

EMERALD CITY

Issue 56

April 2000

An occasional 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at cmorgan@ceres.wallis.com or on line at <http://www.emcit.com>

Introduction

As promised, this issue is a British writers special. I'm pleased to say that I have some very good books on offer. Us Brits can write science fiction, you know, it is just that few of us want to read it.

At this point I should, of course, be saying "Hello Eastercon". Sadly it is not to be. That is mainly my fault. With all this globe trotting that I do my mail does not always catch up with me very quickly, and I don't always read the backlogs when I do get them. Consequently by the time I realised that it was time to book a room in the Central, not to mention was certain that I could afford to go, it was already full.

That left me with two choices, room share or stay elsewhere. But as British hotels charge by the person, not by the room, there is no reason for anyone to want to share a room. Which left me with staying elsewhere. Now I know it is silly of me, but Glasgow scares me quite badly enough in the daytime, there was no way I was going to make plans that involved having to find my way to another hotel each evening. So I'm not going.

Still, hopefully this issue will hit the aether before most people head off for the convention. Have a great time folks. Hopefully I won't be so disorganised next year.

In This Issue

Still Blazing - Mary Gentle on fire

Les Fleurs du Mal - Brain Stableford on killer foliage

Fast beats the Heart - Maggie Furey's epic soap opera

But not as we know it - Justina Robson's machine intelligence

Terminal - Mark Chadbourn ends the world

Behind the Veil - Amy Harlib on the new Catherine Asaro novel

Gormenghast Revisited - I finally get to see the whole thing

Super Nova - A fine critical magazine

Derring Do - A tale of piracy

Footnote - The End

Still Blazing

So, I got hold of the new Ash book after all, and first I should clarify the printing situation. As I said when I reviewed part one, I was expecting two books. As the US publishers were promising two and the UK publishers only one I figured that the UK people had decided to issue it as a single volume. It turns out that I was wrong. The UK is sticking to the original 2-book plan, and the US is issuing four

separate books. This is great, because it means we are getting twice as many books as I expected, and if the second two live up to the promise of the first two we are in for a treat.

Of course I now find myself stuck with the usual problem of what to say about the middle books in a series. I can't really talk about the plot, because some of you might not have read #1 yet, and I can't form any overall impressions because the story hasn't finished. You see now why I often leave multi-book series until the last one is published before reviewing them.

What I can say at this juncture is that #2, entitled *Carthage Ascendant*, is just as good as the first one. There's slightly less military action, and we learn somewhat more about Ash herself as a result. In episodic terms, this is one of those character building and plot advancing sections.

Also the fantastical element of the story comes more to the fore. I still wouldn't call the book a fantasy, but as an alternate history it is getting decidedly weird. To an extent it is more SF than anything else. If the phrase "emergent intelligence" means anything to you then you will have an inkling of the sort of being that you will encounter. As an extra clue, #3 is apparently to be called *The Wild Machines*.

All of which takes us a pretty long way from mediaeval Burgundy. This results in an interesting sideline in discussion of parallel universes as the historian and archaeologist researching Ash's life, and the apparent ruins of mediaeval Carthage, try to make sense of their seemingly anachronistic finds.

But the core of the book is still provided by Ash, her mysterious origins, and her mercenary troop. The story has certainly made me want to find out more about John De Vere, the Lancastrian Earl of Oxford, who befriends Ash. He sounds like one really cool guy. Mary certainly

seems enamoured of him, and as a fellow redhead I trust her taste.

All of which presumably tells you very little except that this is a really fun series with some genuine smart stuff sprinkled through it. I can't wait for the next volume. Nuff said.

Ash #2: Carthage Ascendant - Mary Gentle - Avon - softcover

Les Fleurs du Mal

Thank heavens for Tor. You will have noticed from past issues that they are normally the first publishing company prepared to take a risk on up and coming non-US writers such as Sean McMullen and Stephen Dedman. But it also appears that they are equally prepared to take risks with older, established writers when they take it into their heads to do something a little unusual.

Brian Stableford's new book, *Architects of eMortality*, would probably never be accepted for publication in Britain. It has no space ships or ray guns, so it can't be SF, but it does go on at length about nineteenth century novelists, many of them French. Worse still, it dares to speculate that genetic engineering might be an art form. Pretentious and politically incorrect: how dare the fellow?

Because he is a writer, of course. *Architects of eMortality* is set in the same world as *Inherit the Earth*, but several hundred years into the future. By this time the biological and political changes chronicled in the first book have largely settled down. Thankfully this means that Brian steers mostly clear of economics. I'm not sure that the society he describes could work exactly as he paints it, but I do see how it might be made to work,

and as the workings are not central to the book, that's fine by me.

The world in which the new novel is set is one in which the more holistic sciences such as ecology, economics and medicine have been advanced sufficiently for mankind to have the planet, and their own bodies, under control. It is a world that can be managed effectively. Alan Greenspan would love it. And I guess I should not complain because my job involves helping create a sort of wildlife park for capitalists in which they are free to exercise their competitive instincts without evolving to the point at which they will cause undue harm to their environment.

But some people do object. They object because a world in which everything is monitored, everything is managed, and pretty soon everyone will be forever young, is, well, boring. The writer of the jacket blurb cleverly compares the book to Moorcock's classic *Dancers at the End of Time* series, in which Jherek Carnelian and his friends have so much power over their environment that they are bored to tears and don't care about anything anymore. Moorcock, of course, challenges them by introducing Mrs. Amelia Underwood, a Victorian lady who has actual, genuine emotions and beliefs. Considerable chaos ensues.

Stableford's world has not quite got that far, but some far-sighted individuals can see it getting that way. They feel that their world is too predictable, too safe, too controlled. If they could remember what the word meant they would probably say that they lived in a Disneyesque environment. These people, of course, are artists, and the medium in which they work is the ultimate creative tool, the genetic code.

Meet Lt. Hal Watson and his sidekick, Sgt. Charlotte Holmes, UN Police. Their

names are of course a literary conceit, but then so much else in the book is too so we should not let that bother us. Watson is indeed slow and stolid, a digger in the data streams. Holmes would like to be a detective, but is sadly lacking in the intuition and deductive brilliance of her namesake. This is a shame, because they have a particularly nasty murder to solve.

From Homer's Lotus Eaters through Dorothy's poppy field to Jeff Noon's *Pollen* and the boy in the tree from Elizabeth Hand's *Winterlong*, the most beautiful and deadly of all man's enemies has been the flower. With the skill of one of the world's greatest genetic engineers on hand, that has never been so true. The spores are small, almost invisible, undetectable as a weapon. Yet in a matter of hours they reduced poor Gabriel King to a gleaming white skeleton and a mass of beautiful black blooms. They took his flesh as their soil, and from his ageing body, created their own startling beauty.

To help them in their investigation Homes and Watson have recruited one of the world's foremost flower designers, a Dr. Wilde, who thanks to his parents calling him Oscar has developed a particularly pretentious self-image. But Wilde is not only an expert in genetics. Having immersed himself in the life of his namesake, he is a walking encyclopaedia of nineteenth century literature and theories of art. This is important, because Wilde quickly deduces that the murderer is an artist himself, and one who is putting on a very special performance. Even murder, if done well enough, can be seen as art. The play, it seems, has only just begun.

But enough of the plot. This is, after all, SF. And if it is SF it must contain lessons for our own world. To be sure Stableford

is making some interesting points about a world where immortality is imminent, but what is he telling us about ourselves?

Firstly he is addressing the issue of genetic engineering. Yes, he says, of course it is dangerous. Yes, it has to be controlled. But it is also capable of great beauty, and great benefit. Just because it is dangerous does not mean that it must be stopped. Indeed, it probably cannot be stopped.

Second, there is a point about age. We are not yet facing the prospect of immortality. Indeed, our current medical advances are merely contributing to the eco-catastrophe that eventually gives rise to the need for the Infertility Plague of *Inherit the Earth*. But we have reached a point where starting a new career at 50 is a viable prospect, and our children might easily double their Biblical three score years and ten. For those of us seeing this miracle developing, there is an inevitable sadness that we shall probably not be part of it.

But the main point of the book is, I think, about art. To be precise, it is about books. Far too much of the publishing industry these days is driven by market research. Fantasy books must have the requisite compliment of dragons and elves. SF must tie in to a TV series and be just as sterile as the programmes on which it is based. This, as we should well know, is a fast track to stagnation. Someone has to be brave enough and clever enough to do something new and original. And someone has to be brave enough to publish it.

Like I said, thank heavens for Tor.

Architects of eMortality - Brian Stableford - Tor
- hardcover

Fast beats the Heart

It has probably been said before, but I shall say it again: much modern epic

fantasy is soap opera. What I mean by that is that it is character-based, but the characters are stereotypes who act out simplistic morality plays about everyday life on a fantasy stage. Instead of running a pub, launderette or crime syndicate in the East End of London, the characters are blacksmiths, merchants, soldiers and apprentice sorcerers in a magical pseudo-mediaeval kingdom. Somewhere in the background is a vast and unbelievable battle between good and evil, but in order to fill up the thousands of pages that the readers expect, much of the attention falls the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Nowhere is this more true than in Maggie Furey's latest magnum opus. The background, where it intrudes, is a classic piece of silliness: a planet on which various species of fantasy creatures have been dumped by a mysterious elder race, and which is criss-crossed with magical barriers to keep them apart. A secret band of sorcerers and warriors, known as the Shadowleague, is charged with keeping things in order. You can easily see it as a setting for a role-playing game, and indeed much of the combat in the story takes place in suspiciously dungeon-like surroundings. Indeed, sometimes the characters refer to themselves as "adventurers". So far, zero out of ten.

To give Maggie credit, there is an attempt at addressing a serious issue. The activities of the Shadowleague effectively keep the inhabitants of the world in stasis. They are not allowed to develop, and most certainly not allowed to find out about each other. But this question looks like being addressed on a very simplistic level. You get the impression that asking readers of epic fantasy to think too deeply is not the done thing. More important is that the resolution of the question has been tied up in some cunning inter-personal links that will cause much heart-rending tragedy for the heroine at a later date, thus subsuming

any philosophical debate in morass of personal emotion.

But whilst the big picture stuff is all heavily telegraphed, the sub-plots are off all over the place. If you have a really dumb story like this you have to rescue it somehow, and Maggie Furey does a superb job. There are enough twists and turns in the plot to keep a whole regiment of minotaurs penned up for life. Some of them are so outrageous that you wonder if Maggie has a secret ambition to write farces. It is quite brilliant. You can see where the main story is going, and the ending doesn't look that far off, but you keep finding yourself diverted off down narrow side-streets and never quite going where you expect.

The most remarkable thing about the book, however, is the time scale. 438 pages of it, and the vast majority of the action takes place over just a couple of days. There's not much descriptive padding either. Obviously this requires a fairly extensive cast, but each one of them is lovingly described caricature, as instantly recognisable in their roles as the line-up of a Punch and Judy show. I kept thinking to myself, "why am I reading this twaddle", and deciding that it was because it was brilliantly crafted twaddle and in any case I wanted to know what would happen next. Goddess help me, I will probably even buy the other books in the series, and enjoy them too.

Heart of Myrial - Maggie Furey - Orbit - hardcover

But not as we know it

You may remember a few issues back my asking for suggestions of new British-based writers that I should try. Jeff Noon has been around since *Emerald City* started, and Ken MacLeod and Tom

Arden are now familiar figures in these pages. It was about time, I felt, that I found someone new. More to the point, I knew that if I whinged loudly enough Caroline Mullan would not let me down. And she hasn't. Ladies and gentlemen, the name is Justina Robson. You'll be hearing it a lot in future, I think. At the very least I shall be encouraging you all to nominate her for the Campbell next year.

The philosopher John Searle believed that he had a watertight proof of why computers could not be intelligent. He called it the Chinese Box problem. Imagine if you will a large box whose task is to translate from English to Chinese. English words are fed into the box through one hole, and the translated ideograms come out of another.

Inside the box is a man with a long list of instructions. Each time a word comes in he consults the instructions to see what he should do. Some times he simply moves to another part of the instructions, and others he takes cards illustrated with Chinese characters out of a file and passes them through the output slot. He has no understanding of what he is doing; he just follows the instructions.

Can the box speak Chinese? Can the man inside it? Clearly not. But, said Searle, the box is doing exactly what a computer does. Computers have perfect memory, and can follow complex instructions flawlessly, but they don't understand anything.

Meet Anjuli O'Connell, half Pakistani, half Irish, with a serious self-esteem problem and an addiction to comfort eating. Anjuli has been rushed through a hot house school and university, the better to serve the burgeoning needs of the UK's high tech industry, yet she comes from a society that is deeply

mistrustful of any technological advance. Remember, we British invented Luddism. She is, it seems to me, a perfect heroine for a British SF story.

Yet although Anjuli passed every exam the educational system could throw at her with flying colours, she has little faith in her own intelligence. You see she has a perfect memory. Every book, every picture, every smell, sound or texture she can recall with utter clarity. She remembers everything, and can reproduce it on demand. But, she wonders, do I ever understand any of it? It is perhaps no surprise that she is now one of the world's foremost experts on the psychology of artificial intelligences. 901, the software she is employed to monitor, is closer to her than most humans.

Anjuli's best friend through school and university was Roy Croft, though they were in many ways complete opposites. Roy couldn't be bothered to learn to spell, but he could work anything out from first principles. He could write code like no one else, and he loved computers. The ancient alchemists had a dream of turning base metals into gold, but no such paltry ambition would suffice for Roy. He wanted to turn base metals into life.

Roy followed Anjuli up the corporate ladder, his undoubted technical skill more than compensating for his crazy ideas and involvement in lunatic fringe pro-AI pressure groups. But even Roy could go too far. Now he is dead. The company investigation described his death as suicide. Anjuli isn't too sure. 901 doesn't like the story either, and is worried that it might be next.

Just roll down the window and let the wind blow back your hair.

The night's busting open, these two lanes can take us any-where.

What follows is a rollicking ride of a cyberpunk thriller cut with Ken MacLeod style radical politics, one of the most imaginative sex scenes I've ever read, an undeniable feminine touch and heaps of chocolate. There's some lovely imagery too. 901 sends cryptic messages to Anjuli by manifesting as characters from old movies. Roy is equally obscure, having posted her a copy of a favourite comic book before he died.

The comic stars a female character called Thunder Road who undertakes miraculous journeys. It is no accident that the favourite god of the ancient alchemists was Hermes, the patron of travellers. Roy too sees himself leading mankind, and machine-kind, down a new and perilous road to enlightenment. And Justina, I suspect, has been reading Jung.

With all this psychology floating around it is tempting to crank up my Freudian sub-program and ponder upon the significance of the wealth of dysfunctional relationships described in the book. Family, friends, boyfriend, work mates: nothing seems to go right for Anjuli. And Roy is clearly worse. The surprise ending adds a further bizarre twist to Anjuli's social scene. It is all a bit strange.

I should also point out that winning the fight to be deemed alive is only the first step along the way to AI rights. Many authors have taken that as a matter of course and have concentrated on subsequent issues. Robin Williams' film of Asimov's *Bicentennial Man* will provide a good primer to the issues (although it is of course a parable about racism).

But this is nit picking. For a first novel *Silver Screen* is very good indeed. It is good to know that in a society that is as deeply distrustful of technology as modern Britain there are still people

prepared to see the wild ride ahead of us as a challenge rather than a threat. Justina Robson has looked into the future, discovered that it looks like Hell, and has walked right in with her eyes wide open and a laugh on her lips. I think she deserves some company.

Silver Screen - Justina Robson - Macmillan - softcover

Terminal

Oh dear, oh my. Having been so pleased with my first new British author, I'm afraid I found the second a complete let down. It is very rare that I fail to finish a book. When I do, it is normally because I lose interest in the story or because it is a comedy novel and I'm finding the constant jollity hugely irritating. Heck, I read through the entire Kim Stanley Robinson *Mars Trilogy* despite hating most of it. It takes a lot for me to give up on book.

The book that I could not read is *World's End* by Mark Chadbourn. It is, in essence, a *Shadowrun* novel. You know the sort of thing: ancient magic returns to modern world, civilisation falls apart. That sort of stuff. Very silly.

But I have read *Shadowrun* novels: real ones. I trust that Marc Gascoigne and Carl Sargent will forgive me if I say that they are not quite in the same league as most of the authors I review here. But for game tie-in novels they did pretty well, and they are a damn sight better than Mr. Chadbourn.

It is a terrible thing to say, especially as I have friends at Gollancz, but *World's End* reminded me of nothing so much as the self-published novels that are appearing all over the Web these days. Or worse, it reminded me of my own pathetic

attempts at writing fiction. I failed to get to the end of chapter two.

Maybe it is just me. Maybe there is something about Chadbourn's prose style that grates upon my text processing neurons. I hope so, because I hate being so negative about a book, especially by someone relatively new to the field.

I have no qualms about being rude about, say, Brian Aldiss, because I know he can take it, and that if he even deigned to notice me he could hit back far more destructively and far more wittily than I ever could. I'm also happy to attack writers because of their political or religious views, which are clearly subjective. But I feel a complete fraud telling an author that he can't write when I know I could not do any better.

Still, there it is. In my view *World's End* is terminally unreadable. Somebody please disagree.

World's End - Mark Chadbourn - Gollancz - softcover

Behind the Veil

By Amy Harlib

The latest from veteran SF writer, Catherine Asaro, is a blend of cyber-intrigue, Moroccan setting and romance with a strong ballet component drawn directly from the author's personal experience adding to the book's background verisimilitude and emotional resonance.

In the summer of 2010, web-surfing ballerina Lucia del Mar meets Rashid al Jazarr, the attractive inventor of a cutting-edge artificial intelligence system. Lucia and Rashid are kidnapped by international terrorists who covet his invention with the goal of using it for world domination through mind control

by means of the device's powerful VR capabilities. While the protagonist couple manages to foil the abductors, in order to keep Lucia safe when they land in Morocco, Rashid arranges a hasty marriage. Cloistered in Rashid's traditional Islamic home, Lucia overcomes her loneliness by befriending both Rashid's vivid and colourful family and Zaki, the uncannily human computer program Rashid has designed.

When the terrorists strike again, Rashid's AI system is destroyed, but the unlikely marriage survives in this gripping yarn containing edifying subtexts dealing with millennial issues; with promoting cross-cultural tolerance and understanding; and with the potential and dangers of AI and VR, especially if they are combined.

Asaro's exceptional talent at combining science, adventure and compelling characterisation is evident here in this near-future earthbound departure from her usual galaxy-spanning 'Skolian' sagas. Here the author has done her homework, transcending clichés to portray the Moslems as the fully-dimensional, passionate people they are.

The Veiled Web also succeeds in telling an exciting story set in the world we know, at the dangerous intersection of cutting-edge technology and the eternal conflict of culture and the human heart. The narrative is electric with the tension between tradition and modernity, science and art, female and male, cynicism and idealism. The book also satisfies as a story of romance, both of ideas and between a man and a woman attempting to build a bridge two very different societies, tellingly conveyed through the authentically detailed backgrounds - a Moroccan household and community, computer geeks, and contemporary ballet companies. Surprisingly enjoyable was the scene-stealing, quirky and moving character of Zaki, a truly loveable artificial intelligence around which

revolves this provocative and thoroughly entertaining tale that pleases on many levels.

The Veiled Web - Catherine Asaro - Bantam/Spectra - softcover

Gormenghast Revisited

Well, I have finally got round to watching the whole thing. Time, I think, for a retrospective.

Episode by episode I think that Part I is the best. It has a lot of character introduction to do so the plot builds up nicely. Also it has most of the best imagery of the series. The scene with Steerpik and the twins on the tree is by far the best of the lot.

Part II I thought was a bit disjointed. It was the only one of the four episodes that gave the appearance of having had rather a lot of book squeezed into very little TV time. Thankfully things recovered later.

The third episode was obviously intended to be the comic relief section. And let's face it you can't go wrong with a cast that includes Stephen Fry, Spike Milligan, Eric Sykes, John Sessions and Gregor Fisher. Not to mention a starring role for Warren Mitchell. But it is also the episode that most clearly demonstrates that the whole story is an allegory about the fall of the British Empire. I'm very glad that the BBC managed to keep that aspect of the books in the series.

Part IV was given over entirely to the dramatic climax and so is as tight and consistent as Part I. I must admit that I found it difficult to believe in the bunch of grotesques and clowns that make up the cast actually doing anything with any decisiveness. It fell a bit flat, which is a shame.

Overall then, the best thing about the series is still the visuals. The blue screen work is, I think, rather disappointing. However, that may have been deliberate to give the castle a fairylike appearance. But the costumes are stunning and the sets are perfect in their grubbiness. It was a real shame to have to watch it on such a small screen.

In addition, having seen the whole thing, it is very clear that there is a damn good story behind it all. I said in my review of Part I that *Gormenghast* was an anti-*Lord of the Rings*. That came over very clearly in the series. Everything in *LotR* that is naïve and romantic is shown by *Gormenghast* to be corrupt and foolish. Nor are the lessons limited to the past. Next time someone tells me that I can't do something in fandom because it is not traditional I am liable to say, "thank you, Secretary Barquentine".

Final point, the books are quite clearly a trilogy. The TV series only covers the first two and it is obvious from the ending that there has to be another episode. Of course from a visual point of view it will be a complete let down because the final volume takes place outside the castle. But the story is incomplete without it.

I guess I shall just have to read the books.

Super Nova

I packed the fall/winter 1999 issue of *Nova Express* in my flight bag intending to read it on the way back to the UK in February. I forgot, and have only just rediscovered it. Still, it doesn't come out that frequently so I guess a late review is OK.

The theme for this issue is one of Bruce Sterling's literary theories. Now if, like me, you read the "manifesto" for the new

millennium that Sterling had published in the February *Interzone* you will probably have concluded that the fellow is a pompous twat with a complete inability to structure a rational argument. But then he did sort of invent the concept of cyberpunk, so I'm prepared to give him a chance.

Slipstream appears to be an attempt by Sterling to create a global category of fiction that brings together the best of current SF&F genre writing, speculative fiction by mainstream writers, and fantasy categories that mainstream critics invent to avoid having to lump their favourite writers in with the genre scum (Magic Realism, etc.). The current *Nova Express* has an article on the subject by Sterling, a report from a Slipstream convention, an interview with an acknowledged Slipstream writer and more. The theme issue idea works very well.

As for Slipstream itself, as a movement I think it is a complete fallacy. Very few people claim to be writing it, most especially the mainstream folks that have been co-opted. I also object strongly to what appears to be Sterling's attempt to cream off the best of today's young SF&F writers and put them in a separate category so that he can then look down his nose at the rest of the genre just like the mainstream critics do.

On the other hand, as a guide to good writing, Slipstream seems to be an excellent starting point. *Nova Express* includes a list of well-known Slipstream novels. I note on it names such as Candace Jane Dorsey, Umberto Eco, Karen Joy Fowler, Elizabeth Hand, M. John Harrison, Nalo Hopkinson, Jeff Noon and William Browning Spencer. Iain Banks and Gene Wolfe are in there too, but only for their more mainstream work which merely serves to underline the snobbishness of the concept. But all those writers are favourites of mine. I shall

certainly try to check out some of the other names on the list.

Elsewhere in the issue are two very intelligent reviews of *Cryptonomicon*. Plus there's John Clute and Russell Blackford laying into each other over the *Australian Encyclopaedia of SF&F* with a viciousness that only academics can manage. There's also a bunch of short reviews, most of them by professional writers, including Dave Langford on the new Gene Wolfe, *On Blue's Waters*.

Taken as a whole, this is a pretty impressive contents list for a critical magazine. I still find it impossible to treat a publication that boasts such an impressive array of professional writers as a fanzine, even though by the strict letter of the Hugo rules that is what it is. I also think that it should do very well in the semi-prozine category. The production values might not be on a par with *Locus* but, the excellent Gary Wolf apart, its content is clearly superior.

Regardless of such obscure disputes, however, it is an excellent magazine, and one that anyone with a serious interest in SF&F fiction should read. Write to Lawrence Person at PO Box 27231, Austin, Texas 78755-2231. Rates for four issues are \$12 within the USA, \$16 for Canada and Mexico, and \$22 elsewhere.

Derring Do

Piracy, it seems, is alive and well on the high seas of cyberspace.

I guess I had always expected to see something from *Emerald City* pirated at some point. But I had expected it to be by some young kid trying to get a good start to his fanzine career, or by some nutty Libertarian who believes that copyright laws don't apply to him. I had not

expected to find stolen copies of my work on a commercial site.

It all started at the beginning of this month when I got an email from Canadian author, Rebecca Bradley. Those of you with long memories may remember me reviewing two books of hers way back in issue #26. I wasn't enormously complimentary about them so seeing this email come in I was half expecting an ear full. But no, it turns out that Rebecca is one of those wonderful authors who don't take poor reviews too much to heart, at least not when the review is original.

What had got Rebecca mad is that she had found another version of my review on the Web. It was quite clearly, and rather clumsily, adapted from mine, and it was on the Web site of a specialist SF&F bookshop under the by-line of the shop's owner. I checked the site out and found that my review of Sara Douglass's *Battleaxe* from issue #48 had been similarly pirated. Rebecca's view, and I wholeheartedly agree with her, is that whilst bad reviews are only to be expected occasionally, bad reviews from people who have plainly not read the book in question but have simply copied someone else's comments are not to be tolerated.

At this point I was at a bit of a loss. I don't know any copyright lawyers. Kevin was away for a week on his company's annual retreat. I really wasn't quite sure how to proceed. But Rebecca had already fired off a note of protest to the Web site in question so I did the same, being careful to let a bunch of other people in on what was going on so that I had some witnesses. I have copies of the pirated reviews, as do a number of other people.

After a couple of days waiting we finally heard back. Our pirate was insistent that the reviews were all his own work but, as I had expected, he removed the evidence from his site. When you think about it,

this was all he could do, because if he had admitted to copying my work I might have sued him.

Not entirely happy with this outcome, I decided to try to find out whether the fellow was genuinely contrite or whether he was just having a good laugh at having got away with it. I wrote to him and suggested that if he wanted book reviews for his site I would be delighted if he added a link to *Emerald City*. I even promised him a link to his site in return. I have not yet had a reply, which I think tells us all we need to know about his attitude.

Thinking back on it, even if I had had the appropriate legal advice, I probably would not have sued the guy. Specialist SF&F bookshops are rare enough as it is and I would not want to get blamed for putting one out of business. On the other hand, I have a very low opinion of people who think they can get away with stealing other people's work. Besides, for all I know I may not be the only victim. There are a lot of reviews on that site and some of them could have been stolen from other writers.

Still, forewarned is forearmed. I shall now be keeping a very close eye on the site in question, not to mention occasionally checking the Web for material credited to a certain person. Next time it will be lawyers first and polite letters later. And if anyone reading this has book reviews published on the Web and wants to check out the site to see if they have been ripped off too, please get in touch. I would be happy to pass on all the details.

In the meantime, huge thanks to Rebecca for being kind enough to inform me of what was going on. Thanks also to a bunch of other folks who helped me out during what I found to be a very difficult week. You were all wonderful.

Footnote

OK, what else? Quick note to Liz Williams to say that I very much enjoyed her story in the April *Interzone*.

Thanks to Amy for the guest review. Contrary to what it might seem at times, I do not insist on writing this whole thing myself. But I am fussy, and I do edit. Potential contributors be warned.

The new Jeff Noon novel, *Needle in the Groove*, will apparently appear early in May so should get reviewed next issue. Locus says that there was a new M. John Harrison book published in April, but I can't find any mention of it on bookshop sites. The new Philip Pullman has been delayed again and is now scheduled for September, more than a year overdue.

Also due up next time some Charles De Lint, and perhaps a bit of Harry Potter. Yes, I have been reading the provisional Wiscon program.

And after Wiscon, back to California for a few weeks. Hooray!

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl