

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Looks like a bumper issue this time folks. This one has two convention reviews and those always take up a lot of space. Plus I have yet another fascinating crop of books. And of course being back in California means much better Web access and much more time spent researching articles.

I was going to have the long-promised article on e-books in this issue, but given that it has grown to considerable size already I'm going to postpone it until July. Add to that stuff hanging over from Wiscon, and the large collection of books I bought at that convention, and I think I have the July issue pretty much mapped out. At this rate I might actually have time for a life.

No, that won't do. Better think of something to do to the web site, or go earn some money.

A special welcome is due this issue to those of you who found *Emerald City* through the review in Tipworld. None of you actually mentioned Emily Alward's kind comments when you subscribed, but the fact that I got 15 new subscribers on the day that the Tipworld column came out is kind of suggestive. Anyway, many thanks to Emily for the plug, and I hope you all enjoy the zine.

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Wiscon Tales

Another year, another Wiscon, and another opportunity for the Secret Feminist Cabal to subvert the patriarchy, indulge in wild lesbian orgies, and sacrifice hapless men to the Great Goddess.

Well, almost. We had a lot of fun anyway.

Life without Jeanne

I've said before that Wiscon is one of the best-run conventions I have ever attended. It does, of course, have the advantage of being in the same place every year and having a regular crew in charge of operations. But even so, it is spectacular. This year, however, we made a serious mistake. We made Jeanne Gommoll one of the Guests of Honour.

Now Jeanne is one of the founding mothers of Wiscon and has been a leading light behind the convention ever since. If any fan deserved GoH status at a con it is Jeanne at Wiscon. It also seemed fair that she should have a year off from working (not that GoHs don't work, but it is different). Of course it is only when someone good is not around that you realise just how valuable they are.

Not that the convention fell apart, you understand. In particular Richard Russell was his usual flawless self at registration. And Debbie Notkin did her usual fine job of choosing program items. But somehow none of the schedules we got were quite right, and panels kept getting moved. It was just like an ordinary convention.

Ho hum. You win some, you lose some. Next year we get to work out just how Jeanne did what she did. And we make things better again.

Perhaps more seriously, some of us are coming to the conclusion that Wiscon has perhaps rather too much programming. I commented last year that I frequently found myself wanting to go to several panels in each time slot. Other people have the same problem. We keep coming away from the convention having had a great time but wishing we could have been two people for the weekend so we could get to all the good stuff. It is getting silly, and I think the con needs to limit its ambitions a bit.

Socialist America

Several of the panels I attended or was on this year were of a general political nature. We talked about utopias, the future of Marxism, and the works of Ken MacLeod. Overseas readers may be a bit taken aback at the thought of Americans discussing Marxism. But, as I have said before, Americans are just as prone to believe in Big Government as anyone else. They just omit the word 'Socialism' from their political vocabulary. In any case, Wisconsin appears to be one of the most left wing states in the country, at least in the cities.

That is not to say, however, that the nature of the political debate is the same in the US as it is in the UK or Australia. There are differences, and I was particularly struck, by the way in which the Libertarian right in the US seems to have hijacked the concept of personal freedom, in much the same way that the fundamentalists are attempting to hijack Christianity.

On the Utopias panel I made the comment that any Utopian society had to be predicated on a sense of personal responsibility. To my surprise, some people opposed this because, as it turned out, they seemed to have a completely different understanding of the term to me. To some Americans, 'personal responsibility' now means 'responsibility for yourself', not 'responsibility for what you do and how it affects yourself and others'. Furthermore, they no longer see being responsible for something as carrying with it the implication of willingness to accept the consequences of one's actions.

Now there are extremist Libertarians who seem to believe that they do have the right to do whatever they want, without obligation to anyone. Others amongst them, thank goodness, have slightly more common sense. What is sad is to see this extremist position coming to be viewed as the only mode in which personal freedom

is possible, because if people cannot be responsible for their own actions, the only logical alternative is for the state to take on that responsibility. 1984 here we come.

This same polarisation of opinion also seems to make it hard for the American left to understand Ken MacLeod. People I talked to still appeared to view the political process as a race between left wing attempts to build a world wide Marxist state and right wing attempts to build a world wide monopoly corporation. They don't seem to understand that for all practical purposes those two are the same thing.

In addition, because America is the very paragon of technological progress created by Capitalism, the American left has decided Luddite tendencies. MacLeod's apparent view that true Socialism can only come about through technology providing an abundance of resources cuts little ice with them.

For those reasons, and perhaps because there was a preponderance of Bay Area people in the audience, the MacLeod panel ended up focussing a lot on Ken's fear of AI's and uploaded minds. We ended up drawing an interesting parallel between MacLeod's worlds and Ian Banks' Culture. In the former humans are engaged in a continual desperate battle to avoid being conquered and exterminated/enslaved by machine minds. The Culture, in contrast, seems to be a largely benevolent, paternalistic society run by AIs. Of course whether Banks' AIs behave this way for ethical reasons, or whether they just keep humans around as pets, is very much open to doubt.

What is fantasy?

Another interesting panel was one which attempted to define the difference, if any, between science fiction and fantasy. This little question often raises its head in panels on the Hugos because someone

almost always asks why there are not separate prizes for SF and fantasy. The panel then responds by asking the questioner which category Anne McCaffrey's *Pern* books fit into.

Just in case you are confused (and don't worry, several people at the Wiscon panel were too), the answer is that the second most famous "fantasy" series ever (I'm giving pride of place to *Lord of the Rings*) is unequivocally science fiction. Yes it has dragons. Yes, the society is pseudo-mediaeval. But McCaffrey has provided a detailed explanation as to how human settlers got to *Pern*, how they genetically engineered the native fire lizards to create dragons, and why their level of technology fell so drastically. There is nothing magical or fantastical about it.

Of course having just defined *Pern* as an SF series I have by default assumed that there is a distinction between the two genres. The trouble is that not all books are as easily categorised as *Pern*. Take the Raphael Carter book reviewed elsewhere in this issue, for example. The story is quite clearly SF, but the use of mythological themes in the book might easily qualify it for a Mythopoeic award.

The truth is that there is a lot of overlap. In the vast universe of fiction there is a subset of stories that are clearly not set in the real world. The panel at Wiscon tended to call all such books "fantasy". Many bookstores lump them all under the title "science fiction". I refer to use the term "speculative fiction" (i.e. books set in a "what if" world) because otherwise you have trouble when you get to genuine SF and fantasy books. Within that subset are books which can be described as SF, as alternate history, and as fantasy, and many which overlap between those categories. Mary Gentle's *Ash* is apparently in all three.

One of the most interesting comments by the panel came from author Eleanor Arnason. She provided a political distinction between the two genres.

Science fiction, she said, is forward looking and considers what life will be like in the future. Fantasy, on the other hand, is backward looking, and considers how life was, or more generally might have been, in the past. You may not be surprised to learn that Arnason is a Marxist, but it is still a useful distinction.

My preferred discriminator is based on the logic of the story. Science fiction books have to proceed according to scientific logic. The themes of the book may not be provably correct, but they have to be couched in terms that a scientist would consider logical. Fantasy, on the other hand, proceeds by mythic logic. Events in the book might be unexpected, even miraculous, by scientific standards, but they are the right outcome from a mythic point of view. They are true to the spirit of the story.

You can go on like this for ages, which is one of the reasons this topic makes such a good panel. But I have the rest of the convention to talk about. Onwards.

Other panels

There was a fascinating panel on Suzy McKee Charnas' Holdfast series. I've already done one massive piece on Holdfast and I can't really do any more without adding yet more spoilers. I'll just say that the Holdfast Chronicles forms one of the best, and most important, SF series ever written. Suzy is a genius, and a wonderful person. Nuff said.

The other panel I did was on publicising your web site. It was pretty poorly attended having been rescheduled and finding its final slot at 10:00 am on Saturday when 90% of the convention was either asleep or at the farmers' market. The panel, however, had a great time batting ideas back and fore amongst themselves and I learned a lot. The panel was also my only serious encounter with GoH Charles De Lint who turned out to be a really nice guy. I was impressed to

note that De Lint refuses to sell his books from his web site because he doesn't want to undercut specialist bookshops.

One of the star events of the weekend was the 20/20 panel, at which the panellists were invited to list their 20 most essential books of the last 20 years. We had enormous fun with this, as did the attendees at this year's Potlatch where the idea was first tried. Many thanks to Jerry Kaufman for the idea, which I will probably use if I ever design a convention program myself. There's far too much to talk about here. Also the results of the Wiscon panel are not yet on the web. I'll probably do an extended piece on this, including my own list, next issue.

Memory miscellany

What else? First of all profuse thanks to Kerry Ellis for allowing me to help her out in the Green Room and for the fabulous thank you present.

David Hartwell was one of the other people on the utopias panel. We had lunch together later in the weekend and I was pleased to discover that David does regard World Fantasy Con as an event for both pros and fans. Obviously the policy has been a little distorted in the application, but it is good to know that the big boss has his heart in the right place.

No Wiscon report would be complete without an Ellen Klages story. This time she contrived a really fun entry in the art show. It was a photograph, showing what appeared to be a Callisto doll next to a prancing horse wearing a bow tie. The picture was entitled "Holdfast Barbie Prom Night". I laughed so much that I bid for it in the auction, but sadly could not afford the final price.

Talking of strange stories, this year I am pleased to say that there were no wedding party problems. There was a wedding: the hotel is not likely to give up

the money for hosting one, but this year's crowd was considerably more sober and restrained than the last lot. One day I guess we should have a convention wedding so that we don't have to worry about this. I guess it would need to be a lesbian affair. Any volunteers?

No wedding party stories, but I did have one or two interesting encounters with Governor's Club guests. The top three floors of the hotel are rather swish and each year a few unwary mundanes book in there over Wiscon weekend. They tend to end up horrified.

The first day I was there I popped down to the pool as nothing much was happening. A family of mundanes was in there as well, and were complaining bitterly about the fact that the express elevator for the Governor's Club did not stop at the third floor where the pool was. This meant that they had to use the "White Trash elevators" (*sic*). Well, that was me put in my place, huh?

The following morning I got into the elevator on the 10th floor, just below the Governor's Club. A young couple were on their way down, and had realised with horror that they were not in the express elevator. They got out on my floor so that they could go back up and then come back down the fast way and not have to mix with the likes of me.

The funny thing is that the Governor's Club is very affordable. The standard convention room rate is \$85/day (and the rooms sleep up to four). The rate for Governor's Club rooms is only \$109/day, and you get free breakfast, free nibbles through the day, and free drinks in the evening. Quite a few Wiscon regulars book there every year. Cynthia Gonsalves and I have booked a room there for next year. Must find some suitably outrageous outfits to wear.

And on the subject of clothing there were a few entertaining t-shirt slogans around. Having a chemistry degree myself I

rather liked, "Chemists do it on the table... periodically". However, the star t-shirt of the weekend belonged to Freddie Baer's friend, Mikki, which read, "Peter Kropotkin, the Anarchist formerly known as Prince".

Wiscon takes place every year in Madison, Wisconsin, on the last weekend in May (Memorial Day weekend). Anyone interesting in joining us at Wiscon next year can find the details at the con's web site (<http://sf3.org/wiscon>). Next year's Guests of Honour will be Nancy Kress and Elisabeth Vonarburg.

BayCon Comes of Age

By Kevin Standlee

The San Francisco Bay Area's major general-interest SF convention is BayCon, held over the Thursday-Monday of the last weekend of May. It was the first time since I started attending conventions in 1984 that BayCon was larger than the previous year's Worldcon, which was an odd sensation to me. BayCon 2000 ("We're 18 years old; now we can vote!") had over 1,800 registered members. Unfortunately, a fairly substantial number of "ghosts" also attended. ("Ghosts" are people who contrive to attend a convention without buying a membership. In general these are people with only a peripheral connection to fandom.)

Programming and stuff

I wish I could report on the program, but I only went to those panels on which I was scheduled, spending most of the rest of my time volunteering to sit behind the

ConJosé table, since most of the ConJosé committee were working on BayCon.

I did host the *Science Fiction Match Game* (based on the 70s-80s game show hosted by Gene Rayburn), which was a lot of fun. Thanks to local fan and real-life game show winner Tom Galloway (his team split \$100,000 on Fox's GREED) we even had prizes for the contestants: Rice-A-Roni for the winners, and Jell-O for the losers. I also should give thanks to Eric Larson for doing the Johnny Olson announcer role, and to all of the panelists who took a couple hours to sit up on the panel and have people make fun of their answers.

[British and Australian readers will know *The Match Game* as *Blankety Blank*. The thought of Kevin doing Terry Wogan impressions does not bear thinking about. I'm glad I wasn't there - Cheryl]

There was a good at-con newsletter, published twice a day, but I will remember most the hoax "issue 27". It was dated the following Thursday and announced that the Doubletree Hotel and surrounding parking were incorporating as an independent BayCon City as the convention was going to continue indefinitely. All of the issues, including the hoaxzine, are available on-line at <http://www.baycon.org/2000/newsletter.html>.

The Meet the Guests gathering, introduced by deputy Chair Brenda Daverin and MC'd by Toastmaster Kent Brewster, had a great Guest of Honor speech from Fan GoH David Clark. There was also an entertaining talk by Author GoH Esther Friesner in which chocolate was mentioned many times. Artist GoH Baron Engel didn't have much to say, but let his art speak for him eloquently.

Remembering flight

Just before my stint as a game show host, the same area at the hotel was used for

the charity auction. This year, BayCon raised money for the Friends of the California Air & Space Museum. The group has the goal of setting up what amounts to a West Coast Branch of the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum at Moffett Field in Mountain View, California. Regular readers will remember Cheryl mentioning Moffett Field as the place where we could hangar Minneapolis in '73's airship, in the massive Hanger One. According to the plan, that massive building would contain the CA&SM centrepiece: one of the three surviving Saturn V rockets, assembled upright in one of the few buildings in the world large enough to hold it. BayCon auctioned off many things, including large chunks of former Red Lion Hotel fixtures removed during the hotel's post-takeover renovations. If one always wanted the mirrored sign announcing "Donner Pass Room," this was the place for it.

BayCon raised \$4,478 for the FoCA&SM, which is a pretty good sum. If you'd like more information about the CA&SM, see their web site at <http://casc.arc.nasa.gov>.

Dangerous Fittings

Speaking of the contributions that the hotel provided for the charity auction, I should mention how different the hotel was this time. After 17 years of history at the Red Lion San Jose fans were very comfortable with it. We worried that removing all traces of "Red Lion-ness" from the hotel would also ruin it for our conventions.

My verdict: They mostly should not have bothered. The renovation halved the size of the hotel's "Quiet Bar," which – unlike most American SF conventions – formed an important social centre for the con. Replacing large carpeted areas with lots of echoing marble may look nice, and makes it easier to roll carts around, but otherwise doesn't improve the place.

But the worst mistake they made was with the chandelier on the upper level of the function rooms. The clearance between the bottom of the fixture and the ground is only about two meters (about 6 ½ feet, for the metrically challenged). It would reach out and grab any tall person or high hat or large costume that walked nearby it. BayCon operations staff came up with a way of securing the area that I applaud. They put up velvet ropes around the area under the fixture, surrounding an outline of a dead body in tape on the floor, showing the unfortunate decapitation of the victim. Everyone gave the carnivorous chandelier a wide berth thereafter.

Night life

BayCon had a lot of parties, of differing themes, spread fairly evenly throughout the second and third floors in such a way that (thankfully, by my lights) reduced the amount of hallway clog that has made getting around the party floors such a challenge in the past. Not being overly fond of loud music myself, I limited my touring to mostly the bid parties and convention promotional parties, including Loscon, I-5 in '05, Arizona 2002 Westercon, and ConJosé, plus the Furry Party across the hall from ConJosé.

I couldn't get to the Friday night parties, where other bids were partying, because I was involved in the charity Casino night, first as a player, and then as a blackjack dealer after I lost all of my money. (I ran it up pretty high, then crashed and burned). From the way I took the players' money after I started dealing, they should have had me back there all night long.

ConJosé news

I attended the ConJosé open meeting ("Birds of a Feather" gathering), where ConJosé's chair Tom Whitmore made a couple of major personnel

announcements. The Extravaganzas Division will be led by John Blaker (a.k.a. "Father John"), and Fixed Functions will be led by Michael Siladi. Congratulations and condolences as appropriate to both of them.

Just before BayCon, ConJosé announced an extension of its initial membership rates. The rates announced right after Aussiecon Three initially were good only through the end of May. ConJosé has decided to extend those rates through July 15, in order to give people at Westercon a chance at the early cheapest rates. If you haven't yet bought your 2002 Worldcon membership, there is still time to get in at the lowest possible rate. See <http://www.conjose.org/Memberships/> for the full story. Realizing that it's never going to get any cheaper, over 200 people bought memberships at BayCon.

Learning to fly

Whilst most of the convention went smoothly as usual, the event that will remain in fannish memory for this year was the unfortunate accident that happened early on Sunday morning. A young man fell from a room balcony on the seventh floor, landing on the second floor patio area. He was rushed to hospital but later died of his injuries.

Understandably the police were called. No charges have been brought, so it seems like the victim was probably to blame for his demise. But whatever the cause, this is not the sort of thing that a convention committee wants to happen during its event.

According to BayCon's Information Division Head, Michael Siladi, the victim was part of a group registered under BayCon's room rate, but not registered as members. In other words, he was a "ghost" who had not only managed to gate crash the convention but had got a cheap room rate as well. Unfortunately when the event gets reported this sort of

detail tends to be forgotten. As with the well-known episode of the Disclave sprinkler head, a convention has once again been given bad publicity thanks to the actions of hangers-on who are not part of fandom.

I asked Michael how this incident might affect relations between BayCon and the Doubletree Hotel, where BayCon has been since it started (including the Doubletree's days as a Red Lion Hotel). Michael says that the hotel seems eager to have them back. At the time I asked, the only thing keeping them from signing the contract for next year was that the hotel sales rep was out sick with chicken pox! While this was a very unfortunate incident, BayCon seems to have survived it.

How to win friends

I can think of at least one person attending BayCon whose precipitate downward departure from a seventh-floor balcony would not have troubled me much, and I think my fellow conrunners sitting behind the Loscon/LA in 2002 Westercon Bid table might have agreed.

Unlike BayCon, which is a very predictable event, or for that matter most annual SF conventions in the USA, Worldcons generally do not give complimentary memberships to program participants. Most people probably neither know nor care that every year's Worldcon is a huge one-shot convention, with no direct financial connection to its predecessor or successor. The uncertain finances of such a convention mean that you have to wait until after the con to see if money is available for refunds. Normally it is, but the solvency of the con has to come first.

The person in question had demanded a free membership of ConJosé, the 2002 San José Worldcon. Having been told he could not have one, he apparently spent a

good deal of time badmouthing ConJosé, announcing to the world that it would have no programming, because there would only be five guests, the invited Guests of Honour. Obviously, he claimed, nobody would ever do a panel at a convention unless s/he was given a free membership, especially if s/he was a Significant Important Professional such as his good self.

(Incidentally, nobody seems to know exactly what it is he does other than appear in a lot of costumes at conventions and make a nuisance of himself demanding he be treated as an Important Person. I think he's on the BayCon "Do Not Invite" list, but managed to sneak in as someone's guest-of-guest member.)

Unbelievably, having already worn out his welcome with Northern California fandom, he went over and started baiting the Loscon/LA2002 people. I think someone should have told him that deliberately antagonizing senior conrunners is not a good way to get invited to be a program participant.

This troublemaker was part of a group that otherwise would have been a great addition to the convention. You will recall that a few months back, Cheryl, in her review of *Galaxy Quest*, said that she expected people in costumes from the series this summer. Well, they were here at BayCon. A full-blown *Galaxy Quest* club group with a fan info table, costumes, models of the ship, etc. It would have been much nicer without this one person, who made himself so obnoxious that I saw him badgering his own friends, at one point making one woman behind their table break down and cry. Regrettably, Fandom is still full of people with limited social skills – indeed, to a certain extent, it attracts them. All of us are misfits of one sort or another, I guess. But it's sad to see such people inflicting themselves on so many others around them, just for the fun of it.

The wrap

I rated BayCon as "worth advance purchase price" in my review at BASFA, but I may be getting jaded, because a BASFA member who had never been to one before this year said he paid the full \$70 at-the-door membership and said it was worth it.

I enjoyed myself, and will try to go back next year. For information about BayCon 2002, see <http://www.baycon.org/2001/>.

Oz that Was

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Dorothy. She lived in the big city of St. Louis with her mother and father and baby brother. But the big city was a dangerous place in those days. Dorothy's mother and brother died of diphtheria, and her father ran off in fear, so she had to go and live with her family in the country.

Uncle Henry and Auntie Em were as dry and poor as the Kansas dirt that they farmed. They had no room in their budgets, and little room in their hearts, for a little girl from St. Louis and her pet dog. For Dorothy and Toto, life was thoroughly miserable.

"On the wall, there was an old sampler, slightly charred in one corner.

"There's no place like home', it said.

And there wasn't, not anywhere."

My thanks to Tom Arden for this one. His column on fantasy literature in *At the World's End* is a constant source of good material, and it doesn't come much better than this. *Was*, by Geoff Ryman, is a fantasy about a fantasy.

Well, more than one fantasy actually. It is about a story called *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. It is about the film of that book and the legends that surround it. But the book itself is about fantasy, about a child's view of a magical place that is nothing like dreary old Kansas. And, as Geoff Ryman shows, the book is also about a fantasy known as the Great American Dream. The dream that said that if you worked hard, even in Kansas you could reach a land of milk and honey.

*Now those memories come back to haunt me,
They haunt me like a curse.
Is a dream a lie if it don't come true
Or is it something worse...*

Bruce Springsteen, *The River*

Frances Crumm's home life was not much better than Dorothy's. Her parents split when she was young, though no one would tell her why. Her mother was determined to make the girls into stars, and Frances, it seemed, unlike her sisters, had what it takes. She seemed a natural on the movie set, oozing charm, understanding the process, and getting on well with most of the adult actors. For some reason that no one could fathom the little girl seemed particularly drawn to gay men. She could learn her lines too, and delivered them well. All except the ending of *The Wizard of Oz*, where for some reason something she was required to say caused her to burst into hysterical tears.

"She dreamed it was wartime. There was a war between children and adults. Adults were hunting children across the landscape, on wagons and horseback. The children had to hide under the leaves. If the adults caught you, they made you a slave like in ancient Egypt. But if it was your parents who caught you, then they killed you."

By far the most powerful message in the book is the one that Baum himself championed. When they were first published, the Oz books were almost universally despised by American society. They were thought, to put it mildly, unsuitable for children, because they encouraged them to dream.

But of course the adults of the time were no less guilty of fantasy than their offspring. Indeed, they indulged in it rather more. Awful things happened in small town America. But no one ever spoke of them, because it was not polite to do so. That sort of thing did not happen in a proper, God-fearing town. So no one saw the bad things happening around them, because that would mean that they themselves might not be good, God-fearing folk.

"Bill took all of this home to Carol, and Carol was disturbed. What she loved in Bill was his normality. She had been trained to confuse that with virtue."

When he was very small Jonathan's favourite colour was red. He would paint it everywhere: jam, lipstick, any source he could get his hands on. His parents were relieved when he appeared to grow out of his obsession. What he had actually done was grow into colour blindness. This was Jonathan's first experience of growing up.

Now Jonathan is fully an adult, and coming to terms with adult problems. To be precise, he is dying. But his counsellor, Bill, had once met this crazy old lady in Kansas whose name was Dorothy and who claimed to have had a dog called Toto. Jonathan had always loved that film. The real Dorothy, if what was who she had been, was long dead, but if she had really existed, perhaps Oz did too. Jonathan was determined to find out before he died.

"Jonathan sat in the back, where he always did. He tried to pretend the bus was full of Munchkins, all of them talking in speeded-up voices. The bus was full of Angelinos instead. Angelinos have never met each other and cannot trust each other. They suspect each other of carrying murder weapons, possibly with some reason. Angelinos sit alone, in silence, no one next to them."

Was is not a comfortable book. Indeed, the *Daily Mail*, in a rare moment of perspicacity, commented, "The book and the characters will haunt you". And so they should. We have all been children. Most of us have seen Oz. And we all long for the day when once again we are not in Kansas any more.

Was - Jeff Ryman - Flamingo - softcover

Pieces of History

It is a lost art, mosaic making. Few craftsmen these days can make a picture from a myriad coloured stones, let alone master the higher art of doing so in glass on a roof, playing with light as well as with colour. We might have been on the verge of re-discovering it with early computers when pictures could only be made from letter-sized blocks, but technology quickly outflanked that effort, making the picture elements too small for the artist to need to concern herself with. So mosaic making remains one of those things that the ancients did far better than we can manage.

However, making a picture from a number of disparate elements is not confined to mosaics. Words can be used to make characters, events and locations. And these can be combined to make a story. The art of the writer is not that far removed from that of the mosaicist. Guy

Gavriel Kay recognises this, and with mild conceit has constructed the prologue to his *Sarantine Mosaic* series as a patchwork of people and places designed to set the scene for what follows. As a result, the story takes a while to get going. But once it does the reader is blessed with one of the finest fantasies I have read in a long time.

Like the mosaicist, Kay takes particular care with the elements that make up his picture, in particular those known as characters. Almost anyone of any significance in the story is picked up, examined from all angles, scrutinised for flaws, and placed lovingly into the narrative at exactly the right place to add to the overall vision. Again it makes for slow going at the start, but you come away from the books feeling that you know a whole lot of new people really well.

Ostensibly the book is a thinly disguised, if somewhat distorted, history. Crispin, a Rhodian (Roman) mosaicist, is summoned to the court of Valerius and Alixana (Justinian and Theodora) in Sarantium (Byzantium). There he is to work on the roof of a new temple that the Emperor is having constructed (St. Sophia). Once arrived he plays a small but significant part in the history of that great city.

In truth, however, Crispin is a literary device, a lowly but conveniently placed observer who allows Kay to tell a much greater tale. On the historical stage, the books are the story of three women: one a dancer who has become an empress; one an aristocrat who dreams of being an empress; and one a barbarian queen who has lost her throne. It is a tale of a great romance, a vaunting ambition, and a burning hatred. It is precisely the sort of grand design of which good fantasy is made.

The overt fantasy element, however, is quite small. It is used in part to provide Crispin with a sense of the divine that

will inspire his work, and mould his character. In addition it provides a convenient plot device when the hero needs to know things that are hidden from him. Anyone hoping for elves and dragons will be sorely disappointed. But the rest of the book more than makes up for this.

To my mind the best element of the books is the subtlety of the politics. Most writers of fantasy have only the faintest grasp of how a royal court works. Kay, however, is second only to Dorothy Dunnett in portraying the clever games played by courtiers. He is by no means as cunning or cruel as Dunnett, but he has made his politics believably subtle and devious without making social nuance the be all and end all of the book.

Then there is the history. Sarantium is a very thinly disguised version of Byzantium, and Kay has clearly taken a lot of trouble researching it. Somewhere along the way he became fascinated with chariot racing (or maybe he just watched Ben Hur once too often as a kid). The parallels between Sarantium's obsession with the goings on in Hippodrome and modern sporting events are startling.

The history is also where the fantasy element comes to the fore. In my review of *Wiscon* I commented that fantasies work on mythic logic that demands that story outcomes should be True and Right. What Kay has done with this series is take the basic story of Justinian and Theodora and adjust the outcome to make a better story.

The real history is somewhat less romantic, though as Kay notes the historian Procopius (Pertennius in the books) is so unpleasant about Theodora that his testimony must be suspect.

Anyone interested in an alternative angle on the story should check out *Count Belisarius* by the very wonderful Robert Graves. Belisarius is Leontes in Kay's

novels and is one of the few Byzantine leaders to come out of history with a reasonably glowing reputation. Though anyone who has read Graves' excellent Claudius novels, or seen the Derek Jacobi TV series, will know that, unlike Kay, he makes no allowances to sensibility when describing the cruelties and debaucheries of ancient courts.

The story comes as two volumes, *Sailing to Sarantium* and *Lord of Emperors*, but like a Tad Williams novel the parts should be viewed as a single work. Indeed, the first book simply stops. There is no grand finale, and the story picks up where it has left off in the second volume. You need to read both back to back.

Historical purists will, I suspect, be annoyed at how Kay has simplified and romanticised the story. I have no sympathy with them. He made it quite clear when he changed all the names that he wasn't just re-telling history.

Others may complain that Kay has whitewashed many of the participants, especially Theodora. Some of that charge is fair. But, as I have pointed out before, Theodora has been pretty badly treated by Procopius. She isn't the only strong woman from history to have been sniped at by jealous men, and she won't be the last. Besides, she must have had tremendous strength of character and determination to get where she did. If she was vicious as well, hey, that's politics.

But I think viewing Kay's work in the context of actual history is a mistake. He has made it quite clear that he is not just re-telling what happened. He has told it as it might have been, perhaps as it should have been. It is fantasy, and he has done it very well indeed.

Sailing to Sarantium - Guy Gavriel Kay - Earthlight - softcover

Lord of Emperors - Guy Gavriel Kay - Earthlight - hardcover

Faerie Queen

When I first noticed a new Arthurian series on the bookshelves I resolved that this time I would try to resist my addiction. After all, it was centred on Guinevere to it was probably just another romance series like the dreadful Persia Wooley stuff. Then I realised who the author was: Rosalind Miles, a well-known feminist writer and broadcaster and, most importantly, author of the famous *A Women's History of the World*. This, I thought, could be rather good. It might even take on Bernard Cornwell at his own game. Addicts are always making excuses for having just one more hit.

In the event I was sorely disappointed. The books are at best misguided, at worst deliberately dumbed down. I would have been even more scathing, but I had the opportunity of going to hear Ms. Miles speak about the books at the Brighton Festival and ask her a couple of pointed questions. At least now I know what she was trying to do.

One of the first things I discovered is that Miles is not an academic historian; she is a populist historian. This allows her, von Daniken-like, to make all sorts of unsupported assertions and present them as incontrovertible fact. She began the talk with a short reading from *A Women's History of the World*, and unfortunately it was about Sumerian religion, which just happens to be one of my little hobbies.

Now I'm quite happy to tell anyone that worship of goddesses was far more important in ancient societies than it is now. Heck, Ishtar (or Innana as the Sumerians called her) is one of my favourite deities. But that is not to say that the Sumerians had a purely matriarchal religion. Indeed, their creation epic can be interpreted as a

triumph of the Warrior God over the Great Mother. And has for her assertion that worship of male gods was introduced to Britain from the east through Judaism, Christianity and Islam, oh please! Has she never heard of Lugh or Odin?

Nevertheless, Miles's stated purpose is honourable. She has correctly identified that Celtic society held women in greatly more respect than later cultures. She also spotted the fact that Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot can be interpreted as the sacred queen replacing the old king (Arthur) with a younger, more virile man to maintain the fertility of the land. She has clearly read *The Golden Bough* and quite probably taken it rather too seriously. A story that makes this the focal point of the Arthurian legend, and that uses the legend to illustrate the rise of patriarchy, is worth telling.

But there is a problem here. These days everyone pretty much accepts that Arthur was a Romano-British warlord who fought against Saxon invaders in the 6th Century. It is perhaps possible that Guinevere's Celtic kingdom, still practising matrilinear descent, could exist in the remoter parts of Scotland at that time. It is quite inconceivable that it could exist in Somerset, only a few miles from the great city of Aquae Sulis, 500 years after the Roman conquest.

Marion Bradley knew this. She felt that it as much more likely that Celtic culture would have survived in religion than in politics. That is why she made Morgan her heroine and her Guinevere was a simpering Christian twit. If Miles wanted to write about a Celtic queen fighting against patriarchy she should have chosen Cartimandua. But, as she pointed out, a book about Guinevere would sell much better. Populism again.

Of course Miles could have thrown the history out altogether and written a purely Celtic Arthur. But I suspect she

thought that might have confused her readers. Despite the fact that she uses a 6th Century setting, her language is defiantly Mallorian. She speaks of knights rather than champions, of castles rather than hill forts. And she has tournaments and mediaeval clothing. Guinevere is as obsessed with the concept of sin as any good Catholic girl. When I asked her about this, she said that she didn't think that the majority of readers wanted accurate history, they wanted the familiar vision of Arthur and his knights. As far as reaching a mass market is concerned she is almost certainly right. It also irritates the hell out of those of us who recognise what a screaming anachronism she has created.

There are other, more subtle problems with the background as well. As Guinevere is the heroine, Morgan has to be the villain. And because of the Mallorian feel she has to be a witch in the classical Christian sense. Miles seems blissfully unaware (or more probably doesn't care) that the "witchcraft" that the Christians condemned is the very same Celtic religion that her Guinevere is supposed to be championing. Once again, it grates.

The assumptions that Miles makes about the ignorance of her readers also cross over into her use of the legends. She believes that her audience will be familiar with the basic story, but not much else. As a result she fills the book with prophecies and forebodings about events that anyone who knows the Arthurian cycle well will already have seen coming a mile off.

But by far the worst aspect of the book is the character of Guinevere herself. Although her mother is supposed to have been a glorious Celtic queen, leading her armies into battle in her chariot, said mother dies young and has completely failed to prepare her only child to inherit the throne. I take the point that flinging a war chariot against a well-disciplined

Roman legion is not a smart idea, and Guinevere should not have been encouraged to do so. But to leave her completely devoid of the political and administrative skills that she would need to run a kingdom is criminally negligent.

In answer to a more general question about feminism at the Brighton presentation Miles did say that she felt that women were often their own worst enemies, acting to perpetuate patriarchy by failing to encourage their daughters to take charge of their lives. When I questioned her specifically about Guinevere's mother she admitted that she was attempting to illustrate this point. She also said that she wanted her heroine to start out vulnerable and grow into her role.

Those are reasonable arguments, but the fact is that her Guinevere does not grow up, at least not in the first book of the series which is the only one I have read. She starts off with the worldly wisdom of a new-born lamb and all of the self-confidence of a rabbit caught in a car's headlights. From there she goes on to spend the majority of the book either consumed with fear, mooning pathetically over some man, or throwing a temper tantrum. The overall message seems to be that it is OK for a woman to behave like a spoiled, selfish brat and that even if she does so it is her right to expect men to fawn over her and dance upon her every whim. I sincerely hope that is not the message that Miles was intending to impart.

There are, of course, two more books in the series. Miles says that she has just been contracted to write a second trilogy, and for entirely appropriate symbolic reasons she is hoping to write a third. I suspect that I shall not be reading any of them. If I want to read stories about strong, admirable women Guy Gavriel Kay seems to do a much better job. Besides, I prefer to support authors who

treat their readership with a little more respect.

Queen of the Summer Country - Rosalind Miles - Pocket - softcover

Machine Minds

During the Ken MacLeod panel at Wiscon Tom Becker commented that another author with an interesting take on the inhumanity of uploaded minds was Raphael Carter. Roz Kaveney kindly found me the book in the dealers' room and I read it on the flight back to California. Boy oh boy have I let you guys down here. This one is a cracker, and it has been about since 1996. I hang my head in shame.

Maya Tatyanchna Andreyeva is a Camera. That is, her brain has been wired with the necessary equipment for everything that she sees, smells and touches to be monitored, recorded and transmitted. It is called Telepresence, and as a sensory experience it is as far above television as that ancient technology is above the even more antiquated newspaper. The world is no longer watching, it is there, because Maya is there for it.

But Maya of course is not just a conduit for experience; she is a journalist. What the public experiences is not random, it is what she has prepared for them. The sights, smells and sensations are, to a large extent, as she chooses them. The view of the lake is obvious; the clammy feeling around the ankles is because Maya has walked into the ooze around its edge. And the sense of nausea that the audience feels on being told that the mud they are standing in is made from the ashes of thousands of human bodies is enhanced by Maya's own emotions, held

carefully in check by her screener back in the studio until she choose to announce the fact. Maya Adreyeva is a journalist, and she is investigating The Holocaust.

No, dear reader, not that Holocaust. Never underestimate the ability of mankind to surpass itself in cruelty. It all began with the Guardians. They came out of America with tanks, guns and Bibles. Their mission was to bring peace to the world. And so they did, because anyone who disagreed with them was either shot outright or placed in re-education camps. They were very effective, and quite ruthless. To wrest the world from their grip would take an effort of extreme bravery, or mindless stupidity. Naturally those with the power to do something chose the latter.

The Unanimous Army was caused by a virus of sorts. It got into people's minds and encouraged them to slot a certain type of chip that enhanced its own effects. It also encouraged them to help convert others. And that was all the free will it left them. The Army grew rapidly, exponentially. Like a locust swarm it moved across the planet: implacable, hungry, and mindless. It marched.

No, to tell you any more would count as a spoiler. Suffice it to say that the world has recovered from the Army's deprivations, and that the domination of the Guardians has been broken. But there is a mystery here. Where did the Army virus come from? Who wrote it? Who designed its campaign? Maya wants to know, and hopes that when she finds the answer it will be sufficiently interesting for the notoriously fickle public to tune in to her broadcasts rather than those on another channel. What she finds is something else entirely. All unwitting, Maya has contrived for herself an interview with the last survivor of a terrible genocide.

So much for the plot. And if that were all there was to it, the book would be a very fine one indeed. But you can't just write about subjects like that as if you were producing some Jeffrey Archer thriller. There are philosophical questions to be answered, specifically about the nature of evil. These are questions that can sometimes only be answered in myth. And you can't just broadcast stuff like that through your own mind without being affected by it. There is, after all, this little problem called feedback.

And there is more, so much more. For Maya herself has secrets. She wears a suppressor chip that shuts off part of her mind. It is a punishment for a terrible crime that she committed years ago. Those who watch the world of information, who guard against a re-occurrence of The Unanimous Army, or something like it, dare not let human thought get out of control. The Weavers, as they are known, are largely uploaded minds, working at frantic speed in cyberspace. They have to be so to do their job properly. The only trouble is that in making themselves into ideal thought police they may have ceased to be human themselves. Indeed, they may no longer even understand what it is like to be human.

Had I known about this book when it was published I would probably have been clamouring for it to be nominated for a Hugo and the Mythopoeic Award. As it was, Carter got Campbell nominations in 1997 and 1998 which is good to know. Since then, all Carter has produced is a short story which won a Tiptree. Genius, I guess, is not on tap. But there is a very good book out there, and you should all go read it.

The Fortunate Fall - Raphael Carter - Tor - hardcover

Back in the Kitchen

The new novel from Michaela Roessner continues the story of Caterina de Medici and her cook, Tommaso. Like its predecessor, *The Stars Dispose* (see *Emerald City* #35), it provides a healthy assortment (I'm resisting the temptation to say diet) of history, mediaeval cookery, cats, and pagan magic. Also like its predecessor, I found it entertaining but somewhat empty.

The Stars Compel tells the story of Caterina's life under the sway of her wicked uncle, Pope Clement. His Holiness has installed his even nastier bastard son, Alessandro, as Duke of Florence, a position to which Caterina holds a better claim, and is seeking to marry His niece off to best advantage. Caterina is attempting to contrive her way out of His clutches and find some way to rescue Florence from Alessando's oppressive yoke. Meanwhile Tommaso is continuing both his education as a cook, now in Caterina's personal service, and his relationship with the famous artist, Michelangelo Buonarotti.

Oh, you can tell when a book fails to inspire me, can't you. I resort to blandly summarising the plot. But it could be worse. I could be talking about the recipes. The oysters in cumin sauce sounds quite appetising, and Kevin liked the sound of the rice and fruit pudding. When I had the time to attend SCA-type events, my place was firmly in the kitchen, and I make no secret of the fact that I read Roessner's books at least in part for the food.

But if you are not interested in that sort of thing you'll want something more, and to be honest there isn't a lot. The new book has all the trappings of the mid-section of a trilogy. It lacks the drama of the first volume, and tails off disappointingly into trailers for the sequel. Given that Caterina is still a teenager, I suspect that somewhat

more than three books are planned. My guess is that the number of volumes will depend at least in part on Caterina's travels. The first book focussed on Florentine recipes. This one is set in Rome, and the next will be somewhere else that I can't mention without giving away the ending. I've resisted the temptation to read a biography of Caterina to find out.

Which I think brings us to the nub of the problem. Real history can often be rather boring. Whilst reading *The Stars Compel* I found myself comparing it to Guy Gavriel Kay's Sarantium books and realising how much freer Kay's decision to create a fantasy Byzantium left him. I'm sure that Roessner has played about with events a little bit, and that she has probably made some major value judgements about some of the characters, but in the end her plot is constrained by Caterina's actual life. Kay, in contrast, was free to have the story of Justinian and Theodora turn out the way he wanted it, and he had a better plot as a result.

Still, there are the food, the cats, and the paganism, all ingredients which should have me liking a book. Also I'm very impressed with the way that Roessner makes few concessions to modern sensibilities. The relative danger of life in mediaeval Italy is not glossed over, and the fact that fourteen-year-old Tommaso is carrying on a homosexual relationship with Michelangelo is treated in a completely matter of fact way, as it would have been by most people at the time. Also, reflecting again on both Kay and Miles, Roessner makes it quite clear that women could and did play important and powerful roles in mediaeval society. All of this is to be applauded. I just wish that the books grabbed my attention a bit more.

The Stars Compel - Michaela Roessner - Tor - hardcover

Encouraging Reading

In her latest column in *At The World's End* (<http://www.markchadbourn.com/worldsend.cfm>) Justina Robson bemoans the fact that whilst Prince Charles' superstitious attacks on science are given massive media space, the presentation of the Arthur C. Clark Awards was completely ignored. Even ignoring the relative media profiles of royalty and SF, this is not entirely surprising. We Brits, as I have said before, are the nation that invented Luddism, and we have an appalling tendency to whinge mightily whenever anything changes. America, despite the rise of fundamentalist Christianity, is still nowhere near as backward-looking. But it is moving in that direction. Thankfully, some people are prepared to do something about it.

Back in 1996 three SF authors, David Brin, Gregory Benford and Greg Bear, wrote an open letter to the SF community encouraging the use of speculative fiction in schools, both as an aid to improving literacy and as a means of giving kids an interest in science. That letter has given rise to Reading For the Future; a non-profit organisation dedicated to the aims that the letter set out.

As you might imagine, encouraging anyone to read SF and fantasy literature is a concept close to my heart. However, as I have very little contact with kids or schools (other than people reading my web site) there's not a lot of practical help I can give. What I can do is give the idea a bit of publicity. The best web site for information about RFF activities is run by their Utah branch and can be found at <http://www.jps.net/helgem/rffutah>. If you are involved in schools at all, please give it a look. It may give you some useful ideas.

Ring in the New

Last September (*Emerald City* #49) I wrote a small piece on the last ever baseball games at Candlestick Park. San Francisco's brand new ballpark is now finished, and Kevin and I have had the opportunity to check it out. Now I don't have that much experience of baseball parks, other than seeing a bunch of them on TV, but I have to say that Pacific Bell Park is beautiful.

The great thing about a baseball park, as opposed to most other sports venues, is that it does not have to be all-encompassing. Nearly all the action takes place at one end of the field because, unlike in cricket, the area behind the batsman is not in play (major simplification here).

This has two major benefits. First the crowd can get really close to the play. In Pac Bell Park the front seats are only a few yards from the home, first and third bases. Second, there isn't a lot of point building masses of seats at the other end of the ground, because they will be too far away to see anything much. This allows you to plan for open views.

Pacific Bell Park is built at China Basin at the southern end of the San Francisco docks. Huge stands bristle around the northern and western ends of the ground, but the east and south are more open. The south side backs directly onto the water and the stands have been deliberately kept low here to allow Barry Bonds to hit home runs into the Bay. Beyond you have a fine view of Oakland and Emeryville on the far shore. To the east you have a view up the Embarcadero to where the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge stretches out over the Bay, across Treasure Island and beyond. At night, of course, it is all lit up. By day, with any luck, you get blue skies and blue waters and a plethora of

water craft. Even if you can't stand baseball, it is a great place to sit and watch the world go by.

By happy coincidence our first visit together (Kevin having already checked it out with another friend before I got here) the Giants put on a fabulous endgame. They were 2-1 down in the bottom of the ninth with two men out and Bonds at the plate. Barry and Jeff Kent brought home the two runs required for victory. A perfect end to a perfect evening.

Except for one thing. I was sat there looking at the Bay Bridge and I realised that there was a very easy way to tell the difference between it and the Golden Gate. The towers on the Bay Bridge use crossed bracers between the vertical struts whereas those on the Golden Gate use horizontal bracers. So I went back home and checked out that new cover that is being used for William Gibson's *All Tomorrow's Parties*. Oh dear, wrong bridge again.

Fan Scene

Alison Scott (she of *Plokta* fame) has started a fanzine review web log on her family web site, *Kittywompus* (<http://www.kittwompus.com>).

Basically what this means is that when she gets new 'zines she reviews them on the site, so it should in a very short time turn into an excellent fanzine review site.

Alison and I do not exactly see eye to eye on what a fanzine should be (she comments that she is delighted with *Gloss* because it "will make no sense to anyone who is not already thoroughly rooted in the culture"). But she does make an honest attempt to understand what individual editors are trying to do rather than judge everything by her own preferences. That's good reviewing.

The UK2005 Worldcon bid has finally made up its mind which site it is going to bid for. In the end it was a no-brainer. Brighton council has decided to privatise its convention centre. Several offers have been received from potential bidders, some of which involve a complete rebuild of the site. I met with the Brighton Visitor's Bureau on behalf of UK2005 and I would not have wanted to be in their convention organiser's shoes for anything. Basically she had to tell me that she'd be delighted to take our booking, but she could not guarantee that the convention centre would be there in 2005 when we wanted to use it.

So it is Glasgow again. Thankfully the SECC has been significantly upgraded since Intersection. In particular it now has The Armadillo, a purpose built convention centre (rather than exhibition hall) that has all the meeting space we are likely to need. No more panels in a converted aircraft hanger. More details can be obtained from the bid's web site at <http://www.uk2005.org.uk>.

If you were one of the people who filled in the psychology questionnaire on sense of community in fandom at Aussiecon Three you may be interested to see the results. They are now available on line at <http://www.arts.qut.edu.au/psyc/pgrad/obstP/index.htm>.

To be honest the results are not that unexpected. There is a sense of community in fandom. Golly. However, what did interest me was the data on how fans keep in touch. The results were as follows:

Local gatherings: 34%
The Internet: 26%
Large conventions: 18%
Personal contact: 14%
Magazines and snail mail: 8%.

So much for fanzines being the backbone of the hobby, huh?

Finally, profuse congratulations to UK fans, Caroline Mullan and Brian Ameringen on the birth of their daughter, Meriol. It is nice to see fandom propagating itself.

Footnote

In an attempt to attract people to the Ken MacLeod panel at Wiscon I produced a special issue of *Emerald City* which I cunningly left lying around public areas of the con. This issue contains the reviews of MacLeod's work that I have done for previous issues, but also two interviews with Ken that, whilst they have appeared elsewhere on the Web, you may not have seen. I've put this issue in the archive section of the Web site so if you are interested you can read it on line or download it.

Next issue, the e-book piece, really and truly, I hope. Also reviews of books by Carolyn Gilman, Jan Sigel, and Karen Joy Fowler, to name but a few.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl