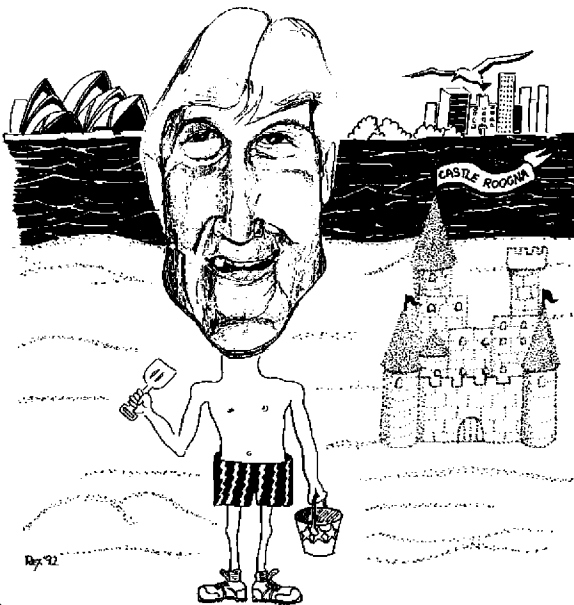


"FROM THE PRYING FFANZ INTO THE FOYER"

A FAN FUND TRIP REPORT BY REX THOMPSON



FROM THE PRYING FFANZ INTO THE FOYER is a trip report detailing the epic excursion of young Rex Thompson on his first ever trip abroad as FFANZ candidate representing New Zealand fandom in Sydney at SYNCON'92, held over Easter of that year.

Any similarities between the characters of this report, and persons living or dead, is a bloody miracle, coz Thompson is deaf, dumb, blind, has a memory like a seive, and more often than not, pissed out of his gourd... so you're doing quite well really...

If by chance you have received a complimentary copy of this report, it means you either saved my bacon by providing a roof over my head, transportation when I needed it most, or were able to direct me to the nearest bottle store. There are also those that are receiving this coz I like you, or I'm guilty of owing you some token item of trade.

If you're reading this over a friend's shoulder, and desperately desire a copy of your own, they are available for \$NZ5.00 (plus postage), from:

REX, P.O. BOX 333, DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND

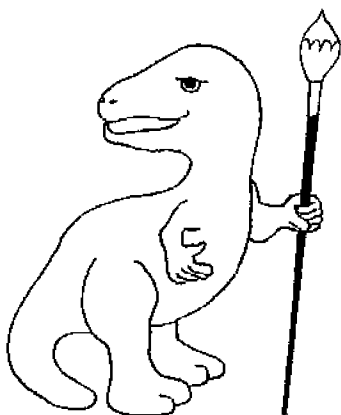
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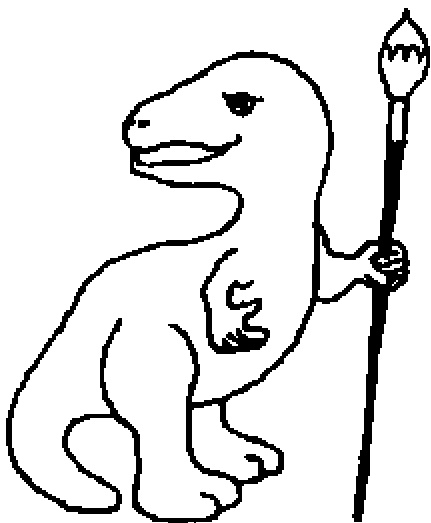
ARTWORK

Cover: "Face" caricature of Rex by Vernon Trainor, with other bits by Rex.

All other artwork by Rex.



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After Tom Cardy returned from his FFANZ trip in 1983 and told me what a great experience it was, I decided I would run for FFANZ "sometime". I found myself considering the idea sooner than expected however, when Roger Weddall was in New Zealand in 1986.

St Kilda, DUNEDIN, to St Kilda, MELBOURNE...

My journey began on Sunday April 12th, at 5.30pm. I travelled from Dunedin to Christchurch by hitching a lift in a NZ Post truck and trailer (a "B-Train" is wot they call'em). Thankfully this didn't involve ye traditional "thumb-out-on-the-side-of-the-road" variety. I am a Courier for NZ Post in Dunedin, so I have a free country-wide transport network at my disposal whenever I please. However, you have to be prepared to follow some pretty antisocial timetables at times...

The trip to Christchurch took six hours. The driver on for that week was Dave. I had never done this trip with Dave before (and if I have my way, I never will again!) He has something of a penchant for folk music... actually, LOUD folk music. I could see this was going to be a LONG six hours.

The rig only went as far as one of the outer suburbs of Christchurch, so I had to connect with a shuttle truck to get into the Chief Post Office (where I was spending the night). It turned out the shuttle truck driver was an ex Post Office mechanic that had helped me out 3 years earlier when the brand new van I was taking back to Dunedin broke down after travelling 12km out of Christchurch. (This example of the sort of luck I attract whilst travelling should be noted for future reference...) He had obviously opted for a job in the transport section rather than redundancy, after the decision to contract out all repair work. The hot

There were no less than three races that Roger attempted to get me to run for, and by the third one I was beginning to think this is getting a little embarrassing, and my excuses were getting a little thin, so I accepted. As a consequence I found myself travelling to Australia around Easter of 1992. The following is a report of that trip:

favourite on all the grapevines these days was the subject of changing all the Couriers into contracted Owner Drivers. The feeling in these har parts was much the same as back home (ie. pretty negative).

By the time I started heading up to the lounge/rec room on the 7th floor it was well after midnight. I jumped into my sleeping bag and stretched out on a couch for some kip before having to check in at the airport at 7am.

It wasn't long before some arsehole flicked all the lights on and was followed by 20 or so others having a half hour tea break. This was to happen several times during the course of the night...

Between supervisors challenging me for ID; women screaming when they discovered this big bag had something IN it; and cleaners asking me if "the wife had kicked me out", it was not a night renowned for its restful slumber. At 5.30am I gave up attempting to sleep and had a cup of coffee with the cleaning ladies and talked work, babies and the weather.

For the first time in my life I was on a plane heading for a foreign country. (Well, not so much foreign as 'strange'...) I was served my old favourite for breakfast (Sanitarium Light And Tasty) and had a very pleasant 2 hour 50 minute flight to Sydney. Having departed Christchurch which boasted a temperature of 6°C,

the 25°C of Sydney hit me like a dragon blowing kisses! After a 10 minute bus ride from the international terminal to the domestic terminal, I had enough time for a spot of lunch. (It was only 10am Aus-time, but my stomach was telling me it was 12pm!)

While waiting for my boarding call, who should wander past, but Jon English talking on a cellphone! I enjoyed lunch #2 on the plane, and had a very friendly woman [from a small unpronounceable Aussie town] make conversation for the duration of the journey.

Upon disembarking at Melbourne, who should I see meeting his girlfriend off the plane but James Reyne (of "Australian Crawl"/ EAST OF EDEN fame)!! Bloody hell, who was I going to see in the carpark? Olivia Newton John? the Bee Gees??...

But no, it was John Farnham! Then I realised it was only Roger Weddall wearing a wig... Roger and Donna Heenan were my welcome committee. Roger was putting me up/putting up with me till the end of the week (it's the least the bastard could do for getting me into this mess...) .

Roger to my mind is the quintessential fan (and human-being). He is charming, loving, caring... and lots of other nice things ending in "ing".

They paid me the luxury of a guided tour around Melbourne. It was a lovely sunny day (hotter in fact than it had

been in Sydney, hough paradoxically, far more comfortable), and my shutter finger got a good workout recording such sights as the Shrine Of Remembrance, and Daimaru- the inner city shopping complex. Daimaru is basically a cone-shaped building that had been planted over the top of the original building on the site- an old brick shot-tower. The architectural incongruity was truly awe-inspiring; the giant pocket-watch with spinning

cockatoos etc (and played "Waltzing Matilda") was truly vomit producing!

I was informed that a welcome dinner for that night had been arranged in my honour, and found myself sampling my first gastronomic delight at THAI TARA in Collingwood. Donna and I left Roger to his own devices (typing LHYFE I think), and joined the other fen that were gathered at said establishment (they being: Frances Papworth, Phil Wlodarczyk, Alan Stewart, Ian Gunn, Karen Pender-Gunn, Elaine Cochrane, Bruce Gillespie, and Mark Loney (who got the time wrong, and turned up a little later in the evening).

It was good getting to meet Mark in the flesh. The infamous stuffed cane toad instigator, and past spouse of Michelle Muijert. He reminded me a little of Tom Cardy, only a little more sophisticated, sensitive, and vulnerable. Actually, he's nothing like Tom Cardy... Frances asked me if I was a fan of Star Trek, and much to her delight (and Phil's disgust), I said "Yes".



Dorothy

Elaine Ann

Rev. Phil Brown

Frances

Mary

Karen Allen

Phil (Wlodarczyk is not a name to say with your mouth full) is one of a handful of excellent Australian fan artists that I have enjoyed the work of in fanzines for years, and as a consequence is one of the names that immediately rang bells of recognition. Ditto with Ian Gunn. It was quite a kick getting to meet these two guys face to face! Ian looks a lot like Pavarotti, so I half expected to hear him burst into spontaneous operatic choruses. In actuality he was comparatively quiet (at least tonight he was) though there was the ever-present twinkle in his eye and cheeky smirk behind which that Gunny-humour was hiding.

Apparently I flattered Bruce a while back by sending him a copy of my zine, even tho' he hadn't produced anything himself in quite a while.

Oh, and the food was nice...

Tuesday the 14th.

Had a LOVELY lie-in. (which I needed after my nightmare-night in Christchurch). Typo had taken an instant liking to me and curled up on top of my sleeping bag. I guess that makes me eligible to wear an "I'VE SLEPT WITH A DITMAR-WINNER" t-shirt! I got up and helped myself to some toast, and had the dishes finished JUST in time for Roger to arrive home (with his paper supplies for LHYFE) and chain me to the coffee table until such time as I had produced some fillos for his zine. (I've heard of Artists in residence but Artists in bondage is ridiculous! ...Mind you, it's a lifestyle I could get used to...) These particular illustrations have in fact been the ONLY ones I have done THIS YEAR [1992] (barring the cover of this zine) unfortunately the humour in one or two was a little ...strained?

Come 2.30pm, Roger introduced me to the delights of Tram travel, and gave me a run-down on the logistics of using this 'quaint' but effective mode of transportation.

I managed to stumble across MINOTAUR the local SF merchandise outlet, where I bought an SF FANDOM DIRECTORY for the NASF library (NASF had been after one for a while), and an ST VI postcard to post home. I took the opportunity of poking my nose into a video-game arcade (which I haven't done in years) more for curiosity's sake, to see how much they had advanced since 'my day'. Things weren't that radically different, though I was intrigued by a shooting game that looked like a western movie gone wrong. You shot at the characters on-screen (while they shot back) There were a variety of scenarios to choose from (Sheriff's Office, Saloon etc) and even a practice scene that showed bottles sitting on a wall that shattered when you hit them. Aaah the miracle of laser disc technology...

Bought a few pressies for the poor deprived folk back home (including the obligatory Koala) and also got myself a shirt and velvet waistcoat (of which not a few ten ran their fingers through during the course of my visit!)

Tonight's dining establishment was to be THY THY 2, a Vietnamese restaurant in Fitzroy. Besides Roger and Geoff, I was to be eating with a couple of ex-pat Kiwis, Greg Hills, and Michelle Muisert accompanied by her then-current lover [but not for much longer] Chris.

I had last seen Greg in Dunedin in 1989 (he came to SATYRICON), but I never really got much opportunity to talk to him then, so it was nice to sit down over a yummy meal and lots of wine and have a leisurely chat. Heard about his efforts to find a city that he was relatively comfortable with and happy to settle in. [Poor bloody Melbournites...]

Roger and Geoff hadn't been greatly forthcoming in the "Juicy Gossip Department" but felt sure that as far as Michelle was concerned, I would get it

from the horse's mouth. Unfortunately the presence of Chris meant Michelle was somewhat restrained as to her topics of conversation. I met Michelle exactly 10 years ago, and have always liked her. She is a very intelligent articulate individual, but very down-to-earth and easy to get on with. It was a real thrill to see her again. I actually thought I had helped convince her to attend SHAKEYCON (the NZ 1992 Natcon) at Queen's Birthday Weekend, but alas, she did not show (so I still haven't heard the guts of the gossip- tho' Geoff and Roger did give me a couple of tidbits on the way home...)

transfers. We found all the above and left 'them' to it for an hour or so. We killed the time by looking at a couple of art galleries. In the midst of our "walkabout", we got drenched in the most incredible torrential downpour, so we took refuge in a handy coffee shop (It was either that, or find ourselves a wet t-shirt contest to enter). The rain (I assume) caused my watch (which has a liquid crystal display) to 'blank-out', but thankfully it 'came-to' not long after.

For the third night running, I dined out. Melbourne, I LOVE this town!! This time it was with the NOVA MOB which on this occasion comprised of Roger, Bruce Barnes, Alan Stewart,

Bruce Barnes was a fairly unassuming sort of chap, who I thought was a dead ringer for "Mr Bean", and almost as talkative.

Wednesday the 15th.

For some unknown reason I woke at 6.30am, and found it very hard to get back to sleep... zzzzz.

Yep, did some more work on those darn illos..

It was a drizzly-damp day today. In the first half of the day, I went for a walk around the shops of St Kilda with Geoff and Roger. Roger bought a propellor beanie from a novelty shop (after we'd read all the naughty cards and played with all the wind-up toys). The highlight of this excursion was the sight of window-upon-window of cake shops! The selection (and quantity) was amazing! Geoff and Roger's 'old favourites' were cream-filled cherry turnovers. YUUUM! We bought one each, and they tasted as good as they looked!

I wanted to run off extra copies of my "SF CONVENTIONS - WHEN THE FANS HIT THE SHIT" t-shirt, so Geoff spent the afternoon ferrying me around the town searching out a source of cheap t-shirts and colour-copy

Marc Ortleib, Donna Heenan, Bruce Gillespie, (who must like my company... or maybe he just likes dining out..?) Lyn Wolfe, and Jane Tisell. We sampled Thai food at EREWON, which was absolutely delicious (but for which I suffered slightly the next day). Bruce Barnes was a fairly unassuming sort of chap, who I thought was a dead ringer for "Mr Bean", and almost as talkative.

Dinner was followed by a real-live Nova Mob Meeting at Alan Stewart's house. Alan had contacted me some weeks earlier and asked me if I would present a talk at this month's meeting (which had been rescheduled for me specially- the dear souls). The academic-like intellectual posturing of these meetings was legendary, even where I am from, so I found myself intimidated somewhat by the prospect, but eagerly accepted this as an 'official duty' as FFANZ Candidate. (Hell, even Tim Jones exclaimed "YOU are going to speak at a NOVA MOB MEETING!?!?!"). Actually, going to dinner first rather than walking into

the meeting could be good. It meant I was talking to acquaintances rather than strangers (and it gave me a chance to drink heaps of wine!).

Rather than talk on some esoteric indigenous subject (which was probably what everyone was expecting), I presented SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM- THE OUTCAST CONTEMPORARY INFRACULTURE. (Is that something for Intellectuals to jerk-off over, or what?). As a back-up, I brought video tapes of past NZ Natcons, but no-one seemed particularly interested...)

Marc was the only one to ask a question afterwards, so the group weren't falling over themselves to point out holes in my logic at least. It was good meeting Marc. He is one of a few Aussies with which I've corresponded with over the years, so it was great to see the face that fronts the editorship of TIGGER etc.

I had a great ole natter with Lyn Wolfe, who was very candid about her relationship with Terry Frost (the things that man does with icing sugar...) She also told me there WAS such an entity as a dissatisfied BMW owner...

I had a great ole natter with Lyn Wolfe, who was very candid about her relationship with Terry Frost (the things that man does with icing sugar...).

Clive Newall and LynC arrived toward the end of the evening, and their arrival was obviously a subtle signal to the rest of the group. Just as I was getting lulled into a false sense of security (not to mention security), they let me have it- "How would you like to join ANZAPA" they said. They used all manner of devilish psychological ploys, and even bribed me with a sample mailing. However, I held firm in my resolve, and escaped unrecruited. Donna kindly gave Roger and I a lift

back to St Kilda, where I got a tour of the LHYFE Editorial Office (a room about 5ft square. You couldn't fit a cat in there, let alone swing one). I was especially interested in this issue of LHYFE, as it featured a letter from me, clarifying some cryptic but slightly juicy points made by Michelle Muljert in the previous issue. Tom Cardy however, ALSO had a letter in this issue which basically spilt the beans (though Tom will tell you I prefer spaghetti) in typical unsubtle Cardy fashion.

Thursday the 16th.
My diary says- "Got up at 10amish, and listened to the latest". (Latest WHAT??) I do recall at least that it was music of some description.

Roger had made a final marathon effort during the night, and had finished pasteing up LHYFE at 3am in the morning. Before setting off to Greg Hill's place to get the thing photocopied, Roger took me to ALTERNATE WORLDS. AW was the local suburban sf merchandise store. Roger was obviously well-known by the staff, and introduced me,

explaining my sordid origins, and the reason for my defiling their beautiful city with my presence. I discovered one of the staff was even going to the con which was to be a VERY important piece of throwaway information in the hours to come...)

I spent bloody hours in that shop. I didn't want to leave without buying something, but couldn't decide what. The graphic novels were a real attraction (particularly the DAREDEVIL.

one), but eventually settled on a classic and Next Generation Star Trek t-shirt.

Having again ventured into town, the Victoria Museum was on my list of "must see" places. The statues in the grounds were very impressive, as were the butterfly collection and dinosaur skeletons. Unfortunately I had to rush through it a bit as I was scheduled to rendezvous with Roger "under the clocks" at 2pm. The "clocks" were a row of (you guessed it) clocks over the main entrance of the Melbourne Central Railway Station, and has apparently been a historic meeting place for couples for decades.

THYME had had its fair share of mishaps at the BOMBED BUDGIE PRESS, but it was done. Our next port-of-call was the establishment known as JACKSON AND YOUNG (a pub). This pub had the infamous reputation of being "Chloe's hangout". Chloe was a painting of a naked woman, who had graced the walls of said establishment for literally decades. My father-in-law had made a point of telling me to go see Chloe. He had seen her on his Melbourne stopover when returning from the Middle-East during World War II. In those days, she had been downstairs in the public bar. Now she resided upstairs in the lounge bar which was called now called (surprise surprise) CLOE'S BAR. Roger was surprised that I was already so "well-acquainted" with Chloe. We started downstairs, where I had a Guinness (my first ever) while we discussed politics, particularly New Zealand politics, and the ramifications of having introduced GST. I did my usual bitch about our eroded health and education systems, and the sale of the country's silver (state-owned businesses like Telecom) to overseas interests.

The dim surroundings, dark beer, and black conversation, were starting to take their toll on my high spirits, so we moved upstairs into sunnier surroundings, lighter beer (Carlton

Draught), and more flippant conversation.

Roger eventually departed to make ready for his bus trip to Sydney, and I checked out the Victoria Market- just in time to see them packing up...

The time came to be readying myself for the train journey to Sydney, so I packed my gear, pushed my front-door key through the mail slot in the front-door, and headed into town...



By the time I walked from the tram-stop to the station my gear was getting pretty bloody heavy, so I was thankful to finally set my fist on the platform door. Funny, it seemed to be locked. The next thing I see is the **FUCKING TRAIN STARTING TO MOVE!** I look at my watch and see I've still got 20 minutes, so I relax, figuring that's the train for Perth or somewhere. I say to a woman "Is that the train to Sydney?" and she says "Yes", and I say "But it's not 8 o'clock yet" and she says "Yes it is" and points at the clock on the wall.

[Remember how my watch 'blanked out' yesterday in the rain? I had assumed it had phased back in at the correct time, though obviously it had literally stopped for 20 minutes!]

I returned to the ticket office and explained my situation. This was the eve of Easter. Everything was booked solid. There were no more trains, no buses, no planes. *fuck*.

As realisation seeped in like ink through blotting paper (or bheer through a vegemite sandwich), my heart got so enthused with its' thumping that I expected a sandworm to come bursting through the floor any second! I recall being intrigued at my comparatively calm and collected state. Here I was, having travelled thousands of miles to a foreign country, and I was going to miss the very event that people had raised money for me to attend- and I hadn't even fainted or anything!

I wasn't giving up though. Maybe there were still local fen in town intending to drive through? Maybe I could get the radio-stations to put a desperate plea over the airwaves? Maybe I could stand on the side of the Hume Highway with my thumb out?...

Suddenly my brain went "click" Danny at ALTERNATE WORLDS had said he was driving up after work tonight! The shop was open till 9pm, so I caught the tram back out to St Kilda, and arrived there at 9.06pm. The shop was dark and the door was locked. I banged frantically on it to no avail. *shit*.

I walked back to Geoff and Roger's. I no longer had my key, so I knocked... There was no answer. Geoff's van was outside, but perhaps he had gone to the pub. I get a twig and start shoving it under the door in the hope that I can retrieve my key. Peering under the door, I notice a pair of bare feet walking across the hall- "GEOFF!!"

He was a little surprised to see me to say the least. I scramble for the phone and attempt to phone ALTERNATE WORLDS. I get a Telecom message- "The number you have dialled..." I call another number... The phone is answered, but Danny has gone. They give me his home phone number, but I can't seem to ring through. I ring AW back. "Could you try ringing Danny for me and tell him to give me a call?" Yes, they will.

I call Bruce Gillespie, explain my predicament, and ask if he knows of anyone else driving through tonight?" I spend 5 minutes listening to Bruce saying "Oh hell, oh hell, OH HELL" -he can't help. I put the phone down and it rings with my hand still on the receiver. It's Danny Heap. They had a full car, but one person had pulled out at the last minute so they had space. (I felt a sense of relief akin to diarrhoea after a month of constipation. Boy was I relieved!) Geoff very kindly gave me a lift to the other side of Melbourne, where I met Danny again), Paul, and Becky. Becky kept me entertained by chatting away merrily, and showing me her prized phallic symbol- a replica of the sword "Excalibur", while the guys packed the car.

LUCK TO BE BE-HOLDEN.

After a whirlwind "hit-and-run" easter egg delivery to someone I forget the name of, we were on our way!

Danny could best be described as "James Dignan on Speed". He is one of the most exuberant and energetic individuals I have ever met. Paul by comparison was incredibly dry, but certainly wasn't lacking when it came to witty repartee. The two of them bounced off each other throughout the night. Becky was the Mother Hen, always looking out for everyone else's welfare and continuing to make a fuss of me. A real Sweetie.

All three took a turn at driving and attempted to get some shut-eye along the way. It was during this portion of my travels that I discovered petrol was almost half the price that we pay back home!

When dawn broke the light obviously started playing tricks on me, as I thought I could see this building shimmering away in the distance, topped with twin gold arches... No it couldn't be. We're out in the middle of the fucking outback for crissakes!!

We had breakfast at McDonald's. In Oz they have a thing called a "breakfast menu". I had to content myself with a bacon and egg McMuffin when I would have KILLED for a Big Mac!

SEED-KNEE MATE!

Because SYNCON was 'over the bridge' at the SHORE INN, I got to see quite a bit of Sydney as we passed through. At 10.30am our journey came to an end, and I was actually bloody here!

"Fine" I thought, "I can handle sharing a room with a woman she can handle sharing one with me".

I found myself standing in the hotel foyer checking in when who should walk in the door, but Alan and the rest of the Melbourne Mob from the train. "Where the hell have you been!" exclaimed an irate/surprised/relieved Donna Heenan. "I was on the train, where were you?" I replied.

They were astute enough not to fall for my story (surprise surprise), so I confessed all. Donna passed a remark about "causing an international incident" which I thought had a nice ring to it, but somewhat inflated the importance of my visit.

I hadn't had any real problems with the Australian accent up to this point, but it was soon to change...

I asked the Receptionist who the person was that I was sharing the room with, and she replied "Anne Stathopoulos". "Fine" I thought, "I can handle sharing a room with a woman if she can handle sharing one with me". Then while telling someone (Donna?) in the lift that I was sharing my room with Anne Stathopoulos, they said "Oh, Nick!" "Fine" I thought, "I'm sharing a room with Nick and Anne Stathopoulos. I hope they don't mind being lumbered with me in their room..."

Yes, okay, so I'm really slow on the uptake and it FINALLY occurred to me that Anne Stathopoulos was in fact "N" Stathopoulos, ie. NICK- On his own!

I dumped my gear in my room (514) and sorted out my stuff and had a lie down (which was a complete waste of time, but hell, at least I tried...) Went for a wander to the local suburban

shopping centre and got myself a "build-your-own-sandwich, or at least that's what I ended up with after getting them to fish out numerous extra sandwich fillings for me..."

I had been asked to ensure I was "about" for the Opening Ceremony, so come 2pm I was seated in the main room along with everyone else. The opening was a "no frills" short and sweet affair, with concom and guest intros, and then it was straight into Sean McMullen's presentation on AUSTRALIAN ART OF SF COVERS AND INTERNALS.

I found this talk quite fascinating, It surprised me to see just how extensive the subject matter was. It also showed us that Seans' research abilities are formidable, even when it comes to 'arty farty' topics such as this.

Karl was next up with what ended up being a non-descript journey-through-life-and-the-outback story, with plummeting New York cats thrown in for good measure. This man is a hilarious speaker, and could obviously play "the entertainer" and keep an audience spellbound no matter WHAT kind of convention audience he was speaking to!

At 4.30pm there was the combined talents of Pro and Fan Guests of Honour on hand to present JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER discussing the importance and impact of bookcover art.

Unfortunately I missed Jean Webers' RECENT SF BY WOMEN. Getting to meet Jean in the flesh at this convention, was for me, verging on a religious experience! WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE was the first (and most frequent!) overseas fanzine I received. Eric Lindsay's worth a mention too!

I was part of a very small but interested group sitting in on Jack Hermans' A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN NATCONS - PRE 1975. I figured this would be a good way to do some 'cramming' on the subject of Aussie Natcons.

I had heard that in some quarters Mr Herman is regarded as a bit of a prat with a capital P-R-I-C-K, and I have to admit that I thought I would be a bit beneath his contempt. I have to say though, that I found Jack very approachable, friendly, and extremely knowledgeable.

I dined in the Shore Inn restaurant tonight, at a table inhabited by Nick

Stathopoulos, Dianne DeBellis, Sarah Murray-White, and Greg Bridges. They were all odd strangers to me, and I was even stranger to them. It is situations like this when I am at my shyest, but I soon discovered that this crowd were a pretty friendly bunch, and put me at ease in no time at all. Of course when I was most wanting to make a favourable impression, I had to order a hard-to-eat messy meal like fucking fettucini!

Greg presented a slideshow on SF ART IN ADVERTISING. He's a friend of Nick's from the 'outside world' rather than being a bonafide fan himself, though he obviously has had a taste for sf since his early youth judging by the amount of his own work done with an sf theme. It's a brave man who can show drawings from his childhood to a hotel full of strangers...

9.30pm saw the commencement of the Cocktail Party. This was an official programme item obviously designed to "break the ice" and get the attendees "mixing" (ghod, TWO lousy puns in one sentence!)



SO WHAT TIME IS THIS ROOM PARTY TONIGHT?

The bar prices (as always) were exorbitant, so I steered clear of cocktails, and sampled more Aussie beer. Got into a number of conversations including such topics as kids and karate with Sean McMullen; beer with Rod Kearins, and discussed BLATANT SEDUCTION TECHNIQUES OF AUSTRALIAN FANDOM with Dianne DeBellis, while watching Tim demonstrating said techniques.

I sat in on UNCLE TERRY'S BEDTIME STORY at midnight. This was not only a chance to sample some of Terry Dowling's writing, but to hear how he imagines it to be read. It is a chance to pick up on subtle nuances of character inter-play, and emotion. It also gives you an insight into the writer, how he feels about his characters, and a look at the obvious passion he has for his writing. Terry has a VERY pleasant speaking voice, and is an eloquent reader (even with the Aussie accent).

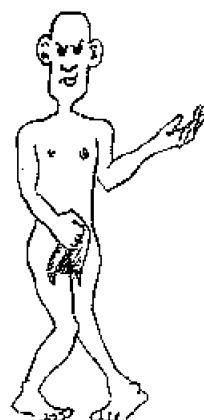
I discovered over the course of the weekend that Terry Dowling REALLY likes to talk and be the centre of attention. Initially I was tempted to brand him as Australia's own Harlan Ellison, but he doesn't have an inferiority complex that drives him into the same "Me and Them" confrontations as Mr Ellison. Terry debates and cajoles with a glint of the eye rather than a gnash of the teeth.

I'm sure I 'socialised' some more before going to bed. Damned if I know where though...

Saturday April 18th.

Woke up at 9.30am thanks to Nick pulling back the bloody curtains and letting the sunshine in! He also indulged in this disgusting habit of MAKING CONVERSATION! I forced my brain into kick-starting itself so that I could attempt replies that were coherent. Nick is a FANTASTIC guy, and it was an honour and a pleasure to share a room (and nose-hair clippers) with him!

CANCHA KNOCK BEFORE
YA TURN-NA PAGE ?!!



Key 85

I attended the pun panel at 10am. The two teams were chaired by Donna Heenan. Team One consisted of Roger Weddall, and Team Two was Alan Stewart. Yep, one apiece. Teams of multiple players (as it is supposed to have been) would have worked better, but people (understandably) weren't game enough to take that kind of punishment. Nevertheless, Roger and Alan [aren't they a couple of folk singers?...] put on an impressive display with occasional contributions from the audience. Alan tended to have the edge, and impressed me with his razor-sharp wit. Topics like food (bean there, done that), plants (best leafed well-alone), and circuses (murder within-tent) filled the hour effortlessly. Nothing to do with science fiction, but a helluva lot of fun anyway.

I followed the pun panel with my slideshow ARITCHOKE FARMING IN THE HIMALAYAS. Nervousness meant the jokes fell a little flat, but feedback tended to be positive. This was a presentation on New Zealand fan art. What I thought was a small turnout was actually quite reasonable compared with some of the audiences over the weekend.

Fan picked to represent NZ in sci-fi convention

Mr. Thompson, 35, of Auckland, has been chosen to represent New Zealand at the Australian National Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne.

The convention has now been held for 20 years. New Zealand is the only country in the world to have a representative at the convention. Mr. Thompson will be the only New Zealand representative at the convention.

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Lunchtime was spent wandering about for one and a half hours, feeling a little melancholy from the dreaded homesickness. After a pita bread for lunch, and finding a bottle store for my weekend's drinking requirements, I felt much better!

Michael Whelan presented a slideshow on the work he has produced during his professional career. There are few artists that I admire as much as Michael. He is a man of phenomenal skill and vision (but then I don't need to tell you that do I...) This was such a nostalgia trip getting to see all these old paperback covers, and thinking "Oh! that's from..." As well as being a great artist, he is also a neat person, a good speaker and wonderful storyteller. (I asked him what it is he least likes to paint, and the answer was "Dragons!" He has done a few in his time...)

pointers from the McMullens and Dowlings was not one to pass up. She was quite a talker and I spent a fair amount of time sitting on the floor with her comparing notes as this was the first Aussie natcon for both of us. I hope she makes it as a writer- she'd make a great Guest of Honour one day...

I stuck my nose into the FFANZ auction, partly to offer assistance (which wasn't especially needed), and partly out of curiosity to see what prices my donated items fetched. Justin Ackroyd did the auctioneering, and was nothing short of Sensational (yes, with a capital "S"). His slick quick lean clean no-nonsense style, and formidable knowledge of all things pro and fanish was entertainment in itself.

...I had been admiring Jane's pussy (the blue felt one pinned to her chest)...

2.30pm. THE FINE ART OF FAN PUBLISHING. This was yet another poorly attended "fanish" (with a double "a") programme item, but hell, the panellists had a great time...

The auction went till 6pm, so I missed LIVING WITH THE ARTIST. Besides, I might find I have more bad habits than the ones already know about!

3.30pm. THE HISTORY OF NATCONS - POST 75. The continuing saga of deception and intrigue in the power struggle for the Natcon... I missed Lewis Morley's "Robots On Film" which is a shame, more for not getting an insight into WTIO this Lewis Morley person IS than for the topic of the programme item.

I ate with Alan Stewart and Jane Tisell at a local Chinese Restaurant. Had a steak (served in slices so it was chopstickable). I learned the reasoning behind the high-pitched greetings Jane gets- "Ooooh hullo Miss Jane!" It seems "Miss Jane" is a Presenter on the children's tv programme "Mr Squiggle" (probably along the lines of "Miss Helen" from "Romper Room").

I stumbled upon one Cathy Cupitt sitting in the hall (looking a little 'down-on-it' and it seems she too was suffering the ravages of homesickness. Cathy is a Perthite (Perthonian?) who was attending her first ever Natcon. She is an aspiring writer who had taken the year off from University to concentrate on her writing, and felt that an opportunity to get some

I had been admiring Jane's pussy (the blue felt one pinned to her chest) and I was somewhat flabbergasted at her generosity when she offered it to me. (It was the absolute original stuffed CONSTANTINOPLE cat, which I discovered, Jane payed a good deal of money for). I found Jane a really friendly, fun, person, and I discovered later, a bonafide Party Animal (dem's my kinda people!

At 8.30pm it was time for the masquerade. By the time I hunted the hotel for an iron, got dressed and fronted up downstairs, it was 8.25pm. Obviously worried that I wasn't going to show, the concorn had re-allocated my seat at the judging table to someone else (thank GHOD!).

Nick played MC for this, which effectively meant "entertain the plebs during the intervals you bastard!" I suspect Nick is used and abused by concorns to provide a stand-up comedy routine more often than not, but when you see him in action you can understand why. The man is hilarious! Seeing him dressed as Jessica Rabbit was like seeing Adolf Hitler play the Tooth Fairy! He also won a round of (condemning) "OOOOOOOOH's" with his disparaging remark about the late Isaac Asimov.



The most memorable effort was from Danny Heap and friends as Jesus Christ and followers. It wasn't so much a 'presentation' as a bloody Broadway musical!!

The masquerade was however, fair-to-middling, and has obviously suffered the same fate as NZ Natcons. Theories accounting for this range from purely economic reasons through to fear of ridicule for 'amateurish' efforts. Perhaps they have simply lost their novelty value (hell, back when we were A.L. Neos, and natcons numbered in single figures, EVERYONE dressed up). Is it worth going a couple of years without masquerades, in an effort to re-inject some 'freshness' back into them???

Stayed up and partied with Donna, Roger, Jane, and Lea Henderson (one of Syncon's more eccentric personalities, even by fannish standards). Jane attempted to jack up some music, but after Jane, Roger and I boogied away to a couple of numbers, the radio died a frazzled death. We therefore resorted to conversation (ergh!) I recall SUNCXON being one consuming topic of conversation, and Roger inevitably wanted to know which con attendees we'd all like to sleep with! (being the gentleman that I am - and fearing the repercussions involving animal excrement, I will refrain from elaborating). There must have been more, coz we kept at it (talking you fools!) till 5.30am!

Sunday April 19th. I managed to arise at 10.30am, and Jane came-a-knocking at 10.45am (I'd asked her to ensure I was up in time for the business session). All manner of exciting business was discussed such as the retro-active reinstatement of Typo's Ditmar and changes to the wording of the constitution, to which Jack Herman (being the constitution engineer) stated "I am biased, but objective in my approach to remits".

At 12.15pm I got my newly-bought copy of WONDERWORKS signed by an embarrassed Michael Whelan (he spelt my name R-i-e-k and asked if there was an "s" at the end of it). We laughed the whole thing off, and I got to talking with him about New Zealand. He

and Audrey had hoped to include it in their itinerary this time round, but that wasn't possible, though he is VERY keen to come under 'down under' one day.

Ate another custom-built sandwich and an almond croissant before attending Nick's slideshow on his career as a professional artist. It was probably at this time that he told us the story of leaving his capping ceremony (having graduated as a lawyer) and walking into the pub where the other Graduands were, still fully frocked, and in that coy grinning-from-ear-to-ear fashion of his, saying- "I've got a job". (While en route to the pub, he had been offered a job [as an artist] at HANNA BARBERA!) FANDOM THE FIFTH ESTATE was scheduled for 2pm, being a discussion on Fandom around the world. It was particularly interesting hearing from Eva Hauser (the GUFF winner) talking on fandom in Czechoslovakia. Eva was an excellent speaker of English, and informed us of the differences between Czech and Slovakian fandom (Eva is Czech, but relates better to the young 'party people' Slovaks. Ron Clarke also had some tidbits to impart on Russian fandom and hessian condoms.

I had a look at the artshow before attending the next item on the programme. NZ cons haven't ever staged a decent artshow worth writing home about. This display however was impressive! Admittedly the contributions from both Michael and Nick played a significant part in this, but had their works not been present, Syncon would still have had a worthy artshow, and one I definitely did write home about!

Michael Whelan, man of much talent (and many slides!) added another notch to his brush at 4.30pm with THE SYMBOLISM OF ART explaining WHY Renaissance art has things like Elvis and Flymos in it. (I may have misheard that, possibly it's supposed to read owls and crows...)

5.30pm. MY FAVOURITE GIZMO. Hey this was really fun! I was on a panel with Nick and Terry Frost, and had the details of various devices divulged to us so that we might produce working drawings of these inventions. They included a helmet for increasing brain power, a black hole closet, and a rat catcher that had twin towers, an external spiral staircase...

I invented a new use for the Dalcon Shield (which raised a few eyebrows). We did our 'design concepts' in felt pen straight onto overheads that were shown to the audience instantaneously! Brilliant! I'll have to remember this one for a certain convention in '94...



At the banquet I ended up seated with Martin Reilly, a mediafan from Queensland, and Tara Smith and Cathy Cupitt from Perth. Had a good chat with Martin concerning the divisiveness of media and lit fen in Australia, and the efforts being made to combat it. I had great difficulty keeping tabs on plates, milk jugs and cutlery for some reason. Either the place was haunted, or Tara and Cathi weren't as sweet and innocent as they looked...

The banquet was followed by a Celebrity Roast. The individual being roasted was the FanGoH himself, Nick Stathopoulos. I'd seen the Dean Martin versions on telly, and while the panellists didn't drink as much, they were just as entertaining! Terry, Dianne, Justin and Jenny did the honours.

Terry: "Do you know why Nick uses a dry-brush technique? Because he can't find the taps!" (Many-an-aspersion was cast on Nick's housekeeping skills..)

(don't you hate the way the carpet fibres stick between your teeth...). Sean McMullen was keen to get some "technical details" (on heart surgery) for a (possible) future story/stories.

I took Tammy up to my room to ~~see my exchings~~ give her a copy of my fanzine, in the vain hope that she might actually contribute something to it sometime. After she came out with the line: "Where have you been all weekend" it was ironic to find her room was directly across the hall from

As for Tim, I dread to think what he does any of the time...

Jenny recounted a camping trip story where Nick told some 'roudy campers' to "SHUT-THE-FUCK-UP! And then discovered he was "conversing" with some 8ft Hells Angels...

At 9.30pm it was the Ditmar Award presentations. The award itself (from the glimpse I got of it) looked like a moulded ceramic slab. These were a Lewis Morley effort, and because they looked so good, ALL the nominees were keen to get their hands on one!

...I ended up spending a good part of this evening standing in a hallway... Donna did a fantastic job of holding my drinks when I needed my hands free for other things...

I met a charming individual known as Tammy Lomas tonight. Her looks and obvious energy really caught my attention. Tim and Tammy had an inter-Thespian discussion session. (It seems that Tammy does heart surgery by day, and acting by night). As for Tim, I dread to think what he does any of the time...

I discovered that Tammy Lomas was the Tammy Lomas wot had the artwork in the art display! I listened in on her discussion on Japanese comic art (on which I was totally lost) with a couple of guys 'grazing' the hall party

mine! Tammy went to bed and I returned to Donna "The drink-stand" Heenan and others downstairs. Donna, with her voluminous verbal vociferations, reminded me of Dion Kelly in Dunedin. (He was good at telling a good bullshit story or two too!)

It turned out that I was forced (all 6 arms behind my back and everything!) to party until the early hours of the morning because Dianne DeBellis and my esteemed self were trying to stall Nick while Danny, Becky, and Paul 'doctored' our room... Trouble is, once Di and I had convinced Nick to "hang about" after his initial attempt to go to bed, he seemed to get his second wind and kept going for "expletive deleted" hours!

FINALLY, Nick went to bed, and upon turning out the lights, he gazed up at the ceiling and saw luminous lettering saying:

NICK, I'M WATCHING
- ISAAC.

When I entered the room, he was like a kid who'd just seen Santa come down the chimney, all grins and waving arms, saying "Look at the ceiling! Look at the ceiling!"

After going to bed (for all of 5 seconds) we decided it was going to be impossible to sleep with the room "glowing" and that it might be a good idea to get the stuff off. So, there we were at 4.30am, in our undies, standing on the bed, arms stretched above our heads trying to pick the glow-in-the-dark silly putty and glowing stars off (along with a few flakes of paint I might add). Anyone looking through the window would've been thinking "What the hell kind of foreplay is that!?!?" And people listening at the door would've heard lines like "Hold my ball", "this stuff is STICKY", and "Stop bouncing so high!"...

Monday 20th April.

The day started with SO THAT'S HOW THEY DO IT! at 10.30am. Nick and Michael explained their painting techniques accompanied by step by step slides showing the whole process. This was a must for anyone contemplating from black and white drawing to full colour artwork.

Ye ghods! I was somewhat surprised to see one Trish Crowther among the attendees (she is yet another Kiwi who has flown the coup for sunnier shores). Trish used to live the wild life of a single Wellington fan (inevitable when you flat with Michelle Muijser), and here she was married and with a little sprogle!

Lunch consisted of a cheese and bacon burger.

At 1.30pm I attended THE DINOSAUR IN SF presented by Jack Herman and Blair Rabbage (Wow, pots calling kettles black!). This was effectively a nostalgia trip through classic B grade horror flicks, with an unofficial competition to see who could come up with the most obscure title. Good fun.

Michael did yet another appearance at 2.30pm when a question and answer session was conducted. Got to hear some funny Med school stories.

The con finished off with a radio play. The script was appallingly bad as these things tend to be, but some great hamming (we've got the hamsters, all we need now is the double-sided tape!) made for a hilarious show nevertheless!

And before you know it, it is time for the Closing Ceremony! The concom did their bits. The guests did their bits, and it was done. The attendees slowly dissipated, and I seemed to spend a couple of hours saying goodbye to people as they drifted off. I ended up in the Huxsters room with a few of the hangers-on including Nick and Roger, and had a close brush with a conversation on facial hair? I bade my fond farewells as the post-con blues began to set in (Roger at least, still had the PRINCE concert back in Melbourne to look forward to) and soon it was time for me to depart with Jack, Jenny, and Justin (Jack and Cath were VERY



"AND THESE TWO ARE AS OLD AS THEY COME!"

kindly putting the three of us up at their place for a few days).

So what were my impressions of an Australian natcon? I have to admit that with over 30 conventions under their belt (compared with New Zealand's dozen) I was expecting a con substantially bigger and flashier than those held in NZ. I was surprised to find very little difference and barring the accents, I could just have easily been at a Wellington convention. That's not to say I was disappointed. Far from it!

There were a number of programme items that have not been seen at Kiwi cons, giving it a degree of 'differentness' for me to experience. The real coup for SYNCON though, was the (incredibly brave) step of having artists rather than writers as Guests of Honour. This led to a very visual accent to the programming which did have mass appeal where some people might think this was something "just for artists".

Of course, inevitably the factor that makes or breaks a con, are the attendees themselves. I found Australian fen very friendly, and was humbled by their good will toward me. (Gerald Smith and the rest of the concom treated me more as a bonafide guest than as a freeloader). I was surprised at how many of the Melbourne fen I had met weren't in attendance, particularly when Aus transport costs are so much cheaper than in NZ (though admittedly, their registration and accommodation costs are higher). Fen on both sides of the Tasman are becoming a little more jaded (and the economic situation doesn't help), seeing a downward spiral in the number of con attendees. I doubt though that things will ever get to the point where we see the death of the humble natcon, merely something of a 'downsizing' (to use the fashionable corporate phrase of the nineties!) It's worth noting that Australians put far more emphasis on their GsoH than

New Zealanders, both in their workload in the programming, and in their perceived importance that 'success' is dependant on a 'contemporary Big Name'.



IS THAT A PROGRAMME
IN YOUR POCKET, OR ARE
YOU JUST SEIZED TO
PLEASE ME...?

After visiting friends from "club days gone by", we Dead Dogged at Gerald and Womble's place (we were the first ones to arrive there). I heard a great shaggy-dog story from Jenny (literally about their shaggy dog!), but I'm struggling to recall the exact details...

Returned to Jack's to find one VERY CROOK Cath watching tv. Boy, she looked ill and I was shocked to hear she was actually going to go to work in the morning!

I thought "what a cheek showing JUMPING JACK FLASH on tv again so soon, even if it is being shown on a different channel..." then I realised that I was watching it in a different country! Is that a sign of fatigue or what!??

Tuesday April 21st.

The sound of a closing door woke me at 7.20am, so I got up and showered and marmaladed on toast (you have to be careful the toast doesn't get soggy...)

I met up with Tara Smith, Dianne DeBellis, Sarah Murray-White, and Eva Hauser on the Town Hall steps. Did lots of window-shopping, most notably in the beautifully restored Queen Victoria Building.

Dianne slipped into a *Kimono* command-mode, and mapped out our itinerary for the day (taking charge is something she confessed she has a habit of doing, particularly at work, she's a no-nonsense, no-fluff kinda gal. Dianne is a neat lady, who's not afraid to take something [or someone] by the balls and run hard with it. An ideal candidate for a concom...)

We met up with Andrew at the Tower, and then caught a boat to Manley. Eva found the boat trip quite a novel experience (coming from a country with no coastline), and wanted to know 'how it was for me'. I explained how Dunedin was a coastal city (as are all the big cities in Godzone), so this was comparatively hum-drum for me (now a ride on the Cook Strait ferry- THAT'S a boat trip...)

The beach had a distinctly yellow tinge to it. Quite different to the white sand I have at home. Tara got to talking about roller-blading and other exotic pursuits. For someone who's an Accountant and Mother in her 40's, she's a surprisingly un-sedate person! I suggested she should try a spot of bungee-jumping sometime...

We grabbed a cappucino, then missed our return ferry (Deja vu!!). At least on this occasion it was only a 20 minute wait for the next boat.

Lunched at YUM CHA in Chinatown. This has to be the most "exotic" meal I have ever eaten, from the method of charging/payment to the dishes

themselves. We consumed chicken and pork and doughy thingys and pastry wotsits, but I wasn't going to eat the chicken feet (or even lick between the toes) for anything...

We rode the monorail, spent hours in the Powerhouse (and I forgot to look for Nick's Enterprise!), wandered hither and yon until a quick taxi-ride to Sarah's saw us collapsed in little exhausted heaps on the furniture. I had mistaken Sarah's cat for a bean-bag but soon repositioned myself on a chair while Sarah consoled the poor puss with a feed. I recall at some stage getting a scouling-but-sexy smouldering glare from Sarah (I can't remember what I'd done or said, but it was worth it).

After discovering that Jenny Morris was in fact playing at a pub on Tuesday NEXT week, we filled in the evening with a meal at a cook-your-own-steak restaurant, and a pub crawl (now also with Ian in tow, though we lost Sarah to a philosophy lecture). Ian I discovered was another ex-pat Kiwi fan and had even attended CONFUSION '88 in Christchurch before crossing the ditch. He performed this really neat magic-trick by presenting me with an honorary retroactive membership card for CONFICTIONARY.

Dianne really knows her pubs! (I suggested that I would have to reciprocate sometime by giving her a pub-crawl around Dunedin- Dunedin having the highest number of pubs per capita of any New Zealand city. (Aren't I a mine of priceless information!) I made a serious and concerted effort to sample as many Aussie brews as possible, some of which I even tried twice, just to be sure!

A walk up and down KINGS CROSS was the climax of the evening (pun intended). I initially spear-headed our march through the Cross, but was accosted so often by the "Doormen" that I retreated to the rear of our group. But still I found myself to be the prime target of the "sales pitches"! Was it my

clean-cut wholesome healthy Kiwi image? I picked my tongue up off the pavement and continued to run the gauntlet of promised ecstasy... At the end of the evening I was duly presented with a FORTUNE OF WAR HOTEL, coaster certifying that I had attended the establishments listed thereon.

The night finally came to an end at 2am, after Ian very kindly drove me back to Jack's. I have to say that this had to be one of the most enjoyable days of my life, and the fuss that these people made of Eva and myself, was well and truly above and beyond the call of duty. It was sad having to say goodbye.

Wednesday April 22nd.

I awoke at 9.40am when the phone rang- "Hi Rex, it's Jack here, I-" "I'm sorry, Jack's not here right now, but I'll tell him you called, bye" 'click'.

I picked my tongue up off the pavement and continued to run the gauntlet of promised ecstasy...

I did a final dash around the town (and FINALLY got to see the legendary GALAXY BOOKSHOP) buying last-minute pressies, before catching my early afternoon flight back home. We studied the merits of inflight gin and tonics, and upon deciding they were a good thing, had a couple of red wines to celebrate the fact. "The Cursh Ov Mr Bean" wash the in-flight video AGAIN hic!

Thursday April 23rd.

After another 6 hour truck-trip home (thankfully with a different driver, and DIFFERENT MUSIC) I got home to my beddy-bise at 6am and slept till 4.40pm.

After a couple of days of work, I was off sick. Looks like that bug of Cath's got me afterall. It was fully a month before I shook it off too...

I may have been as crook as a kookaburra on bad berries, but boy did I have some stories to tell!!!



Eva

Rex

Sarah

Tara

Diane

SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM : THE OUTCAST CONTEMPORARY INFRACULTURE

Most of us have found that during the course of our lives that outside of our own group, few mundane people take fandom seriously. Indeed, Ursula LeGuin has been quoted as saying "The day that SF becomes respectable is the day to get out!"

I submit that SF will never become respectable...

The "Three R's" of Kiwi Culture (and Australian Culture) are "Rugby, Racing, and Beer" (yes, education standards ARE slipping...)

As an infra-cultural pursuit (along with sport and recreational groups) "Fandom" is an often misunderstood and much maligned group. Let us play "word association" for a moment. The term "science fiction" for most mundanes will almost always conjure up images of either UFO's (a subject substantially divorced from SF), Star Trek, Star Wars, or (for older generations) Buck Rogers. From **fen** on the other hand, you will get replies like "Heinlein", "Dune", or "Cyberpunk". From this we can assume that people living in the 'real' world see only the tip of the iceberg (and only the bit with whipped cream on at that!), not the cold hard crux of the genre that we ourselves find so compelling.

But why is it that Fandom is not taken seriously? Is it the cliché image of the sf fan - a bespectacled, intellectually competent, but socially inept "Geek"? Is it simply due to bad press - The fact that Reporters are FOREVER seeking out fen wearing capes and pointy ears, thus undermining our attempts at presenting ourselves as intelligent articulate NORMAL human-beings!*

The reason I think has little to do with the people that inhabit Fandom, and is based more on the **subject matter** of the genre that is the basis for this ostracism from society.

Contemporary society regards sf as frivolous and irrelevant flights of fancy with no bearing on the 'real' world. It is escapist claptrap to be shunned, especially when there are better and more relevant methods of occupying leisure time such as watching re-runs of NEIGHBOURS...

There are some that say SF is making headway at becoming an acceptable part of contemporary culture. Every year more and more SF is published, and it is even being incorporated into University English courses.

As to the first, I suspect it is a matter of commercial success. Publishers are simply exploiting a market that they know can make them a dollar (the quality of work published or rather, the lack of, is an indication that they rarely have the good of the genre at heart).

And on the latter point, is SF being studied to investigate its literary merits, or simply being put under the microscope to see what it is that keeps this ugly son of a bitch going?

In YHOS 50 (February 1991) Rich Brown states that in the 60's he (and others) were of the opinion that- now spaceflight's become a reality, mundane folk will stop making fun of SF fans. We'll have the last laugh on all those who sneered at us as if we had two heads because we read that crazy Buck Rogers stuff".

The theory is perfectly reasonable, but people being the quirky fickle beasts they are, fail to follow the theory to its logical conclusion.

One year ago [at a Nova Mob meeting April '91- Marc Ortleib presented a discussion topic- "So Who Needs Science Fiction". Marc suggested that with the speculative nature of magazines like "New

Scientist", we no longer need SF for our "Sense Of Wonder" tripping. This is still a reasonable statement, but fails to account for the degree of speculation.

We need to give Rich and Marc's statements some perspective. Being a Courier by trade, I will use a driving analogy: Science fiction fan are the night-time drivers wearing infra-red goggles. They can see the IMAGE of something on the road way up ahead. 'New Scientist' writers are the people writing about that same object once it is within range of the headlights, giving it more depth, shape, and PLAUSIBILITY. Mundanes see the object, but discount its existence until they hear the WUMP of it against the front grille and feel it going under the wheels, at which point we fans say "I TOLD YOU SO!"

That is why we are outcasts. We have a 'vision' that Mundanes cannot relate to, and by the time they do relate to them (eg spaceflight) we are already looking ahead into the darkness for the NEXT object...

Besides, you all look pretty damn silly wearing those goggles...



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TWO FROM APHELION

Or "Is the sense of wonder alive and well and living in Australia?"

A Review by Dan McCarthy.

The first time I heard of Terry Dowling was at Suncon in Brisbane in 1991, when he held the official launching of WORMWOOD. I bought the paperback mainly because I could get it signed not only by the author, but also by Nick Stathopoulos who did the cover art and whose work I greatly admire.

So I read it, and was very much taken; enthralled you might say. It seemed to me to be one of those rare books that point in a new direction, that leave the beaten track as it were, and start hacking their own way through the scrub. But this review is about BLUE TYSON. It isn't quite the same thing.

I enjoyed BLUE TYSON. I read it straight through without skipping ahead or indulging in any of my other bad reading habits that indicate that I am becoming bored, or that the story is starting to ring false. I found it good, but not as good as WORMWOOD. The imagination was under a tighter rein, we were travelling more familiar country.

BLUE TYSON is a second collection of stories centred around Tom Tyson, the Captain of the sandship Rynosseros. I find myself at something of a disadvantage in not having read the first collection, RYNOSSEROS. I don't know to what extent the reader has been filled in on the background. One of the strengths of WORMWOOD is Dowling's nice judgement of when not to explain and let the reader paint their own mental pictures. Coming into BLUE TYSON cold, one finds oneself just pleasantly on the obscure side of the optimum. The stories are set in a future Australia where power resides with the tribal "Ab'Os" with the rest of the nation existing on the fringes. It is sensitively handled, but I can't help feeling that any New Zealander of European descent would be crucified for attempting anything similar with the Maoris.

As in WORMWOOD, the theme underlying all is one of a dispossessed people striving for a place, respect, and recognition under the new order.

There is a feeling of J.G. Ballard's VERMILLION SANDS about it all, especially with the similarities of atmosphere and landscape. But the people are different, they interact and are rationally motivated, rather than randomly propelled by their obsessions as Ballard's characters appear to be.

CALL TO THE EDGE by Sean McMullen is also a collection. It is packaged much the same way, with yet another Stathopoulos cover. It is probably the same blurb writer too. But under all that it is a far more varied bag of tricks. Sean McMullen writes science fiction with capital letters on both words. His science seldom drifts towards magic, his scientists are never anything but human. I felt the quality of these stories was less even than in the Dowling book. Some were superb, others merely very good.

I am not about to review this lot story by story, much better that you read them yourself. ALONE IN HIS CHARIOT won the short fiction Ditmar, but personally I liked it less than THE COLOURS OF THE MASTERS or WHILE THE GATE IS OPEN. THE EYES OF THE GREEN LANCER and DESTROYER OF ILLUSIONS tell of an Australia even stranger than Dowling's. THE DECIAD and "PAX ROMANA" deal with time travel Roman-style.

Each story is followed by an afterword by the author. Opinions vary about this practise. One is inclined to have doubts about an artist that feels the need to explain his pictures. Stories already being in words, should need it even less. Be that as it may, Sean McMullen's afterwords are lucid and interesting and on the whole probably add more than they detract. So much so in fact that in conclusion, I would like to quote from one of them...

"...this story carries an important and serious message, so I've tried not to let the mood become too sombre. I've done this by including my favourite people: eccentric. A decade of working with scientists, engineers, and computer professionals has taught me what bright and dynamic, yet frail and obsessive people some of them are. If my characters are all fictitious, their foibles are real..."

And this I think, says much about the appeal of all these stories.

BLUE TYSON by Terry Dowling, Aphelion Publications 1992 ISBN 1 875346 05 8

CALL TO THE EDGE by Sean McMullen, Aphelion Publications 1992 ISBN 1875346 06 6

