

Aussiecon

Preliminary Report



This is the AUSSIECON preliminary report. The full trip report, THE TASMANIAN LIBERATION ARMY EXPEDITION, will start in January as a part of CONVENTIONAL fanzine. All text and most photos by Jack L. Chalker, 5111 Liberty Heights Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21207 for SAPS if it gets to Doreen in time, and FAPA if it doesn't. A couple of the photos of the masquerade were taken by Alan Huff, who was kind enough to take some photos with my camera while I helped out with the masquerade.

Aussiecon, the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention, was held at the Southern Cross Hotel this past August. The mind boggles at this, not because of the place but because it's over. Something you live with and look forward to for so long -- and work so hard for -- becomes a part of you. I will miss that damned film, even if I saw it more times than any human being alive. And I will miss the expectation of the trip, even though the trip lived up to it. One cannot get as involved or emotional about a forthcoming trip to Kansas City, Missouri.

I had had a traumatic summer, which I will go into more detail on the big report, and badly needed this trip for my own mental health. I arrived in LA by train from San Francisco, where I was seeing some people (nice train trip -- the only way I had never before been down the coast -- but long). It cost more to get to the LA Marriott by taxi from the train station than the ticket cost between SF and LA. Ran into the Moffatts almost immediately, and after checking in went to the party they threw for the Aussiecon group. It was a pretty good party, with lots of Coors and loads of west coast fans. Most of the 60 Aussiecon members were there, and the Lundrys and the travel agent were dispensing guidebooks and Air New Zealand flight bags.

Saturday a group of us piled into Chuck Miller's car and went over to the LASFS clubhouse, which has been fixed up very nicely indeed. They were having an Open House, and several other fans were there for some good conversation. From there we went out to The Tower, which is the Pelz's abode. They, too, were throwing a party and more folk were there. Now that's faanishness, anyway -- the Pelzes were throwing a party and entertaining until after 4 P.M.; they were on the flight with us.

The flight itself was really a strange experience. 20 hours on a plane. I had changed all of my U.S. money (not the traveller's cheques, though) to Australian, and when we stopped over in Honolulu I tried to buy coffee and a paper and failed. Had to borrow a dollar. So much for foresight.

Two movies, 18 meals (no kidding -- well, only a mild exaggeration, as anyone on the plane can attest) and 457 cups of juices. Even a stewardess named Masher McCall. Only 14 of the 60 smoked, so we 14 were in the back of the plane while the rest were in the front. Tried to sleep for a while just out of Honolulu after Dinner #3, and started hearing the clickety-clack of a typewriter from the rear seats! Alan Frisbie was back there typing a one-shot on a portable. A good little one-shot, too, the first of many on the trip. It was run off by Eric Lindsay when we hit Sydney.

Stopover in New Zealand -- got a few hours sleep on the plane and wasn't feeling bad; DC-10s actually have seats wide enough for me! Auckland Airport is one of the smallest and draftiest airports any of us had ever been in. They're building the shiny new fancy one next door, but....

And then we arrived at Sydney. Australian customs proved to be less formidable than anyone thought; only three of us were searched, and one of these (me) was because I declared by Mirage Press book samples. They passed. Cathy Hill had terrible problems getting her art through, but not half as much as the Art Show stuff. Seems art valued at \$50 or less is dutiable, but over \$50 is Fine Art and duty free! The travel agent had forgotten that \$1.00 Australian = \$1.27 U.S., and had valued the small stuff at \$50 U.S.!!!! Took incredible effort and a call to LA to unfreeze it without a lot of duty. Ned Brooks, with the Kelly Freas stuff in his suitcase, wasn't searched at all.

Robin Johnson was waiting at the airport for us; he'd flown up to meet us a couple of hours earlier. A real shock going out into the open air. It was midwinter and we expected a chill -- it was about 70°! Unfortunately, that unseasonable weather didn't last.

The Hyatt Kingsgate isn't one of the better Hyatt hotels; it's expensive and not really worth the effort. But it is nicely located and was included in the trip price. After getting settled in a mixed Australian-American group led by me (no, not the Australians) got down to Sydney Harbour and rode the hydrofoil ferry out and the steam ferry back. We crossed a number of other fans on the way back.

The Sydney elevated/subway system is fast but no cleaner than New York's -- and they ride at high speed with the doors open! Tucker was startled when he jokingly asked if his Austrail Pass was good on the subways.

It was.

Dinner with a group and then off in a taxi with another group to pick up train tickets. The Sydney taxis meters click off in cents!!! Found Robin Johnson and Fred Patten ahead of us in the train ticket line. Robin turns around and tells me I'm on an art panel. An art panel? "Well, you've sold more of it than anybody."

Kings Cross by day looks like a model shopping center; at night the false fronts come off to reveal that most of those nice, mild establishments are girlie houses with full services.

Big party in Robin's room that night, with lots of local Sydney fans around. Gave everyone a new charge, adrenalin flowing. Discovered I was a VIP in Australia.

Next day Stu Tait, Jake Waldman, Joan Serrano and I took the package tour of Sydney. A really beautiful city, with one of the best looking harbors in the world. Rained for most of the trip. A number of other fans also took the trip. Then off to downtown to buy some opals. Fairly cheap and not bad. Picked up a bagfull to bring back to my father, who is a gem cutter.

Off at 7 PM to the train station to catch the overnight to Melbourne. John Millard, Lynn Hickman, Ruty Havelin and Bob Tucker, among others, are already there. Met Ken Ozanne for the first time, a local Sydney fan about whom a lot more in the big report.

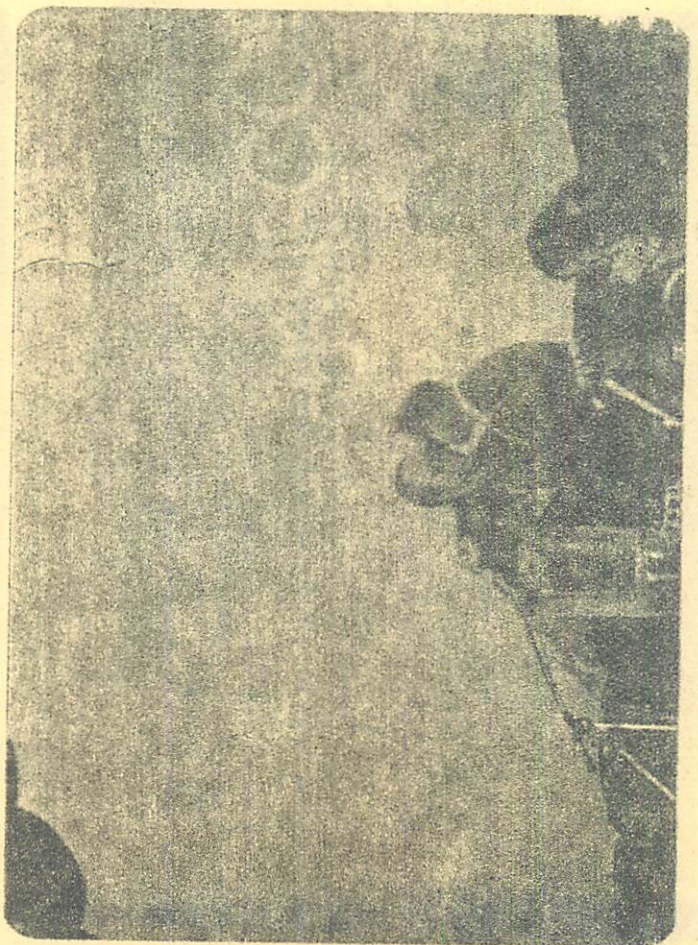
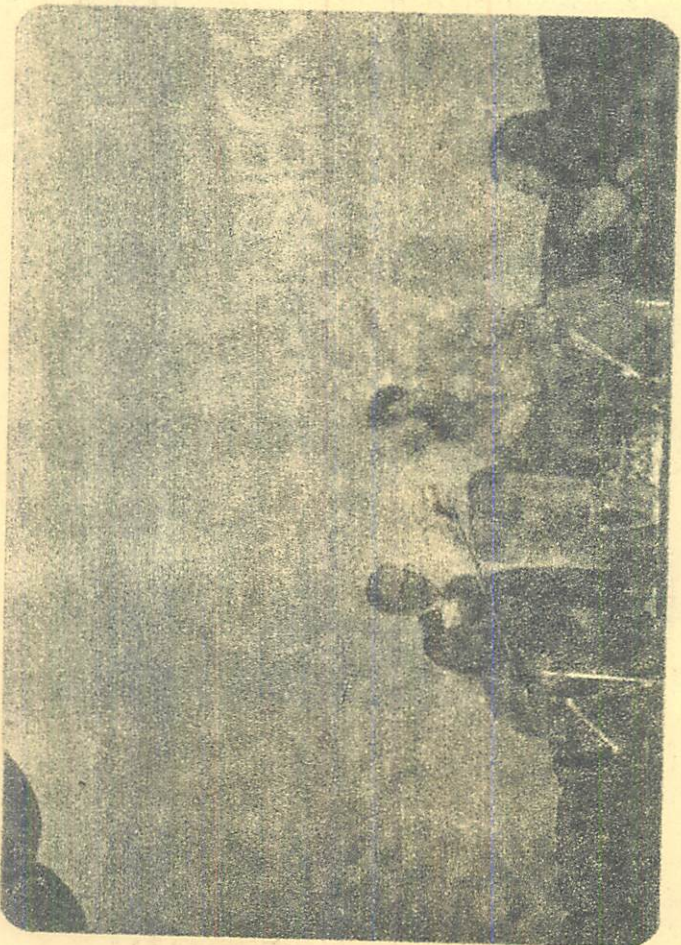
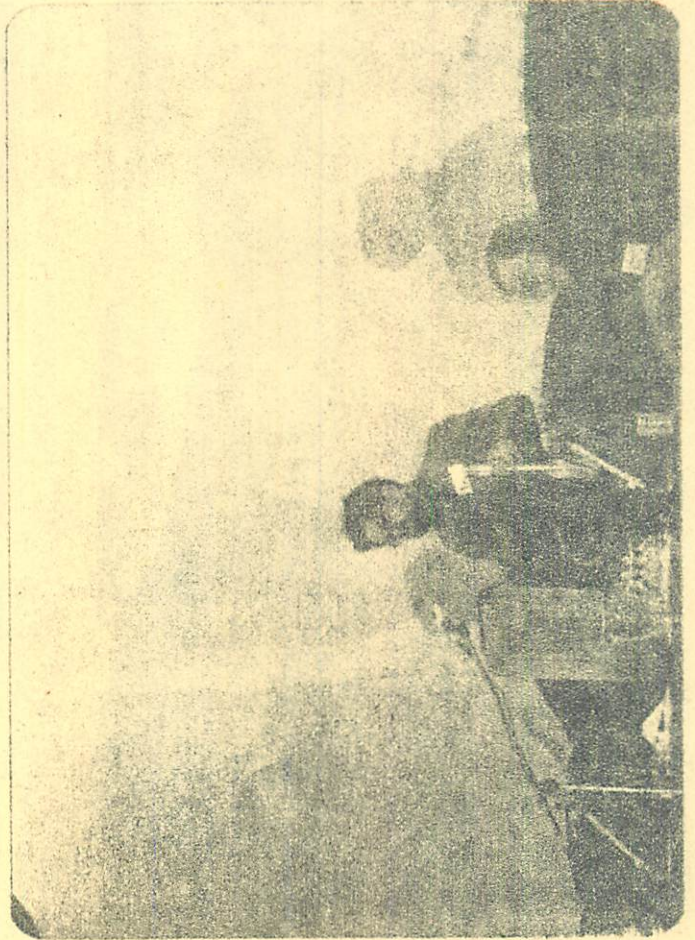
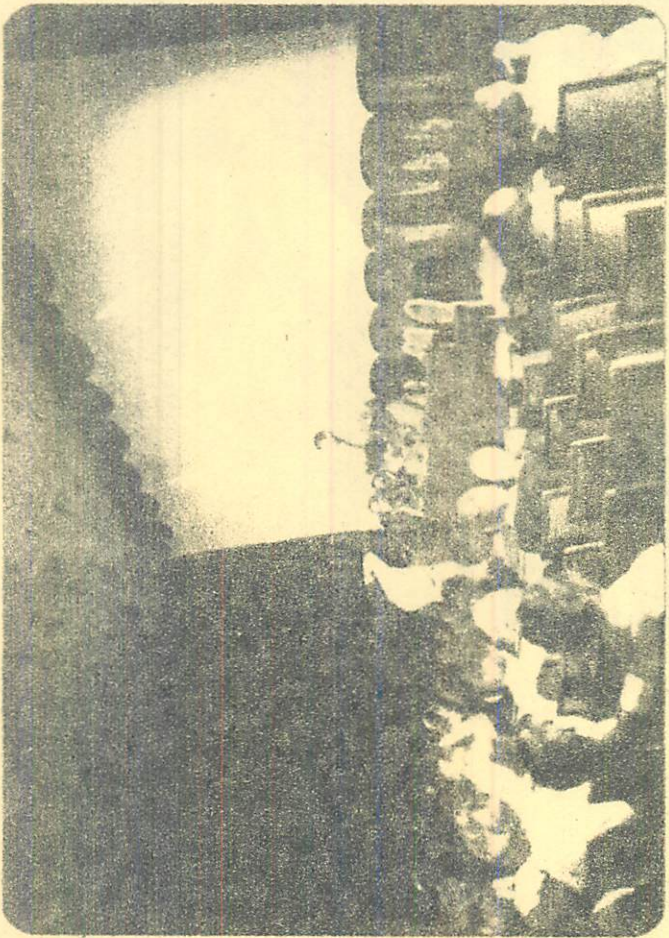
The overnight train to Melbourne is fantastic, comfortable, and full of service. Even the food was good, although it was train-priced. Average dinners in Australia ran \$4.00, other meals less. Had already discovered that Australian coffee was not British coffee, thank the Lord, but real stuff, tho at 40¢ a cup addiction was painful. Made up for was the fact that Alpine cigarettes, hard to obtain in the U.S.A., are the most popular cigarette in Australia. Those people have taste.

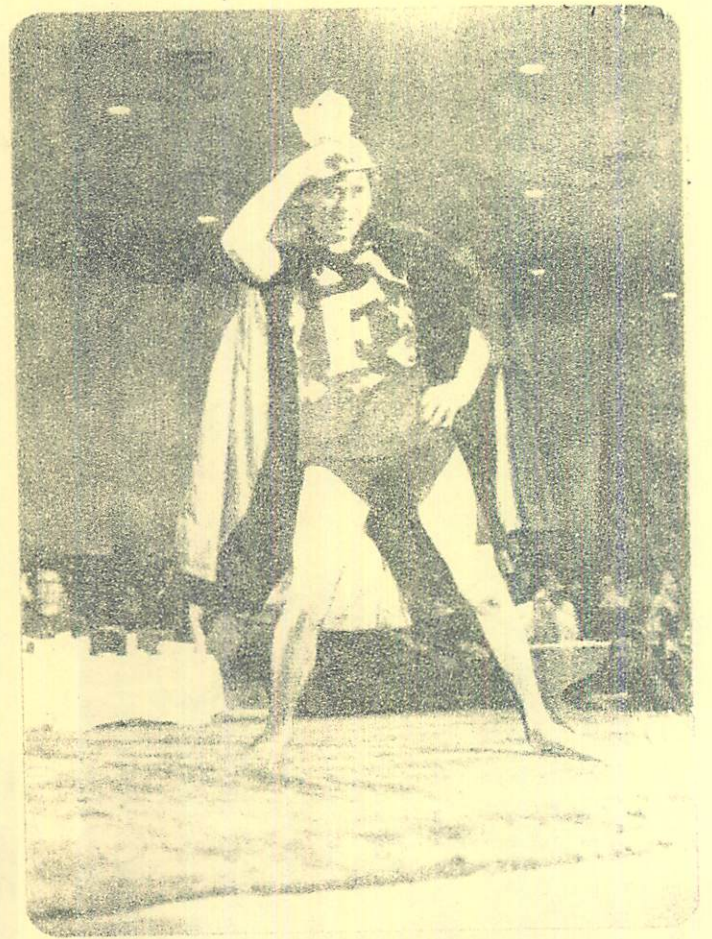
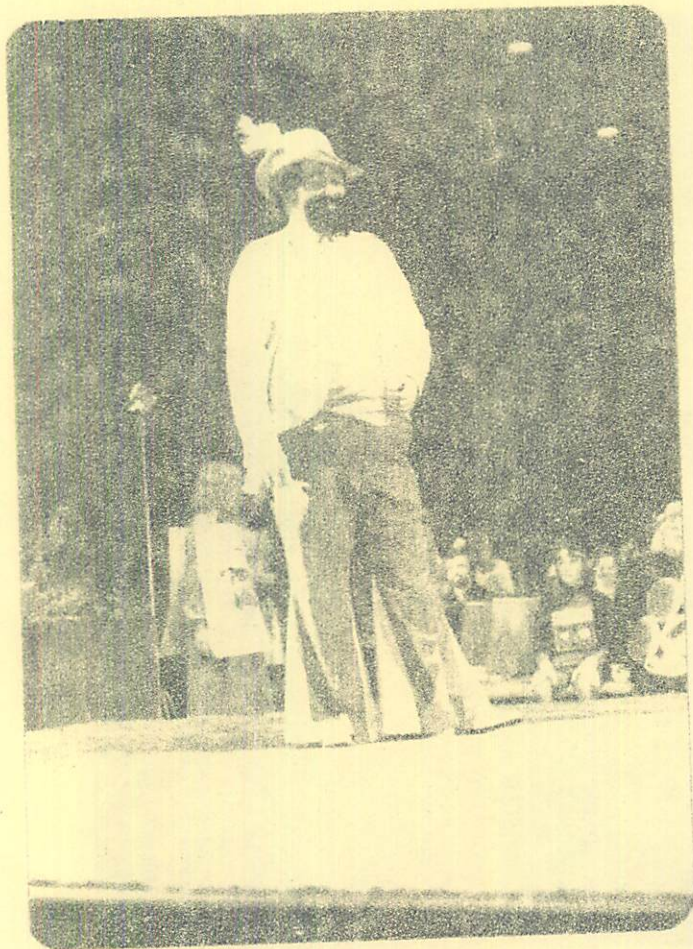
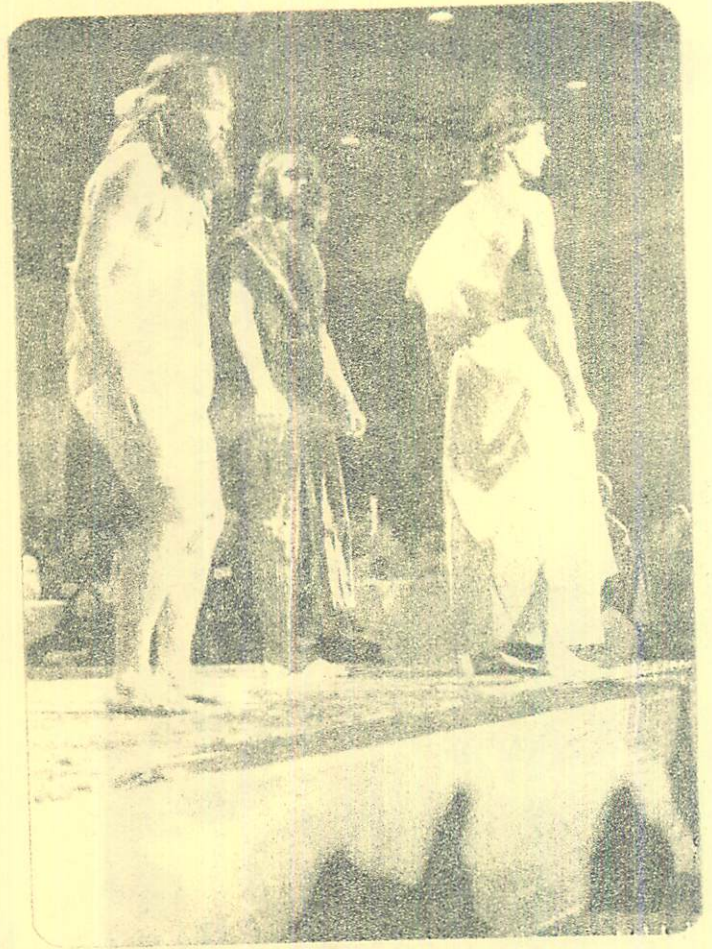
In about 9:30 Wednesday morning of the con, and a quick taxi to the Southern Cross. Melbourne taxis click over in 5¢ increments, but are actually cheaper than Sydney. Throw was 35¢ and it was 25¢ per mile after. Reinforced all of the American's general impressions of Australia: everything kind of reminded us of the U.S. in the fifties, with British overtones.

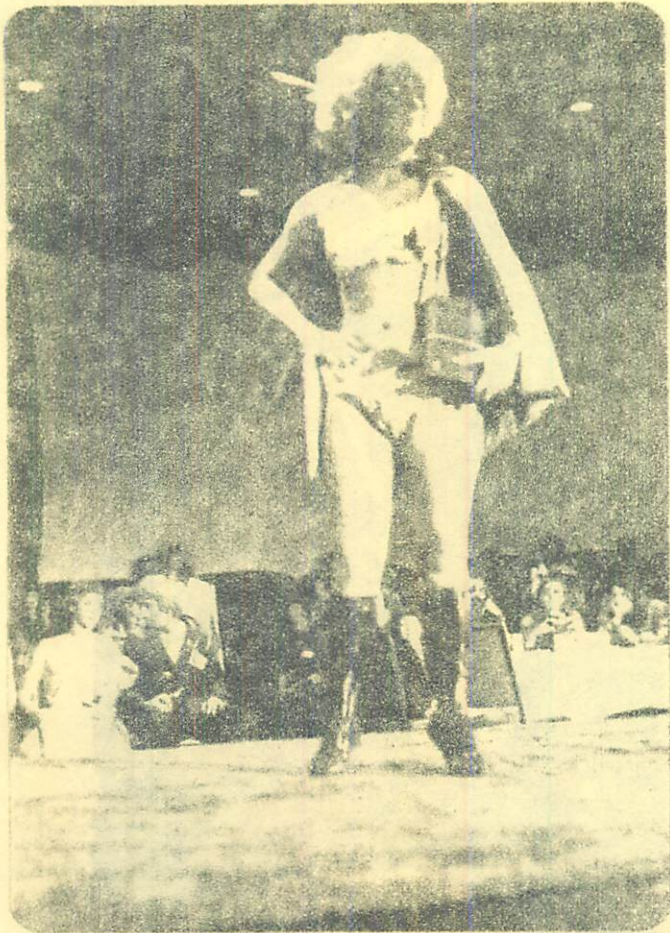
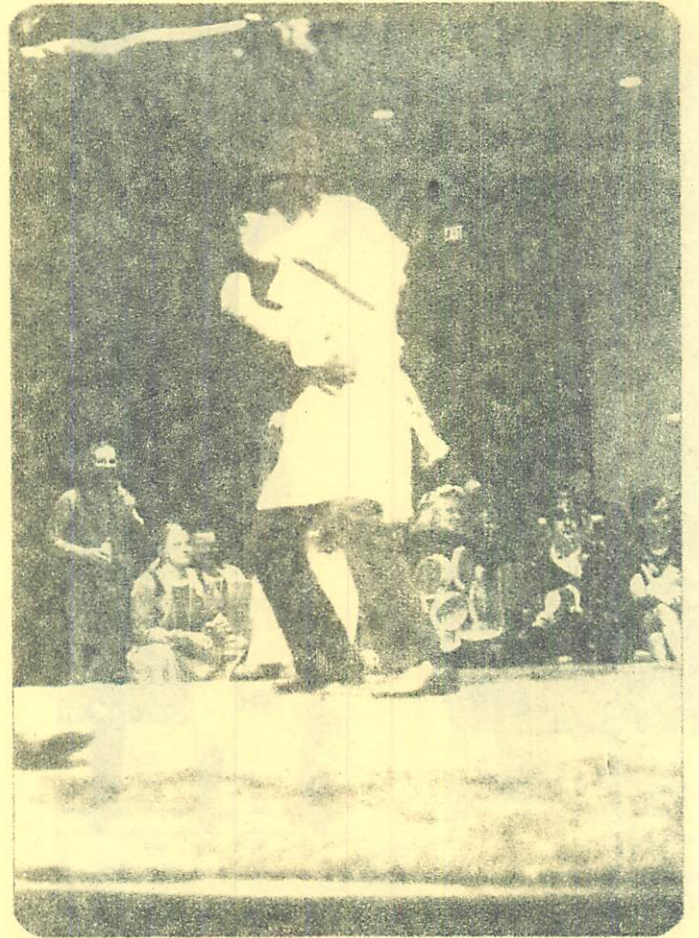
Once Jake and I settled in we went down to see what the con was doing. It was setting up. Met Micheline Tang and Paul Stevens unpacking artwork for the art show, and helped out. Some nice stuff from British publishers. Robin had warned me that it would be mostly available light, and, in winter, the sun set at 5 PM. Micheline had gone to pick up the pre-rented hangings for the show and discovered that the place had double-booked them and already rented them out. The hotel built hangings and set them up in cubicles. That was pleasantly shocking in itself, but later they came in without prompting and installed ceiling-hang floodlights for each cubicle!

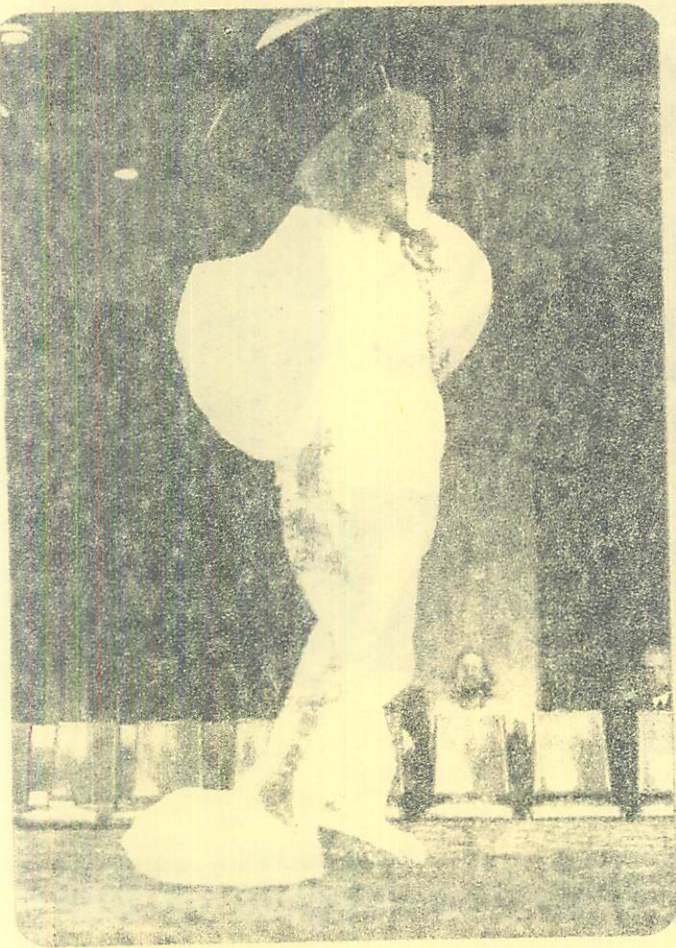
I'd anticipated a small art show. It was not, and used almost all the available space. I started recruiting additional auction help fast.


When the Australians showed me the General Auction, I was back in a 60s worldcon. Huge amounts of books, including a SHIP THAT SALLED TO MARS and a mint jacketed OUTSIDER. Over 300 items! It would be a loooong auction stint as usual -- about the same total as for Noreastcon.











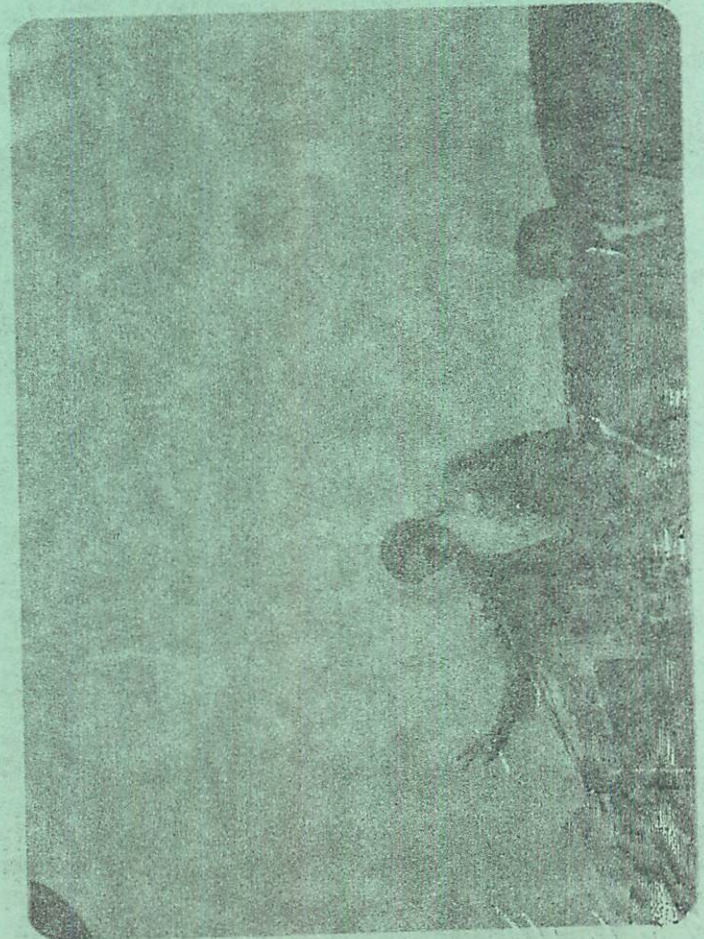
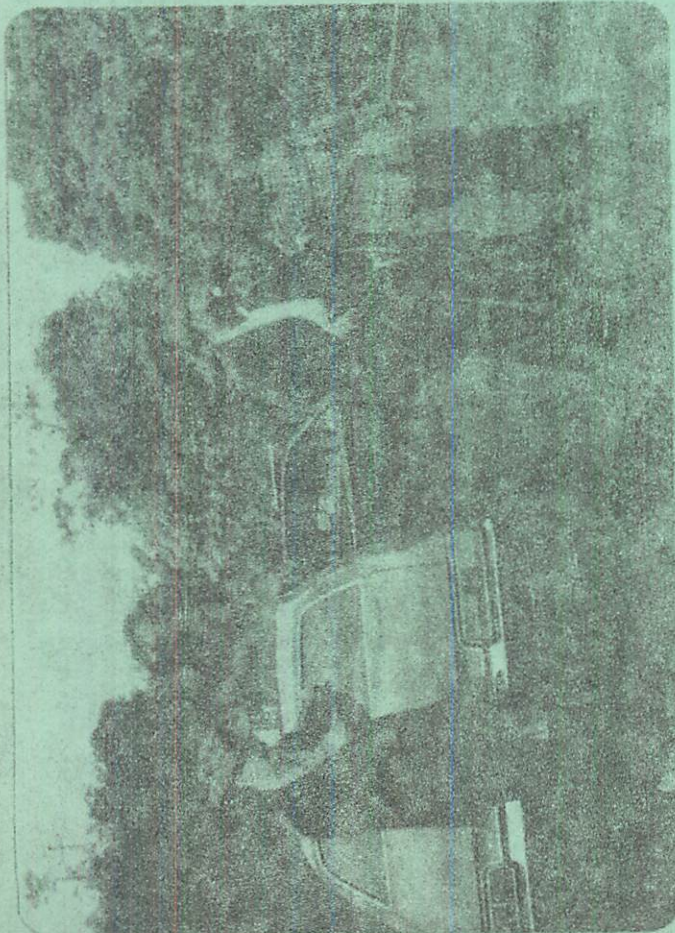
PHOTOGRAPHS: P. 3: Top: L: Program Room & AV screen; R: Bruce Felz & David Grigg; Bottom L: Don Lundry, Robin Johnson; R: Forry Ackerman, Ron Graham, pose interesting.

P. 4: masquerade. The bottom right is Capt. Frog, left Van Rijn.

P. 5: Masquerade. Top right is Paul Stevens raiding as Antifan; bottom left is a man.

P. 6: Top L. is Jan Howard Finder. Costume is pink in color. Costume title: Fuzzy Pink Niven. Bottom R are some local SCA types who fight with cold steel.

P. 7: Immediately left of this box is Ursula LeGuin with Robin Johnson; bottom left is Tucker doing a Smoo with banquet toastmaster John Bangsund trying to figure it out. Bottom left is the TLA: Ned Brooks, Jake Waldman, Stu Tait, Joan Serrano, in Tasmania. Note TLA headgear.



Nice get-acquainted con suite party that evening, spent lots of time talking mostly with Australian fan. Tucker began his bourbon pass-arounds that are now bound to be an Australian custom as they often are here.

Official opening on Thursday was nicely done, with the use of the big projection screen in back of the podium (see top left picture on p.3). Nice multi-media slide and electronic music presentation on the history of SF, starting with the April '26 Amazing cover and winding up with the Aussiecon symbol. Notables were introduced and things started rolling. Spent much of the time setting up & starting to sell in the Hucksters Room, went in during the con only for programming that I was on or particularly wanted to see, as usual. Space Age had one room to itself a la Bakka at Torcon, and the general room consisted of a comics/film huckster & me. Did a pretty good business in to-be-sent-later books despite limited stock.

A general run-down:

PROGRAM: What I saw seemed to be fairly standard Worldcon fare, the only exception being a serious panel on the role of sheep in SF which Foyster will have to describe sometime (he moderated). LeGuin's GoH speech on women in SF seemed to be mostly a rehash of her award speech (Newberry was it?) last April, nothing startling. Except for the publisher's party Thursday night, though, she did not mix, did not attend any parties or make herself accessible to people. My impression was she seemed a bit scared of us. The charismatic and extroverted Tucker took center stage and it was his con, from a fan, media, and programming standpoint. Don Tuck did not show up. Much fine use was made of the professional multi-media efforts of Sonographics, at one time doing an impromptu SF art show to introduce our art panel, another time working in at-the-con shots in their prepared program. Very fine. Sonographics also showed their radiotelescope multimedia production that made them famous. Superb.

MASQUERADE: Small, nicely timed, good comfortable views by the audience, nice ramp set-up, but the feed to the stage should have been through side doors, not the kitchen! Lee Harding did a great entertainment job as caller, but one wonders what he would do if faced with our mob. Shayne McCormick's plans were nicely thought out.

BANQUET: John Bangsund was a fine toastmaster tho he should be shot for reading the Hugo awards out of order. Best novel should always be last. LeGuin got sick and had to leave before receiving her own award. Ended by 11:30 but typical awards banquet, no records for brevity, etc. The food was very good, service very slow. One would think a high-class hotel would know better than to serve the head table last.

BIDDING: 10 A.M. as usual, most bidders speaking to an empty hall. About 70 votes cast at the meeting, tho, so it shouldn't be ignored. DC had far and away the best presentation (narrated funny slides) but it should have been used for the entire year preceding the bid. NYC did not prepare Ben Yallow at all and he made every mistake in the book, certainly losing some of those 70 votes. Orlando won, NYC second on the mail strength, and DC third. The fact that the Orlando chairman was there certainly helped swing the votes to keep it from going to a second count. Williamson '77 GoH.

BUSINESS MEETING: Preliminary on Saturday did an effective and honest weeding out job. Monday saw about 20 regulars and 45 lookers (many of whom were horrified as they watched who decides on Hugos, etc. and how it was done). Wright ran an effective and tight meeting. Mail ratification was rejected and replaced with ratification of business meeting votes by the next business meeting. On request from KC, Hugo definitions were reinstated, wordage lengths debated and set, novella dropped and one optional Hugo made. Otherwise the Scithers constitution was ratified. Much was made of the fact that so few people show up for business meetings. Just schedule one at 8 PM instead of 10 AM and you'll find out why.

ART SHOW: Nicely run and well displayed. The bid-offs were held in the main program area. It was predominantly American up front, with Bruce Pelz and I doing most of the auctioning and Elayne Pelz doing the cashier work. Ken Ozanne was drafted to help and keep the international flavor. The Australians seemed fascinated with my bidding chant style. Bids were high; no bargains here, as per usual Worldcon.

GENERAL AUCTION: Ken Ozanne and I ran through hundreds of items, some pure gold. Lots of money in the audience and astronomical prices. Two Art and 3 general auctions were needed and we still didn't get through all of it.

PARTIES: Wednesday and Thursday night plenty of them, thanks to the bidding. As bidding was Friday morning, though, parties fell off afterward. Minneapolis in '73 threw one for two nights, and there were several others. Aussiefans tended to keep to the con suite, tho, and one found himself talking mostly to Americans at the room parties. The SFWA meeting and party didn't have a quorum. First Fandom had a large representation in Ron Graham's suite. Weirdest party was Monday night's meat pie and tomato sauce orgy thrown by Foyster and Edmonds. Australian meat pies are pure Colonel Mortons without the vegetables but a lot more suet, and catsup is unheard of down there; it really is a hefty, somewhat sour tomato sauce they put on those things. I had just taken Micheline Tang out to dinner in a fine Chinese restaurant and was stuffed, but had a meat pie forced on me by Foyster. He seemed upset when I pronounced it "not bad." Seems I was supposed to say it was terrible. Bova by Sunday night had gotten to know everyone and was bemusing everyone by trying to sing really filthy filksongs.

FILM PROGRAM: Paul "Anti-fan" Stevens did a fine job with most of the film programming. I don't remember any previous con ever showing every Hugo nominee for best dramatic presentation. Huge audience for "Young Frankenstein" of course. Some pretty weird shorts, some even weirder local amateur films, and some really creaky cartoons, but altogether a really nice show. The Aussiefan film, sound version, had been with me almost since it was printed and had been seen by only a very few of the BNFs of Australia and none of the local fans per se. Stevens opened it in his Anti-fan garb and did some evil bantering with the audience. He later appeared as Anti-fan at the Masquerade to cause more trouble. Stevens is running for DUFF next year, nominated by Tucker, Ackerman and me. He got the most Australian votes last time out but the U.S. fans didn't go that way. Vote for him. KC will never be the same if Stevens comes (he's also the only candidate so far who could not afford to come if he doesn't win).

AUSSIEFANS: Very oddly and totally expected, Australian fans are virtually identical to American fans except for accents and national background culture differences. The similarities are, in fact, incredible, which seemed even more incredible to the Australian fans -- when all us foreigners just seemed like other members of the family. They kept trying to figure out if we were just being nice to them, or whether this worldcon was like a real Worldcon (we weren't and it was) and this sort of thing got to the point where I finally got mad and told them they were fans like all the rest of us and that this was the World SF Convention and to quit feeling cut off and such -- nobody is cut off in SF because of geography; they cut themselves off by feeling like that.

Also, Aussiefans went out of their way to treat all 80-100 North American fans as VIPs, BNFs and the like. There were parties every night, and you almost had to be impolite to keep Australian fans from going out of their way to try and give you the moon and everything they owned. A more generous group of nuts I've never met.

THE HOTEL: The Southern Cross was a good choice for the con in that I've never seen a more cooperative hotel nor one with more pride and care in their work. The staff is practically proprietary (they got insulted when Glicksohn made the traditional banquet insult). A staff official was on duty in the program room at all times and talked to everyone. Any complaint seemed to be acted upon. The rooms were nice motor-hotel type (twin doubles mostly) with color TV and the hotel was very American in operations (which, considering it's owned by Pan Am, isn't surprising -- but they should run their airline this well).

THE COMMITTEE: Experience tells, and this committee had, in the main, been to other worldcons and seen what was necessary. There was far less bickering and far more efficiency than I've seen in most recent or old committees, and operational efficiency, including the critical area of changing the game plan in midstream when necessary, was flawless. Easily one of the best organized committees I've seen in recent years, and it told in the ease with which things flowed.

Later on, in a wider report, I will give more detailed impressions of all of

the trip including my specific account of my trip, which, with 4 other fans, spanned 2000 miles of Australia and also included 4 days of 60 of us in New Zealand.

In the meantime, let's just say that none of us felt that we'd been overcharged or that our debt was too high. We all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, and I do not know of anyone with any negative comments on the con or the trip as a whole.

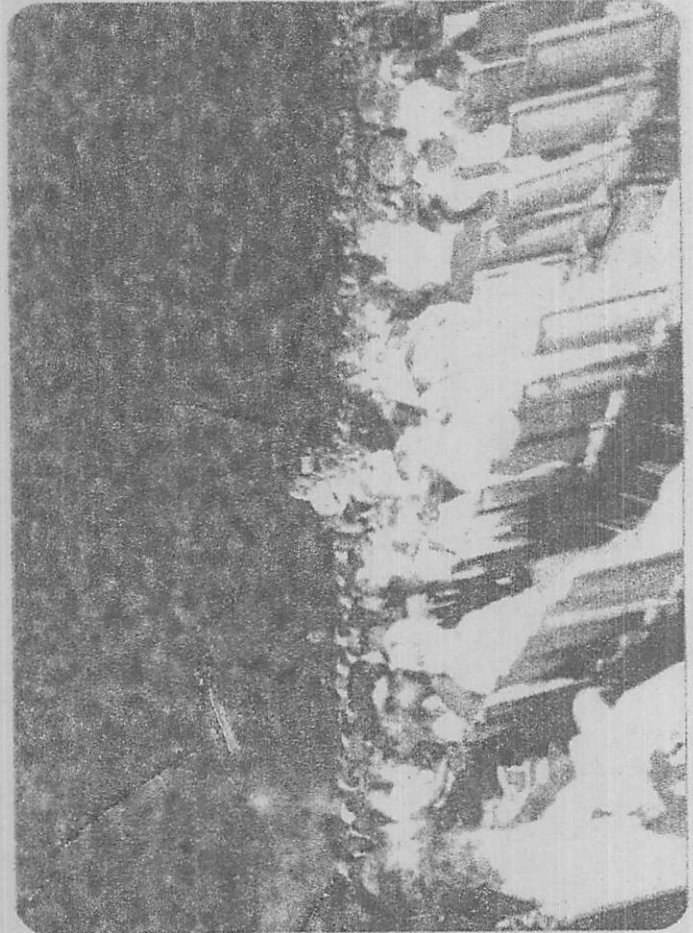
You ought to have been there.

Part III of OH YEAH, on a different con, and the first part of the TLA expedition, will be in CONVENTIONAL FANZINE which will begin its circulation in January.

....jlc



Toastmaster John Bangsund



Audience. Note videotape camera. Whole con was videotaped.