July 2006

Mumblings from Munchkinland

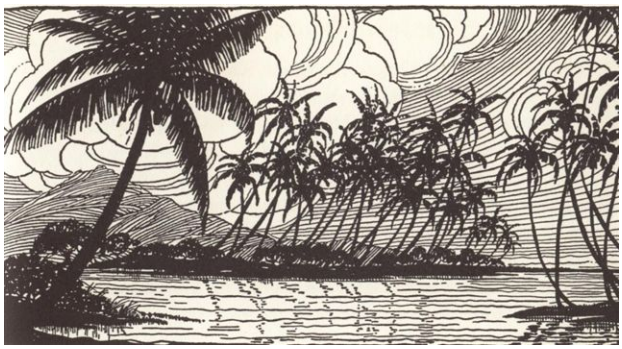
23

Mumblings from Munchkinland – the only West Australian fanzine published in Fiji – returns!

VISIONS OF THE PACIFIC

1: CHAOS IN KIRIBATI

Hear "South Pacific" and the first scene that enters your head is probably one of gently swaying palm trees overhanging clean, white sandy beaches. If you're of a certain age, however, the beaches may be stained in blood. In 2003 I visited the site of one of the most vicious battles of World War II. Here's how it came to be (both the battle and the visit)…



Terowie, South Australia, March 1942

As the Japanese invasion of the Philippines nears its end, President Franklin Roosevelt orders the Commander of Allied forces in the islands, General Douglas MacArthur, to evacuate and set up headquarters in Australia. Switching rail gauges in a small town north of Adelaide, he makes the speech that includes his famous vow to the Philippine people, "I shall return."

Alafua, Samoa, February 2003

The Director of IRETA (USP's Institute of Research, Extension and Training in Agriculture) calls to ask if I'm available to help organize the information management workshop he has planned for July. I'm interested, but I've heard a rumour that he's going to be travelling for much of the period before the workshop, so agreeing to "help" might commit me to a lot more work than I have time for at present. "I'll get back to you on that," I say.

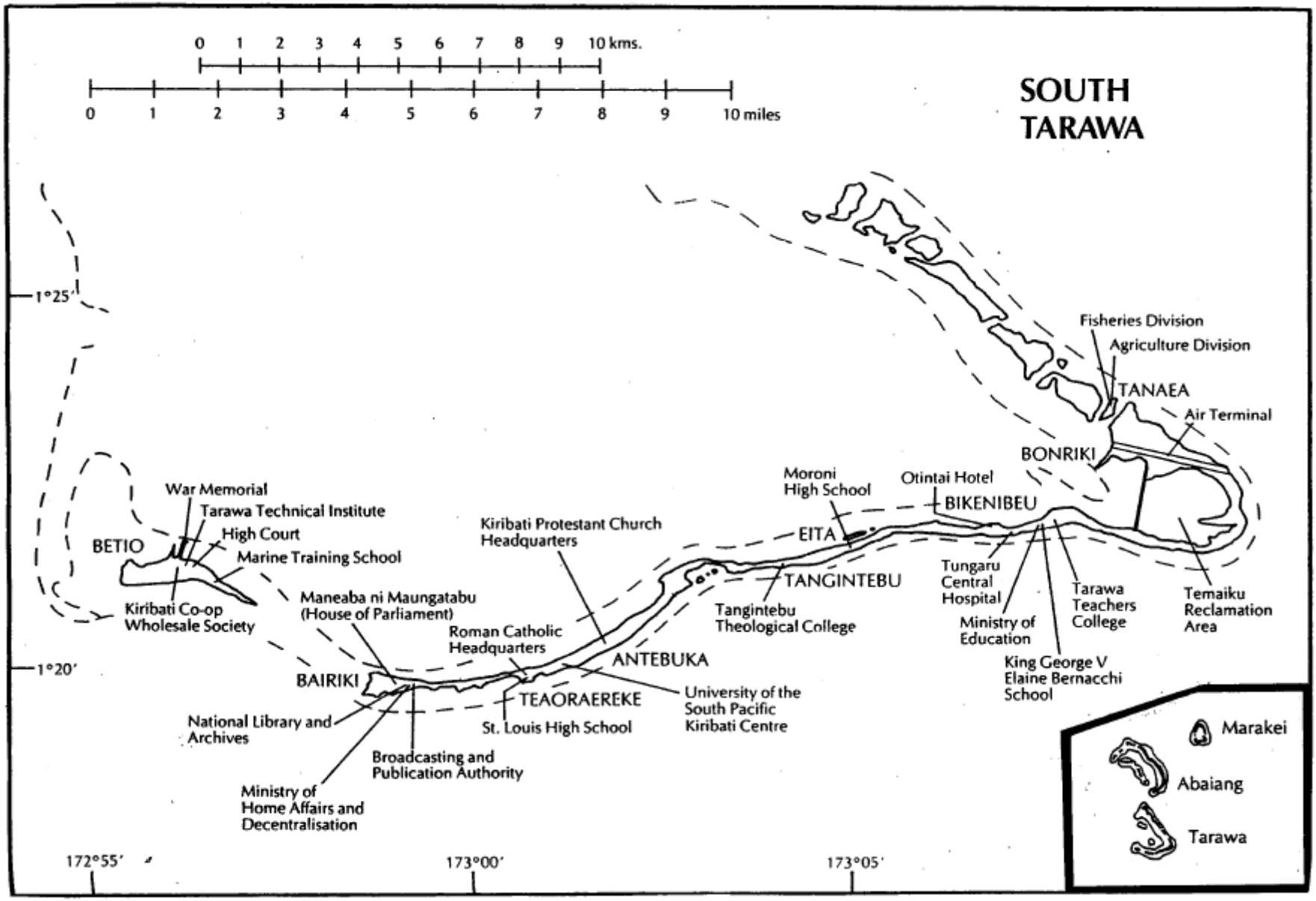
Washington, D.C., May 1943

The Japanese advance in the Pacific having been halted by the Battles of the Coral Sea, Midway and Guadalcanal, the Allied Joint Chiefs of Staff meet to debate their counter-offensive strategy. MacArthur argues for a single push back through the Solomons and Papua New Guinea, being impatient for his return to the Philippines. The Joint Chiefs instead decide upon twin campaigns, island-hopping across the Central and Southwest Pacific. The recapture of the Gilbert Islands, held by the Japanese since 1941, is their first goal in the Central Pacific. It will prove to be a far more difficult and costly task than they imagine.

Alafua, Samoa, May 2003

The workshop organizing committee meets to discuss progress. This is becoming frustrating, as the person appointed by the Director to head the committee in his absence has himself been absent or late to most of our meetings. He is an evangelical preacher and faith healer, so we have little in common, but more to the point, important decisions are not being made. Now a fax from the Director lobs a grenade in our laps: He has decided to hold the workshop in Kiribati rather than at Alafua. Susana, the only one among us who has been to Kiribati, is stunned. We have been planning to use the recently upgraded computer lab at USP Alafua to conduct a hands-on workshop for the dozen participants; Sue warns that conditions at the USP Centre in Kiribati are much more primitive. We send an urgent reply to the Director recommending a rethink of the venue change or a postponement to give us time to ascertain exactly what facilities we will have to work with. Not for the first time, I begin to wonder what I've gotten myself into. The meeting breaks up. I return to the library and look for an atlas to find out where Kiribati is.

If that would be your reaction, too, the maps opposite might help.


SOUTH TARAWA
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 kms.
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 miles
1°25'
1°20'
172°55'
173°00'
173°05'
BETIO
War Memorial
Tarawa Technical Institute
High Court
Marine Training School
Kiribati Co-op Wholesale Society
Maneaba ni Maungatabu (House of Parliament)
BAIRIKI
National Library and Archives
Ministry of Home Affairs and Decentralisation
Broadcasting and Publication Authority
Roman Catholic Headquarters
Kiribati Protestant Church Headquarters
ANTEBUKA
TEAORAEREKE
St. Louis High School
University of the South Pacific Kiribati Centre
TANGINTEBU
Tangintebu Theological College
EITA
Moroni High School
Otintai Hotel
BIKENIBEU
Tungaru Central Hospital
Ministry of Education
King George V Elaine Bernacchi School
Tarawa Teachers College
BONRIKI
Temaiku Reclamation Area
Air Terminal
TANAEA
Fisheries Division
Agriculture Division
Marakei
Abaiang
Tarawa

My research reveals that the Republic of Kiribati consists of less than 35 low-lying coral atolls and one volcanic isle straddling both the equator and the international dateline. Its total land mass of 811 km^2 is distributed across more than 2 million km^2 of Pacific Ocean. The islands were first settled during the eastward migration of early seafarers between 3,000 and 1,000 BC. Much later, they became British protectorates -- the Gilbert, Ellice, Phoenix and Line Islands, most of which were occupied by the Japanese during the Second World War. In the 1970s the islands were divided up again as the independent nations of Tuvalu and Kiribati.

I didn't know much of this to start with. When I mention to my dad that I am going to Kiribati for a workshop, it means nothing to him, either. When I tell him the name of the island I'll be staying on, though, his reaction is instantaneous. "Tarawa! That name, I know," he says.

Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 1943

It is one of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific Campaign. Tarawa is heavily defended by units of Japan's Naval Landing Force, the well-trained equivalent of the US Marines. They are protected in bunkers and pillboxes of thick concrete, surrounded by mines and barbed wire. The Americans outnumber them two to one, however, and are confident of victory.

The American attack begins before dawn on November 20th with a naval and air bombardment that many feel will leave few Japanese alive. Betio, where the assault is concentrated, is soon aglow from raging fires. Marines waiting in Higgins landing craft just outside the fringing reef cheer at this sight, but their joy will be short-lived. The bombings have been inaccurate and too short – called off as smoke obscures the first Marine advance, in amphibious tractors (amtraks). These are too lightly armoured for the heavy and accurate fire which greets them and only one of every three will survive the battle.

American planning has also been poor, including a miscalculation of the depth of water over the reef. As the Higgins boats move in, they ground on the coral ledge and come under fire from shore artillery and a Japanese seaplane. The vast majority of Marines are forced to jump into the water and wade over 600 metres to shore through sharp coral, under constant enemy fire. Less than half of the men in the early waves reach the beaches alive. Some drown as soon as they jump from the landing craft, weighed down by their ammunition belts. Others lose rifles or equipment in the water. Those Marines that do make it onto the beaches find themselves pinned down, the bodies of their comrades bobbing gently in the water behind them.

Tarawa, Kiribati, July 2003

The IRETA Director and his crack team of workshop organizers rendezvous successfully with most of the eager young workshop participants in Nadi. They are drawn from nations all over the Pacific, but two have missed connecting flights – our first casualties. A few hours later, as our plane approaches Bonriki Airport, we reconnoitre the long, roughly V-shaped ribbon of sand that is Tarawa, bounded by dark ocean blue on one side and beautiful aqua shades of the lagoon on the other. Our landing is neither bloody nor fatal, though several of us are initially repulsed by Kiribati ground forces. Our intelligence on visa requirements has been flawed and Immigration officials deny access to the PNG, Palau and Australian nationals. This obstacle is overcome only after an interminably long discussion followed by a quick exchange of Aussie dollars – the official currency of Kiribati, ironically.

Mini-buses transport us around the atoll to our hotel, the Otentaii. We learn that in Kiribati (as in Fiji and other places of the Pacific) early missionaries allocated letters of the English alphabet to unique sounds of the local language with little regard for logic. Kiribati is spoken as "Keer-ee-bas" and our hotel name is pronounced as if trying to say "Oceanside" after too many beers. Its founder may have had one too many, too, for his hotel sits on the lagoon rather than the ocean. Then again, perhaps he just had a sense of humour. We quickly discover that it helps to have one when staying at the Otentaii, for hotel staff turn off the water from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm every day. We become adept at washing our clothes quickly before going for breakfast.

In truth, water restrictions are a feature of life on Tarawa. Rapid population growth has created a greater demand for the resource than the thin lens of freshwater beneath the surface of the atoll can supply. Rising sea levels can only hasten the infiltration of the lens by seawater. Publicity in the media about high tides here and on other low-lying Pacific nations have created an image of atoll populations having to flee as ocean waves crash over and submerge their homelands. It's more likely the islands will be uninhabitable before this occurs, as their potable water becomes contaminated by the sea. We see numerous water tanks going up, but are told that rainfall has not been as heavy as in the past.

The gorgeous, beckoning lagoon is also unsafe to swim in, we are warned -- dashing our hopes of a refreshing daily dip after toiling over a hot workshop. "Why's that?" someone asks, peering out over the azure waters. "Sharks?" No, H.G. Wells would be proud, for the monsters in the lagoon are much smaller - coeliform bacteria, from human and animal wastes. Normal tidal flushing of the lagoon has been reduced by a poorly-designed concrete causeway linking Betio with Bairiki, built with (you guessed it) Japanese aid. And the sea side of the island is little better, still serving as the toilet, quite literally, for much of the population. We find no bodies floating in on the surf, but plenty of turds and disposable nappies.

Inland, piles of trash are not uncommon. Though the nation spans a huge area, only a tiny bit of it is dry land and the I-Kiribati live on just a fraction of that, mostly Tarawa. Betio, the islet that so many men died fighting over, is now the urban capital, with a population density comparable to Singapore. Add to this their desire to adopt Western foods and products and you'll realise that all of these people create plenty of rubbish that they have to bury, burn, pile up or dump in the ocean – just as we do in the "developed world". It's striking how much more obvious the consequences of these actions are when one is standing on a narrow strip of sand, surrounded by a vast ocean.

However, I digress. The Regional Workshop on Agricultural Information and Communication Management in the Pacific is why my colleagues and I are in Kiribati. The venue for this grandly titled exercise is the USP Centre near Bairiki, about a twenty minute drive from the hotel. Sia, our IT wizard, and I are keen to check out the computer facilities at the Centre. We have planned to stun the participants with an intensive multimedia barrage supported by rapid-fire Powerpoint presentations and live Internet demonstrations.

We are relieved to find a dozen PCs in working order. Relieved and astonished, frankly. The lab is small and crowded, tacked on to an adjoining building by a low corrugated iron roof, so the room heats rapidly in the tropical sun. In a move to alleviate the heat, students open windows to catch any breeze, but this of course carries salt spray and wind-blown sand into the lab to settle on (and in) the computers. Not surprisingly, many of the PC floppy drives don't work. Internet connections are intermittent and slow, neutralizing a key strategy of our training sessions. Centre IT staff advise they can't load the software I want to use on their server, forcing me to install it individually on every PC (a violation of the licence, but a justifiable one under the circumstances, I rationalize). All of this necessitates a fast rethink of the workshop programme, a fact not lost on the participants. Our backs to the wall, we muddle through Day 1 and retire to the Otentaii bar for some liquid reinforcement.

Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 1943

Intense fighting continues on the second day. A dawn wave of Marines results in only 450 of 800 getting to the beach. As the tide rises, however, the Americans are able to land tanks on shore and these begin to turn the tide of battle against the Japanese. Enemy bunkers and machine gun posts are steadily hit and destroyed. The Marines reinforce their beachhead, advance inland and capture the airfield.

Tarawa, Kiribati, July 2003

The grueling workshop grinds on. Sia scores a major hit by disassembling a PC to explain how it works, but the tedious routine is clearly taking its toll on participants and presenters alike. We are all glad for an opportunity to take a break to enjoy some entertainment. A dinner has been arranged by the local Minister of Agriculture (whose brother just happens to be one of the USP lecturers at Alafua; I suspect the dinner is part of the payoff for holding the workshop in Kiribati).

The dinner is accompanied by a performance of local dancers in traditional costumes. These are absolutely stunning, made up of woven pandanus leaves, flowers, seeds and other native materials. The dancers are all easy on the eye, too, and their intricate hand and feet movements impress even the skilled Tongan and Samoan ladies in our workshop group.

[continued on p.14]

INSPIRATIONS AND WORKS

For my last birthday I received two surprises from my brother Tim.

One was a DVD set of the complete first season of *The Outer Limits*, the 60s sf television series. As readers with good memories will recall, my ten-year-old self claimed this was his favourite tv show in the booklet I summarized in issue 21. So it has been interesting and instructive to watch these episodes "again". Apart from "The Galaxy Being" pilot starring Cliff Robertson, none of them have triggered the faintest recognition.

The second surprise was even more personal and astonishing, a gorgeous dose of egoboo created by Tim that I decided to share with you in the centerfold of this issue. As the title of this colourful collage suggests, it illustrates many of the works which inspired my early interest in sf, on a background composed of my own "works", the first twenty-two issues of this zine. (Of course he is already on notice that he'll have to do a companion piece after I publish issue 44.)

Many of the works depicted will be familiar to most of you, but I include here excerpts of Tim's explanatory memorandum for a few that will be a little obscure, along with my own comments.

"To the right we find *A Good Knight for Dragons* (your birthday present from Mr & Mrs V.H. Koch [our maternal grandparents] in 1970, plus *Dr Seuss' Sleep Book*, another early favourite."

"Just to establish (for the record) that *Mumblings* was not your first foray into the world of publishing, I have included the fourth and final issue of *Baby Comics* from May 1974. Featuring "Baby Mystery vs. the Martians" this classic comic is still fondly remembered by its legion of readers (moreover, with only one copy each of the entire run in existence, this could well be the rarest comic in the world!)"

The "legion of fans" was of course only Tim – I recall doing these tiny imitations of comic books for him when we lived in a small town on the Murray River for a short time before we moved to W.A. We were both fascinated by the Golden Age superhero origin stories that Jules Ffeifer reproduced in his book *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (thanks, Dad!). And we were both young enough to be oblivious to how atrocious my drawings were -- our sister Nancy inherited all of the artistic genes in our generation. Why the characters were all *baby* superheroes I don't recall, but I've observed that Ella, Lauren and Ruby all find babies cute or funny when they watch videos or tv programmes, so I guess kids have a natural empathy for babies up to a certain age. (I have asked Tim if it is possible to scan any of these venerable works and, if so, I may inflict some of them upon you in a later issue.)

"Bottom centre, meanwhile, is occupied by the legendary space hero, Duck Dodgers. Remember when we went to one of the sf movie festivals at WAIT [Western Australian Institute of Technology, now Curtin University] to watch a collection of tv episodes and cartoons including Duck Dodgers? And how there was a woman who brought her little kiddies along for an afternoon treat? And how one of the kiddies started screaming bloody blue murder when some horrible creature appeared on an episode of *The Outer Limits* and scared the crap out of him? And how the mother went absolutely ballistic at the staff because no one had explained to her that *Duck Dodgers in the 24th and a Half Century* wasn't a full-length movie, but only a 5 minute cartoon? Hot damn!"

Yep, those were the days!


Galaxy
AMAZING
AMAZING STORIES
H. G. WELLS
THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON
Famous FANTASTIC Mumblings
Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries
CREEP, SHADOW!
RAY BRADBURY
FAHRENHEIT 451
PLANET MUMBLINGS
FROM MUNCHKINLAND
asimov
FOUNDATION
asimov
Second Foundation
asimov
FOUNDATION AND EMPIRE
AIR WONDER MUMBLINGS
Astounding
MUMBLINGS FROM MUNCHKINLAND 16
Munchkinland 13
15
MONSTERS ON THE PROWL
WHERE CREATURES ROAM
VANDOOM!
BAD COMPANY
THUNDERBIRDS
Authentic
MUMBLINGS FROM MUNCHKINLAND
FORBIDDEN PLANET
WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE
THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL
THE OUTER LIMITS
The TWILIGHT ZONE
OTHER WORLDS
MUMBLINGS from LAND
21
Astounding
SCIENCE FICTION
DICK DODGERS in the 24th CENTURY
inspirations and works

CAMOUFLAGE

"Russ…you were fucking an alien from another planet. That's probably illegal in Samoa."

I awaited Joe Haldeman's novel *Sea Change* with much anticipation. *Not* because I expected to be acknowledged as Joe and Gay's "guide through the alien world of Samoa" – that was a true surprise and, truly, undeserved. As readers of *Mumblings* would know, my main contribution to their stays in Samoa in 2002 was to arrive to take them to the airport 12 hours *after* their flight to New Zealand had departed. Some guide! (However, it's in print now so I guess I'll just have to live with it. Many thanks, Joe!)

My particular interest in *this* Haldeman novel was of course to see what he would make of Samoa since he had dropped a number of hints about the storyline when he was there. Not all of these survived to the final draft -- it pleased me that Apia was not obliterated by a nuclear blast, for example – but then neither did the working title. Apparently on marketing advice, the book was serialized in *Analog* and published by Ace as *Camouflage.* The change certainly hasn't affected the book's critical reception; it has again gained Joe the highest acclaim of his peers, a Nebula Award, as well as a James Tiptree, Jr. Award, which recognizes works that explore gender roles.

The basic premise of *Camouflage* is an intriguing one: What would life be like if it managed to evolve in an extremely hostile environment: a planet in an unstable orbit around a star within a globular cluster, subject to constant "ferocious geological and climatic changes"? Joe's answer: very tough and very adaptable, able to change itself at will, in fact, and effectively immortal. We learn this much in the short prologue. The dramatic question the book really explores, however, is: What might such a creature learn from we comparatively frail and transient Earthlings?

Well, lots about sex and violence, when it finally takes human form – it spends a million years as anaerobic bacteria first, then many millennia as a great white shark and a few other species before venturing out of the ocean. Unfortunately, over this time, it has also forgotten how it came to be on Earth, though it retains a curiosity for the sea, especially an area of the deep Tonga-Kermadec Trench where its spaceship lies. The chapters then alternate between following the alien in its various human (and other) forms, from 1931 on, and a team of humans (and other!) who discover and raise its vessel from the deeps in 2019.

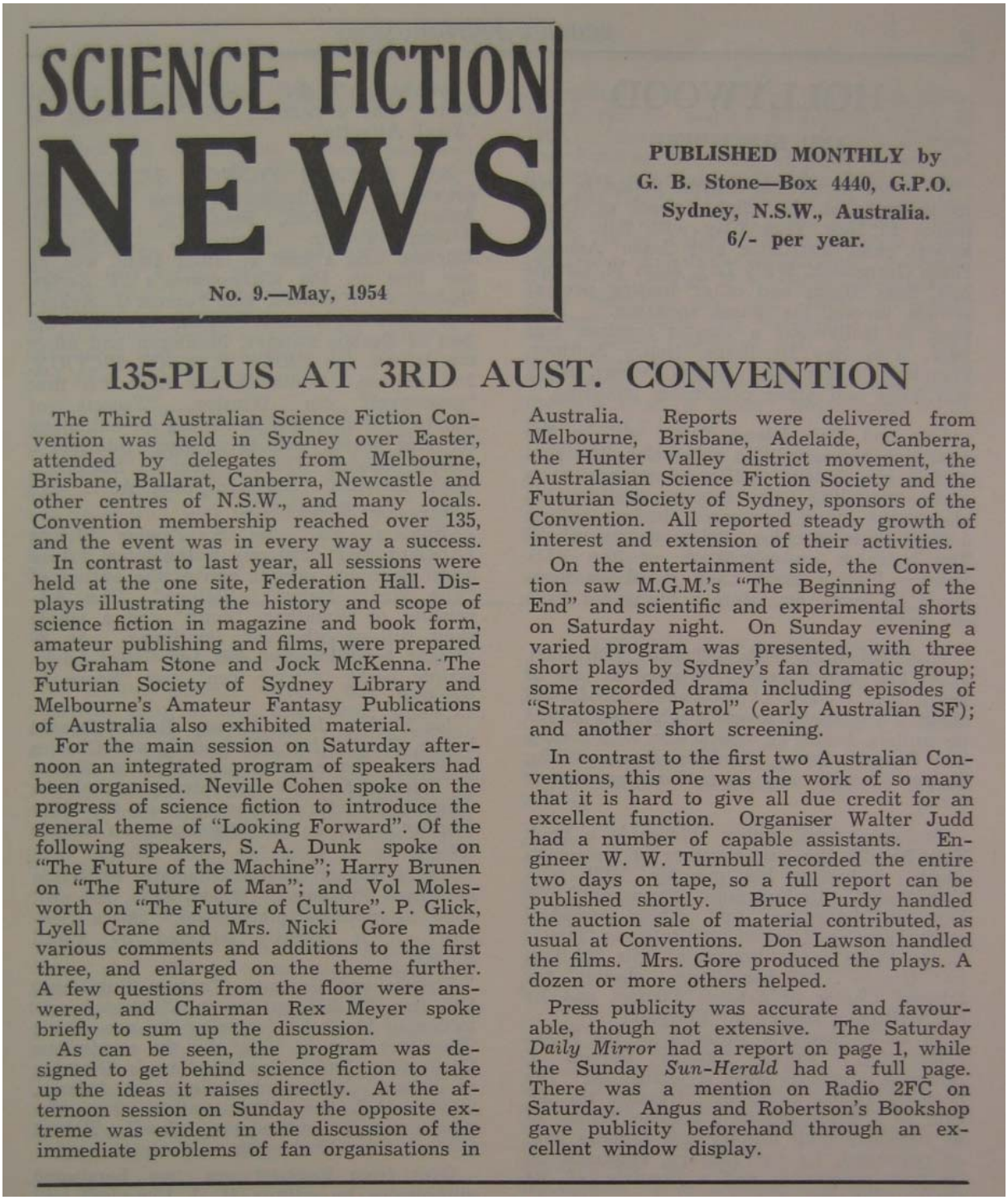
The "other" here is a second alien (different from the first, but also tough and immortal) and its early introduction (p.65) suggests comparisons with Hal Clement's classic *Needle*. Joe, however, is more interested in placing his aliens into situations which demand our consideration of how we humans treat each other, raising issues of gender, sexuality, evil and love. The awards mentioned above prove how effectively he achieves this. The climax which brings together the two aliens is rather rushed compared to the preceding chapters, but leaves open the possibility of a sequel – if Joe feels there is more on these or other issues to explore, perhaps on the aliens' worlds.

Regarding Samoan aspects of *Camouflage*, Joe's depiction rings true; it is essentially the Samoa of 2004 and I'd agree that the country is unlikely to undergo any dramatic changes in the next 15 years. I spotted one error, in the description of roads the alien travels to reach Faleolo Airport (p.222), but can understand this. I made the same mistake for several weeks after we'd settled in Apia. (Take the route described and you'll end up on Mulinu'u Penisula, passing the Fale Fono.) I'd be curious to know what the sub-plot Joe mentioned in his diary was to be, but the references to Sails, Bad Billy's, the Clock Tower and other Apia landmarks were all great fun to recognize.

Camouflage was a thoroughly enjoyable novel on many levels and I highly recommend it.

NEWSFLASH -- THE 3rd AUSTRALIAN SF CONVENTION

Here's an indigenous, contemporary report of the 1954 national convention.



SCIENCE FICTION NEWS

No. 9.—May, 1954

PUBLISHED MONTHLY by G. B. Stone—Box 4440, G.P.O. Sydney, N.S.W., Australia. 6/- per year.

135-PLUS AT 3RD AUST. CONVENTION

The Third Australian Science Fiction Convention was held in Sydney over Easter, attended by delegates from Melbourne, Brisbane, Ballarat, Canberra, Newcastle and other centres of N.S.W., and many locals. Convention membership reached over 135, and the event was in every way a success.

In contrast to last year, all sessions were held at the one site, Federation Hall. Displays illustrating the history and scope of science fiction in magazine and book form, amateur publishing and films, were prepared by Graham Stone and Jock McKenna. The Futurian Society of Sydney Library and Melbourne's Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia also exhibited material.

For the main session on Saturday afternoon an integrated program of speakers had been organised. Neville Cohen spoke on the progress of science fiction to introduce the general theme of "Looking Forward". Of the following speakers, S. A. Dunk spoke on "The Future of the Machine"; Harry Brunen on "The Future of Man"; and Vol Molesworth on "The Future of Culture". P. Glick, Lyell Crane and Mrs. Nicki Gore made various comments and additions to the first three, and enlarged on the theme further. A few questions from the floor were answered, and Chairman Rex Meyer spoke briefly to sum up the discussion.

As can be seen, the program was designed to get behind science fiction to take up the ideas it raises directly. At the afternoon session on Sunday the opposite extreme was evident in the discussion of the immediate problems of fan organisations in Australia. Reports were delivered from Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Canberra, the Hunter Valley district movement, the Australasian Science Fiction Society and the Futurian Society of Sydney, sponsors of the Convention. All reported steady growth of interest and extension of their activities.

On the entertainment side, the Convention saw M.G.M.'s "The Beginning of the End" and scientific and experimental shorts on Saturday night. On Sunday evening a varied program was presented, with three short plays by Sydney's fan dramatic group; some recorded drama including episodes of "Stratosphere Patrol" (early Australian SF); and another short screening.

In contrast to the first two Australian Conventions, this one was the work of so many that it is hard to give all due credit for an excellent function. Organiser Walter Judd had a number of capable assistants. Engineer W. W. Turnbull recorded the entire two days on tape, so a full report can be published shortly. Bruce Purdy handled the auction sale of material contributed, as usual at Conventions. Don Lawson handled the films. Mrs. Gore produced the plays. A dozen or more others helped.

Press publicity was accurate and favourable, though not extensive. The Saturday *Daily Mirror* had a report on page 1, while the Sunday *Sun-Herald* had a full page. There was a mention on Radio 2FC on Saturday. Angus and Robertson's Bookshop gave publicity beforehand through an excellent window display.

Readers outside of fandom may have been perplexed by a contradiction: "the immediate problems of fan organisations in Australia" that "all reported steady growth". In fact, a major rift had occurred in Sydney. Just a fortnight before the con, a group had broken away from the Futurian Society of Sydney and started meeting at the Sydney Bridge Club, their room costs supported by Dave Cohen's commercial activities. Meanwhile, the FSS had already been experiencing low attendances (apart from a few meetings, notably Robert A. Heinlein's visit in February) and rent deficits. This report conspicuously makes no mention of either the North Shore Futurian Society, or the vote at the con's business session that gave it responsibility for organizing the 1955 convention. NSFS members were largely aligned with the Bridge Club group.

VALE

Stirling (Bill) Macoboy (1927-2005): Bill Macoboy was best known for his voluminous writings on gardening, particularly the series of books which began with *What Flower is That?* in 1969, but he also holds a place in fan history. Born in Victoria, raised in Tasmania and schooled in Melbourne, Bill was introduced to the joys of gardening by a grandfather. (It ran in the family – a great-grandfather who was a nurseryman in Scotland migrated to Australia in 1850.) Bill was also a keen photographer from an early age and he combined both interests when he began snapping photos of flowers as the age of 8.

The family moved to Sydney when he was in high school and it was here that he joined the Futurian Society of Sydney in 1944 (just before its activities were put on hold). He became a very active member after the war, contributing artwork and writings to the group's fan magazines, as well as producing several LP records of greetings from Sydney fans to the 8th Worldcon in Oregon in 1950. Professionally, he was a member of the Lux Radio Theatre, adapting plays for radio broadcast. A few years later he left Oz to study television production in the US -- working with, among others, Rod Serling. Returning to Australia in the mid-50s he was one of the early pioneers of the tv industry here, eventually moving into advertising.

He always maintained his early interests, however, and began contributing flower photographs to *The Women's Weekly* on a freelance basis. This led to many articles and then *What Flower is That?*, his first book, which was heavily illustrated with his own photographs. The popularity of this was followed up with *What Tree is That?* and many other titles. He became the gardening editor of *Better Homes & Gardens* in the late 1970s and loved showing visitors around the garden of his own home in Neutral Bay, an old whaler's cottage. For his health he moved to the warmer clime of Coffs Harbour in 2004 (not far from Arthur Haddon's house, unbeknownst to either).

I visited Bill several times in the late 1990s hoping to record more about his Futurian activities. He was jovial but frustrated at being unable to answer my questions in any depth due to the onset of tremors associated with Parkinson's Disease.

Farewell, Bill! If there is a God in Heaven, I suspect you're giving him gardening advice.

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Eric Russell (died October 2004) and his brother Edward (Ted) were even earlier Futurians. His name became the better known, in part because he shared it with the English sf writer, Eric Frank Russell, which led to some confusion. He edited one of the more durable fanzines of the pre-war period in Australia, *Ultra*, and was active for a time after the war. Professionally, he became a freelance journalist and writer specializing in histories of Sydney suburbs.

Kevin Dillon (died September 2005) I never met, but know that he discovered fandom at the first national convention in 1952 and regularly attended Futurian meetings in Sydney. He collected with a passion – I recall Graham Stone telling me that he had so much material that his apartment floor gave way from the weight on several occasions. He left 6 garages of material but no will.

Noel Kerr (December 2005) I learned of from an ozfan-history posting by Bruce Gillespie after his death. In brief: He was a major figure in Melbourne fandom in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly a comics fan and a major supporter of the Melbourne SF Club. Noel won a Ditmar for *Somerset Gazette* in 1971 and was a founding member of Anzapa. He died on New Year's Eve.

VISIONS OF THE PACIFIC 2: TRAVELLING TO TOKELAU

by Megan Lee

In April 2004 I took some time out and headed off to Tokelau – as you do. Chris stayed home for the week and did some full-time parenting, with the invaluable help of Pua, our neighbour.

I had been harbouring the desire to travel to Tokelau for a long time. Our discovery of the music of Te Vaka (get hold of a CD) fuelled my interest. Surprisingly, Chris seemed reluctant to travel the twenty-six hour journey over the open ocean with the girls, so I set out alone for the group of three coral atolls north of Samoa. Undaunted by the knowledge of how long the trip would take, I *was* a little rattled to find there were no beds and that I should take a bedroll to sleep on deck.

The aptly-named boat sets off with Apia in the background

After I kissed everyone goodbye I boarded the ex-fishing vessel and parked my bedroll in a space on the top deck. That night I discovered that the locals knew what areas to avoid -- I got soaked. After packing up and hanging around exhausted for a while, I spied a small space between some women and children and squeezed in. No one seemed to mind and I even got some sleep.

There were at least 40 people on board with me and many of them were women and children because there had been a Tokelauan women's meeting in Apia. On my return journey I accompanied a large number of chiefs and important men who were off to a meeting about Tokelauan independence, a hugely unpopular option being offered by New Zealand. I found I was chatting to all sorts of ministers and chiefs on that journey – after the stomach-churning initial part of the trip. By the way, when travelling in very rough water you would be advised to follow the Samoans and Tokelauans by lying down the whole time. That's how we spent most of the twenty-six hours plus, otherwise the women just seemed to feed their kids chips non-stop.

I was headed for the middle atoll called Nukunonu. We arrived earlier than expected because a medical emergency meant that the boat was only stopping briefly before heading for the furthest atoll. It turned out that it arrived too late; the woman died from an ectopic pregnancy. A stark reminder of the flip side of the wonders of living on an isolated island with no air travel options.

On Nukunonu I had a great time chatting to people, hanging out and swimming. I stayed at the only accommodation offered in Tokelau. Unfortunately the delayed arrival of supplies caused by the medical emergency, combined with the chief's desire for fish to be caught and sent back on the return journey, meant that I spent a dry time there too. No beer at all. However, I did join the village men on an amazing twilight fishing trip to the mouth of the lagoon. I just invited myself and no one said no -- we were in the Pacific after all. The catch was very successful and I was even given a share, which I handed over to the couple running the guesthouse.

Another medical emergency saw me on board early in the morning of our planned departure. But even though the boat had a woman in pain plus her support team, we went nowhere for hours. It transpired that the chief wanted to catch more fish to sell in Apia, so medical emergency or not, we had to wait. We were entertained by a pod of dolphins, but otherwise we just sweated it out. The return journey was hellish, undoubtedly the lowest point of an extraordinary adventure. I recommend it to all of you with tough stomachs and a delight in wacky holiday destinations.

[continued from p.6]

Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, November 1943

On the evening of the third day of fighting, a last-ditch suicide raid by the remainder of the Japanese force is the last major action of the conflict. Demonstrating what lies in store for the rest of the Pacific campaign, they fight tenaciously. By dawn only isolated snipers and disorientated soldiers remain. After mopping up operations, the Marines tally the human cost of the battle to both sides. They have suffered 3,000 injured, including 1,100 dead. Of the 4,500 defenders of the island, only 17 are taken alive.

Tarawa, Kiribati, July 2003

By Day 4 of the workshop my role is pretty much complete, apart from digitally manipulating the group photo for the workshop to insert some participants who have gone awol. It's possible they have been driven away by the unique approach to training adopted by our workshop coordinator, the lay preacher. He exhorts them, pulpit-style, to prepare their strategic management plans in a manner consistent with the Bible (which, last time I checked, didn't actually have much to say on this topic). He rolls his head and gestures dramatically to make a point. It is so over-the-top that I have to bite my lip to stifle a giggle. A few of the participants notice this, grin and nudge each other in the ribs, making it harder for me to stop. In short order a ripple of suppressed titters is expanding across the room. The cause of our mirth remains oblivious to this, too busy channeling the Lord's energy into his sermon on information management to be aware of what is happening around him. The Director, however, is clearly unimpressed. I carefully avoid him the rest of the day. Day 5 is mainly just the wind-up and presentation of certificates to the survivors.

Finally, we have time to do some sightseeing. I talk a few people into accompanying me to the battlefields of 1943.

Tarawa guns in 1943 and 2003

Signs of the fighting are still evident on the beaches of Betio. A number of the concrete bunkers and Japanese gun emplacements look out over serene waters littered here and there with rusting bits of heavy machinery. We are told that amid the corals lie a collection of slowly deteriorating stocks of ammunition, helmets, canteens and other artifacts. Almost anywhere else in the world, this site would be a major tourist attraction, with an interpretation centre offering guided tours, glossy handbooks and media recreations of the battles. Here, there are a few staid memorials to the victims of war, bunkers filled with sand-drifts and one faded sign that mentions the war but is mostly about one of the 8" guns nearby. In another small irony, the gun was of

British origin, sold to the Japanese in 1900. (It reminds me of an American comedian's comment on George W. Bush's initial justification for the Iraq War: "We *know* they have weapons of mass destruction -- we have the receipts!")

Further up the beach, a number of the concrete bunkers are now both a garbage dump and a playground for I-Kiribati children. I find it an evocative juxtaposition: the young islanders beaming at us, oblivious to both the past horrors of war and the uncertainties of their own future.

We fly out of Kiribati the next day. When the Americans left these islands in 1943 they did so with lessons learned (at a heavy cost) about atoll warfare. Our reason for coming here has proved largely pointless, but we knew this would be so before we arrived. What the I-Kiribati must make of this passage of chaotic wars and workshops, I don't know, but I suspect they wonder at times what it all means. I hope they find out some day, so they can explain it to me.

As I wrote on p.1, images of the Pacific are often romanticized. One of the best perpetrators was Don Blanding, a journalist ad-man turned artist-poet whose works were very popular from the late 1920s into the 1950s. The illustrations on the front cover, p.1 and below are all good examples, taken from his books *Vagabond's House* and *The Rest of the Road* (both Dodd, Mead & Co., 1928 and 1937, respectively). The contrary images of the war for Tarawa were all taken by US Marine photographers at the time; I borrowed these from the Internet. The maps on page 3 are from *Kiribati: a changing atoll culture* (Institute of Pacific Studies, 1985). If anyone is still trying to figure out the source of those illustrations I used in the last issue, it was Robert A. Heinlein's *Farmer in the Sky* (Scribner's, 1950). The artist was Clifford Geary and he provides an encore from the same source on the back cover of this issue.

Joe Haldeman's latest book, *Old Twentieth*, includes a scene set during the Tarawa landings. If you've read *Camouflage* and want to see a map of the Tonga-Kermadec Trench, have a look at www.usp.ac.fj/pimris/pimris_publications.html, specifically p.5 of the December 2004 issue of my *other* fanzine, the *PIMRIS Newsletter*. I'll tell you more about this next time.

I've written more about Bill than the others on p.12 because he was the only one I ever met. If anyone is willing and able to write longer obituaries for any of the others, I'd like to see them.

We have just passed the second anniversary of our move to Fiji and the job here has kept me pretty busy. However, we've been able to travel to a few other places in the region over the past two years and there are other interesting bits and pieces I can say about Samoa and Fiji, so I hope to have another issue out before too long. Your locs will of course help, so send them on, please, to:

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