

OH YEAH, An Informal History of Discon II, is written and published by Jack L. Chalker, 5111 Liberty Heights Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21207 U.S.A., and is intended for serialization in SAPS and FAPA. All opinions expressed herein are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of anyone else on the Discon II Committee, the Board or members of Science Fiction Conventions Inc., WSFA, or any other concerned groups or individuals. When completed, copies of this work will be bound as one with a couple of photos and sold to the public.

INTRODUCTION

The primary idea behind writing this narrative aside from a little personal catharsis is as a general guide to world science fiction conventions for those who have to do them in the future, and as a picture of what actually goes on to prepare for a worldcon and run one successfully. This is, however, a personal history--a sort of insiders' con report--and as such is more a series of thoughts and impressions than a manual in the sense of EVERYFAN'S GUIDE TO THE AUCTIONS. I don't necessarily recommend that you do it our way. However, I do hope that by pointing out the problems and preparation I can steer some people in the right direction.

CHAPTER ONE: ANYBODY WANT TO HAVE A WORLDCON?

Discon II's genesis was in the losing days of the Baltimore bid in 1966. I personally had tried to bid Baltimore in 1967, with Ron Bounds and Mark Owings and backed by the then Baltimore Science Fiction Society and the Washington Science Fiction Association. We failed before the New York Tide, but the bug had been caught by regional fandom. I had originally intended to bid again the next cycle, but while everyone seemed willing Jay Haldeman, who'd discovered fandom at Discon I and had risen to President of the Washington Science Fiction Association, was busily hatching his own bid for D.C. in '71 with the knowlege of only a few people, including Ron Bounds, who was also still technically on my bidding committee but who had struck up a fast friendship with Jay Haldeman. While I busily worked on a Baltimore rebid, Jay, his wife Alice, and Ron, along with Bob Pavlat and Bill Evans from the original Discon I committee, were secretly setting up a D.C. bid. In the meantime the Baltimore club collapsed for reasons best not gone into, leaving Jay with a stronger local power base than I. Pavlat had originally lit the fire under me for a Baltimore bid but had, for reasons never determined, become an implacable foe of Baltimore in '67 or anytime, and they let me go my own way while not telling me of their plans. In the meantime I'd become involved in working on the Baycon and let things slide.

At the Baycon I was put to work, and it was late in the first day of that con that I ran into somebody who asked me how come I'd given up the Baltimore bid and was letting somebody else bid Washington. Sure enough, an ad in the Program Book proclaimed D.C. in '71, and when I sought out Jay and Ron to find out what the hell had happened I was met with derisive laughter from both, and Jay

twisted the knife with some rather cruel comments. I'd definitely been had, and I felt betrayed--not because of the other bid but because of the way it had been done, in secret, and without at least letting some of the Baltimore people into the secret so we wouldn't make expenses and fool ourselves. From that point I became, for obvious reasons, an implacable foe of D.C. in '71, and while keeping a friendly relationship within the Washington club I listened in on everything and did my best to monkey-wrench the bid, while doing everything I could, openly in the end, to support Boston. That my efforts contributed to Boston's victory I know, although they had superb organization and financing and would probably have pulled it off regardless. Nonetheless, I had the satisfaction of watching the devious bid go down to defeat and had the satisfaction, however vindictive, of twisting the knife in the other direction.

Needless to say, I was not included in on any rebid--but the rebid was obvious; the club was ready and willing and they wanted one. Having had my revenge, I then started as a supporter of D.C. in '74--if only for the reason that WSFAns were my closest friends and they (as opposed to Haldeman & Co.) deserved a worldcon. The second time out saw me helping with bidding information, helping to get liquor for the parties, arranging to "cover" key cons when the committee couldn't, and generally talking up the bid. While Washington had no direct competition at first, I was extremely nervous, and when Al Schuster and Art Saha bid New York in '74 the spectre of what happened in 1966 to my own bid was raised. However, several factors assured D.C. of victory that I hadn't had in 1966--first and foremost the two year in advance rule which put the bidding in Los Angeles, where less New Yorkers would be, and also the fact that Schuster never seriously pushed the con bid while we ran like we were nineteenth in a nineteen way race, entirely the result of my unremitting pessimism and belief that a bidder expects the worst, tries to anticipate it, and counter it.

It worked, and the mail ballot support alone (generated by our presence at all those regionals) was enough to put us over.

But who was "us"?

This proved to be the most ticklish question in the first year after victory.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FIRST DISCON II COMMITTEE

Presidency for all those years of the Washington Science Fiction Association and the running of several Disclaves had shown a glaring fault in Jay Haldeman, which even he recognized and admitted: he was incapable of delegating authority, and, even when he deliberately ran counter to his instincts and tried, he couldn't follow through. A bidding committee is a team effort but there are few crucial decisions, only logical choices. But this was a bidding committee no longer.

Haldeman moved early to let the WSFA know that this was not a WSFA convention, but the Discon Bidding Committee convention. While he asked several people to do various jobs, the Bidding Committee would make all decisions.

This is, by the way, a policy I agreed with and agree with totally, despite the fact that I wasn't in the select group at the beginning. You can't create the kind of organization and discipline needed for a worldcon with a free-floating mass democracy; decisions must be made for the con by a board of responsible officers.

What wasn't known at the time was that the policy committee wasn't making policy, either. Early on, Jay had made sure that they knew that only he made policy. This is reflected in the one major decision series that must be made while bidding: who's going to be your GoH, Fan GoH, and Toastmaster.

Jay contacted the Bidding Committee for D.C. in '74 (which consisted of Jay and Alice, Co-Chairpeople, Ron Bounds, Vice-Chairman, Ted Pauls, Secretary, and Bill Evans, Treasurer, Pavlat having semi-gaffiated after the defeat and after having several severe policy disagreements with Jay being dropped). The Committee--Bounds, Pauls, and Evans--were asked by Jay to submit a list of GoH names for the 3 main category picks. Each did so, some time in April of 1972.

The first week of August, Jay announced his choices to them: Roger Zelazny, Jay Kay Klein, and Andy Offutt. None of them were on the lists of anybody I asked about this. This is no slight to the three--most felt, as I did, that Roger's links with local fandom and his close friendship with Jay might tarnish a deserved GoHship, and that he's a better one for the Midwest or West. Jay Kay was a nice selection and certainly deserved it, but nobody'd thought of it. Offutt was left off as untried and unproven as a toastmaster, and as this was and is the most difficult public job of a worldcon the others went for experience. Offutt was, however, another close friend of Jay's.

This, then, was how Discon II would be run--by fiat.

Ron went with me out to Octocon, that enigmatic social and political fan gathering that still has smoke-filled rooms talking con power politics that's held yearly in Sandusky, Ohio. It was early November 1972, the Octocon held then because Lou Tabakow's bowling team had a championship the weekends in October, and we drove up, talking about the con, etc. Ted Pauls was in the back seat chipping in his comments. I learned from the two that no committee meeting had been held in the two months since winning. I also learned that none was planned or scheduled, and I heard at that time the story above of the GoH selection process. It was becoming clear that Jay was actually going to try and do the whole damned thing himself. I put the screws on Ron, still one of Jay's closest friends, to have a committee meeting, and Ron and Ted's pressures finally got Jay to call one, late in November. Over the next six to eight months we had four general committee meetings and the central committee had two short private meetings to which I was not invited. All of these meetings, as far as I can determine, were instigated by me.

A post office box had been taken in D.C. near WSFA Treasurer Bill Berg. He would collect the incoming mail and bring it to WSFA, where it would be given to Jay (not the Secretary or the Treasurer). Jay would then sort the mail at home, answer the pressing ones, deposit the checks, and so forth. It was becoming obvious that this was truly

the smallest worldcon committee in history. As Alice had always been the strong personality in that family and the backbone of Jay's one-man Disclaves, we all assumed that the same was true here--that she was the real final authority. This has since proven a very false assumption; she did very little after winning the con, and almost all of it was Jay. Some of it should have been obvious, as Alice sometimes didn't attend the meetings of the committee held at her own house, but somehow it never was. What wasn't obvious to anyone, even their closest friends, was that by mid-1973 their marriage was in grave trouble, and that this was part of the reason why Jay had to be practically forced to attend to con business. The reasons had nothing to do with the convention or even fandom, and are nobody's damn business except those two people involved, but it was the missing--and disruptive, passively--factor that kept me worried about the progress of the con and everybody else confused.

Those who saw them at Torcon would never have guessed, and we didn't, either. Indeed, this made what was coming all the more inexplicable--we didn't learn the true facts until June of 1974, and even then only a little of them. I make these comments so you'll realize how much in the dark we really were--as to the con, as to everything.

What also didn't help was that, starting some time in 1972 and for reasons never made clear by either party, Ted Pauls and Jay Haldeman had a complete falling out. They are to this day stiffly civil to each other and little else. But Ted was obviously not going to be a party to anything con-wise, either.

The preliminary meetings accomplished only a little of substance, but they did as they were intended to do: (1) build a team (2) clearly define who was doing what. The team built up at that time you can read in your Discon II Progress Reports or Program Book, except that Pavlat, Huff, and Bischoff were added later, for reasons almost as wacko as the whole precon situation already was. Almost no thought was given to program that first year (you really can't consider it until the year before, anyway) but a few general decisions were made. The Trimbles had offered to do our art show, but Jay didn't like farming out tasks to people outside the organization--and outside our control, really--and he found ready support within the committee. It was nothing against the Trimbles, really--they've done a nice job in the past--but simply that we felt that a con committee should have total control and responsibility over all facets of con operation. The Trimble's art shows are fine--but they're the Trimble's art shows, not the cons. I'm not certain if I'm conveying this properly, but I hope so. Basically, I'm saying that it was our feeling that we were qualified to put on the show ourselves, and that all facets of the con should be under our direct planning, control, supervision, etc. Others may think differently, but it's my opinion, and it was shared by all the others.

A sense of theirs as opposed to ours sums it up, I think. While listed on the committees, the Project Art Show set-up is a slickly run professional operation run entirely from outside, including an independent control of all art show funds, set-ups, etc. The con merely provides security (gratis) and a room.

Also settled, finally, was the flow of mail to Evans rather than Jay, something taken not because it was volunteered or logical but simply because Bill properly insisted it be that way--and Jay was getting bogged down on that end.

Art Show was put in the hands of Jackie Harper, who'd done a nice job on the Disclave shows, and Ray Ridenour, an old hand WSFA. Mike Riley, of WSFA, was to coordinate with Program Chairman Joe Haldeman and start working up a preliminary plan (difficult since Joe was over a thousand miles away, but at that stage it didn't really matter).

Bill Evans became Secretary-Treasurer, in reality, although Ted was given occasional correspondence. The no love lost relationship he had with super-proprietary Jay was a Grand Canyon and this reflected it.

But despite this organization and the light spirit of the meetings, the truth was we knew little about the con except our own niches, and were meeting only when I applied heat to some of the principals to have meetings. Jay and I had, however, become not exactly friends but at least we'd buried the hatchet and talked to each other friendlier and with some kind of mutual respect. Alice I saw less and less during this period, but it never sunk in why.

During this same period Jay started selling a few stories to AMAZING and this involved him more and more as well. We began to think that his newfound career and his dream of emulating brother Joe and becoming a full-time writer were eclipsing any considerations of the con. He even started missing some WSFA meetings.

At the start, Jay alone had made all policy.

By Torcon, nobody was making policy.

I was involved in the con as little as possible, since I smelled a disaster in the making. I already had my Masquerade plan pretty well worked out in my head, had the O.K. for the pipers idea, and had put the general layout down on paper. There was nothing on the auction front. Jay had written, edited, and printed all of the original PRs. I was content to let Jay run his con and I'd do my small part and stay out of the rest. I did smell disaster, but it was organizationally and from lack of policy. I was determined not to get into the middle.

Events, however, were overtaking all of us.

CHAPTER THREE: THE COLLAPSE OF DISCON II LEADS TO ANARCHY

It was late October of 1973 and Bruce Gillespie was in town from Australia and staying at the Zelaznys. It was a Wednesday night, and Roger had invited a number of us over for a small party for Bruce. I had no sooner arrived and parked my coat than Ted Pauls beckoned me to step over to a private corner. After making introductory small talk I joined him and was wondering what this was all about.

"Did you know that Jay's going to move to Florida?" he whispered.

"Sure," I replied. "He's always talking about it--immediately after the con."

"No," Ted said, "Not then. Now. This month. He's selling his house and moving."

A number of thoughts went through my mind, not the least of which was that Ted had cracked up--or, if true, that Jay had cracked up. I got Bounds into a corner and asked him, "What's this about Jay going to Florida now?"

Bounds shrugged. "He says he's enough along on his writing to quit his job and that he can't wait a year to fulfil his dream."

"But what about Discon?"

"He says he can run it from Florida," was Bounds' reply.

Oh, yeah?

Oh, yeah!

Now action could be neither pressured nor forced. And because so much of the con so far had been Jay alone, it left a vacuum at the con site and on the committee, while the key man would be 1200 miles south.

Events quickly followed, while I remained somewhat dazed. The only thing I knew was that it couldn't be done.

Let me make things clear--I don't really care who runs a con, or where--I only care about the quality of the con. The previous committee operations had been substandard--but this was impossible.

Jay called a meeting at his house--the first one called directly by Jay without any prodding--that showed at least a hint of the future. His personal lawyer (and next door neighbor) was there with a corporation agreement to create something called Science Fiction Conventions Incorporated. I admit I was in something of a fog. Ted Pauls opted for a con in New York to sell books for his T.K. Graphics and wasn't present. Jay had things fairly well worked out, although he had a larger role for me than I'd thought. The corporation was to be formed so that we would have the lawsuit and financial protection that incorporation brings. Bill and I talked a bit of it as a continuing body, possibly throwing its protective blanket around local cons and any other cons that might want such protection. A Board of Directors, with me as Chairman of the Board, was selected. An article empowered Jay and Ron to put on Discon II under the Board, although both Jay and Ron were on the board. Nine Members of the Corporation, including Alice and Ted, were also chosen. This placed financial control of the con in Bill Evans' hands as corporation treasurer, gave us a solid structure, and allowed the Board overall policy authority if it needed it. The structure was there.

And with that, Jay left for Florida.

The day Jay left I talked to him briefly and got an intimation that all wasn't well within the committee, either. Ron was taking the added responsibility very hard, and also was suffering from an extreme case of lack of self-confidence.

"Jack, I want you to know that your main job from now on is trying to keep Bounds together--and kick him in the ass when he weakens," Jay told me privately. Frankly, I was none too thrilled--but I knew what Jay meant. The major burden had fallen on Ron's shoulders, and Ron had never been the man in total charge before. He'd even deplored the supervisory responsibility that had come with promotion to executive level on his job. Everybody liked Ron--but did they, and most particularly the committee, have full confidence in him? And did he, even most important of all, have full confidence in himself?

The truth was that little really changed. There had been no real clearly defined policy body before, and there still wasn't. We were a committee without clear direction of any sort.

At the WSFA meeting in November Ron and I talked for a while outside, away from everyone else, on the direction of the convention. At that time I was still, I felt, on the outside. The convention wasn't mine, and there'd been no really clear movement from Ron to establish control. For every decision his impulse was to call Jay. Jay wasn't really close to the problems, was already too distant to make many clear decisions, and wasn't even easy to reach--at that point he was going around the southeast in his school bus, living in it, and we didn't really know where he was to contact him, anyway.

I told Ron that the only way we were going to get anything done was to use the SF Conventions Inc. as a new start, a clean slate. That he would have to be the Chairman, not Jay, and he would have to assemble a policy Central Committee, hold the meetings, keep track of everything, and act as if we'd just won--with him as Chairman. He was hesitant. He admitted to me that he had been thinking of resigning, of leaving the whole thing. Jay's actions had upset him deeply. To all of us it seemed clear that Jay had been anxious to win the con, but had copped out when things would start getting rough. Ron admitted to me that he'd had this idea of chucking it all, too, and that he'd turned down an offer in California because he thought his obligation to the con made other personal considerations secondary until the con was actually over and done with. The message was a simple one: Ron had suborned all personal considerations because he'd taken on an obligation. Now Jay had apparently done what Ron wanted to do without considering such points.

We returned again to the idea of central committee and Ron said, "If we set this up your way you'll have to be on it, to help me run it." I think my own feelings surfaced then, and I said, improperly, "Damn it, why should I put on Jay Haldeman's con? If it works he gets the credit and if it fails I get the blame." "Because you care about cons," he replied.

As to why Jay Haldeman really left when he did, it was mostly because he was going through severe personal, emotional, and family

strains that we knew nothing about. What I did know was that, whatever the reason, Jay had not resigned, and this, at least, would have to be lived with. I didn't--and particularly now, don't--fault him on leaving if he felt he had to; I only faulted him for not resigning. It left us all out on a hell of a limb.

We held a couple of general committee meetings to set up the new order, and in January Jackie Harper's husband Jim was transferred to Okinawa--and the Harpers left, so no art show coordinator. At the same time, Mike Riley was transferred to Alaska--so no program coordinator, either. This necessitated not only a formation of a central committee but also the replacement of two key people.

By Boskone of 1974 things were still in a state of flux. While acting one way, Ron was doing it differently. We had a long series of talks, mostly around the fact that he couldn't solve some simple problems involving what I call "Nasty Bastard Decisions"--i.e. the right way will get you called names. This was what I had always been afraid of--Ron has a natural desire for everyone to like him; you can't be liked and Chairman--you tread on too many toes. The only way to solve the problem was to create the long-overdue Central Committee. It would give him the sound policy base he needed, and would serve as both advisory board and fall guy for some of the least popular decisions. Ron seemed unwilling to do this, and I got mad. I threatened (for the second or third of five times) to quit, but he calmed me down and said he'd do it. The clincher was probably a friendly dinner we had with John Millard at the end of Boskone; John backed my side completely and gave a lot of advice as one Chairman to another, which helped Ron's confidence and gave him a base for building his convention.

The new committee was formed shortly thereafter. It was four people (actually five, but more on this later). Basically, it was Ron Bounds, Chairman, Bob Pavlat and myself acting as Vice Chairmen with clearly defined but separate halves of the con to handle, and Bill Evans as Treasurer. Pauls was also invited to be on the central committee, but for one reason or another (I'm not certain of the reasons) did not fully participate at any time.

Pavlat was handed Hotel Liason, a key post, and the Art Show. I was handed all Special Functions except the actual mechanics of the Banquet, which would be in Bill's hands. Programming was left to Ron, who had already added Al Huff and Dave Bischoff (the latter of whom, when asked to draw up a program, drew up a blockbuster that would serve for 24 hours straight for about 10 days straight--on 24 hours notice!). The Department Head positions remained substantially the same, with the exceptions noted. It was decided that no changes would be reflected in the official committee list as shown in the Progress Reports, despite the fact that there were grave changes. The reason was that we hoped to promote continuity in the minds of fandom, who, seeing a change across the board at the top, would have assumed that things had fallen apart and were still apart.

From March on the same committee worked the con, and from that point on the work got tough--but we had a stronger, more viable organization that we'd ever had.

NEXT: How To Set Up A Worldcon