

THE AMBLING ALLIGATOR

Anzapa: August 1977

A B*R*I*C*K**S*H*I*T*H*O*U*S*E Production

published for Anzapa by John Foyster, GPO Box 4039, Melbourne, V3001, on a typewriter provided by John Bangsund, on stencils provided by John Bangsund. Owing to circumstances beyond our editorial control, the correction fluid has also been supplied by John Bangsund. This charming publication is produced in far-off Adelaide, the first fanzine I have ever produced in South Australia.

ANZAPA TITBITS

Situate in Adelaide (as I am), the place of residence of such high-powered constitutional lawyers as Mr Bangsund and Mr Mason, I am, I think, forced to give at least a token amount of space to discussion of that most ancient and revered of ANZAPA topics, the ANZAPA constitution, which is of course totally misunderstood by everyone in or out of the organization except my humble self.

For today's discussion, I refer you to that part of the constitution which empowers the Official Editor to set a deadline by which contributions must reach him, a deadline other than the mailing deadline. Or date, as some people thing of it nowadays. This is one aspect of the current ANZAPA constitution which I feel is less than desirable, perhaps even The Most Undesirable Of Them All. Unfortunately I am not qualified to submit an amendment to the constitution (Carey Handfield, Bill Wright, and Ken Ford are, as you no doubt recall), so I am restricted to discussing, in the most general of terms, a nagging fear (or should that be terror) I have in relation to this particular aspect of the ANZAPA Constitution (hereinafter the AC (an abbreviation for ANZAC)).

Amateur press (or publishing) associations operate upon much the same principle as other human organizational structures. Firstly, you rely upon the common sense of your fellow human beings. Second, after you find that a scarcer commodity than could possibly be imagined, you write constitutions telling other people just what is common sense. Apa constitutions are very much like this, although there is a considerable variation in the extent to which these two ingredients are combined. In the Spectator Amateur Press Society (or whatever it is called), the common sense element is very much emphasised: there are rules, which encourage the Official Editor not to be TOO stupid about the way she or he runs the organization. Then, of course, one might expect to find at the other end a constitution which binds the OE very tightly to certain prescribed behaviours, and allows little or no variation. FAPA might come rather close to this. But this is not in fact the extreme at greatest remove from the SAPS end of the spectrum. No, for there are constitutions which go further.

I think of ANZAPA, of course. ANZAPA has a constitution which contains a device apparently intended to encourage nonsensical behaviour on the part of the OE. Turn the page for more detail.

THE AMBLING ALLIGATOR: 1: 2

The ANZAPA constitution specifies a mailing deadline. It specifies it quite precisely and unambiguously. Nevertheless, this mailing deadline is frequently ignored; thus I received the June mailing of ANZAPA on June 10 - the day upon which it was supposed to be mailed. This creates a slight proble, of course, for if a mailing can be mailed one day before the deadline, why not two, or three, or more? No doubt we rely upon the good sense of the OBE, to coin a phrase - if only there had been evidence of this recently in ANZAPA one might feel a little more confident.

OBEs in the past have not, however, erred in the direction which occurred for the June mailing. More commonly mailings are sent to members after - sometimes well after - the constitutionally specified deadline. While in general one mightn't worry too much about mailings going out before the deadline (though this isn't so simple as it appears, as I shall argue later), the despatch of mailings after the deadline is a matter which usually concerns everyone. Once again, one or two days may not apparently matter: two weeks does matter.

Here then are the variations which have been found to be allowed by OBEs from a specific instruction in the constitution. It is surprising, in this context, that there has not so far been (to my knowledge) any serious problem with the other constitutional specification regarding deadlines - that allowing the OBE to set a deadline by which he must receive contributions.

It is this, as you will have now worked out, which concerns me. Doubtless harrassed, overworked OBEs, especially those who find themselves running off other people's fanzines, are delighted that such a provision exists. But perhaps, right at that point, I should comment on that aspect of the OBE's 'job'. This tendency of OBEs to acquire other people's work is most unfortunate, but mainly because it imposes a workload on the one person in ANZAPA who really sweats for the organization anyway. It's also unfortunate because the OBE, poor overworked soul that he is, perhaps cannot see that any duplicating which he might do for members of ANZAPA has nothing to do with his role as OBE of ANZAPA; it's a purely private and if the OBE is sensible commercial activity - a service, perhaps profitable and perhaps at cost, which he performs for friends or acquaintances. It has nothing to do with being OBE. It involves negotiations between the interested parties until a mutually satisfactory agreement is reached. And it clearly has nothing to do with the ANZAPA constitution. So our discussion above concerning the need to lighten the load of the OBE, to allow him to get those contributions which he has to print in early, has nothing to do with his role as OBE. Like any other member of ANZAPA who undertakes printing, the OBE has to make personal, private arrangements. If he so overloads himself (or herself) that he or she cannot perform his or her OBELY duties (at last, after ten years I've been able to use that word again!), then members have every

THE AMBLING ALLIGATOR: 1: 3

right to complain about the dereliction of duty.

Thus the reason for the present provision is quite simple: I happen to disagree with the need for the provision, since basically the job of getting out the mailing can be done overnight, but the notion appears to be that the OBE needs a period of several days to type and run off the one or two stencils involved.

If one accepts, as members of ANZAPA apparently do, that OBEs can't manage 90 minutes work in a night, then certainly they should make provision in the rules for a period of time during which the OBE can get it all together. Unfortunately, in the case of ANZAPA, that hasn't been done.

The constitution of ANZAPA effectively says to the OBE 'figure out how long you reckon you'll want to prepare the mailing, and set a deadline for contributions to arrive the appropriate number of days before the mailing deadline'. This doesn't actually seem to me to be a terribly good idea, for the following reasons.

In the first place, as we've already seen, the tendency over the years has been for the mailings to be sent out late - despite the specific constitutional requirement to the contrary. This means that the members have less time than the constitution suggests in which to read the mailing and provide comments in the following mailing.

When one adds to this reduction in available time an unspecified requirement for early delivery of contributions to the OBE, a deadline which the OBE from time to time determines, one considerably reduces the amount of time in which members may prepare their contributions. Typically, the OBE asks for contributions to be in on the first of the month - ten days before the mailing deadline. Typically, though not so far under the present OBE, the mailing may be despatched a week after the 'official' deadline. After a couple of days are allowed for transit time each way, one can easily find, under commonly practiced habits, that of the eight weeks or so which supposedly exists between mailings, three of those weeks are taken up by screwing about with the contributions by either the OBE or the postal service. In the case of overseas members, the amount of time which is dead so far as they are concerned is longer - possibly four weeks if packages are airmailed.

What I'm writing about above relates to normal practices - though one can hope that these will not occur under the present OBE. The effect is to allow the members some five weeks between mailings - and that's not too different from monthly mailings, Meyer.

In the second place, the present constitution is very much open to abuse - you may have noticed this. In the specific provision to which I have been boringly referring these past three pages, the abuse is to the intention of the constitutional provision, not to its content.

THE AMBLING ALLIGATOR: 1: 4

The intention of the constitutional provision is to allow the OBE an amount of time during which to put mailings together. The effect of the constitutional ~~xxxx~~ provision is to allow him to set a deadline for contributions for any date whatsoever. For the August mailing, the OBE can, under the present constitution, set a deadline for contributions of June 30, if he so wishes. Such a procedure would ensure a rapid turnover of members - or rather, a turnover rate rather greater than that which has been experienced lately. That no one has tried this on is a little more than lucky, but the chances are, with the present form of the OBE's little helper, that someone someday might try it.

Of course constitutions, like other pieces of paper (constitutions aren't pieces of paper of course, but sometimes people in ANZAPA have acted in the past as though they were, so it will probably be easiest if I use the common notion), are intended to be interpreted with a little common sense. No one in his right mind would accuse an ANZAPA OBE of being overendowed with common sense. (Sometimes they don't even know the unwritten, but historically well-known rules of the game - like Carey's not waiting the mandatory three mailings before reinstating himself as OBE.) Clearly something must be done - but that's up to Bill & Carey.

LOVELY ADELAIDE

Ran into Gary Mason on Rundle Mall this morning (Saturday, July 23). A strange feeling, since only a few minutes earlier - maybe less than a minute, now that I think about it - I had run into Barbara Ferguson, a Schools Commission person somewhat more attractive to me than Comrade Mason. It reminded me of the occasion back in May when I was wandering down Goodwood Rd, and Marc Ortleib pulled up on his motorbike. Adelaide really is small - as I've found out both by travelling around most of it this week (North to Elizabeth, east to Modbury, West to Port Adelaide, and south to Glenalta - next week I go a little further south, to Morphett Vale) - but it is also small in the usual other sense. Not so much that everyone knows everyone else, but rather that there isn't all that much to know anyway.

I found this view confirmed last night when I had a rather light dinner at The Coffee Pot with a teacher who has been out from England for about three years. He has a job which moves him around quite a lot, but his wife finds Adelaide rather too (and I'm sorry that I can't use another word, but this one seems precisely right) provincial. Science fiction fans are of course exempt from this sort of all-embracing description, but it seems unavoidable.

The other thing I discovered was that Adelaide is flat. Most of my previous time in Adelaide I have spent in the hills, or at least the undulatory parts. This time around it has been flat, flat, flat! I don't quite know whether this is a good or a bad thing overall, but it certainly is boring.

SCIENCE FICTION

I knew I'd get around to it eventually. This was quite accidental. John Gaffney mentioned a film which was to be shown on television, and I thought he said WAR OF THE WORLDS. Having nothing better to do at an earlier stage in the day I spun the dial and discovered that he had said WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, and WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE is a very different matter.

I'm so old that I saw both of these films on their first Australian release. WAR OF THE WORLDS ~~may~~ made no impression on me at all, but I could still remember some of the scenes in WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE. There are very good reasons for this, and they don't really relate to the quality of the film.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, as a very early science fiction novel (if one follows the kind of definition of science fiction I do), embodied some of the most pervasive of scientific themes - the destruction of earth, the building of the first rocket, the discovery of a new world. These are all still in common usage. The film uses the themes, but adds to the ideas the sort of simple and innocent interpretation which has become the staple of magazine fiction (and also of the mass market paperback science fiction).

Perhaps, if there's anything missing from modern science fiction, it's that discovery of the new Arcadia. Is it that writers can no longer dream of new worlds, or do they choose not to? This is a far more ancient theme of fiction than the above-mentioned destruction/construction, and its relative absence is I think suggestive about the nature of modern science fiction which may perhaps be a little more inward-looking than I had previously thought.

The childlike qualities of the film I have already mentioned. Such qualities, at which I do not sneer, were also qualities of magazine fiction twenty and thirty years ago, while now science fiction has all the maturity of pimple-faced adolescents. And maybe it's about as attractive. Science fiction might be going places, but I wish it would get a little closer to one of them so that I can look at it a little closer.

MAILING COMMENTS

I really would like to have done some mailing comments for this mailing, for I still think this innovation of Jack Speer's to be the heart of spas. Unfortunately my copy of recent mailings is some distance from here - as you might have guessed from my occasional vagueness in discussing the AC. By contributing to the August mailing, I extend my membership through to February - maybe by then I'll be able to get around to the staple diet.

When John Bangsund and I were discussing this fanzine ("I'm really very grateful to you for delivering the typewriter to my hotel John." "That's all right, John." "It truly is a great pity that I won't be able to type a fanzine, since you didn't provide any corflu. And besides, the type is very small, and I'll have to write an awful lot to make up six pages." "Double space and have them finished by Sunday. Other people double space.") on Monday night, and as you have seen he gave me many helpful tips. As I recall, the main thing I have to do is put the cut stencils away for six months. That's not my style, I'm afraid. I do wish my life could be rearranged so that I had time to do things now that I won't need for six months. For that matter, the unpleasant thought has just struck me that in six months I'll be out of a job again. Which means that I'm six months into this one.

You see, all this time that I've been happily typing away I really should have been working on funny little jobs that don't take a lot of time but really need to be done on the run. For example, I'm now two days behind on writing up my project visits. I'm in South Australia visiting about 20 projects in education, interviewing those involved, and occasionally some of those not so involved. Although I taperecord most of my interviews, I still need to write up an abstract of the important points which emerged from the conversations so that I'll know which tapes to go for for which information. At the moment I still have one interview from Thursday to write up, and as well have two regular interviews and two most irregular interviews, plus two telephone conversation to write up from Friday. Although I might forget a couple of things, it will probably be all right provided I get things finished by Monday, because that day I have five for all interviews (9 am start to 6 pm start) and I really won't be wanting anything to be left over when I tackle that! (Oy! this has a real shriek (as before) as well as the ersatz! It also has £, but what can you get for a quid these days?)

I suppose the other thing I should really be giving some thought to is a seminar I am to give at Sturt next Tuesday. This was sprung on me rather suddenly this week, and preparing for it might also help me to get through a brain-picking I'm due to get on the Wednesday night. Part of the problem there is that both groups of people are interested in things which don't interest me at all (it'll be like being at a science fiction convention) and I'm in for a couple of hours at both places. If I talk about what interest me, they'll be unbelievably bored and will also probably adopt an attitude towards me I could do without. The alternative, talking about what interest them, is slightly terrifying, but at least by the time anyone reads this (if they bother) it will all be over, and your hamble and obedient servant will be safely in Sydney.

That's quite enough, I think.

John Foyster, 18/7-23/8