

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

Oh dear, it looks like we are starting with apologies again. To begin with, there is the matter of Amy Harlib's reviews. I was browsing around the web recently and to my horror I found some of the reviews Amy had sent me on a professional site labelled as "web exclusive". Having read the site's copyright policy and checked with Amy I concluded that I hadn't in fact done anything illegal, but it gave me a very nasty fright.

It turns out that the situation is like this. Most online SF sites do not pay for book reviews, and consequently ask for very little in terms of rights. Typically they ask for exclusivity to a review for 2 months, but some don't ask for anything at all. Not being able to get paid, freelance writers like Amy get their recompense in egoboo and exposure by getting their work on as many sites as possible. I can understand the economics of it, but for me there are two problems.

Firstly, most people are not aware of the economics. If they see the same stuff on a professional site and on mine they will immediately jump to the conclusion that I have pirated the work. After all, that happens a lot on the web, as I have found to my cost. What is more, a professional site could decide to get nasty. Just because I haven't broken the law doesn't mean to say that they couldn't sue me. So, just to be on the safe side, I have removed all of Amy's reviews from the web site, and from copies of *Emerald City*

downloadable from the site. I know it is drastic, but I can't afford to take risks.

Then there is the question of my obligation to you, the readers. Putting myself in your shoes, I can see no point whatsoever in reading *Emerald City* if all you are going to get is material that you have already seen on professional sites. I want *Emerald City* to be a site where people can read good quality reviews and articles that they cannot find elsewhere. You have my unreserved apologies for having let you down on that. It won't happen again.

Now, given that I can't afford to pay people for contributions, I therefore can't demand any control over use of the material. So, as of now, *Emerald City* will no longer accept outside contributions, because I can't afford them on the sort of terms I would want. Sorry folks, you are just going to have to be bored by me in future. That situation will probably continue until I feel I can afford to pay contributors.

Finally on this subject, a quick word to fanzine collectors. Yes, I know, I have done something awful. I have re-edited and re-issued several old issues of *Emerald City*. If there are people out there who care about this sort of thing, you have my profuse apologies. The issues concerned are #57 through #61. The new versions are, of course, on the web site.

On an entirely different subject, apologies are also due to the good folks of Dublin. I

was hoping to attend Octocon this month. However, various things have intervened, including Kevin having an ongoing housing crisis, so I am dashing off to California to help out. Sorry Octocon, maybe next year.

In This Issue

Jungle Lore - Gene Wolfe goes Green

Far Future Lore - Brian Stableford goes on living for ever

Very Ancient Lore - Paul Levinson goes Neanderthal in New York

Fantasy Lore - Martha Wells recreates a world

Island Lore - Kathleen Ann Goonan re-engineers Hawaii

Women's Lore - Nicola Griffith does without men

SF&F web sites - a miscellany of online magazines and communities

Footnote - The End

Jungle Lore

Ah, the master returns once more. What can one say? I mean, really, what is a poor book reviewer to do? I have trouble enough with the middle book in a trilogy, but this? To follow the action in *In Green's Jungles* it is not sufficient to have read the previous instalment of *The Book of the Short Sun (On Blue's Waters, Emerald City #55)*. Nor is it sufficient to have read the four volumes of the *Book of the Long Sun*, so that you know who people like General Mint, Auk and Chenille are. No, it requires us to remember all of the way back to Nessus and the Matachin tower. It

requires us to know that if Horn is dressed in a black, hooded cape and carrying a big, black sword he might easily be mistaken for a member of the Torturers' Guild. And it requires us to remember that in Severian's time the sun of Urth was dying.

I am sure that there are all sorts of subtle little nuances hidden in the text that you will only spot if you have a good memory for all ten previous books in what is apparently one gigantic, inter-related series. This being Wolfe, that is a certainty. But it was around 20 years ago that I read *Shadow of the Torturer*, and I didn't understand half of it at the time. I don't have time to go back and read ten books, even if they are all excellent, just to do a review of this one. And besides, I have no idea how much of the series you have read. You want me to avoid spoilers? No chance.

But I can't abandon a new Gene Wolfe book just because I don't have the time or knowledge to do it justice right now. So here are a couple of points for you to chew on.

Firstly, I think the current series has abandoned all pretence of being science fiction. Wolfe may have a justification for how Horn manages to travel between worlds stored up for us, but it is going to have to be something quite bizarre - something along the lines of Dan Simmons "love equation" from *Return to Endymion*. And will someone please tell me where the inhumi get the high quality cosmetics and wigs necessary for their disguises? The short sun whorls have almost pre-technological societies. The cosmetics I can just about handle. But wigs? They can't possibly make them themselves. One of the distinguishing factors of the inhumi is that their hands are nowhere near as dextrous as those of humans. And without machinery, wig making is a very fiddly business. The inhumi just seem to find everything they

need lying around when they need it. Or it appears when they need it. Strange.

But the inhumani, of course, are simply part of the great moral conundrum that Wolfe is weaving. I suspect that they are intended to represent our baser instinct. Jahlee even says at one point in the book that when men do cruel, violent and senseless things, like fighting wars, it is the inhumani that profit.

The flip side to the inhumani is provided by the gods. Wolfe is quite clear that it is only belief in God, or at least a god, that allows men to develop a moral sense and resist the temptations of evil. But what exactly are the gods? We, as SF readers, are all painfully aware that the gods of the Long Sun world are uploaded human personalities resident in the mainframe of the great generation ship known as Whorl. But to Horn, and perhaps even to Silk before him, the Long Sun gods are Gods, of equal rank, if perhaps not worth, with The Outsider, who may be God, or at least a real god. And then there is the sea goddess of Blue, whose true nature is still a mystery.

The point that I think Wolfe is making here is that, provided Clarke's Law works, and that the technology wielded by men who have made themselves into gods is sufficiently godlike to impress the natives, then from the point of view of the natives they are indeed Gods. And they are just as useful as real Gods (if there are any) in terms of encouraging moral behaviour in mankind.

The lesson from all of this? Perhaps Wolfe is saying that OK, maybe we did make JHVH, Jesus, Allah, Krishna, Ishtar and Eris in our own image. But so what? As long as they work, that's OK. That's a very neo-pagan argument. And I suspect that Wolfe would actually reject neo-paganism on the grounds that its gods are consciously created. But hey, it is all very interesting. I just wish I had the time to go back and read everything again. Whenever I read anything by Wolfe I

always feel that I have missed much of what he was saying and that I should immediately go back and start again. And make notes. And read theology textbooks. How many other authors can you say that about?

Gene Wolfe - In Green's Jungles - Tor - hardcover

Far Future Lore

Once again on reading a Brian Stableford book I am struck by the sheer effortlessness of the man's writing. And I do not only mean the prose. Stableford's mastery of different styles is awesome. The first book in his future history series, *Inherit the Earth*, was a cyberpunk thriller. The second, *Architects of eMortality*, was a murder mystery. The new book takes us back to the classic first person style of 19th and early 20th Century SF in which the future world is described through the eyes of the narrator. There are other books to come in the series, and I have no doubt that Stableford will write all of them in different styles. It is almost as if he finds sticking to one style too easy, and tries out different things to keep from getting bored. Amazing.

The Fountains of Youth is set many years in the future from *Architects of eMortality*, at a time when the last mortal humans are dying out and those blessed with the miracle of the Zaman Transformation are looking forward to living forever. It is a time "when genetic, cybernetic, continental, and even planetary engineering are the norm, when suicide is an art form and diseases are for recreational use only". (There I quote from the jacket blurb which is unexpectedly apposite - David Hartwell is listed as the editor and presumably deserves the credit here.) In this world in which death finally seems to have been

abolished, what better purpose is there for a serious writer than to produce a history of man's longest and greatest conflict, the war against death.

Of course that war has not quite been finally won. It is still possible for accidents to claim lives. Mortimer Gray suffered a near death experience when only a young man in his thirties. It was that experience that led him to write his *History of Death*. But for the most part his work is of interest to his contemporaries for what it says about how they should now live their lives. Is it true, as the Thanaticists claim, that eMortality is simply resulting in a fossilisation of humanity? Should humans take their own lives when they feel that they have outlived their purpose? Or perhaps one should agree with the Cyborganizers that continual human progress could be made if only people would be willing to evolve themselves by submitting to bodily augmentation.

This is all heavy philosophical stuff, and one might be tempted to ask what relevance it has to today's reader. But the role of all good SF is to teach us things about our own lives by magnifying present day issues through the lens of the future. Many of Stableford's little asides are quite clearly directed at present day life.

"I'm from the Reunited States, where we have a strong sense of history and a strong sense of purpose; we learn in the cradle that we have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - but we grow up with protective IT so powerful that it circumscribes our liberty, operating on the assumption that the pursuit of happiness has to be conducted in comfort."

Adventure holidays, anyone? And by the way, the "IT" in that passage stands for Internal Technology, the nanotech systems that keep all citizens of Stableford's future world in a permanent

bloom of health. Or how about this for an author's quick swipe at modern fashions for graphic design?

"Other critics complained of my commentary that the day of 'mute text' was dead and gone and that there was no place in the modern world for arguments whose primary illustrations resolutely refused to move, but I disregarded them as mere fashion victims. The imminent death of unembellished text had been announced so many times before that the new attempt to bury it seemed puerile."

The main thrust of the book, however, is not about fashion, but about cultural attitudes to change. This is a question that is dear to me, because having lived in Australia and California I can see just how fossilised the UK is in comparison. Stableford's argument is played out on a wider stage, with daring space-faring pioneers pitted against the complacent and introverted Earthbound. But the story is the same. There are cultures in which change is welcomed and even sought out, and there are cultures in which change is acceptable only if it is carefully managed and involves doing the same old thing in a very slightly different way.

Mortimer Gray, it turns out, is temperamentally Earthbound. He is, after all, an historian, and what would an historian do in a world that has no past? But it is very tempting to see much of Brian in Gray. He is, after all, happily lodging in Reading, turning out wonderful novels and teaching others to do the same, while maniacs like me rush around the world trying to Make Things Happen. Thankfully Brian, and Gray, do see the benefit in boundless enthusiasm, they just think that it is not for them, which is of course their right.

If there is one thing that disappointed me about this book it is that it focused on change largely at the global level of

politics and sociology. But I think that, in considering longevity, there are many personal issues with change as well. In the past people could expect that in the course of their lifetime little would change: they would leave the world much as they found it. In Mortimer Gray's time scales nothing can be permanent, perhaps not even the solar system itself. Stableford certainly shows that in Gray's time mankind is far more willing to make changes to the world, presumably on the grounds that in their lifetimes change will happen anyway. But the effects of this change on human attitudes are not fully explored. Of course Brian has promised more books, so he may yet address this point. I hope so, because he deals with this philosophical stuff very well indeed.

In the meantime, however, Brian has left his future world quailing before the advance of a mighty enemy. I think we need to find out what happens next.

The Fountains of Youth - Brian Stableford - Tor - hardcover

Very Ancient Lore

Warning, this book takes a long time to get going. I picked up Paul Levinson's novel, *The Silk Code*, because it came top of this year's Locus Poll for best first novel. As it beat a number of very good books, I figured it had to be worth a read. But to begin with I was very disappointed.

The first section came over badly. It read like a piece of X-Files fan fiction: bizarre ideas, use of the Amish as a "mystery" element, people dropping dead all over the place. It was a mess. But Connie Willis had praised the book in the jacket blurb, so I kept reading.

Section two came as something of a jolt. It was just as poor, the characters were even more wooden, but it was set somewhere else entirely. Whereas the first section took place in modern America, this one wandered all over the world in the mid-8th Century. Sadly it suffered that classic American fault of assuming that everyone in every country and every time period thinks and talks just like modern day Americans. Levinson clearly knows a bit about Greek philosophy, but he completely failed to convince the reader that this was anything but a rather bizarre episode of the Hercules TV series. There was no attempt to create a believable setting. I mean, people of ancient times did not just refer to their money as "coins". The coins had names and values. And people speaking in Greek do not make puns in English. But, the sudden jump in setting did at least betoken a strong sense of imagination, and Joe Haldeman had praised the book in the jacket blurb, so I kept reading.

Then suddenly everything fell into place. We were back in the 20th Century, flipping between New York and London. The British stuff was a bit clichéd, but affectionately so and Levinson certainly knows the UK well. I spotted only one mistake: BBC1 is a television station; the radio station is called Radio One. There was a brief trip to Toronto as well, during which Levinson took the opportunity to vent his anger at Canadian Immigration. As the same sort of thing happened to Kevin when he was travelling back and fore for Canadian Executive Committee meetings, I know where Levinson is coming from. But what he doesn't know is that US Immigration can be just as unpleasant to foreigners.

When I got to this section of the book I was reminded of my review of Dirk Strasser's *Zenith* in which I said that if I ever wrote a novel, once the book was finished I would throw away the first few chapters and re-write them from scratch.

Levinson should have taken my advice, because he can write. Indeed, he has apparently written a lot of successful short stories about his hero, forensic detective Phil D'Amato. Once he got back to the familiar D'Amato setting of New York he managed fine and the book fairly zipped along.

You will have gathered from the above that this is a mystery novel. It is also, as I have said, very X-Files in places. Levinson brings in a whole lot of interesting ideas, from Amish "science" to Celts living in China (the Tocharians, they are real) to telomeres (biochemical bits that cause ageing). But the science, and more particularly the anthropology, seems a bit suspect in places. As I recall, the Neanderthals did not produce cave paintings.

My main concern about the book, even above the poorly written opening sections, was Levinson's use of female characters. Almost every woman in the book, including one who was supposedly over 60, was used as a sex object. Indeed it seemed de rigeur that every time a new woman character was introduced some male character or other started lusting after her. Most of the women seemed to have no other function in the plot. And worse than that, every time a young woman was killed, Levinson found it necessary to describe her genitals. I suppose I can't object if he happens to find murdering pretty women sexually arousing, but one can't help feeling that someone who writes about such things might just take to doing them in practice.

Other than that, as I said, most of the book did fairly zip along. As of page 140 it was unputdownable. Which makes it an even bigger shame that the previous sections were so bad. The book was very much an ideas novel, but in these days SF writers should not be allowed to use that as an excuse. Here's hoping that Levinson now has his act together and that

subsequent novels will be good all the way through.

The Silk Code - Paul Levinson - Tor - hardcover

Fantasy Lore

Every year the Koshite priests of the city of Duvalpore make a sandcastle. It is a very big sandcastle representing, as it does, the entire world in miniature. It is called the Wheel of the Infinite, and without its continual renewal, the Koshites believe, their world would cease to exist.

The power of the site is cyclical. Every ten years it channels greater power and takes on greater importance. This year marks the one hundredth year of the cycle, and the importance and power of the rite are magnified yet further. Which makes it a particularly bad year for something to go badly wrong. No matter how hard the priests try, the Wheel keeps unmaking sections of their work, throwing parts of the world it represents into chaos. If the problem cannot be fixed, come the culmination of the rite the Koshites will find out the hard way whether or not their myths are true.

The obvious thing to do is send for Maskelle, the Voice of the Adversary. As the earthly representative of the only God in the Koshite pantheon to dabble in violence it is her job to fend off danger. There is just one small problem. Many years ago Maskelle dared to dabble in court politics, and she has been banished from Duvalpore for trying to prevent the accession of the current Emperor. If she returns, The Throne, who pays little heed to religion, may order her death.

Martha Wells is one of those authors whose lack of fame leaves me nonplussed. I was pleased to note that her

previous book, *The Death of the Necromancer*, got nominated for a Nebula, but you still don't see a lot about her. Fortunately one of the main purposes of *Emerald City* is to tell you about good books that you won't hear about elsewhere, so here are my thoughts on her latest effort.

Wheel of the Infinite starts off in fine form. There is an interesting new fantasy world to learn about. Maskelle is having an entertaining time travelling to Duvalpore in the company of a group of itinerant players and one of those handsome, brown-haired, fair-skinned, sword-wielding northern barbarians. There is much humour, and mysterious things happen to whet the appetite.

Once the party arrives in the city things get darker very rapidly, and don't lighten up again until right at the end. What starts off as a rather too obvious mystery story turns into a very dangerous game of bluff and counter-bluff involving powers way above the court intrigues that flavour the first half of the book.

Whilst I very much enjoyed the initial chapters, and the final one, I found the meat of the book a little disappointing. Not wanting to simply pan it, because I do like Wells' work, I sat down to try to work out why, and I finally decided that it was because it was too short.

Oh no! Surely Cheryl can't actually want people to write giant fantasy blockbusters? Well yes I do, if it is what the book needs. The problem with *Wheel of the Infinite* is that there is far more going on than that in which Wells involves the reader. The initial set-up for the mystery is disappointingly obvious because we only see things from Maskelle's point of view. The relationship between Maskelle and the Emperor, which is hugely emotionally charged, is skimmed over because it is not central to the plot. The bad guys, although they are given solid reasons for the actions, are very one-dimensional. There is so much

more that Wells could have put into the book and didn't.

Now you can get away with that in the right sort of book. I didn't find anything shallow about *The Death of The Necromancer*. But *Wheel of the Infinite* is drawn on a much broader canvas, and consequently needs much greater detail. I'm sure that Wells is capable of doing it, and I'd love to ask her why she didn't. I hope it wasn't something silly like the publisher wanting the book quickly or imposing a size limit.

Anyway, please don't let this musing put you off. *Wheel of the Infinite* is a good book. It just isn't as good as I would have liked. It is still worth reading, and Martha Wells is still a name worth looking out for. I'll still get her next book as soon as it comes out.

Wheel of the Infinite - Martha Wells - EOS - hardcover

Island Lore

In the none-too-distant future the world has pooled its space program effort. Hawaii has been chosen as the site for the international space centre. Interspace, the conglomerate responsible for running the enterprise, is busily working on a starship that it hopes will take mankind to distant planets. All it needs is some means of navigating the vessel through hyperspace, and for that it might just need a very special kind of person. Perhaps that is why Lynn Oshima, whose family practically owns Interspace, specialises in manipulating human DNA.

Years earlier, brilliant Century Kalakaua is working on just the sort of math that might elucidate understanding of hyperspatial navigation. As a native Hawaiian he is a descendent of the great Polynesian seafarers who could navigate

the vast reaches of the Pacific. But Cen is also a direct descendant of the great kahunas, the priests who served the Hawaiian royal family before the Americans came. Cen is as much a conquered indigene as Sitting Bull or Geronimo, and with his glowing heritage he is wanted as a recruit by the Homeland Movement. Furthermore, he is developing a strange obsession with Kaiulani, the last princess of Hawaii. Who will benefit from this work: Interspace, the Homeland Movement, or his beloved princess?

Having loved *Queen City Jazz* I am quickly rushing my way through the rest of Kathleen Ann Goonan's novels so that I can get to the latest one and nominate it for this year's Hugos. *The Bones of Time* is her second, and it was short-listed for this year's Clarke Award. I can see why too, and why Goonan is perhaps less popular than she deserves in her native America. *The Bones of Time* is a book about colonisation. It is a book that says that what the USA did in Hawaii is every bit as bad as what the British did in Africa, India and Australasia. And of course it all happened in America's favourite holiday playground. Quick, brush it under this grass mat! The British, of course, will all feel very smug because they aren't the only villains in the world. The Americans won't want to know.

Goonan grew up in Hawaii, which explains her interest in its history and presumably means that the background is highly detailed. She clearly has a love for the islands and their people. As an island lover myself, I can relate to this. Reading the books reminded me that I have done an awful lot of writing on the beach in Scilly with only the sound of waves and the cry of gulls (well, and perhaps the shrieks of happy children) for company. Of course I had seals instead of dolphins and cod instead of tuna, but hey, it was an island, and it was magical.

I said "presumably" above because while the Hawaiian sections of the book sounded very well researched the chapters set in Britain are sloppy. Goonan is another writer seduced by the mad idea of extending the London Underground to Oxford. A quick check of a map would have told her the idiocy of running a surface train from Oxford into Victoria. Finding a hilltop pub in flat central Oxford is quite an achievement. And we got that classic old American mistake of describing the inhabitants of Scotland as the Scotch. I guess the Underground thing is forgivable if she got the idea from Connie Willis but the other mistakes are just careless and detract from one's trust in the rest of the book.

Fortunately the rest is excellent, or at least as far as my knowledge of such things goes. Goonan chucks in a plethora of SF themes from bioengineering to utopian societies to quantum consciousness. She does a far better job of creating a novel around Roger Penrose's ideas than Penrose himself (with Brian Aldiss) managed in *White Mars*. Indeed Goonan actually had me thinking that perhaps Penrose isn't completely mad after all. It is all delightful and thought-provoking stuff. Not many books have me not only enjoying the scientific exposition but wanting to go out and read more about the theories on which they are based. Now where can I find a copy of *Mississippi Blues*?

The Bones of Time - Kathleen Ann Goonan - Tor - softcover

Women's Lore

When I pick up an old book for review there is usually a story behind it. This one is no exception. At the Women and Awards panel at Worldcon someone mentioned that Nicola Griffith had got

her Green Card largely on the basis of having won the 1993 Tiptree Award for her novel, *Ammonite*. Aha, I thought to myself, there's the answer. If I want to stay in the US, all I have to do is write an award-winning novel. Not a lot of chance of that, of course, but at least I could check out the book and see how it is done. Besides, Nicola is the only one of the guests at next year's Foundation convention in Liverpool whose work I am not familiar with.

Those of you who are regular readers will have spotted the words "Tiptree Award" and be expecting me to immediately dive off into a discussion of the feminist politics in the book. But actually *Ammonite* won the Award, not because of its politics, but rather because of its lack of them, or at least its lack of overt politics. In order to understand that you need some basic background on the plot.

Ammonite is set in a far future world in which the all-powerful Durallium Company scours the galaxy for planets to exploit. Grenchstom's Planet, GP for short and Jeep in the vernacular, was a bad investment. An earlier settlement a few hundred years ago had almost failed and had reverted to primitive society. On landing, the Company task force soon found out why. Jeep is home to a virulent virus that is fatal to all men and many women. The planet was quickly quarantined and the star cruiser Kurst put in orbit to make sure that the virus stayed confined on Jeep.

What then of the task force on the planet surface? Should they be abandoned, or should some effort be made to save them? And how had the previous settlers survived hundreds of years without men? Where had their children come from? There could be some valuable biological secrets to be unlocked on Jeep. The Company therefore gave permission for a government anthropologist, Marghe Taishan, to visit Jeep, test a potential vaccine, and study the natives.

The inevitable consequence of this set-up is a world entirely without men. And that is it: bald fact. The only man with a significant role in the book is Marghe's father, whom she remembers in flashbacks. Griffith makes no apologies for this; neither does she thrust the situation into our faces. And of course there is nothing wrong *with* a book that has no men in it. In her Judge's Notes for the Tiptree Ursula LeGuin asks us to consider how many women there are in, for example, *Moby Dick*. And she ends with a cute quote from Kate Clinton, "When women go off together it's called separatism. When men go off together it's called Congress".

Nevertheless there is some issue-dodging here. One of the themes of the book is that the Jeep task force has to face up to the fact that if the vaccine fails then Company may decide to cut its losses and abandon them. That would require them to go native. It might be expected that some of them would take badly to the prospect of having to join what is obviously a lesbian society. Yet this point is completely ignored. In effect Griffith is saying that in an all-female society sex between women is natural, inevitable, and unlikely to be an issue. Of course in the long term she is right, but it would have been an issue for the women of the task force, many of whom would have family back home or may even have lost lovers to the vaccine.

Much of the rest of the book is also fairly naive in its politics. It certainly isn't a utopian novel for all that the natives of Jeep seem to get on very well. There is quite clearly jealousy, greed and even megalomania present in their society. Nevertheless there is a persistent undercurrent of suggestion that big government and big corporations are inherently evil and that if we all lived in small, primitive communities we would get along together much more easily. This, I'm afraid, is escapist fantasy. One

only has to look at fandom to realise that the smaller a community the more vicious its politics becomes and the less tolerant it is of outsiders and deviance. Griffith does make the valuable point that trade and cultural exchange between communities is essential, but she still makes it all sound far too easy.

These failings aside, however, *Ammonite* is still a wonderful book. Griffith is an excellent writer and provided you are not seriously allergic to wishy-washy New Age philosophy you will quickly be drawn into the story and want to rush through it. I certainly enjoyed it, despite picking the politics apart as I went. I suspect that most of you would too.

Ammonite - Nicola Griffith - Del Rey - softcover

SF&F Web Sites

The confusion over Amy Harlib's reviews resulted in my having to take a look at some of the wide range of SF web sites that are available on the web. It is probably very stupid of me to review a bunch of other sites that do book reviews. Some of the sites listed here are professional (or more likely semi-professional) and it is probable that none of those would ever review *Emerald City*, or even link to it, because they would see me as a competitor. However, this isn't a commercial venture. I know I haven't a hope in hell of competing with professional sites in terms of graphic design. But I like to think that you will keep coming back here because the reviews are better. After all, if they were not, I would be wasting my time writing them. So, what have we got out there on the big, wide web?

I guess I should start with SciFi.com. This site specialises in news and media-related material, but I'm including it because of

Ellen Datlow's excellent fiction section (<http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/>). If you want good short fiction for free, this is the place to go.

Another well-known location is SF Site (<http://www.sfsite.com>). This does contain reviews: lots of them. And author interviews as well. The reviews are generally pretty good too, if perhaps a little formulaic (I suspect there may be a house style). Definitely worth a visit.

SFF Net (<http://www.sff.net>) is a somewhat different animal, being more of an attempt to create an online community than a magazine site. It also covers a wide range of genre fiction, including mystery, horror and romance. There's loads of stuff on the site. I particularly liked the idea of Basement Full of Books, an area in which writers can sell copies of hard-to-get editions of their books. Sadly Martha Wells has sold out of copies of *Element of Fire*. The site also hosts material for Clarion West Writers Workshop, Reading for the Future and a whole bunch of other worthwhile causes. A new venture is E-Stand in which e-zines can list information about themselves and their current contents. The lists are a bit thin right now because the service has only just started, but I expect it to grow.

A new site to me was SciFiNow (<http://www.scifinow.com>). It covers both media and books, but the selection of book reviewers is not as good as SFSite's. When I visited the site for the purpose of doing this review it would not load at all under Netscape and produced a bunch of Microsoft database error messages under Internet Explorer. Hopefully they will get it fixed soon.

SF Revu (<http://www.sfrevu.com>) is a rather more fannish site. The latest issue contains a Robert Sacks obituary and a Chicon report as well as the reviews. I must confess to being a little suspicious of someone who says in his Worldcon review that his favourite thing to do is

crash publishers' parties, but hey, everyone to their own. The rest of the site is fun and I have to admire the choice of books to review. The current issue features Sean McMullen and Iain Banks.

One that I have mentioned before but it is worth reminding you about is World's End

(<http://www.markchadbourn.com/worldsend.cfm>). Tom Arden's monthly fantasy column and Justina Robson's equivalent for SF are always good reading and thought provoking. The rest of World's End is aimed mainly at professional writers and probably of less interest.

A couple of new sites were launched at Worldcon, both aimed squarely at the magazine market and carrying book reviews, articles and fiction. Strange Horizons

(<http://www.strangehorizons.com>) is run by Mary Anne Mohanraj, who is a Wiscon regular. That should tell you quite a bit about the sort of material you will find on the site. It is also worth noting that Strange Horizons is a non-profit venture which means that it is free to promote the sort of thing that its editors like rather than lowest common denominator stuff. I think this could become a site to watch.

The other new site is Black Gate (<http://www.blackgate.com>).

Technically this is a paper magazine. The web site is intended as a taster for subscription material, but it contains quite a lot of articles. Content is entirely fantasy, though with the blurring between the genres you never can tell what will turn up. The Editor in Chief is John O'Neill who is the founder of SF Site. Despite that site's impressive appearance, John still sees it as a fanzine and wants to do something more sophisticated, hence the new venture. The first issue of the print magazine promises a new (and rather different) Elric story, which is certainly an impressive start.

They pay too, which means they should get good material and be able to select from it. I'll keep watching; it could be good.

Another British site can be found amongst the masses of material on the LineOne portal site. You can get there directly using

http://www.lineone.net/clubs/entertainment/sciencefiction/sciencefiction_front-d.html. The site is edited by Anne Gay who, it transpires, will be Guest of Honour at this year's Unicon in York. The best part of the site is 5th Column, in which various people, including a lot of big name authors, have a jolly good rant about something they feel strongly about. Much of the rest of the material is media-based. There is a book review column, but most of the reviews are too short to say anything interesting.

A quick repeat mention for a site that I commented on last issue. Wavelengths Online

(<http://www.wavelengthsonline.com>) is devoted primarily to SF&F fiction that has gay, lesbian, bi or transgendered themes. This is most certainly a place where you will find reviews of interesting books that don't get covered elsewhere.

Another site I have mentioned many times before because I write for it is Phantastes

(<http://www.phantastes.com>). Things have been a little quiet of late, the summer issue having gone AWOL because of pressure of work. Editor Staci Ann Dumoski has recently got back in touch with me and promises that a new issue will be out shortly. As it contains an interview I did with Jane Routley I'm very pleased about this.

And finally, here is a rumour. Well, hopefully more than a rumour. A high tech company called Matrix.net has decided that it would be really cool if it set up an SF magazine. The idea is apparently that hotshot programmers would much rather work for a company

that does all this neat sci-fi stuff. It sounds corny, but they have gone about it in the right way. There are promises of regular material from Bruce Sterling and Michael Swanwick, and William Gibson has apparently agreed to do a story. That's quality. The URL (<http://www.infinite.matrix.net>) just shows a place holder page right now, but keep an eye on it. Also check out Wired News as Craig Engler of Sci-fi.com is apparently doing them an article about the site.

Footnote

A few bits and pieces of information about Chicon 2000 have come in since last issue. Steven Silver kindly pointed out that having a Green Room table next to registration was Sharon Sbarsky's idea, not his. Commendable honesty, Steven, thank you, and well done Sharon.

Lloyd Penney related a tale of incompetence on behalf of the Hyatt front desk staff that beggars belief. Kevin, Raven and I had a small mix-up with our room too. How a hotel can get people's bookings right weeks beforehand and then completely mess things up on the day is beyond me. Must be bad software.

More vitriol has been heaped on the unfortunate art show staff in newsgroups. It sounds like many of the artists were very angry indeed.

An interesting review by author Steve Lazarowitz appeared on SFSite. Mostly it was very complimentary, but Steve also related the horror that he and many ordinary fans felt at the opinions expressed by some members of the "Do fans still read SF?" panel. People who are not regular members of fandom (fans rather than fen, if you will) clearly have no idea about the various pretensions and

feuds that fannish regulars take for granted. It is bad enough that we have people who look down on media fans. Having people made to feel unwelcome at Worldcon because they read books is just horrific. But that is just what Ben Yalow & co. managed to do. No wonder fandom has trouble getting new recruits.

The Foundation conference to be held in Liverpool next June has announced student/unemployed rates (£177/\$265) and day rates (£50). Remember that these rates include accommodation (where applicable) and all meals. Further details are in previous issues and, of course, on the convention web site (<http://www.liv.ac.uk/~asawyer/2001.html>), or contact me for more information.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl