

The RUBBISH BIN(S)

An AUSSIECON THREE SPECIAL

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Irregularly by

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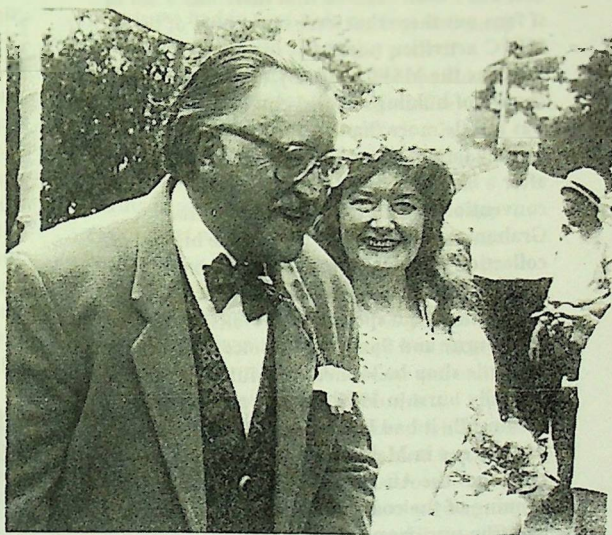
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Dear Readers.

As the third world sf convention to be held in Australia draws near I am just contemplating my almost fifty years as a science fiction fan. Initially I did not even know that I was an sf fan, but I found out about fandom when I was asked to join other sf readers to start the Melbourne Science Fiction Group, which I later referred to as the Melbourne SF Club.

I soon found myself running the library, mainly because I worked in a book shop I guess and probably nobody else wanted the job. We started producing fanzines and started to think about running a convention, when we learned that some had already been held by our friends in Sydney. We finally got it on by 1956, the same year that Melbourne hosted the Olympic Games.

The club became my whole life but the membership was small for many years, though I did my best to keep it alive through the 1950s and early sixties, when fandom in Australia seemed to be at a low ebb. We ran movies and socialised but that was it. I made many friendships during those years and they have endured. My wife Helena, then masquerading as Margaret Duce made a brief appearance, but went off and married Kelvin Roberts and changed both her names. To cut a long story short Helena and Kelvin became friends of mine and for many years attended my parties and various functions with other friends and I. Some years after Kelvin died, Helena and I decided to share a house together, following my father's passing at 90 years old in 1996 and soon after we got married.



*Helena and me on our wedding day
March 22nd 1998*

During the 1960s Australian sf fandom was beginning to grow rapidly, due mainly I believe to the many people who were producing fanzines and exchanging them. Over the last month I have been sorting out all my old zines and deciding which ones I want to keep and those I wish to pass on to other fans. It was quite an eye opener and fantastic nostalgia trip. It made me realise just how big fanzine fandom has been and the connections with fans in other countries has been tremendous. No doubt AUSSIECON ONE was the direct result of the friendships forged during the 1960s between Australian and American fanzine publishers.



Merv Barrett and friends in the infamous Melbourne SF Club lift at 19 Somerset place.

In the 1960s the Melbourne SF Club began again to hold conventions. Very modest at first but I soon realised that there was a lot of sf fans out there that were never part of the MSFC activities normally, but they came to the cons the MSFC held. By the late 60s the chance of holding a world con in Australia was a little more than a pipe dream and even Sydney fandom, which had gone into limbo after a break up around 1954, held a convention in 1970. The sf collector Ron Graham from Sydney, who had the biggest collection of sf in Australia and probably one of the best in the world, discussed with me the opening of a specialist sf bookshop in Melbourne and Space Age Books was born. My little shop ballooned over fifteen years but it finally burst in 1985 and left me bankrupt. Meanwhile it had been the hub of activities in the sf scene in Melbourne and was the nerve centre of the Australia in '75 bid and eventual running of the con. The "Anti-Fan" concept and film was dreamed up mainly by my friend and employee Paul Stevens, who alas has moved way out west and gaffiated. That film I

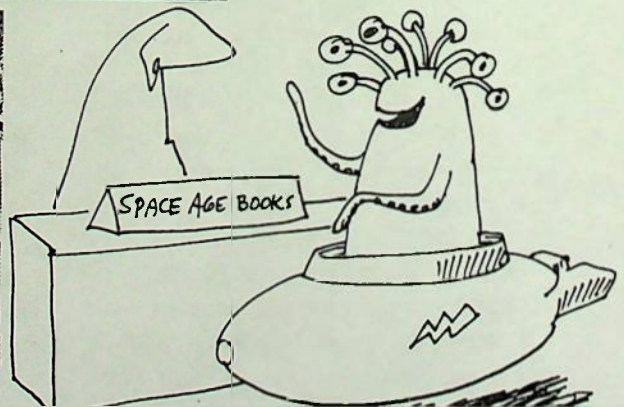
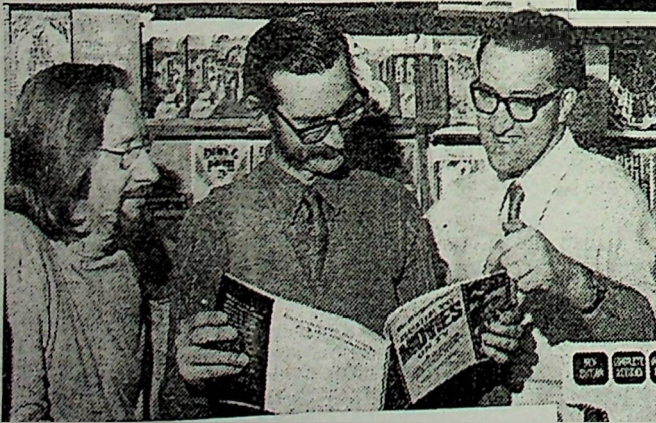
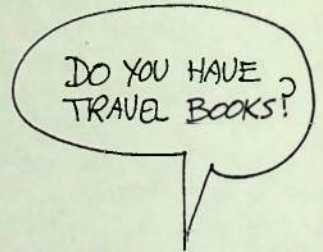
believe simply backed up our winning bid for the world convention in 1975. Another Space Age employee Justin Ackroyd, left us and went to work for other booksellers, but finally opened his own business and my "protege" is now established as SLOW GLASS BOOKS in the same building that Space Age occupied.

My partner, the late Ron Graham insisted that I attend TORCON and that Space Age foot the bill and in fact Space Age footed the bill for two more trips. To SEACON and NOREASCON in 1979 and CHICON in 1983. At least, I got those three trips during the Space Age years, but I lost almost all I owned in the process. The fact that Ron Graham died in '78 did not help my situation, but that is another story.

I could rave on about the World Cons both here and overseas, but I think the most significant thing of all was meeting people. Names in fanzines and on books became real. Having the larger than life authors in my shop, actually signing books for my customers was a thrill I shall never forget. Ron got me into a room party at TORCON and "everybody" was there including Poul Anderson, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Bob Silverberg, Isaac Asimov, Harry Harrison and many more. I was ten feet off the ground. Just simply meeting fans and authors at the cons and in my shop when they visited from interstate or overseas was the biggest buzz of all.



Ron Graham



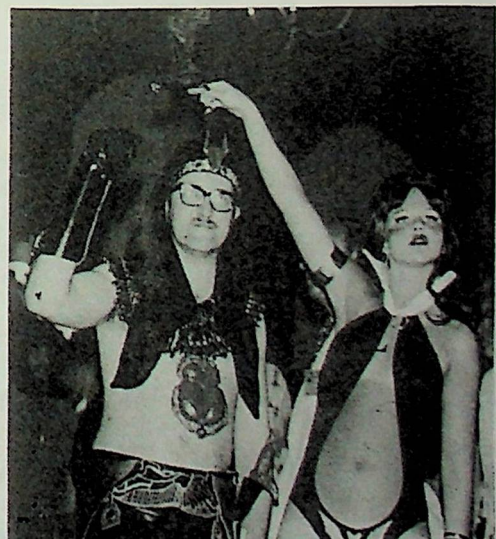
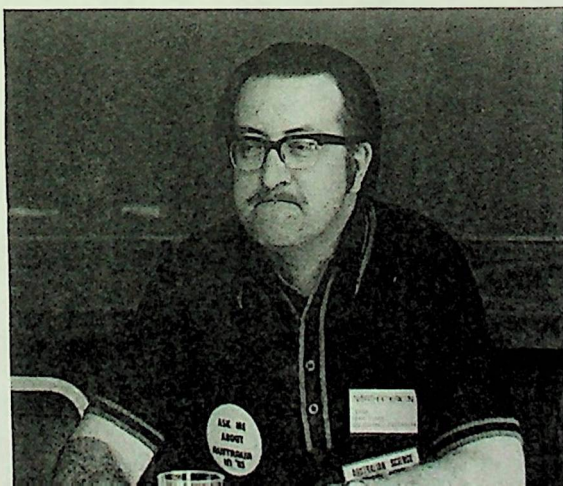
What a time it was! We won the bid at TORCON in 1973 when accompanied by other Aussie fans I made my first overseas trip, to Canada via Hong Kong and England. My friend, New Zealander Merv Barrett, who was living in London at the time, took me along to meet British fans at a London pub and I travelled to Cambridgeshire to say hello to Ken Slater, who I had been buying books from since the early 50s. The big moment for me was meeting people at TORCON. The MSFC had the great pleasure of meeting Arthur Clarke when he stopped in Melbourne on his way to the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, Australia. That trip resulted in a book about the reef and novels including 'Deep Range'. But I had not met any other high profile authors until, when I was talking to Susan Woods, while she was displaying fanzines at TORCON, on my first morning there, I walked this giant of a man, Robert Bloch. I had met my first big pro and fan with a capital "F". I organised a few conventions with my friend Paul Stevens mainly and in 1981 our love of s&f movies induced us to put on CLNECON. We invited Bob Bloch to be our Guest of Honor. Even now, looking through the old fanzines, I realise how big a fan Bob Bloch was. Much more than an author drawn into attending cons and such. We invited him not only because of his connection with cinema and TV writing, but because he was a fan in the full sense and I realise now, reading the zines and the letters that I received from him, what a great guy he was and why all American and all the fans who knew him loved him.

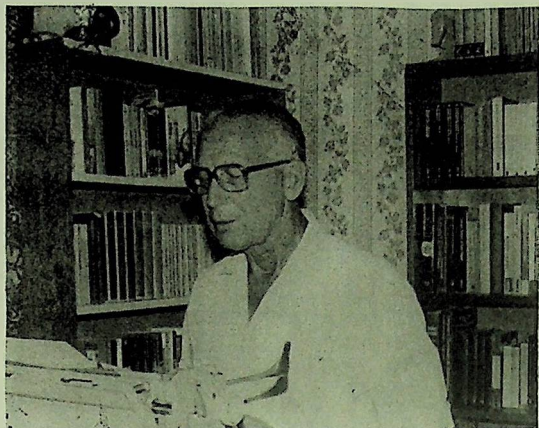
Yes, I did meet a lot of famous authors at Space Age and yes, I do love name dropping but don't worry I am not going list all the



Dad, me, Bob Bloch and Paul at Melbourne Airport 1981

people we had in for book signings and such. Enough to say it was the major perk of owning and running an sf bookshop. The biggest turn up was for Anne McCaffrey, with a queue half way around the block, through the shop and up the stairs to the first floor. There were many others during cons and during promotional visits, whom many fans got to meet at any rate, but one unexpected pleasure was Russell Hoban the author of the sf title "Ridley Walker" and the famous children's classic, "The Mouse and His Child". The biggest coup though was taking Doris Lessing to dinner. At a loose end one night during a visit for a Melbourne University lecture, Harper Collins publishers rang me to see if I would like to meet her. Fantastic! I got on to my friend George Turner and he and Ms Lessing had a great refe-a-refe while I just sat back and listened.





George Turner behind his typer in his flat in Inkerman Street, StKilda.

George was almost a neighbour, living only about a mile away and he often made it to my New Year's Eve parties. He helped me with my editing of *Australian SF News* and helped me improve my grammar no end and was always willing to do any reviews for me. Along with all Melbourne fans, I was very pleased to see him get stuck into sf writing, and become a great example and guru for all other local authors endeavouring to master the art of writing and writing good sf. As a critic his reputation became known world wide.

Space Age Books closed down just after Aussiecon 2 in 1985. I tried to run a mail order service from home while I cared for my aging father, but that also failed and when dad died in 1996 I closed that down also. However when Helena and I got together we found that we had lots of duplicates in our collections, and old friend and MSFC early member, Jack Kearing died and left me his collection, while other friends have given me lots of books to sell. Helena and I are living on pensions and I do some gardening and lawn mowing work that my late father Ern introduced me to, so just living and getting the things we want is very difficult. Endeavouring to sell all the books we had was an obvious option, but it seems to be costing more than what we are getting out of it. I do have about five hundred books on the shelves, which I am still trying to sell and I am hoping that selling those will enable me to pay the people who have given me books to sell for them at least. The fanzines I am trying to sell hopefully will give me enough to renew my subscription to *LOCUS*, which has lapsed after nearly thirty years.

Teaming up with Helena was the best thing I ever did in my whole life. I did not realise how much I needed the love and companionship of a woman until we began living together. Luckily we had a little money to spare in '97 and we paid our subs to AUSSIECON 3, so we are here, but it is costing so much to attend even the local cons, we do not expect to attend many more. You can certainly expect that we will make the most of this one.

About ten years ago or more a friend gave me an old computer, but I could never get it going. I did not have the time and patience and besides that I think to use the vernacular, the programme was corrupted or inadequate. Since then other friends have worked on it and completely rebuilt it and one recent contact, who bought some books from me, has given us a printer and pretty well a whole new set up. Although everything is out of date and we have a fairly limited capacity, **IT IS WORKING!** Thanks Craig! All we have to do is learn how to use the bloody thing.

Back in the early 70s I started my sf newszine AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS. I had forgotten at the time that Sydney bud Graham Stone had done an SF NEWS and I considered changing the name, but it had become so well established by then I continued with that name. I have noticed however, going through all the old zines, that some names have been used more than once by different editors. After a few breaks in between it is still going, being combined with the Hugo nominee and Ditmar winner **THYME**. I do want to produce copies separately and hopefully I will again and selling all my old zines I hope will help me to do just that. So I hope you will ask me for a list at the con, and I will be happy to bring any in from home that people may want or if you are reading this later, please drop me a note or ring and I will send you a copy of the LIST of FANZINES I have TO SELL or the SF&F BOOKS For Sale list.

Finally, HELENA AND I HOPE THAT EVERYBODY HAS A GREAT TIME AT AUSSIECON 3 AND THAT WE GET TO SAY HELLO TO ALL OUR FRIENDS WHILE WE ARE HERE!

Merv & Helena Binns