

EMERALD CITY #94

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Introduction

There was a slight change of plans for this issue. To begin with, I managed to get hold of a proof copy of the new Dan Simmons novel, *Ilium* (profuse thanks to Tom Whitmore here). That caused a rejig of my list of projected reviews. In addition, I got to spend a week in Sydney. You probably all know that any excuse to go to Australia is good for me, but finding out that you have to go on two days notice is a little disruptive. And spending an entire week with clients is not conducive to reading books. So, apologies to Storm Constantine and L.E. Modesitt, whom I will try to fit in next issue. But we do have an excellent collection of books in this issue, which I hope you'll enjoy.

In any case, I did manage to find a small amount of time for myself Down Under. Sydney is one of my favorite places in the world to shop, and I'm now well set up for something to wear to the Hugo ceremony. You can probably see my grin from here.

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The Age of Heroes

High upon the towering slopes of Olympos Mons, mighty Zeus gazes down on Earth. They are puny things, these humans, who war so enthusiastically before the gates of Troy. And yet they have struck a chord somehow with the Gods and Goddesses.

This war has become a special project for so many of them: bold, pushy Athena; quiet, scheming Aphrodite; brash, stupid Ares; swift, deadly Apollo. Yes, even his proud and dangerous wife, Hera, has become obsessed with the quarrelsome and heroic mortals. And so she should, for is not the champion of the Achaeans Zeus's own son, the fearsome Achilles? She is a jealous one, Hera; she will not want Achilles to triumph. So Zeus too, will play a role, will plot and scheme from his citadel on green, terraformed Mars. And he has an advantage over his rebellious brood. You see, Zeus has read Homer's *Iliad*. He knows how the war will turn out.

And yet, across the gulf of space, minds immeasurably superior to ours regarded his Mars with suspicious eyes, and slowly, and surely, they drew their plans against him. (And with that part of their processing power that was not required for the task in hand, they debated the relative merits of Shakespeare and Proust.)

The moravecs of Jupiter space come in various forms and conceits. Mahnmut spends his life navigating his submersible around the seas of Europa and has opted for a humanoid shape. His friend, Orphu of Io, looks rather like a very large metal horseshoe crab, some three meters by five in size. Neither of these unlikely heroes expected to be called upon to save the Solar System from a potentially disastrous overuse of quantum tunneling. Still, pollution is pollution, and whoever those people are who have terraformed Mars, they need to learn a few laws of neighbourliness. Besides, they might have an interest in literature. They might even know why so many moravecs are obsessed with human writings.

Meanwhile, what of poor little Earth? What of those poor humans who, last we

saw, were helpless pawns in the machinations of the Gods, or at least in Homer's script? We have three views of them. Achilles, Hector, Agamemnon, Paris, Odysseus and the rest drink, brag and fight their way through their lives in exactly the way in which the ancient bard relates. Disturbingly accurately so, in fact. One might think that it is all the real thing, and that Homer was actually there, memorizing what was said. Perhaps it is.

But why, exactly, have the Gods resurrected a bunch of 20th Century literature professors to monitor the course of the war and comment on just how accurate Homer was? The expense must be enormous: the morphing gear to allow them to take over the roles of various minor characters while they perform their work; the quantum teleportation devices to carry them back and fore between Troy and Olympos. And given that we are dealing with QT, there could be real time travel here. They could indeed be watching the real Trojan War. Then again, that morphing stuff sounds suspiciously like taking over someone's avatar in a sim. Who knows? Certainly not the hero of our tale, one simple scholar by the name of Thomas Hockenberry; as quiet and unassuming example of American manhood as you could hope to get. And one of the very few American males ever to get a chance to sleep with Helen of Troy.

Our third view of humanity is also on Earth, but by no means necessarily the same Earth, or at least the same place in the time stream, as that used for the War. Dawdling idly in the gardens and cities left to them by the departing posthumans, the last few remnants of mankind party away their lives in blissful ignorance of all things. They are Eloi in all but name, but there are no Morlocks in their world, at least not that they know about. Indeed, the strange

creatures called voynix have been provided precisely to protect them from danger. They can chase off passing dinosaurs, and that sort of thing. Not to mention pull carriages, there being no such thing as horses any more, and the dinosaurs and giant, carnivorous birds being rather unsuitable for that type of work.

Daeman is perhaps an archetypal human. He lives only to party, and in particular to seduce beautiful young women. His current target is called Ada, but she has some very strange friends. Why, that fellow Harman claims that he has taught himself to read! Of all the bizarre, wasteful activities. What possible purpose could that have? Except perhaps if you were about to embark on a very unusual adventure involving a wandering Jew, flying machines, being chased by murderous voynix, and visiting the orbital cities where the posthumans are said to dwell. Except perhaps if you are about to meet a disgusting barbarian of a man who calls himself Odysseus after a character in a shroud drama about some ancient war and claims that everything you know about your world is a lie.

Completing our cast of characters, we have Prospero, who may be a computer program; Ariel, who might be Gaia; and Caliban, who is most definitely a monster and who enjoys eating humans for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Then there are the Little Green Men on Mars, who seem to worship Prospero. It is all very complicated. And let's face it, we would be deeply disappointed if we got anything else from Dan Simmons.

This, then, is *Ilium*, the first science fiction book from Simmons since the completion of the *Hyperion* quartet six long years ago. I'd like to tell you how good it is, but that is a little complicated seeing that all we have is part one of a

very long novel and we are going to have to wait until next year for the rest of it. On the other hand, as you will have gathered from the above, *Ilium* is positively bursting with ideas, and despite all my reservations about voting for part-works I'm certain it is going to be amongst the Hugo finalists in Boston.

What I can tell you is that *Ilium* is very literary. Simmons appears to have read every translation of Homer available, and has Hockenberry and his colleagues comment of the various merits of them during the story. He has, of course, read Shakespeare and Proust. Only Prospero and co. from *The Tempest*, and the Dark Lady of the sonnets, have yet made it into the novels. But who knows who will turn up in part two? Meanwhile Mahnmot and Orphu have been busily debating the merits of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, known in English as *Remembrance of Things Past*, but less commonly as *In Search of Lost Time*. Did you remember that there was a possibility of some time travel in this book?

The Proust work is famously complex in its use of time, so to understand what Simmons is getting at us poor reviewers probably also need to read Gérard Genette's famous commentary on it, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Then there is Ada, whom the perceptive Mr. Clute has noted may bear some relation to Nabokov's novel of the same name. So, add that to the reading list, as well as Brian Boyd's definitive study, *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness*. The nature of consciousness is, after all, a good science fictional theme. And we do have robots and AIs in the story. Not to mention those Little Green Men who appear to be a group consciousness. Oh dear, Mr. Simmons does make us work hard.

Then again, I wouldn't have it any other way.

Ilium - Dan Simmons - Eos - publisher's proof

The Age of Aether

Approaching *The Light Ages* by Ian R. MacLeod, the first thing you notice is a fuzzy, slightly out of focus cityscape. It is an Edward Miller of course — the same guy who did the cover for *Perdido Street Station*. Except this time the city is obviously London. And this time the cover is predominantly blue rather than red. For British readers, that should be a clue.

(American readers will be somewhat confused right now, as they got given a much prettier golden cover. But there are many things in this book that only make sense if you have a reasonable knowledge of British culture. This one is a question of political flag colors.)

Opening the book, you find a prologue describing the journey of an unnamed stranger through the city. There is mention of trains and the river, of poverty and deprivation. As it turns out, this is not an introduction but a framing device with respect to which most of the book becomes flashback. Also the stranger is the central character of the book, not a desperate visitor. But in a metaphorical sense, he has most certainly had his wings clipped.

By this time the reader's expectations are firmly set, and one of two conclusions about the book seem likely. Either the publisher has asked MacLeod to produce a China-clone novel, or MacLeod deliberately wants his readers to thinking about Miéville as they read

the book. We seem to be are looking either at imitation or debate.

An answer to that conundrum is given fairly quickly, for if the prologue is somewhat Miéville-like in character, the rest of the novel is very much the opposite. Whereas Miéville's work is aggressively and enthusiastically within genre, MacLeod turns his back on such things almost immediately. In New Crobuzon you can scarcely walk two blocks without encountering some new and bizarre marvel. MacLeod's London has but one genre idea: that something called "aether" which has magic-like characteristics has been discovered and is being used to power the industrial revolution. Miéville manages to make even the ordinary sound fantastical. MacLeod, on the other hand, has set out to make the fantastical mundane.

This isn't a simple difference; it runs right to the heart of the book and the argument that MacLeod is trying to make. *The Light Ages* is an avowedly anti-genre book, and consequently its author has picked techniques that a mainstream reviewer would approve of. The bulk of *The Light Ages* is more reminiscent in style of Dickens and Hardy rather than Miéville. Indeed I am told by people who know Dickens better than me that the parallels to *Great Expectations* are substantial. The book is thin on plot, but the characters are nicely drawn. Much of the novel is simply the tale of a young man growing up in a depressed industrial town in Yorkshire. This is not the stuff of weird fiction. It is deliberately and very effectively ordinary. And it is very well done.

An interesting by-product of this is that although the book is packaged as fantasy it is very easy to read it as SF. MacLeod postulates that undue exposure to aether will result in people becoming "changelings." They will take

on hideous physical forms, and may have mysterious supernatural powers. Children born to people who have worked too closely with aether may be changelings too. If you replace "aether" with "nuclear power" and "changeling" with "mutant" you get the basic plot of the X-Men.

But if the book is so resolutely mundane, why are we supposed to be thinking about *Miéville*? To find out we need to peer a little more deeply into the story line.

Our hero, Robert Borrow, is born in the small Yorkshire town of Bracebridge, a community that is almost entirely dependent on the local aether mine for its prosperity. MacLeod does a wonderful job of portraying a grim, Northern industrial town (although I must admit that I kept expecting the book to drop into that Monty Python sketch about young people today not knowing what hard times were). As Robert gets older, things get worse. His mother begins to sicken, and eventually it becomes clear that she has been in an industrial accident and is becoming a changeling. It also transpires that she has changeling friends: the aged Mistress Sommerton and her pretty young ward, Annalise.

Robert is, of course, expected to follow his father into the Lesser Guild of Toolmakers. However, his mother read lots of fairy stories to him when he was a kid and filled his mind with foolish romantic notions. As we will see, this addiction to fantasy fiction blights him for life. (This is why the book cannot be genre-like in style.) Furthermore, when taken to look round the factory, Robert takes an instant dislike to the bullying foreman, Uppermaster Stropcock. However, for reasons as yet unclear, the boy is befriended by a senior manager, Grandmaster Harrat.

If you really don't like spoilers, stop reading now. Sorry, but I can't develop this argument without going into more detail about how the story unfolds.

This, of course, is all part of the plot. MacLeod has to fill in some background. It transpires that Harrat is a pedophile who doesn't quite have the courage to molest the boys he befriends. Or at least he doesn't with Robert. But then he does have reason to feel sorry for the boy. It turns out that the experiment that caused Mrs. Borrow's sickness was carried out under Harrat's instruction. Harrat himself got away unscathed, but Mary Borrow was exposed to a serious aether blast and her friend, Kate Durry, was killed. Harrat is disillusioned with aether, and tries to escape from it by experimenting with electricity, but all of his efforts meet with failure. When Mary Burrows commits suicide rather than be put in an asylum for changelings, Harrat also kills himself. A few years later Robert, determined to have nothing to do with the factory, sets off for London. He hoes to make his fortune, and perhaps also discover the mysterious senior guildsman who ordered Harrat to undertake the fateful experiment.

In the big city, Robert is befriended by Saul Duxbury, a streetwise city boy who makes his living thieving in the East End markets. His mother runs a dreamhouse - the aether-powered equivalent of an opium den. Growing up, the boys find work with Blissenhawk, a revolutionary who aims to bring down the aether Guilds and restore the rule of Parliament. Saul turns out to have a talent for political cartoons, and Robert ends up writing editorials for Blissenhawk's paper, *New Dawn*. Although most of his work is simply revolutionary polemics, Robert cannot resist introducing elements of fairy stories into his articles to help encourage

his readers to believe that change can happen.

Now do you see why MacLeod wanted us to start off thinking of China Miéville?

Second spoiler warning. If you are still with me and don't want to know how the book ends, stop reading now.

Although Robert spends most of his time in the East End, he runs into Mistress Sommerton in a market and she tells him that Annalise is also in the city. Now a beautiful young woman, Anna Winters, as she calls herself, has used her changeling powers to charm her way into high society and build a career as a successful concert pianist. Through Anna, Robert meets the spoiled and flighty Sadie Passington, daughter of the all-powerful Greatgrandmaster Exultant of the Guild of Telegraphers.

Here we have another very British reference. Why are the Telegraphers the most powerful guild in MacLeod's Britain? Not because they control the means of communication, but because the author is making a joke about newspapers. For Guild of Telegraphers, read *Daily Telegraph* readers. Robert's enemies are the people who read Britain's most conservative (and Conservative) newspaper. If there is to be a successful revolution against the Guilds, Robert must destroy the Telegraphers.

Mixing with Sadie and Anna brings Robert into contact with some other significant members of the upper classes. The first is Highermaster George Swalecliffe, an upper class twit of majestic proportions who has made a hobby out of Socialism. For some unexplained reason, Anna and George seem to hit it off together. The others are Mr. and Mrs. Bowldly-Smart, a pair of desperately obvious and embarrassing

nouveau-riche. Only Robert knows that their surname is an affectation, for it is clear to him that Grandmaster Bowldly-Smart is none other than the odious former-Uppermaster Stropcock.

As the end of the century approaches, revolutionary fervor is in the air. Robert and Saul work hard on stirring up the working masses for Blissenhawk, while George works away at the consciences of the middle classes. A Chartist-like petition is drawn up demanding rights for workers, and a massive demonstration is planned for Midsummer's Day.

And lo, everything goes wrong. There is a riot. The military take a hand and lots of people get killed. Saul's girlfriend, Maud, who is heavily pregnant, stays back at the newspaper office. But the office is attacked by a gang of thugs and Maud has a miscarriage. It is clear here that the author is punishing our heroes for their revolutionary activities. Maud gives up on Saul and goes to live with her family in Kent. George, being obviously upper class, is almost killed by the rioters. He is only saved because Anna uses her changeling powers. Now knowing what Anna is, George breaks off their relationship and starts to go mad. The young men have had their warning, and they ignore it.

