

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Hello, and welcome to the AussieCon Three special issue of *Emerald City*. In this issue we have reviews of a whole pile of good Australian SF and fantasy. I've also included a guide to Melbourne for the benefit of those of you who are travelling to the convention from overseas. As many of you will know, I love Australia, and I am firmly of the opinion that there is a mass of fine writers in the country who are under-appreciated by the rest of the world. Go check out some of these folks. You won't be disappointed, I promise.

AussieCon Three will also see the end of the Bay Area in 2002 Worldcon bid. For Kevin and I this has been a three-year labour of love. We've worked our butts off and spent a fortune travelling to conventions (where as often as not we've spent most of our time advertising the bid). It seems strange that it is all coming to an end. I wonder what we will do with our lives now it is over.

Australian readers, I hope you can all make it to the Worldcon. It will be great to see you again. Please note that you (and indeed everyone else) are welcome to attend the Bay Area in 2002 parties. Watch the newsletter and notice boards for more details.

Routley does Russia

Usual warning: this is girly stuff. Jane Routley writes books which are a cross-over between romance fiction and fantasy. She does it very well too, so for those of you who can stomach books which do not have someone getting their brains blown out in every chapter, here's something worth trying.

Aramaya is the third and apparently final book about Dion Holyhands. Rumour has it that Jane has sold a new series of books set in the same world but several hundred years earlier and with different characters. Meanwhile, as readers of *Fire Angels* will remember, there is a problem to solve. Dion's headstrong niece, Dally, got mixed up with necromancers in the last book and has run off. If Dion can't find her in time, she may end up becoming a pawn of Bedazzler the demon.

The new books sees Dion hot on Dally's trail in the far kingdom of Aramaya, a place that bears a striking resemblance to Tsarist Russia. She has also had a miscarriage and a nasty spat with her husband and finds solace in the arms of the charming Count Nikoli. Best of all, however, she is accompanied by her Aramayan friend, the irrepressible courtesan, Kitten Avignon. Where Kitten goes, trouble is sure to follow.

I think this is probably the best of the Dion books so far. It seems to find the right balance between the action, the heart-rending stuff and humour. *Fire Angels*, in comparison, spent far too much time on Dion's anguished mental self-mortification. I prefer the social background as well. The stoic good humour of the Aramayans in the face of the predatory secret police, the Prekazy, lightens the book no end. What a shame they didn't manage to knock a few holes in Dion's prissy Protestant pretensions.

The good guys win in the end, of course, and true love triumphs. Along the way there is much heart searching, derring-do and foul sorcery. It won't stretch your brain or shake the world, but it is entertaining, well crafted and perfect for whiling away the odd few hours. Nice one, Jazza.

Aramaya - Jane Routley - Avon - softcover

Greatwinter comes to the World

If you only buy one Australian novel at the Worldcon, buy this one. There will be better written books. I'm sure Sean will forgive me if I say that he isn't quite in the same league as, say, George Turner, Terry Dowling or Greg Egan. But you will not find a book with more wonderful ideas, nor one which is so thoroughly Australian.

It isn't exactly a new book either. I have reviewed Sean McMullen's previous novels, *Voices in the Light* and *Mirrorsun Rising*, in previous issues of *Emerald City*. Sadly those books were published by a small Adelaide-based company called Aphelion Press which is now out of business. Much to my delight, Tor has seen fit to rescue the Greatwinter series. This book is a fairly heavily edited combination of the first two books. It isn't new, but it is easily available and I'm delighted that you all now have the opportunity to read this wonderful stuff.

What stuff, I hear you asking? Tsk, you should have remembered this from previous reviews. A post-holocaust Australia in which any attempt to make electronic devices is zapped by orbital battle satellites. A world in danger of freezing thanks to an ancient, automated cure for global warming. A society run by librarians who fight duels to protect their honour. A giant computer made up of thousands of people with interconnected abacuses. Trains that flash across the desert under pedal and wind power. The mysterious Call that keeps mankind in fear of the sea. And not forgetting that marvellously unreconstructed Aussie male, John Glasken, or the mad abbess, Theresla, who eats mice for breakfast (or so she claims). McMullen's writing is inventive, surprising and full of humour. He's a delight.

Some of you, of course, will be wondering about the rewrite. I haven't had time to go back and compare with the originals, but from memory I would guess that the book is about 40% from *Voices in the Light* and 60% from *Mirrorsun Rising*. There is very little new stuff, and that is mainly set-up for the next volume, *Miocene Arrow*, which is due for publication next June. I know that Sean was not very happy with *Voices*, feeling that it was rather poorly patched together from a number of short stories. The new version flows much better. If I have any complaints I think it is that there's rather too little of Lemorel's early history in the book, though Sean still manages to have the reader rooting for her at the beginning. Whichever idiot at Tor wrote the cover blurb deserves shooting for giving the

game away on one important plot twist. But the trainspotters scene is still there, thank goodness.

Not a lot more I can say really, having reviewed the material once already. Just buy it, OK?

Souls in the Great Machine - Sean McMullen - Tor - hardcover

Australia's Queen of Fantasy

Sara Douglass is by far the biggest commercial success amongst Australia's SF and fantasy authors. I've reviewed her stand-alone novel, *Threshold*, in issue #22, but it is her fantasy trilogies that have sold in vast quantities in Australia. The first one has recently been marketed in the UK and I thought it was about time I took a look.

The "Axis Trilogy" turns out not be to about neo-fascists, but about a handsome chap called Axis who happens to be chief of a bunch of church-sanctioned warriors and, surprise, surprise, the mighty hero who is destined to save the universe. His troops are known as the AxeWielders, and he is the BattleAxe, hence the title of the first book of the series.

The setting is, I'm afraid, very predictable, though not quite as formulaic as some fantasy novels. The bad god and his church have persuaded the gullible humans to cut down trees and exploit the environment. The pacifist deer people and the aloof bird people have been driven to the farthest reaches of the world and are slaughtered on sight. Worship of the nature goddess is punishable by death. All of this, however, is about to come badly unstuck because the really evil god, or at least one of his minions, is about to set forth on a trail of conquest. Only by uniting against him, under the leadership of Axis, can the peoples of the world save themselves. Well, that's what the prophecy says anyway.

OK, it isn't quite that bad. Fantasy novels always sound stupid when reduced to their bare bones. But it isn't great either. The best thing about the book is that Douglass has been a lecturer in mediaeval history (she has since given that up to concentrate on writing and gardening) which means that her background is nowhere near as pseudo as most. The worst part is that she doesn't seem to have much feel for mythopoesis. The fantasy bits come over as very artificial and soulless. *Threshold* is a far better book and proves that Douglass can write well when she's not turning out "what will sell".

I've no idea how the books have sold in the UK. I'd like them to do well because it will encourage UK publishers to take a chance on other Australians. Unfortunately, given their current prevalence in remainder shops, I suspect they were not a roaring success. I said in my *Threshold* review that the covers of the Axis books were awful and I stand by that. In a crowded market like epic fantasy a good cover is essential. What a shame the publishers could not have done better for the UK launch.

BattleAxe - Sara Douglass - Voyager - softcover

Pretender to the Throne

This review is long overdue. Some of you may remember that Kate Jacoby came over from Australia to the 1998 Eastercon for the launch of this book. Knowing her from the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, I went and bought a copy, only to have it stolen from my side (along with Ian MacDonald's *Sacrifice of Fools*, both hardback) whilst I sat in the bar chatting. It has taken me a year and a half to get round to buying another copy.

Whereas Douglass has made a name for herself in Australia before trying to crack the UK market, Jacoby has gone for the big one first. It would be interesting to know how the tactics compare. Douglass is obviously doing well enough to make a comfortable living in Australia. Jacoby might make it seriously big, but she might not make it at all. As I said, epic fantasy is a crowded market.

I'd like to say, because Kate is a friend, that she has produced something new and refreshing that will revitalise the fantasy field. I'd like to, but I can't, because she is writing "what will sell" as well. What I can say is that on balance she is as good as Douglass and therefore deserves to do as well.

What I like best about Jacoby's book is that she avoids the trap of having black and white characters rather well. You can see where she gets the idea from as well. Her hero is a (thinly disguised) Scottish nobleman who begins the book by arriving back from exile by sea in secret. He is a brooding and aloof chap who is distrusted, even by his family and close friends, because of secrets in his past that he refuses to talk about. Recognise him? Sadly Robert Douglas is not the divine Francis, and Jacoby, good though she is, is no Dunnett. But hey, if you are going to be inspired by others, make sure you pick the very best, which is exactly what Kate has done. I look forward to seeing how things develop.

The Exile's Return - Kate Jacoby - Millennium - softcover

The Man Most Likely To

If there is one Australian writer who has the right style and talent to make it big in the rest of the world it has to be Sean Williams. I reviewed his first novel, *Metal Fatigue*, in glowing terms way back in issue #12. Finally, perhaps as a result of the Worldcon, Harper has seen fit to publish it around the world. An advert on the back of the latest *Interzone* promises publication on August 4th so you should all have copies by now. I, meanwhile, have been reading his second book which is every bit as good.

Have you ever wondered about transporters. You know, they take your body and turn it into some sort of signal which is then re-created at the other end. So in the middle of the process you are just some sort of digital file, yes? Gee, you can do a lot with a digital file.

Officer Marilyn Blaylock knows all about the interesting things you can do with transporters. She is hot on the trail of a serial killer with the perfect alibi - none of his victims are dead. Sixteen young women are blissfully ignorant of the fact that exact duplicates of themselves have turned up, hideously tortured and hacked to pieces, in transporter booths. Blaylock has a personal interest in the case. Every one of the victims bears a striking resemblance to her.

Jonah McEwen has missed out on all the excitement. As a top rated private eye he would have loved to take the case but, but three years ago someone stuck him into suspended animation and filled his mind with drugs that selectively erased his last week of memories. Now his body has been found and revived and McEwen finds himself drawn rapidly into the mystery. It is incontrovertible that he has been asleep for three years, but during that time someone with his unique DNA signature has been using the transporter system. Besides, who has a better reason for wanting to persecute Marilyn Blaylock than the lover she walked out on three years ago? The police want McEwen's help in tracking down their prime suspect, himself.

There you have a brief introduction to the plot. There is a bit of spoiler in there, but only for the first three chapters in a 600 page novel. After that the surprises and innovative ideas keep coming. I found myself unable to put it down even though it was the middle of the night and I knew I had to be up at the crack of dawn to catch a plane. Sean Williams is one of the best writers of future noir thrillers around. He deserves to be famous. Make it so.

The Resurrected Man - Sean Williams - Harper Collins - softcover

Aussie Shorts

If short fiction is your cup of tea, you can drown in Australian writers right now. The Worldcon has resulted in rash of anthologies which allow you to sample just about every Australian writer on offer. This is great. I just wish I had time to read it all.

We will start with the August issue of *Interzone*. Britain's premier SF magazine (as opposed to SFX which is a sci-fi magazine) has given an entire issue over to antipodeans. And a fine issue it is too. There is an interview with Terry Dowling (as well as one of his stories, which you can hardly avoid because short work is his preferred format). Sean McMullen contributes a short history of Australian SF together with a hilarious story about marketing wine in a fantasy world. Aussie ex-pat, Tom Arden pitches in with some incisive book reviews. Lots of other good stuff as well, especially the first published story by the incredibly precocious Catherine McMullen. If Sean's daughter isn't famous by the end of the next decade I'll eat my keyboard. This issue of *Interzone* could become very valuable.

Next up is *Centaurus: The Best of Australian Science Fiction*, edited by David Hartwell and Damien Broderick and published in the US by Tor. My guess is that of this team Broderick assembled the material and Hartwell saw to the production. I wish Hartwell had edited it a bit more, starting by cutting the whole of Broderick's introduction.

Tom Arden has already laid into Broderick in *Interzone* and he's quite right, the introduction is incredibly pretentious. He has also let Broderick off lightly. Not content with the intellectual conceit, Broderick has also produced an essay that oozes with xenophobia. As a non-Australian who has worked hard to promote Australian writers, I found the whole thing deeply offensive. To open a book intended to introduce Australian SF to the world with this sort of pathetic infantile whining does a huge disservice to every writer represented therein.

Fortunately the writers speak for themselves. Because *Centaurus* is intended to reprint the very best of Australian short fiction there was no problem in ensuring quality. I haven't read all of it yet, but I've yet to find a duff story. Terry Dowling is at his wonderful best, Stephen Dedman slaughters sacred cows with gay abandon, and Lucy Sussex has enormous fun with feminism. The book is particularly notable for having a contribution from Peter Carey. He is a Booker Prize winner whose work mainstream critics have to apply terms like "magic realism" to in order to pretend that it isn't SF.

The other major anthology issued for the Worldcon is *Dreaming Down Under*. This was edited by Jack Dann and Janeen Webb and was published in Australia by Voyager. The Australian publication makes it much harder to get hold of, which is a shame because I think it is the better book. Certainly Jack and Janeen do their job far better than Broderick. Whereas the latter whinges about the lack of recognition for Australian SF being all an Evil American Plot, Jack and Janeen say, "We needed to smash the idea that we were isolated, too far away from the cultural meccas where the action was". I'm glad they did. Without their efforts, writers like Dedman and Jacoby would still be being condemned back home for "selling out" by having their work published overseas first.

Point two in favour of *Dreaming Down Under* is the number of stories, 31 compared to 20 in *Centaurus*. There is, as might be expected, considerable overlap in authors, but you'll get to sample a lot more of them in the Dann/Webb book. Jack and Janeen are, after all, there on the ground in Melbourne. They know who is hot, and they know that there are lots of them.

The contestable point is that that whereas *Centaurus* went direct for the very best, Jack and Janeen insisted on original, unpublished stories. As a result, the quality is a little patchy. There are stories in there that I would not have published, but then I am not a big fan of short fiction and my standards for it are very high. A small raspberry here for Russell Blackford who wrote a story for *Dreaming Down Under* and then sold it to *Centaurus*. But hey, Russell is primarily an academic. He doesn't write a lot of fiction and he's probably very proud of this one.

Of course there are a lot of really good stories too. I headed straight for Dedman and Dowling again because I really love their stuff, and I wasn't disappointed, but there's still a lot I haven't read. Sorry guys, but I have a deadline to meet.

The most important story in the anthology is the last ever story by George Turner. George was in the process of writing it when he died, so it is unfinished, but there is plenty there to delight. Jack and Janeen ask readers to guess how the story might end, and kick off the process with suggestions from Bruce Gillespie, George's executor, and Judy Buckrich, his biographer.

Finally, the cover. *Dreaming Down Under* has a superb piece of artwork by Nick Stathopoulos (which *Interzone* had the good taste to re-use). The cover of *Centaurus* was done by a designer, not an artist. You did all remember to vote for Nick in the Hugos didn't you? If you didn't you'll regret it when you see this cover.

To sum up, there are a lot of good Australian (and New Zealander) writers out there. For example, I haven't yet mentioned Cherry Wilder, Isobel Carmody or Leanne Frahm. I've reviewed a lot of their work in the past (check out the review index on the web site for

details), but if you want to now what these people write like you should buy one or al of these anthologies and give then a try. You won't be disappointed.

Interzone - Ed. David Pringle - <http://www.sfsite.com/interzone>

Centaurus: The Best of Australian Science Fiction - Ed. David Hartwell & Damien Broderick - Tor - hardcover

Dreaming Down Under - Ed. Jack Dann & Janeen Webb - Voyager - softcover

World Fails to End - Not Many Dead

So there I was in Britain idly wondering what was happening. Picking up a newspaper, I discovered that the world was about to end.

This, of course, is not really news. *National Enquirer* carries a story of that type just about every week. British newspapers are a little more reticent, but here there seemed to be a remarkable degree of unanimity. Everyone from the *Sun* to the *Financial Times* agreed that on August 11th the sun (the funny yellow thing in the sky, not the "news"-paper) would grow dim. The exact details of the end of the world were a little hazy, depending on which astrologer, doctor, traffic expert or neo-pagan cult leader the paper had interviewed, but they were all greed that disaster was imminent.

The arrival of the Anti-Christ, it seemed, would take place somewhere in the far west of Cornwall. His name was revealed to be John Prescott, Minister of Transport, and it was prophesied that he would preside over the worst traffic disaster ever to befall modern civilisation. He would, it was said, make the M25 seem as empty as the Nullarbor Plain, or at least it would have been if any British newspaper journalist had the slightest idea of where or what the Nullarbor was.

Close on his heels were to be an entire legion of demons, led by the arch fiends, Michael Fish and John Ketley. It was to be the duty of these denizens of darkness to inform us that, whilst the End of the World was indeed due to take place in Britain, it would be overcast and raining at the time and we would miss all of the fun. The fires of Hell would be quenched by a torrential downpour and the Whore of Babylon would cover her nakedness in a plastic raincoat and souwester. Only Leviathan would be happy, but he'd be stuck somewhere off the Isles of Scilly due to traffic congestion in the Channel.

The BBC, mindful of the gravity of the situation, assigned Michael Beurk to cover the story in the hope that his experience of plagues and famines in Africa would stand him in good stead. Kate Adie, it was rumoured, was with a fast response unit ready to fly anywhere in the world upon a confirmed sighting of any of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Sadly for Beurk, the gravity of his commentary was somewhat marred by some nameless BBC mandarin who decided at the last minute that, as the End of the World was to take place at 11.00 am, it must necessarily be made suitable for viewing by children. Philippa Forrester was duly assigned as Beurk's assistant and was set to work interviewing various dogs, owls and crickets to determine their view of proceedings. All of them declined to comment.

With the majority of the Police and Armed Forces deployed to protect Cornwall against an expected invasion of New Agers, Eco-Warriors, Hippies, American Tourists and other forms of undesirables, it was left to the RAF to defend Britain from the Satanic Hordes. A

lone Hercules was dispatched skywards and reported back that, yes, the sun did actually exist, though they had had to climb to 39,000 feet to get out of the cloud. Furthermore, our local star did seem to be in the process of being eaten, though there was no sign of the gigantic Chinese dragon predicted by the BBC's astronomy expert. A brief interview was held with a wizened greybeard called Patrick Moore who claimed that the sun was in fact being occluded by the moon, but no one believed him because the explanation was too boring and therefore bad television.

Meanwhile, back on the ground in Cornwall, the Radio 1 Roadshow was doing its usual trick of braving the elements and holding a pop concert in a sea of mud with an audience composed entirely of drunken holidaying lager louts. An unusually reverential girl DJ explained that the Pet Shop Boys had written a special new song to be played at the moment of darkness in order to welcome the forces of evil to the world.

I had elected to spend the final hours at my hotel room in Hove. Had it been a nuclear attack there might have been some sense in heading for ground zero, but somehow I doubted that Satan intended to allow anyone to escape a hideous death. I figured I should just hole up with a few good books and some coffee and wait for him to get round to me.

As predicted, it went very dark. The skies being clear and blue, I got an excellent view of the sun being eaten. The light went a very strange colour, as if I was viewing everything through a blue-grey filter. It wasn't as dark as the TV pictures from Cornwall, but then we didn't have the massed demonic hordes and 39,000 feet of cloud blotting out the sky. Shadows, especially those from trees, became very strange and very beautiful.

Then, as the Pet Shop Boys began to play, there arose a great wailing and gnashing of teeth in the West. The clouds parted, and the bite marks upon the face of the sun receded. Mothers clutched their children and wept. Drunks complained about someone shining a bright light in their eyes. Stockbrokers in London who had liquidated their portfolios threw themselves off tall buildings. And the journalists got back on their trains, already composing a new story. Satan, it seemed, had shamefully failed to save the English cricket team from defeat at the hands of New Zealand. Someone would have to ask God to make it rain again.

World Almost Ends - Millions Dead

And now, for those of you who are sick to death of things Australian, a book review which covers every continent except Australia.

I don't watch a lot of TV, and when I do it is mainly sport. Occasionally, however, you get a really good documentary. Once in a blue moon, you get a history program that has me sat there absolutely gobsmacked. Channel 4 managed that recently, courtesy of their two-part series built around the book *Catastrophe* by David Keys.

Most of us think of tree rings simply as a means of dating. With one ring every year it is easy enough to count back and find how old a tree is. And because the pattern of rings is very similar from one tree to another, you can match them up and do clever things. For example, the wood in a piece of furniture can be dated by comparing the ring pattern with trees. You can go back in time too. Take some wood from a very old house, compare to the

first rings on an old tree, and you have extended the reference pattern back in time. Clever stuff.

By now there is an established tree ring sequence for many countries of the world. That, of course, means that some smart person is going to think of comparing them. And lo, it turns out that around the period 535/536 AD there are abnormally narrow tree rings in all countries studied. This is unusual, because narrow tree rings are a sign of poor climate: if the weather is bad, the trees don't grow much. The 535/536 pattern suggests that for those two years the weather was very bad indeed, all over the world.

At this point, enter journalist and amateur historian, David Keys. He noticed this unusual feature of world climatic history and determined to investigate further. What had caused it, and if things were really that bad, what were the consequences for people who lived at that time?

The cause had to be something like a meteor or comet strike, or a volcanic eruption. Enough work has been put into looking for the meteor strike that killed the dinosaurs for the first two possibilities to be eliminated - there is no suitable crater. Volcanoes are another matter. There are plenty of them, but really big eruptions always leave a tell-tale signature. The sulphur emitted by the eruption shows up as acid in nearby glaciers. For really big eruptions that acid signature should appear in both polar ice caps. Dating ice cores is difficult, but the evidence in support of a massive eruption in 536 looks good.

So, there was a huge bang, volcanic dust obscured the sun, weather was disrupted, crops failed: surely this would have been recorded. And so it was. Keys has found records of a climatic disaster from sources as far apart as Rome, Constantinople, China and Japan. Even where no written records are available, the evidence is there. The great Mexican city of Teotihuacan suffered a severe famine, evidenced by a massive increase in burials with signs of malnutrition, at just the right time.

The Chinese records include mention of a loud noise coming from the south-west and dust falling from the sky like rain. An interesting but somewhat suspect source from Indonesia describes what can only have been a vast eruption at around the right time. Suspicion has fallen on Krakatoa which is known to have blown its top massively in early historic times. There's a caldera on the sea floor which is way bigger than the one the recent eruption left. Sadly dating has proved impossible - there is nothing organic left to date from that period.

Periods of unusually cold weather often precipitate epidemics. The first known case of bubonic plague began in Africa at around the right time. Cold is necessary for the coagulant produced by the bacterium to block the guts of the fleas, making them ravenously hungry and willing to bite anything that moves. By 542, following the route of the ivory trade, the plague had swept up through Constantinople and was moving on through the Roman Empire. Millions died in its wake.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the whole story, however, concerns Britain. There are no records of the disaster because the mid 6th century was the middle of the so-called Dark Ages. It is the time that King Arthur is said to have lived. Now the Arthurian legends include the tale of the Waste Land which tells how the kingdom was made barren and nothing would grow. This is blamed on a wound to the thigh of the sacred king that no one could heal. That part of the legend has always been assumed to be purely mythical, but it fits perfectly with the climatic disaster, and the eponymous buboes of the plague are festering wounds which appear in damp parts of the body such as the armpits and groin. Arthur's kingdom, with its continuing trade links to Rome, would have been much more

vulnerable to the plague than the Saxons. No wonder the Christian monks felt that God had decided to punish Arthur.

Sadly Keys' book, *Catastrophe*, is very poorly written. The TV programmes presented the argument in a much more interesting and accessible way. But the basic data seems incontrovertible. Here is a major event in world history that we know very little about, but which, Keys argues, was instrumental in creating the modern world as we know it. Sometimes it is amazing how much we can miss.

Catastrophe - David Keys - Century - hardcover

A Dream of Wessex

Oh dear me, I nearly forgot, I've been to a convention. Wincon V was held at King Alfred's College in Winchester shortly after the non-end of the world. It was part of the itinerant British convention series known as Unicon because it makes use of educational facilities rather than hotels, something which has notable advantages. More of that later, but first a slight digression to Brighton.

It all began in a pub. Well, this is British fandom after all. Actually though, it began in the local branch of Borders whose cafe happens to be the only decent mocha I've managed to find in the town so far. Glancing through the magazine racks for something to while away my imbibing time, I chanced upon the latest issue of *Interzone* which, for reasons that have been explained elsewhere, I simply had to buy. In the classified section at the back I found an announcement of a regular Friday pub meet for SF fans in the Brighton area. Why should they escape when London hasn't, I asked myself, and determined to blight them with my presence.

The *Interzone* people turned out to be a friendly bunch who coped remarkably well with having a mad, globetrotting redhead thrust into their midst. I had a long chat with David Pringle who seems to hold some sort of record because he managed to work for Games Workshop for three years without getting fired and, even more impressive, without doing any work for the last two of them. I also (re-)made the acquaintance of Andy Robertson and Pete Garratt whence I managed to blag a ride down to WinCon for the following day. Thanks guys.

I have to confess, once again, that I didn't see a lot of the convention. I spent a good deal of time with various SMOFish types discussing arrangements for the UK in '05 Worldcon bid. Then I had lunch, found the dealers room, and spent a long time catching up on the gossip with Sue Mason who, it seems, will shortly be getting a web site courtesy of the Plokta cabal. This means that her seriously wonderful pyrogravure work will become accessible to an international audience. Watch this space.

After that I did manage to get to a panel, only to discover that the convention had decided to do without moderators. You can, of course, have un-moderated panels that run very well. This one was at least entertaining in parts. But it began with one of the participants reading several pages of pre-prepared screed that had nothing to do with the supposed subject of the panel except the word "history". Thank goodness for Tanya Brown who was able to wrest control back for the rest of the panellists. I presume that it is probably

"unfannish" to have people guiding the discussion, but if you are going to let panellists talk about whatever they like, why bother having a program in the first place?

I promised some comments on the advantages of college sites for conventions. There are some, honest. The sleeping accommodation is, of course, crap, and if there is food it is pretty basic, but everything is cheap which, with British hotel prices, is very useful. One thing you can guarantee is a huge bar with a moderately reasonable selection of beer. The main bar was sufficiently large that it was possible to go in there without feeling that you had just stuck your face into a box full of smouldering cigarettes. Even better, there was a non-smoking bar. Fabulous.

I'd like to say that I'll be back next year, but when I left they were still trying to browbeat someone into bidding for next year's Unicon. There were rumours floating round about massive ructions amongst the con committee due to the enormous burden of running a con for around 100 people. <sigh> I guess I'm just spoiled.

Cheryl & Terry's Guide to Melbourne

Having named the fanzine after Melbourne, I could hardly get away without saying something about the city in advance of the Worldcon. Here, for the benefit of those of you visiting "the world's most liveable city" for the first time is a brief guide of places to visit in an around Melbourne. I have been aided and abetted on this endeavour by my good friend Terry Frost. Individual contributions are marked with our initials so you'll know who said what. Terry has also provided the proofing, my knowledge being two years out of date.

In Melbourne

Transport - getting around the city could not be easier. There is a free tram that stops outside the convention centre and will take you into the city, but for serious sight seeing you may wish to purchase a one-day MetCard which allows unlimited travel on trams, buses and trains. The price is \$4.40 for the central zone and you can get one from most stations, newsagents and branches of 7-Eleven. The card has a magnetic stripe and you need to put in through a machine when you start a journey. - CM

Hook turns - If you decide to hire a car, beware, Melbourne has one very strange traffic law. At 4-way junctions in the city you may see a sign in the shape of a large hook. This is a hook turn, and the objective is to keep you out of the way of trams. Normally, when you want to turn across the oncoming traffic (that's a right turn in Australia) you wait in the middle of the road for the traffic to clear. If you do that at a hook turn intersection you will be blocking the tram tracks and your car will soon be flattened. What you have to do is swing out left in front of the traffic in the side street and wait until it is safe to come back right. Watch very carefully behind you, because you will be crossing the lane you have just come out of and there may be some idiot barrelling down on you at speed trying to beat the lights. - CM

Vic Market - Melbourne's market, located at the top end of Elizabeth Street, is a must see venue for any tourist. The food is fabulous, and I particularly recommend the kangaroo salami available from some of the deli stalls. Much of the other merchandise is tat, but there's a lot of tourist tat so if you are looking for cheap souvenirs for the folks back home

this is the place to come. The market is open every day except Monday and Wednesday. Being a market, it opens and closes early. - CM

Bridge Road - Ladies wishing to be able to brag about the stunning new outfit having been bought in Melbourne must visit Bridge Road in Richmond which is full of cut price factory seconds shops. You get there via the 48 or 75 tram from Flinders Street. A word of warning, however, I'm a size 16 in the UK (14 US and Australian) and in Australia I am regarded as seriously fat. American visitors may find clothes shopping in Australia a depressing experience. - CM

Brunswick Street - You can get there in 20 mins by the 11 tram from Spencer Street Station or Collins Street. It's a good alternate area with bookshops, cafes, coffee emporia and Polyester Books and Records where non-SF fanzines and alternative books are sold. Recommended places are Rhumbaralla's Cafe, Cafe Fitz (which does breakfast until 4pm), Brunswick Street Bookshop and Jasper's Coffee Shop, which also sells good chocolate. - TF

Slow Glass - Justin Ackroyd will have stall in the dealer's room, but serious fans should make the pilgrimage to his shop at the top end of Swanston Street (and by the way, the 't' in Swanston is silent) just to say you have been there. - CM

Myers Sports - You thought Australians were sports mad? Visit the basement of this top Melbourne department store and you'll see that this is a gross understatement. - CM

Melbourne Central - This is the largest mall in the city and is home to one of the world's most irritating animated clocks. Go see it on the hour just to see how awful it is. The mall is built around an old ammunition factory and the short tower has been preserved as the centrepiece of the main atrium. At its foot is a restaurant that allows you to sample roo, emu and other local delicacies. Don't bother with the croc, it is very dull. - CM

The Gardens - Everyone knows that Australia has some weird wildlife, but one of the best ways to get close to it is to wander in the city's parks as dusk. If you visit Fitzroy Gardens just as the sun is going down you should be rewarded by the presence of several of the local possums. They are used to visitors and are fond of apples. Look up for a while, and you should see some of the fruit bats that live in the Botanical Gardens out hunting. If you are used to little European bats you are in for a shock. Australian fruit bats are the size of a small cat with up to a 6 foot wing span. They are majestic in flight. Please remember that wild animals may bite. The fruit bats sometimes have some nasty diseases. - CM

Toorak Road and Chapel Street - Whilst the bargain hunters head for Bridge Road, the seriously rich can be found in Toorak Road in South Yarra. The number 8 tram from Swanston Street takes you straight there. Perpendicular to it is Chapel Street where you can find designer clothing for the younger market and some seriously arty shops. - CM

The Esplanade Hotel, St. Kilda - A few years back, the Espy had a kind of rubberised surface to the front bar floor. Years of spilled beer, blood and vomit had made it flypaper sticky. It was like walking on a zero-gee space station with velcro carpeting. They've fixed that. The Espy has resisted developers who want to turn St Kilda into a half-arsed Newport Beach. You can still get Coopers' Ale on tap, sit at a table in the big bay window and contemplate the Bay and the roller bladers. The toilets are clean but have that antique look and alas, the condom dispenser in the men's room doesn't work. Nonetheless, it's a Melbourne institution and well worth a visit. The #12 tram to St Kilda Beach goes right past the Worldcon venue, so you'll have no probs finding one. - TF

St. Kilda - Melbourne does have a beach, though it is only onto Port Philip Bay, not the ocean. Swimming is not recommended, but the area close to the beach is full of interesting shops and restaurants. There is a craft market on the sea front on Sundays. - CM

Ken Duncan Photo Gallery - When I stopped living in Melbourne the best thing I could think of as a souvenir of Australia was a book of photographs by the absolutely brilliant Ken Duncan. His shop in the Southgate mall is a must for every visitor. - CM

Moonee Ponds - Yes, it does exist. You can even visit the street where Dame Edna lived before she became a Superstar. If you really want to. - CM

Melbourne Cricket Ground - They won't be playing cricket in September, but there will be "footy". Australian Rules Football is one of the fastest ball games in the world and the MCG, with its 100,000 capacity, is right in the top flight of the world's great sports stadiums. The regular season ends the weekend before Worldcon and the playoff schedules have not been issued at the time of writing but there should be some good games in the offing. There is a cricket museum at the MCG. - CM

Melbourne Zoo - Not the best place to see those fabulous marsupials, but if you don't have a lot of time the 57 tram up William Street will get you from the city to Melbourne Zoo in around 15 minutes. - CM

MSFC - Further up the same tram route is the home of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, the oldest SF club in the Southern Hemisphere. Club meetings are on Friday nights and all are welcome. Hopefully the club will have a stall at the convention with further details. - CM

Outside Melbourne

Sorento - Anyone remember the Tina Arena song, Sorento Moon? You get there by following the bay eastwards as far as you can go. If romantic moonlight isn't your thing, you may prefer boat trips to meet the local dolphins. Check availability before you head out there, they may not sail in bad weather. - CM

Ramsay Street - The set for Neighbours is deep in the Melbourne suburbs. If you really want to go, ask and I will give you the address of a good psychiatrist. - CM

Philip Island - Famous to some of us for the motor cycle grand prix, and to the rest of the world for the penguin parade. Fairy penguins nest in holes on the beach and come home en masse each evening. This is Melbourne's ultimate wildlife experience. - CM

The Great Ocean Road - Head out west along the coast from Melbourne and you come to the most spectacular piece of coastal scenery anywhere in the world. It isn't the best time of year to see it, but if the weather is awful you'll be able to buy photos. Heck, you can't avoid the damn things. This is a day trip. - CM

Healesville - By far the best way to get close to Australian wildlife is to head out east to Healesville Sanctuary. It is about a 3 hour drive, but it is well worth it for the platypus exhibit alone which allows you to watch the world's weirdest animal in its favourite habitat - under water. You can also watch wombats, cuddle kangas and, if you must, discover just how bad koalas smell (you would too if you only ate eucalyptus leaves). - CM

Vineyards - In the same direction as Healesville is Victoria's premier wine growing region. Spring is not the best time to be visiting vineyards so I would check with tourist information before planning a trip. - CM

Puffing Billy - Train fanatics can enjoy a steam-hauled experience through the Dandenong Mountains courtesy of this cute little engine. Better still, you can get there by train. Take the Belgrave line from and city centre station and go right to the end. Wives and girlfriends who are dragged along for the ride may wish to ponder the local vegetation, particularly the tree ferns which would be a familiar sight to a passing dinosaur. Watch out for kookaburras, cockatoos and the stunningly beautiful rosellas in the trees, and perhaps an echidna ambling along beside the lines. Again, allow a whole day, and dress warmly. - CM

Sovereign Hill - Victoria's gold fields are to the west of Melbourne and this small town has been restored just as it was at the time of the gold rush, complete with actors in period costume. Another day trip. - CM

Food and drink

Tipping - Australians do not tip. Please do not encourage the habit, restaurant staff are well paid. - CM

BYO - Many Australian restaurants allow you to bring your own alcohol. Look out for the BYO sign and check whether it covers beer as well as wine. There may be a small charge for opening the bottle. - CM

Beer - Despite Australia's reputation as a nation of beer-swillers, most of the local brews are undrinkable. As an illustration, a few years ago there was a big advertising campaign for Fosters Export which claimed that the muck they sell abroad was better than the local version. Fortunately a few Australian breweries do know what they are doing. For lagers check out James Boag and Hahn Premium. Redback, a wheat beer, is a particular favourite of mine. Terry, as you will have noticed, prefers Coopers Ale, and something called Dogbolter. - CM

Wine - Despite having drunk vast quantities of it, I would not class myself as anything approaching an expert on Australian wine. Knowing that there are people on my circulation list who are experts makes me somewhat nervous writing this. Anyway, here goes. Firstly, as usual, don't touch anything cheap. For mid range stuff, try Jamesons Run or anything from the Wolf Blass range. At the higher end, look out for Petaluma, Henscke and Yarra Yerring. If you happen to find wines from a small NSW vineyard called Lakes Folly, by all means try it, but don't acquire a taste for it. There isn't enough made to go round and I wouldn't want to have to kill you. - CM

Isthmus of Kra - Possibly the best Thai restaurant in the world and my personal favourite in Melbourne. The Monsoon Oysters are not to be missed. Found at 50 Park Street in South Melbourne. - CM

Vlado's - By strange coincidence, Melbourne has a large Croatian community. This place, at 61 Bridge Road, is a Croatian steak house and is supposedly the ultimate carnivore experience. There is, after all, nothing much on the menu except steak, but it is the very best steak there is. Wash it down with plenty of fine Aussie Shiraz and drink a toast to our friends from Zagreb. - CM

Flower Drum - The top restaurant in Melbourne's China Town. It is fairly expensive, but comes enthusiastically recommended by Jerry Doyle and Andrea Thompson who, one might imagine, have seen a good restaurant or two in their time. Found at 17 Market Lane - CM

Pepper Chili - For those of you on a tighter budget, this Szechuan restaurant at the far end of China Town (85 Little Bourke Street) is a favourite of many Melbourne fans. We had the Nova Mob Christmas Dinner there one year. - CM

Red Emperor - This restaurant in the Southgate shopping mall is the home of the best dim sum (known as "yum cha" in Australia) in Melbourne. I'm particularly fond of the chili fried tentacles. - CM

Madame Joe Joe - No, not the famous London transvestite club, this is a fine French restaurant at 9 Fitzroy Street, St. Kilda. A bit pricey but well worth it. Excellent wine list, but liable to bankrupt most folk. - CM

Australia on Collins Food Court - If you are on a budget and want something filling and reasonably priced there are many food courts around the city. My favourite is in the basement of the Australia on Collins mall in Collins Street. At the far right as you come down the escalator there is a Japanese stall that does the best noodle soups I have ever had. - CM

Fan Scene

Last stop on the Australian Special stuff, a brief tour of Melbourne-based fanzines.

Thyme - Australia's premier newszine is edited by Alan Stewart. If you want to know what is happening SF-wise in Australia, this is the zine to get. Contact Alan at fiawol@netspace.net.au.

Mimezine Flashback - Terry Frost is easily the most entertaining fan writer in Australia. He is usually controversial and occasionally tactless, but he always has something interesting to say. hlector@netspace.net.au

SF Comentary & The Metaphysical Review - Bruce Gillespie is a perfectionist. He doesn't produce his fanzines very often, but when he does they are stunningly good. Check out the fan lounge for some back issues and prepare to be amazed. Then give Bruce some money so he can afford to produce some more.

SF Bullsheet - For regular news of Australian fandom, sign up for Marc Ortlieb's SF Bullsheet. This is Australia's answer to Ansible and it is available by email. A\$10 lifetime subscription. mortlieb@vicnet.net.au

Ethel the Aardvark - This is the MSFC clubzine. It is available only to members but the annual membership is only A\$25 which isn't bad for 6 issues of a fanzine. I understand that Karen Pender Gunn has just stepped down as editor. I don't know who will be in charge next. Ask at the MSFC table (if they have one) or the fan lounge.

AMD - I've not seen an issue of Paul Ewins' fanzine in a while which is a shame because he's very good. Pester him, huh? EwinsP2@anz.com

Eidolon - This isn't a fanzine, it is a semi-prozine from a bunch of guys in Perth who have been a hug factor in the current growth of Australian SF. Excellent short fiction. <http://www.eidolon.net>.

Aynf - New fanzine edited by Emilly McLeay, the MSFC librarian. Needs a few more issues under its belt, but Emilly and her colleagues have plenty of enthusiasm. twennyseven@yahoo.com

Rosie's Tavern - Brand new 'zine, first issue published for the Worldcon. The editors are MSFC stalwarts, Bev Hope, Rose Mitchell, Michael Jordan and David Arblaster. Promising, hope they keep it up.

ANZAPA - The best place for people wishing to keep up contacts with Australian fans is this long-running APA. Kevin and I were in it for a while, but didn't have the time to keep up contributions. More info from Marc Ortlieb. mortlieb@vicnet.net.au

Footnote

OK, that's this issue out of the way, now I have two major conventions to go to. Guess what I'll be talking about next time.

Gee, I've just noticed I've now been going for four years, on a monthly schedule too. And #50 coming up. Doesn't time fly when you are enjoying yourself.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl