

## **Fen are the most individual group of people.**

*Maree Pavletich*

*FFANZ Laureate 2004*

*Conflux 2004, Canberra*

**Mission:** To explore Australian fandom, volunteer for Everything, seek out new fen and ideas, be the centre of attention at least once and have a lot of fun!

I really like attending SF conventions; I must do, I was up at 4am to catch the flight to Sydney then the bus to Canberra for Conflux.

I had a brief qualm about whether my arrangement for a billet had gone through – I needn't have worried, one fan had a word to another fan (thanks Kevin) and Robbie and Dev (wonderful people) put me up at their slanshack at five minutes notice, thanks guys.

One of my first stops at Conflux was the hucksters room, where I seriously strained my baggage allowance – and all this in the first hour! BTW my husband loved the ceramic astronaut lamp that I bought from Edwina Harvey (**Celestial Cobbler**).

Meeting fen proved to be not a problem as I soon sussed out the traffic areas and proceeded to introduce myself and ask the remarkably unstressed registration desk people if there was anything I could do. I did get listed to help out on the registration desk for two hours but by the time the two late slots came round it was decided the amount of attention needed could be coped with by manning the desk from a restaurant a couple of blocks away.

Dinners and other meals that weekend usually followed that pattern, I love getting together with groups of fans for meals and debating fandom in one of the best ways to do this – over food!

The Opening Ceremony was fun with a time travel theme that made many of us groan as we realised we remembered 1974 all too well! Or were we just envious of the fans that hadn't been born then? I have to admit I like 2004, the Universe is going to pieces in a most laudable manner.

One thing that stuck me was the age of Australian fans. I don't mean to be rude but it seems to me that Australian fans and fandom are about five/ten years ahead of New Zealand fans and fandom. Right now in New Zealand we are going through the point where from being students with very little discretionary cash, we now have fans coping with mortgages, babies, fighting their way up the career ladder, and very little discretionary cash. Australian fans have been through that stage of their lives (speaking very generally here) and now are finding that they are on top of real life, the children are past the crawling stage, finances are more stable, and there is time to take up the involvement again. And isn't it great to see pre-teens running round taking part (– now is the time to conscript them for gopher duties!)

It rapidly became apparent that Australian fandom has a great relationship with small press publishers and the bigger multinational publishers who have actually woken up to the fact that there is this huge pool of talent available on their doorstep. And that science fiction, especially SF set locally, SELLS. Almost everyone I ran into was an author, having been published in a zine (pro, semi-pro or amateur), anthology, or announcing their third trilogy in trade paperback. So yes, it was very much a LitCon,

but it was terrific to not be discussing the traditional golden oldies but the new and exciting authors pouring out of Australian fandom.

New Zealand publishers PLEASE TAKE NOTE.

Note: because almost everyone was an author there were t-shirts for sale illustrated with the traditional SF beanie and stating 'NOT an author!' sigh, pity I don't qualify to wear one.

All this creativity was heady stuff, the art display was awesome and the huskters tables groaned under volumes of zines and anthologies.

Fen are relentlessly creative and that is what it is all about afterall; fen celebrating their individuality however they want to do it, writing, painting, theatre, sculpting, organising events and whole conventions or the performance art involved in wearing a T-shirt proclaiming your interests.

## SATURDAY

Saturday rolled around and I dived right in with a panel on 'What are Fan Funds?' FYI: They are a great way of seeing how other parts of fandom operate around the world. I postulate that any convention-going fan could be dropped into the middle of a convention anywhere on Earth and be able to orientate themselves instantly. They would know what was going on and what was expected of them.

Which brings me to my usually soapbox of "Get Involved" – you don't get nominated by being someone who sits on their hands. It is better to give than receive and nowhere is that more apparent than in fandom. Writers and artists (of all types) give of themselves and so do the organisers – what they get back, speaking from personal experience, is a buzz like no other. When you see your name in print or listen to the happy whirl of your convention happening around you – well, you just have to be there. Gopher at the next convention you attend and see what I mean.

My fellow panellists included NAFF winner poet Jon Swabey, DUFF candidate Erica Lacey and chair Mark Loney. During the discussion a well known Australian fan, Bill Wright, referred to us as laureates. Intrigued, we discovered that it meant being recognised for the value of your whole body of work. A terrific term for the elected recipients of fan funds.

Later that day Rose Mitchell organised lunch for the Fan Fund winners and administrators and we voted unanimously to adopt this term to best define what a fan fund winner is. Jon Swabey grinned and said "We've changed the world."

Met previous DUFF winners (laureates!) Naomi Fisher and her husband Patrick Malloy, I had met Naomi when she had included the New Zealand Natcon ConTour as part of her holiday down under. There is a huge amount of international interaction in fandom that needs a lot more encouragement and exposure and while I applaud the efforts of the previous fan fund laureates who go on to be fan fund administrators, the organising committees of a lot of cons could get behind them in advertising more than they do – speaking from a purely local perspective. Links from the website are a huge help in getting publicity about these funds out into the local fan base.

Also a note to con organisers – use these people – laureates have got to this point by being fans who know what they are doing, are outgoing and can be a great help for panels, chairs, organising minutiae, basically anything you suddenly need someone to

do. It's not a problem of how many panels can they cope with, it's a problem of prising the microphone out of their hands!

I made sure I attended the Murder Mystery/whodunit style theatre; where the description of the crime was read out and then the panel of suspects were asked questions by the audience.

After listening and trying to remember all the details from Karen Herkes retelling of the circumstances of the murder plus the details of each of the panellists as they introduced themselves we proceeded to question the seedy security guard, the wanton PA Trudi White, the sinister executive ex-assassin, Seyla Vie and the filibustering Captain Dirk Flinthart.

All answered in character and it was really difficult trying to get at the facts as I wouldn't have relied on any of that motley crew to tell the truth if they thought a good lie would do! All had something to hide, all had complicated interactions with each other and phrasing your one question so as not to waste your turn or be beaten to a clue by another of the audience made it more than fraught.

I had an extra bit of fun. I had a question for the captain and had no sooner got a couple of words out when I was accused of being an interloper from THAT OTHER ISLAND! Obviously a dubious character and very likely a suspect! Busted! And I thought my accent wasn't that strong!

Looked in on the filming then attended the ASIM room party and then went yawning back to my billet.

## SUNDAY

I had volunteered to look after a room for the afternoon and had fun gophering for the panels and listening to the speakers. It did allow me to get out to catch a couple of other sessions such as Sean McMullen's "What they sang in medieval times" then dashed back to listen to "Cartography and the art of maps" as I had caught Russell Kirkpatrick's "Building your own imaginary world" the day before.

It was great meeting Sean and Trish again who are regular New Zealand attendees and it was a great surprise when on walking into a room I heard someone say "Hello." and turned to see a very jetlagged Catherine grinning at me. She knew I hadn't registered her presence when I walked in but that was because I thought she was still in Italy! Considering she had just got off the plane she was very coherent, probably more than me at that con sleep-deprived stage.

### Masquerade:

The Masquerade was a terrific party! In New Zealand it is a major event. We have a DJ and the Masquerade is run as a floor show/cabaret with a compère and the presenters get up on a stage to display their costumes and most times do a short skit to accompany the costume. They are judged on costume and /or presentation.

At Conflux Chuck McKenzie generously let Sean and I help organise the masquerade. I found some hotel notepads and pens and the judges, Sean, Bob and Greg wandered around while the party went on around them, making copious notes about the costumes they saw and were then herded off (herding cats is easy, believe me!) to compare those notes and decide the winners – then - they let me have a microphone! We called all the entrants up for a photocall and while the cameras were busy clicking

away I made sure the prizes were sorted. Sean and I presented the prizes as they were passed over from Chuck, our multi-talented DJ. At one point Sean said he needed one more minute, so I put the time to good use by calling "Vote Norman Cates for DUFF, Vote Norman Cates for DUFF, Vote Norman Cates for aaarghh urk!" Sean had decided that was enough of that! (worked though – Norman is the current DUFF laureate)

Then it was back to the party and a fantastic time was had by all. I danced a few dances with various people and collapsed to chat beside the dance floor with a few more. For most though the rule was, only vacate the dance floor to rehydrate, then get back out there!

More filking was going on upstairs and I can't tell you to this day what time it was when we got to bed.

## MONDAY

Managed to hear Sean McMullen's lecture again on the Realities of the Quest. In New Zealand I'd called it method writing. How far will one person go to research the toll marching in chainmail in the desert heat will take on a body – well if you're Sean, you gear up and off you go!

Had to take off to catch my bus midday Monday, as I had to get back to Sydney to catch my flight home.

So what did I learn? That the faces and mores of fandom stay the same no matter where you are. That fen express themselves in fandom to remember who they are in a world that is suspicious when it comes to different ways of looking at the world. It is a hobby or a way of life, and a platform for some to look at and consider the real world from.

Fen are the most individual group of people - I like that.

### **Maree is the current FFANZ Laureate.**

Maree has headed up three conventions and been on the committee for more than she wants to count. She has been secretary of the Stella Nova Science Fiction and Fantasy Club and is on the board of the SF and Fantasy Association of NZ. Maree is an accomplished actress with roles in Terry Pratchett's *Mort*, *Wyrd Sisters* and *Guards Guards!* New Zealand fans recognise her as one of only two people to have run three cons in New Zealand, the *Cond'or* 2000 FGOH, a published author, skit writer and convention speaker when ever someone is incautious enough to leave an unattended microphone. She also sets SF quizzes from memory. And she has lately come to the shocked realisation that she has been in active fandom for over twenty years.

Maree would like to thank her husband Matthew, co-winner of FFANZ and also an actor, writer and organiser, for his never ending support and sanity checks.