena – The Gods remain original Star Trek **Gods and immortals** of Myth and Fantasy
Some characters within the Piers Anthony **‘Incarnation’ series of books**, exceptional people filling the roles of the Greek gods
Empress of the Multiverse – Glory Road
The Crysalids – John Wyndham
All Meta Humans – X Men (I think)
The Children of the Lens – EE Doc Smith (Kit, **Kat**, Con and Kam?)
Fairyland by James McCaully
Killashandra in ?? by Anne Macaffrey
Pat Cadigan, several books (we think?)

Probably not Superwomen

Barbarella
Lara Croft – Tomb raiders
Genie from TV’s I Love Genie
Sarah Connor – Terminator movies
Emma Peel from TV’s The Avengers
Samantha from TV’s Bewitched
Red Sonja – by guy that did Conan
Scully from TV’s The X Files
Characters from books by Johanna Russ
Greg Egan’s story about Women that went out their wombs to grow machine parts etc.

Garry’s four types of Super Women

- a. **Super Hero**
- b. **Power of the Ancients**
- c. **The capable modern woman**
- d. **The Cyborg/GM gal**

I think that classification of Super Women in science fiction can be resolved into a four-fold thing, Early and Modern and again easily splitting into two distinct types.

The earliest types of Super Women are variations on the theme of the 1930s Comic Book ‘Super

Hero’. Currently there is a cinematic revival and re-interpretation of these themes. These Super Women have magical ‘unscientific’ powers conferred on them by strange natural events or the intervention of older, more advanced alien races or mythical powers/beings capable of bestowing seemingly magical abilities.

The other type of early of Super Women, comes more from very early Science Fiction, where the powers are a gift from an ancient lost past, or by virtue of being a re-discoverer of the ‘secret wisdom of the ancients’ or being a survivor of the lost past.

There are two sorts of modern of the super woman, the emancipated women of stunning competence (Honor Harrington) and women who are enhanced by nearly comprehensible technology such as The bionic Woman and Seven of Nine, or who are genetically modified and manufactured to order, such as Max and her Manticor siblings from Dark Angel.

Modern and earlier Super Women live very different lives while still doing much the same line of extra-human, heroic interventions. The experience and lifestyle of the modern super woman is diametrically opposite to this. I think that a very telling and significant difference between Super Women old and new is that the great struggle of the older types was to keep secret their super identity and the source of their powers in order to live seemingly ordinary lives, while the modern sort of Super Women lives more openly and their problems are how to try to live among normal people who know what their powers are. A double life Vs living with celebrity?

Fandom, Science and SF&F News of the July 18 2003 Sydney Futurians meeting

June - I survived the 2003 Sydney SF Weekend. No post-con stress cold this year. Many new people attending and enjoying being there. I was much encouraged by some features of the 2003 SSFW, so I will be running more. The next two are likely to be single-day Freecons, timed to be

well clear of next year's 'local' Natcon, Conflux at Canberra.

July – IAU (Astronomy) conference currently in Sydney, just down the road. Eastcoast SF and the Eidolist have accounts of Melbourne's Continuum (reports of lots of drinking?). Ted Scribner attended and Selwa Anthony's Festival of popular Fiction and said that there were several panels featuring local SF&F writers which were well attended, but that lacking effective moderation, most panel members soon wandered off the advertised topic.

August – The 2003 Australian Skeptics National convention will take place in Canberra, August 22 to 24. Mars is at its closest and brightest for 70,000 years.

September – The free entry Magic Casements 'Festival of Speculative Fiction' will take place during the weekend of September 13 & 14, at the NSW Writers Centre, Rozelle. See the Ted Scribner's 'Krenon' websites or the Australian Science Fiction Bullshead for program & writer details etc.

October - Another NSW Writers Festival, at Rozelle, see the NSW Writers Centre website for more details.

November - The Sydney Futurians will meet for dinner at the (Transport?) Club in Harris Street, just round the corner from our usual venue NB details still to be determined.

Zara Baxter is looking at venues for a 'daycon', SF&F event that is likely to be more 'fannish' event than Sydney Freecons.

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The Australian Skeptics National Convention for 2003, held at the CSIRO Discovery Centre, August 22 to 24, Canberra ACT.

My little treat to myself when going on long trips (usually to interstate SF conventions) is to buy myself a copy of the Fortean Times. The issue available in late August included accounts of the 2003 UK Fortean's 'Unconvention', so I felt inspired to try to take some notes and render an account of what took place at the 2003 Australian Skeptics convention.

Garry's thoughts on some reasons why groups might want to hold annual conventions, i.e. criteria to judge the success of a con.

In no particular order of importance:

- a) To 'value-add' to ordinary memberships and raise revenue from ordinary members to subsidise group activities.
- b) Allow the passive membership to meet and be inspired by the activist membership.
- c) Report to all members on the group's achievements over the past year or significant developments.
- d) A repeat of what we did last year, coz it was an enjoyable day out and everyone has annual conventions?
- e) An opportunity for instruction and the sharing of experiences among the activist membership cadre.
- f) A social event for activist members to meet their interstate counterparts
- g) For outreach to the media and the general public. A larger forum for group ideas than at usual single topic public monthly meetings.
- h) A marketing opportunity for group and sympathetic goods & services.
- i) A chance for allied groups and sectional sub-interests to publicise to the full group membership and members of the public whose attention is caught by the broader event.
- j) Stimulate the production of material for the group's journal.
- k) A forum for an exchange of views with the public or adversary groups.
- l) Conference subscription money can allow you to import from overseas or interstate a speaker or performer that would not otherwise be available.
- m) Having an Annual convention in different cities serves to show the flag and has the potential of increasing your group's recognition / membership beyond the place where you are most started or are currently most active.

The venue for the 2003 Australian Skeptics convention was the CSIRO Discovery Centre's auditorium. The venue was located at the far side of the ANU campus, within the CSIRO's complex of laboratories and offices.

The Australian Skeptics convention for 2003 ran over three days, with a Young Skeptics event on Friday Afternoon, a Friday Evening public forum, Sessions on Saturday and Sunday and a Dinner on Saturday night.

I decided to leave for Canberra on Thursday, as some of the items on the 'young skeptics' Friday afternoon event seemed more interesting than items on Saturday and Sunday. To find my way to the venue I'm afraid I had to use dowsing rods. That is when they couldn't detect any water etc. I knew I must be getting near to a concentration of skeptics.

The people present were on the whole rather mature to be 'young skeptics' apparently more people had paid than attended. I get the feeling that an investigation of which Canberra High Schools had 'Sports day' on a Friday afternoon could have boosted the attendance.

General Impressions of Canberra

-Canberra women of all ages wear black coats and their hair longer than in Sydney, no doubt something to do with the climate and long hair being able to dry much faster than in Sydney. Consequently many of them look the same from

behind. I kept seeing the same Black/Blonde/Brown haired woman walking away from me all over Canberra.

-Even quite modest sized Newsagents in Canberra have a much broader range of local and overseas magazines that I have seen in the Sydney CBD.

-Magpies have moved into role occupied by seagulls in Sydney, hanging around until you are prepared to throw food scraps into the bin.

-The motor cars seen on the streets are a few years older than those seen on Sydney streets and there seem to be more Subaru cars than you would see double parked outside a k d lang concert.

-More shops seem to be vacant than last time I visited.

-Although Canberra people are more 'Anglo-Saxon' on average than Sydney or Melbourne, I was surprised at the greater fraction of 'black' people about, without a correspondingly larger

contingent of 'brown' or Asian faces in the crowd than is usual in Sydney, a consular town effect?

-Fire doors that are left open in Sydney, in Canberra are secured with 'break the bolt' type catches.

Friday PM – Young Skeptics event?

Welcome and Introduction from **Dr. Peter Griffith**, President of the Canberra Skeptics and con convenor.

Seeing is believing – or is it?

Nicholas J Johnstone – Magic tricks were performed, Napkins appearing and disappearing, a \$5 note teleporting into a lemon and examples of apparent 'mind reading' by controlling your 'free choice' of offered playing cards etc. Some of these tricks were explained and some were left as objects of wonder. Recommended 'funny bones' website.

How do we know it is really so

– was the moon landing faked? - **Peter Barrett**, Vice President Canberra Skeptics. Peter covered most of the more commonly cited 'reasons' why the moon landing must have been faked and the real world explanations for each. He also suggested some useful mental tools for evaluating internet claims in the absence of specific expertise on the topic.

Big topics in small bites – cults telepathy and more.

Lynne Kelly, a Science Maths and Technology teacher and writer. One of the better talks of the convention, but rather hard to describe as it wandered over a number of areas. Lynne is the principle of an Internet maths and Science Teacher, -Mentioned that Astrological dates were thousands of years shifted from reality

-Nostradamus' predictions, the ones that they do not publicise, contain all sorts of bloopers and omissions

-ESP card reading results even out over time, selection of 'good' portions only was to find above probability results.

-Levitation of the lifesaver along a stretched rubber band.

-Calls for 'safe believing' to be taught to young children.

Blood and guts - the ins and outs of psychic surgery - **Peter Griffith** and friends. This was a demonstration and talk through of the methods and tools of 'Psychic Surgery', with the usual exposition of fake blood, entrails and slight of hand.

Aliens on Mars - **Dr Neal Newman**, NASA representative to Australia. Dr Newman gave a comprehensive and well illustrated talk on what to expect from NASA's current mission to Mars, a pair of rover equipped landing craft that will unfold like a transformer toy and run for about 100 days of solar power, until collectors get too dusty while orbiters will be able to survey, sample and photograph Mars to a greater extent than previously possible. The only ominous note was that he had some difficulty translating Imperial to Metric measures and we all know what that leads to! He hopes that we will see humans as aliens on Mars in twenty years or so.

Skeptics student cartoon Competition - Unfortunately this event ended up attracted only a Homeopathic level of entries. The winning entries were shown and Prizes were awarded. Next time it might be better to hand this aspect of the convention over to the CSIRO's Double Helix club or to the people that run existing school Maths / Science competitions, in the same way that the Australian Skeptics Eureka Prize fits in with the Australian Museum etc.

Friday Night Open Forum: Alternative remedies - the Good, the Bad & the Ugly

Was billed as a public forum with Skeptics, the regulatory authority and an open offer to the Alternative Health Industry, in the hope that representatives of the 'Alternative' mindset would attend to explain the basis of their beliefs. No such luck, unforeseen circumstances apparently prevented the psychic busloads from turning up. In their absence the regulatory body received a bit more critical scrutiny than was probably expected. Not enough of a grilling to satisfy me, but the 'no-show' seriously unbalanced what could have been an illuminating session.

Alternative remedies - What are the options - **Dr Pete Griffith** - Discussed the range of Alternative therapies that were available and which forms of

conventional health practice had started as alternative remedies until their reliability had been proven.

Why do people believe in and use unproven or useless treatments? - **Prof Bob Montgomery** - Explored the limits of logic and the psychology of people faced with life threatening illness and their willingness to embrace any possible advantage. Also discussed the 'touchy feely' gap between most orthodox practitioners who know the limits of their existing technology and ignorant but sincere alternative practitioners who may genuinely believe that they can cure or at least help anyone suffering from any form of illness.

Dangerous Practitioners - **Peter Bowditch** - www.ratbags.com

Alternative Medicine claims that their stuff is safe, natural and can do no harm compared to the picture they choose to paint of orthodox medicine. Many of the statistics they quote are false or misleading and many Alternative Medicine practices such as side effects from undocumented ingredients. Ineffective 'remedies' or preventatives may leave consumers unprotected and at risk of passing on infectious diseases in the false belief that they are protected. The greatest risk to patients with potentially life threatening illnesses can be the reliance on 'Alternatives' at the cost of being delaying diagnosis by conventional medicine until their illness is no longer treatable.

The Alternative Remedies Industry - Protecting the Consumer

- **Val Johanson, Executive Director, (CCH) Complimentary Healthcare Council of Australia**

A talk that illustrated some of the conflicts inherent in attempting to regulate an industry where there is a basic conflict between what must be done to protect consumers and what Alternative Medicine lobby would like to get away with. The CHC regulates its members by consent and its standards are a matter of compromise between what Industry self interest and the government and medical industry's will to impose efficacy. Val came across as defensive about her body's role and unable to meet the criticisms (from a sceptical side) of the regulatory process' shortcomings.

Saturday Morning: Faith fear and superstitionMissing links - Prof Colin Groves

Colin gave a talk that covered a lot of geological time and ground on the subjects of the surprising number of intermediate fossils that have been discovered and illustrate the trend of evolution over millions of years and multiple species. This material is on the public record and has been communicated to creationists who continue to knowingly distribute material falsely claiming that science has no answers on this subject.

Fear of Death, Superstition and the Quest for Immortality - Dr Trevor Case

Faced with the apparent certainty of death people will clutch at any conceivable straw that seems to offer any additional chance of beating the odds.

Meteorological Myths, Mistakes and Mumbo Jumbo

- **Steve Symonds** Steve spoke mostly on the inability of meteorology to precisely predict time and location specific. Weather events due to some weather variables still being hard to observe and include in prediction calculations. He also explained that part of Australian weather's unseasonability may be the fault of trying to apply European notions to local Australian conditions. He gave some examples of the seasons recognised

by several aboriginal Australian groups. The seasons they identified were usually based on significant and locally observable natural phenomena specific to their area, such as animals bearing young or the flowering and fruiting of important food plants as well as wet/dry weather. There were pictures and an explanation of Lenticular Clouds and other unusual aerial phenomena. The final part of the talk was about the need to catalogue and investigate local weather myths such as the behaviour of birds and ants being predictors of weather to come. Some of these myths may be correct and useful, only documentation and investigation will tell.

Lies, Damned Lies – & Statistical Traps

- **Dr Borek Puza.** Not a dreary as it could have been, being a talk based on statistics. Mostly Dr Puza gave examples of the framework of

probability that explains most of the counter intuitive miraculous 'one in a million' occurrences that so frequently occur in modern life.

Conspiracies, Inventing things to believe in – Peter

Bowditch - Peter takes very seriously the pursuit of the shonks and scammers that occupy the 'imaginary goods and services' sector.

Saturday AfternoonHoles in the plot – Richard Saunders

Richard attempted to explain some of the way that some people can live with the self inconsistencies required to be a subscribing member of the group think required for holding 'new age' and 'fundamentalist' religious beliefs. He attempted to draw analogies with the ability of serious Sci-Fi fans (Not SF fans) to develop reasonable explanations for observed plot inconsistencies or apparent contradictions in episodes of their favourite Sci-Fi TV programs.

This is a rather different coverage and comes from a different point of view from my own article in a 2002 edition of Visions Newsletter, Fandom and Fundamentalism that deals with the similarity in behaviours between the groups of SF Fandom (Not Sci-Fi) and the fundamentalist or actively religious lifestyle. An incident during the talk astonished most of the audience by showing how well researched about 'canon' Sci-Fi fans can be.

Judgement day for the Bible Codes

Prof Brendan McKay - It seems that there is much less to Michael Drosnin's 'Bible Codes' than meets the eye. The 'Bible Codes' are supposed to work like this, you put all the words that make up your (that is in Hebrew!) into a computer then ask it to print them out for you as a table some number of characters high or wide. The end result is a big number of pieces of paper with letters all over them that you now treat as a giant 'find the word' puzzle. If you can find words spelt backwards, forwards or jumping a few lines, they all count. Where words intersect or are nearby they count as a prophecy or 'prediction'. In practice you can save time a lot of time by using freely available technology. You do not need to print all this out and do a manual search, as you can in fact just tell your computer to sample a range of numbers every 'X' hundred

letters and use word recognition software to sort out 'hits'.

Sounds like there might be something in it? Well probably not, when you take into account that Hebrew is spelled without consonants and letters can be numbers depending on context, so there can be many alternative Hebrew spellings for words, particularly non-Hebrew place names (if you are attempting to 'predict' that President JFK was killed in Dallas, Texas, Daley, Plaza, USA, 1963, CIA, FBI, KGB, America or Lone Gunman etc.). The clincher was that Drosnin responded to criticism of his methods by stating that he would believe them if they could find better predictions in Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick', which Prof McKay was easily and cheerfully able to demonstrate.

Mindpower: Fact, Fiction and Fakery

– **Ian Rowland** - A stage presentation by a professional 'magician' / illusionist, featuring 'mind reading' through sleight of hand and subconscious direction of apparently free choice. Quite a puzzling and entertaining show. Ian was also selling his book on cold reading that was highly recommended by Skeptics committee members who had read it.

Conference Dinner, Bent Spoon Award and other homespun entertainment

This year's bent spoon award went to a pair of 'Alternative Health' industry spokespersons who demanded at the height of the Pan Industries product recalls (due to non-existent quality control in a pill manufacturing plant, dosages in pills varying from non-existent to 'the lizard-monkeys are talking to me again) that Millions of taxpayer dollars be spent to tell the public that 'all was well' rather than insisting on pharmaceutical industry standards of quality control. After dinner entertainment was in the form of card tricks as attending magicians went from table to table demonstrating their professional skills.

Sunday Morning: Getting the message across - Why was he surprised Parts I and II

Prof Emeritus Chris Bryant AM and
Prof Sue Stockmayer

These two talks were in response to the gulf of understanding between some scientists and the public. This problem crops up more often than you would think, a public statement is issued by a prominent figure to the effect that they cannot understand why the public is so concerned about GM food / mobile / fluoridised water and mobile phone towers etc. when 'all the information' has been made available in the form of charts, graphs and other statistics and still the public persists in being concerned. In Science issues the public's concerns must be listened to and addressed rather than being flooded with statistics and statements of reassurance. The 'Anti' vaccination, Nuclear, Fluoridisation crowd are very good at hearing what matters to people and addressing their dogma to deeply emotive human concerns that will in practice always shoulder aside more rational considerations.

Capturing the young – Lynne Kelly

An animated discussion of issues encountered by a classroom and internet teacher of Maths and Science, how to get children interested and thinking straight about Maths and Science and collisions with 'beliefs' and the ethical considerations of what to do when empowering children to think rationally may lead to the rejection of their parent's irrational beliefs.

Spirituality is the new motherhood

– **Annie Warburton Old Skeptics**

Annie asks, What is this 'Spiritual' thing? Every thing seems to come with unchallenged claims of 'added spirituality' these days, although very few people can explain what they actually mean by 'spiritual' or the effective difference between the 'spiritual' and the 'unspiritual' product. Perhaps we should all start our own 'Spiritual jars' and make workmates, friends and family but a dollar in the jar each time they use the word 'spiritual' in your presence, violating your personal 'spiritual belief system' (and use the money to buy decent spirits at the nearby bottle shop).

Science to entertain and inform

– **Prof Mike Gore** - Story telling matters because a good story is remembered and re-told, so if you have a science message to deliver then make sure you can tell it with a memorable story attached. In between several stories Mike gave several

demonstrations of simple scientific principles. His story about Yackels could raise hackles though.

Sunday Afternoon: **the Planet and beyond**

Extraterrestrial Life - seeking the evidence – **Dr Jeremy Bailey** - This is a talk I walked out on, Dr Bailey is an Astronomer and most of the search for ET life is the province of Biologists and Geologists, I do not think he had much to say that I was not already aware of, 'It's a Bug Hunt', beyond SETI the major ET life search boils down to looking for life like the extreme-ophiles, things that live in the hot dark places that you can see with a microscope rather than something you can say 'take me to your leader'. He probably covered most of the basics, but as I had seen similar talks in Sydney I excused myself from a repeat.

Watchout for the happy Medium

– **Dr Colin Keay** - In a word, Hormeosis, all life on earth has evolved in the presence of many naturally occurring chemicals and effects that can be toxic in excess. Over 5,000 of these 'harmful' chemicals have been identified as being essential for well being in small quantities. 'Orthodox' alternative thinking promotes the view that there are 'no safe levels' for many man made substances and that the only safe environmental concentration is zero and that even very small doses will kill you in time.

This ignores the fact that in many cases there are places where people have lived for a long time with high 'natural' background concentrations (well above international health advisory limits) without apparent long term health complications. The true picture is that for a lot of things the 'wellbeing Vs exposure' graph starts with zero exposure being a harmful state of deficiency rising to concentration that gives a state of maximum measured wellbeing before wellbeing starts to drop back to 'average' long before concentrations approach estimations of LD50 (a concentration found to be lethal to 50% of exposed mice). Why this matters is that firstly pursuit of 'zero levels' of Toxic stuff is in fact not a path to community well being and secondly, there is considerable economic cost in maintaining these exposure levels based on false assumptions.

My criticisms of the Convention Venue:

The Discovery Centre venue was chosen on the basis of an 'unbeatable offer' quote for the convention and as I do not have details of the alternative quotes my criticism is muted, after all they did manage to fit in 200 plus people.

The Discovery Centre itself which is on the Black Mountain side of the ANU campus was remote from 'walk-in' trade (admittedly the weekend of rain wasn't encouraging perspective, it took me 20 to 30 minutes to walk in from my CBD hotel each Morning and Evening

Ingress and Egress (words you do not see that often in a con report), the Auditorium was designed for single presentation events, i.e. it had a single way in and out, unlike University theatres with several exits, it took a while for the Auditorium to empty and fill at the end of each session.

The Dinner cost and seating, \$35 doesn't get you much for a conference dinner even in Sydney and I expect that everything seems to cost a bit more in Canberra. They served re-heated catering pack entrées, a main course and a dessert. No booze was included in the \$35 per head and bar prices seemed a bit steep. I stuck to water ('the Spirit of the Lord should be intoxication enough for any man'). As a major cost of serving staff I expect that the cost of booze was something of a cost a re-coup on the conference facility quote. As the dinner was shoe-horned into an irregular spaced area of the Discovery Centre cafeteria I did not find it an ideal setting to listen to the after dinner presentations or to observe the outbreaks of spoon bending and card tricks which occurred after speeches concluded.

If I had been running the event, I would have tried to hold the convention dinner at a venue separate from the Convention, possibly one of the ACT's many service clubs for a more comfortable (and affordable?) dining experience for convention attendees (and Media?) with a keynote speaker (An evening with Ian Rowland doing his usual stage performance to a Skeptical AND public audience?) in addition to the usual awards and presentations. This could have allowed another avenue for the 'working public' to get some taste of the Skeptics convention experience and would have saved the conference venue the disruption of having to set up

for a dinner while the convention was running and needing to do lunches and morning and afternoon teas etc.

On the way home

I caught a 9.00 am bus out of Canberra without incident, finding the busses toilet made for a much less anxious ride than on Thursday morning. All the way up to Sydney by the side of the road were signs of the previous day's high winds and rain. There were dead trees and emergency services crews on the road verges and there was water in the creeks and dams that had been dry on the trip down to Canberra a four days before.

In Sydney itself there were only minor visible signs of destruction, mostly slight roof damage and tree shredder crews with trailers feeding fallen branches and whole trees into the machines to become loads of woodchips.

The most affected seemed to be the homeless, their cardboard shelters had been destroyed and their usual camping places in the shrubbery swept away by the winds. They were mostly sitting in the sun on the municipal grass waiting for their blankets and mattresses to dry out. The bus driver announced that he was retiring on Tuesday, after 38 years on the job, today being his second last day, and so it goes.

The bus did not stop at the airport as advertised, so I got off at Eddy Avenue and dragged myself round the corner to railway square and was fortunate to catch a bus home almost immediately and I was at home shortly after 1 pm.

When I arrived home my first sight was of a massive heap of bricks and rubble. Fortunately, it was on the lawn of the house next door, as the guy who has just moved in next door had taken delivery of a few thousand used bricks to build his garage.

Garry's Review of Magic Casements, a Festival of Speculative Fiction held on Saturday September 13, 2003,

at the NSW Writers Centre, Callan Park, Rozelle, Sydney

Impressions

The recent 'Magic Casements' Festival of Speculative Fiction was an enviable success. To have a SF&F event in Sydney with Writers and over 200 attendees justifies a re-definition of what is possible in Sydney SF&F events. The day was the sort of success that I wish I could claim to have had some part in.

I consider 'Magic Casements' to have been an event of national significance, with 31 credited guests from all Australian States (except Tasmania?) listed on the program sheet, Fantasy writers mostly with a few SF&F Academics.

On the bus to and from Callan Park it was possible to see a big welcome banner stretched across Leichhardt's main street, near the town hall. This was an early indication of how well run Magic Casements would prove to be. Many thanks must go to Irina Dunn, Ted Scribner the writers and the NSW Writers Centre's staff and volunteers who ran the event.

The event was run by the NSW Writers Centre, as a Literary Festival to showcase many of Australia's SF, Fantasy and Horror writers under the banner of 'Speculative Fiction'. In my opinion the important difference between it and a SF convention was that people attending Festivals do so to see what is new and to be entertained, while at a SF convention the most important thing is that SF fans have an opportunity to be among and talk to fellow SF&F fans AND to see what is new and to be entertained.

It was a very good day out, but not a very Science Fictional day out, even though some fannish stuff was done. On the grass and at lunchtime there was a fair amount of fan interaction, but this was largely in spite of the scheduled sessions. Quite a few attendees took the third room option, to sit in the winter afternoon sun and catch up with friends from Convergence or the last CSF con.

When reading the rest of this report please bear in mind that where I appear to be critical of events during Magic Casements, I do so from a highly subjective point of view which is really no reflection on what the NSW Writers Centre's set out to achieve.

In it's nearness to a Science Fiction event I would liken it to last year's Fantastic Fictions, a Sydney SF&F symposium where Academic SF&F was very generously made available to the interested public, including SF&F fans.

In the crowd (and isn't it nice to be able to use the word 'crowd' in a sentence about a Sydney SF&F

event) I noticed a few familiar faces from Sydney Freecons. As only a fraction of all the Sydney Freecon / Futurian people were there I assume that next year, with a Sunday program and the transport issue addressed, a two day Magic Casements event could attract almost double this year's attendance for the same publicity effort.

From the too quiet, passive and respectful behaviour of the majority of people present I would guess that only a minority of them would have identified as 'fans' of Fantasy or Science Fiction.

The Sessions that I didn't attend

Tips on becoming a successful Speculative Fiction author with Terry Dowling (*With Terry Dowling and Van Ikin*) This was the only pay-to-see (\$15) session during Magic Casements.

The art and craft of building imaginary worlds (*With Terry Dowling, Richard Harland, Maxine McArthur and Fiona McIntosh*)

Magic, sorcery, wizardry and the Spirit world (*With Chris Barnes, Kate Forsyth, Josephine Pennicott and Gillian Polack*)

Breaking into the business: newcomers discuss their experiences (*With Deborah Biancotti, Nathan Burrage, Michelle Marquardt, Ben Peek and Kyla Ward*)

The Sessions I did attend (GPD)

I left home (Earlwood) a bit after 8 am and ended up at the Writers Centre a bit after 10.30, via two buses (the 412 and the 445) and a couple of pages of reading time spent waiting between buses. On arrival I spent some time dithering around, trying to hand copies of my Freecon Writers bookmark to each of the writers listed on it and sorting out the heap of SF and Sci-Fi meeting flyers I had brought with me (Sydney Dr. Who Club, 25 copies of the Irish SF Times, a bookmark of Freecon Writers, A Sydney Futurians meeting notice and some 'After Magic Casements' forms for Sydney Freecons).

As Magic Casements was a two room / two program track event I was only able to attend one half the events on offer. **NB the sessions I attended are marked - GPD, sessions where notes were provided by Rod McLeod are marked - RMcL.**

As I caught only the last few minutes of

Oh for a Muse of Fire: sources of inspiration (*With Traci Harding, Louise Katz & Ted Scribner*) – GPD

I can't offer much of an impression of the substance of the talk, other than to say that the audience still seemed quite absorbed towards the end.

Ted had told me earlier that in planning for Magic Casements the program had originally been intended have a 'something for writers room' and a 'something for readers room', but on the day I could not really discern much of a distinction.

I am grateful to Rod McLeod for permission to use a part of his report on Magic Casements that was posted to Fantastic Fictions on September 17. His report on two sessions that I did not attend brings this report's coverage to five out of eight sessions.

RMcL **Oh for a muse of fire! Sources of Inspiration** - *Both Caiseal Mor and Louise Katz had strategies for using all the ideas from the unconscious as they arrived. Stories come from the source and are then altered by discipline. Louise Katz used a notebook for recording ideas and are then altered by discipline. Louise Katz used a notebook for recording ideas and recorded dreams*

when they came. Caiseal firmly believed that writing was a matter of priming the mind and practising the skills. Speaking Gaelic until 15 and living in a home where he was saturated with original Irish folktales and stories from an illiterate grandmother certainly gives you a strong base for writing Celtic fantasy, though. Caiseal deliberately primed his mind before sleep and then steadily dreamed his way through his novels. He plays his Irish harp and writes a novel in about three months.

RMcL The Art and Craft of building Imaginary Worlds. (With Terry Dowling, Richard Harland, Maxine MacArthur and Fiona McIntosh) *Fiona was the least disciplined of any of the writers she knew and described her way of writing, which was to write from her English background that she knew well. She wrote in her off time from her family and her business. She wrote drafts, without revision and then passed these to readers who pointed out any problems, which she then fixed in a re-write. In contrast, Richard Harland, (ex Uni of Wollongong) was a very engaging and articulate speaker on the necessity for developing a detailed background and back history for his books, which he put a lot of time into. Terry Dowling had constructed an elaborate backstory for his Rynosseros stories, which he will finally reveal in his next book. Maxine was another careful planner, to prevent plot problems developing.*

I attended the following sessions, seeing the back of Rod's head for two of these sessions.

Speculative fiction publishing: the gatekeepers (with Leigh Blackmore, James Cain, Bill Congreve, Van Ikin, Stephanie Smith & Cat Sparks) – GPD

The panel was very representative of the producer and distributor side of the Australian SF&F publishing Industry. This panel gave a very good overview of how Australian Speculative Fiction gets to be publishing Industry' and describes fairly well the barriers to ease of publishing Spec. Fiction in Australia. Catch 22 seems to be the rule of thumb, in that to have any hope of getting a SF&F novel published, you need a pre-existing track record of Small Press success. Hence the true 'Gate

Keepers' seem to be the abstraction of 'public demand for SF&F' that seems to be installed in the wet ware of the publishing industry bean counters who only want 'mass market' successes. Most of the writers on the panel had 'succeeded' largely through the route of 'non-professionalism' i.e. self publishing, being active in 'not very-commercial' SF&F publications and by winning fannish awards. The panellists who made it by through 'do-it-yourself' SF&F publishing made it sound easier than it must have been, but it is important to remember that those on this panel were after all the success stories of Australian SF&F publishing (no matter what their bank managers may think) and we did not get to hear from the unsuccessful side, those who 'tried'n'died'.

