

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

OK guys, bear with me, this is going to be a long one. The reason for this is quite simple. Over a period of three consecutive weekends, Kevin and I managed to attend five different conventions in four different countries. Sure, we had to split up to do this, we are not quite that mad. But whatever, it means five convention reports. Here's hoping you don't get bored.

Oh, and by the way, for those of you who really want to keep track of my movements, I'm now back in the US and expect to stay there until after Worldcon.

Meanwhile, a warm welcome to anyone who picks this up at Westercon in San Diego. Please note that this fanzine is not always quite this thick. 10 or 12 pages is more typical. Normally I can't churn out more than that in a month.

Down Among the Rad Fems

Wiscon is a convention that I have been rather ambivalent about attending. On the one hand, many of my friends, including Jean Weber and Lucy Sussex, have recommended it highly. On the other, it is an avowedly feminist convention and, although I am happy to describe myself as a feminist, I am deeply suspicious of some of the movement's flag wavers and am sympathetic to the many people I know who eschew the tag for fear of being associated with man-hating harridans such as Andrea Dworkin. What prompted me to take the plunge was the fact that Sheri Tepper was the Guest of Honour for this year's Wiscon. Regular readers will know that I am a huge fan of Tepper's work. She doesn't go to conventions often. This was too good an opportunity to miss.

I guess another reason for avoiding Wiscon had been the fact that it takes place in Madison, Wisconsin, a part of the US famous only for being unbearably cold in the winter, the Green Bay Packers (boo!) and for being unaccountably proud of producing really bad cheese. Happily I am pleased to say that Madison is a beautiful city and that, if you make sure to go there in the late spring or early autumn, it is a very pleasant place indeed.

The city is built around two lakes with the downtown area being on a narrow neck of land between the two. This is the reason for avoiding it in high summer, or mosquito season as it is known to the locals. It is the capital of Wisconsin and a university town. Friends tell me that it is known as the Berkeley of the Mid-West and I can see why. The concentration of

bookshops and new age stuff is positively Californian. Being a student town, it has many cheap restaurants. This is starting to sound like an ideal location for a convention.

And does the con live up to the setting? Oh boy, and how! As you may know, Worldcons can often have around 10 streams of programming running simultaneously and I am lucky if I find more than a dozen panels in the five days that I really do not want to miss. When I saw the Wiscon programme I was struck by the number of times I had to make a really hard choice of which item to attend out of a four or five stream selection.

In addition, the con organisation was superb. OK, they've been doing this for 22 years now, but everything seemed to run like clockwork which, for a 500+ person convention is good going. I spotted only one snafu, when a panel I was on got postponed for half an hour without anyone telling most of the panellists. I also felt that the green room could have been open for longer, but then I didn't offer to help staff it so I shouldn't moan.

The attendance list was great too. Well known women writers such as Ellen Kushner, Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler are regulars, as are people that I know less about such as Suzy McKnee Charnas and Candas Jane Dorsey. Tepper was there, of course, but I really knew I was onto something good when I came down to register and found Mary Doria Russell just finishing a stint behind the desk.

Mary, it turns out, is a wonderful person. I attended a discussion panel on *Children of God* and was deeply impressed, not only with her intelligence, but with how relaxed, charming and caring she is. She's the sort of person you would love to have to a dinner party, but you'd also be delighted to have her educate your children. If I ever get to chair a convention, she will be amongst my list of most desired guests.

Sheri Tepper, on the other hand, was a bit of a disappointment. She is clearly very intelligent, and a marvellously witty speaker, but sadly she seems to be every bit as angry and bitter as she comes over in her writing. I was on a panel with her discussing pastoral themes in feminist SF. In her summing up she said that she hoped that some young people would start to try to build some new types of community that had a much more balanced and caring attitude to their environment. That was the only positive thing I heard her say all weekend, and I felt like grabbing her by the shoulders, shaking her and saying, "why the hell don't you put a bit of hope into your books, then?".

I was on three other panels through the weekend - quite a contrast from my UK experience. The one on non-linear fiction didn't really get anywhere because we ended up talking about what might be possible if the technology were available, rather than what we can do now. The women in science panel was great, largely because the moderator, Linda Shore, was so good at getting the audience involved. For the most part we panellists just sat back and listened.

The seriously interesting panel, however, was the one on Fundamentalism. Much to my surprise, I found myself arguing in favour of religion against people who seemed to believe that if you were religious you had to be a narrow-minded lunatic. It is sad to see how far the Fundies have got in placing a hold on the American national consciousness. Much more on this subject later when I get round to discussing Bruce Bawer's book.

Wiscon rents a bunch of suites on the 6th floor of the hotel which it makes available to anyone wanting to run a party. This was too good an opportunity to miss. I do have a Worldcon bid to promote after all. Fortunately I had Cynthia Gonsalves on hand to assist,

the rest of the crew being busy at BayCon. Cynthia was a great help, especially as she came up with the best idea of the weekend. She dragged me out of bed at a totally unreasonable hour of Saturday morning in order to get to the farmers' market held in Capitol Square.

This, of course, brought me into contact with Wisconsin cheese. Anyone who knows anything about American football knows that Green Bay Packer fans are known as Cheeseheads. Wisconsin is a dairy state, and its inhabitants are convinced that they make the best Cheddar cheese in the world. This cheese is normally packed with orange colour and has about as much bite as a geriatric anteater. Residents of Wisconsin would not know a real Cheddar if it fell on their heads. And the sad thing is, that compared to the rest of America, they do produce quite good cheese.

Fortunately this fascination with cheese has led to people experimenting. Whilst they haven't got a clue what Cheddar is supposed to taste like, they are getting very good with a wide range of herbed and European cheeses. Cynthia and I went back to the hotel weighed down with interesting flavours, including something called a Butter Kase which I'd not heard of before and which tasted so creamy you could almost feel the fat piling on as you ate it. No matter what else happened, we were going to have good food at our party.

As it turned out, we were at entirely the wrong end of the corridor. Wisconsin people didn't seem to understand the concept of party cruising. Many of them stayed in the Con Suite all night, or wandered back and forth between there and the Tor party where there was plenty of free beer. I had forgotten that Madison is very close to Milwaukee, the original centre of the US brewing industry. We didn't have beer. But we did have chocolate. 10 lb of Ghirardelli's finest to be exact.

The other problem was that there was a vampire party between us and the Con Suite. They had loud music. People tended to avoid them. But gradually, through the evening, stories of cheese and chocolate filtered down the far end of the corridor and a steady trickle of people came the other way.

It would appear that Wisconsin people do not really understand how Worldcon bid parties work. We are not a corporation like Tor that can afford to throw a big bash on a PR budget. Those parties get paid for by the pre-supports that people buy. Still, they'll learn. And I did have the consolation that Davey Snyder's Orlando party and Joni Dashoff's Philadelphia party were similarly unproductive. At least I know that if I go back next year I just have to advertise the return of the giant chocolate bar.

Joni's party was the scene of one of the stranger events of the weekend. She had brought with her a small chocolate computer with 'Philadelphia in 2001' inscribed upon it. Eventually it came time to cut into this edible sculpture, and Vicki Rosenswieg was given the honour. She raised the knife high above her head and brought it stabbing down. It went in right up to the hilt, and came out bent at right angles. A large number of bad Yuri Geller jokes followed.

Whilst we were on the weird stuff, I also got the full story of Lise' Eisenberg's Leeds adventure, right from the source. Sadly I didn't have a video camera with me, and there's no way I can re-tell the story as well as Lise told it. Suffice it to say that if you have ever had a fantasy of being followed down the street by a dark, handsome stranger who is begging you for sex and promising nights of unbridled passion, talk to Lise. It isn't quite as good as it might seem.

To sum up, Wiscon was great fun. I'm gonna feel really guilty about not going to BayCon, but I've just got to go back next year. After all, Mary is the GoH.

Fundamentally Crazy

As I mentioned in the Wiscon review, one of the panels I was on was centred around the book *Stealing Jesus* by Bruce Bawer. This is subtitled "how Fundamentalism betrays Christianity", which should already give you a good idea of its message. The full background, however, cannot be understood without some knowledge of the author, for which I am indebted to Roz Kaveney.

Mr. Bawer, it would appear, is the most famous, and possibly the only, Gay Republican Christian. Clearly this is a man with a severe ideological problem. Not that there is anything wrong with his theory, but when you belong to a political party and a religion the majority of both of whose members would happily see you burnt at the stake, life must be pretty hard.

For me, the most interesting part of the book was that it presents an excellent history of religion in the United States, from the Unitarian beliefs of the Founding Fathers through to the triumph of Fundamentalism today. Bawer is very illuminating on the subject of how this came about and how the intellectual portion of American society managed to lose control completely of religious thought in the country. As you might expect, US religion is now controlled almost entirely by politicians and marketing men rather than philosophers and theologians.

The other really interesting part of the book is where it outlines what Fundamentalists actually believe. This will come as quite a shock to many people, even inside the US. Despite their insistence on the literal truth of The Bible, they have thrown most of the book out of the window. They are very keen on Genesis, on the Gospel of John (the one that differs substantially in its reporting of Jesus' life from the other three), on the Book of Revelation (clearly a drug-inspired hallucination), and on a few other little bits such the parts of the letters of St. Paul where he lets his misogyny get the better of him and the bits of Leviticus which list all sorts of juicy new sins and hideous punishments therefore. Most of the rest of The Bible they ignore. Indeed, if you attend a Fundamentalist ceremony it is quite likely that you will not hear the word "love" mentioned at all.

The bulk of the rest of Fundamentalist belief is centred around a collection of interpretations of parts of The Bible, particularly good old Revelation. It is a basic tenet of Fundamentalist belief that we are living in the Last Days and that God will destroy the world in our lifetime. They also believe that those who have been Born Again (that is themselves and their buddies who accept the word of their leaders unquestioningly) will be saved and taken to a Heaven that bears a remarkable resemblance to an America in which everyone can afford the absolute latest in cars, houses, clothes, plastic surgery and all of the other essentials of the Los Angeles lifestyle. The rest of us will Burn In Hell For All Eternity, regardless of our qualities or otherwise as human beings.

That last is an important point, and it is one which Bawer skirts around somewhat because he classes himself as a Protestant. It was, after all, Luther and Calvin who came up with the idea that it was Faith rather than good works that brought salvation. The Fundamentalists

have simply taken it to its logical conclusion, conveniently ignoring the fact that it is in direct contradiction to the message that Jesus was giving in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The rest of the millennial nonsense is equally important and incredibly scary because it explains why the Fundamentalists care so little for this world and what they do in it. For example, they take environmental degradation as an example of the coming Apocalypse and refuse to interfere in God's work. After all, in a few years it won't matter. If anything, many of them are keen to speed up matters, so chucking off a few nuclear bombs would be a good thing, wouldn't it. (Incidentally, in their vision of Heaven, no animal will eat another, except man who gets to eat whatever he wants.)

Before I read *Stealing Jesus* I was convinced that Christianity must somehow be at fault because people who were so obsessed with the Bible came to such unpleasant conclusions. Having discovered how far the Fundamentalists have strayed from the original text, and how fervently they are encouraged never ever to think for themselves, I've changed my mind.

You see, there is nothing that atheists, agnostics, pagans etc. can do about Fundamentalism (except join the war for our survival when it starts - and yes I did say "when"). Anything we say would be dismissed as the Lies of the Evil One. Even Bawer, who claims to be a Christian, will be dismissed as a Commie Faggot Spawn of Satan. The only people who can do anything about the problem are other Christians who, by patient explaining and use of examples from Jesus's life, should, I hope, be able to open a few eyes. Go to it, guys, the soul of America, and perhaps the world, depends on you.

Stealing Jesus - Bruce Bawer - Crown - hardcover

Rich, Dark and Intoxicating

What can I say about this book, other than it won this year's Tiptree Award and that it has a very beautiful cover? The words are very beautiful too, in many parts. Certainly the sentiment is beautiful. But as a novel, well, maybe it errs just a little too much on the side of art and not enough on the side of understandability.

Black Wine, by Candace Jane Dorsey, follows the lives of three women in three very different societies. It is clear from the start they have some connection and are therefore probably in different parts of the same world. Slowly but surely, we see how their lives are intertwined, and they unravel the secrets of their past.

The world that Dorsey has created is very interesting, being just on the cusp of becoming technological. On the one hand there are castles and taverns that make the place seem almost mediaeval. On the other there are airships which bespeak a certain level of engineering sophistication. Best of all, as the book proceeds, Dorsey uses increased evidence of technology as a signal that time is passing and that the societies she describes are evolving. Sometimes she plays tricks, such as when a character refers to a "calculator" which later turns out to be an abacus. Some readers have found it all very perturbing (in both senses of the word), and certainly there is no attempt to provide a rational description of the technological advance, but I found it all rather clever.

Besides, the technology is not what the book is about. It is about society, and how we treat each other, and it is about love and abandonment. The book describes a range of different societies from anarcho-communism to feudalism, the important point being that some are based on love and some on hate. The message isn't exactly pounded in, merely left for the reader to draw conclusions from. In the same way, some of the characters enter into unorthodox sexual relationships - lesbianism, sadism and a threesome. Once again, this is portrayed as perfectly normal. Look at this, the book says, isn't it just so ordinary? But, once again, doesn't some of it seem filled with love and some of it with hate? I must add that the lesbian sex scenes are steaming hot, certainly the best I've ever read.

I think what Dorsey wants us to take away from the book is this. She has created a world in which a range of behaviours exist, some social, some personal. The world itself does not judge. No one is complaining about Commies or perverts. But, stripped of the labels that our world imposes on them, nevertheless some of them appear good and others appear bad. So maybe we should stop labelling things and think about the basic behaviour instead.

Meanwhile, back with love and abandonment. One character was abandoned by her mother when very young and resents it. But twice she walks out on lovers. Another character finds herself needing to abandon her child for its own safety. This is the book at its most post-modern. Nothing lasts, it says. Sometimes you just have to pack up and go. Of course you do, and of course sometimes the decision turns out to have been wrong. Happy endings are for fairy tales. Endings, in fact, are for fairy tales.

This isn't an easy book to read. For example, some of the characters don't acquire names until very late on in the story. And it is very arty, very literature. But it is still beautiful and has still been crafted with love and care. I am forced to conclude that its irritations are the result of deliberate stylistic choices, not lack of skill on the part of the writer. If I may be forgiven for returning once more to the obvious metaphor, it is like the rarest of wines, where you have to work hard to understand it before you can see how good it is.

Black Wine - Candas Jane Dorsey - Tor - softcover

Building a Fine Fandom

I very nearly didn't get to New Zealand. Arriving at SFO an hour before my flight to LAX was due to leave, I found it listed as running an hour and a half late. Given that I had allowed only 2.5 hours to make the connection in LAX, things were starting to look very dodgy. As a seasoned traveller, I did the only thing possible: I panicked. Fortunately Kevin is very good at remaining calm and unflappable, and after a while I calmed down and spoke to everyone who needed to be spoken to. I made the connection with about 10 minutes to spare, and I was on my way back over the Pacific.

Thanks to the magic of the International Date Line, I left LAX on Wednesday night and arrived in Auckland early on Friday morning. Thursday vanished completely. I then had to catch a local flight and got into Wellington at about 9:30 am. This is the sort of thing that hotels hate, and I was fully expecting to be told to go away until the afternoon. In fact I got a room immediately and headed straight for the shower. A few hours later I was feeling almost human again and went exploring.

Wellington, despite being the capital of New Zealand, is hardly a teeming metropolis. There are only about 3 million people in the country, and most of them seem to live in Auckland. Wellington is a collection of cute wooden houses nestled in the hills around a large bay at the bottom end of the North Island. It looked rather like San Francisco's baby sister. Very baby sister. I guess I'm pretty confident with new countries these days, but it was ridiculously easy to find a bus and get myself into the city centre.

Back up a minute. I booked late. The convention hotel was full. It turned out that a large convention of Vietnam vets was taking place in the city the same weekend and hotel rooms were at a premium. Muggins here was stuck out at the airport hotel which was about 20 minutes away from the city centre. I would have been much happier with the main hotel which was substantially better and well as being more convenient, but so it goes.

Anyway, I found the bus system, I found the city, and I found the hotel. And, of course, I found the convention. After that, everything was just fell into place.

My main reason for going to Construction, other than promoting the SF2002 bid, was the guests. The main GoH was my old friend Neil Gaiman whom I hadn't seen since SwanCon in Perth in '96. In addition we had George R.R. Martin. Those of you who remember my review of *A Game of Thrones* will know that he's someone I wanted to meet. And the great thing about a small convention is that you can actually get some time with the guests, especially if you know one of them.

So, Friday night I end up in an Indian restaurant with Neil, George, Parris McBride (George's partner), Medge & Bean, Sean McMullen, and the inimitable Catherine McMullen, the most exhausting child in the known universe.

Gosh, that's bitchy of me, and Catherine is very sweet, but boy can she be hard work at times. For a nine-year-old, she is exceptionally bright, and she holds her own in fandom with ridiculous ease. The trouble is, we just don't have her energy. How Sean copes I do not know.

Meanwhile, back in the restaurant, we began to discover just what effect being booked out can have on a small city like Wellington. I think it was about an hour and a half before we got our main courses, and as some of the party had been foolish enough to not order a starter, there were some pretty hungry diners. When it finally arrived, the food was very nice, but by that time we were too annoyed to care. As I had picked the restaurant, I was left feeling very guilty indeed.

The next night we decided to stick with a native guide on the assumption that we'd get somewhere good. One of the local Kiwis was organising a trip to his favourite Japanese restaurant. Neil is very fond of Sushi, so this seemed a good bet. What we hadn't reckoned on was the effect that 30 hungry fans has on a kitchen. If it weren't for the fact that Laurie Fleming, our guide, knew the owner, we would never have got George back to the hotel to judge the masquerade. Neil, Medge & Bean and I stayed on with Laurie, and were rewarded with a free round of some very nice sake from the apologetic owner. Laurie was right, it was a good restaurant. One to go back to, if I ever visit Wellington again.

Sunday night was the con banquet, but Medge, Bean and I decided that we would like to see more of the city. The original plan was to go to a place called The Malthouse that promised a microbrewery and wild boar pie. But this was Wellington on a Sunday. Most of the restaurants were shut. We ended up in lovely little Malaysian place, were very well fed, and were in and out in just over an hour. Success at last, if a little too late.

Having access to George, one of the first things I did was to ask him about the bard called Marillion in *A Game of Thrones*. Much to my surprise, he had never heard of the band. Neil and I got to do the first of what proved to be a regular series of lectures in British culture, and Neil revealed that Fish called himself Fish because his real name was Derek Dick. So now we know.

As with all good guests, George was adept at amusing stories about his work. For example, he waxed lyrical about the filming of dark and dingy alleys for *Beauty and the Beast*. First, the location guys would go out and about looking for a suitable spot. Next, all the tramps living in the alley would be well paid to find a new home during filming. The clean-up crew would then come in and remove all the shit and garbage. A steam canon would be used to ensure that the entire area was up to union standards for a healthy work environment. Next the scenery people would come in and lay fake shit and fake garbage. A bunch of extras dressed as tramps would complete the scene.

George was also responsible for one of my more interesting encounters with the New Zealand accent. We were drinking in the bar one evening and I was getting the next round (I think on Neil's behalf 'cos he'd had to go fetch something). George said he'd have another of whatever it was he was drinking. It looked like stout, but I figured I'd better check and questioned one of the locals. "Just ask for an Old Dyke", he said. Was this a Xena joke, I wondered, and what would Xena or Gabby say about being called old? Turned out what he meant was "Old Dark". Sad really, Old Dyke seems like a good name for a beer.

Neil, as those of you who have seen him in action know, often does his GoH speech as a series of questions and answers. He does ask for the questions in written form to help him put together a good show, but basically he just stands there and tells anecdotes. He's very good at it. Having seen him do this a few times, I know some of the stories well, but there is always something new. The pick of the bunch from Construction concerned Dave McKean.

As most of you will know, McKean is a very fine artist who has worked a lot with Neil. Surprisingly, he is rather short on imagination. The story concerns a disastrous plane trip that Dave took to San Diego. "It was awful", Dave reported to Neil. "A woman a few rows in front of me had a seizure. They did the usual call for a doctor thing, but no one turned up and she died. We had to land at this really small airfield in Kansas and wait on board until the police could come and take the body away. By the way, there was a fan of yours on board." "Really?" "Yeah, one of those cute goth girls with a really pale face, jet black hair, black clothes and a big silver ankh." Dave never quite made the connection.

(Those of you unfamiliar with *Sandman* will just have to go read a few episodes 'cos it would spoil the joke to explain.)

In the "these Kiwis are crazy!" category, Neil informs me that a young lady called Ryn asked him to autograph her back so that she could have it made into a tattoo. Ouch!

The funniest incident of the convention, however, concerned an interview with Neil, George and Evan McCarthy of the ConCom on breakfast TV. Having introduced his guests, the announcer asked, "so, what did the Zorks do to the Zebulons?". Neil went quiet. George went quiet. "I haven't got a clue", said Evan. "Neither have I", chimed in Neil and George in unison, relived that this wasn't a Kiwi joke they didn't understand.

"Oh", says the announcer, "well, er, what about the Klingons and the Rimlons?"

"I think you mean Klingons and Romulans", said Neil, "they are Star Trek villains".

"Yes, good, thank you. That's what science fiction is all about, isn't it, Star Trek."

"Well, no".

The interview continued in this vein for a few more minutes until the interviewer made the mistake of comparing Neil's work with that of Anne Rice. "Actually", says Neil, "Anne Rice's books are mainly about sex". At which point the studio suddenly had to switch to another story.

So next time you are in an audience putting questions of Neil or George, you know what to ask.

If Neil and George do not remember New Zealand for the Zorks and the Zebulons, they will certainly do so for the warmth and enthusiasm of the local fans and the smooth efficiency with which the convention proceeded. There were only two major hitches that I noticed. One person failed to turn up to run a scheduled panel on *Sandman*. A Neil reading was quickly improvised instead and the programme continued seamlessly. The other hitch was a slight delay in the masquerade because of George being late back from the Japanese restaurant.

Those of us with experience of Australian fandom (well, Melbourne), which included Renaldo, Phil and Frances over on their FFANZ trip, were struck by the lack of rancour between fans. The con handled its lit guests and its media guest (the wonderfully dishy Michael Hurst, alias Iolaus from *Hercules*) with not a trace of inter-interest rivalry. It was a welcome breath of fresh air.

And talking of Melbourne fandom, there was a very positive panel on Aussiecon Three. Tim Jones, their NZ agent, did a good job of promoting the convention and he chaired a panel of people who have been to Worldcons and knew the ropes. Much to my delight, several of the Kiwis had been to ConFrancisco and loved it. Happy customers are always the best advertisement.

Some of the other panels were, I must say, a little lack lustre. I was particularly annoyed by some of the advice (from locals) to budding writers which was along the lines of, "writing is a job, you have no business being creative, you must write what the editor wants". Fortunately Sean McMullen did a sterling job of putting people right on this one. Indeed, he seemed to spend most of the convention encouraging Kiwis to start writing and, more importantly, publicising themselves.

Probably the panel I enjoyed most, other than Neil's bits, was Cherry Wilder reading one of her short stories. Somehow I had got the impression that she was one of those people that Australian fandom promoted because she was local (well, she'd lived in Australia so they could claim her as theirs, something Australians do a lot with talented New Zealanders). The story, however, was very good, and I'm now most of the way through one of her novels. Why she hasn't won heaps of awards I do not know. She's a lovely person too. She might not class as Worldcon GoH material, but I think A3 should get her over.

I found myself quite sad to be leaving New Zealand. I'd like to go back, but next year's convention, to be held in Auckand, is at Easter. With Steve Davies being the chair of next year's Eastercon, I really have to be in the UK at that time. 2000, however, is a possibility. This will be in Wellington, at the same hotel on the same weekend as Construction, and is to be chaired by my new friend Daena Schofield. It has occurred to me that, site selection

vote willing, if SFSFC is holding a Westercon in Hawaii on July 4th weekend, there is a feasible trip taking in that and the NZ con. All I need to do is find something to do for the month in between, and I won't have been to Australia since A3. Hmm.

Jazza on Fire

Much to my delight, Jane Routley's second book has been given a massive publicity push here in the States. It is great fun watching your friends become successful. And well deserved too. *Mage Heart* was a very competent start, and *Fire Angels* shows clear signs of improvement.

The new book picks up the same character, the mage, Dion, from the earlier book, but dumps her in a quite different setting. This time, rather than court intrigue in a renaissance-style setting, we have our heroine rescuing members of her family from a necromancer whilst a war rages around her. Given that on one side of the war is the Church of the Burning Light, which believes in making bonfires of mages, it is not an easy situation.

Jazza's world has few of the trappings of traditional fantasy. There are magicians and demons, but no dwarves, dragons or other fantastical beings. In this book she comes close to introducing elves, but instead of having them as a mysterious elder race, she uses a gypsy-like people who happen to share some of the aloofness and familiarity with magic that typifies most portrayals of elves. It works very well.

Like *Mage Heart*, *Fire Angels* is very much a romance novel as well as a fantasy. Dion spends a lot of time agonising over whether she is in love with the right guy when it is painfully obvious for most of the book who she should choose. Her behaviour is nowhere near as stupid as that of the heroine of *The Sun and the Moon*, but it grates all the same. Still, on the bright side, Jane does write good sex scenes, of which there is a sufficiency without them being intrusive. This is mainly because Jane makes a lot of the sexual nature of demons and demon magic. The power of demons to seduce and corrupt human games is so much more believable when they are portrayed as appealing to lust rather than just greed.

Jane tries had to introduce a reasonable amount of feminism into the book. Dion regularly bewails the fact that everyone assumes she is incompetent even though she is the most powerful mage in the world, and there is a noblewoman leading one of the factions in the war who is clearly more competent than any of her male counterparts. Nevertheless, having chosen a pseudo-mediaeval setting, there isn't a lot you can do except acknowledge that it is a sexist society and have your characters shrug, accept their lot and work within it.

If I have one criticism it is that I would like to see some of the action from another viewpoint. Perhaps it is a convention of the romance genre that the story should always be told from the point of view of the heroine, in which case I guess we are stuck with it. But there are places where I think a change of viewpoint would have been interesting. For example, there is a long period when Dion is hidden away from the world by her gypsy allies. A lot of suspense could have been added by spending a few chapters telling of people searching frantically for her before revealing where she had gone. In addition there are interesting characters, particularly Lady Julia and Dally (Dion's young niece who is likely to end up as the villain of the next book) who would be much more vivid if we had a chance to get inside their heads.

All in all, a very enjoyable book (except for anyone out there who is allergic to romance). There are certainly better fantasy writers than Jane about, but there are an awful lot more who are worse. Some who are much worse. Here's hoping all that sales promotion pays off, Jazza, and that Avon get round to packing you off to a convention or two. I miss your company.

Fire Angels - Jane Routley - Avon - softcover

Chilling out in Hobart

And so to Tasmania, Thylacon and the delightful Hadley's Hotel. Hobart is hardly the richest city in the world, but it has its own little pieces of Victorian opulence. What is more, the State Government, being keen to attract visitors in the depths of winter, was actually subsidising our stay. I've stayed in bigger, more luxurious hotels, but none with quite the cosy, elegant charm of Hadley's.

George, being GoH, got the best deal. He and Parris were billeted in the Amundsen Suite, the rooms used by the great explorer on his return from the South Pole. The bar where we spent most of the con was where he held his first press conference. Local legend has it that Amundsen, fresh off the ship, thin, disheveled and windblown, was mistaken for a tramp by the hotel staff and asked to leave. If they did so, I bet it will have been done with the utmost politeness.

On Thursday evening Cary Lennahan and I went to collect Neil from the airport. On the way we dropped George off at the local radio station. We got to listen to the interview whilst we were waiting for the plane. The contrast with the NZ interview could not have been more marked. The woman DJ asked a string of intelligent questions and coaxed a wonderful anecdote out of George.

"I started writing very young", he said. "As a kid in the housing projects in New Jersey I was already writing. After a while it occurred to me that I could sell this stuff, and I had a nice business going writing horror stories for my friends. Unfortunately one of the kids started to have nightmares. His mother spoke to my mother. My mother spoke to me, and that was almost the end of a promising career".

Next day, in between business meetings, I went exploring with Neil, Sean and a bunch of others. We did the museum, gazing sadly at the pelts of the Thylacines and discovering a cartoon poster used by the British authorities to try to explain to the Aborigines that they would be just rulers. We ended up having lunch at the sushi bar in the Mure's seafood centre on the docks. I knew that Mure's was good because I'd been treated to a business lunch at their gourmet restaurant the day before. Also a friend from Melbourne had rated the sushi the best in Australia. Thanks Dee, I think you may be right. In fact I think that Hobart may have the best seafood of all kinds in Australia.

Mention of Sean McMullen reminds me that he had the best trip report as of the start of the convention. Many of the Melbourne people had decided to drive to Hobart. Justin Ackroyd, for example, had loaded a van full of books and brought it over on the ferry. Sean had flown to northern Tasmania and then rented a car to go touring through the twisty little mountain roads on his way to Hobart. Somewhere out in the wilds he was driving along placidly when - BOING! - a large wallaby jumped into the road in front of him. It was

far too late for Sean to do anything but make sure that he and Catherine didn't come to any harm. The wallaby hit the car full on and left a six inch dent in the front bumper. Fortunately the car was still driveable, but the incident cost Sean dearly. Next time you rent a car, take a look at the small print in the insurance section. Sure he only had to pay \$250 dollars in an accident with another car. But wallabies do not have road insurance, so having an accident with one of them comes in a sight more expensive. \$1500 to be exact. Poor Sean was considerably subdued all weekend.

The first event of the con was a showcase for Neil, sponsored by a local bookstore and open to the public. Neil was very annoyed when he discovered that punters were being charged \$10 for what amounted to a brief speech and a signing. Normally, if a signing does charge admittance, the store will count the fee as a down payment on any books you buy. Unfortunately what was happening came to light far too late. The ConCom seemed to think it was no great deal. Perhaps we Poms are just weird. Australians tend to assume that all business is corrupt and shrug it off whereas we get uppity and complain.

Just as an experiment, and because I can't resist playing the journalist at times, I decided to test Neil's anecdote system. I felt that the Dave McKean story was worth re-telling, so I gave Neil a question that would allow him to move into it easily. I was impressed to find that he told a completely different story. The man is a seriously good entertainer.

The best Neil story from Thylacon arose from a bar conversation about comic collecting. He was attempting to explain how the bubble burst so badly. Apparently, once comic collecting impinged upon the general public consciousness, a group of companies that specialised in collectable cards decided to corner the market. They placed massive orders with Marvel and DC for issues expected to be sought after. In cards, this would mean that they owned most of the print run. Little did they realise that in comics the publishers would just print more to cover the extra sales. The companies were left with thousands of copies of comics that every collector already owned.

The contrast between the Wellington and Hobart conventions could hardly have been more marked. Both were small, friendly and relaxed, but there the resemblance ended. Where Construction panels ran pretty much time, those at Thylacon started anywhere between zero and sixty minutes late depending on when someone could be bothered to corral an audience. Where Construction had three streams for 100 people, Thylacon had one for 70. Where Construction had large a number of well planned panels and panellists well briefed, Thylacon announced at the opening ceremonies that none of the panels were staffed and asked for volunteers.

Thylacon also seemed to take its guests much more for granted than Construction. The first Neil knew of his being a guest was when I emailed him to say I was looking forward to seeing him at both conventions. He'd been listed on the Thylacon web site for some time by then. Gentleman that he is, Neil accepted the explanation of a lapse in communication, but with another writer the situation could easily have turned into a disaster. Heaven only knows what Harlan would have done.

The really scary thing is that afterwards several Australians described the convention as "very professionally run". If that is the sort of standard they aspire too, heaven help the Worldcon.

I volunteered for only one panel, on the subject of "is fantasy literature". The standard of debate was quite high, with the panellists including George, Sara Douglass, Janeen Webb and an academic from the local university. I don't think anyone on the panel disagreed with the claim that attempting to divide fiction into "literature" and "non-literature" was ridiculous. The panel therefore defaulted to discussing whether fantasy was, or could be, good fiction, and what that might mean. Of course someone in the audience had to trot out the line that all points of view are equally valid and that academics or critics who try to impose standards are elitist. This was inevitably followed by the claim that David Eddings must be a really good writer because so many people like his stuff. I think that classes as *reductio ad absurdum*.

The most depressing aspect of the convention was the business meeting. The only substantial item of business was to decide where the NatCon would be held in 2000 and, as no bid had been forthcoming last year, in 1999. Swancon, in Perth, had volunteered for 2000, using their usual Easter weekend and taking advantage of a late Easter to roll in ANZAC Day holiday as well. It should be a great convention. 1999, however, was still not taken. The meeting had two choices before it. It could decide not to hold a NatCon that year, or it could ask AussieCon Three to take on the business aspects of the NatCon (basically the Ditmars and the business meeting). We were told that many Australian fans are dead against having the NatCon and Worldcon combined. Apparently some of them were present at Thylacon. Not one of them turned up at the business meeting to make their point.

So, we will get a lot of acrimonious nonsense on listservers about how A3 has "hijacked" the NatCon (or more likely about how an evil American convention has hijacked the NatCon). A3 will probably decide to help out, and probably and understandably decide to do the minimum necessary. I tried to drum up some interest in giving the NatCon a distinct presence, perhaps having its own GoH whose speech could be used to attract people to the Ditmar presentation. This proved distinctly unpopular, largely on the grounds that it would involve someone having to organise something. If it wasn't for the guys from Perth I think the Australian NatCon could be quietly put to rest.

That said, Thylacon did manage to award the Ditmars and by and large the results were good. Terry failed to repeat his triumph of the previous Thylacon, but no one minded because the Best Fan Writer gong went to the very wonderful Leanne Framm. Best Fan Artist went to Nick Stathopoulos who promptly announced he was handing it on to Sean Tan because he felt Sean deserved it more. Best novel went to Damien Broderick's *The White Abacus* which rather surprised me as I've yet to hear anyone have a good word for it. Damien's writing tends to be rather difficult and his victory, ahead of Isobel Carmondy and Sara Douglass, would seem to say something about the nature of the voters.

Perhaps the most controversial result was the awarding of Best Fanzine to *Eidolon*. For those of you not familiar with the Australian scene, this is rather like giving the Best Fanzine Hugo to *Locus* or *Interzone*. There being no semi-prozine category for the Ditmars, *Eidolon* gets lumped in with the fanzines and often wins. This seems grossly unfair to me (and please note that I am no longer eligible for any Ditmars). I'd like to think that a future NatCon would do something about this. It isn't as if *Eidolon* is the only semi-prozine in Australia. It just happens to be the only one whose editors care enough about the Ditmars to vote and persuade their friends to vote.

Aw heck, why do I bother? Very few Australian fans give a damn about the Ditmars, and even fewer of them vote. Just scrap them, guys, why don'tcha. It would mean less work for everyone.

Another thing that Thylacon did well was have book launches. There were two. The first was for Sara Douglass's new novel, *Pilgrim*. The second was for the *Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Encyclopædia*. Sara was there for her launch, and seemed somewhat more confident amongst fans than the last time I saw her in Perth. Paul Collins, who edited the *Encyclopædia*, was not present, but his assistants, Sean McMullen and Steve Paulsen, were on hand, as were Peter Nichols who wrote the introduction. It was all very civilised. The hotel even served wine, though I suspect that was paid for out of our convention memberships rather than by the publishers.

Even here, however, we had a screw-up. Justin Acroyd had stocks of both books, or at least he did when Steve Paulsen arrived hot foot from Melbourne on Saturday with copies of the *Encyclopædia* hot off the presses. Naturally Justin sold as many copies as he could. What no one had told him was that Melbourne University Press had decided on a 25% drop in the price of the *Encyclopædia* at the last minute. Thus, instead of giving what he thought was a small discount, Justin found he had overcharged convention members by over \$10. Naturally he was steaming. I don't blame him.

The major attraction of a Hobart convention for most Australians (well, the female half of the population anyway) is Salamanca Market. This takes place every Saturday on a long street leading down to the harbour and is one of the best craft markets I have ever been to. Sadly I spent most of the morning wandering round saying "I'd never get that through US customs", but it was great to go browse anyway. For those of you who haven't been to Hobart in a while, the city has recently opened up a fine little shopping area more or less behind where the fruit market is. This includes an "Antarctic Adventure" museum and a lot of nice little gift shops. Terry, Sharon and I had lunch in a delightful cheese shop there on Sunday.

Due to congestion on flights and having booked late, I was unable to get plane space on the Monday and had to leave early. I'm told that I missed the best event of the convention, namely a quiz show type panel at which Jack Dann proved himself to be a world expert on tits (not of the feathered variety). Mind you, it was Terry who told me this, and if there is a tit story going you can bet that Terry is at the bottom of it somewhere.

I gather from talking to Cary before I left that Thylacon lost a substantial amount of money. This is a shame, because it was a good convention and if only it had been advertised better it could have easily broken even. Many fans, even in Melbourne, were unaware that it was on. There must have been at least 20 or 30 people in Melbourne who would have come over to see Neil, and more media people would have come if George's TV connections were played up. Furthermore, when Neil's evening signing was on, people coming in just for that were told that to attend the whole convention would cost an extra \$65. There was no mention of the day memberships and student discounts that could have got them in for a day for \$20. I'm sorry to say that this is just one more example of Australian fans messing up because they couldn't be bothered to take simple and obvious steps.

A Party for 1700 Friends

By Kevin Standlee

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While Cheryl was off in Wisconsin being literary, I spent the weekend of 22-25 May at BayCon, the San Francisco Bay Area's biggest annual general SF convention. About 1700 people officially registered; the total attendance was probably around 10-15% higher, as the con attracted the usual run of kids looking for a free party.

BayCon is a good example of "rightsizing" a convention. If you measure success solely by attendance, BayCon's glory days of nearly 3,000 members in the late 1980s are behind it. However, the strain of putting on a 2,500-3,000-person convention every year was too much for BayCon's volunteer staff and for the hotel, which is otherwise ideally suited for SF conventions of the 1,000-2,000-person range. BayCon deliberately "spun off" aspects of its programming, particularly the Anime portion of the convention, and BayCon is better for it.

We pretty much took over the hotel except for what I call The Loud Bar (officially Maxi's Lounge), where the mundanes gawked at our costumes while we stared at theirs. Fans could be found in The Quiet Bar (its real name), which is perfectly located in the midst of the main traffic flow for the hotel. You can sit there with your friends and watch the entire convention go by.

There were lots of costumes. The SF2002 table was right next to the Bay Area Costumers' Guild table and the "Works in Progress" room, where costumes under construction were on display. A gang of Klingons loudly came by the fan tables on Saturday, where they were subdued by our ten-pound bar of San Francisco Chocolate. ("We will let you live another day," they said, after doing their part to reduce the bar to chocolate dust.) Furry Fandom had their usual large presence, including the Fur Dance. (Imagine a whole bunch of human-sized "funny animals" dancing on the hotel patio. It's quite a sight.) I like costumes, although it's been quite a while since I last wore any (I won a Best Hall Costume award at OryCon 16 in 1994), and I like seeing lots of them around the con.

Another place from which to watch the con go by is at a Fan Table, and the San Francisco in 2002 Worldcon Bid had one of those along the hallway allocated to such tables. It's a good location, but has the drawback of acting like a greenhouse due to the large windows that separate it from the pool deck. Representatives of both the Boston in Orlando and Philadelphia Worldcon bids for 2001 were there, along with folks from both of the 2000 Westercon bids (Hawaii and Phoenix). Conspicuous by their absence was San Francisco's competition, Seattle in 2002; apparently the people on their committee who planned to come had to cancel at the last minute. When I wasn't on panels or shopping for SF2002's party, I was usually behind the table explaining to anyone who would listen why they should vote for San Francisco in 2002.

Of course, before I could get as far as that, I usually had to explain how Worldcon sites are selected. For nearly everyone, I also had to explain what a Worldcon is. Odd as it may seem to some, most of the people stopping by our table had either no idea or only a vague idea of what a World Science Fiction Convention is. Once I explained it to them, nearly all of them

seemed to think that having one in San Francisco was a good idea. 29 of them signed up as pre-supporters, bringing the bid to 627 pre-supporters (and 682 members of all classes).

We even had one person give us a check payable to Aussiecon Three to buy a supporting membership for the 1999 Worldcon. We've offered to mail in memberships to A3 for anyone who wants to write the check right then. Of course, if there is ever an authorized agent of A3 at a convention we're attending, we send the person there, but there rarely is one except at Worldcon. We carefully warn anyone who takes us up on this offer that we do not represent A3; we're just doing a favor by providing envelopes and stamps to anyone who wants to join A3. Of course, it's in our bid's best interest to get anyone who favors our bid to join Aussiecon Three so they can vote for us next year.

You would think that BayCon would be an easy con for SF in 2002, what with 2/3 of the bidcom living in the Bay Area and all, but the opposite is true. BayCon sucks up most of the available members of the SF2002 bidcom, leaving me to make shift with whoever I can find. I've had to swear off most con volunteering until the bid is over, partially because I find myself as the only available person sometimes. Fortunately, three or four SF2002 bidcom were also sitting out working this year's BayCon, and Danny Low, Julie Porter, Eric Larson, and Shirl Roth (when she wasn't being summoned to ConOps to write BayCon checks - she was on Treasury staff) did good work behind the table and helping set up and staff our bid party on Saturday night.

BayCon let us use one of their "function suites" (a converted hotel room) which was available at night, having been used for the writers' workshop during the day, to hold our bid party. It was a good, high-traffic location, but it also was an excessively easy short cut from the patio deck to the inside of the party wing, and a lot of people used it solely for that purpose. They also acted like a swarm of locusts, wiping out US\$100 worth of food and sodas (which generally lasts all night) in about 90 minutes. Our friends from the Hawaii Westercon bid, who used the room the following night, learned from our experience, kept the door to the patio closed, and arranged the room so that even if you opened that door to cut through, you had to zigzag through the room to go through. This mostly ensured that only people actually interested in the subject of the party showed up. We expect to use the same space next year; I hope we remember this lesson.

One of BayCon's peculiarities is the "Dive-In Movie." No, that's not a typo: I really did say "Dive" and not "Drive." The center area of BayCon's hotel (the 500-room San Jose Doubletree - formerly Red Lion - Hotel) is a pool deck, and looming above the pool deck is an eight-storey tall blank white wall. A few years ago, someone brought a film projector and started showing cartoons at night on this wall. BayCon liked this idea so much that they adopted it as a regular feature, with a better projector and sound, so now you can spend the evening in the pool watching cartoons and movies. This year it was old Godzilla movies on Saturday and "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" on Sunday.

Speaking of Godzilla, there was one thing we didn't do there that I wish we had. The new Godzilla movie premiered this weekend, and the area has been blanketed with advance publicity ("His foot is as big as this bus!"). If I'd thought about it in advance, I would have tried to do something that had been done a few years ago. The top-floor hotel rooms overlooking the pool-patio deck are usually assigned to BayCon staff, so it's relatively easy to get into them. I wanted to hang a banner from the balconies that would read MONSTERS MUST BE TALLER THAN THIS SIGN TO ATTACK CITY. (My roommate,

Michael Wallis, actually managed this a few years ago, but the hotel made him take it down.)

Programming? I'm afraid I only saw the three panels for which I was a panelist, and one of those ("How to Start a Fan Club") was cancelled due to no audience. I was also at the Meet the Guests/Opening Ceremonies, where convention Chair Craige Howlett proposed to his girlfriend to start things off. (It was a set up; Yvie appeared to consider the offer, then pulled out a long roll of paper, describing her list of requirements. She then tossed the list away and accepted.) After that, Toastmistress Lillian Csernica introduced Writer Guest of Honor S.M.Stirling, Artist Guest of Honor Alicia Austin, and Fan Guest of Honor Michael Siladi, who all gave the usual thank-you speeches.

The other two panels I attended as a panelist were "Rumor Control on the Internet" and "Is SF Too Elite." The first was interesting to me, because I was able to use the experience of the SF2002 bid dealing with our recent change of dates. (In case you haven't heard, we've had to change our proposed dates from the "traditional" Thursday through Monday of the US Labor Day weekend to the Friday through Tuesday of the same weekend. The reason is that the group using the convention center before us can't release the space to us until Thursday, and we need a minimum of one day to set up the convention.)

I'm big on communication, and insisted that the SF2002 bidcom (more than 30 people, located in four countries) discuss the facilities issues thoroughly, despite those on the committee who wanted the discussion and decision to be kept within a small cabal (usually consisting of the people who wanted the discussion limited). That was risky - any of the people could have easily forwarded any part of our discussion hither and yon. But it worked out, and the announcement of our date change came and went with hardly a splash in fandom.

"Is SF Too Elite" spent about half of its time discussing whether Science Fiction was too elite and the rest about whether SF Fandom was too elite. Personally, I'm not sure what "elite" means in this context. There were lots of great discussions on this subject, and maybe a few eyes opened.

There was a Dealers' Room, and Art Show, and an "Artists' Alley." (The last is an area outside the Dealers Room where various artists sell their art and do sketches. It wasn't until I started going to conventions outside of the Bay Area that I realized that Artists' Alley is not a standard convention function, and appears to be a regional peculiarity.) I browsed all of them and bought nothing, which is pretty common for me these days. Besides having no money left to buy things after spending so much money on bidding (when I did my taxes, I found that I had over \$6,000 in tax-deductible travel expenses related to my volunteer work for SFSFC Inc., SF2002's corporate parent and a registered charity), I haven't found many things out there that interest me and which I can afford.

BayCon was a moderately successful convention. There were no obvious disasters, and most of the attendees seemed to be having a good time. After fifteen years, BayCon is in a good groove.

And Finally... Canada

By Kevin Standlee

Over the weekend of June 5-7, I flew up to Toronto to attend Ad Astra, an important Canadian SF convention.

Canadians seem to have a reputation of being very friendly and helpful, and Ad Astra did nothing to damage that reputation. Their committee were very helpful to me, although they seemed to have a hard time with the concept of a "fan table." SF2002 eventually got one on Saturday morning located in an excellent spot right across from Registration in a high-traffic location where everyone had to pass multiple times.

A digression here: A "fan table," sometimes called a "club table," is a table given to a group of fans promoting some good fannish purpose (clubs, conventions, bids for Worldcon and Westercon, and so forth). Generally speaking, I'm used to conventions giving groups such tables at no cost. The only limits tend to be availability of space or tables, and usually groups are prohibited from competing with dealers by selling things you could get in the dealers room, which seems fair to me. I used to think that fan/club/info tables were a standard feature of all SF conventions, but apparently they are not completely ubiquitous. Some cons don't know what they are at all, while others think you mean a dealers room table, and others will charge you for an info table.

I took a red-eye flight from San Francisco to Detroit, where I changed planes for Toronto. I have to take those red-eye flights because - like most Americans who get any paid vacation at all - I get only ten vacation days per year, and I have to conserve them for Worldcon trips. I had hoped to be able to use a first-class upgrade certificate, but all of the seats were taken. At least I got an aisle seat.

Taxis and limousines from Lester Pearson International Airport charge a flat rate based on the zone to which they are travelling. In my case, that was 40 Canadian dollars. (As of this writing, USD 1 = about CAD 0.70.) I later heard on the radio that I would have been just as well off to rent a car for the weekend - one company was offering a C\$80 weekend rate with unlimited kilometers.

I've been to Toronto once before, but that was to a SMOFcon held at a near-airport hotel, and I ended up seeing very little of the area. Therefore, imagine my surprise as my taxi cruised down the Don Valley Parkway and I got this sense of *deja vu*. A moment later, I realized that it was my other hobby - trains - that had triggered this off, because I was seeing nearly the exact same angle as a photograph in *The New Electric Railway Journal* reporting on Toronto's transit system.

Arriving at the hotel - the "Toronto Don Valley Hotel Formerly the Radison" as they answered the phones (the hotel had been un-Radisonned a week previously, with workers still chiselling off logos during the weekend) - at 11 AM, I hoped to check into my room and get a few hours of much-needed sleep before hitting the convention. Unfortunately for me, the hotel had been full the night before, and no rooms were available yet. I had lunch and sat groggily in the lobby until 1:30 PM, when the front desk clerk took pity on me and found me a room, and I fell into bed for a few hours of nap time.

Not getting up until 6 pm, I found that I hadn't missed much. Ad Astra apparently doesn't actually start until 4 pm of the Friday, with the Dealers Room and Art Show staying open until 10 pm and panel programming running until Midnight. I'm not used to this approach

myself, but it seems to work for them. The SF2002 table having been promised to me for Saturday, I had the rest of the evening to myself, so I browsed the small dealers room and art show and took in one panel, the subject of which was "Do We Still Need Panels?" The person framing the question for the programming noted that Midwestcon (a long-running relaxacon) doesn't do programming, and asked whether conventions need to bother having a program anymore. I didn't have a lot of energy to participate in this subject, but I think it's a silly question to ask. Of course conventions need to have programming; how else would we be able to justify ourselves? (This is only half in jest.) I spent the rest of the evening in the Con Suite, which surprised me: I'm not used to a Con Suite that *sells* food instead of giving it away.

Saturday found me stationed behind the San Francisco in 2002 Info Table for the entire day. I gave away lots of chocolate, having brought with me a 10-pound bar of Ghirardelli San Francisco chocolate, and answered questions as usual, staffing the table from 10 am to 6 pm Saturday and 10 am to Noon Sunday (I had to leave for the airport after that). Being there Sunday morning turned out to be a good thing - of the seven pre-supporting memberships I sold during Ad Astra, three of them were during that short stretch.

As those of you who have sat at a Worldcon or Westercon bid table know, at least half of our job is educating the potential electorate as to what it is we are selling. Toronto fandom - at least the Ad Astra attending crowd - seemed to be just barely getting the idea that there was something called a Worldcon and that they might be involved in it. After initially having people shy away from our bid because they thought they had to support Toronto instead, I made it part of my "standard speech" that "We're not running against Toronto - they're in a different year. You can support BOTH of us with no conflicts of interest." This reassured many people. The last pre-support I sold, to Evelyn Baker of East York, was particularly heartening. She said to me, more or less, "I was so impressed that your bid would have someone come all the way to San Francisco to promote the bid that I really had to buy a membership."

San Francisco in 2002 did not hold a party. I won't do one by myself, nobody else on the bid committee was able to come, and I had no contacts locally on whom I could rely. In retrospect, I now know that we could have co-hosted a party with Toronto in 2003 on Saturday night. I'm normally down on such arrangements, but T2003 had two rooms across from each other; they indicated that they would have been amenable to sharing with us if we'd known each other better in advance. (The chair of T2003, Larry Hancock, took me out to dinner on Saturday night to "pick my brain" about Worldcon bidding. I opined that chairing a Worldcon bid was *prima facie* evidence that I have no brain.) I ended up spending most of my Saturday evening in the T2003 "annex," after making the rounds of the other parties. Both of the 2001 bids were there, as was a group promoting this year's Convention, which will be part of ConCept Montreal. (Convention usually attaches itself to a host convention, rather than standing alone as Worldcon and Westercon do.)

Travelling to promote the bid isn't primarily about earning income for the bid, of course; it is to increase awareness of our group and spread the word about bidding. After all, if we were solely interested in increasing the bid's income, I could have just given the bid the \$700 it cost me to travel to Toronto. In case there was anyone reading this who wasn't sure: when you travel to promote a bid, you generally do it at your own expense. Worldcon bids, at least in my experience, do not have the money to be able to afford to pay for people's travel expenses. The bid pays for ads in program books, flyers, parties, chocolate bars at info tables, etc.

About 500 people attended Ad Astra, which I'm told is fairly typical. It isn't the largest Toronto-area convention - Toronto Trek draws over 2,000 annually - but it is the primary "general SF" convention in Toronto. I found that it reminded me very much of Eclecticon, the Sacramento-based general SF convention which ran for five years and from whose organizers sprang many of the senior management of ConFrancisco (including me). I can't say as I would spend the money to travel that far again unless I had the need to promote a bid there, but it was a good little convention by my standards, and seemed successful to me.

Back in the MSFC

This trip was the first chance I have had to see the renovations to the church hall where the MSFC holds its meetings. I have to say it is pretty specy. In particular we now have a very nice kitchen with a good stove and microwave. Sharon Nebel did a pie night - something we would never have been able to contemplate before. I'm rather sorry that I do not have the opportunity to cook there. Those of you who are coming over for Aussiecon Three should make a point of coming to visit if you can. OK, so we don't own our clubhouse like NESFA and LASFS do, but I bet we produce the best food of any SF club in the world.

The current piece of gossip in Melbourne was a large article on the club that appeared in The Age, the city's leading newspaper. I must say that it was one of the most balanced pieces of journalism about SF fans that I have ever read. Apparently the journalist put in a fair amount of work, including reading the novel which was the discussion topic at the club the night she visited so she could participate in the meeting.

The only poor bit of the article was, sadly, a shot in the foot. At one point in the interview Michael Jordan mentioned SMOFs, which of course required an explanation and ended up making fandom sound like a bunch of freemasons.

The night I was there, George turned up to give a talk and do a signing. We got a good crowd for that and it seemed to go pretty well. Sorry about the mass exodus at one point, George. As you may have guessed, it happened when the audience twigged that the fruit pies had just come out of the oven. Also guys, just in case you missed Bev Hope accidentally putting her foot in it, never, ever ask authors where they get their ideas from.

Deep North, Deep Trouble

Whilst I was in Australia, the news was dominated by two topics. One was the falling value of the dollar, dragged down by the financial chaos that is sweeping through all of the Pacific rim except the US. The other was the forthcoming election in Queensland and the possible success or not of a party which laughingly calls itself "One Nation".

British readers may remember "one nation" as a rallying call of the Tory left, meaning a belief in integration, in working together, in mutual understanding. Australia's One Nation means something quite different. It means one race, one religion, one set of social mores. Anyone who does not fit its vision will be deported, flung in prison or, quite likely, shot.

Most of the policies that One Nation espouses are most easily described by the term Fascist. This is not to use the word in its debased sense as used by left wing activists to mean anyone we don't like, but in the original sense of following similar a political path to Franco, Mussolini and Hitler. It is openly racist and white supremacist. It is fervently in favour of isolationism, both political and economic. It panders openly to the working class by promising full employment and simple, no-nonsense attitudes. It believes in arming its supporters. And it wants to see the trains run on time.

Now there are Fascist parties all over Europe, but few of them, except the French, evoke any great interest. What has happened to Australia that such a party should be the focus of media attention? Partly, of course, it is fear. Times are changing. Economic reform is in the air. The global economic climate is poor and Australia is seen to be the innocent victim of evil foreign currency speculators. That is understandable.

In part, I'm sorry to say, the party has been given legitimacy by the Prime Minister. When every other party was condemning the racist speeches of Pauline Hanson, John Howard refused to do so. Now she has a rapidly growing political force behind her. When local Liberal Party groups in Queensland told their supporters to give One Nation second preference ahead of Labor, Howard refused to discipline them. When asked about the possibility of One Nation holding the balance of power, he said he'd rather deal with them than the centrist Democrats.

Howard's attitude is by no means common in the Liberal Party. Peter Costello, the Treasurer, and Jeff Kennett, the Premier of Victoria, have been particularly outspoken in their condemnation of Hanson and her followers. Even Tim Fisher, the leader of the extreme conservative National Party, who is Howard's coalition partner and Deputy Prime Minister, has been fairly aggressive, although of course it is his party that is most under threat from a new far right group. Almost the whole of Australia's intellectual elite thinks One Nation is an abomination. Except John Howard.

Finally, and depressingly, One Nation is pandering to views which are deeply ingrained in Australian culture. To look at Sydney and Melbourne now, it would be hard to conceive a more multicultural society. Yet it was only 30 years ago that Australia's immigration policy was openly racist. Most of One Nation's supporters, I suspect, remember that time as being more prosperous. Certainly it was safer for them. They put two and two together and come up with the Asians and Aborigines as the villains.

As it turned out, 23% of Queenslanders voted for One Nation. They got at least 10 of the 89 seats and may even be asked to join a general right wing coalition government with the Liberals and Nationals. This would be a sight to behold. Hanson herself doesn't have two brain cells to rub together, although she does have some very smart backers. Her new MPs don't sound much better. The leader of one right wing pressure group, many of whose policies One Nation has adopted, said he would be terrified if the people elected in Queensland ever got into power.

But the big question is what will happen in the forthcoming Federal elections. Howard, you may remember, threatened a general election if the Senate refused to pass his (deeply racist) legislation on Aboriginal Land Rights. The Senate stood firm. Now Howard faces the possibility of going to the polls and seeing himself trumped by a party with a "more racist

than thou" policy. Like his Queensland counterpart, he may find himself needing to deal with One Nation in order to form a government. Goodness only knows what Hanson would do if, for example, she got her hands on the Sydney Olympics.

The good news is that Queensland, otherwise known as the Deep North of Australia, is the most right wing state in the country. Support for One Nation in Queensland is at least an order of magnitude greater than it is in Victoria. The bad news is that it has another weapon on its side. Australians are, in general, highly suspicious of intellectuals and they dislike people becoming successful (except at sport). Much of the appeal of One Nation is based on this attitude. They present themselves as ordinary folk with simple, common sense ideas who have come to cut down the tall poppies of national government and big business. In Australia, that is a very powerful message. If I were John Howard, I'd be very worried indeed.

Meanwhile, of course, the world is watching. Hong Kong newspapers made the election result front page news. I'm not sure what Britain said, but America seems so far to be blissfully ignorant of developments. The only thing I seen so far is that TV guide has the name "Hanson" splashed across the front page for this week's issue. For some inexplicable reason they have accompanied this by a photograph of three long-haired schoolboys.

Fan Scene

I'm happy to say I have some good news to report on Aussiecon Three. Firstly they have some publicity out. It is a small newsletter called *Voice of the Platypus* and it is aimed largely at Australian fans, although Construction gave out copies in their registration packs. The messages in it are very inclusive, which is good. Interestingly it states categorically that there will be a masquerade, though there is still no sign of anything like a suitable venue.

The other good piece of news is that a head of programming has been appointed. His name is Dave McDonnell. I'd not met him before Thylacon but it appears he has a good record of doing the job at other large Australian conventions. Certainly he sounded very enthusiastic, competent and, most importantly, willing to accept help.

Meanwhile, America is shaking in its boots (or should be anyway) because Terry Frost will be on his way in a few days time. I'm not exactly sure of complete itinerary, but he is spending a few days in LA before going down to San Diego for Westercon. After that he will be staying with Kevin, Michael and I at LunaCity for a week and then heading off for Seattle. Other planned stops include Minneapolis, Rivercon (which I think is in Louisville), New York and, of course, Bucconeer. Please remember, folks, Australians often use insults as a sign of affection.

If you are interested in New Zealand fandom you might like to try to get hold of Phoenixine, the newsletter of the Phoenix Society. The issue I picked up is very competently put together by editor Laurie Fleming and is evidence of a thriving, active club. I don't think they do subscriptions, although I guess overseas people could always apply to join the society, but they do trade with other clubs and possibly with other zines.

Contact Laurie on lfleming@actrix.gen.nz or check out the web page at www.vuw.ac.nz/~lloyd/phoenix/home.html.

The latest issue of *Mimosa* has arrived, just in time to jog memories for the Hugo ballot. This time I actually managed to find some articles about things that had taken place after I was born, which made it a much more interesting read.

One of the lead articles was the start of a series by Mike Resnick detailing his memories of various Worldcons. From this it became clear that Mike had been to a lot of Worldcons and had not enjoyed any of them. Then again, given that his comments on ConFrancisco would make the average Nazi race hate pamphlet seem fair and objective, perhaps there was a policy decision on his behalf not to enjoy them. Whatever, his comments were neither entertaining nor constructive, which just goes to show that being a famous fan-turned-author does not necessarily make you a great journalist.

Cleverly, Dick and Nicki followed Resnick's torrent of wingeing with an entertaining and positive piece on LoneStarCon2 by Richard Brandt. It was particularly noticeable that whereas Resnick concentrated almost entirely on things that went wrong, or how he personally had got one over on some poor, unsuspecting victim, Brandt mentioned problems and then described how people worked round them. The effect of the juxtaposition of the two articles was to make Resnick seem even more pathetic.

At the back of the zine was a depressing piece by Nicki Lynch bewailing the demise of fandom whilst at the same time complaining about what awful people young fans are. It included some of the classic misconceptions. For example, she claimed that 'zines not distributed by post have no connection with their readers (on the assumption that they must only be posted on the Web).

It seems to me that older fans often lose sight of the fact that most of today's youngsters have been watching *Star Trek* since before they could walk, so it is hardly surprising that media is the direction from which they enter fandom. Maybe if someone actually bothered to try to make them welcome instead of deriding them as not "true" fans we'd get a few more recruits. Sure there will be a proportion that is only interested in buying TV merchandise and gazing adoringly at famous actors, but in amongst that bunch is the next generation of fandom, people who are intelligent and enquiring and are probably already reading a lot of books. But I guess "true" fandom has always defined itself on an exclusionary basis, so perhaps we should not be surprised if it dies out.

And finally, being back in California, I get to go to BASFA again. Before the last meeting started, there was some discussion of the new X-Files movie. I commented that with the movie being so heavily linked into the TV series many people would not be able to follow it. "Well", said Julie Porter, "they say that most people should be able to pick it up. Of course you have to line your baseball cap with aluminium foil to do it..."

Who says Americans have no sense of humour.

Footnote

Earlier this week Kevin and I went to a signing by Tad Williams at a local bookshop. It turned out to be one of the funniest events I have ever been to. If Tad gets fed up of writing novels he could always be a stand-up comic. His tale about rescuing Riley the kitten from a tree in the middle of a storm had the audience rolling in the aisles. Tad appears to have (rather sensibly) given up on London and moved back to San Francisco. Hopefully he will be popping along to BASFA sometime later in the year.

Next issue, of course, will have a review of *River of Blue Fire*, the new *Otherland* book. Also Cherry Wilder, Mike Scott Rohan, Janeen Webb and maybe another book or two as well. It will have only one convention review (Westercon), and it just might have a few comments from Terry on what he has made of the US so far.