



iOTA 19
February 2021

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 for 'the usual' or issues of *iOTA* are put up on efanzines.com fairly soon after I've completed them.

The cover opposite is from the first issue of Dough Nicholson's *Forerunner*. I can't now recall whether I took this photo in the Mitchell Library at the University of Sydney (which has Ron Graham's fanzine collection) or whether this is Doug's copy that he showed me when I visited him.

EDITORIAL **On The Job**

Since the previous issue Valma and I have moved to a larger place with more storage. A fan's got to have lots of storage and we certainly have that now. But what we have here at the moment is chaos and confusion as we hunt in the 1001 boxes (or so it seems) for the bits and pieces we need for every day life. It's coming together, but slowly. And so it is with this issue of *iOTA*.

The attached second section of the history of Australian fandom was ready a couple of months back but moving priorities took over. The draft for the section after that is also complete but it will have to wait a while for me to revise before it sees the light of day.

If things go according to plan the section attached to this issue, 'The Rise of Sydney Fandom' will go before the section on AFPA that I circulated last issue and the next section, 'The Fall of Sydney Fandom' will go after it. We will see how things turn out.

In the meantime I've collected a few items from the fanzines published in the period covered by 'The Rise of Sydney Fandom' for this issue that might give you something of a feel for what it was like to be involved in Sydney fandom during this period.

The Molesworth History

Some of you may be aware that Vol Molesworth, one of the founders of fandom in Sydney, wrote a history of what he called Australian fandom, beginning in the early 1950s and completing it before he died in the early 1960s. It is a particularly idiosyncratic document that has been generally discounted as being biased and therefore unreliable. In comparing it to contemporary documents it doesn't seem to me that Molesworth fabricated any of the story, just that he left out a lot of material that was inconvenient to his point of view. It is therefore, I think, a very useful source of historical evidence from the period and should be made readily available to people who are interested in this sort of thing.

The history has been published several times in several forms, the most accessible is the one published by Ron Clarke in serial form in his fanzine *The Mentor* in the 1990s. You can find it on Fanac.org reprinted from issues 82 to 87. Ron and I don't know if anyone owns the copyright to Molesworth's history and if they do, who that might be. In any event, Ron had given me permission to reprint the history again, which I will probably do in the issue after the next one. It is rather lengthy.

In the meantime, I wonder if anyone out there has a copy of the version published by Graham Stone in 2009 - according to the catalogue of the National Library of Australia. I would like to compare it to the version that Ron published about fifteen years earlier to see if there are any amendments that Stone made. If they could send me some kind of copy of it or lend it to me I would be most grateful.

Doug Nicholson Remembers

From time to time our fine fannish friend Doug Nicholson sends me snippets of memories from his involvement in fandom in the 1950s. He was one of the few who attended Australia's first science fiction convention and has some vivid memories of the times and the fans involved.

I have enjoyed reading them and I had been thinking of including a couple in this issue, but it has occurred to me that I know of the people, places and times Doug writes about because I've been doing the research

to write this history. It might make more sense to hang on to them until you've had the opportunity to read my account of what happened in Sydney to give Doug's memories some context. Something to look forward to, n'est-ce pas.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

My email in-box did not bulge with responses to the pervious issue and the draft of 'The Short Life and Long Shadow of AFPA'. I was not surprised, that is not the kind of thing that inspires folk to leap to their typers with emails of response. I did receive one response along the lines that the respondent couldn't write a letter of comment because he hadn't any experience of the period the section was about. Fair enough too, but I was left wondering whether or not that reader had liked what he'd read or found it interesting, informative or even entertaining. I've been doing this history stuff long enough to know that there is little response if you've done a good job and plenty if you haven't, so I've taken the general silence to be encouragement to keep going. I hope I'm right and you're not all just being polite about it.

There were several emails of comment, however:

Dick Jossen writes:

The cover graphic for Perhaps No.2 was created by my school friend - my best friend - David Rose. He would have been seventeen at the time.

David was an enormously talented artist, as is obvious from the skill displayed by the cover where working in scraperboard is essentially working with a negative image.

David took a B.Sc degree at Melbourne University, essentially as a fall-back in case he could not make a living through his art - a precaution which was never used. He had a very successful career as a creator and teacher of art, with many exhibitions. Some of his work is housed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Sadly, David died fourteen years ago.

Jessie Lynn writes:

I've been meaning to write and say hello and thank you for including

me in your distribution list still - I read *iOTA* and am really enjoying following you on your journey. I'm sorry to hear about John as well - I saw a brief mention of him on social media and was waiting to hear more (I thought from you). Your tribute to him is quite lovely, and shows the intimacies of time and community.

Thanks Jessie for your comments on John. I had not thought of it quite that way but it reminds me that I think we sometimes take fandom for granted since it is the world that many of us is a taken for granted part our lives. The comradeship and support is has given us in our formative years may be one of the reasons we drift back to it when many of the struggles of our lives are behind us and we need a nice, friendly port in which to put down an anchor.

Mark Plummer writes:

And something actually pertinent. You mention the influence of *The Cosmic Dustbug* but how many issues were there? Kim Huett has identified #3, 4, 5 and 10 and an unnumbered issue which may be the same one that Robert Lichtman has and which he thinks may be #7. JB himself said in *Philosophical Gas* #50 that he only had issue on file, #10, but he doubted there were that many. My best guess is that there probably were issues #1 and 2, because I doubt John started at #3, but he probably lost count somewhere after #5 and picked up again at #10 which may or may not be the tenth issue but probably wasn't.

The reason for my curiosity is that a few weeks back I started trying to put together a John Bangsund fanzine bibliography, just for my own amusement really. I know it's possible that John had records of some kind but I didn't want to bother Sally with a query and anyway I quite enjoy trying to work it out. I cross-referenced what appears in Kim's and Robert's catalogues, what's in Marc Ortlieb's index of Anzapa, and what's on Greg Pickersgill's website, as well as what we have here, giving me a list of items seemingly in the possession of somebody, and JB's list of titles and issue numbers as published in *PG*#50 (goes up to 1980). So far we're looking at about 280 items.

Time to begin the Great *Cosmic Dustbug* hunt!

WAHF: Gary Mason, Lee Harding, Doug Nicholson and William Brieding. Kim Hewitt sent some valuable comments on the draft history that are too long and detailed to include here but will lead to a few changes in the final version when it is published. Thanks Kim.

THE GREAT COSMIC DUSTBUG HUNT

Mark Plummer continues:

I thought I'd better check exactly what JB said about it in *PG*#50:

'The Cosmic Dustbug: The only copy I have is no. 10, but I don't think I did 10 issues (6?:10)'

The bit in brackets means he thinks there where 6 but isn't sure, and only has #10). But that was back in 1980. Maybe new information came to light.

I was swapping emails with Paul Skelton just after John died and he mentioned that while the scans of the first few *ASFRs* have found their way onto the fanac website nothing else has, and while there seems to be plenty of potential for a Best of Bangsund nobody's ever put one together, although maybe John had a view about that. I guess part of the problem will be that there's so much of it and nobody has access to the lot, except maybe now Sally. Robert Lichtman has the best collection but that's only about half of it. Perhaps it needs to be a group project.

The listing of John's publications in *PG*#50 is especially useful. It includes everything John considered to be a fanzine or 'other fan publication', and several of those are things I wouldn't have thought to include as they're little more than flyers or Anzapa admin. But John's approach was 'inclusive' and so is mine now. It also addresses a few apocryphal issues, fanzines the should exist based of numerical logic but perhaps don't. There was a *Lodbrog* #6 but John didn't have and thinks there may never have been a #5. Similarly with *Stunned Mullet*, where there may never have been a #2 but there were two #1s. *Philosophical Gas* is a bit tangled too. John implies he has a file copy of #21 but elsewhere says he destroyed the print run and while he meant to start again he conceded in #25 that that wasn't going to happen. There is a *Philosophical Gas* #87 and

several people have copies, and Marc's index says there was a #92 in Anzapa and a version of #92 was posted to a usenet group in 1996 but nobody seems to have any copies of #s 88-91. Did they ever exist?

It's giving me something to do in the long winter nights

I have the feeling that in one of John's FaceBook posts late in 2019 or early 2020 he wrote that he had discovered the The Cosmic Dustbug file lurking somewhere in his flat. Perhaps Sally knows something about this because, to me, that fanzine seemed like the first little shoot of a great fannish talent emerging from the earth in which it had been planted or a young bird first testing its wings. ASFR was a group effort in which John was the front man (as we will see) but The Cosmic Dustbug was the beginning of something original.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN OLD SYDNEY TOWN

It might be a good place to begin a brief cruise across some of the writing of early post-war Sydney fandom with the report of the first meeting of the revived Futurian Society of Sydney. From the first issue of *The Sydney Futurian*, published in September 1947 and probably written by Vol Molesworth.

FUTURIAN SOCIETY OF SYDNEY REVIVED

The seventy-eighth meeting of the Futurian Society of Sydney was held on Saturday, August 9, 1947. Present were Sterling Macoboy, Eric F Russell, Graham Stone, Laura and Vol Molesworth.

The preceding constitution and rules were rescinded and the following constitution accepted in their place:

'The Futurian Society of Sydney is an organization of persons interested in the discussion and promotion of science, weird and fantasy subjects. Persons living within 100 miles of Sydney are eligible for membership. Persons living elsewhere in the Southern Cross area may become associate members. Annual membership fee shall be one guinea, five shillings of which shall be payable on election. Associate members shall pay half a guinea per annum, of which half a crown shall be payable on election. Each member

may invite one guest to any one meeting. Membership automatically lapses after three months; non-payment of dues. Each member shall receive a copy of the constitution, and copies of any stationary, notices, publications, etc issued by the society. Meetings shall be held on the second Saturday night of each month, and shall be conducted according to the rules of debate. A quorum shall consist of two executive and two other members. Elections for the positions of Director and Secretary shall be held quarterly. This constitution can be amended by a two thirds majority vote at a meeting after all members have been notified by circular of the proposal to amend.'

'The following persons then became members under the new constitution: (1) Sterling Macoboy; (2) Mrs Laura Molesworth; (3) Eric F Russell; (4) Graham B Stone; and (5) Vol Molesworth.

Eric F Russell was elected Director of the society and Vol Molesworth was elected Secretary. It was decided that the duties of the Treasurer would be carried out by the Secretary until such time as the society deemed it necessary to elect a separate executive for that work.

It was decided that the Society should have a library of books, magazines and fan publications for the benefit of members. Mrs Molesworth volunteered to be custodian of the library. The Director pointed out that magazines could be obtained for the library which individual members may not themselves wish to collect. Any magazines obtained in exchange for club publications would be placed in the library.

Discussion was then held on club publications. It was decided to issue immediately a small monthly bulletin, to contain news and correspondence. In the future the Society would publish a high-grade magazine, with good art reproductions and editorial matter of more than ephemeral interest. . Mr Macoboy suggested that publications should be kept to a uniform size, viz folded foolscap,

which would enable copies to be bound. This was seconded by Mr Stone, and carried. It was agreed that the monthly bulletin would be priced at 3d a copy to non-members and that Americans could subscribe at the rate of one prozine for six issues. The bulletin would publish general stf information as a service to its subscribers.

Mr Molesworth pointed out that Colin Roden and Arthur Haddon (or Duncan) were still members of the Society. The Director said they would be notified of the change in constitution and the continuance of their membership would depend on their payment of fees.

It was unanimously agreed that meetings should dispense quickly with business and then be thrown open for discussion. No form of intense external activity of a political or other nature would be encouraged.

Mr Molesworth was authorised to publish the first issue of the monthly bulletin, and a financial adjustment would be made at the next meeting, scheduled for Saturday, September 13.

Next is a snippet contributed to *The Sydney Futurian 5* published in January 1948, written by Arthur Haddon. I'm not quite sure what point or points Haddon is trying to make but it seems clear that he is trying to give expression to one of the fundamental questions about science fiction fandom, what is it for and what is it supposed to do. My guess is that this is a response to a debate that was taking place in the Futurian Society of Sydney at the end of 1947 but unfortunately we don't know anything more about the debate than what is written in this contribution.

The final exclamation, 'Remember the Futurian Society is Fandom', might be some kind of call to arms for a group that was becoming dispirited by its lack of progress in converting the world to an appreciation of science fiction. On the other hand, it may be a rebuke to a faction in the society that was questioning its validity or viability. Either way, it was a clear expression of a belief that the goals of fandom could only be achieved

through collective action through organizations such as the Sydney Futurians. Bear this in mind when we come to the next reprinted item.

CROSS ROADS

Arthur Haddon

So Fandom has had a revival. So what?

Fandom has new members and prospects of more. So what?

In spite of recent happenings, fandom is no better off now than it was some years ago. Before, we had the misfortune or sense to disband. Admittedly, there will not be the bickering so evident in the last meetings of the FSS, stage 1. The members, because they are new, know nothing of the events leading up to the Courts of Inquiry, Left and Right Wing diffusion, or the Neofan Party. As a result, there shouldn't be a revival of such.

Looking at things in general, it would appear that at last fandom can look forward to harmony, if not unity. What of unity of purpose? For that matter, what purpose is there as yet? Excepting, of course, what was, and is, embodied in the constitution regarding the expansion of fandom and working for the future.

However, the progress of the latter is directly proportional to the success of the former.

We, as we are, cannot do anything at all for the future. The minority can never rule the majority, when both are of equal status as citizens. So, unless we should suddenly aspire to Parliament, the only course available is expansion. In that way, and that way only, can we ever hope to have ourselves recognized by the public.

Expansion of fandom in Australia has been tried, but only by individual effort. Each member had his own method and ideas on how to attract new fans. A large-scale publicity campaign through bookshops was suggested, but dropped. Not through lack of funds, for a bundle of stickers is not expensive, but from the lack of united effort. 'A' might vote for it, but 'A' might not feel sufficiently keen to include himself in the actual work involved.

Then again there was (and is?) nothing in fandom to attract new members.

An avid reader of science fiction may not make a good fan, for after all stf is only a specialized form of escapist literature. /Brother, are you buying into a fight there!/? Because a chap reads, it does not mean he understands or believes in it in any way but fancy. A good fan should have an intelligent interest in the scientific principles embodied in the stories.

Here there arises another type: the reader who delights in analyzing each story and attacking every thing not in keeping with his accepted scientific (fundamental) theories. He would be bored with Einstein's theory of Relativity, for example, as he would not be able to handle the possibilities it suggests. He would discard it as the thoughts in it require proofs he couldn't believe, for he couldn't understand them.

So, it may be seen that the number of fandom does not mean as much as the type of fans there are. That should be one of the first objectives when taking in new fans, ie, an assessment of their value to fandom. Probably that value doesn't go any further than the joining fee to the club at the moment, but that will have to change.

A majority of members who join through curiosity would prove disastrous to any plans and aims the club may have.

REMEMBER THE FUTURIAN SOCIETY IS FANDOM

An enduring feature of Sydney fandom was the informal weekly gathering known generally as the 'Thursday Night Group' though it went by other names, some of them far from flattering. These weekly gatherings began in mid 1948 and continued almost unbroken for more than a decade. In later years there was a falling out between the Sydney Futurians and the Thursday Night Group which, I think, was over the unstated - and perhaps unasked - questions of what fandom existed for and whether or not it needs

to be organized to achieve those ends.

This write-up of an early meeting will be familiar to almost any fan who has been to these kinds of informal gatherings, then and now now with only the names and location changed. This appeared in *The Sydney Futurian*, 13 September 1948, author unknown.

From this single item you learn more about the personalities of Sydney fandom at the beginning of the 1950s than anything else written during this entire period because Sydney fans only rarely wrote about themselves as people.

A SOCIETY COLLECTS MINUTES AND WASTES HOURS

It is seven-thirty. Those who have lingered on in town to attend theaters, lecture and dance have finished their dinners and departed. The Quality Inn, in King Street, Sydney, has only a half tenanted appearance.

At a longish table a muscular dark-haired young man and a thin fair-haired young man, with occasional references to coffer cups and ashtrays, are playing chess. 'Check,' exults Veney ... Molesworth stiffens, scowls, sucks at the inevitable cigarette, and then shoves in the way an inoffensive pawn.

It is a quarter to eight. Up ambles a small and slim individual, fanning a palm and saying, 'Ha.' Or else - 'What news on the Rialto?' or something indecent. Stone heaps a heap of prozines on the table, gloats over the latest US book Molesworth has brought in, then with a serious and scholarly profile examines the menu. ('Lemme see, now, lemme see ...')

It is eight pop emma. There is an influx. Royce Williams, wearing a devilish scarf, with his hair slicked, breezes along, inspects the female patrons with a bright eye, and then, in a quiet and gentlemanly fashion, inspects magazines. Stan Lanarch, plump and middle-aged, manifests himself; and drawing back a chair with an ingratiating air is Harold Lennon, lean, dark and saturnine, but claiming no direct kinship to Dracula. (We are not deceived by this

flesh-hued daemon's professed interest in fairy tales. We suspect ... the unmentionable.)

'Check,' says Molesworth. 'A legal move,' condescends Veney, raking up a rook.

'Have you noticed, Vol,' asks Stone, 'the peculiar way in which Macoboy sidles up to a waitress and says -'

'Ah bien, mes chers,' sleekly greets Macoboy-san. 'I trust you are well, yesss? Goot evening, Graham; I am glad to see you looking your usual lecherous self. Ah, Messrs Larnach and Lennon. While book hunting the other day, I found, in miraculous condition, the first edition of, etc ...'

'Interested?' Stone armlengths a 1929 Amazing.

'Seeing as the really important member is now present,' says P (Strawberry Blonde) Glick - 'referring of course to my august person - shall we commence?'

'O let them begin the beguine,' yodels Stone.

'The meeting,' frowns Molesworth, 'is called to order. I will order a toasted ham. The secretary will read the minutes of the last meeting.'

'Why not read the minutes of the next meeting for a change?' sniggers Stone, who reads old fanzines and imagines he is a baby ghoul. (The syllabic shift frustrates him.)

Business tonight is slack. No matter how hard Molesworth tries to thing things along, there is a slobbering interest in the STARTLINGS at auction. 'Two bob,' bids Stone. 'Three.' 'I warn you - I'm going to get that issue no matter what it costs.' 'Three and six.' 'Four bob.' 'Etc.'

It is nine-thirty. Molesworth and Glick are playing slow motion chess. Veney is arguing politics with Macoboy-san, while Harry Brunen discusses eroticism in ancient times with Moby Dick, who pats the makings into shape and puffs a reflective smoke. Larnach is elaborating on the history and comparative prices of

book collecting to Lennon, and from time to time slyly winks, while Stone, Williams, and anyone else who isn't doing anything else, listens. Then:

'Hi, jazz. Heard the latest jazz about jazz?' 'Tis Jock McKenna, bow tie, bright toothy smile, furrowed brain, little black notebook, and all. Folding money, envious looks, and magazines are exchanged.

'Wait a minute, wait a minute, I think it is, I'm sure it is, yet, it is, look, it's - Check!'

Glick overlords gloatingly while Molesworth mutters foul fantastic phrases.

The meeting is adjourned at 11.30pm.

Another light hearted look at Sydney fandom appeared in a report written by Harry Brook about his visit to Sydney fandom that Bill Veney published in *Ugh! 2* in February 1952. It includes, among other things, the suggestion that Sydney fans were keen on their 'ginger Ale' and I've included a short fillo, probably written by Veney, which emphasizes the point. The consumption of alcohol appears to be a continuing theme in science fiction fandom. (On a personal note I might add that the second worst hangover I ever achieved was in the Blue Mountains in the company of fans, but about three decades after this story. The first worst was in Minneapolis, also in the company of fans, but that is another story.)

'... and finally, Harry, when you get to Sydney be sure to see Vol Molesworth and get his point of view.'

MARTIAN INTERLUDE PART 1

Well, my child, it's time all good Martian kiddies were fast asleep. Adjust your pumber and meedle into your lasteron. Oh damn, the little brat wants a bedtime story. I'll never hatch another egg as long as I live. Kids are too much bother. I'll think of something fantastic and weird, otherwise the little horror'll keep me here all night.

Once upon a time there was on the third planet a tribe called humans, who thought they had intelligence – of course they were not very bright, what with only two arms, two legs, two eyes, and not a single solitary tentacle. Anyway, they had organizations called science fiction clubs all over the planet and there the most advanced thinkers of the community sat and talked and read and discussed stories by people with odd names like Bradbury, DeCamp, Nicholson or Hemming, who in turn represented the cream of the most advanced thinkers. And in a small village called Sydney there appeared a fellow by the name of Brook, who for a brief three weeks wanted to meet all those people.

Now this is the story of the fellow Brook, who went to Sydney and hasn't been the same since. He went to the meeting place of the Sydney Science Fiction Group on Thursday night and he was introduced to so many people that he forgot most of their names and he looked at all those magazines which were for auction and his eyes gleamed and his predatory instincts arose and then he heard bids for GALAXY and ASTOUNDING go as high as seven shillings and he realized the implications of a thing called HCOL. But he managed to buy a few magazines, which he clutched tightly to his chest when he left. But he didn't meet Mr Molesworth.

And on the following Saturday he went to Double Bay with a few others in a monstrous and antediluvian conveyance, to a place called the Oaks and drank ginger Ale and Bluey Glick decided to buy a tapeworm. And Brook didn't meet Mr Molesworth at Double Bay.

The next weekend Brook went to the mountains and spent a very pleasant two days at the Grand View drinking ginger Ale and looking at scenery and drinking ginger Ale. And on the way back, Ted Butt explained to Brook the intricacies of the Theory of Relativity which you are taught in kindergartens but which those humans find very deep indeed, which shows what an absence of tentacles will do. But Mr Molesworth didn't come to the mountains.

And on the next Wednesday Brook went to the Australian Fantasy Foundation library and paid five credits to join and he rejoiced, for at last his ambition would be realized and he'd be able to read all the science fiction he wanted. But when he went to the Thursday night meeting of the Sydney Group he found that people were spitting chips and there were dark mutterings on the sidelines and he was told by the librarian that he couldn't borrow any more books after all, because it was now illegal and only an August body call the Futurians could borrow books. And Brook was sad and invoked a deity by name of Edward Kelly and said that Mr Kelly was a gentleman. And Brook didn't meet Mr Molesworth that night either and he grieved deeply.

On the following Saturday, they drank more ginger Ale and Brook was very grateful to Jack Leggett for lending him magazines so that at least he would be able to read science fiction when got back to the Mulga, which is a plant which grows on the other side of the black stump. But he didn't meet Mr Molesworth.

And Brook was most reluctant to leave Sydney, but being in the Army he has no choice because that organization took a very poor view of a thing called Ack Willie, which shows you what a queer bunch those humans were. He resolved, however, to return at the earliest opportunity, because he had had a wonderful time and he intended to try and attend the Convention so that he could meet Mr Molesworth at last.

Now go to sleep, my darling. Daddy has to go out and meet a perfectly gorgeous blonde with twenty seven lovely tentacles.

----- Harry Brook

BUTT- VENEY INCIDENT

There was a strange tension in the air which could be cut with a knife. Veney, his eyes smoldering with emotion, turned and with measured tread walked towards Ted Butt. The Newcastle man, white-faced but determined, stood his ground. Finally, when a scant

three feet away, Veney stopped. Neither spoke for a full ten seconds. A crisis had arrived. Something had to happen.

'Well,' said Butt, the man who had reviewed Ugh! in SFR, 'what are you doing to do? Speak up. Don't stand there like a Homo Neanderthalensis.'

'I'm going to another pub. They've turned the beer off and it's only about nine o'clock. Let's get the hell out of here. I'm thirsty.'

WILL BROOK MEET MOLESWORTH?? WILL MOLESWORTH MEET BROOK?? DON'T MISS OUT ON THE SECOND CONVENTION WHERE THE NEXT EPISODE OF THIS DRAMA WILL BE PLAYED...

A LITTLE LATER, IN MELBOURNE

Twelve or so years later the flame of science fiction fandom in Australia was being kept alive by Merv Binns who chronicled the progress of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club in *Australian SF News*. By 1965 the world of science fiction had changed remarkably with a greater emphasis on movies and television, the first steps into space were being taken and there was plans for the next science fiction convention in Australia.

March 1965

NEWS AND VIEWS

Despite the continuing flow of paperbacks and books being published nothing really stands out. Heinlein's FARNHAMS FREEHOLD did not live up to expectations. Then again, we expect the best from him and when it does not meet the highest of standards we tend to criticize it a little more harshly. At least the sequel to DUNE WORLD has appeared as a five part serial (scream!) in Analog. This should be really good.

Despite my caustic comments on the TV series OUTER LIMITS in my last report I must admit that some of the recent shows seen here have been slightly terrific. The emphasis on the monsters seems to have been dropped. Eando Binder's I ROBOT was quite well done and one a week or two before called, I think, THE GLASS HAND, starred

Robert Cup as the humanoid robot destined to spend thousands of years carrying the remaining earth population on his person in the form of a wire recording. The latest, a two parts about an alien life force taking over human bodies to help it build a spaceship, is also really good. I would say that with the last few shows on this series, SF movies on tv at any rate have at last grown up. Another series just started from England, Dr Who, looks as though it may be fun but not to be taken seriously. The TV series based on JOURNEY TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA would not have to be much to be better than the original to be an improvement. This is due to start soon on one of the local channels.

Some years ago there was a flourishing group of SF fans in our sister city. From what I hear they tried to do things in a big way. I attended the 3rd Australian SF Convention and was suitably impressed. It would seem however that things were not all that they seemed and some people could not get their own way and, to cut a long story short, they succeeded in putting Aussie Fandom back about 20 years. It is against our nature to be organized in any way and despite brave attempts by various people to organize an Australia wide organization nothing very startling has come of it. I am not knocking these efforts but I must admit I have done little towards them myself. What makes fandom tick in the US and England at any rate. The conventions? What is the main attraction? Big Name authors? What contribution to fandom do the fan mags make? Help to make friends of fans many miles apart? Yes! Maybe a lot of them are a lot of rubbish but that is not so important. What is all this leading up to at any rate?

The Melbourne SF Club sponsored two Conventions in 1956 and 1958. They were reasonably well attended by local fans but very few interstate faces were seen. What happened to all the faces at Albury and Canberra and Sydney too as far as that goes? At any rate let us forget the past and look to the future. Wait for it!!!!!!

Discussions are already underway for a CONVENTION IN MELBOURNE in 1966. You will hear much more about it over the next few months but we can promise you now we are aiming at 'quality rather than quantity' this time.

The MSFC is still rolling along, it must be if we are talking about

putting on conventions. However we would like to see more people at the meetings Wednesday and film nights. A trip to BALLARAT and a discussion at the Observatory was attended by six of our members on the 6th of March. Everybody enjoyed the trip. We should do it more often.

TWILIGHT ZONE has started on local TV again, now in hour episodes. The first was good but others have been mediocre despite the last, MUTE, scripted by Richard Matheson. Of the three episodes so far the first and the last were true sf as against the old style TV shows with a distinct fantasy aspect. They could improve.

June 1965

NEWS and VIEWS

The headlines these days are what 'we' expected to see in the daily news around about now, but now that the time has come when every day a little bit more science fiction becomes science fact you still can't realize that it is fact. Seeing the United States Gemini film on TV tonight was not the letdown that I thought it would be. It was really terrific and I can't wait to see a better version of it in color and so on as soon, as we can get it from the NASA branch. The Russian 'walk' in space was not very clear and I think the American film has had a much bigger impact on everybody. The frontiers of space are slowly but surely being turned back and we are very privileged to be here watching mans greatest adventure. Many people who knock the space program are unable to see the significance of it all. SF has prepared us to a certain degree so please let us be patient with the 'uninitiated'. The fact that we, the Earth, are just a speck of dust on a gigantic plane means nothing to people involved in their everyday efforts to just go on living. What is happening today will have more effect on the people of the future, though we are already beginning to feel the benefits of the space program is only in small ways. Whether we, that is homo sapiens or his decedents, ever do the things we dream about with the help of our SF authors,, we now will never know, but at least we can say we saw the promise of things to come.

Nothing further to report on the 7th Australian SF Convention.

Everybody will be receiving a report very soon from the organizer John Foyster. One thing we can promise is a very good movie program. I am told we have now over 50 paid up members both here and overseas. Your subscription is needed now! What about sending 15/- to John Foyster at Box 57, Drouin, Victoria.

THE PURPOSE OF HISTORY

While I've been putting this issue together I've been wondering what readers might make of it. Most of it is reprints of material written about seventy years ago by many people who are no longer with us. What has the people they knew, the events they took part in and their thoughts about them to do with us? Very little, you might say. And you might be right if you are not curious about the shape of our world today. It did not just come into existence by magic the day before yesterday, it was created day after day by all the people who have lived before us. The big decisions and even their little decision have built up like the layers inside a pearl or the rings in a tree to make our present out of the past. That's what I find interesting about history, it tells us how our world came to be the way that it is.

This point in this issue of *iOTA* is, I think, the point at which our understanding of our past turns from being antiquarianism or chronicling into history. Copying out the stories that people in the past wrote to help explain and record their present only tickles our imaginations and raises questions about what their world was like and the people who inhabited it with them. They are not talking to us and interpreting their present to make sense in our present, how could they? That is what history is for, to tell stories about what happened in the past in a way that is understandable in the present that has followed their present and then understand ourselves and where we are a little better as a result.

The other point of history is to turn what happened in the past into stories because our brains have evolved to find pleasure and understanding in stories rather than in lists or statements of fact. The challenge of writing good history is to turn evidence left to us from the past into a story which we understand and enjoy in the present. That is my aim.

THE RISE OF SYDNEY FANDOM, 1947-1953

DRAFT 28/1/21

The embargo on importing American publications continued after the war due, the Australian government said, to the imbalance of trade between Australia and nations not in the British Commonwealth. For a while towards the end of 1952 the government planned to lift the embargo but a downturn in the sale of Australian wool overseas led to a decline in the Australian balance of trade so the government maintained its embargo, which lasted until the end of the 1950s. This starved Australian science fiction fans of what they considered to be the best science fiction, American science fiction.

The embargo did not prevent American books and magazines from entering Australia, it was intended to prevent Australians spending their money on them to limit the flow of Australian money to America. Customs authorities were given the power to seize American publications they suspected had been paid for by Australians and customs regulations also allowed them to seize material that was banned on political, moral or other grounds. This left Australians in a constant state of apprehension about what might be let in or seized because officials in different States applied the rules differently and there was no appeal against the decisions of individual officials. In Western Australia, for example, the post office had no objection to selling International Reply Coupons or Money Orders that could be sent overseas to pay for books and magazines but customs authorities were very enthusiastic about seizing anything they thought looked suspicious. In other States it was much more difficult, if not impossible, to send any money to America but customs authorities were often lax in seizing material coming into the country. At one stage the customs authorities in Sydney placed a ban on almost everything coming into the country which was so severe that Sydney fans debated whether they should appeal to the Minister for Customs, but the seizures eased so they decided it was best not to make the matter official. When Sydney fan Doug Nicholson had a story published in America in *Galaxy* he took part of his payment in the form of additional copies of that issue so he

could give them to friends who would not be able to buy them in Australia. When the parcel arrived in Australia it was stopped by the authorities so Nicholson had to explain why he wanted it before it was released to him.

Science fiction was dismissed in the general community as inferior literature, often referred to as ‘that Buck Rogers stuff’ and demeaned as escapist literature. Science fiction’s fans knew differently and believed it helped them prepare for the future. Bert Castellari, for example, was in the Australian Army in Borneo in 1945 when he heard about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. He understood what it was and what it meant, and his first thought was that the future had arrived sooner than he expected. His army mates did not know or care about the future, to them it only meant the war would be over sooner. In 1952 Vol Molesworth told a meeting of the Book Collector’s Society that science fiction had outlived its pulp origins and attained manhood, and that it embodied the spirit of the Atomic Age and looked towards the stars. Graham Stone said that science fiction was not a means of escape but a means of catching a glimpse of the reality that every day life obscured.

The science fiction that was publicly available in Australia was mainly British books and reprint editions of American magazines which were reduced versions of the American originals. The most common place to find them in Sydney at the beginning of the 1950s was McKays, a bookstall run by two brothers in the Royal Arcade between Pitt and George Streets. Some British reprint magazines were on display and more interesting science fiction (and possibly pornography) might appear from below the counter if you asked. In the early 1950s British paperback (called ‘pocketbooks’) began appearing in bookshops, some reprinted American science fiction among them, costing around 2/6 and 2/9 each. However hard-cover books, costing from around 10/6 to 16/-, remained prized by fans and collectors. For a short period in 1953 Kevin Dillon published a weekly sheet listing the science fiction on sale at the various shops in Sydney, usually no more than a page listing the titles, shops in which they were available and their price. The largest range could be found at Angus & Robertson which had, in March 1953, eleven science fiction and fantasy titles of which only one novel was by an

American author.

Some science fiction was published locally including *Thrills Incorporated* which ran for 23 issues from March 1950, the first twelve in pulp format and the rest in pocketbook size. Most of its stories were written by local hack writers who knew little about science fiction and eight stories were plagiarized by local authors from American stories. Descriptions of the magazine ranged from 'juvenile' and 'unpromising' to 'bloody awful'.¹ Following the demise of *Thrills Inc* the Malian Press published American reprints and other short lived magazine titles included *Future* and *Science Fiction*. Newspapers and magazines published the occasional science fiction short story, often reprints of American stories but also sometimes by Australian authors including Frank Bryning and Norma Hemming.

Vol Molesworth and some of his friends attempted to launch a local science fiction press named 'Futurian Press' in 1948 but the deal to buy a printing press for it fell through. In 1950 Molesworth bought a small letter press and, with the support of some friends, published a handful of booklets. The first publication was a *Checklist of Australian Fantasy* by Stan Lanarch that was launched at a cocktail party on 29 October 1950. Other titles included a volume of verse by Sydney fan Lex Banning (under the name John Hilbery), Molesworth's 'Blinded They Fly', 'Let There be Monsters' and the first part of his History of Australian Fandom, and Graham Stone and Royce Williams 'Zero Equals Nothing'. These were not easy booklets to produce because each letter of the text had to be set by hand and the pages printed individually. The largest, 'Blinded they Fly' was 36 pages long with a print run of 200 copies, each one numbered and autographed, at the cost of 6/-. Overseas reviewers complained that they were very expensive and that there was little print on each page - which was due to the small size of the printing platen of the press. These booklets were not published for the general public but for collectors, not to make much money but to promote Australia to overseas fans and collectors and

¹ Etherline 20 and 27, S-F Review 4, Telepath 1, Woomera 1, Con 13, Stopgap May-June 1952, Molesworth chapter 3, I Remember AFPA, interviews with Lee Harding, Merv Binns and Doug Nicholson.

be a source of overseas money that could be used there to buy American books and magazines.

Another attempt to publish science fiction in Australia was Doug Nicholson's *Forerunner*. He intended it to pave the way for a professional, adult, Australian science fiction magazine that would grow out of fandom and have the interests of fandom at heart. He saw that many fans in Sydney wanted to write science fiction but had nowhere to publish it except in fanzines, so he wanted to create a magazine that was between a fanzine and a prozine to encourage Australian writers by giving them a place where they could be published to gain experience and learn the art of writing. At eighty page the first issue of *Forerunner* was more ambitious than anything published in Australian fandom after the war but inexperience marred it so it was a jumble of styles. Some pages were run off from stencils that Nicholson typed himself, several with interior illustrations hand drawn onto stencil, and some were photo-litho printed in a very small font. There was a two tone printed cover of Nicholson's design and everything was held together by a big metal clip. The result looked far from professional but it was a promising start with the first episode of a serial by Vol Molesworth, fiction by Norma Hemming, C Gilbert, Royce Williams and Norma Williams, verse by Lex Banning and an article by Nicholson.

The second issue of *Forerunner* was dated Autumn 1953. Nicholson had learned a great deal about production from the first issue so the second one was a much slicker 46 pages with a neat wrap around cover. All the pages were printed from stencils with right hand justification and some electrostencilled headings to enhance the tidy appearance. It contained stories by Frank Bryning, Royce Williams, Vol Molesworth and Dough Nicholson and an article by Norma Williams.

However *Forerunner* was doomed to failure almost before it began. The standard of the fiction and the production values were adequate but Nicholson's big hurdle was distribution. There was no commercial interest in science fiction in Australia so the only avenue of distribution he had was through fandom so he promoted the magazine as much as he could, took copies to club meetings and conventions and sent many copies overseas in trade for overseas

fanzines. The contents of the third issue were ready when Nicholson took a job in Ballarat, Victoria, and handed it over to Kevin Dillon to publish, which never happened.

Forerunner became a collectors item, as did the productions of the Futurian Press, the Malian Press and even *Thrills Incorporated*. They could be traded with collectors overseas for American publications and were a necessary part of any Australian collection. The paucity of science fiction in Australia forced fans to hunt for and hoard it, making most of them collectors. Fans regularly visited second hand shops in the hope of finding new treasures they could add to their collections. As those collections grew fans began making lists of what they already had and what they still needed so collecting and bibliography became the central focus of many Australian fans' activities. Lanarch's bibliography of early Australian fantastic fiction, published by the Futurian Press, was an early example and, in Tasmania, Don Tuck's bibliographic work became his main fannish activity. Vol Molesworth built up an impressive collection of rare and collectable books and magazines, in 1948 Queensland collector Charles Mustkin has 500 science fiction magazines, including 50 post-ban issues and Stone had built up a collection of 117 books and 745 magazines, including almost complete runs of *Amazing* and *Astounding*. When established fans such as Eric Russell and Bert Castellari lost interest in science fiction they began selling their collections, often at auctions where the highest prices went to items that other fans needed to fill gaps in their collections.

Collecting and the building of large libraries became one of the reasons for the formation of science fiction clubs in Australia after the war. One of the objectives of the reformed Futurian Society of Sydney was to build up a club library from which members could borrow and which would become one of the club's main attractions for new members.

Vol and Laura Molesworth married in 1946 and hosted the first meeting of the revived Futurian Society of Sydney at their home in Kensington on 9 August 1947. Five people were present, Vol Molesworth, Laura Molesworth, Graham Stone, Eric Russell and a new fan, Sterling Macaboy who was an author, radio script writer and producer. They also had the support of

letters from Bill Veney and Arthur Haddon (who were still away on military service), Ralph Smith and, from Tasmania, Bob Geppen and Don Tuck. All five present were elected as members of the Society, Russell was elected Director, Vol Molesworth Secretary and Treasurer and Laura Molesworth was appointed Librarian.

The first order of business was to ratify the Society's new constitution which set out the details of how the club was to function. Molesworth believed in the necessity of formal organizations with constitutions to govern the club and give direction to fan activities so the Society was tightly controlled by its leadership and constitution, prospective members had to submit applications and their membership be approved by the existing members. When something was to be done it was debated in parliamentary fashion and subcommittees formed so, when the Society considered a proposal for Australian representation at an 'American' convention (now the 'World Science Fiction Convention), a sub committee of three was set up to consider how that might be done.

The Society's constitution was carefully drafted so it may seem a little strange, seen from a modern perspective, that it did not mention science fiction. Instead it began: 'The Futurian Society of Sydney is an organization of people interested in the discussion and promotion of science, weird and fantasy subjects'² This was in keeping with the Futurian philosophy of adopting a name that was more dignified than the term 'science fiction' and the claim that Futurians were more than just fans, they were people who had an interest in the changing world, were interested in more than just a pile of musty magazines and looked forward to seeing something of the dreams in those magazines come true.

'Promotion' was the most important word in that statement because the Society could not promote the objects of its interest if it did not first promote itself to gain more members and public acceptance. To do this the Society published a club fanzine to spread news of its activities

² *The Sydney Futurian* 1

and established a library to attract members and give them science fiction to read. At its first meeting the revived Futurian Society of Sydney resolved to set up a library comprising magazines that individual members did not wish to collect and any magazines obtained in exchange for club publications. Full membership of the Society was one Guinea and associate membership was half that, 10/6. Members and associates could borrow from the library at the rate of 3d per item per fortnight, plus postage. By the end of 1947 the library has 17 books, over 40 prozines and 200 issues of 47 different fan publications and the club had 17 members and eight associates, most of whom lived outside Sydney.

The Society immediately began publishing a small fanzine, *The Sydney Futurian*. It was neatly and plainly duplicated on four, and later eight, pages in a folded-foolscap format which was chosen because, Macoboy suggested, copies could later be easily bound to preserve them. It's main content was the progress of the club and its slowly growing membership, news of club activities, notices of the science fiction becoming available locally and some interstate and international news. About 120 copies of most issues were printed and distributed as widely as possible in Australia and overseas to draw support from a wide fan base. It was free to members, cost 3 pence a copy to non-members and Americans could subscribe at the rate of one American prozine for six issues of the Society's fanzine. This subscription rate for non-Australian fans became a common asking rate for Australian fan publications because it was one way most Australian fans could get otherwise unaccessible American prozines and books.

The Society believed that it represented Australian fandom to the rest of the world and, in fact, made up the greatest proportion of known fans in Australia. An Australian Fan Directory published in Sydney in 1950 listed twenty-two names, all but five living in New South Wales. As part of that representation to overseas fandom the Futurians organized contributions to be sent to overseas conventions including a sound recording of Sydney fans sent to the 1950 'American' convention and photographic displays to one or two later conventions. Correspondence began between Australian and overseas fans, encouraged after a permanent air mail service was opened between Australia and North America in mid 1947. Letters from Australians appeared

occasionally in American fanzines and letters from fans in New Zealand, Britain and North America sometimes appearing in Sydney fanzines. By 1952 nine Australian and New Zealand fans had joined the American National Fantasy Fan Federation.

The largest issue of *The Sydney Futurian* was its eighth, a special 'Torcon Issue' that the Society sent to the 'American' convention in Toronto in 1948. It featured a cover drawn onto stencil by Ralph Smith, a description of the Society and its activities, a list of the Society's by then 27 members, a description of the library, an article about Australian fantasy books and a letter column including letters from Canada and Japan. It highlighted the Futurians belief that organization was necessary for fandom to succeed and, in the opening greeting, suggested that time was ripe in the post-war world to establish one global fan organization to which national organizations and individuals could affiliate because, it said, 'there are many ways in which fans in different countries can assist one another in the collection and appreciation of stf, weird and fantasy fiction'.³ The proposed constitution for a World Science Fiction League was drawn up in Canada and a Futurian select committee comprising Molesworth, Royce Williams and Eric Russell prepared a report on it for the November 1948 Society meeting. Despite the effort that went into this proposal, the Futurians had to tell fans overseas that they could not participate in an international fan organization because Australian government regulation prevented them from sending money overseas to support it.

The Futurians received generous support from overseas fans in their quest for American science fiction. A letter from Molesworth published in the June 1948 issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* about the need for magazines for the Society's library brought numerous letters from North America, so many that Molesworth could not answer them all and farmed them out to other Futurians to answer. Unsolicited parcels of magazines began arriving from the United States, Canada and Britain and donations from well known overseas fans including Ted Carnell and Ken Slater in Britain and Red Boggs in America. Australia's plight became so well known

³ *The Sydney Futurian* 8

in fandom overseas that the 1949 American convention in Cincinnati donated \$100 to be spent on books and magazines for the Futurian's library.

A more promising and regular source of science fiction began with a letter from British fan Ken Slater that was published in *The Sydney Futurian* at the end of 1947. Writing as the trading section of the British Fantasy Library, Slater said he could offer a large number of wartime American magazines and could 'send them quite a bit'.⁴ Slater's service became Operation Fantast and a major supplier of science fiction to Australian fans. By the beginning of 1952, Australians also had access to other British book and magazine dealers including Milcross Book Service of Liverpool, Dell's of Bradford and, in London, the Fantasy Book Service, E J Carnell and G K Chapman. British reprint magazines and books were considered inferior to the American originals but they were more readily accessible so these services became very popular with Australian fans who learned about them.

The Sydney Futurians held monthly gatherings that included an official business meeting that was kept as short as possible and at which 'no form of intense activity of a political or other nature would be encouraged'.⁵ To begin there was not much disagreement because there was little to disagree about. However, Slater's letter and application to join the Society encouraged Futurians to expand their horizon and their view of the Society's place in the science fiction world. At the December 1947 meeting they decided to drop the word 'Sydney' from the Society's title to become simply the 'Futurian Society' with the objective of serving science fiction fandom globally by offering membership to anyone around the world. Those who could attend meetings paid a fee of one guinea a year, those could not became associates at half that fee and Americans could pay their subscriptions in prozines or books. The use of the library, however, was limited to Australia.

⁴ *The Sydney Futurian* 5.

⁵ *The Sydney Futurian* 1.

By the end of 1948 the Society had 34 members including some North American associates and newcomers Phinneas (“Bluey”) Glick and Nick Solntseff, whose family had recently migrated from Shanghai. The membership included a university lecturer, a writer, an editor, a pharmacist, an artists, a sailor, a store man, a musician, a tailor and a plumber. Growth in the Society’s membership was not a complete blessing because more members brought a diversity of opinions which did not always sit well with some members who were quick to argument and did not appreciate being challenged. The first sign of this confrontation came at the May 1948 meeting when some members wanted the Society to revert to its earlier name of the Futurian Society of Sydney and revert to being a purely local club. ‘Animated discussion’ occurred, no agreement could be reached by the meeting and the issue had to be decided by a plebiscite of all full members, resulting in the Society reverting to its original name. Argument had apparently become common at meetings and when Molesworth had to resign as Director in March due to ill health Bill Veney replaced him and commented on earlier ‘stormy periods’ in the Society, but said there had been no open clash of personalities such as had spoilt the Society in earlier times.⁶

The Society had been meeting in members homes but the growing membership led to it holding a meeting at the Quality Inn in King Street in April or May 1948. Seven members and five invited guests attended, making it the best attended and liveliest Futurian meeting for some time. Following this success the Society decided to hold weekly meetings on Thursday night at the Qaulity Inn and they began on 10 June 1948 at which 14 fans were present. The Society’s business was kept to a minimum and at the 98th meeting it lasted for two minutes, from six to eight minutes past 10 in the evening, during which the Director opened the meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting were read and, there being no further business, the meeting was closed. The rest of the evening was spent in talking, swapping and selling books and magazines and playing chess. The meetings were better attended than previous Society meetings and invariably very enjoyable.

⁶ *The Sydney Futurian* 10 and Molesworth chapter 3.

Although its Thursday Night meeting were popular the Society was beginning to struggle. When Molesworth had to withdraw due to ill-health Stone took over publication of *The Sydney Futurian* and wrote that the Society needed a couple of energetic and capable fans to maintain the club because the pace had proved too much for two secretaries so far - Molesworth and Eric Russell said he couldn't keep up with it. A few Futurians began drifting away (including Laura Molesworth) and when Laura and Vol Molesworth hosted a party to celebrate the Society's ninth anniversary on Sunday 7 November, with a buffet provided by Laura, only eight members arrived. (The low attendance might have been affected by a strike in the coal fields which limited railway travel and led to an 'occasionally tense' discussion of politics during the meeting.)⁷

One reason for the Society's decline may have been that, by now, many of its most active members were into their twenties and, having lost several years during the war, were beginning to move on with their lives. As a result the leadership of the Society changed during 1948 as members found they had little time for club responsibilities and at one time or another Stone, Veney and Molesworth all held leading positions in the Society but had to withdraw due to other demands on their time. At elections in September 1948 Molesworth was elected both Director and Editor, Veney Secretary, Glick as Treasurer and 'Moby' Dick as Librarian. However, at the beginning of 1949 Molesworth announced he could not continue as Director due to pressure of work and study so relative newcomers were elected to the leadership; John Cooper as Director, Lennon as Treasurer and Williams as Secretary-Librarian.

Despite this instability the Society decided to embark on a new venture at the end of 1948. At Molesworth's suggestion *The Sydney Futurian* ceased publication and a new fanzine for local consumption was planned, along with a more ambitious but less regular 'high-grade' magazine for the Society's overseas members and for trade with overseas fan publications. An elected sub-committee comprising Cooper, Lennon, Macoboy and Russell was to edit the new

⁷ *The Sydney Futurian* 14 & 15.

magazine. They decided it would be called *Boomerang*, comprise about 40 pages and ‘convey an idea of the nature of Australian fandom’. It never appeared and the new local fanzine, called *FSS News* and edited by Eric Russell, was only published three times during 1949.⁸

By April 1949 nobody was interested in recording the minutes of Society meetings and it appears there were no meetings at all later in the year. In July Molesworth was again elected Director and said that unless something was done soon the Society would lose its members and the support of overseas fandom. However, by October, the Society’s membership had declined to only seven full and 14 associate members.

Another cause of the Society’s decline was probably the continuing popularity of the Thursday Night gatherings which met the needs of most fans without any of the Society’s formality. Meeting in a coffee lounge also made it difficult to hold formal Society meetings while people were eating and, when the Quality Inn closed in August 1949, the Thursday Night group moved to another coffee inn, the Mariposa, where fans had to sit at various small tables rather than one big one, fragmenting the gathering. Friction developed between the Futurians and those who went on Thursday nights only to meet other science fiction fans and buy and sell magazines. Macoboy claimed that the Thursday night meetings had become a ‘magazine market’ rather than a meeting where science fiction could be discussed, but he also acknowledged that the gatherings and magazines attracted more people than a Society meeting would.⁹

The difference in attitudes between the two groupings about the Thursday Night meetings raised the question of what the Society and fandom more generally exist to do. The Society existed, so its constitution said, for ‘the discussion and promotion of science, weird and fantasy subjects’ in the framework of a formally constituted and run organization.¹⁰ On the other hand,

⁸ *The Sydney Futurian* 15, Molesworth chapter 3.

⁹ Molesworth chapter 3

¹⁰ *The Sydney Futurian* 1

the Thursday Night gatherings had no formal purpose except the enjoyment and entertainment of those who attended them. To set out the difference the Society's meeting in October 1949 formulated the statement that it was 'a group of active science fiction fans meeting to discuss and promote science fiction, to take part in international fan activities, and to publicize FSS activities, and Australian fandom generally in other countries'. It emphasized the formality of its proceedings with the addition of; 'Meetings shall be conducted along Parliamentary principles'.¹¹

To emphasize the difference between the two groups Molesworth suggested that the Society should withdraw from the Thursday night gatherings and hold separate meetings, while maintaining friendly relations with the Thursday Night group. This decision made sense at the time but it left the Society without a purpose and it continued to decline. At the end of 1949 Roger Dard, an associate member of the Society who lived in Perth, wrote to Operation Fantast that 'the Sydney Futurians seem to have become a thing of the past'.¹² He was almost right, but the Society didn't know how to die. When the Society met in May 1950 it was virtually defunct, half the executive had left Sydney, leaving Director Solntseff with most of the responsibilities. He was authorised to take over the treasury and library funds for safe keeping and when he retrieved the library he found it had dwindled from 36 books and 287 magazines to six books and 90 magazines.

At the beginning of June 1950 ten fans attended a special meeting to try to find a solution to the problem but, instead of reaching agreement, the meeting turned into a series of formal motions and counter proposals so that, after two hours of 'bitter and acrimonious debate', nothing had been resolved. Eventually a motion that 'This meeting recommends to the FSS that it consider winding up its affairs' was moved, followed by another three-quarters of an hours of 'fierce and disorderly debate'.¹³ At a final meeting on 13 August Molesworth was again elected

¹¹ Molesworth, chapter 3.

¹² *Operation Fantast* 1/3.

¹³ Molesworth chapter 3

Director and Solntseff Secretary and Treasurer but membership had fallen to four full members and ten associates. All prospect of resuscitation seemed remote but the meeting decided to keep the club's machinery intact and carry on with a restricted programme which might include meetings when possible and an irregular news sheet, but only one issue appeared. The Society's only visible achievement for 1950 was preparation of a double sided 12inch sound recording prepared by Sydney fans and sent to the American convention in Portland, Oregon that year.

Molesworth blamed the decline of the Society on university studies, the ban on professional magazines and the lack of fan publications which would encourage new members. However many Sydney fans were preoccupied with other activities and, during 1950, fourteen fans, including several Futurians, were students at the University of Sydney. An attempt was made to launch a Sydney University Futurian Society but it only met two or three times and was disbanded due to lack of support.¹⁴ Study had become a major preoccupation for several leading Sydney fans and at the end of 1950 Molesworth had topped his class in Philosophy, Solntseff had achieved a credit in Senior Physics and others including Stone and Michael MacGuinness had achieved good passes. Bluey Glick, who already had a Bachelor of Science degree, added to it a Bachelor of Engineering degree.

The Society's only real asset was its library which had been built up through donations, much of it from overseas fans and particularly the generous donation made by the 1949 American convention. To preserve it Solntseff recommended, at the Society meeting on 22 June, that the club should hand the library to a Trust to consist of seven trustees who would look after and administer it for the benefit of Australian fandom. A few days later the FSS Library Trust was established with seven members, three of them Futurians and three from the Thursday Night group and about seventy books and 200 magazines were transferred to it.¹⁵

¹⁴ Molesworth Chapter 3

¹⁵ The Trust's membership was Larnach, Macoboy, Molesworth, Russell, Solntseff, Stone and Veney.

The Thursday Night gatherings continued despite a change in venue to the Sun Si Gai Chinese restaurant, then to the Monterey Café in Castlereagh Street in the first half of 1950 and then to the Moccador some time later. Fans also begun gathering on Saturday's at the Molesworth's place at 160 Beach Street in Coogee to help with the Futurian Press. This developed into a social event where fans discussed sf generally, used the Library and shared tea en masse afterwards. When the Futurian Press's first book, Larnach's *Checklist of Australian Fantasy*, was launched at a cocktail party on 29 October thirteen fans attended and Molesworth said that showed Sydney fans could get on well together despite their differences.

Fanzines played only a small part in Sydney fandom after the war, in comparison to their central pre-war role. The first fanzines published in Sydney after the war was *The Sydney Futurian* which was a modest publication in comparison to the extravagance of many pre-war fanzines and it's purpose was limited to supporting and promoting the Futurian Society of Sydney. The first independently published fanzine was *Woomera*, the first issue published in August 1950 by Nick Solntseff and Mick McGuinness. It was a very neatly typed and duplicated comprising 12 pages in the folded foolscap format. It's intention was, it's editors said, 'to foster the International flow of ideas on and of fandom'. They said the decline in fanzine publishing in Australia was due to declining interest in science fiction, a direct result of the paucity of magazines and books. *Woomera's* content was serious and earnest with a short memoire by Eric Russell, a scientific article and some notes on current fan activities by Bill Veney.¹⁶

The second issue of *Woomera* appeared in February 1951. It was also numbered issue number one and was a fresh start, edited only by Solntseff and typeset in the style of the Futurian Press. It was a handsome publication of 24 pages with a red cover and serious content including part one of a serial by Molesworth (that was later reprinted by the Futurian Press), an article about the state of science fiction by Graham Stone, Roger Dard on British Prozines and some news of Sydney fandom. Molesworth described it as by far the best fan publication in Australia

¹⁶ *Woomera* 1 August 1950

with the printed format and neat layout that ‘gave an appearance of permanence and dignity to the well-balanced contents’.¹⁷

Solntseff published another four issues of *Woomera*, each looking identical to the first with a mixture of sercon articles and some fiction. A second new fanzine was Stone’s *Science Fiction Courier*, also type set in the Futurian Press style, that saw three issues between March and August 1951. The third new fanzine was Arthur Haddon’s *Telepath*. The first issue, published in December 1951, looked almost identical to the other products of the Futurian Press but was produced on a press Haddon had bought, similar to Molesworth’s but with a cracked platen. The result was as handsome as *Woomera* with content just as sercon, but with a blue cover. The painstaking effort of setting type was too much for Haddon so when the second issue of *Telepath* appeared in October 1954 it’s interior pages were hectographed with the same printed blue covers, containing three sercon articles, by Cockcroft, Tuck and Dard, and a note about the Thursday Night group. All these fanzines reflected the Futurian attitude towards science fiction; serious, restrained and sober. A few years later Melbourne fan Lee Harding described them as being ‘generally stuffy’ with an ‘unapproachable personality’. (He might better have said, ‘a lack of personality’.)¹⁸

The failure of the Futurian Society led Stone to establish the Australian Science Fiction Society. He believed the Futurians had failed because they were unable to achieve anything co-operatively and suffered from lack of stable leadership, so he took it upon himself to launch and run the new organization independently. It would be his organization and he would keep control of it to prevent it from suffering the fate of all previous Australian fan clubs with similar plans. It had no rules, no elections, no constitution or planned activities beyond finding fans and introducing them to each other. It had one office bearer, a Secretary, and that was Stone. Having discussed the idea with other fans Stone announced, in February 1951, the formation of ‘a

¹⁷ Molesworth, chapter 3.

¹⁸ I remember AFPA.

national association to keep Auslans in contact ...'¹⁹ He kept the new Society simple to reduce the effort it would require and its purpose was simple, to enrol as many science fiction readers as possible and give them an avenue through which they could make contact with each other. To achieve this goal Stone did what the early prozines had done, published the addresses of members so they could make contact with each other. This modest goal meant Stone would not over extend himself in the way that the Futurian Society had in its several attempts to create a national fan organization.

For this new Society Stone first published *Science Fiction Courier*. It was typeset in the Futurian style, but the work of typesetting each issue was too time consuming so, after issues published in March and April the next one did not appear until August. After that Stone published *Stopgap*, a sheet or two of duplicated folded foolscap produced with no fuss or undue effort containing news and information that might be of interest to Society members. It was often quite chatty with news of fan doings in Sydney and, with increasing regularity, notes and reviews of books and magazines. With this simplified newsletter Stone kept up a good regular schedule and with each issue he also mailed out to Spcoety members other flyers and fanzines that came to hand so *Stopgap* became the main avenue of communication for most fans in Australia. Initially the Society membership fee was 2/6, which Stone subsidized personally so the membership fee did not discourage prospective members, so the membership grew rapidly from 10 in March to 55 by December 1951. The Society's membership had grown beyond expectations so the cost of postage had become too much for Stone's pocket and it had to be increased to 5/- to cover costs.

The Thursday Night Group continued to meet regularly, from about 8pm. Attendance varied from six or eight to twenty and visitors to Sydney knew they would meet local fans there. Meetings were unstructured, people borrowed from the FSS Library Trust, magazines were bought and sold and discussion ranged wider than just science fiction. However, and despite the

¹⁹ *Woomera* 1

success of the Thursday Night Group and Stone's ASFS, the uncontrollable Sydney urge to organize fandom reemerged. In the hope of creating something more formal in Sydney Bill Veney called a conference, referred to as the Fourth Sydney Science Fiction Conference, in July 1951. It was attended by 17 fans and was claimed to be the largest fan gathering so far held in Australia. Through periods of sometimes 'disorderly argument' the conference decided to organize a science fiction convention in Sydney and not to disrupt the Thursday Night Group. However the meeting also decided that Sydney needed a formal science fiction club and gave Bill Veney and Arthur Haddon authority to decide on the form of the new club. They decided that it would be simpler to revive the Futurian Society than set up a new club, even though that carried with it the danger of reviving old animosities and problems of apathy and lack of support.

The first meeting of the revived Futurian Society of Sydney was held three weeks later and attended by eleven fans. Seven members were elected or reelected to the Society and it's old guard of Molesworth, Veney, Haddon and Solntseff took charge. After going through a revised constitution point by point the meeting decided that the Society would be a purely local club while Stone's ASFS catered for fans outside Sydney. The Society's meetings were held on the fourth Monday night of each month in the Board Room of the GUOOF Building where the formal atmosphere provided a dignified change from previous meetings in lounge rooms and restaurants. To avoid confusion between the revived Society and the now separate FSS Library Trust, the Trust met a little later and renamed itself the Australian Fantasy Foundation.

The decision made at the July conference to organize a convention in Sydney was made with little discussion despite other vigorous arguments, so it had probably already been discussed and agreed to by Sydney's leading fans. It was a good decision because it energized the Society and gave it a common goal that helped create a spirit of co-operation and reduce conflict between the members. As a result, a proposal to publish a new club fanzine, which previously could have cause much disagreement, was raised during the year but shelved and then dropped because Futurians were too busy organizing their convention. A committee of four had been formed separate from the Society to organize the convention but only Stone had put in much work by

September 1951 so the Society had to take over responsibility for it or seeing it fail. Molesworth told Futurians it would mean a lot of work and that the reputation of the Society in overseas fandom depended on the convention's success, and the meeting agreed unanimously to accept that responsibility. A committee, led by Veney and comprising virtually the entire Society membership, except Molesworth, was then appointed to organize the convention.

The Futurians spent most of their meetings leading up to the planned convention date of 22nd of March 1952 in organizing the details such as hiring a hall and film projector, catering, publicity and a convention dinner. Arthur Haddon received permission from the publishers of the BRE *Astounding* to insert flyers into copies of the magazine distributed in Australia and they went out with the December 1951 issue. Haddon thought the Australian distributor was not very keen on the arrangement because they set him the impossible deadline of providing them with 1,200 copies of the flyer by the beginning of business the following day. To meet their deadline Haddon went straight home to his printing press where he spent all night printing the flyers, before riding his bike into the city in the morning to meet the deadline. As a result the Society received about forty responses that brought into fandom new fans including Rosemary Simmons and Doug Nicholson, who found himself press-ganged into helping with the convention. The increased interest and activity brought the Society's membership up to fifteen and there were 21 fans, including five femmefans, at the Thursday Night gathering at the Moccadore Café in Market Street on 31 February 1952.²⁰ Gatherings of this size were too much for the Moccador and the Thursday Night Group began meeting at the Katinka Library in Pitt Street on 6 March 1952.

By the beginning of 1952 most Sydney fans were well pleased with themselves and Bill Veney wrote that a 'Pleasant aura of achievement' radiated from Sydney fandom and that plans

²⁰ They were: Lex Banning, Harry Brunen, George Dovaston, Sid Dunk, Bluey Glick, Elizabeth Gotch, Arthur Haddon, Keith Kennedy, Don Lawson, Michael McGuinness, Vol Molesworth, Madaline Moriarity, Les Raethel, Bill Russell, Rosemary Simmons, Nick Solntseff, Graham Stone, Ann Torrens, Bill Veney, Diana Wilkes and Alan Wilkes, *Stopgap* Jan 1952, p.6.

made earlier in the year were, despite a few upsets, disappointments and disagreements, coming to fruition.²¹ Molesworth said he was immensely pleased to observe the state of Australian fandom which, despite the ban on American science fiction, had seen the reestablishment of the FSS, the ASFS membership reach 70, the Australian Fantasy Foundation running like clockwork, a regular attendance of two dozen or more at the Thursday Night gatherings, three regular fanzines and the Futurian Press.

Australia's first science fiction convention was held on 22 March 1952 in the meeting room on the 7th floor of the Grand United Building, 149 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. The organizers had hoped for a good showing but were amazed when 58 members joined. They had also hoped for some interstate members but the only one was Race Mathews who flew up from Melbourne. Roger Dard sent a telegram of congratulation from Perth, there was another from Tom Cockcroft in New Zealand and a radiogram came from the author A Bertram Chandler who was at sea (he was a ship's first officer who visited fan groups around Australia on his travels and was usually known by them as Bert).

The door of the convention was opened at 10 in the morning and within half an hour there were thirty fans inside mingling. Many may have known of each other before but few had met in person and it was the first time many had felt free to talk about science fiction openly. The displays that had been prepared helped break the ice by giving members something to spark conversations. Stone had prepared a historical survey of science fiction that included magazines and fan publications dating back to 1926 and he talked to newcomers about them. Vol and Laura Molesworth manned the Futurian Press stand and took orders. The next display was of about 150 items that were to be auctioned later in the day to raise funds for the convention and, finally, the Australian Fantasy Foundation had a stall where librarian Ian Driscoll displayed a selection of items from the library, and joined up 23 new members. Qantas contributed a display that included an aerial photograph of coastal New South Wales seen from the height of a trans-Pacific

²¹ *Woomera* 3

rocket and a Lunar landscape with rocket and space suited figures, illuminated by ultra-violet light. As they arrived each member was given a 20 page souvenir program, a booklet prepared by Stone called 'What is Fandom' and a copy of *Stopgap*.

Bill Veney, the Chairman of the organizing committee, opened the convention at 11.30 with a welcoming address, followed by Molesworth speaking on 'What is Science Fiction?' and Stone on 'What is Fandom?' The auction began at around midday and saw some keen bidding that raised £35 to help cover the costs of running the convention. In the afternoon Veney chaired a business session which received reports from various organizations and groups and then discussed several motions including one encouraging *Thrills Inc* to publish better stories and another welcoming the appearance of science fiction in general magazines that did not normally publish it. The meeting agreed unanimously that there should be another conference in Sydney later in the year and that another convention should be held in 1953.

There was a problem in organizing the Convention dinner but over forty fans attended the dinner at the Mayfair. The convention then resumed in the evening for films projected by Ian Driscoll and Lex Banning, which was marred because the advertised films were not available and the projector broke down.

The convention program was slight but it's main purpose had been to create a space in which science fiction fans could get together. The convention broke up at about 11 in the evening but groups of fans kept talking until two or three in the morning. Nothing official had been organized for the following day, Sunday, but groups of new friends congregated in several groups around Sydney to discuss science fiction and fandom. On Monday evening the Futurian Society held an open meeting which was attended by twenty-five and finally, on Thursday Night about thirty fans gathered at the Katinka where magazines were auctioned and there was a lot of talking.

The convention generated a wave of enthusiasm in Sydney by encouraging established

fans and creating new ones so that a small group of barely ten fans expanded into a community of more than fifty. It also created new groupings. One was the North Shore Futurian Society (which had no relationship with the existing Futurian Society) which was launched on 1 April 1952 by Michael Bos and J C Crawford who had both been energized by the convention. This new club was created to serve fans along the North Shore Railway Line that ran over the Harbour Bridge into the northern suburbs. Its membership consisted mainly of younger fans who were at high school or college and its main purpose was to provide them with a library of books and magazines. Before long the group's membership was opened to anyone and one or two older Sydney fans joined Bos in running the club. The membership of the NSFS fluctuated with the school year and ages varied from 11 to 50, but the majority were under 20. When the membership fell from 42 in October 1952 to 21 in April 1953 Bos explained it was due to exams at the end of the previous year before the club picked up again for the next school year. Membership fees varied from 1/- to 5/- (or a magazine for the library) and overseas fans could join for a book or three British or American magazines. Bos and some of the members began attending the Thursday Night Group meetings where their youthful enthusiasm might have reminded some of Sydney's now veteran fans of what they had been like before the war.

Bos produced the *North Shore Futurian Society Notesheet*, which he later renamed *Sonic*, containing news about the club, doings in Sydney and some snippets of science information. By March 1954 there has been eleven issues ranging in size from one to eight pages and none with any pretense of style or neat appearance. Not long before the next convention the club also published another fanzine, *Terrific*, with the help of other fans including Rosemary Simmons, Kevin Dillon and Graham Stone. At 32 pages it was one of largest and most adventurous fanzines published in Australia after the war with a three colour cover and fiction and science articles.

There were six women at the 1952 convention. They were Rosemary Simmons, Norma Williams and Norma Hemming (who had already had stories published in *Thrills Inc* and *New Worlds*) and the wives of existing fans, Diane Wilkes, Pauline Roth and Laura Molesworth.

They decided to band together to publish their own fanzine to give voice to local doings and overseas news. The first issue of *Vertical Horizons* appeared the month following the convention and contained an editorial by Laura Molesworth, a column of news and views by Rosemary Simmons and a story by Norma Hemming. Like most other Sydney fanzines of this time it was folded foolscap in format and neatly typed with no illustrations.

Post convention enthusiasm led to the publication of more fanzines. Veney, who had moved to Launceston in Tasmania at the end of July and then Brisbane by the end of 1952, published *Ugh*. No issue was longer than 10 pages, they were neatly presented without illustrations and were fannish in tone and generally encouraging of all aspects of Australian fandom with news of development of fan groups in other states. In Sydney Molesworth and Ken Martin published three issues of *Notes and Comments* in the three months following the convention and Molesworth published one issue of *Fantasy Impromptu*, another small folded foolscap fanzine of fan news.

More influential was Rex Meyer's *S-F Review* which aimed to give Australian fans a wide range of magazine and book reviews that were contributed by a few local fans. The first issue contained reviews of many current magazines by eight different reviewers, with reviews ranging from a few to 20 lines. Some reviews were very simple but others were analytic and literate to a standard not previously reached by fan writers and reviewers in Australia. Early issues were four or five pages long but by early 1953 they had grown to ten or more pages of considered and useful reviewing before reducing in size to about eight pages because Meyer was unable to keep up with the demands on his time of publishing it. There was little pretense of attractiveness or style about *S-F Review*, its purpose was to inform its readers about what was available and what it was like, not to look good.

The most ambitious publication of this period was Stone's *Science Fiction News* which first appeared in January 1953. It was intended to promote science fiction more widely than fandom with news and reviews of the field that would interest general readers. Stone's primary

concern was that it had to look good to be acceptable in the general public so he worked hard at its appearance and had it professionally photo litho printed so that good quality photos and book covers could be shown. While *Science Fiction News* appeared more professional than any fanzine previously published in Australia Stone would not have called it a fanzine and it showed the direction he thought fandom should take. Others did not agree and Veney said it was as though Stone arrived at a picnic wearing a dinner suit. He said that Stone had worked hard to make *Science Fiction News* as technically perfect as possible in the hope of getting a good response from people who didn't know about science fiction, 'But it has failed to capture the spirit of the times' and '... he should have let his hair down this once and joined in the fun'.²² Fun was not on Stone's agenda and there was no sense of it in *Science Fiction News* which was a very serious publication. Stone did not seem to appreciate others having fun either and his review of *Hyphen*, widely regarded as one of the best fanzines ever published, criticized it for having 'too much funny stuff' which was 'laid on more than a little to thickly'.²³

Stone renamed his Australian Science Fiction Society the 'Australasian Science Fiction Society' to recognize it's New Zealand members. His *Science Fiction News* replaces *Stopgap* as that society's publication so he made it available free to ASFA members in his regular mail outs that included other material such as publishers pamphlets and fanzines such as *Vertical Horizons* and *S-F Review*. By November 1952 the Society had 122 members, agents in Melbourne and Adelaide and Lyell Crane became the Society's General Secretary to help Stone cope with the heavy workload of running the growing society.

The work of the ASFS, publication of other fanzines and enthusiasm following the convention stimulated the development of fan groups outside Sydney. Molesworth's letter published in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* drew an astonished letter from Roger Dard in Perth who had long thought science fiction readers in Australia were too apathetic to form any kind of

²² Ugh 2.

²³ *Science Fiction News* 5.

organization. Dard became one of the most active fans in Australia with extensive correspondents in Australia and overseas. With other Perth fans and collectors, John Park and Ralph Harding, he formed the Perth SF Group which had little contact with the rest of fandom. They published one issue of the fanzine *Star Rover* in November 1950 in which a page of compact reviews of leading British, Irish and American fanzines, demonstrating Dard's intimate knowledge of fan activities around the world. He became an Australian agent for the American Fantasy Fan Federation and Operation Fantast but his increasingly bitter disputes with customs authorities in Perth soured his interest in science fiction and fantasy so he had handed his responsibilities for those organizations to fans in the eastern states by 1953.

Don Tuck had been an active fan in Hobart before the war and moved to Melbourne during it. He was still in Melbourne at the end of the war but back and forth between Melbourne and Hobart for some time before settling permanently back in Hobart by mid 1952. He knew of other science fiction readers in Tasmania including Bob Geappen and John Symmons but they were more interested as collectors and readers than in fandom and had little to do with the rest of Australian fandom. Tuck hosted fans if they visited Hobart and encouraged them with letters and articles for their fanzines. Encouraged by Roger Dard, Tuck began working on a comprehensive bibliography, the *Handbook of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, that he self published in 1954 to wide acclaim by fans around the world. Subsequently he devoted himself almost exclusively to his bibliographic activities.

Fan groups formed in other Australian cities. There were periodic meetings at Ian Moye's home in Adelaide by early 1953 and he made his extensive library available to all Adelaide fans. A more substantial group formed in Brisbane when author Frank Bryning moved there and began contacting fans including Chas Mustchin and John Gregor, who were joined by Bill Veney when he moved to Brisbane. They held regular meetings every two or three weeks where they talked science fiction and exchanged magazines. After a meeting at Bryning's home in February 1953, attended by twelve fans, they decided to find a more suitable meeting place and were soon gathering at a coffee lounge in Queen Street on Thursday nights. Veney met a fan

group forming in Melbourne and reported to Sydney fans the progress being made there with meetings of about twenty led by Bob McCubbin and Race Mathews. Don Tuck, who visited them on occasions, reported that he was surprised by the enthusiasm of the group.

The emergence of new fan groups around Australia was encouraging but Sydney remained the center of Australian fandom. Fans visited from interstate and overseas, Roger Dard from Perth, Don Tuck and Bob Geappen from Tasmania, Alan Roberts and Harry Roberts from Queensland and Tom Cockcroft and Jack Murtagh from New Zealand, all attended Futurian meetings. A regular visitor to the meetings of most groups was the author Bert Chandler who was First Mate on a ship sailing regularly from Britain to Australian ports on the south and east coasts.

Lyell Crane said these were stirring times as fandom blossomed. He worried, however, that fandom in Sydney had waned before and asked what could be done to keep the activity going while avoiding the dead ends that littered the history of fandom. Doug Nicholson and Kevin Dillon complained, in *Stopgap*, that Sydney fandom was essentially un-constructive because there was a preoccupation with the trivia of fandom rather than its purpose.

Some fans thought fandom had an important political or sociological role. In *Ugh 3* Harry Brook wrote that science fiction illuminated the infinite possibilities of the future and that fandom was ‘in the vanguard of the search after the ultimate truth with the goal which humanity cannot yet see clearly’.²⁴ Graham Stone wrote that fandom offered the complete freedom of perfectly voluntary association where fans could be themselves instead of harnessing their minds to a team and wrote ‘There’s nothing on earth like it’.²⁵ A little later he had much less lofty ideals and wrote that ‘Fandom is not an organization or complex of organizations, but a state of mind which leads a great number of people to make themselves known th each other and to co-

²⁴ *Ugh 3*.

²⁵ *The Sydney Futurian 8*.

operate to serve their varied interests'.²⁶

Fandom in Sydney became more active and sociable after the convention but the growing fan population had to accommodate a wider range of opinions and a divergence grew between those who thought, as Stone did, that fandom's purpose was to promote science fiction, and those who felt the purpose of fandom was to enjoy science fiction and the community that gathered around it. In the post-convention glow these differences did not create many problems because the Futurians saw themselves as conducting the serious business of fandom and the Thursday Night group were happy to let Futurians do what they liked while they celebrated and enjoyed science fiction and fandom by socializing with other fans away from the disdain of the mundane world.

Unfortunately, Sydney fans have left only hints of their active social lives during this period that included parties, picnics and barbeques. Just before Christmas 1952 a small group including Norma Williams and Norma Hemming went to Manly Beach for the day and went paddling and looking at life in the rock pools. On another outing after Christmas two cars of fans went from Kings Cross to Garie Beach for a barbecue. Over the Easter weekend in 1953 a small group of fans traveled around the Bathurst region 'conducting scientific research in to the alcoholic content of beer served in the district'.²⁷ During the second half of 1952 the Futurian Society organized three 'science fiction weekends' for all Sydney fans at the Grand View Hotel at Wentworth Falls in the Blue Mountains, though Roseamry Simmons wondered why they were called 'science fiction weekends' because that topic was rarely mentioned. There was no structure to the weekends and there was substantial drinking as fans socialized and explored the countryside in the company of other fans, such as a stroll down to the falls where fans could 'drink in the mountain and other things'. Seventeen fans went to the first weekend in May, twelve went to the second Wentworth Falls weekend around September 1952 and four more

²⁶ *Stopgap* Dec 1951.

²⁷ *Ugh* 3.

drove up from Sydney to join them on Sunday. Only eight attended another weekend towards the end of the year but by then examinations were occupying many fans' minds.²⁸

There was apparently a lot of partying and drinking. When Harry Brook spent three weeks leave from the Army in Sydney around the end of 1952 he attended one of the Wentworth Falls weekends, went to Thursday Night group meetings, joined the Australian Fantasy Foundation and went drinking with fans on the weekends. Vol and Laura Molesworth hosted parties that were generally restricted to the Futurian Society crowd, on 4 May 1952 they hosted a cocktail party for the Futurians and the Femme Fan Group which was attended by thirteen. One group on the front verandah discussed the weighty affairs of Australian fandom and there was dancing in the lounge. Twenty attended another party the Molesworths hosted at which 'an extraordinary time was had by all' and, on 5 September, the Molesworth's hosted another party to raise funds for the coming convention that was attended by 47 fans. A serious minded group gathered on the front verandah to discuss science fiction and other serious matters, others danced to the radiogram in the lounge and the rest adjourned to the back of the flat to sing 'doubtful ditties'. Fans there had such a good time that one well known femme fan did not leave until 5 the following afternoon.

During 1952 tertiary study occupied the attention of many fans; Solntseff graduated from Sydney University with First Class honours in Science and the University Medal in Physics. Molesworth topped his year in Philosophy, for the third year in a row, and others including Rex Meyer, Arthur Haddon, Doug Nicholson and Judy McGuinness all successfully passed another year of study.

Sydney fandom, which had been a small group leading up to the 1952 convention, became a much larger swirling pool of personalities united by almost only one thing, their enthusiasm in science fiction in a period when it was frowned upon by the general public. Some

²⁸ Molesworth chapter 4, Vertical Horizons May 1952, November 1952, May 1953, Stopgap 10, Doug interview

fans looked like mad scientists or anarchists, some looked a little weird and some would not have looked out of place at business meetings. Almost without exception the wore collars, ties and jackets for anything but the most informal occasions. Not long after the convention Stone conducted a survey of Sydney fans and received 35 responses including five from women. A tabulation of the results showed that the average Sydney fan was male, 26 years old, 5'9" tall, weighed 10st 6lb and had brown hair and blue eyes. They smoked, drank, were unmarried and had no religion. Their ages ranged from 17 to 48 and only two were under 20. They had been reading sf for fifteen years, liked *Galaxy* best and their favourite author was A E vanVogt. Most were white collar workers and had, on average, reached at least Matriculation, and nine had university degrees or equivalent.²⁹

Some fans stood out. Bill Veney was genial and friendly and liked the social side of fandom. He was eloquent, a talented but insecure salesman who left Sydney for Launceston and then moved to Brisbane in November 1952. Lyell Crane, the one fan in Australia who has been overseas and attended conventions in North America and Britain, was an Australian by birth who had gone to Canada after the war. He returned to Sydney in May 1952 and played an active role in fannish organizations and tried to keep the peace between warring factions. Harry Brunen was a short sighted tailor with a little shop near Royal Arcade who hated anything that brought science fiction into disrepute. He had a close to eidetic memory and entered a big quiz show with the topic of the works of EE Smith and walked away with a very big prize. Lex Banning was brilliant but was severely disabled and could only move about with difficulty. His poetry was admired by many but he could barely write or type so Rosemary Simmons helped him in many ways including doing the typing that helped him gain his Masters degree. Norma Hemming and Norma Williams (known as Mark I and Mark II), made an impression on Sydney fandom's social life. Williams, who was ten or fifteen years older than the other women, often strode around in jodhpurs and riding boots and when she heard there was some serious drinking going on turned up with her own bottles in hand.

²⁹ *Notes and Comments 2*

As the number of women in fandom grew relationships, engagements and marriages followed; Lorelie Giles and Phinneas Glick, Valerie Pauline and Doug Nicholson, Betty Such and Bruce Purdy. And babies too, a daughter to Len and Pauline Roth. There were also unrequited longings and secret, often fleeting, relationships, or rumours of them. It was whispered that Rosemary Simmons was Vol Molesworth's mistress and the relationship between Laura and Vol Molesworth was volatile because she learned to have a sharp tongue to survive his attempts to undermine her. There were also fallings-out over relationships and Nick Solntseff and Doug Nicholson fell out over a girlfriend. Most notorious was a liaison between Diana Wilkes and Arthur Haddon which led to a fight between Haddon and her husband, Alan, which started in the Lincoln Inn (another fannish meeting place) and continued outside. Through their association with Sydney University a few fans drifted into the circle of Professor Anderson's free thinkers and bohemians who became known as the Sydney Push and met at various places around Sydney, including the Lincoln Inn.

Friendships and alliances were like the tides, ebbing and flowing due to the volatile natures of some Sydney fans who drew others into their disputes. In one dispute allies might not be friends and in others new alliances were formed. A few, like Lyell Crane tried to keep the peace and gained little thanks from their attempts. Two of the most disruptive fans were Graham Stone and Vol Molesworth who were usually allies but not usually friends.

Graham Stone cut a debonaire figure and could party with the best of them when the mood took him. He was the most active fan in promoting science fiction in Australia, serving in almost every official capacity in the Futurian Society, editing its publications and setting up and running the ASFS. He was also opinionated and often intolerant of others who did not agree with him. Molesworth called him a 'stormy petrel', a person who delights in conflict and attracts controversy, and he did not go out of his way to avoid it and may have hidden a reserved and insecure nature behind his bravado.

Vol (properly Voltaire) Molesworth was a veteran of pre-war Sydney fandom and one of

the original Sydney Futurians. A diabetic, he was often in poor health and unable to enlist in the Army so he spent the war working as a journalist and writing a series of widely circulated juvenile novels. When the opportunity arose after the war he set out to study literature at Sydney University but discovered instead his forte in philosophy, which he then went on to study, teach and write. His father had been a conservative politician and he shared the inclination towards parliamentary forms of organization and debate which shaped the Futurian Society into an organization driven by its constitution and formal debate. He was among the brightest Sydney fans and was probably the Secret Master of Sydney fandom in the early 1950s, sometimes acting through the agency of Graham Stone. Like some other Sydney fans he had a prickly ego and his intelligent personality included a cruel streak which he could use to manipulate and upset other fans if he so chose. He was eloquent, in a scholarly fashion, and his fondness for arguing fine constitutional points made many of his friends (and enemies) think he had missed his calling as a constitutional lawyer.

Major alliances formed around the FSS and the Thursday Night group because of their differing attitudes towards science fiction. The weekly focus of fan activity in Sydney was the Thursday Night meeting which was sponsored by the FSS but had an almost separate existence. When the weekly meetings became too big to continue at the Katinka Library Rosemary Simmons suggested the Sydney Bridge Club on the third floor - to the left of the lifts - of 160 George Street, about 100 yards from Wynyard Station. Thirty one fans attended the first gathering there on 5 June 1952. The room, with its bare wooden floor and pressed metal ceiling was large enough for fans to move around the tables freely to look at books and magazines and socialize in what Stone called an 'unorganized social affair with no purpose beside providing a handy meeting place for anyone interest in sf'.³⁰ Usually there was no formal program but, on some occasions, there were talks and on other occasions Don Lawson set up his film projector and showed movies of interest to fans. The weekly meetings started at about 7.30 and ran to about 11.30 and, by the end of 1952, about thirty people were attending the meetings. There

³⁰ *Stopgap* 10.

were disagreements and fights, sometimes people flounced out in anger, but generally they calmed down and returned. Les Raethel managed the venue for the Futurian Society and collected small fees to pay for the room hire and supper. Gradually he built up a small reserve to be put back into improving meeting conditions.

The FSS was more argumentative because its participants took seriously their objective of promoting science fiction in Sydney and because the club had a thorough constitution and a tradition that encouraged debate and argument. Unlike the Thursday Night Group, membership of the FSS was limited to those who were considered suitable and had been elected by existing members so those with different ideas or attitudes were not welcomed and, from the outside at least, it looked like a secret society. The FSS took itself seriously with what Nicholson called a 'ridiculous assumed dignity' and they encouraged that view by the way they presented themselves publicly with a booklet of the Society's constitution and rules beautifully printed on Arthur Haddon's letter press and a bound book of FSS minutes, carefully typed preserved. Argument was never far from the surface and attempts to organize the rest of Sydney fandom later in 1952 came to nothing, partly because outsiders were not interested but mainly because Society members could not agree on what they should do to achieve that goal.

This serious attitude was the result of a conservatism rooted in the desire to make science fiction presentable and acceptable to the general public, which was also very conservative. This echoing of traditional conservative values emerged at the open Society meeting immediately after the convention with a proposal to create a Women's Auxiliary for the Society, which was a common practice at a time when women were excluded from many organizations. Rosemary Simmons then asked whether women could join the Society and Molesworth said that the admission of women had caused problems in the pre-war Futurian Society and a heated debate followed. The motion to admit Simmons was defeated by six votes to three but, unsatisfied with this result two members, Banning and Stone, demanded a special meeting at which three men were elected to membership without debate but Simmons application was again rejected, on Molesworth's casting vote. A series of quasi parliamentary maneuvers followed during which

the Society passed a motion that it did not discriminate 'on the grounds of race, creed, party or sex', Molesworth was then forced to withdraw his casting vote and Simmons was finally elected to membership by six votes to four. Norma Hemming was then unanimously elected to membership at the following meeting.

Another dispute arose a couple of months later over how fandom in Sydney should be organized, ranging from establishing a council of the various Sydney fan groups to an internal reorganization of the Society, which appears to have been snuffed out by 8 votes to 3. These small numbers demonstrate how much effort and emotional energy so few fans put into trying to create formal structures and activities for fandom in Sydney. While this was going on three times that number regularly turned up at the Sydney Bridge Club on Thursday night to borrow from the Foundation library, look at and buy the science fiction that might be available and enjoy themselves in each other's company.

A much more bitter dispute within the Society, which occupied the second half of 1952 and spilled into 1953, was the standing and future of the Australian Fantasy Foundation and its library. The problem might have been solved easily but for the form in which Futurian debates were conducted, the seriousness with which Futurians took themselves and their argumentative natures. The problem arose because, of the seven Trustees who had been appointed when the Foundation was set up, two had left Sydney (Macoboy, who went to the US in mid 1952 to learn about television, and Veney, by then in Tasmania) and three more had gafiated (Larnach, Russell and Solntseff). The library itself had been housed by the Molesworths and they asked for it to be moved elsewhere. Two fans, Stone and Haddon offered to take it and when it was given to Haddon Stone resigned and claimed that the library should have gone back to the Society. At the next Society meeting in August 1952 Haddon claimed that Stone did not give him all the Foundation's money and records but Stone said that, since the Foundation no longer existed, there was nobody he could give them to.

The argument worked its way laboriously and painfully to the question of whether or not

the Foundation had been properly established to begin with so the decision was reached to conduct a 'Futurian Court of Enquiry' at which the legality of the situation would be examined. The Society debated the problem for two following meetings and the Court of Enquiry was conducted on 17 December with a lawyer present as a 'Judge-advocate' and Molesworth as 'Examiner'. Evidence was taken from seven people and a transcript of the proceeding, running to 23 closely typed foolscap pages, was put into the club records. While all this was going on the library itself was not open and missing from the Thursday Night group meetings, which did not impress the wider Sydney fan community or enhance the Society's reputation. The lawyer who has been appointed for the Court reported that it appeared the Trust had not been legally constituted in the first place because the transfer documents had been defective but, he said, the problem was really a practical rather than a legal one and depended on what the original donors to the library had intended.

The library was returned to the care of the Society in early 1953 and was again open for borrowing from the general fan community. However the Society, and Stone and Molesworth in particular, were criticized for the way in which they had dealt with the problem and the general feeling that the Court had been a farce that was held to put certain fans on trial. In the end the solution to the problem had been very simple but getting to it had created a great deal of unnecessary animosity in Sydney's fan community.

A little more animosity entered Sydney fandom in February 1953 when the Futurian Press published Vol Molesworth's *Outline History of Australian Fandom, Part 1, 1935-1940*. Reviews in *S-F Review*, *Woomera* and *Vertical Horizons* were supportive or positive but fans who had lived through the period, such as Veney, did not think it was entirely accurate and that it gave too much emphasis to a Futurian perspective. Consequently a number of fans who had offered to help with the publication withdrew their support before it was published and Veney had been so critical of it that he was surprised when it was actually published.

Against this background of growing discord Sydney's fans began organizing Australia's

second science fiction convention. Planning for the convention began at the Fifth Sydney Conference held on Saturday 19 June 1952 that was attended by 19 fans. It began with reports of various fan activities and then discussed the coming convention which, it was decided, would be spread over three days and a tentative list of committee members was drawn up and referred to the Society for approval. At the following Society meeting Haddon, Martin, Molesworth and Nicholson were nominated and additional members were appointed to take care of various responsibilities. The proposed programme, which had been drawn up by Molesworth and Stone, was adopted with a cocktail party on Friday night, exhibits on display on Saturday morning and a general 'Exposition of Science Fiction' in the afternoon, and films on Saturday night. There would be an auction on Sunday morning and a formal business session on Sunday afternoon. This program was relatively informal and aimed at the relatively new fan, offering plenty of opportunity for milling around and meeting other fans. It appears that Arthur Haddon ended up with most of the responsibility for running the convention, he arranged for publicity pamphlets for the convention to be circulated again in an issue of BRE *Astounding* and placed advertisements in several overseas magazines to attract the interest of overseas fans.

The Second Australian Science Fiction Convention was held in Sydney from 1-3 May 1953. Before the event Nicholson wrote that, despite differences in Sydney fandom, the convention committee had minimized that intrusion into the convention which showed that fans of violently differing views could co-operate on something like a convention.³¹ However, the management of the convention showed otherwise and Melbourne fan Ian Crozier wrote that it reeked of 'bad organization'.³² Later examination of the problems that occurred showed the main cause had been lack of communication between members of the organizing committee, many of whom were highly antagonistic towards each other.

Eighty-four people attended the convention, the vast majority from Sydney. Joyce Joyce

³¹ *Ugh* 3

³² *Etherline* 5

and Ian Moyes came from Adelaide, Harry Brook and Bill Veney from Brisbane, Ian Crozier from Melbourne and two national service trainees stationed in Sydney, one from Western Australia and the other from Tasmania were also there. On the Wednesday evening prior to the convention the 'King's Cross Ludo, Science Fiction and Glee Club' staged a cocktail party for the benefit of interstate visitors. The following evening the Thursday Night Group welcomed visitors at their weekly meeting. The following evening things started to go off the rails.

The Society had organized an elaborate cocktail party at the Woolhara Golf Club to begin the convention but Haddon failed to confirm the booking so, on the night, several interstate visitors were stranded in pouring rain, wondering what was going on while alternative arrangements were made. Nicholson found an alternative venue at the last minute but while a enjoyable party for thirty-eight finally got going the venue was more expensive and put the convention into the red almost before it had started.

The convention also began badly the next day. The plan was that fans would congregate at the Bridge Club on Saturday morning and then go to the GUOOF hall for the afternoon sessions. However, nobody turned up in the morning to start proceedings so fans were left to mill about until about 11.30 when Vol Molesworth learned there were problems and, with the help of Lyell Crane, saved what he could of the situation and then led the group to the afternoon's venue. The session began with a souvenir program and fanzines being handed to members and Stone and Nicholson giving informal talks explaining various exhibits arranged around the hall. Molesworth opened the formal program with a welcome and then a lecture on 'Science Fiction and the Development of Modern Literature'. Next Nicholson talked on 'Science Fiction as a Specialist Literature' which traced the development of the field, illustrated by illustrations from magazines (that was marred by problems with the slide projector). Glick followed with a talk on 'Science Fiction and Science' and then Rex Meyer on 'Biology in Science Fiction'. Stone then talked about fandom and fan publishing and Dave Cohen spoke about Operation Fantast. The work that had gone into preparing the talks helped smooth over the convention's earlier problems and created plenty of topics for fans to discuss later.

During the dinner break Crane held an informal meeting with several local and interstate fans including Ian Moyes from Adelaide, Ian Crozier from Melbourne, Harry Brooke and Bill Veney from Brisbane, Ted Butt from Newcastle and Dave Cohen. Crane was apparently trying to create a network of Australian fans to circumvent the divisions in Sydney that effected the rest of Australian fandom.

In the evening Don Lawson showed some short films of interest to fans and then the Czech fantasy of Karel Capek's 'Krakatit - An Atomic Fantasy'. After the film show fans broke into little groups and headed off for various coffee shops, sly grog joints and the hotels where interstate fans were staying.

Sunday was supposed to begin with the auction but the auctioneer and material failed to make an appearance. Eventually Jack Legget found the auction material and Bluey Glick started the auction. There were 200 items, a lot of them of little interest but American magazines fetched fabulous prices, as was expected.

A formal business session occupied the afternoon, chaired by Molesworth. It began with a series of reports from various fan groups; the FSS, NSFS, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide groups, Operation Fantast, the FSS Library, Forerunner, the femme fan group and the Thursday Night group. Then things got lively when Molesworth opened the meeting to motions from the floor. A motion that Australian fandom should show its appreciation of US fandom's help by sending a parcel of Australian science fiction to the coming American convention in Philadelphia was passed without argument. Next Bill Veney moved that Stone be forced to include interstate fans more in the workings of the ASFS. This came about because Veney had failed to get any satisfaction from Stone by letter and so brought it up in public. He wanted from Stone a clear picture of what the ASFS's policy and position was and interstate fans agreed that they did not feel included in the Society's business. The thin veneer of civility in Sydney fandom was quickly ripped away and Sydney fans' ability to disagree violently emerged very quickly between those who supported Veney and those who supported Stone. He refused to take part in

the argument except to say 'No comment' and eventually, when he was asked to explain where the authority of the Society lay he replied, 'I am a law unto myself'. Veney, seeing that nothing could be achieved, withdrew his motion and the meeting calmed down.

The final item of business was the next convention. Wally Judd, a relative newcomer to fandom, said he had observed the errors in the current convention and thought he could correct them. He asked that the Society be given another opportunity to stage the convention so Australian fandom could see what the club could really do, and the meeting resolved that the FSS could run the next convention. To overcome the communication problems that had marred the current convention the FSS would appoint one person to take responsibility for the next convention who they would pick a committee of their choice and report progress regularly to the FSS. (At the next FSS meeting Judd was appointed to organize the 1954 convention.)

At the conclusion of the 1953 convention Molesworth talked about the splendid work Haddon had done in the early days of preparing the convention and took on himself the blame for the problems that had so marred the convention. In concluding he stressed that the fundamental aims of the convention had been to bring Australian fans together and that, in doing so, the convention had been an 'unqualified success and promised well for the successful meeting in 1954'.³³

³³ Reports of the convention which differ in some details but agree on most points. They can be found in *Mumblings from Munchkinland* 22 (reprinted from *Fantasy Times* 179), *Etherline* 5, *Wastebasket* 1, Molesworth chapter 5.