

CHUNDER!



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In this issue Don Fitch reports on the 1975 AUSSIECON; this material originally appeared in various apazines published by Don. The drawing on this page is by Ralph Silverton: can someone tell me Ralph's current address?

Contributions are always welcome.

AUSSIECON 1975

A Report by Don Fitch

Coming down (in more ways than one) from the sunburnt country, from the wide brown land which is Central Australia, had been eased by the last stage - the bus trip through the rolling green pasture and farming lands which fill much of the distance from Adelaide to Melbourne. Despite the relaxing beauty of the countryside, however, the day had been long, and as I dropped my rucksack beside the telephones and girded myself to cope with pushing button A, dialling "without undue hesitation", and trying to figure out what to do with button B, I fervently hoped that my note posted from Sydney had fallen into the hands of someone who who'd been willing to go to the bother of making a reservation, and that the Southern Cross wasn't solidly booked up.

Just as I was fishing in my pocket for the correct change, however, I was approached by a Most Extremely Australian Personage - a chap who looked rather like an extra-fuzzy Koala and walked like a cross between a Kangaroo and an Emu. "Don Fitch," the apparition ~~accused~~ said, "I'm John Foyster." "John Foyster?" I wittily remarked, "Wow! Gee, I'm sure glad to meet you after all these years." (Actually, we'd met many times, in apazines and in John's genzine, but meeting an old friend in person is something more.)

After that (and for the following week) things became quite Vague. I was Taken In Hand, told ~~finally that I did not want to stay at~~ that there was a bit of a Problem with the hotel reservation (I suspect that might have been translated into "you are not going to spend all that money to stay in the hotel for two days before the Con", but that I was going to stay with the Foysters, questioned about dinner (- Famished, and yes, I like Chinese food - was about the way I answered), and about walking (- No more than 5 miles per hour, nor farther than about 10 miles, this evening - I might have said, tiredly and unmetrically), and we started off through the streets of Melbourne.

John is a rather brisk walker, as I usually am, though this evening I lagged behind a bit, trying to drink in some of the sights, and it was not long before we passed The Space Age Bookshop (which sparked off some fascinating Stories about Fabulous Melbourne Fandom), reached a Mysterious Chinese Restaurant (one got the feeling that behind the brightly lighted and contemporary dining room were Inner Recesses and Secret Passages which ultimately led to the Hidden Underground Headquarters of Fu Manchú) and quickly wrapped ourselves around a more-than-decent meal, including an excellent Seven Treasures soup. (Or so I'd call it, though here "Peking Short Soup" seemed to be the name ... well-made, anyhow, with the major ingredients not cooked so long as to lose their individuality.) I suspect this restaurant was Wong Shing Kee (166 Russell Street); I cannot compare it with many other Australian Chinese restaurants, but by my

U. S. standards it seemed to be an Old Standby type - varied menu, not especially Fancy, but Good food, in generous servings, at reasonable prices. The sort of Dependable place at which one might eat regularly. I got the impression that the waiter might not speak English, or be willing to say that something was not on the menu that evening - he'll take your order, and the cook will send you what he wants to send you, along the general lines of what you ordered, and (if you're recognized as a Regular, and an Appreciator) maybe something Fancy he's whipped up ... especially if you've previously sent a tip into the Kitchen. Such Old-style Chinese restaurants are not often found, and are to be Cherished.

Out again through a maze of streets (at a somewhat less rapid pace this time), past the Space Age Bookshop again (I must've passed this Focal Point of Melbourne Fandom at least ten times during the week, with never an opportunity to enter and browse), then darting quickly into an obscure doorway, up half a flight of featureless stairs, and through a Plain and Unmarked door into a room, which was suddenly Home, and my introduction to Australian Fandom.

It probably wasn't a typical meeting - the influx of out-of-city (and out-of-country) fans would preclude that, and I doubt that Aussie fans commonly dress that much more formally (suits and ties were much in evidence) than U. S. fans, or that a table with sherry, cheeses and biscuits is a feature of many club meetings. In fact, this may well have been the tail-end of the meeting of the Fellowship of Australian Writers which Fanew Sletter #6 describes as taking place on Tuesday. (It may well have been a Tuesday, and (in retrospect) the look on John's face earlier that evening could well have been that of a sercon fan who was missing a Discussion of Science Fiction Writing by Lee Harding, George Turner, and Bruce Gillespie, and possibly a speech by Ursula Le Guin. Those people were there, along with a number of Little Old Ladies and Gentlemen who looked as though they Wrote Poems and would belong to a Writers' Society, and the party felt like an after-meeting affair.)

I was delighted, for no special reason, to meet Ms Le Guin - the simple "Howjado" contact obtained under such circumstances would delight only those who keep a List of Famous People I Have Met - I'd just missed meeting her some years ago in Berkeley (she was in Paris, about to get married, at the time), and have enjoyed and admired her writing in recent years. She is a writer of definite Power, and every time I see her I'm surprised that she seems such a delicate slip of a person. Only a moment in her presence, however, is needed to bring home the realization that here is someone who copes (quietly but effectively) with almost any situation. Ms Le Guin was here partly as the Professional Writer Guest of Honour at the Worldcon, and partly under the auspices of the Australian Government Arts & Literature Board. She had been conducting an SF Writers' Workshop during the past week, and was still happily Talking Shop. The meeting broke up rather early (by L. A. fanclub standards, anyway) and somehow we got back to South Yarra. (Walked? Carey Handfield

gave us a lift? Elizabeth Foyster fetched us? - as I said, many of the Details of that week have become Hazy.)

It must've been at some time during this evening that I met Elizabeth Foyster, and I suppose it's the sort of thing which ought to be memorialized, on general principles. There are a number of husband-&-wife teams in fandom (usually they met within the microcosm), and a number of active fans with a spouse who is somewhat bewildered by it all but who tolerates the hobby. Frequently, however, I've met the spouse of an Active Fan and discovered that she (or, less frequently, he) is a strikingly fannish person who would be a welcome addition to our little world. Elizabeth Foyster is such a person - intelligent, perceptive, outspoken, opinionated (within reason) (people who don't have Opinions are dreadfully dull, and those who hold too firmly to them are usually unbearable), and possessing a fine way with words. Though frequently mentioned in John's fanzines, she's been but a shadowy character, and I wish she'd do more writing for the fan press (that's just a vague Wish, of course - taking care of a home, giving proper care and attention to a precocious child (Jillian's 6 or 7 years old, I reckon), and teaching school can hardly leave one with much spare time or energy, and those activities can be a reasonable outlet for anyone's Creativity.)

Jillian most generously gave up her room to this Foreign Visitor (it was claimed that she enjoys sleeping in The Loft, which does sound reasonable - I still remember the pleasure and excitement of being allowed to sleep up in the attic or on the living-room couch when we had Visitors), and I collapsed appreciatively after a cup of something hot to drink. The Collapse was so thorough, in fact, that I slept shamefully late the following morning, and John (who had taken several days off work to do Convention Committee Things) was ready to leave by (or perhaps before) the time I awoke, somewhere around 8 am.

This first day, I think, John and I had a bit of breakfast, then walked in the misty rain through South Yarra and across the grounds of the Botanical Gardens - less actively a real Botanical Garden in recent years than Sydney's, and more like an attractively-designed and carefully-tended Park, but obviously worth much more thorough attention than I was able to give it, this trip - and on to the Southern Cross.

Various pre-convention things were going on, and John immediately plugged into ConCom activities, solving Problems and telling people what to do, and I talked and listened to many people, explored the hotel, and generally eased into the old familiar Convention Mode (and Mood) - a sort of Relaxed Excitement, metered out so that it could be maintained throughout the Con, and geared myself to renewing old acquaintanceships and trying to form new ones. (That didn't work out too well. I was already Overwhelmed by the sensory input of several weeks' travel and New Experiences, and even though this was small for a WorldCon, it was Too Much; I kinda Withdrew, and stood around being even more of the Galactic Observer than usual. People-watching and nametag-reading were on the agenda, of course, along with reminding

myself frequently to sit down and Relax. (Normally, I stand up and/or walk around a whole lot, but I was starting out Tired, and with an anticipated average of less than four hours sleep per night during a five-day Con, this can be overdone, and lead to more of an Exhaustion High than one really desires).)

Back early in the evening to South Yarra, where John disappeared into the Dungeon/Study/Office beneath the house, to catch up with job-related work which had to be completed by the beginning of the following week, and Elizabeth and I settle down to talk late into the night. I learned all about Melbourne (and Australian) fandom (well - much of it - from a careful and articulate observer) and much about Australian Customs and Culture and Nature.

(It's getting so you have to lock the door of your house when you leave for the day, and lock your car when you park it on the street. # The Headmaster, Faculty, and of-age students of a Good Public (private) School may be expected to gather in a local Pub for a few drinks as soon as school is out for the day, and for the students the idea of a few social drinks without getting drunk is an Educational Experience. # In the Country, however, teachers (especially female ones) are usually expected not to touch alcohol (in public). # Australians tend to be ambivalent towards their country, sometimes knocking it and sometimes (almost Defensively) praising it too highly. # There is still much Regional Fractionalism - not so much Outback vs Cities any more, since the urban population is now such an overwhelming Majority, but city vs city and state vs state (almost the same thing, with one Big City in each state). # Aussie fan politics are about as bad as those in the U. S.... No, worse; most U. S. fans ignore such things, or act only marginally on a fanpolitics basis, whereas much of Aussie fandom seems to be divided by that attitude of Regionalism. # Australian Government/Politics seem to be almost as those of the U. S., with hardly anyone having a good word to say for the Officials or Party currently in Power (no matter who the officials or what the Party may be), though the objection there seems to be more to mere Incompetence than to the combination of incompetence and Corruption-by-Power which is currently disgusting so many Americans. I get the impression that Australians in general haven't yet quite adjusted to the idea of Federalism and that there's a tendency to blame everything bad on "Those people in Canberra". # Inflation, unemployment (complicated by considerable recent immigration and attendant quasi-racism (anti-Italian and anti-Greek - Melbourne has the largest Greek-speaking population outside of Athens and Thessalonika jokes and snide remarks are common)), the Welfare rolls and TAXES are constantly increasing, to the point of putting a serious crimp in the traditional hard-working but pleasure-indulging Australian Way of Life. # I did not take all this (and much more) as Gospel, of course, but where my observation had overlapped it there seemed to be a good correspondence to Reality and during the conversation a number of free-floating pieces fell neatly into place. # I must confess that I pumped Elizabeth shamefully, and contributed little to the conversation aside from remarking that this or that

situation was also operative in the States, but suddenly we realized that it was Very Late, and that tomorrow was another day.)

And indeed it was quickly. (I'm by no means certain of the chronology of events on these two days (or maybe it was three), but will firmly say that things happened thus, and hope that no-one will confuse me with niggling corrections.) John and I walked for a bit through exotic and romantic ("some of those houses may not be homes") South Yarra and perhaps a bit of St. Kilda, met Carey Handfield, and advanced upon the palatial residence of Leigh Edmonds & Valma Brown, which we entered with John bellowing "We are Hungry - Feed Us!"

Valma ~~threw something at~~ said something to him in Strine (I politely tried not to ~~appeal~~ listen) as her face took on the semi-glazed expression of a woman mentally dividing the amount of food left in the pantry by the number of Visitors. The number of new visitors, that is - already present (since at least the day before) were Canadian/American fans Susan Wood, Sheryl Birkhead, Mike Glicksohn, John Berry (who looks as though he might be counted as three, for dividing-for-food purposes), and possibly two or three other people.

Leigh has mentioned in his SAPSzine that their unhandy landlord recently laid down new linoleum; I was unable to see how good or bad a job he'd done, since every square inch of it was covered in the best fannish tradition with furniture, sleeping-bags, fans, cats, stacks of books, cartons of fanzines (including several hundred copies of Emu Tracks Over America, collated and stapled the night before), and much electronic/audio equipment. (Gee, I never did get to hear Leigh play any of his compositions on the synthesizers.) Food appeared, which was Good, and we Talked, which was even better. (I got caught up on much U. S. Fan ~~66666~~ News - it's a fine note when one has to go halfway around the world for that. Andrew Main (formerly Andy Main bem) is much into things at the Zen Center in San Francisco, and is as happy as a zenjin ought to be; Bob Lichtman & family are happily living on The Farm, a quasi-religious commune in Tennessee; and Calvin & India Demmon & family are also enjoying life in a somewhat religious commune in Canada. It struck me as Rather Strange that all of these people who were so Furiously Independent a decade or so ago are now leading such rigorously Structured Lives, but they're Happy, and that's what counts - that news put me into a Pleased & Optimistic mood, which is an excellent way to start off a Con.

I met Leigh and Valma when (as DUFF winners) they'd passed through Los Angeles en route to DisCon last year. They probably didn't remember me (the LASFS kitchen was pretty crowded, as usual, but I'd much enjoyed their presence then and, of course, had been reading Leigh's fanzines for several years with great delight. How to describe Leigh Edmonds for those who don't know him? Over six feet tall, I reckon, heavy (actually thin for his build, but big-boned), though with an unusual almost feline grace of movement, very long, straight hair falling from under a knit cap, functional & nondescript clothes, sandals or boots (in cold weather) on his feet, and a

friendly & amiable expression on his face. That's probably because he is a friendly and amiable sort of person (I suspect that he can easily be persuaded to do things, but I don't think I would like to have the job of trying to make him do anything). Not boisterous, but definitely an Outgoing Personality, yet highly perceptive of other people's feelings & emotions.

Valma is a quieter person (though not particularly shy) and not as easy to get to know, but she, also, seems to be unusually Aware of other people, and to have a questing and thoughtful mind. As throughout the trip, I regretted not having enough time to get to know all these people much better.

We loaded cartons of things (Program Books) into Carey's car and headed again for the Southern Cross. There was more sitting and walking around, talking with people - the Con was just beginning, with the registration table opening up in the penthouse Con Suite - that's a good place to hang around & learn people's names. Then, I reckon, it became Wednesday night.

A Fancy Dress Party ('scuse me, "Reception") seemed to be starting up in the Con Suite, for Professional Writers, Publishers, and associated Bigwigs, so we scruffy ones of the hoi polloi were briskly rounded up and told that we were going to attend an Exciting & Veddy Fannish Meeting of the Melbourne SF Club at Degraives Tavern. I'd been told All (and then some) about this restaurant by John Foyster. The Lamb Kabob used to be marginally edible, he said, but now it has joined the rest of the menu in being matched in wretchedness only be the service (or was it the wine?) And the normally Grumpy-at-best host had been talk to expect more than the usual Wednesday crowd of fans - in such a way as to assure that he wouldn't believe it, in the hope that he'd get All Excited and throw the whole mob of us out, making it An Adventure. Well, I found Degraives (only because we had a Native Guide; it's around an enormous number of corners and down inconspicuous stairs) to be ... interesting. The system of ordering, paying for the food, ordering again at the window, waiting for your dish to be called out, picking it up, getting wine, etc, was Confusing for a non-Initiate, but seemed to work out okay. The Lamb Kabob was delicious (had I been less hungry, it would still have been much more than merely "edible"), the wine was an adequate Claret-type (quite a good blend, but rather younger than I'm accustomed to drinking), and the company and conversation most enjoyable, though the most interesting things seemed to be happening at some of the tables down at the other end of the room, just out of earshot. I definitely would've returned to Degraives for at least one more meal, had time in Melbourne permitted.

Actually, as things turned out, I may have spent more time in Melbourne than in any other single place, and probably saw less of it than I did of any of the others. From The People's Yelo Pages (An Alternative Cultures Directory of the City) I'd listed a vast number of fascinating sounding things to check out, and managed to catch almost none of them - the company at the Con was too enthralling.

I did get out to walk and ride around Melbourne for a total of about two days - long enough to form a few Impressions; not long enough to be at all certain of their correctness. Melbourne is not as large as Sydney (and gives the impression of being almost unhappy and resentful of that fact), nor quite as modern (though fine old buildings are being razed right and left to make room for undistinguished Modern High Rise Edifices). Sydney is a city of Flamboyant Fashion, Melbourne is a city of (somewhat self-consciously) Elegant Style. The men here are not so flashily dressed, and the women tend to be much more Stylish, as in San Francisco. Melbourne would not be so crass as to vie with Sydney in building a Showplace Opera House at Fantastic Expense, but is not to be left behind, either - she built an large new opera house, reportedly of excellent acoustical quality, for a reasonable sum, and may be a bit Smug concerning the excellence of the performances held there.

The Official Opening of the WorldCon was held on Thursday afternoon (Aussies like their weekends long), beginning with a speech (also long - politicians like them that way) by a Member of Parliament (and original co-founder of the Melbourne SF Club). This was interrupted by a spirited rendition of several verses of a song - I had some Linguistic Difficulties here, but believe it was the Notional Anthem, or "Orstrilier, we'll never file yer" as published in one of John Bangsund's fanzines - and went on to be ... well ... just a Typical WorldCon, insofar as the Official Program was concerned. After nigh on to twenty years (so people tell me - it sure doesn't seem that long) I don't expect the Program to contain much that is New or particularly Exciting.

Typical, perhaps, but certainly not quite the Same - the opening of each session and program item featured a synchronized multiple-slide and light show, with theme music, projected onto a wide screen over the speakers' platform. This was done so superbly, with fine Timing and humorous juxtaposition of visual effects, that I formed the habit of dropping in to watch it even when I didn't plan to stay for the program event. Those Items I did remain for turned out to be somewhat better than the worldcon average over the past decade, largely because of the slightly different points of view contributed by the Australian fans and writers.

There were (as has become almost mandatory in recent years) many movies, some in a nearby theatre and some in the main meeting room. (I don't know whether or not the later continued all night, though that is certainly a convenience for impecunious fans who need a place to sack out and who haven't made arrangements for floor space in someone's room.) (A number of Russian films did not arrive until the day after the Con, but the people in charge coped admirably, and the selection of films was nicely varied, as might be expected considering that Film Fandom is rampant in Australia.) Not being a movie buff, I didn't watch any of them (and if there was any Monty Python item, that would be a cause for Regret), nor, in fact, did I attend much of the Program, though from all reports this went off with fewer hitches and foul-ups than most WorldCon Programs do, even though some

of the items were re-shuffled pretty close to the last second. (There were some complaints, mostly from the Platform side, that the strong lights (the ConCom had worked some sort of tie-in with TV to videotape the proceedings) militated against speaker/audience interaction & intimacy. There was also some feeling expressed that there may have been an insufficient leavening of fannish fans, leading to a somewhat sercon, formal, and unresponsive audience.)

I'd been asked (well, told) Christine McGowan seems to need a hearing aid when anyone says "No", if she's engaged in a Good Cause) to take part in a panel on "Myth and Religion in SF" (apparently on the theory that I might know something bearing on this in connection with American Indian Cultures). Fortunately, Ursula Le Guin consented to take part and I escaped having to get up there in front of All Those People. The Daughter of Theodora Kroeber undoubtedly knows more about Amerind religious beliefs than I do, and just has to understand them deeply. That treasure was not displayed for us: the discussion got off onto Lofty & Esoteric Theorizing and my Practical Application approach wouldn't have fitted in well. It seems to me that there's something wrong with a genre which habitually (there have been some exceptions) assumes that its characters (and even cultures) will be agnostic or atheistic, ~~perhaps even / not at all~~ quite free from the religion/mysticism/metaphysics which have added complexity to human motivation from prehistoric times. Most religions grow up, it seems, to explain the Unknown; one might assume that intelligent, non-humanoid, extra-terrestrial races would do the same thing. Mankind today has explained so much of the Unknown by the discovery of physical laws and chains of reaction that he makes the questionable assumption that everything can be thus explained.

Then there's the question of "is it all Chance and Accident, or is there some Purpose? ... and if so, what Cause?" There is no assurance that Man (or anyone else) will continue to be satisfied with ignoring such things, even if he achieves a Technology capable of carrying him to the stars, and even less assurance that Religion & Mythology will decline or remain substantially unchanged if our future follows less spectacular lines. To hop on the Ecological Bandwagon and suggest that we might well drift into something like the Aboriginal American & Australian Communion with Nature might be a bit cheap, but the concept would bear investigation, along with some parallels between contemporary Western Culture (which seems to be disintegrating), the breaking-up of Australian & American Aboriginal cultures when the people are removed from the Places where their religious spirits reside, and what might happen to Man (or any other sentient species) when removed from the Home Planet.

To say merely "The Program was Pretty Good", even though I'm not an aficionado of Convention Programs any more, would be doing a disservice to the AussieCon Committee. I've been on the fringes of such groups for years; I know how much work (and Stress) is involved in producing a smooth-running Con, and time spent in the C. P. room & with Committee members indicated that things are no whit different Down Under. Not only did things run smoothly for the attendees (at

least two events were rescued from Disaster by Heroic Measures taken Behind The Scenes), but by the end of the Con all of the Committee members (insofar as I know) were still speaking to the others, and no-one was either Yelling or being Extremely Polite.

Machiavellian ol' Robin Johnson, confident of his Organizational Ability and unafraid of getting people temporarily mad at him, deserves much of the credit (I suspect he burdened his attention with too many Trivial Details, but that seems to be his Thing, and he carried it off quite well), but so do such workers as Bruce Gillespie, Leigh Edmonds, John Foyster, Peter Darling, Carey Handfield (a quiet, always-present-when-needed Tower of Strength), Peter Millar, Chris McGowan, several Ashbys, Shayne McCormack, Ken Ford, and a whole mob of others.

It's my personal contention that nothing (save possibly A Disaster involving the death of someone we know & love) can ruin a convention (but that's for me - there'd always be a dozen or so Good People to spend the five days with, and that's as much as (or more than) I can handle). Most of the people attending this worldcon, however, were probably sf fans who aren't all that much into Fandom; a well-organized Program made the con worthwhile for them.

Someone has called Aussiecon "an anomaly - the last of the Small and Intimate WorldCons". There were about 600 people present - a moderate-size regional con by recent U. S. standards, and less than a quarter the size of current worldcons - which I reckon to be just about right. I was not in the best of shape to enjoy it after Travelling and Seeing and Absorbing and coming down with an acute case of Sensory Overload. I knew few of the U. S. fans (many of them I'd never heard of before) and I frequently regretted the absence of lots of people I think of as being much more representative of Fandom. (Maybe one of the qualifications for this is the inability to scrape up over \$1000 for a month's trip.) But then there were the Australian fans - some already in-person acquaintances, more acquaintances / friends by way of their fanzines, and an incredibly large number of overwhelmingly delightful ... Others. I am firmly convinced that Australia has the potential of becoming the Fan and/or fanzine center of the world. The number of intelligent, articulate, imaginative, and enthusiastic fans there (including some who are very young) is simply astonishing. (And for me, being astonished isn't very simple.)

Fortunately for U. S. preeminence, Aussiefandom has some holdbacks: geographical separation, and Money Problems may interfere with potential development. This was the first Big Convention many of these fans attended, and they seemed to like it - so much so that I suspect future fan historians will pinpoint some instant during this week as being the Turning Point in Australian Fandom, perhaps even the beginning of a genuine National Fandom. Previously there had been Sydney Fandom, Melbourne Fandom, Adelaide Fandom, etc - local clubs, with meetings (frequently discussing Science Fiction), and localized social interaction, with a few regional cons. Fanzine

fandom existed, and helped tie things together, but without a really broad base, and there does not seem to have been much of the sort of Communication which leads to the Communion which characterizes a fannish-type fandom. The geographical barrier can be overcome by way of fanzine activity, and I hope it will be (if only, selfishly, because I might get in on that sort of thing). Unfortunately, although Australia has a comfortable standard of living, inflation is almost as rampant there as in the U. S., and postal rates are high. Aussies are great at ~~making~~ ~~the~~ ~~do~~ making do, however, and if even half of the Enthusiasm generated at Aussiecon carries over into the cold light of the weeks after, something Significant is likely to come about.

My guess is that there will not quickly be a great flood of individual/personal fanzines, but rather that group- and club-published genzines will experience an upswing of activity, with some tendency to move away from the Serious Constructive sfnal approach and towards a less formal and more personal style. (Err ... not that I want to get into the Sercon Vs Faannish battle here - the astonishing thing is that so many Aussies are outstanding in both categories.)

For me, Conventions are People, and this Con was packed with Really Neat People. It was a pleasure to meet in person those I knew already (and it's surprising how well one thinks one knows a person after seeing his name a few times over the years and reading a couple of things he's written), and they quickly became friends, insofar as time permitted. Some complete strangers seemed like friends immediately, because they bore a striking resemblance to people I already knew. Peter Browne (though more intellectually oriented) could've been Roger Hensell four or five years ago, Michael Drew looked almost exactly like Craig Stone, with slightly shorter hair (& upon returning, I discovered that Craig had cut his hair somewhat - I suspect because he wanted people to be able to see and Appreciate his new/antique beaded Sioux belt), one of the Ashbys resembled Don Simpson in several ways, and Doug Elliott, a Canadian immigrant, was a robust version of Jeremy Knight (almost as young as Jeremy when I first knew him, and almost as mature as he was when I last visited the Bay Area.)

Noticed a tall chap wearing a hat which caused me to say "Montana?" "Alberta, Calgary," he replied, and we got into an involved conversation about that part of the country, which I've long wanted to see. (Had I been unable to afford the trip to Australia, I'd have gone up to the Crow Indian Fair this summer, and on into Canada for a week or so.) As we were talking, something kept niggling at the back of my mind, and was finally identified as a fear he'd skirt too close to the border of obnoxious Intellectual Arrogance and I'd have to find some excuse to leave, but then he mentioned his age, and I relaxed. (A quality which is intolerable in someone 20 to 23 years old is OK in a 16 year old. Canadian Fandom is showing promise, too.)

There was some conversation and companionable waiting around with Al Fitzpatrick, fannishly scruffy, relaxed yet internally tense, somehow

reminiscent of rich brown and Steve Stiles, and with someone called "The Grunt", who might be the prototype of all Enthusiastic Neofans. There was a fair mob of neofans (I use the word in a non-insulting (and even admiring) sense) around - if Simon Smith, Michael McBride, and half a dozen other youngfen I talked with or listened to were typical, Australian Fandom is really Going Places. Err ... not to imply that it Needs Improvement - the level of quality is already high (higher than that of U. S. fandom, I'd say). but a number of the Established Fans are showing signs of ~~diminishing~~ diminishing Enthusiasm and Sense of Wonder, and it's Good for any fan group to have promising New People coming along.

Conventions are also Parties, and of these Aussiecon had no lack. Apparently small, closed parties are not part of the Australian Fan Tradition (they're mostly an outgrowth of very large cons) (or perhaps there were many, and I wasn't invited (*Sniff*) - though that's not likely, since the people one would expect to be at Exclusive parties were at most of the open ones). There was an Abundance of big (but, being numerous, not excessively overcrowded) open parties, given by individuals, Space Age Books, and the ConCom, every night of the Con. For the most part, I did my usual Thing of standing around on the fringes, enjoying the aura of people enjoying themselves - even more than usual, since by now I was getting People Fatigue (I'm not really Comfortable in groups of more than 6 to 10 people; 50 to 100 can get pretty Overwhelming), and did a lot of Walking around.

As I stepped over John Berry's legs for the 8th or 9th time (he was part of the HallCon outside one of the party rooms) he murmured "still looking for the Perfect Party, eh, Don?" That wasn't quite correct, but I agreed. (Actually, I was trying to wire into various parties at the Perfect Moments, when they were on the swell from the almost-dull phase of their cycle up to the peak of breaking and wiping out from being too crowded and noisy. Two people had good, large parties at opposite ends of the hall on one floor several nights, there was the Dependable Minneapolis in '73 party ("If you go back over the International Date Line enough times, you'll return to 1973, which was a pretty good year," I believe Dennis Lien explained it. My theory is that the Minneapolis fans gave such enjoyable parties while bidding for the '73 Con that they've continued them ever since), and several others. Most of these finally moved to the Convention Suite (on the top floor), where a room was available on a 24 hour basis. (Well ... 22 hours; people were chased out to breakfast while the place was tidied up each morning.) There were usually anywhere from a dozen to fifty of us up there to watch the sunrise.

Keeping this room open practically around the clock was an excellent idea; the computer games set up there kept occupied some people who might otherwise have been at loose ends, the room itself served as a place to visit if one wanted to check out other parties without having to explore the entire hotel, and it frequently served as a good place for quiet conversation ... when it was not, itself, the location of a Big Party. (Incredibly Australian Note: one morning,

about 3 or 4 am, a Room Service cart with coffee and mountains of sandwiches appeared at the ConSuiteParty - some member of the ConCom had realized that people were Hungry, and had ordered a repast, paying half of the cost himself and taking the other half out of the Convention Funds. That sort of thoughtfulness is not often encountered at U. S. cons. Here, we're more likely to get situations such as that at the NASFiC, where the Con paid for the drinks for the Science Fiction Writers of America party (I understand) which was open only to SFWA members and their escorted guests.)

Most of the parties followed the usual cycle (as people drifted in and out) of being small and almost dull, increasing slightly to become quietly enjoyable, then rather crowded, and finally unbearably noisy, thereupon going back down the curve as people left to find a quieter one (and make it crowded), though the cycle was somewhat less pronounced than usual since a fair number of people settled down in one room and spent the entire night there, Australians are greater Standers and Leaners; after the chairs and sittingplaces (tables, beds) were taken, it was several hours (rather than just a few minutes) before everyone else was sitting on the floor.

U. S. Fandom, in the decade or so I've known it, has gone through several phases of Drinking Patterns (with much overlap, of course - fans aren't about to be Standardized). At one time, a roomparty would be centered upon a bathtub full of ice and cans of beer, then liquor ("spirits", in Australia) became more popular, then closed-door pot parties, and in recent years there's been a strong trend towards soft drinks. Many of the older fans are discovering that they no longer care to drink all that much any more, and younger ones have taken a hard look at the whole thing and decided that they don't care to start. All these types are well-represented in Australian fandom (and, as in the States, there seems to be no particular Pressure to conform to any one of them), with a trend towards beer & wine drinking, in the tradition of Pacing - getting moderately high and Maintaining that state for many hours. In general, Aussiefans seem to imbibe more than U. S. fans, and hold it better.

The usual tendency to associate with the people one knows best was much in evidence. It is ridiculous, of course, to travel half-way across a continent (or half-way around the world) and spend most of the time with people you see at local club meetings every week or month, but everyone does it; there were certainly groups of Queensland fans, Adelaide fans, Sydney fans, etc, though I don't know the people or dialects well enough to be sure how extreme this may have been.

Conversation was always interesting (Aussies are Great Talkers), rather more centered on Science Fiction than on social/personal matters, and generally displaying a wide range of reading and a high level of critical ability as well as Enthusiasm.

15 or 20 years ago, perhaps at my first convention, perhaps at my second, Something Happened - and it's been repeated at almost every

con since. Sometime on the 3rd or 4th night, usually around 2 or 3 in the morning, the Exhaustion High takes over, breaks down inhibiting Barriers, and I find myself in a Memorable Conversation. (Usually the details are not too clear later on, so it's probably more a matter of Emotional Rapport than Intellectual Exchange - almost certainly so, since it has several times been a Musical Experience (a driving-beat guitar & Kris Kristofferson songs at one con, a Minneapolis fan (Ken Fletcher?) playing classical music on the piano at another, a street musician from Newfoundland on the Yonge Street Mall at TorCon).

I really hadn't planned to stay up until dawn again that night, but dropped by the ConComSuite to check with Robin Johnson about some travel arrangements, and we got into a bit of additional talk. "Did I hear you mention Aborigines?" a bystander asked ... and it became an unforgettable 3 or 4 hours with Doug and Chris (Elliott and Swaine, I believe their last names were). It was as much an exchange of Feelings as of Ideas, but both were present, and both sank immediately and directly into my Inner Self, which may be why the details are hazy - most of what they said now seems to have been always a part of my Being. We talked about the Aboriginal cultures, rich in spiritual and mystical values and harmony with nature, which contemporary Western European/American/Australian society is beginning to realize that it lacks, and about the Australian Land, and Bushwalking, and a host of other things.

It was a good Communion, and I was sad when they left, because there would be little chance of being in communication with them when the con was over, but after a little while the sun rose, the Pancake Parlour opened for breakfast, and I may have gotten a couple of hours of sleep, more or less in that order.

I was glad to get Accommodations at the Southern Cross on such short notice, and deeply appreciate Peter Millar's willingness to share his room (& \$14 per night is a whole lot better than \$28), but sharing a room at a con is something less than Ideal. One has to be Considerate, and try to slip in quietly just when exhaustion (& possibly a slight degree of inebriation) makes quietness difficult, but Peter seemed to be living a double life - most of the time he was either still partying, or just getting up to start on Committee work, when I came in. I like a room of my own for other reasons, too. It's nice to be able to offer people crash space on the floor (some of the Best Fans are students who don't really have enough money to afford to attend cons, and certainly can't afford an expensive hotel room), and I like to give a party or two, in an attempt to repay some of the Hospitality ... oh, well, Next Time.

Physical surroundings have considerable effect on a con, and a Bad Hotel (with dramatically inadequate elevators or meeting rooms, or a staff which Doesn't Like Us & makes that evident) can be something of a Downer. (Fans overcome this, of course - it Unifies us with something to whinge about, but it does detract from Total Enjoyment.) The Southern Cross was admirable in every respect (save, perhaps, the

Expense, and accommodation rates are only a small portion of the cost of going to a distant con). As far as I could see, the service was friendly, prompt, and efficient, and the banquet, elaborately served, featured food which was Delicious (I could've eaten two portions) rather than just marginally edible, which is about the best one usually even hopes for. As far as I know, the hotel didn't overbook, they put the fans together on certain floors, and they didn't close down the room parties. That's a Good Hotel. (Some Credit devolves to fans as well. Jan Finder proposed that we go around and collect many packets of bubble bath from the rooms, empty these into the fountain in the lobby, and go wading. The group of youngsters to whom he suggested this took off ... and came back in short order, possibly because they realized that he wasn't coming with them to share the ~~blame~~ fun, or (I think more likely) because they did not want to make the hotel people unhappy. * When we were sailing paper airplanes out the penthouse window, someone went down and gathered them up so they could be used again ... and when the fad was All Used Up, several people went down, picked most of them up from the street and sidewalk, and put them in a trashcan. That's Good People.)

Somewhere in there (Saturday evening, just after the Banquet) was held an Extraordinary Business Meeting of ANZAPA - the Australian & New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association. Extraordinary it was in that only about four members (at least half of them being the OBE (Official Bloody Editor)) were present when it started, and Extraordinary Business in that dues were increased to \$A7.00 per year (partly to cover airmail postage to the 3 or 4 overseas members). That seems Rather Stiff to me, but perhaps it's one of those Facts of Life in an Inflationary World. (Too much of that increase, in my estimation, goes towards paying Air Mail Postage on the Mailings to U. S. members (ca. \$A15 per year): it's good, I guess, to be in contact with U. S. fandom, but perhaps not at a cost which makes membership too expensive for valuable Australian fans.) People were talking about the Golden Age of ANZAPA being past, and I sure hope that the high dues do not preclude that influx of new blood (often impecunious neofans) which often brings apas to newer and greater Golden Ages. I think this apa could be an important influence in cementing together a pan-Australian fannish fandom, which seems to be about ready to coalesce around something. Being a fanzine fan, I'd rather see that focal point be fanzines, rather than social Conventions.

The last few hours of a Con are always sad, because it's a time of leave-taking, and that should've been particularly bad here, where I frequently couldn't say, "See you next year", but AussieCon faded away, rather than ending suddenly. The Official Close of the Program Sunday afternoon was followed by a Pie Night which seemed to be as crowded as any of the previous parties; a fair sized mob of fans lived in Melbourne and/or took a holiday on Monday & perhaps Tuesday.

I had eaten a number of meat pies in Australia (they're a take-out food roughly comparable in popularity to hamburgers in the U. S.) and they had ranged from Good to Delicious (this not entirely depending

upon my Hunger at the moment of impact), but when John Foyster handed me this one with a gleeful grin and the words "Have one of these - they're Absolutely Horrible", I was Suspicious.

Cautious nibbling indicated that the crust was ok, so I essayed a small bite which included some of the filling. The material used for seasoning these pies must give off some sort of subtle & insidious vapour which renders the taste buds insensible, since I noticed nothing until I'd swallowed that first bite. Then a Burning Sensation began at my lips and flowed back over the tongue and down through throat and stomach - it felt as though lye or some Powerful Acid were eating its way out, and for a few moments there I rather hoped that it would dissolve my neck entirely and cause my head to fall off, thus ending the Agony. My first thought was to sing a few verses of Chunderin' Blues (guaranteed, in my rendition, to empty the strongest stomach within two minutes), but then I figured that, as with the ingestion of other Corrosive Materials, vomiting should not be induced. And indeed, the stomach acids, aided by several glasses of water and a few pints of beer, finally took care of it, the throat turned into a tube of relatively painless scar tissue, and all was fine save for a slight residual effect on the vocal cords. (The following day I could speak Strine more easily than American, and developed the theory that if those meat pies were taken away ... oh, well, it is a bit far-fetched, and I shan't insist upon it.) Strangely enough, all the Melbourne and Adelaide people I mentioned the incident to said something along the lines of "Oh, you must have got one of the Sydney-style ones". Be that as it may, I cannot, to this day, sing "I've Got Those Sydney Meat Pie Blues" without feeling queasy.

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