

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Well, in some ways this issue has been a complete bust. I had, for example, intended to see several movies over the holiday weekend. Instead Kevin and I saw the one film that we really, really wanted to see, and we spent the rest of our days off doing very little except sleeping. I think exhaustion had caught up with us.

One of the reasons for the exhaustion, of course, has been the 4 hours we have been spending commuting. One of the first things we did in the New Year was to do something about that, and I am pleased to say that our commute is now cut in half. You can read more about that later in the issue. But moving house is a time consuming process and reading kind of fell by the wayside. Consequently, this is not the longest issue I have ever produced. But at least I am still getting it out on time.

In This Issue

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Golden Rings and Silver Screens

Oh my, where does one start? We are, after all, dealing with the book that easily topped all of the "book of century" polls that were undertaken at a height of millennium fever. Reviewing anything to do with Lord of the Rings seems a bit like taking on Biblical criticism: so much has been said before, and so many views are strongly held, that you feel you need a Clute-like encyclopaedic mind to do the job.

For me the problem is exacerbated by the fact that I know far less about making movies than about writing books. When I go to a movie I sit there and take in the story. But having seen reviews that analyse everything from camera angles to Legolas's fighting style I know that far more has gone into this particular work than a single viewing is going to reveal.

In its own way, Peter Jackson's movie is just as rich as the book on which it is based, but most of that richness is expressed visually rather than verbally.

This, of course, is not where most of the debate is being fought out. As soon as the movie was announced, there were those who claimed that if Jackson changed but one word of the sacred text then it would be anathema to them. Equally there are those who cannot resist the temptation to nit-pick, either because the movie isn't quite like they had imagined the book, or because, well, they are fans, and nit-picking is what fans do. All of this misses the point.

Rule 1 in any review of a book become movie is that books and movies are not the same thing, and that to expect the movie to be exactly like the book is both foolish and futile. Movies (and TV and plays) take a basic plot and adapt that plot to the particular requirements of their medium. To ask, "if the movie identical to the book?" is to guarantee a negative response. The correct question should always be "is it a good movie?"

A good example of this is the debate over missing portions of the plot. Sure, the whole Tom Bombadill episode was missing. That doesn't make the movie bad per se, we have to ask ourselves whether its absence detracted from the plot. We also have to note that if Jackson had included every single scene in the original book then the movie would have been nearer 9 hours long than the 2.5 or so that it actually ran. As far as I could see, the story was easy to follow without Bombadill, and nothing major was left out. You did, as Kevin pointed out to me, come away with the feeling that Bree was only a mile or so outside the Shire, but I don't feel that was a major problem.

Rule 2 is even more obvious, and it is that everyone who reads a book will come away with a slightly different impression of the story, characters and setting. To claim that a movie is bad because "it isn't

how I imagined the book" is as foolish as it is inevitable. In some way it will be true for everyone.

I suspect it is also true that the more devoted a fan of Tolkien one is, the more likely one is to be disappointed by the film. David Bratman, for example, is a long time pillar of the Mythopoeic Society and knows more about *Lord of the Rings* and Tolkien than any other five people I know combined. David could probably find something to nit-pick in every scene of the film. Some of the comments he has made are meaningless to me. I couldn't care less, for example, whether the Hobbits have been portrayed as being English or Irish. Most viewers, I suspect, would not even be able to tell the difference.

However, David has made one comment that I found very revealing. He said that while Tolkien's book smells of elves, the movie smells of orcs. This is absolutely spot on. Tolkien's book is a melancholy lament for times past. Whilst Sauron is beaten in the end, the departure of the elves from Middle Earth leaves you with a sense that the battle might have been won, but the war is lost. Jackson's film, on the other hand, is much more action-oriented, and inevitably so. Sure, he could have made a film that oozed dreamy sadness, but he would have quickly found it languishing in movie theatres specialising in art films. By concentrating more on the fact that there is a war to be fought, and heroic deeds to be done, Jackson has ensured himself a decent profit and, along the way, will be introducing far more people to a wonderful story.

Which brings us neatly to my primary interest in the film. Quite frankly, I could not care less what hard-core Tolkien fans think of the film. As I have already said, most of them are bound to be disappointed anyway. Once I had satisfied myself that the movie was going to be good (and not an embarrassing farce

like Ralph Bakshi's cartoon version), what I really wanted to know was whether the movie would get more people reading and enjoying the books?

Having seen the film, I must admit that initially I was quite worried. It is at least 20 years since I read the books, but I still remembered them well enough to fill in vast acres of background detail in my mind as the film progressed. For example, when the council took place in Rivendell I knew immediately who all of the major players were, and why they were there. It struck me that someone who had not read the books would find it hard, for example, to work out just who Boromir was and why he was in attendance. I think it was all explained in the end, but it seemed very sketchy to me. Since then there has been a lot of discussion of the film in fannish circles, and I made the point of asking at BASFA whether people felt the film was understandable if you had not read the book. Of course there was no one at the club who was actually in that category, but I was reasonably cheered by reports of discussions with non-fannish folk who had not seen the film. If indeed the movies do bring a whole new generation into contact with Tolkien's work, and cause them to love it as much as my generation does, then they will have been a very good thing.

No film, of course, is perfect. I have got the impression that the wizardly battle between Gandalf and Saruman was a definite case of the desire for spectacular action scenes overwhelming the producer's good sense. Hardly anyone I have spoken to liked it. It also seems to be the case that the orcs, and even the Uruk Hai, have got their fighting training from the Imperial Stormtroopers Academy in another universe. I have seen heroes triumph against vastly overwhelming numbers in D&D games, and of course it is commonplace in movies, but it doesn't really happen much in practice unless the heroes have an excellent defensive

position. Many people too have complained about Galadriel's "blue moment", but I very much liked it, which just goes to show that one fan's nit-pick is another fan's delight.

Overall, however, I very much enjoyed the film. Even though I know little about how movies are created, it was obvious to me that a great deal of care and attention had gone into the making of it. The film was a labour of love, and of course it had a fabulous story to tell. When the DVD comes out, I am going to buy a DVD player so that I can watch it on a decent sized screen rather than on my laptop computer. And I will be in line for the other two films when they come out. It would not surprise me at all if, in three years time, Peter Jackson has three Hugo rockets in his trophy cabinet.

Chips in the Night

Once upon a time there was *Neuromancer*, and with its publication the world fell in love with William Gibson and his concept of cyberspace. A few people also wondered how come someone who had never used a computer in his life managed to invent such a wonderful and highly plausible online environment, years before Internet usage became widespread.

Gibson, of course, is an absolute master of marketing. Given a concept, he is able to figure out just how to sell it. All of his novels since have shown a keen awareness of the role of marketing in human society. But did he invent cyberspace? No, he coined the name (marketing again), but the concept already existed. The Internet was already a reality for some pioneers, and stories about life online had already been written. The most significant of these was *True Names*, a novella by Vernor Vinge.

Whereas Gibson didn't even own a computer when he wrote *Neuromancer*, Vinge was already a computer professional when he wrote *True Names*. Indeed the novella was the first story that he wrote on a word processor. OK, so the computer was a Heathkit LSI 11. PCs had barely been invented in 1979. But Vernor was already teaching Computer Science at San Diego State University and he knew a few things about what was going on.

Most impressively, Vinge was already aware of the need for a symbolic interface to enable ordinary people to understand and manipulate software. At the time iconic interfaces were still academic toys at Xerox Parc. But Vernor took things much further. He considered the concept of manipulating things with symbols and realised that there was already a name for this: magic. What is more, the story was written in 1979 when the Dungeons & Dragons craze was at its height and invented fantasy worlds were everywhere. So *True Names* does not have "cyberspace", it has "The Other Plane", a fantasy world in which the online community has avatars.

The parallels with magic go even further. The entire theory of demonology is based on the concept that if you know the true name of a demon then you can blackmail it into serving you. Vinge's story is about online freedom. He was aware, even then, that a sufficiently competent government could control everything that happens online because computers could be made powerful enough to track what everyone was doing. Unless, of course, you could hide behind some handle and keep your true identity secret. Of course, if the FBI do manage to find your True Name, well, you are as helpless as any bound demon. And therein lies a story.

If that were all there was to the book then it would still be very significant. But *True Names* is a novella, and the full name of

the book I am reviewing is *True Names and the Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier*. The novella, *True Names*, occupies only 112 pages of a 352-page book. The rest of the content comprises essays by people who have taken an interest in the ideas that Vinge has developed; and what people they are.

Here, for example, is Tim May, one of the founders of the Cypherpunk movement and an expert on things like anonymous remailers. May at times comes across as an extremist Libertarian of that strange American type whose views can best be summarised as "I have the right to do whatever I want and to Hell with the rest of you". This leads to some fascinating apparent contradictions. For example, May is very keen to have systems which allow him to remain anonymous, but he regards the government's Witness Protection Program as evil because he can't find out who the people protected by the program are. Politics apart, however, May certainly knows his stuff and he has produced a superb summary of the situation with regard to online anonymity and the idiocy of government policy (the world over) on cryptography.

Here also is John M. Ford with an amusing look at how AI sociologists will look back at the origins of their race in the 20th Century, and their relationship to those strange fleshy beings who may or may not have had a role in their creation.

On another track entirely, Chip Morningstar and F. Randall Farmer talk about Habitat, an early online role-playing game. As a lapsed games master myself I found this discussion particularly fascinating. Having run an RPG campaign with over 100 actual players I have some inkling of the problems that Habitat faced. But when you get to thousands of players those problems become enormous, and analogous to the problems faced by pioneer communities in trying to set up social rules and government. The article

teaches us a lot about how humans relate to each other.

And of course there is Marvin Minsky, who talks about how the symbolic techniques that Vinge uses to interpret the online world are in fact direct analogues of the way in which our brains interpret the real world. If you have already read Minsky's *Society of Mind* then his essay will not contain much new, but if you haven't you will be left wanting to buy the book.

There are many other essays as well, most of them very good. If you have any interest at all in the science and politics of online worlds you should buy this book, it is fascinating.

True Names - Vernor Vinge et al - Tor - softcover

Tooth and Gore

OK, let's get the puns out of the way first. If your name is Mr. Dedman and you are a novelist then it is inevitable that at some point you will write a book about vampires. Resistance is useless. The only real question is whether it will be a good vampire book or not.

Of course there is a lot to live up to. If you wish to write a vampire book set in modern times then you have to compete with Kim Newman. I hope Stephen will forgive me if I say that Kim knows more about vampires and more about movies and more about horror novels than anyone I know. Stephen, however, does very well. He quite clearly has done his research and knows more about all of those things than I do. What is more, unlike with Kim's books, being able to spot where Stephen got an idea from is not important to your appreciation of the story. Much as I admire Kim's work, I have to admit that needing less

background to enjoy the book fully is in some ways a good thing.

(Digression here. You can read a Kim Newman book with no knowledge of the background and enjoy it thoroughly. The more you know about the ideas he is using, the more you will get out of it and the more jokes you will get. But equally, if you only know a fraction of the background, you know just enough to know that you don't know nearly enough to appreciate the book fully, and that can be a pain.)

But to get back to the book in hand, *Shadows Bite* is a fairly straightforward vampire thriller. It is also a sequel to Stephen's first novel, *The Art of Arrow Cutting*, in that it features the same lead characters: Mage, Charlie Takumo and Kelly Barbet. Part of the story even includes a carry over from the yakuza-centred plot of the previous novel. However, this is merely an additional complication that gets in the way of our heroes sorting out the main plot, a potential plague of vampires in LA. As if anyone would notice, right?

Well, maybe: even LA is not quite so insensible that it would not notice large numbers of murders and the bodies of the deceased going missing.

OK, so there, in a nutshell, is the plot. Vampires are created; vampires start killing people; the cops are mystified. Brave vampire hunters sort it all out. The rest of the book is constructed in three ways. Firstly, as I intimated earlier, there is a lot of background information on vampires, horror novels, movies and so on. Second, there are characters: real characters, even the bad guys. I particularly liked the treatment of Woodcott, the born-again Christian homicide detective and was pleased to see that, for all his narrow-mindedness got in the way most of the time, his devout belief proved useful to him in the end. Finally there is the usual thriller novel stuff about lots of different types of

guns and swords and knives and other deadly things, all of which Stephen seems to do very well indeed.

This being *Emerald City*, you are probably expecting me to now go on about the political subtext of the novel. Well, *Shadows Bite* is for the most part a very straightforward thriller (and therefore likely to sell in larger quantities than most books I review here if it gets decent promotion). However, Stephen's characters do have political opinions. Those of his heroes happen to reflect Stephen's own politics, and very fine views they are too. Some of you doubtless won't like them, especially if you are of a strongly conservative bent, but that's your problem, not mine.

So, there we have it. Good book, excellent pacing, and if you like thrillers or vampires you will enjoy it greatly.

Shadows Bite – Stephen Dedman – Tor – hardcover

The Last Battle: Again

So, here we are once again back in the mists of British mythic history. Arthur is High King but, as we all know, the story has a tragic ending. The only question is how do we tell it?

As you may remember from my review of *The King's Peace*, Jo Walton has taken the option of renaming everything in the story so that she can tell it in her own way with no preconceived ideas of what should happen. Arthur, of course, will still die at the end. The rest is up for grabs. The new novel, *The King's Name*, is Jo's version of the final conflict.

It is a strange experience at times reading Jo's books because if you have read as many Arthurian novels as I have you end up translating in your head. Sure there is this character called Angas of Demdia,

but I know he's Gawain and I read him as such. In some ways it makes the writer's job easier, because the reader already has expectations of the character, thus relieving the author of the need to do much characterisation. Newbie authors often start off doing TV series tie-ins for precisely this sort of reason. Jo, of course, has added many of her own characters to the story, so you can see that she is not using Arthur for this reason, but you still fill in a lot about characters you know.

Where things get more complicated is the area where Jo has departed significantly from the Arthurian tradition. In particular she has, in effect, a female Lancelot. Sulien, the heroine of the novels, is Urdo's (Arthur's) leading warrior, and as the end game develops the rumour that Arthur is the father of Sulien's son takes the place of the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship in destabilising Arthur's rule.

One thing that Jo does very well is describe how Morthu (Mordred) manages to cause trouble. Basically the guy is a consummate politician who is able to play upon the minor resentments of the various local kings and turn them into burning grievances. He doesn't actually use magic until the final encounter, and Jo finds an interesting and imaginative way of working the Waste Land legend into the story.

There is no Grail search in Jo's tale, but she handles the religious conflict very well, getting right to the heart of the reason why Christianity causes so much trouble. Raul (Merlin) complains, "if worshipping God is not the highest good, the only good, the only source of honor, then what is life for?" And that, in a nutshell, is it. Raul is portrayed as a very reasonable character, and a loyal supporter of Urdo, but his duty to his god competes with his duty to his king. He need not have been a Christian to say such things; the same sort of comments could have come from a Muslim, or from many other religions, and indeed in the

book the term “Christian” is never used. Jo calls them “followers of the White God”, although the parallels are way too obvious for the connection not to be made.

Had Sulien been a theologian (and had Jo wished to keep in line with the Bible) she might have retorted how Jesus once commented on the desirability of the separation of church and state. Raul, of course, could have found other passages to quote in response. But regardless of the theological niceties, it is inevitable that any religion that has claims to exclusivity and absolute moral authority will come into conflict with a government that has a multi-culturalist policy. That is true regardless of whether the government is Urdo’s in 6th Century Britain, or any modern democracy.

But to get back to the book, how does it stack up as a re-telling of the Arthurian legend? For me the impressive thing is that, while the book is steeped in myth, the driving force of the plot is entirely character-based. There is no sense of mythic inevitability. Urdo rises to power on the back of his own abilities, and he falls because those whom he leads are all too human. That is a refreshing change in a world where fantasy writers all too often take the easy way out and use fate as a plot device. Jo has shown that she can write very well, and I expect her to be a nominee for the Campbell once again this year. Next, however, I would like to see her come up with a story that is entirely her own.

The King’s Name – Jo Walton – Tor – hardcover

Murky Twilight

“Anything is possible in the fabulous Celtic twilight, which is not so much a twilight of the gods but of reason.”

J.R.R. Tolkien

A few issues back I reviewed the excellent *Britain in the First Millennium* by Edward James. That book exploded a few more obvious “Celtic” myths. For example, most of what we now describe as “Celtic” art derives from a time when Britain had already been settled by Saxons for many decades and the artistic styles of the two cultures had intertwined. Equally the nation we now call Scotland was the product of the unification of disparate ethnic groups with origins in Ireland, Scandinavia, Germany and Wales as well as the local Picts. Debunking “Celtic-isms” seems be quite the fashion in historical and archaeological circles right now, and a fine new contribution to the debate comes from Simon James (no relation as far as I know) of the British Museum.

The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention? is a penetrating and at times scathing look at the notion of Celtic-ness as applied to ethnic groups such as the Welsh, Scots, Irish and Cornish. James makes an excellent case in support of the view that the whole thing is a modern invention created for political purposes with little basis in history or archaeology. Now you might expect me to be rather offended by this. James is unashamedly English, and such debunking of my national heritage might be viewed as a little aggressive. Actually, however, I find the whole thing highly amusing. I suspect that, while James is keen to avoid ideas of a Celtic Race poisoning political debate, he is quite happy with ideas of Celtic ethnicity and his major targets are the New Age movement and Americans.

Let me explain. Many Americans regard themselves as having Celtic ancestry, or at least take a keen interest in things Celtic. Of those, a fair few have bothered to actually learn something about the historical peoples whose culture they believe they are continuing. Many,

however, stick to that uniquely American view that you can learn all you need to know about history and the world outside the US by watching Disney movies and visiting Las Vegas. This tends to lead them to spout complete nonsense and to tell me earnestly that I know nothing whatsoever about my own country. Just as the American definition of "Renaissance" stretches all the way back to Egyptian times, so the American definition of "Celtic" seems to encompass anything with origins in mediaeval England.

History is not inherited, handed down directly from generation to generation, a truthful, ready-made account unaltered thereafter. Nor do we discover history as unambiguous truth dictated by the surviving evidence of the past; rather, we create history.

So, let us boldly go and debunk a few things, starting with the name itself. The word "Keltoi" is Greek in origin and was a name given by the Greeks to a people who lived in regions we now know as Austria and Switzerland. The primary archaeological sites that have been used to define "Celtic" culture, Hallstatt and La Tène, are located in this region. No one in Britain or Ireland ever referred to themselves as Celtic until the 18th Century. The origin of the name appears to lie with a Welsh clergyman and linguist by the name of Edward Lhwyd. He was one of the first people to systematically study the native languages of the ancient British (what we now know as Q-Celtic or Goidelic and P-Celtic or Brythonic) and their modern descendants such as Welsh, Gaelic and Cornish. Lhwyd needed a name for this group of languages. Though he believed they may have been related to languages spoken by the Gauls and other European groups, he could not call the languages "Gallic" as that would presume a relationship to the hated French (whom, as we know, are as

much Frankish as Gallic themselves). Nor could he use the term "British", because at the time he did his work the English government was in the process of adopting that term to describe the new super-state they were creating by the annexation of Scotland and Ireland. So he chose "Celtic" instead, and because the ethnic groups who spoke those languages were being oppressed by the English, and because they had had their own name stolen, they took to being Celtic instead.

School histories are often as much about promoting modern political ideology as about honestly seeking to understand the past.

So, if the name Celtic is of recent adoption, what about the actual ancient inhabitants of Britain and Ireland? Are there provable links with Gaul and with the cultures that produced Hallstatt and La Tène. Certainly some artefacts of unquestionably European Celtic style have been found in Britain, but not enough to have needed to be supplied by means other than simple trade. Certainly Julius Caesar reports some Gallic settlement in Britain, and there is archaeological evidence of this in Kent, but other Roman writers such as Tacitus describe the British as a separate people from the Gauls and even distinguish between northern and southern groups of Britons.

More convincing evidence is provided by what appear to be common styles of worship, and by similar languages. However, the names used for similar sounding gods in different parts of the supposed Celtic region vary widely. Also, as James points out, calling a people Celtic because they happen to speak a Celtic language makes about as much sense as calling Americans (or Kenyans) Germanic because they speak English. More importantly, the archaeological evidence shows that the ancient British

and Gauls had distinct cultural differences. The Gauls built their houses on a square pattern and buried their dead. The Britons built round houses and cremated their dead, just like their Bronze Age ancestors had done centuries earlier.

A lot of the current confusion arises from the somewhat arrogant attitudes of historians towards what they saw as “primitive” peoples. The general view up until near the end of the 20th Century was they primitive societies were stagnant and that cultural development could come only through conquest by superior races. Thus for the Bronze Age Britons to develop new technology and cultural patterns they must have been invaded and conquered by Celts from Europe. This makes about as much sense as if a 22nd Century archaeologist, excavating in Kenya and discovering a Coca Cola can and a Mickey Mouse toy, concluded that at some point in the 20th Century Kenya had been invaded and settled by people from the USA.

So Henry Ford was right, much of what we think we know about history is indeed bunk. But does it matter? Politically the answer, I think, is no, because ethnicity does not depend on common ancestry, common language, or any other hangover from the past. Ethnicity is self-determined. Indeed that is the very meaning of the term. People become an ethnic group when they identify themselves as in some way similar to one another, and also as different from those outside their group. To say, therefore, that Welsh Nationalism is nonsense because there was no such thing as Celts in ancient Britain, or because Shirley Bassey’s genes clearly originate from somewhere many miles away from Cardiff, is irrelevant. People today identify themselves as Welsh because they or their parents were born in Wales, because they live there, because they love music and rugby, because they love the landscape, and most importantly

because they despise the cultural arrogance of the English. Simon James recognises this, and spends a lot of time in the book explaining the difference between race, culture and ethnic group. So let’s get the history right, and keep ideas of race out of politics.

In reading James’s book it became increasingly clear to me that fandom is in fact an ethnic group. We self-identify ourselves to be part of a specific community because of particular modes of behaviour that others do not have. That, in essence, is what an ethnic group is. We even have the typical variation in identification that you find in other ethnic groups.

As an example, consider the Jews. They are clearly an ethnic group, even though you can find them anywhere from Moscow to New York to Sydney. They identify by means of common traditions and customs. For some it is enough to simply say, “yes, I am a Jew”. Others try hard to conform to traditional Jewish religious and cultural practices, even though they live amongst people of a very different culture. Yet others live in secluded enclaves within Israel and are very strict in their observances. So it is with fandom. Some people are happy to just say, “yes, I read science fiction”. Others will say, “I am a fan, I read fanzines and go to conventions”. And then we have Leah Zeldes whose definition of what it is to be a true fan would probably exclude the vast majority of people who attend Worldcon.

Fandom even evolves the same way that ethnic groups do. James points out that much of the confusion in early attempts at history resulted from them being written by people who could not conceive of any alternative to the nation state. Ancient Britain therefore had to be populated with distinct tribes that had their own national identity. There is no reason why this must have been the case.

In the absence of such a concept, any sufficiently rich or powerful person will accrete followers. When that person's power wanes, those followers will attach themselves elsewhere. As James puts it, kings do not create peoples, people create kings.

It is the same in fandom. Sub-groups come and sub-groups go. This is particularly noticeable with television shows. Four years ago, large numbers of people in fandom would identify themselves primarily as Babylon 5 fans. These days many of those people have transferred their allegiance to Farscape, Buffy or some other series. There is doubtless a learned fannish paper to be written about this by someone. Luckily for you, it won't be by me.

The Atlantic Celts – Simon James – British Museum Press – softcover

Moving Daze

You will doubtless be relieved to hear that Kevin and I are now more or less moved into our new apartment. We are still to some extent living out of boxes, and will continue to do so until we have bought lots of bookcases. It would also be nice to have things like crockery and cutlery, but that merely requires a trip to Kevin's storage locker. The important thing is that we are now a whole hour closer to our respective workplaces and we will be getting a whole lot more sleep.

The moving process was made much easier by the kind assistance of a bunch of kindly folk from BASFA who turned up one Saturday to help us shift all of the furniture. Our heartfelt thanks therefore go out to Eric Larson, Bruce Kawetz, Raymond Chuang, Jon Demers, Jon Roth and Pam Rice, without whose help a simple 3-hour project would have turned into an entire day's backbreaking work.

Thanks also to Arun Menon who sold us a lot of his furniture when he had to move to Detroit. Without him we would still be sitting on plastic garden chairs.

As I explained last issue, we are now living in a gated community. However, having got some experience of the place, I am now a lot less embarrassed about it than I was. To start with, the walls are only about 6 foot high, and therefore no barrier to an averagely fit teenager. In waiting for various service people to come and connect things up I discovered that every public utility in the Bay Area has keys to the complex. It can't be difficult for an enterprising thief to acquire one. Besides, if you want to gain entrance, the easiest thing to do is wait around until a car comes in. The gates move sufficiently slowly to not risk damaging any vehicle, so there is plenty of time for pedestrians, or even a tailgating car, to get inside.

So what purpose do the walls and gate serve? Well, they certainly don't keep out kids on skateboards. Some of the inhabitants of the complex are kids and I'm sure that some of them have skateboards. They do keep out people in cars who think that they can avoid traffic jams by driving at 70 mph through residential areas, and that, I can tell you from experience in the UK, is a very good thing. But mainly they serve the same purpose as the so-called "security" procedures that have been introduced at airports. They don't do anything much to protect the people they are supposedly designed to help, indeed they are something of a nuisance in many ways. However, they make people who don't think too deeply about security issues feel safer. It is, in other words, all a public relations con trick.

Miscellany

Bear Mountain

With so many science fiction authors living in California it is not surprising that we regularly get them signing at local bookstores. This weekend David Brin was about, though sadly I was too busy to go and see him. The weekend before it was the turn of Greg Bear, and Kevin and I caught up with him at a store near our old stomping grounds of Mountain View. Books Inc. (then Printers Inc.) was my local bookstore when we lived at Lunacy, so I was delighted to go back there to see Greg.

Signings, of course, are not hugely dramatic affairs, but Greg came out with a couple of anecdotes that I thought were worth sharing with you. The first is directly connected to his new novel, *Vitals*, which I will be reviewing in a couple of issues time. The book is about biotech and, in particular, bacteria. Greg was telling us about how all humans need a healthy population of local bacteria in order to survive. He pointed out that the primary effect of the current fashion for antibacterial soaps is to kill of the indigenous, friendly bacteria that our bodies need and create a niche for aggressive, dangerous bacteria to move in. I rather liked his analogy that each time you wash your hands with antibacterial soap you are devastating the Amazon rainforest of your body.

The book is also about conspiracies and paranoia, and Greg got on to talking about popular conspiracy theories. One idea that is very popular in the US is the idea that the Moon landings were faked by the US government and Hollywood, and that the whole thing was shot on a film site somewhere in New Mexico or Arizona. Greg claims to have an answer to such people, and it is a good one.

By far the best special effects scenes of space travel shot at the time of the Moon landings were those in Stanley Kubrick's

2001: A Space Odyssey. Although Kubrick's technicians did a superb job for the time, when they came to film a landing on the Moon they got things badly wrong. The scene shows clouds of Moon dust billowing up the way they would for a landing on a desert in Earth's atmosphere. The US government's film of the Apollo missions, in contrast, shows the Moon dust spreading out in straight lines as would be expected for a landing in a vacuum. Three conclusions are possible: a) that the US government had much better special effects technicians than Kubrick; b) that they bribed Kubrick to get things wrong in the movie to make them look good; or c) that their film was actually shot on the Moon. Hardened conspiracy theorists will, of course, opt for choice b). Everyone else, I hope, will go for c).

The 2002 FAAn Awards Ballot

Fanzine fandom's annual awards are now open for voting. Here is a voting form for you to cut and paste into your email or word processor.

The 2001 edition of the annual Fanzine Activity Achievement awards will be presented at Corflu 2002, the fanzine fans convention, in Annapolis, Maryland, the weekend of Feb. 15-17, 2002. Voting is open to all fans, and submission of the ballot by midnight, Feb. 16, 2002, is the only criterion for voting eligibility. It is not necessary to physically send this ballot for your vote to be counted: Votes will also be accepted via e-mail at <vmgonzalez@hotmail.com>, and voting will continue through the first two days of the convention. PLEASE NOTE: Votes sent by snailmail to Victor Gonzalez, 263 Elm St., Cambridge, MA, 02139, USA, must reach their destination by Feb. 14.

Please list, in order, your top three choices in these categories: Best Fanzine, Best Fanwriter, Best Fan Artist, Best Letterhack, and Best New Fanzine Fan.

Fan Writers, Fan Artists and Letterhacks must have been active in 2001, and Fanzines must have been published at least once during 2001, to be considered eligible for the FAAn Awards. Fans whose first fanzine activity took place after Jan. 1, 1997, are eligible for the 2001 Best New Fan award. No distinction of media of reproduction or distribution will affect a fan or fanzine's eligibility.

Results of the balloting will be tallied on the following simple point system: A first-place vote is worth five points; a second-place vote is worth three points; and a third-place vote is worth one point. The individual or publication receiving the most points in each category will receive the award.

Please mail this ballot to Victor Gonzalez, 263 Elm St., Cambridge, MA, 02139, USA, or e-mail to <vmgonzalez@hotmail.com>. Please include your name and full street address below, so that you can be added to the FAAn Awards mailing list. Mail ballots must be received by Feb. 14, 2002, to be counted. If you are completing the ballot at Corflu, the ballot box will be available until midnight, Feb. 16, 2002.

Best Fanzine:

Best Fanwriter:

Best Fan Artist:

Best Letterhack:

Best New Fanzine Fan:

Your Name and Address:

And, since I will have to declare myself ineligible for the Hugos this year, you can all vote for me/ *Emerald City* in these awards instead, can't you. I have, after all, never lived with Victor Gonzalez, and I'm sure poor Victor would be horrified at the prospect.



Hugo Update

Since last issue we have had our annual Hugo discussion at the Bay Area Science Fiction Association (www.basfa.org). The results of this are now reflected on the *Emerald City* web site. Remember that Hugo nominations do not close until the end of March, so you still have plenty of time to influence voters. Send me your recommendations.

And don't forget, this fanzine is the official home of the Send a Hugo to China campaign. So far the number of recommendations for *Perdido Street Station* has been very pleasing, but let's not be complacent. Get those nominations in now. Remember also that you have

only until January 31st to join ConJosé in order to nominate. If you are not sure that you can come, buy a supporting membership now, you can always upgrade later. I know that there are only a few days to go, but as long as your envelope is clearly postmarked in January you'll be OK.



Footnote

In the next issue: Connie Willis, Ken Wharton, Julie Czerneda and hopefully most of the rest of the Phil Dick Award short list (excepting the excellent *Ghost Sister*, which I reviewed last issue). Yes, I am trying to finish my Hugo reading. The news stuff, including Bear and Brin, will have to wait for March. Perhaps Benford will have produced something to complete the set by then.

I am hoping to get the issue out in time for Potlatch on February 22-24. Here's hoping that the new home gives me a lot more reading time. The March issue will, of course, include a con report.