

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Well, here I am again. Same old Melbourne, same old office. Even same old desk.

It was originally planned that I would be here for only 2 to 3 weeks. The latest news is that I will be here until at least the middle of November. This is what happens when you get to work on a project that also involves two state governments, three state transmission authorities, and one federal body. Lots of meetings. Lots of memos. Not much progress.

More on my return to Melbourne later, but first one important announcement. My computer was stolen shortly after I arrived here. This time I did have reasonably up to date backups, and there are spare machines in the office I can use. However, I did have to re-type my email address book, and I'm not certain I have caught all the updates since last issue. If you, or someone you know, has got the wrong format, or no 'zine at all, please let me know.

In the air again

Well, it seems a bit silly to describe my rampantly peripatetic lifestyle as "on the road", doesn't it.

I can, however, report that I hitting the ground running. I phoned Terry Frost shortly after I arrived, and that led me to dinner at Michael Jordan's and a chance to catch up with DUFF winner, Janice Murray and Alan Rosenthal before they headed off to explore Australia. The next day was Friday and therefore an MSFC meeting, and on Saturday Danny Heap and Sharon Moseley were having a party. Things have slowed down a bit since then, but it was nice to come all that way across the Pacific and immediately have a full social calendar.

Of course on Monday morning things all fell apart. I'd decided to take the weekend off and had left the computer in the office. When I arrived on Monday it was gone. There was no sign of a break-in, and nothing else had been touched. What we think happened is that, some time between 5:00 and 6:00 on Friday evening, someone just walked in and took it. There were only two people in the office at the time, and both could see neither the door nor my computer from where they sat. The thief was obviously in an hurry as he didn't touch any of the peripherals, the heap of CD ROMs, or even the power supply. The police said that this sort of thing happens all the time, so it is down to arguing with the insurance company.

Since then, Melbourne has been Melbourne. Occasionally it has been warm and sunny. The rest of the time it has been cold, damp and miserable. Given that this is a month after the dates for the Worldcon, anyone intending to come should be prepared for any sort of weather. I wouldn't like to claim that this year, with one of the biggest El Nino's on record, is typical, but nor would I advise you to take the risk. Remember also that the rest of Australia, with the exception of Tasmania, will be warmer and drier.

In the last *Mimezine Flashback*, Terry Frost launched a notable rant against Melbourne and all that is in it. This is, of course, sadly typical of Sydney-born people who are so insecure that they feel the need to run down rival cities at every opportunity. Nevertheless, it is a question of horses for courses. If I might lapse into Terry-style metaphor for a while, Melbourne can be viewed as a crotchety old dame bravely trying to keep up the appearances of her colonial and gold rush past despite advancing poverty and arthritis. Sydney, on the other hand, is a brash whore who lifts up her skirts and proudly declares that all human life can be found between her legs.

It is a shame. Sydney has one of the most beautiful vistas of any city in the world. That it should want to mould itself into a fast-paced, dirty, overcrowded copy of a US city is very sad. Admiration for Sydney is fine if a) you like that sort of thing, and b) if you have only Australian cities to choose from. Personally, if I wanted something like Sydney, I'd go to New York or Los Angeles. If I want a quiet, spacious, elegant city with a deep sense of culture and superb eating, Melbourne is the place. I like it here.

Paper clips of Doom

Let's face it, work is soul destroying. There you are, itching to get on with your masterful novel, audition for your next blockbuster movie, pen another verse of your chart-topping song, or whatever creative urge happens to suit you, and what do they have you doing? Writing memos, filing reports that no one will ever read, reading turgid motivational tracts written by some idiot in Human Resources who thinks that people really believe all that garbage about hard work and company loyalty. They have you pushing pieces of paper from one desk to another in a seemingly endless Moebius loop of bureaucracy. They have you bored stupid and resorting to playing with paper clips. As I said, soul destroying.

Now, as we all know, the destruction of souls is not the proper provenance of faceless corporations and pointy-haired bosses, it is the job of Lucifer and his ravening demonic hordes. It is the job of Sauron and his Nazgul, or of black Ereshkigal on her throne of bones. And, of course, it is the job of Dead Cthulhu and his band of merry, tentacled cohorts who slime and slither their unpleasant way around the universe by means of dark magics too terrible for mortals to comprehend and yet remain sane. Did you ever wonder, perhaps, whether your boss had a copy of *The Necronomicon* secreted in his desk drawer?

Philip Kenan doesn't suspect, he knows. He has, after all, seen it there. He has also seen the hideous, star-shaped symbols stamped on the wrists of his fellow employees, and he has seen zombies pounding away at the keyboards in the dead of night when the mortals have all gone home. Of course none of his colleagues believe him, not even his girlfriend, Amelia. This is inconvenient, because it means he keeps having to rescue her from working overtime lest she accidentally stumble on the dark ceremonies in the basement where luckless employees are lashed to the top of photocopiers and stabbed with letter openers in

hideous rites designed to bring the Great Old Ones across the trackless wastes of space to our own poor, unsuspecting planet.

You might, of course, think that Philip was mad. Certainly a stream of therapists think so. But then they would say that. If everyone was sane, therapists would be out of business. Besides, as with Phil Dick, William Browning Spencer never once admits that the obsessions of his characters are not real. Indeed, there is always some small, nagging fact that doesn't quite fit. Something that suggests that perhaps we really are all as conditioned and blinkered as Philip thinks. Next time you find yourself playing with a paper clip, check that you haven't subconsciously bent it into the form of an Elder Sign.

I loved *Zop Wallop*, and I was pretty sure I'd love *Resume with Monsters* as well. Any book whose cover blurb describes it as a Lovecraft novel written by Woody Allen has to have something going for it. Read it, your sanity may depend on this vital action.

Resume with Monsters – William Browning Spencer – White Wolf – softcover

Fantastic Lady

The trouble with most fantasy writers is that they put little effort into creating the worlds in which their novels are set. They seem to think that a few stereotyped motifs are all that is required. A dragon here, a sea serpent there, a cute patchwork of light and dark elves, lashings of thick, brooding fog concealing the turret-encrusted citadel of the Evil Overlord and topped with a single lost prince set about by a doom-laden, world-saving quest.

Of course not everyone uses every item from *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, but sometimes it seems like it. You only have to read the back cover blurb to know what you are up against. Take this, for example:

For more than seventy years the magical statue of the Lady in Gil has lain hidden as the island kingdom groans under the barbed heel of the accursed Sherank, barbarian invaders who have raped the country of its wealth to finance their subjugation of the rest of the civilised world. Tigralef is a Scion of Oballef, a direct descendant of the first Priest-King in Gil... and it's his turn to follow tradition by returning in secret to Gil to seek the Lady, conjure her powers and overthrow the Sherank.

Then again, blurbs can be deceptive. That was taken from the back of *Lady in Gil*, by Rebecca Bradley. It was given to me, along with the sequel, *Scion's Lady*, by Alan Stewart who, having run out of other likely people on whom to foist *Thyme's* fantasy review material, figured I'd do as a plausible dumb girlie. I glowered at him. I read the blurb and muttered dark comments about mindless nonsense. But hey, they were books, and they were free. So I read them.

I have to say that Bradley starts out pretty badly. The setting for the first novel is typical of exactly the sort of nonsense I was expecting: that is, it was entirely unbelievable. However, whereas most fantasy novels are unbearably turgid, this one sped along with frantic speed, dragging the unsuspecting reader with it. There is an art to pacing plot, and Bradley has it

in spades. Right from the first chapter, the damn thing was unputdownable. I ended up finishing both books in five days.

What is more, slowly but surely, Bradley threw off the stereotyped nonsense and got down to creating situations which were believable, characters that were at least two dimensional, and a certain amount of interest. By the second book, she was putting her PhD in archaeology to work and having great fun creating religious cults. There is also a fair amount of sly humour involved, much of which, in the first book, is dedicated to poking fun at the situation she first set out. It is almost as if she set out to write a formulaic story and, a few chapters in, decided “to hell with this, I’m going to write a decent book instead”.

The thing I liked least about the books was Bradley’s attitude to women. The book is written in the first person from the point of view of the male hero. Most of the women in it are some combination of vain, power-mad, bitchy and stupid. The only woman to be portrayed with any sympathy at all is the heroine who is bossy, arrogant and fairly competent, except in tight corners where she is liable to go all wussy.

I guess I should also warn the boys that there are soppy bits. Bradley is clearly keen to explore the psychology of her hero. In the first book this is largely a rather inept discovery of love and sex of the type you might find in cheap teen novels. The second book, however, is more in the form of a Thomas Covenant story done tolerably well.

I wouldn’t put these books anywhere near my all time favourites, but they are certainly worth a read for the magnificent way that Bradley paces her tales. To carry though a weak plot and uninteresting characters purely on the basis of pacing and readability is an impressive achievement. It isn’t an easy skill to acquire either but, if you have it, getting editors to read your submissions will be very much easier.

Lady in Gil – Rebecca Bradley – Vista – softcover

Scion’s Lady – Rebecca Bradley – Gollancz – hardcover

Lucy on Ice

As all of the cyberpunks amongst you will know, “black ICE” is counter-intrusion software specifically designed to kill invading hackers. Reading the back cover blurb of Lucy Sussex’s latest novel, you would be forgiven for thinking that it was a cyberpunk book. It isn’t. It is a straightforward ghost story which just happens to be set in a world in which email and web browsing are commonplace. A world, indeed, much like yours and mine. The *Black Ice* of the title refers to a particularly unpleasant type of psychic presence.

It is also a book for teenagers or, in the latest publishing industry vogue terminology for that market segment, “young adults”. This imposes certain stylistic limits and requirements. Most importantly, it is relatively short and easy to read. For example, on the way to the MSFC last week I saw a guy on the tram reading two books. One was a copy of *Gormenghast*, the other a copy of Webster’s Dictionary to which he referred every so often when he came across another of Peake’s exercises in vocabularic archaeology. You won’t find any of that sort of thing in a “young adult” book.

Such books are also supposed to be written about teens and with teen culture in mind. I’m sure Lucy had done her research, but at times the book left me wondering whether I was that shallow when I was a teenager. Did I really believe that my personality was defined by

the fashion statements I made, and that by changing my image I could become a different person? Maybe I did. Maybe in some ways I still do. Anyway, it got me thinking.

Now thinking is something that readers of “young adult” fiction are not often assumed to be capable of. Soap opera style moral dilemmas are the usual limits of the intellectual content. Lucy, bless her, tries harder. In the space of a rather short book she manages to touch on parental divorce, religious fundamentalism, child pornography, censorship, sexism, theft and the appalling treatment of Australian Aborigines by early settlers, all of it without a trace of preaching. There’s not much debate - there isn’t room for any and it would probably have been edited out by the publishers if she had written it - but the readers should go away with something other than fashion to occupy their grey matter.

This isn’t a great book. The restrictions under which it was written see to that. Lucy can do, and has done, much better. But as an example of how a supposedly simple genre book can be made interesting and thought-provoking, it is very fine indeed.

Oh, and there is a quote from Terry Frost in there. He happened to produce a rant about child porn on the Web whilst Lucy was writing the book and it fits in just perfectly. Count yourself lucky that you are a friend of Lucy and not Dave Langford, Terry. There are other ways of appearing in your friends’ books. Ask Martin Hoare about the failed regeneration tank sometime.

Black Ice – Lucy Sussex – Hodder Signature - softcover

How it should be done

In fantasy fiction there are two basic approaches to the created world. On the one hand you have authors such as Tolkein and Tad Williams whose world is complete in itself with no reference whatsoever to other realities. On the other, in works such as the Narnia and Thomas Covenant stories, the fantasy world is reachable from our own and the protagonists are most often people from our world who have found their way into the alternate reality.

There are those who believe that Tolkein debased fantasy fiction precisely because he broke the link between our world and the created one. A plausible argument in support of this is that it is much more difficult, with an isolated fantasy world, to hold it up as a mirror to our own and thus pose moral and philosophical questions for the reader. Reading Stephen Donaldson, it is difficult to give much credence to such a position. Reading Isobelle Carmody is another matter entirely.

Long time readers will remember my reviewing one of Carmody’s *Obernewtyn* books and being somewhat less than overwhelmed. They were, however, published as “young adult” fiction, and she did start writing them whilst still in high school. *Darkfall* is in all ways much more of an adult book.

It is worth noting at this point that another disadvantage of the Tolkein-style complete-in-itself world is that it has to be much more consistent. Somehow it doesn’t seem to matter that much if a world you get to through the back of a wardrobe doesn’t have a believable ecology or social structure. Rebecca Bradley’s world falls down precisely because she hasn’t put enough effort into making it seem real. Yet Isobelle Carmody, despite not being bound by the same restrictions, and despite pleading magic to be able to throw many standard laws of nature to the winds, still manages something much more believable.

So how is it done? Well, if I knew that, I'd probably be writing blockbuster fantasy novels, but it seems to be something to do with having a feeling for the themes of fantasy rather than simply deploying a bunch of stereotypes. It isn't that Bradley doesn't have any knowledge of mythology - the exuberant way in which she creates religious cults proves she knows a lot about the subject. But for her it is something dry and academic, and for Carmody it is something spiritual.

Darkfall tells the story of two young Australian sisters who, in classic fantasy tradition, find themselves in an alternative world in which they are seen as long-awaited mythological saviours. Put that bluntly, there doesn't seem much to it at all. But that doesn't say anything about the beauty of the characters, the complexity of the plot, or the richness of the fantasy world. Nor does it tell you that there is something else to the book entirely.

As I said earlier, Narnia-style fantasy novels are, or at least should be, written with the objective of telling us something about our own world by reflecting it in the distorting mirror of fantasy. Even Lovecraft (and William Browning Spencer) understood this. Lewis was telling Christian parables. Carmody also has a moral position to push.

It is often said, particularly of Tolkein-style fantasies, that they are used as an escape from the real world. People who are unable to face the realities of everyday life retreat into an imagined world in which moral questions are unambiguous, good always triumphs, and, as Terry delights in pointing out, there is often an absence of people such as blacks, homosexuals, the disabled and feminists. Such arguments are, of course, normally made by people who think that politics is the be all and end all of life, but they are not without some force.

Isabelle Carmody, it seems to me, is taking this challenge and meeting it head on. Her view of the everyday world is not that it lacks political correctness, but that it lacks care and compassion. Everyone is so spiritually deadened by the horrors they see around them: the endless wars, the corrupt politicians, the rapacious businesses, the loveless families, that they become incapable of giving love themselves. There is, she believes, a spiritual sickness loose in the world.

The role of the fantasy world (and therefore the novel that portrays it) then becomes one of healing. It represents an environment in which people from our world have a chance to face moral problems free from the obstacles (primarily lack of power) that confront them in reality. It is a place where they have a chance to see good triumph and reap the benefits of loving people. OK, so maybe it isn't real. But doesn't it feel good? Wouldn't it be nice if our world worked like that? Don't you think you could give it a try?

I am reminded of the ending of *Yellow Submarine* in which the Beatles, fresh from their triumph in Pepperland, inform their viewers that "newer, bluer meanies have been sighted in your neighbourhood" and that we should get out there and give them a jolly good dose of Love. It may be trite, but it may be right, or at least a damn good start.

OK, so the book isn't perfect. There is one glaringly stupid piece of behaviour by the main character that was obviously foisted upon her by the demands of the plot. Also it is very long and very much only a first part. Justin Ackroyd tells me that the promised "trilogy" is actually a two-parter followed by a companion novel, but this doesn't do anything to decrease my irritation at being left high and dry in the middle of the story. But it is a very fine, and thoughtful, fantasy novel indeed. Anyone who enjoys that sort of thing, or worse, wants to write one, should go see how it should be done.

Darkfall - Isabelle Carmody - Viking - softcover

Basicon 2

Being a report of Basicon 2, the 1997 Combined Australian SF Lit/Media Natcon (36th Australian National Science Fiction Convention and 15th Australian National Media Science Fiction Convention) held over 27/28 September 1997 at the Cato Conference Centre (YWCA), Elizabeth Street Melbourne

by Paul Ewins

The success, or otherwise, of Basicon 2 probably boils down to the philosophy of the person making the judgement. Viewed from one perspective you could hardly ask for a better convention. The membership price was dirt cheap. The venue was in a brilliant location with reasonable accommodation and heaps of parking and public transport available. There were things happening till late at night. Lots of fannish identities turned up. There were no major screw ups. The things that were supposed to happen did happen. Everybody seemed to enjoy themselves.

But on the other hand... There was almost no accommodation available. There weren't many people there. The program was pathetically small. There were no guests whatsoever. There were precious few "newbies" attending. The whole event was laid-back to the point of torpor.

Okay, enough of simplistic analyses, what really was good and bad about Basicon 2 and why?

The first Basicon was a late-in-the-day, slapped-together affair that took over from a failed Media Natcon/Awards ceremony. People were happy with the result, which was perfectly acceptable given the situation. The (qualified) success of Basicon encouraged the organisers to run another con using the same format and bid for both the media and lit natcons. They won both bids, Basicon 2 the combined Natcon was born, and by the standards set for it, it was very successful.

A A\$20 membership fee makes Basicon 2 the cheapest con I have attended in years. In fact the last time I can remember paying that little was Moggiecon, a mini-con fund raiser for Constantinople, the 1994 natcon. Actually, despite being officially a minicon, Moggiecon ran for the same length of time as Basicon 2, and also managed to have at least one invited guest. Still, for just A\$20 we were in a nice venue in Melbourne city centre with abundant transport opportunities and the delights of The Queen Victoria Markets right next door. It was a smallish venue, but then the organisers were thinking small and they weren't expecting the sort of numbers that turned up to Constantinople or even to recent mediacons like Multiverse or Force 2.

A lot of my fannish friends turned up which was great. I spent a lot of time hanging out in the dealers room / fan lounge chatting to friends and lunch on both days dragged out as largish groups congregated to eat. It was great to have the time to chat, but then there wasn't much chance that you would miss anything exciting on the program. In fact both streams of the program total just 23 hours, of which 7 hours were ceremonies, meetings and auctions. Add to this another 17 hours of video programming and the Saturday night Star Trek: The Next Generation 10th anniversary party (not actually part of the con) and it still doesn't even make 48 hours of programming. But hey, the organisers were thinking small.

The only major problem was the lack of accommodation, which was due to the deliberate decision to run on the same weekend as the Australian Rules Football Grand Final. Well, Adelaide made it into their first ever Grand Final and all accommodation in Melbourne was booked out, including the con hotel. I didn't need an hotel room, but a couple of my friends from Adelaide couldn't make it over because all the trains, buses and planes were booked solid as well. I guess it seemed attractive for those with the usual fannish bias against sport (and other forms of exercise) to pick that particular weekend but in the end it was the fans who lost. It did however pave the way for the biggest piece of bastardry of the weekend, when Michael Jordan interrupted the "I hate Football" panel with an important message which turned out to be the half time grand final scores. He escaped the room with his life, but only because he is a fast runner.

Saturday night there was a party held to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Star Trek: The Next Generation. It was hosted by one of the local Trek clubs, Enterprise, but for some reason hardly any of their members turned up. In the end most of those who attended (40 - 50 in all) were convention members who got in for just \$2. This covered finger food and a few drinks and a cake so I guess it wasn't particularly successful from a financial point of view. I can say that everyone who attended seemed to be having a really good time, and I had a great time.

Sunday was spent much the same way as Saturday, hanging out with friends and chatting. I did however get in early enough to attend the combined business meeting which, after a spirited but friendly debate, voted to combine the media and lit natcon constitutions. This effectively means that there will now be just one national convention and just one set of awards. Seeing as three out of the last four natcons have been a combined affair, this is hardly a radical move.

The big difference is the death of the ASFMA's (media awards). Well, as someone who has won four of them I am not unhappy to see them go. When I first won one it was a big deal to me, but after seeing the number of nominations drop in some categories to the point where there are only two nominees and given the usual practice of voting for one's friends that seems to prevail I would hesitate to say that they even manage to honour the right people. In fact the best in any category aren't usually even nominated as the media natcon has moved away from the bulk of media fans. In the end both the con and the awards had ceased to be relevant and deserved to die. The only award that may be resurrected in Ditmar form is the Amateur Audio Visual award for which there is a precedent anyway.

The other business was of course site selection for 98 and 99. The eventual bids for the newly combined natcon were from Tasmania, a follow up to Thylacon, and a last minute bid for a con in Ballarat. The Ballarat con was to be even more down-market than Basicon 2. The plan was to hold it in a scout camp with the usual level of amenities and accommodation that a scout camp provides. Part of the bid speech, by Geoff Tilley whose organising skills are well known on both east and west coasts, alluded to the decreasing number of attendees at recent cons and suggested that the day of the big con was over and that we should be planning smaller cons. I am sure that the con he proposed, which didn't win the natcon bid, would have a small attendance, but given a good reason to attend people will turn up in large numbers as the organisers of Constantinople, Swancon, Multiverse and Force 2 will attest. If you think small and plan a small event that is almost certainly what you will get.

Later that day the closing ceremony was held and the awards were handed out, which went pretty much as I expected, right down to Karen Pender-Gunn's annual grizzle about not winning any awards which was a little more public than usual. I had a really good time

at Basicon 2, and would be happy to part with another A\$20 (or A\$30) to attend to Basicon 3. It was everything I thought it would be and everything it was supposed to be, except for one thing. It was not a good natcon. It was a really bad natcon.

The natcon is supposed to be an event that brings fans together from all over the country. How many fans are going to spend time and money travelling to a tiny event? The answer was not many. I feel that it is incumbent on natcon organisers to provide a con that is big enough and varied enough that most fans will find a reason to come along, rather than just the hardcore natcon regulars. To say, "We want to run a small event" is not good enough. To bid for a natcon should be a pledge to provide an event that is worthy of the name, instead of a glorified minicon that felt like a two day long MSFC meeting. I only hope that the mythical committee of Aussiecon 3 don't get the same idea and start planning a 1000 member Worldcon.

I hope I never see another Basicon style Natcon, but will be more than ready to attend another Basicon. It was fun.

[It occurred to me that a few numbers might be useful here. Basicon 2 had a membership of just over 100. The NatCon I attended last year in Perth managed around 250. Multiverse, a Melbourne convention run by a coalition of local clubs, drew similar numbers last time out, and Constantinople, the last proper Melbourne natcon, managed around 400. The next Multiverse is aiming for similar numbers and will probably get them. It has Grant Naylor and Claudia Christian on the guest list, but will be a proper fannish event. They have even decided to invite some local writers. I once asked the organisers why they didn't bid for the natcon and they said they didn't see the point in lumbering themselves with an irrelevant business meeting and a set of awards that no one has any respect for, for no apparent benefit. Eric's ideal plan for Aussiecon Three was 500 people, but I gather that they already have more members than that. - Cheryl]

[Oh, and I guess a few of you might be interested in the results of the Ditmars. Best Fan Writer went to Bruce Gillespie, Best Fan Artist to Ian Gunn, and Best Fanzine to Alan Stewart's Thyme. Lucy Sussex won Best Novel for *Scarlet Rider* which is not really SF but is a great book. - Cheryl]

Fan Scene

It is always a welcome relief, especially when you have just been castigated by Alison Scott for producing a fanzine which is far too long, to have a copy of *Banana Wings* come crashing, Godzilla-like onto your desk. Sixty-four pages, most of it text, densely written, and nearly always thought-provoking, even if the thoughts it provokes are sometimes rather less than charitable.

Mark Plummer continues to make me laugh out loud at almost everything he writes. Meanwhile, Claire Brialey continues to ramble on, though this time rather more self-consciously. There is an article entitled "Claire goes onwards and upwards and round and round", which indeed she does. There is also a small aside for a joke: "Q. what would Claire be if she was a fish? A. a carp." It is always good when writers are able to laugh at their own foibles.

There is some deviation in the pattern too. A short piece on the UK Corflu proves that Claire can be precise and humorous when she wants to, and Mark had me blinking in astonishment when he somehow managed to turn a commentary on the British election into a piece on Jefferson Airplane's set at Woodstock.

Paul Kincaid, however, is his usual curmudgeonly self. Having condemned the Hugos as irrelevant in the previous issue, he then spends the whole of this one discussing the candidates for the fanzine award and unsurprisingly concludes that none of them are worthy of it. I have to admit that I agree with him on the question of *Nova Express* and *Tangent*, neither of which come anywhere near what I consider to be a fanzine. On the other hand, dismissing *Ansible*, *File 770* and *Mimosa* as unworthy simply because they do not cover all aspects of fandom only goes to prove that Paul sets his standards ridiculously high.

No sign of Maureen Speller in this issue, but some news of her activities. The '97 TAFF race will end up taking a North American to the '98 Eastercon, but there is plenty of room left in '98 to have a race for a European to go to Bucconeer. Maureen is standing, and I reckon she'll make a pretty good candidate. If nothing else, we can all give her big hugs and tell her that you don't have to have read every single SF classic before you can be admitted to fandom in the US.

The second Friday I was here saw the MSFC Annual General Meeting, which, I'm sorry to say, was deeply embarrassing. This was partly because of the shambolic way in which the meeting was conducted. Having the pleasure of watching Kevin control the recreational parliamentary practice at BASFA each week has doubtless given me high expectations. The other reason was that the meeting was attended by a significant number of people who are rarely if ever seen at MSFC, most of whom seemed not to care how much damage they did to the club as long as they scored a few petty political points for their friends. Fortunately, common sense seemed to prevail in the end, and the MSFC will continue to be a club open to all SF fans, not an exclusive clique for one small segment of Melbourne fandom.

Anyway, congratulations to Michael Jordan on being elevated to President. I'm pleased also that the committee has been expanded significantly, giving Sharon Nebel a post in recognition of her kitchen work, and adding two anything-but-Ordinary Members in the persons of Terry Frost and Paul Ewins. Welcome too to Tracey Oliphant: the club has gone from having a publicity officer who is a PR executive to one who is a shortly to be published writer - not bad, eh?

Personally I still think that the editor of *Ethel the Aardvark* should have a place on committee. Ian Gunn was apparently offered a seat but turned it down because he felt it would damage his editorial independence. This is not the way, Gunny. Take the seat, but insist that your independence is written into the constitution. You never know when you might need that vote.

Talking of Gunny, it is tumour tale time again. First the bad news. Bill Rostler, having battled bravely for many months, has finally lost the fight. It is a trite thing to say of a multi-Hugo winning fan artist with a career in fandom spanning over 50 years that he will be missed, but he will, and not knowing him, there is little more I can say. Gunny, on the other hand, is looking remarkably fit and well. He has very little hair left, but otherwise is remarkably active and cheerful. Here's hoping that this is a good omen for Gary Anderson

and Ross Pavlac, both of whom are treading a similar path, and also that this is the end to fannish cancer stories for a while.

One of the good things about coming back to Melbourne is that I've been able to see some actual progress with Aussiecon Three. Michael Jordan, Bev Hope and Paul Ewins of the MSFC committee have all been drafted in to help, and this means that the convention is being actively promoted at MSFC meetings. Bev tells me that Perry is planning at least three streams of media-related programming for the convention and Michael has been asked to write publicity material. Paul has apparently been asked to edit something called *Voice of the Platypus* which is to be some sort of pre-con newsletter. It is apparently not the same thing as progress reports, and as of now I have no idea whether it will be distributed outside Australia. Whatever, there is action, there are local fans getting involved, and this is good.

Still on Worldcons, after much deliberation and meetings in smoke filled pubs, UK fandom has decided that its next Worldcon bid will be for 2005. Pam Wells doubtless registered her objection and asked that this be amended to 2050, but there are enough active Worldcon goers in Europe, not to mention friends and supporters elsewhere, to make this one fly. Interestingly, the bid chair is a Canadian living in York (KIM Campbell) and the treasurer is a Scotsman living in Oman (Vince Docherty). Hopefully this will be the final nail in the coffin of the idea of Worldcons as some sort of outpouring of patriotic fervour.

Footnote

That's just about it, except for the computer neepery.

Firstly, a reminder that you have a number of options for receiving the zine by email. It can be in plain ASCII, RTF (a format readable by many word processors including Microsoft Word) or simply a notification that the latest issue is on the Web site. The RTF format seems to be working pretty well and allows you to print out a nice-looking zine instead of poorly formatted text, but it is slightly larger than the ASCII.

And talking of the Web site, the on-line letters page is now up and running. Check out www.emcit.com/loc.htm if you would like to leave a comment.

Love 'n' hugs, Cheryl