

EMERALD CITY

Issue 12

August 1996

An occasional 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at 100610.3413@compuserve.com

WARNING: This fanzine has NOT been approved by Ben Yalow.



Introduction

Hopefully (assuming things work the way I want), a lot of you will be seeing *Emerald City* for the first time having picked up a copy at LA Con III. Alternatively you may get a copy thrust at you in *The Tun* in London when I stop off there on my way home. A few words of introduction are therefore in order.

I guess the first thing I should say is that the 'zine has nothing whatsoever to do with Seattle. Not that I have anything against that city - indeed I am hoping to visit it sometime soon. But it is not the only place in the world to have named itself the Emerald City. Melbourne also claims that honour. As the most southerly city in mainland Australia, it has a climate sufficiently cool to maintain an atmosphere of greenness against the encroaching tide of the Red Desert. Kim Stanley Robinson would doubtless be proud of it. It is also the only Australian city sufficiently cool to be bearable in summer to emigre Poms.

Of course, I have no intention of disputing with the good people of Seattle their right to use the title for their city as well. It's a big enough world, and they are on another continent. But should they happen to wish to argue the point, I have only to ask which of the two cities is actually in the Land of Oz.

Meanwhile, back to the 'zine. Content concentrates mainly on book reviews and con reports, though other stuff sneaks in from time to time. Publication is, much to my surprise, still monthly after an entire year. Distribution is by email, except for those fortunate members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club and the Bay Area Science Fiction Association who can get printed copies if they turn up to the right meetings. I know this is an elitist method of circulation, but it keeps the 'zine free.

If you are interested in seeing further copies, email me, or look for me at any of the San Francisco in '02 events at LA Con III. A disc containing back issues should be available from the fan room.

The content of this issue is a little unusual. It being a Worldcon special, I have taken the liberty of reviewing some of the best (and some of the not so good) of Australian SF and fantasy. Many of the books I mention are published only in Australia. Indeed, I have deliberately ignored the work of Greg Egan because he is widely published and should be known to all of you, especially as he has two Hugo nominations this year. The purpose of this issue is to introduce you to something new.

There are many reasons why these authors are not available in the rest of the world. Partly it is simply difficult for small publishers at the arse end of the planet to get folks elsewhere to take their wares seriously. Partly, I have sadly concluded, it is because editorial standards in Australia are not quite what they might be, leading to distrust of everything they publish. And partly it is the fault of the authors themselves for stubbornly insisting on Australian publication first.

There is a view common in some Australian literary circles that to seek publication in the US or UK first is somehow unpatriotic, especially as your book may then not see publication in your home market until a year or so later. Unfortunately, this leads to many fine books not getting the exposure they deserve. I hope that this issue of *Emerald City* will help to correct that injustice.

Given that most of these books are not generally available outside Australia, you may well ask how you can get hold of them. If you are LA Con, go and see Mark Ziesing in the hucksters room. He imports Aussie books and should be able to help you. If all else fails, get in touch with Justin Ackroyd at Slow Glass Books, GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, VIC 3001, Australia; tel: +61 3 9639 1551.

Of course I must confess a certain amount of personal interest here. As you will see, many of these authors are well known to me. A few are very good friends. It is not always possible to be impartial in such situations, though I shall do my best. What I will also do is flag any personal relationships in the reviews in question. I leave it up to you to decide how biased I am.

But enough. I'm nearly at the bottom of page 2 already and I haven't even started any reviews. Get on with it, girl.

Zenith: Dirk Strasser

I started with Dirk Strasser because his work is published by Pan Australia. Such an illustrious publishing house, I thought, should pick the best of what is available. Besides, Dirk is a co-editor of *Aurealis*, one of Australia's leading SF and Fantasy magazines. I thought I was onto a good thing here. Sadly I did not get quite the results I expected.

Which is a shame, because Dirk is a nice guy and he does have talent. He has certainly sold enough short stories and newspaper articles to prove he can write. I met him briefly at the launch of *Equinox*, the sequel to *Zenith*, and was favourably impressed. A small, dark man,

he has an infectious affability which belies the sharpness of his features. I liked him, and wanted to like his work.

Alas and alack, the first ten or so chapters of *Zenith* were so bad I started to get the “even I could do better than this” feeling. Good for fuelling my literary ambitions, but a very bad sign for the poor reviewee. As things went on, the book got better, and by page 250 or so it was starting to get interesting. It also gave the plot away entirely, but so it goes. I talked to Dirk about this and he tells me that the first few chapters were written over several years whereas the rest of the book was done in one burst. The difference shows.

Of course there were only 400 pages in all, so you had to get past half way before getting to the meat, but as *Zenith* is merely the first part of one of those multi-volume fantasy “trilogies”, it isn’t really that bad. Given the amount of improvement as you go through *Zenith*, I would expect the sequels to be much better.

I think the primary problem is that Dirk hasn’t really got to grips with the basics of fantasy novel writing. He says that he wanted to do something outside the ordinary stream of fantasy writing, but in doing so the concepts of subcreation and suspension of disbelief seem to have gone out with the bathwater. He chucks in strange things on that assumption that this is all a fantasy needs without any attempt to construct a rational, believable world. Like David Brin last month, he has one of those pea-brained heroes whom you end up wanting to shake some sense into after only a few chapters. And like so many fantasy writers, his names are awful.

Once again a different approach might have made things a lot better. Dirk clearly knows a lot more about the world than he lets on, and he has chosen to write the initial book from the point of view of a highly naive member of a group that knows very little about the world. Things could get a lot more coherent when we learn more about the world.

Some of the best parts of *Zenith* are the descriptions of the two religious orders in Strasser’s world. They are based on Tibetan Buddhist sects and apparently Dirk has been to Tibet and speaks from experience. They are also very different (perhaps too different) from traditional fantasy religions. However, it is a lone highlight. I was particularly annoyed at the portrayal of the feminist characters as mindlessly violent. Goodness only knows what Tess Williams has had to say about this. Dirk says that large parts of the sequel, *Equinox*, are written from a female point of view and I look forward to reading that. But by not having any of it in the first book he has risked alienating readers.

But my real beef about *Zenith* is that it should never have been published as it is. You can see Dirk getting into his stride as the novel wears on. Had his editor sent it back and told him to re-write the first third or so now that he knew what he was doing, it would have been so much better. I don’t know if it is lack of standards, lack of interest, or lack of ability, but for some reason Australian fiction has been badly let down by its publishers here.

Hmm, end of lecture on how to write fantasy novels.

Zenith, Dirk Strasser, Pan Australia, 1993

Voices in the Light: Sean McMullen

Ah, now this is much better. Not perfect yet, but very promising.

Sean McMullen is a tall, slim man with a wiry body that befits a karate instructor. By day he is a senior computer engineer at the Bureau of Meteorology in Melbourne. The rest of the time, when he isn't teaching self-defence, he is a writer and a fan. In the past he has also been the lead singer of various rock and folk bands. I first met him at Swancon where I was struck by his charm and enthusiasm for the subject. We had something of a set to in one of the panels because Sean has this theory that modern SF is too literary and short on readability and adventure. I think we have more or less reached a compromise on that one, but it helps you realise where his writing is coming from.

One of the first interesting things about *Voices* is that it has a very Australian setting. Sean's world is a post-technological society reminiscent in some ways of Keith Roberts' excellent *Pavanne*. The map is clearly that of southern New South Wales and northern Victoria. Some town names are still the same. And there are Koorees (aboriginals) and a distant, camel riding race far out in the Red Desert at a place called Alspring. Farmers herd emus, and kangaroos bound through the narrative. You won't find that in many SF books.

For reasons which are eventually, and not too disappointingly, explained, electrical devices no longer work. Sean's world consists of a large number of small, town-based Mayorates, linked into a loose confederation by heliograph towers and a pedal and wind driven railroad system. To this Sean adds a propensity for duelling and a computer made entirely of human slaves, abacuses and a maze of wires and levers. As *Interzone* so sagely said, "an eccentricity far more intriguing than *The Difference Engine*".

And then there is the Call. At regular intervals, from somewhere to the south or east of the known world, comes a strange sound which so enthralled creatures hearing it that they lose all conscious thought and head mindlessly in its direction, never to be heard of again. Society has adapted. Everyone carries a clockwork timer which, if not re-set at regular intervals, will release a shackle onto the wearer's legs. Buildings have guide rails that you can hook yourself to as you move through them. Towns have guard walls on the callwards border which have no gates but guide victims carefully into holding areas where they can recover in safety as the Call passes.

Naturally such a powerful influence has found its way into religion (good subcreation at work here), and the most sought after military breakthrough is some means of resisting the baleful effects. Leaders are also desperate to know the source of this power, and Sean does not let us down. When I got to the point where the secret was revealed I sat there gobsmacked for several minutes at the audacity of it. This man has a splendid imagination.

Also in Sean's favour is his treatment of characters. The motivational analysis is not really very special, but he has bravely opted to make most of his lead characters female, one of them even a mute, and he does it not so badly. No Mills & Boon nonsense from him. He's also not afraid to have his characters show flaws. They are a mixed up lot, and thus rather interesting.

On the negative side, much of the storyline is rather disjointed, probably as a result of the novel having been cobbled together from several short stories rather than planned as a whole. It comes over more as a history than a plotted narrative. He has also succumbed to the evil temptation of ending the book so *in media res* that you cannot help but buy the

sequel. In reading the book you do not so much marvel at the technical skill of the writer but at his boundless and fascinating imagination. And that, I suspect, is how Sean thinks SF novels should be.

Anyway, who can resist a book whose cover blurb asks, “will the trains run on time after the end of the world”. This is not Douglas Adams, it is serious SF, and the question is perfectly valid.

Sean’s work is published by Aphelion, a small publishing house based in Adelaide. A sequel, *Mirrorsun rising*, is also available and was on the Locus recommended reading list.

Voices in the Light, SeanMcMullen, Aphelion Publications, 1994

Wormwood: Terry Dowling

“We may not live in the best of all possible times but we live in times considerably richer than they might otherwise be if the Author were not working at his excellent best. Scuffing my toe in the dust, I confess to being flattered at having been permitted to drop these few smartass remarks at the threshold of tales as tasty as these.”

Yes, this is the Right Stuff. This is what I, at least, am here for.

Now reading the above eulogy, and bearing in mind that yet again I probably know the author, you might be forgiven for thinking that this is just Cheryl lapsing into hyperbole again. But, gentle reader, those words are not mine. They were penned by a critic far more fearsome and far harder to please than I will ever be. They come from the introduction to *Wormwood* by Harlan Ellison.

Now Harlan freely admits that he and Terry are mates, very good mates it would appear as the relationship survived Terry tricking Harlan into eating Vegemite. In the introduction, Harlan speaks guardedly of obscure male bonding rituals involving blood and red sand. Nevertheless, he is not a man to offer praise lightly. And he is not wrong.

And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great silver star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountain of waters. And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. - Revelation 8:10-11

Thus begins a collection of short stories concerning the world after the Landing. I’m sure you have it sussed by now. A gigantic alien spacecraft lands on earth, backed up by fleets of space-borne fighting craft. Our planet is conquered, laid waste, and xenofomed that it might be a suitable home for its new masters. In the aftermath of conquest, only the bravest, most resourceful of humans survive.

Sounds tacky, doesn’t it. But a writer of Terry Dowling’s talent can make a silk purse out of any part of a sow’s anatomy, and this one is a treasure to behold.

Firstly there is simply the quality of the writing. It is right up there with Banks, Wolfe, McDonald, Hand, and all my other favourites. It is inspiring stuff. And then there are the stories, the characters; the love and pathos and heroism and tragedy that pervade the narrative. They are stories about the best, and occasionally the worst, of humanity. For that, as in so much quality SF, is the purpose of the tales.

Perhaps the best bit of all in the book is the portrayal of the aliens. We often make jokes about how, in Star Trek, they boldly go all over the galaxy and find it populated largely by English speaking humanoids; and yet we forget that in many novels the aliens are not that alien at all. Larry Niven made a brave stab at it with his Kzin and Puppeteers, but they were really only extensions of earth-type herbivore and carnivore behaviour onto the standard alien. Terry Dowling's aliens are truly different.

We have the giant, four-legged, barrel-bodied Hoproi whose addiction to war springs from their ability to derive pleasure from tapping the dying agonies of their warrior slaves. Or the telepathic Darzi, ordered into exile from their homeworld to serve in the occupation and forever pinning for the lost glories of a planet-wide mind-meld. The Matta, whose homes beat to the rhythm of the bodies; the Qualagi, born dead and growing into independence only at the price of acquiring a fearsome hunger for the life-force of others; and the Amazi, desperate to help nurture our race, but only able to do so by raping human women. Much of the stuff of *Wormwood* is concerned with the attempts of both humans and aliens to understand each other's language, culture and thought modes. In my reading, only Ursula Le Guin has come close to this.

The above, of course, can be seen as an analogy for the racial and religious tensions of our own world. But there is more to *Wormwood* than that. The question that Dowling's heroes struggle with most is this: in a world suddenly teeming with intelligent species, and in which we are the defeated and downtrodden, what does it mean to be human? There is an answer. We know there must be because the aliens who commanded the invasion force picked their colonising races carefully. There is an experiment going on, and humanity has a place in it, if only we can work it out.

The novels have a humour to them as well. Terry is a small, slightly rotund man with silver hair and moustache and a beatific smile seemingly glued to his chubby visage. In an earlier time he should have been a monk, for he oozes a love of the world, of people, and of learning. And there is this cheeky glint in his eyes. Few writers could get away with calling his incorporeal major alien race the Nobodoi, and covering his tracks by having his human heroes always refer to them as the Nobodies.

I mustn't finish either without describing some of the outlandish heroes Dowling presents to us. There is Aspen Dirk, the master boggler, half of whose body is warped into another dimension. Hollis Green, the rogue clone, woken before his time and desperate to bring his knowledge and experience up to match his bodily age. Or Jamis Talby, the only man to go brain-to-brain, ego-to-ego, with a Darzi mind-rider and live. There is Jason Peck, burglar par excellence of Matta houses. And Antelim, the mad poet who seeks God by flying a living starship through hyperspace. This is rare and wonderful stuff. I love it.

And for those book collectors amongst you, note that an overseas distributor might just be lucky enough to have one of those rare, unsigned copies.

Wormwood, Terry Dowling, Aphelion Publications, 1991

She's Fantastical: Lucy Sussex & Judith Raphael Buckrich

This is not a novel. It is a collection of short stories by Australian women writers. Lucy and Judith are the editors, although Lucy also has a story in the collection. With so many different writers and styles, I can't really give an overall impression, so I'll focus on a few people whom I know a bit about.

Before I do that, though, I must mention the fact that this is one of the most beautiful looking modern books I have seen in ages. The text is printed in dark blue, with all of the titling in a calligraphic font called Arabian. The design was by the enormously talented Kerri Valkova (whose work on the Costume Ball you will remember me praising last issue). The resulting cover price of AU\$23 for a B format paperback may have put off some potential buyers, but if you like books you only have to see this on the shelf to want it.

Leanne Frahm is not a writer I have met (she lives in North Queensland), but Terry Frost has always enthused about her to me. Terry mate, you were not wrong. Leanne's story, *Entropy*, is a mind-numbing tale of a woman driven to madness by the belief that her worth is measured in terms of the tidiness of her house. I was lucky enough not to have this nonsense drummed into me by my mother, but even so the story left me shaking for minutes afterwards.

Lucy Sussex is petite with long blonde hair. She lives in Melbourne with her two cats and Julian Warner, a member of the Australia in 99 Bid Committee. They are the current hosts of Nova Mob, Melbourne's monthly SF literary discussion group. As well as being a writer, Lucy has a passionate interest in women's writing and spends much of her time seeking out and re-publishing women's fiction from past eras. Her story, *A Tour Guide in Utopia*, reflects this, telling the tale of a fictitious Victorian (in both senses) writer whose most famous work describes a trip 100 years into the future. The tale is told from the point of view of a woman of our time who meets and becomes a guide to the time traveller. Although mightily impressed by our technological advances, the visitor is appalled by our multi-racial society and the fact that prominent women wear make-up as if they were whores. Although Lucy stops short of asking what, for me, is the obvious question, what aspects of our world view would a future world find crazy, it is still a salutary lesson in cultural prejudice.

Sue Isle lives in Perth where she has been a regular part of Stephen Dedman's role-playing circle. It is about time I thanked her publically for helping me get an Australian flag tie for Kevin. Her story, *A Sky Full of Ravens*, concerns an apprentice witch sent to remove a plague of birds from her old home village. I enjoyed it primarily for the style which so accurately captures the attitudes of a seventeen year old girl who is exasperated with her elders and with boys. It also has a fine twist ending.

Tess Williams is our hard line feminist. It was she, I think, who harranged the Feminism in SF panel at Swancon on the phallocentricity of plots. Nevertheless, *The Padman Affair* is another fine story. It tells the tale of a young space pilot who, ignoring government health warnings, take his pleasure on an alien planet and ends up pregnant as a result. The story starts as a rather bad taste joke at the expense of an inferior species (men), but it quickly develops into a ringing condemnation of how medical services mistreat pregnant people. The fact that the patient is male helps highlight the ridiculous nature of the system.

Jane Routley turned up at Nova Mob this month having recently returned from a year and a half in Denmark. She seemed very reticent at being introduced to everyone as a famous writer who could talk about her latest book, but on the way home in Charlie Taylor's car we discovered a common interest in *Call of Cthulhu* and suddenly conversation blossomed. Her story, *The Goddess Wakes*, weaves a fascinating tale of how a Hollywood actress survives the holocaust thanks to a special body maintenance machine she uses whilst asleep and ends up as the focus of a new religion. Lovely observation. Jane's novel, *MageHeart*, was recently published in the US by William Morrow/Avon and I look forward to picking up a copy in LA.

Talking of novels, Lucy, Leanne, Tess and Sue all have books out around now. I'm not sure how many of them will see US publication, but look out for them. Lucy's is a novel, *The Scarlet Rider*, and is due from Pan Macmillan this month. *Borderline*, a collection of Leanne's short stories, appeared under the MirrorDanse imprint recently. Tess's *Map of Power* will be available from Arrow in October, and Sue has just sold *Scale of Dragon, Tooth of Wolf*, based on the story mentioned above, to Hodder Headline. Expect to see them all reviewed here.

I could go on. There are a lot of fine stories in this book, but I don't have space to review them all. Time to talk about something else.

She's Fantastical, Sybylla Feminist Press, 1995

Metal Fatigue: Sean Williams

Dawn in Kennedy Polis. The warming air brings smog and the usual stench from the recycling plants. Slowly the sun peeks it's way over the great wall, illuminating the ruins of Patriot Bridge. It is the only outsider that Kennedy ever lets in.

The city began life as an hope-filled pilot for ecologically sound urban planning. The public transport is cheap and impressive, but it was the reclamation plants that saved its life. The War started with atomic exchanges in the Third World, but the unrest and violence soon spread and troops were called home to deal with civil unrest. Firing on civilians, of course, only made things worse. Some troops mutinied. Others, primarily the bio-enhanced Berserkers, found slaughter all too enjoyable. More quickly than anyone could have imagined, the USA collapsed into anarchy.

Kennedy built the wall. Self-sufficient for years into the future, it was able to cut itself off from the world and preserve a reasonable level of civilisation. It also passed the Humanity Laws, making the mere possession of implants a capital offence. There would be no more Berserkers in Kennedy's world.

But nothing lasts for ever. Starved of natural resources, Kennedy's technology level slowly declined. Computers can only be repaired so often. And the outside world was not going to stay barbaric for ever. Sooner or later, someone would come knocking on the door. And if that someone happens to be a military convoy from the Re-United States of America, resplendent in their crisp, new cotton uniforms, armed with brand new weapons, bristling with new technology, and as committed to the purity of humanity as Kennedy? Well, it can seem like a dream come true.

Perhaps, however, not all is as it seems. RUSA seems to be a military dictatorship, and some of Kennedy's people are terrified of renewing contact with the outside. One of them is so concerned that he is killing known supporters of re-assimilation. Phil Roads, one of Kennedy's top cops, has to catch him before the political process is wrecked, and soon comes to the conclusion that his quarry is more than human. But Roads has a few secrets of his own, a past that he dare not reveal.

Well, yes, it is formula stuff. *Metal Fatigue* is a fairly classic cyberpunk thriller. But it is very well done, and for a first solo novel it is outstanding. Sean Williams has captured the feel of the genre perfectly, his pacing is superb, and the story gripping. When you find yourself in the kitchen stirring your dinner with one hand and holding the book with the other, you know you are onto a good thing. It is, perhaps, a little short on double-bluff. Most cyberpunk novels lead their characters through nested layers of intrigue and betrayal. Here the good guys tend to stay good and the bad guys bad. But other than that, it is excellent, and highly commercial. Given the right promotion, this book could sell in very large quantities in the US. Here's hoping Harper Prism's head office notices it.

Metal Fatigue, Sean Williams, Harper Prism, 1996

The Farseekers: Isobelle Carmody

This book has been published outside Australia, but I include it here because it is listed as a children's book and may therefore escape your attention. After all, *Earthsea* was written for children. It is, in fact, the middle part of a trilogy, but having been written for children it has a fairly comprehensive review of past events in the first few chapters and I didn't feel disadvantaged by coming in part way through.

The world in which it is set is a fairly standard post-holocaust, reversion to mediaeval society with the addition of mental powers. It seems to have derived a fair amount of inspiration from Julian May's *Saga of the Exiles* and possibly also from Anne McCaffrey's *Pegasus* series. People with mental power are hunted down and killed, both by a ruling council trying to prevent complete collapse of society, and by an oppressive religious cult. The books concern the efforts of a group of these people to establish a safe haven for their kind and obtain human rights for their fellow "Misfits". The stories also touch on animal rights as various creatures also turn out to have mental powers.

Obviously, having been written for children, the books are somewhat short on the literary gymnastics. Everything is clear and readable. I found the lengthy introduction in the first few chapters a little wearing as it was all done so obviously, but as soon as the plot got going I was hooked and sat up all evening to finish it. The themes it deals with are the sort of thing that appeal to teenagers, but the treatment is not that shallow. Not is Carmody afraid to upset the reader - a character whom we are encouraged to feel sympathy for dies in an accident near the end of the book. I would thoroughly recommend these books to anyone who is happy to while away an afternoon with a good McCaffrey.

I know very little about Isobelle herself, other than that she lives at Apollo Bay on the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, one of the most beautiful places in the world. But she clearly

has more talent than these books show. Her story in *She's Fantastical* was a re-working of fairy tale themes that Angela Carter would have been proud of. A collection of her adult short stories, *Green Monkey Tales*, has just been published and I look forward to reading it.

