

EMERALD CITY

Issue 32

April 1997

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Introduction

Ha, see. Two months of "unseasonably warm" weather in Britain, spring officially begun, and what do we get. Snow, of course, at Easter. It is cold. I want to go home. Fortunately, I can. California here I come.

In the meantime I have gone to a couple of interesting conventions and read some very good books. Herewith, my witterings on the latest batch.

One Woman's Intuition

Intuition, of course, being the current name of the UK Eastercon, held in the Jarvis Piccadilly Hotel, Manchester, at, er, Easter.

Day 1: Thursday - no rain

I was delivered safely and punctually to Manchester by Virgin Trains (in marked contrast to Great Western who were 25 minutes late again getting a morning commuter service into London from Swindon). Having booked up late, I found myself in the overflow hotel, the Portland, but as the Piccadilly area is fairly crawling with hotels it turned out to be a mere 222 Standlettes from the Jarvis (a Standlette being a short, girly version of the Standlee; when I get home I'll calculate the conversion ratio).

Checking out the con hotel I quickly ran into Giulia de Cesare and we set about making plans for the masquerade. Quite how anyone manages to design a fine hall with a reasonable-sized stage and not provide any backstage area I do not know, but I guess we'll cope. I'd provided Giulia with the guidelines we used for the Australian Costumers' Guild Ball which, in turn, were based on the standard International Costumers' Guild procedures. They worked well in Australia, they work well at Worldcons. Fingers crossed the UK is not that different.

Time passed quickly in a combination of meeting old friends and trying to get my computer and the hotel switchboard to talk to each other. Before I knew it, dinner expeditions were forming. Giulia had found the local Chinatown (actually only a handful or two of restaurants but it did have an arch) was in easy walking distance so off we went. On the way we ran into

Steve Glover and party coming back. They warmly recommended the Mai Sum which did all you can eat for £12.50 (about \$20 which is cheap for the UK). He was right. The food was not great, but it was very plentiful. We stuffed ourselves. This is called getting the con off to a good start.

Day 2: Friday - floods

Even by Thursday evening it was clear that something was wrong. Manchester was getting slightly damp, but people were phoning in with tales of massive tailbacks on the motorways. It wasn't until Friday morning, however, that we realised just how lucky us early travellers had been. Several fans, including Paul Kinkaid, reported having spent many hours in a tunnel outside Rugby with nothing to drink except Virgin Cola. Paul arrived around 5 am on Friday. Apparently he was lucky - some people spent all night on the train. Meanwhile Paul Dormer looked with horror on the TV pictures of water lapping around the tops of the platforms at Banbury railway station. "I went through there yesterday morning", he wailed. There had been at least three feet less water then.

Floods or no, the con started fairly smoothly. I did a stint on the information desk in the afternoon which was very easy. All I had to do was to sit there with one hand pointing out right and say "Registration is over there". There were three signs saying so, but mine was the first desk people saw on coming out of the lift and they reacted accordingly.

Most of the other questions I got were of the "where is" type. The convention programme was split between the Jarvis and the Britannia just over the road (90 Standlettes door-to-door). For some reason the ConCom had neglected to print maps in the program and many fans seemed incapable of reading the lists of which room was where or of following Steve Davies' excellent signs. Strangely enough, there were no toilets on the same floor as the bar in the Jarvis. "Straight up those stairs" was my second most-often used phrase.

I had only two major problems to deal with. The first was a harassed looking father desperate to change his kid's nappy. This being the north of England, the only baby-changing facilities were in the ladies' toilets. The other was Jack Cohen who arrived in a panic having left his progress reports at home. "I've got no evidence I'm a member", he said, "will anyone on registration recognise me?" Only if they haven't been to a UK con for at least 20 years, I mused to myself as I sent him on his way.

Dinner was spent in the main restaurant of the Britannia. Marcia Illingworth expressed her disappointment that the vegetarian items on the menu were not available and was promptly allowed to suggest something to the chef. When she could not eat all of her garlic bread, the waiter took it away and came back with it wrapped in foil shaped to look like a swan. Meantime I had one of the best pepper steaks I have ever had. We were seriously impressed.

Day 3: Saturday - snow

I went to bed fairly early on Friday night, having discovered that the Masquerade tech rehearsal was scheduled for 9 am Saturday. Consequently I missed most of the excitement. This was provided in part by overwrought Manchester United supporters drowning their sorrows after their team had thrown away the championship race by only drawing with

Liverpool at home. Security, despite being called security, apparently handled them well. The weather was not helping. White stuff was falling out of the sky and persuading the roving thugs that a nice, warm bar was a much better thing to smash up than the city streets. Suspicion fell on the large contingent of Norwegian fen who were running a room party that night. We felt that they were taking the atmospheric a little too far.

By Saturday afternoon, the con was apparently running so smoothly that the gopher hole was shut down and the gophers told to go away and enjoy themselves. This was slightly illusory. Things were working, but they showed significant signs of being arranged at the last minute. Bernie Peek, for example, was rushing round trying to find which authors had actually turned up and when they would be willing to do signings. This resulted in less than optimal publicity and consequently Mssrs Banks and Noon, two of the best SF authors in the world today, sitting there chatting amongst themselves for 45 minutes before heading back to the bar. Bernie and I contrived to get Tracy Oliphant on that signing panel, and Bernie even bought a copy of her book, thus giving her almost as much to do as her famous colleagues. Hopefully there will be a photo on the web site for the benefit of those Melbourne fans who do not believe that Tracy is a famous author here in Pommiland. By the way, Tracy, Rog Peyton of Andromeda Books says he bought lots of copies of your book because everyone was telling him how good it is.

Meanwhile, back at the information desk, everyone seemed to have found their way around the hotels. There were few programme changes, except for the films and signings which both seemed to be last minute things. At one point I fell asleep, which shows you just how much work I was having to do.

Saturday night, of course, was Masquerade night. Giulia de Cesare had been conned into running the show and I came along to help her get backstage under control. This proved quite a challenge as UK costumers appear to be largely ignorant of the ICG guidelines. Den Moms are unknown, ninjas are recruited from whatever gophers happen to be around, and some of the costumers seem to have little idea of things like timing and respect for their fellow competitors.

There was very little sign of assistance backstage. A couple of acts had brought friends along to help, but we ended up with one assistant den mom (thank you Lor), and one assistant ninja (my new friend Karin Lagesen) plus Teddy, Giulia and me. Just before the show was about to start, a bunch of gophers showed up, far too late and unsuitably dressed. I sent them all away. Apparently a whole bunch of them had turned up at the right time (about 2 hours before) and had been told by someone that they would not be needed until later. Sigh.

Fortunately there were only 13 acts, three of them kids, and we coped pretty well. UK masquerades place much more emphasis on comedy acts and complex presentation than the costumes. Tom Nanson looked very splendid, but there was nothing approaching the quality of, say, the Martian Samurai from LSC2 or Chris Baylis's Hornblower outfit. There were, however, some constructions that Robert Jan would have been proud of. SMS in a massive harness as a Mythotherium was very impressive, and Jane Weddel and friend in skimpy space suits and silly Tellytubby voices partnered him well.

Dave Wake's Alien was another star act. I still don't quite understand how he got his feet into the thing's legs without heels showing and was still able to walk. His team worked very well too - they had to get Ripley off stage and into a massive suit of expanded polystyrene body armour during the performance, then get her out again for the finale. Dave was deeply

embarrassed at having fallen off his stilts whilst making his exit and bravely crawled his way backstage. He then went back on for a second act at the end, and again for the prize giving. It wasn't until later that he realised he had broken his ankle. That should give you some idea of the adrenalin rush that costumers experience during a masquerade. It also shows what happens when you don't have trained ninjas. In the US Dave could probably have sued for damages.

The most imaginative entry was the Android Striptease which involved peeling off layers of artificial skin to reveal all that sexy circuitry beneath. Mention should also be made of Anders Holstrom's Dragon Knight. I'd love to know how he made those wings flap because there were no obvious wires or hand movements.

In the end everything went well and Dave Wake got a well-deserved Best in Show. Guilia's idea of a wedding dress parade after the show provided good entertainment (and rather better dressmaking) and the judges were ready to hand out the awards at the end. I understand that my offer to remove one of their toenails of every minute late they made us contributed to the timeliness of their deliberations. Perhaps we should try that method at Bucconeer.

That evening I ended up having dinner with Claire Goodall who was head of tech for the show. I was impressed with the fact that they had managed to provide radio mikes for the Aliens act so that their dialogue could be heard. Without such facilities, complex presentations don't work in a large auditorium (indeed, we normally don't allow acts to speak on stage at Worldcons). Nevertheless, things could be a lot smoother with a bit of organisation and understanding. For example, the guys from 2Kon (the 2000 Eastercon) changed the script they gave to MC Sue Mason after the rehearsal, with the result that Tech missed their cue. Also, SMS if you are listening, it really isn't on to give Tech more than one set of music and expect them to change it on cue. They got it right, but with a large show it would add unnecessary complications. It is a shame that no debrief was scheduled because that really helps make things better from year to year at Worldcons.

Talking of dinner, I found myself in the pizza restaurant at the Britannia. After the superb service in the main restaurant the previous night, I was surprised and disappointed at how rude and incompetent the staff were. I understand that they were short staffed, but there was no excuse for the behaviour of our waitress, or the fact that they managed to bill us for every item we'd discussed during the order, whether or not we had finally ordered it, and whether or not they had served it to us. I don't often complain in restaurants, but when I do the staff do not forget it in a hurry.

Day 4: Sunday - sunshine and hail

Sunday morning seemed suspiciously bright and cheerful for half way through a convention. Obviously the sun had got to bed much earlier than the rest of us. I sleepwalked through the morning at the SF2002 desk and handing out free Ghirardelli chocolate to all and sundry. My thanks to Reconvene (the 1999 Eastercon) for the share of their table and to my new Norwegian friends for their company. Some of you may know that European fans have been trying to get large-scale conventions going on the continent, the so-called BEC (Big European Convention). The first one of these is scheduled for 2000 at Bergen in Norway (a good choice because it is not in the UK but is an easy ferry ride away). Judging from what I've seen of the

committee (hello Bjørn Tore Sund, Sissel Borgen and Karin Lagesen), it should be a good show. They are all coming over for Bucconeer and I'm looking forward to seeing them again.

Lunchtime was spent supping Dim Sum with Bernie Peek. Sadly Manchester does not seem to have discovered chili fried tentacles, but the food was good and plentiful. After that I went and snoozed on the bid table again. We ended up with 11 pre-supports sold which I was well pleased with. Later on I helped Vince Docherty get to his email. For some reason, every time he tried dialing with his modem (a PCMCIA Worldport, not exactly an unusual model) it caused the phone in the bathroom to ring. There being very little open in Manchester on Easter Sunday, I ended up having Chinese for dinner as well.

Day 5: Monday - wind

I awoke to the sound of a choir of yetis rehearsing a performance of Wagner's Ring. Slowly this metamorphosed into the wail of the wind around Piccadilly Gardens. I had missed breakfast. Perhaps I had done more than I remembered on Sunday.

The last day is the day when it is almost safe to go to the dealers' room because they are close to sold out. I had made an earlier foray there in order to ensure I got one of the few copies of the new Mary Doria Russell book, but I figured I ought to go again. I was sort of intending to get the latest Ian MacDonald in softback, but somehow Rog Peyton managed to persuade me to end up with that, and Tracy's book, in hardback. Sadly they got stolen whilst I was sat chatting to people in the bar later that day. Hotel and con security were very helpful, but there was no sign of the books. You don't expect that sort of thing to happen at conventions. Ah well, at least it wasn't my handbag.

Of course I should have been on panel at the time. I didn't know I was going to be on panel, but when I arrived at the con I was given a letter telling me I was talking about American fandom on Monday morning. That's very kind, I thought, someone has heard about my unfortunate experience at Corflu and is trying to put things right. Come Sunday afternoon I picked up the latest newsletter to discover that, yes, my panel had been cancelled. This time no one had even bothered to come and tell me that I'd be boring. Spotting Claire Brialey, who I knew was involved in programming, I had a few words. "Oh dear", said Claire going an interesting shade of pink, "we amalgamated your panel with another one that was on yesterday. Didn't anyone tell you?" "No", I said, "not a word". Claire looked pleadingly at the floor, but despite her desperate entreaties it steadfastly refused to swallow her up. Next time someone asks me to be on a panel at a British convention I am not going to turn up, even if the panel is not cancelled.

Feeling thoroughly fed up I went back to my hotel for an afternoon nap and was rewarded with a superb snooker match on TV. This was followed by a fine meal in what Tanya Huff described as a Californian restaurant. It was wonderful food, but the only Mexican element on the menu was an extremely hot chorizo sausage in my starter. I think the word you were looking for, Tanya, was "fusion". This is a school of cooking which involves mixing and matching from all over the world, for example my chorizo and humous, or Maureen Speller's mussels in Thai green chili soup. This style is quite popular in places like LA and Palo Alto, but it is not what I'd call Californian cuisine. No matter though, the food was excellent. I would never have thought of doing a crispy duck pizza, but it worked very well.

This is turning into a Foodie Fandom column, isn't it? Ah well, at least we didn't talk about IKEA. Yes Karin, there is such a thing as IKEA fandom. I don't know why either. Just don't tell the Swedes, OK, we'll never hear the end of it.

Talking of unbelievable things, the one thing I was determined to do at Intuition was meet Jim De Liscard. *Banana Wings* readers will be familiar with Jim, the Croydon fan who is not part of Croydon fandom and who seems capable of coming out with the most wonderful comments right on cue. He seemed so good that I was half sure that Claire and Mark Plummer had made him up. Having just been to dinner with Paul and Maureen, and being on our way back to the Dead Coypu Party (another *Banana Wings* joke), I insisted that they introduce me. As we walked in through the door of the party suite, Maureen pointed and said "you see that guy being laced into a corset". OK, I surrender, he does exist (even if he does have no waist).

Summary

I said at the end of my Corflu review in the last issue that the UK does have a lot of good con runners. I was terrified that Intuition would prove me wrong, but thankfully all went remarkably smoothly. Most of the problems were caused by the split site. Some "It is in the Other Hotel" t-shirts would have sold very well. Things were not helped by the howling gale that blew along Portland Street (spot the synchronicity here). Were they to build a walkway between the two hotels life would be a lot easier. It would also be a very interesting edifice as the décor would need to change from the Jarvis's Industrial Concrete look to the Nouvelle Bordello of the Britannia half way along.

Another significant problem was having only three elevators in the Jarvis. I don't think they ever blew out, but there were significant delays and serious problems for those in wheelchairs or with pushchairs. The worst part of it was that there were no public stairs between the second floor and street level. The people who built the Jarvis were obviously from LA because they put a car park on the second floor and reception on second with it. It did not occur to them that anyone would come in and out any other way. Someone had been putting round signs with number quizzes on them (things like "13 S o t A F", meaning 13 Stripes on the American flag). The one next to the elevator read "2 H t W f a L". Hint: the British word for "elevator" is "lift".

Split site apart, Manchester is a superb place for a con. There are plenty of cheap (by British standards) and good restaurants nearby, the city centre is 5 minutes walk away, and the main railway station 10 minutes. There is a tram station right alongside the Jarvis. The city is only 2.5 hours from London by train and it has an international airport. A thousand people fitted into the facilities comfortably. I guess the real ale ran out, but that happens at every Eastercon. I'd be happy to go back there in future.

Very little seemed to go wrong and problems were dealt with swiftly and competently. Sure there were communications problems, and the closing of the gopher hole, plus not having an Ops room in the Jarvis, did not help. My favourite snafu happened when I was in the newsletter office printing some copies of this zine. Suddenly a bunch of gophers arrived claiming that Ops had received a request for people to distribute the newsletter. John Dowd, the editor, looked very blank and sent them away. What had actually happened was that Fran Dowd (con chair, or sofa as she preferred to be called) had asked for people to distribute a quiz that had been printed by the newsletter staff. So much for marital communication.

In fact, gopher distribution seemed to be at the root of most problems. There were either too many or too few. It seemed to me that the trouble was that everyone had relied on their being enough gophers to be able to wing things on the day. Had department heads done a bit of prior organisation, this might not have happened.

But hey, this is nit picking. It worked, people enjoyed themselves. What more do you want out of a con?

Of Castles and Kings

Fantasyland, as well all know, is peopled with easily recognisable characters. There are weak kings, evil queens, spunky princesses, stupidly loyal knights, undead, giant wolves horse-mad barbarians and dragons. That, pretty much, is what you can find in George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. Not forgetting, of course, the map and the genealogy. From first impressions, then, it should be a giant, 800-page yawn. Nevertheless, Justin Ackroyd has never let me down yet. Being short of a book on Liverpool Street Station, I decided to give it a go. I'm very glad I did.

So what has George done different? His world is not very imaginative, the long term plot seems pretty predictable, and yet I was riveted all the way through. Why? Because the book has two saving graces.

Firstly, there is a lot of complex subplotting along the way. The story twists and turns in unexpected ways, even if the final destination is clear. Martin is not in the same league as Dorothy Dunnett for deviousness, but he is well on his way there.

That alone would be enough to entertain, but George also has some of the most vivid, believable characters I have ever read about. Budding authors should read this book just to see how characterisation is done. Not all of them are likeable, of course, but all of them stride off the page as solid and imposing as you could wish for.

I should add also that George has done his research. He writes glibly about clothing, castles, weaponry and warfare as if he had lived in the Middle Ages. This is a welcome change from most fantasy writers whose characters seem to inhabit a world derived from a cross between Tolkein's Shire and a Hollywood film of Robin Hood.

That doesn't seem a lot to say about a book, especially such a fat one. But without going into detail on the plot, which is standard fantasy stuff, there isn't a lot more to say. Of course it is the first part of a trilogy, but you knew that already, didn't you. I don't know as yet how many volumes it will have, but with any luck it will actually be three. I believe that the next instalment is in the final stages of production. Get on with it, George, there are a large number of people out here who are on tenterhooks.

Oh, and George, having a bard character called Marillion is seriously bad form. Please keep him out of future books.

A Game of Thrones - George R. R. Martin - Voyager - softcover

The Sparrow Takes Flight

The Sparrow is probably the best SF novel never to be nominated for a Hugo. The publishers promoted it as mainstream and we didn't find out about it in time. It did get the BSFA Award at Intuition, and hopefully Mary Doria Russell will walk away with this year's Campbell Award. There's a Mythopoeic Society Award up for grabs too, not to mention the already won Tiptree. But now there is a sequel out. Is it, perhaps, next year's Hugo winner?

From an SF point of view, perhaps not. *Children of God* adds very little to the world created in *The Sparrow*. The emphasis of the book is more on morality, on religion and on politics than on science. Nevertheless, it is every bit as good as we have come to expect. I laughed, I cried, I was in awe. Russell is very, very good indeed.

In case you hadn't guessed, Emilio Sandoz gets to go back to Rakhat. What he finds there is a telling lesson for anyone looking forward to first contact with an alien species. Cleverly, Russell makes excellent use of relativity to allow an awful lot to happen in the life span of a single character. Other than *The Forever War*, it is the only SF novel I can think of that makes good use of time debt rather than bending over backwards to avoid it.

But, as you might expect, the central question of the book is Sandoz's faith. Does he get it back again? Does he forgive God for what happened to him? Does he convert to Judaism? Are all Jesuits as stupid as Russell made them out to be in *The Sparrow*? Ah, that would be telling.

In my review of *The Sparrow* (EmCit #30) I said that I thought Russell was deliberately making the Catholics look stupid as part of her justification for her own conversion to Judaism. I now think I was wrong. Russell doesn't seem to have converted because she thinks that Judaism is a better or more moral religion, just a more honest one. The God of the Jews is, after all, a capricious, jealous, arrogant chap who never, ever explains what he is up to nor apologises for the shit he puts his creations through. He ordered Abraham to sacrifice his son, He hounded Jonah mercilessly, and He stood by and allowed the Holocaust to happen. Christianity supposedly provided the apology. Russell, it would seem, thinks that that apology was insincere, and wants to go back to a more honest relationship with her deity.

The problem with this, of course, is that, if you continue with an anthropomorphic view of God, you have to come to the conclusion that he is a thoroughly unpleasant old git who deserves our contempt rather than our worship. Therefore we find God disappearing into the machinery of his creation and Russell's religion starting to have rather a lot in common with my own. Creation is indeed miraculous and beautiful, but don't expect it to step in and grant you salvation. It is far more likely to kick you in the teeth. The trick is that if you believe in a merciful, compassionate God you are going to be disappointed, but if you don't you can still find beauty, love and hope.

And you can find all three, and the obligatory Chicago Cubs joke, in *Children of God*. Read it, it is splendid.

Children of God - Mary Doria Russell - Random House - hardcover

Fire Storm

Oh, Storm, I'm sorry. I finally get round to reading the final part of the Shemyaza saga, and I end up reviewing it alongside two really fine novels. In most any other company, *Stealing Sacred Fire* would be a star book. In this issue it is merely good. Faint praise, which is a shame because the book deserves better.

This series, which does not seem to have an official name, is one of the most unusual sequences of books I have read. The first volume (EmCit #15) was a cross between a Miss Marple mystery and a modern gothic vampire tale. The second (EmCit #16) read like a *Shadowrun* scenario set in Britain. The last book sees Storm dabbling with the political thriller and ending up as a modern day Dion Fortune. Like its central character, the trilogy moves from darkness into light and thence to astral majesty. Very strange.

What Storm has done is to create a modern mythic synthesis. The basis of her work is the Book of Enoch which treats of the deeds of the Fallen Angels, the Nephilim. Onto that she has grafted a Celtic veneer, she has delved into the Mesopotamian origins of the Bible, has found survivals of that religion in the folk beliefs of the Kurds, and has thrown in a few modern theories about the pyramids, seasoned with some suspiciously Lovecraft-like terminology. That is a fair old mix, but somehow she carries it off. Personally I am a little perturbed about introducing Isthtar as a little girl with a pet scarab, but Storm has not been struck down from On High so I guess the Boss is cool about it. The Christians are going to hate it, but that's their own fault for stealing so much of their mythology from elsewhere. And has Storm invented all this, or has she actually uncovered the Ancient Wisdom that Madame Blavatsky only hinted at? As far as I know, she hasn't been murdered in mysterious circumstances, or died from an ancient curse, so I guess it is all her own work.

If you are playing with religion, however, and especially if you are being reviewed alongside a Mary Doria Russell book, you can't get away without people examining your morality. Storm's book is a message of hope for the New Millennium, an anti-*Glimmering*, perhaps. No one but the most dopey New Ager is going to believe it will actually happen, but does it go beyond vapid New Age nonsense and provide some worthwhile ethics? Maybe Storm just set out to entertain, but I'm afraid I'm going to turn on the spotlight nevertheless.

In essence, Storm's message is little different from that of the New Testament or the saga of Tammuz and Ishtar. It is a tale of love and sacrifice on a grand scale. Where it differs from Christianity is that Shemyaza is a rebel, not just a sacrifice: Lucifer and Jesus in the same body. In a gnostic-like reversal it is the jealous God who is in the wrong, trying to deny humanity knowledge and self-determination. Shem tried to put things right in Eden, but he did so in anger and arrogance and therefore failed. This time, having suffered as a scapegoat for humanity for millennia, he does the job with love and gets it right. So far, so good.

In the process, however, Storm removes God altogether from the scene. He is just one of the more powerful of a collection of all-to-human superbeings, and not a very pleasant one either. Nor is He even the most powerful of them, just the son of one of the Elders, or was it the Great

Old Ones? Furthermore, Shemyaza fixes things all by himself. Humanity, if anything, just gets in the way. There's no sense of the numinous, and no moral responsibility. Go back to Joseph Campbell, Storm. Sure the old myths still have power, but they have to be made to work for us. There may well be a God, but if there is She is as remote, capricious and uncaring as Russell seems to think. We are in this on our own. No one is going to come out of the pyramids at the turn of the Millennium to save us.

That said, it is still a jolly good book. On the back cover Neil Gaiman says that Storm is worth a dozen Anne Rice's. He's right.

Stealing Sacred Fire - Storm Constantine - Penguin - softcover

Fan Scene

After Corflu I had intended to do a review of UK Fanzines. Time constraints conspired to scupper that plan, or rather to delay it by one month. Here we go.

With the demise of *Attitude*, the title of the UK's premier fanzine must fall squarely on the pinions of *Banana Wings*. Langford excepting, Mark Plummer is clearly the best fanwriter in the UK. Claire has her moments too, though she generally spoils them by being overly long-winded. Paul Kinkaid is unfailing controversial in his fanzine reviews, and Maureen Speller manages to go splendidly over the top in caring about SF. And, of course, they have Jim De Liscard on hand to say something bizarre whenever they need it.

Issue #9, distributed at Corflu, includes guest articles by two Aussies, Ian Gunn and Irwin Hirsh. It also contains a piece by KIM Campbell promoting the next UK Worldcon bid. The latter is a splendid piece of impartiality as the *Banana Wings* collective, along with most of the rest of UK fanzine fans, seems adamantly opposed to Worldcons in all shapes and forms. Maureen finally manages to lay the ghost of *Tiger, Tiger* in a fascinating article which reveals Bester's book to be a cunning re-write of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Paul devotes his entire column to an obituary for *Attitude*, and Mark regales us with tales of his adventures in the company of a life-sized cut-out of David Mellor. What more could you ask for?

If Mark has a serious rival for the UK fanwriting crown it has to be Christina Lake. Being back in Bristol after her world travels, she is once again editing the Bristol SF Group's collective fanzine, *Balloons over Bristol*. The current issue contains articles from six different writers including, St. Andrews people please note, one Tim Goodrick.

Christina and Ian Sorensen have been at pains to point out to me that the decision to cancel the Trans-Atlantic Relations panel at Corflu was a personal decision on Christina's part. In *Balloons over Bristol* we get an intriguing insight into her reasons for preferring another panel.

I suppose one reason why I was so keen to stage the drugs and alcohol panel at Corflu UK was to get away from the "sad bastard" image of fans. Rightly or wrongly there is much more street cred about the reformed heroin addict and the busted drug dealer than the anorak fan sitting in his bedroom watching Babylon 5 videos. In some sad, pathetic way this helped validate my involvement.

Ah well, at least she realises that it is sad and pathetic. Admitting your problems is going a long way towards being cured. On the other hand, Christina, if you really think that fandom is full of sad bastards, could I recommend that you get hold of a copy of Factsheet Five. There you will find SF fandom in a tiny minority amongst material with such obvious street cred as zines that deal with excreta, serial killers, self-mutilation and creating works of art from corpses. I would imagine you would feel right at home.

Changing tack entirely, we come to the fourth issue of Fiona Anderson's EuroConvention 'zine, *Babelon*. As you may remember, Fiona is working hard on becoming the Ben Yalow of European fandom by being the *Eminence Gris* behind the Big European Convention (BEC). This issue contains material from Mark Plummer, amusing as usual, on the then forthcoming Intuition plus our old friend Wolf von Witting promoting the Navigator 1998 convention taking place on, oops, Bucconeer weekend in Stockholm. Sorry Wolf, I'll be elsewhere.

The other major article in from Bjørn Tore Sund on the origins on the Bergen BEC. It transpires that Bergen has been nominated European City of Culture for the year 2000. That in itself isn't a great honour. After all, the title did go to Glasgow some years back. But it does mean that a large pot of Euro-money is available for cultural events in the city that year. Popping along to meeting to find out what this was all about, Bjørn discovered that the chap in charge of the project was an SF fan. A lot of hard lobbying has obviously been needed because when he wrote the article Bjørn was by no means certain that the con would take place. The enthusiastic promotion at Intuition tells us that it will. This is a convention that I am getting more and more keen to attend.

And I guess this tells you that *Babelon* is doing precisely the job that Fiona intended for it.

Meanwhile, back with Ian Sorensen, we have the Corflu and 14th issue of Bob. Probably the best thing about it is the D. West cartoons, but Ian is a competent enough writer with an ability to ramble that almost rivals that of Claire Brialey. I can't say that I got an awful lot from it, other than the entirely superfluous information that Ian is most definitely a Bloke. There was, however, a two page article on excreta which will probably get Ian a whole shit load of street cred with Christina Lake.

Rushing on we have *Squiggledy Hoy* #2 from Bridget 'Bug' Hardcastle. It seems to be mainly letters, plus a little family reminiscence, but it has an article about cheese so I've got little to complain about. If I must have a whinge, it is because Bridget lists 75 fanzines received since the last issue and manages to review only one of them. Come on Bridget, let's have some opinion, huh?

TommyWorld continues on its idiosyncratic way. A weekly schedule is, I think, far too frequent to expect good stuff in every issue. Sometimes Tommy is wonderfully controversial, sometimes

he hardly has time to put together a letter column. The 'zine is, I think, the best argument I have seen for a letter column because it helps Tommy keep to the schedule when he is busy and it is frequent enough to get a reasonable conversation going. Which does not mean that I will be starting one in *Emerald City*.

No review of UK fanzines can, of course, fail to include *Plokta*. I place it below *Banana Wings* in my list of favourites mainly because the content is almost entirely comic. For example, Steve Davies was going to include as report of his and Giulia's wedding trip to Australia, but after the first instalment it got pulled for not being funny enough. What *Plokta* aims to do, however, it does remarkably well. A splendid example of a fanzine with a purpose if ever I saw one.

Contact information:

Banana Wings - Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA.

Balloons over Bristol - Christina Lake, 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA

BabelOn - Fiona Anderson, 129 Colegrave Road, Stratford, London E15 1EA

Bob - 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY

Squiggledy Hoy - 19 Wedgewood Road, Hitchin, Herts, SG4 0EX

TommyWorld - tferg@dial.pipex.com

Plokta - oops, forgotten the snail mail, try alison@fuggles.demon.co.uk

And finally, it's that man again. Ian Sorensen asks me to point out that the first floor con suite at Corflu UK was a non-smoking area. Indeed it was, and I should have mentioned this in the review. What I did point out was that I was unaware it was available through the day until Saturday afternoon. As far as I know, hardly anyone used it. Furthermore, having a bar for (mainly British) smokers and a con suite for (mainly American) non-smokers is just the sort of "us and them" situation which the con should have been trying to avoid.

Footnote

Well, I won't be taking that job in Houston, I think to the relief of all parties concerned. By the time you get this I should be back in San Francisco and looking forward to a trip to WisCon. Apparently they have put me on several panels, so there is a good chance I'll get to do one. Why, one of them I'm even doing with Sheri Tepper! I think I'm going to enjoy this.

Ciao,

Cheryl