

EMERALD CITY

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

Introduction

Drought and downpour department: no, I'm not talking about the California weather, but about my employment situation. Finally, I thought I had something going. I've started doing some freelance work for a small consultancy in the Bay Area. It isn't much right now, but it is keeping my mind working and it could turn into a full time job soon. Then, just as I thought I was settled, I get a call from a company I applied to last July. Suddenly they are very interested in me. Can I come to Houston next week? Ah well, better too many possibilities than none.

Sometimes I think we forget that Science Fiction has some connection with science, but recently it all seems to be coming true. It is only January, but it has been a great year for science so far. First we had that wonderful astronomy convention in Washington which has laid to rest two great cosmological mysteries. We are now certain that there is a black hole in the centre of the galaxy. I'm sure Greg Benford will be pleased. Also we now know that the universe will continue to expand forever. There is no chance of a collapse back to a singularity. Of course this still doesn't answer the question of where the universe came from in the first place...

On the subject of space, the Moon is back in the news. The little Lunar Prospector is the first NASA mission to our nearest neighbour in 25 years. It comes as a bit of a shock to realise that there are people who have left college for whom the Apollo missions are ancient history. The Prospector is big news around here because it is controlled from the Ames Research Centre just a mile or so down the road from us. Ames does a lot of work with local schools. Here's hoping for a new generation of space-mad kids.

And on the subject of science fiction, it was announced a couple of weeks back that a biochemistry lab in California had discovered a treatment to prevent ageing in human cells. Yes, you heard me, and this is not April. Prevent Ageing. Of course there is a long way to go before that treatment can be applied to entire bodies, but I suspect the queue of cosmetics companies outside the lab is already awesome. Michael Jackson is probably at the head of the queue. And only a few weeks ago I was reading about a similar idea in *Blue Mars* and dismissing it as far-fetched.

Comrade Uncle Sam

Confession time, folks. I've known Kim Newman for years. He and my brother were at school together. Eugene Byrne was in the same group. I am about to praise their new book to the skies, and I'm asking you to believe that this is an objective assessment. Hopefully you know me well enough by now to know that I try hard to be fair, even when the writer is a friend.

"Comrades", he said, small voice filling the vaulted arches of Union Station, ultimately filling the whole of the country, "it looks s if what we have here..."

Debs looked around, unable to contain his grin.

"...is a REVOLUTION!"

It began in 1912 with the assassination of President Roosevelt by a Wobblie activist. Only Hammett of the Pinkerton agency saw the assassin, and he was apparently unable to run him down. A small person, he said, and obviously a fine shot with a rifle.

Oh, things continued on as normal for a while. The new president, Charles Foster Kane, used his newspaper empire to good effect keeping up morale. But the greed of the Robber Barons could not be disguised forever, and the debacle of The Somme cost too many young American lives. The association between Kane's wife and the notorious British mystic, Aleister Crowley, hardly helped the establishment cause. Social unrest grew and when, in 1917, Eugene V. Debs arrived in Chicago on the famous sealed train, the United Socialist States of America was inevitable.

Faintly embarrassed by the comic melodrama of it all, Zapata crouched behind the low all at the edge of the square, his detachment cradling their carbines, ready to fire. Up in the clear blue sky, the buzzing biplanes circled. Both the von Richthofen brothers were up there, jousting like the last of the Teutonic Knights, and so was their fat friend Göring. The brightly painted airplanes swooped low over the Alamo, guns chattering, and dropped smoking incendiaries.

Get the idea? From the fairly simple operation of inserting Dracula into world history, Kim has gone on to wholesale reconstruction of the time line. *Back in the USSA* is the story of the communist revolution as it happened in America. It is a world turned upside down, but a world still very much the same. Debs, for example, didn't last long, and for many years Chairman Capone held the Communist Party, and the country, in an iron grip. It is a world in which Jack Kerouac and Buddy Holly are freedom fighters, in which Lyndon Johnson is a bum riding the rails to California and Britain and Russia get embroiled in a long and painful war in Vietnam.

He glanced across the stage at the men with whom he would debate. Francis Urquhart, the local MP, was talking to the bewildered Jim Hacker, a former Eden protégé serving his time as a Junior Minister.

I must say that you need a fair bit of background knowledge to get all of the references. For example, a little knowledge of British TV comedies is required to fully appreciate the fact that the squad of soldiers in the Vietnam story contains The Likely Lads, Stan Butler from *On the Buses*, Rev. Noote and Frank Spencer, or to understand why the film based on their exploits (and instantly recognisable as *Apocalypse Now*) is titled *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*. I suspect that Kevin and I had something of an advantage because he knew a lot of the American references and I knew a lot of the British ones.

You have to be careful, though. I was reading this piece of dialog that sounded strangely familiar. Who did I know that talks like that? Hmm, the character is a Russian called Colonel Ivanov. Oh yes... Except, as Kim reminded me, Yvegny Ivanov is the Russian spy who so enjoyed the company of Christine Keeler. For all we know he may also be the grandfather of Susan Andreivitch, but if Kim and Eugene had that possibility in mind it was only subliminal.

A discreet row of well-dressed but dangerous men were doubtless ready to step in if trouble started. They were under the direction of a calm chap with a bowler hat, an umbrella and a carnation in his frogged lapel, and a startlingly beautiful woman with auburn hair who wore a leather jump suit.

The book is divided into a number of short stories, each telling a tale of some notable event in the history of the USSA. They are very different. *Citizen Ed*, for example, is very black humour indeed. It tells the story of a small, rural town whose local party boss has some strange habits. Professor Lecter, the head of the State Psychiatric Institute, claims that mental illness is impossible in a Communist society. Try telling that to Sheriff Harry Truman and the people of Plainfield, Wisconsin.

Abdication Street, on the other hand, is an utterly hilarious tale of the marriage of Prince Charles to the Tzar's daughter, the Grand Duchess Ekaterina. Of course it does have the benefit of Charles's favourite uncle, the Earl of Balham, who was one of the stars of a popular radio comedy series before getting a little too seriously involved with Princess Margaret.

"There are worse prospects." [said Charles]. "I could be stuck with a blue-blooded English neurotic with a fashionable eating disorder and a brain the size of a pea."

A world in which Rudolph Nureyev stars as Agent 007 of SMERSH, Yul Brynner is a hit in Russian soap operas and Isaac Asimov is a famous TV astrologer. A world in which the Grand Duchess Anastasia grew up to become Barbara Cartland and the Moscow Free Hospital is run by a chap called Zhivago. George Smiley takes care of Royal security in case that feisty little US cultural attaché, Harlan something-or-other, whom everyone knows is a Commie spy, decides to make trouble.

Lady Penelope was well into her forties, but looked a sight better than her pictures. Her skirt seemed to restrict her movements, forcing her to bob in tiny steps as if she were on wires.

I could go on, but why give away all the good jokes. Besides, there's far more to it than that. Sure it is funny, hilariously so, but it is also very clever and very serious. Time after time, Byrne and Newman make telling moral and political points. It is very good satire. Very good indeed.

Now the hard bit. This book is hardback only and is published by Californian SF bookseller, Mark Ziesing. We are talking fairly small press here, people. Hopefully someone in Britain will have the good sense to stock it, and Justin Ackroyd knows Ziesing well so he should have copies. In the US you can get the book from Cargo Cult, 2804 Stuart Street, Berkeley, CA 94705 (\$29.95 + tax). Failing all else, Amazon.com has everything.

See, and not a single mention of Sheepworrying.

Back in the USSA - Eugene Byrne and Kim Newman - Mark V. Ziesing Books - hardcover

Potlatch by the Bay

And lo it came to pass that the travelling convention known as Potlatch came to rest at the most southerly point of its tri-annual migration. And the people of the Bay Area saw Potlatch, and they saw that it was good.

Of course Oakland is not the ideal place to go for a convention, but the area around Jack London Square is one of the better parts of the city. Some of you may remember me raving about it in *Emerald City* #24. More about food and beer later, but first, the hotel.

As many of you will know, American cities have often been built around their railway lines rather than vice versa. Jack London square, being a conversion of part of Oakland docks, is right on the main west coast line. The Jack London Inn, where Potlatch was held, faces onto the street where the trains run. Kevin thought it was paradise: an SF convention and a train to watch every 15 minutes or so. Some of the rest of us were less enamoured of the rumbling of the trains, the frantic ringing of the crossing alarms and the deafening sound of train horns as the drivers tried to point out to idiot motorists and pedestrians that trains are not extinct in the US.

We survived, however. We even made a feature of the trains. One of the highlights of the weekend was when, during the program item I ran on the musical version of *War of the Worlds*, a train passed by just as Wells' narrator was describing the action in Woking station. Live sound effects.

As is usual with Potlatch, the program was thin and heavily lit-biased. I went to only one panel: the one on *War of the Worlds* whose centenary the convention was celebrating. That panel was excellent. I can't comment about the others. However, as is traditional, there was a lot of micro-programming. Anyone with a good idea for a panel was able to publicise it and run it. Hence my panel on the musical *War of the Worlds*. Hence also the poker game which occupied Kevin for most of Saturday night. We did a panel on Dorothy Dunnett, and one on Warrior Goddesses, of which more later.

The major event on Sunday is, also by tradition, the auction in aid of the Clarion West Writers' Workshop. As usual, there was a splendid collection of items available, including a signed

manuscript of Elizabeth Hand's *Waking the Moon*. Oh, I wanted that so badly, but us semi-employed people cannot afford to spend almost \$100 on a book I already own in both hardback and softback.

Somehow, however, panels and the like are not really the stuff of Potlatch. It is a small, friendly convention at which fans from the north-west of the US and, for some reason, from Madison, Wisconsin, gather together to eat and drink. The con suite was superbly stocked by Karen Schaeffer and Ruth Lafler. The restaurants in Jack London Square and the surrounding area were duly patronised. We re-visited the Indonesian restaurant that Kevin and I had so liked: over 30 fans, over half the evening's clientele. Service got a little poor as the restaurant wasn't expecting a flood and had one person off sick, but the food was as good as ever.

We went to the pub too. To be precise, to the Pacific Coast Brewery Company, a brewpub a few blocks into the city. Decent beer, excellent food, and Fullers ESB on tap. It felt almost like London.

All in all, a very pleasant weekend in a surprisingly pleasant part of the Bay Area with a bunch of very nice people. Can't ask for more from a convention, really. (The person who asked about the Guest of Honour may now leave the room.) Next year Potlatch is in Eugene, Oregon. Kevin likes this too, because it is hard to get to by air but very easy by train. We are thinking of organising an expedition. After all, the Coast Starlight is Amtrak's most luxurious service. The bad news is that it is on Superbowl weekend. The organisers seem to have taken a leaf out of Basicom's book and timed their convention to coincide with a major sporting event on the assumption that no true fan would ever watch sport. At least the hotels in Eugene won't be booked out - they don't even have an NFL stadium. Nor will we miss the game. I'm fed up of being looked down on by snooty sports-haters. There will be a Superbowl party at the next Potlatch. Watch this space for further details.

Meanwhile, back to Warrior Goddesses. This one was an idea of my new friend Cynthia Gonsalves who has a web site (<http://members.home.net/cynthia1960/goddess.htm>) devoted to the concept. She is mainly interested in characters like Xena, Ivanova and Honor Harrington. I, of course, tend to know more about the likes of Ishtar, Artemis and the Morrigan. The objective of the panel was to investigate why tough and beautiful female characters are now popular and whether they are good feminist role models.

The former question is easier to answer. Feminism has changed. Twenty years ago, Red Sonja was derided as nothing but a male sex object. Today, Xena (who has thankfully taken on board the concept that chain mail bikinis are very bad for the tits) is a lesbian icon. Why? Because (in very brief summary) Naomi Wolf is in and Andrea Dworkin has been consigned to the rubbish bin of philosophical history.

But have things really got any better? Consider: Ivanova is completely screwed up, unable to sustain any sort of emotional relationship whatsoever. Xena is fairly well balanced now and has a stable relationship with Gabrielle, but she is wracked with guilt about her past which was, we must admit, pretty unpleasant. The message seems to be that women can be strong and aggressive, but only if they have been traumatised into it and, in the case of Ivanova, if they become cold and distant. Neither of them are true avatars of Ishtar.

Are there any better examples out there? Cynthia and I would be grateful for any ideas you may have.

Wily Wizard

It isn't often that I get approached by an established author rather than the other way round. (Well, let's face it, it has never happened before.) But whilst the likes of Spider Robinson and Norman Spinrad are complaining about how hard it is to get published, Allan Cole is out there promoting himself. He has an interesting web site, he's happy to correspond with fans, and he goes all out to find more, even to the extent of surfing the web to look for potential new readers. My site must have stuck out like a sore thumb. All this promotional stuff can seem a bit crass to hardened cynics like myself, but there's no denying that Allan is working hard at his business. Question is, can he write as well as market himself?

I trotted down to the local bookshop and picked up a copy of Allan's latest opus, *The Wizard of the Winds*. In many ways it is a classic fantasy: poor kid from obscure rural background turns out to be world's greatest magician and helps king repel demon hordes. If that was all there was to it you could expect a scathing review. Yet Allan had assured me that he was not a David Eddings clone, and Spinrad, of all people, had described it as "an intelligent fantasy". So what have we got here?

Well to start with, no elves, no dwarves, no fairies, no talking animals and only half a dragon. There are demons, but they have a kingdom of their own and an almost believable society: they are people (and so are the human characters which is unusual for fantasy novels). I found it a little difficult to get into at first, but after a couple of chapters I realised that if I switched my cultural perceptions from Tolkien to Arabian Nights it all seemed to make sense. There's a reason for this: Allan told me that he based the lead character, Safar Timura, on Omar Khyyam.

All of you who said "who?" take ten demerits and see me after class. Khyyam (Abu al-Fath Omar ben Ibrahim al-Khayyam to give him his full title) was an 11th Century Persian intellectual. A mathematician and astronomer, he is most famous to us as the author of the beautiful poem, *The Rubaiyat*. In other words, a genuine, all-round renaissance chap from a time when the Arab world was a shining beacon of human achievement on the edge of sordid, violent, proto-mediaeval Europe. He was also a Sufi mystic.

Not that there is a lot of Sufism in the novel. If you are looking for a whole load of wonderfully silly Nasruddin parables you will be disappointed. But Allan has got the concept of being "in the world but not of the world" off pat. For the most part, Safar does it very well, even though he doesn't really want to. And after all, Sufism is nothing if not subtle. If it were obvious it would be worthless.

Now whilst there might be no Nasruddin jokes, there are a lot of others. Allan is a humourous chap and he likes to get the reader laughing now and again. This is a dangerous practice in fantasy. For the most part the jokes are within the fantasy world, which works fine. But on occasions, such as when one demon says to his buddy, "we've been fiends together for a long

time" it seems that the joke is at the expense of the fantasy world, a la Pratchett, which doesn't work at all.

Another potential problem with fantasy books is prophecy. *Wizard of the Winds* has one right up front, which means that you know what is going to happen. Keeping the tension up in such cases is hard, but if you have a prologue telling you what will happen after the prophecy is fulfilled, and a vision revealing part of the long-term plot of the trilogy, it all gets a bit much. Allan does a surprisingly good job of maintaining the suspense after all these revelations, but I think he overdid the foreknowledge a bit.

Much of the above is, of course, nit-picking, an anti-social habit that is distressingly common amongst fandom. Were I a reviewer for a professional publication rather than some scummy fanzine I would be praising an entertaining tale, off the usual beaten track of fantasy novels, and well worth investigating. But, as I said earlier, I am a hardened cynic. I spend too much time looking for great literature in genre fiction and thus find it hard to praise unreservedly. I'd be fibbing if I said that *Wizard of the Winds* moved me the way that, say, *Winter Rose* did. I'd also be fibbing if I said that it left me desperate for the next volume. That, however, is for the excellent reason that, most unusually for these days, Allan has produced a first book of a trilogy that is complete in itself and does not end on a massive cliff-hanger. For that reason, which I greatly applaud, I will make sure I read the next volume. I suspect that I will enjoy it, just as I did the first.

One more thing. Allan's web site is very interesting. His father was a CIA operative and Allan has taken a lifelong interest in the intelligence community. The web site has a whole pile of links to everything from the CIA home page to how to avoid surveillance to conspiracy theory newsletters. <http://acole.com> And maybe you should access it via someone else's account...

The Wizard of the Winds - Allan Cole - Del Rey - softcover

Only in America: Television

If you think that Hollywood is lacking in imagination, just wait until you see American television. It has the usual standards: cop shows, lawyer shows, doctor shows, situation comedies. But aside from that most of what it broadcasts is derivative or repeats. For example, there are the Hercules and *Xena* imitators, *Roar* and *Robin Hood*. There are the multitudinous Star Trek spin-offs. Most of all, however, there are movies spin-offs. *Stargate: the TV series*; *Honey I Shrunk the Kids: the TV Series*; even *The Magnificent Seven: the TV Series*. I can see the day when we get *Star Trek: First Contact: the TV Series*. Thank goodness for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* which not only was a very silly movie but manages to be a very silly TV program as well.

Meanwhile, money flows like water. The contracts for coverage of American Football have just come up for renewal and the new 8-year contracts are reputed to be worth in the region of \$17.6bn. ABC, Fox and CBS, together with the sports cable channel, ESPN, have all got a slice of the pie. NBC has missed out. Considering that it has also lost the country's top rated show, *Seinfeld*, due to actor boredom, it could be seen as being in big trouble. On the other hand, it has just re-signed *ER* for a reported \$13m per episode. As one news announcer said, it wasn't

long ago that people were making movies on that sort of budget. Then again, *Seinfeld* was rumoured to gross \$28m in advertising revenue every episode and *ER* can't be far behind.

Cartoon shows, of course, are another high point. Everyone knows of *The Simpsons*, but *King of the Hill*, about a similarly dysfunctional Texan family, is just as popular here. And of course there is *South Park*. It is only available on cable which we don't have, but everyone else absolutely raves about it. The only sense I've been able to get out of people is that it is "a satire on everything".

As far as the SF goes, both *Voyager* and *DS9* are now very different shows. The *B5* influence is clear and both are much darker and much more violent than *ST* or *NextGen* ever were. *Voyager* is as irredeemably awful as ever, this season's major plot device being the addition to the crew of a Borg girl whose costume is more sprayed-on than BatGirl's. Fortunately, being a Borg, she doesn't have to act, so choosing the actress for the shape of her tits has not unduly detracted from the show.

DS9, on the other hand, is finally getting its act together. It has a storyline, the current one being the invasion of Federation Space by The Dominion who just happen to live on the far side of the Wormhole, thus making *DS9* the front line. Things happen. There are changes. Not, of course, permanent ones, but enough to keep a bit of interest in the goings on.

This is an interesting development for TV programs. As you probably know, TV companies hate continuing stories because it constrains how you can fill your schedule. Not that this stopped Australian TV from messing with *B5* so that President Santiago took office in the episode after the one in which he was assassinated. But it is happening, even in such an avowedly studio product as *Star Trek*. Of course few series have writers able to sustain anything like the *B5* story arc, but they are producing something which is much more like I remember from comics: a collection of short stories lasting 5 to ten issues, sometimes interlaced. Progress.

Meanwhile, what of *B5*? Most of you will know that Warner has dropped the series and it has found a new home on Ted Turner's cable channel, TNT. This is a pain in the butt for those of us who don't have cable, but TNT are clearly putting a lot of effort into the show. Their opening day had the original 2-hour pilot, *The Gathering*, the new 2-hour show, *In the Beginning*, and an introductory show hosted by Bruce Boxleitner. Five hours of *B5*, shown twice on a Saturday. Now they are showing all of the old episodes, one per day, and fans all over the country are stocking up on blank video tapes. The new season has just started.

The Gathering has had new sound and effects added to it, but it seemed pretty much the same as I remembered. It isn't a great story, the first episode of season one is a much better introduction, but it is OK. *In the Beginning*, on the other hand, is awful. Firstly it is telling a story that we already know very well. Much of the footage is pieced together from flashbacks in previous episodes: the death of Dukhat, Sheridan's destruction of the Dark Star and the Battle of the Line. Also, much effort has been put into creating appearances for the rest of the cast. In fact, most of the new footage is just that. It looked cheap, probably because it was cheap.

And now we wait. Much of the joy of the first few seasons came from the fact that Straczynski had it all plotted out in advance and thus was able to drop teasers and clues right through the series. Does he have a new story arc, or are we going to go back to something more like *DS9*? I have a sneaking suspicion that we may come to see the first 3.5 seasons as the golden age of *B5*.

Bay Area Diary

The start of 1998 was a busy time in this little corner of the world. It began with a New Year party chez Karen Schaeffer and Mike Ward. I must say that they have a splendid house. The food was darn good too and Mike has excellent taste in whisky. A thoroughly good time was had by all and the New Year was welcomed in in fine style with fireworks. My contribution to the festivities was, of course, the haggis. Much to my surprise, the Americans seemed completely unfazed and rather fond of it.

The following day Kevin and I hosted a small gathering at our apartment, LunaCity. The primary purpose of it was to allow a few friends to sample the Aussie beers I had brought back with me and thereby convince Americans that there is life beyond Fosters. In addition, Lynn Gold brought some chili flavoured pasta which was delicious. Australian readers will be interested to know that Dogbolter was voted the best of the well known brands. The star of the evening, however, was a beer called Moonshine which was 8% proof and tasted like a British beer. I'd never heard of it before wandering into the off licence at the Chinatown end of Little Bourke Street and asking for unusual beers. Try it out, guys, it is good.

On the Saturday we had a full scale party, preceded by a bunch of guys coming to play trains with Kevin. Well, a train game, something called Empire Builder which turned out to be a rather neat game. Obviously someone forget to tell California about my parties because several of the guests had dinner before they came. As a result we had even more food left over than usual (Melbournians faint with shock). Of course Kevin, Michael and I would have eaten it all in the following days, had it not been for the fact that we all came down with a nasty gastric flu bug in the following week. No, it was not my cooking. We know who the culprit is, don't we, Raymond.

Christmas here was remarkably warm: clear blue skies and temperatures probably in the low twenties. Since that time, it has rained with a vengeance. We are now well on our way to 200% of annual winter rainfall and mention of El Niño in TV news broadcasts has reached saturation point. We've even started to get El Niño jokes in the adverts.

And one final point. As many of you may know, my work involves the reform of electricity markets. One of the reasons why I'm here is because California is right in the middle of such a reform. The new market was due to go live on January 1st but, to no one's surprise, it has been delayed because the software isn't ready. However, on the morning of January 1st I woke up to find the clocks stopped and the UPS on Michael's computers bleeping plaintively. Oh ho, I thought, they've decided to start after all. Kevin found a battery-operated radio and eventually we learned that it was just us and 14,000 other customers in the local neighbourhood. The blackout actually ended one block south of ours. PG&E blamed "an animal in a substation". The squirrel, being deceased, was unavailable for comment.

Parties, flu and rain aside, the main topic exercising the minds of Bay Areas residents right now is what to do about the 49ers. Now I know that there are some people in fandom who

think that a hatred of sport is a pre-requisite for true fannishness. Those people may skip this section. This is my fanzine, and if I want to write about sport, tough.

There are football teams and there are Football Teams. As with Manchester United or Real Madrid, the 49ers is one of those teams whose fans expect a championship, every year. If they get it, it is an OK season, if they don't, it is a failure. Given their record over the past 15 years, it is not an unreasonable expectation. And yet, for the third year running, they have been dumped out of the playoffs by the Green Bay Packers.

Green Bay is a small community of 93,000 people in the frozen north of Wisconsin, famous only for its cheese, and its football team. Uniquely in the NFL, the city owns the team and uses its profits to fund roads, schools and so on. When I first started watching American Football they were one of the laughing stocks of the league. But they had a proud tradition. They won the first two Superbowls. Heck, the trophy is even named after their head coach of that era, Vince Lombardi. It belongs to them. It took them 29 years to get it back again, and they did so by adopting the 49ers' famous "West Coast Offence".

To be beaten by a team that is clearly better than you is depressing, but to be beaten by a team that is better than you at deploying tactics you invented is deeply galling. Yet it is true. The Packers play like the all-conquering Joe Montana 49ers team of the 80's and they do it very well. So well, in fact, that when the 49ers were looking for a new head coach at the end of last year they headed straight for the guy who had trained Brett Farve, the Packer's quarterback.

It made for a great story. Mike Holmgren, the Packer's head coach, was born in San Francisco and still owns a bar here. He even had his Harley shipped out here for Sunday's game so he could take a ride round his home town (in the event, it was raining too heavily). In contrast, Steve Mariucci of the 49ers was born in a small town called Iron Mountain just north of Green Bay. He had supported the Packers with every cell of his body right up until the day he signed with San Francisco. And of course he and Farve were old friends.

1997 had been a strange season for the 49ers. They had a new head coach. In the first game of the season they were soundly beaten and lost their two best players, Rice and Young, to injury. But they fought back. They won the next 11 games straight, a club record, and secured home field advantage throughout the playoffs. Young was back, and the junior receivers were doing a fine job deputising for Rice. Surely this time they had the edge on the Pack?

No. They got thumped. It was embarrassing.

And now the Bay Area is abuzz with inquests. What went wrong? Why does it keep going wrong? What do we do now?

There have been a lot of suggestions. It used to be the running game that got the blame, but Mariucci had hired a top class running back and built the offence around him. The 49ers managed an average of less than 2 yards per rush against Green Bay. Sure the corners got repeatedly burned by the Packers' receivers, but Green Bay only scored 23 points. Sure Garrison Hearst and Brent Jones were only half fit. But the sad fact is that the 49ers are getting old.

It is a fine team. Many of the players collect Pro Bowl appearances the way that Dave Langford collects Hugos. Some of them have a whole hand full of Superbowl rings. But they are the oldest roster in the league, and with each year it gets harder. The management, aware of the expectations placed on their team, is afraid to do more than tinker. Sooner or later they are

going to have to bite the bullet and go for a radical restructuring. It may mean a year or two out of the playoffs, but it is probably the only way back to the Superbowl.

Fan scene

It has been a busy month for new fanzines. First up we have *The Twilight Zine* from none less than the current MSFC president, Michael Jordan. Most of the content is film reviews, all of it is opinionated, which is generally a good thing. A little heavy on the bitching for a first issue, I think. Wait until you are a jaundiced old hag like me, Michael. The layout is a classic example of why I do not try to do anything fancy with *Emerald City*. One other tip, Michael dear. Put contact details in it. Or don't you want subscribers?

James Allen has also produced a new fanzine. Any of you who have seen "Jocko's" zany contributions to ANZAPA or the delightfully weird Kalien will know to expect something weird. *Does Anybody Read This List* is a fanzine made up of a collection of lists. Look, don't ask me explain unless you are prepared to feed me a few dozen margaritas first. Your best bet, if you really want to know, is to email James at jamesallen@vut.edu.au or write to him at PO Box 41, West Brunswick. Victoria 3055, Australia.

Kevin was sent issue two of *Snufkin's Bum* from Maureen Speller, the appearance of which she assures us has nothing to do with her candidacy for the next TAFF race. I guess my copy may have gone to Australia. Then again, Maureen might have known from experience what I'd make of the opening article. Two pages of angst on why she was producing a fanzine and whether or not it would be a "proper" zine. She writes so well, I just wish she'd be a little less self-flagellatory. Vote for her for TAFF, folks. Let's get her to Bucconeer, give her a big, friendly hug and tell her it is OK. Meanwhile, get the zine from 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ, UK.

Finally we have *Anita's Book of Days* which I picked up at Potlatch. Anita Rowland is a Seattle fan who has been active in APAs for some time and is also heavily into the on-line journal scene. No, seriously, there is a whole hobby out there for people who write, and publish, their diaries on the Web. Lucy Huntzinger and Luke McGuff are big in that scene too. Personally I can't understand it. As Anita points out, it is very public for a diary. Anyone could read it: your boss, your mother, that guy you've gone gaga over but are too shy to approach. I thought diaries were for juicy stuff that you would never let anyone else read, only to be published after your death.

Anyway, Anita has done a pretty good job of editing material from her diary into a zine. It is divided in various topics representing different facets of her life, one of which is fandom. I'm sorry to say that it was only the fannish bits that held much interest for me, probably because I knew all the people she was talking about. There were a couple of gems too. Interesting to hear of Anita boycotting the Orycon opening ceremonies in 1997 because they didn't have a drag act that year. But my favourite was the recounting of Tommy Ferguson's visit to Seattle (well, to Lesley Reece). He and Lesley had cooked up a one shot fanzine for the meeting of Vanguard,

the Seattle SF club. It opened with an article based around the question, "If you had one shot to shoot at Seattle fandom, who would you shoot?".

Now there's interesting. Didn't Gary Farber live in Seattle for several years... Sorry Gary.

If you are interested in this stuff, the best bet is to go straight to the diary itself at <http://www.halcyon.com/anitar/journal>. Otherwise write to 1732 15th Ave. Apt. 5, Seattle, WA 98122, USA.

Not knowing where in the world I am going to be living in the near future, or how much money I'm going to have, it is kind of difficult to predict which conventions I will be attending. However, if there is any way I can get to this year's Wiscon I will. Why? Their Guest of Honour is Sheri Tepper, and other guests include Ellen Kushner. If they'd got Liz Hand as well it would have been perfect. The dates are May 22nd to 25th. Check out their web site at <http://www.sf3.org/wiscon> for more details.

And finally, a couple of tales for those of you who believe that Americans are devoid of all humour. Sure they are completely nonplussed by irony and tend to see sarcasm as insulting, but they appreciate a good giggle as much as the next man.

For example, at a recent BASFA meeting we donated some of our money to help the kids of a local fan who had died suddenly. Mindful of the large number of obituaries over the past year, Paul Israel moved that BASFA issue an edict forbidding fans to die during 1998. A spirited debate ensued, touching on subjects such as whether death could be avoided, if fans who became unavoidably dead would be required to make themselves undead and whether this was discriminatory against garlic lovers. An amendment was also proposed that the edict should exempt those persons whose death would benefit fandom as a whole. Every member had their own idea of whom this meant, but the fact that Newt Gingrich has been known to express an admiration for SF was foremost in many minds.

Also you may remember from last issue the story of NESFA's least-loved neighbour, Mr. Skunk. At a recent meeting various of the Boston fans proposed that their pungent lodger be removed. I hope they will not mind me paraphrasing some of the debate as reported in their newszine, *Instant Message*.

The original plan was for the skunk to be removed by humane methods at a cost of \$150. George Flynn asked how much it would cost to do so inhumanely. Lis Carey responded that noxious chemicals would be involved, only to be informed that the chemicals could hardly get more noxious than they were already. Mike Burnstein complained that he borrowed a book from the library, only to find it smelling of skunk. Priscilla Olsen said that this was a feature designed to enable swift recovery of overdue items.

Following some debate on the legal rights of skunks, Mark and Priscilla Olsen announced that they had bought a membership for Mr. Skunk, thus giving him the right to attend meetings. This was referred to the Membership Committee to determine whether skunks could indeed buy memberships and whether that included the right to be under the clubhouse as well as inside it.

Ted Atwood announced that the best way to lure a skunk from its lair was to lay a trail of marshmallows. He therefore proposed that such a trail be laid from the NESFA clubhouse to that of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society. Hasty calculation revealed that some 9.24 million marshmallows would be involved and concern was expressed as to the effects on Mr. Skunk's waistline.

The minutes concluded: "Finally, everyone left the clubhouse except for the new subscribing member Mr. Skunk." As far as I know, he is still there.

Footnote

Not much to report here save for an update on the science news from the introduction. *The Weekly World News*, America's finest tabloid newspaper, reliably informs us that NASA has discovered mysterious pyramids on Mars.

This issue is for John Elway for refusing to give up hope.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl