



THE INSTRUMENTALITY

The Instrumentality of the Australian S.F. Foundation

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Committee:
[Various people have been approached and have agreed to be on the committee. They will be co-opted at the next Committee meeting.

-- Ed.]

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SunCon Still On

Ellison Cancelled But Con Goes Ahead

Two weeks before it was due to open, SunCon, the 1991 Australian Science Fiction Convention, appeared certain to be cancelled.

One of the professional Guests of Honour, Harlan Ellison, contacted the convention regarding prepayment of his airfare and fees. He had apparently expected to receive money for fares about six months ago, but SunCon had not paid.

In fact, SunCon could not pay. Membership had risen more slowly than expected, and the convention simply did not have the reported \$10,000 required.

SunCon Convenor Cathy Kerrigan was unwilling to take the financial risk of holding the convention without the main professional drawcard, and was prepared to cancel the event entirely.

However, other fans and members of the convention committee argued that the Australian Science Fiction Convention has enough momentum so that loss of one of the two Guests will not reduce attendance dangerously. The other Guest of Honour, Patrick Tilley, will attend.

The result is that SunCon will continue, without Ellison and Kerrigan. The convention has issued a notification of this to all members. The remaining committee members



SUNCON '91

Rumours

There have been persistent rumours spread regarding SunCon. Rumours that the convention had been taken over by Sydney fandom and was to be run by Jack Herman or that the convention had been shifted to Melbourne, were false. The source of the rumours has not been identified.

It is ironic that, in the end, the rumours were wrong but SunCon was still in trouble from an unexpected direction. It shows up the folly of not making certain you can achieve your stated aims.

Program

This issue of *TI* is intended for distribution at SunCon, so there is no point in discussing the program in detail. However, the tentative list in the 4th Progress Report has some features which should be examined.

One item that immediately catches the eye is that on Friday, Harlan Ellison was to be reading from 3:30pm to 5:30pm in room 2/3. At the same time, the Writers Workshop was scheduled for Room 1 from 2:30pm to 5:30pm. Some conflict of interests seems inevitable. Add the item called, cryptically, 'Top 10 Books', in Room 1 from 2:30pm to 3:30pm and the conflict is multiplied.

Saturday in Room 1 from 5:30pm to 6:30pm is listed as 'DUFF Winner'. I hope someone tells Art that he'll be there. Given that the winner had not been announced when this PR came out, it seems unlikely that they consulted him first.

The Masquerade has been allocated an hour on Sunday from 8:30pm to 9:30pm and is followed by something called 'classic lines'. This speaks of considerable confidence that the Masquerade, including parade, photos, judging, and prizes, not to mention the essential socialising and 'great cozy' remarks, can be completed in an hour. I suspect, based on experience of Masquerades past, that the timetable may be somewhat optimistic.

I think that while the listed programme is 'not yet 100% worked out', the above points show weaknesses in the conception that are central rather than peripheral. Given that the PR appeared only two months before the Convention was due to open, it has too many blank spaces and too many flaws. SunCon is shy one Guest of Honour; can it afford to lose its programme too? We should expect better from a NatCon.

Conclusion

Australian fandom has tended to take its NatCons for granted. They have been held at all times of the year and have had bizarre features and shortcomings. They have been bedevilled by problems with publicity and memberships. There was a long-running hassle over the Constitution, finally resolved by an ultra-short version with a clause voiding any amendments that increase the number of words. (Constitutions, like everything else, tend to get longer and cost more.)

I think it's time we got serious about our NatCon. I am not arguing that we become legalistic or engage professional organisers. I don't even think that the NatCon should take on permanent Incorporation, though individual conventions should either incorporate themselves or pass on some permanent structure from committee to committee. But some form of supervision should exist, by which convention committees could be advised and kept up to scratch.

— Greg Hills

Mailing lists

Have we got your address? We obviously think that we do. At today's postage rates, we don't want to squander money on posting copies of this magazine to ourselves via the scenic route. But even the best of mailing lists get out of date.

Jack Herman and Cath McDonnell have a con-running business, which they call **McDonnell Herman**. They recently posted out a leaflet promoting 'Legends', billed as a seminar on trends in sf and fantasy, guests Greg Bear and Tad Williams. No doubt a worthy event. *TI's* spy in the Post Office reports that out of eight copies seen, six had out-of-date addresses. (They were the copies for Dennis Callegari, Terry Frost, Ali Kayn, James Styles, Julian Warner, and Janeen Webb.) One was partially incorrect (Michelle Muijsert is now in Britain). The remaining copy was addressed to 'The Occupant' at a private box at the North Richmond Post Office. (This was correct.)

Now if Jack Herman can sometimes get it wrong, dare we suggest that *we* will always get it right? Obviously not.

So we've decided to make it easy. At the back of this zine you'll find a small tear-off form. If you move, fill it out with your correct new address, put it in a stamped envelope, and post it to us. It's worth a free copy added to your subscription.

Editorial

If the SunCon debacle proves anything, it is that Australian fandom needs to take a greater interest in and scrutinise more closely the selection of bids to hold its national convention.

The Australian Science Fiction Convention, unlike a regional or casual convention, must be run in as efficient and – Ghod forbid – ‘professional’ a manner as possible. While it is fandom’s creature and must cater to fandom’s desires, not the desires of those who make a living from it, it has certain obligations placed on it which it cannot avoid. These obligations recognise the continuing nature of the NatCon and concern passing the title ‘Australian Science Fiction Convention’ to the next year’s organisers with its reputation enhanced or at least not diminished, thereby making the job of future organisers that little bit easier. The obligations include treating Guests and hotels and members with courtesy and care, payment of debts, efficient handling of the Ditmar Awards, and intelligent attention to the myriad of details that go into a successful convention.

I hope that future Australian SF Conventions will learn a lesson from SunCon and avoid repeating its mistakes.

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This issue of THE INSTRUMENTALITY is rather different to the last. That is because it is experimental, trying out a few ideas that will be used if we successfully move into the THYME editorship later this year. It is not intended to be a permanent new direction for TI.

Terry Frost’s column is one example. Our THYME will feature this column, and will add one by the eminent Lucy Sussex, who will talk about (*ugh, ptoole*) science fiction. We will also give more space to discussion of the news we present than does the present THYME team.

The other point of difference between this and previous issues of TI is, of course, the typesetting. This will continue. I have taken the plunge and purchased my own laser printer (a Sharp JX-9500E).

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Attached to the back of this TI you will find a copy of THE DITMAR NEWS, which is the SunCon Ditmar Subcommittee’s cunning way of reporting the results of the 1991 Ditmar selection. No, I’m not on the Committee – I’m just the sucker they found to do the production work on the report.

-- Greg Hills

Have Gall, Will Travel

by Terry Frost

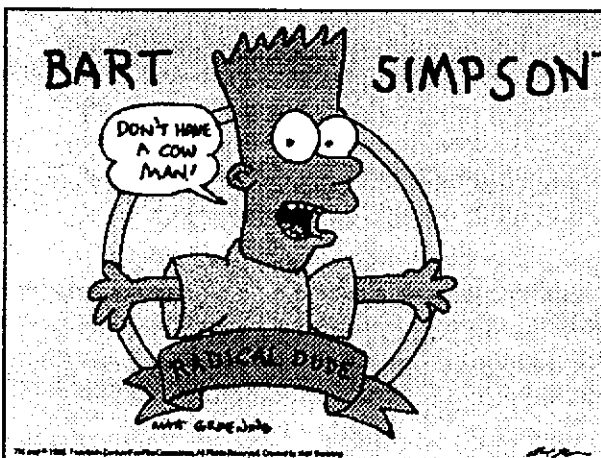
Don’t blame the editors, I volunteered for this gig. I still haven’t quite worked out why; something to do with nurturing the new THYME when it comes out and generating some minor controversy so that someone will write the editors an outraged letter demanding that I be soaked in creosote and used as a railway sleeper and thus, the essential dialogue upon which fanzine thrive can commence. My brief from Greg Hills is a simple one: shit-stir. This is like requesting a salmon to spawn or an evangelist to sing scat and call it ‘talking in tongues’. People love other people to say the things that they want to say but cannot. People hate others to say the things they’re

scared to hear. I seem to do both. So this is a disclaimer. *If you think you aren’t going to like what I say, don’t read it.* It’s your own karma from this paragraph onward.

###

Of late, one or two of Yarratown’s Widow Twankeys have accused me of using ‘offensive language’ at various places around town. Therefore I’ve done some research on this singular attitude to the utterances of others: the Norman Conquests and the Manichean Heresy, both of which happened more than a few TV ratings periods ago.

A religious visionary called Manichaeus was born in 215 or 216 Ad. (An interesting sideline is that his father was a member of a cult that believed in sexual abstinence.) He was a Persian, and as we know, Persians are the cause of all life’s woes. Manichaeus convinced a lot of people that things of the flesh were vile, disgusting, and wash-your-hands-before-you-eat-supper in general, while things of the spirit were divine and praiseworthy. His cult had a brief vogue in Eastern Europe but mightily pissed off the Church, got thrown out of it, and eventually died out in China in the fourteenth century. St Augustine was a Manichean for nine years, and he’s considered



to be one of the great Christian thinkers of olden times. He was built along the lines of Savonarola and Fred Nile, even freaked out his fellows in the Church somewhat at a time when none of them were all that enlightened. They thought he was a bit of a nut-case but he became the conduit by which Manichean ideas infiltrated Christianity. It was done pretty much in the way contemporary politics works: the Church liked a few of Manichaeus' ideas, stole them, and claimed them for its own in much the same way that the Labour Party stole Liberal Party ideas when the former went conservative in the mid 1980s.

So now Manichaeus' neurosis has been inherited by even our far-flung colonial outpost. (The moral here is be careful what you say, people might take it seriously for an unseemly length of time.)

History lesson part two: just over nine hundred years ago a bunch of proto-Gallic characters invaded the British Isles, stuck around, goosed the waitresses, and began running up exorbitant bar-bills. It was called the Norman Conquest and led to things like Robin Hood, English Francophobia, and a lot of 1950s swashbuckling movies starring Tony Curtis, Robert Wagner, John Derek, and Richard Greene. Ever since 1066 AD, words of Anglo-Saxon derivation have been second-class citizens in the mouths of English speakers. Good honest Anglo-Saxon words for things carnal and cloacal suddenly dropped off the 'A-list' and couldn't get into the nightclubs. The language's words for lofty ideals: heritage, patriotism, empathy, etc, have all come to us from France. The Upper classes, who make laws to suit themselves, were all Normans. All courts were conducted in French. If it wasn't for the Black Plague killing off most of the French-speaking magistrates, legal proceedings would probably still be parley-vooded to this day.

So there it is. Am I going to be dictated to by a long-dead Jesus freak and bellicose Frogs who are now dust? No. Fuck'm all.

###

With the dogs of war well and truly off the leash, I think it's time to start doing something positive about this supreme silliness.

People should try to levitate the Pentagon again.

In the sixties, realising that Pentagons were a symbol of evil in some cultures, the Yippies decided that they'd try surrounding that edifice with true, cosmic-type dope-smokers, peaceniks, and girls with daisies painted on their cheeks, and by force of will raise the Pentagon three hundred feet in the air. But they couldn't get a permit to raise it that high, so they had to settle for less ... five feet. Abbie Hoffman got arrested trying to measure the building with a tape-measure to work out how many people they'd need to surround it. But the media had a hell of a lot of fun with the very concept and someone got in the shit for giving them a permit to levitate the Pentagon five feet, so they got Richard Daley and the Chicago Police to beat the shit out of the hippies and the Chicago Seven got railroaded and Robert Loggia got to play William Kunstler in the television docudrama, none of which invalidates the basic idea.

Greg Hills reckons we should levitate the Pentagon with a tactical Nuclear weapon, but I don't think he's really understood the spirit of things. Even if it was levitated hippie-style, he'd suggest dropping it on Baghdad, or maybe Langley, Virginia. There's sometimes something quite neolithic about Greg.

Some of you may think the levitation suggestion is frivolous, simplistic, disgusting and unworthy. (Sweet talk will get you anywhere.) If so, I suggest you look at the waste of resources, the rhetoric, the death and lack of empathy that's going on at the top end of the Persian Gulf and imagine if, for instance, the same commitment was put toward another end, like curing AIDS or feeding the Horn of Africa or building an international Lunar base. Levitating's too good for the bastards but I'll settle for it. Let's see someone censor footage of a building hanging thirty storeys above Washington DC.

I'm also disgusted that the US troops have a mob of grunts who've adopted Bart Simpson as a mascot. They even sent a Bart doll to George Bush! (Eight to five someone checked it for bombs first, though.) Why Bart? Homer Simpson, okay. That's appropriate. He's dumb, violent, easy to anger, balding, aggressive, and works in a disgusting job. Just like George Bush! But Bart is sacred and too good for a bunch of tank-jockeys too dumb to know that they're being conned by an ex-CIA director.

Catch you next time, dudes.

— Terry Frost

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Moved? Write your new address here and post this slip to us!
