

SCANSION. S_F. NEWS SHEET.

Thursday . January 27. 1955.

No. 23.

In this issue I intend to depart somewhat from the general editorial policy by attacking everyone, instead of confining my attack to one or two individuals.

I say that science fiction fandom has had its day, it has lost its crusading appeal, it has remained unchanged while it has changed other things (like Allah).

In the early days, science fiction was sniggered at in intellectual circles and laughed at by the proles. This gave science fiction fans a feeling of being able to see in a world of blind people, or to describe the feeling in Plato's terms;

A group of people are living in a cave and can see the shadows of things happening outside the cave reflected on a wall. They have spent all their lives trying to ascertain the nature of the outside world from a detailed study of the shadows. The science fiction fan is one who turns around and gazes directly at the outside world and sees the real nature immediately. He then turns around to his fellow men and tells them what he has seen and is thereupon sniggered at or laughed at depending on the group he addresses.

This then was the feeling of the science fiction fan of old. The literature was difficult to obtain, I remember with nostalgia the intense elation that was produced in me by the sight of a stack of prewar "Amazings" or "Astounding" in a second-hand book store after pedalling a push bike around the district after school. When I was laughed at for being a Buck Rogers fanatic, I could smile inwardly to myself thinking "none are so blind as those who will not see".

This was the spirit of science fiction at its height. Then . . . bang, the "only fan in Australia" discovered he was not the only fan. The First Australian Science Fiction Convention. Fans everywhere, magazines everywhere, This would have been wonderful had it been five years earlier, because since about a year previous to this there had been an increasing amount of "science fiction" appearing on the news stands.

At first this was most welcome after the previous difficulty in obtaining it. But in all these magazines I could vaguely realise that something was lacking. It had something unsatisfying about it, it left me feeling slightly frustrated. The warmth and individuality that so greatly endeared one to prewar Stf. just was not there. It was only very occasionally that one was really able to identify himself with the hero. At first I was completely in the dark as to how to explain this. Then awareness dawned--science fiction had become popular. Thus as I have said, the First Australian Science Fiction Convention was five years too late. At the time of course, this was not obvious, it seemed imperative to join a fan club and receive fan magazines, to discuss old mags with people equally informative about them. Then comes the rather rude awakening that almost every Tom, Dick and Harry has read, or at least heard of science fiction. At first---

"Science fiction fandom is achieving its aim, it is bringing itself to the general public - oh; rapture."

I am tempted at this point to write an obscenity, but I shall refrain.

In bringing itself to the public what has it achieved? Degredation, degeneracy, loss of spirit, unfavourable criticism, popularisation etc. etc. With the exception of four people, all the old time fans have been browned off and have dropped away. Half of those who came in around the 1st Convention have dropped off; one well known ex fan said only a few weeks ago "Science fiction fans are people who, when one sees coming, he immediately ducks around a corner and hides until they are gone."

Why? It is not because these people don't like the literature any more (there is still one respectable magazine left.) It is not because they don't like associating with people of similar interests. It is for this reason - science fiction fans have brought SF to the public, therefore it has achieved its aim, therefore there is no longer any need for fan clubs and club rooms, therefore there is something wrong with people who still try to organise these things, therefore avoid them - they bite.

I am not advocating that fans should cease meeting, talking and drinking together, but I am advocating the complete dissolution of all fan clubs and clubrooms and the return of the coffee shop era. We could occasionally have someone get a letter published in "Astounding" this would enable any "only fan in Australia" to meet people who can talk about science fiction stories and not about science fiction organisation. This would probably result in most of the "browned offs" being seen again.

If "Astounding" was the only magazine on the market and science fiction wasn't publically known, literary critics would probably speak much more favourably on the field. I recently read an editorial in the scientific magazine "Endeavour" which unfavourably criticised science fiction. If the editor had restricted his reading to "Astounding" I think the criticism would have been much more favourable. He probably read a cross section of magazines and since "Astounding" is outnumbered by about thirty, is it any wonder that he was not impressed?

I can see a rather subtle incompatibility between my two arguements, but the ideal is mine anyway.

Incidentally, I can remember round the time of the formation of the Bridge Club Group some enthusiastic talk about an "Ivory Tower". Have the trees obstructed the view of the forest.

I must extend my congratulations and greatest well wishes to Loralie and Bluey. I hope their marriage is all bliss and sunshine and I really think it will be. Another thing I've heard is that they have moved back to Sydney. Hoorah.

Well I hope that I've thoroughly annoyed everyone.

Edited and Published by..... John C. D. Earls
207 Victoria Street,
Kings Cross.

Have YOU auction material for the Fourth Convention?