

# STOPGAP

## a letter, circular or publication

— Graham B. Stone, Box 182 Broadway P.O, SYDNEY, N.S.W.

February, 1952

### Magazines:

Astounding SCIENCE FICTION, Dec. 1951 (Br.) is not an outstandingly good issue. If you haven't seen it yet, it contains three stories. "...And Then There Were None" by Eric Frank Russell is in the spirit of "The Lion and the Lamb" and numerous others in which the shipload of officious minions of a bureaucratic Earth runs up against a planet colonised by humans with a culture the expedition can't understand, which gets the better of them. In this case it's a total anarchy with an economic setup based on barter and an honour system of obligations. It's a system that would in practice be far more limiting on individual liberty than modern democratic systems, but let it pass. As outlined, it's not feasible anyway. You can find something resembling it in primitive tribes, but the highly industrialised civilisation Russell depicts couldn't function on sheer neighbourliness. It just isn't efficient to do everything by barter. Money was introduced, not because people didn't trust each other, but because they couldn't keep track of who owed what to whom otherwise. Russell exposes another basic fault -- absolute lack of organisation and responsibility -- in the discussion on the Fire Squad without a head. He evades it by the neat trick of stating the fundamental objection to the idea, then just ignoring it.

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One thing that irks me a great deal is the assumption of many stf writers that the social set-up in a civilisation of interplanetary or interstellar extent and complexity will be what is politely called these days a police state, since the more communicative term "fascism" has become by constant abuse a bit disreputable. Very often it is treated as a matter of course, the writer not apparently even realising that it's hardly desirable and certainly unnecessary. Now here, Russell has quite a plausible explanation to show how the trend of historical events imagined might be in the direction of rigidity and regimentation back on Earth while innumerable colony worlds went on along mutually different lines. But he doesn't care to make a point of it, though it's an important point and an original one.

It irks me more than ever when a writer has no better answer to the police state than half-baked utopias like this one.

The other stories in the issue are not very outstanding. I might have enjoyed "The Friendly Man" much better if I hadn't read so many variations on the theme in the past year or so. You may like it a lot.

AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION is the same periodical previously called S.F. Fortnightly and S.F. Monthly. Published by Hamilton & Co, the address is 1-2 Melville Court, Goldhawk Rd, London, W 12, England. It is not strictly a magazine, since each issue features only a single novel. But the intention is far more in accord with what we look for in a science fiction magazine than is true of any other current British productions except the

Nova pair. The latest issue has been on sale in Sydney. No 15, undated, it features "Report from Mandazo", a reasonable looking story by Lee Stanton. There is a new cover layout, emphasising the title of the series -- hence its continuity -- instead of the story, as had been done previously: the change is a progressive step that was long overdue. The issue has an editorial, a short filler article on the Second International Congress on Astronautics, and a readers' page, including plugs for British fan organisations, the kind of service that has been badly needed in England for so many years. Slipped in is a dodger announcing a scheme by which each issue will be sent, and you send 1/9 Stg. on receipt. But surely it would be far more efficient to subscribe in advance. The rates are 10/6 per six issues.

When THRILLS INCORPORATED first appeared with its cover partially copied from THRILLING WONDER on Australian news stands, local fans welcomed it as the first attempt at an Australian stf magazine. Not a very good one, certainly. But it might improve, we thought. It showed flashes of improvement for a while, mainly in the form of stories plagiarised from American magazines by an unscrupulous hack writer and palmed off on the unsuspecting editor. But as far as producing any new local talent for worth while science fiction, not a glimmer. The reason is simple enough, and is really twofold. In the first place, the thing was run as one of a string of pulps aimed at a market of children and those who think like them. No originality here, if you please. Just formula, simple plots and plenty of action. It was run and is run by men who did

not and do not know what science fiction is all about, but had a hard and fast view of the kind of publication they were producing. Naturally, no creative writer was going to appear there. In the second place, they aimed too low. They thought the market was a juvenile one, so they produced a publication aiming at the ten-year-old. They sold it -- to ten-year-olds, and to determined science fiction readers. Not to any possible new readers of science fiction who might have been attracted by a better class action magazine. Science fiction is a live field -- it thrives and grows on intelligent, critical interest, on new imaginative concepts and original scientific speculations. The kind of stuff appearing in THRILLS is bare of new ideas, of scientific basis, and of appeal as fiction to older adventure fiction readers. There is nothing there to encourage active interest or invite further investigation of science fiction.

It was bad enough to begin with, and far from improving it changed for the worse. The reduction in size and price, the emphasis on a story title instead of the magazine title so that the thing is more like a discontinuous series of booklets, was a backward step towards the "Scientific Thrillers" of the same publisher. And the standard of the fiction --- well, I would now suggest that it is absurd to speak of THRILLS as a stf magazine. It's really a kids' comic of the prewar type, with text mainly instead of pictures, catering for those now old enough to read properly. It can best be compared with the British boys' papers we read at the appropriate age, the CHAMPION, MODERN BOY, WIZARD, and so on. Its only definite parallel, such a periodical using only futuristic and pseudo-scientific stories, was the old British SCOOPS of 1936. SCOOPS was better.

## The First Australian Science Fiction Convention:

The date is still March 22nd, the time from 10.30 a.m. to 11 p.m. The place, the 7th floor of the Grand United Building, 149 Castle-reagh St, Sydney. The Convention was publicised by 1200 printed leaflets inserted in the December 1951 Astounding for the NSW distribution, thanks to the co-operation of Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, the Australian agents. Replies are coming in steadily from fans not hitherto contacted, and one of these has already joined ASFS. Taking 1200 as the number of regular stf readers in the state, I conclude that before this, about 5½% of fans in NSW were to some extent known: for Sydney the figure would be higher, about 8% perhaps. Not very high. If we were better able to make contacts it would have been much higher -- and it's going up sharply as new fans write in to ask for more information on the Convention.

## Australian Science Fiction Society:

Although Australian fandom is not large by comparison with the known circulation of stf magazines here, our society has the highest proportion of the known fans of any such organisation in any country. Practically every active fan is a member, and the exceptions are just those but recently met. Well, this is the purpose of ASFS -- to bring together for their mutual benefit anyone in Australia who's genuinely interested in stf has the corollary that any active fan is a member as a matter of course.

It was with this in mind that the annual dues were a nominal 2/6d. But I have found in the first year of ASFS' existence that a minimum contribution can be less than the minimum. Half a crown did not

cover postage. Not that I mind running Stopgap out of my own pocket as a service, but it was a little too far from an economic proposition. There has been some discussion on the point, including a paragraph in the last Stopgap.

So the dues now amount to 5/- a year, still practically a nominal figure. And this year I intend to keep the monthly mailing fairly regular. In answer to inquiries, no, there is no fixed date for payment. Membership is reckoned by the year from the date of joining. If you forget you'll get a notice after a while.

The main membership benefit is the monthly mailing, containing Stopgap and any other material that may be going out, such as publicity handouts from American book publishers, which have been available lately. Members seeking information on anything in the science fiction world will be given all possible help,

#### New Members:

- 63: Andrew J. Harkin, 7 Blakett St, Wollongong, NSW
- 64: Maurice Kaye, 44 Bayswater Rd, Kings Cross, Sydney.
- 65: L.J. Harding, 510 Drummond St, Carlton N 3, Melbourne, Vic.
- 66: M. Taylor, 40 Railway Rd, St. Peters, NSW
- 67: Donald Lawson, 25 Frederic St, Concord, NSW
- 68: D.C. McDonald, C/- Soil Bureau, 54 Molesworth St, Wellington, New Zealand

69: Bruce Purdy, "The Laurels", Bobbin Head Rd,  
North Turramurra, NSW

70: Leonard D. Roth, "Oceanic Mansions",  
80 Campbell Parade, Bondi, NSW

Mail Bag:

First, an unsolicited testimonial. Vol Molesworth, ASFS No. 2, writes: "I am inspired by the latest issue of Stoppap to write an open letter, congratulating you on the splendid work you have done in launching, and nursing through its teething troubles, ASFS. With our national fan organisation we are teaching even the U.S. fans a lesson: if NFFF had progressed as ably as ASFS the present status of U.S. fandom would be far less chaotic, and if you will spare an atrocious but irresistible pun, less un-conventional." A word of explanation. The National Fantasy Fan Federation was set up at the 3rd U.S. Science Fiction Convention at Denver in 1941 with the object of bringing all active fans in the States together, and undertaking a program of varied projects. It came near to being a failure in its early years, and is still not very large, considering the numbers of active fans in America. It does, however, run several useful services -- indexes to stf magazines and stf stories in general magazines, published sheet by sheet over the past few years. Periodical directories to existing local clubs and fan publications. Now and then it publishes a book. And so on. It is a useful organisation deserving of more support and needing more stable management. It has a small external membership in various countries, and is represented in the South-West Pacific by R.N.Dard, 232 James St, Perth, W.A. -- who will have more in-

formation for anyone interested. Back to the point, Molesworth says: "That the success of ASFS is due to your own indefatigable efforts is realised by all. Though you tend to be a stormy petrel, you are undeniably a keen organiser and an inspiring secretary to the many new fnas coming to light." Hmm! Mutual admiration society?

"You have done the right thing in suspending Courier and bringing out Stopgap regularly. A printed magazine, like Woomera, is a slow, painstaking job. To spread news quickly, to keep fans in touch, you must use the roneo." For those who came in late, when ASFS began I published several issues of a small printed maglet. What Molesworth says is true, and then some. It was a lot of work, cost dough, and was never on time or up to date with its news.

"May I make two suggestions?" You may. "Firstly, do not change your policy of editorial omnipotence. Write the whole 8 or 12 pages yourself, in your own interesting literary style. You have a phenomenal knowledge of science fiction and fan activities, stretching way back to the early 'thirties, and (regrettably) you are almost alone in your interest in fan publications. Perhaps the one element lacking in most of our new fans is the most important element that goes to make up a fan -- an interest in, participation in, fan activities. It is not enough to meet... Your function, as I see it, is that of a mentor, a guide through unfamiliar terrain... So refrain from seeking contributed matter." Can't agree. Much as I enjoy blowing my own trumpet, it doesn't get us much participation if I refuse to use other fans' stuff. Not that there's room for much, but the reason I quote letters and other stuff is to bring in some feeling that it's not just a one man show.

"Secondly, imitate the basic wage and put up



ASFS dues to 10/6 a year. This will finance a copy of Stopgap each month. This we need to keep going the present renaissance." See p. 34. Such an increase wouldn't be justified, I feel.

"It is an immense pleasure to observe the present state of Australian fandom. Although the 'ban'--" on magazine imports from the U.S.A. that is "-- continues, now nearly twelve years old, the Futurian Society of Sydney is solidly re-established; ASFS has 70 members; the Australian Fantasy Foundation is running like clockwork; two dozen or more fans are rolling up on Thursday nights; we have three regular fanzines; and -- may I modestly add -- our own publishing company."

"I think it's time you took a Tucker census to determine the age-groups, sex, occupation, best liked magazine, etc, to give us a picture of that increasingly valuable specimen, the average Australian fan. And seeing that we now have members in New Zealand, should not 'Australian' be changed to 'Australasian' or, more embracing, 'Southern Cross Fantasy Society'?" I'd prefer to keep to 'Science Fiction' personally. As for the location, I don't know. Have members any strong feelings? If we made it "Southern Cross" it would logically invite members from South Africa and Argentina -- perhaps rather beyond our scope at present. In fact, no perhaps about it! I've enough to handle in this corner of things, though certainly there are other fans who might be benefited.

R. Douglas Nicholson writes in suggesting points the Convention should take up: "Means to circumvent... the Government's determination to prevent the entry of U.S. science fiction should be considered, and reciprocal arrangements between fans to share available

material could be made. My modest library of about 30 books and 150-200 magazines is open to anyone prepared to lend me book for book or give a reasonable guarantee of good faith." This the true spirit of fandom.

A point should however be clarified. It is not the case that the Australian authorities are anxious to keep stf out of the country. It is true that they are unsympathetic and unco-operative, and from time to time as policy or individual discretion prompted have often seized incoming material -- and there is no come-back. But they are far harder on Detective magazines and pulps in general, not to mention comics. And there are numerous publications that are actually banned, not prohibited imports as stf magazines are.

The position is that many years ago a tendency developed for non-dollar countries to find themselves deeply indebted to America and unable to pay. During the war Australia, and the whole British Empire, fell into this position. Since 1940, therefore, the governments concerned, including ours, have tried to cut down as far as possible any buying from America, attempting to save what credit may remain, while trying to get more dollars by various means. American books and magazines were cut off for this reason.

Now, if an American makes you a present of some magazines, that's all right. But you aren't allowed to pay him. Customs officials are paid to suspect peoples' motives, and in this case they suspect that you are somehow paying for the stuff, and thus letting a few dollars out of the country. If they really persued the matter, probably nothing short of absolutely unreturned gifts would be legal. In practice it is possible to exchange something printed over here (for instance) for what you want.

But in any case, the restrictions in England are

less severe, and you can get anything you wish from British agents who import a small quantity of stf. See list, below.

Australian Fantasy Foundation, mentioned back there, is a library of stf established by the Futurian Society of Sydney several years ago, and maintained independently for the benefit of interested fans. It is run along regular circulating library lines. The Librarian is Ian Driscoll, of 247 Forbes St, East Sydney.

I quote:

"What ever happened to the tentacle crowd? Time was when the stf fan could depend on meeting one or more of these hellish creatures in every issue of a science fiction magazine. Usually they came from outside the solar system and their science was far superior to that of Earth. They could always be distinguished by their tentacles. They had one or more of these appendages, perhaps as many as ten or twenty. This enabled them to do a number of things at once -- they never seemed to be right-tentacled or left-tentacled as humans are right-handed or left-handed.

"For example, one tentacle could drive the spaceship; another could summon help from other members of the crowd; one tentacle could flick tobacco specks from one eye that was filled with tobacco specks blown there by our hero, George, to confuse the tentacled one; the other three or four tentacles could be used to restrain George, who was doing his best to save us. You can see the advantage that such a being would have.

"In spite of this advantage, George usually won out. Few tentacled ones ever got to first base.

Our boys usually came up with some gimmick that wiped them out.

"But just lately, none of this horrible bunch has been near the solar system. Our boys have been fighting among themselves. The villains have been our boys gone wrong. And you can get that in Dick Tracy. I sort of miss the tentacled ones and the narrow escapes."

-- T.E.Watkins, in Futurist Spr.'50

British Science Fiction Dealers:

Milcross Book Service, 205 Brownlow Hill, Liverpool 3  
England. (Formerly Science-Fantasy Service) New and  
second hand books and magazines.

Fantasy Book Service, 25 Stoke Newington Rd,  
(and magazines) London N 16. (Agent for Gnome  
Press.) New and second hand book

E.J.Carnell, 17 Burwash Rd, Plumstead, London SE 18.  
Agent for Fantasy Press, Prime Press, Fantasy Pub.  
Co., Shasta, Grandon. Books only.

G.K.Chapman, 23 Farnley Rd, South Norwood, London  
SE 25. Agent for Arkham House. Books only.

Dell's, 209/211 Kirkgate Market, Bradford, Yorks,  
England. Books and magazines.

Operation Fantast: a title that covers various fan  
activities, especially the fan magazine of that name  
and subsidiary publications. One activity is the  
trading bureau, which can supply magazines. the oper-  
ator is Captain K.F.Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C., B.A.O.R:  
15, C/- G.P.O. England.