In passing a minor point was raised by Stephanie Smith, that Harper Collins Voyager expected to publish only a handful of Australian SF books in the next 12 months. This stuck in my mind over the rest of the day as I began to notice how little 'Science Fiction' there was at this event, compared to the volume and frequency of Fantasy books and writers. It seems that Book length Fantasy is doing really well in commercial publishing, but that Science Fiction is largely dependent on the ebb and flow of the level of commitment of small press and fan based publishing. One day someone is going to have to explain to me how it is that in Australia there are 'Science Fiction' conventions and SF fans while Fantasy outsells SF by a disturbing multiple but the only 'Fantasy Fans' you meet are at SF conventions. Are there such things as organised (fannish) Fantasy fans in Australia?

A view from the Ivory tower: Academics Speak (with Susan Batho, Ruth Drobnak, Angus Glashier & Kim Selling) – GPD

I had been looking forward to this panel, as a continuation of what occurred at Fantastic Fictions, where we got a view of what Academics found to be interesting about SF&F and to a lesser extent SF fandom, but this did not happen. There was a better discussion of the practical difficulties in getting SF onto the HSC and the High School English Syllabus during the previous panel. Rather too much time was spent on poetry, justification for Academic interest in teaching Fantasy, and an overly long and unnecessary

'academic' attempt to explain how the term 'Ivory Tower' entered the English language. A listing of current and future SF&F related PhDs might have been welcome.

Most useful was Susan Batho's explanation of her trajectory into Academia via Fan writings and the gulf of understanding she encounters as a resident of two cultures, fannish and Academic in trying to translate the cult language that Academia tries to use when it encounters material common to the Fannish experience.

Shadows and Light: the Horror and the Humour (*with Simon Brown, Robert Hood, Chuck McKenzie & Richard Womack*) -GPD

This turned out to be the most fannish and enjoyable of the sessions that I attended, as the panellists seemed more relaxed and the audience felt better able to participate, at times it felt like some of the audience had time-slipped back into a Syncon mode of Audience to panel banter. Discussion of Fan interests and experiences were part of this panel talk and alone of all the sessions I attended, this one spent some time talking about non-book stuff, Sci-Fi and Horror movies. The panel was in agreement that in both Humour and Horror (and Science Fiction) the inversion of the mundane or the expected was a key part of the story.

For the Future

Towards the end of the day I was able to speak briefly with Irina Dunn (Director of the NSW Writers Centre) about the likely future of Magic Casements. Irina seemed very well pleased with

attendance and how the day turned out. For next year it is likely that the event will be repeated, at the same venue, over two days and at much the same time of year (well ahead of October's NSW Writers Centre Harvest Festival). The event for 2004 may also include some opportunities for SF&F Art.

Conclusions I draw from the day

Before people start to howl for blood or ask 'Who does this Garry person think that he is', let me

point out that the following is only my opinions and represent my thinking out loud about matters that concern me but which probably do not reflect what 'should', 'must' or 'will' happen in relation to SF&F meetings and conventions in Sydney or elsewhere. I have organised some rather idiosyncratic SF cons in Sydney, so having thought about Magic Casements the following are some of my conclusions, you may well disagree with most of them:

- **Negatives:**

I have seen several email comments posted about Magic Casements and they are without exception positive. The only Negative point that I have been able to identify is that while the Speculative Fiction writers all loved it (perfectly understandable for a Writers Centre run event). Fans of SF have been quieter, indeed, Rod McLeod in his report posted to Fantastic Fictions used words to the effect that Fantasy came first, Horror second and SF a distant third.

- **SF Differentiation:**

Magic Casements was a SF&F event featuring mostly Australian Fantasy writers and very little local Science Fiction and even less room for discussion of non Australian SF, which is the greater part of the SF that is likely to be encountered by an Australian SF reader or SF convention attending fan. Future Sydney SF events of the 'lit' sort may need to make an effort to clearly differentiate what they offer from what will be available at the events that will follow Magic Casements.

- **Symbiosis:**

Alternatively, should I propose to Irena that there should be a less formal 'Veranda con' program stream at next year's Magic Casements, a set of shorter more fannish Australian and overseas SF panels specifically for the minority fannish and SF interested section?

- **Mainstream publicity advantages?**

Given the clear success of well organised publicity, should I develop a relationship with one of Sydney's large annual Arts / Literature Festivals so as to benefit from having a Bankstown / North Sydney suburban Freecon publicised listed as one of their events.

- **Sydney's fan population:**

It is almost 'bankable' that a two-day Syncon like SF convention with adequate guests, venue, date,

