

The Norma K Hemming Award

for race, gender, class and sexuality in speculative fiction

Norma Hemming with two young Arcturian players



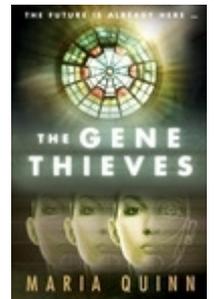
Norma Kathleen Hemming (1927–1960) was a British author who migrated to Australia in 1949 and wrote for local pulp magazine *Thrills Incorporated* and enthusiastically participated in the Australian fan scene.

She was a founding member of the femme fan group Vertical Horizons, and wrote and acted for the SF theatrical group The Arcturian Players.

Norma returned to international publishing in the late 1950s with stories in *Nebula SF* and *New Worlds*, but died at the age of 33 of lung cancer on 4 July 1960.

The inaugural Norma K Hemming Award for excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, class and sexuality in Australian speculative fiction was won by the late Maria Quinn (1942 - 2010) for her novel *The Gene Thieves* published by HarperCollins-Voyager in 2009.

Maria Quinn was born in 1942; sadly, she died of leukemia on 2nd June, 2010. After working in the US and Canada, she moved to a London agency as Creative Director. Returning to Australia, she became a magazine editor and feature writer. Her television credits include producing the national program *King's Kitchen*. She won the 2007 Todhunter Literary Award for short story and was the recipient of a prestigious Varuna fellowship. 'The Gene Thieves' was her first novel.



Most Australian early post-WWII SF authors (such as Frank Bryning, Wynne Whiteford and A Bertram Chandler) were published overseas. So was Hemming at first. Fan historian Graham Stone recalls that the first of her sixteen (known) stories *Loser Takes All* appeared in a 1951 edition of the British magazine *Science Fantasy* as by N K Hemming. To be published anywhere in the 1950s you had to be male, or at least appear to be male.

Norma Hemming outed herself as a woman to her readership at the first Australian science fiction Convention, *Sydcon 1952*. In addition to her stories she also wrote for newspapers, fanzines and importantly for the stage, writing Australia's first science fiction plays. For nearly forty years after her death she was a footnote for magazine bibliographers until, in 1998, Sean McMullen and Russell Blackford produced a detailed biography and analysis of her work in *Fantasy Annual No 2*, followed a year later by publication of the book '*Strange Constellations: A History of Australian Science Fiction (Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy)*' by Russell Blackford, Van Ikin and Sean McMullen (1999). This important literary reference is a critical survey of the history of Australian science fiction from its nineteenth century origins to the year 1998.

The Norma K Hemming Award for excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, class and sexuality in science fiction was established by the Australian Science Fiction Foundation in her honour.

A collection of her stories by Dr Toby Burrows, head of the scholars centre at the University of Western Australia, was launched at Aussiecon 4, which is also the venue for a staged reading in the style of a radio play from the last of Norma Hemming's five plays *The Matriarchy of Renok*.