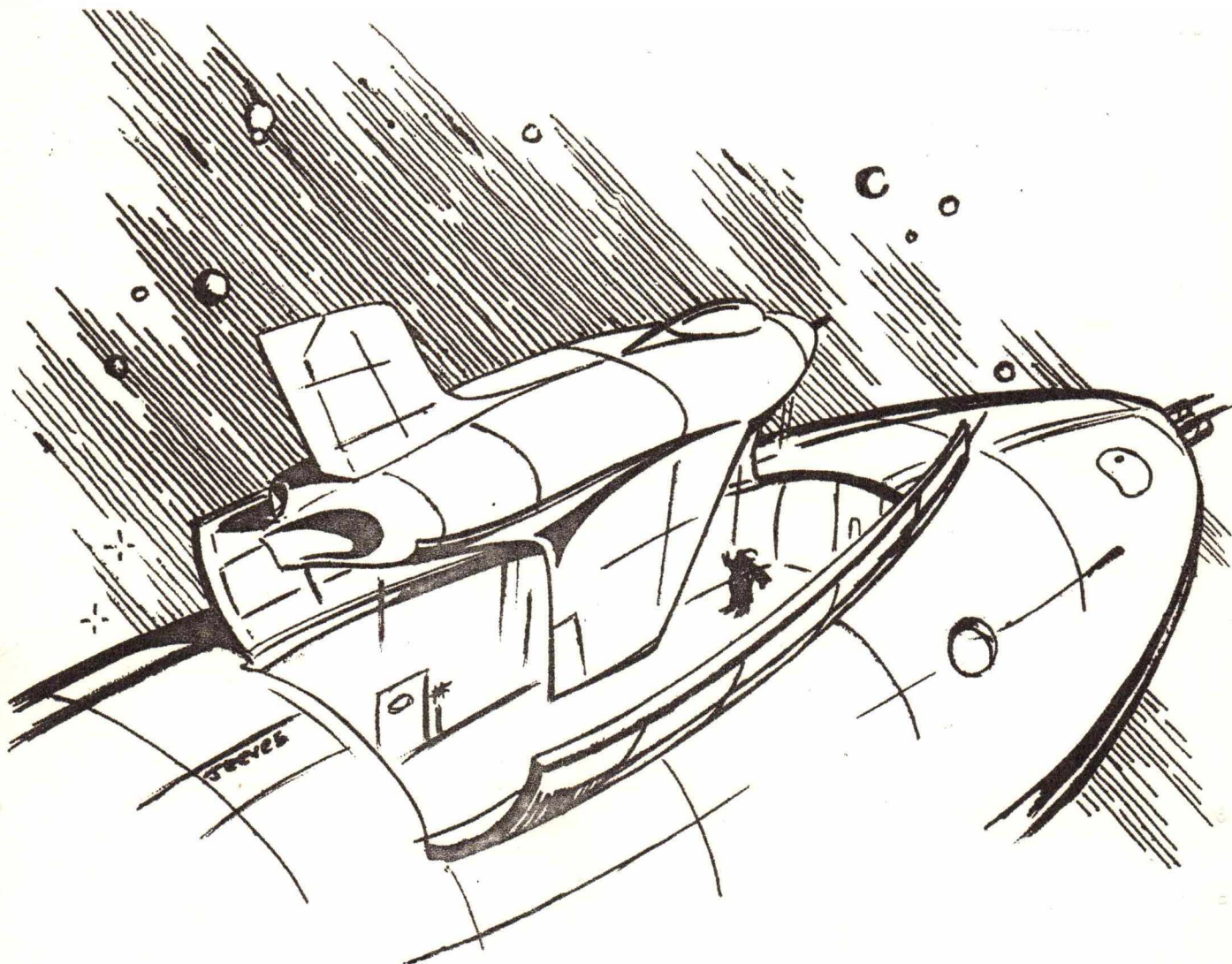


RATAPLAN SIX



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letters of comment and the usual other things. There is no
price for a copy, just write to me saying that you want the
next one and it shall be yours.

George

The other night Paul and I were sitting around (well, to make the tale quite accurate, Paul was standing and I was sitting, on a bike, in our kitchen), talking about nothing very important; you know the sort of stuff, tearing various notable personalities of local fandom to little bloody bits, the sex life of the arabian water rat, the creature we'd found growing in a bowl of two month old custard; the usual small talk, you know. It was a scene of tranquil domestic bliss (as close as you can come to it when you are living in the same flat as Paul Stevens anyhow) and there we were just relaxing.

Knock, knock, knock went the front door. "Damn!" ejaculated Paul and "*****" I stated loudly. Nobody wants visitors when they have friends like we have, but still, I dismounted and went over and opened up the door to see who it was that was standing so gallantly on the other side.

Well, to cut a long story short, it wasn't anybody that I knew, either by sight or by reputation. However there are certain standards of common decency that one must abide by so "Hello" I said in an uncommonly decent tone of voice. While I stood taking in our caller (by that I mean that I looked at him; quite a sight he was too in a suit and a collar and tie) he took in our flat. Well, let me see. I suppose that if you were standing on our doorstep the first thing that you would notice would be the big old chest of drawers that stands rotting just in front of the door so that it strikes you in the face if you have the door opened to you (which some people don't). Also there is a black bike parked in the middle of the lounge room, the bits of dusty old board stacked up against the wall, the movie posters and the old newspapers and bottles scattered everywhere.

I could tell from the look on his face that he was beginning to doubt the wisdom of knocking on our door - he was probably regretting the fact that he had ignored the quite obvious "NURDLE" sign on our door.

By the look of him it seemed pretty obvious that he was selling something or wanting to get us to donate something to something; why else would he, a complete stranger, be standing at the open portal to our flat?

He started by saying "I'm an inspector...." He shouldn't have done that for as soon as I heard the word "Inspector" I linked it in my mind with the word "P.M.G." to form "P.M.G. Inspector" and into that I added the extra words to form "P.M.G. Radio and Television Licence Inspector". We don't have one. We do have a TV set and a radio even so. However, we don't have the \$200 that they fine you for having either of the latter without having the former.

My vision blurred and I could feel the strength draining from my knees. All thoughts except those of panic were rushing from my mind when I realised that he was continuing. ".... for the Royal Globe Assurance Company and I've come to offer you a proposition." All I could think of to say was "Yeah?" but Paul, who is far more agile in affairs of the wit replied, "We don't have any Royal Globes".

You could see our good friend outside, on the doorstep as it were, wilt, visibly. But I'll say this for the lad, he had pluck. Nay, he had more than pluck, he was downright fearless; "Do you mind if I come in?" he asked.

I was amazed. Much greater men have ventured into our flat and found themselves subdued by the horror of the five month old garbage which stalks the living room, or, have found themselves attacked by the sentient creature (thing) which has grown from the stuff we left in the sink for a few weeks. Even I, the supposed ruler of this flat, have trouble in passing through the lounge room without getting attacked by at least a dozen of Paul's socks - they lie in wait for me (and any unfortunate visitor) under the bones of a long dead refrigerator.

((If you don't mind me disrupting this tale for a moment, I might pass the time by making you a little more acquainted with the story behind these marauding socks. It seems that a long time ago, nobody is quite sure how, these socks came to life. They would really be quite harmless little creatures, spending their time grazing away on the moss that grows in the corners of the flat and under lots of things, except for the fact that they smell bad and they have this morbid attraction for feet - hence the fact that they attack any feet they see.

For a long time the only way Paul could get to wash these socks was to herd them down to the laundrette, but recently he hasn't even had to do that as the task has been taken over by a race of sentient underpants which we've discovered living in one of the darker and danker corners of Paul's room.))

And now, returning to our narrative. As I said, I was amazed, he had asked if he could come in, I had heard the words with my very own ears. But, by studying the expression on his face a little more closely I could see that he didn't really want to come in; indeed the quivering of the lips, the spasmodic jerking of the facial muscles and the look of terror spoke for themselves. And then, quite suddenly, he pulled himself together and said with determination, "Look, let's cut out the bullshit, are you interested in buying any life assurance?"

To tell the truth, I didn't, but even if I had been interested he wouldn't have sold me any - nobody who says something which is supposed to be as downright honest and down to earth as that as if he were standing in front of a mirror reading it out of a book sells me anything. Even so I explained to him that I was already assured up to my ears, for what reason I'm not sure, and that I didn't want any more - I couldn't afford it.

I could see written all over his face quite plainly that here was a sucker who couldn't resist a bit of the good old soft sell, no matter what. Unfortunately he was right. But then from behind me came salvation. Paul appeared from around a corner and leered over my shoulder at our friend and muttered that yesterday he'd fallen off the roof and had died, he could do with some life assurance.

So the guy on the doorstep muttered something and left, rather more quickly than most people do.

I turned to look at Paul and do you know what; he does look atleast a day dead.

* * * * *

Oh yeah, before I forget, welcome to RATAPLAN SIX. Have fun.

I'm not sure when the next issue will appear but since I promised faithfully last issue that I would bring it out every month or something stupid like that (the last issue appeared six months ago), I won't make any promises this time which will make me feel guilty later on... Time will tell.

A Monologue for Law-Abiding Citizen & Law Enforcement Officer

All right, constable, I'll take my bag off the seat. I'm sure it left no more than a few specks of dust.

All right, I will say-my-piece-'n'-'urry-up-about-it. Well, you couldn't call that rude. I have half an hour before I leave this city and I would like to give this statment without too much fuss and bother. I've lost fifteen minutes already waiting for one of you gentlemen to notice me, and then the one man who smiled at me was called to the phone.

All right, I know you're not paid to smile. I know that you've barely enough to buy a uniform - I've read it in the newspapers often enough - "Crisis in the Police Force"; "Officers Resign". In a city like this I don't blame you, but I do have to catch a plane in an hour and it takes more than half an hour to reach Essendon.

Yes, I will get on with it. Turn it up, constable. How can I keep you waiting when I've been waiting twenty minutes. What do you have intercoms for? Why doesn't Sir Arthur hire some secretaries to replace all these one-fingered typists in blue. You look quite funny you know....

Don't swear at me now... I've had enough to put up with. Briefly - you haven't even a pen in your hand; and wipe that bored expression from your face - I see, you have a dictaphone; make sure it has some tape in it - briefly... I'd like to report a disappearance. Several disappearances, in fact.

What do you mean: "That's all?" If Sir Henry disappeared you would all raise hell, wouldn't you? Nobody else would, but every policeman in the ~~state~~ would rush around like blue Daleks. My disappearances are more important the disappearances you normally investigate.

The story is this. I'm working out of Melbourne at the moment, and only come down occasionally, just to buy a few books and see some films... no, I'm not a nut. Try buying James Joyce where I come from and see how far you get. No, I know you wouldn't know who James Joyce was. Put it this way; you probably couldn't buy THE SPORTING GLOBE less than half a day later than in Melbourne. Yeah, I know that's serious. Your missus might find out which of your horses lost before you do. It's primitive all right.

No, I'm not wasting tape at all. These Melbourne trips are important, even if only to see some real people. What do I mean? When you've seen one farmer you've seen them all. No, I know they don't go around causing demonstrations, but they don't do much else either except farm.

However, I put up with them for three or four months at a time, and then - snap! My brain goes haywire, I get flu or purple spots in front of my eyes or write a bit of poetry - no, I'm not in that state at the moment. It's you who seem to be excited, and it's nowhere near morning tea break. I think you will find that this reads back on tape rather entertainingly.

All right, constable. I know you're not paid to be entertained. I might as well eat a sandwich myself, since I've already missed the plane. You'll make sure I catch the next one if only I'll hurry up? Thanks very much, constable... the police force is looking up. Must be all that poverty... no, I was only joking. What would the newspaper say if I said a policeman swore at me? They'd swear at me too? Yes, I suppose so.

As I was saying, I come down to Melbourne every three or four months, and this seems to be the reason why I'm the only person who has noticed The Disappearances. My friends do not remember that these beings ever existed, let alone that they disappeared. The disappearance that most affects me, that really distressed me when I first noticed it, was the absence of the Disk Shop.

Sir! You don't remember the Disk Shop? How can you investigate these things if you don't remember them. Surely you have it on file - longtime residence of the Cream before any other shop had ever seen them, the only place I could buy Otis Redding until all the other record shops saw the light. The hangout for the longest hair and best musos in Melbourne? Surely, sir... You have ridden down Bourke Street in your Cortina, I presume. You pranged on the corner of Russell Street and never got that far? Is that why you're listening to me now instead of patrolling North Carlton? You really should find a way of releasing those frustrations, you know.

Well, you may have attended the Tivoli at some stage of your life. That was the night you picked up the girl in red? The night before the Tiv burned down? Some people have all the luck. The Disk Shop was in the same building.

Now you can see what I'm driving at? Good man. Yes, that was the building that was demolished after the Tivoli burned down. It gave me quite a shock. One week I shopped at the Disk Shop as usual; or rather, I made a list of all the records I wanted to buy. A month later I came back with pockets loaded, and - snuff! - nothing, zero. A hole between two buildings. Tiv, the Flea Market, and the Disk Shop, gone into the fifth dimension.

"Whattheyell am I talkin' about?" Well, as I mentioned, nobody noticed the disappearance or complained about it, so I presume that the whole building heaved itself up from the foundations and walked off into a neon sunrise. Unless it has disappeared into the fifth dimension, which cuts off the memories of those who are left so they don't remember the existence of Those Who Disappear. I scoured the newspapers for days to find out when a police investigation would begin, but... nothing. The fifth dimension must eat file cards as well. Even now it may be licking at the tape in that tape recorder.

No, I'm not going off my head. I must be one of the special few who are not affected by the fifth dimension, often baffled by disappearances that we have no way of investigating. Why don't people snarl and throw stones and have fits on the footpath when they pass the site of the old Menzies Hotel? Thousands of people drank there or stayed there or watched people like Frank Ifield. But nobody has launched an investigation now that it has gone. There are now no places for overseas entertainers to perform, so everybody from Sammy

Davis downwards forgets about Melbourne before they are even reminded of it.

You seem to be having fun, constable. Did your wife tell you a good joke last night? You wouldn't like to tell it to me while I get out a sandwich from my bag? You're laughing at my story? I really don't see the humor in the situation. The whole of Melbourne could be kidnapped by Geelong, and you'd still be cackling there. Come to think of it, though, it would suit you. If there were only insurance buildings in Melbourne, or just a mile-square hole in the ground, then all you could do would be to write hunting and dog licences and make an occasional arrest for murdering a policeman. You just don't like Melbourne; that's your trouble. Probably somebody in your department is an agent for the fifth dimension.

There, that's wiped the smile from your face. Have you ever considered that, constable? That there are paid agents of the fifth dimension arranging illegal immigration for Melbourne's buildings right at this moment? They are probably creeping and skulking right now.

"Well, who cares?" I care, and... well, my wife doesn't care that much, since she comes from Sydney. But she refuses to recognize that the same thing is going on there. On the other hand, no building has disappeared in my town up the country for nearly fifty years, so one theory is that the building kidnappers are employed by the Country Party.

What did you say? The Communists are running it? You don't really believe that rubbish, do you, sir? ... I see: you don't believe anything I've told you. I haven't produced any evidence yet, sir so please hold back your scepticism. Let's be reasonable... well, I am trying to be reasonable. If you smirk and grumble like that, I don't think we could call you reasonable. As I say, let's be reasonable: what would the Communists want with the Disk Shop? Not really their sort of caper at all. Why would they want to put insurance buildings in the place of all the buildings that have disappeared recently? No, it must be a group dedicated to the destruction of Beauty and Civilization... no, I know you wouldn't call a record shop beautiful, but it will be better than whatever they put in its place.

"What's my evidence?" Wait a bit, wait a bit. At least you are interested now, aren't you? I've had these Emanations lately. No, not that; an Emanation. From the fifth dimension. I had an Emanation before the Regent Theatre closed down. What more skulduggerous plot could tear at the vitals of this city than to destroy the Regent Theatre, with all those curlicues and banisters and acres of seats? It reminds us of the past, and even a cop like you would realize that that is about all that is left of the city of Melbourne. Sir Henry said that Melbourne will have a "glorious glowing future" when the underground railway will be completed in 1984? He also said that our police force is "one of the best in the world", and you don't believe that, do you?

You may have heard that some prominent citizens protested about the closing of the Regent. No, it wasn't a mob of knockers. Gripe, gripe, gripe, and all in the best of causes. But since the Regent has been closed, what has happened? Not a whimper. No pickets, no attempts to show nude movies in the balcony. Instead, the fifth dimension has been slowly sucking the guts out of the cinema, until when I come back to this city next time every brick will have gone. And when I ask my friends about the Regent Theatre, they will say: "I remember going there in 1939 just before the war, and wasn't that the place that had the symphony orchestra, or Wurlitzer organ or something?" And there will be

another insurance office on the site.

You have a real objection to my idea, sir? "What about the Arts Centre, and all the new cinemas in Bourke Street showing all those dirty films?" I'm shocked, constable, really shocked. I had heard that the constabulary were unsympathetic to the arts, but I never expected to hear such ignorance. You were on the vice squad before you were put on the car squad and pranged the car in Bourke Street. But, sir, there's no filth left in the movies they show on Bourke Street: it's all been removed by the censors. "But you can't be too careful"? I'll be very careful of you, sir, the next time I see you going to a cinema. I really had hoped to be interviewed by a cultured policeman today.

I don't like to point out the obvious, but I will. Where are the new houses of culture and entertainment being built? On Bourke Street; in the city centre. Not to the north of the city - there are only radio stations and insurance buildings there. Not to the west of the city - there is only Spencer Street and insurance buildings there. Not to the east - there are only gardens and insurance buildings there. And to the south there is Flinders Street station and...

"The Arts Centre"? Out of town altogether, sir. All the best cinemas are in the suburbs. Civilization now huddles along a thin line surrounded by crevasses of pillbox buildings. This calls for emergency measures. Soon whole blocks will disappear, swamped by office workers. One day you'll come to work here at D-24 and there will be a large sign: "This site is being developed by Australian Providence Prudential Insurance Assurance Pty Ltd." You'll probably go home wondering why you bothered going into town that day, because you will have received in the mail that morning an envelope directing you to the new police headquarters in North Eltham or somewhere.

And the greatest monument to culture in Melbourne, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, home of our greatest art, football. My Emanations have told me that even that holy shrine will be pensioned off and replaced by a soccer stadium when the Waverley Footabll Ground comes into full operation.

My evidence? My evidence. Nothing much, sir; nothing with which I could convince a court of law. Another Emanation. What is happening, I said? What is the pattern of disappearances? Mainly from the North, East and West, I said to myself. That leaves the city centre. And what is at the very centre of the city? What will be left when every other building collapses into atoms?

There is one building, sir. At its front is a mysterious institution called McGills Bookshop. You've passed there frequently, sir? You have not been greeted by the charming smile of its manager, Mr Binns? You haven't? You must be an even more horrifying looking policeman than I took you for.

Now, McGills looks like just any other bookshop - junk in the back (Penguin books) and junk in the front (the latest in popular fiction). But there are two vital differences between McGills and other bookshops. These will really stir you to action. Firstly, McGills is the only bookshop in town that doesn't look as if it will go bankrupt at any moment. It is too much to expect that you have ever been to Cheshires, except to tell them the books they won't be allowed to sell this month. But Cheshires is being eaten by the fifth dimension at this very moment. Most of the staff seem to have disappeared into the Great Beyond, and most of the books with them. The only books left are on the Bargain Table.

But McGills is booming - books everywhere, people everywhere, and they haven't even been taken over by Paul Hamlyn. And have you noticed that they have a large counter full of science fiction?

So what? Not an important piece of evidence in itself, but wait for the next bit. You'd better turn over the tape now, while I finish off my sandwich, so that you don't miss any of it. There now. Tape back on. I can see the glint of desperation in your eye, constable - no doubt you can now see the terrible plight which Melbourne faces. The clinching piece of evidence is that behind McGills, in the lane called Somerset Place, there is a door marked only McGills Bulk Store Number 19. If you go up the stairs however, you will find the most evil institution in Australian history - the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Hidden behind the piles of science fiction, and the Cinemascope screen, I'm sure you will find huge matter transmitters. If you wait outside the Melbourne Science Fiction Club on any Wednesday night or Friday night or Saturday morning you will see weird creatures disguised in beards and scrappy coats and piles of science fiction books.

These, sir, are agents of the fifth dimension, dedicated to the elimination of Culture and Everything That Is Beautiful And Good And Decent In Australian Society. Consider, sir... the piece of evidence that blinded you to the truth is the presence of the insurance buildings. You thought they were the culprits. As they are the next most uncultural entities in Australian society after the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, then they just step in when the fifth dimension steals all the pubs and cinemas and bookshops, because the Club has no money to put up its Satanic institutions. For, if you look at the map carefully, constable, you will realise that soon there will be nothing in Melbourne but the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, McGills Bookshop and office buildings. Then in 1975 when all the agents from the fifth dimension gather in Melbourne, they will knock down the office buildings, put McGills and the Melbourne Science Fiction Club up a hundred storeys high, and subject Victoria to a rule more evil and horrible than anything seen during the days of Sir Henry.

You are acting, sir, on my information! At last! You've grabbed a telephone. The entire force of D-24 and the Sunshine North police force will now swing into action. The Melbourne Science Fiction Club should burn easily, constable. Think of all the marvelous buildings that will explode back into existence from the fifth and the sixth and the ninetieth dimensions. Think of the cable trams again in Bourke Street! Think of all the thousands of record buyers who will again be able to enjoy the jam-packed comfort of the Disk Shop! Think of all the drunks who will again be able to sleep up the back of the Regent! The waves of evil will be turned back.

What's this coming along the corridor? They don't look like policemen to me. They have a horrible emaciated look of the members of the....

Am I doomed, then, sir? You are one of them? You read an sf novel once and that turned you into a member of the fifth dimension? Our civilization is doomed then? The bearded ones are nearly here, holding up copies of science books in the shape of... in the shape of... I am disappearing into the fifth dimension: Melbourne's last prophet gone.

Revenge me, whoever hears this tape. It will be your last hope.

- Bruce R Gillespie 1970

How I Almost Died for Fandom

In a moment of mental aberration I decided to attend the Sydney convention (fervently hoping that the word "Syn" as in "Syncon" had been misspelled) and with that decision, nearly cut short a brilliant career in fandom.

I hitched my way up to Sydney, there being a couple of reasons for this decision: (a) It's interesting and (b), which is more important, it's economical.

I caught the train out to Cobourg (I think?) and started to hike from the Melbourne Crematorium (considering the rest of the journey, a most appropriate place). I'd walked for about half an hour when I got my first ride and lo-and-behold it turned out to be one of the chaps I work with at the hospital! I got about a hundred miles of "gee whiz, fancy meeting you here" and he dropped me off with about four hundred miles still to go. After another short walk walk (Is that a mistake? No, it's just that I develop a nervous stutter whenever I remember this trip) I was picked up by what must be one of the last old time 'truckies'. Picture a chap in his late forties or early fifties, built like a tank and driving a great huge semi-trailer wearing nothing but an old blue singlet, shorts and bare feet! The idea of his naked tootsies at the controls of this great monster did not inspire any great confidence in me at first but it soon became evident that he could handle that rig in bare feet as well as most people handle their family car. We proceeded along at a reasonable rate and reached Holbrook by about 2-00 am, Friday morning. Unfortunately the trucky decided to stop here and sleep for a couple of hours, and there is where my troubles really began.

I decided to continue and so, bidding him farewell, I moved on towards my scrape with the 'Grim Reaper'. By 4-00 am I was still standing by the side of the road. The temperature was about thirty-two degrees. I had called the Almighty about every name I could think of (and a few I'd made up purely for this occasion) and made up rather elaborate fantasies involving the motorists whizzing past me in their dozens... The Marquis de Sade himself would have been proud of me!

By 4-30 I'd just reached the stage of looking for somewhere quiet to curl up and expire when one of these cars did a very strange thing... It STOPPED! The car contained two rather rough looking young chaps but to me they were the most desirable couple I'd seen since the Kessler Twins. If Raquel Welch had been lying naked in the grass, crying out with lust for me, I still would have climbed into that car without a backward glance... Well, maybe I would've peeked... I'll have to think about this some more, I wouldn't want to make any rash decisions. Anyway, for now... on with this taut tale of terrible tribulations!

I had just begun to sit back and relax, feeling the blood once again coursing through my numb limbs when a number of things became evident which made me slightly uneasy. The first thing was that the driver and his mate were both drinking quite heavily and looked like they had been doing so for some time; the

second was that the roads outside Holbrook (which are both winding and hilly) at about ninety miles an hour. This, as I said, made me slightly nervous but this was soon to give way to sheer gibbering terror. Anyone who can remember back to the Friday morning of the SynCon will recall that it was distinguished by a rain storm worthy of the second great flood. These two motorised suicides (with yours truly whimpering quietly on the back seat) were wending their slightly intoxicated way through these winding roads, at ninety miles an hour, in blinding rain... WITH NO WINDSCREEN WIPERS!!

As we sped erratically through the night every broken and twisted body which had come through the doors of the casualty ward flashed across my mind in wide-screen and grisly technicolour. I would have asked them to stop and let me out but I was afraid to open my mouth in case my heart leapt quivering into my lap.

In the grip of the grape they told me how the night before they had been chased by the 'fuzz' for using a landing strip as a drag racing strip and how during the chase they had overturned the car (their other car) and had made their escape on foot. Deciding that discretion is the better part of valour, they were heading for Queensland until things cooled off a little. By now I'd stopped praying to be saved, and was praying only for a quick and painless death.

Given a set of circumstances such as this, sooner or later something had to happen. We had just crossed one of those narrow bridges which seem to abound on the Melbourne to Sydney run, and had only just scraped past a car coming the other way. Our moronic driver turned to his equally moronic sidekick and made some remark about how much fun it is to scare the living daylights out of every other poor bastard on the road, not noticing that he was heading straight for the concrete stanchions of the next of these small bridges. At the last minute his mate yelled a warning to him and he turned the wheel sharply to the right. We missed the stanchions but drifted off the right side of the road towards the trees. Another sharp correction caused us to do the same thing, again, only this time on the left side. This happened five or six times more before he regained full control of the car.

During the last twenty minutes I'd embraced religion with a fanaticism like you wouldn't believe. I'd started on Jesus Christ, worked my way through Mohammed and Buddha and also covered a few on the other team just to be on the safe side. Apparently one of them heard me because five minutes later (fortunately at a low speed) the tire blew, and just in case that wasn't enough, the car bogged in the mud as we pulled off the road.

After sitting there motionless for about two hours (which did wonders for my nerves) a chap in an Austin Healey stopped and asked if he could help. Seizing my opportunity in my hand I explained my predicament and begged him to take me with him. Probably because he couldn't stand to see a grown man cry, he agreed.

The rest of the trip was (thank god) uneventful, and he dropped me off in Sydney about midday on Friday.

I won't say too much about the SynCon because it has been four months since that particular convention and my memory starts overloading if I try to remember anything that happened four hours ago... twenty-four hours or longer and it just refuses to try. However I will try to dredge up a few highlights from that mass of pollution known as the Peter House mind.

The panels were, to a fringe fan like myself, only moderately interesting. Two exceptions to this were Bertram Chandler, whose wry humor and "telling" remarks could not fail to be appreciated and Elizabeth Foyster had our number right from the beginning and addressed us pretty much like she would address her own class. One other event that sticks in my mind was Ron Graham's party at the motel, everybody who went thoroughly enjoyed themselves and nobody more than Paul Stevens and myself who were seated with Bert Chandler and his wife.

This report wouldn't be complete without a few words about our visit to that street of iniquity which Sydneysiders, in their wisdom, have called KING'S CROSS.

Having stayed in Victoria Street (which is directly behind the Cross) about two years ago I had some idea about what to expect. This did not, however, prepare me for the "Pink Pussycat" as I was too poor to visit any of the night spots last time I was there. After seeing what they are pleased to call 'entertainment', and at two dollars for the privilege, I would find the name "Fractured Feline" a more appropriate name for this particular dive.

After paying our requisite quids, myself and about five other sex-crazed Melbournites were shown up some narrow stairs and led into a room that looked like nothing so much as a converted shower recess. This opinion was reinforced by the fact that the buttons for the emergency sprinklers system were marked "Hot" and "Cold". After seating ourselves amongst a group of characters who would have made 'Jack the Ripper' uneasy, we were subjected to one of the most incredible displays of dilapidated female flesh that it has ever been my misfortune to gaze upon. You've heard of girls with 'OOMPH!'... These girls had 'EERK!'. Each stripper wore an expression which seemed to say that they would find washing their hair a lot more exciting (I think we would have too).

One of the girls did her routine (which is a hell of a good word for it) in a cow-girl suit and with the theme from "The Big Country" as her background music. Mervyn Binns is an incessant whistler of almost any tune that he has ever heard and with this in mind Paul Stevens leaned over to me and in a voice which positively dripped with menace (and which Mervyn could not fail to hear) said, "If Binns starts to whistle this tune I'll cut his throat out!" In a great triumph of mind (and fear) over conditioned reflex, Mervyn kept his lips unpursed while the girl dis-robed and disappeared back into the depths of darkest back-stage. The only high point of the evening was one girl who found a whole new series of things you can do with a feather duster, none of which would be printable in "Home Beautiful".

This then was our night of sin and sexual depravity in the heart of Sydney's vice-ridden "King's Cross"... I think that I would have more hope of being corrupted by a Walt Disney movie at a Billy Graham Crusade.

About the only other thing which sticks in my mind about the SynCon and Sydney was the party at John Ryan's place which I think was the perfect way to end it all (makes it sound like a method of suicide, doesn't it?).

- Peter House

(reprinted, with a little editing, from
Mad House Muses which appeared in
ANZAPA mailing 11)

Paul Stevens Sees Fandom in Action

One day, or so legend has it, John Foyster, guru of Australian fandom visited the environs of the Melbourne Science Fiction club and was disgusted out of his mind by the fact that nobody (and I mean NOBODY) wanted to talk about science fiction. Well I mean, there was Paul Stevens and Peter House sitting on the radiator discussing the latest horror films and comparing notes to see who had counted the most censor cuts, there was Graham Shannon constructing his latest wide-screen, cinemascope, all-colour, stereophonic curtain opening device. Mervyn Binns was seated at his desk shuffling through his book orders and muttering darkly all the while, John Breden and Dimitrii were disceting the latest comic illustrations from Marvel, Noel Kerr was discussing dirty movies with Malcolm Hunt, Gary Woodman was getting drunk in a corner and two unknowns were tripping under the table-tennis table while Dick Jenssen, Bill Wright, Bruno Kauczner and some other person played Black Lady in full view of several new members.

Foyster was disgusted. He was also upset because no-one even said hello to him, not even Leigh Edmonds his foremost disciple who was endeavouring to persuade Stevens and House to try and beat him at snooker. Foyster was horrified!! He would cleanse the temple!

It was not until the annual general meeting that he proposed that he form a group that actually discuss stf and somehow everyone agreed. "Let's not hold the meetings in the MSFC," Edmonds suggested, he knew that if they were held there he would only end up playing snooker with House and Stevens (and get beaten again). It was Tony Thomas who offered his flat as the venue for the first meeting and it was agreed that we would all meet there on the seventh of August to talk about some unknown wop author called Italo Cantina or somesuch.

Came the seventh of August and with it a fateful omen, there was a twenty-four hour power strike! Merv, Peter House, David Allen and myself arranged matters so that we arrived late, very very late, and that way we got out of having to hear about Calo Intfantino or whoever. As we entered we could see that everyone was happy and cheerful (for happy read drunk and for cheerful read paralytic) and we were greeted by happy cries of "Where's your grog?", "Didja bring any?" and "The pubs don't close for twenty minutes yet!" Unfortunately for those present the two full flagons of claret plainly visible on the sideboard killed any need for a foray on the pubs and saved the Thomas's from a mess or two on the carpet.

I seem to remember Foyster, Boutland, Broderick and several other hairy individuals discussing stf but I managed to ignore them and got down to the serious business of catching up with the claret consumption of the mob. House left when he realised that people were talking about stf, but then he never was a strong lad.

At one part in the evening John Foyster mentioned the letter that his daughter was going to write to TIME... "Dear Time, my father is a student

remotely like those today, premature death of the prisoner would be the worst possible disaster, creating the loss of the portion of the punishment intended as a spectacle and a lesson to the public.

\$\$\$ L.E. No Harry, I didn't mind not getting a mention in RQ, not really. The only thing that I wished was that I had got all the space which you had given over to Gary Mason, what does he need with a write-up in RQ anyhow, me, I need the egoboo.

Quite probably the Romans in Jerusalem at the time couldn't have cared less about whether or not Jesus died before he got to the cross. Following on the line of reasoning most often given, the Romans would have gladly let Jesus go free but the Jews didn't want it that way and so, once again, I couldn't see why they would be worried what happened. As for saving Jesus for an example; I seem to remember that at one time the Romans nailed up just about the whole population of a village for an example and putting one man along side that seems a little weak, besides, they had two guys already lined up for the cross that day. The Jews only wanted to see Jesus dead. \$\$\$

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I suppose its a bit cheeky of me to comment that "its nice to see RATAPLAN again" when to the best of my knowledge I didn't bother to acknowledge previous issues... Perhaps I might amend that to expressing my pleasure at seeing Edmonds producing something by himself for a change...

Actually, RATAPLAN provided the opportunity to refresh my thots on the Guest of Honour speech at the SynCon, and John's talk, which at the time didn't really come across...

I am inclined to think that Ron Graham lacks that mysterious something that makes the majority of us fans, and it shows in his GoH talk. Quite simply and in short order his magazine was plugged, fans promptly dismissed, and in fact Ron Graham was much moved by the didactic impulse... perhaps not the wisest thing to do at a science fiction convention where the majority are presumed to have a reasonable knowledge of matters sfictional. Not a very enlightened GoH speech, in my opinion, definitely lacking in any entertainment value (other than the thought that we should all revise our thots on John Russell Fearn), and not what one would call the 'high spot' of the SynCon.

Bob Toomey managed to make his collection of facts on Jesus of Nazareth quite readable, and I have little doubt that things were as he describes them. Your average believer still has trouble with anything that too drastically departs from the traditional, though; witness the yells that went up when "Son of Man" was shown on ABC TV recently...

I am pleased you found our lounge floor comfortable. However, it does kinda reduce that pleasant evening we all had to a common denominator: the floor. As I recall the only persons who came down to converse with you were my son and the two cats...

\$\$\$ L.E. I found "Son of Man" stunning, though not at all upsetting since I'm not a christian. In the manner it portrayed Jesus if fits quite well with what Bob Toomey had to say. \$\$

We Also Heard From: a couple of other people whose letters I've lost.

Sappho

The poetess Sappho, who was born in or near 612 BC, has almost been reborn in the last fifteen years. It was probably the publication of two books in 1955 which gave rise to the flood of translations since that date. Previously many translations of her work had been published (many of them collected in THE SONGS OF SAPPHO, Peter Pauper Press), but POETARUM LESBIORUM FRAGMENTA (Edgar Lobel and Denys Page) and SAPPHO AND ALCAEUS (Denys Page), both Oxford: Clarendon Press, were so thorough-going and scholarly that even now there are few if any challenges to their authority.

Since 1955 there have been four 'complete' translations of Sappho into English - before that date less than a dozen.

Sappho was born on the island of Lesbos, off the coast of Asia Minor, probably in Mytilene, which is where she seems to have spent her later life. The details of her life are uncertain, but at that we know more about her life than about her poetry. Years after she died her work was collected into nine books, of which the first contained 1320 lines: of the five hundred or more poems which existed then we now have about 700 lines.

But many other authors, of lesser repute, have survived the ravages of time more completely. Sappho's work, however, did not meet with the approval of the Christian Church, and on at least three occasions her books were publicly burned. Perhaps we are lucky to have so much. What we do have left is there by chance - collected "from the scholia of ancient grammarians", "the mummy wrappings in Egyptian tombs" and other places such as clay pots.

Certainly the present sad state of affairs was not brought about by disinterest on the part of ancient scholars. In response to a classification of Sappho with eight male poets the statement was made that she was not the ninth among men, but the tenth Muse. This sentiment was echoed by many writers, including Plato. Meleager suggested that her poems were "few, but roses". And of course her work survives partly because it was so often quoted by admirers. Gilbert Murray, whose remarks should be of especial interest to Australian readers, said: "a dispassionate judgment must see that her love-poetry, if narrow in scope, has unrivalled splendor of expression for the longing that is too intense to have any joy in it, too serious to allow room for metaphor and imaginative ornament."

And she is frequently referred to as the only woman to have written unquestionably first-rate poetry.

Catullus copied her.

And so on.

I want to look fairly closely at one of her poems (the one Catullus pinched) to see if I can help you see what is there. W.C. Williams has done a translation, but I shan't be quoting that here. And now - the translations.

First a prose translation by Walter R. Agard from his THE GREEK MIND:

That man seems to me like a god who sits beside you and listens to your sweet chatter, and your lovely laughter, which sets

my heart beating wildly. For when I look at you my voice leaves me, my tongue is frozen and a piercing flame pervades my flesh, my eyes are blurred and my ears ring, sweat pours down me, I tremble all over, I become paler than grass, and I feel I am nearly dying.

Here is a second prose version, from T.S. Dorsch's translation of *ON THE SUBLIME* (Penguin), which is the source of this poem.

A peer of the gods he seems to me, the man who sits over against you face to face, listening to the sweet tones of your voice and the loveliness of your laughing; it is this that sets my heart fluttering in my breast. For if I gaze on you for a little while, I am no longer master of my voice, and my tongue lies useless, and a delicate flame runs over my skin. No more do I see with my eyes, and my ears are filled with uproar. The sweat pours down me, I am all seized with trembling, and I grow paler than the grass. My strength fails me, and I seem little short of dying.

Apart from illustrating the problem of writing even a prose translation of the poem, I think these two versions will help you to see what lies within Sappho's work.

Next I have three non-prose translations of recent vintage. Mary Barnard's (University of California Press) was published in 1958.

He is a god in my eyes -
the man who is allowed
to sit beside you - he

who listens intimately
to the sweet murmur of
your voice, the enticing

laughter that makes my own
heart beat fast. If I meet
you suddenly, I can't

speak - my tongue is broken;
a thin flame runs under
my skin; seeing nothing,

hearing only my own ears
drumming, I drip with sweat;
trembling shakes my body

and I turn paler than
dry grass. At such times
death isn't far from me.

Two later translations are those of Willis Barnstone (1964) and Paul Roche (1966). In chronological order, then, we have:

To me that man equals a god
as he sits before you and listens
closely to your sweet voice

and lovely laughter - which troubles
the heart in my ribs. For now
as I look at you and my voice fails,

my tongue is broken and thin fire
runs like a thief through my body.
My eyes are dead to light, my ears
pound, and sweat pours down over me.
I shudder, I am paler than grass,
and am intimate with dying - but
I must suffer everything, being poor.

And:

He is a god in my eyes, that man,
Given to sit in front of you
and close to himself to hear
The sound of you speaking.

Your magical laughter - this I swear -
Batters my heart - my breast astir -
My voice when I see you suddenly near
Refuses to come.

My tongue breaks up and a delicate fire
Runs through my flesh; I see not a thing
With my eyes, and all that I hear
In my ears is a hum.

The sweat pours down, a shuddering takes
Me in every part and pale as the drying
Grasses, then, I think I am near
The moment of dying.

The last lines of Barnstone's version (Anchor-Doubleday) is the only surviving line (or partial line) of the fifth stanza. Roche (mentro-NAL) gives a prose translation as follows:

But I must bear with it all because now
I'm a beggar.....

I shall come back to discuss these later. It is clear that the three translators had slightly different aims. But before examining that let us see how Catullus and his translators fared.

Just in case there are any Latinists reading, here is Catullus:

Illi mi par esse deo videtur,
ille, si fas est, superare divos,
qui sedens adversus identidem te
spectat et audit

dulce ritentem, misero quod omnis
cripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi

lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suo
tenteinant aures, gemina taguntur
lumina nocte.

And now a couple of translations. First that of Peter Whigham in his Penguin Classics translation of Catullus:

Godlike the man who
sits at her side, who
watches and catches
that laughter

which (softly) tears me
to tatters: nothing is
left of me, each time
I see her,

... tongue numbed; arms, legs
melting, on fire; drum
drumming in ears; head-
lights gone black.

And then Vincent Buckley's version (melbourne University Press, 1966):

Surely no one but a god
(Or Adversary) could sit like that
Opposite you, watching, taing in
Your pleased laughter,

When I, torment, feel my whole body
Lapse out at the first sight of you.
My mouth is drained of voice, my tongue
Stooped; where I watch

A flame steeps in secret down
Under my limbs, my ears ring
With their own sound, my eyes crouch
In double darkness.

It is quite clear from these two translations that a great deal of Sappho has survived the translations from Aiolic Greek to the Latin of Catullus to English, at least if we compare with the versions translated direct into English. But there are many differences, and these must attract our attention as much as the similarities.

In looking at the translations one cannot help but be struck by the similarities and the differences. To see how these arose it will be profitable to momentarily utilise a description used by Ezra Pound. In "How to Read" Pound uses these three terms: melopoeia, phanopoeia and logopoeia. There's barely any excuse at all for using Greek words, except that this article is about a Greek poet...

Melopoeia - sounding pretty
Phanopoeia - being pretty
and Logopoeia - coming from prettiness
these three if you like....

Of course my description there is playful rather than useful. But melopoeia is related to beauty which you can hear in a poem and, as Pound remarks, one need not even speak or understand the language in which the poem is written to appreciate a little of this aspect of the poetry. Phanopoeia is, if you like, the language-independent component of poetry: Pound claims that it is impossible to destroy this component save by "very gross bumbling" - he should know. Logopoeia is, briefly, context. Thus words can acquire more meaning than they have in common use when placed in a poem in a particular way.

This may be because the words have previously been used by another poet (a particularly common approach some years ago), or it may arise in some other ways.

So, in the translations which we have seen, we find some common elements: the skeleton of the poem, if you like. But it is the flesh which matters, of course. The logopoeia in Sappho's poem is all but inaccessible to us today, so that almost everything you see in this respect is planted by the author of the translation and is almost certainly not Sappho. A good translator will only introduce elements which the poet might have used. And this explains why good translators work slowly. The melopoeia you can more or less obtain from the original Greek. You will find elements of melopoeia in the best translations, because the translator happens to be a poet with a good ear. (Some translators have a tin ear, and their work can jar more than I can comfortably say.) The pnanopoeia, as I have said, you will find in almost all of the translations.

And now the translation by William Carlos Williams, for which I have been preparing you:

That man is peer of the gods, who
face to face sits listening
to your sweet speech and lovely
 laughter.

It is this that rouses a tumult
in my breast. At mere sight of you
my voice falters, my tongue
 is broken.

Straightway, a delicate fire runs in
my limbs; my eyes
are blinded and my ears
 thunder.

Sweat pours out: a trembling hunts
me down. I grow
paler than grass and lack little
 of dying.

- John Foyster

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EDITORIAL CODA: Keep those cards and letters rolling in please, folks.

