

EMERALD CITY #72

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Introduction

With any luck a fair number of people reading this issue will be doing so for the first time because they have picked it up at The Millennium PhilCon, this year's Worldcon in Philadelphia. If you are one of those new people, welcome! I'm Cheryl, this is *Emerald City*, and mostly what you can find in it is book reviews. If you are looking for me, the best place to try is the WSFS Business Meeting as I'm on the podium staff so I have to be there. Otherwise, leave me a message on the Voodoo Board. I check it fairly regularly.

This being a Worldcon issue, I am up to my usual tricks and am focusing this issue on British-based writers. I say "British-based" because one of the featured authors is actually an American and another a Canadian, but both currently live in the UK. The general idea though, is to talk about writers whom American readers (not to mention those coming into Philadelphia from all corners of the globe) may not have heard of.

Of course I mustn't forget to say "hello California!" I'm here, at last. A genuine legal alien, and the visa is good until June 2004. I have sunshine, blue skies, not to mention an actual genuine job. As Kevin pointed out, for the first time in four years I can actually say of somewhere, "I live here".

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Live-ish from Philadelphia

This is an experiment. I'm playing with weblog technology. For those of you who don't know, a weblog is simply a series of online postings about a particular subject. You may have them called "blogs" or "bloggers" after the leading software supplier in the field. A weblog can be about anything: an ongoing rant about something, a journal of your pregnancy,

regular updates about happenings in your favourite soap opera, anything. One of the better uses for them is live reportage.

Which brings us to Worldcon in Philadelphia. Normally at Worldcons I take lots of notes, because I do a huge report on the convention in the next issue of *Emerald City*. This time I'm taking those notes online. There is a weblog on the *Emerald City* web site, and you can find it at: www.emcit.com/blog/blogger.html. I'll be updating it as often as technology allows. Hopefully that will be fairly regularly, because my hotel claims to have Ethernet web access from rooms. I did investigate wireless web access, but sadly it was too expensive. However, if the technology doesn't work, or doesn't arrive in time, I may be reduced to using the convention's Internet lounge, or even the hotel's business centre.

I have no idea how this will turn out. If things go really well there will be regular updates throughout the day. If things go badly I might manage just a daily report. You'll just have to log in once in a while to see how things are going. I'll try to mention in the log how things are going so you'll know how often to expect updates.

If you would like to participate in this exercise, and you have means of creating text files on disk, I'd be happy to add postings from other people. If you have been to a fascinating panel and want to write about it, leave a disk with the text file on it at the ConJosé table for me or Kevin to pick up. Make sure your name is on the disk, and preferably in the text file too. We are just playing here, and we'll see how things develop.

Pope on a Rope

Pope Joan is dead. We'll leave the circumstances of her death to one side for now, because I try not to do spoilers in reviews, but she is most definitely dead. Much of the world is in mourning. There are calls for her to be canonised immediately.

Cardinal Santo Ducque is not in mourning. Well, not for Joan anyway. But he may well be in mourning for the Vatican soon. With the Pontiff dead, a few people have been taking a look at the Church's accounts. There appear to be very large sums of money missing. More to the point, there doesn't appear to be very much left. Santo Ducque wants to find out what has happened, preferably before the World Bank auditors arrive.

Axl Borja is the Cardinal's enforcer. The former star of the military docusoap, *Warchild*, Axl has probably killed more people on live TV than anyone else on the planet. Since the show folded he has been working as an assassin. Officially he's retired, but there is always one more job, especially when you are bankrupt and reduced to flipping burgers for a living. Besides, Axl's gun is bored.

The gun is a Colt HiPower with full AI capability. It is almost certainly smarter than Axl. It may well be smarter than the Cardinal. It also has a dreadful attitude problem.

Out in space hangs the Dalai Lama's orbital habitat, Samsara. It is a place of peace. Kate Mercarderes, the ex-Pope's financial advisor, is hiding out here. She should be safe. No one comes here but refugees, people that Earth no longer wants. Besides, Tsongkhapa, the AI that runs the habitat, is a pacifist. Violence is forbidden.

Kate needs to stay safe because she has just taken charge of a very important person. Mai may not look much. In fact she's a Japanese child whore. But the

Jesuit, Father Sylvester, didn't bring her here for nothing. Nor is it a coincidence that this place belongs to a religion that believes in reincarnation. On a rope around Mai's neck hangs a soulcatcher. Some of the beads on it look distinctly like data crystals.

I spent quite a bit of time talking to Jon Courtenay Grimwood at the Liverpool convention (reported on last issue). We discussed *Pashazade*, and he said he was deliberately light on the Arabic background the first time round to ease people into the idea gently. Further books will have more Arabic stuff in them, and the third volume is the serious foodie book. Sounds good. Jon also talked about *redRobe*, the book that made the BSFA ballot this year. It sounded very interesting so I bought it. I'm very glad I did.

That stuff comparing Jon to Tarantino is on the back of *redRobe* as well, and to a certain extent I can see why. There is a lot of blood. Heck, Axl kills people, it is his job. There are other very violent people involved too. But at no point did I consider the violence unjustified. With the entire fortune of the Vatican at stake it is not surprising that things get a bit nasty. Besides, *redRobe* is a very angry book, and it is angry in all of the right ways.

Jon is angry at the way our world treats refugees. He's angry that there are refugees. He's angry that poor kids growing up on the street in New York or Mexico or wherever might just as well be refugees for all that they have of a chance at life. There is anger too at all those supposed do-gooding organisations, from the UN and the IMF down to the Vatican, that talk grandly about putting things right but seem to end up doing good only for those who happen to work for them. And worst of all Jon is angry that if you are in a position of power, and you do try to make something happen, you are

going to end up making exactly the sort of decisions that anyone else involved in world politics makes. You are going to end up being public enemy number one to very many people.

Jon was on the radicalism panel at Liverpool, and he didn't say very much. He just talked about *redRobe* a bit. Now I understand what he was talking about, and he's right. There are no magic bullets. And the more you look for one, the more likely it is you will end up shooting people with it.

For me, *redRobe* is everything that *Pashazade* wasn't. It has pace. It has characters who might be unpleasant, but at least they are legitimately unpleasant rather than being spoiled yuppies. And above all it has passion, oodles of it. *RedRobe* has something to rage against, and it does it magnificently. It was, I think, a very worthy BSFA nominee. It is also a much better book than *Salt*, so goodness only knows what the Clarke judges were thinking there. Here's hoping that the sequels to *Pashazade* are as good.

redRobe - Jon Courtenay Grimwood - Earthlight - softcover

Living on Sunshine

"*This book should make Ryman a front-runner for the major literary prizes*". Thus trumpets the book reviewer of The Guardian on the cover of my copy of Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*. Of course it didn't. How can a book possibly be considered for a literary prize when it is so obviously, well, you know, that science fiction stuff? I mean, look at the evidence.

We are well into the 21st Century. Biotechnology has flowered, so to speak. Many wondrous things have been achieved. For example, people

photosynthesise. There is no need to eat if you don't want to. Having a distinct purple tinge to your skin is presumably a minor inconvenience compared to putting an end to hunger.

Then there is the cure for cancer. The great scourge of the previous century is gone, wiped out. Unfortunately it turned out that cancer had certain benign effects. The normal production of cancerous cells is useful to the body in helping resist the ageing process. Only out of control tumours are dangerous. Without cancer, the typical lifespan of a human being is about 34 years.

Ah, but don't worry about that. Things can be done to increase our useful adult lifespan. Memory, you see, is simply a biological process. It can be replicated, artificially. Treatment with manufactured memory viruses can ensure that children know everything they need to know. The whole of history can be memorised; and Shakespeare, Plato and Marx; and the official interpretations of those texts. See, no need to spend ages in school learning things. Indeed, no need to learn at all, or even to know how to learn.

This is all very useful, especially to the Government. You see, mid-21st Century Britain is a Socialist paradise. Everyone works for the good of the community, as directed by the vast group mind known as The Consensus. Children are Read into the information banks at the age of ten to add to the wealth of experience, and to register their citizenship. They can also be checked for diseases of the mind such as dysfunctional political beliefs. These can be cured by application of suitable viruses. Politics is, after all, simply a matter of biology.

At this point you will presumably be expecting some sort of grim, biotechnology version of Orwell's *1984* in which some brave non-conformist struggles against the oppression of The Consensus. Ryman, however, is far too good a writer simply to recycle old ideas

like that. Unlike Big Brother, The Consensus has the luxury of being allowed to learn from the mistakes of Communism. It knows that it is stagnant and lacking in originality. When, therefore, it discovers a young Czech immigrant girl who is allergic to the knowledge viruses and is therefore obliged to make her own way in the world, as people used to, it decides to watch her and see what happens. Milena Shibush could provide just the stimulus that society needs to continue to evolve.

At which point Ryman stops talking about politics almost entirely. The ideas are still there in the background, and every so often he will make a salient point, but the focus of the book is not on politics, but art.

Milena turned the rose round and round in her hand. It was an old-fashioned rose, a very pale pink marbled with magenta. Rosa mundi, whispered the viruses. The petals had gone brown at the edges and had curled back to reveal a fresher core. It must have been recently watered by the gardeners. Fat pearls of water clung to it. Milena thought she ought to be embarrassed to be seen walking with a stolen, public rose. Then she found that she didn't care, and carried it boldly. It bobbed along on its stem as if made out of lead, as if heavy with meaning. The public rose was a private valediction.

The teenage Milena, and remember that from the age of 10 onwards citizens of Ryman's world are adults, is an actress. She works in a large, government-run theatrical collective based appropriately at London's South Bank. The staff of the collective live mainly in a building known as The Shell, a place with which regular users of Waterloo Station will be intimately familiar.

It soon becomes obvious that Ryman has conceived a clever double use for his imagery. As well as providing a means

for implementing an apparently ideal Socialist society, the viruses also provide for a stinging parody of accepted mainstream interpretations of art. Milena and her colleagues are required to put on plays precisely according to the interpretation encoded in their viruses. Productions must be the same, every time. The actors have no idea how to interpret a play for themselves. Except, of course, for Milena, whose virus treatment has been woefully incomplete and who has had to learn for herself what the rest of her colleagues know, by the age of 10. Milena is a source of heretical ideas.

There are other heretics about too. For example, the GEs: genetically enhanced humans. The most common GEs around London are the bears, whose human genes have been cut with those of polar bears, allowing them to work easily in the frozen wastes of Antarctica, the one place on Earth where substantial mineral deposits still exist to be mined. The bears are tall, strong, and covered with white fur. They are also independent, not part of The Consensus. They are, in fact, more human than most of mankind. One of them, Rolfa, has a passion for opera, and her relationship with Milena leads to the greatest operatic project ever conceived, a show compared to which Wagner's *Ring* cycle is the operatic equivalent of a Ramones song.

There is a lot of fun along the way as well. Ryman mercilessly parodies loveidom. (For the benefit on non-British readers, in the UK people heavily involved in the Arts are known as "lovies" for reasons that are hopefully obvious if you have ever met one.) I particularly liked Milton, the Arts Minister, who speaks only in pompous, empty but erudite platitudes. This whimsy does, of course, mean that anyone likely to be responsible for actually judging mainstream literary awards will probably be deeply offended

by the book, thereby killing Ryman's slim chance of getting any sort of prize.

Then space was twisted. Space shivered as when heat rises up from roadway. The shivering space rose up, and began to roll, quivering towards her. It was a wave, a wave in both space and time, a wave in the fifth dimension where light and thought and gravity are one. It confronted her, trembling as if with desire. It wanted Milena to be a story, that it could Read.

We should not forget, however, that the book is science fiction. I have already shown how Ryman is deeply aware of the dangers of scientific cleverness. He fills his book with wonders, such as biological space ships, but there are horrors aplenty as well. And, just as art and politics are cleverly melded, so art and science are also brought together.

Viruses, of course, mutate. They can have unexpected consequences. Milena's acting troupe gets hold of a new virus that allows them to ingest a personality template very quickly. It does away with a lot of rehearsal time. But it mutates, and the actors find themselves vulnerable to catching personalities from other people, or animals. Then there is the singing virus, a rogue disease that leaves its victims unable to speak without stuttering, unless they sing the words. Ryman provides a scientific basis for this one, but of course it is also an ideal affliction for characters in a book about an opera.

"Cilla, I think of you as my best friend. But I am not sexually attracted to you. Ask yourself this question. Am I Milena's type? Am I two and a half metres tall and covered in fur?"

The Child Garden is not the easiest book to read. It chops back and forth in time, is full of literary and musical allusions, and

introduces some very strange ideas about space, gravity and time. Also, as some of the extracts here show, Ryman has adopted a short, choppy style for his prose which is very disconcerting to begin with. It is, however, a wonderful book. It is clever, imaginative, humourous, deeply sad, and full of wonderful characters. I am fast coming to the conclusion that Cheryl's Pantheon of Literary Gods should be expanded from Gene Wolfe and M. John Harrison to include Geoff Ryman as well. And least anyone accuse me of pro-Brit bias, I should point out that, like John Clute, Ryman is an expatriate Canadian.

The Child Garden - Geoff Ryman - Voyager - softcover

Living in the Past

You are going to have to trust me on this one, folks. For much of the time I was reading this book I was pretty certain I was going to hate it. The only thing that kept me reading was that I didn't really have a clue what was going on, and that therefore there was always room for the author to pull a surprise. In the end it was worth it, but it was painful along the way.

The world of *Something More*, by Paul Cornell, is a *Daily Telegraph* reader's wet dream. Britain in the 23rd Century has reverted to feudalism. The country is divided into numerous warring regions; each controlled by a Great Family. The rich spend their lives loafing around in stately homes, throwing balls, conspiring against their rivals and protecting their honour. The poor live in constant danger from roving bands of soldiers. Homosexuality is punishable by summary execution without trial. Unlike grouse, peasants can be hunted all year round.

That's the basic set-up, but some things have gone very strange. Jane Bruce is a vicar in the Reformed Church of England. The schism that caused the Reformation occurred when some bishops became converted to spiritualism. More to the point, they proved it was real. Ghosts exist. You can detect their influence on electromagnetic fields. Some believe that with enough faith you can even do miracles, or talk to God.

Booth Hawtrey doesn't believe in God, but he can do miracles. He is by far the oldest member of the powerful Hawtrey family, lords of the Home Counties. But he doesn't bother with family politics any more. It is boring, and anyway it wouldn't be fair because he is immortal. Besides, Booth has a job to do. Since 1998 he has been the official ambassador of the Aurigians, the only other intelligent life form in the universe.

Rebecca Champhert is Booth's current official biographer. She is a talented novelist in her own right, but ended up with Booth for having had the temerity to write a book in which two of the Great Families make peace: Romeo and Juliet with a happy ending. Not that Rebecca believes in happy endings. Almost every year of her life that she can remember, something really awful has happened to her on her birthday.

Heartsease is an abandoned stately home deep in the Wiltshire countryside. It was built after the First World War by the famous architect, Edwin Lutyens. The client was an eccentric millionaire whose only son had died in the war. It has, as Lovecraft might have said, some very strange and particular geometry. The Campbell family wishes to claim it, and has sent Jane and a platoon of soldiers to check it out. Booth has also been sent to the house, on a mission for his mysterious alien masters. Rebecca's birthday is due any day now.

I came across *Something More* while I was in Bristol for Neil Gaiman's signing (see last issue). I'd never heard of the author, but it was a new Gollancz SF novel edited by Jo Fletcher, which sounded very promising. I opened it up and discovered that it started in Bristol. Taking that as an omen, I bought it. In fact Bristol only gets used as a jumping-off point for the mission to Heartsease, but so it goes. By the time I found that out I was already hooked. As you can see from the above, the book is very strange.

Lately I have been talking a lot about books that are a crossover between SF and fantasy. It seems to be the current fashion, and in *Perdido Street Station* and *Ash* the idea works very well. *Something More* is slightly different. It is a crossover between SF and horror. It has many of the tropes of horror: the mysterious country house, ghosts, supernaturally intelligent animals. It also has the excessive and gratuitous violence that is typical of bad horror novels. But it has aliens, and in the end it starts talking theology.

The horror stuff almost put me off the book. Not that I'm particularly squeamish, but I had just finished reading Jon Courtenay Grimwood's *redRobe*. In there you get stuff like this: "Oh no, these soldiers have just arrived at a peasant village. They are young and scared and they have big guns and you know awful stuff is going to happen." In *Something More* the story goes more like this: "Hey kids, want to come and peek at what these soldiers are doing in this peasant village? It'll really gross you out." You have to wonder whether that sort of thing is necessary, and you have to get a very long way into the book before you decide that, yes, it was after all.

There are also some very strange things about the world of *Something More*. If there has been a global economic collapse, how come people still have sophisticated portable computers and Britain still has an Internet? If inter-

Family warfare is so endemic and ferocious, how come there are any peasants left, and where do the Great Families get their money? These sorts of questions worried me for quite a while. But then I got to the end and discovered that things got much more weird and it didn't matter in the slightest because it was all allegory anyway.

I do think that the book has faults. In particular I would have liked it more if the lead characters had found out stuff rather than have it all explained to them. I also think that many people won't make it to the end, and those that do may be the sort of people who enjoyed all the gross stuff. They are going to be very deeply disappointed. But I very nearly put the book on my Hugo list. I still might if better stuff doesn't come along.

Why? Because it is such a strange and intriguing idea. Because it leads you up the wrong path for so long. Because when you get to the end you suddenly realise that this whole thing is way bigger than you had ever imagined. Because lots of people with hard line political and religious views are going to hate it. And because it is a wonderful commentary on the state of Britain today. I know it might not seem like it, but this is a book about the future of British politics. It is about saving the pound. It is about Ulster. It is about the choice between living in the future and living in the past. SF is often written as political allegory, but it is rare to see a book with its finger so accurately on the pulse as this one.

Something More - Paul Cornell - Gollancz - softcover

Living on the Edge

The trouble with Adam Roberts is that he is too clever for his own good. If he could just stop being clever for a while and

focus instead on producing something for people to read he'd be a much better novelist.

Let me explain. *Salt*, you may recall, was about barrenness. The vast, lifeless sodium chloride deserts of the planet on which the book was set were there to reinforce the intellectual wasteland of the competing political philosophies of Als and Senaar, not to mention the inevitable pointlessness of their conflict. The book failed for me, and for most other people I have talked to about it, because it had nothing to say except that it was barren.

Roberts' new novel, *On*, is a similarly concept-oriented book. This one is about precariousness. It is set on a world called Wall. The characters in the book live on Wall, which is vertical but has many ledges on which life can maintain a desperate grip. The sun rises up the side of Wall during the day, and disappears over the top at night. No one knows what it is like at the top or bottom of Wall, but many people and animals have fallen off ledges, never to be seen again.

The setting is again intended to reinforce the message of the book, which is that life itself is highly precarious. We first meet the hero, Tighe, as a child. Here he suffers from his volatile and temper-prone mother who can fly into a violent rage at any time and for no apparent reason. Later he is suddenly orphaned, and soon after he falls off a ledge.

Unlike most fallers, Tighe is lucky. Many miles downwall he lands on the bag of a hot air balloon and his fall is broken. Now he enters the adolescent phase of his life and, as is common with teenagers, he gets involved in tribal conflict. To be precise, he is press-ganged into an army and sent off to war as a kite pilot. You don't need me to tell you that this is a pretty precarious existence.

Finally, the war over, Tighe enters the adult phase of his life. At this point he starts to discover how the world works,

and consequently realises that nothing is as simple as his childish self once thought. Normality - work, a home, a full stomach - is something that can be taken away from you at any moment because there are people around who are far more powerful than you are, and your life exists in their wake.

And that's it. Unless you are interested in the physics and origin of the world that Adams has created, which is actually very clever, you don't need to read the book because I have told you all that there is to it. Yes, there is a plot of sorts, and there are characters that are a good deal more likeable than anyone in *Salt*. But the point of the book is simply the image of living on the edge.

I think that maybe Roberts would be better off as a sculptor. His work reminds me very much of minimalist modern art. If *Salt* were a sculpture it would simply be a large, flat slab of pure white salt crystal. The sculpture of *On* would be a mountain with a sharply pointed peak and concave, slippery sides. Those sculptures would encapsulate everything that Roberts has to say in the books, and do so rather more elegantly.

Of course Roberts may be trying to appeal to the "literary" community. The sort of people who, you may remember from last issue, rejected Nicola Griffiths' latest novel because it was "a rattling good read". Personally, however, I don't think that is what novels are all about. Novels need to have something to say. Unlike sculptures, paintings, or even poetry, they can't just be a pretty image. Why would anyone bother to read all the way through a novel for a message that can be fully encapsulated in a haiku?

On - Adam Roberts - Gollancz - softcover

Mind Games

Tricia Sullivan is our token American here, though she now lives in London. Most of her books seem to be available in the US, which might be something to do with her nationality but I suspect is more a result of her having won the Clarke Award in 1999 for *Dreaming in Smoke*. Despite that win, Tricia doesn't seem to get noticed much in the UK. I found the book I'm reviewing here in a remainder store, but I think that may be a result of poor marketing. The title, *Someone to Watch Over Me* (taken, I trust, from the fabulous Chet Baker song), and the cover showing just a woman's eyes suggest something rather soppy, and not the hard-nosed cyberpunk thriller inside.

One of my favourite characters from Marvel comics was a short, bald, large-headed fellow in a toga. He is The Watcher, and he is used as a narrator for a series of excellent short stories. The idea, of course, is that he can see the whole universe, and thus is ideally placed to bring us these tales. The twist is that this power comes with a limitation that he is only allowed to observe; he may never interfere, no matter how tragic the tale.

Watching through the eyes of others is not a new idea. We of the television generation are well used to the concept. The idea of the camera in the eyes is not new either. It has been used in SF since the 60s, and to particularly good effect in Raphael Carter's excellent *The Fortunate Fall*. Of course Carter's heroine, Maya, is more than just a camera. All of her senses and emotions are hooked up for her customers to enjoy. But they, like Marvel's Watcher, can only observe.

Adrien Reyes is an observer too. Like Maya, his senses and emotions are fully wired. Unlike her, he has only one customer, the mysterious C. For Reyes it is a good life. He goes where C tells him,

does what C tells him, uses his martial arts skills to engage in espionage on C's instructions. It pays very well indeed. C, it appears, goes along for the ride, and because it is easier to watch what Adrien does than wait for a report back. But lately C hasn't been content just to watch. Adrien has started to get the impression that C is living his life through him, that C might even want to become him.

From there the story progresses around the world, as thrillers do, from Zagreb to New York to Maui. We meet many strange people, from the brutal Russian PR man, Max Niagarin, to sad Tomaj who seems to view being Watched as simply another form of acting. Most importantly, we encounter The Deep, a rich source of black technology, and a place where you can lose your mind, in more than one meaning of the phrase.

Your mind is a collection of neurons; your mind is an organ; your mind is a quantifiable series of electrochemical events; your mind is a system of logic; your mind is the entire world and everything in it. Which of these is true - are they all true in some way?

There is a trite and rather patronising quote in the back cover blurb, apparently taken from a *Locus* review. "...shows real intelligence at work", it says. One wonders what sort of intelligence the reviewer expected Sullivan to have. Fantasy intelligence? Virtual intelligence? But I know what the reviewer was trying to say. In writing *Someone to Watch Over Me*, Tricia Sullivan has thought long and hard about the nature of consciousness, and about what it would be like to share that consciousness with another person. That is the sort of thing that good SF is supposed to do. She has also produced an excellent, fast-paced thriller full of dastardly plots and Russian gangsters. In other words, it is a very good book. I

think I need to track down more of her stuff.

Someone to watch over me - Tricia Sullivan - Orion - softcover

Miscellany

This month on IgoUgo

Having finally escaped from the UK, I have devoted this month's travel journal to my home town of Bridgwater in Somerset. It is not the most exciting place in the world, and IgoUgo is not really the venue to talk about a place having been home to the likes of John Brunner, Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne. However, it does have some interesting history. As usual you can find the details at <http://www.IgoUgo.com/>. Next month, of course, Philadelphia.

ConJosé news

For the benefit of those of you who have not been caught by my vast ConJosé publicity spluges, we have some very good news on hotel rates. One of the benefits of not being in a major tourist city (such as San Francisco) is that we can offer hotel space at much more reasonable prices. ConJosé's hotel rates are lower than those for The Millennium Philcon, lower than those for Chicon 2000 and, after adjusting for exchange rates and per-person charging, probably lower than those for Aussiecon Three as well. We are very pleased about this, and we hope that it helps more people attend Worldcon. As usual, more information is available on the ConJosé web site (<http://www.conjose.org/>).

I'd also like to take the opportunity to explain a bit of Worldcon arcana. Although room rates for several of our hotels have been announced, it is not

possible for you to book yet. In particular you should not approach the hotel directly. Given fandom's tendency to paranoia, people often assume that this is evidence of some sort of evil scam being perpetrated by the Worldcon. In fact the explanation is very simple. Firstly, if you approach the hotel directly, you won't get the convention rate. The ordinary reservations staff are not normally told about such things. It is their job to sell rooms at the publicly announced rates. Second, they will probably tell you that the hotel is full. The reason for that is that we have booked all of the rooms, and will be selling them on to you early in 2002. This is simply a matter of process. If you follow the advice given on our web site and in our progress reports, hotel booking will (we hope) go smoothly.

Tad at BASFA

Now that I am back in the Bay Area I have been able to catch up with various people and make a nuisance of myself. As a result of this I am delighted to be able to announce that Tad Williams will be making an appearance at the Bay Area Science Fiction Association on October 8th to talk about his new online novel, Shadowmarch. Directions for getting to BASFA meetings can be found on the Association web site (<http://www.basfa.org/>) and you can find more about Shadowmarch at <http://www.shadowmarch.com/>.

Also Tad has extended the deadline for the introductory subscription rate for ShadowMarch because they were a bit late getting the sign-up system in place. If you haven't already subscribed, go do it now.

Given that I have a Worldcon to publicise, there are likely to be more SF related events coming up in the Bay Area over the coming year. Watch this space.

Award Watch

The nominees for the World Fantasy Awards are now out. The Best Novel category features: *Declare*, Tim Powers; *Galveston*, Sean Stewart; *The Grand Ellipse*, Paula Volsky; *His Dark Materials 3: The Amber Spyglass*, Philip Pullman; *Lord of Emperors*, Guy Gavriel Kay; and *Perdido Street Station*, China Mieville.

I'm pleased to note that I have reviewed most of those and that I have the Tim Powers lined up for next issue. This one looks a bit tough to call. The Pullman and Kay are both excellent books, although the Kay is the second part of what is essentially a single novel. I expect the Powers to be good too, but I think China has to be the favourite.

Other nominees worthy of note include *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root*, an anthology of Caribbean fabulist fiction edited by Nalo Hopkinson; and M. John Harrison's recent short story collection, *Travel Arrangements*.

Newman's Doctor

Paper Snarl, the Paper Tiger Publishing e-zine, reports a forthcoming series of Dr. Who Novellas from Telos Publishing. The first in the series is apparently by the very wonderful Kim Newman. Sadly the books are going to be numbered, limited edition, signed hardbacks, which will make them very expensive.

Getting there

I have sufficient hubris to think that some of you may be interested in how things are going for me now I am back in California and back in a job. So far so good. The job is very interesting, the weather is wonderful, the only real problem is the commute.

Kevin and I live in a place called Blossom Hill that is just to the south of San José. I work in Berkeley, which is about 50 miles

north of there. That's a fair old journey each day. I can't drive it. Even if I could afford a car, I don't have a licence. For years I have been visiting California as a tourist and driving here happily on my UK licence. Now I live here that is no longer legal. I have to take a driving test, and it will take time to get that arranged.

That leaves public transport, of which there are many choices, all taking horrific lengths of time because the Bay Area does not have any overall transport policy. Each county or city does its own thing, and the systems only rarely connect up.

I am writing this on a very splendid Amtrak train that happens to go from San José to Berkeley. It is very comfortable. It even has a power outlet at the seat for me to plug my laptop in. But the journey is two and a half hours in total, and the service is very infrequent. The earliest return journey I could take leaves Berkeley at around 7:30. Besides, Amtrak has a very hazy notion of schedules. The second day on the job I was 3 hours late thanks to various train problems.

Most of the time, therefore, I take BART, a local commuter rail system. This means I have only a 2 hour journey, but it means Kevin has to drive to work because the nearest BART station is about 25 miles away. He's now doing about 100 miles a day on the road, which is not good. Both of us are very tired. Sometime soon we will have to move. But right now we don't have time to think about anything except the forthcoming Worldcon and the work we are doing for ConJosé and WSFS at the convention.

Footnote

Next issue there will be the traditional massive Worldcon report. If I have any time between now and then I'm also

planning to read books by a couple of supposedly hot American fantasy writers. And I have Tim Powers' *Declare* sat waiting for me. But first I need some sleep. Goodnight.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl