

iOTA 18
November 2020

iOTA is the little efanzone put together by Leigh Edmonds who can be contacted electronically, and in almost no other way, at leighedmonds01@gmail.com.

This little efanzone is produced as a progress report on my project to research and write a history of Australian fandom. *iOTA* is a research tool and document, containing some of the material and thoughts that will be used in writing the history. It is also a place where I publish bits and pieces of the writing and art from Australia's fannish past to help introduce you to the rich vein of material that previous generations of Australian fans have left us. If you want more details about this history project you'll find them in the first issue of *iOTA* or an update in *iOTA* 13.

iOTA is more or less available from me for 'the usual' or issues of *iOTA* are put up on efanzines.com fairly soon after I've completed them.

EDITORIAL On The Job

I've not much to say about this project right now, the writing is going ahead apace and coming out fairly well. It's not the easiest work I've done.

A NOTE ON JOHN BANGSUND

It is a very sad time in Australian fandom. In the previous issue I noted and wrote about the death of Merv Binns and in this issue I must write about the death of John Bangsund. I find writing about John very difficult because anything I might write would seem trite and clumsy in comparison to John's ability with words. There is also the problem that I've known him since I was 18 and his influence on my life has been greater than I can express.

It was John who set me on the path to becoming a fanzine fan. Unlike most who will write about John, his major influence on me was not *Australian Science Fiction Review* but a little newszine he called *The Cosmic Dustbug*. In it for the first time John unleashed his talents as a fannish, witty, jovial and entertaining writer. That interested me more than serious discussion of science fiction. With the creation of ANZAPA and John's other publishing adventures his fanwriting blossomed.

As a person I probably knew him as well as any other fan, having shared slant shacks with he, Diane and Paul Stevens in (probably) 1967-69.

Melbourne fandom blossomed when John ran what was basically an open house at Bundalohn Court in the early 1970s; almost any time day or night there was something fannish and interesting happening there - a lot of talking, drinking and listening to music. He let his spare bedroom to a number of people including Valma Brown.

Sometime in the early 1970s Valma and I embarked on our lives together and John's influence dwindled. At some time he moved to Canberra to take up a job with the AGPS and I had little contact with him after that, except for a very sodden week we spent there with he and Sally, which my liver is still recovering from. By the beginning of the 1980s I was moving into different circles and saw very little of John's development as a fan and editor. Still, it was when I was a bumbling neofan that John influenced me the most and it is for that gentle and generous introduction to the world that I owe John more than I can say.

OTHER TIMES, OTHER VOICES

The work of trawling through old fanzines continues. It has become more focused since I began writing the history and the reprints I offer here reflect that. Lee Harding was probably not the only fannish fan in Australia in the 1950s but he seems to have been almost the only one who put his energies into publishing fanzines, which explains why there is so much of his writing appears in this issue. (As we will see in later chapters, there were probably a few fans in Sydney who were similarly inclined but they put their energy into drinking and feuding instead. This might have been great fun at the time but leaves little historical evidence for people like me who come along later looking for stuff to reprint in fanzines like *iOTA*.)

Some of Lee's best writing in the later fanzines he published in the 1950s was his reviews, but they are not very useful in helping to sketch in a picture of what being a fan in Melbourne in the period was like. So, instead, here is a snippet of the experience of going to a meeting of the Melbourne SF Group in the basement of the Oddfellows Hall in mid 1953. Imagine it's a cold and blustery evening in Melbourne and you find yourself at the Spring Street end of Latrobe Street in central Melbourne,

not one of the most savory parts of Melbourne, to be sure. This description comes from the first version of *Wastebasket* 2 that Lee published in July 1953. He was probably around 16 at the time.

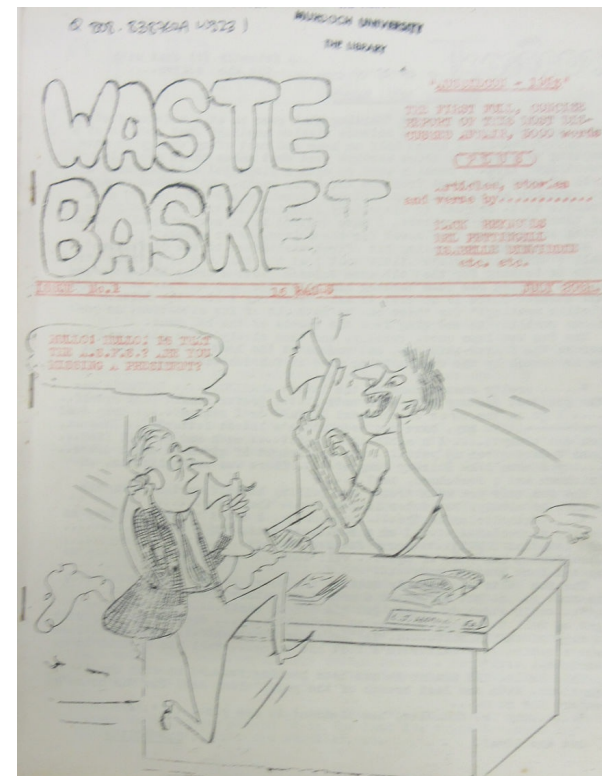
The Fan Who Dared Lee Harding

People keep asking me 'Harding what goes on at a science fiction meeting? What goes on at a science fiction meeting? What goes on at a'. Usually I spend half an hour and most of my energy in attempting to reveal to those worthys just what makes these so-called 'meetings' tick. I usually end up with a disgusted audience and a look of pure blankness from the enquiring party,

who somehow manages to remember an important appointment elsewhere and hurries off at a frantic trot. So just to dispel any illusions as to what DOES go on at these fan get-togethers, I have decided to do away with all formalities and let the fans speak for themselves, so to speak.

Now, take the fan making his first visitation to the Oddfellows' Hall (VERY appropriate title that) at the tall end of Latrobe street.

He is looking for



the Melbourne Science Fiction Group that some guy called Harding has been bashing him about for many months. He ascends the stairs. There is no need to ask 'Where may I find the Science Fiction meeting?' for there can be no doubt of its situation. An ominous rumbling is emerging from the bowels of the basement.

The fan swallows once, quickly, and then slowly drags his timid feet across the Shaver-skin rug, and pauses at the head of the stairs as he is struck by the overwhelming wave of fannish warbling

'..... pretty snazzy dame on the latest AMAZING FANTASIA was the greatest fantasy film ever made I prefer Donald Duck myself I go on the cover of the next PERHAPS or I resign drop dead you ----- say, have you seen Stone's latest letter? Haaaaaa, you don't say! I'm a biblical typist seek and ye will find hasn't Dard given up yet? sex is alright if given in small doses you mean like Shirley temple? There was an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotchman, see?

The fan quivers with dread, but pulling himself upright from his fours, he slowly, but determinedly descends the steps

'..... Catholicism is the personally, I don't think the Party is really appreciated ... I am a BNF yeah, Big Noise Fan who let that BEM in sorry Jenssen, old boy look, blood Aussiefandom has come of age will somebody give Harding the key so he can lock himself up?

The fan halts uncertainly outside the door, He has come too far now, he must go on. But he pauses a moment to gather his strength

'..... will somebody please get him off my back? you should get on well together, both being earbashers doesn't anybody want a copy of WASTEBASKET is the paper absorbent? duck boys, look who's coming Walkerden's lost his voice tell him to look in my earhole

This is it. THE moment he has been looking forward to with chaotic emotions. With one last breath of the good, clean air, The Fan bravely enters the room

'..... why Mr Chandler, how pleasant to see you

Get the idea?

Moving along in time three years we find Lee largely disassociated from the Melbourne SF Group but still with a lot of the fannish spirit surging through his veins. He gave vent to this spirit in two issues of *Antipodes* which was not written for Australian fans but to make connection with overseas fans. In the second issue he looked back to his baptism into fandom, and to the dark mysteries of fan publishing in the 1950s. This article comes from *Antipodes* 2,

YOU TOO CAN PUBLISH A FANZINE

Certain Memoirs being episodes from First Fandom in Melbourne Lee Harding

FORWARD

Purely through geographical arrangements, Australian fandom resides at the pit of the world entity we usually associate with American, British and Willis fandom. This is, of course, the fault of ghod and not we humble trufans, who quite naturally loathe this state of affairs.

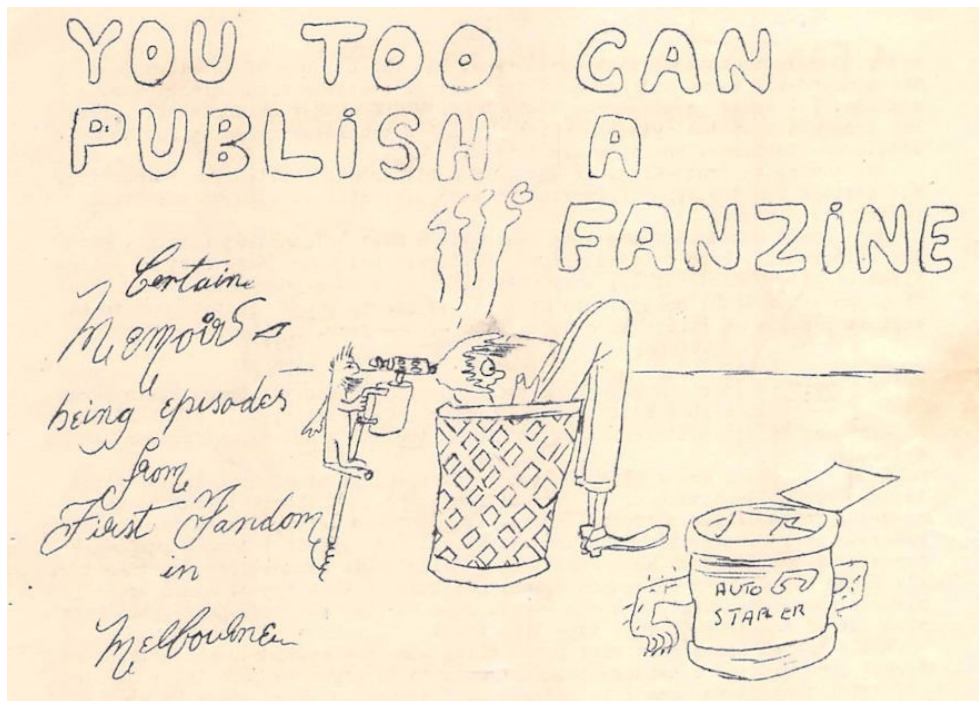
We seem to have become notably famous for our so called 'feuds' of some time back, which for some indefinable reason were given more blatant publicity by our BNFs overseas than our more durable accomplishments. Still, who was it said that the mind of fan is a strange thing indeed?

I myself got more wholesome enjoyment out of my neofan

days than other might like to remember. (Apparently they're afraid it reflects on their newly found moral integrity or something like that). Therefore, the object of these reminiscences that follow is to show that Aussifans are pretty much the same as fans the world over. They have the same bright spark of actifanning, they disagree sometimes, they produce fanzines, organize conventions

They even read science fiction.

And I do hope that you enjoy these memoirs, for I got a hell of a kick out of living them.



A FANTASTIC COLLABORATION!!

By

Lee Harding and Dick Jenssen

PART ONE

'ENCOUNTER AND CONCEPTION'

The Brighton bus bounced and rattled along its bizarre course while two wild-eyed youngsters in the rear of the coach were engaged in earnest conversation, oblivious of the unease apparent in the eyes of the fellow passengers. They could perhaps be excused on the grounds of suspecting that all was not as it should be in the minds of the merrily gabbling boys.

A sample of their loud, hand-waving conversation went as follows:

'That terrific series of yarns by Bradbury in ARGOSY some time back. All about a family of vampires and one of the kids who didn't have teeth like the rest and couldn't fly and didn't feel attracted to blood at all'

'Then there was that "Mars Is Heaven" thing ...'

'... yeah, that was about his best. Been quite a bit in that mag y'know. That was where I first encountered him. Bradbury. I mean. Then there was that colossal thing of his in an issue of PLANET called "Pillar of Fire" ...'

'It was YOU who scrawled "terrific" and 'this is the best yet', and so forth, all over that issue of Franklin's library?'

'(grinning ghoulishly) Yep, that was me. Also a Temple yarn in an unusually good issue of AMAZING, of all things ...'

And so forth. Little wonder that the other occupants of the bus thought they were sitting next to a couple of budding imbeciles.

The young chap enthusing over Ray Bradbury was a rather anemic young fellow of fifteen named Leo Harding; the other was a wickedly bem-faced something-or-other, about a year older, and would have everyone believe he was a human being, type Dick Jenssen. It would have been well to study those two names carefully in those early years, for they were to become, along with

Campbell tag-lines, a byword on latrine walls.

The two fans were on their way to the second 'official' meeting of unorganized Melbourne fandom. This was early in 1951, if Harding's memory serves him rightly, and the meeting was being held at the home of Race Mathews, a prominent Melbfan of some standing.

Harding had come in contact with Race via Rog Dard, in Perth, whom he had contacted as Australian Representative for OPERATION FANTAST. He had got the address of that esteemed establishment some time ago, in an edition of STARTLING in Franklin's Library. This library consisted of many rare pre-war US promage, including WONDER STORIES and early AMAZINGs that Old Man Franklin had bought up, brutalized them by removing the covers of each issue and having them bound separately and pasted the covers on the resulting ragged job. He then set up a purely S-F library composed of these priceless gems, and charged a membership fee of £2/-/-. This was later dropped to 10/-, and was a great boon to Harding's diet, for it was here that he became embroiled in fanzines and the jargon of fandom. Dick Jenssen had a like experience, though had also been a long time friend of Race Mathews, as a result of which he became associated with s-f and bad women at a rather early age.

The first 'official' gathering of Melbourne fans had been held some few weeks previously, and had quite a nice success. I had been absent because of ill-health, and I believe that this time was Jenssen's first 'official' visit. By now, of course, as the two youngest members of the group we had unfortunately become inseparable, so that one was always referring to Jenssen and Harding as one singular entity.

At this second meeting something like a round dozen fans were present, mostly the old timers from pre-war days who had long since disappeared from active fanning. Prominent among the

guests that evening was one Bob McCubbin, Bob, thank, ghu, is still with us, and I hope he stays with us for quite some time to come. At least until the OLYMPICON is over and done with ... Quite easily the most prominent and dynamic personality in Melbourne Fandom, Bob has been the backbone of the organization since its inception, and acts as a sort of unofficial overseas ambassador to American fandom.

Harding hugged the outskirts of the meeting that night, proudly waving the hard-cover edition of 'Green Hill of Earth' only just arrived from Ken Chapman, but to no obvious effect. Together with Dick Jenssen he huddled down in one corner and they earbashed each other solidly for the next four hours, stuffing their hungry bowels with Mrs Mathews' excellent tit-bits provided for our collective supper. I still swear that we collected over half of THAT supper ...

My main recollection of Race Mathews is that of a gigantic Tarantula. He was more than a shade over six feet and I'll swear that at least five of them were taken up with legs and feet. His most customary position was to squat on his haunches in whatever room he happened to be in, and curl his legs up, yoga fashion, in front of him. This usually left room for about three other fans at the most in a 20 x 16 room. It was thus that we coined the phrase 'Tarantula Mathews'.

Race also possessed a rather cherubic face that would have went down well with femmfans - but unfortunately we didn't have any at that particular time. If we had we mightn't have been so busy concocting fanzines as concocting other things. These features combined with massive curling, dark hair and an amazing amount of artificial self-assurance, which didn't for one moment fool any of us, led to a rather high and exalted position in Melbfandom. He lost more money publish a fanmag than the rest of us put together.

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After these first two 'trial' meetings, the leading fans took it in turn to play host at something like monthly intervals to the rest of the Melbourne fans. This situation eventually got out of hand when one night at Bob McCubbin's something like 20 fans turned up and we had to resort to the time-honoured practice of name cards to distinguish each other. This started us on the hunt for 'premises'.

I would like to point out that at this particular time the only form of s-f available down-under were the regular BREs of ASTOUNDING, THRILLING WONDER STORIES and PLANET, though the last three were highly irregular. There was also the regular AUTHENTIC, but NEW WORLDS and SCIENCE FANTAST were unknown. It was therefore understandable that the only members we could get would be the 'old timers' and the newcomers who had access to American magazines, such as those who frequented Franklin's Library. The number of these readers who were actually interested in fandom was understandably equal to that amount of regular readers who become fans, and so we didn't get many - if any - neofans via that medium.

After a prolonged search, the group finally settled for Val's Coffee Lounge in the heart of Melbourne. Now, I know that many reading this have always professed the desire of holding a convention or some such affair in a brothel. Let it be known, therefore, that the Melbourne fans have actually DONE this, for Val's, as this establishment was popularly known, was revealed as a hangout for every imaginable pervert and sexually warped individual in Melbourne. Not that they interfered with fans - it was just that the ATMOSPHERE was so damned nauseating, that we finally had to start looking for more suitable premises. Bob McCubbin quoted: 'Introverts and extroverts we may be, but

perverts never!'

Unfortunately, I might add, none of us every thought to take advantage of the more unusual aspects of this establishment. At least, I don't THINK so. Thought come to think of it, I do remember one member of our refined Group fraternizing with the 'others' and disappearing for a few hours every now and then. Fortunately he later parted company with s-f.

Possibly the most cataclysmic event ever to occur in the whole sordid history of Melbourne Fandom was the introduction of a new fan to the VAL's meetings. His name was Mervyn Binns, and for a living he dispensed s-f and other assorted literature over the counter at McGill's, Melbourne's leading book and magazine retailer (advert). This very sinister looking character certainly made his presence (he hardly said a word - then) felt, and many and varied were the suggestions as to what he did at nighttime. (The same way that most of them wondered whether Harding slept in a bed with some dame or hung by his toes from some appropriate rafter.)

The names of Binns and McGill's are now recorded history. Every genuine trufan takes off his hat when he enters McGill's Newsagency and makes his Offering to Binns at the Altar (or Counter) and receives in return the latest ASTOUNDING, the latest NEW WORLDS, or the latest in French Postcards. It all depends on the point of view ... or something like that.

Apart from turning his employer's establishment into the High Altar of Melbourne Fandom, Mervyn also managed to earbash purchasers of s-f mags and books into coming along to the meetings at VAL'S. This was perhaps a rather unfortunate time to encourage new members! However, as the weeks went by and Binns' overpowering willpower made itself felt, attendances began topping well over the 20 mark. In the smoke filled, feminine-filled (with well-filled you-know-whats), grease-filled atmosphere of VAL'S this was a little over the fence. Harding couldn't hear himself

talk, anyway.

The above reasons set us on the search for new premises. That and a desire to be among decent people. (Eg Fellow s-fans. Modesty was not one of our finer points ...)

One of the highlights of our brief sojourn at VAL'S was a visit by Bill Veney, old time s-f fan en route from Sunny Queensland to Fresh Tasmania. At an informal meeting at Bob's a week previously he had brought up the idea of forming the Melbourne Fans into a loose-knit, informal 'Group', away from the pseudo-organization of the Sydney cliques. I don't think the matter was brought up during his visit to our 'coffee Lounge' - indeed, I seem to remember only a hurried exchange between Bill and I on the subject of Bradbury, Dard, OF, Sydney Fandom, and more Bradbury. Then we had to dash madly out before the local vice-squad made its periodic raid on the esteemed establishment. We were rather fortunate in that all the time the joint was raided during our sojourn, something like half a doze within a couple of months (that's all I counted!) we didn't happen to be present at ANY of them. Maybe we weren't so fortunate at that. I've always wondered what a genuine 100% Police Raid was really like. You know, in them Yankee Crime movies. Bogart blasting away at stiff-upper lip 'Tec and so forth ...

Our new headquarters turned out to be a basement room in the Oddfellow's Hall, at the tall end of Latrobe Street in the city (and I make no excuses for that title. And punsters beware: it's been worked to death down here already). It was rather difficult to obtain premises in the city itself, and we were rather lucky to get even the basement!

Here it was that the library of mags and books that had been handled precariously by Bob McCubbin amidst the food encrusted tables at VAL'S, was turned over to the safe keeping of Race Mathews. An immense trunk was loaned to the group by Bob, in

which the precious US promags, BREs and hardcover stuff were installed and dragged out regularly at every meeting. I don't think Race was ever sure just whether he was librarian or not. Anyway, he never seemed to do much about it. Mervyn Binns eventually took over this side of the business and has since made an admirable job of it.

Shortly before taking leave of VAL'S, our bunch of fans became officially The Melbourne Science Fiction Group. The foundation members at that time were Bob McCubbin, Race Mathews, Dick Jenssen, Marshall McLennan and Gordon Kirby. The latter two didn't take long to fade in a puff of smoke, Marshall for family reasons (he was an old timer from Pre-war days), and Gordon for more pressing University duties.

Installed in our new, quiet premises, we began holding film nights with the help of one of the fans, Dan Bicknell. These were held roughly once a month, and usually went off quite well. The roll up usually flowed between 12 and 20, and on rare occasions topped the two dozen mark.

Six months passed, during which time the membership remained steady. It was about this time that Merv Binns, taking the bit between his whiskers, ordered immense supploes of back issu NEW WORLDS and SCIENCE FANTASY. The counter was literally swamped with the stuff! Merv eventually convinced his boss of the fortune to be mikled out of s-f, so he arranged a special counter for our favorite literature. It's still in existence today.

We began to see a lot of 'transient' members; those who appeared for a single meeting at Binns' behest and failed to reappear. Still, we weren't unduly concerned, for they weren't really fans if they couldn't find something in common with sex, bheer, jazz and the Union Jack - and science fiction.

The Great Decision, as we now refer to it, occurred one night deep in the depths of Oddfellow's Hall, in our own little sanctuary

of gabbling humanity. Mervyn, Dick and Harding were squatting down at a tablee discussing – well, what DO fans discuss? – when Dick happened to casually pick up Bob’s latest newsheet of the Group. This was a single page foolscap ‘letter’ that Bob produced periodically and mailed out to interested fans, and consisted of Progress Reports on our doings.

Now, here events becom somewhat vague. I can’t recall at all truthfully just who it was who suggested the Great Idea at that moment. All I know is that one of the Terrible Trie – possibly either Dick or myself – uttered the Immortal Words”

‘Why don’t we publish a decent fanzine?’

Needless to say, anything remotely resembling silence was shattered from that moment on. Dick folded the foolscap sheet over once, the light of neo-fan fanaticism glaring from his third eye. ‘Why not like this?’ he gabbled. ‘About 12 pages’, followed the second set of Immortal Words.

Harding slobbered slightly and wiped his chin. ‘Sure, why not?’

Binns nodded his head in that off-headed way of his and riffled his budding moustache reflectively. I think that that was about the limit of enthusiasm at that moment, Mervyn was never what you would actually call excitable. He approached everything – excluding the opposite sex – with utmost caution.

But the fever had caught on and was incurable. For the next few hours we frantically unfolded and refolded our dummy fanzine, covering Bob’s sacred newsheet with pencil and biro scrawlings. Then sanity dawned briefly in Harding’s eyes, and he said with a voice approaching that of Doom: ‘How are we going to print the damn thing?’

While Dick tried frantically to slit his throat in exasperation and Harding lapsed back into his accustomed state of comatose gibbering, someone remembered that Bob had an old flat-bed job

that he ran the newsheet off on. The good old press and roller technique. Still, it was something ...

Bob was dragged into the tirade of pseudo-plans rather reluctantly, which Race looked down on us with paternal understanding. Have you ever seen a vampire look paternal?

I would like to point out at this junction that all this time there were no really ‘genuine’ fanzines being published down under, with the exception of Graham Stone’s newsheet STOPGAP. This was an eight to twelve page semi-foolscap affair, subtitled, ‘a letter, circular, or publication ...’, and was the official organ of the Australasian Science Fiction Society, founded by Stone a few years previously in an endeavor to bring together fans down under. It was a tremendous success, and at that time boasted a membership something in the region of 150. STOPGAP listed Sydney fan activities, had thumb nail reviews of new s-f mags and books, and an occasional mention of far-flung groups in Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. (Melbourne even got a mention ... occasionally).

ASFS was a vital link in the chain of Aussiefandom. For the sub rate of 7/6 (later 10/-) per year, members received STOPGAP, regular publicity handouts from US and UK book houses, an odd little item titled VERTICAL HORIZONS, an eight paged (sometimes a few more) ‘fanzine’ the same size as STOPGAP, and issued by the small Sydney femmfan contingent, and an excellent magazine from the editorial hands of Rex Meyer: SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. This reviewed all current US and UK magazines and books as they became available, reviews being handled by a bevy of fans throughout Australia. It was usually ten or twelve quarto pages, impeccably duplicated. All in all, it was a handy little item.

The ASFS mailings came at monthly intervals, and the envelopes were usually BULGING with interesting issues of all the above. Neither of the 'fanzines' contained illustrations or headings of any sort. Everything was typewritten, setting the so-called style for fanzines down under. The belief was – then – that a fanzine did NOT need illustrations, the material was what mattered. Needless to say, that position didn't take long to change.

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While Bob and I debated over the flat-bed mimeo, Mervyn came out of his trance and announced with his usual intrepid verve: 'Why don't we use the McGills' rotary job?'

This shattering statement left us all awed and shaking in front of Binns, and for a few moments we were speechless. Even Harding. Dick threw away his blunt razorblade and looked on with a renewal of disinterest. We eventually decided that if we gave the might McGill's a free advert in the proposed mag, they should agree to let us use their Rex Rotary. It would at least pacify them a little, Bob observed. He probably had horrifying visions of the three of us let loose amongst McGill's offices. Brother, when I think back at what that boy Merv managed to talk his boss into ...!

Looking back now over the veil of time, I can't help smiling – or is it shuddering? – at the humble beginnings of our pride and joy, and what it eventually turned out to be : a monstrous hybrid that refused to die until Harding beat it to death after three memorable (?) issues.

Harding had recently bought himself a typewriter, determined to break into prodom. He never got very far – in fact he didn't even get a start – before he came face to face (or key to platen) with stencils, obliterated, duplicating paper and all the stuff of fanmags. The typer also served to assist in leveling the

increasing monster of a correspondence file. In between all this he somehow found time to dummy up an issue of the proposed fanmag, and gave it the rather lofty sounding title of PERHAPS : The International Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. (Shades of Boucher-McComas!) Through numerous consultations with co-editor Dick Jenssen the following had been decided upon as material for the first issue:

- (a) an editorial by (sic!) Harding.
- (b) first part of a serial by Martin James (Jenssen).
- (c) an article, again by Harding, on 'What's happened to ASF?'
- (d) a column by Ken Slater.
- (e) a column from Sydney by someone-or-other, and possibly
- (f) some book reviews – by ghod knows who.

The whole projected mess would come to something like 16 to 20 semi-foolscap pages, with Dick doing most of the illustrating. It was round about this time that everyone seemed to be writing articles about the downfall of the Campbell mag so I didn't see why I shouldn't be one of the first Aussiefans to get on the bandwagon. The editorial and so-called serial were along the pattern of the usual fannish stuff run by budding faneds. I'm still wondering as to what sort of effect we would have had on fandom if we'd stuck to this original plan ...

Things began to happen.

Pondering as to how he could type a foolscap stencil LENGTHWAYS on an 11 inch carriage, Harding ignored Bob's comment to get a typewriter with a telescopic platen. In fact he had to ignore a lot of suggestions as to what he should do with the entire project. Fortunately at that time he was rather young and innocent if Jenssen can be believed.

The wheels began their monstrous turning.

Harding contacted Dave Cohen in Sydney and he agreed to act as NSW rep for the proposed magazine, when and if it ever appeared. His job was to huckster off single copies to the Sydney fans and generally beat the drum for our efforts down Melbourne way.

Mervyn, Dick and the unavoidable decided to issue a sort of advance warning to Aussiefandom of what was soon to be forthcoming. We did this in the form of a PREVIEW, as we called it; a two paged open letter to fans everywhere informing of the forthcoming magazine, what it would contain, and when it would be due. Needless to say, no one took any notice of the letter.

Harding typed out two foolscap stencils (upright!), adding a plea for material in the time-accepted manner of the thirsty faned. This was to go on both sides of a sheet of duplicating paper, a whole 150 copies.

And it was so armed with stencils, paper, obliterate and a good supply of blood and sweat that the deadly trio invaded McGill's storeroom late one afternoon; about 5.30, just after work. The awe with which we first regarded the monstrous Rex-Rotary hulking silently in one corner is still vivid in our memories. I can also remember the stricken fright that Dick and I received when Merv stripped off his shirt and began cranking away in his singlet. Still, it WAS summertime and it WAS rather humid ... and it WAS a rather gruesome sight - then. Naturally we had to get used to the sight or our mag was finished. Yet for that one brief moment Harding was almost ready to give the whole thing up. After all, he was young and innocent, wasn't he?

Just as we became used to the sight of Binns' bared and tortured body slaving over the duper, so we became used to the sight and smell of ink smeared paper. Reams of it.

The first encounter with the duper was a fiasco. Merv assured us that he knew what he was doing, but unfortunately

there was no one around to assure Merv. But these were minor deterrents to our Great Dream. We slapped on the first stencil and Merv began his long and lengthy career of cranking the handle of a duplicator.

The first few copies came through with delightful inch-wide smears of ink on the backside of the paper. Nice jet-black stuff. Lovely. One at either end of the paper. Great.

We stopped printing and examined the monster. Merv couldn't find anything wrong. Neither could Harding. Neither could Jenssen - and that clinched matters. There was NOTHING wrong with the monster.

We decided to go ahead and trust that the 'bug' ironed itself out as we went along. We stood helplessly by and watched copy after copy emerge from the fangs of the duper with the same smears on the rear side.

We stopped again.

Merv stuck his head dangerously close to the fangs of the monster.

He sniffed.

We sniffed.

We felt like a couple of dogs on heat.

A light dawned in the eyes of Binns. 'Ink on the rollers', he said, after a careful examination.

Harding plunged his hands daringly into the monster's gaping mouth to test the validity of the statement. He withdrew it covered with black duplicator ink. He withered the worthy crank with a scorching stare: 'That is THE understatement of the year', he said wittily.

Merv grunted sourly, moustache tritching spasmodically. 'We'll have to take them out and clean them'.

Harding looked at his watch. They'd only been there the better part of an hour and it looked as if tea time was still a long

way off. But ... they just had to clean the rollers ... While Dick and Harding staggered and lifted the great monster Merv ducked under and expertly removed the offending rollers. Holding them triumphantly in the air he assumed a Statue of Liberty pose and said: 'There's the trouble!'

After consenting grudgingly, Binns sat down and very carefully began to wipe the rollers clean. This took about ten minutes, during which time Dick amused himself with prying here and there over the offices, singing rebop tunes and humming Stravinsky Strains to himself. Harding passed the time mentally writing his great editorial and ruminating over what dirt he could smear Campbell with.

'Fixed it', came the words of the almighty Binns. And what came next ...?

'Jenssen!' said Harding, ominously. Dick clambered back down the wall and said rather disinterestedly:

'What's up?'

'We lift.'

'Oh.'

While the water poured out of their veins they lifted and Binns replaced the shiny new rollers. 'Right', he muttered, triumphantly, the bristles of his moustache standing out with an unmistakable air of authority.

The duper was lowered.

The paper was shoved in.

Binns began cranking.

Dick and Harding watched with satisfied smirks as the first copies came through nice and clean - then every following copy emerged with the old friends the ink-smears on the backside.

Binns stopped cranking. He looked slightly puzzled. He poked one finger in on one of the rollers and it emerged nice and black. He looked up solemnly at their strangled looks. 'Something

wrong here.'

Dick took a flying dive into the waste basket and to accompanying gurgling sounds a cloud of mushroom shaped smoke began to drift slowly towards the ceiling.

'Too true'. Harding grunted, and tried desperately to think of something else.

After giving the enemy the once over Merv said: 'I cant' see how the ink's getting onto the damn things'.

Jenssen popped his head up, blew the marihuana cigarette out of his mouth and said curtly: 'I'm not doing any more lifting!'

One look at Dick's wildly spinning irises was enough to convince Merv of the utter truthfulness of the statement. 'Then what do we do?' he wailed despondently.

Harding nonchalantly unclasped his hands from his neck and looked up with an air of superiority. 'What we shall do is just run the damn things off the way they are, ink smears and all.'

'But we won't be able to use both sided of the paper', Binns reminded.

'I know. We'll do them on separate sheets and staple them together. Simple.'

'But what about PERHAPS?' Dick asked with an unusual display of interest. 'We can't run IT off with the duper packed up', he added, extricating himself from the wastebasket.

'No, I suppose not,' Harding commented.

Merv threw down a bunch of in-smear'd paper viciously. 'Look', he said, 'I suggest we forget the whole thing for the time being and do the darn thing after Xmas. If we try and rush it now we're sure to mess it up.'

He might have added that besides which they had all rather had dupers and duplicating for the time being, or perhaps he didn't think it necessary to put into words what they were all thinking.

'Right', they agreed.

Merv ran off the balance of the two stencils (complete with ink smears) and Harding took them home that night and stapled them together. If this was to be a sample of what was to come in PERHAPS, then he didn't place much success in the value of the PREVIEW. Inwardly he groaned at what the Sydney fans would think of their duplicating efforts ...

The first batch was mailed out to Dave Cohen for distribution Sydneyside. The remainder were posted out individually to fans through Australasia and a few overseas.

The first encounter with ampubbing was over. The sabotaging duper hulked in some corner of McGill's waiting for the next onslaught from fandom. What would happen then was too horrible to think of. Merv retired back to his counter to deal out the rapidly increasing supply of s-f, Harding retired back to work for the few weeks that remained before the holidays and Dick retired (?) Back to his schoolwork.

Came the vacation and all departed to parts unknown to indulge in the more pleasurable aspects of this mundane world of s-f and fantasy, while the PREVIEW shattered the belief in Sydney fandom that all fans were human.

And it wasn't until Harding had returned from his county tour, loins girded for the battle to come, that Merv casually informed him over the Altar at McGill's that the reason they had been getting ink on the rollers and subsequently on the paper, was simply because the stencils used were too small for the machine. Exactly ONE INCH TOO SMALL, leaving a neat one inch wide strip of inking screen uncovered which swept merrily down on the rollers with each turn of the handle.

In the sanctity of McGill's Harding clenched and unclenched his hands desperately, gnashing and grinding his teeth feverishly. His face turned from red to yellow and on towards white as he smouldered and burnt his way through the floor. The last thing he

remembered was the hairs on Binns upper lip twitching in merriment, and then he had slid from sight through the floorboards.

END OF PART ONE

(In the next installment of the Memoirs you'll hear of the affair of Jenssen and the Stylus, Harding and the Obliterine - and of course the great encounter of Merv and the Duplicator. Not to mention Bert Campbell's hand in the whole thing, Bob McCubbin's eleventh hour call to arms when the Rex-Rotary collapsed into smouldering ruin and much more. Really, you CAN'T afford to miss it!)

Sadly there is no following part so those of you who remember drawing onto stencils and Obliterine (properly known as Corflu) will have to use your imaginations and those who don't remember that far back can wonder what all the fuss was about.

It is hard for us in 2020 to understand the way in which science fiction was seen seventy years ago in the 1950s. This little piece from Norma Hemming gives some sense of the feeling of the times for a science fiction fan. It comes from *Vertical horizons* 5 published by Rosemary Simmons in October 1953

ON THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF BEING A SCIENCE FICTION FAN Norma Hemmings

Has anyone ever realised just how hard it is to be a science fiction fan? I'm finding out the hard way.