Obernewtyn, The Farseekers and Ashling, Isobel Carmody, Viking

Sabriel: Garth Nix

And here we have another children's book, though you could have fooled me. You didn't get books that talked about childbirth and menstruation when I was a kid. Indeed, this novel recently won the Aurealis Award for Best Fantasy Novel of 1995 in both the children's and adult categories. The publishers took the hint and an adult version has just been released.

Garth has done something very brave for a fantasy writer. He has created a world where a sorcerous kingdom and a mundane one exist side by side, separated by a wall. Normally this sort of thing does not work too well, but here it barely grates at all. Indeed, all the stuff about the mundane army garrison at the wall being handicapped by the refusal of the masters back home to admit that magic exists provides a welcome bit of humour to what starts out as a fairly frightening book.

The story concerns a young girl who is brought up in a boarding school in mundane Alcestierre but is actually the daughter of a necromancer from across the wall. When her father is trapped on the far side of Death by his enemies, she must take up her birthright and rescue him. In doing so she discovers that far more is at stake than her father's life. A fairly standard story, but very well done and well worth its awards. I particularly noted that the names, although they had that fantasy ring to them, did not seem silly. Also the portrayal of magic is very believable and bespeaks some study of magical traditions.

The book is not perfect. The characters are somewhat stereotyped and the plot just a little too pat, but it is an enjoyable read all the same.

Sabriel, Garth Nix, Moonstone

The Lady of Situations: Stephen Dedman

This is not a novel, nor even a collection of short stories. It is a single story in a US-published horror anthology. I'm reviewing it here for several reasons. Firstly, Stephen and his wife, Elaine Kemp, are very good friends of mine. I don't get to Perth to see them often enough. Second, Stephen is the only Australian author who will actually be at LA Con. He has a book due out from Tor at the World Fantasy Con and is making a long tour of his visit. And finally, it is quite an achievement for an Australian writer to find himself published in the company of such luminaries as Clive Barker, Pat Cadigan, Ruth Rendell and Dan Simmons. Ellen Datlow does not pick stories from strangers without good reason.

It is a very short piece, only a few pages, and is about... Well, with a story that short if I told you what it was about you'd have the story, except that Stephen writes far better than I do. Besides, I'm not sure that it is something for which you can discuss meaning. Have you ever heard a song, or read a poem and wondered "what on Earth was that about", but found it beautiful anyway. It is about sex, and memory and pain, and it sang to me. It reminded me of things, including M. John Harrison and John Fowles. What more can I say?

If you are looking for Stephen in LA, make tracks for a slightly built young man with a black beard and pony tail and a Gaimanesque dress sense.

Little Deaths, Ellen Datlow (ed.), Dell.

Footnote

I can't finish without a small message of support to various people who will be anxiously awaiting vote results at LA Con III. This 'zine is firmly in favour of:

- the ConFrancisc02 Worldcon bid;
- Ian Gunn for the Best Fan Artist Hugo;
- Diamond Age for the Best Novel Hugo;
- Babylon 5 for as many Hugos as I can think of;
- Greg Egan for the Best Novelette Hugo; and
- a new suitcase for Martin Hoare because carrying all those Hugos home for Dave Langford must be ruining the ones he has.

I would also love to see A. Bertram Chandler win a Retro Hugo for Best Novella in order to get a clean sweep for Australia, but sadly I cannot bring myself to vote against *Animal Farm*.

Next issue will, of course, be mainly Worldcon review, but with new novels around by Larry Niven, Iain Banks, Sherri Tepper and Patricia Kennealy, not to mention all those new Aussie books listed above, I'm not going to be bored on my plane journeys or short of material. And it is even possible that QANTAS or BA will manage to screen a decent film.

Finally, apologies to anyone not on the Intersmof mailing list and who will therefore not understand the comment in the masthead, and those of you receiving the ASCII version who won't get the accompanying cartoon.