

# EMERALD CITY

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## Introduction

It is a warm, humid Sunday afternoon, and you hardly need a weather forecast to feel the threat of thunder. Melbourne is like this. We get hot days - yesterday a tentative 34 or so Centigrade, just a practice run for the low 40's we'll get hit with early next year - but it never lasts, and we always pay for it. As the old saying goes, Melbourne has weather, not climate.

So this is Christmas. I've pontificated on the ridiculousness of reindeer and fur-trimmed red suits in Australia before, and I guess if I stay here long enough I will get used to it. But right now I can't get into the spirit at all. I have a few days off, and I'm going to amuse myself trying out a few recipes for things like venison and kangaroo. I may go to the Test Match one day. Other than that, it will be quiet. But it is long past the time to swear off Christmas Parties. I don't have the stamina for this any more.

Some of you may remember that last issue I promised that this one would contain either a selection of book reviews or reports of all the parties I had been to. Somewhat to my surprise, several people wrote to say they would prefer the party reports. This rather upset me, because I enjoy doing book reviews and it was worrying that the stuff I was producing was so dull that details of my private life was deemed better reading. But I guess that a tendency towards voyeurism is fairly strong amongst the fanzine community. Some editors, especially in APAs, seem to do nothing but talk about themselves and their lives, and it is popular. So, just to prove what a shameless panderer to fannish consumer tastes I am, let's go party.

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## Ligging galore

I guess things started on November 23<sup>rd</sup> with Lillian and Kerry's Thanksgiving party. These two wonderful people are friends I have met through the SCA, and they were holding a Thanksgiving party because they are ex-pat Californians. When Lillian and I first met it amused us mightily that they had once lived on El Camino Real in Mountain View. The world is smaller than you think.

Of course, Thanksgiving in Australia is a little different from the traditional image, although I'm sure that in LA and Miami the turkey is also served cold. I tried my hand at pecan pie and clam chowder, both of which turned out rather well. But this was Australia, so the focal point of the party was not just the food, but also the pool. It was a warm late-

spring day. The sort of day on which having friends with a heated jacuzzi in their back garden seems the height of civilisation.

That was an afternoon party. From there I went straight to another one. But this was not just a party, it was a Fabian party.

Now what, you may ask, is so special about that? Well, dear reader, had you spent any time in Melbourne you would surely know, for Fabian's parties are legendary. There was, for example, the time when he filled a flat with half a ton of sand for a beach party. Or the time when he built a river through his house, complete with a waterfall in the hallway. Fabian does not do things by halves. Now admittedly this was not one of his more extravagant affairs. It was a "bo" party, for which everyone was encouraged to wear or carry or be something involving a bow, or a bough, or a beau, or something. Having been a little rushed, Fabian had merely wrapped a giant red ribbon around the roof and covered the main room with small bows and ribbon intended for present wrapping. It was quite restrained.

The other thing about Fabian's parties is Hell's Surrender. This is a vicious-looking green liquid reminiscent in colour of Midori but tasting of vodka and smelling of something industrial. It is quite probably lethal in sufficient quantities, and most people sensibly used it as an ingredient for cocktails. I tried a glass of it neat, and decided that I had then had quite enough alcohol to last me the rest of the night. I stuck to soft drinks from then on, but that didn't stop me from having one hell of a hangover the next morning.

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The following weekend was relatively relaxed - just George and Kerri's housewarming. This was a splendid affair, enlivened by some excellent music and the presence of Melbourne's favourite South Australians, Medge and Bean. As George said to me later, there is nothing like having inter-state guests to get you a good crowd to your party. Throwing modesty to the winds, I must confess another success with the cooking. Having learnt my lesson over the Mexican evening, when I am not cooking for SCA people (who are used to eating weird stuff) I now provide Australians with as plain a fare as I can manage. In this case it was a type of Scottish meat pasty called a Forfar Bridie. For the benefit of American readers, a pasty is a sort of meat pie, not a, well, you know.....

You may be wondering how I end up cooking for all these parties. It is not because my culinary expertise is legendary in Melbourne, but because bringing food to parties is an established Australian tradition. It is almost expected of you, although some people wimp out and just bring chips (crisps to you Poms). Given the trouble that EC regulations are causing in the UK for things like SCA revels, I can't see this custom taking off elsewhere.

Another strange thing about Australian parties is that if you bring drink you expect to have it for your own personal use throughout the evening. This is in marked contrast to the UK where everything just goes into the kitchen to be used by anyone. It is an excellent example of the militant individualism of Australian society. Anywhere else and it would be taken as extreme miserliness, but here people with otherwise open and friendly dispositions become guarded when asked to donate anything. This does not sit easily with the socialist attitudes of most Australians, but I think the difference is that they don't see public services as being paid for by them. Somehow the link between taxes and welfare pay-outs is just not made. There is an article in this once I understand it properly.

Another weekend, another party. Or rather a revel. The William Marshall Tournament is one of the highlights of the SCA calendar in Melbourne. This year it attracted some 180 people, including the Queen of the West herself. I have to say that it was not one of the

better revels I have attended. It was a very warm day, which discouraged people from wearing their best velvet finery, and the hall we were using, although remarkably mediaeval looking, was far too stuffy for such a gathering. Many of the revellers spent the evening outside on the lawns rather than dancing. Also the presence of the Queen led to an over-long a very boring court, and to a lot of people spending most of their time huddled away in corners plotting. A shame. But the food was good and, as ever more than plentiful.

Sunday saw the annual Nova Mob Yum Cha (UK readers will know this as Dim Sim - don't ask me which is the authentic Chinese usage) at a very fine Szechuan restaurant. This turned out to be far better attended than most club meetings, including Roman Orszanski on holiday from Adelaide and a rarely seen Damien Broderick. It was a splendid spread, and Terry, Jane Routley and I revealed ourselves as secret Cthulhu cultists by our passion for chilli fried tentacles.

After this, and the previous night, I was stuffed stupid and spent the rest of the day slumped on Terry's sofa watching the last five episodes of Babylon 5 season 3. The quality of Straczynski's plotting still continues to amaze me. OK, so people have done better, but for popular television it is outstanding. The only thing that really jarred was a strange jump in Z'ha'dum. It was a UK version we were watching, and this made me suspect a piece of crass cutting. Must try to find an original sometime.

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The following week was well into office party season. Theses are generally tedious affairs, but on the Tuesday I moved on from one to something more interesting. The party was being given by a video conferencing company and I'd been invited by my new friend, Jan Whitaker whom I'd met at Kerri & George's. Jan is an ex-pat Arizonan and we found we had a lot to talk about regarding the difficulties of doing business in Australia when you are a foreign female. Like me, Jan is also fairly adventurous when it comes to food and we were both pleased to find someone with whom to try different restaurants. That night we had arranged to try Mongolian.

I don't know how many of you will be familiar with Mongolian Barbecue restaurants. There is a good one in Portland that Kevin and I tried to get to during Potlach last year, but we were late and they had shut for the afternoon when we got there. But Jan had never heard of them so they can't be very common, even in the US. The one in Melbourne claims to be the only one in the Southern Hemisphere.

The idea is deceptively simple. You pay a flat fee for your meal and on arrival are given a bowl. Along the wall is a series of bins containing food. The first few held very thinly sliced meats: beef, pork, lamb, chicken. These were followed by sliced vegetables: onion, capsicum, carrot, bean sprouts - the usual stir-fry stuff. Finally there was a row of bowls of sauces: soy, chili, peanut and so on. You select what you want to eat and take the bowl along to the chef. He has a huge drum-shaped cooker, the belly of which is filled with fire, and which is supposed to be based on the war shields of the Mongol hordes, the original cooking implement. It does not take long to sear the food.

Now given that you make it up yourself, the chances of your producing a superb culinary delight are not high. On the other hand, a more freshly cooked meal you could not hope for. It smells great too. And you can go back as often as you like. I felt it was a little over-priced for what it was by Melbourne standards, but then it is different. If anyone in Melbourne is interested, it is at the far top end of Exhibition Street.

And so to the MSFC party on the 14<sup>th</sup>. As a committee member, I had, of course, been busy with this for some time. We had had two evenings of prop building at the club, I spent the morning cooking (shepherd's pie, and a rice salad which proved too adventurous for Aussie tastes <sigh>), and the afternoon helping with the set-up. I must say that Chris Ballis did a tremendous job with the decorations. The theme was Irwin Allen, and the place was well decked out with props suggesting such SF classics as *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Lost in Space* and *Land of the Giants*. Our normally drab meeting hall looked quite splendid.

Where I think Chris did let us down a bit was in the music. There were some damn good dance tracks on the tapes, but most of them appeared in the last half hour and others during or shortly after the meal. A lot of the rest was standard club dance music which is OK in a place where people have gone to dance but does not drag people out onto the floor. Chris, quite rightly, told me that if I wasn't happy I could do the music myself next time. I accepted the challenge. You have been warned.

The party was organised jointly with Enterprise, a local Trek club, and the local Dr. Who club. This worked well from the point of view of having more people to help with the organisation, but I'm not sure that the three groups melded too well. The Dr. Who fans seemed to be mainly boys in their mid teens, and behaved accordingly. One of them even managed to throw up, which for a party in a teetotal church hall is quite an achievement. The Enterprise crowd, on the other hand, included a lot of parents with young children, and this resulted in us suffering party games such as Pass the Parcel, and Musical Chairs.

We did have a costume parade, but there were so few entries I ended up making use of a mask I'd brought along just in case to make up numbers. Chris and Wendy were absolutely superb as IDAK and one of the other androids from *Lost in Space*, and there were a few other competent entries, but it was very disappointing. I don't think many people even knew we would be having one, or what to do if we did. And in any case the whole thing was made a mockery by the judges pointedly not giving Chris & Wendy a prize of any sort.

There were very few MSFC members there. This was partly because the publicity fliers for the most part mysteriously omitted our name (and I do know who was responsible and she won't get away with it again). It was partly because our members are older and have pretty full calendars at that time of year, and partly because of an accidental clash with the Star Wars club party. But having said that, if they had been there, few of them would have enjoyed it much. As Treasurer I am reasonably happy because we look like we will be making a small profit, but from a general point of view I am fairly swayed by comments made about having something better targeted at our members, and perhaps at a less congested time of year.

By the way, you can still buy soft drinks made with revolting food colourants in Australia. Something bright green with a few pellets of dry ice in it makes a wonderful drink for an SF party.

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Despite having been busy with the clean-up until 2 in the morning I somehow managed to drag myself out of bed and off to the western suburbs for the Babylon 5 club barbecue. Although fairly sparsely attended, this went very well. It was a glorious day, the park was beautiful, we ate well, and the conversation was excellent. It was, in fact, far more of an MSFC type event than the party. I also got to try out something interesting I had acquired the night before.

I have no idea who brought it, but this unassuming little bottle found itself on the kitchen bench at the MSFC party. The label said it was “mild peri-peri sauce”, listed the ingredients as “spices”, and claimed it was a traditional Portuguese recipe. George decided to sample some, acquired a pained expression, and headed for a glass of water. It is one of the hottest sauces I have tasted in a long time. We have someone of Portuguese extraction on the mailing list. John, could you please tell us some more about this stuff, and where can I get a hot one?

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## Grigori revisited

Last issue, you will remember, I was half way through Storm Constantine’s *Stalking Tender Prey*. You will be pleased to know that I have now finished it and, thanks to the kind offices of Alan Stewart, have also read the sequel, *Scenting Hallowed Blood*. So, have foul, tentacled monsters devoured the inhabitants of the small, sleepy village? Not quite, dear friends, not quite.

To start with, the book gradually lost its Lovecraftian air as the action built up. In some ways this was a shame as I was enjoying the small village atmosphere, but at some point any fantasy novel has to part company with reality. The second half of the book was much more in a traditional horror mould with nasty events coming thick and fast and, in the end, a reasonable sized, if rather restrained, bloodbath. The second book changed character yet again, beginning in thriller mould in central London, and dropping into something akin to one of Dion Fortune’s novels towards the end.

Along the way much of the Goth air seemed to evaporate. The second book’s cover still shows the tall, pale figure in black, but after a short sojourn in London’s clubland, the action makes its way to Cornwall where the whole idea of Gothness seems somehow slightly ridiculous. Storm tells me that she wasn’t intending to write a Goth novel anyway and would like to get away from that image. I think that maybe to do this completely she will have to stop using personal experiences in her work, and possibly change publisher, because even if she wants a change of image you can bet that they will want to stick with it. In any case, I applaud her intentions and wish her best of luck.

But if her fallen angels, the Grigori, are not Goth-vampires, what are they? Well, fallen angels of course, but they also bear a marked resemblance to Shadowrun elves. I guess this analogy will mean little to many of you, but the idea is quite simple. Here is a different species which shares the planet with us. Although they can all do a little magic, most of them are not greatly different from us. Their elders jealously guard their secret knowledge and behave as if they run their world. But there are some amongst them who are so old, and so powerful, that little in this existence can surprise or challenge them. Such people are seriously dangerous, and often quite mad. Get the picture?

So what is it all about? Storm, like me, is a student of mythology and loves re-writing the stories. In this case the story in question is The Fall, but as portrayed in the Book of Enoch and various associated occult texts rather than the short, simple version in Genesis. To say more would probably spoil the story for you, so I will content myself with expressing my approval as a student of myth as well as a reader of novels. I should also add that there is some splendid misdirection. It is a long time since I found myself so totally taken in by the

direction of a novel as I discovered myself to be at the end of *Stalking Tender Prey*. I'm looking forward to the third book.

*Stalking Tender Prey & Scenting Hallowed Blood* - Storm Constantine - Signet - softback

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## Millenium Fiction

North America, 1959, a group of young college girls meet for the first time and become friends. One of their number, Sophy, is stunningly beautiful and scared stiff of boys. In order to protect her from the endless stream of suitors, her friends give her a make-over so that she looks dowdy. Along with the poorly fitting clothes and glasses, they advise her to carry a large, heavy book everywhere so as to look studious. The book in question is *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. It becomes a symbol for the group, and they form a club, the Decline and Fall Club, in which they swear to each other to stand on their own two feet as women and not Decline or Fall from that noble position.

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As many of you will know, Sherri Tepper is one of my favourite authors. Her early fantasy stuff is, I'm told, not very good. I haven't gone back to check this. I was introduced to her work with *Grass*, which was a Hugo nominee. Since then she has produced a series of fine novels that combine SF and fantasy themes and most of which have a sharp feminist edge to them. Of particular note are *The Gate to Women's Country*, which is a thoughtful, and sometimes hilarious, look at a feminist utopia, and *Beauty*, a startling re-interpretation of the Sleeping Beauty story which lives up to its name. Tepper has her faults, and we'll come back to a few of them later, but I always look forward to a new novel from her with considerable eagerness.

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Forty-one years later, the girls are grown older, wiser and, inevitably, sadder, but they still try to adhere to their vow. Once a year they meet up at the home of one member and assure their friends that they have not Declined nor Fallen in the intervening months. And for most of them that is mostly true.

Carolyn is married and has an adult daughter. When her husband retired from the FBI she gave up her legal career and moved to the country with him. Ophelia is married too, to a famous journalist who is never home, but she is still working: a doctor in the Manhattan South Receiving Infirmary (Misery to its staff). Bettiann's husband is in advertising. She does not work, having swapped the endless round of beauty pageants her mother had forced her through for the equally artificial life of a society hostess. She is still bulimic. Jessamine keeps company with the chimps and monkeys who are her research subjects as she struggles to unravel the mysteries of genomes. The primates make better company than her drunken, philandering husband. Agnes, married to God, is now head of her abbey, which also happens to run one of the best oyster farms in an America whose coastal waters can no longer support fish. Faye, still a militant lesbian, is now an internationally respected sculptress.

And Sophy? Frightened, uncomprehending Sophy? Thoughtful, questioning Sophy? Sophy, who travelled the world recording stories of man's inhumanity to woman? Sophy who spent all the money she got from her books establishing shelters for battered wives? Sophy lost hope. There was a bridge, a fast flowing river, an abandoned car. Sophy, it would appear, had Declined and Fallen, terminally.

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*Much of Tepper's Science Fiction is written in answer to the question 'How might Society be changed?'*

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That was Anne Wilson, from a long and perceptive article on Tepper in *Attitude* #8. It is spot on, as is Anne's contention that Tepper's answers to this question are frequently unacceptable. She has tried covert social engineering, submission to a parasitic mind-controlling fungus, wiping out most of the population and, in her previous novel, *Shadow's End*, God turning up in person to flush His failed experiment down the plug hole of the universe. The majority of this has been done in a science fantasy setting.

*Gibbon's Decline and Fall* is different. Whereas before Tepper has always used an invented setting to detail the villainy of her enemies (primarily males and patriarchal religions), the new book is set fair and square in our world. The onset of the Millennium is used as the pretext for postulating a resurgence of the type of ideas she despises, but she has needed no artifice to find examples of evil with which to terrify us. Any reader of the excellent *Marie Claire* could have done the same thing: brides burned for their dowries in India, girls "circumcised" in the Sudan, girl babies exposed in China so that their parents can try again to make their single allowed child a boy, raped women jailed in Pakistan for their "immorality", doctors at abortion clinics murdered by religious mobs, and unmarried mothers deprived of welfare in the supposedly enlightened west to discourage them from breeding again. In many ways the real world is more horrible than anything a fantasy author can imagine.

But, as usual, Tepper has no easy solution, no evolutionary path to a better society. Is she really as despairing as she makes out? Does she really want some avenging angel to come down from Heaven and cleanse the world of its wickedness? I can't tell, but I would love to get to talk to her and ask.

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Shortly before the annual DFC meeting, Carolyn is asked to take on a new case. An uneducated girl, without even the sense to know she was pregnant, gave birth to her rape-engendered child in a quiet alley and disposed of the unpleasant, bloody lump in a nearby skip. The local District Attorney, a known misogynist, has taken on the prosecution as part of a moral crusade aimed at boosting his chances of being elected Governor. Carolyn calls on her friends for help. But there is much more to the case than meets the eye. Her opponent is but a tool for the vast and shadowy American Alliance which masterminds right wing groups around the world. How can six old women living on past idealism hope to challenge an international conspiracy?

Perhaps Sophy would have known, but she is dead, isn't she? The women are not so sure. They have been having visions, and the body was never found. Perhaps they should check up on their old friend, but how? She came, she said, from an obscure Amerindian tribe in New Mexico. But how much did they really know about her? Who was she?

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Needless to say, it is Tepper, the writing is wonderful, the emotion it generates is intense. I loved it. But ever since my long and fascinating discussion with David Brin about *Glory Season* I have had new criteria by which to judge feminist SF. Once again, Tepper fails on both counts.

On fairness, yes she does have some good men: Carolyn's husband and friends are solid, reliable and caring. But there are no bad women. Sure some of them are taken in by the lies men have fed them and slot apparently happily into their controlled lives, some of them are just too poor, stupid and desperate to know better, but none of them are ever motivated by greed to share in the oppression. Tepper, it would seem, has never heard of Margaret Thatcher.

And, as I have already said, she once again falls back on the unacceptable solution.

Maybe I am an idealist, maybe I am just young and foolish, but I don't want to give up looking for a solution that does not involve mass disease, death and destruction. And I don't believe that any answer we come up with in that way can be any better than what we have now. Unacceptable solutions lead to unacceptable results. I will keep reading Sherri Tepper's books in the hope that she manages to find an answer that is less apocalyptic, and I will continue to enjoy her fine writing. But I think I will continue to be sad and disappointed by her endings.

*Gibbon's Decline and Fall* - Sherri Tepper - Bantam - hardcover

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## A Mage in the Heart

Now this was scary. I've reviewed books before by people I knew who were already famous. Sometimes I have been less than enthusiastic in doing so. But I know that I am an insignificant cog in the great machine of fiction reviewing. Nothing I say is likely to affect the likes of, say, Neil Gaiman. Besides, I already know that little Neil does is ever duff.

This was different. This was the first time I have had to review a first novel by someone I regard as a close friend. I have a lot of respect for Jane Routley as a person, and I enjoy her company, but before reading *Mage Heart* I had never seen any of her writing. I was considerably worried as to what I would make of it. And Jane, for her part, had revealed the occasional glimpse of nerves concerning what the Queen Bitch of Melbourne fanzine writers would make of her work. I managed to put it off for a month or two by reading other stuff, but finally I plucked up the courage, and two chapters in I was sighing with happy relief.

Before I go any further I should point out that Jane is not, in my opinion, in the same elevated company as Sherri Tepper or Ursula le Guin. But this is her first novel, and I have high hopes.

In many ways, *Mage Heart* is a simple fantasy novel. At first glance it could easily have been written by Barbara Hambly, Marion Zimmer Bradley or, Goddess forbid, Anne McCaffrey. The story is, after all, a simple tale of a young girl sorcerer from a backward, puritanical region suddenly being asked to act as magical bodyguard to the Duke's mistress, and being stalked by demons and necromancers as a result.

But it is not just that. Dion (interesting choice of name, that, Jane) is indeed naïve and innocent, and mentally scarred by her loveless, puritanical upbringing. She also falls in love with both a kindly young painter and a dark, handsome nobleman. It is also true that Kitten Avignon is far from the flighty, fashion and sex-obsessed strumpet that Dion takes her for. This is all standard fantasy stuff. What is different is that Jane does not just go along with the accepted memes of the genre, but instead takes the opportunity to make pointed comments about the role of women in mediaeval societies and some sideswipes at organised religion that would make Sherri Tepper glow with approval. It is, if you like, fantasy with a brain.

I should also mention that the story rattles along in an engaging manner which had me finishing it in a couple of days. OK, so the writing wasn't that difficult, it came easy on the eye and the mind. But that, of course, is just what the genre requires. I understand that Jane has been contracted to write two further novels. Whether this will result in a trilogy about Dion I don't know, but *Mage Heart* bears none of the cliff-hanging signs of a premeditated series. Guess I'll have to offer to cook some chili fried tentacles and ask.

Good on yer, Jazza. And best of luck with the sequels.

*Mage Heart* - Jane Routley - AvoNova - hardcover

## Aardvarks for sale

Time out for a little business. As many of you will know, I have recently been elected Treasurer of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Given that the club finances are not in the best of states, I am keen to find ways of raising money, and one of the things we have for sale is a rather fine fanzine.

It occurs to me that, come 1999, a large number of overseas fans will be descending on Melbourne for a convention. One of the things that peripatetic fans like to do is make contact with their local counterparts. But, since the mass gaffiations that followed the local war that was Aussiecon Two, there has been little contact between Australian fandom and the rest of the world. Few of us can afford to travel overseas on a regular basis, and few of the younger fans produce fanzines. It would be good, I think, to re-establish a bit of dialog.

One of the ways we can do this is through *Ethel the Aardvark*, the club magazine. Under the newly started editorship of Ian Gunn, the 'zine will be carrying regular news columns and articles about what goes on Down Here. You get six issues a year, and come 1999 anyone who has been reading *Ethel* regularly should have a good grasp of who is who is Melbourne fandom. It seems to me like it is a good deal.

Overseas membership of the MSFC is a mere US\$15 a year, or GBP10. I'm in the process of sorting out agents in the US and UK, and I'll see a fair few of you in February and March, but if you are really in a hurry, email me and we'll sort something out. I think you will enjoy what we have to offer.

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## Worldcon doings

Back in November, Aussiecon Three held its first Annual General Meeting. It was not well publicised, but some of us managed to find out about it and get the word around. There was not a good crowd, but at least there were a few ordinary fans there.

Not a lot happened at the meeting except that the Board re-appointed itself, and lots of people expressed their disappointment at the arrogant and elitist attitude displayed by Eric Lindsay in various fanzines. Since then, it all went quiet.

A couple of weeks back, there was a brief email message from Mark Loney, who chaired the meeting, letting us know that Perry Middlemiss had been appointed chairman of the convention. This has been greeted with a fair amount of approval in Melbourne. Not that we don't like Alan Stewart, but it is clear that his quiet, unobtrusive efficiency is better suited to administrative roles than leadership. A lot of people also said "Perry who?", but Perry has already expressed his willingness to come and speak to the MSFC about his plans. Local fans please look out for our next calendar for more news.

It is axiomatic that you can't appoint a committee until you have appointed a chairman, and I don't expect Perry to make any announcements until after the holiday, but hopefully we will be seeing a bit more action from A3 in the near future. Here's hoping. This is a tremendous opportunity for Melbourne fandom, and Australia in general. I wouldn't want to see us blow it.

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## Footnote

Those of you who are more technically aware will notice that this issue is not coming from the LunaCity remailer. I asked last time that you not reply to the list and someone did. It was probably an accident, but until Kevin and I can figure out how to fix the system so that this can't happen (and there is no danger of anyone's personal correspondence to me accidentally ending up going to everyone), I have asked him to disable the list. I hope to get it fixed in February.

In the meantime, Compuserve is dragging itself kicking and screaming into the modern world. As you may have noticed, I now have a less cryptic email address, though you'll probably find this listed as coming from the number-based one. 'Tis only an alias, after all.

Still on the reading list: *Otherworld* by Tad Williams (with I am enjoying immensely), *Idoru* by William Gibson and *Scale of Dragon, Tooth of Wolf* by Sue Isle. I've also noticed that *Space Precinct* has finally made it out to Australia.

Next issue may also contain some news of the nuptial travels of Guilia De Cesare and Steve Davies who will be passing through Melbourne after their wedding in Tasmania on January 18<sup>th</sup>. Please note that using issues of *Plotka* for confetti will probably not be appreciated.

Congratulations are due to Justin and Jenny Ackroyd on the birth of someone or other. I've not been able to find anyone who can give me the gen. Terry said he was fairly sure it was "a chick baby", which is actually acceptable Aussie for female and not sexist slang. If anyone is interested, mail me for more details.

Meanwhile, I am off to enjoy the sunshine.

Happy New Year,

Cheryl

This 'zine supports Janice Murray for DUFF