Before coming into fandom the necessity of keeping secret the fact

of membership in such a cracked up maniacally dangerous cult was second nature, but after a short while of being able to discuss such subjects with others equally mad the rein is apt to slip.

At work, among normal people, during the afternoon tea session someone descended from normality to mention such things as flying saucers (seen only in opium pipe dreams, the DT's and by odd creatures as SF fans). I piped up with an unguarded and happy remark that brought down upon me the astounded stares of the normal. In the deathly silence I crept cowed back to my desk, conscious that I had destroyed in one unwary remark the appearance of sanity I had been working so hard to put over. For weeks afterwards everyone spoke in hushed whispers when I came near. As if that wasn't enough, after weeks of carefully reinstating myself I nearly flattened it all again by suggesting a force field around the desk when someone suggested something ought to be done about stopping things falling off desks. In the nick of time I amended it to the very lame suggestion of a fence. I still think a force field would be much better. Much more spectacular.

After some months had passed I was allowed to return to the fold. I should have learned my lesson. I bought a book. I didn't particularly want it, but I couldn't resist the over. (Twenty-four hours). After buying the book I should have known better than to bring it into the office, but being lunch time there was nothing else for it. With many furtive glances I hid it. Without the force field things are apt to fall off the desk. It fell. Now I'm back in coventry. Can't someone start a society for the prevention of cruelty to science fiction fans?

And finally, the continuing saga of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club as told through the newsletter entries in Merv Binns' *Australian SF News*.

July 1964

THE MELBOURNE SF CLUB

Due to most of our members being devoted film fans many were absent recently at the Melbourne Film Festival. I hope that attendances will improve now that it is over. On July 3rd one of three films which have been booked from the National Film Library, Vampyre, Thief and Bagdad or The Lost World. Last show we saw MGM's Time Machine for which we had a very good attendance. Now that we have our own bookshelves completed in the Club we intent to obtain as many magazines as we can and we need plenty, so if you have any to sell or even give away we may be interested.

17 September 1964

Dear Member

It is with much regret that we report the death of one of our oldest members, Tony Santos. He was a staunch supporter of the club from beginning to end and was one of our most enthusiastic helpers during conventions and the like. Tony was always the life of the party and we have many happy memories of the times he spend with us. We shall all miss him very much. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to his wife Marjorie and family.

.....

It was unfortunate that one of Tony's closest friends Ian Crozier should be away at this time. He is at present on a 'trade mission' for his firm in Asia including China and Japan. No doubt he will have a very interesting trip.

.....

They say that for every passing there is a coming and it is with much pleasure that we congratulate Mr and Mrs Lee Harding

on the birth of their baby boy last Saturday. Lee is doing reasonably well with his writing efforts at the moment. Opinion has it that the best story in the latest New Worlds was his 'The Evidence' and he received an honorable mention from Judith Merrill in the latest Years Greatest SF anthology.

Another of our authors Damien Broderick has also had stories published in the Australian Everybody's magazine and is included in the new anthology NEW WRITINGS IN SF edited by John Carnell.

.....

Australia's 'Forrie Ackerman', Graham Stone has informed us that a new Australian SF magazine is in the offing. The aim is to publish original material if possible and reprints not previously published in Australia in any form or in any British editions or any US books or magazines available in Australia. Rather a tall order I think but I am sure that there would be stories in this category. They will take some finding however so if anybody has any suggestions write to Graham Stone at Box 185, Manuka, ACT.

.....

THE MELBOURNE FANTASY FILM GROUP

The next film night will be on Friday the 25th of September. We have been forced to make this a selection of short films mainly because we have not been able to obtain 'The Vampire' or 'Thief of Bagdad'. Last month we screened 'The Mysterious Land' but because of the very poor attendance the increased cost of the hire of films we were £4/1/- down on the night. For the show after this month we will be showing a feature film which will be decided upon later. Next weeks films will be:

Islam	Canadian National Film Board
Begone Dull Care	Norman McLaren cartoon
Big Hill Blues	Belgium, Big Bill Broomey singing the blues

Music of India

Czechoslovak Films:

The Lion and the Boat	color cartoon
Song of the Prairies	Puppetoon in color

German Films:

The Eloquent Light	Describing the invention of sound recording on film
The Skill (?)	The sculpture of mobiles with music by Art Blakey
Ballet in Jazz	Ballet danced to modern jazz

Program starts as usual at 8pm.

.....

The MSFC Library

Because of numerous commitments I am unable to spend all the time on the library and the club that I would like. However our new shelves which we completed earlier this year will give us enough room for expansion for quite a while. We have not had time to check all the books for a while but we know that many are overdue and missing and when these are returned we may not have as much space as we anticipate. In the very near future we will be adding a lot of American magazines not previously on our shelves and we hope to fill most of our gaps in the top class mags like ASF and F&SF. Some people may say why bother, the club is barely struggling along now and not many books are being borrowed at any rate.

Personally I see it this way, we do have a small group of members attending the club regularly. If we gave the club away we would lose contact with most of the members altogether. We have quite a library really and it would be a great loss to disband it, many of the items being irreplaceable. We are just managing to pay our way at the moment with the help of AFPA and the usual sources of revenue, the club attendance charges, yearly

membership, the film group and the library sales and lending. With two or three more members like Margaret Leckie who borrows on the average of £1 worth of books and mags each week we would have no worries at all. We owe a few pounds overseas for books and so on but you could not say we are in debt and although I may have to dip in to pay the rent or pay for books it is only temporary. What it all boils down to is what I have said before, a few more members attending regularly and we will have no worried about keeping going which I intend to do as long as I possibly can.

Finally would everybody who has borrowed books at some time from the club please check that you have none on hand or if you have, return them as soon as possible. We would also be glad of any donations of unwanted sf magazines and books.

AND NOW, WHAT WE'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR

In the previous issue I wrote that I was about to start writing the history, in draft form due to the restrictions imposed by the virus. And that's what I've been doing. So far I think I probably know more than any fan really needs to know about fandom in Australia between 1947 and 1955 and I've written most of it too. However, like all precious writers I don't want to expose my tender prose to the readership until I'm happy with it (and I'm sure that in writers' school they taught you that it is a good idea to put your writing aside for a while to let it simmer - like a good curry).

The first chapter has now been sitting on the side of the stove for a few months bubbling away quietly. I've also had three tasters, Race Mathews, Dick Jenssen and Lee Harding have a taste and they think it is okay. Now that I've tweaked it a little at their suggestions it is ready for the rest of you to have a taste.

As it says, this is a draft. As I've worked away on these first three chapters the shape of the first half of the history has become clearer to me and, depending on how other things go, this will be the third or fourth

chapter in the first part of the history of Australian fandom up until 1975. This means that some minor part of this chapter might be moved to a previous chapter, or a later one, depending on how the story goes with those chapters. There is also the possibility that I will come across more information as I read for other chapters, and if any of that adds to the story here it might be incorporated.

What do I expect you to do with this? Not much really. You may read it if you like and let me know if you find it interesting. If you have problems with the historical facts in the story I'd like to hear about that too. There's no point in picking on me for my spelling, punctuation or grammar, better people than you (John Bangsund for one) have spent a lot of time and effort trying to improve that in my writing, to little effect. I do my best, and if you've seen any of my published work you will have seen the immense good that an excellent editor can do.

While working on this I've been giving some thought to the question of what is the difference 'fan history' and a 'history of fandom'. It seems to me that the obvious difference is that 'fan history' is written by fans and for a 'history of fandom' that is not necessarily the case. I consider myself more a historian than a fan, with the exception of my current involvement in old-style fanzine fandom. I don't go to conventions, have an on-line presence or do any of the things that current day fans appear to do. The fanac that I do indulge in is the same kind of fanac that I did in the 1960s and 1970s and might be considered to be antiquated. I would like to think, however, that this is an advantage rather than a disadvantage because I have a personal experience of earlier stages of fandom. For example, fans of a more recent era find it difficult to imagine a world in which the George Pal version of *The War of the Worlds* was the pinnacle of cinematic science fiction and fantasy.

Anyhow, that is theorizing of a kind and what is important here is the story. A fan who knew little about history would write something different, as would a history who knew nothing about the culture of fandom, and I hope that readers will find this a happy medium between those two paths.

THE SHORT LIFE AND LONG SHADOW OF AFPA
MELBOURNE - 1950-1953

(DRAFT 9/11/20)

Melbourne was a drab and dour city at the beginning of the 1950s. It's 1.3 million inhabitants had experienced two decades of depression, war, rationing and regulation and all that most people seemed to want was a nice suburban block of land where they could build a home and raise a family. It was the dream of suburban prosperity that their politicians had promised them. The habits of frugality learned through the depression and obedience learned during the war lingered and gave most people comfort and a sense of security. They had become used to a world of grey conformity where fitting in with the crowd was what counted.

Australia was a provincial backwater of British and American culture. Like the food they ate and the clothes they wore, everything was uninspiringly British and cultural life was sober and conformist. Shops closed after noon on Saturday and the city's streets were empty of life so most people entertained themselves with sport, almost exclusively football, cricket and the horses. At night they flocked to the city's picture theatres, many located close to suburban railway stations because cars were still uncommon. Week after week families sat in the same seats to watch whatever was being shown, usually a British B-grade movie before interval and something American after.

Melbourne was a highly conservative city bathed in the waters of traditional Christian values. The bars shut at six in the evening and the only form of public entertainment on Sunday was the churches that were packed. There was little else for the populace to do. Life was dominated by a kind of puritanism that demanded and enforced high standards of morality, in public at least. Public drunkenness, lewd behaviour and possessing immoral reading material were all punishable offences. Censors protected the public gaze from anything that might offend public morals. They banned many publications, some music and films for moral or political reasons and it was common for them to remove questionable scenes from films so that they did not offend or arouse public passions. The paperback

anthology that included John W Campbell's novelette 'Who Goes There' was banned in Australia and, in Perth, Roger Dard and the Customs department were in a state of perpetual war over his attempts to import such questionable material as *Weird Tales*.

Australian politics were also conservative and repressive. After almost a decade of national ALP government, and a rapid succession of radical social changes, a conservative government was returned to power that appealed to conservative middle class values. Victorias experienced the solid, patriarchal and restrictive Bolte government - with the exception of a mere two and a half years in the early 1950s - which made Melbourne the most staid and tedious of Australia's state capitals.

Melbourne was a more relaxed, slow placed and welcoming city than Sydney. In its own way Melbourne accepted, for example, gays and managed them. Sydney's narrow gloomy streets gave it a closed in feeling unlike the wide and open main streets of Melbourne. Sydney was about money and while money counted in Melbourne, so did other things. There was a string of live theatres, most of it amateur, and JC Williamson dominated with American musicals at the Her Majesty's and Comedy theaters in Exhibition Street. There was some night life for the sophisticated and monied class such as The Chevron in St Kilda Road. For that class overseas trends were followed seriously and women wore the current year's fashions

There were pockets of less restrained culture, some of it provocative, such as Frank Thring and his group that titillated Melbourne tastes. Jazz and folk music clubs, sub-cultures and pockets of deviance dwelt in the city's back streets. A seedy night life could be found at the Spring Street end of Bourke Street and parts of Little Lonsdale Street with offerings such as prostitution, sly grog joints and, if you knew where to look, gay enclaves. A bohemian demi-monde sustained itself in cafes and coffee shops, but nothing as brazen as the Sydney Push because, after all, this was Melbourne. Political deviance also flourished in political movements including various factions of the Communist Party but everything was managed by the state to keep it out of public view. There was the Special Branch and the Vice Squad to keep deviance under control so it did not sully the calm and conservative waters of

Melbourne life.

Melbournians could glimpse the rest of the world, tantalizingly out of reach, through the windows of cinema. Even with heavy handed censorship it showed worlds of experience and excitement that Melbournians who wanted more could only imagine. The immense wave of migration that would transform Australian life was only beginning and television and ‘rock and roll’ were still six years in the future.

Science fiction had almost no place in this conservative and constraining world and its relative scarcity and pulp origins made it socially unacceptable. The science fiction that most Australians saw was comic strips in newspapers and comics and movie serials made for Saturday matinees, so it was inevitably described as ‘that Buck Rogers stuff’. People who insisted on reading it in public did well to hide their books and magazines inside something more respectable like *The Sporting Globe* or *Man Magazine* to avoid public stares and ridicule. Fans of the genre did not discuss science fiction in polite company and any friends who learned that they read it politely did not raise the topic or mention it to others. At school boys who read it were ridiculed as ‘a dill, a drongo or a wet weed’.¹ This attitude made the people who read science fiction feel outsiders in Australian society, but they also believed that what they read was important because it pointed the way to the future and offered insights into life that others ignored.

Science fiction was hard to find. There were comic strips such as Speed Gordon, Brick Bradford and Mandrake the Magician in the newspapers and magazines and the fantastic elements in the boys papers, but the pulp magazines that were freely available in the drug stores of America were rare in Australia. There was a small but dedicated market for it, but the supply of new American science fiction was limited by the Australian government’s general embargo in the importation of American books and magazines. Some of it was brought in by individual science fiction readers through the postal system but it could be seized by the Australian Customs on suspicion that it had been paid for or because it fell foul of the censors who were particularly sensitive to anything that was tinged with licentiousness

¹ Interview with Dick Jenssen.

or horror, so almost every issue of *Weird Tales* was routinely banned in Australia.

British Reprint Editions (BREs) were available. They were reprint editions of American pulp magazines but they were thin and weak in comparison, usually without several stories that appeared in the American magazines so Australian readers missed some of the most important sf novels of the period that were serialized in the American magazines. Books also came from Britain because of the copyrighting agreement that restricted selling American books in the British Commonwealth. A little science fiction such as *Thrills Incorporated* was published in Australia, but it was generally mediocre, at best.

The few science fiction fans in Melbourne before the war had ceased to be active. Some kept in touch with each other as friends and collectors but did not continue their pre-war activity. Thus it fell to a new generation of science fiction readers to recreate fandom in Melbourne and four of them were the teenagers Race Mathews, Dick Jenssen, Lee Harding and Mervyn Binns. They were all children of the Great Depression who grew up during World War II, so they suffered all the privations of that period, shortages, regulation, rationing and housing shortages. What they had in common was their love of the printed word in general and science fiction in particular, and they were voracious readers. They came from different background and economic and educational circumstances but their love of science fiction and the need to share that enthusiasm with others brought them together.

Race Mathews' parents read to him while he was still a babe in arms. He was a sickly child and insisted that his parents read to him constantly and, after he learned to read at a very early age, he learned how to use libraries and select his own books. He also developed a love for the British boys magazines of the time, beginning with *Chicks Own* and *Rainbow*, progressing to those for slightly older boys like *Knockout* and *Beano* and then to *Hotspur*, *Rover*, *Adventure*, *Wizard* and *Champion*. He also discovered his grandparents cache of similar magazines from the previous generation and also read them avidly. There were many fantasy elements in this reading; lost worlds, strange powers, time travel and other flights of

fancy so he was no stranger to science fiction when he finally discovered it.²

When he was nine, in 1944, Mathews started at Melbourne Grammar School's preparatory school in East StKilda and got there from Brighton by tram, with a change at the junction of High Street and Balaclava Road in St Kilda. Before long he discovered a nearby second hand shop which had comics in the window and he regularly went to look at them. One day the comics had been shuffled aside to make room for something he had never seen before, an issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* (the Tenth Anniversary issue published in 1939). It was love at first sight. The price was 2/6, a week's pocket money which was not due until the following Saturday so he feared that somebody else would buy it before he could. But it was still there when he arrived on Saturday, he bought it and started reading on his way home.

Dick Jenssen (properly 'Ditmar' but always called 'Dick') was born in Shanghai in 1935. His father worked for the Shell Oil Company which moved him to Sydney in 1941. When Jenssen arrived in Australia he was exposed to the same kinds of fantastical literature as Mathews, comic strips such as Buck Rogers and the same British boys papers. However, his sense of wonder was fired at school, first when he saw a book of (possibly) Chesley Bonestell astronomic art in breathtaking colour, the beauty of which made him gasp and opened up for him a new world of imagination. The other was a story read to him by a teacher about traveling back to the time of the dinosaurs that stimulated his imagination and helped him to see this new world and its inhabitants. He was also a student at Melbourne Grammar where he met Race Mathews who introduced him to the term 'science fiction' and directed him to the couple of science fiction anthologies in the school library.

Jenssen was an insecure little boy because of his upbringing. His self confidence was eroded further when other boys found out that he read science fiction and he was ridiculed at school. He was not put off, science fiction was vital to his development because it challenged his intellect, illustrated the beauty of the natural world and opened his mind to the exciting

² For more information in these fascinating magazines Dick suggests looking at E R Turner, *Boys Will Be Boys*, Faber & Faber, 2012.

world of science.

Lee Harding (known as 'Leo' during this period) had a less settled childhood after his mother left his violent father and they spent the war years struggling to find a permanent place to live because a single woman with a child was not acceptable to most landlords. Consequently he had an unsettled education at several schools but, after the war, they found a spacious place in Gertrude Street in Fitzroy where life became more settled. In 1949 his mother remarried and the family moved to a semi-detached house at 510 Drummond Street in Carlton. It was a solitary childhood and he was an empathetic, shy boy who felt himself an outsider to the world he found around him.

Harding's mother read to him when he was a child. She read him poetry and fiction and taught him to read and write and do 'sums' before he began primary school. He loved to read, had an enquiring mind, was interested in science, particularly astronomy, was curious and imaginative and could dream up his own stories that he started scribbling in books in primary school. He too found the science fiction comic strips including 'Silver Starr' that was drawn in Sydney by Stan Pitt. Like Jenssen, he suffered the ridicule of those who found out that he read science fiction, sneering at him, 'There goes Harding, he thinks people are going to fly to the Moon'³. When he was twelve he discovered the Franklins Lending Library in the Eastern Market (later the site of the Southern Cross Hotel) from which he borrowed old science fiction pulps and read them avidly. At technical school he discovered photography and started working in a photographic studio around the end of 1951.

Mervyn Binns grew up in a family that also encouraged reading and an interest in science. He was a happy but friendless boy at school because he didn't know anyone who shared his interests. He found the Buck Rogers comic strips in his mother's copies of *New Idea* and then the strips that the others had also found. He was an avid reader and discovered the same boys comics and magazines as the others. His revelation came one day when his parents bought him a copy of Vol Molesworth's *Spaceward Ho!* so after that he went to the Preston Library and asked for more books like it. The library didn't know what science

³ Interview with Lee Harding.

fiction was so they gave him books about science instead which he found interesting and enjoyed reading. In 1951 his interest in science led him to begin a career as an electrical apprentice but he didn't like that so he sought another job. Since he was interested in reading and books, he was sent to work at McGills Newsagents and Book Seller in Elizabeth Street where he found out about science fiction.

These boys were dreamers. They thought about more than the simple world around them that seemed to be enough for most people. They thought about the universe and what was possible in it. Science fiction fired their imaginations about the world and stimulated them to think more broadly, combined with adventure yarns that fired their sense of wonder. It gave them new ways of looking at human problems. SF exposed them to the wonder of the universe and the intellect, promoted and fed their imaginations and gave them something against which to measure their everyday world. It cultivated and fed their inquiring minds and often made them feel like outsiders in the mundane world. Those who made fun of them called their literature 'escapist', but to them it was liberating.⁴

Being a fan of science fiction fan in Melbourne at the beginning of the 1950s was a solitary occupation because they had no one to share their enthusiasm with. Not only did they experience social isolation, the books and magazines they sought were hard to find due to the import restrictions and the literature's low social status. This shortage led readers to build up collections which became prized possessions. Binns, for example, built up a collection of books, magazines and comics that he kept in a large box in the family's garage, which was stolen and then sold by the thief to a nearby second hand shop. Scarcity meant fans looked for anything that was out of the ordinary including American comics (with their vivid colours) and the works of writers such as Dennis Wheatley and Rider Haggard.

To build up their collections fans found second hand bookshops where they could occasionally find a book, magazine or American comic, apparently sold by people who were selling their collections or had friends in America who sent them those things. Mathews and

⁴ Readers will recall, of course, that JRR Tolkien pointed out that the people most afraid of escape are the jailors of the world.

Harding had regular routes of second hand shops near tram lines they visited regularly, trawling to find anything that looked remotely strange and fantastic. For Mathews the shops included Birds, Hanley's, Quaine's in Commercial Road, Halls in Chapel Street and Franklin's and Hall's in the city.

Franklin's had a lending library behind its second hand shop which contained a rare treasure trove. It had acquired hundreds of American pulp science fiction magazines such as *Astounding*, *Amazing*, *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling Stories* and had them hard bound with the covers cut off and glued to the front. For a hefty joining fee of £2/10/- and a lending fee of 6d each they could be borrowed, and Harding struggled home on the tram with five or six to devour over the weekend. He favoured *Thrilling Wonder*, *Planet* and *Startling Stories* because, in addition to the fiction, they also had letter columns and fan sections which other magazines, and the BREs, did not have. Through them he began to learn about fandom.

Harding wondered how Franklin's got so many American pulp sf magazines, despite the restrictions, but he soon discovered that there were ways to do it. Through advertisements in magazines he discovered the book sellers Ken Chapman and Ted Carnell in Britain who could supply the latest books and, through a mention in the fan column in *Startling Stories*, he found out about Operation Fantast, a mail order business run by Ken Slater, a British soldier based in Germany with the British Army of the Rhine that was part of the Allied occupation of Germany after the war. Slater could obtain copies of American books and magazines which he then sold to fans around the British Commonwealth. He published catalogues of his offerings and his customers sent in their orders, paid for with International Money Orders, and waited expectantly. Many years later Harding could still recall the delight and wonder when he opened his first package from Operation Fantast that included an issue of *Thrilling Wonder*, issues of the new British magazines *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*, the first *Wonder Story Annual* and a couple of paperbacks. Many other Australians also discovered Operation Fantast and it became the way in which some of them first made contact with each other.

Roger Dard, a collector in Western Australia, saw Vol Molesworth's address in an

issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* in 1948, wrote to him and soon found himself invited to join the Sydney Futurians. He was soon probably Australia's best known fan overseas through his correspondence and a regular column in a prominent American fanzine so Ken Slater asked him to become the Australian agent for Operation Fantast. Dard put Mathews in touch with Don Tuck, who was still living in Melbourne after the war, who introduced him to another Melbourne collectors, Gordon McDonald. Through Tuck Mathews also came to know of Melbourne's pre-war fans, Hockley and McLennan.

Mathews and Jenssen first met in Grimwade House, Melbourne Grammar's preparatory school, and Mathews introduced Jenssen to the second hand shop in St Kilda and its treasures. Not long after Jenssen, three months younger than Mathews, entered the Senior School so they lost touch, but after Jenssen's father took him out of school for a year to tour the world they were then in the same class and reconnected. Mathews introduced Jenssen to what he had found, including more sources of science fiction in second hand bookshops and the Franklin's lending library where Jenssen borrowed the same hardbound American magazines that Harding was also reading.

Mathews also learned about fandom in Sydney and Graham Stone appointed him the Melbourne agent for the Australian SF Society (ASFS) - an agency which did not last long when, due to his studies and other interests, Mathews failed to live up to Stone's high administrative expectations. Harding also joined the ASFS and began receiving regular packets from Stone which included the latest Sydney fanzines including *Stopgap*, *Vertical Horizons* and *S-F Review* which impressed him with its literate reviews of recent prozines and hardcover books.

Dard put Mathews and Harding in touch with each other. They corresponded for a while and then Mathews invited Harding to visit him in his parent's home in Barnett Street, Hampton, a Melbourne bayside suburb. When Harding arrived on a lovely Sunday afternoon he found Mathews sitting on the front lawn reading *Wonder Stories Annual*. They talked about science fiction for a few hours and Harding left after giving a vague promise that he would return a few weeks later to attend a meeting Mathews was arranging with some other

science fiction fans.

Bob McCubbin was a middle aged teacher who had served as an education officer with the Australian Army in the occupation of Japan after the war. He was a compulsive collector and when he returned to Melbourne he began trying to collect as much science fiction as he could and, like others, had a circuit of shops that he visited regularly. One day he fell into conversation with Mathews as they were standing next to each other fossicking in McGills and McCubbin noticed that Mathews looking at a copy of *Amazing* he had already read. He commented on it, they exchanged names and then went together to another shop, Hanley's, where Mathews had heard there was a sale of second hand magazines.⁵

Slowly a few fans began to establish a loose network and some occasionally visited each other's homes and loaned each other books and magazines. McCubbin's network grew to include Harding, Jenssen, Mathews, Marshall McLennan and Gordon Kirby, but these fans did not necessarily know each other. Mathews was the one who brought these individuals together. He was only 16 and baby faced, but he seemed to have a wisdom beyond his years, a strong and mature personality and unlimited energy. (Jenssen's mother thought Mathews was the best-looking boy she ever met.)

Everyone who bought science fiction at McGills knew Binns, the jolly seventeen year old shop assistant who built up a small section of science fiction in the shop. One day McCubbin asked him if he would like to attend a meeting at Mathews' place in Hampton where they would talk about forming a science fiction club in Melbourne and he agreed.

The meeting took place on 9 May 1952. There were about ten people there including Mathews, Jenssen, Harding, Binns, McCubbin, Jack Keating and two pre-war fans, Warwick Hockley and Marshal McLellan. It was the first time any of them had been at such a large

⁵ Most accounts of first encounters with other fans vary in slight details but I have tried to use the version that is most likely to be the correct one or, if that is not possible, the more entertaining one. If you want to be pedantic you can look them up for yourself using the sources listed at the end of this chapter.

gathering of science fiction fans.

By coincidence Harding and Jenssen met on the bus traveling up South Road from the railway station to Mathews's place in Barnett Street. They became instant friends and spent the bus trip in animated conversation about what they had read and what they liked. They were an odd couple, Dick a well off Melbourne Grammar boy and Lee from working class Fitzroy, but they shared the same enthusiasms and vision so where they came from counted for little and they became lifelong friends.

At the meeting Jenssen and Harding were initially shy but felt accepted in this group among people who were happy to talk about science fiction and understood what they were talking about and what they saw in it. Harding, who was 15 at the time, found his first friends in this group, particularly Jenssen who was, like him, younger than the others. He found that fans weren't concerned about a person's religion, whether they were straight or gay and if they had physical handicaps, what mattered was that they read and liked science fiction and wanted to talk about it. He found it very liberating to be part of the group. Jensen found that the group, by their acceptance, was enormously effective in building up his confidence.

Following that initial meeting the group met about monthly in the homes of some of its members, usually at Mathews', McCubbin's or Kirby's places. Meetings revolved around talk, letters, barter and chess. New members were recruited by Binns who promoted the group at McGills so numbers gradually swelled to about a dozen. Among them was the British science fiction writer, fan and mariner A Bertram Chandler (known to Australian fans as 'Bert'), who attended meetings when he was in port.

During these meetings the idea emerged of creating a broader organization so there would be even more people to talk to. The decision to establish a formal group was made at a meeting at Mathews' place which the Sydney fan, Bill Veney, attended on his way moving from Tasmania to Brisbane. He argued strongly for a highly structured organization similar to the Futurian Society of Sydney but Melbourne fans resisted and instead decided on a much less formal organization with no formal office holders, formal meetings, subscriptions,

minutes or any of the other trappings of the Futurians. It had five conveners, McCubbin, Mathews, Jenssen, McLennan and Kirby, with McCubbin the prime mover who also published a newsletter for the group. They called themselves a 'group' because they felt they would be getting closer to a Sydney style arrangement than if they called themselves a 'club'. So the Melbourne group remained a bunch of people who got together regularly to swap yarns and trade a few magazines in the hope of avoiding many of the problems that occurred in Sydney and, while there were occasional disagreements, there was little that disrupted the general harmony of the group.

The group grew and, after a meeting at which nineteen people packed into McCubbin's modest living room in Auburn, they decided to find a meeting place that didn't also involve spouses having to clean up after them. Somebody suggested Val's Coffee Lounge at the top of a flight of stairs leading from a doorway in Swanston Street opposite the Town Hall. It was an ideal venue in some ways, a convivial spot in the heart of Melbourne that served coffee and snacks where people could sit for ages talking to friends. It was also a place where Melbourne's newly emerging lesbian and gay community met, apparently known to many people but not to others because it was not common knowledge in the repressive climate of early 1950s Melbourne. The group began holding fortnightly meetings there on 14 August 1952 with five around one table and, by November, the meetings had grown so much that there were twenty-nine who occupied the whole of the west end of the Lounge.

Some found the atmosphere of Val's disagreeable though others might have found it convenient and more than once a member of the science fiction group disappeared for a time into the company of the others there. The Melbourne SF Group did not meet at Val's for very long but their time there became vivid in the memory of the group. McCubbin wrote that 'the odd characters frequenting Val's soon made it imperative that we move to a more healthy position'.⁶ Apart from Val's sexual overtones, and the sometimes questionable quality of the food it served, the Group was beginning to build up a collection, a library, of books and magazines that were initially kept in a large box that McCubbin had brought back from Japan.

⁶ *Etherline* 12, page 6.

As it grew the Group needed somewhere more permanent to meet where it could keep a permanent library. Keith McClelland found a basement room in the Oddfellows Hall at 30 Latrobe Street that cost 12/6 for each meeting, and the Group began meeting there on 14 November 1952.⁷ It was much more austere than Val's and fans felt a little out of place there, but it gave the Group space to itself where it could lay out books and magazines for sale or swap and build up a library in a cupboard in the hall outside their room.

In February 1953 the Group decided to meet weekly on Thursday evenings. Despite the suggestions of some, including Mathews and Harding, that the Group become more organized, it continued on with no formal organization and McCubbin at its informal leader, collecting cash to pay the rent and holding brief informal sessions where he delivered news of general interest, introduced new members and kept attendance records. By September 1953 the Group had a roll of 58 names but the usual attendance at meetings was about fifteen, roughly ten of them regulars. Bert Chandler visited when he was in port and other fans including Don Tuck, Doug Nicholson, Mick McGuinness, Bill Veney and Rex Mayer visited when they were in Melbourne. The evenings were spent in informal discussions, swapping books and magazines (sometimes for cash) and playing chess. After the meetings members adjourned to Mirka's, another convivial central Melbourne meeting place that was more acceptable than Val's.

Also in their Oddfellows Hall basement room the Group watched movies after Dan Bicknell brought a movie projector and occasionally brought it in to entertain the Group with trade and educational films of interest to the members. Almost all Group members were film fans and Group members went together at times to science fiction films that were screened commercially. They went to a preview screening of *The 5000 Fingers of Dr T* at the Windsor Theater in Chapel Street and when *Fantasia* was re-released the group went to see it. Individually and together. Mathews, Jenssen, Harding and Binns went to see any movies that

⁷ Bob McCubbin suggested that the move was made in November 1952 and Bill Veney gives, in *Ugh*, the precise date of 14 November. On the other hand Race Mathews writes that the agreement with the Oddfellows was signed on 17 December 1952. Who is right and does the precise date matter?

displayed reality from slightly different perspectives including some early French and Russian films. However Australia's harsh censorship rules meant that many movies never made it onto Australian screens or, of they did, scenes that were offensive to the censors were cut out, no matter what they did to the rest of the film.

Most Group members knew little about the state of fandom in Sydney. As far as they understood the situation the fans there were nasty and back stabbing with combative personalities so they could always find something to argue about. A few Melbourne fans had more direct contact with Sydney. Mathews attended the first Sydney convention where he felt immediately at home with the other attendees in discussing science fiction unguardedly. He met most Sydney well known fans including Vol Molesworth, Bert Castellari, Graham Stone and Kevin Dillon. Bill Veney met him at the airport, took him to his accommodation, to the convention and to a famous Kings Cross night club one evening. Mathews attendance at the second convention was very short. After he left his wallet in a taxi he had only enough spare change to get him back to the airport and home again.

Harding's enthusiastic correspondence with Roger Dard introduced him to the schism in Sydney fandom. He formed a rapport with Veney when he visited Melbourne and was included in a group letter circulating between Dard in Perth, Veney (by then in Brisbane) and Lyell Crane in Sydney. When the group letter arrived he was surprised to find page after page of typing, none of it about science fiction but rather it was about fan politics and the general world situation. He loved it. After the initial shock he looked forward to each new instalment, but it petered out after about nine months, probably after Crane tried to play peacemaker with the Stone and Molesworth group, but Dard would have nothing of it.

Harding's irrepressible energy and enthusiasm had helped drive the formation of the Group and kept it going. Next he turned his enthusiasm to building relationships with overseas fans,. Shortly after he joined Operation Fantast he began writing to fans and fanzine editors overseas and established a few contacts there, one of the first was Bob Silverberg who was then publishing the fanzine *Spaceship*. Fanzines began to arrive such as *Slant*, *Hyphen*, *Spaceship*, *Peon*, and others. He was flabbergasted and inspired. He didn't think about

anything except the fanzine he wanted to publish but, always at the back of his mind, was a professional aspiration because he thought it would be a way of getting into professional publishing and learning how to deal with contributors and things like that. He had bought a typewriter with the intention of trying his luck with the promags but, having met with poor response to his first story, he decided to turn to fanzine publishing.

Around the time the Group began meeting at Val's Harding said to Jenssen, 'We must put out a fanzine.'⁸ Jenssen agreed, he was happily drawn into Harding's project and, as the two youngest members of the Group, it was natural that they should plan this venture together. Jenssen was also looking for an outlet for his creative energy and, while he tried his hand at writing, his greater interest and skill lay in drawing and illustrating and that became his responsibility in the fanzine they began planning.

Harding and Jenssen thought big. Their fanzine was to be called, *Perhaps, The International Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. They had seen Doug Nicholson's Forerunner that came out in September 1952 and planned something similar but not quite so elaborate. Harding wrote to his contacts overseas and in Australia asking for contributions and gradually their fanzine began to take shape. Jenssen prepared a scraper-board cover, Roger Dard and Ken Slater provided autobiographical contributions, Veney contributed an article on the Australian SF writers, Bob Silverberg in New York provided news about fandom in America and Bert Campbell, editor of *Authentic* in Britain, also provided a contribution. Jenssen also wrote a short story and provided fillos.

The content for the first issue was far more adventurous and wide ranging than any Australian fanzine for years, but planning was the easy part. Apart from McCubbin's news sheets for the Group nobody in Melbourne had published a fanzine since 1941 so Harding and Jenssen had nobody to teach them how to do it and they learned the hard way, through experience. At first they planned to produce their fanzine in the traditional folded-foolscap format but then discovered that Harding's new portable typewriter would not take stencils

⁸ Lee Harding, 'I Remember AFPA', *iOTA 16*, p.57.

sideways. Instead they had to redesign their fanzine in a quarto format and found that it had the advantage of allowing more space for art and headings. Harding also had no experience with cutting stencils and had not heard of corflu, so when he made a typo he either struck it out or planned to cross it out later on the printed pages.

More challenges followed. Planning was more or less completed by mid-November 1952 so they decided to spread the news of their forthcoming opus by publishing a two page Preview. Binns suggested that they could use the McGills Rex-Rotary duplicator to print it so, eager and excited, the three went to McGills after work one evening to print it with the two stencils Harding had typed, complete with typos and strikeouts. An evening of frustration and disillusionment followed when the pages from the duplicator came out with a two inch wide stripe on black ink on the reverse side. Binns tried to fix the problem by cleaning the rollers but the black stripe reappeared no matter what he tried. Eventually they gave up, printed the second stencil on a second sheet of paper which Harding then stapled together and sent out to roughly a hundred fans listed in the ASFS directory and a separate bundle mailed to Dave Cohen in Sydney to distribute at their weekly meetings. Later they found out that the problem had been caused because the stencils had been two inches too short for the duplicator.

The response to their effort was a stony silence but they continued with preparing their first issue. Harding had almost completed stencilling the issue when he heard that Mathews was planning to publish his own fanzine, initially to be called *Xanadu* but later *Bacchanalia*. Graham Stone had loaned Mathews copies of two outstanding American fanzines, *Nekromantikon* and *Fanscient* and Mathews hoped to produce an antipodean counterpart. Harding was alarmed that a second fanzine from Melbourne would be competition for *Perahaps* so he and Jenssen visited Mathews and suggested that they combine their resources rather than compete. Mathews agreed that they would pool their cash and the material for *Perhaps* and *Bacchanalia* in an alliance they called the Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia (AFPA). They would concentrate on publishing the first issue of *Perhaps* and then the first issue of *Bacchanalia*. Both would be in the same format but *Perhaps* would be mainly about science fiction and *Bacchanalia* devoted mainly to fantasy. When Harding

wrote to Dard about their arrangement he replied with a cheque for £10 and became a silent and unacknowledged partner in AFPA.

The wrap-around cover for *Perhaps* was at the printer when they again approached the McGills duplicator, more prepared than last time. But their problems were far from over. Harding had recently received a copy of Silverberg's *Spaceship* duplicated on shiny, semi-slick paper in contrast to the customary American twiltone paper. He was so impressed with it that he scouted around Melbourne's paper houses until he found something similar. It cost twice as much as the regular duplicating paper and he bought four reams of it. They found it was a quarter of an inch larger than their usual paper and soon also discovered that their duplicator ink was incompatible with their new paper and refused to dry on it.

With only a few pages of duplicating to go the Rex-Rotary stopped working and they left it for McGills to repair. They knew that McCubbin had an old fashioned flatbed duplicator that he used to run off the occasional MSFG newsletter and asked him to help complete printing the issue. He did what he could but they soon discovered that the flatbed delivered only about fifty to sixty copies before the stencils started to crease and fall to pieces while they had hoped to print an optimistic hundred and twenty copies. A few weeks later the Rex-Rotary was repaired, Harding had retyped the butchered stencils and they ran off the remainder of the first issue.

When the covers arrived from the printer they were finally able to publish the first issue of their fanzine in February 1953. Harding and Jenssen had laboured hard to produce a superior fanzine but what they ended up with was a great disappointment. At every stage of production the fanzine of their imaginings had crumbled into dispiriting reality. Harding was dismally disappointed because nothing had turned out the way he had hoped due to his youthful lack of experience. He hand trimmed the pages into a semblance of unity and mailed out copies with a heavy heart. He sent a few dozen copies to Cohen in Sydney for distribution, the nominal cost was one shilling a copy but he told Cohen there was no charge if the buyer felt it was unwarranted, and most did not pay.

On top of a muted response Graham Stone's review in *Science Fiction News* was short and condescending. 'A fine effort marred by childish drawings and bad typing and duplicating' he wrote. 'A lot of hard work goes into a fanmag. Without care, common sense and taste it is work wasted. We expect better next time.'⁹ Others were more encouraging. Dard was conciliatory and Tuck was enthusiastic. In *S-F Review* Nicholson wrote that perhaps was 'characterized by energy, enthusiasm, inexperience and general untidiness', a very good summary.¹⁰ The letters of comment that came in were mostly generous and supportive and Harding and Jenssen were thankful that a few people had thought the effort had been worthwhile. It was enough to encourage them to do better with the next issue of *Perhaps*.

Bill Veney wrote that *Perhaps* was 'like a breath of fresh air in a musty room'. It was, he admitted, full of every error imaginable but also that; 'The happy renegades, who hold the theory that the spirit is more important than the form, will find more enthusiasm and vitality than in any other Australian fanzine since FUTURIAN OBSERVER'.¹¹ He was right. *Perhaps* looked sad, due to Harding and Jenssen's inexperience, but its content was a vivid departure from everything that had previously been published in Australia. It was lively, energetic and enthusiastic and bubbled over with new ideas and content. Previous Sydney post-war fanzines had spent more effort on looking neat and tidy but their content had been staid, provincial and conservative. Harding had been inspired by the best of American fanzines of the period and tried to do what he had seen in them. He had sought and received support from overseas fans so *Perhaps* was international rather than parochial. The issue of Stone's *Science Fiction News* in which the *Perhaps* review had been published was carefully laid out and expertly printed but its tone was unexciting and uncreative in comparison. *Perhaps* might have seemed like a poor effort to Stone, but it showed what fanzines published in Australia could become.

⁹ Graham Stone, *Science Fiction News* 2, February 1953, p.8.

¹⁰ Doug Nicholson, *S-F Review* 6, March 1953, p.12.

¹¹ Bill Veney, *Ugh!* 2, February 1953, p.8.

Chastened, Harding and Jenssen began planning the second issue of *Perhaps* which would have none of the faults of the first issue. The big hurdle to their plan was money. Many of the problems of the first issue could be overcome by publishing the second in photolith, but a thirty page issue would cost in the vicinity of \$120-160. Where could AFPA find that kind of money?

A partial solution came in the shape of Ian Crozier who found out about and joined the MSFG through Dard and Operation Fantast. He was more than five years older than Jenssen and Mathews and seven years older than Harding, was employed at a Customs Agent and experienced in business. He was smooth, affable and extraordinarily hospitable, and the Group was awed by his talent for organization. The MSFG were lethargic with little or no inclination to become organized, or had much of an idea about how to do it, so his influence on the club was felt from the start.

Crozier did the lettering for the cover of *Perhaps* but his influence on AFPA came from his experience and knowledge about business and office equipment, and his ideas about what fans should do. The group wanted to produce expensive photolithoed fanzines because it was the only method they knew that would reproduce artwork well. However, Crozier told them about an alternative method of electrostencils that could reproduce half tones and photographs on a duplicator. He brought samples of what the method could do to a MSFG meeting and they were quickly convinced. The catch was that old duplicators like the McGills one could not use electrostencils so they would need to buy a new one. The cost was an astounding \$300 but one photolithoed issue of *Perhaps* would cost almost half that, and with the grand plans the group had, it made economic sense to buy the duplicator. The purchase also came with two drums of different colour that would give them a great deal of flexibility with future publications.

The original idea had been for each AFPA member to contribute \$20 each towards the cost of photolithing *Perhaps 2* but this was rearranged so that the money went towards the purchase of a Roneo 500 which was to be paid off over three years from what they expected would be the profits from their publishing ventures. Crozier became a member of AFPA and

not long after another group member, Kevin Whelahan, also joined.

Buying their own duplicator freed the group to think more imaginatively about what they wanted to do. Crozier was not very keen on most fanzines and saw AFPA as a vehicle for publishing semi-professional magazines to be marketed through various fan outlets across Australia and by direct retail sales. Harding's imagination was much broader and less business like. In addition to the next and improved issue of *Perhaps*, he began thinking about and gathering material for a smaller and frequent news fanzine for Australia. He had devoted some space in *Perhaps* to news from overseas under the heading 'Etherline' and decided to use that title for his new project. He talked to Binns and Jenssen about the idea and they decided to go ahead with a sort of Victorian newsletter on a fortnightly schedule to compete with the Sydney fanzines. He dummied up the first issue but was not keen on cutting the stencils sideways on his typewriter so, when Crozier offered to do the typing for him, he agreed. McCubbin was happy because *Etherline* meant he didn't have to continue publishing a newsletter for the Melbourne group.

Binns ran off the first issue of *Etherline*, dated 1 March 1953, on the McGills Rex-Rotary but when Harding saw it he was upset. Apart from his initials at the end of the editorial on the front page and a couple of interior contributions, there was no mention of him or his role in the fanzine. Harding felt slighted because, after all, *Etherline* had been his idea, but they talked the matter over at length with Crozier and they finally came to an agreement that Crozier would take over *Etherline* and Harding would concentrate on *Perhaps*. There was, Harding said, no point in being greedy, Crozier was enthusiastic and eager to get started and Harding doubted his ability to stick to a fortnightly schedule. The second issue of *Etherline* acknowledged Harding as publisher but, after that, *Etherline* continued on with only Crozier as editor and Binns as publisher, under the AFPA banner.

Mathews' *Bacchanalia* appeared in April 1953, looking quite like *Perhaps* with a printed wrap around cover and duplicated interior pages. There were many many less mistakes and the content was mainly fiction of a fantasy nature including an article about H P Lovecraft. A month later, in May, the second issue of *Perhaps* was published and it was a

marked improvement over the first issue. It made full use of corflu, electrostencils for most of the art work and a red duplicator drum to add colour to the issue. Dard had told Harding how to create an even right hand margin - a laborious process of typing everything twice - so this issue looked much tidier. It featured a long article by the American fan Hal Shapiro, that came to Harding through Dard, about witnessing an atomic bomb test and a few other well written and generally lively pieces, including a letter column. Among its features was three pages of thoughtful book reviews in the style of Rex Meyer's *S-F Review*. It was, in many ways, a good Australian version of an American fanzine of the times and quite a contrast to the earnest Sydney fanzines. When Stone reviewed this issue in *Science Fiction News* he commented favourably on the Hal Sapiro piece but, as for the rest, he wrote, 'Some of the rest of this issue is good enough to sort out from the rubbish' but 'The standard of grammar, spelling and typing is low, and rather spoils the issue'.¹²

By this time Harding had little regard for Stone and his opinions, and his fevered fannish brain was hatching another project. Publishing an issue of *Perhaps* took a great deal of effort and organization but what he needed was an outlet for his fannish energies and enthusiasms, something more immediate, fannish in the American style and less serious than *Perhaps*. The result was *Wastebasket* which he put together quickly using a few items lifted from American fanzines to fill out the issue. His intention was to make *Wastebasket* a fanzine of fannish fun not seen in the Australian fan scene, modelled on American fanzines and poking some fun at Sydney fanzines and what *Etherline* had become under Crozier's editorship. *Wastebasket* bore the sub-title 'What the Good Editors Reject — We Print!' but the content was good so this was more a statement of self denigration than a statement of fact. The production was even more assured than *Perhaps 2* but there was no attempt to include electrostenciling, rather the interior art, of which there was a lot, was all drawn onto stencil, and there was no attempt at right-hand justification which showed the production was more spontaneous. In contrast to *Perhaps*, *Wastebasket* bulged with energy and enthusiasm at the cost of intent and appearance.

¹² Graham Stone, *Science Fiction News* 6, June 1953, p.4.

Response to *Wastebasket* seems to have been stunned silence. Harding later recalled that Doug Nicholson told him; ‘This sort of thing just wasn’t proper for Australian fans’ and that, chastened, he wrote to Cohen asking him to destroy the copies that he had sent him to distribute in Sydney. What probably happened was that Australian fans did not realize the enormity of Harding’s transgression until a second issue of *Wastebasket* appeared a few weeks later. There are two versions of *Wastebasket 2*, a lively 16 page issue dated July 1953 that appeared to be thrown together enthusiastically, containing generally well written and lively material, illos drawn direct onto stencil and a few scurrilous comments thrown in for good measure. There is also a second 12 page version dated 30 July bearing the sub-title ‘News, Views and the Lighter Side’ but containing much more serious material, no illustrations and all but the final couple of pages right margin justified. It could not have looked more like a Sydney produced fanzine or *Etherline* if it had tried. Perhaps Harding had been chastened by response to the first version, recanted his evil ways and shown that he could conform to the expectations of others. Or perhaps there is a touch of parody about the second version. It looked more worthy but, of the two versions of *Wastebasket 2*, the first is much more interesting and entertaining.

Wastebasket demonstrated the divide between the fannish and serious values in Australian fandom with only Harding visibly deviating from traditional Australian values to the fannish side. Fandom should be for fun, he declared, but others did not agree and Harding began to feel that he was on the outer. There was nothing of the cultural cringe about *Wastebasket* as there was in most Australian fanzines of the time. Rather than the tidy, self effacing and anemic nature of those, Harding took the energy of American fannish fandom and tried to give it an Australia, or more precisely Melbourne, voice. However, like many other Australians at that time who were trying to find an Australian voice in the arts and Australian culture more generally, he and his work was not understood or appreciated.

Harding also began to feel that he was being pushed to the outer in AFPA where Crozier and *Etherline* had become the main publishing activities. Harding and Crozier had quite different personalities, Harding was young, enthusiastic and keen to engage with difference and change while his enthusiasm bubbled over into publishing fun fanzines.

Crozier, on the other hand, was a conservative business man who expected general orthodoxy of behaviour in the fan group that would do things in what he considered to be the right way. He took his science fiction seriously and thought that AFPA should publish material that contributed to the betterment of the genre, not for fun. Harding began to feel that Crozier was edging him out by not talking to him and deliberately avoiding him. What, Harding wondered, had he had done that was wrong, what was Crozier planning, and did he want Harding out of AFPA so he could take over control? He began to notice that Crozier and Kevin Wheelahan were often seen in earnest conversation about something, but he was not included in their plans. He began to see Crozier as underhanded and a sinister person who manipulated people, so he withdrew his support for *Etherline* and concentrated on his own fanzines.

The third issue of *Wastebasket*, dated August 1953, probably brought to a head the issues bubbling below the surface. It was published in the same folded foolscap format as *Etherline*, bore the sub-title 'The Science Fiction and Fantasy Review' and had 24 pages of generally excellent content of which a highlight was seven pages of good, literate book reviews. In comparison, the tenth issue of *Etherline*, which was published at the end of July, contained 12 pages of news from Australia and overseas, book lists and news about forthcoming books and magazines, a page of MSFG news, film news and reviews and ads for Operation Fantast and McGills in a style that had no hint of levity.

Talk openly began about reorganizing AFPA along lines preferred by Crozier during August 1953. He announced in *Etherline*, on 20th August, that, in future, the book and magazine reviews which normally appeared in *Perhaps* would be included in *Etherline* and the fiction and other material would appear in AFPA's new fanzine, *Question Mark*, while *Bacchanalia* would continue to feature fantasy and allied subjects. A much more intense discussion, which Harding recalled as a 'Court of Enquiry' in the Sydney style, was convened by Crozier the following week. Harding was accused of publishing 'a magazine in direct competition with an AFPA publication' and copies of worthy *Etherline* and unworthy *Wastebasket* were produced in evidence. Harding was then expelled from AFPA, but after the experience of the previous few months he was glad to go. The expulsion was cordial

enough - Melbourne fans wanted to avoid the acrimony they saw in Sydney - and Harding was allowed to recoup his investment in AFPA by running off fanzines on their duplicator.

The next issue of *Etherline* announced that AFPA had been reorganized with three full members, Mervyn Binns, Kevin Weelahan and Ian Crozier and associate members Keith McLelland and Bruce Heron. Its publications would be *Etherline* and *Question Mark* and all other publications previously under the control of AFPA would revert to the care of their editors, though AFPA would print any fanzine or other material at a low charge.

By the time that Harding was expelled from AFPA Mathews and Jenssen has already ceased to be active in it. Mathews had continued to talk about a second issue of *Bacchanalia* and planned a fanzine of fantastic verse but his interests had begun to shift elsewhere and his attendance at Group meetings became less regular as he drifted into the glades of gafia. After high school he enrolled at the Toorak Teacher's College which offered many new distractions so he developed new interests and his reading widened beyond science fiction. There he met Geraldine McKeown, who attended Group meetings on occasions, and he began selling parts of his science fiction collection in courting her, part at Group meetings and a large part to an academic in Sydney. In July 1954 he sold *Bacchanalia* to AFPA and at the end of the year he and McKewon were posted to begin their teaching careers, he to a single teacher school of 21 students at Yinnar South in East Gippsland and McKewon to a similar school about 20 miles away. They married in 1955 and when they returned to Melbourne 1958 for him to teach at Blackburn South his family, and the home he was building in Croydon, allowed no time for fanac.

After Mathews returned to Melbourne he joined the Australian Labor Party and became active in politics. For a time in the 1960s he served as the Principal Private Secretary to Gough Whitlam, then the Leader of the Opposition in the Commonwealth Parliament, then as a Member of Parliament during the Whitlam Government between 1972 and 1975. He opened Aussiecon in 1975 in that capacity. From 1979 he served in the Legislative Assembly of the Victorian Parliament and held several important positions including Minister for Community Services, Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for the Arts,

in which capacity he opened Aussicon II in 1985. When his political career came to an end in 1992 he turned his mind to other activities including writing and co-authoring several books and gaining a couple of Doctorates. His activities in the Fabian Society and the ALP had moved him into circles where science fiction was rarely discussed, so he did not share his interest in the genre with these new groups. Although he had no involvement with fandom during this time he continued to read science fiction which, he found, kept his mind agile and ready to accept new ideas.

Jenssen was also finding his way into other endeavours. Science fiction has revealed to him the beauty and adventure of science and that was the direction he took. His father never refused to buy him a book of any sort when he asked but also discouraged him as a 'dreamer'. However, in the Melbourne Group he had found friends who shared his passions, saw him as an intelligent person and encouraged him. The Group gave him the confidence to believe in himself and to follow his interest into a career in science. Serious study kept him away from the Group but resulted in him completing Matriculation with honours and enrolling in a Bachelor of Science course at Melbourne University in 1954. At university he also discovered another group of people he could relate to, where intelligence counted and where some people read science fiction but had other things to talk about. His increasing interest in science also effected his tastes in science fiction and he sold his complete run of *Galaxy* to help build up his run of *Astounding*.

After he completed his Science Degree in 1956 Jenssen was invited to study for a Masters, working on Australia's first digital computer, CSIRAC, which had been relocated to Melbourne University the previous year. He thought it was like living science fiction in real life. On this computer he did the first weather modeling in the southern hemisphere and also some of the first computer graphics when he produced weather maps on the computer's printer. He continued to work with computers when he spent some time at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and then studied for a Doctorate between 1959 and 1963, using the same theories he has used in weather modelling to study glaciers. He then went to the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1963 as an Assistant Professor in the Meteorology Department and returned to Melbourne and Melbourne University in 1967.

For the rest of the 1960s Jenssen was a regular at the MSFC's weekly meetings, playing games, amusing the others with his humour and talking about science fiction. However, his real passion had become his academic career and it took over his life so he was rarely seen in science fiction circles for twenty years. During that time he became Head of Department, wrote academic papers, co-edited an academic book and journals, served on positions in academic societies and undertook research in Europe and North America, and loved almost every minute of it.

When Jenssen finally retired from university he returned to one of his first interests, fantastic art. He had started in AFPA drawing direct onto stencils and experimenting with other techniques including scraperboards and electrostencils. When he returned to art it was the modern world of computer graphics which freed his imagination from the problems of manual technique to embark upon great leaps of imagination in form and colour. The result was a series of vivid, imaginative and exotic covers that began to appear on fanzines in Australia and around the world that won him several awards including his own two Ditmars.

Harding produced one more issue of *Perhaps* after he was expelled from AFPA. It showed how much he had learned about writing, editing and production so quickly. Dated January 1954, it impressed with an elegant Jenssen scraperboard cover and a full range of contents from well known and respected Australian and overseas writers. It was the equal of all but the very best American fanzines but the response was minimal, in contrast with the mail he had received on *Wastebasket*, and he was ready to move on to something new.

Harding aspired to become an author so that is where he turned his energy next with a project to publish a semi-professional magazine in Australia to be called *Tomorrow*. However, despite his energy, efforts and the letters he wrote to authors soliciting advice and submissions, the project was not viable and ended before a word had been published.

Like Mathews and Jenssen, Harding had to become serious about his future so he dedicated himself more fully to photography and, feeling unwelcome in the Melbourne Group, was rarely seen there. However, the creative fannish spirit could not be subdued

completely and in 1956 he produced two more fanzines on the AFPA Roneo at the cost of 30 shillings a ream. *Antipodes* was subtitled 'The Friendly Fanzine from Down Under' and was entirely fannish, inspired by American fanzines of the time. The second issue (I haven't seen the first) features a long, amusing story about AFPA's first encounter with the McGills Rotary Rex, a couple of pages of extensive fanzine reviews, notes on Wellington (New Zealand) fandom, a contributions from Don Tuck and a long rambling fannish editorial. There was no artifice of right justified margins and all the illos were drawn direct onto stencil and looked to be an expression of unrestrained fannish enthusiasm.

Antipodes was not published for Australian fans, it was published for fans overseas. Nevertheless, the animosity between Harding and Crozier emerged in some of Harding's comments about *Etherline* that stirred Crozier into response by questioning Harding's comments and reminding his readers that *Etherline* was a registered name and infringement left one open to be sued. His comments about *Antipodes* were dismissive, he wrote that despite its mild attack of typos, *Antipodes* was well produced and readable. Bob McCubbin summarized his review by writing that Harding had learned moderation since *Perhaps* and *Wastebasket* and if he continued to improve he might 'yet carve a niche in the fannish Hall of Fame'.¹³

Harding, however, was now following a different path. He had decided that photography was his future and at the time of the Olympic Games 1956 he was working the Melbourne night clubs and had other projects including working as photographer for a group of French officials in Australia in preparation for the Games. He also worked on the film sets of two American movies made in Australia, *The Sundowners* and *On The Beach*. Harding wanted to make a career as a photo journalist but there was no future in that in Australia so he was beginning to think he had gone as far as he could with photography. When he showed his photographic essays of pictures and words about those two movies to the editor of *Photo Digest*, for which he also provided a monthly column on 35mm photography and the occasional journalistic piece, the editor suggested his writing was as good as his photography,

¹³ Bob McCubbin, *Etherline* 76 (undated), p.7.

so he returned to writing.

As a photographer Harding had filled in the time between appointments jotting down ideas for stories. He began submitting them to Ted Carnell, the editor of *New Worlds* because his interests lay more in the direction of British fiction than the American pulp style. Sending stories overseas was expensive and required a lot of patience. You put your manuscript into an envelope with a return addressed envelope and return postage in International Reply Coupons. After it was posted you then waited weeks for a response due to the distance between Australia and Britain. Harding's first rejection was a simple, 'This doesn't quite suit our needs' and, for five years, Harding kept sending stories and receiving rejections that still encouraged him to send more. Then, in 1960, Carnell accepted Harding's first story, called 'Displaced Person', and after that he became a regular contributor to the British magazines. Perhaps his greatest success came in 1979 with publication of his young adult novel 'Displaced Person' which won the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award in 1980, helped redefine the young adult genre and remained in print for twenty-one years.

Of the four original AFPA members Binns remained closest to it. He remained active in the MSFG and publish *Etherline* for Crozier. He continued to work at McGills, building up their science fiction offerings, building up the MSFG and its library and building up his own clientele of customers for overseas science fiction. In 1970 he opened Space Age Books, the first specialist science fiction bookshop in Australia.

Through Binns AFPA's influence on Australian science fiction fandom extended many years beyond its short life. Although it had ceased to exist in all but name by 1954 its heritage continued through its Roneo 500 duplicator that stayed in the MSFG where Binns continued to use it and where he later taught a new generations of fans how to also use it so it launched several fan publishing careers. More than a decade later it was still in use so when Harding, who had been lured back into fandom in the early 1960s, helped produce the first issue of *Australian SF Review* in 1966 and the first issue of *SF Commentary* in 1969 it was on the old AFPA Roneo 500.

All four had, in their own way, found sources of meaning and achievement despite Melbourne's repressive and uninspiring background. Perhaps they had been driven to their achievements by that environment and by the possibilities of the bigger and more imaginative world of the science fiction that had first brought them together. The other influence on them was the movies that showed them worlds beyond the restrictive life of Melbourne and the wider potential of those worlds. It was also their previously shared life in AFPA and love of movies that brought them together again.

Decades later the youngsters who had formed AFPA and then gone their separate ways, came together again. With the achievements of their professional careers largely behind them, Race Mathews brought them together again as a group to watch movies and party, along with some fans from newer generations. Their lives lived through science fiction and fandom had created bonds that remained strong and their friendship continued together again for many years.

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