

EMERALD CITY #84

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

Introduction

Wow, looks like I made it: three separate issue of *Emerald City* in one month. *Cheryl's Guide to San José* has been on the web site for a while now, although only in PDF form. I was right not to include it in this issue because it eventually ran to 11 or 12 pages (depending on your paper format). The other special issue, nicknamed *The Bay Area Collection*, which contains a whole pile of reviews of books set in the Bay Area, will hopefully also be up as a PDF when this issue goes out. I plan to produce HTML versions of both issues after the con. If anyone wants a plain text version of either special issue, let me know and I'll send you one.

For various complicated reasons it looks like I won't actually be able to attend the convention myself. Sorry about that, I was looking forward to meeting a bunch of readers. Sometimes things just turn out like this.

Those of you who remember the Footnote from last issue will note that I've changed the contents slightly from those advertised. Partly this was a result of needing a few shorter books that I could read so as to get everything read in time. And partly it is because it seemed a real shame, in this month of a Bay Area Worldcon, to not feature a book by a Bay Area writer when I had a new one to hand. Hence the presence of Lisa Goldstein in this issue. I'll get back to Australian authors next month.

Meanwhile, on with the regular service.

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The Price of Magic - John Dee and Rabbi Loew help Lisa Goldstein make magic in ancient Prague

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Return to Oz

Well, it took me almost a year, but finally I managed to persuade my new employers to send me on a business trip to Australia.

Much of this, of course, was sentimental. I got to visit old haunts, see old friends, and generally feel homesick. And, this being me and Australia, a lot of sports was involved. The glorious Wallabies delivered me two fine victories over South Africa and New Zealand. Beating the All Blacks at any time is a miracle, but I wish the boys would stop waiting until the last minute of the game to do so; it is bad for my heart. In addition, even my beloved Richmond Tigers bounced back from an awful season in the AFL to record only their third win of the year. Almost everything went right, except of course my going down with an absolute killer of a cold in Sydney, just at the point when I had to actually get up on platform and lecture. More than a week later and I'm still not over it. Bleagh.

While I was there, however, I did manage to find my way to Slow Glass, Galaxy and a number of other bookshops and generally check up on what is happening with the Australian SF&F scene.

The good news is that I came back with a pile of books. The bad news is that a substantial proportion of these are the result of desperate efforts by Australian publishers to find a new Sara Douglass. If you are female and can chuck a few standard fantasy cliches into a multi-thousand page romance trilogy it doesn't seem too hard to get published in Australia right now. Some of it is promising, some of it less so, but judging from what I have read so far the publishers are rushing stuff out without much care.

I also had a long chat with Rose Mitchell about the state of Australian plans for another Worldcon. It sounds like all of the enthusiasm that was generated by Aussiecon Three has long since evaporated. Rose said that she even had trouble drumming up fannish interest in Convergence, the big NatCon that was held in Melbourne earlier this year. Australian fans, it seems, are far more interested in organizing small-scale social events than in running conventions. The writing community has a little more ambition, but by themselves they probably couldn't run a Worldcon.

Much of the lack of interest in Worldcons stems from the usual Australian paranoid theory that any Australian bid is bound to be voted down if it has competition from anywhere else in the world, but especially from the US. I remember well how worried the Australians on the 99 bid team were about Zagreb. It doesn't matter how much I tell folks in Australia that the people who vote in Worldcon site selections love to travel, they are convinced that any Australian bid is certain to be opposed by a bid from the US and that the US bid will win by miles.

And of course they all believe that the new No Zone voting system, which places far fewer limits on when American cities can bid, makes the situation much worse. I remember one Australian fan writing to me that the only way a Worldcon could ever get to Australia under No Zone is if a group of US fans ran the bid. Whereas in fact nothing is more likely to get an Australian bid voted down than if it is perceived as not being run by Australians. It is sad that there is so much misunderstanding across the Pacific, but there doesn't seem to be much that can be done about it.

Far more serious, however, is the problem of the amount of work that goes into winning and running a Worldcon. Six years is a very large amount of time out of anyone's life, especially if it is going to involve lots of trans-Pacific flights to promote the bid and convention. It has been very clear all along that you don't need three years to organize a Worldcon. It is also very clear to those of us who have been through the process that a year off does far more harm than good. And conditions in the hotel industry change. It may well have been the case when the 3-year lead-time was introduced that it was necessary to book facilities that far in advance. But Rose, who runs conventions for her job as well as within fandom, says it is hard to get any facilities to commit to anything more than a year in advance these days. I come back once again to Seth Breidbart's observation at the Chicon 2000 Business Meeting: almost everyone who has been through the six-year Worldcon experience is in favor of reducing the lead time, but we keep getting voted down by people who have not had the benefit of that experience.

One final note on Australian Worldcons. I have at last managed to visit Darling Harbour, where the Sydney convention center is situated. And I have to say that from the outside a more perfect venue for a Worldcon would be hard to imagine (and yes that does mean I think it is better than San Francisco). It is a beautiful site, the area is packed with tourist shops and restaurants, there are an Imax theatre, a fine maritime museum, and one of the world's greatest aquariums all on site. There are two hotels adjacent to the convention center and more within a short walk. A monorail service connects the area to the shopping center and other hotels. Sadly Rose tells me that the convention center itself is entirely exhibition space and there is simply nowhere to hold the sort

of discussion panels that are so central to the Worldcon experience. Hopefully one day Sydney will learn the same lesson that Glasgow's SECC has learned and will create some meeting spaces.

Grand Opera

In their long crushing reign, the Inhibitors had learned fifteen distinct ways to murder a dwarf star.

One thing you learn very quickly about Al Reynolds is that he doesn't do things by halves. The new book, *Redemption Ark*, is a direct sequel to *Revelation Space*, and much of the action happens on a galactic scale. The bad guys, the Inhibitors, are machine intelligences who work on a planning horizon of several billion years. And yes, they do blow up a star. They dismantle several planets in order to build the weapon with which to do it. There is nothing shy and retiring about an Al Reynolds space opera.

For the benefit of those of you still working your way through the first two books, it is not absolutely necessary to have read *Chasm City* before reading *Redemption Ark*. It does help to know who people like Sky Haussmann, Zebra and The Mademoiselle are, but it isn't essential. You must, on the other hand, have read *Revelation Space* first, because the new book takes up the tale of Ilia Volkova, Ana Khouri and the *Nostalgia for Infinity* once again. Most importantly, it deals with the origins of the Hell Class weapons that *Nostalgia* carries with her in her hold, and the attempts of the mysterious Conjoiners to get them back. We discover who the Conjoiners are, where they came from, and how they came to corner the market in starship

drives and really, really nasty pieces of military hardware.

If that was all that there was to it, this would simply be space opera - no better than Flash Gordon or Star Wars. But it isn't. Reynolds, remember, works as an astronomer for the European Space Agency. He understands space, he's up to date with cosmological theory, he knows that he is talking about. In other words, his writing is very fine science fiction.

Consequently, along the way the reader becomes familiar with David Deutsch's Multiverse theory, and with the idea of starship drives that utilize inertia-suppression technology based on Zero Point Field theory. Now how many science fiction writers do you know who play with ideas like that?

Sorry, not familiar with these ideas? Well the Multiverse thing is simply the idea that new universes are generated whenever quantum reality is required to choose between two states. That's been around for ages, and there are a couple of books that use it reviewed in the ConJosé special edition of *Emerald City*. As for Zero Point Field theory, those of you asking about that obviously failed to read Will McCarthy's excellent *The Collapsium* when I recommended it. For your benefit, the idea is that mass is not really an intrinsic property of matter, it is simply a consequence of the interaction between matter and the mysterious, all-pervading Zero Point Field. If you can somehow tweak that interaction then you can reduce your inertia and consequently travel faster. It is easy really.

Reynolds even goes on to show that if you are really stark-raving bonkers you can tweak the interaction so hard that you skip through the photonic state of matter and land up on the other side as tachyonic mass capable only of

travelling faster than light. Of course if anything goes wrong with the process, the resulting shock wave through quantum reality can have bizarre side-effects within the structure of the Multiverse, but you don't want to know about that. Really, you don't want to know.

So where were we? Oh yes, the *Nostalgia for Infinity* is still parked in the Resurgam system, the Captain is steadily succumbing further to the effects of the Melding Plague, and Volkova and Khouri are trying hard to disappear lest someone on Resurgam work out that they were responsible for the audacious kidnapping of Dan Sylveste. Meanwhile the Hell Class weapons are sitting around quietly doing nothing much, and the Conjoiners are starting to do something about getting them back. In fact, they have sent their two top operatives, Skade and Clavain, after them. And why, after so long, are they so keen to get their hands on their most deadly hardware? Not for the war with the Demarchists, which they have just about won. No, the Conjoiners want the weapons for the purpose for which they were built. They want them to confront the Inhibitors, whom they have heard are about to launch an assault on human space. Little do they know that the Inhibitors have already arrived, and are busy taking apart planets in the Resurgam system.

Ah, of only it were all that simple. But of course it isn't. So along the way we need to have various fallings out of supposedly allied parties, some spectacular space battles, a little piracy (stealing a lighthugger, nothing small, remember), some populist insurgency, and the occasional tantrum from certain pieces of scary, high-powered weaponry. Not forgetting, of course, mysterious Miss Felka, the product of a failed Conjoiner genetic experiment whose

brain is so active that she'll die if she can't find a constant supply of fiendishly complex intellectual puzzles to keep it busy. No, Al Reynolds does not do things by halves. He does things on a scale unimaginable by most science fiction writers, and he does them backed with a solid grounding in physics that lets you know that there's little fanciful in what he writes. This is the way science fiction was always meant to be. It has sense of wonder oozing out of every page. It has pace, it has drama, it has wonderful characters and galaxy-spanning vision. If this book does not get a Hugo nomination there is something very, very wrong with the system indeed.

Redemption Ark - Al Reynolds - Gollancz - hardcover

Love Triangles

In the sequel to *Bold as Love*, Gwyneth Jones gives up all pretence that she is not writing an Arthurian romance. The new book, *Castles Made of Sand*, deals with the middle period of Arthur's reign and with the inevitable love triangle between Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere.

Except of course that it doesn't, because these are all shadows, mythic archetypes that lurk behind Jones's fascinating study of the Matter of Modern Britain. The up-front story, the public face of the series, tells us how Ax Preston's Rock 'n' Roll Reich beings to fall apart under various pressures, not the least of which is the strain on the ruling triumvirate caused by their tangled love life. Thus Ax tries to find peace and purpose by travelling the world as a respected statesman and diplomat, Sage begins to lose himself in his relentless mystical

quest for ZenSelf, and Fiorinda is left to juggle the reins of power as various factions, most notably the Pagan Movement, seek to wrest power from the rag-tag collection of pop stars who seem to have inherited it by accident.

With our heroes plunged into conjugal disharmony, there is much less music in this book, but to compensate there is much more of the science fiction and fantasy that was only hinted at in the first volume. In particular, the magical element comes to the fore as Fiorinda's long absent father, Rufus O'Niall, returns to the scene intent on reclaiming his daughter from the young upstarts who have stolen her.

Along the way there is much sharp political observation of the state of modern Britain. In particular Jones seems to have little time for pagan movements who play at ritual and fantasize about ancient societies. We Celts, she points out, were a bloodthirsty lot and nothing like the peace-loving, democratic people portrayed in so many modern fantasy novels. Consequently Jones's Pagan Movement is comprised of people who are into blood sacrifices, the rule of the sword, and a Nazi-style obsession with racial purity. We also see, courtesy of Ax's disastrous visit to the USA, some sharp and hilarious observations on American politics that are likely to have most American readers seething with fury.

The center of the books is, of course, the intense study of a triangular polyamorous and bisexual relationship, for which I suspect that a Tiptree nomination is a strong possibility. The politics is generally sensible and always entertaining, if perhaps only truly understandable to people who have lived for a long time in Britain. I'm a little nervous about Jones's continual emphasis on the ambiguous gender of the transsexual character, Roxanne

Smith, who seems to have settled well into a female role. However, it isn't clear whether Jones is making a political point about refusing to accept transsexuals as women, or whether she's just trying to remind her readers of Roxanne's nature.

Regardless of the politics, however, this is once again a hugely entertaining book and one which would be a hot favorite to follow its predecessor to the Clarke Award were it not for the fact that it has *The Scar* and *Redemption Ark* to contend with. The more open Arthurian references, plus the occasional mythological mixing from other areas of the British collective subconscious, also add to the entertainment value.

And now, presumably, a resolution. If the series is true to its Arthurian roots, then Ax must die, Fiorinda enter a nunnery and Sage go off to pine his life away in France. And then, of course, there is young Marlon, Sage's son from a previous relationship, who is presumably Galahad and will therefore have a major part to play in the end game. But I would be so disappointed in Jones if she managed to do anything that was expected of her, except of course to surprise and delight us, which I am sure she will.

Castles Made of Sand - Gwyneth Jones - Gollancz - softcover

Spooky Stuff

When you are looking for short books to read, something aimed at kids is always a good bet. Fewer pages, bigger print, yes, I'll go for that. And as for quality, well it is by Neil Gaiman, did you have to ask?

Gaiman's latest book, *Coraline*, has been a long time in the making. He began

writing it for his daughter, Holly, when she was five. She's now fifteen. Reading it, you wonder what a five-year-old would make of something so scary. But as Gaiman says, kids are often able to cope calmly with things that would terrify adults. *Coraline* is a good example of this, in more ways than one.

Our heroine is quite an ordinary girl. Sure her parents both work from home, and I guess she does live in a big, spooky house that has been converted into apartments. Other than that, there seems nothing remarkable about her. Even the house is really quite ordinary. It has a door that goes nowhere – it got bricked up when the conversion was done – so it is hardly very weird, most of the time.

Occasionally, however, the spare door does lead somewhere. It leads to a shadow world where Coraline meets her Other Parents, strange creatures with buttons sewn onto their eyes, who nevertheless seem eager to give the little girl everything she wants. Something that her normal parents are generally reluctant to do. The Other Parents are kind of weird, but at least they are there, which is more than you can say for Coraline's real parents when she gets home from her visit beyond the strange door. They seem to have been parent-napped, and Coraline has a good idea who might be responsible.

Because this is a kids' book, there are lots of jokes. The heroine's name, for example. Her parents know that they have given her a weird name. They do weird stuff. Her father makes Recipes, things with tarragon garnish and no chips. But at least they remember what they called her. Every other adult in the world calls her Caroline. It is a running gag.

But the other world, where everyone gets Coraline's name right, is full of seriously creepy stuff. No one does

otherworldly things quite like Gaiman. He seems to have his finger on the pulse of Faerie, and consequently is among the very best fantasy writers in the world today. While their parents are reading big, fat trilogies designed to comfort them, kids will be reading *Coraline* for a taste of real magic.

The book, by the way, is illustrated by Gaiman's long-time collaborator, Dave McKean. The artwork too is scary stuff, and as good as we have come to expect, even if McKean's Scottie dogs do occasionally look like poodles. There are, on a quick count, 15 full-page pictures in the 162-page book. I think that's actually a higher picture count than *Dream Hunters*. But the book is attributed solely to Neil; McKean doesn't get equal billing. And it is a kids' book, and we all know that kids' books have pictures. If some moronic "traditionalist" Hugo administrator consigns the book to the Best Related Book category on the grounds that it is a comic as was done with *Dream Hunters* I shall be very annoyed indeed.

But let us put such adult stupidities aside. *Coraline* is a great read, and a wonderful example of how to write fantasy properly. If only more supposed fantasy writers would follow Gaiman's example.

Coraline - Neil Gaiman - Harper Collins - softcover

The Price of Magic

"Hush!" Kelley said. "What is the price for knowledge?"

"What do you mean?"

"What is the price for knowledge?" Kelley said again, much louder this time. "How much will you pay? Anything?"

Great magicians, like great scientists, are rare folk. It is unusual to find two in the same generation, and even if you do they may have lived too far apart to ever have met. And exception to this rule is given by Dr. John Dee and Rabbi Judah Loew. Dee, in addition to mundane activities such as designing ciphers for Queen Elizabeth I's secret service, spent much time communing with the spirit world through the agency of his disreputable assistant, Edward Kelley. Loew is famous for having been the only man to ever construct a golem. Dee lived in London, and Loew in Prague, but when Rudolph the Mad, Holy Roman Emperor, called for all magicians and alchemists to attend upon him at his castle in Prague, Dee answered the summons. As Lisa Goldstein says in her introduction to *The Alchemists' Door*, there is no evidence that the two great men ever met. But then again, there is no evidence that they did not.

In the novel, Dee and Loew quickly fall foul of the mad emperor. But they also find that their presence in Prague is no accident. There are cycles in the nature of the universe, and at the time of our story the door that separates the world of men from the world of spirits is opening wider. As it does so, magic becomes easier to work, and things find it easier to pass from one world to the other. Including the sort of things that Kelley likes to talk to. Sorcerers and alchemists are converging on Prague from all over the world. God-fearing men like Dee and Loew seek to close the door, but you can be sure that the likes of the notorious Transylvanian princess, Elizabeth Bathory, do not share their views.

The book takes a long while to get going. For much of the book, Dee is a timid, ineffectual character, bamboozled by Kelley and running in fear of demons. About two thirds of the way through, however, things hot up and the book becomes unputdownable. Goldstein understands alchemy and demonology well, and therefore manages to resolve the plot in a thoroughly satisfactory manner.

Overall I think this book could have been better than it is. Certainly it took ages to get going. Also Goldstein brings in a whole raft of interesting philosophical ideas that she does very little with. In the end, however, I am delighted to find another fantasy novel that is a mere 300 or so pages long by an author who understands what magic is all about.

The Alchemist's Door - Lisa Goldstein - Tor - hardcover

Light & Dark

This is the first of the books that I brought back from my trip to Australia. I understand that Louise Cusack is a former romance novelist who has decided to take a crack at this fantasy stuff that is so much in demand. The result is interesting, but I'm not entirely sure where it is going.

The basic story of *Destiny of the Light* (part I of the *Shadow Through Time* trilogy) is a portal set-up. The heroine, trying to solve the mystery of her brother's apparent suicide, not to mention the strange voice in her head, travels through a magical gateway from her home in Queensland to a very different world. The difference between this and classic portal stories such as

Narnia is that it turns out that Catherine Ennae is not an Earth woman at all. She is in fact Princess Khatrene of the magical land of Ennae, who fled with her mother and brother to the Land of Illusions after her father's murder. Knowledge of this has been wiped from her mind, but it slowly comes back after her return home.

This, as I said, is interesting. Typically in a fantasy novel you find that Earth is the real world and that Earth people travel to some mysterious alternate world that may or may not be real. In Cusack's story, Ennae is the real world, the heroine comes from Ennae, and Earth is a mysterious place that people know about but that they dismiss as essentially illusory. There's a lot of interesting ideas in there, though as yet Cusack hasn't really made use of them.

More mysterious still, is the fact that Ennae, to our minds, seems much more like a shadow world than Earth. Everything is colored shades of brown, and there are no animals, not even insects. Even the vegetation isn't up to much compared to Queensland (though of course that is rather a tall order).

And it gets more complicated. There are in fact four worlds; each one based on one of the elements. Earth is in fact not the earth world; it is the water world (which kind of makes sense as it has rather more water than land in surface area terms). Ennae is the earth world, which is why everything is brown. The other two worlds are spirit worlds: the air world is where righteous souls go after death, and the fire world speaks for itself.

Now we get to the prophecy bit. At some point in the future (which is of course always conveniently now) some descendant of the sacred royal family of Ennae ("The Light") is going to somehow unite the four worlds. This will

doubtless be a great cataclysm, and all sorts of exciting stuff will go on. And this all leaves you wondering quite what philosophical point Cusack is trying to get over here. From just the first book in the trilogy, it isn't at all clear, and I'm not entirely that there is a point. I hope there is, but I'm not convinced.

Why am I not convinced? Because I don't get the impression that it is that sort of novel. There are other areas that are a little odd. For example, what does one make of a book in which a race of brown-skinned people are ruled over by a pale skinned royal family who have some sort of hereditary divinity? Isn't that a little, er, tactless? Maybe not, because this is a romance novel as well as a fantasy, and both of the men that Khatrene gets involved with are natives of Ennae and therefore brown-skinned. So we have what is essentially a cross-racial romance. I know of one or two Queensland politicians who would be horrified by that.

Talking of the soppy bits (regular readers will know that romance is not exactly my favorite genre), yes, there are lots. Cusack assures me that romance novels can be very sophisticated these days, and she knows more about them than I do so I'm happy to take her word for it. But for this series she has chosen to use what she feels are traditional fantasy themes, and consequently it all comes over a bit stereotyped. So Khatrene falls in love with this dark and mysterious guy, Djahr ("The Dark"), who turns out to be a complete bastard, in league with demons and so on (which you have to admit is one up from being beastly to horses, peasants and servants). She has to have a child by him because the Prophecy demands it, but after that she sensibly ends up with Talis, the sensitive, scrupulously honorable guy who is madly in love with her but won't

say so because he's supposed to be her bodyguard. How sweet.

Thankfully there is a parallel affair going on that is much more amusing. This is between the shrewish priestess, Lae (who is also Djahr's daughter), and the insufferably self-confident and capable young swordsman, Pagan. They spend almost the entire book needling each other mercilessly, so you just know that they are going to end up madly in love in a weird sort of way at some point. I liked their story much more than that of the hero and heroine, who spend far too much time agonizing over things.

And all of this could have come to a very neat, tidy and predictable end. The pace of the book picks up nicely as we go through, and it is all set up for Talis and Pagan to rescue Khatrene and the baby from the evil Djahr and for everyone to live happily ever after. You can see it coming quite clearly.

But instead Cusack turns the whole thing around. I can't tell you how, because that would be a massive spoiler, but I can tell you that it was sufficiently surprising for me to pick up the second book to find out what was going to happen. And given the strong romance element, and my doubts about the fantasy element, that was a considerable achievement by the author.

Destiny of the Light - Louise Cusack - Earthlight - softcover

Whither Fantasy?

This is going to be a really hard review to write, which of course is all my fault. I met Fiona McIntosh at Westercon. She had come all the way from Adelaide to see what one of these big American SF conventions was like, and I wanted to

make her feel welcome. She's a lovely person, and she was kind enough to give me copies of her first two books to review. I really want to be nice about them.

Which is a problem, because if I had just picked up *Betrayal* off a shelf in a bookstore I would probably shredded it mercilessly. You know what I'm like with formula fantasy. I'm sorry Fiona; this is just not my sort of thing at all.

I had been quite hopeful as well. The book contains an enthusiastic cover comment from Megan Lindholm (Robin Hobb). She says, "*The style is straightforward, the pace headlong, and the characters are unabashedly larger than life*". But let's take a look at that and see what it means in practice.

I'll deal with the headlong pace first, because that is spot on. Being able to sustain a frenetic pace for 600 pages is a skill that very few writers have. George Martin can do it, and McIntosh has that skill too. It will stand her in good stead in her career.

As for straightforward, yes, indeed the book is. There is no flowery prose, none of the subtle redirection that you get from Gene Wolfe or Gwyneth Jones, not even any hard words. All of the plot is explained very clearly. You never have to work out what the characters are thinking or feeling from their words and deeds, you get told. That makes the book very accessible. But of course to me it also makes it dull.

And then there are those characters. Larger than life? My Goddess they are. I very quickly got sick to death with being told how handsome/beautiful and fabulously powerful the two lead characters were. I wouldn't have minded so much if they had actually put all these bountiful gifts to use, but most of the time they trailed along in the wake of the plot. Indeed, because of the Prophecy

(you knew there was going to be one of those, didn't you), there is this huge cast of supporting characters hanging around to help and rescue our hero and heroine when it turns out that their stunning good looks and awesome magic fail to save them from trouble.

And trouble there is aplenty, of course. After all, we have 600 pages to fill, and that's only the first part of the Trilogy. Now you would have thought that with all those powers, not to mention unearthly beauty, and all those kind-hearted folks ready to lay down their lives in the service of the Prophecy, that trouble would have difficulty manifesting itself. But that would be boring, so the Prophecy has to include the caveats that it is Destined that bad things happen to the lead characters when it is convenient for the plot for them to do so. Even down to having the god who has been protecting our heroes for the past nine months suddenly withdrawing that protection at the most inconvenient moment possible because it was Destined that he should do so. Yes, it's a betrayal all right, in more ways than one.

But all this carping of mine is really unfair, because I'm reviewing the book as if it were a fantasy novel. It isn't. It has nothing of the atmosphere that you would find in books by fine fantasy writers from Dunsany through Tolkien and Le Guin to Gaiman. The world building is limp, and there is hardly any magic (except in a D&D rulebook sense of the word). No, this book is a romance novel with a bunch of standard fantasy tropes thrown in to make it look like fantasy. The whole point is of the book is that two hugely attractive young people have a difficult love life. Everything else is just window dressing. And the book is easy to read, has just enough nastiness to make it seem serious, but makes sure

that everything comes out right in the end.

There is, apparently, a large market for this sort of thing. And quite likely Fiona McIntosh will do very well. After all, years ago I reviewed a first novel by another Australian, Kate Forsyth's *Dragonclaw*. It read like she had used Diana Wynne Jones' *Tough Guide to Fantasyland* as a manual on how to write fantasy fiction. And yet her trilogy appears to have expanded to at least 10 volumes judging from the bookshelves in Slow Glass (I understand that the technical term for such a series is a Xanthology). McIntosh is better than that. She has no plot tokens for a start. There isn't even a map for the characters to wander round in search of them. She hasn't been writing by numbers.

The point is, though, that this is not what I call fantasy. It has the external appearance of it, but none of the inner complexity and beauty. It is, apparently, what the public wants. Or so Australian publishers seem to think. But thankfully the public also wants Neil Gaiman. Everyone in Faerie should be grateful for that.

Betrayal - Fiona McIntosh - Voyager - softcover

Miscellany

Mythopoeic Award

This year's Mythopoeic Society Awards have been announced, and much to my horror they have given their Best Novel award to Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*. The Mythopoeic Society people can normally be relied upon to pick a really good fantasy novel for their award. But it seems that they too are not

immune to the Curse of the Hugely Popular Writer, no matter how bad the book in question is. Whatever next, I wonder? Jeffrey Archer winning a Nebula?

ConSpiracy?

Just before ConFrancisco the con chairman, Dave Clark, received a summons to do jury service during the week of the convention. Thankfully the Alameda county court system allows potential jurors one request to delay their period of service. Dave delayed his period of duty, and we all thought no more about it.

In the last year, however, Kevin has become co-chair of ConJosé and we have moved home so that we now live in Alameda country. And lo, just recently Kevin received notice of a summons for jury duty in the week prior to the Worldcon. Once is an accident, twice is a coincidence. Just what does the Alameda county court service know about Worldcons? I think we should be told.

Transit Insanity

I see that there is going to be a panel on airport security horror stories at ConJosé. That one should have no shortage of material. For example, reader Piet Brouwer asks me why, if things like nail files and tweezers are so dangerous, is it legal for passengers to carry heavy glass clubs full of inflammable liquid. And why are such weapons freely available at knockdown prices at many airport shops, even inside the security barrier?

This month, however, I'm more interested in simpler safety issues. With Kevin having spent two weeks in Detroit on business, I have had to catch a lot of buses. Now, when aircraft are

approaching a gate, it is frequently necessary for them to stop and be towed in. At such times their speed rarely exceeds 5 mph. And yet we are told, for our safety, that we must remain in our seats, with seatbelts fastened, during this process.

Can someone therefore please explain to me why it is that bus drivers feel obliged to test the 0-60 acceleration characteristics of their vehicles while passengers are still stood in the gangway fumbling for change to put in the ticket dispenser? Not only are you not sat down and belted in, you probably don't even have a free hand with which to hang on to something. What is it about buses that makes them immune to the safety panics we have on other forms of transport?

Sadly I know the answer to this, at least in America. Aircraft are used by important people, but buses are only used by the poor.

ConJosé Blog

This is the point where I should be announcing that I will be running a blog from the *Emerald City* web site during the Worldcon, just like I did last year in Philadelphia. However, as I am now not certain how much time I am going to be at the con, and given that right now it looks like I'll be crashing on the floor of the Shadowmarch suite, I don't know how much Internet access I'm going to have. Right now I'm thinking I'll be spending a fair amount of time in the Internet Lounge, but at least that is going to be 24 hour and has a T1 line. All I can say is keep an eye on the blog and see what happens. You can find it at <http://www.emcit.com/blog/blogger.shtml>.

Proof reading

I should apologize in advance for the probably above average numbers of typos, grammatical errors and pieces of plain editorial incompetence in the ConJosé issues of *Emerald City*. Anne has been overwhelmed with proofing convention publications, and Kevin has been rushed off his feet doing vast numbers of things. With any luck, approximately normal service will be resumed next month.

Footnote

Next issue there may or may not be a ConJosé review, depending on whether I not I got to the con. Other than that, it will be mainly back to the haul from Australia, unless something really good turns up before then. I note that the new M. John Harrison novel is due out in October, and when I get a copy, everything else stops.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl