

# EMERALD CITY

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## Introduction

Another year, another Worldcon. Hello, San Antonio. I'm Cheryl, and although I am currently living in California, I was born in the UK and have lived in Australia for two years. This means that my 'zine will be peppered with references to people and places far flung across the globe. You may find this confusing. Bear with me please. Hopefully it will prove worthwhile.

This being a Worldcon edition of *Emerald City*, it will follow the now traditional (I've done it once before) pattern of highlighting Australian SF. In particular this issue salutes George Turner who died a couple of months back. It was a drastic way of getting out of being Guest of Honour for Aussiecon Three (not to mention his promise to dance on tables with Bruce Gillespie), but in his 80 years on this planet he managed to leave us with a number of very fine books. I hope I manage to do him justice.

In addition we have another report from our European correspondent. This time Wolf von Witting has been to the major German convention, Ratzecon, and has some interesting things to say about the German Worldcon bid.

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## Making tracks

For the last Worldcon issue of *Emerald City* I reviewed *Voices in the Light*, the first volume of Sean McMullen's Greatwinter series. Quite why it has taken me so long to get round to the next volume I am not sure. Sean has some delightfully zany ideas and has created probably the best Steampunk society ever.

For those of you who missed the earlier review, the books are set in a far future Australia in which various disasters have caused civilisation to revert to a pre-steam age. Global warming has caused sea level to rise, drowning all major Australian cities, but the worst trick of the sea is the mysterious Call, a mental wave which causes people to walk blindly and senselessly towards the ocean until they drown. Various nations suspected each other of causing the Call, leading to a brief nuclear war that ended when automated surveillance satellites pummelled the Earth's armies rather over-enthusiastically. Meanwhile a ring of nanotech panels called MirrorSun, designed to help reverse global warming, is threatening to plunge the planet into another ice age.

Although Sean's world is free of steam and electrical power (the Gentheist religion teaches that use of such machines will call down vengeance from the skies once more), it is far from

un-mechanised. There are railways powered by wind and pedals; there is a sophisticated heliograph network that allows rapid communication across the continent; and there is the Calculator. Highliber Zarvora, the head of the great library in Rochester, has invented a calculating machine composed of hundreds of enslaved humans armed with abacuses and advanced mathematical knowledge. Now Zarvora is de-facto ruler of the all the South-Eastern mayorates and is negotiating with the cities of the West. She hopes to use treasures found in the ruins of Perth to counteract the effects of Mirrorsun. But deep in the central desert, a new war leader is welding the Alspring tribes into a military machine that rivals that of Attila the Hun.

*Mirrorsun Rising* features pretty much the same cast of characters as the first book. Lemorel, Zarvora, John Glasken and the mad abbess, Theresla, all feature strongly. I have to say that Sean manages to put in rather more sex than would seem necessary, and his handling of character emotions is not good. He tends to rely on their words to convey their emotions rather than letting us know how they feel. In particular I would have liked more information on Lemorel's state of mind, and her final confrontation with Glasken was very disappointing. On the other hand, the characters are interesting, and do develop, which is more than you can say for a lot of books.

Where Sean does score is in his comedy scenes. In particular he has a lot of fun with the fact that the Western cities have their own railway based on the Broad Gauge system invented by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Like their predecessors, the employees of this new Great Western Railway are fanatically devoted to their trains and to the Great Engineer. The best scene in the book is the one where two soldiers who just happen to be members of the local trainspotting club watch Zarvora crash a GWR locomotive through the gates of the city that they are supposed to be guarding.

Sean tells me that a third book in the series, *The Miocene Arrow*, has been delivered to a publisher but has not yet been accepted. The book is set in North America rather than Australia, although some of the same characters will feature. Goodness only knows how they are going to get there. Hopefully, we shall see.

*Mirrorsun Rising* - Sean McMullen - Aphelion - softcover

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## George's damp future

Sometimes you can know too much about a writer.

*The Sea and Summer* is George Turner's finest book. It won the Arthur C. Clarke Award, and the cover of my copy bears enthusiastic testimony from such luminaries as Joe Haldeman and Gene Wolfe. Some of you may know it as *Drowning Towers*, the title under which it was published in the USA, but I'm going to stick with the more poetic title.

The Summer in question is the shift in climate that global warming brings to Melbourne, changing it from a city with real weather to one in which winter is only those days on which it is slightly less hot. The Sea is the vengeful Tasman, swelled by massive immigration from the Antarctic ice cap, which has over-run Port Phillip Bay, drowned the lower reaches of the Yarra, and threatens to come knocking on the doors of Melbourne demanding retribution for humanity's mistreatment of the planet.

