

# EMERALD CITY

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

## Introduction

Very quickly, the ongoing saga of Cheryl's disastrous life. There is still no sign of work here in the US of A. I've been getting interviews that go really well, but then nothing, and explanations like "we are not recruiting any more". It is so weird that I am beginning to think that someone is giving me bad reviews. This does not mean you, Danny.

On the good side, however, I seem to have landed a short term consulting assignment in Melbourne and will therefore be back Down Under in October. I've no idea for how long - it depends on the job - but the standard visa lasts for 3 months so I might get the chance to see all those things I meant to see when I lived there and never quite got round to. I can get to visit my favourite hairdresser too. Anyone got a spare couch?

And now, without further ado...

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## Chilly in Texas

Being a report of the 55<sup>th</sup> World Science Fiction Convention in San Antonio, Texas, otherwise known as LoneStarCon2.

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### The Furnace and the Freezer

San Antonio is, in many ways, an ideal site for a Worldcon. There are two large Marriott hotels next door to each other, providing plenty of rooms and only a single hotel company to negotiate with. There is a reasonable sized convention centre a short walk from the hotels. Above ground, there is the usual American cityscape, built to serve the Great God Automobile, but below street level, connecting the two hotels and the conference centre, is the Riverwalk, a charming pedestrian thoroughfare along the banks of the San Antonio River. It is, perhaps, a little inconvenient for the disabled: wheelchair paths and elevators exist, but are not easy to find. But for the able bodied it is ideal.

Also connected to the Riverwalk is a large shopping mall, including a shop for cat fanatics, and a food hall offering cheap and reasonable quality fare with not a McDonalds or KFC in sight. There is a range of interesting restaurants and sports bars opening directly off the river. And in the middle of all this urban splendour stands Texas's greatest tourist attraction: The Alamo, bulwark against the Mexicans, but powerless against encroaching

sprawl. There is, in short, just about anything you could ask for (except a copy shop), all within easy walking distance.

There has to be a catch, and it is the temperature. San Antonio at the end of August is a humid cauldron. During the day, the outside air temperature hovered around 35-40C. It was cooler by the river, and warmer at night when the streets got decidedly cool, and much of the Riverwalk was in shadow, but venturing out during the day was not comfortable, especially for the gravitationally challenged.

Needless to say, for this is America, the hotels and conference centre were air conditioned - ferociously so. Anyone dressed suitably for a trip into the steaming outdoors was automatically condemned to shivering amidst the icy halls. That I failed to come away from the convention with a nasty cold is, I submit, a genuine case of the miraculous. I had come to San Antonio for chilli, and had found chilly of a quite different sort. No matter, however. It was a small price to pay for a reasonable location. Give me this over Glasgow any day.

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### **Beer and Badger**

The convention got itself off to a roaring start. Wandering down to the bar on the Wednesday evening in search of the Pommie contingent, I chanced instead upon my good friend Ed Rush (who, like me, was billeted in part of the SF2002 party suite). He was organising a dinner expedition to a local brew pub and included amongst his party a gentleman whom I had long admired. At last I was to make the acquaintance of the inimitable Robert Lionel Fanthorpe.

The pub was called the Blue Star, and Ed showed a most un-American turn of geography in describing a 17 block trek as "only a short walk away". It was, however, worth it, proving that, even in darkest Texas, American beer is becoming interesting. Ed and Lionel were enthusiastic about the brown ale, Lynn Gold was complimentary about the stout, and Paul Dormer and I both ordered seconds of the pilsner. The food was pretty speccy too. Paul ordered a mixed grill and, despite previous visits to the US, was caught once again showing that classic British expression of disbelief at the arrival of a plate so covered in food that it would have classified as a banquet in its own right back home. I tried the prawn noodles in chipotle sauce (chipotles, for those of you not well up in chilli lore, are smoked red jalapenos). Lynn and I, keen cooks both, were in raptures over this one and will doubtless both be working on reproducing it at home. All in all, a fine evening, including some very friendly waiters, and we would have been back had not convention work beckoned and there been so many other places to try.

All of which tells you little about the Great Literary Hero, save that, in common with most British men, he enjoys a good pint or two. Fear not, dear reader, all is about to be explained. For the following day he was granted a panel at the convention and told once again the magnificent saga of Badger Books.

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Once upon a time, as all the best stories begin, a young man wrote a pastiche of a poem and sent it off to many publishers. It began thusly:

*I must go back into space again,  
To the lonely space and the stars;  
And all I ask is a rocket ship  
And a job to do on Mars...*

Not surprisingly, the publishers wrote back politely but firmly explaining that they did not publish poetry. Or at least, reading between the lines, not that sort of poetry. One publisher, however, was different. They also did not publish poetry, but they did publish science fiction and would be interested to receive manuscripts of length 45,000 words. The pay (10 shillings, about US75c, per 1000 words) seemed tempting, and a deal was struck. The year was 1952. Robert Lionel Fanthorpe was 17 years old, and he had just sold his first novel.

The Badger books, all 160+ of them over a period of 12 years, were not written under the best of conditions. Normally they had to be delivered in a week or two, and Fanthorpe worked by dictating into a tape recorder. Not for him the luxury of word processor editing, or even the small miracle of a word count function. This led to long passages of inventive padding when the muse just would not come to order, followed by the most Houdini like of endings when the publishers' typist told him he had but two pages to get the heroes out from captivity, back to the other side of the galaxy and saving the universe. It led to a lot of prose that causes modern readers to howl with mirth on attempting to read it. And yet much of the whimsy was deliberate, self-parody even, as seems only appropriate when you know the man.

Lionel Fanthorpe is remarkably fit for a 62-year-old. His shirt open to the waist in the San Antonio heat, his body betrays the leanness of purpose that years of judo training have bestowed; his jeans are belted with the emblem of his favourite mode of transport: Harley Davidson. He is an Anglican priest, a professor of English, an expert in unsolved mysteries and now a TV personality. His series, *Fortean TV*, in which he regales viewers with tales of the mysterious and unexpected, has just been granted a second season and he is besieged by chat show hosts eager to have such a wit and raconteur on their programmes. He is, in short, and amazing gentleman. Catch him if you can.

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### **International Rescue**

Ask people about the Permanent Floating Worldcon Committee and you will get one of three answers. Members of the Aussiecon Three Board will probably tell you that they are a bunch of evil American SMOFs who descend upon conventions and take them over, pushing out the local committee members and turning every Worldcon into a carbon copy of one in Boston. Those same American SMOFs will tell you that it is an ad hoc group of people with years of Worldcon running experience who are ready and willing to help out if called upon. Most people, however, will just say, "who?" and that is how it should be.

If you ask me, of course, I will say they are a wonderful bunch of folks. But then I would, because I am now one of them, and I can prove it. You see, I have this ribbon which says "Emergency Holographic Texan", this being the reward - quite possibly the sole reward - handed out to those who saved LoneStarCon 2 from disaster.

It was a swan of a convention, mostly smooth and unruffled on the surface, but paddling like crazy underneath. We had always suspected that there was something amiss as for most of its early life the convention apparently had more staff devoted to the much-hyped Chilli Cook-Off than the whole of the rest of the show. When that event was seriously down-sized due to lack of sponsorship we knew we had trouble. Then, about two months out, came the first news of resignations amongst the senior ranks of the committee, and Ruth Sachter was appointed head of the hitherto inactive department of Human Resources. A call for volunteers went out over the SMOFish mailing lists, and by the end of August most of the missing posts had been filled.

By no means everything went according to plan. There were things I saw which could have been done better, some of which I'll mention below. But it was clear from the number of people with Ruth's ribbons that without those volunteers the con would have been very thinly staffed indeed. Credit should go to the con's senior management, Karen Meschke, Fred Duarte and Randy Shepherd for admitting that they had a problem and asking for help in time. They had previously made a point of wanting to run a "Texan" convention, in much the same way as the disaster of Conspiracy in 1967 was caused by people wanting an "British" convention, and some people are demanding that Aussiecon Three must be an "Australian" convention. But, in the face of incontrovertible evidence, they swallowed their national pride and went where they knew they could find experienced staff.

I should also add that there were places in which local knowledge was proved right. The Texans had maintained all along that their local people would sign up late. Standard predictions of membership levels derived from previous US Worldcons pointed to a final attendance of around 3500. The final figure was just over 4000. This led to some panic, last-minute cost cutting, but it is difficult to see what could have been done otherwise. If the con had continued using the Texan predictions and they had been wrong it could have been thousands of dollars in the red.

One interesting facet of the rescue operation is that it is now very much an International affair. Most of the volunteers were, of course, Americans, but there are a fair few Canadians who are also regular members of the team, and an increasing number of people from overseas. John Maizels of Sydney did his usual sterling work behind the camera in the Tech crew, and the majority of people in the operations department were British. So much for it being an "American take-over".

My own small part in this affair was a stint on the Information Desk - a department that John Lorentz had been running until his sudden elevation to head of Registration. KIM Campbell (Canadian resident in Britain) had been drafted in to take charge, and having known me for years she asked me to be part of her team. I can't claim to have done a lot in this regard, just several hours behind the table telling people again and again how to find the Anime programme and the VIP room (of which more later). I did, however, get an opportunity to see just how well experienced Worldcon staff can work together.

I was patrolling the corridors of the Rivercenter hotel during the masquerade, making sure that the members of my den didn't get lost coming back from the photo session, when I chanced upon backstage co-ordinator, Suford Lewis, and head of Tech, Bill Parker, deep in conversation about the availability of video tapes. Bill admitted that this was an area in which the ball had been dropped, but yes, they had recorded all of the major events, and tapes could be made. But did people want them, and who wanted what? Would he have to mail the entire con membership? "No worries mate", says I, "Information Desk will collect names and addresses of those interested".

Of course I'd had no chance to tell KIM, and didn't manage to do so all evening, but I knew she'd back my judgement. I did, however, tell Tom Whitmore who was managing front of house. I did this first because I knew I could rely on him to pass the message to KIM if he saw her, and second because his wife, Marci, was also on the Information Desk team. As usual I was stuck in the SF2002 party until around 3:00 AM, but when I skidded up to the desk, bleary eyed and hungry, around 5 minutes before the 10:00 AM opening time, Marci already had the list running and a long queue of people waiting to sign up. When you can rely on your colleagues like that, running a Worldcon is (almost) effortless.

### **Langford beaten - shock, horror!!!**

Although Information Desk was interesting (and I think I now know enough to run it myself at a Worldcon), my major interest has always been the Events department. Knowing that everywhere was short staffed, I decided to try to get to work on the Hugos. This proved more difficult than I thought.

The problem was that I took the wrong approach. I went to the volunteer room and signed up there. They took my name and that was that. After two days of coming back and being told that there was no news and no staff meetings, I decided to take matters into my own hands and went round asking everyone I knew who was in charge of the Hugos and where I could find said person. Eventually I discovered that Lori Wolf was in charge and that the best place to find her was in the Events office. There is an Events office? Even Tom hadn't known that, and the room number I was given was wrong, but eventually I found them.

Much to my surprise, Lori remembered me from LA Con. Yes she'd be pleased to have me, no she hadn't been given my name, and sorry she now had a full compliment of staff backstage. Would I, perhaps, like to be an usher? Well, you have to start somewhere, so an usher I became.

Arriving in the Events office at the appointed time in my best evening dress (well, it is the Hugos we are talking here) I was introduced to Mary, the head of ushers, given a torch and a pile of programmes, and told to go to the main ballroom and find a door to station myself at. On arriving in the ballroom I found my fellow ushers busily putting programmes on every seat. "This is what we've been told to do", they said. Wondering quite who was in charge here, I distributed my pile of programmes and then went to tell Mary that the instructions she had been giving out seemed at variance with practice. It turned out that some arrogant oik had taken upon himself to issue new orders because, he said "it was the way it had always been done so it must be right". Wrong on two counts. Firstly, Intersection had handed out programmes at the door. Second, as I watched the evening unfold, it became clear that putting programs on seats was daft. Why? It goes like this:

1. It costs people points. Someone has to go round every seat and put a programme on it. This is a waste of energy;
2. Disabled people don't have seats, they bring their own with them, so they don't get programmes;
3. When the doors open, people rush in and start collecting programmes. Not just for themselves, they want souvenirs for their friends. Some people just picked up a few programmes and left;
4. Once the lights go down, you are left hoping that there are indeed a few programmes left on the empty seats to which you are directing people. If there are not, people end up blundering around in the dark looking for them;
5. In any case, by this time, having put out all the programmes they were given and not thought about the consequences, most of the volunteer ushers have concluded that their job is over and have sat down to watch the show. In fact the job of the ushers only really starts when the lights go out and you need to get people to empty seats rather than have them standing in the doorways where they block each others' view and cause the fire marshal to have apoplexy.

Next time perhaps I'll get to run the ushers and perhaps we'll get it done right.

Oh, but you want to know what happened. Like who won what? The full results are available in many places, but here are the interesting ones.

Best Novel went to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Blue Mars*. It wasn't that popular a winner, but then it was a pretty thin field. Now that all three Mars books are out in paperback I must get round to reading them. Surprisingly, Lois McMaster Bujold's *Memory* was narrowly beaten into third place by Elizabeth Moon's *Remnant Population*.

Best Non-Fiction went to *Time & Chance* by L. Sprague de Camp. The rest of the field was pretty even, but it was *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* that clawed it's way through the pack into second. *The Silence of the Langford*, although second on the first round, came a lonely fourth.

*Babylon 5* won Best Dramatic Presentation by a mile, missing a first round win by only a handful of votes. *Mars Attacks* got fewer votes than No Award. Stationed by the door, I was saddened to note that there was a substantial influx of people as soon as the ceremony got to this award, and a massive exodus as soon as JMS left the stage. Considering that I had had people coming to Information Desk at 4:00 PM willing to pay \$50 for a day membership when the dealers' room, art show and main programme ended at 6:00 PM, because all they wanted to do was see JMS, I guess I shouldn't have been surprised.

Best Professional Artist went to Bob Eggleton which is always good value as he enjoys himself so much when he wins. Easily the best part of the show.

*Mimosa* won best fanzine in a reasonably close race with *Tangent*. Nicki and Dick have won before, and are worthy recipients, though personally I'd been rooting for Mike Glycer. Having now seen a copy of *Tangent*, I must say that it looks to me even more deserving of being bumped up to the semi-prozine category than *Nova Express*. Mary Kay Kare, who writes for it, assures me that the editors have a good fanish ethic. But it is clear that they spend more money on a single issue that I will ever spend on *Emerald City*, even if I carry on publishing it for the rest of my life.

And talking of *Nova Express*, it came last, which just goes to show the value of hard campaigning.

Just when we were beginning to think the unthinkable, Dave Langford came through to win Best Fan Writer. This is only fair, because writing is what he does best. Why Evelyn C. Leeper came second is a mystery to me because her con reports bore me to tears, but she does write large chunks of *Proper Boskonian* and is thus foremost in the minds of the NESFA hordes when they cast their votes.

The one I'd been waiting for, of course, was Best Fan Artist. I'm sad to say that Gunny did not win. The Hugo went to Bill Rostler, and no one was going to argue with that. Bill has been struggling with cancer for rather longer than Ian and, being much older, is far less likely to survive. To add insult to injury, his home was burgled and trashed whilst he was in hospital.

The voting for this award was amongst the strangest I have ever seen. In the main ballot, Gunny came firmly last with only 47 votes, but in the nominations he was a clear second with 55. Rostler only received 16 nominations and would not have even made the ballot had Teddy Harvia and Brad Foster not withdrawn. Which just goes to show that, despite two last places, Ian is in there with a serious chance. As it now looks like he'll live to fight another day, I expect to see him high on the list again next year.

Thanks to the good offices of Mr. Langford I have obtained details of the full nomination counts and I thought you might be interested to know how the rest of Australia did. By far

the best performance was put up by Alan Stewart whose *Thyme* as a mere 7 votes short of making the ballot. Also listed were Terry Frost (8 votes for Best Fan Writer) , Kerri Valkova and Craig Hinton (7 votes each for Best Fan Artist). Given that I got 9 votes in both Best Fanzine and Best Fan Writer, my bet is that all of the votes for Terry and Kerri came from BASFA members (they were both on our recommended list). Those Australians with voting rights for the convention should be ashamed of themselves.

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### **Night of a Thousand Sequins**

Well, not really. Sequins? They have their place, but there is a wealth of other materials that masquerade contestants can use to stand out. And so many of them did. Well, from what I could see of them, which from backstage is often a lot less than you would think.

Masquerade running is now a well-developed part of convention science. We refine things occasionally. The interfaces with Tech and with the convention's facilities people are always prone to problems. But within the costuming community, things run pretty smoothly. The secret is a well integrated team of people, many of whom know each other well, and an official set of procedures that many of us have read. Strangely enough, no one ever talks about the Evil Permanent Floating Masquerade Crew; no one ever demands that their convention have a "Texan", "British" or "Australian" masquerade. Indeed, con committees seem positively delighted to be able to hand the whole show over to us and let us get on with it.

I'm still a bit on the outside of this group. A fair number of the usual backstage people now know me by sight, and this year my good friend and colleague from SF2002, Father John Blaker, was chief catcher. However, because I don't have time to go to Costume Con or to hang around the costumers' party suite, I'm not quite part of the community. C'est la vie. You can't do everything. But it is a real pleasure being part of such an efficient team.

We get great recruits too. This year I got elevated from assistant den mom to one of the senior den moms, and that meant I got two assistants. I doubt that Geri and Juan will ever see this fanzine, but if they do I'd just like to tell them that they were wonderful. Two more competent, caring and proactive people I could not have asked for.

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But enough of this waffle. You want to know about the costumes, and I'm not going to prevaricate any longer. Here - with due allowance for the fact that I was generally too busy with my own den to notice what was going on elsewhere - are some of the more interesting acts.

Word of warning for prospective den moms. Den one is dangerous. Why? Because it means that your people are first on and that means you get all the kids. We had three, but fortunately they were all very well behaved. The one I took to most was Jared Dashoff, a young man with a fine SMOFish pedigree, who seemed to be a masquerade veteran already. I've known adults who were far more trouble. His Young Jedi costume wasn't that sophisticated; just a hooded robe, as you might expect. But he had a good joke - chasing bugs with his light sabre - and he carried it off well.

John-Stephen Bondi-Ernoehazy was more of a challenge. Indeed, the whole act was a chapter of disasters coped with brilliantly by contestants and crew. The kid was costumed as a Star Wars bounty hunter, with dad John playing the role of his monstrous mount. The trouble was, half of the mount costume got lost in the UPS strike. To many contestants, this

would have meant instant withdrawal. Not to this group. Perhaps because the whole thing was the kid's idea, they set about scavenging stuff from local shops and putting together a makeshift costume. Given that this involved making a saddle for the young rider, rather a lot of Duck Tape was involved.

It was all very precarious, and led to the first major delay of the evening when the poor kid fell off just as they were about to go on stage. As they were already in the wings, I'd handed them over to the catchers and don't really know the exact details, but somehow everything was put back together again and there were no disasters in front of the audience.

To make up for all the kids, I'd been assigned Joy Day, a masquerade veteran who knew the ropes backwards and could be relied upon to look after herself most of the time. She and a friend had put together a superb re-creation of the beehived girl from *Mars Attacks*. The hairdo and the pneumatic bust were no problem, but the skirt was very tight at the calves. At the ankles it flared out massively and was held by tubing which, combined with the enforced short steps, gave a wonderful impression of her floating on air. It did, however, make doorways, and getting her up the steep narrow steps to the stage, rather a challenge. Fortunately everything had been rehearsed. I believe I heard that she was carried up and down the stairs.

Turning to the other dens, one of the most spectacular costumes (and in the end voted Best in Class at Master level) was the Martian Samurai. Making ordinary western-style armour is hard enough. Making these concoctions of leather, mail, metal plates and goodness knows what else must have taken years. Sometimes the dedication of costumers amazes me.

The highlight of my evening, however, was Kathy Saunders' entry featuring the entire Endless family from Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* books. This was not because of the costumes, which were up to Kathy's usual high standard, but because the group included two stars of the comic world. Marv Wolfman and Len Wein, whose work I'd bought by the bucket load in the days when I could afford comics, turned out to be charming guys. I even managed to chat with Marv for a while. Wow! It made my evening.

A nice touch for this masquerade was that during the interval the audience was asked to vote for its favourite act. They, of course, went for presentation more than anything, and Alfred J. Richard with his transvestite Klingon was an absolute hoot. There was no contest for this one, or for Best Presentation in the Journeyman class.

There were two presentations based on the *Men in Black* theme. One of them featured my friends Kristin A. Ruhle and Patrick Lasswell. Kristin did a fine job as the alien, despite having been pressed into service after Lynn Gold had cut her hand (on frozen dim sum, would you believe) the previous night. They, however, were relatively straight. The other act featured two Men in Black Watch: tartan, that is. And they had sheep, which put them right in with the theme of the evening.

Sheep you ask? What have sheep to do with a Texas Worldcon? It goes like this. Joni Dashoff, Jared's mum, knew that her friend, Susan de Guardiola, was a bag of nerves about her role as compere for the evening. So Joni made up a couple of cardboard cut-out sheep which, with the connivance of the catchers, she and Jared managed to insert onto the stage during embarrassing moments, such as people falling off their fathers' backs. Susan took the ball and ran with it, and soon had the audience baa-ing on cue. Sheep jokes reached epidemic proportions in the parties that evening.

As with last year, there was little doubt about the winners. A large group in various stunning costumes as The Lords of Chaos were going to win and everyone knew it. This

shouldn't take anything away from their work, which was stunning. A photo of their group, together with a number of other shots of contestants, can be found on my web site. Sadly, pictures are worth a thousand words. Well, several thousand of mine, actually. My apologies to those without the equipment to go and look.

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Which leaves me only to ponder on what went wrong. Very little, actually. Father John was a little put out (which, given his calm nature, would translate to a towering rage in most people) that a roving cameraman was inserted between the catchers and the stage without even a cable puller to keep his tail tidy. It was a communication failure, and probably a failure of people higher up to appreciate the impact of what they'd authorised. In the event, the catchers coped, and the cameraman got some stunning close-ups. The lesson, as Father John rightly put it, was to be more proactive. Next time he will talk to Tech before the show, just in case they forget to talk to him. Usefully, John Maizels was also at the debrief and was therefore able to learn the lesson from the other side.

The other thing that we still don't seem to have right is getting people back on stage in good time to receive awards. During the main show, each act gets queued up in order and is thus always close at hand when needed. For the presentation, we don't know until the prizes are announced just who needs to be on stage next. In LA this was a huge problem because the green room was a long walk away. Here we managed better, having a fairly spacious backstage which just about accommodated every act. There was still confusion, however. For some reason I never got to the bottom of, the left-hand stair was closed for the presentations. Given that it was much wider than the right, and the only one we could get Joy up, let alone the lady in the wheelchair, this caused some last minute panics. Next time I will make a point of asking in advance about any changes in routine for the presentations.

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### **Monkey Business**

Most people who attend Worldcons have the same view of the Business Meeting as most students do of student politics: that is, it is an undignified zoo full of ego-maniacal nerds who suffer under the ridiculous delusion that what they are talking about actually matters. Most Worldcon attendees, like most students, are wrong, for the same reasons.

Now it is perfectly true that the majority of what goes on in the Business Meeting is the most appalling nonsense. And, as Kevin so sagely points out, because the stakes are so low, people are apt to take every minor procedural point to the uttermost extreme and take it all way too seriously. Nevertheless, the Business Meeting can be a source of useful information, and it is the governing body of Worldcons. As such it is responsible for such things as determining how site selection is carried out, setting guidelines for membership rates, determining what Hugos we get to hand out and who is eligible for them, and stipulating what Worldcons are obliged to do. This means that they occasionally touch on something vaguely important.

On the information side, Business Meetings oblige all selected and past Worldcons to present financial statements until such time as they have closed their accounts. The main purpose of this is to ensure that any Worldcon that makes a surplus disposes of it in an approved manner (i.e. by donating it to good fannish causes). You also get an chance to check on future Worldcons to make sure they are not going too far off track.

Given the chance (oh joy!) to ask pointed questions of Stephen Boucher about Aussiecon Three, I thought I'd put him on the spot in front of his SMOFish colleagues. Well aware that he was in a pool of sharks, Stephen promised faithfully that Aussiecon Three would run its Business Meetings using the standard procedures and not try to disrupt things by insisting on the use of Australian parliamentary procedures as had been mooted by some of his colleagues. He then gave himself an out by jokingly commenting that this promise held good unless he happened to be taken by a mischievous whim at the time, which is of course exactly the reason his colleagues had been giving for their proposed actions. The man ought to have been a politician; his capacity for disguised double-talk is prodigious.

Aussiecon Three also presented a financial report and, given that it is most unlikely to see publication outside that meeting, here, for the benefit of Australian readers, are the salient details.

A3 has taken in just over A\$111k, around three-quarters of which has come from memberships and most of the rest from donations by previous Worldcons (primarily LA Con III). Of this it has spent around A\$16k. This included a A\$10k deposit on the World Congress Centre and just over A\$4k spent on printing, presumably for Progress Report #1 which has finally been published. What struck me most about the figures was that they have managed to spend the magnificent sum of A\$212.23 on publicity, that is around 0.2% of their income. It is hard to say exactly how unusual this is, partially because every Worldcon uses different definitions for the expense items in its reports, and partially because I do not have any financial reports of any other Worldcons after their first year of existence. However, Bucconeer, the 1998 Worldcon, has managed to spend 1.5% of its income on "flyers/advertising/agents", which seems to be pretty much the same thing. They also spent 2.1% of their income on throwing parties at conventions, a standard method of promoting your con, but something A3 claims that it cannot afford to do.

Even more mysteriously, Stephen assures me that the whole of that A\$212.23 was spent on promoting the convention within Australia. Where? Is there some secret ad campaign in the works that we haven't seen yet? Or is that just the cost of the few fliers we have seen hanging around at the MSFC and in Slow Glass? C'mon guys, don't you want anyone to come to this convention? Sorry Eric, what was that? You don't. Oh, I see.

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The other item of interest to come out of this year's Business Meeting was a seemingly innocuous little motion called "Master in our own house". The motion amends the part of the WSFS constitution that says that Business Meetings shall be run according to the Standing Rules to say that they shall be run according to the Standing Rules and the Customs and Traditions of WSFS. Sounds harmless, doesn't it. Read on.

OK, so now what if I tell you that these Customs and Traditions are not written down anywhere. Indeed, no one can agree on what they are. Still sound harmless?

The main proposers of this motion are strange bedfellows indeed. One is Robert Sacks, the bête noir of SMOFdom, a man whose devotion to petty procedural nonsense and the letter, as opposed to the spirit, of the law has four times earned him the infamous Mid Atlantic Fan Fund award. The other is Mark Olsen, a former Worldcon chair and one of NESFA's most senior SMOFs. Normally these two can be seen sniping at each other across the Business Meeting floor. To have them agreeing with each other is profoundly worrying. It is like having Johnny Rotten and Andrew Lloyd Webber writing a musical together.

Of course they don't really agree at all. Each of them has arrived at the motion from entirely different positions for entirely different reasons. Robert, rules lawyer to the core, is

concerned about making sure that Business Meetings behave appropriately. His particular beef is over disabled access to Business Meetings. Traditionally, this is now provided. Last year Robert tried to get such provision written into the Standing Rules. The Business Meeting, in its wisdom, felt that this was unnecessary, so Robert is now trying to force the point in another way. Although I do not agree with Robert that every last speck of procedure should be codified in detail so precise that even Seth Breidbart cannot find loopholes in it, I have a certain amount of sympathy with his position.

Mark, on the other hand, has far more sinister motives. Mark is one of that group of older SMOFs who dislikes the rapid growth in Worldcon attendance over the past few decades and feels that the traditions and atmosphere of the convention he knew in his youth is being swamped by hordes of ill-informed and uncaring newcomers (did I say "media fans"?). Having seen the behaviours of some of these newcomers at the Hugos, I can also have a certain amount of sympathy with Mark. However, I cannot support his method of doing something about it.

Quite simply, Mark wants to have the Business Meeting governed by a set of rules which are not accessible and which are known only to people who have been attending such meetings for several years. The purpose of this is to prevent anyone other than an elite group of SMOFs from having any say in how Worldcons are governed. I'll concede that this often happens in practice, because these people normally make up the majority of Business Meeting attendees. However, to have such a system enshrined in the constitution like this is profoundly unethical and entirely the wrong sort of message to be sending to people who wish to join our community. If there are rules, they should be written, and they should be accessible to anyone who has a right to vote. That is a basic tenet of any democratic society.

The fact that the motion passed this year was, I suspect, largely because few people had thought very much about the implications. It was also very cunningly presented as a means of defending the rights of the Business Meeting against rules lawyers who try to nit-pick on points of parliamentary practice. That argument is entirely specious. The Business Meeting already has a set of standing rules that can be used to delineate where our practice differs from the accepted norm. The parliamentary rule book (*Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, for those who know about such things, and nothing to do with Mr. Sacks for those who do not) is there to provide a well thought-out background which we can bend to our own purposes and which avoids the need for us to document everything. Instead we now to have a system which is undemocratic in its purpose and which will lead to endless argument as to what is Customary and Traditional. It is also, I suspect, a potential back door method of making substantial changes to practice without the usual requirement of ratification over two years.

End of rant. Fortunately this WSFS constitution is very careful about allowing changes to practice and in order to become codified this motion must be ratified at Bucconeer. With any luck, people will have had time to think about it and Something will be Done.

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One small final point on the Business Meeting. Right at the end, some idiot tried to introduce a motion that would create a separate Hugo category for electronic fanzines. Whilst there is a certain attraction in having another category that I would be eligible for, I am pleased to say that this nonsense was thrown out without further discussion.

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## **Rumour and Innuendo**

At last the section you have all been waiting for. The disasters, the embarrassments, the things that went wrong, and the people with their feet firmly lodged in their mouths. Well, some of it anyway. Working the convention has good and bad sides for a gossip hound. On the good, you are close to what is going on. On the bad, you are often too busy to gossip. Not to mention the fact that occasionally the people responsible for the snafus happen to be your close friends. Has that ever stopped me? No, of course not.

One of the more obvious foul-ups was that the convention was clearly not sure who their Guests of Honour were. The cowboy singer at the opening ceremonies introduced one of them as "Mr. Michael Mooncock". That same gentleman was described in the Souvenir Book as "Michael "Moocock". Perhaps this was simply prim Texan sensibility that prevented them from pronouncing the word Moorcock. Perhaps, given the prevalence of sheep, it was felt that a few moos might give a more authentically Texan air to the convention livestock. Or perhaps the ConCom was just as bad at proof-reading as the SF2002 Bid Committee (guilty party sneaks away in embarrassed silence).

As well as the mis-named guest, there were a few that were missing altogether. Harlan Ellison, in his inimitably grouchy style, issued an announcement to the effect that, due to the rudeness of the convention's programming staff, he would not be attending. Artist Kelly Freas had a much better excuse: the artwork he was bringing was stolen from a friend's car at an airport on the way to the convention. The market value of the haul is around US\$25,000 and fans are asked to be on the lookout for large quantities of Freas art being offered for sale in suspicious places.

Quite what happened to David Brin and Jerry Pournelle I do not know. As far as I could gather from my position on Information Desk, they didn't turn up, because panels involving them got cancelled. No reason was given.

Some of the more interesting disasters happened pre-con and revolved around money and Registration. The story I heard was that the head of Registration resigned about two months out because the convention management refused to insure the computer equipment he was planning to bring. John Lorentz stepped into the breach and did a fine job of getting everything running smoothly. The only real problem, other than the Registration office being located at a ludicrous distance from the convention entrance and being accessible only via a long walk in the sun, was badges. John discovered that the convention did not have a firm contract with the badge printer and got gazumped. He managed to find an alternative source, but in the panic the instructions about name sizes got garbled and we ended up with badges that were even more difficult to read than those at Westercon.

Another interesting tale regards Progress Report #6. This was due to be printed at about the time the money panic hit and someone decided only to print 4000 copies. As this was also the time that the last minute rush of Texan memberships was starting to flow, a substantial shortage ensued. Oops.

The worst opprobrium, however, must be reserved for the Programming department. There were times when working on Information Desk that I would happily have had the whole lot of them taken out and shot. Program items were being moved or cancelled for no apparent reason, and we were always the last people to find out.

As far as I can tell, the trouble started in April when Debbie Hodgkinson, the head of Programming, reportedly stopped answering her email and didn't tell anyone. This may explain why my offer to organise a George Turner Memorial panel was not even responded

to. Whatever, programming was a mess. Although there was a whole stream of baseball panels, there was only one on costuming. The down-sized chilli cook-off was scheduled against the Hugos and Masquerade. The panel on quantum physics clashed with the one on dark matter, and the room in which most of the science programming was located was way too small. It was, to say the least, unimpressive.

Furthermore, Harlan's little encounter with the programming team does not seem to have been an aberration. Forry Ackerman reportedly offered his services as a panellist and was told that he was not required because they had enough people. But the worst foul-up of all appears to have been the panel entitled "Upcoming Tor Releases with Patrick Nielsen Hayden". For some unexplained reason, the programming team completely neglected to inform Patrick that the panel existed.

The one disaster that was not entirely programming's fault was the Case of the Missing Rooms. A small amount of construction work was taking place at the convention centre, and, shortly before the con opened, a considerate workman managed to cut through some pipes and flood two of the rooms that the convention had booked. They coped. There were other rooms, and things got moved. However, this was all too late to go in the programme booklet. The programme grids issued at registration had the right room names, but they were not marked on the map in the programme book so no one could find them. It gave us hours of fun at the Information Desk.

Finally, a little snippet of masquerade gossip. At the gripe session, director Peggy Kennedy, who seemed to have coped very badly with the whole thing despite how smoothly it went, let slip that she had refused to take the job unless all of her expenses were paid. This is disgraceful. Panellists and convention staff may, if funds allow, get some or all of their membership fee back. But nobody, nobody barring the Guests of Honour, gets all of their expenses paid. There are plenty of people in America capable of directing a masquerade, and for a Con Committee to accede to this sort of demand sets a very bad example.

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### **Groovy parties, man**

OK guys, you've had the juicy bit. Now you have to pay the price whilst I witter on once again about this little Worldcon bid I'm involved in.

As you might imagine, SF2002 was pretty busy during the convention. Having volunteered to sit behind a table for 2 hours a day for KIM, I was not about to do the same for the bid. Not that they needed me as Mary Kay Kare had everything under control, and my activities concentrated on parties. We are sticking with the Summer of Love theme for now because it is fun and instantly recognisable, though judging from what the Boston people were up to we are going to have to put more imagination into our parties in future. Not that Boston are the Honourable Opposition, but they have set a new standard for party quality against which future bids will be judged.

Yours truly was in charge of the music for the parties, which meant that I had a whale of a time going round Virgin looking for old hippy stuff and making up tapes. For the first time in my life I bought a Grateful Dead album and was pleasantly surprised at how good they were. I also got a live album by Donovan on which, in the middle of Hurdy Gurdy Man, he tells this wonderful tale from when he and the Beatles were in India with the Maharishi. Everyone was sat around on the floor cross-legged doing not a lot and an embarrassed silence had descended upon the gathering. Eventually, John Lennon got bored, got up,

walked across to the Maharishi, patted him on the head and said, "there's a good guru". Laughter descended like an avalanche.

Looking for something typically San Franciscan to serve, Lynn had decided to go for the Chinatown angle and provided dim sum for the parties. This was incredibly popular. So popular, in fact, that we were kept stretched trying to keep up with demand and fell down rather on replenishing the standard nibbles. Lisa Hayes cooked up a pot of Rice-a-Roni each night, which also went like snow in the sun. And dear Patrick Lasswell provided us with two kegs of fine Wydmers' beer and a keg of their cider. I'm very partial to Wydmers' wheat beer, though sadly that was not on offer, and liked the stuff Patrick did bring. The cider in particular was spectacular. Ed Rush did superb service as barman for most of the three nights of party.

One other silly thing we did for the parties was produce a tongue in cheek trivia quiz about the Summer of Love and hippies. You had to be a regular Worldcon attendee to appreciate some of the jokes, but, though I say it myself, there were some good ones. If you are interested, it should be appearing on our web site real soon now.

Finally, we cannot allow a Worldcon to pass without holding a BASFA meeting. As is now traditional (we've done it twice), we annexed San Antonio to the Bay Area for the duration of the con, renaming it the Deep South Bay. A large number of confused fans were duly trapped into attending the meeting in the early hours of Monday morning and forcibly convinced that we were indeed mad enough to want to run a Worldcon. The major event was the appointment of Chris O'Shea to the post of Ambassador to Greenland, and mandating him to form a committee of snowmen for the purpose of promoting SF conventions there. Also, in view of his sterling service in providing our beer, Patrick was appointed ambassador to the State of Inebriation.

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## Summary

All in all, it was a pretty good Worldcon. OK, so I arrived home absolutely exhausted, but SF2002 did well (over 150 new pre-supporters), I got to meet Lionel Fanthorpe and I caught up with a lots of old friends, including Craig McBride and Ed McArdle who were over from Melbourne. The big disappointment for me was the chilli. Aside from the chipotle sauce on the first night, I just could not find any. There were Mexican restaurants, but they served Mexican food, not Tex-Mex chilli. Bizarre. I guess I'll just have to stick to cooking my own (or going to the Prince of Wales, of which more later).

Oh yes, one more thing. Yes, the news of Princess Diana's death did go round the convention like wildfire. Yes, it was the talk of the evening. Americans kept rushing up to any Brit they could find and asking how we felt. Vince Docherty and I amused ourselves by saying, "look, it is a nasty way to die, and she seemed to be trying to use her position for good, especially the land mine thing, but as far as the Royal Family is concerned, we don't given a damn". Which was true, because neither of us do. The Americans, who almost to a man are convinced that every Brit is as avid a Royalist as they are, simply refused to believe this, and their news coverage followed suit. It is quite odd to see your country of birth being described on foreign news in terms that make it unrecognisable to you.

When feeling really malicious, I would tell my American friends that Diana's death was a national disaster because it greatly reduced the amount of money we could expect to get from selling the Royals to them. In practice, however, we can get far more cash out of them on a tourism basis than from a one-off sale, even accounting for the reduced costs in

supporting the bunch of royal layabouts. The Spencers certainly understand this. The pseudo-Avalon they have created for the People's Queen is probably set to become as big an attraction as Graceland. I look forward with interest to the development of Diana Mythology. She does, after all, have a rather good name for a Goddess.

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## A Fitting Finale

Once upon a time, as Aenea began all her stories, there were two very beautiful books. One of them, despite its beauty, its elegance, its sophistication and its treatment of themes that most people do not like to have intrude upon their alternative realities, managed to win a Hugo Award. Together they told a breathtaking story of love, betrayal, courage and self-sacrifice, all painted against a background of inter-stellar war and philosophical musings on the nature of God and the destiny of human evolution. I cherish them still.

Then, against all expectation, they had a child. A cheap, artless runt of a book, scarcely fit to appear on a shelf at all, let alone in the company of its illustrious parents. I was deeply disappointed, and said so, in no uncertain terms (*Emerald City* #6). There was clearly a sequel due. An incessant stream of them, if the tenor of that awful child was to be believed. But when one appeared, I looked favourably upon it, the memory of the delights its parents had brought to me still fresh. And I bought it, in hardback. I kept faith, and lo, I was duly rewarded.

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*"Daniel, dearest", enthused Tyrena Wingreen-Fief, "you've brought me another best-seller. How sweet of you!"*

*"It is finished. Yes."*

*"And about time too. It shouldn't take you much time to crank these out you know. All we want is more travelogue stuff like Endymion. You know, endless tripping from world to world, not much plot, plenty of references back to Hyperion, recycling the same themes and characters over and over again. We can take as many as you pump out. Ten volumes, twenty volumes. You can write the longest trilogy the world has ever seen!"*

*"I think not."*

*"Dan, are you trying to tell me something? There will be more books, won't there."*

*Tyrena's voice had an air of Antarctica about it. Dripping with ice on every syllable, it clashed hideously with the perfect model of a Maui Covenant motile island that adorned her current hairpiece. The man slumped gracelessly and disrespectfully in the chair before her seemed unperturbed.*

*"Actually, no. I've finished the story."*

*"Don't be ridiculous. No story is ever finished. We can wring a sequel out of anything. Bring all the characters back from the dead if you have to. Ridiculous. Next thing I know you'll be telling me that you filled the book with more of that tedious philosophical stuff that hampered sales of Hyperion so much."*

*"Very perceptive of you. That's just what I have done. I'm quite pleased with it, too."*

"Dan, Dan, Dan. You know what this means, don't you. End of contract. No more advances. No more signing tours. No more chat show appearances. No more name in lights."

"No, it means I've finished the book. I'm rather pleased with it, but it is done now. Its time to write a different one. Goodbye"

"Authors", muttered Tyrena to herself after he had gone. "They think so much of themselves. Don't they know that no one would ever read their drivel were it not for the work we put into promoting them? Ah well, no matter. We'll get some young hopeful to write the sequels for him after he's dead. Talking of which, I guess I'd better get on and arrange that."

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I have my suspicions about *Rise of Endymion*. When I read its predecessor I was certain that Simmons had not intended to write more books in the *Hyperion* series. Having read *Rise*, I'm sticking to my guns, despite an interview in *Locus* in which Simmons says that this was the ending he had always intended to write. Gary K. Wolfe, *Locus'* chief reviewer, is prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt, billing the numerous revisions and revelations as clever plotting. Personally I think it is very clever re-writing. Whatever, it is very clever writing.

When we left them, our heroes, Raul and Aenea, were running all over the galaxy, fleeing from the vengeful minions of the new Vatican, and trying to get a bit of breathing space to allow Aenea to grow up and become the messiah that the church feared. You knew they'd make it in the end because there were Beings To Mighty To Describe guiding their path. Besides, we'd all seen the future in *Fall of Hyperion*, so we knew it had to happen. Eventually. Ten volumes or so down the road.

*Rise of Endymion* turns all of this on its head. After a first few chapters that seem set to repeat the foibles of the previous book, everything suddenly settles down. Aenea grows a character, side-plots sprout like buds on a May tree, things get interesting. There are worrisome bits: the guest appearances by Het Masteen, Fedmahn Kassad and Rachel Weintraub had me thinking at one point that the entire cast of *Hyperion* was about to walk back on stage. But it didn't. And by the by, the greatest unsolved mystery of *Hyperion*, whatever happened to Masteen when the Shrike took him away, was explained. It was very pat. It was so good it looked like it had been planned from the beginning. Maybe it had.

But the most important thing that Simmons does it to bring those Beings To Mighty To Describe right back down to a human level. In the end, it reminded me very much of Sherri Tepper's *Raising the Stones*. That book has often been criticised for seeming to use a hive mind to end humanity's senseless bickering and bigotry. I never believed that that was what Tepper intended. Hive minds mean an end to mankind's best trait, our individuality: even Star Trek knows that, and Simmons has Aenea state it unequivocally. And yet he manages to construct a reality in which the force of Love, the missing component of theoretical physics that Simmons always maintained powered his hyperspatial universe, The Void That Binds, is able to win through and transform our world.

In the end, love is all there is. A simple love story, given sweetness and pathos through the mysteries of time travel. The story ended. I cried. This time, please Goddess, it really is over.

*The Rise of Endymion* - Dan Simmons - Bantam - hardcover

## Queen's Knight

There are some fictional characters that seem more real than the people we see every day. Sherlock Holmes is so vivid a personality that fans criticise actors' portrayals of him as they might such well known figures as Churchill or Nixon. James Bond can make guest appearances in countless novels free from copyright restrictions because it is not necessary to mention his name for everyone to know who he is. Other fictional heroes are less well known but are equally vivid and memorable to those who have shared their lives. For lovers of historical fiction, one name springs instantly to mind. One man has cut a dashing swathe across Renaissance Europe, weaving subtle plots, outwitting monstrous tyrants, and charming his way into the hearts of his female readers.

Lymond is back.

Thus began the first novel in the Lymond Chronicles, and it is true once more, for the series is being re-issued and newly promoted. Alan Stewart got a copy of the first novel, *A Game of Kings*, to review for Thyme and kindly passed it on to the biggest Dorothy Dunnett fan he knew: moi.

One of the things I find hardest to believe about the whole thing is that this was Dunnett's first novel. It is stunningly good. Most authors never get this good after a lifetime of practice, and yet there she was, producing a masterpiece at the first attempt. The book was reprinted three times before publication thanks to the weight of advanced orders, and deservedly so. I'm gushing, I know, but it is just great. Despite having read the book before, I spent most of one Saturday reading it, including staying up until 2:00 am to get to the end.

The story concerns a young Scots nobleman, Francis Crawford of Lymond, who has been outlawed for treason. After building up a force of mercenaries on the Continent, he returns to Scotland and proceeds to wreak havoc with the plans of both sides in the current Anglo-Scottish war, not to mention with the lives of his family. He is suave, sophisticated, cultured, handsome, superbly educated, a gifted musician and swordsman, an irresistible leader, and possessed of the most brilliant military mind of his generation. And all of Scotland knows him to be the most wicked man in Europe.

Is it so? Of course not. This is historical romance we are talking here. But, unlike many misunderstood anti-heroes, Lymond is not allowed to wallow in 20<sup>th</sup> century morality. His creator allows him to follow the necessary mores of the brutal time in which he lived and, in later volumes, so tortures the poor lad that the occasional outburst of anger and revenge is understandable.

In subsequent novels, Lymond gets to wander all over Europe, meeting up with major figures of the time (in one book he is employed by Ivan the Terrible) and coming close to out-smarting all of them. There's a love story (has to be, doesn't there) which is very well handled and, for the most part, not in the least mushy. Also, as the series progresses, Dunnett develops a talent for emotional cruelty that is hopefully unsurpassable. The book which deals with the kidnap of Lymond's son is particularly heart-rending and had me in tears most of the way through. Of course, that wouldn't have happened if the characters hadn't been so believable.

If the books have any fault at all it is that they are perhaps too clever. The plots are incredibly complex (be warned, Dunnett also writes detective novels) and, as with Gene Wolfe, you can find yourself getting to the end of a book and still not having a clue about what was actually going on. Also there are times when it seems that, in order to fully

appreciate the books, it is necessary to have a working knowledge of Latin, French, Spanish, Italian and Mediaeval English, plus a masters degree in Mediaeval History. Dunnett's research is way beyond my ability to find fault with.

Unfortunately, being the sort of person I am, this only makes me love the books more. Nothing, in my experience, has brought that ancient world to life more vividly than these books. They make me want to rush to the library and follow up on the tantalising glimpses I've been given. They make me want to set a role-playing game in that world and to practice what I've learned at SCA revels. Above all, they make me wish I was there; they make me wish that I could meet this brilliant, charming, tortured man and be as swept away by his personality in the flesh as I have been in print.

There is a legend back in the book shops. Beware, it is dangerous.

*A Game of Kings* - Dorothy Dunnett - Michael Joseph - softback

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## Not All Greek

Harry Turtledove is one of Kevin's favourite authors. Normally he works in multi-volume series, but when Kevin found a novel that was stand-alone I promised to give it a try. Oh dear. Had we not learned by now to despair quietly of each other's tastes in fiction there would have been severe ructions within the walls of LunaCity. Fortunately I am not so foolish as to encourage Kevin to read Joanna Russ.

Turtledove is a prodigious producer of fiction, and from *Thessalonica* it is easy to see why. It is the worst piece of hack work I have seen in ages. Which is not to say that the writing is bad. He strings words together perfectly competently. They don't sing to you off the page the way they do when Iain Banks writes them, but neither do they grate. No, what I mean by this is that the book has been turned out mechanically with a little plot stretched a very long way, uninteresting, cardboard characters, barely a day's research and, I suspect, no pride whatsoever in one's work.

The story, such as it is, concerns the role played by a poor shoemaker in the siege of Thessalonica by the barbarian Slavic hordes. The tale is set in an alternative version of the late Roman Empire. Christianity has a stranglehold on people's minds, and the mythical creatures of ancient Greece, weakened by lack of belief, are being forced into non-existence by the power of the saints. The Slavs are a threat because they bring with them their own mythic wildlife in which they believe fervently.

It is a nice enough idea, and could have made a good book were it not so lazily handled. Turtledove is a professor of Byzantine history and should be able to write historical fiction every bit as good as Dorothy Dunnett's. Instead he opts for the sort of tongue in cheek anachronisms that Americans seem to find so enchanting. There is the occasional descriptive passage which shows he really knows what he is talking about, but one of the main characters is, of all things, a stand-up comic, and when the hero's wife complained about no one having invented the refrigerator I'm afraid I lost patience. Besides, someone that well versed in Greek history should damn well know that a satyr has the hind parts of a goat, not a horse. The cover artist got it right, but the author and editor are clearly idiots.

For the majority of the book, the promising plot goes nowhere as the author cranks out chapter after chapter of boring incidents in the siege, the pattern of which soon becomes

hopelessly predictable. In the end, as massively telegraphed, the mythic creatures save their compatriots. And what thanks do they get? They are driven off by the bishop. The hero, after a brief pang of guilt, accepts this as the way the world is. As you can imagine, by this point I was absolutely steaming. I'm sure that Mr. Turtledove is a very nice man - he did write a very nice birthday message to Kevin for me when I got him to sign his latest book at LoneStarCon - but had I met him just when I'd finished that book I don't think I would be responsible for my actions.

*Thessalonica* - Harry Turtledove - Baen - softcover

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## Open Space

Did you ever wonder why science fiction was so popular in America? Obvious, isn't it. Here it is not just fantasy, it is a possibility. Oh sure, other nations have seen men walking on the moon. But only here, and possibly in Russia, can people say with conviction, "that could have been me". Americans can go to Florida to watch the Shuttle being launched; they can tour NASA Mission Control at Houston. They can get jobs in those places (and my friend Jordin Kare has a t-shirt that says, "actually, I am a rocket scientist"). For them, space travel is a reality. For most of the rest of us, it is just something we watch on TV.

California does not have its own spaceport (yet). However, a mile or so down the road from where I am living is Moffett Field, an old naval air station which is home to NASA's Ames Research Facility. This is where they test stuff. They have a wind tunnel big enough to put a Boeing 737 (or a Space Shuttle) inside. They have a 52-foot centrifuge that they use to test artificial gravity for space stations. And, of course, they do a whole load of less glamorous stuff too. Last weekend, they had an open day.

Would this happen in Europe? Supposing the British government had a big space research centre, would they let the public in to tour it? And would anyone go? Even in parts of America, science isn't that exciting. NASA has run open days at other bases before now. None of them attracted more than about 25,000 people. This, of course, is Silicon Valley, home of geeks and nerds, so they budgeted for up to 70,000. They shut the gates at 3:00 p.m. after 200,000 people had come in.

Kevin and I, not having far to travel, but being highly allergic to morning, managed to get there by 11:30. Already the lines to get into the wind tunnel and centrifuge were of Disneyland proportions. There were, however, quite a few exhibits that you could get at easily. The aircraft display was one of the easiest as the exhibits were large enough to see over the crowds. There was a range of experimental planes, converted jet fighters and helicopters with nifty VR piloting aids. The really big stuff included a fire-fighting plane with a 30,000 gallon tank, the Kuiper Airborne Observatory, and the ER-2, a converted U2 which is used for mapping work. Photos of some of this stuff will appear on my web site. The previous day a converted 747 had been parked there as a Mr and Mrs Clinton were delivering their daughter to start term at Stanford, but they hadn't stayed around for the show. I guess they can get private tours.

The main exhibit area was the Big Hanger; an enormous building originally made for airships. This included a VR simulation of driving the Martian lander and a piece of the infamous "life on Mars" asteroid. It was packed solid, but we managed to tour round a range of less glamorous stalls at which local firms trumpeted their skill at aerospace

industries and NASA bragged about how the runway approaches on the Bay shore were home to all sorts of rare birds. Outside on the big stage they were doing interviews with astronauts and playing music, including a concert by well known Bay Area filker, Kathy Mar.

When you see a crowd like that, and especially when you see things like kids being encouraged to sit down and play with computers running aircraft design software, you start to believe in space travel again.

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## **Only in America - Personal Safety**

Shortly after I arrived here I had reason to call my former employers in Australia. During the conversation, I mentioned to Danny that Kevin and I were intending to spend the evening strolling round Downtown Mountain View. Danny's first reaction was, "be careful you don't get shot".

Now of course there are parts of San Francisco where that might be a sensible warning, and it is certainly true of parts of LA, Washington, New York and Miami. But Mountain View? It is no more dangerous than Melbourne.

This question came up for discussion again as Kevin and I left for the NASA show. Kevin didn't lock the door. We thought that Michael was still asleep, though we hadn't checked. We didn't go back to check. Indeed, we have both left the apartment unlocked by accident before now. Also, as we don't have air conditioning, we have been known to leave the front door wide open in the afternoon to get some airflow through the place. This contrasted starkly with my experience in the UK.

London, of course, is a special case. But even in suburban Buckinghamshire you would never leave your front door open unless you could see it. And at night, additional bolts went across all external doors and windows were locked. The police encouraged you to do that sort of thing because burglary was at epidemic proportions. In California that level of security would probably be illegal because of the fire hazard.

So what is the difference? Is America really a much safer place to live? It is certainly possible that you can be walking down the street and be shot by some passing lunatic. Muggers will often carry guns. On the other hand, burglary seems to be a lot less popular, probably because the potential burglar is well aware that the householder whose home he invades may well have a gun and know how to use it. The deterrent works.

Are Americans gun crazy? I don't know that I'm sure any more.

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## **Flaming burgers**

Well, you might not be able to get a decent chilli in San Antonio, but you sure can get one in the Bay Area. The Prince of Wales is a small and dingy pub in San Mateo that could almost have been transplanted from London. It has darts (the landlord is a former

American champion), table football, fish & chips, Bass on tap and, Goddess help us, Newcastle Brown. It has a plaque on the wall given to them by the Norton Owners Club of California. It also has chilli.

The most famous dish on their menu is the habañero burger. I've had one of these, and personally I didn't find it that hot. Sure it has a layer of chopped habañero on top of the patty, but there is hardly any liquid so the burn doesn't get spread around the way it would with, say, a Thai soup. Admittedly that was only orange habaneros I had, not the super-hot red Salinas variety, but I really didn't think it was that dangerous.

The beer is mixed. I got quite excited by their special offer of a starter and a pint of British beer for \$2.75 until I asked what was they had on tap. Their cans include Ruddles, Abbot and Murphys, but sadly they were not part of the offer. Feeling adventurous, I decided to try the Alaskan Amber and was very impressed. It is one of the smoothest beers I have ever had. Yum.

We headed up there again after the NASA open day because they were doing a special chilli festival, and were joined there by Dave Clark. There was a range of special dishes on offer, and I went for the burger covered in their new chipotle ketchup, which is just wonderful. They also had a batch of Salinas in are were offering tastings of a sauce made with them on crackers. Kevin and Dave made some very strange noises indeed. After the second one, my nose and eyes started producing embarrassing quantities of liquid. Given that we were going out for dinner with Kevin's mother that evening, I decided not to risk my digestive system any further.

Crazy stuff aside, however, the pub does really good chilli. This, of course, means that it takes several days to cook a pot full, which in turn means that it is only available on one day a week (Thursday lunch time, and come early). If you like that sort of thing, it is well worth a visit. Profuse thanks to Bob and Brenda Daverin for recommending it.

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## **Cuteness beyond belief**

One weekend when I was feeling particularly depressed about the lack of job interviews, Kevin suggested that we take a trip to Monterey Aquarium. Sometimes he has the most wonderful ideas.

Monterey claims to have the biggest fish tank in the world (and one of the few tanks dedicated to open ocean fish). This, however, it not what really recommends it. Quite simply, Monterey Bay, a deep bite out of the California coast between Monterey and Santa Cruz, is an ideal place to study marine life. Firstly it is home to the giant kelp, the world's largest seaweed. The kelp forests are an incredibly rich marine environment. Not a patch on the barrier reef, of course, but pretty specky all the same. It is on the edge of the Pacific so it has access to a wide range of deep sea life, including being on the migration path of several whale species. And an ocean trench almost 2 miles deep starts near the centre of the bay. And if all that wasn't enough, the bay is home to the world's cutest animal, the sea otter.

Unlike older-style aquariums, Monterey does not have a series of small tanks for each type of fish. It believes in big tanks with as much variety in them as possible. The kelp forest tank has a wide range of different fish, from halibut to bass to shark, and even a small

colony of diving birds which are a real shock the first time you see one go past in the tank. Some creatures, of course, are too dangerous to be allowed into shared tanks. The giant octopus, for example, has its own home and just as well too. It was hard to tell just how giant it was, but some of the suckers on its arms were over 2" across.

The really big tank is the open sea one, containing tuna, barracuda and turtles, amongst others. Being mainly just big grey fish and water, it wasn't that exciting for the audience unless you could appreciate that few aquariums can house that sort of stuff. The otters also had their own tank, in which you can see them really close up, but for my money I much preferred the tide pool.

Being right on the sea shore, the aquarium is able to extend its activities into the wild. The tide pool is a large area cordoned off with boulders that are covered at high tide. It is kept well stocked with starfish and the like, and the otters know it well. Whilst we were there we saw two wild otters come into the pool area. Sea otters are one of the few species of animal which are regular tool users - in their case using stones to crack the shells of abalone and other delicacies. One of the wild otters gave us an impressive demonstration of how to get into and devour a large crab in rapid time. Their continual happy frolicking is, in fact, designed to keep their fur full of air bubbles to help them keep warm in the water, but it still looks great fun. A life of nothing but swimming, seafood and play seems pretty good to me. I wonder if I worked hard on my karma if next time round I'd be allowed to reincarnate as one?

Further out from the shore, but easily visible, are rocks that are used as roosting points by harbour seals and various types of sea bird. The kelp forests start around 100 yards offshore and with a telescope it is easy to see other otters playing amongst the fronds. Alternatively you can hire a canoe and paddle out amongst them, or join a scuba safari.

The aquarium has an educational side to it as well. There are numerous fun exhibits for kids and a large staff of volunteers eager to answer any questions you might have. The upper floor is given over to educational exhibits that describe some aspect of the marine environment. Whilst we were there, the subject was fishery management.

The basic argument here is well known. The sea is not a limitless source of food. Over fishing has caused catastrophic declines in fish yields in many parts of the world, Monterey itself being a prime example. The town was originally built on the back of a thriving sardine industry. Today, not one cannery remains in operation, though fish catches are slowly recovering. The solution to this is now reasonably well understood. Larger mesh sizes on nets allow young fish to escape and grow. Seasonal harvesting can give the fish population breathing space at vital breeding times. Knowledge of the life cycles of shellfish can help avoid destruction of the habitat of the young fish, and so on. The exhibit also demonstrated new styles of net that would, for example, catch a relatively small and stupid fish, but provide an exit for a turtle. There are still problems. Getting international agreement on handling of fishing grounds is difficult, and banning the catching of some species often leads to them being thrown back dead into the sea when they are caught alongside other fish rather than protecting them. But progress is being made.

Interestingly, the aquarium provided a comment board for members of the public to say what their reaction was to the exhibit. There was a wide range of opinion, ranging from conservationists and pagans who believe passionately in the subject, to people who simply wanted to ensure a continuing supply of fish dinners. The aquarium was also happy to show opposing viewpoints, and these were even more interesting, if very depressing.

One of the dissenting views was from a Libertarian who complained that the whole exhibit was a pack of lies designed to give governments an excuse to introduce further regulations. That didn't surprise me much. What can you expect from people whose "philosophy" boils down to "I must be able to do whatever I want and to hell with the rest of you"? Libertarianism is a creed with the morality of a hungry scorpion and the consistency of a blob of mercury. However, all of the other dissenters were fundamentalist Christians who claimed that we could fish as much as we liked because "God would provide". This is scary.

I am well aware that most varieties of Christian are not this stupid, but America seems to be full of fundamentalist crazies who are every bit as unthinking and illogical as the Islamic fundamentalists who are, after the collapse of Communism, their major bugbear. They are, in their way, as much a suicide cult as Heaven's Gate. Their chosen method of self-destruction might take a few decades longer, but they are determined to take the rest of us with them in their headlong rush to the Final Judgement. What is more, because they hide behind an established, respectable religion, they have access to political power. Personally I think it is about time Christianity put its house in order.

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Monterey itself is a surprisingly unspoilt little town. Of course, Cannery Row is hardly the place it was when John Steinbeck wrote about it. Nowadays the canneries house restaurants, ice cream parlours, tourist shops and a very fine aquarium. There is one amusement arcade, which I was delighted to discover had an original Centipede machine which kept me busy for a while whilst Kevin racked up high scores on the pinball tables. But it is very well disguised. The area does not look like a seaside town at all.

This being Northern California, one of the things on offer at the tourist shops was local wine. Californian wines are, by and large, very good, though with Kevin not being fond of the stuff I haven't got round to sampling many. The opportunity to do a bit of tasting was too good an opportunity to resist. As well as the standard Cab Savs, Chardonnays and Zinfandels, the winery shop offered a range of sweet wines made from varieties of berries and a mead. English mead, in my experience, is generally hideously sweet and extremely alcoholic. If that is your definition of mead, this stuff was not it. It was, for want of a better description, a honey wine. It had a similar alcohol content to normal wines, and was no more sweet than everyday dessert wines. Served warm infused with cinnamon and cloves, it was very drinkable indeed. Even Kevin liked it, so much so that he bought a bottle.

All in all, it was a wonderful day. I'd certainly recommend the aquarium to anyone, especially if you have kids old enough to appreciate the learning experience. Monterey is not the sort of town to take a young family for an extended holiday, but Kevin tells me that there is a lot of good hiking to be had in the area and the restaurants, especially the seafood ones, look very good. Recommended.

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## **Fannish doings**

On the fanzine side, it is about time I put a plug in for *ANZAPA*. This is not because I am a member, though I do occasionally manage to find time for a contribution. Nor is it because I am a great fan of APAs. I find the reams of comments on other people's mailings very disjointed, rather like a newsgroup discussion with a 2-month turn round time. Also

*ANZAPA* is worse than most for degenerating into discussion of family crises, illnesses and the doings of the authors' cats. But, it also has some excellent contributors.

In the pages of *ANZAPA* you can find the acid Terry Frost, the wry Marc Ortlieb, the craziness of James Allen and Phil Wlodarczyk, and the cultured John Bangsund. You can find leading Aussie authors Leanne Frahm and Jane Routley. But best of all, it is the only place I know that you can get to read new stuff by Bruce Gillespie. The last issue contained the excellent paper on Olaf Stapledon that Bruce presented at one of last year's Nova Mob meetings. It also had the paper that his partner, Elaine Cochrane, had presented on R.A. Lafferty. The next issue of *SF Commentary* might be awaiting a lottery win so that Bruce can produce something of the insanely high standard he sets himself, but you can get previews of the material in *ANZAPA*.

Overseas membership costs A\$42 (about US\$35) a year for six mailings. There is plenty of room for newcomers. If you are interested, contact Marc Ortlieb at PO Box 215, Forest Hill, Victoria 3131, Australia (mortlieb@vicnet.net.au).

One of the best things about attending a Worldcon is that you get another issue of that microscopic wonder, *Bento*. David Levine and Kate Yule are not exactly the most prolific of fanzine writers, but they pick some of the weirdest subjects to write about. The latest issue contained articles on Las Vegas, dim sum, transgender politics and gay naked square dancing, all of them entertaining. Write to 1905 SE 43<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Portland, OR 97215, USA (davidl@co.intel.com or kyule@agora.rdrop.com) enclosing *The Usual*. Well, OK, they'd probably prefer *The Unusual*, but you know what I mean.

Also available right now is the latest issue of Paul Ewins' *AMD*. Given that this issue contains an article on Paul's collection of Apple computers, I figured that it would be a good idea to hand out copies at BASFA. I also note that anyone who gets rave reviews from Mike Glyer and Andy Hooper has to be worth trying (EwinsP2@anz.com).

Finally on the fanzine stuff, I got an email telling me that I was being reviewed in the next issue of *Factsheet 5*. This is not an SF fanzine, it is a professional magazine devoted entirely to fanzines. I know that some SF fans think that they invented fanzines probably don't even know that you can get them in other hobbies too, but guys there is a whole wide world out there. There are sports fanzines, music fanzines, train fanzines and political fanzines. There are food fanzines, gay fanzines, poetry fanzines and religious fanzines. There are sex fanzines, personal fanzines and grrrl fanzines. There are fanzines devoted to fanzines, fanzines devoted to cheering up long term prisoners, and even fanzines devoted to bowel movements.

I don't have the time to do *Factsheet 5* justice in this issue. There is a web site (<http://www.factsheet5.com/>) if you'd like to follow it up yourselves, and I'll try to take a look at some more of the stuff for next issue. Crazy. But then it is published in San Francisco.

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Meanwhile, fan fund activity seems to be cranking up. Perry Middlemiss has opened nominations for the next DUFF race, and American fans should be aware that they have the rare and unusual opportunity to meet the very wonderful Mr Terry Frost. OK, so he is a very dear friend, but I'm choosy. Vote for him, you won't regret it.

There is also rumour that a new GUFF race has been started and that it will be to take an Australian to the 1998 UK Eastercon. As I remember, the last time we had a GUFF race it took Ian and Karen to Intersection. What happened to Poms coming to Australia? Didn't

anyone want to come? Couldn't you find one with a criminal record? Oh well, I guess someone might want to attend Aussiecon Three in 99. In the meantime, who is in the race? Anyone fess up?

TAFF, on the other hand, seems to be going great guns. Last I heard there were four candidates and Ulrika O'Brien was the hot favourite. Which just goes to show that fan funds can recover from organisational and financial disasters. Well done Mr. Langford & co for a superb rescue operation.

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It is now certain that I won't be able to make Basiccon. However, it looks like the con is going to break even (they have 100 members) despite the lack of accommodation. It remains to be seen whether this sort of low-key affair is what Australia really wants from a NatCon. Robin Johnson tells me that he does intend to go ahead with a bid for 98, but given the expense of getting to Tasmania that is unlikely to be much bigger. This is hardly the way to prepare for a Worldcon, guys.

Meanwhile, there are all sorts of nasty rumours coming out of the MSFC. Sadly the awful spectre of personal politics is rearing its ugly head once again. Quite why Australian fandom seems to run on an ethic of "if x is in your club I'm not going to join" I am not sure. It all seems pretty pathetic to me. I was sorely tempted to propose a couple of MSFC's American members for President and Vice President on the grounds that no one knew them so no one could possibly have a feud with them. Or maybe I shall just turn up at the AGM and bash a few heads together.

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## Footnote

As most of you will know by now, I am now able to send word processor files from my CompuServe account to most Internet addresses. Well, sort of...

Warning: start of computer neepery

OK guys, I know what I sent out was RTF files disguised as DOCs. What happened here is that Microsoft, when it produce Word 97, instead of proving a "save to Word 6 format" option, just saved files to RTF and claimed that they were Word 6. They read OK anyway, so it doesn't matter much. I do know that RTFs are text, not binary. I have tested the email with real binary as well. But I have something that works, so I'm not going to mess with it.

End of computer neepery

What this means is that most of you can receive your copies of Emerald City with nice formatting rather than plain text. You will need a copy of Word 6, or something that can read Word 6 files (or, if you understand such things, something that can read RTF files). You will also need an up-to-date email package (one that understands MIME, if you know what that means). If you have that, you will be able to get a much more readable zine and be able to print it easily.

I hope you do print the zine. What is more, if you do, I hope you wave it under the noses of any big name fanzine fans and shout "see, I get mine in paper". Sometime I will get some badges made that say "Email is a method of distribution, not a method of publication".

Oh, and people who do not have the necessary equipment, or do not wish to change format, can still get their 'zines in plain text.

One quick update from last issue. Memberships for Potlatch are \$25 to Oct. 31st, \$30 to Jan 1st and \$35 thereafter. Make cheques payable to Potlatch and write to 6405 Regent Street, Oakland, CA 94618-1313. The dates are January 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> and the location is the Jack London Inn, Jack London Square, Oakland, CA. No news of hotel rates as yet, but Bay Area people can always commute. As Kevin's sister and nephew are coming down for the last baseball games of the regular season, we'll be passing back through Jack London Square next Sunday. Look out for another restaurant review next issue.

And talking of baseball, the race for the National League West title is going crazy. As I write, there are six games left in the regular season (of 162 games) and the Giants have a 2 game lead over the LA Dodgers. What is worse, the Colorado Rockies are only 5 games behind, and they play all their remaining games against the Giants and the Dodgers. Kevin and I have been to a lot of games, and the average attendance is around 15,000. The games against the Dodgers last week sold out which, for Candlestick in baseball configuration, means over 50,000 people. It was loud, very loud.

And I think that is quite enough for now. Melbourne here I come.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl