

# EMERALD CITY

Issue 49

September 1999

An occasional 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at [cmorgan@ceres.wallis.com](mailto:cmorgan@ceres.wallis.com) or on line at <http://www.emcit.com>

## Introduction

Oh boy, what a heck of a month it has been. I've attended two major conventions, one in the US and one in Australia. I've been on business trips to Sydney, Adelaide and Reno. I've moved my belongings into storage in California and I'm now in the UK where, miracles notwithstanding, I think I am going to stay for the foreseeable future. Don't ask, it is far too complicated. But if this issue is a few days late, please accept my apologies.

The deadline I am aiming at is the October Tun so the issue will definitely be out before then. If you pick up a copy there and wonder at the length, don't panic, I'm not usually this verbose. Major convention reports always tend to bust the page count records.

The day after that Tun I'm off to Dublin for Octocon. That's a convention I'm really looking forward to. I haven't been to Eire for years, but I can still remember how much better Guinness tastes when it is fresh. Besides, there is a magnificent guest list. Several of the authors whose books are reviewed here are due to attend, so if I don't make it back, it probably isn't because I got too drunk. Maybe I'll just hide at the Rugby World Cup matches. Australia v Ireland, hmm...

---

## Cons Around the World

### Lair of the Mouse

In 1996 the San Francisco in 2002 Worldcon bid (SF2002) was launched at L.A. Con III in the Anaheim Hilton. Three years later, the bid, now for San José, held some of its last ever events across the street from there in the Marriott. We were at Conucopia, the North American Science Fiction Convention (NASFiC), an event that takes place only in years when the Worldcon is held outside of North America. The following weekend we would be heading out to Australia for the Worldcon, but first we had to put on a show for those Americans who could not afford the trip.

Anaheim is an awesome convention site. The convention centre itself isn't that huge, about big enough for two Worldcons, though it is getting a huge extension built. The hotels, on the other hand, are massive. We are, after all, adjacent to Disneyland. The NASFiC was held in the Marriott, which is more than large enough to handle a 2000 person convention. L.A. Con III also used the similar sized Hilton which is opposite. On the same block there are three or four other big hotels, and the neighbouring blocks hold large numbers of small hotels. There were two other conventions taking place on the site the same weekend as

ours. This isn't in the same league as Vegas, but to non-Americans it is pretty damn impressive.

Kevin and I were late. The con started on Thursday, but due to our plans for Australia Kevin wasn't able to leave work until the Friday afternoon. Fortunately a whole bunch of other people from the bid had gone down earlier and were doing a fine job looking after things. The plan was that we would take it easy to start with because there would be a lot fewer of our people in Australia and we'd need to work hard there. In practice, of course, some of the best places to take it easy were behind the bid table and in the bid parties. OK, so we are workaholics, we admit it.

I should of course say that the convention was great, even though I didn't see much of it. Unfortunately I can't. As I write this I am sitting in the lobby of the Anaheim Marriott in the company of a bunch of other fans all waiting for the shuttle buses to take us to LAX. Most of us are playing with our Superfluous Technology. As of now, I have not actually read the convention programme schedule. I have no idea what went on. Oops.

---

### **Alien Invasion**

I did, however, get to go to one program item. The "Meet the Bidders" panel is supposedly an opportunity for interested fans to question quiz future Worldcon bids about their plans. Being due for our vote in a week's time, we were a prime target. However, most people were far more interested in asking questions of our opposition, the Roswell bid. There was, after all, a large amount of concern about safety. With all those saucer crashes, was the air traffic control system going to be updated before the convention?

Gerri Sullivan had a particular requirement. She was hoping to arrive by airship and wanted to know if it would be possible to land it with all those saucers whizzing around. This gave us an opportunity to score a point. Michael Siladi pointed out that Moffett Field, only a few miles from the San José site, has facilities to hanger up to six blimps with mooring for many more. Minneapolis fans please note.

If you think holding a Worldcon in Roswell is daft, however, you may be surprised to know that it seems far less daft that holding one in New York. This particular bid, which is for the 2004 Worldcon, is run by a group including Robert Sacks and Brian Burley. These two guys were described on line by Patrick Neilsen Hayden as "the two people in the play whose job it is to entertain the audience during the interval by hitting each other with pig bladders", which should give you a very clear picture of how fandom views them. Robert declined to make the presentation himself, but Brian had sent a prepared speech which was read for him by one of the other bid members, the lady responsible for facilities. It was one of the most pompous things I have ever heard from fandom, which, when you consider how pompous some fans can get, is quite an achievement.

The trouble with New York, of course, is that it is hideously expensive. The bid committee had managed to secure around the same amount of space as we had in Anaheim: fine for 2000 people, disastrous for 5000. Furthermore, the hotel rooms were priced at \$170 - \$199 a night in current prices. That compares with the \$95 we were paying in Anaheim. Those figures are, as is usual in the US, before tax. Tax rates in Anaheim are 15% whereas those in New York are around 30%.

Somewhat towards the end of her slot, the poor girl representing New York commented that she's be happy to hand over the hotel negotiations to someone living in New York. She

lived in Tuscon and, she said, she had no plans to go back to NY in the near future. "No", I said in a stage whisper, "neither have we".

The one good thing about the New York bid is that it means more people running parties at conventions. With that in mind, Kevin and I both signed up as pre-opposers. Robert had invented a special category, "enemy of the bid", which seemed specifically designed for Kevin, but alas we could not afford the \$300 he was asking.

---

---

### **Masquerade**

The other part of the convention I made sure I attended was the masquerade. I have no idea when I'm going to have the opportunity to see a top class costume show again, so I wasn't going to miss this one. Besides, Sandy Manning was running the Green Room. It is always much more fun working on a con when you have absolute confidence in your boss.

There were only about 20 or so entries, quite a few of which, I gather, had been persuaded to join in at the last minute. Nevertheless, the standard was very high. I was lucky enough to have Pierre Pettinger in my den. He's an angel. No problem at all to look after. Ready ages in advance. Knows the ropes. No need to tell him anything. And he looked stunning too. I'm disappointed he didn't get more recognition, though I suspect his presentation was a bit too arty for the judges.

The rest of the den was taken up with a large group from San Diego whose presentation involved a Celtic bard being given inspiration by a bunch of goddesses. The costumes were absolutely stunning, from the fabulous sculpted fibre-glass armour that The Morrigan was wearing to the exquisite, leaf-covered dress that Mary Ann Meyers created for the forest goddess. Brilliantly simple idea too. One day I might use it myself, if I have the patience.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, Mary Ann and company won Best in Show. Now you may think that a Den Mom has no reason to crow about what her den does. I had no hand in making the costumes, or presenting them. But believe me, once you have had two hours sharing the hopes, fears and frustrations of a bunch of costumers, and generally doing your best to keep up their morale, your emotional investment in their efforts is pretty high. I was leaping up and down and whooping with the rest of them when the awards were announced. Thanks guys, you made my weekend.

---

---

### **The Anaheim Tea Party**

On Sunday night, with many of the Bay Area folks heading home so as to be back at work on Monday, Kevin and I decided to help with the UK05 party. The British bid had done stunningly well at its table taking heaps of memberships. I'm a little concerned that Vince Docherty set the initial pre-support price rather too low - he'll need a lot of cash if he ends up running a contested campaign in the US. However, he has instituted the idea of increasing pre-support prices with time which I think is a good thing.

The party was a breeze to run. We had a bunch of stuff left over from the San José parties, and lots of other people donated food as well, including the con suite which closed long before we did. We ended up desperately looking round for LA locals who could take the excess away, and donated quite a bit of food to the housekeeping staff. Vince and Andrew Adams had managed to add a British flavour to the proceedings through the magnificent feat of finding tea pots in US shops. Tea was duly served, at which point Andrew

discovered that the damn things had been made with hollow handles. Ow, ow, ow! You can tell Americans never use them.

Perhaps the strangest aspect was that Andrew was the only totally British person involved. Vince currently lives in the Netherlands, having moved there from Oman, Bjorn Tore Sund is Norwegian, Kevin is American, and I try to avoid all questions about nationality because it is too confusing for people. Still, we were British for the night, and we had a great time.

---

---

## **PlaneCon I**

And so to Monday, and what became known as PlaneCon. Having little to do on the day. We slept in late and went for brunch early in the afternoon. Word of warning. Never, ever order pasta at the IHOP in Anaheim. Talk about over-cooking, it had the consistency of mucus. Indeed, just about every meal I have had in the LA area has been atrocious, except for the Indian place that Kevin and I found at L.A. Con III which has now been closed down and demolished. I wonder if southern Californians have taste buds. Perhaps the cocaine kills them off.

Next there was the previously reported gathering in the lobby of the Marriott. There was much SMOFing and much discussing of international air travel. Ben Yalow prophesied doom and gloom for anyone travelling through Sydney. He's obviously experienced their air traffic control problems before. I've only ever had trouble on domestic flights, but I had to admit that he might be right, we could be delayed hours. Those flying via Auckland looked duly smug.

And so to LAX, where the mug with the silver QANTAS frequent flier card handled much of the bid's luggage. I have an obscene luggage allowance on international flights. As I remember, I had 64 kg of checked luggage. Good job I had Kevin to carry it for me. Many other people were fairly well laden too, especially if they had been buying books at the NASFiC and hadn't had time to go home and dump them. Kevin wondered whether, with all that luggage, plus lots of overweight fans, the planes would be able to get off the ground.

At check-in we joined up with various people newly arrived from San Francisco, held some impromptu BASFA meetings, and played Pass the Pigs as there isn't a lot else to do in an airport, especially one as short of space as LAX. Blars was on the same flight as me and we were happy to invite him to join us as he is the only current competitor to the UK05 bid. Blars is promoting I5 in 05, I5 being a US interstate highway that runs up the west coast of the country. It is a fine silly hoax bid, the con being scheduled to run for the entire year, stopping off at any hotel we find along the way. Following SF2002's invention of cute pre-support rates, Blars is asking \$5 for a pre-support. Pre-opposing is \$1.01 because highway 101 is the other main route up the west coast. All money raised is used to help fund parties. There should be more bids like this.

As usual I was asleep before the plane left the ground. Blars tells me that we spent ages on the taxi-way in LAX, apparently because a plane in front of us had problems and had to be moved. We were half an hour late into Sydney, but for once there were no problems at all and I breezed on through to Melbourne where I met up with Kevin who had been on a United flight, also through Sydney. So much for Ben's prognostications of doom.

Whilst we were waiting for the others we had a look round and we found a Vodaphone shop renting mobile phones: two phones for A\$4 a day plus calls with. Just what we needed to keep in touch during the con, and Superfluous Technology to boot. Needless to

say, Steve Davies had spotted the shop when he arrived and had rented one too. These *Plokta* people are sharp.

The QANTAS flight via Auckland had arrived on time before us so many of our companions from LAX were already at the con, but the United flight on the same route, carrying Ben Yalow and Robert Sacks, amongst others, was late. Kevin and I hung around to wait for them as some of our BidCom were also on that flight. As I remember they were about an hour and a half late altogether. The story was that the pilot discovered that his luggage hold was unevenly packed when taxiing out at LAX and he had to turn back to get it fixed. Gee, all those heavy fans with their books are such a nuisance.

And so it was that a whole bunch of us arrived at the taxi rank at the same time. I asked the rank manager if he could find us something large, and he called in a minivan. The driver patiently ferried a bunch of wisecracking fans around several Melbourne hotels and, as far as we could tell, charged us no extras at all. He even turned the clock off each time he stopped. The ride ended up costing us A\$5 per person. It was an excellent welcome to Australia.

---

## **Party Hell**

Of course it could not last. Once we got to the convention, things went rapidly downhill. A harassed Bev Hope, A3's party co-ordinator, asked Kevin and I to have an emergency meeting with the hotel management. This was very bad news indeed.

Prior to the convention there had been a lot of confusion as to exactly what we would be allowed to do in the way of bid parties. In America we are used to being able rent a suite and throw a party ourselves; including doing all our own catering. We would normally budget around US\$100 plus room costs for a typical convention, maybe US\$300 plus room for a Worldcon. In the UK, in contrast, a combination of draconian food safety laws and hotel greed make it impossible to consume anything on hotel premises without being charged a fortune for it. We had no idea what the situation in Australia would be.

Bev had been put in charge of liaising with visiting fans who wanted to hold a party. Unfortunately her job was pretty much impossible because the A3 committee would not let her talk to the hotels. Everything had to be done via facilities manager, Stephen Boucher, who is at best uncommunicative and at worst downright obstructive. To help Bev out Kevin and I set up a mailing list for people interested in holding parties. The big question was whether we would be allowed to buy and prepare our own food. If not I estimated we'd be faced with bills of around US\$2000 per night.

For much of the time Bev was unable to get a sensible answer out of Stephen and most people decided to cancel their parties. As one of the bids being voted on, we felt that we had an obligation to do something, so we said we'd do one night. Then, a week or so before the NASFiC, Stephen announced that he had done a deal with the hotel and we would be allowed to self-cater the parties. Apparently he had spun some tale about us wanting to bring in special American food. Personally I didn't believe that the hotel could have been so naïve, but we had to accept the official line so we reinstated our second party and planned for self-catered events, including transporting a pile of Lynn Gold's cooking gear to Australia with us.

As it turned out, I was right. The first party organiser that the hotel spoke to had given the lie to the "special food" story and the hotel was now very suspicious of us. That the unfortunate party thrower had been Melbourne's "mister clueless", Justin Semmel, only

served to deepen poor Bev's embarrassment. Kevin and I went off to see the banqueting manager to try to rescue things.

At the time it seemed to go quite well. Unfortunately, neither of us had much experience with hotel banqueting people, and we were groggy with jet lag too. We had no idea just how far the hotel's understanding was from our own. For example, a plate of snacks which was supposed to serve 10, and costing A\$10, turned out to be around 30 tortilla chips and 10 sticks of crudités - less than A\$2 worth of food. Not knowing how many people we'd attract, we made a point of requesting rapid refills on the drinks as we needed them. As it turned out, "rapid" meant about 15 minutes for the coffee and at least half an hour for sodas. To their credit, the hotel did go along with Lynn's plans for a burrito bar and agreed to use her recipes and the special ingredients she had brought, but they insisted on doing the preparation and the rest of the shopping themselves, at a substantial mark-up.

Things would not have been so bad had we not been the only party on Thursday night. Also there was little in the way of evening programming, so what seemed to be just about the entire con descended on us at opening time and we were out of most of the food in half an hour. The sodas didn't last much longer. The liqueur coffees held up reasonably well, but probably only because of the enormous waits for refilling the coffee pots. And believe me, there are few people more unpleasant to deal with than fans who have been expecting a free feed and are not getting it. Huge thanks to Giulia de Cesare who came and took over from me for a while when I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown after having been complained at solidly for the past hour or so.

Having assessed the cost of the Thursday night debacle, Kevin and I took the decision to cancel the Friday party. This probably did not go down well with the fans, and I expect to see a whole pile of con reviews which complain about how stingy and incompetent we were, but there are limits to what you should do with bid money. People buy pre-supports in a bid for several reasons. They may see it as a means of buying a membership in installments, they may want the discount on the membership that you get for pre-supporting and voting, and in many cases they do it because they know that bids need money to run parties. Now running parties is all very well in America where they are cheap and many of the people attending are likely to both vote and attend your convention. Running parties in Australia where they cost between 5 and 10 times more and very few of the people attending are likely to either vote or attend your convention is another matter. We felt that it would be more responsible of us to cancel the Friday party and pass the money saved on to the Worldcon.

We were also due to help out with a party on Sunday night in collaboration with the seated Worldcons (Chicago and Philadelphia) and the Bucconeer thank you party. Given my poor handling of the hotel, I was delighted to be able to pass the whole thing over to Joni Dashoff of Philadelphia who did a much better job of negotiating. That, plus the fact that four Worldcons together can afford the horrendous costs, made for one of the few decent parties of the convention. Thank you, Joni. I owe you one.

If our party was bad, however, it was by no means the worst one of the con. That honour has to go to the one official party run by A3. Another one of those Worldcon traditions is that the host convention should throw a party for past and current Worldcon chairs, generally known as the "old farts party". Tom Whitmore, as the chair of 2002, got four tickets and kindly gave two to Kevin and I. We were quite honoured, but when we got there it was quite plain that this was one of those traditions that A3 resented having to honour. Sure parties were expensive, but A3 had clearly spent the minimum possible. Petty really.

---

---

## Hugo Heaven

If the parties were one of the major nightmares of A3, the Hugo ceremony must count as the highlight. Michael Jordan had taken the potentially controversial step of relegating all awards except the Hugos and the Campbell to a separate ceremony. Whilst it is certainly a good thing to have the likes of the First Fandom award, and to allow the Japanese to present their Seiun awards, these are the presentations which tend to attract marathon speeches and turn the Hugo night into a 3 hour purgatory. A3 in contrast had a slick ceremony which took around 1.5 hours and gave the Hugos the prominence that they deserve.

The staging too was minimalist and excellent. The plain, black stage was flanked by two giant silver Hugo rockets, lit from below with blue lamps. It was so impressive that both the Chicago and Philadelphia Worldcons enquired about buying the set, and the two rockets were duly dismantled and packed off to the US where I expect them to appear at Worldcons for years to come.

The results were pretty good too. Ian Gunn at last won the Best Fan Artist award; Connie Willis won Best Novel for *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, and Nalo Hopkinson got the Campbell. Dave Langford got his traditional two rockets, despite the bad omen of Martin Hoare not being there to accept them for him. Tom Veal did a superb impression of Bob Eggleton in accepting the Best Professional Artist award for the absent eccentric. *The Truman Show* was a surprise winner in the Best Dramatic Presentation award. All in all, a pretty good evening.

---

---

## Other impressions

Not that I got to see much of it, but programming at A3 was apparently a screaming disaster. DUFF delegate, Janice Gelb covered herself in glory by being prepared to work flat out for almost 2 days getting the schedule into some semblance of order. All I can say is that the one panel I was one took place as scheduled in the right room. Perhaps people were scared to mess with a panel full of feminists.

Doubtless there will be some Australian fans who will bitch like crazy for the next ten years about how the evil Americans, and Janice in particular, "took over their convention". However, I don't expect hear this sort of nonsense from the middle management of A3. After all the offensive nonsense that was bandied about before the convention, it was a real pleasure to hear people saying how grateful they were for the help of visiting fans. It was also a delight to be told that areas of the convention were running smoothly because those in charge had decided that a professional, business-like approach was necessary. The likes of David Evans, Jamie Rueul, Rose Mitchell and Michael Jordan seem to have done a fine job and did a lot to dispel the bad feeling that had been generated by those further up the management chain.

That said, Australian fandom still has a fair bit to learn about Worldcons. In his post con report, Marc Ortlieb mentions the lack of a con suite and excuses this by saying that feeding the entire convention for free would be too expensive in Australia. That on its own gives a false impression. Food is no more expensive in Australia than it is in the US, and the membership fees for A3 were higher than an average US Worldcon. Their fixed costs are probably higher per attendee, but the real killer is the necessity of paying the hotel for catering rather than doing it yourself. Even so, there was plenty of space. Con suites are not

intended to provide three full meals a day (though some fans do treat them that way). The coffee bar area next to the fan tables could have been cordoned off and advertised as a meeting and relaxation area.

Marc also comments on how impressed he was by the efficiency of the overseas fans who helped with the costume parade. Well admittedly Lori Meltzer invented most of the backstage procedures we now use, and the O'Hallorans are amongst the best back-stage managers that we have, but the procedures they used are the same International Costumers Guild guidelines that Wendy Purcell and I used for the first Australian Costumers Guild Ball in 1996. If A3 had been prepared to be polite to the costumers rather than drive them away Marc would have found that there were plenty of people in Melbourne who would have been just as slick, and the quality and quantity of the costumes would have blown people away.

---

### **WSFS stuff**

This year's WSFS Business Meeting produced much discussion but very little action. The only substantive motion to be passed was the ratification of the No Zone system, first passed at Bucconeer. This change to the constitution does away with the old zonal bidding system. As from now, any site is eligible for selection unless they are within 500 miles of the site of the Worldcon where the vote is held. For a period of 3 years sites which would have been eligible under the old rotating zone system are eligible too so that no existing bids are ruled out by the change.

No Zone has been controversial and many people seem to think that it will lead to a small number of sites (or maybe just Boston) dominating Worldcons forever more. Personally I can't see why anyone would want to run Worldcon every year. What it does mean is that a bid which loses one year may be able to roll over to the next year rather than have to keep bidding for another three years waiting for its zone to become eligible again. This should mean less waste of potentially good sites and committees. It will also mean less weak years, which may be a bad thing for places like Australia.

There was no other business from Bucconeer to be ratified, but there were plenty of new motions. Surprisingly, though there were several good ideas, not one of them passed. The most publicised motion was one which would create separate Hugos for short form (i.e. TV episodes) and long form (i.e. movies) media SF. There was much nit-picking about what this meant for TV mini-series and for "story arc" series such as Babylon 5. Sadly the sort of fan who attends business meetings seems largely incapable of appreciating that no system can be perfect. The purpose of this motion, according to its sponsor, Charles Barclay, is to increase interest in the Hugos by providing more categories aimed at media fans. That seems a laudable objective, but I suspect his ideas may be forever bogged down by detail.

Another Hugo change, proposed by Vince Docherty, was to increase eligibility for the literary and dramatic Hugos to two years. This would allow books, films and stories first published outside the US to have a better chance of recognition. It would also increase interest in the Hugos because these days most novels are only available in expensive hardback format during the first year of publication. To avoid too much domination by popular items, anything that won in its first year would not be eligible in the second. Sadly this motion failed because of wording problems. Vince had thought that a simple global change to the eligibility wording would suffice, but during the debate some people realised that the past winner rule would apply to categories such as Best Fanzine and Best Professional Artist. It was, as Kevin said, a good way of stopping Dave Langford and



Charles Brown from winning any more Hugos, but it wasn't what Vince intended. You can expect to see this one back with improved wording next year.

Vince also proposed a return to a two year lead time for Worldcon site selection. Having just participated in a long bid campaign, I'm very much in favour of this one. Many people believe that the hotel problems experienced by the Seattle and San Francisco bids mean that we should increase the bidding cycle to four, five or even ten years so that we can lock in hotel contracts. This is naïve. High quality hotels will have no qualms about throwing out Worldcons if a more wealthy prospect comes along, no matter how far in advance we confirm.

From a hotel point of view, having only a two-year lead time makes it less likely that sites will get gazumped because the big money conventions will already be booked in. Also there is no need for the three years organisation time. You can put a Worldcon together in between 18 and 24 months, and having an extra year just leads to con committees burning themselves out by doing too much too soon. A shorter lead time, combined with No Zone, may also lead to shorter bid campaigns, which would also be a good thing.

Sadly this motion fell foul of timing. If it has been passed, and ratified in Chicago, it would mean that the 2004 Worldcon would be voted on in San José, not Philadelphia. Robert Sacks and his friends have chosen to interpret this as an evil SMOFish plot to make it harder for New York fans to vote on his bid. Much rancour resulted. There was also some rather silly opposition from people who thought it was unfair that attendees of the Philadelphia Worldcon should lose their right to vote on a site selection (Chicago would have voted on 2003 and 2004 would be delayed a year). This is a fixable problem - the eligibility could be carried forward - and in any case a large percentage of those people who vote on site selection do so every year. Another example of nit picking getting in the way of a sensible idea. Expect this one to come back next year as well, when hopefully Mr. Sacks will not see it as a personal affront.

---

### **End of the road**

All this talk about site selection brings us to the 2002 vote. Yes, of course we won. Despite the love of fandom for silly ideas, there was no real chance that Roswell would get enough votes to win. I would, however, like to say a big thank you to Liz Mortensen and the rest of the Roswell committee for helping preserve a certain lightness of spirit in the bidding process. With the withdrawal of the Seattle bid, things got a lot more unpleasant for us. Firstly it got much harder for us to maintain our own level of effort when we were almost certain to win. In addition, once we were the only game in town, we became an immediate target for anyone in fandom with an axe to grind. This was particularly the case with certain people from Boston who still haven't got over losing last year. Having the Roswell bid around to laugh with helped remind us that not all fans are petty-minded idiots who can't bear to see anyone succeed at anything.

I would also like to say a big thank you to Mark Linneman for doing a good job managing site selection. Prior to the convention this had been the job of someone called Mark Lawson whose level of responsibility was such that there would have been no postal voting had not Kevin and Bob Daverin written the ballot form for him and ensured that it appeared in A3's final progress report. We were expecting a similar lack of care at the convention, but fortunately Mr. Lawson declined to turn up and Linneman was drafted in at the last minute. Not everything went perfectly, but Mark made it quite clear that he intended to

make up for the bad press that A3 had got itself over the postal ballot debacle and we were much relieved.

We were all very surprised at how many pre-supports we took at the NASFiC and A3: over 200 people in all. Now given the closeness to the vote, there was very little we could do with the money. The only possible reason for someone signing up that late is that they wanted to take advantage of the discounted membership you get for pre-supporting and voting. Given that several of the people who joined up had previously trumpeted their opposition to our bid, it seems to me that giving discounts to such people is a bad idea. As I mentioned earlier, UK05 will be changing its pre-support prices throughout the life of the bid. Hopefully they will start a tradition of not giving any breaks to people who pre-support at the last minute.

This was the first year I had attended a site selection count, and I must say that I agree with Ben Yalow that I worry about some of the voters. It is, for example, supposed to be a secret ballot, so why did one person write her name and address on the tear off ballot slip? And why did two people copy the whole ballot onto easily recognised pink paper? Also, why do people persist in listing preferences after they have selected the "no preference" option? Very strange.

The strangest thing of all, however, was the final result. San José ended up with the ominous total of 666 votes. Yes, we are the Worldcon of the Beast. Goodness only knows what nonsense this will elicit on newsgroups in the coming months.

For those of you who haven't heard, the 2002 Worldcon will be called ConJosé. The Guests of Honour will be Vernor Vinge, David Cherry, Bjo and John Trimble and Ferdinand Feghoot. Tad Williams will be the toastmaster. Vinge you should all be familiar with as I have reviewed his work in the past. He has already won one Best Novel Hugo, and I think he will run *Cryptonomicon* close with his latest book, *A Deepness in the Sky*. It also seems entirely appropriate that the Silicon Valley Worldcon should have a Guest of Honour whose day job is a computer science lecturer. Cherry I confess I know little about, but then I know little about most artists. What little I've seen of his work looks excellent. Tad doesn't attend conventions very often, but I've seen him speak twice and believe me you won't find anyone more entertaining anywhere.

The other guests are less well known. The Trimbles, our fan guests, were the most prominent members of the campaign to revive *Star Trek* after Paramount cancelled the original series. Whilst being responsible for *Next Gen* and all that followed might not be entirely glorious, it is certain that few fans have had a greater effect on the SF industry. Without their efforts, SF might still be a ghetto interest. Feghoot is our imaginary guest. He is the hero of a large number of short stories all of which end in dreadful puns. I think you can probably see where this is going. We hope that a lot of amusement will result.

---

---

### **For the want of a nail**

Time now to return to the Hugo Awards. After the convention the award administrator releases the full figures, not only for the voting, but also for the nominations. These generally show something interesting, and this year is no exception. (If you are interested all the figures are on the A3 web site.)

Firstly there is no doubt that the Secret Feminist Cabal voting block did a good job. Connie Willis would probably have won anyway, but Mary Doria Russell was a solid second all the way through the voting and Nalo Hopkinson won the Campbell, both signs of Wiscon

people voting. Ellen Klages placed second in Best Novelette and Freddie Baer was third in Best Fan Artist, having been second on first preferences. Freddie, I suspect, will continue to place well in subsequent years, and I confidently expect her to win on home territory in 2002. As it happens, she was born in Chicago, which might stand her in good stead next year.

As I said earlier, there was considerable surprise that *The Truman Show* beat out *Babylon 5's* final episode in Best Dramatic Presentation. The B5 episode placed first on first preferences and this has already led to various people (including, it is rumoured, JMS) complaining that the voting system is "unfair". I'm not going to waste space explaining preferential voting here, but this sort of sour grapes does no one any good. If you don't like the voting system, go to the Business Meeting and try to get it changed, otherwise play with the rules we have.

Someone with more of a case for complaint is Lawrence Person. *Nova Express* received 16 votes as Best Fanzine and 7 as Best Semi-prozine. Normally the Hugo administrator would have moved the semi-prozine nominations to fanzine, in which case *Nova Express* would have made the ballot. As was the case in so many areas, A3 did not seek any advice from those who had done the job before and thus the usual unwritten rules were not applied. I can see why Lawrence is upset, but as one of the people who believe that those who throw money at their fanzines (of which *Tangent* is far more guilty than *Nova Express*) should be in the semi-prozine category I'm pleased to see that my nomination was taken as it was intended.

Finally I note with some pleasure that I got 17 nominations. That placed *Emerald City* equal ninth in Best Fanzine, six nominations away from the ballot, whilst I was sixth in Best Fanwriter, just three nominations away from a serious excuse to get dressed up. Thank you, everyone, I'm flattered. I also note that everyone who nominated me is eligible to nominate again in 2000 (members of the preceding Worldcon may nominate but not vote). I shall be shamelessly reminding you of this nearer the time.

---

---

### **American tourists**

With the convention over, Kevin and I were able to do the tourist thing. Not that I really needed to play tourist around Melbourne, but Kevin had never been to Australia before and I wanted to show him some of my favourite places. We had two major day trips, both of them out east into the Dandenong Mountains.

The first day we took the hire car. This enabled me to drive past the flat where I used to live, and then embarrassingly take a wrong turning. Later, and back on track, we headed out along Whitehorse Road and therefore passed the local IKEA. We were not surprised when soon after we passed road signs welcoming us to Croydon. Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer were nowhere to be seen, so we headed on out to Healesville Sanctuary.

I've probably enthused about Healesville before. It is by far the best place to see Australian wildlife. Sure it is a zoo, but it concentrates solely on local species and the animals have plenty of room. The roos were a bit sleepy, it being a warm, sunny day, but Kevin got a close encounter with a wallaby and got to pet a dingo puppy that was being taken for a walk. If you get to go to Melbourne on holiday, this is one place you must visit.

Our other major outing was by train. Melbourne's commuter rail system will take you all the way out into the mountains where you can pick up the narrow gauge steam train, Puffing Billy. Kevin was in his element, and I got to enjoy the countryside. Not much in the

way of animal life, but I spotted a couple of kookaburras on a telephone wire and Belgrave station has a bird table which is frequented by gulahs, rosellas and cockatoos. Kevin was quite taken by the pretty pink and grey gulahs. He was quite amazed when I pointed out that they were about as common, and almost as much a nuisance, as pigeons. Australian bird life is wonderful.

---

## PlaneCon II

Kevin had to get back to work after only a few days touring. I stayed on a bit longer for some business meetings and made my own way back. It was touch and go too. Australia is the only country I know of where you have to go through as much nonsense getting out of the country as getting in. Apparently someone had made a mistake entering my details when I arrived and I was held up half an hour whilst they decided whether I should be allowed to leave. Fortunately for Melbourne fandom, they let me go.

Spike Parsons & Tom Becker were on the same flight as me, having been busy touring. They were saved from putting up with me through the flight by QANTAS who decided to reward my loyalty and give me a free upgrade to business class. Luxury, it was. I got to watch *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Mummy* and *Entrapment*. I got decent food and a comfy seat. Just sometimes, long flights can be fun.

---

## Tad Hits a Homer

I was hoping I'd have something by a ConJosé guest to review as a tie-in to the Worldcon report. Thanks to Tad Williams for obliging me. *Mountain of Black Glass* is the third and penultimate instalment in the *Otherland* series and things are beginning to come to a head.

Much of mystery of the series so far has centred on the character of Paul Jonas: why is he in Otherland, why is the Grail Brotherhood so anxious to recapture him, and who is the mysterious bird woman who keeps contacting him? Much to my surprise, all of these questions get answered. Then, just as everything seems to be getting wrapped up a whole volume early, the plot takes a completely unexpected twist. It is an interesting move, and I look forward to seeing how Tad resolves things.

Meanwhile, much of the action has taken place in a simulation of Homeric Greece. Tad clearly has a great affection for the ancient poet, and some of the fitting of characters from the book to characters in the Trojan War is so apt that you almost suspect that Tad started the plot with this section. I particularly liked the casting of Orlando Gardiner and Sam Fredericks as Achilles and Patroclus. Goodness only knows what the kids will say when they find out what has been done to them. It is true that you get much more out of the book if you know your Homer well, but I have no objection to this. If it encourages a few more people to read the master, all well and good.

Much of the thrust of the story revolves around personal choices rather than philosophies. Just about every character in the book seems to have some deep moral problem to confront. This volume, however, also introduces an interesting philosophical conundrum. Two of the simulations in which action takes place are wracked by wars in which hundreds of people appear to die. In another, software-based characters are shown falling in love and being murdered. Otherland truly is an impressive simulation. It seems that it is so good that the

real humans who are Tad's heroes are starting to treat the constructs as if they are real people. This, I suspect, will have a direct bearing on the resolution of the plot.

By now I will have some of you a little confused. I have written this review on the assumption that you have read the previous two books. Well hey, I don't want to give away the plot, but I do want to have something to say. Besides, Tad is one of the best writers active in the field today. If you haven't read the previous books I want to know why.

*Mountain of Black Glass* - Tad Williams - Daw - hardcover

---

## A Fine Start-up

I've probably said it many times before, but one of the worst things about knowing a lot of authors is that you end up reviewing your friends' books. Amy Thomson is a friend. Indeed, she is one of the nicest people I know. With three novels under her belt, she still attends conventions just as if she were still only a fan. I've avoided reading her books up until now because I've been worried that I wouldn't like them, but as she persuaded me to go round wearing a badge advertising her latest release at Westercon I figured I should find out what I was advertising. Besides, I'm sure she could do with the sales.

*Virtual Girl* is Amy's first novel. The title is a bit of a misnomer because, unlike the software constructs in *Otherland*, Amy's heroine is a full-blown android. Created as an AI, Molly is downloaded into an artificial body and the book is the story of her efforts to survive in human society. The book is, in effect, Data for grown-ups. Amy eschews the abstruse philosophical debates and cute jokes about emotion chips that beset Star Trek's efforts to treat the question of artificial life seriously. Instead she focuses on immediate practical issues like how to learn which of the vast flood of inputs that the world presents are worth taking notice of. The only Star Trek like issue is Molly's need to define her relationship with Arnold, the man who created her but who treats her like a possession. The book is as much an allegory of slavery as anything else.

Allegory indeed is a theme of the book. In an effort to keep his illegal research secret, Arnold lives as a hobo, doing everything he can to keep off official records. When she is accidentally separated from him, Molly knows no other life and continues to live amongst tramps and prostitutes. This automatically puts her amongst a bunch of other people who are on the edge of acceptable society. By now she is good at passing for human, but sooner or later her true nature will have to come out. Amy uses the setting to provide a perfect excuse: Molly's landlady turns out to be a transvestite, so who is the bigger fake?

All in all, the book is a fine start. It could be better. If I ever write a novel I will make sure that I go back and re-write the first few chapters from scratch because I've seen so many first novels where the author takes a while to get the hang of things. But by the end Amy has established a confident control over the medium. There are two more books to go, and I'm looking forward to them.

*Virtual Girl* - Amy Thomson - Ace - softcover

---

## Revolutionary Software

*Kevin Stanley, Kevin Stanley, Kevin Stanley... I know who he was! [...] a surly 1970s middle-class teenager, a would be punk rocker from the south of England. Sixteen years old, always moaning about how his parents hated him, or how he hated them, and neurotic about his acne and whether girls liked him.*

---

See, you were just thinking how cool it must be to know all these authors. Now you know the price you have to pay. Actually, Eugene Byrne assures me that it is a complete coincidence that his first novel contains characters called Kevin Stanley and Michael Wallace. Nothing to do with my flatmates, Kevin Standlee and Michael Wallis, truly. I hope he's right, because otherwise I'll never dare face Mike again. His namesake is a much less likeable character than Kevin's.

*Thigmoo* is a book in the glorious British tradition of social satire. It is often amusing, though thankfully not as unrelentingly funny as Terry Pratchett. It is also quite pointed in parts. My main problem with it is that I can't decide who the target is.

The basic plot is that a bunch of AIs, known as erams, created as a history teaching aid, escape from their host computer, declare their right to independent existence and ferment a world-wide Socialist revolution. Like Amy, Eugene doesn't waste much time debating the philosophical niceties of artificial life, he simply shows the AIs behaving as the ordinary people they were programmed to represent and leaves us to decide what it means to be human.

Suspension of disbelief does wear a bit thin at times (especially the bit about England winning the European Cup). Amy didn't spend a lot of time on geekery, but Eugene is positively dismissive of it and software professionals may find important plot details untenable. But then the book isn't about computers, or even much about a-life, it is about politics.

Eugene certainly understands his political theory, and it does seem possible that a group of powerful AIs might actually be able to seize control of the means of production on a world-wide scale in a sufficiently computerised society. What isn't quite clear is whether he wants us to think that this is a good thing. The erams are portrayed sympathetically throughout, but the more the book progressed the more sympathy I came to have with the irascible reactionary, Professor Sir John Westgate, whose department created the electronic revolutionaries. Byrne seems to recognise this, and in the end there is some suggestion that the revolution is not a desirable thing. But then the book is a comedy. For all I know Eugene might be spinning a parable to show why no one believes in Socialism any more. The book could certainly work that way.

Anyway, it is amusing stuff, though not, I am sorry to say, up to the standard of *Back in the USSA*. Once again, not bad for a first solo novel. Here's hoping for more.

*ThigMoo* - Eugene Byrne - Earthlight - softcover

---

## Dragons for Grown Ups

Storm Constantine has been busy since my last review. She has published a collection of short stories which I haven't got round to yet, and a novel about a rock band which I figured might not be my cup of tea. Now there is a new fantasy novel as well. At first sight it is a bit worrying, but I know I can trust Storm. I was not wrong.

It is the cover that is scary. It shows a young girl by a rocky seashore. She is wearing a green velvet gown and her blond hair is bound in a perfect plait down her back. In front of her, a huge dragon emerges from the waves. Oh dear, oh my, is this a Pern novel? Fat chance.

Oh, you are fooled for a while. It starts out very much the traditional pseudo-mediaeval fantasy. The land of Caradore is conquered by the evil Empire of Magravandias and the boy *Sea Dragon Heir* is forced to swear fealty to his new overlords. Several generations later, young Valraven, the fourth Heir of the name, aided by his twin sister, Pharinet, seems destined to restore his land and family to their ancient glory.

That lasts about half a dozen chapters. Before long we are in familiar Storm territory. There are unbridled passions, unorthodox sexual relationships, and the dragons are very much not to be trifled with. They have an almost Lovecraftian disdain for the humans who worship and leech power from them. As the novel develops, we get some devious intrigue, some serious political philosophy pondering the nature of empires and how they should be ruled, and even a taste of spirituality.

The book does take a while to get into. Although there is an official prologue, the first third is more prologue material, setting up Pharinet and Valraven and their tortuous family relationships. The second third introduces the character who appears to be the true heroine, Princess Varenienne of Magravandias, forcibly married to Valraven by her father but thanks to her sorceress mother very much aware of the sea dragons. Finally we get to the start of the real plot as Storm introduces some of the political intrigue that surrounds the young couple and seeks to exploit their magical powers.

If there were a prize for the most subversive novel of the year this book would be a runaway victor. It looks and sounds so much like traditional comfort reading, but very soon it destroys all expectations. The only resemblance to genre fantasy is that there will be several more volumes. Can't wait.

*Sea Dragon Heir* - Storm Constantine - Gollancz - hardcover

---

---

## Chaga Takes Over

OK, so I was so mad about *Sacrifice of Fools* that I refused to buy Ian McDonald's next book in hardcover. However, McDonald is a damn good writer, and I knew that it would not be long before I succumbed and bought the softback. After all, I had very much enjoyed *Evolution's Shore* (published as *Chaga* in the US). I liked Gaby McAslan as a character, and I wanted to find out what happened next. Besides, McDonald is just so enjoyable. Here he is setting the scene for a piece of African diplomacy.

*The Fwa villages rode on the backs of enormous walking machines. They moved with the speed of seasons, shuffling forward a kilometre a day along the elephant migration routes. Now their migration had run into another.*

*The Fwa were elephant people.*

*The Loolmalasin were cow people.*

*The Missionary of the Harambee was here to stop them killing each other.*

*[Gaby] thought of old educational TV about open-cast mining, and behemoth walking draglines. She thought of legends of star-swimming turtles bearing worlds on their shells. Gaby knew all about one tradition demanding the right to walk through another tradition's territory.*

---

---

Marvellous. First we get an innovative image, then we go from Terry Pratchett to Northern Ireland in the space of a sentence. How many other writers would have the courage to do that? Now here's a straight, simple and very pointed piece of hype-busting.

---

---

*The defence strategy and its weapons are only named after Star Wars. They are not fast, lean little fighters that seemingly need no fuel to perform their high-velocity astrobatics and fire their incredibly destructive ray guns. This is Space War, fought out with limited resources and opportunities on a battlefield of fractional orbits, firing arcs, recovery times and gravity wells.*

---

---

So what is it all about? Well, the alien life form known as Chaga has successfully established itself in the Southern Hemisphere. The poor bottom half of the world, abandoned by its supposedly more civilised neighbours, has learned to live with the newcomer and is now starting to exploit the nanotech fungus. New political forces such as the Harambee Federation and the iMerina Empire of Madagascar are rising. Their technology might just outstrip that of Europe and America. The UN wants to open negotiations, but the Americans have other ideas. By capturing the alien space vehicle, known as the Big Dump Object, they hope to learn the secret of nanotech for themselves and maintain their world dominance.

Gaby, fired from her job as a reporter with SkyNet and banished to Kenya because her unborn baby scanned positive for Chaga infection, has turned to drink and drugs. Meanwhile her lover, Shepard, has gone to the BDO as part of a UN science team and vanished during the US military coup. Gaby's daughter, Serena, is now an angst-filled teenager, angry at her wastrel mother and runaway father and eager to fight for the South against their oppressors. It is intense stuff at times, as we have come to expect from McDonald.

This book's inspiration is Neal Stephenson. We get both the diamond nanotech of *The Diamond Age* and the cyborg guard dogs of *Snow Crash*. But it is only inspiration, not a wholesale steal of a plot like *Sacrifice of Fools*. McDonald has his own interesting ideas of what nanotech can mean for the world. It doesn't just mean cheap manufactured goods. Nanotech medicine can give people interesting new abilities, of which defeating ageing is one of the least outlandish. Besides, if you can make things that easily, why can't you make plants, or animals, or people?

Ultimately, however, the book is not about nanotech, it is about politics. It is about the exploitation of the third world by Western civilisation, and about opportunities for emancipation. McDonald doesn't want nanotech to make the rich richer, he wants it to



make the poor free. He wants it to remove excuses for racism by giving blacks the means to force respect. And he asks even more difficult questions about what it means to be human.

Which begs just one question. If McDonald thinks that telepaths and people with an extra set of arms instead of legs are legitimate members of the race, how come he thinks that people whose only crime is to be confused about their gender are inhuman monsters?

*Kyrinya* - Ian McDonald - Millennium - softcover

---

## **Bye Bye Baby**

Way back in issue #13 I wrote about my first impressions of baseball. I was not exactly complimentary. Those of you who live in the Bay Area may have noticed that since then I've been an awful lot of baseball games. So what gives?

Well, much of what I said originally still holds good. Very little actually happens in a baseball game, and for Americans to describe cricket as boring in comparison is the height of hubris. Also I still think that giving batsmen a free base if they get hit by the ball is seriously wussy. OK, so there was a little bit of fuss in cricket about "bodyline" bowling, but that was years before I was born. These days the fast men go for the throat as a matter of course.

On the other hand, once you understand what is happening in a baseball game it gets a lot more interesting to watch. It is a game of possibilities. There is always a chance that something exciting will happen, quite often a very good chance, but most of the time good defence causes the play to break down. And of course I have got quite fond of the idea of tailgate parties. Ballpark food is expensive and often inedible, but having your own barbie in the parking lot before the game is great fun. And for night games Kevin and I have got some thermal bottles that we can use to take our dinner to the game. As a result, over the past three years, I have spent rather a lot of time (and many freezing evenings) at Candlestick Park watching the San Francisco Giants.

Now Candlestick is pretty much of a disaster as a baseball park. The unpredictable winds play havoc with fly balls, turning home runs into catches, catches into drops, and pop-ups into home runs. And it is cold, bitterly cold. Crowds for night games should be much larger than weekday day games, but few people want to spend a California summer's evening freezing to death. Public transport access is poor, and the roads leading to the stadium are narrow and quickly clogged. It can take an hour to get out of the parking lot after a game. So the Giants determined to construct a purpose-built ball park right in the middle of the city. This year would be their last at Candlestick. Special celebrations were planned.

Kevin and I attended the last ever night game at Candlestick, and if you had scripted it in advance it could not have been much better. Naturally it was against our traditional enemies, the Los Angeles Dodgers (now hated even more as they are owned by Rupert Murdoch). As part of the festivities, the Dodgers most famous manager, Tommy Lasorda, came to the game just so we could boo him one more time. He clearly loved it.

The Giants took an early lead thanks to a home run by their star hitter, Barry Bonds. This was great, because Bonds is a real Candlestick kid. His father, Bobby, played for the Giants back in the 60s when they first arrived from New York. Barry was with the Giants early in the 90s when he was voted the league's most valuable player. Now he's getting on a bit.

Knee injuries mean he can barely run, and he wouldn't even be playing were it not for the sentimental nature of the game. For him to homer in his first at bat was an ideal start.

The Giants maintained a lead right through to the final innings when they were four runs ahead. But four runs is not a viable lead in baseball. A home run with the bases loaded scores four. With starting closer, Rob Nen awaiting elbow surgery, the Giants were forced to finish the game with their relievers. The Dodgers, evil nemesis to the end, duly loaded the bases. In desperation Giants Manager, Dusty Baker, called upon a young closer brought up from the minor leagues as cover for Nen. Bronswell Patrick had previously pitched only four innings in the major leagues and had conceded twelve runs. Now he faced loaded bases, the tying run on base, and only one man out. Of course the kid came through, and the crowd exploded. It was a perfect night.

Thank you, Giants. This has been a time for endings and goodbyes. By sharing yours with mine you made the whole thing much more bearable.

---

---

## **A Small but Heartfelt Thank You**

This issue of *Emerald City* is dedicated to all those people who have worked so hard to make ConJosé a reality. It hasn't always been easy, or even fun, and the past three years have seemed at times like an eternity and at times like no time at all. Whatever, it couldn't have happened without you guys. Kevin and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

---

---

## **Footnote**

OK, that's it. I'm done. This has been the almost-Hugo-nominated Emerald City. It has been a big one.

Now I have a special 50<sup>th</sup> issue to plan. So far I have no idea what to do, but I do have a new Kim Newman novel to review. There will be the Octocon report, of course. Maybe I'll change the layout or something. If I have the time, of course.

Then there is the strong possibility of Wales v Australia in the Rugby World Cup quarter finals. It is doubtless far too late to get a ticket, and I wouldn't have a clue who to cheer for anyway. Oh well, to paraphrase The Stereophonics, as long as someone beats the English I don't care.

See you next month,

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl