

EMERALD CITY

Issue 13

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Introduction

Issue 13, unlucky for some. Probably the editor.

I'd like to start this issue by apologising if it is somewhat substandard. There are two reasons for this. First, as I start typing this I am in an advanced state of convention and jet lag. In the past three weeks I have circumnavigated the world, stopping off in two radically different time zones, attended a Worldcon, and today I have been up since 3 am because some idiot at QANTAS decided that showing Mission Impossible in the middle of the night was a good joke. So far I am still awake, but if you start seeing random characters you can assume that I've fallen asleep over the keyboard.

The other reason is that I am going through one of those phases where it seems like the bottom has fallen out of your world. In past week I've had to say goodbye to just about everyone I was really close to. It has not been fun. Heck, I've even bought a Leonard Cohen album, and that line from Sisters of Mercy, "if your life is a leaf that the seasons tear off and condemn", seems somehow horribly appropriate. Right now I do not trust my mental state too much. If I start spouting nonsense, or insulting all and sundry, please accept these apologies in advance and make allowances.

Worldcon Tour 1996

Heck, if you are going to head off round the world for a convention you might as well make a holiday of it. Buried somewhere in here you will find my impressions of LA.con III. There is other stuff as well, not always particularly well related.

A game for wusses

First stop, San Francisco, and Kevin, bless him, decided to treat me to a baseball match. I think he was testing his luck. Long time readers will remember that in February he took me to see the San Jose Sharks who were currently propping up the bottom of the ice hockey league. They scored a magnificent victory. It so happens that the San Francisco

Giants have a similar role in baseball to that of the Sharks in the NHL. They win once in a blue moon. Would the Aussie luck hold? Who cares?

Look guys, ice hockey is fast, rough and tough. It is non stop action (except the commercial breaks). I love it. Baseball, on the other hand... Suffice it to say that I would have much preferred to see the 49ers, NFL having started the weekend I arrived, but getting tickets for their games less than a few years in advance is not easy. Seeing the Giants at least got me into The Park Formerly Known As Candlestick. Indeed, the place was more than half empty.

Now partially this is because professional baseball is seriously in the doldrums. There was a player strike a few years back and the dispute has never really been settled. Old resentments still simmer, minor skirmishes break out regularly, and players are leaving the game, though nowhere near as fast as spectators. What beats me, however, is what Americans ever saw in the game in the first place. If ever any of them has the cheek to complain to me that cricket is boring I now have the perfect riposte. For the benefit of Aussie and Pommie readers I'll try to explain in cricketing terms.

A baseball match consists of 9 innings per side. I'm not sure how many players there are per team (the usual US problem of multiple replacements) but you only need to get 3 people out to end an innings. They turn over pretty quick. Indeed, more than half of the innings played are likely to end with no runs being scored. And one of the most common methods of being out is to fail to hit the ball in three attempts. If something actually happens, the crowd goes wild.

A lot of this is a result of the silly round bat. It is damn difficult to hit the ball, and harder to control it if you do. If a batsman does connect the most likely results are that he will be caught out, or that the ball will go behind the near edges of the diamond and be called dead. Only balls hit forward through the diamond can be run for. The other problem is that of wides. It being so difficult to hit the ball, there is a strict definition of where it should be thrown. If a pitcher throws four wides at the same guy he gets to advance a base for free. But a ball cannot be called wide if you try to hit it, so much of the batting tactics revolve around deciding whether to bother to make the attempt. Obviously this exacerbates the lack of action.

And if all this wasn't enough, I discovered that if the ball hits the batsman he gets a free base! What a wussy game. I well remember Brian Close striding down the wicket towards Dennis Lillee or Andy Roberts, chest thrust out, pointing at his breastbone and yelling "it me yer". In cricket, aiming for the batsman is half the point of fast bowling, and if anyone gets hit it is their own silly fault for not ducking. Baseball players wouldn't last a day in that sort of environment.

The game's one saving grace is that scoring, when it comes, can be rapid. Load the bases (i.e. have a batsman on each one) and hit a home run (put the ball out of the ground) and suddenly you have 4 runs. Thus, even though the visitors, Montreal Expos, went into their final innings 5 runs down, they were far from out of it. As it transpired, they were all out for 0 again. The Giants won 7-2, Kevin increased his belief in my magic powers, and I left wishing I'd taken my embroidery.

Home from Home

As Friday night is MSFC night, so Monday night is BASFA night, and I sincerely wish I could get to the Round Table Pizza parlour in San Jose more often. BASFA are a great bunch of guys, dedicated to bringing silliness to the realm of SF fandom. It was a fairly normal meeting. Kevin was allowed to indulge in recreational parliamentary practice, the pun jar clinked to the sound of tossed quarters, and the rest of us got down to the serious business of auctioning anyone who had a birthday in the current week, namely Kevin.

There is a more serious side to the meetings as well, however. These days this is normally provided by discussion of the San Francisco in 2002 Worldcon bid (SF2002), and with LA.con only a few days away we had a lot to sort out. Yet even this was done in typical BASFA fashion. We voted to officially endorse Dave Clark's hoax bid of Alcatraz in 1999, and also to annex Anaheim to the Bay Area for the coming week so that we could hold our next weekly meeting at the Worldcon. This is how an SF club should be run.

Fandom on the Freeway

I've used that line about LA being a great big freeway before, but it is so true it deserves to be trotted out again. British readers might try to imagine Milton Keynes on the scale of London with desert instead of grass. In a 20 minute trip from John Wayne Airport to the Anaheim Hilton it was concrete suburbs all the way. The hotel, together with the Marriot, the Inn on the Park and a few restaurants and fast food outlets, exists on an island in the midst of a sea of cars. Across a short strait of freeway and broad shoals of parking lots is the looming bulk of Disneyland. Elsewhere, there is nothing. Southern Californians, Kevin tells me, are born welded to their car seats. They have to be, otherwise they would never get anywhere.

Having said that, cozened in the elegant foyers and conference rooms of the Hilton, we were effectively isolated from LA, not to mention the searing heat of summer. Outside, temperatures quickly rose to the high thirties. You could make toast on the sidewalk and poach eggs in the humid air. No one went out unless they had to get from one building to another. Visitors from Manchester, Montreal and Minneapolis bemoaned the awful weather. I just grinned and muttered "good job we're not bidding for Brisbane in '99".

Inside the hotels and conference centre, air conditioning held the environment to human-friendly proportions, with one unfortunate exception: our room. By mid afternoon, the sun on the great glass walls had turned the place into a sauna. The air con didn't give up, however, it kept going at full tilt, all through the night, so that by morning it was so cold that we needed the bedspread. One day I even woke up with cramp. I was not impressed.

Strangely enough, although the attendance was somewhat higher than Intersection (though nowhere near the record numbers of LA.con II), the con felt smaller than last year. OK, so the hotels in Glasgow were miles away from the SECC, but once you got there you found the whole of the rest of the con thronging the cavernous halls. In Anaheim the programming was spread evenly between the Hilton, the Marriot and the Convention Centre. And in each case the rooms were spread out and properly walled. It is much easier to lose 6000 people in such an environment.

You might think that with such a diverse site it would be difficult to get around, but the programme department had thoughtfully scheduled plenty of time and you could get from any one rooms to another in 15 minutes. The only real problem was caused by a stubborn reluctance of the Hilton to allow the posting or erection of any signs or notices. This meant that, although all we SMOFs were billeted in the con HQ, we all had to make a daily trek to the Marriot to check the Voodoo Board and the list of the day's parties. Many people probably never found them.

A day in the life of a SMOF

Those of you unfortunate enough to have been reading Emerald City from issue 1 will recall that I missed most of the programming at Intersection because I was sat in the bar chatting to friends. LA.con was worse: I missed most of the programming because I was working, and not just because I was trailing around after Kevin. I had two Worldcon bids to promote (I figured I ought to do something to help the Aussie contingent even though I could have died of embarrassment at times). I was on three panels - all role-playing stuff, what else. I worked as a Den Mum on the Masquerade, and most of the rest of the time was spent networking. I think I got to three panels, plus the major events. And two of those panels were the ones that had Liz Hand on which I was not going to miss for anything. SMOFs, even trainee ones like me, do not get to see much of Worldcons.

All of the fan tables were on the second floor of the Hilton arranged around the escalator shaft. It was an ideal location. Robbie Cantor had kindly provided Australia with a table right at the top of the escalators and opposite the site selection area. We couldn't have asked for a better location. This sort of promotional activity is quite foreign to Australia where the NatCon bidding sessions often consist of trying to find someone wanting to run one. It is also getting very expensive. SF2002 set its pre-support rate, somewhat reluctantly, at US\$20.02. This is a big price hike, but when we costed all the goodies that people now expect from a pre-support it came to over \$15 and from there it was an easy step to the cute number. Still, Australia will get a taste of what Worldcon bidding is like because the '02 vote will take place at the Melbourne convention, making Aussies important potential voters. I can't speak for Seattle, our rivals, but SF2002 will be running bid parties at Australians cons. Watch this space.

Doing panels was fun, even if the gaming stream did get relegated to small rooms in the Marriot and didn't get the same Ops support and taping facilities given to the main streams. My sincere thanks to Steve Perrin for giving me the chance. I'm looking forward to doing more next year.

SMOFling, as everyone knows, takes place in darkened corners and smoke-filled rooms, all of which seem to have Ben Yalow in them. In reality the darkened corners are any quiet spot in the convention. Kevin was almost impossible to keep track of: we'd be heading off to some meeting or for dinner and someone with "important business" to discuss would buttonhole him. I seriously thought of investing in a leash so as I wouldn't lose him so often.

As for the smoke-filled rooms, California is now sufficiently health conscious to have banned tobacco from restaurants, so the only smoke was from the sizzling of Szechuan

dishes. Kevin and I never got to the local Chinese, even though it was highly recommended. The one night we tried the queue was well out of the door. Instead we spend most of our evenings in a nearby Indian which, despite the signs outside advertising traditional American breakfasts, was actually not at all bad for the US. Serious Pommie curry eaters such as Tim Illingworth, Paul Dormer and Martin Hoare ate there without complaint. Much plotting got done. Shortly we will take over the world (if we can find a way to get rid of Ben). In the meantime we busily carved up advance Worldcon dates.

Evening, i.e. from around 10pm until 2am, longer if you have the stamina, is party time. For most people this comprises getting round as many parties as possible to see who has the best free food and booze and then settling in the one of your choice. For us SMOFs it comprises going to all the parties run by friends whom you have promised you will attend, all the parties run by people who are politically important and whose dos you ought to be seen at, and finally ending up at the party thrown by your own team to show the troops that you haven't forgotten them and you weren't too busy SMOFing to do any work.

With convention programming starting at 10 am, this all makes for a pretty long and exhausting day. A couple of times Kevin and I resorted to getting breakfast on room service despite the extortionate 17% service charge that the Hilton added. There being little chance of us eating again until the evening, we opted for the traditional American fare: steak. I must admit that I could get used to consuming half a pound of succulent meat first thing in the morning, but then I am a disgusting carnivore. I just wish you could get it with some decent chips (fries to those of you not brought up in the UK) rather than have to suffer badly cooked scrambled eggs and under-done hash browns.

Tiptreed for Fame

One of the panels I did manage to get to was the one on the Tiptree Award. Yes, it had Liz Hand on it - she won this year for *Waking the Moon*, which is excellent. But I was also very interested in the whole idea of the award.

For those of you who don't know, the Tiptree is awarded for work in SF and fantasy that includes groundbreaking exploration of gender roles. In the past it has largely been awarded for works which portray strong female characters, but recently it has moved on to rewarding discussion of homosexuality and, in the case of the latest winner, transsexualism. Many of the winners are fascinating books.

The award, by the way, is named after James Tiptree Jnr, a pseudonym for the SF writer Alice Sheldon. It was started by Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler (who is, by the way, an excellent writer herself) as something of a spoof to get their own back on the pompous, male-dominated industry awards. Tiptree is defiantly female in style, and irreverently so. Money to pay for running the awards is raised by bake sales, and the usual trophy they give out is a chocolate typewriter. Also most of the judges are female, and most of the winners have been female. This, of course, has its dangers.

The panel was trundling along in a very relaxed manner and in danger of becoming boring, particularly because the little anti-ego war between Pat and Spike Parsons, in which each tried hard to give the other the honour of talking, had long since ceased to be funny. I'd tried asking Interesting Philosophical Questions, but that hadn't inspired any of the panel to expound on anything. Then the guy behind me had a go.

Said guy turned out to be none other than David Brin, who had some questions to ask about the judging of *Glory Season* (reviewed in *Emerald City* #11). The book hadn't won, which didn't surprise me, but David had got word that some particularly unpleasant things had been said about it by one or more of the judges and he wanted to know where he had gone wrong. Those of you who remember my review would not be surprised that radical feminists (of whom you probably get one or two on a Tiptree judging panel) might react very badly to the book, and I looked forward to the ensuing discussion.

Much to my disappointment, however, the panel steadfastly refused to discuss the matter. To be fair, Spike and Liz probably had no knowledge of the question, and Pat may have felt bound by the usual "we do not discuss the judges' decision" policy. However, it seemed to me that here we had someone with an honest and interesting inquiry that could have led to some useful discussion. The refusal to consider the issue left a bad taste in my mouth, especially as there seemed to be a lot of antagonism along the lines of "you are a man, we won't talk to you", and "you only wrote the book to win our award so we don't want you to win it".

Please don't mistake me here. I am in no way saying that *Glory Season* was worth of the award. It wasn't. But, as I said when I reviewed it, it was a brave attempt which approached some difficult questions in an interesting way. By her arrogant dismissal of David's inquiry, Pat Murphy has done nothing to advance the cause of the Tiptree, and far too much to reinforce the myth that feminists are all narrow-minded, intolerant harpies.

David tells me that he intends to tackle the issue of gender again one day. I hope he does, and wish him luck. The more good minds are devoted to the subject, the better off we all shall be.

The Main Event

The Masquerade, what else? This year, newly armed with what I hoped was a good knowledge of standard practice, thanks to Wendy having run our Costume Ball to strict ICG guidelines, I decided to get involved. As a Den Mum you don't get to see the performance, and you work your butt off most of the evening, but you get a much better sense of atmosphere, and you get to see the costumes real close up. It was fun.

Reviewing any sort of costume parade is kind of difficult without the ability to publish photos. I took plenty, but as yet I have no means of scanning them. And even if I did I'd want to put them on a web page so more of you could get to see them. A much fuller report will appear in the next issue of *Coztume*, but sadly few of you will see that. For now, a few word portraits will have to suffice. Good practice for me, I guess.

Exuberance: the pirate crew representing Bucconeer were in my den, and they were determined to enjoy themselves. They did not let us down, performing with much gusto

and flash bangs. Who cares if you don't have great costumes as long as you have fun. The Croats had much the same idea. I missed the act, but apparently it involved a chastity belt and caused much mirth in the audience. Congratulations to Maia for having the courage to take part even though she needed Igor along as a translator.

Armour, in all its shapes and sizes. Elegantly studded leather, hand-crafted chain mail, helmets adorned with fur and horns, Judge Dredd helmets and epaulets perfectly cast in fibreglass. Costuming is not just flinging a few things together on a sewing machine, guys. There is serious construction involved here.

Dedication: the guy in the ogre suit whose costume was so heavy it practically had to be winched on. Buzz from Toy Story, whose space suit was cast in plastic and arrived, carefully packed, in a pile of old computer monitor boxes. The guy in the ten foot tall dragon suit running round the stage despite the fact he couldn't see anything except his feet. And above all to Deirdre McCarthy. If you are going to do a Centauri woman, don't wimp out with skull caps or tights, do it properly, shave your head.

Ego. Yes, costumers have it in spades, and few more than Janet Wilson-Anderson whose bridal act was accompanied, not only by the groom, but by 14 bridesmaids and guards of honour, plus a giant worm which had six people inside to operate it, not forgetting the backstage crew to handle the effects. You think I'm too hard on her? All of the worm operators and backstage people wore specially printed t-shirts to let you know that they were part of Janet's act.

Last of all, masks. From Spiderman to Morn from DS9 to a gorgon and a lizard man from Mars. And capping it all, the utterly amazing salamander people, their stunning flame-fabric costumes being offset by lizard masks, complete with neck ruffs and huge, glistening eyes. As with the Tanu at Intersection, there was little doubt who should win. Some might have given it to Janet to avoid the sulks afterwards, but justice was done in the end and the salamanders were triumphant.

It was a job well done. Everything ran to time, the judging was fairly much spot on, the crowd loved it. The only real disaster was that it took about a minute to get from the green room to the stage, and when you are waiting for an act to come and collect a prize that seems like years. Tom Whitmore, the MC, dealt with the delays as best he could, and everyone went home happy anyway. Except Janet.

Hugos galore

Giving out awards is something that big conventions feel the need to do in vast quantities. LA Con was worse than most in this respect because it gave out not only the usual Hugos for this year but a whole extra set for 1946. The first Worldcon took place in 1939, but no Hugos were awarded until '53. Some bright spark on the LA.con committee decided it would be a neat idea if we filled in one of the gaps.

On the face of it, it was rather cute. There were some great nominees, and some great people to give awards to. Isaac Asimov and George Orwell were unable to accept their prizes in person, but we clapped loudly all the same. Asimov's agent and Harlan Ellison

stood in manfully. There were, however, a number of problems. One was politics, which I will return to later. The other two involved presentation.

In order to avoid having us all stuck in the Arena until gone midnight, the convention decided to schedule the Retro-Hugos, as they were called, for Friday afternoon. Much programming was still going on at the start time, and because it was detached from the real Hugos, the event drew a disappointingly small crowd. I had been delighted that A.E. Van Vogt had taken the trouble to attend, despite being so infirm that Harlan had to come down off stage to present the special award he was given. It was such a shame that more people were not there to cheer him.

The big disaster, however, was the staging. There had obviously been no rehearsal at all and the tech crew gave the impression that they had never used their kit before. Having excerpts read from nominees, accompanied by stills of book and magazine covers was a good idea. Managing to keep getting them in the wrong order, and being unable to pause them to allow the MC to get a word in edgeways, was not clever. Bob Silverberg did a magnificent job of making a grand joke of it all, and many people, Kevin included, thought that this made up for all the gaffes. Me, I was imagining being the ceremony director and wondering what sort of tongue lashing I was going to get from Silverberg when he finally escaped from the stage. There is no excuse for this sort of lack of professionalism at a Worldcon.

The big event was much better done. There were a few minor glitches when presenters, despite having been told several times before, forgot how many awards they were to give out, and the Japanese were boring again, but all in all it went very well. Connie Willis, the Toastmistress, was outstanding (and so was director Janice Gelb's dress). Kevin and I ended up sat next to Andre and Robin Lievin, the Canadian agents for Bucconeer, who had been in my den the previous night. By the end of the ceremony they were wondering what sort of idiot they had befriended. But, dear readers, I had a good excuse. A really good excuse.

OK, so the cheer for *Diamond Age* was over the top. I'd been worried about it, and was greatly relieved when it won. But why was I doing my nut over Langford? Surely he has enough Hugos already? It is like this. Dave does not travel to Worldcons. The tradition of Martin Hoare appearing on stage on his behalf is so well ingrained they may have to keep it up when Dave stops publishing. This year, however, Martin and Jean planned to travel America before returning home, and this year's Hugos were huge. They needed someone to take it home for them. So when Martin Tudor handed over the Hugo for Best Fan Writer to Martin H, I cheered my heart out because I knew that, albeit briefly, it was coming to me. Dave and Martin, thank you.

Australian readers will doubtless be wondering what happened to Ian Gunn and the Best Fan Artist category. Well, he made a good showing. Hardly anyone wins on their first nomination because they are not yet well enough known. Besides, the result was a foregone conclusion. It was not surprising to find the name Bill Rostler on the ballot. He's a well respected LA artist who appears in many fanzines. If you looked carefully, however, you'd notice his name on the Retro ballot as well, for the same award. To be at the top of your field for 50 years is a significant feat, and the result of both awards was never in doubt. Next year, unless Teddy Harvia is competing at his home Worldcon, Ian will be in with a serious chance.

A little while ago I mentioned politics. Hugos, being awards, can hardly avoid this, and there were two areas of concern this year. Both, as usual, concerned the validity of the awards.

I've always respected the Hugos because they are voted on by knowledgeable fans (the members of the Worldcon) rather than some cabal of industry experts, but there is always the question that they may be being voted on by ignorant fans as well. This debate was thrown into high relief by the actions of *SF Weekly*, a webzine which cheekily decided to hold its own vote. There was some suggestion that their result would be more valid because it was open to more voters. The last time I looked, David Brin's *Brightness Reef* had been running away with the best novel category and *Diamond Age* had languished somewhere near the bottom. This worried me.

Not, I hasten to add, that Brin's book is a bad one. I haven't read it, so cannot comment personally, but judging from all the reviews I had read, *Brightness Reef* is another solid, competent Uplift War novel, slightly spoilt by being so obviously the first party of a trilogy rather than complete in itself. *Diamond Age*, on the other hand, is something special. It is certainly the best book I've read in the past year. And although it was by no means the first nanotech novel, it has quickly established itself as the standard by which all others are measured. So why the strange result?

The theory was, at least at Nova Mob when we discussed the Hugos, that many of the voters had read none of the novels nominated, but that they all knew Brin's name. There is no proof of this, and I'm sure that David would prefer to believe that *SF Weekly* readers have better taste than Worldcon members - I would in his position. But then if we went on popularity alone, Terry Pratchett would win every year. For me that fact that the real vote made *Diamond Age* the clear winner means that the Hugos are still striking that fine line between mass market and literary pretension. Here's hoping they stay that way.

The politics over the Retros surfaced afterwards on SMOFish mailing list with some people complaining vehemently that the results were "wrong" because they did not turn out the way they would have done in '46. So what? OK, so some keen fan historians may have sufficient 'zines from the period to judge what the result would have been then. But if that is what they wanted, why have a vote now. It was inevitable from the structure of the thing that the results would reflect hindsight and modern tastes, and it staggers me that anyone could have expected anything other.

Whether or not the '46 Retros have any place in the historical roll of Hugo winners is another matter entirely. I don't think they do, because they are not a record of how people thought at the time. Provided we recognise this, and treat the Retros simply as a pleasant means of honouring some great names from the past, I'm quite happy with them.

Finally, some of you may be puzzled about my off-hand remark about Japanese. It is traditional (meaning that it has been done for several years now) for Japanese fandom to present awards at the Hugos for the best translated long and short fiction of the year. Personally I think this is wrong - why should Japan have this honour whereas the likes of France, Germany, Spain and Croatia do not? But it is a tradition, and the Japanese people are really nice, and anyway they gave a prize to *Fall of Hyperion* which shows they have

excellent taste. There is just one problem. The culture gap between us and them is so wide that, despite their obvious and earnest attempts to entertain, they are always deeply boring.

Australia, be warned. You are going to have to do this. There will be an international outcry if you don't. Better get hold of a very good Japanese speaker quick, and see if you can get them to do the presentation their way, rather than trying to be Western and failing.

The Triumph of JMS

Did I mention the winner of the Media Hugo? Did I need to? As far as I can see, Eric Lindsay is the only SF fan in the world who is not stunned by *Babylon 5*, and that is only because he steadfastly refuses to watch it.

B5 did not have a landslide victory in the category, all of the preferences were re-distributed, but it was always at least 100 votes ahead of the nearest rival, *Apollo 13*. To complete the numeric theme, *12 Monkeys* was a pleasing third. Interestingly, the *Star Trek* entry, an episode of *Deep Space 9*, came a resounding last. How are the mighty fallen.

It was also clear from the audience reaction that this was a very popular winner. But then everyone at LA.con knew that because they had heard about Saturday. Heck, half of them were there. And where was that, you ask: the panel item at which JMS talked about the show and showed a tape of bloopers. It was popular. The fire marshals were doing their nuts. "Why", people asked, "was this not put on in the biggest room". It was the biggest room. It held 1000 or so people. There were three times that many trying to get in. They would have fitted in the arena, but that was booked for Masquerade set-up and rehearsals. Eventually JMS was prevailed upon to do the show twice, and most people who wanted to got to see him. They saw him again on Sunday night.

It is rare for the winners of the Media Hugo to turn up and collect their prizes. JMS was there, and he was clearly delighted. His acceptance speech was a gem. I'll paraphrase it for you.

- Winning a Hugo means a lot to me, and I'll try to explain why. When I was a kid, growing up in Brooklyn, my family were very poor. We couldn't afford books, so if I wanted to read I had to steal. I shoplifted books, took them home and read them, and when I'd finished I'd put them back and get something else. I quickly learned to look for those books that said "Hugo winner" on the cover, because that always meant they'd be good. I'm honoured. Thank you. -

The ceremony was taped, so someone will have the actual words which were much funnier, but I think I have the sentiment correct. Isn't it great when a fan wins a pro award?

Innocents Abroad

By this time you will be wondering what on Earth happened to the Australia bid. Most of you will know by now that I resigned from the bid committee shortly before the Worldcon. I'm not going to go into the reasons, the events at LA.con speak for themselves.

Not that the bid suffered, of course, and I didn't expect it to or I wouldn't have walked out. The final count was Zagreb 158, Melbourne 808. None of the Above got 33, and Alcatraz was a very respectable fourth with 19. The word "landslide" springs to mind.

But. But. It was always going to be like that. Hardly anyone in Australia seemed to believe me, but this result has been a foregone conclusion ever since the Las Vegas bid folded (possibly for longer). You only had to listen to the Americans talking about war zones and communists to know that. The Australian bid would have had to do something absolutely awful to lose. They tried hard, but they won nevertheless.

Am I being to harsh? Perhaps I am. But did I have a stream of people coming up to me saying "aren't the Australians nice helpful folk" and "don't they do good parties"? No. What I got was people complaining that the bid table staff were unhelpful (one of the SF2002 staff failed to buy a pre-support despite trying very hard) and that the parties were dull. In contrast, the Krazy Kroats, as they described themselves, were a barrel of fun.

Part of this was actually policy. Dick Smith had decided early on that most of the people who bothered to vote would be people who expected to be able to afford the trip. Such people would be well off, and middle-aged. They would not be greatly excited by the loud music and strong alcohol of the Zagreb parties. In contrast, the Australian parties were sedate. The wine was good (of course), and everyone said that Perry made an excellent bar tender. Other than that, there were a few pictures, the blow-up platypus, crackers and cheese, and the highly popular home-made Anzac cookies. A jar of Vegemite lurked menacingly in one corner, but thankfully didn't bite anyone.

It was functional, it got people through and fed, but it didn't do much for the image. Zagreb's parties were voted the best of the con. Australia's, had the Newsletter not been too polite to award such a thing, might have won "most boring".

It was after the vote, however, that things got really exciting. It is traditional for the winning bid to present details of its prices and guests at the Business Meeting on Sunday morning. The Aussiecon Three Progress Report #0 was duly handed out, and very quickly the meeting creased up with mirth. "Did you really mean", someone asked, "that your initial rates are fixed until December 1999?". Most Worldcons raise prices steadily throughout the run-up. "And what about the child rate?", asked another, "it says here that it is available to anyone born *before* Sept. 1987". Stephen Boucher made some lame comment about typing it up at 6:00 that morning. But why? They knew they were going to win when they arrived in LA. The true story of PR#0 is so bizarre and depressing that you probably wouldn't believe me if I told you. Suffice it to say that it was one of the reasons I cited in my resignation.

The Business Meeting, generous to a fault, allowed the bid to issue a corrected PR#0, which is just as well or we'd all be getting in for AU\$45 and the con would go bankrupt very quickly. In the meantime, however, people were finding other things to get angry about, and these were more serious.

The first thing that stood out was that the current price of a full A3 membership was US\$140, which was \$20 more than the equivalent for LoneStarCon 2, the 1997 Worldcon.

This was a serious price hike, and did not go down well. Part of the reason for this is the cost of the facilities. Convention space is more expensive here than in the US (less competition), and the expected smaller membership means less economies of scale. Nevertheless, things could have been easier had it not been for the reluctance of the bidcom to seek anything much in the way of sponsorship. Intersection's site was more expensive than ours, but it was largely paid for by sponsors.

The other reason for the high initial price is to safeguard Aussie fandom. Australians are not used to Worldcon membership purchase, and anyway are reluctant to buy anything until the last moment. Had a more traditional price escalation path been followed, Australian fans would have ended up subsidising overseas visitors to a significant extent. As I understand it, the plan was to start high and rise more slowly so that those people wise to the system who buy early had less of an advantage. Nevertheless, the tactic proved a serious gaffe. At one point when I was working on taking memberships one of the staff from the LA.con Information Desk came over and said "I think you guys should know that we've had a lot of people coming to us complaining about your prices". We were supposed to be getting good advice about pricing policy from people who claimed they knew the score. What happened to it?

Another point of dissension was the fact that, whilst pre-supporters who voted got their whole \$10 back in a discount off their membership, pre-supporters who did not vote only got \$5. Sharp-eyed readers of Marc Ortlieb's *SF Bullshead* will have noticed that in the initial prices published by Eric on the web site this was not the case. The pricing got changed at the convention. It would be interesting, if it didn't make you wonder how on Earth the people responsible for all this are going to manage to run a Worldcon.

The other really embarrassing thing about being an Australian in LA was the panel on Aussie fandom. The rest of Australian might not be aware of it, but as far as many Americans are concerned, two of the biggest names in Aussie fandom are John Foyster and John Bangsund. Those of you who said "who?" should, of course, be ashamed of your lack of historical knowledge. Yes, they are still alive, and occasionally they exchange fanzines with people they know in the US. Almost no one else in Australia does, so no one in America has heard of you.

So to the panel, put together, so I'm told, on the advice of Eric Lindsay as to who amongst the membership had their finger on the pulse of things Down Under. It was composed of Craig Hilton, Perry Middlemiss, and the aforementioned Mr. Foyster, possibly making his first fannish appearance since Aussiecon Two. Now Craig is a very nice guy, a whiz cartoonist, and pretty active in fandom. In WA, which, sadly, thanks to the tyranny of distance, is like asking someone from Hawaii to talk about US fandom. Perry and John probably know more about Australian fannish history than anyone, but their appearances at fannish events in Australia in recent years can be counted on the fingers of one hand (or, in John's case, more like the thumbs). This led to some interesting statements.

Did you know, for example, that the only SF fan living in Queensland is Leanne Framm? Or that all media cons in Australia are FerengiCons¹? I didn't. Fortunately the panel was

¹ FerengiCon is a term of endearment for those professionally run media cons at which members pay large sums of money to listen to a big name actor for an hour or so, get an autograph, and buy loads of worthless merchandise. This is not quite what I understand happened at Multiverse.

very poorly attended, and most of the unsuspecting Americans there to hear this nonsense were friends of mine whom I was able to disabuse of any funny notions. It was embarrassing nonetheless.

I don't blame the LA.con organisers for this. This did the best they could with the names they had to hand, and it was very kind of them to schedule such a panel. I am a little peeved that John and Perry did not have the good grace to admit that they didn't have a clue what they were talking about. But most of all, Aussie fandom has no one to blame but itself. If you are insular and xenophobic, people will get strange notions about you. Get out there and communicate guys. Trade your fanzines overseas. Participate in fannish newsgroups. If I can do it, anyone can. And, what is more, you'll end up with a whole lot of overseas friends before they arrive here in '99. Not forgetting that fan-hopping is one of the cheapest and most enjoyable ways of touring abroad. Ask Michael Jordan about his trip to Seattle.

Three Days of Glory

All good things, it is said, must come to an end. Conventions, relationships: they are all mortal. And so it was that Tuesday came around and Kevin and I headed back northwards. There was a brief re-kindling as we ran into Perry and Martin Tudor, off on their respective DUFF and TAFF trips in the care of Spike Parsons, at San Jose airport. Martin was wondering what to do with the Langford Hugo given into his care (the one for Best Fanzine). Sadly I could not possibly carry another.

Then it was off to the flat for a quick re-pack, lunch, and down to SFO for the flight to Heathrow. When we arrived, BA had a notice up saying that the flight would be delayed. It gave Kevin and I an extra two hours for the difficult job of changing the status of our relationship from lovers to just good friends. BA will never know how much I treasured those two hours.

And no, I am not going to explain all this. Rather too many people seem to know more about it than me already.

Fortunately, nothing in life is ever completely black. I might have been leaving behind something wonderful, and with more goodbyes due to come in England as well, but **I had a Hugo.**

Look, I know I'm being completely over the top about this. But it was the Hugo for Best fan Writer, the one that I really covet. I'm never likely to actually win it, but I did have it in my possession for three whole days. Give me a break, guys, will you. I needed it.

Of course I then got totally covered in embarrassment because, despite by best efforts at packing it, BA still managed to bash the box so thoroughly that a couple of little bits of plastic got broken. They weren't too visible, and of course that silver rocket is as solid as a Volvo, but I was still mortified. Dave, I promise you, if I ever win one, you can come and break it, OK?

Eventually Thursday evening arrived and the Hugo and I made our way down to The Tun. An unfortunate communication lapse in the US meant that Dave wasn't as surprised as I had hoped to see it, but the assembled throngs of Pommie fandom gaped in wonder at

the famous trophy all the same. Ace reporter, Alison Scott, was on hand to record the event for posterity on her digital camera, and the results can be seen on the *Plotka* web site (<http://www.fuggles.demon.co.uk/Plotka/ColSupp2.htm>).

It was great to see you all again, guys, though one evening hardly seemed long enough to get to see everyone. I guess I'll be back again one day.

In Your Face Fanzines

Attitude. You either have it or you don't. If you do, you are being treated to some of the finest fan writing around at the moment. If you don't, you are missing out badly.

Sometimes it is pretty embarrassing to be a Pom. You get thrashed at just about every sport you can name, your country is heading fast towards third world status, and everyone expects you to be incapable of cooking. However, the one thing Poms can do better than anyone else in the World is write fanzines. Look at Langford, for example: 13 Hugos, and no sign of the flow stopping. If it does, it might be another UK 'zine that topples him.

Attitude is a very different animal to *Ansible*. It has an editorial team², many contributors, and is thick and meaty, more in the mould of something like *FosFax*. This makes it more difficult to distribute overseas, but, as I mentioned above, if you don't see it you are missing out. I've only seen two issues, but both of them were cram full of interesting and insightful articles. There was even a piece by Mary Gentle explaining the theory behind her White Crow stories. And there are a lot of good cartoons and long-running layout jokes³. It is the sort of fanzine I would be proud to be asked to contribute to. What more can I say?

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London: Pop Capital of the World

There's not a huge amount I miss about England, but shopping in Australia is not quite what it is in the UK. Thus my trips back to Blighty are always crammed with fixes at Marks & Spencer and HMV. This time the latter excelled themselves, having a huge CD sale at 3 for GBP15. Needless to say, I bought lots. Two of these, doubtless reflecting my mood, were compilations by Leonard Cohen and Lou Reed (*Berlin* is probably the most suicide-inducing record ever made, but I still love it). But there are few things better for a girl with a broken heart than a Kirsty MacColl song.

² Pam Wells, John Dallman and Michael Abbott.

³ In honour of the *Attitude* review, this is the first issue of Emerald City to feature footnotes.

⁴ You can always tell long-time UK fans by the fact that they have CIX accounts.

Kirsty is probably best remembered for her stunning duet with The Pogues on *Fairy Tale of New York*, still by far the best Xmas record ever produced, but her own songs are little gems in their own right. The music is fairly standard bubble pop that could almost have been written for Bananarama, but the lyrics are magnificent studies in adolescent female angst. The combination of sugary music and splintered relationships brings to mind a girl whose brain is still reading *Just Seventeen* but whose heart is learning lessons you really need *Cosmo* to understand. In *New England* she is just discovering that she has been taken for a ride:

I loved you then and I love you still.
I put you on a pedestal, you put me on the pill.

But cannot give up the romantic notions:

I saw some shooting stars last night,
But they were only satellites.
It's wrong to wish on space hardware.
I wish, I wish, I wish you'd care.

Great rhyme that, wish I'd thought of it.

In *Terry*, on the other hand, she has already found someone else and this leads to some stunningly good put-down lines:

Sorry if your heart is broken.
Why's your mouth just hanging open?
Don't look so surprised,
I've found another guy.

Or:

You thought you were such a smartie,
But Terry knows about karate.
There's other things he's good at too.
Terry's not a bit like you.

I wonder if guys develop romantic attachments to songs with their name in them. If they do, Mr. Frost, I'll do you a tape. In my own case I have developed a bizarre fondness for Bruce Springsteen's *Sherry Darling*. Please don't ever tell my mother about this, it has nothing to do with her. It is just that the lyrics sound like they were written by a male version of Kirsty MacColl and they always make me giggle.

There's a hot sun beating on the flat top,
She keeps talking she'll be walking that last block,
She can take the subway, back to the ghetto tonight.

Well I got some beer and the highway's free,
I got you and baby you got me,
Hey, hey, hey, whad'ya say, Sherry darling.

I'd say yes, Bruce, if I knew where to find you.

Footnote

I was hoping to have reviews of the SCA Coronet Revel and the latest Patricia Keneally novel as well, but this issue is already over-long and I'm over-tired so they will have to wait for next time.

Not that I am short of material. Thanks to having been to a Worldcon, I have a large pile of books to read, including *Excession* (Iain Banks), *Ringworld Throne* (Larry Niven) and *Mage Heart* (Jane Routely). Once I manage to find time to get down to Slow Glass these will be joined by *Decline & Fall* (Sheri Tepper) and the collection of short stories set in the Sandman universe. I'm going to be a busy girl.

Also in the next issue: Footy Wars. It is the 100th anniversary of the Aussie Rules Football League, and for the first time in all those years we have a Melbourne v Sydney final. Civil war is expected. Stay tuned for a report from the front lines.

Finally, a few words of thanks are in order:

- to Mike Glycer and the LA.con III crew for a wonderful week's entertainment;
- to Steve Perrin for putting me on some panels;
- to Janice Gelb, Kathy Sanders and Byron Connell for letting me poke around behind the scenes at the major events;
- to David Brin for a fascinating discussion, and for vowing to continue to explore gender themes even after being shat on from a great height by feminist writers;
- to Dave Langford for winning that Hugo, and to Martin and Jean for letting me carry it;
- to Fiona and Bernie for their hospitality in London;
- to Kevin for a magical year;
- and to Dierdre for being there when I desperately needed a shoulder.

Until next time, this has been Emerald City #13, a lost and lonely perzine in search of friendly readers.

Ciao,

Cheryl