

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Well, well. Who would have thought it and all that. My first science fiction convention was the UK Eastercon in, I think, 1984. It was in Brighton and was a Eurocon as well as I remember. I met John Brunner, Bob Shaw, Julian May and Neil Gaiman, amongst others. Hawklords played a gig that was the loudest musical experience I have ever had. Now, 14 years later, it looks like I will get to another Eastercon. About time, I guess.

The more cons I hand this zine out at the more bored I get with the introducing me bit. And the shorter it gets. I'm Cheryl Morgan. This is *Emerald City*. I presume you know what a fanzine is. More information is available in return for supplies of Guinness. OK?

For those of you who actually care which part of the world I'm in, yes, I'm still in the UK. I expect to be here for a week or two because plane fares over Easter are a bit horrific. I'm chasing a couple of contracts in Australia and if they don't come off expect me back in the San Francisco Bay Area sometime in early May. I think.

Corfluing the UK

Day 1: Arrival

It must admit that things did not really get off to the best of starts. It was entirely my own fault, of course. But then I hadn't reckoned on being billeted at a customer site for the whole of the two weeks either side of Corflu. This in turn meant struggling on and off trains between Swindon and Ipswich, and then between Ipswich and Leeds, laden not only with enough clothes to last me two weeks in consultant mode and all my computer equipment, but also a pile of fanzines and a 10 lb bar of Ghirardelli chocolate. By the time I arrived at The Griffin I was not a happy bunny.

Having said that, I must put in a good word for the Great North Eastern Railway. Their rolling stock looked superb in a dark blue coat so polished you could do your make-up in it and a vibrant red stripe down the side. They had their own stationery for the tickets, even their own logo on the buffet sandwich wrappers. And they managed the journey from Kings Cross to Leeds pretty much on time. GNER actually looks like a real, professional railway, something that can not be said of any of the other services I have used whilst I have been here.

So there I was in Leeds, having dragged my suitcase the 200 yards or so from the station concourse to the Griffin, checking in in front of a massed group of beer drinking fans. Art Widner gave me a cheery wave. Most of the Brits, presumably thinking that a woman in a flash business suit could not possibly be anything to do with them, appeared to turn and mutter into their beer. "Fascist Bitch", they were probably saying, "bet she's asking for a picture of Margaret Thatcher in her room".

Fortunately, having finally got to my room and got changed, I began to feel slightly more human. Wandering down to the bar, I encountered Giulia De Cesare and started swapping notes about the bits of her visit to California that I had and had not been kept up to date with by Kevin. Multitudinous sensitive fannish faces were in evidence and I was soon back in the swing of normal convention activity.

The first thing any fan does on arriving at a convention is, of course, to complain about the hotel. The Griffin had rented a large billboard at the station proudly proclaiming that it has recently been fully refurbished. There was no date on the poster, and whilst the hotel had an air of being recently decorated, they had obviously decided on keeping as much olde worlde charm as possible. This included the fabulous features of room doors that you have to lock manually when leaving, and floors so creaky that you could not walk anywhere upstairs without sounding like a rampaging herd of brachiosaurus.

They were obviously unused to business travellers, having managed to hide all of the plug sockets away behind the desk. After a good deal of crawling under furniture I finally got my computer up and running, only to discover that all data connections had been barred. Ah well, at least it saved on the hotel phone bill. Other than that, the hotel seemed almost OK. It was warm and comfortable, the staff seemed friendly and they'd even laid on a special late breakfast for the convention. Their only serious mistake, she says, understating wildly, was to forget to get any decent beer in for the bar.

This being Corflu, the ConCom were obliged to show their Trufannish credentials by flouting as many rules of con running as possible. They started early with the evening programme. A quiz had been scheduled for 8:00PM. When 8:15 arrived and there was no action I made enquiries. "Oh", Ian Sorensen told me, "too many people are at dinner so we've postponed it until after they get back". Foolish conrunners such as Martin Easterbrook and myself who had assumed that programme timings meant something and had planned to eat after the quiz promptly rushed out to find dinner.

The Griffin is bang in the centre of Leeds so finding a restaurant was not hard. Even so, in a less than 5 minute walk we managed to pass at least one night club. It was a little alarming to discover, not so much that the density of bouncers per square yard in Leeds was greater than that in Glasgow, but that bouncers per square yard actually seemed to be a sensible unit of measure.

Being in a hurry, Martin, his wife Margaret Austin, and I trotted across the road to the Old Orleans restaurant. I was, after all, pining for decent Cajun and Mexican food and this place at least promised to serve it. Having said good evening to the bouncers, we wandered inside to discover the Plokta Cabal at one table and another group of Brit fans elsewhere. Vicky Rosenzweig was the only American in evidence. We could only presume that, whilst we dined on ethnic American food, all the Americans had gone off in search of something authentically British. If there was a Harry Ramsden's in town it was probably doing good business, at least until someone found out what mushy peas actually taste like.

Martin commented that it would be a shame if the convention turned into two separate groups, one of drunken Brits and the other of bemused visitors. It seemed likely, however. What I had read so far of the con material seemed to suggest that the ConCom were being anti-American in such an unsubtle way that their visitors would assume that this was one of those wacky British jokes that none of them would ever understand. "Ah yes", said Martin, "Corflu: a continuation of Conspiracy by other means".

The restaurant tuned out to produce rather good food. So good, in fact, that we all decided to come back the following day. Of course we did have a good excuse. The condom machine in the gents, which promised to purvey such fabulous flavours as beef curry and malt whisky, was completely out of stock. Martin, probably quite correctly, concluded that the Plokta people had bought the entire stock. Anyway, we asked our waiter to make sure it was stocked up again in time for our return. He seemed to treat us in a strangely different light from then on.

And then it was back to the hotel where we found the quiz was just about to start. Those of you in Melbourne who remember the quiz I ran at MSFC and complained about how hard it was would have been aghast. I think I have a reasonable command of general knowledge, but as I recall I was only able to answer two questions. (I'm ignoring the Larry Niven ones because everyone got them right.) After the first few questions I decided to do a Gunny and try to make up the most entertaining answers. It seems my team got no recognition for my efforts which is a shame because I was rather proud of one of them. We were asked what name of an American car turned out to mean "a small male genital organ" in Brazil. The answer, of course, is a Portillo, but the justice of this was probably lost upon the quiz-masters. Somebody else apparently suggested "a Sorensen", though how they imagined that this could be a Portuguese word is a mystery to me.

Fanzines were, of course, being given out like confetti. I spotted some copies of *Weber Woman's Revenge* (Jean Weber) and *Q36* (Marc Ortlieb) on the oldies table. I also found a zine that allowed me to discover what the AussieCon Three committee was doing during Multiverse. Whilst the largest fan-run convention Australia has seen in four years took place on their doorstep, the A3 board was busy entertaining Judith Hannah and Joseph Nicholas who were on a tour of Down Under. Full marks for fostering international relations, nil points for sensitivity to local fannish opinion.

Day 2: Disillusionment

Morning. There was nothing on the programme before 1 pm which, considering the state of Martin Smith fast asleep on one of the couches in the bar, was possibly a good idea. I went out for a walk and was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the shops. However, the one thing I really wanted was a photocopy service. It is hardly the done thing to print vast quantities of fanzines on the copier at your client's office, and in any case the damn machine was one of those that you needed a special security card to use. So, if I wanted to make any fliers or fanzines, I needed someone to do it for me. The hotel directed me to the local ProntaPrint who proved to be closed at the weekends. There was an industrial-quality-looking copy shop close by, but they wanted 50p a copy. I wandered back to the hotel musing on the viability of the concept of a fanzine convention which had no copying facilities and realised that I was being intensely foolish. Real fanzine fans (Plokta Cabal

excepted, they'd brought a laser printer) do not use photocopiers. Their zines are hand-hectographed onto paper that they have lovingly crafted themselves.

The next surprise of the day was when Christina Lake accosted me to tell me that the panel I was on that afternoon was being scrapped because the ConCom thought that it would be "quite boring". It was apparently being replaced by a panel on alcohol that had been displaced from the previous evening's schedule by the late-running quiz. Leaving aside the personal insult, this happened to be the panel on promoting trans-Atlantic relationships. That the ConCom should think this a subject that no one wanted to discuss speaks volumes for their attitude to their overseas visitors.

Meanwhile things bumbled on in the usual way. Fanzines were distributed containing what, had they been about anything other than Americans, would have been deemed offensive racial stereotypes. Conversations in the bar revolved around the topic of "what I hate about America". Fortunately very few of the Americans made it far into the bar, not because they don't drink, but because the density of cigarette smoke was such as to inhibit normal breathing if you were not used to the stuff. A small feminist cabal that retreated over the road to the BHS café at lunchtime briefly considered asking for a no-smoking area somewhere in the hotel, but the advice from our British member was that the ConCom was unlikely to look kindly on such an approach. It wasn't clear what the reason was for this but I suspect either a) it would require that they actually do something, or b) that having such a facility would make the convention seem "too American".

I did manage to get to one panel item. It was on the potentially interesting subject of the whys, wherefores and hows of team-produced fanzines. Given that one of the panellists was Victor Gonzalez of the recently fissioned Apparatchniki, there was even the prospect of some good gossip. The panel managed to stay on course for all of about ten minutes, during which time we learned that the Plokta Cabal was a truly amazing organism. According to Alison Scott they actually do co-write much of their material. That is something I would love to see in action.

It did not take long, however, for the subject to drift. The method of moderating the panel seemed to be that whoever had the loudest voice could talk about whatever they wanted (something at which moderator Lilian Edwards was very good). Despite insistent cries of "get back to the subject" from Mike Abbot we were soon hopping rapidly from letter column editing to fan history to home improvement in a manner which Lionel Fanthorpe once charmingly described as the behaviour of a "mind wallaby".

I found the fan history stuff quite illuminating. It was a great relief to find that people other than myself think the great fannish paragon, *Mimosa*, is deeply boring. I'm also in complete agreement (for once) with Paul Kincaid who pointed out there is no actual history in *Mimosa*. Nostalgia might be a better word. But even this interest level soon waned. Lilian's introduction of IKEA and its implications for fannish sociology caused a mass exodus, and I gave up soon after.

I had not originally booked to stay at the con Sunday night as I figured I'd need to be back at work. However, having been reminded of the awfulness of trying to travel in Britain on a Sunday, I had negotiated the Monday morning off. Nice idea, but the hotel had not reserved an adequate supply of rooms for the Con on Sunday and they were fully booked. I was then faced with the prospect of hunting around Leeds for a hotel room, or heading off Sunday morning. Looking at the remainder of the programme, considering the chances of

the proposed events actually happening, and examining my feelings about having to catch a 7 am train to London on the Monday, I decided to cut my losses.

Which is not to say that it was a bad convention. Certainly it was a poorly run one, but then this may have been what the majority of attendees wanted given the strange antipathy that so many fanzine fans seem to have for those of us who run conventions. On the other hand, Potlatch is an avowed low-maintenance, low-programme convention which nevertheless always makes an effort to get people involved and doing something. They have a notice board, they have micro-programming, and what panels they do have are generally fairly intelligent, if not always to my taste. The only effort that the Corflu committee seemed to indulge in was rushing round at the last minute trying to find people willing to be on the few panels they had. Given that they had chosen such enlightening subjects as booze, sex at conventions and, apparently the highlight of the weekend, a quiz show that involved throwing Jaffa Cakes at each other, I can see why they had trouble.

When it comes down to it, however, the point of a Corflu is to meet up with a bunch of people with whom you normally only correspond. For the visiting Americans there was also the point of having a good excuse to visit Britain and do some sightseeing. I'm sure they will have enjoyed themselves, even in Leeds.

It is tempting to speculate that I have now found the answer to that intriguing mystery, the meaning of a "British Convention" as opposed to the evil "American" variety that Worldcon is said to epitomise. Could it be that a British Convention is one with a programme that never runs to time, has infantile subject matter, takes place in a dense fog of cigarette smoke and is put on mainly to allow the ConCom to demonstrate its lack of manners? Fortunately I know enough intelligent and responsible British fans to be sure that this isn't the case, but I shall be sorely tempted to use this as an example when that ridiculous argument is trotted out again.

And so to Saturday evening and a return to the Old Orleans. This time we dragged along KIM Campbell, looking resplendent after having her head shaved for charity, and David Bratman who claimed to be a fan of Cajun cuisine. I was pleased to find that David deemed the food not the real thing, but an above average attempt at it. For a restaurant in, say, California, that might have been damning, but for Yorkshire it was pretty damn impressive. Also impressive was the music. We got good jazz, we got Chuck Berry, and we got the sort of tight, frenetic, fiddle-based music that you would expect to hear at a dance in rural Louisiana. Old Orleans is apparently a chain, and any British readers who haven't tried them would be recommended to seek out their nearest branch.

After the meal, we headed back to the hotel. Going through the main doors, I almost gagged at the atmosphere and knew I had made the right decision about Sunday.

Day 3: Departure

Time to end on some highlights, I think. For me this was certainly an opportunity to catch up with a bunch of people I hadn't seen for ages. There was also the usual collection of classic quotes which, for some reason always seemed to involve Alison Scott and Lilian Edwards. The runner up was from Alison bent in concentration over a collection of photos on the screen of her Mac portable. "Oh look", she exclaimed loud enough for the entire bar to hear, "there's the one of Lilian and I washing our breasts!". The winner, however, came

from Lilian when, at the start of the team editing panel, she turned to Alison and asked, "so, you've been doing it with a number of groups, then?"

The principal disappointment of the convention was that I did not get to see Greg Pickersgill eat anyone's feet. He did, however, eat a number of rather strange things to raise money at the fan fund auction. Quite possibly feet would have tasted better.

The major event of the convention apparently involved Lise Eisenberg and a waiter at a local Indian restaurant. I never did get the full details, and the rumour that said fellow ran out of the restaurant after Lise, tearing off his shirt and shouting offers of marriage, may be slightly exaggerated. Only the post-con reports will tell.

Of course you'll have to get hold of a whole bunch of fanzines to make sure you get the full story. And that, at last, might be how Corflu UK manages to achieve what one would assume should have been one of its objectives: to promote the reading and writing of fanzines. I wonder if that waiter knows what a service he has performed?

The Sun, the Moon and the Comet

The Sun is, of course, Louis XIV, Le Roi Soleil, possibly the most glorious monarch who ever lived. Certainly he was a man who would brook no discomfort, nor any begging of his people, in pursuit of his own glory and, by reflection, that of France.

The Moon is Yves De La Croix, Jesuit Priest, Scientist and now somewhat inept courtier. He is in orbit around the Sun, and currently shining with more reflected light than all but a few of his fellows, thanks to the remarkable feat of having captured and brought back alive an actual genuine Sea Monster.

The Comet is a novel by Vonda McIntyre, an object of beauty that rockets through the SF firmament boasting a tale of vibrant, shining prose. When you look closer, however, you discover that it is, in fact, a large lump of dirty ice. Far from being a free wanderer in the heavens, carving a new philosophical path, it is in fact circling aimlessly, caught in the grip of a relentless, monotonous gravity not of its own making.

The heroine, Marie-Jospehe, is the sister of De La Croix and if ever there were a comet at Versailles it must be she. Ravishingly beautiful, she is also able to make drawings that seem to come to life off the page and music that plucks firmly at the heartstrings. She too is of a scientific bent. She is a sufficiently good mathematician to have corresponded with Mr. Newton himself, and is currently working idly on the problem of fluid dynamics in turbulent systems without a ghost of an inkling that physicists won't get anywhere near a solution for at least another 200 years.

Sadly, our heroine is also profoundly ignorant. Brought up in far off Martinique, and confined to a nunnery during her adolescence, this supposedly intellectual woman is not only completely in the dark about the workings of the world and her own body, but is incapable of working them out for herself. I'm sure I've said before that I detest novels where the prime character is portrayed as missing vast swathes of knowledge that seem common-sensical, not only to the reader, but to most of the other characters as well. Such things are even harder to take when said heroine is supposed to be a genius.

This set-up is, however, probably necessary to the author's purpose because, once you dig beneath the delightful prose, what you find is one long, dull, implacable feminist rant. We have menstruation, we have attempted rape, we have poor Marie-Joséphine told to shut up and stick to her proper station in life by everyone from the King's music master to the Pope. There wasn't a childbirth scene as such, but there was a dream about how the sea monsters accomplish it with dignity, community spirit and not much pain. Presumably this was meant to contrast with how awful it is in male-dominated human society. It is, from a feminist point of view, a remorseless tirade of self-pity.

The saddest thing of all, however, is that the book is also a bodice-ripper. On arriving in Versailles, our innocent heroine immediately falls madly in love with the most notorious rake in the court. She gets burned, and is eventually rescued and taught true love by the kindly young count who has been following her around all through the novel. It was a plot that the average fourteen-year-old schoolgirl could churn out in a matter of minutes.

All of which is a great shame because, as I said earlier, the prose is delightful. It is a very pleasurable book to read, provided that you can ignore the failings of the plot and the heavy tread of the political message. What is more, the basic idea, an intelligent sea creature at the court of Louis XIV, has a lot of possibilities. All of them, sadly, were wasted.

On the back cover, Ursula Le Guin describes *The Sun and the Moon* as "the best alternative history ever written". Well, she and Vonda are very good friends, but really. What I can say is that that is one of the least accurate pieces of cover blurb I have ever read.

The Sun and the Moon - Vonda McIntyre - Pocket - hardcover

Spice Mix

No, this is not a review of the latest album by The Girls You Love To Hate. It is, at long last, my take on the latest novel by Jeff Noon. I first encountered *Nymphomation* around May last year. I had wandered into Slow Glass and saw a copy on the front desk. "Mine", I said instantly. "No", said Danny Heap, "that's my copy, and we sold the last one earlier this morning." He grinned maliciously. "Best thing he's ever done", he said.

Mr. Ackroyd was off enjoying himself somewhere in Europe so no orders could be placed. When he got back he apologised that he would not be able to get a copy before I had to leave for the US. "Shame", he said, "best thing he's ever done". And then I was in America where, for some unfathomable reason, Jeff Noon books are not to be found gracing the shelves of high street book stores. I guess I could have given in and ordered it from Amazon.com, but somehow I thought it could wait. I was wrong. Best thing he's ever done, I venture to submit.

Manchester, 1999: a world not so different to our own. It is raining, United are top of the Premier League, but the good people of Manchester could not care less for them, and they alone, are test subjects for the newest, most exciting lottery game the world has ever seen. Dominoes.

Dominoes? Why of course, this is the north of England. What else could it be?

Of course there are not enough dominoes for a simple random draw. What happens is that each one of them keeps changing its spots. From the moment you buy to the moment of the draw they are mutable. On Friday night, the lovely Cookie Luck does her dotty dance on TV. The spots on her dress mirror the frenetic variation of the players' bones. At nine-o'clock, everything stops. If you have a half match you have a small win. If your bone matches Cookie's dress exactly you win very big indeed. Unless, of course, the winning combination is double blank, in which something very, very bad happens.

Manchester is enraptured. Perhaps it is because of the ubiquitous blurbflies that flutter everywhere calling out advertising slogans. But probably it is because those bones change. Hang on to yours. Watch those spots mutate. Will that bone to win. If you want it badly enough, the money will be yours. As the blurbflies say, play to win. Play to Win. Play to Win!!!

Enter Professor Maximus Hackle, expert in chaos mathematics, especially as applied to the chord structure of Jimi Hendrix's Purple Haze, the colours experienced under the influence of "substances", digital lifeforms and the navigation of mutable mazes. If anyone can beat the game, it is Hackle. Its mathematics are complex. So much so that Hackle believes that only a very few people could possibly have produced it. If the mysterious Mr. Million is who Hackle thinks he is, Manchester is in very big trouble indeed.

And so, to a background of rave discos, lounge music, urgent, fumbling university student sex and the incomparable curry bonanza of Wilmslow Road (hey Eastercon, we are in Manchester, let's go eat!), the plot unravels. Along the way we discover that we are in a Vurt novel after all. We learn of the origins of Vaz and the childhood of Miss Celia Hobart. We discover how *Automated Alice* links into the Vurt universe. We also learn that sometimes, if you want to win, you have to play to lose.

The parrot, Whippoorwill had green and yellow feathers. Green for vert or Vurt. Yellow for death. In childhood jealousies are the nightmares of tomorrow born.

The major criticism levelled at *Vurt* and *Pollen* was that Noon did not know how to write endings. This time he has got it right. The prose is positively poetic, the ideas so far off the wall as to circle the planet and end up round the other side. The only writer I know who comes anywhere close in wackiness is William Browning Spencer. No one else I know takes such pleasure in the use of words.

Best thing he's ever done. And that means very, very good indeed.

Nymphomation - Jeff Noon - Doubleday - hardcover.

Hot Spurs

I would have thought it would be Bellerophon who had the spurs rather than Perseus, but Julian May was thinking of Galactic Geography, not Greek Mythology, when she named her first serious post-Metapsychics book *Perseus Spur*.

May fans are doubtless aware that she has been going through a rough patch with books lately. Things got very slow whilst her husband was ill. This was followed by the rather formulaic Trillium books co-written with Marion Zimmer-Bradley and André Norton. And we had the lame and tired-sounding *Magnificat* which disappointed even the most ardent of her followers. *Perseus Spur* is the first book in an entirely new series. "The Rampart Worlds: Book 1" is the ominous sub-title. Are we in for another massive series? Better read it and find out.

Surprise number one is that the book is not fantasy. It is good, solid SF. Not intense theoretical stuff like you might expect from Greg Benford, but nevertheless taking the science seriously enough to sound convincing to non-nit-pickers. The setting is a far future galactic civilisation that seems to be run entirely by commercial concerns. This gives it a sort of cyberpunk-in-space feel. The hero is the son of the head of a minor corporation. Our man has been the subject of a sting by a rival and is now disgraced and disguised, living as a beach bum on a remote planet. He's had a few years to get used to it. He's even grown to like his new life and would be happy to stay in it. Or at least he would have been until the sea toad ate his house. It was hardly a normal meal for a toad. Obviously someone still wanted him dead.

And so it goes on, taking in chases through hyperspace, corporate scheming and aggressive aliens along the way. Sadly it was all a bit predictable. The only thing I didn't foresee too well was the final puzzle and that, although clever, was a bit disappointing. The story was competent enough, as you might expect from someone who has been writing for almost 50 years, but it had none of the majesty of the Pliocene series and no characters anywhere near as enthralling or heart-breaking as Felice Landry, Aiken Drum or Marc Remillard.

The good points were largely to do with the setting. May is obviously intending to make a point. Commercial exploitation of backward indigenous races is a major issue. Also the aliens are suspiciously reminiscent of countries like China and India: desperate to catch up with the big boys but held back by lack of technology and cultural barriers to the adoption of full-scale capitalism. The message isn't rammed down your throat, but it is noticeable.

Another commendable point is May's handling of her viewpoint character. There is a panel scheduled at WisCon about the difficulties for female writers attempting to write male characters. May does a creditable job of portraying a testosterone-driven twit. The female security operative who finally and inexplicably falls for his lack of charm is far less believable.

Finally, a big cheer for having made her hero fallible. Every time he attempts something approaching heroics, especially if any sort of combat is involved, he comes badly unstuck. I liked that. It was a refreshing change from most space opera.

Oh, and the book is complete in itself. Despite the ominous subtitle, there is no cliff-hanger.

Summary? A good start. May is obviously getting her appetite back. Let's hope the books carry on getting better. We all know she can do it if she wants to.

Perseus Spur - Julian May - Voyager - hardcover.

Fan stuff

One of the effects of ducking out of Corflu early was missing out on the banquet and FAAN Awards. It would appear than Victor Gonzalez managed to avoid having his spot cancelled because the results have since appeared in a number of places. Tommy Ferguson was first off the mark and I've copied his data. Those covered in glory are:

Best Fanzine: 1. Idea (Geri Sullivan) – 105; 2. Attitude (Pam Wells, John Dallman, Mike Abbot) – 63; 3. Trap Door – 51

Best Fanwriter: 1. Christina Lake – 64; 2. Geri Sullivan – 56; 3. Dave Langford – 31.

Best Fan Artist: 1. D. West – 94; 2. Ian Gunn – 70; 3. Bill Rotsler – 55.

Best Letterhack: 1. Harry Warner Jnr. – 71; 2. Lloyd Penney – 42; 3. Vicki Rosenzweig – 37.

Best New Fanwriter: 1. Lesley Reece – 71; 2. Ulrika O'Brien – 47; 3. Claire Brialey – 23.

The most interesting thing about these results is that more people seem to have voted than normally vote in the fan categories of the Hugos. This may be an illusion. I seem to remember that you got to give 3, 2 or 1 votes to your choices. Also a lot more British fans got placed. Of course anyone who is active in fandom can vote in the FAAN Awards whereas to vote in the Hugos you have to have a Worldcon membership, something that it appears most British fanzine fans would rather die than purchase.

Anyway, congratulations to those who won, particularly Christina and Lesley whose work I am familiar with and are certainly deserving. Commiserations to Gunny for losing his crown to the local hero (D. West lives in Leeds). Personally I think Sue Mason is by far the best fan artist in the UK, but I guess she doesn't have the history. I don't remember reading any of Geri Sullivan's stuff. Obviously I should rectify this.

One final point. Lots of people seem to have received the results in full. I'm sure I filled in the box on the voting form asking for them, but I don't seem to have got anything. Can anybody forward me a copy?

Press Release

SAN FRANCISCO WORLDCON BID COMMITTEE CONFIRMS PROPOSED DATES

Citing a conflict with the event using the facility immediately before their desired dates, the San Francisco in 2002 Worldcon bid has shifted the proposed dates of their bid for the World Science Fiction Convention by one day. If selected, San Francisco's Worldcon will run from Friday, August 30 through Tuesday, September 3, 2002.

A major city-wide convention happening the previous week in San Francisco is the cause of the shift in dates. According to SF2002's Facilities Liaison, Crickett Fox, an overlap with the move-out time for the Fancy Food Show, which will use the entire Moscone Center complex and all surrounding hotel space, means that SF2002 cannot take possession of its reserved space in the Moscone Center until Thursday morning. The convention requires one day of move-in time. This move-in constraint forced the SF2002 bid to rethink its proposed convention dates.

"We considered other options," said bid Chairman Kevin Standlee, "including moving to a different weekend in the summer of 2002. However, San Francisco is a popular convention destination, and Moscone Center is booked in excess of 90% - there are no other dates

available between Memorial Day (the last weekend of May) and Labor Day (the first weekend of September) of 2002. We also considered, but discarded, the alternative of cutting our proposed Worldcon to four days (Friday through Monday). We think that Fandom has come to expect a full five days for its annual 'Gathering of the Tribes.'"

The committee had previously announced its intention to hold the 2002 Worldcon on "the traditional Labor Day Weekend." Standlee said, "Some people have pointed out that our new dates still include the three days of the holiday weekend, but I believe most fans consider the 'traditional' dates of Worldcon to be the Thursday through Monday of the weekend including the first Monday of September; therefore, we felt obliged to announce our intent to hold our convention on dates that are one day different than the traditional ones."

The bid committee will post additional information about the date change on its web site (<http://www.sfsfc.org/worldcon>), and print it in its next progress report, scheduled for release at this year's Worldcon, Bucconeer.

San Francisco in 2002, a committee of San Francisco Science Fiction Conventions, Inc. (the parent corporation of ConFrancisco, the 1993 Worldcon) is bidding for the right to host the 2002 Worldcon. Members of Aussiecon Three, the 1999 Worldcon in Melbourne, Australia, will vote to choose the site of the 2002 Worldcon.

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That's the official bit. All I want to add to it is that problems of this sort are becoming depressingly familiar. The 1998 Worldcon, Bucconeer, had to change dates to early August. One of the 2000 bids, Kansas, had to fold when they lost their hotel. The Boston in 2001 bid was unable to find decent prices/facilities mix and had to move to Orlando. Given that sort of record, only having to switch dates by one day is a positive triumph.

This month's bad news is that Ian Gunn has had a recurrence of his cancer. Karen is understandably devastated. Ian, flippant as always, commented "so much for growing my hair back". Still, he's beaten it once, he can do it again. Keep smiling, Gunny mate.

What Ian needs now is support. Send email, send cards, send fanzines. Contact details are:

Ian Gunn, PO Box 567, Blackburn 3130, Australia. fiawol@ozramp.net.au

And one final piece of Australian news. Congratulations to Katrine and Rob on their engagement. Best wishes, guys.

Footnote

Here's hoping none of you are getting bored by my going on about the privatised railways in Britain. This is all for Kevin, you understand.

Well actually in this case it is because I am seriously fed up. Last weekend I went down to Somerset to visit my Mother. Bridgwater isn't the easiest place in the world to get to, but it is supposed to have a train service. Just to be sure, I phoned the national enquiry line on the Friday before leaving work. They gave me the times of the trains both there and back. I also checked that it was OK to go via Bristol or Taunton. It was. So far, so good.

On arriving at Paddington I decided to make sure and looked at the timetables. The train I was due to catch did not exist. I phoned Mother in a panic and got my cab rearranged then settled down for a long wait. Seeing that the queues for tickets were a bit long, I decided to get mine later. Then, about 10 minutes before it was due to leave, my train turned up on the departure board. By that time it was too late to get a ticket and rearrange the cab again. I waited anyway. The train was 20 minutes late arriving. It took me 8.5 hours to travel from Ipswich to Bridgwater, about the same time as it takes to fly from San Francisco to London.

Meantime I'd checked with the information desk about the Sunday trains. They gave me a timetable dated up to May 23rd. The Sunday pages were all labelled valid to February 22nd only. The poor lady at the information desk was very apologetic and looked up the trains on her computer for me. The times did not correspond with those I had been given by the national enquiry line.

On Sunday morning I decided to check the times again. Sorry, they said on the enquiry line, there are no trains from Bridgwater today. Engineering works. You have to take a bus to Bristol. I hate busses so I asked if I could go from Taunton instead which is much closer. No, I was told, that is not allowed. Given that it had always been OK in the past and there were no restrictions marked on the ticket, I went to Taunton anyway. It was OK. The train was 25 minutes late getting into Paddington.

Two points. First, British Rail was never this bad. Secondly, if this is the Great Western Railway, I am Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

On a more positive note, the BBC has recently signed a deal with America's Discovery Channel. Discovery, which specialises in educational material, has been buying BBC programmes for years. The new deal means a lot of joint production and joint launching of channels around the world. In particular Americans can look forward to the arrival of BBC America. Given that there are rumours of a new Dr. Who series in the offing, this could be very good timing.

In return, the Brits get South Park on Sky. Poor little Kenny will get to die all over again.

And talking of American cartoons, a little gem from one of my nieces. She lives in South London in a very multi-racial area. Her mother is a Catholic so she gets to go to church occasionally. One day the priest was teaching the kids about racial harmony. We must pray for all types of people, he said. Black people, brown people and yellow people as well as white people. "Well", says little Grace afterwards. "I know lots of black people and brown people, but I've never met a yellow person. Do you think he means the Simpsons?"

Finally, a quick word of warning to American tourists planning to visit Scotland in the near future. Should you happen to see something swimming in Loch Ness that looks like two or three humps, do not jump to conclusions. The Scottish Tourist Board is planning to reintroduce beavers to some of the country's rivers, including the River Ness. When a beaver swims its neck is submerged. The tail may appear as a third hump. Don't tell your friends, though, it will make a great photo.

