

Scratch Pad No. 36

December 1999

A FEAST OF FRIENDS

Aussiecon 3 Convention Report



Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz.

A remembrance from Ditmar

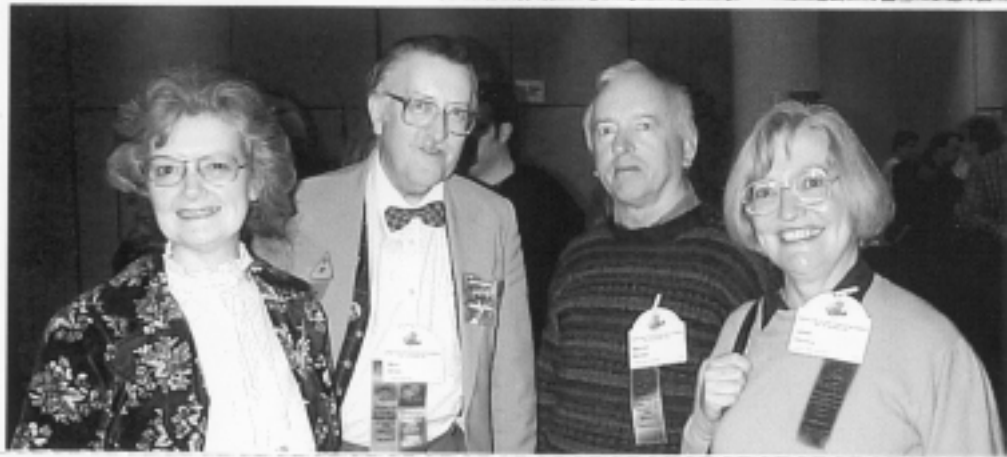


John and Cheryl Straede.

Aussiecon Three 1999



John Foyster.



Helena Binns, Merv Binns, Merv Barrett, Janet Horncy (Barrett).

need to produce a quickie *Metaphysical Review* in 1999.

During 1999, my supply of Paying Work picked up. Time available to publish fanzines or do research into fan history disappeared. At the beginning of August, I looked at the bank account, moaned softly, refused further offers of work, and settled down to 'research' my talk (rummage through thirty-two years of accumulated fanzines). I was looking for Ron Clarke's book-format publication of Vol Molesworth's *History of Australian Fandom* (actually the history of Sydney fandom before 1962). I didn't find it in my collection, but the amazing Alan Stewart took the trouble to photocopy for me the pages I needed. This 'research' (fun fun fun) turned up vast amounts of material for the nearly completed collection of George Turner's non-fiction, plus a lot of fan history I'd forgotten. A week to go before the Convention, the mulchy Gillespie brain limped into life. Four days before the Convention, I finished writing the Fan Guest of Honour speech.

The express train loomed. I still hadn't found a way to get off the tracks.

As far as Elaine and I were concerned, the Convention began on 27 August, the Friday before. Merv Barrett and Janet Horncy from New Zealand arrived in Melbourne. Jenny Bryce, sensible person, was about to leave for three weeks in Europe. Sally Yeoland expected to attend no more than one day of the convention, but she was determined to have some fun as well. She arranged for us all to meet at the Saigon Inn in Melbourne. Merv Barrett, who had lived in Melbourne during the early sixties, said he could remember when the Melbourne SF Club moved to Somerset Place. About Easter 1961, he said. Definitely.

Meanwhile the British contingent had arrived in Adelaide, were overflowing the Foyster/Rousseau residence for the weekend, and were about to descend on Melbourne.

Meanwhile Geoff Roderick had vague hopes of publishing before Aussiecon Roger Weddall's tape-recorded DUFF Report from 1992. He asked me to do some editing work on the transcript, but I ran out of time during the weekend before Aussiecon.

Dave Hartwell phoned from deepest St Kilda, and asked for a few phone numbers.

The news came that Peter Nicholls was threatening to stuff up one of my favourite arrangements for the convention. The committee had agreed that there would be no items programmed against my speech on the first night of the convention. Dave Langford's 'Thog's Master Class' speech was scheduled to follow mine, followed by the Auld Lang Fund party for all those people who had contributed to the fund, which had brought Dave to Australia. Several weeks before the convention, Dave received an invitation to a party at the Nicholls mansion on the first night of the convention. Naturally, he accepted. He did not realise that many of us had (at that stage) not been invited. The committee asked Peter and Clare to hold the party on the Wednesday night instead. They refused. Marc Ortlieb, who was in charge of the Auld Lang Fund, had to reschedule that party so that it took place before Dave's speech. But Marc did not realise that my speech was scheduled before Dave's. A few days before the convention, I still had the impression that most of the fans for whom I had written my speech would not be able to attend it because of the party. (And, of course, I would not be able to go to the Langford party.) Who solved the situation? Doughty last-minute programmers and Dave himself made sure that his party finished before the Opening Ceremony and my speech.

On Monday I phoned the hotel where the many of the British fans were staying. Yes, it's Mark Plummer here, and we'll meet tomorrow at noon.

Rose Mitchell (Treasurer for Aussiecon) had rung Elaine and me to invite us to a pre-convention restaurant night in Brunswick on Monday night to meet some of the overseas visitors. (We were supposed to have been invited to a Sunday afternoon yum cha on the Sunday afternoon, but this had not happened. If it had happened, I might have got to yarn to Greg Benford. But I could not have finished writing both the GoH and Turner speeches.)

Monday night's restaurant night (30 August) provided a large assortment of Melbourne people I didn't know well, a few I did know, and some of the overseas people who had already arrived in Melbourne. Most successful ploy of the night: ask Lise Eisenberg to tell stories about overseas fans. She told of the tour of Oxford once given by Dave Langford to her and some other American visitors. He pointed out the landmarks of his student days: all the buildings at which he had caused explosions or where explosions had taken place while he was present.

Tuesday morning (31 August). I felt nervous. Would the British fans like us? Great people in print, but then, people sometimes think that the Gillespie-in-print is a great person. I need not have worried. Mark Plummer and Claire Brialey were much as I expected, although Claire berates herself so much in her fanzines that I hadn't expected her to be quite so — ahem — personable. Paul and Elizabeth Billinger were younger than I expected (although they say they only *look* younger than their real ages), and Paul proved to be highly articulate, although he doesn't write for *Acnestis*. Pat McMurray is also good at holding up any end of a conversation.

Andy Butler? A total surprise. I had expected a dark, tall and vaguely sarcastic pipe-smoking British academic. Instead, here was this short, rotund, merry and very easy-going British fan-who-happens-also-to-be-an-academic.

Dave Langford? Taller than expected, devastatingly charming, and perhaps as shy as I am. I had no idea how we would get around the problem of Dave's deafness, but he's been solving this problem for years. He is very good at lip reading, and I talked more slowly than usual. When Dave cannot hear what is going on, he shows infinite tact, and goes with the flow of events.

The name of the game was book searching, but lunch first. Forward we strode down Little Bourke Street into Chinatown, to the Shark Fin Inn for yum cha ('dim sum' elsewhere in the world). Not for the last time did we astonish visitors with the cheapness and quality of food at Melbourne restaurants. Everyone filled up for less than \$20 a head.

Back to book searching. I led the expedition up the hill to Carlton, not far from the centre of Melbourne. To me it seemed a pleasantly warm day, but it proved too warm for some British fans with delicate skins. We walked through the Carlton Gardens past the vast Exhibition Building (finished in 1889) up to the first of several secondhand book shops in Carlton. Nobody suffered an extreme 'book accident' (*Acnestis* term for succumbing to book-buying addiction), but a few people soon had difficulty lugging their purchases. At Book Affair on Elgin Street, as soon as we walked in the door the proprietor said: 'So you're from the Convention, too!' Grin, grin, as he watched dollars flow out of British wallets.

Eventually we retired to air-conditioned Brunetti's (the air-conditioning was needed by now; the top temperature

that day was 28°C) for cakes and/or ice cream and coffee or cold drinks. Then to Reading's, whose new large shop is filled with new books and CDs, but the prices proved a bit much for the assembled multitude. We took the bus to our place, and settled to chat, pat cats and recover from the 'hot weather'. (At the time I wondered how Claire and co. would survive a few weeks later in the centre of Australia. To judge from a later postcard, I don't think they did.)

Dinner? Why not go around the corner to our favourite Thai restaurant (Ruan Thai in Johnston Street)? And what better entrée than chicken satay (chicken on skewers, surrounded by peanut sauce)? The dish was accompanied by flaming liquid in a silver bowl. Surely this was part of the cooking process? Dave Langford plunged his peanut-sauce-covered skewer into the flame. Another Langford explosion! Would we and the restaurant go sky high? No. We assured Dave that the flaming spirit in the bowl is only for decoration.

Again, collective wonder at the quality of the food and the low price of the bill.

The next night, Wednesday, 1 September, was not listed as the beginning of the convention, but most overseas and interstate people were already in town. It was the usual night of the Nova Mob (first Wednesday of the month), so we had agreed to meet in the bar of the Centra Hotel about 8 p.m. Elaine and I had also agreed to meet Sally, Merv, Janet and various others for dinner, but we were late. They had left by the time we reached the bar at the Centra. The Convention, it seems, had already begun, with Registration beginning a few hours earlier. The famous, the infamous and the people who had turned grey since last I saw them littered what proved to be the centre of the Convention — the congenial, if early-closing (half past midnight each night) bar of the Centra, which is part of the same building as the Melbourne Convention Centre, site of Aussiecon.

Immediate question: what's happening tomorrow morning? Perry Middlemiss, Chairman of the convention, had mentioned arranging for someone to pick up me and my luggage on the Thursday morning and hand me some money for expenses, but no arrangements had been made yet. I tried to attract Perry's attention, but he was just a bit too busy.

The Nova Mobbers were in party mode, as were the British fans. At last Elaine and I met Maureen Kincaid Speller, 1998's TAFF winner, and Paul Kincaid, 1999's GUFF winner. I had read only an hour before that one of Paul's stated aims for visiting Australia was to meet me. So we met, and liked each other, as both he and Maureen proved as amiable and knowledgeable and energetic and sociable as I had expected. People such as Maureen and Paul, Claire and Mark, Elizabeth and Paul, Dave Langford, and Eve and John Harvey, all from Britain, proved to be my anchors throughout the convention. No wonder that after Aussiecon I began to have strange thoughts about standing for GUFF some time in the future.

Thursday morning, 2 September 1999: Terror Day — the Day of the Speech. Also, the day I had to find a way of transporting my stuff from home to the Centra Hotel. In the end, I did what should have been arranged in the first place: took a taxi. I hoped I had taken everything I needed. (I hadn't, of course; somehow I had forgotten a tooth brush and tooth paste and several other vital bits and pieces. Elaine said she'd bring them in later.)

Arrival at hotel; large room with great sixth-floor view over Spencer Street, the Yarra and the Casino. Pack away a

few things. Register.

I had seen the convention facilities several times before. Then it seemed enormous. Now filling with fans, the atrium still seemed fairly large. It took me two days to find yet another enormous area of floor space that lay behind the lower atrium. That was the area for Site Selection and the convention's own coffee shop. I'm told that to overseas visitors these were compact convention facilities, but I found that I was always running in the wrong direction, or rushing past somebody I wanted to talk to.

I tried not to pull rank too often, but I had no hesitation in avoiding the queues and asking for my Aussiecon bag and badge ahead of everybody else. I was supposed to be on a panel at midday, and only just made it.

'Criticism and Reviewing', by People Who Should Know. Not a wildly exciting panel; we were all getting used to the idea that yes, we were really here, and it's Aussiecon, and we're supposed to Do Something. Good to catch up with John Douglas. We hadn't seen each other since 1973 in Toronto, but with him I felt the same as I always do with John Berry, of picking up the conversation just where we left off, years before. Since then I've become a journeyman freelance editor, while he's become Publishing Head of HarperPrism, and before that the publisher of George Turner's most successful novels. (Two weeks after Aussiecon, HarperPrism disappeared, and John lost his job. Perhaps it's safer to stay a humble journeyman.) John offered some insights on the decline of reviewing, especially newspaper and general magazine reviewing, in America. He also explained why it's impossible for reviewers to obtain the right books from publishers. Sending out review copies is a job usually handled by the most junior staff member of Publicity, and she usually moves onto another job after a few months, leaving no lists.

Bill Congreve from Sydney, who I hadn't met before, described some of the vicissitudes of reviewing for newspapers, and Maureen Speller explained how Acnestis had been formed from a group of people who simply liked reading and reviewing books. She also raised the difficulties of purloining the books that need reviewing from the publishers who purport to be publicising their wares.

Next question: what would we do for lunch around here? The Centra seemed like a major American hotel until I tried to find the twenty-four-hour coffee bar, the main anchor of sanity in an American hotel. It didn't exist. Eventually I discovered that I could buy a decent hot lunch in the bar. And in the bar, as was their custom during Aussiecon, were Claire and Mark and Paul and Elizabeth and quite a few other friendly souls.

Much has been said about problems with programming at Aussiecon III. The story I've heard is that Perry Middlemiss, convention chairman, who surely had other things on his mind, had to sit down a few days before the convention to write a new database so that the program could work. Janice Gelb (now referred to as 'Saint Janice'), who was supposed to be enjoying herself as the DUFF candidate, then sat down for several more days, constructing a program that worked. The result? For me, a program that was much too successful. At 2 p.m. on the first day, there were two fannish items competing with each other ('Origins of the Melbourne SF Club' versus 'Adelaide's Critical Mass and Melbourne's Nova Mob'), which in turn made it impossible for me to hear Andy Butler in action ('The Building Blocks of Science Fiction').

I went to find out about the origins of the Melbourne SF Club from the horses' mouths. Race Mathews, Merv Binns



Perry Middlemiss introduces Dave Langford's 'Thog's Master Class' (Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz).

and Dick Jenssen were there as founder members of the Club, and Karen Pender-Gunn moderated. This panel was part of FanHistoricon 9.5, which John Foyster in Adelaide and Joyce Scrivner in Minneapolis had concocted during the last months preceding Aussiecon. John's FanHistoricon agenda was to tell the whole story of Australian fandom in a series of panels spread throughout the convention. I attended as many as possible, but missed some that I wish had been taped, such as the one on apas. But the Convention Centre would not allow taping unless it provided the service — but it would provide the service only at \$75 per hour per session. Therefore most of the information offered at most panels and talks has been lost forever. Unless Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, who attended almost every FanHistoricon session, have eidetic memories.

We all leaned forward, anticipating fabulous tales about the early days of the Melbourne SF Club. Helena Binns passed around a photo album filled with fannish photos of the fifties and sixties. Then Merv Binns read from his notes, painstakingly researched from *Etherline*. No fabulous stories here, but a lot of facts, which I hope Merv will publish *Real Soon Now*. His half-hour piece stopped the conversation dead in its tracks. Eventually Race and Dick slipped in a few stories, but many of us felt an opportunity had been lost. If only Lee Harding had been there!

As I look back over the program, I see a dazzling array of items I missed. Why miss Terry Frost's 'Mondo Video'? Unforgivable mistake. But I was running out of time and energy. I had brought from home a box of Gillespie fanzines and Norstrilia Press books that Justin Ackroyd of Slow Glass Books had offered to sell for me. I had one hour to scribble an invoice and deliver the goodies to him. During Aussiecon, Justin sold a fair amount of my stuff and a vast amount of everything else. (He also gave me — you read that correctly... *gave* me — a copy of Shaun Tan and John Marsden's *The Rabbits*, which won the Australian Children's Picture Book of the Year Award for 1999.)

I looked around the Hucksters' Room and drooled somewhat while circling Andy Richards' table. New hardbacks of Stephen Baxter's *Time* and Greg Egan's *Teranesia!* Various other hardbacks that had never been released in Australia! Much flapping of the VisaCard. I noticed that at the Slow Glass Books table, Justin and staff couldn't take the

money fast enough from the customers.

I approached the Small Press Publishers' table with some trepidation. I had been swapping idle chatter with quite a few of them for months on the Eidolist e-group, but had set eyes on only one or two. They all said hello, but nobody seemed to be in a hurry to hold a conversation. Jonathan Strahan very ostentatiously did not offer me a trade copy of his new reviewzine *The Coode Street Review*, although I had sent him a copy of George Turner's *Down There in Darkness* to review for it. Jeremy Byrne said he would send a copy of the latest *Eidolon*, which hasn't arrived. I bought the books and magazines that looked interesting, especially *Altair* and the new Stephen Dedman collection. I meant to catch up with Erika Lacey later during the convention, but didn't see her again. At last I met Sean Williams, after 'talking' to him for a whole year while co-judging the Aurealis Young Adult Awards in 1998.

Most of the people who gathered around the small publishers' table were also writers, many of them from Western Australia. They've formed their own fandom, with their own uniform of flashy black suits and flashier ties. Maybe they're rich or something! But not from writing or editing, surely? They know nothing of fan history, or even much about Australian SF history, but they have about them the gleam of youthful optimism. Some of them, such as Steve Dedman, are actually selling SF overseas, while others have yet to learn what a heartbreak old world SF small publishing can be. (Dan Fari, of Ticonderonga Press, has found this out already, but he keeps going.) I didn't hear any of these people speak at the convention, and probably none of them heard me. Different worlds for different folks; I hope some day they might let me join them in conversation around a bar somewhere.

Dinner time, but nobody around with whom to have dinner. Again, the burning question — are there any good restaurants around the Centra? Nobody had mentioned any. I didn't have enough time to go back into the city. I wandered along the concourse outside the Casino until I found a Greek restaurant, where I ate a light meal. Time to settle the first-night nerves. I drank one beer with dinner. Amazing how relaxed one beer and a light meal can make you feel. I wandered back across the river to the hotel. I hoped I could find somebody with whom to have dinner

during the rest of the convention.

I had been told to gather in the 'Green Room' before the Opening Ceremony. Later, the 'Green Room' marshalling system broke down, since most panel members had no choice but to rush from one item to another. Perry was in the Green Room, silent, studying something or other. I sat quietly at the other end of the room. Perry came over. 'You'll be okay? You'll be standing at a lectern. You don't need audiovisual facilities, do you?' 'No,' I said, waving a copy of my speech. 'I would have ordered them long ago if I'd needed them.' 'Yes,' said Perry, 'but would anybody have told *me*?'

Others drifted in. The bright-and-cheery Green Room manager bustled in. We filed off to the execution. I hadn't even had time to attend the Auld Lang Fund party.

I hadn't been told much about the Opening Ceremony. I presumed I was supposed to be there. John Foyster launched the Convention with a wonderfully mellow speech about fandom and the real purposes of a world convention. This was a return to the Foyster of the late sixties and early seventies. Those of the Guests who had arrived toddled onto stage and were introduced: Greg Benford as Overseas Pro Guest of Honour, me as Fan Guest of Honour, Janice Gelb as DUFF winner, Paul Kincaid as GUFF winner, and Linnette Horne as FFANZ winner. J.M.Straczynski (Media Special Guest) hadn't arrived yet (and would be delayed until Sunday), and unfortunately George Turner, Australian Pro Guest of Honour, couldn't be with us. Perry wrapped it all up. Then I was on.

It is very strange to arrive at the moment I had been dreading for three and a half years — the Fan Guest of Honour speech. Right at that moment, 8.30 p.m., it could still be a disaster, but at least the speech had been written. I had learned many years ago: never wing it; prepare and over-prepare. Perhaps I should have attempted to memorise the talk — but I cannot memorise lines. The Batman Theatre was nearly full. At least I didn't have to worry about all those people who had been lured away to the Nicholls party. There wouldn't have been room for them if they'd turned up. As soon as I stood at the lectern I felt okay. The small overhead light was so strong that I couldn't see anybody in the audience. I began. People laughed in the right places. I kept hearing above everything else that cheery laugh of Leigh Edmonds, a sound I had not heard at a convention for many years. About half way through the talk I realised that this was just a large Nova Mob audience, and Nova Mob talks always go well, don't they?

As you would know if you've read the speech, it sprang from my sense that there was a certain injustice in choosing me to be Fan Guest of Honour. Some other people of vital importance to Australian fandom — especially Merv Binns, John Foyster and John Bangsund — seem to have been overlooked. Using this premise, I told the true story of Melbourne fandom up to the point when I joined it in 1967. When the speech finished and I realised it had gone well and I was staggering off stage, Merv Binns came up to me and put his arms around me. He was in tears. Some measure of justice had been restored. Hey, Merv, we never forgot you; it just seemed so.

What would I do now that I was free to enjoy the rest of the convention? Settle down to listen to Dave Langford deliver his world-famous 'Thog's Master Class' talk. Like most of the audience, I found my breathing apparatus seizing up under the pressure of severe laughter. Dave was a bit put out when later I compared his speaking style to

that of Brian Aldiss. We remember Brian at his best, when he was here in 1978. Dave's speechifying voice and stance are very Aldissian, compared to his conversational voice, which is shy and sometimes a bit hard to catch.

What should I do for the rest of the night? I didn't have the energy to go out to the Nicholls party, although at the last minute Elaine and I had been invited. Elaine went home for the night. I decided to find out if I could actually sleep in a hotel room, having not done so for many years. I went up to my room, unpacked a bit more, and tried to relax. That didn't work. I went down to the bar until it closed. I slept fitfully, and woke at dawn to hear the first trams crossing the points outside the hotel. I must have drifted off, because I woke up just in time for the room service breakfast I'd ordered. It wasn't too exciting, so I decided to find somewhere else for breakfast the next morning.

All this talk of consecutive events hides the essential nature of the convention — meeting and talking to people whenever and if ever our paths crossed.

Time and again, I saw David Russell floating up the up elevator while I hustled down the down elevator, or the other way around, but I hardly said a word to him all convention. He seemed to be having a good time. On the first day, I said hello to Anne Poore, an Adelaide fan who had migrated to folk fandom for many years, and was obviously now back in SF fandom. Almost every time I crossed the vast main floor, I saw her in the distance and waved, but we didn't have another chance to talk. Other people, such as Maureen and Paul, I kept meeting and chatting to.

I was introduced to Teddy Harvia, ace fan artist, on the first day, but for the rest of the convention could do little but wave to him. As I was coming off the platform after the Opening Ceremony, a greying little man introduced himself. The legendary Waldemar Kumming, one of the first fans to trade fanzines with me in 1969, and whose *Munich Roundup* still appears once a year! But what could we say to each other? Not much. I felt much the same when I met the legendary Jack Speer, founder member of FAPA, at the ANZAPA/FAPA party on Sunday. What do you say to a legend when you realise you don't know nearly enough about the legend? Luckily, Jack and John Bangsund hit it off when Jack visited John in Geelong a few days later.

A figure from the past was Rowena Cory, who I had last met several years before she moved to Brisbane with Darryl Lindquist. Now she writes fantasy novels as Cory Daniels, but she hasn't changed much in appearance. She had a phone number for Chris Johnston, long-lost Melbourne fan and artist, and knows the whereabouts of Stephen Campbell, last seen in a St Kilda street on the day of George Turner's funeral. Steve, it seems, now lives in a southern coastal town of Victoria, taking care of his mother. I wish he'd ring, but I guess he never will.

And Mark Linneman, looking much the same as ever but limping, was back for a few weeks. He had become a close friend when he spent eight years in Melbourne in the 1980s as the Law Librarian at Melbourne University. Back in America, he fell on hard times, but had just landed a job as Law Librarian of the State of California. He had to move to Sacramento from Cincinnati four days after returning from Australia. He was conducting Site Selection during the first three days of the convention, so we didn't really get to talk much until the week after. Mark Linneman being back in town seemed enough was enough to guarantee it would

be a successful convention.

On Friday, I met Angelo D'Alessio and his wife Charlene. Angelo has been a Gillespie-fanzine subscriber since the 1970s, so I was pleased to meet him at Aussiecon II in 1985. Now they were back for yet another Australian holiday and convention. They mentioned that they had found a pleasant place, up Spencer Street, to eat breakfast. I said I'd join them there the next morning.

Friday, 3 September: The hurtle of the convention began all over again, but not before I had turned on my hotel-room radio to find that most of the people of East Timor were now suffering the burning of their homes and thousands of them were dying every day. The news became worse each morning during Aussiecon. Would the convention end just as war was being declared between Australia and Indonesia?

At 11 a.m. was my favourite item of the convention, Alan Elms's talk 'From Canberra to Norstrilia: The Australian Adventures of Cordwainer Smith'. This was also the highlight of what everyone called the 'Atrack', the academic track of programming that had been finalised by Russell and Jenny Blackford more than a month before the rest of the program came together. Alan Elms has spent twenty years researching a biography of 'Cordwainer Smith' (Dr Paul Linebarger). He has discovered a much closer relationship between Linebarger and Australia than I had realised. Linebarger visited here during World War II, then took three sabbaticals at ANU during the fifties and sixties. The best-known result of these visits was the novel *Norstrilia* ('Norstrilia' is short for 'Old North Australia'), but Dr Elms also reminded us of the many Norstrilian references that can be found in the later short stories. After the talk, I overheard him talking to a representative of the small press that has recently republished E. E. Smith's works in quality hardback editions. This bloke, whose name I've forgotten, sounded very interested in publishing the biography. He also said that the key to success for small publishers in America today is amazon.com, the online distributor. 'They take 3000 copies; ask for only 50 per cent of the retail price; pay in 30 days; and ask for another 3000 copies.'

After leaving the august company of Dr Elms, I had about forty minutes to grab some lunch before the next item I wanted to see. A quick meal at the bar seemed to be the only way to get something to eat quickly without leaving the hotel.

John Foyster's 'Samuel R. Delany and the Yackademy: An Evolution in Style' is the least describable hour of the convention, but I didn't know I would have to memorise it in order to describe it later. Foyster set a chair upside down on the desk to give himself a podium. He then threw away the usual Foyster style, and proceeded at full academic rant, imitating I-know-not-who (perhaps Delany himself), tearing apart some of Delany's more fashion-conscious recent statements about criticism. Since Delany argues, as many do, that the author no longer exists behind the work that bears his name, Foyster argued that the talk itself could not exist. At the end of the hour he tore apart the speech, threw the pieces in the bin, and announced that no other copy existed. Which must have been annoying for Jenny Blackford, ace Atrack organiser who had introduced the speech, waiting breathlessly for a copy to publish in the forthcoming Aussiecon issue of *Foundation*.

I was starting to lose energy at this stage, so I went back to my room and stretched out on the bed for awhile. When I got up, I realised that I had just missed the program item

I most wanted to attend: Race Mathews and others talking about 'SF and Politics'. Worse, I arranged weeks before for the Programming Committee to shift one of my own items so that I could attend 'SF and Politics'. When I arrived, a vast buzz of excitement was still going, with everybody announcing that yes, it had been the best item of the convention so far. It hadn't been taped, of course. Joe Haldeman, Robert Silverberg, Elizabeth Moon and Peter Hamilton are the other people I missed hearing on that panel. Thanks to Race for giving me a duplicated copy of his own opening statement for the talk.

It was quite something to see Race Mathews transformed from Visiting Politician, as he was at Aussiecons I and II, into Race Mathews, famous (and ebullient) old-time fan. I wish he had been able to attend more of the convention. He spoke well at the next FanHistoricon panel, 'Introduction to Australian Fandom', sketching the early days of Melbourne fandom. Chris Nelson, who has interviewed people from the period, talked about the early days of Sydney fandom, Susan Batho (better known as Sue Clarke during most of her fannish career) talked about the growth of media fandom, and I filled in a few details of Melbourne fandom since the late sixties. I doubt if I had been in the same room as Sue since Syncon II in 1972, but from time to time I'd heard that she had remained one of the major figures in Sydney fandom during the last two decades. (She received the A. Bertram Chandler Award in 1998.)

My speech, 'The Good Soldier: George Turner as Combative Critic', was at 5 p.m., when everybody, including me, was running out of energy, and thinking about drinks and dinner. I had hoped that the whole convention might somehow be dedicated to the memory of the great George Turner, and indeed many of the panels seemed set up at his suggestion. But the items that actually discussed George and his work were not well attended, except for Judy Buckrich's book launch a couple of days later. A few stalwarts turned up for my talk, which ran a bit under time. It looked as if the Question Time would go flat, but it warmed up just as we were told to finish the session. The speech itself will appear in the special Aussiecon issue of *Foundation*.

After the talk, a greying man of about my age introduced himself to me. 'Hi, I'm Patrick McGuire.' I hope I didn't seem too amazed. Last time I saw Patrick was in 1973 at Torcon, when he was fiercely black haired and a bit intimidating. This man, with whom I'd wanted to have another conversation ever since, seemed rather shy. I knew Patrick was in the country, and had expected him to ring me in the week before the convention. We exchanged a few words, but I didn't get his room number, and didn't find out when he would be staying in Melbourne after the convention. I didn't see him again at the convention, and didn't hear from him again before he returned home. I feel guilty at not sitting down with him right *then* and catching up on twenty-six years of conversation.

Among the milling masses in the atrium, some familiar people were gathering, mentioning important words such as 'dinner' and 'hungry'. The Banquet (the first Worldcon Banquet since Aussiecon II) was scheduled for that night, but nobody had approached me about it. Nobody had mentioned whether or not I was supposed to pay \$50 to attend it. Paul and Maureen, John and Yvonne, Roman, most of the British fans, and others friends agreed that they wanted a cheap, filling meal instead of a banquet, so we set off by tram for the Italian Waiters Club at the other end of the city. The entrance to this famous restaurant is a door off a dark alley off Bourke Street near Spring Street. Until



Valma Brown, Leigh Edmonds, Jae Leslie Adams (Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz).

recently, there was no sign over the door, but I remember being taken there in 1972 or 1973. We flowed over and around two large tables, and ate cheaply and hugely and drink vastly for the next few hours. This was my idea of a convention meal.

Back at the Centra, I wondered what to do about parties. At first I decided to avoid the problem altogether. Then I fell asleep for an hour and a half. I woke, completely refreshed. Now where was that party I had been told about? Room 401, up the road at the Grand Apartments.

The Grand Apartments was the most expensive of the overflow hotels for the Centra. For most of its life it had been the headquarters for the Victorian Railways. When the VR was destroyed as an organisation, its headquarters lay empty for several years. Now the vast bluestone and granite pile has been transformed into a hotel outfitted even more luxuriously than the Centra. Since many of the rooms have been created out of old offices, they have three levels: a large kitchen–entertaining area, a sitting room area on the mezzanine, and the bedroom and toilet upstairs. This proved an ideal space for holding parties, especially as the Grand’s management did not hurl everybody into the street at half past midnight, as did the Centra’s. Room 401 had been retained as the fannish party room for the whole convention. Friday night was Caroline Mullan’s birthday, which meant the place was full of British and other overseas fans, some of whom I recognised. I talked to Jae Leslie

Adams from Wisconsin, whom I had ‘met’ on the Internet. She said that she had done her tour of Australia before the convention. The result? Everybody on the bus contracted ‘convention cough’. ‘Convention cough’ eventually took its toll on large numbers of people at Aussiecon.

Later I talked to a bloke named Mike Moir, who had been sitting at Andy Richards’ table earlier in the day. Mike had been a partner in Kerosina Books, an enterprising British small publisher that did three of Keith Roberts’ most recent books. Mike and I agreed that *The God House* is Keith Roberts’ best book. We discussed Roberts and much else, including unrepeatable gossip about many famous British publishing personalities.

Many Aussiecon lives were saved, I believe, by the fact that by two or three o’clock in the morning, very few cars were still hurtling down Flinders Street, which we had to cross to return to the Centra. I felt quite chipper at 3 a.m., but an unbiased observer might not have agreed with me.

On Saturday morning, 4 September, I still felt chipper. Conventioneering agreed with me. I wasn’t huddled over a computer, which is how I spend many of my working days. This was my first real holiday, away from the desk, for nine years. I was striding around in my new Scarpas, getting lots of exercise and exuding an air of bonhomie and relaxation. (Well.) So I strode up Spencer Street to the Jarrah Room, a little restaurant that is the only one I’ve discovered claim-

ing to serve 'authentic Australian food'. The breakfast menu featured good old-fashioned eggs and bacon. There was lots of other food for a small cost, and I was able to chat with Angelo and Charlene, who discovered this restaurant during their 1985 trip. The restaurant plays Australian bush music as background. When they are at home in Connecticut, Angelo and Charlene buy tapes and CDs of Australian music from a Brisbane shop. John Williamson's their favourite, and sure enough, I could hear him singing all during breakfast.

I should have attended the 'Time Travel' symposium that was set to begin at 10 a.m., but I felt like walking. Melbourne south of the Yarra River has been transformed since Aussiecon II, as Charles Brown noted in a recent *Locus*. It seemed unlikely I would get another chance to walk the whole length of the Casino complex and Southbank, so I did so. The wind was cool, the rain still had not set in (as it did later in the day), so I walked from Spencer Street to Swanston Street and back, taking in coffee and muffins along the way.

Midday was the FanHistoricon panel on 'Remembering Somerset Place'. The number of people in the audience was only slightly larger than the number on the stage, but this was the most amusing hour of the convention. Take Dick Jenssen, fandom's only senior-citizen fourteen-year-old, Bill Wright, whose jokes are surrealistic at the best of times, Leigh Edmonds, who remembers the good times, as does John Foyster, and mix in Merv Binns, Merv Barrett and me, and you hear all the best stories ever told about the Melbourne SF Club's days at Somerset Place. Foyster managed to persuade us that the Club moved there in 1962, a year later than Merv Barrett's date. Bill told stories of the strange people, the refugees from sixties Melbourne, who visited the Club. Foyster drew a map of the Somerset Place headquarters, and tried to describe riding the hydraulic lift, which had broken down by the time I visited the Club for the first time. And Dick told jokes whenever anybody paused for breath. Karen Pender-Gunn, who moderated proceedings, must have been sincerely glad that the Club had acquired some *gravitas* by the time she joined it. Cedric Rowley, who wasn't officially on the panel, also told some good stories about the Club. Since the panel wasn't recorded, I hope Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer can remember the stories they heard.

Saturday was an overcrowded day. The next two hours featured Greg Benford's Pro Guest of Honour speech, which was an audiovisual presentation of his thoughts on 'Deep Time', about which he's written a book. I gather from later comments that Greg had given this speech several times in America, which might be why it wasn't as well attended as I'd expected. Greg's drawings of architectural devices for protecting information over time looked somewhat like the paintings that can be generated in a fractals program. I liked the way Greg gave us a sense of the fragility of information. Good sensawonder stuff, delivered without notes, but not helped by the deeply stupid questions that were asked at the end of the two hours.

I had caught up with Elaine, although we didn't see each other for long stretches of the rest of the convention. She had volunteered to help Mark Linneman run the Site Selection table, but found herself free by mid afternoon on the Saturday. At that stage, I discovered the special coffee shop set up by the convention because the regular coffee shop opens only on week days. Sitting around exhausted, we caught up with the other members of the Middlemiss family: Perry's mother and father, and Robin, Catherine

and William. The child-care program at the convention was proving very popular, so Catherine wanted to go back there. Brian Middlemiss was one of the most pleasant people I met at the convention. Yes, he must be older than his son, but by this stage of the convention Perry was looking a bit ragged. Many years ago, Perry told us that his father was the person who alerted him to science fiction, and Brian is just the sort of aware, chipper, amusing person you would expect of somebody who had been reading science fiction all his life.

Not much time to sit down, since 4 p.m. brought the Other Awards. Splitting the awards ceremony into two was one of the most popular actions of the Aussiecon committee. Often at world conventions the awards ceremony seems longer than the Academy and AFI Awards put together. After shepherding (and saving) the disastrous Hugo Awards ceremony of 1985, Marc Ortlieb knew how to punch through the awards in an hour, even constraining the Japanese awards to ten minutes.

Dick Jenssen turned up, hoping to receive a Ditmar Award at last. He didn't, since Ian Gunn was always certain to win the Best Fan Artist award, but he did receive a round of applause for being the Ditmar after whom the Ditmars are named. Nick Stathopoulos astonished everybody, especially Ditmar statisticians such as Marc Ortlieb, by handing his Best Pro Artist Award to Shaun Tan. I accepted the Ditmar awarded to David Lake for his story in *Dreaming Down Under*. Most of the Ditmar Awards went to the usual suspects, such as *Dreaming Down Under* and *The MUP Encyclopedia of Australian SF*. There was one exception. Because Alan Stewart had been nominated for a Hugo Award for Best Fanzine and I hadn't, I expected him to win the Ditmar in the same category. Suddenly I was standing up there, trying to think of something to say after winning the Ditmar for Best Fanzine. That put a high gloss on what was already a shiny convention.

Oddity of the event was the annual award of Forry Ackerman's Big Heart Award. The committee spent weeks trying to find this year's winner, Chris Collier, who was said to be Australian. Unfortunately, this was one of only two world conventions that Forry has ever failed to attend, so we couldn't ask him.

Another hurdle, to Random House's presentation of the George Turner Award. The winner, Maxine Macarthur's *TimeFuture*, had been announced a month or so before, but it was felt best to make the formal presentation at the worldcon. This was the sort of occasion at which one really should wear a collar and tie, but the air-conditioned atmosphere of the Centra/Convention Centre was so warm and humid that I refused to wear either. I didn't know many of the throng, but I did introduce myself to Maxine, a very pleasant person whose novel has proved a worthy winner of the award. Several Sydney Eidolisters I particularly wanted to meet must have been in the room somewhere, but their name tags ne'er passed my eye.

Rush away as soon as possible. Elaine had already ordered from the bar something to eat. It arrived twenty-five minutes later. I hurtled upstairs, had a shower, wished I could have a brain change, then hurtled downstairs. The pie and salad was nearly cold, but delicious. Nearly time for the Hugos. Why was I so nervous? All I had to do was pick up a Hugo for Tom Disch if he won in the Non-fiction category. All this ceremony! Justin Ackroyd in bow tie and tails?

The Hugo ceremony went without a hitch, ably compared by Michael Jordan and featuring a cast of thousands,

plus some well-done audiovisuals. No boring speeches. A few surprises, including Jeremy Byrne's standing-jump short cut onto the stage. (What if your knee had gone *twang*, Jeremy?) There were two Australian Hugo winners — Greg Egan for 'Oceanic' and Ian Gunn for Best Fan Artist — and in their categories, Alan Stewart and Maureen Speller did well against double Hugo winner Dave Langford. I said some ill-chosen words when Tom Disch did win the Hugo. He seems to have been the only non-attending member who hadn't sent a neat little acceptance speech by email. At the end of the ceremony, I was photographed with the other acceptors. That's the only way I'll ever be shown on the front cover of *Locus*.

At this stage, I was floating somewhere near the ceiling. Can a convention be this good? Once in a lifetime. What to do with the rest of the evening? Elaine went home, I deposited a Hugo and two Ditmars in my hotel room, and Maureen and Paul and I decided to make up for the meals we'd missed earlier in the evening. The 'Hugo Losers' Party' was overcrowded and understaffed, so we left. The top-rated Chinese restaurant in the Centra was still open at 9.30, so we ate generously and well and drank deeply but not too much, and glowed and said what great people we were and so was everybody else... After thirty-two years of plugging along in fandom, why not one night of triumph?

On Sunday morning, I had breakfast with Mark Linneman at one of the Centra's restaurants. The food was not much better than that available on room service, but at least I had someone to talk to. Later I wandered through the maze of corridors that links the various buildings along Spencer Street, and found myself having a second breakfast with author Kim Wilkins, who is hoping to move to Melbourne next year, and is really looking forward to Nova Mob meetings. (She had given a talk to the Nova Mob during the year.)

The morning immediately turned into another day of rushing from one room to another. Irwin Hirsh gave a wonderful panel called 'Fannish Remembrance'. It began as a way of saying nice things about recently deceased fans, especially Andrew Brown and Ian Gunn, but quickly turned into a fine set of stories about all the fannish people we miss most. Again, I wish this had been taped.

Rush, rush, from there to one room to apologise for not being able to attend the panel on small press publishing, on which I was supposed to appear, then rush, rush, to hear Judy Buckrich giving George Turner's Guest of Honour speech. Surely the attendance could have been greater... but at least I was there.

Grab some lunch, then return for the FanHistoricon panel on Space Age Books. Lots of good memories, especially of Space Age as the central gathering place for fans of the eighties. Lots of rueful, sad memories. Merv Binns broke up as he remembered the final days of this all-important book shop. He admitted that he hadn't been the greatest businessman in the world. Perhaps he wasn't in the seventies, either, but Space Age did well for more than ten years. Changes in the demography and traffic flow of Melbourne in 1985 had as much to do with destroying Space Age as anything Merv did.

ANZAPA (the Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association), as much as Space Age Books or the Melbourne SF Club, has been at the heart of Australian fandom, especially Melbourne fandom, since 1968. The collation of the special Aussiecon mailing (60 copies) at 2 p.m. was a way of meeting lots of people I had merely waved

to during the rest of the convention. I finally got to talk to Lucy Schmeidler, who is very interested in Australian SF writing, both fan and pro. Finally I could sit down and talk to Leanne Frahm, who seemed to be having a great time at the convention now she's decided to stop being A Writer, and can go back to being a person instead. Leigh Edmonds was being sarcastic about ANZAPA's long-term prospects, even while contributing to the special mailing and watching yet another resurrection happen before his eyes. Marc Ortlieb, the current OBE, roped in at least four new or returning members. We collated our copies, and I rushed off yet again.

The most successful celebration of George Turner's life and work at the convention proved to be the launch of Judy Buckrich's biography (*George Turner: A Life* from Melbourne University Press). Barry Jones, Australia's favourite politician and polymath, gave a succinct and insightful speech, based on his reading of the book and his own correspondence with George. (Barry Jones had reviewed *The Sea and Summer* when it first appeared.) In the audience were lots of friends of Judy's, some of whom I recognised, plus lots of friends of George's. Justin was busily selling copies of the book when I left.

Later in the afternoon Elaine and I joined Judy and some of her friends at a Southbank restaurant for afternoon tea. Unfortunately, we lost Sally Yeoland along the way. Elaine left for home, and I wandered back to the hotel. Again, I couldn't find anybody with whom to have dinner, so I ate alone downstairs at the Centra. A low point of the convention, until in the loo I met Dave Langford, who said that he was dining at the next-door Chinese restaurant with Joyce Scrivner and John Foyster, who had declaimed to both of them, 'Just my luck to be sitting between two deaf gits!'

At midnight I found myself in the tumultuous bar, drinking a Southern Comfort, chased by several beers. I hadn't sipped a Southern Comfort for twenty years! I hadn't felt this partyish for twenty-five years! What was I thinking?

Robin Pen from Western Australia introduced himself. He was the only one of the *Eidolon* crew to approach me for a chat. I'm not sure what we talked about, but I'm certainly glad he said hello.

Andrew Macrae and his friends started buying me drinks. Andrew, recently moved from Brisbane, had been attending the Nova Mob with his partner Sarah Marland since the beginning of the year. He had enjoyed the convention, meeting Andy Butler (whom I hadn't seen since the second day of the convention) and grooving in the Actrack. He introduced me to Paul Starr from Brisbane, who paid me the most ambiguous compliment I've ever received. 'You did it with that Guest of Honour speech,' he said. 'You put a spell of graciousness and civilisation over the convention. Nobody's been rude to each other ever since.'

The bar closed at 12.30, so I wandered over to the Grand for the ANZAPA/FAPA party. Another feast of friends, beginning with a small number of people, wined and wined by bottle-waving Bill Wright, with people appearing constantly at the door. This was my only chance to talk to Jack Speer, although I didn't know what to say to him. I caught up with Rusty Hevelin, who doesn't look much different from when I last met him at Aussiecon I in 1975. We talked of mutual friends from the American midwest, and Rusty said that it's unlikely Bob Tucker will ever make the journey to Australia again. Gerald Smith and Womble were there from Sydney. I don't think I'd spoken to them since 1985, although Gerald and I enjoy disagreeing with each other

about politics in ANZAPA. Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber were in fine form. I caught up with Jeanne Mealy and John Stanley, but never managed to sit down and have a decent conversation with them. I observed the awe-inspiring phenomenon of Dave Langford drunk: he seemed to float above the crowd, gently radiating benevolence.

I went back to the hotel at some very late hour. Bill Wright, who left even later, actually remembers Weller guiding him across the junction between Flinders and Spencer Streets.

You would think that the last day of the convention could be quiet and peaceful, with people slowly gliding around the atrium, nursing sore heads and exchanging names and addresses with soon-to-be-absent friends. Instead, I found myself at 10 in the morning listening to two good, gritty, illuminating talks on the work of George Turner: Judy Buckrich on the early, non-SF novels, and Janeen Webb on the SF novels. I hope that both talks will be printed somewhere soon. (Janeen taped her own; I don't know if Judy's was also taped.)

In the hour between that item and the next, Judy drove me and my luggage back to Keele Street, and I caught a taxi back to the Centra. Hi, cats, goodbye; see you tonight.

At midday on the last day of the convention, you would hardly expect more than a hundred people to turn up to a deep and meaningful Actrack talk on 'What Is It We Do When We Read Science Fiction?' But Paul Kincaid's reputation as an SF critic in Britain goes before him, and the place was packed. I had read a much shorter version of the speech that Paul had published in *Acnestis* a year or so earlier, but I enjoyed the chance to hear the long version. The talk was followed by lots of intelligent questions. Paul's talk will appear in the Aussiecon issue of *Foundation*.

Last items were the Closing Ceremony, followed by the Volunteers' Party. Nobody had actually mentioned that I should turn up at the Closing Ceremony, but I assumed that somebody would want me to say something. I said thanks for the memories, but totally forgot to say thanks on behalf of George Turner. This illustrates the way in which George was often forgotten at 'his' convention, although many of us would not have been surprised to see him wandering across the atrium, looking for someone with whom to argue. If I didn't say the right things during the Closing Ceremony, it was because I was slightly distracted by Security supremo Greg Turkich wearing a pink tutu.

The Closing Ceremony produced two of the best moments of the convention: the standing ovation for Perry Middlemiss, and the staggering-to-their-feet of all the volunteers, who made up one-third of the audience. That Perry could still speak, let alone wrap up the convention, seemed impressive. That the convention was run entirely by volunteers symbolises everything I love about fandom. Also applauded were Karen Johnson and Sue Burszynski, who organised the successful Children's Program. (Some people, such as Lucy Sussex and Roseleen Love, who organised the Writers' Program, and the Blackfords for the Academic Track, should have been thanked as well.)

One last memory of the convention itself: the volunteers' party. Lots of noise; lots of celebration. I finally got to talk to Greg Benford. 'When are we going to get together for a chat?' he said, as he had said several times during the convention. 'When somebody invites us to the same social event,' I said. 'I'll see you tonight,' said Greg. 'Where?' I said. 'At the Blackfords.' 'But Elaine and I haven't been invited to the Blackfords.' Greg couldn't believe it. Perhaps

some Guests of Honour are more equal than others. But I suspect that nobody else, not even the other Guests of Honour, had more fun at the convention than I did.

Aussiecon 3 did not finish at 5 p.m. on Monday, 6 September. It kept rolling all week. On Tuesday night, Weller called in to catch up news and pat cats. She had dropped out of ANZAPA about a year before, finding herself unable to communicate with anybody. When her interest revived, she attended Aussiecon and rejoined ANZAPA, and seemed much cheerier than when she visited Melbourne in 1990. Later the same night we met Dick Janssen, Bill Wright, John and Cheryl Straede (long-time Melbourne fans who now living in Sydney), and Mark Linneman at Abla's. The staff of Abla's always ask after 'our American friend', but this is the first time Mark had had a chance to visit the restaurant since 1990. Unfortunately, both Abla and her sister were overseas. I hope somebody later told them about the triumphant return of the large American gentleman.

Elaine belongs to an international apa of SF fans who are also devoted to gardening. She spent much of Aussiecon running around trying to organise a fannish Garden Tour on the Wednesday after the convention. Until the last moment, Elaine couldn't find a driver, but eventually all her efforts paid off. My interest in gardens can best be described as minimal, so I worked at home during that day. Late in the afternoon, everybody arrived to inspect our garden, the last on the list, and go to dinner. Eve and John Harvey, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller, Caroline Mullan, and Scott and Jane Dennis made it to our place, as well as Lise Eisenberg and Debbie, the driver. Caroline's partner Brian Ameringen, British book collector and seller, had already arrived at our place. He took one look at the bookshelves and said, 'You could get four hundred quid in Britain for that one.' 'That one' was the British hardback edition of Greg Egan's *Quarantine*, which in September had been out of print for seven years. I resisted the temptation to ask Brian to evaluate the whole SF book collection. Later that night we had yet another wonderful, and wonderfully cheap, meal at Ruan Thai.

Friday was our farewell to Maureen and Paul, and a mass gathering of fans at the Myer cafeteria. Such were the good feelings produced by the convention that Paul, Maureen and I found ourselves planning a possible new international fanzine that will print (and reprint) the best of British and Australian writing about science fiction.

On Saturday, Maureen, Paul and Jack Speer visited John Bangsund in Geelong. (Dave Langford and Leanne Frahm had made the pilgrimage on the last Monday of the convention.) I came down with the 'convention cold', which slowed me up for nearly a week. Despite that, we celebrated the treally ruly end of the convention the next Tuesday with roast dinner for Mark Linneman and Alan Stewart.

What a time it was. What a feast of friends. Thanks to everybody who made it possible.

— Bruce Gillespie, 4 December 1999