

A MAD WOMAN'S KNITTING #1, JUNE 1996 is produced by Perry Middlemiss of GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia 3001, and on email at either of larrikin@ncc1701.apana.org.au or PMiddlem@VCRPMRKT.telecom.com.au. This fanzine is intended as a contribution to the Fantasy Historical APA, or fHapa for short.

After giving a bit of thought to the problem of a history of Australian fandom and contemplating whether it is preferable to attempt writing something or just to reprint old articles with something to offer, I have decided to come down on the side of the latter. Actually the decision was a fairly easy one given that I have little knowledge of the history of Australian fandom prior to my encounter with it in 1975 (and a lot since can be considered to be rather hazy) and that I find myself with rather too much on my plate at the moment to even contemplate the prospect of a large research project.

So I have done a bit of delving into some old apazines and come up with the following article by Bill Veney, a Sydney fan of the late 30s and 40s (he may well have lasted in fandom longer than that but the article covers that period). John Foyster reprinted this article in the 10th anniversary mailing of ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) in October 1978. He also added some comments of his own to the end of the piece which I have included with his permission.

Hopefully I will be able to find articles of a similar historical import in the future which I will reprint as best I can. There won't be any form of organisation to all this as presume that I had some sort of plan. No, it will just be all over the shop...hence the fanzine title. -pm

PREWAR FANZINES IN AUSTRALIA

by
Bill Veney

Every now and again you will read an article by one of the deep thinkers in our ranks on the subject of amateur publishing. One such writer will say fanzines are a fine thing and help fandom a lot. Immediately some equally deep thinker will jump to the nearest type-writer and say that fanzines are a bad thing, and cause no end of trouble. I'm not going to buy in on that fight. I do know, however, that a large percentage of the Australian fan population read and enjoy fanzines. I also know that fanzine editors get a lot of enjoyment out of producing their brainchildren. I think you'll agree fandom would be a very dull place without them.

Perhaps the first Australian attempt to produce an amateur publication devoted to Science Fiction took place at Randwick School, Sydney, in 1937. Several of the students were caught up in the first flush of discovering the US professional magazines. Two, Bert Castellari and I had been on the staff of the regular class magazines and decided to try a private one of our own. It wasn't intended to be anything more than an outlet for our writing and illustrating efforts, but that didn't quite work out.

SPACEHOUNDS, as we called our magazine, was a handprinted weekly journal with a circulation of one. Bert Castellari was editor, and I was assistant editor. It was intended to be handed around for general reading under the watchful eye of one or other of the editors. We didn't think more than a handful of other students would be interested.

Within a couple of weeks it had a following far beyond anything visualised by either of us. As soon as each issue appeared, it started on a round of readers that often took three or four days to complete before getting back into our anxious hands. By the seventh or eighth issue, it received official recognition by going into the staff room. (The recognition, by the way, took the form of congratulation to Bert for his energy, and severe criticism to me for my spelling.)

SPACEHOUNDS lasted ten weekly issues and a 'quarterly' before falling victim to examinations. However, it had a profound effect on the thinking of the science fiction circle and made us realise quite a lot of people could be reached by medium of even a small periodical. We were agreed that this wasn't the end of our publishing efforts.

1938 was final examination year for the Randwick readers, so there wasn't much time for any more experimenting. There was much talk about magazines, particularly after Eric Russell and his brother, Ted, became known to us as fans. I had known them both for many years, but only introduced them to science fiction about this time. It wasn't exactly my fault. Both contributed many good ideas and entered the spirit of fandom. We laid plans for 1939 and letters were sent to AMAZING so as to appear on the Australian market when we were over the examination hurdle.

In January 1939 we had our first contact with U.S. fandom. Harry Warner Jr., prominent fan at the time, and editor of SPACEWAYS, noticed Bert's name in the reader's column of one of the professional magazines and dropped him a letter. Shortly afterwards he sent a copy of SPACEWAYS. The impression it created when it arrived was terrific. We'd never imagined an amateur publication had such possibilities and our thoughts turned to how we could emulate it.

Our opportunity came when Frank Flaherty, a non-fan, offered to do our typing and duplicating. The three most active readers, Bert, Eric and I, were to do the collecting of material and general editorial work. For juniors on junior pay, it was a big job, but we went about it as efficiently as we could under the circumstances. We didn't have a clear idea what we wanted other than a name - AUSTRALIAN FAN NEWS.

Before we could get started, John Gregor of Adelaide brought out his SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. The first information we had about John was an announcement appearing in the Science Fiction League section of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. This also carried the information that John was the editor of Australia's first fan magazine. Eric Russell made contact with him and John later entered into a short but furious correspondence with several Sydney fans.

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW eventually arrived in Sydney. It was a sixteen page octavo effort done by hand and produced on a hektograph. It didn't impress us very much at all. We lost touch with John after this as he joined the army. To add to the confusion and make locating him even more difficult, he had used the pen-name of 'John Deverne'. Years later when in Adelaide I spent many fruitless hours going through the South Australian electoral rolls looking for the name 'Deverne'. I thought that he probably had some relatives who could help me.

After a lot of trouble AUSTRALIAN FAN NEWS finally appeared. The first issue was dated May, but it didn't get into the mails until August. It was to have been a twelve page foolscap bi-monthly. The further activities were to be much more limited. This didn't apply only to AFN. We were trying to organize a national club and a local club, as well as maintaining contact with America and bringing out the magazine. A mighty effort when you remember that our oldest fan was only 16.

Even before AFN was posted, we decided on our next step. Eric, Ted, Bert and I had a serious discussion on fandom generally. Eric wanted to try a small magazine that wouldn't cost too much or be too much trouble to produce. I wanted to get started on organizing a local club. We weighed everything and agreed that the best thing would be to try one thing at a time. Eric had the clearest idea of what was wanted so we marshalled our efforts behind him.

Eric and Ted went to work and in October the first issue of ULTRA appeared. It was a carbon-copied 12 page typed magazine featuring articles, fiction and general news. Circulation was around thirty. The whole thing was produced on a shoestring and looked it. We were very proud of it, mainly because we had kept faith with our overseas friends. Also, the cheapness of production ensured that we - or rather the Russell brothers - could produce a second issue.

Vol Molesworth had become known to us in the early part of that year and gradually gravitated into our circle. He was a ball of energy and couldn't quite see the reason for our slowness in many matters. To his credit, he swung into line with the rest of us and helped with our various projects, particularly the very pressing problem of keeping contact with America. However, when ULTRA appeared and the local club had been established, he started making plans of his own.

His LUNA appeared in December. It was almost a second issue of AFN in many ways and had the same format. There were improvements in layout and a more fannish approach to the subject of science fiction. Also Vol was able to display his natural journalist ability, giving LUNA a sense of continuity no other fan publication had achieved until that time.

December also saw the second issue of ULTRA. It appeared in much the same form as number one, but was vastly improved in layout. Eric had already made plans for the third issue to be duplicated, so this was the last of the carbon-copied issues. He announced that a new fan, Ralph Smith, had joined the staff as art editor and we could expect illustrations as soon as duplicating details were finalised.

Bert Castellari had watched the developments during this period without taking a leading part. He had helped Eric Russell with ULTRA, Vol Molesworth with LUNA, and had been a tower of strength to me in getting the club going. Even before the end of 1939 he started making plans of his own. Without telling anybody what he had in mind, he studied the US fan publishing field, and discussed the subject with several American fans.

Late in December, he took me aside and outlined his plan for FUTURIAN OBSERVER. It was to be a single foolscap sheet duplicated on both sides and appearing every two weeks. Bert thought that the most important thing about a magazine of this type was that it appeared on time. Eric Russell was aiming for perfection with ULTRA and Bert would aim for regularity with OBS. I suggested to Bert that it would be almost impossible to keep up a regular fortnightly schedule because of non-fan matters, but he was determined to go ahead. After a great deal of discussion I agreed to join him as co-editor. We told Eric Russell and Vol Molesworth what we had in mind and both said they would help us all they could.

The first issue of FUTURIAN OBSERVER appeared during January 1940. From then on until February 1941 we never missed an issue. There was much criticism of bad duplicating, typing errors, grammatical errors, spelling errors and general untidiness, but it didn't worry either of us. We made regularity the watchword and if it was the difference between a deadline and a dictionary, the deadline always won. We brought out OBS for our own satisfaction and it was more by good luck than good management that other fans liked it. Eric and Vol stood by us in the teething stage, both with material and know-how.

So the first quarter saw the fan publishers of Sydney setting out on their respective tracks. LUNA went through some startling changes and numbers two and three appeared in a quarto format complete with illustrations. FUTURIAN OBSERVER, presenting its version of the news and preaching the cause of the local club, rounded off the picture. We were all justifiably proud of our mags.

In the second quarter of 1940, there were some more startling changes. Vol dropped LUNA and brought out a new one, COSMOS. Now, in looking for copy, he stumbled on one of the periodic storms-in-a-teacup that have continuously dotted fan progress and dressed it up into a full-scale feud between Eric and me. He reported it as the event of the year. This was moonshine. We certainly spat words at each other, but both regarded the thing as a private disagreement. Castellari was still on the best of terms with Eric, and I still managed to get along with Ted Russell. No word of the disagreement appeared in either ULTRA or OBS. Both Eric and I wrote to Vol to deny the report.

The outcome of it all was that COSMOS started out under a cloud. Vol intended it to be a letter mag in the tradition of the American IMAGINATION but never managed to dispel the suspicion that he had some deeper motive. There certainly was a need for a magazine of this type to let Australian fans get to know each other better. Vol's slick journalism and goodnatured digs made Eric and I overlook the earlier mistake, but we never quite relaxed when writing to him.

COSMOS started out as a six page tri-weekly, reduced itself to a two page biweekly and finally blossomed out into a LUNA-ised version with anything up to sixteen or so pages. It didn't stick to any set editorial policy (in fact it even changed editors for a couple of weeks!) despite periodic statements by Vol. COSMOS had a rather unique reputation amongst the Sydney fans. It was the only fan publication that successfully managed to tread on the toes of everybody.

It was about the middle of the year that we saw AUSTRALIAN FANTASY, the Melbourne fan magazine. Warwick Hockley, it's editor, was unknown to any of us and we were very surprised when we first heard about it. The first issue was a small carbon-copied one, with an undisclosed circulation. Wog, as Warwick was known to us, never did let on how many he distributed. It had the usual fan-fiction; articles and news. We were very enthusiastic, mainly because it opened up a new field of fan activity. The fact that it was sloppy in comparison with the Sydney publications was discreetly overlooked, when the wheel turned and some Sydney mags were sloppy in comparison with his, Wog was equally discreet in overlooking our shortcomings. The enthusiasm in Wog's letters made us realise we had located a fan of the most active type. Being outside the centre of fan activity didn't affect AUSTRALIAN FANTASY much. Wog suffered the usual difficulty of any fan editor in getting material at first, but gradually he managed to get a backlog of both articles and fiction. Once he had this, he was in a position to demand a certain standard from his contributors. This in turn made the contributors spend more time in polishing their material and the whole magazine improved in quality

AUSTRALIAN FANTASY will always be remembered for its climb to the top of the fan popularity ladder. The second issue appeared in September. It was hectographed. The third issue was dated December and was duplicated with the usual black on white. The fifth issue was a blaze of colour with four or five coloured inks being used in the duplicating process. Even the most conservative fan could find little fault in the Melbourne magazine.

In August 1940, six Sydney fans combined their talents to produce ZEUS! This was to be the 'balanced' magazine, giving equal prominence to both fan and professional activities. The first issue was a sixteen page one, and immediately threw out a strong challenge to the leading magazine of the day, Eric Russell's ULTRA. However the fact that it had six very interested fans on the editorial committee proved a hindrance rather than a help. ZEUS! had the unusual experience of having no less than two second issues! Two of the editors brought out an issue which was duplicated and immediately dubbed 'official', and another two came out with their version, which was hectographed and dubbed 'pseudo'. This state of affairs existed until the fourth issue. The 'pseudo' folded up and its editors assisted with the official, although never actually coming onto the editorial staff.

The final publishing venture of the year was again from Melbourne when Wog Hockley produced his MELBOURNE BULLETIN. This was an 'all sorts' with no net policy or publishing date. When some fan in Sydney became frantic with worry over the impending collapse of something or other, then he generally dashed off a short article or letter to Wog to see if anyone else was losing sleep.

ULTRA continued to appear on a bimonthly basis all through 1940 and was recognised as being Australia's No. 1 fan publication. It was duplicated from February onwards. Many of the best-known fans had their first published works in Eric's magazine. Chas. Mustchin wrote an article which ran for three issues, Colin Roden submitted the first of his dry, humorous stories, Bruce Sawyer, under his penname of L. Vague De Damp, appeared as both artist and author, and David Evans and Wog Hockley and others also contributed. In addition to the better-known fans such as Vol Molesworth and Ralph Smith they developed their talents under the watchful eye of editor Russell and before the critical audience that constituted ULTRA's readers. The anniversary issue in October ran to thirty odd pages and presented material from just about every well-known fan.

By the beginning of 1941, American and British fandom had realised that Australian fan publications were here to stay. The encouraging but condescending reviews that appeared in overseas publications turned to unqualified praise as the tiny Australian fan community continued to expand and improve their magazines. The regular FUTURIAN OBSERVER showed we had stability, the controversial COSMOS showed we were much the same as fans in the rest of the world, while the bigger magazines, particularly ULTRA, but also AUSTRALIA FANTASY and ZEUS!, showed we aspired to greater and higher things. MELBOURNE BULLETIN hadn't made any impression, but it was later to fill the gap between FUTURIAN OBSERVER and COSMOS.

Time out for an explanation. As I said before, I don't want to buy into any fights, but it has always been my contention that the reason fans produce these magazines was for the satisfaction of sitting on the editorial board (if such existed) and having some say in the production. I do not believe power was the prime motive. Rather I'd say a desire for recognition, an outlet for energy, but mainly a great big hunk of egoboo. It was the fun of being editor, rather than the lust for being dictator, that started these magazines going and the pride in the work turned out, that kept them going.

The first half of 1941 opened up very well. ULTRA developed a style that set the standard for the rest of Australia. ZEUS! came through its difficulties and under the capable editorship of Ron Levy and Bert Castellari started to concentrate on fan fiction. Noel Dwyer and David Evans contributed the outstanding items of a serious nature, whilst Bruce Sawyers under his tag of Vague De Damp, gave us some good belly laughs besides keeping the egos of the would-be great in a suitably deflated condition. FUTURIAN OBSERVER had a change when Ron Bevy replaced me on the staff and it became 'irregular' instead of bimonthly. Vol Molesworth seemed to be in doubt and after attempting a new venture called telefan, abandoned the publishing field altogether. In Melbourne, Wog Hockley quietly but systematically improved AUSTRALIA FANTASY besides turning out MELBOURNE BULLETIN.

Don Tuck of Hobart had been known to us all for some time, and had contributed to both Sydney and Melbourne magazines. We all knew Don was an enthusiastic collector, but nobody ever thought he had plans for entering the publishing side. Therefore it was with very great surprise that it was learned in Sydney that Don, with the assistance of several of the Hobart readers, had plans for a magazine.

Within a week of the news reaching Sydney, Don's magazine PROFAN had turned up. The speed and efficiency of the Tasmanians quite took our breath away even though we learned that Wog Hockley had been helping in an advisory capacity. The first issue was favourably received everywhere.

PROFAN - meaning 'pro' and 'fan', not 'for fan' - lasted three issues and featured the usual articles and fiction. Coming into the field at a time of so many other fan magazines, Don had much difficulty in getting good material. He kept at the mainlanders, however, until he received his share of the quality efforts being turned out at the time. Each issue was an improvement on the last, so it is difficult to see just where PROFAN would have ended up if it hadn't been for the war cutting short its career. As it was, Don and his Hobart Yelpers did a great Job under the circumstances.

The highwater mark of fan publishing in Australia was reached in the second half of 1941. The necessary 'firm base' had been provided by the comparative newcomer, Colin Roden, who taught us older fans a thing or two with his SCIENCE AND FANTASY FAN REPORTER, which appeared as a regular weekly for 34 weeks - and never missed an issue! He presented news and views on both fan and professional matters in such a way that even the most touchy couldn't take offence. He 'scooped' all the other magazines in such a gentlemanly way that the other editors actually enjoyed seeing the news appear first in Colin's magazine.

The second anniversary issue of ULTRA appeared in October with fifty pages including printed inserts. As with the first anniversary issue, just about every fan in Australian was represented, but the improvement in the quality of the material made this the showpiece of Australian fandom. Everyone expected the effort would exhaust the Russell brothers, but the December issue appeared, although late, and showed the dependable team would still set the standard.

AUSTRA FANTASY appeared on a regular schedule, but roughly quarterly. Wog, practically alone in Melbourne, was doing a tremendous job, and every issue was a blaze of colour. His art was undoubtedly the best in Australia. Artists Ralph Smith, Bruce Sawyer and Ted Russell all submitted their best work to Wog, and he certainly showed it to advantage.

MELBOURNE BULLETIN was overwhelmed by its bigger companion, but was still widely read and enjoyed.

ZEUS! aimed at the fan fiction market all through 1941. However it did blot its copybook by printing the FSS minutes. Both editors had resigned from the FSS, and it was in particularly bad taste to dig into the muddled and murky past of that organization to find copy. (An odd aspect of this incident was that active Futurian Vol Molesworth called for action against Ron Levy and Bert Castellari, yet continued to support them with material. Ex-Futurian Foundation director, myself, refused to contribute any material for ZEUS!, but maintained the most cordial relations with both editors.) ZEUS! was at its best during the latter part of 1941.

FUTURIAN OBSERVER, after a long absence, came back to the fold. The editorial attitude also went through a dramatic change. Instead of being 'anti-fandom' in outlook, Ron Levy and Bert Castellari jumped on the bandwagon of co-operation and supported the Third Sydney Science Fiction Conference which looked like being the best gathering ever attempted in the Southern hemisphere. It was, however, still very anti-FSS. The Hobart magazine, PROFAN, was finding its feet and a place for itself in the scheme of things.

Then came Pearl Harbour. The entry of Japan into the war destroyed Australian fandom and with it fan publishing. There was a sense of anti-climax in the manner in which one fan publication followed another in closing down its activities. Within a couple of months ULTRA, FUTURIAN OBSERVER, AUSTRALIAN FANTASY, ZEUS!, MELBOURNE BULLETIN, SCIENCE AND FANTASY FAN REPORTER and PROFAN were nothing more than pleasant memories. It was all so sudden. It just didn't seem right.

In summing up, the efforts of the fan publishers had a tremendous effect on the expansion of Australian fandom. They made mistakes and lots of them. However, they were brought out for personal enjoyment and the enthusiasm of all concerned should make even the most critical observers view them with tolerance. They contributed a vital part to that youthful period we now call pre-war fandom.

BILL VENEY

The above has been modified slightly from an article appearing in Etherline for March 1955 (number 46). It is probably true that at no later time were so many general fanzines produced in Australia, with the possible exception of the very early fifties and the late sixties.

John Foyster - October 1978

John, of course, wrote this just as a new wave of fanzine production started to sweep Australia in the wake of AUSSIECON, the 1975 Worldcon held in Melbourne. Sydney fandom began to find a publishing voice which eventually led to APPLESAUCE, the apa begun by Keith Curtis, Ken Ozanne and Peter Toluzzi amongst others; Western Australian fandom started to kick off into a direction all of its own, combining fanzines of a quite non-Melbourne approach and conventions which seemed to suggest to outsiders that they were having quite a lot of fun; and Adelaide fandom tried to follow the Melbourne line of fanzines first and conventions second. It was a wave that lasted till about 1983 or thereabouts as Australian fandom geared up for the lead-in to AUSSIECON II in 1985. Unfortunately no similar publishing wave followed the 1985 event which probably gives some indication of the relative levels of acrimonious fallout that followed the two events. But that's another story.

Perry Middlemiss

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