Robert and Anna spend much of the rest of the year investigating their backgrounds. It turns out that Anna is the daughter of Kate Durry, born shortly after the accident while Kate was still clinging to life, so they have much in common. A visit home to Bracebridge provides them with proof that Greatgrandmaster Passington was the mysterious stranger whose orders killed their mothers. But far worse, they discover that the Bracebridge aether mine has been worked out for years. A great fraud is being perpetrated on the

people of Britain. Passington is at its core, and Stropcock, who discovered the fraud and has blackmailed his way into the scheme, is responsible for covering everything up.

I have to say that the fraud that MacLeod describes is utterly unbelievable. It is of such vast size, and such massive import, that it would have been discovered long before Robert and Anna stumble on the truth. However, we must remember that MacLeod is not writing genre fiction, and that niceties such as logic are not required for any allegorical devices that he might use.

Armed with this new information, Robert and Anna head off back to London to expose their enemy. Poor mad George is in jail for acts of politically-inspired vandalism, but Blissenhawk and Saul have been training a small revolutionary army. It is time to strike. This time they will bring down the Guilds.

And so they do. Passington commits suicide. London falls into chaos. The economic system is fatally wounded. There is much looting and murder. Robert and Anna catch up with Mistress Sommerton, who admits to providing the spell that powered Harrat's experiment. She is then caught by a mob who decide to burn her. (Witches, changelings, all the same.) Now it so happens that Mistress Sommerton lives amidst large deposits of engine ice - the decayed by-product of aether (another nuclear power reference). As the mob lights their pyre, it transpires that extreme heat re-activates engine ice. Britain suddenly has a brand new source of aether, and the economy is saved. Everyone can live happily ever after.

The hell they can.

This is, after all, none of our heroes doing. They wanted to bring down

Passington and the Guilds. They did so, very successfully. The result was economic collapse and massive loss of life. The fact that a solution to this disaster was found was, if anything, an act of God. Thankfully the natural state of the world re-asserted itself and the wheels of industry were able to keep on turning. George, whose outrageous acts have made him something of a revolutionary hero, marries Sadie and becomes the new Greatgrandmaster of the Telegraphers, but is in continual danger of his passion for gay orgies being discovered and causing his ruin. Anna sets up a rest home for changelings in Somerset, but it seems unlikely that it will come to anything other than a slightly more pleasant asylum. Blissenhawk immediately sets up a revolutionary movement to oppose the new order, but Saul takes the money he looted in the revolution and buys a farm in Kent where he and Maud can live. As for Robert, he acquires enough money to buy into the Guilds, and becomes best friends with the Bowldly-Smarts. To salve his conscience he becomes a regular patron of Mrs. Duxbury's dreamhouse.

So what exactly are we to make of all this? MacLeod's message that all political revolutions are dangerous is trite and insulting to anyone who bothers to think deeply about politics. You always have to weigh the costs and benefits. The further message that proponents of revolution are naive dreamers who end up selling out is also simplistic and unsubtle. He provides no real justification for it. Indeed, Robert's character is deliberately set up to fail, as if this was all that MacLeod needed to prove that revolutionaries are idiots.

As for his points about fantasy readers being naive and stupid, well MacLeod certainly has a point. See my comments last issue about the sophistication of

some of the political thinking at Wiscon, for example. M. John Harrison has made a career out of pricking the illusions that we weave for ourselves. But even Harrison never goes as far as to say that all human endeavor is hopeless. MacLeod does. Harrat knows that there is a problem with aether and tries to save the country by experimenting with electricity, but MacLeod has him fail dismally. The revolution happens, but rather than let people work their way out of the chaos it causes and try to build a better world, MacLeod introduces a Deus ex Machina ending to restore the status quo. Saul might just have made a go of his life, but MacLeod hints that he didn't get enough money and that he and Maud end up fighting a constant battle against debt. The only character in the entire book whose personal endeavors are successful is Ronald Stropcock, and the means he used to get rich were blackmail and fraud.

It is clear from the constant beating the reader over the head with the message that MacLeod expects us to learn a moral lesson from the book. Robert's family keep telling him not to rock the boat. It is even possible that they know that the Bracebridge mine is empty, and that they go along with the deception so that the townspeople can keep their jobs. Mistress Sommerton continually tells Robert and Anna that their investigations will only bring disaster, and of course MacLeod arranges things so that she is proved right. So the message is that you should never hope, never try to change things, never even think that things might be better. You must go along with everything that the *Telegraph* readers tell you. And if you want to get on in this world, try a little blackmail and fraud. That's acceptable. Nothing else is.

Yeah, right.

As for MacLeod's attempts to link together revolutionary politics, fantasy fiction and China Miéville, that is simply ignorant. Firstly Miéville, as a disciple of Harrison, is just as opposed to naïve, consequence-free fantasy fiction as MacLeod. And secondly, while Miéville's politics and mine are miles apart, I have to admit that he is one of the most rigorous political thinkers I have ever met. No way is this guy an idle dreamer. MacLeod appears to have taken the surface appearance of a Trotskyist who writes fantasy fiction, put two and two together, and got the square root of minus one. This isn't debate; it is just ugly and inaccurate caricature.

And finally, I note that there are precisely two gay characters in the book. Grandmaster Harrat is portrayed as a pedophile, and George Swalecliffe is described as an enthusiastic organizer of orgies. Talk about stereotypes. It is exactly the sort of thing you would expect to find in the *Daily Telegraph*.

All of which is a great shame. *The Light Ages* is a brilliantly written book that has received well-deserved praise on artistic grounds from many quarters. I would like to think that maybe MacLeod was simply depressed about the state of the world, and this flowed over into his book. But if he truly believed that nothing mattered and that we should just shackle ourselves, uncomplainingly, to the wheels of industry, he would not have made the effort to create such a beautiful book. He would be writing ten-volume fantasy trilogies with black and white morality instead, because that's what the publishing industry wants. Ironically the very beauty of *The Light Ages* tells us that somewhere, deep inside, Ian R. MacLeod cares about something and wants to get his dream out to the public. Unlike Robert

Borrows, he seems to have succeeded admirably.

The Light Ages – Ian R. MacLeod - Earthlight
– hardcover

Family Feud

This was where Alice made her first fortune. The entire adventure consumed fifty thousand years and the talents of hundreds. Yet today, working alone, a creature of Alice's capacity could finish the work in less than six centuries.

Robert Reed doesn't do things by halves. His latest novel, *Sister Alice*, treats of beings of such godlike powers that it might as well be called a fantasy for all the talk of dark matter, non-baryonic particles and black holes. The set-up goes like this.

Following a period of dreadful wars the people of Earth decide that they need looking after. A special commission is created to look for individuals of exceptional talent and moral character. These people will be given awesome powers and asked to shepherd mankind into a new era of peace and prosperity. Ten million years later, humanity has settled the galaxy. Each of the original guardians has created a Family of clones to help in their work, and scientific advances have made the senior members of each family more than powerful enough to consider themselves gods. Why, even ordinary humans are practically immortal.

Our hero, Ord, is number 24,411 in the highly respected and powerful Chamberlain Family. He's still a boy – only centuries old and considered not mature enough to be let out of

childhood. So he spends his days playing educational games with kids from other Families at home on Earth.

Then one day a visitor arrives at the Chamberlain ancestral mansion. Her name is Alice, and she is Chamberlain number twelve. As far as the family knew, she was busy undertaking massive terraforming projects at the galactic core. So why has she come home? Why has she done so in secret? Why does she refuse to talk to any of her brothers and sisters except baby Ord? And why is her conversation with him laced with talk of redemption? Didn't someone once say that absolute power corrupts absolutely?

Sister Alice is a fix-up novel created from five stories published in *Asimov's* from 1993 to 2000. It is currently only a UK publication, but according to Amazon Tor will be issuing a US hardcover edition in October. The stories do form a genuine sequence and seem to work better as a novel. It must have been quite frustrating for *Asimov's* readers to have to wait so long for a conclusion.

As to the content, it is largely about humanity. Although Alice and her ilk are, to all intents and purposes, giant machines, Reed argues that they are still human, and that this is important. I'm not sure that the final segment would stand up to much philosophical scrutiny. And I'm not at all sure that Reed had planned to have a conclusion when he wrote the first segment back in 1993. But along the way his observations on the illogical and immoral behavior of the human herd mind are spot on.

Sister Alice – Robert Reed - Orbit – softcover

War of the Wizards

Martha Wells has returned to Ile-Rien, and I suspect that its citizens are none too happy about this.

In three novels, Wells has taken her imaginary, vaguely European state through the centuries. Her first book, *Element of Fire*, which I'm still looking for a copy of, appears to have been standard mediaeval fantasy. When she returned to Ile-Rien in *Death of the Necromancer*, the country had moved on into the Victorian era, complete with its own versions of Holmes and Watson. Now the century has turned, and Ile-Rien has been plunged into the age of total war.

From some unknown dimension, the ruthless and humorless Gardier have launched a brutal invasion. Their airships pound cities with clockwork efficiency, and their sorcery is more than a match for anything Ile-Rien can throw at them. The people of Vienne are close to surrender, if not total annihilation. Rumors are that the royal family has already fled into exile. In the midst of all this destruction, the wealthy playwright, Tremaine Valiarde, is trying to work out how to kill herself and make it look like an accident.

Perhaps one should not be too harsh on Nicholas Valiarde for trying to bring his daughter up as a normal child. A powerful crime lord and Ile-Rien's most accomplished master spy is not exactly the sort of role model that a young girl needs. But you can't hide from reality forever. With her mother murdered, and herself falsely accused of insanity and confined to an asylum until her father rescued her, Tremaine could not regard herself as normal. Especially when those responsible for her incarceration turned up floating in the river, carved into many small pieces. Then her father

became obsessed with some new threat to the Kingdom. He and his best friend, the sorcerer Arisilde Damal, spent a lot of time researching it, until they vanished. That was the first that the government of Ile-Rien heard of the Gardier — when they defeated the country's two most trusted secret agents.

What with the war, being thought a recovering lunatic by most of polite society (Nicholas could hardly reveal the truth behind his daughter's kidnapping) and knowing that her father was a brutal murderer, Tremaine has been looking for a way out of life. Working on air raid relief for the Aid Society failed to produce the desired result. Then, just as Vienne is about to fall, her guardian, Guillame Gerard, asks for her help. He has been working on a project to develop a magical weapon to fight the Gardier. So far all of their work has met with failure. The magical devices, "spheres", that they are developing are just not up to the job. In fact they have blown up. There are no top flight sorcerers left to make new ones. Only one hope remains: the little sphere that Tremaine's Uncle Ari gave to her as a toy years ago. It is keyed to the young woman, so she will be required to assist with the project.

— *I know it's dangerous, but if you could*
—

Dangerous. Tremaine stared at him. That's perfect. She nodded.

Meanwhile, on a small island off the coast of Sypria, Giliead and Ilias are hunting for wizards. It was not long ago that they disposed of the evil Ixion, though not before Ilias had been captured and cursed, forcing him to wear a curse mark on his cheek and become outcast from society. Now a new

group of wizards has taken over Ixion's old haunts, and a strange bunch they are too.

To start with they all wear identical brown uniforms. They hide in a cave system where they keep a species of giant whale that floats through the air. And they use a lot of magical lamps that make light without fuel, save perhaps for black, rubbery cables that connect to them. Still, those lamps do make fire when knocked over. And fire seems to make the giant whales blow up in a most satisfactory fireball.

While escaping from this spectacular feat of sabotage, Ilias is wounded by a projectile fired from one of the wands carried by the wizards. He falls into a river and loses consciousness. When he awakes he finds himself in the company of strangers: two pleasant young girls and an arrogant young man. They are looking for a friend, an older man who may have been captured by the wizards. Little does Ilias know that some of these strangers too are wizards. Indeed, they have traveled from far away thanks to the sorcerous power of the little bronze sphere that one of the women carries. All he knows for now is that they are enemies of the brown-clad strangers. If the newcomers do turn out to be wizards later, well he'll just have to kill them too.

Much of *The Wizard Hunters* is based around the entertaining conceit of not knowing what is magic and what is not. To the Syprians, all of the Gardier's technology, from pistols to airships, is magical. Tremaine and her colleagues, of course, are desperate to gain allies, and somehow have to explain how their magic is not like Gardier magic, or Ixion's magic. It is amusing, and very lightweight. While the book is certainly very entertaining, I somehow felt that

Martha Wells was letting herself down. *The Death of the Necromancer* was full of humor, but also had its dark moments and periods of nail-biting action. In *The Wizard Hunters* Wells seems to have gone for a much lighter approach. Even Tremaine's suicidal tendencies are treated as a joke, and the obvious horror of the fall of Vienne seems strangely muted.

Still, this book is only the first part of a series. While it reaches a satisfying conclusion, it only scratches the surface of the fight back against the Gardier. It also drops hints that Nick and Ari may still be alive somewhere, carrying on their fight. So things might get a little more serious as the series develops. Not to say that this is a bad book. I just expected something more powerful from a writer as good as Martha Wells.

The Wizard Hunters - Martha Wells - Eos - hardcover

Silver Mist

One of the few good things about British weather is the mist. You can find it of a morning, slinking low across the fields, somewhere between ankle and knee height. It looks like the world is slowly coalescing into existence, or shrugging off some placental wrapping. It is no wonder we Brits believe in fairies.

Imagine, then, that same mist rising at dusk. As the sun sinks, a silver blanket oozes slowly out of the ground and drifts silently across the fields. But this is not water vapor. This is the Silver. It is a cloud of nanotech machines, and it is hungry.

That is the setting for Linda Nagata's latest novel, *Memory*. Although Nagata

is widely touted as a hot new hard SF author, *Memory* reads very much like a fantasy novel. It starts off talking of temples, kobolds and a sleeping goddess, yet it is obvious to us as experienced SF readers that the story is taking place on an artificial world, long after its makers have abandoned it and left it to fall into disrepair. The "kobolds" are toy-soldier-sized robots with dip switches on their chests. The Silver is clearly an out of control nano-plague. And the fact that the inhabitants of the world call themselves "players" suggests that the entire world was once some sort of giant role-playing game. The sleeping goddess whom the players worship is presumably someone very like Alice Chamberlain, and the dark god with whom she is said to have battled another mighty post-human.

Besides, if this were a fantasy novel, the characters would not have computers and motorbikes, right?

The heroine of our tale, Jubilee, lives in a temple. Her mother is the priestess. Jubilee is worried about her mother because she is very wise. Wise people, it is said, will go to Heaven when they die, instead of being eternally reborn in some new life. Young Jubilee wants to be sure that she will meet her mother again in a future life. It is perhaps a silly, childish fantasy based around a common myth of a karmic cycle.

But wait. This isn't really a fantasy book, and one of the names for the Silver is "the memory of the world". What if the players really are pieces in a game? What if they really do get reanimated time after time? And what if some of the players are not just pawns, but kings and queens as well? Might there indeed be a game to be played? If there is, it will have been going on for millennia. And if there is, this may be a fantasy novel in

which the heroine has a real chance of meeting and killing a god.

For Jubilee it all began on the night that her brother was taken by the Silver. The dread destroyer should not have been able to climb the temple walls, but it did. Jolly claimed, just before it engulfed him, that he had called it to him. And years later Jubilee saw a dark man stride out of the deadly mist, apparently unharmed by it. He asked after Jolly, and then turned back the way he had come. The king piece had announced himself, and Jubilee had no choice but to play.

I was much more impressed with *Memory* than with the other Nagata book I have read, *Limit of Vision*. The fantasy-like setting is a bold move, and well within the current fashion for genre busting. Of course if it had been intended as a fantasy novel I would have been criticizing *Memory* for the lack of development of its religion and mythological themes. But under the circumstances I'm happy to forgive it that failing. There's no deep philosophizing in this book, aside perhaps from making clear that god-like post-humans can be just as dumb and fractious as us, but it is an entertaining tale.

I would have liked Nagata to make more of the theme that the players all have a single ideal lover whom they spend much of their lives searching for. I wasn't quite sure of its significance, in particular why Jubilee's uncle, Liam, had never found his. But the book provides an entertaining and haunting story and I'm happy to recommend it.

Memory - Linda Nagata - Tor - hardcover

Girls and Gullibility

When we read a book we tend to expect something that is something new: a novel. In science fiction that is emphasized as much of the point of the genre is to explore scientific ideas. You will hear literary critics talking about the “novum”: that innovative concept that is central to the plot of the book. But fantasy is not about things that are new. It is about things that are so old that they have become part of us. Or, as Neil Gaiman once said to me, there are no new stories, only old stories told in new ways. Which is why Terri Windling can get away with running a series of books that are all re-tellings of ancient stories.

The fairy tale series has had something of a checkered history; for all that it has attracted writers such as Steven Brust, Charles De Lint and Jane Yolen. Now it seems to have found a new home at Tor, and the first book from the new publisher is *Fitcher's Brides* by Gregory Frost.

These days we tend to think of fairy stories are harmless nonsense for kids. But those of us who have delved into the history of the tales, or have read excellent studies like those of Jack Zipes, know that long before Disney, before even the likes of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, fairy tales were anything but childish. Perhaps one the darkest of them is Bluebeard, a story of a serial killer of women. The villain gets away with his bloodthirsty hobby for many marriages, until he picks on a family of three sisters, the youngest of whom is wiser and more resourceful than the rest.

As Windling points out in her introduction, the story is open to multiple interpretations, and the

existence of many different versions makes an original intent hard to discern. Some versions are clearly a cautionary tale about the dangers of arranged marriages, others rail against the willfulness and curiosity of women who are unable to obey their husbands. In other words, it is a good text to work with.

Frost places his recreation of Bluebeard in a late 19th Century America that is in the midst of religious fervor. Our heroines have lost their social position to economic disaster and their mother to illness. Now their evil stepmother (there has to be one, right?) has persuaded their father to sell up and throw in his lot with the Reverend Fitcher, a famous apocalyptic preacher. The family leaves their home in Boston and travels to Fitcher's country community of Harbinger, where Mr. Charter is to act as the community's gatekeeper. Knowing that the end of the world is a scant few months off, the girls have all but given up hope of finding husbands and escaping the family. It is therefore much to their surprise when the Reverend decides that he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven without a wife.

By choosing a modern setting, Frost risks his story by creating an environment in which magic seems unlikely. He cleverly gets around this by invoking hypnotism, and generally not doing anything that would not be regarded as unusual in a period of history when interest in things like spiritualism was rife. And of course most of the characters involved are religious fanatics whose gullibility is somewhat more acute than most.

I'm getting very bored of the interminable convention panels on subjects such as “can men write women characters?” “can whites write black characters?” “can straights write gay

characters?" and so on. It is all the same question, and it always pre-supposes that the act of creating a character who is different from yourself is impossible, in which case we might as well all give up now. Such panels are just an excuse for various sub-groups of humanity to claim special status. But there is one area in which I think this debate may have some validity. I have found very few male writers who can write convincing female characters when the subject matter turns to sex.

I find sex scenes written by women writers interesting. This is true even when the sex involved is lesbian. Indeed, Severna Park and Nicola Griffiths do some of the best sex scenes I have read. Conversely I find sex scenes written by men dull, whether they are straight or gay, whether the characters involved are male or female. An essential part of *Fitcher's Brides* is the depiction of how the sisters, in particular the vernal eldest, appropriately named Vernelia, become sexually obsessed with the Reverend. It is an area of the tale that Frost doesn't quite pull off. Thankfully it is the only area of the book that did not work for me.

On the question of the meaning of the text, Frost is carefully neutral. The elder sisters, ambitious but over-imaginative Vern, and foolish and insecure Amy, are both easy victims for Fitcher. While it is hard to claim that they deserved their fates, they certainly brought doom down upon themselves. On the other hand, Fitcher himself is clearly an insane brute, not a cuckold. Frost uses blood as a symbol of female sexuality without stooping into obsession and revulsion as is so common with misogynists. On reflection I think going for balance was a wise move. In doing so Frost has allowed himself to concentrate on the story and not become mired in the

gender politics of a tale that can lend itself to extremism on either side.

Something that Frost does very well indeed is handle the impending air of menace as Fitcher's chosen date for the end of the world, and young Kate's appointment with marriage, violent abuse and death rush the story towards its conclusion. The use of an apocalyptic religious cult, with its Manson-esque overtones, works brilliantly as a setting for the Bluebeard tale. The fact that I was sat up in the middle of the night finishing the story thanks to post-Australia jet lag only served to further heighten the atmosphere of doom. Furthermore, Frost knows that in the real world fairy stories should never end with "and they lived happily ever after". The epilogue, which looks at what has become of the sisters years later, is one of the best bits of the book. Female sex fantasies apart, Frost has done a superb job here. I'm looking forward to more books in this series.

Fitcher's Brides - Gregory Frost - Tor - hardcover

A Tiger's Tale

This is going to be another one of those reviews where I have to tell you the ending or I can't really talk about the story. Sorry about that. At least I have warned those of you who hate spoilers.

But let's start at the beginning. The hero of our tale begins life in Pondicherry, India. For obscure family reasons he is named after a Paris swimming pool: Piscine Molitor Patel. Naturally his school friends call him "Pissing". To protect himself from this he adopts the nickname, "Pi", which is why this

Booker Prize winning novel by Yann Martel is called *The Life of Pi*.

Young boys often acquire obsessions. For Pi's older brother, Ravi, it is cricket. For Pi it is God. He is very religious. The Patels are nominally Hindu, but Pi's parents have little interest in things mystical. This doesn't worry Pi. He attends the temple. And because he loves God so much he becomes a Christian and a Muslim as well. Martel says in his introduction that Pi's story is one that will make the reader believe in God. Bear that in mind.

I can well imagine an atheist's last words: "White, white! L-L-Love! My God!" – and the deathbed leap of faith. Whereas the agnostic, if he stays true to his reasonable self, if he stays beholden to dry, yeastless factuality, might try to explain the warm light bathing him by saying, "Possibly a f-f-failing oxygenation of the b-b-brain," and, to the very end, lack imagination and miss the better story.

Concerned by Mrs. Ghandi's dictatorial behavior, Mr. Patel decides to emigrate to Canada, taking his young family with him. The trouble is that he is the owner and director of Pondicherry Zoo. No one wants to buy the zoo from him, so he has to close up and sell everything. But international regulations concerning endangered species make this very difficult. Most of the animals can only be sold to other zoos, and most of the zoos with money are in North America. So the Patel family rents a cargo ship and, with a hold full of animals, sets sail for the New World.

And lo, the ship sinks. It is not clear why, but young Pi finds himself adrift on the Pacific in a lifeboat. His only companions – apparently the only other survivors – are a zebra with a broken

leg, an orang-utan, a hyena, and an adult male Bengal tiger.

Within a few days the law of the jungle asserts itself and the living occupants of the lifeboat are reduced to two. One of them weighs 450 pounds, has orange, stripy fur, and an impressive array of killing weapons in his paws and mouth, but little knowledge of life on the high seas. The other has nothing but his brain, a limited amount of experience of zoo keeping, a manual on survival thoughtfully left in the lifeboat, and his faith in God. Somehow, both of them manage to survive.

For reasons almost as bizarre as those surrounding Pi's naming, the tiger is known as Richard Parker.

This is a mainstream book that we are reviewing here, so don't expect an involved and suspenseful plot detailing how Pi and the tiger outwit each other, the denizens of the deep, vicious Chinese pirates, killer squid and a mad French sea captain with his own eccentric submarine. Martel doesn't do plot. In any case, we already know that Pi and Richard Parker are going to survive. So instead Martel gives us a series of delightful but short vignettes about different aspects of life adrift on the Pacific. He deals well with the problems of survival, and it is surprising how much exposition gets passed by the reader without being noticed.

If there is any plot development it is that the adventures that Pi relates become more bizarre and unbelievable as his ordeal continues. The chance meeting with another adrift castaway while both are blinded by thirst is suspicious. The tale of the island of carnivorous trees and millions of meerkats is more likely a figment of a fevered and failing mind than a report of reality.

And yet somehow the lifeboat manages to find its way to a beach in Mexico. With a series of admittedly unsteady bounds, Richard Parker heads off into the jungle and vanishes. Pi is found by some local villagers and taken to hospital where he is nursed back to health. Some civil servants from the Japanese Ministry of Transport come to interview him to see if they can throw some light on the sinking of his vessel, which was owned by a Japanese company. They are not impressed by his story.

"I know what you want. You want a story that won't surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won't make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality."

So Pi tells them another story. In this version of events, the shipwreck is survived by Pi, his mother, the ship's vicious French cook, and a wounded sailor. It is a story about murder and cannibalism. It is short, nasty and brutal.

And if you consider those two stories, and the two quotes I have given from the book, then you will understand why the novel is being reviewed in *Emerald City*, and why Martel believes that his tale will make people believe in God.

Unfortunately Martel is wrong. Most of the people who read the book will discover Richard Parker. They will be impressed by his strength, his power, his beauty and majesty. They will believe in the tiger, and will threaten to burn anyone who does not do likewise for heresy. They will have found God, but it will be a God that Pi cannot understand.

The right thing to do, in my humble opinion, is to believe in stories. There is a great, mysterious universe out there.

We don't know whether the story of that universe is set in Larry Niven's *Known Space*, or Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea*. But we know that Niven and Le Guin both tell good stories and have something valuable to teach us about our world. Or we might think about M. John Harrison's *Light*, and decide that all possible stories are True. Of course as non-quantum beings we are continually required to choose just one story to create a world in which to live. But we must never forget that we made a choice, and that if we don't like the results we can always choose not to believe it tomorrow and try something else.

Believe in stories, not tigers.

The Life of Pi - Yann Martel - Harcourt - softcover

Woke Up This Morning...

Most visitors to California see only San Francisco or Los Angeles. The more adventurous might try the seaside beauty of Monterey, wine tasting in Napa, or winter sports at Lake Tahoe. But California is a huge state, around the size of England, and there are plenty of hidden treasures to be discovered.

An hour or so north of Sacramento takes you into Yuba County and the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. This used to be gold rush country. Marysville, the county seat, still shows faint echoes of Victorian grandeur. (For some bizarre reason, Yuba City, separated only by a river from Marysville, is in Sutter County.) But if there was money here once, it is long gone. Around 40% of the county's population is on government relief of some sort. Fortunately that

doesn't mean to say that they don't know how to have a good time.

Kevin's family comes from around here. Years ago they were Ozark Mountain hillbillies: one of the many families that married into the Cherokee, exchanging land rights for safety from the Trail of Tears. Then, in classic *Grapes of Wrath* style, they headed out to California and set up home in some new mountains. As some of you may know, Kevin's mom and her husband run a custom jewelry business, Tranquil Reflections (www.cut-coin.com). They do most of their selling at craft shows. We were on our way to one.

We ventured up into the Sierras in early June. It is a good time to see country California. The fields still have a tint of green to them, fire season hasn't started, and wild flowers enthusiastically dot the verges. It is beautiful, and once away from the main roads awesomely quiet. On our way to Kevin's mom's place in the small town of Dobbins we stopped off by Lake Francis and listened for a while to the frog chorus. For once in my life I positively loved morning.

This rustic idyll is broken on three weekends a year in the small town of Brownsville, when the Blues come to town. On a shallow-sloped hillside edged by pine trees and roofed by the blue California sky, the people of Brownsville have built a small amphitheater. It is a true community project. Clay Thompson, the amphitheater manager, told me that he has kids from the local youth probation scheme helping keep the site clear of weeds. And this is the site of the Brownsville Blues Festival, an afternoon and evening of quality music backed up by a small craft fair and the inevitable hot dogs and beer. Local people come from miles around with their rugs and picnics to enjoy sun and sound. As

Kevin's mom was organizing the craft fair, we got to see the show from the prime location of the Tranquil Reflections booth.

The Festival opened up with local bands formed from people who play at jam sessions at local pubs and hotels. You could tell that they were not professional, but they were very competent, and provided the occasional surprise. Bass and drums form the backbone of any guitar band. Seeing them provided by a father and his twelve-year-old son is unusual. Young Robbie kept his band steady for over an hour - that kid will be a great drummer when he grows up. However, the rock star life style is still a way off. Having completed his set, Robbie had to spend most of the rest of the day keeping his over-active toddler brother from annoying the rest of the audience.

Later in the evening the professionals take the stage. Acts come up from Oakland and San Francisco: Lisa Kindred, Willie G., and the Craig Horton Band. These folks were seriously slick, and they played for little more than their expenses, home-cooked food and the opportunity to play in the mountain air rather than a dingy club. Kindred is a famous Blues voice from back in the 60s. She has a voice like Janice Joplin. Horton lent her his band for a backing group. Willie G. is a tall Texan in a big, black coat and hat who has an amazing line in Blues patter. I quickly lost count of all the personal tragedies he related to introduce the songs.

Craig Horton is originally from Chicago and is one of those guys like Hendrix who doesn't need to sing much because his guitar has such a good voice of its own. And he had a magnificent lead guitarist to back him up and keep the band flowing as well. Steve Gannon is one of those guys who can walk on stage

and without saying anything, or playing a note, announce that he owns it and that it will be moving to his rhythm from now on. Getting to see him play for Lisa Kindred and then with Horton was the highlight of my day.

We paid \$10 for over nine hours of music, and they were still rocking when we had to leave to get back to our hotel. It is a ridiculous bargain. There's still gold in them there hills if you know how to find it.

There are photos on the *Emerald City* web site.

Short Stuff

Hugo shortlist #1

Gregory Frost's "The Madonna of the Maquiladora" has made it onto both the Best Novelette Hugo shortlist and the Tiptree recommended reading list. And deservedly too, because it is one of the most powerful short stories I have read in a long time.

The viewpoint character, who is never named, is a photographer with an El Paso newspaper (probably *the* El Paso newspaper). Shortly after he starts the job his boss takes him across the river to Juarez so that he can see how the other half lives. Most of the local Mexicans work in Western-owned factories, the maquiladoras. They get paid around \$20 a week. Anyone who tries to organize the workers ends up very dead.

The news comes in of a former agitator who has started seeing visions of the Virgin Mary. The factory tolerates his behavior, not complaining when the workers gather round to hear his prophetic announcements. Our

photographer decides to turn investigative reporter.

It quickly becomes obvious why the factory turns a blind eye, for Gabriel Perea's message from the Virgin is that the workers should suffer in silence for they will find their reward in Heaven. It is also notable that the factory specializes in making "control devices". Perhaps there is a story here. But exposing it will risk the life of Perea and the small degree of happiness that he brings to so many miserable lives.

It is worth comparing Frost's story to *The Light Ages*. Frost never once shrinks from pointing out the ignorance and naiveté of his hero, nor the terrible consequences of his bungled intervention. Nor does he have any delusions about the power of middle-class white liberals to solve the problems of the third world. But also he never lets slip his anger at what is being done to the Mexican workers. If he allows them an escape into religion, it is because it is the only solace that he can offer them, not because it is their moral duty to submit to the state of the world.

There are four other nominees in the Novelette category, one of them by Le Guin, but I'm going to have to find something really good to topple this story off first place.

Hugo shortlist #2

Fictionwise is continuing to add to its collection of free Hugo nominees, though it looks at the rate that they are going that they won't get close to having all of them. You can find the stories at: <http://www.fictionwise.com/Hugo2003.htm>. In the meantime here is a look at a couple of the short story candidates.

"Falling onto Mars" by Geoffrey A. Landis is a tale of what would happen if Mars were used as a penal colony, much

as Australia was originally. However, whereas the British government did make some effort to govern their dumping ground, in Landis's story the convicts as simply packed off in rockets to fend for themselves. Their only hope for survival is a scientific station, some of whose staff refused the offer to be brought home. It is, as you might expect, a brutal tale, designed to illustrate just how far humanity will have to be prepared to go under such circumstances. It makes the point. Other than that, there is not a lot to it.

"Creation", by Jeffrey Ford, is an altogether more beautiful tale, but then it has much more pleasant subject matter. It tells of a young boy who takes his catechism lessons seriously and decides to try his hand at creating life in the woods behind his home. The story is unashamedly a fantasy, which will probably lose it votes in some quarters, but equally it is much more comfortable to read than the Landis. As for me, I confess to being utterly bored of American father-son stories. Still, at least in this one the father and son are not trying to kill each other.

Naked commercialism

Having met Toby Litt at the ICA events in London last month I decided that I really ought to read some of his work. His first published book is a collection of short stories and is called *Adventures in Capitalism*. How could I resist?

Actually, however, the book is not about politics, and not much about economics either. It might more accurately be called *Adventures in Consumerism*, because it is a collection of tales that take a wry, often hilarious and sometimes deeply disturbing look at 1990s British society. It treats of rampant consumerism,

celebrity relationships, fashion victims and social paranoia.

You do have to know a little but about Britain to appreciate this book properly. For example, non-Brits will probably not even know who Jeremy Beadle is, let alone why is it so important that he should die. Also non-Brits will not appreciate quite how accurate some of Litt's caricatures are. However, there is enough entertaining material in the book to make it worth buying by anyone.

Probably the best story in the book is the one that begins, "When I met Michael Foucault, the great French philosopher, he wasn't alive and I wasn't awake." It is an extended dream sequence, during which Foucault takes the narrator to a gay S&M club in San Francisco called Hell and the narrator wonders why Hell should be a non-smoking environment. However, my favorite story is the opener, "It Could Have Been Me and It Was", in which the narrator wins the National Lottery and, being rich enough to afford it, decides to take the advice of every advertisement he sees.

Hopefully I have conveyed the impression that Toby Litt has a wonderful, pointed sense of humor that he deploys to great effect in sticking pins in the absurdities of modern life. He is also a very fine writer indeed. Must try some of his novels.

Adventures in Capitalism - Toby Litt - Penguin
- softcover

Miscellany

Sidewise Award shortlist

Chris Priest's move towards world domination continues apace with the

release of the shortlists for the Sidewise Awards, given for works dealing with alternate histories. The awards will be presented at Torcon 3 (but thankfully not at the Hugo ceremony). Here are the nominees.

Long Form (60,000 words or longer or complete series): Gary L. Blackwood, *The Year of the Hangman*, Dutton; Martin J. Gidron, *The Severed Wing*, Livingstone Press; Christopher Priest, *The Separation*, Scribner; S.M. Stirling, *The Peshawar Lancers*, Roc; Harry Turtledove, *Ruled Britannia*, Roc.

Short Form (shorter than 60,000 words): Charles Coleman Finlay, "We Come Not to Praise Washington," *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, 8/02; John Kessel, "The Invisible Empire," *Conjunctions* #39; William Sanders, "Empire," *Alternate Generals II*, ed. Harry Turtledove, Baen, 7/02; Robert Silverberg, "With Caesar in the Underworld," *Asimov's*, 10/02; Walter John Williams, "The Last Ride of German Freddie," *Worlds That Weren't*, Roc, 7/02.

Seiun shortlist

Talking of overlong Hugo ceremonies, I can add a bit of spice to the Seiun presentation by letting you know who the nominees are for the translated work categories. These are quite an interesting awards because you never know when a work is going to be translated, which sets up contests between works from different years that would never meet in Western awards. The shortlists are as follows.

Translated Novel: *Cryptonomicon*, Neal Stephenson; *Davy*, Edgar Pangborn; *A Deepness in the Sky*, Vernor Vinge; *Freeware*, Rudy Rucker; *Gloriana*, Michael Moorcock; *Illegal Alien*, Robert J. Sawyer; *Passage*, Connie Willis; *The Reefs of Earth*,

R. A. Lafferty; *The Telling*, Ursula K. Le Guin; *Thraxas*, Martin Scott.

Translated Short Story: "Different Kinds of Darkness," David Langford; "Funnyfingers," R. A. Lafferty; "Luminous", Greg Egan; "A Map of the Mines of Barnath," Sean Williams; "Partial Eclipse," Graham Joyce; "Pilot," Stephen Baxter; "Seventy-Two Letters," Ted Chiang; "A Spy in Europa," Alastair Reynolds; "What Continues, What Fails...", David Brin.

By the way, the winners are announced at the Japanese National Science Fiction Convention in July. If you don't want to know who won before Worldcon you'd probably better stay away from Locus Online.

Aurora Finalists

Still with Torcon 3, we also have the finalists for the Prix Aurora Awards, Canada's national SF prizes. These will be presented at the Worldcon, though hopefully not at the same ceremony as the Hugos or we will be there all night. The shortlists are as follows:

Long-Form Work in English: *Hominids*, Robert J. Sawyer (Tor); *Martyrs*, Edo van Belkom (Design Image Group); *Permanence*, Karl Schroeder (Tor); *To Trade the Stars*, Julie E. Czerneda (DAW); *Warchild*, Karin Lowachee (Warner Aspect).

Long-Form Work in French: *L'Aigle des profondeurs*, Esther Rochon (Alire); *Horizons blancs*, Guy Sirois (Médiaspaul); *Piège pour le Jules-Verne*, Michèle Laframboise (Médiaspaul); *Le Revenant de Fomalhaut*, Jean-Louis Trudel (Médiaspaul); *Les Sources de la magie*, Joël Champetier (Alire).

Short-Form Work in English: "By Its Cover", Isaac Szpindel (*Explorer*,

Trifolium Books); "Ineluctable", Robert J. Sawyer (*Analog*, Nov 2002); "Just Like Being There", Eric Choi (*Orbiter*, Trifolium Books); "Prism", Julie E. Czerneda (*30th Anniversary DAW: Science Fiction*, DAW); "Rain, Ice, Steam", James Alan Gardner (*Explorer*, Trifolium Books).

Short-Form Work in French: "Les Femmes viennent de Mars et les hommes de Vénus", Michèle Laframboise (*Solaris* 140); "Fractures", Mehdi Bouhalassa (*Solaris* 140); "La Guerre sans temps", Sylvie Bérard (*Solaris* 143); "Les Navires de Saint-Elme", Jean Pettigrew (*Solaris* 143); "Un Port dans la Tempête" (traducteur: Marc Bailly), Mark A. Rayner (*Science-Fiction Magazine*, Fév 2002); "La Trajectoire du poisson", Yves Meynard (*Solaris* 141).

Work in English (Other): Edo van Belkom (for editing *Be VERY Afraid!*); *Explorer: Tales from the Wonder Zone*, Julie E. Czerneda, ed. (Trifolium Books (anthology)); "Faster than Light", Joe Mahoney, Robert J. Sawyer & Barbara Worthy (CBC Radio drama pilot); *Rescue Heroes Cycle III*, Isaac Szpindel (tv screenplay); *Stardust: Tales from the Wonder Zone*, Julie E. Czerneda, ed. (Trifolium Books (anthology)).

Work in French (Other): Insufficient nominations: no award will be presented.

Artistic Achievement: Andrew Barr; James Beveridge; Lar deSouza; Michèle Laframboise; Jean-Pierre Normand; Ronn Sutton; Mel Vavaroutsos.

Fan Achievement (Publication): *Ailleurs*, Pierre Luc Lafrance, ed. (fanzine); *Filking from C to C*, Peggy Warner-Lalonde, ed. (filkzine); *Made In Canada Newsletter*, Don Bassie, ed. (webzine); *Opuntia*, Dale Speirs, ed. (fanzine); *Pubnites & Other Events*, Yvonne Penney, ed. (e-zine).

Fan Achievement (Organizational): Martin Miller (Toronto Trek 16 masquerade); Barb Schofield (Toronto Trek 16 masquerade); Marah Searle-Kovacevic (USS Hudson Bay and Torcon 3 committee); Joan Sherman (I.D.I.C.); Brian Upward (I.D.I.C.); Georgina Miles (Toronto Trek 16).

Fan Achievement (Other): Alex von Thorn (fan writing); Eric Layman (fan writing); Lloyd Penney (fan writing); Gord Rose (masquerade MC at Toronto Trek & Ad Astra); Larry Stewart (one-man SF parody shows); Jason Taniguchi (entertainer).

I've already reviewed a couple of the long-form/English nominees and intend to cover the others, and hopefully the English short works as well, not to mention a bunch of other Canadian SF&F writers such as Margaret Atwood, in the Worldcon (August) issue of *Emerald City*. I'm afraid my schoolgirl French is not up to reviewing the French language works. More information about the nominees can be found be found at this very useful web site: <http://members.rogers.com/mic-newsletter/> (for which Don Bassie seems likely to get himself an Aurora).

Genre Wars continue

In a bizarre follow-up to the current interest in cross-genre writing, Harper Collins UK has announced that it wants book stores to shelve fantasy separate from science fiction on the grounds that fantasy appeals to a wide, mainstream audience whereas SF only appeals to spotty-faced geeks and people who believe in UFOs. Voyager publishing director, Jane Johnson (who also writes very genre fantasy under the pen name of Jude Fisher) was quoted in *Locus* as saying, "Fantasy and SF are completely

different genres, as we've always known."

Well knock me down with a light sabre, Ms. Johnson. So the fact that the World Science Fiction Society persists in awarding the Hugo for both SF and Fantasy because the majority of its members admit that it is too difficult to separate the genres is presumably irrelevant. You've always known different. And you can adopt a royal "we" to give dubious authenticity to your views over those of other people. How generous.

But of course it is not literary criticism we are talking about here. It is marketing. What Ms. Johnson wants is to get Voyager's books onto the mainstream shelves alongside Harry Potter where she believes that they will sell better. To do so she has to divorce them from the geek ghetto. And she may have a point. The Harper Collins press release highlights a survey that claims that 86% of general fiction readers also read at least one fantasy book in the previous year. Of course a survey of 1,000 people is hardly authoritative, and I suspect that the results might have been very different if the question had been "any fantasy book except Harry Potter or Tolkien". But still, the idea is out there, and we'll see how it goes. One obvious benefit is that Johnson realizes that for her plan to succeed she has to get the dragons and chicks in chain mail off the covers, and that will be a good thing.

And you know, it just might work. If we can sneak a little China Miéville, Tim Powers, Ursula Le Guin, Tad Williams and Neil Gaiman – to name but a few – onto the mainstream shelves, we might just loosen up a few heads or two. A little bit of weirdness would do the mainstream audience a lot of good. And when they are nicely loosened up we'll

start disguising Justina Robson novels as chick lit and Jon Courtenay-Grimwood books as John Grisham. Guerilla marketing, boys and girls: it is the wave of the future.

Cheap books

There, thought that would get your attention.

I get a lot of email from people asking me to link to their web site. Mostly I turn them down. *Emerald City* is a review site, not a links site. I don't have time to maintain a comprehensive links site, I prefer not to link to sites unless I think they are worth visiting, and I absolutely refuse to have anything to do with arrogant media fan sites who graciously offer to put a tiny little link to my site somewhere buried deep in theirs if I will only do my duty and put their massive, animated banner on the front page of mine.

Occasionally, however, I get a request that is worth looking at. One came through this month from a site called The Price Search (<http://books.thepricesearch.com>). It is a price comparison site for books. You type in the name of the book, and it looks various book-selling web sites and gives you a price comparison. It isn't perfect: none of these things can be, especially as they rely to a large extent on the software of the sites that they search. But it seems to do very well and is blindingly fast. I was impressed, which doesn't happen often on the web.

Footnote

For next issue I have an unexpected flood of Australian works, including new books from Sean Williams, Cecilia Dart-Thornton and Isobel Carmody. I'll also try to catch up on what I missed from this issue. Thankfully it doesn't look like there will be a huge pile of good stuff waiting for me in the UK when I get back, but I should have reports on Westercon, and the Interaction planning weekend in Cardiff. See you next month.

Ciao,

Love 'n' hugs,

Cheryl