

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

On the evening of Sunday June 8th I was sat writing up material for this issue. One of the things I wrote about was the recent Nova Mob meeting at which Judy Buckrich read extracts from her biography of George Turner. Little did I know as I wrote those words that George had died about an hour beforehand. I've left those words pretty much as I wrote them and you'll find them later in this issue. George should be celebrated for what he was in life, not for the fact that he has died.

A memorial web page for George has been created on the MSFC site. Everyone is welcome to add their own tributes, and we've had some pretty fine ones already. If you have anything to add, email it to me at the address above. The URL, should you wish to take a look, is <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~msfc/george.htm>, and if you are reading this on my web site, that link will take you straight to it.

It is all bad news on the job front, I'm afraid. I missed out on a good job in Sydney by the skin of my teeth. There are other companies who say they are interested in me, but it has now got to the stage when I must make decisions about things like my furniture and my superannuation contributions. Indeed, today things got even more complicated when it transpired that removals to the USA are so expensive it would be cheaper to buy new over there. So if you are coming to the party, be prepared to take stuff away.

Of course, once I am gone, it becomes much more expensive, both for me and for an employer, to get me back. Therefore it is fairly certain that I will not be returning to Australia on a permanent basis. I can imagine that this will be a source of great joy in certain quarters. The bad news, however, is that I still have loads of frequent flier points, so there is a good chance that I will be back for Basicon 2 and/or the Worldcon.

I'll miss Australia. It is a beautiful country and I've had some great times here over the past two years. I came here with the intention of staying, and everything I've done here was done with that in mind. It hasn't always been easy - the culture shock doesn't really hit Poms until we've been here for a year or two, but I would still stay if I could. No matter where I go next, I suspect that for a long time I will remember the QANTAS theme song and still call Australia my home.

Meanwhile, American fans will doubtless be quaking in their boots.

Through convenient coincidence, Westercon, the large west coast regional convention, takes place in Seattle the weekend after I arrive. I'll be there along with the rest of the SF2002 campaign team. I'm also on a panel entitled "Will there ever be another non-North American

Worldcon after Aussiecon Three". Given some of the comments that have been made on newsgroups about A3's membership rates, not to mention the ongoing saga of letters to Ethel from people who can't get a reply from A3, I think I may be in trouble. There may be a lynching party, and I'll be the only Australian close at hand.

What I'm intending to do is do a bit of PR for European fandom. The 2003 Worldcon race looks very interesting with bids from Toronto, Cancun (Mexico) and Berlin. So far the Toronto bid looks very well organised. The Cancun lot have by far the best site (they are close to Chichen Itza) but it is really a Texas bid located over the border. Emotionally, however, I think it would be great for Berlin to do well.

Never trust a smiling computer

As most of you will know by now, the last issue was something of a disaster. My poor little portable (who is called Emmet because he is fast and powerful and comes from Texas) was sat on my dinning room table doing not very much. I was having dinner and watching Jancis Robinson pontificating on the evils of the Champagnois, when all of a sudden Emmet made a nasty grating sound. I trotted over to the keyboard and tried to exit the program that was running. Another grating sound emerged, followed by an ominous "Failure reading drive C".

I knew what that sound was, though I hadn't heard it for many a year. It reminded me of when Martin Hoare and I used to write computer systems for hotels back in the early 80's. The hard disks on those machines (which were 18" across and held a massive 5Mb) made the same sort of noise if they got too much dust on them. It was the noise of a head crash, and is the computer equivalent of dragging the stylus radially across vinyl. It is the noise made by a dying computer.

Now it so happens that I was booked on the 7:05 flight to Brisbane the following morning. Fortunately I wasn't likely to need to machine, so I got up ridiculously early and got the cabbie to drop me off at the office on the way to the airport so that someone could get poor Emmet to the doctor's fast. I infuriated my colleagues by phoning them every few hours to ask for news.

As I expected, the prognosis was not good. To recover anything from the disk would require the services of expensive disaster recover specialists. The machine was, of course, under warranty, and a new disk would be supplied, but the data was gone. I did have backups, didn't I.

Well of course I did. They were a few weeks old, but most of my work is done on the network so I'd only lost a few days work. *Emerald City #21* was on the list of lost files, but fortunately I had just sent a copy off to Kevin for proof reading. Talk about off-site backup! Anyway, when I got back to Melbourne I went straight to the office and checked out the machine with the backups on it. It was all there as I had expected. At this point I did a very stupid thing. I did not take a backup immediately.

On Friday night I put the returned *Emerald City* onto the backup machine and took it home. I put it on the table, plugged it in, switched it on, and nothing happened. Blown motherboard. Completely useless computer.

It was at this point that I decided someone had it in for me. *Emerald City #21* was still available in San Francisco, but I had now lost my entire email mailing list. Eventually, with a bit of help from some wonderful friends, and an archive stash on the network I had forgotten about, I got

most of it back. But I do not wish to have to go through that ever again. I think I shall buy a zip drive.

Kids' Stuff

Last time I was in San Francisco, Dave Clark, who, as I have said before, has excellent taste in books, urged upon me a little paperback called *Zod Wallop* by William Browning Spencer. Neither book nor author was familiar to me, but I trust Dave judgement, and the book did carry a stunning range of review clippings from just about every major genre magazine and newspaper in the US. It was, I think, one of my better decisions.

Mad, mad, we are all mad. Well, perhaps not quite all of us. But Raymond Story is quite definitely mad. He almost drowned as a child and hasn't been quite the same since. No one quite knows if Emily Engel is mad: she has been more or less catatonic for years so it is difficult to find out. Paul Allan is mad, he suffers bouts of uncontrollable violence, but then with a mother like his, who wouldn't. And Rene Gold? Well, she's just pathologically anti-social.

Harry Gainesborough, however, is not mad, he is a successful writer of children's books. He did go a little bit crazy for a while, after his daughter, Amy, drowned in a seaside accident. Following that he was resident for a while in Harwood Psychiatric Clinic. It didn't take them long to cure him. Amy had been his muse: he wrote his stories for her, and her alone. Once the shrinks had persuaded him to write again, and he had produced the massive best seller, *Zod Wallop*, they let him go.

But the version of *Zod Wallop* that hit the streets was not the first one Gainesborough wrote. The original was much more dark and menacing. Few people know about the other version. Raymond Story is one of them. He told Harry he had destroyed the book, but you would hardly just get rid of something so disturbingly prophetic, especially when you yourself, along with several other fellow inmates and staff from the clinic, have been written into it. Gainesborough obviously knew something about the world, and what he knew was starting to come true.

Give Terry Pratchett an overdose of LSD whilst playing him endless Leonard Cohen songs and ask him to write a children's book. What you end up with might be the first version of *Zod Wallop*, the children's book. Now imagine that Rincewind is locked up in a lunatic asylum and is the only person in the world who knows that the events in the book are real, and that the only person who can stop it all coming true is the author. Add to this a healthy scepticism for everything from psychiatrists to drug companies to literary agents to family life and you might come close to *Zod Wallop*, the adult novel.

Then again, you might not, because producing something that crazy requires a unique sort of mind that has already written a novel which the New York Review of SF described as a Lovecraft story written by Woody Allen. And this man lives in Texas. Here's hoping he turns up to LoneStarCon.

Zod Wallop – William Browning Spencer – Borealis – softcover

The Wrong Trousers

As some of you may know, subtitling a book “God, Physics and the Gender Wars” is like a red rag to a bull as far as I am concerned. I spotted the cover of *Pythagoras’ Trousers* in *The Australian’s* book review supplement one day and forthwith went out and bought a copy. It could hardly fail to be interesting, now could it.

Margaret Wertheim is an Australian science writer now living in New York. She claims in her introduction that she set out to write a history of Physics and, in researching it, discovered an Evil Misogynist Plot, started by Pythagoras and perpetuated by male physicists down the centuries, even unto the present day. It sounds, if I may be forgiven a tenuous link to another part of this issue, like something out of Foucault’s Pendulum. But was she right? Oh deary, deary me.

The premise is sound enough. Men have, after all, held exclusive rights to the high priesthood of science for most of the past two millenia. They have tended towards a very mechanistic and reductionist view of the world. Many famous scientists, from Aristotle onwards, have been either misogynists or at least held the view that celibacy was essential to good science. And it is true that the Pythagorean religion emphasised the power of the number 1, symbolic of maleness as if you couldn’t guess, over the number 2, symbolic of femaleness. So far so good. Had Margaret made a fantasy novel out of this (oh dear, another tenuous link) it might have worked. But she went for conspiracy theory instead.

Actually I think it might even have worked had there been a bit less ranting and a bit more logic. This, however, I am sorry to say, is the sort of book that gives feminism a bad name. Just because men pride themselves on their logicity, there is no need for women writers to throw out reasoned argument in a fit of strop. It just proves the men’s point for them.

The basic error that Wertheim makes is to ignore the social setting in which most of the scientists she is chronicling operated. Wherever she finds evidence of sexism, blame for this is placed firmly at the door of the scientists concerned as if they were the source of the discrimination rather than a manifestation of it. From there she goes on to claim that physics itself, thanks to its inherently mathematical nature, is a sexist concept and therefore in need of reform.

In order to reach such a conclusion, it is necessary for Wertheim to make some very selective arguments. For example, she praises the holistic nature of pre-Copernican physics, even though that physics is based on the work of Aristotle who was dogmatic on the question of the stupidity of females. Meanwhile poor Copernicus is castigated because, at the time, his system was no more accurate than that of Ptolemy. Never mind that it was later proved a much closer estimate. Wertheim uses its lack of success at the time to imply that it is somehow a bad theory.

There is also a lack of consistency with regard to the connection between religion and magic. When men bring God into their arguments, it is held up as evidence of the religious nature of physics. When women do the same thing they are disguising their work in religious tones because they are not allowed to have original thoughts of their own.

When we finally get to modern times the logic gets even more lose. For example, I have little doubt that the Nobel committee is biased against women, but the example Wertheim chooses

makes her argument seem petty. She fixes on the case of Chien-Shiung Wu, a brilliant experimentalist whose work has been very important in quantum physics. The Nobel prize for the discovery Wu is most famous for went only to the (male) theoreticians whose ideas Wu confirmed. This is held up as an example of bias, but Wertheim herself admits that another experimental team was working in the same area and published first. Also this was in 1950s America when persons of Asian extraction were not exactly popular. To lay the whole blame for Wu's lack of a Nobel on misogyny is surely stretching the point.

And this is a salient point. What Wertheim has managed to miss in her survey of the history of physics is that the famous scientists are not just male. They are, almost without exception, white and Christian. Moslem science, which kept the flame alive during the early Middle Ages, is generally ignored by modern scholars. Non-whites were as firmly barred from education as women. Even Stephen Hawking, whom Wertheim seems to detest, would not have been allowed into university had he been born 50 years earlier.

Of course there has to be some reason for all this wingeing besides simple hatred of men. Two obvious political points are made during the book. The first is that Wertheim is firmly (almost fanatically) opposed to funding any further particle accelerators. This is a reasonable point. Certainly the \$10bn or so that the things cost these days could be better spent in other ways. But to paint the whole of physics as a fiendish male plot simply for this is a little excessive.

The other point is much more reasonable. Despite all the advances of modern feminism, girls are still discouraged from studying science at school and women scientists still have to be far cleverer than their male counterparts in order to achieve acclaim. Part of this, of course, is because Western society is still infected with the Aristolean meme that women are incapable of scientific thought. Wertheim makes the standard feminist claim of complete equality between men and women, and then goes on to contradict herself by claiming that women would do science differently from men. They would be more socially responsible, and less obsessed with physics as a religion.

Are there any examples of the sort of science Wertheim thinks women would do? Well, there is the Gaia hypothesis. Oh dear, that was developed by James Lovelock, one of Them. Never mind, he worked with female colleagues. That must explain the anomaly. And do we notice that Gaia is the most obvious example of bringing religion into physics? Of course not. I shall draw a discrete veil over the section where the discussion veers onto faith healing and spiritualism.

The said thing is that, if you can cut through the bad logic and polemic, Wertheim does have a point. A recent issue of *The Economist* carried an article about a study in Sweden, hardly a bastion of pro-male bias, that female biochemists needed to be around 2.5 times better qualified than males to have the same chance of getting a paper published or be given a grant. This is an incredible waste of talent. But to argue the point in such a way as to make Aristotle's case for him does no one any favours.

Pythagoras' Trousers – Margaret Wertheim – Fourth Estate – softcover

Claws out

Dragonclaw, by Sydney author Kate Forsyth, hit the book shops in vast numbers recently. Obviously Arrow felt that they had their very own New Queen of Fantasy. The back cover

sported the usual comparisons to such luminaries as Anne McCaffrey and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Could this, perhaps, be something new and wonderful?

Sadly, no. *Dragonclaw* reads as if the author had discovered *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* and took it for a writer's manual. All of the ingredients are there: the badly drawn map, the glossary of funny words, the pan-Celtic society, the dragons, the talking animals, the weak king ensorcelled by an evil witch. The plot elements were as predictable as a rain storm in Manchester: you never quite know when one is going to turn up, but you know if you wait long enough one will. And if that wasn't bad enough...

One of the things I really hate about fantasy books is when writers give their characters awful accents. Ms. Forsyth obviously thinks she is playing on her Scottish ancestry by filling her conversation with a smattering of words such as "auld", "ken" and "bairn", and dropping the f from every occurrence of the word "of". Perhaps Australian readers won't care, but I suspect that any real Scots who get hold of the book will be seized by a fit of nationalist rage.

It can be done well. If anyone wants an example of how a foreign writer can create an interesting Celtic world they can go and read Patricia Keneally. It is a little bizarre, being Celts in Space, but there is no doubt that she has put a lot of effort into her research. *Dragonclaw* contains little that you could not discover from reading similarly bad fantasy novels.

In fact, I'm fairly certain that's where a lot of it came from. There is a moon called Galadrielle, a heroine called Isabeau, the boy thief with the pet dog lifted straight from Maggie Furey. If this is imaginative fiction, I am a platypus.

Then there is the writing. It reminds me strongly of those Pern novels where McCaffrey is retelling the same story for the second or third time and can't be bothered to do anything except recite a list of events. The characters are mainly unsympathetic stereotypes. And towards the end of the book we have a long digression that seems pointless until you realise that it gets one of the cast to part of The Map that had not yet been visited.

I'm probably being a bit harsh here. It is the girl's first novel. She's done very well to get published. But it irks me to see rubbish like this getting heavy promotion when the fine writers we do have are forced to rely on specialist publishers like Aphelion or go abroad to get noticed.

Oh, nearly forgot. It is the first book in a trilogy of indeterminate length.

Dragonclaw – Kate Forsyth – Arrow – softcover

On the edge

One of Australia's more established fantasy writers is Sara Douglass (whose real name is not Douglass but something central European: Pan-Celtica strikes again). I've avoided her work in the past, partly because she came over very poorly at Swancon, partly because of the awful cover art, and partly because a fantasy series called "The Axis Trilogy" reminds me of the tendency of fantasy literature of lapse into Neo-Fascism. Nevertheless, if I am going to irritate Andy Hooper by reviewing crap fantasy novels I might as well do a good job of it. Besides, *Threshold* is a stand-alone novel, and had been recommended to me by Sharon Nebel and, shock horror, Paul Ewins. Perhaps there is something here worth looking at.

And lo, it is so. If *Dragonclaw* is a predictably typical fantasy novel, *Threshold* is anything but. For starters, it is not set in a Pan-Celtic or Pseudo-Mediaeval society. The heroine is Nordic, but the vast majority of the action takes place in a not-quite-Egypt. Tirzah is a glassworker of exceptional talent who finds herself a very valuable slave because the pyramid builders have need of such talent. The Magi of the land of Ashdod have abandoned their traditional religion in favour of a mathematical belief that could have been inspired by Pythagoras. Their pyramid, Threshold, is being built to very careful plans. When finished, the precision optics will focus the sun to provide enormous power for their magical workings.

See what I mean? A little bit of imagination for once. It is clear that Sara does not really have much interest in numerology – there is a lot more she could have done with it if she did – but at least she had the courage to try something different.

The writing is a lot better too. The characters have some life to them, and there is genuine emotional tension. You should be warned that the book is as much romance as fantasy. The relationship between Tirzah and the evil Magus, Boaz, is the central theme of the story, and the plot comes uncomfortably close to bodice-ripping at times. Douglass is heavy on the emotional torture: not in the same league of viciousness as Dorothy Dunnett, but painful stuff all the same.

I should say that the plot gets very bogged down in the second half, almost as if the publishers had told her that 450 pages wasn't enough so could she please add another 100. But it picks up again at the end, and has the sort of cute finale that you normally only expect from short stories.

All of which should not be taken to say that this is fine literature. It is solid, competent fantasy/romance and is a welcome breath of fresh air in a field that is full of unimaginative formula writing. I remind myself that Sherri Tepper started out writing bad fantasy novels. I shall watch Sara Douglass with interest.

Threshold – Sara Douglass – Voyager – softcover

Melbourne Diary

The MSFC, as I have probably said before, is very much a broad church club. It has a full range of membership from people like Alan Stewart and myself, who read voraciously, to a prominent member of local Trek fandom who likes to wind up Terry Frost by claiming that he doesn't read at all. But there are also many specialist clubs in the city. Most of them are devoted to particular media shows, but one, Nova Mob, is centred on literature.

Nova Mob meets once a month at the home of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner. Bruce Gillespie is a regular attendee, and various local authors have turned up, either to present their work or just to participate. The typical pattern is for a guest or member to prepare a presentation on a particular person's work. Recent subjects have included Delany, Stapledon and Banks, though just to show that we are not always serious, Charlie Taylor gave us a fascinating look at the techniques used by R.L. Stein in churning out a *Goosebumps* book every few weeks.

This month's meeting was something special. Judy Buckrich, a local writer, has been working on a biography of George Turner for some years. With George now enshrined as Guest of Honour at Aussiecon Three, her work has taken on sudden significance. At the last Nova Mob she gave us a sneak preview of her work. Some of the assembled gathering knew George well

and were doubtless not too surprised, but those of us to whom he is merely a famous writer were stunned.

George, it would appear, has led a very full life indeed, much of which shines through in his work. His constant portrayal of unhappy family life, for example, probably stems from his having been abandoned by his father at an early age. His first novel was inspired by his experiences as an infantryman in the Pacific War and, though a keen reader of SF, he wrote only mainstream novels until very late in life. Indeed, we are lucky to have got any SF from him at all. After the War, George suffered badly from alcoholism and would have died of it had not a neighbour's son idly peered over the fence and seen George flat out on the lawn spewing blood. Alcohol features prominently in his writing as well, particularly in *A Waste of Shame*. Nevertheless, and despite another brush with death from a heart attack, George has lived to a ripe old 80 and fully intends to see in the new millenium.

There is still a way to go yet before publication, including the usual problems of getting approval for a biography when the subject is still alive to nigger about it. George can be very irascible when he wants to be. Hopefully, however, all will be sorted out by 1999 and we will have not only a very fine writer as a guest, but also a fine biography of his fascinating life.

Well, that was what I wrote before I knew George had died. The funeral took place the following Wednesday. Although I had only met George a couple of times, as the only representative of international fandom in town at the time, I decided to go. Thankfully no one thought it presumptuous of me, and it was a splendid event. Many local writers, including Jack Dann and Janeen Webb, Lucy Sussex, Sean McMullen and Damien Broderick, were present. On the fannish side, John Foyster had come over from Adelaide, Perry Middlemiss and Alan Stewart represented Aussiecon Three, and many others were also present. Justin and Jenny Ackroyd also came, and little Lucy was very well behaved.

The fannish speakers were John Bangsund, who had first introduced George to fandom, Bruce Gillespie, and Judy Buckrich. George's relationship with his family was not good. I don't know if any of them were there, but there was a sizeable contingent of George's friends from Ballarat, including Jim Dunwoody, George's best mate for many years. Jim was presumably too upset to say anything, but his brother Andy made a superb speech and, yet again, Melbourne fandom discovered a side to George it had not known had existed.

The next issue, if there is one, will contain reviews of some more of George's work. In the meantime, check out the memorial web page. The words of people who knew George well are better than anything I could offer.

Some of the overseas fanzines I receive have bemoaned the end of Paul Ewin's tenure as editors of the MSFC clubzine, *Ethel the Aardvark*. Personally I think the Ian Gunn incarnation of Ethel is better suited to serving the club, but there is no doubt that Paul is a good writer with a natural fanzine editor's eye for an interesting anecdote.

Freed from the constraints of Ethel, Paul has produced an exploratory issue of a new perzine. He has called it *AMD*, this being an IBM acronym for Air Movement Device. I'm sure you will be able to follow his reasoning. I say "freed" because, although Paul could never resist putting personal material into Ethel, it is clear that he had a lot more to say. *AMD* gives him a chance to let rip.

The 'zine starts tamely enough with reviews of books, films, music and computer games, but it isn't long before things get intensely personal. An article on his most vivid memories of

childhood and adolescence is quickly followed by a short confessional about Paul's passion for Airfix kits. It takes a lot of courage to hold your head up proudly in fandom and confess to really nerdy hobbies, but having done so, Paul clearly feels on solid enough moral ground to take fandom apart.

I've read a lot of articles purporting to give a taxonomy of fandom, but Paul's *Nine Circles* is one of the best. As a characterisation of the Melbourne fannish community it is particularly accurate. I wish I had had it to read before I got here. This is followed (after another modelling piece) by a short look at the complexities of fannish relationships. Thankfully Paul avoids naming names, but he does touch on the recent appearance of gay and bi-sexual fans. His thoughts on a fannish Mardi Gras float are quite Lovecraftian.

Finally there is a page-long piece entitled *In Praise of Cynicism*. Here Paul pulls out all the stops. Of some fans he says, "They live in an incredibly small niche, leading passive, non-participatory lives and yet have the gall to call the rest of the world 'mundane'". It is fascinating stuff: very personal, very thoughtful, and likely to teach you more about life than any amount of watching *Star Trek: Next Gen*. More power to your keyboard, Paul. This is what perzines should be like.

A fine gathering of fans and writers took place at Slow Glass Books last Friday. Justin has been importing copies of the paperback edition of Jane Routley's *Mage Heart*. Given that Jane's husband, Terry, has landed another programming contract in Denmark and the pair is about to depart for parts north, an early signing was deemed appropriate.

It being her first such event, poor Jazza was a little nervous. In the end, however, she performed splendidly. Many copies of the book were sold, much to Justin's delight, and a good time was had by all. Jane is already hard at work on a follow-up novel which I guess will be out sometime late in 1998 (launch it at *Bucconeer*, Jazza) and more will doubtless follow.

Look; let's be blunt about this. Jane is a good friend of mine. Her writing is good. Buy her books. OK?

And whilst I am about it, readers in Scandinavia should be aware that Jane is a very nice person and should be made very welcome. I'm sure she'll be looking for conventions to attend.

Mention of *Bucconeer* reminds me that my dear friend Terry Frost is intending to stand for DUFF in 1998. America, you have been warned. He's well worth the trip, and will be splendid entertainment wherever he goes, but don't expect another Alan Stewart or Perry Middlemiss. Whereas those guys raised money for their trips by selling fanzines, Terry will be selling stuff like *Club Buggery* playing cards. Not know what I mean? I'll be bringing some over with me in July. First set to be auctioned at BASFA on June 30th. The rest go to Janice Murray to do with as she wills.

Wasacon

OK, who laughed when I mentioned readers in Scandinavia in the last section? O ye of little faith. Herewith, a report on a recent convention in Stockholm by Wolf von Witting. Wolf lives in Stockholm but, as you might guess from his name, he has a German father. He has been active in German and Swedish fandom since 1975, has published many fanzines and has been

involved in a large number of conventions. For the benefit of those of you who like acronyms: FIAWWF (fandom is a world-wide family).

WASACON

June 14-15th/Stockholm, Sweden.

Things started on the Friday night with a Sigma TC meeting at my place. Jonas Holmberg brought with him a big tv-screen-projector to give every media fan in our midst the shivers, being able to immerse ourselves in some of the latest Star Trek-episodes released on VHS. We could have immersed in beer too, but next day when opening the fridge, I found most of the bottles still accounted for. And you're being left with the profound question: "What kind of fans dwell in these realms, that go for Star Trek and leave beer bottles without a purpose to their existence?"

On the whole, this eve before the con was a worthy opening for a fannish weekend. And plenty of beer was consumed over the weekend anyhow.

After several dark years in Swedish fandom, con activity is increasing. This year three cons are being held. This one, WASACON, NAVIGATOR'97 (Saltsjoe-Con XIV on August 1st-3rd in Saltsjoebaden) and Konfekt'97 or the Upsala SF-meeting VI (<http://www.bahnhof.se/~anglemar/EFSF/konfekt.html>) It is late awakening for the Swedes, alas, a mere 70 souls bothered to witness this greatly entertaining and fannish manifestation.

Fannish events appear to be easy to cope with and free of greater financial risk. Once again, improvisation by experienced Swedish fans proved to be sufficient to entertain the gathered crowd. Anders Bellis did an interview with Annika Lidne, Wasacons SGoH. She has contributed to swedish literature with one cyberpunk novel (COMA). Janne Johansson's comment on her went something like this: "Gosh! A babe, who writes science fiction!" And she was a babe, indeed. Can't say more about her myself either. I haven't read the book (yet).

On the awry side of the con was the damned heat that made smokers and non-smokers flock on the tiny and only balcony of the locale. Perhaps some lurked there for a chance collision with the SGoH, because she spent an awful lot of time there. So did I.

I was cast in a media panel myself, as an expert on the subject. The others were Peter Flenshammar, StarWarsfan and head of the Swedish Jedi Order and to my right Nanna Svensson, captain of the local Trekkers. The panel was directed by Carolina Gomez-Lagerloef, who also is the chairman of SFSF (Scandinavian SF-Society and the club behind the con). First I decided to take a position opposite of everyone (for entertainments sake), but Nanna and Peter were sitting ducks and unable to counter. When Nanna grew increasingly red for having to defend her pointed ears, I felt sorry for her and decided to soften it. After all - everyone has the right to wear pointed ears at any time. And Peter's humble personality makes him an impossible target anyway.

I was happy to make the acquaintance of Norwegian fan Herman Ellingsen, a fellow smoffer and passionate con-visitor. He signed up for our con in August and was also the first guest to put up the cash for it. Doubly so appreciated! This is the kind of fan that every con needs.

The banquet meal was good as ever but tardy. Between the bites the Swedish Alvar-prizewinner (some kind of fan-Hugo) was announced. This year it went to Tommy Persson from Linkoeeping. Well deserved! And SFF (an APA) announced the SFF-winners for best

fanzine; Anders Bellis and Lennart Uhlin, best fan writer; Maths Claesson and best fan illustrators; Chris Loneberg and Lars Olsson. No surprises here.

After stuffing our bellies, writer Carl Johan de Geer was on, talking about his writing-technique. Got some useful input there. I hope it will show in my future attempts. Most of the events this day were captured by my video camera and will be part of the program for Sigma TC's own con.

Due to the prolonged banquet, the con spot of the evening was moved from prime time to aftermath. It was disappointing, but the panel did its best to present the upcoming cons of the year and next year. When it finally was my turn to talk about Intuition 1998 in Manchester, I was forced to cut it short and stick to basic facts and figures. This definitely was to the benefit of Eastercon. Under the pressure of limited time, my presentation was left unharmed by my limited knowledge of real Eastercons and by my unlimited imagination. I'm really looking forward to attend my very first Eastercon next year.

But my next destination is Ratzeburg in Germany and the national German convention run by the SFCD. There I will commemorate twenty years of con memories. Perhaps with a large pint of beer, which reminds me... I still have a couple of bottles in the fridge.

Footnote

A strange thing happened to me the other day: I had an idea. I was thinking about Maureen Speller's *Banana Wings* article on early SF and how I might have done it better and it occurred to me that the occasional retrospective book review might be a good idea. What I want to do is occasionally pick on an author from yesteryear and do an overview of his/her more famous books. It will encourage me to catch up on those I've missed and hopefully bring classic works to the attention of younger readers. (Spot the editor who now thinks of herself as an old person.)

The people I have in mind are the likes of Ray Bradbury, Phil Dick, Alfred Bester, John Brunner, Roger Zelazny, James Tiptree Jr, Joanna Russ and Ursula Le Guin. (Yes, I know some of them are still publishing. Being dead is not a pre-requisite.) I'd like it to be a regular feature, but I don't think I can guarantee to read three or more books each month just for one article. We'll see what comes of it. Any suggestions of authors and/or books to include gratefully received (but I would rather not have to re-read Asimov or Heinlein).

I was going to have a review of Umberto Eco's *Island of the Day Before* in this issue, but what with the usual weight of Eco's prose and the current distractions in my life, I haven't finished it yet. Next time, if there is one.

Today's issue of *The Australian's* computer supplement had a major feature on computer games for girls. Apparently this is going to be the next big growth industry. And what sort of games will they be? Why, adventure games in which the player can get to date really cute guys and become a supermodel. Questioned as to whether this isn't a bit sexist, the CEO of one company replied that boys never complain about their games being stereotypes. Too busy killing things I guess. Anyway, this industry is supposed to be worth US\$60m this year. Oh really? Anyone remember *Heartquest*?

This 'zine supports Ian Gunn for a Hugo and Terry Frost for DUFF.

Ciao,
Love 'n' hugs,
Cheryl