

## **iOTA 16**

### **March 2018**

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**Art credits:** John Bangsund (design) p.1 & p.22; Keith McLelland, p.4; unknown, p.5; Dick Jossen, p.11.

*iOTA* is the little efanzone put together by Leigh Edmonds who can be contacted electronically, and in almost no other way, at [hhandc@hemsleypark.com.au](mailto:hhandc@hemsleypark.com.au).

This little efanzone is produced as a progress report on my project to research and write a history of Australian fandom, focusing on the period between 1956 and 1975. *iOTA* is a research tool and document, containing some of the material and thoughts that will be used in writing the history. It is also a place where I publish bits and pieces of the writing and art from Australia's fannish past to help introduce you to the rich vein of material that previous generations of Australian fans have left us. If you want more details about this history project you'll find them in the first issue of *iOTA* or an update in *iOTA* 13.

*iOTA* is more or less available from me for 'the usual' or issues of *iOTA* are put up on *efanzines.com* fairly soon after I've completed them.

## Thisish's Cover

Not a fanzine this time, but a convention program book. I found this in one of the Foyster boxes at Monash University among many other convention booklets and other memory inducing stuff. I was going to use the cover for the 8th convention put together by, to look at it, Paul Stevens, but you will find, further into this issue, a report of the 10<sup>th</sup> convention written by John Bangsund, so that cover seemed more appropriate. Besides, I reckon that John put that much more dignified program book together, so the cover and the report seem destined for each other.



## Editorial The End of the Line

I'm ceasing publication of *iOTA* at this point in time. There are two reasons for this.

The first is the lack of encouragement I get from the time and effort that goes into publishing *iOTA*. As the colophon above says, the point of this little efanzone has been as a research tool in the process of researching and writing a history of Australian fandom. Several issues ago I dropped the suggestion that a little egoboo in response would be appreciated because virtually none was forthcoming. Of late, the response I've been getting has been from people suggesting ways in which I can make *iOTA* better, and even offers of help. While I really appreciate these comments, I need more encouragement to continue than reminders that my grammar and spelling are less than optimal; or that I need to brush up on my photo improving skills. If all I was doing was publishing *iOTA* and not conducting a full research and writing project I would take up offers of help and suggestions without hesitation, but *iOTA* is not the core of the project and if it doesn't pay its way (in one way or another) it has to go.

For me, publishing *iOTA* has been invaluable because it has helped me to think about this project in ways that would not have occurred to me otherwise. On the other hand, I have to consider whether the time and effort I put into it might not be better spent just getting on with the research and writing. Since I have received so little feedback on whether or not this is a useful and interesting project for others I can only conclude that it is not.

On this topic let me conclude by quoting myself from the letter column of the most recent issue of *Banana Wings*:

I am indebted to Jerry Kaufman for his insight about

[fandom being] a gift economy. He is right and I hereby confer upon him a fannish PhD for his thinking. The two go together - egoboo is the fannish currency and the making and giving of gifts like fanzines or letters of comment is the process by which that currency is minted. I leave it to fans much better at punning than I to put together the pun which, in its draft stage, goes something like: which came first, the chicken or the Egg o bu.'

The other reason for ceasing publication of *iOTA* at the moment is that opportunity has come knocking and when that happens only a fool would not open the door.

One (and perhaps two) potentially good history project have opened up and I need to explore them. This may take six months, it may take a year or longer. When I have finished them I will return to this history of Australian fandom project because it is too interesting from a personal perspective and because I think that a well researched and written history of fandom in Australia would also make a valuable contribution to the wider history of Australian society and culture.

### **1955 - When Are Fans No Longer Fans?**

Here is a case in point of *iOTA* being a useful tool for considering the nature of fandom from the examples thrown up by the past of Australian fandom. It forces us to think about what makes a reader of stf a 'fan' rather than a fan or enthusiast.

I am coming to the conclusion that somebody might enjoy reading stf and have friends who also share that interest but that doesn't make them a 'fan'. I also think that groups what came together through fandom but cease to maintain contact with fans beyond that group cease to be part of fandom or be fans. This is not because these people cease to think of themselves as fans but because

fandom is a collective enterprise and if one does not participate in that collective activity then one may be a fan but not a 'fan'. Some of you may disagree, but that's what the dialectic process is for.

This brings us to the Albion Futurian Society which may, or may not, have existed in Sydney in the 1950s. The following are two items published in *Etherline* in 1955 about meetings of a new group said to be formed in Sydney as a result of the troubles there in the first half of the 1950s. There is some question as to whether or not this is a hoax, perpetrated on outside fandom by one of two Sydney fans, certainly this is the conclusion that can easily be drawn from Vol Molesworth's history and Graham Stone's footnotes to it.

Either way, the real question is, by separating themselves from contact with the rest of fandom as a group, did the Albion Futurians remain part of fandom, of simply a group of friends who met each other through fandom and remained friends who met socially, occasionally. What happened to this group after these two meetings? Did they continue to meet and under what circumstances? If there is nothing further recorded of their activities we cannot know because, without historical evidence to tell us otherwise, their continued meeting may as well not have happened. That's the logic of historical enquiry for you.

### **1955 ALBION FUTURIAN SOCIETY**

The inaugural meeting of the new club was held on Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>. In case you are wondering where Albion is it isn't a district - it is a historic name for Sydney and its environs. Foundation members felt that such a general name would not restrict membership to any particular district, and yet confine it more or less to Sydney.

The words 'Futurian Society' were added to the title because members are in general agreement with the policy and

aims of the Futurian Society of Sydney, which indeed are the aims of science fiction fandom anywhere.

The group was formed by seven fans who considered that the failure of recent efforts to secure unanimity in Sydney fandom emphasized the impossibility of doing worthwhile work under those circumstances.

Arthur Haddon was elected Director of the new Club, Neville Cohen Treasurer and Vol Molesworth Secretary. Half a dozen items were donated to form the nucleus of a library.

The bulk of the meeting was occupied with discussion of scientific and science fictional topics. While Neville Cohen, Bill Turnbull and Bruce Gore became deeply involved in radio astronomy, the rest toyed with the subtler theme of social responsibilities. Kitti Kaplun took out top honors of the night with her remark that the emancipation of women had created fresh social problems which had not been adequately met as yet.

Later in the night a play was taped, Bruce Gore having little difficulty in portraying the role of an ugly monster. Thanks to the ladies for a slap-up supper.

Vol Molesworth  
*Etherline* 50, c. May 1955

### **1955 ALBION FUTURIAN SOCIETY**

#### Meeting No 3

Who says all the strife and trouble in Sydney fandom has gone? Members of the recently-formed Albion Futurian Society viewed with alarm and deep suspicion the date set down for the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting - Sunday, May 8<sup>th</sup>. It neatly bisected the birthdays of Mesdames Nicki Gore and Laura Molesworth. Outcome was the meeting turned out to be quite a party, with both Nicki and Laura

collecting attractive loot in the form of presents.

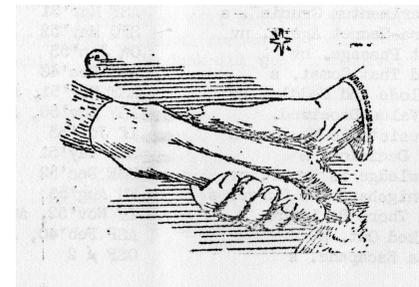
The fact that the 10 persons present were divisible into five males and five females was a further cause for alarm: the short sighted scurried for the works of Philip Jose Farmer, the longer-range planners for Ray Bradbury.

Despite these fears and tensions, the meeting went off very pleasantly, except for the regrettable incident involving Director Arthur Haddon, Bruce Gore, Tottie Kaplun, John Power, and a large bowl of cocktail frankfurt, which is best left in limbo. That Vol Molesworth is still the evil mastermind in back of Sydney fan intrigues was evidenced by that fact that (a) he was seen surreptitiously licking his fingers and (b) his collar was smeared with tomato sauce.

Guests Lee Taylor, Nola Davidson, Joy Anderson and Les Lee were impressed by a number of SF tape recordings played. While Marj Haddon, Nicki Gore and Laure Molesworth pored through a batch of 107 magazines just arrived from USA, Nev Cohen and Vol Molesworth discussed (or tried to discuss) infinity, a subject which has a large number of points.

At 2AM it was decided to adjourn the meeting until May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

*Etherline* 51, c. June 1955



Keith McLelland *Etherline* 49

## 2018 - Our Fearless Reporter on Contemporary Zine Culture

Here's a first for *iOTA*, a report on the current state of affairs not written by me and made possible by modern communications technology. Mike O'Brien, veteran of Australian fandom in the 1960s, mentioned on facebook that there was going to be a display of zines in Hobart and I asked him to write about it for *iOTA*. Much to my pleased amazement, he did.

### ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR, WELL SORT OF Michael O'Brien

So I am reading the publicity hand-out for the Vibrance Festival, a 7 day street art festival (February 19-25th) happening in Bidendopes Lane in the centre of Hobart, and I raise my eyebrows when I read the following:

*SUNDAY Thylazine fair: 12pm-4pm*

*Get on down and snaffle up some zines for your collection with great homemade publications from Hobart, Australia and the world! You'll find some local art-zines, comic-zines, poetry-zines and magazine-zines.*

I am familiar with the modern usage of 'zine' from browsing in music shops, but I have never seen a gathering of such. Maybe I will drop in and browse, I think.

The next Sunday is partly cloudy but not inhospitable. Bidendopes Lane is a place I am very familiar with, having grown up just around the corner -- most days I would have passed it by or gone through it on my way somewhere downtown.

At first glance, the Street Fair part of the festival is in full swing, with all that you would expect. Rap music, coffee stalls, vegan snacks, ethnic delicacies and a whole slew of artists putting

the finishing touches on colourful works of art that will brighten up the grey concrete walls of the laneway.

Walking on a bit further, one comes to a series of tables where the local zine publishers are hawking their wares. I would have been a bit surprised

if I could have seen into the future back in the day, because they are set up right outside where my back door was.

There are about five tables, all with their different sorts of product. Some are obviously fanzines to look at -- pretty similar to what we would have put out in the 1960s if we had access to word processors and colour photocopiers (undreamt of luxuries back then). Some were mostly amateur comic books, while at the other extreme some of them were on the verge of being Little Magazines or music review publications.

What was most interesting was what wasn't there. As I expected, there was no science-fiction, though some of the comics were verging on fantasy of various types. Most of the stuff was fairly G-rated, with none of the sex or gore that some artists of the past had drenched their work in. Neither was there





From the Facebook page for Dandelion Roar

much political stuff, though one title Dandelion Roar ('art and writing by young Hobart folk') had some pro-ecology articles.

It was pretty much what you'd expect from a crowd that skewed to the younger end

of the population. I guessed that most of them were about 20, plus or minus a couple of years. Moving along to the end of the row, I paused to chat with one of the older members of the group. Paul Peart Smith is a softly-spoken black man who used to work as a professional illustrator. Now he was selling his own quirky comics, with titles like B.U.M. (for Big Ugly Monster). Its simplicity made it feel over priced at \$10 but I bought a copy and wished him well for the future.

I didn't attempt to engage any of them in conversation with a view to explaining how we did things in the 1960s. I doubt a lecture on the problems of hekto or the delights of slip-sheeting would have found a receptive audience, any more than a description of black and white television would have meant anything to them. Suffice to say that the past is a different country ... and we did things differently there.

Michael O'Brien, 2018

## 1968 - Before the Video Age

Here's a piece that really needs no introduction because it speaks for itself. However, a brief explanation might be necessary for those among us who do not remember the age before video recorders, dvds or on-line streaming. In those long forgotten days the kinds of activities written about below (but not the chaos) were necessary to see anything that wasn't being shown on cinema screens or on the tv or anything much to do with stf, fantasy or horror.

### ONE FLASH AND YOU'RE ASH, BUSTER

Paul Stevens tracked down a bloke who owns an almost complete run of the old Universal serial, FLASH GORDON. For various reasons I will not identify him; let's call him (hm, what's something original?) Mr X.

With Paul I visited Mr X to see if there was any chance of screening the film for the MSFC's Fantasy Film Group. There was indeed. Mr X stated his price and terns, all of them eminently reasonable. They included the condition that he be allowed, if not to show the film himself (since he was a qualified professional projectionist), at least to sit in the projection booth with his precious film.

(I pause, lest there be any misapprehension, to point out that Paul is the Film Group Secretary and I his typist, chauffeur and witness, when available.)

Paul had already discussed with the owner of he Astor Theater, St Kilda, the possibility of hiring the place for Film Group screenings, and had reached an agreement with him. I shall refer to him as Mr Thanatos (not to protect the innocent, but because I can't remember his Hellenic-type name. (Mr Poneros? No, I'm guessing.) Paul had also discussed the matter with Mr Thanatos's

projectionist, a septuagenarian named (No covering-up here; he can fend for himself) Wally Waterford, and failed miserably to come to any agreement with him on certain points. Mr Waterford, you see, hates horror films, and finds it difficult to discern the difference between science fiction and horror. Paul at one point rather tactlessly mentioned that he would love to screen FRANKENSTEIN sometime - and was nearly ejected bodily from the theater. Now you know, and I know, that FRANKENSTEIN is a science fiction story, a quite important and eminently respectable literary work that has supplied the basic plot for a myriad other stories since, and that it is worthy of study no matter in what form it is presented. But try explaining that to a seventy-two-year-old average Australian illiterate to whom the word Frankenstein means horror-monsters-JD's-wrecking-theaters-at-midnight-shows.

At first we were under the impression that we would be watching sixteen episodes of a serial, but Mr X advised us that he had spliced the episodes, cutting out the introductory sections, so that they made one continuous film of just over two hours running time. Paul was relieved to hear this, and only hoped that too many people wouldn't turn up at 7.30, the advertised time.

At various times on the day of the screening I had the feeling that something would go wrong. We would have an attendance of fourteen and Paul would have to flog his sf collection to pay the bills; or four hundred, mostly local larrikins, and they'd wreck the joint. Or that somewhere in the film there'd be a monster and Wally W would stop the film and order everyone out. You know the sort of bad feeling you get when you've taken a risk on something, and you're terribly confident of it working

out, but as the time draws near ... like that.

On behalf of the Club, Paul had taken a risk - a big one. Club finances for years have been minimal - at the best of times we've been hard put to it to find even the modest rent for the cobwebbed firetrap we are pleased to call the Clubroom - and part of the problem has been the Film Group. More often than not the Group's 16mm screenings at the Club have lost money - and who can be blamed for staying away from our primitive shows, with their dusty, drafty, cigarette-smoke-laden auditorium, rickety old seats and fuggy sound system? Deciding whether or not to attend a show at the Club has been almost as difficult as deciding whether to watch a film on commercial television.

So all honor to Paul for taking the risk of arranging a full-scale 35mm show in a proper theater.

By 7.30, after a last-minute panic when we realized that a program-cum-propaganda sheet hasn't been prepared and tore about typing stencils, running them off and thanking the fannish ghods that we hadn't haired a theater on the other side of town, it looked as though Paul's gamble was about to pay off. There were about sixty people in the Astor's foyer within a few minutes of our arrival, and half an hour later more than double that number.

Mervyn Binns was signing people up as Film Group members almost as fast as he could write, and I was folding the propaganda sheets and wondering where the hell all these people were coming from, when there was a bit of a commotion and I observed that Paul has turned a deep shade of blue. Diane came over to me. 'Bloody Projectionist,' she said. 'He's locked the film in a box and gone home!'

Well, I'm not too sure whether that bit actually happened of whether Mr Waterford just threatened to go home, but the fact is that for the next half an hour all seemed lost. Mr Waterford had half a dozen stories, and none of them seemed terribly reasonable. He wasn't allowed to have anyone in the box with him - it was against the law - and even if we had arranged for Mr X to be in the box (which he claimed we hadn't) it was still illegal. The film was of the old nitrate type - he couldn't use it unless there was a fireman on duty in the theater. Mr X wouldn't let him run through the films before showing it, obviously proving (to Mr W's satisfaction anyway) that it must be in a dangerous condition.

The arguments drifted down to us from upstairs. We appealed to Mr Thanatos to honor his (verbal, worse luck) contract with us and proceed with the show. He just shrugged. He had hired the theater to us for the night; we were in the theater, he could do nothing more.

Eventually Paul had to tell the audience that the show could not proceed 'due to technical difficulties', but that if everyone was willing to go to another theater, Mr X was willing to show us the film. Everyone was willing. It takes more than a lunatic projectionist to upset a dedicated film fan. So, as Mr X busied himself in a phone booth across the road trying to find us another theater, the crowd milled around in the foyer. Some discussed incendiary techniques, some pondered methods of killing theater managers and projectionists which would look like accidents afterwards, others - about thirty of us - debated the logic of the situation with Mr Waterford, who had (with incredible foolhardiness, if he really believed we would destroy the theater at the first sight of a monster) descended to the foyer. 'I've been

a paratrooper, luv,' said some character we'd never seen before to Diane, 'and me mate's a commando. Who do you want us to do in? Just say the word.' Diane was tempted, but wisely refrained from saying the word.

Then a delightfully absurd thing happened. Mr X returned and mounted the staircase to address us. Mr Waterford followed him, and they stood, on either side of the bannister, like a couple of rival politicians on the hustings, each telling us in the most dignified terms why the other was, if not a dangerous lunatic, at least a nasty spoilsport. We learnt for the first time that in examining a cartoon that was to be shown before the main feature, Mr Waterford had managed to break the film in four places. Naturally, Mr X would not trust him with his priceless film. 'Priceless my foot!' said Mr Waterford, 'You can imagine what condition the film is in if he won't even let me look at it!' And so on and so forth, with all of us cheering and booing alternately, just like a matinee crowd.

Finally we all piled into cars and headed off for Toorak, where Mr X had found for us an obliging friend with a private theatrette. Which seated forth-eight people. Somehow we packed in, about a hundred of us. On the way in, so they tell me (Diane and I were among the last to arrive), a chap stopped everyone with a melodramatic gesture and said, 'Okay, I'm the projectionist here, and if there's anyone in the theater I'm not showing the film!'

(We found out later that this man's name was Fred Smoot. He enjoyed himself hugely and swore he would be using the night's incidents for a sketch in his show at the Chevron. We have no way of telling whether he did, nor to what effect. Sf fans don't

patronize night clubs to any large extent. I mean, you're either the kind of person who goes to night clubs or the kind of person who pays 70¢ for *Analog*. It's hard to do both.)

FLASH GORDON was fun. We knew it would be. The film was in superb condition. But... well, it was all a bit of an anticlimax after the entertainment we'd already had that night.

The most important result of Paul's magnificent gamble is, of course, that the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group now lives. Not only does the Club look like having a financial backer, but the Group itself could become quite a significant thing in its own right. We have booked the Plaza Theater at Newport for our next show on 17<sup>th</sup> October, and we hope that in time Newport, Vic, will become as synonymous with fantasy films as Newport, RI, is with jazz.

Naturally, with our luck, on 17<sup>th</sup> October we'll probably all turn up at Newport and find that the theater (which has been converted downstairs into a dance hall) has been hired out for an Italian wedding reception, or a Seventh Day Adventist ball, or ...

John Bangsund

*The New Millennial Harbinger* 1, ANZAPA mailing 1, October 1968.

## **1970 - Keeping in Touch**

The converse of The Albion Futurians - if they existed - are those fans who live in social isolation but are active in fandom nevertheless, using the technologies of the time available to them. Here is Bruce Gillespie, at the beginning of his career as an indomitable fanzine editor, typing away in his lonely flat in Ararat, far from the growing fannish community in Melbourne. Even so, in his isolation Bruce was building up the kind of communications

network that was to sustain him (and he it) for another half century (we hope).

## **I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS**

Friends in Melbourne have finally sent me some information about the 10<sup>th</sup> Australian Science fiction Convention, to be held in Melbourne on January 1 and 2. Details are still not very precise; here's what I know. The convention will be held on the grounds of the University of Melbourne, Parkville, and it's a lot easier to find than the Capri Theater, Murrumbena. The auction will be held in two segments, each half an hour long; there will be no films, but Paul Stevens is arranging a special film program on January 3; and for the first time in Australia there will be a masquerade ball on the night of January 2. In the hands of John Foyster, Lee Harding and Leigh Edmonds, this should be the most relaxed, unusual convention for some time. Attending membership is \$1.50 until December 1, \$2.50 after that, and \$3 at the door. Obviously you should pay before December 1. Non-attending membership is \$1. Payment to Leigh Edmonds, PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183.

The Ditmar Awards news does not please me quite so much. As you may have worked out in SF COMMENTARY Numbers 11 and 12, many people felt that the rules should be tightened and clarified so that this year's results can never be repeated. These reforms have not been carried out. The nomination form for the Ditmar Awards 1971 reads very like the form issued at the last Convention. There are some amendments, none of them helpful. The 'Best Magazine' category has been deleted, for reasons I cannot work out. The 'Best International Fiction' category is still a farce. First preference is still given to the first publication of

overseas works, instead of 'first edition freely available in Australia', an amendment which would have been more sensible. Several people have been talking about SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE (Kurt Vonnegut Jr) as a contender for the Ditmar. It is ineligible because the first American edition, unavailable in Australia, was published in 1969. It may have been published between 1<sup>st</sup> September and the end of the year, but it is impossible to tell from the book itself. The first freely available edition was the British one, which only came out a few months ago. On the other hand, I happen to know that Aldiss' BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD was published in the first week of October 1969...

Even more ridiculous is the provision that 'Committee members of the Tenth Australian Science Fiction Convention will be ineligible to receive awards'. This cuts out the obvious winner of the 'Best Australian Fanzine' category - NORSTRILIAN NEWS published by John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds. It cuts out the only possible winner in the 'Best Australian Fiction' section - Lee Harding's THE CUSTODIAN, one of the finest stories of the last five years. As I can't vote for it, I'll probably vote 'No Award' in this category. I'm only halfway through reading the magazines at the moment, but I don't think this will have much bearing on my choices for 'Best International Fiction; 1. BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD (Aldiss). 2. THE TIME MACHINE (Lanagdon Jones (Orbit 5). THE ASIAN SHORE (Thomas M Disch) (Orbit 6). 'Best Australian Fanzine' - Well, ahem, since you can't vote for NORSTRILIAN NEWS or RATAPLAN, then the obvious choice is ...

Perhaps I've lost some friends here, but the matter is important, as many people pointed out to me after the Easter Convention. The awards are still open to hopeless mixups. This

year there will be a Nomination Form, released sometime after December 1, so there won't be any surprise results. But still, it's not good enough.

Melbourne fandom is booming in other ways as well. The Melbourne Science Fiction Society was renamed 'The Nova Mob' at the second meeting, on September 4. Yours truly non-led a discussion on Philip K Dick, which improved into a general party at John Bangsund's flat in St Kilda. I did hear people talking about science fiction, and even Philip Dick, so the occasion was not altogether wasted. About 40 people attended, and I've heard that about 20 of them turned up at the Degraives Tavern in Melbourne for the third meeting. John Foyster talked on his feet (literally) and people drank a lot. I've not heard where November's meeting will be. The one meeting I've been to was great fun, and let's hope other meetings continue in this way.

Welcome news, but not completely unexpected, is the return of John Bangsund to Melbourne fandom. And what a return. Publication of THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK and THE AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION DIRECTORY; by the end of the year, organization of Parergon Books (that is the right spelling, John), promised publication of SCYTHROP 22, form about that, letters about this. We've heard it all before, but if John has come though the last bout of gafia unscathed, I'm sure we can expect further great performances for some time to come. The ASFY will feature articles by Ursula K LeGuin, George Turner and myself as well as many others, and will cost \$1. Further details from John Bangsund, Flat 1, 8 Bundalohn Court, St Kilda 3183.

Also welcome news is the kind publicity this magazine has

been receiving. P Schuyler Miller reviews S F COMMENTARY 9 in a recent ANALOG (100,000 readers) and David German dedicated his fanzine S F WAVES to this magazine. Virginia Carew featured the magazine in the prospectus for the latest Secondary Universe Conference. Charlie Brown continues to keep the light glowing in America. Our steadfast friend, Harry Warner Jr, talked about Australian fanzines in the most recent RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY. Thanks to everybody who helps to keep the banner high.

Talking of the mailbox - here's a letter from Our Favorite Author, and it's a letter that raised as many questions at it solves:

PHILIP K DICK (707 Hacienda Way, San Rafael, California 94903. USA)

...

(Bruce Gillespie, *SF Commentary* 17, November 1970)

## **1975 - Getting Together for a Meal**

This issue seems to be developing a couple of unintended themes. One is what we can know and not know about events of the past and the others is fans as social beings, at a distance and in person.

On the first topic; most fans who were active in Melbourne in the first half of the 1970s will have had dinner with other fans at Degraives Tavern at one time or another. It was the place where, weekly, Melbourne fans and visitors from out-of-town got together and the 'dread chip thief' plied her (and his) evil trade. As Lee points out here, it was also at this venue, under another name, where the revival of Australian fandom in the mid 1960s, was planned. (Perhaps the National Trust needs to give the place a heritage listing.)

On most evenings Degraives Tavern was fun with much convivial conversation helped along by Henry's rough red. However,



Dick Janssen, *Etherline* 054

there was very little written about it so, did it happen? There is more historical evidence of the existence of the Sydney Thursday Night Group in the 1950s because they published a weekly round-robin fanzine. Could this article, written by Lee Harding and published in *Fanew Sletter* in 1975, be a hoax, as the Albion Futurians might be?

The second point needs little analysis, at the moment anyhow. Fans, like most humans, like to share each other's company and we like to

do it with food and grog. Jenny's Cellar and Degraives Tavern were ideally suited for this weekly social ritual. There was nothing formal about these gatherings, they happened by common consent and might have continued indefinitely had not Henry decided not to open in the evenings. When Degraives Tavern closed Melbourne fans looked for other places to gather, but it was never quite the same. I'm told that there are still weekly gatherings for a meal in Melbourne, I wonder if they are as much fun.

## **THE DEGRAVES STREET IRREGULARS**

**Lee Harding**

It is nearly four years since Melbourne science fiction fans (and their friends) began meeting informally at a downstairs bistro. From humble beginnings the word eventually spread and interstate visitors are always welcome at De Graves on Wednesday evenings.

In 1966 the place was known as Jenny's Cellar and sported

a full licence and an a la carte menu. Some of us can still recall a couple of riotous 'meetings' held there when the 1966 Melbourne SF Convention was being 'organized'. Shortly after the place changed hands and name and became known as De Grave's Tavern. The food became self-service and mainly middle-eastern in character: plenty of pasta, moussaka, and stuffed peppers, as well as the more common fare of fried fish, fillet steak and etc. Fans continued to use the place on and off; the food was cheap and pleasant, and Henry's house wines very agreeable.

Early in 1971 I joined Mervyn Binns in an office somewhere in Elizabeth Street and we set about the business of getting Space Age Books off the ground. I had lived for the past ten years in semi-rural surroundings at the base of Mount Dandenong; commuting daily to the city gave me an opportunity to see some of my sf buddies more frequently. I took to staying back in the city on Wednesday evenings and dining at De Graves, which was convenient and inexpensive. I mentioned to Leigh Edmonds that it could be generally noised about that I would be there every Wednesday, and that anyone who wanted to eat and chat would be welcome.

So it all began. As I recall, Leigh was one of the first to join me for the occasional dinner. Then there was John Bangsund and his (then) wife Diane, and one or two others. The idea spread slowly, but once it caught on there was no stopping it. Now, nearly four years later, we sometimes have twenty or thirty people turning up; sometimes only half a dozen. Some of the old guard have gone, others appear very infrequently. Everyone seems to enjoy the atmosphere, and the occasional visitor from interstate has a place to go on Wednesday evenings where he can

meet and talk sf if he feels like it ... or just eat and booze.

Perhaps the most agreeable feature of De Graves is the atmosphere. The place is mostly deserted, except our table (tables?): Henry has a capacity lunch-time house, filled with businessmen, but the evenings are sparse. Through the years he has worked hard to look after our interests, although if pressed he could no doubt deny this with his customary insincerity. Of late there have been a few changes made, some of which have caused long faced among the Irregulars. It was bad enough when chips were taken off the menu - most of us would have preferred the price to go up rather than lose our favorite fare - but of late the wine has been, well, not so reliable as it used to be. Or perhaps we are getting older?

A few of us hope that a night at De Graves can be arranged for a select group of fans sometime before or after AUSSIECON. I'm sure that our visitors would be impressed by the very special qualities we have come to enjoy at Henry's Bistro.

Sometimes the origin of things gets lost in the muddle of fan history. For this anniversary issue of FANEW SLETTER it would be nice to get things in the proper perspective: Now you all know how it began. Over the years, quite a few fanzines have littered the tables at our jolly meeting place; none have achieved such a remarkable record of regularity as the one you are reading now. I hope that FANEW SLETTER continues on for many more years, growing from strength to strength as our editor becomes more expert with his product, and as the sun slowly sinks into the west we must reluctantly say farewell to Henry's Bistro ... where the food is nearly always okay, the atmosphere is very special, the wine is always passable, and the cultivated insolence of the maitre

unmatched anywhere that I know of. Thank you, Henry, for putting up with us so well for so long - and thank you, Jemma, for always smiling, and you, Maria, for somehow making the food more palatable than it sometimes looks.

Lee Harding, *Fanew Sletter* 24, February 1975

## **Letters of Comment**

### **‘Of Course!’ Moments**

Let’s begin this column with a couple of ‘of course!’ moments.

Robin Johnson, Helena Binns and others have reminded me that the photo on page 17 of *iOTA* 15 of the Hugo laden couple is of Ben and Barbara Bova.

More embarrassing, Helena has also reminded me - most kindly and graciously - that the photos of Aussiecon that I published last issue were hers. So when you’re looking at that issue again, don’t forget to attach a virtual ‘photo by Helena Binns’ on each of those photos. (If this were a paper fanzine and I had an old style mailing list I could send out amendment pages to you all, but modern technology doesn’t allow that kind of thing.)

Dick Jessen also commented, most kindly too, that it was difficult to tell the difference between what you wrote and what I wrote in the letter column so this new departure is Dick’s fault if it doesn’t work and mine if it does.

Dale Speirs, from Calgary, Alberta in Canada, gives us an interesting comparison”

In reading through the comments on SF conventions now and then in *iOTA* #15, I agree that today's conventions are not comparable with those of decades ago. Rather than me-too all the observations, I'd like to point out a different type of trend that has happened in Canada, the atomization of fandom and

conventions.

Calgary (population 1.2 million) had for many decades a big-tent convention called Con-Version, much the same as other general conventions. Something for everyone, from costumers to media fans to them that has read a book. It died after 2010 after the Old Guard had retired a few years earlier and handed over to the Millennials. They made a hash of it and ran it into the ground.

At about the same time, the new wave of fans came ashore. They did not know or care about traditional fandom, and stayed in their own pastures. Today Calgary has the following conventions:

Calgary Comic Expo, with 60,000 to 100,000 cosplayers and media fans. They take over all the big trade show buildings at the Stampede rodeo grounds. They have a parade through the downtown core. City officials and the tourist bureau fall all over themselves helping them because they are big spenders and very visible.

When Words Collide is a readercon created by the Old Guard after the death of Con-Version. No masquerade and the dealer bourse is strictly limited to books and nothing else. Membership is capped at 750, takes over a suburban hotel, and no one in City Hall knows it exists.

OtaFest is an anime convention held in the downtown convention centre, with 5,000 to 8,000 cosplayers.

Calgary Horror Con is a dealer bourse for cosplayers and goths. They get a couple of hundred visitors and are almost invisible.

I consider the atomization of fandom to be a good thing. I only attend When Words Collide and enjoy it immensely. The other conventions draw away those who would swamp readers and authors, and leave us to enjoy like-minded people. I have nothing against cosplayers but I prefer my own kind, those who read. *Litera scripta manet.*

There seems to be a lot more happening in Calgary than there does in any of the larger Australian cities (four or so times larger in the case of Sydney and Melbourne). Not that I keep track of these things these days. I'm hopeful of finding out what the attendances were at Australian conventions in the 1960s and 1970s, no more than 200 I would suspect. Conventions are thus a lot bigger these days, but I still wonder if they are organized more with the consumer in mind than they once were.

We also heard from - Dick Jenssen, Jennifer Bryce, Gary Mason, Robin Johnson, Jessie Lynn, Bruce Gillespie and Roman Orszanski.

### **1964-66 Evidence of the Melbourne SF Club's Existence, thanks to Mervyn Binns**

I've been doling out Mervyn's report in his irregular *Australian SF Newsletter* but, under the circumstances, I'm going to reprint here most of the rest of Merv's reporting on the Club's activities up to the eve of the 1966 convention. I would have preferred to set each of these extracts in its proper time and context

and you will have to bear in mind, as you read this, that Merv wrote these extracts over a period of two years and that they appear in the midst of a lot of other material. In reading this you're doing what we do when we spend the day binging on many tv show episodes that originally appeared weeks apart.

Merv's main motive for publishing his newsletter was to let his friends and clients know what was being published and what he could supply for them. But among those lists and comments Merv also mentioned the activities - the ups and downs - of the Melbourne SF Club from time to time. By 1965 there were a number of actifans in Australia who had little significant contact with the Club but, because of its location in Somerset Place, it (and Jenny's Cellar it seems) were meeting places and thus focuses of fannish activity. However, while the actifans were writing about their activities for a largely overseas audience, Merv kept the Club going and the mentions he made of it in his Newsletter are really all that remain of those formative years of modern day Australian fandom.

#### **March 1965**

##### **NEWS AND VIEWS**

Despite the continuing flow of paperbacks and books being published nothing really stands out. Heinlein's FARNHAMS FREEHOLD did not live up to expectations. Then again, we expect the best from him and when it does not meet the highest of standards we tend to criticize it a little more harshly. At least the sequel to DUNE WORLD has appeared as a five part serial (scream!) in *Analog*. This should be really good.

Despite my caustic comments on the TV series OUTER LIMITS in my last report I must admit that some of the recent shows seen here have been slightly terrific. The emphasis on the monsters seems to have been dropped. Eando Binder's I ROBOT

was quite well done and one a week or two before called, I think, THE GLASS HAND, starred Robert Cup as the humanoid robot destined to spend thousands of years carrying the remaining earth population on his person in the form of a wire recording. The latest, a two parts about an alien life force taking over human bodies to help it build a spaceship, is also really good. I would say that with the last few shows on this series, SF movies on tv at any rate have at last grown up. Another series just started from England, Dr Who, looks as though it may be fun but not to be taken seriously. The TV series based on JOURNEY TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA would not have to be much to be better than the original to be an improvement. This is due to start soon on one of the local channels.

Some years ago there was a flourishing group of SF fans in our sister city. From what I hear they tried to do things in a big way. I attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian SF Convention and was suitably impressed. It would seem however that things were not all that they seemed and some people could not get their own way and, to cut a long story short, they succeeded in putting Aussie Fandom back about 20 years. It is against our nature to be organized in any way and despite brave attempts by various people to organize an Australia wide organization nothing very startling has come of it. I am not knocking these efforts but I must admit I have done little towards them myself. What makes fandom tick in the US and England at any rate. The conventions? What is the main attraction? Big Name authors? What contribution to fandom do the fan mags make? Help to make friends of fans many miles apart? Yes! Maybe a lot of them are a lot of rubbish but that is not so important. What is all this leading

up to at any rate?

The Melbourne SF Club sponsored two Conventions in 1956 and 1958. They were reasonably well attended by local fans but very few interstate faces were seen. What happened to all the faces at Albury and Canberra and Sydney too as far as that goes? At any rate let us forget the past and look to the future. Wait for it!!!!!!

Discussions are already underway for a CONVENTION IN MELBOURNE in 1966. You will hear much more about it over the next few months but we can promise you now we are aiming at 'quality rather than quantity' this time.

The MSFC is still rolling along, it must be if we are talking about putting on conventions. However we would like to see more people at the meetings Wednesday and film nights. A trip to BALLARAT and a discussion at the Observatory was attended by six of our members on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March. Everybody enjoyed the trip. We should do it more often.

TWILIGHT ZONE has started on local TV again, now in hour episodes. The first was good but others have been mediocre despite the last, MUTE, scripted by Richard Matheson. Of the three episodes so far the first and the last were true sf as against the old style TV shows with a distinct fantasy aspect. They could improve.

## **June 1965**

### **NEWS and VIEWS**

The headlines these days are what 'we' expected to see in the daily news around about now, but now that the time has come when every day a little bit more science fiction becomes science fact you still can't realize that it is fact. Seeing the United States

Gemini film on TV tonight was not the letdown that I thought it would be. It was really terrific and I can't wait to see a better version of it in color and so on as soon, as we can get it from the NASA branch. The Russian 'walk' in space was not very clear and I think the American film has had a much bigger impact on everybody. The frontiers of space are slowly but surely being turned back and we are very privileged to be here watching man's greatest adventure. Many people who knock the space program are unable to see the significance of it all. SF has prepared us to a certain degree so please let us be patient with the 'uninitiated'. The fact that we, the Earth, are just a speck of dust on a gigantic plane means nothing to people involved in their everyday efforts to just go on living. What is happening today will have more effect on the people of the future, though we are already beginning to feel the benefits of the space program it is only in small ways. Whether we, that is homo sapiens or his decedents, ever do the things we dream about with the help of our SF authors, we now will never know, but at least we can say we saw the promise of things to come.

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Nothing further to report on the 7<sup>th</sup> Australian SF Convention. Everybody will be receiving a report very soon from the organizer John Foyster. One thing we can promise is a very good movie program. I am told we have now over 50 paid up members both here and overseas. Your subscription is needed now! What about sending 15/- to John Foyster at Box 57, Drouin, Victoria.

**October 1965**

Dear Fans

I am afraid this issue is a little late but I am finding it increasingly harder to find the time to work on it. Any rate we are here now and I hope I can get another issue out before Christmas. Nothing much happening around here at the moment except convention planning which I will mention more fully later on. Bert Chandler dropped in to see us recently at the club. He told us he has three books on the way from ACE. Jack Vance was in contact with Bert when he was recently in Sydney. His visit was disrupted unfortunately by the illness of his wife and I believe his daughter and they were unable to make it to Melbourne. Incidentally we are endeavoring to induce some over seas authors to attend the Convention but nothing definite yet. Bert we hope will be here but it depends where his ship is at the time and whether he can get away.

The science fiction movie situation has been pretty grim. The only thing worth seeing and that purely for the spectacular effects was CRACK IN THE WORLD. Worth seeing but don't expect too much.

As yet we have not seen Day of the Triffids in Melbourne. I would be interested to know if it has been shown in any other states.

By now I think the World Convention in London will be well over but as yet I have received no reports on it. The main thing of interest to us will be what has won the Hugos for this year. It will be interesting to see if the fact that the Convention is being held in London has any effect on the voting.

Definite plans for the Melcon next Easter are not yet decided upon but you will receive full reports when available We have close on 50 members now but most are from interstate,

country and over overseas. What about it you Melbournians? Don't leave it till the last minuet, join now!

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Member

The club has been going now about thirteen years. I think this may be the unlucky one. I am getting very tired with trying to run the club as it should be run and carry on all my other activities as well. Over the years the club has been a break for me at times from the usual grind as it no doubt has been for very many others. I have made quite a lot of friends. We have had a bit of fun with conventions and so on and quite a lot of work has been done at times by a small number of club stalwarts. Whenever something has to be done there is always some one to help out, but not enough help has been given to me in the actual organization of the club and the library and so forth. A lot of the blame for this is entirely my own fault as I have not had the time to devote to things that they need.

Many or the library books are lost mainly because I have not had the time to chase members up and keep a proper check on things. I believe that if a thing can't be done properly it should not be done at all and I am now beginning to realize that I cannot run the club efficiently. Evidence to support this is the fact that we are over £50 in debt plus two months behind in the rent. We do have reasonable assets in the library books and the Film Group movie projector. If we closed the club tomorrow I would not come out losing, I don't think. I have threatened I know to close the club before but I have now reached the point of no return. We have a convention coming up next year and I fully intend to keep the club afloat till then, but things will have to greatly improve

over the time between now and the convention for me to be convinced that it is worthwhile continuing.

I am sorry we have reached this state of affairs and I will be sorry to see the club go so it is once again up to you. More people attending meetings and more constructive help in running and PUBLICIZING the club is the only thing that will convince me that it is worthwhile keeping on.

Yours sincerely

M Binns

PS We would appreciate it very much if the persons or person who has been borrowing items from our 'to be read in the club only library' please return same items.

If anybody has had any experience at upholstery we could do with some help on the club's theater seas. Please contact me if you can help and we will organize a working bee.

**January 1966**

Dear Fans

Well this looks like being a busy year. Plans for the 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Science Fiction Convention are underway.

The organizer John Foyster, has announced his engagement but has assured us this will in no way effect his running of the Convention.

Kiwi Merv Barrett is off to Spain next month. He has been with us at the Melbourne Sf Club for 3 to 4 years new and has been one of the most active members. His help in organizing the Film Group has been marvelous and we will miss him very much. I am sure every one in the club is behind me in wishing Merv and Jill the best of luck.

The attendance at the club has improved very much over

the last two months. Financially speaking we are not out of the red by a long shot but we have cut the debt down a bit and we have paid our way as well. This is always the busiest time for the club as there are always a few people around during the holidays. However we have gained about four or five new members recently and we hope this trend continued. Our main concern is keeping the members supplied with library books. New books are of course being added regularly and we are slowly catching up on our magazine wants. We urge all members to return the items they borrow as seen as possible particularly the new and recent paperbacks. Many of our most wanted items are missing altogether so please hunt about and make sure you do not have any books or mags overdue. If you have any old material you do not want we will be glad of it.

Good quality wanted items are needed for the Convention auction. We do not want recent issues of magazines, books or paperbacks but practically any magazines published before 1950 would be okay and we consider rare or hard to get. So please let us have your lists as soon as possible. We will advise you what we will auction for you and you can forward some or bring it along to the Convention when you come. We will of course accept any material at all for sale which will be displayed at the Convention continuously. A 10% discount will be deducted on all items sold.

Most of you by now will have heard that E E 'Doc' Smith died last September. Most of us cut our teeth on his 'Lensman' series and very few writers were quite as colorful in their descriptions of the fabulous 'space opera'. Exaggerated as they are they are still great fun to read and some of the most sort after books. Nearly all the Lensman books are out in PB now. Hugo

Gernsback had been honored by the World Convention naming the best SF awards after him. Something should be done to honor 'Doc' Smith in the same way.

## **APRIL 1966**

### **SPECIAL CONVENTION ISSUE**

The 7<sup>th</sup> AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

EASTER April 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>

The venue for the convention is the Melbourne SF Club room at 19 Somerset Place, Melbourne C1 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor. The program is roughly as follows but members will receive a circular from the organizer.

Friday 8<sup>th</sup> Afternoon Informal getting to know one another  
2pm Auction of sf magazines, books and artwork  
Night Movie, Metropolis

Saturday from 11am

Afternoon Discussions and Authors panel  
Night Movie The Seven Faces of Dr Lao or The Haunting

Sunday from 2pm

Afternoon Talks and further auctioning  
Night Movie, The Haunting or Dr Lao

We have a number of short films also booked including some of the NASA films so I would think that the night programs will be starting fairly early. For full details keep in contact with John Foyster the Organizer or myself. Keep those memberships coming in now It is absolutely essential that we know how many people are attending as soon as possible. Not only do we need the cash to cover all the expenses we need to make sure we have ample seating and enough refreshments to go around. So:

JOIN THE CONVENTION NOW!

Finally best wishes to the convention, best of luck to John Foyster and the rest of the committee and I hope everybody has a marvelous time. If we all turn up and find Foyster not there we will know he has skipped off to the Mediterranean or somewhere with his new wife, after Merv Barrett and Jill.

.....

This will be the third convention I have been associated with. Most of the people connected with them have left the scene. Bob McCubbin has found his school teaching duties more time consuming. Ian Crozier got himself married, enough said. Barry Salgram the play organizer, now local rep for Newsweek. Everybody's mate Tony Santos succumbed to his asthma and we all miss him very much. There are many others of course also on the go some like Don Latimer and Keith McLelland we still see occasionally in the Club. As for myself, well I never know what I was letting myself in for when I accepted the job of Librarian of the SF club some years ago. It has been a lot of fun at time and a lot of work but with a little more help from members I think I can keep it going for a while yet. Although we have not put a lot of time into this convention - I really think we were a bit ambitious on the others, but we were let down badly by the country and interstaters - I think this will prove to be the best. We have a strong film program, we hope to have well known author Bert Chandler and we also have a few surprises in store ...

.....

The auction catalogue is now closed but if you have anything to add make a list of it with your name and address on the top, put the reserve prices if any and bring them along on

Friday about 11am. We have quite a lot to auction including some rare books and magazines. There will also be tables where we will lay out the piles of magazines and books for sale other than those to be auctioned.

.....

Over the years since the first Melbourne Convention the amount of good sf material available has increased considerably. First the American import restriction went then the space race started and seemed to make the demand for sf bigger than ever. Paperback books in general are enjoying a boom which evidently is here to stay and sf has not been left out. An average of 12 a months pub titles are being published in America and the British are not far behind. ...

The SF field in movies leaves much to be desired. You can count the good ones on one hand. Nothing new has been released here recently. The Day of the Triffids is definitely banned. This censorship mob is enough to drive you crazy. The promise of good things to come on TV has not been realized. Journey to the Bottom of the Sea is only fair, Outer Limits was good while it lasted, The Twilight Zone also did not last very long and the latest which has some very good effects at times is purely juvenile Lost in Space. Thunderbirds the British puppet series is extremely good but you can pick a lot of holes in this as well as Lost in Space. We can only watch and hope that we will eventually get somebody to produce an sf movie or series that will stand up to our criticism. Just a little more research and a little more thought put into the background to the stories would make all the difference. A good example of what could be done was a recent play on ABC TV 'Campaign for One' which deals with the problem

of an astronaut trapped in space and the political implications of same. We hope to have Set Designer Kevin Bartledd at the convention to tell us how he put together the very effective set.

(Mervyn Binns, various issues of the *Australian SF Newsletter*, 1965 and 1966)

## **1971 - National Convention Report**

So, let's move on only a handful of years to the convention which most who were there remember as Gelaticon, for reasons that will become obvious in a page or two. (A photo of the event appears on page 27 of *iOTA* 06.)

This report appeared as part of the editorial of John Bangsund's, *Australian SF Monthly* 2, published in 1971. The first couple of paragraphs refer to an episode in John's fannish life when he wanted to 'Organize Fandom' (as most fans want to do at one time or another - I call it the 'Futurian Affliction' for shorthand). Having recovered from this difficulty John then wrote many thoughtful and entertaining pieces - time for an anthology?

'Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest, some ...' Oh, pardon me - just waxing melancholy a bit. Gives it a nice shine, you know.

The cover of this issue marks, shall we say, not to put too fine a point on it, a change in direction for *ASFM*. Backwards? Forwards? Who knows? But, with all the supercargo jettisoned, you can be sure that wherever we're headed now we'll be moving more comfortably.

I wanted to explain in this editorial exactly why *ASFM* has changed direction, why the Yearbook, Directory and other things have been abandoned, and why I can't really get excited about Ron Graham's new venture; but it's such a nice, mellow early-

autumn kind of day today, and I've already written half a dozen unsatisfactory drafts and don't feel like trying again. However I go about the subject, what I write seems to come out sounding bitter and twisted, and I'm not bitter. Twisted, yes, but that's congenital.

So let's talk about the convention instead.

About ninety people attended the tenth Australian SF Convention at the University of Melbourne on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Under the direction of John Foyster, Leigh Edmonds and Lee Harding, the convention was something of a departure from others of recent years.

The programme relied on short, concentrated segments and long free periods, and this approach seems to have paid off. There were no films, apart from some 8mm movies of Ron Clarke's travels. (Unfortunately Ron ran short of money while overseas, with the result that he has an extensive documentary of the reconstruction and fitting-out of the double-decker bus in Sydney, but only about forty seconds of Heicon. I recall doing something similar when I was about sixteen; on the second day of my fortnight holiday in Sydney I took 96 photos of animals at Taronge Park Zoo, then discovered that I couldn't afford any more film. If anyone is interested in those snaps, by the way, I still have them, and if there's a spare hour or so during the next convention I could ... I couldn't? Oh.) Since every Australian convention of recent years has relied on films for a large part of its programme (and a large part of its membership), this was rather a gamble; but the committee was convinced that we could entertain ourselves, and we did.

To cater for the film fans, the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group

put on an excellent programme at the Capri Theatre, Murrumbena, on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. It included LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, WORK IS A FOUR LETTER WORD, MOON ZERO TWO and a superb, reported to be complete, version of METROPOLIS.

At the business session, the Australia in 75 Committee was formally instructed to bid for the 1975 World Convention.

Conventions are for people, and the organizers are to be congratulated on never losing sight of this. The programming was excellent, and the committee was quite prepared to scrap segments when it felt people were tired or just wanted to sit around and talk. The emphasis on self-entertainment was fully justified: no film could be quite as entertaining, for example, as Carla Harding, Elizabeth Foyster and an invisible Martian (played brilliantly by Kevin Dillon, who was in Sydney at the time) discussing what it's like being married to science fiction.

The Paul Stevens Show, which is becoming something of an institution at Melbourne conventions, was actually scripted this year - though, regrettably, not rehearsed. (Or is it regrettable? Paul's shows tend to give pretty much the same impression as his fanzines - haphazard productions, ragged at the edges, yet interesting enough to persevere with and occasionally showing sustained glimpses of inspired comedy. Would a little more thought and planning ruin this? I am fairly confident we will never know.) Paul interviewed Superman (played, somewhat unconvincingly, by Peter House, who is lean and red-bearded and had considerable difficulty in seeing his notes without his glasses); John Foyster interviewed Olaf Bangsound, publisher of Parallel Books (in which role Lee Harding gave a most impressive characterization of myself, L Ron Hubbard and Doctor

Strangelove, more or less simultaneously); and I vaguely recall making an appearance as Professor Humphrey Tape of the University of Ard-Knox, delivering an address on the neglected science of ektachiasology. (I can remember wishing very sincerely that I could have invented a word easier to pronounce than that one. At the time I was in a rather relaxed state, and every time the audience responded particularly enthusiastically I wondered whether it was laughing at my very erudite puns or my slight difficulty in delivering them. I have subsequently heard John Foyster's tape of this programme, and I seem to detect a certain note of hysteria in my performance. Whether this constitutes an argument for or against rehearsing the Paul Stevens Show, I'm not sure.)

Press coverage of the convention was the heaviest yet experienced here. The New Year break is a dull patch for the Press, and it was made even worse than usual this year when unseasonable rain washed out the Test Cricket. I suppose ninety people talking about sf is ultimately as worthwhile and significant as several thousand people watching a few men in white knocking a little ball around a paddock, but that's not the way the Great Public sees things.

Dick Jenssen, the Melbourne fan who shares a body with Dr Ditmar Jenssen, a lecturer in meteorology at the University of Melbourne, was interviewed by TV, radio and newspaper reporters, and his comments led to the Great Public being fed the 'news' that science fiction is dead and fans are mostly drug addicts. What Dick had to say was, in fact, perfectly reasonable, but the Press chose to distort it. To say that some fans are on drugs is about as significant as saying that some fans are

homosexual or drive dangerously or take part in anti-war demonstrations or play the stock market. The more serious matter - about science fiction being dead - is very much open to debate. It seems to me it has never been more alive than it is now.

(There will be a brief interlude here, while I adopt my Serious Constructive Attitude. Since this entails meditating for some time before a leather-bound copy of EXPLORERS OF THE INFINITE, you might just as well pop out for a bbeer or a coffee or whatever you normally pop out for - and don't worry too much if you're not back before I start again: I won't say anything witty for at least nine paragraphs.)

(Here follows a few paragraphs on the state of stf and its place in the pantheon of writing, interesting but not relevant here, so time for that bbeer.)

The highlight of the convention - to return to the story I started with - was undoubtedly the Gelati incident.

On the Saturday afternoon, during a not particularly sparkling panel discussion on science fiction films, Lee Harding walked into the hall, eating an ice cream. 'Excuse me interrupting,' he is reported to have said, 'but there's a little man on a bike out there selling gelati, if anyone is ...' The hall emptied, Lee narrowly escaped being trodden underfoot by the panel members.

I didn't actually see this Incident. I was at home, writing that scholarly address on ekstrachiasology. So someone else, Bruce Gillespie probably, got the exclusive interview with the Gelati Man. Scooped again ...

John Bangsund

*Australian Science Fiction Monthly* 2, January 1971

