



Scratch Pad No. 49
August 2002

Convergence: Gathering of the Clan



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Based on *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life* No. 34 (for Acnestis)
and **brg** No. 33 (for ANZAPA (**brg** No. 33)),
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ConVergence:

Gathering of the Clan

***41st Australian
National Science Fiction Convention,
Melbourne, June 2002***

written by Bruce Gillespie,
includes Ditmar's (Dick Jenssen's) Ditmar Acceptance Speech,
and is based on the photographic contributions of
Cat Sparks, Helena Binns, Dick Jenssen, Richard Hryckiewicz,
Alison Barton and Rose Mitchell,
to whom much thanks

Front cover photos:

Gay Haldeman awards Bruce Gillespie the Ditmar for Best Fanzine
(Photo: Cat Sparks)

Ditmar gets his Ditmar!
Race Mathews awards Ditmar (Dick Jenssen) the Ditmar for Best Fan Artist
(Photo: Helena Binns)



Photo: Helena Binns.

Friday, 7 June 2002

People had been gathering for ConVergence (Cato Centre in the Y Hotel, Melbourne) since nine in the morning. How was I to know that? The program said that the first event was the Opening Ceremony at 6.30 p.m. I turned up at 6 p.m., without Elaine. (Because she recovering from an infection, she isn't able to attend any convention events.) I registered, collected my little bag of goodies, went looking for everybody, and found that everybody was there already.

Almost the first people I met were **Claire Brialey** and **Mark Plummer** from Britain. Claire gave me a hug from **Dave Langford**. (That was her excuse. I never get used to this hugging business, but Claire's hugs made this mode of international fannish communication very enjoyable.) Would this convention be a replay of Aussiecon III, so rudely interrupted only three years before? It already felt like that, only better.

I have only one photo of Mark (l) and Claire (centre), and that was taken the next day. **Irwin Hirsh** is on the right. It was good to have them back in the country. Also appearing in the crowd was **Janice Gelb**, saviour of Aussiecon, fresh from her visit to New Zealand. I don't have her photo.

Opening Ceremony The Guests of Honour

ConVergence was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Who better to open the convention than **Race Mathews**, at whose parents' home a small group of people, calling themselves the Melbourne Science Fiction Group, first gathered in 1952?

Race was a parliamentarian for many years, so he knows how to give a good rousing speech. He welcomed us to this 'gathering of the clan'. He remembers some good stories from the early days, and makes some useful connections between science fiction as it was then and SF as it is now. If I had a copy of Race's speech, I'd print it here.

Other Guests of Honour included Joe Haldeman (Overseas Pro GoH), Gay Haldeman (Overseas Fan GoH), and Lucy Sussex and Sean Williams (Australian Pro GoHs) (see photos on the back cover of this magazine).

Unfortunately I missed the Guest of Honour Speeches by **Lucy Sussex** (interviewed by Murray McLachlan) and **Sean Williams** (interviewed by Jack Dann), but I did see those by **Gay Haldeman** (interviewed by Eric Lindsay) and **Joe Haldeman** (interviewed by Jack Dann, the most overworked man in Melbourne). I first met Joe and Gay when they were here in 1980, when I was able to hand to Joe the Ditmar he had won in 1976 (the trophy had been sitting in my desk drawer because I hadn't had an address for the Haldemans). Gay greeted me like a long-lost brother at Aussiecon 3, and then we actually were able to catch up on our twenty-two-year-old conversation at ConVergence. Gay's talk mainly concerned the ways in which she organises both their lives so that they can travel widely, attend conventions, and write a bit. Joe described the way his career began, the way he writes (longhand, in neat notebooks, at 5 a.m.), and his thoughts about current American foreign policy. Gay and Joe, like Race, Lucy and Sean, were valuable, hardworking Guests of Honour at ConVergence.



Jack Dann

Just because a man loves publicity, gladhanding people, jumping up and down in one spot, and ‘making with the *schtick*’ (as he likes to put it) doesn’t mean that he has to be worked into the ground. **Jack Dann**, Australia’s resident big-name American writer, was chosen to be Toastmaster for the Opening Ceremony. He also consented to act as Toastmaster for the Awards Ceremony, interview Joe Haldeman for Joe’s Guest of Honour speech, play host at most of the book launch events, and appear on many panels. Jack’s continuing joke for the convention was that writers are ‘ego-less’ beings. Here’s Jack being ego-less.

(Seriously, though, Jack doing his Jack Dann thing welded together the convention as a whole event. And he does look good in a penguin suit. Photo: Helena Binns.)

The 50th Anniversary Cocktail Party

When did I really begin to enjoy this convention? When, during the after-Opening Ceremony cocktail party (free drinks in the main fan/gathering lounge), I found I could suddenly put faces to about fifty names I had known until then only from the Internet. For instance, I met **Marianne de Pierres**. Marianne is a freelance writer in Brisbane, and I hope she might write for *SFC* one of these days. **Brendan Duffy** had got in touch only a few weeks before the convention, as had **Thomas Bull**, a fan, newly arrived from Western Australia, who seemed to be enjoying himself, although he still didn’t know many people. **Vanessa Jacobson** and I were going to meet up at the convention, but somehow it didn’t happen. We did wave at each other during the cocktail party. I met old friends I had last seen at Aussiecon 3. **Rowena Lindquist** (who now writes as Cory Daniels, and lives in Queensland) has hardly changed I first met her at the end of 1975. Although I’d met **Simon Brown** briefly at Aussiecon, this was the first time I had ever talked to him. Old friends had flown in for the convention. **Peter** and **Mariann McNamara** were over from Adelaide, although Peter had recently undergone radiotherapy. I talked to **Gary Hoff** from Western Australia. I first met Gary in 1971. **Roman Orszanski** was not quite unrecognisable, as he had just shaved off a 25-year-old beard. Other people, rumoured to be at the convention, never appeared to me, although **Cat Sparks** has taken some great photos of them. Hang around long enough at this convention, and you met nearly everybody.



Rowena Lindquist (left) (who writes as Cory Daniels) and Marianne de Pierres. (Photo: Cat Sparks.)



Danny Heap and James Allen. (Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz)

Timebinders

There were at least two main groups of convention-goers at this convention — the people who knew who Race Mathews, Merv Binns and Dick Jensen are, and how important they have been to SF fandom in Australia; and those who didn't. **Irwin Hirsh** and **Perry Middlemiss** organised a Timebinders stream: a series of panels covering the whole history of fandom in Australia. (But where was the panel to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Australia's first convention, in Sydney in 1952?)

The first two Timebinders sessions were on Friday night: **Dick Jensen**, **Race Mathews** and others discussing the very beginnings of the club; and **Danny Heap**, **James Allen ('Jocko')** and **Susan Batho** discussing the 'ratbag years', 1985–95, the days of the 'New Wave' in Melbourne, when young fans published (and won a Ditmar for) a fanzine called *Get Stuffed*, and the Melbourne SF Club transferred from Space Age Books (closed at the end of 1985) to its present site, the St David's Uniting Church Hall in West Brunswick. No bland history here: just lots of funny stories about weird adventures from Jocko and Danny, with Sue Batho trying to tell the story of Sydney when she could get in a word. From the audience I kept begging Jocko and Danny to get it all written down, but I guess nobody will.

Let us now praise Mervyn R. Binns

Timebinders panel: 'The Lost Years: 1958–66'

'The Lost Years' were those when Australian fandom almost disappeared from the world map. **John Foyster**, **John Baxter**, **Bob Smith** and a few others were publishing fanzines, but there was no convention anywhere in Australia between 1958 and 1966. A barely visible flicker of light was the Melbourne SF Club, at 19 Somerset Place, Melbourne, its entrance a doorway on a lane behind McGill's Newsagency, where Merv Binns was manager and science fiction pusher.

There was a sublimely ludicrous moment during this panel when **Bill Wright** pointed at **Merv Binns** and said, 'This man provided a perfect home for all of us, the refugees from Melbourne of the fifties and sixties. He is our hero', and Merv replied by saying, 'The Club in the sixties was a failure; hardly anybody attended the weekly meetings, and fannish social events were held elsewhere', and I tried telling Merv that if it hadn't been for him selling science fiction at McGill's Newsagency and the Club providing the physical centre for all SF activity in Australia, there would have been *nothing*. Australia would have been a complete desert for SF fans then, and might still be. But Merv wouldn't believe us. Just how many times do we have to grovel before the sainted Merv before he gets the message?



'The Lost Years, 1958–66' Timebinders panel: (from left): Merv Binns, Bruce Gillespie (wearing propeller beanie cap, a present from David Russell), Dick Jenssen making a joke, and Bill Wright. Below: same panel, with Merv demonstrating some astounding feature of the old Melbourne SF Club. (Photos: Helen Binns.)



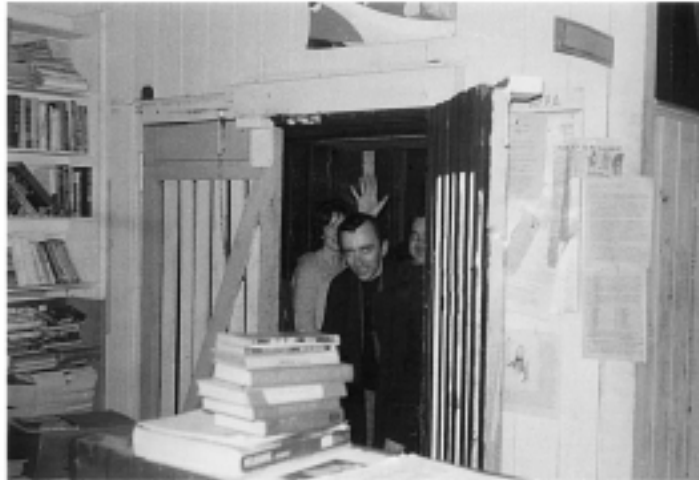
The cover of *Science Fiction Fandom in Melbourne: Part One*. You can probably still buy copies for \$5 from Merv Binns at PO Box 315, Carnegie VIC 3163.

Before the convention, Merv researched old issues of *Etherline*, the Melbourne SF Club's magazine during the fifties, and produced the fanzine whose cover appears above. **Dick Jenssen** scanned and cleaned up innumerable photos from Merv and Helena's files. Many of them appear in *Science Fiction Fandom in Melbourne*. Dick also printed and laminated some of them into photomontages, and had them on display at the Timebinders panels.

It's still not easy to find out just what happened in Australia during the 'lost years'. Nobody can yet find out when the Club moved from McKillop Street to 10 Somerset Place. Merv said that back issues of *Etherline* proved that it must have been in 1962. From the audience, **John Straede** said that his memory of particular events in his life (his first job, etc.) said that the move could not have been after the end of 1959. Since then, he and **John Foyster** have, by email, settled on a date of late 1961 or early 1962.

The Club was the scene of innumerable ping pong matches, film programs (the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group showings actually paid the rent), book lendings, and natter. It had the last hydraulic lift (elevator) in Melbourne. In September 1970, not long before the end of the Somerset Place venue, I walked into the Club on a Saturday afternoon with Leigh Edmonds. Graham Shannon offered to show us the world's longest, best print of *Metropolis*. Four hours later, we staggered out, amazed. On the panel, Merv reminisced about that print of *Metropolis*, which is now in the National Library's Film Archive.

Somerset Place



Top:
Bottom Left:
Bottom Right:

Mervyn Binns at the duplicator
Paul Stevens and The Lift
Mervyn Barrett and The Lift

Photomontage by Dick Jensen, based on photos from the files of Merv and Helena Binns.



Fans of (top and right bottom) the late sixties; and (left bottom) early sixties. Photomontage by Dick Jenssen, based on photos from the files of Merv and Helena Binns.



Left: The comics fans at the 1969 Melbourne Convention, Capri Cinema, Murrumbena: (l to r): John Breden, Bill Wright, Dimitri Razuvaev, Gerald Carr, Merv Binns, Paul Stevens, Kevin Dillon, John Brosnan.

Right: panel at the same convention, MSFC Club rooms: (l to r): Lee Harding, John Foyster, Leigh Edmonds.



I didn't see many program items apart from those in the Timebinders stream. My most pleasant memories of the convention include lunch on Saturday with **Edwina Harvey**, **Gerald Smith** and **Womble**, and **David Russell** who was being the eyes of **Les Peterson**; dinner the same day with **Dick Jenssen**, **Bill Wright**, **Merv** and **Helena Binns**, and **John** and **Truda Straede**; and a quiet hour nattering to **Claire Brialey** and **Mark Plummer** on Sunday.

I had to stay home to work on Monday, the last day of the convention, so I missed the liveliest Timebinders item — the panel on the last afternoon when fans talked about storing their vast collections, especially of fanzines. Just where in the house do you put all that stuff? Is there anybody you can trust to take care of your collection after your demise? Big plans were made to store fanzines on CD. Hah! Scanning old fanzines takes far more time and effort than it did to publish them in the first place.

On Sunday, it was great to catch up with most members of Anzapa for the Anzapa Collating Party. They included **Lucy Schmeidler** from New York, who brought along **Ros Gross** (from North Balwyn) as a possible recruit. This was the only time I caught up with **Jack Herman**, and almost the only time I could talk to **Eric Lindsay** and **Jean Weber** during the convention. And I should catch up with **David Grigg** a bit more often than once a year.

The Hot Panel

The convention's program made good use of the vast array of attendees from Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and all other points north and south. Somebody called it a 'Swancon in Melbourne' — a lot of fun, especially as many of us can never afford to travel to Western Australia for Swancon.

However, many of the Melbourne people you would normally expect to be on panels when there is a convention in Melbourne were not asked to be on panels, which was odd. The only panel that made use of the enormous resources of the Nova Mob (which has become so successful that it is now almost a Melbourne monthly mini-convention) was the 'Hot Panel'. **Kirsten McDermott**, **Ian Mond** and **Andrew Macrae** were asked to look at what's 'hot' and what's 'hip' in science fiction at the moment. The argument was ferocious, the puns outrageous, and the interaction between audience and panel members stupendous. Needless to say, most of the names mentioned were not genre authors, but writers such as Danielewski (*House of Leaves*) and Palahnuik (*Fight Club*, among others). Ian mentioned Joe Lansdale and Stephen King, his two favourite writers, and made fun of *House of Leaves*. Much mud was cast at the ideas of 'hip' and 'hot'. As Andrew said, today's top insult is: 'How twentieth century!' At the end of the panel, **Sean Williams** put his head through the door. Audience and panel decided he was the hippest and hottest writer around (although he claims he is the Alan Dean Jones of Australian SF) and crowdsurfed him. It was that sort of convention.



'What's hip and what's not?':
Kirsten McDermott, Ian Mond, and Andrew
Macrae.
(Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz.)



Rose Mitchell (l) giving Short Story competition prize to Cat Sparks. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

Awards! Awards!

My official line is that awards are unimportant, and the quantity of awards in any field is in inverse proportion to the quality of the products being awarded, etc. etc. But at ConVergence I put aside my official line. The Awards Ceremony was a great celebratory item on the program, a way to get to know who's who in Australian SF these days. Thanks to **Cat Sparks**, **Dick Jenssen**, **Richard Hryckiewicz**, **Alison Barton** and **Rose Mitchell**, who answered my cry for help and sent me photographs of Awards Night.

I'm having a bit of trouble remembering the order in which the Awards were given, and I haven't been able to find out details of the Art Show or Short Story Competition award winners. I know that **Claire McKenna** won first prize in the SF Foundation's short story competition, and **Cat Sparks**, official photographer for the convention, and generous donor of photos, gained a place. I don't have the names of any of the winners of the Art Show competition.

Rose Mitchell did a superb job of organising the Awards night, **Jack Dann** was the 'egoless' MC, while **Marc Ortlieb**, the convention's official Ditmar Awards person, hid within a monk's cowl because he had just sacrificed his beard for the sacred cause of DUFF.

To me, the most important award for the night was the **A. Bertram Chandler Award** for distinguished service to Australian science fiction. I've already said that Merv Binns is the person we can thank, more than anybody else, for the fact that any of us were sitting in that hall on that day taking part in any sort of Australian convention. Merv's received his Chandler Award. The other person we should all thank for whatever is alive and continuing in Australian SF and fannish activity today is **John Foyster**. I felt that Chandler Award presenter Clive Newell (on behalf of the SF Foundation) rather over-summarised the immense list of John's achievements, most important of which was the convening of the 1966 Melbourne convention, which led to the publication of *Australian Science Fiction Review* (*ASFR*), with John as one of the editorial team, which led to the bid for Aussiecon I and the resurrection and enormous expansion of Australian fandom and SF activity from 1966 to 1975. Along the way, John has also had a major



(l to r): Rose Mitchell, the A. Bertram Chandler Award, Clive Newell presenting and Roman Orszanski accepting the Chandler for John Foyster. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

bid for Aussiecon I and the resurrection and enormous expansion of Australian fandom and SF activity from 1966 to 1975. Along the way, John has also had a major part in starting Anzapa (in 1968), the Nova Mob (in 1970), the DUFF race (in 1972), *ASFR*, Second Series (in 1980), and the bid for Aussiecon II.

Unfortunately, John was not well enough to travel to Melbourne for ConVergence, so **Roman Orszanski** (minus beard) accepted the Chandler Award on John's behalf. When I talked to Roman, he did not quite know how he would transport it back to Adelaide.

Pro Awards

The Professional Ditmar Awards usually don't mean a lot to me, as usually I haven't read or seen any of the nominated items. However, this year I had read **Sean McMullen's** *The Eyes of the Calculator*, and was a bit surprised that it lost to **Garth Nix's** *Lirael*. (Garth accepted his Ditmar from a restaurant table via mobile phone via Jeremy Byrne.) *Eyes* lost on preferences, perhaps because it is still only available in a few bookshops in the \$57 hardback edition, while *Lirael* is widely available in a \$17 paperback. As happened to George Turner during the 1980s, Sean might have trouble winning the Ditmar with books published and imported from overseas.

The Best Short Fiction award posed a bit of a problem. How could I look either **Lucy Sussex** ('Absolute Uncertainty') or **Jack Dann** ('The Diamond Pit') in the eye if either of them lost (especially as both of them lost in the same category of the Aurealis Awards)? They solved the problem by tying for first place, thus leading to one of my favourite photos from the convention (see below left).



Jack Dann (l) and Lucy Sussex (r).
(Photo: Helena Binns.)

When Lucy Sussex announced the Ditmar for Best Collected Work, there was no sign of **Damien Broderick** to collect it for *Earth Is But a Star*, his anthology of fiction and critical writing published by University of Western Australia Press. **Sean McMullen** gave a fine speech when accepting the Ditmar for Damien. Damien has perhaps given up attending prize-givings after missing out on many awards he should have won (as at this year's and last year's Aurealis Awards).

For some reason, the Best Professional Achievement Ditmar arrived nearly at the end of the night. It went to **Dirk Strasser** (r) and **Stephen Higgins** (l), six months after they had given up the editorship of *Aurealis* to Keith Stevenson.



Photo:
Cat
Sparks.

The Fan Awards

Months before the Ditmar Awards, I told myself not to worry about them. *You've lost already*, I told myself. *There are new forces in the land; they'll roll right over you.* Not that I knew who these new forces were. Who were **Geoff Allshorn** and **Deb Biancotti**? With **Bill Wright**, they were the other nominations for Best Fan Writer. Bill Wright is writing so well at the moment that I knew he had to win. *But who are those other people?*

I have a vague notion that I've met Geoff somewhere before this convention, but it was at ConVergence that I became aware of him and the other members of Spaced Out Inc, 'the gay/Lesbian SF club of Victoria'. They've been publishing a lot in the last two or three years, but they hadn't sent anything my way, so I had no idea who they were. Geoff and the group have formed an energetic new force in Australian fandom.

I still don't know who Deb Biancotti is. One day I'll see some of her fan writing.

I was sitting in the second row on Awards Night, and **Gay Haldeman** (our Overseas Fan Guest of Honour) began to read out the nominations list. I was so certain that Bill Wright would win that I was surprised when I heard my name. And then Gay was reading my name as the winner! I was nearly as overcome as when I won my first Ditmar, for Best Fanzine, nearly thirty years ago at Syncon 2. In 1972 I nearly did a Bob Hawke and sobbed into the microphone. This year I said the first silly thing that came into my mind. Quoting Sally Field (or was it Gwyneth Paltrow?) on Oscars night, I said, 'Now I know you really love me!' I was being ironic, friends! But I am really moved that anybody still votes for me. And it was great receiving the Ditmar from Gay, who still remembers me from her and Joe's first visit to Australia in 1980.

The next few minutes were the most suspenseful of the year. Would Ditmar win this year's Ditmar? The Ditmar Awards are named after **Dr Martin James Ditmar (Dick) Jenssen**, who, as 'Ditmar', computer graphics fan artist, was also nominated for this Ditmar for Best Fan Artist. I did not know the work of his competitors, **Cat Sparks** and **Miriam English**. For all I knew, they had vast followings. **Race Mathews** read out the nominations — and the suspense was over. *Ditmar had won his Ditmar!* Dick believes this is the first time anybody has won the award that is named after that person. Dick was particularly pleased to receive his Ditmar Award from Race Mathews, the person who first made Dick aware of science fiction sometime in the late 1940s when both were schoolboys. With Merv Binns, Lee Harding and Bob McCubbin, they founded the Melbourne SF Club fifty years ago. The pattern is complete. (Dick's acceptance speech appears next page.)

I'm not quite sure why I felt a bit more confident about winning Best Fanzine than I had about winning Best Fan Writer. I had composed an acceptance speech in my head in bed at 5 a.m. that morning. But the odds were against me. Only one *SF Commentary* appeared in 2001. **Bill Wright** had published six issues of *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* in the same period — it's a superb fanzine, it appears regularly, and every fan should beg or borrow a sample copy. Surely Bill would win! I knew nothing about *Solar Spectrum* or *Diverse Universe*, which, as I discovered at the convention, are published by Spaced Out Inc. *Fables and Reflections* is very well designed and printed, but publishes mainly fiction. Only one issue appeared in 2001, but it *is* a Western Australian fanzine. I expected the Western Australians to rally behind **Lily Chrywenstrom**.

I still don't know why I won and Bill didn't. Perhaps it's because I print 350 copies of *SF Commentary*, 120 of which were distributed in Australia. Bill publishes mainly for Anzapa and about fifty other people. But I was very glad that people still like my magazines, and it was gratifying to receive my Ditmar from Merv Binns (all the more because I heard him say, in true Merv fashion, 'Bruce must have about twenty of the things by now!') I forgot most of what I was going to say, so on page 15 I've printed the speech I meant to give. (The colour photos on the front cover illustrate this page.)



Ditmar's acceptance speech: (l to r): Rose Mitchell, Race Mathews, Jack Dann and Dick Jenssen (Ditmar). (Photo: Helena

Ditmar's acceptance speech

There are many people whom I should thank for guiding me to this moment, the foremost of which is this Convention's Fan Guest of Honour, **Race Mathews**. You have all heard how Race was the driving force behind the formation of the group which became the Melbourne Science Fiction Club fifty years ago. I was lucky enough to be a school friend of Race's, and so was in the right place at the right time to become a founding member of the Club. Although Race was the great influence in bringing Science Fiction into my life, it was a dinner he gave ten years ago for the old diehards which brought me here tonight, for we discovered that although we all still were interested in SF, we were all probably more fanatical about film. And so Race organized a monthly film night where we, and others, would get together to watch laser disks and DVDs.

It was at these nights that I rekindled my friendship with **Bruce Gillespie** and his wife **Elaine Cochrane**. I had just retired and, rather than passively sliding down the razor blade of life into terminal senescence, was filling in the time waiting for the end by attempting to create graphics on my computer. Bruce and Elaine not only encouraged me in my efforts but were bold enough to actually use my images in their fanzines. Elaine, in particular, prodded me into grafting more and more bells and whistles onto the fractal program I had written, and which was used in my work.

Also at Race's was **Bill Wright**, who, like me, had

moved away from the SF world, and only just returned. Bill was about to resurrect his apazine *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*. Now for some reason, I have always managed to frighten Bill with a word or look, and so I told him that *IRS* would have a cover by me on every issue. Bill — cowering, trembling, massive Bill — of course agreed. Without that compliance, I am sure that I would not be here tonight.

And there are overseas people to thank as well — people such as **Michael Waite** and **Tim Marion** — who have been bold or foolish enough to use my graphics in their magazines. Michael deserves special thanks for the quality of the reproduction of my works in his *Trial and Air*.

Finally, as has been pointed out in the *ConVergence 2002 Handbook*, I have said that there are only two things in my life of which I am truly proud, in the sense that I would not like my brief existence to have been without them. One is finding the love of my life, which is irrelevant to tonight's proceedings, and the other is having my name attached to the Australian Science Fiction Achievement Awards. I tell you this so that you may understand just how important this day is for me. For now there are *three* things in my life which I regard as truly important.

And for that, and this Award, I thank you all very much indeed. Thank you.



Merv Binns laughs at a Bruce Gillespie joke! (Photo: Helena Binns.)

Bruce Gillespie's acceptance speech (that should have been)

Thank you, everybody who voted for me this year. You could so easily have voted for the other nominees!

Let me say how pleased I am to receive this Ditmar Award from **Merv Binns**. If it had not been for Merv standing behind the counter of McGill's, providing lots of science fiction and putting on display a new magazine called *Australian Science Fiction Review* in 1966, I would not be here today. For nearly two years I bought that magazine from McGill's, reading it with wonder and delight, before I wrote to the editor, John Bangsund, subscribed, and began writing for it.

In 1968, I first ventured into the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, which was Merv's kingdom. There I found hundreds of American books for sale, books that Merv was not allowed to sell in McGill's. My SF library began to expand exponentially. The Club was also the venue for my first two conventions, the 1968 and 1969 Easter Conventions. There I met a wide variety of SF fans, some of whom are here today.

May I also thank the 'ASFR team', as they were known: **John Bangsund**, **John Foyster** and **Lee Harding**, who published *Australian Science Fiction Review* regularly during the late sixties, and who provided the main inspiration for all my efforts. When I announced to a breathlessly unexcited world that I was going to begin my own fanzine, called *SF Commentary*, the ASFR team actually duplicated, collated and stapled the first two issues in early 1969. They probably hated every minute of it, but they did have faith in me. I bought my own duplicator in May 1969 and John Bangsund taught me how to use it. *SF Commentary* had taken off.

Thanks also to the hundreds, even thousands, of reviewers, critics, artists and correspondents who have contributed to *SF Commentary* since 1969. In particular, **George Turner**, who died in 1997, was the first person to send me contributions. He sent me many hundreds of thousands of words over the next twenty-five years. Thanks to **Brian Aldiss**, who sends me cheery letters just when I feel most discouraged about publishing and life in general; to **David Lake**, who has made generous financial donations to the magazine; and thanks to this year's Chandler Award winner, **John Foyster**, who guest edited six issues of *SF Commentary*, and who put me in contact, through **Franz Rottensteiner**, with **Stanislaw Lem**. It was Lem's articles appearing continually in *SFC* in the early seventies that gave the magazine such a sparkling reputation during its champagne years.

Recently *SFC* has gained much prestige from printing the computer graphics supplied by **Dick Jenssen**, also known as **Ditmar**. I was so pleased tonight that Ditmar won his Ditmar.

In the last twenty years, *SF Commentary* has been greatly improved by the proofreading of my wife **Elaine Cochrane**, who cannot be here tonight. She won't allow me to give her written credit for proofreading, however, because, as soon as she's added her corrections, I change everything around and make a whole lot of new mistakes.

I publish *SF Commentary* because I enjoy doing so, and I hope to keeping publishing each time I have the time and money. Thanks for your long-time support.



Joint winners of Best Fan Production — Other: (l to r): Geoff Allshorn, Miriam English, and Mitch.
(Photo: Helena Binns.)

The Awards Ceremony was not over yet! Only slightly shorter than an Oscar Awards Ceremony, it included a few surprises.

Until the convention, I had never heard of any of the entrants for Best Fan Production — Other. First place was a tie between **Miriam English** and **Geoff Allshorn** for the Spaced Out Website, i.e. the Web site for the Spaced Out Club; and *Mitch? Tarts of the New Millennium*, by **Mitch**. I have a photo of the three of them with the award, but I still don't know Mitch's full name, or what *Mitch? Tarts of the New Millennium* actually *is*. Is it a publication or Web site or video or stage production? And what are *Tabula Rasa*, *Consensual* and *JB Resurrection*, the other three nominees? Australian fandom is suddenly too large a house for one to find out what's in all the rooms.

We already knew the result of Best New Talent before the night began. There was only one nomination: **Cat Sparks**, who, as well as being an ace photographer, is very good at art, writing, and publishing (she and **Rob Hood** are Agog! Press, as I discovered during the convention). When **Dick Jensen** awarded her the Ditmar, and she gave the sharpest Acceptance Comment of the night: 'Why am I the only person on the ballot? There is a huge amount of new talent around at the moment. Take the trouble to nominate!'

The program for the Awards Night listed a mysterious Special Award. **Tony Shillitoe** presented it. It was, he said, an award organised by **Robert Stephenson** and others to celebrate the life and work of **Peter McNamara**, whose work with Aphelion Press in the eighties laid the foundation for much Australian SF activity of the nineties and the new century. The new award, called The Mac, turned out to be a glorious orb sitting on the table. The first winner was **Paul Collins** for a wide variety of work since the 1970s. (But hang on! Wasn't there a special new award, also named in honour of Peter McNamara, given at the Aurealis Awards only a few months ago? Um, yes. I still haven't found out the true story behind this apparent conflict.)

I've run out of space and superlatives. ConVergence was the best organised Australian convention for many years. Thanks, committee, from me and the other 374 people who attended the convention.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 28 July 2002



Guests of Honour

*Photomontage
by Dick Jenssen*

*Top:
Joe and Gay Haldeman*



Middle: Race Mathews

Bottom: Race Mathews, Sean Williams, Lucy Sussex