OK, it is a disaster novel, and because of this it reminds me even more strongly of John Brunner. As in *The Sheep Look Up*, ecological catastrophe overwhelms the planet; as in *Stand on Zanzibar*, humanity is crushed upon itself in conditions reminiscent of modern Bombay (Mumbai for those of you following trends in post-colonial city naming), Calcutta and Mexico City. And, as with John, there is that same bewilderment of a generation that survived through the horror of WWII only to see the world they fought for vanish under an advancing tide of technology, terrorism, eco-disaster and ideological economics.

But this is George Turner, and thus we are also talking about a very human novel rooted deeply in personal experience. The novel concerns Francis and Terry Conway, two small boys who are born "Sweet", that is into a family with a wage earner, and whose world is turned upside down when their father loses his job and kills himself. With no means of support, the family is forced to go onto welfare and move to a lower class area of Melbourne close to the infamous Newport tower blocks, home of the "Swill" of society. The boys and their mother must learn to deal with street gangs, drug addiction, prostitution and the infamous Tower Bosses whose protection rackets are all that passes for law and order in Swilldom. They must also face the rising tide of water which, with every storm season, laps further and further up the lower stories of the Towers. Terrified and disgusted, the two boys plan, each in their own way, to make it back into Sweet society, little realising that politeness and wealth are simply veneers covering behaviour just as corrupt as that of the Swill.

So far so good. It isn't until you remember that "family circumstances" (Judy hasn't been more specific in any fragments of the biography I've heard) caused George's mother to take her children from the goldfields of western Victoria and move to Melbourne that you start wondering how much of the six-year-old George is in Francis and Teddy, and whether he despised his own behaviour as an adolescent as much as he does that of the two boys in the novel. Also, having worked for much of his life in the employment service, George will have been intimately familiar with the struggle to make it in the world, and the difference between those who get on in life, and those who drift from one welfare cheque to the next.

The first half of the book is spent mainly in introducing the world and the characters. It drags a little in places, but it necessary to establish a background for what follows and prepare the readers to be as appalled as the Conway boys by the betrayal of discovering the world as it really is. The second half moves with considerable pace as a real plot develops and the true nature of this future world unfolds. Finally, in the last few chapters, George present some hope for mankind in a suggestion of how society might reform itself and that people are not all as self-serving as he has portrayed.

Perhaps the strangest thing about the book is how out of time many of the ideas are. Writing in 1987, a time when Thatcher and Reagan's style of government was in full swing, only an Australian could conceive of a future world in which 90% of the population gets welfare payments sufficient to give them a roof over their heads and prevent starvation. Furthermore, only someone born at the beginning of the century could conceive that the wife of a low grade electronics engineer being able to afford the luxury of not having to work. Fortunately, George's understanding of people is far more important to the story than his understanding of social trends, and the book is well worth reading even now. Indeed, his solution for the world's ills is not that far from much of what is actually happening.

*Drowning Towers* - George Turner - Avonova - softback.

## Is anyone out there?

Warning: I don't know when Jodie Foster's new film, *Contact*, will be released in Europe and Australia. Unlike the last two films I reviewed, this one has a plot. That makes it hard to discuss without giving away a few spoilers. Life was much easier in Australia when I used to see everything after the rest of the world.

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Most of you will already know that *Contact* is based on Carl Sagan's book of the same name and that it concerns Earth's first contact with extra-terrestrial life. Being a big proponent of the SETI project, Sagan of course had the contact being made via a radio telescope rather than the traditional method of the appearance of flying saucers. Foster's character is the astronomer who first hears the alien signal. The film describes the lead up to and aftermath of the contact.

And that's the plot? No way. This film has more plot to it than 10 showings of *Batman & Robin* and *Men in Black* combined. It isn't always brilliant. It is, after all, based on a very undistinguished novel. But it is always interesting. On leaving the theatre, Kevin and I were happily drawing food analogies. For the past two weeks we had had the movie equivalent of fast food. Now we'd had a decent 3-course meal.

From a movie point of view, other than Foster's acting, the best parts of the film were the way that events in the story were tied in to the real world. Robert Zemeckis used the same film-combining techniques he had used in *Forest Gump* to make it appear that *Contact* was happening here and now. For example, he used footage of a Clinton speech, probably the one on sheep cloning, to provide a believable Presidential address following the official announcement of contact. Later Clinton is patched into a scene so that it appears he is actually sat at a table with the cast members. The White House press department got a bit huffy about their man's image being used without permission and out of context, but there was little they could do without making fools of themselves. Besides, I reckon Slick Willy will be pretty pleased at being in a film that is already being touted as an Oscar nominee.

In the same vein, several newscasters and chat show hosts appeared as themselves so that TV coverage of the events in the film could be shown. A few channels got mad with their people, which just goes to show how little humour TV bosses have. But perhaps the best bit of this interplay with real life was the scene where Foster returns to the radio telescope array in Arizona after her summons to Washington. The desert around the site is covered in tents and RVs and every conceivable sort of weirdo cult is present trying to cash in on the aliens. Elvis is alive and living on Vega. Believe it.

There is more to the film as well. Sagan had always intended the novel to be propaganda for SETI, and the film could hardly fail to do the same. The main philosophical theme is the debate between the scientists, represented by Foster, and religion, represented jointly by a group of Fundamentalist terrorists and Matt McConaughey's more restrained "spiritual advisor to the President". It is easy to come away from the film thinking that Sagan is a von Danikenist and that the message of the film is that God is a Space Alien. This would be a mistake, but you have to work hard to get the real message.

What Sagan is trying to say is two-fold. Firstly, and in my view fairly obviously, we cannot continue to base our world view on an explanation designed for Palestinian nomads over 2000 years ago. As we continue to explore our universe, we discover more and more amazing things. We learn that creation is far more glorious than we had imagined. Even his

aliens admit that there are mysteries in the universe that they do not understand. We have to keep learning.

Secondly, Sagan wants us to accept that not everything in the world can be explained by science. Sure we now know that thunderstorms are caused by electrical activity between clouds, not by Zeus or Thor throwing a strop. But occasionally people still experience things which, despite complete lack of proof, they insist are true.

This is a much more debatable point. Sagan is, in effect, asking us to have faith in the existence of aliens. He is saying that some of those people who swear blind that they have seen flying saucers might actually be right. He is saying that we should throw money at SETI because we believe, even though there is no sign of results. And he is recognising that if we accept that we have no reason for denying people who claim to have seen God.

Were it true, as has been claimed, that I am actually a pseudonym for Joseph Nicholas, I would now launch into an extended rant on the infallibility of Pure Rationalism. However, it so happens that I don't believe in the infallibility of anything, especially science. After all, most scientific progress is made by people disproving old theories and coming up with new ones. There is no bigger mistake that anyone can make than believing that they cannot be wrong.

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Incidentally, some of you may be wondering how close the film is to the novel. Julie Porter of BASFA went back and read the book, and she said that the story is essentially the same but that the characters have changed a lot. In her opinion, the scriptwriters have taken a large number of uninteresting characters from the book and combined them to make a small number of interesting characters for the movie. For example, in the book, Foster's character is actually five separate scientists. That might be a little more realistic, but it doesn't make for an interesting film. Given that most people I know who've read the book said it was pretty awful, this may be a rare instance of Hollywood screenwriters improving on the original.

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## **Ratzeview**

By Wolf von Witting

SFCD, the national German science fiction-club held this year its annual convention in Ratzeburg near Luebeck. There may have been one hundred fans coming together, which would constitute the hard core of German fandom today.

This year the SFCD-con had international program-items, in english language. 10 years ago in Hackenheim/Bad Kreuznach this may have been quite difficult to do. 15 years ago in 1982, MoenchenGladbach, when the con was supposed to be a Eurocon as well, the only program-item that everyone could enjoy was a pantomime by spacehero Tommy Star. Germans were extremely reluctant to speak anything but German.

Having been away from German fandom for most of the 90's, I can observe some development here. German fans appear to open up towards international fandom. And I was not the only foreigner at the convention.

Arriving on Friday afternoon I encountered three UK fans at the registry; Fiona Anderson, Mike Cheater and Miriam Moss. Peeking in on Dieter Steinseifers presentation of the freshly revived APA F.A.N. another UK fan sat there, Wilf James. I ran into the SGoH Brian Stableford in the lobby. He and his wife Jane gave yet another opportunity to avoid to speak German. I'm out of practice and really have to concentrate in order to get it right. Yes, it's a shame, I should practice!

Two Lithuanian fans arrived, hitch-hiking from Vilnius and then there was me from Sweden. Kes van Toorn and Jacek Rzeszolnik couldn't make it, so Holland and Poland were not represented. Since Jacek couldn't come, I was asked to talk about Scandinavian Fandom, a program-item which rightfully should have been entitled "about Swedish Fandom". Norway and Finland now both have very active and lively fandoms and they can speak for themselves. I really don't know much about them, so it became a review of Swedish fandom today.

My other program-item was filksong. On my way to Ratzburg I had written 10 new filksongs, just to make sure that I wouldn't run short of them. This was fortunate. I was allowed to sing for a full hour. Being good in the kitchen or in the bathtub is something else, but I'm never allowed to sing this much at home. This gave me new confidence. Now I produce songs based on any subject that is unfortunate enough to cross my mind.

Our host Eckhard D. Marwitz had a nice idea for the opening ceremony, charades. We should try to guess which fans names were illustrated. Wherever I went my video-camera was with me. These charades were perfect for a convideo-documentary. And during this convention I collected some incriminating evidence. Mike Cheater had a narrow escape, but his secret is safe with me. I will not make a filksong of it. Besides, he promised he would come to Stockholm and assassinate me if I did.

Brian Stableford was quite unlike what I had expected. He was on schedule to every one of his program-items, he was witty, entertaining and easy approachable. Unlike some writers I've met. Even though he first was \*just another science fiction-writer\* to me, I have to admit that he has accomplished something long ago, which has been my lifelong ambition. Got to respect the man for that. It doesn't mean that I would drool all over him. Knowing the man only enhanced the reading experience when I opened his collection of short stories *Sexual Chemistry*. I was specifically thrilled with the story *And He Is Not Busy Being Born*.

German fan Beluga Post was a new acquaintance. He has only been around in fandom for three years, but has already made quite a name for himself. His convention, the SF-Tage in Dortmund has become the biggest German sf-con so far (not counting the Perry Rhodan-Worldcon). He also appeared to be a humble person and has not yet become a victim of megalomania. So I agreed to become Swedish agent for SF-Tage.

I was happy to see Waldemar Kumping alive and well. He has been recording SFCDs conventions on audiotape for as long as I can remember. It gives a sense of order and stability to the universe to see him around. His fanzine *Munich Round Up* is now at #166 and it has always been thoroughly edited and with an international summary.

Dieter Sachse is another German fan that appears to withstand the test of time with excellence. While Dieter Steinseifers hair has turned from black to grey, I can't discover any signs of increased age at Sachse. Perhaps he is not even human? Or perhaps he has a portrait at home in the attic, doing all the aging for him? He still looks the same to me over 20 years.

The Worldcon-debate on Saturday night turned into one great yawn. Eckhard D Marwitz sank deeper into his chair and went completely quiet while Juergen Marzi and others seemed to find further obstacles for Berlin in 2003. German fans have little faith in their own ability when the Worldcon is mentioned. This is sad.

The Saturday night session was already the second Worldcon-debate of the day. It didn't change anything either. But it is most unlikely that the German bid will fold this year. Juergen Marzi is out of the game anyway. If this is good or bad remains to be seen. I would like to go to Berlin in 2003 - but the Germans have to shape up. A lot!

Too bad that Kes wasn't there. The debate may have taken a more interesting turn. Marwitz is not very eloquent in English, but this second debate was in German language and the UK fans Fiona Anderson and Mike Cheater were sitting quietly in the back of the auditorium. Achim Sturm, one of the German fans opposing the bid fell asleep during the first round of the debate when Juergen Marzi was laying out the "facts". Sturm then woke up from his own snore just to repeat what Marzi already had said. This was the point where Mike, Fiona and I decided to leave and use the night for something far more appealing: sleep!

In Ratzeburg I was the last fan at the con site after the closing ceremony and everyone had gone. I was invited for dinner so I had to freshen myself up. This proved difficult. Sometimes problems have to be solved as they come along... I had access to a shower, but I was separated from my towel. I had no shampoo, but there was liquid soap in the lavatory. I had run out of clean shirts, since the days in Germany had been wet and hot. At Sundays most shops are closed in Germany. Buying anything at all is difficult. Use your imagination. But I did turn up for dinner fresh and clean!

Yet another con in the gallery of past conventions. This one had a certain significance for me - I found myself. After six years of gafia the first half of 1997 slowly returned me to fandom. With Ratzecon I feel that I'm finally back completely!

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## **A bloom in the snow**

Once upon a time, in a land where fairy tales happen, lived a farmer and his two daughters. Laurel, the elder girl, was tall, elegant and efficient. She is engaged to be married to Perrin, a lad she has known since her childhood. The other, Rois, is wild, unpredictable, untamed, beautiful. She is prone to wandering in the woods with no shoes and returning home late with flowers in her hair and the scent of the wildwood for perfume. Their farm is close to a small village where life is peaceful. There is no local Lord, for many years ago Nial Lynn was murdered by his mis-treated son and since that time the family and Lynn Hall have been under a curse.

One summer, Rois was taking a drink from a secret well, deep in the woods, when she spied a handsome young man step out of a shower of light. His hair was blond, his body muscular, and his face the type that takes your heartstrings in an unbreakable grip. Later she hears that he rode into the village on a mare the colour of buttermilk, though he had no horse when he appeared. His name is Corbet Lynn, and he has come to claim his grandfather's inheritance. For Rois and her family, their lazy, comfortable life is about to be torn apart.

What kind of man can appear so suddenly and charms everyone he meets? What kind of woman can see his arrival and glimpse the world from which he came? What is the curse that Nial Lynn laid on his family, that every villager alive at the time remembers differently and none can remember who heard it laid? There are doors, he said, pathways to other places. There are voices on the wind that call to Rois, but do they tell the truth about Corbet Lynn, or are they like the Moon, showing a different face each day? Why can Rois see what the villagers cannot? Is she the only person who can help break the Lynn curse? Is love all she needs to do it? And if it is, do the voices on the wind speak true when they say that you must be human to love? Because if they are, and only she and Corbet can hear them, perhaps there is no hope at all.

There are many books that bear the label "fantasy". Very few of them convey any of the power, majesty and wonder that is the true mark of the Sidhe. I remember from years back Ellen Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*. I remember Rob Holdstock invoking the forest in *Mythago Wood*. I have not seen anyone do it as well as Patricia McKillip. *Winter Rose*. buy it, read it, be spellbound.

*Winter Rose* - Patricia McKillip - Ace - hardcover

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## Bay Area diary

When I lived in Melbourne I used to run a fairly regular on what was happening in local fandom. I see no reason why the people of the Bay Area should escape, so what have we been up to in the past month.

For starters, I attended my first meeting of the South Bay Costumers Guild. This wasn't a serious costuming meeting, but rather a birthday party for one of the Guild's officers. In fact there was very little mention of costuming at all. The event struck me as being more like an SCA meeting in mufti, with people spending most of their time discussing beer and paganism. This impression was enforced by the presence of a couple of members of the Berkley folk rock band, Annwn, who played for us during the afternoon. They'd been billed as Celtic rock, but most of their repertoire was more what I'd expect from the likes of Fairport Convention, Steeleye Span and Jethro Tull than Runrig, Capercaille or Clannad. Not that I am complaining, they were darn good. Any organisation that can provide entertainment like this at their parties is going to get my support.

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The following day BASFA was having a baseball outing. The reason for the event was the season's only "double header" - a day on which the teams play two games consecutively (and ticket prices are at normal levels). This seemed like a good idea. Spending all day at a summer sporting event was almost like getting to go to a cricket match.

The day got off to a bad start. I got up in the morning to thread the meat I'd had marinating all night onto some skewers and discovered that Kevin had been seized by the need for a midnight feast. He had eaten my packet of Kettle chips that I'd been saving for the game. Fortunately I have a fanzine in which I can expose his perfidy to the world, a far more serious punishment than any amount of yelling and screaming. He's not going to make that mistake again in a hurry.



We had a good crowd - 14 people in all - and the first event of the day was the tailgate party. For those of you who are not familiar with American sporting habits, this means that everyone sits around in the car park having a barbie before the game. Kevin had arranged things so that we arrived in plenty of time and knew just the right place to park so that we had plenty of room, even close to the start of the game when the car park was starting to look like the M25 in rush hour. A variety of food and drink was supplied, and my kebabs seemed to go down well.

Other people were taking advantage of the special event, including a cookie company who were handing out packs of baseball trading cards. This went down very well with many of our crowd who were soon busy circulating around the car park swapping cards. Personally I've never understood the attraction of this sort of thing, but it seemed to have been a popular idea.

Around midday it was time for the first game to start. The San Francisco Giants have a motto of "Anything can happen". This is smart for a baseball team because it is the type of sport where long periods of inaction are followed by bursts of frenetic activity. It also described the day's play perfectly. The opposition was the Pittsburgh Pirates, and their lead batter put the very first pitch of the day deep into the stands. It was their only run of the first innings, but the Giants replied with four when it came to their turn. We settled down for an entertaining day.

What followed for the next couple of hours was largely a duel of pitchers. Runs were very hard to come by, and by the ninth innings the score had advanced only to 5-2. At this point the Giants brought in a new pitcher, Rod Beck, who is a specialist in keeping the final innings quiet. Heck, he is the best in the league at it. The Pirates, however, were not impressed and proceeded to add another three runs to force the game into overtime. It wasn't until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> innings that the Giants managed to force a run and wrap up the game.

Now four extra innings is almost an extra half game, so we were all congratulating ourselves on the value we were getting. The players, on the other hand, obviously thought that the half-hour break was far too short. The Giants in particular seemed to have gone to sleep. So did I, until Kevin appeared wafting a plate of garlic fries under my nose. By the end of the eighth innings the score was a measly 4-1 to the Pirates. Then all hell broke loose. In their final innings the Pirates took advantage of a fielding mix-up to get going and finally posted an extra six runs. Eric Larson commented that the game was clearly over and perhaps we should make a move and avoid the rush. I countered that from the look of the stands everyone else was doing just that so we'd be better off staying. Besides, it would only be another minute or two.

We were both badly wrong. Somewhere, the spark of aggression had been lit in the Giants. A double followed by a home run got some runs on the board. This was soon followed by a 3-run homer, and when a solo home run was added bringing the gap back to three runs everyone who was left in the stadium was on their feet cheering. Sadly that was the end to it, the next the batters all being put out easily, but it had been an amazing end to the game. Anything can happen, they said. Can't argue with that.

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The following weekend, Michael Jordan paid a flying visit to San Francisco. He was en route to a holiday in Canada, but had a 7-hour wait for his connection in SFO. Not wishing any of my Aussie friends to get bored here, I trotted up to the airport to keep him company.

We ended up taking a brief tour of the SF2002 Worldcon site, focusing in particular on the View Bar at the top of the Marriott. It was a little foggy on the day, but we still had a superb view out over the city. The more I go to this hotel, the more I like it.

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A couple of weeks later, Kevin and I took his nephew to the baseball. This wasn't a very newsworthy event, save to say that young Shane is one of the best behaved 10-year-olds that I have ever met. However, in order to get the kid and his mother back home, we had to drive them from Candlestick to Oakland train station. As Amtrak's parking meters have a minimum time of 3 hours, this left us with quite a while to look around.

For those of you who don't know, Oakland is the Dark Twin of San Francisco. Squatting across the Bay in the midst of decaying but still active docklands, the city glowers back at its colourful neighbour with undisguised malice. Where San Francisco is sophisticated, gay (in all senses of the word) and multicultural, Oakland is defiantly urban (that being the latest PC term for poor and black). It is also the home of the football team that everyone loves to hate, the team that Game's Workshop's BloodBowl parodied as the Orkland Raiders. Get the picture?

However, just like every other major port in the developed world, Oakland has seen the wisdom in turning its waterfront into a tourist attraction. Thus their railway station (and in true American fashion the main west coast railway line itself) is slap in the middle of Jack London Square. I find it a little bizarre to contemplate a pedestrian shopping precinct where Amtrak's main passengers services to Seattle and Chicago can come rolling down the middle of the street, but I guess it adds colour. In any case, it is a great location.

Time out now for a couple of diversions, firstly on Jack London. As many of you will know, London is one of America's most famous novelists. He was born on Third Street in San Francisco, but I guess he must have lived much of his life in Oakland, or at least has written about the place, because they are very fond of him. Jack London Square contains a replica of the Yukon cottage where London lived when he was a gold prospector, a period which inspired his greatest works. Many of the shops and restaurants are built in a similar rustic style, and the pavements are dotted with wolf prints in honour of White Fang. It is cute, but not overdone.

The other digression concerns a forthcoming event in the area. As many of you will know, I am very fond of Potlatch, a small, friendly lit convention that moves up and down the north-west coast of North America. Next year, on the weekend January 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, it will be in the Jack London Inn, Oakland. Given that this year's convention is being run by such excellent people as Sarah Goodman and Tom Whitmore, it should be a fine event. In any case, Kevin and I figured we'd better check out the surrounding area.

Most of the shopping is craft and tourist oriented. There is a small and fairly poorly stocked games shop, but I did find a copy of James Wallis's "Once Upon a Time" card game there. More importantly, there is a large branch of the liquor superstore, Beverages & More. This one claimed to have over 600 different beers, which should be enough to keep even Martin Hoare and Dave Langford happy for a weekend. They had a lot of Australian wines too.

The restaurants were mixed but plentiful. We saw no sign of fast food chains, but there were a couple of well known restaurants such as TGI Fridays and Old Spaghetti House, plus a lot of interesting stuff. We were surprised to see one place offering Australian lobster at \$40 a meal, but most places were reasonably priced. There was a lot of seafood, but we ended up at an Indonesian restaurant called Dutch East Indies. The food here was the real

thing and every bit as good as you can find in Australia. What is more, they also put on displays of Indonesian folk dancing (which for those of you who haven't been to Bali is similar to what you get in Thailand). We sat there by the window, looking over the Bay, watching the fog set over San Francisco and flocks of pelicans heading home to roost, and stuffed ourselves silly. I'm particularly fond of Indonesian curries which use a lot of coconut milk as in Thailand but also a lot of tamarind which imparts a unique flavour. We were both very impressed and will be organising an outing there one evening at Potlatch.

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The following day was and SF2002 committee meeting. Crickett Fox, our Facilities Manager, had arranged a tour of the Marriott so that everyone else could see what a fine hotel it was. On an earlier visit I had spotted a brew pub only a few hundred yards from the Moscone Center. Mindful of the needs of my Pommie friends, for whom no convention is considered adequate without copious supplies of real ale, I organised an expedition.

The Thirsty Bear is decorated warehouse style, meaning lots of bare brick and pipes. Along one wall are seven large, gleaming vats around which the bar is built. The rest of the area is given over to industrial-style seating. There are two pool tables upstairs, but no dart board. There are nine beers brewed on the premises, although only seven are even on offer at any one time, including an ESB, IPA, stout, and a wheat beer. Dave Gallaher, who is a serious beer drinker, was impressed with the ESB. I tried the wheat, but the flavouring of coriander and orange peel made it very cloudy which rather spoilt my enjoyment. The vanilla ale, on the other hand, was delicious. Lynn Gold and I both loved it, and even Kevin, a notorious beer hater, ordered a glass. Strangely a half-pint costs \$3.00 whereas a pint costs \$3.75, but I'm not going to complain. More information on the beers is available on their web site at <http://www.thirstybear.com>.

If that was all there was to the place I would have been delighted to find it, but Thirsty Bear is also a very fine Spanish restaurant. Unlike some of the supposed Tapas bars in London which cashed in on the trend by simply putting a bowl of olives on the bar, this place is the real thing. We shared a number of delicious dishes including garlic prawns, fish cheeks, mussels in tarragon and white wine and deep fried calamari with a paprika sauce. The main courses looked good too, including three different paellas. We paid around \$25-\$30 a head including beer and everyone seemed very impressed.

One small warning: do not go there in groups of more than 7. For large groups they have a mandatory 18% service charge on which they also tried to charge us sales tax. But otherwise it is an excellent place and yet another feather in the cap of our Worldcon site.

Incidentally, the name of the pub came from a 1991 news story. An escaped circus bear in Moscow chanced upon a local pub and accosted one of the drinkers. When the man refused to part with his beer, the bear bit his hand stole the glass. Three other drinkers subsequently parted with their beers without resistance. The bear then wandered off and was later apprehended by police whilst sleeping off his binge in a nearby park.

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Finally, a strange event at BASFA. I turned up there last Monday to find Stephen Boucher amidst the crowd. It turns out he could be doing this a lot as United are planning a direct Melbourne-San Francisco service which will make getting to the USA a lot easier for Melbourne folks, and Stephen does more business trips to the US than I did. We promptly appointed him Ambassador to Australia and Julie Porter asked whether we should hold a joint BASFA/MSFC meeting. Much to Stephen's surprise, it turned out that there were six

MSFC members in the room, but we were not sure what the rules are for convening meetings so we dropped the idea. Alan, Terry, Gunny: someone care to remind me?

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## Fanzine Scene

So now that I'm in the good old US of A, what's the fanzine scene like? Wish I knew. I'm getting the bizarre impression that people in "fanzine fandom" over here don't actually publish fanzines. Fortunately there are exceptions. Here's some that I do know about.

Normally, any discussion of US fanzines would start with *Apparatchik*. Unfortunately, as I reported last issue, Andy, Victor and Carl have decided to call it a day. This is sad news, but as someone who has been through the pain of folding, I offer them my full support, especially against those people who say "you can't do this to us". Here's hoping they all find a way to enjoy publishing, or at least writing, again in the near future.

Something that Andy has been praising for some time is *TommyWorld*. This is an e-zine from Tommy Ferguson and it is available on the web at <http://www.globalserve.net/~tferg/> As you might expect from one of Andy's recommendations, the writing is excellent and it is full of interesting personal material. What can I say but add my own recommendations.

*'ukelele* is not on the web. It is an honest-to-goodness eighties fanzine resurrected after a ten year stretch in which editor Daniel Farr made the foolish mistake of getting a life. I suspect that soon an issue or two discussion will focus on what is different in fandom and what has remained the same in the period of *'ukelele's* absence. Interesting, as is the fact that both it and *TommyWorld* hail from Toronto. Does a Worldcon bid really stimulate fanzine publishing that much?

Another blast from the past is *Gasworks*. John D. Berry is returning to fanzine publishing after a prolonged absence, and the first article in the zine is a report of the DUFF trip he and his wife made in 1989 and his follow up trip to Aussiecon Two. To arrive in California and suddenly receive a fanzine from Seattle edited by a close friend of John Bangsund was a little bizarre. John is aided and abetted by Steve Swartz (which, in my surprise, I initially read for Steve Scholtz) who contributes a fascinating review of a trip to Intervention, the last UK Eastercon. I suspect that only an American could describe the Adelphi as "great". I also suspect that a few Poms will be a little put out at his extrapolation from Intervention that all British conventions are totally disorganised. But otherwise Steve seems pretty much on the ball as regards his outsider's view of British fandom.

Bob Devney is perhaps best known for his review column in *Proper Boskonian*, but he has his own 'zine as well. Devniad is originally published as part of NESFA-APA, but it is available by e-mail as well (although possibly not to anyone). The latest issue is comprised largely of a "review" of Readerson which consists entirely of quotes from various people linked by sentences from Bob. I found the whole thing disjointed and uninteresting as no one thread ever developed for more than a paragraph. This is a shame, because Bob can do very much better. The film reviews, which he makes deliberately short because of the space taken by other stuff, are far better, and his long stuff in *PB* is very good. Ho Hum.

Of course the one of the real stars of American fanzines is Mike Glycer's *File 770*. Both the 'zine and Mike have won fannish Hugos, and now that Mike has emerged from the herculean task of chairing L.A.con III he is getting the 'zine back on track again. Mike has an excellent line in gossip, particularly with regard to con-running, and knows just how stir things to maximum effect. He also has a wry sense of humour that could almost make you mistake him for a Brit. I particularly liked his comments in the last issue on LoneStarCon 2.

*"Unbelievable! The San Antonio Worldcon has cancelled its trademark event, the Chili Cookoff. What's next, Milwaukee cancelling beer? Los Angeles cancelling smog?"*

No Mike, San Francisco cancelling fog.

And finally there is *Attitude* which is not from North America, but did contain Spike Parson's report of Attitude: the Convention in which she shares with us the interesting comment that Kevin is America's answer to KIM Campbell. I wonder who can guess what line of thinking brought her to that conclusion. Anyway, *Attitude* continues on its heavyweight way towards the planned shutdown at issue 12. Despite the fact that after many issues of trades they still refuse to include *Emerald City* in their length fanzine review section (another anti-electronic bias, I guess), I'm going to restrain myself from calling the 'zine "worthy" as to many British fans do. Yes, the articles are sometimes pretty serious, but they are also very interesting. There's one more issue to come. Don't miss out.

*'ukelele* - Daniel Farr - #106, 77 Maitland Place, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2V6, Canada.

*Gasworks* - John D. Berry & Steve Swartz - 4114 Interlake Ave. North #4, Seattle, WA 98103, USA.

*File 770* - Mike Glycer - PO Box 1056, Sierra Madre, CA 91025, USA.

*Attitude* - Pam Wells, John Dalman and Mike Abbot - 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge, CB1 3QF, UK.

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## Footnote

Rumours are reaching me of some strange goings on at the MSFC. I gather that Karen has resigned as President on the unimpeachable grounds that looking after Ian is more important. However, despite hearing it from two independent sources, I refuse to believe that they elected Justin Semmel in her place. You are having me on, aren't you, guys.

The news on Gunny's cancer is good. It is responding to treatment, and given that most people who don't get cured are unlucky because they do not respond to treatment, this is excellent news. He continues to keep the world informed of his progress by chatty and humorous emails which has to be a good sign.

One slight casualty of his illness appears to be Basicon. A number of Melbourne fans had offered to help out, but there is one problem they won't be able to do anything about. For reasons best known to themselves, Ian and Karen had scheduled the convention for the same weekend as the Aussie Rules Grand Final - Australia's answer to the SuperBowl. Somehow every room in the convention centre managed to get booked out to football fans before Basicon members even got a look in. Given that you won't be able to find a hotel room in Melbourne at any price for that Saturday, and that it is the one night of the year it

is not safe to be on the city streets, I suspect that this will hit attendance hard. I'm certainly reconsidering my plans.

Meanwhile, the job search continues slowly. It seems to take people here several weeks to even get round to looking at a resume, let alone interviewing you and making up their minds. Frustratingly, I've had a couple of interviews go really well only for some bizarre coincidence to turn up which prevents me being offered a job. It is all very depressing.

However, next week is Worldcon time and I, together with a large contingent from the SF2002 committee, am off down to San Antonio. From what I've been seeing on the web, the convention is in a considerable state of disarray. Fortunately, when such things happen, experienced fans from around the world are quick to step in and help out and I don't anticipate any major disasters. I do, on the other hand, expect to eat a lot of very good chile. The next issue should be red hot.