

EMERALD CITY

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Introduction

Well, so much for the big, celebratory 50th issue. It is as much as I can do to get something normal out in time. The upside of this is that I'm short of time, at least in part, because I'm busy doing things that earn money. The downsides I will not bore you with. Thankfully I happen to have a couple of books by two wonderful writers to adorn an otherwise lacklustre and rather depressed issue. Thank you, Kim and Bill.

Horrible choices

An awful lot of nonsense has been written in the last couple of decades about how the concepts and mechanisms behind role-playing games will revolutionise literature. Most of this has been written either by people who know nothing about creating role-playing games, or by people wanting to elevate role-playing from its nerdish ghetto. Neither of these groups, of course, is without bias. But regardless of whatever fine motives one might have, you can't escape from the fact that creating even something as simple as a Zork-style computer game or a choose-the-paragraphs book is very difficult. It is, in fact, a programming exercise, requiring flow charts and debugging, in addition to the (often rather neglected) literary side. It would take an obsessive of Tolkeinesque proportions to successfully create a multi-stream novel using the same techniques. I didn't think any of today's leading authors would be mad enough to try. Which just goes to show how wrong you can be.

Kim Newman is no stranger to role-playing. He has, of course, written a large number of novels for Games Workshop under his Jack Yeovil pseudonym. And whilst I don't think he has ever played in a game I have run, we have a lot of friends in common and I'm immodest enough to suppose that the odd one or two of my ideas might have worked their way through to him. He is, therefore, better suited than most authors to attempt this Herculean feat. The result, *Life's Lottery*, is now available, and a very fine book it is too.

You, the reader, are Keith Marion. And that itself is a new experience in at least two ways. First, the vast majority of novels are written either in the first person, from the point of view of one of the characters, or in the third person, from the point of view of some unknown observer. Role-playing books are written in the second person. The author is continually telling you, the lead character, what you are doing.

Secondly, the nature of the narrative has a profound effect on character identification. In a third person narrative you generally have a choice of many characters with which to

identify. First person narratives give less choice, and are often chosen by an author precisely because they produce closer identification between reader and heroine, but you always have the choice to remain aloof and allow the character to talk to you.

In a role-playing book you have no choice about character identification. That can be a problem. For example, a self-conscious teenage boy growing up in a depressingly familiar Somerset town is not a role I would have chosen for myself if I had had any leeway in the matter. Kim, of course, could not make exceptions for me. Writing the book in such a way as to give multiple potential character viewpoints would have increased the complexity by orders of magnitude. So Keith Marion we are stuck with, like him or not.

Keith, by the way, is not Kim Newman, although much of his childhood and adolescence is based on environments that Kim knows well. I suspect that the character Mickey Yeovil is Kim's personal presence in the narrative, and have a sinking feeling that many of the other characters are probably based on people I know well. Fortunately, being a couple of years older, I was only tangentially connected with Kim's social group so I'm not in a position to name names.

But back to the book. You are Keith, the book is the story of your life, and you get to choose how it pans out by selecting which paragraph to read next. Simple. But there are two obvious questions. Can you really get multiple novels out of this? And isn't Keith's life going to be a bit boring?

Let's knock the multiple novels thing on the head first. The book is quite long (almost 500 pages), but that is nowhere near enough to provide for more than a couple of novels. Instead what the book represents is a collection of interconnected tales, each of which provides a vignette of Keith's life. From a reader's point of view, it is very much like a standard short story collection. You can read one story, put the thing aside, and come back to it a week later for something different. I have sampled only a few possibilities. Kim, I think, rather hopes that people will keep reading out of a desire to get a better outcome for poor Keith. There may, indeed, be one plot line in which he becomes rich and famous. But there might not be.

Which brings us back to the entertainment. Kim, you may remember, is a writer of satire and of horror novels. As such, he has a splendidly jaundiced view of growing up in 20th century Britain, and a truly vicious twist of the pen when it comes to providing interesting directions for poor Keith's well-intentioned life. He says right up front that, just as in real life, doing good may not always be rewarded. Sometimes being an utter bastard is much more successful. Of course as Keith you have that choice. Just remember that I said "sometimes".

This is a book that deserves to make Kim's name as a major mainstream writer. I've not noticed any SF or horror tropes at all, and nothing on the book jacket suggests to the bookshop that it should be shelved in some ghetto. But I doubt that the publishers have any idea how to promote it, or that any mainstream book critic in Britain would condescend to read it. Never mind, you folks I know are not so blinkered. Get out there and buy it, it is great fun.

Life's Lottery - Kim Newman - Simon & Schuster - hardcover

Thursday's Rags Become Her

The last time an author got this up close and personal with me it was Elizabeth Hand. She, of course, has a very good case for claiming synchronicity: there was no way she could have known in advance that I would end up reading *Glimmering* in Logan Airport. William Gibson's case is not so watertight. Were I sufficiently paranoid I could make a case that he could have found out all these things about me. Fortunately for you, dear readers, I have no intention of doing that, but all the same the connections are startling.

Gibson's new novel is named after my favourite song by the exceptionally wonderful Velvet Underground. It is set in San Francisco, and surely it cannot be a coincidence that the cover designer, in looking for a cute way to mangle his spelling, should have decided to replace "to", not with "2", but with "02". Very Bay Area. Much of the action takes place in just the part of the city where I would live if I could afford it. There are executive apartments now, clustered along Embarcadero at the City end of the Bridge. The stunning view at night is complemented by the convenient access to the business district, just about every form of transport, the Gordon Biersch brewery and, of course, Pac Bell Park. In the future, Gibson tells us, there will be a bar on the bridge that serves wonderful hot wings, and Redback beer all the way from Australia. Of course there's no way I would go there to listen to a country music singer, no matter how good his guitarist, but it sounds like a pretty cool place to me.

The Bridge, by the way, is the Oakland one, with the stop half way at Treasure Island. That's another advantage of Embarcadero living: you are in easy mortar range should King Willie ever succeed in his wish to establish a Mayoral Palace in the middle of the Bay. Gibson never names the Bridge, and I suspect he is relishing the prospect of counting the number of reviewers who automatically assume he is talking about the Other One, the one with the orange paint.

The setting isn't quite perfect, however, and I suspect that Gibson hasn't been to San Francisco in a while. He seems fairly unaware just how pervasive the gentrification of the SoMa district has become. And I find it hard to believe that such a dominant feature of the local landscape as Pac Bell Park would not feature at all in the story unless the author were unaware that it was being built. And by the way, Mr. Gibson, the name of that stretch of water is San Francisco Bay. Oakland is just a city that happens to have been built on the eastern shore.

There is, of course, a story here somewhere, though not necessarily much of one. I'll return to that point shortly, but first I should reiterate that you don't necessarily have to read a Gibson book for the plot. Reading Gibson is like listening to Van Morrison. A truly great artist can take a pile of words or notes, throw them up and reassemble them in a totally unexpected order and yet still make it sound as if there is no other way that they could possibly have been put together. I have little doubt that one or two of his similes will end up in Thog's Masterclass in *Ansible*, but unless you have a very literal approach to reading your won't notice these slightly off tones as the images flow elegantly past.

The plot of *All Tomorrow's Parties* is about history. Gibson has taken the character of Colin Laney from *Idoru* and built around him the concept that patterns in data flow can be used to determine patterns in social and economic development. The story is based around the concept (which, as an SF meme, goes at least as far back as *Foundation*) that there are nodal points in history which, if pushed one way or another, can have a substantial effect on the outcome of future timelines. From an academic historian's standpoint this is a highly

contentious view, but it is the basis on which most alternative history novels are built. For the want of a nail, and so on.

In Asimov's version of the story, understanding of the equations of psychohistory enables the protagonists to predict the occurrence of cusp points and determine what new factors could be introduced to change the balance of outcomes. Gibson, perhaps aware of the fact that psychohistory can only work on a galactic level, takes a more holistic approach. Laney's drug-enhanced brain allows him to see patterns in data flows that are invisible to the ordinary mind. He can see the threads drawing together, but all he can do is introduce new factors and hope that things turn out differently.

Gibson's previous two books, *Virtual Light* and *Idoru*, have been rather disappointing. Aw heck, let's face it, everything he has done since *Neuromancer* has been disappointing, though it is hard to see how it could not have been. *All Tomorrow's Parties*, I think, is a better book. The plot is still pretty thin, though it doesn't look emasculated in the way that *Idoru* did. More importantly, it has inherited depth. Gibson doesn't write sequels: the presence of Molly in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is as much re-use of a convenient and popular character as a continuation of her story. In the same way the presence of Laney and Rei Toei, plus Berry Rydell and Chevette Washington from *Virtual Light*, does not imply that the new book is somehow a conclusion of those tales, even though the effects of the plot on Laney and Rei are substantial. But by using characters that he has already spent much time developing, Gibson manages to create a depth to this book that seems to have been lacking in its predecessors.

The plot itself, however, as I have said, is another matter. In a recent feature on the book in *The Independent* (Gibson being one of the very few SF authors whose works are considered worthy of consideration by the literary establishment here) the reviewer complained that nothing much happened in the book. It is a fair charge on a brief and uninformed read through. Compared to the complexity and ingenuity of plots developed by many SF authors, Gibson's work in that area of novel writing is poor. But here are a few defences.

Point one: nothing much should happen. Remember that Laney is dealing in nodal points of history. A slight nudge is all it needs: a gunman sneezes, a bullet goes awry, an Arch Duke is not assassinated, and the world is not plunged into war. It is appropriate that the actual event should seem insignificant.

Point two: the subtlety is there if you look for it. Although Gibson is purportedly talking about nanotech, the book can actually be seen as an allegory of the challenges currently facing the Internet. Will the technology become the private fiefdom of someone like Bill Gates or Rupert Murdoch, or will it remain the property of the people and a powerful force for change? That is the battle that Laney is fighting. Gibson just never puts it in quite such bald terms.

And finally, whatever pigeonholes the critics might choose to use, *All Tomorrow's Parties* is out and out SF, and needs to be read in that context. The cover jacket clearly labels the book as science fiction. Notwithstanding this instruction, my local Borders placed it among the mainstream fiction shelves because Gibson is a big name writer. Class consciousness in Britain is far more pervasive than most people imagine. The trouble is that no one but an SF addict would understand the end. Laney talks glibly of the end of the world as we know it. And yes, it happens. The final chapter proves that it has. But unless you have read visionary nanotech novels such as *The Diamond Age* and *Evolution's Shore* you are highly unlikely to understand the magnitude of the changes that brief couple of pages describe.

To summarise, then, absolutely wonderful use of words, as we have come to expect. There is more depth, both in the world building and characterisation, than we have seen from Gibson in a while (and I think that will apply even if you haven't read *Virtual Light* or *Idoru*). Also some interesting ideas to chew upon, though you have to go looking for them. This isn't a book that will set the SF community on fire because it is so understated. I don't expect it to be a Hugo contender, but it is a great read none the less. Recommended.

All Tomorrow's Parties - William Gibson - Viking - hardcover

Confluence Comes Together

Ah, so near and yet so far.

Every Paul McAuley book I have read so far I have ended up thinking that the guy has heaps of talent, a wonderful imagination, and a dreadful habit of losing track of things, normally somewhere in the last third of the book. I keep thinking, this is going to be it, he's going to write a really good book, and then he doesn't.

Confluence, as regular readers will remember, is McAuley's far-future artificial world series. It is an unashamed attempt to write a story in the style of Gene Wolfe. That, in a way, is an admirable objective, because Wolfe is one of the best writers there is in the genre. It is also an idea that is inevitably doomed to failure because, well, Wolfe is one of the best there is, and anything that sounds similar to his work is going to seem poor by comparison. The first two books in the Confluence series have suffered from this problem because McAuley isn't quite in the same class as Wolfe when it comes to complex mysteries and Byzantine political plots. The third book, *Shrine of Stars*, is much better because most of the twists were revealed towards the end of the previous book, leaving only the origins of the hero, Yama, to be revealed. In *Shrine of Stars* we are left mainly with the plot, driving purposefully towards conclusion, and not getting side tracked along the way. So far so good.

The final volume also tries its hand at some serious philosophy. Wolfe's books, I am told, are all very deep Catholic allegories. They must be fine Jesuit stuff, because it isn't at all noticeable. McAuley is far more up front. The world of Confluence is wracked by a war between the Civil Service, who wish to maintain stasis and belief in religion, and the heretics who believe in personal freedom and self-determination. McAuley berates both sides, the Civil Service for stifling individuality and innovation, the heretics for selfishness and lack of social responsibility. Yama, supposedly represents some sort of Third Way (fashionable British political term) which allows self-determination without falling victim to greed. The trouble is, it is difficult to understand how what he is doing differs from what the heretics are doing, or at least how their methods will lead to different results. I was expecting the finale of the book to somehow demonstrate this point.

Sadly, it didn't. McAuley decided to go instead for a final clever plot twist. It is the sort of thing you expect to find at the end of a short story, not a trilogy, and it had the effect of seeming to render the whole story meaningless. I can't say any more than that without ruining it for you, but I was very disappointed.

It is all a great shame. There are some wonderful ideas in Confluence. Almost too many, in fact. Biology geeks in particular will have great fun working out the origins of all the

various bloodlines. And I loved the idea of invoking Jimi Hendrix to add colour to a climactic fight between two mighty feral machines. Now the series is over, and knowing McAuley his next book will be something totally different. I'm looking forward to it. Maybe next time it will be something I can rave about.

Shrine of Stars - Paul J. McAuley - Gollancz - hardcover

Promising blossoming?

The Campbell Award is always a good place to look for interesting new writers. After all, that is precisely what it is about. The people who get nominated have managed to impress a large number of readers. From this year's batch I have already raved enthusiastically about Nalo Hopkinson. Now it is time to take a look at the second placed contender, Kage Baker.

The Garden of Iden is Baker's first novel (she has published at least one other) and it is best, though a little poorly, categorised as a time travel story set in Elizabethan England. To explain it properly I need to go into a little of the background. The Company, is a far-future organisation dedicated to the rescue of things lost in the past. By this they mean anything from extinct species to works of art and famous manuscripts that have been destroyed. To accomplish their aims, they needed to invent a means of time travel. But it turned out that this was only possible in a backwards direction. They could get their operatives into the past, but they kept dying centuries before they could bring anything back. Very inconvenient.

The solution was obvious: The Company needed to make its operatives immortal. That proved possible only with certain select people, and only if you operated on them when they were very young. So they sent back teams of surgeons who could spot and capture suitable kids, make them immortal, and train them up to form a secret cadre of Company agents who would safeguard rescued material until such time as it reached the present. Now that's what you call a job for life.

It is a cute idea, made even more cute by the fact that The Company is only what employees call it. The real name of the organisation is Dr Zeus, because it has defeated Chronos, get it?

Unfortunately, with a little inspection, it all falls apart. Baker wisely avoids thinking about what happens when the operatives reach the present and get to meet the people responsible for their centuries of indentured servitude, but she can't avoid the implausibility of global conspiracy. It is hard enough believing in the likes of the Illuminati. When you add in a secret training base in Australia, a network of underground railways covering the whole of Britain, rocket planes that go unnoticed by the natives, a radio network that operatives tune in to avidly at every opportunity, computers and scientific equipment disguised as furniture, operatives who display 24th century lifestyles and opinions when in private... Need I go on?

Problem number two is that the book looks as if it has been designed at least in part to be a bodice ripper, except that the heroine is a selfish and stupid teenager and the hero a religious bigot. Actually, just about all of the characters are totally unsympathetic, and I

was rather hoping that they all got executed. Certainly they were so inept at being secret agents that no other conclusion was remotely plausible.

And finally, the setting. Ms. Baker, we are told, is an expert on all things Elizabethan and has even taught Elizabethan English as a second language. She was also born in Hollywood. Why is it that so many Americans can learn so many facts about history and still be utterly clueless about how people lived and thought and behaved in the past? Of course the SF setting doesn't help, because most of the lead characters are not genuine Elizabethans and are incapable of behaving like them. But the book really did come over like a Hollywood film of Merrie Englands: vacuous and patronising.

It is a shame really. Baker does write well. The prose skips along fairly lightly and she has a nice turn of wit. Sadly all that does for the book is make it more like a Mel Brooks film than an Errol Flynn one. Maybe it is all done deliberately on the grounds that it will sell better that way: I don't know. Book two is apparently set in Mexico and California. I might give it a go on the grounds that I am much less likely to be offended by its trivialising of the subject matter.

The Garden of Iden - Kage Baker - Avon - softcover

A Slow Pace of Life

When I was in Liverpool for the Eastercon the fan table next to BA2002 was for Octocon, a convention in Dun Laoghaire, Eire. That sounded like a great idea. It is years since I have been to Dublin (Dun Laoghaire is the city's port and these days one of its suburbs). Besides, I had heard some really great things about the convention, and the guest list was stunning. I signed up, and then pretty much forgot all about it. Well, there was this question of a Worldcon bid to finish.

Come August, however, I got an email from the convention reminding me to book a hotel room. That was easy, just call the hotel, but I needed a flight too, and I was in the USA. Would web booking work? Had I been dealing with British airlines I would probably have been stuffed, because most British web sites won't let you buy anything unless you live in Britain (it is an artefact of the idiotic software they use to validate credit cards). BA would probably have been OK as they are used to international customers, but they wanted to charge around \$400 for the hour each way trip from Gatwick to Dublin. I decided to try RyanAir. It worked: they only wanted \$150 and being an Irish company they took my credit card. They did charge me extra for paying on credit, but then that happens all the time in Britain so I'm used to it. What did stun me was that they charged extra for an e-ticket. Why? I was saving them postage. Weird.

I'd not flown RyanAir before, but I knew that they were a bargain fare company and I expected something like Southwest. I was not wrong. Not only did they have no seat allocation, they had no boarding system either. Thank goodness for the good old British habit of queuing, otherwise the undignified scum that takes place at Southwest departure gates would have been replicated at the bottom of the steps on the tarmac at Gatwick. I shall never be rude about flying Southwest again.

Arriving in Dublin, I began to realise how spoiled I have become after two years in America. The airport was great although, like almost every other airport in the world, it

was under construction. Getting to the hotel was another matter. The airport is to the north of Dublin, the sea port to the south. The only way to get from one to the other was through the city centre. There wasn't even a direct bus. If ever I met a city in desperate need of a ring road, Dublin is it. Last time I was in Eire I was told that at any one time 90% of the cars in the country are in Dublin. This time they were all lined up on the road in front of my bus.

Anyway, I got there in the end. The convention committee were very proud of the hotel, and I have to admit it is a beautiful building. It is one of these old Edwardian seaside hotels, the sort of place that you would have found the British nobility sunning themselves when British nobility were welcome in Dublin. What is more, there was none of the faded opulence that you get in places like the Adelphi. This place had been pretty well looked after. Nice big bar too, with very high ceilings so there was none of the cigarette smog that befouls so many British conventions.

Other than that, the hotel wasn't up to much. The service was very poor and the restaurant disappointing. I just thought that the food, especially the breakfast, was uninspired but other guests complained about the waitresses as well. Apparently they were particularly rude to Ian McDonald, but then I guess that a broad Belfast accent is not going to endear you to the average Dubliner.

And so to the convention. I must admit I hadn't expected much. I figured that the pace of life in Dublin was going to be pretty slow and that this would be similar to the conventions I had attended last year in Wellington and Hobart. I just hoped that the renowned Irish love of books would make it more like the former. The omens, however, were not good. Any convention that manages to put out a progress report and forget to mention the dates is probably not on the ball. Octocon, it turned out, didn't even know where the ball was.

There are very few hard and fast rules about running a convention, but one of the most important, right up there with things like not embezzling the funds, is that you should not advertise an author as a guest until they have agreed to come. Octocon, to celebrate its 10th anniversary, had invited back all of the previous guests of honour. They had listed them all as guests. They didn't have much idea who was actually going to turn up. Rob Holdstock claimed he was busy writing a book, Maggie Furey cried off sick, Harry Harrison didn't arrive until Sunday afternoon, and no one seem to have had any contact with Storm Constantine at all. It was left to headline GoH Robert Rankin, plus Kim Newman, Eugene Byrne and Brian Stableford to carry the panels.

That wouldn't have been so bad if the ConCom hadn't assumed until the last minute that everyone they had invited would turn up. The result was a lot of last minute changes, not to mention much rushing around looking for people who would be willing to be on panels. That led to some pretty disgruntled guests. Brian Stableford was particularly miffed because he had been really looking forward to being on the Goth panel. It got moved, and although the ConCom were running around frantically trying to find Brian to tell him, no one thought to call his hotel room, so it went ahead without him.

This is a real shame. Octocon was one of the few conventions round here that had a good reputation with writers. I asked around to find out why people didn't go to Eastercons any more and got pretty much the same answer each time. British fans, at least in the opinion of British writers, are rude and not interested in books. After this year's fiasco I don't suppose many writers will be turning up at Octocon either.

I found the whole experience highly depressing. Octocon only attracted around 150 people. It isn't hard to run a convention of that size. If it had been a one-off I might have understood, but for people who have run cons before to make basic mistakes like having

the timing of your two program tracks overlapping is just inexcusable. I felt quite sorry for the four guys in charge, because it was quite clear that they were only doing the job because they felt that someone ought to. There were plenty of local fans wanting to be entertained, but no one willing to do any work.

I guess I ought to try to find something nice to say, because actually I quite enjoyed myself over the weekend. In part that was due to seeing Kim and Eugene again (I hadn't seen Eugene in about 20 years). Thanks also to Brian and Jane Stableford whom I had not met before but turned out to be really nice folks. Brian, it seems, knows absolutely everything there is to know about every novel that has ever been published. Awesome. And, of course, the Irish are really wonderful, kind and welcoming folks.

The video programme too was superb. I've never yet seen a convention that managed three top class international rugby matches live on the hotel TV. Wales won, England lost. Can't ask for better than that, except it was thanks to the unexpected presence of two Kiwi friends, Peter Hamilton and Anne Shephard, whom I hadn't seen since Wellington last year. What a shame there were so few English around for us to laugh at.

Then again, rugby is not what you are supposed to go to a science fiction convention for. The final match of the World Cup happens to be on the same weekend as Novacon. It will be between Australia and France so it should be a real cracker, not to mention a game that I will have an intense personal interest in. I can watch it without going to Birmingham. Novacon, I suspect, will just be a bunch of people sitting around in a smoke-filled bar drinking vast quantities of warm beer and whingeing about how fandom isn't what it used to be. Guess how I am going to spend the weekend.

In the Zone

Whilst I am here in Brighton and hanging out, on occasion, with the folks who produce *Interzone*, it only seems fair that I should plug the magazine on a regular basis. It isn't widely distributed outside the UK, and it deserves to be, so here am I doing my bit. This may become a regular column.

The problem, as I have said many times before, is that I really don't go much for short fiction. The current issue (#148) is a case in point. It has two stories by writers whom I greatly admire: Kim Newman and Stephen Dedman. Neither of them made much impression on me. Kim's is beautifully written, but seemed rather pointless; Stephen's was little more than a political rant until the traditional last paragraph twist. Finding two naff stories by people you know are good rather puts you off sampling the rest of the magazine.

There is a story by Greg Egan as well, and it is probably superb because people keep telling me that everything Egan does is superb. Then again, as Mr. Egan believes that mere readers are woefully under-equipped in their critical faculties and unworthy of passing judgement on his work, I shall refrain from comment. I wouldn't want to upset him by having the temerity to apply my pitiful fannish brain to attempting to comprehend his peerless prose.

Fiction, however, isn't the only thing you will find in *Interzone*. There are reviews as well. In particular, there is Nick Lowe. Kim Newman, who knows more about films than Brian Stableford knows about books, thinks that Nick Lowe's film review column is the best thing

in *Interzone*. I know next to nothing about films, but I do know good writing when I see it, and Mr. Lowe is a palpable quasar in the critical firmament.

In this issue Lowe spends three (count them, three) pages discussing *The Phantom Menace*. His message is straightforward: it is in many ways a crap film, but it is elevated by its cultural context. It is, in fact, one of the few films (if not the only one) which is more important because of what isn't in it than for what it contains. That isn't exactly a profound insight, other people have said pretty much the same thing in many fewer words. But by a combination of genuine erudition, effortless style and sniping wit Lowe manages to educate and entertain the reader to great effect. Ah, if only I could write a fraction as well.

Of course it isn't exactly the sort of thing you could publish in a US magazine. Well, not if you wanted to avoid endless lawsuits from Lucasfilm anyway. That is, assuming that the lawyers can ever work their way around the convolutions of Lowe's damning with faint praise.

It's amazingly hard to judge how clever or naïf or both Lucas is being here: The implication is presumably that some Force is constraining narrative into quasi-archetypal patterns that merely look like dodgy plotting by an out-of-shape screenwriter who ran out of ideas in 1979.

See what I mean? Or try this:

Bad plotting has always been George's master suit. The defining feature of Lucas's writing is the extreme transparency of his narrative substructure; and this time around he has surpassed even himself, with his three heroes' Jedi senses working overtime to foreshadow everything in the story.

"Why, yes, Your Honour, of course I was complimenting Mr. Lucas. As any student of the critical arts will understand..."

Of course in any magazine there are ups and downs. Goodness only knows why they bothered to waste an entire page reviewing a series of *Dr. Who* based radio plays, one episode of which, "*sees Bernice arriving in 1909 London where giant locusts are murdering prostitutes*". But the fact remains that *Interzone* is worth the cover price for Nick Lowe's column alone, even if, like me, you hardly ever go to the movies.

Footnote

That's it for another issue. Apologies once again for the lack of celebratory spectacularity. More or less normal service will be continued next issue where we will have a *Locus* and Tiptree Award winner from Maureen McHugh, a George Turner Prize winner from Maxine McArthur and, if the adverts in the last *Locus* are to be believed, the long awaited new novel from Mary Gentle. Stay tuned.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl