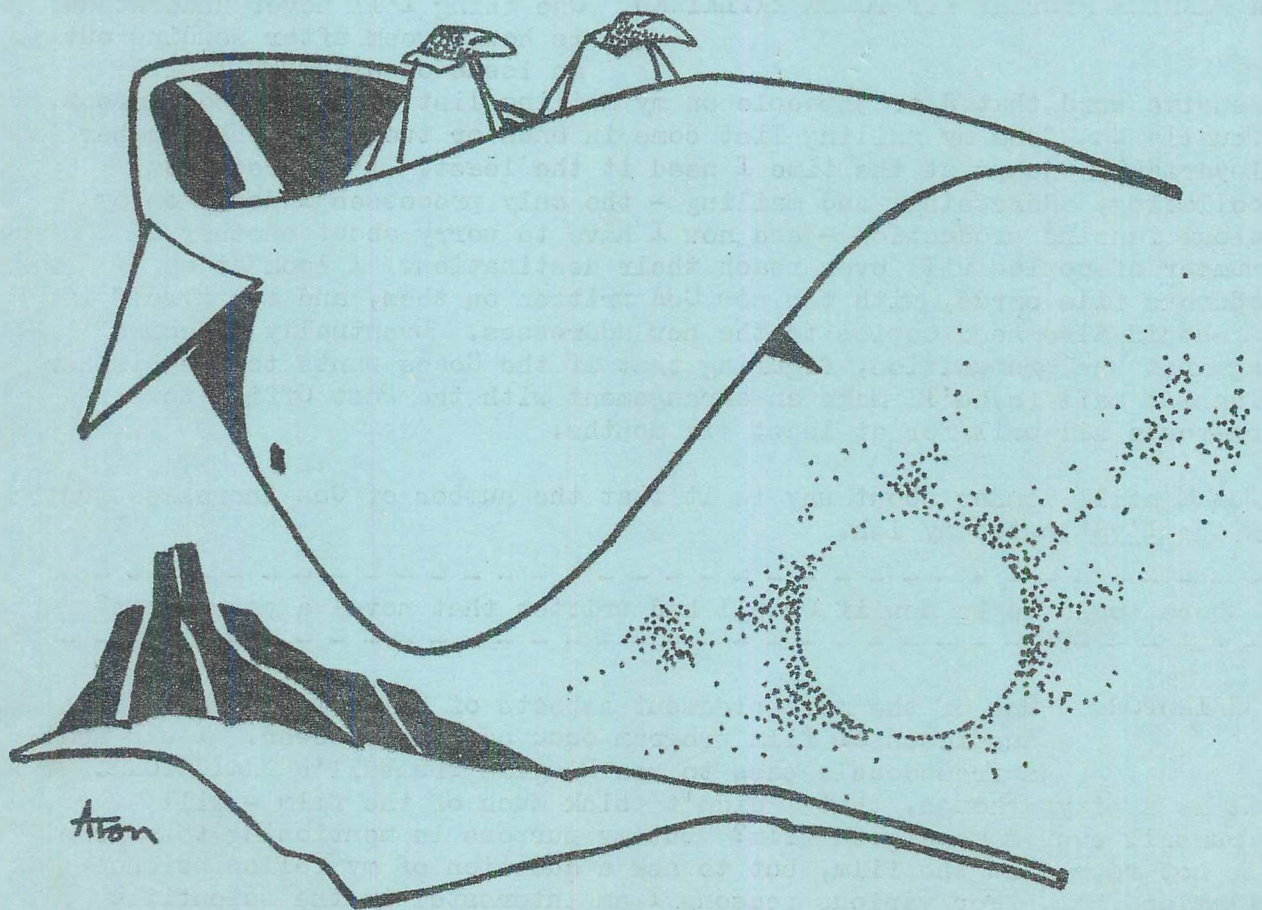


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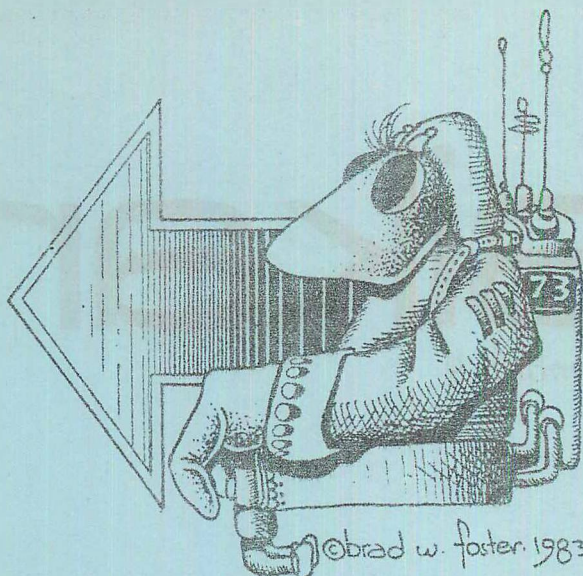
February 1984





# CAPRICE

## Irwin Hirsh



### A FANNISH MYSTERY YET TO BE EXPLAINED

One thing I'll never understand is how a week after sending out an issue of SIKANDER I will receive word that 4 or 5 people on my mailing list have changed address. Usually CoA from my mailing list come in ones or twos, but that number invariably jumps at the time I need it the least. I'm tired from collating, addressing, and mailing - the only processes I don't enjoy about fanzine production - and now I have to worry about whether a number of copies will ever reach their destination. I look at my address file cards, with the new CoA written on them, and ask myself if I should also send copies to the new addresses. Eventually I decide against the proposition, figuring that if the CoAee wants to see his/her fannish mail (s)he'll make an arrangement with the Post Office to re-route all mail for at least six months.

But I still wonder about why is it that the number of CoA increases just after I've posted my ish.

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Where would we be now if Orwell had written that novel a year later?  
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**BRAINSTORM** One of the more pleasant aspects of being in charge of the Aussiecon II film program occurred last October. I was sent a free double pass to see Douglas Trumball's BRAINSTORM.

It is a pity, though, that I didn't think much of the film - will Trumball ever make a good film? But my purpose in mentioning this here is not to review the film, but to ask a question of my fellow science fiction fans. For various reasons I am interested in the scientific advance projected in the film; that of a device that can transmit and record one's thoughts and feelings. I would like to read some stories and novels that are about such a device. Can you help me by suggesting some titles?



GRONK! FLASH! ZAP! "What's your highest score?"

I thought for a moment, but I couldn't quite think of the specific answer required. I quite conservatively replied, "40-something thousand."

"Gee! That's good. My best is 27000," my opponent said as he pressed the "2" button. I watched as he tried to get his man to the top of the frame, blinding dinosaurs and cavemen and generally picking up points along the way.

Just as he lost his first man I remembered. "Actually, my highest score is 57000." I said as I picked up the first points towards trying to bettering that score.

"That must be one of the best scores."

"It was the highest score on that day, and the third highest to date." I felt odd. I had never been this good at Arcade Games. "I probably would've got an even higher score, but for the people watching. I was 55000 when I got through the third frame and I still had two men left. Someone mentioned that 60000 would get me another man, and I just siezed up. If he hadn't said a word I would've gotten something like 80000, which, as it happens, is actually the score you nedd to get the 2nd extra man. The thing was that it was my last game before a lecture, and when I came back 2 hours later I had 3 games and didn't even manage to make 20000 in any. So there I missed out on even getting the first extra man."

\* \* \* \* \*

"A credit!" I scretched.

"A credit!" my lecturer scretched back in mimic.

"But all through the term I was just managing to avoid a fail. For each of the first 3 assignments I got a 'D', and only passed the first test by 2 marks. And I really had to work hard to get those results."

Bruce handed me the fourth assignment and the second test. My marks were a 'B' and 19/30 respectivilly. "Well, maybe Ted graded the terms results to a curve. I mean, the subject is statistics. He's too careful to make a mistake; even pleasent ones like this. In fact, when he gets back from overseas it will be too late to change any results, as your transcripts of results will be out. So he would've been even more careful. But, of course, it is not as if you've been hard-done-by..."

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1981 the Rusden State College Student Union decided that a good way of generating funds would be to lease some pinball and video game



machines. Every term there would be 2 or 3 machines to entertain us. And just as we would become a bit bored with the machines along would come the end of term and off we'd go on a few weeks of holidays. We would come back, all fresh and bright-eyed, and be dazzled by the new machines, with glass that isn't yet permanently stained from tobacco and meat pie droppings, controls which respond attentively to our commands, and tactics which are yet to be discovered.

Normally I wouldn't spend part of my holidays at college but this August I did. My Statistics lecturer Ted Bryt had generously given us till the Monday of the second week of our 3 week holiday as the deadline for the last assignment. The class had decided to work together on the assignment and the discussion room of the library was agreed to as our work place. For some it was the chance to work hard to make up on some disastrous results early in the term and hope to get enough for a pass. For others, like me, it was the chance to make sure of not getting the bad result that would mean a fail. While for 3 or 4 of my classmates it was the chance to not wreck the good work during the term and continue on the line to a honour. For all of us, it was the chance to check methods and workings out, and to pour our resources on the assignment. We worked in twos and threes on a question and, as it happened, there was very little outright cheating.

It was when I decided to give myself a hour lunch break on the first day of that week that I discovered what machines had been selected to earn the Student Union some money in the third term. There was "Roc'n'Rope", which I've briefly described, and "Cubiod". In the former the aim is to climb to the top of the frame avoiding dinosaurs and cavemen. If they got you you lose one of your 3 lives, but it is possible to momentarily stun them (and pick up 20 points) by flashing a light in their eyes. Throughout each frame there are a number of power balls, and should you run over one you are given a ten second period during which you kill any cavemen and dinosaurs you run into, and it is here that you pick up the big points. The array of "Cubiod" is a triangler and made up of 28 cubes, and the aim is to make your man jump from cube to cube. With each jump a cube changes colour, and when you have changed the colour of every cube you gain bonus points and start again. But you have to be careful that the bouncing balls don't get you or that your man doesn't jump off the triangler array.

Someone was playing "Roc'n'Rope". Looking over his shoulder I read the instructions, and watched the play. When I felt I understood the game I placed my 20¢ on the machine, indicating my place in the queue to play.

The player glanced over to my coin. "You won't need that."

"But I want to play."

"You just won't need it."

"What do you mean," I queried.



"I'll show you at the end of this game."

A minute later he lost his last man. "The machine isn't earthed. So all you have to do is build up some static and transfer it to the machine, and you'll get a free game." He started rubbing his shoes on the carpet, lifted them off the ground and touched a key to a bit of metal on the machine. Zap!, and a free game was registered. I sat down and joined him. Zap! Zap! Zap!

\* \* \* \* \*

I knew on re-enrollment day that second term was going to be a hard term. School and Society, Psychology of the Adolescent, Statistics, the final term of Studies in Teaching: Mathematics and Studies in Teaching: Media Studies, and 2 days a week of Teaching Practice. It was going to be the worst term of my course, I knew for sure.

It didn't necessarily have to be so bad, though. The course I've been doing is a four year degree course for a Bachelor of Education. Doing this course is the same as going through 3 years for a Bachelor of Arts or Science, and following it by the one year Diploma of Education. At Rusden the education component of the course is spread over the last two years, and in it you do Sch&Soc, Psyc of the Adsol, 45 days of teaching prac., Studies in Teaching for two methods, and 3 Education Electives. The academic component of these two years comprises 9 units of work, with 3 units making a major. Along with the Ed. Electives, you can choose which units you can do. When I arrived on re-enrollment day I had 10 academic units (8 in Media Studies, and 2 in Mathematics) and 1 Ed. Elective. To qualify for my degree I had to complete the compulsory education subjects, and 2 Ed. Electives; I'd already completed my quota of academic units. Had I decided to do just these subjects I would have been okay. I could've spread them quite comfortably over the first 2 terms, and that would've been it.

I enrolled in 6 academic units. I wanted to have a major in Mathematics. So down went the words "Mathematics 309 - Statistics" on my enrollment form. I tried to get into a different maths unit as I knew the workload for Stats would be enormous. However, having done Maths 110 and 210, rather than the more traditional Math 100 and 200, in my first and second years I now had to pay the penalty. I didn't have the pre-requisites for any other maths units.

The other five units were in Media Studies, and were designed to meet particular creative and practical needs. I hadn't touched video since early in second year and I didn't feel I had enough expertise in the field, so I enrolled in Advanced Backpack and Studio Drama. I had a strong desire to put together an oral history of the period when my mother's family came from Poland to Australia, interviewing my mother, uncle, and grandmother. I enrolled in Sound Production. Documentary Photography was due to a desire to record aspects of the near-by shopping center on Toorak Rd. The last unit was a Contract, in which I



was allowed to write my own unit. Here I was to bring together 3 strong fascinations I had to meet in photography: try some portraiture, use the large format 8 x 10 (inches) camera, and explore the media of gum-bicromate photographic emulsion. Despite only getting a credit for only a terms work I expected this project to involve close to a years work, mainly in testing out the gum-bicromate - a non-silver emulsion which I would mix myself and apply to paper; when dry it is sensitive to light.

\* \* \* \* \*

I sat down at the "Roc'n'Rope" machine, placing my key ring on the glass. Martin was playing. His score was over 70000. Then I noticed the highest score.

"Who got the 106000?"

"It's not official."

"How come?"

"Not union members," he said, as he nodded to the Cubiod machine. Two students from the local high school were playing. "Scabs!" Martin roared out, "Where are your student cards? We pay \$85 so we can play on these machines. No students cards, no games, I say."

"Get away!" rivotted the two 15 year olds.

When Martin lost his last man he got up. "Off to a lecture," he growned.

"What's this Martin," someone near-by said. "You going to a lecture. Since when?"

"Have to! 80% attendance or fail."

"80%! It's a good thing we don't have that. I probably don't go to more than 30% of our classes," said one 15 year old to the other.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was about 4 weeks into second term that things started to go wrong. I was more than two-thirds into my teaching practise and I didn't feel I had reached the level of competency expected at that stage of the program. I had thought I'd be at the point where my lessons were well in control, and I would be using the last 12 days to be expanding my teaching style and gaining confidense for full-time teaching. Instead, what I had were lessons which lacked purpose and direction. Unless I spent 3 hours planning for every moment of the 50 minute lesson, making sure I have everything clear in my head, things wouldn't go well.

I went to see Bruce Henry, one of my two Maths Method lecturers, about



my situation. After discussing how I viewed all this Bruce could only agree. "Though I'm glad you are able to see the stage you are at. A lot of the concerns that you've just expressed are the observations that I have got from my visits and the reports from your supervisors. Though, it is good that you've said what you've just told me. Certainly, it sounds like the May holiday break hasn't been good for your teaching practice. It occasionally happens that the gap breaks the flow of teaching, rather than provide a time to refresh."

"So, what do I do now?"

"Well, fortunately, you know what it is to be a better teacher. Try, as a first step, to get back to the level you were prior to the May holidays. Use that as your first goal. I suspect if you get there your confidence would come back, and things can go on from there. You'll start to feel comfortable with your role in the classroom, and from there you'll find your own teaching style. For the moment it means having to spend 3 hours on a lesson plan, but that will reduce soon enough."

"So, what happens if at the end of my 45 days I'm still not ready to teach?"

"Well, assuming you want to qualify, you'll have to do some extra days in third term. But for the moment try not to worry about that. You've still got 6 weeks of this term to go, and it will be a few weeks before you will have to do extra days. Are the troubles with teaching affecting your college work?"

\* \* \* \* \*

The trouble was that my college work wasn't going well, either. And not necessarily because teaching practice wasn't going well, though it certainly did contribute. Choosing to do School and Society and Psychology of the Adolescent in the same term proved to be a major error of timetabling judgement. The college advises that we do one in first term and the other in second term, but my wishes to do those extra Media units wouldn't allow for that. And in second term I had to suffer that desire.

Together those two subjects demanded only four hours from my weekly timetable. Not a lot of time, but they made up for it by demanding a lot in niggly little assignments. I would much rather do one 3000 word essay than four 500 word essays; there is only one time in which I have to get over the block of starting the thing. Then there was the 1800 word paper I had to give. One of my high school teachers had once told me that I should make my handwriting larger as some people may immediately assume I haven't met the word requirement and fail me. Now, five years later, I had to contend with that advice. "No-where near the required length" Marilyn wrote at the bottom of my paper. But I decided not to argue. I knew I could convince her that the paper was 1750



words, but there was no way that I'd win her over on the rest of her comments. Her last line, "This seems to have been written in quite a rush," was apt. I had to resubmit. And it was all because of stats.

The assignments Ted was giving us were all evenly spaced, but they also demanded a lot of our time. The college constitution states that for each hour of lecture time we were expected to spend one hour of study time. Statistics was the subject that abused such a requirement. For a subject with 40 hours of lectures, I estimate I devoted 180 hours of study time on assignments and only on doing just the bare minimum.

The worst aspect of my troubles were an extension of an observation I had made in first term. Of every week we spend 3 days at college being students and 2 days in school being teacher, and I felt we were made to make a compromise between the two disciplines. I would come home after my two days of teaching and I wouldn't be able to reflect upon them; I'd have 3 days of college assignments to do. I felt sure that a lot of my teaching problems were because I was never able to get any momentum going.

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One of the more interesting pieces of college graffiti is the Pinball Hall of Fame wall. It was designed to highlight the notable achievements of the machine in use. Highest scores, lowest scores, most free games gained, near misses (for those who came within 10000 of getting a free game), etc. The only time I ever qualified for a listing was about half way through a term. I was last in a round of players, and my score was 40000 with just my last ball to play. As I took my position at the head of the machine someone muttered something about how I wouldn't be there for too long. I don't blame him for the sentiment; an average of 10000 a ball in a game which gives away a free at 440000 isn't very good. I became determined to save some face by getting my score above 100000.

I put my ball into play. And boy did I 'carve' (to use the vernacular of the pinball player). It took a bit of effort getting to 100000, but from then on it all went well. The ball started going exactly where I intended it: through the 'horse-shoe', past the spinners, getting the 'squeller', etc. When I eventually lost my ball I knew I would be hearing "the sweet sound of bock", and be getting a free game. As I collected my bonuses the score rolled over 440000 ("bock!") and finally settled on 452000. Until then I'd always regarded myself as a player who had to put together two good balls per game to have a chance at getting a free, and here I was almost getting a free with one ball.

Two or three days later I stepped up to have another game. As I put the ball into play I overheard someone whisper, "He's the guy who got 400000 with one ball the other day". It was my moment of triumph.

\* \* \* \* \*



Last June my father was at Mt. Buller for a weekend of skiing. One morning he bent over to do up a clip on his ski boot and something happened.

The something didn't show for a few days until a sharp constant pain began in the top half of his right leg. Being his own man of medicine, dad regarded it as a blood clot and didn't feel it necessary to actually see someone about it. It turned out not to be a blood clot. One of his vertabrae had cracked and some fluid had leaked out from the bone. When the fluid hardened it did so on the nerve leading to the right leg. My father went into hospital, had tests and then two weeks of traction. After two days of traction the pain had gone and all my father had to cope with were the weights tugging at his feet and avoiding bedsores. He finished out his two weeks of traction and came home for six weeks, in which time he was only allowed to stand or lie flat - no sitting, bending, etc. In this six week period it was hoped the fluid would dissolve, and the vertabrae would heal itself.

On a Thursday three weeks into the six week period the pain started again. Friday it just got worse. My dog's bark woke me early Saturday morning. He was barking at the two ambulance men who had come to take me father back to hospital and straight into traction.

Three days later the pain was still intense. The decision was made: they would operate to heal what was hoped would happen over time.

I have no way of assessing how all this affected my performance as a teacher or added to my hassles as a student. I tried to remain calm and philosophical towards what was happening to my father, and for the most part I think I was successful. The rest of my family were also successful in this way, but there was still a lot of tension in the household. And it all added up: for the first time in my five years there I was starting to hate college, and for the first time I was finding it hard working at all my subjects. I was finding it hard, very hard. I spent a lot of time trying to avoid doing work which I couldn't afford to put off.

Eventually it was decided that I should do the extra days of teaching. In a way this caused a sigh of relief. It took the pressure off me to a large degree, and my teaching picked up so that I wasn't scared or bothered at the prospect. During those last two weeks of term I also began to reconsider the subjects I had enrolled to do in third term. I was tired and sick of college and as much as I wanted to complete those extra Media units I also wanted a rest. I withdrew from Documentary Photography, Studio Drama and the Contract; allowing me to just complete the two Education Electives, and the extra days in the early part of the term.

Assignment wise those last two weeks of second term were horrible. At the start of the last week I still had ten assignments to complete, and I arrived at college on the morning of the last day with 4 uncompleted



assignments. For the first time in my sojourn at college I had serious doubts about getting them in on time, and I didn't like the experience. Only by sheer hard work did I manage to complete them on that day.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mid way through the second week of my August holidays I went out to college with my girlfriend, Wendy, and Raoul, a friend from Sydney. I had already told them how it has been discovered how to get a free game on the video games, and we intended having a game after I'd shown them a film I had made.

Walking into the cafeteria to have a coffee Wendy and Raoul saw a machine. "Is that one?" they asked. "No," I replied, "It is a Bio-Rythm machine." Wendy and Raoul were inquisitive and went over to have a look. They read the sheet that mentioned that the bio-rythm is determined from 3 cycles (physical, emotional, and mental) and that the cycles started at your date of birth.

"Ever used this?" Raoul asked.

"No." I shrugged my shoulders, "But let's have a go."

I pressed the buttons for the day's date, and Wendy pressed the buttons for her birth date, and followed it by inserting a 20¢ coin. Out came a card showing her how she rated in each of 10 areas (leisure plans, friendships, finance, etc). Wendy rated a 'high' in each area.

Raoul had his turn, and I followed. My card seemed appropriate enough. I didn't even get a 'low' in any of the categories, while I totally failed to rate in four categories.

While we were walking away from the machine the true significance of it came up. At the side of the card was a number that was our Critical Day Code, telling us which of the cycles were in a "state of change". I gained a "7" which meant no change could be expected. I imagine it had been that way for the previous ten weeks.

- Irwin Hirsh

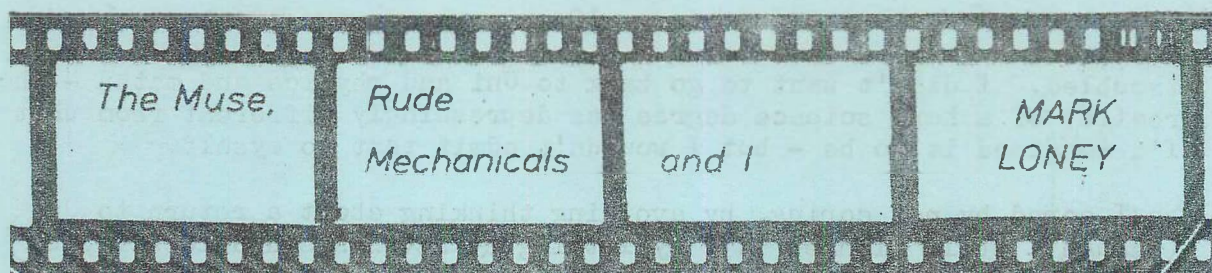
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Nationalism is a concept with ambivalent values: on the one hand we recognise its closeness to chauvinism and racism, and we know (however superficially) that it is a cause of war, of strained international relations and a way of setting us against them. But it also has an acceptable face, one that appears as national identity, or national pride, and this is the one currently being promoted by, significantly, sport and advertising throughout contemporary Australia.

- Bill Bonney, "Packer & Televised Cricket"

"N.S.W. Institute of Technology Media Papers", June 1980.





Two years ago I failed second year physics and maths at the University of Western Australia. The situation had been hopeless since the first term exams where I had dropped 30% of the physics bundle but I kept on trying to slog through. Thirteen years of good marks in anything academic I had put my hand to didn't prepare me for the possibility of failure.

All the same, I thought I had accepted it fairly well when I arrived back in Perth in the New Year after six weeks working on a wheatbin. I had always planned to take a year off between second year and third year to work and go travelling in... All this meant, I thought, was that I would come back to second year again after my break.

I thought wrong. It was three months before I got a job. My inexperience in the job market caught me out and I waited around Perth for two months on the promise of a job, spending all my savings, before I realised I was being had and started looking for work in earnest.

The 20th of March, 1981 I started work with the Central Norseman Gold Corporation in Norseman. I started on \$10000pa, was on \$16000pa two weeks later and two weeks after that was on about \$23000pa.

An excellent wage to save money on, except that during my stay in Perth I had fallen for one of the premier idols of our time and had driven out to Norseman in the car I spent the next year paying for. I had plenty of good reasons for it at the time; I would take two years off instead of just one and do the job properly going back to University with a car, a stereo and enough money to get me through the last two years of my degree. Having a car became important; serious thought about my trip went by the board.

Rationalizations all. Looking back now I can see that that decision was brought about by a complex of factors, family pressure, lack of support in my goals when I needed it and, most tellingly, my unadmitted desire not to go back to physics and maths at UWA.

So my two year trek started, I worked at Norseman for 8 months before moving to the better wages and conditions of Teutonic Bore and then settled down to finishing paying off the car and saving towards my goal of ten thousand dollars.

Everything was going all right on the surface, but underneath I was



troubled. I didn't want to go back to Uni and physics and maths - the reality of a hard science degree was depressingly different from what I'd imagined it to be - but I wouldn't admit that to myself.

So I coped by not coping, by avoiding thinking about a return to Uni (though I still planned it), by letting my savings schedule slip, by starting to think about a third year off and so on.

Then in July, 1982 I caught up with a wise and wonderful friend who I hadn't seen for nearly two years and who asked me what I was doing and why and what my plans were. And when I revealed my confusion and uncertainty she gently pointed out to me that a fail at University wasn't a fail at life; that I didn't have to keep on doing something because I had once thought it was the right thing to do and that maybe there was something I had always wanted to do but had never dared.

And she was right and there was.

I want to make movies and I want to write.

Not that it was that easy. It was a month later before I tentatively revealed to the world my secret dream of directing and producing movies. And it was over a month after that, and all the support I recieved, that I declared my secret, secret dream of being a writer.

All of the sudden I was motivated again, to the extent that when I went to Perth for my 21st birthday in August and had a week of disasters - major conflict with my father, mechanical problems with my car that left me no choice but to sell it and a \$2000 setback to my savings - which a month earlier would have had me giving up my goals. I perservered and pushed through and now am looking at being in a better financial position than I ever aimed at previously.

So where am I going from here? Am I going to, as no doubt a few of the audience fear (Hi Leigh), inflict terrible fiction upon Australian fandom via its fanzines?

Well, in a word, no. If Irwin still wants me after this little piece then I will be quite happy to continue writing for SIKANDER, but it won't be fiction. I've made my views on that plain elsewhere (in THE SPACE MASTREL) that if it's fun it is for zines, if you're serious about being published then you should go elsewhere.

What I doing in 1983 is study in the School of English at the Western Australian Institute of Technology towards a Bachelor of Arts degree in Film & Television and Creative Writing. The Film & Television section of the course should help me find out whether a life in the Director's Chair is for me and the Creative Writing units should help me polish up my writing and hone my word skills so that I can do justice to the ideas that have been in my head for so long.



It feels good. I have an inner surety about what I will be attempting that I haven't had for several years and that, in itself, is worth the price of admission.

I feel I understand myself better. I know I understand myself better because so many actions and choices of mine for so many years I now understand with a new clarity of vision and a new insight.

I remember, for example, being taken into Perth when I was a child by my father one Saturday morning and his offer, after he had completed his business, to buy me a book.

I was overjoyed by the offer and my deliberations at the next bookshop window were intense. Dad suggested a history of the development of atomic energy, *THE ATOMSMASHERS*. I saw Andre Norton's *SARGASSO OF SPACE* and that was what I wanted and was what I chose.

I realise now that the choice I made then I have just made again... the muse before rude mechanicals.

The decisions I made in July, August, and September all followed this line and in an unsure and tentative manner I started thinking of myself as Mark Loney; potential writer, potential filmmaker - rather than Mark Loney; potential physicist.

- Mark Loney

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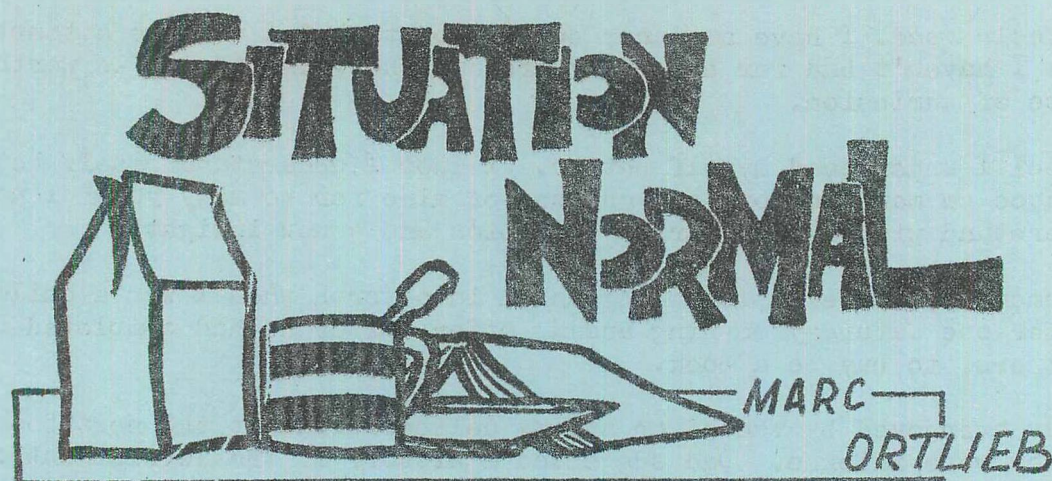
8 July, 1882: Unpredictable Australian composer Percy Grainger was born. A child prodigy, he was billed by some as one of the twentieth century's greatest pianists, though in fact he claimed to hate the piano - except at rehearsals when he would settle down underneath it for a nap. Sporting one of the earliest Afro haircuts he was, to say the least, unconventional in appearance. He burnt all his ordinary suits, insisting they were unhygienic, and had new one made of towelling so he could regularly wash them. When he married Ella Strom in 1928, he wouldn't buy an engagement ring because it represented subjugation. The ceremony was held in the Hollywood Bowl and the 22000 guests all paid admission. In typical style, the honeymoon was spent exploring the uncharted wastes of the Arizona Plateau. In music, as in life, Grainger had his little idiosyncrasies. He would often stop in the middle of a concert to tell jokes, though apparently he was serious when he wrote *THE WARRIORS* for three conductors - one on the platform, one half on and another hidden from the audience. Refusing to use Italian terminology, he would give musicians instructions like 'bumping bumpingly', 'hold till blown', 'in walking measure' and 'die right here'. In one composition he required the organist to fasten down two keys with a pair of pencils, and in another that he should play with his nose.

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Zzzzit!

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The day starts as usual. My early morning wake-up call comes in, and I leap out of bed ready to face a brand new day. I regret the action immediately, and the snow falling outside the window confirms my opinion that it's going to be a cold one. Still, I think to myself, that's what living in Minneapolis is all about. I'm halfway through reading the MINNEAPOLIS OBSERVER when there's a harsh buzzing in my ear. This time I really wake up, and lie in bed, listening to the dulcet tones of the cat-hinting that it is 6:30am, and at least an hour past his rightful feeding time. So much for sweet dreams.

Fortunately my dressing gown is right there next to the bed where I dropped it the previous morning. After the obligatory early morning fumbling, I locate the belt, tie it, and then go out to open the door for the cat. He's in his usual early morning mood, and purrs for a couple of minutes while watching me drop the cat food can from the can opener. Thoroughly entertained, he settles down to eat while I put the kettle on and head for the shower. While relieving my bladder of the night's accumulation I make a mental note not to flush the loo before showering. Reflex, however, takes over and so I have to wait until the cistern refills before jumping into the shower. Otherwise the cold water balance is impossible.

By the time I'm dried, and feeling slightly more human, the kettle is boiling. I grab a carton of orange juice from the fridge, and carefully pour a measure into the coffee cup. Somehow sensing that orange juice and instant coffee are not going to go well together, I pour the sludgy mess into the sink, and start again. This time I pour the hot water into the coffee cup and the orange juice into the glass. Things are getting better.

The cat, having finished his dinner comes up looking for a little attention. He's picked the wrong moment, as I've discovered that the bread has developed the sort of mould appreciated by incompetent microbiologists. Breakfast consists of orange juice, coffee, and an apple.



The time is 6:45. I push last night's dinner plate to the edge of the coffee table, plunk down coffee and apple, grab a copy of *ASTERIX AND CLEOPATRA*, and put Tom Verlaine's *DREAMTIME* onto the turntable. Having a modicum of respect for my neighbours I plug in the headphones. I determine to listen to one side only, as I really should type up a ditto master for the morning's Year 11 English class.

Halfway through side two of Television's *MARQUEE MOON* I remember to turn the iron on. Well, after the guitar solo on Mary Marie I had to listen to Venus, and, by the time I'd done that, there wasn't really time to type up the master. I then return and, having tired of New Wave, put on a couple of Melanie tracks while waiting for the iron to heat up.

Somehow the ritual of deodorising my armpits, brushing my teeth, dressing, tying my tie, and putting my shoes on the appropriate feet goes on while my mind checks off all the things I'm supposed to take to school with me. The bundle of Appleszines is sitting on the coffee table under the television guide, but it takes a little longer to locate the novel I was going to read to the Year 11 English class. (I have to do something, having failed to get their worksheet typed up.)

The back tyre on the bicycle is a little flat, but the squeeze test assures me that it can wait until I get to school. There's a further 5 minute delay while I work out where I left my cycle clips. Then I spend 30 seconds reassuring myself that the keys are indeed in my trouser pocket before closing the front door. It is 7:55.

The ride to school passes without incident, until I approach the school gates. Tom and Anne are just pulling up behind me, so I rouse my lazy body, and sprint into the car park. Thus, having quickly chained up the bike, I can point at them, look at my watch and mutter "8:05? Tut tut. This just isn't good enough." Tom replies with a time honoured gesture, and we make our way into the staff room, grabbing our morning's notices. The prescribed cynical remarks are made concerning the notice about teachers who don't phone in early enough to tell the front office that they will be away.

Gradually the staff filter in, and the English senior comes round to have a few words to me about the programme that I was supposed to submit 5 weeks previously. He is fobbed off with an assurance that I was up at seven this morning working on it, but had to leave it until I checked the results of the classes' literacy tests. I make a note to give the kids their literacy tests one of these days.

The 10 minutes before the bell is spent in checking my journal, and in quickly working out some essay topics for my Year 9 English class. Then it is time to go over to my home group. Anne and I check the roll, read out the notices, and remind those kids who have not returned the last 5 circulars that there'll be real trouble if they don't get them in real soon. We spend the rest of the class period discussing the fuck-ups on the new timetable. The bell goes, and I head off to my Year elevens.



"Not science fiction again?" mutters a voice from somewhere in a back row. I reply with a long spiel on the place of the genre in preparing them for the future, and finalise any discussion by saying that if they keep arguing I'll censor the juicy bits when I get to them. This silences most of the class. The sole objector is assigned the job of writing a half page summary of what I read during the lesson. There are no further objections.



The Year 9 class in the next lesson are feeling particularly rabby, but soon quieten down when threatened with a doubling of the essay word count. While they get on with their work I get out my journal, and continue with an article for Q36. One of the kids, whose hand has been up for 10 minutes, but who hasn't managed to tear my attention from a particularly awkward piece of syntax finally yells out, "What are you writing Mr Ortlieb?" I quickly cover it, and reply, "A report on this class's behaviour for the principal." The bell goes. The

essays are collected. I make my way back to the staff room, where my desk is piled high with marking 'awaiting attention'. I pile the new lot on top, and then get into a conversation with Grace, comparing our overseas trips.

Before I know it, it's recess time, and I rush over to the bridge table, narrowly beating Jock to the remaining seat. We only manage to get 3 hands in, as Ivan is interrupted by the science senior who wants to find out whether or not he can use the geology lab in lesson 7. All 3 contracts bid go down by one trick. I promise not to bid any more 3 card suits.

After recess is a double lesson with Year 10. They are in the library doing some research on famous authors. I promise one of them that I won't forget to bring the latest Asimov biography again. Then I settle in a corner, and catch up on the latest NEW SCIENTIST. Dandelus's new theory gives me a great idea for a new filk, and I jot down a couple of ideas. Lunch time is soon upon me, and forgetting to set homework I dismiss the class, and go out to do my yard duty.

Yard duty finished, I head back for the staffroom. Passing one of the deputy principals I mention the group of kids who were heading for the Year 8 area and were muttering something about 'killing the little dobber'. I then head straight for the bridge table, but all the seats are taken. Fortunately, though, Fred has one of them. I remind him that he is supposed to take over for me in the second half of lunch. He's just picked up his hand. He takes one look at it, passes it to me,



and goes out to do his yard duty. I soon understand his hurry. That poor little jack of diamonds looks terribly lonely with no other points to keep it company.

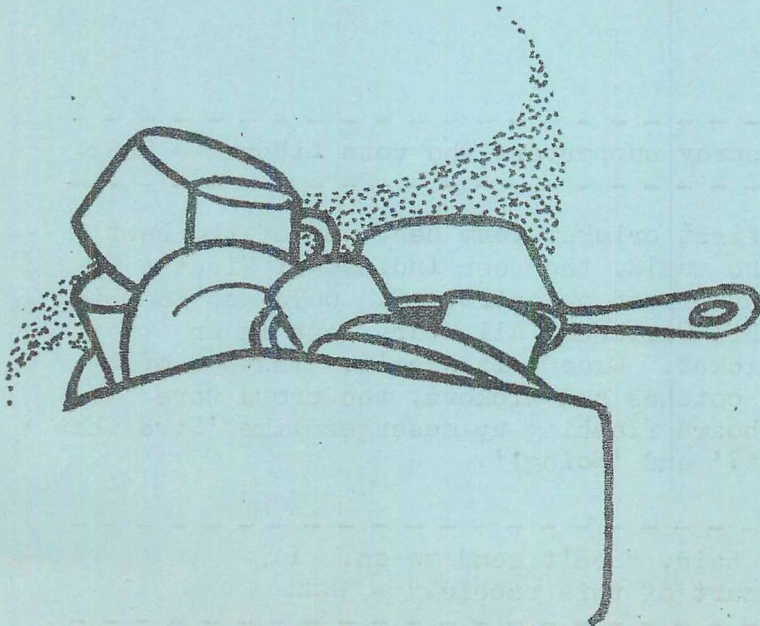
The second half of lunch passes quickly. The bell goes while I'm in the middle of trying to make four clubs doubled. I stay and finish the hand, going down two when an unnecessary finesse fails to come off. By the time I get to my Year 10 remedial English they've already been told to be quiet by the deputy principal, who looks rather sternly at my late arrival.

The last two lessons are frees. I bicycle up to the bank, extract \$50, spend half of that on stamps, and pick up my mail from the post office box. The rest of the afternoon is spent reading through the latest STIPPLE-APA. There's a staff-meeting after the kids go home, but all that means is that I have to move from one reading spot to another. The principal does not notice the fact that I haven't listened to a word he's said, but then he hasn't said anything that directly concerns me. Besides, all the important stuff will be found in the morning bulletin.

Staff meeting over, I trudge out to the carpark with the yawning teachers. "Did he say anything important?" I ask. "Dunno," replies Tom. "I was marking a Year 12 history essay."

The ride home is rather bumpy, and I remind myself to pump up that rear tyre in the morning. The letter box contains the gas bill, and a letter from Cathy. I dump my bag in the middle of the lounge floor, pour an orange juice, and push the breakfast coffee cup to one side of the coffee table so that I can read the letter.

There is a thump on the front door, and a scrabbling of cat claws as Mac decides to tell me that he knows that I'm home and that he'd like to be let in and fed. Fortunately I have a couple of tins of catfood left.



A survey of the kitchen tells me that I have just enough dishes left for dinner if I wash out the little saucepan. I put that off until I've written a reply to Cathy's letter. I consider starting my STIPPLEzine, but the growling in my stomach makes dinner a high priority. At the crucial point in dinner preparation,



when the chips are just turning burn, John Packer phones to ask me when I'm coming around to get the cover art he's done for Q36. No sooner have I put down the phone than my brother rings. He's just been up to my parents place, and has picked up the mail that has been sent there for me. Some people are a little slow to pick up changes of address, I think, as I haven't used that address in over a year now. Still, knowing the speed of the Post Office, it could well be that some of that mail has been in transit for more than that time. I ascertain that there's nothing there that requires my immediate attention, and then I promise to pick it up the next time I see him.

The chips are a little darker than I like them, but a healthy dollop of tomato sauce soon disguise both colour and taste. It's a lucky evening. Both fried eggs have their yolks intact.

After dinner it's coffee and apa time. Halfway through the second page of mailing comments though it's time for THE BIG MATCH. I wonder back into the lounge, turn on the television, and settle down. Somhow I discover that there's a cruddy AQ movie on one of the other channels. The stencil doesn't get finished that evening. At 11:50 I stumble into the bedroom, stepping over my dressing gown, and setting the alarm clock. As I toss and turn, trying to get to sleep, I get 3 tremendous ideas for fanzine articles. I consider the possibility of getting up and making note of them, but realise that doing so will merely alert the cat to the fact that I am awake, and he'll start yowling to come in.

Some time later that night, I wake up, sure that it's time to go to work. Then I remember. Since I won the lottery, and moved to Minneapolis, I don't have to work anymore. The beautiful blonde in the bed beside me starts to stir, but I kiss her softly on the cheek, and then snuggle back down into the silk sheets. Outside, it's just started to snow.

- Marc Ortlieb

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 Essendon supporters are Footscray supporters who vote Liberal - 3RRR  
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4 September, 1977: America's first cricket team beat one of the best teams in the world, the West Indies, at Giant's Stadium, in the first match ever played on astroturf. 6674 people paid \$50000 to see Gary Sobers and his Caribbean All Stars lose in an afternoon of gentle English cricket. Except it wasn't. Instead of discreet applause, boundaries, catches and wickets, the crowd were greeted by an electronic scoreboard flashing up messages like 'Give that man a hand!', 'Did you see that?' and 'Boing!'.

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 And Steve Copping said, "Don't send me on. I don't want to be part of this rabble." - 3RRR  
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# THE LAST CHOP

John J. Alderson

Way back in 1946 I sallied forth to see the world. It shouldn't elicit any surprise that I first went back to the scenes of my childhood. The hospital I was born in was gone and all that remained was an empty block, and the doctor's next door was represented by an empty space amidst some luxuriant wattles. I remember vaguely attending the doctor here, together with the rest of the family and getting jabbed in the bum with a needle... a matter which caused further discomfort when I used the toilet. It happened that my younger brother had contracted diphtheria, and the doctor after having peered down his throat pronounced him ill. He proceeded to peer down the throats of my sisters, and when he came to the second of these my dad asked whether or not it wouldn't be better if he sterilized the spatula, where upon the doctor said, "Er, I, hum, oh yes," and having done so, peered down my throat. So within hours my sisters were also carted 40 miles away to hospital (apparently the Bush Nursing Hospital next door couldn't handle contagious diseases), and I was left to enjoy my solitude for several weeks.

The nearest neighbour lived about a mile away and it was unthinkable that children would travel that distance. So, now my own master, I dropped in on him and spent a pleasant afternoon chatting with the old chap. It was from him that I heard, not for the last time for the name was a household word amongst farmers, of Indigo Jones and his long range forecast of the terrific drought we were to get in the 1980's. To be specific it was to start in 1981 and continue for the rest of the decade, interspersed with some useful rains. Well we are over the first drought during which we had no useful rain for 19 months. A useful rain being defined as being at least an inch, or more in summer. I think there is a precise definition but I can't lay my hands on it. There is a point about rainfall which many people miss. Falls of say 20 points are useless from the farmer's point of view unless they come after a substantial fall the day before. Thus the Victorian Forest Commission do not count falls of 20 points unless there was a fall of one inch or more the previous day. In reality we could get a fall of 20 points every day of the year, that is 73 inches per year, and the place would be a desert. (For the curious I speak of a 20 inch rainfall area.)

So I'd known about this drought since 1946... I think most of us knew because most of us would bet our left elbow on the accuracy of Indigo Jones' long range weather forecasts. Indeed the Maryborough Highland Society got one of his forecasts for their 100th Highland Gathering. The forecast was that it would be a balmy spring day. It was. I was there. But apparently no-one ventured to ask what would give a balmy spring day on the 11th of January at Maryborough. That was the Monday. On the previous Friday afternoon the storm which hit the town unroofed the grandstand, tore the tops of the willows along Princes Lake, laid 80 foot pine trees flat and covered the streets ankle deep in leaves and



branches. It also dropped something like 8 inches of rain in as many seconds and the oval where the games were to be held was a lake 4 feet deep. They still held the games there. You can't keep a good Highlander down and I hastily commiserate with you unfortunate types who aren't Highlanders. Fortune has played a nasty trick on you.

So there we were, a year into this blessed drought. All of us who could, unloaded our stock several months previous, and I didn't because of an unfortunate death in the office of my Stock and Estate Agent which put them in a tizzy, and when they recovered my sheep were unsaleable. Already sheep were being shot because they couldn't be given away. I was offered some for the taking. Few of us had any feed left, that is baled hay, ensilage or grain. The last harvest was quite poor and we'd been feeding for 12 months. The lowest price for baled hay was \$2.50 per bale and one just cannot feed sheep at those prices. Indeed the cheapest feed was wheat and there is a reason for this which will surprise most people. The hay being sold now at those prices was to feed horses, trotters and race-horses and a few ponies. Horse owners apparently can afford to pay those inflated prices but we who grow sheep and cattle for a living just cannot. But horses are not partial to wheat. Indeed it would be the greatest blessing our country could have if every horse in it was given a generous bucket of wheat. Almost all the produce from our irrigation areas (non-horticultural of course) went to feed horses.

I wasn't caught napping by this drought, but I've been caught none the less. I'd already lost one third of my sheep and hoped to get through to next shearing with half the flock. I saved one third, but others were worse off. It is unlikely I'll go broke, that is, bankrupt, but I have lost two thirds of my income for future years. Those sheep which could not be given away then are our capital, and when the drought broke the sheep went at such a price that at current wool prices it will take a sheep 9 years to pay for itself. That is, 2 generations of sheep before the owner gets a cent himself. And some of us have to keep sheep over or the country will go broke (er, broker).

It was 20 years ago that I saw one solution for droughts. That was to plant fodder trees. These trees, being deep-rooted, still flourish during a drought though their yield may be low in succeeding years. There are two types, either providing leaves as fodder or several hundred weight of beans or nuts (acorn is a good example) per tree with a food value at least as high as oats. Ironically it wasn't until 2 years ago that I planted my first few rows, and that without irrigation. The information just wasn't available and it was not until the advent of Permaculture that I found anybody else interested in such things. In fact, a great deal of the research has been done by yours truly and the results are at present running through EARTH GARDEN. I had in fact wanted to plant wilga but I could not get the plants until last year. Well it's drought resistant but also slow growing, but something I found out which is not mentioned by most authorities. The frosts cut it right back. So I am just as well pleased I only ventured on 4 or 5 plants.



Those of us who expected the drought had forgotten the frosts. They were the real killer that winter. In fact the saddest blow came when the fruit trees blossomed with a wild abandon and the bees worked like mad which hardly a fruit set. The frosts killed all the buds so there were very little wine-making last summer, even if I could have found the water to add to the poetry that goes into wine.

There is another ironical twist to the drought too. Without rain there were no mosquitos and this meant no myxo. So, to add to our troubles, rabbits were almost in plague proportions and they dug out and ate the very grass-roots. Their presence made irrigation pointless.

Very little is now being said about the Jupiter Effect. This is a pity, it's just that the students of this line-up of planets came to the wrong conclusion. Indigo Jones based a lot of his weather predictions on the sun-spot cycles (there are a number of cycles which interact, but how he originally isolated the cycles I don't know). Several years ago John Campbell, in an ANALOG editorial, pointed out that the Solar System revolves around the centre of gravity of the system and this does not coincide with that of the Sun. Jupiter is the major influence affecting the said centre of gravity and when all the planets line up, as they did last year, the centre of gravity of the Solar System reaches closest to the Sun's surface. This phenomena causes sun spots and these according to Indigo Jones affect our weather. Prior to Campbell, Velikovsky pointed out the astrological ideas of conjunction and oppositions of the planets may have been developed from definite observations of their effects on earth. So I think we are seeing the Jupiter Effect in action.

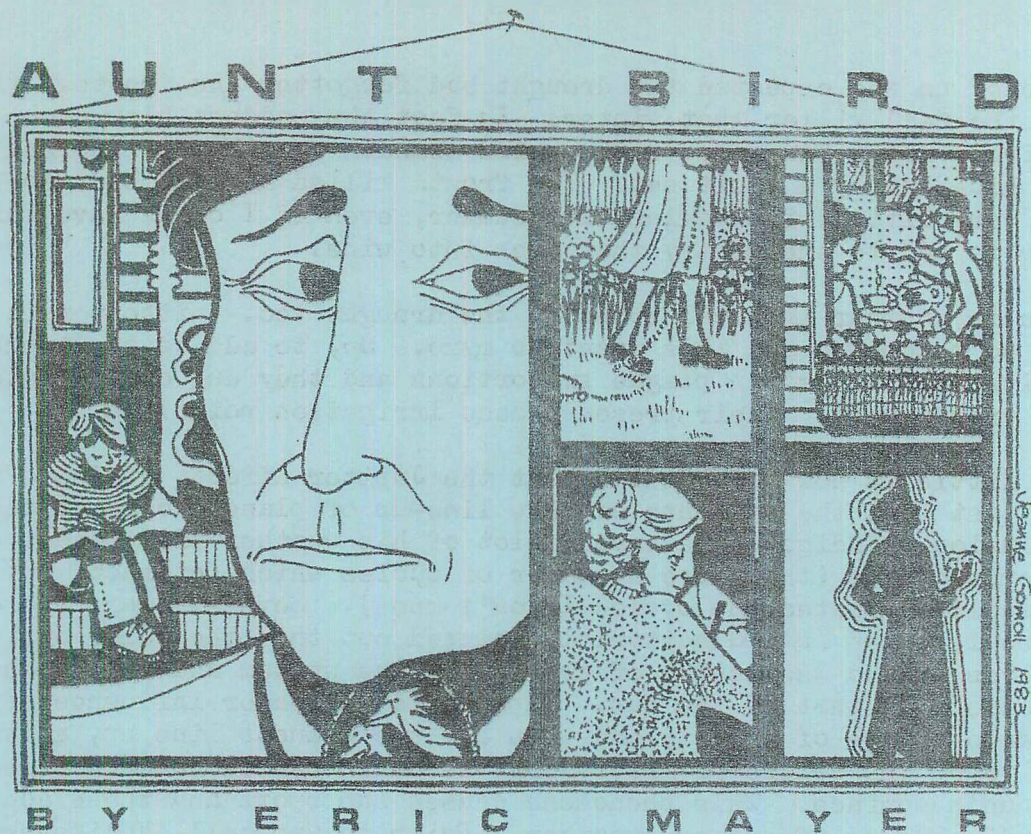
Unlike most of my colleagues I entered the drought without debt. I survived but a great number of us will not. I survived with one third of my sheep. A neighbour with 50 out of 750! There is still hardly a sheep to be seen and most farmers cropped heavily, I have planted a lot more fodder trees. However it may take several years before a lot of farmers know if they will survive. Now there is a strange thing about droughts. Already this financial year I have sold more wine and more of my writing than I did all through the drought. Droughts seem to dry up more than dams.

More farmers will leave the land, and already there are far too few farmers in the country. We just can't look after it.

- John J. Alderson

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 31 August, 1895: The world's only financial composer was born. His name was Joseph Schillinger and all his compositions were inspired by the money pages of the NEW YORK TIMES. He would draw a graph of the fluctuating prices of commodities like gold and wheat, and use the resulting curves to add to his stock of melodies.  
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"Aunt Bird's lost the doggie again!"

I set my sf paperback down on the porch rail and climbed up out of a radioactive crater and into the suburbs of Dallas, Pennsylvania where my brother Todd was staring at me round eyed as if he'd just bought a ticket for the roller coaster.

"Doggie's lost," he repeated. There was a note of expectancy in his voice.

I was at the age where my concern with adult preoccupations like nuclear war was nothing more than a newly discovered game, on a par with tag or hide n' seek. In an instant I was racing away from Armageddon toward the back yard, my book forgotten.

I saw my aunt as soon as I rounded the corner of the barn. She was making her way hesitantly along the edge of the garden. She wore a kerchief and a threadbare black sweater, unbuttoned in deference to the early June heat. She had twisted Sandy's leash around her thin wrist and it was still securely in place. Sandy, however, had absented herself from the collar which trailed on the grass behind Aunt Bird, much to our amusement.

"Where's Sandy," we hollered. My little brother was hopping up and down



with excitement. He'd reached the top of the roller coaster. The search was on, made urgent by the comfortingly slight, but heart poundingly real possibility that our puppy had run out onto Lake Street.

My aunt shuffled her sneakers around with exaggerated care until she was able to direct her thick lenses toward the empty collar. "Oh my," she bleated. "Oh dear." Her voice rose into the coloratura quaver she affected in moments of stress. This merely fueled our hilarity.

The commotion brought a small, blonde cocker-mix bounding out of the tangled pea plants not five feet away. Sandy loved eating peas raw from my aunt's hand and had, perhaps, decided to go after some on her own. She snuffled around my aunt's feet and my aunt clucked at her with relief. I put Sandy's collar back in place, making sure it was fastened correctly, something my aunt never got the knack of, and returned to my contemplation of thermonuclear devastation, much to the disgust of Todd who was not yet interested in such advanced games.

Losing Sandy was a common occurrence for Aunt Bird and even today, when I know better, I can't help thinking of her as a frail, comical old woman dragging an empty dog collar along the edge of a garden that no longer exists.

Her real name was Birda Shephard but no one called her Birda except for my grandmother who only resorted to it in moments of extreme exasperation. Bird fit her but it's impossible to say whether her nickname arose from her demeanor or whether it merely called attention to her small boned frame, bright eyes and sharp nose. The fact that Shephard was not her maiden name did not prevent me from thinking of her as an old maid.

I first knew her from her letters written with a fountain pen in deep blue ink, postmarked Philadelphia. There was nothing out of the ordinary in that. There were always piles of letters on the marble top of the big bureau in my grandmother's dining room. They arrived weekly from the remotest parts of Pennsylvania, from Ohio, Michigan, even California. It was common to see my grandmother seated at the dining room table, the round table with the heavy clawed feet hidden by the lacey white tablecloth, patiently answering her mail.

She was forever commenting on the state of summer squash in Dearborn or the health of strangers with names like Bessie, Ozzie and Lila. Rarely, one of these strangers would turn up for a day or two before vanishing again into the great mysterious world beyond Dallas. Sometimes there would be a phone call but that usually meant that certain letters would not be arriving anymore. Most of my grandmother's correspondents I never met and I thought it remarkable how she spoke with familiarity of people she had not seen for longer than I had been alive.

My aunt was an exception. A few years before she died she came to live in Dallas, and from seeing her in person I came to think I knew her.



Looking back, I suspect the groundwork for her move was laid the summer my grandmother and I visited her. We travelled by bus and the trip is a dim memory. I recall being awed by ranks of steel towers carrying high tension lines toward the city. The towers reminded me of the giant robots I habitually dreamt about in those days.

My aunt lived outside Philadelphia, on a quiet street in Ardsley, not so different from Lake Street as I'd imagined. We had spent nearly two hours on the bus. Despite my having refused a second glass of orange juice at breakfast, it had seemed an eternity and I had expected to be practically at the other end of the universe by the time we disembarked. However, no strange wonders awaited me, only a tiny, white frame house where two elderly sisters sat with the blinds drawn to exchange gossip and discuss certain esoteric matters not meant for the ears of children.

The nearest I came to having an alien encounter was when I mistook for water the blue plastic glassful of hydrochloric acid my aunt drank before meals.

"Acid," I told my parants when I got home, "I drank acid!"

My aunt lived alone and had adopted and nourished peculiar habits as if they were stray cats. She flushed her toilet with a bucket of dish water, to save on the water bill.

My grandmother put a stop to that. "Now Birda," she said, "You just put away that old bucket while you have company."

My aunt protested ineffectually. She was the elder and when they argued you could still hear the ghost of the older sister's sharp tongue, but my grandmother, who was the more robust, had gained the upper hand over the years and soon had the bucket matter straightened out.

The other matter that wanted straightening was a neighbor by the name of Mrs Bredney. I had often heard my grandmother refering to that Mrs Bredney and I suspect, in retrospect, that she was the reason for our visit. She turned out to be a tall, dignified, overbearing woman. She towered over my diminutive aunt but my grandmother matched up to her. I wasn't able to overhear the conversation they had but I did hear the discussions between my aunt and my grandmother. They probably thought they were speaking in low tones but neither had good hearing and occassional phrases penetrated the walls of the bedroom.

"Her help has been a blessing," said my aunt.

"How much monay?" my grandmother kept asking.

We escaped the gloomy house long enough to see Atlantic City. Aunt Bird urged me to change into my bathing suit under the Boardwalk. I'm not sure whether she considered the public changing rooms unsuitable for a child or just too expensive. I was too old to do that, however, so it



was years before I got my first mouthful of saltwater. I didn't want to swim anyway. The filthy beach, littered with cigarette butts, candy wrappers and bottle caps, disgusted me. My one fond memory is of going into a small aquarium and seeing a fish with legs.

Not long after our trip, Aunt Bird came to live in my grandmother's house in Dallas. That Mrs Bredney showed up once or twice but was driven off and my aunt from then on concentrated on sending her spare cash to missionaries and evangelists.

My grandmother was a regular churchgoer but, perhaps she was a plain methodist, she had no use for fancy southern preachers who promised salvation on the installment plan. When their mailings began to arrive, along with the first arthritic twinges of middle age, she dealt with them expeditiously by writing DECEASED across the big bellied African children on the envelopes and sticking them back in the mailbox. Aunt Bird, on the other hand, had greeted those initial mailings with donations and the result was similiar to that obtained by my grandmother when she set a can of Puss n' Boots on the backporch to feed a single stray cat she'd taken pity on. By the time my aunt arrived in Dallas it appeared that everyone in the world who was not starving was soliciting her on behalf of those who were.

"Now Birda," my grandmother would say, "Its just foolishness wasting your money like that." But since my aunt kept a vigil for the postman every afternoon there was little that could be done about it. I used to laugh seeing her sitting there, a shawl over her shoulders whatever the season, but years later, when I discovered Fandom I went through a similar period at a much less advanced age.

My aunt's concern with health was not limited to the heathen. With the possible exception of her unusually dark hair which she bragged about to anyone who would listen as she grew older, including, to my shame, my friends, there was not an organ in her body that had not been trying to kill her for forty years. She ordered pills through the mail. They came in the largest jors I have ever seen - the same jars that stores fill with jelly beans at Easter for their "Guess How Many Beans in the Jar" contests.

Whatever ailment the pharmaceutical companies lacked a specific for was combatted by home remedies. The garden scraps which before her arrival had gone onto the compost heap went into my aunt's ancient juicer. Celery tops, beet skins, peapods, rutabega rinds were all squeezed together into a viscous, olive drab concotion resembling the things that have crawled through so many Grade B science fiction films. My aunt expected me to ingest this horror as a cureall but I refused. There are some things human taste receptors were not meant to know.

Some of my aunt's remedies, like the vinegar and salt mixture I still use to reduce swelling in insect bites, worked. She was, after all, a practical nurse, the personal nurse to the family of Connie Mack who



owned and managed the Philadelphia A's baseball team. As a young man my father was privileged to watch games from the Mack's own box and, so the family folklore goes, I was a premie who would not have survived his first day of life in the dark ages of 1950 without the benefit of the advanced techniques available only at the private hospital my aunt's connections entitled me to.

By the time I knew her the only reminders of my aunt's profession were a couple of blood pressure cuffs, a stethoscope and the hypodermics she used to administer her own insulin. As a child growing up in the days when every doctor's visit brought me into intimate contact with penicillan bearing needles, I developed a fear of injections. I could never understand how a woman who unplugged the tv after watching Billy Graham because she was afraid to touch the newfangled dials could drive a needle into her arm every day of her life.

I did not waste time fretting over contradictions in my aunt's character. I was old enough to notice such obvious ones, but I was still a child and still saw adults as the sort of flat characters displayed on tv. They played their parts in a world adjacent to my own and did not explain to me anything I could not already see from my disadvantageous perspective.

One afternoon a football I was booting around the yard landed too close to my aunt who was walking Sandy. My aunt must have seen it approaching, panicked and tripped over the leash. She fell. She was unhurt but I recall the incident vividly because it was the last time I experienced that terror that is peculiar to childhood, the terror that comes from feeling you have broken through into the world of adults and caused some catastrophe there.

My aunt's fear was one peculiar to the aged. She dreaded the day she would fall and injure herself irreparably. It seemed a strange and awful fear to a kid who knew he hadn't had a good time unless he had a scab on his knee to prove it.

There was a gap between us and when my aunt tried to bridge it by telling me on hot days, "You scream, I scream, we all scream for ice cream," I regarded her with the disdain children reserve for those who treat them as being younger than they consider themselves.

Finally my aunt did fall. She went away to a nursing home and when she died a year later it was almost as if one of the strangers from my grandmother's letters had died. I was put into a suit and taken to the funeral. My grandmother, who I never knew to lose her composure, fussed with the makeup on my aunt's no longer familiar face. "Birda, Birda," she kept muttering, not sorrowfully but as if to scold her for having too much rouge on.

From then on my grandmother lived alone. As the years went by there were more long distance calls and fewer letters piled on the bureau. I



discovered Fandom and the pleasures of correspondance and when I went away to law school I began writing to her as I would have to anybody else.

We compared the waather in Brooklyn and Dallas. She lamented the state of her garden which had not grown well since 1931 but by the end of the season invariably produced more tomatoes, cucumbers and peas than she could possibly eat, can or give away. On holidays she sent me the small, square writing tablets she had always used.

I had learned a little about life. It wasn't as easy as I'd thought as a child nor as impossible as I'd concluded it would be as an adolescent. I began to realize that my family had not appeared full blown the moment I'd been switched on but had had to grow just like I did. I wondered how they had coped with their lives.

Questions began sneaking into my letters. "How do things compare today with the way they were 30 years ago?" "What was it like growing up at the turn of the century?" I once went so far as to inquire ill advisedly about a couple of elderly cousins of mine who had lived together and shared the same suits for years. "They're too old to be gay," my grandmother replied tartly.

I was amazed at how easily I could talk with my grandmother. She had grown up in a farmhouse but had had a proper, late Victorian upbringing. As a young woman she played piano. She had always read voraciously. She did not like to talk about herself though or discuss family matters with outsiders or children.

It was during one of my last visits to Dallas that I learned about my Aunt Bird. One evening, my grandmother and I were sitting and talking in her living room. The room with its Victorian love seat, its rocking chairs, was the same as it had always been. Even the portable tv was the same one my aunt had unplugged for fear of the on/off control. My grandmother was in the rocker where she had read to me before I could read myself. Now, however, I sat across from her rather than at her side.

Kathy and I had recently taken the F train to Coney Island and telling about it, recalling the bottlecaps in the sand, I remembered my one trip to Atlantic City. So we talked about my great aunt, my grandmother's sister.

"Oh my. She loved feeding those peas to Sandy," my grandmother said, stroking the huge black cat purring in her lap.

For some reason I thought about her name being Shephard, which, as I had always known, was not her maiden name. Before it had been the sort of thing that only adults were interested in. "Was Aunt Bird married?" I asked.



My grandmother must have had a hard time remembering. I was no longer a child. In the dimness, the books in the case next to her chair might have been Heidi, the Wind in the Willows or whatever else she had just replaced, preparatory to sending me off to bed. The warm, orange pool of light cast by the same table light, still placed just so on the same end table next to the glass bowl of mints, was precisely the same pool we had swum in years before. But my grandmother was a realist. She had read Thorton W. Burgess who had told me how foolish and thoughtless mice who strayed afield at night would be snatched up by the owl's sharp talons with no happy ending to dilute the message. "Yes," my grandmother told me, "Bird was married."

"What happened to her husband?"

"Oh dear," she cupped her hand over her mouth to catch an embarrassed laugh. You could see the genteel young girl in that gesture, so inappropriate to the mores of this opposite end of the century. "He just left," she said. "We never knew where he took himself." Her tone in referring to "he" reminded me of the tone she had used when referring to that Bredney or whatever Reverend she'd caught my aunt slipping a dollar to. She said, "It was foolishness, is all. Plain foolishness."

But it wasn't clear what it was that had been foolish. The husband's leaving? The marriage? The reasons for one or the other? With the word, my grandmother seemed to want to encompass the whole affair and everyone involved, wherever the blame might lie.

"It was a good many years ago," my grandmother said. "Bird managed."

"It was lucky she was a nurse."

"Oh no," she said, with a slight wave of her hand, another gesture from long ago dismissing the idea that a married woman might have an occupation. "She went to school nights. She was 45, you know, when she was licensed."

I could tell my grandmother was proud of this accomplishment which had had to be hidden along with the family foolishness that one could simply not talk about. I didn't know what to say. I remembered a gullible, silly old woman who walked an empty dog collar. My grandmother was describing a woman with the guts and determination to start life over again in middle ages, in an era where it was difficult enough for a woman to start her own life at any age. I had known my aunt was a nurse but it had made no impression. As a child I figured that grownups grew up to be whatever they were as effortlessly as I passed from one shoe size to the next.

"How did she do it?" was all I could think to say.

"She just worked like nobody's business," said my grandmother. "That's all." And that was all she intended to say.



In the hallway at the top of the stairs in the house Kathy and I rent hangs a faded sepia showing three women seated on a rough lawn in front of a farmhouse. Oddly, the windows of the house appear blank. Someone may have fastidiously drawn the shades the day the photograph was taken, more than a half century before my birth, or maybe the curious effect is merely a trick of the fading pigments. Since the day we removed the photograph from the top of my grandmother's stairs where it had always been, I have not been able to discern anything through those blank windows, not the back of a chair, not a bottle left carelessly on a sill, not a shadow. The house might as well be a photographer's painted prop.

My grandmother is in that picture, along with her mother and an unidentified young girl. When I asked my grandmother what it was like inside the house where she grew up she described the kitchen with its great coal stove where she cooked and canned and the long cold pantry. That letter, written in the year following our talk, was one of the last she wrote. I wish now I had asked her more questions, had more talks.

Each evening the sun, having marked another day, reaches into our hallway and settles for a few moments on the photograph, carrying off now the print on my grandmother's long dress, now her mother's features. The past only remains vivid in the darkness of my own memory. I know now how incomplete its record is there. I can only wonder how distorted.

- Eric Mayer

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 Essendon rooms look like an absolute stalag, if I might tell you, Geoff! With razor blade barbed wire and hungry alsatians guarding the entrance. It's understood to inspire the players today, that they've all got to read Mein Kampf. I got one exclusive from a player and he said, quote, Riviting stuff -- can't wait for the sequel, unquote. - 3RRR  
 -----

In a couple of cases, television stations have created new sports, or new sports have been packaged for television creating momentary fads. Remember The Roller Game? World Championship Wrestling? TV Ringside? Television unlike the print mediums, can, through the illusion of 'being there' and the advantage of showing what is happening, demonstrate the popularity of minor sports. The ABC from time to time discovers (or rediscovers) things like Lawn Bowls, Cycling, Baseball and Basketball in their pale Australian imitations. But without the razamatazz of the commercial networks these small shows seem mainly watched by converts, and are an effort by the ABC in the direction of a more complete coverage for the Australian community. The commercials even sell their minor late night programs - American sports, European winter sports - as entertainment pure and simple.

Consider the Commonwealth Games, and the 1984 Olympics - viewers sat and will sit glued to their sets watching all kinds of sports that normally



wouldn't rate a quiver of interest. Badminton, for example, even swimming. These events are more competitive it is true, and they often contain Australian performers, but essentially Games are compulsive viewing because they are vast international showbusiness entertainments - and that is why someone as careful with his money as Rupert Murdoch will spend millions to bring the Olympics to our very homes.

And the next Olympics will be in Hollywood, after all.

- Carrie Hutchinson, "The Age", 16-11-1982

-----  
 Carey has come off with bruised knuckles. - 3RRR  
 -----

#### ISSUE END NOTES

- the editor -

LAST ISSUE I neglected to include the addresses of the fanzines Ted White reviewed. This was mainly because there wasn't enough room at the end of the article to include this list. I realise now that I should have published the list instead of the "Recommended Reading" section on page 69. Here, an issue late, is the addresses of the fanzines reviewed:

- Derrick Ashby (THE HAG AND THE HUNGRY GOBLIN), PO Box 175, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205.
- \* Ron Clarke (THE MENTOR), 6 Bellevue Rd, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776.
  - \* Leigh Edmonds (RATAPLAN), PO Box 433, Civic Square, Canberra, ACT 2608.
  - \* Jack Herman (WAHF-FULL), Box 272, Wentworth Bldg, Uni. of Sydney, NSW 2006.
  - \* Marc Ortlieb (Q36), GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.
  - Gerald Smith (PARIAN), c/- 20 Roseberry St, Balmain, NSW 2041.
  - Peter Toluzzi (THE PETER PRINCIPLE), 2849 W. Jarvis, Chicago, IL 60645, USA.
  - \* Jean Weber (WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE), PO Box 42, Lyneham, ACT 2602.

Those marked with an asterisk have published since SIKANDER #8 was published. It is hoped the non-asterisked will publish in the future.

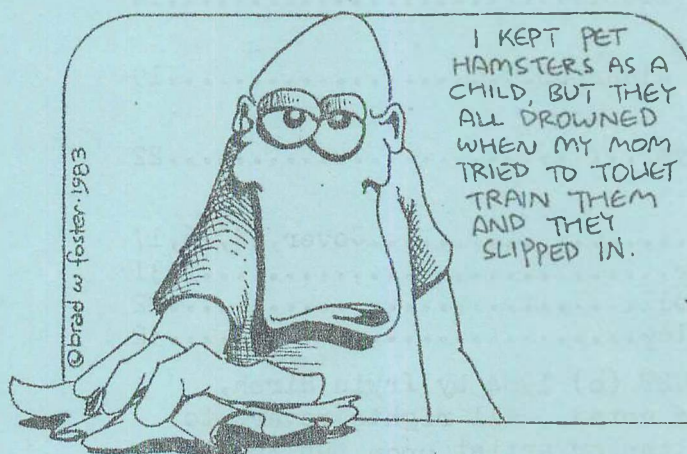
AUSSIECON TWO is the 43rd World Science Fiction Convention and is being held in Melbourne, Australia between 22 August and 26 August 1985. I mention this because I am in charge of the film programme and I've figured out it is going to be a great place to meet you. The current membership rates (good to the 30th of June 1984) are Attending: \$45 (Aust), \$40 (US), Supporting: \$28 (Aust), \$25 (US) and the committee address is GPO Box 2253U, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, AUSTRALIA. Among our agents are such people as Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh St, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER, U.K., and Fred Patten, 11863 West Patterson Blvd, Apt 1, Culver City, CA 90230, USA, and they will be willingly accept your membership monies. Again, see you there.



ONE PERSON I will be meeting at Aussiecon Two is Bob Shaw. Bob, well known fanwriter and convention speech-maker, is a subject of a special one-off fan fund to bring him to the 1985 Worldcon. Like all fan funds this one is in need of money and items that may be auctioned. If you can help contact The Shaw Fund administrators Marc Ortlieb and Justib Ackroyd at GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, AUSTRALIA. Anything will be gratefully received.

I should mention that I intend to donate \$2 of the monies gained from the sale of this issue to the Fund. (The extra dollar is to pay for the postage on the copy sold.) I somehow doubt much money will be donated to the fund, but it would be nice if other fanzine editors did the same.

-----  
 Ah, courage. They talk about it up in the 3KZ box, but there it is out on the ground. - 3RRR  
 -----



-----  
 And Bradbury has certainly come on since he gave up the science fiction writing and took up football. - 3RRR  
 -----

All lino credits to 3RRR are from 3RRR's broadcast of the 1983 VFL Grand Final and are here for John Foyster. Talk about keeping the flag at Princes Park, eh, John?

All the 'On this day' type quotes are from Jeremy Beadle's book "Today's The Day: A Chronicle of the Curious".

-----  
 Their best score against Essendon in the history of the universe and the America's Cup. - 3RRR  
 -----



Edited and published by Irwin Hirsh, 279 Domain Rd, South Yarra, Victoria 3141, AUSTRALIA. It is available for a letter of comment, written and/or drawn contributions, your fanzine in trade, Old Fanzines or \$3.00. \$2.00 will go to The Shaw Fund for every copy sold.

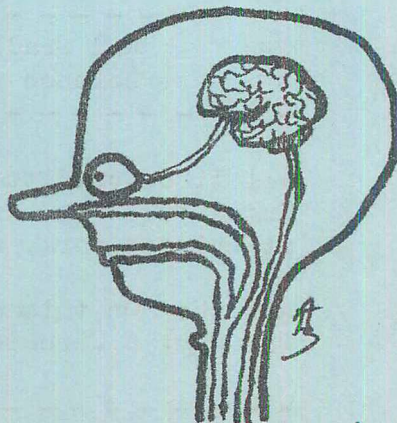
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 SPECS ON?