

# EMERALD CITY

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## Introduction

We have a little bit of cheating in this issue. As some of you may know, I have joined the Mythopoeic Society's APA, *Butterbur's Woodshed*. Normally I wouldn't touch another 'zine with the proverbial ten foot sterilised barge pole - I have quite enough writing to keep me busy, thank you very much. However, the flier I saw for *Butterbur* at Potlatch stated that the primary function of the 'zine was book reviews and that two of the authors to be covered this year were Elizabeth Hand and Tim Powers. This is what is known as highly effective Cheryl bait.

Now, having got myself into another 'zine which does book reviews leaves me in a bit of a dilemma. Here I am writing a bunch of stuff that is prime *Emerald City* material and not using it there. At times when I am in a hurry this seems an awful waste. Therefore I've lifted my review of Powers' *Earthquake Weather* as the lead article for this issue. I won't do this too often, and my *Butterbur* contributions will start to appear on my web site very soon. In the meantime I claim I have a good excuse.

And what might that be, you ask? Well, as I've said in earlier issues, I am spending Memorial Day weekend at Wiscon where I will be able to meet Sheri Tepper, Mary Doria Russell, Ellen Kushner, Pat Murphy, Karen Joy Fowler and a whole range of other wonderful writers. The dear committee have even put me on panels, four of them. Now that is right at the end of May when I should be producing this issue. But as soon as I get back I am going to do something with my vast collection of QANTAS Frequent Flier points (before they expire). It so happens that there is a unique opportunity for a round trip that takes in both the New Zealand and Australian NatCons. That's three conventions on three consecutive weekends in three different countries - crazy even by my standards. As a result, I want this issue out before I go to Wiscon, and hence the borrowing of an article from *Butterbur*. Do you forgive me?

No prizes for what I am writing about next issue - jet lag.

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## Mistletoe and Wine

I saw a review of *Earthquake Weather* in the pre-Worldcon issue of *Locus* and, despite not having enjoyed *Last Call* and *Expiration Date* overmuch, resolved to buy it in San Antonio. In the dealers' hall I drew a blank and, running into Tim Powers (who remembered me from a panel I'd made a nuisance myself at during LACon!), learned that the publishers had failed to get it out it time. Other books then somehow took priority until the last

Potlatch. Inspired by that flier for the Mythopoeic Society APA, I went straightway to Tom Whitmore and placed an order. It was January 17<sup>th</sup>, Dionysus's Death Day, the day around which the story in *Earthquake Weather* is built.

Four days later, we had just had dinner. Kevin turned on the evening news and moved my copy of *Earthquake Weather* from the space on the couch where he usually sits. I started to pick up the book and place it out of the way. The TV announcer was describing a phone-in on mortgages. "You will be speaking to Tim Powers", he said. With most authors, you'd dismiss this as coincidence. With Powers you know that synchronicity is at work.

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**Ghost Fish Soup à la Rennes** - Take one copy of *The White Goddess*, a couple of Elvis records, some poker chips and a Raiders cap. Shred finely. Place in a large Grail cup with a chopped monkfish tail. Add two cups of red zinfandel, a can of Coors and a cup of royal blood. Stir thoroughly.

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Tim's books are not just weird; they are painstakingly, exquisitely and, in their own way, maddeningly consistently weird. That, I love. His writing, I love. His quality research, I love. I just don't understand the why of his books.

*Earthquake Weather* worked a lot better for me than the previous two books, primarily I guess because I now have a reasonable degree of familiarity with the setting. That leads me to a generalisation. Fantasy, I suspect, needs to be grounded in geography. Stuff like Tolkien, Arthurian and Faerie works for me because the landscape is familiar. Heck, I was born less than 10 miles from Glastonbury. One of the better aspects of *The Wood Wife* was, I thought, the way that Wilding managed to make the existence of Brian Froud faeries in Arizona believable. But Powers writes fantasies for a world that is still alien to me. It doesn't resonate.

The book is a great read, of course, and full of stuff about Bay Area history that has got me wanting to know more about the area. The wine stuff was especially neat (but then us Brits always appreciate a story in which the French are the bad guys). What I didn't understand was, is there supposed to be anything more to it? Surely Tim can't be expecting us to take all this King of the West stuff seriously?

Yes, you've got it, the story continues from the Grail Quest style material of *Last Call*, tacks on a bit of *The Waste Land* and ends up saving California from something or other through the good person of poor old Scott Crane (of *Last Call*) who seems to have a pretty rough life for a king. Along the way we meet a whole load of characters from both previous books: Koot Hoomie, the Sullivans and Archimedes Mavranos being the principal players. There are also several new, and significantly more crazy, people involved, not to mention good old Dionysus and the ever so wonderful Zinfandel grape.

So, is Tim a pagan? Does he believe that California needs a Sacred King in order to stay healthy? The books hardly read like a religious platform. They are far too much fun. And, whilst the characters wrestle with problems of personal morality, no message seems to be extended to a wider stage. Arky is trying to save his friend from death. Janis Plumtree, the shizophrenic, is driven by guilt. Pete and Angie are trying to protect their kid and Sid Cochran, the hero of the book, is trying to help Plumtree. Kootie understands the wider threat, but is scared stiff, poor kid. Only Crane himself really sees the big picture, or seems to care much about it.

The only conclusion I can come to is that Tim is seeking to give America a myth it can call its own. Something that takes in the source myths of the immigrants, wraps them in a new cultural context and adds any new mythic elements (The Frontier, Elvis, etc.) that have arisen since settlement. Is this Mythopoesis?

Maybe. Somewhere in the back of my mind a nagging voice is asking "what use is it?" Sure it is based around an original religious theme, but is this seasonal renewal stuff of any use to Californians? If not, isn't it just a good story?

*Earthquake Weather* - Tim Powers - Tor - hardcover

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## House of Confusion

As I mentioned above, reading *Earthquake Weather* gave me a tremendous appetite for going to see the various places around the Bay Area that Tim used in the story. First stop, because I'd driven past it so many times, had to be the Winchester Mystery House.

For those of you who don't know, this fascinating building was the home of the widow of a president of the Winchester Rifle Company. Shortly after her husband's death, so the story goes, Mrs. Winchester consulted a psychic who informed her that she would be haunted by the ghosts of all those killed by the "gun that won the west" unless she started building a house and never stopped. The sound of construction, said the mystic, must continue without ceasing until the day you die.

And so we have a warren-like structure in suburban San Jose which makes a fortune off the backs of those who believe in ghosts. There are many features in the house supposedly designed to confuse (or possibly trap) unwary spirits: doors that are very small or lead nowhere; long, winding staircases with very shallow risers; windows that look into other parts of the house; pillars installed upside down and the number 13 found everywhere.

That, at least, is the story. The reality is rather different. Sure that description of the house is correct, but most of the anomalies can be put down to the continued building and to much less bizarre facets of Mrs. W.'s life. The stairs, for example, were a result of severe arthritis which prevented her from raising her feet very far. Everything was built small because she was only 4' 10" and designed the house around herself. She was a very distrusting person and put in internal windows to keep an eye on her staff.

However, what really killed the legend for me is a new tour that has just opened at the house. Called the "behind the scenes" tour, it takes you to some of the less bizarre parts of the building and tells you much more about how the place was built and used. Mrs. Winchester, it turns out, was the Bill Gates of her age. She ran the Winchester company, and her own fruit farm, with an iron fist, and spent her money (a \$100,000 a day salary at the turn of the century) largely on technology and the house.

For example, knowing that California was short of water, Mrs. W. designed the house with water conservation in mind. All of the guttering leads down through leaf traps into the house storage system where the water can be re-used. Everywhere water was used, even the special plant watering room, was specially designed to ensure minimum wastage. Earthquakes were catered for too. Modern architects think that floating foundations are a bright new idea, but down in the basement of the Winchester House you can see how the

whole structure rests, beam-on-beam, with notches to allow the main joists to move around without bringing the structure down.

If there was a modern invention available, Mrs. Winchester had it. The house is strung through with whistle pipes (like those used on ships) to allow the staff to talk to each other wherever they were. The servant call system is electrical. There is a carbide furnace which generates gas for the lighting and can be automatically activated and lit from any of the main living rooms. There is an electricity generator in one of the barns and the garage housed three cars and a car wash.

In short, far from being a crazy old bat, Mrs. Winchester was a very smart, capable woman with a few eccentricities that her vast wealth enabled her to indulge. I think she deserves a little more respect than history currently allows her.

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## **Authors in Glass Houses**

Ah well, an Ian McDonald book is an Ian McDonald book, and they are hard to come by in the US. So despite having bought the hardback version and had it stolen within the hour, I went and bought a softback copy of *Sacrifice of Fools*. I read it on the plane back to California. Oh dear, oh my, what a mess.

Ian, as I have said before, writes very well. However, one thing he is not known for is originality. This particular book has its main concepts, alien visitors of dubious sexuality, lifted direct from Gwynneth Jones' Aleutian trilogy. It is probably the most blatant steal he has ever done.

To a certain extent, Ian uses this very well. Returning to a favourite theme, he settles the aliens in Northern Ireland and uses the fairly obvious reactions to them to highlight the stupidity of the sectarian divide. The lead character is a former Loyalist paramilitary whose time in the Maze Prison has caused him to re-assess his attitudes to his fellow beings.

I should also make mention of the *Sacrifice of Fools* itself which is an interesting attempt to explore a difficult moral problem. Unfortunately saying any more would give away the plot. McDonald keeps it quiet for a long time too, which then leaves him far too little space to tackle the question. But it is a good question. So far so good.

Now for the bad bits. Whereas Jones uses the aliens' ambiguous sexuality to throw light on our own attitudes to sex and gender, McDonald uses them to display the sort of narrow-minded bigotry that is all too often the result of a hard-line Christian upbringing, regardless of the sectarian affiliation.

And so we have a book which, on the one hand asks us to put aside petty sectarian concerns, and on the gripping hand is a long tirade against clubbers, goths, transvestites, people who have sex over the internet, transsexuals and anyone else whom Mr. McDonald deems to be a filthy pervert. Gays manage to escape, though McDonald does take a side-swipe at a society in which it is hard to find a straight couple for a dinner party. There's a little bit of bad pop psychology to back it all up, but basically it is just an intolerant rant. It is ugly. Very ugly.

Which is all a great shame because I have very much enjoyed most of McDonald's books. Now, each time I see a new one, I shall probably reflect on the fact that the author is a rather unpleasant bigot and elect not to buy it.

*Sacrifice of Fools* - Ian McDonald - Vista - softcover

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## Times of Hope

Talking of Northern Ireland, Ian McDonald can probably give himself a pat on the back for prophecy. The book was first published in 1996 and to set the story in the early years of the new millennium in a Northern rules by a "Joint Authority", not to mention talking about "Saint Gerry the Peacemaker", takes a lot of confidence in your crystal-gazing ability.

As a Brit wandering round the world, one of the things that I'm most being asked about is the current peace process. Why has it taken so long? Why is it different this time? And will it work? It is a long and complicated story, folks, and you should be asking Tommy Ferguson, not me. But I'll give it a shot.

Superficially, the major difference this time is that both sides have been prepared to make concessions. In the past, the Republicans have always opposed any settlement other than a united Ireland. The Eire constitution even claims that the North is theirs by right. Equally the Unionists have always opposed any involvement of the Eire government in the affairs of Ulster. In both cases these claims have been, or in the process of being, abandoned.

This does not, of course, mean that everyone agrees. Hard line Republicans have been busy setting up breakaway terrorist groups and seem to have been responsible for most of the continuing violence. Hard line Unionists, led by the certifiable Mr. Paisley (the Dr. and Rev. are, I believe, self-appointed) are campaigning hard against the referendum. This was inevitable, and three cheers to the US negotiator for pointing it out loudly and clearly before the media could talk too much about failure.

More importantly, however, almost everyone else is in favour. Margaret Thatcher has spoken out against the agreement, which just goes to show that she is as crazy as we all thought. Full marks in particular to Tony Blair and John Major for going hand-in-hand to the people of Northern Ireland to sell the agreement. The only area where support is conspicuous by its absence is the church. I saw a TV interview on Easter Sunday with the Anglican Bishop of Northern Ireland. He cagily refused to endorse the peace settlement, and flatly refused to condemn members of his clergy who spoke out against it. So much for a religion of peace and love. The Church of England is far too busy persecuting homosexuals and women to give a damn about such things.

But why did it happen? Is Blair that good a politician? Sadly for him and his spin doctors, the answer is no. Well, not in that respect. The real driving forces for peace have been little to do with the negotiations. On the Catholic side it is probably true that they have finally realised that they can't win. Gerry Adams has probably seen how Yasser Arafat became a respected world statesman through preaching peace instead of violence and decided that he wants a shot at being an important guest at the White House.

The Unionists have had no such qualms. What they lost was the backing of the British government. Remember that until recently they were part of the Conservative party. For as long as many people can remember, Britain has had a Conservative government. At times

they had a big majority but a leader (Thatcher) whose sympathies lay with the Unionists. At others they had little or no majority and relied upon Unionist support to keep them in power. The advent of a Labour government with a massive majority has been the decisive factor in changing Unionist minds.

The referendum will be voted upon shortly after you receive this issue of Emerald City. So far the indications are good, but you never can tell. A large vote in favour will go a long way towards providing a political mandate for peace, but it cannot stop the violence. Only people can do that. A vote against would, if Blair has the courage, be a mandate to cut Northern Ireland adrift to solve its own problems. That is probably what the majority of English, Welsh and Scots have wanted for years, but you can't just abandon people, they have to tell you to go away. Possibly the worst result would be a narrow victory. That would just condemn the province to many more decades of conflict.

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## A Catholic Elf

From the modern day rump of the Catholic-Protestant war, we go back almost to the start of the conflict. *The Royal Changeling*, by John Whitbourn, was a give-away in the registration pack at Intuition. For a free book, it was pretty good, though I'm not sure I will rush out and buy any more of Whitbourn's work. Here's why.

Things started off very well. The book relates the life of James, Duke of Monmouth, bastard son of Charles I, and Theophilus Oglethorpe, a famous cavalry commander of the time. As everyone born in Somerset knows, when James II ascended to the throne and attempted to restore Catholicism, Monmouth led an invasion of Britain which ended disastrously in the Battle of Sedgemoor near Bridgwater. I've been dragged through the mud of that battlefield by enthusiastic history teachers desperate to make full use of the area's only claim to fame. It isn't pretty, but it is home.

In Whitbourn's alternate history, Monmouth is a half-elf whose royal ambitions are snared and manipulated by an ancient evil spirit by the name of King Arthur. Oglethorpe is the unwitting dupe of the good elves who seek to prevent Arthur returning to life. Well, it is different, isn't it?

The writing is, in general, pretty good, though most of the dialogue relies heavily on irony which may damage the book's saleability in the US. What lets Whitbourn down is his inability to construct a convincing marriage of 17<sup>th</sup> Century England with the realm of Faerie. Having Arthur as the bad guy just makes things worse because it upsets everyone's expectations. And with the wry style of writing you are never quite sure if you are in a serious novel or a 17<sup>th</sup> Century version of Bored of the Rings.

In addition, there was a definite whiff of religious bias sneaking around in the remote corners of the book. I have no idea whether Whitbourn is a Catholic, and certainly the excesses of the Puritan era deserve to be pilloried. However, I think it is a bit strong to hold up Catholicism as the defender of tranquility, beauty and environmentalism, let alone elfdom. It isn't even as if the whole thing did any good because a few years later Parliament threw James out and invited William and Mary (whom Whitbourn describes as raving homosexuals) to take over. Maybe if the elves hadn't been exhausted by their fight against

Arthur we'd still be living in a pastoral paradise in which the Divine Right of Kings is still recognised. Maybe Whitbourn should read some Mary Doria Russell.

*The Royal Changeling* - John Whitbourn - Earthlight - softcover

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## **Meanwhile, back in Europe...**

I've been to England, Ireland has been to the peace table, but Wolf von Witting has been to Dortmund.

### **SF-Tage 10, Dortmund, Germany - 20<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> March 1998**

Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ) wrote on Monday 23rd that SF-Tage had 2000 guests. I have the number 1580 from a far more reliable source. Still - it was the biggest convention in Germany so far, exceeding SFT 9 with just about 280. But SFT had the atmosphere of a smaller con. You could never see more than 250-300 people at once (this was when the Amphi-Saal was crowded).

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#### **Friday, March 20th**

I arrived early on Friday and was picked up at the railway station by Beluga Post in a Mercedes (sponsored by Daimler-Benz to transport GoHs in). The con site is conveniently situated next to the station and the Astron Hotel as well - where I was going to meet Mike Cheater, so both places were easy to find for anyone who arrived by train.

After coffee with Beluga's charming family, I went to find Mike. He wasn't in at the moment, so I decided to explore town on my own. But the first people I ran into were unexpectedly Brian and Jane Stableford, whose acquaintance I made in Ratzeburg last year. It was quite a happy reunion. Brian was eager to explore the local CD-market for a bargain, since he likes to listen to music while writing.

Incoming rain had us soon returning to the con site for lunch and then we split up to gather strength for the impending convention, each in our own fashion. I still had to find a new mouse for my computer, an Amiga-1200, which I had brought along as an accompanying instrument for my filk songs. I was prepared for an exhausting quest, but found one (a mouse) in the first bleeding electronics shop I happened to venture upon. Not much of a quest, I tell you. Then again - Dortmund does have a reputation of being Amiga-friendly. So I returned to the Astron to find Mike. He still wasn't in.

It appeared to be my lucky day! Upon exiting the Astron I ran into all the fans I felt inclined to meet at this point: Mike Cheater, Ralf Grosser and Juergen Marzi... They couldn't have picked a better time to show up. Mike and I agreed to share rooms for the duration of the SF-Tage. And then... What else were we expected to do? Of course, we had to explore yet another establishment in town.

Sitting there with Mike, Ralf and Juergen, I contemplated on current events and I came to the conclusion that these are the moments in life that I live for. Most days in life (my life) appear to be the same somehow. But since these conventions only come twice a year or so,

developments in life become far more obvious, when you can sum them up in words fewer than the con report itself. Most things I do, don't appear to be worth mentioning.

Mike got to tell his story of (the) great joy one more time. I've heard it in Ratzeburg first time and was so amused by it, that I almost wet my pants. It was almost as funny the second time. I decided that I will need to have my video-camera ready for the next time he tells it. That would be right here in Stockholm, this year, as he is GoH at the 1998 Navigator convention. Guess I'd have to write a filk song about it, based on Beethoven's "Song of Joy". I believe it was Jane Stableford who remarked that most British fans seem to go to conventions just to get laid. Is that so? [*Dunno about Poms, but ask Terry about Australia - Ed.*]

Next pit stop was the HCC-Treff at the con site. Being FGoH I was requested to be there, so that early arriving fans could talk to us GoHsts... Brian and Jane were there, Alan Dean Foster and his niece Shannon Hettinger were there. ...and we were very much unpestered by the Gerfans. We were actually so unpestered, that we all decided to go for some Chinese food, Brian, Jane, Alan, Shannon, some German "fan" who I thought was supposed to be our guide... and me.

Alan and Brian were leading the way. Jane sometimes jokes about her husbands limited eye-sight, calling him Mr.Magoo, but he seemed to know his way about better than "our guide". When she confessed that she didn't know her way around at all, I suddenly realized that we were in trouble. Our guide was in fact Claudia Kern, chief editor of *Space Views*, a German equivalent of *Dreamwatch*. "Hey, you guys!" I called out, "Our guide is not our guide at all! We're now lost in Dortmund!"

But Mr.Magoo did know his way around, curiously enough, since he's from Reading and had never been to Dortmund before. It appears that Brian Stableford has a keen sense of observation. He found an excellent Chinese restaurant for us! And the entrance was quite unusual. We entered an elevator at ground level and found the restaurant on the first floor.

Someone had told me that Alan Dean Foster was a wee bit patronizing. "Shields up!", I thought. But at the table, him being quite relaxed, he appeared to be a normal kind of guy. It probably isn't easy to maintain "normality" when surrounded by enthusiastic fans. Being a writer is not a glamorous life. It is only at SF conventions that they really can feel appreciated. For Alan it may be a little bit different, since he is involved in Hollywood's business machine. Perhaps he is more used to appreciation.

Shannon looked at me quite intensely. "You have bedroom eyes!" she stated to everyone's amusement. Well, I'm happy she didn't say that I had toilet eyes. That would indicate that I'm full of shit.

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### **Saturday, March 21st**

The "Amphi-Saal", gatheringplace for the main program-items was full for the opening ceremony at 11:00. Suddenly I became aware that I was going to make some kind of speech. And I was hoping that I wouldn't have to go up first... but with my usual kind of luck... well...What can I say - of course I had to go up first... But I've got a useful piece of advice from David Elliott (a friend of mine), which works every time. It's the "K.I.S.S.-principle". Ever heard of it? It's short for "Keep It Simple, Stupid!"

I had no idea how long my fellow-GoH's were going to "ramble on", but keeping it short would have to be a good recipe. In all I was sure that the six of us would wrap it up, all that needed to be said... And they did. I think German writer Mark Brandis (Nikolai von



Michalewsky) did very well considering that he has never appeared in public before. Do you have any idea how difficult it can be for someone who hasn't been talking to a crowd before? Well, none of the GoH's seemed to have a problem with this.

Brian Stableford was as eloquent as ever. By the time he was finished, nothing really needed to be added. Or let's say, next person was bound to repeat something. And we still had Alan Dean Foster to go. But Alan surprised everyone by giving his speech in German. Well done, I'd say! He can't speak German, everyone could hear that. But everyone also understood perfectly well what he had to say. It was a gallant homage to the German fans. I was impressed.

I expected to encounter a few people from my fannish past at this convention. And I did. The two most touching encounters were Michael Dengler from Hamm... an early member of TERRA CORPS (our SF club), who once visited us in Sweden and secondly Wilfried Onckels from the PRC FELLOW's INN, who was one of the committee (of four people) who arranged the convention in Kleve 1977 (the first SF convention I ever went to). Both looked very much the same as I remember them, which is amazing, considering that 20 years have passed.

Other people from my fannish past have become fannish present, since they're still around: Dieter Steinseifer, EDM, Klaus N Frick, Juergen and Ralf... Dieter Schmidt... I'm happy that they're still into fandom, because I wouldn't feel as comfortable if EVERYONE had disappeared. And I've been away longer from German fandom, than from Swedish fandom.

Some may argue that Klaus N Frick is no longer a fan. But he is! Frick has advanced to "chief editor" of the infamous Perry Rhodan-series... Some people may argue that he has turned into a snob. I would say that his only problem is that he's been "cursed with fame". At heart he is still the same person. Put him in neutral environment and you'll see. He's been successful, credit him for that.

At 14:00 Fiona, Juergen and I were up for a debate on European fandom. I have to admit, I don't remember the things we said very well. I only remember feeling uneasy about this program item. It was mainly the presence of Fiona and Juergen which kept me calm. Somehow I knew it wouldn't flop. But I was ill prepared, 'cause I've been spending far more energy on my two other program-items.

Most of this convention I preferred to hang out with Mike and Fiona or Brian and Jane, but with a constant 5th-wheel-feeling I tend to slip away on my own. Guess that I'm kind of a loner, not entirely by choice however. I used to be a social misfit as a teenager.

I had some filk song practice with Kerstin Droege, which was fun. Kerstin picked up a few songs quite easily. I'd say we came to an immediate understanding. Filking was our main program item for the evening. She wanted to go up first, since she felt that I would bring down the house. Her filk songs were more serious than mine, and she had a lovely voice and I sincerely believed that she'd be more successful than me.

The filk song program item got slightly delayed, because of lengthy talks at the Kurt Lasswitz-Award... Beluga Post looked awfully tired at this point, and I believe that I knew exactly how he felt. A responsibility of this magnitude would trouble any man. He had that look: "I wish the earth will open up and swallow me, and I will never be seen again!" I know that feeling!

I was sitting next to Brian Stableford and translated for him. It wasn't easy to catch everything that was being said, so my translation was more entertaining than correct; "It's

about some short story-writer... He doesn't say anything of any significance... Wait! ...Gaahh! That was a long and complicated sentence.. which didn't mean anything... you know the Germans do that quite well... Ah... something about a parallel universe..." Brian was listening patiently. Suddenly a man came up and started to talk. I translated everything exactly, word by word.... "Who is this guy?" Obviously someone who is used to make sense. Oh... It was Wolfgang Jeschke, that figures!

Next thing for me was the filk song program. I grabbed my computer and headed for the Amphi-Saal. When I got there, Kerstin Droege was already through her part of the program. The audience appeared to be as pleased as I had suspected. Only one problem: I had requested a television-screen (or an Amiga-compatible monitor) to hook up my computer, since I had some of my accompanying music on it... In particular the song about SF-Tage (based on Mike Oldfield's song "Moonlight Shadow"). There was no TV. There was none of the requested equipment. I was completely marooned on stage, with an half-filled Amphi-saal expecting entertainment.

What to do? For a moment I was considering to go bananas. At this moment, I was furious!!! But the sight of a repentant Ulrich Krause (who I mistook for the head-gopher) made me reconsider. I had to do something... I sang partly "a capella" and for a few songs I had the assistance of Kerstin Droege and her guitar. Sadly enough I had to cancel half of my program. But I went for the disorganized approach... and it fitted in quite well here. If YOU ARE disorganized, and appear to be disorganized - then the audience will act accordingly - they'll forgive imperfection. On the whole - they seemed to be amused enough. It was just me who was bearing a grudge.

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### **Sunday, March 22nd**

I consider writing autographs as being embarrassing, since I never felt that I deserved that kind of attention. This time it was feeling different about it. I was part of a show that was bigger than me - and I was playing along. Besides, suddenly I realized that there was a second and different aspect to this act. Asking for someone's autograph could also be a gesture of appreciation.

So I decided to try it. I bought one of Alan Dean Foster's recent books "Jed the Dead" (a story about a Texan who finds a dead alien in a cave and takes him along on his journey, hiding him "in plain sight"). When Alan had his signing hour I went to ask him to sign the book for me. I could see that he wouldn't have expected me to do that. So I got some quite enthusiastic words in three languages (German, English & Russian) in my copy of the book.

Due to Brian Stableford's acrophobia (fear of heights) some program items were moved from the 18th floor to ground level. Though this was a sensible thing to do I had some difficulty in finding the room in which we were going to have our program item "Psychological Impact of Longevity or Immortality". There could have been a sign on the 18th floor telling me where to go. Instead there was just one telling me which program item was next in that room. And no one bothered to tell me that it had been moved. A minor oversight.

I found the room in time. Knowing that Brian always was on time to his program items I didn't wish to be late myself. In fact I got there first after my thorough exploration of the building. The previous program item wasn't even finished yet. So I could wait. Got acquainted to a good looking saleswoman from Bavaria, trying to vend Star Trek and

Rhodan stuff on CD-Rom. I thought all Bavarians were fat from beer. Obviously not. She was almost as cuddly as Pucky (a cute Rhodan character now available as a stuffed doll).

Brian and I had agreed to disagree. He was the optimist and looking forward to scientists' possibility to prolong the life span of humans. I was the pessimist, 300 years of age, looking back at a long life and gloomily embracing the prospect of eventually being allowed to die. We both got our supporters in the audience, which participated enthusiastically. By the time we wrapped it up (because our time was up) they'd really gotten into the spirit of things. I was surprised how well many of these German fans expressed themselves. And I was also surprised by the number of active participants in our debate.

No doubt this was my most successful program item so far. But I did prepare for it well. I'm happy it worked.

For the closing ceremony only Brian, Brandis and I were present of the GoH's. Arno Behrend did most of the talking, unfortunately placing himself between Brian and me (so I couldn't translate for Brian), and he asked us one by one about our impressions of the SF-Tage. When he came to me I was prepared to say all nice things, but he asked me the wrong question. He asked me how the filk singing went last night.

Later he explained that he had heard that the filk singing had been a successful program item... and that's why he asked. He didn't know that I had to cancel half of my show. Well... I wished he wouldn't have mentioned it. I did enjoy the SF-days [*which is what SF-Tage means in English - Ed.*] a lot and I don't mind the flaws I observed. I've been to an awful lot of conventions and there has never been a single con where NOTHING went wrong. It's just the way cons go.

Finally Alan Dean Foster turned up (almost recovered from his flu, which had been affecting his voice and his ability to speak). I grabbed the opportunity to hand my chair over to him and flee off the stage, leaving it to the really interesting GoH's. Besides, it was as much fun, sitting next to Jane Stableford and doing the translating for her. Germans tend to forget that some foreigners only understand "Bahnhof".

Unfortunately Mike was in no condition to attend the Dead Dog Meal in the evening. He decided to take a rest in the Hotel room. "It'll be fun and you will probably be back late." he said. "Not a chance!" I thought. I was tired too and decided that I would be back by 22:00 or so - but no later. But I was wrong once again.

I got the seat next to Shannon Hettinger, who was full of surprises that evening. I didn't know Texan women could be so... intense. Poor Beluga - he appeared to have been run over by a tank. Arno also seemed to be quite drained of energy, but most of the gophers were still in terrific shape. Shouldn't it have been the other way around? Shouldn't the gophers be all exhausted by the end of a con and the department heads in good shape? The only department head with lots of energy left was Ulrich Krause (Shannon only called him "Captain Crunch"). I guess that Cpt. Crunch must have been a good organizer.

There was a handful of people left, who didn't want the con to end. Guenther Derra, Cpt. Crunch, a gopher named Volker Wischniowski and three or four more. We talked long into the night in the Hotel Bar at the Astron. Like Friday, like Saturday... we didn't finish before 02:00. And yes, when one has had this much fun - it is always sad when the con has to end.

### **Monday morning. March 23rd**

Mike said goodbye and checked out early. I went for breakfast and spotted no more fans that day. Talked briefly with Wolfgang Jeschke in the lobby. When I headed for the railway station I looked up at the tall building of the Harenberg-Center and pondered on recent events.

Yep! I was very happy to be there - and I'll make damned sure that I can return next year. Watch out, Dortmund!

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## **That Hugo Time of Year**

Well, as expected, most of my Hugo nominations got nowhere, as did Kevin's continued and probably doomed attempts to get me on the list. Here's this year's pack of popular picks, plus my recommendations where I have them.

**Best Novel:** Forever Peace - Joe Haldeman; Frameshift - Robert J. Sawyer; The Rise of Endymion - Dan Simmons; Jack Faust - Michael Swanwick; City on Fire by Walter Jon Williams. My vote will probably go to Simmons, though Haldeman is very good.

**Best Novella:** The Funeral March of the Marionettes - Adam-Troy Castro (F&SF July 1997); Ecopoeisis - Geoffrey A. Landis (SF Age May 1997); Loose Ends - Paul Levinson (Analog May 1997); Marrow - Robert Reed (SF Age July 1997); ...Where Angels Fear To Tread - Allen Steele (Asimov's October-November 1997). I've not read any of them.

**Best Novelette:** Moon Six - Stephen Baxter (SF Age March 1997); Broken Symmetry - Michael A. Burstein (Analog February 1997); Three Hearings on the Existence of Snakes in the Human Bloodstream - James Alan Gardner (Asimov's February 1997); We Will Drink A Fish Together... - Bill Johnson (Asimov's May 1997); The Undiscovered - William Sanders (Asimov's March 1997). Again, I've not read any of them.

**Best Short Story:** Beluthahatchie - Andy Duncan (Asimov's March 1997); Standing Room Only - Karen Joy Fowler (Asimov's August 1997); Itsy Bitsy Spider - James Patrick Kelly (Asimov's June 1997); The 43 Antarean Dynasties - Mike Resnick (Asimov's December 1997); The Hand You're Dealt - Robert J. Sawyer (Free Space, Tor); No Planets Strike - Gene Wolfe (F&SF January 1997). Hmm, Fowler and Wolfe, maybe I should start reading some of these magazines.

**Best Related Book:** Space Travel by Ben Bova with Anthony R. Lewis; The Encyclopedia of Fantasy edited by John Clute & John Grant; Infinite Worlds by Vincent DiFate; Spectrum IV: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art edited by Cathy; Fenner & Arnie Fenner with Jim Loehr; Reflections and Refractions: Thoughts on Science-Fiction, Science and Other Matters by Robert Silverberg. Silverberg is probably very entertaining, but I'm voting for the Encyclopaedia of Fantasy because I know some of the people involved.

**Best Dramatic Presentation:** Contact; The Fifth Element; Gattaca; Men in Black; Starship Troopers. Wot, no Babylon 5? I guess someone screwed up the choice of episode to nominate. Still, nice to see that media fan block voting doesn't always work, and there's a fine collection of films up there alongside Starship Troopers.

**Best Professional Editor:** Gardner Dozois (Asimov's); Scott Edelman (SF Age); David Hartwell (Tor; Year's Best SF); Stanley Schmidt (Analog); Gordon Van Gelder (F&SF). Goodness knows.

**Best Professional Artist:** Jim Burns; Thomas Canty; David Cherry; Bob Eggleton; Don Maitz; Michael Whelan. Mostly the usual suspects. Vote for Bob because he's such good fun making acceptance speeches.

**Best Semiprozine:** Interzone; Locus; The New York Review of Science Fiction; Science Fiction Chronicle; Speculations. Can we have someone other than Locus win this year? Or is Charlie Brown locked in a battle with Dave Langford for the biggest rocket collection?

**Best Fanzine:** Ansible; Attitude; File 770; Mimosa; Tangent. Hooray for Attitude! (Sorry Mike).

**Best Fan Writer:** Bob Devney; Mike Glycer; Andy Hooper; David Langford; Evelyn Leeper; Joseph T. Major. Now there's a turn up! I think Bob Devney's great, and with NESFA (he writes for Proper Boskonian) and BASFA behind him, how can he fail? Glycer, Hooper and Langford are all good, however. Who is Joseph T. Major?

**Best Fan Artist:** Brad Foster; Ian Gunn; Teddy Harvia; Joe Mayhew; Peggy Ranson. Anyone not voting for Gunny is advised to take out fresh life assurance 'cos I will not be pleased if he doesn't win this time.

**John W. Campbell Award:** Raphael Carter; Andy Duncan; Richard Garfinkle; Susan R. Matthews; Mary Doria Russell. Mary Doria Russell. No contest.

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## Fan Scene

With Worldcon fast approaching, attention is focussed on the fan fund races, and unlike the Hugos I seem have had a fair degree of success. Congratulations are in order to Maureen Kinkaid Speller who won TAFF by a significant margin. I'd start getting t-shirts made saying "I haven't read *Tiger, Tiger* either", except, as I reported last issue, Maureen has finally laid that ghost. Will she bring Paul with her? Will he hate Bucconeer as thoroughly and entertainingly as he hated Intersection? I think I rather hope so.

Congratulations also to Terry Frost who won DUFF with another big margin. Is America ready for him, I wonder? West Coast fans may be interested to know that Terry is planning to come over for Westercon so if you can't make Bucky come down to San Diego on Independence Day weekend. Terry tells me that he's planning to pop over the border to see Tijuana, so if he misbehaves too much in his first couple of days we can slip his photo to the border guards and see to it that he stays in Mexico. Can someone in Melbourne get Danny Heap to run up a photo of Terry with a droopy moustache and a sombrero just in case?

In Canada there are strange rumblings regarding their east-west transfer fan fund. Apparently the current administrator has issued an edict stating that only fanzine fans are eligible for the contest. Hopefully the miscreant has now been fed to the polar bears or used as a puck in an ice hockey match.

And finally, the FFANZ race which transports Aussie and Kiwi fans back and forth across the north sea. This year's race is a big problem for me because it pits some of my best friends against each other. First up are Phil Wlodarczyk and Frances Papworth who are

wonderful people and splendidly zany. But they are opposed by Renaldo, Frances' toy sheep, who is one of the most intelligent and erudite animals ever to grace the portals of the MSFC. Personally I can't see how anyone can fail to fall for Renaldo's charms. He's bound to be a landslide winner. Fortunately he has offered to take Phil and Frances with him just in case... (jokes about Kiwis and sheep censored because I want to get out of Wellington alive).

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And finally, a little bit of media stuff. Having a web site is cool because every so often people write to you out of the blue having come across your site. Recently I was contacted by a representative of Gargoyles fandom. Que? You might reasonably ask. Gargoyles, it would appear, is a series that was produced by Buena Vista Television from 1994 to 97. I'd never heard of it.

Now, having a web site dedicated to a defunct TV series is hardly new. What these guys have done different is to take the characters and story lines and continue the series. They write episodes of the show and publish them on the web site on a regular basis. It is, as far as I can see, fan fiction, but it is pretty good as far as that goes. What is more it is dedication above and beyond the call of duty. It is not just fan worship, collecting merchandise and stuff, it is constructive and creative and pretty well executed. These guys deserve a pat on the back. You can find them at (<http://tgs.gargoyles-fans.org>).

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Fans of the NESFA skunk will be pleased to hear that Boston's most odiferous fan is still alive, well and contributing its olfactory delights to club meetings. The last issue of *Instant Message* commented happily that Mr. Skunk's activities had greatly increased the keenness with which the zine is read. Members continue to come up with new and increasingly devious means of skunk disposal. So far, however, they seem to have missed one obvious opportunity. If Melbourne fans can send a sheep to New Zealand on a fan fund ticket...

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## Footnote

Out of time. Out of inspiration. Ciao. Love 'n' hugs, Cheryl