

EMERALD CITY

Issue 61

September 2000

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

I guess I had better start with an apology. This issue contains some 13 pages of Worldcon report. Well it does only happen once a year. I know I tend to go on a bit each year about how the con is run, but hopefully a fair few of you will find it interesting enough to read.

Now for some good news: last issue I told you about a convention in Liverpool next June. Just as that issue was going to print the organisers managed to negotiate a reduction in the accommodation charges. The price is now £235 (\$350), inclusive of 3 nights in a hotel and all meals. All that plus Brian Aldiss, Stephen Baxter, Nicola Griffith, Gwynneth Jones and Ken MacLeod. What more could you ask for. Check out the convention web site (<http://www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/2001.html>) for further details.

And finally on the good news, while I was at Worldcon Mike Ward of Hidden Knowledge presented me with a new copy of the *Magnificat* CD. Mike has done away with the complex security stuff for the CD version and getting at the book is now a much more friendly process. And there's a lot of support material on the CD as well now, including news of Suzy McKee Charnas's forthcoming novel, *Strange Seas*. It is flattering to know that Mike took note of my complaints about the install

procedure, but much more important that he cared enough about his customers to do something about it. For more information see the Hidden Knowledge web site (<http://www.hidden-knowledge.com>).

In This Issue

Con with the Wind - Worldcon returns to the Windy City: a comprehensive (and lengthy) report

Look Back in Anger - Iain M. Banks on war veterans

Out of Africa - Mary Gentle resurrects Carthage

Lioness in Winter - Eleanor, Queen of Hearts and Swords

A Perfect Storm? - George Martin's latest fantasy blockbuster

Those Magnificent Men - Sean McMullen takes to the air

Angel with a Dirty Face - Pat Murphy goes wild with wolves

Footnote - The End

Con with the Wind

Chicago

Another year, another Worldcon, and once again the great fannish circus has descended upon Chicago. The city has held more Worldcons than anywhere else has, this being the sixth in the series although, for obvious PR reasons, it was named Chicon 2000 and not Chicon VI.

Kevin and I arrived on the Wednesday, flying into O'Hare from opposite directions. The weather was hot, humid, foggy and windy all at once. I gather that in winter the hot and humid are replaced by snow, but that it is always windy. I quickly decided that Chicago was not the sort of place where I would want to live, which is just as well, because it also quickly became clear that I could not afford to do so. The city centre positively reeked money, far more so than any other American city I have seen. Fortunately it seemed highly unlikely that I would get an opportunity to go shopping.

The convention was being held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, with overflow programming in the nearby Fairmont and Swissôtel. The Hyatt is blessed with a veritable rabbit warren of basement rooms that link into an underground shopping mall. This in turn exits directly to the Swissôtel and to within about 100 yards of the Fairmont's front door. There were plusses and minuses to this arrangement.

On the plus side it was not necessary to exit into the uncomfortable Chicago weather for more than a few minutes at any time. In addition the underground mall was blessed with a number of reasonable quality, cheap restaurants and a grocery store. Given that the hotels themselves offered higher quality restaurants, it wasn't necessary to leave the convention area at all.

On the downside, the maze of rooms and corridors quickly proved to be the assembled multitude that, for all the D&D we might have played, mapping a dungeon is no easy task. Everyone was having trouble. Jack McDevitt wandered past me muttering something about an intelligence test. Bob Daverin said that the place made him feel like he was inside an Escher painting. As for me, I finally realised why the Chicago basketball team is called the Bulls. Something obviously lurked in those tunnels. Hopefully it was as lost as we were.

The hotels themselves got mixed reactions. For the most part the staff were very helpful, though service in some of the hotel restaurants seemed painfully slow. But the Hyatt, where Kevin and I stayed, charged you for everything except breathing. There were massive mark-ups on all phone calls (especially those to 800 numbers to dissuade people from using calling cards). And if you even opened the mini-bar to look inside they would charge you \$2 a day from then on for the privilege of checking to see if you have taken anything out. It was clearly a hotel that assumed that anyone who could afford to stay there would be so rich that they would not notice being continually gouged.

The food was generally pretty good and we did not miss not having the time to venture further afield in search of good restaurants. Indeed the one time I did provided the worst dining experience of the weekend. Chaz Baden had organised an introductory group dinner for the newsletter staff at an Asian restaurant called Big Bowl. The food, when it finally came, was delicious, but we had made the mistake of ordering the set menu. It was advertised for a minimum of four people. We ordered for ten, but what arrived, after a seemingly interminable wait, looked suspiciously like food for four. Chaz did a superb job of negotiating the

bill down, but even so I still think we were ripped off. I also wonder somewhat about the common sense of a restaurant that upsets the entire newsletter team of a 6,000-person convention the night before the con is due to start.

Probably the best meal that we had was at the Hyatt's steak house. As you might expect, this is a seriously posh place. But it is also American. On entering the restaurant we spotted a collection of steak knives with nameplates on the handles. These were the personal knives of regular and VIP diners, including the Mayor of Chicago. And yet the food was not hugely expensive - even the Chateaubriand was only \$52 between two. And on the next table there was a family whose kids were eating pizza and were allowed to roam around the restaurant without complaint from the management or the other diners. I like America.

Panels

Not having to spend every waking moment bidding for a Worldcon this year, I managed to attend quite a few panels. I was pleased to see that Chicon had gone for 90 minute programming slots, giving 75 minutes per panel and 15 minutes to get from one panel to the next. I gather some people are complaining that anything other than panels starting on the hour is "too complicated". Personally I think folk can get used to it. Besides, hourly panels generally end up having to be wound up in the middle of lively discussion, overrunning their time, and in some cases even refusing to relinquish the room for the next slot. 90 minutes seems to be just about right.

Around half of the panels I attended were on the academic track (or acatrack as it was known). Despite the somewhat off-putting

name, this series of panels provided some of the most interesting programming of the convention. There was also a determined effort made to introduce fans to academics and vice-versa. More Worldcons should do this sort of thing. I mean, where else could you discover that there really is such a thing as *The Journal of Mundane Behaviour*?

While we are on the subject of bridging divides, Kevin was on a panel entitled "Do fans still read SF?" This was not intended as a dig at media fans - the sales of TV and film tie-in novels provide plenty of evidence that many of them do read. Rather it addressed the question of what fandom is all about. As you know, I read a lot of books, and am firmly of the opinion that fans should read and promote books. Kevin took that line on the panel. At the other extreme was (no surprise here) Ben Yalow whose view was that while reading SF might get you into fandom, once you had arrived it was fandom that became your hobby and that continuing to read SF was not important.

Ben does have a point in that fandom is itself a hobby and can take up valuable reading time if you wish to participate fully. However, it is only a small step from his position to saying that fans should not read, or talk about SF. That is a view held by a sizeable minority, particularly amongst fanzine fans, and I find it very sad. How are we supposed to recruit more people into fandom if the first thing we do is tell them that they have to stop doing the things that brought us here in the first place?

In a similar vein, an interesting piece of paper was floating around the con and was jumped upon by experienced conrunners. It was headed "The Neo-Fan Manifesto" and it sets out a bunch of guidelines for established fans, panellists and conrunners to bear in mind so as to avoid alienating

newcomers. The whole thing makes a lot of sense and there will be a copy of it available on the *Emerald City* web site by the time this issue goes out.

The Manifesto was written by an East Coast fan called Julie Stickler. She came into fandom through Star Trek and has helped run a number of fan-run media cons in New England. In other words she is an experienced conrunner and therefore just the sort of person we desperately need to recruit. That someone like her feels alienated by Worldcons is a pretty damning indictment of how we run things.

Some of Julie's complaints are a bit hard to fix. For example, there are people who have been in fandom for decades and who go to Worldcon purely to see all of their old friends. We can't require those people to mix with younger fans. And we should probably provide some historical panels for them to go to and talk about the old days. But if they are on more general panels they should perhaps remember that not everyone has been around as long as they have. Even us slightly younger folks have to be wary too. There are people out there whose first experience of SF was *Neuromancer*, or *Babylon 5*. We need to remember that, and make sure that we make them welcome.

Hmm, now there's me starting to worry about how many of my readers have not heard of *Neuromancer*. I'm going to have to start doing some reviews of classic SF, then at least on the web site my references will be explained.

Another panel along the same lines was "Fractured fandom". This looked at how fandom was increasingly becoming divided into specialist interest groups such as gamers, costumers, media fans, furry fans and so on. The general view of the panel was that this was so, but it was an inevitable result of growth, not a bad thing

that had to be resisted. Kevin made his usual point that the purpose of Worldcon is to provide a big tent where the various fannish tribes can gather and intermingle.

This panel also got on to discussing the problem of recruiting people to fandom and whether people these days were more attracted to entertainment-based conventions such as CreationCons rather than participatory events such as Worldcon. This in turn led to discussion of the demise of college SF clubs, and of all forms of community-based hobby activities. And from there we arrived at a very scary conclusion. Fandom started because SF fans felt excluded from normal society and wished to found a group of like-minded people where they would feel at home. Fans might often be somewhat socially inadequate, but within our own group we manage to get along. These days, however, it seems that most people are so socially inadequate that they cannot partake in any form of social activity, even fandom. Now there's an interesting question for the sociology professors in the acadtrack.

By the way, kudos here to David Levine, the moderator. Having let me speak once he made very sure that he went round everyone else who had a hand up before letting me get a word in again. It was, of course, infuriating for me, because I'm a dreadful show-off, but he was right. See item 8 of the Neo-Fan Manifesto.

And more panels

The only panel that I was scheduled to be on was one on reviewing SF books. I very much enjoyed this one. This was primarily because all of the panellists, even the two from *Fosfax*, a fanzine which prints a lot of very short reviews, agreed that it was important that a review be entertaining and

analytical. It is not enough just to précis the plot as is the case with so many on-line review sites. I was particularly interested to meet Rob Gates who edits the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender SF book review e-zine, *Wavelengthsonline* (<http://www.wavelengthsonline.com>). I suspect he will be reviewing a lot of interesting stuff.

The panel I would have most liked to have been on (judged on the basis of the number of times I stuck my hand up to comment from the audience) was the acatrack panel on Women Writers and Awards. Actually since the mid 70's women writers have not been too badly represented in the Hugos, but there are still lots of really good writers who never get nominated: Elizabeth Hand, Suzy McKee Charnas, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Mary Gentle, to name only a few. This is especially strange because women writers dominate the Campbell. Out of the last 15 years 10 of the Campbell winners have been women. Can it really be the case that women start good and get worse, but men start bad and get better? I doubt it. Explanations on a postcard, please.

The worst panel I attended was also on the acatrack, but this was a problem with panellist selection rather than topic. The panel was on the use of rhetoric in SF, but three of the five panellists were rabid Heinlein fans who all wanted to tell us in great detail how brilliant Heinlein was because his arguments had convinced them. The fact that Heinlein by no means managed to convince everyone seemed to pass them by. Indeed they seemed to think that people who did not agree with him were not "unconvinced", but rather "wrong". They did stop short of saying "evil", but only just.

A particularly large amount of invective was reserved for the *Starship Troopers* film which they all regarded as a gross

distortion of the book. It never occurred to any of them that what Verhooven had done was to film the book exactly as it reads to almost anyone outside the US, that is as a nasty piece of offensive militarist propaganda. When you happen to be one of the people portrayed as Bugs or Skinnys it doesn't come over nearly so heroic.

Evolving Hugos

One panel that I attended but haven't mentioned yet was called "Revamping the Hugos". Kevin and I went along because the Business Meeting had had a whole pile of Hugo motions submitted, but the debate ranged a lot wider than that. In particular Michael Nelson, Chicon's Hugo Administrator, wanted to talk about why so few people now participate in the Hugo nominating and voting process, and what could be done to change that.

It quickly became obvious that while some problems were probably intractable (for example the cost of hardback books), much of the difficulty arose from either ignorance of or disillusionment with the process. The disillusion resulted primarily from some of the results being so predictable (for example the dominance of Locus and Dave Langford in the semi-prozine and fanwriter categories). This might be affected by better awareness of possible rivals.

Ignorance is mainly in the area of eligibility - for example many people appear to believe that the semi-prozine category is only for non-fiction magazines. Again this can be solved by having better information available. Right now all WSFS, and by extension most Worldcons, can do in terms of education is point people at the Hugo rules in the Constitution. That is, of course, written in legalese, so most people don't bother.

The Hugos badly need better promotion. Michael Nelson did a fine job getting voting on line to work and generally encouraging Chicon members to vote. As a result he got a very good turn out. But we need to do better. We need a plain English explanation of the various categories. We need SF clubs to publish lists of recommended reading the way that BASFA and NESFA do. And we need Worldcon web sites to point people at these lists.

Yes, I know what you are saying. Who is going to do all the work? Yes, I am a mug. I put my hand up. Expect to see some stuff on the *Emerald City* web site real soon now. And note that you will be expected to contribute.

Two other areas of concern were the awareness of US voters (who are always in the majority) of works published in other countries, and the Dramatic Presentation Hugo. Both of these were the subject of motions at the Business Meeting so I'll talk about them more later. For now I will just mention that some people were in favour of dropping the Dramatic Presentation award altogether on the grounds that Hollywood isn't interested in fandom and doesn't care about the Hugos.

The Hugos

And so to the ceremony itself, and the first thing that became obvious was that for all Chicago's fine facilities the one thing the site lacks is a hall big enough for a Worldcon major event. An inside source tells me that the seating capacity was only 1250, or less than a quarter of the convention. Typically the Hugos and Masquerade attract half of the attendees. Fortunately a technical genius on the Chicon committee (step forward and take a bow, Ben Lieberman) had worked out how to get video coverage of the events piped

through to the hotel TV systems without the expense of hiring a satellite. Without this useful service there would have been a lot of angry fans.

Entry and exit were a serious problem as well. There wasn't enough space for queues to form outside the hall, and the queue management left a lot to be desired. Some idiot was handing out fliers at the bottom of the escalator causing it to back up. And on exit a vast mob headed straight for the single escalator out. Kevin and I had dawdled and got into a conversation with the McMullens, Freddie Baer and Jane Routley but I'm told by those who were out early that the situation was very dangerous. What the hotel should have done as reverse the down escalator to provide more exit capacity, but it seems no one thought of that. Yet another one of those bits of established wisdom that isn't getting passed along.

The best part of the ceremony was undoubtedly the music video. Entitled, "An Historical Overview of the Woman's Role in Science Fiction Films", it used the song, "Hit Me With Your Best Shot" as the glue for a montage of famous women SF characters from film and TV. Starting with Dale Arden, it flashed forward through such stars as Uhura, Ripley and Ivanova and, perhaps inevitably, ended with Tawny Madison, cleavage to the fore, blowing a kiss at the camera. The film editors were listed only as "The California Crew", but whoever they were, they did a great job.

So the best part of the ceremony was a music video? That doesn't bode well for the rest, does it? Too right, there were some very popular winners, but as for the ceremony itself, much of the audience was cringing with embarrassment. There were some dreadful typographical errors in the slides, including some nominees' names. A couple of times the screen was accidentally

set to show all of the slides, including results which had not yet been announced. It looked like the whole thing had been rushed together at the last minute with no proof reading and no rehearsals.

Patrick Nielsen-Hayden was particularly annoyed with the Hugo program book for listing magazine titles along with the Best Professional Editor nominees. And he's right. The award is for all of the nominees' work in the year of eligibility, and it is most definitely not confined to magazine editors. Listing the nominees in that way will only perpetuate the myth that the award is for fiction magazines rather than for editors, and will make book editors feel even more left out.

But Patrick's best point (made in a post on the SMOFs mailing list) is that the Hugo ceremony needs to show respect for the nominees. He said, "*events like this should be run with the presumption that every one of the nominees has their mother in the audience. And that if we misspell their name, or garble its pronunciation from the podium, we're telling the nominee's mother that, regardless of the fact that they made the ballot, they're really not all that important to us; not important enough for any real effort.*" That is a shabby way for fandom to treat people it is supposed to be honouring.

Three more points before I dive into the results, the first two of them to do with minor awards. Firstly this year's Big Heart Award went to Robert Silverberg. This was a hugely popular result. Bob has been attending and entertaining conventions for many years, never once acting the Big Name or coming over superior to fandom. Forry Ackerman remembered Bob once saying "*I'll never win one of these*", on the assumption that his acerbic wit would forever disqualify him from an award given primarily for being a nice guy. So

Forry had that quote inscribed on the award plaque. It was a lovely touch.

Congratulations also to our Japanese friends. They have a new man fronting the Seiun presentation and he is a lot slicker than his predecessor. The Seiun has now become a pleasant interval in the Hugos rather than an extended lecture to be endured. Long may it stay so!

And finally, for those of you who are wondering, the splendid giant rockets that AussieCon Three used as part of their staging are still in Australia. It is looking like it would be cheaper to build new ones in the USA than ship the Australian ones out. Which probably means that no one will do it. Shame, they looked great.

And the winners are...

Yes, I know that most of you have seen them a dozen times already. But not all of you have, so here they are again.

John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer: Cory Doctorow;

Fan Writer: Dave Langford;

Fan Artist: Joe Mayhew;

Fanzine: *File 770*;

Semi-prozine: *Locus*;

Professional Artist: Michael Whelan;

Professional Editor: Gardner Dozois;

Related Book: *Science Fiction of the 20th Century*, Frank M. Robinson;

Short Story: *Scherzo with Tyrannosaur*, Michael Swanwick;

Novellette: *10¹⁶ to 1*, James Patrick Kelly;

Novella: *The Winds of Marble Arch*, Connie Willis;

Dramatic Presentation: *Galaxy Quest*;

Novel: *A Deepness in the Sky*, Vernor Vinge.

A few comments are in order. Cory Doctorow's acceptance speech was excellent. This man will obviously be Toastmaster at a Worldcon in the fairly near future. Yes, Langford won again. So did *Locus*. Show some imagination people. It is the second year in a row that the Fan Artist award was given posthumously. Let's not do that again, huh? I prefer my friends to be alive. Vernor Vinge gets his second and once again thoroughly deserved Hugo. I hope I don't have to remind you that he will be a Guest of Honour at ConJosé in 2002. I promise you that his GoH speech there will be somewhat longer than his Hugo acceptance speech in Chicago.

And then there is *Galaxy Quest*. So Hollywood doesn't care about the Hugos, huh? Well, maybe most of them don't, but two people quite clearly do. Dean Parisot and Robert Gordon, Director and Screenwriter respectively of *Galaxy Quest*, were there to pick up their awards and they were quite clearly overjoyed. And so they should be. They had produced a film that was an affectionate piss-take of fandom, and fandom had got the joke and laughed itself silly. So for all those of you fighting to keep film and TV in the Hugos, just remember: Never Give Up, Never Surrender!

Hugo Analysis

Michael Nelson managed to get the Hugo nomination figures printed on the back of the results edition of the newsletter. This meant lots of poring over the numbers after the ceremony and a few interesting facts emerging.

As might be expected, most of the winners also topped the nominations list, but not all of them. In two of the three short fiction

categories the top nominee did not win, which perhaps shows that people are getting the nominated stories from Alexandra Digital Literature and reading them. Bob Eggleton got more than twice as many nominations as anyone else, but still didn't win. I don't understand that one.

Some of my Australian friends did well. Sean McMullen came 10th in the nominations for Best Novel (for *Souls in the Great Machine*). His daughter Catherine got five nominations in the Campbell, and when I pointed this out to her it was the first time I have ever seen her lost for words. Nick Stathopoulos placed 7th in Best Professional Artist and Lucy Sussex has a story (*The Queen of Erewhon*) at 9th in Best Novelette. Congratulations to them all.

For the second year running the administrator chose not to combine votes for *Nova Express* from the fanzine and semi-prozine categories. This will doubtless irritate Lawrence Person mightily. However, examination of the numbers shows something interesting. The combined vote was 18 nominations. In Best Fanzine that would have placed *Nova Express* 8th. In Best Semi-prozine it would have been 6th. Andrew Porter has since announced that *Science Fiction Chronicle* is going up market and will no longer be eligible for the semi-prozine category. So if *Nova Express* gets the same level of votes next year and they are all in semi-prozine it has a very good chance of a nomination. Think about it, Lawrence.

And then there was me. I got 14 nominations for 9th in Best Fanwriter, and *Emerald City* got 12 nominations for 12th in Best Fanzine. Both sets of votes are down a bit on last year, but that isn't surprising as a few of the Australians won't have bothered this time. I'm happy. Kevin, as usual, is intensely proud of me. There was no one

above me who didn't have a good claim to be there.

Masquerade

Facilities were a problem for the Masquerade too. In addition to all of the problems for the audience detailed above in the section on the Hugos, things were pretty bad for the contestants too. The Green Room (where the contestants get changed) was several floors up from the hall where the Masquerade was to take place. Fortunately we had a conveniently placed freight elevator that could ferry contestants directly from the Green Room to backstage, but it was certainly not ideal.

To add to our woes there was a mundane wedding taking place on the same floor as the Green Room. Waiters with trays of food had to pass by our area to get to the wedding. And the wedding party had booked exclusive access to the toilets on our floor. The Masquerade contestants, most of whom will have been very nervous and uptight, had to be escorted through the hotel to another set of toilets several floors down. These were small - no disabled cubicle for people in big costumes - and the floor of the men's toilet was flooded.

It isn't 100% clear who was responsible for this mess, but it looks like it was a cock-up between senior management of the con. The room in which the wedding was taking place had originally been allocated for fan photography for the Masquerade. When the wedding folks asked to book, whoever was handling hotel negotiations was unaware of this, and presumably unaware of the presence of the Green Room on that floor, and said that the room could go. No one told the Masquerade management until it was way too late. This also meant that fan photography ended up taking place on the stage whilst judging was

taking place, an experiment that none of the regular photographers is keen to repeat.

Video coverage for the Masquerade also suffered a few problems early on. The tech kit apparently included a lot of special effects, and the person in charge appeared keen to try them all. Also a lot of the camera work was very poor. There have been a lot of complaints about this on SMOFs, but as with all tech issues the truth is a little complicated. Some of the most authoritative posts have come from Skip Morris and I've relied upon him for what follows.

Firstly the special effects were the fault of the guy at the mixing desk, not the cameraman. So all of you folks in the audience who were yelling out "kill the cameraman" please apologise. Second, Chicon had a much lighter tech set-up than other recent US Worldcons. Bill Parker's team in San Antonio had at least three cameras, and I suspect that LA had something similar. Chicon had only one. Skip says that lightweight tech is a tradition in Midwest cons, and that when the Chicon committee were told what the cost would be for a typical modern Worldcon tech crew they threw it out. Someone at the ConJosé meeting on the Monday night of the con said they thought that Chicon's committee was trying to run the Worldcon like an over-sized WindyCon. I think this was a classic example of that problem.

I was working reception on the Green Room this year, Chicon's events staff having inexplicably come to the conclusion that experience and numbers were not important where Den Moms were concerned. As a consequence of this I didn't get to see nearly as much of the costumes as usual. However, I did get a few backstage photos and these will be on the *Emerald City* web site.

As is often the case, the judges seemed to manage to give an award to almost everyone, so I'm not going to list the full results here. Instead here are the major awards, with a few comments.

Best Novice went to Rachel Hrubetz, Sallie Abba, Mandi Arthur, Diane Dunlap, and Jeanette Roth as "Galaxy Breast Bra". I have no idea what this one was all about, except that there were a lot of girls with fabulously excessive eyelashes and Madonna-like pointy bras.

Best Journeyman went to Susan Eisenhour and Margaret Blakesley as "The Awakening". I wish I had got a photo of this one because one of these ladies was in a fabulous Ent costume. I was backstage when they were on stage and they got a huge roar from the audience.

Best Master, and also **Best in Show for Workmanship**, went to Jacqueline M. Ward as "Ill met by Earthlight". I'm not surprised that this one won because the costume is incredibly intricate. However, it is unusual for a single-person entry to do well in the high level awards, so very well done Jacqueline.

Best in Show was almost a foregone conclusion. As usual the Masquerade Director had scheduled the obvious favourite last, and true to form Pierre and Sandy Pettinger, Julie Zetterberg, Greg Sardo, John Blaker, Les Roth and Greg Abba picked up the rosette for "Ancient Plagues". I'm delighted that they won, firstly because Pierre's costume in particular was absolutely stunning. And second because ConJosé can now claim that our Events Director has won Best in Show at a Worldcon Masquerade. Well done, Father John!

The other spectacular big group entry was "Carnival 2047" by John Bondi-Ernoehazy, Gail Bondi, Bill Ernoehazy, Tina Beychok

and Steve Bartlett. This was actually a Journeyman entry. Overall, the costumes were not hugely spectacular, but they had a fabulous technical trick. I missed some of Bill's demonstration to a fascinated group of fellow contestants after the show, but basically they had some sort of optical cable that could have lights running up and down it. Very neat stuff.

I also have two honourable mentions. Firstly there was Lance Ikegawa and David Sheets as "Poke-Brat". One of these two was dressed up inside a huge, furry Pokemon creature outfit that deservedly won the Best Workmanship in the Master category. And finally, Alfred Richard was back with another one of his hilarious "Klingon Quiet Night In" presentations, this time recruiting Margot Palmere for a bit of 70's disco. Worf as John Shaft - I kid you not. Richard has now used the same basic outfit three times, but he always has the audience in stitches. It is good to see that presentation skills still have a place in the Masquerade.

And I guess I have to mention the cows. The Millennium Philcon herd got together to bring us a veritable dairy-full of entries featuring bad cow puns. Despite moos from the audience and the beefs of the other costumers they milked it for all it was worth. We pailed before their udderly awful jokes and some fans would cheerfully have had them hoofed out, but somehow they managed to steak a claim to a prize or two. All I can say is that I think they all deserved a pat on the back.

2003 Site Selection Results

In the Site Selection ballot Toronto easily defeated Cancun by a massive 1375 to 247. No need for a second round of counting there, though I gather that the site selection team failed to break Aussiecon Three's record for the shortest ever count.

Considering that Chicon 5 was the scene of the notorious 14-hour ballot count, I suspect that there were a few very relieved SMOFs around. Another ghost is laid to rest.

The convention has unsurprisingly taken the name of Torcon 3. The Guests of Honour will be George R.R. Martin, Kelly Freas, Mike Glycer and Spider Robinson as toastmaster. While ConJosé's GoHs are all wonderful people and I'm delighted with them, there are always those who are up there in the same starry firmament. Torcon 3 has a fabulous guest list. Well chosen, guys. George's latest book is reviewed in this issue, so I need not say any more about him, but I would like to put in a quick word about Mike Glycer. After all, how many other fans do you know who have both chaired a Worldcon and got a pile of fanzine and fanwriter Hugos? Not to mention being a wonderful person to boot. Congratulations, Mike, this is well deserved. For more details of membership rates and so on, see the Torcon 3 web site (<http://www.torcon3.on.ca>).

Future Worldcon bids are filling up fast. Boston are now into full swing in their efforts to wrest 2004 away from Charlotte. The UK bid team has settled on Glasgow for their 2005 bid. LA has announced its intention to bid for 2006, and Tokyo is looking at 2007. The Japanese bid team was a definite curiosity in Chicago - their parties were packed out every time I went near them. The guys in Melbourne who were thinking about 2007 will probably move to the more sensible 2009. It is pretty much an unwritten law that no one gets a Worldcon more frequently than once every 9 years. My guess is that there will be a bid for somewhere in or close to Texas for 2008.

I bumped into Richard Lynch of *Mimosa* on the Monday party round and he opined that what we are seeing is the fall-out from

the "No Zone" constitutional amendment passed last year. His argument was that because bids are no longer tied to the zonal rotation system, if there is a bid outstanding for the year they want they simply move to the following year, thus stretching advance announcements out into the future. However, what his analysis doesn't take into account is that most of those bids are from outside North America. They will have taken note of Aussiecon Three's extended bidding campaign and will be trying to emulate it by staking a claim to a year well in advance, hoping to shame the Americans into not opposing them. LA has simply responded in kind. Non-North American bids have never been tied to a particular year, so I don't think No Zone can be blamed.

What is interesting is that we are now facing the possibility of 40% of the Worldcons in this decade being outside of the USA. We are starting to leave the US every other year. It will be interesting to see whether the Americans take badly to this and try to oppose one of the foreign bids.

Meanwhile, commiserations to Cancun. I have to say that their bid team did not work nearly hard enough to win, but as long as they had fun that's fine. And Cancun is an interesting destination. KIM Campbell has suggested it as a possible SMOFcon venue. I think Mexico in December sounds like an excellent idea, and ConCanCun is too good a convention name to waste. Hopefully someone will follow up on this.

World Science Fiction Society

Kevin and I, sick puppies that we are, spent most of our time doing WSFS business. Well we are both on the Mark Protection Committee, and we were both members of the head-table staff for the Business

Meetings. At least it meant that we got so see each other, which might not have been the case otherwise.

The Mark Protection Committee is the closest thing that WSFS has to an ongoing public face. We handle the minimal amount of official business that the Society does - mainly to do with protection of service marks such as WorldconSM and HugoSM. But we are also responsible for the WSFS web site, and this year we actually made a decision that affects people. From now on anyone who wants to bid for a Worldcon is entitled to a domain name on the WSFS server. So if you are, say, bidding for Mars in 2010, then the name marsin2010.bids.worldcon.org is yours. See, us faceless bureaucrats do have a purpose.

Chicon had not exactly endeared itself to SMOFdom at large, and to Business Meeting staff in particular. Some bright spark had scheduled the Business Meetings to start at 8.30 am, which in Worldcon terms is practically the middle of the night, parties being what they are. I'm sure that there were good reasons for this, but no one was about to let it happen again. One thing the Business Meeting can do is tell Worldcons what to do. It doesn't do it often, because it is a mighty power and not to be used in a trifling manner. But breakfast is important, so we passed a resolution saying that from now on Business Meetings should not start before 10.00 am.

That was fine, except that we did it at the first Business Meeting on Friday and Mark Olson then came up with the bright idea of seeing if we could change the times of the Saturday and Sunday meetings at Chicon. Well, Program Ops went at it with the best of intentions, but somehow what we got was meetings in the same time slot but in two different rooms. Net result: many

grumpy SMOFs and Kevin and I having to get up even earlier to put up notices to make sure people who go to the wrong room know how to find the meeting. Never try to change a Worldcon on the fly, folks, it is a recipe for disaster.

The first piece of substantive business that got discussed was the question of Hugo eligibility. We have known for some time that books, stories etc. first published or premiered outside the USA stand very little chance of getting nominated because most of the voters are American and they don't get to see the material until the eligibility period is over. A committee had been discussing this, and had come back with several suggestions; the most favoured of which was an experiment.

The WSFS constitution allows a work to have its eligibility extended for a year on grounds of limited availability. The committee proposed that we pass a blanket resolution extending eligibility by one year for all works published only outside the USA in 1999. Under the rules such a motion required a three-quarters majority to pass, but it got it easily, so the experiment is now in place.

The effect of this is that works such as *The Sky Road*, by Ken MacLeod, and *Silver Screen*, by Justina Robson, are eligible for next year's Hugos. I am trying to get together a list of recommendations so that American readers can start chasing up these books now. So if you have any ideas (and this applies to books published anywhere outside the USA), let me know. Meanwhile the committee is continuing to deliberate and watching the progress of the experiment. Kevin is chairing it this year, so if you want more information email me and ask.

Main item of business number two was the Dramatic Presentation Hugo. For some time now people have been trying to get a

separate Hugo for TV programmes because it is very hard for something like an episode of *Buffy* to go up against a blockbuster movie. The trouble is that no one can agree how this should be done. Some people want the split to be TV/Movie, but that would disenfranchise all other forms of dramatic presentation. Others want the TV Hugo to be for a series rather than an episode, but that would likely be as predictable as Best Semi-prozine.

In all three separate motions were submitted to the Business Meeting, all with roughly the same aim, but different specifics. Understandably the meeting threw them all out without further discussion, and just as well too or we would probably still be debating now. Instead we have another committee which will hopefully come back next year with a single recommendation. Again, if you are interested in the debate, ask me and I'll tell you how to join in.

Finally we discussed the lead-time between site selection and a Worldcon actually taking place. Currently this is three years. Many people with a lot of experience believe that this is too long. Certainly Worldcon committees do very little in their first year of life. In my experience from ConJosé most of the effort in the first year is spent either doing things that don't really need to be done yet, or trying to stop people from doing things that definitely don't need to be done yet.

Those in favour of three years have two main arguments. Firstly, that time is needed to assemble a team, and secondly that hotel space needs to be booked as far as possible in advance, and you can't confirm the booking unless you know you have won the bid. The hotel argument is a powerful one, and seemed to sway the meeting, although Ben Yalow, who knows

more about hotel negotiations than any other Worldcon regular, does not support it. Seth Briedbart made the excellent point that everyone with experience of both 2 and 3-year lead times supported a return to 2 years. But the meeting chose to ignore the experienced view so 3 years it stays.

I'm in the process of typing up the minutes of the meetings. If you are interested in finding out more about what went on, they will be available on <http://www.wsfs.org> soon, hopefully some time in October.

The convention

Looking back, Chicon was a perfectly acceptable Worldcon. If I have been somewhat critical in what has gone before, that is probably because mistakes are always much more obvious than what went well. So let us start the summary with a bit of praise.

Registration, as far as I could see, was flawless. Congratulations too to Steven Silver for having a temporary Programme Green Room table right next to Registration for the first few days so that programme participants could pick up their information packs easily.

The at-con web site was also wonderful. Erik Olson was unfailingly enthusiastic and helpful, making it possible for Kevin and me to get agendas for the Business Meetings on line in good time. Kudos too to the Internet Lounge for providing Ethernet points so that people with laptops could just plug in and use their own software.

The in-room video of the Hugos and Masquerade was also a great idea, especially in view of the small size of the main hall. I gather that some of the quality wasn't so good, but it is much better than not being able to see the show at all.

Top of the negative list has to be the Hugo Ceremony. I was amazed to discover that the people responsible are actually bragging on-line about how professional they were. And there is a rumour going round that they had hired a "professional events organiser" who insisted on kicking out anyone with previous experience of running the Hugos so that the team would not be contaminated with old fashioned ideas. Presumably those old fashioned ideas included things like spelling nominees' names correctly. Well Chicon 2000 managed to produce the worst Hugo ceremony I have ever seen, and in my humble opinion the people responsible should never be allowed near running the Hugos again. Aussiecon Three, running the whole thing on a shoestring with hardly any experience, did a far better job.

Please note that this does not extend to Michael Nelson who was responsible for handling the voting, not the ceremony.

The site, despite it being almost all under one roof, was a bit of a pain. I found it harder to find people and places at Chicon than at any other con I have been to. Those twisty little passages really are all alike. Also tall buildings are a real disaster come party time, especially if the hotel is designed to have one suite on each floor, not a few floors of suites. The Hyatt elevators took a real hammering. Fortunately they only failed on one day, and huge thanks to the hotel for providing their own Elevator Party Hosts, but the arrangement is far from ideal.

Publications had one or two fouls ups as well. A lot of people complained that the cover of the souvenir book was too flimsy. Somehow the people putting it together managed to omit most of the portion of the WSFS Constitution that deals with the Hugos. And Richard Lynch tells me that

there were errors in the past Worldcons listing as well.

The Newsletter came in for a bit of stick in some quarters. Personally I think Chaz Baden and his team did a pretty good job, but I will admit that it was sometimes difficult to get them to do what you wanted. I needed to get announcements in about the business meeting, and while some stuff was printed, the two things I most wanted in were cut.

I got the impression that the Newsletter team was rather more interested in entertaining the reader than in providing important information. I can sympathise with that. Information is boring. I suspect that as at-con web sites become more easily accessible the need for the Newsletter to carry information will reduce. It won't be that long, I suspect, before hotels start having in-room web access. But until then the Newsletter has an important role to play in keeping con attendees informed as well as entertained.

The Art Show was another area that received a few brickbats. I know very little about putting on an art show. In fact it is rare that I even get the time to visit one at Worldcons. But this year I did and I was immediately struck by the fact that the first thing I saw when I came in was photos by my friend James Daugherty. Now James is a great photographer, and a lovely bloke, but he was only too willing to admit that pride of place in the art show did not belong to him, as it appeared to do. That slot should have gone to Artist Guest of Honour, Bob Eggleton. If the Art Show people were that careless I guess they could have made other mistakes as well.

Finally on the negative stuff there have been a few words of complaint about the quality of projection in the film programme. This may be another example of Chicon under-spending on tech. Again

films are not something I know anything much about, but if you are going to have a film programme it has to be a lot better than what people could get by renting videos. If the quality is poor, why bother?

In the final analysis, however, a Worldcon is put on by volunteers and it is truly amazing that anything gets done at all. We have high standards because people have performed miracles in the past. And quite unreasonably we expect that things will get better. Strangely they often do, and I was delighted to see that at the closing ceremonies Tom Veal, the Chicon Chairman, presented a series of "Above & Beyond" awards to members of his staff whose performance had vastly exceed expectations. Erik Olson and Ben Lieberman, whom I have mentioned above, were among the recipients.

So, another year over, another one to come. Next year Philadelphia. See you there, I hope.

Look Back in Anger

Iain Banks dedicates his latest Culture novel, "For the Gulf War Veterans". I guess he has been talking to a few, but he could just as easily have mentioned veterans of Kosovo, Vietnam, the Dresden raids, or the crew of the Enola Gay. And if that doesn't give you a clue as to what this book is about, you haven't been paying attention.

Look to Windward, as all of you who are fans of T.S. Eliot will instantly recognise (and I didn't and had to be told by Roz) is a sequel of sorts to *Consider Phlebas*. Quite how much of a sequel I'm not sure. It must be ten years at least since I read *Consider Phlebas*, and while I remember the Idirian war I can't recall any of the characters or

the plot. This at least proves that you do not have to have read the earlier book to enjoy the new one. It does of course help if you have a basic understanding of The Culture, but other than that the book stands alone.

Mind you, standing alone does not mean being divorced from the greater corpus of SF. *Look to Windward* makes a few respectful nods in the direction of *Ringworld*. It is set primarily on a Culture orbital, which is the name that Banks coined for a ringworld. The action centres around a race of Kzinti-like creatures: a warrior race who have evolved from a cat-like species. And one of the other major characters has three legs, just like a Puppeteer. No sign of Teela Brown however: if you want to talk about probability wait for the *Ash* review coming up next.

Banks has written so many Culture novels now that for most readers any new volume will compare unfavourably with a past favourite. For me nothing is likely to quite match up with *Use of Weapons* and *Against a Dark Background*. I did like the last one, *Inversions*, because it was so subtle and clever, but I know a lot of people who found it too different, and even one or two who didn't realise that it was a Culture novel.

Look to Windward doesn't sink to the depths of frivolous boredom that marred *Excession*, but it does suffer from the same plotting problem in that it is impossible to create any situation that looks remotely threatening to the all-powerful Culture Minds. Banks tries very hard in this one, and then laughs at himself for having done so.

But, as I alluded to earlier, this book is not just an adventure story set in The Culture. It is a book about wars, and the effect that they have on those who fight them. In his

Guest of Honour speech at Lexicon Philip Pullman said that the very best literature is always that which teaches us something about the human condition. That's a very non-sfnal attitude. SF is supposed to be about ideas, not about people. I think that Banks is pretty much out of ideas as far as The Culture goes. But what he can do is use the popular setting to write the sort of stories that Pullman was advocating. He did that well with *Inversions*, and he has done it well here too. Long may he continue to do so.

Look to Windward - Iain M. Banks - Orbit - hardcover

Out of Africa

So I got back to the UK, and there it was, all 1113 pages of it. All four "volumes" of *Ash*, neatly, if probably somewhat ill-advisedly, bound into a single book.

Four volumes is, of course, a somewhat arbitrary division. Mary Gentle delivered the book in two parts, neatly divided by Ash's return from Carthage, but the book is clearly designed as a single narrative and it is presented to the reader as sixteen separate volumes. Who knows how it would be best published? My only concern is that my single volume softcover is going to fall apart after a while. Guess I should have bought the hardcover, but I picked up the first copy I laid eyes upon and purchased it on the spot.

Yes, I did want it that badly. I wanted to know what on Earth was going on. If you look back at my reviews of the US Part I and Part II you will see me desperately speculating on what the heck the book is all about. Most of it I got wrong, especially in the review of Part I. But then it isn't exactly

obvious. This is a very clever book. If I might be trite and try to summarise, *Ash* is:

- a rip-roaring fantasy adventure about a band of tough mediaeval mercenaries with a female captain;
- a fascinating alternate history in which the Visigoths found a New Carthage in North Africa and world religions develop very differently;
- a clever SF tale about parallel worlds and quantum probability; and
- a delicious literary conceit that is a story about a story within a story.

All that in one book. Not bad, huh? And there's a feminist side to it as well, although it could easily be claimed that what the book has to say about the role of women in mediaeval society is undermined by the fact that it is an alternate history. Male historians will continue to claim that women played no significant part in mediaeval life. Fortunately remarkable women did exist at the time, and their stories are gradually being made known. See the next review for an example. Besides, I think Mary had enough on her plate with writing a book that spans all of the sub-genres of speculative fiction without doing politics too.

I said in my review of *Left to His Own Devices* that Mary delights in confounding the expectations of her readers, and that in doing so she often offends the very people that began by enjoying her work. I still think that there was no excuse for *Ancient Light*: it was just plain rude. With *Left to His Own Devices* I wasn't aware when I wrote the review that Mary had suffered a bad accident and was unable to finish the book. It is a real shame that it had to be published in that condition, and I hope that one day Mary might finish it, but I do now understand why it was the way it was. But with *Ash* I think that Mary has finally

cracked the secret of confounding expectations without giving offence.

I am sure that there will be devotees of fantasy that will object to the SF intrusions. I am even more sure that a lot of SF fans will refuse to even consider the book because it looks like a fantasy. And I guess there will be people who will refuse to read it because the principal character is a woman. I have no patience with such narrow-mindedness. This is one of the cleverest books I have read in a long time. It will be on my Hugo list for next year (although I can foresee endless rows over whether it is one book or four). I just hope that it isn't too clever for its own good.

Sorry, what was that? No, I haven't told you any more about the book. If I tell you any more than I did in the previous two reviews it will only start spoiling it for you. Go buy: trust me, it is long, but it is brilliant.

Ash: A Secret History - Mary Gentle - Gollancz - softcover

Lioness in Winter

While many men will doubtless sneer at *Ash* and say that it would be impossible for any woman to hold such a position of authority in the Middle Ages, there is no doubt that some pretty remarkable women did live at that time. One of the most remarkable is Eleanor of Aquitaine. While at *Lexicon* I discovered a new biography of Eleanor (thank you once again, Caroline Mullan) and hastened off to buy it.

Eleanor's story is truly astounding. She was their heiress to the very substantial Duchy of Aquitaine and County of Poitou in France. At the age of 15 she was married to

the future Louis VII of France and became Queen when Louis inherited the throne. Later, aged 30 and tiring of her wimp of a husband, she persuaded him to divorce her, and promptly ran off with one of his arch enemies, the much younger Henry, Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy.

Now Henry was the son of Matilda, daughter of Henry I of England, who was currently waging a civil war against her rival for the crown, Stephen de Blois. The young Henry was an impressive lad, and when Stephen died the English chose him for their King ahead of Stephen's son. So Eleanor became a Queen of a second country.

Henry II's father was Geoffrey of Anjou, a notable French warlord. It is from him that the family acquired the title of Angevins. Geoffrey was also nicknamed Plantagenet, after the Latin name of a flower he was fond of wearing in his hat. The name was apparently not widely used for the family until Shakespeare popularised the notion.

Eleanor and Henry had a stormy relationship, but at least initially they were very fond of each other. When Henry was persuaded to join the First Crusade Eleanor and her ladies went along too, reportedly dressed as Amazons. She and Henry quarrelled during the campaign, and it is alleged that she considered dumping him, both for her uncle, the King of Jerusalem, and for Saladin, the Saracen general. Much later, when the relationship had broken down completely, Eleanor supported, and perhaps even incited, a rebellion by her sons against the old King.

Henry II was a tough fellow and easily beat off his sons, two of whom pre-deceased him. Eventually, however, he died, and Eleanor, at the age of 67, found herself ruling England on behalf of her favourite son, Richard I, while he was off Crusading. This included the difficult 18 months that

Richard spent as a captive of first Duke Leopold of Austria and then the Holy Roman Emperor, and during which time his brother John attempted to seize the throne.

Eleanor outlived Richard as well, and had she not died at the remarkable age of 82 she might have helped John make slightly less of a mess of his rule. Throughout much of her life she had been Queen, or Queen Mother, of an empire that included not only England but most of northern and western France. Two of her sons became Kings of England, her daughters were Queens of Sicily and Castile, and she counted a Queen of France and a Holy Roman Emperor amongst her grandchildren. Of all British monarchs, only Queen Victoria has a more impressive record.

Alison Weir's biography can hardly fail to make an entertaining story of such a life. Readers are treated to a fascinating progression of Eleanor from a young and impetuous beauty through quarrelsome wife to wise old matriarch. Although the sources about Eleanor are slim, and much of them doubtless heavily embroidered, Weir does a good job of separating fact from fiction. Occasionally she works rather too hard on our behalf. I would have liked to hear from some of the Mediaeval writers occasionally rather than have Weir always interpreting them for us. But over all it was a very enjoyable book about a most amazing woman.

Eleanor of Aquitaine: by the Wrath of God, Queen of England - Alison Weir - Pimlico - softcover

A Perfect Storm?

Now if you thought *Ash* was long, try this for size: the latest volume of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* is 924 pages all by itself. It is the third volume, and the book is clearly a long way from being finished. And whilst *Ash* was sort of divided up into 16 volumes, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is quite clearly a single narrative somewhat arbitrarily divided up into chunks of around 1000 pages each. This latest offering, *A Storm of Swords*, starts with material that overlaps the events of the Battle of Blackwater from the previous book, *A Clash of Kings*, and ends with multiple cliff-hangers. Which is a shame, because I really would like to nominate George for a Hugo, but no way is the book a stand-alone work.

There's not a lot I can tell you about this volume, other than that if you are the sort of person who hates it when any of the leading characters die then you are in for a bad time, because this time George has a veritable bloodbath. Other than that, the wonderfully complex plot continues, and if I say anything about it those who haven't read the two earlier volumes will a) be totally lost and b) have their enjoyment of those earlier books badly spoiled. So what I'm going to try and do instead is talk about why this series is so good.

The preceding books reviewed in this issue, *Ash* and the Eleanor of Aquitaine biography, give us a grimly realistic mediaeval fiction and a fascinating glimpse at how real mediaeval dynasties slugged it out between them. *A Song of Ice and Fire* does a marvellous job of appearing to be realistic, but at the same time has just the right amount of caricature and romanticism to make it brilliant soap opera.

Don't believe me? Look at some of the characters. You have Catelyn Stark, the

archetypal over-protective interfering mother; Cersei Lannister, the selfish manipulative beauty; Tywin, her rigid, conservative father; and Sansa, the innocent airhead. All of these characters could have come straight out of some American daytime soap. But George has dropped them into a pseudo-mediaeval society and they sound just as believable as the quarrelling Angevins.

Now saying that they are caricatures makes it sound like they are one-dimensional, but they are not. The caricature nature makes them instantly recognisable, but George gives every one of them depth by giving them contrasting aspects to their characters that genuine caricatures would never have. Catelyn clearly loves her family deeply, but can't stop herself from meddling; Cersei too dotes on her children, though in her case this leads to them being spoiled rotten; Tywin has fought long and hard to get his family to the top of the tree. Consequently the reader is never quite sure who the good guys are, and where the next dirty deed is coming from.

The plot also has a soap-opera structure. Just as with a TV series, the viewpoint is constantly switching. *Ash* has one dominant viewpoint character. The Sean McMullen and Pat Murphy novels reviewed later have only a few each. George has at least twelve that I can think of off the top of my head, and each one of those has their own plot thread that is being developed independently. Occasionally two or three will come together temporarily for a major event, but for the most part it is like reading twelve separate, inter-linked books all at once. The effect of this is that instead of having the occasional cliff-hanger at the end of a chapter you are juggling a whole cat's cradle of dangling threads. And boy does that make you rush through the book.

Of course the end of an individual book can be rather disappointing. In *A Clash of Kings* George did a very good job of bringing a lot of threads together at the end in a single major incident, the aforementioned Battle of Blackwater. But you can't do that in every issue, it becomes a little too predictable. So this time the book just stops. I sure hope we don't have to wait another 18 months for the next one, because I Want To Know What Happens!

Another technique that George uses is constant upsetting of expectations. He will have a nicely developing sub-plot in which characters are working toward a particular aim, and they just about get there when... Wham! Something completely unexpected happens and the plot lurches off in a different direction. There are times in the current book where I think he rather over-uses this trick, but it certainly gives the reader a sense of "oh no, what now?" I don't normally watch soap opera on TV, but as I recall this is exactly the sort of technique that the writers use for the end of each episode.

There are other things that George does well too. For example there is just enough magic in the story to appeal to the fantasy reader without the need to radically reconsider the nature of the background society. There are some fabulous comedy moments along the way. He even manages to get away with the occasional joke anachronism. For example in *A Storm of Swords* a character who has just received a drubbing from an angry hero in sword practice asks, "what part of yield did you not understand?" In a lot of books something like that would completely puncture the atmosphere, but George knows just when it is safe to drop it in and get a laugh.

Overall, however, this series is soap opera television done in book form. It is very

clever, it is very addictive, and it deserves to be a rip-roaring commercial success. If you asked me whether it was better literature than *Ash* I would probably say no - certainly *Ash* asks more of its readers, but where Mary is intellectual, George is master story-teller. Nobody does it better.

A Storm of Swords - George R.R. Martin - Voyager - softcover

Those Magnificent Men

Boy have I been waiting a long time for this book. I read *Voices in the Light* and *Mirrorsun Rising* when I was living in Australia, which is over three years ago now. Those books later became *Souls in the Great Machine*. And now, finally, we have the sequel.

In *The Miocene Arrow* the action, perhaps for very smart commercial reasons, moves to North America. It is good for other reasons too, because it gives Sean an excuse to devise yet another fascinating post-holocaust society. The Americans, unlike the Australians in the earlier book, have not lost the secret of the petrol engine. So they have trams, and most importantly aircraft. But because they can't get involved in electronics or heavy industry the planes are pretty much at a First World War level. Sean has therefore constructed a chivalric society based on knights of the air. His futuristic America is a bizarre combination of the Middle Ages and Richthofen's air war: fabulous.

Into this romantic setting Sean drops two rival groups of Australians. One group, the Aviads, are seeking to use their superior powers to gain control of the American's military technology so that they can use it to seize power back home. They intend to

do so by starting a major war and stealing planes in the confusion. John Glasken and Theresla have been sent over to stop them.

And then everything takes off just as before. Glasken still can't resist a pretty girl, Theresla still eats mice, and there are multiple misunderstandings, wild passions and devious plots. It is probably unfair to dissect Sean's writing in an issue that also reviews Iain Banks, Mary Gentle and George Martin, but what he occasionally lacks in technique he more than makes up for in furtive imagination. There are no huge surprises in this issue, because by now we all know what *The Call* is, and where it comes from. But you may still find your stomach churning when you learn what *The Miocene Arrow* actually is.

What more can I say. Sean is a wonderful bloke, a good friend, and one of the most inventive writers on the scene today. No one I know who has taken up my recommendation of reading *Souls in the Great Machine* has failed to love the book. This is more in the same vein. Look, Sean got more Hugo nominations this year than Gene Wolfe, George Martin, or Joe Haldeman. Go get the books and see what the fuss is about.

The Miocene Arrow - Sean McMullen - Tor - hardcover

Angel with a Dirty Face

There are a number of themes running through this issue. Obviously there is a lot of mediaeval stuff. There is also, for me, an unusual amount of stories featuring war. Theme number three is genre mangling. With *Ash* Mary Gentle wrote a book that was SF, Fantasy and Alternate History all in one. Pat Murphy appears to be doing a

similar sort of thing, only in her case she is writing a loose trilogy which, it appears, will comprise one book in each of three genres.

There And Back Again, the Hobbit-in-space book, was the SF component of the series. The new book, *Wild Angel*, doesn't fit into any of the standard niches, except to say that it is heavily influenced by *Tarzan of the Apes*, and perhaps by *The Jungle Book*. Burroughs probably thought that he was writing a scientific romance, but as Pat points out in her Afterword he didn't actually pay much attention to justifying his background, really he was just writing an adventure story. *Wild Angel* is an adventure of sorts too, but perhaps more of an adventure for girls.

I should point out before I go any further that *Wild Angel* is written in very much the same vein as *There and Back Again*. That is, it is written to be accessible to the younger reader. The language is straightforward, and the plot twists fairly predictable. The morality of the plot is plain and simple for all to see. But this does not mean that it is a simple book. As with *There and Back Again*, Pat loads it down with subliminal messages for the younger reader. Here's hoping that they get through.

The basic plot is very simple. In the time of the California Gold Rush a young girl sees her parents murdered by a ruthless criminal. She runs off into the mountains where she is found and reared by a pack of wolves. Much later attempts are made to lure her back to civilisation, but her parents' murderer, now a pillar of the community thanks to the money he got from his crimes, is afraid she might recognise and denounce her. Pat wanted to call the book *Sarah of the Wolves*.

The clever stuff comes from the way in which 19th Century Californian society is portrayed. Sarah, the wolf child, wears

clothes to keep her warm, and makes sure that they do not get in the way of her hunting. Efforts to "civilise" her have as much effect on some of the women she meets as they do on Sarah herself. Freedom of movement, for example, is a radical concept for Victorian females. There is smart stuff about the nature of criminality as well. And there is a guest appearance by a journalist from San Francisco by the name of Sam Clemens, which is just as well because his magnificent quotability provides some truly wonderful chapter headings.

The link up with *There and Back Again* comes in two ways. Firstly, this book is supposedly written by another of Pat's pseudonyms: Mary Maxwell, who is actually a pseudonym of Max Merriwell, the author of *There and Back Again*. In addition, the book contains a couple of characters who also appeared in the earlier volume: Gitana and Gyro. Pat has obviously been having great fun with this, but I don't think the idea really comes across well in the books. Pat might have felt that she was writing as Max writing as Mary, but that doesn't come through to the reader. And anyway, Tor, for eminently sensible commercial reasons, are insisting on putting "Pat Murphy" on the cover of each book, regardless of which pseudonym Pat thinks it was written by. The final book will apparently make a lot more use of this strange background, so I'm looking forward to it.

But to get back to *Wild Angel*, it is a lovely story, absolutely brilliant for girls, and good fun for women too. Boys of all ages will, I suspect, loathe it, but hopefully those who manage to grow up a bit will like it. Just remember that it is intended for kids, so don't expect anything too sophisticated.

Of course one of my main reasons for liking the book is the presence in the narrative of

the very excellent secret society, E Campus Vitus. These folks are somewhat more venerable, and definitely more verifiable, if perhaps not quite so much fun, as the Discordians. Which just goes to show that Californians have been crazy for a lot longer than most people imagine. More importantly, I discovered that the Clampers' motto is "Credo Quia Absurdum" - I believe because it is absurd. Given that the Bay Area SF Association's motto is the rather similar, "We do these things, not because they are hard, but because they are weird", this brings to mind the possibility that BASFA was founded by a secret cell of Clampers. Doubtless the truth will out at some point.

Wild Angel - Pat Murphy - Tor - hardcover

Footnote

A small note here about web rings. The WebRing company has recently been bought out by Yahoo who have decided to upgrade and "improve" the system. So far they have made a complete mess of things. One of the rings the *Emerald City* site is in has already defected to a rival system, NetRings, and I am seriously considering withdrawing from any ring that is operated by Yahoo. The main reason for this is that they are trying to introduce a system whereby the web ring link on ring member web sites is loaded directly from Yahoo's servers and may contain any material that Yahoo decides to include. I have no intention of having Yahoo pump advertising into my site just for the privilege of being in a web ring.

One thing that does concern me is how much traffic I will lose as a result. I haven't yet worked out how to get the statistics for

this, so I need to ask. Is there anyone out there who found *Emerald City* through a web ring? If so, please let me know.

Ok, that's that monster issue over. Next month Gene Wolfe, Brian Stableford, Kathleen Ann Goonan, Martha Wells and Paul Levinson whose *The Silk Code* topped the Locus poll for Best First Novel. Plus some other stuff, I guess. Better stop writing and get reading.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl