

EMERALD CITY

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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

Ah, there we go. Nothing like a few weeks without any work to get the magazine back on schedule. I did, of course, have a small incentive as well. If I can get this issue out I can include festive greetings to one and all and save myself a fortune on cards. Gosh what a Scrooge I am. Apologies to Jewish readers for whom I think this will be a bit late, but I should just about hit the Solstice and be in time for Christmas and the New Year. Best wishes to one and all. End of the World notwithstanding, I shall see you all again in the year 2000.

Of course not having any work to do doesn't mean I have been idle. I've been working on a business project that has required me to get my Web design skills up to date. I've been spending a few happy hours playing with the latest release of Macromedia's Dreamweaver and have been having a lot of fun. Web site readers, you have been warned. Watch this space.

Arabian Delights

"Come, Mighty Sultan, repose by my side and let me tell you a tale of adventure set in a land of magic and mystery. There will be a handsome prince, a beautiful princess, a wise counsellor, a wicked vizier, plucky thieves, a crusty sea captain, barbaric desert nomads, a fortune teller, a flying carpet and a magic lamp complete with genie!"

"Ah, dear Cherylezade, though you are the light of my life and delight of all my days, yet you seem a little lacking in imagination tonight. Surely such stories have been done before. A flying carpet? A genie in a lamp? Why I might almost think it clichéd."

"And so it might seem, Great One, but this is no ordinary story. It is another excellent tale from that master of story tellers, Mr. Tom Arden."

"Oh, ho! Does that mean that there will be cunningly convoluted plots, cheeky wit and lots of salacious spicy bits?"

"Undoubtedly, O Lord of Life. Not to mention eunuchs, ladyboys, catamites and untoward goings on amongst the ladies of the harem. Or did you perhaps means the sheep's eye curry?"

"Personally I'll stick with the corned beef hash, but the rest of it rather perks my fancy. Come hither, dear one, and tell me more."

When we last left them, dear reader, Jem and Raj had succeeded in wresting the second Orokon Crystal from the midst of the Zenzan War and Cata had exchanged the frills of Mistress Quick's Academy for a place in the Bluejacket army the better to search for her lost love. The third volume sees all three transported in various ways to the far off land of Unang where the third crystal is rumoured to lie at the heart of the sacred flame in the holy city of Kal-Theron, ruled over by the powerful *Sultan of the Moon and Stars*.

They are accompanied upon their quest by Lord Empster who becomes more and more mysterious until such time as it becomes quite obvious who he is. This gives Tom a further opportunity to break with fantasy convention and suggests a distinctly less than orthodox resolution for the series.

The stars of the show, however, are the Unangs themselves, from the cruel and bitter Sultan, down through the Imams of the court to the traders of the market place and the thieves who prey upon the customers there. It is all a fabulously camp pastiche of the Arabian Nights and derivatives thereof. In particular the genie seems highly reminiscent of Robin Williams.

What is more the plot is twisted into a cat's cradle of coincidences the like of which could only exist inside one of Scherezade's stories. It is all dreadfully unlikely and therefore entirely appropriate. This is again opposed to the standard fantasy novel which is also dreadfully unlikely and has no excuse whatsoever except the convenience of the writer.

I must admit that I found this volume somewhat less side-splitting than the previous two. Part of this is undoubtedly due to the absence of Morven and Crum who are by far my favourite characters in the series. Part of it also is that fictional characters are rather harder to satirise. Aunt Umbecca, hideously grotesque though she may be, is not that far removed from the standard British stereotype of which Hyacinth Bucket is a less extreme example. The Unangs, on the other hand, are fictional stereotypes, and presumably bear little or no relation to the inhabitants of modern Turkey. They may be comical, but they are not satirical.

But, having said that, the book was still highly gigglesome in places. Arden is very good at the winked aside to the reader. It had excellent pacing, and appropriate pathos. It did seem as if it had been cut a little towards the end as one or two things happened off camera that I would have expected to be made into chapters. All in all, however, another excellent addition to the Orokon cycle. US readers, you should now be able to get the first two volumes (*The Harlequin's Dance* and *The King & Queen of Swords*) in paperback, so paying for imports won't be too painful. Go buy, you won't regret it.

"So, my dear, that's three crystals found, two to go. I guess that means two more books."

"I believe so, O Mighty One."

"And how quickly does he produce them?"

"One a year, Your Magnificence."

"Damn! That means two more years before I can have you executed. I wonder what we can do in the meantime..."

Sultan of the Moon and Stars - Tom Arden - Gollancz - hardcover

Night Fever

There are times when I wish this were a multimedia production. They are very few and far between times, but this is one of them, because this review needs music.

We're so pretty, oh so pretty...

Cut to a dingy hotel room in New York. Sid lies slumped in front of the TV, apparently unaware that Nancy is entertaining a young man in the bed next to him. Unaware too that this is not just any young man. This is Ion Popescu, or Johnny Pop as he now calls himself, late of Transylvania, now just another element in the multi-ethnic mix of the Big Apple. For Sid and Nancy it is too late. For New York, the horror is just beginning.

When we left him in Italy, Dracula was missing, presumed dead. Francis Ford Coppola has made a film of Bram Stoker's book, complete with Van Helsing charging into Transylvania in attack helicopters to the tune of Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries. Hollywood aside, however, the USA, thanks to sterling work by the likes of Hoover and McCarthy, is pretty much vampire free. All that is about to change.

Staying alive, staying alive. Ah-ah-ah-ah, staying ali-i-i-ive.

It took Johnny a while to get the hang of New York, but then he fed off a young Brooklyn kid called Tony Manero and in his blood discovered disco dancing. That was his big start. Vampires, after all, know more about the rhythm of the night than do the warm. From there, he discovered drug culture. Putting two and two together, Johnny realised that he had something that, in America at least, was fairly unique, and very, very saleable. Johnny's fortune was, quite literally, made in blood.

Up to Lexington, 125. Feel sick and dirty, more dead than alive. I'm waiting for my man.

But Johnny isn't the only vampire in New York. One Andrew Warhola, himself the son of Transylvanian immigrants, was certified dead in 1968 after being shot by one of his acolytes. But being dead was not going to keep Andy off the scene for long. He had always looked undead, and manipulating others, feeding off their energies and enthusiasms, came naturally to him. In truth, when Andy returned from the dead, no one noticed any difference.

Andy Warhol's Dracula is the latest, and perhaps last, in Kim Newman's vampire series. It is, I am sorry to say, only a novella. It is also, I think you will find, somewhat darker than the previous works. For the most part Kim is writing more for an audience of literary and art critics than anyone else. The story of Johnny and Andy is cut with extracts from a fictional

academic biography of Warhol that charts his interest in, and finally conversion to, vampirism. It is perfectly done. After all, Kim is a well-respected film and book critic himself, so he knows the style well. He even manages a very cute knock at his own profession along the way.

But there are plenty of the usual references there too if you want to find them. I'm not an aficionado of vampire movies, but I bet that the gang of misfits who try to track Johnny down are all taken from well-known horror flicks. What Kim doesn't know about movies isn't worth knowing, so I can trust him on this one.

The book, I'm sorry to say, seems to have been published as a limited edition. I paid a substantial sum for my copy which is only a soft cover novella. However, you can all read it for free. The full text of the story is available on Ellen Datlow's webzine, Event Horizon (http://www.eventhorizon.com/sfzine/fiction/warhols_dracula/index.html). Go take a look, folks. This really is a very, very clever story. When it comes to nominating for the Best Novella Hugo, this is going to be at the top of my list.

Andy Warhol's Dracula - Kim Newman - PS Publishing - softcover

Flavours of America

Those of you who, like me, have spent some time living in the San Francisco Bay Area will have noticed that the current chapter in the great saga of American immigration belongs to India. Competent software engineers are in great demand in Silicon Valley, and the people of India have risen to the challenge. For those of us who, again like me, have a taste for curry, this is excellent news. For many of the Indian immigrants, however, it means a repeat performance of an unhappy tale that is already being played out in Britain. It is a tale of culture shock.

Quite how much modern Indian culture still focuses on issues such as dowries, arranged marriages and, in particular for Sikhs, strict religious observance, is not clear to me. TV documentaries about India delight in finding examples of young Hindu wives who profess that they can think of no greater honour than to fling themselves to their deaths on their husbands' funeral pyres. But that is TV for you. Reality is more likely to come from those who are involved in the problem. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni works as a teacher of creative writing at Foothill College in Los Altos. She is also president of a helpline for Indian and Pakistani women living in America. Her first novel, *The Mistress of Spices*, tackles the issues that these women face head on.

But wait, I hear you say, this magazine is supposed to be devoted to science fiction and fantasy. Is Cheryl off on some feminist political kick? Fear not, dear readers, for this book is what our lit. crit. friends call Magic Realism. In other words, it is a modern fantasy. Tilo, the heroine, has been trained in the art of using spices to perform magic. She is what, in my own Western magical tradition, would be called an herbal magician, though of course the herbs she has to work with are very different. Young girls are trained in the arts of the Spice Mistresses on a mysterious island in the Indian Ocean. When they have graduated, they are sent out into the world to use their skills to help Indian people. Tilo, for convenient authorial reasons, elects to be sent to Oakland. There she runs an Indian grocery store and, along the way, works her magic to help her customers.

The stories that she finds there are, I suspect, typical of Indian communities struggling to come to grips with life in a new culture. There is Lalita, trapped in an arranged marriage with a much older husband, young Jagjit who is bullied at school because he can't speak English and always wears a turban, and Geeta whose family are appalled that she has an Hispanic boyfriend. All of these, and others, Tilo tries to help with her magic, but she quickly learns that in this complex new society simple herbal magic is not always enough.

The strictures of traditional Indian society are neatly compared in the novel with the strictures surrounding the practice of Spice Magic. Tilo is only permitted to help Indians, she is not permitted to leave her shop, and she must take the form of a bent old crone and never look in a mirror. Above all, she must never, ever, become emotionally involved with anyone. These strictures weigh as heavily upon Tilo as those of her family do upon young Geeta.

Matters are brought to a head when Tilo discovers that her own people are not the only ones to have trouble adapting to American culture. In a neat piece of authorial genius she meets another "Indian", one whose people have been in America for generations, and yet are just as lost as Tilo's folk. He is a young man, handsome, and with magical powers of his own that enable him to sense the vibrant, attractive woman behind the magical disguise of the aged shopkeeper. Tragedy, it seems, is inevitable.

The Mistress of Spices is a very clever book in many ways. It is great fun to read, the political content is excellent, and the way that the spice magic is woven into the story is also very ingenious. I was particularly impressed with Divakaruni's mastery of speech patterns. Tilo speaks reasonable English most of the time, but those characters who are recent immigrants clearly use the distinctive Indian English and the American, Raven, has an unmistakable California drawl. The book does gloss over a few points: in particular the deep religious divisions that exist in Indian culture, though I suspect that was necessary for the book to achieve its objective. I also suspect that Divakaruni didn't really think through her theology very deeply. Not that I have any quarrel with her eventual conclusion, except that it is presented purely on an emotional level rather than being reasoned through. Yet another one on the recommended list. It has been a good month.

The Mistress of Spices - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni - Anchor - softcover

The Ghost of Millennium Past

Sick to death of the Millenni-yawn? Well thank whatever Gods that you worship that you were not around last time it happened. You don't think it could have been worse? My dear, you do not know the half of it. But you will, because thanks to the miracles of Science Fiction we are able to take you live to ASC TV (that's Anglo Saxon Chronicle to you acronym watchers) who are covering events in England and throughout Europe as we approach the year 1000.

We go first to ace reporter Kate Adled whom we find covering strange goings on in Germany.

"I am speaking to you today from the walls of the town of Erfurt. Below me, encamped around the walls, are some 3,000 members of the sect known as the Flagellant Brethren

who are demanding entrance. Like me, many of the people of the town have been up here on the walls this morning gazing in amazement at the scenes of extreme piety, penitence and self-mutilation taking place below us as the Flagellants perform their rituals."

"The Flagellant pilgrims, all of them men, have arrived here from all over Southern Germany. They have been on the road for thirty-three and a half days, the exact time, of course, that our Lord Jesus Christ spent on Earth following his Resurrection. Early this morning, to the accompaniment of much loud singing and prayer, they began their own peculiar form of worship. They took off most of their clothes, leaving only a long skirt reaching from the waist to their feet. Then they marched in a circle and, one by one, threw themselves on their faces and lay motionless with their arms stretched out in the form of a crucifix. Those coming behind beat the prostrate bodies with whips and scourges before throwing themselves to the floor. When all of the worshippers were prone, their leader gave a signal and each man rose to his feet, beating himself with his own scourge until the blood ran freely down his back. Many of the scourges are studded with sharp iron spikes, and the damage that the flagellants have done to themselves is so horrific that we are not permitted to show it in this broadcast."

"I have with me the Mayor of Erfurt who has refused the Flagellants permission to pass through the gates. Your Lordship, surely such pious people would be an example to the good citizens of your town. Why have you denied them entry?"

Mayor: "Well to start with they claim that their self-mutilation can absolve them from sin without the intercession of a priest. I don't need my friend the Bishop's advice to know that that is heresy, and I have no desire to be excommunicated. Furthermore, the Flagellants have made it known that they are on a Holy Crusade to wipe out all Jews. Our Jewish community provides vital money-lending services to many local businesses here in Erfurt, including my own, and I will not see them persecuted by a bunch of fanatics who have no official religious sanction."

"Thank you, Your Lordship. Now I see that the leader of the Flagellants has arrived in the city to negotiate with you. Can I try to get a quick word with him before you get started?"

Mayor (grinning): "I'd be delighted if you approached him."

"Thank you. Excuse me, Herr Schmid, Kate Adled of Anglo Saxon Chronicle News, may I have a word with you?"

Schmid: "Aiiiee, what Spawn of Satan is this you have brought before me? 'Tis a filthy, polluted Woman! My Sacred Purity has been tainted by her Evil Presence! I must cleanse myself immediately!" (Rushes out of the town, whipping himself as he goes and calling on his followers to begin a fresh round of devotions.)

Mayor: "Good, that's them out of the way for another couple of hours. Pint of ale, anyone?"

We now move to a secret location somewhere in Paris where the ASC's chief political correspondent, David Bumblebee, is conducting a very special interview.

Bumblebee: "I am here today to talk to one of the most controversial figures in Europe, a man who is the intellectual leader of one of the most feared Millennialian cults of our time, the Amaurites. It is rumoured that he is a lecturer at the University of Paris, but we know him only by the pseudonym of William Aurifex. We are, of course, unable to show you his face, but you can hear his voice. Monsieur Aurifex, your name, I believe, means 'goldsmith', would I be right in suspecting that this is a reference to Alchemy?"

Aurifex: "You would indeed. Though the common people believe that Alchemy is simply a means of transforming base metals into gold, amongst the learned it is known also to be a discipline of spiritual transformation."

Bumblebee: "How has that helped you?"

Aurifex: "Well, we are now at the beginning of the Third Age of Mankind. First there was the Age of the Father, which we know from the Old Testament. Then there was the Age of the Son, in which we are currently living. Shortly will begin the Age of the Spirit. Some of the most pious amongst mankind have been chosen to usher in this New Age and guide our fellow beings towards Enlightenment.

Bumblebee: "And you believe that your system of devotions has succeeded in transmuting your soul to a state of total purity?"

Aurifex: "I do."

Bumblebee: "Has that brought you closer to God?"

Aurifex: "More than that, it has enabled me to become God."

Bumblebee: "You are God?"

Aurifex: "I am God. And you can become God as well if you choose to become one of my disciples."

Bumblebee: "I see. And what differences have you noticed in your life since you became God?"

Aurifex: "The most significant difference is that I am now totally free of all mortal sin. My body is now simply a base container for the divine being that I have become. I can do with it whatever I wish without sin."

Bumblebee: "And that includes fornication?"

Aurifex: "Most certainly."

Bumblebee: "I can see why your teachings are so popular with the young men of the University."

Aurifex: "Oh, not only the young men. You see, the great piety of the French people means that many of our young men take holy orders and become celibate. Furthermore our gallantry means that many others die in the wars. This leaves a great number of unattached women who are denied the right of holy matrimony. Many such women are only too eager to partake of the spiritual blessings that result from sexual communion with God."

Bumblebee: "How did you say I could join up?"

The scene switches now to the far west of Cornwall where the ASC Natural History Unit is searching for a very special creature. The presenter, of course, is David Attenburrow.

"Hello. You join us here as we prepare for an event that the natural world will see but once a Millennium. I speak, of course, of the arrival of the Great Beast of the Book of Revelation. Our Holy Scriptures tell us that it will arise out of the sea. We know that it is a creature of prodigious size, perhaps too large to swim through the narrow confines of anything but the great ocean that surrounds the world. And so it is here, at Land's End, that theologians expect the Great Beast to make landfall in England. We aim to be here to capture that moment."

"But whilst we are waiting for this exciting event, what can the Scriptures tell us about this unique animal. We know, for example, that it has seven heads and ten horns. It has the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. Why? What special purpose do these features have that make it better suited to fulfil its role in the coming Apocalypse? Which of its heads has the mouth of a lion, or do they all do so? These are some of the questions that we hope to answer as the Beast comes to shore."

"To assist us in answering these questions, I am delighted to have with me Bishop Patrick Muir, the renowned authority in all matters astrological¹. Bishop Patrick, welcome."

"Delighted to be here, David, and I must say we are all quite thrilled to be here for this fabulous once in a lifetime event."

"Yes indeed. None of us will ever have seen anything like this before."

"Or will again, David. The Scriptures are quite clear about that. The Beast will slay all who stand before Him. We are utterly doomed. There's no doubt about it."

"Fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. Now, what about those seven heads? How do you think those horns will be distributed?"

"Well, to be honest with you David, we don't know. Of course as theologians we can make some very educated guesses. From numerology it is obvious that some heads will have more than one horn. We can point, for example, to the chimaera of ancient Greece which had three heads and, to the best of our knowledge, five horns. But it really depends on those mouths. Do all seven heads have the mouth of a lion? If so, are the entire heads leonine, in which case the horns might be somewhere else entirely. It is getting the answers to questions like this that will make this moment so exciting."

"Thank you, Bishop. Like you, I am absolutely thrilled to have the opportunity to witness this amazing event. All we can do now is sit and wait and hope that the world ends on cue. Back now to the studio."

Finally we return to the studio in London where Jeremy the Axeman will ask two prominent local politicians for their views on the impending crisis.

Axeman: I have with me today Mr. Tony Blur of the Viking Party and Mr. William Vague of the Saxon Party. Mr. Blur, if I may turn to you first, is it true that some of your followers do not believe in the coming Apocalypse.

Blur: That is absolutely untrue. We Vikings have been Christianised for centuries. We have absolute faith in the power of the Church. It is possible that my colleague Mr. Pressedgut may have referred to the coming Millennium as Ragnarrok in a moment of absent-mindedness, but that should not be taken as indicative of party policy.

Axeman: How do you think England should prepare itself for the forthcoming end of the world?

Blur: I think closer ties with Europe are essential. I have already helped us develop close relationships with our friends in Scandinavia and we are busy forging links, and other forms of armour, in collaboration with the forces of Vikingism elsewhere in Europe. We

¹ American readers are asked to imagine a massively overweight version of Bill Nye, the Science Guy, in this role.

have a particularly forward-thinking colony in Normandy which I think could be of great benefit to England in the future.

Axeman: What sort of benefits do you foresee?

Blur: Co-operation is the key. Think of the great projects we could undertake as a Europe united under Viking rule! I mean, look at what happens now. Lief Ericson discovers Vinland, but he doesn't have the finance needed to found a proper colony. It could be centuries before we are able to mount another expedition. In the meantime the poor Vinlanders continue to exist in unenlightened savagery. Do you know they are so primitive that they worship a god in the form of a mouse!

Axeman: How about the rumours of a plan to apply to join the Holy Roman Empire?

Blur: The idea has a lot of merit, Jeremy. Think, after all, of our glorious Imperial past, of such figures as Vespasian, Constantine and Arthur. Since the Romans left 600 years of Saxon rule have reduced us all to living in mud huts with no hypocausts and no hot water supply.

Axeman: Emperor Henry IV is a German and he is rumoured to be opposed to English entry.

Blur: I haven't ruled out the possibility of rape and pillage as an alternative membership strategy.

Axeman: And how do you see England's future once the Heavenly Host has descended.

Blur: Very promising. My soothsayer has been prophesying some of the Blessings which shall be bestowed upon us in the Millennium to come. He predicts wagons that move without oxen to pull them and tapestries on which the figures move and tell stories. Best of all, the Spanish are going to invent something called an Inquisition which allows politicians to torture and kill anyone who dares to disagree with them. I could do with that right now.

Axeman: Is that a reference to Ken the Red?

Blur: I categorically deny that I have any berserkers in my army, I mean party.

Axeman: Mr. Vague, if I may turn to you, do you agree that the English have the best chance of Salvation if we have closer ties with Europe.

Vague: It is utter rubbish, Jeremy. I've never heard so much nonsense in all my life. What we should do is what we have always done. And by that I mean we should cleave to the teachings of Saint Margaret of Finchley in whose Blessed Footsteps I am unworthy to follow, even crawling and abasing myself as I do now.

Axeman: Are those the marks of a Flagellant's whip I see on your back?

Vague: No sir, that is just where my friend Mr. Portabello suggested a fun new game involving studded leather, chains and a ceiling-mounted holy water sprinkler.

Axeman: Mr. Blair says that England has gone to the dogs since we severed our ties with Rome.

Vague: Dog racing is a fine Saxon tradition. I've often hankered after owning a wolfhound or two myself but my wife says Jack Russells are more my size. Sadly, much of the revenue gained from taxing gambling on such races has gone towards that ridiculous Great Hall that Mr. Mandelsshon is building in Greenwich, which, by the way, I am reliably informed is an exact scale replica of the pagan feasting hall of Valhalla.

Axeman: It is a figure of speech. "Gone to the dogs". It means that our country is not as glorious as it was under the Romans.

Vague: What rubbish! We Saxons have covered ourselves in glory. Look at Alfred the Great. Look at the Venerable Bede. Look at Ethelred the Unready. He is a personal hero of mine with whom I feel great spiritual kinship.

Axeman: But we don't have hypocausts or a hot water supply in our houses, do we.

Vague: I should hope not. I have no objection to the odd foreign trader, or even immigrant, but there are some vile European customs to which the English shall never bow. There can be no compromise on this. I swear to you that while there is breath in my body the English people shall never again be forced to bathe.

Some, but perhaps not all, of the above, was inspired by reading a thoroughly excellent history of the first Millennium. Truly, dear readers, we have been here before. The only difference is that the Mediaevals, being somewhat hazy on matters calendrical, but unwavering in their belief in the immanence of the Apocalypse, assumed that when nothing disastrous happened they had simply got the date wrong. They kept on anticipating and preparing for the Millennium for several hundred years after it had actually happened. Now there's a scary thought.

The Pursuit of the Millennium - Norman Cohn - Palladin - softcover

Meandering

Finally some more miscellany, first amongst which is an apology. Jean Weber has written to point out that *Time Future* was not, as reported last issue, the inaugural recipient of the George Turner Prize. The Prize was first awarded in 1998 and the winner was *Splashdance Silver* by Tansy Rayner Roberts. Sorry folks. I shall try to do better in future.

Talking of literary prizes, there has been some discussion on the subject in the British press recently. Have you ever wondered why the winners of such prizes, particularly in Britain, turn out to be complete flops that no one wants to read? Well now we know. The organisers of the Whitbread Books Prize have taken it upon themselves to extend an invitation to Ms. Jerry Hall to join the judging panel for the latest award. Besides being a quintessential blonde bimbo, it would appear that Jerry is remarkably well read. Blake, Pushkin, Joyce and Garcia Marquez are listed amongst her favourite authors.

Now you might think that being able to converse intelligently on the works of such eminent authors would be an ideal qualification for judging a literary prize. Not so, it appears. The organisers of the rival Booker Prize have launched a ferocious attack on Ms. Hall claiming that, having not been trained in the fine art of literary criticism, she would be unable to understand the criteria by which the books should be judged.

So there you have it. Literary prizes should not be judged on things like quality of plot, characterisation or use of language. They should be judged instead according to a set of arcane rules which none but a small, highly-educated elite can understand. Indeed, the fact

that winning books are incomprehensible to lay readers is a sign of their quality. I felt that you all needed to know that.

Ah well, at least no one has yet claimed that Mick Jagger is not qualified to judge Miss World.

Changing tack a little, a brief foray into the world of Web-based fiction sites. In the review of the Kim Newman story I mentioned that it is available for free on Event Horizon (<http://www.eventhorizon.com>). I rather wish I had given a plug to this site earlier because Ellen Datlow has announced that, due to funding problems, the site will be going into stasis for a while pending finding a new backer. Ellen meanwhile is taking up a full time post with the Sci-Fi Channel's Web site (<http://www.scifi.com>). This is a big shame because Event Horizon is one of the few places on the Web to be publishing quality fiction by big name authors. It is a shining beacon amongst a vast sea of vanity publishing sites.

The sort of thing I mean can be found by taking a quick look at authorlink.com (<http://www.authorlink.com>). In many ways this is a very useful site, providing a wealth of information and contacts for budding authors, but the one SF book that they had on offer last time I looked had me cringing in despair. It is about time we invented a separate genre for novels inspired by the likes of Von Daniken, Velikovsky and the X-Files. Kook Fiction, perhaps. Please folks, never, ever buy an SF novel for which the cover blurb says something like, "by the time you have finished this book you will be left wondering whether it is indeed fiction, or if it is all frighteningly true".

A better source of reading material is Dave Howell's excellent Alexandria Digital Literature site (<http://www.alexlit.com>). This started out just as a recommended reading site for the SF community, but it has quickly branched out into other genres and is now offering downloadable short stories for sale. As you know, I'm not a great short story fan, but I do know that the AlexLit people love books. I note also names such as Vonda McIntyre and Bob Silverberg amongst the authors, not to mention a story called *The Raven* by a chap named Poe which, as I recall, is rather famous.

One of these days I will get round to doing a proper survey of fiction sites on the Web. For now, however, the deadline calls. Time to wrap up.

Footnote

You have been reading Emerald City #52. This zine is guaranteed to be absolutely stuffed full of fabulously festive Millennium Bugs, all of them made in the finest Belgian Chocolate. If you do not get your free Millennium Bug collection with this zine, complain at once to your ISP who has probably eaten them.

Next issue, Brian Aldiss takes issue with Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars series and we return to some Australian fantasy writers.

See you next year,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl