

EMERALD CITY

Issue 44

April 1999

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

By the time you get this I will be back in California. I flew out on April 30th and this issue is being finalised there. Most of the issue, however, was written in the UK. Not surprisingly, therefore, this issue looks at the Eastercon and a couple of British writers. Enjoy!

One small apology is required. Kevin has been snowed under at work since he got back from the UK and hasn't had a chance to put together a trip report yet. Hopefully it will appear next issue.

The Band Plays On

On the stricken liner, *Titanic*, icy water laps into the sideways lurching lounge. The cream of society, bedecked in the most elegant finery Europe can manage, execute a baroque dance through the rising waves. The floor is moving, not their feet.

Cut decades into the future to an even more bizarre scene. The lounge of the Adelphi hotel in Liverpool is an exact replica of that on the doomed ship. It is full, not of socialites, but of an entirely different tribe. Women who look like overweight rejects from a Xena extras casting session. Bearded, corpulent men wearing creased t-shirts that extol the virtues of their favourite ale. A tall, greying chap who lifts one hand to his ear for the local conversation whilst somehow magically ingesting every word of the gossip being generated across the hall. In short: fans. The Eastercon has come to town.

I'll not say much about the Adelphi itself. I was born in these crazy isles, so faded Victorian opulence is relatively familiar. I was going around the place thinking things like "that carpet is just like one my grandmother had in her place, and some of the furnishings are just as tacky". For Kevin it was all much more alien, and I shall leave him to describe it.

As for the convention, yes, it was one: neither good nor bad, neither triumph nor disaster. We had fun, but there were things we missed. In my case that largely meant books. Sure there was a book room crammed full of the things (and I mean book room, not dealers room, of which more later), but for the most part they didn't have any of the books I wanted.

Not all of this could be blamed on the dealers. The new Vinge is a case in point. The UK edition had been scheduled to appear before Easter, and the shops had ordered only a few copies of the US edition for those people who couldn't wait a few weeks. As it happened, UK publication was put back, and those few copies of the US edition vanished like snow in the sun on Thursday, long before I got there.

Other failures had no such excuse. I got my copy of the new Liz Hand, but only because I had ordered it in advance. Very few copies made it to Liverpool. Eugene Byrne was there promoting his first solo novel, but his publishers seemed to have neglected to tell any of the dealers and none of them had copies. Mostly the stalls were full of myriad instalments of bad fantasy 'trilogies'. And though there was a lot of second hand stuff about, none of the stalls had any of the things I was looking for. All of which is just as well because my bank picked that weekend to erroneously inform me that I had a £1500 overdraft. I guess I should call that good luck, because I would have hated to have wanted to buy a whole load of stuff and not been able to.

I mentioned earlier that the convention had a book room, not a dealers' room. This was not because there were no other dealers, though Eastercons do always have a heart-warmingly large number of book stalls. The other folks, including Sue Mason's superb pyrogravure, were in the same room as the art show. This was not an innovative experiment, it was forced upon the ConCom for security reasons. There were larger rooms available, but previous experience at the Adelphi suggested that those areas were too vulnerable to break-ins and should not be used. As a result, the book room was stuck away right at the back of the hotel. You didn't have to go that far to find it, but to hear the Poms whinging about it you would have thought that they were all as gravitationally challenged as some American fans.

Those dealers exiled to the art show had a legitimate beef. I don't normally find the time to go to art shows. If I hadn't sold an SF2002 membership to someone whose table was there, and been told how to find her, I probably would not have gone there at all. Con Chair Steve Davies tells me that they waived the table booking charge for all dealers who ended up in the art show, which should have gone down well, but people complained anyway.

The book dealers were equally unhappy. They felt that they were losing trade because people were not willing to walk the 100 yards or so necessary to find them. Personally I suspect that much of the poor trade was due to having brought the wrong books, but you never can tell about these things. Steve tells me that the location of the book room meant that loading and unloading books was very easy. Doubtless if it had been closer the centre of the con the dealers would have complained about distance from an entrance instead.

As it turned out, the con seemed to go quite well from a security point of view. As far as I could gather, only one guest room was burgled. Fortunately it wasn't mine. The only other hotel disaster I noticed was that some 30 people were double booked and had to be moved elsewhere. For a city centre hotel in the UK this really isn't that bad. There were some anxious moments on Saturday night when the street outside filled with police cars. This was because of the Liverpool - Everton football match that had taken place that afternoon. It might have looked scary, but there is an argument that having every yob in town distracted by football actually made the con safer. In fact the biggest problem caused by the football was that every

hotel room in Liverpool was booked, so the 30 unfortunates without rooms had to be accommodated on friends floors in the Adelphi.

I missed most of the panels through helping Kevin on the SF2002 table. One I could not skip, however, was the one on the evolution of fanzines. It was, I'm pleased to say, not as reactionary as I was expecting. Much of this was due to Alison Scott being on the panel. The Queen of Superfluous Technology can hardly be expected to condemn e-zines out of hand.

Having said that, there was still a lot of the usual nonsense about what makes a "true" fanzine. There were plenty of the usual crowd that maintains that fanzines should only ever discuss fandom. Thankfully the best fanzines in the UK do not hold to this policy. *Attitude*, now sadly missed, had some good articles about SF, and several guest columns from big name authors. *Banana Wings* has an excellent regular book column by Maureen Kincaid Speller. Even *Plokta* has run what Alison assures us was a serious article about SF, though of course they dressed it up as a joke so as not to ruin the image. Apparently that article was not well received, which amazes me because the folk at BASFA were rolling in the aisles over it.

There too were the paper-only brigade. Tommy Ferguson was quite firm in maintaining that electronic zines had no value, and he produces one! How we have got to the stage of believing that the act of writing a zine is worthless, and all the value is imparted by clicking the Print icon, is beyond me.

Alison was a lot more sensible. She maintains that the physical appearance of *Plokta* is of tremendous importance to the editorial collective. She would be quite happy to distribute it by email, but only to those people who are capable of receiving the fully formatted file (several Mb of it) and printing it exactly as it is intended to look.

I have a different philosophy. I deliberately keep the layout of *Emerald City* simple so as to increase the number of people capable of receiving and printing it as it was designed. I also offer a pure ASCII version to those who don't have the appropriate tech. Even so I still get accused of being elitist because I only distribute by email. Who is more fannish, Alison or me? Feedback would be appreciated.

The biggest idiot by far in the audience was the guy who said that he would not put his zine on the web because he was very rude about Americans in it and didn't want them to see what he wrote. Full marks to the panel for pointing out that there were several Americans in the audience and asking TAFF delegate, Vijay Bowen, to comment.

All in all, I think things are getting better. There is still a long way to go before I would not be insulted by being described as a fanzine fan, but there are signs that a degree of common sense is starting to creep in, at least in the UK. Long may the trend continue.

Whilst I am on the subject of fandom, full marks to Eve Harvey for an excellent stream of fannish programming, and a high quality fan room. Other than the SF2002 table, I probably spent more time there than anywhere else. I have just two small complaints, neither of which were Eve's fault. Firstly, if there is a programme item going on, I would have thought that other people in the fan room would have the courtesy not to talk loudly and drown out what the panellists are saying. Second, if there is a notice in the room asking people not to smoke

during panel sessions, it would be nice if people took note of it. How that room managed to attract all of the most ill mannered people at the convention I do not know. Hopefully they will not be there next year.

I began with a description of a sinking ship, and I did so quite deliberately. Reconvene, as the 1999 Eastercon was known, was a perfectly competent convention. Seen in the context of the historical tradition, however, it was a disappointment. The attendance was only about 800, compared I think to 1000 the year before. Many of the big names in UK fandom were conspicuous by their absence. And the authors had almost completely vanished. Iain Banks, as usual, held court in the bar. Ken MacLeod was around to make sure he always had a drinking partner. Jeff Noon and John Meaney were around quite a bit as well, but that seemed to be it. Peter Beagle, the GoH, apparently spent most of the con hiding in his room. Many of the big name British authors simply didn't bother to go.

Why this is I don't really know. One suggestion I got was that the con was too fannish, and that all fans care about these days is fandom. Certainly you would get that impression at some of the fanzine panels, and one of the reasons that *Emerald City* exists is to steer clear of all that navel gazing. Whether the charge is true of UK fandom as a whole is debatable, and I'd be interested in hearing other opinions. I thought it might have been due to a lack of programming about the craft of writing, but I was assured afterwards that it did exist. Another possibility is that this is all a result of whinging Pom syndrome: no matter how hard the ConCom tries, everyone will complain.

One final point. This Eastercon was the first one in living memory at which fans were not ordering the guest real ale in vast quantities. Well, they were nor ordering it by name anyway. The beer was called Cwrw Tudno. Time for some more issues of *Twll Ddu*, I think, Mr. Langford. British fandom needs some language lessons.

Wry Hope for British Fantasy

When *Mythago Wood* was first published it was a breath of fresh air through fantasy fiction. No one had done anything quite like it. Rob Holdstock, it seemed, had discovered a bright new vein of gold in the rock of literature. Since that time, he has done little but mine it slavishly. Book after book has either been set in Ryhope Wood, or similar wildwoods around the world, and had rehashed the same themes. One can get very tired of those neurotic Huxleys.

Gate of Ivory (which I think was called *Gate of Ivory*, *Gate of Horn* in hardback) is the latest in this sequence of tales of Ryhope Wood. I bought it only because I was short of something to read on a train journey and Bristol Temple Meads, for all of its Brunelian splendour, is not exactly the best place to find books. Having now finished it, I'm glad I did. At last it seems that Holdstock is finding some means of progression for the tales, and there is a promise of something new.

The theme, of course, is eternal and deeply psychoanalytic. After all, the whole idea of the mythago is of a Jungian archetype given shape and form by the neuroses of the humans that meet/conjure it. The background story for *Gate of Ivory* is firmly within this theme. Christian Huxley is tormented by the suicide of his mother, which he witnessed as a boy and may have unwittingly aided. One of the mythagos he meets may have been created by his mad father as a lust object based on Guinevere. Is it possible, Holdstock asks, to have a relationship with a woman who you know to be a figment of your father's dirty mind and jealousy over whose creation drove your mother to kill herself?

Heck, is it possible to have a relationship with a mythago at all? In the original novel, the mythagos were elusive creatures who were rarely glimpsed, let alone spoken to. And that, dear readers, is where things have changed.

These days, perhaps fuelled by the vivid fantasies of generations of Huxleys and their equally insane colleagues, Ryhope Wood is now a teeming battleground of mythic characters. They are learning, and growing. One such, Kylhuk (Cwlwch of *The Mabinogion*), has been strong enough to gather his own army and live out, maybe even create, his own legend. In *Gate of Ivory*, therefore, most of the characters are mythagos. They live, breathe, have hopes and dreams, just like real people. And yet their lives are both driven by their own mythic nature and dependent on Kylhuk's ability to keep his army together, to move through the shifting time and cultural zones of the Wood, and defend them against the roiling chaos that rages around them.

There is a whole new concept of characterisation to explore here. We have books a plenty about humans. We have books to which take mythic figures and treat them as if they were real people (as indeed some of them may have been). But the mythagos are neither humans nor myths. They are independent beings whose nature is shaped by myths, but who have a certain degree of free will. They understand that they have a destiny, but the form which that destiny takes can be shaped by their own action and by the shifting cultural tides of the wood. The same destiny looks different from different viewpoints.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the relationship between Issabeau and Someone. They are characters from the same myth: lovers, in fact. But they come from far separated versions. He is a pagan Celt, she a Christian from mediaeval France. They are attracted to each other, but do not know why. Huxley, of course, is able to see the link, but it would have been interesting to resolve the issue without his input.

I had given up on Holdstock. I was quite convinced that he was old and tired and had nothing new to offer. My apologies, Rob. I was mistaken. This is a valuable addition to the mythago series. Next time, how about a book with no humans in it at all?

Gate of Ivory - Rob Holdstock - Voyager - softcover

Cyberpunk Revived

If it was sad that Holdstock seemed to be marking time, it was much worse that an entire sub-genre of science fiction seemed to have run out of steam. *Neuromancer* was always going to be a hard act to follow, but, Jeff Noon aside, cyberpunk never seemed to come close. As with Holdstock, I had pretty much given up on it.

This book I bought out of a sense of debt. Last year in Manchester John Meaney and his wife bought pre-supports in SF2002. Authors don't often do that. Apparently John has a brother who lives in the Bay Area so he felt a bit of local loyalty to us. I determined at the time that I should buy his book to return the favour, even though it didn't look like my cup of tea. Once again, I am glad I did.

To Hold Infinity is not exactly your average cyberpunk novel. For starters, the heroine is 60-year-old Japanese woman. OK, so she is fairly fit from a lifetime of martial arts exercise, but a software wizard she most certainly is not. Yoshiko, recently widowed, has come to the world of Fulgor to visit her eldest son, Tetsuo, who has been making a career there as a software expert. When she arrives, not only is Tetsuo missing, but he is suspected of murder. In finding him, and clearing his name, Yoshiko becomes involved in a mystery that could threaten the political stability of the entire planet.

Meaney does the computer stuff well. He works in the software industry himself so he has a good grasp of what he is talking about (unlike Gibson who famously had never used a computer when he wrote *Neuromancer*). The code fragments which he scatters about the book are, I think, largely unnecessary. They might add colour but they don't add much information. (If there was a joke in the assembler fragment, John, I apologise for missing it, I'm rusty.) But software isn't what the book is about.

Firstly, the book is about an old woman coming to terms with life again after the loss of her husband. Yoshiko originally went to Fulgor because she wanted to see Tetsuo once more before giving up on life. Being forced to fight for that life gives her a different perspective on things.

The other major theme is politics. The Luculenti of Fulgor are humans who have had computer brains surgically implanted. They are able to access the world-wide network, the Skein, through thought alone. This is a superior breed if ever there was one. Meaney doesn't get too philosophical here, but he has clearly thought about the issues. I particularly liked his introduction of eco-terrorists protesting against the terraforming of Fulgor. 150 separate factions, all warring against each other for land in the unterraformed region, and over doctrinal differences. Such a breath of fresh air after the romantic nonsense of Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars books.

All in all, then, a pretty good book. As Connie Willis says in her cover blurb, it is impossible to believe that this is a first novel. Mr. Meaney should have a fine career ahead of him. Here's hoping that it takes off in the US as well.

To Hold Infinity - John Meaney - Bantam - softcover

Song of Life and Love

Well, having so enjoyed *The Last Unicorn*, I could hardly avoid buying a Peter Beagle book at the Eastercon. After all, he was GoH, so the book room was full of them. *The Innkeeper's Song* is set in the same world as the earlier book, though there is only a hint of a character crossover. It is also a purely adult book, whereas the unicorn makes a great story for kids. Other than that, not a lot of difference. Both books are brilliant.

Once again I find myself thinking that Beagle writes the sort of book that Neil Gaiman was aiming at with *Stardust*. This is not a Tolkien clone. Beagle's fantasy world is not at all deeply thought out or detailed. But it is none the less convincing as a result. What it has instead is resonance. Everything about it feels right. If there were wizards, both good and bad, this is how they would be: not Hollywood caricatures, but people. If the good wizard had adventurers for pupils, they would be this stubborn and brave, and this powerless in the face of a mighty sorcerous opponent. If an innkeeper had this motley crew land up on his doorstep asking for rooms, he would be precisely this appalled, and this resigned to his fate.

The story is told from multiple viewpoints, and each one of them is from a richly imagined person with his or her own hopes, dreams, secrets and individual take on the plot. Most fantasy stories focus heavily on the plot. This one would be nothing without its characters.

That, of course, means there is not a lot more to say. There is no great story line, no great message, no profound allegory. This is just a book about people. They are blessed (or cursed depending on which one you listen to) to live in interesting times. It isn't often that the two greatest wizards in the world battle for supremacy. But that is almost irrelevant alongside seeing how the various characters cope with events, and how they are changed by them. You can't write books like this without profound literary skill, and Beagle has it in spades.

All I can add is that I cannot understand how I managed to miss Peter Beagle's work before. I have been deeply remiss, and I shall go and find his other books forthwith.

The Innkeeper's Song - Peter S. Beagle - RoC - softcover

This Year's Hopefuls

The Hugo nominations for 1999 are now out, and a very interesting selection they are too. No, this does not mean that I got nominated. Nor did I expect do, despite Kevin's heart warming optimism. There are, after all, a lot of good people about.

We'll start with fanzines, however, and a big fanfare for *Plokta*. Steve and Alison are doubtless over the moon, and hopefully this makes up for Steve losing the GUFF race by just two votes, and for continually losing in the Novas to *Banana Wings*. With the ever present *Ansible*, that makes two British zines out of six nominees. Even better, one of the six is Australian. Alan Stewart's *Thyme* makes a well deserved appearance in the list. With the vote being in Australia,

it might even be a serious contender, though given the negative attitude that most Australian fans seem to have towards awards, the location may count against it.

If Claire and Mark are disappointed about not getting a nomination for *Banana Wings*, they can console themselves with the knowledge that their staff writer and chief duplicator keeper, Maureen Kincaid Speller, has got a nomination for Best Fan Writer. I'm especially pleased about this because, as I mentioned in the Eastercon review, Maureen's column is devoted to book reviews. Her last one was particularly clever, combining part of her TAFF report covering her visit to San Francisco with reviews of books set in the Bay Area.

Much as I like Maureen, however, I'm going to find the fan writer category very hard. Dave Langford is, of course, head and shoulders above the rest of us, though he hardly needs another rocket. Mike Glyer and Bob Devney are also very good. The only thing I no for sure is that I won't be voting for Evelyn Leeper.

Fan Artist, of course, should be no contest. This one is yours, Gunny. I hope that somehow you get to know that you get it. A quick word in passing, however, for Bay Area artist, Freddie Baer. Freddie is very good indeed, and could probably be a professional if she wanted to. As it is, she just does a load of stuff for fannish good causes, in particular the Tiptree Award. Hang in there, Freddie, we'll get you a rocket some time soon.

Unsurprisingly I didn't manage to get a nomination in the Campbell for Tom Arden. However, Nalo Hopkinson is on the list. I was very impressed with her first novel (see Emerald City #36) and she's getting my vote.

Best Dramatic Presentation will presumably go to "Sleeping in Light" from the last series of Babylon 5. I don't think I have seen that episode, but I'd be surprised if it was as good as "Day of the Dead". I will be interested to see the full nomination figures to see if Gaiman's episode would have qualified. JMS doesn't understand the voting system (despite having it explained to him by Kevin) and insists on withdrawing all but one of the episodes that make the ballot in the belief that it gives him a better chance.

And so to Best Novel. *Children of God*, by Mary Doria Russell, is there, and is excellent. But then so is *To Say Nothing of the Dog* by Connie Willis. The other nominees are *Factoring Humanity* (Robert J. Sawyer), *Distraction* (Bruce Sterling) and *Darwinia* (Robert Charles Wilson). I will try to get round to these over the next few months. I think, however, that I will vote for Connie. At least then we know we are guaranteed a top rate acceptance speech (and probably a hilarious Gwynneth Paltrow impersonation).

Fond of Fondue

Direct flights from Heathrow to San Francisco have an annoying habit of leaving in the morning. As you have to be at the airport 2 hours before departure, this means that I have to be staying somewhere very close at hand the night before. Fortunately the great fannish metropolis of Reading is just in the right place. This time I imposed myself on the very

wonderful Giulia de Cesare and Steve Davies, and compensated by providing an excuse for them to visit one of their favourite restaurants.

The *Fondue Pot* is in Caversham, a suburb of Reading that I could probably find on a map but cannot give directions to right now, other than to say it is across the Thames from my normal haunts. As the name suggests, the restaurant specialises in fondues. Now my own experience of such dishes had been coloured a distinct shade of sickly green thanks to a school trip to France and a collection of cheese so ripe that you could probably have smelt it in Moscow once it got warmed up. However, I have great faith in Giulia and Steve's gourmandish abilities, so I went along in high hopes. I was not disappointed.

To start with, smelly cheese was by no means the only choice on the menu. There were, for example, meat dishes where you took the raw meat on your fork and fried it in a pot full of an oil, wine and seasoning mix. Also in the selection we had was a mixed fish dish where you got to dip the pieces of fish in batter and deep fry them. OK, so you may be wondering why you are going to a restaurant and having to cook the food yourself, but it has definite advantages. For starters, there is a lot more conversation because you don't always have a mouth full. In addition you tend to eat more slowly, which is probably good for you (and definitely good for inveterate shovelers like myself). Besides, it is fun.

The star dish of the night was one of the desserts. In keeping with the theme, lots of fondues were on offer, most of them chocolate based. I have had many sinful desserts in my time, but dipping pieces of marshmallow into melted Mars bar has got to be one of my best pig out experiences. And it is ridiculously easy to prepare as well. All I need now is a fondue set and an excuse to hold a dinner party.

[Note to US readers. The British Mars bar is similar to what you know as a Milky Way. I have tried one and it doesn't seem to taste quite the same. I shall experiment with fondues and report back.]

All of the above make for a good restaurant, but what really prompted me to write this review was the service. We were the only people in that night. Most British restaurants would have tried to chase us out quickly so they could shut up and go home. Not these guys. The husband and wife team that ran the place was very attentive all evening, and even stopped to chat with us for half an hour to so after the meal. They were really nice people, and deserve to have a very successful business. If you happen to be in Reading, check them out.

Culture Clash

Every time I move from one country to another I am remind of just how different seemingly similar cultures can be. Here are a few snapshots as an example.

A life of convenience

I am becoming an American. I know this because I have found myself forever complaining about the lack of convenience in Britain. No, that does not mean toilets, though the difficulty of finding a restroom in Terminal 2 at Heathrow is a matter of considerable irritation. It means that in Britain everything you want to do is hard, and you probably have to pay for it.

What really brought it home to me was a business trip to Scotland that I made shortly before departure. My client and I pulled into a service area somewhere in the wilds of Cumbria for some petrol and I found myself looking in amazement at the Burger King because it didn't have a drive through. I mean, who else would be going there except drivers?

If that sounds like simple laziness, consider this. One of the major irritations of travelling on business is the size and weight of printers. I have quite enough hassle with the laptop, modem, zip drive, disks and half a ton of cables that I need without lugging a printer along as well. In a British hotel you are lucky to be able to plug in your modem, and if you can there will probably be cables everywhere because the power and phone sockets are on opposite sides of the room. If you wanted anything printed it is just possible that the hotel will have a "business centre" where they charge you around 30c a page for printing your documents, and probably manage to mess them up.

Now contrast. Last weekend Kevin and I wandered into one of our favourite hotels (the Marriott Courtyard in Rancho Cordova). We were paying about a third of what we would pay in an equivalent hotel in the UK, but there, right in the lobby, was a laser printer terminal. Just plug and print, compliments of the house. I rest my case.

Look Martha, there's a war on!

Something else that hit me immediately on returning to the US was the difference in attitudes to the Kosovan War. British newspapers have finally stopped devoting their entire front pages to the Balkans, but media coverage is still intensive and support for the war, both in Parliament and amongst the general public, is very strong. Ask British people about the causes of the war, however, and they will almost certainly blame the Americans. There is a view in Britain, probably shared by the rest of Europe and certainly shared by Russia, that America is war crazy. People see the average American family as clustered intently round the TV screen, beers in hand, and screaming "yee-ha!" each time a Nato bomb crashes into Serbia. This bears little relation to reality.

To start with, foreign news, any foreign news, gets short shrift in US newspapers. If it exists at all, it will be found squirreled away at the back along with all the other stuff that no one bothers to read. The media did sit up and pay attention when Jesse Jackson secured the release of the three American soldiers. Since then, however, the war has been more or less ignored again.

Support for the war amongst the people here is probably around 33%. One third of Americans do conform to some degree to the stereotype and are all for pushing on as hard and fast as possible. Some of them live in caves in Montana and are well enough stocked up on beer, ammunition and sports videos to last well into the next millennium. Many of the rest probably get told what to think at church. Another third, however, are opposed to the war. Some of these are genuine pacifists, but most of them are better described as isolationists. Why, they

ask, should US servicemen be risking their lives, and US tax money be spent, to solve that is a European problem? Finally, one third of the US population has no idea where Kosovo is and couldn't care less. They never vote, they only ever watch the news to get the sports results, and they probably don't even know the war is happening.

As for Congress, they are equally divided. They debated the issue recently and whilst some journalists derided them for being indecisive they actually seem to have been quite subtle. They have avoided embarrassing Clinton, and by extension the country, too far by condemning what has already been done, even though they were given no say in the matter. But they have given a clear signal that they will not allow any extension to the conflict, in particular a ground invasion, without being consulted first. That is about as far as they could have gone towards condemning the war without seriously damaging the country's standing overseas. If they could have pulled out gracefully I think they would have done. So which country is war crazy?

All of which is presumably no comfort whatsoever to those in the war zone. A few months back many fanzines were contacted by the Faros SF Club from Bela Crkva, Yugoslavia. They are on my mailing list. I've been trying to find Bela Crkva on a map, and it seems that there are at least two places of that name in Yugoslavia. One is in the far north of Serbia and therefore presumably fairly safe (and apparently famous for pear brandy). The other is close to the Montenegro-Kosovo border and is presumably the place cited by many news reports as the site of a major massacre. If you get this issue, guys, can you let us know if you are OK?

Poppy trimming

Enough of Britain and America, how about Australia. Giulia (who, as many of you know, is from Tasmania) has lent me an amusing little book called *The Xenophobe's Guide to the Aussies*. Much of it is rather silly, and I have found several glaring errors, but in a couple of areas the book is absolutely spot on. Furthermore, these are areas of Australian culture which are so antithetical to American culture that I feel I must warn people about them prior to Aussiecon Three. You see, every American's goal in life is to become successful and wealthy, but to an Australian that is a path to pariah-hood. Consider:

"Every Aussie knows full well that all champions are conceited and therefore deserve to be knocked off their pedestal. This is the 'tall poppy' syndrome: stand out from the crowd and you'll be cut down to size. Trying to grow tall is admirable. Actually succeeding is inexcusable."

Alternatively:

"The only truly acceptable way to accumulate money is by winning it... If you inherit wealth you're lucky. If you accumulate wealth you're a crook, and if you win a fortune [through gambling] you are a national hero."

All of which should explain why we all have to vote for Gunny in the Hugos, because none of the Aussies will. After all, the guy has won quite enough Ditmars, without going after some two-bit foreign award as well.

And forewarned is forearmed. When trying to make friends with Australian fans, try to remain restrained, reserved and above all modest. The more you look like an underdog, the more they will like you.

Next issue, more sage advice on survival in Australia: how to tell a Drop Bear from a Koala.

Footnote

So what happened to the Liz Hand novel, you are asking? Well, I've read it, it is great, but I thought I would leave the review for next issue which should be available at WisCon. I gather that there is a new Sheri Tepper book out too. Those two together should make for a good issue to be handed out at a feminist convention.

Finally this issue, one small apology. Last time I was muttering darkly about the use of words such as "sanified" and "timeously". The erudite Mr. Langford informs me that "timeously" is in fact a good Scottish word of fine pedigree and therefore a perfectly legitimate utterance for Glasgow football managers. <Sigh>. I have enough trouble juggling British, American and Australia. Sorry Scotland, I shall try to do better next time.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl