

EMERALD CITY

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An occasional 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at cherylmorgan@compuserve.com or on line at <http://www.emcit.com>

Introduction

Another road issue, another explanation. This magazine has nothing to do with the City of Seattle, though I do think it is very kind of the Seattle Worldcon bid to advertise my 'zine on their t-shirts. Full explanation on my web site.

Of course the 'zine is being published in Seattle this issue, because I'll be handing out paper copies at Potlach 6 before I am able to do so at MSFC or BASFA. The email and web versions will go out earlier, of course, but, as I keep getting told, they are not "real" fanzines and so don't count. Collectors amongst you should therefore look out for the Potlach edition. The BASFA one the following Monday may or may not be a second printing.

Yes, that was heavy sarcasm. The reason for it is buried somewhere in the Boskone report.

In the meantime, if you do pick this up at Potlach, welcome. In view of the convention, I have stuffed the 'zine full of reviews of books by Australian authors. Janice Murray, Eric Lindsay and I will probably be running a micro-programme item on Aussie writers sometime during the con, and I will also have some copies of #12, which also features Australian writers, available.

In the meantime, because I know my regular readers are far more interested in my sordid personal life than in books, some travelogue.

On the road again

Melbourne, Sunday 9th

It is hot and sticky. Again. The weather forecast predicts yet another day of temperatures in excess of 30 C. Well at least it has come down from being in excess of 40. OK, I know this is Australia, but it is Melbourne. Weather like this might be the norm in Sydney, Adelaide and Perth, and a welcome cold snap in Darwin, but here it is unusual. About 5 C above average, in fact. Guess whose flat doesn't have air conditioning?

You see, Melbourne is one of those nice, balmy places where the weather is OK most of the time. It drizzles it bit much, and you get the odd few days of too hot or too cold, but serious weather catches us out.

When Giulia de Cesare and Steve Davies were in Australia, we had some pretty serious forest fires. Three people died, and a great fuss was made of the heroism of the volunteer

fire fighters. Such things are great media events. In this past week, many people have died of heat-induced heart attacks. There were five in one day. The media hardly mentioned it. Funny how our priorities go, isn't it.

Boston, Thursday 13th

Snow.

Well, I exaggerate a bit. There wasn't any snow in Boston. But flying here yesterday I found the northern US blanketed in a uniform, white carpet all the way from the Sierra Nevada to the east coast. And it was snowing in Pittsburgh when we stopped to refuel, so much so that we were an hour late leaving due to having to wait in line for the aircraft to be steam blasted free of ice and snow.

Anyway, it was cold.

Framingham, Friday 14th

OK, today it snowed.

Massachusetts in winter reminds me rather of Pepperland under the Blue Meanies. The grey of the concrete malls blends seamlessly with the grey of the tarmac, the grey of the denuded trees, and the dirty white of the snow. There is no colour, save for the occasional false gleam of the infamous Golden Arches. And yet, deep in their concrete fastnesses, the people of Massachusetts manage to produce food of a quantity and quality that I had hitherto only associated with Melbourne and San Francisco. In search of a substantial lunch, Kevin and I found a branch of the Legal Seafood Company and dined splendidly on clam chowder ("as served at Presidential inaugurations") and a range of other fishy delights. Yum.

The Sheraton Tara, where Boskone is held, is a large hotel just off exit 12 of the Massachusetts Turnpike. It is awesome in its awfulness, managing an appalling mixture of sub-Camelot crenelations and carved wood, painted on Tudor half-timbering, and the very worst of cutesy peasant pseudo-authentic Irish nonsense, begorrah. Quite nauseating. But, it was warm and dry, which was just what the Australian and Californian delegations needed.

By the way, for those of you who don't know, Boskone is the annual convention of the New England Science Fiction Association (NESFA). It is called Boskone rather than BosCon because Boskone is the name of the evil empire in E.E. Doc Smith's Lensman stories. This was to be their 34th annual convention.

My first experience of a NESFA-run event was not encouraging. I arrived at registration to find that they had lost my membership. They did have my banquet ticket, which was kind of suspicious, and I did point out that I was hardly likely to have come all this way from Australia just to defraud them of a \$30 convention fee. Nevertheless, the guy in charge was adamant: no membership, no convention, go away. So I did, at which point he had second thoughts and came rushing after me. I could, he said, come to the convention, provided that I bought a membership. By an extreme effort of will I managed to avoid eviscerating him on the spot.

Of course, none of this would have happened were it not for the fact that they didn't know me from Eve. Little did they know that they were dealing with the travelling companion of

the great Kevin Standlee. A little later in the evening, a few words in the ear of Ben Yalow had everything sorted. Sometimes it is kind of useful to be able to pull strings.

That night Kevin and I, ably assisted by Kathryn Daugherty, ran a San Francisco in 2002 bid party. As Eric Lindsay and Martin Hoare did sterling work keeping me company on the door, we had a real international flavour to things. Some people even mistook us for an Aussiecon Three party. The event was very well attended, continued long into the early hours of the next morning, and seemed to be very successful. East coast fandom made a note in its collective consciousness that we had had the courtesy to turn up to their major event, but Seattle had not.

Framingham, Saturday 15th

The programme, when I finally got hold of a copy, was very interesting. The main streams appeared to be hard science, mythology and fannishness. Of particular interest was FanHistoricon, a sub-convention at which Old Fart Fans of all ages could gather together and bemoan the “fact” that Things Aren’t What They Used To Be. There was, for example, a panel entitled “Where have all the fanzines gone”, at which we concluded that there were now more of them than ever. Similarly the panel investigating why there were no more fannish musicals was forced to conclude that the tradition was alive and well.

A particular thing that annoys me about old time fanzine fans is their insistence that anything distributed electronically, or published on the Web, cannot be a fanzine, and that these evil technologies will bring the death of fannish writing. They seem to have forgotten the furore that took place when photocopying and lithography first became an economic possibility, and doubtless the earlier one when mimeo replaced spirit duplicators.

Surely these people, who pride themselves on their literary-ness, should concentrate on the content, not the medium. If something is well written, why does it matter how it is delivered to the reader? Admittedly the ease of reading is poor on a pure ASCII e-zine, but this is only a temporary technical problem. I pointed out that even now some of my readers were able to receive a fully formatted version of Emerald City over email which they could print if they wished, only to be told that this would make it a second edition and therefore less valuable. Hopeless, they are.

That evening saw the convention banquet. After another brush with administrative incompetence, from which we were ably rescued by Lisa Hertel, Kevin and I found ourselves sharing a table with a bunch of local fans. It being a buffet meal, tables were called out to collect their food at random. As time passed, it became clear to us that we were going to be last, but the guy sat next to me insisted that we keep our spirits up as the people called last were always the winners. And so it turned out. When Gay Ellen Dennett finally called our table number, she announced that in view of our long wait we would be given a free bottle of wine. It was a lovely touch, and worked perfectly.

The food, which was a selection of Italian dishes, was excellent and plentiful, but it was as nothing to what came next. Boskone’s author Guest of Honour, John M. Ford, is a man for whom filking is not just an hobby but an obsession. He had personally written a short musical on the subject of fantasy novels, and the convention found enough people with good voices to perform it.

Entitled *Another Part of the Trilogy*, the show opened with *Fantasy Tonight*, based on Sondheim’s *Comedy Tonight*. This was followed by a range of numbers featuring various

members of the fantasy novel cast. For example, a pastiche of *Chain Gang* gave us “That’s the sound of the Dwarves, working down the gold mine”. The villains encouraged us to *Do ‘Em Wrong* to the tune of Cole Porter’s *Be a Clown*, and the *Monsters’ March* was set to the tune of *Seventy-Six Trombones*. By far the most impressive number of the night was based on *Ya Got Troubles* from *The Music Man*. This is really difficult to sing, and Larry Seiler managed magnificently. It was also very funny, being a warning to the people of Little Trollkin of the disasters that would befall them now that a dungeon had been discovered in their neighbourhood.

Ford, in wizard costume, narrated his own creation, and seem genuinely surprised and delighted at how well it was received. At the dead dog party I asked him if there were any plans to make the lyrics available. “Well”, he said, “*I am very grateful that people have been asking me this question every five minutes since the damn thing finished...*” Con chair Davey Snyder added that NESFA was indeed considering publication, but as the piece was fairly short they might just stick it on their web page. Look out for it.

Framingham, Sunday 16th

The Sunday was very quiet. The morning was spent trying to wake up after the previous night’s partying, and the afternoon was taken up largely by dismantling things as the con was due to finish by 16:00. Nevertheless, Kevin and I managed to keep up a constant cycle of alternating bid table duties and panel attendance. By the end of the convention we had signed up 29 new pre-supporters for SF2002, which pleased us greatly.

The dead dog party began at the local John Harvard Brew Pub. Once again the food was excellent, and I have to say that those Poms and Aussies amongst you who turn your noses up at American beer because all you have seen is Budweiser should come over here and try some. I don’t think that east coast beer is yet up to the standard we get in Portland and San Francisco, but Harvards do pretty well. I tried their sampler selection, and found a passable imitation of a British pale ale, and a Newcastle Brown impersonation that was better than the original (not, of course, a very difficult task). Their stout looked OK, but was rather thin, and the President’s Ale was far too bitter for me, meaning that it would probably go down well with Poms.

The most contentious issue of the evening was the Raspberry Ale. Fan Guest of Honour, Rob Hansen, opined that they should have been taken out and shot for such heresy. Personally, however, I found it the best of the lot. It was half wheat beer, which I much prefer, and the addition of the fruit nicely took the edge off the bitterness. Resident beer expert, Martin Hoare, had stayed in the con suite where there was a range of interesting bottled beers, but he later assured me that putting fruit in beer is by no means unknown in Europe. I felt a lot less heretical then.

Overall it was a very enjoyable convention. I guess the only thing left to point out is that, whilst Boskone is supposed to be a serious lit fan convention, the best parts of it were undoubtedly the cabaret and the art show.

San Jose, Tuesday 18th

Trotted down to San Jose to get some tickets for Thursday night's Sharks game. Had lunch in a fast food joint called Rock 'n' Tacos. Anywhere which not only does passable burritos at good prices (US\$4) and plays White Rabbit for you whilst you are eating is OK by me.

San Jose, Thursday 20th

The Sharks were awful. They dominated much of the game, and at the end of the second period were ahead on every game statistic except the one that counts, on which they were behind 3-0. The final period started well (we had a 4 minute power play) but ended disastrously when a piece of appalling and unnecessary violence had one of the Sharks players expelled from the game. The final score was 6-1 to Vancouver. This is a shame, because much of the Sharks' play was very good. Unfortunately they are hopeless on front of goal. The way that they spent most of the game camped in their opponents' half standing round waiting for a miracle reminded me strongly of the English soccer team.

Santa Cruz, Saturday 22nd

Take highway 85 south from Mountain View, hop onto highway 17, go through Los Gatos (meow!) and Scotts Valley (home of the rapidly dwindling Borland empire) and you come to The Seaside. In many ways, Santa Cruz is just like English seaside. It has the funfairs, the amusement arcades, the fish and chips, the mini golf, the hot dogs, the ice cream. All the usual stuff. OK, so the beach-front architecture looks suspiciously Spanish, and there are sea lions sleeping on the pier supports, but the average Pommie holidaymaker would have felt quite at home.

Well, except that we had clear blue skies and warm sunshine.

We had a great time. I beat Kevin at mini golf and pool, and he got his own back at pinball - even finding a Gilligan's Island machine on which to humiliate me. It would have been a lovely day out without the food. With it, well...

Today was the annual Santa Cruz Clam Chowder Festival. The concept of the cook-off seems to be a peculiarly American tradition, so some explanation is in order. In a cook-off, a range of professional and amateur chefs gather together to cook their version of a particular dish. There are official judges, but the general public also gets to sample the food and cast its own votes. For \$5 you got a bowl, a spoon, five tickets for chowder samples, and a voting ticket. Between us, Kevin and I sampled 20 different versions of clam chowder (and were stuffed by the end), and we had less than half of what was on offer.

The basic rule of clam chowder is that there are two types: Manhattan includes tomatoes, New England does not. Other than that, it has clams and potatoes in it, and other stuff which is up to the chef. Kevin and I both happened to prefer the New England variety, which cut down the choice a bit. Even so, there was plenty of variety. In my opinion, one other essential ingredient is bacon. Without it the chowder lacks a lot of punch. From then on, it really gets into the realm of preference. I prefer it made with real cream, but worrying about calories and being allergic to dairy products are fashionable here. Adding Tabasco certainly gives it bite, but tends to swamp the flavours of the spices.

I can feel me getting boring, so I'll wrap up here. It was a great day. Shame I can't put samples on line.

Mountain View, Monday 24th

BASFA has a trial meeting at Harry's Hofbrau, just over the road from Kevin's place. This is not bowing to some presidential whim, we are growing out of our present site and have been trying a range of places around the Valley. The food wasn't too hot - basically standard UK pub stodge, but they had a splendid array of beers, which only Dave Gallagher and I appeared to appreciate. I don't think we'll be back.

Much of the meeting was given over to discussion of our Hugo choices. More details of this later in the 'zine.

Mountain View, Tuesday 25th

SF2002 Bid Committee meeting. Seven MSFC memberships sold. Happy club treasurer. People of San Francisco learn to fear Cheryl's Chili as much as Australians do, except here there are people who like that sort of thing.

Of witches, ravens and dragons

Back in issue 12 I reviewed a collection of short stories by women writers called *She's Fantastical*. One of those stories was *A Sky Full of Ravens*, by Sue Isle. I said at the time that there was a novel based on the story in the works. This is it.

Scale of Dragon, Tooth of Wolf, is published by Hodder Headline's young adult SF and fantasy line. It is, therefore, a fantasy novel aimed at teenage girls. It shows. Of course that doesn't make it a bad book, and Sue does her best to get her audience thinking, but at the same time she has to be careful not to bore or confuse them. I think that Garth Nix did a better job with *Sabriel* (also reviewed in #12), but for a first novel this is a good attempt.

The story is fairly standard stuff - young girl with exceptional magic powers has to learn to control them in a world where magic is increasingly frowned upon. It has a feminist twist: only women can do magic, and their oppression is part of a move from a dualistic to a patriarchal religion. There is a love interest in the shape of a young boy who just happens to be a member of the Inquisition. Very predictable.

The story, *A Sky Full of Ravens*, forms a single chapter of the book. As you may remember, my favourite part of the original was the surprise ending. Unfortunately the effects of that were so dramatic that they just had to go. It would have been very hard to carry on with the novel afterwards. I was hoping that Sue would keep some vestige of it, but no, we just headed off down the nice, predictable plot to the final chapter and...

Oh shit, she's done me again.

Sue dear, I know it is set up for sequels, and I hope you get to write them, but please keep the endings as off the wall as this. I love 'em.

Scale of Dragon, Tooth of Wolf - Sue Isle - Hodder SF/Fantasy - softback

By George, he's brilliant!

I've promoted a Worldcon that he will be Guest of Honour at, I've been to his 80th birthday party. I think it is about time that I read some of George Turner's fiction. I am ashamed to say that I was finally spurred into action by finding one of his works in a remainder bin, but I am very glad I did, and I will now seek out the rest. George is very, very good.

The Destiny Makers is science fiction only by the skin of its teeth. It is purportedly set in a future world where overpopulation has made most of our current technology unaffordable. It also discusses neat ideas for dealing with the excess people problem. But really it is a political satire, and George has Victorian society off pat.

Being kids, we played "cull" games. ... In our games one side was picked to be culled and was hunted down by the "real Aussies". Those to be culled were known by the most offensive names we knew - Chinks, Wogs, Nignogs. The names had little real meaning save as denoting outsiders, non-Australians. Our own black, brown, yellow and mixed nationals (about half the population) were "real Aussies" no matter what their origins.

And this in 1993, years before anyone outside a small Queensland town had heard of Pauline Hanson. These days, of course, it is the Wops, Dagoes, Krauts and other assorted Europeans who have graduated from being evil invaders to "real Aussies", but George's version is very believable.

George is equally unsympathetic and accurate about the police — necessary, but inevitably lured into corruption — and about politicians. At one point he comments:

Our society of oligarch administrators striving to maintain themselves in position had created so corrupt a system that their children saw corruption as a way of life, the norm, and never realised more than dimly what "corruption" meant.

He claims to be talking about his future Australia, in which a massive class divide has been created, but I think he was talking about the present day. Political corruption in Australia is a fact of life, so much so that Australians seem to just accept it, and sometimes even believe that it is the way all leaders should behave.

George even goes so far as to suggest that the strained relationship between the Victorian Premier and his wife is due to some unwholesome domestic situation that the media either knows nothing about or has been muzzled on. The exact details don't match, but I hope for George's sake that Jeff Kennet never reads this book.

Overall, the novel reminded me a lot of John Brunner. This wasn't only because it treats of ecological disaster in a thoroughly depressing manner. There was also the air of an older man bemused and disappointed by the world that has developed around him. Although the setting is decayed urban, even down to the street gangs, there is none of the sex, drugs and glamour you would expect of such a book these days. Everything is cheap and grubby, which is probably how it should be.

So, George Turner is a very fine writer, and thoroughly deserving of his GoH status. Must go and find some more of his books.

That Hugo time of year

Nominations time is upon us once again, and thanks to the good people of NESFA, a copy of the forms reached Australia in good time. I've passed a pile of copies on to Alan Stewart, so anyone who wants to vote should contact him.

There is a fair amount of confusion over here about who can and cannot vote. Listen up, Australia: everyone who was a member of L.A.con III (and over 50 of you were) is entitled to Nominate for this year's Hugos. You probably didn't know this, and no one is going to tell you because no one is obliged to. The official notification, in case you missed it, was in very small print somewhere in your L.A.con III programme book. But nominate you can, and nominate you should.

Note that I said nominate. To vote on the final outcome, you have to be at least a supporting member of LoneStarCon 2. That costs US\$25 (about AU\$32). And for that you also get the programme book and other assorted goodies from LSC2.

Unlike site selection, there is no fee for nominating or voting. All it will cost you is an envelope and letter postage to the USA.

Knowing Australians, you are probably all thinking "*why the hell should I vote, people shouldn't need this egoboo*". Here are a few reasons why:

- publishers take note of Hugos — if the sort of book you like gets nominated, more of that type of book gets published;
- it is a way of saying thank you to people who have worked hard to entertain you over the past year; and
- getting Australians on the ballot makes people sit up and take notice of us. Normally the awards are pretty much carved up between the US and UK. We have people who are just as good. Isn't it about time we got some recognition?

And now, without further lecturing, here are a few recommendations. These are partly my personal choices, and partly stuff that came up at the BASFA meeting on Monday. Particular thanks to Dave Clark who supplied many of the short fiction recommendations.

Best novel: *Excession*, Iain M. Banks; *Metal Fatigue*, Sean Williams; *Automated Alice*, Jeff Noon; *Infinity's Shore*, David Brin; *The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman; *Nadya*, Pat Murphy; *Memory*, Lois McMaster Bujold; *Encounter with Tiber*, Buzz Aldrin & Stephen Barnes; *Feet of Clay*, Terry Pratchett.

Best novella: "Human History," Lucius Shepard (*Asimov's*, April); "The Refuge," Allan Brinnert (*F&SF*, April); "Abdication Street," Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne (*Interzone*, March).

Best novelette: "Flat Feet," Howard Waldrop (*Asimov's*, Feb); "Moving Mysteriously," Dominic Green (*Interzone*, June); "Eye of Aquarius," William Barton (*Asimov's* May); "Citizen Ed," Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne (*Interzone*, Nov); "Bicycle Repair Man," Bruce Sterling (*Interzone*, Nov).

Best short story: “The Bridge at Waikiki,” Kevin Standlee (**Again, Alternate Worldcons**); “The Literary Fruitcake,” Don Webb (*Interzone*, Nov); “First Tuesday,” Robert Reed (*F&SF*, Feb); “Such Dedication,” Ian Watson (*Interzone*, Jan); “The Reason For Not Going to the Ball,” Tanith Lee (*F&SF*, Oct/Nov).

Best non-fiction: **Tough Guide to Fantasyland**, Diana Wynne Jones; **Silence of the Langford**, Dave Langford; **City on the Edge of Forever**, Harlan Ellison.

Best media presentation: “War Without End,” “Severed Dreams,” “Voices of Authority,” “Z’ha’dum” — all *Babylon 5* season 3; **Star Trek First Contact**; “Trials and Tribblations” (*Star Trek: Deep Space 9*); **Ghost in the Shell**.

Best professional editor: K.K. Rusch; Gardner Dozois; Stan Schmidt; David Pringle; Elizabeth Mitchell.

Best professional artist: Michael Whelan; Bob Eggleton; Ron Walotsky; Phil Foglio; Kaja Foglio; Scott Adams.

Best semiprozine: *Speculations*, *NY Review of SF*, *Keen Science Fiction*, *Interzone*, *Crank!*.

Best fan artist: Ian Gunn, Steve Scholtz, Kerri Valkova, Sue Mason; Teddy Harvia; Brad Foster.

Best fan writer: Terry Frost, Dave Langford, Andy Hooper, Cheryl Morgan, Kevin Standlee, Sharon Farber; Roland Castle, Chris Carrier (yes, we got very silly here).

Best fanzine: *Mimezine Flashback*, *Thyme*, *Attitude*, *Plokta*, *Ansible*, *Emerald City*, *Apparatchik*, *Mimosa*.

John W. Campbell Award (for new writers): Tess Williams; Dominic Green; Michael A. Martin; Michael Libiny.

Great to see Kim and Eugene in there. I’d love to see them nominated, especially as I haven’t seen Eugene in about 20 years. How’s about some Hugos for Somerset, folks?

Yes, I know I’m in there. Kevin gets over enthusiastic at times.

Reflections on Australia — Beer

My throw-away comment last issue on the awfulness of Aussie beer has prompted enquiries from worried Poms concerned that they might suffer undue deprivation should they come to Aussiecon Three. I must admit that beer is not one of my strong points, and personally I find the warm, bitter stuff that is so popular in the UK quite undrinkable. Fortunately Australians hate this stuff too, but much of what Australia produces is well short of the best Belgian or German beer, and even compares poorly with the output of American micro-breweries.

Anyway, with a bit of help from Mr. Frost, and a book I picked up in the airport on my way out, here is Cheryl’s Guide to Aussie Beer.

The first thing you have to remember is that Australian beer is very much a regional thing. In Victoria, everyone drinks VB and Carlton. Both of these are produced by CUB, who also own Fosters. In New South Wales they wouldn’t touch Victorian beer, preferring Tooheys.

In Queensland they drink XXXX, but not Tooheys, even though they merged with Castlemaine some years ago. South Australia, I think, has West End, in Western Australia they have Swan, and Tasmania has Cascade. No self-respecting Aussie beer drinker would admit to drinking Fosters.

But are there small, good breweries? Yes, there are. Tasmania produces some pretty good lagers. Cascade Premium is OK, and James Boag even found its way into the Wine Society lists. Coopers, a family-owned South Australian company, is fairly widely available. Terry likes their Red Label, and I have been quite impressed with their stout (this from a confirmed Guinness fanatic).

If you can find them, the output of the Matilda Bay Brewing Company of Fremantle, WA, is very interesting. Dogbolter, a dark lager, is Terry's favourite tippie, and Redback, a wheat beer, is mine. Unfortunately the company has recently been bought out by CUB, but the beer is still good at the moment.

The book also had a few interesting beers I haven't found yet. I will certainly be looking out for Cane Toad from the Sanctuary Bay company in Queensland. This is brewed to the standards required for German Bock beers. If you find some, make sure it is the proper 7% variety, not the 5% one they make for wussy locals. I must also look out for beers from the Traditional Brewing Company of Melbourne which is the only true pub-based brewer I know of in the country.

I got Steve Davies to try a fair number of beers whilst he was here, and a more informed report may appear in *Plokta* at some point.

I should also put in a good word for Perry Middlemiss's homebrew which I was very impressed with.

Whether any of this is capable of satisfying the hardened CAMRA member is another matter. But if you are seriously worried, I can point you to a bottle shop in town, only a short tram ride from the World Congress Centre, that sells Old Peculiar and many other Pommie imports.

Strange, but true

When I first arrived in Melbourne I had a look at a number of fanzines. One of them was Sian O'Neale's *Strange Matter*. It was... raw. In places it sounded reminiscent of an internet flame war. I was not impressed. But when I communicated these feelings to my friends, I was told to be patient, the lad had promise. Eighteen months later, I'm glad to say that those predictions have been fulfilled.

Thanks, in large part, to sterling work by Terry, Sian has been lured away from the Young Liberals, and away from the ghetto of Dr. Who fandom into the big wide world. And he is not ashamed to admit that he has matured. Here's an extract from his latest editorial on the subject of discovering fandom at large:

"My interest in Doctor Who and science fiction took on a much wider significance. I was no longer a passive viewer of one particular, off-beat TV series who also liked to read SF, but an instant

member of a fan collective, at the time, beyond my understanding; the whole fandom experience was an intellectual awakening."

I'm going to treasure that passage, and quote it every time some arrogant twit tells me that media fans are all illiterate morons who should be shunned. Are you listening, Eric? Sian is now reading back issues of *Mimosa* to get familiar with fannish history. We have a convert.

Of course, as a Dr. Who fan, one of the things that pre-occupies Sian is what is to make of a fandom whose series has ceased production. He spends several pages on the subject in the current issue, and although his arguments tend to meander rather, he ends with the heart-warming conclusion that continued isolation means death, and that the only hope for survival is to preserve the memory of Dr. Who within the wider confines of general SF fandom. There are shades of Pauline conversion here, and if he turns out to be as successful an apologist (though hopefully not such a misogynist) we shall be well served.

Overall, a though-provoking and well written fanzine that is thoroughly deserving of encouragement.

Strange Matter #18 - Sian O'Neale, 185 Kooyong Road, Toorak, Vic 3142, Australia.

Powerful stuff

In the frozen wastes of Antarctica, Cheela and her tribe believe that they are the last people left on Earth. Their elders tell of the time long ago when the planet was poisoned and everything died. The tribal ancestors set out for the one place they felt would be safe from the spreading pollution. Now they live from hand to mouth, dependent for everything on penguin, fish and seal. But, clustered protectively in their summer camp in the shadow of the Dark Times building with the great towers, they are a community, they are alive.

Far out in an orbit almost as high as the Moon is the skywheel. No shuttle has come from Earth in centuries. As far as the crew know, there is no one left alive to send it. But there might be, and whilst there is hope, they cling to their duty. It is a military-scientific establishment, originally charged with finding cures for the viral plagues that ravaged a planet shorn of bio-diversity. There is little point in that work now, but the material they had to work with: DNA samples of every species they could salvage; that is worth preserving. It is monotonous work, and the uniform, grey, metallic environment of the 2 km across wheel, adrift in the vast vacuum of space, is perfectly in tune with that work. Is it any wonder that some of the crew are starting to go a little loopy?

Amidst the half-drowned ruins of Perth, Western Australia, a small kingdom is growing. Morgan Welwyn is not exactly part of it. He is a sorcerer, an heretic, a dabbler in the black arts of the Dark Times. As such, he is invaluable to Piper, the ruler of this land. His discoveries could prove useful in the inevitable war with Isiah Barron's people from the eastern lands. Weaponry will be the key. The skywheel, according to the plans Morgan found in the observatory, has lasers and a rail gun. And somewhere in the former Chilean-owned portion of Antarctica is an experimental fast breeder reactor with a plentiful supply of plutonium.

High amongst the stars, Kass experiments with strange, green liquids that combine with and enhance the human nervous system. Research into mind-enhancement is illegal, but as deputy-commander of the station she is able to get away with it. Being the commander's lover also helps keep her out of the clutches of Kagan, the station psychiatrist. For Kass is quite mad, and afflicted with terrible dreams in which all of mankind marches, hungry and barefoot, through a wasted land; a refugee column with nowhere to go. Those dreams, Kass might know if she were not mad, are shared by many of the crew, and even by Cheela far away on the ice. Madwomen, of course, have difficulty with reasoning. In any case, there is another question that Kass might ponder. She has visions and hears voices; Piper wants the station's weapons and the plutonium; Commander Hovar, desperate to keep his fragile link with Earth, has agreed to help: which one of them is most crazy?

Like I said, powerful stuff. Tess Williams is another of the writers from *She's Fantastical* to graduate into writing novels, and the talent she demonstrates should take her far. It isn't perfect: her action scenes don't seem nearly as well crafted as her character studies. But for a first book it is very good indeed. Like *Otherland* (reviewed last issue), *Map of Power* is very much the first part of a trilogy, so I cannot recommend it for an Hugo. I am, however, nominating Tess for the John W. Campbell Award for new writers, and whilst I am rushing round the US I shall campaign on her behalf. Let's put Australia's talent on the map.

Map of Power - Tess Williams - Arrow - softback

On the Border

Leanne Framm's *Entropy* was one of the outstanding contributions to *She's Fantastical*. I was therefore pleased to hear that an entire collection of Leanne's stories had been published. *Borderline* (the book) comes from a small Australian publisher and is limited to 500 copies. It will probably be impossible to get hold of in the US, but Justin Ackroyd (Slow Glass Books, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, VIC 3001, Australia; tel: +61 3 9639 1551) will probably be able to get a copy for you if you want it. Other than *Borderline* (the story), all of the material has been published elsewhere, but only in magazines like *Eidolon* and *Aurealis* which are also pretty rare outside Australia.

So what to say? I think that Leanne is wasted on SF. This is not to say that she is too good for it, but rather that what she does superbly well is not necessary to SF, and that as soon as she starts postulating on science or sociology things get a little dodgy. Leanne is a superb observer of people, and is at her best when describing people's feelings. She doesn't need to write SF to do this, and her stories are better when she does not. If she feels that she needs an unusual setting then horror will do nicely. Indeed, several of the stories in *Borderline* could be classed as such, and *Entropy* is one of the most horrifying stories I have read.

I'm sorry if this sounds unduly dismissive. It is not intended to be. Leanne has a lot of talent, but I think it needs to be focused properly. Where she is now is not where she should be.

Meanwhile, back with the book. It contains five stories, of which *Borderline* is the longest. In addition there is an interview with Leanne by Lucy Sussex (in which Lucy makes the magnificent pun of describing Leanne's work as highly littoral) and a complete bibliography of Leanne's work. Good stuff.

Fodor's Middle Earth

"Good morning campers, and welcome to another glorious day in Fantasyland. Today we have a number of wonderful excursions available to you. You can take a trip through the Southern Marshes, get captured by cannibal Marsh People and almost sacrificed to the evil Crocodile God. You can take ship for the Mysterious Island of Dragons, get attacked by pirates and shipwrecked on a barren rock until rescued by passing slavers. Or you venture into the Dungeon of Doom, at the bottom of which lives the renegade fire demon, Gorlab. Remember, have your magic sword with you at all times. And take these encounters seriously. Tomorrow is the last day of your stay and you have to take on the Dark Lord, rescue the captive Princess and Save the World."

Silly? Of course it is. Fortunately I made that up, though with modern technology you never know what Disney will come up with next. The point is that putting the above together was dead easy because, although Fantasyland is supposed to be a product of the imagination, it has rules and mores which seem as regular and inescapable as our own. Dwarves are always stocky and taciturn. Elves are always skinny and smug. Princesses are either spoilt or spunky. Princes are either noble and athletic, or fat, sulky and cruel. Once you have read a few fantasy novels, writing your own is almost a cut and paste job.

Jugglers are normally hired as extras by the Management and will exhibit their skills in most markets and often also in palaces. They will be there purely for local colour and your entertainment. In rare cases, the Tourist will need to hide in a group of jugglers and even learn juggling skills. You can tell when you are going to have to do this because the jugglers will have Names.

Diana Wynne Jones has noticed the predictable nature of the average fantasy novel, not to mention the fabulous non-sequiturs with which such worlds are filled and, on the reasonable assumption that such books are actually describing adventure holidays in a real world, has produced an indispensable tourist guide. The book is filled with wonderfully acerbic into the nature of Fantasyland that will doubtless make many an author cringe in embarrassment.

Chilblains are unheard of, however inclement the weather. This is probably because the Management lives mostly in California.

There is also a wonderful sequence of helpful icons against individual entries to help you recognise useful sections. Thus a (modern day) caravan is used to indicate anything to do

with travelling merchants and a radioactivity symbol denotes curses and magical devastation. Somewhat cheekily (until you remember that He always lives in the east), a hammer and sickle is used to represent the Dark Lord.

It is, I think you will recognise by now, a very, very silly book, which should be quite enough to recommend it to you.

The Tough Guide to Fantasyland - Diana Wynne Jones - Vista - softback.

Lucy Rides Again

This is not Science Fiction. It is not fantasy either, though it could be said to be a ghost story. Mainly, it is a story of literary detection. It is also another one of those chances to lose friends in print. Fortunately, I really enjoyed it.

The back cover carries endorsements from Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler. These ladies, you may remember, are the founders and custodians of the Tiptree Award. It is rather like putting a bit note on the cover saying "Warning: feminist novel". Except, of course, it isn't. Certainly not in the Joanna Russ mode anyway. But it is Herstory. Consider: Karen's superb *Sarah Canary* is a ghost story set in the frontier towns of the US west coast; Pat's new novel, *Nadya*, (which I hope to review next issue) is about a female werewolf in 1830's America; *The Scarlet Rider* is set in the goldfields of Victorian Victoria. All three books focus on the fact that there were women as well as men in these frontier worlds, and that in many ways their lives were tougher. There's a pattern here somewhere.

Lucy is not one to soapbox. She has her points to make, but she pokes fun at herself at the same time. The lead character is a young history graduate hired by a feminist publishing company to research an anonymous Victorian novelist. When she tells her best friend about her new job, the friend retorts: "Prunefaces. Read one of the books once - everything bad is men's fault". Well, there are a few pretty abominable men in the book, but there are some nice ones too. And Lucy makes her publisher characters lesbians, not because she is making a big anti-male statement, but because she delights in slightly over-the-top characters, and because it allows her to use gay characters in a normal-seeming environment.

Indeed, multiple reasons for things is part and parcel of the book. It exists on an interwoven web of levels that reminds me of John Barth. In *Scarlet Rider*, the book, we have Lucy, the author, writing the memoirs of Mel, the researcher, as she remembers her work on Melvina, the author of *Scarlet Rider*, the novel, which is really a semi-autobiographical book about Melvina the writer. And the whole thing is based on Lucy's experiences researching Victorian women writers. Confused? Maybe, but entertaining.

The trail is complex too. It is clear that Lucy has done the sort of work that Mel does before because of the convoluted way the clues come up. It puts the average Call of Cthulhu scenario to shame, and if I ever get to run the game again I may well require my players to read this book so that they know what that Library Use skill is all about.

Although the story is entertaining in itself, Lucy has peppered it with, mainly understated, subtexts of a quasi-political nature. There is, for example, and undisguised admiration for

the founders of Australia: not the rich British lords making it big in Melbourne, but the rough, tough “diggers” and their women, wagering their lives on the goldfields. There is also acknowledgement of the original Australians, the people who had been there for thousands of years before Captain Cook arrived. Here is a passage every Australian should read:

“Twenty years back, how were me and my husband to know? We thought we’d do the proper thing, adopt an original Australian, a little orphan from the bush. It seemed so right, too, when we saw this beautiful café-au-lait baby, with the biggest googly brown eyes you ever did see. We fell in love on the spot. Nobody told us his mother hadn’t consented to give him up, nor that she was only fifteen. So we took him home, to this suburb, with nothing but white faces for miles around, and did we find out all about prejudice...”

Then there is the way that Lucy weaves varying sexual behaviour into the book as if it were entirely normal. I’ve already mentioned the lesbian publishers. There is also a Victorian policeman whose repressed homosexuality blights his life. Lucy even manages to bring in a transsexual as a guest speaker at an international conference on historical biographies. Given the way such people are still treated by the general public, that one seemed a little far fetched, but I guess the character could have been based on Jan Morris. If you are good enough, you can rise above the slime.

Finally there is this subtext about family and the need to keep in touch with it, no matter how horrible they seemed to you as a child, or how stuffy and embarrassing they became when you were at college. I’m not quite sure what Lucy is getting at here. Certainly I don’t subscribe to the view that family is in some way sacred, and I’d be surprised if she did. Perhaps it is something personal.

Meanwhile, back with the story, I should add that I was entranced by the characterisation. As I’ve said, many of them are a little over-the-top. I found the dreadlocked receptionist amateur opera singer who is incapable of speaking without maximum projection a little hard to take. But generally the cast was interesting and entertaining.

Towards the end things got a little bit funny. I’m not sure that it was necessary to make the book a ghost story, and the juxtaposition of Voodoo mythology with the pronounced Australian-ness of the rest of the text jarred a little. Of course I have to admit that the vocabulary of Voodoo possession fits perfectly with the rest of the book.

Heck, like I said, I enjoyed the book. Go find it if you can.

Oh, and Lucy, thanks for the good press for redheads. You are right, we are a feral lot.

Footnote

Not a lot to say here really. I’ve been keeping you up to date with things through the travelogue. All I have to do now is pass this over to Kevin for proof-reading and printing. Then we do Potlach. Then I do the Tun. Back in Oz just in time for the Grand Prix. See ya.

Music whilst I've been in California has been provided by Philip Glass whose *Heroes Symphony* is splendid stuff. Also 98.1 FM, a classic rock station here in the Valley. Today they have managed to fit in *Layla*, *Stairway to Heaven*, *Aint Seen Nuthin' Yet*, *Sweet Home Alabama* and half a dozen Eagles tracks. Wonder if they play them every day. Still, it is better than Australian commercial radio which seems to repeat the same songs every hour.

This fanzine supports Janice Murray for DUFF and the San Francisco in 2002 Worldcon Bid.