

EMERALD CITY

Issue 19

March 1996

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

Introduction

I guess the most important thing to tell you this issue is that, due to a variety of reasons including the difficulty of getting visas here, the changing nature of the market, and some crass stupidity on behalf of our US office, my job here is coming to an end. I'm trying hard to find something else in Melbourne, but the visa problem is a pretty big disincentive to potential employers. More likely is that I will move to California where my particular skills are very much in demand right now. I'm going out there for some interviews early in April (just in time for my birthday, BASFA members please note). And if all else fails, I arrive back at Heathrow just in time for an Ashes test series.

At the moment I have no idea how much longer I will be in Australia, or how much longer I will have access to a computer. I should be able to put out at least one more issue from here. I'll try not to disappear without letting you know, but if I do, you'll know why.

Meanwhile, on a much happier note:

WELL DONE GUNNY!!!!

For those of you who do not know, the FAAN Awards (something to do with Fan Activity and Achievement I think) were handed out at Corflu recently. Best fanzine and best fan writer were won by the very excellent Andy Hooper and *Apparatchik*, and best fan artist went to Australia's very own Ian Gunn. For reasons that I will explain later, most Australians are probably totally pissed off about this, but I'm delighted, and I think it is thoroughly deserved. Now for the Hugo...

Still Travelling

OK, I know, last issue's travelogue bit just sort of stopped, didn't it. What I should have done was put a "continued next issue" at the end of it. Well, I didn't, but it is. Here goes.

Seattle, Friday 28th February

Kevin and I head off for Potlatch, a friendly little hard lit convention which moves up and down the north-west coast of the USA. Last year, you may remember, it was in Portland. This year it has come to Seattle.

As everyone who has seen That Film knows, it rains 9 months of the year in Seattle. Fortunately this does not mean it is raining 75% of the time. It simply means that there is some rain on 75% of days. But, when we arrived, it was raining.

The trip did not get off to an auspicious start. Alaska Airlines managed to double-book Kevin's seat (I'm sure it can't be that hard to write software that prevents this), and when I arrived at the hotel I discovered that, for reasons I will not go into here, I had no room. Fortunately, Seattle also happens to be the home of the very wonderful Janice Murray and Alan Rosenthal, who were more than happy to find me a bed for the night. This meant that I got to meet a very significant trend in evolution.

As most of you are probably aware, biologists cite the opposable thumb as one of the major innovations that have enabled primates, specifically humans, to dominate this planet. Should any other species group develop such a facility, they too could be on their way to building a civilisation. Well folks, Alan's cat, Odie, has opposable thumbs. I have seen it with my own eyes. And I can't think of a more appropriate species to take this great leap forward. One day, cats will rule the world.

As opposed to just thinking that they do.

Seattle, Saturday 1st March

Justin Ackroyd told me that Seattle is one of the best places in the world to eat out, and I was looking forward to testing this. However, the convention was in the University Plaza hotel (another fake-Tudor monstrosity, though thankfully not on the same scale as the Boskone hotel), close to the University of Washington. It is inevitable that university districts of cities will feature restaurants that are cheap and cheerful rather than spectacular. So what did we have?

Last night, Janice and Alan took me to a Thai restaurant near the hotel. Of course we are spoilt for Thai food in Melbourne, and there was no way this place was going to live up to the standard of the Isthmus of Kra. Instead I decided to try the Real Heat Test. Whilst all the wussy Americans (and Canadians, sorry Alan) were ordering their food mild, I asked for mine hot. The waitress made the usual "are you sure you know what you are doing" noises, the rest of the table looked at me as if I was mad, and I just smiled sweetly and looked confident.

I was right. The meal (a green curry) was hot, but by no means screamingly so. And the Tom Yum soup, which I shared with some of the others and was therefore mild, was almost heat-less. This was a far cry from some of the Thai soups I've had in London, one of which even defeated me. But the food was OK, and wasn't that expensive. So far, Seattle rates 6 out of 10.

For breakfast we went to a pancake house. Now stuffing yourself with sweet stodge is not my idea of breakfast, so I ordered steak and eggs instead. Somewhat to my surprise, the waitress asked me if I wanted pancakes or hash browns with it. Not being keen on hash browns, I opted for pancakes. I should have known. When the meal arrived, it turned out to be a large plate of pancakes with a little bit of steak and egg on the side. Still, at least they had Earl Grey tea. 4 out of 10 for this one.

Meanwhile, back with the convention. I'm sorry to say that this Potlatch was the first US convention I have seen that was less than well organised. There were only five items on

the main program. The idea seemed to be to have a small number of longer, intense sessions. Unfortunately none of the panels appealed to either Kevin or I. We ignored them.

One thing that programme supremo, Tom Whitmore, does deserve applause for, however, was having people on hand at each panel to take notes of what went on, and these were actually available on the Sunday, a superb achievement. However, the notes only managed to prove that the panels were uninteresting and that we had not missed anything.

The rest of the programme was supposed to come from nano-programming, in which anyone with a good idea sticks a note on the con notice board suggesting a theme and place, and interested parties turned up. Seeing that Eric Lindsay and I would be there, Janice had been trying for some time to get a panel going on Australian writers. We ended up doing this as a nano-programme item, and by the time we were due to start, we had an audience of one, and the allocated room was locked. I asked Jerry Kaufman, who was in charge of the nano-programming, about the room, and he said that all organisation of such panels was the responsibility of the people running them. I sure hope Basicon doesn't turn out like this.

In the event, thanks in a large part to big mouth Cheryl letting rip in the con suite, we had a fair crowd and the panel went very well. George Turner, Sean McMullen and Lucy Sussex generated the most interest, and I also gave a big plug for Tess Williams. Here's hoping, guys.

I should also add at this point that, despite the lack of interesting programming, Kevin and I were hardly bored. One of the best things about Potlatch is that it always has an excellent con suite, well stocked with good Portland beer and interesting people to talk to. You really don't need to go anywhere else.

Still on compliments, the con bags were full of the most amazing things. To start with, there were two free books. Not just any old books, but recent stuff by Ursula le Guin and Connie Willis (the latter the Hugo nominated *Remake*). From there it got weirder. There was a conservationist magazine, adverts for restaurants, a pair of chopsticks, adverts for student banking schemes, an ashtray with a picture of a gargoyle on it, a selection of bookmarks, and a plastic thing. People got different plastic things. Kevin got a toy dragonfly. I got an Elvis' Pelvis key ring. And there was an Archie McPhee catalogue, which explained everything.

That evening, having re-established contact with Kevin and my room, we ventured out in search of dinner. It was at this point that we discovered that the restaurant guide had been written by locals, for locals. Seattle has a very strange road naming system, and before long we were lost.

Here's the problem. The hotel was at 400 N 45th Street. The restaurant we fancied was at 1815 NE 45th Street. Did you spot the difference? We didn't. So we set out walking in the direction of increasing numbers; and found no restaurant. At this point we re-read the guide, discovered our mistake, and headed back. If you went the other way from the hotel, you eventually came to the end of N 45th Street and, in exactly the same road, started on NE 45th Street. Fortunately, the high numbers came first, so we didn't have much further to go, but boy were we hungry by the time we got there. At least for once it wasn't raining, much.

The point is, we would never have made this mistake if the restaurant guide had taken the simple expedient of including a map.

Had the food been bad when we got there, it would have absolutely killed the evening. But the place had got rave reviews in the restaurant guide, and it had all the right smells.

Chutneys is an Indian restaurant, but rather than just follow the traditional pattern they have taken a small range of traditional Indian dishes and tried to create an interesting menu. The main courses were fine, but the starters were spectacular. It is a long time since I have had such succulent and well-flavoured meat. Excellent mango lassi too, and very good service. It was so good we decided there and then that we would go back there for lunch the next day. 9 out of 10. Definitely somewhere to go back to.

We got back to the hotel very late in the evening. I took a quick look into Andy Hooper's disco, just enough to determine that he was playing some very good music and that I was way too tired to dance. I'm sorry Andy. Maybe next time.

Seattle, Sunday 2nd March

The only real programming on the Sunday was the banquet brunch and the auction. Last year's brunch had been pretty poor, so Kevin and I had not bought tickets for this one. This was good, because it meant we could go to Chutneys and stuff ourselves. Another one of those wonderful all-you-can-eat buffets, and it was very good.

Whilst we were out, we investigated a few shops. There was a very good map and tourist guide shop, and a record shop that sold only vinyl, including 78s. The weirdest place, however, was The Erotic Bakery, which sold everything from suggestive postcards to blow up sheep. I found some naked woman jelly babies ("Gummi Babes") and cocktail flavoured condoms. No prizes for guessing which Aussie fan I bought these for.

The Potlatch auction is always good value, firstly because the proceeds always go to the Clarion West Writing School (which also holds classes at the con), and secondly because they have some really good stuff. I can't really afford to collect in that way, though the first edition hardback Gene Wolfes were very tempting. Instead, Kevin and I spent most of our time in the dealers' room (the con suite had been closed to improve auction attendance). There was some really good stuff in there too.

A round of applause, please, for Wrigley-Cross books, run by Paul Wrigley and Debbie Cross. They specialise in importing British and Australian SF, and there was a wealth of familiar names on their shelves. I bought a copy of Sean McMullen's *Voices in the Light* for Kevin (it has trains in it) and was somewhat stunned when I looked at the pricing. It cost me US\$10, whereas the Australian price was A\$15. So I got a bargain. And in the UK I could have got it even cheaper, for £5. Bizarre.

Incidentally, Debbie is the author of *Down the Badger Hole*, the seminal guide to the works of Robert Lionel Fanthorpe, and one of the funniest books I have ever read. Paul found me a copy of one of Fanthorpe's books in his stock — a US printing rather than a real Badger, but only US\$2. Another bargain. Only another 186 to collect.

All too soon it was time to go back to San Francisco, though this time, thanks to the wonderful little digital camera, I have some photos to remind me. They are on the web site, if you are interested.

On the way to the airport we passed Boeing Field. Parked on the tarmac was the prototype 777. It is, I think, a little larger than the 747, but without the upper deck. Kevin says they are now not scheduled for service until late 1999, probably too late for Aussiecon Three, but you never know.

My final Seattle tale takes place at SeaTac. We had found a pub with good-looking chowder and micro-brew beers for dinner. As is becoming my custom, I went for the wheat beer. It arrived in a proper pint glass, but to my horror there was a slice of lemon in it. Forget raspberries, Mr. Hansen, this IS a crime worth stringing people up for. I had words with the waitress, who seemed genuinely shocked. "It is our normal practice", she said. Obviously they get very few Europeans through the airport.

Boston, Wednesday 5th March

Thanks to annoying stuff to do with work, I'd been forced to catch the red eye from San Francisco to Boston. This wonderful flight leaves SFO at 1:15 in the morning. You change planes in Minneapolis at around 6:00, and arrive in Boston at 11:30. By now, of course, I have a fair amount of experience of aircraft. I slept all the way, which, thanks to the stop and time zone changes, meant about 5 hours rest.

Logan airport is a dump. This is an insult. If you are going to name an airport after my cat, it is beholden on you to make it good. Unfortunately, Boston simply doesn't have the business. The entire day's international flights only took up one and half TV screens. Heathrow and LAX do more flights than that in an hour. So there I was, stuck for 8 hours, with bad food and virtually no shopping. BA didn't even open for business until 14:00. Good job I had Elizabeth Hand to cheer me up (see later).

London, Thursday 6th March

Now here's timing for you. Thanks again to work, I had only one day in London, but it was a Tun day. The goodly fannish folks are in the process on moving their monthly meeting from the Wellington (round the back of Waterloo) to the Jubilee (out the river side of the station). I'd never been there before, and, much to my annoyance, the Bakerloo line was closed for renovation south of Piccadilly Circus causing me to take a big detour. Still, you can't keep me away from a pub for long.

According to *Ansible*, the main reason for moving is that the Wellington is full of yuppies waiting for their trains back home to Surrey. The Jubilee, it was said, was nice and quiet. Imagine my surprise when I arrived to find the place packed to the gills. You see the Jubilee is just down the road from the Shell Centre, and that day there was a leaving do on. Life gets you like that occasionally.

Anyway, I caught up with a lot of old friends, far too many to mention, and handed out lots of SF2002 fliers. I guess it is kind of nice the way I can just slot back into things as if I have never been away. It was an OK pub too. The real ale people seemed happy, the Guinness was good, and they did food. Shame I caught it on a bad day.

Sadly, I had to leave a little early as I had to get back to Reading (I was staying with Martin and Jean Hoare for the evening). Dave Langford and I headed off for Paddington. We got

lost amidst the roadworks marking the progress of the Jubilee Line extension, marvelled at the magnificence of the cost overruns, and finally ended up on the Circle Line, swapping scurrilous stories of fannish life. I was looking forward to my first experience of the newly privatised and re-named Great Western Railway. We timed it badly and had half an hour to wait, so we settled down for a beer at the station pub. And waited. And the station announcer apologised that the service would be half an hour late. We had another beer. Some things never change.

Melbourne, Sunday 9th March

QANTAS, Goddess bless them, for their economy class is wondrously comfortable, got me into Melbourne on time just before midnight on Saturday. I'd had to leave Reading at 7:00 in order to get into London, pick up my bags and a cab from the office, and get out to Heathrow. Martin, Jean and I had sat up chatting until gone 1:00. I was so tired by the time I got on the plane that I fell asleep immediately after lunch and didn't wake until breakfast was served on our way into Bangkok. This meant I was actually on Melbourne time when I got there.

This day, of course, was Grand Prix day, and the city was a-buzz. The anti crowd screamed their protests; the car engines drowned them. But there was a problem. No public transport. The Victorian government and the unions had been in negotiation for some time over a proposed pay rise. According to Terry Frost, the government had deliberately dragged things out until Grand Prix time. If it was a trap, it was a very good one. The unions fell for it hook, line and sinker, and are now unlikely to get a decent deal, or any sympathy when Jeff privatises their jobs. You would have thought that they would have learned something from the fate of the British coal miners.

But I didn't care. I sat down to watch the race on TV, which is much better (you don't get Murray Walker if you go to the track). With QANTAS being the major sponsor, they played *I still call Australia home* during the opening ceremonies. It had been a great holiday, but it was good to be home. Given that by then I knew it probably wouldn't be home for much longer, I sobbed pitifully for a very long time.

A Light in the Darkness

As I said last week, I was very disappointed with 1996's collection of SF novels. One of the reasons for this, of course, was the lack of an Elizabeth Hand novel. *Waking the Moon* (World Fantasy Award nominee and Tiptree winner) appeared in 1995, too early even to get reviewed in *Emerald City*. I nominated it for an Hugo, but didn't really push it. Since then, nothing, until now. Raven O'Neil and I had gone shopping and promo photo taking in San Francisco, and I had detoured into a bookshop down by Fisherman's Wharf. At last, there it was, a new one.

The plot of *Glimmering* is fairly simple. A combination of events: big solar flares, a volcanic eruption in Antarctica, an accidental release of a new refrigeration agent, just happen to coincide. This concoction of chemicals and radiation finds its way into the upper atmosphere, right by the already holed ozone layer. Chemistry takes its course, and suddenly, achingly beautifully, the atmosphere beings to burn.

But now Jack only stared at the spectral sky, the coruscating heavens, and knew it had come at last. What they had all been waiting for, consciously or not — the whip coming down, the other shoe dropping, the sound of sixteen hooves beating measured and far off upon the tarmac, still distant, but not for long...

The last years of life on Earth are seen through the eyes of Jack Finnegan, a New Yorker from a once rich family who now edits America's last ever literary magazine. The imminent death of the planet is mirrored in the slow decline of Jack's business and his own approaching death from AIDS. Question: will any of them last long enough to ring in the new millennium?

But there is more. More to Hand's vision of the millennial society we are growing into. What portrayal of modern life is complete without a take on popular culture? Enter Trip Marlowe, choir boy turned pop star, Curt Cobain with Cliff Richard's brain. The Apocalypse is coming, who better to sing it welcome.

Not forgetting, of course, all those millennial cults, of which there are legion. Chief amongst them is Blue Antelope, the radical Christian environmentalists. Their creed is simple: we have spoiled God's creation, we deserve to be punished, severely.

So this is it, then, we are all going to die — Arthur Dent

Wait a minute, though. What about science? What about the big corporations? OK, so the world is falling apart, governments are falling, economies collapsing. Surely, somewhere under that brilliant and permanent aurora there is someone with the smarts and the money to come up with a solution. GFI, a Japanese-American-Mongolian conglomerate specialising in pharmaceuticals and entertainment, believe they can do it. They have promised to launch their atmosphere-cleaning satellite at their New Year party in 1999. The world will be saved.

Question: but at what price?

I read this book whilst I was sat in Logan airport waiting for my flight to London. As I did so, I started to have one of those bizarre reading experiences that normally only happen to gonzo journalists after they have taken one too many tabs of acid. To start with, all the action takes place on the East Coast of the USA. At one point Trip finds himself in a dingy hotel in Cambridge, much as I had been two weeks ago. He is unable to leave because of problems at Logan airport.

Then there is the book. Jack gets given a copy of *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers, a first edition, 1895. Do I know it? Sure I do, I spotted it on a dealer's stall at Potlatch. It caught my eye because it is also the title of the play that, according to Lovecraft, contains the rituals for summoning Hastur the Unspeakable. Lovecraft wrote in the 1920s and 30s. He must have known about Chambers' book. I wish I had bought it. Now I will have to hunt the damn thing down.

There other resonances too which I do not want to go into (and no, this does Not mean I have AIDS). How Liz manages to know so much about my life is a mystery to me, but she does, and she has a devoted, if occasionally horror-struck, reader as a result.

By the way, for the testosterone driven amongst you, there is a photo of Liz on the back. The fact that she manages to look that good (after two children) and write so well, occasionally seems like a piece of enormous cosmic iniquity. Equally, why someone who in person tends to talk lots about her kids and motherhood writes such dark, depressing books is also a mystery. But she does, and there it is.

It is a great book, folks, and is already on my Hugo list for Bucconeer. Highly recommended.

Glimmering — Elizabeth Hand — Harper Prism — hardback

Out of Africa

A couple of years ago, if I were looking for a book to recommend for a Hugo, I would head straight for Ian McDonald. Having been disappointed by *Out on Blue Six*, and not that enthralled by *Necroville*, I had got out of the habit. This was a mistake. Had I bought *Evolution's Shore* in trade paperback rather than wait for the small copy, it would have been on my list for LoneStarCon 2. Sorry, Ian.

(Incidentally, US readers will know this book as *Chaga*, and will know *Necroville* as *Terminal Café*. Why US publishers have to mess around with book titles like this escapes me.)

In the time of *Independence Day* and *Mars Attacks!*, it should perhaps behove us to read a really good novel of alien invasion, and they don't come much better than this. At the start of the book, one or two strange things happen in the moons of Saturn. Years later, some packages arrive at Earth. They land and begin to grow. Meanwhile, a much larger object is sighted approaching through space.

There are no aliens in this book. It is occasionally postulated that the life-form that arrives on our planet was designed by someone, but it is equally possible that it evolved naturally in interstellar space. This really made the book for me. Yes, the Earth is invaded, but there are no battles, no bug-eyed monsters, just chemistry and evolution in action.

Much of the action takes place in Kenya where the first package lands. UN teams are busy analysing the alien infestation and trying to find ways to get rid of it. Meanwhile, the country collapses around them, weighed down by debt and AIDS. There is a fascinating resolution to this at the end, but I should not say any more than that.

The principal character is a feisty, red-haired Irish news reporter (Danny Heap will love this). McDonald is normally pretty good at writing females, but this one, possibly because she is a little too close to home, doesn't quite work for me. I'm sorry, but us feisty red-haired Celts to not drink Diet Coke, we drink Pepsi Max. Nor are we the slightest bit interested in a wussy game like soccer. I did, however, rather like the female Russian pilot whose favourite toast is "big cocks and vodka!". Good attitude.

As usual with McDonald, the characters are interesting, the ideas are clever, and the book asks plenty of interesting questions of the reader. He still hasn't written anything quite as clever as *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*, nor anything quite as heart-rending as *Hearts, Hands and Voices*, but he has just published another new novel. I promise I will read this one before the Bucconeer Hugo forms go out.

Evolution's Shore (Chaga) — Ian McDonald — Bantam — softback

Recommended Reading

One of the common themes in newspapers and business magazines at present is, "when is the Internet going to deliver a useful service?". This is, of course, a stupid question, because it is already delivering far better technical support for computer users than we ever got before. It is also a great means of making sense of the American airline system. However, if we define the question more closely, we might have something interesting.

When is the Internet going to deliver a useful service for book readers?

OK, so you can now buy books over the web from Australia and thus avoid sales tax. But all those author home pages are a little dull, and computer technology is not yet at the stage where anyone but the most ardent tech toy freak reads whole books using computers. Where are the people with the innovative ideas for utilising the new technology?

I think I may have found them, at Alexandria Digital Literature. I came across this neat idea at Potlatch where its creator, Dave Howell, was plugging it on another one of those panels about digital publishing. I like it. It makes good use of the wide availability of the net, has some smart use of CGI interfaces to a database, and uses some innovative AI technology.

The idea is like this. The database contains a vast list of SF novels and stories. Anyone who joins the service (and there is no membership fee) is able to enter the library, pick out the items she has read, and rate them. The more stuff you rate, the better idea the software has of the sort of works you will like. And the more people who rate things, the better a correlation can be drawn between different readers and authors. The objective is for users to be able to say, "this is what I liked, please recommend something similar".

Of course, this is not always an ideal approach. Occasionally everyone should try something very different. But there are so many authors around these days that it is hard to get to try them all. A service like this could be very useful indeed. It is early days yet, so the database is pretty sparse, but even so, the system managed to recommend a fine list of books to me (most of which I am deeply ashamed at not having read).

There are a few inevitable glitches. The system can be a bit slow at times, there is quite a lot of stuff missing (though you can add authors and titles yourself), and the database crashed on me a couple of times (displaying a Microsoft internal error message). But this is a very worthwhile project.

Hopefully Dave will seek to extend it. There is no reason why it should be restricted to SF and fantasy (and several strange names have already crept in). He could also encourage members to add links to reviews that they have published about the books in question,

and I guess eventually you will be able to order the books, or even download them, direct from the site.

Check it out. The more of us join, the better it will get.

Reflections on Australia — Tall Poppy Syndrome

One of the things that often gets said to me at overseas conventions is that Ian Gunn must be a certainty for the best fan artist Hugo in 1999. To this I have to reply that a Worldcon in Australia is the last place that I would expect Ian, or indeed any other Australian, to win anything. This causes much confusion. I'm not entirely sure that I understand the reasons myself, having only been a student of Australian culture for 2 years, but I'm going to try.

This will seem particularly strange to Americans, where the notion of the American Dream is enshrined in the national psyche, but to an Australian there are few greater social sins than trying to be better than your mates. It is possible that pretending to be better is a worse sin, but it may be that actually being better is deemed impossible anyway. However you excel, or attempt to do so, it is wrong. "Tall poppies", it is said, must be cut down.

It isn't hard to see where this attitude comes from. Social posing is endemic amongst middle and upper class Brits, or at least was so until recently. Australians, priding themselves on being people that Britain has thrown out, make a point of trying to avoid the evils of social class.

Strangely enough, the one area where excellence is allowed is sport. Australians pour contempt on successful businessmen, artists and politicians, but adore a winning sportsman. I don't really understand why this is so. Perhaps it is because winning at sport is often seen as winning For Australia. Perhaps it is because sport is regarded as a great social leveller.

One of the rules of the system is that striving to better yourself, whether you succeed or not, is often frowned upon. And actually trying to win an award for your efforts is Very Bad Indeed. As an example, suppose I came to you and asked you to vote for me in the Hugos. In America that might well be taken as a serious request. In Britain people would probably treat it as a joke. In Australia it is a serious social gaffe.

Ian is particularly vulnerable in this respect because he is already seen by many as having tried to win awards. The fist full of Ditmars he won at last year's NatCon was viewed with considerable resentment by much of Australian fandom. For him to win an international award as well is rubbing salt in the wounds.

Personally I find all of this very sad. Australia has a lot of fannish talent that deserves recognition. And all Ian has actually done to get this international acclaim is to take the trouble to send cartoons to fanzine editors overseas. Some Australian fans have gone as far to suggest to me that such behaviour is tantamount to touting for awards. But if it is, then hardly any form of international fannish activity could be acceptable. Australia is currently going Oscar crazy over the glories that might be heaped on Shine, although news programmes are always careful to present the reports as being about a potential win for Australia, not for the individuals involved. Why can't Ian's success be a win for Australian fandom?

A few years back I saw a TV programme which discussed British immigrants to Australia. It was from that programme that I learnt that culture shock doesn't really set in until you have been living in a country for a couple of years. Initially everything is new and exciting, and it takes a while to realise just how different things are. I can vouch for the truth of this proposition. Australian society seems much more alien to me now than it did when I arrived. But...

Also according to the programme, after a few years, many immigrants packed up and went back to Britain. Not me. If I go back, it will be kicking and screaming and with many tears. I find cultural diversity fascinating, and even though Australians irritate the hell out of me at times, I'd rather live here than anywhere else in the world I've visited.

Oh Goddess, I'm getting morbid. Shut up, Cheryl, before people get bored stupid.

Footnote

For those of you who follow software, this is the first issue of *Emerald City* which has been written using Word 97. I haven't used the software enough yet to be able to comment on its features, but I have noticed the real time grammar checker. Never again will I be able to type it's when I mean its and claim it was an accident. Ah, the miracles of technology.

In the fanzines received pile this month was a copy of *Never Quite Arriving* which details much of the US portion of Christina Lake's round the world trip. Given that I've just spent two issues of *Emerald City* on travelogues, I found this a little depressing because now I know just how bad I am at it in comparison to a real expert. As I type, Christina is in Sydney somewhere, but she'll be off again soon to goodness knows where. Ian Gunn tells me that she's written something on Melbourne for the next *Ethel*, and occasional reports have appeared in *Apparatchik*, but the main Australian report is unlikely to appear until after she has got back to Bristol. If you are interested in the entire saga (and believe me it is well worth reading), your best bet is to write to her at 12 Hatherly Road, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA. Don't expect a reply before July.

Some of you may be wondering what all this travelogue stuff has to do with SF anyway. But I've found that the best fan writing is often well off subject. For example, a postal Diplomacy 'zine would seem to be the last place one might think to find journalistic excellence, and one would be very wrong. Thanks to the wonder of the World Wide Web, the writing of Pete Birks is now easily available to people who haven't the slightest interest in Diplomacy. The latest issue, 207, contains some evil ideas for getting your own back on telesales people, and a screamingly funny review of Independence Day. Check it out at <http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~evandale> if you are able, and enjoy.

Still with the Web, this issue should be the first *Emerald City* ever to have a letter column. Long time readers will remember that I chose not to put one in the 'zine because last time I had a fanzine letters took up vast portions of the 'zine, and people were forever complaining about me not printing or cutting their missives. Well I now have a solution. Thanks to a little bit of CGI wizardry (and to Michael Wallis for letting me copy code from the BASFA guestbook) you will shortly be able to leave your comments on the web site

(<http://www.emcit.com>). Nothing will be edited. I'll only interfere to close off one issue's letters when a new issue is published. The code isn't quite working yet, but it should be by the time the next issue comes out. I wait with interest to see what appears.

Next issue, Pat Murphy on werewolves, Kim Newman on vampires, and Gwyneth Jones on alien sex. Also, Terry and I get seriously old, and probably seriously drunk as well. Stay tuned.

This has been *Emerald City* #19, a fanzine from the country that thought it had won a major international award in the movie industry, until we realised they'd given one to Andrew Lloyd Webber as well.

Ciao,

Cheryl