

# EMERALD CITY #79

Issue 79

March 2002

An occasional 'zine produced by Cheryl Morgan and available from her at [cheryl@emcit.com](mailto:cheryl@emcit.com) or online at <http://www.emcit.com>

## Introduction

Ah, that's better, firmly back on track again. I wanted this issue out in time for Eastercon, and I made it easily. Sadly the reasons for my being able to get it done so quickly are not good. More of that later. But let's not delay any more with introduction. This issue previews the fabulous new novel by China Miéville. I should not keep you from that.

## In This Issue

Deep Cuts - China Miéville's new novel is launched

The Stuff of Life - David Brin works in clay

Germ Warfare - Greg Bear gets nasty with bacteria

Time Enough for T. Rex - Michael Swanwick goes visiting in the Mesozoic Era

Bay City Brawlers - Richard Morgan brings cyberpunk to the streets of San Francisco

Maze of the Cursed - Midori Snyder explores the mythic mysteries of Labirinto

Miscellany - all that other stuff

Footnote - the end

## Deep Cuts

Around the time of last year's Eastercon I began hearing rumours about China Miéville's new novel. "It is set in the same world as *Perdido Street Station*", the story went, "but it takes place a long way away from New Crobuzon. In fact the whole book takes place on a ship. That's not going to work, is it? I mean, the best thing about *Perdido* is the city". Boy, were those rumours wrong.

OK, so they were right about the ship, well, ships anyway. *The Scar* does indeed take place entirely at sea. And why not? The sea, after all, has a long tradition of being the source of nameless horrors. Did I hear someone say "tentacles"? Yes, *The Scar* has horrors of the deep a-plenty, and of course it has so much more, including a fabulous city, and some wonderful characters.

The vessel called the *Terpsichoria* is newly out of New Crobuzon, bound for the far off colony of Nova Esperium. The passengers, such as they are, are all fleeing something. There are bankrupt businessmen, pregnant nuns, even former associates of the now notorious terrorist, Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin. But by far the bulk of its human cargo (not to mention khepri, cacatae and other sentient beings) cannot fairly be described as passengers, and they cannot flee anything. They are

transportees, living effluent that New Crobuzon has chosen to use to fertilise a new land.

Bellis Coldwine is a passenger. She keeps her reasons for leaving New Crobuzon close to her chest, as she does everything else about her. It is generally the sweeter wines that are served cold, but Bellis is nothing but bitter. Nevertheless, fleeing though she may be, she loves her city with a passion, and when it seems it may be denied to her forever the prospect wounds her deeply and does not heal.

Tanner Sack, on the other hand, is a transportee. He has already been punished once; a pair of tentacles was grafted to his chest in the punishment factories of New Crobuzon. But perhaps transportation is the kindest thing that could be done to the remade. A new world, a possibility of a new life, and of course the sea, which is the only place that Tanner can now feel at home.

Silas Fennec joined the *Terpsichoria* late, but more than anyone else aboard he is fleeing for his life, not to mention the lives of millions of others. Fennec is a spy, a secret agent in the pay of the government of New Crobuzon. He bears with him news of vital import to his masters, news of an impending invasion. Fennec is a highly trained, finely honed weapon, but even the best of blades cannot always act alone. Those who encounter Fennec will be marked by the experience forever.

Far out to sea, the *Terpsichoria* encounters a very different weapon. Uther DouL is no delicate stiletto like Fennec; he is the flashing cutlass of a pirate kingdom, an unstoppable blade that cuts the links between the *Terpsichoria* and New Crobuzon in an instant. DouL is a one-man killing machine. From the moment that they encountered him, the passengers, crew and cargo of the *Terpsichoria* were sundered from the world they knew and grafted into a very different one.

Chief amongst the rulers of that world are The Lovers. Pirates are a fractious bunch, and to rise to the top in such company requires ferocious intelligence, a weapon such as Uther DouL, and above all an unbridled passion for power. The Lovers have all of these things, but they are also a team, and teams can be broken, set against each other. Not these two, however, for their mutual devotion is plain to see, on their faces, their chests, their backs arms and legs. Newly, with each challenge, they confirm their fierce loyalty to each other and their cause by cutting each other. Their scars form chains of devotion and zeal.

The great pirate city of Armada sails before no winds; it is too heavy, and the legion of vessels that comprises it could never be co-ordinated to run a consistent course. Instead it drifts, part at the mercy of the currents, part in response to the gentle nudging of steamships and clockwork ships within its body. But always, now, it moves according to the whims of The Lovers. The *Terpsichoria* and its passengers are, for the most part, an annoying inconvenience encountered along the road to an ultimate goal that encompasses a mighty drilling rig, the greatest beast in the seas, and the legacy of the mighty and mysterious Ghosthead Empire.

Yet pirates, as I have said, are a fractious lot. The Lovers may direct Armada, but they do not control it utterly. Other forces are at work. A city of criminals, Armada throws the social order on its head. Peasants and servants can become captains; the remade are made free and equal; and even the undead may become kings. Brooding in his dark vessel, the vampir Brucolac watches the plans of The Lovers with unease. For him, Armada is a place of freedom, a city on which he is not just safe to roam the streets, but able to rise into the ranks of respected politicians. For him the indescribable powers of the long-dead Ghosthead hold little attraction

if they mean risking the un-life that he enjoys. The vessels that make up Armada are lashed together with ropes and chains, but no such ties bind the city's leaders.

---

As you may have guessed by now, *The Scar* is another fantasy novel of stunning complexity and power. China, poor dear, is still coming to terms with the praise being heaped upon him, and was worried that his latest effort would disappoint. Not in this little corner of fandom, dear boy. The sense of awe is perhaps a little dimmed. I now have an idea of what to expect. But that expectation is far and above what I would anticipate from most other authors. I judge China against the likes of Gene Wolfe and M. John Harrison, and I do not find him wanting.

One criticism that many people had of *Perdido Street Station* was that it was too dense and difficult to get into. You can't say that about *The Scar*. The writing is much tighter, the pacing faster at the beginning. With this one the action sucks you in quickly even if you are not one of those people who are seduced by elegant prose.

I think too in literary terms. As you may have noticed, the imagery of wounds and scars runs deeply throughout the book. So too do the references. From the intelligent crayfish to the great sea snails to a restaurant called Unrealised Time that is named after a famous plaza in Viriconium. It occurs to me too that the whole idea of a mysterious floating pirate city existing unknown to the rest of the world is just the sort of concept that Jules Verne might have produced. (I know, by the way, that many other books, including Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, have used the motif of a city of ships, but I'm sure that no one has used it as well as China.) As for the Island of the Mosquito People, it might have come straight out of Homer or the Arabian Nights.

Then too we cannot have a China Miéville book that does not include politics in some shape or form. Armada provides an excellent opportunity for China to display his understanding of political processes and mechanisms. Each district of the city has its own form of governance, from the Brucolac's enforced autocracy through The Lovers populist demagogy to the impotent democracy of Curhouse, all political life is there. And it goes without saying that China understands the dynamics of coups and revolutions.

But I have gone on for long enough. It should be enough to say that *The Scar* is a wonderful book but, as one of my friends wrote to me about it, "there is wonderful, and then there is China". My Hugo nominees list for 2003 has just been started. What more can I say?

*The Scar* - China Miéville - Macmillan - publishers' proof

---

## The Stuff of Life

*So the goddess created an image in her mind, and it was of the stuff of Anu of the firmament. She dipped her hands in water and pinched off clay, she let it fall in the wilderness, and noble Enkidu was created.*

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*

---

Very many of mankind's creation myths involve the gods sculpting people out of clay and breathing life into them. Perhaps with good reason too, for some scientists believe that life only evolved on this planet because of the peculiar physico-chemical properties of clay. It is more likely, however, that the ancients simply recognised the magnificently malleable qualities of the substance. It was clearly possible to make people from the earth. Indeed, the ancient Chinese emperor, Ch'in, had an army of 8,000 life-size

model soldiers buried alongside him. Perhaps the Chinese sorcerers believed that the Emperor could breathe life into the army and bring it forth at the Empire's hour of need. So too, the legend of the golem has men able to animate clay. And what mythology postulates, science may yet make true.

---

---

Morning. You wake up on a cold slab. It is going to be a bad day. You know that as soon as you see your organic original slinking away into the bedroom, doubtless preparing for another taxing day of pleasure seeking and looking after his irreplaceable shell of complex carbon compounds. Worse still, looking at your skin, you discover that you are a green, a copy built solely for menial tasks. Most greens while away their time cleaning the house, tending the garden, and running errands to the shops. But when your owner is a well-known private eye, menial jobs probably means putting your mayfly life at risk of lasting far less than its allotted day by placing yourself in line for beatings and bullets from the bad guys. It ain't easy being clay.

---

---

So David Brin's new novel is not an Uplift story: far from it, in fact. *Kiln People* is entirely new territory, and is one of Brin's most ambitious novels to date. There have been many science fiction novels about body swapping and mind transplants. A lot of them are simply excuses for crude jokes about sex changes. But Brin uses the concept, at least in part, for some pointed social satire.

The twin obsessions of modern Californian life are safety and excitement. On the one hand, people want to be protected from all danger. On the other they want temporary release from their stifling, thickly padded lives. Provided, of course, that they have someone to sue if things go wrong. But what if it were possible to experience all those dangerous

things for real in another body, to upload the experiences into your organic mind if they were pleasurable, and ignore them if they were not because they only happened to a clay copy?

Once the idea takes hold, there are many things you can do with it. Fight to the death, consume the most outrageous cocktails of chemicals and indulge in every sexual perversion known to man, all in perfect safety. War can become a sport staged for television. All sorts of uses can present themselves. A mother can let her estranged husband take little Johnny's copy to the zoo in the knowledge that the real boy is safe with her. And if the copy happens to have a good time she can always choose not to let her son upload the happy memories least he start to think well of his father. Oh yes, David Brin knows modern life only too well.

Alongside the search for "safety" runs a parallel search for life extension. Many Americans spend a lot of their time working hard on living longer. Again Brin has this social trend tapped, and to a certain extent solved. No one in the world of *Kiln People* lives significantly longer in real time, but through the use of clay copies they can live many lives in parallel, and remember them all. However, the possibility that copying technology might one day lead to prolonging of life drives much of the plot of the book. In addition the pitifully short lives of the clay copies is used as a counterpoint to the comfort and selfishness of their organic originals.

But *Kiln People* is not only satire. Most body-swapping stories are mysteries, because of the endless possibilities for complication that they pose. So exactly who committed the crime, and was it the real person, or just a copy, or maybe someone else entirely wearing the real person's face?

Albert Morris, the hero of *Kiln People*, is a private detective who specialises in copyright crimes, in particular the illicit

copying of body images such as that of the famous dominatrix, Gineen Wammaker. His archenemy is Beta, a notorious counterfeiter who always manages to stay one step ahead of the law. No matter how many of Beta's operations Morris shuts down, the criminal mastermind always gets away and comes up with something new. But hey, it's a living, right? And the Labor Subcontractors Association is always happy to pay Morris to track down yet more illicit copies of famous people.

Then, one day, Albert gets an offer he can't refuse. Aeneas Kaolin, President of Universal Kilns, hires him to investigate the disappearance of one of his top scientists. Very soon, Albert finds himself involved with a case that ranges from industrial espionage to political terrorism to mass murder. It is no surprise that Beta turns out to be at the end of many of the threads of evidence that Albert pulls.

As a concept, *Kiln People* is excellent. It is a fresh and innovative approach to the body-swapping plot, and it gives rise to some excellent satire. I do, however, have a few reservations about the book.

Firstly, Brin can't resist the temptation to take petty digs at people he doesn't like. Goddess worshippers and hackers both feel the rough end of Brin's tongue, and this is beneath him. Brin is far too good a writer to have to resort to this sort of snide ridicule. If he has an argument to make, he should make it, not assume it.

Secondly, *Kiln People* is a Disneyfication of a detective story. This is partly because Brin is too nice to write the really nasty stuff, and partly because he can't decide whether he is writing cyberpunk or comedy. (OK, so there are no hackers, so it is not really cyberpunk. Let's call it Dark Future.) He would be fine with an Agatha Christie style mystery, but this book requires heavy weapons, brutal beatings, and language that would sear the paint off the walls. Brin can't even bring himself to use the word "dominatrix". When

Green Albert is struggling along on one arm and one leg he should be in excruciating pain, not be a figure of fun.

Finally, towards the end of the novel, Brin gets side-tracked into pondering the existential qualities of the human mind and the possibilities for transcendence inherent in the person-copying process. This means that the ending drags on interminably, with the villain making all sorts of bizarre speeches in a burlesque of mad scientist movies. Just as slapstick and Dark Future don't mix, neither do slapstick and debates about the fundamental nature of existence.

Now all that might make it sound as if I didn't enjoy the book, but that would be an unfair conclusion. Brin has set out to do something very different, and very ambitious. Personally I think it is the best book of his that I have read since *Startide Rising*. It fails in places only because its ambition is so high. I do hope that the book is well received and that Brin is encouraged to be equally adventurous in the future.

*Kiln People* - David Brin - Tor - hardcover

---

---

## Germ Warfare

I wanted to like this book, I really did. I mentioned a while ago that I went to see Greg Bear read from his latest novel at a Bay Area bookstore. I liked the extract I heard, and I liked what Bear said about the book. In particular Bear said that he was trying to make his work available to a wider audience. Hey, I'm all in favour of encouraging people to read SF, as long as they end up reading good books. Sadly *Vitals* is not a good book.

I think Bear was worried that his fans would complain about the science in the book being dumbed down. I'm not very familiar with Bear's work, but I can quite

imagine that his other books are far more rigorous. However, *Vitals* does have a genuine SF plot element. Ostensibly the book is about the possibilities of using bacteria to counteract aging. However, it soon veers into using bacteria to do something very different indeed. There is a lot of background stuff about the origins of life and undersea vents and other extreme environments where primaeval bacteria may have survived. I was happy with the science, though I can see that some hard SF fans might not have been.

I was unhappy with the rest of it. Bear has tried to write a conspiracy theory thriller. The first part of that, the conspiracy theory, he gets badly wrong. In a conspiracy theory novel you need to feel that the protagonist is genuinely privy to some great mystery that the rest of the world cannot see. Bear's bad guys are screamingly obvious. No conspiracy ever uses helicopter gunships in LA. It just isn't done. *Vitals* is a splatter movie equivalent of a conspiracy theory novel. If you go to see a splatter movie you don't expect to be afraid. You know that most of the cast will die in stupidly spectacular ways amidst fountains of fake blood. The conspiracy in *Vitals* is just like that. No, if you want conspiracy, read Phil Dick, he's a master at it.

Then there is the thriller bit, and here *Vitals* reminds me of Dan Simmons' *Darwin's Blade*, except not so well done. There is appealing to a wider audience, and there is appealing to the lowest common denominator. *Vitals* doesn't have the obsession with the model numbers of guns and cars like *Darwin's Blade* does, but neither does it have the driving pace. The male characters in *Vitals* are pathetic and unlovable, and most of the females are first introduced with discussion of their suitability as sex objects. Maybe this is what people want from a thriller, but it isn't what I want from a novel. But people probably don't want a plot that is confused, leaden and

uninteresting, which is what you get with *Vitals*. If you want a good thriller with lots of paranoid spy stuff, try *Declare* by Tim Powers.

The one brief high point in the book is a debate late on about the value of immortality research to mankind. It isn't entirely clear whether Bear is in favour or not, but if you check out *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan, reviewed elsewhere in this issue, you'll see the anti case put in much more detail. Bear is generally pro-technology, and it is good to see him consider the opposite view in this way.

I'm sure that Bear can do much better than he has done with *Vitals*. He wouldn't have won a Hugo and got to be a Worldcon Guest of Honor by writing bad books. And I do hope that he carries on trying to widen his audience. But I think he needs a bit more practice. If you want a really good, really disturbing biotech thriller, read *Mappa Mundi* by Justina Robson instead.

*Vitals* - Greg Bear - Del Rey - hardcover

---

---

## Time Enough for T. Rex

When I was a kid, like so many kids before and after me, I was fascinated by dinosaurs. Inability to draw put paid to my chances of any sort of career in biology, prehistoric or otherwise, but I never lost my love for those amazing creatures. Like so many of us, I would love to see one in the flesh.

---

---

*For a long, still moment, he stared at what was contained within, packed in ice. Then, dazedly, he reached inside and removed it. The flesh was cool under his hands. The skin moved slightly; he could feel the bones and muscles underneath.*

*It was the head of a Stegosaurus.*

---

---

Of course I have seen That Film. I even read the book, and was deeply disappointed until I realised that Michael Crichton writes novels with the intention of having them turned into screenplays. Consequently his work is much thinner than a novel that is intended to be a novel. It leaves less to cut out. The science didn't worry me too much, but I gather it wasn't up to much.

---

---

*Could someone have employed recombinant engineering to reassemble fragments of dinosaur DNA like in that movie he used to love back when he was a kid? Again, no. It was a pleasant fantasy. But DNA was fragile. It broke down too quickly. The most that had ever been recovered inside fossil amber had been tiny fragments of insect genes. The business of patching together the fragments? Ridiculous.*

---

---

But then if you are going to write a science fiction that has dinosaurs in it, how do you do it? Well of course you can go to another planet in which they evolved separately (or were rescued from Earth by helpful little Greys in flying saucers). Hey, but if you are going to have to invent some excuse anyway, why not go the whole hog and get the real thing.

---

---

*The man beside him turned a cheerful round face his way and stuck out a hand. "Hi! I'm Bill Metzger, and this is my wife, Cedella. We're from ten years forward."*

---

---

Now that is the way to start a book. 17 pages in and already we have a very recently live Stegosaurus and time travel. And some lovely writing along the way. *Bones of the Earth* by Michael Swanwick sucked me in with charm and bravado and ambition. Sadly it didn't maintain that frenetic pace throughout, though I

did very nearly miss my stop on the train because I was so engrossed. But hey, it was great fun.

---

---

Health warning: do not read this book if you are a Fundamentalist Christian. You may suffer heart problems as a result. Patriotic Americans are also at risk.

---

---

Throughout the book Swanwick has a lot of fun. He takes side swipes at bad science, he lays in ferociously to Creationists, and he pokes the occasional hole in the pretentious of people who think on time scales shorter than the geological. He even drops in a few dinosaur jokes.

---

---

*Leyster was able to add several rare dinosaurs to his life list. He got clear sightings of betrachovenators, cryptoceratops, fubarodons, and jabberwockias. Once he even saw a Cthuluraptor imperator in all its terrifying splendour.*

---

---

Fun, however, does not a great novel make. There has to be more to it than that. In particular with a time travel story, you have to grapple with the inevitable paradoxes; the fact that the heroes could go back and rescue their friends the instant before they die; and that they could travel into the future and find out what happened, which kind of negates all of the suspense. Swanwick struggles bravely with all this, and does a competent, but not outstanding job. As time travel stories go, I much preferred Connie Willis's *To Say Nothing of the Dog*.

I note also that Swanwick is famous for his skill at writing short stories, and this novel reminds me very strongly of a rather long short story. It is fun, it is clever, but it is somehow unsatisfying. Now certainly it has plot and character development, but the back-story is so

clearly a convenient McGuffin that you are left feeling that you have been had.

Don't let that stop you from reading the book, though. For me it made the difference between the book's making my Hugo shortlist, which I thought it was going to after the first few chapters, and not making it, which is where it is now. It really is a delightful piece of writing, and it has a truly fabulous explanation for the extinction of the dinosaurs. Besides, if you love dinosaurs, you'll love this book.

*Bones of the Earth* - Michael Swanwick - Eos - hardcover

---

## Bay City Brawlers

Richard Morgan (no relation) is the latest in the long line of authors riding the wave of the British SF Renaissance. He teaches English at Strathclyde University, and thus will doubtless find himself compared to Banks and Macleod, but Morgan is not another writer of political space opera. His first novel, *Altered Carbon*, is pure cyberpunk, and about as hard edged as it comes.

The first thing that caught my attention about the book is that it is set in San Francisco. Hey, there's the TransAmerica Pyramid right there on the cover! So how is a Brit going to cope writing about my adopted back yard? Fine. He knows which bridge is which, he seems to know the streets (at least he knows the main ones well enough for me to not bother getting a map to check the others), and he knows the weather. If he didn't come here to check the place out he's done a fine job of research.

I have only three (very small) complaints. For starters you'd be unlikely to find a hotel called the Hendrix here. That would be in Seattle. San Francisco would have a hotel called the Garcia (or perhaps just

The Dead) and its AI probably wouldn't be able to hold an intelligent conversation, being stoned most of the time. Also the local councils of the Bay Area would rather see the whole conurbation disappear in a nuclear fireball than combine to form a single jurisdiction called Bay City, no matter how sensible such a move might be. And finally, given the amount of sex in the book, how come nearly all of it is straight? In San Francisco? Come on!

The next thing to catch my eye was that this was yet another book about mind transfer and immortality. As with the Brin book, Morgan postulates that some means has been found of copying the human mind, but whereas Brin moves his minds into artificial copies, Morgan moves them into other people. Minds can be saved and stored after death (provided that your head is in good condition) and bodies can be stored too. A standard means of punishing criminals is to put their minds in storage. It is much cheaper than keeping them in jail, and there is the possibility of someone taking a fancy to the vacant bodies and buying them while the owner is elsewhere. It is all good money for the prison service.

For the rich, or course, there is cloning. You can make copies of your body at any age, back up your mind to silicon on a regular basis, and simply move from one clone to the next as the fancy takes you, or as your existing "sleeve" wears out. It is also easier to travel by having clones of yourself posted at different points around the world and having your mind digitally transmitted from one to another. No more aircraft, and no more jet lag.

The hero of *Altered Carbon*, Takeshi Kovacs, has another use for the technology. He is a highly trained mercenary, a former member of the UN's elite Envoy Corps. In Kovacs' line of business, bodies get lost on a regular basis, generally very messily. And sometimes you need the right body for



the job. Solid bruiser, or elegant ninja? It depends on the mission.

The novel starts with Kovacs being hired by Laurens Bancroft, a “meth” (short for Methuselah), one of those people rich and powerful enough to have lived hundreds of years in a sequence of clones. Bancroft recently killed himself – fried his head to pieces destroying all possibility of resurrection. But of course he has back-ups and clones aplenty in a secret, secure store on Alcatraz. Bancroft knows he isn’t stupid. Why bother shooting yourself when you know you will be brought back? So despite the compelling evidence to the contrary, and the unwillingness of the local police to tackle a seemingly obvious case, he’s convinced he must have been murdered. He hires Kovacs to find out who did it, and why.

Before long our hero is embroiled in the labyrinthine plots and jealousies of the very rich, and the seedy street life of the Bay Area. This is Dark Future with a vengeance. There are big guns, mind-twisting cocktails of drugs, vicious gangsters, pretty and oppressed whores (most of whom end up getting brutally murdered), blood and gore by the bucket load, and language so tasty I’m worried it might affect the book’s marketability in the US. Still, China gets away with it, so hopefully Morgan will too.

There isn’t a lot of politics in the book (not much room for it with all that blood and gore and sex). Morgan has a bit of a thing about Catholics and their refusal to make use of medical advances. In the book they have taken a stance against mind transfer, which of course makes them ideal murder victims, as they won’t be brought back to testify. But the main political edge is simply that of the underdog against the rich and powerful. American SF, particularly Heinlein, has a tendency to promote wealth and immortality as being the provenance of the good guys. Indeed, the American Dream is often to become rich and immortal. But Morgan, probably

quite rightly, holds that the only people to get the goodies will be the people nasty and ruthless enough to fight their way to the top.

---

---

*Human life has no value. Haven't you learned that yet, Takeshi, with all you have seen? It has no value, intrinsic to itself. Machines cost money to build. Raw materials cost money to extract. But people? They reproduce like cancer cells, whether you want them or not.*

---

---

See what I mean? That was the villain of the novel holding forth on the place of humans in the world economy. Morgan knows that the little guy can never win, not without becoming as bad as the big guys, but his message is that you should never stop trying to make a difference. Sometimes justice can be done.

All in all, I was very impressed. As first novels go, this was very competent indeed. I have a few worries about the amount of sex in the book. It was hard to sort out whether the plethora of dead whores was a device to demonstrate the nastiness of the bad guys, a piece of gritty realism, or just there because Morgan likes writing about killing pretty girls. I wasn’t impressed that the only time the hero got downloaded into a female body it was for the purpose of being tortured, and there is no doubt that Morgan has an obsession with breasts. But all of that will probably go down very well with adolescent boys who will hopefully buy the book in large quantities. You should buy it too. It is very good.

*Altered Carbon* - Richard Morgan - Gollancz - softcover

---

---

## Maze of the Cursed

Have you heard of Labirinto? Have you heard of the Maze? Whatever ails you, you can go there and be cured. I have heard it told.

---

---

*There are wonders hidden inside the maze. Cities rise out of a mist in a single night and fade away in the morning. Forests grow there and an ocean whose waves lap upon a shore of diamond sand. It's peopled with the old gods, with devils and demons. Even dragons...*

---

---

Could it be possible? Why of course. You believe in magic, don't you? Besides, we are in Renaissance Italy, where all sorts of things happen. Why, you only have to sit in the market square and watch a play to know that the strangest things can come true.

The play, of course, will be in the tradition of the Commedia del Arte. It will feature well known characters such as the clown, Arlecchino, the pretty Columbine, lecherous old Pantelone, boastful Il Capitano, the stuffy clerk, Il Dottore, and, of course, the star crossed lovers, the Innamorati.

And here they all are, come to seek absolution in the Maze of the Cursed. They don't know their roles right now, and neither do we, but they will find them. We see them as ordinary citizens of Venice, Milan and Labirinto. They are people with problems. Lorenzo the poet who is unable to write, Simonetta the whore who fears losing her youth, Fabrizio the would be actor who stutters on stage, Rinaldo the duelling master cursed to love killing, Erminia the siren who can't sing, and several others. And, most importantly, Anna Forsetti, the mask maker, the genius who makes the characters of the Commedia come to life in clay. In searching for answers to their difficulties, they will find out more about themselves than they perhaps wanted to

know, and also the secret of the great maze.

Midori Snyder won the Mythopoeic Award for *The Innamorati*, and it is easy to see why. The maze itself is reminiscent of Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*, a Tardis-like venue full of creatures from myth. Snyder's handling of the Commedia characters and of Greek and Roman myth is excellent. From a fantasy point of view, this is a truly wonderful piece of work.

On the fiction side I have a few reservations. Snyder has tried to use the whole cast of the Commedia, and in doing so has left herself rather too many stories to tell. I would have preferred fewer characters and a little more about each one. It seemed that they came to their answers a little too easily. She also needed a background plot, something to make the book more than just a literary conceit about ancient plays. She has done that with the story of the maze itself, but again the story is a little thin, and it doesn't connect with the other main players.

Overall, however, this is a very fine book. I guess that one or two people might be offended by the enthusiastic coupling that goes on (and not just between the satyrs and the nymphs). But to my mind the sumptuous descriptions of the delights of human flesh work just as well as the parallel descriptions of delicious Italian food. I loved it. I think you will too.

*The Innamorati* - Midori Snyder - Tor - softcover

---

---

## Miscellany

### Skullduggery

Well, it has been another thoroughly depressing month at ConJosé. Those of you who are on smoffish newsgroups will already have seen much of the goings in

gory detail, and those who are not will doubtless be able to get a condensed version from news hounds such as Dave Langford and Mike Glycer in due course. I'm not going to say a lot about it here.

What you may not be aware of, however, is that subsequent to the events being so hotly debated, I was threatened with a lawsuit for slander. All I had done was relate the substance of the discussion at the February SFSFC Board Meeting to one of the few people who had a clear need to know about it. Other people had been discussing the matter much more widely, and in much more prejudicial terms than I did, but no threats were made against them. Furthermore, when I got some legal advice, I was told that the case against me was so flimsy that if action were taken I would have a very good case for a counter-suit for abuse of process.

Well, these things happen, and I have nothing against the person who made the initial complaint against me. She has been under a lot of pressure, and she probably acted in anger and haste. We've all done that at times. But I am deeply disappointed with the reaction of some of ConJosé's senior management. When committee politics gets ugly like this, the right thing to do is to stamp firmly on it and try to calm people down; sadly that didn't happen in this case.

Even so I would not have cared much had the potential consequences not been so serious. Any American citizen faced with such a threat could have laughed it off. But I am not an American citizen; I am an immigrant worker. Any trouble with the Law at all would seriously damage my chances of ever getting a green card, and it might even jeopardise my right to remain in the country. Indeed, since the passage of the last batch of anti-terrorism legislation, the US immigration service apparently has the right to hold immigrant workers indefinitely without trial, or deport them, with no right of appeal, or even any right to hear what

charges are laid against them. Not that I think I am likely to be mistaken for a terrorist, but it doesn't help your comfort zone to know that if a miscarriage of justice does happen there is nothing you can do about it.

Now that we've all had a bit of time to look at the facts and untangle the chain of hearsay that led to this, things have calmed down a lot (much to the distress of partisans on both sides, hence the recent furore on SMOFs). As far as I can see, no action is going to be taken against me. Sadly I have no expectation that similar attacks will not be made in the future. I have not lost my enthusiasm for *Emerald City*, for fandom in general, and for Worldcons in particular. But my experience of ConJosé has been poisoned beyond repair. As far as I am concerned, I would be very happy if I could have nothing further to do with ConJosé and SFSFC.

Unfortunately...

As part of the attempts to patch things up and get the operation back on track, Kevin has been asked to co-chair the convention. There is not a lot I can do to help him. The atmosphere on the committee is such that I'm concerned that if I got involved again attacks would be made against me with a view to embarrassing Kevin and undermining his authority. It is best for him if I stay out of the way. In any case, knowing Kevin he's going to be working 48 hours a day, 10 days a week, to try to get the convention back on track. My part in all this is to try to make sure he gets sleep and food occasionally, and to keep him happy.

Now you may well be asking yourselves, "What does all this mean for the convention?" Well, the good news is that we have picked a reasonably good time to have the traditional committee row. A few months earlier would have been better, but six months out is still plenty of time to pull things around if people are prepared to concentrate on running a

convention rather than bickering. It is far better to discover that you have a dysfunctional committee now than to do so just before the con (as appears to have been the case with San Antonio) or not until the event (as per parts of MilPhil). Besides, we have a lot of very good people working on the con already, and if they are allowed to get on with their jobs they will do them well.

Furthermore, it is very hard to wreck a Worldcon so badly that the Permanent Floating Worldcon Committee can't rescue it. The wonderful band of volunteers who turn up to work every Worldcon are very competent and, what's more, are far more interested in the success of the event than in fannish politics. Which is how it should be. We might not end up with the wonderful Worldcon that Kevin and I had hoped for, but we won't have a disaster.

Of course after five and a half years of working my butt off to make a success of this convention, I am deeply disappointed not to be able to see it to fruition. However, it will be easier on Kevin this way, and I simply can't afford to risk anything like this happening again. It took me four years to get a job in California, and I don't intend to lose that just because I'm deemed an expendable pawn in some stupid fannish feud. It therefore remains only for me to thank all of the people who have been happy to work with me over the past few years, and in particular all those who sent me messages of support when I had to duck out. I'm sorry I wasn't able to say more at the time. Hopefully I will be able to attend the convention, and I look forward to seeing you all there.

---

### BSFA Awards Nominees

Sorry, I am a bit late with these. The final ballot and award ceremony will take place at Eastercon. I'll be there to report the results.

**Best Novel:** *American Gods* - Neil Gaiman (Feature); *Pashazade* - Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight); *Bold as Love* - Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz); *The Secret of Life* - Paul McAuley (Voyager); *Chasm City* - Alastair Reynolds (Gollancz); *Lust* - Geoff Ryman (Flamingo).

**Short Story:** *Under the Saffron Tree* (Interzone 166) - Cherith Baldry; *First to the Moon* (Spectrum SF 6) - Stephen Baxter & Simon Bradshaw; *Children of Winter* (Interzone 163) - Eric Brown; *Myxamatoxis* (Interzone 165) - Simon Ings; *Wind Angels* (Interzone 171) - Leigh Kennedy; *Isabel of the Fall* (Interzone 169) - Ian MacLeod.

**Artwork:** *Roach Motel* (cover, Interzone 166) - Dominic Harman; Cover of *Omegatropic* (Baxter) - Colin Odell; Cover of *Gridlinked* (Asher) - Steve Rawlings; *Heart of Empire* CD-Rom - Bryan Talbot; Cover of *Pashazade* (Grimwood) - The Whole Hog.

**Non-Fiction:** *Omegatropic* - Stephen Baxter (BSFA); *Terry Pratchett* - Andrew M Butler (Pocket Essentials); *Tim Burton* - Michelle LeBlanc & Colin Odell (Pocket Essentials); *Storming the Bastille* - Justina Robson  
([http://www.thealienonline.com/archive/sections/news/content/lunar\\_park/](http://www.thealienonline.com/archive/sections/news/content/lunar_park/)); *The Best Introduction to the Mountains* - Gene Wolfe (Interzone 174).

---

### Nebula Final Ballot

When I remember to read my copy of Dave Stewart's excellent *SF in Ireland* newsletter I am far more up to date with the awards news. This year SFWA has managed to demonstrate complete lack of taste (or at least massive parochialism) by ignoring *Perdido Street Station*. Here's the shortlist.

**Best Novel:** *The Quantum Rose*, Catherine Asaro; *Eternity's End*, Jeffrey A. Carver; *Mars Crossing*, Geoffrey A. Landis; *A Storm of Swords*, George R.R. Martin; *The Collapsium*, Wil McCarthy; *The Tower at*

*Stony Wood*, Patricia A. McKillip; *Declare*, Tim Powers; *Passage*, Connie Willis.

**Best Novella:** *A Roll of the Dice*, Catherine Asaro; *May Be Some Time*, Brenda Clough; *The Diamond Pit*, Jack Dann; *Radiant Green Star*, Lucius Shepard; *The Ultimate Earth*, Jack Williamson.

**Best Novelette:** *To Kiss the Star*, Amy Sterling Casil; *The Pottawatomie Giant*, Andy Duncan; *Undone*, James Patrick Kelly; *Louise's Ghost*, Kelly Link; *Auspicious Eggs*, James Morrow; *Dance of the Yellow-Breasted Luddites*, William Shunn.

**Best Novelette:** *Kaddish for the Last Survivor*, Michael A. Burstein; *The Cure for Everything*, Severna Park; *The Elephants on Neptune*, Mike Resnick; *Mom and Dad at the Home Front*, Sherwood Smith; *Wound the Wind*, George Zebrowski.

**Best Script:** *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Ethan Coen and Joel Coen; *X-Men*, Tom DeSanto & Bryan Singer (story); David Hayter (screenplay); *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, James Schamus, Kuo Jung Tsai, and Hui-Ling Wang; *The Body*, Joss Whedon (Buffy the Vampire Slayer).

The winners will be announced at the Annual Nebula Banquet, which takes place this year in Kansas City.

---

### Clarke Shortlist

And still on the awards trail, here are the finalists for this year's Arthur C. Clarke Award.

*Bold as Love*, Gwyneth Jones (Gollancz); *Fallen Dragon*, Peter F. Hamilton (Macmillan); *Mappa Mundi*, Justina Robson (Macmillan); *Pashazade*, Jon Courtenay Grimwood (Earthlight); *Passage*, Connie Willis (Voyager); *The Secret of Life*, Paul McAuley (Voyager).

The winner will be announced in a ceremony at the Science Museum, London, on Saturday 18 May.

---

### Fame and Fortune

All in all it hasn't been a bad month. Sure, some bad things have happened over ConJosé, but thanks to that, and a generous financial year-end bonus at work, I am able to attend Eastercon. And, I have discovered, I have become famous. Wiscon progress reports regularly list "other attending luminaries", that is the people who are not Guests of Honor but whom the ConCom think that attendees will want to know will be there. And this year, right up there with people like Suzy McKee Charnas and Mary Doria Russell, was little old me. Chuffed? I practically fell over in the Sunnyvale Post Office. Thanks girls!

---

### Footnote

Well, there we go for another month. It is great to be back on schedule again, even in such distressing circumstances. Seeing as I am off to Eastercon, my top priority now is to get the new Brian Stableford novel, *Dark Ararat*, read before I see Brian again. Also on the list for next issue are the new Liz Williams and the new Jon Courtenay Grimwood, plus any other good new British stuff that I pick up at Eastercon. There's a new Sheri Tepper out too. Someone tell me that it isn't as bad as *The Fresco*, please.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl