

Out of the Bin



(Transit photo by Helena)

The image of the Sun is projected on a piece of card, the shadow of the telescope and its stand surrounding it. The planet Venus is the tiny black dot just inside the circle of the Sun's image.

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A Newsletter from MERV BINNS

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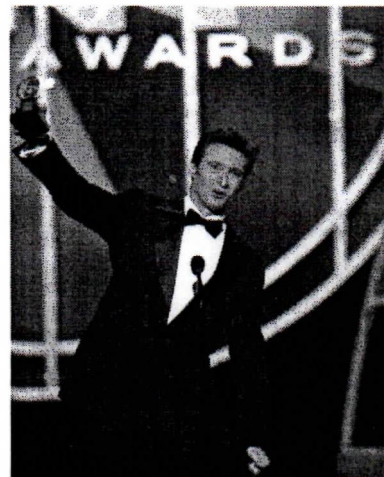
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AN EYE ON THE SKY

On June 8th at about 3.30PM, Helena brought out her telescope (a little old refractor with a 4.5 cm lens) and set it up to watch the **TRANSIT OF VENUS** (a rare astronomical event in which the planet Venus in its orbit crosses the face of the Sun as seen from Earth). The weather was good, with only a few clouds and by holding a piece of white card in front of the lens of the 'scope (the only safe way to view the Sun) we were able to bring into focus the projected image of the sun's bright disc with the planet Venus a small black dot near the rim. It was difficult dodging tree branches around the area but we did periodically check and see the dot had moved, before the sun finally went behind clouds on the western horizon. Having looked for comets and eclipses before with little success because of weather and city atmospheric conditions, it was pleasing to finally see a significant astronomical event. And we did get a good look at Mars when it came its closest to us last year, through the telescopes at the Melbourne Observatory. So our star gazing of late has been fruitful.

MOVIES AND TV

The **TONY AWARDS** were good to watch and it was great to see Hugh Jackman presenting the show and receiving his award for Best Leading Actor in a Broadway Musical (as Peter Allen in *The Boy From Oz*). This is one of the kinds of events we find it useful to have cable TV for, apart from the reruns of all the



HUGH JACKMAN with his TONY Award

Star Trek, *Stargate* and other SF series. It is becoming harder to find anything on the free-to-air channels to watch apart from our regular series that we like, with first-run movies being becoming rarer all the time. They are all going to cable first, and we can't watch recent movies on the cable because to be able to access all the movie channels it would cost about twice as much as what we are already paying just for the basics. The *CHER FINAL CONCERT* was on the ABC channel 2, so it was good not being interrupted by commercials. A very spectacular show but it was a bit sad to see her flamboyant performance possibly for the last time. The ABC screened over three nights the mini-series *ANGELS IN AMERICA* and I must admit I approached watching it with trepidation, considering the general theme of it. However the promos got us in, particularly with Emma Thompson as the angel, with glorious, enormous wings, crashing through the apartment ceiling of the guy with AIDS, who is apparently imagining all that and more. But Al Pacino as the real character Roy Cohn, a lawyer and Senator McCarthy's right hand man, who was a real detestable piece of shit it seems, who is also dying of AIDS although he says it is liver cancer, gives as always a remarkable performance. Meryl Streep plays three roles in the drama, the first as a Rabbi (a performance that you would never pick if you didn't know), as a bag lady and as the gay Mormon guy's mother, is also at her dramatic best. Despite the drama and virtually impossible situation for AIDS sufferers depicted in the play, it ends with happiness and hope. Spectacular at times and more than a bit over the top, but nevertheless a very interesting experience.

The only movie seen in the theatre since our last *OoB* was *THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW*, which although it is only a movie and the science as our retired meteorological scientist friend Dr Dick Jenssen points out, leaves a lot to be desired, is a very frightening scenario. Scientists have been saying for some years that it is more than likely that the Earth may endure another ice age. This movie takes the global warming problem and cleverly adds such as the gulf stream ceasing to operate and gigantic storms eventuating (though inaccurately depicted), followed by

the Northern Hemisphere being almost entirely covered by ice. Our scientist hero, whose warnings of the coming catastrophe are ignored, endeavors to rescue his son from the frozen-in New York Library, where he and friends survive the devastation, and that is the main part of the movie. Yes, it is a spectacular load of hogwash, but based on perhaps not altogether unlikely scientific theory and therefore more than a bit frightening if you think about it.

FANZINES RECEIVED

After eventually getting some of the piles of printed matter in my study sorted out, I did find number 218 of **Bill Wright's I.R.S.** and he gave me number 219 at CONTINUUM II. And I have all the issues for last year, Bill, and many before, including *THE BEST OF I.R.S.* I should be used to Ditmar's artwork by now, but his cover illustrations for *I.R.S.* continue to amaze me. OK, D.J. is a friend but that does not mean that I am in any way biased and I would still think these illustrations are great no matter who might have produced them. Reading Dick's articles it is interesting too learn a little about how he produces his artwork. Like him I also read *The Cruel Sea* which he mentions, when I was working for McGill's Newsagency, simply because I had to read more than SF. Being in charge of the general book department I was obliged to read other literature when I would rather have been reading more SF. A great report on CONFLUX, Bill, and it sounded great. Wish I had been there! Tiki Swain's report on CHRONOPOLIS reminded me again that the Perth fans do put on very popular and original conventions, but getting over there is another thing for us. *I.R.S.* continues to be a quite unique fanzine containing varying articles and trip reports and it is great to see letters from fans I know personally but have not met for a while. Proving once again that fanzines give us a great way of keeping in touch.

Bruce Gillespie's brg #37 features another Ditmar cover illustration with a photo of John Foyster that I took at MONOCLAVE convention in 1977. I have been somewhat confused trying to sort out all my photos for my memoirs, but I am quite sure I took that one. However John Litchen is quite correct in the assumption that he took the photo of Bill and Foyster on page 25. I have about forty photos taken that day at the football match at the farm including some by John, some apparently by Lee Harding, now I realise reading John Litchen's letter and some by me. We will be using some in my memoirs mention of the football match, which I cannot see mentioned in Yvonne's JMF timeline. At any rate we will credit any specifically used where we can or in general accordingly. Personally I have never been a big fan of critical writing on SF or otherwise, but I am aware of the fact that John Foyster and John Bangsund with *ASFR* really made people sit up and take notice. Let us not forget George Turner also. So it is good that Bruce is re-publishing the best of JMF's critical writing. The letter column in *brg #37* is of particular interest to me with David Russell, Elizabeth Darling, and John Litchen's letters providing some details on things I am pleased to know. Peter McNamara's reference to John Foyster visiting him in hospital, being particularly poignant with both of them now passed on.

Chris Nelson's MUMBLINGS FROM MUNCHKINLAND #22 with an *Authentic* cover is quite a unique little gem with a report by Joe Haldeman on his and Gay's stay in Samoa, where Chris is presently ensconced. Bert Castellari's account of the Canberra bush fires and the reprint of Rex Meyer's 1953 SYNCON II Report being also being interesting. The note on *Authentic* magazine of the 1950s brought back memories to me of how little SF we had available in those days and the title lettering from another source that you have used, Chris, is remarkably like the magazine's. (*Helena adds: My introduction to fandom was, in a roundabout way, through reading Authentic's letter columns when I was 13, so although I agree with Merv that it would have been nice to see some American magazines as well, I'm grateful to Authentic at least for that!*)

Michael Waite's TRIAL AND AIR # 14 dated February this year turned up recently, with a cover reproduction of the 1938 fanzine *Spaceways*, making me realise that SF fandom was well established when I was only four years old. Reproduction of some of Harry Warner's writing is a fitting tribute to him and the old *Astounding* covers look great. The fact that Michael includes in this issue John Baxter's tribute to John Foyster plus a lot more by and about John, plus a great selection of photos in full colour, indicates to me the high regard American fans also had for our own John Foyster. Thanks Michael, we really appreciate it. As you will know from seeing my zines I like to use a lot of illustrations, so I really like your use of magazine and book covers in colour, illustrating Dick Jenssen's SF reading memoirs. And the photograph of Helena and me is just too much. You will have us more known by fans in the USA than here at home. But *TRIAL and AIR* is much more than illustrations with reviews and letters all of interest. Finally a comment on our "favourite books". I have not yet made up a list myself but I will include same in my upcoming memoirs. It is interesting though that most people have some favourite title that nobody else has heard of agrees with at any rate, such as John Hertz's *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet*. Otherwise all he mentions apart from the *Glass Bead Game*, which I think our mutual friend raved to me about many years ago but I have never read, I would include in perhaps a top twenty SF books of mine. Thanks again Michael for *Trial and Air* and for your kind inclusion of items about or by my friends and Helena and me and photos and all.

Thanks to Sue Bursztynski for giving us a copy of *ANDROMEDA SPACEWAYS In Flight Magazine*. With now three, or is it more, small SF&F magazines being published in Australia, with another new one, *Orb*, having been launched at the CONTINUUM II Convention (to which the whole of our July special issue will be devoted), writers have plenty of opportunity to see their writing published. Also indicating to me how the urge to write SF&F has developed over recent years. I have noted all the fantasy books being published by Harper Collins and Random House for instance, but I did not realise until now how SF&F writing in general in Australia has grown.

Merv B June 23rd 2004